

THINK LABOUR

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WHO IS LABOUR FOR?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following the results of the local elections, many are claiming that Labour can no longer sustain a broad electoral coalition because its voters are too divided by class, culture and values.

This report rejects that theory. It asserts that Labour can form a compelling coalition if it is proud of its core values, it stands up for the economically insecure and delivers for transactional voters worried about the economy, the NHS and irregular migration.

Last week's local elections and ThinkLabour's own polling show Labour lost votes to the left and right, with more than half of 2024 general election voters deserting the party.

To win again Labour must attract support from three groups:

- Left-liberal voters aligned with Labour on values
- Economically insecure voters seeking tangible improvements in their lives, and who look to Labour to stand up for them
- Transactional Voters who must be convinced that Labour can outperform its rivals on key issues such as the economy, public services, and immigration.

This report recommends a Labour plan to win back support that includes a clear focus on the following broad elements:

- Be clear about Labour's values
- Stand up for the economically insecure
- Deliver for transactional voters
- Be honest about trade-offs
- Unite the country

P4	INTRODUCTION
P7	THE LOCAL ELECTIONS AND LABOUR'S COALITION
P16	THE NEED FOR VALUES.. AND VOTERS
P19	PUTTING THE COALITION BACK TOGETHER
P24	THE WAY OUT
P28	OUR WORK AHEAD

INTRODUCTION

Last week's local election results were shocking but they were not surprising. Local elections are often seen as an opportunity for voters to punish an unpopular government without committing to an alternative at a general election. Third parties typically outperform in these elections, and history shows governments suffering heavy local losses can still recover nationally.

Yet the results show that Labour lost support across very different types of areas, and to parties on both the left and the right. The fragmentation visible in the 2024 general election has intensified, with the combined vote share of the two main parties falling further in the latest local results.

There are those who argue that Labour must make a choice between only trying to win back those it has lost to the left, or only appealing to voters who have switched to Reform UK or the Conservatives. But under First Past the Post—where parties that exceed roughly 30% of the vote are disproportionately rewarded, while those below it face volatile and often punishing outcomes—Labour's path to power still depends on holding together a broad and politically diverse coalition.

This paper argues that rebuilding a coalition must begin by asking why people vote for political parties at all. We identify three broad groups: values-driven voters, those motivated by material interests, and transactional voters who prioritise delivery on key issues. The coalition Labour needs spans all three:

- Left-liberal voters aligned with Labour on values
- Economically insecure voters seeking tangible improvements in their lives, and who look to Labour to stand up for them
- Transactional Voters who must be convinced that Labour can outperform its rivals on key issues such as the economy, public services, and immigration.

These groups have very different priorities and experiences. In the past, Labour could rely on a stable partisan base enabling it to focus only on swing voters. Today, with support drifting from both ends of the spectrum, it must actively manage and hold together this diverse coalition.

The local election results suggest it is not succeeding. It seems to many that the Government appears to have been transactional with its left flank—raising the minimum wage, taxing business, lifting the two-child cap, and nationalising rail—without consistently articulating the progressive rationale. This has led to voters switching to the Greens, and not just in major urban areas. Meanwhile critics have argued that it has attempted to connect with voters it has lost to its right with language and values which have at times felt inauthentic to Labour. This has alienated some progressives and ultimately, has failed in its objective of winning back those voters.

This paper argues for a different approach. Labour can only sustain its coalition if it is clear and confident about its core values. To retain progressive voters, the party must make clear that it is an outward-looking, economically left-leaning and moderately socially liberal, and consistently connect its policies and decisions to its founding mission: supporting those facing insecurity and creating a fairer society. At the heart of Labour's tradition is the belief that "by the strength of our common endeavour we achieve more than we achieve alone" — that an active and effective state should provide a safety net and public services that everyone can rely upon.

At the same time, it must demonstrate competent delivery to win over those more transactional voters who may not share all its values but will back it if they believe it can deliver.

This means favouring the creation of new, growing industries for our future rather than simply preserving old industries for their own sake. It means accepting that high quality public services and a working welfare system that will require tough choices on tax and spend. It means standing up for those facing economic insecurity, while also recognising that those who are able to contribute to the shared national effort should be expected to do so. There must be a distinction between those who cannot contribute and those who simply choose not to. For those Labour voters considering Reform, Labour must also demonstrate that it can bring irregular migration under control and build a more resilient country to cope with a crumbling international order and increased security threats.

Governing in a fragmented political era—especially amid this volatile global environment where global crises repeatedly arise—is extraordinarily difficult. After nearly two decades in which many people feel their lives have not meaningfully improved, voters are increasingly attracted to the simple and emotionally compelling narratives offered by populists on both the left and the right, who identify clear causes of decline and promise easy solutions. Opposition parties are able to advance these straightforward but often impractical answers, and governments can be tempted to imitate those simplistic narratives rather than confront difficult trade-offs honestly. But this is ultimately self-defeating: governments are judged on outcomes, and when easy promises fail to deliver, the political consequences are severe.

Instead, Labour should make full use of incumbency. Government has the capacity to act and has a platform to explain those actions. Rather than being guided by short-term polling on the popularity of individual policies, it must use that platform to articulate a clear and consistent narrative: why its choices are necessary, how they reflect its core values, and what they will deliver over the long term.

ThinkLabour has been created to generate the bold ideas, political strategy and public insight needed for Labour to govern confidently and win the next General Election. Our collective challenge is to develop a strong programme and story of delivery and hope that can secure the support of this wider coalition. This must include a single-minded focus on driving growth to enhance British prosperity and security, a commitment to creating a resilient

society based on contribution, cohesion and integration, and a willingness to be frank about the challenges the UK faces and the trade-off required in a challenging and uncertain world.

THE LOCAL ELECTIONS AND LABOUR'S COALITION

The results of the local elections confirm that Labour is losing support across the nations of Britain and across different types of areas in England. Labour lost control of the Welsh Senedd and failed to oust the SNP from power in Scotland. In England, Labour lost 1,498 council seats, while Reform UK were the main winners, gaining 1,452 seats. The Green Party were the second biggest winners, gaining 441 seats. However, focusing only on the headline numbers in England risks creating the misleading impression that Labour's losses were overwhelmingly driven by voters moving directly to Reform.

ThinkLabour's polling shows that in terms of absolute numbers of votes lost, Labour lost 22% of its 2024 voters to the Greens and the Liberal Democrats but only 11% to Reform UK and a further 4% to the Conservatives. Nearly a fifth (19%) did not vote at all.

Labour's catastrophic losses were in fact driven by at least four distinct voter movements:

- Labour 2024 voters switching directly to Reform (or, in some cases, the Conservatives)
- Labour 2024 voters switching directly to the Greens (or the Lib Dems)
- Lower turnout among Labour 2024 voters, while Reform disproportionately benefited from mobilising less frequent voters
- Former Conservative voters consolidating the right-wing vote behind Reform

These dynamics played out in different combinations across different parts of the country, but in most areas all four factors were present to some degree. Even in places where Labour lost seats to Reform, direct movement from Labour to Reform was rarely the only — or even the dominant — explanation for the result.

To understand how Labour's losses played out across England, we have grouped the key battlegrounds into four categories: Deprived Towns and Suburbs, Major City Centres, Affluent Areas and Classic Swing Areas (a fifth group of Rural councils contains areas where Labour is generally not competitive). Because Labour will need to win substantial numbers of marginal seats across all of these areas to retain power, the party's challenge will be one of broadening Labour's appeal, rather than tilting exclusively towards winning back voters lost either to the right or to the left.

DEPRIVED TOWNS AND SUBURBS

This group of towns and suburbs in the bottom third of deprived areas in England and Wales, contains the largest number of Westminster seats. Many are ex-industrial towns, which were historically part of the Labour heartlands.

Labour's 2026 council retention by area type

Each panel = 100 hexes; one hex = one percentage point of retention.

