

# RENAISSANCE RESEARCH:

Re-connecting Labour with its  
former voters

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# Renaissance objectives

# What is Renaissance - and what is this project all about?

## Renaissance is here to:

1. Build bridges between Labour and the electorate, particularly those former Labour voters who have moved to voting for the Conservatives over the past decade.
2. Retain Labour's focus on winning back the towns and communities that Labour lost in 2019 - for reasons of electoral calculus and moral principle:
  - Labour needs to win 44 seats in 2024 just to deny the Tories a majority and an eye-watering 124 seats, a swing of over 10%, to win outright.
  - More than 60% of these seats are in the North, the Midlands or Wales; one in four are in southern England, and one in seven are Scottish. 104 are in towns rather than cities.
3. Reach out beyond the political bubble to engage with former Labour voters to understand how the party can regain their trust and support.

## In our first project we:

- Spoke to 60 of Labour's former voters about the challenges facing Britain and local communities.
- Put forward potential Labour agendas to meet these challenges.
- Focused on the broad direction of Britain, rather than individual policies.

# Labour's former voters

# WHO WE SPOKE TO

8x groups, split by age:

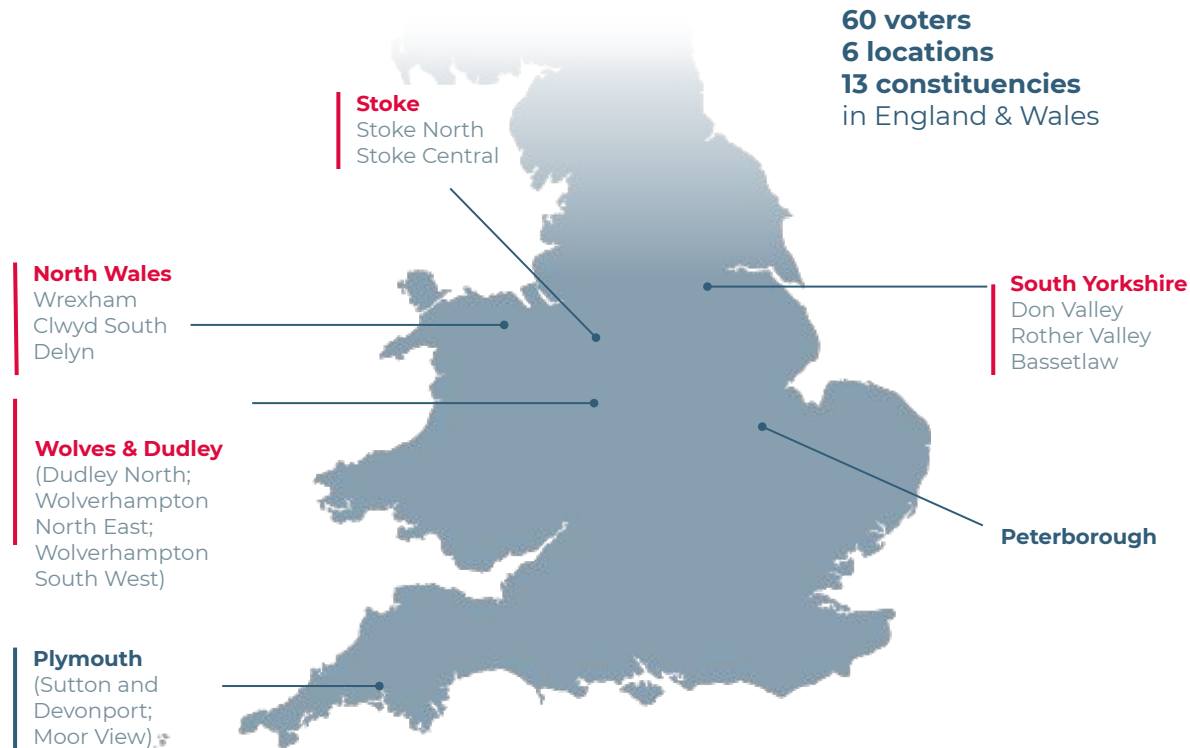
- 2x 25-35s
- 4x 35-50s
- 2x 50+

Voted Conservative in 2019, but Labour at some point in the past and would consider doing so again.

