

# URBAN VOTE:

## The battle for the cities

Hannah Brown & Claire Maugham  
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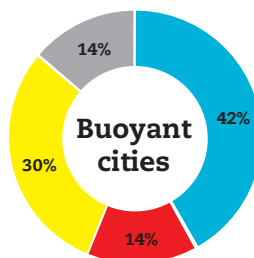
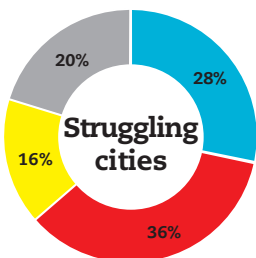
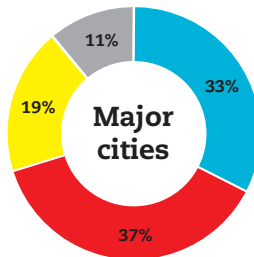
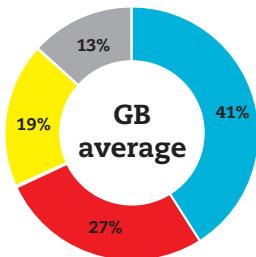
Our analysis of voting intentions in a selection of cities during the period February 2009 to February 2010 shows that between the 2005 general election and the beginning of the 2010 election campaign, Labour lost ground in many cities and the Conservatives made significant in-roads in cities such as Birmingham.

Gordon Brown was unpopular in every city, with more than half of the voters in each city we looked at dissatisfied with the way he is doing his job as Prime Minister. But they were still in two minds about David Cameron. Nick Clegg had good net approval ratings with urban voters even before the election campaign began.

The economy was the most important issue for urban voters, ahead of race, immigration and crime.

Voters in struggling cities are disengaged from the political process. They were twice as likely as those in buoyant cities to say they are 'certain' not to vote.

### Voting intention (Feb 09 – Feb 10)



- Conservative
- Labour
- Lib Dem
- Other

Source: Ipsos MORI Political Monitor – February 2009-February 2010: Combined voting intention – certain to vote (7,109 Great Britain adults aged 18+).

The UK is emerging from a recession which has seen the economic gap between cities widen. This means that the outlook for the recovery will feel very different in different places. In some buoyant cities, like **Reading** and **Cambridge**, which have been relatively resilient to the recession, we would expect jobs and growth to begin to return in the coming months. By contrast, cities such as **Stoke** and **Barnsley** that have been struggling for many years to recover both from industrial decline and the impact of previous recessions, have been hit hard. These places face a tough recovery.

### Background to our methodology

This analysis of voting intentions over the past year looks at seventeen cities. Using research conducted by Ipsos MORI between February 2009 and February 2010 across a range of cities, we have assessed whether the political parties are addressing the issues of concern to voters across Great Britain in three different types of cities, and in London.

- **Major cities** – the six largest cities (by population size) outside the capital – **Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool, Sheffield, Newcastle** and **Birmingham**.
- **Struggling cities** – five that have struggled for many years to recover from industrial decline and the impact of previous recessions, they've also been hit hard in this recession. We have looked at **Hull, Doncaster, Stoke, Hastings** and **Barnsley**.
- **Buoyant cities** – five small cities with strong economies that have generated private sector jobs and businesses over the last decade. We've looked at responses in **Milton Keynes, York, Reading, Brighton** and **Cambridge**.

In making our selection of cities, we have looked at a range of factors, including employment growth in the year leading up to the recession, and the increase in numbers of people claiming benefits (Jobseekers Allowance) since the recession began. Our *Cities Outlook 2010* gives a more detailed analysis of the economic fortunes of UK cities.

Ipsos MORI's research was carried out via monthly interviews with a representative sample of voters in constituencies across Great Britain. In looking at this time

period from February 2009 to February 2010 and comparing it with the actual 2005 election result, we are examining the longer-term trends behind the urban vote, rather than seeking to present the latest snapshot of public opinion or to predict the election result in particular constituencies. For this analysis, the three city groupings outlined above and London are defined by the Parliamentary constituencies that 'best fit' each city included.

When referring to cities, we use the Primary Urban Area (PUA) as defined by the Department for Communities and Local Government – that is, the built up area surrounding a city. In some cities (eg Hastings and Cambridge), the PUA encompasses only one Parliamentary constituency. In others, such as Manchester and Birmingham, there are 20 or more MPs representing the city. In many cities, the PUA covers an area wider than that represented by the city council.