Labour lost Labour retained

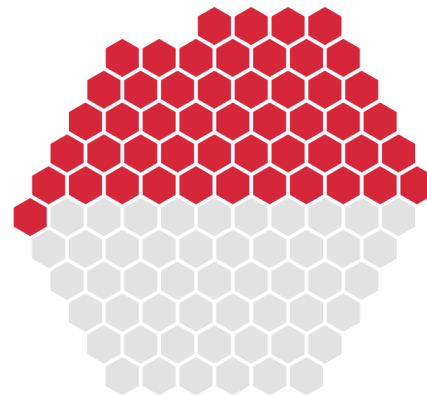
Deprived Towns and Suburbs



19%

122 of 641 Labour councillors held
139 current Labour Westminster seats

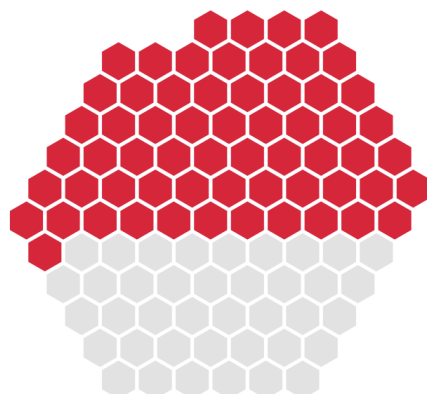
Major City Centres



50%

467 of 934 Labour councillors held
64 current Labour Westminster seats

Affluent Areas



61%

93 of 152 Labour councillors held
47 current Labour Westminster seats

Classic Swing Areas



48%

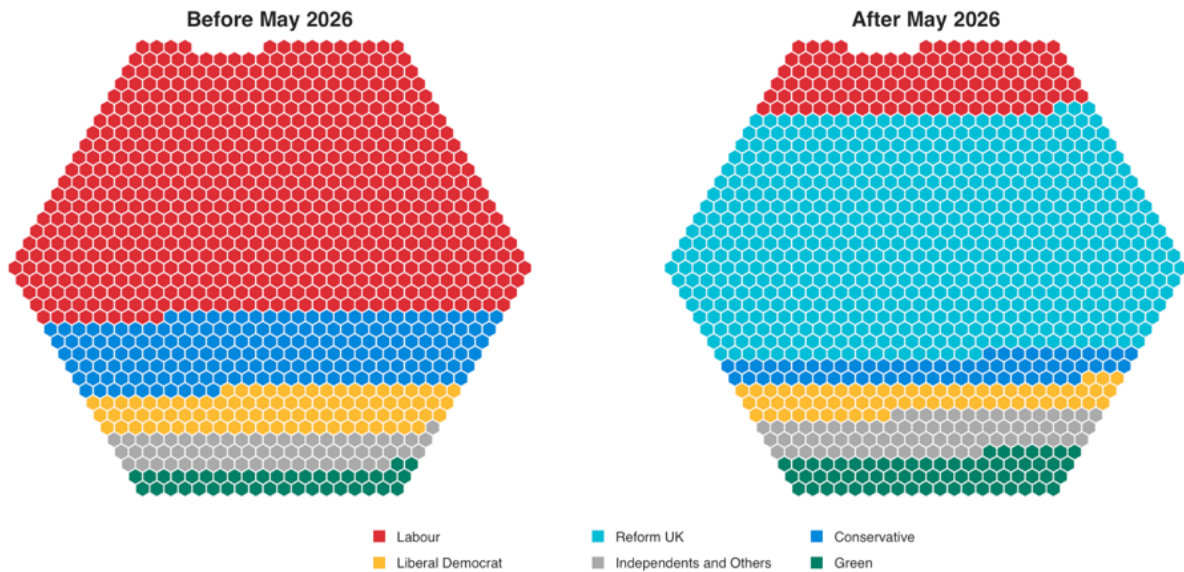
331 of 689 Labour councillors held
97 current Labour Westminster seats

But Labour has been in long-term decline here due to demographic and social change. As age and education have become stronger predictors of voting behaviour, older and disproportionately non-graduate populations in these areas have increasingly turned away from Labour.

There are 139 Westminster seats which fall into the category of Deprived Towns and Suburbs, making it the largest of the four competitive groups. At the last General Election, 128 were won by Labour. There is no plausible route for Labour to retain power without holding onto a substantial proportion of these constituencies.

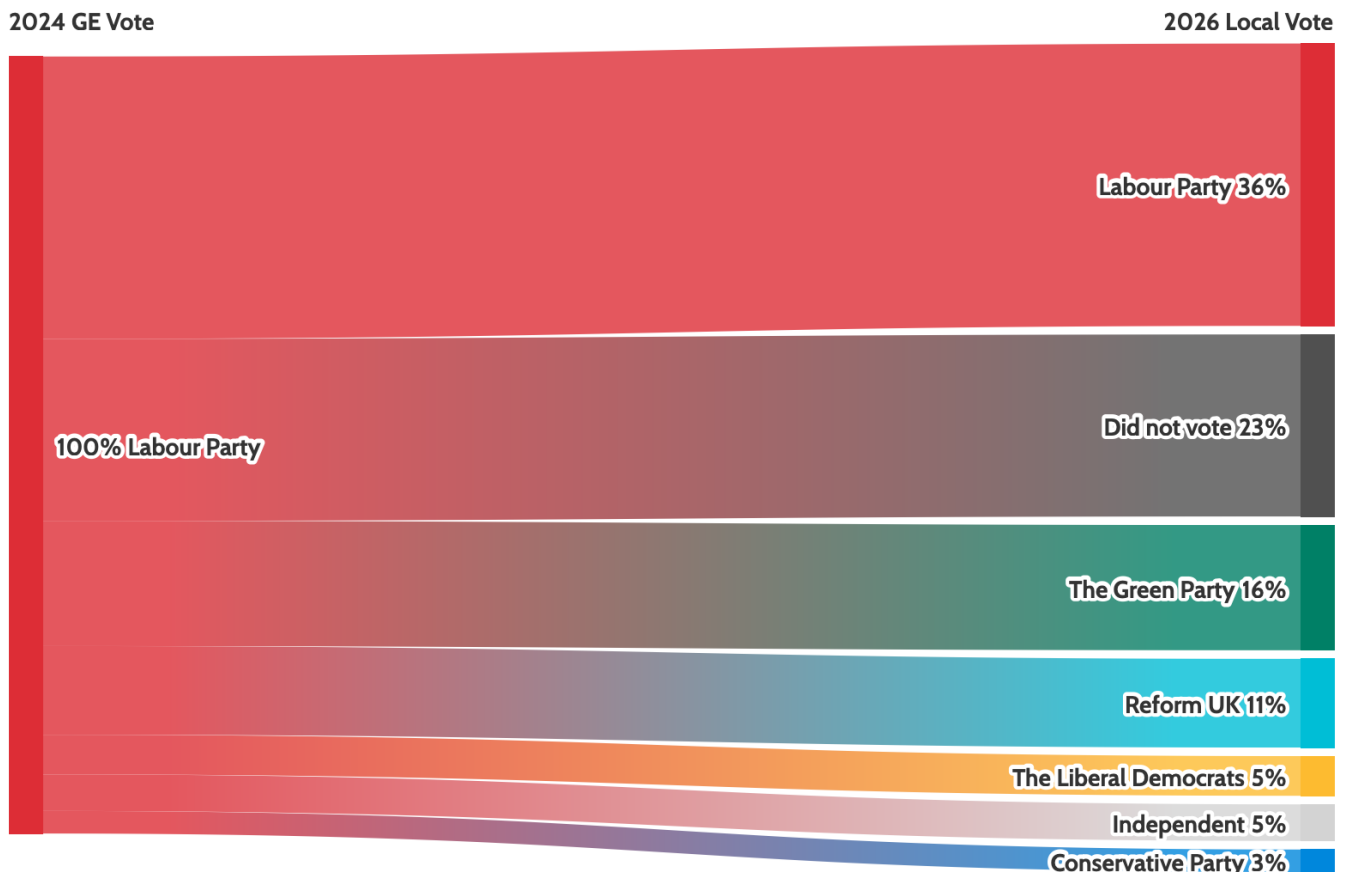
In the 2024 General Election, these areas still recorded a higher-than-average Labour vote share, but in these local elections they were home to

some of Labour's most devastating losses, including the loss of all its seats up for election in Wigan and Hartlepool. Labour retained a mere 19% of the council seats it had held in these areas.



SEATS CONTESTED IN DEPRIVED TOWNS AND SUBURBS IN THE 2026 LOCAL ELECTIONS HELD BY EACH PARTY

It was in these areas that the combination of all the four factors described above came together most catastrophically for Labour. The party experienced significant vote switching both to Reform and to progressive parties and nearly a quarter did not vote.



SOURCE: THINKLABOUR • 8TH - 12TH MAY 2026 • 2,703 ADULTS FROM AREAS WITH LOCAL ELECTIONS IN MAY 2026

Although Labour is losing fewer voters overall to the right than to progressive parties even in these seats, those losses were especially electorally damaging in these constituencies because Reform was typically the principal challenger. With the exception of places such as Burnley, where large Muslim communities created stronger conditions for independent or Green challenges, progressive parties were generally not competitive. As a result, every vote Labour lost to Reform had a double effect — taking one vote from Labour while simultaneously giving a vote to its main opponent.

Labour's losses were compounded by the consolidation of the right-wing vote behind Reform in a way that had not occurred at the 2024 General Election. In that election, the right-wing vote was often divided between the Conservatives and Reform, allowing many Labour candidates to come through the middle. In last week's local elections, some of Labour's worst results came in areas where the Conservative vote also collapsed - much of it transferring to Reform. In Tameside, for example, Labour's vote share fell by 30 points, while the Conservative vote share declined by 27 points.

Preliminary analysis from the Election Centre at Exeter also indicates that there was a significant increase in turnout in the areas where Reform did best.

