

Winning the vote with a universal basic income

Evidence from the 'red wall'

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The logo for Basic Income Conversation, featuring the words "Basic", "Income", and "Conversation" stacked vertically in a bold, sans-serif font, with horizontal lines separating the words. The text is white and set against a dark blue speech bubble background.

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About the Basic Income Conversation

The Basic Income Conversation is an initiative, powered by Compass, to promote the idea of a universal basic income in the UK. We work with people across civil society to understand the opportunities, questions and concerns around basic income. We help organisations decide if they should add basic income to their policy toolkit and look at how it fits alongside other big policy reforms. We work with researchers to ensure the basic income debate is informed by research. We help coordinate a growing network of cross-party politicians and activists to put basic income at the top of the political agenda.

About Compass

Compass is the pressure group for a good society, a world that is much more equal, sustainable and democratic. We build alliances of ideas, parties and movements to help make systemic political change happen. One strategic focus is on policy ideas that are rooted in real needs now but which have transformative potential. Introducing a universal basic income is one such policy and speaks to every element of the good society we want to create by providing more freedom, independence, time security and sense of citizenship. This is our third report on basic income and shows how a desirable and feasible scheme could be implemented. The next stage is to build a national coalition in support of a basic income.

About the project

This work was funded by the Wellcome Trust as part of a wider project entitled 'Assessing the prospective impacts of Universal Basic Income on anxiety and depression among 14-24-year-olds'. This serves as a pilot study for our much broader interest in the [health case for universal basic income](#), (UBI).

The project commenced in August 2021. This report is a counterpart to an earlier Compass publication *Universal Basic Income: can it be framed to address voters' concerns?* That report examines public perception of UBI, with a specific focus on health, within the crucial 'red wall' seats lost by Labour to the Conservatives in the 2019 General Election.

The redistributive outcomes modelled herein have the potential to be endorsed by those who are likely to benefit most, those in left behind communities in Labour's former heartlands.

These two reports show that a UBI, even at a modest level, is a powerful tool for dealing with several current and coming social and economic faultlines, and especially for cutting poverty and inequality. For these reasons, it could also be a key means by which Labour, in particular, can re-engage with its traditional voters.

The final report to be published by the Royal Society of Arts at the end of August 2022 will set out the full findings of the final stage of the project and the mental health impact of a young person's UBI. This will also provide new understanding of the potential longer term dynamic effect of a UBI.

Contents

About the authors	2
Acknowledgements	3
About Basic Income Conversation	4
About the project	5
Contents	6
Foreword, by Mayor of Greater Manchester Andy Burnham	7
Executive Summary	8
Introduction	13
Why is UBI right for the ‘red wall’?	16
Good in theory, good for politics	21
The Overton window is not what we think it is	24
Voting: age and inequality	26
Different reasons to support the same policy	29
Survey Findings	33
Paying for UBI	53
Conclusion	55
Support from the PLP	59
Recommendations	60
References	62

Foreword

- Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham

During the pandemic, the North of England experienced significant increases in mental illness, loneliness and rates of antidepressant prescriptions. It's no surprise as long-standing regional inequalities in infrastructure, wealth and health were all compounded by the need for longer lockdowns and even greater financial and social strain across the region. The lack of investment in our people simply made it much more costly to deal with the pandemic.

People in the North see how regional inequalities stretching back decades and even centuries affect the opportunities available to us. Our young people feel it particularly strongly. Many have to leave for London to find work, missing out on the support that family can offer and taking with them their skills, knowledge and talent. In many areas, those who stay are left unable to maximise their potential due to a lack of resources and opportunities to pursue further study, find high quality work, or start businesses.

We have to find a way to support young people in securing financial and mental wellbeing. While there are, of course, other factors involved in mental health, I am convinced that the two are inextricably linked. This report sets out how Universal Basic Income, a radical yet feasible alternative to the existing, failing benefits system, could begin to address these issues. Universal Basic Income would reduce poverty to almost-unheard-of levels, address the inequality both between and within regions that harms people's wellbeing, and provide a foundation for our young people to secure good lives that support good mental health.

Most importantly, the report confirms that our people see this as an important policy – something that can transform their lives at a time in which they need change most. They see it as giving working people the security they desperately need. These are voters who are aware of inequality, aware of the lack of investment in the North and who need a visionary offer from politicians.

As Mayor of Greater Manchester, I am fighting every day for equality for people in the North. Universal Basic Income may well be the means of achieving it.

Executive Summary

Universal Basic Income (UBI) describes a range of systems under which all citizens or permanent residents are provided with a guaranteed, secure cash transfer on a regular basis. It has divided progressive policy makers due, in part, to an assumption that it would not be popular with voters, particularly in ‘left-behind’ constituencies. We can now say that this assumption is incorrect.

This report brings together findings from a number of surveys with ‘red wall’ voters in Wales and the Midlands and North of England over the course of two years in a pandemic and post-pandemic context. It seeks to contextualise these findings and chart a way forward for progressive forces to achieve transformative change through policies like UBI.

The findings suggest consistently high levels of support for UBI. Support increases even among opponents when the policy is presented to voters in terms developed by strong opponents of the policy. We find little evidence of voters’ bearing conservative social values that preclude radical socioeconomic policy. Rather, those voters are firmly aware of the need for radical reform and recognise the need for redistributive policy. The redistributive outcomes modelled in our first report, *Tackling Poverty: The Power of a Universal Basic Income* (Reed et al. 2022), have the potential to be endorsed by those who are likely to benefit most: those in left behind communities in Labour’s former heartlands. This report and its predecessor show that UBI is a powerful tool for dealing with several current and coming social and economic faultlines, and especially for cutting poverty and inequality. For these reasons, it could also be a key means by which Labour, in particular, can re-engage with its traditional voters.

There are 3 key findings regarding existing attitudes to UBI:

1. The electorate recognises the need for economic change and for solutions as big as the problems faced.
2. UBI provides an incentive to vote and can tackle political cynicism.
3. UBI transforms social security into social cohesion.

There are 3 key findings for presenting UBI to voters:

4. Support is high – the issue is framing.
5. Material circumstances matter more than values.
6. Anecdotal narratives that highlight ‘in-group’ material benefits for different groups of people are important.

The findings are summarised in themes here but further detail is available in the main section of this report.

1. The electorate recognises the need for economic change and for solutions as big as the problems.

Voters recognise that big changes are needed to address big problems. The Conservatives have been far more successful in capitalising on this through appealing to people's day-to-day material circumstances and need for change, even if they are likely to be unable to deliver on those promises. Policies like Furlough during the Pandemic and 'Levelling Up' following Brexit have proved popular with voters and show that grand economic schemes are possible with scope for narratives of investment and growth out of the crisis.

Focusing on fiscal neutrality by increasing income taxes is self-defeating – with the cost of living crisis affecting millions, Universal Basic Income has to be a redistributive measure to benefit the majority.

Recommendation 1.1: Progressive parties should be progressive – the electorate recognises the need for economic change.

Recommendation 1.2: Politicians need to emphasise both that the present system is chaotic and that UBI is a means of reducing uncertainty.

Recommendation 1.3: Universal Basic Income needs to be presented as a central pillar of 'Levelling Up' to foster regional development.

Recommendation 1.4: Universal Basic Income needs to be funded by externalised streams: cutting red tape by reforming the Department for Work and Pensions; removing tax reliefs that benefit the wealthy; introducing land and wealth taxes on the wealthiest.

2. UBI provides an incentive to vote and can tackle political cynicism

Right-wing parties have been more effective in appealing to voters' need for control and security even though the policies they pursue necessarily undermine both.

Progressive parties, and Labour in particular, need to make a transformative offer to voters who already recognise the need for change. These voters are the majority. People at the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum recognise the need for redistributive measures but have lost faith in the ability of politicians to deliver those goods through the failure of New Labour to transform the 'red wall' when in Government and subsequent positions on Brexit.

Progressives can only halt the 'downward spiral' by setting out a vision for a secure Britain using a set of narratives that tie policies that transform citizens' lives to the vulnerabilities that citizens recognise themselves. People are biddable, but require tangible incentives to turn out to vote. Dealing with cynicism requires good governance, and there are examples of progressive leadership across the UK that can do this.

Recommendation 2.1: Progressive parties should seek to genuinely improve people's lives as their only route to power.

Recommendation 2.2: Progressive parties should make redistribution their single biggest advantage over a Government centrally responsible for fostering inequality in the first place.

Recommendation 2.3: Progressive parties, and Labour in particular, need to make a transformative offer to the majority of voters who already recognise the need for change.

Recommendation 2.4: Progressives should present Wales, Manchester, Preston, and Salford as living examples of progressive government in practice to assuage cynicism and demonstrate competence.

3. UBI transforms social security into social cohesion.

Generous Universal Basic Income schemes transform welfare as something for out-groups (unemployed people, etc.) to something for hard-working, aspirational citizens. Low-level schemes are seen as inadequate and do not achieve two key benefits of Universal Basic Income: reduction in complexity and increase in efficiency.

Recommendation 3.1: We should avoid advocating very low-cost starter schemes, as these schemes do not reduce complexity, increase efficiency

or avoid UBI being seen as something solely for unemployed ‘others’.

Recommendation 3.2: Politicians need to go big on UBI – its value lies in being sufficient to protect those in work specifically.

4. Support is high – the issue is framing

Universal Basic Income already has extremely high levels of support (70-76 on a 100-point scale) in the ‘red wall’.

We found no evidence in our surveys to support the ‘insurmountable conservative values’ hypothesis – that voters’ values are necessarily opposed to progressive change. Voters are overwhelmingly supportive of Universal Basic Income and other redistributive policies when framed effectively.

Recommendation 4.1: ‘Adversarial co-production’ with opponents of policies should be used to guide presentation of evidence-based policy.

Recommendation 4.2: Initial positions on policies should be understood as starting points for persuasion, not end points for evaluation of policy.

Recommendation 4.3: Policies have to be tied to people’s sense of self; values ought only to be used as narrative devices.

5. Material circumstances matter more than values

People are aware of their financial strain and need for security, but underestimate the impact of a significant cash transfer on their own affairs. ‘Red wall’ voters are much more concerned about their day-to-day material circumstances than abstract values. People’s views are fluid and redistributive policies are the single biggest advantage that progressives hold over conservatives.

Recommendation 5: Progressives should use anecdotal, narrative voices to tie people’s pre-existing needs to the benefits of the policy, without relying on values-based narratives.

6. The importance of anecdotal narratives that highlight ‘in-group’ material benefits for different groups of people.

Evidence alone is not enough to persuade people of the benefits of policies like UBI. Instead, narratives must be developed to help voters recognise the specific personal benefit of redistributive policies.

Health and economic security are two related concerns that are often poorly presented to voters, but are critically important to people and need to be the basis for any electoral strategy to win on a platform endorsing UBI.

Recommendation 6.1: Policy makers need to use narratives that highlight ‘in-group’ benefits in ways that emphasise material impact for different groups of people.

Recommendation 6.2: Policy makers must stop referring to UBI as a policy for unemployed people. UBI is a policy that offers the single biggest improvement in workers’ interests since the National Minimum Wage.

Recommendation 6.3: In presenting a transformative policy package, progressive parties should use different narratives to appeal to different groups: health is particularly salient for older people; security is particularly salient for younger people.

Introduction

Forms of Universal Basic Income (UBI) have been advanced over several decades by policy makers from across the political spectrum. Providing individuals with a largely unconditional means of satisfying basic needs has been presented as a means of dealing with labour market insecurity, bureaucratic stagnation (Gordon 2014) regional inequality, material deprivation and, more recently, public health (Johnson et al. 2021). For those who believe in progressive politics, UBI offers the possibility of moving from conditional welfare systems that have the potential to inflict harm to a largely unconditional system based on people's universal needs.

I, Daniel Blake, speaks to experience of many welfare recipients over the past decade of austerity, in which increasingly arbitrary and self-contradictory rules have been applied to the most vulnerable people in society. This system actively undermines people's ability to take action that promotes their interests, with many fearful of the consequences of being active, whether physically, socially or economically.

The suffering imposed by our socioeconomic system extends, however, beyond those out of work. Increasingly, work has ceased to be a path out of poverty and has actually been a source of ill-health itself. Just as people are trapped on welfare, people are also trapped in jobs that make their lives unbearable. For people in left-behind areas of Britain, this is even more prevalent, with decades of de-industrialisation leaving few opportunities for upward social mobility and an overarching story of a gradual reduction in living standards across generations. That regional inequality has contributed to an exodus of generations of people in search of work, further draining communities of their skills and ability to develop independently of support from the state.

