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WINNING FOR BRITAIN

Rebuilding the Liberal Democrats to change the course of our country

Introduction and Overview

The aim of this report

This report is a contribution to the debate on the future of the Liberal Democrats. It is a response both to the party's 2019 election performance and an attempt to supplement and build on the Liberal Democrats' 2019 Election Review. It is published by the Social Liberal Forum (SLF), and in keeping with the SLF's role as a forum for debate, in the name of the authors alone and not as a position statement on behalf of the SLF as a whole. The report has been prepared with extensive data and analytics support from Datapraxis, a political consultancy working with a variety of progressive political parties across Europe. We are publishing it now, in the wake of Ed Davey's election to the leadership, to help focus minds on the strategic challenge ahead for the party, and to provide important context to the debate on what the party now needs to do to rebuild its electoral strength.

The Liberal Democrat 2019 Election Review was a brilliant and hard-hitting piece of work, and this report is not an attempt to criticise it. Rather, it is a constructive attempt, through a data driven approach, to build on that report, and to point to some areas where its conclusions might need further reflection.

If the review had one major limitation it was that it did not present the findings of a deep dive into the data available with regard to what actually happened in terms of voting behaviour at the election. This was made clear by the subsequent publication of the *Labour Together Election Review*[1] of Labour's election result, put together by an independent election commission. Much of the Labour Together analysis was also provided by Datapraxis. Ten days before Election Day in the UK General Election of 2019, Datapraxis also produced a report entitled *24 Seats Where Liberal Democrats Could Still Beat Boris Johnson*[2], which - although largely ignored at the time - foreshadowed many of the findings of the Party Review. Our partnership with Datapraxis in the preparation of this report is therefore driven by the belief that a similar approach to that adopted by Labour Together can generate new and important insights of relevance to Liberal Democrat strategic reflection.

[1] https://www.labourtogether.uk/review
[2] https://www.dataprax.is/24-seats-where-liberal-democrats-co

The electoral challenge for the Liberal Democrats

The findings of the *Labour Together Election Review* alone should focus minds for Liberal Democrats, as well as for Labour. Just to become the largest party, not even to enjoy a majority in parliament, Labour would need to achieve a swing from the Conservatives at the next election at least as significant as 1945 or 1997. However well Keir Starmer performs, and however poorly Boris Johnson performs (and you can be sure the Conservatives will replace him if he looks like being a loser), an outright Labour majority at the next election is all but impossible.

We should also expect that this government will use its power to make boundary changes that will further entrench their advantage in 2024, and we must further accept that we will be stuck with the First Past The Post voting system for this critical election.

As a result, the Liberal Democrats are going to play a nationally important role at the next election.

Labour remains the principal challenger to the Conservatives in most of the "Red Wall" seats it lost in 2019, but even an historically unrivalled swing will not be enough for a majority. Scotland and the SNP will be in the spotlight of British politics in the coming years, but there are only six Conservative seats available there: this will not be where the government is removed from power. And although the Green Party is a proud movement with a vital message, and an important force in local politics, it has no realistic prospect of increasing its representation in Westminster at the expense of the Conservatives: the Greens have one seat and are second in only two, both behind Labour.

This means that the burden of responsibility falls heavily on the Liberal Democrats to help usher in a more progressive, hopeful, and unifying alternative to the divisive politics of contemporary Conservatism. Although the party today has only seven English MPs and four in Scotland, it came second to the Conservatives in 80 seats across the country at the 2019 election - and in many of these, Labour remains nowhere.

In this context, the Social Liberal Forum asked Datapraxis to provide data and input to help us answer two questions, building on the Liberal Democrat 2019 Election Review:

1 How might the Liberal Democrats better use polling data to understand what happened at the last general election and better prepare for the next one?

2 What lessons can be learned from the 2019 election results with regard to assembling a stronger voter coalition for the Liberal Democrats both in those seats the party is best placed to win, and more widely across the country?

In this report, we seek to answer both of those questions.

However poorly Boris Johnson performs, an outright Labour majority at the next election is all but impossible.

Report overview

The report is structured into five parts.

In **Part 1: Better Data**, we expand on and contextualise the Liberal Democrat 2019 Election Review's critique of the influence on campaign strategy of a multilevel regression and post-stratification (MRP) model from June 2019. We clarify the actual failings of this model and draw on previously private YouGov **daily MRP data**, to which Datapraxis had access during the campaign, to consider both what happened during the election campaign and how this sort of data might be used to better effect in future campaigns.

In **Part 2: Better Messaging**, our starting point is the Review's critique of the relationship between message testing and creative message development in the campaign. Drawing on Datapraxis' IRT (implicit response testing) data, we consider how this approach might better be partnered with other techniques, and the right creative resources and strategy to improve messaging.

In **Part 3: Election Results**, we start from the headlines of the Review and dig further into the detail of who did and did not vote for the Liberal Democrats in 2019. Drawing on a combination of publicly available results, Yougov's daily MRP and "Profiles" data and Datapraxis' bespoke "voter tribe" analysis, we provide a detailed understanding of the electoral context for the Liberal Democrats as a basis from which to look forward.

In **Part 4: The Future**, we bring the picture together to set out three possible strategic options for the Liberal Democrats going forward. Only one of these, in our view, is commensurate with the scale and nature of the challenge the Liberal Democrats face as a party, and Britain faces as a country.

In **Part 5: Conclusions**, we summarise the key points made throughout.

Part 1
Better
Data

Part 1: Better Data

"MRP" is the accepted shorthand for the cutting-edge modelling technique called multi-level regression with post-stratification, which estimates the state of the race in each constituency based on massive sample polling and large datasets of past election results and constituency demographics.

Datapraxis' work for the SLF confirms the broad findings of the Election Review, but adds some significant insight about opportunities missed, lessons to be learned and future approaches to the use of MRP data. **MRP modelling needs to be more timely, and must be regularly updated as voters shift.** It needs a critical mass and sufficient quality of input data. The quality of the modelling algorithms is critical, and cutting-edge practice will deliver more detailed estimates of how different groups of voters are moving, rather than simple headline estimates of the state of the race in each seat.

Although it was conducted by experienced professionals, the June Liberal Democrat MRP fell short of this ideal in a number of respects. **Despite unprecedented success in fundraising, the party did not secure regularly updated MRP estimates during the campaign.** MRP results made public during the campaign were also not adequate to fill this gap.

This was a major strategic error. Done well, MRP is quicker, lower cost and - with the right model and enough responses - can vie with traditional constituency-level polling for accuracy (given the challenges of securing representative samples within constituencies). **For example, the first public release of the YouGov MRP, on 27th November, accurately predicted the result in almost 96% of seats - more even than the Ipsos exit poll.** Datapraxis secured access to the private YouGov MRP and also conducted two of its own MRPs for publication, based on the same polling data but using a different technique designed to pick up local seat-level variations rather than movements over time; these estimates were very close behind the YouGov first MRP release, more accurate than the published estimates from any other MRP model and more accurate than YouGov's final published call.

As with any model, what you get out of any MRP is only as good as what you put in. In particular, because MRP models are highly responsive to the polling data they draw on, their accuracy depends on having data gathered at the right time. June was much too far in advance to be relied on as an accurate map of target seats for the campaign itself; coming in the aftermath of the Liberal Democrats' success and the meltdowns of Labour and the Conservatives in the European Elections, with the benefit of hindsight it can be seen clearly as a false high.

Indeed, the first daily take Datapraxis had from the private YouGov MRP - on 6th November - gave a very clear signal.

As Graph 1.1 shows, even as early as this, the day after campaign launch and a week before the Brexit Party stood down many of its candidates, the Liberal Democrats were ahead in only 18 seats. The range of uncertainty in the model suggested they could win between 14 and 26. The prediction fluctuated around this level for a week before declining; it ended up very close to the eventual result, and far from the boosterism of the party's media briefings and activist communications.

Graph 1.2 compares the Liberal Democrats' estimated seat tally in the daily private YouGov MRP with those of Labour and the Conservatives.
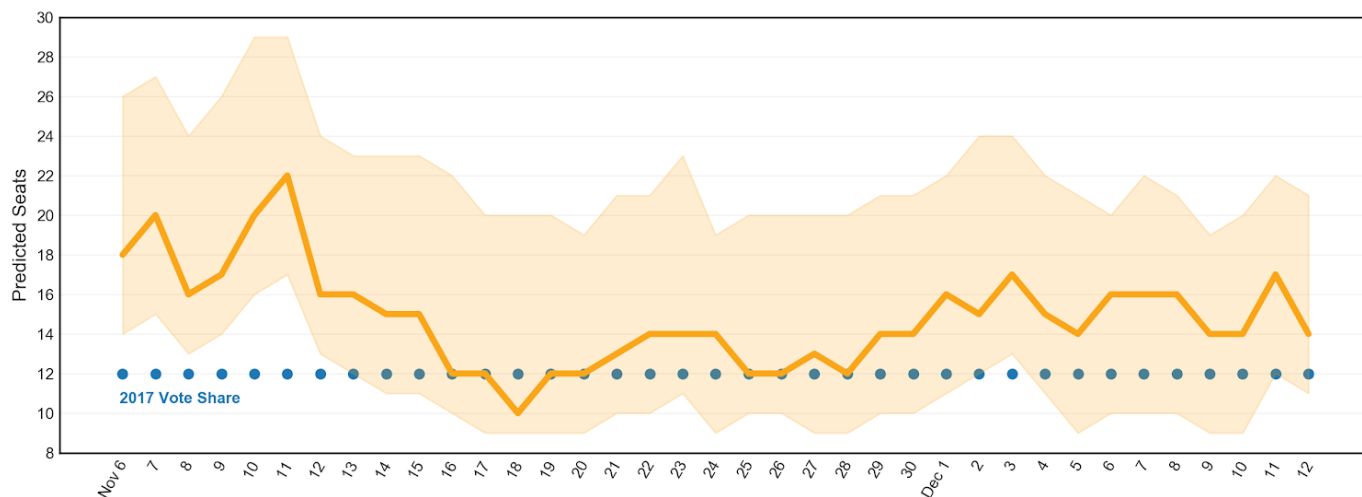
Graph 1.1 Daily National MRP Projections for the Lib Dems During the December 2019 General Election Campaign
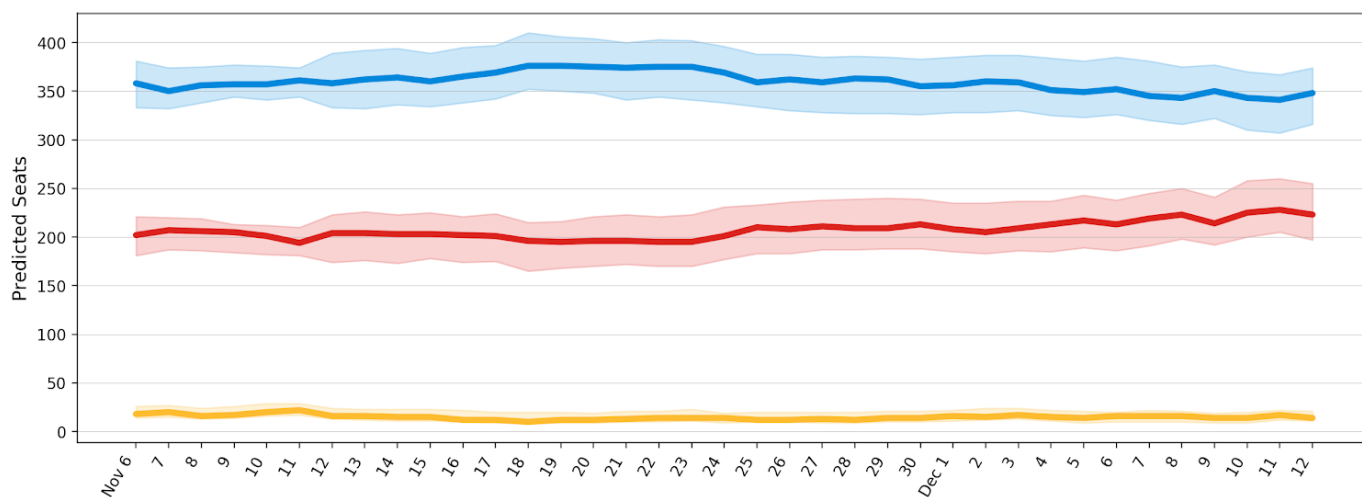
Graph 1.2 MRP Predictions for Conservative, Labour and Lib Dem Seat Totals