MAJOR CITY CENTRES

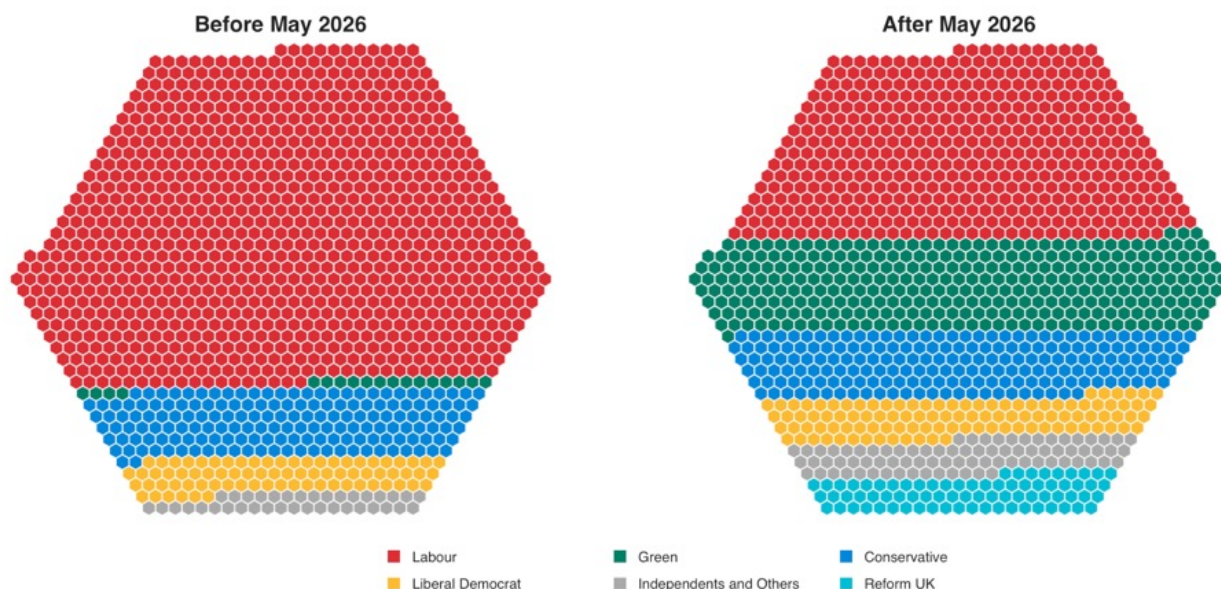
Today, Labour's principal electoral strongholds are in major cities. While the party has always performed relatively well in urban areas—the scale of its advantage has grown significantly over time. In 1987, Labour's vote share in major cities was around 8 points above the national average; by 2019, this gap had widened to 17 points.

This shift reflects underlying demographic change. Groups more likely to support Labour—young people, graduates, private renters, and ethnic minority voters—have become more concentrated in cities, and have grown as a share of the urban population.

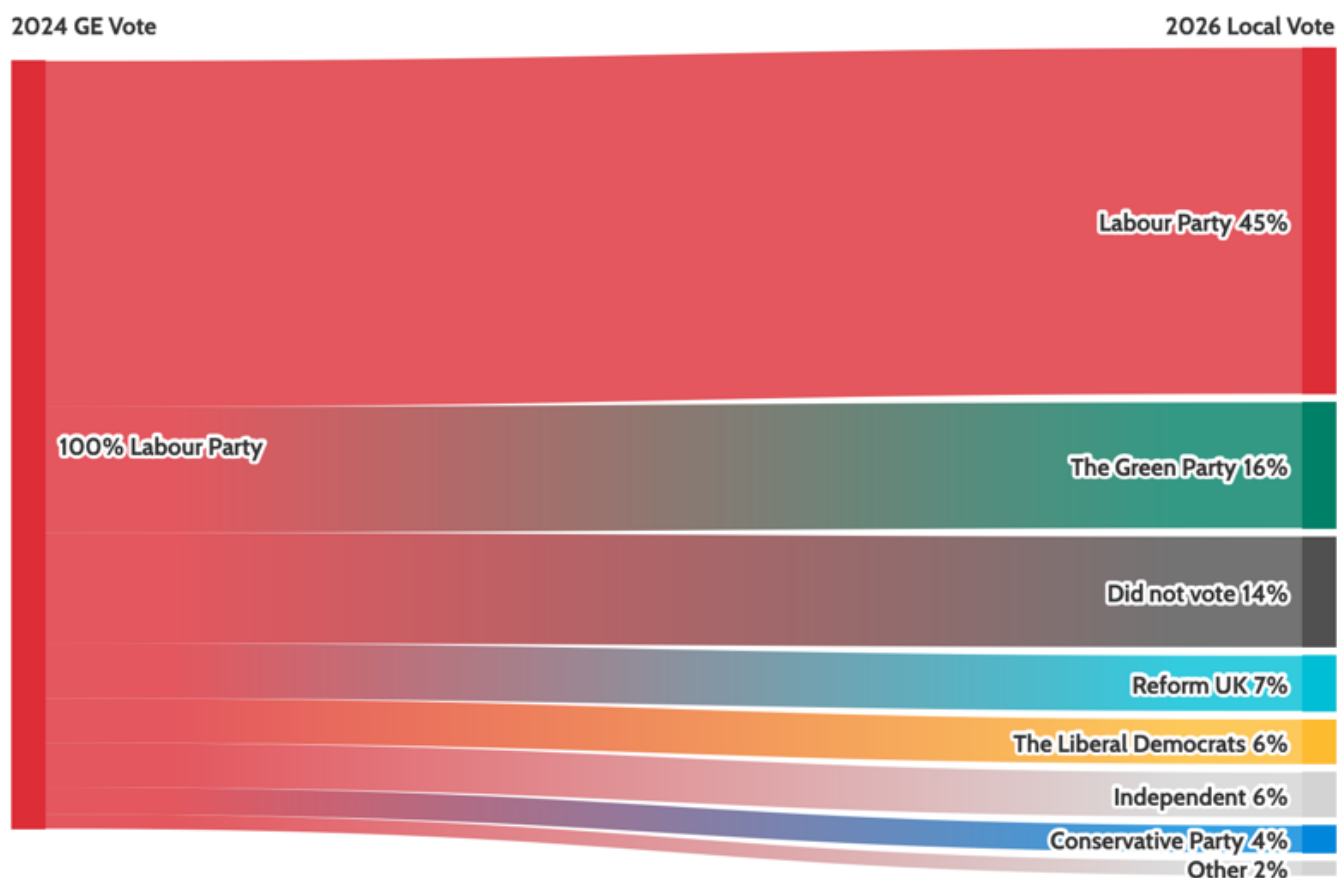
There are 64 seats we have classified as Major City Centre constituencies, of which 61 are currently held by Labour. Many are among Labour's safest parliamentary seats.

Labour's vote share in city centres peaked in 2019 but fell back in 2024, with some voters moving to the Greens or Independents, or disengaging altogether. In the last General Election, Labour's lead remained large enough to retain most of these seats, albeit with reduced majorities. The local election results suggest that this erosion has now become a more serious electoral threat with the Green Party emerging as a major challenger in many urban areas. Labour lost control of councils including Hackney and Lewisham in London to the Greens, while in Manchester the party lost 17 council seats to Green candidates.

Labour retained 45% of its 2024 General Election vote in Major City Centres, with fewer losses to Reform and to not voting, than in Deprived Towns and Suburbs.



SEATS CONTESTED IN MAJOR CITY CENTRES IN THE 2026 LOCAL ELECTIONS HELD BY EACH PARTY



SOURCE: THINKLABOUR • 8TH - 12TH MAY 2026 • 2,703 ADULTS FROM AREAS WITH LOCAL ELECTIONS IN MAY 2026

The Green Party performed strongest in younger and more deprived urban areas, while Labour proved more resilient in major city areas with older and more affluent populations. By contrast, Reform UK performed notably poorly in all urban seats.

The Conservative Party has been in long-term decline in major city centres and retained very little representation in places such as Manchester and London by the 2024 General Election. However, from this low base

they still achieved some important gains in the local elections, regaining Westminster council from Labour and becoming the largest party in Wandsworth. In both cases, Conservative vote share still declined, but Labour's vote fell further because of losses to the Greens and the Liberal Democrats.

