Mapping the Mancunian Way
Dialectal variation and levelling in Greater Manchester

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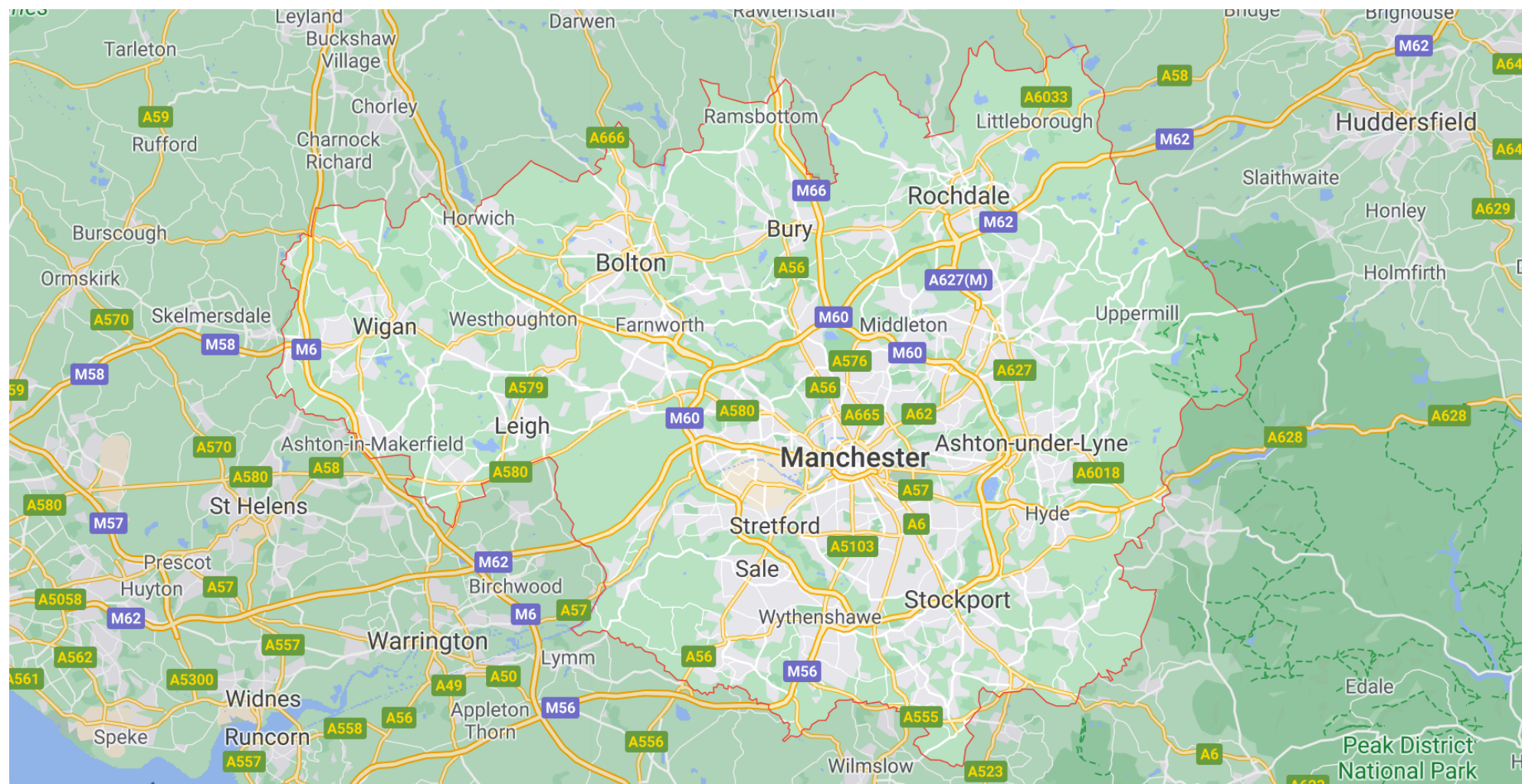**Laurel MacKenzie**
New York University

