LOCALIS

NEO-LOCALISM

Rediscovering the nation

Edited by Liam Booth-Smith
Foreword by Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP

About Localis

Who we are

We are an independent, cross-party, leading not-for-profit think tank that was established in 2001. Our work promotes neo-localist ideas through research, events and commentary, covering a range of local and national domestic policy issues.

Neo-localism

Our research and policy programme is guided by the concept of neo-localism. Neo-localism is about giving places and people more control over the effects of globalisation. It is positive about promoting economic prosperity, but also enhancing other aspects of people's lives such as family and culture. It is not anti-globalisation, but wants to bend the mainstream of social and economic policy so that place is put at the centre of political thinking.

In particular our work is focused on four areas:

- **Reshaping our economy.** How places can take control of their economies and drive local growth.
- **Culture, tradition and beauty**. Crafting policy to help our heritage, physical environment and cultural life continue to enrich our lives.
- **Reforming public services.** Ideas to help save the public services and institutions upon which many in society depend.
- **Improving family li**fe. Fresh thinking to ensure the UK remains one of the most family-friendly places in the world.

What we do

We publish research throughout the year, from extensive reports to shorter pamphlets, on a diverse range of policy areas.

We run a broad events programme, including roundtable discussions, panel events and an extensive party conference programme.

We also run a membership network of local authorities and corporate fellows.

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Foreword

One of the great ironies of the 21st century is that politicians have never been more visible whilst, to many ordinary voters, seeming so distant.

People can follow every twist and turn of Westminster life through a seemingly endless parade of 24-hour TV coverage, rolling news websites, daily emails and more. Thanks to social media, individual politicians can instantly share the most important or mundane details of their daily lives with an almost limitless audience – and individual citizens can instantly share exactly what they think of them, for good or ill.

But in this era of unprecedented connectivity, an increasing number of voters see politicians as more and more disconnected from "real life". We've seen the results in polls, elections and referenda around the world; here in Britain, the simple yet understandable desire to "take back control" was made abundantly clear in the summer of 2016.

This matters because, as Liam Booth-Smith argues in the introduction to this excellent collection of essays, the political process forms part of a golden thread that runs through us all, helping to hold the nation together. Allow that thread to fray, and the consequences won't just be lower turnouts at elections. It could damage – even destroy – cohesion at every level of society.

Preventing that from happening is a task that should occupy all of us in government and, as this paper shows, the best place to start the fightback is at the local level. Local government and local decision-making is the direct link between the state and the community, between the services people rely on every day and the people who provide them – whether it's a road being resurfaced or a school being expanded or a housing development being granted permission. When a lever is pulled at the local level, the effects are immediate and obvious.

I often talk about councillors being on the frontline of democracy – and, just like the armed forces, they deserve the very best tools to do the job. That, for example, is why I'm so keen on devolution and elected mayors. The policy isn't about merely tidying up various constitutional loose ends. It's about actively moving power from national to local, putting control of government where it belongs: in the hands of the governed.

Devolution is just one part of the drive for localism that has been a core part of this government's agenda for the past seven years, and this collection of essays provides plenty of food for thought on where to go next.

Some of the contributors are figures I'm familiar or friendly with; others I have not crossed paths with before. But all their inputs are very welcome because, although I'm not going to comment on the validity of the individual essays and the concepts they espouse, politics in this country is supposed to be all about ideas and debates.

We won't overcome the challenges we face by simply sticking to the same old thinking and repeating the same old mistakes time and again. We need creative thinking, fresh ideas, new ways of working and new fuel for discussions about the future of localism.

With this collection, that's exactly what Localis has delivered. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did.

Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP

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Introduction

Neo-localism isn't a neologism. It has been in use for some time in human geography circles. A quick google search tells you it was coined by Wes Flack and refers to the idea of promoting and preserving community identities and cultures. Wanting to place it into a UK political context, we have what you might describe as 'culturally appropriated' the term. The only similarities between our definition and the original is the sense of 'the local' being acutely important to communities.

This collection is really a statement of where Localis is heading intellectually. We'll certainly continue to produce precise policy research on the economy and public services, but we can't be blind to the wider political breakdown the UK is experiencing. To not have a view on the nature of what is happening to our politics, to not be brave enough to take the risk of having an opinion and making it known, would be wasteful.

I'd like to thank all of our contributors for this collection, whose ideas and arguments have shaped my own. I would also like to thank the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust whose generous grant helped to make this collection possible.

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1. What is neo-localism?

Liam Booth-Smith

I must open with a confession. I write this essay as a conservative. I'm no longer a card carrying member, but I am connected to a philosophy and have of late felt its strain. As such, it is reasonable to take this essay as my view on how conservatism can adapt to survive. Yet I believe there is as much here for the left as the right.

On the second floor of the National Portrait Gallery sits the Wellington Exhibition. A collection of scenes and figures of statesmen from 18th and 19th century Britain. At the end of the longest room, furthest in, hangs Sir George Hayter's commemoration of the 1832 Reform Act. It shows the first sitting of the House of Commons in 1833 following the general election. I've stood in front of this painting many times, mostly in a mindless awe. More recently however, I've come to regard it as symbolic of something greater. It has prompted two thoughts in me worth sharing.

The first is democracies owe their existence to a sense of shared loyalty to the nation. The second is such loyalty to the nation, far from being solely an abstract idea, finds life in the bonds of kinship we share with one another. Hayter's painting shows us that to respect the democratic process is to protect the integrity of the nation. Our common political endeavour; the extension of freedom and a natural love and respect of place, fellow citizens and binding culture, is strengthened by the connection between democracy and a sense of nationhood.

There is a touch of romanticism to this, and a painting sparking reflection is undeniably cliché, but nonetheless it feels true. And it is because I feel, as well as think it, it seems significant to me and not merely interesting. Particularly as we are regularly told we now live in a post-truth age. That we rationalise the lies of our leaders, or that our political elite deliberately disguises the truth in order to appeal to our baser instincts. The implied message is that to trust our emotions is dangerous. I don't believe this.

Trusting in one's emotions shouldn't lessen your intellectual rigour or capacity for rational discrimination. Rather heart and head should coexist, helping us to separate truth from fact. To warm cold logic and harden soft ideas.

However, it seems our politics is increasingly presented as this false fight; hearts versus heads. The result is our discourse is impoverished, reduced to a process of fact checking the statements of demagogues. Worse still is the anger it appears to create. Whether through anonymous online abuse, intimidating protest or worse, acts of violence, we share little of the gentleness Orwell attributes to us in The Lion and the Unicorn. Our politics lacks civility.

This should trouble us. Our politics filters through our social condition, suggesting the real problem isn't a lack of civility or connection between politicians, but between us as individuals. We have forgotten what Hayter so beautifully captures. There is no longer a sense of kinship between us because, to paraphrase Roger Scruton, we do not believe we have inherited something worth preserving. For too many the nation is no longer a unit of solidarity that matters and therefore the kinship necessary to protect it is diminished.

This essay collection, and our exploration of what neo-localism means, is an attempt to rediscover and understand these bonds of kinship. To rebuild the common political endeavour which is the nation.

In his essay, Rafael Behr rightly argues that a task of such magnitude means we must begin small and local. Theresa May's *citizens of nowhere* or David Goodhart's *anywheres and somewheres* point to the growing importance of 'place' in our politics. The 'where' matters.

Arguing the importance of place isn't new, nor would I pass Bertrand Russell's evidence against interest by doing so. However, using the local as a means to remake the national, reconnecting the golden thread that runs through us all, just might be. So how do we do it?

Much of what we need to do, we already know. If you want to give individuals and local businesses more control over the effects of globalisation then you need to devolve economic power to a level they can influence. If you want to inspire civic renewal in places which have fallen into disrepair then you must remind people politics has the capacity to improve things.

State policy can lead and encourage significant shifts in society. Take the post war political consensus which built the foundations of the modern welfare state, or the Thatcher-led march toward the home-owning democracy. The key is in recognising such things occur when the prevailing case is empathetic, or in other words *emotional*, as much as economic.

What separates localism from neo-localism is the latter's embrace of this emotion. The economic arguments for greater local control have taken us so far but we need more. *The head needs the heart.* Take the ideal of beauty as something to unite us and aspire to, or the idea and language of *virtue*, both are as equally universal and neglected by our politics. Yet they reach the part of us immune to the rationalists, that which yearns for the eternal; the desire to lay roots, commit to community and be accepted.

On returning to Britain the journalist Adrian Wooldridge wrote that "political life in the broadest sense is increasingly driven by the quest for a sense of community and belonging: by a sense that globalisation and technology has atomised society and that we need to recreate a sense of belonging if we're not to fall apart completely".

This is the neo-localist agenda; the search for ideas which create and support new bonds of kinship, to reconnect the civil with the civic. To ultimately strengthen our sense of common political endeavour; the continued existence of a free, democratic, pluralistic open society. Or as I choose to term it, the nation.

To some this kinship may look like patriotism, to others solidarity. Such a definition is irrelevant until we recognise its absence and begin to address it.

2. Why place matters

Barry Quirk

It is possible to avoid doing almost anything. But it is not possible to avoid being somewhere. When immersed in the most absorbing augmented or virtual reality simulator or simply with the benefit of a vivid imagination, you may project yourself elsewhere in space and time. But the truth is that you have to be present somewhere, in the here and now. At this very basic level, locality matters. We live in localities and they live in us.

Localities are woven into our personal lives: of where we are from, where we've been, where we are now, and where we imagine we're going. Specific localities give form and colour to our origins, our journeys and our imagined destinations. The fabric of locality gives texture to our lives. The memory of past landscapes and places may be seared more strongly in your memory than the image of the bland location in which you are currently situated. And the personal ties that bind you to other places may overwhelm the flimsier connection to the locality where you are now. But one thing is for sure, you are reading this somewhere.