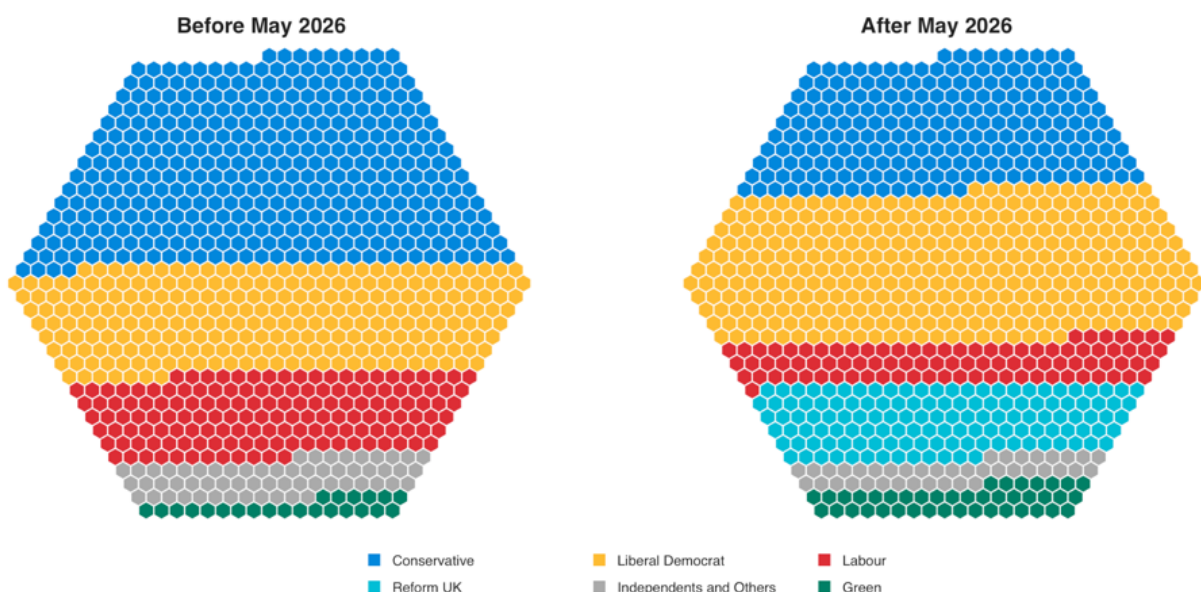
The places where the Greens overtook Labour represent a serious warning sign for the party. Politics is increasingly organised around broad ideological “blocs”, with voters moving more often between parties on the same side of the political divide than across it. The rise of the Greens suggests that, in some urban areas, they are increasingly being seen as the dominant party within the progressive bloc, as happened in the Gorton and Denton by-election. Once voters begin to see the Greens rather than Labour as the main progressive challenger to Reform, Labour loses its ability to make tactical arguments about the need to unite behind it to defeat the right.

AFFLUENT SUBURBS AND COMMUTER TOWNS

Until relatively recently, affluent suburbs and commuter towns were solidly Conservative territory. However, demographic change has begun to reshape these areas. Younger, more liberal graduates—alongside increasing numbers of people from ethnic minority backgrounds—have been priced out of major cities and moved into these communities.

As a result, many of these constituencies have become increasingly competitive, with the Liberal Democrats emerging as the dominant challenger in a large number of them and winning the highest number of council seats contested in this category. Some of these areas also came within Labour's reach at the last General Election, including Chipping Barnet and Welwyn Hatfield.

There are 120 Westminster constituencies in England and Wales which fall into this category, of which 47 are currently held by Labour.



SEATS CONTESTED IN AFFLUENT AREAS IN THE 2026 LOCAL ELECTIONS HELD BY EACH PARTY

What stands out in these results is that both the Green Party and Reform UK performed relatively poorly compared with other types of areas. As Luke Tryl of More in Common UK has observed, “Where Green and Reform voters find common ground is a loss of faith in Britain’s political institutions and a desire to ‘just let them all burn.’”¹ Affluent suburban areas, by contrast, contain disproportionately high numbers of voters who feel they have benefited from the existing economic and political settlement and are therefore less attracted to anti-system politics.

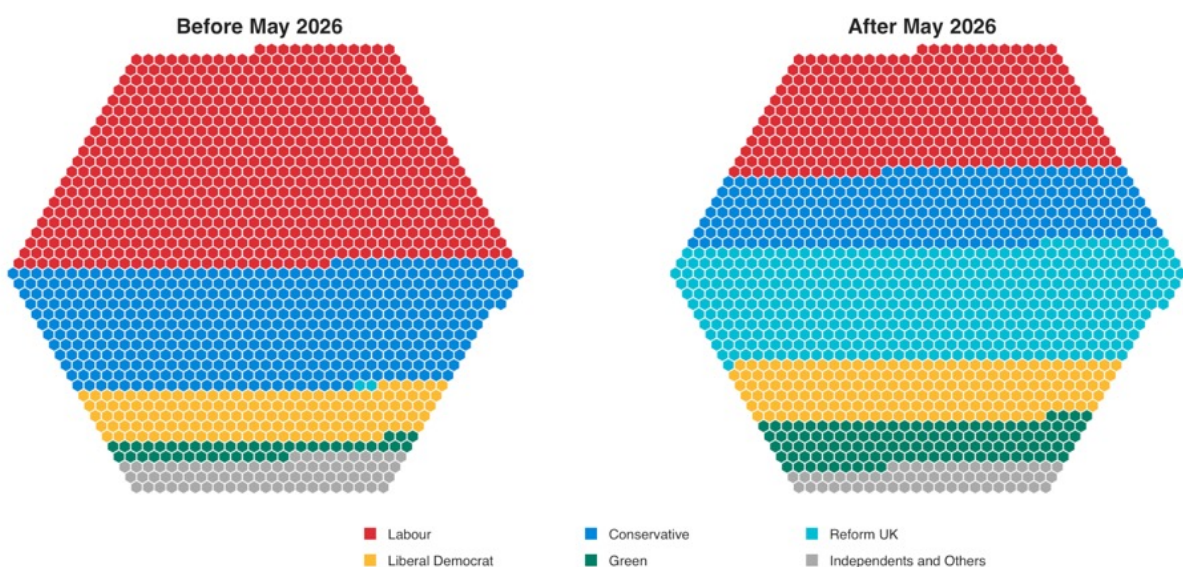
This helped Labour perform more resiliently in these constituencies than elsewhere. Labour retained 61% of its councillors in affluent areas — the highest retention rate of any segment. The relatively weak Green performance was particularly important in limiting Labour’s losses.

CLASSIC SWING SEATS

In the past, these were the areas that most often determined election outcomes. They tend to be places with a balanced mix of deprivation and affluence, where average age and education levels closely mirror the national profile.

There are 126 Westminster constituencies in England and Wales within this category, making it the second largest of the four groups, and 97 are currently held by Labour. Historically, the party that goes on to form the government has tended to dominate these kinds of areas.

At the last General Election, Labour won around three quarters of the constituencies in this category. In the local elections, however, the party lost roughly half of its councillors in these areas. Although Reform UK emerged with more councillors in these areas than any other individual party, its dominance was still limited: Reform secured only around 38% of the total seats contested, while both Labour and the Conservative Party retained substantial

