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Place-based Politics and Nested Deprivation in the U.K.: Beyond Cities-towns, 'Two Englands' and the 'Left Behind'

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ABSTRACT

'Place-based explanations' of politics in the U.K. tell sweeping narratives about 'Two Englands', or of sizeable regions of the country that have been 'Left Behind', reinforcing popular accounts of a North–South or city-town divide. We introduce the concept of *nested deprivation* – deprivation that may occur in just one housing estate or even one row of flats within neighbourhoods that are otherwise affluent. We report on intensive fieldwork in 8 neighbourhoods varying in relative affluence and density of population (including urban, suburban/satellite, market town or rural village). Three key themes and consequences emerge for those living in nested deprivation in relatively affluent and geographically dispersed contexts: (a) either disconnection from or entrapment within the local economy; (b) social isolation and atomisation; and (c) powerlessness to affect politics. 'Place-based' explanations of rapid and radical changes to political participation in Britain need to take fine-grained geographical distinctions much more seriously. Our study provides evidence that the rising tides in affluent areas are drowning some residents rather than lifting all boats. Where deprivation is dispersed and then nested within mostly affluent constituencies it does not allow for the political mobilisation among communities of interest that is a necessary condition for pluralist representative democracies.

KEYWORDS

Deprivation; Left Behind; place; participation

Introduction

The escalating inequality associated with globalisation and advanced capitalism is seen to be at the root of recent 'earthquakes' in the political landscape. Rising social and economic inequality has fed a sense of alienation from political and economic elites. Internationally, inequality and alienation is linked to the rise of populism across Western Europe and to Donald Trump's electoral successes in the Rust Belt. In Britain, it is linked variously to the rise of UKIP as an electoral force, to the transformation of the Labour Party under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn, and most dramatically of all to the success of the Leave campaign in 2016's Brexit Referendum with the subsequent rise of the Brexit Party and the result of the 2019 general election. As such, seeking to explain the impact of inequality

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on patterns of political participation in these contexts has become *the* chief concern in contemporary political science and public punditry. The debate is currently dominated by competing diagnoses of the causal dynamics underpinning these shifts, and the meaning of their political consequences. One side emphasises the effects of economic stagnation, and interprets the newfound volatility in participation primarily as a manifestation of deeply held resentment towards political and economic elites. The other side emphasises social or cultural insecurity, and interprets the desire to ‘take back control’ primarily as an assertion of identity and belonging. What both sides share in common is an emphasis on *place*. The consequences of rising inequality are assumed to be concentrated geographically in ‘marginalised communities’ – communities that have been losers rather than winners in the free market economies of advanced capitalist societies. In Britain, the focus is on shifting patterns of public opinion and political behaviour in smaller towns in the North and Eastern coastal regions especially. These ‘place-based explanations’ draw on survey data to tell sweeping narratives about ‘Two Englands’, or of sizeable regions of the country that have been ‘Left Behind’, places that were red and are now blue (or vice versa), reinforcing popular accounts of a North–South or city-town divide.

These accounts offer important insights into fast-moving developments, shining a penetrating light on the social and political effects of pervasive and rapidly escalating inequality. In Britain, they reveal, and reinforce, a changing wisdom about electoral battlegrounds. But they are a problem because they are *too* simple. They lack nuance, especially when their influence spreads beyond the realm of strategic discussion of electoral campaigning and into prevailing narratives about British politics, policymaking and participation more broadly. A 20-minute drive from almost any point on the map, or a cursory glance at ONS census data, reveals that the U.K. cannot be so neatly divided geographically into economic haves and have-nots.

As 2017s Grenfell disaster demonstrated tragically, there are pockets of deprivation in even the most apparently affluent areas, and this deprivation bears consequence on how we live and die. This is a form of what we call *nested deprivation* – deprivation that may occur in just one housing estate or even one row of flats within neighbourhoods that are otherwise non-deprived, and potentially very affluent – a situation common to almost anywhere designated a ‘winner’ in broad macro accounts of contemporary British politics.

Nested deprivation is inequality that is widely dispersed. It is a salient feature of Britain’s geography and economy. Although ONS data allows us to discern patterns in the geography of multiple deprivation in the U.K., it also highlights ‘pockets of deprivation surrounded by less deprived places in every region of England’ (MHLG, 2019, p. 5). Nested deprivation as a phenomenon is spread geographically across the country, but it tends to occur with greater frequency and intensity in regions that are overall more prosperous, such as the South of England. There is also a good reason to think nested deprivation manifests and is experienced differently to concentrated deprivation in other parts of the country. Inequality in contexts of nested deprivation is acute and immediate. For individuals living in nested deprivation, economic, social and political inequality is in-your-face, not through the television set.

However, outside of one-off catastrophes like Grenfell, the presence of nested deprivation and its consequences have received little attention in political research or in the popular imagination. People living in nested deprivation are not so much the ‘Left

Behind' as the 'Never Acknowledged'. Acknowledging and seeking to understand this sort of inequality is important not just because it adds nuance to sweeping geographical accounts of British politics, but because it provides a different setting through which to disentangle causal claims about the effects of inequality and consequences for political participation and representation.

In this paper, we fill this gap by looking at the lived experience of nested deprivation within the South of England, a region in stark contrast to the 'marginalised communities' imagined in place-based explanations of changing political participation. In fact, counties like Hampshire and Dorset are presented as archetypal 'winners' in the social and political chasm caused by widening inequality in Britain. Aggregate statistics present the South of England as an area of high employment, with rising house prices close to London benefiting the South's relatively high proportion of homeowners. But aggregate statistics hide individual experience. What is it like to live under economic strain when most people nearby, either in neighbouring towns and suburbs or even those living next-door and on the same street, are relatively affluent? What does this visceral, in-your-face inequality mean for an individual's sense of social identity and belonging, their perception of the local economy, and ultimately their political views and behaviour?

The census and survey research underpinning existing place-based explanations is too blunt a tool to answer these questions effectively. It cannot drill down to the local neighbourhood level where nested deprivation presents most acutely, nor reliably pick up on a geographically dispersed and notoriously 'hard to reach' demographic. New survey methodologies have shown that individual's perceptions of their community vary widely but focus on the spaces where we meet people with whom we are interdependent, and that government statistics cannot always reveal the nuances in the lived experiences of these places and spaces (e.g. Wong, Bowers, Rubenson, Fredrickson, & Rundlett, 2020). In this paper, then, we join a swelling group of qualitative researchers aiming to add rich colour and context to broad narratives about the causes and consequences of inequality in British politics (see Bromley-Davenport et al., 2018; Hopkins, 2019; Killick, 2018; Mckenzie, 2017). We draw on qualitative data from a recent project supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Boswell et al., 2018). The project involved intensive fieldwork in 8 neighbourhoods across Dorset, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight that varied in terms of both their relative affluence and their density of population (including urban, suburban/satellite, market town or rural village). The 'boots on the ground' approach to fieldwork allows us to effectively target the *Never Acknowledged* living in *nested deprivation* on the South Coast, and to explore and report their authentic views and experiences. The variation in fieldwork settings allows us to capture a fuller range of contexts in which nested deprivation presents within the region, and to make more robust claims about the relative experience and consequences of deprivation in contexts of greater affluence and geographical dispersion.

