

# Southern Discomfort

ONE YEAR ON

By Patrick Diamond and Giles Radice

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By Patrick Diamond and Giles Radice  
with Penny Bochum and Simon Latham

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# About the authors

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# Acknowledgements

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# Introduction

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This pamphlet is the sequel, a year on, to *Southern Discomfort Again*, the Policy Network study which sought to address the crippling weakness which the Labour party now faces in Southern England after its catastrophic 2010 election defeat. In last year's study, we showed that Labour now holds only 10 of 197 seats in the South East, the South West and the Eastern regions combined. In the South of England and the Midlands as a whole, the party has just 49 out of a total of 302 MP's. We also stressed the overriding need for Labour to reassemble the successful alliance of its traditional supporters in the party's Celtic and Northern 'heartlands' with voters in the South and the Midlands: the informal coalition which has given the Labour party three record breaking election victories over the last fifteen years.

We make no apology for highlighting once again what voters are saying, and for putting their views at the forefront of our analysis. We do not argue that we should slavishly follow the opinions of particular groups, or that opinion polls are a substitute for policymaking. But listening carefully to voters and getting a feel for their hopes and aspirations is a prerequisite of any successful political strategy. A party which ignores the views of the electorate is doomed to failure. The Labour party has to learn to listen, as well as to lead.

Our research included interviews with former candidates, key campaign staff and party activists in marginal constituencies in both the South and the Midlands. We also commissioned a large scale opinion survey, carried out by the polling organisation, YouGov, supplemented by telephone interviews with former Labour voters in the Midlands and the South.

In this pamphlet, we have focused our qualitative research on the Midlands as a microcosm of the English electorate, and therefore strategically significant for Labour. Some seats in the Midlands are strongly urban with attendant 'inner-city' characteristics such as a larger proportion of ethnic minority voters, and higher levels of unemployment and deprivation. However, other seats in the Midlands now resemble classic southern marginals: they are more suburban with higher levels of home ownership, fewer people

employed in manufacturing industry, and above average numbers of white collar and skilled workers. It is important to recognise that Labour's problem is as much associated with social change as it is geographic.

Following Labour's 1992 defeat, the original *Southern Discomfort* Series for the Fabian Society revealed that floating voters were aspirant and upwardly mobile. Today, they are far more cautious about their own prospects, prioritising security and a better future for their children. This group of voters feel more insecure and vulnerable than ever in the aftermath of the financial crisis and the dramatic squeeze on living standards. Wage rises over the last six years have been small or nonexistent, with employees having to work harder for the same or less money, while there are record levels of consumer debt in the UK economy. Figure 1.0 below shows the dramatic slowdown in household earnings:

### Relative growth in UK weekly pay since 2001

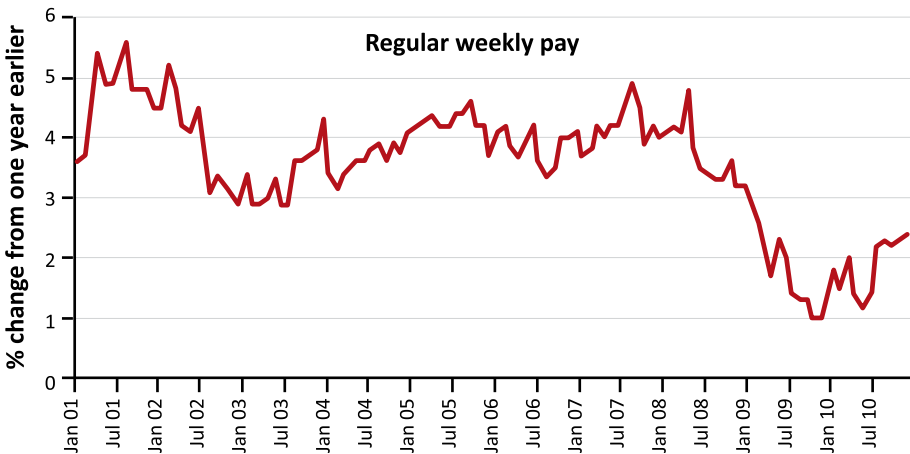


Figure 1.0

So while pay rises have failed to keep pace with inflation, household incomes are more unstable than at any time in the last forty years, and job insecurity is widespread with increased polarisation and hollowing out in the labour market as the result of technological change, migration and temporary agency working. In these circumstances, centre-left parties must be alive to the politics of insecurity, not just financial and employment insecurity but the combination of crime, public disorder, family breakdown, and loss of identity which impact directly on people's everyday lives.

This year's survey shows that voters are, if anything, more anxious than they were even in 2010, as the impact of the austerity measures begins to bite. Insecurity has replaced aspiration as the dominant concern of wavering Labour voters. Their pessimism is reflected in the finding that three quarters of all voters believe that children growing up in Britain today, 'are likely to face tougher times than their parents' generation'. These voters still have aspirations to get on and do better for their families. But for many, life is far more financially precarious than it was during the previous decade.

However, Labour has not yet managed to capitalise politically on this feeling of anxiety and insecurity, while its position in Southern Britain remains weak. Disturbingly, widespread disillusionment with politics and politicians is now endemic in Britain. According to our survey, a quarter of voters think that neither a Conservative nor a Labour government would make any difference, while over a third describe both major parties as 'incompetent' – 35% with respect to the Tories (though only 32% in the South) and 43% for Labour (rising to 48% in the South). This mood of disengagement is especially bad for Labour, since parties of the centre left depend on creating a climate of hope and optimism about the future. If voters come to believe that little can be done by governments, then the main beneficiary is likely to be the Conservative party, whatever their record in office.

**“Following Labour’s 1992 defeat, the original Southern Discomfort Series for the Fabian Society revealed that floating voters were aspirant and upwardly mobile. Today, they are far more cautious about their own prospects, prioritising security and a better future for their children”**

So Labour has to do more to reconnect people with politics and tackle the corrosive decline of trust, but it is the economy which continues to damage its electoral prospects. Polls consistently show a Tory lead on the economy. While the majority of voters believe that the coalition government is managing the economy badly, they trust the Tories more than Labour to run it. In the latest YouGov survey<sup>1</sup>, voters are more likely to trust the Conservatives: 40% trust the Tories 'to take the right decisions on the economy', while

54% do not; meanwhile 36% trust Labour, but 56% do not trust the party. However, in Southern England, the gap widens substantially: 47% trust the Tories; 49% do not. But only 31% trust Labour, while 62% do not. By a wide margin, voters in the South of England trust the Conservatives more than Labour on the economy. Although they are increasingly concerned about jobs and living standards, they continue to blame Labour for the credit crunch, and think that public spending cuts are necessary to secure the economic

<sup>1</sup> The fieldwork for this question was undertaken by YouGov on 22-23rd August 2011.

recovery. The Conservatives have successfully defined Labour as the party of economic incompetence, financial profligacy and recession, recalling historical images of past Labour governments swept from office after one kind of economic crisis or another.

**“Restoring trust, both trust in politics and trust in Labour’s capacity to manage the economy, will be critical to the party’s prospects of electoral recovery, particularly in Southern England and the Midlands”**

It is absolutely crucial for the party to regain its reputation for economic competence, so painstakingly built up in the decade after 1992, and then so dramatically lost following the 2007-2008 crash. As we wrote in last year’s pamphlet, “if Labour does not restore its reputation on the key question of economic competence, it will not earn the right to be heard on its wider aspirations for a better society.” As one party worker

interviewed for this pamphlet said, “History is now being re-written by the Conservatives. The biggest hurdle is being branded economically incompetent. It is a very difficult legacy to overcome”. Labour would also go into the next election with an insuperable political handicap. No party has secured a parliamentary majority in the British political system since 1945 without winning the trust of the electorate on the economy. Restoring trust, both trust in politics and trust in Labour’s capacity to manage the economy, will be critical to the party’s prospects of electoral recovery, particularly in Southern England and the Midlands.