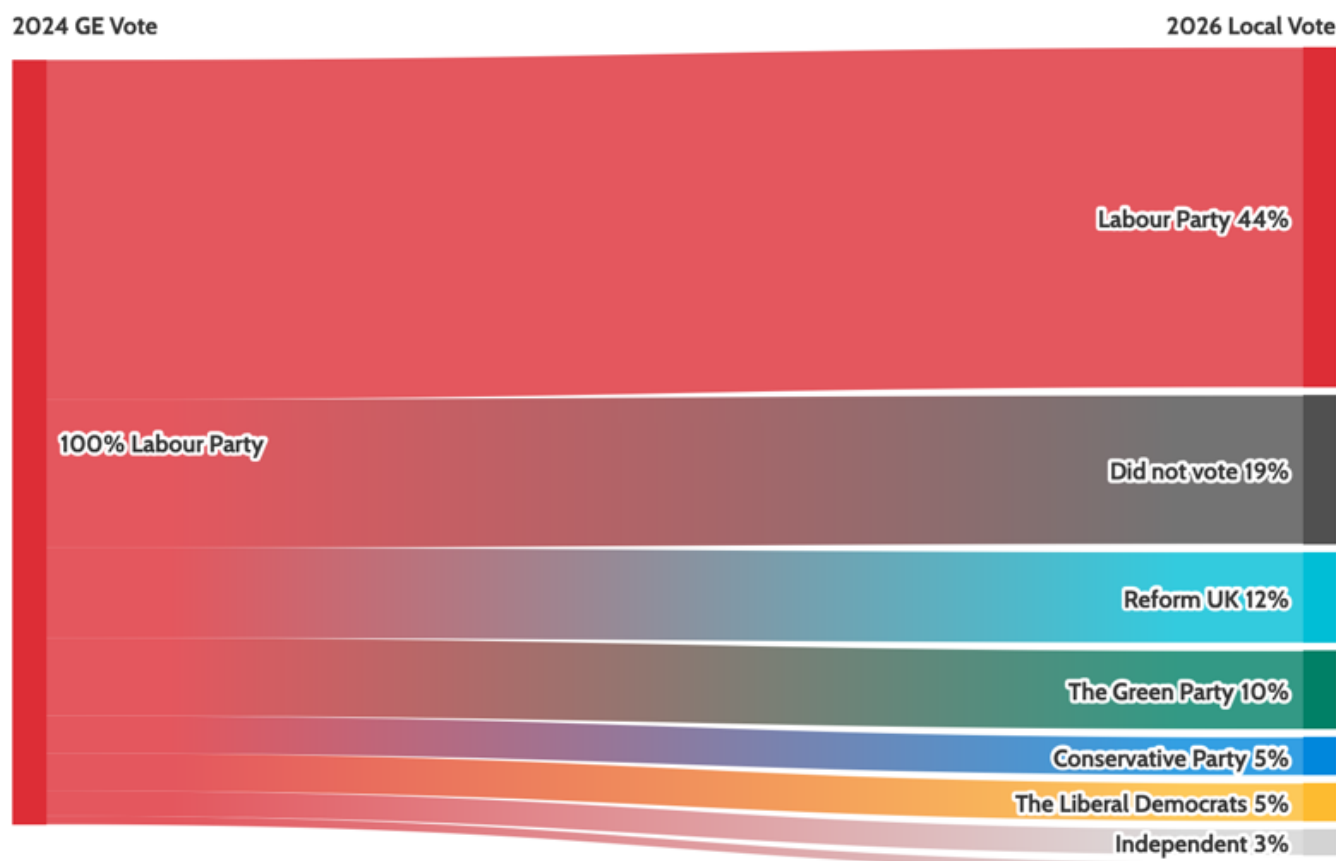


SEATS CONTESTED IN CLASSIC SWING SEATS IN THE 2026 LOCAL ELECTIONS HELD BY EACH PARTY

1. [HTTPS://WWW.MOREINCOMMON.ORG.UK/LATEST-INSIGHTS/THE-POLITICS-OF-DEPRIVATION/](https://www.moreincommon.org.uk/latest-insights/the-politics-of-deprivation/)

representation. Unlike in major urban centres, the Green Party also failed to make significant breakthroughs in these constituencies.

Labour's votes went in all different directions. Some consolidation of the right-wing vote behind Reform took place, but not on the scale seen in more deprived areas. The Conservatives managed to retain 58% of their councillors in this segment. Nevertheless, the combined effect of Labour losses to Reform, smaller losses to progressive parties, and lower turnout among Labour-leaning voters was enough to produce major setbacks in a series of politically important bellwether councils. Labour lost control of councils such as Swindon, Milton Keynes and Nuneaton & Bedworth, with all three falling into No Overall Control.



SOURCE: THINKLABOUR • 8TH - 12TH MAY 2026 • 2,703 ADULTS FROM AREAS WITH LOCAL ELECTIONS IN MAY 2026

CONCLUSION FROM LOCAL ELECTIONS

The local elections confirm that we have moved away from an old electoral model—where large, stable blocs voted out of habit and identity and elections were decided by a relatively small number of swing voters. Today's electorate is far more volatile, and far fewer seats can be considered truly safe.

There are, however, some grounds for optimism. Both Reform and Green advances remain geographically concentrated. Reform has made little impression in more affluent areas, while the Greens have struggled to break through outside major urban centres. In addition, while many Labour voters stayed at home in local elections often viewed as lower-stakes contests, the high turnout in the Gorton and Denton by-election suggests progressive voters are willing to mobilise behind the most competitive alternative when

they perceive a serious threat from Reform. Nevertheless, the overall picture is clear: Labour must regain at least some support from voters it has lost to the right, while also persuading progressive voters that it remains the main vehicle for defeating Reform.

THE NEED FOR VALUES.. AND VOTERS

The argument that Labour should have a clear, core set of values and be clear about who it stands for is not new and is sometimes advocated by those who overlook the need for Labour to appeal to voters beyond its core to win elections. ThinkLabour's mission is to support Labour to govern and to win. We will not make that mistake, especially at a moment when Labour is facing real electoral jeopardy. We are clear that Labour will need to pull back votes it has lost from both the right and the left in order to stand a chance of forming the next government. But we believe that Labour embracing its values is the best way to do this.

APPEALING TO VOTERS LOST TO THE RIGHT

At the 2024 election, Labour identified economically left-leaning but culturally authoritarian voters as essential to winning a majority, sometimes referred to as "hero voters". Despite targeting them, Labour made no net gains among this group. Its biggest gains came instead from the opposite direction: economically right-leaning but socially liberal former Conservatives². The Red Wall was won back less by persuading "hero voters" to switch than by a combination of Conservative authoritarians defecting to Reform, more liberal Conservatives switching to Labour, and Liberal Democrat tactical voting.

Since the election, the drift has continued. ThinkLabour has found that among former Labour voters who have switched to Reform, 57% now place themselves at zero on a scale of zero to 10 measuring their likelihood of voting Labour again. er

Labour has become more restrictive on immigration in both rhetoric and policy, but the two halves of its former coalition are reading this differently. British Election Study data shows that Labour to Reform switchers saw Labour as more pro-migration in the summer of 2025 than they had done at the time of the General Election. They see the continued small boat crossings and asylum hotels, and conclude nothing has changed. Meanwhile, those Labour has lost to the Greens or Liberal Democrats thought that Labour was more anti-migration.³

A study of Keir Starmer's controversial speech to launch the Immigration White Paper, in which the Prime Minister described high levels of immigration

2.THE BRITISH GENERAL ELECTION OF 2024, R. FORD, T. BALE, W. JENNINGS & P. SURRIDGE

3.LABOUR-TO-REFORM SWITCHERS SAW LABOUR AS SIGNIFICANTLY MORE PRO-MIGRATION IN SUMMER 2025 THAN SUMMER 2024 (+1.25 POINTS ON A 0-10 SCALE).

- LABOUR-TO-GREEN/LD SWITCHERS SAW THE OPPOSITE: LABOUR AS SIGNIFICANTLY LESS PRO-MIGRATION (-0.92 POINTS).
- BOTH GROUPS STARTED FROM NEAR-IDENTICAL BASELINES (~4.9) IN 2024 AND DIVERGED SHARPLY, ENDING MORE THAN TWO POINTS APART.

as having done “incalculable damage” and said that Britain risked becoming an “island of strangers”, found it produced a 14% rise in voters identifying immigration as their most important issue. Furthermore, Labour was perceived as more anti-immigrant by pro-migration voters and overall evaluations of Labour’s handling of migration fell slightly. The net impact was a 1.2-point drop in Labour vote share.⁴

Migration-sceptic voters largely do not believe that Labour’s tougher rhetoric reflects its underlying values. Political identities are built over decades, and Labour’s brand remains closely associated with a legacy of progressive social reform that many voters see as fundamentally incompatible with claims of being genuinely hardline on immigration.

Denmark’s Social Democrats are the most cited example of successfully engineering a shift in perceptions on immigration. But their repositioning took years of consistent commitment from the entire party, an explicit willingness to lose metropolitan voters, and a proportional electoral system that let them govern with just 28% of the vote. The results of the local election show that metropolitan areas are currently among the few places which Labour retains significant presence. Sacrificing support in these areas could therefore completely hollow out the party’s parliamentary base. The Danish Social Democrats have been able to maintain their hardline stance on immigration only by going into coalition with a centre-right party – an option that would be unthinkable for Labour.

Some have argued that a more authentic route for Labour to win back voters lost to the right could lie in reasserting itself as the party of the traditional working class, seeing Labour’s current difficulties as stemming from a long-term drift away from its working-class roots. But the picture is more complicated. Labour’s shift towards a mixed middle and working-class coalition is not a recent phenomenon, reflecting deep social and economic changes over decades. The working class is no longer politically united. Older working-class voters – often homeowners with secure pensions – tend to feel economically stable and hold more right-wing economic views alongside cultural conservatism. Younger working-class voters, facing insecure jobs and high housing costs, are generally more left-leaning.

That means defining Labour purely as “the party of the working class” risks targeting a group that is not only shrinking but increasingly divided, especially along generational lines.

RELYING ON PROGRESSIVE UNITY

The alternative case is that Labour should focus on reuniting the progressive vote. Labour is losing more of its 2024 voters to the Greens, Liberal Democrats, SNP and Plaid Cymru than to parties on the right. These voters hold attitudes much closer to loyal Labour supporters and

4. ACCOMMODATING THE RADICAL RIGHT: THE ELECTORAL COSTS FOR SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTIES STUART J. TURNBULL-DUGARTE, JACK BAILEY, DANIEL DEVINE, ZACHARY DICKSON, SARA B. HOBOLT, WILL JENNINGS, ROBERT JOHNS, KATHARINA LAWALL

are significantly more likely to say they would consider returning.

The argument that Labour should prioritise winning back voters it has lost to the right relies on the belief that progressive voters will be prepared to tactically vote for Labour when faced with a Reform government. This is complacent. Recent YouGov polling suggested that while 76% of Labour supporters would be prepared to tactically vote for the Greens in a contest against Reform only 57% of Green supporters would return the favour for Labour.⁵

Meanwhile, there is the danger that voters might not be sure of who they should vote for tactically when the General Election comes around. Our previous polling illustrates this problem. Respondents were asked which two parties they believed would come first and second in their constituency if an election were held now, and their answers were compared to the results of a YouGov MRP model from the same period. Only 11% managed to correctly identify the top two parties in the correct order, and just 22% named them in any order (the minimum amount of information needed for tactical voting to be effective).