Individually, few urban constituencies are key marginal battlegrounds. But the urban vote matters to any party seeking a mandate after May 6. London and the UK's six major cities together account for nearly one-third of England's population<sup>1</sup>, 35 percent of England's jobs<sup>2</sup>, and 40 percent of England's wealth<sup>3</sup>.

#### **Buoyant cities: Cambridge, York, Brighton, Milton Keynes, Reading**

Our analysis draws on polling from a selection of small to medium-sized cities that have prospered in the decade leading up to the recession.

All of these cities have high proportions of graduate-level residents – over 50 percent of residents in Cambridge, and 38 percent in Brighton. Some, like Cambridge and York, also benefit from excellent universities, that help to attract investment. Cities like Brighton and Milton Keynes have benefited from strong private sector jobs growth in the decade leading up to the recession.

These cities have economies that have adjusted to the modern economy, for instance Reading has benefited from its proximity to London and has developed a specialisation in IT and business and financial services.

*“The urban vote matters to any party seeking a mandate after May 6”*

*“The outlook for the recovery will feel very different in different places”*

### Labour is losing ground in the cities

In the 2005 election, Labour's share of the vote was ahead of the Conservatives in all the major cities and struggling cities, and the two parties were neck and neck in buoyant cities.

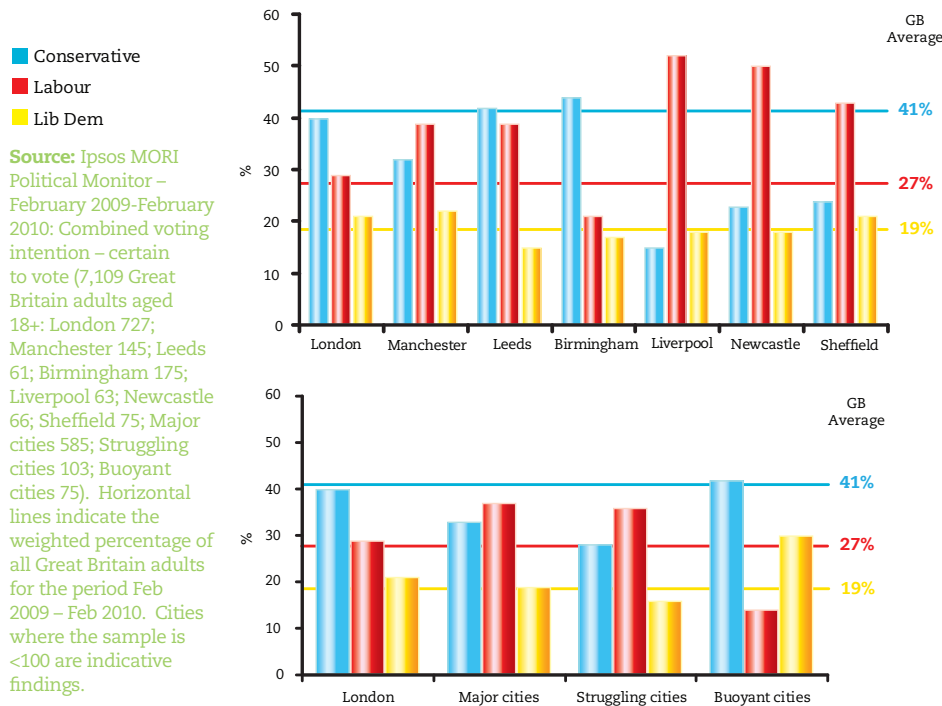
Polling on voter intentions between February 2009 and February 2010 indicated that the Conservatives had made significant in-roads into some urban areas, including London and, most dramatically, Birmingham, since the 2005 general election. Traditionally the party of the shires and the south east, the Conservatives' 2005 share of the vote in the major cities outside London was 24 percent. According to our polling, by the start of the 2010 election campaign this support had increased to 33 percent.

Labour had retained its overall lead in our groups of major cities and struggling cities.