Periodically we are drawn backwards by the nostalgia of a slightly misremembered past. We may remember with fondness and tenderness the comforting rhythms of life we experienced in specific places during specific times in our lives. These memories tether us to places in our past. And this tethering can sometimes entangle us with places we loathe, almost as much as it attaches us to places we love. Thoughts of place and locality can evoke a sense of belonging to old places as well as generate a genuine longing for new places.

Writing about the way that lived experience both reflects and impacts upon the wider sweep of societal changes is not new: arguably, Homer got their first. And in the late 1940s when Arthur Miller was asked whether his play, *The Death of A Salesman,* was about one family's emotional journey or its interplay with the wider waves of economic change in mid-century America, he simply said, "the fish is in the sea and the sea is in the fish".

However, deep in our psyche we seem to possess a pastoral longing for past places where people both worked and played together. In the fields perhaps in Kent, in Devon or in Suffolk; or in tight occupational communities in South Wales, Scotland or in England's northern cities. Places where friends at work were also neighbours at home. A century long process of deindustrialisation and urbanism seems to have changed all this.

The dominance of city economies on the broader life of the nation sits behind a lot of critical commentary. However, the depiction of the city as a site for modernity and exploitation, contrasted to the relaxed and innocent arcadia of the countryside was carefully rejected by the late cultural theorist Raymond Williams. He argued that this imagery was, "myth functioning as a memory". Instead he suggested that the English countryside and the cities within it, were symbiotically connected to each other in mutual cultural and economic interdependence.

Our lives have origins in places: but our life journey may lead us to very different places - even if we stay still. It's a long way from, say, Dhaka in Bangladesh to East London; but it may be further, in socio-economic terms, to move from the Isle of Dogs of the 1950s to the Canary Wharf of today. In the journey to our life's destinations we cannot but fail to carry memories of our

origins alongside memories of the journey itself.

Can you recall the smell of your childhood? Mine was a peculiar blend of vinegar and leather - growing up, as I did, between the Sarson's vinegar factory and the tanneries in Bermondsey, in South East London. I also recall the blended smell of custard creams and hot metal. For my mother worked in the Peak Freans biscuit factory; while the episodic visits of my father brought the lingering smell of the print rooms where he worked as a compositor. Vinegar, leather, biscuits and print combine in the peculiar smell collage of my late 1950s childhood.

So what do young children smell in London today? Certainly not the products of manufacturing. For only some 100,000 of London's 3 million workers are employed in businesses that make any products at all. Most of the economic value that is made and exchanged in London today cannot be smelt. Indeed, most of those employed in today's manufacturing businesses do very little manufacturing themselves.

The decline in the curve of manufacturing jobs in London finds its mirror reflection in the incline in the curve of financial and professional jobs. That's why the nation with the largest share of London's exports is currently, Switzerland. For since the mid-1980s, it has been the silent transfer of money, in the form of ones and zeroes, and the daily exercise of "the croupier's take" that has maketh London. This financialisation of London and its uninhibited embrace of the digital world has effectively relocated the nation's capital farther away from the rest of the country. And the escalating value of land in London and the role of so-called "prime property" as a positional good has added yet more distance.

What's more the past thirty years has witnessed an increasing influx of graduates from across the UK and from the wider world. This has swelled the pool of twenty and thirty-somethings in the capital. The resultant distorted profile of London's working-age population which includes its bulging share of younger workers most probably flatters its productivity measures compared to other regions.

But it could have been otherwise. London's population declined throughout most of the 20th century. Indeed, London's overall population was shrinking for half of my lifetime. Until 1980 the assumption was that London was in decline. That its population would never return to its pre-war peak of 8.7 million people.

It is only since the mid-1980s that London has begun to grow again. Doubtless the "big bang" of financial deregulation in 1986 sparked the incredible growth of financial services in the City that then generated demands in professional services, information technology and the new creative digital economy. This financialisation of the London economy (producing £1 in every £5 in the capital's economy by 2015) has brought both promise and peril. At its most perilous it may well have contributed to the extraordinary financial crash of 2008 and the decade-long impact of stagnation this has had across the nation.

However, the fabric of locality is more than economics and the world of work. Its fabric also involves the social and cultural life of a place. The socially diverse, cultural vibrancy that characterises London today is a recent phenomena - reflecting just two to three generations of migration into the capital. Nowadays, each of the thousands of communities that compose the kaleidoscope of today's London have as many connections across the globe as they have with other Londoners.

Crucially, these connections have not been established through the framework of the nation state but directly through the complex interactions between people and between businesses. The economic geographer Parag Khana has written of the critical importance of "competitive connectivity" for the success of cities. For Khana 'connectivity' is the comparative advantage that localities must nurture as the 21st century progresses. He argues that only the most connected localities can thrive in the uncertainty of our future global economy.

But what if your place of origin was in, say, the North East of England; and what if you lived in a locality where the prospects of economic turnaround were

slim? A place where population is declining and what was once the source of the nation's energy, is now a site of economic stagnation. In places like this, the adaptable, flexible types have no waves to surf like the millions of their counterparts in London. Instead they have to make their own waves. Generating inclusive growth is somewhat easy when the circumstances are propitious.

But how do you do this when circumstances are not propitious? Localities can't be shut down simply because it's difficult for the people in them to make their economies thrive. There are many thousands of "company towns" throughout the world that have shrunk back when the dominant company goes bust. The solution isn't to find another dominant company but to diversify the economy. Don't just make things: attend to people's desperate need to learn throughout their lives and not just before they start work. Also assemble things, distribute things, create value in services, discover new markets, and deepen your connections with existing markets. Search for connectivity to other localities.

In the North East they are trying to do all these things. They need the nation's support. They are trying to make waves through the unique cultural heritage of their region (in Gateshead); through university-led growth and high tech investment (in Newcastle); and through linking local supply chains to substantial investment in car manufacturing (in Sunderland). These local efforts are supplemented by plans to develop the region's economy through the £330m North East Growth Deal and the £55m North East Investment Fund.

Of course, the truth of global capitalism is that it will continue to be disruptive and destructive. The geographical dislocation of production, distribution and exchange will increase. Things will literally be made everywhere. The shoes that you are wearing, the phone that you use daily, and the book that you are reading just now. These things will not be made anywhere near where you live and work. And it is most unlikely that they will be made in any single location. Consider the iPhone.

The iPhone is Apple's most profitable product. Apple has annual revenues of some $225bn with a market capitalisation of $800bn. Half of all iPhones are made by the Taiwanese company, Foxconn, in its massive facility in Zhengzhou in China. Zengzhou is an ancient city in east central China with a history going back over 3,500 years. With a population of 9.6 million, it has 1 million more residents than London. Over a decade ago, local governments in Zengzhou promised Foxconn discounted energy and transportation costs, lower social insurance payments, and more than $1.5bn in grants for the construction of factories and dormitories for hundreds of thousands of workers.

The city government created a special economic zone for the project (now known as iPhone city) and provided a $250m loan to Foxconn. Local governments also pledged to spend more than $10bn to expand the airport, just a few miles away from the factory. From this airport, some 350,000 iPhones are flown out every day to San Francisco.

The scale economies achieved by such a concentration of technically competent mass labour employed at low wages enables Foxconn to generate substantial profits. But these do not compare to the profits made by Apple who, more simply, just design the iPhone and sell 240 million of them globally. The power of propinquity is that it generates cluster advantages for designers in San Francisco and electronic assembly workers in Zengzhou.

As consumers we demand reliable, high-quality products that are ever improving - this comes from design standardisation and economies of scale, a form of uniformity. But as humans we desire uniqueness. We want our own experience in somewhere distinctive. The challenge for locality is how to be a source of deep uniqueness. For every locality has its distinctive history and unique character.

We are all tethered to the fabric of locality. This tethering can tie us down through attachments that limit our horizons or our scope for action. For the limit of localism is parochialism. But when properly attached to the fabric of locality

we can also develop our capabilities and our confidence to craft new and productive attachments to other places nearby or across the globe.

3. Why beauty matters

Adrian Harvey

Even in normal times, making the case for beauty as a legitimate concern for public policy is a hard sell, and these are far from normal times. Policy makers are far more comfortable in the realm of the quantitative than the qualitative and beauty, especially in relation to the built environment, is often seen as too controversial, too difficult, too ephemeral. Yet while it remains hard to pin down, beautiful places are highly valued by people.

Despite the assumption that beauty is highly personal and subjective, it is a universal idea. We may not always agree on where it resides but none of us would dispute its existence entirely. It is elusive then, but it is far from illusory. The idea is present in all cultures and times. It inhabits art, music, and ideas; faces and landscapes too. And it is often found in the buildings and places that surround us.

While the fabric of our cities, towns and villages serves many functions – as homes and offices, roadways and factories, car parks and transit hubs, and as green spaces where we walk our dogs, play football, or jog - they are not simply packages of space, wrapped in brick, glass and tarmac. They can be things of beauty that simply make us smile – or conversely curse their ugliness. And we are more likely to value places that we find to be beautiful.

Thinking about beauty

If we are to capture the value of beauty, we need to be able to describe it. Over the centuries, beauty has meant different things at different times and the classical understanding of beauty, seeking to boil down its essence into formulae, is only one of two traditions that have dominated Western thinking. At the other extreme is the romantic understanding of beauty, based on personal experience and insight that is not open to explanation or proof.

These ideas remain influential and in many ways the tension between customary and natural beauty play themselves out in the tussle between the different waves of modernism and post-modernism, the idea of a timeless and universal recipe for beauty and one with is individuated and unknowable.

