



More in  
Common

# Gorton and Denton

A More in Common dispatch after  
the by-election

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### About More in Common

More in Common is a think tank and research agency working to bridge the gap between policy makers and the public, and helping people in Westminster to understand those voters who feel ignored or overlooked by those in power. Our British Seven segmentation provides a unique lens at understanding what the public thinks and why. We've published ground-breaking reports on a range of issues from climate and refugees to culture wars to crime. We are a full-service research agency offering quantitative and qualitative research and are members of the British Polling Council.

This research was conducted in late 2025 - early 2026. Full methodological information can be found at the end of the report.

## Introduction

The result of the Gorton and Denton by-election was unprecedented in British political history. It was the Green Party's first win in any parliamentary by-election, and with Reform UK in second place, epitomised the dramatic fragmentation in British politics that has seen voters break away from the traditional mainstream parties. The Labour Party, less than two years after winning a record majority in the House of Commons, lost a seat they had held onto in some version for almost 100 years, losing their majority of 13,000 and ending up in third place.

The numbers are extraordinary, but they belie a wider trend in British politics. While it is easy to get caught up in the sheer size of the vote flows and shifts, the result was one driven by real people and their concerns. By speaking to residents of the constituency themselves we are able to find out much more about why the result panned out the way it did, and what it might mean about the future of politics in Britain more generally.

With that in mind, More in Common convened three focus groups on Friday 27th February, the day that the by-election results were announced. This report is a summary of the groups, and paints a picture of the fragmented and confusing politics that accompanies Britain's increasingly multi-party system. While the three groups (with Green voters, Labour voters, and Reform voters) all had slightly different views and concerns about specific candidates and issues, there was a lot in common across all of these groups and indeed with other groups More in Common has run across the country - which, will likely manifest themselves next at the Scottish and Welsh Parliament and English council elections in May.

- **Extreme disillusionment with recent Governments is giving people few reasons to stick with the traditional mainstream**

Many residents believe that the Labour they have seen in Government is not the one they elected. The sense that the Conservatives betrayed their trust in office, and now Labour has done the same is making people much more willing to support new or untested political parties. Traditional worries that new or smaller parties are unelectable, untested or might be too extreme are now secondary to the mood of 'roll the dice politics' - because few think that things can get much worse.

- **Cost of living as the main driver of disillusionment**

Across all the groups, it was specifically Labour's perceived lack of action on the cost of living that had eroded faith in the party. Matching polling which shows a record number (59 per cent) of the public now believe that the cost of living crisis will never end, residents in Gorton and Denton explained that they felt they were struggling as much as when Labour was elected and that too much of life felt unaffordable. Across the groups people were cutting back or missing out because they simply couldn't afford to live their lives to the standard they had in the past.

- **Personalities matter**

These voters all had strong views on the personalities involved in this by election

context. In fact many of the participants were more concerned with whether the candidate's character was trustworthy, down-to-earth, and authentic than if their policy positions were in the right place. They wanted, above all else, to have someone who was hardworking and understood their problems. In that regard, Andy Burnham was the most popular politician across the groups, with both Reform voters and Green voters. Hannah Spencer was very popular with some voters, and her 'ordinary appeal' was clearly a driver for those who voted Green. In contrast, voters almost uniformly found Starmer personally unlikeable, even those who stuck with Labour were enthusiastic about the Prime Minister. Labour and Green voters were very concerned about Matt Goodwin and Nigel Farage, whereas the Reform voters we spoke to tended to like Farage but most had not heard of Goodwin.

- **Division and trust in politics**

Across all three groups, one of the most striking and consistent themes was a deep unease about the state of political discourse in Britain today. Voters were not only disenchanted with specific parties or politicians, they were troubled by what politics itself has become. Many felt that political debate had grown nastier, more tribal, and harder to follow, and there was a strong sense that this division is not accidental but is being actively stoked, leaving voters feeling confused about who to trust and exhausted by the noise.

This is part of a broader pattern in focus groups across the country: as well as the political landscape fragmenting and new parties competing for attention, politics is becoming simultaneously more polarised and more chaotic. Many Britons raise feelings of unease and that there is something bubbling below the surface that is setting the potential for a conflagration.

### Group 1 - Green voters

Speaking to Green voters in Gorton and Denton, they were extremely happy with the result, and excited both that the Greens had won and that Reform did not. Driving this, the main factor for their support for the Greens was clearly how impressed they were by the candidate Hannah Spencer; this was coupled with complete disillusionment with the Labour Party, and concerns about the risk of Reform UK winning.

“When I woke up this morning to start my fast, I checked Facebook and it said the Greens had won and I was really ecstatic. I was really happy. It made my day. And even more shocking was Labour coming third. It was really good news. I was really happy.” Zain, Cardiologist

#### Hannah Spencer’s popularity

Hannah Spencer was immediately cited by almost every participant when asked why they had voted for the Green Party. It was extremely clear that her personal popularity had gone a long way in securing these voters’ votes.

I’m really happy for Hannah. And the way she comes across, she’s an amazing lady.  
Zain, Cardiologist

I lost faith in Labor a long time ago. ... But yeah, I think I really like what Hannah has been saying, and I kind of agree with everything she said. So yeah, I’m just happy. Happy she’s got him. Yeah. Happy for her. Happy for the party.  
Sarah, Prison Officer

Yeah, I really like her. I like everything she kind of stands for and I think it’s kind of what this country needs.  
Naura, Finance

The main reason for this was that Spencer seems more ‘normal’ than most politicians. They liked that she is a local candidate, working a ‘normal’ job and someone who seems to get people’s concerns better than most politicians - particularly around the cost of living.

Hannah Spencer, I’ve seen her a lot on TV and heard a lot of what she has to say. And I felt that a lot of what she had to say made sense and she seemed to be the one that was more for ordinary people like us that work for a living rather than any of the other politicians.  
Sarah, Prison Officer

Matt [Goodwin], why does he know about Gorton and Denton? Apart from he came here and just wanted to go in parliament. He doesn’t know nothing about poor people. He’s a rich man. He doesn’t belong to Denton and Gorton. And it was an easy decision because ... it was easy to see that Hannah is a working class girl, just a local

girl, she understands everybody.

Humza, Business owner

I've seen clips from her and I've heard that she works normal jobs and things like that. So she seems pretty relatable. ... I think she's very likable. Yeah, she's relatable to me because she must be around the same age. So yeah, I like her.