*"The Conservatives had made significant in-roads into some urban areas, including London and Birmingham"*

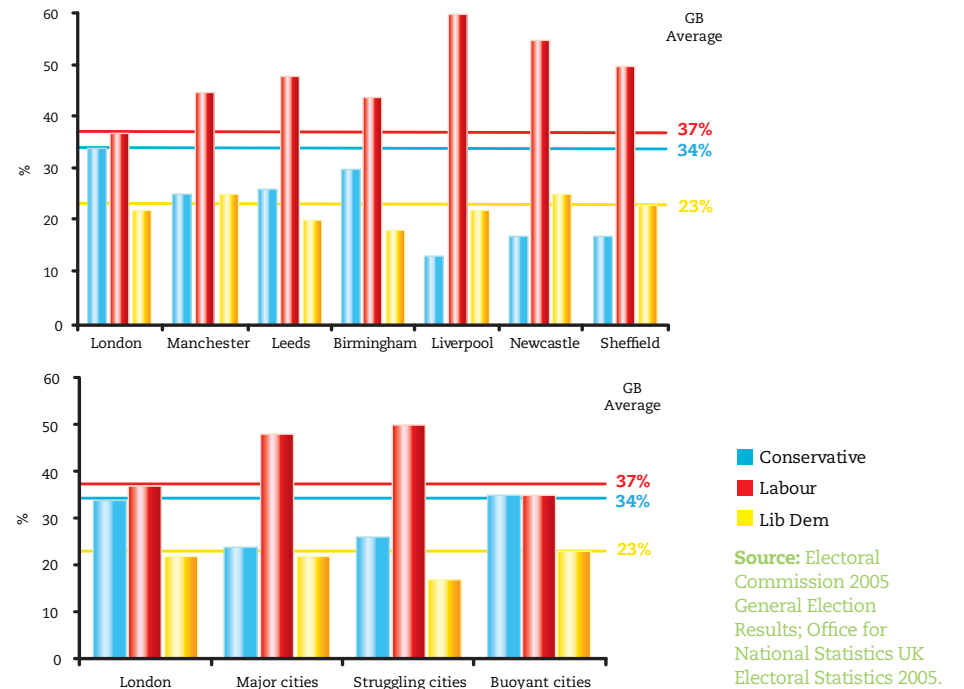
- In the groups of major cities and struggling cities, our polling between February 2009 and February 2010 shows that Labour was still in the lead, but the party's national fall in popularity was reflected by a weaker lead with both these groups than in the 2005 election.

**Figure 1: Voting Intention in 2009-2010**



**Source:** Ipsos MORI Political Monitor – February 2009-February 2010: Combined voting intention – certain to vote (7,109 Great Britain adults aged 18+: London 727; Manchester 145; Leeds 61; Birmingham 175; Liverpool 63; Newcastle 66; Sheffield 75; Major cities 585; Struggling cities 103; Buoyant cities 75). Horizontal lines indicate the weighted percentage of all Great Britain adults for the period Feb 2009 – Feb 2010. Cities where the sample is <100 are indicative findings.

**Figure 2: Actual share of the vote in the 2005 General Election**



**Source:** Electoral Commission 2005 General Election Results; Office for National Statistics UK Electoral Statistics 2005.

- The Conservatives are winning over decisively in some places. In Birmingham, the second city in the UK, which has been hit badly by the recession, the Conservatives were in a leading position, attracting 44 percent of those certain to vote – a striking contrast compared to their 2005 election result of 30 percent.
- In London and in our group of buoyant cities, the Conservatives had made gains in appealing to city residents – 42 percent of those certain to vote in buoyant cities in 2009-2010 said they would vote Conservative, compared to 14 percent who would vote Labour. In the 2005 election they were neck and neck in these prosperous places, with 35 percent each.

**“Liberal Democrats had stronger support than their national average with our group of buoyant cities”**

- The Liberal Democrats have traditionally been well-represented at local authority level, including in the UK’s major cities. Of our major city group, the Lib Dems control Liverpool, Sheffield and Newcastle City Councils, and are part of a minority administration with the Conservatives in Leeds.

However, this level of representation on city councils is not reflected in the numbers of Westminster MPs in areas covered by city councils. In Sheffield, for example, which has a Liberal Democrat council, the local authority area is represented by only one Lib Dem MP (Nick Clegg in Sheffield Hallam). In Liverpool, another Lib Dem-held council, there are no Lib Dem MPs at all.

- Only 19 percent of people in the major cities outside London intended to vote Liberal Democrat at the start of the election campaign, equal to the national average.
- However, the Liberal Democrats had stronger support than their national average with our group of buoyant cities, where 30 percent of those certain to vote said they would vote Lib Dem. This was up from 23 percent in the 2005 election.