The ambition of the Liberal Democrats in the 2019 General Election should not have been set by MRP data from June, whatever the model behind it; in this fast-moving political environment, neither was an October MRP a sufficiently robust guide. So, what would have been a better way to use such data?

Timely data from a high quality model could and should have informed the ambition at the start of the campaign. But the best use of MRP and large-sample polling data would have been to track the data on an ongoing basis, daily or weekly, as well as looking at more granular breakdowns (for example, how Conservative Remainers were moving over the campaign in key target marginals, the resistance of younger and Labour-leaning voters to voting tactically for Liberal Democrat candidates better placed to win, and the responses of key voters to Liberal Democrat messages), and to use this rich data to inform decision making throughout the campaign. This might also have given the party earlier warning of the failure of campaign messages and strategies.

Graph 1.3 gives a flavour of some of the constituency level data that could have been available to the party during the election campaign, showing the evolving state of play in nine seats that were identified as decisive head-to-heads with the Conservatives in Datapraxis' 24 Seats report. Datapraxis secured more granular data from YouGov on the voting intentions of target groups by constituency too, and this could also have been helpful. Illustrative insights from that data related to the campaigns in two critical marginals the Liberal Democrats came close to winning but ultimately lost, in Winchester and Cheltenham, are presented in the Appendix.

A "good practice" use of MRP data would not just have seen the party adopt a more realistic ambition at the outset; it could have played a major role in informing ongoing changes to the strategy. More effort could and should have been invested in those seats which were genuinely target marginals, in particular before the short campaign. When it became clear how difficult it was going to be to win these priority target seats, resources could and should have been swiftly allocated and reallocated. In the event, every single one of the seats shown on the following page - including South Cambridgeshire, where the MRP suggested a Liberal Democrat win but within the range of uncertainty - were lost.

The ambition of the Liberal Democrats in the 2019 General Election should not have been set by MRP data from June.

NINE DECISIVE HEAD-TO-HEADS

Graph 1.3 Graphs show constituency level data tracked and available on a daily basis from November 6 to December 12, 2019

Part 2
Better
Messaging

Part 2: Better Messaging

Datapraxis' work for the SLF again confirms these findings, but suggests that quantitative message-testing using techniques such as Implicit Response Testing has a key role to play here as well as more qualitative approaches such as focus groups. **Large-sample message-testing, analytics and modelling can also give rich insight into what messages might be best deployed** *where* **- right down to constituency level, and on an almost real-time basis.**

Implicit Response Testing (IRT) is a polling method which puts messages to respondents, and asks them either to agree or disagree, or sometimes to choose between competing statements. As they do so, their response is timed. If they respond quickly, this suggests that the response is "implicit", emotional or instinctive, delivered without much recourse to rational evaluation, and thereby more powerful (see for example Daniel Kahneman's *Thinking Fast And Thinking Slow* for the science behind this work). If the response is slower, it is more logical and typically weaker: the message has required them to process and consider its implications before deciding whether they agree.

Head-to-head comparisons are also possible, allowing clear understanding of whether a party's message is likely to "beat" its opposition among cross-pressured voters.

Messages such as "Take back control" and "Get Brexit done" test very well using these methods. They play into what respondents already think and feel, but give this feeling clarity, direction and substance - and of course, provide an emotionally compelling reason to support the party from which the message comes.

This insight into what works in political messaging might be viewed by some as sinister but it is critical to engage with these insights into human behaviour if you want to win elections.

Key points from the Liberal Democrat 2019 Election Review

- A primary focus of the Review is to describe the journey to the message of "Stop Brexit, Build a Brighter Future" and the emphasis on Jo Swinson as a candidate for Prime Minister - a journey as understandable as it was unfortunate.

- In the section entitled "the air war", the Review sets out the chaotic nature of message development, and criticises under-investment in creative development and production, and the lack of focus group research.

The key point is that the bar for effective election communications has risen significantly - but that doesn't mean Dominic Cummings is some unbeatable genius. He was simply equipped with the right tools and had planned sufficiently in advance, developing a small but powerful arsenal of tested messages that could be deployed in different situations in different constituencies, and delivered in a flood of agile, engaging and surprising ways by skilled creatives.

There are some things that the Conservatives did that the Liberal Democrats would never do, and rightly so. But there are some skills and capacities that the party must ensure it develops, for the sake of the nation.

In the course of Datapraxis' research during the election, a handful of active and potential Liberal Democrat messages were tested using the IRT technique, together with Labour and Conservative messages. Chart 2.1 shows a selection of these.
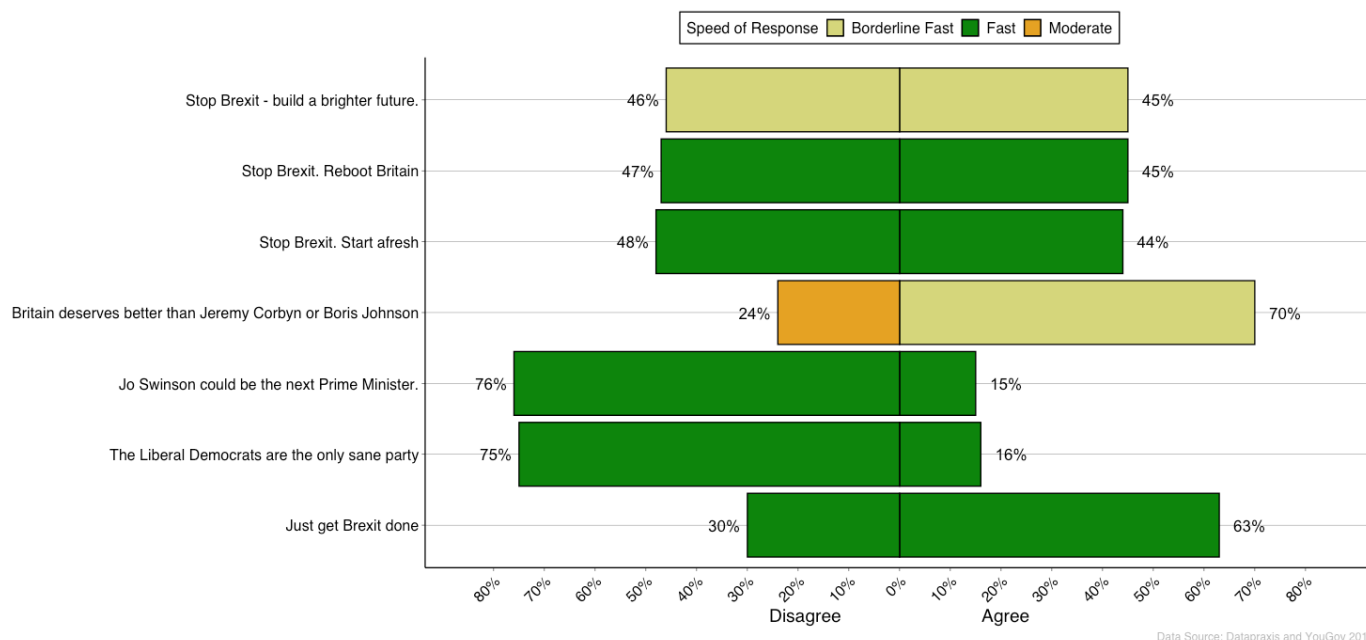
Chart 2.1 Message testing responses using the IRT technique. *Selected IRT message responses, all respondents (1500 sample, various dates during November 2019)*

These examples bring the potential of this approach to life. Even the slight tweaks of "start afresh" or "reboot Britain" (which might have hinted at a more future-facing, digital society) could have significantly improved on the party's verbose and undistinctive "build a brighter future" line (a classic example of a lowest common denominator message which tests well in focus groups because people find nothing to disagree with in it). The quicker response time indicates that these alternatives would likely have stuck more easily in the public consciousness.

