Reconnecting Labour | Initial findings

Dan Jarvis MP
Executive Summary

There is much in this report that will make for uncomfortable reading for the Labour Party. That comes with the territory of losing a General Election. We have lost our connection with millions of people. The onus is now on us to show that we are listening, learning the lessons of defeat and that we are willing to act on them if we are to win back their confidence.

It is clear that UKIP played a significant role in Labour’s defeat on May 7th. They may only have retained a single seat, but UKIP cost Labour many constituencies that we needed to win and contributed to our defeat in several communities we never expected to lose. It proved once and for all that any idea that UKIP posed no threat to Labour, or that they were a greater problem for the Conservatives, was complacent and misguided.

Nigel Farage has not only made good on his promise to park UKIP’s tanks on Labour’s lawn – he has driven them through the front door and crashed them into our living room.

There are three broad trends in how UKIP damaged Labour’s prospects across England and Wales:

1. **Labour was challenged in our Traditional Heartlands**: UKIP achieved dramatic swings in seats like Heywood & Middleton, Dagenham & Rainham and Hartlepool. 63 of the 100 seats where UKIP made their greatest inroads were Labour constituencies, helping them achieve 44 second places in communities that elected Labour MPs.

2. **Our path to victory was blocked in many Marginal Battlegrounds**: There was a UKIP swing of 10% or greater in more than a third of the 106 key marginals Labour was targeting in order to form a government. This contributed to defeats all over the country, including Morley & Outwood and both Plymouth seats. Even smaller UKIP gains were enough to make the difference in crucial contests like Croydon Central.

3. **Labour is at risk of Southern Retreat**: UKIP also helped entrench Labour’s southern discomfort, eroding our foothold in seats we used to hold and would need to regain to win a majority. UKIP even succeeded in pushing us into third place in constituencies that had Labour MPs as recently as 2010. In places like Basildon and Sittingbourne & Sheppey, Labour is in danger of becoming irrelevant.

There is also a distinct challenge in **Coastal Communities**. These often provide a cocktail of the key factors fuelling support for UKIP, including significant numbers of older voters and blue collar workers left behind by cultural and economic change.

UKIP is effectively serving as a barometer for Labour’s shortcomings. Too many no longer trust us and do not think we are on their side – particularly on issues such as welfare and immigration. Many voters were pushed into the arms of the Conservatives for similar reasons. Labour must address these issues if we want to rebuild trust with these communities and govern Britain again.

There are no quick fixes or silver bullet solutions. This report suggests several potential building blocks for a Labour plan to reconnect with the people we have lost:

- **Defining what we stand for – the ‘story’ we want to tell as a party**
  Labour is seen less and less as the party of working people. Too often voters did not know what we stood for. The fault for this must lie with us rather than the public. Labour needs to develop a positive narrative about who we are as a party, what we are about, and the kind of country we aspire to build.
- **Policies - how we express our values**
  This report outlines several areas that should form part of any policy response to the concerns that have given rise to UKIP. This includes reassurance on issues like work and immigration, an economic plan to extend opportunity to communities that feel forgotten, a distinct message for older people and reclaiming our mantle as a patriotic party.

- **How we do our politics**
  Different communities face different challenges in reconnecting with the public. We need to ensure local Labour campaigners are given the capacity, confidence and flexibility to effectively respond to the issues on their doorsteps and rebuild trust at a local level. This report suggests exploring ways we can revitalise constituency parties, encouraging effective community campaigning and recruiting candidates from more representative backgrounds.

Overall, it is clear that UKIP and the reasons behind the explosion in its support are not going away. With a European Referendum approaching, Labour must take them head on. If we cannot offer a more appealing and credible vision for Britain’s future than UKIP, then we have no realistic hope of defeating the Tories.
Introduction

The first step towards solving any problem is acknowledging that one exists in the first place. Labour didn’t just lose a General Election on May 7th – we lost our connection with millions of people across the country.

As we look to renew and rebuild, we know that the majority of the people we need to win back voted for the Conservatives. But it is also clear that the Tories are not the only opponents we need to overcome across England and Wales. Labour needs to tackle UKIP too.

If we are honest with ourselves, we know Labour has been in denial about the problem posed by UKIP for too long. For years we tried to shrug it off as a threat only to the Tories. We talked about taking on Nigel Farage, but in reality we were more comfortable picking fights with Nick Clegg.

The consequences of this were evident on Polling Day. UKIP may only have retained a single seat, but it cost Labour many constituencies we needed to win back and contributed to our defeat in several communities we never expected to lose. This was despite local UKIP campaigns that were often underfunded and amateur in their presentation and execution.

This is not a solely British phenomenon. Similar winds of political discontent are blowing across the Continent and fuelling support for populist parties all over Europe – from the Danish People’s Party, the Swedish Democrats, to the Front National leading polls in France. Sustained pressure on living standards, rapid global change and declining trust in mainstream political leaders are coinciding with falling election turnout and the loosening of traditional party loyalties.

I saw this first-hand while campaigning across the country over the past year.

Our country faces many challenges today, but the greatest obstacle we face is the increasingly widespread belief that our problems have outgrown our politics. Many have lost faith in the idea that politics of any colour can make a positive difference to their lives. In an age where our livelihoods can be thrown into chaos by property speculators on the other side of the Atlantic, in many ways it is a rational view.

Some of the longest conversations I had during the election campaign were with people who thought that UKIP might be the answer.

I remember two self-employed decorators in Swindon, a father and a son, both angry about the decline in their pay and conditions. There was Susan, a pensioner in Dudley, worried about queues at her local GP surgery. And Michael in Morecambe. He wanted to know how Labour would make life better for people like him – a gas fitter with a family to support.
Like many, they all felt shaken by forces beyond their control, cut-off by an economy that didn’t work for them, and powerless to change their own lives.

