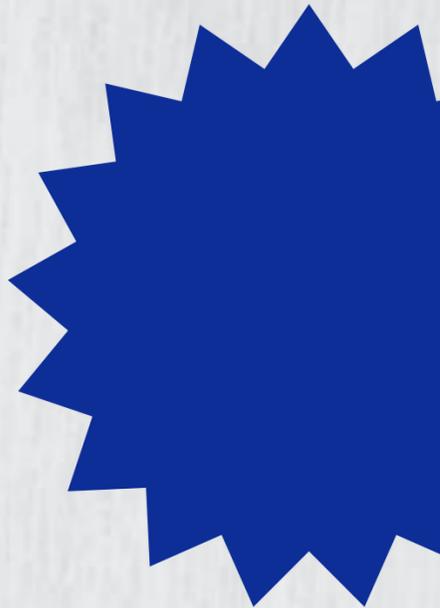
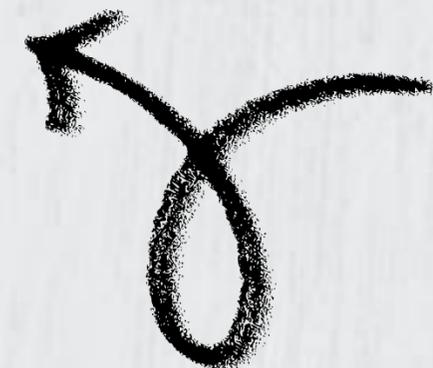


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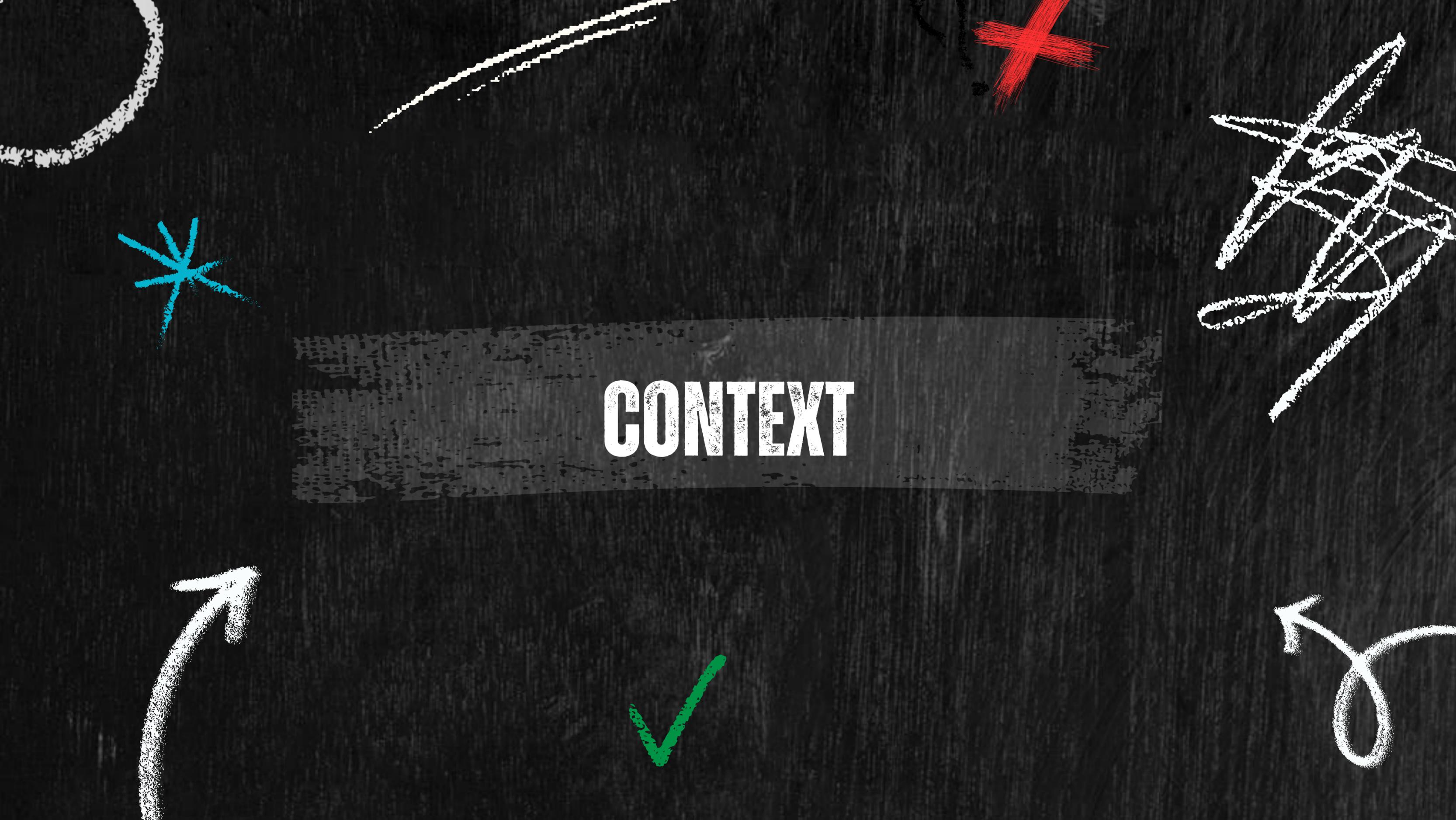
# PROGRESSIVE POPULIST PLAYBOOK