But most of us no longer possess a language of beauty: the idea is confined to the intensely personal, something for the eye of the beholder. Often it elides with a number of other ideas that overlap with, but are not, it: style, taste and fashion. If there is no common ground on which to hold a dialogue about beauty, how do place-makers harness it?

Talking about beauty

Research conducted in Sheffield in 2010 by CABE, found that, given time to reflect, most people are capable and confident in talking about their ideas of beauty. What is more, there was a high degree of commonality about what people find to be beautiful, and where they found it. Overwhelmingly, respondents said that they found beauty in art and music, in people and in fashion, but also in the natural environment, in buildings and places.

When asked to identify beautiful buildings in Sheffield, most people cited the two cathedrals, often not because of a stylistic preference, but for reasons related to an appreciation of longevity (history and continuity) and grandeur (craft and ambition). In fact, people were fairly consistent in the things they found to be beautiful in buildings and places. Nature and greenery, of course, but also scale and proportion; the quality of materials used and the standard of upkeep also matter, but so too light, peacefulness, and distinctiveness, both in the sense of difference and of rootedness in the character of an area – capturing the spirit of a place, either of who we are or who we want to be. People like places that feel like places.

Valuing beauty

Collectively, we value things that are beautiful for what they are, not simply what they can do. This intrinsic value is important to people and to regard beauty simply in instrumental terms is to steal something of its essence: it is not a tool, it is a quality and people are overwhelmingly content to justify their preferences, and even their spending, by appealing to beauty as a reason. It is something we are all disposed to value for its own sake and spending more for something beautiful makes perfect sense. Governments, however, tend to believe and behave differently.

Fortunately, there are also good instrumental reasons for promoting beauty in our cities, our towns and villages.

Economy

We know that people monetise the value they place on beauty every day in their consumption choices: whether in where to live, in what to wear or in what technology they use. Where a choice exists, and the means too, each of us will pay a little – or a lot – more for something we find more visually pleasing. We know instinctively that people can and do pay more to live in areas that are more beautiful – houses in Conservation Areas are valued more highly and, while beauty is only one consideration along with schools, transport links and services, it remains a significant factor in our spending decisions. This is borne out by studies that show that places seen as more beautiful command higher house prices and commercial rents. For retailers, a good-quality public environment can improve trading by attracting more people into an area.

Health

Attractive public spaces, streets as much as parks and gardens, are important factors in both physical and mental health. Research in a number of cities has found that 'more attractive streets and pathways' and 'more attractive public parks and greenspaces' were most often cited as changes that would encourage people to undertake healthy lifestyle activities such as walking, vying with safety as the top priority (*City Health Check*, RIBA 2013).

David Halpern's *Mental Health and the Built Environment: More Than Bricks and Mortar?* (1995) remains the classic text linking the quality of the built environment and mental health. In the book, Halpern demonstrates a clear connection between the quality of the immediate environment, over and above other factors, and people's mental health.

Community

Alongside the health gains from being in attractive environments, there are also gains to be made from engagement in the local community. The participants in the Sheffield research believed that beauty was important in fostering civic pride, in signalling and generating respect for places and, by extension, the people that

live there.

Putting beauty at the heart of place-making

Distinctive, attractive buildings and spaces are key to creating the places that people will want to make their homes: for themselves, their families and their businesses. It's not the only factor, of course, and I do not claim that beauty should take precedence over all other considerations. However, just because beauty is not always the most important thing, does not mean it should be considered a luxury.

People often disagree about what is beautiful, but that is not a fact unique to beauty; subjectivity is found in other areas of public policy and it is dealt with. The critical question is whether it is possible to have a civic debate about these differences in ways that are a productive negotiation rather than a clash of tastes. That means that communities need to be supported to enter negotiations in the constructive way, to define their own expectations of beauty and to identify the character of their place that they want to see enhanced.

It is worth noting that beauty already exists in legislation, in the designation of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, created by The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. Beauty already enjoys legal protection and is formally valued, but only in the places where most people do not live. As we begin to rethink how we add value to our towns and cities, we need also to construct new ways to capture to value of beauty closer to home.

4. When does solidarity occur?

Rafael Behr

There are many reasons why the campaign to keep Britain in the European Union failed, many of them flowing from a condition that long predated the referendum: at a cultural level, the UK had never joined the European project in the first place.

There was institutional membership, signatures on treaties and technical integration. But the foundational ethos of the community, as conceived after the Second World War, was never incorporated into British nationhood; that kind of "Europeanness" (as distinct from the simple fact of geographical location) was not a resonant part of our identity. That is why the UK didn't join until 1973.

As one of the victorious forces that liberated the continent from Fascism, the UK felt no obligation towards collective atonement, nor great moral urgency in subordinating national politics to supranational, continent-wide authority. And there was the recent memory of Empire for comfort, albeit illusory. At the very core of the EU proposition is a concept of solidarity that has not taken root in Britain.

A lot of politics is defined by questions of who is prepared to pool resources with whom, what are the fairest mechanisms for doing it and who gets to decide and enforce the rules. An electoral majority has rejected "Europe" as a unit by which that kind of solidarity might be denominated – too large, too remote, lacking the emotional glue of shared cultural reference points.

But the UK itself is vulnerable to the same judgement. Scotland voted to preserve its union with England but nationalism's defeat was not politically convincing. Nicola Sturgeon calculated that enough Scots saw themselves as part of a distinct community from the English to keep the independence question simmering away, never far from the surface of politics north of the border. And that dynamic has provoked an English nationalist backlash. Resentment of what is perceived as an habitually demanding Scotland, taking more than its share of British resources and showing no gratitude, threatens to unpick the threads of union from the southern side of the seam.

Zoom in closer and the difficulty in persuading large volumes of people to imagine themselves as part of a single political unit with common interests is replicated across multiple axes. London takes pride in its status as an engine of prosperity and considers any transfer of wealth to other regions as, at best, charity. Large parts of the country resent the capital as a selfish hoarder of income and opportunity.

Geography is by no means the only factor in solidarity. Ethnicity and class matter, although not always in the ways that validate a Marxist (or quasi-Marxist) analysis. There is a rhetorical habit on the British left that treats all voter discontent as an expression of distributional injustice. So when people say they are annoyed by high levels of immigration and that they feel their community has been disturbed by social and demographic change to which they did not give consent, the underlying cause of their anger is said to be inequality. In this account, anger at perverse outcomes from an antiquated benefits system would be washed away if the sluices of wage growth were unblocked. Anti-immigrant feeling might be obliterated in a frenzy of house-building.

Economic structures are central to the question of whether people feel they

have things in common, but the relationship between cohesion and wealth isn't simple. Accounts of current social and economic malaise tend to focus on two factors: stagnation in median wages in the UK, dating from around the middle of the last decade, and public spending cuts that began after Labour left office in 2010. A broader left analysis sets the clock back further, to the 1980s, to blame the liberalising economic policies of the Thatcher era for undermining the very concept of society – transferring public assets into private hands and by promoting a culture of greed and individualism, expressed through a radical conservative ideology that made personal ambition the engine of prosperity.

The right has a different interpretation. Crudely speaking, Conservatives identify three likely causes of shrunken solidarity (although the word itself is not one that leaps naturally to the Tory vocabulary). First, an excess of state meddling. The theory is that too much government interference deprives citizens of agency and responsibility, suffocating the natural processes by which societies thrive. Second, liberal social attitudes, elevated into a doctrinaire cult of a "political correctness" are said to have alienated people who don't automatically share those values. And third, mass migration and a fetish of "multiculturalism" are said to have undermined an indigenous sense of belonging and national identity.

For most of the period over which those debates have played out, party allegiances have also become more volatile. In the 1950s, Labour and Conservatives enjoyed a broad duopoly, with well over 90 per cent of voters lining up behind either the red or blue banner. That share dipped to 67 per cent in 2015 but bounced back to 82 in 2017. It is too early to know if that signals a reversal of the decades-long trend of diversification. Many MPs report that the legacy of "leave" and "remain" positions in their constituencies are just as salient as traditional party allegiances. And on the Labour side it is hard to forecast the durability of a peculiar voter coalition that includes people who rallied to the party because they were inspired by Jeremy Corbyn and those who stuck with it despite being highly sceptical of the leader's readiness to be Prime Minister.

Nor does Labour's relatively strong performance, confounding prophecies of doom, prove the existence of a renewed appetite for orthodox policies of redistribution based on abstract notions of national solidarity. Labour's manifesto offered specific rewards to different social segments – pension protection for the old; free university education for the young – and was cagey about how it would be funded. Corbyn appealed as much to multiple, fragmented self-interests as he did to a unitary national interest. Meanwhile, opinion surveys also show a decline in support for redistributive policies in each successive generation since 1945. This runs counter to a received wisdom that the young tend generally to be more left-wing than their elders.

A Mori poll from 2014 found 18-30 year olds half as likely as the wartime generation to agree with the proposition that "the government should spend more money on welfare benefits for the poor, even if it leads to higher taxes". Other similar statements saw even wider disparities. Where the merits of redistributive state action are concerned, "millennials" appear more sceptical than their parents and grandparents. On social attitudes they are more liberal.

Cause and effect can be hard to disentangle. The decades immediately after the War, the hey-day of British welfarism, were marked by relative income equality and social mobility – with the important caveat that women were still structurally excluded from swathes of the economy. Did political support for the ethos of that time wane because the methods stopped working or did the system stop working as values changed and support for the ethos declined? The answer is likely to be both, in a feedback loop, just as both left and right accounts of the causes of social fragmentation are likely to contain truth while neither side can claim to own the whole explanation.

