

Why did ‘Workington Man’ vote Conservative? An analysis of the factors which contributed to the fall of the ‘Red Wall’ in the 2019 UK General Election

Introduction

The 2019 UK General Election witnessed the Conservative Party achieve an 80 seat majority and the Labour party experience their lowest number of seats since 1935. This victory was characterised by the supposed collapse of Labour’s ‘Red Wall’, a term originated to describe the traditionally Labour-supporting constituencies of North Wales, Northern England, and the Midlands¹. Within this ‘Red Wall’, ‘Workington Man’ was identified as a representative, albeit stereotyped, target voter for the Conservatives. However, it was argued before the election that there was still an entrenched scepticism from ‘Workington Man’, based on intrinsic left-wing values linked with Trade Unions and memories of Margaret Thatcher’s policies, which meant that he “wasn’t necessarily willing to vote for the Tories”².

Observing the 2019 election campaigns, I noted the media portrayal of ‘Workington Man’ and the simplified presentation of the election as polarised around Brexit. I decided to undertake this study to explore if there were additional complexities beneath the surface of this unprecedented result, as well as to gain a greater understanding of this voter, and what motivated him to switch his vote from Labour to the Conservative Party. To conduct this research, I explored primary sources (party manifestos, opinion polls and newspaper articles) and secondary sources such as online journals, magazine articles, government reports and research papers. It is acknowledged that, in light of the short time period since the election, academic literature is limited and, due to the nature of the topic, authors and reports are likely to contain political bias.

As a result of my research, I will argue that although the ‘Workington Man’ vote was often presented as the product of the specific circumstances of 2019 (namely Brexit), it was actually the culmination of various inter-connecting factors that have been evolving and emerging over a much longer period of time and their interaction with ‘Workington Man’. I will also show that it was as much about the Labour Party forgetting ‘Workington Man’, as it was the Conservatives aligning with him.

Defining ‘Workington Man’

‘Workington Man’ was a term first used by Onward, a centre-right thinktank linked to the Conservative Party, representing “the key swing voter in Britain today”³; an older, white-British, traditional Labour voter, characterised by his lack of degree and decision to vote Leave in the EU Referendum⁴. ‘Workington Man’ was situated in predominantly working-class towns such as Warrington and Wakefield, which formed part of Labour’s ‘Red Wall’. Onward’s own

¹ James Kanagasooriam, Twitter Post, August 14 2019, 3: 02 p.m., <http://www.twitter.com/JamesKanag>

² Sebastian Payne, “UK General Election: Can Boris Johnson Break Labour’s ‘Red Wall’?,” *Financial Times*, November 6, 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/fbd00ed6-ffd1-11e9-be59-e49b2a136b8d>.

³ Will Tanner and James O’Shaughnessy, “The Politics of Belonging” (Onward, October 30, 2019), <https://www.ukonward.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Politics-of-Belonging-FINAL.pdf>,

⁴ Ibid.

post-election analysis found that 77% of those classified as ‘Workington Man’ voted for the Conservatives⁵. Whilst acknowledging the think-tank’s possible bias, voting behaviour from a wide variety of other sources (such as YouGov and the House of Commons Library) indicated a correlation between the defining characteristics of ‘Workington Man’ and those that voted Conservative in the election. For example, post-election surveys suggested the Conservatives had their largest majorities amongst people aged over 39, within the C2DE social grades, with education below degree-level and who voted leave in the 2016 European Union (EU) Referendum⁶.

Brexit

It could be argued that ‘Workington Man’ only voted Conservative due to the specific circumstances of the 2019 General Election, namely support for Brexit after weeks of stalemate. The Conservatives offered a distinct ‘Leave’ position, which reflected the referendum vote of ‘Workington Man’ in 2016. In contrast, Labour predominantly focused on health, environment, and business sectors⁷, prioritising “A Green Industrial Revolution” in their manifesto⁸ whilst their position on Brexit appeared vague and less targeted^{9,10}.