Progressive comms in a populist world



# CONTEXT



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People in the UK are feeling insecure and worried for their **quality of life** and the **future of their families.**

Just

**1 IN 5**

people in Britain believe a better future is possible

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There is a **distrust** in the ability of the government to make **real changes that will improve people's lives.**

Nearly  
**90%**  
of Britons have  
little to no trust in  
politicians

---

People voting for Reform are voting for **change** and **against the status quo** - not necessarily for the far right.

Over  
**ONE THIRD**

of Britons say they would consider voting for Reform UK at a future election.\*

**HOWEVER**

The belief that “the country needs something new” is a key driver of new support.\*\*

\*Ipsos

\*\* [More In Common](#)

---

But political allegiances are in **flux**.

40%

of those currently considering voting Reform UK are more likely to be convinced not to do so.\*

28%

would consider voting for the Greens, but most would also consider voting for other parties \*\*

\* [Best For Britain](#)

\*\* [YouGov, July 2025](#)

---

And many people are  
**persuadable**  
on progressive issues.

Research shows:

Nature and environment  
are **unifying priorities**.\*

Taxing the super-rich and  
making polluters pay are  
**popular policies**\*\*

**65%**

of people support debt relief for  
struggling countries (only 8%  
oppose).\*\*

\* [Britain Talks Climate & Nature](#)

\*\* [Money Talks](#)

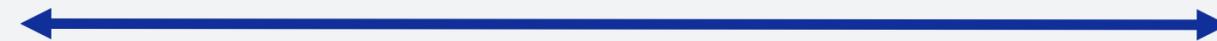
More than

**80%**

of people want more  
climate action.

But it doesn't feel  
like that, does it?