It underlines why UKIP and the complex reasons behind the explosion in its support are not going anywhere. Where Nigel Farage and his party have taken advantage of people’s anger, Labour must now show that we can provide answers.

That’s why Andy Burnham was right to make this a priority in his campaign for the Labour leadership. Andy recognised that taking on UKIP is essential to making Labour relevant again to millions of people and laying the foundations for a Labour government.

This report seeks to throw further light on this challenge. It outlines the shape of the UKIP threat Labour must now face in different parts of the country, and suggests some of the building blocks that could form part of our response.

I am indebted to everyone who has taken the time to contribute to these initial findings. I would especially like to thank the hundreds of party members, councillors, candidates, members of the public and the ex-Labour supporters now voting for UKIP who submitted feedback to my consultation.²

We will only succeed in reconnecting Labour by working together, in the best traditions of our party. In that spirit, I am pleased to incorporate insights from parliamentary candidates who have written powerfully about why they lost and colleagues who have long been dedicated to tackling UKIP – particularly John Healey and Jon Cruddas. This interim report would also not have been possible without the support of The House of Commons Library.

Overall, I hope these findings will serve as a useful starting point for a wider debate across our movement about how we can renew our party, overcome UKIP’s pessimistic brand of politics, and return Labour to government.

Winning again won’t be easy, but the bottom line is straightforward. Nigel Farage has made good on his promise to park UKIP’s tanks on Labour’s lawn. Our response now as a Labour Party should be simple. Bring it on.

Dan Jarvis
Labour MP for Barnsley Central
August 2015
The Populist Challenge

The 2015 General Election result underlined that Britain is not immune to the sense of discontent and disillusionment with mainstream politics sweeping across much of Europe. ‘Challenger’ parties other than the Tories, Labour and the Liberal Democrats won a quarter of the popular vote – the highest share since 1945.

Although Nigel Farage’s party did not make as great a breakthrough as some had predicted, it left an undeniable mark on the British electoral map. Even when the question of choosing a government and a Prime Minister was on the table, more people went to the polls and voted UKIP than ever before.

Just under 4 million people voted for UKIP on Polling Day – a 9.5% increase on its vote in 2010. This gave it 13% of the popular vote and a clear third place finish on the basis of votes cast. UKIP won its first parliamentary seat at a General Election, and underlined this with 120 second place results across the country – from Merthyr Tydfil in Wales to Middlesbrough in the North East, and Folkestone on the south coast.

What did this mean for Labour?

There were three broad trends in how UKIP damaged Labour’s prospects across England and Wales. While they are not perfect, they are a useful rule-of-thumb for the complex nature of the populist threat in different parts of the country.

1. ‘Traditional Heartlands’

Labour was challenged in our Traditional Heartlands. These are Labour-held seats – often constituencies we have represented for generations – where UKIP has significantly cut into our support.

Despite speculation about the potential for serious challenges in a handful of communities, UKIP failed to win any Labour-held constituencies.

There were however sizeable swings to UKIP in many traditional Labour seats, including in Dagenham & Rainham (26%), Rotherham (24%) and Hartlepool (21%). Of the 100 constituencies where UKIP made its greatest gains, 63 of them elected Labour MPs. There was an average swing to UKIP across all Labour-held seats of more than 10%.

This trend was particularly strong in post-industrial communities north of Birmingham. It is important to note it extended to Wales as well as England.

With the Tories still weak in many of these areas, the collapse of the Liberal Democrats created a vacuum that UKIP was able to fill. This allowed UKIP to finish second place in 44 Labour-held constituencies and position itself as our foremost
challenger over the coming years. Indeed, senior UKIP figures have made no secret of their ‘2020 Strategy’ to target Labour-held seats in northern England.³

Labour must ensure we are ready to respond – especially in constituencies where our activists have not had to face significant political opposition for many years.

Case Study: Heywood & Middleton

Labour has represented Heywood & Middleton and its predecessor constituency since the 1960s. A predominantly white working class community in Greater Manchester, Argos and the Stobart Group are among the larger employers here but there are fewer well-paid manufacturing jobs than there once were.

Labour won the seat comfortably in 2010 with 40% of the vote and a majority of just under 6,000 over the Conservatives. UKIP finished fifth behind the Liberal Democrats and the BNP with just 1,200 votes (2.6%).

The 2014 by-election offered a preview of the threat UKIP can pose in a two-horse race with Labour. UKIP increased its share of the vote to 39% and came within 600 votes of winning the seat.⁴

Labour did retain the seat at the General Election with a slightly reduced majority of 5,200, but UKIP cemented its place as the clear challenger. The swing (29.6%) and vote share (32%) they achieved were the largest in any Labour-held seat in the country.

Liz McInnes, Labour MP for Heywood & Middleton: ‘I’ve fought two recent elections in my constituency of Heywood & Middleton with UKIP as my main opponent. The close by-election result in October 2014 should have brought it home to Labour supporters that there is no such thing as a ‘safe’ Labour seat.

‘Where there is no credible opposition – as was the case in Heywood & Middleton, where the Tories barely bothered to campaign – UKIP can all too easily fill that vacuum and become a focus for general discontent. Labour needs to be clear about its policies on employment, health, welfare and education in order to address concerns that immigration may be having a detrimental effect on these.’

Other examples: Dagenham & Rainham, Rotherham, Rother Valley, West Bromwich West

2. ‘Marginal Battlegrounds’

The second trend was across the knife-edge battleground constituencies throughout England and Wales that decide who governs Britain and which helped shape the outcome of this General Election.

This was a very broad category including seats of many shapes and sizes. What they had in common is that they were communities where UKIP has proved capable of taking significant numbers of votes from both Labour and the Conservatives.
Overall, UKIP’s advance undermined Labour’s efforts in seats where we were challenging a Tory incumbent and, in the worst circumstances, contributed to the defeat of several incumbent Labour MPs.

