



The Social Justice Battleground

The poverty challenge for Conservative Party leadership candidates



The Centre for
Social Justice

www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk

Contents

Introduction	1
Identifying the social justice battleground – the challenge facing the next Conservative Party leader...	3
Overview:	3
Methodology - how we have created the social justice battleground:	4
What these voters think about the Conservative Party: Do they really care?	4
Will they vote?	4
Will they vote Conservative?	5
Do they care about me?	5
Appendix 1:	6
1a. The 100 Most Marginal Constituencies:	6
1b. The 17 constituencies the Conservative Party needs to win a majority of 25	8
Appendix 2:	9
Methodological statements on calculating the social justice battleground:	9

Introduction

The forthcoming Conservative Party leadership election needs to be about more than Brexit if it is going to address the issues that face low income Britain. Whether you voted leave or remain in 2016, the Conservative Party will struggle to win a future general election if it fails to re-connect with those who are most disadvantaged across Britain and demonstrate that tackling poverty is a top priority.

As an independent think tank the CSJ is neutral on who should be the next leader of the Conservative Party, but it isn't neutral on poverty which is why we have put together this analysis for Conservative MPs and party members choosing the next leader of their party.

We commissioned an opinion poll of low-income voters, the results showed that those on the lowest incomes view the Conservative Party as 'uncaring' and disinterested in the concerns of low-income Britain:¹:

- Only **5 per cent** of low-income voters associate the Conservative Party with being "compassionate".
- Three quarters (**72 per cent**) say the Conservative Party is unconcerned about people on low incomes.
- More than half (**52 per cent**) say that Conservatives "don't understand what it is like to struggle"
- Almost **6 in 10 (57 per cent)** say that the Conservatives "only care about the rich".

When we asked these voters to 'describe the Conservative Party's approach to poverty' they overwhelmingly came back to a single phrase: 'they don't care'. This is the challenge facing the next leader of the Conservative Party – do you care? It will take more than sympathetic statements. If the party wants to win a general election it needs to put forward an ambitious social policy agenda with a compelling narrative to convince low income voters that the Conservative Party is really on their side.

The better news for our party is that there are about **1 million** low income voters who could be persuaded to switch to the Conservative Party. Our polling shows that the Labour Party is taking these voters for granted. When we ask if our voters had heard from either the Conservative Party or the Labour Party in the last year – half told us they haven't had any contact from the Labour Party (**50 per cent**).

57 per cent said the same thing about the Conservative Party. When it comes to matching the Labour Party in campaign effort the Conservative Party isn't far behind. With better messaging and ambitious social justice policies there is every reason to believe the Conservative Party can pick up votes from poorer households.

So far the early part of the contest has been dominated by the candidates' views on negotiating (or not) our exit from the EU. Our polling and number crunching of marginal seats shows that this is not the only show in town. The next leader will struggle to be Prime minister for long if they can't build a big social justice narrative.

Number crunching by the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) shows that over **1.4 million** poorer voters live in the 100 most marginal seats which represents **1 in 7 voters** in these areas - more than enough to swing the result of the next general election. This is the social justice battleground that is hard to ignore for anyone who wants to be Prime Minister.

Put simply, you can't win a general election and a working majority in the House of Commons without a clear message to these voters with a plan to tackle poverty and improve the lives of the poorest. We have published this data today to make sure that when choosing a new leader for their party, and indeed the next Prime Minister, Conservatives should back a candidate who talks about the biggest social issues as passionately as they do their plans for Brexit.

¹ <https://www.survation.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Final-Tables-CSJ.xlsx>

There are big issues that need to be addressed in this leadership contest and each of the candidates needs to set out how they would go about tackling them. The Centre for Social Justice is calling on each of the candidates to make a clear commitment to making social justice a top priority if elected and to make a statement on their plans to reduce poverty and improve the lives of the poorest voters.

In our political system, some voters are more equal than others. To win, party strategists need to target resources on the marginal seats where a few hundred votes either way could be the difference between winning and losing, in all of the 100 most marginal constituencies the number of the lowest income voters exceeds the majority, making it difficult to win these constituencies without their support.

As they go about trying to persuade MPs and then Conservative Party members to back their campaigns to be the next leader of our party, every candidate should ask themselves what they will do for our poorest constituents and neighbours if they are elected. Our poorest voters need the help of a Conservative government committed to social justice and this will only come from a Prime Minister who clearly demonstrates that commitment.

Andy Cook

Chief Executive, Centre for Social Justice

Identifying the social justice battleground – the challenge facing the next Conservative Party leader...