An underlying process in all of this might simply be the passage of time. The Nazi threat, placing the nation in a state of existential jeopardy, can be seen in retrospect as a massive infusion of solidarity. To this day the Spirit of the Blitz is

invoked as the apogee of British collective resilience and determination. The war effort also demanded huge acts of economic collectivism, while levelling incomes. Post-war austerity and rationing prolonged the egalitarian dynamic. A Tory Prime Minister led the nation to victory in war but, in 1945, Labour won the peace.

Britain's distinct perspective on the Second World War and its aftermath determined our ambivalence towards the European project. The fading of that memory is surely also pertinent to our sense of 21st Century nationhood. The UK has been spending from its reserves of solidarity without finding galvanising ideas or missions to restore them. The left has tended to retreat into a kind of reactionary social democracy — seeing its best hope in defending territory won in an era of post-War consensus. The right flirts with crude, sometimes xenophobic rhetoric, combined with post-Imperial nostalgia, when trying to gee up a spirit of national purpose. Moderate liberals in the centre are paralysed by fear that their intellectual incumbency is being torn down by radicals and populists.

The mistake that politicians often make in this respect is to imagine that there is some off-the-peg national project that can restore a sense of collective purpose. There is a lazy impatience – exemplified by a fashionable revival in vacuous appeals to "one nation" politics – for some rhetorical device that will bring people together across regional, racial and class divides. The truth is that the "nation" as a whole might not be available any more as a unit for organising meaningful solidarity. Europe is clearly too vast a unit to command visceral collective identification and the UK might be going the same way. If that unravelling is to be reversed, the bonds of solidarity have to be rewoven at closer quarters. The cultural deficit needs to be paid off in currency that voters recognise, which is likely to be much more locally defined. It is easier to persuade people to join a collective endeavour if they live on the same street and their children attend the same school – or if they are part of the same Facebook group; locality can mean proximity on a network, not just a geographical space.

But tiny units have no capacity for mass mobilisation. The street, the school, the Facebook group can pool resources but they might not amount to much. So the essential question is this: what is the smallest large unit (or the largest small unit) of political organisation in which a plausible sense of communal identity is available and with sufficient resources to make big policy projects feasible? What is the ideal unit for rebuilding solidarity? It could be the borough council, a combined regional authority or, devolved parliament. It might be a digital denomination, not a geographical one. There is no fixed answer. But it is probable that the ambition to revive a truly UK-wide account of shared political enterprise is so big that, to succeed, it must start small.

5. Is the local, liberal?

Ryan Shorthouse

The 'local' is in vogue. Liberalism isn't. In the UK, at least.

These two points are related. A misrepresentation of liberalism has been cultivated in political discourse – that it's the playthings of North Londoners obsessed with dinner parties, sexual freedom and Class A drugs. Apparently, the economic and social liberalism that has dominated politics in recent decades has been pushed by and only benefitted a 'liberal metropolitan elite'.

So it's time to direct resources to those Brexit-voting folks who live outside London and feel 'left behind'. Hence the localist agenda: metro-mayors and the 'Northern powerhouse' will revitalise these areas and rebalance the UK economy.

The two main political parties have embraced and encouraged this damning depiction of liberal philosophy. Theresa May's Conservative Party offers a 'post-liberal' vision, seeking to rein in the liberalism that overwhelmingly now guides public views and policymaking.

In the minds of the coterie of Mayites, contemporary liberalism has unleashed excessive individualism, with people focused on enriching themselves rather than their relationships with and responsibilities to others. Attacks on 'citizens of nowhere' and 'elites', coupled with a hard-line approach on immigration, reveal their deep scepticism with geographical and social mobility, strong tenets of liberal politics.

For the Corbynistas, liberal economics — the belief in a small state, free markets and the pursuit of profit — has made society sick and led to vile levels of poverty and inequality. Even Theresa May, admittedly, is lukewarm about economic liberalism, primarily offering market meddling in her manifesto.

But the clever clogs twisting and trashing liberalism ought to be careful. Providing intellectual fuel for anti-liberal, authoritarian populists like Trump, Le Pen and Putin is empowering such politicians who jeopardise the real achievements and stability of western liberalism. The greatest gift liberalism has given us is liberal democracies, by far the most prosperous and happiest societies in history.

Properly understood, the canon of thinking which is liberalism emphasises respect and empowerment to all individuals. It is not libertarianism, just allowing individuals and businesses to get on with it with minimal or no state support. Nor is it relativism, enabling people to do whatever they want; liberals want to make sure individual action does not harm others. Without doubt, it has provided strong and positive foundations for our society.

Now defended and defined, can we say that 'the local' is liberal? The short answer is: not necessarily. Local communities or government are not inherently liberal. What determines them as liberal or not is their behaviour and actions — specifically, how they give choices and powers to individuals in their area. In fact, since it is likely that local communities or government will not consistently empower every different type of person and on every different type of issue, it seems improbable that any locality can ever be described, unambiguously, as liberal.

Certainly, localities can do liberal things. Local councils can lower levels of taxation or introduce personal budgets for vulnerable people — the disabled or homeless, for example — so people have more control over their money.

Local communities can be tolerant — even inviting — of people with social characteristics that are non-traditional, such as immigrants.

But localities can also be illiberal, too. They can prevent private, voluntary or independent providers from bidding for certain services, thereby reducing citizen choice. And communities can stifle and ostracise different, non-conforming individuals.

Does this mean I think 'the local' and localism are unimportant? No. Liberalism has been and is an essential philosophy for creating good lives and societies. But, alone, it is insufficient to guide our values, policymaking and conduct. Other beliefs are important, sometimes just as much, and need to also be an inspiration for what we — people, policymakers and politicians — do.

Conservatism, for example, recognises the wisdom and importance of traditional values and institutions, which can steer and support people. Communitarianism stresses the role of familial and civic life. Liberalism should not be abandoned by our current politicians, but sit alongside these other philosophies in their thinking.

Since the 1990s, it is clear that the modernisers in the Conservative Party — to move beyond Thatcherism — have developed and offered a more communitarian vision. Hence David Cameron's 'Big Society' and Theresa May's 'Shared Society'. A key component of this has been stressing the importance of local communities and localism to tackling public policy problems: protecting the environment, building more homes and early intervention, for instance. So, we have — gradually — seen greater devolution of powers and funding decisions to local government in recent years.

This localist agenda should, theoretically, make public policy more innovative and responsive. And encouraging greater participation in and responsibility from local communities ought to help strengthen pride, trust and relationships in local areas, all shown to enrich lives.

But, crucially, we need liberal — not closed — local communities and communitarianism. Emancipated, empowered and tolerant individuals, after all, can transform local communities for the better.

6. The case for new power

Professor Vernon Bogdanor

May 4th saw a quiet revolution in local government when voters in six metropolitan areas — Greater Manchester, Liverpool, Peterborough and Cambridge, Tees Valley, the West of England and the West Midlands — elected metro-mayors. A seventh metropolitan area — the Sheffield city region — will elect a mayor in 2018, and others may well follow in future years. For the Devolution and Local Government Act providing for metro-mayors is enabling legislation setting up a legislative framework which can be applied flexibly to different areas of England by means of secondary legislation.

These metro-mayors are an innovation. They differ not only from ceremonial Lord Mayors, but also from the 16 local authority mayors elected under the provisions of the 2000 Local Government Act. The metro-mayors represent not single but combined authorities, and unlike local authority mayors, they enjoy powers devolved from central government. They are in part a response to the English Question. The day after Scotland rejected independence in the 2014 referendum, Prime Minister, David Cameron, announcing new powers for the devolved bodies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, declared, `It is also important we have wider civic engagement about how to improve governance in our United Kingdom, including how to empower our great cities'.

The metro-mayors differ also from the mayor of London in that they enjoy more extensive statutory powers and they are not subject to scrutiny by a directly elected assembly as with the Greater London Assembly. The exercise of their powers is, however, subject to scrutiny by overview and scrutiny committees, consisting of backbench councillors from the constituent authorities. The metro-mayors are required to work with a Cabinet, which they chair, comprising the leaders of the combined authorities, and they cannot alter the personnel of the Cabinet without their consent.

The metro-mayors represent around 6.7 million people; and, if one includes the London mayoralty and the local authority mayors, around one-third of the population of England now live under mayoral regimes.

The metro-mayors are the product of devolution deals between the combined authorities and the government, negotiated separately on a bilateral basis with each combined authority. The powers of combined authorities are derived not from local but from central government. Each deal yields its own set of statutory powers, which differ from area to area. Some powers rest with the mayor, others with the combined authority as a whole. While there is no single model, the metro mayors are in general responsible for infrastructure issues crossing boundaries such as transport and strategic planning, while the combined authorities are responsible for public services to improve local skills and employment and to integrate health and social care – though there is to be no devolution of any functions relating to the core duties of the Secretary of State for Health, nor of health-related regulatory functions vested in national bodies. Greater Manchester, which has the most generous deal, has powers over strategic planning, transport, adult skills and health and social care and has taken over the functions of the police commissioner. The combined authorities are funded through their constituent councils by a levy, but cannot raise additional

resources. Metro-mayors, however, can make a precept on local council tax bills where there has been an order allowing them to do so. They may also increase business rates by 2p in the pound provided that the relevant Local Enterprise Partnership agrees.

But the most important power enjoyed by the new mayors is not on the statute book at all. For these mayors, like the mayor of London, will be regarded as spokespersons for their areas even over matters for which they have no statutory responsibility. With an electoral mandate behind them, a mayor can mobilise public opinion and speak for local electors in a way in which the traditional council leader could not. The metro-mayors will provide a clear focus of accountability for voters, personalising local government and making it more exciting. That has certainly been the case since 2000 with the mayor of London, the first directly elected mayor in British history. He is responsible for no more than around 10 percent of public spending in London, and has no power to raise his own taxes. Yet he is regarded by most Londoners as their spokesman on a very wide range of policies, whether or not he is statutorily responsible for them. After the terrorist atrocity at Westminster in March, it was Sadiq Khan, the mayor, not the Home Secretary, who spoke for London; and while few people could name the leader of an old-style local authority, most Londoners know the name of their mayor.