The recent Gorton and Denton by-election illustrates the biggest danger to Labour. In that contest, the Green Party, rather than Labour, emerged as the principal progressive challenger to Reform UK. Following last week's local elections, there will be dozens of constituencies where the Greens can plausibly argue that progressive voters should back them rather than Labour in order to stop Reform. In these areas, a purely transactional appeal to vote Labour will no longer work. Labour will need to give progressive voters a more positive reason to support it.

5. [HTTPS://YOUGOV.COM/EN-GB/ARTICLES/54117-WHAT-IS-THE-TACTICAL-VOTING-LANDSCAPE-IN-FEBRUARY-2026](https://yougov.com/en-gb/articles/54117-what-is-the-tactical-voting-landscape-in-february-2026)

PUTTING THE COALITION BACK TOGETHER

The question is how to appeal to voters lost to the left and right more successfully than the party has done thus far.

The answer starts with understanding why different groups supported Labour in the first place. The reasons fall broadly into three categories. Some voters back a party because they feel it reflects their values. Others support it because they believe it stands up for people like them – either in material or cultural terms. A third group is more transactional – their values or material interests do not fully align with any party. Instead they vote based on leadership, competence, specific policies, or simply because a party seems the least bad option.

We asked Labour defectors to select from a list of reasons for supporting their current party.

	Loyal Labour	Labour to Liberal Democrats	Labour to Reform	Labour to Green
I have always supported it	31%	2%	1%	5%
I like the local MP/candidate	17%	15%	7%	6%
It has policies that would help me and my family the most	20%	14%	12%	23%
It has the best leader	23%	16%	23%	26%
It has the best policy on the issue I feel most strongly about	28%	25%	47%	35%
It isn't great but it's better than the alternatives	35%	52%	47%	26%
It shares my values	43%	31%	27%	51%
It stands up for people like me	32%	20%	37%	32%
None of the above	1%	1%	1%	8%
To stop another party winning in my area	14%	11%	15%	11%
Where I live, it's the party that people like me tend to support	9%	3%	4%	3%

SOURCE: THINKLABOUR • 17 OCT 2025 TO 10 DEC 2025 • 7,831 UK ADULTS

- **Labour to Green switchers:** Most have defected because they believe the Greens better reflect their values. This group is also disproportionately economically insecure.
- **Labour to Lib Dem switchers:** Primarily pragmatic. The most common reason was “it isn’t great, but it’s better than the alternatives”, with shared values a secondary factor.
- **Labour to Reform switchers:** Motivations were mixed. The most common reasons were that Reform has “the best policy on the issue I care most about” or that it is “better than the alternatives,” with “it stands up for people like me” as the third choice. Only around a quarter switched because they felt Reform shared their values. This reflects the fact that most Labour-to-Reform switchers do not hold both economically right-wing and socially conservative views consistent with core Reform voters. The minority (around 29%) who do hold these views and nevertheless voted Labour in 2024 are likely to have done so primarily out of anti-incumbent sentiment and are therefore unlikely to return. Labour-to-Reform switchers are also disproportionately economically insecure.

We therefore argue that Labour should seek to win back voters lost to progressive parties primarily by appealing to shared values. It should appeal to economically insecure voters by positioning Labour as the party that demonstrably stands up for them. And it should target the voters it has lost to parties on the right by demonstrating credible, practical delivery on the issues they care most about, rather than attempting to claim value alignment where it does not exist.

LEFT-LIBERAL VOTERS

Left liberals make up 24% of the population⁶. Being both economically left-leaning and socially liberal was a strong predictor of voting Labour. At the last election 37% of this group voted Labour, compared to 21% of the general population (including non-voters) and made up 33% of Labour’s 2024 coalition. They are drawn to Labour primarily because they feel it reflects their values.

But Labour’s position has deteriorated so badly that even among left-liberals who voted Labour in 2024, only around half still intend to vote Labour. Defection has been highest among the most economically left-wing and most socially liberal, many of whom have switched to the Greens. Under the leadership of Zack Polanski, the Green’s headline polling has surged from around 9% in autumn 2025 to roughly 16% today, with a handful of polls placing the Greens ahead of Labour.

When we asked people who voted Labour in 2024 what they believe the party now represents, only around half thought it stood for anything positive. One in five of Labour 2024 voters were unclear about whether Labour stands for

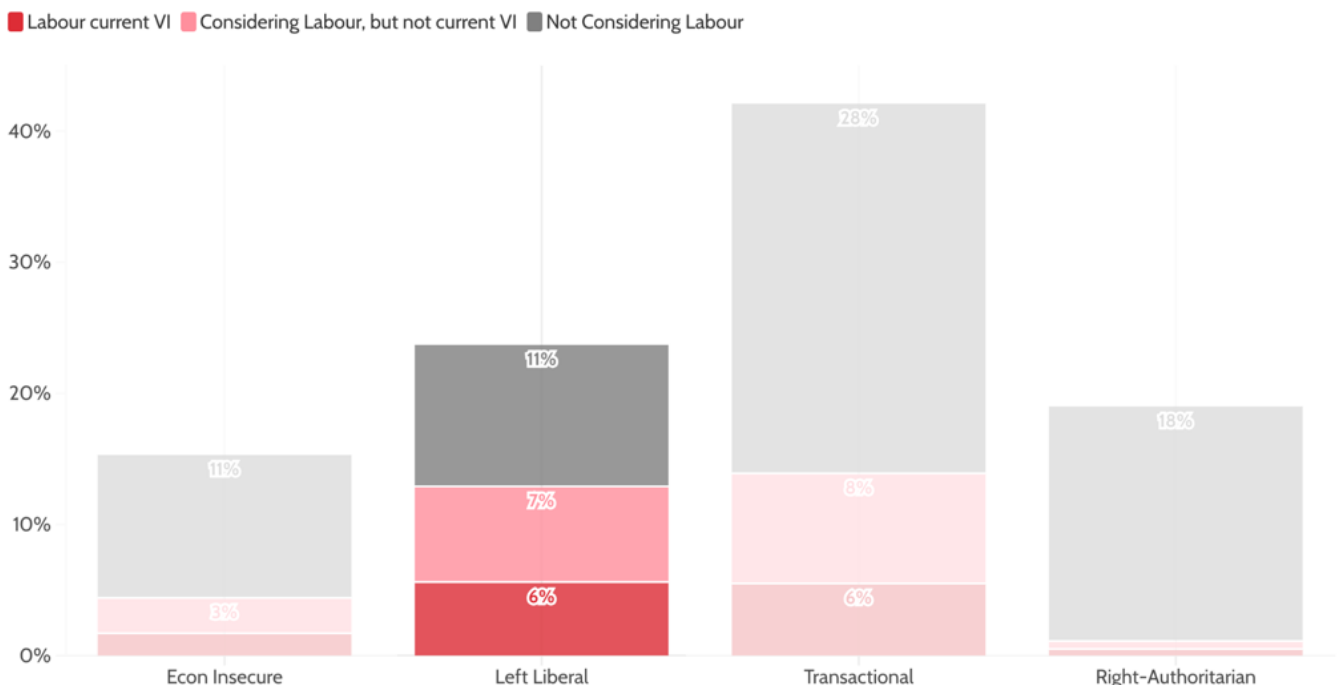
6. THIS GROUP WAS DEFINED AS RESPONDENTS SCORING 6 OR MORE, AFTER ROUNDING, ON A 10-POINT IDEOLOGY INDEX BUILT FROM FIVE ECONOMIC-LEFT AND FIVE SOCIAL-LIBERAL ITEMS, EXCLUDING THOSE WHO ALSO FALL INTO THE ECONOMICALLY INSECURE GROUP

anything at all. The parties which are thriving in the current environment are ones with clearer and more distinctive brands than the two mainstream parties.

Left-liberal voters are more likely than average to be graduates and younger, but these traits are easily overstated. More than half do not have a degree. Around a third are over 55. They are more likely than average to come from ethnic minority backgrounds or non-British white groups, and among the working-age population their household incomes are slightly above average. Left-Liberals lean slightly urban, but are far from confined to inner cities. Around 28% live in Major City Centre areas, with a roughly equal share (28%) split between Affluent and Rural places. The remaining 44% are spread across Moderate and Deprived areas.

If all left liberal voters who do not currently say they would vote Labour, but have at least a six in ten probability of voting Labour in the future were to switch, then Labour's vote share could increase by six points.

VOTE AND CONSIDERATION BASED ON SEGMENT (% OF EACH OVERALL)



SOURCE: THINKLABOUR • 20TH - 25TH MARCH 2026 • 4,289 UK ADULTS

THE ECONOMICALLY INSECURE

Labour was founded to give political voice to those facing economic insecurity. That purpose has not changed, even as the people experiencing insecurity have. At the last election, a large plurality of those economically insecure people who turned out to vote, backed Labour.

