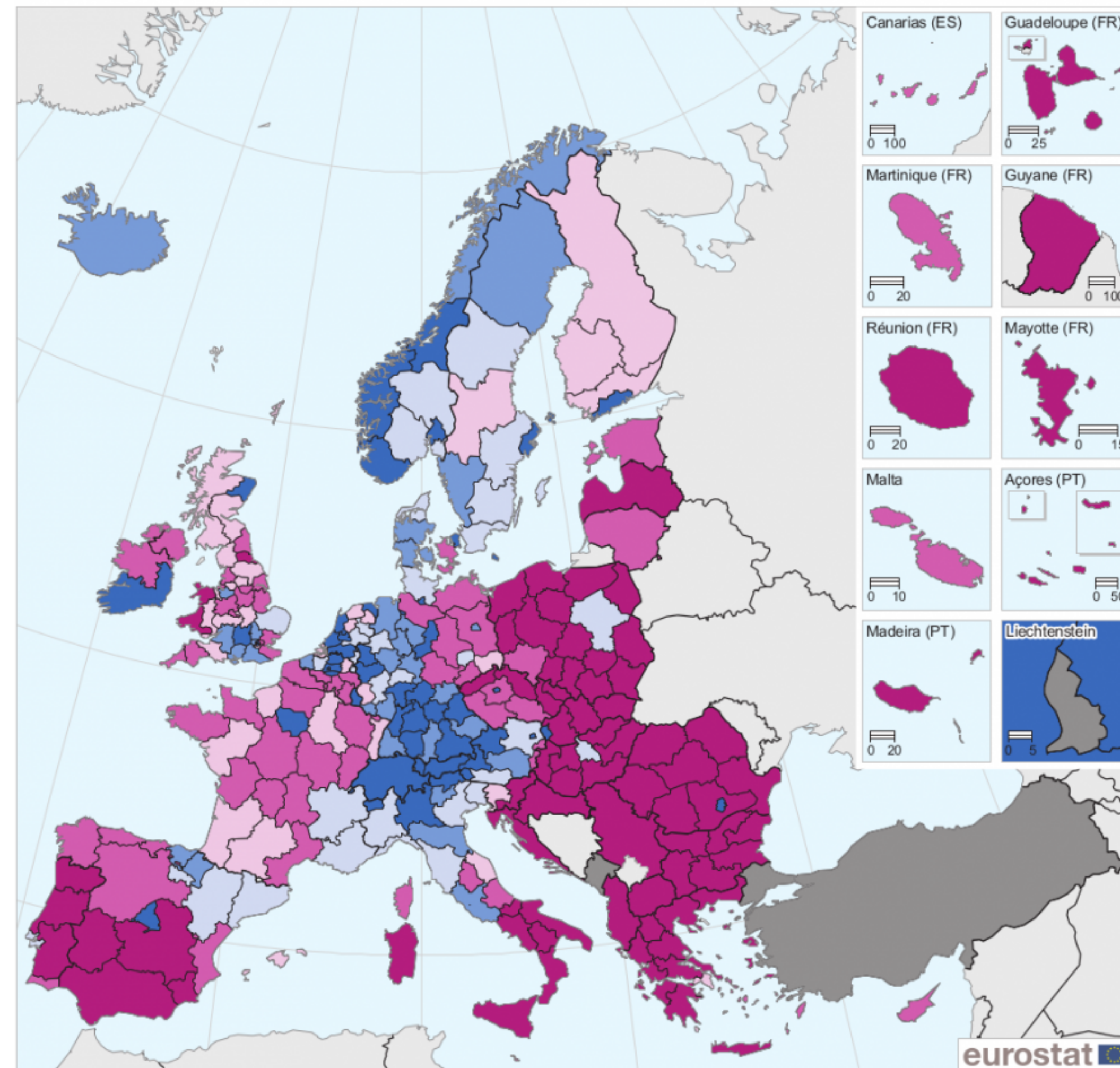# The Capability Approach:
A response to the "geography of discontent" challenge?

Maria Abreu
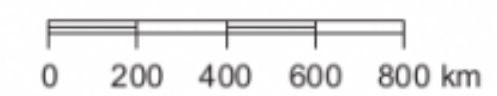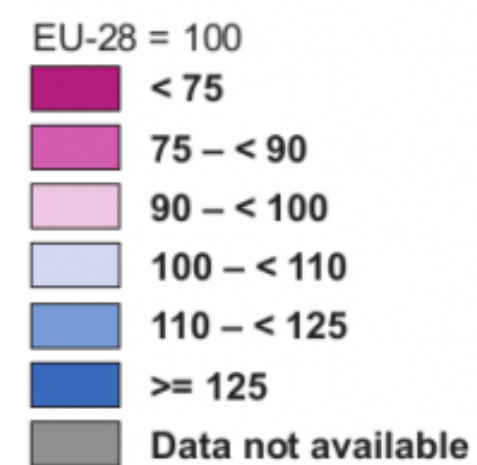University of Cambridge

A short detour through Brexit

Gross domestic product (GDP) per inhabitant in purchasing power standard (PPS) in relation to the EU-28 average, by NUTS 2 regions, 2014 (¹)

(% of the EU-28 average, EU-28 = 100)

Canarias (ES)   0 100

Guadeloupe (FR)   0 25

Martinique (FR)   0 20

Guyane (FR)   0 100

Réunion (FR)   0 20

Mayotte (FR)   0 15

Malta   0 10

Açores (PT)   0 50

Madeira (PT)   0 20

Liechtenstein   0 5

(% of the EU-28 average, EU-28 = 100)

Administrative boundaries: © EuroGeographics © UN-FAO © Turkstat
Cartography: Eurostat - GISCO, 04/2016

eurostat

EU-28 = 100

- < 75
- 75 – < 90
- 90 – < 100
- 100 – < 110
- 110 – < 125
- >= 125
- Data not available

0 200 400 600 800 km

(¹) Norway: 2013. Switzerland, Albania and Serbia: national data. Switzerland and Albania: provisional.

*Source:* Eurostat (online data codes: nama_10r_2gdp and nama_10_pc)

Regional variations in the Brexit vote

Large variations in the pro-Brexit vote, ranging from from 8% in Hackney, to 88% in Staffordshire Moorlands.

Age, education, and (less significantly) job insecurity are important determinants at the regional level.

Trade shocks and the extent of inward FDI are also correlated with the Brexit vote.

Fallacy of ascribing group views to individuals: poor areas voted for Brexit —> poor individuals voted for Brexit.
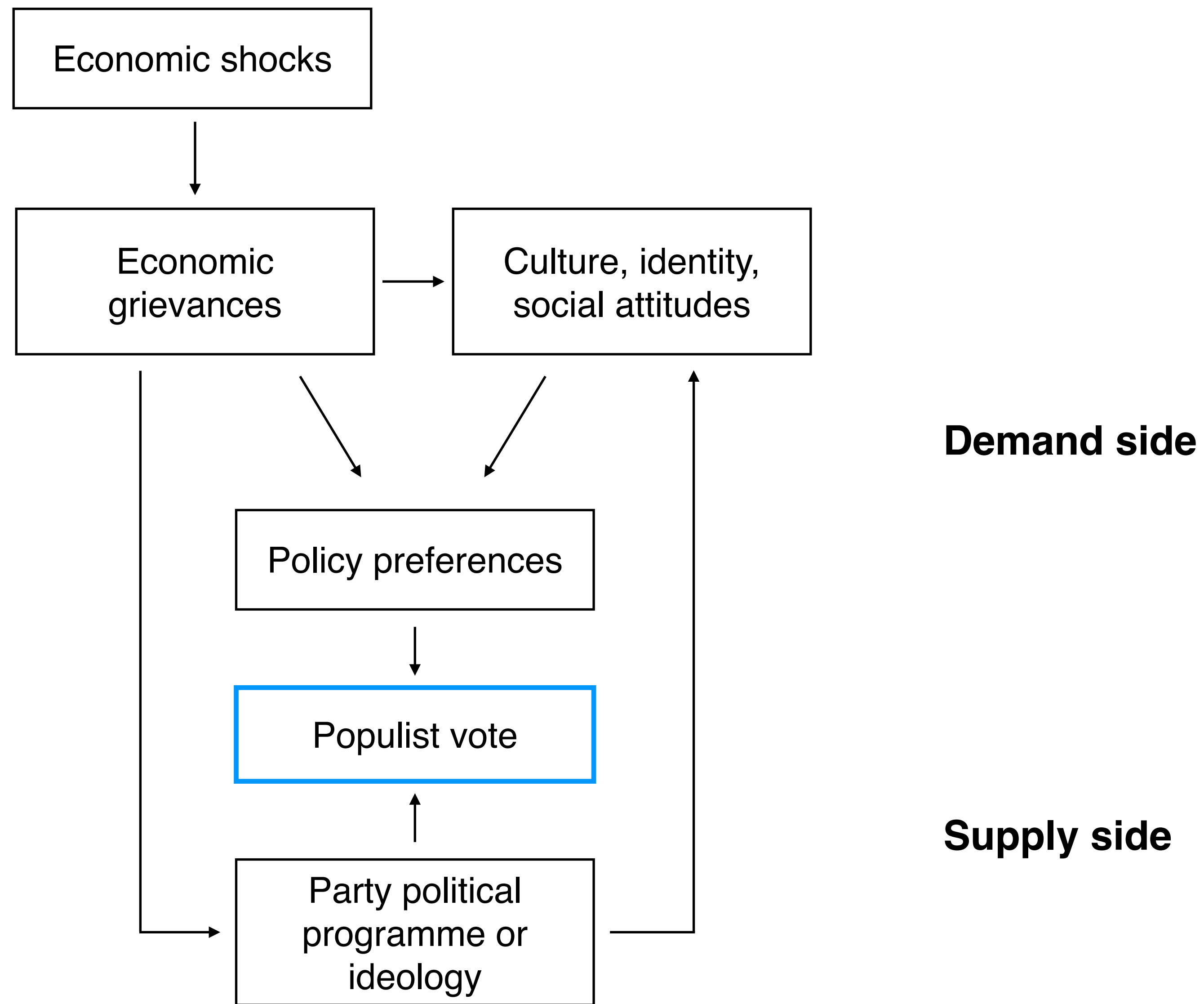
Source: Adapted from Rodrik (2020), *Why does globalisation fuel populism? Economics, culture, and the rise of right-wing populism*, Fig. 1, p. 31, with some additions.