**Struggling cities: Hull, Hastings, Barnsley, Doncaster, Stoke**

We have looked at five cities whose economies have struggled for many years to recover from industrial decline, and in many cases had not fully recovered from the recessions of the 80s and 90s before being hit hard in the latest economic crisis.

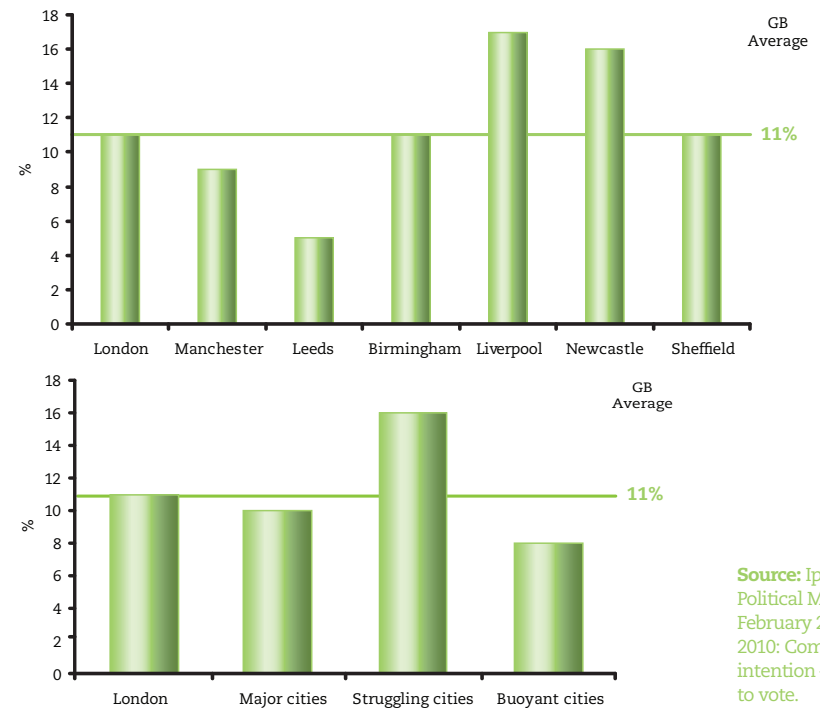
Hull grew up around the Humber Ports, but has had a difficult transition to a post-industrial economy. Hastings is part of the Greater South East, but its poor connectivity and low levels of skills and enterprise means that it has not shared in the region’s growth over the last decade. These cities saw many job losses in the decade leading up to the recession. For example, Stoke has seen a net loss of over 20,000 private sector jobs in the decade before recession began.

For some, like Hull and Hastings, their relative isolation exacerbates problems of economic decline, whereas others, like Barnsley, may be able to benefit from being located close to stronger cities, like Leeds.

**People in struggling cities are less engaged**

Given the collapse in trust in politicians following the expenses scandal, combined with the economic crisis, we would expect wide levels of disengagement amongst voters. What is clear is that this is more pronounced among people in cities with weak economies than in more prosperous cities.

**Figure 3: Proportion of respondents who would not vote**



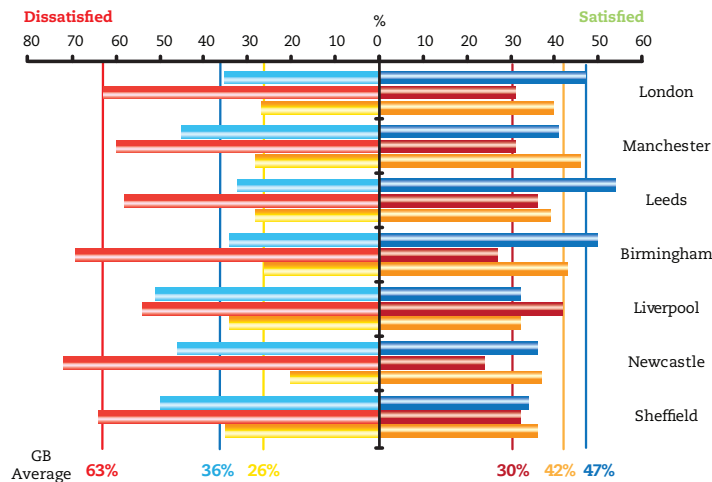
**Source:** Ipsos MORI Political Monitor – February 2009-February 2010: Combined voting intention – certain not to vote.