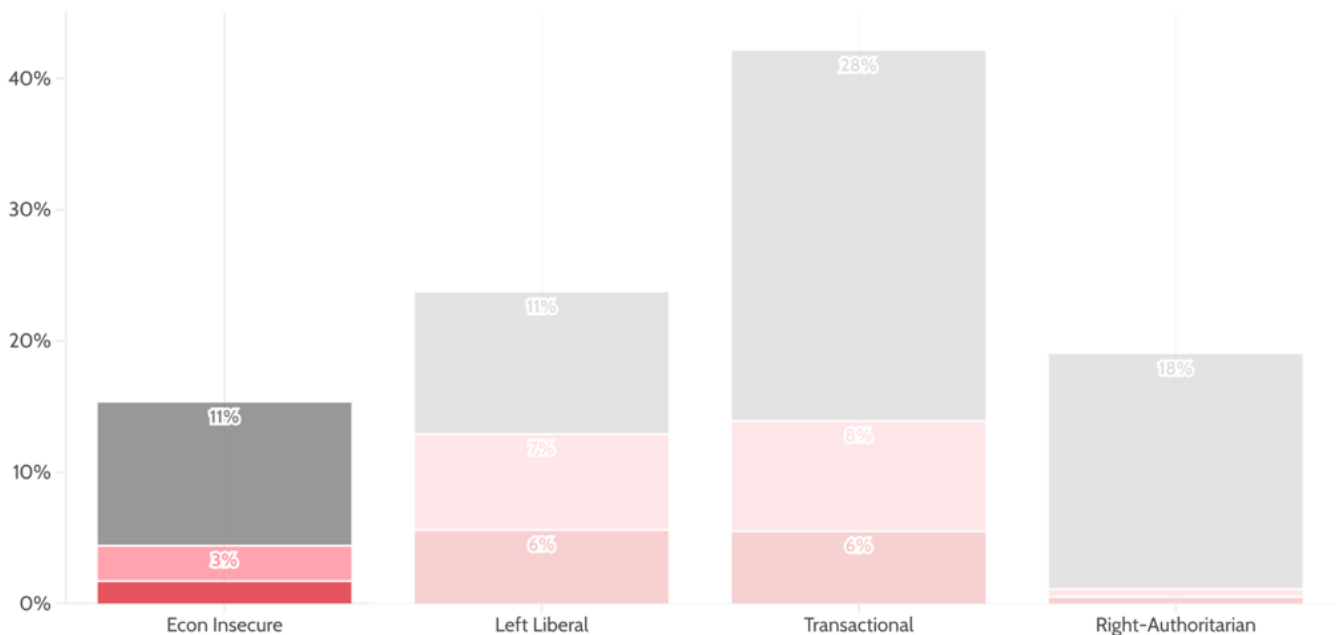
ThinkLabour defines the economically insecure as people in day-to-day economic precarity: based on their employment status, level of savings, ability to meet unexpected expenses and home ownership. On this basis, 23% of the population qualifies. Around half of the economically insecure did not vote at all in 2024, but a large plurality of those who did turn out backed Labour.⁷

The economically insecure are spread across the country rather than concentrated in inner cities. Around 30% live in Deprived areas and a further 28% in Moderate areas. Just 23% live in Major City Centers, and the remaining one in five are in Affluent or Rural areas.

Since then, Labour has lost them faster than almost anyone else. The party has retained only 37% of economically insecure voters who backed it in 2024, compared with 48% of Labour voters who are more secure. These losses have flowed mainly to Reform and the Greens; parties that present themselves as challengers to a system that has failed.

VOTE AND CONSIDERATION BASED ON SEGMENT (% OF EACH OVERALL)

■ Labour current VI ■ Considering Labour, but not current VI ■ Not Considering Labour



SOURCE: THINKLABOUR • 20TH - 25TH MARCH 2026 • 4,289 UK ADULTS

Economic insecurity today is shaped more by age than by occupation or traditional social class. Housing costs are the great divide. Older homeowners are more likely to own their homes outright while those of working age facing high rents, childcare costs and precarious work. On average, working-class voters aged 65 and over are now slightly more economically right-wing than middle-class voters of working age.

The old language of “working class” no longer captures who Labour is for. As Claire Ainsley argues in *The New Working Class*, there is “a large section of the population [that] lives off low to middle incomes, who may not share a unified identity ... but who have a similarity of economic and financial experience compared to those who are better off”.

7. STRESSED PRECARIAT IS DEFINED BY MEETING ALL THREE OF THESE CRITERIA SIMULTANEOUSLY:
- STRUCTURALLY VULNERABLE – UNEMPLOYED, OR HAS LESS THAN £1,000 IN SAVINGS
 - CASH POOR – CANNOT PAY A £300 UNEXPECTED BILL FROM THEIR OWN MONEY (WOULD NEED TO USE SAVINGS, DEBT, SELL ITEMS, ETC.)
 - HOUSING EXPOSED – RENTING (SOCIAL OR PRIVATE) OR ON A MORTGAGE – I.E. NO OWNED-OUTRIGHT SAFETY NET

If all economically insecure voters who do not currently say they would vote Labour, but have at least a six in ten probability of voting Labour in the future were to switch, then Labour's vote share could increase by one point.

TRANSACTIONAL VOTERS

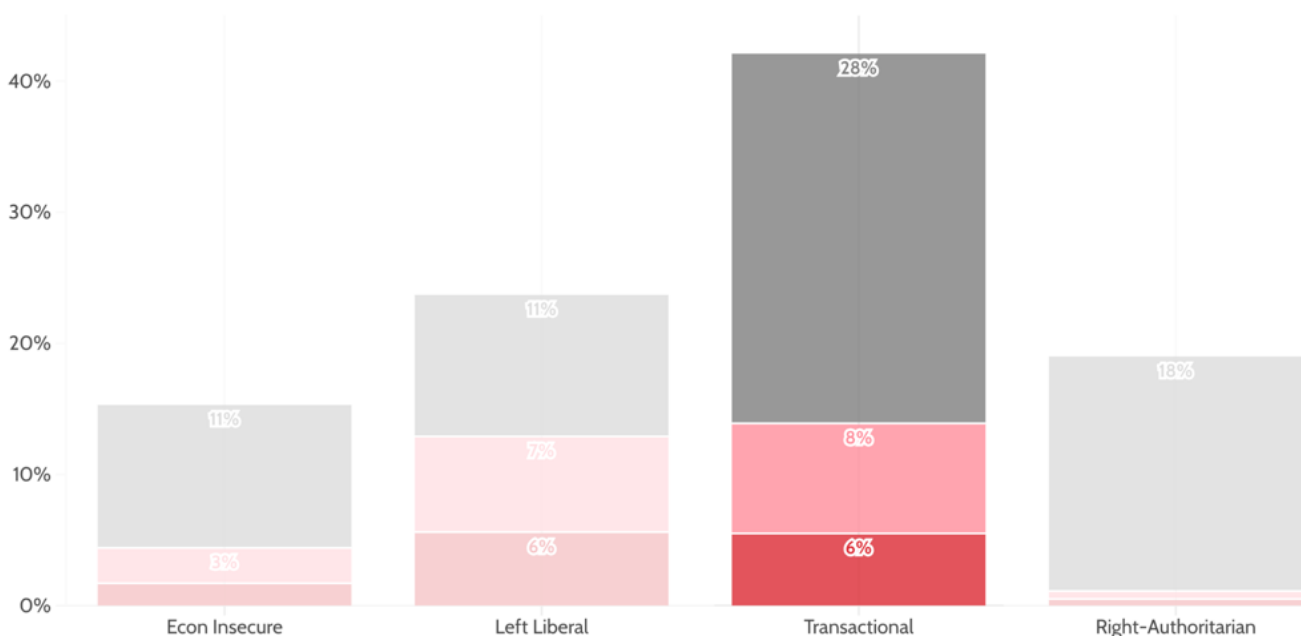
Transactional voters made up 37% of Labour's 2024 coalition. They do not have strong ideological alignment with any party. They will tend to vote based on which party they believe will deliver on the issues they care about. We have defined them as those who are not economically insecure and who neither have left-liberal views nor right-authoritarian ones. This leaves a group with a wide range of attitudes.

Their reasons for switching are revealing: the most common motivations were that their new party has the best policy on the issue they care about, or that it is simply the least bad option. Only 10% of Labour-to-Reform switchers said that Reform shared their values. This matters. Many of these voters are not ideologically lost to Labour and did not leave because they became right-wing. They left because they concluded Labour was not delivering. The path to winning them back runs through competence and results.

Labour's vote share could increase by four points if all the transactional voters who currently do not say they will vote Labour, but would consider doing so, switched to Labour.