This sense of inevitable decline within the status quo has led to radical political phenomena such as Brexit and party realignment since 2019. Commentators such as Paul Mason have concluded that this is the result of a conflict of values and that the divisions apparent in Britain stem from communities holding different views of their place in society and of the ideas that underpin public policy. In effect, this analysis asserts an 'insurmountable conservative values' hypothesis that reads as facts people's present political preferences and has reduced some progressive politicians to a strategy either of appealing to believers (university-educated, younger, urban-dwelling liberals who support membership of the EU and other multilateral organisations) or mimicking the putative values of

socially conservative working voters. These voters, until recently, had voted largely for parties that supported EU Membership, LGBT+ rights and redistribution. The 2019 General Election, and subsequent local and by-election results show the limitations of that policy, given that the Conservatives have managed to gain the support of many traditional Labour ‘believers’ within left-behind areas of the North, Midlands and Wales. In a society of growing inequality, in which the status quo of the New Labour years shows diminishing returns, and make-up of constituencies favours the Conservatives, that is a strategy that depends on low election turnouts and building coalitions with parties that have historically favoured coalition with the Conservatives or wish to secure independence from Westminster. A great deal of evidence suggests, though, that explaining voting patterns through reference to values is wrong. The success of the SNP in Scotland has coincided with their adopting a more clearly progressive economic agenda, while the growth of the Conservatives in the North has coincided with their commitment to ‘levelling up’ and investment in regions that saw little benefit from Labour during 13 years in Government and the Liberal Democrats during their 5 years in Coalition. Labour’s growth in 2017 coincided with their adoption of substantive socioeconomic policies, such as the nationalisation of energy and rail, and fiscal reform. Given that progressive parties in England now find themselves outflanked by Conservative Party policy on the right in terms of values and on the left by economic policies, such as Levelling Up, progressive politicians face an uphill struggle to recover relevance.

In general, progressives often say of policies like Universal Basic Income that they are ‘good in theory’ but would either ‘not work in practice’ or ‘would be electoral suicide’. One aspiring potential Labour PPC who recently failed in an attempt to take over a large city council, stated that Universal Basic Income is a ‘nice idea, but no one would vote for it’. In contrast, the evidence of recent years suggests, both in the slump in Liberal Democrat support and of Labour as an entrenched party of opposition, that few people are interested in voting for more of the same.

This report grabs the ‘good idea, but unpopular’ intuition by the horns and tests it to destruction in the very constituencies that Labour hopes to regain: the mythical ‘red wall’. In what follows, we do three things. First, we show that the intuition that UBI is necessarily unpopular is false. While the reasons for assuming it’s being false are understandable, they do not apply now, if ever they did apply. There are a sufficient number of material needs that UBI can satisfy as to ensure that different types of voters are receptive to different narratives. Second, there are means of persuading the electorate of its value, even among the minority of voters who express strong initial opposition to the policy. People’s material interests dictate

the kinds of narratives needed and those narratives are often best developed by those who share opposition to UBI. Finally, the evidence we produce by examination of UBI as an economic policy enables us to assert a position that applies to a much larger number of policies: that focusing on abstract values is wrong and that approaches based on people's real-life, material circumstances have the capacity to increase the relevance of progressive parties to an electorate in genuine need of improvements in their living conditions.

Methods

This report is based on three survey waves conducted between April 2020 and February 2022. The first was conducted on both UK and US national samples. The second and third were conducted within 'red wall' constituencies in Wales and the North and Midlands of England and were weighted to ensure representativeness with respect to 2019 voting behaviour.

The surveys were conducted online using the prolific.co, a crowd-sourcing platform for psychological and social research. The research was conducted at various stages of the pandemic, with the final survey occurring during the first stages of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The surveys elicited both quantitative and qualitative data. The second study involved adversarial collaboration with opponents of Universal Basic Income. The surveys, research protocols and all data are available freely on the Open Science Framework at <https://osf.io/2n37u/>. The results have been presented in three published or forthcoming peer-reviewed articles and are condensed here. The studies were approved by the Newcastle University Research Ethics Committee.

Why is UBI right for the ‘red wall’?

The case for Universal Basic Income has been made by many different thinkers and policy makers from across the political spectrum. It is precisely the sort of multipurpose policy that has the capacity to address the structural inequalities highlighted by work on ‘Levelling Up’ that lead to such rampant crises in economic decline, crime and, vitally, health. Once relatively prosperous in the wake of Labour’s post-1945 reforms, our ‘red wall’ constituencies have suffered disproportionately from the loss of industry and from the lack of investment in infrastructure. The consequence is young people forced to move to cities in search of work and opportunity and an ageing population confronted by increasing antisocial behaviour and chronic pressure on health services.

Thus far, measures to address the slide have been piecemeal and inadequate, with communities continuing to see their interests suffer across Conservative, New Labour, Coalition and Conservative Governments. Those measures have focused on the symptoms, not the causes, of the decline, with attempts to stimulate economic activity through commerce zones, to mitigate antisocial behaviour through a range antisocial behavioural orders and to improve health by increasing access to GP surgeries, all at a time in which the resources by which to achieve change have been reduced by austerity. As even the Government now recognises, this has all failed. Prevention is better than cure (Department of Health and Social Care 2019).

Prevention, in this case, can only be achieved by addressing the social determinants of each of these chronic failings: poverty, inequality and insecurity. While ‘social prescribing’ of physical and social activity have taken many of the headlines, these material factors all require money. Attempts to funnel that money to communities via the private sector have largely failed. Where investment is promised, it is via large-scale Government stimulus, as in the case of Levelling Up. The problem is that this is inconsistent, uneven and cannot possibly achieve the transformative impacts required to revive the fortunes of the ‘red wall’.

The idea of the state redistributing resources by providing an adequate, regular and predictable cash transfer to citizens is radical. It turns the discourse of welfare on its head: from a payment for those with no other

means of satisfying their needs, to a payment to all akin to a pension. Yet, we argue that there is no alternative with the capacity to turn around the fortunes of our communities by addressing the social causes of decline.

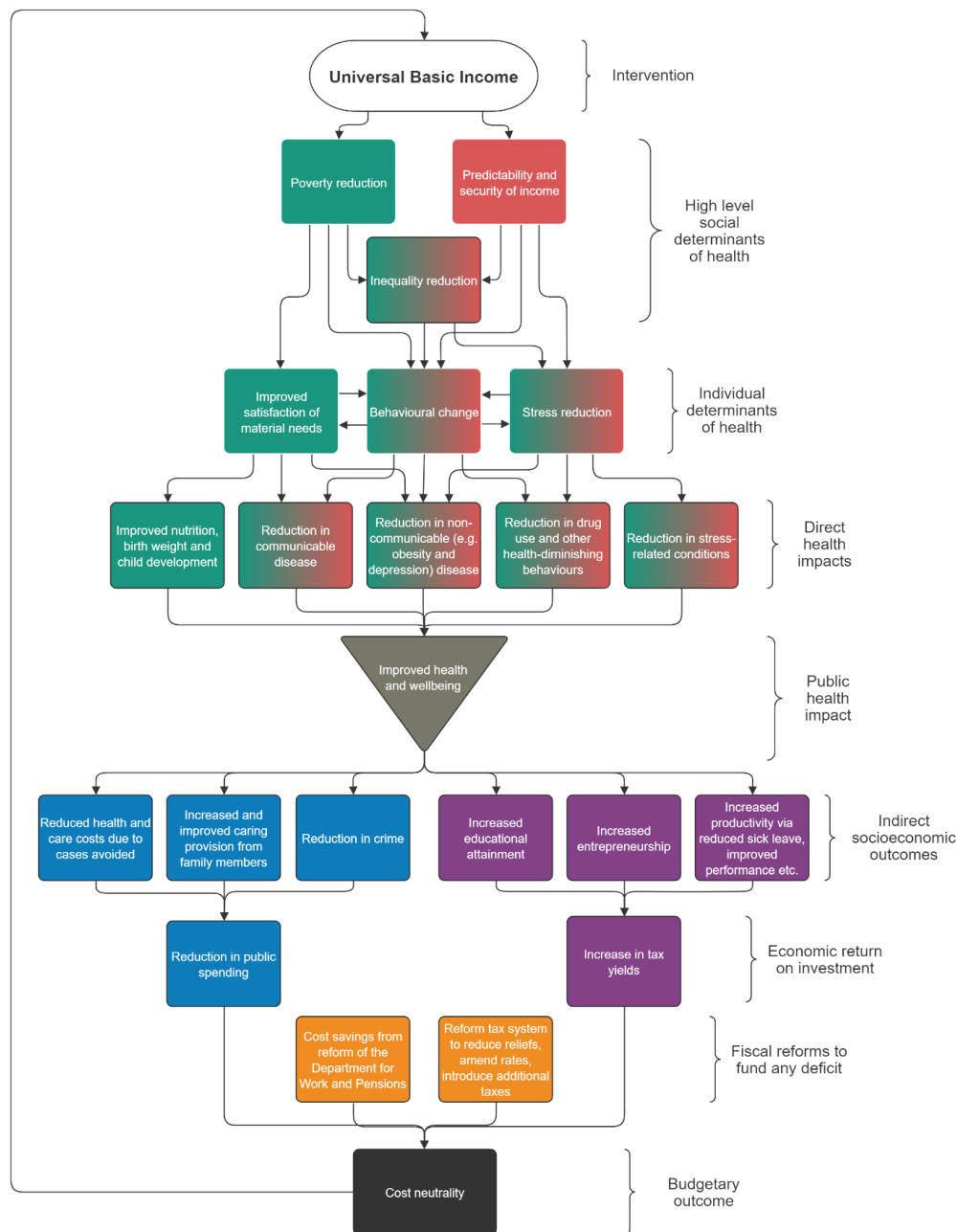
Existing trials of cash transfers indicate an increase in economic activity, a reduction in crime and drug use and an improvement in health. In terms of health, UBI:

- reduces poverty and increases the ability of individuals to satisfy their basic needs (Johnson, Degerman & Geyer 2019).
- reduces stress and stress-related illness by mitigating inequality and enabling people to leave abusive environments (Johnson & Johnson 2019).
- changes behaviour that impacts on health by increasing people's perceived longevity of lifespan (Johnson et al. 2021).

These are significant benefits that interact with the others above to create compound improvements in society. It is for these reasons that The Lancet (2020) and various health bodies have called for examination of UBI.

Figure 1, below, maps out the ways in which Universal Basic Income addresses social determinants of health and then subsequent social and economic activity and public budgets.

Figure 1: UBI model of impact (Johnson, Johnson, Nettle & Pickett 2020)



This impact would most keenly be felt in those parts of the country, such as the North, Midlands and Wales, that suffer most from the low incomes, inequalities and general hopelessness that contributes to ill-health. At a time of pandemic, the prospective case for introducing UBI is great. Most importantly, as a universal benefit, UBI transforms welfare from something that affects other people to a benefit for all. This is crucial, since the key reason that needs- and means-based benefits are so vulnerable to austerity is that, in the eyes of those most likely to vote, they affect others. There is good political reason that pensions have been increased at a time that most other forms of welfare have been frozen or very significantly reformed. In contrast to UBI, Universal Credit and the range of benefits before it are all framed as being available only under

conditions of emergency. For long periods, in the minds of workers, the risk of having to depend on those emergency payments has been abstract and alien. Under those conditions, it is entirely logical for those in work who are facing pressures on their own household budgets to call for benefits to be cut in response to state budgetary pressures. The pandemic, the environmental crisis and the cost-of-living crisis have all ensured that risks are much more pressing. The consequence is a workforce afflicted by historically high rates of stress, anxiety and depression (Health and Safety Executive 2020).

These factors have also highlighted the importance of secure income to precisely the sort of risk-taking behaviour that is central to a dynamic economy. Even though increasing attention is being paid to the social backgrounds of employees, the platform for dynamic economic activity is often concentrated in a relatively small proportion of the population: those with wealthy relatives.

In the 'red wall', young people, in particular, lack the foundation of wealth necessary to take risks. UBI provides the social security for hardworking, entrepreneurial and aspirational people without wealthy parents to make the investments in themselves and others that transform communities. The importance of that basis for risk taking is demonstrated by two stories from the family history of two of this report's authors.

In 1927, 69-year-old Peter McCartney was working as a joiner at Armstrong, Whitworth & Co. in Walker, Newcastle. At the end of his shift, he had to work on insecure staging which carpenters were too busy to fix. Because Peter was paid a set price for work completed, he would lose out if he had to wait. This would mean his family going hungry. He climbed the staging and it collapsed. He died from an infected wound in the days prior to introduction of the NHS. He left behind a destitute family. That was a bad risk to take, but he had to take it because he had no money to fall back on. He was without the power to say no.

In 1956, Tommy Johnson, was a gas fitter for the Gas Board. His foreman recognised his talent, skills and hard work and offered him a unique opportunity. If he resigned his job, he would be offered a monopoly on cooker repairs at the Gas Board yard in Heaton, Newcastle. He would become self-employed – his own boss. This would offer a higher income and a chance to expand. It was the opportunity to create a business that would give work, not just to him, but eventually to his son and other relatives. But he had no family wealth to support him from his last wage to his first invoice. And with two young children, he simply could not risk his family going without. He turned the foreman down. Which responsible

father could risk not feeding his family? For the rest of his life, he regretted not taking this risk and spent his last two decades fighting industrial-related diseases on a Council Estate in Newcastle that was rife with crime and anti-social behaviour at the time of his death in 2006. Becoming self-employed was a good risk to take, but he could not take it because he had no money to fall back on. He was without the power to say yes.

These are not just cases from history. They are precisely the dilemmas that hardworking, aspirational people face on a daily basis throughout the 'red wall'. Now, more than ever, tradespeople are subcontracted for price work. They take risks they should not. They perform less well than they know they can because they have to work as quickly as possible, even if it means cutting corners. But the biggest problem is that people in the trades are flogging themselves into the ground, with little possibility of improvement for them and their families. For younger workers, often on zero hours contracts, it is getting harder and harder to do what Tommy wished he had done and take leaps that are the basis for dynamic economies. It just is not possible to train or start businesses when you do not know if you will have a roof over your head in the short term.

The irony is that some people do have a Basic Income: the descendants of the likes of Armstrong and Whitworth. They are the people who profited from Peter McCartney's and Tommy Johnson's decades of labour and poverty. They know they can take risks because they have their families' wealth to fall back on.