Esther, Assessment Officer

It wasn't anything that she does or anything that's different. It's just because she's more relatable and down to work and not dissoluted.

Callum, Masters Student

She's a plumber and she's now just become a plasterer as well, is that she can work well under pressure. She can deal with difficult situations. She's a nice person. She's got a nice personality. I think she's easily approachable.

Zain, Cardiologist

### **Wider attitudes to the Green Party**

Interestingly, fewer participants had heard much about Zack Polanski than Hannah Spencer. Some participants had seen clips of Polanski on social media, describing him as a strong speaker and charismatic. However, it was clear that Hannah Spencer, rather than Zack Polanski, had attracted them to the Green Party at this election.

Yeah, I think he recently became party leader and he's at a good start. I don't personally don't know much about him, but he's at a good start. And like I said, only a few months since he became leader, I think.

Hamza, Small business owner

He's well spoken. He has good facts and information. He's really good he's a strong leader.

Zain, Cardiologist

I like what he stands for when he's being challenged. He can articulate himself

Naura, Finance

[Moderator: Have you heard anything about the wider Green Party?] Not off the top of my head, no. Like others said, really, I've not really seen that much about them. I'm just going off Hannah Spencer and that's why I voted for her because I like what she had to say.

Sarah, Prison Officer

These participants were mostly extremely enthusiastic about the Green Party, however, when pushed, some did express some concerns with them that might worry them about supporting the Greens.

However participants brought up the party's drug policy as a potential barrier to their support for the Greens.

But I do not agree with them on one thing, and that I would say is legalising drugs. We've got massive problem in Manchester ... Well, the whole country, but in Manchester, I run a small business around that area. We have massive drug problems here. To tackle that, this is not the solution to legalize it.  
Hamza, Small business owner

I know there are countries in Europe, like Portugal, I think Switzerland, where it kind of works a little bit, but then there's countries ... I think it was in New Zealand where they decriminalized drugs and then it's like a massive meth problem. So I just think there's a lot of issues with drugs in this country and I just don't think it'd work at all. Maybe some kind, cannabis may be okay, but all of them is just, I think, ridiculous.  
Callum, Masters Student

... others mentioned their stances on transgender issues...

I did see something on the transgender thing that if you're transgender male, [the Greens] see you as a male, but I don't know how that would work in the real world with, I don't know, public toilets or ... Because obviously at birth get assigned a sex, you can't just then go and say, "You're another sex," and then that's it.  
Naura, Finance

### **Dissatisfaction with the Labour party**

However, these concerns about the Green Party were secondary to these voters, because they felt the Labour Party was no longer worthy of their votes. In this context, concerns with some elements of the Greens platform paled in comparison to their bigger frustration with the Government. There was a pervasive sense that the Labour Party are “over” or “gonners”, with some suggesting that voting Labour would be a wasted vote. Most participants said they had not even considered voting Labour at this election (even though all of them had voted Labour before).

They're gonners. I don't think there's any way back for them ... I just think the ship's already sunk, so I don't really think there's anything [Starmer] can do.  
Callum, Masters Student

I think I feel a bit disillusioned with Labour altogether. I'm done with Labour for now. I need something new.  
Esther, Assessment Officer

It was easy to vote Green ... I'm not going to vote Reform, and Labour was out of the question  
Zain,

Above and beyond any other issue, the cost of living crisis was the main reason for voters' disillusionment. They felt no better off than when the Conservatives were in power, and could not see the Government taking the sufficient action to make the cost of living any better and felt like working hard and doing the right thing wasn't rewarded. Rent frequently came up as one of the biggest concerns relating to cost of living.

"We just don't seem to be any further forward from when the Conservatives were in, no one feels any better off. And as people have said earlier, the cost of living crisis is probably one of the biggest things for everybody, and we're all no different, we're no better off ... one of the big things is the housing crisis that we've got. There's not enough houses to go around. There's a lot of people homeless. People are paying extortion at rents in private houses with private landlords. I think it's a big crisis that needs tackling" Sarah, Prison Officer

"I remember voting for Labor then, because I thought it could be a turning point and they could change things. But since then, I just feel like they've done nothing. Keir Starmer has done nothing, especially about the cost of living ... The cost of everything, especially rent, food, is so extortionate compared to wages, but wages don't seem to ever rise, but everything else does. So I feel like that needs to be the main thing that's sorted out, I would say" Esther, Assessment Officer

"They were previously for the working class, so everything they stood for was to kind of benefit the majority of the people, but I feel like they switched that when they got in this time. So there was a lot of deprivation due to it, more people using food banks. I think that was due to Labour." Naura, Finance

More broadly than just the cost of living, voters felt that Labour had betrayed their principles and not delivered on their promises since they were elected. They felt that the Labour Party is no longer standing up for working people. Failure to tackle the cost of living crisis was part of this, but so was tax rises, high-profile U-Turns and the recent stories about Peter Mandelson. Across the groups, they felt that this Labour Party of Government was not the one they elected.

Labor's not really tackled the cost of living crisis. That's been one of the biggest issues all these years since they took over there has been a lot of U-turns as well, they just lost touch.  
Zain, Cardiologist

It's not the same Labour party that it was before the general election, last election. And they're not looking after the people who need is, and they changed their policies and they did so many U-turns, which didn't help much.  
Naura, Finance

They've had a large majority, but our expectations, they've not been met ... My generation from 60s, 70s, has always been a Labour, but now time has come when I thought this is not the party we grew up in.

Hamza. Business owner

I remember thinking the election would be a turning point .. but they've done nothing.

Esther, Assessment Officer

That said, when asked whether Labour could win back support by moving to the left, participants were largely dismissive and did not see how that would help. Most simply said that the main thing Labour needs to do is to tackle the cost of living - which for some included lowering taxes.

Sarah said she didn't think it would make a difference, while Naura repeatedly stated that "the damage is already done," pointing to the loss of ethnic minority voters who had previously been loyal to Labour. Hamza was the only participant to leave the door slightly open, suggesting that a new leader willing to make "a big change in the policy" on cost of living and taxes "might stand a chance", but even he framed this as a remote possibility rather than an expectation. Overall, the group suggested that the issue is not where Labour sits on the political spectrum, but whether the party can be trusted to deliver on any promises at all.