UKIP achieved a swing of 10% or greater in more than a third of the 106 key seats we were targeting in order to form a government. It took votes from the Tories, Labour, absorbed a sizeable chunk of the former Lib Dem vote and brought together a broader ‘none of the above’ protest vote that included some non-voters.

Some evidence suggests that the Tories were much more effective in squeezing the UKIP vote in these marginals. Labour typically did 4% worse in the areas where support for UKIP increased the most, compared to a 2% fall in support for the Tories.

The impact this had was well-summed up by UKIP’s candidate in Warwickshire North – a must-win constituency where Labour needed to overturn a majority of 54. The Tories held the seat and increased their majority to nearly 3,000 votes.

‘The reason the Tories have won the key battleground of the Midlands is that UKIP came to their rescue,’ said William Cash. ‘We rode into the flanks of the white working class and captured them. I had Tory workers coming up and hugging me.’

The most extreme example of this trend across the country was Thurrock – a Thames Estuary marginal decided by just 92 votes in 2010. The seat became a genuine three-way contest. In 2015 UKIP achieved a swing of 24% - the largest in any seat on Labour’s target list. They finished narrowly behind Labour in third, polling more than 15,700 votes. Labour fell short of winning the seat by 536 votes.

Polly Billington, Labour PPC for Thurrock:

‘We had little to offer previous Labour voters who went to UKIP in May. As a result, in many parts of England but particularly the south, the Tories were able to increase their majorities in key marginals as UKIP wooed away voters whom we had, over many years, come to consider ‘ours’.

‘They are not [ours] any more, without some serious work to rebuild our relationships and understand people’s fundamental anxiety about loss of control and power.’

Similar dramatic swings were also seen in Labour targets such as South Basildon & East Thurrock (20%) and Great Yarmouth (18%). These bigger swingers were only the tip of the iceberg. Under the surface UKIP won votes at the margins that in many places were enough to make the difference between Labour winning and losing.

In some areas the UKIP threat extended across the constituency, while in others the issue could be isolated to particular neighbourhoods which Labour had lost touch with. Labour campaigners in Croydon traced their defeat to a single ward - New
Addington – where UKIP polled significantly higher than expected. Labour fell short of winning Croydon Central by 165 votes. UKIP polled just under 5,000.

As well as blocking Labour gains, UKIP contributed to Labour defeats. There was a 12% average swing to UKIP across the nine seats that the Conservatives gained from Labour across England & Wales. This was above the national average, but only slightly. It was still enough to make the difference in nine close contests decided by a total of just 8,000 votes. Arguably the most painful example was Morley & Outwood, where it was local UKIP campaigners who first raised the prospect of Labour losing the seat. This was based on their own canvass returns before the ballot boxes had even been opened at the count. Similar reports link the rise of UKIP to other narrow Labour defeats in seats including Plymouth Moor View, the Vale of Clwyd and Southampton Itchen.

Rowenna Davis, Labour PPC for Southampton Itchen: ‘In white working class communities, particularly on the coast, UKIP tore our vote apart. The safer, older council estates that used to be solid Labour were now significantly disillusioned. No matter how hard we worked these areas, significant national differences, particularly on immigration, meant that we couldn’t stop the tide.’

Case Study: Plymouth Moor View and Plymouth Sutton & Devonport

Plymouth has a rich Labour tradition stretching back to 1945 and the election of a certain Michael Foot as its first Labour MP. It returned two Labour MPs between 1997 and 2010. What happened here in 2015 is in keeping with a broader story for Labour in constituencies across the country. The naval city had two neighbouring seats: one a Labour-held marginal that we needed to hold, the other a Tory marginal that we needed to regain in order to form a government. Labour was defeated in both.

In Plymouth Moor View, Labour were defending a majority of 1,500. A 2% fall in the Labour vote allowed the Tories to retake the seat by just over 1,000 votes. UKIP won more than 9,000 votes (21%) on a swing of 14%.

In Plymouth Sutton & Devonport Labour needed to overturn a Tory majority of just over 1,100 in a seat that was 20th on our target list. We increased our vote, but came up 523 votes short. UKIP won 6,700 votes on a 7.5% swing – below the national average but enough to prevent a Labour victory.

Luke Pollard, Labour PPC for Plymouth Sutton & Devonport: ‘UKIP’s populist positioning meant they ate into our vote on both the right on immigration, and the left on issues like the economy. Whereas many UKIP voters who switched from the Tories went back in May, those more recent switchers from Labour did not and our data collection wasn’t sophisticated enough to spot this in time.’

Other examples: Bolton West, Morley and Outwood, Derby North, Southampton Itchen, Vale of Clwyd, Croydon Central.
3. Southern Retreat:

The third trend has received less attention since Polling Day, but is arguably more alarming for Labour’s future as a national party with reach across the country.

There has been a significant growth in support for UKIP in southern areas where Labour has been very competitive in the recent past. These are typically constituencies across the South East and East of England that helped build the majorities won by Labour in 1997, 2001 and 2005. Many of them are commuter areas and New Towns.

The Tories won these seats back in 2010 and held them in 2015 – many with increased majorities. The concern however is that UKIP is encroaching on Labour as the main challenger party in these areas. In extreme cases, UKIP has succeeded in pushing us into third place in seats that had Labour MPs as recently as five years ago.

A typical example is Chatham & Aylesford, a seat we lost in 2010 and that was 101st on Labour’s target list for 2015.

Campaigners in the seat had little trouble finding people who had previously voted Labour – but mainly many years ago. On May 7th the Tories held the seat with 50% of the vote and almost doubled their majority to just under 12,000. Rather than make progress, the Labour vote fell back by a further 9% and came only narrowly ahead of UKIP, which won 8,500 votes on a swing of 17%.