That is not just unfair, it is also bad for our economy and society. It means that talented people in our communities are denied the opportunities to make good on their abilities. Ironically, given that it was previously an industrial destination for economic migrants, the 'red wall' often feels like Ireland before the boom: the only option to pursue ambition is to leave, often against people's preferences to stay where they have grown up and where their families have lived for generations. The brain drain that afflicts our communities is tragic. Families are broken apart, communities are deprived of talent and the narrative of 'left-behind' communities becomes self-perpetuating. UBI means that people in our communities can take risks and start businesses near home instead of moving away. That is the single biggest way of preventing the brain drain from our communities and rebalancing the economy, which the Government claims to support.

Having a regular, predictable income means that people can feel safe and leave harmful relationships and workplaces knowing that they have money to fall back on. In contrast to the fears of many commentators, there is no evidence that it reduces employment levels or encourages idleness.

Good in theory, good for politics

However, these diverse justifications often lead to a common response among policy makers: this is good in theory but is either bad in practice or impossible to implement due to electoral considerations and concerns over cost (which we have addressed in our recent *Tackling Poverty: The Power of a Universal Basic Income* [Reed et al. 2022]). There are some understandable reasons for the Labour Leadership believing that UBI is unappealing. First, there is good evidence that people often reject benefits felt across society in favour of seeking disproportionate personal gain and harming competitors. This concern for relative gains is particularly relevant when UBI is presented as a means of helping both unemployed people, since it is assumed that it will be funded by income tax rises, and those in poverty, since voters often do not identify themselves as poor. Second, there is a widespread belief in deservingness: help should go only to those in need, recipients should do something in return, and recipients ought not to be responsible for the need that has befallen them (see Nettle & Saxe 2020). As a universal benefit, UBI dissolves the distinction between deserving and undeserving poverty. Third, there is concern for ‘eudaimonia’ or wellbeing, such that people should not be inactive, because it is harmful to theirs and others’ wellbeing (see Johnson 2013). UBI may be seen to reward or foster fecklessness. Fourth, there is concern for interdependence, such that society depends upon reciprocity in order to function. UBI may remove the everyday ties of reciprocity forged through employment, leaving individuals unwilling to contribute to society (see Shah 2020; Gilbert et al. 2018). Fifth, there is concern that UBI might enable the state to dominate individuals by imposing dependence (see Lazar 2021).

Because UBI is a policy with high up-front cost, politicians fear that adopting UBI subtracts credibility (Rentoul 2020), offering opponents opportunities to present their politics as frivolous or incompetent (Duncan Smith 2020). In the absence of representative trials, politicians also lack the ability to point to tangible narrative examples around which to advance an evidence-based case. Despite this, numerous UK councils, including those in the North of England (Halliday 2019), the Welsh Labour Administration, the Green Party, the Liberal Democrats, and the SNP in Scotland (Crerar 2020) have committed to support for trials. That support, however, is tentative and is conditional on other parties entering

government or, in the case of the SNP, achieving independence from the UK. Indeed, the UK Labour Party commitment to trial UBI in 2019 (Labour Party 2019, 60) has been rescinded by the current leadership (Boscia 2020).

This is happening at a time in which the Conservative Party is consolidating its power by claiming to focus on investment, addressing regional inequality through infrastructural investment and committing to increasing wages among those in manual professions, with some infrastructural success in certain areas. Even the shortage of transport workers presents the Government with a means of entrenching support, since it highlights the widespread practice of using underpaid migrant workers in key sectors and presents a structural case for improving skills and pay. These are tangible benefits for communities with evident material needs. That progressive parties have allowed the party of industrial decline, offshoring of wealth and austerity to present itself as the party of the regions is due in part to their misunderstanding people's reasons for wanting change in the Brexit referendum and the 2019 Election and their own ideological incapacity to support real redistribution.

In the 'red wall', Brexit was precisely the sort of 'grand scheme', 'big idea' or 'new deal', that some progressive politicians regard as politically toxic. As a big and vague concept, it could be understood in myriad ways as a means of dealing with very real crises of pay, living conditions, infrastructure and regional inequality more broadly (see MacKinnon 2020). While Brexit as a response to people's challenges may be deconstructed rationally, politicians rarely presented a material case for continued membership other than 'things will get worse', which seemed irrelevant for people accustomed to things inevitably becoming worse while within the EU.

Progressive politicians also made the key error of dismissing people's complaints about their material circumstances, since whichever objections may be raised to the strategy to deal with those circumstances, people's perceptions of those circumstances were generally accurate. In effect, progressive parties abdicated responsibility for advancing the interests of those for whom their parties were created, leaving an electoral void that parties most responsible for increasing inequality could capitalise on.

In this context, the salience of UBI has only increased during the pandemic. Programmes such as the Furlough scheme (HM Revenue & Customs 2021) and temporary freezes on evictions (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government 2021) have been deployed to prevent people's destitution. Indeed, given the issues facing them, there have been moves within the Conservative Government to overturn decades of ideological orthodoxy by claiming that there is no evidence of an increase in benefit

payments' leading to reduced willingness to work (Butler 2021). This suggests that politicians who dismiss the policy or similar 'grand schemes' (BBC 2020) may be misreading a public mood in which only 12% of voters wish to return to the 'old normal' (Britain Thinks 2020, 35). That indicates an electorate willing to consider policies that deal with issues in new and dynamic ways.

Recommendation: Progressive parties should be progressive – the electorate recognises the need for economic change.

The Overton window is not what we think it is

Progressive parties and policy makers have not always grasped the reasons for the shift in public opinion and the political opportunity that it presents. In part, this is because of the almost exclusive focus on values as means of explaining voting patterns. Even though UBI is explicitly an economic policy, understandings of the reasons for people's evaluation of the policy often focus on abstract values (see Hamilton, Yorgun & Wright 2021). In these instances, such values as fairness are inferred from statements like 'people shouldn't get money for nothing'. As a radical revision to existing needs- and means-based welfare systems, UBI has often been regarded as sitting outside the 'Overton Window' of policies acceptable to the electorate (see Gopal & Issa 2021) because it conflicts with people's understandings of, say, fairness by virtue of its paying people unconditionally. Value-based understandings of the window present its parameters as situated within the centre of an ideological continuum, capable of nudging through forms of top-down communication.

Such analyses suffer from an inability to explain radical shifts in opinion and the ways in which views correspond to people's material interests. Our research is derived from an inversion of this position. We regard the window as being shaped first by the ways in which people satisfy their needs and second the ideas that provide narrative justification for people's socioeconomic behaviour. Those ideas emerge from a number of different social contexts, but their salience depends upon the extent to which narratives make sense of people's basic material conditions (Nettle & Saxe 2020). This is the case even if the strategies adopted for advancement of those interests are self-defeating. The implications of the two positions are profound: the former is inherently conservative and fosters concern among politicians and policy makers for symbolism in search of a centre that may simply not exist, at least in the terms its proponents envisage; the latter fosters concern for presenting policies that better satisfy people's needs and articulating those policies in ways that make sense in people's circumstances.

For the past five decades, industrialised countries have been broadly committed to trickle-down economic policies that have radically increased inequality (Piketty & Saez 2014). This shift has been advanced through the justification of absolute societal gains. The UK Conservative Party, in particular, has argued that reducing the tax burden on the wealthy would

stimulate economic activity that would incrementally improve the welfare of those in all subsequent strata of society (Thatcher 1975). Any increase in inequality was justified through reference to any absolute material gain among the worst off on the grounds that such impacts improve the interests and wellbeing of all members of society. There is evidence that the opposite may be true. Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) provide a substantive overview of the impacts on inequality on society: as inequality rises, crime and social disorder increases and health, among other social goods, decreases. Not only does the distribution of risk increase among particular groups, morbidity and mortality increase overall (Marmot et al. 2020). Marginal absolute gains among the worst off do not mitigate impacts. Indeed, Bartram's (2022) study of 78 countries has demonstrated that, in wealthy countries, increased inequality has a substantial negative impact on life satisfaction.

In the UK, there is evidence both of higher rates of anxiety and depression among lower socioeconomic SES groups and bi-directional causality. Not only are conditions affected by SES, they affect income (Wilson & Finch 2021), compounding inequality. However, the primary driver is income to health (Parra Mujica et al. 2022). This is likely the case for a large number of other health conditions, but depression is critical given that it has long been predicted to be among the costliest diseases to society (Lecrubier 2001) and is defined by the WHO as a leading cause of disability worldwide (Bernardi & Johns 2021). If governments are serious in their 'prevention' strategies, there is genuine need for upstream socioeconomic interventions that address the source of morbidity and broader social pathologies: inequality.

Recommendation: Progressive parties should make redistribution their single biggest advantage over a Government centrally responsible for fostering inequality in the first place.

Voting: age and inequality

Evidence on voting participation suggests a political challenge. Because of deindustrialisation, lack of infrastructure and the brain drain, battleground ‘red wall’ constituencies have lower levels of income and wealth than average, are older than average and are particularly affected by higher rates of various health conditions. Those from lower-SES groups (Hill & Leighley 1992) and those with mental health conditions, in particular, are less likely to vote than average (Sund et al. 2017). Ojeda and Pacheco (2017) found that worse ‘self-rated health is associated with a lower probability of voting in one’s first election’ and ‘depression is related to a decline in turnout over time’. Ojeda (2015) argues that this is because depression reduces motivation by instilling a sense of hopelessness and imposes somatic burdens that reduce capacity for participation. He argues that this creates a political cycle of depression:

1. individuals with depression are unlikely to participate in the political process,
2. the lack of participation leads to underrepresentation and a lack of policies that benefit those with depression, and
3. the lack of beneficial policy outcomes perpetuates the experience of depression. And so it repeats. (Ojeda 2015, 1240)

There is evidence that the clustering of anxiety and depression among lower-SES groups has played a significant role in recent electoral outcomes. For example, there is evidence both of association between income and increased support for ‘Leave’ in the UK’s 2016 Referendum on EU Membership (Stark 2017) and that neurotic traits, including anxiety and depression, positively predicted support for ‘Leave’ and Trump in 2016 (Obschonka et al. 2018). There are two contrasting explanations for this trend. First, the campaigns focused on increasing control, including by claiming to support particular constituents against competitors for material resources (see, e.g., The Atlantic 2016). This provides means of mitigating a source of anxiety and depression. Second, Bernardi & Johns (2021) argue that those with depression or depressive traits support the politics of the least upheaval. With regard to Brexit, they argue that there was a shift from pre-referendum support for Remain to post-referendum Leave in order to ‘make the issue go away’ (Bernardi & Johns 2021). These two explanations highlight a tension in preferences among lower-SES voters, who are disproportionately affected by anxiety and depression, between increasing control and mitigating unpredictability, since the means of delivering the former require a degree of reform beyond the status quo. The very voters

who stand to benefit most from change may have a psychological disposition against the uncertainty bound up with that change.

A second challenge is that those from higher-SES groups, who are more likely to vote, are less likely to benefit from redistribution and may, in fact, lose out through increased taxation to fund redistribution. Indeed, policy makers, who are much more likely to be well off, fall into this category (see Dickins 2022). That is to say, the very people responsible for addressing inequality have a personal interest in not pursuing policies to address it. Evidence on concern for relative gains suggests that this is a crucial consideration: voters are less likely to support policies that impose a personal net loss to achieve a net gain for others. Moreover, people's perception of their socioeconomic status and their potential exposure to tax rises means that they may believe that they are at risk of losing out, even when they stand to benefit significantly.

Thirdly, we have shown elsewhere that age and wealth predict evaluation of UBI and battleground constituencies have older populations. Older voters are more likely to be more secure materially, both by acquiring wealth throughout their working lives and having access to guaranteed basic income through their pensions. Property ownership, for example, rises up to the age of 70, when it then decreases (Cribb 2019). This is a consequence of older generations benefiting from post-War booms, high levels of state investment and programmes such as the Right to Buy scheme that distributed state property into private hands (see Advani, Bangham & Leslie 2020, 19-20). Given that those older voters are the most comfortable, have the most wealth and are either in receipt of pensions or are approaching receipt, they are also the least receptive to any policy that implies an increase taxation on their income and wealth. Given that they vote in disproportionate numbers, in part because they have always voted for the side that wins and thus have always seen the benefit in voting, they have a disproportionate impact on policy formation. In this context, policy makers assume that UBI is toxic because older voters are necessarily opposed to any policy that disproportionately benefits younger voters and instead invest a great deal in policies that do the opposite, such as the triple lock on pension increases.

These challenges mean that politicians often conclude that redistribution is a vote loser, often in the face of the available evidence (see Morris 2021). In the UK, the consequence has been a reluctance to support redistributive policies and a re-affirmation of New Labour-style technocracy combined with English identity politics (Dyer 2021). This may assuage concerns about the previous leadership's ambivalence toward English national identity, but leaves open the possibility of much longer-term electoral problems. The

trend of 'PASOKification' suggests that the more unequal a society becomes, the less likely it is to be able both to function and to support middle-ground parties. This creates a hypothetical downward spiral, in which the worst off expand in number, lose faith in government and support right-wing parties for material benefit, whether through mitigating zero-sum competition for low-paid employment via policies such as Brexit or via 'pork barrel' infrastructural investment. Given that right-wing parties' policies exacerbate inequality, this spiral leads to diminution of public health, increases in anti-social behaviour and a perpetual reduction in the possibility of addressing social determinants by lack of electoral success among progressive parties.