**THE NORMALISATION GAP**



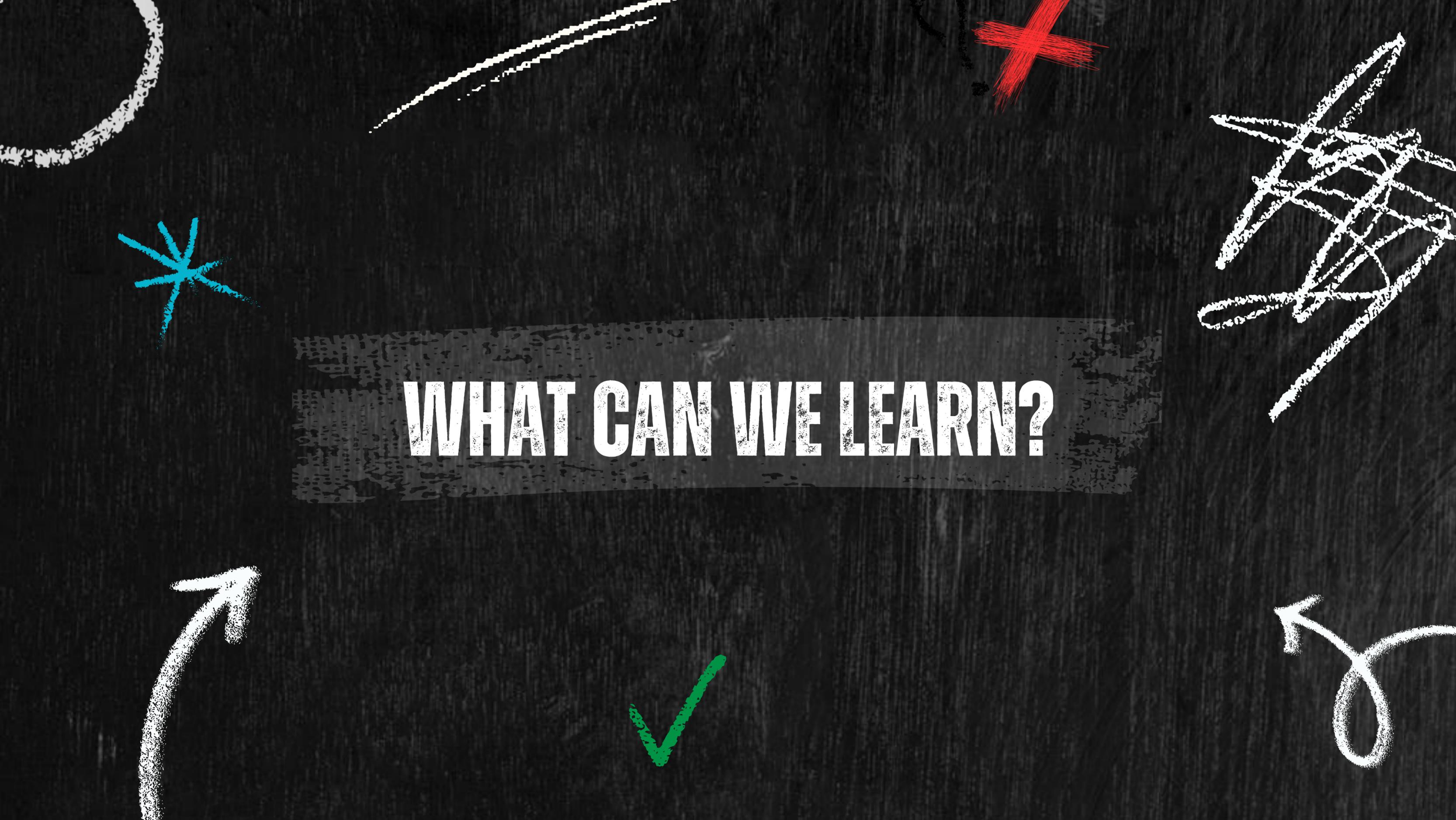
Maybe because just

**1 IN 10**

frequently share  
their views on  
climate change.

---

And there is a **large mainstream audience** receptive to the issues if we can find the messengers to reach them - **with the right messages.**



**WHAT CAN WE LEARN?**



# CHAMPIONS OF THE PEOPLE

Right-wing populists position themselves as **champions of the people**, fighting against an incompetent shadowy elite that is not to be trusted.

This successfully **builds a picture of a shared enemy**, and **taps into feelings of distrust and frustration with the status quo**.

## PROGRESSIVE PROBLEMS



**Patronising:** tendency to talk down to people who don't "get it"



**Global / "big picture" outlook** gets in the way of listening and understanding people's daily realities



Tendency to **defend institutions** that aren't working



Lack of clear **villains and heroes**



# MEETING THE MASSES

Right-wing populists **pick up on what people really care about**, and then use this to achieve their own objectives.

By **meeting the public where they are, talking to them in ways they understand, and making them feel seen and understood** people instantly become more receptive to their messaging.

## PROGRESSIVE PROBLEMS



We tell people what **they should care about** instead of talking about what **they do care about**



**Out of touch:** routinely over-estimating how progressive the rest of the country is



Communicating in an **echo-chamber** of people with similar views



Accountable to **progressive donors and supporters** (only strengthening the echo-chamber)



# BUILDING 'BRITISHNESS'

They have also **clearly defined their own British 'values'**, and so can **fiercely defend this clear vision of 'Britishness'**.

This helps people to feel **united as part of a growing movement fighting for a common cause.**

## PROGRESSIVE PROBLEMS



Emphasis on **apologising for British history** rather than a clear vision for British values now.



Far right's aggressive patriotism causes progressives to **shy away from claiming British identity.**



Tackling the challenges of **national identity across all UK nations.**



## MAKING IT EASY

Presenting **simple, bold solutions with confidence and clarity** is a key way right-wing populists win support.

By not getting tied up in the detail, they present **clear solutions to things people care about** which makes change feel possible. And they endlessly **repeat the same message** so everyone hears it.