UKLVC13, 8th September 2021
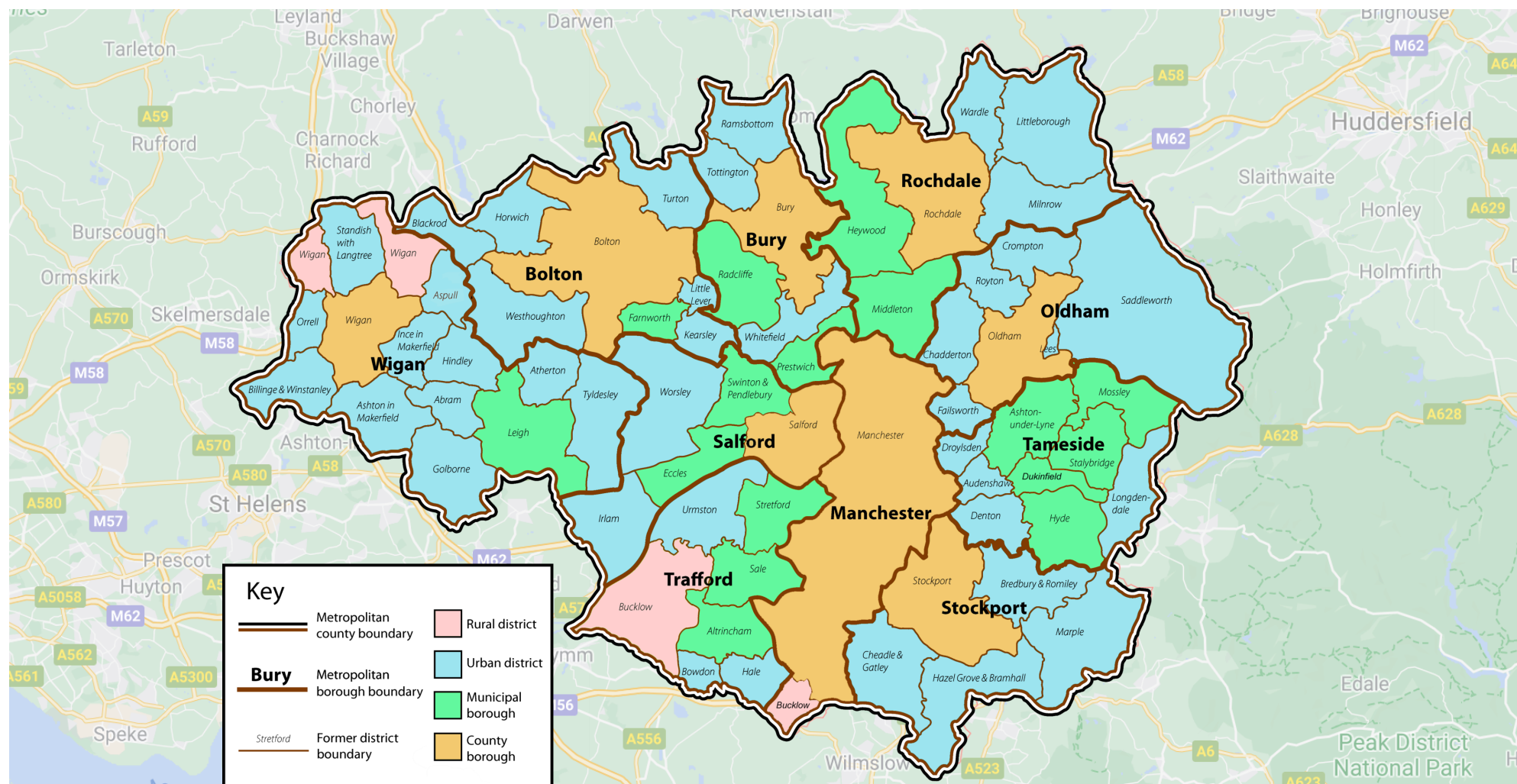
The 'Mancunian Way'

Why (Greater) Manchester?

- Large metropolitan area (population 2.8 million) consisting of ten boroughs, including the large urban city centres of Manchester and Salford

