Northern Lights

Policy Exchange

Public policy and the geography of political attitudes in Britain today

#northsouth

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Image courtesy Andrew Whyte/ LongExposures.co.uk

Northern Lights

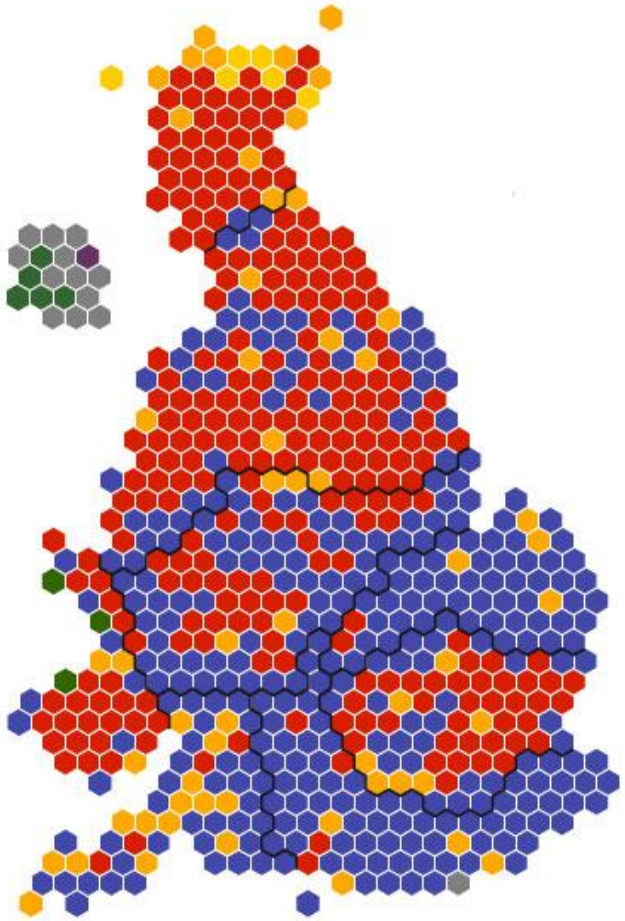
1. Background to the research
2. Our polling exercise
3. Regression analysis
4. Qualitative research

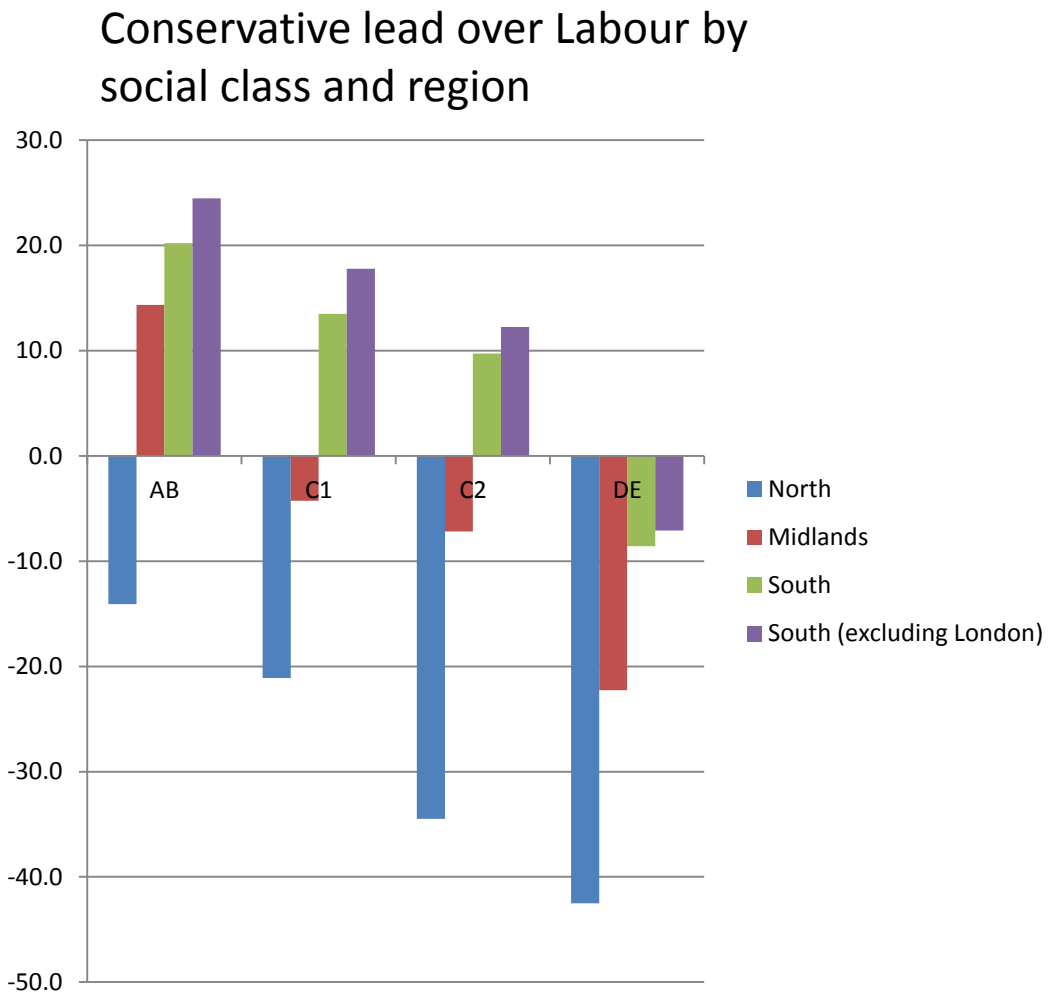
Background to the research

1. Geographical differences

2. What really drives the way people vote now: demographics, issues or government performance?

1) Geographical differences





Is Britain polarising politically?

Conservative share of combined Labour and Conservative seats		
	1951	2010
South Excl. London	81%	94%
London	50%	42%
Mids	37%	62%
North	39%	29%
Scot	45%	2%
Wales	16%	24%

Share of seats by region, 1951 and 2010 elections						
	Con		Lab		Lib	
	1951	2010	1951	2010	1951	2010
South East	87%	88%	13%	5%	0%	5%
South West	73%	65%	22%	7%	4%	27%
Eastern	68%	90%	19%	3%	14%	7%
London	50%	38%	50%	52%	0%	10%
East Midlands	37%	67%	61%	33%	2%	0%
West Midlands	37%	56%	63%	41%	0%	3%
Yorks and Humber	30%	35%	63%	59%	7%	6%
North West	51%	29%	48%	63%	1%	8%
North East	16%	7%	81%	86%	3%	7%
Scotland	41%	2%	49%	69%	10%	19%
Wales	14%	20%	75%	65%	11%	8%
Total	48%	47%	48%	40%	4%	9%

A series of different two-party races?

Table 1 The number of British constituencies in which different pairings of parties occupied first and second places at each post-1970 general election

	C:L	C:D	L:D	O	Total
1974 (February)	430	145	22	26	623
1974 (October)	448	104	14	55	623
1979	511	98	5	9	623
1983	287	282	52	12	633
1987	331	246	36	20	633
1992	415	161	14	43	633
1997	335	126	124	48	633
2001	413	99	60	45	633
2005	338	126	121	42	627
2010	286	203	95	45	629

C:L – Conservative and Labour; C:D – Conservative and Liberal Democrat; L:D Labour and Liberal Democrat; O – other

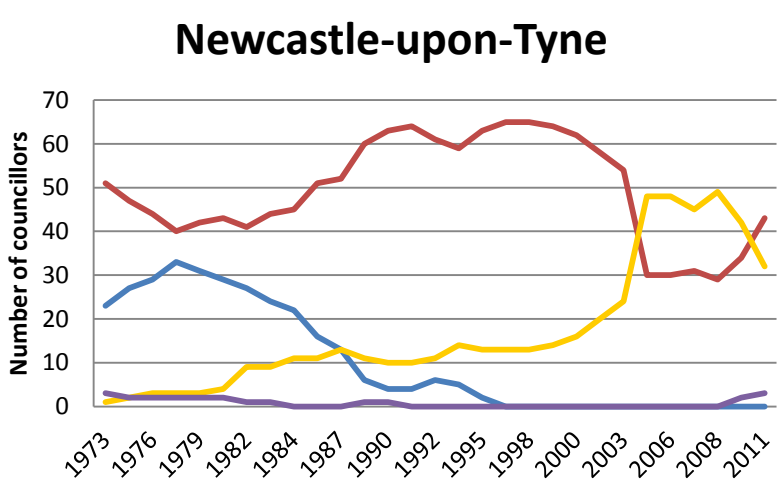
Few real ‘three way’ races…
And third placed party gets few votes

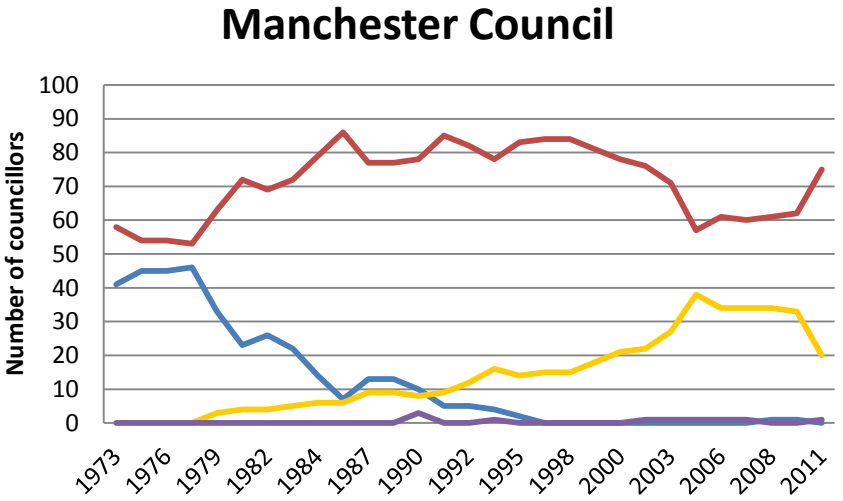
Tory v. Lib Dem competition in South/ East
Tory v. Labour in North / West

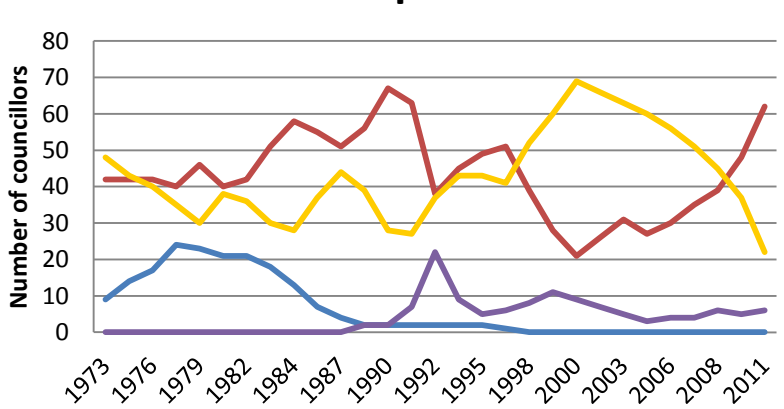
	Con-Lab	Con-Lib Dem	Lab-Lib Dem	Other
London	60%	14%	26%	
Southwest	24%	73%	4%	
Southeast	24%	74%	1%	
East	34%	64%	2%	
East Mids	34%	64%	2%	
West Mids	69%	20%	10%	
Yorkshire/Humber	58%	19%	23%	
Northwest	63%	16%	21%	
Northeast	48%	7%	45%	
Wales	50%	3%	23%	25%
Scotland	14%	7%	20%	59%

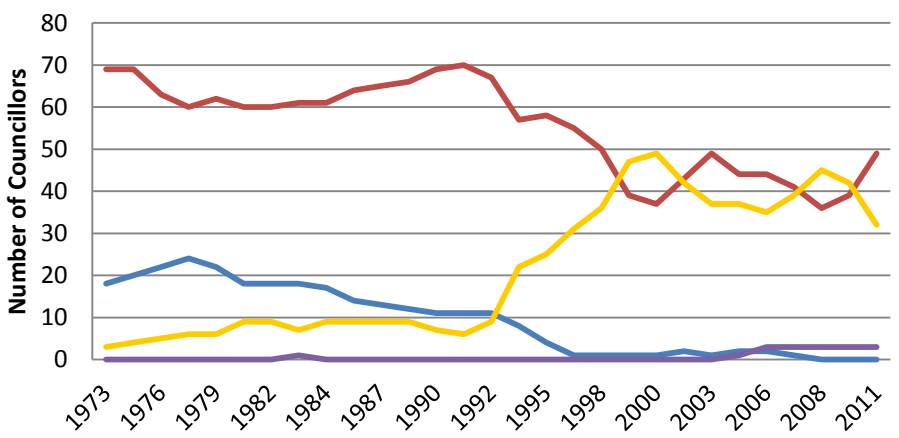
	Con	Lab	Lib
Conservative–Labour	37.3	37.8	17.1
Conservative–Lib Dem	48.8	12.7	32
Labour–Lib Dem	16.9	44.6	29.7

Path dependent politics?