30 Leave voters, 27 Remain voters, 3 non-voters.

5/8 groups were ethnically mixed, reflecting local demographics. (10% ethnic minority participants.)

6/8 groups with non-graduates; 2/8 groups split graduate / non-graduates

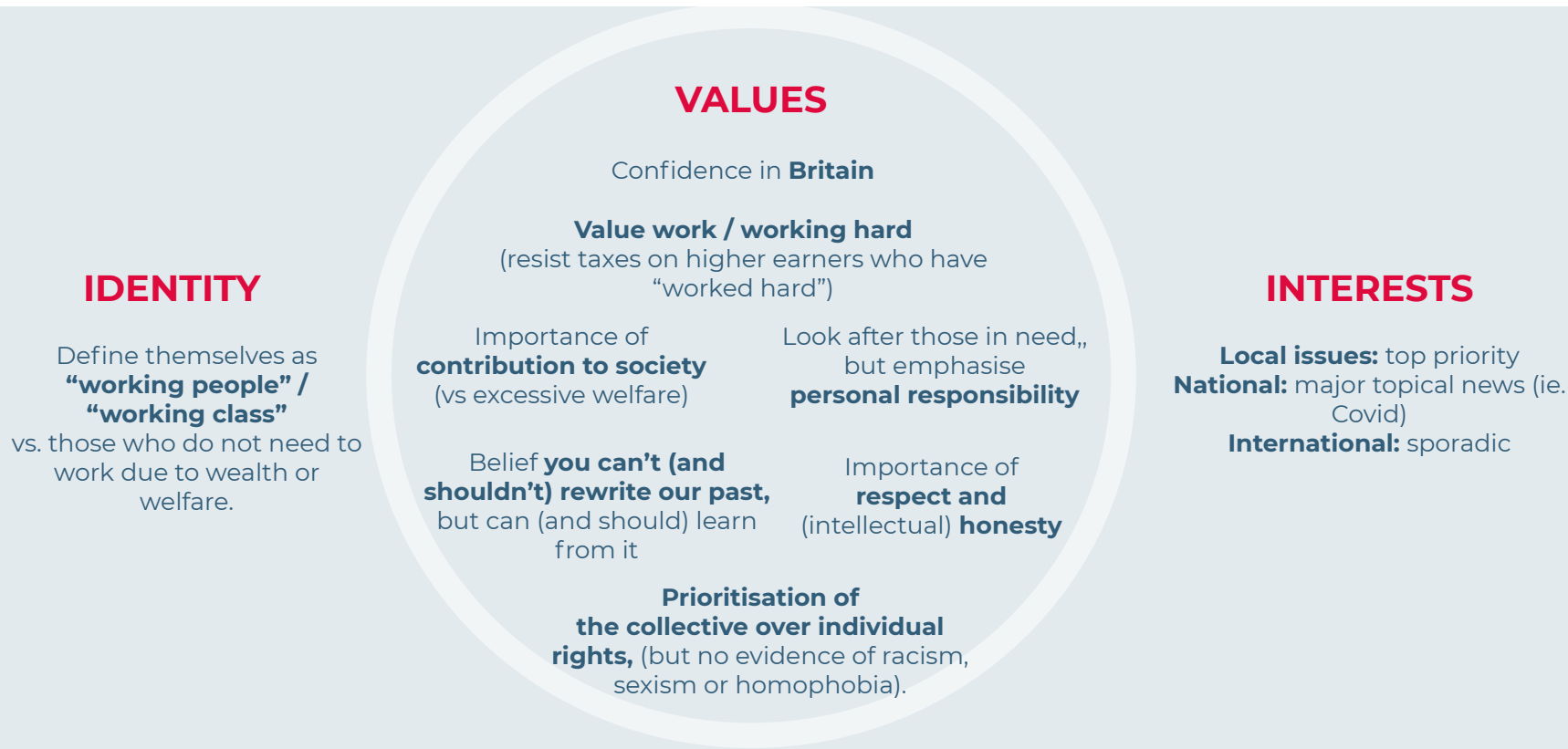


**60 voters**  
**6 locations**  
**13 constituencies**  
in England & Wales

**North, Midlands and Wales locations:** Participants were long-term Labour voters who switched to the Conservatives in 2017 or 2019

**Southern swing seats:** Participants were 2019 Conservative voters who have voted Labour at some point in the past and would be open to again.