VOTE AND CONSIDERATION BASED ON SEGMENT (% OF EACH OVERALL)

■ Labour current VI ■ Considering Labour, but not current VI ■ Not Considering Labour



SOURCE: THINKLABOUR • 20TH - 25TH MARCH 2026 • 4,289 UK ADULTS

Labour should rebuild its coalition by doing three things: being clear about its values, standing up for the economically insecure, and delivering for transactional voters.

1. BE CLEAR ABOUT LABOUR'S VALUES

Labour is a socially liberal party with progressive values. It believes in an active state that provides high-quality public services, supports those facing insecurity, and intervenes to correct imbalances of power, wealth and opportunity. It has a proud history of extending rights to women, ethnic minorities, disabled people and LGBT people. It should say so without apology.

But this should not mean racing ahead of public opinion. Britain is becoming steadily more liberal, driven by long-term demographic change and younger generations growing up in a more diverse and gender-equal society. In 1987, only 11% of Britons said same-sex relationships were “not wrong at all”. By 2023, around 78% supported equal marriage. But progressivism by its nature pushes beyond existing norms, and risks moving far ahead of where voters are. Had equal marriage been proposed in 1987 it would have been roundly rejected. Labour’s handling of gender recognition is an example of getting it right: pulling back from self-identification while committing to a more dignified process. The party should apply the same logic more widely. Confident in its direction, realistic about its pace.

2. STAND UP FOR THE ECONOMICALLY INSECURE

When we asked Labour 2024 voters who or what they thought Labour should stand for at its best, the most popular answers focused on the working class or ordinary working people (36% mentioned this). Labour currently uses the language of “working people” to describe who it represents. This is vague enough to include both a senior investment banker and the zero-hours contract cleaner who cleans their offices. Labour should be clear that it prioritises the latter, and in government, Labour’s revealed preferences have been clear. The Employment Rights Act, the Renters’ Rights Bill, and the removal of the two-child limit all point to a consistent concern with reducing insecurity. These are not liabilities to downplay, but expressions of Labour’s core beliefs, which are overwhelmingly popular with the public.

Where big corporations and landowners have genuinely been exploitative or are blocking progress, the Government should take them on and be vocal about doing so. ThinkLabour has recommended Thames Water is forced into administration with bondholders losing their money. Our paper on developing

the Oxcam arc recommended landowning Oxbridge colleges pay for building infrastructure, with public money directed towards trams in Leeds.

3. UNITE THESE GROUPS WITH TRANSACTIONAL VOTERS

Transactional voters do not have views which would strongly align them with a particular party, and therefore are likely to vote according to whichever party they think will best deliver on the issues they care about. Many of them will not share the values expressed above.

Appealing to enough of those who are voting on values, those who are economically secure and those who are neither, is challenging. ThinkLabour suggests the following approaches:

- **Cost of living:** The most important issue across all three groups, and cited by 74% of the economically insecure. However, realistically, the government has limited capacity to directly reduce consumer prices beyond areas such as energy bills, where interventions have already been made. Durable improvements in living standards are more likely to come from sustained growth in real wages than reductions in price levels.
- **Public services:** Public services matter to all three groups, but especially to the most economically insecure. Our General Election review found that 65% of Labour voters expected noticeable improvements in the NHS within two years. If the government fails to deliver visible progress, it risks serious electoral damage. If better-off voters increasingly turn to private healthcare or other alternatives, they may become less willing to pay for public systems they no longer rely on. Maintaining good quality public services especially at a time when higher levels of spending on defence are needed, will require difficult decisions about taxation. Labour should be upfront about that.
- **Economic growth:** Ensuring good quality public services makes economic growth the single biggest priority. It is the only way to raise living standards and properly fund public services without relying on large tax increases. Pursuing it more will require choices that parts of Labour's coalition find uncomfortable: prioritising new industries over old ones, building houses that existing homeowners may oppose, and moving towards closer economic cooperation with Europe. Labour should make these arguments rather than avoid them.
- **Fiscal Rules:** Lower interest rates are needed for investment and to lower mortgage costs. This requires discipline on borrowing. Where cuts are unavoidable, Labour must clearly frame them in terms of progressive values — for example, by explicitly linking reductions in benefits for wealthier pensioners to increased funding for the NHS.
- **Immigration:** Labour should be consistently clear that Britain has been the most successful large country in building a multicultural society. The vast majority of migrants make a positive contribution and both their economic and cultural contribution to the UK should be

celebrated. We know public concern is focused primarily on irregular migration and a sense of loss of control of our borders. While more than three-quarters of the public (76%) say the number of people entering the UK through irregular routes – such as crossing the Channel in small boats – is too high, only 32% say the same about people coming legally to work. Voters therefore expect the Government to control irregular migration and close asylum hotels. Those in the UK illegally should expect to be removed, and those who refuse to integrate should not expect to receive indefinite leave to remain. ThinkLabour has also proposed an annual Migration Budget, setting out transparently who Britain wants to invite to the country and why, while making clear the benefits those migrants bring to the UK.⁸

4. BE HONEST ABOUT TRADE OFFS

The UK is experiencing a profound absence of hope, with trust in political institutions at historic lows. ThinkLabour found that 63% of the public believe politicians are in politics for themselves, while only 9% think they enter politics to make a difference. Among Reform UK supporters, cynicism is even higher.

Populist parties thrive in this environment by persuading voters that politics is so broken that taking a gamble on an untested party becomes a rational response. They offer simple, often misleading solutions that avoid acknowledging trade-offs or constraints, aided by a media environment that rewards emotionally charged and simplistic narratives.

Rebuilding trust requires honesty about difficult choices and about what government can realistically achieve. Empathy without results is insufficient. The previous Conservative Party government illustrates the danger. Its promise to “stop the boats” with performative policies such as the Rwanda scheme saw trust collapse and it lost a quarter of its voters to Reform.

In the long run, governments are punished more for denying hard choices and failing to deliver than for confronting those choices honestly. In an era of fragile global trade and growing geopolitical instability, Labour should level with the public about the difficult decisions needed to build a stronger and more resilient Britain — while making clear that those decisions flow from its progressive values, not despite them.

5. UNITE THE COUNTRY

In last week’s local elections, Labour suffered its heaviest losses in deprived towns and suburban areas. Although the party also lost substantial numbers

8. IN AN OPINIUM POLL (3/9/2025) THE PUBLIC REACTION IS FAR HARSHER TO ILLEGAL MIGRATION THAN TO OTHER FORMS. OVER THREE-QUARTERS (76%) SAY THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE ILLEGALLY COMING TO THE UK IS TOO HIGH, COMPARED WITH AROUND A THIRD (32%) SAYING THIS ABOUT PEOPLE LEGALLY COMING TO THE UK TO WORK WITH 39% SAYING IT'S ABOUT RIGHT.

of councillors to the Green Party in major urban centres, its overall retention rate was significantly stronger in those areas.

Labour's strategic interest therefore lies in aligning the interests of towns with those of the cities that currently form the bedrock of its support. By contrast, right-wing parties with a stronger base in rural areas have tended to align rural voters with towns, as Boris Johnson's Conservatives did in 2019.

The example of London and its commuter belt shows this is possible. When a productive city is well connected to the areas around it, prosperity is shared. But outside London, Britain's cities lag well behind their European counterparts in productivity. Investing in second cities and building transport links between urban centres and towns offers a long-term answer.

Labour should favour rebalancing public investment towards the parts of the country outside the Greater South East. This is not only the most practical way to drive economic growth, but a clear expression of Labour's commitment to supporting places that have long been overlooked.

OUR WORK AHEAD

In an age of fragmentation and deep distrust, mainstream parties are finding it challenging to hold together broad coalitions. We believe Labour can still do so, but not by asking values-driven supporters to set aside the principles that motivate them. Nor can it persuade more right-leaning voters that it has fundamentally reinvented itself.

Instead, Labour should articulate a clear and consistent set of authentic values across the whole of government. Only through clarity, honesty and results can Labour rebuild trust and sustain the coalition. This requires strong leadership and the courage to argue for decisions which may be unpopular in the short-term.

Over the next period, ThinkLabour will be focused on working openly and collaboratively with others across the Labour Party and beyond to generate the bold ideas, political strategy and public insight needed for Labour to govern confidently and win the next General Election.

Under new leadership, we will bring together policy expertise, political strategy, public opinion research and high-impact communications to help address the challenge posed by this report and to help shape a coherent, popular and radical governing programme that can assemble a winning coalition.

To do so, over the next few months, we will be undertaking work in key areas, including:

- A vision of political economy that can build prosperity and security;
- Reform of welfare to develop a system based on contribution;
- Plans to promote a Labour offer to post-industrial towns;
- Thinking on the shape of the UK's future relationship with the EU
- Understanding more deeply why key voter groups have deserted Labour.
- Assessing how to communicate difficult truths in an age of populism

ThinkLabour will also be hosting events and activities to engage and debate with a wide range of people and organisations across Labour and beyond on key issues and challenges.