Regional dimension in the Brexit campaign

Elections in the UK are essentially 650 mini-elections, one per parliamentary constituency.

Usually local results are heavily influenced by the local campaign: resources, volunteers, local issues.

The Brexit referendum was a national poll, with no campaign finance limits set for each constituency.

In the Brexit referendum individuals were micro-targeted on social media by the national campaign (targeted by place of residence).
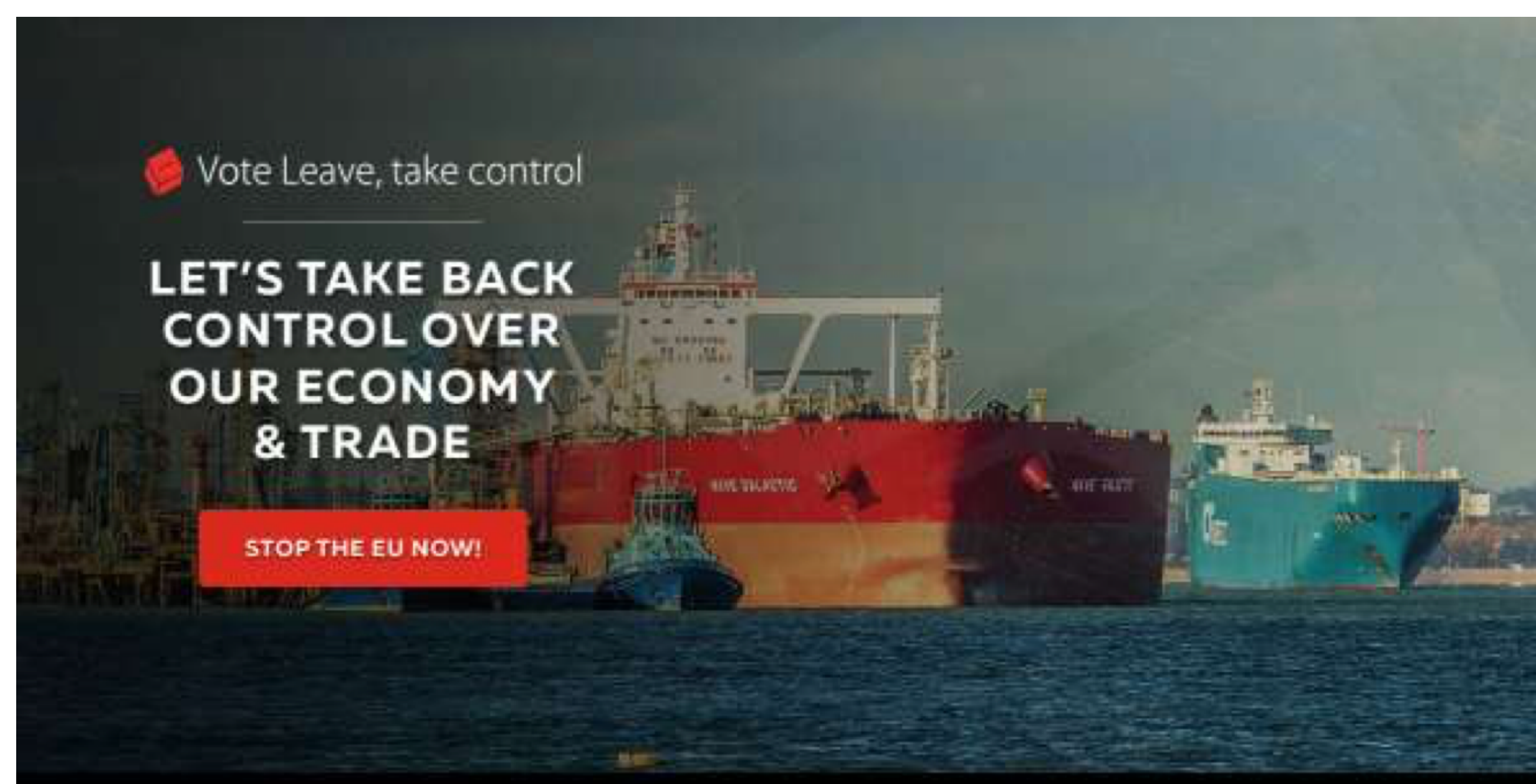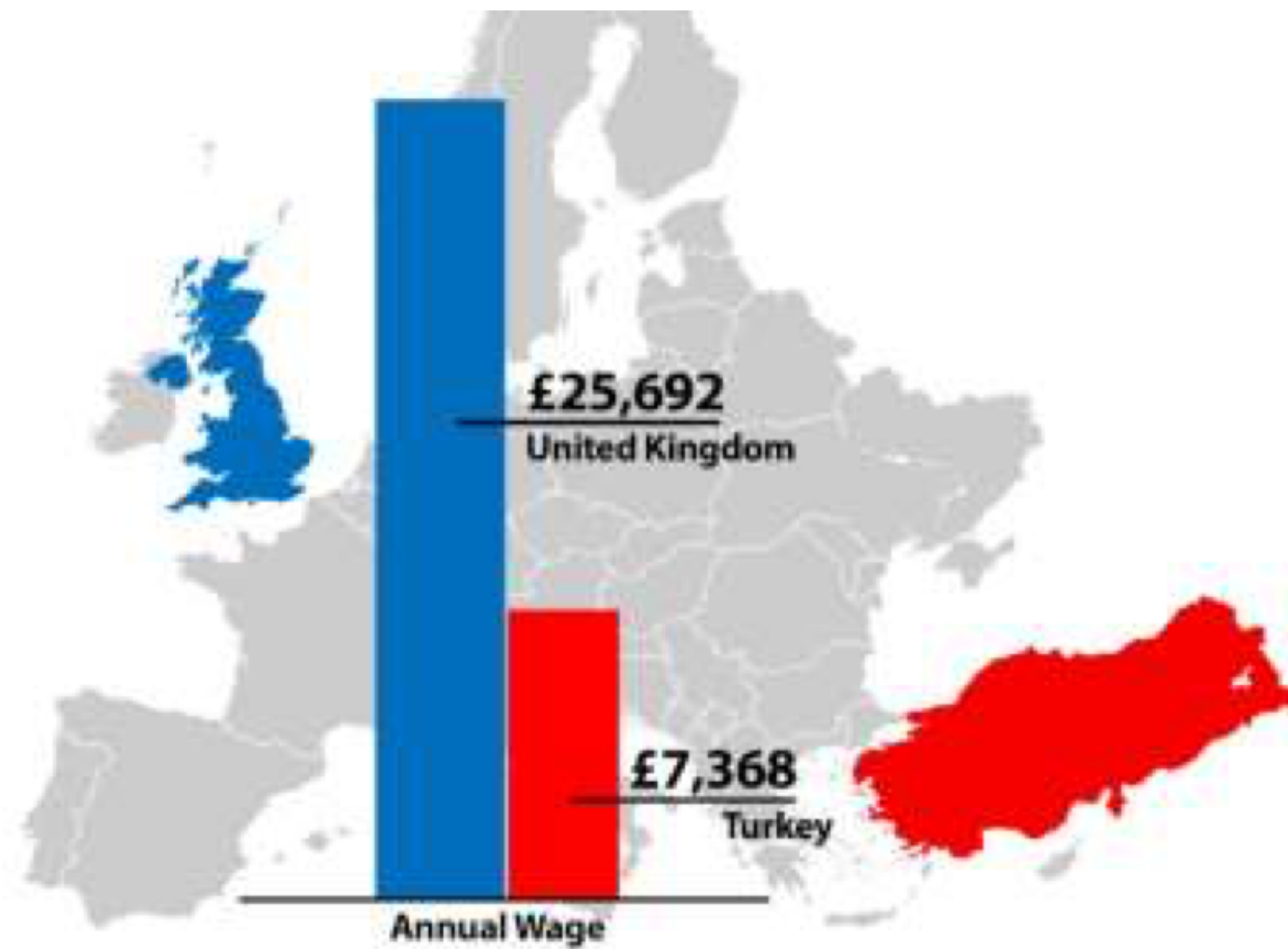
Source: https://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-committees/culture-media-and-sport/Fake_news_evidence/Ads-supplied-by-Facebook-to-the-DCMS-Committee.pdf

This is Our
ONLY CHANCE

We Need a Points Based
Immigration System!