With hindsight, it is possible to trace the early seeds of this emerging trend back to the Eastleigh and Rochester & Strood by-elections during the last parliament. Even when given the opportunity to inflict a blow on the government of the day, most voters spurned the opportunity to vote Labour and instead chose UKIP as the vehicle for their protest.

It was UKIP rather than Labour that came second in 75 Tory constituencies largely across the South East, South West and East of England in 2015. That included more than half of the 35 seats across Kent and Essex – two counties that returned 14 Labour MPs in 1997.

This confirms that while much has been written about UKIP challenging Labour in the north, we also have to be alive to the danger of it squeezing us as challengers to the Tories in parts of the south. While UKIP is advancing, Labour is retreating and in danger of losing our relevance in too many communities that we would need to form a majority Labour government.
Case Study: South Basildon & East Thurrock

In 1992 Basildon became a symbol for Labour’s failure to win over the crucial swing voters needed to build a General Election victory. We subsequently won the seat convincingly in 1997 and held it at successive elections until 2010. In 2015 however, Basildon risks again becoming a symbol for Labour’s lack of traction with skilled working class voters in southern England.

UKIP won just 6% of the vote in South Basildon in 2010, but in 2015 achieved a swing of 20.6% - the second highest of any seat on Labour’s list of 106 key target seats.

The collapse of the Lib Dems and a significant BNP vote allowed UKIP to poll 26.5% in 2015 and push Labour into third place. This helped Tory MP Stephen Metcalfe increase his majority from 5,700 to 7,700.

The result reflects a broader trend across the Thames Estuary, which delivered UKIP’s victory in Clacton and another 18 second places across the 35 constituencies in Kent and Essex.

Mike Le Surf, Labour PPC for South Basildon & East Thurrock: “In Basildon there is very little Lib Dem activity so a space was created for the protest vote which UKIP has exploited. Regardless of party colours, a lack of community presence and a lack of campaigning has let UKIP take on these roles.’

Other examples: Chatham & Aylesford, Sittingbourne & Sheppey, Castle Point, Rochester & Strood, Clacton

Guy Nicholson, Labour PPC for Sittingbourne & Sheppey:

“There is no shortage of people who need a Labour Government in Sittingbourne & Sheppey, but Labour is in danger of becoming irrelevant in our community. We won three elections here and had a Labour MP for 13 years until 2010. Since then we have haemorrhaged support and our local party is battered and bruised.

“The problem is not only losing votes to the Tories - UKIP are pulling the rug out from underneath us. They pushed us into third place at the General Election and now have more than double our numbers on the local council.

“I spoke to so many people on the doorstep in blue collar neighbourhoods who were once Labour, but now felt angry about their personal lot in life. They were demanding change and UKIP’s simple mantra answered their call.’
Coastal communities:

The marked growth in support for UKIP in seaside communities over recent years also deserves particular attention.

UKIP’s rise in ports and seaside towns cuts across the wider political trends identified in this report. It ranges from Traditional Heartlands like Hartlepool, to Marginal Battlegrounds like Plymouth and Great Yarmouth, and areas of Southern Retreat like Clacton and South Thanet – both of which elected Labour MPs within the last decade.

Coastal areas provide a cocktail of the key factors fuelling support for populist parties of protest – including a significant proportion of older voters. Research published by the Office of National Statistics has shown the majority of seaside towns has higher levels of deprivation than the country as a whole.\(^8\)

Many have been hit harshly by the forces of globalisation and economic change – from the decline of local fishing industries to the impact of cheaper foreign holidays on domestic tourism. Issues like underdeveloped transport infrastructure can help fuel a sense of being ‘left behind’ or forgotten ‘at the end of the railway line.’

There are as many as 20 coastal communities among the 95 constituencies that Labour needs to win back in order to win a majority in 2020.\(^9\) It is important that we now engage with the challenges that seaside towns face – many of which were covered in a report written for Labour’s Policy Review in 2013.\(^10\) Labour must have a distinct offer for how we will help these communities succeed in the future.

Case Study: Great Yarmouth

One of England’s historic seaside resorts, Great Yarmouth is a seat that Labour has only ever won in years when there has been a Labour government – including 1945, 1966 and 1997. The Conservatives won it back from Labour in 2010. UKIP has subsequently made serious inroads here, winning 40% of the vote and gaining 10 seats on the Borough Council at the local elections in 2014.

Despite being one of Labour’s key targets in the East of England, the Tories increased their majority in 2015 from 4,200 to over 6,000. Labour’s vote fell by 4%, leaving it only just ahead of UKIP, which pushed hard for second place and polled 23% of the vote on an 18% swing. This represented the third greatest to UKIP on Labour’s target list.

Lara Norris, Labour PPC for Great Yarmouth: “There is a real sense of isolation in Great Yarmouth. I spoke to so many people on the doorstep who felt like they didn’t matter and weren’t important to anybody. There is a complete mistrust of the political system and UKIP were able to offer an outlet for that anger.

“The challenge is changing minds, not identifying votes. During the campaign I would regularly have conversations lasting ten minutes or more as it was the only
way to try and connect with people. We have a lot of work to do to rebuild trust as it just isn’t there and too many people haven’t been spoken to by Labour in ages.”

Tony Wright, former Labour MP for Great Yarmouth from 1997 – 2010:

“When I was an apprentice engineer 45 years ago, Great Yarmouth was a town with over 20,000 manufacturing jobs, a booming seasonal tourism industry and the beginning of the rush for North Sea oil & gas.

“Today it’s a different picture with our manufacturing all but disappeared, a changing tourism industry with higher than average unemployment, and a high proportion of senior citizens who have witnessed many changes over those years and are concerned about the direction places like Great Yarmouth are going in.