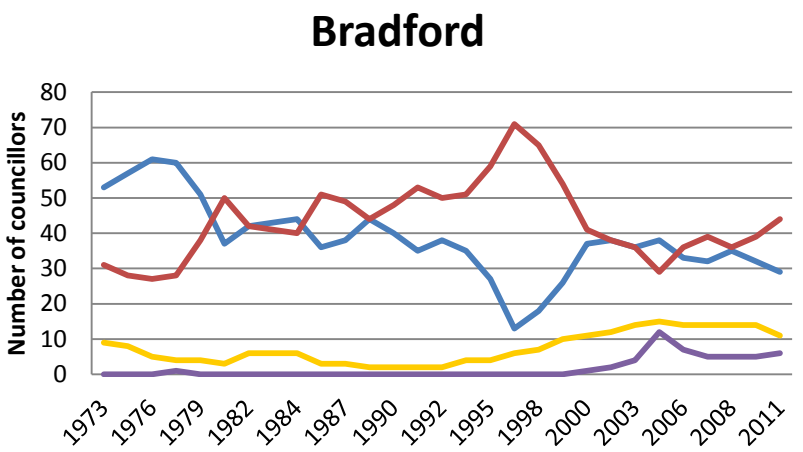


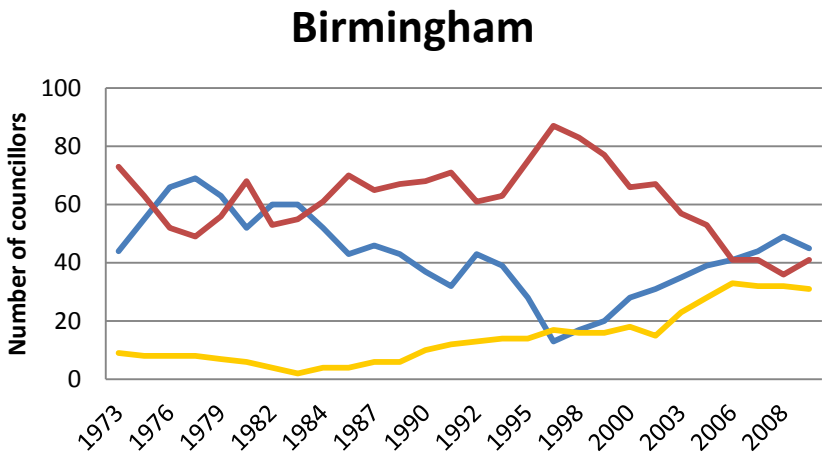


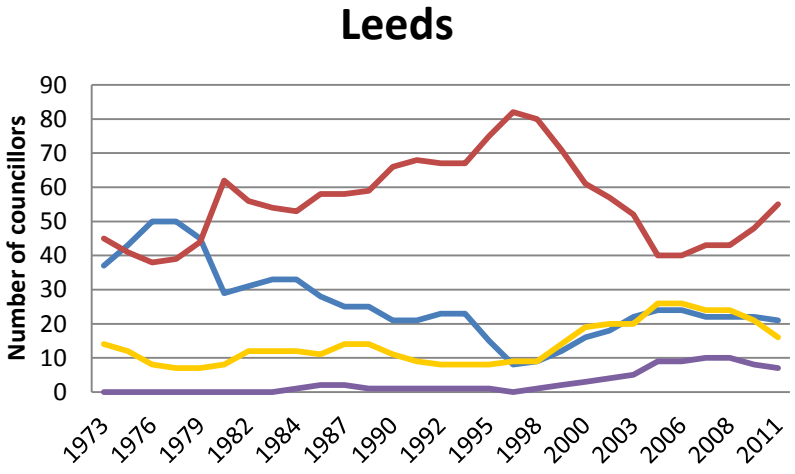


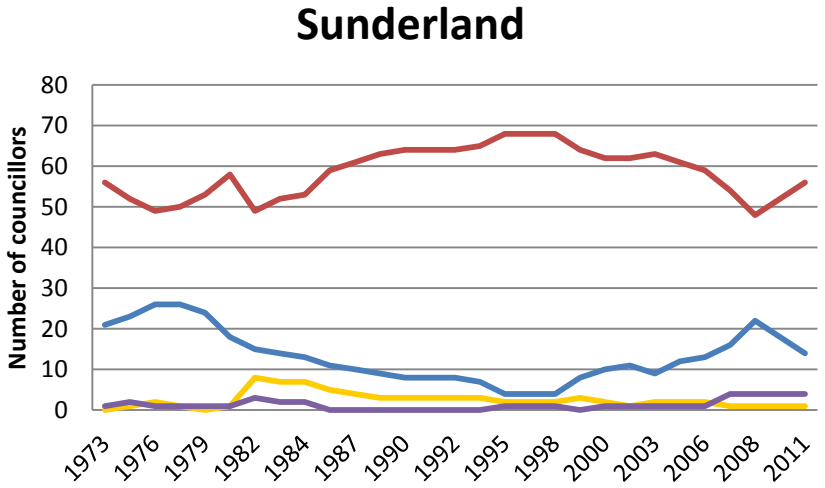


Four similar cities with Tory councillors



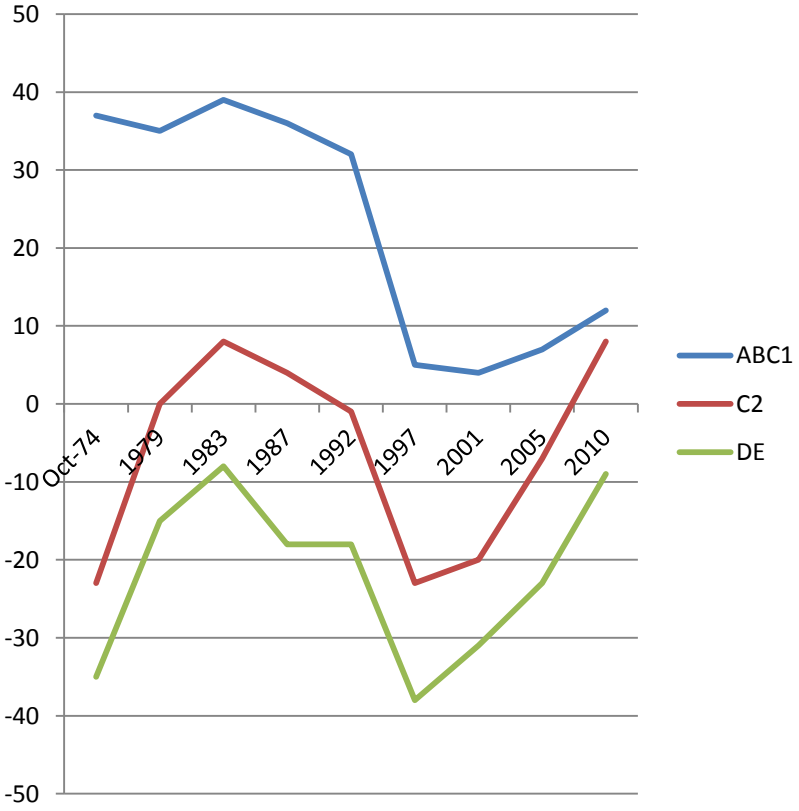




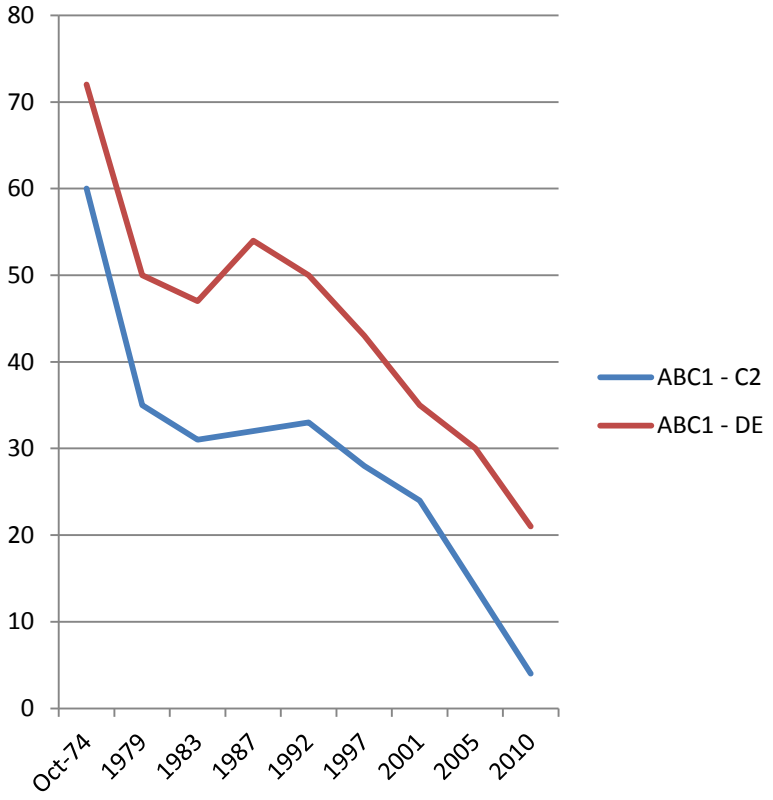


2) What determines how people vote?