I AGREE!

£25,692
United Kingdom

£7,368
Turkey

Annual Wage

Turkey's 76m people are joining the EU

GOOD NEWS???

YES

NO

EU politicians and bureaucrats **SPEND OUR MONEY ON PRIVATE JETS** for short distance travel. This is an outrageous abuse of British taxpayers' money and **MUST BE STOPPED!**

CLICK IF YOU AGREE

EU politicians and bureaucrats **SPEND OUR MONEY ON LIMOUSINES** to drive them around town! This is an outrageous abuse of British taxpayers' money and **MUST BE STOPPED!**

CLICK IF YOU AGREE

IMAGINE IF WE COULD KEEP **OUR MATERNITY UNITS OPEN** BECAUSE
WE WEREN'T SENDING **£350 MILLION TO THE EU EVERY WEEK!**

SAVE MATURNITY UNITS

Vote Leave, take back control

The EU puts pressure on unions and workers rights

CLICK IF YOU AGREE

The **EU** blocks our ability to speak out and **PROTECT** polar bears!

CLICK TO PROTECT THEM

Now the EU wants to ban tea kettles!

TAKE BACK CONTROL NOW

**£350 million a week
to the EU**

OR

**Flood defences for
Yorkshire**

YOU DECIDE:

EU

YORKSHIRE

**£350 million a week
to the EU**

OR

**Support the
UK steel industry**

YOU DECIDE:

EU

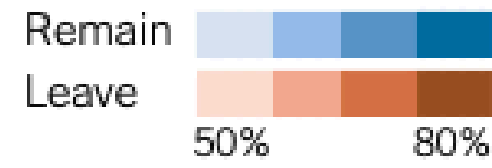**UK STEEL**

Brexit as a protest vote

The Brexit vote was not necessarily about the EU.

A large number of disparate groups voted for Brexit for different and often contradictory reasons.
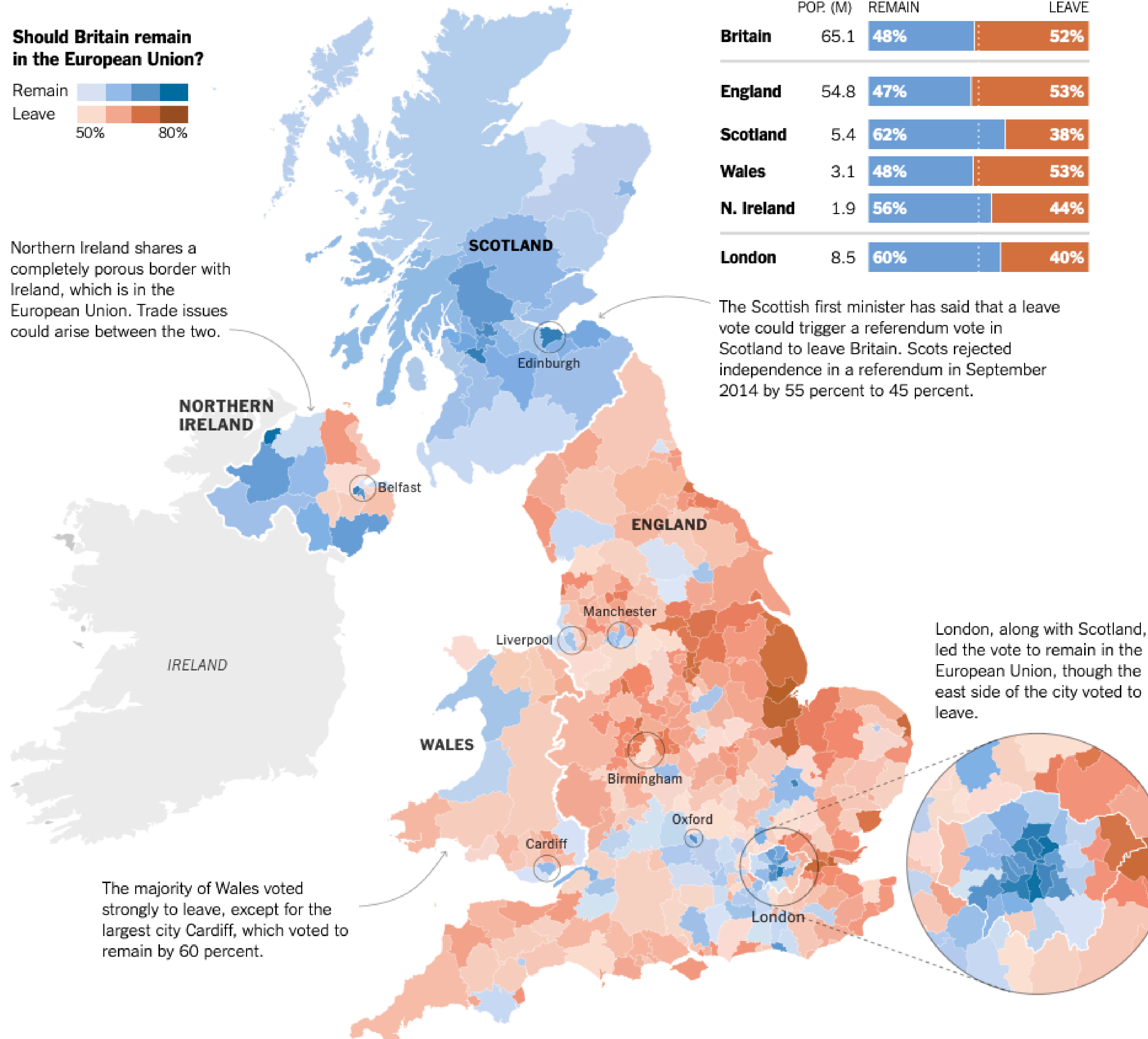
A higher Brexit vote in a specific location could reflect local concerns.

Targeted advertising on social media could have amplified those concerns.

Should Britain remain in the European Union?

Remain
Leave

50%   80%

	POP. (M)	REMAIN	LEAVE
Britain	65.1	48%	52%
England	54.8	47%	53%
Scotland	5.4	62%	38%
Wales	3.1	48%	53%
N. Ireland	1.9	56%	44%
London	8.5	60%	40%

SCOTLAND

Northern Ireland shares a completely porous border with Ireland, which is in the European Union. Trade issues could arise between the two.

The Scottish first minister has said that a leave vote could trigger a referendum vote in Scotland to leave Britain. Scots rejected independence in a referendum in September 2014 by 55 percent to 45 percent.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Edinburgh

Belfast

ENGLAND

IRELAND

Manchester

Liverpool

London, along with Scotland, led the vote to remain in the European Union, though the east side of the city voted to leave.