# Voters across all eight groups tended to be united by a set of communitarian values - and identify strongly as workers.



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## IDENTITY

“ You can still be working class and have a healthy bank balance.

North Wales, 50+s

## VALUES

“

My area is rough with gangs smoking drugs and vandalism, it's a concern when there are elderly people and young people about.

Don / Rother Valleys, 35-50s

It's very sad that people have to sleep rough on the streets, there should be more places for them to go.

Plymouth, 35-50s

[The wealthy] are already paying 50% tax, why should they be penalised because they have a good job?

Wolves & Dudley, 25-35s

I'd be better off on benefits, but I want to show an example for my daughter, it's self-respect.

Wolves & Dudley, 25-35s

## INTERESTS

“ The drugs, I walked past someone 13/14 outside smoking, there's no police about and so people are overt about doing drugs in the street and then violence comes along with that too.

Peterborough, 25-35



# Voters feel relatively positive about Britain's future, with vaccine success breeding confidence - but there is insecurity about Covid resurgence & debt.



**Voters just want things back to normal - "building back better" is not a spontaneous reaction:**

“ Hopefully things go back to normal without restrictions, but who knows what the future holds.  
Peterborough, 25-35s



**Voters think debt will mean a more constrained economy:**

“ We need solutions but we also can't do any more spending or borrow more money  
Peterborough 25-35s



**Interestingly culture wars were raised but were not associated directly with party politics.**

“ Cancel culture is insane, you watch old TV shows and cringe, I don't think we should be proud of certain things but we shouldn't dwell - just focus on the future.  
Don / Rother Valleys, 35-50s

# Locally, beyond the pandemic voters have the following priorities....

1

## Better job opportunities

“ If they want to attract people or want them to stay there needs to be opportunities...more than there is at the minute.

Wolves & Dudley, 25-35s

2

## Tackling crime

“ If there's nobody on the streets you can expect crime to go up. There used to always be police, city ambassadors, but now I couldn't even see one.

Don/Rother Valleys, 50+

3

## Tackling homelessness

“ A lot of money has been chucked at homelessness during the pandemic and it has reduced.

North Wales, 50+s

# Perceptions of political parties

# The challenge: trust in politicians is virtually non-existent.

## Confidence is undermined by two core beliefs:

### 1. “Politicians are all self interested”

“ Labour and the Conservatives are the same. They’re in it to line their own pockets and their friends.  
Peterborough, 25-35s

### 2. “Politicians are full of empty promises”

“ They all promise you everything, then turn up with a barrel full of mud.  
Plymouth, 35-50s

## ...Which means voters don’t see politicians as...

### ...*motivated* to help them

“ All parties are in it for themselves - they just want your vote.  
Don / Rother Valleys, 50+s

### ...*having the ability* to help

Many are pessimistic about the capacity of the state to deliver its aims

“ They are all full of promises to try and keep everyone happy but they just tell lies.  
North Wales, 50+s

In this context, being “worth listening to” is a key challenge for all politicians.

# But the Conservatives have gone some way to re-building that trust...

Tories are seen as having a record of delivery on:

1. **BREXIT**
2. **FURLOUGH**
3. **VACCINE ROLLOUT**
4. **STABLE ECONOMY (since 2010)**

Tories have neutralised weaknesses around 'passive government' and NHS

**On the economy:** government support schemes such as furlough have been positively received, demonstrating that the Tories are willing to spend money.

**On the NHS:** despite a decade of austerity, voters did not raise many concerns about Tory privatisation or underfunding.

In this context, traditional attack lines from Labour relating to austerity and the NHS are having little effect.

# But Labour faces three key challenges to winning back trust:

## 1. PARTY IDENTITY

**Labour's primary identity as 'the party of work and good jobs' is not as clear as it needs to be.**

“ When it came to voting I didn't know what the policies were.... they need to go back to being for the working man and woman.

Don / Rother Valleys, 50+s

## 2. ECONOMY

**Labour is yet to fully convince voters that they will manage the public finances responsibly**

“ Socialism is well and good but what do we do when the money runs out? [In 2019] it was false promises.

