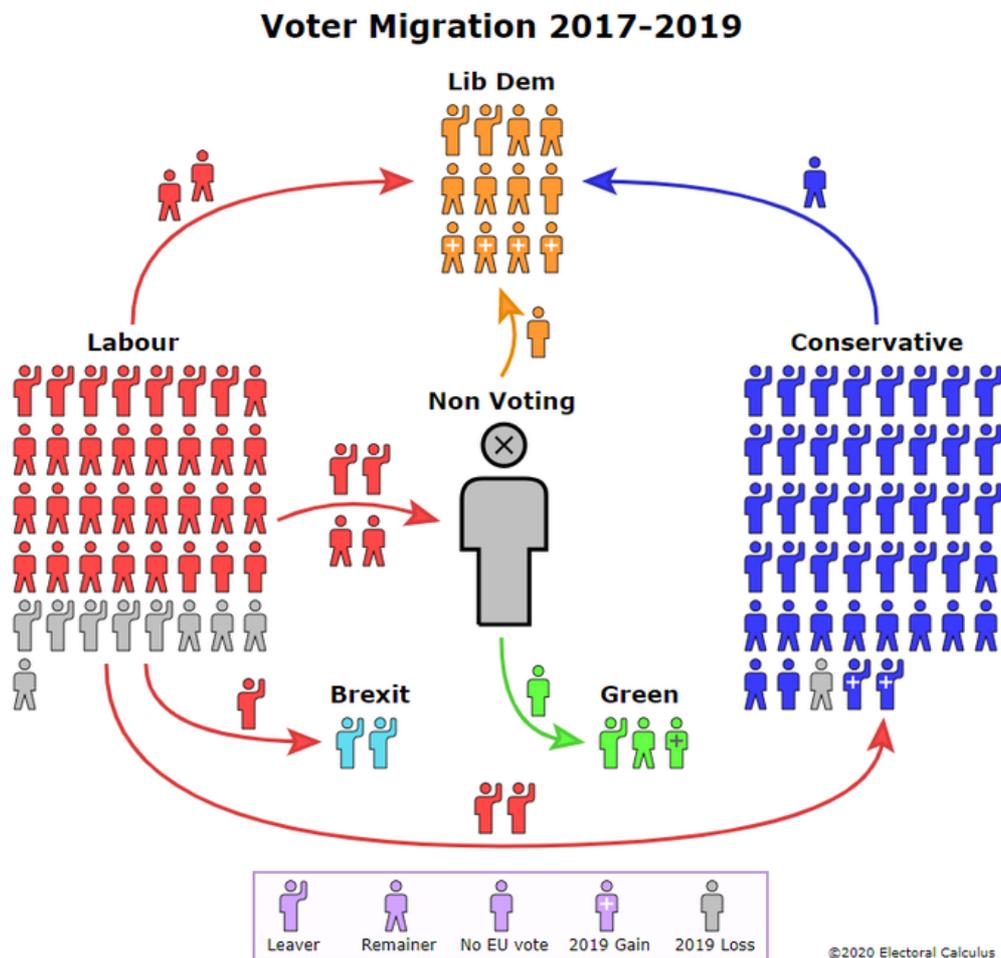


So, how did we end up with this government?

Danny Dorling

On December 14th the Telegraph newspaper reported that “In a sign of the damage Mr Johnson's Tories have done to Labour, there are 24 constituencies that have voted Tory for the first time in decades. The new Conservative majorities in three of these constituencies is more than 20 percentage points: Dudley North (31.3 per cent), Bassetlaw (27.6 per cent) and Great Grimsby (22.2 per cent). All of these seats saw double-digit swings from Labour to the Tories. The seat with the longest history of backing Labour is Rother Valley, that had elected a Labour MP since Thomas Walter Grundy won the seat with 55 per cent of the vote in 1918...”¹ So what happened?

