

Red Walls falling and the parallels with migration and gentrification

How do changes in the changing political geography during the 2010s intersect with demographic shifts?

Webber Phillips, November 2020



- This analysis uses Origins, a dataset based on name recognition, to compare the demographic makeup of English and Welsh parliamentary seats in 2011 with that in 2019
- It looks at the level and change of the each seat that is non-white British (non-WB), by which we mean those with names that are not Anglo-Saxon or Celtic; this could include new migrants or refugees, as well as BME groups that have been in the UK for several generations
- Origins is able to drill down in much more detail, to look at specific nationalities and faiths, but this report primarily focuses on the top-line 'non-WB' figure, as a proxy for historic diversity and for the more recent pace of change
- The report compares this with the cumulative swing from Labour to Tory (and vice versa) during roughly the same period (i.e. by comparing the 2010 and 2019 General Elections)
- The Conservatives won both these elections, and the state of the parties is not radically different in terms of overall numbers of seats
- But by looking at the cumulative swing in different constituencies reveals big swings in both directions beneath the surface; Lewisham West and Penge saw a 22 point swing to Labour, for example, whereas Bassetlaw saw a 22 point swing to the Conservatives



- This report considers the relationship between:
 1. The change at parliamentary constituency level, between 2011 and 2019, in the share of the population that is non-WB
 2. The cumulative swing in each seat, between the 2010 and 2019 general elections, from Labour to Tory or vice versa
- This is a period during which Labour moved towards the language of social liberalism and internationalism, and the Conservatives moved towards protectionist and culturally nationalist policies, particularly on immigration
- It is also a period when the BAME population began increasingly to settle in more affordable areas further away from city centres and when the attraction of city centre living caused urban hubs to become more gentrified, more expensive and as a result (in many cases) more white.
- Our report finds that sharp demographic transitions underlie electoral changes; historically diverse, gentrifying parts of inner London are shifting dramatically towards Labour, deprived, predominantly white areas with rapid increases in migration are moving to the Tories



- For instance, there are 24 seats where there has been a cumulative swing of over 15% from the Labour to the Tories since 2010. Dudley North, Walsall and Boston and Skegness are examples; the non-WB share of the population in these 24 seats averaged 7.38% in 2011 and grew by 2.25% in the following nine years, to 9.63% in 2020
- Meanwhile there were 15 seats which had cumulative swing of over 15% from the Tories to Labour in the same period. Ealing Central, Cambridge and Bristol West are examples; the average non-WB share in these 15 seats was 38.11% in 2011 and grew by just 1.79% to 39.9% in 2020
- By way of a comparison, the averages, across all English and Welsh seats, are 15.95% non-WB in 2011, with a 2.10% increase in the subsequent nine years
- Hence, Labour has seen its biggest successes in seats that were more than twice as diverse as the UK average in 2011, but where the non-WB population is growing slowly or in some cases not at all as a result of gentrification and studentification
- The Conservatives did best in seats where the 2011 non-WB population was half the UK average, but where change was more rapid than average



- How much you can attribute this to causation is hard to say
- It is often noted that a high *level* of the population being non-WB reduces nativism and hostility to immigration, but that rapid increases in that level have the opposite effect; diverse places where the non-WB population is stable tend to be more positive about immigration, non-diverse places where it is rising fast tend to be more hostile
- So, there may be a genuine factor whereby communities with no history of migration but with rapid recent change are drawn to Tory policies on Brexit and immigration
- But the findings also show a picture of a country in flux, with very different experiences of diversity and multi-culturalism: Labour has done well in inner city seats where migration has played an important role in the areas' history, but which are becoming increasingly affluent and white; the Tories have done well in 'left behind' areas that are now affordable destinations for migrants and for BME groups that have traditionally settled in inner areas of big cities
- For Labour, the hard part is going to be reconciling the liberalism of the inner cities with the social conservatism of the former 'Red Wall'; for the Tories, the question is roughly the same (although it is less pressing, as they have electoral arithmetic on their side)



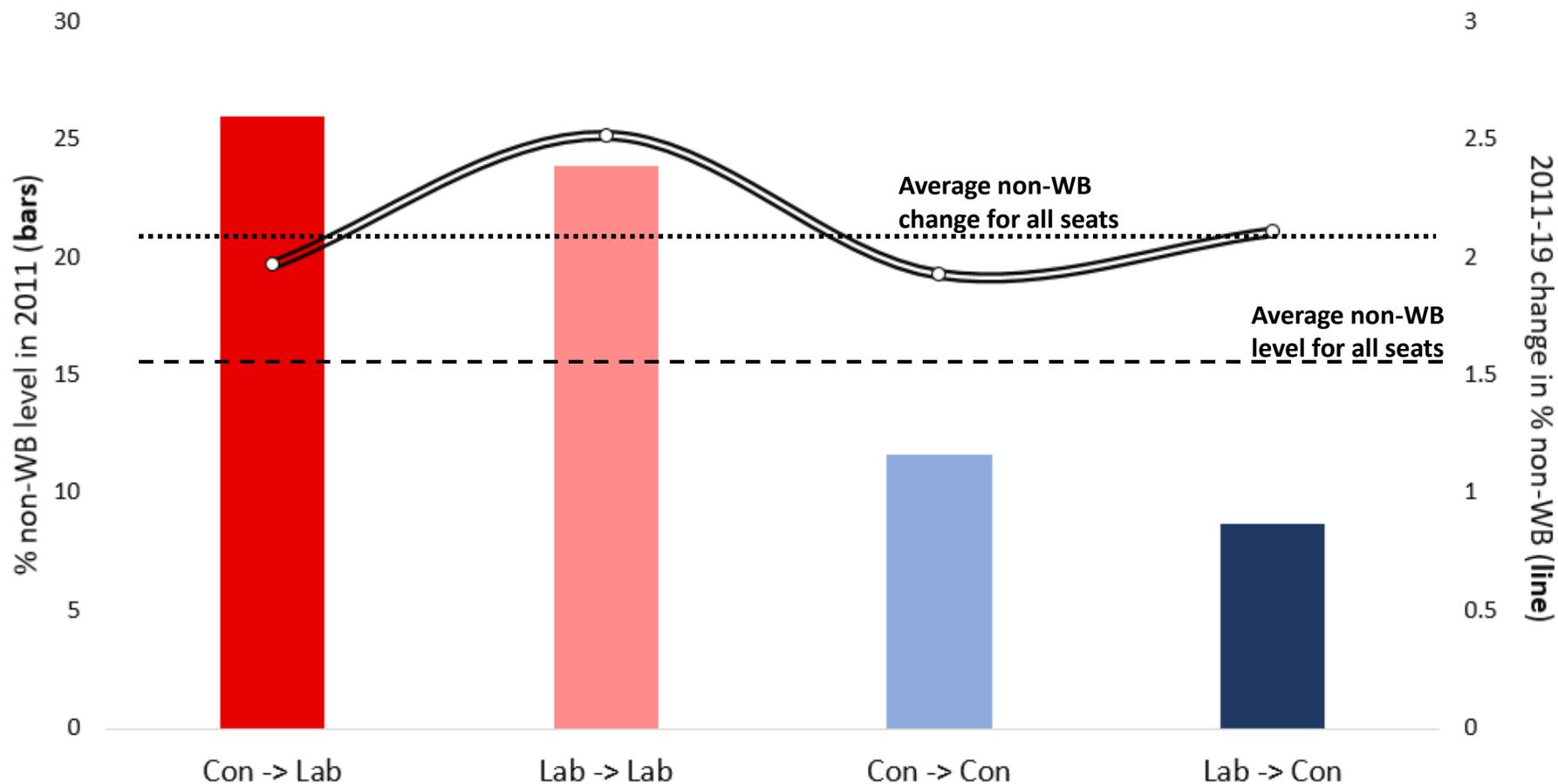
“The key conclusion from this analysis is that the seats captured by the Tories since 2011 tend to be dissimilar from Labour held and Labour gained seats, in that they started from a situation of having low numbers of non-WB residents. Since then they are characterised by a recent and marked increase in the size of the minority population. Boston and Skegness and Stoke-on-Trent South typify this.