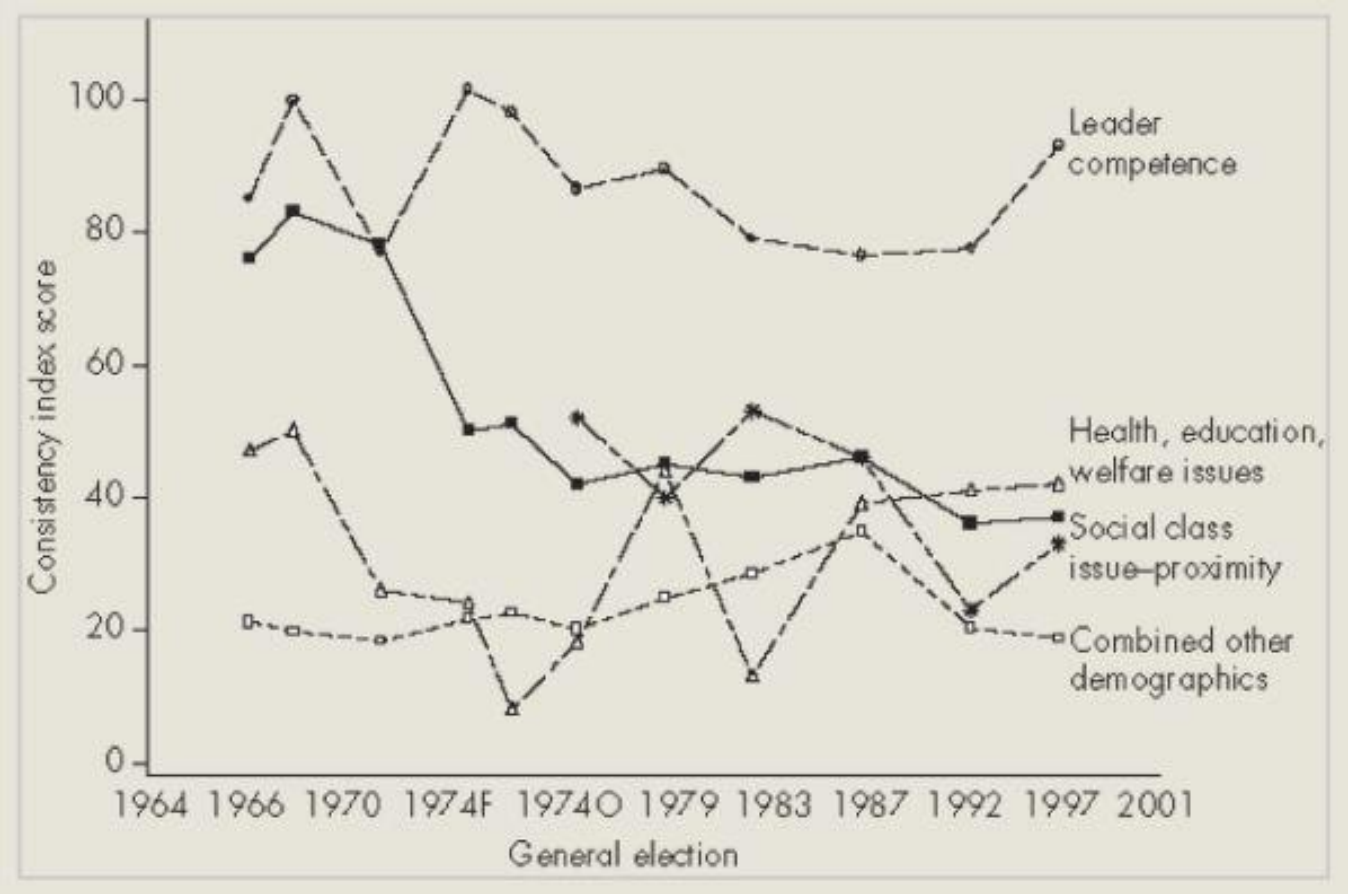
Conservative lead over Labour by class



Difference in lead between different classes

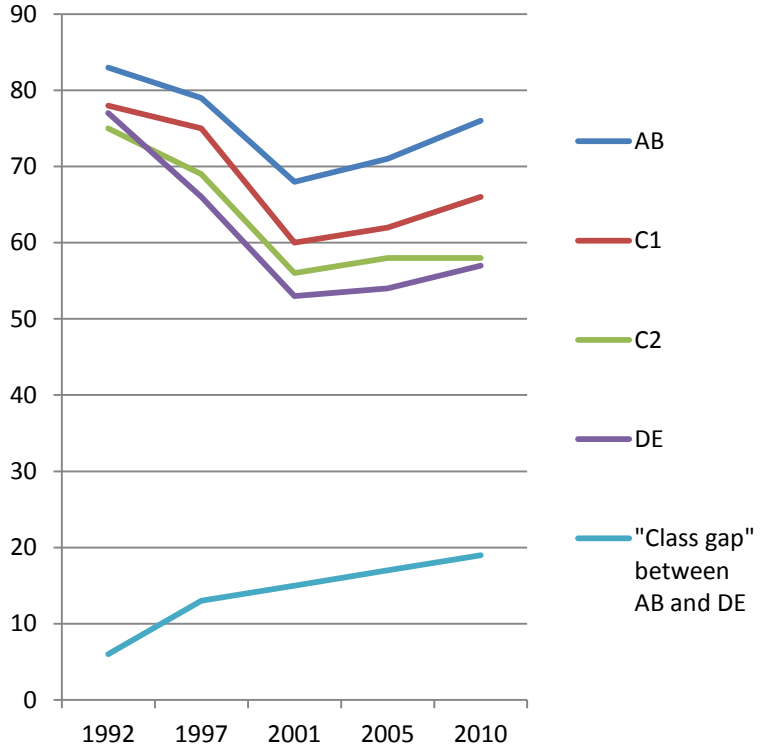


What determines how people vote? Performance politics?

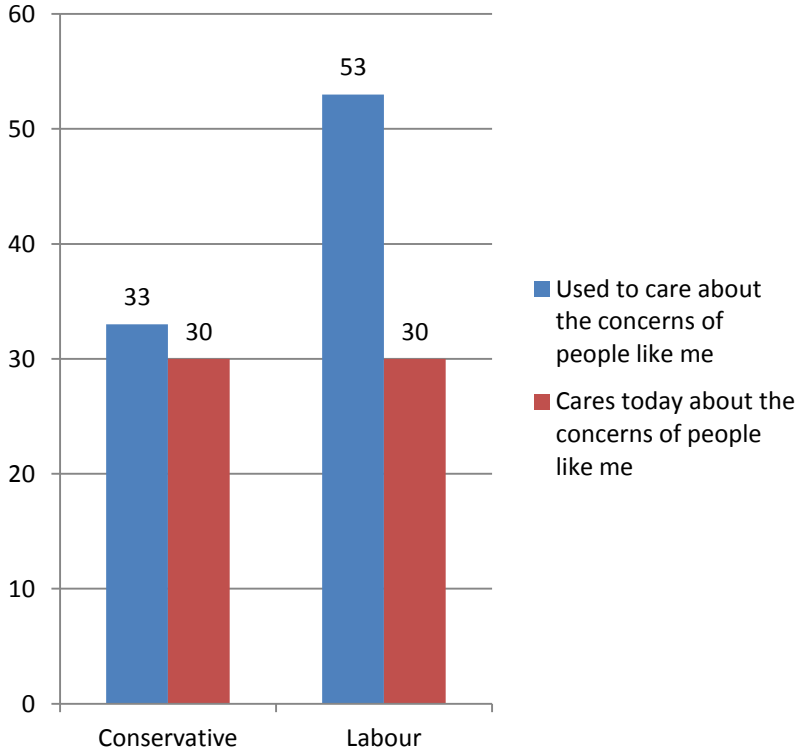


Two things to note about class

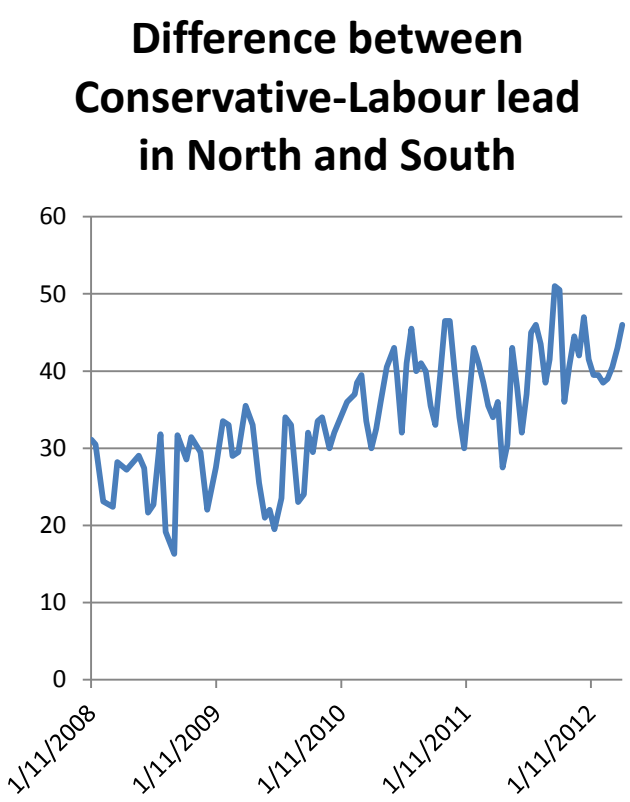
Turnout by social class and widening “class gap” in voting



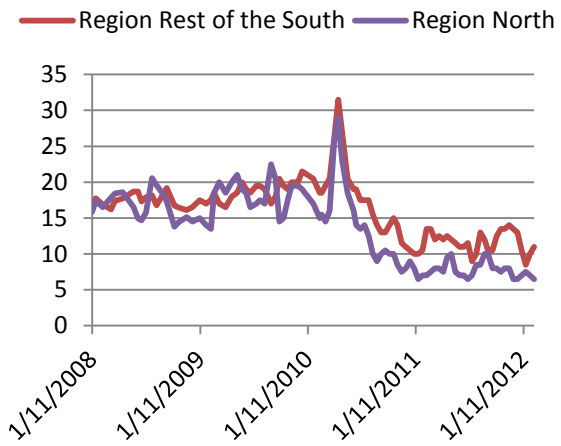
Is it true that the Conservatives/ Labour…



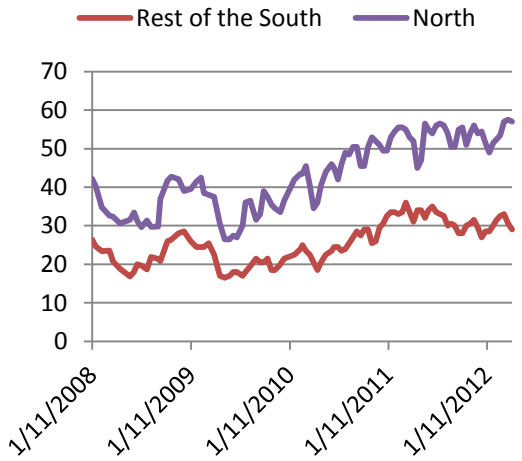
A growing north south gap



Lib Dems Down in North…



…and Labour up more in the north than south



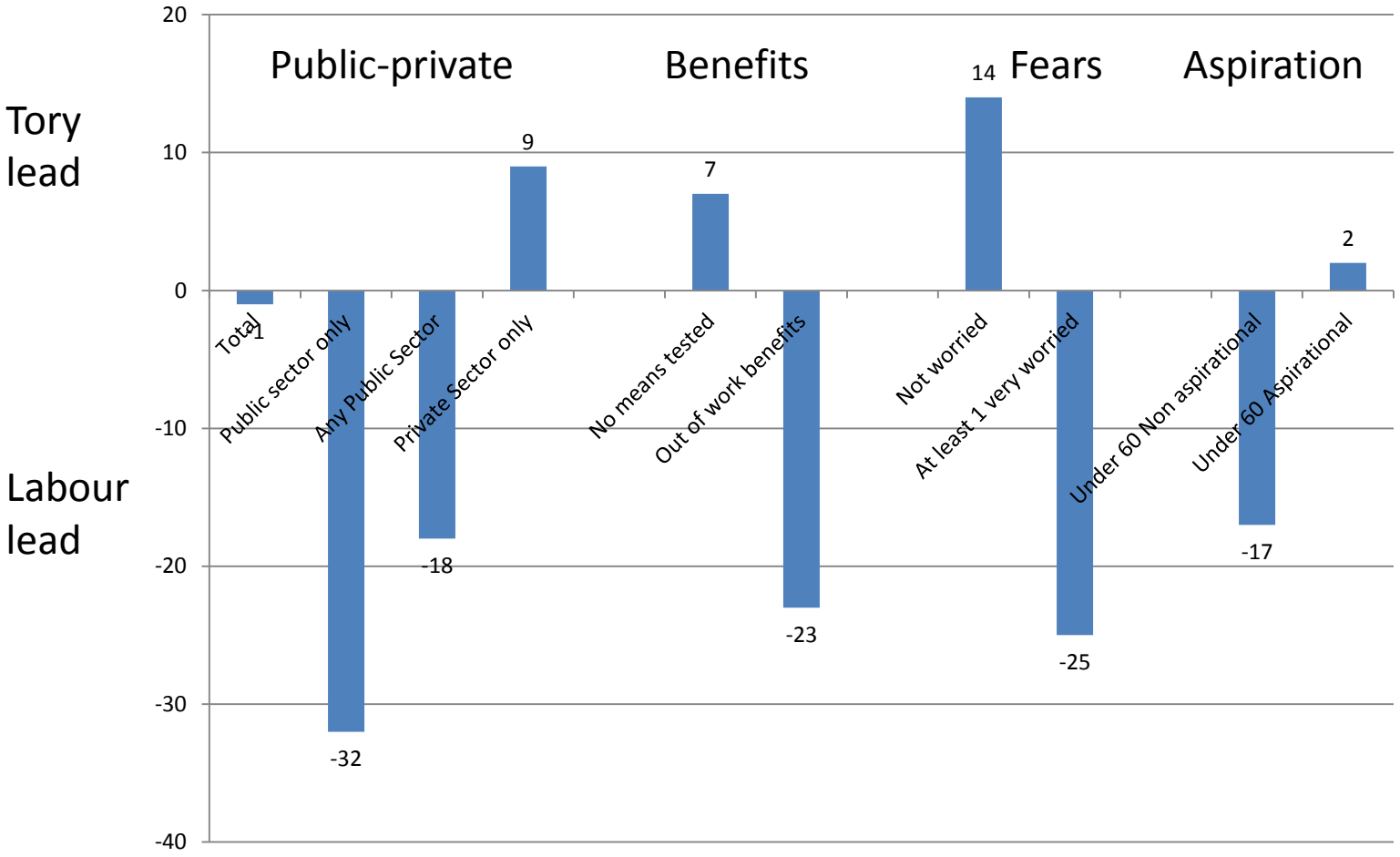
2) Our Polling

- Understanding north/south and urban/rural divides
- What really drives the way people vote now: demographics, issues or government performance?
- What are different voters policy priorities?
- How do they think the parties should change?