The presence of the Brexit Party, despite receiving just 4.2% of the Workington vote¹¹ may also have contributed to ‘Workington Man’s’ voting decision. The Brexit Party appeared more in line with ‘Workington Man’s’ authoritarian social agenda but left-wing economic outlook¹², yet ‘Workington Man’ almost unanimously voted Conservative¹³. I would argue that the Conservatives were able to appeal to ‘Workington Man’ because of their connection, both explicit and implicit, with the Brexit Party. The Brexit Party’s decision to stand down in many other seats had two crucial effects in causing their potential voters to turn to the Conservatives. Primarily, it made the possibility of the party achieving any significant gains in parliament minimal, thus making a vote for them potentially ‘wasted’, but also gave populist credibility to the Conservatives that they could offer a sufficient Brexit deal. This meant that the Brexit Party was able to mobilise ‘Workington Man’, simultaneously distancing him from Labour and making the Conservatives seem the ‘next best’ alternative.

⁵ Onward, “Realignment,” December 18, 2019, <https://www.ukonward.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Realignment-Onward-deck-1.pdf>.

⁶ Adam McDonnell and Chris Curtis, “How Britain Voted in the 2019 General Election” (Yougov, December 17, 2019), <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2019/12/17/how-britain-voted-2019-general-election>.

⁷ David Deacon et al., “Report 5: 7 November - 11 December 2019” (Centre for Research in Communication and Culture, Loughborough University, 2019), <https://www.lboro.ac.uk/news-events/general-election/report-5/>.

⁸ Labour Party, “It’s Time For Real Change: The Labour Party Manifesto 2019,” 2019, <https://labour.org.uk/manifesto-2019/>.

⁹ Darren Lilleker, “UK Election Analysis 2019: Media, Voters and the Campaign,” ed. Dan Jackson et al. (The Centre for Comparative Politics and Media Research, December 23, 2019), <http://www.electionanalysis.uk/>.

¹⁰ David Cutts et al., “Brexit, the 2019 General Election and the Realignment of British Politics,” *The Political Quarterly* 91, no. 1 (February 19, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923x.12815>.

¹¹ Carl Baker, Elise Uberoi, and Richard Cracknell, “General Election 2019: Full Results and Analysis” (House of Commons Library, January 28, 2020), <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8749/>.

¹² Paula Surridge, “How the Conservatives Won the Red Wall,” *The UK in a Changing Europe*, March 12, 2020, <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/how-the-conservatives-won-the-red-wall/>.

¹³ Onward, “Realignment,” December 18, 2019, <https://www.ukonward.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Realignment-Onward-deck-1.pdf>.

Goodwin and Heath, when analysing the results of the 2016 EU Referendum, came to the conclusion that it was the “left-behind”¹⁴ that voted for Brexit- “pensioners, low-skilled and less well-educated blue-collar workers”¹⁵ that had been “united by a general sense of insecurity, pessimism and marginalisation”¹⁶. The implication of people feeling “left behind” is suggestive of enduring, complex issues that had arisen before Brexit, supporting Labour MP Stephanie Peacock’s claim that ‘Workington Man’ had been “ignored, forgotten and abandoned”¹⁷. It has been argued that ‘Workington Man’ began to feel marginalised by Labour during the leadership of Tony Blair as the Party moved economically towards the right¹⁸, a feeling that developed further when Labour was perceived to be preventing Brexit passing through parliament. Therefore, the effusive support for Brexit offered by the Conservatives gave the perception that ‘Workington Man’ was being given the acknowledgement and attention that Labour had “taken for granted”¹⁹.

Media interviews with those defined as ‘Workington Man’ in the lead-up to the election reflected this view; locals described how Labour “forgot who they are supposed to stand up for”²⁰ and how they had been “neglected in politics” due to Workington being assumed to be a “safe seat”²¹ for Labour. Whilst these beliefs alone cannot explain ‘Workington Man’s’ decision to vote Conservative, they give an indication of the “nostalgic deprivation” (the loss of status over time, from perceived importance to marginalisation) experienced by ‘Workington Man’²², a view advocated by MP Dan James who highlighted that ‘Workington Man’ had been marginalised and “vilified” by Labour²³.

In contrast, the Conservatives ‘Get Brexit Done’ slogan dominated both party and national media²⁴- Brexit was referenced by the Conservatives in 45% of their tweets in the weeks

¹⁴ Matthew J. Goodwin and Oliver Heath, “The 2016 Referendum, Brexit and the Left Behind: An Aggregate-Level Analysis of the Result,” *The Political Quarterly* 87, no. 3 (July 2016): 323–32, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923x.12285>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ryan Swift, “Can the Conservative Party Win in the North of England?,” *The Conversation*, November 5, 2019, <https://theconversation.com/can-the-conservative-party-win-in-the-north-of-england-126162>.