### **The impact of blocking Burnham**

Several participants also expressed frustration with Labour's decision to block Andy Burnham from standing as their candidate, which they saw as a significant own goal. Burnham was spoken about with genuine warmth and trust across the group, and several suggested that had he been the Labour candidate, their vote might have gone differently.

If Andy Burnham had stood, my vote, I'm 99% sure I would have gone and voted for Andy Burnham because he's somebody who stands up for the working class ... It's somebody that I can trust. It's something about Andy Burnham. It's just the way his charisma, his character, he says, and he does.

Zain, Cardiologist

That would've made a difference ... Since he became mayor of Manchester, he has improved things in Manchester and people would have voted. But I still would have voted for the Greens because I lost faith in the Labor Party ... Andy Burnham, of course, yeah, it would have made a bit of difference, but I'm not sure if he would have won the election.

Hamza, Business owner

I know Andy Burnham is very popular. He's done a lot for the people of Manchester ... I do think a lot of people have lost faith in Keir Starmer. I do. And I think that's part of the reason why people are turning to different parties now.

Sarah, Prison Officer

That said, even with the affection for Burnham, most participants were clear that their frustrations went beyond any single candidate and for some the actions of the early Starmer Government had put them off voting Labour whether he remained or not.

Asked about another prominent Manchester figure in the Labour Party, participants doubted that Angela Rayner was ready for a return to frontline politics: while many said that they had liked and respected Rayner, the tax scandal remained front of mind and divided their opinion. Some were sympathetic, while others felt that the scandal was reflective of a wider pattern of behaviour from politicians.

Well, she got caught for that. What else is she doing? You know what I mean? What else are they doing, these people who are hiding stuff?

Allan, sales manager

Everyone's doing it, but she's the only one that's being caught for it

Sarah, administrator

Angela, there's a lot of baggage there. Again, me personally, they're all kind of very similar, and I think whoever comes in, regardless, you're going to get the same output regardless.

Greg, IT support

### **Fears about Reform**

Participants were united in their hostility towards Reform, who they saw as a racist party that is deepening divisions in the country. When asked how they would have felt had Reform won the by-election, participants expressed genuine fear, particularly ethnic minority participants, who worried that a Reform victory would embolden racist behaviour and make them and their families less safe.

I think they're very racist. They're a nasty bunch of people. They're causing divide and division. They're not helping the country. They've just got all these millionaires backing them and they're just causing this really bad feeling out there, just throwing the blame on either Muslims or on immigration ... They're not looking at what the Conservatives have done in the last 14 years. They've messed everything up, but we're just using Muslims and ethnic minorities as a scapegoat.

Zain, Cardiologist

I feel like they're quite racist. Well, they are racist ... I feel like people are voting for them because it kind of goes hand in hand with deprivation. When you're poor and you've got nothing you want someone to blame, and that's an easy target.

Naura, Finance

When asked how they would have felt waking up to a Reform victory, several participants said they were frightened by that prospect. Zain linked this directly to the recent mosque

attack in Manchester, suggesting a Reform win would have worsened an already tense climate.

I think it'd cause a bit of fear, especially about my family and friends and family and everything. I think we've had this bit of an incident in the mosque in Manchester, and I think it would have raised more kind of tensions and more disunity ... I think it would be more unsafe for me and my family to live. Things would have got worse, I think would have been maybe target of more racist attacks and give more power to racist people.

Zain, Cardiologist

I'd be really disappointed because I feel like I'd see it as representative of where the country would be heading. So I'd feel scared for the future and upset that many people can align with Reform's views.

Esther, Assessment Officer

This fear of Reform also played a tactical role in how some participants voted. Several noted that the by-election felt like a straight contest between the Greens and Reform, which gave their vote an added urgency beyond simply supporting the Green candidate. It's possible that Reform's choice of candidate in this constituency therefore boosted the progressive voters' turnout.

It felt like it was a bit of a race between Reform and Green, and I'm just so glad that Reform didn't get in, because it felt like this as a whole was sort of representative of the country in a way.

Esther, Assessment Officer

### **Some thoughts on immigration**

Participants' expressed nuanced views on immigration, some quite different from the Green Party's policies. Across the group, there was a clear and consistent distinction drawn between legal and illegal immigration. Participants were frustrated that the government had failed to get illegal immigration under control, and several argued that this failure was creating the conditions for Reform to thrive, which in turn made ethnic minorities less safe.

For me, I just think it's the illegal immigration that's the biggest problem. The illegal ones, you could be criminals come into the country and nobody knows the criminal record and stuff like that. That's one of my biggest concerns. So I think it's the illegal immigration that needs tackling the most.

Sarah, Prison Officer

It's the illegal immigration that is the issue that needs to be tackled and that's not being tackled. That's the biggest concern. Then there's a confusion with other parties. There's non-illegal immigrants that are coming here to study. They're going through the right channels and everything. So the media doesn't show that side of things. That's where the problems and issues start amongst the public feeling like they're

getting everything.  
Zain, Cardiologist

Hamza gave a particularly striking account of this tension. As a British-born ethnic minority small business owner, he described sharing many of the frustrations about illegal immigration that the wider public feels, and then in his view Reform exploits those frustrations to target people like him. He felt it was hard to voice these concerns without being associated with Reform, and unable to rely on any government to actually fix the problem.

The British people are, I'm going to be honest, sick of all this. When they see someone coming here and just next to my street, just say, Bob moved in with his family, he just arrived on a boat. Of course, I'm not against any human race, but if he's got a free house there, he's got nothing to pay, no bills. I'm 57. I work at least 12 to 13 hours a day, seven days a week, and hardly then I can't make a living for my family. And then I see someone there who's got free house and free this and free that. And that's, of course I'm going to be feeling frustrated ... It's just Reform using that as an excuse. As a brown person, I feel the same, but it's nothing I can do. This government needs to do something about it. Hamza, Business owner

The thread running through all of these responses was a sense that the government's failure to tackle illegal immigration is doing real harm to community cohesion, and that the vacuum left by inaction is being filled by Reform. Participants wanted the issue dealt with seriously and practically.

In a previous focus group conducted during the by-election campaign, some Muslim residents described their worries that racism had effectively become increasingly normalised and legitimised in recent years, and that mainstream politicians had failed to challenge it. On a more local level, some were concerned that the by-election could surface racist sentiment in their community, and worried about what a local Reform UK victory would mean for their relationships with neighbours - although they also linked this to what they saw as a wider long-term trend: that Britain is becoming a more hostile place for Muslims and people from minority backgrounds.