There have been three mayors of London – Ken Livingstone, Boris Johnson and Sadiq Khan. Like the metro-mayors, they were chosen, not by party groups on a local authority, but in primary elections. They are beholden, therefore, not to a local party group, but to the voters. They could therefore help to break the hold of tribal politics on local government. Two of the three London mayors – Livingstone and Johnson – were political mavericks – indeed Livingstone first won election in 2000 as an independent against official Labour opposition. All three mayors were and are national political figures who decided that the mayoralty offered them a greater opportunity for exerting political influence than remaining as back-bench MPs. Boris Johnson used the mayoralty as a springboard for national leadership in the Brexit campaign, and is now Foreign Secretary. Sadiq Khan was a minister under Gordon Brown and Shadow Justice Secretary under Ed Miliband. He could well be a future leader of the Labour Party, and would certainly be a more plausible and popular figure than the current incumbent. Another possible future Labour leader is Andy Burnham, mayor of Greater Manchester, the former Culture and Health Secretary. He defeated another MP, Ivan Lewis, and a former MP, Tony Lloyd, to win the nomination. In Liverpool, MP Steve Rotherham defeated MP Luciana Berger and the mayor of Liverpool city, Joe Anderson, to win the Labour nomination, while the West Midlands Labour nomination was won by former MP, Sion Simon.

One of the reasons why local government has been so little valued in Britain and why it has been unable to resist the process of centralisation is that there has been so sharp a separation between local and national political roles, with the local role being seen as distinctly subordinate. The metro-mayors may well alter that perception.

Before the London mayoralty, only three politicians had been able to build national careers upon their record in local government – Joseph Chamberlain, the Radical mayor of Birmingham between 1873 and 1876, Herbert Morrison, first Labour leader of the London County Council between 1934 and 1940, and Ken Livingstone in an earlier incarnation as leader of the Greater London Council from 1981 until its abolition in 1986. But these three were very much exceptions to the general rule that central and local politics are in separate spheres. When Morrison stood for the Labour leadership in 1935, his critics argued that he was a local rather than a national political leader, and that is one of the reasons why he was defeated by Clement Attlee. Morrison's leadership role in local government was seen as a handicap, not an advantage.

The sharp separation between central and local politics in Britain contrasts

sharply with politics on the Continent and in the United States where success at local or provincial level allows politicians to gain executive experience and provides a springboard for national political leadership. In the United States, presidents such as Franklin Roosevelt, Carter, Clinton and George W Bush were state governors before reaching the White House. In Germany, every Chancellor between Kiesinger in 1966 and Angela Merkel in 2006 had been the leader of a provincial government. In France, Jacques Chirac was mayor of Paris before reaching the Elysee, while Nicolas Sarkozy had been President of the General Council of Hauts de Seine in Paris before becoming President. In Britain, by contrast, of recent Prime Ministers, only John Major and Theresa May have executive experience as chair of a local housing committee and a local education authority respectively. Edward Heath, James Callaghan, Margaret Thatcher, Tony Blair, David Cameron and Gordon Brown did not have this advantage. A senior civil servant, exasperated by Blair's lack of understanding of management, once burst out at him `you have never managed anything'. `I have', Blair replied, `I have managed the Labour Party'. But that, perhaps, is not quite the same thing as managing a government department or a local authority.

The metro-mayors, therefore, will give English city regions a voice which they have hitherto lacked, thereby helping to correct the imbalance between London and the rest of England, and acting as a counterweight to the devolved bodies in Scotland and Wales. They could also transform the relationship between central and local government by showing that a major contribution to British politics can be made from a local base. They may, therefore, yield greater prestige to a career in local government. The metro-mayors might provide an alternative route for political leaders by making the control of territory the basis for political power. We may in future years see a new cadre of political leaders in Britain, leaders with real executive experience. All this might herald a real revolution both in local government and in our perception of it, leading to a new and more vibrant local democracy.

7. The identity of a city

Philip Collins

There was a time when everything that mattered in political economy was happening in Manchester. All at once. In the early years of the 1840s, the Anti-Corn Law League, led out of the Free Trade Hall, Manchester by Richard Cobden and John Bright, was pressing the Prime Minister, Robert Peel of Bury, to lift tariffs on corn, known by the working class who suffered the cost, as "the bread tax".

At this very moment, when the argument for free trade was on the verge of success, half a mile away two studious young Germans were skating out a different course which would in time convulse half the world. In the library at Chetham's music school a Manchester mill owner called Friedrich Engels and his visiting friend Karl Marx were working on a manuscript that would be published in 1848 under the portentous title of *The Communist Manifesto.* It is little wonder that Disraeli had described Manchester as "the philosophical capital of the world", although it was Cobden and Bright who prevailed rather than Marx and Engels. Manchester has always owed more to mercantilism than Marxism.

That is still true today now that Cobden and Bright stand guard in stone in Albert Square outside the magnificent town hall, in which one of the great urban revivals was, in part, created. Manchester of the 1980s was, like many provincial towns reliant on manufacturing industry, a rather dispirited place. There was a lot to like about it and, as resident, I loved it but there was no question that Manchester's sense of itself was defined too much by economic failure. In the 1840s the newspapers had been full of anguished pieces about the North-South divide in which the North had all the money and the jobs. In the 1980s the articles were back but this time the other way round. Even the *Manchester Guardian* had moved to fancy London.

Good governance in part helped Manchester to thrive again; but only in part. There were three other elements in the revival of Manchester which owe a lot to the animal spirits of the city's culture. The first was that private enterprise was unleashed. It is to the credit of the politicians and officials, notably Sir Richard Leese and Sir Howard Bernstein, who understood Manchester could flourish only if it became more prosperous. The second element was the spirit of the people themselves. Manchester has a culture which survived, and partly alleviated, industrial decline. These days it is good business. Cultural industries in the Manchester region contribute £135.9m in gross value added each year and employ more than 4,000 people. In the North West, like everywhere else, every pound invested in culture pays back £5. The third element was a welcome absence of partisan political point-scoring. In a deal negotiated by the Conservative Chancellor George Osborne with a Labour council, Greater Manchester now has a suite of new powers, notably over the health and social care budget, which will fall to a new mayor.

These partnerships, between public and private enterprise and between local government and citizens, are the ingredients of a flourishing city. Manchester over the last decade has been a case study in why it matters to shift power to the level of the city. It is important to note that the city level is the correct point for power to land. Curious as it was for a party so rooted in the North of England, but Labour came to power in 1997 with no real understanding of

the various cultural identities that make up the North. There is a good deal of residual affection for the old counties. My mother and all her friends never really accepted the 1974 local government reorganisation which took her town from Lancashire into Greater Manchester. But the allegiance was held to the county not to a nebulous thing called a region. The idea of a region is an economic unit which might make sense in consideration of transport policy and the deathless prose of spatial awareness plans but had no connection to how people thought of themselves. It was no surprise that when regional assemblies were put to a vote hardly anyone cared and most of those who did were opposed.

The city is a much better focus of identity because even people who are proudly from Bury, Bolton, Oldham or Rochdale feel a sense of pride in a fine metropolis within easy travelling distance. There is still a task to ensure that the prosperity generated in Manchester spreads out into the towns on its perimeter but that can be done. The mayor will be subject to the usual petty local rivalries as leaders used to their own fiefdoms suddenly find a big new player but they need to get over themselves and co-operate. Durkheim once said that not everything contractual is in the contract and that is the case with the new mayoral powers. The scope of the powers available will rather depend on how effectively they are wielded. Rather than obstruct and declare a kind of political independence from Manchester, the mill towns of former Lancashire would be well-advised to pitch in.

They may well soon find the need for safety in numbers. The cuts to local government are about to bite. Since 2010 national government has been curiously Janus-faced about local government. One face presents a salutary commitment to the devolution of power. There is a case that the coalition between 2010 and 2015 sought to devolve more power than any of its predecessors. At the same time the government presented a hard face when it came to the financial settlement. The best local authorities – Bury and Oldham have been imaginative – have responded by thinking rather than complaining but the capacity for obvious reforms is starting to run into the reality that you cannot keep statutory services running without more money. On that at least, the studious young men in the library at Chetham's were right.

8. Can there be civil society without faith?

Dan Hitchens

It usually takes a terrorist attack for Britain to discuss seriously the role of religion in civil society. And when the conversation happens, it tends to flow into two channels. One is about what motivates Islamist violence: the role of mosques, the responsibility of the Muslim community, the sources of radicalisation, the effectiveness of security and counter-extremism measures. The second conversation will emphasise the contribution which the great majority of Muslims make to their communities. In the wake of the Manchester Arena bombing in May, for instance, journalists told the stories of individuals like Sam Arshad, a taxi-company owner whose drivers took survivors home for free, and Muslim charities like Human Appeal, which raised thousands for the victims and their families.

The first conversation, about Islamist violence, is well worn, and too complex for me to do it justice here. But the conversation about Muslim social action, though it usually stays at the level of heart-warming anecdote, raises critical questions: what makes religious communities effective sources of social action? And how can local and national government help those communities to make the best possible contribution?

These are not marginal questions. Of the UK's 190,000 or so registered charities, 50,000 are religion-based, according to New Philanthropy Capital, and the proportion has been rising. This is not to mention how many others rely on religious individuals or networks. The think-tank Theos estimates that 10 million Britons per year access some kind of community service through a church. And this is not to mention the more intangible, and vast, effects of religious communities as sources of solidarity, friendship, and so on.