- People in struggling cities were twice as likely (16 percent) as those in buoyant cities (8 percent) to be ‘actively disengaged’ – that is, to say they are certain not to vote.

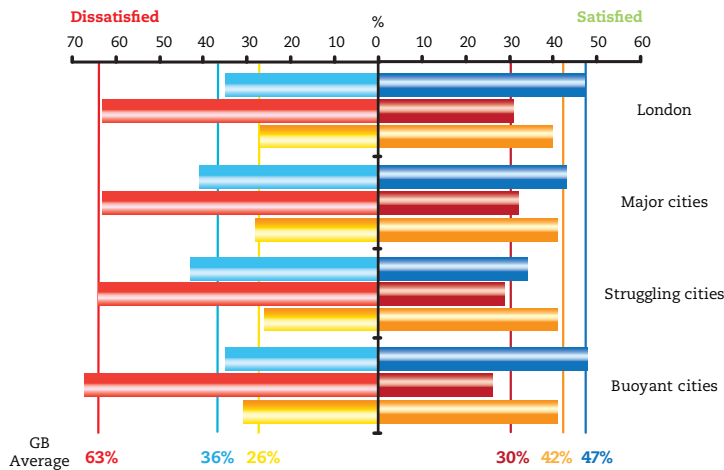
Gordon Brown is unpopular with urban voters. But they are still in two minds about Cameron.

It is clear that **Gordon Brown** has been unpopular with urban voters. Over half of respondents in every city from February 2009 to February 2010 were dissatisfied with his performance as Prime Minister.

**Figure 4: Satisfaction with Brown, Cameron & Clegg**



**Source:** Ipsos MORI Political Monitor-February 2009 to February 2010. Q4: Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way Gordon Brown is doing his job as Prime Minister? Q5: Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way David Cameron is doing his job as leader of the Conservative Party? Q6: Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way Nick Clegg is doing his job as leader of the Liberal Democrats? Horizontal lines indicate the weighted percentage of all Great Britain adults. 13,605 GB adults aged 18+: London (1,389), Manchester (259), Leeds (126), Birmingham (360), Liverpool (124), Newcastle (133), Sheffield (135), Major cities (1,137), Struggling cities (216), Buoyant cities (131).



- In Newcastle, a former Labour stronghold, nearly three-quarters (72 percent) of voters were dissatisfied with how the Prime Minister is doing his job, three times as many as satisfied.
- City residents were more approving of David Cameron than Gordon Brown in London, Leeds, Birmingham and Manchester.
- Liverpool, however, was more approving of the Prime Minister. Gordon Brown had an approval rating in Liverpool of more than 40 percent. And in Sheffield, approval ratings of the two leaders were only 2 percentage points apart, with David Cameron taking a narrow lead.

*“David Cameron was more popular with urban voters than Gordon Brown”*

But city voters were generally in **two minds about Cameron**.

- David Cameron was more popular with urban voters than Gordon Brown, showing for example a 54 percent satisfaction rating in Leeds.
- However, in some large Northern cities, and in cities with struggling economies, David Cameron was still far from ‘sealing the deal’. In Liverpool and Sheffield, more than half of voters were dissatisfied with how he is doing his job as leader of the Conservative Party.