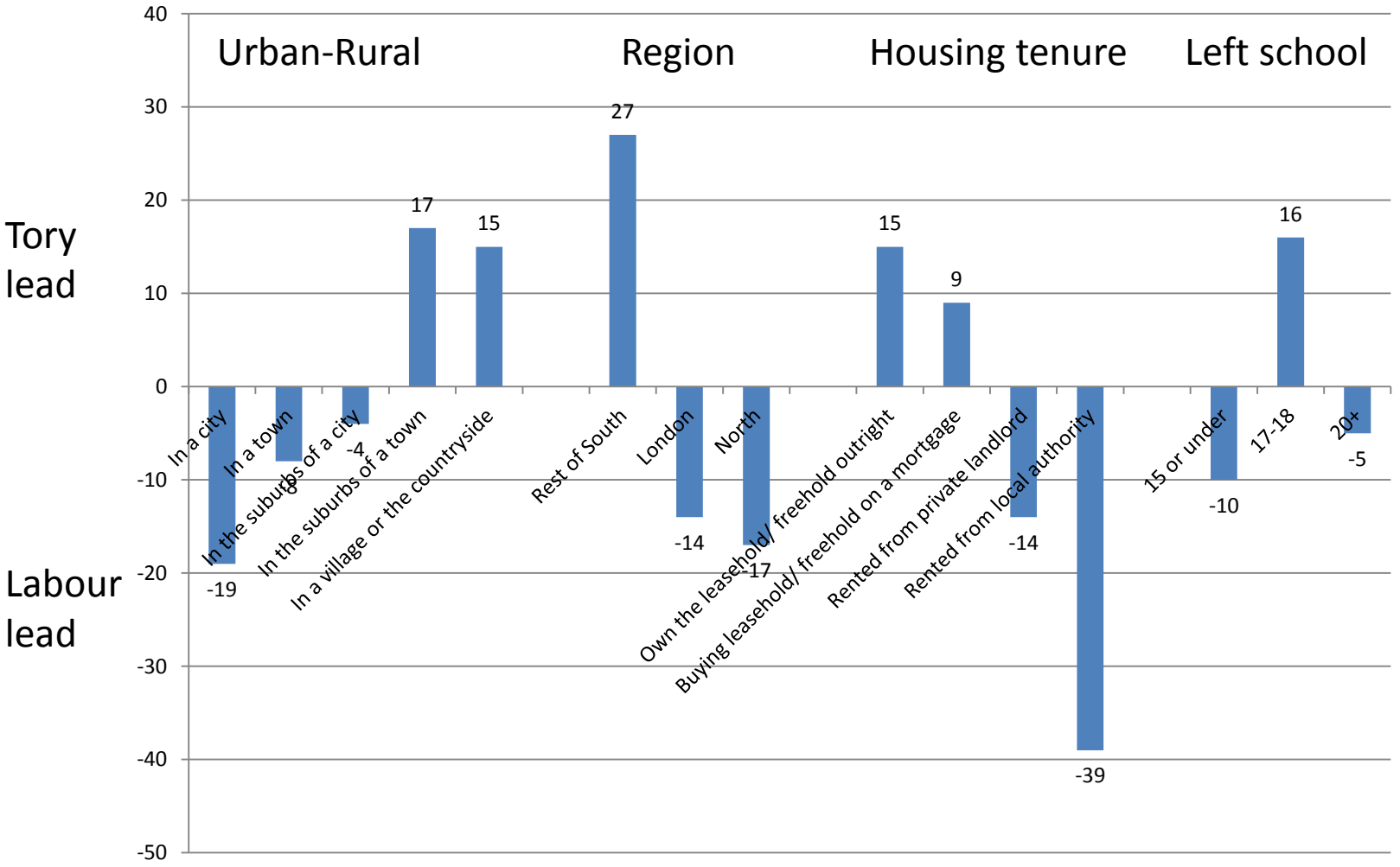
Vote intention

- Headline vote intention is: Lab 40%, Con 39%, Lib Dem 9%.
- Conservative lead over Labour largest among older voters, rural areas, higher social classes, and in the south – particularly the south outside London.
- Little variation in Lib Dem vote by different category. Highest in young, middle class, highly educated, in the south outside London.
- Of the people who voted for Labour and the Conservatives in 2010 nine out of ten plan to do so again. But only 35% of Liberal Democrats do so, with 39% now planning to vote Labour and 13% for the Conservatives.

Some less usual factors

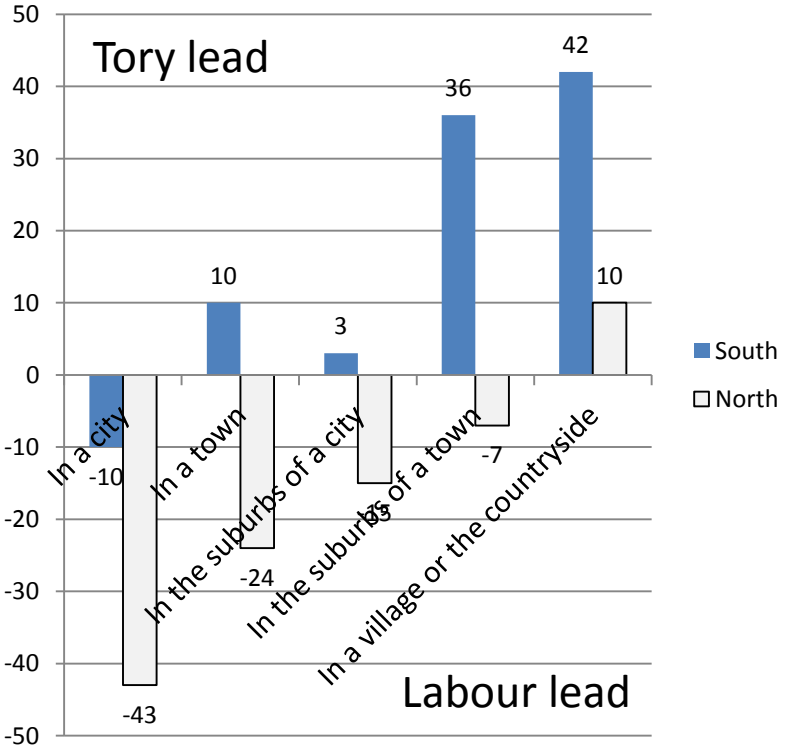


Some less usual factors

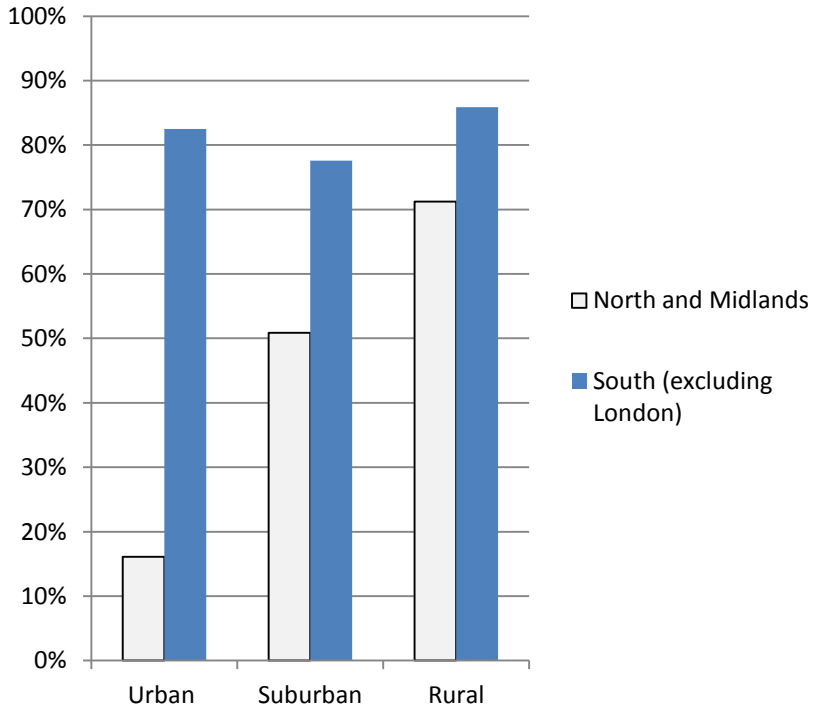


Layering up factors increases differences: e.g. northern cities and rural south

Conservative lead over Labour by type of area in north and south…

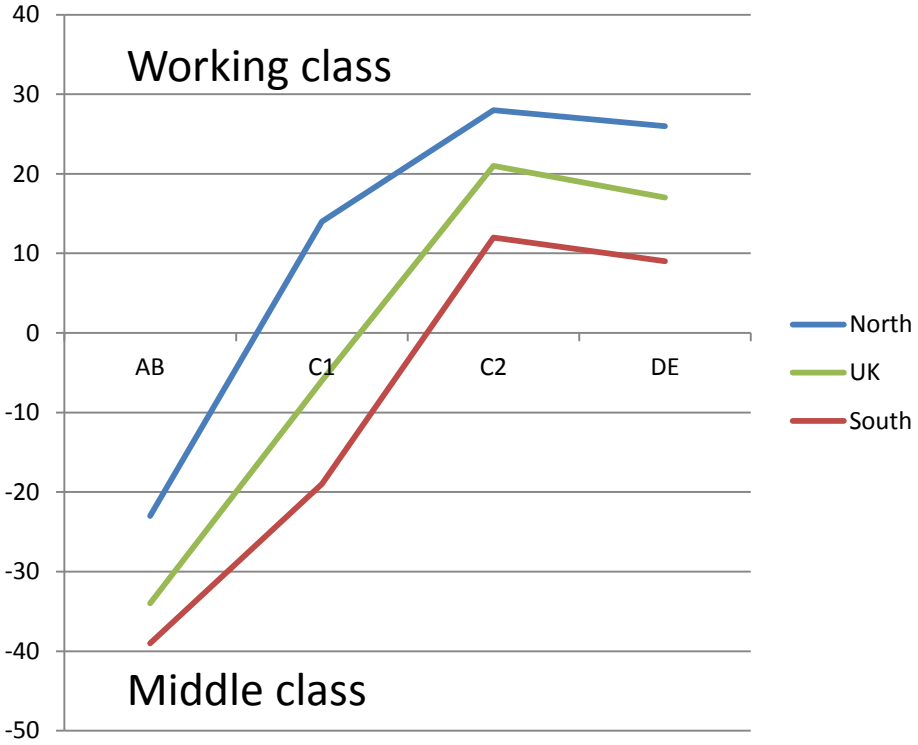


… maps neatly onto the Conservatives share of different types of parliamentary seats

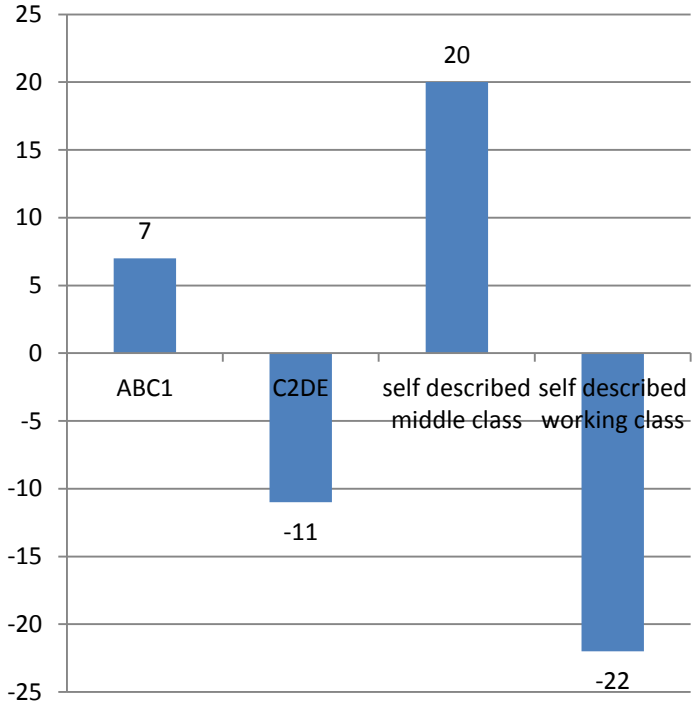


Self described class vs occupation

Proportion describing themselves as working class, minus middle class, by region and class…