“We have to reconnect with our people and challenge the many myths about the reasons for those changes and respond with policies to help coastal towns.”

Other examples: Great Grimsby, Hartlepool, Waveney, Dover
What is fuelling UKIP’s rise?

Each of these trends highlights why any idea that the rise of UKIP would not have consequences for Labour was complacent and misguided. It undermined the foundations of our support in our traditional areas and hindered our ability to make progress in target seats we needed to win back.

None of this should have come as a surprise. Some key seat candidates were raising the alarm about the impact of UKIP on the Labour vote as early as 2013. The *Revolt on the Left* report by the Fabian Society in late 2014 also profiled the different types of voters being attracted to Nigel Farage’s party and identified a number of seats vulnerable to increased support for UKIP at General Election. It is a piece of research well worth Labour rediscovering in the months ahead.

The underlying demographics of UKIP’s support base have been well documented by Robert Ford and Matthew Goodwin in the book *Revolt on the Right*. It has been confirmed since the election that UKIP’s advance was strongest in seats with the largest concentrations of white working-class populations, voters with no educational qualifications, and where opposition to immigration and the European Union was highest.

> ‘UKIP’s revolt is a working class phenomenon. Its support is heavily concentrated among older, blue-collar workers, with little education and few skills; groups who have been ‘left behind’ by the economic and social transformation of Britain in recent decades.

> ‘UKIP are not a second home for disgruntled Tories in the shires; they are a first home for angry and disaffected working class Britons of all political backgrounds who have lost faith in a political system that ceased to represent them long ago.’

Robert Ford and Matthew Goodwin, authors of *Revolt on the Right*

> ‘My cross firmly went in the UKIP box, not for their policies, but as a shock to all three main parties. Labour was formed to give the WORKING man a voice in politics and I personally feel that I am no longer represented by the party.’

Stuart from Preston

> ‘I voted Labour in every election until two years ago when I became a member of UKIP. The Labour Party in my view no longer represents the working class. If you speak to your own voters you’ll find that many disagree with the unlimited immigration that has suppressed wages and put pressure on local schools, hospitals and housing. We aren’t coming back until Labour starts to represent our interests.’

Mark from Greater Manchester
Overall, UKIP is serving as a barometer of Labour’s wider shortcomings. Its advance has especially shown that Labour’s support among blue collar voters is not as strong as it once was.

People who voted UKIP on May 7th were more than twice as likely to think that Labour had ‘lost touch with ordinary people’ as those who supported other rival parties. Moreover, 77% did not think that Labour ‘respects or understands the views of its voters’ – viewing us even more harshly than the Conservatives. Almost a quarter of Labour’s own supporters apparently share the same view.15

Jon Cruddas’s research into the General Election defeat has confirmed how Labour was deserted by socially conservative voters from largely lower income households. Support from these voters dropped by 9% compared to our last victory in 2005, with UKIP the chief beneficiary.16 Perceptions about Labour’s stance on issues like immigration and welfare contributed to our party losing support to the Tories as well as UKIP.17

With the majority of UKIP’s support coming from older voters, the rise of Farage’s party also underlines Labour’s troubles with the silver vote. Labour won the support of only one in four people aged over 65 – the group most likely to turnout at election time.18 The Tories won two million more votes from people over the age of 65, which was greater than their overall margin of victory – an issue that Liam Byrne and others have rightly highlighted elsewhere.19

In the north, there are parts of Labour’s communities that feel forgotten and taken for granted. But UKIP does not represent only a ‘northern’ threat to Labour – as John Healey has rightly said.20 In the south, Farage’s party is aggravating Labour’s existing discomfort outside the capital. Put London to one side and as many people have walked on the moon as there were Labour MPs elected in the South West, South East and East of England.

It is also worth noting that UKIP achieved these gains despite what is widely agreed to have been an amateur and disorganised election campaign.

UKIP proved incapable running much of a campaign outside of its key targets of South Thanet, Clacton, Thurrock and Rochester & Strood. Many Labour campaigners tell the same story of poorly organised UKIP candidates and very limited local campaigns. In 2015 UKIP was still largely reliant on the ‘Farage effect’ in print, on air and online.

On the one hand this is encouraging for Labour. It underlines that UKIP is not properly entrenched in many communities. On the other, it raises the question of what it could achieve if it does get its act together.

Some have described UKIP as ‘a canary singing in Labour’s coal mine.’21 The evidence available would suggest there is much truth to this warning. The onus is now on us to both listen to what the public are telling us and act on it.
Labour’s retreat

General Election vote share

1997

2005

2015
UKIP’s advance
General Election vote share

2010

2015

Share of the vote %

- 20+
- 15 to 20
- 10 to 15
- 5 to 10
- 0 to 5

no candidate
2015 General Election result

Second place results

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UKIP second place results
### Traditional Heartlands

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<th>UKIP vote (share)</th>
<th>UKIP swing</th>
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<td>Heywood &amp; Middleton</td>
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<td>15,627 (32%)</td>
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<td>Dagenham &amp; Rainham</td>
<td>17,830 (41%)</td>
<td>12,850 (30%)</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>4,980</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rotherham</td>
<td>19,860 (53%)</td>
<td>11,414 (30%)</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>8,446</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rother Valley</td>
<td>20,501 (44%)</td>
<td>13,204 (28%)</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>7,297</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Marginal Battlegrounds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constituency</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>Labour vote (share)</th>
<th>UKIP vote (share)</th>
<th>UKIP swing</th>
<th>2010 majority</th>
<th>2015 majority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thurrock</td>
<td>16,156 (33%)</td>
<td>15,718 (32%)</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>536</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amber Valley</td>
<td>15,901 (35%)</td>
<td>7,263 (16%)</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>4,205</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuneaton</td>
<td>15,945 (35%)</td>
<td>6,582 (14%)</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>2,069</td>
<td>4,882</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolton West</td>
<td>18,943 (39%)</td>
<td>7,428 (15%)</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>801</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vale of Clwyd</td>
<td>13,523 (38%)</td>
<td>4,577 (13%)</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>2,509</td>
<td>237</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