## PROGRESSIVE PROBLEMS



**Jargon and technical language**



**Thinking logic, facts and science will win the argument**

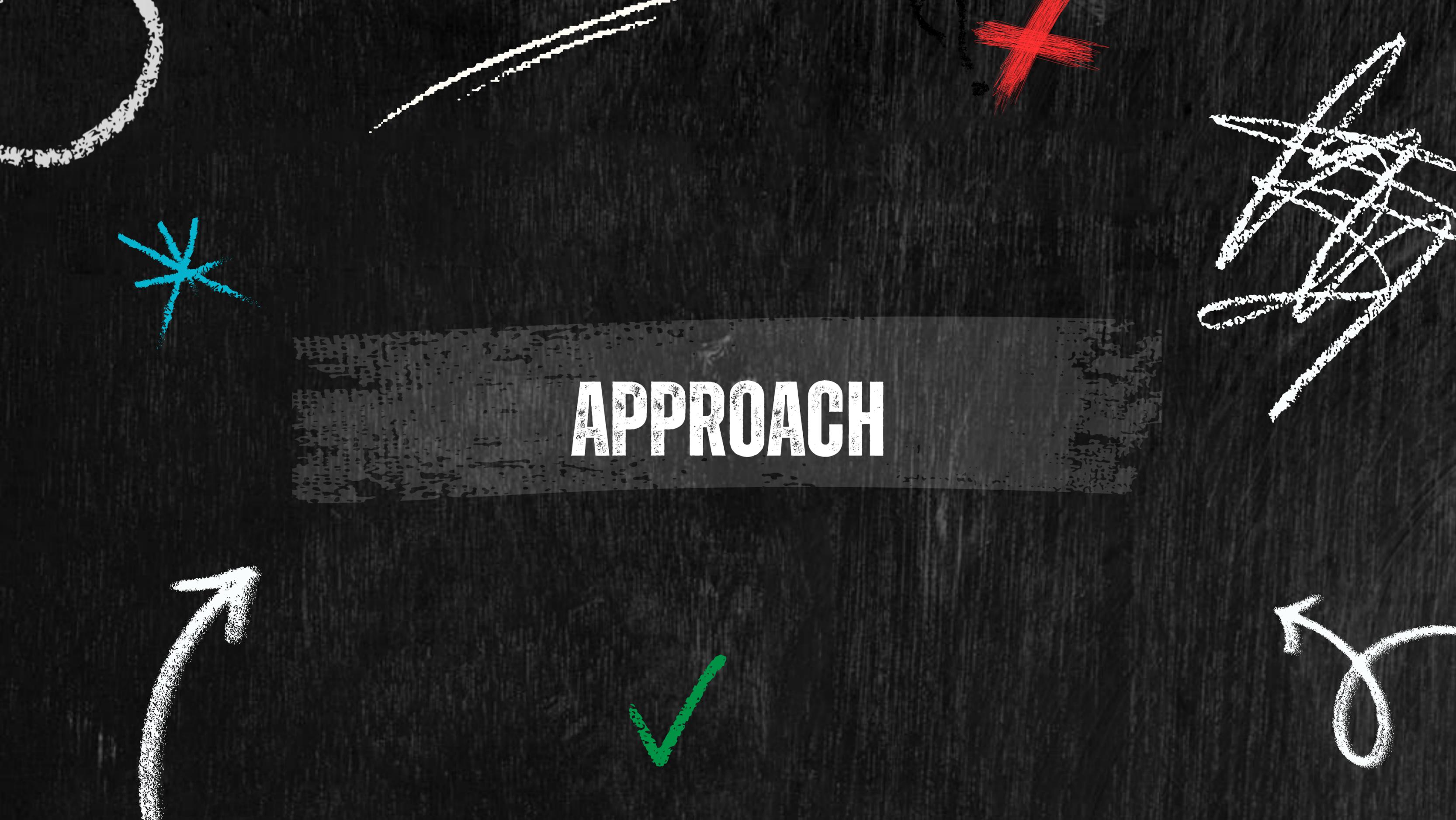


**Nuance and detail obscures the message**



**Leading with the problem and lacking a strong optimistic vision for the future**

# APPROACH



**WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND PEOPLE**

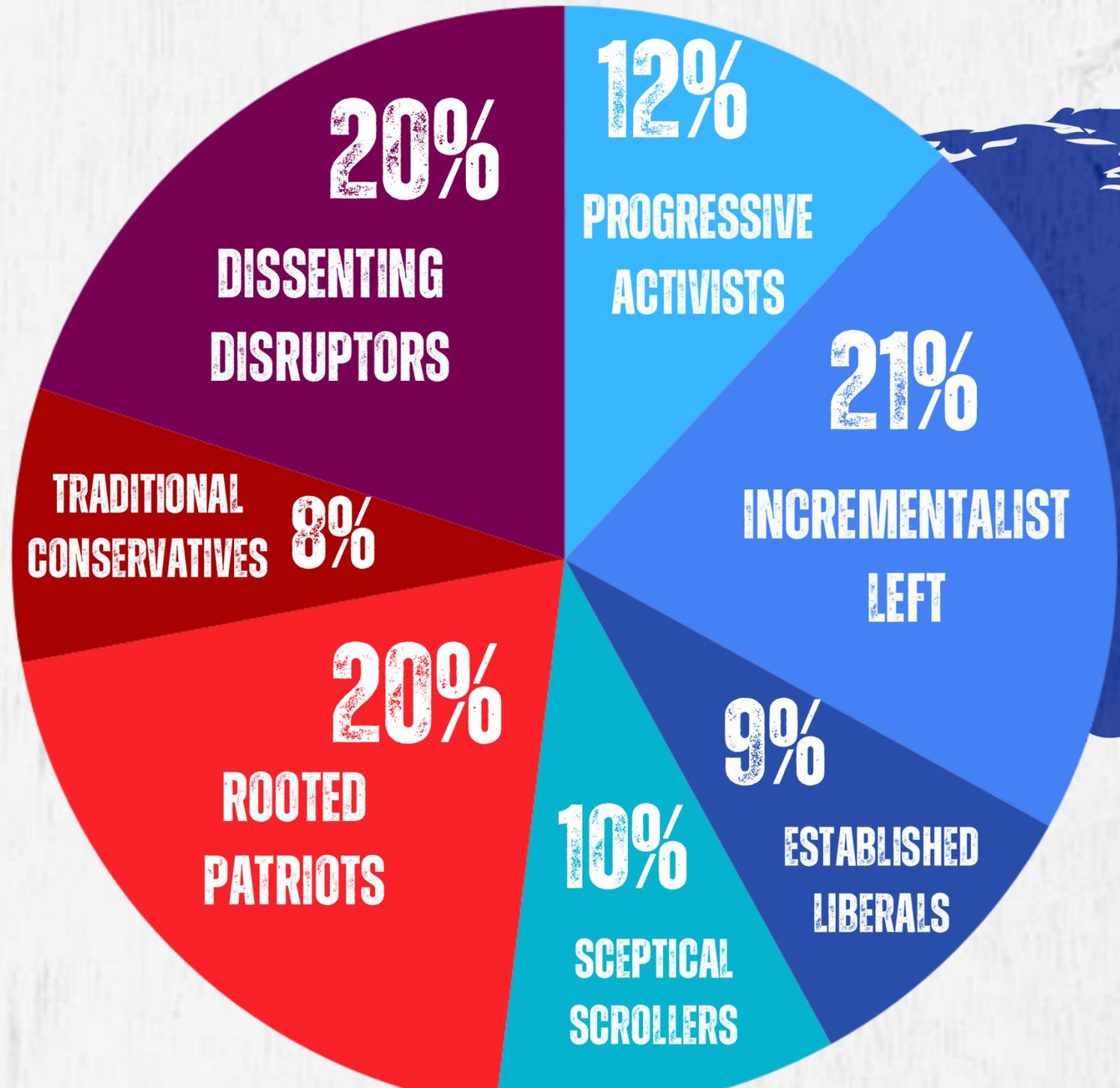


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It is easy to operate in a  
'progressive activist'  
bubble but we need to  
connect **with the mindsets  
of much bigger audiences.**

# THE SEVEN SEGMENTS

**SEARCH:**  
More in Common  
Seven Segments



**CHALLENGE YOURSELF IN EVERY  
CAMPAIGN TO ENGAGE WITH  
PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT LIKE YOU**

Which segment are you?

[TAKE THE QUIZ](#)

---

We ran some focus groups. The concerns of those that are 'Reform curious' and those that are 'Green curious' were indistinguishable. **It was their solutions to the issues that differed.**

1

“[On shoplifting and addressing bad behaviour by kids] ....people are scared....you can walk into a shop and walk out of a shop without being held or stopped, and the rules are that you can't touch anybody..... So it's just ridiculous.”

2

“[On what I want from government]... to make communities inclusive, welcoming and more supportive to everyone..... it bridges that division and plants the seed of unity.”