Recommendation: Progressive parties should seek to genuinely improve people's lives as their only route to power.

Recommendation: Progressive parties, and Labour in particular, need to make a transformative offer to the majority of voters who already recognise the need for change.

Different reasons to support the same policy

Elsewhere, we have argued that increased awareness of exposure to risk of destitution among the population has increased support for equality-promoting measures that enhance security (Nettle et al. 2021). The Global Financial Crisis of 2007/08, subsequent austerity measures and now the pandemic have demonstrated that the risk of destitution is not restricted to people who are long-term unemployed or perceived as idle: workers in almost all sectors are largely unprotected by the present social security system. Those at most risk are more likely to live within the ‘red wall’ than in the metropolitan centres.

Younger groups increasingly recognise that their material interests cannot effectively be pursued exclusively through the private sector. At a time in which graduates from leading universities are forced into intercontinental travel simply to undertake unpaid internships, the outlook for young people in left-behind communities is especially bleak. If people wish to pursue work, they often have to move to more prosperous parts of the country simply to accept low paid work in ever-declining conditions. For those young people who do gain employment, their experiences are often at odds with those of their grandparents and parents. Unemployed graduates of today look incredulously at the not-too-distant past in which tax inspectors could succeed without a single qualification and business owners survive repeated bankruptcies eventually to make it big.

As such, younger people often no longer view employment as a source of inevitable progression and accumulation of wealth. This represents a reversal of the post-War gains achieved by the Labour Government of 1945-51, which transformed post-Victorian hardship so markedly as to create at least two generations of voters who were provided with unprecedented sources of security and predictability.

Alongside this, the pandemic has demonstrated disproportionate risk of ill-health for older groups (Villani et al. 2021) and the crisis in social care for the elderly. Not only are older groups vulnerable to threats to health in ways that are particular to their cohort, but they are also dependent on younger groups for the reduction in those threats. Throughout the pandemic, older groups’ survival lay in younger groups continuing to work in hazardous conditions for low wages. As the social care crisis develops, there is every reason to believe that such dependence will increase and

that older groups will have an explicit need for younger groups to be able to provide that care effectively and to have the capacity to comply with quarantine and isolation guidance when exposed to communicable diseases that pose a particular risk to older people. Often, those low paid, precarious workers simply could not afford to comply with self-isolation mandates (Tapper 2021). Health, increasingly, has become a topic that presents a narrative frame in which older voters have good reason to adopt certain redistributive measures for good, material reasons.

These contrasting material concerns mean that several different justifications are salient to the same multipurpose policy instrument. While Ed Miliband (2019) has emphasised the value of evidence-based policy, there is a bulk of evidence to suggest that narrative, rather than evidence, is critical in persuading the electorate of the value of a policy. UBI illustrates this neatly. All available evidence suggests that it would be hugely impactful on the economy, education, crime and health and that there is no reduction in labour market activity among recipients (Kangas et al. 2019; Gilbert et al. 2018; Salehi-Isfahani and Mostafavi-Dehzoeei 2018).

However, there is also a body of evidence to suggest that people are not always persuaded by evidence. Indeed, the finding of no negative impact on labour market participation during a recent Finnish trial was met with a dramatic shifting of goalposts by opponents in which the success of UBI was determined by whether it increased labour market participation. This stemmed from a failure by proponents of the trial to shape objectives effectively and to build narrative around what was a significant finding. Indeed, presenting evidence that long-term unemployed people report higher levels of wellbeing may actually increase opposition among those in work. If evidence matters, it matters where it serves to enhance the persuasiveness of narrative justification that ties a policy to people's material interests. That evidence can be derived from unreliable sources and be wholly misleading. This is illustrated by perspectives on tax and welfare in the US, where 'myths' about opportunity and the threat of the poor to those in work contribute to the poorest citizens disproportionately opposing increases in tax for the richest on the basis that they would not wish to be taxed when they realise the American dream (Shapiro 2002).

Progressive politicians and policy makers have often failed to develop narratives to highlight people's genuine material interests, but there is evidence of success in the promotion of healthcare treatments (Fadlallah et al. 2019) and, crucially, egalitarian socioeconomic policies (Piff et al. 2020). Where narratives are successful, they 'help each other see from different perspectives' (Stone 2011, x), invoking people's interests in ways

that align with the content of policies. Narrative practice focuses on establishing five elements (Goodman 2013):

1. start with a common assumption;
2. introduce a point of conflict;
3. cast your story with clearly identifiable heroes and villains;
4. include at least one memorable fact;
5. point the way to a happy ending.

Those on the left have often focused simply on highlighting points of conflict (Katz 2010, 489) without taking seriously the need to focus on identifiable figures or interests with whom individual voters can identify, salient facts that endorse the position and clear pathways to resolution. The consequence is that policy may be seen as being grounded in concern for the interests of others, which contributes to perception of progressive politics as being anti-aspirational (see Fielding 2015). For example, Jeremy Corbyn's pledge to eliminate homelessness (Labour.org 2019) would have addressed a compelling need that affects significant numbers of people directly or indirectly, but could easily be regarded as being of relevance only as a moral act toward 'others' by the overwhelming majority of an electorate already concerned with pressures on their own material interests. The present framing of UBI as a benefit for those out of work attracts similar perceptions. This is despite the fact that, under most funding formulations, UBI would constitute a relative gain in real terms for most recipients (see Johnson, Johnson & Webber 2020; Lanlsey & Reed 2018) and benefit specifically those who do not currently receive benefits.

Framing needs to shift from being concerned with poverty and the unemployed to support for the aspirations of those in work. Focusing the policy on improving the interests of those in work represents a significant shift in discourse, since UBI is most commonly associated with support for those out of work. While the policy may benefit those out of work by removing conditionality, our work (Johnson, Johnson, Nettle & Pickett 2021) suggests that the key benefits are to those in work, reducing stress-related ill-health and improving the wellbeing of workers (Johnson, Degerman & Geyer 2019), and providing opportunities to upskill and advance business (D'Mello 2019). Indeed, it may be possible to frame UBI in terms of relative gains or a disproportionate benefit for those in work by contrasting a needs-based system that rewards others at their expense with an unconditional system that provides additional support to them while they strive.

Recommendation: Policy makers need to use narratives that highlight 'in-group' benefits in ways that emphasise material impact for different groups of people.

Recommendation: Policy makers must stop referring to UBI as a policy for unemployed people. UBI is a policy that offers the single biggest improvement in workers' interests since the National Minimum Wage.

Survey Findings

Narratives specifically for the 'red wall'

In our second series of surveys, we began by creating narratives for voters based simply on the key 'red wall' distinction in need based on age and wealth: one health based and designed to appeal to older voters; one economic security-based designed to appeal to younger voters.

Public health

During the COVID-19 pandemic, even usually healthy Britons have faced serious illness and even death from the virus. Lockdowns have been used to try to reduce the number of people having to go out to work, potentially spreading the virus. But many of us have had to continue working in potentially hazardous conditions through no fault of our own. Indeed, some of us have not been able to afford to self-isolate when we have caught the virus. This has resulted in poorer health for many Britons and led to further lockdowns. Universal Basic Income would ensure that you and your friends and family have something to fall back on when you are unwell and is designed to support your health. There is evidence that it may help to reduce the number of long-term health conditions that many of us now suffer from. This could reduce the burden on the NHS by reducing stress-related conditions, such as heart disease and depression, and lifestyle diseases, such as diabetes, strokes and lung cancer.

Economic Security

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many Britons have suffered financially due to the impact of the virus. The furlough scheme has been used to try to reduce the number of us losing our jobs. But many Britons have been made unemployed through no fault of our own and instead had to claim unemployment benefits or find lower-paid work. Some of us have not been able to afford to self-isolate when we have caught the virus. This has led to further lockdowns, causing further financial damage to many of us. Universal Basic Income would ensure that you and your friends and family have something to fall back on when you are unable to work and is designed to give you long-term financial security. There is no evidence that people are more likely to stop working when given a Universal Basic Income. There is evidence that people are more likely to be able to provide care to their friends and family or become self-employed and start their own businesses. This is particularly important for areas that have lost traditional industries over the past four decades and require redevelopment.

We then engaged with those who expressed fundamental opposition to the policy in a form of adversarial collaboration. This is an emerging method in the natural and behavioural sciences and is intended to improve research by working with those who oppose a method or finding. It has rarely been used to examine public opinion on policies, often because researchers and pollsters take people's preferences as fixed and try to understand how to appeal to those fixed positions. This fails to recognise both that people's positions are often fluid, even when they express a fundamental position on something, and that the means of persuasion lie in tailoring narratives to people's sense of self.

We then asked 20 participants who had reported strong opposition to UBI to spend 15 minutes producing narratives that they felt could persuade people like them to support UBI. Given that the narratives produced often contained a large number of typos, spelling, grammar and punctuation errors and disparate content, we created six 'synthesised' narratives of similar length based on the broad themes derived from literature review of behavioural science with as little editing to original wording as possible. For ease of reporting, we allocated conceptual grouping terms to each narrative, but did not include these terms when we subsequently presented them to voters.

One: Economic crisis

This country is in a terrible mess at the moment. Health aside, the COVID-19 situation has caused untold misery, stress, and economic uncertainty to millions of people. The economy is on its knees as businesses fold and jobs are lost hand over fist across the private sector. Families are struggling, rent and mortgage payments are being missed. People do not have as much disposable income to spend in local businesses, meaning entire communities are dying. By giving us all regular, predictable, secure income, Universal Basic Income would give the economy a vital boost, kick-starting growth and bringing back confidence to businesses and consumers alike. It would also help create a smaller, simpler state as civil servants are moved from the large Department of Work and Pensions to deal with other more pressing issues, such as health. A smaller state could lead to reduction in the overall rate of taxation, helping boost stock markets and new industries. UBI is the simple answer to bring our society back from the brink of total disaster.

Two: Evidence

By paying all of us regularly, regardless of whether we work or not, Universal Basic Income is a social contract for all of society. As such, we

need evidence that there are obvious benefits for society as a whole. Evidence currently shows that it does not reduce willingness to work and increases health and entrepreneurship throughout society. The best evidence in support of introducing Universal Basic Income can be seen in the Covid-19 Furlough payments and the temporary rise in Universal Credit. Although there was some inflation, there was no hyperinflation and the Government itself declared that there was no effect on willingness to work. Before Universal Basic Income is gradually introduced, the criteria for evaluating the policy will be laid down and its impacts will be monitored by the Office for National Statistics. The policy will be tailored according to those established impacts and there will be continuous assessments of affordability to ensure there is a net benefit over the economic cycle.

Three: Relative Gains

Universal Basic Income (UBI) gives you the financial security that the wealthy and those on long-term benefits take for granted. With a regular, unconditional payment, you would be able to educate yourself and develop your business ideas, making you and your family better off in the process. This is just levelling the playing field for talented, hard-working people who strive to get ahead, but can't take the risk of taking time out. As someone who gets up and goes to work every day, you currently get nothing back from the government. Unlike both Universal Credit and the Furlough scheme, UBI does not discriminate against you. You will not be paying taxes with no reward. This is peace of mind for working people. If you are self-employed, this is a buffer for times when you are ill or on holiday. If you are employed, why not see this money as a nice bonus? However you use it, take it, enjoy it and be grateful that, for once, we're getting money back for a change!

Four: Flourishing

The current welfare system disincentives work for several reasons. It has an extremely high marginal 'tax' rate, which means that the benefit is withdrawn too quickly as income increases. It then takes too long to be re-instated when income reduces. In order to receive disability-related benefits, you have to demonstrate that you are completely inactive. Making yourself healthier by being active, socialising and participating in society increases the chances of losing benefits. Having disincentives to work traps people in poverty, not just economically, but psychologically too. Being unable to provide for yourself is debilitating. It is bad for self-respect and mental health and provides a bad example for children.

Counter-intuitively, evidence suggests that, where Universal Basic Income is introduced, these disincentives to work are removed. This is because, by paying all of us regularly, there are no longer disincentives stopping you from working and you are no longer stigmatised for receiving benefits. This means that you have the ability to be active, better yourself and provide the best role model for our children.

Five: Efficiency

The UK welfare system is long overdue for reform. Universal Credit was supposed to replace previous complicated schemes, but has been extremely inefficient. Claiming it requires you to fill in various complicated forms. It takes weeks to receive the first payment and is withdrawn too quickly when people start to earn small amounts of money. This means they stop your benefits when you need them again quite quickly. That puts your entire life on hold, leaving you to rely on Wonga for cashflow. Universal Basic Income (UBI) guarantees everyone weekly income when you don't earn without fear of it being cancelled when you do. Paying everyone regardless of work status, age and amount of savings may at first seem extravagant and wasteful. However, the cost of administering means tested schemes far exceeds any payments to those who would be ineligible at present. In 2020/21, there was an estimated loss to the nation of £7.6 billion from fraud or error. UBI eradicates this and leads to a slimmer, simpler state for us all to navigate.