# Recapturing lost votes

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Since the 2010 defeat, Labour has made modest but steady progress. Crucially, it has avoided the bloodletting which was such a feature in the aftermath of the 1951 and 1979 defeats. In Ed Miliband, it has a young and vigorous new leader committed to renewing the party. A wide-ranging, root and branch policy review is being carried out. The Tory-led coalition appears increasingly accident prone, while Labour has a narrow but consistent lead in the national polls. Meanwhile, Labour made significant advances in the 2011 local elections, securing a net gain of 839 council seats, largely concentrated in northern Britain and the cities.

Nonetheless, the party faces an uphill challenge if it is to return to power next time. The truth is that Labour is not yet doing well enough to be confident of securing victory at the next election. Apart from Labour's hammering by the SNP in Scotland, the local election results were less good for the party the further south they went. In northern England, Labour made some impressive gains. In the North East, they won control of Newcastle-upon-Tyne from the Liberal Democrats, North Tyneside and Redcar and Cleveland from 'no overall control'. In the North West, Labour won Blackpool (from the Conservatives) and eight previously hung councils. In Yorkshire and Humberside, the party gained Kingston upon Hull from the Liberal Democrats and Leeds, Sheffield and York from no overall control; in Sheffield, the Liberal Democrats lost nine of their fifteen councillors, putting Labour back in control.

The results in the Midlands were less outstanding, though still satisfactory. In the East Midlands, Labour gained six councils (Ashfield, Lincoln and Bassetlaw from no overall control, Chesterfield from the Liberal Democrats, Gedling from the Conservatives, and Mansfield from Independent control). In the West Midlands, it won North Warwickshire (from the Conservatives), Stoke on Trent, and Telford and Wrekin. Labour also won fourteen extra seats on Birmingham City Council, six short of the overall majority needed to overturn the ruling Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition.

But in the South, Labour's results were largely disappointing. In the South East, the party gained only one Council, Gravesham, to add to Slough which they already held. In Medway, where there are a clutch of marginal parliamentary constituencies, Labour

gained seats but so too did the Conservatives, who remain firmly in control. In the Essex new towns, Labour made modest progress but the Tories retained their hold over the iconic constituency of Basildon. Parliamentary marginals such as Dover, Harlow, and Reading West would all have remained in Conservative hands at a general election. In Hemel Hempstead, Labour lost one of its three council seats and made no progress in marginal Hertfordshire constituencies such as St Albans and Watford. In the South West, Labour holds no councils, though it came close to taking control of Exeter and made gains from the Conservatives in Swindon. In the Eastern region, the party won just one council, Ipswich, with the Conservatives losing two seats and the Liberal Democrats three. Overall, Southern England, at least outside inner London, is still a sea of deep blue.

John Curtice in the *Daily Telegraph* estimated that in the 2011 elections, Labour took two seats from the Liberal Democrats for every one it took from the Tories. It was a better performance than at the 2010 General election, but not nearly enough to win next time. On the basis of the local election results, the BBC's projected national share was Conservative 35%, Labour 37% and Liberal Democrats 15%, while Rallings and Thrasher's National Equivalent vote was Conservative 38%, Labour 37% and Liberal Democrats 16%, proving that Labour would not have come close to winning a general election.

**“The inescapable fact is that, if Labour is to win the next election, it has to do much better in the Midlands and the South”**

The inescapable fact is that, if Labour is to win the next election, it has to do much better in the Midlands and the South. The sheer number of seats in these regions makes them key to a successful electoral strategy. In the South East alone there are 114 seats (excluding London), and

in the South as a whole there are 302 seats (including the Midlands). Outside the capital, Labour won only ten seats at the last election, south of the line from the Wash to the Bristol Channel. In the South-East, Labour won just four seats. Though there are still target seats to be gained in other regions, including the North West, the North-East, and Yorkshire and Humberside, there are not enough additional winnable seats in these areas to guarantee a Labour victory. The party cannot win without doing much better in the South and the Midlands, nor can it rely on David Cameron's failure to make further inroads in the North and Scotland.

## 2010 seat distribution by region in the South and the Midlands

	Conservative	Labour	Liberal Democrat
South-East	107 (+20)	6 (-19)	1 (+1)
Eastern	20 (+4)	0 (-5)	3 (+1)
South-West	36 (+11)	4 (-8)	0 (0)
West Midlands	33 (+15)	24 (-14)	2 (0)
East Midlands	31 (+12)	15 (-11)	0 (-1)

Table 1.0

Since the election, debate in the party has focused heavily on Labour's performance in terms of social class, with some suggesting that the party did worst among its 'traditional' supporters, and that it should concentrate on addressing that weakness. It is certainly true that Labour's vote fell sharply among the unskilled (DE's) in 2010 (-8%). But the Labour vote share also shrank by 11% among skilled workers (C2's), and by 15% among the white collar C1's and C2's combined, as table 1.1 below illustrates. This group are often highly aspirational, having helped to delivered three successive election victories for Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s, and for Tony Blair after 1997. Today, they are more anxious and insecure, but they still want politicians to recognise the importance of enabling people to get on in life and do well for themselves and their families.

## 2010 Percentage voting by social class

Social Class	Con	Lab	LD	Other	Con lead	Turnout	Con	Lab	LD	Other	Con/Lab swing
AB (28%)	39	26	29	7	13	76%	+2	-2	0	+5	2.0
C1 (29%)	39	28	24	9	11	66%	+2	-4	+1	+4	3.0
C2 (21%)	37	29	22	12	8	58%	+4	-11	+3	0	7.5
DE (23%)	31	40	17	12	-10	57%	+6	-8	-1	+3	7.0

Table 1.1 (Figures in brackets show the group as a total proportion of the UK population)

Peter Kellner has pointed to the changing class composition of party support in the UK. Over the long term, two distinct but related trends have occurred. Not only have working-class numbers shrunk – but class has lost its overwhelming significance as a determinant of voting behaviour. In 1970, the ‘class gap’ was a vast 34 points: 56 percent of C2DE’s voted Labour compared with 22% of ABC1’s. By 1997, the gap had shrunk to 17 points. It is now just six points. Today, voters are no longer sharply divided along occupational and class lines, making the pattern of voting more variable and fluid than it has ever been. As Kellner puts it, “Half a century ago the typical Labour voter belonged to an utterly different tribe from the typical Tory voter; now they occupy slightly different slots on the same continuum”.

“Arguing that Labour should concentrate exclusively on mobilising its traditional support ignores the reality that the DEs now amount to less than a quarter of the electorate, while the C2s and the C1s make up as much as half”

Be that as it may, the party will certainly need to make up lost ground among its traditional supporters. Deborah Mattinson has shown how poorly Labour performed in 2010 in constituencies with a higher proportion of manual workers. Labour appears to have lost much of its capacity to mobilise working-class communities, leading to declining levels of electoral participation and turnout. This is an important issue which the party must address. Labour will only restore its

electoral fortunes, however, when it performs more strongly among the crucial groups labelled by psephologists as ‘white collar’ and ‘skilled’ workers. These voters can be found in every constituency across the UK, but are most heavily represented in Southern and Midlands’ marginals. Arguing that Labour should concentrate exclusively on mobilising its traditional support ignores the reality that the DEs now amount to less than a quarter of the electorate, while the C2s and the C1s make up as much as half. The study carried out by ‘Britain Thinks’ shows that more than 70% (33.6 million) of the UK voting population consider themselves to be ‘middle-class’. As the BBC political analyst David Cowling has argued, “They are ‘middle Britain’ and any party that gives them up for lost surely ought to think seriously about whether they want to be in the game at all”.