Peterborough 25-35s

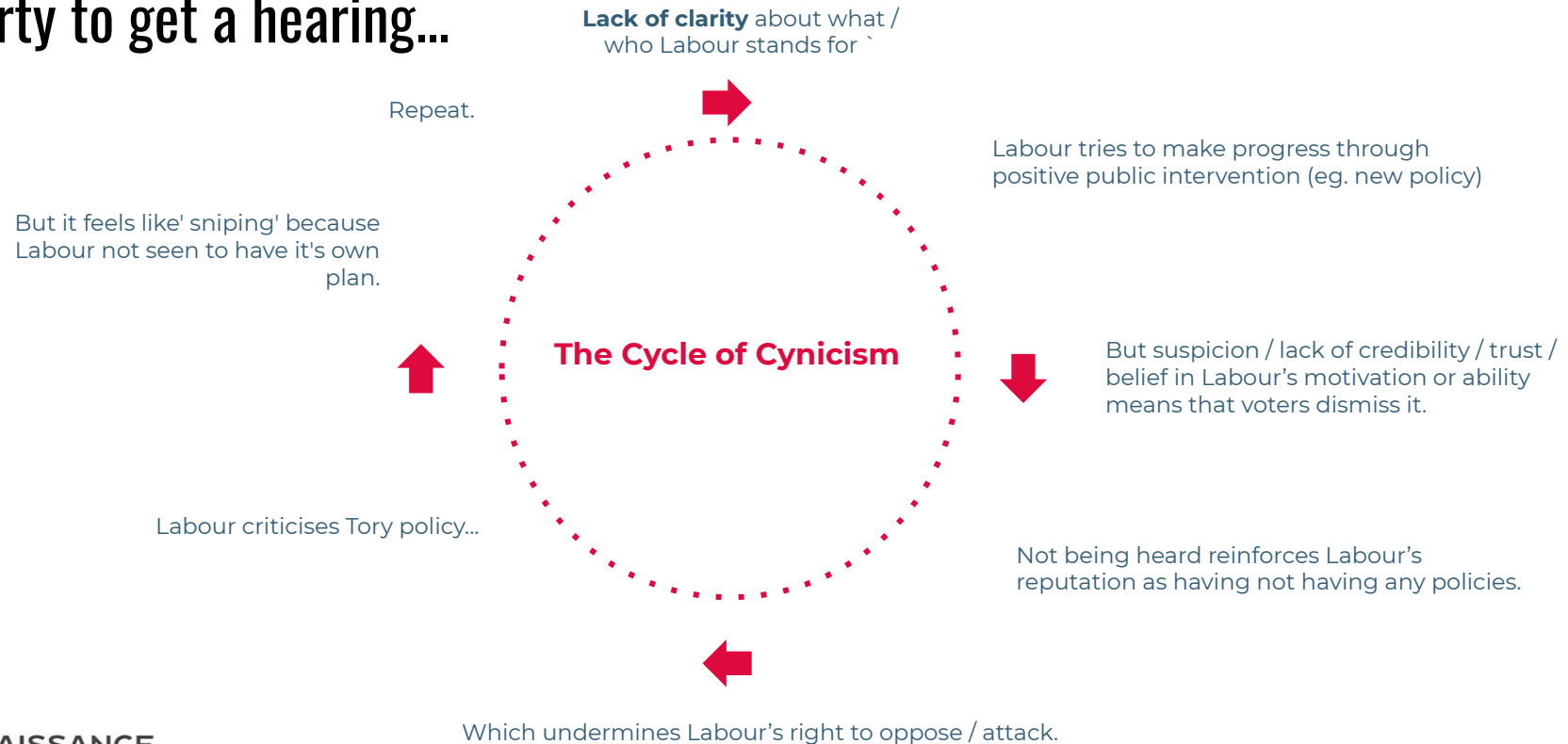
## 3. COUNTRY

**Labour needs a positive and uplifting plan for the future of Britain**

“ [Labour] should put the people of Britain first, not just pick at faults all the time.