WALES

Birmingham

Oxford

Cardiff

London

The majority of Wales voted strongly to leave, except for the largest city Cardiff, which voted to remain by 60 percent.
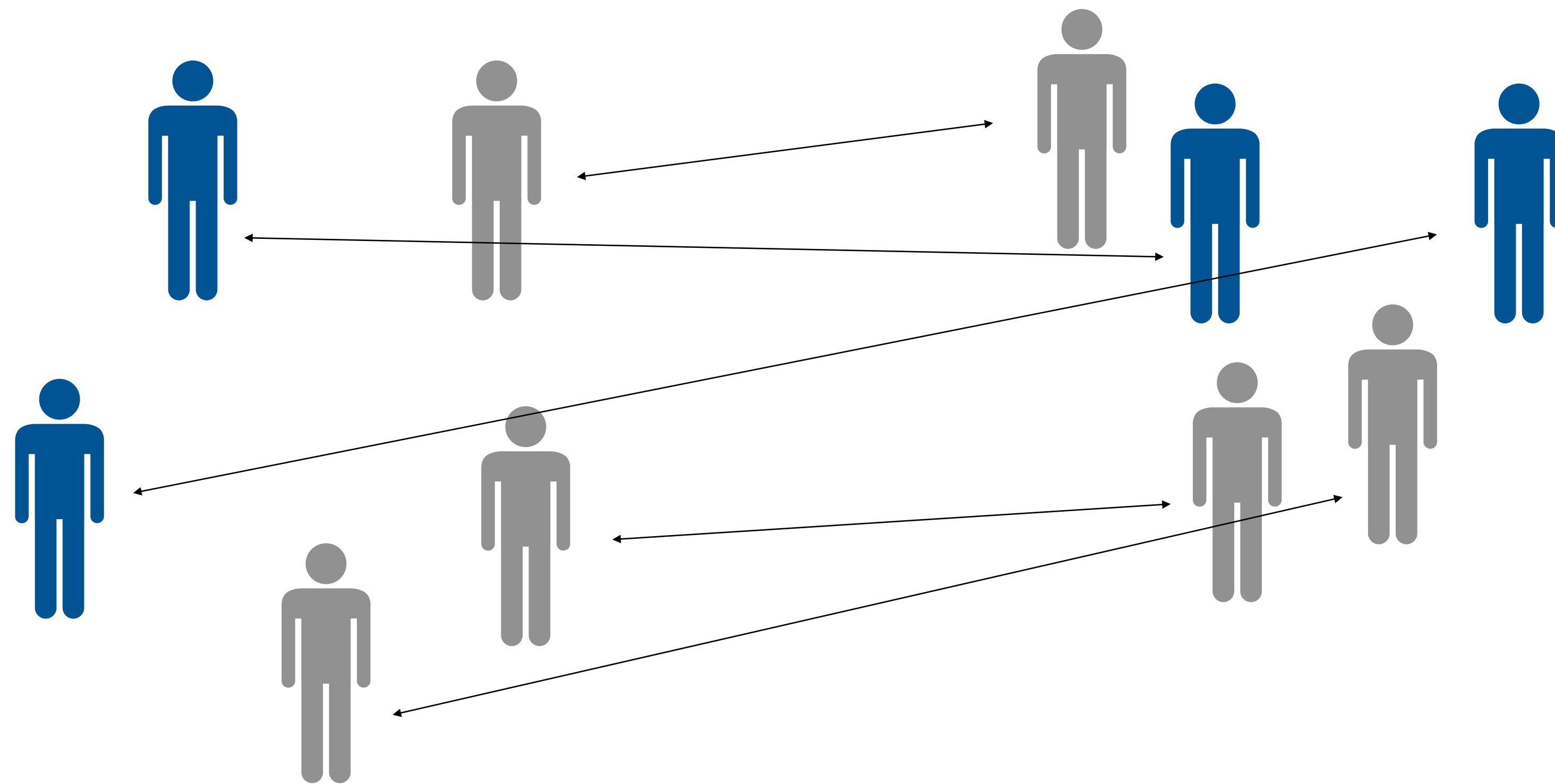
Town A   Town B
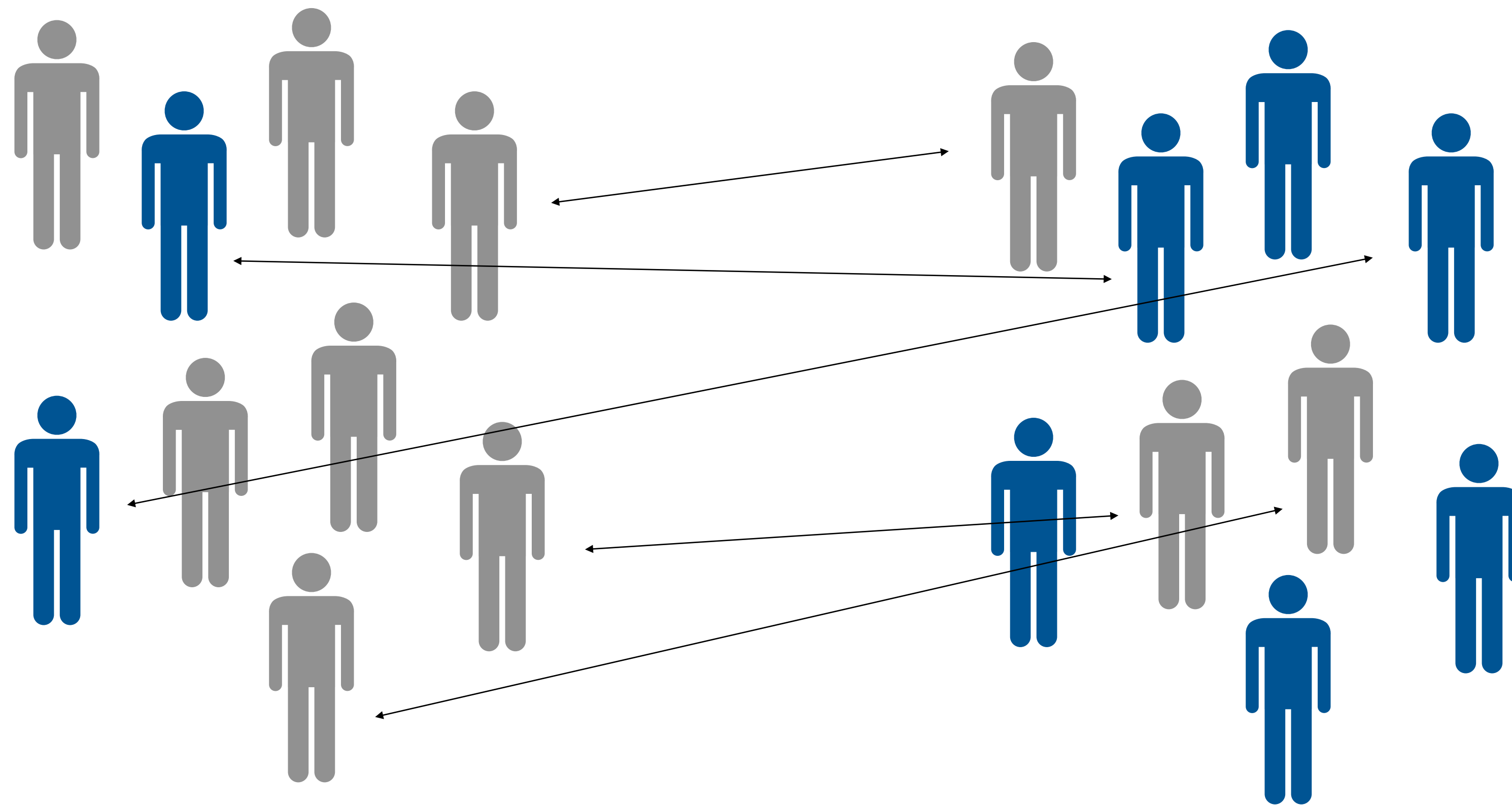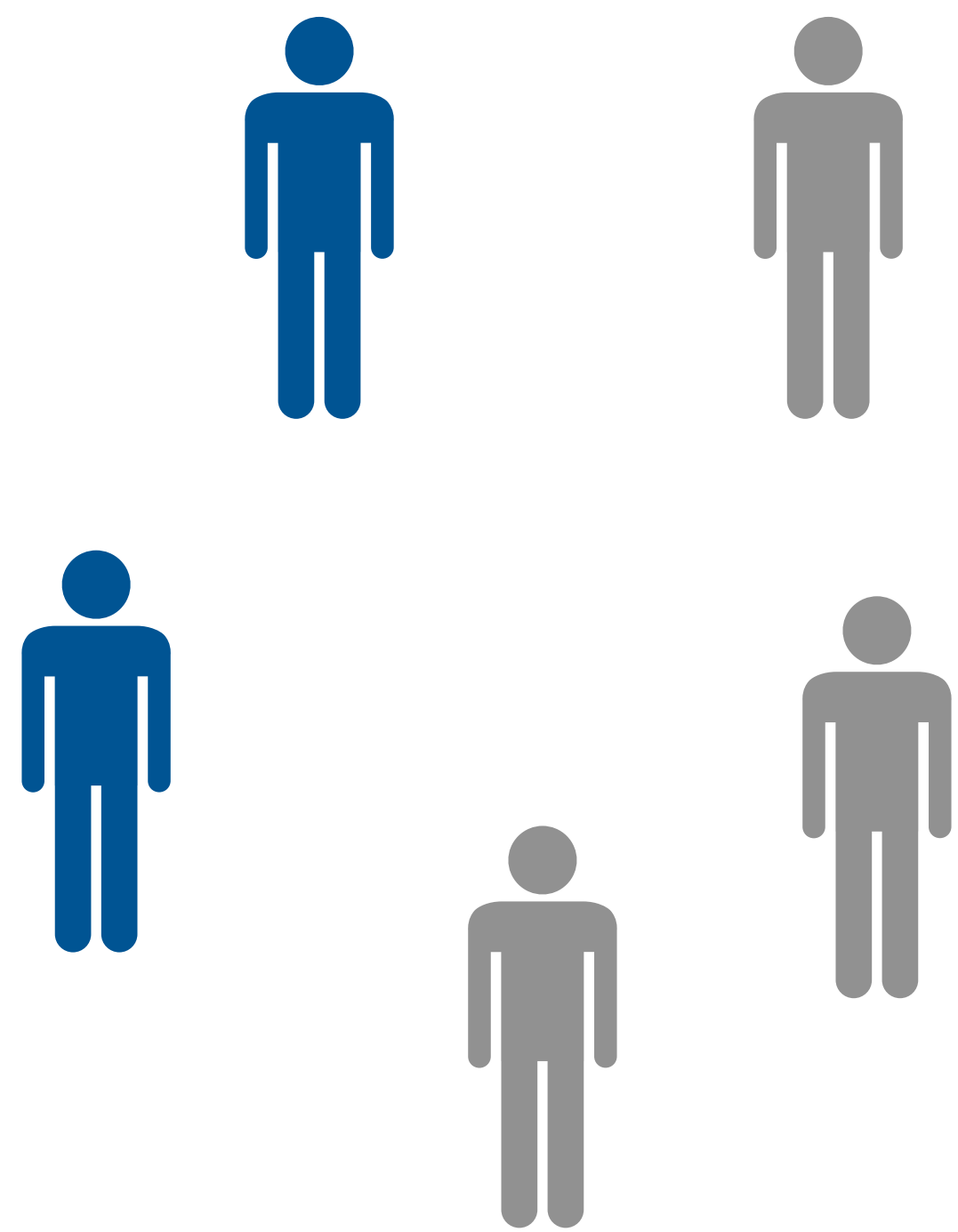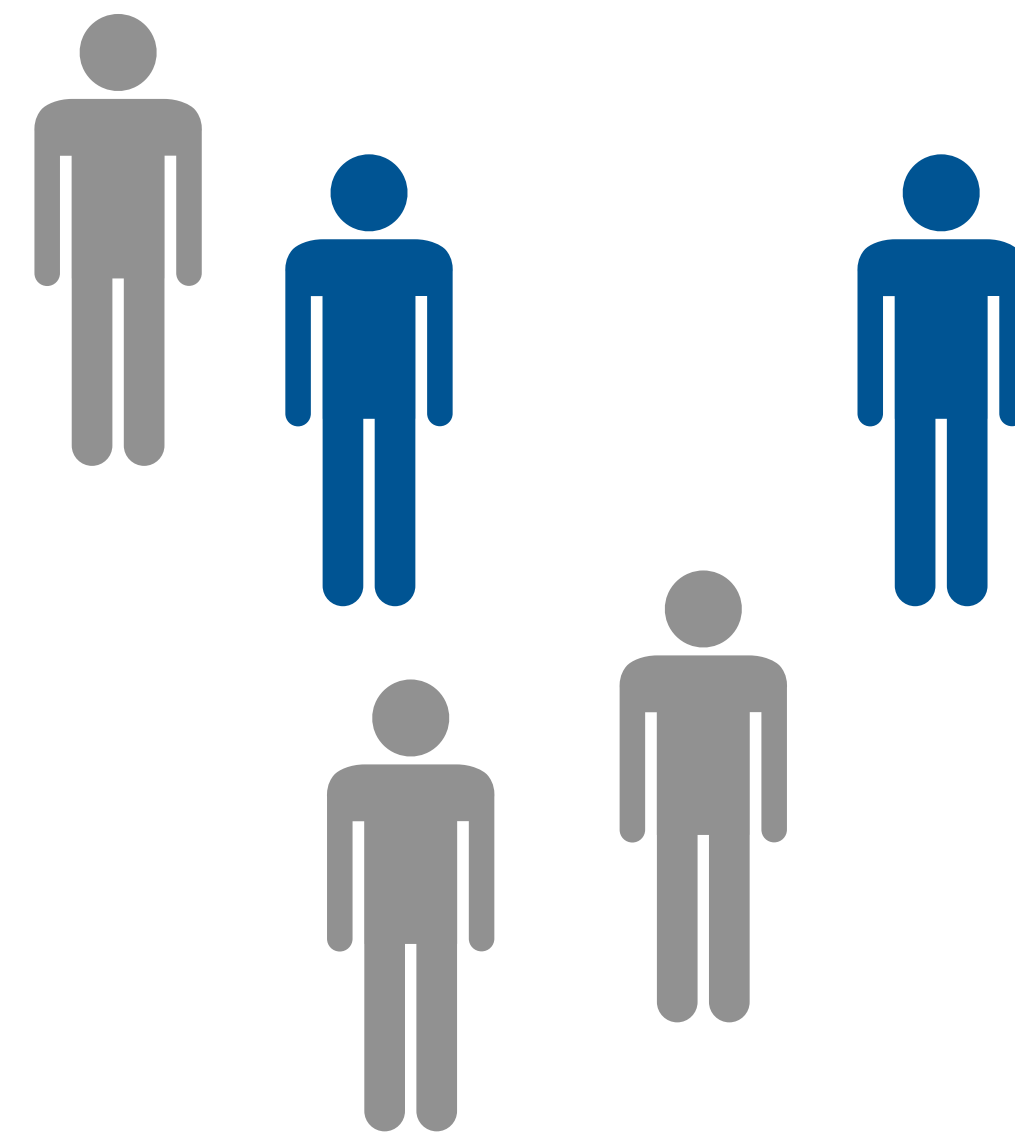
Town A