“Meanwhile seats where Labour is becoming more competitive have not experienced a recent inflow of minorities, but rather have experienced either gentrification or studentification by younger white adults. Battersea and Putney exemplify the former, Plymouth Devonport and Reading West the latter.

“It is our belief that considerable value is to be gained from the analysis of voting patterns across a longer time frame than a single election. It is hard to credit that the Tories once returned five MPs from Glasgow, or that a Labour MP was returned in South West Norfolk.

“The 2010s have seen a suburbanisation of the BME electorate, as gentrification and changes to the housing benefit system have displaced minorities into more affordable housing in post-war suburbs of London and provincial towns. Where Enfield Southgate and the Harrow seats led Labour to success in 1997, similar success in 2024 could be achieved from the capture of Barnet and Chingford rather than the fall of the Red Wall.”

Level, change and swing



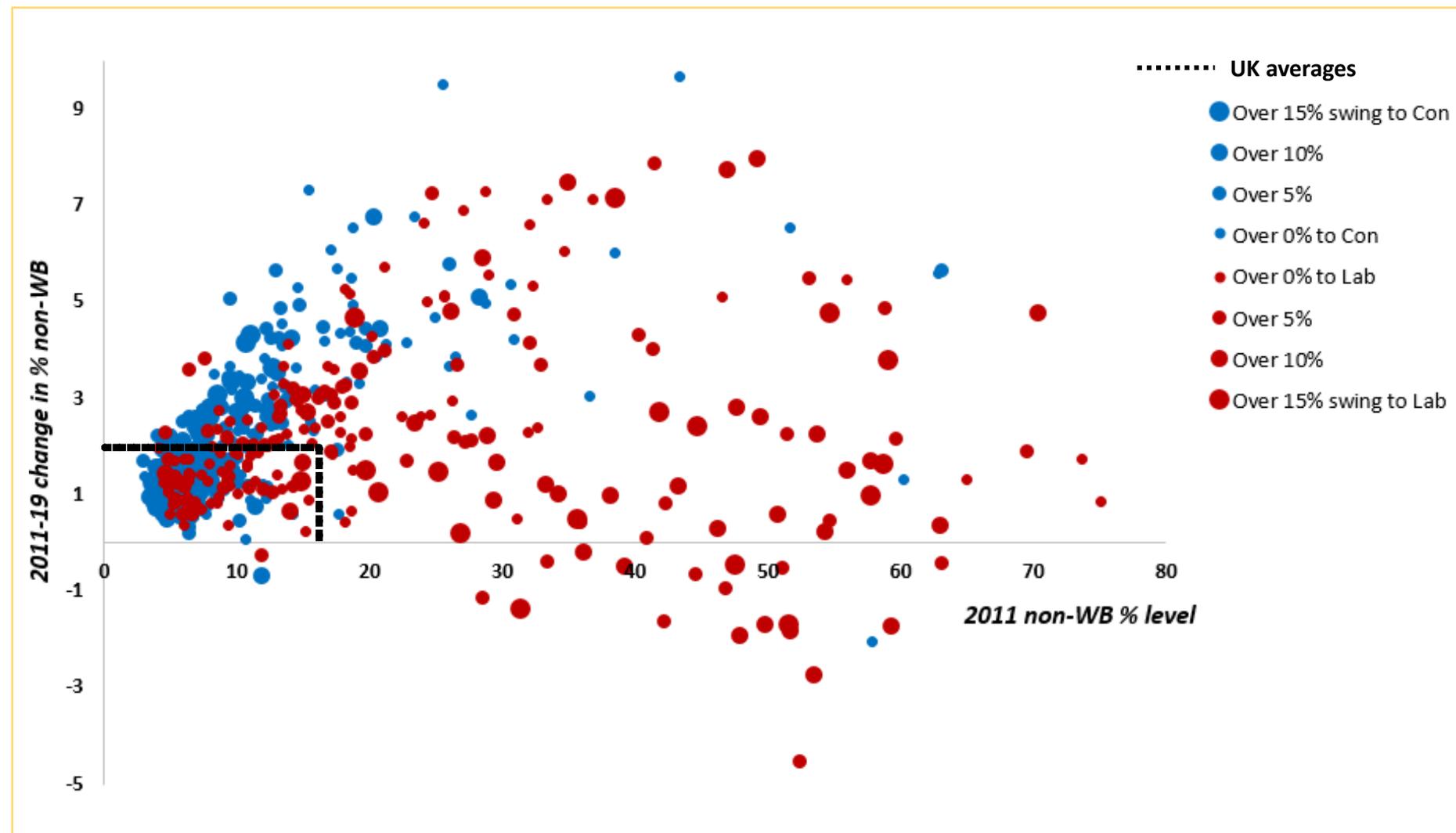
- There are 21 seats where Labour overtook the Tories as the larger of the two parties between 2010 and 2019 – and 50 seats where the Tories overtook Labour as the largest
- There are 170 seats where Labour was the largest of the two both times, and 283 where the Tories were the largest both times
- Seats where Labour overtook the Tories had high non-WB levels in 2011 but low increases in the period since
- Seats where the reverse happened had low levels but high increases