Conservative lead by occupational class and self-described class

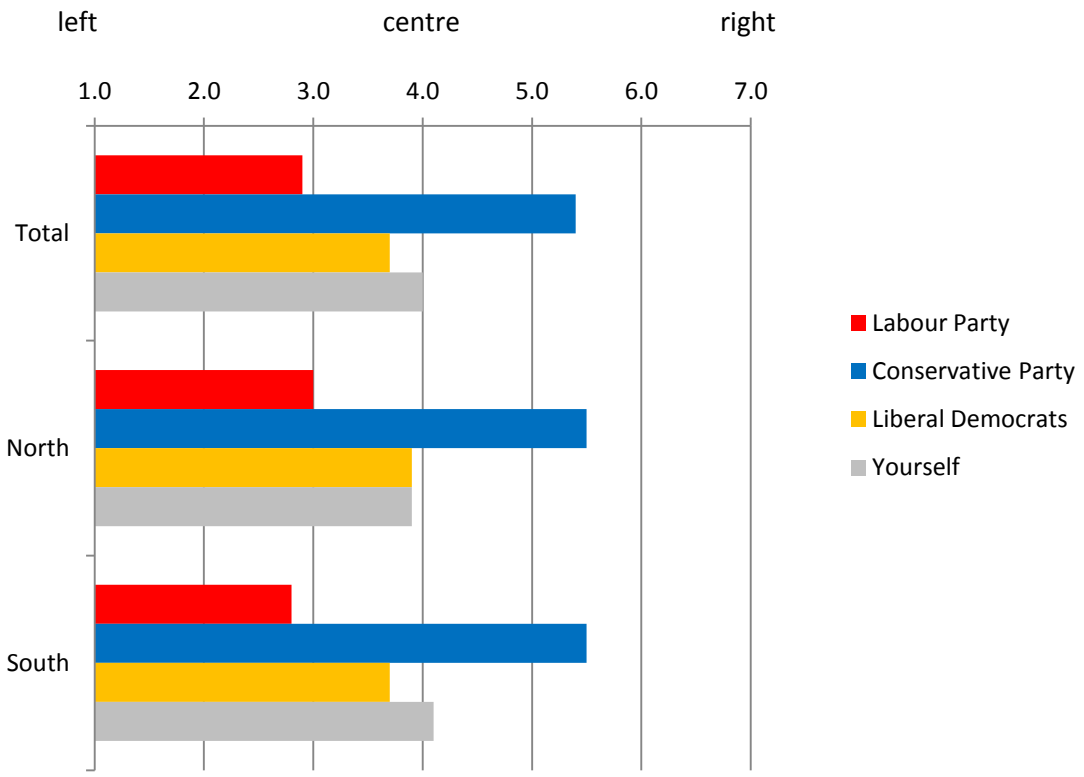


Memories of Thatcher? Leaders past and present

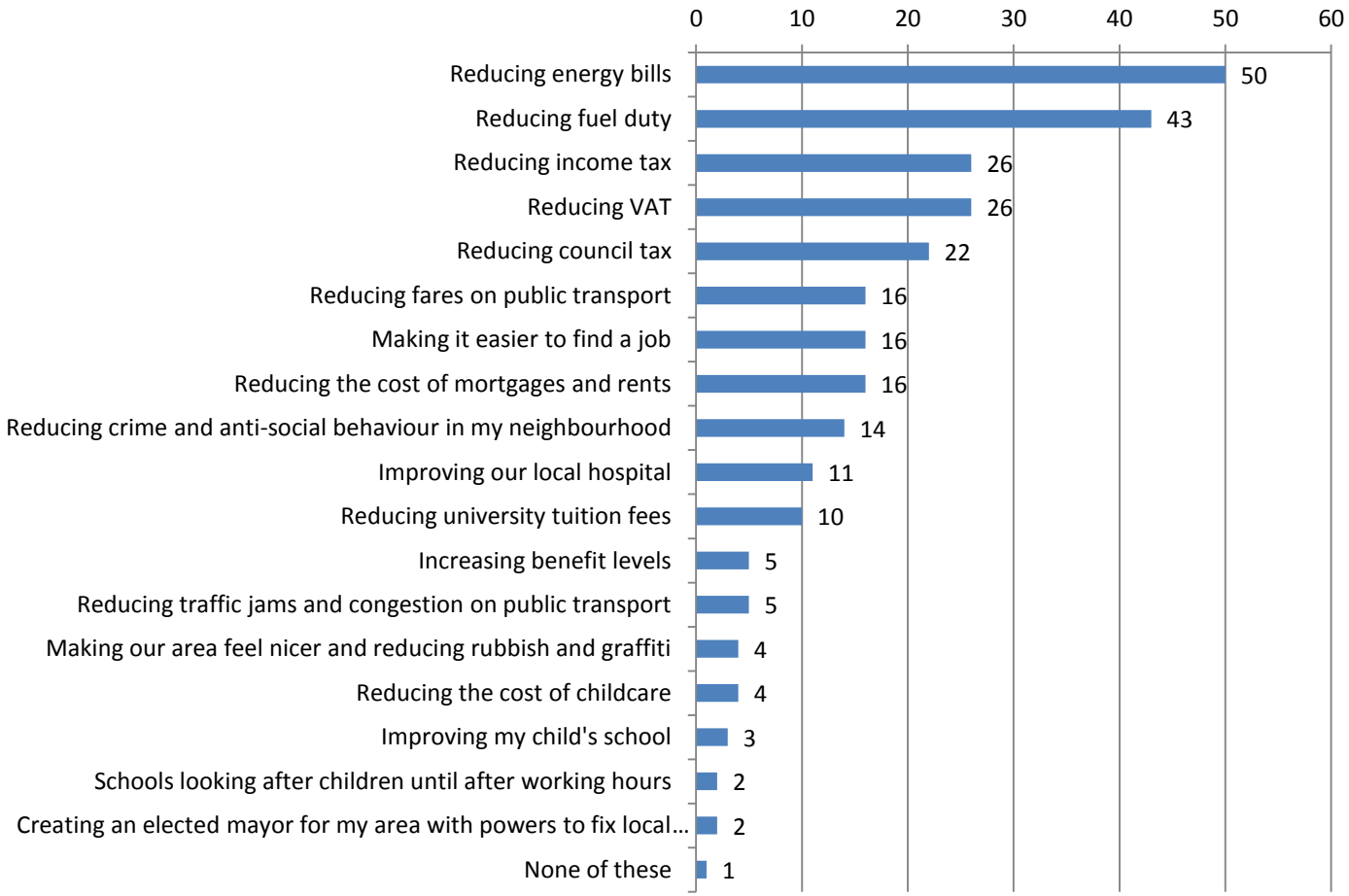
	All	North	London	South excluding London	Own party voters
Margaret Thatcher	4.5	4.0	4.3	5.3	7.7
David Cameron	4.2	3.8	4.1	4.8	7.3
Tony Blair	3.8	4.1	4.3	3.4	5.6
Gordon Brown	3.2	3.3	3.8	2.8	5.6
Ed Miliband	3.2	3.3	3.7	2.9	5.1
Nick Clegg	2.9	2.7	3.0	3.0	6.3

* Caveat: current party leaders go up and down month to month (e.g. Miliband ahead in MORI April poll) but previous PMs more stable…

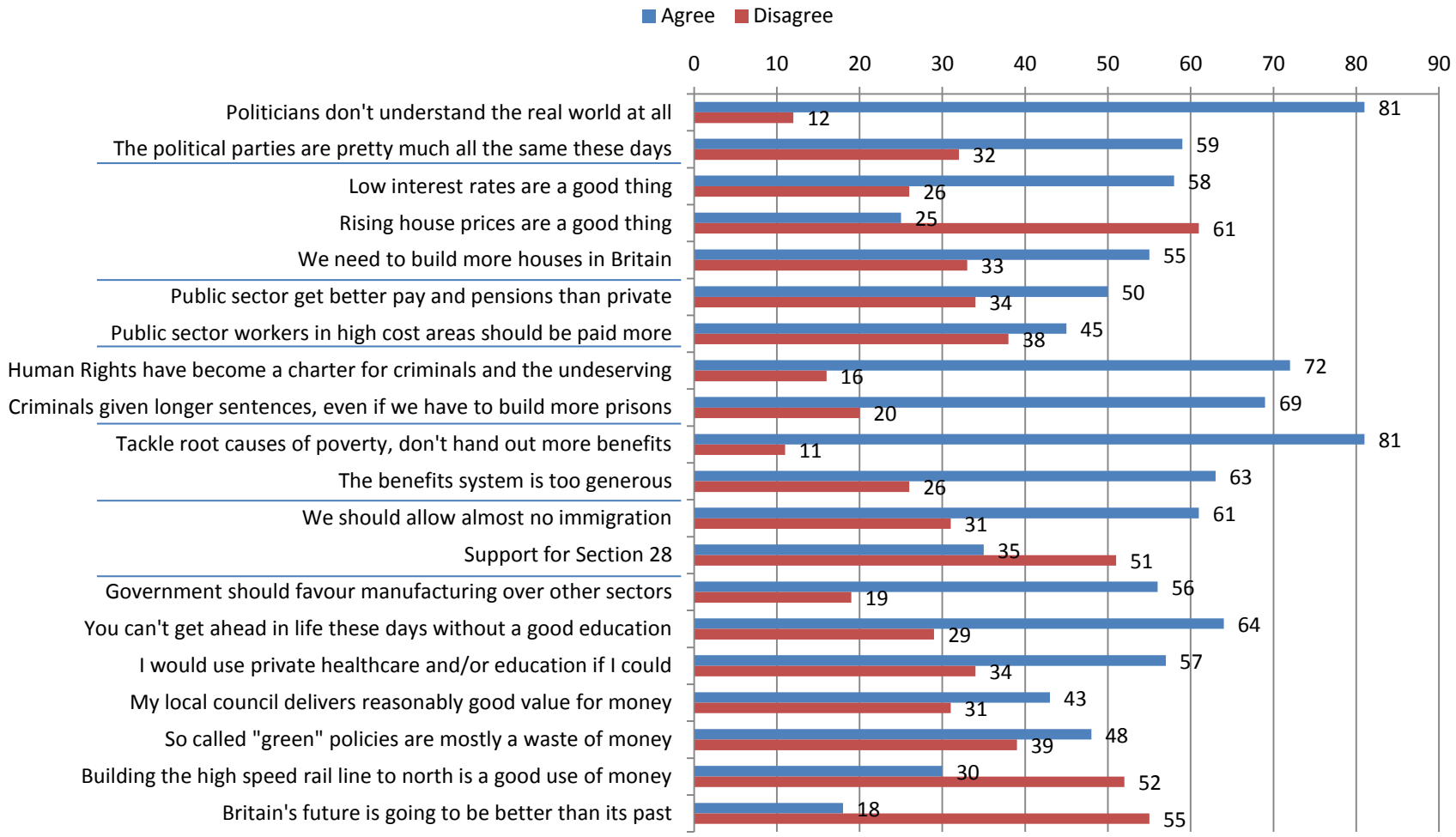
Different ideology?
How people place parties on a left right scale

- 

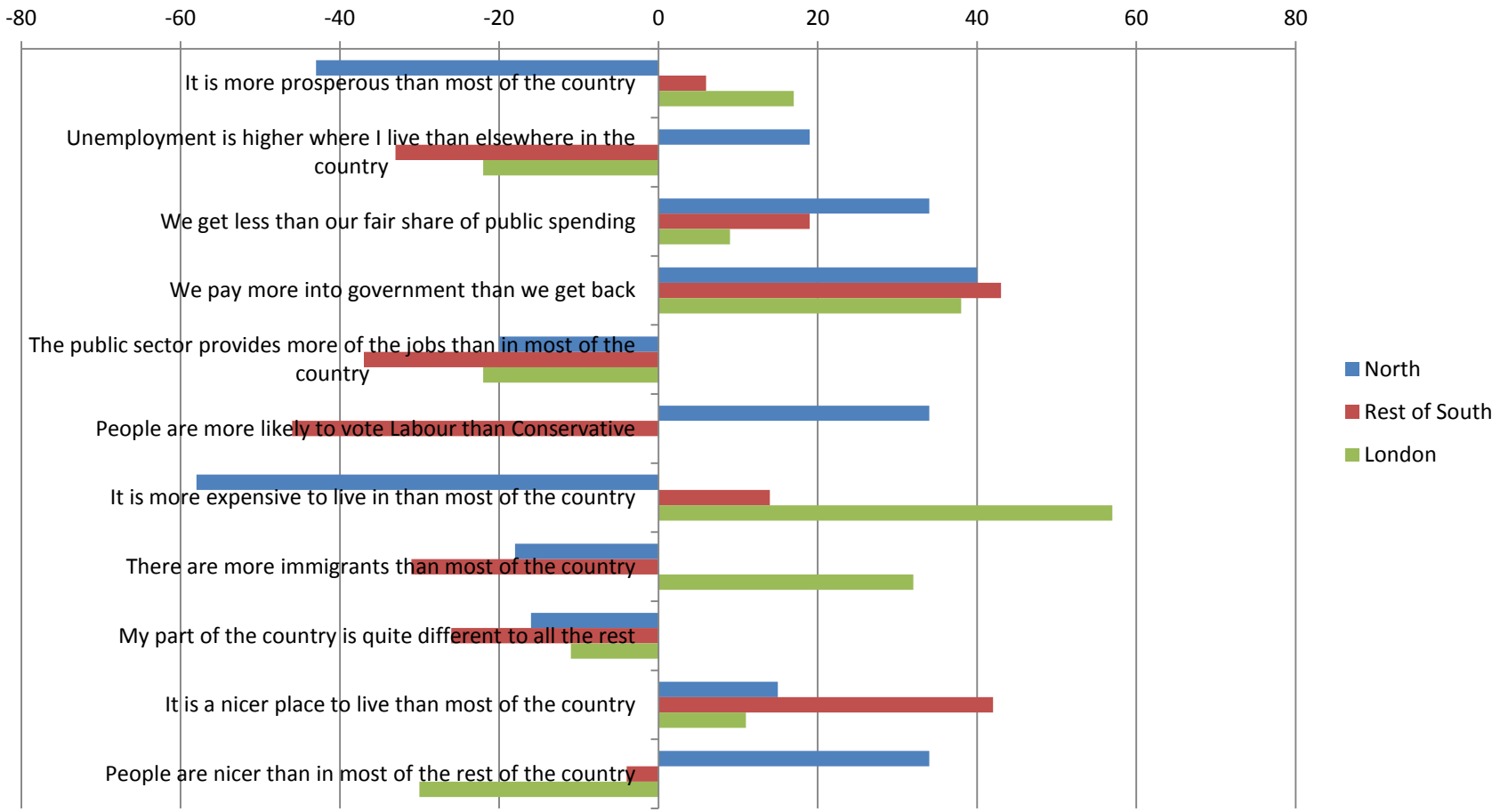
Which of the following would be the most helpful things politicians could do to improve life for you and your family?