If Reform won... what would it mean for me as a neighbour, as a person of colour, living next to someone who agrees with the likes of Tommy Robinson and their policies? I think only then you see really how far someone would go once their party wins.  
Hasan, social worker

I think the tide turned during Brexit, that's when people started getting a bit more racist I'd say... it's just carrying on and getting worse and worse.  
Umar, admin officer

I feel like people can openly be racist now. They're not actually scared of anything. They're just so open about it and they know there's no consequences to it. I think that's the issue. They can go on social media, any platform and openly write these

comments, whereas I feel like five, seven years ago people wouldn't be doing that.  
Nadia, finance professional

### Group 2 - Labour voters

Speaking to these Labour voters in Gorton and Denton, they were relieved that Reform had not won more than anything else, many didn't expect much else to change. Every single participant had voted Labour in the by-election, but for most this was driven more by habit, loyalty, or a desire to stop Reform than by any real enthusiasm for the party.

There was a high level of anxiety about what Reform win would have meant for their multicultural community, frustration that Labour had made it so hard to support them, and uncertainty about whether the Green Party could deliver for the area.

#### Worries about a Reform win and a confusing by-election

The single most important factor driving these voters' decisions was ensuring that Reform did not win the seat. When asked what concerned them about a potential Reform victory, participants expressed significant fear, particularly those from ethnic minority backgrounds, who worried that a Reform win would embolden racism and threaten the multicultural character of the area.

If I were coming ... so I had two issues with reform. One was the candidate. It wasn't local or anything, not even from the Manchester area. That was a big issue for me. Then secondly, it was the party itself and what they stand for. Manchester or rather Gorton and Denton is really ... especially I live in the Gorton area is really multicultural. So what reform does stand for, what they're known for, their links with Tommy and all that just doesn't suit the demographic of Gorton area.

Hafsa, HR Officer

I just don't agree with anything they say, to be honest. And again, I love the multiculturalism. I've grown up around it, and I don't want that to change. And I think they're a threat to that. So yeah, I'll never vote for them.

Laura, NHS Worker

Ali gave a particularly impassioned account of why Reform's politics were incompatible with the community he lives in. He described a neighbourhood where people of different backgrounds share food during Ramadan and look out for each other, and felt that Reform's approach threatened all of that.

It's the divisive nature of the politics of Reform, the sort of anti-Muslim rhetoric. It just makes you feel uncomfortable in Denton, Gorton, all these areas. We're very, very multicultural. People do get on. Communities live with each other quite happily. And I've gone to a school and my neighbours, we're going through Ramadan at the moment. My neighbours, Jackie, and other people we'll share a

dish with them. They'll bring us flowers at Eid ... Everybody just wants to get on with each other. We don't want to be fighting and we don't want to be playing politics on colour of skin or where people have come from. For me, as long as everybody's contributing to the system, they're all working hard. They're not criminals. That's what countries are built on ... We are all one big community and we should be promoting a United Kingdom, which means we're united in all colours, races, religions.

Ali, Taxi Driver

For some participants, the prospect of a Reform raised questions about whether they would feel safe continuing to live in the area. Both Issy and Sue expressed visceral reactions.

I would never vote for them, ever. And I think in that respect, whether it's the individual or the party, whoever's standing for Reform, I'm not going to vote for them. And I think if they had won, I dread to feel like how it would ... I just was very uncomfortable with them being in power. And if they had, I don't know if it would actually make me think a little bit different about being here, even though I've lived in this area for donkeys years, I think it would make me feel a little different for living here.

Issy, Training Manager

It makes you feel that, do I even want to live here anymore? [Reform] are not focusing on what needs to be focused on, on crime and on other things and the economy. It's on this multicultural and people like us, it really does make us feel like, should we move? Should we start to focus on looking to our future in a different country? Is this country safe for us anymore?

Sue, Housewife

This fear of Reform created real anguish on polling day. Several participants described being torn between voting Labour out of loyalty and voting tactically for the Greens to block Reform. The by-election felt extremely confusing, and many did not know which vote was the right one to stop Reform winning. Issy said she was up all night worrying about making the wrong tactical choice:

I was really up until the ballot box like this. And again, with what to do, whether it was a tactical vote or sticking with Labour. ... However, I was up pretty much all night wondering about, oh my God, did I do the right choice? Because the one thing that I wanted to do was not have Reform in.

Issy, Training Manager

I was sort of swaying towards, "Do I do the tactical vote and vote Green Party?" But I just, in the end, just stuck to what I've always voted for.

Laura, NHS Worker

Faris, the youngest member of the group at just 19, summed up the tactical calculation that many were making. He voted Labour out of fear that splitting the anti-Reform vote could let them through, rather than support for Labour.

I just went with that as an anti-Reform vote, really, because I think there was murmurs and polls where it was very close and it's a couple of hundred votes. So I thought I might as well just vote Labour this time just to stop Reform in a sense. And I don't want it to be a Reform win by 90 votes. And then if I voted Green or something and they came third, I would've felt like I'm wasting my vote.

Faris, Data Engineer

### **Cautious support for Labour**

Despite all voting Labour, there was very little enthusiasm for the party in this group. Most described their vote as being driven by loyalty, habit, or a lack of better options rather than genuine belief that Labour would deliver for them. As with the other focus groups, there was a sense that Labour has drifted away from its roots as a party for working class people.

I've always been a Labour voter, always. I don't have much trust in any of them anymore, to be honest with you. There's so many parties coming in and it's just so confusing, but if a little bit of trust is left, it's still on Labour. Like I said, I don't have much trust on any of them at the moment. Labour, they're coming off track of what they say and what they promise. But like I said, out of all of them, there's still more trust left in Labour than any ... I don't have any trust in any of the others.

Sue, Housewife

I voted, I stuck with Labour just because it's home I've always voted, but I think I voted for Labour just out of loyalty.

Hafsa, HR Officer

Several participants described voting Labour as a family tradition going back generations, but one that now felt hollow. Ali and Greg both articulated a sense that the party had lost its way.

Labour were a traditional left party, centre left or left, not far left, but left. But now I think it's going from the left more towards the right. And I wonder, Keir Starmer and other people, are you true Labour? Are you just a washed down Conservative? Because Labour for me should be helping working class people. People like myself that go out and earn my living every day.