### Southern Retreat

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constituency</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>Labour vote (share)</th>
<th>UKIP vote (share)</th>
<th>UKIP swing</th>
<th>2010 Tory majority over Labour</th>
<th>2015 Tory majority over Labour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Basildon &amp; East Thurrock</td>
<td>11,493 (25%)</td>
<td>12,097 (27%)</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>5,772</td>
<td>8,295</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sittingbourne &amp; Sheppey</td>
<td>9,673 (20%)</td>
<td>12,257 (25%)</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>12,383</td>
<td>14,725</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chatham &amp; Aylesford</td>
<td>10,159 (24%)</td>
<td>8,581 (20%)</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>6,069</td>
<td>11,455</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Coastal Communities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constituency</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>Labour vote (share)</th>
<th>UKIP vote (share)</th>
<th>UKIP swing</th>
<th>2010 majority</th>
<th>2015 majority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Great Yarmouth</td>
<td>12,935 (29%)</td>
<td>10,270 (23%)</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>4,276</td>
<td>6,154</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hartlepool</td>
<td>14,076 (36%)</td>
<td>11,052 (28%)</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>5,509</td>
<td>3,024</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Grimsby</td>
<td>13,414 (40%)</td>
<td>8,417 (25%)</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>714</td>
<td>4,540</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waveney</td>
<td>19,696 (38%)</td>
<td>7,580 (15%)</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>769</td>
<td>2,408</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plymouth Moor View</td>
<td>14,994 (35%)</td>
<td>9,152 (22%)</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>1,588</td>
<td>1,026</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plymouth Sutton &amp; Devonport</td>
<td>17,597 (37%)</td>
<td>6,731 (14%)</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>1,149</td>
<td>523</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Building a Labour Response

There are no quick fixes or silver bullet solutions for stemming the rising UKIP tide. Many people have turned to UKIP due to long-held frustrations with Labour and the wider political establishment. There is little evidence to suggest they will return swiftly or easily.

The challenge ahead for Labour is to build an effective response based on listening and genuine engagement, rooted in the realities facing these communities.

We will not repel UKIP or the populist brand of politics it represents by trying to ‘out-UKIP UKIP’ and simply taking a tougher line on Europe. Nor should Labour lurch to the left in search of answers that make ourselves feel better but do nothing for the people who have lost faith in us.

There is equally no neat ‘one-size-fits-all’ formula that will work for every community and we should be wary of trying to create one. The weaknesses of this approach were exposed by ‘More Tory than the Tories’ – the response Labour deployed against UKIP from 2014.22

This was a valid political critique and it did have some resonance – particularly with older voters in traditional Labour areas where memories of Thatcherism were still long and bitter. It helped secure a clear Labour victory over UKIP in the South Yorkshire, Police and Crime Commissioner by-election in November 2014 – despite challenging circumstances.

‘More Tory than the Tories’ however was much less effective in constituencies that had voted for Tory governments in the recent past. In some places, it was counter-productive. A number of local Labour campaigns in southern marginal seats deliberately chose not to use the material – even though they were identifying significant support for UKIP on the doorstep.

It highlights that while UKIP has held up a mirror to Labour’s shortcomings, we have yet to develop an effective counter-attack as a party.

If Labour is to reconnect with the people we have lost, we need a fresh approach to what story we want to tell as a party, how we express our values through policy, and how we do our politics.

What follows is not a fully-formed recipe, but a look at some of the ingredients that will be needed.
Our Story

Labour must have a compelling story to tell about who we are as a party, what we are about, and the kind of country we aspire to build. This may have seemed obvious to us in the past, but it is not to a great many people living across Britain today.

Complaints that people do not know what Labour represents are common on the doorstep. This is also reflected in wider surveys. More than half of people do not think it is clear ‘what Labour stands for’ – a view held by as many as three out every four UKIP voters. Less than a quarter of people surveyed feel the same is true of the Conservatives.

Even Labour’s role as the natural champion for working people is not as obvious as it once was. This has created space for UKIP to challenge us as ‘the party of the working class.’

Our lack of a positive Labour story was magnified by our efforts to counter UKIP on the campaign trail.

Too often our activists were encouraged to respond to concerns raised on the doorstep by playing an unappealing game of ‘us or them’ and pointing to UKIP policies that were less appealing. Too many voters responded by sticking with UKIP or decided that even if they couldn’t support them, they still couldn’t choose us.

Labour needs to develop a positive case that spells out what a vote for our party means today and why people should put their trust in us. It needs to be rooted in everyday realities, speak to people’s local concerns, and be ready to reach outside our own comfort zone where necessary.

Our party’s story needs to be expressed both in our policies and how we do our politics.
Our Policies

Reassurance on voters’ key concerns – particularly around immigration and welfare

Significantly large numbers of people are drawn to UKIP due to anxieties about immigration. The overwhelming majority of UKIP voters on May 7th ranked ‘controlling immigration’ as one of the most important issue facing the country (87%) and their own family (68%).

There is also overlap with concerns about the welfare system and benefit dependency. These have been consistently ranked amongst the biggest concerns of voters drawn to UKIP.

Labour must offer reassurance on concerns about work and immigration as the starting point for winning back the trust of UKIP-leaning voters. Otherwise we will struggle to win a hearing on anything else.

This also applies to our efforts to reconnect with sections of the wider public. More than half of people who considered voting Labour thought the party needed to be tougher on immigration and ‘abuse of the welfare system,’ according to research published by the TUC.