As one might expect, the findings from this sort of research are richly nuanced, but for the sake of clarity we highlight the three key consequences that emerge for those living in nested deprivation in relatively affluent and geographically dispersed contexts:

- (a) a sense of disconnection from or entrapment within the local economy;
- (b) a sense of social isolation and atomisation; and
- (c) a sense of powerlessness to affect politics.

As such, we conclude that ‘place-based’ explanations of rapid and radical changes to political participation in Britain need to take fine-grained geographical distinctions much more seriously.

The argument and analysis proceed as follows. The first section reviews place-based explanations of changing political participation in more depth. The aim is to situate these explanations within a more established scholarship on the ‘geography of opportunity’, and highlight the gap in the high-profile debate with regard to the widespread phenomenon of nested deprivation. The second section outlines the method, including a justification of our comparative case selection and a detailed account of our approach to data collection and analysis. The third section analyses the data according to the social, economic and political dimensions of nested deprivation. The conclusion draws together the main implications of these findings for place-based scholarship in British political science and for political advocacy and policy work targeted at addressing the causes and consequences of inequality.

Interrogating Place-based Explanations of Changing Political Participation in the U.K.

Political geography, long a peripheral interest in studies of public opinion and voter turnout, has become perhaps *the* central concern in contemporary politics scholarship. Scholars are turning to place to disentangle the sudden and unexpected changes underpinning anti-political sentiment and electoral volatility in established western democracies (see e.g. Cramer, 2016 and Norris & Inglehart 2018 on the U.S.; Treib, 2014 and Hobolt, 2016 on Western Europe; and Ford & Goodwin, 2014 and Jennings & Stoker, 2016 on the U.K.). It is a scramble to make sense of the new electoral maps emerging in this era of uncertainty and change.

In the context of the U.K., and England especially, emerging scholarship finds clear discrepancies in attitudes towards trade, immigration and progressive social issues between the affluent South (concentrated especially in London and university towns) and ‘marginalised communities’ in the post-industrial North and Eastern coast. The nature and meaning of this discrepancy is a subject of considerable public debate and contested academic emphasis – one side focuses more on economic insecurity, the other side on a form of social or cultural displacement – with consequences both for how we understand the shifting plates of electoral politics in Britain and for how the political system and political parties within it ought to respond.

We map out the debate and place it against long-standing scholarship on the ‘neighbourhood effects’ of inequality on how individuals perceive their economic and social context and what this means for their political participation. Our emphasis, befitting our interpretive approach (as outlined below) is not so much on distal and abstracted accounts of community associated with place, but a more subjective account which accords with the way people living in a context of nested deprivation see and define community themselves. Our aim is two-fold. One is to reveal relevant complications in the pervasive narrative underpinning divergent views of Britain’s new political geography. While imagining a neat geographical divide into economic or cultural haves and have-nots may serve well as a blunt heuristic for media pundits and electoral campaign strategists, it does not come close to capturing the nuances of political attitudes and behaviours in practice, especially

across areas of nested deprivation. The second is to draw on decades of scholarship about the geography of inequality largely missing from recent provocative commentary, in order to develop a more grounded conceptual account of the economic, social and political factors associated with the domestic effects of advanced capitalism and globalisation.

First, however, a caveat. We are aware that framing the debate in terms of ‘economic marginalisation’ versus ‘social marginalisation’ risks downplaying the nuances and degree of overlap between these perspectives and analyses in recent academic work. However, we hold to this framing for three key reasons. One is that, although there is increasing recognition of overlap and accommodation between these perspectives in recent academic writing (see e.g. Jennings & Stoker, 2019), we maintain that it serves as a useful device to summarise and highlight the different emphases in the causal explanations underpinning diverging political attitudes. Two is that the broad distinction remains strong in public debate and political rhetoric. Indeed, prevailing narratives around the Left behind and Two Englands offered important discursive resources participants could draw on in discussion in interviews and focus groups. Narratives of geographic political divides have continued to dominate analysis and policy in the wake of the U.K.’s 2019 election. Three, and most important, is that laying these prevailing narratives side-by-side helps reveal a common blindspot. It illustrates clearly that prominent scholarship in this high-profile area despite its various lenses has neglected to consider the potentially complicating effects of nested deprivation that we describe here.

Economic Marginalisation

One version of the ‘marginalised communities’ narrative, associated most closely with Jennings and Stoker’s (2016) account of ‘two Englands’, places strong emphasis on economic stagnation (see also Flinders, 2018; Jennings & Lodge, 2018).¹ The narrative is one which imagines England (and by extension Britain) to be divided into thriving cosmopolitan areas and post-industrial cities and towns in decline. At the root of the problem lie decades of market liberalisation and increased global trade, which have been experienced unevenly across the U.K. Specifically, the claim is that the economic benefits have been disproportionately concentrated in some areas (especially London), while the costs have been borne disproportionately by others (especially in the post-industrial North and Wales as well as seaside towns, especially on the East coast). These economically marginalised communities have thus become stagnant ‘backwaters’. The alienation that residents feel towards business and political elites, and their cosmopolitan values, is seen as primarily a product of these economic circumstances (see McKay, 2019). And so the remedy, underpinned by the narrative of economic stagnation, entails redistributing wealth and opportunities afforded by the macro successes of market liberalisation to ‘backwater’ areas.

The idea at the core of this narrative; that ‘place matters’ or that there are ‘neighbourhood effects’ on the economic potential and capacity of individuals is closely tied to the concept of ‘geography of opportunity’ which ‘suggests that where individuals live affects their opportunities and life outcomes’ (Rosenbaum, 1995, p. 231). There is a consensus in this scholarship that these area effects might manifest through supply of neighbourhood resources such as local services and access to jobs; model learning from social ties and social networks; socialisation and collective efficacy relating to local norms and values; and residents’ perceptions of crime and disorder (Friedrichs, Galster, & Musterd, 2003;

Massey, 1996; Perri 6, 2007). This consensus lies at the heart of long-standing support for mixed planning policies which seek to avoid ghettoisation (see Berube, 2005; or for a more critical account Graham, Manley, Hiscock, Boyle, & Doherty, 2009). The logic is that a rising tide of economic growth will lift all boats.