Town B

Town A

Town B

Likelihood of voting for Brexit by type of area (%)

Type of area / region	Unadjusted	Adjusted for composition
High UKIP vote area	11.9	7.7
Low wage growth area	2.2	1.8
High skills area	-8.0	-4.2
High immigration area	-4.1	0.5
Anti-immigration area	15.5	7.0
Anti-same-sex marriage area	6.5	3.8

Abreu and Oner (2020). Disentangling the Brexit vote: The role of economic, social and cultural contexts in explaining the UK's EU referendum vote. *Environment and Planning A*, 52(7), 1434–1456.

Individuals or context?

Voter composition explains around one third of the variation in the Brexit vote (Abreu and Öner, 2020).

Cultural perceptions and views, particularly on immigration, have strongest explanatory power.

Economic context has little explanatory power, except for education and (v. marginally) low wage growth.

We conclude that context explains a large proportion of the vote, but it's cultural context that matters.

(a) Employment in the "gas, energy, and water" industry in 1981, and geological coal deposits

(b) LSOAs within high-employment wards, and within 10 miles of geological coal deposits
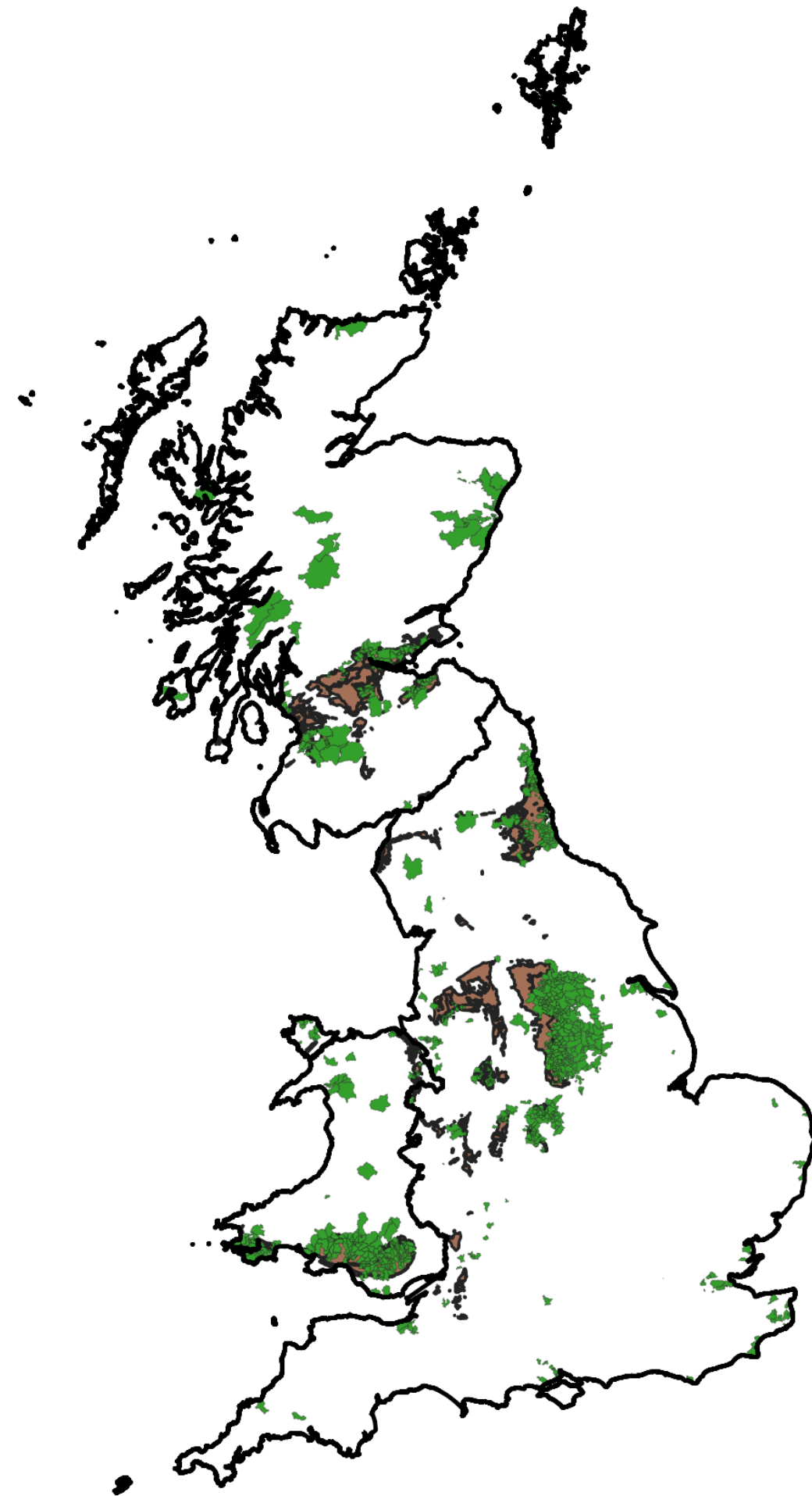
High employment in coal, energy, and water
Geological coal deposits

Coal mining LSOAs

What do voters in former coal mining communities think?

Interest in politics

Coalmining LSOAs   Other LSOAs   95% confidence interval
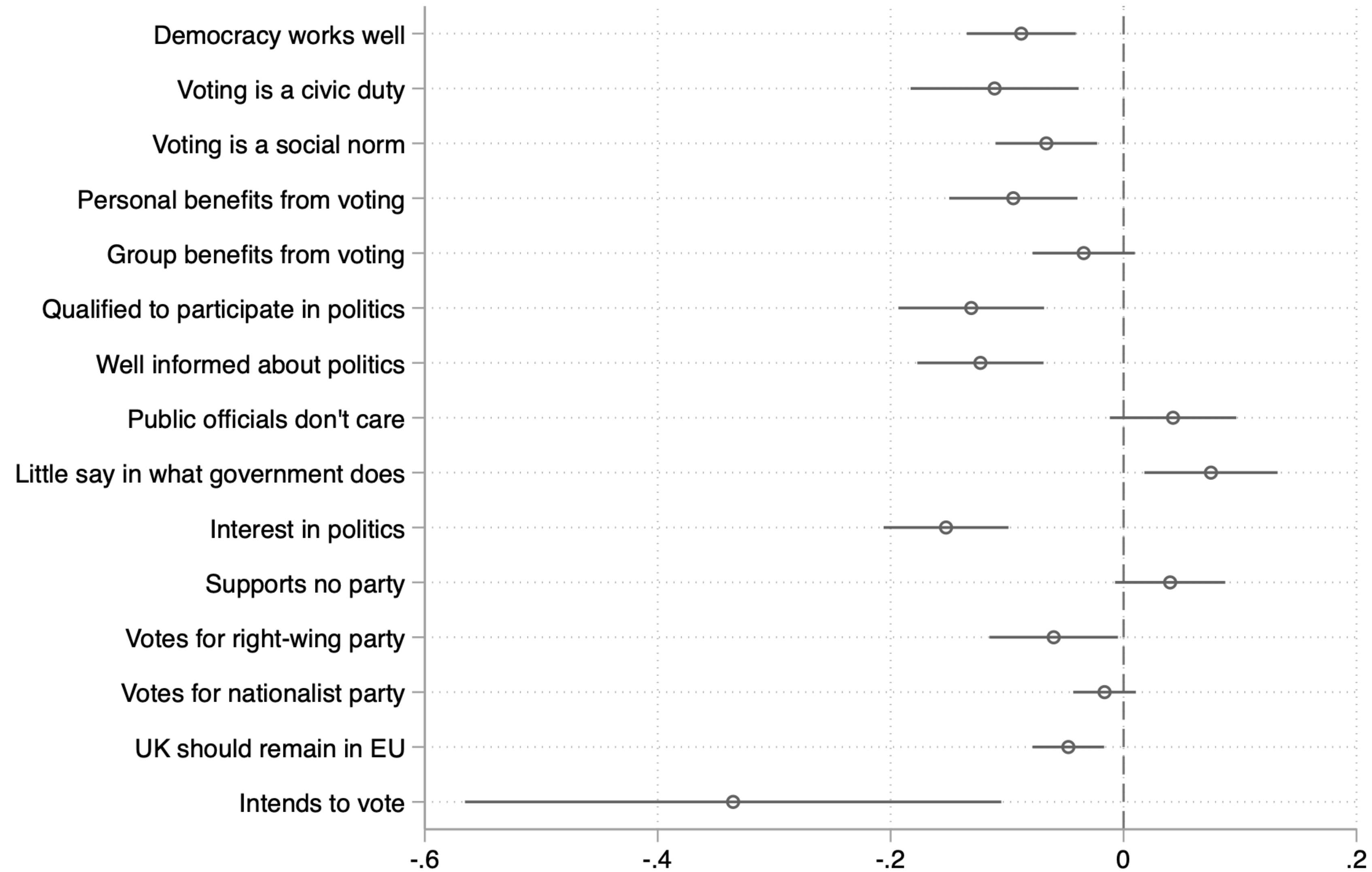
Abreu, M., & Jones, C. (2021). The Shadow of the Pithead: Understanding Social and Political Attitudes in Former Coal Mining Communities in the UK. https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/6sd7f.

Nature of the challenge

ALL EARS
PUTTING THE PUBLIC AT THE HEART OF LEVELLING UP

BEN GLOVER
ANDREW PHILLIPS

OCTOBER 2021

Key challenges of regional policy

Objectives: how to identify them, and how to reconcile growth and productivity vs. quality of life objectives.

Agency: how to involve the local community in the process, and encourage ownership of the outcomes.

Measurement: how to choose priority areas; how to evaluate success.

Delivery and process: who should deliver the policy; how should the delivery process be scrutinised and evaluated.

Capability Approach and regional policy

Capability Approach

A conceptual framework for thinking about human development with a focus on individual opportunities and agency.

An alternative to approaches that focus on resources (e.g., GDP) or desire fulfilment (e.g., happiness).

It is pluralistic by design, and can incorporate other concepts such as human rights, spatial justice, or happiness.

Widely used in development programmes and by international development agencies (esp. UNDP).

INDIVIDUAL INTRINSIC CHARACTERISTICS

Age, sex, ethnicity, physical ability, cognitive ability, metabolic rate, talent, etc.

CONVERSION FACTORS
Individual, social, and environmental

STRUCTURAL FACTORS

Institutions
Social norms
Environment
Infrastructure
Media

INSTRUMENTAL FREEDOMS

Political freedoms
Economic facilities
Social opportunities
Transparency guarantees
Protective security

RESOURCES

Income
Human capital
Social capital
Non-market production
Time

CONSUMPTION

Food
Education
Housing
Transport
Healthcare

INTRINSIC FREEDOMS (CAPABILITIES)

AGENCY FREEDOM

PROCESS FREEDOM

COMPREHENSIVE OUTCOMES

Resources and capabilities

Policy area	Resources	Capabilities
Transport	Income Owning a car, bike Driving, cycling skills Access to roads or cycle lanes	Ability to travel to work Ability to meet friends and family Ability to access shops and services Ability to enjoy scenic landscapes
Food and nutrition	Income Access to grocery shops Home storage capacity Cooking skills Access to kitchen appliances	Ability to be well nourished Ability to enjoy food with others Ability to provide for one's family

Agency

How can we use these insights in practice?

Challenges of implementation

There are two well-known challenges of the Capability Approach:

Multi-dimensionality: capability sets include many complex aspects of life.

Observability: we do not observe capability sets, only resources and outcomes.