¹⁸ David Cutts et al., “Brexit, the 2019 General Election and the Realignment of British Politics,” *The Political Quarterly* 91, no. 1 (February 19, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923x.12815>.

¹⁹ Peter Reeves, “UK Election Analysis 2019: Media, Voters and the Campaign,” ed. Dan Jackson et al. (The Centre for Comparative Politics and Media Research, December 23, 2019), <http://www.electionanalysis.uk/>.

²⁰ Colin Drury, “‘I Feel Dirty – but Labour Took Us for Granted’: Why Workington Man Has No Regrets Voting Tory,” *The Independent*, December 13, 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/general-election-results-boris-johnson-conservatives-workington-man-a9245496.html>.

²¹ Joe Mellor, “Conservative Think Tank’s ‘Workington Man’ Election Stereotype Leaves Locals Unimpressed,” *The London Economic*, October 30, 2019, <https://www.thelondoneconomic.com/politics/conservative-think-tanks-workington-man-election-stereotype-leaves-locals-unimpressed/30/10/>.

²² Justin Gest, Tyler Reny, and Jeremy Mayer, “Roots of the Radical Right: Nostalgic Deprivation in the United States and Britain,” *Comparative Political Studies* 51, no. 13 (July 20, 2017): 1694–1719, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414017720705>.

²³ Ryan Swift, “Can the Conservative Party Win in the North of England?,” *The Conversation*, November 5, 2019, <https://theconversation.com/can-the-conservative-party-win-in-the-north-of-england-126162>.

²⁴ Karla Adam, “‘Get Brexit Done’: Boris Johnson’s Effective but Misleading Slogan in the British Election,” *The Washington Post*, December 12, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/get-brexit-done-boris-johnsons-effective-but-misleading-slogan-in-the-uk-election/2019/12/12/ec926baa-1c62-11ea-977a-15a6710ed6da_story.html.

preceding the election²⁵. This forceful and succinct message was able to mobilise voters, including ‘Workington Man’, around a core theme in a way comparable to Donald Trump’s ‘Make America Great Again’ slogan in the 2016 Presidential Election²⁶. It served to connect with this largely “frustrated” and dissatisfied electorate²⁷, which ‘Workington Man’ embodied. Their Manifesto was also based around the idea of “taking back control” from the EU²⁸, with a notion of national empowerment, which combined with a message that individually ‘Workington Man’s’ vote could make a difference. Being specifically targeted by the Conservatives enabled a sense of recognition for ‘Workington Man’ as a politically important voter and essential to the Conservative’s campaign.

Brexit appears to have been a primary reason why ‘Workington Man’ voted Conservative, but this cannot be reduced to simply a shared desire to leave the EU. Instead, I would argue that the underlying sense of empowerment and political importance offered by the Conservatives and supported by the Brexit Party, which juxtaposed the political marginalisation and feeling of being left behind by Labour, were contributing factors.

Cultural Issues

‘Workington Man’ was presented as being “sceptical about the benefits of globalisation” and twice as likely to consider immigration problematic²⁹. Despite long-term commitments to the Labour party, the strength of nationalistic parties within the ‘Red Wall’ in previous elections, although marginal, indicates that social conservatism has been a major presence. For example, in 2015, UKIP received 19.6% of the vote in Workington³⁰ a significant vote share for a third party, whilst the BNP, widely considered extremist and far-right³¹, received the fourth highest number of votes in 2010. Evans and Tilley argue that parties on the far-right are “disproportionally” favoured by working-class voters, a pattern mirrored across the world where left-wing parties have “moved to centrist positions and lost their former working-class supporters to radical right parties”³².

²⁵David Deacon et al., “Report 5: 7 November - 11 December 2019” (Centre for Research in Communication and Culture, Loughborough University, 2019), <https://www.lboro.ac.uk/news-events/general-election/report-5/>.

²⁶Anthony Ridge-Newman, “UK Election Analysis 2019: Media, Voters and the Campaign,” ed. Dan Jackson et al. (The Centre for Comparative Politics and Media Research, December 23, 2019), <http://www.electionanalysis.uk/>.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸Conservative and Unionist Party, “Get Brexit Done Unleash Britain’s Potential: The Conservative and Unionist Party Manifesto 2019,” 2019, https://assets-global.website-files.com/5da42e2cae7ebd3f8bde353c/5dda924905da587992a064ba_Conservative%202019%20Manifesto.pdf.