Level, change and swing



- This gets more pronounced if we look at the size of the swings to between the parties
- Seats with a cumulative swing to Labour of over 15 points were, on average, 38% non-WB in 2011 with a 1.8% increase in the size of that population during the period since
- Seats with a cumulative swing to the Tories of over 15 points were, on average, 7% non-WB in 2011, with a 2.3% increase
- High level, low change places have swung to Labour; low level high change places have swung Tory

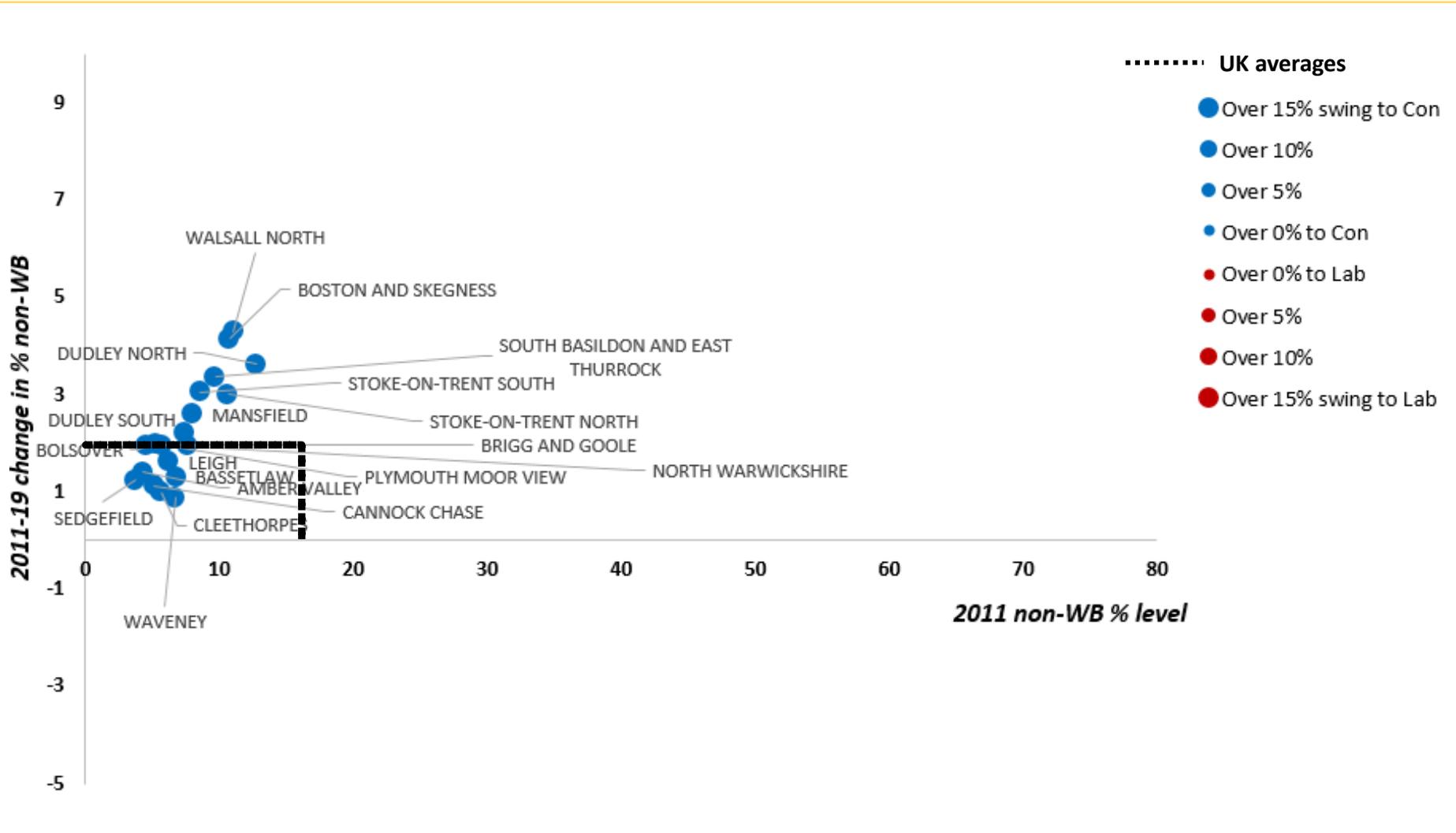
Level, change and swing



- The scatter chart to the left shows the 2011 *level* of the non-WB population on the horizontal axis, and the subsequent *change* in the size of that population on the vertical axis
- The size of the dots shows the size of the swing to Labour or the Tories
- The thick dotted black line shows the UK averages