Figure 1: Migration of voters from 2017 to 2019 by 2016 referendum choice



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Martin’s graphic is excellent. However, it has to simplify what happened by only showing net flows. In the actual election some people who had not voted at all 2017 would have voted Labour in 2019 and many more than 1,200,000 Labour voters (the four stick people shown in the diagram) would have chosen not to vote. For most people in Britain voting is not very important. The largest group of all chose not to vote. Most voters vote partly by chance with little thought until the day. People who study elections tend to forget how uninteresting people find elections. I drew Figure 2 below to illustrate the results of the 2019 election in a different way, by dividing the population of the UK into 66 groups of a million people and approximating how they each voted choose not to vote or could not vote, to the nearest million. The figure divides 66 into 11 equal sized age groups that contain 6 million people each.

What Figure 2 shows is that it was mainly older people who chose to vote Conservative in 2019, even more so than they had done in 2017. The Labour vote was the most spread out by age, and the Liberal and Labour votes combined were equal to the Conservative vote. In practise that split the opposition very effectively. For the smaller political parties, the disaggregation gives a too crude an approximation as they received so few votes that it is not possible to show the age range of their supporters. Instead their solitary squares are placed their at the age of many of their key supporters; and to make the entire diagram square up correctly.

Figure 2: Disaggregation of the population of the UK in 2019 by age and vote

The 2019 General election was the Brexit deciding election

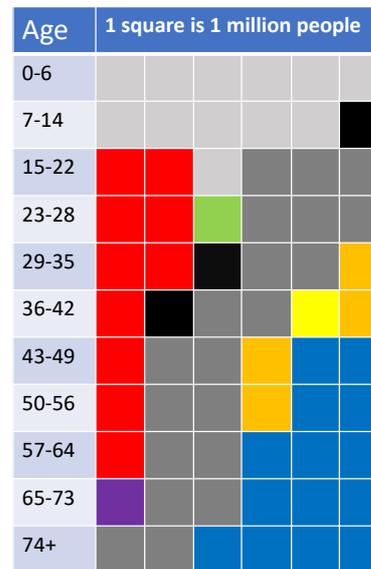
Of the 66 million people living in the UK

- 20 million did not vote or were eligible but not registered to vote ●
- 14 million voted Conservative (365 seats of 650) ●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●
- 12 million were children (and UK citizens) ●
- 10 million voted Labour (203 seats) ●●●●●●●●●●
- 4 million voted Liberal (11 seats) ●
- 3 million were not UK citizens●
- 1 million voted in Northern Ireland (18 seats) ●
- 1 million voted Scottish National Party (48 seats) ●●
- 1 million voted Green/Plaid or other (5 seats) ●

These 9 groups approximately assigned to 11 equal sized age groups

<https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/how-britain-voted-2019-election>

<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/young-cosmopolitans-and-ge2019/>



Just before the event two rival estimates were made of the likely outcome of the December 12th election. One, by ‘Survation’, relied on data collected between 16th November 2019 and 10th December from 42,138 respondents and turnout to be closer to what actually happened. The second, by ‘YouGov’, polled a much larger group of people nearer to the date of the actual election and reported (with a great flourish) that ‘*After much anticipation, YouGov’s second and final MRP poll of the 2019 general election is here. The model which correctly called 93% of seats in 2017 currently shows that a small Conservative majority is likely. This is the final public polling YouGov will conduct before Thursday’s vote.*’³ The result, which was not a small Conservative majority, surprised everyone who had been paying attention. Either voters had been lying to pollsters in ways they had not lied before, or a larger than usual number of voters changed, or actually made up their minds, on the day of the election or the day before.

On January 27 the Guardian’s John Harris wrote that ‘*a lot of people on the left ... [believe] that Labour’s lost heartlands are synonymous with angry men, nostalgia and “social conservatism”. They are not really like that at all.*’⁴ Of course, all six word summaries are approximations – but if we were to assess the degree to which Labour switchers to abstention were more often nostalgic angry (often also old and white) men who favoured social conservatism, then we would have to look at the data rather than base our assumptions on our travels.