However, this kind of message testing was a route not taken with **the Liberal Democrats failing to take up opportunities for rapid cycle message testing. The party also failed to take opportunities for more rapid, creative delivery of the message.** The Real Change Lab[3], a third party content-driven campaign which was loosely linked to Labour and benefited from creative direction from Arun Chaudhary, who had worked previously with both Barack Obama and Bernie Sanders, is a good example of cutting edge practice in the latter regard and the Liberal Democrats could usefully learn from it.

The high agreement with "Britain deserves better than Jeremy Corbyn or Boris Johnson" shows why the party might have been tempted by the strategy of positioning Jo Swinson as the alternative - but the reaction to the statement that "Jo Swinson could be the next prime minister", if tested by the party itself, would surely have been enough to suggest a different approach. The fact that 63% of all respondents agreed fast with "just get Brexit done" shows the strength of that message vividly, and provides a helpful benchmark for success in message development - although for a party not aspiring to win an absolute majority, 45% fast agreement is plenty.

Datapraxis also tested the Liberal Democrats' Brexit position, "Stop Brexit - Revoke Article 50", using the IRT methodology. It performed well, including among Labour Remainers. But in the professional judgment of Datapraxis, it risked being a "sugar high, bad aftertaste" message which hit an emotional button for many Remain voters, but which lacked credibility almost as much as the "Swinson for prime minister" message (and for similar reasons).

[3] For a sample of their work, see: https://twitter.com/realchangelab?lang=en

Datapraxis therefore also deployed another research technique to understand this response better - an open-ended question which asked, "This week, the Liberal Democrats have announced a policy to revoke Article 50 and cancel Brexit if they win the next general election. What do you think of this policy?"

At the cost of only a few hundred pounds, this question delivered insights that could have been invaluable to the Liberal Democrats, coming from many more voters than could have been engaged even in a comprehensive focus group programme costing tens of thousands of pounds.

Around half of the voter pool the Liberal Democrats were targeting responded positively to the position. But the rest were either strongly critical or skeptical of the feasibility of the policy, particularly among the priority target group of Tory Remainers. Some illustrative quotes follow. It seems clear from these that the party has some lessons to learn about message development, testing and delivery.

Responses from Liberal Democrat and Change UK voters (2019 European Elections)

Mostly supportive but significant minority pushback, for example:

"Nice idea but totally unworkable"

Woman, 55+, voted Remain, LAB in 2017 and Liberal Democrat in EP2019

"I think this will make the Liberal Democrats unelectable"

Woman, 27-34, voted Remain, LAB in 2017 and Liberal Democrat in EP2019

"I think it's stupid, the last thing we need is another extreme party"

Woman, 35-44, voted Leave, LAB in 2017 and Liberal Democrat in EP2019

"Whilst I'd rather not leave the EU this policy could be extremely controversial and could cause many problems"

Man, 27-34, voted Remain, Liberal Democrat in 2017 and Liberal Democrat in EP2019

"It would be undemocratic. It should at the very least go to the people to vote again."

Woman, 27-34, voted Remain, LAB in 2017 and Change UK in EP2019

Responses from Tory Remainers
(voted Conservative 2017 and Remain 2016)

Mostly negative feedback, for example:

> *"I think we should be following the democratic referendum vote result - even though I voted Remain. Their new policy now means it makes a mockery of a democratic vote in this country."*

Woman, 45-54, voted Remain, CON in 2017 and CON in EP2019

> *"It will cause serious problems and split the country further"*

Man, 55+, voted Remain, CON in 2017 and Liberal Democrat in EP2019

> *"It's wrong to ignore half the country"*

Woman, 45-54, voted Remain, CON in 2017 and Green in EP2019

> *"I would be angry that they ignore the results of the referendum and treat the public with such disdain."*

Man, 55+, voted Remain, CON in 2017 and Liberal Democrat in EP2019

Responses from Labour Remainers
(voted Labour 2017 and Remain 2016)

Mix of negative, positive and ambivalent feedback, for example:

> *"Whilst I would like to remain in the EU, I think the people should be asked to vote on the options put forward. Revoking article 50 without this is undemocratic."*

Woman, 55+, voted Remain, LAB in 2017 and LAB in EP2019

> *"Although I would be delighted I think it's rather silly to say this and that it will alienate a lot of their voters."*

Woman, 55+, voted Remain, LAB in 2017 and SNP in EP2019

> *"I think it goes a bit far but overall I would support it - I would rather see a push for second referendum"*

Man, 35-44, voted Remain, LAB in 2017 and Liberal Democrat in EP2019

> *"I think it's undemocratic - it makes me believe Liberal Democrat's are untrustworthy"*

Woman, 55+, voted Remain, CON in 2017 and CON in EP2019

Part 3
Election
Results

Part 3: Election Results

The clear implication of Datapraxis' research for the SLF is that the Liberal Democrats need to analyse the election results more closely as an input to the long-term direction and strategy called for in the Review. While the view given is for the most part not wrong, it is partial; and there is much more insight to be gained from a more detailed investigation than we have been able to carry out here.

Even the relatively light-touch analysis we were able to undertake with Datapraxis for this report, looking at the data through multiple lenses but without the resource available to combine these approaches fully, identified three such insights:

- There is no such a thing as a Liberal Democrat core vote at present.

- Tactical voting did work in the Liberal Democrats' favour to an extent, winning them both anti-Conservative and anti-Brexit voters - but it will not be enough on its own to transform the party's prospects.

- More Conservative voters were available to the Liberal Democrats than the Review implies - and they should be more of a focus for the party.

Key points from the Liberal Democrat 2019 Election Review

- The Review gives a relatively brief overview of the actual results of the election, as the focus is more on how these came about.

- It observes the failure to cut through to voters motivated by anything other than stopping Brexit; the party's weak performance among BAME voters relative to Labour; and the failure to attract "Labour Remainers" (who voted Remain in 2016 and Labour in 2017).

- It cites "extreme squeeze" on the Liberal Democrat vote as a result of Labour and Conservative voters each fearing the extreme represented by the other, and argues that tactical voting did not work in the Liberal Democrats' favour.

- In the "positives" section, the Review also notes that the Liberal Democrats are now first or second in 102 seats, up from 50 in 2017.

There is no such a thing as a Liberal Democrat core vote at present

Around the time the election was called, Datapraxis commissioned a 10,000 sample poll from YouGov, which was fielded between 28th October and 5th November 2019. They used the responses to build a "voter tribe analysis" that divides up the electorate into fourteen different groups, via a "cluster" model that assigns respondents to a tribe based on patterns of similarity between their responses to over 85 questions. This approach can be very helpful in identifying potential voter coalitions and developing communications strategies to reach and persuade them, since it assigns groups not on the basis of organisational pre-conceptions or simple demographics, but on multi-factor worldviews and behaviour patterns.

It vividly and helpfully illustrates how worldviews, value systems and political tendencies differ across the British electorate. It paints a picture of multi-dimensional fragmentation; it cannot simply be explained by Remain-Leave or left-right polarisations. A full overview is presented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Datapraxis Voter Tribes and Their Characteristics.

VOTER TRIBE ANALYSIS	Young Insta-Progressives	Older Traditional Recalcitrants	Older Establishment Liberals	The Green Left	Establishment Tory Brexiteers	Anti-Tory Heartlands	Progressive Cosmopolitans
Political identity	Left / Centre	Centre / Right	Centre	Left	Right / Centre	Mostly Centre	Left / Centre
Social attitudes	Progressive	Traditional	Mixed, progressive-leaning	Progressive	Traditional	Mixed, traditional-leaning	Progressive
Core demographics	72% 18-34, 69% ABC1	75% 55+, 62% ABC1, 56% women	66% 45+, 77% ABC1	61% 25-54, 65% ABC1	70% 55+, 58% ABC1	74% 35+, 59% C2DE, 56% men	77% 35+, 79% ABC1
GE2019 vote	46% LAB, 30% DNV, 12% LD, 7% SNP	57% CON, 18% LAB, 11% DNV, 9% LD	48% LD, 18% CON, 16% LAB, 6% Green	79% LAB, 10% SNP, 8% Green/LD	95% CON	50% LAB, 17% DNV, 9% LD 8% SNP, 8% CON	57% LAB, 32% LD, 9% NAT/Green
Voting intentions at start of 2019 campaign	34% LAB, 29% LD, 13% Green, 9% don't know	40% CON, 17% don't know, 14% LD, 10% LAB, 9% BXP	61% LD, 27% don't know, 6% Green	78% LAB, 9% SNP, 9% Green	89% CON	41% LAB, 18% don't know, 12% LD, 9% SNP	57% LD, 21% LAB, 11% don't know
Second choice party at start of 2019 campaign	25% Green, 24% LAB, 21% LD, 15% don't know	20% none, 20% don't know, 19% BXP, 12% LD, 11% CON	33% don't know, 20% Green, 19% CON	55% Green, 18% LD, 10% LAB	73% BXP	23% none, 20% don't know, 16% LD, 13% Green, 11% LAB	33% LAB, 26% Green, 24% LD
2019 European Parliament	60% DNV, 12% LD, 11% Green	33% DNV, 29% BXP, 11% LD	49% LD, 26% DNV, 12% Green	33% Green, 34% LAB, 9% LD, 7% SNP	75% BXP, 15% DNV	41% DNV, 19% LAB, 8% LD, 6% SNP, 6% Green	59% LD, 20% Green
GE2017 vote	80% DNV, 15% LAB	51% CON, 23% LAB, 12% DNV, 7% LD	53% CON, 24% LD, 14% LAB	79% LAB, 9% SNP, 5% Green	89% CON, 4% LAB	59% LAB, 11% CON, 11% DNV, 7% SNP	59% LAB, 27% LD
Referendum vote	84% DNV, 14% Remain	54% Leave, 34% Remain	89% Remain	86% Remain	98% Leave	48% Leave, 37% Remain	96% Remain
GE2015 vote	86% DNV, 6% LAB	41% CON, 18% DNV, 17% LAB, 11% LD, 9% UKIP	51% CON, 18% DNV, 14% LAB	56% LAB, 17% DNV, 13% Green, 8% SNP	67% CON, 18% BXP	43% LAB, 22% DNV, 10% CON, 7% UKIP, 6% SNP	45% LAB, 22% LD, 11% Green, 10% CON
GE2010 vote	92% DNV, 4% LD	39% CON, 17% DNV, 18% LAB, 17% LD	34% CON, 29% LD, 20% DNV, 10% LAB	39% DNV, 27% LAB, 19% LD	62% CON, 10% DNV, 8% LD, LAB, UKIP	34% DNV, 28% LAB, 13% LD	37% LD, 27% LAB, 20% DNV
Tactical voting	52% likely, 34% unlikely	47% unlikely, 36% likely	45% likely, 43% unlikely	54% likely, 41% unlikely	58% unlikely, 31% likely	49% unlikely, 38% likely	79% likely
Values behind voting decisions	Fairness, plus a mix	Loyalty, fairness, order	Fairness, order	Fairness, protect the weak	Loyalty, order, fairness	Fairness, loyalty	Fairness, protect the weak
Would prefer to vote for	96% opposition for real change	96% no response	82% opposition for real change	100% opposition for real change	97% Boris to get Brexit done	79% opposition for real change	98% opposition for real change
Worst outcome of election	85% Tory Brexit	97% no response	61% Corbyn, 33% Tory Brexit	98% Tory Brexit	91% Corbyn	60% Tory Brexit, 34% Corbyn	93% Tory Brexit