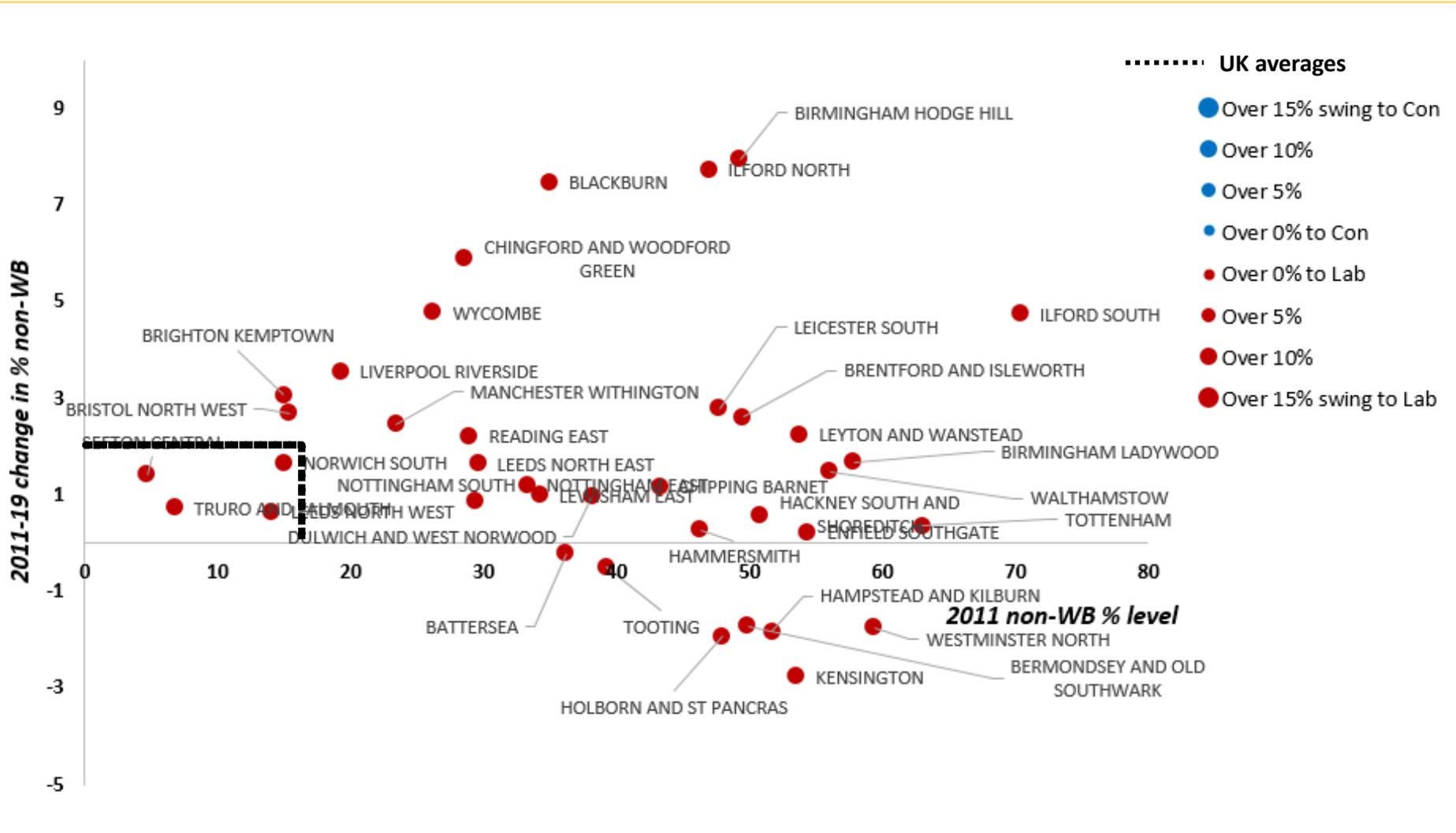
Over 15% swings to the Tories



- Many of the biggest 2010-19 swings to the Tories came in traditionally very white places which had seen big increases in the non-WB population during the 2010s
- Walsall North's non-WB population was 11% in 2011 and had increased to 15% by 2019 – and increase more than double the England and Wales average
- Many of the 'Red Wall' places won by Boris Johnson in 2010 fall into this category