Six: Security

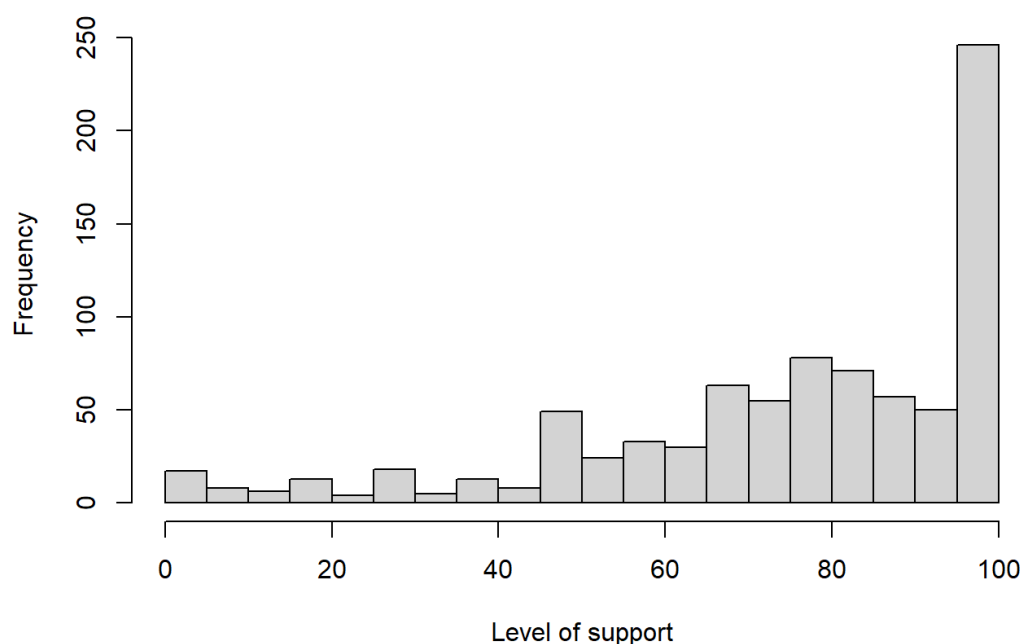
Universal Basic Income (UBI) is a living pension for all adult citizens, providing state support for your basic needs. It would be a safety net during short periods of unemployment, giving you some time to support yourself and your family while looking for employment. This helps to stop you slipping into poverty and ensures that you do not face homelessness. As many infamous cases have shown, this is vital for us, as the current system does not keep us secure. There was the case of the diabetic British War Veteran whose Universal Credit payment lapsed, leaving him with no money to top up his electricity meter. This meant that he could not keep his medicine refrigerated, meaning that he went into a diabetic coma and died. In our country, you should not have the stress of worrying about meeting your basic needs. You should not have to worry that taking on short-term work will leave you unable to support yourself. UBI secures you from the many unpredictable events in modern society.

These narratives were presented to voters from the ‘red wall’. As we show below, they were all impactful.

Universal Basic Income is overwhelmingly popular

Across our studies, we found consistently high levels of support. Nationwide samples suggested an average of 80/100 approval, with hypothetical 64/100 approval during non-pandemic conditions. While those who identified as left wing were more likely to support UBI strongly, those who identified as right-wing were still supportive and were more likely to increase support for UBI in response to the pandemic. Within ‘red wall’ constituencies, levels of support were consistently high, ranging between 70-76/100 across two surveys of initial perspectives. There was consistently a large, 64-71%, proportion of participants who expressed strong support above 70/100 approval and a much smaller, 8-11% proportion who expressed strong opposition below 30/100 approval. The levels of support are historically significant, especially in comparison to other welfare or health policies (e.g., YouGov 2022; Health Foundation 2022, 56). This finding, which has been repeated in several similar studies, emphasises the extent to which voters are aware of the need for upstream interventions to mitigate risk.

Figure 2. Frequency of numerical levels of support for UBI amongst ‘red wall’ respondents.



Our initial surveys of UK and US participants indicated that the level of support stemmed from two key facets of UBI's formulation: its efficiency and its ability to mitigate stress. These are two features that become increasingly salient during periods of crisis, such as during the pandemic. In general, people's exposure to risk of illness, destitution and death increased overall, albeit unequally, raising anxiety and stress in the process. This increased people's recognition of the need for simplicity of administration and delivery of swift social security, such as that provided by UBI. With that recognition, the importance of directing support to the needy and preventing fraud reduces. Indeed, UBI was rated as substantially better than targeted welfare for being hard to cheat.

Vitaly, the pandemic was thought to have increased stress and anxiety exactly for those people who were not previously being helped by the welfare system. That is, the effect of the pandemic is not so much to have made things even worse for those who were already in precariousness and need, but to bring people not previously at risk of that state firmly into it. It makes sense that respondents would have shifted their preference towards inclusion of the whole population into a universal social safety net, rather than making the selective safety net more generous for those already eligible for it. If the pandemic means that anyone, at any time, and for an identifiable reason which is obviously beyond their personal control, may fall into sudden need, then a universal system seems a more attractive way of ensuring assistance to the deserving, even if a collateral effect is that everyone else receives it too. This means the pandemic may have accelerated, in people's minds, the process that many pro-UBI commentators have previously attributed to automation: the bringing of a greater and greater proportion of the population into precariousness, until the point where universality becomes the only reasonable option.

This is a significant finding: given the multiple crises with which voters are faced, UBI is particularly popular by virtue of its universality and efficiency – two features that have continually been reduced by Coalition and Conservative Governments.

Young people see the economic need, older voters see the health need

The raw levels of support in the 'red wall' exceed even optimistic views of UBI's public appraisal and rebut the insurmountable conservative values hypothesis. The widespread and strong support for UBI in these constituencies reflect the particular conditions in which people within the 'red wall' find themselves. As 'left-behind' communities, in a country with

radical levels of regional and geographic inequality, their material circumstances (income, wealth, etc.) and outcomes (health, education, etc.) are significantly below the national average. This means that the risk of serious illness and destitution are higher than the national average. People appear to recognise this and appraise the policy in ways that belie the claim of their communities' being socially conservative and intuitively opposed to 'free money'.

Our initial health and economic security narratives elicited high levels of support from voters. As expected, younger people and those who did not own their own home were more likely to support UBI; the health narrative received higher levels of support from older voters; the economic security narrative higher levels of support from younger voters.

Figure 5: Support for UBI by age and narrative framing amongst 'red wall' respondents

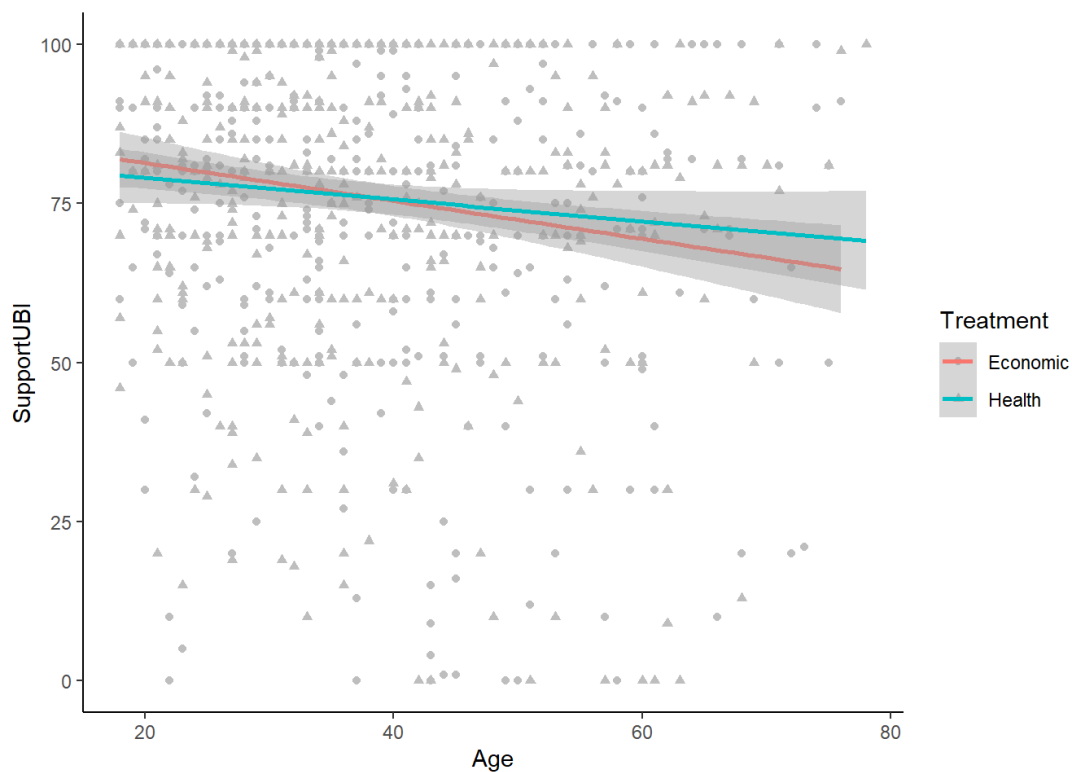
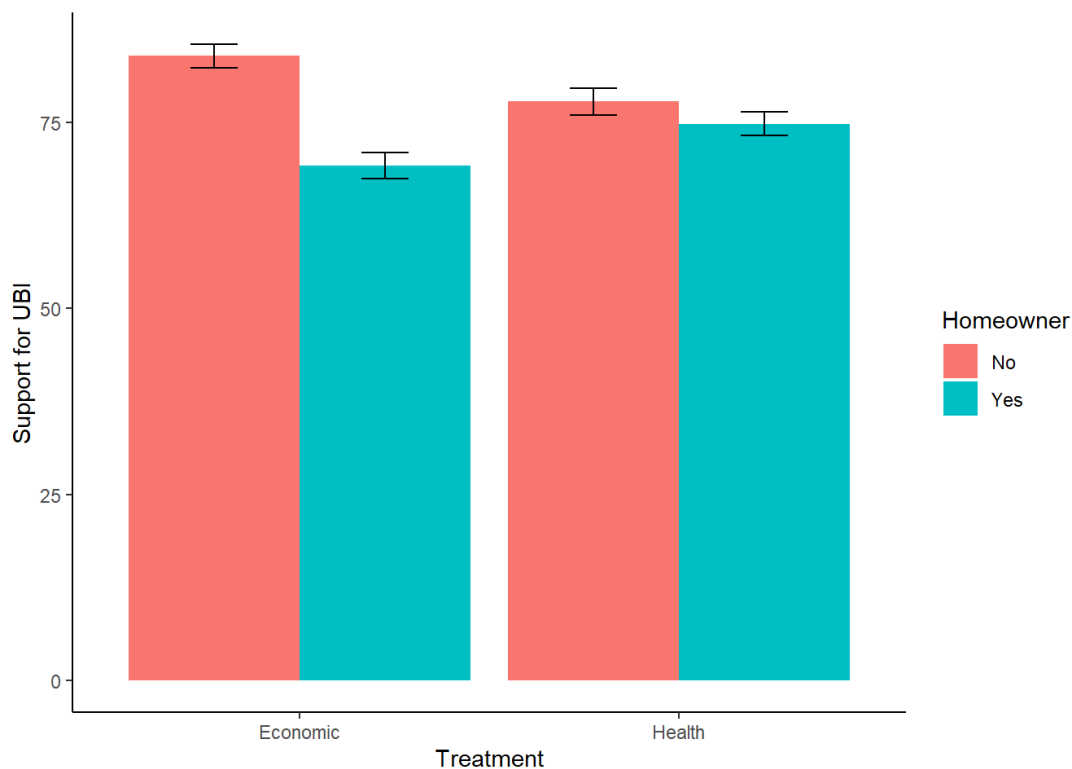


Figure 6: Support for UBI by home ownership and narrative framing treatment among 'red wall' respondents



The reason for the differences in levels of support is clear: younger and older people have different material concerns that transcend whatever other ideals they may hold. Likewise, homeownership, which is correlated with age, constitutes a significant constituent part of the material circumstances affecting people's preferences. Owning a home provides a degree of security in the satisfaction of needs that is not found in renting or sharing accommodation with family or friends. As such, it makes sense for homeowners to be less in favour of UBI as an economic intervention, since their material security is greater. On the other hand, they are still amenable to health-based narratives than economic ones, since these provide added value beyond the material security granted by their existing wealth. Conversely, renters, by virtue of their lower levels of security, are more likely to value economic narratives as a precondition of other goods, including health.

These are two complementary narratives of the same multipurpose policy that appeal to two cohorts simultaneously. When asked whether the material presented was likely to decrease or increase their support for UBI, voters overwhelmingly reported a likely increase in support (62%) or no change (29%). Given the large number of respondents reporting 100% support, this latter finding may indicate, not indifference to the narratives,

but rather that levels of support cannot be enhanced. Only a small proportion indicated that the narratives reduced support (6%). Those who had not heard of the policy previously reported that the arguments presented were more likely to change their mind (72%), which exceeded the levels of those who had heard of it (61%).

These findings suggest that health and economic security are two related concerns that are often poorly presented to voters. Different narratives set out the underlying relationship in ways that transform voters' views.