Overview:

The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) has analysed government deprivation data to map out the number of low-income, most deprived voters across the most marginal constituencies in the UK.

Our analysis of the **100 most marginal constituencies** in the UK – the seats that will decide a general election - shows that there are over **1.4 million** disadvantaged voters across these seats, representing **1 in 7 voters (14.3 per cent)** in these areas. The number of voters living in poverty exceeds the majorities in each of these marginal seats. This is the forgotten 'social justice battleground'.

As an independent think tank the CSJ is neutral on who should be the next leader of the Conservative Party, but it isn't neutral on poverty which is why we have put together this analysis for Conservative MPs and party members choosing the next leader of their party.

To crunch the true number of poorer voters across the most marginal seats we have used a more complex Index of Multiple Deprivation rather than a simple poverty line measure. Using the best available government data from England, Scotland and Wales we have calculated the number of voters who are either 'employment deprived' or 'income deprived' and taken the higher of these two figures to calculate our battleground.

The next Conservative Party leader needs to win in the social justice battleground if they want to win a working majority:

Conservative Party strategists will need to win a minimum of 17 seats from other parties if they are targeting even a small working majority of 25. In the 17 most marginal constituencies that the Conservative Party needs to gain, there are just under **250,000** poorer voters who make up **14 per cent** of the electorate on average in each of these parliamentary seats

In the 34 seats the Conservative Party needs to win to target a more ambitious majority of 50, there are almost **half a million (468,000)** deprived voters.

At the next general election, the Conservative Party will have been in government for 10 years. Holding onto the seats the party already holds will be a major challenge. In the 35 seats Labour needs to gain from the Conservatives, there **are over half a million (526,340)** low-income, deprived voters, or one in six of all voters across these seats.

The social justice battleground should be a major concern to party strategists and MPs picking the next Conservative Party leader. They will need to set out plans to win the social justice battleground if they want to remain Prime Minister. It is almost impossible for the next leader - regardless of who it might be - to achieve a working majority without winning votes from voters on the lowest incomes.

Methodology - how we have created the social justice battleground:²

The social justice battleground has been created using government data sets for each of the countries that make up the United Kingdom. The major political parties traditionally contest vacancies in England, Scotland and Wales, so for this reason we have excluded Northern Ireland.

Each national statistical authority produces an Index of Multiple Deprivation covering a range of deprivation indicators. Each nation produces a Multiple Index of Deprivation which is slightly different. However, each home nation measures Income and Employment as sub categories within their Indices.

Within each it is possible to identify population numbers allowing us to build constituency level profiles. How this has been achieved is outlined below.

It should be noted that as each nation measures income and employment deprivation differently, these are not 'like for like' comparisons but they do give an indication of the level of income poverty within each constituency. However, this represents the best available data to identify voters in poverty.

What these voters think about the Conservative Party: Do they really care?

Alongside this electoral data we commissioned a survey of the lowest income UK voters to understand what they really think about the Conservative Party and the challenge facing any new leader to win their votes.

Survation conducted an online survey of 506 UK adults (aged over 18) whose household income is below £16,999. The field work was completed between 24th-25th April 2019.

These voters overwhelmingly view the Conservative Party as 'uncaring' and disinterested in the concerns of low-income Britain³:

- Only **5 per cent** of low-income voters associate the Conservative Party with being "compassionate".
- Three quarters (**72 per cent**) think the Conservative Party is not concerned about low income voters.
- More than half (**52 per cent**) say that Conservatives "don't understand what it is like to struggle"
- Almost 6 in 10 (**57 per cent**) say that the Conservatives "only care about the rich".

Will they vote?

Poorer voters appear far from apathetic – contrary to popular canvassing myths that those on the lowest incomes do not vote. More than half of our respondents are "certain to vote" (**51 per cent**) at the next general election. With about **3 in 4 (71 per cent)** very likely to vote in a general election. This is the social justice battleground of low-income voters.

To try and quantify this in absolute numbers the Centre for Social Justice has calculated that this represents approximately 8 million voting age adults across all UK constituencies, or 1 in 6 voters⁴.

² For a more detailed methodology please see Appendix 2

³ <https://www.survation.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Final-Tables-CSJ.xlsx>

⁴ For a more detailed methodology please see Appendix 2

Will they vote Conservative?

Only **1 in 5 (19 per cent)** of those likely to vote say they plan to vote Conservative at the next general election when we asked low-income voters about their current voting intentions. More than twice as many (**46 per cent**) plan to vote Labour. Almost **4 in 10 (38 per cent)** of the lowest income voters would “never” consider voting Conservative.