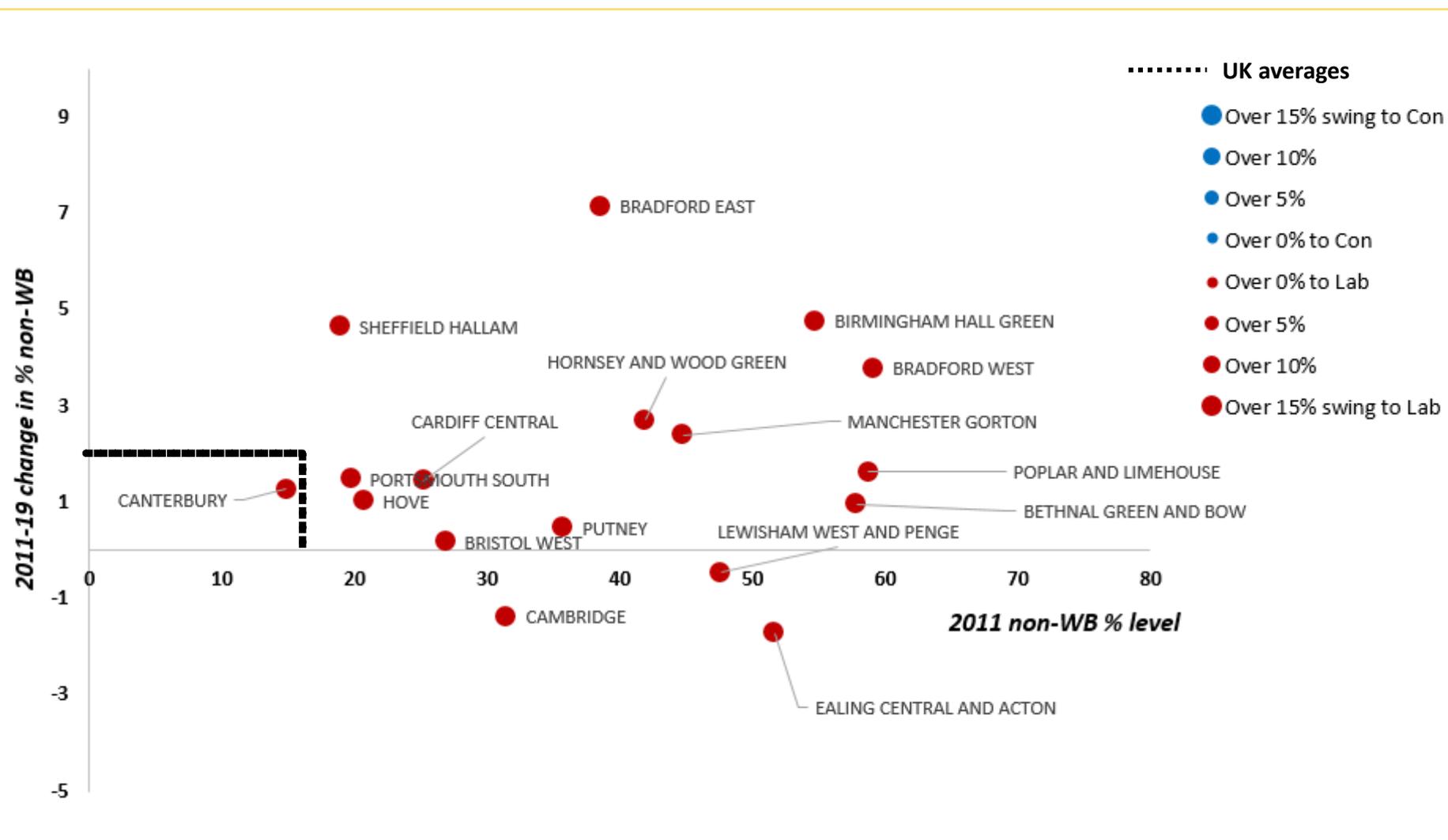


10-15% swings to Labour



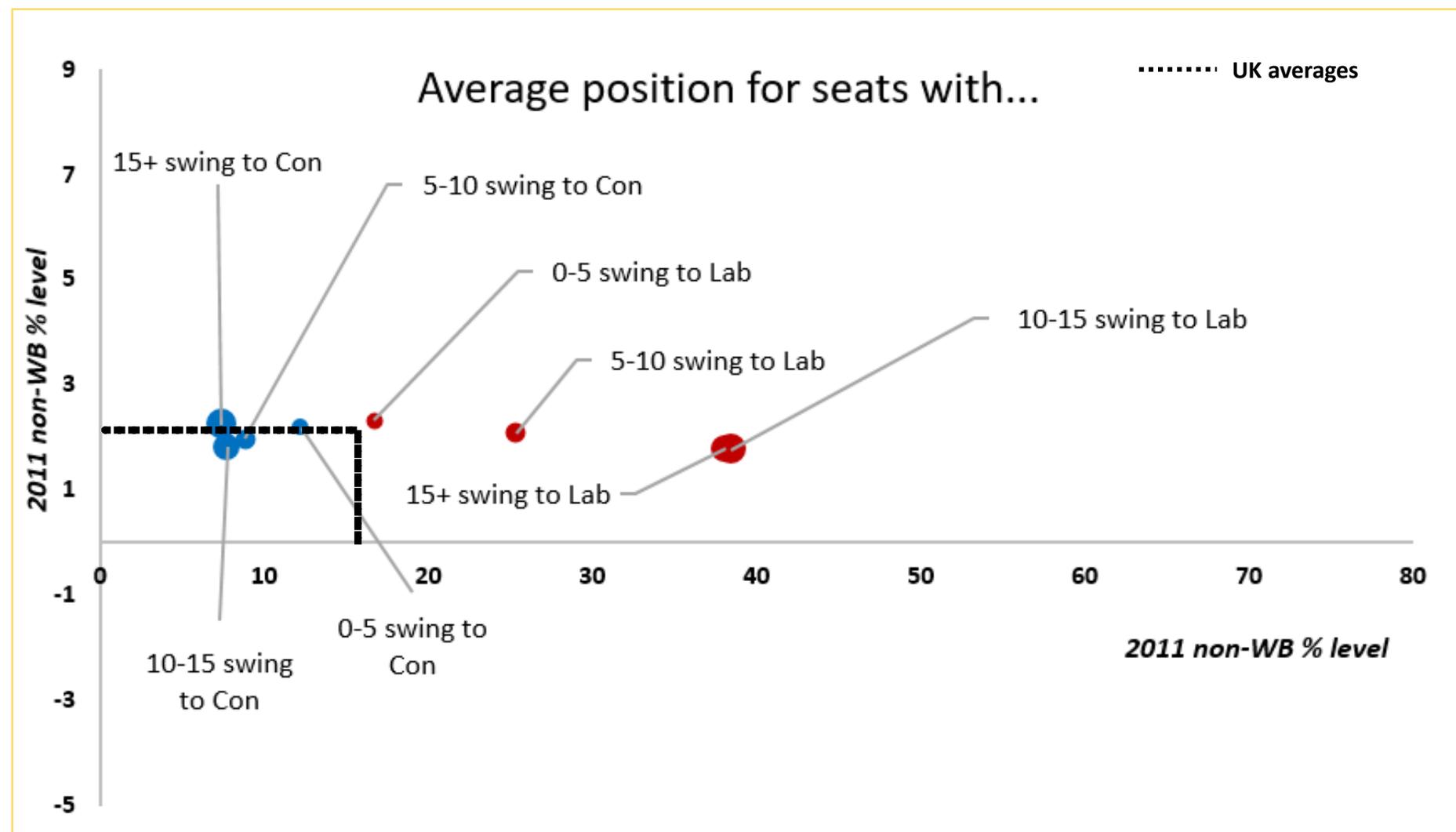
- And we start to see dramatic shifts to Labour, of 10% or more, in seats which are historically very diverse, but which are no longer seeing rapid change
- In fact many of the seats where Labour has done best are among the small number of seats in Britain where the non-WB population is actually shrinking – such as Keir Starmer’s seat, Holborn and St Pancras
- This may be thanks to the gentrification of inner cities meaning migrants often settle elsewhere; or it may reflect BAME communities choosing to relocate

Over 15% swings to Labour



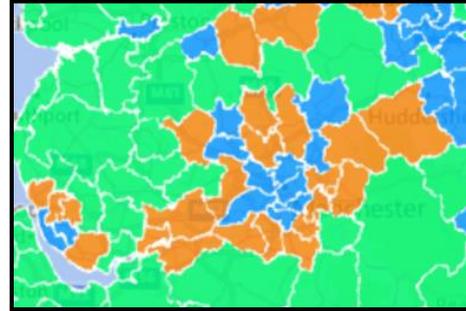
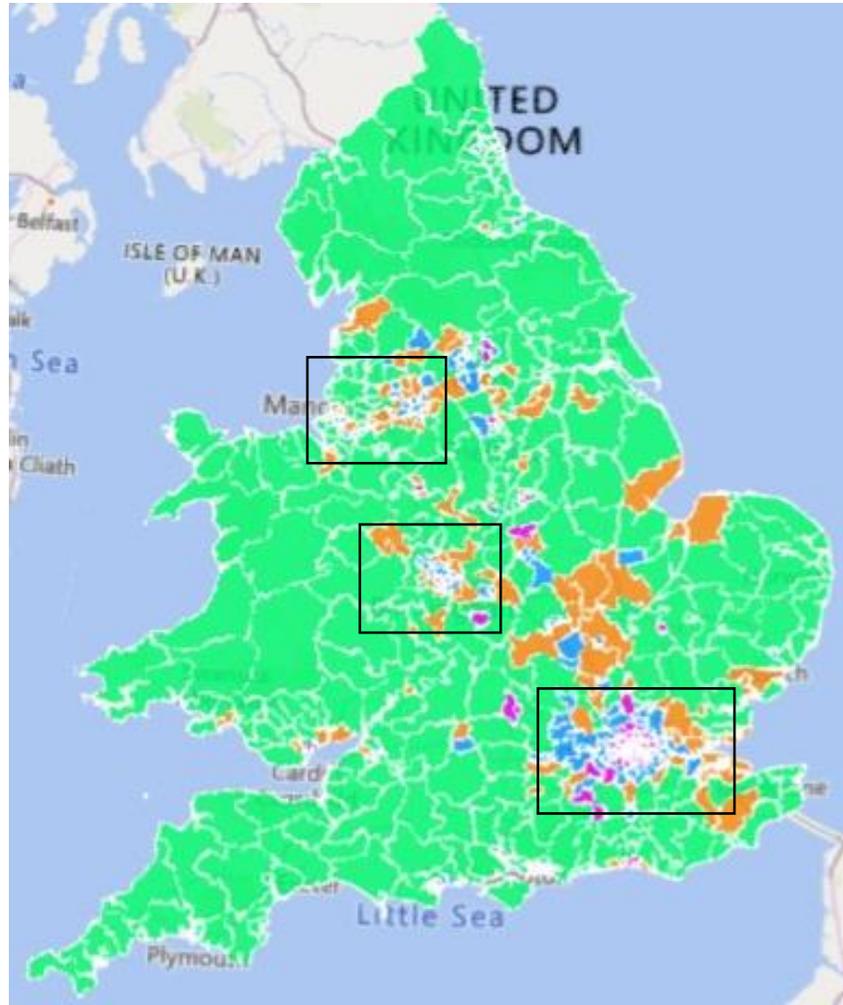
- Putney, for example, has seen a 17% swing to Labour; a seat which was a scalp for Tony Blair at the high point of New Labour remained red in the disastrous 2019 election
- The seat was 36% non-WB in 2011, but this rose by less than 0.5% during the subsequent decade – a period during which the rest of the UK became notably more diverse but when many parts of inner London became less so