²⁹Will Tanner and James O’Shaughnessy, “The Politics of Belonging” (Onward, October 30, 2019), <https://www.ukonward.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Politics-of-Belonging-FINAL.pdf>.

³⁰Oliver Hawkins, Richard Keen, and Nambassa Nakatudde, “General Election 2015,” *Commonslibrary.Parliament.Uk* (House of Commons Library, July 28, 2015), <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7186/>.

³¹Tim Wigmore, “What Killed the BNP?,” *New Statesman*, January 12, 2016, <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/staggers/2016/01/what-killed-bnp>.

³²Geoffrey Evans and James Tilley, *The New Politics of Class in Britain : The Political Exclusion of the British Working Class* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

Whilst Lawrence questions the “judgemental myths” about the “white working-class”³³, the increasingly accentuated divide between social liberalism and conservatism has nevertheless caused ‘Workington Man’, to some extent, to feel separated from globalisation and internationalism³⁴. Surridge highlights that Labour voters who switched to Conservative were much more left-wing economically than conventional Conservative voters, yet further right on the liberal-authoritarian scale³⁵. Consequently, the Conservatives were able to gain ‘Workington Man’s’ support through their perceived connection to authoritarianism without changing either their own or ‘Workington Man’s’ economic principles, possibly due to the party’s inherent right-wing values (which led into social conservatism), that Labour were unable to manufacture.

It has been argued that ethnocentric voters have viewed immigrants as both a threat and outsiders since the turn of the century³⁶. Despite increased immigration within the UK, many northern towns (and the home of ‘Workington Man’) have remained almost universally White-British. Yet, studies in Germany have shown that anti-immigration sentiments are most common in areas of the lowest levels of immigration³⁷ whilst research into the British Nationalist Party suggested that their greatest support was from those who had seen cultural change nearby, rather than experiencing it directly, or through sensationalist media, causing “fears” of change within their local area³⁸. From this, it could be claimed that the lack of ethnic diversity within ‘Red Wall’ constituencies increased the popularity of Conservative immigration policies (such as the Australian points-based system³⁹) among ‘Workington Man’.

Whilst populist parties like UKIP claimed to be able to address these root ‘grievances and anxieties of voters’⁴⁰, I would argue that it was their role in polarising the two major parties that was more significant. It enforced a greater nationalistic, socially authoritarian element within the Conservative Party and created an exaggerated image of Labour as the party of liberalism and diversity⁴¹. In addition, Labour’s growing popularity in metropolitan areas and amongst younger voters coincided with their increased levels of support amongst ethnic

³³ Jon Lawrence, “Labour and the Culture Wars of Modern Politics,” *The Political Quarterly* 91, no. 1 (January 2020): 31–34, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923x.12819>.

³⁴ Anna Grzymala-Busse, “The Failure of Europe’s Mainstream Parties,” *Journal of Democracy* 30, no. 4 (August 2019): 35–47, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2019.0067>.

³⁵ Paula Surridge, “How the Conservatives Won the Red Wall,” *The UK in a Changing Europe*, March 12, 2020, <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/how-the-conservatives-won-the-red-wall/>.

³⁶ Maria Sobolewska and Robert Ford, “Brexit and Britain’s Culture Wars,” *Political Insight* 11, no. 1 (February 24, 2020): 4–7, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2041905820911738>.

³⁷ Anna Grzymala-Busse, “The Failure of Europe’s Mainstream Parties,” *Journal of Democracy* 30, no. 4 (August 2019): 35–47, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2019.0067>.

³⁸ Peter John et al., “The BNP: The Roots of Its Appeal,” 2006, https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:1261d5d2-b2d1-4799-b0bf-8427deac2e80/download_file?file_format=pdf&safe_filename=The%2BBNP%2Bthe%2Broots%2Bof%2Bits%2Bappeal%2B%2528full%2Breport%2529.pdf&type_of_work=Report.

³⁹ Conservative and Unionist Party, “Get Brexit Done Unleash Britain’s Potential: The Conservative and Unionist Party Manifesto 2019,” 2019, https://assets-global.website-files.com/5da42e2cae7ebd3f8bde353c/5dda924905da587992a064ba_Conservative%202019%20Manifesto.pdf.