Despite these findings the Conservative party would be wrong to write off poorer voters. Our research finds that **14 per cent** of those not planning to vote Conservative would be likely to do so in the future. This represents almost **1 million (907,000)** voters who are potentially open to voting Conservative if the next leader of the Conservative Party puts forward a ‘pitch’ that resonates with these voters. To win a majority at the next general election the Conservative Party needs to convince these ‘low-income considerers’ that the party understands the challenges they are facing.

A **third (32 per cent)** of low-income voters would be more likely to vote Conservative in a general election if “the Conservative Party made helping people on low incomes a priority”.

There is evidence from our research that despite enjoying significant support from poorer voters the Labour Party is taking these voters for granted. When we ask if our voters had heard from either the Conservative Party or Labour Party in the last year – half told us they haven’t had any contact from the Labour Party (50 per cent). 57 per cent said the same thing about the Conservative Party. When it comes to matching the Labour Party in campaign effort the Conservative Party isn’t far behind. With better messaging and ambitious social justice policies there is every reason to believe the Conservative Party can pick up votes from poorer households.

Do they care about me?

Our research shows that the Conservative Party has a long way to go to convince those on the lowest incomes that the party cares about the challenges they face and the issues that matter to them. Only **12 per cent** of these voters think that the Conservative Party “best represents people like them”.

The polling revealed an image of a Conservative Party that is out of touch and uncaring. This should be a concern to Conservative Party leadership candidates. Almost **6 in 10 (57 per cent)** think the Conservative Party ‘only cares about the rich’ – more than four times the figure for the Labour Party (**13 per cent**).

Just **5 per cent** see the Conservative Party as “compassionate” - ‘Compassionate Conservatism’ is a popular slogan among Conservative Party leadership candidates but still has a long way to go to convince poorer voters it is true. About half of these voters think that Conservatives are ‘out of touch’ (**48 per cent**) and don’t understand what it is like to struggle (**52 per cent**).

These figures show that the Conservative Party needs to show a commitment to these voters to stand any chance of winning the ‘poverty vote’ – **72 per cent** think that the Conservative Party is not concerned about people on a low income. Only **5 per cent** of these voters think the Conservative Party is ‘very concerned’ about winning their vote.

Appendix 1:

1a. The 100 Most Marginal Constituencies:

These are the 100 constituencies with the smallest majorities from across the UK:

Most marginal constituencies - England

Most Marginal Seats - England	Sitting MP	Party	2017 Majority (by election majority where relevant)	Higher of number of people income or employment deprived [3]	Percentage of either low income or employment deprived [4]
Kensington	Emma Dent Coad	Labour	20	17,017	15%
Perth and North Perthshire	Pete Wishart	SNP	21	8,373	9%
Dudley North	Ian Austin	Labour	22	17,812	21%
Newcastle-under-Lyme	Paul Farrelly	Labour	30	12,245	13%
Crewe & Nantwich	Laura Smith	Labour	48	13,215	12%
Canterbury	Rosie Duffield	Labour	187	12,645	11%
Barrow & Furness	John Woodcock	Independent	209	13,889	16%
Keighley	John Grogan	Labour	239	14,606	15%
Lanark and Hamilton East	Angela Crawley	SNP	266	14,661	15%
Ashfield	Gloria De Piero	Labour	441	18,104	17%
Bishop Auckland	Helen Goodman	Labour	502	16,871	19%
Peterborough	Vacant: by-election	Labour	607	25,827	21%
Stroud	David Drew	Labour	687	9,434	9%
Westmorland and Lonsdale	Tim Farron	LibDem	777	5,923	7%
Bedford	Mohammad Yasin	Labour	789	18,078	17%
Oxford West and Abingdon	Layla Moran	LibDem	816	6,581	6%
Ipswich	Sandy Martin	Labour	831	18,296	16%
Stockton South	Paul Williams	Labour	888	14,521	14%
Colne Valley	Thelma Walker	Labour	915	14,523	13%
Edinburgh South West	Joanna Cherry	SNP	1,097	11,383	11%
Warwick and Leamington	Matt Western	Labour	1,206	8,986	9%
Central Ayrshire	Philippa Whitford	SNP	1,267	16,689	19%
Penistone and Stocksbridge	Angela Smith	Change UK	1,322	8,928	10%
Argyll and Bute	Brendan O'Hara	SNP	1,328	9,375	11%
Carshalton and Wallington	Tom Brake	LibDem	1,369	13,742	14%
Lincoln	Karen Lee	Labour	1,538	17,911	16%
Portsmouth South	Stephen Morgan	Labour	1,554	19,472	17%
Eastbourne	Stephen Lloyd	LibDem	1,609	14,405	13%
Wrexham	Ian Lucas	Labour	1,832	12,718	18%
Derby North	Chris Williamson	Labour	2,015	15,410	15%
Wakefield	Mary Creagh	Labour	2,176	16,878	17%
Wolverhampton South West	Rob Marris	Labour	2,185	15,799	18%
High Peak	Ruth George	Labour	2,322	10,127	11%
Stoke-On-Trent North	Ruth Smeeth	Labour	2,359	20,854	21%
				468,282	14%
				total number	percentage average