**Nick Clegg** had high net approval ratings even before the election campaign began.

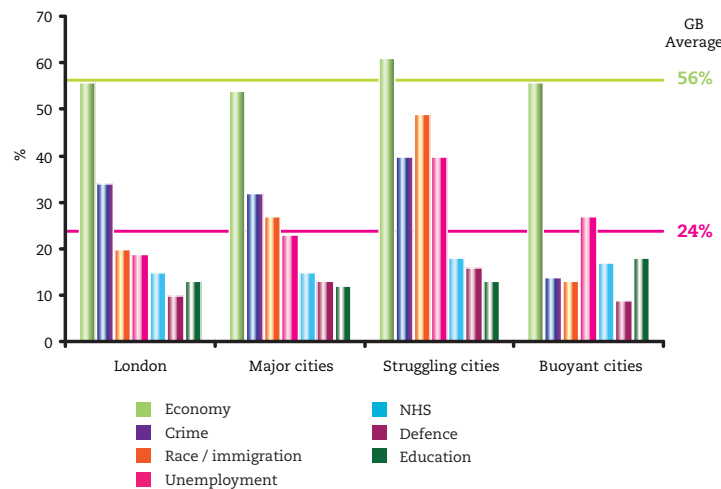
- One-third (33 percent) of urban voters did not have a view on Nick Clegg – a higher figure than for David Cameron (17 percent) or Gordon Brown (6 percent).
- However, those who expressed a view were more approving of Nick Clegg than of the other two leaders. Across all the cities we looked at, Nick Clegg’s net satisfaction rating was 13 percent, against 7 percent net approval for David Cameron and 34 percent net disapproval for Gordon Brown.
- Nick Clegg was the only leader to show a net approval rating with our group of struggling cities. However, in Sheffield, where he has his constituency, his net approval was just 1 percent – lower than in nearly every other city.

### It's the urban economy, stupid

Unsurprisingly, having only just emerged from the deepest recession since the war into a fragile recovery, 50 percent or more of people in most cities cited the economy as among their top issues of concern. The economy was more important to voters than crime, race and immigration, defence and foreign policy. In every single city we looked at, more people cited the economy as a major concern than any other issue.

**Source:** Ipsos MORI P.A.M. Issues Index – February 2009-February 2010. Q 1/2: What do you see as the most / other important issues facing Britain today? Horizontal lines indicate the weighted percentage of all Great Britain adults. 13,605 Great Britain adults aged 18+: London (1,199), Manchester (260), Leeds (113), Birmingham (383), Liverpool (95), Newcastle (166), Sheffield (83), Major cities (1,100), Struggling cities (218), Buoyant cities (68). Cities where the sample size is <100 are indicative findings.

**Figure 5: What issues matter to voters?**



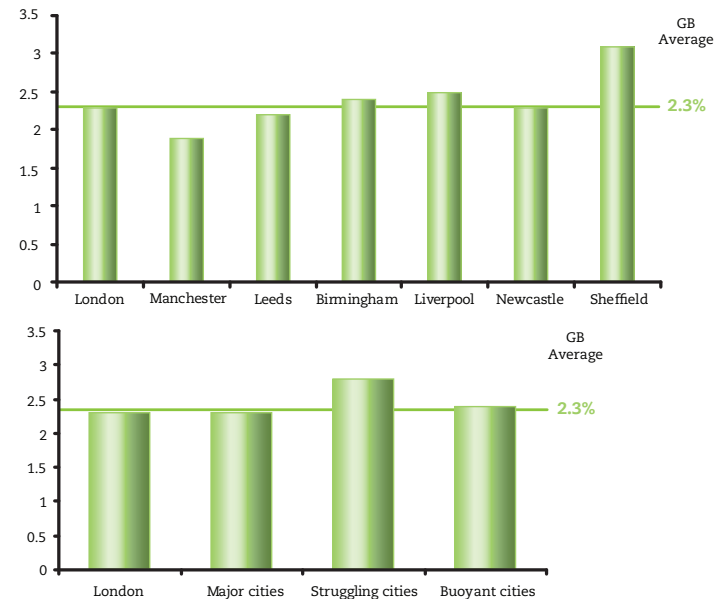
The economy and unemployment were particularly big issues during this period in cities with weak economies and high unemployment, like Liverpool and Newcastle, and the group of struggling cities, where these issues were foremost among voters' concerns:

- In struggling cities, 61 percent cited the economy as a major concern. This was a greater number than those citing any other single issue as a major concern.
- In Birmingham, where numbers claiming Jobseekers Allowance rose by 3 percentage points during the recession (a bigger increase than Great Britain as a

whole), 56 percent of respondents were worried about the economy, and 37 percent were worried about unemployment.

- It is also notable that people in cities with struggling economies were also more likely to be worried about issues like race and immigration, and crime.
- Moreover, voters in cities with weak economies tend to have a larger number of concerns than people in cities with stronger economies. Residents in Manchester, one of the stronger major city economies, appear to have relatively few concerns.