Table 3.1 Continued

VOTER TRIBE ANALYSIS	The Younger Disengaged	The Older Disillusioned	Older Brexit Swing Voters	Centre-Left Pragmatists	Young Apathetic Waverers	Mainstream Tories	Anti-Establishment Hard Brexiteers
Political identity	Centre	Centre	Centre	Centre / Left	Centre	Right / Centre	Right / Centre
Social attitudes	Mixed	Traditional	Traditional	Mixed, progressive-leaning	Mixed, few strong opinions	Mixed, traditional-leaning	Traditional
Core demographics	57% 18-34, 60% women, 56% C2DE, 44% ABC1	72% 35+, 62% C2DE	77% 45+, 65% women, 56% C2DE, 44% ABC1	63% 25-54, 63% women, 60% ABC1	74% 18-44, 61% C2DE	66% 45+, 70% ABC1	73% 45+, 64% men, 53% C2DE, 47% ABC1
GE2019 vote	57% DNV, 21% LAB, 10% CON, 10% Remain parties	75% DNV, 16% CON, 4% LAB	51% CON, 13% LAB, 16% DNV 70% LAB, 10% SNP, 9% LD, 4% Green	57% DNV, 21% LAB, 12% CON	86% CON, 8% opposition, 5% DNV (lower than 17)	74% CON, 11% BXP, 8% DNV, 3% LAB	57% LAB, 32% LD, 9% NAT/Green
Voting intentions at start of 2019 campaign	31% don't know, 34% would not vote, 12% LAB	68% would not vote, 19% don't know, 5% CON	49% don't know, 18% CON, 16% BXP	49% LAB, 21% don't know, 11% LD, 8% Green	39% don't know, 32% would not vote, 12% LAB, 7% CON	91% CON	49% BXP, 43% CON
Second choice party at start of 2019 campaign	41% don't know, 35% would not vote	64% none, 26% don't know	54% don't know, 20% none, 9% CON, 8% BXP	27% don't know, 25% LD, 17% Green, 13% LAB	47% don't know, 39% none	33% none, 25% LD, 13% BXP, 12% don't know	34% CON, 32% BXP, 16% none
2019 European Parliament	88% DNV	92% DNV	48% DNV, 30% BXP	36% DNV, 24% LAB, 14%, Green, 10% LD	77% DNV	41% DNV, 24% CON, 16% BXP	69% BXP, 20% DNV
GE2017 vote	69% DNV, 13% LAB	68% DNV, 12% LAB, 10% CON	37% CON, 35% LAB, 18% DNV	79% LAB, 8% SNP, 4% LD	49% DNV, 20% LAB, 13% CON	77% CON, 7% LAB	56% CON, 15% DNV, 15% LAB
EU Referendum vote	63% DNV	52% DNV, 40% Leave	86% Leave	84% Remain, 15% Leave	41% DNV, 24% Leave, 22% Remain	48% Remain, 37% Leave	89% Leave
GE2015 vote	79% DNV, 7% LAB, 7% CON	73% DNV, 7% CON, LAB, UKIP	25% CON, 26% LAB, 23% DNV, 12% UKIP	56% LAB, 13% DNV, 9% Green, 7% SNP, 7% LD	63% DNV, 17% LAB, 12% CON	68% CON, 18% DNV, 8% LAB	31% CON, 30% UKIP, 19% DNV, 13% LAB
GE2010 vote	84% DNV, 5% LAB, 4% CON	67% DNV, 9% CON, 8% LAB	18% DNV, 25% CON, 23% LAB, 16% LD	37% DNV, 32% LAB, 15% LD	63% DNV, 11% LAB, 8% CON	56% CON, 29% DNV, 9% LD	34% CON, 25% DNV, 13% LAB, 11% UKIP
Tactical voting	47% unlikely, 36% don't know	61% unlikely, 30% don't know	42% unlikely, 29% likely, 29% don't know	49% unlikely, 34% likely	65% don't know, 26% unlikely	66% unlikely, 27% likely	48% likely, 42% unlikely
Values behind voting decisions	Fairness, loyalty to the people of Britain	Loyalty, fairness	Loyalty, fairness	Fairness, loyalty, order	Fairness, loyalty, order	Order, loyalty, fairness	Loyalty, order, fairness
Would prefer to vote for	62% opposition for real change	54% Boris to get Brexit done	69% Boris to get Brexit done	94% opposition for real change	58% opposition for real change	95% Boris to get Brexit done	85% Boris to get Brexit done
Worst outcome of election	53% Corbyn, 40% Tory Brexit	67% Corbyn, 27% Tory Brexit	78% Corbyn	80% Tory Brexit	50% Corbyn, 40% Tory Brexit	92% Corbyn	86% Corbyn

What is most pertinent here is that across these fourteen different groups, the Liberal Democrats failed to win a majority in a single one. The closest was the "Older Establishment Liberals": older, wealthy, concerned with fairness and order, they represent 6% of the electorate. 48% of this group voted Liberal Democrat in 2019, 19% voted Labour, and 18% voted Conservative. The Liberal Democrats achieved a much higher proportion of this group than in previous elections: in both 2015 and 2017, over half of this group voted for the Conservatives under David Cameron and Theresa May. But it still remains hard to define this as a "Liberal Democrat core voter" tribe.

Of the other thirteen tribes, there were only two from which more than 10% voted for the Liberal Democrats, and these two - Progressive Cosmopolitans and Young Insta-Progressives - are both primarily characterised by their willingness to vote tactically against the Conservatives. By contrast, Jeremy Corbyn's Labour had a clear centre of gravity among the "Green Left" and "Centre Left Pragmatists", with 86% and 75% of these groups respectively voting Labour.

Table 3.2 shows some key data for the 2019 elections among the five tribes where the Liberal Democrats had their greatest potential support.

Table 3.2 The Five Voter Tribes Where the Lib Dems Had Their Greatest Potential Support in the 2019 General Election

Liberal Democrat 2019 Voter Coalition	Older Establishment Liberals	Progressive Cosmopolitans	Young Insta-Progressives	Centre-Left Pragmatists	Mainstream Tories
Political Opinions	*71% oppose ending freedom of movement with the EU; 54% identify strongly as European*	*Overwhelmingly pro-migration; 87% identify strongly as pro-European; 87% thinks big business takes advantage; mostly pro-redistribution*	*85% thinks big business takes advantage; 83% think politicians are out of touch; most oppose privatisation, support redistribution and welcome refugees*	*84% think politicians are out of touch; 80% think big business takes advantage; 60% don't trust mainstream media; more pro migration*	*68% support government investment and borrowing; 58% backed Boris's Brexit deal; more likely to trust the government*
% respondents	6%	9%	5%	7%	8%
Initial 2019 LD voting intentions	**61%**	**57%**	**29%**	**11%**	**1%**
Potential LD support (including LD as 2nd choice)	**68%**	**81%**	**50%**	**36%**	**26%**
Final Liberal Democrat 2019 vote share	**48%**	**28%**	**16%**	**9%**	**2%**

Across these fourteen different groups, the Liberal Democrats failed to win a majority in a single one.

The Progressive Cosmopolitans are particularly worth highlighting. This group are 9% of the electorate, larger than the Older Establishment Liberals. They are a high turnout group, strongly anti-Brexit, mostly left of centre but pragmatic in their choices. 59% of them voted Labour in 2017 and only 27% for the Liberal Democrats, but in the European Parliament elections of 2019 59% chose the Liberal Democrats and 20% went for the Greens.

This tribe might be more natural Liberal Democrat voters in a fully proportional system, but they do not like wasting their votes. At the start of the 2019 general election campaign 57% were intending to vote Liberal Democrat, due to a mix of factors, principally their views on Brexit and Jeremy Corbyn. But by the end of the campaign, 63% voted Labour and only 28% voted Liberal Democrat (although there was significant movement between these groups, likely related in part to shifting understandings of which party was best placed to win locally).

Among all the other voter tribes, the Liberal Democrats ended up under-performing their theoretical potential massively. Voters returned to Labour or the Tories, likely due to a combination of First Past the Post (FPTP) tactical voting and the stronger campaigns they were running. At the start of the 2019 campaign, 29% of Young Insta-Progressives (a small, politicised, very young group, so named because 60% of them use Instagram) intended to vote Liberal Democrat and the party was the second choice for a further 21% of them (making a total of 50% potential). But 38% of this tribe ended up voting Labour and only 16% for the Liberal Democrats.

Among Centre-Left Pragmatists, the Liberal Democrats' total potential at the start of the campaign was up to 36% (11% current voting intention, 25% second choice party), but they ended up winning only 9% of this tribe.

Finally, the Liberal Democrats were the second choice for 25% of the Mainstream Tories tribe (which together with the Older Establishment Liberals included most of the Tory Remainers); but the party ended up winning only a tiny fraction of this tribe in 2019, whose primary motivation seems to have been their very strongly anti-Corbyn views.

The Liberal Democrats continue to lack a clear definition of what they are and what they stand for in the eyes of the electorate, as opposed to what they are not and what they stand against. The data highlight the risk that different parts of the potential Liberal Democrat voter coalition are very much available to Labour and the Conservatives, and that the electoral system pushes them to make tactical "lesser evil" choices.