# The electoral battle ground

Our quantitative polling reveals an anxious and insecure Britain where families are increasingly nervous about the future, and where there is relatively little confidence in any of the established political parties. Faith in politicians and politics appears to be at an all time low, and many voters believe that both Labour and the Conservatives are incompetent, untrustworthy and break their promises.

The polling also reveals important regional differences, and it would be mistaken for Labour not to recognise this in framing its future political strategy. Generally, voters in Northern England and Scotland reject the government, and view the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition as incompetent and out of touch. Conversely, the Conservatives appear to be doing markedly better in Southern England, and, to an extent, in the Midlands. Nonetheless, there are messages for both parties that transcend the geographical and regional divide. Voters in general regard Labour as ‘more interested in helping immigrants than working people born in Britain’, while at the same time, they believe that the Conservatives ‘are more interested in looking after the rich than the British people as a whole’.

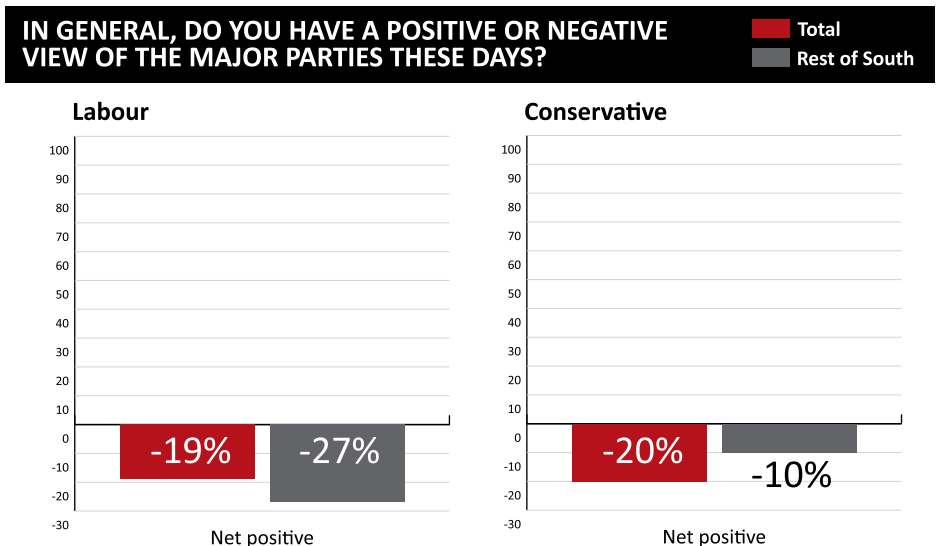


Figure 2.1

## WHICH TWO OR THREE OF THESE TERMS BEST DESCRIBE THE MAJOR PARTIES?

Labour  
Conservative

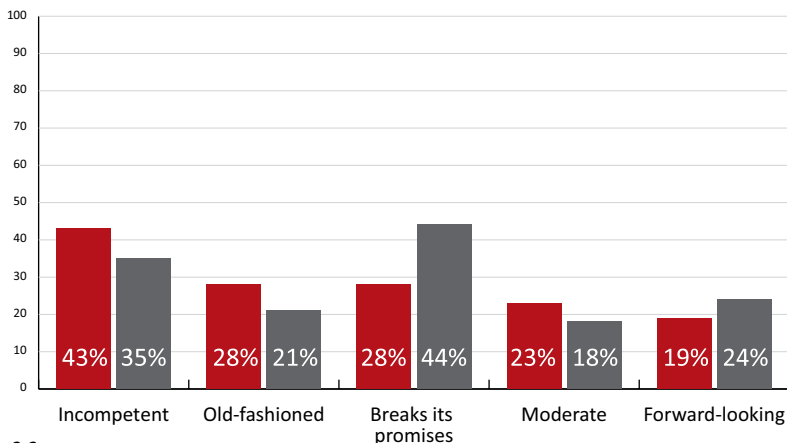


Figure 2.2

### The mood of Britain's families

When asked about their family's prospects, voters are stoical, believing that 'things will be tough but they will get by' (39%), but also anxious (35%) and worried for other family members (33%). Very few feel optimistic (11%) or financially secure (8%). Those in middle-age (40-59) are most anxious about the future (40%), compared to 18-24 year olds (29%). Notably, there is little variance between male and female voters in relation to financial insecurity and uncertainty about the future.

**"Faith in politicians and politics appears to be at an all time low, and many voters believe that both Labour and the Conservatives are incompetent, untrustworthy and break their promises"**

voters agree by a margin of 75% to 14% that 'children growing up in Britain today are likely to face a tougher time as adults than their parents' generation', with markedly little regional variation.

Southern voters are just as anxious and worried for the future as their counterparts elsewhere in the UK, suggesting that the stereotype of the South as merely wealthy and aspirant is increasingly outdated. Across Britain,

Labour voters are the most anxious and pessimistic about the status quo and the future; they are more anxious than the national average (41% compared to 35%). While the South and Midlands are marginally the UK's most anxious regions, Labour does not yet seem to be gaining any significant electoral advantage. The heightened mood of pessimism

and anxiety may encourage voters to take refuge in what they know, namely the apparent certainties of the Conservative approach based on sound money, smaller government, hostility to Europe, and a punitive approach on immigration and crime which may have added resonance among some voters given the prevailing sentiment of insecurity.

### What the parties stand for

In general, voters are still much clearer about what the Conservatives stand for than Labour. 57% know what the Conservatives stand for, while 37% are unclear. Only 40% of voters are clear about Labour, compared to 54% who are unclear. Perhaps not surprisingly, the Liberal Democrats have suffered from a weakening of their political identity with only 21% of voters now clear what they stand for, compared to 72% who are not clear. The national variance is amplified in comparing North and South; 61% of Southern voters are clear about the Conservatives compared to only 53% in the North. Northern voters are also much clearer about what Labour stands for (45% clear, 48% unclear), indicating the potential resonance of Labour’s message on public spending cuts in these regions.

When asked about how they view the major parties in British politics, the electorate is negative about all three, but there are marked regional differences. In the South, the Conservative party has a net popularity rating of -10 compared to -27 in the North (a gap of 17 points). Labour has a -27% rating in the South, compared to just -4 in the North (a gap of 23 points).