- But Greater Manchester is a relatively recent 'creation' – Local Government Act of 1972
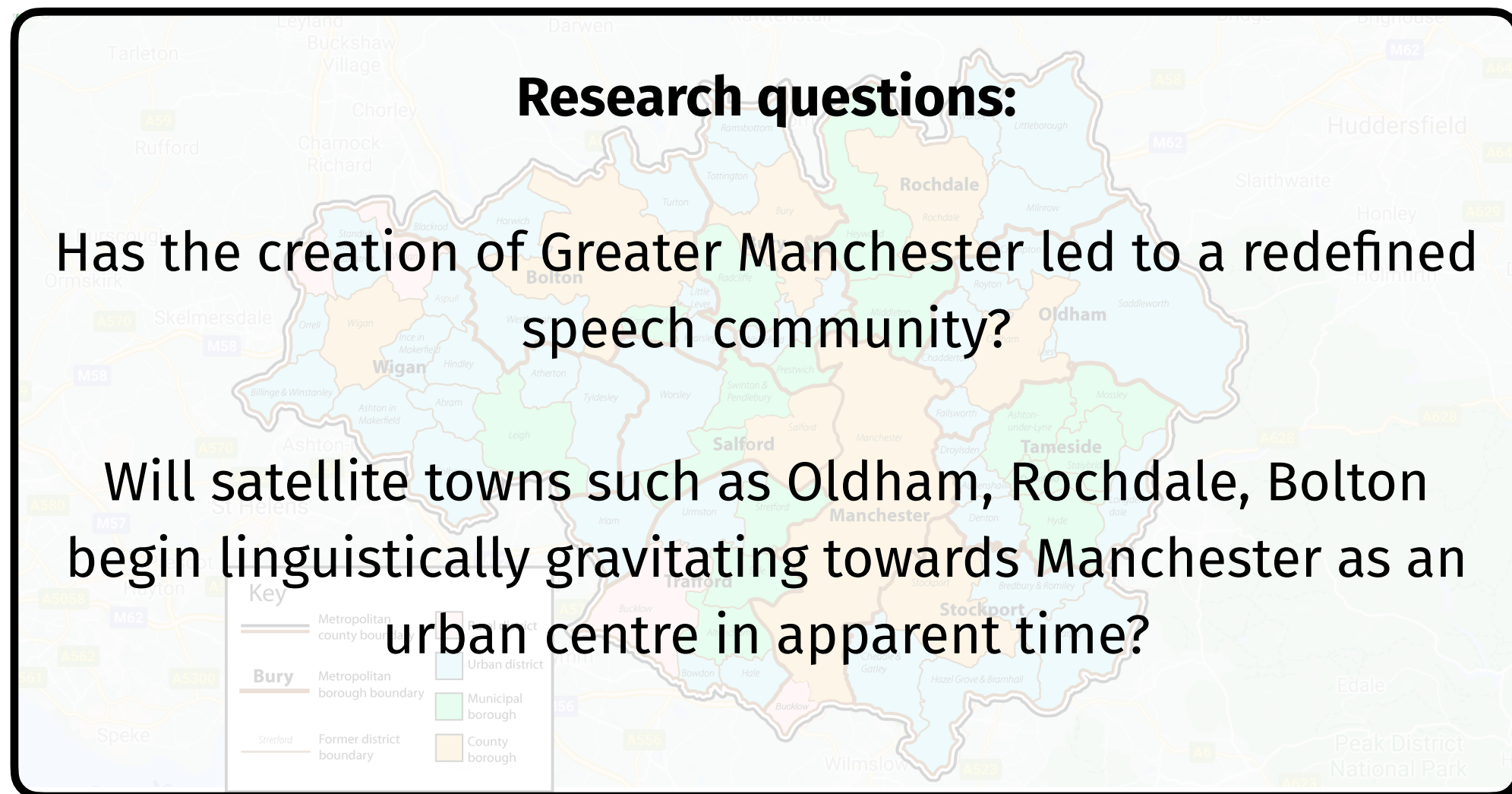 - unification of areas that were previously part of Lancashire, Cheshire and Yorkshire