It is not just that believers feel obliged by their creeds to house the homeless, feed the hungry and listen to the miserable; religious groups also have a way of building and maintaining connections which national and local government struggle to match.

Take Kisharon, the Jewish charity in Barnet which offers training and employment opportunities to those with learning disabilities. Beverley Jacobson, its chief executive, told the *Jewish Chronicle* in 2015: "We've even had a guy from Jobcentre Plus asking how we do it. They are so impressed with how we have got people into work and built relationships with local business."

Or take the Trussell Trust, which began in 2000 when Paddy and Carol Henderson, a Christian couple in Salisbury, set up a foodbank at their local church. The idea caught on with other congregations; they began to share ideas. Now the Trust gives out a million three-day food parcels per year, while exerting a considerable political influence.

Much of the religious contribution to civil society is out of view, in, for example, the disproportionate amount given to charity. The Charity Commission's Nick Donaldson has praised the "sheer scale" of financial generosity from British Muslims, which during Ramadan last year worked out at £38 per second.

So the disenfranchisement of at least parts of some communities is troubling. It is Muslim integration which makes the headlines, but Britain's largest religious groups sometimes send out warning signs, too. Most Christians voted to leave

the EU: 62% of Anglicans and Episcopalians, 53% of non-conformists, 51% of Catholics. If the vote was a referendum on the status quo, then many Christians are plainly uneasy with it.

Whatever the causes of this – and the most obvious, the increasing secularisation of public life and the rising number of Britons who call themselves 'non-religious', might also be the most important – they should concern anyone who hopes for a strong civil society.

I have two suggestions. The first is that the authorities can demand more from religious communities. That partly means clearing the way for institutions to do good work: Theos's Paul Bickley observes that: 'Religious social change agents report a struggle to engage with secular grant funders, and feel that they can still be regarded with suspicion.' For instance, charities are asked to show that they are collaborating with non-religious groups, or that they are not seeking to proselytise.

But it also means asking religious communities to go into action. For instance, last year the government made a general appeal for groups to sponsor refugee families – to make arrangements for housing, English lessons, training and other necessities for integration. Only two groups came forward: the Archbishop of Canterbury's official residence, and the Catholic parish of St Monica's in Salford. At St Monica's, different members of the parish quickly came forward to help a newly-arrived Syrian family of five. Within weeks, the father had found work as a chef, as well as volunteering to do the catering for a night shelter run by Manchester churches, and the kids were settling in well at school. Such are the feats which religious communities can perform, when called upon. That only two institutions came forward to help refugees says less about churches than about the government's effectiveness at enlisting them.

My second suggestion is that the authorities demand less from religious communities, in terms of asking believers to compromise on articles of belief. There are inevitable clashes between religious people and the state on such matters as school curriculums, wearing headscarves or crucifixes, conscientious objection and free speech (especially about marriage and sexuality), employment law, Sunday opening hours, faith schools and so on. At the very least, it should be part of any cost-benefit analysis that driving believers away from the public square may have serious knock-on effects for the rest of civil society. As Rowan Williams has written:

> *"People who have a sense that the deepest roots of their motivation can be stated and respected in public are more likely to want to engage in civic and civil labour. Tell them that their contributions are welcome but only if they rigorously censor the expression of their most serious commitments, and some will not be eager to close on the bargain."*

The 'Big Society' or 'Shared Society' – the ideal held up by the last two Prime Ministers – needs the contribution of religious believers, if it is ever to be more than an aspiration. And maximising that contribution will need a delicate touch, as well as the confidence to ask religious communities to show they really mean it about loving their neighbours.

9. The incivility of civic language

Claire Fox

If localism's aspiration is to ensure local citizens have a voice, then its advocates may need to learn a new language to hear what the demos is saying. Most people in Britain don't speak public sector jargonese and the demand that the masses learn it by rote (or shut up) confirms the idea of a nation split in two, partly geographically and certainly in terms of values.

A divided nation has very much informed political debate since the EU referendum result last June. Indeed, after the Brexit vote, many of my Remain voting peers empathised with Laurie Penny's *New Statesman* article, 'I want my country back'. Penny confessed: "This morning, I woke up in a country I do not recognise."

Rather than drawing the lesson that maybe those at the heart of politics and the media may need to leave their echo chamber and listen more, many remain stuck in a feedback loop, tone deaf to huge swathes of the electorate. Penny assumed, and it's been a prejudice presented by many since, that "the frightened, parochial lizard-brain of Britain voted out, out, out", that leave voters represented "crabbed, cowed racism and xenophobia". Is it any wonder that recent polling has got it so wrong? Shy voters didn't dare voice their views for fear of being dubbed as 'parochial' and 'bigots', effectively silenced or ignored.

If Penny et al don't feel at home in this country, conversely 62 per cent of Britons (many of whom undoubtedly voted for Brexit) say Britain "sometimes feels like a foreign country". This is too often taken as anti-foreigner prejudice. But more likely it's because those in authority are speaking at them in a foreign language. I don't mean Polish or Punjabi. I mean PC-speak, with its opaque codes that connote whether you are 'on message' that insidiously decide whether you are 'our kind of people' or one of those, racist lizard-brained oiks.

Look at the new diversity language that is now being commandeered by many public-sector bosses. The British Medical Association recently sent all its employees a 12-page booklet, *A Guide to Effective Communication: Inclusive Language in the Workplace*. This tells staff how to change their language to suit "an increasingly diverse society", for example replacing the term "manpower" with "staff, workforce, personnel, workers". Ludicrously, staff should no longer refer to pregnant women as 'expectant mothers' but as 'pregnant people'. In April, *The Times* reported that UK universities are forcing students to conform to new codes restricting the use of gendered language. The University of Hull warns students that "failure to use gender-sensitive language will impact your mark"; common terms such as 'mankind', 'forefathers' and 'manpower' should be replaced by 'humankind', 'ancestors' and 'human resources'.

Another layer of complexity is the demand for non-binary, gender-neutral pronouns and honorifics like "they", "xe", "ze" and "Mx". I was recently sent a code of conduct warning me of the cost of misgendering: "It is very important to note that any attempts to undermine pronoun introductions *will not be tolerated*." [My emphasis] I immediately became tongue-tied. Can you imagine then what it feels like to the uninitiated? The problem for most people is that they are not 'educated' in these linguistic niceties. Don't get me wrong: I don't mean educated as in qualifications. I mean trained in the cultural literacy now required to

survive Modern Britain without failing the language test and being castigated as transphobic or xxxphobic etc. for using the wrong words.

There has been much discussion about the educational levels of those who voted Brexit, with a distasteful snobbery lurking beneath the boast that Remainers had the best-educated on their side. However, history has shown us you don't need A-levels or a degree to be smart, rational, politically shrewd, brave or forward-thinking. Freedom fighters, from the *sans-culottes* to the founders of trade unionism — whose struggles created our modern, liberal Europe — were often uneducated, even illiterate.

But there is one educational advantage that does matter: having access to the rules governing new ways of speaking, so often inculcated in the environs of modern universities. In David Goodhart's important new book, *The Road to Somewhere: The Populist Revolt and the Future of Politics*, he describes the gulf between the metropolitan graduate tribe he calls Anywheres and the Brexitland tribe Somewheres. And here geography and educational divisions are a factor. The referendum results show that outside London and Scotland, the highest-voting Remain areas were either "home to a university or have very high entry rate to university", while most of the highest-voting Leave areas not only don't have a university but are geographically remote from HE institutions.

But lest anyone concludes that those influenced by universities are enlightened free thinkers, increasingly today's campuses are ideologically insular places that are hostile to freedom of speech and intolerant of dissent (see my recent book, *I Find That Offensive!*). The opaque world of today's student politics means, among other things, that: the wrong type of feminists, such as Germaine Greer, can be no-platformed; speech is cordoned off in safe spaces; trigger warnings are issued for great works of literature in case their contents cause emotional distress.

We might mock tales from university life such as dubbing Mexican-themed parties involving sombreros as racist or the renaming of yoga as 'mindful stretching' because it's been appropriated from cultures that "have experienced oppression, cultural genocide and diasporas due to colonialism and western supremacy". But while such absurdities may seem far removed from the everyday life of millions, we should not fool ourselves that such censorious micromanaging of speech is confined to the ivory towers. It's a mistake to underestimate the key role that colleges play in shaping the worldview of the metropolitan elites who go on to dominate the world of politics, media and work.

University life initiates almost half of tomorrow's opinion formers into the rhetoric of identity and inclusivity, into the rules about which combination of words can get you in trouble, into the parameters of what is considered offensive. It is this ever-growing army of graduates, well-versed in the acceptable discourse, whose life experiences are shaped by a culture that presumes that 'dangerous' words should be policed, who go forward to populate local government, often members of a new professional class of expert, trained to detect offensive speech and re-educate the public mind, on the way to leadership of so many public-sector organisations.

Look at how the Equalities Act 2010 has been used to wage a full-scale culture war against a variety of workforces deemed in any way insensitive to those possessing "protected characteristics", and usually assumed to be so because they don't use the correct lingo. One of its fashionable targets – and one of the most invasive interventions by an army of language cops – has been the disparaging of banter, where "mate speech" is demonised as 'hate speech'. For example, the LGA's recently launched report, *An Inclusive Service: The 21st Century Fire and Rescue Service,* declares the need to "change the culture of the service… historically dominated by white males" by targeting workplace 'banter'. The Oxford English Dictionary defines banter as 'the playful and friendly exchange of teasing remarks'. More colloquially, it is understood to be the informal, jokey letting off steam, so important for camaraderie. But for the LGA,

this unregulated speech is depicted misanthropically as an expression of "thinly disguised" sexism, dangerous "macho culture", bigoted small talk that needs to be stamped out.