Stoke, 35-50s

The lack of trust in politicians mixes with confusion about Labour's core identity to create a **Cycle of Cynicism**, which in turn makes it difficult for the party to get a hearing...



# How Labour could break the cycle of cynicism



# To break the Cycle of Cynicism we discussed the challenges facing Britain and how Labour could address them.

The following narratives emerged, combining the authentic mission and purpose of the Labour Party with the priorities of the British people...

1. Jobs you can raise a family on.
2. Invest to Save.
3. A Britain that can stand on its own two feet.

We found that specific policy proposals did little to break through the cycle of cynicism, because (a) politicians are assumed to break policy promises, and (b) they don't address the fundamental issue of the voter needing to understand Labour's identity and wider motives before they give the party a hearing.

“ They wouldn't do it. They can say it before they get in and then, when they get in, things don't happen.

*Don/Rother Valleys, 50+s*

# 1. Pro-worker: “Jobs you can raise a family on”

Former Labour voters recognise that it is the government's duty to support workers to adapt to the modern job market, and that work should come with fair pay and working conditions.

## Broad agreement on key points:

- *The world is changing, as is the job market. We need a government that stands up for British workers.*
- *Children and adults should be offered the education and skills that they need to thrive in the modern workplace.*
- *Workers need higher pay and more of a say over conditions; zero hours contracts are bad for families.*
- *Some concern that raising the minimum wage too high would hurt small businesses.*

“ “Whoever says this I'll vote for it.”  
Plymouth, 35-50

“ “I'd like to see investment in the youth 20-35s, there's too much emphasis on uni and not trade jobs. There's a wasted generation.”  
Don / Rother Valleys, 50+s

“ “A lot of working people have to go to food banks.”  
Wolves & Dudley, 25-35s

“ “I remember when Labour were in charge, the worker had more rights. The employer has too much power now.”  
Plymouth, 35-50s

“ “With regards to passing laws to give workers more rights, I agree, I would not be able to feed my family if I was on a zero hours contract, it's not right.”  
Peterborough, 25-35s

“ “I do believe Labour would stand up to the workforce. We need a liveable wage. [Trust the Conservatives to deliver?] No - not at all.”  
South Yorkshire, 35-50

“ “Raising minimum wage to £12 would just kill small businesses.”  
Wales, 50s+

## 2. Pro-value for money: 'Invest to Save and Prevent' - a commitment to smart, long-term investment.

Former voters recognised that prevention was better than cure, because early intervention could save the NHS and Police valuable time - saving money in the long-term and delivering better results for the public.

### Broad agreement on key points:

- *Politicians are too focussed on the short-term.*
- *Children's centres are cut to save money, which just leads to more kids joining school with behaviour problems.*
- *Cuts to homeless shelters (beds costing £8.50 a night), sees the NHS pay >£400 per night for a rough sleeper in hospital.*
- *We need to think long-term and 'Invest to Save'. Focussing on preventing problems, rather than always reacting, would lead both to better lives for people and save money.*

“ *The emergency department it's absolutely full of people who are there because of homelessness or addiction. There's a lot of resources that would be spent elsewhere.*  
Plymouth, 35-50s

“ *It's all true, you will save money in the future if you invest now.*  
Don / Rother Valleys, 50+s

“ *Absolutely, this is a real problem. Let's spend more on prevention.*  
Plymouth, 35-50s

“ *Courts are clogged up. There's nothing there to stop reoffending. We need some rehabilitation.*  
Don / Rother Valleys, 35-50s

“ *More and more people are being let off because something hasn't been filed in time.*  
Plymouth, 35-50s

“ *Let's spend money on services [for the homeless], but not benefits.*  
Black Country, 25-35s

### 3. Pro Nation: A resilient Britain that can stand on its own two feet.

Restoring pride, prosperity and security by supporting UK manufacturing is popular - particularly in context of pandemic.