There is also evidence to corroborate Jennings and Stoker's account of the political consequences of Britain's 'geographies of opportunity'. They argue that individuals in thriving cosmopolitan areas and 'backwaters' are likely to be equally pessimistic about politics, but that they are likely to express their political discontent in distinct ways. The former are more likely to engage in higher cost activities (such as protests), while the latter are more likely to limit their activity to voting. This fits with existing research on political participation in deprived areas. For example, Gordon et al. (2000) discover that from a list of civic activities respondents have to choose from to indicate in which they engage themselves, only voting (in local and general elections) drew more than 1 in 3 respondents.

Nevertheless, the contemporary reality of how deprivation presents across the U.K. is considerably more nuanced and varied than this broad narrative allows. Ethnographers like Lisa Mckenzie (2017) write about working-class estates from a 'community studies based approach'. She compares a London estate with one in Nottingham, describing how in London gentrification is squeezing long standing working-class residents out to make way for 'yuppies'. These residents' feelings that they are living on a shrinking 'reservation' chimes with our description of 'nested deprivation'. We know that there are significant pockets of this kind of deprivation even in areas of apparent affluence that escape national attention, nowhere more so than in the rural and dispersed areas of Southern England. Such areas are typically presented as affluent and affording their residents a high quality of life (Milbourne, 2010). Indeed, cultural constructions of rural life in England in particular serve to '(re)produce and (re)negotiate arcadian and pastoral idylls about rural life', in doing so limiting even the recognition of the existence of poverty (Cloke, Milbourne, & Thomas, 1997, p. 354). Area-based measures of deprivation or socioeconomic status focus on measures of central tendency that obscure the heterogeneity of the population and finer-level deprivation (Farmer, Baird, & Iversen, 2001) – including in rural villages and market towns in counties like Hampshire and Dorset. This form of *nested deprivation* matters not just because it complicates the essentialist narrative of 'haves' versus 'have-nots', but because it suggests that different 'geographies of opportunity' entail different experiences. We need to know whether these different experiences have different consequences for political attitudes and participation.

Social Marginalisation

The alternative account of the 'marginalised communities' framing, associated with Ford and Goodwin's (2014) *Revolt on the Right*, represents recent political volatility as a form of cultural backlash (see also Goodwin & Milazzo, 2017; Kaufmann & Harris, 2015). This narrative posits that large swathes of the U.K. feel 'left behind' socially and culturally as much as economically. The trouble here is not so much with the economic consequences of market liberalisation and global trade, but the social consequences associated with these policies, including the concentration of cultural capital in London, increasing social liberalism and rising levels of immigration. The 'left behind', therefore, are seen to be nostalgic about the past, to be uncomfortable with social liberalism, and most of all to want stricter

controls on immigration. The remedy, according to the narrative, is greater recognition of and respect for this concentrated form of shared cultural anxiety.

Once again, this narrative accords with existing scholarship on deprivation and place. Certainly, existing research shows that nostalgic feelings have been strongly associated with areas that have experienced de-industrialisation and urban decline in the U.K., such as the valleys of South Wales described by Walkerdine (2010) or the West Midlands where ‘living memories of de-industrialisation have translated into a feeling of the “depressing present”’ (Popov & Price, 2013).

However, just as economic marginalisation is not divided neatly into haves and have-nots, social and cultural marginalisation is better understood as a more nuanced phenomenon. Most obviously, while ‘Leave Land’ and ‘Remain Land’ represent headline-grabbing heuristics, the reliance on labelling territories based on broad turnout data and relatively small majorities in public opinion data disguises contemporary complexities of social identity and cultural insecurity. Particularly crucial here is that pockets of nested deprivation tend to be at the pointy end of the social and cultural upheavals wrought by market liberalisation and economic globalisation (van Ham & Manley, 2012). As such, there is significant evidence to suggest that social and cultural marginalisation happens *within* communities – including apparently affluent centres of cultural capital – as well as between them. Moreover, we might expect deprived individuals to suffer from weaker local networks and social cohesion or ‘place attachment’ within these more affluent communities. In Britain especially, for instance, there is evidence that this geographically concentrated nostalgia can underpin solidarity, instilling a collective sense of ‘us versus them’ within marginalised communities (see Atkinson & Kintrea, 2004; Kearns & Parkinson, 2001). There are potentially important implications for how deprived individuals in more affluent settings experience ‘place attachment’, and ultimately how they might seek to exercise political voice, in a context of dispersal and isolation.

In sum, narrative devices like ‘Two Englands’ and the ‘Left Behind’ offer appealing heuristics for understanding Britain’s emerging electoral battleground, but the reality of place-based politics is more complex. There is significant economic and cultural marginalisation *within*, rather than just across, communities as a consequence of nested deprivation. The unresolved questions, which we seek to unpack, are how these alternative experiences of economic and social marginalisation impact on political attitudes and behaviours, and on whether these findings might inform academic and political debate about the impact of escalating inequality on politics in Britain.

Methods

In part, nested deprivation has been overlooked as a natural consequence of reliance on methodological tools like the British Election Study (BES). It is simply not practical to drill down to the level of detail required in order to understand the effects of nested deprivation in affluent areas like the South of England using a national survey of this sort. In this project, we adopted a qualitative approach that can expose more fine-grained levels of detail. O’Loughlin (2018) has bemoaned an expanding divide between political scientists, who favour quantitative operationalisations of objective ‘space’, and geographers who tend to honour ‘place’, and favour less positivist approaches that are more sceptical of official boundaries. In a recent study that aims to take the difference between the concepts more

seriously, Adler and Ansell (2020) show using house price data strong evidence for effects of ‘space’ on Brexit at both the individual and aggregate level. Their analysis uncovers a ‘fractal’ pattern with regard to space, showing that higher house prices and price-growth is associated with voting to remain in the EU – a finding that is reproduced and often strengthened in smaller spatial units of analysis. But we still do not know if these trends are reflected in the authentic voice of people in deprived communities, speaking to their own self-understanding of place. In a further effort to overcome divides and fill a significant gap in the literature, our work systematically selects cases according to spatial criteria and then extracts qualitative data through fieldwork with place in mind. The approach allows us to identify any meaningful variation in place at these more local levels. Here, we outline our approach to case selection and data collection and analysis.