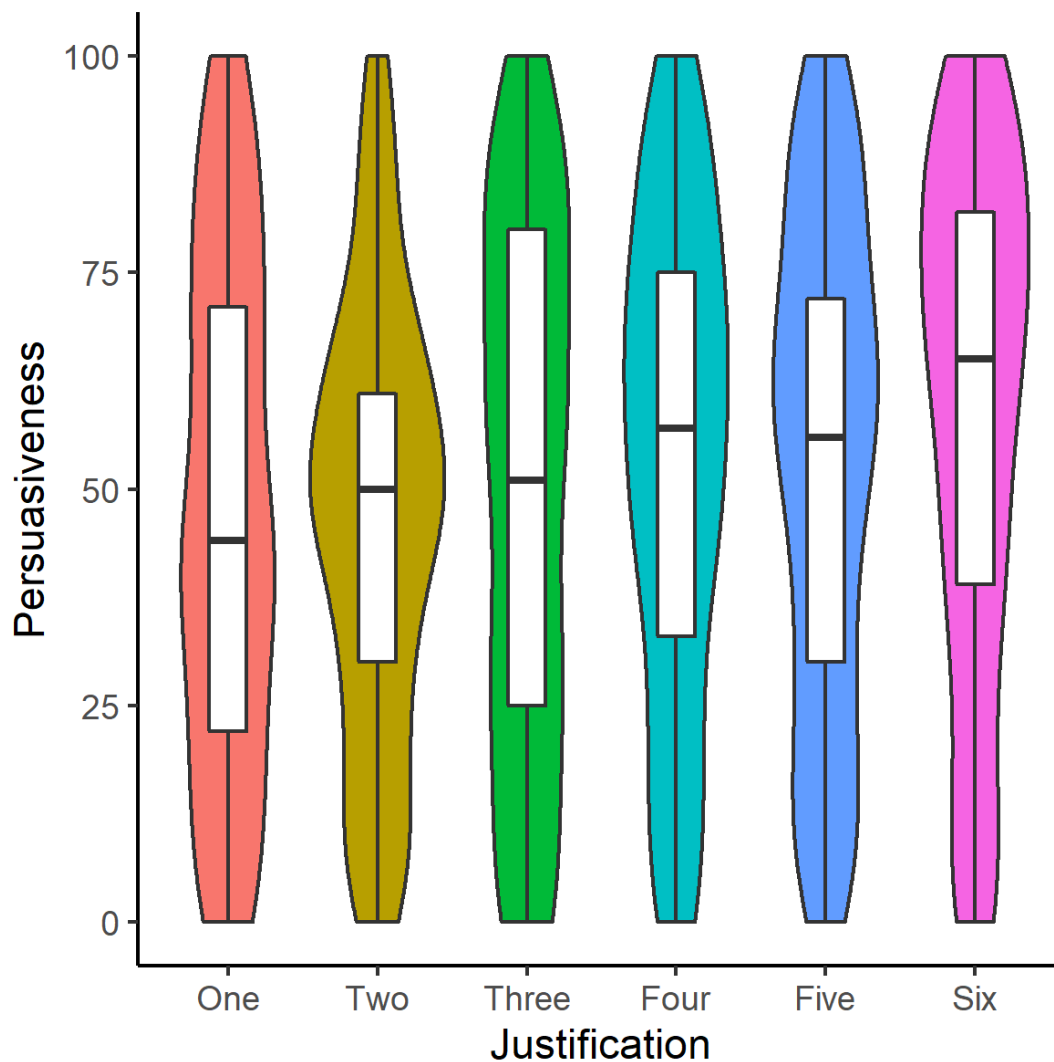
Recommendation: In presenting a transformative policy package, progressive parties should use different narratives to appeal to different groups: health is particularly salient for older groups; security is particularly salient for younger groups.

The small number of people who initially dislike UBI can be persuaded

We found no evidence to support the 'insurmountable conservative values' hypothesis. In each of our three survey waves, the highest proportion of respondents evaluating UBI at below 30 in a 0-100 scale was a screening survey which identified 11%. We asked 20 of those opponents of UBI to provide arguments in favour of the policy and the resulting six narratives were able individually and collectively to transform the opinions of other opponents. Just being presented with these narratives dramatically increased their level of support for UBI, rising from an average of 16/100 up to 47/100. Participants reported that their views on UBI had been substantially affected by the arguments they had read. Moreover, the more they felt their views had been affected, the greater their increase in support.

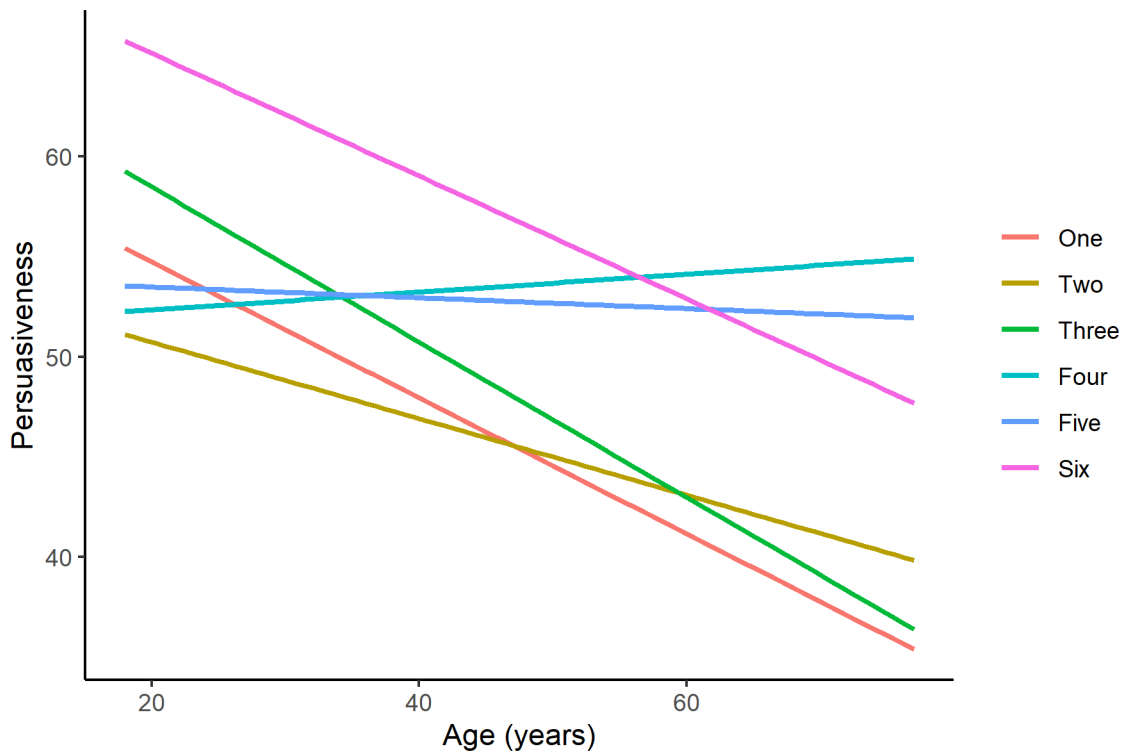
The violin plots in Figure 7, below, show the distribution of ratings of persuasiveness for each narrative, and the embedded box the median and interquartile range. The justifications are listed on pages 35-37. One: economic crisis; two: evidence; three: relative gains; four: flourishing; five: efficiency, and six: security.

Figure 7: Persuasiveness ratings by justification



Importantly, again we found that age affects people’s receptiveness to narratives. As Figure 8 shows, for narratives based on economic crisis, evidence, relative gains and security, persuasiveness declines with age. However, the persuasiveness of flourishing and efficiency has a flatter relationship with age, meaning that these justifications are more persuasive than the others at the older but not the younger age ranges. This reflects the differential exposure to risk even among those who strongly oppose UBI and are more likely to identify as right-wing. The lines in Figure 8 represent linear fits. The justifications are one: economic crisis; two: evidence; three: relative gains; four: flourishing; five: efficiency, and six: security.

Figure 8. The relationships between age and persuasiveness for each justification



Again, narratives grounded in the notion of security appear to have the effect of transforming people’s understandings of welfare as an out-group issue for the unemployed into an in-group issue for those in work. This may also explain the impact of the flourishing narrative, with its concern for the role of activity in people’s wellbeing.

Adversarial collaboration highlighted the value of tying material interests to people’s sense of their own capacities and self. The more successful narratives each presented a circumstance within which respondents could identify a set of challenges that they believed would affect them directly. Importantly, as in the security narrative, which outlined a ‘living pension’, need was invoked in a way that respondents believed legitimate in relation to their own behaviour. Opponents often referred to themselves in such terms as ‘hard working’, ‘aspirational’ and ‘independent’. Given that sense of self, and given that they are disproportionately home-owning, it is possible that they conceive legitimate need as emerging from those circumstances that would substantively subtract their agency and leave them destitute – illness or injury or pernicious decisions by government. Assessing need through reference to the self is important because it necessarily depends, not on abstract value, but upon the material conditions in which a person finds themselves and is necessarily prone to change.

This also highlights the ways in which values are both multiply realisable (see Johnson 2013), shaped by circumstance and deployed as justificatory devices in ways that often cannot be reduced beyond a person's pursuit of self-interest. As a concept, 'fairness' is commonly invoked within the context of welfare. However, there is no sense in which that value is attached objectively to any particular configuration of welfare, including the rejection of welfare itself, independently of the perceived particular interests of individuals. That provides wide scope for policy makers to shape narratives that highlight people's fundamental interests, identify means of a policy's promoting those interests and invoking fairness as a narrative device.

The six narratives themselves further demonstrate the need for different narratives for different groups. The proximity of older people to receipt of pensions and their increased rate of home ownership may explain the declining levels of persuasiveness among four of the six narratives, particularly in terms of UBI as a means of dealing with an economic crisis and increasing security. They are more insulated economically anyway. It is important, then, to note that flourishing and efficiency justifications were more persuasive for older people. The former emphasises impact on behaviour that may affect them and their children and grandchildren, while the latter alludes to tax burdens that may affect them given the likelihood of their higher levels of earnings and wealth.

Recommendation: 'Adversarial co-production' with opponents of policies should be used to guide presentation of evidence-based policy.

Recommendation: Policies have to be tied to people's sense of self; values ought only to be used as narrative devices.

Recommendation: Initial positions on policies should be understood as starting points for persuasion, not end points for evaluation of policy.

Voters want big bangs

In our recent Compass Report, *Tackling Poverty: The Power of a Universal Basic Income* (Reed et al. 2022), we developed three different UBI schemes with radically different levels of cash transfer. They stretch from an updated version of an entry-level starter scheme (Lansley & Reed 2019) up to a full Minimum Income Standard payment.

Each would offer improved health gains, in a way that would lower existing health inequalities, especially in the more generous schemes. Each of the schemes is intended to meet the following conditions. That it: be paid to all eligible citizens, without condition; raise the incomes of lower income groups; reduce the percentage gap between the top and bottom through fiscal reform; be high enough to make a material difference to people's lives; raise the level of universality in the social security system, thus reducing reliance on means-testing; be affordable, although this depends on how this is defined; minimise losses for low-income households; minimise the amount of disruption involved in moving to a new system of income support; and enjoy broad public support.

We presented the following schemes to survey participants. They differ slightly from the final modelled schemes in our recent report, but not in ways that should alter evaluation of the cash transfers for adults.

Scheme 1: £60 per week plus retention of existing welfare system

Part 1: An unconditional, guaranteed Universal Basic Income (UBI) of £60 per adult (18+) per week

Part 2: A conditional system that assesses people's needs (disability, unemployment, etc.) and means (savings, wealth, etc.) to supplement UBI payments through Universal Credit and disability related benefits (Personal Independence Payment (PIP), Disability Living Allowance (DLA), etc.) locally assessed costs (rent, Council Tax, childcare, school dinners, etc.) The first £25 of UBI is disregarded for the assessment of Universal Credit/tax credits/means-tested benefits, so that each household – including those whose only income is from Universal Credit or benefits/tax credits – gets an income boost from the UBI programme.

Scheme 2: £145 per week plus retention of existing welfare system

Part 1: An unconditional, guaranteed Universal Basic Income (UBI) of £145 per adult (18+) per week

Part 2: A conditional system that assesses people's needs (disability, unemployment, etc.) and means (savings, wealth, etc.) to supplement UBI payments through Universal Credit and disability related benefits (Personal Independence Payment (PIP), Disability Living Allowance (DLA)) locally assessed costs (rent, Council Tax, childcare, school dinners, etc.). The first £25 of UBI is disregarded for the assessment of Universal Credit/tax credits/means-tested benefits, so that each household – including those whose only income is from Universal Credit or benefits/tax credits – gets an income boost from the UBI programme.