Figure 3 shows how we tend to make assumption about places from the names of their constituencies and their history. All four of the seats which most dramatically turned away from Labour (and were listed by the *Telegraph* at that start of this short piece) contain significant pockets of very low poverty. Figure 3, uses the very recent work of Alasdair Rae and Elvis Nyanzu to reveal that each has at least three large neighbourhoods counted in the fifth of least deprived areas in all of England.⁵

Figure 3: Areas of very high and low poverty in the four iconic 2019 seats

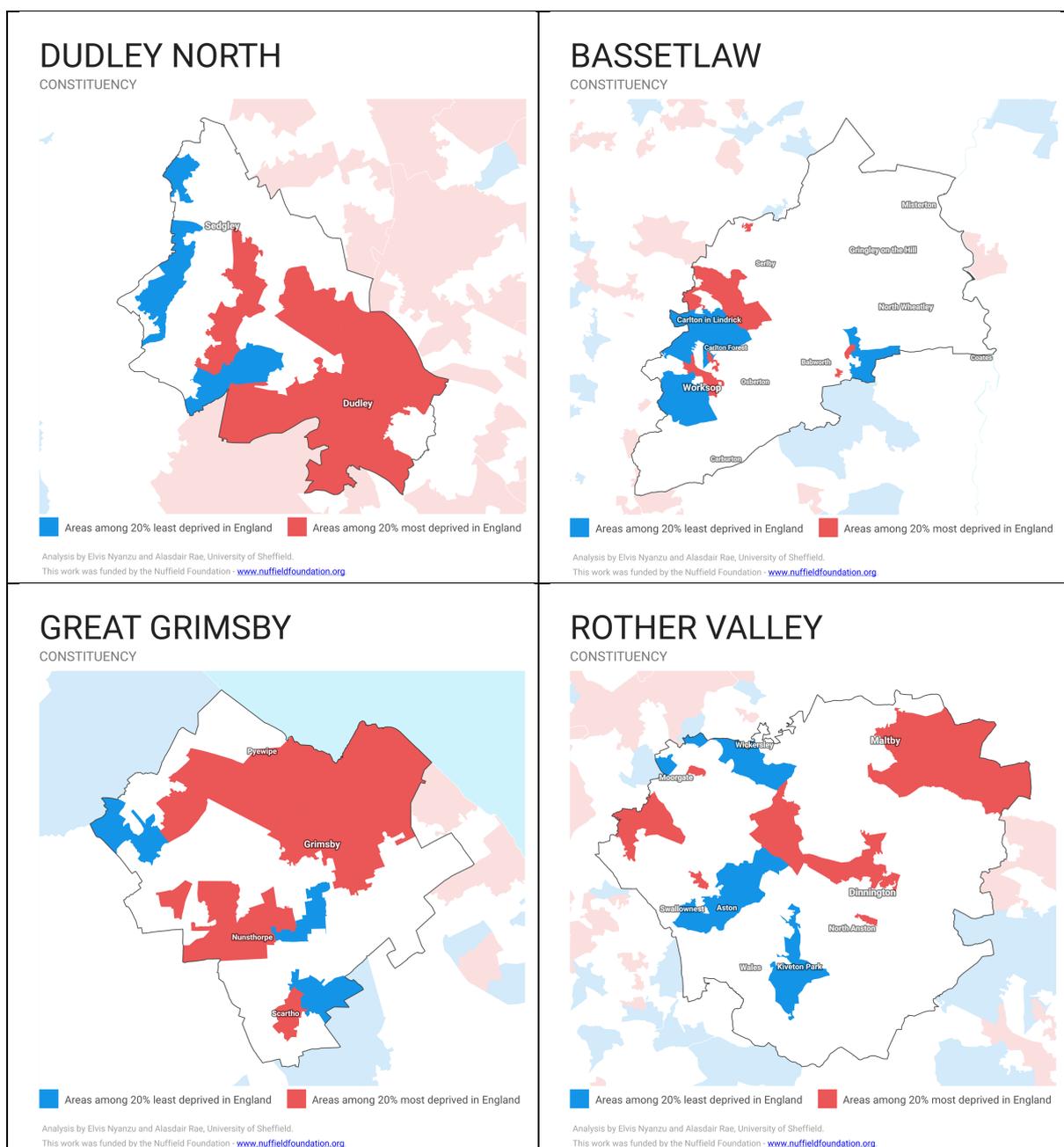
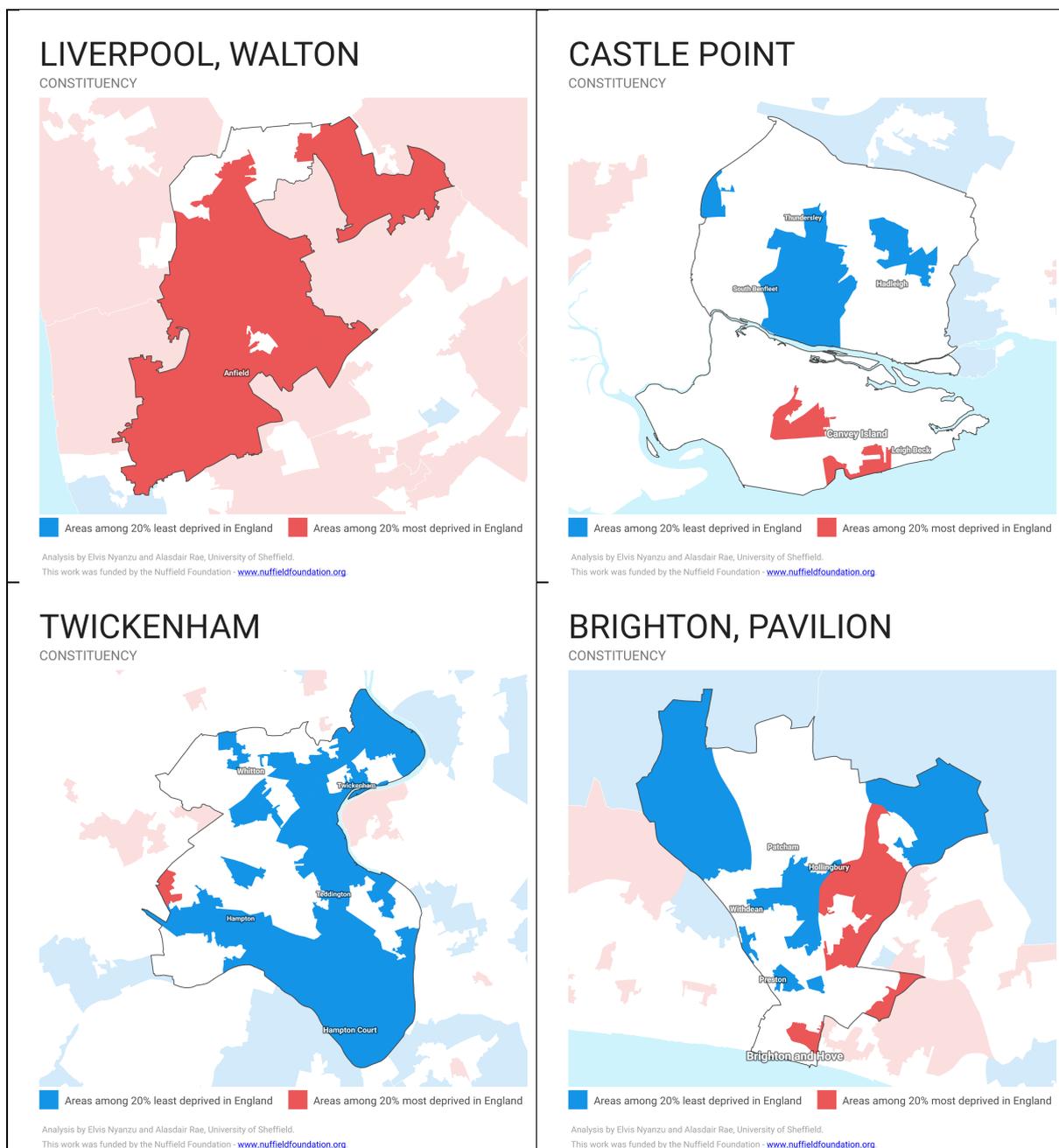