Case Selection

Some of the cases we select are examples of relatively larger areas suffering deprivation nested within the more affluent South, but others represent small neighbourhoods themselves nested within affluent towns or hinterlands. We compare these different types of nested deprivation to understand the consequences of that variation on individuals and families as they struggle to make ends meet. Investigations of deprivation and its effects tend to concentrate on deprived areas and seek general lessons about the differences between those areas and the U.K. average. Those studies, typically of declining industrial towns, or coastal seaside resorts, do not necessarily shed light on the deprivation that exists in the countryside and small towns. In addition, they do not explore whether there are regional variations to the experience of poverty. We lack any understanding as to whether the experience is different in areas that are seen as wealthy or even ‘idyllic’ places to visit and live. Within some of the most affluent areas of the south, there are individuals experiencing economic hardship that can be overlooked when comparing aggregate data on wealth and prosperity.

We used quantitative techniques in order to systematically select Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs)² across Hampshire and Dorset that match certain criteria regarding their geographical context and their relative levels of deprivation. The table below demonstrates the criteria for case selection allowing comparison of urbanity/rurality and levels of deprivation. The selection criteria for each category are then explained.

	Relatively Deprived	Not Deprived
A. Inner City	Case A1	Case A2
B. Suburban	Case B1	Case B2
C. Town Fringe	Case C1	Case C2
D. Rural dispersed	Case D1	Case D2

Creating the Geographical Classification

The geographical classifications above (A–D) are not used by the Office for National Statistics (ONS 2017) to classify LSOAs. Instead, they utilise a 2011 measure that, classifies LSOAs as either *City and Town*, *Rural Town and Fringe* and *Rural village and dispersed* (E1) based on the construction of a ‘density profile’ for each hectare (100 m x 100 m)

cell of the United Kingdom (Bibby & Brindley, 2013).³ We have recoded this data from these three categories into the four categories (A-D) above in the following way to better reflect the different categories of neighbourhood as they present along the central southern coast where rurality is less pronounced than in other parts of the U.K.:

Inner City: LSOAs that have the ONS classification of *City and Town* and are located less than 5 km from any city centre in Hampshire or Dorset with a population of 100,000 or greater.

Suburban: LSOAs with the classification of *City and Town* or *Rural Town and Fringe* but are located between 5 and 15 km from any city in Hampshire and Dorset with a population of 100,000 or greater.

Market Town/Fringe: LSOAs that have the classification *Rural Town and Fringe* that are not located between 5 and 15 km from any city in Hampshire and Dorset with a population of 100,000 or greater.

Rural Dispersed: LSOAs that have the classification *Rural village and dispersed*.

We used ArcGIS to measure the distance from each LSOA to the nearest large cities (Southampton, Portsmouth, Bournemouth, Basingstoke, Poole) The distance 5–15 km is our proximate measure of whether a suburb is urban, with significant connections to a larger urban city. For example, in this definition, most areas in the Eastleigh local authority are classified as a suburb of Southampton.

Definitions of Deprivation

After recoding the LSOAs in Hampshire and Dorset, we had to determine their relative levels of deprivation. The ONS data ranks every LSOA in the country on an Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). It allocates each LSOA to a decile, reflecting their position in the overall distribution of deprivation. For example, LSOAs that have an IMD decile ranking of 1 are in the top 10% most deprived LSOAs nationally. Those LSOAs with an IMD decile ranking of 10 are in the bottom 10%. We used the following method to classify LSOAs as *Deprived* and *Not Deprived*:

Deprived: Any LSOAs that has an IMD decile of between 1 and 3. These LSOAs are in the top 30% most deprived nationally.

Not Deprived: Any LSOAs that has an IMD decile of between 8 and 10. These LSOAs are in the 30% least deprived LSOAs nationally.

From this classification system, we attained a subset of the dataset representing each category from A1 to D2. From there, using a randomisation technique performed with Microsoft Excel, we randomly selected five potential case studies from those that fell in each category. We then made inquiries as to the viability of each potential case study in terms of costs and access for recruitment of participants, and fit with the overall aims of the project. Where potential cases were deemed equally viable a final randomisation procedure was used to select the case. For the D1 category of rural dispersed and relatively deprived only one location was attained. This is due to the relatively low levels of multiple deprivation across rural areas in Hampshire and Dorset. Therefore we made every effort to include that case to represent the D1 category.

The table below reveals the outcome of the case selection. The next section introduces the study sites in more detail.

	1. Relatively Deprived	2. Not Deprived
A. Inner City	Central Fratton (Portsmouth)	East Moordown (Bournemouth)
B. Suburban	Leigh Park East (Havant)	Catisfield (Fareham)
C. Market Town / Fringe	West Portland (Weymouth and Portland area)	North Alresford (Winchester area)
D. Rural dispersed	Chale Green (Isle of Wight)	West Wellow North (Test Valley)

*Pen Portraits: Rural and Market Town LSOAs.*⁴

Chale Green, Isle of Wight

Chale Green is the northern settlement of the dispersed rural village of Chale, halfway between Newport and Ventnor. The area is a thoroughfare for tourists visiting Blackgang Chine in the summer. Deprivation centres around the large Spanners Close social housing estate. Developed in the late 1970s, the estate was described to us by locals as a planning 'disaster' that, in relocating and concentrating 'problem families' from across the Island in a rural area poorly served by transport links and amenities, exacerbated social problems and generated considerable antipathy between the old village (Chale) and the newcomers (Chale Green). The consensus is that the problems associated with this planning move have mellowed over time, but Spanners Close retains something of an aesthetic and social disconnection from the surrounding area. It is the deprived rural LSOA in the Hampshire and Dorset area according to our selection criteria.

Portland, Dorset

Portland is a small town on an isolated peninsula southwest of Weymouth. It is home to a mix of retirees, working age people and families. Deprivation in this area centres around a couple of large social housing estates developed in the 1960s built to house naval and quarry workers. As with Chale Green above, the predictable outcome of this planning decision to build social housing in a remote and sparsely populated area generated antipathy in the wider community, and Portland subsequently developed a reputation as a 'rough' area. Our participants reflected that it retains this to some extent, describing one part of a neighbouring estate as 'Beirut' and referencing ongoing social and health issues related to drug supply and use in the community. Nevertheless, Portland's geographical remoteness, coupled with its close proximity to attractive coastline, give it an 'island' feel, reflected in a friendly and laid back local culture.