In addition, there are challenges linked to implementation:

How do we choose which capabilities to prioritise?

What is beneficiaries choose the "wrong" thing (e.g., flower displays rather than healthcare?)

What is the role of society in the Capability Approach?

Our proposal: three steps

We break down the challenge into three steps, ranging from easy to more difficult:

Articulate a <u>conceptual shift</u> in policy focus from intermediate to ultimate goals.

Use a <u>deliberative participation</u> approach to identify valued capabilities (<u>between elections</u>).

Involve local communities in the <u>implementation, measurement, and scrutiny</u> of policies.

There are examples of each step (although not explicitly CA) across regional and national policymaking.
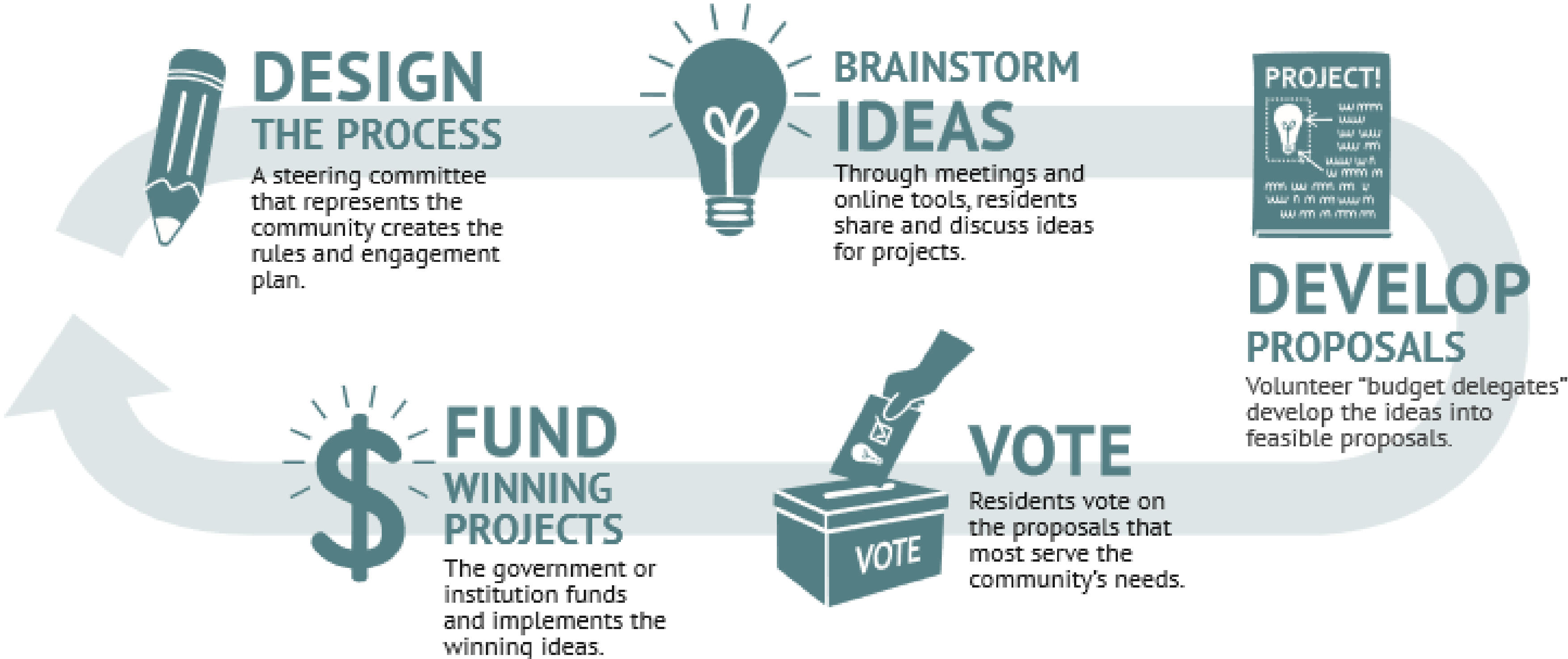
Poverty and Wealth Reports - Germany

The German government adopted the CA as the theoretical framework for its Poverty and Wealth Reports (published every 3-4 years).

Poverty is defined as a lack of capabilities, and wealth as a richness of capabilities.

Progress is measured using 38 indicators, identified by academic, policy, and civic society experts through a participatory process.

Indicators include measures of individual and regional context, realised capabilities (functionings), agency, and satisfaction with outcomes.

Participatory budgeting

DESIGN THE PROCESS
A steering committee that represents the community creates the rules and engagement plan.

BRAINSTORM IDEAS
Through meetings and online tools, residents share and discuss ideas for projects.

DEVELOP PROPOSALS
Volunteer "budget delegates" develop the ideas into feasible proposals.

VOTE
Residents vote on the proposals that most serve the community's needs.

FUND WINNING PROJECTS
The government or institution funds and implements the winning ideas.

Source: The Participatory Budgeting Project, Brooklyn, NY.

Resort Municipality of Whistler

WHISTLER

Climate Action | Services | Parks, Recreation & Culture | Business & Development | Municipal Government | Stay Connected | About | 📅 Calendar

Visiting Whistler? | Search

Controlled burn on Whistler Blackcomb - for the month of October, smoke may be visible in the area. There is no need to report it.

Whistler2020: Our Vision

Home / Municipal Government / Strategies and Plans / Whistler2020

🖨 Share ▾

Municipal Government

Overview

Bylaws and Regulations

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy

Budget and Taxes

Municipal Governance

Council

Grants and Funding

Committees of Council

Elections

Divisions

Strategies and Plans

Corporate Plan

Vision and Official Community Plan

Community Monitoring

Financial Plans and Reports

Recreation and Leisure Plan

Learning and Education Report

Careers

Following a substantial community effort and many years, Whistler has an updated Official Community Plan and Vision (OCP) that sets the course for the community into the future. Whistler Council adopted the OCP at its meeting June 23, 2020. The new vision and OCP builds on Whistler 2020, Whistler's previous guiding policy document.

Work is underway to align existing community performance indicators with the new vision and OCP. The most current data is available in the 2019 Annual Report. View the 2019 data.

Whistler2020 is Whistler's integrated community sustainability plan and highest level policy document. It is the community's shared vision and plan for continued success.

Monitoring our Progress

The Whistler2020 vision and annual action plans are informed and supported by an annual performance monitoring and reporting system that tracks more than 90 indicators measuring progress towards sustainability.

One component of the annual monitoring program is the Community Life Tracking Survey.

View the results of the annual monitoring program.
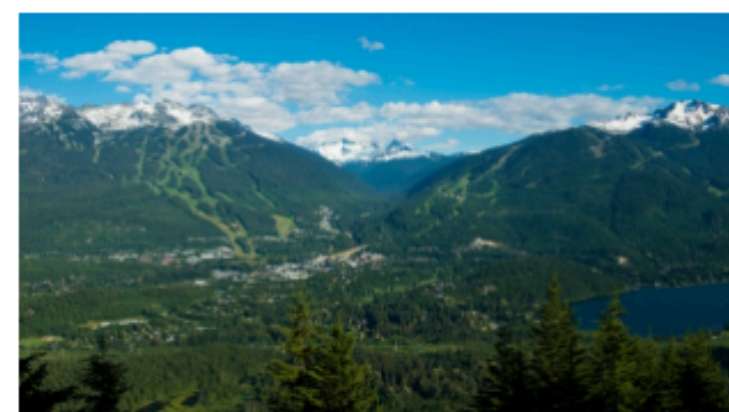
Developing Whistler2020

Building on the resort community's previous five-year vision, Whistler2020 was developed in four phases over three years of consultation and community collaboration before it was adopted in 2005.

Related links... ▾

Whistler2020 Priorities

The community vision articulated in Whistler2020 is organized around five priorities.

Related links... ▾

Whistler2020 Key Strategies

These sixteen strategies define how the community will achieve the vision and descriptions of success are outlined for each area.

Related links... ▾

Source: https://www.whistler.ca/municipal-gov/strategies-and-plans/whistler2020.