Averages for the different swing categories

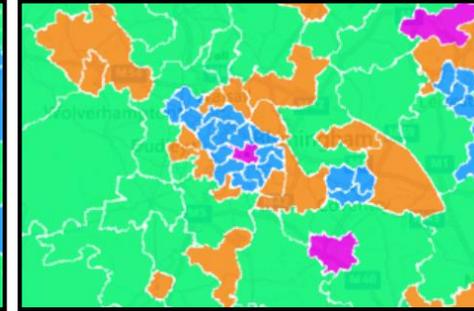


- If we look at averages for each grouping we can see the differences
- Places with a very small swing to Labour are the closest to the UK average for level and change
- Seats with big Labour swings are ultra-diverse but fairly stable
- Seats with big Tory swings are not very diverse at all – but are becoming more so

Types of place

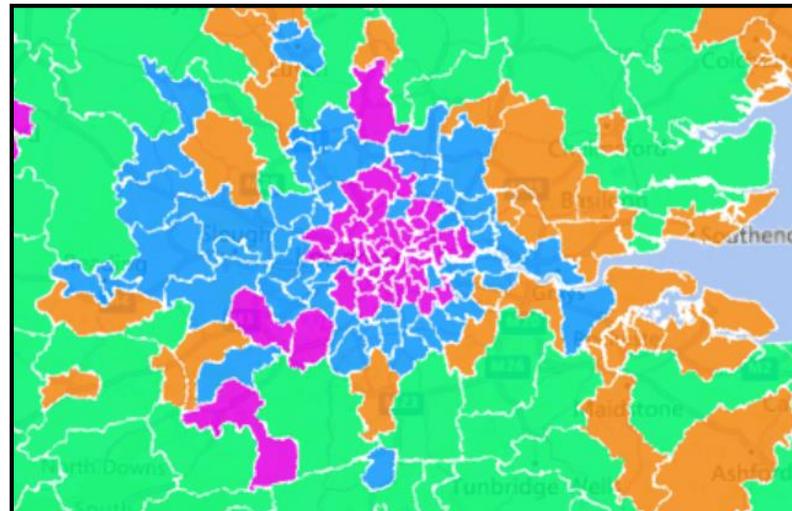


North West



West Midlands

London

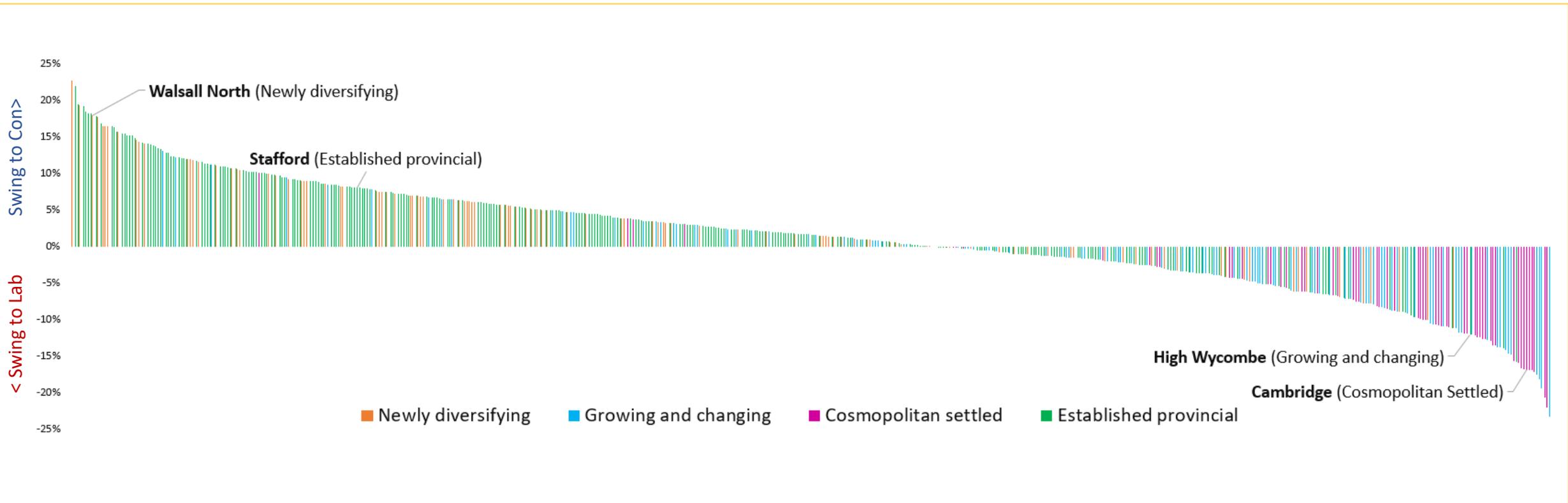


- Using Origins we can divide all English and Welsh seats into four broad categories:
 - **Established provincial** (below E&W average non-WB level, below average non-WB increase)
 - **Newly diversifying** (below average level, above average increase)
 - **Growing and changing** (above average level, above average increase)
 - **Cosmopolitan settled** (above average level, below average increase)
- The maps to the left show what this looks like: city centre seats tend to be Cosmopolitan settled