West Wellow, Hampshire

Wellow is a wealthy rural village to the west of Romsey, near the Hampshire-Wiltshire boundary. The area has traditionally been home to wealthy retirees and provided seasonal work in agriculture. In recent times, it has also become an area popular with commuters to London and Southampton. Deprivation here centres around the Gurnays Mead social housing estate, which is populated by a mix of older people and families. Notable in particular is a sizeable Irish Traveller community within the estate (and with links to temporary settlements nearby). Social housing in Gurnays Mead is in high demand, and, with a proportion of houses already transferred into private hands, there is a strong perception locally that these properties are being earmarked for private sale. These perceptions feed distrust or concern for official institutions among the local population – which made recruitment in this area especially challenging for the research team.

North Alresford, Hampshire

Alresford is a pretty market town near Winchester. The town is a visibly wealthy one that conforms to common stereotypes about Hampshire. It is home to many professionals commuting to London or elsewhere, and many wealthy retirees. The pockets of deprivation here are small and are clustered around condensed areas of social housing and ex-social housing. These are located nearby leafy streets lined with large 'mansions'. The town's amenities represent the idyllic view of life in a market town, largely catering to the needs of the upper middle class and older residents. Many of our participants, especially younger people, joked about Alresford being in a 'timewarp' – with little recognition of diversity and old-fashioned stigmas attached to the minority of residents who remain economically and socially vulnerable.

Pen Portraits: Suburban and Inner City LSOAs.

Leigh Park, Hampshire

Leigh Park is a large suburb north of Havant, built in the post-war era by Portsmouth County Council to house displaced residents from the Portsmouth area. Our research concentrated on the area to the North-West of the Park Parade shops. The area has a varied demographic profile with a mix of young families and pensioners. Many of the residents we spoke to are attending food banks.

Fareham (Highlands), Hampshire

The town of Fareham lies to the north-west of Portsmouth city. The population has expanded rapidly in the area since the 1960s as part of housing development along the southeast Hampshire coast stretching between the two major cities. Many of the residents are commuters and Fareham boasts the highest density of car registration in the U.K. Our research concentrated on the Highlands area

They expressed a nostalgia for a time when the estate was more 'well looked after' and many mentioned the closing down of shops in Park Parade. There is a feeling that the area is a little cut off from the rest of the urban sprawl stretching along the coast. One young teenager mentioned his excitement at having visited the beach recently for the first time ever despite living only some 10 miles away.

Portsmouth (Fratton), Hampshire

Fratton is a large area of post-industrial residential terraced housing in the city of Portsmouth. Our respondents, some of whom had lived in the area for many decades spoke of nostalgia for the past and a feeling that the area had changed beyond recognition, particularly highlighting the replacement of local shops by large supermarkets and many betting shops, as well as HMOs replacing family homes. Homelessness was identified as a major issue in the area by almost all respondents. Many mentioned the change from a time when everyone's door was open to a current climate where many homeless camp out in tents on the streets. Residents in Fratton were positive about the many opportunities for entertainment and 'liveliness' of living in a city close to the water. The proximity to Southsea, a more affluent area by the sea was also highlighted by many interviewees.

in the north-east suburbs. The estate is primarily made up of council houses with older tenants and families. Recently many of the properties have been purchased by private landlords and turned into houses of multiple occupation (HMOs). In addition to this, property developers have built new houses on the outskirts of the estate where small council estates and clusters of lower grade housing are hidden behind avenues lined with trees and larger detached houses.

Bournemouth (Moordown), Dorset

The East Moordown area of Bournemouth is on the Western side of the Charminster road and does not include the shopping centre of Moordown itself. Therefore it does not have a clear heart or focal point but consists of largely residential streets of detached and semi-detached owner occupied houses on gently sloping streets. There are a variety of occupants, from elderly to students. It has good transport links to all parts of the city, from Castlepoint shopping centre to beaches. However it does not have many green spaces. Most residents say it lacks a community feel even among long term residents. The most deprived part nests at the edge of the area, in a small housing estate consisting of low rise and terraced properties, many of which are now privately rented.

Data Collection and Analysis

The participants we hoped to speak to are notoriously 'hard to reach' in social science research (see Bonevski et al., 2014) – a fact that made the research particularly timely and important, but which obviously presents ethical and practical challenges in the field. As a consequence, the research team put a lot of collective energy into recruitment. We made multiple site visits to each setting, approached local community leaders, contacted food banks, posted on community Facebook pages, dropped flyers, posted letters, and knocked on doors. We also drew on relationships with initial research participants to 'snowball' through neighbourhood networks (see Wagenaar, 2011). This range of recruitment strategies enabled us to get a diverse sample, with variation in age, ethnicity and gender across the overall sample and across most individual sites as well. Importantly, this recruitment approach meant the people we spoke to were not habituated to participating in mass surveys or other forms of research; it was a new experience for all of them. Some told us they participated out of curiosity. Some told us they participated because they felt passionate about their community. Some told us they participated to get the small honorarium. This diversity – in demographic and motivational terms – ensures that we have captured a rich variety of experiences. Our sample, therefore, provides the basis for 'plausible conjecture' (see Rhodes, 2014)⁵ – we have confidence that the patterns we have found in the responses and reflections of participants offer plausible and authentic accounts of nested deprivation on the South Coast.

Interviews were semi-structured, ranging in length from around 25 min to two hours. Most interviews were one on one, but a small handful were with couples, siblings, friends or multiple generations of the same family. Interviews were generally conducted in people's homes, or in local spots such as cafes or meeting halls. The intimacy of these encounters meant we could experience and sense-check for ourselves some of the

claims of our participants – notably around public transport, housing arrangements, and local amenities and shopping precincts (see discussion in Boswell et al., 2018). We followed up the initial round of interviews with focus groups – 6 in total – which enabled us to elicit rich reflections on emerging themes. Participants were paid a small honorarium for their participation, in light of the fact they were giving up their time. We were also aware that participants were consenting to sharing with us sometimes challenging or harrowing experiences. We have endeavoured to be sensitive to their feelings while still seeking to give authentic voice to the lived experience of nested deprivation.

The interview, focus group, and field note data was coded in a process of abduction common to richly qualitative research (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2013). Abduction entails moving between the findings emerging in the empirical data and key themes emerging through critical engagement with the literature. As is typical of this sort of research – particularly when the fieldwork has been undertaken by a multi-member team – it was not a hydraulic, stepwise process, but more iterative, co-productive and creative. We outline that process below.

The research team met at multiple stages – before, during and after the intensive fieldwork phase of the research – to discuss anticipated themes from the relevant academic literatures and emergent themes from field visits and initial interviews. Key themes from the interviews and field notes were then collated and used to prompt a subsequent round of focus groups, where participants were given a chance to reflect on, challenge and elaborate on initial impressions. Based on these collective reflections, Boswell and Ryan manually coded the data independently in the first instance, and merged these initial insights for a project report and launch (see Boswell et al., 2018). This initial analysis was followed by a more methodical coding process, using Nvivo software. We built on and extended this ‘first cut’, incorporating reflections by the research team and discussions with end users at the report launch event.