Scheme 3: £229.81 per week with most of existing welfare system eliminated

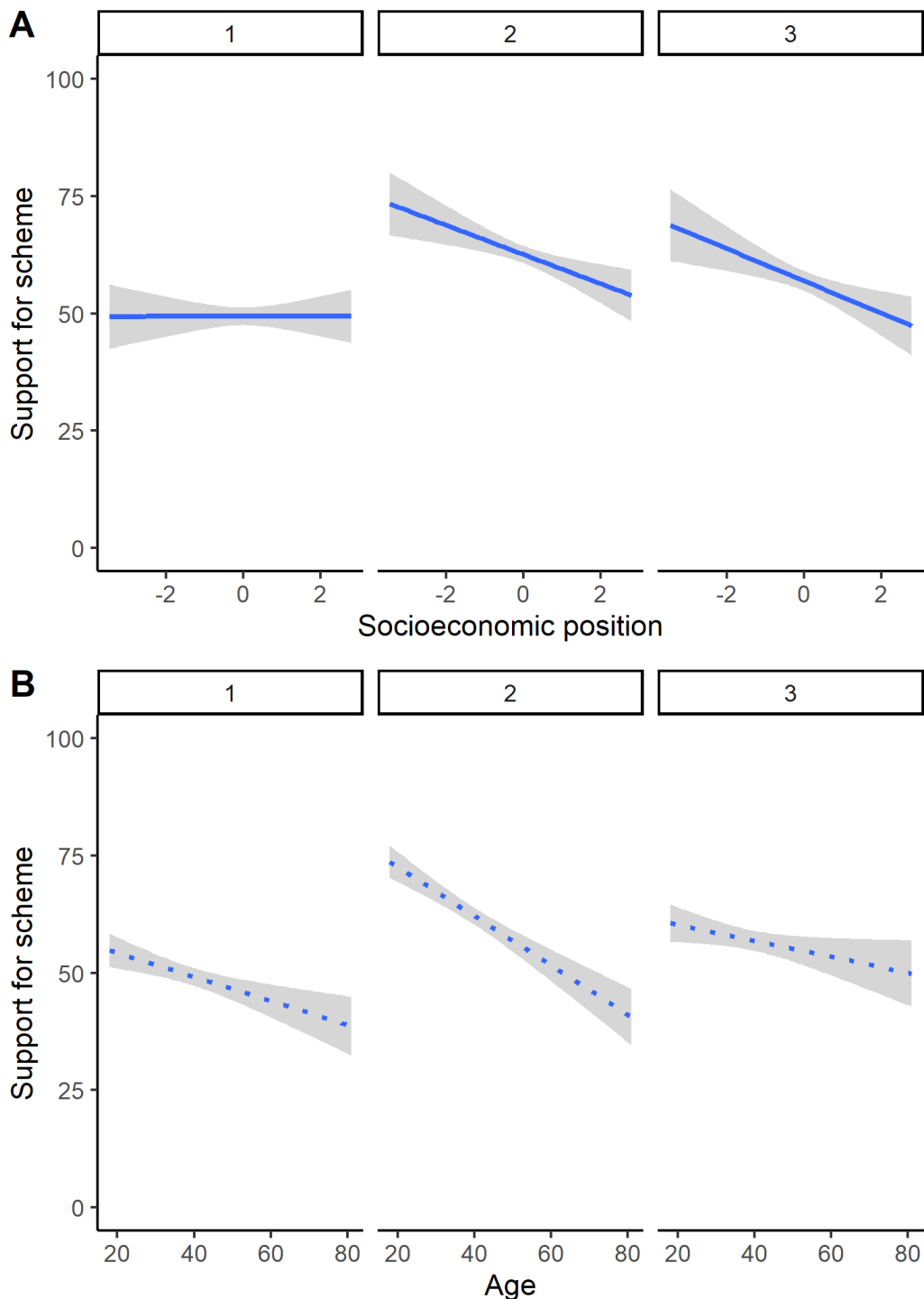
Part 1: An unconditional, guaranteed Universal Basic Income (UBI) of £229.81 per adult (18+) per week to meet Minimum Income Standard (MIS) levels for 2021: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/minimum-income-standard-uk-2021>

Part 2: A conditional system that supports disability-related needs (Personal Independence Payment (PIP), Disability Living Allowance (DLA),) and locality-specific costs (housing, council tax, childcare, school dinners, etc.). All other benefits, including Carers Allowance, to be removed. Because of the commitment to MIS, Council Tax Costs are included, but with reformed means of funding local authority costs that do not disproportionately benefit the better off. Because of extreme geographical variation, housing, childcare and school meal costs will be excluded, but with reformed means of meeting those costs. For reasons of complexity and political expedience, needs-based disability benefits remain, but with reformed assessment.

The mean support for each of the specific schemes was lower than for UBI in general, with the intermediate Scheme 2 having the highest levels of support, and the least generous scheme, Scheme 1, having the lowest: Scheme 1: 47.15/100; Scheme 2: 58.00/100; Scheme 3: 55.27/100. Support was lowest for Scheme 1, which retained the complexity of the present welfare system but offered partial supplements through a small universal payment. Support was higher for the full Minimum Income Standard Scheme, 3, which offered full protection for individuals and eliminated most means-tested benefits. The most popular scheme was the intermediate scheme, Scheme 2. This is a common feature of policy appraisals in which the middle scheme is valued by virtue of its being seen as a compromise or realistic simply as a consequence of its being the mid-point.

Figure 9, below, shows levels of support by socioeconomic position in chart A, with support for Scheme 1 consistent across the socioeconomic position spectrum, while schemes 2 and 3 had markedly higher support amongst respondents of lower socioeconomic position. Chart B shows support by age, and all schemes were more highly supported by younger respondents, but this was particularly true for the intermediate Scheme 2.

Figure 9: Levels of support by treatment, SES, sense of control and faith in government



In our results, Scheme 1 was unique insofar as support was consistent across age groups. Older participants were fairly consistent in their rating of the schemes. This may be because they are already in receipt or close to receipt of age-conditional basic income of comparable size to the payments. Scheme 2 and Scheme 3 differ insofar as support is much higher among younger participants. This may be because the schemes benefit a much broader body of the population much more clearly, granting more generous support to those dependent on work for satisfaction of their needs.

We have highlighted the importance of relative gains previously. There is more evidence of that impact here. Scheme 1 may be regarded solely as supporting the least well off – externalised ‘others’ with whom there is little expectation of reciprocity. This is a particular deficit in the scheme, since the large number of conditions attached to payment render it much less appealing to those in work, who may view the payment as inadequate.

Vitality, this externalisation leaves the scheme open to precisely the same objections as Universal Credit and other needs- and means-based payments: as something for ‘others’ to be progressively diminished as those in work experience greater financial strain. Fiscal responsibility may not be the salient consideration for voters in this regard. In contrast, schemes 2 and 3 may be perceived as benefiting participants specifically as an in-group. Again, this supports the notion that progressive politicians have good reason for adopting schemes that are grand in their formulation specifically because they benefit those more likely to vote. Scheme 2 may be more popular than 3 because it is the intermediate option and was perceived as a reasonable compromise.

Recommendation: We should avoid advocating very low-cost starter schemes, as these schemes do not reduce complexity, increase efficiency or avoid UBI being seen as something solely for unemployed ‘others’.

Recommendation: Politicians need to go big on UBI – its value lies in being sufficient to protect those in work specifically.

Challenge 1: Cynicism

We found that socioeconomic position affected support for UBI via three separate pathways. First, there was a direct pathway, with a weak negative coefficient: lower socioeconomic position leading to greater support. Second, there was an indirect pathway via mental distress: lower socioeconomic position was strongly associated with more mental distress, and more mental distress weakly associated with greater support for UBI. Finally, there was an indirect pathway via cynicism about government, with lower socioeconomic position associated with greater cynicism about government, which in turn weakly reduced support for UBI. This highlights the broader challenge for progressive politicians in general: people at the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum recognise the need for redistributive measures, but have lost faith in the ability of politicians to deliver those goods.

This final dynamic is often cited as a key reason for progressive politicians abandoning ‘unrealistic’ redistributive policies. The problem is that, in the ‘red wall’, decades of decline mean that perception of Labour’s track record in Government is not that held by Labour politicians themselves. There is little sense that New Labour radically improved people’s circumstances. On the contrary, there is a sense that 13 years of Government failed to make good on the ‘grand schemes’ that voters had believed would be introduced by Labour following 18 years of Conservative Government. The lack of transformative change means that a return to New Labour-style technocracy is actually self-defeating: it simply confirms that progressive politicians offer no prospects for material enhancement.

In our polling work, we found that those who were materially worse off were less happy, and this increased their support for UBI. This is line with our general claim that people want policies that serve their material interests and enhance their wellbeing. However, we also found that being materially worse off increased cynicism about government, and this in turn reduced support for UBI. This pathway partially suppressed support amongst those who need the policy most.

Dealing with cynicism requires good governance. There are several examples of progressive leadership across the UK that reduce cynicism and reverse the trends we see in the ‘red wall’. In Wales, the Labour Administration has adopted a transformative programme of government that has often outperformed the UK Government in dealing with the economy and health, even and especially under great strains imposed by the pandemic and austerity measures. Likewise, in Scotland, the SNP has benefited not simply from being a national opposition to Conservative Government, but also from its being committed to more fundamental

transformations of society through policy than the Labour Party or Liberal Democrats. The loss of Scotland in 2015 was of just as great significance as the loss of the 'red wall' in 2019. It stemmed from precisely the same historical perception of New Labour, poor judgement on responding to constitutional referenda and a lack of commitment to progressive change to address the structural inequalities that afflict Scotland as they do large parts of the North and Midlands of England. Finally, in Local Government, Labour has had consistent success in Manchester, Preston and Salford against the broader trends. Again, this is due to leaders in these areas introducing transformative policies that have demonstrated the material benefit of voting Labour. Elsewhere, the trend is much less optimistic.

Recommendation: Progressives should present Wales, Manchester, Preston and Salford as living examples of progressive government in practice to assuage cynicism and demonstrate competence.

Challenge 2: Good idea, but it will make no difference to me

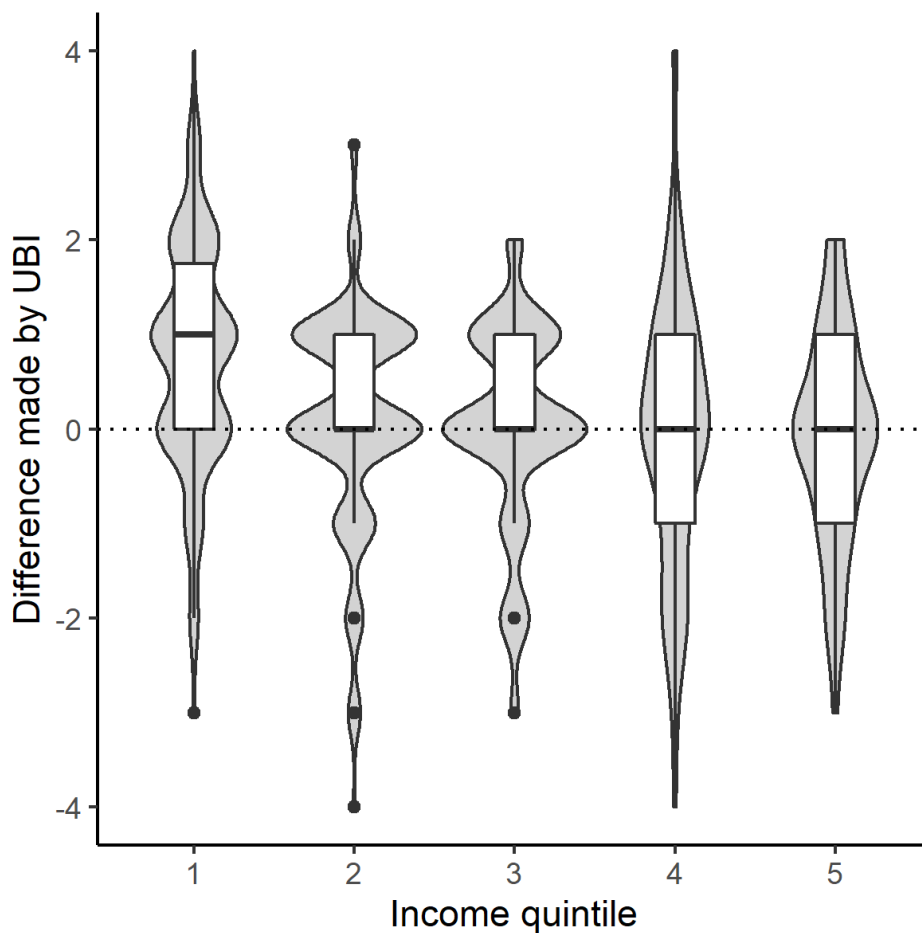
The difference between appraisal of UBI as an idea and particular schemes is reflective of many policy proposals in which a general idea is regarded as good, but specific formulations more problematic. The important point to note in this regard is that the two extremely generous schemes still attract approval ratings of between 55-58/100. These mean levels of support for UBI are historically high, especially in comparison to other welfare or health policies (e.g., YouGov 2022; Health Foundation 2022, 56). Even if individuals do not immediately regard themselves as personal beneficiaries, they broadly regard the policy as being of value. This is significant for progressive politicians seeking support in left-behind' communities.

Interestingly, although levels of support were consistently high, there was a significant discrepancy between participants' rating of the policy and their perception of impact. Such high levels of approval would seem to be dependent on voters believing that the policy would make a significant impact on the sources of their financial strain and associated psychological conditions. However, we found significant discrepancy: people appear to be aware of their financial strain, but underestimate the impact of a significant cash transfer on their affairs. This may be due to individuals

misidentifying the intended beneficiaries of UBI or wrongly regarding those recipients as an out-group.

This is supported by participants' perception of the difference made by their favoured UBI scheme on how well they are managing financially between the present and a future in which the scheme is implemented. As Figure 11 illustrates, only respondents from the lowest quintile (1) perceive mean levels of improvement in condition, although the median in quintiles 2 and 3 is also positive.

Figure 11: Difference between how I am managing and how I would manage after the introduction of UBI (positive = I would manage better), by income quintile



Our microsimulation results indicate that Scheme 1 will raise disposable income of those in the lowest quintile (1), while schemes 2 and 3 are likely to raise incomes among all but the higher earners within quintile 5. As Table 3 illustrates, those in the lowest quintile (1) are more likely to perceive a positive impact, with belief reducing progressively up the quintiles. However, even in quintile 1, 30% of respondents believe that the

scheme will have no positive impact. As such, there is evidence of voters erroneously assessing their financial status and the impact of redistributive policies.