On immigration, it is important to stress however that Labour does not need to follow UKIP’s pursuit of an unappealing and unworkably hard-line policy. The think tank British Future estimates that as many as half of UKIP supporters hold attitudes to migration that they describe as in ‘The Anxious Middle.’ This is in line with the majority of public opinion, appreciating that large-scale immigration can bring both pressures and benefits. This group is not opposed to immigration, but wants reassurance that it is controlled and in Britain’s best economic interests.

This suggests that there is a sizeable number of UKIP voters that Labour can win back, with a smart approach to managing migration that is fair and true to our values.

Our tone is just as important as our policy. Labour’s challenge is to convince the British people that we care as much about issues like competent management of our borders, tackling illegal immigration and ending the exploitation of migrant workers as we do about improving our schools and hospitals.

Policy proposals, such as an intelligent approach to managing migration and increased EU funding for communities that have been particularly pressurised by migration, are worthy of further debate within the party.

As well as economic and resource aspects to migration, Labour must not shy away from having a voice in the debate about cultural impacts and the importance of integration.
Valuing contribution, by requiring people to work for a period of time before they can claim benefits, should also be in keeping with Labour’s broader policy of ensuring that people are always best off through work.

As the party who created the Welfare State, Labour will always be about looking out for the vulnerable and providing every support to those who need it. By 2020, all voters should know that when it comes to Labour’s attitudes to work, the clue is in the name. If you can work, you must.

We should be seen as the party of employment – supporting business, championing fairness in the workplace, strengthening employment rights, encouraging growth and jobs, cementing Britain’s place in the global marketplace – showing that Labour is working.

**Spreading economic opportunity – especially to communities that feel ‘left behind’**

Most UKIP voters are notably pessimistic about their prospects in Britain today. 82% of those who voted for Farage’s party on May 7th said they were not feeling the benefits of economic recovery. More than half said they did not expect to either.29

This reflects a great number of people who feel forgotten and left behind by the nature of our economy today. Many live in areas that have been harshly hit by globalisation or work in industries where new technologies have impacted on jobs, pay and conditions.

Where UKIP has preyed on this despair, Labour must offer new hope for the future. This must be built upon fiscal responsibility and credible management of the public finances. Research carried out by the TUC showed that fears Labour ‘would spend too much and couldn’t be trusted with the economy’ were shared by UKIP voters just as much as by people who voted for other parties.

Labour’s alternative should include an industrial strategy for creating good, skilled, well-paying jobs, and ensuring the rewards of a growing economy reach all corners of our country. It must also be relevant to the local challenges that specific communities are facing. For instance, investment in green technologies such as offshore wind is creating new industries in former fishing ports like Grimsby and Great Yarmouth. Many of the skilled jobs created however are beyond the reach of many local people.

With support for UKIP weighted towards people who left school earlier or with fewer qualifications, Labour must be able to offer answers on education and skills to help people compete for the jobs of the future.

Labour should also be the champion for the self-employed and entrepreneurs carving out a living for themselves as small business owners – a significant number of whom have been drawn to UKIP.30
Reclaiming our mantle as a patriotic party

Nigel Farage has defined UKIP as the only party that ‘Believes in Britain.’ As a party with a proud and patriotic tradition, Labour cannot and should not let that stand.

Labour should have a strong voice in shaping the debate about what it means to be British today, rather than ceding this space to the political Right.

At a time when devolution, the future of our national constitution, our diversity, the nature of our communities, our shared identities and Britain’s place in the world are all being discussed, these are not second order issues that Labour can ignore.

People who defined themselves as ‘English’ were nearly twice as likely to support UKIP as those who said they were ‘British.’ This is relevant when considering that the fear a Labour government would be ‘bossed around by Nicola Sturgeon and the Scottish nationalists’ was the third biggest doubt UKIP voters had about voting Labour.

The TUC/GQRR’s post-election research also found that voters would prefer Labour to ‘be more patriotic and do more to promote British identity’ over ‘keeping flag-waving out of politics’ by a margin of around two to one. UKIP voters in 2015 also considered issues of patriotism and national identity much more important than the rest of the electorate, ranking it as the fourth most important issue.

Labour should have confidence to put forward our vision for what Great Britain is and what it can be, as a proud alternative to Farage’s flawed picture of Britain as it was.

There is an opportunity to express this in the campaign for Britain’s continued membership of the European Union. We should not only consider the risks for jobs and workers’ rights that an exit from Europe would bring, but celebrate the positive difference that our country has made on the world stage and talk about how our continued membership will help build a better Britain.

As Jamie Reed and others have said, embracing our English identity has an important part to play in this. It is welcome that a debate has already begun about the merits of a potential ‘English Labour Party.’ This is a discussion that should continue. The test must be to ensure that any potential changes improve our engagement with the public and aren’t simply used to make us feel like we have done something to resolve the issue. Community celebrations like the St George’s Day events organised by Labour MPs and councillors in Southampton can be just as important in this debate as reforming internal party structures.
A distinct message for older voters

More than half of the UKIP vote came from people over the age of 50, exacerbating Labour’s broader weaknesses with silver voters. This is an issue that must be addressed – especially as by 2020 40% of voters will be over the age of 50 and there will be 1.6 million additional voters over the age of 65.

Labour must have more to offer older voters than we did in 2015, and a specific message for those inclined towards UKIP. Just as with younger voters, this will need to offer reassurance on areas they are concerned about in order to win a hearing for our policies to improve services such as pensions, social care, accessible transport and the NHS.
How we do our Politics

As well as Labour’s story and how we express it through policy, we should also examine how we do our politics – particularly on the ground.

Different communities will face different local challenges in reconnecting with the public. We therefore need to ensure that Labour campaigners are given the capacity, confidence and flexibility to effectively respond to the issues on their doorsteps and rebuild trust at a local level.