Such assaults on people's free speech amongst mates are justified in the name of tackling bigotry. In fact, they reveal the bigotry of the 'educated' metropolitan diversity enforcers, unaware that their target culprits are not the ignorant, prejudiced Neanderthals they assume, but just people who do not spout the correct jargon or share their 'I Find That Offensive!' thin-skinned mentality. Goodhart cites polling across Anywheres and Somewheres that shows that the divide about liberal issues such as gay rights and racial discrimination barely exists, noting that Somewheres are "in the main, modern people for whom women's equality and minority rights…are part of the air they breathe". But who cares if they don't sound the part?

Too many associated with local politics seem on a mission to police those who fail to adopt the correct terminology or attitudes associated with *bien pensants,* OR ELSE! The LGA report includes a chilling threat: "Notwithstanding the need for personal freedom, everyone needs to know…that they will be excluded if they demonstrate words or actions that do not confirm to the desired culture of the future. There is no room for maintaining the status quo." If localism's missionaries similarly aim to replace the status quo with punitive dystopian echo chambers at odds with the electorate at large, albeit close to home at a local level, it is likely to suffer the same fate as Esperanto, doomed as a language only spoken by a clique talking to themselves.

10. A neo-localist England

Jack Airey

Let England assume its shape, wrote Orwell in 1941. In a fundamental shift in power the native genius of the people had to be freed; and the inefficiency, class privilege and the rule of the old dispelled. His point was democratic but more so of destiny. Only by the people taking charge could transformative freedom be reached.

England faces the same challenge today but for reasons of geography: the background of today's decision makers is the most diverse yet, but decision making remains geographically lopsided. This concentration of power in one place, one square mile, is stultifying parts of England and their trust in government.

A shape laid bare

From government to media to industry, almost all England's establishments are focused in London. Its inner boroughs are an epicentre of decision-making: decisions affecting people and places not just up and down the country but also across the world. England is not unique in this sense, but certainly unusual in comparison to other countries of similar size. London is a "capital of globalisation" and proud. But so is New York, one of the many great cities of the United States.

England's peculiar over-centralisation, argues the Economist, "poisons the country's politics" and was an important factor in the Brexit vote. When a decision is made hundreds of miles away it is reasonable to question whether it has been done so in your place and community's best interests. Indeed a recent study found that only eighteen percent of British people thought the government prioritises their concerns. Seventeen percent believed decisions about public services were made better nationally as opposed to locally. Just thirty-eight percent thought their local area has a fair share of the success enjoyed by the country as a whole.

Through the devolution agenda and now the industrial strategy, establishments are being broken up. New places and people are taking charge. But the pace is slow and resistance tough. A case in point is the rather laughable suggestion by Channel 4 executives that moving its operations out of London would damage its creativity and independence.

Institutions in place

So who, or more accurately which places, should take charge? England's six metro-mayors are now a few months into their tenures and London onto its third mayor. Each, with varying scales of influence and profile, are making daily decisions in the interests of their place. In Greater Manchester a regional spatial plan has enabled a long-term direction of land for new homes and businesses. In Tees Valley the first Mayoral Development Corporation outside of London has been set up to help regenerate the SSI steelworks site.

All are writing their own industrial strategies, speaking for their place's

economic needs on both a domestic and global front, able to set in place the policies to attract the right people and investment to their place.

Yet the majority of England's places, comprising just over thirty-six million people, have no person to make these decisions. A patchwork of places with the power to make their resident's lives better: most without. In what other functions of the state have whole swathes of the country been so ignored?

In London I can travel on a bus, one part of a transport network controlled by the mayor, from one side of the city to the other for £1.50 without needing to hold any cash. In Essex it takes more than a five-pound note to get from my mum's village to the town of Colchester, half-an-hour away. If the bus comes at all that is. Why is it acceptable for a resident of London to have a local custodian of their living standards, but not someone in Essex?

What is needed is institutional equality. In Germany, for instance, each state has its own constitution and government. Even the Saarland, with a population at the last count of just under one million people, has eight ministers responsible for issues such as the economy, finance and European affairs. A business operating in Germany can engage with municipal government knowing a decision will be made and things done. In most of England the only power is to create another conversation.

To be clear, new institutions should be created along neo-localist lines, not localist. Economic governance needs to be done at a scale which is big enough to influence factors such as labour markets; and yet local enough to respond quickly to economic and social change. This means ignoring the boundaries of district councils and following those of strategic authorities (i.e. city regions and counties). It also means greater clarity from central government on the means by which local empowerment is achieved: the back-door deal making which characterised the localism agenda of the coalition era should end.

Taking charge

Compared to their international counterparts, England's metro-mayors are relatively weak in their influence. For instance Bill de Biasio, Mayor of New York, controls a $70 billion budget. Marcelo Ebrard, a former mayor of Mexico City, legalised abortion and introduced gay marriage in his city.

While in England social issues such as abortion should, of course, only be determined at a national level, a political paradigm now at ease with the notions of devolution and economic intervention represents an opportunity. The role and potential of England's metro-mayors and county leaders should be strengthened to further improve local living standards and economic growth.

For instance, immigration policy. The number of international students at the University of Sunderland dropped by forty-five percent between 2013/14 and 2015/16. If Tyne and Wear city region had some control of local student visa issuance, might the outward flow of international students have been stemmed?

Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester, has established a public homelessness fund, donating fifteen percent of his salary in the process. This is a great cause, helping to tackle one of the city-region's most pressing issues. But, with greater mayoral fiscal powers, there would be potential for genuinely transformative funding. For instance, people across Los Angeles County recently voted for the introduction of a quarter-cent sales tax to pay for homelessness prevention and housing services. Why shouldn't the electorates of England's city-regions and counties be given the opportunity to vote on the same?

Give place a chance

Orwell's call for England to assume its real shape was a call to arms. A neo-localist agenda would bring profound change to the way England is governed, establishing new centres of power in the interests of places and their people. However it is not an attempt to overhaul the economic order. It is neither a

utopian vision and nor is it a purely technocratic agenda.

What would it look like in practice? No more banal, titbit references to a Northern Powerhouse, but a firm rooting in government's industrial strategy. City and county leaders appearing on Question Time instead of backbench MPs whose only influence is their Twitter account. Finally, and most importantly, places defined by economic failure given the chance to change that.

Then, and only then, will England assume its real shape.

11. Why the United Kingdom is a legacy worth preserving

James Worron

The United Kingdom has one critical flaw: there are too many English people. There are in fact five times as many English as the other three nations combined. This has always led to the perception of English dominance, and the practical risk that the English can outvote their partner nations.

Over the years this problem has got worse. The English will just not stop multiplying. In 1700, just before the creation of the Union between England and Scotland, there were five times as many English as Scots, by 1900, eight times as many. This problem gets worse even today – the population of England grew faster than Scotland between the 2001 and 2011 censuses. There are now more than ten times as many English as Scots. The population of England has in fact grown by more since 2001 than the entire population of Scotland. The Union therefore is no longer so important in providing the English with the strength of additional numbers.

It is to that relationship between England and Scotland that I shall turn. This is the United Kingdom in a legal sense. Wales has been part of England since 1535 and Ireland was a separate Kingdom until 1800. Both were also conquered by England. Only Scotland was truly a willing, albeit bribed, bride.

Over the years however a story of English oppression has developed. This is the *Braveheart* version of history. This film is set in the 1290s and what is startling is that this is how far back you have to go to find the "English" oppressing the Scots. Many wars were fought in the centuries after, but the Scots were as likely to be the aggressor as the English. Scotland's oppression has come from elsewhere: from France in the 16th century for example.

In the Union Scots have thrived and often been dominant. This includes political dominance: Scotland has given the UK nine Prime Ministers – from the Earl of Bute to Gordon Brown. Tony Blair's first Cabinet in 1997 contained six Scots, and two of the five contenders in the 2016 Conservative leadership election were Scottish, with both Liam Fox and Michael Gove representing a long tradition of Scottish MPs sitting for English seats. Political dominance was long matched by economic significance. Scotland was at the heart of the British industrial revolution, with a dominant role in iron, steel and shipbuilding.

Yet the Union is under threat. The long-term structural problem – too many English – has collided with political differences. Since the 1980s the English have been voting differently to the Scottish. The English voted for Thatcherism, responding to industrial decline by letting the UK fully embrace the global economy. The Scots were amongst those parts of Britain which did not like this approach.

Why has this proved such a problem? It is not a problem of poverty. Scotland is poorer than the UK average but comparable to middling English regions. However, Scotland, unlike those parts of England dissatisfied with Thatcherism, could draw on nationalism as an alternative. It also had North Sea oil as a base for an alternative economic vision. This has led to what we see today, a political force, the SNP, which is both patriotic and progressive, and so forming a powerful, and up to now enduring, political cocktail.

Against this vision of the future is set the legacy of the Union. It has been

claimed that this legacy is dominated by Empire and Protestantism and so no longer relevant. The legacy is deeper and more enduring. It contains three compelling elements:

- Scottish and English identity
- The security legacy
- A legacy of tolerance and liberty

Scottish and English identity

The SNP sometimes claim that Scotland is a Celtic country, and sometimes they claim that it is a Scandinavian country. It is very telling that they cannot decide. The truth is that the country Scotland has most in common with, is England. Medieval Lowland Scotland was a lot like England. It spoke a range of English dialects, was dominated by Norman Barons and a Latin Church. A Church which was later overthrown in favour of English-language Protestantism. Highland Scotland was a different land, Gaelic speaking and more Catholic.