Most marginal constituencies - Scotland

Most Marginal Seats - Scotland	Sitting MP	Party	2017 Majority (by election majority where relevant)	Higher of number of people income or employment deprived [3]	Percentage of either low income or employment deprived [4]
North East Fife	Stephen Gethins	SNP	2	5,577	7%
Perth and North Perthshire	Pete Wishart	SNP	21	8,373	9%
Glasgow South West	Chris Stephens	SNP	60	19,018	22%
Glasgow East	David Linden	SNP	75	20,455	22%
Stirling	Stephen Kerr	Conservative	148	9,494	10%
Airdrie and Shotts	Neil Gray	SNP	195	13,632	16%
Glasgow North East	Paul Sweeney	Labour	242	21,172	25%
Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath	Lesley Laird	Labour	259	15,327	16%
Rutherglen & Hamilton West	Gerard Killen	Labour	265	17,278	16%
Lanark and Hamilton East	Angela Crawley	SNP	266	14,661	15%
Motherwell and Wishaw	Marion Fellows	SNP	318	16,213	17%
Inverclyde	Ronnie Cowan	SNP	384	16,303	21%
Dunfermline and West Fife	Douglas Chapman	SNP	844	9,711	10%
Midlothian	Danielle Rowley	Labour	885	9,550	11%
Na h-Eileanan An Iar	Angus MacNeil	SNP	1,007	2,803	10%
Glasgow North	Patrick Grady	SNP	1,060	19,459	25%
Edinburgh South West	Joanna Cherry	SNP	1,097	11,383	11%
Central Ayrshire	Philippa Whitford	SNP	1,267	16,689	19%
Argyll and Bute	Brendan O'Hara	SNP	1328	9,375	11%
Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill	Hugh Gaffney	Lab	1,586	16,942	18%
Edinburgh North and Leith	Deidre Brock	SNP	1,625	12,616	11%
Glasgow South	Stewart McDonald	SNP	2,027	15,515	18%
Caithness, Sutherland & Easter Ross	Jamie Stone	LibDem	2,044	7,101	12%
Glasgow Central	Alison Thewliss	SNP	2,267	20,743	21%
West Dunbartonshire	Martin Docherty-Hughes	SNP	2,288	15,951	18%
Paisley and Renfrewshire South	Mhairi Black	SNP	2,541	12,706	15%
				358,048	15%
				total number	percentage average

Most marginal constituencies - Wales

Most Marginal Seats - Wales	Sitting MP	Party	2017 Majority (by election majority where relevant)	Higher of number of people income or employment deprived [3]	Percentage of either low income or employment deprived [4]
Arfon	Hywel Williams	Plaid Cymru	92	5,607	9%
Ceredigion	Ben Lake	Plaid Cymru	104	1,462	2%
Preseli Pembrokeshire	Stephen Crabb	Conservative	314	5,523	7%
Aberconwy	Guto Bebb	Conservative	635	10,020	17%
Wrexham	Ian Lucas	Labour	1,832	12,718	18%
Vale Of Glamorgan	Alun Cairns	Conservative	2,190	22,208	22%
Vale Of Clwyd	Chris Ruane	Labour	2,379	18,007	25%
				75,544	14%
				total number	percentage average

1b. The 17 constituencies the Conservative Party needs to win a majority of 25

This data set takes the 17 constituencies with the smallest majorities that are held by parties other than the Conservatives to demonstrate the most winnable constituencies for the Conservative Party.