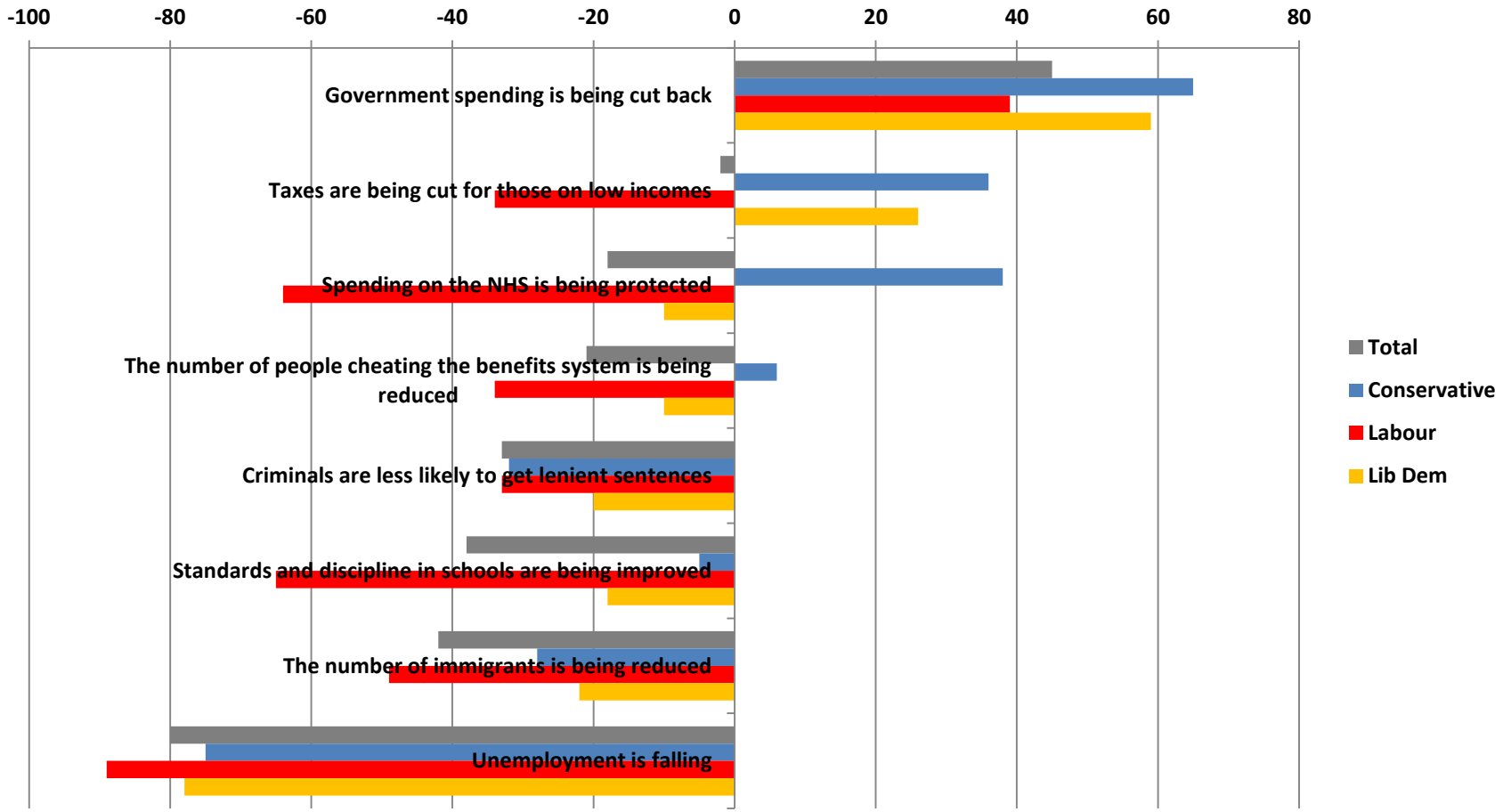
Attitudes towards polarising issues



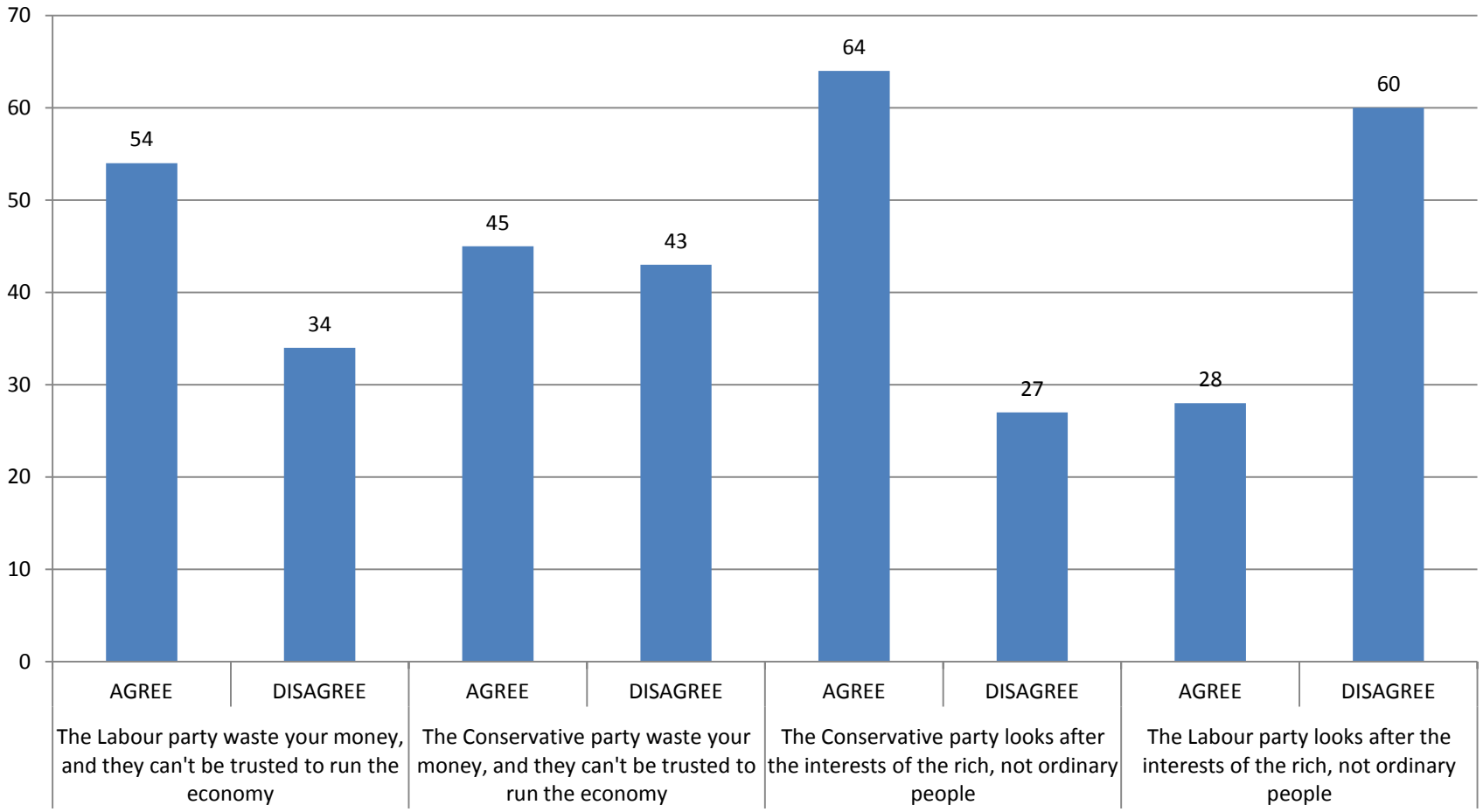
Views about their own area



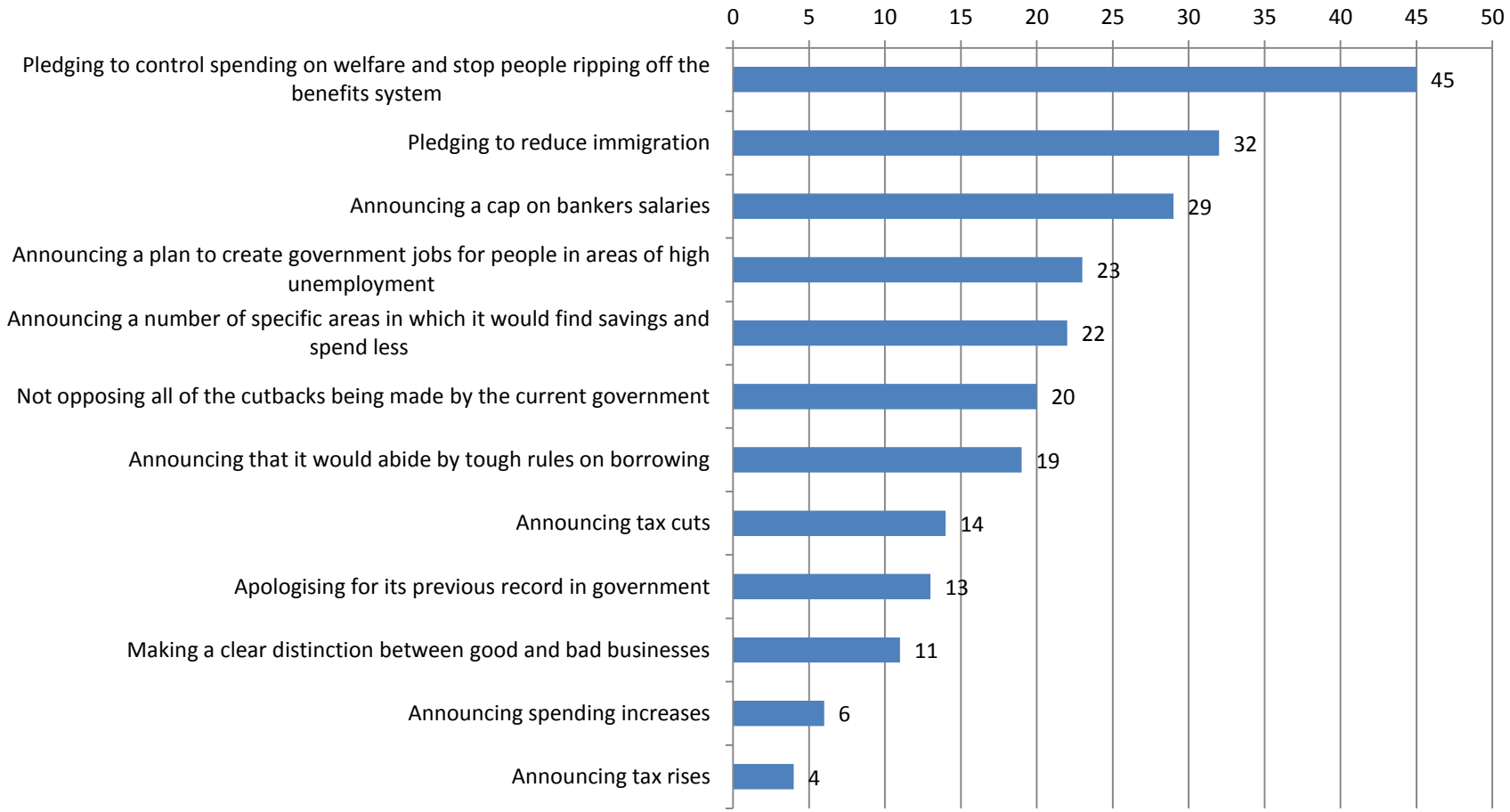
Views about government performance



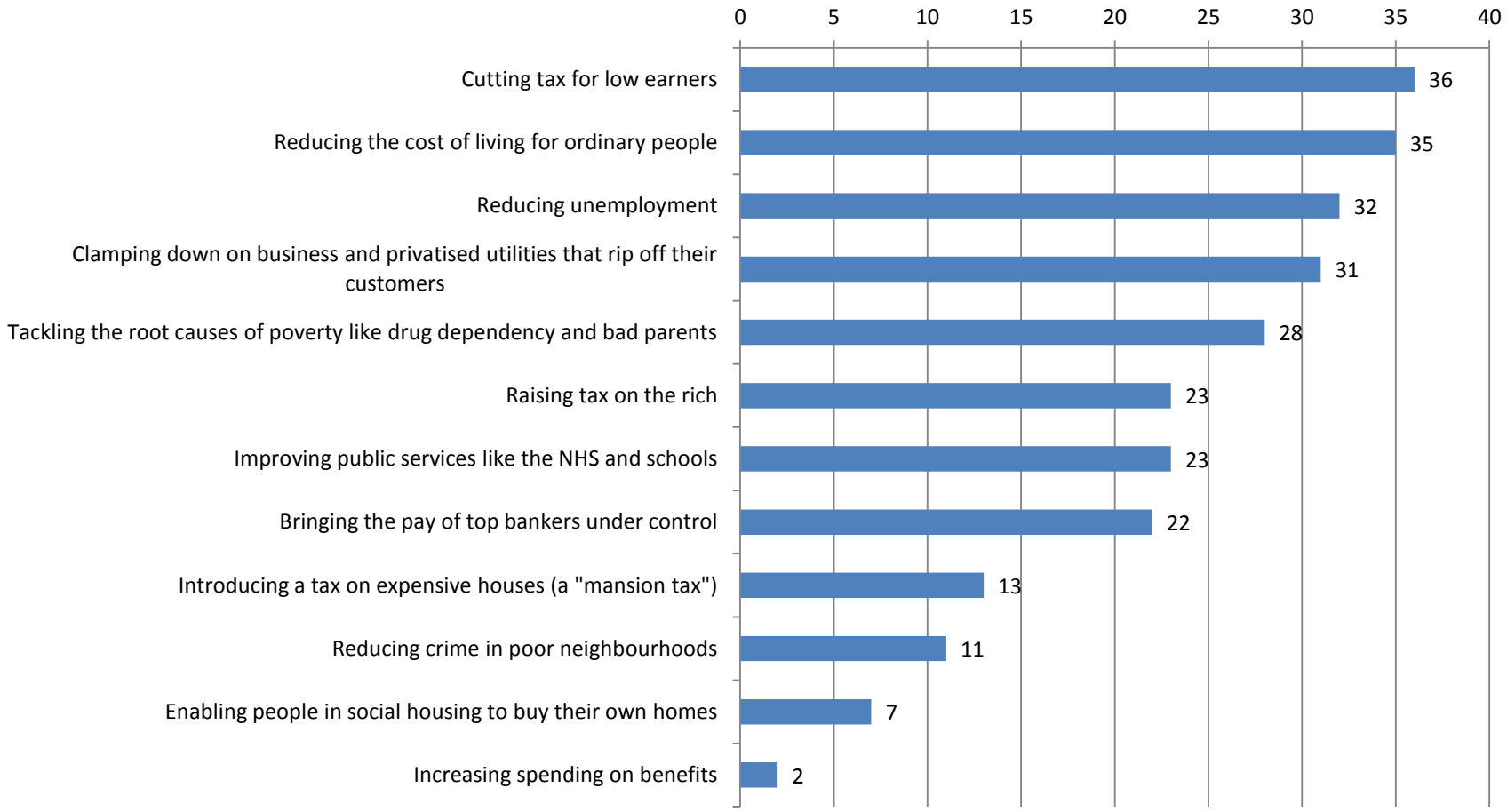
Most important party negatives



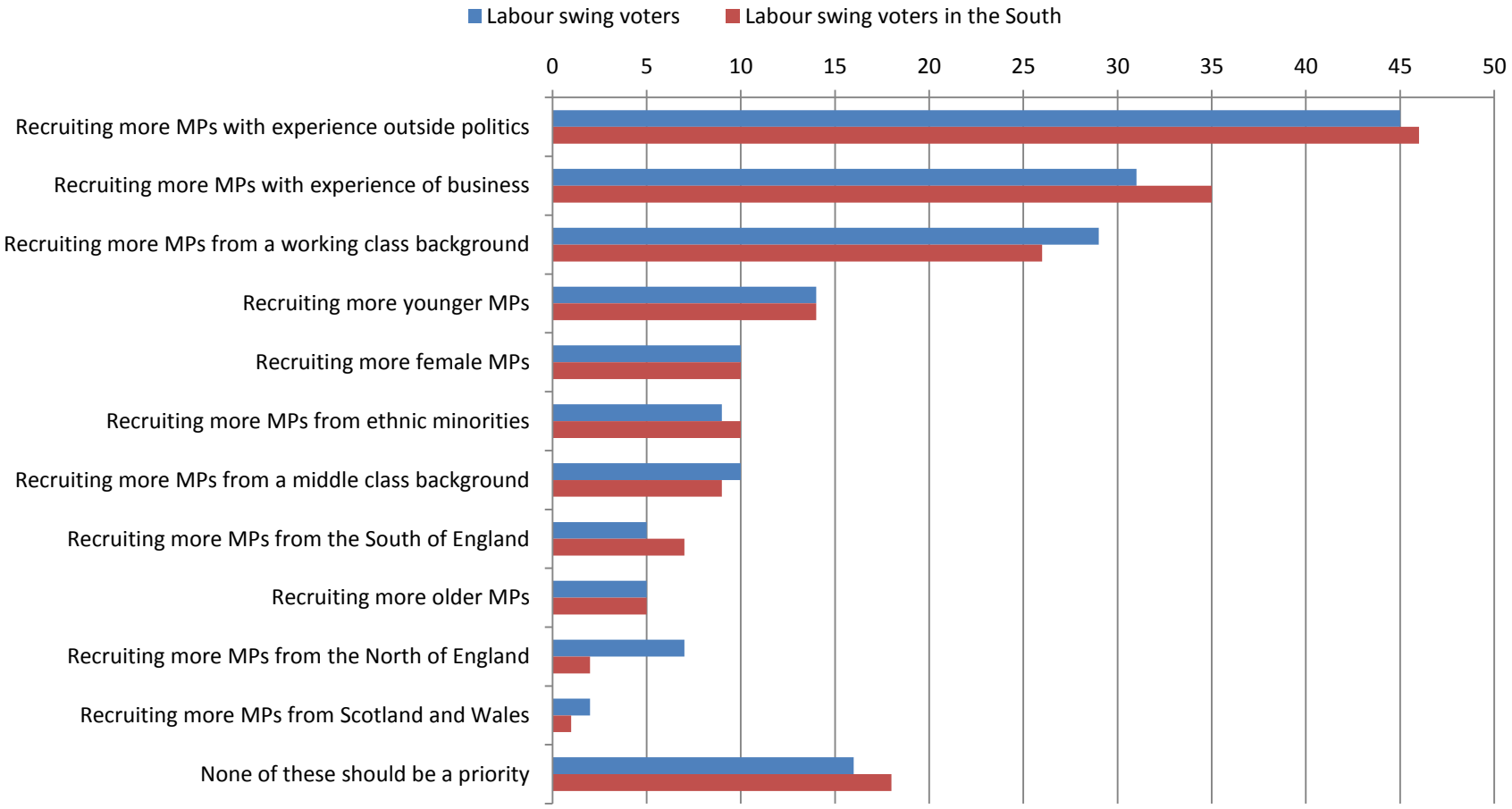
Which of the following would most convince you that the Labour party would