3

[On ULEZ] pollution has gone down by a considerable amount. I don't know exactly, but, like, 30 or 40% in London, it's something that the mayor has been really touting as one of his successes. And I think that's a positive thing, you know, it means that there's less pollution, less people are suffering the effects of high pollution.

# FOCUS GROUP QUOTES

Can you tell which are **Green-curious** and which are **Reform-curious**?

# 1 GREEN

“[On shoplifting and addressing bad behaviour by kids] ....people are scared....you can walk into a shop and walk out of a shop without being held or stopped, and the rules are that you can't touch anybody..... So it's just ridiculous.”

# 2 REFORM

“[On what I want from government]... to make communities inclusive, welcoming and more supportive to everyone.... it bridges that division and plants the seed of unity.”

# 3 REFORM

[On ULEZ] pollution has gone down by a considerable amount. I don't know exactly, but, like, 30 or 40% in London, it's something that the mayor has been really touting as one of his successes. And I think that's a positive thing, you know, it means that there's less pollution, less people are suffering the effects of high pollution.

# FOCUS GROUP QUOTES

**WE NEED TO CHANGE HOW WE TALK**

A thick, horizontal red brushstroke underline is positioned beneath the words "HOW WE TALK" of the main text.

---

We need to connect with people  
on a personal level – **not just a  
systemic one.**

**“THE POPULISTS SPEAK IN DIRECT TERMS;**

**TOO OFTEN WE SPEAK IN RIDDLES.**

**WE ARE SYSTEMS THINKERS, WHICH IS GOOD FOR  
SOLVING PROBLEMS, BUT WHEN WE COMMUNICATE,**

**A PLUS B RARELY EQUALS C.”**

**– Peter Hyman**

# WHAT IF NGOS WROTE ADS?

**We provide footwear enabling targeted populations to undertake physical activity.**



**We provide standardized household solutions to target groups in low-resource settings**



**We encourage affected communities to adopt alternative approaches to cognition and problem-solving.**



---

# We need to build faith in solutions **and reclaim transformation.**

The idea that laws and policies shape how our economy works is no longer a contested one.

We have a new set of ideas to contest: who gets to make decisions about the systems that make up our economy, who benefits from them – and how decision makers are held to account when those systems are falling short.

People understand that the system is rigged – they need specifics as to how it can be ‘unrigged’ for our collective benefit.\*

**WE NEED A VICTORIA SPONGE**



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We're good at planning for the next COP/UNGA/policy moment. But we're not planning for the **next 3 to 5 years, or beyond...**