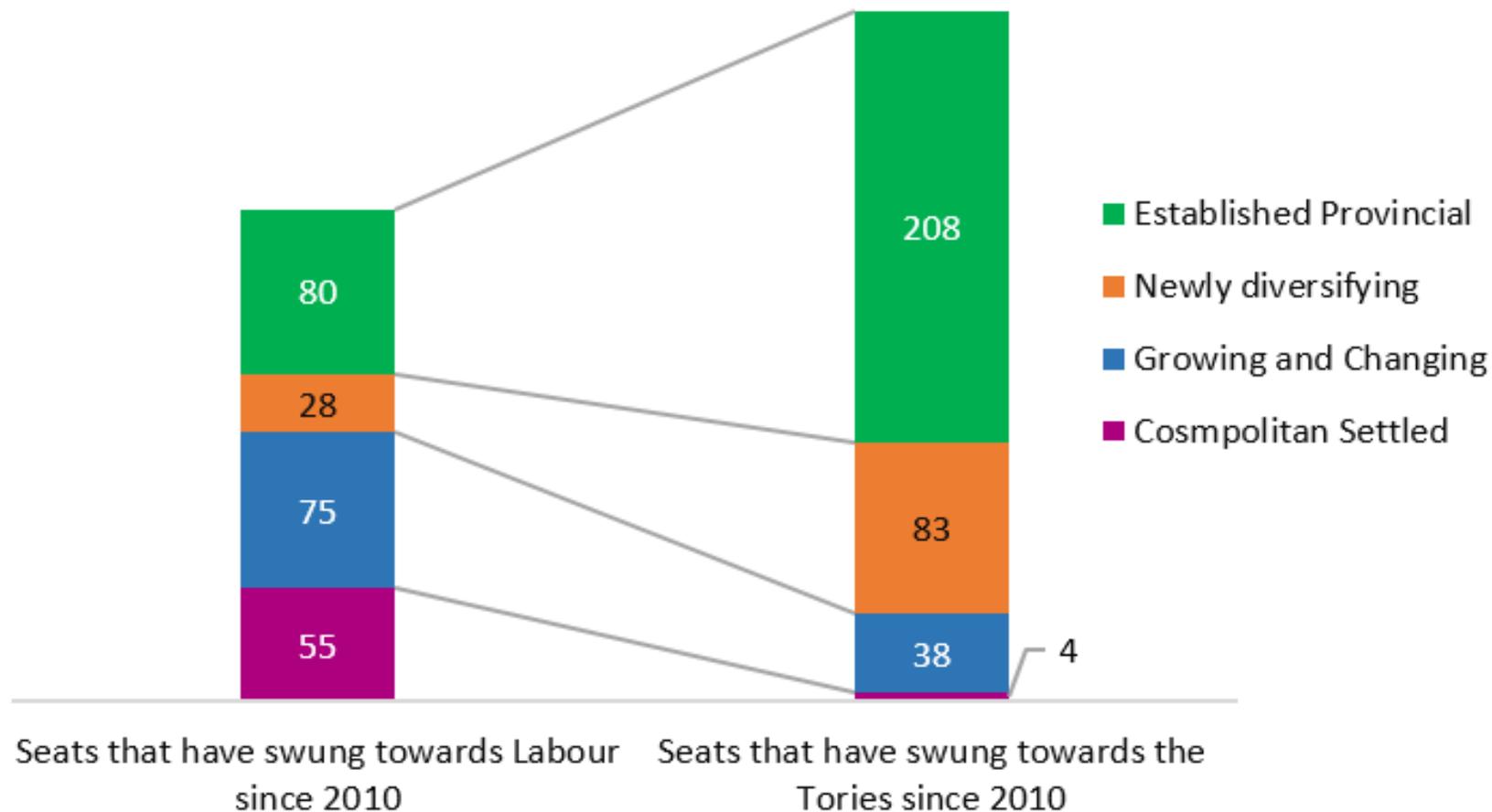
Types of place



- The chart below shows all of the seats in the UK, with the biggest Labour to Tory swings on the left and the biggest Tory to Labour ones on the right – the bars are coloured to show which of our four groupings each seat fits into
- In total there are 290 Established provincial seats, 111 Newly diversifying seats, 113 Growing and changing seats, and 59 Cosmopolitan settled seats, across England and Wales

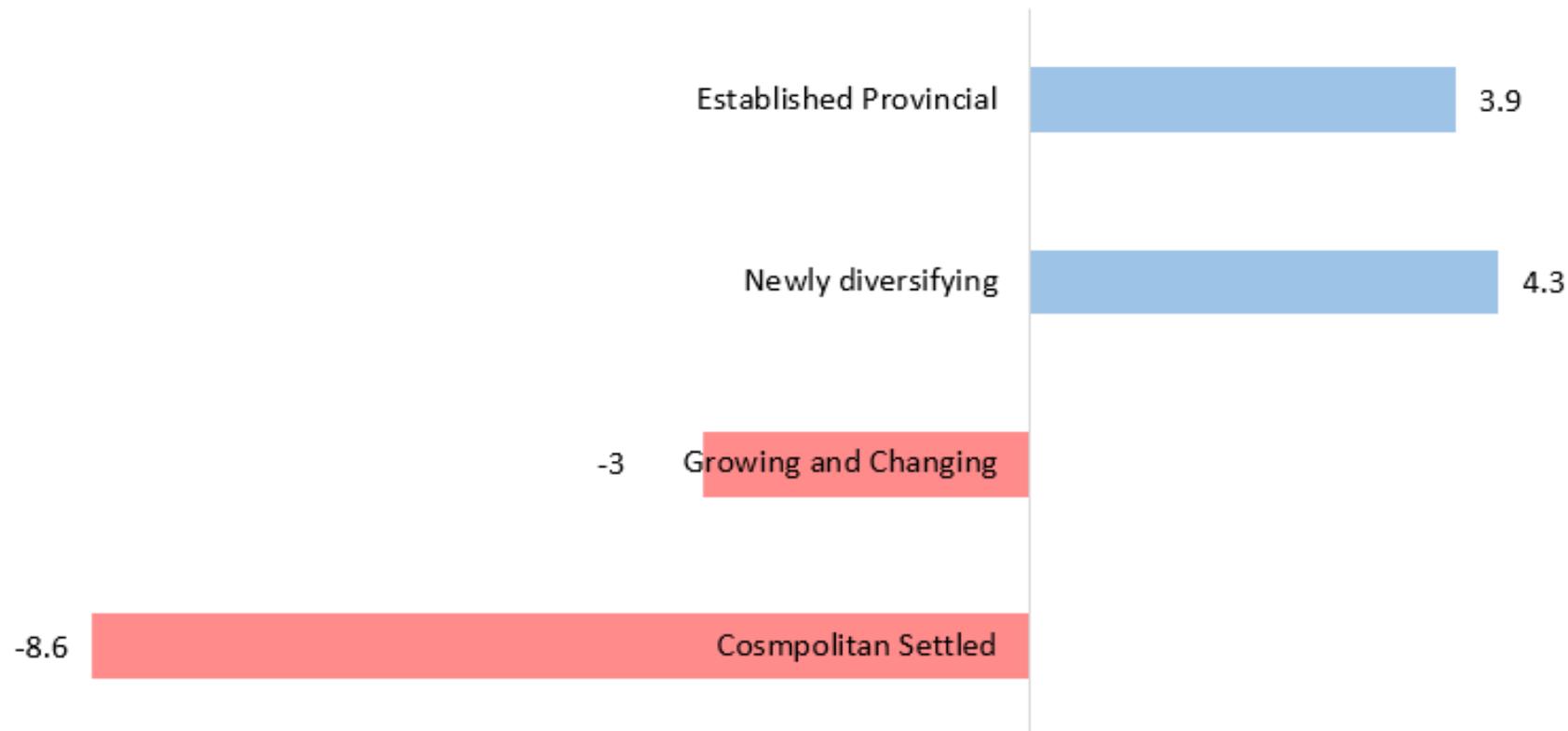


Clusters and the two parties



- The chart to the left breaks this down in more detail
- It shows that almost every one of the Cosmpolitan settled seats (i.e. places with a historically high migrant-heritage population, which are now becoming more WB) have swung towards Labour (several of the four exceptions being places with big Jewish populations)
- Meanwhile three quarters of the Newly diversifying seats (i.e. places with the opposite dynamic) have swung towards the Conservatives