Figure 4 contrasts the four seats above for four others: the seat with the highest Labour vote in 2019, where 85% of voters chose Labour in Walton in Liverpool; the seat with the highest Conservative vote (77% in Castle Point in Essex); with where the Liberals did best in Twickenham in London (56%); and where the Greens polled most – which was in Brighton Pavilion (57%).⁶

Figure 4: Areas where Labour, the Conservatives, Liberals and Greens do best



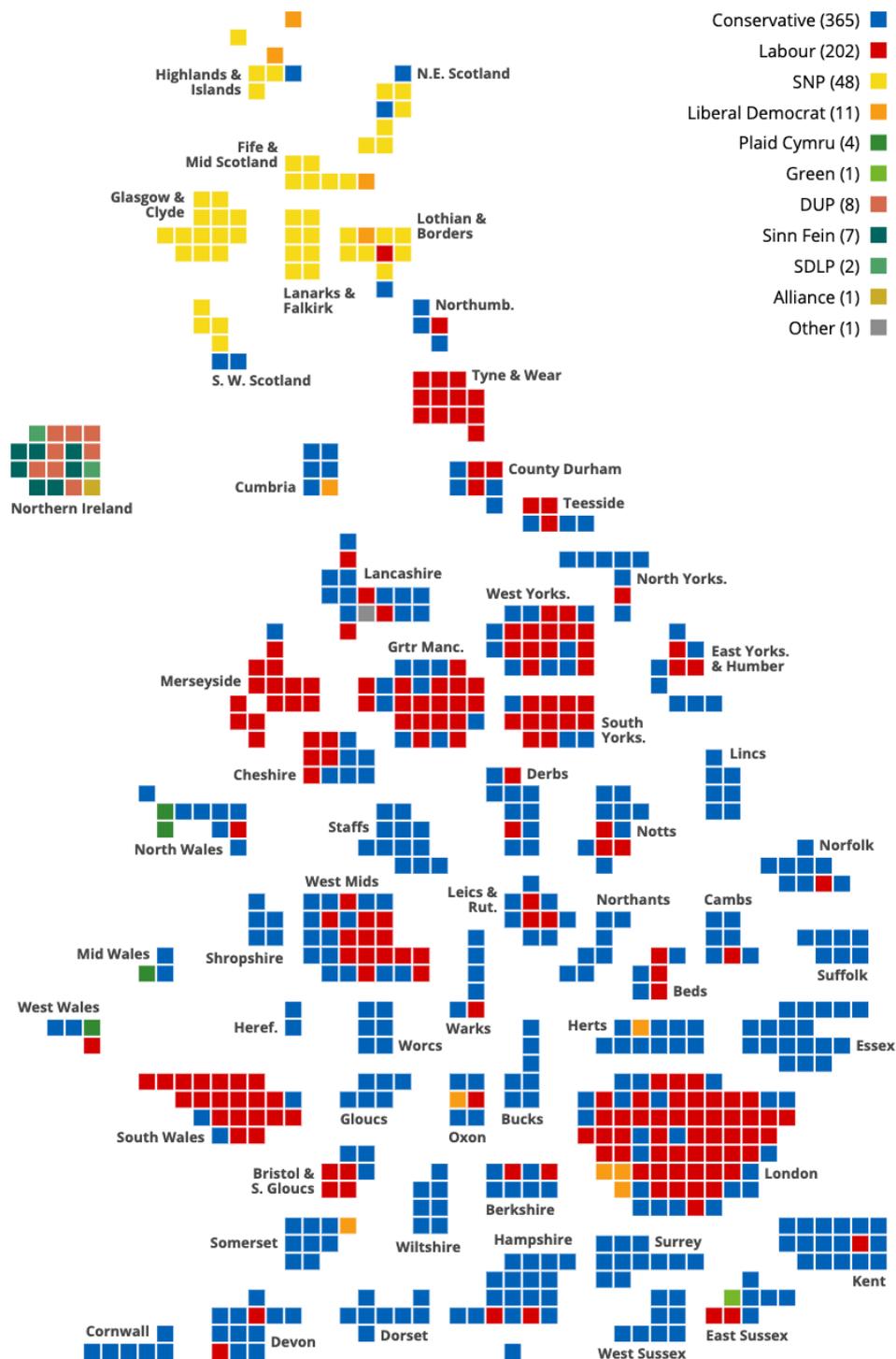
The Liberal party and the Greens now do best in some of the most affluent parts of the country. The Conservatives are no long confined to the most leafy suburbs; but where they do best – in parts of Essex – is not that unlike the places where they have just (for one election at least) secured their new MPs in the North. These north victories were predominantly in areas where people are older and it may well be that in those areas it was mostly nostalgic angry men who favoured social conservatism who are most likely to vote for a party lead by Boris Johnston.