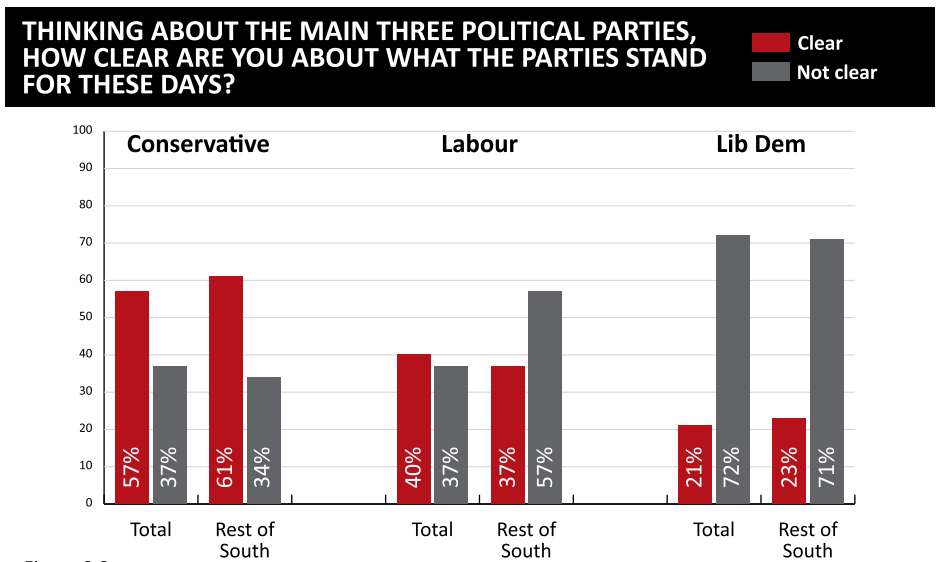


Figure 2.3

## HELPING PEOPLE WHO PLAY BY THE RULES BUT ARE STRUGGLING TO MAKE ENDS MEET?

■ Total  
■ Rest of South

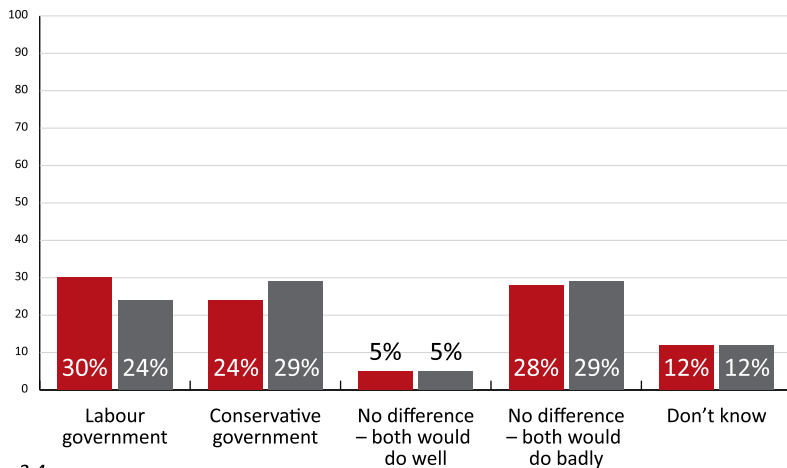


Figure 2.4

## LABOUR IS MORE INTERESTED IN HELPING IMMIGRANTS THAN WORKING PEOPLE BORN IN BRITAIN?

■ Total  
■ Rest of South

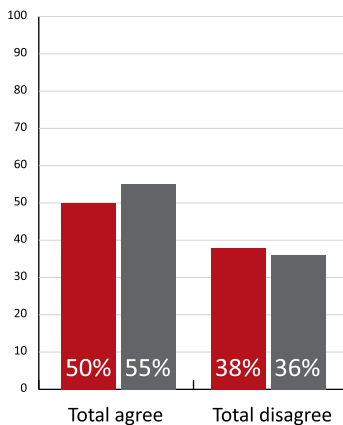


Figure 2.5

## Party policies

This gap is repeated in relation to particular aspects of the policy agenda. Voters in the South believe that the Conservatives are more likely than Labour to ‘ensure value for money in the provision of public services such as schools and hospitals’ (34% to 22%). Northern voters believe that Labour ‘understands the concerns of people about day-to-day life in Britain’ compared to the Conservatives by a margin of 43% to 16%; in the South the margin is 30-25%. There are similar differentials for ‘helping people who play by the rules get on in life’ (36-22% in the North, compared to 29-24% in the South), and ‘acting fairly towards people like you when taking decisions on tax and welfare benefits’ (36-20% in the North, compared to 28-23% in the South).

Furthermore, voters in the South are more likely than the national average to have a negative perception of Labour’s immigration policy (55% think Labour is more interested in helping immigrants than those born in Britain, compared to only 50% nationally) and Labour’s capacity to deal with the so-called ‘something for nothing’ welfare culture (66% compared to 61% nationally); by implication, these same southern voters are more likely to have a favourable view of the Tories. They are less likely than the national average to agree that the Conservatives favour the rich, and more likely to dispute the claim that the Tories are not serious about improving and protecting the NHS.

This demonstrates that Labour has to work much harder in order to convince voters in Southern England that it shares their instincts. The public are more ambivalent about the proposed cuts to the size of government and the public sector than Labour might imagine. For example, voters agree by a small margin (45% to 43%) that ‘public services such as health, education and the police are so inefficient that it is perfectly possible to cut spending on them significantly without cutting the quality of the service they offer’. As expected, more Southern voters (48%) apparently agree with that proposition than Northern voters (42%).

Other surveys have repeatedly demonstrated Labour’s fundamental weakness on the economy. In a recent YouGov poll conducted for Policy Network, 46% of Southern voters (compared to 39% across the UK) believe that, ‘when in government, Labour taxed too much with too little public benefit’. In monthly tracker polls for YouGov, the Conservatives have led Labour as the party best placed to manage the economy in almost every poll, usually by a margin of 33% to 28%. Voters also have a tendency to blame Labour’s ‘mismanagement’ of the economy for the current economic downturn and ensuing spending cuts (40%).