The Liberal Democrat 2019 Election Review implies the party is at rock bottom; but the party must be very clear that if the wrong decisions are made, there are still a lot of votes that could be lost.

The Liberal Democrats continue to lack a clear definition of what they are and what they stand for in the eyes of the electorate.

Tactical voting <u>did</u> work in the Liberal Democrats' favour to an extent - but it will never be enough

The one statement from the official Review that we found to be inaccurate was the assertion that tactical voting did not work for the Liberal Democrats.

In Esher and Walton, for example, where Monica Harding almost beat Dominic Raab, Labour lost nearly 80% of its 2017 vote; in Winchester, where Paula Ferguson lost narrowly, the figure was almost 60%. This was partly due to unwinding of tactical vote dynamics that more disproportionately favoured Labour in 2017 and partly due to deeper shifts; but with just 7% of Labour's 2017 vote switching to the Liberal Democrats nationally, this clearly included a significant element of tactical switching in favour of the Liberal Democrats. The trendlines for these seats make this clear, as Graph 3.3 shows.

Reports from the main tactical voting websites suggest as many as 20% of voters checked one of the sites, and these are likely to have been concentrated disproportionately in 100-150 key marginal seats.

What is true, however, is that tactical voting was not enough, and on its own is never likely to be. **Datapraxis modelling suggests that even with 100% tactical voting - if every single Labour and Green voter had switched to the Liberal Democrats in every seat where the Liberal Democrats were the progressive frontrunner, and vice versa - that would still only have secured 28 Liberal Democrat seats, with the Conservatives still winning 303.**
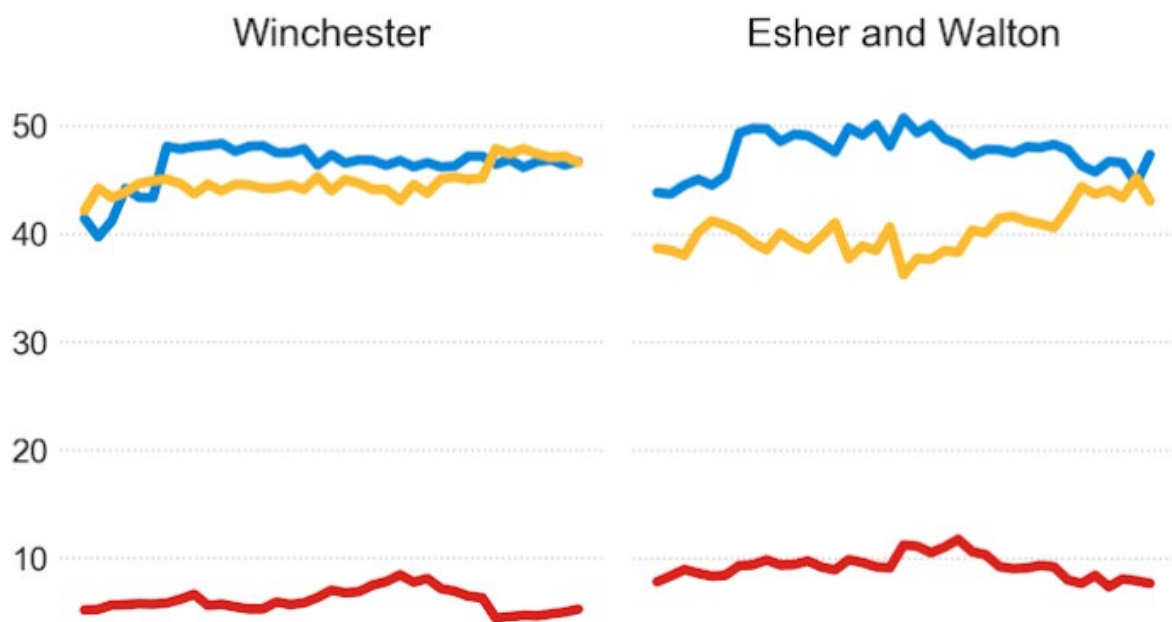
Graph 3.3 The Effect of Tactical Voting in Two Key Marginals (Data Tracked from Nov 6 to December 12, 2019)

Datapraxis did however identify 10 seats where tactical voting could realistically have made a difference, but failed. These are listed in Table 3.4. The Liberal Democrats would have been the beneficiaries in six. Some of this was down to poor recommendations on the part of tactical voting sites. The underlying blockage, though, was the animosity between Labour and the Liberal Democrats.

Table 3.4 Ten Seats Where Tactical Voting Could Have Made a Difference But Failed

Constituency	Conservative %	Labour %	Liberal Democrat %
Wimbledon	38.4%	23.7%	37.2%
Kensington	38.3%	38.0%	21.3%
Cities of London and Westminster	39.9%	27.2%	30.7%
Finchley and Golders Green	43.8%	24.2%	31.9%
Carshalton and Wallington	42.4%	12.4%	41.1%
Chipping Barnet	44.7%	42.6%	10.3%
South Cambridgeshire	46.3%	11.7%	42.0%
Watford	45.5%	37.9%	16.1%
Cheadle	46.0%	12.3%	41.8%
Truro and Falmouth	46.0%	38.3%	12.1%

Even with 100% tactical voting, that would still only have secured 28 Liberal Democrat seats.

More Conservative voters were available to the Liberal Democrats than the Review implies - and their numbers could increase

To the extent that the Liberal Democrat Election Review seeks to identify where more votes for the party could have come from, we have already mentioned that it rightly suggests increased need to target BAME communities. Elsewhere, in the Review the focus is more on the voters the party failed to earn from Labour - and in particular on "Labour Remainers". The implication is that the focus should be on taking votes from Labour in future.

The data, however, suggest that while this focus is not entirely wrong, it is certainly too narrow. In particular, while the absolute number of "Conservative Remainer" voters was significantly smaller than "Labour Remainers", the Liberal Democrats arguably could have won a greater proportion of the former in 2019 and, moreover, stand a greater chance of winning these voters over in future. Indeed, many of these voters can be identified as Older Establishment Liberals in the voter tribe analysis.

Chart 3.5 makes clear the relative performance amongst these two groups of voters. There were only half as many Conservative Remainers as Labour Remainers in the electorate. The Liberal Democrats converted 19% of Conservative Remainers in the end (1.4% of the electorate), as opposed to 9% of Labour Remainers (1.2% of the electorate). However, **Conservative Remainers who did not vote Liberal Democrat represent nearly 6% of the electorate. This is not an audience to be ignored.**
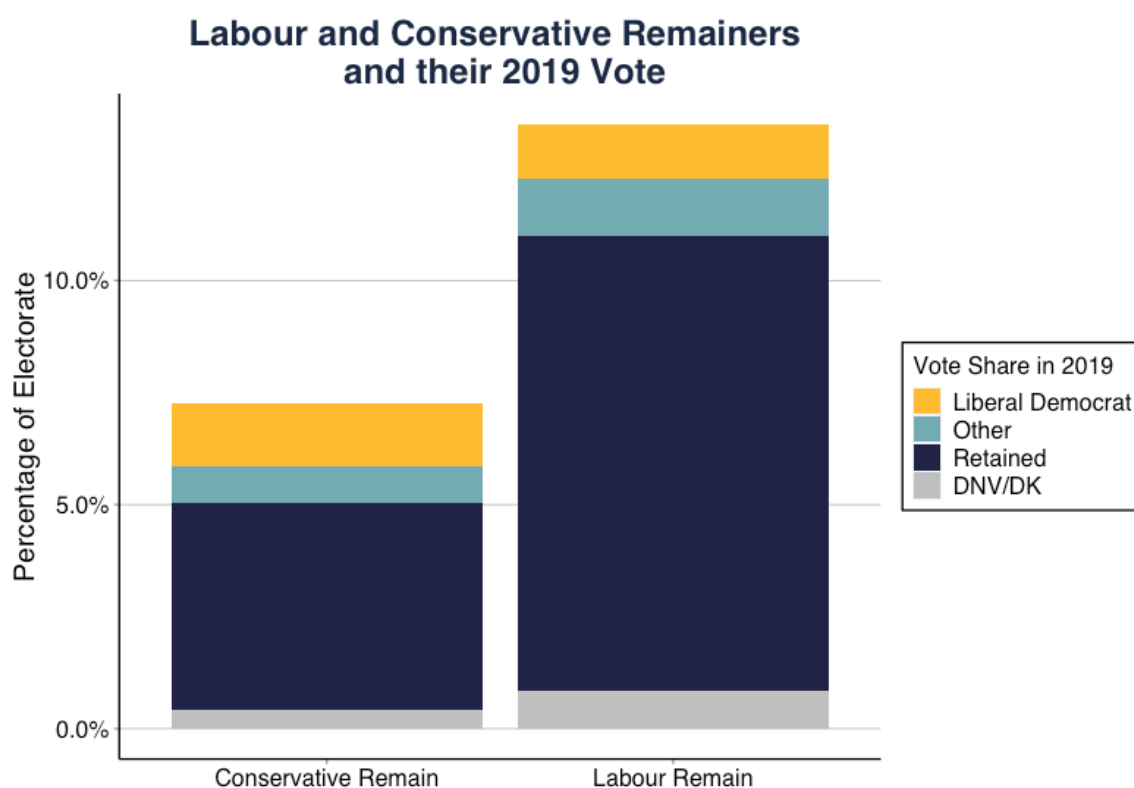

Chart 3.5 Labour and Conservative Remainers and How They Voted in 2019

Two additional points reinforce the need to pay attention to those who voted Conservative.

First, it is highly likely that the Liberal Democrats will **need** to win votes from the Conservatives in order to translate votes into seats. Of the 102 seats in which the Liberal Democrats are now first or second, the Conservatives are their primary opposition in 87, Labour in 9 and the SNP in 6. Given that tactical voting by Labour voters did happen but was not enough, and that in many cases the Labour vote was squeezed very low in 2019 in these seats, the Liberal Democrats arguably need to win more converts directly from the Conservatives in these constituencies in order to increase representation.

Second, several data points suggest that the Liberal Democrats **can** win over more of these voters:

The Liberal Democrats will need to win votes from the Conservatives.

