

## Red Walls falling and the parallels with migration and gentrification – commentary note

This Webber Phillips analysis investigates how closely changes in the level of the non-white British population in the decade since 2011 are associated with changes in the share of the vote of Labour and Conservative candidates in parliamentary election between 2011 and 2019.

The report's key finding is that whilst Labour's share of the vote has held up best, or even increased, in those seats which already contained a high non-white British electorate in 2011, Labour has lost ground most in seats where the size of the non-white British electorate has grown very fast from a very low 2011 base. In essence Labour has done best in seats with a well-established minority population, has done worst in historically non-diverse seats which have seen significant non-white populations in recent years.

Most studies of the association between levels of diversity and party share of the vote rely on information for a particular point in time. This study is unusual in being based on longitudinal data both for voting and for ethnicity.

To capture information on the change in the ethnic composition of individual constituencies since the date of the last census we applied the Origins classification to two files, one containing the personal and family names of virtually all UK adults as of 2011, the other as of 2019. The Origins software application infers a person's heritage based on their personal and family names. Using Origins we can identify the respects in which the proportions of adults with different heritages has changed at the level of the parliamentary constituency.

To measure changes in the level of support for Labour and the Conservatives we have compared the two-party share of the vote in the 2019 General Election with the corresponding shares for 2011.

Rather than correlate these two longitudinal variables we have organised all constituencies across England and Wales into four broad categories: "Established Provincial", seats which both started and ended the period with few non white British electors; "Newly Diversifying", seats where the proportion of non white British residents has grown rapidly from a small base; "Growing and Changing", seats where what in 2011 was already an above average minority population has grown significantly by 2020; and "Cosmopolitan Settled", seats where the size of the non white British population has declined since 2011, albeit from a very high base.

When we examine the electoral fortunes of the two main parties it is apparent that Labour has improved its share of the vote most strongly in seats described as "Cosmopolitan Settled". Many of these seats are located close to the centres of London or large provincial cities and have been subject to varying levels of white re-gentrification. Where Labour has lost most ground is in seats which prior to 2011 had little or no experience of attracting or assimilating non white British groups. Most of these seats are located in smaller urban centres distant from universities and centres of professional employment.

The results of the study reveal very clearly the change in the location of Britain's non white population as higher housing costs have forced long-standing members of some minority communities leave inner city communities for new lives in suburbs on the metropolitan fringe. Meanwhile newly arrived immigrants during this period have tended to settle in provincial towns that offer more affordable housing and greater economic opportunities in certain roles and sectors.

Likewise, whilst much attention has been given to the successes of the Conservatives in the so-called “Red Wall” seats, a trend which was already visible in 2015, the examination of swing over a longer period points to the capture by Labour of a significant number of seats with large student populations and to an improved share of the vote in most inner-metropolitan seats. This is particularly true in those subject to increases in the white British population (which we would infer, given the extent to which they buck a national trend otherwise pointing towards non white British increases, are places seeing gentrification).

Clearly the results of the study have implications for Conservative and Labour strategies in terms of the constituency targeting. Some seats which in the past had been considered “safe” will now become contestable which many traditional “marginals” may not change hands again for many years. More particularly it is evident that demographics could play an interesting role in creating new political battlegrounds the new battlegrounds where elections are won and lost.

*Professor Richard Webber*

*Originator of ACORN, MOSAIC and Origins*