## LABOUR IS NOT REALLY SERIOUS ABOUT TACKLING THE 'SOMETHING FOR NOTHING' CULTURE AMONG PEOPLE LIVING ON WELFARE?

■ Total  
■ Rest of South

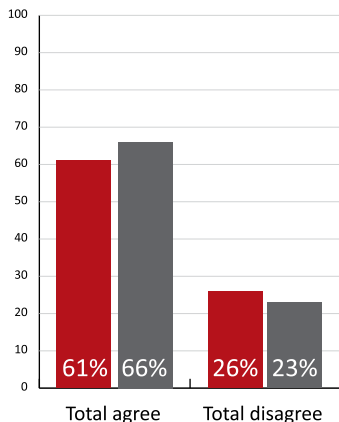


Figure 2.6

## ENSURING VALUE FOR MONEY IN THE PROVISION OF PUBLIC SERVICES SUCH AS SCHOOLS AND HOSPITALS?

■ Total  
■ Rest of South

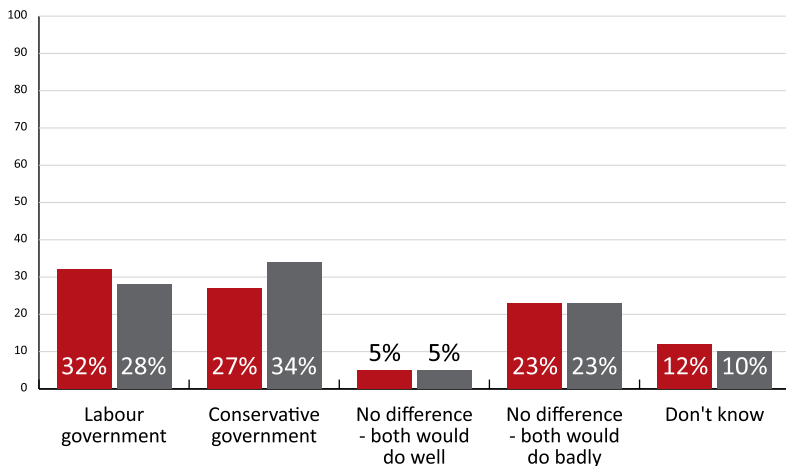


Figure 2.7

## UNDERSTAND THE CONCERNS OF PEOPLE IN YOUR AREA ABOUT DAY-TO-DAY LIFE IN BRITAIN TODAY?

■ Total  
■ Rest of South

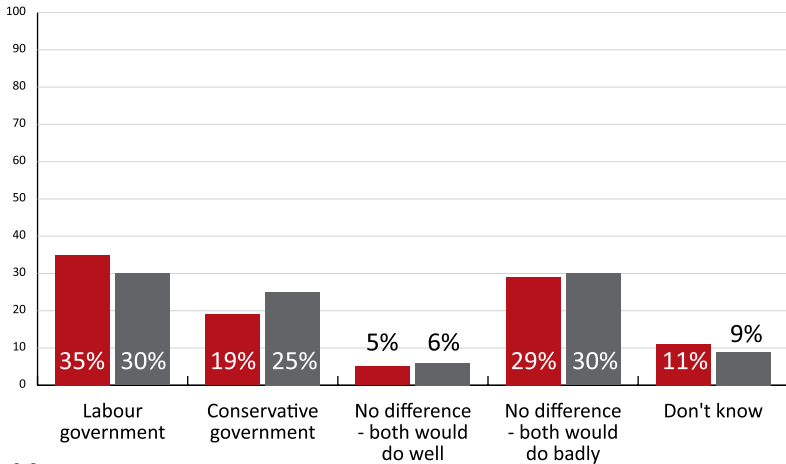


Figure 2.8

Nonetheless, there is a mood of considerable negativity about the Conservatives. Not only do voters believe that the Tories are for the rich and privileged in society, they agree by a margin of 53% to 37% that the current government ‘is not really serious about maintaining the quality of the National Health Service’. Voters also believe that the Conservatives break their promises and are incompetent. Even Conservatives such as Lord Ashcroft admit that the government has failed to spell out why deficit reduction ought to be the fundamental purpose of the government. They concede that aside from the vacuities of the ‘big society’, the centre-right has no compelling project for Britain.

However, the anti-government mood is undoubtedly less prevalent in the South of England. Southern voters are less likely to believe that the Conservatives have broken their promises (39% compared to 50% in the North), while they see the Tories as more ‘forward-looking’ (29% to 20%) and less ‘extreme’ (25% to 17%). Conversely, they see Labour as much less competent (48% to 38%) and more ‘old-fashioned’ as a party (30% to 24%). While voters still see Labour as caring and fair, they no longer believe that the party is capable of running the economy. Even more importantly, they do not consider that Labour understands, respects or rewards those who want to get on. Far from encouraging and rewarding talent and opportunity, Labour is still seen as a party likely to ‘clobber’ those who want to make the most of new opportunities.

## Reaching women voters

In the 2010 general election, women were 5% more likely to vote Conservative than Labour (36-31%); however, men were 10% more likely to vote for the Tories (38-28%) according to IPSOS MORI. This suggests that women's traditional support for the Conservatives has continued to decline, and is supported by findings from our survey: women are less clear than men about what the Tories stand for (a gap of 9 points), while men are much less positive about Labour than the Conservatives (a gap of 15 points). Rosie Campbell of Birkbeck College, London attributes the shift away from the Tories to an increase in the proportion of working women in the United Kingdom. The 'Mumsnet generation' believe that the state has an important role to play in ensuring fairness at work, alongside adequate childcare provision and high quality state education. Many women view politics through the lens of family life, but oppose Conservative proposals such as tax breaks for married couples which they believe unfairly penalise single mothers and unmarried partners. Meanwhile, increasing numbers of women are employed on a part-time basis in insecure service sector occupations. Labour must show it understands both their fears and their aspirations for a better life.

# Appealing to wavering voters

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In 2011, our research has focused particularly on voters in Midlands constituencies<sup>2</sup>. Polling data generally shows that voters in the East and West Midlands are closer to the national average in their political attitudes than voters in the South. The region itself is not regarded as having a particularly strong sense of identity, and, although it is traditionally associated with industrial manufacturing, the Midlands is perceptibly changing.

Midland's suburban seats appear to share many of the characteristics of their Southern counterparts. MP's, party workers and voters stressed that the Midlands is, in the words of one, "an astonishing variety of communities". As they said, "Culturally, the Midlands is not the same. Some people feel very similar to those in Kent and Sussex. Others remember the miners, big industrialisation, strong unions. People still remember that, though they have aspirations like people in the South". Another added, "My part of the Midlands is almost an honorary member of the South".

**"Voters have even less idea about what Labour stands for now than a year ago, despite the election of a new leader"**

Although headline polls appear positive for Labour, qualitative interviews reveal more negative underlying attitudes, in particular the extent to which Labour

lacks credibility on the economy. In 2010, respondents were strongly hostile both to Gordon Brown and Tony Blair, still angry about Iraq as well as generally disillusioned with the previous Labour government. Most were unsurprisingly undecided about the next election. Now voters seem more open to Labour, but also confused as to what the party is offering.

Voters have even less idea about what Labour stands for now than a year ago, despite the election of a new leader. There is a general sense that New Labour had been abandoned, but very little idea what this means in practice. One interviewee noted, "I've been aware of the fact that Ed Miliband has tried to distance himself from the New Labour idea and that it's time for Labour to go back to its roots. But I'm not sure what that means".

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2 This chapter is based on YouGov respondents who were dissatisfied former Labour voters and on telephone interviews with voters in the South and the Midlands who had previously voted Labour, but did not do so in 2010.

All our interviewees wanted Labour to set out clear policies in order to be persuaded to vote for the party again: “They should set out a clear vision in ordinary language about what is important in life, because we’ve lost sight of that”. Another added, “They should be putting across proper alternatives, there’s none there, they accept what Cameron says and that’s it”. Labour is not seen to be offering strong and clear opposition, for example one said, “Labour has had a real opportunity to defend the welfare state, but they aren’t doing it, I’m disappointed they’re not. They still have got an identity problem”.

Respondents felt that Labour had not really learnt the lessons of its defeat in 2010. One concluded, “They’re no more in touch than they were. They’ve completely run out of steam”. More alarmingly another said: “They haven’t made much progress since the election, I haven’t heard anything about it. I don’t think they’ve changed”. The general view appeared to be, “They don’t have any policies. You don’t really know where Labour stands on anything”. Labour has also struggled to identify itself with the hopes and aspirations of the mainstream and is still seen as, “Islington centred, not doing anything for real Labour supporters”.

**“Labour may be missing out on a huge opportunity to reach out to these voters by developing an inclusive, genuinely ‘one nation’ appeal”**

At the same time, it is clear that voters have an appetite for principled and well thought out ideas on the issues that matter most to them – from democratic empowerment at the local level to forging a new industrial policy: “You’ve got to disperse more power to local government,

neighbourhoods, more to individuals”, and, “They should stand up for manufacturing to get the country making things again. It’s run down to the ground here. We’re not making anything, everything seems to be made in China”. However, there are also positive perceptions of Labour as, “still the party which tries to protect ordinary people as opposed to the Conservatives who mainly look after their own”. They identify Labour as continuing, “to fight for communities and social justice”, as, “the party for the ‘people’ and not big business or solely for the middle classes”, embracing “genuinely fair policies”. Nonetheless, voters fear that Labour has little concrete to offer, so they are forced to go along with the coalition by default. Labour may be missing out on a huge opportunity to reach out to these voters by developing an inclusive, genuinely ‘one nation’ appeal.

### **The coalition government: no alternative?**

Most voters remain deeply worried about the economy and the impact of cuts, and cited few positive policies where they believed the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition

was making a difference. Nonetheless, these groups remain open-minded about the government, not least because Labour is seen as failing to provide an alternative. Cameron is not loved but he is respected as a capable leader, while the Coalition is perceived to be working reasonably well, although there are doubts: “I was impressed with the Coalition initially. I thought they were acting in the national interest, but in recent weeks there have been growing tensions”.

Where the public object strongly to government policies, the Liberal Democrats get most of the blame, especially on university tuition fees and cuts in child benefit. Nick Clegg’s abandonment of the tuition fees pledge is viewed with almost universal contempt. One interviewee said, “It puts me off voting Liberal again, they’ve abandoned their principles, particularly on tuition fees, that was a mistake”. The general sense is that the Liberal Democrats do not have significant influence on key planks of government policy, particularly the timing and severity of public spending cuts and reform of the banking system: “They have no influence on the Conservatives: the university fees show they were not listened to. They must have felt squirmingly embarrassed”. There is no confidence that should growth in the British economy continue to stall, the Liberal Democrats can persuade George Osbourne that ‘Plan B’ is now necessary.