- A significant proportion of voters who were open to the Liberal Democrats in 2019 ended up voting Conservative. Datapraxis identified a group of voters that could be seen as "Liberal Democrat Possibles" - combining those who had voted for the party at some point in the past with anyone who seriously considered doing so during the course of the 2019 election. Of these Liberal Democrat possibles, 48% ended up voting Liberal Democrat and 21% Labour, but 17% voted Conservative.

- Of Datapraxis' voter tribes, the Liberal Democrats' strongest performance was among Older Establishment Liberals - but even here, 18% of this group voted Conservative in 2019. Many more voted for the Conservatives in both 2015 and 2017, so Liberal Democrat gains in this group will need to be defended fiercely; but this is a group that is certainly open to voting more for the Liberal Democrats if the Conservatives move further away from liberalism.

- It is also clear that a significant proportion of Conservative voters were not particularly happy to be voting Conservative. This is illustrated by Datapraxis' semantic analysis of responses to open text questions that were integrated into MRP surveys. One question posed was "What are your current thoughts about Boris Johnson's Conservatives, their policies and their election campaign?" A full 16% of responses from Conservative voters were categorised under the heading "Best of a bad bunch". For example:

"I can not bear the thought of Jeremy Corbyn and his stupid ideas running the country, but Johnson is so bad. For the first time in 59 years I feel afraid of what will happen to the country and of the dangerous direction it is going in. There are no real leaders any more, no one to be trusted. We need someone with integrity and honour to lead us, not a cad and a clown."

Taken together, the data suggests that while the Liberal Democrats had more success in taking votes from the Conservatives than from the theoretically larger pool of centre-left swing voters deciding between them and Labour, there is still plenty of headroom available to recruit more Conservative-to-Liberal Democrat swing voters - and that this strategy may be crucial to the outcome of the next election.

Part 4
Future

Part 4: Future

The strategic decision identified in the Liberal Democrat 2019 Election Review as crucial to the "car crash" that followed was between two mutually exclusive options: a strategy to Stop Brexit, which would have meant some form of agreement with at least explicitly pro-Remain Labour MPs; or a strategy to maximise Liberal Democrat representation, which could have meant letting Brexit happen. The Review argues that this decision was ducked, on the basis that the latter option would have seen the Liberal Democrats behave differently, stepping back from the part the party played in allowing the election to be called at all.

However, in practice in the election, the latter strategy was largely the one adopted, and once Labour came firmly behind a second referendum, it became very much more difficult to execute successfully. While the stance taken was understandable in the sense that any party naturally wants to maximise its representation, in the event it delivered a disastrous result. Clarity on the Liberal Democrats' strategic positioning, vision and electoral strategy will be crucial going into the 2024 General Election if this kind of failure is not to be repeated.

In this section, we draw on the data to outline the three strategic options open to the Liberal Democrats going forward. All are fundamentally progressive and socially liberal: Cleggism and "equidistance" were consigned to the past in the leadership election, and are rightly off the table.

Clarity on the Liberal Democrats' strategic positioning, vision and electoral strategy will be crucial going into the 2024 General Election.

Strategic Option 1: "Strategic Challenger to Labour"

The first option is hinted at in places in the party's own Election Review - for example, with the greater focus on the failure to win more votes of "Labour Remainers" noted above - and is occasionally made more explicit. At one point, for example, the Review recommends "planning, messaging and targeting for BAME communities with whom we have to become more representative if we are ever to genuinely challenge Labour." Engaging authentically with the full diversity of the population is rightly a key concern for the party. But this option has real dangers too, and the conflictual framing with regard to Labour is potentially unhelpful, at least in terms of the national picture.

If the party were to pursue the strategy of primarily aiming to be a strategic challenger to Labour, this would likely mean the Liberal Democrats attempting to outflank to the left a Labour Party that appears to be reorienting itself further towards the centre ground under Keir Starmer's leadership. This would be easiest to do on social issues, but it could also be attempted on economics, depending on Starmer's next steps.

This is an approach popular with some of the party grassroots, and there may indeed be some potential for the Liberal Democrats to increase their vote share among the voter tribes that were the heart of the Corbyn movement: the "Green Left" and "Centre Left Pragmatists", as well as the friendlier swing voter tribes (Progressive Cosmopolitans and Young Insta-Progressives). In recent times, the party pursued a similar (though not identical) strategy under Charles Kennedy in 2005, when it achieved its highest representation in Parliament.

There is not sufficient longitudinal data available to compare the behaviour of voter tribes in 2019 with 2005, but Charts 4.1 and 4.2 show the comparison with 2010, another good year for the Liberal Democrats, across six key voter tribes.

While in 2010 the Liberal Democrats won more Green Left voters and a few more Progressive Cosmopolitans, these charts illustrate the Liberal Democrats' greater vote share in 2010 was won also with the support of significant minorities of the more centrist tribes, Older Brexit Swing Voters and Older Traditional Recalcitrants.

There is then, room for the Liberal Democrats to grow on the left, but there is more room elsewhere, and with the right approach the two do not have to be mutually exclusive (a point we return to shortly, in Strategic Option 3).

The great problem with this 'challenge Labour' strategy is that it is highly unlikely to win votes from those currently voting Conservative, and as such unlikely to significantly increase Liberal Democrat representation in Parliament given the current lie of the land. Kennedy and even Clegg went into elections second in many Labour seats, which they could credibly target and in some cases win (the Lib Dems took 12 seats off Labour in 2005); that is no longer the case, and Conservative-Liberal Democrat swing voters are now more important.

In a worst case scenario, this strategy could actually also alienate "Older Establishment Liberals" in particular (a big pillar of the Liberal Democrat vote in 2010 as well as in 2019), pushing them towards the Conservatives or even toward Starmer's Labour. And unless accompanied by at least an informal agreement not to campaign against each other in key seats, it could easily feed tensions between the Liberal Democrats, Labour and the Greens, and depress the willingness to vote tactically among supporters of each of these parties. This would damage the Liberal Democrats in seats where they were relying on tactical voting as a contributor to the building of a winning coalition. As noted earlier, this was a significant problem in 2019.

Also, while Progressive Cosmopolitans and the Young Insta-Progressives are important and enticing targets for the Liberal Democrats, they are unreliable ones - because they tend to vote pragmatically in the end.

Handled badly in the context of the post-2019 lie of the land, this strategy could actually lose seats, not gain them for the Liberal Democrats.

Comparing 2010 Vote Shares
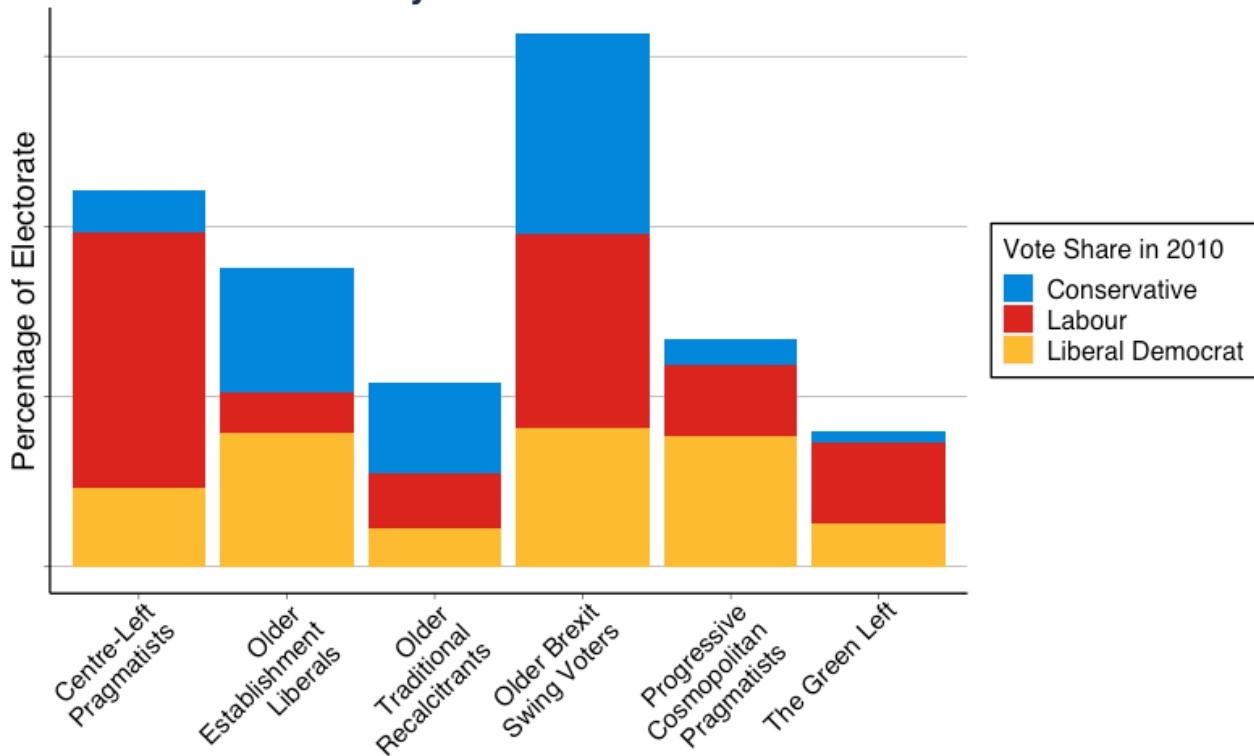## By Voter Tribe

Chart 4.1 The Distribution of the Lib Dem Vote Across Six Key Voter Tribes in 2010