Ethical considerations were important not only in data generation and access but also in analysis and writing-up as well. The study was examined and approved by the University of Southampton Faculty of Social, Human and Mathematical Sciences Ethics Board, and one key condition of its approval was that individual participants would remain anonymous. However, the communities we drill down into are small and intimate. We think an authentic account of the specific communities is important to the analysis and argument. So, we have done our best to anonymise all quotes and vignettes and altered some contextual detail. In this way, we can represent authentic local voices in these specific communities while still preserving the anonymity of individual participants.

Analysis

As we might expect, there is significant variation in perception both within and across each of the eight neighbourhoods in our study. We encountered stories of connectedness and isolation, anxiety and contentment, empowerment and disaffection, optimism and pessimism, all in different shades across each site. That said, certain trends or patterns in the responses of our participants emerge. In this analysis, we connect these patterns to the three key elements of nested deprivation introduced in the literature review: namely economic marginalisation, social marginalisation, and the political consequences of both.

Economic Marginalisation

There is concern about ‘economic stagnation’ across the more deprived settings, especially in the more densely populated neighbourhoods. Leigh Park provides perhaps the most obvious example. Participants here commented at length on the ‘drab’ High Street dominated by betting shops, payday lenders, empty lots and boarded up shops, the lack of employment opportunities, and the absence of social mobility. Yet this stagnation or decline is made all the more stark by the area’s proximity to areas of relative affluence, including landscaped parkland. One participant explained:

I think this area reflects struggle, and I think that shows in the boarded up shops. Even to the point of the amount of pound shops we’ve got; there are quite a few of those in Park Parade. It’s not the biggest shopping precinct ... I love Staunton Country Park, I think it’s lovely. I think it’s great that it’s right on our doorstep. And it is massively different; it’s like a different world. It’s green. Do you know what I mean, without sounding silly?

Participants in more rural and dispersed areas of deprivation, like Portland and Chale Green, emphasised even more strongly a sense of economic disconnect from a broader context of affluence. Residents spoke about both as being ‘islands’ of deprivation within the islands themselves, cut off from the local economy which revolves around wealthy retirees or tourists. Chale Green residents concentrated their ire on the local shop – the only one within several miles – which caters for the wealthy retirees in the broader village of Chale and for tourists visiting the island. One participant joked:

It’s so expensive and it’s like, they’re not – they use a lot of basic stuff, fair enough but then have a price to match. So there was some – I wanted a bubble bath the other day, I was 2p shorter than £4. And I thought for £4 I want the little fairies coming out and dabbing my face with a little flannel!

This immediate or in-your-face sense of economic marginalisation came across stronger still among those deprived but living in less deprived areas. In the urban and suburban contexts of Bournemouth and Fareham, the central concern was around affordability and security of housing. One participant explained:

Just with the money you get for what you’ve got to buy, especially with Bournemouth more expensive to live in, it’s just not enough money ... I’m in the middle of getting my bank, and I tried telling them my income/expenditure, and they couldn’t even take a payment plan off me because my expenditure exceeded my income.

Interestingly, employment opportunities and strong public services and amenities afforded by the prosperous urban economy were seen as insufficient compensation for this housing ‘trap’. One participant reflected:

I work in London a fair amount and you can – from Bournemouth Station into Waterloo takes two hours, so it is a commutable place, which keeps the – again pushes the prices up. It’s all one of those things where it – it seems like we’re living in an affluent area but it’s all relative, it’s not – it’s not like we can sell up and be in the money ... Relocating anywhere would be difficult, especially after working for somewhere for so long and progressing through the ranks and what have you.

Concerns about economic ‘entrapment’ in areas of expensive housing were also apparent in more sparsely populated settings of nested deprivation, in Alresford and Wellow.

For example, all of those reliant on social housing in Wellow that we spoke to expressed deep concern about the high (and increasing) value of the properties they lived in. But in more dispersed areas we also uncovered a much broader sense of marginalisation *from* the local economy. The most poignant example was Alresford. In contrast to Leigh Park's 'drab' shopping precinct, the High Street here was a source of resentment and alienation because it is 'way up there for the rich' – it is stocked with boutique shops in which these individuals are unwelcome, either as potential employees or as customers. Discussion in a focus group here lingered on the topic:

- P1: Well, yeah, the shopping, there are some nice clothes shops in Alresford.
 P2: Yeah, if you've got loads of money.
 P1: But it's way out of my league.
 P3: It's silly. It's £400 for handbags.
 P2: £400 for a handbag, that's in Alresford!

This stark sense of marginalisation extends from the High Street through the residential areas, as one interviewee surmised:

There's quite a strong sense of wealth here and you can see the difference here, do you know what I'm saying? You've got a comparison there and it's clear, the wealth and like myself on the benefits side of life. I don't know how people afford to do all these things but they do ... it's when you see these big houses, I go by and I peer in like, and I think to myself and think bloody hell, how could they do it? And I think, oh you'd get lost in there and they're after Bedroom Tax from me for this small, tiny house.

In sum, drilling down reveals that the 'geography of opportunity' in the U.K. has not produced a neat division of winners and losers, and that those living in a context of nested deprivation perceive themselves to be marginalised *from* their local economy in fundamental, everyday ways. They feel economically entrapped in affluent communities where everything – the cost of housing, even the target market at the local shopping precinct – feels designed for someone else. In other words, the rising tide does not lift all boats; it can leave some people to drown. We will return to this point in discussing the consequences for political participation.

Social Marginalisation

In more deprived settings, participants expressed a clearer sense of belonging to a marginalised group, expressing a sense of 'us versus them'. This occasionally found expression in the sort of cultural anxiety at the heart of the Left Behind thesis, particularly among older participants. In more densely populated sites, some of these participants spoke with great nostalgia about the post-War Britain of their childhood, and relayed concerns about immigration as a threat to community cohesion. Take, for example, this exchange from a group interview with three friends in their 60s in Fratton:

- P1: It's not as friendly. You've really got no neighbours who talk to you. It's not as nice. I'd sooner go back to the 50s and 60s.
 P2: Well, I live in [X] Road. I've lived there 23 years and it's changed massively. It's not very friendly now. A lot of little bedsits and a lot of immigration. In my road it's a very, very, very mixed community so there's not really a lot of interaction with other people. They don't want to know.