However, some voters still prefer to have the Liberal Democrats in government as a moderating influence on Cameron’s party: “Yes they did influence the Conservatives, they can stop them being too extreme. They tried their best with tuition fees. The cuts are savage and they are trying to soften it”.

## **The economy and spending cuts**

There is great concern in the country about what is happening on the economy, but no clear consensus as to who is to blame for the cuts. Although people believe that Labour spent too much and unwisely in government, Labour is not seen to bear sole responsibility. There is no confidence that the Coalition is definitely taking the right decisions, although most voters believe that Labour would also have made major cuts.

Anxiety about the general state of the economy is palpable: “I’m very worried about it all, so many jobs are going”. Another added, “The thing I worry about with the Conservatives, they think the economy will be turned round by the private sector”. There was also a strong sense that those in the middle of the income distribution were being hit disproportionately hard: “I think it’s really bad to hit middle income hard working families

with the child benefit cut. I resent that, because it was the bankers that caused the economic problems, and ordinary people are now hit with that”.

Many voters are genuinely unsure about whether the cuts are too deep and they dislike what hits them personally. Some believe that the cuts went too far: “Surely there’s a point where you do more damage than good, and from what I’ve seen, they are causing more damage. If we get back into the black, what then? We’ve cut this and that and manufacturing has suffered and people’s lives have suffered”. But others were more fatalistic: “I don’t really know what the alternative is”.

**“Labour’s credibility on the economy is still regarded as weak and has been damaged by perceptions of mismanagement”**

Labour’s credibility on the economy is still regarded as weak and has been damaged by perceptions of mismanagement: “Labour was in power all that time, how the country was handed over had to be their responsibility”. In particular, “Labour has responsibility for turning its back on regulating business and banks”. In relation to the future, “They haven’t told us anything about what they would do. They’ve lost confidence after what happened”.

### **Concerns about immigration**

Opinion polls have repeatedly shown high levels of public concern about the issue of immigration. Disquiet is highest in the West Midlands, where there is strong support for the government’s policy of imposing an annual cap on immigration: “One thing the Conservatives have done is to control immigration, which I agree with. People should give something back if they come here and that’s what Cameron has done. Labour should be doing that”. There was also general unease about how Labour has faced up the issue of immigration in recent years: “The Labour lot say if you discuss immigration you are a racist. You have Pakistanis and Indians now saying what we’re saying – you walk around Derby and there are so many East European languages around you and no English. It’s the speed of it, we don’t have any control, and it is putting pressure on the hospitals. Labour needs to learn to talk more honestly - it’s a taboo”.

It is hard to overstate the extent of public concern about immigration. One respondent said: “I believe that the Labour Party have allowed my country to become a magnet and a safe haven for any immigrant and future terrorist who wishes to come here”. Another added: “We all know immigration has skinted this country and left us all on lower wages, owing to them being paid very low wages”. These respondents wanted Labour to properly

engage in the immigration debate, and develop a clear policy position: “Labour is capable of addressing immigration. What is peculiar is that they got obsessed about pleasing everyone and got in a muddle”.

### **Attitudes to Labour politicians**

Ed Miliband elicits few hostile responses; he is seen as essentially decent and as neither extreme nor out of touch. One voter remarked, “He’s ok, he’s clever and all that, he’s not like Brown, I couldn’t vote for Brown”, and another said, “He is bright enough but whether people will listen to him, I don’t know”. Nonetheless, as of now, he is not regarded as a potential Prime Minister, although his boldness in the News International affair may make a more decisive impact. “They don’t seem to have any clout as an opposition”, was a common refrain. Respondents wanted the Labour leader to define his leadership appeal to the country: “I warmed to him in recent weeks. But I didn’t like the way he was elected. He came in on a traditional union vote. He hasn’t defined himself – is he old Labour or new Labour or what”?

Most people have had no contact with their MP or local candidate since the 2010 election. Significantly there is a strong feeling that Labour has too little presence on the ground and is not sufficiently involved in community issues: “I get a lot of emails from my local Conservative MP but I don’t read them. I know he’s been involved in a new school and tried to stop a hospital being closed though. I don’t get any contact from Labour, not even on AV”. This suggests that Labour needs a radically new approach to local party organisation and community campaigning.

# What Labour must do

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The task for Labour now is not to come forward with a raft of detailed proposals, but to begin to win back the confidence of voters. Labour has to demonstrate that it is in touch with their concerns, understands their hopes and fears, can be trusted to safeguard their interests, and will govern the country through an approach based on fairness and competence. It has to show how Labour values can inform a new approach to governing Britain, and it has to set out concrete, deliverable commitments that win the electorate's trust. As one former candidate said, "We didn't listen when we were in government. We should use the advantage of opposition to have a wide and deep conversation about what people are thinking, that's what Cameron did. It's not brain surgery to figure it out".

Labour today needs to develop a new social democracy drawing on the best of the British left's revisionist tradition. That means distinguishing clearly between ends and means: the ends are eternal values, the means are the policies required to bring them about. The party exists not just to win power, but to pursue ethical values of freedom, equality and community. But without power, it is impossible to translate these values into practice. In order to help the most disadvantaged, to pursue injustice, and to widen opportunity, Labour has to be in government.

The first priority is to restore Labour's economic credibility. In his June 16th lecture this year at the London School of Economics, the shadow chancellor, Ed Balls, convincingly argued that eliminating the budget deficit within five years, as proposed by the Coalition government, risks plunging the country back into recession, with all that could mean for unemployment and the long term prospects for the British economy. But despite the intellectual force of his case, voters are not yet persuaded that Labour can be trusted again on the economy.

They tend to believe the accusation of the Coalition that the Labour Government, by running a budget deficit in the good times, was as much to blame for the financial crisis as the collapse of the US sub prime housing markets and the irresponsible behaviour of the banks. Some voters also suspect that the Labour opposition are, in the words of the Chancellor, 'deficit deniers' who opportunistically oppose spending cuts and that a future

Labour Government would resort to profligate ‘tax and spend’ policies which endanger economic stability and lead to further rises in income tax.

**“Labour needs to demonstrate again that it is committed to fiscal discipline”**

As to who to blame for the financial crisis, Ed Balls has accepted that the Labour Government should have been, “tougher in regulating the banks”. He could also have pointed out that, if the Labour Government was too lax with the banks, the Conservative opposition was calling for even less regulation of the City and the financial markets. With respect to the charge of ‘fiscal profligacy’, the Shadow Chancellor retorted that, before the global financial crisis, Britain had a lower deficit and national debt than Labour inherited from the Conservatives in 1997. He could also have reminded voters that, until November 2008, the Tories had committed themselves to matching Labour’s spending totals.

Labour needs to demonstrate again that it is committed to fiscal discipline. Ed Balls is certainly right to defend Labour against the charge of being ‘deficit deniers’. As he argued, Chancellor Darling’s 2009 plan to halve the public sector deficit in four years was a tough set of measures by any standards but one which would also have allowed room for growth and employment, as well as a fairer and more balanced approach to public spending cuts than the ‘slash and burn’ tactics adopted by the present Coalition.

These are strong arguments which could look even stronger if, as seems quite possible, the economy recovery stalls. However, our view is that more is needed if Labour is to recover its reputation for competence and fiscal responsibility. As one party worker said, “We need to portray a credible economic alternative that people understand and think will work, with a sense of being fair, relevant to people’s lives, providing equality of opportunity”.