Ali, Taxi Driver

I've voted Labour, my father and my father's father kind of thing has voted Labour. So I've always just followed family tradition because I always thought to heart they have always put families first and working class men and family people first. But again, like Ali said, they are slowly moving away from what they should be recognised for or what they were recognised for.

Greg, IT Support

### **Views on Keir Starmer**

Views on Keir Starmer were mixed but mostly critical. Several participants acknowledged that he had performed reasonably well on the international stage, particularly in standing up to Donald Trump over Iran and the Diego Garcia bases, but felt that this had not translated into any improvement in their daily lives. As with the other groups, they felt he had not stuck to his word and had been dishonest with voters, often pointing to the U-turns he has made.

I think whenever I've seen him talking, I think he talks well. I think he's good at his speeches and when I hear him speaking, I think, yeah. But then I just think his actions don't marry up with what he says. And obviously he's obviously lost a lot of trust with people and people don't think he's delivered on what he said. So yeah, I think he's good at the front and the speaking aspect, but not so much the backing it up with his actions.

Laura, NHS Worker

He's not done anything really that we shout about has he really. How many U-turns he's done, don't it? He's up to 14 or 15 U-turns he's done at the moment. So he's not got a track record. I don't think he's strong enough as a leader.

Alex, Electrician

It reminds me of the kid at school who got picked last. No one really likes him in a sense. Faris, Data Engineer

In particular, it was Labour's performance on the cost of living that particularly infuriated voters. Hafsa gave a vivid account of the cost of living pressures that she felt Starmer had failed to address, describing how her own shopping habits had changed.

I don't think they've handled the economy very well. Every day you go shopping, it's just the same amount of money buys less for you. Let's say four years ago, I didn't bother going to the yellow sticker side of things, but now I find myself in the last one, two years, I go to the yellow stickers first and then fill up, which wasn't something I felt, not that I was better than others, but I felt perhaps other people, because since I'm working, other people needed that. But now I'm like, nope, I'm going there. It's all man for himself kind of thing.

Hafsa, HR Officer

Those in favour of a challenge felt that Starmer was beyond recovery and that Labour would be decimated at a general election under his leadership.

Starmer is sort of like a dead man walking. So if he's in next general election as Labour leader, I think they'll get decimated.

Faris, Data Engineer

### **Views on Andy Burnham**

If there was one point of near-total agreement in the group, it was that Andy Burnham was the right person for Gorton and Denton and that Labour's decision to block him from standing was a serious mistake. Burnham was spoken about with genuine warmth, and

several participants believed he would have comfortably held the seat for Labour. In contrast to Starmer, they saw him as much more honest, authentic, and passionate.

I think he's amazing. He gets stuff done and I would really like him to be the Prime Minister and I was really excited when it looked like he might run for this area. So I think the result would've been completely different if he'd got in.

Michael, Security Worker

He's very passionate in what he wants to achieve. I feel like he's looking out for us as Mancunians, and I feel like he knows his stuff, and I feel confident in the things he says. I would like to see him as a future prime minister.

Greg, IT Support

Participants particularly valued that Burnham's policies had a tangible, everyday impact on their lives. Hafsa cited the two pound bus fare as a prime example.

His policies were really people driven. Even the cycle routes, there were things that affected everyone directly. The bus fares, the two pound bus thing. And just I think his policies and his initiatives were really, really family-based, focused. The breakfast clubs for the schools, there were really things that didn't just stay up there. They really impacted people on a day-to-day. Just that having that two pound bus fare, I think was even just a major because I used the bus.

Hafsa, HR Officer

Most participants believed that Starmer had blocked Burnham because he felt threatened by Burnham's popularity and potential as a future leadership rival, and they saw this as a damaging act of self-interest. Issy went further, arguing that if Reform had won the seat, the blame would have been with Starmer for blocking Burnham.

I think that's where Labour have shot themselves in the foot and the executive committee need to look at that because Burnham would've swung the result completely different. People would've backed him because of his experience, and his policies for the working class person, and he does fight for you ... And I think Starmer felt threatened and because to save his own position, was actually sort of thrown Denton and that area away really to a party that doesn't have the experience.

Ali, Taxi Driver

To be fair, if Reform came in, I actually think it would've been Keir Starmer's fault because of that move really, of Andy being blocked ... it was nonsense that he was blocked, to be fair. And actually where we're saying that there's a lot of ... I suppose people have worry about the Greens being in for the next two years. What Andy could have achieved for this area in the next two years, I think could have been very, very positive because he has a lot more influence than any of the others that were actually running.

Issy, Training Manager

### Views on Hannah Spencer

Participants had mixed feelings about the new Green MP. Michael was the most generous, saying he thought her acceptance speech was impressive, but even he doubted her ability to deliver.

I thought her acceptance speech was fantastic actually. I listened to it in the car on my way to work this morning and I thought the words were great, but unfortunately, I also thought most of the words that she was saying, she wouldn't be able to influence at all at the local level. So I don't really feel in two years time that we're going to really notice much difference.

Michael, Security Worker

Concerns about Spencer often centred on her lack of experience. They slightly worried that, while her background made her more relatable and in touch with the constituency, without previous political experience, she would be unprepared for Westminster. Others were just generally sceptical that any politician whatever the party could deliver the change they want.

I think on the one side of it, she comes across as relatable. She's working class. She's a plumber. But again, I think it just comes down to an experience thing as well. I don't know. She's young, she's fairly new to politics. I don't know. I could be wrong, but I don't have much faith in her and I don't know if she'll do much for the local area.

Laura, NHS Worker

I just feel as if these MPs just promise stuff and they say stuff to get the votes. But then after they've got them, after they've got their place, that's it. ... How many years have we been seeing this? The promises, we'll do this, we'll do this, and then we'll place that vote. But then when they get their place, nothing's changed. It's all the same.

Sue, Housewife

### Views on the Greens more generally

Beyond Spencer herself, participants had broader concerns about the Green Party and above all, their inexperience as a political force. Ali compared handing power to the Greens to sending a rookie into the ring against a heavyweight, arguing that Labour at least had the institutional knowledge to govern even if they needed to improve.

I think the biggest concern for myself, and I think a lot of traditional voters, is the inexperience of the Greens because it takes a long, long time for a party to be in power and learn from all these things. And for me, the Greens have always been kind of like the hippie party kind of thing ... Free, everything's a bit liberated ... We've got to save the planet, which is all good because we've got to do that a bit as well. But there's things where the rest of us, the economy has to be driven. Things has to be in a real world. It's not Sim City, we have real problems.