Conservative Targets for 25 Majority	Sitting MP	Party	2017 Majority (by election majority where relevant)	Higher of number of people income or employment deprived [3]	Percentage of either low income or employment deprived [4]
Kensington	Emma Dent Coad	Labour	20	17,017	15%
Perth and North Perthshire	Pete Wishart	SNP	21	8,373	9%
Dudley North	Ian Austin	Labour	22	17,812	21%
Newcastle-under-Lyme	Paul Farrelly	Labour	30	12,245	13%
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Oxford West and Abingdon	Layla Moran	LibDem	816	6,581	6%
Ipswich	Sandy Martin	Labour	831	18,296	16%

Appendix 2:

Methodological statements on calculating the social justice battleground:

The list of one hundred most marginal constituencies was updated to reflect the 2017 General Election results by extracting data from the House of Commons Library data and the Election Polling website (www.electionpolling.co.uk). The list of target constituencies for either the Labour Party or the Conservative Party to win a majority of 50 seats in Parliament was determined by extracting data from the House of Commons Library data and the Election Polling website (www.electionpolling.co.uk).

In the original analysis the methodologies varied between England, Scotland and Wales constituencies to reflect the slightly different ways the Index of Multiple Deprivation is reported for each of these countries. This has remained the case in the updated analysis.

English constituencies

For the constituencies in England, the constituency deprivation figures calculated by the House of Commons Library have been used. These are based upon the latest English Index of Multiple Deprivation (2015). They were calculated by taking an average of the deprivation scores for all Lower Super Output Areas in the constituency, weighted by population (to take account of the fact that LSOA population sizes can vary). LSOAs have been matched to constituencies on a best-fit basis. LSOA population data and deprivation scores are published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

From the House of Commons Library constituency data both the percentage of the population experiencing deprivation relating to low income and the percentage of the working age population in an area involuntarily excluded from the labour market has been identified and extracted. These have been multiplied by the relevant 2017 population figures [ONS. Parliamentary Constituencies Population Estimates, Mid-2017] to produce the number of people in the constituency affected by the relevant measure. These have been combined to give a total number of people per constituency affected by either low income or employment deprivation.

Welsh constituencies

The structure of data by constituency in Wales is different to England and both the percentage of the population experiencing deprivation relating to low income and the percentage of the working age population in an area involuntarily excluded from the labour market have been determined based upon the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) 2014 produced by Welsh Government – Statistics and Research.

<http://wimd.wales.gov.uk/geography/wca/W09000002?lang=en#&min=0&max=100&domain=overall>

This provides the levels for the 20% most deprived LOSAs in Wales that are within the constituency.

The same method as for English constituencies has then applied using the Office of National Statistics 'Parliamentary Constituencies Population Estimates, Mid-2017'.

Scottish UK Parliament constituencies

The structure of data by constituency in Scotland is different to England and both the percentage of the population experiencing deprivation relating to low income and the percentage of the working age population in an area involuntarily excluded from the labour market have been determined based upon the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2016 produced by the Scottish Government. This provides the levels for the 20% most deprived LOSAs in Scotland that are within the constituency. However, this is only produced by Scottish Parliament constituencies and so the data for these has been mapped on a best fit basis to the UK Parliament constituencies in Scotland.

The same method as for English constituencies has then applied using the Office of National Statistics 'Parliamentary Constituencies Population Estimates, Mid-2017'.

Additional Methodology

In addition to the main methodology, for the 2019 update the higher of percentage of the population experiencing deprivation relating to low income or the percentage of the working age population in an area involuntarily excluded from the labour market has been identified and multiplied by the relevant 2017 population figures.

This has been provided based upon the NSO guidance to the England IMD which states that there is a strong correlation between the percentage of the working age population in an area involuntarily excluded from the labour market and therefore a degree of double counting to add the figures together. Taking the higher of the two measures provides a more conservative estimate that avoids any double counting.

Methodological statements on calculating the number of low income voters:

We have extrapolated figures from our survey of relative low-income adults. Relative low-income adults were defined, for the purpose of our survey, as adults with a household earning which is less than £17,000.

To calculate the total number of voting age adults who are low income, we used data from the Households Below Average Income dataset. The most recent release stated that 5.9 million working age adults were in relative low-income households and 2.2 million pensioners were in relative low-income adults.

Working age adults are defined as: individuals aged 19 and over, or 16 and not in fulltime education. To exclude those aged 16 and 17 who may be defined as relative low-income, but unable to vote, we subtracted the school leavers from 2016 and 2017 who did not go on to fulltime education from the number of people identified as relative low-income adults.

The number of people who did not go on to fulltime education in 2016 and 2017 equates to 130,000 people, rounded. When we subtract this figure from the number of adults in relative low-income and round, the total number of voting age adults in relative low-income comes to 8 million.

This is likely an underestimate of the total number of people who are relative low-income voting age adults. This calculation makes the assumption that all 16 and 17 years olds not in fulltime education are in relative low-income, which is unlikely. Therefore, the 8 million figure should be treated as a lower bound for the estimated total number of voting age adults in relative low-income.

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