Labour’s strongest card is the absence of a coherent growth agenda on the part of the Coalition government. The Labour party must forge a concerted strategy to promote growth and jobs in the British economy, develop new industries, and promote technological development. Governments have an interventionist role to play where there are clear instances of market failure. This includes investment in new public infrastructure projects, as well as in new skills and innovation, both of which can serve as the engine of growth. The state also has a role to play in renewing and rebalancing the economy, reversing the low-wage, low-skill, low productivity syndrome and encouraging manufacturing industry. By driving forward a modern industrial policy focusing on the development of key sectors,

regional specialisation, and lead technologies such as carbon capture and storage, Labour can show that it understands how to generate wealth, as well as how to spend it. The burgeoning green economy can act as a powerful spur to growth and jobs. We also have the potential to build a thriving digital economy in the United Kingdom, whose population spends more online than any other country in the world.

Before the 1997 election, Labour announced that it would stick to Tory spending plans for the first two years, as well as setting out new fiscal rules. Next time, there is a strong case for Labour to propose a tougher set of fiscal rules, for example a balanced budget for current expenditure not just over the economic cycle but annually, policed not by the government but a more powerful Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR), reporting directly to parliament. A genuinely independent OBR operating with an expanded remit would also be required to examine the effectiveness and productivity of spending on public services.

Another way of reassuring voters that taxes are being effectively spent would be hypothecation, directing taxes towards specific areas of spending. Traditionally, the Treasury has opposed such 'earmarking' of taxes on the plausible grounds that it reduces the flexibility with which governments can use resources. But linking taxes directly to areas of spending most strongly supported by voters, such as health and education, could help people feel better 'connected' to the taxes they pay. Greater transparency, which shows taxpayers in detail how their money is being spent and the impact, will be increasingly important. It should be the case that every household in the UK receives an annual 'citizen statement', setting out clearly how the tax system works and how public spending is allocated, as the Plant Commission proposed in the late 1990s.

In meeting the long-term challenge of funding social care given the dramatic ageing of the UK population, Labour ought to develop proposals for an hypothecated health and social insurance fund modelled on the current system of national insurance. This would restore the principle that it is in the self-interest, as well as the mutual interest, of individuals to insure themselves collectively against the risks of sickness and ageing – rather than simply being left to look after themselves. Labour has to show that in the modern world, aspiration is not inconsistent with looking after and supporting others.

However, the next election will be fought against a background in which there will continue to be long-term pressures on public spending. The squeeze on living standards and wages is set to intensify alongside increased burdens on families, including the impact

of higher university tuition fees and the cost of social care in older age. The Coalition Government will undoubtedly seek to introduce tax cuts and portray Labour as the party of high taxes and extravagant spending, which cannot be trusted to manage the state prudently and efficiently.

**“in the circumstances of the next election, there is unlikely to be much support for large increases in public spending, while most voters think the tax burden on average incomes is already high enough; we agree”**

Labour must, of course, defend the case for high quality public services and remind voters that the Thatcherite tax cutting agenda of the 1980s led to chronic underfunding of education and health. But in the circumstances of the next election, there is unlikely to be much support for large increases in public spending, while most voters think the tax burden on average incomes is already high enough; we agree. Indeed, there is a case for Labour to renew its commitment not to raise the basic rate of income tax, while retaining its flexibility over the 50p rate, ensuring that those with the broadest shoulders pay their fair share in the aftermath of the financial crisis.

The party should also consider the proposals of the Mirrlees review of taxation for the Institute of Fiscal Studies, which proposes a shift from direct to indirect taxation and gradually replacing regressive taxes, such as council tax and stamp duty, that impact negatively on hard-pressed families. There should be much greater emphasis on tackling unearned capital and wealth, including a mansion tax on homes over £2 million as Vince Cable proposed before the last election, using the proceeds to give additional relief to middle and lower income taxpayers. Labour’s emphasis at the next election must be on relieving the pressure as far as possible on hard-pressed working families. In particular, Labour should propose the reform of tax allowances, reducing the pressure on low income families and taking more people out of the tax system altogether. It must also show that a Labour government would strive to cut costs, making public services more efficient. The party must never concede the mantle of public sector efficiency to the right.

### **Tackling the difficult issues**

If it wants to restore trust in politics, Labour has to address contentious issues that most concern voters, especially immigration. The Gillian Duffy incident in the last election was a parable of Labour’s travails over immigration. Gordon Brown quite rightly pointed out to Mrs Duffy that migration had benefited Britain. However, Mrs Duffy was concerned by the scale of Eastern European immigration and the impact it had on local communities

like hers. As our research shows, voters want Labour to talk to them openly about the issue. As one MP said, “People thought we had just nodded off on the job as far as immigration was concerned”. They support the idea of a cap, at least as a symbol, even if they suspect it is likely to be ineffective. Labour needs to show that in government it would prevent illegal immigration, that it would provide help to hard pressed local communities, and that it would insist on responsibilities as well as rights for immigrant newcomers. Part of the answer also lies in how Labour communicates with voters: successful Labour candidates with high contact rates in the 2010 election were often prepared to confront these issues head on: “The only way you can win is to have genuine engagement with people, really listening to them, not shouting at them. In 2010, something broke, there was a disconnect”, said one candidate.

In relation to law and order, the Coalition government is proposing dramatic reductions in police numbers. This will damage the ability of communities to fight back against crime and public disorder, starkly underlined by the riots which occurred in the summer of 2011. However, it is not enough merely for Labour to oppose the cuts. The police do an effective job in many parts of the country and there is still relatively high public confidence, but there are also major concerns about the effectiveness and accountability of the police in England and Wales. There needs to be greater public scrutiny, and senior officers need to be held to account for police performance. A robust approach to crime and anti-social behaviour is essential if Labour is to regain the trust of voters. That means the police working in genuine partnership with communities.

The acute shortage of affordable housing has also fuelled social resentment, and is a major barrier to middle Britain fulfilling its aspirations. The reality is that many families will be compelled to rent for longer, particularly in London and the South-East. Labour needs a programme to improve regulation in the private rented sector, addressing both excessive rent rises and security of tenure. But it would also be quite wrong to close off home ownership as a viable option for hard-pressed families. The key to widening home ownership is improving access to sustainable forms of finance and credit. There is a case for transforming Northern Rock into a state-backed, mutual mortgage provider offering secured loans at a rate not below a 90:10 ‘loan to value’ ratio. This would provide a much needed boost to the UK housing market, and put Labour firmly on the side of people’s aspirations. While the Tories will no doubt seek to bribe the electorate with a short-term tax giveaway through selling taxpayer’s stake in the banks, Labour needs to

show that there are other ways of helping people get on – including providing them with sustainable finance through which to purchase a home from a financial provider they can trust.

## **Devolution and the New Politics**

Politics in Britain has never been more in disrepute. Over-centralisation erodes faith in democracy and politicians, and is particularly corrosive to the cause of centre-left politics. Labour has to decentralise power as far as possible, rather than allowing power to be hoarded at the centre. Citizens in England want to feel as well represented as they do in Scotland and Wales, and need to know that Labour has an affinity with the diversity of places, cultures and communities of which England is comprised. Reviving local government is essential to help the party reclaim an English identity, reconnecting Southern and Midlands’ voters with politics and addressing directly the resentments flowing from the devolution settlement which has apparently given Welsh and Scottish citizens a stronger voice.

There should be a new settlement for local government and local empowerment, giving real control over policy and performance rather than the limited conception of ‘earned autonomy’. This has to include greater fiscal freedoms, the latitude to set local business rates, the right to establish local business levies for specific purposes, and a reining in of the target culture in local services. If local authorities are given autonomy and flexibility, local problems can be fixed more quickly and efficiently. Local power bases are effective because they can be held to account by local citizens. Every significant urban area in England should have its own Mayor with powers similar to the big cities in the United States, providing local voters agree in a referendum. New rights of citizen initiative – such as the right of local groups to take over and run community assets on behalf of local people – should also be championed by Labour as part of putting social democratic values into action.