Comparing 2019 Vote Shares
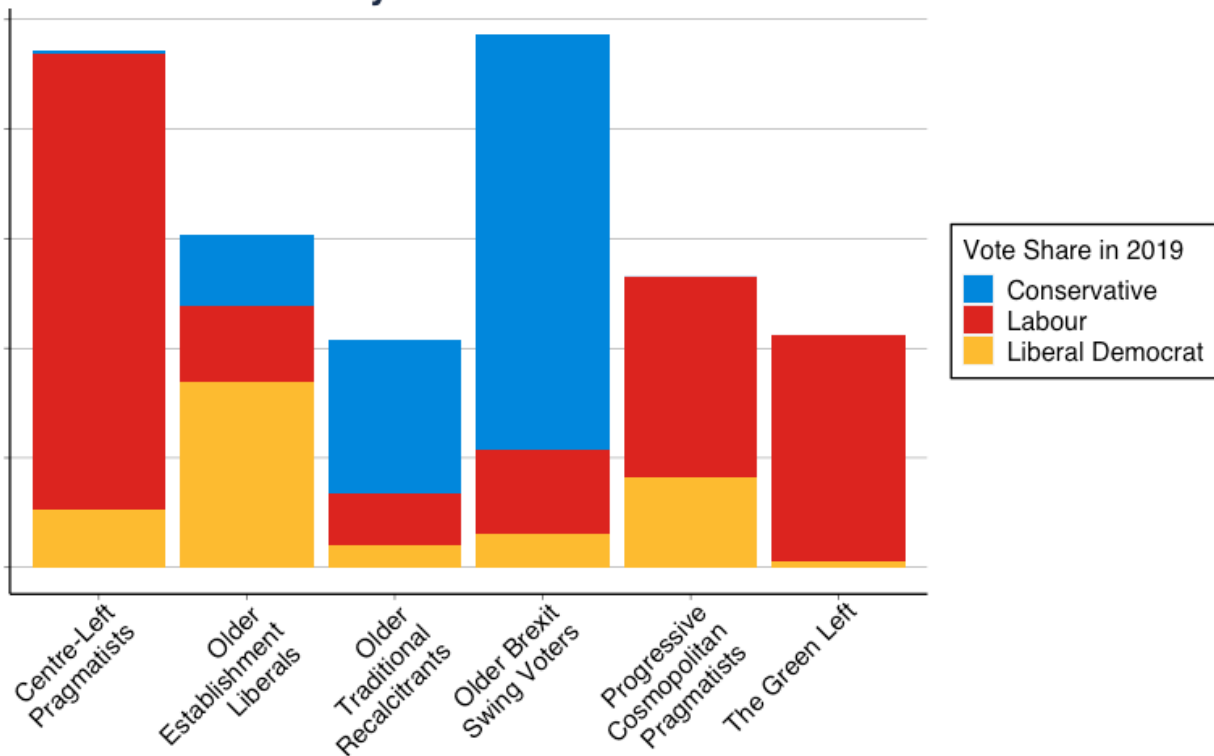## By Voter Tribe

Chart 4.2 The Distribution of the Lib Dem Vote Across the Same Six Key Voter Tribes in 2019

Source: Datapraxis and YouGov 2019 © All Rights Reserved

Strategic Option 2: "Tactical Supporting Act to Labour"

This strategy would seek to maximise the effectiveness of tactical voting by forging a more explicit alliance with Labour, while accepting a lower aspirational ceiling for the Liberal Democrats' own parliamentary representation. It is more realistic and achievable than the first option, but still a long way from ideal.

In this approach, the Liberal Democrats would seek **explicitly** to team up with and work alongside the Labour Party against the Conservatives as a common enemy, subsuming electoral efforts into this cause. The voter tribes sought would be "Centre-Left Pragmatists", "Progressive Cosmopolitan Pragmatists" and "Young Insta-Progressives", with more of an eye to sustaining the support of "Older Establishment Liberals" along the way than in the first option, and potentially greater reach into other tribes such as Anti-Tory Heartlands voters.

As we learn from the data on tactical voting already mentioned in this report, such a strategy would require more than informal tactical voting to make a difference: it would require a formal alliance, in which progressive non-frontrunners stood down on a widespread basis.

If this were possible, this strategy could make a contribution to removing the Conservatives from government and push Labour and Green votes towards the Liberal Democrats in all the seats where they are the primary rivals to the Conservatives. As such, it has more to recommend it than the first approach.

However, there are clear limits to this strategy. The challenge of retaining enough Older Establishment Liberal support would remain. And in adopting this strategy, the Liberal Democrats would in effect be accepting a ceiling of the 28 seats that (as noted above) would have been won with 100% tactical voting in 2019. There are also clear dangers at a time when the Liberal Democrats have struggled to establish what they stand for, beyond stopping Brexit, in the eyes of the electorate. Without a more clearly differentiated position, the potential to disappear into the Labour Party, and leave Britain as a two-party state, is significant. If Labour made a definitive commitment to proportional representation, such a strategy might be viable on a "one-time" basis; but the probability of such a commitment seems uncertain at the time of writing. Overall, this option seems unlikely to be optimal for the Liberal Democrats.

Strategic Option 3:
"A Distinct, Progessive Liberal Alternative"

*This strategy would place the Liberal Democrats unequivocally on the progressive side of British politics (certainly not "equidistant"), but do so in a way that is distinct from and complementary to Labour. It would tap deeply into what liberalism is and means, understand its relationship to and points of difference with socialism, and make it relevant to the present. This strategy requires deep work, but the prize for success is great: it would be capable of holding on to Older Establishment Liberals and of reaching into mainstream Conservative voter tribes, while not alienating and potentially even further attracting Centre Left Pragmatists, Green Left, Progressive Cosmopolitan and Young Insta-Progressive voters. A strategy of this sort is the only real way for the Liberal Democrats to make a major contribution to the goal of removing this government from office **while giving the party a significant and distinct say in what happens afterwards.***

In his acceptance speech after being elected as the new leader of the Liberal Democrats, Ed Davey warned, "Voters don't believe we share their values. And voters don't believe we are on the side of people like them." Our research suggests that Davey was right to emphasise the existential importance of passing the litmus tests of values and identity, and demonstrating that the Liberal Democrats are on the side of "people like me". The party will need to find ways to engage authentically with people across a diversity of critical voter tribes, each of whom have different social and economic priorities, so that they can see the Liberal Democrats as people who share their values and who are on their side.

This is not a mechanical process that can be accomplished through micro-targeting, saying contradictory things to different groups. Cynical short-term strategies of this kind never succeed in the long run. Instead the party needs to understand what is important to its diversity of potential voters, to draw out the connections between its vision, values and policies and their own priorities, and to find ways to engage in ongoing conversation with them, on doorsteps, on online consultation platforms, and on social media as well as through the traditional media.

Only by combining these elements can the Liberal Democrats build a voter coalition that will make the party competitive in the 80 seats where it is second to the Conservatives, converting more people who voted Tory in 2019 while also securing a larger proportion of centre-left swing voters. This can be done, however, and the research behind this report provides some clues as to how, as well as highlighting issues which will be more challenging.

First, in all three 'voter tribes' most susceptible to the Liberal Democrat message in 2019 (the Older Establishment Liberals, the Progressive Cosmopolitans and the Young Insta-Progressives), a commitment to fairness was important in their decisions about who to vote for. Young Insta-Progressives, Progressive Cosmopolitan Pragmatists and the Green Left also all specifically value additional measures to 'protect the weak'.

Within the Young Insta-Progressives, and the Green Left, there is strong support for Britain welcoming refugees and within the Progessive Cosmopolitan Pragmatists, overwhelming support for migration. Among the Older Establishment Liberals there is overwhelming opposition to ending free movement with the EU; the majority of this group, and of the Progessive Cosmopolitan Pragmatists, also identify as European at least as much as they do as British.

It is also the case that across all of the Green Left, Progressive Cosmopolitan Pragmatists, Young Insta-Progressives, Centre Left Pragmatists and Older Establishment Liberals the environment is listed as one of the most important issues.

Taken together, all this means that longstanding Liberal Democrat values of fairness, internationalism, and environmentalism all need to remain central to the narrative.

With these must come a clear narrative on where power lies in our society, and where it should. Among Young Insta-Progressives, Pragmatic Cosmopolitan Pragmatists, the Green Left and Centre Left Pragmatists, huge majorities think 'big business takes advantage', a finding that suggests strong support to address unaccountable and over-concentrated power in the private sector, to promote healthier competition and to defend the public interest. At the same time, both Young Insta-

Progressives and Centre-Left Pragmatists also overwhelmingly see 'politicians as out of touch.' This sentiment is overwhelmingly supported across other voter tribes too, including the Older Disillusioned, the majority of whom did not vote in 2019, the Anti-Tory Heartlands, Older Brexit Swing Voters and Older Traditional Recalcitrants[4].

These findings suggest that it is time for another Liberal Democrat idea - one that is more systemic, and arguably has been less prominent in recent times - to return to centre stage. Deeper democratisation, community politics, and innovative measures to offer more frequent and deliberative forms of citizen engagement may well be crucial, not only to give voice to the voiceless and to build closer relationships between citizens and their representatives, but also to challenge the narrative of an out of touch and distant political class that helps drive support for right-wing populists. The Social Liberal Forum will shortly be publishing separate opinion poll data on the public's appetite for voice in public decision-making that supports this conclusion.

While there is a need to update thinking on all of the issues we have touched on so far, there will be much instinctive enthusiasm and support in the party for the direction of travel implied.

Beyond these however, the picture gets more challenging, pushing the party to think beyond its traditional comfort zones. Among the Older Establishment Liberals where the party did best in 2019, for example, "order" (a proxy for concern about the control of crime and anti-social behaviour) is as important to them as fairness. Moreover, two voter tribes the Liberal Democrats need to consider as "persuasion targets", namely the Centre-Left Pragmatists and the Mainstream Tories, not only join the Older Establishment Liberals in valuing "order" when deciding how to vote, but also "loyalty" (a proxy for patriotism, in-group loyalty, and the belief that the nationals of one's own country should be put first). The same

is true for the Older Traditional Recalcitrants, almost 10% of whom voted Liberal Democrat in the 2019 election and who were an important part of the party's vote in 2010. And this is also true with regard to both the Older Disillusioned, the Younger Disengaged, and many of the other groups seeing politicians as out of touch.

The notion of loyalty and patriotism therefore confronts any Liberal Democrat attempt to grow its own voter coalition and any effort to address the problem of disillusionment and the sense that politicians are out of touch. Commitments to fairness, internationalism, deeper democratisation and community politics may only get the party so far if this issue, and the associated issues of crime and social order, are not more persuasively addressed.