And we're not good at responding to the **fast-paced news agenda.**

# VICTORIA SPONGE OF COMMS

**RAPID RESPONSE!**

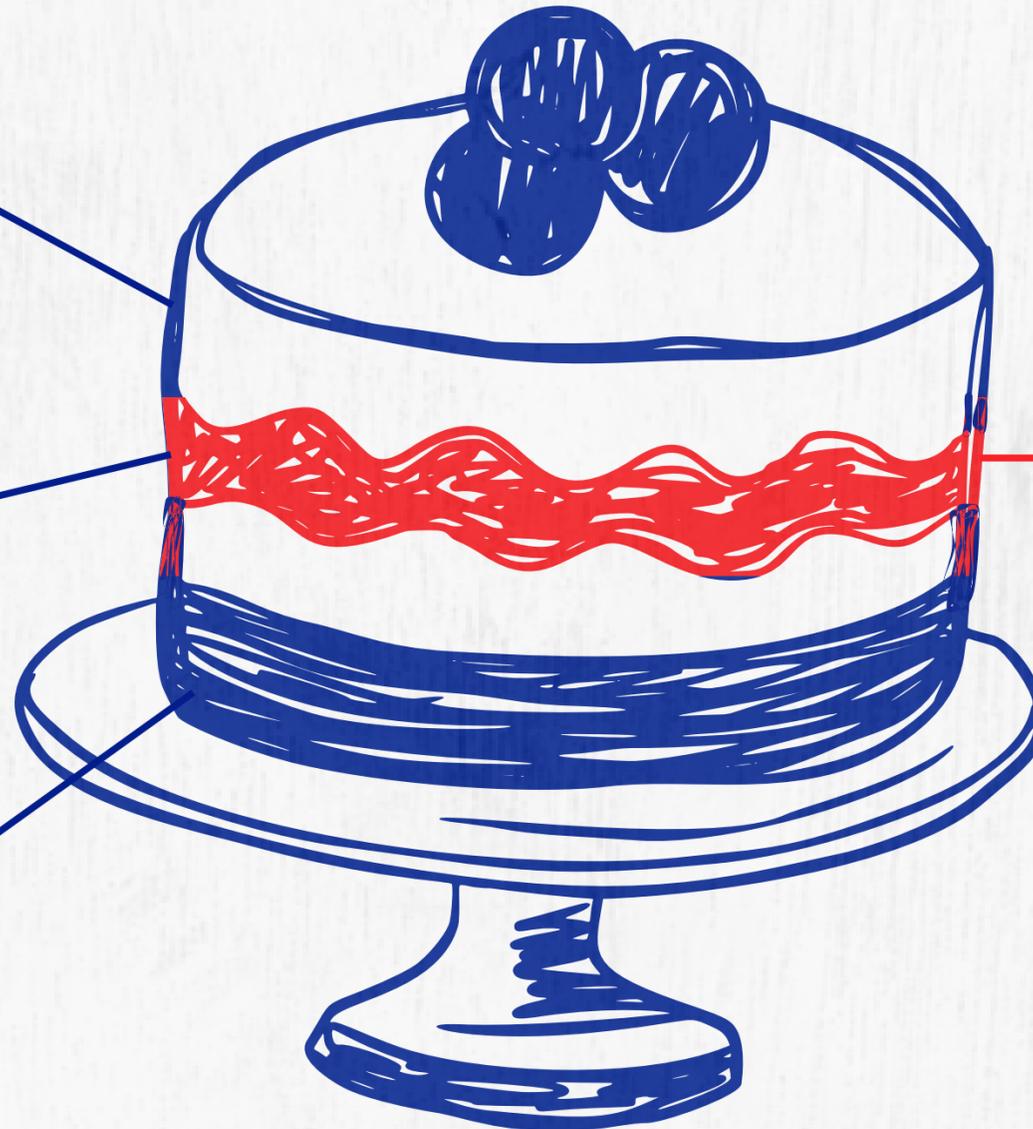
24 hours or less

**MID-TERM**

e.g. next policy  
moment

**LONG-TERM**

e.g. 3 to 5 years



**COMMS ARE HERE**

# ID CARDS CASE STUDY



## WHAT REFORM DID

**3PM**

Starmer announces  
ID cards

**3 HOURS LATER**

Video response posted  
across 3 major platforms

**12 HOURS LATER**

Online engagement  
builds conversation

**24 HOURS LATER**

800,000+ views;  
unmitigated by  
alternate voices



## WHAT LABOUR DID

**3 HOURS LATER**

Traditional media rounds

**12 HOURS LATER**

Infographic posted  
on Instagram

**24 HOURS LATER**

Media coverage  
includes rebuttals and  
opponent voices

# FOLLOW

Jonathan Tanner  
at Root Cause

## WE HAVE THREE CHOICES



### OPTION 1

- Deny it's happening
- Keep sending **press releases**
- Keep losing **narrative battles**
- Keep **wondering** why populists dominate social media