⁴⁰ Anna Grzymala-Busse, “The Failure of Europe’s Mainstream Parties,” *Journal of Democracy* 30, no. 4 (August 2019): 35–47, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2019.0067>.

⁴¹ David Cutts et al., “Brexit, the 2019 General Election and the Realignment of British Politics,” *The Political Quarterly* 91, no. 1 (February 19, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923x.12815>.

minorities, who are considered more socially liberal. I would suggest that the Conservative Party was better positioned to reflect the social views of 'Workington Man', regardless of traditional affiliations. Therefore, 'Workington Man's decision to vote Conservative was a by-product of the changing cultural identities of the two parties.

Research carried out in Germany suggested that a party's perceived position on the left-right political scale can be influenced by either their actual policy or what issues are emphasised, which is dependent on the importance of the issue to the individual voter⁴². The study proposed that perceived positioning on the cultural scale can shift when specific issues gain significance. Using these ideas, it could be inferred that the Conservative's intentional emphasis on culture before economics, and their particular attention to Brexit (where the party had more socially conservative policies) made them seem, to those with similar cultural opinions, to be a more extreme right-wing party than they perhaps were in other areas. The Conservatives 'mobilised the ethnocentric, nationalist side of these identity politics conflicts'⁴³, which appealed to the social agenda of 'Workington man', who had become conflicted between traditional attachments to Labour and anti-immigration, nationalistic views⁴⁴.

Economic Issues

It has been claimed that one of the most prominent causes of Labour's "alienation" of its traditional heartlands ⁴⁵ has been the decline in manufacturing and mining industries, with Workington's traditional base of shipbuilding, coal and steel described as "long gone"⁴⁶. This dramatic waning of local industry has had two major implications- vast numbers of job losses, as evidenced in the demise of the Trident submarine building plant in Barrow that led to over 8000 unemployed⁴⁷, and, over the last 15 years, "less than half the employment increases of the country as a whole"⁴⁸. Whilst such change was potentially inevitable in an increasingly global economy ⁴⁹, it was arguably the lack of support offered by the Labour Party in helping such towns and communities after their industrial decline that allowed a feeling of being forgotten to develop. The decision by Tony Blair to move Labour economically to the right created a "tension" between their newfound middle-class and traditional working-class

⁴² Heiko Giebler, Thomas M. Meyer, and Markus Wagner, "The Changing Meaning of Left and Right: Supply- and Demand-Side Effects on the Perception of Party Positions," *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, May 8, 2019, 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17457289.2019.1609001>.

⁴³ Maria Sobolewska and Robert Ford, "Brexit and Britain's Culture Wars," *Political Insight* 11, no. 1 (February 24, 2020): 4–7, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2041905820911738>.

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Jon Lawrence, "Labour and the Culture Wars of Modern Politics," *The Political Quarterly* 91, no. 1 (January 2020): 31–34, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923x.12819>.

⁴⁶ Harriet Sherwood, "'Workington Is a Labour Town on the Brink of Change. They Voted Leave and They're Fed Up,'" *The Observer*, November 2, 2019, sec. Politics, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/nov/02/workington-man-cumbria-brexit-labour-bellwether-town-general-election>.

⁴⁷ Steve Fothergill and Tony Gore, "The Implications for Employment of the Shift to High-Value Manufacturing" (Foresight, August 2013), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/283885/ep9-shift-to-high-value-manufacturing-implications.pdf.

⁴⁸ Charlie McCurdy et al., "Painting the Towns Blue Demography, Economy and Living Standards in the Political Geographies Emerging from the 2019 General Election" (Resolution Foundation, February 2020).

⁴⁹ Ian Jack, "The Great Betrayal: How Britain's Industrial Towns Died of Neglect," *The Guardian*, March 9, 2019, sec. Opinion, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/mar/09/britain-industrial-neglect-brexit-working-class-alienation>.

electorates⁵⁰. Consequently, it could be argued that a feeling of being left behind economically⁵¹, has grown considerably among ‘Workington Man’, feeding into the anti-Labour sentiment discussed. Without the prominence of Trade Unions and nationalised industry that created the link between ‘Workington Man’ and the Labour party, I would argue that an opportunity arose for other parties to politically align themselves with ‘Workington Man’ and alternative issues to become as significant to this electorate, such as the cultural identities described earlier.