Ali, Taxi Driver

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It's like sending in a rookie into fight Muhammad Ali, for example, they're just not there yet. Do you understand? At least labour have got some kind of experience. They just need to shake it up and be more in touch with the rest of us.  
Ali, Taxi Driver

Several participants were also specifically worried about the Green Party's drug legalisation policy. For Sue, a mother of three, this was a particularly emotive issue.

This drug legalisation is a big concern for me because me and having children myself and being a mother, it's worrying already without it being legal. It's very, very worrying. So just imagine it was legal. I dread to think what's going to happen to this country.  
Sue, Housewife

With the legalising drugs and things, I just don't think that's a great move at all. I'm not too sure what their angle is with that. It's something for me that's really kind of hit home because I'm really anti the kind of drug side.  
Greg, IT Support

Overall, these Labour voters were not hostile to the Greens but nor were they convinced. Overall, they were extremely relieved that Reform had not won, cautious interest in what the Greens might do, but no real confidence that things would improve. In that sense, the result reflected the confused and anxious state of a group of voters who felt let down by their own party but unsure where else to turn. It also suggests that if the Greens continue to show their viability voters like these may not stick with the Party in future and Labour's floor could be lower than the by-election.

### Group 3 - Reform voters

These Reform voters were the most different to the other two groups. Unlike the Labour and Green voters, they were much more sceptical of Hannah Spencer and the Green Party generally. They were concerned about immigration and its impacts on Britain, and some thought that the Green Party was playing off the large number of Muslim constituents in Gorton and Denton to win votes for policies that would ultimately have little effect or even harm the area. They worried that this dynamic would further increase divides.

As with the Green voters, they are fed up with the Labour Party, who they think have betrayed their election promises. While some of these voters really do like Nigel Farage, for others this dissatisfaction with Labour was enough to push them towards Reform in order to “try something new” rather than because they are absolutely convinced that Reform would be significantly better.

### Concerns about what the result means for cohesion and political culture in Britain

These Reform voters woke up on Friday to shock and disappointment about the Reform Party's win in the constituency. When describing the result, some discussed concerns about

the Green Party “pandering” to Muslim voters, and felt that the demographics of the seat had swung the result in the Green Party’s favour. These are voters who are naturally sceptical of all politicians’ agendas, but particularly suspicious that the Greens were superficially adopting polarising policy platforms that would increase division in the constituency.

I didn't realise the catchment area actually went into Longsight and Levenshulme ....  
So I think I wasn't aware of that until this morning myself, but I think that's why we've seen so many votes go to the Green Party. I think if it was just literally Denton and Gorton, I think the results would've been different.

Chris, Bank worker

[I think it ends with] civil war, if [the Greens] get in, I absolutely think it will. ... I don't know who's left or right now, but whatever side ..., they just seem to polarise whatever Reform were saying to just go against them to get the votes because they knew there was this rhetoric of ‘we can gather the Muslim vote here because people are going to be against Reform’. We've got a massive Muslim area. It's self-serving a lot of the time. So I think the policies are a lot of rubbish. The people, I wouldn't cross the street to help them. But again, I think that's true of most politicians, to be honest with you. I wouldn't help any of them.

Rob, Sports Therapist

Some in the group felt that the Green Party’s success was due to them appealing to Muslim voters in Gaza rather than the issues that they worried about.

I think it was pretty much Longsight and Levenshulme as well. And I think you need to take your passport if you're driving through there because it's a totally different country anyway, so I'm not surprised. And if you wave a Palestine flag around there, as the Greens have done, then you get their vote, unfortunately.

Martin, Social worker

For some participants, concerns about family voting had already cut through, and this further added to their concerns about the political culture in the constituency that the Green Party were able to tap into.

I find the Green Party pandered to the Muslim vote quite a lot, putting stuff out and stuff like that. And obviously you've got all the things about the family votes that's all been in the news since last night. So obviously they're not a hundred percent sure, but they are saying that it's the Muslim women that can't speak English and have sent the husbands with them and the husbands tick the box for them. And like I said, disappointed, but not surprised because that's the demographic that they pandered to, and there's a big demographic of that group in Gorton compared to Denton.

Martin, Social worker

I also did hear about the fact that people are going in on the whole family and voting for the same type of thing, but apparently people did it last time for

Labour, so Labour can't complain about that really.

Alan, Sales

These concerns tapped into these voters broader concerns about the pace of cultural change and the scale of immigration that Gorton and Denton has seen in recent decades. Some worried that the culture of the area is being undermined by immigration. They felt that the Green Party was deliberately trying to exacerbate cultural divides between the area's white population and its Muslim population rather than putting forward policies that benefitted everyone.

It's all different cultures coming together, isn't it? And some different cultures aren't stuff that we do as British people, we don't marry off our children at ... It's just all everyone living together. It's just not working through on different people's different beliefs that they believe in. It's not.

Rachel. Beauty Therapist

This is what they want though. They want to divide everybody. So everyone's choosing leaders and people are taking sides on social media. ... I think they like it when everyone's divided, in my opinion. I don't know why, but everyone's upset today and angry or whatever. I feel like that's what they want.

Rachel. Beauty Therapist

For some participants, scandals around grooming gangs had certainly led to a sense that local politicians weren't serious about challenging abuse and worried about what it meant for their kids.

I feel as if it's gone so far the other way. I've got a little girl, I dread bringing my girl up in the next 10 to 15 years, and it's horrible to say. And I know these bad people that are obviously white, British, black, British, whatever, but all these Muslim grooming gangs and stuff like that, and I'm not saying my daughter is ever going to fall into one, but it's a massive risk. And it's something that everybody, especially mums and dads of little girls, I think are thinking about today because if it happens, the police are covering it up. The Muslim community is covering it up. The politicians are covering it up and not going to actually look into it. So it's scary where the country as a whole will go over the next 10 to 15 years.

Martin, Social Worker

### **Complete disillusionment with Labour and all mainstream parties**

Asked about the motives behind their votes, it was clear that disillusionment both with Labour and with mainstream politics in general had attracted them to Reform. Some participants were not enamoured with Reform, but felt that the other options available to them were so bad that they might as well try something different.

I didn't vote Green. I did vote Reform. I mean, none of them are winners, let's be honest. They've all got their drawbacks. Labour have just made an absolute arse of it.