As to why Labour lost it net 1,200,000 voters to abstentions, understanding why people who had voted for a party lead by Jeremy Corbyn in 2017 did not do so in 2019 might take longer to determine; but it is worth remembering who thought they had most to lose from a Corbyn led Labour victory – the best-off 5%. It was the highest-income 5% in the UK who were told that they would have to pay more tax and who will have worried over paying the schools fees that almost all of that group do pay (mostly with some difficulty). Almost none of that 5% live in Essex or the north of England, but they do have a disproportion power to influence the views of people who do.

On the 28th of January 2020 the House of Commons Library⁷ produced the image shown below. Tyne and Wear is still solidly red, Dorset still entirely blue. This is despite pockets of affluent on the banks of the Tyne and much poverty to be found in parts of Dorset. A 'red wall' can still be traced from East Yorkshire, through South Yorkshire, across Greater Manchester and Cheshire. But it now faces a solid blue wall stretching from Lincolnshire, through Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Staffordshire and Shropshire.

The 2019 General election was painted as the worse defeat for Labour in many years, and yet Corbyn's 32% share of the vote was higher than the 30% gained when the party was led by Ed Miliband in 2015; or the 29% won by Gordon Brown in 2010; the 31% won by Neil Kinnock in 1987; the 27% Michael Foot secured in 1983; or the 31% won by Arthur Henderson's Labour party in 1931 and by Ramsay MacDonald's party in 1923. That 32% is probably a solid base of support. The key questions that remain include how well people in the blue squares in Figure 5 will think the new government has improved their lives, and those of their children's and grandchildren's — and what happens to the country and province of the UK that have both, in effect, already left mainstream UK politics some time ago: Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Figure 5: The New Political Map of the UK: drawn by the House of Commons



¹ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2019/12/13/stunning-tory-seat-victories-2019-general-election/>

² https://www.electoralcalculus.co.uk/pseph_transition2019.html

³ <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2019/12/10/key-findings-our-final-mrp-poll>

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jan/27/labour-party-leadership-keir-starmer-rebecca-long-bailey>

⁵ <http://ajrae.staff.shef.ac.uk/atlasofinequality/>

⁶ <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-8749>

⁷ <https://visual.parliament.uk/research/visualisations/general-election-2019-constituencies/>

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Danny Dorling is Halford Mackinder professor of human geography at Oxford University. His latest publication 'Slowdown: The End of the Great Acceleration - and Why It's Good for the Planet, the Economy, and Our Lives', will be released in April.

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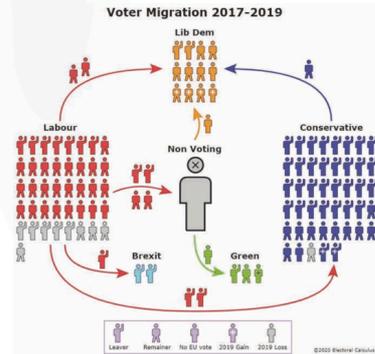
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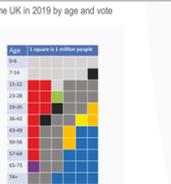
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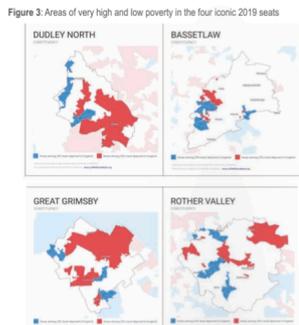
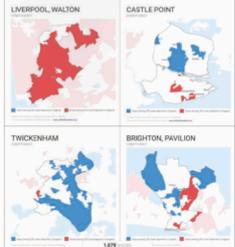


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2. https://www.electoralcalculus.co.uk/peeph_toraxbox2019.html
3. <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2019/12/10/yougov-finds-our-final-mp-poll>
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jan/27/labour-party-leaders-its-keir-starm-rebecca-king-bakky>
5. <http://grjms.staff.shaf.ac.uk/taoofreq.html>
6. <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-5749>
7. <https://visual.parliament.uk/research/visualisations/general-election-2019-constituencies/>

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