Labour must also develop its own conception of the new politics, recognizing that the public appreciate politicians who are prepared to work together in the national interest. Labour should offer a warm welcome to disillusioned Liberal Democrats who are seeking a radical home. And if circumstances change, Labour should not rule out a progressive alliance with the Liberal Democrats, framed around an agenda for political and constitutional renewal.

Of course, constitutional change is not a panacea, particularly in dealing with the widespread disillusionment with politics we have observed among Southern and Midlands' voters. This stems from a political culture where politicians are seen to be increasingly disreputable, even corrupt, and reforming institutions can only go so far. Nonetheless, the constitutional reforms of the last decade remain incomplete, and Labour should champion a new settlement including comprehensive reform of the second chamber, stronger parliamentary scrutiny of the executive in Whitehall and Westminster, and greater opportunities for channelling citizen's participation in the governing process.

## Local Campaigning

The emphasis on community organisation and campaigning, especially in some Midlands constituencies, and the priority given by the leadership team to recruiting new members into the party is of more than just internal importance. An active, vigorous party in touch with voters is a much needed ambassador, especially in the South where Labour urgently needs to strengthen its appeal, and win more council seats and councils. Sensible, progressive local stewardship will help to win new friends to the party.

Some Midlands and Southern candidates won, or increased their majorities in 2010 against the prevailing trend, notably Gedling, Birmingham Edgbaston, Birmingham Hodge Hill, and Oxford East. These seats all achieved very high contact rates with voters, were active on community issues, adopted a local focus emphasising what Labour could achieve in the area, and concentrated on really listening rather than 'political preaching'. As one said, "We won because of relentless campaigning, using new techniques, Facebook, Twitter, supermarket surgeries, and so on. You can only win if you get people in Tory areas voting for you, you have to show you are relevant to them". Another argued that, "It's not about money or support from head office. People have to be pro-active. Labour has to become a movement again. The core of the party is empty. We need to regenerate our soul".

Although campaigning style is not a catch-all solution to the challenge facing Labour, it is clear that 'real' listening and greater involvement in local communities would not only feed the policy debate, but also help Labour in resolving what remains a key problem: how to communicate policies in a way that can be actively understood by voters. As one party worker remarked, "We could have transformed the party with a few active people, we paid the price for not doing that. The local party is decrepit and didn't get enough votes out. The seat was saveable".

Gisela Stuart in Birmingham Edgbaston developed an innovative style of non-party political involvement in community issues, which relied on the use of many ‘networks of local ambassadors’. Her supporters were not necessarily party members or even party sympathisers, but they were united in their desire to address local issues. The campaign was run by Caroline Badley drawing on lessons learned from the Obama campaign in the United States. Badley told us that, “we couldn’t afford to just reach out to Labour voters, we had to reach out to all groups. We don’t discourage people from other parties, it is an inclusive approach. We get involved in everything locally, we bring pressure to bear on local authorities for community assets such as road crossings and grit bins, and on planning issues”.

Finally, Labour needs to become a more open party: all registered Labour supporters ought to have a vote in electing a future party leader. Open primaries would encourage greater political engagement, instead of candidates simply being chosen from the top-down. Local parties also need to embrace the potential of the Internet, transforming the nature and scale of political organisation, and creating more opportunities for involvement.

### **Movement for Change**

Movement for Change was launched during David Miliband’s leadership campaign in 2010, to train party activists in community organising skills. Since then it has been reconstituted, with the support of both David and Ed Miliband as a permanent home for community organising within the Labour movement. The idea behind Movement for Change is to provide training for local parties and members to campaign for change in local communities, to identify and nurture organising talent, and to develop fresh responses to the challenges and problems that people face in their everyday lives.

The work that Movement for Change undertakes is not traditional election organising, but by focusing on the needs of groups such as parents, patients and tenants, it can play a role in helping Labour to engage with ordinary voters. The Movement for Change plans to create a 10,000 strong team of community organisers to help Labour reconnect with voters who feel that the party has lost touch.

**[www.movementforchange.org.uk](http://www.movementforchange.org.uk)**

# Conclusion

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First and foremost Labour has to win the battle of ideas in British politics. Swing voters are attracted by a politics that appeals to mutual as well as self interest. But they also want efficient, broad-based and competent government. The lesson of history is that Labour wins when, as in 1945, 1964 and 1997, it is seen as the party of genuine opportunity for all, uniting a diverse range of classes and constituencies - including key marginals in the South and the Midlands - and projecting its appeal as a national party.

**“First and foremost Labour has to win the battle of ideas in British politics”**

Labour must stand by its fundamental commitment to assisting those most in need and tackling unjustified

inequalities. It must also be the party which works to break down barriers to upward mobility, promoting chances for individual progress and success. At the same time, it has to show that it can be trusted to provide competent and fiscally responsible government. Labour will not win power unless voters trust the party to manage the economy competently, spend responsibly, and tax fairly. The party's key goal must be to inspire the confidence of a sceptical electorate that it has the economic as well as the social vision to succeed in office. Labour must show that it can govern prudently while seeking a fairer, more equal society.

Labour is correct to argue that a ‘Big Society’, which is more than just a Cameron propaganda exercise, needs the support of an ‘enabling state’, but it must be efficient, responsive and accountable. The era when people who are not in genuine need could simply depend on the state has ended; instead people need to show that they are meeting their duties and obligations as citizens, and Labour must show it understands this.

Labour rightly defends public services, but they must also be of high quality and give value for money. Labour supports a fair and progressive taxation system, but it must also demonstrate that it takes seriously the concerns of hard-pressed, middle income tax payers. In difficult times, Labour must be the party which is capable of offering a hand up to those who want to get on, as well as a helping hand to those in trouble.

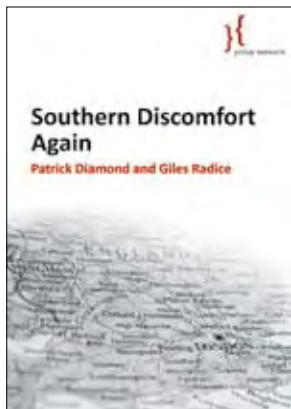
None of this will be possible, however, unless Labour can begin to create a genuinely new politics in Britain. That means winning the trust of the electorate that Labour has the ability to deliver on its promises and manage the country prudently and sensibly. It

“Labour must show that it can govern prudently while seeking a fairer, more equal society”

also means reaching out beyond narrow partisan and tribal lines demonstrating that Labour is a national party capable of governing in the national interest. Most of all, it means

inspiring hope in politicians and politics itself – that by working together, we can build a better country: that Britain can and will be ‘one nation’ again.

# Recent Policy Network publications



# Southern Discomfort

This pamphlet is the sequel, one year on, to *Southern Discomfort Again*, a study which sought to address the crippling weakness that Labour now faces in Southern England after its catastrophic 2010 election defeat. In this pamphlet, we have focused our qualitative research on the Midlands as a microcosm of the English electorate. Following Labour's 1992 defeat, the original *Southern Discomfort* series revealed that floating voters were aspirant and upwardly mobile. Today, they are far more cautious about their own prospects, prioritising security and a better future for their children. This group feel more insecure and vulnerable than ever in the wake of the global financial crash and the dramatic squeeze on living standards. At the same time, widespread disillusionment with politics and politicians is now endemic in Britain.

Restoring trust, both trust in politics and trust in Labour's capacity to manage the economy, will be critical to the party's prospects of electoral recovery. This pamphlet addresses how Labour can fashion a political strategy that will enable it to win next time, escaping the impotence of opposition and becoming once again the natural party of government in British politics.



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