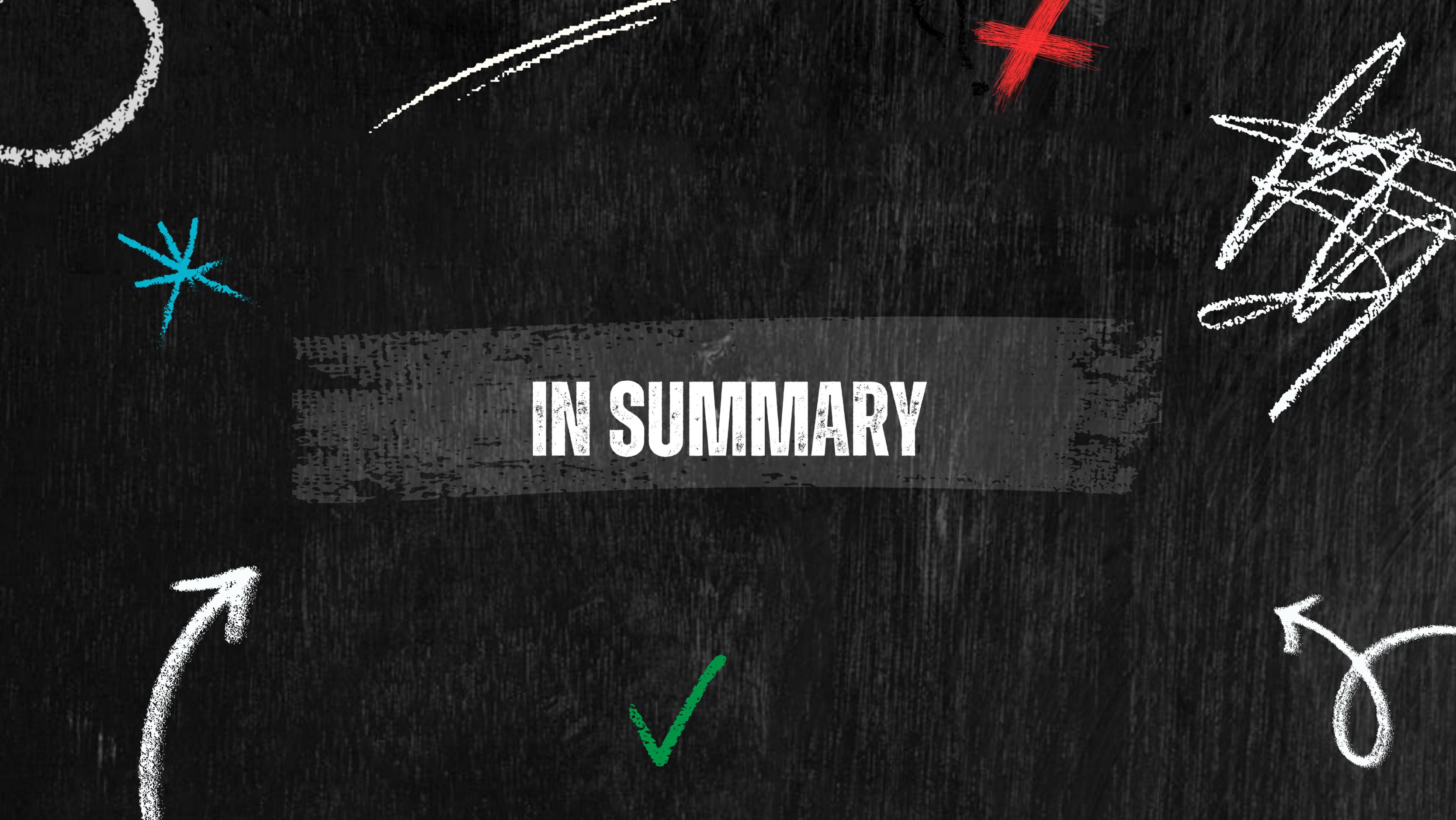
### OPTION 2

- Study it to **death**
- Form a **working group**
- Commission **research**
- Draft a **strategy** to implement in **Q3 2026**
- Lose every battle while planning**

### OPTION 3

- Act today!**
- Set up livestreaming now.**
- Respond to news in hours not days.**
- Build social infrastructure before it's too late.**

# IN SUMMARY



**WE CAN INSPIRE MAINSTREAM MIDDLE AUDIENCES**



**WE CAN RECLAIM TRANSFORMATION**



**WE CAN BUILD HOPE**



# KEEP IN TOUCH

[liz@blacksands.co.uk](mailto:liz@blacksands.co.uk)

[rachel@blacksands.co.uk](mailto:rachel@blacksands.co.uk)

# SIGN-POSTS

The Populist  
Decoder

**More In Common:**

Segmentation & Insight

Progressive activists

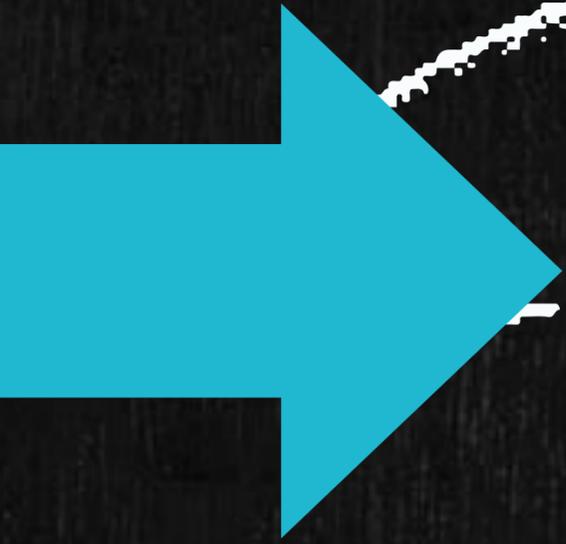
Future of  
Information

(playlist)

Moving Mindsets  
– Frameworks UK

Seven Sins of  
Sensible People

(article)



The



**THANK YOU**