#### Broad agreement on key points:

- *The pandemic has exposed the weak foundations of our economy. We're increasingly reliant on foreign imports, with 500,000 manufacturing jobs moving overseas since the Conservatives came to power.*
- *We need a Britain more secure and more resilient to shocks and hostility; a Britain that can stand on its own two feet, and is less reliant on China.*
- *We need the government to buy British and deliver a plan for modern manufacturing – even if it costs the taxpayer a bit more, because jobs will stay in the economy.*
- *We must support crucial industries, and make Britain a leader in the industries of tomorrow.*

“ *This is exactly what we need.*  
Peterborough 35-50s

“ *We need to stand on our own two feet.*  
Don / Rother Valleys, 35-50s

“ *It's a good idea, worth the extra money, if it's going to British people rather than disappearing.*  
Wolves & Dudley, 25-35s

“ *Surely the pandemic has taught us you never know what's round the corner, we need to be more reliant on ourselves. It's dangerous to rely heavily on one country.*  
Peterborough, 25-35s

“ *The pandemic has shown the big holes we had in infrastructure... They need to bring critical industries in house.*  
Don/Rother Valleys, 35-50s

“ *We shouldn't be selling to China - especially nuclear power.*  
Peterborough, 25-35s

# Recommendations:

1-4: Priorities: 4 pillars for success

5-8: The style of politics required

# Recommended 'priority areas' for Labour

1.

**"Good jobs you can  
raise a family on"**

3.

**"Invest to save  
and prevent"**

**4 pillars for success**

2.

**"A Britain that can stand  
on its own two feet"**

4.

**"Safer communities  
and high streets"**

# 1: Labour should relentlessly promote its core identity as the party of working people - and of “Good jobs you can raise a family on”

Labour should repeat and reiterate Labour’s primary traditional identity, establishing this in all communication:

WHAT IS LABOUR FOR?

**Labour is a party of work and good jobs.**

WHO IS LABOUR FOR?

**Labour is the natural home for working people and families.**

Labour can connect these messages into a *pro-family agenda* (pay & flexible working), a *pro-business agenda* (growth), and a *pro-nation agenda* (good jobs that can power Britain forward).

Following the Labour Party’s excellent campaign “A New Deal for Working People”, Keir Starmer rightly focused on work in his conference speech:

*"I am so proud to lead a party whose name is Labour. Don't forget it. Labour. The party of working people."*

We recommend that this language should be at the heart of a plan to bring the authentic mission and purpose of the Labour Party together with the priorities of the British people.

## 2: Labour must show how every penny it invests will save money in frontline services, preventing the need for future spending.

Labour must re-establish itself as a party that believes in sound financial management and getting 'value for money' from investment - moving the party away from the criticism of austerity which has contributed to four election losses.

Labour must win the argument that investment is needed, whilst easing public concerns about over-spending.

Renaissance recommends an 'Invest to Save' approach, making the 'value for money' case on all public spending. Labour should contrast this approach with eye-watering Tory waste.

We are pleased to see that Shadow Chancellor Rachel Reeves has taken this approach with their party conference speeches and announcements:

*"We will bring an absolute commitment to value for taxpayers' money for every pound we spend and policy we implement. The next Labour government will create a new, independent Office for Value for Money."*

We recommend that this language should be at the heart of how Labour can strengthen support for its responsible and focused approach to managing the public finances.



### 3: Labour must demonstrate it is committed to building “A more resilient Britain that can stand more firmly on its own two feet”

Labour must offer a post-Brexit vision that stands up for Britain, that is forward-thinking and optimistic. This can demonstrate that Labour is a serious party, thinking big and looking long.

The pandemic has shown us we never know what is round the corner. We need a Britain which is more secure and resilient to shocks like pandemics, or threats from hostile powers or asset-strippers.

While Tory governments have overseen the selling off of British assets and Chinese state ownership of our critical national infrastructure, Labour can stand up for Britain's long-term business interests, workers and local communities.

Rachel Reeves has rightly launched a Labour policy to *'make more, sell more and buy more in Britain'*.

We feel, however, that this policy needs to be rooted in a wider story that goes beyond jobs and sets out a Labour response about an increasingly unpredictable world in which we need to build a more resilient British economy. Our research shows that, even before the current supply chain crisis, the public was concerned about Britain's over-reliance on countries like China.

We recommend that this language should be at the heart of how we strengthen public support for our approach to building a more resilient UK.

## 4. Labour must campaign for “safer communities and high streets”

Voters were deeply concerned about local crime, anti-social behaviour and homelessness. Labour should not be shy in pointing out our growing concern over crime and anti-social behaviour, poor conviction rates, weak sentences and re-offending.