Another man in his 40s in Fratton expressed similar views, explaining his dislike for the local shopping precinct:

I don't like how it's all a bit, a bit too sort of multi-cultural, you know what I mean? I know we said this before earlier, it's all a bit sort of foreign. I hate to say it, I hate to sound like a racist or anything, I don't mean to be but it's – I just don't like how it is a bit like that. It's just a bit too much.

Yet it is striking that these ideas were not more prominent in the context of over 40 semi-structured interviews and 6 semi-structured focus groups with over 60 people.⁶ We found participants were more likely to be neutral (or occasionally even positive) about immigration than they were to express xenophobic attitudes. Indeed, a subsequent focus group interaction in Fratton put anti-immigration views in perspective:

The Polish community down here, he's made a lot of friends, and one of the guys was working illegally because he had three children and no visa and no work permit, nothing, and he had to provide for his children, and so he was working and he's been caught three times working, and he's said, 'You've given me no choice. How am I supposed to provide for my children if you don't give me my work permit?' Now he has been let off. I don't know the ins and outs but I know that, 'Okay, we get you,' but he's been here for 12 years and he still hasn't got a work visa. And then they moan that they take money off the state. He doesn't take money off the state and he doesn't want to skive, but I know ones that do and I know ones that should be going home because they are doing it just to sit down and do nothing. But the majority of them want to work, and do work, some of them, illegally, because they haven't given them a choice, and I think that's what's sad.

Instead, in our findings, the greater sense of 'us versus them' in deprived settings reflected a more old-fashioned socio-economic cleavage. Typically surrounded by affluent and Conservative-dominated areas, residents of our more deprived neighbourhoods expressed a sense of community solidarity based on traditional class ties. We saw this to some extent in more densely populated areas but more so still in the sparsely populated 'islands' of Portland and Chale Green. One Portland respondent explained:

It's Portland Whispers, that's what they say it is; it's like one big family up here so everyone knows everyone.

Chale Green residents spoke of a similar phenomenon – something all the starker here for its distinction from the surrounding older village of Chale:

It's like this is Chale Green, but if you go just about five minutes down the road then it goes to *Chale* [said mockingly in 'posh' voice] ... It makes you feel ostracised, because you're not part of – It's Chale, and it shouldn't be Chale Green and Chale.

In our cases of more affluent neighbourhoods this sense of community solidarity among smaller nests of poverty was almost entirely absent. One person in Wellow bemoaned the loss of community with the rise of economic development:

Yes, this used to be a lovely village. There's lots of housing estates that have been built since I was a little girl ... I suppose these land owners need to make money and that's why all the houses have gone up. It's probably good for the village I suppose but you can go down to the local shop and not know anybody and many years ago you would know everybody ... So I don't really know anyone round here now. I wouldn't even know their names.

A participant in Alresford expressed a similar sentiment:

It's just how society's come. I remember when I was a kid people didn't lock their doors. You'd be in and out of each other's houses all day, do you know what I mean? Kids would play in the street and nobody would think anything of it, you can't do none of that these days.

An immigrant who had recently arrived in Fareham put it this way:

I mean you know the neighbourhood, everybody is busy with their life. You won't even see your neighbours – once in a month you probably see them outside or passing through. It's no [sense of] social or community.

In the generally more affluent urban areas especially, participants attributed the lack of community not to immigration but to a consequence of economic growth and inequality. Of particular concern in settings like Fareham and Bournemouth (and also expressed to a lesser extent in Fratton and Leigh Park) was the incremental shift in the rental market from family homes to houses of multiple occupancy:

The houses that go up for sale are being grabbed up by landlords and turned into multi-occupancy houses, such as next door. ... I think if every house that comes up for sale is grabbed up by this multi-house, whatever it's called, it will turn it into a ghetto instead of a proper community with families. That's how I feel.

Participants in settings of nested deprivation also spoke of the stigma associated with living in, for example, the only pocket of social housing in a 'nice' area. We uncovered these sentiments even in the 'nice little bubble' of Wellow, where for example one participant frequently referenced the shame of being from 'Gurnays Mead'. But the sense of stigma intensified in more densely populated settings. For example, one young woman we spoke to in Bournemouth articulated this stigma at length:

I don't know, you think a council house and you probably think the worst of society and I'm not that person, I'm not like that. And although I grew up in it, I'm trying to do everything I can to be the complete opposite, and sometimes I do feel a bit ashamed, and I know that's wrong. And I'm not ashamed of my family and it's nobody's fault, it's not my mum's fault, but I do feel quite ashamed sometimes so I try to avoid that and I won't tell people I live in a council house.

In sum, we see only a little evidence of inequality in the South Coast creating a Left Behind agitated by cultural anxiety about social liberalism and immigration. Remembering that we talked specifically to more deprived residents in all cases, what evidence we find of 'left behind' tends to be concentrated in urban and more extensively deprived areas. We find more evidence in rural deprived areas in this affluent region of old-fashioned class cleavages. Moreover, we find in areas of smaller nested deprivation of a few houses or flats within larger affluent neighbourhoods, especially in more densely populated areas, our participants expressed a weak or non-existent sense of community solidarity or place attachment at all. The experience of deprivation nested within affluent regions has social consequences, but those consequences vary on the dispersion and concentrations of that deprivation in ways that condition political expression.

Political Consequences

The political consequences of this nuanced 'geography of opportunity' require careful unpacking. On the surface, the overwhelming response from participants across our

sample to questions about politics bore striking similarities – they were uniformly negative in their assessment of how politics operates. Many simply laughed off our questions about politics altogether. Digging a little deeper, however, reveals an important qualitative difference across our range of settings.

In more deprived and densely populated settings, participants were more likely to express anger about local and national politics. For some, these perceptions put them off participating in politics altogether. In Fratton, for instance, one participant explained:

I don't take any notice of them because they're all the same. They're big with promises and then they never deliver. All the promises, no matter what, Conservative, Labour, or whoever, in all my years, they've never delivered what they've promised, so I don't even vote.

Yet for others it could be a mobilising experience. One of our participants, for example, related to us that the cutting of funding for the SureStart centre which had been a crucial source of support for her had spurred her and her partner to become involved in local party politics. We encountered similar stories in Leigh Park – in fact, one set of friends we interviewed told us they had actually met at a protest in Westminster the year before. But the sentiment was articulated clearest by another participant there:

So there's a real strong community sense of, we are in this together, but not in that pat way that the Tories did it a few years ago, you know what I mean? Do you remember when they tried to sell us the Big Society, you know what I mean? We're going to take away all the funding of all the projects that we should be doing and leave it up to you guys because you guys are the Big Society, you know what I mean?