Table 1 Number of participants within each income quintile by the extent to which they disagreed or agree that UBI ‘wouldn’t help people like me’

	Disagree strongly	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Agree strongly
Lowest quintile (1)	108	130	56	39	13
Quintile 2	41	73	32	39	15
Quintile 3	27	39	24	21	10
Quintile 4	8	28	15	20	13
Highest quintile (5)	5	14	11	12	10

This suggestion finds support in both the erroneous belief among the majority of quintiles 3-5 and significant numbers of quintiles 1 and 2 that UBI would be of little or no benefit to their personal finances and the consistency of responses to the MacArthur ladder in quintiles 2-5. If people believe, subjectively, that they are above average position within a hierarchy and that welfare schemes are designed specifically to benefit the destitute, then they may regard the scheme as of abstract relevance or of benefit to others.

This represents a challenge of narrative. This is a policy designed specifically to benefit the majority of voters directly by providing social security. Its universality provides additional value beyond needs- and means-based schemes by providing scope for its being regarded as an in-group benefit, as in the case of pensions and, formerly, Child Benefit.

Articulating these key benefits to voters may best be achieved through articulation of lived experience. Throughout our research, we found clear examples of voters tying together their circumstances with the particular impacts of UBI in ways that enable conceptualisation of the policy.

Recommendation: Progressives should use anecdotal, narrative voices to tie people’s pre-existing needs to the benefits of the policy, without relying on values-based narratives.

This Compass report shows us that the idea of a universal basic income is more popular than you might think. And for good reasons: it offers the single biggest improvement in working people's interests for a generation. It increases economic security for the young and reduces the risks of ill health for the old. It's also simpler to run and easier to navigate than the existing social security system. Complexity is our enemy when it comes to tackling poverty and inequality. All progressive parties should be having the basic income conversation.

North of Tyne Mayor, Jamie Driscoll

Paying for UBI

Responsibility does not mean what we think it does

Even before the pandemic, there was clear evidence of the general public supporting investments in measures to promote health and social security, even at the cost of increased taxation (NatCen 2018). There is, clearly, substantive support for proper investment in the NHS (Snug 2021). In our findings, there was little evidence that voters were concerned solely with fiscal and monetary restraint. For example, the most generous schemes were significantly more popular than the starter scheme. However, at a time of a cost-of-living crisis, any increase in the basic and higher rates of income tax to pay for schemes is likely to be problematic, not least because people may not understand rates of marginal taxation and their exposure to any increases.

Moreover, the literature on the desire of those with anxiety and depression to avoid upheaval and uncertainty presents opponents of progressive change with the capacity to suppress support. This is a common and effective tactic among centre-right and right-wing politicians, with claims of 'chaos with Ed Miliband' in 2015 and a 'coalition of chaos' between Labour and the SNP in 2017 both deployed to some success, even though the outcome was upheaval through the Brexit referendum in 2016 and the subsequent internal conflict within Government during the Conservative minority administration of 2017-2019. Progressive politicians therefore face the dual challenges of having to present policies capable of increasing control while resisting claims from opponents that such measures will lead to uncertainty and unpredictability.

As such, there are two tactical options for paying for UBI that require examination: first, externalising costs through elimination of tax reliefs which disproportionately benefit the wealthier, and introduction of land and wealth taxes in ways that a majority of voters view as beneficially redistributive; second, by being less concerned with achieving static fiscal neutrality through income tax rises. A decade of rising public debt and historically significant investments to pay for Covid-19 mitigation measures have been associated with few clear consequences in day-to-day lives. The public may be less concerned about abstract debt considerations and achieving static fiscal neutrality than they were in 2010. As the ‘Levelling Up’ agenda indicates, there is scope for narratives of investment and growth out of crisis. Indeed, the fact that voters recognise the current condition of the country as chaotic provides an opportunity for introduction of a scheme that reduces anxiety.

Recommendation: Politicians need to emphasise both that the present system is chaotic and that UBI is a means of reducing uncertainty.

Recommendation: Universal Basic Income needs to be presented as a central pillar of ‘Levelling Up’ to foster regional development.

Recommendation: Universal Basic Income needs to be funded by externalised streams: cutting red tape by reforming the Department for Work and Pensions; removing tax reliefs that benefit the wealthy; introducing land and wealth taxes on the wealthiest.

Conclusion

The important of UBI for progressive electoral success.

Where our previous report, *Tackling Poverty: The Power of a Universal Basic Income* (Reed et al. 2022), demonstrated that UBI is affordable, this report demonstrates that UBI is popular. Policy makers who suggest that UBI is unappealing to voters are simply wrong. Seats lost by Labour in the ‘red wall’ face some the largest challenges in Britain in terms of long-term decline in wealth, income and opportunity. We have found little evidence to support an ‘insurmountable conservative values’ hypothesis of voters having fixed, socially conservative values that lead them to reject out of hand radical policies that might improve circumstances.

The evidence presented here indicates an electorate that recognises the need for change and, when provided with narratives that invoke their material interests, is open to UBI at levels that exceed nationwide samples in our previous study (Nettle et al. 2020). Progressive politicians have often failed to make the case for UBI, and similar redistributive policies, by making reference to vague, abstract values, such as ‘fairness’ and ‘need’, without tying those values to the particular material interests of voters. This is ineffective.

Progressive politicians need to deploy different narratives for different groups when promoting the same multipurpose policy. While those interests, such as those associated with home ownership, are identifiable at a general level, adversarial collaboration may be able to identify means of invoking those needs more effectively than qualitative methods such as focus groups, in which the dynamics of discussion may mean that minority voices dominate and present misleading views of voters’ preferences.

Beyond this, the data is also important in highlighting a potential deficit in polling and research on preferences more generally: traditional Weberian categorisation of voters may be far less relevance than income and wealth in determining interests. Given the increasing precariatization of work and given inter-generational differences in wealth, voting patterns and policy preferences may have a much clearer linear relationship to wealth and age than to educational levels or traditional categories of employment. It may be that, in an increasingly insecure and materially challenged society, more accurate and effective polling work is achieved by examining income and wealth alone, with home ownership a marker of the latter.

This is crucial for progressive policy makers, since the implications of an apparent rightward shift in ‘red wall’ seats have been misconceived. Voters in these constituencies have long understood that their material circumstances have declined. Votes for Brexit and Brexit supporting parties in 2019 need to be understood as votes for material change. Brexit was conceived by voters as a big idea, a ‘grand scheme’, capable of achieving regional redistributions of wealth and of increasing pay in those occupations that remain. The level of resentment toward Labour rose in proportion to its opposition to Brexit. This was because Labour was regarded as stifling a policy that was perceived to improve material circumstances by a party that, in government, had overseen reforms that were seen to damage opportunity and pay through expansion of the EU. In part because of a values-based understanding of people’s preferences, progressive parties failed to recognise that people have legitimate complaints about their material conditions that cannot be met without radical change and have failed to present alternatives to Brexit and Conservative Government in ways that invoke people’s interests through tangible, practicable policy making.

Figure 12. Labour Party Campaign Leaflet, 1945. This resource is licensed under Creative Commons BY-NC-SA



UBI, combined with infrastructural investment programmes that address climate change, such as a Green New Deal, constitute a policy platform that not only offers transformative change, but ties the interests of voters in the 'red wall' to that change. Labour's key paths to power have always lain in presenting a programme of government distinct from the Conservatives and grounded in a modernising vision.

Whether in 1945, 1964 or 1997, Labour was able to convince voters that voting Labour would lead to a new Britain free from the harms of the past. They did that by leading, not following. This was most apparent in the 1945 General Election, which heralded the most transformative Labour Government in history and one whose policies have had the longest impact. In that election, Labour not only developed a systematic programme of Government capable of rebuilding the country, it explained those policies and their value clearly and consistently, first in terms of their material benefit and then in terms of that benefit's being bound up with achievement of social justice. Nationalising resources, creating social security frameworks and much more besides were presented as means of manifestly improving people's lives and giving them that to which they were entitled as a matter of justice. It achieved this by engaging in deep community organising, integrating various elements of the labour movement into a cohesive body of activists and beneficiaries and, as in Figure 12, unapologetically highlighting material conflicts within society. In doing this, Labour placed itself on the side of workers whose labour was being exploited in ways that have returned today in abundance.

Labour cannot win by pretending that it is on the side of the 1% and ought not even to try. After 12 years of Conservative victory grounded in highlighting material conflicts in society, it is confounding that Labour should chose to adopt a contrary strategy that has shown repeated failure. It must realise that its own account of 13 years in Government is not shared by key sections of the electorate. Indeed, as Figure 13 illustrates, even back in 2010 the Conservatives were better able to recognise those failings, all while introducing policies that exacerbated inequality. Defining yourself by avoiding your opponents' slurs is just not sustainable.

Figure 13. Conservative Party 2010 Election Campaign poster



Only Labour in Westminster has the basic capacity to articulate a vision for the country to address crises of poverty, inequality and climate change. Indeed, doing this is its only chance of being successful. UBI is the multipurpose policy instrument capable of advancing a particular facet of that vision: a Britain socially secure and free from avoidable anxiety. Just like Peter McCartney in the 1927 and Tommy Johnson in 1956, people know what they need. They need the power to say 'no' to situations that put them at great risk of harm and the power to say 'yes' to opportunities that pay off in the long term.

Given the levels of support for UBI, endorsing the policy is not just historically sensible, it is the basis for transformative government capable of returning the 'red wall' to Labour long-term. As in Wales, Manchester, Preston and Salford, once voters see benefit in voting Labour, it becomes the natural party of government; where it makes little transformative impact, centre-right and right-wing parties prosper. As such, just as Labour needs the 'red wall', the 'red wall' desperately needs a Labour Party committed to making good on its foundational commitments to workers and pushing left-behind communities forward. UBI is an integral means of achieving this.

Support from the PLP

A decade of austerity followed by a global pandemic has accelerated the decline of towns and cities across the North who have been held back by successive governments for too long. Poverty levels in the North East are now the highest in the country and continue to rise sharply as the worst cost of living crisis in living memory begins to take its toll.

All the while another pandemic looms in the background – the pandemic of mental health. As a result of long standing regional inequalities this mental health crisis has been particularly devastating in the North, with significant rises in levels of loneliness, anxiety, and suicide over the past couple of years. Not only is this catastrophic for those struggling with their mental health but comes at a huge cost to public funds as a result of the strain it puts on our mental health services.

With such profound challenges facing us ahead in the 21st century and beyond we need to be bold and offer transformative policies that meet the scale of our predicament. Universal Basic Income is a potential solution to many of these problems, offering a remedy to low and insecure pay that could provide working people with the security and structure that is the foundation needed to build happy meaningful lives upon, whilst turning the tide on the alarming rise in poverty levels and mental health problems in our region.

Not only does this report show UBI to be a convincing solution to a wide range of social and economic pressures the country faces, but it also demonstrates that when framed correctly it is a convincing political message that is a potential vote winner for any party willing to be brave enough to adopt it.

Big solutions are needed for big problems. This report shows that UBI may very well be one of those big solutions.

- Member of Parliament for Wansbeck, Ian Lavery

Recommendations

1. The electorate recognises the need for economic change and for solutions as big as the problems

Recommendation 1.1: Progressive parties should be progressive – the electorate recognises the need for economic change.

Recommendation 1.2: Politicians need to emphasise both that the present system is chaotic and that UBI is a means of reducing uncertainty.

Recommendation 1.3: Universal Basic Income needs to be presented as a central pillar of ‘Levelling Up’ to foster regional development.

Recommendation 1.4: Universal Basic Income needs to be funded by externalised streams: cutting red tape by reforming the Department for Work and Pensions; removing tax reliefs that benefit the wealthy; introducing land and wealth taxes on the wealthiest.

2. UBI provides an incentive to vote and can tackle political cynicism.

Recommendation 2.1: Progressive parties should seek to genuinely improve people’s lives as their only route to power.

Recommendation 2.2: Progressive parties should make redistribution their single biggest advantage over a Government centrally responsible for fostering inequality in the first place.

Recommendation 2.3: Progressive parties, and Labour in particular, need to make a transformative offer to the majority of voters who already recognise the need for change.

Recommendation 2.4: Progressives should present Wales, Manchester, Preston, and Salford as living examples of progressive government in practice to assuage cynicism and demonstrate competence.

3. UBI transforms social security into social cohesion.

Recommendation 3.1: We should avoid advocating very low-cost starter schemes, as these schemes do not reduce complexity, increase efficiency or avoid UBI being seen as something solely for unemployed ‘others’.

Recommendation 3.2: Politicians need to go big on UBI – its value lies in being sufficient to protect those in work specifically.

4. Support is high – the issue is framing.

Recommendation 4.1: ‘Adversarial co-production’ with opponents of policies should be used to guide presentation of evidence-based policy.

Recommendation 4.2: Initial positions on policies should be understood as starting points for persuasion, not end points for evaluation of policy.

Recommendation 4.3: Policies have to be tied to people’s sense of self; values ought only to be used as narrative devices.

5. Material circumstances matter more than values.

Recommendation 5: Progressives should use anecdotal, narrative voices to tie people’s pre-existing needs to the benefits of the policy, without relying on values-based narratives.

6. Anecdotal narratives that highlight ‘in-group’ material benefits for different groups of people are important.

Recommendation 6.1: Policy makers need to use narratives that highlight ‘in-group’ benefits in ways that emphasise material impact for different groups of people.

Recommendation 6.2: Policy makers must stop referring to UBI as a policy for unemployed people. UBI is a policy that offers the single biggest improvement in workers’ interests since the National Minimum Wage.

Recommendation 6.3: In presenting a transformative policy package, progressive parties should use different narratives to appeal to different groups: health is particularly salient for older people; security is particularly salient for younger people.

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