



# Engaging Red Wall Realists

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September 2022

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LET'S PROTECT WHAT MATTERS MOST

# Engaging Red Wall Realists

This short paper sets out practical advice for organisations making the case for strong protections. It focuses on how to engage with this key voter group.

Unchecked UK's [polling](#), alongside in-depth [qualitative research](#), demonstrates that these voters care little for deregulation and value the importance of strong protections. But proving that there is inherent public support for maintaining protections is only the first step. Those of us who care about protections need to ensure that we engage and activate the support of these voters. The narratives that we deploy will be critical to achieving this.

The recommendations are based on insights from polling, alongside in-depth [qualitative research](#) in 12 key Red Wall seats. We also draw from the research of others, including the [Coalition for Global Prosperity](#), [Climate Outreach](#) and [Labour Renaissance](#). Working alongside leading strategic communications agency KSBR, the purpose of our research has been to bring to life the importance of strong regulations in a way that speaks to the values and worldview of this pivotal group.

***'If you want to change the narrative, you need to start acting less like a squabble of seagulls and more like a murmuration of starlings.'***

*(Nicky Hawkins, OnRoad Media)*



# Narrative 1



## Protections are the common sense way of maintaining order in our society

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Red Wall Realists pride themselves in having a **clear appreciation of right and wrong**. They aspire to an orderly society where **security** is guaranteed. They see themselves as pragmatists and focused on the day-to-day. Because they feel they live in the real-world, they believe fixing problems is possible but requires **strength and decisiveness**. Whilst supportive of strong rules, this audience is also strongly in favour of people taking personal responsibility for their actions.

### Tips:

- ✓ Focus on regulations as something relevant to daily life and which are locally salient (the safety / health of children, a thriving high street or the success of local businesses, for example)
- ✓ Provide tangible examples of how regulations address real world problems not abstract goals
- ✓ Make proponents of deregulation seem out of touch - people who live in a political bubble and are driven by abstract ideologies that have nothing to do with the real world
- ✓ Illustrate how regulation makes financial sense because this prevents costly mistakes and enforcement ultimately pays for itself (or even better, yields financial returns).
- ✓ Focus on enforcement and stress that there is no point in having rules if authorities don't ensure that they are being followed
- ✓ Seek messengers who recognisably operate in the 'real world' (for example, self-made entrepreneurs or farmers making the case on the basis that without rules 'good' businesses will be undercut by 'rogue' ones who don't care about standards).

### Exemplar:

*"Most people know what it feels like when protections are weak or aren't policed: **ordinary people/local businesses/'normal folk'** lose out and the **rogues** benefit. Whether it's picking a nursery for your child or getting work done on your house / going swimming on the beach / buying something online, strong rules protect the average person from abuse / let you get on with your business / allow us to live with confidence and peace of mind."*

# Narrative 2



## Protections are what makes Britain a great country

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Red Wall Realists are **proud of being British** and see the pursuit of high standards as something that marks us out as a country. Although most recognise that we face big challenges as a nation, they tend to be **resistant to narratives of national decline** or arguments which pit failures in this country against the success of others. They tend to want to see Britain as a **force for good** in the world, a country that leads by example and is looked up to.

### Tips:

- ✓ Celebrate our international reputation as rule makers and as a global leader in setting high standards
- ✓ Focus on historical achievements as a country (especially 'firsts')
- ✓ Make this an upbeat message, focusing on the positive actions that Britain can take
- ✓ Appeal to loss aversion by focusing on the weakening of a system that was once robust and effective
- ✓ Highlight that this is about ensuring that their kids enjoy the benefits of protections we ourselves had / took for granted

### Exemplar:

*"As a country, we have always punched above our weight. Time and again Britain has been at the forefront of **setting standards** that other countries have followed. Britain should continue to lead from the front. This leadership gives us **influence** in the world, but it also gives us something to be **proud** of. Let's keep leading the way."*

*"We have built a **prosperous and secure** country which is **admired** internationally for upholding the rules. From abolishing child labour to adopting the toughest ban in the trade in endangered animals, Britain has always been at the **forefront** of setting high standards. Rather than turn back the clock through risky deregulation, we should build on this record."*

*"Disasters and scandals have **taught us the hard way**: rules are what make us the country we are today. We should hold those lessons close and not let them fade with time. If not, we will just keep repeating the same mistakes of the past. That is **wasteful** and goes against common sense."*

# Narrative 3



## Levelling the playing field

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Red Wall Realists are **not supporters of the small state**. They firmly believe that government is there to take care of people. Whilst they are an **aspirational** group, Red Wall Realists are also strongly aware that the system is tilted in the favour of the richest and most powerful in the country. They are likely to see regulations as an important instrument in the **pursuit of fairness**.

### Tips:

- ✓ Highlight the fairness of applying the same standards for everyone, especially at a time when the poorest are bearing the brunt of the cost-of-living crisis and inflation.
- ✓ Focus on inequalities of power, such as between everyday consumers / decent people / working families / responsible businesses versus big businesses / powerful lobby groups who stand to gain from selling unsafe products / underpaying workers / cutting corners
- ✓ Draw attention to the fact that those who propose deregulation are the most powerful, and that they are out of touch because they are the least vulnerable to risks that arise from weak protections. Show that it is people like them who stand to gain the most from deregulation.
- ✓ Use stories about how things have gone wrong because of weak regulations, showcasing how they've affected individuals just like them.

### Exemplar:

*"In this country we believe in **fairness**. Everyone should play by the same rules. All British people should have the right to buy things without fear, to feel **protected** at work, to breathe clean air, to live in homes that are safe. Only those who have the most to gain from weakening regulation (rogue employers or big business) see them as burdens. Fairness will only be possible if we have strong rules in place."*

*"Regulations are there for **everyone**. It shouldn't matter whether you are rich or poor. It's the government's job to make sure they are **respected**. This means having a **firm** approach to those who flout the rules and take action to close any loopholes. Everyone should play by the same rules."*

# Narrative 4



## Empower those who protect us

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This audience is distrustful of officialdom. They express strong hostility towards bureaucrats and managers in public sector organisations (and charities), perceiving them as out of touch and over-paid. Conversely, **public servants** enjoy real respect, particularly those who are seen to do 'real jobs' on the frontline. Contrary to claims that the public is sceptical about the influence of experts, most studies suggest that those who are demonstrably knowledgeable tend to be amongst the most trusted messengers, especially ones who have acquired their expertise through practical experience (such as running a business).

### Tips:

- ✓ Highlight the work of the 'everyday heroes' who keep us safe (See [Unchecked UK's Public Protectors](#) story bank).
- ✓ Focus on the fact that key agencies are losing valuable expertise built up over many years (see [Unchecked UK's enforcement gap](#) report)
- ✓ Find concrete examples of the risks that protectors have helped to prevent and/or examples where bad things have happened because of their lack of personnel or funding
- ✓ Find credible messengers whose job it is to ensure that regulations are enforced, and use images of people out in the field making an impact

### Exemplar:

*"Britain benefits from an army of dedicated **public protectors** who work hard to ensure that rules are being followed. Their work is critical to keeping us **safe**. However, in recent years workers like them have seen huge cuts to their funding. As a result, inspections are now rare, and enforcers are being out resourced by those who break the rules. We need to equip those that are responsible for keeping us safe with the money, respect and power they need to do their jobs."*