This all points to the need for the Liberal Democrats not only to consolidate the core agenda with which the party is already engaged and comfortable, but also to build out from these issues to address others with which it has been less engaged. To do this, and to position the party to make this third strategic option a reality, the party will need to think about:

- How to contest and reframe right-wing definitions of patriotism and in-group loyalty with more progressive, liberal versions of these concepts, while not in any way diminishing the party's passionate commitment to equal rights for minorities, diversity and internationalism.

- How to be more reassuring on crime and anti-social behaviour (a subject on which the Liberal Democrat manifesto didn't even have a chapter in 2019) while not compromising on the need to protect civil liberties or on the need to ensure the full public scrutiny and accountability of the police.

[4] More detail on the political opinions of the other groups mentioned here can be found in Tory Landslide, Progressive Split: A Datapraxis Analysis of the UK General Election, pp. 18-19. Available at: https://www.dataprax.is/tory-landslide-progressives-split

The party will also need to think about how to pay for, and find ways of addressing unfairness and exclusion in our society, doing far more to protect the vulnerable, while not repelling Older Establishment Liberals and Mainstream Tories with policies that appear extreme in the way that Labour's 2019 manifesto did.

There will no doubt be some in the party who believe, and will say, that even debating such topics is a Trojan Horse for illiberal policies that take the party away from its core values. This report is not the place to debate and to address how these challenges might be met in practice or to speculate on where debates on them may ultimately lead in terms of policy. It is however a central conclusion of our research that if these issues are not successfully addressed, there is a very strong likelihood that the Liberal Democrats will remain trapped in an electorally marginal position.

Addressing concerns of key voter tribes on such issues may be the entrance fee the party must pay in order to win a hearing for the rest of its ideas. At the core of the party's ability to rebuild its electrocal strength is therefore the question of whether its own members are willing to trust each other enough, and in each other's commitment to the values of Liberalism, to allow a robust debate on such issues to take place.

It is vital to keep in mind that this is an issue of importance not only to the party but to the country. As we stated at the outset of this report, the Liberal Democrats' performance in the next general election could be pivotal in changing the national direction of travel: to the life chances of our citizens, the health of our democracy and the future of our planet. With the territory of coming second behind the Conservatives in 80 seats in 2019 comes the national responsibility for the party to challenge itself to be the best and the strongest electoral force for Liberalism it can be.

Part 5
Conclusions

Part 5: Conclusions

The analysis for this report has led us to five key conclusions, namely:

1 The party needs to revisit its methods of data collection and analysis with regard to understanding the values, opinions and drivers of voter behaviour. In the 2019 election its understanding of the strategic landscape in which it was operating was simply not good enough. The bar for fighting and winning elections has been raised in recent years and the Liberal Democrats need to upgrade their data operation accordingly.

2 The party also needs to radically overhaul its message development and testing operation to make it more creative and engaging, and to allow adaptation and refinement of messages on a regular and possibly real time basis, during elections, to ensure effectiveness.

3 While the Liberal Democrat 2019 Election Review was in many ways a thorough and excellent piece of work, the party needs to complement it with a deeper, thorough, data driven investigation into what happened in the 2019 election and into the lessons that need to be learned. Our limited resources, and the cooperation between the Social Liberal Forum and Datapraxis, have only allowed a partial investigation. It has nonetheless been sufficient to generate new insights and to probe and challenge some of the conclusions embedded in the official review.

4 The results show that if the party adopts a strategy of only seeking to hoover up the anti-Conservative vote in constituencies where it came second in 2019, even if it is able to do that with the support of 100% tactical voting, it is likely to still only enjoy modest seat growth (achieving 25-30 seats) at the next election.

5 The path to a real breakthrough, allowing the party to play a significant role in removing the Conservatives from office while giving it a real say in what happens afterwards, is going to require several things: a rigorous understanding of the diverse voter coalition that needs to be built; a much deeper engagement with those voters, including facing into issues that may be outside the "comfort zone"; and the articulation of a distinctively liberal and progressive narrative about the future direction of this country that can span that coalition, inspire hope, and bring people together.

The future of the country, and not only of the party, is at stake.

The Social Liberal Forum is a home to social liberals of all parties and none.

We have an exciting plan for the future, and you can be part of it.

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Appendix

Constituency Level MRP Data Deep Dive

Winchester

Table A1 shows 4th December modelled voting intentions by age cohort in Winchester, which Paula Ferguson missed taking from Steve Brine by less than 1000 votes. This data highlights that the 18-25 age bracket was a large and critical group, and circa 17% of them were intending to vote Labour; this group are very hard to reach using traditional canvassing or leafleting tactics, but they could have swung the seat, either alone or (more realistically) in combination with some of the 25-45 cohorts. But this kind of data was not available to Liberal Democrat constituency campaigns.

Table A1 Winchester Voting intention by Age Cohort on December 4th, 2019

Age range	Total votes	Con	Lab	LD	Brx	Green	Other
18-25	5786	32%	17%	50%	0%	0%	2%
25-30	2925	40%	11%	48%	0%	0%	1%
30-35	3243	33%	10%	56%	0%	0%	1%
35-40	4533	41%	9%	48%	0%	0%	1%
40-45	3954	34%	8%	57%	0%	0%	1%
45-50	5268	49%	5%	44%	0%	0%	1%
50-55	5564	50%	4%	45%	0%	0%	1%
55-60	4675	47%	6%	46%	0%	0%	1%
60-65	4441	50%	5%	44%	0%	0%	1%
65-70	5559	58%	3%	38%	0%	0%	1%
70-75	4534	62%	3%	34%	0%	0%	1%
75-80	3256	54%	3%	42%	0%	0%	1%
80-85	2237	62%	1%	35%	0%	0%	1%
85+	1372	55%	2%	42%	0%	0%	1%

Table A2, also from the 4th December for Winchester, showed that the Conservatives were hanging onto almost two-thirds of their 2017 voters who had voted Remain in the referendum, and that 37% of Remain Labour voters were not ready to vote tactically. While the local team in Winchester would have had rich canvas data gathered over a long period of hard work on the ground, this kind of data could have added real extra value to constituency level campaign strategy.

Table A2 Voting Intention of Conservative and Labour Remain Voters on Dec 4th, 2019

Voters	Total votes	Con	Lab	LD
Did not vote-Con	654	76%	2%	21%
Leave-Con	15644	94%	0%	4%
Remain-Con	9972	62%	1%	36%
Did not vote-Lab	409	16%	34%	48%
Leave-Lab	1204	46%	28%	21%
Remain-Lab	3409	7%	37%	54%

Cheltenham

Perhaps even more interesting is the comparison data presented in Table A3. This is of 5th December and 10th December data from Cheltenham, where Max Wilkinson lost by less than 1000 votes with Labour getting 2912, although the MRP had shown the Liberal Democrats clearly ahead for a few days in the penultimate week.

Table A3 Predicted 2019 Vote by 2016 and 2017 Vote in Cheltenham, Dec 5th and Dec, 10th

5th December					10th December				
Voters	Total votes	Con	Lab	LD	Voters	Total votes	Con	Lab	LD
Did not vote-Con	757	77%	1%	20%	Did not vote-Con	757	82%	1%	16%
Leave-Con	14440	93%	1%	6%	Leave-Con	14440	95%	0%	4%
Remain-Con	8223	60%	1%	38%	Remain-Con	8223	67%	1%	31%
Did not vote-Lab	220	19%	33%	46%	Did not vote-Lab	220	25%	34%	39%
Leave-Lab	1250	43%	24%	28%	Leave-Lab	1250	52%	22%	22%
Remain-Lab	3141	6%	36%	56%	Remain-Lab	3141	10%	34%	54%

By 5th December, the Liberal Democrats took a modelled lead in Cheltenham with the support of Tory Remainers, as well as by squeezing the Labour vote. But by 10th December, around 576 voters (7% of 8223) in the Tory Remain category had moved back to the Tories according to the model. This data suggests that Tory Remainers were a crucial group that decided the outcome in this seat.

The age cohort modelling in Tables at A4 reveals a further insight: in the 30-35 age cohort the Liberal Democrats' lead fell from 22% to 9% in the final days in Cheltenham, and in the 18-25 age cohort their lead fell from 21% to 8%. Again, the importance of younger voters who are harder to reach through traditional campaign tactics is clear.

Table A4 Predicted Vote by Age in Cheltenham, Dec 5th and Dec 10th 2019

5th December						5th December				
Age range	Total	Con	Lab	LD		Age range	Total	Con	Lab	LD
18-25	5786	32%	17%	50%		18-25	5786	39%	13%	47%
25-30	2925	40%	11%	48%		25-30	2925	33%	12%	54%
30-35	3243	33%	10%	56%		30-35	3243	41%	8%	50%
35-40	4533	41%	9%	48%		35-40	4533	38%	8%	53%
40-45	3954	34%	8%	57%		40-45	3954	43%	6%	50%
45-50	5268	49%	5%	44%		45-50	5268	44%	4%	51%
50-55	5564	50%	4%	45		50-55	5564	44%	6%	48%
55-60	4675	47%	6%	46%		55-60	4675	54%	5%	39%
60-65	4441	50%	5%	44%		60-65	4441	56%	3%	39%
65-70	5559	58%	3%	38%		65-70	5559	51%	3%	45%
70-75	4534	62%	3%	34%		70-75	4534	61%	3%	35%
75-80	3256	54%	3%	42%		75-80	3256	60%	2%	37%
80-85	2237	62%	1%	35%		80-85	2237	67%	2%	29%
85+	1372	55%	2%	42%		85+	1372	72%	1%	25%

Datapraxis also asked "squeeze" questions in the tightest Tory-Liberal Democrat marginals at two points, the second time in early December, in the penultimate week of the campaign. These questions made it clear to people that only these two parties were competitive in these seats, and asked them in light of this how they would vote.

They found that in Cheltenham, only 40% of those intending to vote Labour would switch to the Liberal Democrats, and only 45% in Winchester. They also found around 10% of Tory voters in both seats considering a switch to the Liberal Democrats under these circumstances.

Two hypotheses suggest themselves from this and other related data: first, anti-Tory tactical voting was negatively impacted by Liberal Democrat - Labour tensions; and second, the Conservatives' "stop Corbyn" messaging was successful in overriding the question of whether you would prefer a Liberal Democrat MP to a Tory one, particularly among soft Tory Remainers.