Statistical Trend

● desired direction
● undesired direction
● no change, or
   statistically insignificant change

centre
of icon

outer
ring of
icon
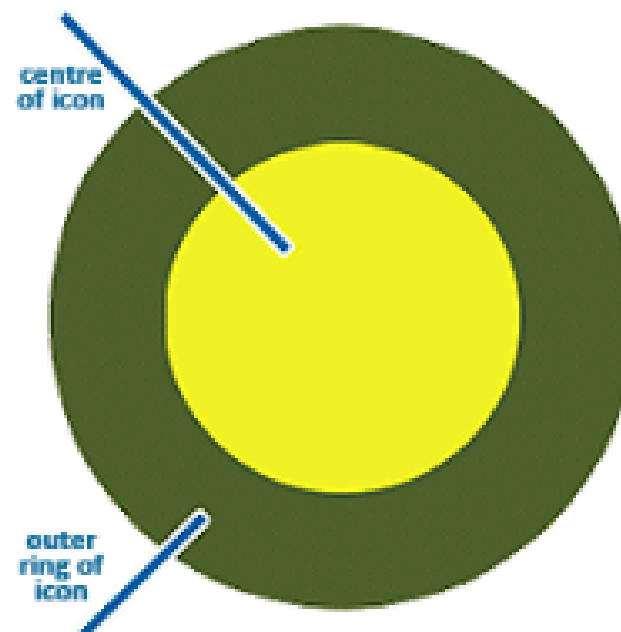
Performance relative to target level

○ satisfied with current level of performance
○ not satisfied with current level of performance
○ desired target level unknown

Enriching Community Life

Whistler's shared community goal and plan for success by the year 2020 aims for the community to be attractive and liveable with a strong social fabric. The majority of the local workforce and many long-time members of the community make Whistler their home.

View Indicators   +

Enhancing the Resort Experience

Whistler's shared community goal and plan for success by the year 2020 aims for the resort experience to continue to exceed expectations. From the moment visitors communicate with the resort about their trip until their return home, they are impressed by the seamless services provided by Whistler.

View Indicators   +

Protecting the Environment

Whistler's shared community goal and plan for success by the year 2020 aims for residents to understand the importance of the natural environment to the resort and to the health of current and future generations. Visitors adopt the stewardship ethic held by residents as they see it integrated into everything around them.

View Indicators   +

Ensuring Economic Viability

Whistler's shared community goal and plan for success by the year 2020 aims for tourism to remain the primary economic driver. To build and stabilize customer visits, the resort has successfully expanded into ventures that complement tourism and that move the resort community toward sustainability.

View Indicators   +

Partnering for Success

Whistler's shared community goal and plan for success by the year 2020 aims to support the spirit of cooperation among residents, business owners and other stakeholders. The community flourishes from years of working together and encouraging each other to become sustainable.
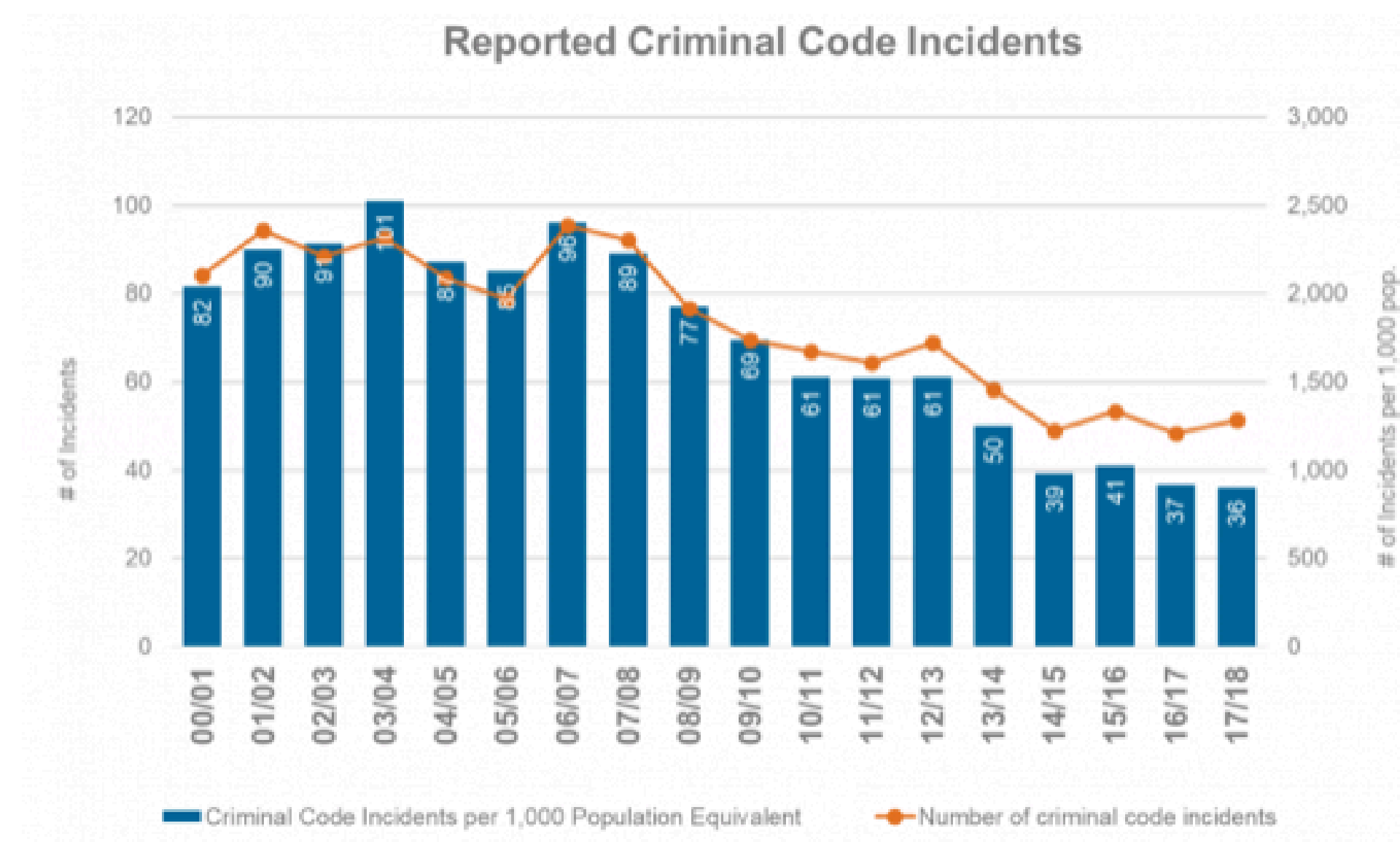
Enriching Community Life

[Whistler's shared community goal](#) and plan for success by the year 2020 aims for the community to be attractive and liveable with a strong social fabric. The majority of the local workforce and many long-time members of the community make Whistler their home.

View Indicators —

- Sense of Belonging
- Personal Health Status
- Resident Satisfaction
- Unlawful Incidents

- Satisfaction with Recreation Opportunities
- Workforce Living Locally
- Satisfaction with Access to Learning Opportunities

Additional Related Indicators +

⬤ Unlawful Incidents

Reported Criminal Code Incidents

Legend: ▬ Criminal Code Incidents per 1,000 Population Equivalent   ●— Number of criminal code incidents

In 2017/18, Whistler experienced a statistically significant increase in the total number of unlawful incidents yet the rate of reported incidents per capita decreased to 36. Violent offences increase by 30% from 155 to 200 and property offences stayed at about the same level. Whistler does not have a defined performance target for this indicator though Whistler's reported 2016/17 result is the lowest in recent years and compares favourably with relevant benchmark rates (incidents per capita): West Vancouver (50), Pemberton (64), North Vancouver City (70), and Squamish (78). For this reason, the performance icon is shown with a green outer ring.

Why monitor this

Safety and security are important aspects of community life and a positive resort experience. Information on crime rates and total numbers of crime incidents provides a better understanding about actual and perceived safety of residents and visitors.

What this measures

Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) surveys report the incidence and type of reported crime within Whistler. To account for the large influx of visitors to the community, Whistler's population equivalent number is used as the community's population for the number of crime incidents per 1,000 people.

Concluding thoughts

The "geography of discontent" has led to a lack of political engagement, and a loss of trust in government.

The capability approach offers a useful framework for addressing some of the resulting challenges.

It highlights the need to involve the local community in <u>meaningful</u> ways, in order to generate agency.

A transparent and democratic process ensures better perception of outcomes, and reinforces support for structural factors (e.g., institutions, social norms).

A capability-approach perspective on regional development

AUTHORS

Maria Abreu, Flavio Comim, Calvin Jones

AUTHOR ASSERTIONS

Conflict of Interest: No ▾   Public Data: Not applicable ▾   Preregistration: Not applicable ▾

Page: 1 of 29   Automatic Zoom

A capability-approach perspective on regional development

Maria Abreu[1], Flavio Comim[2], and Calvin Jones[3]

Abstract

We argue for a broader and more deliberative regional policy-making process that can be used to better identify the needs of diverse left-behind communities and develop appropriate policies. We argue that the capability approach's quintessentially inclusive and broad scope, and focus on real opportunities, agency, and process might better address the challenges of regional development. We use these insights to lay out a practical guide for how the capability approach could be used in policymaking, breaking down the implementation approach into steps, and providing examples from a variety of contexts to show how each step might be achieved in practice.

Keywords: regional development, regional policy, left-behind places, capability approach, agency.

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