be good at running the economy if it returned to Government? (Lab swing voters)



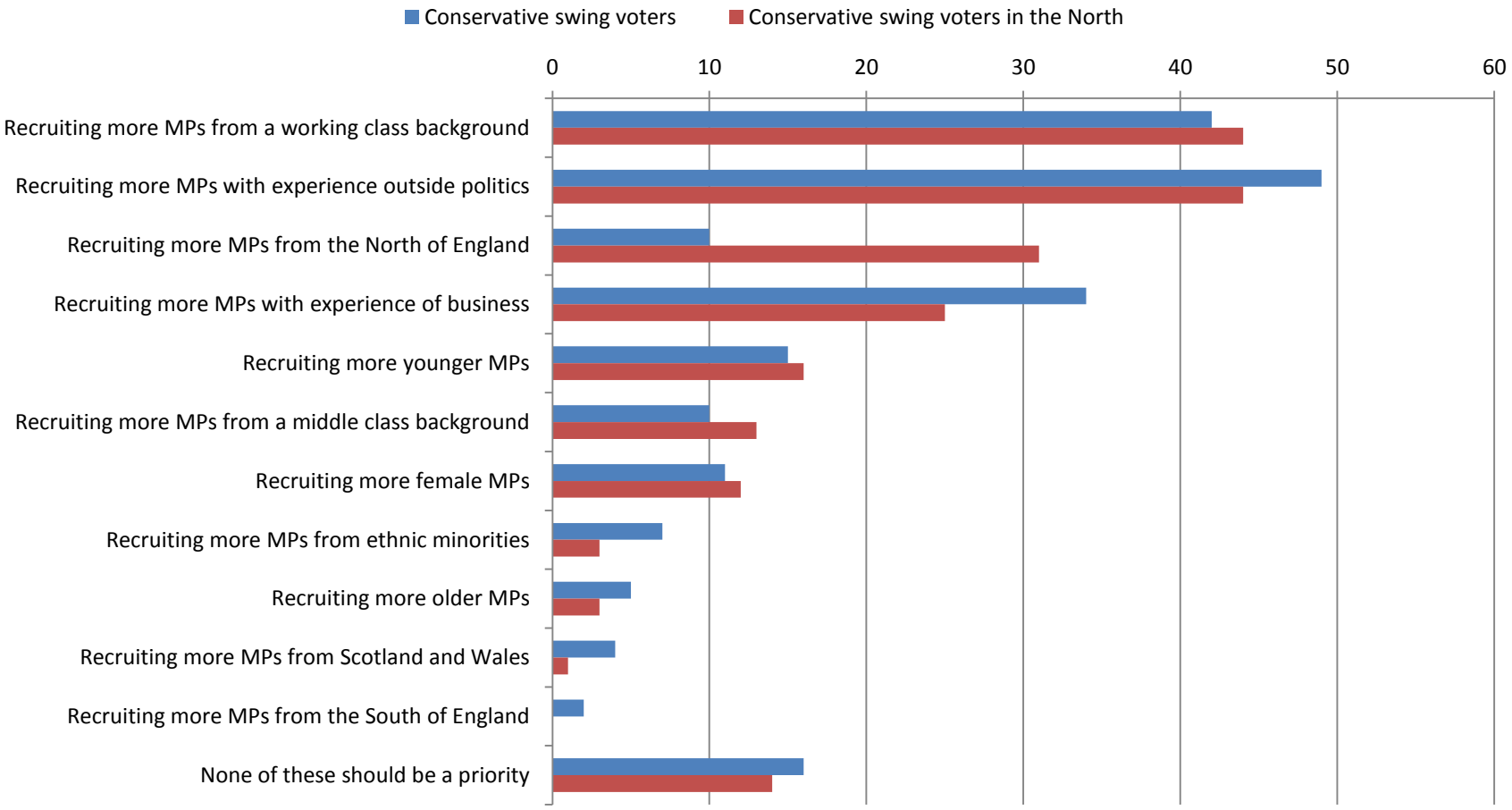
Which of the following would most convince you that the Conservative party was for everyone, not just the rich? (Con swing voters)



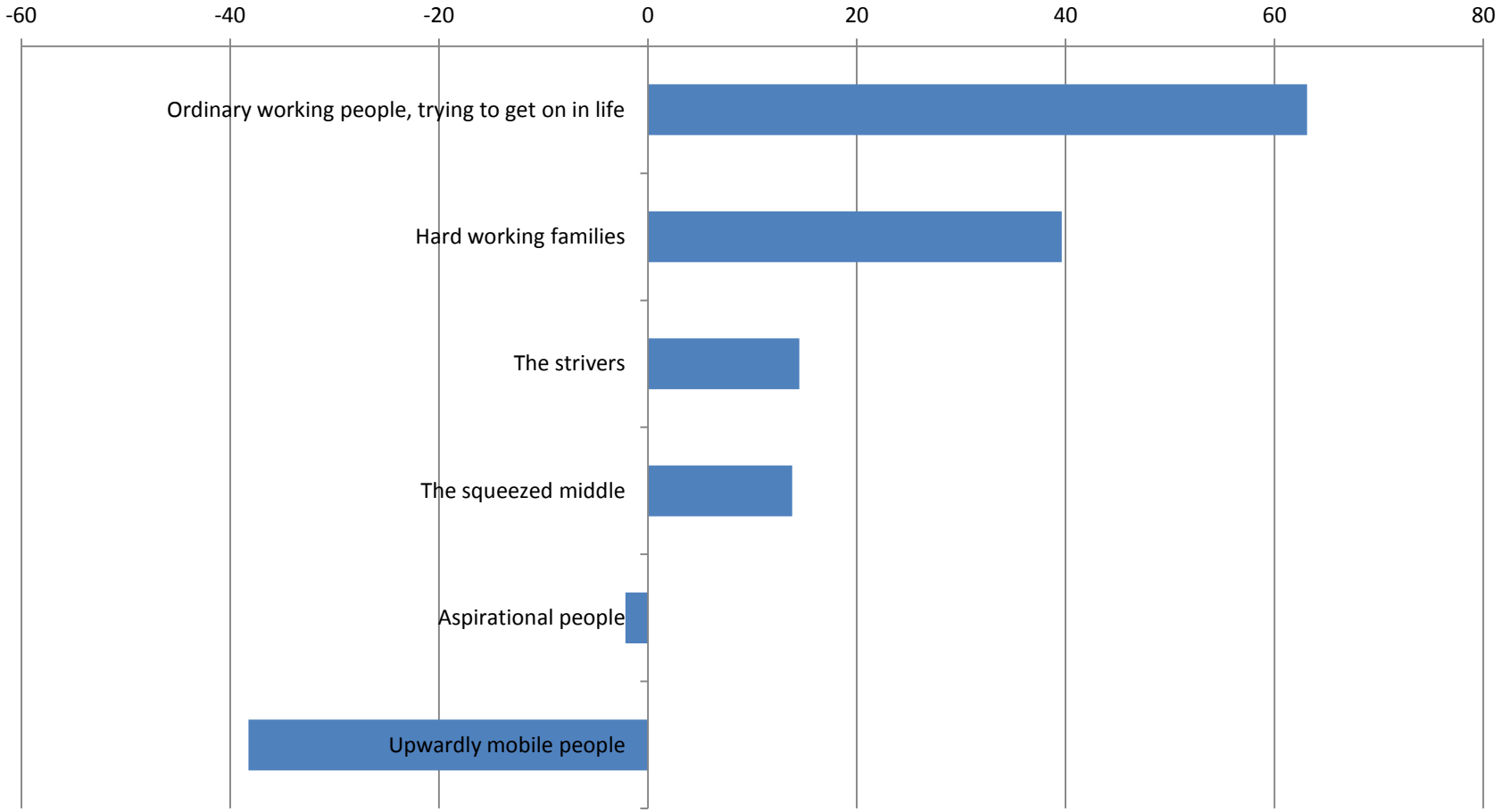
Labour: Which of the following do you think should be their biggest priorities in seeking to better reflect the county?