The Tories have made an arse of it. I thought I would try something new.  
Jack, Personal Trainer

I left it until literally I was in the polling station. I had no idea where to vote for because [If I had an option for a box to] abstain from the vote, I'd have put that almost to make the point of, I've come to vote, but I've got such little confidence in any of you, I would've made my vote for none of you. Because I ended up voting Reform and I was literally on the fence of Reform or sticking with Labour that I've voted for since way back when.

Rob, Sports Therapist

Even though it didn't matter to me what they posted through the door, I knew I wasn't going to vote Labour again. And obviously Reform, they seem to relate to things that bother me in regards to things like the boats and all that kind of stuff, because we do need to get our country back one way or another.

Alan, Sales

Many of the concerns this group expressed matched those of voters who had left Labour for the Green Party. They were fed up with what they saw as Labour's dishonesty and repeated U-turns upon entering office. As with those voters in the Green group, some felt that the Labour Party they saw in Government was not the one that they had voted for. Others felt that the Labour Party was only ever elected because they were less bad than the Conservatives, but had never promised a vision of the country that they agreed with.

When he was coming in with all the stuff, I was just like, there's no way any of the stuff that he's saying is going to be true. There's just no way. And then he comes in and he's like, 'Oh, I'm not going to raise taxes.' 'Oh guys, I've got to raise taxes.' And then everyone online was surprised and I'm like, it's just all labour I've ever done. They're just like, bleed, bleed, bleed. So yeah, not a fan of him all labour. Even if he gave the best person in the world to labour, I still won't vote for him, but especially not him. He's just bad.

Jack, Personal Trainer

I think people must have liked [Starmer]. That's why he got voted in, but he's just not done what he's said. And the amount of things that they've been caught doing, and he just lets him get away with it, his own stuff where he should be gone and things like that.

Alan, Sales

He's very weak. I don't think people necessarily really liked him to vote for him. I just think people have had enough of the Conservatives, and I think that was the point at the time. There was no other choice but to vote for Labour and him because there was no other viable option really, because there was no third party or now fourth party maybe coming in.

Martin, Social worker

Keir Starmer personally was extremely unpopular with this group. Beyond any specific policy measures, they were scathing about his personality, which they saw as weak and unlikeable. For some participants, recent Epstein revelations only confirmed what they thought about the Labour Party, rather than changing their views of it.

I think the whole country thinks the same, don't they? Everywhere we hear his name, the word w\*\*\*er follows. Yeah, I don't like him. Yeah, that's it. I think that Keir Starmer is a w\*\*\*er. That speaks for the whole country, don't it?

Martin, Social Worker

Similar again, don't think much of him at all. I think, again, Martin put it really well before he's an absolute w\*\*\*er. And again, the state the country's in now speaks to his leadership. ... The way that it is now, right across the country, it's just as bad as I've ever seen it, and you go straight to the head and I think it's rotten from what I see.

Rob, Sports Therapist

Now I've just seen loads of proper rogue things about him. Did he used to be a judge? I've seen loads of things that make him ... I don't know. I think he was giving low sentences, serious offences. I keep seeing his name next to Jeffrey Epstein's. I don't know why, but I think that's just enough to not like him

Jo, Criminal Support Worker

### **The appeal of Andy Burnham**

The group's perception of Andy Burnham was almost the mirror image of their impression of Starmer. They felt that Burnham had a more likable personality, was more authentic, and was truer to his word. Some participants had actually met the Manchester Mayor, and said they could vouch that his personality in real life aligned with the impression the other participants' had of him from his media appearances.

I just think he comes across really well. I've been lucky enough to meet him a few times. He's spoke at events within the FA and different things, and he just comes across as the most sound guy. I talked about football as an Everton fan, and even to the point where we had an event on with loads of celebs around the different things, and he was trying to hide away from it, and that would've been a great opportunity for him to get in front of photos and different things and get the back of all the papers or whatever else. But he shied away from it almost like, 'I'm not here for that. I'm here to do good.' And I think a lot of him. I think it was ridiculous that he was stopped from coming and sitting, because I think had he done that, it'd have been a very different result.

Rob, Sports Therapist

Yeah, I really like him. I met him as well. I do hospitality as a second job every now and then. He was at one of the functions and he is probably the least snottiest person there. I think he's more real down to earth, and I think he actually cares about what he does. And I know he's a big part of the GMCA, which actually fund my organisation,

so he gives me a job too.  
Jo, Criminal Justice Support worker

Yeah, I quite like him. The bits and bobs I've read about him seem all good. I know he gives like a portion of his salary to help homelessness and disadvantaged people in Manchester, which I think it's showing he does actually put his money where his mouth is and he seems generally like a sound guy.  
Sarah, Administrator

In particular, this group liked that Andy Burnham seems to make his decisions and own them, and is willing to stand up for what he believes. They compared him to other politicians who they felt made decisions for more cynical reasons without really believing them or being willing to defend them. In contrast, they saw Burnham as much more honest.

I think the thing is there, like you say, from a profile point of view, I knew [Burnham] was obviously Labour, but because of what I know more about him, I think he's someone who would be more believable than the guys who we've just been talking about then, like Hannah Spencer and even Matt Goodwin and all the other people we just talked about.  
Chris, Bank worker

I think that's a good sign because we're talking about pandering and lots of the politicians pander, whatever the loudest noises would go with that, but [Burnham] seems quite ... if you have an opinion, someone will dislike at some moment, but that's your opinion. Do you know what I mean? And that's what I like about him. It doesn't seem to deviate. He just kind of goes, right, that's my opinion. That's who I am. That's what I stand for and just goes with it.  
Rob, Sports Therapist

In fact, a number of participants said they would have voted for Burnham if he had been running as the Labour candidate, or at least they knew people who definitely would.

I would have voted for him. If he'd have been Labour, I'd have carried on voting Labour, but I just would've done.  
Rob, Sports Therapist

I was going to say, I think he would've gotten my vote, but I don't think he would've won. Everyone I know that would've voted for Labour [with Burnham] went to Green.  
Sarah, Administrator

### **Thoughts about Matt Goodwin**

Most participants had limited knowledge of Matt Goodwin, and it was clear that the Reform Party's chosen candidate in Gorton and Denton did not play a large role in persuading these

voters to vote for the party. Most participants' knowledge of him came from skimming leaflets that had arrived to them in the post.