Labour should come up with its own convincing solutions as to how the party would do things differently in government.

Labour should stress how investing in prevention of both homelessness and drug addiction will keep everyone safer.

Labour's summer campaign on 'security' and Keir Starmer's conference speech show that the party is well on track:

"Under my leadership, the fight against crime will always be a Labour issue. Labour will strengthen legal protections for victims of crime... We will fast-track rape and serious sexual assault cases and toughen sentences... I won't stand for the 2 million incidents of anti-social behaviour this year - or 9 of 10 crimes going unsolved."

In addition, Labour should repeat the line “Under the Tories criminals have never had it so good” consistently, to highlight government failures - while also pointing out how the Tories have been “defunding the police”..

We recommend that this language should be at the heart of how we strengthen support for our approach to building safer and more secure neighbourhoods and high streets.

## 5. Repeat, repeat, repeat - and be consistent

Repetitive messages increase the chance of voters clearly understanding, remembering and engaging what Labour stands for.

We recommend that:

1. In order to break through the cycle of cynicism the party should commit to a small number of compelling and uplifting narratives about the future of our country.
2. These narratives should be consistently repeated from now until the General Election, and policy announcements should explicitly connect back to at least one of the narratives.

## 6. Be bold: continue in the vein of Labour conference and take strong and principled positions on major issues.

To illustrate that Labour has the strength, purpose and confidence to lead, the party is right to now be taking clear, strong and proactive positions.

Our conversations with voters showed us that ambiguity and uncertainty are less respected than a position with which the voter disagrees.



*A bad decision is better than no decision.*

Wolves & Dudley, 25-35

We also recommend that Labour picks its battles, and that the party should think very carefully about how and when it criticising the Conservative government if it has not yet formulated its own policy in that particular area.

## 7. Critique the Conservatives through a communitarian lens\* - and focus on future battles

Labour must avoid the trap of painting itself on the wrong side of the Tories on key issues, by looking at issues from the perspective of the electorate - rather than through a the lens of a Labour member.

Here are a few examples:

- Labour's former voters have made up their mind that austerity was a necessary evil. Rather than fight a fifth general election on a rejection of Cameron's austerity, Rachel Reeves is right to focus on value for money. Labour should criticise the *outcomes* of Tory failure (eg. rising crime and homelessness) rather than the policy of austerity itself.
- Ensure that our well-founded criticism of the government's immigration policies is always accompanied by constructive alternative policy solutions.
- Ensure that the retention and creation of work and good jobs is at the heart of our approach to the transition to net zero.

\*See slide 7

## 8. Point to Labour's successes to show what Labour in office can achieve

- We recommend that the party does more to promote its commendable record of delivery.
- Labour can do this by using examples of delivery by Labour in Wales / English local government / English mayors to show the impact that Labour can have - linking to current UK Labour policy.
- Examples of delivery could help to stress that Labour 'can' and 'wants' to deliver for working people and families.
- If pointing to the last Labour government, the party should be aware of its negative reputation on spending.
- We are pleased to see that the Stronger Together policy review has a 'Labour Works' strand which seeks to do this. The challenge will be to find methods to illustrate Labour's successes in a way that cuts through to the electorate.

## 9. Navigate Culture War distractions by focusing on the future, and deliverables

- Our research shows that history and culture are less associated with political parties than major current affairs stories and economic issues - so don't let them distract from Labour's core mission.
- But when addressing these cultural issues, we'd recommend that Labour should:
  1. Focus on the present and future rather than the past, and on what Labour can do for a particular group today with the levers at its disposal. (Eg. Implement Lammy Review)
  2. Err on the side of free speech and open debate - and do not become associated with cancel culture.
  3. Don't caricature voters. Remember:
    - a. Most deplore racism, homophobia and sexism - recent studies showed 2:1 support for England players taking the knee.
    - b. There were only a handful of criticisms of immigrants or foreigners in our conversations, and around half of these came from ethnic minority participants.
    - c. There are of course pockets of racism in British society, but Britain is not a racist country.



# RENAISSANCE

## **Acknowledgments**

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We would also like to thank Republic for their support, expertise and professionalism.