However, in more affluent and dispersed settings, we encountered a more uniform sense of fatalism about even the potential for political efficacy. Politics, for most of these participants, was just another means by which they felt marginalised *from* their communities.

For some, this pessimism was based on direct personal experience. One participant in Bournemouth, for instance, explained how her attempts to contact the local MP about the impact of the high cost of living had felt a 'waste of time':

I don't have a nice car – I don't have a car, you know, or anything like that because we just can't – we can't even afford to learn how to drive down here. It is so bad and I've even spoken to our local MP. He's gone, 'Well I can't afford to live down here.' And it's like, 'Yeah, but you earn £82,000 a year and own two houses, that's why you can't afford to live down here.' You know, I don't own a house and he's just, 'Oh but that's not my problem.' And we're like, 'Well it's mine.'

Likewise, in Chale Green, for example – a concentrated setting of deprivation nested within a rural area of relative affluence – many participants spoke of their anger at the recent closure of their local school, and the process by which it occurred. The situation had momentarily mobilised collective action within the area as people fought to keep the school open, but that sense of agency had dissipated in the face of the disappointing (lack of) response from the local council. The experience left residents feeling powerless, as one explained:

I think the council thought, 'Well, why should these children from low-income backgrounds, why should they have-?' because they were talking about costs and how much more it costs to educate a child in a village school, and how, in comparison to a school in the town with bigger

classes, it's much more efficient financially. And it was almost as if they thought, 'Well, why should children from that sort to background be eligible for having that sort of one-to-one or that extra?'

Most often in areas of nested deprivation this pessimism was simply common sense, expressed often in a gallows humour reflecting a lack of collective agency. This sentiment, and its roots in the local 'geography of opportunity', was made clearest in an Alresford focus group, where participants made pointed reference to local politics being dominated by 'Tories from Eaton':

I think they let you think – and this is my personal opinion – I think they let you think we can have a say in things, but, actually, when it comes down to it, they decide what's what, at the end of the day.

In sum, in deprived settings (especially in urban and suburban areas), we find some evidence of the sort of grievance politics at the heart of accounts of the 'Two Englands' and 'Left Behind', albeit mobilised by different factors (largely against incumbent Conservative governments at national and local level) and in different ways (entailing direct action and not just voting) than these accounts would suggest. More importantly, though, we encounter a strong sense of fatalism and political inefficacy in more deprived (especially market town and rural) settings where low income residents feel they have no genuine voice. Even where political mobilisation at small scales did occur, it met with a lack of response. We think this is partly because this deprived constituency is geographically dispersed in atomised pockets across an affluent area like the south coast. Therefore, there is no easy path for mobilisation to occur and for the advocacy and representation at the heart of pluralist models of politics to take hold. We have shown that deprivation manifests differently but with some consistency in small pockets nested within largely affluent geographical constituencies. Smaller deprived communities already suffer from low political and social capital, reducing mobilisation of political concerns into collective action and response. Yet their dispersion across areas where many fellow citizens experience completely different lives creates a double burden in their attempts to be meaningfully represented in pluralist politics. Even where we saw appetite and some action for political mobilisation, small communities were unable to find potential coalitions and the political system did not respond. Up to now the left-behind, two England, and city-towns theses have not accounted for these features of nested deprivation. Where deprivation is dispersed and then nested within mostly affluent constituencies it does not allow for the political mobilisation among communities of interest that is a necessary condition for pluralist representative democracy.

Conclusion

Our research into nested deprivation on the South Coast should give significant pause to the high profile debate – both academic and political – about the political geography of inequality and especially the new 'place-based politics' of the U.K. We have shown that sweeping narratives about 'Two Englands' and the 'Left Behind', which divide the country neatly into haves and have-nots of market liberalisation and globalisation, are much too simplistic. There is significant deprivation, and acute inequality, in apparently affluent areas, including the South of England. We propose the term 'nested deprivation' enter the lexicon to identify *communities that marginalise* as distinct from *marginalised*

communities. In settings of greater affluence, we find that residents feel marginalised from their economy, marginalised from the social fabric of the community, and ultimately marginalised from any means of realising or expressing political voice. Of course, the findings based on an intensive study of 8 neighbourhoods and just over 60 individuals can only be one stone, and far from the final word, in the contemporary debate about inequality, place and politics. While recent reports point to evidence of the spread of nested deprivation as a phenomenon (e.g. MHLG, 2019), whether the political practices we find (or do not) are as widespread will require some further corroboration. Nevertheless, we think that the implications of this analysis are especially important for two reasons.

First, the advantage of the rich, in-depth qualitative research we have undertaken across different settings is that it adds greater depth and nuance to contemporary understanding of *how* inequality, place and politics interact. Unlike the grand narratives that underpin the Left Behind thesis, we show that being a ‘loser’ from market liberalisation and globalisation does not lead inexorably to a sense of cultural anxiety, even in a region where immigrants are a relatively high proportion of the population. For our South Coast participants, anxiety, alienation and anger are much more likely to be directed at Government, at austerity, and at the affluence that surrounds them. Understanding the new ‘place-based politics’ of the U.K. will require further and deeper investigation across different contexts of deprivation.

Second, the findings have more immediate consequences politically. They suggest that new political grand narratives based on assumptions about the Left Behind and Two Englands will fail if they alone are used to explain, campaign for, and underpin allocation of political resources. The risk lies in efforts to imagine and contest a new map of electoral battlegrounds on the basis of simplistic beliefs about essential priorities and preferences along any North–South or city-town divide. We worry that these trends may only serve to further alienate the Never Acknowledged in areas of nested deprivation who feel marginalised and disenfranchised already.

Notes

1. To be clear, Jennings and Stoker (2019) also acknowledge the importance of cultural beliefs in individuals’ attitudes and behaviours. The distinction with the alternative Left Behind narrative is that these beliefs are driven by economic context, in particular nostalgia for a prosperous past.
2. Output areas are the smallest units of census reporting data in the U.K.. Lower Super Output areas consist of 4–6 adjacent output areas and have a mean population of 1500.
3. We used the latest available release of indices of multiple deprivation (2015) available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2015>.
4. Portraits draw heavily on a similar presentation in Boswel et al. (2018).
5. Rhodes explains that ‘plausible conjecture’ differs from generalizable inference – the claim is not that our findings speak across time and space, but that there is reason to think they may resonate beyond the boundaries of our empirical study.
6. Note that despite changing attitudes to immigration overall in the British population, recent survey evidence suggests that little has shifted within low income populations (Ford & Lymperopoulou, 2017).

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