Clusters and the two parties



- The next chart, meanwhile, shows much the same thing, but in a different form
- Newly diversifying and Established provincial areas have swung to the Tories; more diverse areas have swung to Labour – with the biggest cumulative swings coming in Cosmopolitan settled places where the white British population is now growing
- The challenge for Labour (as the previous chart showed) is that there are only a small number of seats in the Cosmopolitan settled grouping where it has done so well

Clusters and the two parties



Labour seats that could go **Conservative** given another nine years...

ESTABLISHED PROVINCIAL SEATS:

1. WENTWORTH AND DEARNE
2. KINGSTON UPON HULL EAST
3. WANSBECK
4. HOUGHTON AND SUNDERLAND SOUTH
5. CITY OF DURHAM
6. WASHINGTON AND SUNDERLAND WEST
7. CHESTERFIELD
8. HEMSWORTH
9. STOCKTON NORTH

NEWLY DIVERSIFYING SEATS:

1. SHEFFIELD CENTRAL
2. NORMANTON
3. PONTEFRACT AND CASTLEFORD
4. ROTHERHAM
5. WARRINGTON NORTH
6. NEWPORT EAST
7. NEWPORT WEST

Conservative seats that could go **Labour** given another nine years ...

COSMOPOLITAN SETTLED SEATS:

1. KENSINGTON
2. CHIPPING BARNET

GROWING AND CHANGING SEATS:

1. CHINGFORD AND WOODFORD GREEN
2. WYCOMBE

**These are deduced by looking at places in the respective categories which – if the swings for the next 9 years were as big as those for the past 9 years – would switch hands*

- The categories we have described are about more than demographics – they denote places that have quite different relationships with diversity and multiculturalism, and have been on different voting trajectories
- If both main parties continued to shake the same electoral trees – i.e. the Tories appealing to white ‘left behind’ places with higher recent migration and Labour speaking to historically diverse places that are gentrifying – then more seats could change hands

A note on specific minorities



- This analysis is based on the level and change of the *aggregated* non-WB population during the 2011-2019 period – i.e. all names *not* of Celtic or Anglo-Saxon heritage. However, when we break down non-WB names according to their origin we can discern clear differences in the type of seat where different minority populations are growing fastest.
- These are complex and we will not go into them in a lot of detail in this report. However, some of the key characteristics are outlined below.

ESTABLISHED PROVINCIAL SEATS

In Established Provincial seats there are no minority groups that are growing fast. We suspect that established migrant groups are deterred from some such areas thanks to house prices which make it hard for all but the most affluent minorities to move there. In poorer Established Provincial seats the issue may be a lack of connectedness to the wider economy.

NEWLY DIVERSIFYING SEATS

The UK's more longstanding minorities are growing fastest in Newly Diversifying areas. Polish, Nigerian, Caribbean, Sikh, Mandarin Chinese, Tamil, Hindu Indian and Greek Cypriot communities tend to be moving to Newly Diversifying places. Among this list are many of the more economically successful migrant groups. Their 'centrifugal' migration may reflect a quest for owner occupation – perhaps, even, a desire to leave the inner-city areas where many first settled.

COSMOPOLITAN SETTLED SEATS

While the non-WB population is generally falling in Cosmopolitan Settled seats, there are exceptions: Somali, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Vietnamese and Albanian populations, while small, have proportionally grown. These communities are relatively recent in Britain and may include higher proportions of refugees and asylum seekers.

GROWING AND CHANGING SEATS

Growing and Changing seats have the fastest growing non-WB communities. Increases are especially high among Pakistani and Bangladeshi populations, among Black African, Turkish and North African minorities, and among more recent EU accession nations (particularly Baltic and Romanian). This may reflect more affordable accommodation, due to large stocks of older and relatively inexpensive housing, as inner city areas (where many are still likely to work) get more expensive.



- This analysis does not suggest that non-WB groups are switching to the Tories – or vice versa; aside from anything else, many non-WB populations within the data cannot vote (EU migrants, for example) or are in deprived groups that have, on average, lower turnout
- Rather it reveals deeper underlying dynamics in different types of seats – thanks to the shifting demographics of the UK, and to changing economic and political geography
- It implies that Labour’s new ‘heartlands’ (i.e. the places it has been able to rely on throughout this tumultuous period) are *Growing and changing* places on city edges, which are historically diverse and becoming more so; the new Tory ‘heartlands’, in ethno-cultural terms, are non-diverse *Established provincial* constituencies with low levels of change
- Labour, meanwhile, has enjoyed big swings in its favour in *Cosmopolitan settled* parts of inner London – places which are culturally liberal, thanks in part to historical migration, but which are now becoming more white due to gentrification and the cost-of-living
- The Tories’ Eurosceptic and anti-migrant policies, meanwhile, may have had additional cut-through in *Newly diversifying* seats where the reverse is happening; the biggest cumulative swings to the Tories are in less well-off places with more affordable housing, where migrant and BME populations are settling for the first time



- All of these factors are correlations not causations; in many ways they simply prove in demographic terms what many have already observed – e.g. ‘open vs closed’ etc
- But they do point to substantial changes in where migrants are moving – implying that sites of rapid change and (potentially) cultural tension are increasingly away from big cities
- And they suggest that there is a political dimension to this, with areas that have seen major gentrification in recent decades swinging most dramatically to Labour, and those that have seen new migration since 2010 switching in the largest numbers to the Tories
- In the 49 constituencies where the non-WB population has increased by more than a third since 2011, the cumulative swing to the Tories is, on average, 7%; in the 21 seats where the non-WB population has actively shrunk, there has been a 9% cumulative swing to Labour
- In terms of strategy, the big challenges for Labour are short-to-medium-term; only a fraction of UK seats are *Cosmopolitan settled* – and most of these have been won already
- For the Conservatives, on the other hand, the challenges are long-term; as the UK gets more diverse and more seats pass through the EP > ND > GC > CS transition, how do they avoid building in their own obsolescence?