Conservatives: Which of the following do you think should be their biggest priorities in seeking to better reflect the county?

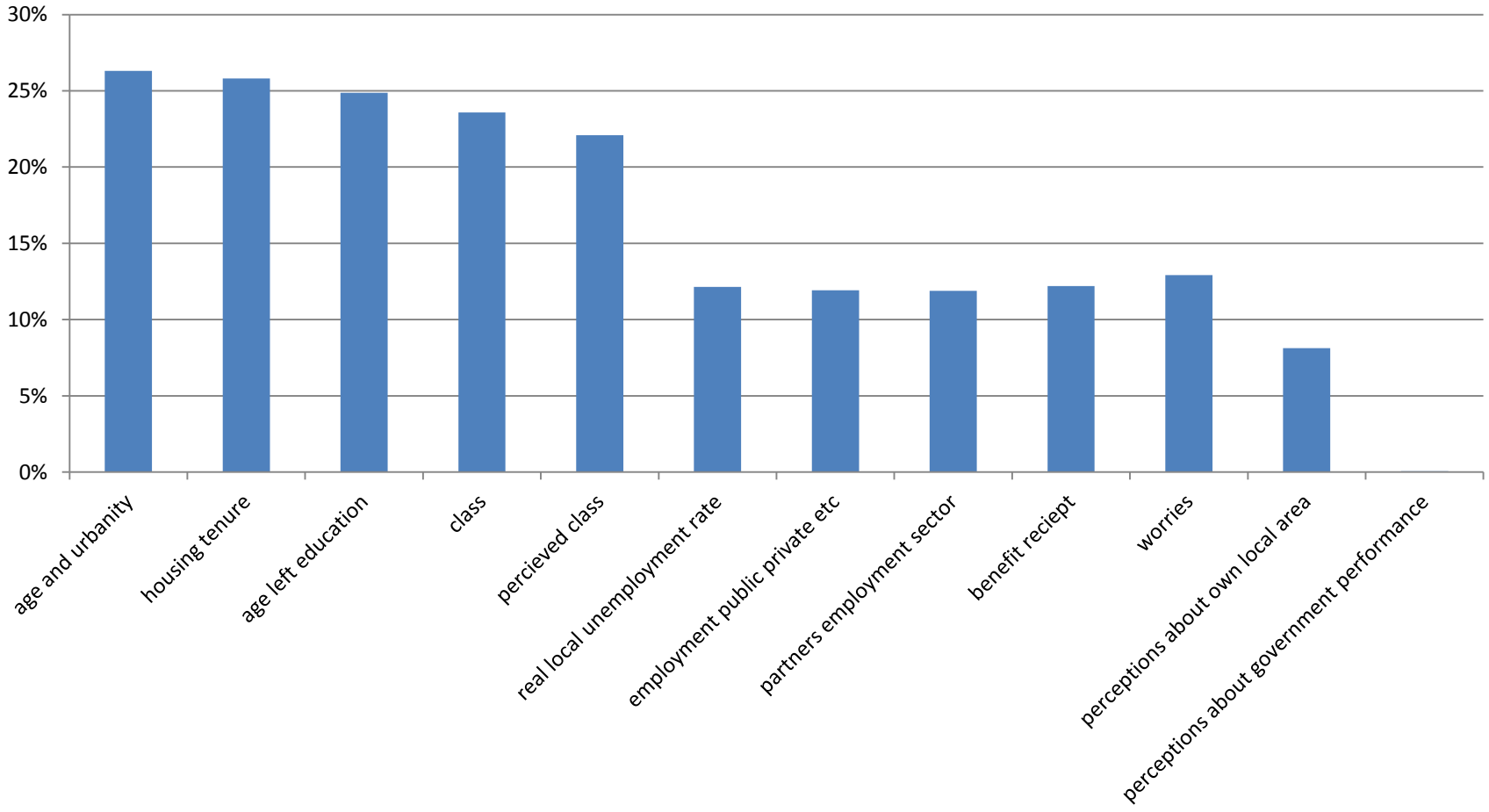


Here are some descriptions of different groups that are sometimes used in discussions on TV and in newspapers. Which of the following do you feel applies to you?

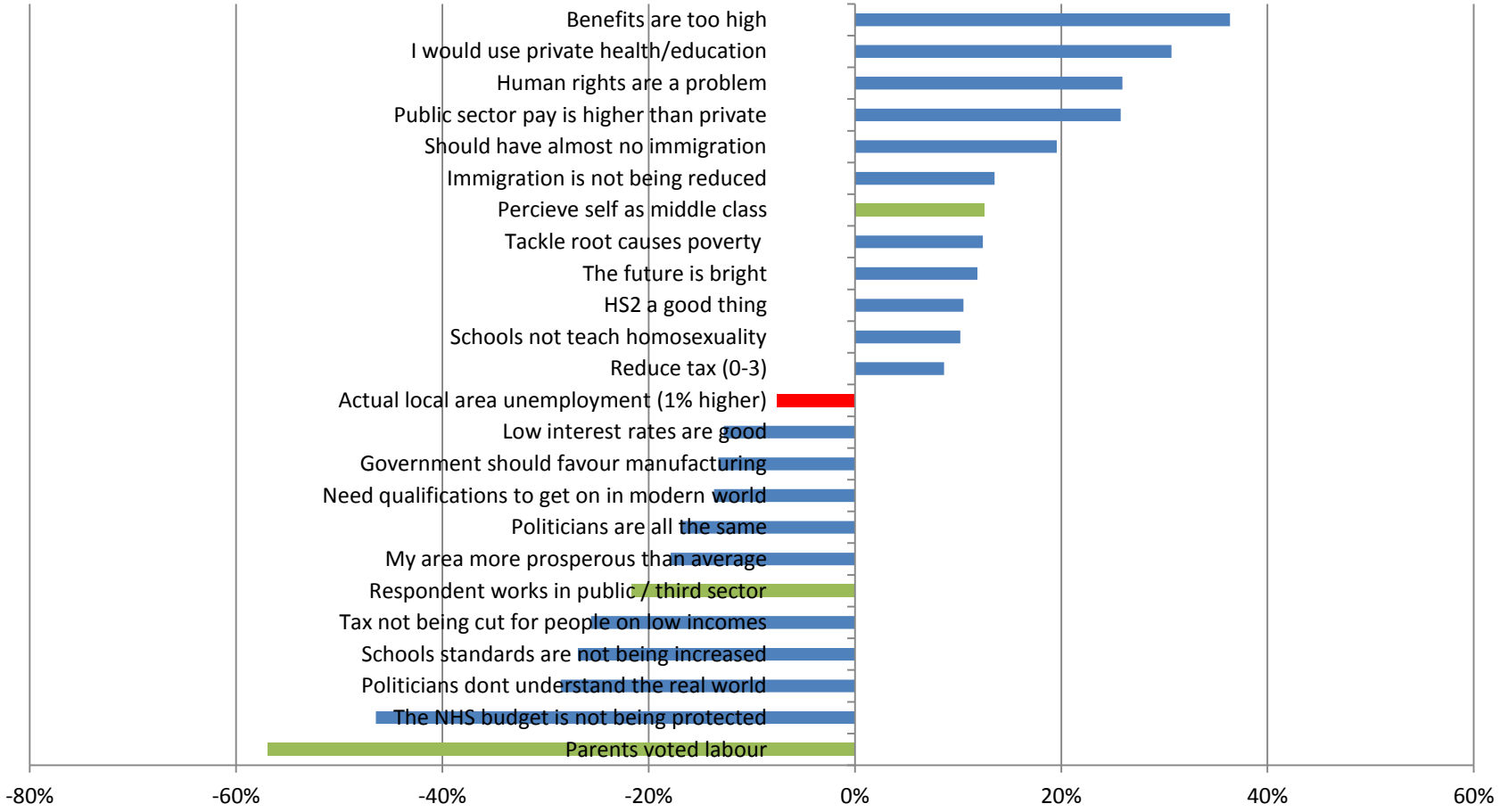


3) Picking apart the factors:

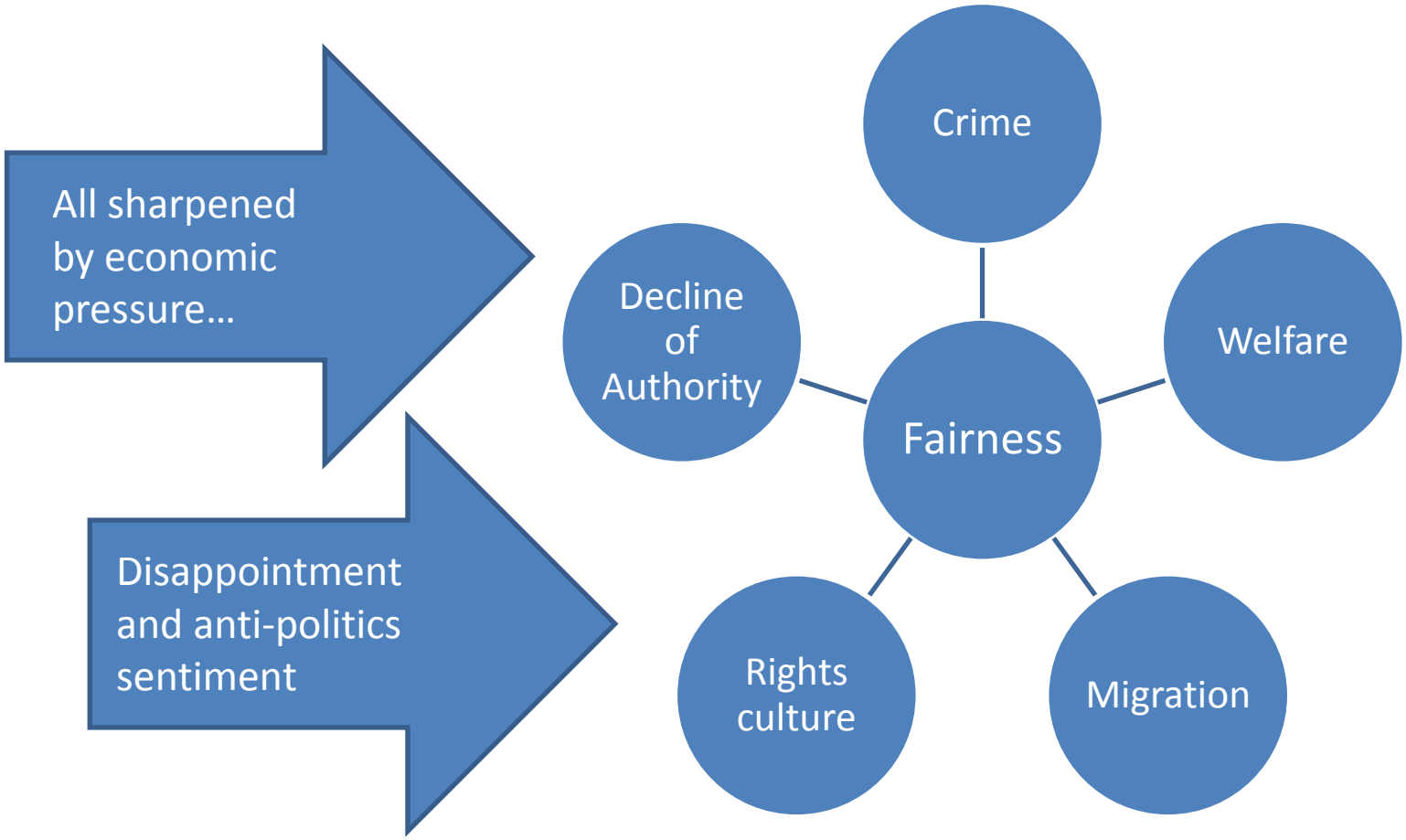
Can we explain the north-south gap?



Factors that are statistically significant and correlated with vote choice



4) Some themes from the focus groups



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