**Figure 6: Average number of issues of concern to voters**



**Source:** Ipsos MORI P.A.M. Issues Index – February 2009-February 2010. Q 1/2: What do you see as the most / other important issues facing Britain today? Horizontal lines indicate the weighted average of all Great Britain adults between Feb 2009 and Feb 2010. 13,605 Great Britain adults aged 18+: London (1,199), Manchester (260), Leeds (113), Birmingham (383), Liverpool (95), Newcastle (166), Sheffield (83), Major cities (1,100), Struggling cities (218), Buoyant cities (68). Cities where the sample size is <100 are indicative findings.

## What does this mean for the main parties?

There has been some tightening in the polls since February, including a recent surge in support for the Liberal Democrats. Nonetheless, we have identified a significant shift in voting intentions between the 2005 general election and the year preceding the start of the election campaign, which shows Labour losing ground even in those areas considered to be its traditional ‘heartlands’.

The Centre for Cities has warned in the past about the gap between the national narrative on the economy, and the reality as it plays out around the country. The UK officially emerged from recession in the fourth quarter of 2009, but in the first quarter of 2010 only grew by 0.2 percent. This national picture masks some wide regional variations.

In many parts of the country, recovery feels a long way off – green shoots are not yet emerging in Stoke, Barnsley or Hull. Urban voters are concerned about the economy and (in struggling cities) unemployment, above any other issue.

Our analysis also shows a correlation between the economic health of a city, and the extent to which voters feel engaged with the political process. People in struggling cities were twice as likely (16 percent) as those in buoyant cities (8 percent) to be ‘actively disengaged’ – that is, to say they are certain not to vote. This has serious implications for the health of the relationship between government and voters.

The economies of struggling cities will be slow to recover whoever takes power in May – and the new government needs to speak to the reality of life in these less prosperous places.

The Government’s recovery story has so far been too national and sectoral, and not sufficiently spatial. In the period we looked at, voters were as yet unconvinced by Labour’s optimism that a recovery is around the corner. But the Conservatives weren’t entirely trusted yet either – they hadn’t convinced cities that ‘we’re all in it together’.

Neither party has approached the electorate with clarity on how a spending squeeze might play out around the country, though it is clear that public spending cuts will hit some

areas harder than others. There are higher concentrations of public sector jobs in cities such as Newcastle and Hastings, and increased reliance on benefits and public services triggered by the recession.

All the major political parties need to look afresh at how they address the needs of different cities if they are to reconnect with urban voters. Whoever wins on May 6, the next Government needs to put cities back centre stage, and generate new ideas for creating more jobs and growth in cities.

For more on the Centre for Cities’ policy recommendations for the next government, see [www.citiesmanifesto.org](http://www.citiesmanifesto.org)

*“The new government needs to speak to the reality of life in these less prosperous places”*

*“In many parts of the country, recovery feels a long way off”*

## Notes

1. NOMIS 2009, Mid-year population estimates for London, Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool, Sheffield, Newcastle and Birmingham (2008 data), based on PUA
2. ABI
3. ONS, own calculations from NUTS3 GVA estimates

## Methodology

## Ipsos MORI

*Voting intention, satisfaction with the leaders and likelihood of voting*

Ipsos MORI interviewed a representative sample of 13,605 adults aged 18+ across Great Britain. Interviews were conducted by telephone in Ipsos MORI's monthly Political Monitor surveys between February 2009 to February 2010 (inclusive), using random digit dialling and quota sampling. Data are weighted to match the profile of the population. Unless otherwise stated, bases are: London (1,389), Manchester (259), Leeds (126), Birmingham (360), Liverpool (124), Newcastle (133), Sheffield (135), Major cities (1,137), Struggling cities (216), Buoyant cities (131)

*Issues of Concern to voters*

Ipsos MORI interviewed a representative quota sample of 7,923 adults aged 18+ across Great Britain. The questions are spontaneous – i.e. respondents are not prompted with any answers. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in Ipsos MORI regular Issues Index surveys between February 2009 to February 2010 (inclusive). Data are weighted to match the profile of the population. Unless otherwise stated, bases are: London (1,199), Manchester (260), Leeds (113), Birmingham (383), Liverpool (95), Newcastle (166), Sheffield (83), Major cities (1,100), Struggling cities (218), Buoyant cities (68)

For more details please see: <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchspecialisms/socialresearch/specareas/politics/trends.aspx>

Where percentages do not sum to 100, this may be due to computer rounding, the exclusion of 'Don't Know' categories, or multiple answers.



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Enterprise House  
59 - 65 Upper Ground  
London SE1 9PQ

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