On my leaflets, he was saying he was from down south basically. So that's what he was saying when they were posting stuff through the door. Obviously, I don't know anything else other than what I read.

Alan, Sales

A few of the participants said they had seen him presenting on TV (presumably on his GB News show), or in local debates. They felt he spoke well and presented the party well. That said, most participants had not seen these clips so could not corroborate or disagree with these views.

Yeah, again, I know he's obviously from presenting on TV. I know he's from Salford. He came across ... I actually watched a debate that he had in the local area and he came across, I felt quite well in the fact that he sort of said in some of the comments to not judge Reform on some of the extremist comments that are out there, because again, a lot of parties have the extreme of each sort of corner that they're in. And he really calmly answered questions that were put to him and people were saying, 'Well, what about Reform that are saying this?' And he put it in a really articulate way and he came across really, really well.

Rob, Sports Therapist

I think he studied in Manchester, didn't he? And like I said, I've seen what he said on the telly. Like I said, I think when he speaks, I think he stands up to questioning quite well.

Martin, Social worker

### **Wider attitudes to Reform**

If participants had little to say about Matt Goodwin, they had much more to say about Farage. Overwhelmingly, they felt Farage was more of a straight talker who stood up for what he believed in and wasn't afraid to say things that might be unpopular with some people. The idea that he "has balls" came up from a few participants.

I really like him. I absolutely love Nigel Farage. I think he's great. I think he's a great speaker. I like everything that he stands for. I like the way he puts things across simply. People ask him a question and he doesn't jargon around things. He just straight to the point, answers it properly, doesn't say what he thinks people want to hear. I just think he's really, really good. And I feel like if he was in power that the country would be in the right hands.

Ellie, Car sales

Yeah, I agree. I quite like him. Was he the only one that went over to America? I'm not quite sure. I think he's got balls, but yeah, I quite like him, quite open spoken. Yeah, I

think he'll do really well. Well, he would do well. Yeah, definitely.  
Sally, NHS property manager

Other participants were less absolute in their praise for Farage. They said they liked what he stood for and thought he seems to speak well, but their scepticism of politicians also made them sceptical that Farage would actually be able to deliver on the sort of change he is promising.

To be fair, he comes across a ... I like the policies he brings. I don't necessarily like him as a person. Do you know what I mean? I mean, I think he's a bit of a really bullshitter. Do you know what I mean? He does say things to obviously get people on board, but if he went with the policies, what they said they're going to come in with. I mean, obviously I wouldn't reckon he'd be a good prime minister.  
Alan, Sales

I like the way he comes across. I think he answers questions really well. I think he's really good at making sure people hear what you want to hear. So I have a little bit of doubt around him because we've seen it when he was in charge of Brexit and stuff like that. If what he actually says gets put into place  
Martin, Social worker

### Thoughts about the Green Party win

Compared to the other groups, these Reform voters knew much less about Hannah Spencer. A lot of what they had heard were rumours about the authenticity of her claims to working class identity and background as a plumber. They felt that this was a performance and was not a genuine part of her identity.

It just doesn't come across as genuine. It comes across a little bit like when Keir Starmer was telling everybody your dad was a toolmaker, just to be seen as working class. And it just ... When was the last time she was under a sink?  
Martin, Social worker

I'd love it to be true [that she is a plumber] because actually to not have a career politician and someone who does get what it's like to run a business and live in the area and all the rest of it, absolutely. But yeah, I just don't buy it with her.  
Rob, Sports therapist

That said, those who were convinced by Spencer's background did genuinely find it refreshing, and exactly the sort of background they would like to see from a politician. They felt it made her more likely to understand everyday concerns about issues such as the cost of living.

I think that's quite nice and quite refreshing. Obviously, I didn't vote for that party, but I think that would draw votes in from people that someone can make it successful

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coming from a non-political background and then can make it into politics. I think it's something that a lot of people would never think is possible.

Ellie, Car sales

I mean, again, knew she was a plumber, knew she was a business owner. She did seem to me like she was interested in the people that live in the constituents and making a difference in helping people and helping people get out of poverty and increasing, giving people a basic living income and things like that.

Sarah, Administrator

More broadly, voters were critical of the Green Party as a whole. Those who had heard of Zack Polanski saw him as an opportunist, and those who had heard Green Party policies - particularly on immigration and on drugs - thought they were out of line with their views and would be harmful for the country. At the same time, they felt that the Green Party were exploiting divisions in Gorton and Denton and some felt they were just appealing to Muslims voters in a sectarian way, rather than proposing policies that would work for everyone.

[Polanski is an] absolutely lunatic. Absolute lunatic. If he honestly thinks opening borders, legalising drugs, giving illegal immigrants a wage every single month, giving him a house and not allowing him to work; he's in Cuckoo Land, absolute Cuckoo Land, if he thinks that that's acceptable and British people need to pay the taxes for him to do all that for him, nah, he can't be doing that.

Martin, Social Worker

I disagree wholeheartedly with a lot that Green stand for. And again, people have alluded to the fact that they pandered and played what I think is a political game to gather votes rather than sticking to policies and actually what they're going to do. I think they've kind of become a game and that's where it feels like it's a game that they're going to win rather than how they're going to help the people of Gorton Denton or the area.

Rob, Sports therapist

The Green Party's immigration policies received the most criticism from these voters, who were particularly concerned about illegal immigration and worried that we gave too much support to asylum seekers.

I don't know where all this money's coming from because this country's just ... When it's us, I don't know where the money's coming from, how much debt that the country's in and how much more they're trying to claw back off people all the time, just getting worse.

Rachael, Beauty therapist

We've not got money to heat pensioners' homes, but we've got it for illegal migrants in hotels where they're eating off full board all the time.

Martin, Social worker

## Methodology

More in Common conducted three online focus groups on the evening of Friday 27 February, each with eight participants from the Gorton and Denton constituency.

**Group 1** featured residents who had voted for Labour in the 2024 General Election, but voted for the Green Party in the by-election.

**Group 2** featured residents who had voted for Reform UK, Labour or the Conservatives in 2024, but all voted for Reform UK in the by-election.

**Group 3** featured residents who had voted Labour In 2024, and voted for the party again in the by-election.

Locally-based professional recruiters were used to recruit participants. All participants were initially recruited in advance based on their planned voting intention, and their actual vote was recorded ahead of the focus group.