Revitalising CLPs

Our members are Labour’s most precious asset. Ensuring we are making the most of their talents and giving them the campaigning support they need is essential in winning the battle against UKIP on the ground.

Labour has hundreds of strong and active constituency parties that are making a difference in their local communities. If we are honest with ourselves however, there are others that have stagnated and failed to reach out to the public. Some have no campaigning culture and relied on the belief that people always would vote Labour simply because they always have. Those days are gone forever.

Many of these CLPs are in our ‘Traditional Heartlands’ and among the more vulnerable to the UKIP insurgency. They typically have smaller memberships and limited recent experience of having to campaign against a serious opposition.

Other local parties in seats which we once held often suffer from no longer having a Labour MP (and often fewer elected councillors) who can play a leadership role.

With this in mind, we should look at ways we can revitalise our CLPs, including:

- Ensuring local parties facing particular challenges get the resources they need from Party HQ and Regions.
- Encourage community campaigning alongside Voter ID – particularly in areas where we need to build new support for Labour rather than simply turning it out on Polling Day.
- Giving members the capacity and confidence to try new ideas.
- Much of the work in a CLP often falls upon just a few volunteers. We should explore ways to better recognise their contribution and use smarter systems to support their efforts and reduce their workload.
- Explore ideas such as a ‘leadership scheme’ to provide training, assess the different talents our members can offer, and help give Labour members – not only aspiring candidates – the skills they need to make a contribution in their local party.
Listening & Language

Labour should consider piloting a specific doorstep strategy for how we engage with UKIP voters – just as the ‘Barking Model’ was developed to counter the BNP in East London.

Many people inclined towards UKIP are disenchanted with Labour and feel disconnected from politics in general. Around 80% of UKIP supporters surveyed believe that the government does not ‘care much what people like me think,’ which is significantly higher than the general population. They are also much more likely to agree that ‘people like me don’t have any say about what the government does.’

This is reflected in local experience. Labour campaigners report that conversations with UKIP-leaning voters are often among the longest and most challenging.

Labour should consider running sustained listening campaigns in areas where this is a particular issue, in an effort to reconnect with these communities and build rapport over time. As part of this, we should take steps to prepare our activists for challenging conversations and equip them with effective techniques like active listening. None of this is rocket science and will already be familiar to some Labour members, but it has sometimes been drilled out of our activists. We must ensure our future campaigning strikes the right balance between the quality and quantity of conversations.

Nigel Farage’s plain-speaking style has also undeniably struck a chord and won UKIP a reputation for saying what they mean and meaning what they say. It should encourage Labour to review the way our party communicates at all levels. Our goal should be to always make every effort to use straightforward language that people can understand and that makes clear our ambitions for Britain’s future.

More candidates with ‘real-life experience’

Labour needs to open up our party to more candidates with life experience away from Westminster. We have long been ahead of the other parties on this, but the General Election highlighted why we cannot rest on our laurels.

The 2015 intake of Tory MPs included three former servicemen and an increased cohort of ten former NHS workers. The Parliamentary Labour Party meanwhile is currently without any former GPs or nurses, has no disabled representation and a shrinking number of MPs with experience of working in manual professions.

There were still sizeable swings to UKIP in seats with excellent Labour candidates from a diverse range of backgrounds, so this is not a silver bullet solution. Our policies will have greater resonance on the doorstep however if they are conveyed by authentic people with local credibility. This applies to council candidates as well as Westminster elections.
With that in mind, we should breathe new life into initiatives like the Future Candidates Programme.\textsuperscript{39} We should also pursue good ideas that have been suggested like a bursary scheme for candidates who would otherwise be priced out of politics.\textsuperscript{40}
Conclusion

The Labour Party has no divine right to expect the support of the British people. We have to earn it.

The relative success of UKIP at the General Election underlined that there is no core vote that will always support Labour, or a golden rule that people dissatisfied with the government will always give their support to the official party of opposition.

This report’s initial findings do not pretend to hold all the answers for how Labour can win these people back. Instead, it hopes to spark a debate about how our party can regain the trust of the public in the months and years ahead. If there was a lack of proper discussion about taking on UKIP in the last Parliament, there now needs to be a strong focus on how Labour reconnects with the British people in this one.

What is certain is that Labour cannot ignore this issue any longer. UKIP has gained a foothold in our political landscape and the referendum on Britain’s membership of the European Union will provide it with a significant platform over the coming months.

The referendum presents Labour with the opportunity to take UKIP’s arguments head-on, but it is also not without risks. The experience of the SNP in Scotland should make us guard against the idea that UKIP will disintegrate if only we can defeat them in a referendum on their central issue. Labour needs to ensure that we can not only win the referendum but that we are ready for whatever comes afterwards.

Taking on UKIP also speaks to a broader challenge for reinvigorating Labour and renewing our party’s mission. This is a battle we need to win not out of electoral practicality but out of principle – because UKIP represents a direct challenge to what we stand for.

Labour has always been about putting our values into action so people can succeed in a changing world. Nigel Farage’s success, by contrast, has been built on airing grievances with how the world is changing and pretending we can solve them by going back to an easier time. But we will not help Britain succeed tomorrow by yearning for yesterday.

Rather than longing for the world as it was, Labour should lead the debate about what our country is today, and offer a brighter vision for what it could be in the future.

This is important not only in winning back the support of UKIP voters, but in winning again against the Conservatives as well. If Labour cannot produce a vision for our country’s future that is more attractive, credible and optimistic than the pessimism offered by Nigel Farage, then we won’t defeat David Cameron or whoever comes after him.
The rise of UKIP is therefore a test for Labour. We must prove that we are equal to it. The British people are telling us something. Now we have to show that we have heard them and will act.
Endnotes

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18 Ipsos-Mori, *How Britain voted in 2015*, (22/05/15)
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