In 2019, Labour endeavoured to attract ‘Workington Man’ through a “radical, redistributive economic programme”⁵², an attempted “triangulation”⁵³ by Labour to match social liberalism with extreme-left economic policies, as research shows that increased economic difficulty often leads to greater support for the radical left⁵⁴. However, Labour’s generalised economic policies were competing with the Conservatives targeted funding packages to “revitalise” Northern high streets⁵⁵ and reboot the “Northern powerhouse”⁵⁶. This would suggest that the Conservatives had a positive economic strategy for ‘Workington Man’ and, through these policies, were able to break down another deep-set ‘cultural barrier’ between ‘Workington Man’ and the Conservatives⁵⁷, who were typically associated with a more middle-class, southern electorate.

As an older and settled voter⁵⁸, ‘Workington Man’ may not have been motivated by radical redistributive policies to the same extent as younger voters. McCurdy et al (2020) found that constituencies in the “Blue Wall” (former ‘Red Wall’ seats gained by the Conservatives) have below-average living conditions but, crucially, not the lowest, the latter of whom may have had a greater desire for economic change. The ‘security-oriented’ approach to the economy of ‘Workington Man’⁵⁹ may have contributed to their Conservative vote, with the economic propositions suggested by Labour seemingly targeted, like their social policies, at younger voters, linking again to the idea of being forgotten by Labour.

⁵⁰ David Cutts et al., “Brexit, the 2019 General Election and the Realignment of British Politics,” *The Political Quarterly* 91, no. 1 (February 19, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923x.12815>.

⁵¹ Sarah Engler and David Weisstanner, “The Threat of Social Decline: Income Inequality and Radical Right Support,” *Journal of European Public Policy*, March 3, 2020, 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2020.1733636>.

⁵² Jon Lawrence, “Labour and the Culture Wars of Modern Politics,” *The Political Quarterly* 91, no. 1 (January 2020): 31–34, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923x.12819>.

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Noam Gidron and Peter A. Hall, “Populism as a Problem of Social Integration,” *Comparative Political Studies* 53, no. 7 (October 16, 2019): 001041401987994, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414019879947>.

⁵⁵ Harriet Sherwood, “‘Workington Is a Labour Town on the Brink of Change. They Voted Leave and They’re Fed Up,’” *The Observer*, November 2, 2019, sec. Politics, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/nov/02/workington-man-cumbria-brexit-labour-bellwether-town-general-election>.

⁵⁶ Ryan Swift, “Can the Conservative Party Win in the North of England?,” *The Conversation*, November 5, 2019, <https://theconversation.com/can-the-conservative-party-win-in-the-north-of-england-126162>.

⁵⁷ James Kanagasooriam, “How the Labour Party’s ‘Red Wall’ Turned Blue,” *Financial Times* (blog), December 14, 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/3b80b2de-1dc2-11ea-81f0-0c253907d3e0>.

⁵⁸ Will Tanner and James O’Shaughnessy, “The Politics of Belonging” (Onward, October 30, 2019), <https://www.ukonward.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Politics-of-Belonging-FINAL.pdf>.

⁵⁹ Ibid

Conclusion

Throughout this analysis, I have focused on the key factors that led ‘Workington Man’ to vote Conservative and contributed to the fall of the ‘Red Wall’. Whilst it could be argued that the specific circumstance of 2019 (namely Brexit) swayed ‘Workington Man’, I would propose that there were longer-term issues at play. An opportunity had arisen for the Conservative party, through their Brexit message as well as the party’s own cultural shift, to offer political importance and recognition. Simultaneously, the marginalisation of ‘Workington Man’ by Labour economically, culturally, and politically over time also contributed to the voting shift⁶⁰. I would conclude that it is the complex interaction between ‘Workington Man’ and the factors identified that led to the election result. This supports the view that the “soul of the Conservatives has shift(ed) from Kensington and Chelsea to North Yorkshire”⁶¹ and, due to the culmination of all the discussed issues at one particular time-point, ‘Workington Man’ actually became a representative Conservative in 2019, rather than simply voting for the party and for Brexit.

⁶⁰David Cutts et al., “Brexit, the 2019 General Election and the Realignment of British Politics,” *The Political Quarterly* 91, no. 1 (February 19, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923x.12815>.

⁶¹ Will Tanner and James O’Shaughnessy, “The Politics of Belonging” (Onward, October 30, 2019), <https://www.ukonward.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Politics-of-Belonging-FINAL.pdf>.

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