The single Scottish identity that we know today emerged fully only after Union in 1707 as the two regions merged and trade and culture thrived. For example, the single great symbol of modern Highland identity, the kilt, was a garment designed in modern form by a Lancashire Quaker. The clan tartans which adorn the kilt were developed as uniform for the Highland regiments first raised for the British army.

Nationalist historians have contested the idea that Scotland was backward before the Union. However, it is undoubtedly true that Scotland was poorer than England, blood feud still existed in law, and its Parliament had only a few hundred electors, compared to England's hundreds of thousands. Scotland after the Union was at the centre of the British Enlightenment, producing figures such as the economist Adam Smith, the historian (of *England*) David Hume, James Boswell, biographer famous for his life of Samuel Johnson (*Englishman*), and Tobias Smollett, the author of novels (often set in *England*). These men were known because they were influential in London, but, equally important what they wrote of was British life.

It is sometimes said that England does not have an identity outside the British identity. Maybe Scotland is also like England in that sense. Scotland's identity is also intertwined with that of the United Kingdom.

The United Kingdom – a legacy of security

The Union of Crowns in 1603 was a big step towards internal peace on the island of Great Britain. After this date conflict increasingly happened within England and Scotland rather than between them, as in the Civil War of the 1640s and the Jacobite rising of 1745. After the Union of 1707 this security Union turned outward facing, with spectacular results. It became history's most massive and successful imperial project. This project has left a lasting legacy on global civilisation, from sport – football in particular, through dress codes – the men's suit, to the English language and to a lesser extent legal system. A legacy that will continue to evolve but will surely endure in some form.

At some point, more or less the moment when Nazi panzers lined up at Dunkirk, that common imperial project became the common self-defence project. At first it was the self-defence project against Nazism, and then against Communism. After the Cold War the British armed forces became part of the liberal intervention project, hesitantly in Bosnia, boldly in Kosovo and Sierra Leone and recklessly in Iraq. This project has proved unpopular as it has over-reached, but when Alex Salmond condemned British involvement in Kosovo in 1999 he seemed out of touch with Scottish opinion.

Today the need for the security union seems as strong as ever. Looking

across the world Scottish independence seems a cause that should, in Francis Fukuyama's adaptation of his own term, happen at the end of history. Terrorism, the Ukrainian war, strife in Korea and the Middle East, all show that history is nowhere near over.

A legacy of tolerance and liberty

The Union was also a step forward in tolerance and good government. It followed on a series of big steps forward in England – freedom of religion, freedom of the press and the supremacy of Parliament. The Union helped formally establish the first multi-confessional state. England and Scotland had separate established religions – Anglicanism and Presbyterianism. Discrimination against other religions endured for some time, but Britain was a multi-confessional state to a much greater degree than any other European nations. The fact that Scotland was and is a multi-confessional state means that it is very different to Ireland or Scandinavia, where nationhood is strongly linked to a single religion.

This tradition of tolerance, and of liberal government, is surely the crowning legacy of the Union. A step on the road towards the societies we know today where religious identity should have no political significance. As well as a major step forward in limiting the power of the rulers over the ruled. Again, that legacy is global.

How special is the Union today?

Perhaps the biggest reason the Union is under threat because it is no longer seems as special as it once was. Peace, trade, travel and cultural links no longer depend upon political ties. The nations of the developed world have learnt to live in peace. People feel that can have their cake and eat it – local control but international interdependency.

Can such benefits be taken for granted though? There is no better legacy than identity, security and liberty, and it would be reckless to risk this legacy by ending the institution which created it.

12. Local democracy and electoral reform

Alexandra Runswick

The impact of our broken voting system on our national politics is clear – the false majorities, voters abandoned in safe seats where representation hasn't changed in generations, and the scourge of tactical voting where millions of people have to decide to vote with their head or their heart – to vote for who they want or to vote tactically to keep out who they don't want. Electoral reform in Westminster is essential, but one of the ways to achieve that is, as with so many things in politics, to start local.

Having a vibrant political culture underpinned by deliberation and participation starts at a local level with people feeling that voting matters - feeling that it can make a difference to their everyday lives. But there are systemic failings in local democracy that are limiting the development of that culture of participation; the growth of one party states and uncontested seats mean reform is urgent. For Unlock Democracy that means a broadly proportional system where voters can choose between both parties and individual candidates, which is of particular importance for independent candidates.

In our current system, political parties are encouraged to chase after the same swing voters in the handful of marginal seats across the country. This has left elections in some areas looking more like North Korea than North Kent, with no opposition at all on the council, or only one candidate on the ballot. Our voting system has stunted the development of local democracy across the country, and millions of people have been left without a strong voice in how their local community is run. Political parties narrow their policy platforms in the search for a centre ground and voters are left with a lack of diversity and debate of ideas. These problems are acute at a local level, which is both the area where most people are likely to first become politically active but also where they are least likely to have choice.

Uncontested seats mean that tens of thousands of people are routinely denied a choice. In 2015 for example, Eden District Council was able to declare 21 of its 38 available seats before the elections had even taken place, with a majority of the council (55%) being returned with no one voting at all. More recently in the May 2017 council elections, nearly 100 councillors in Wales were reappointed without being challenged, with 7.3 percent of Welsh local authority seats uncontested, with half of Wales' 22 local authorities having at least one ward in which there was no challenger. In such circumstances, as a constituent, your options for voicing concerns are very limited indeed when one party has monopoly control over a council, or when you are presented with no options at the ballot box.

This problem compounds and becomes a self-reinforcing cycle. If parties struggle to find and field candidates, they focus their resources on areas where they know they can win. They stop investing in seats that aren't winnable, leaving voters with a limited choice of parties to vote for. This leads to uncontested seats, depriving voters of the choice of a full range of parties at the ballot box, and ultimately, a real voice in shaping the local government agenda. Parties that benefit from no opposition then become complacent, feeling that they don't need to engage with voters because they're 'safe', and in the worst cases this

breeds corruption. The Electoral Reform Society estimates that councils with weak electoral accountability are around a 50 percent higher corruption risk than their competitive counterparts. This is the reality for whole swathes of the country.

The Grenfell Tower fire tragedy that took place in the summer of 2017 sparked a very real sense of anger in British politics at the moment: anger that people aren't being listened to; anger that our health service is failing and schools aren't properly funded; anger that there is no accountability when things go wrong. While our political system did not start the Grenfell Tower fire, it did nothing for the people who lived there.

Long before the devastating fire, residents' concerns were ignored time and time again by the very people that were elected to represent them. The Grenfell Action Group, set up by residents, raised many complaints with the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea - and not just about fire safety in the tower. From calls to protect a local college, to concerns about disruption caused by improvement works, residents' complaints fell on deaf ears. Our democratic institutions are meant to be responsive to the needs of the people elected officials are put in place to represent, and when wealthy residents are rewarded with tax rebates and pats-on-the-back for not claiming support from the council while disadvantaged residents are ignored, it can only be concluded that this system is fundamentally broken.

It's no wonder that only 29% of people think that Parliament is doing a good job of representing their interests, or that when it comes to picking a party to vote for, 56% of people feel that no party properly represents the view of people like them. For a representative democracy - this is crisis point.

Proportional representation is exciting because it is not just about institutional change but how we achieve change. Changing our electoral system is not a panacea that will cure all the ills of democracy, but it is one reform that has the power to open up our political system. This already exists in Scotland and Northern Ireland, and many of the arguments that are used against PR systems, such as the fact that you need to have larger constituencies and elect more than one person, simply don't apply at a local level.

Local electoral reform has transformed the quality of local democracy in Scotland. For example, the phenomenon of uncontested seats has been significantly reduced. There were 67 uncontested seats in Scotland in 2003, whereas there were only three in 2017. Compared with 2003, the number of candidates standing has also increased by 76, suggesting that the Single Transferable Vote (STV) system has stimulated competitiveness in local elections.

When we we talk about democracy it is often in terms of processes and institutions, such as voting and parliament. But people often get involved in politics because of local issues that affect them - planning applications, fracking, air quality, or the closure of local libraries and other public services. Not only does local government often lack the power to act on the issues that matter to local residents, but as previously discussed, it may not have the impetus to act. Local people lack the mechanisms to make change. We need a new bottom up process for communities and local government to reach agreement with central government about new structures that would give people the power to make changes in their local communities.

So, what are the solutions? We need voting reform, more powerful local government, and constitutional protections for devolved power. Scotland and Northern Ireland already prove that electoral reform in local government can be done, to great success. Moreover, existing solutions show that greater local democracy could be achieved without substantial upheaval, such as a complete redesign of boundaries. Beyond these living examples, there are a wide range of proposals that we can look to for inspiration.

Currently, without a written constitution the government is still free to make significant changes to the structure and powers of local government without their input or consent. An obvious starting point is therefore to codify the relationship

between central and local government, with checks and safeguards for devolved powers. A report by the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, led by then chair Graham Allen MP, proposed such a codification to rebalance power away from the centre by putting power and finance together. As Allen described it at the time, this would "pave the way for a radical new settlement" for local government in England, clarifying "at what level of government power and accountability lie and provide a framework within which local councils would have the freedom to meet local needs and priorities".

The Local Government Independence Code, drafted by Professor Colin Copus and proposed by Allen, would have created a clear separation between local and central government. The code would assert local authorities' accountability as being to their electorates, not to Whitehall. Amongst a plethora of suggested reforms, this would have meant separate finances and a lock on provisions so central government couldn't repeal the changes on a whim. Local councils could be transformed in such a system into a vehicle for devolution in England.

While reform is about fairness, and making sure that voting matters, reform is also about providing the public with choice, ending the monopolies some parties have over councils and creating a new spirit in local government of collaboration. Scotland and Northern Ireland show us that it can be done, and the existence of one party states and uncontested seats show us that it must be done.


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