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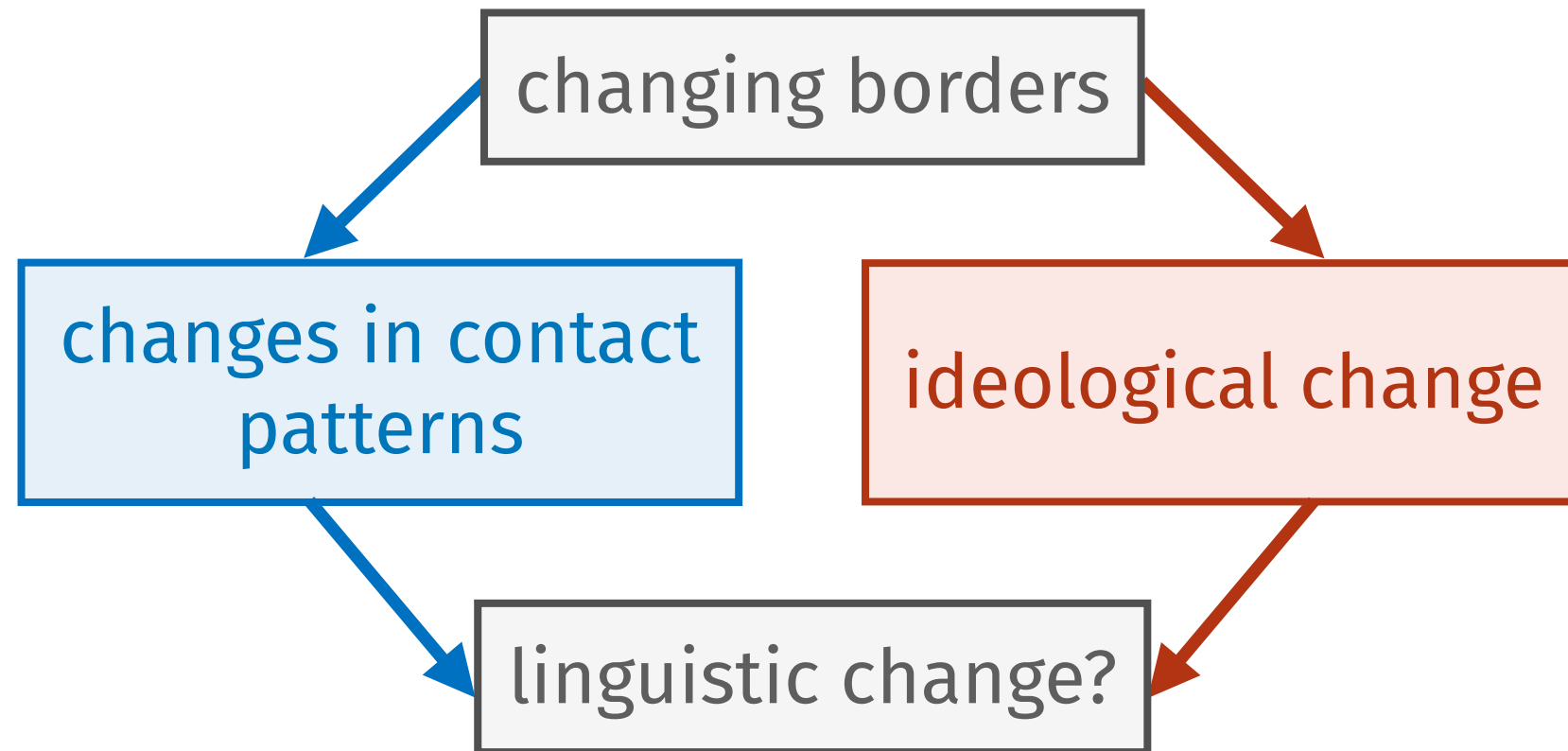
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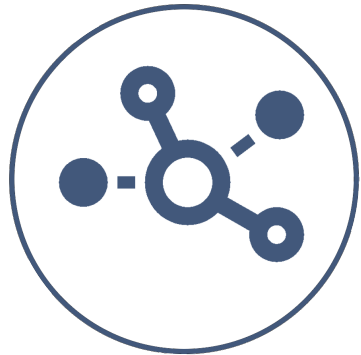
Research questions:

Has the creation of Greater Manchester led to a redefined speech community?

Will satellite towns such as Oldham, Rochdale, Bolton begin linguistically gravitating towards Manchester as an urban centre in apparent time?

Motivations for change

- Why might we expect this kind of linguistic change here?

Motivations for change

emphasising the mechanical factor of density of interpersonal contact (Bloomfield 1933: 46; Trudgill 2008; Bermúdez-Otero 2020)

changing borders

changes in contact patterns

linguistic change?

"a picture emerges, then, of poor roads, and little travel, with people having neither the money nor inclination to travel [...] one informant observed that, if you were one of the half dozen travelling from Little Hulton to Manchester each day, then you were 'a wide-eyed boy, or a man of the world, or something'"

Shorrocks (1998: 19) on early 20thC Bolton

Motivations for change

emphasising identity and attitudinal factors (Eckert 2019)

- see similar work on the Anglo-Scottish border and the unification of Middlesbrough (Llamas 2007; Watt et al. 2014; Watt & Llamas 2017)

"a generational divide between the perceptions and regional/local identities of those who were born before about 1970 and those born after this date"

**Beal (2010: 217) on the Local Government Act of 1972**

"Greater Manchester. See that's my point, Greater Manchester is a made up place for people who want to be Mancunians but they're not! And are like *'I'm from Manchester ehhhh'*"

Informant quoted in Barras (2011: 202–203)

changing borders

ideological change

linguistic change?

Methods

www.ourdialects.uk
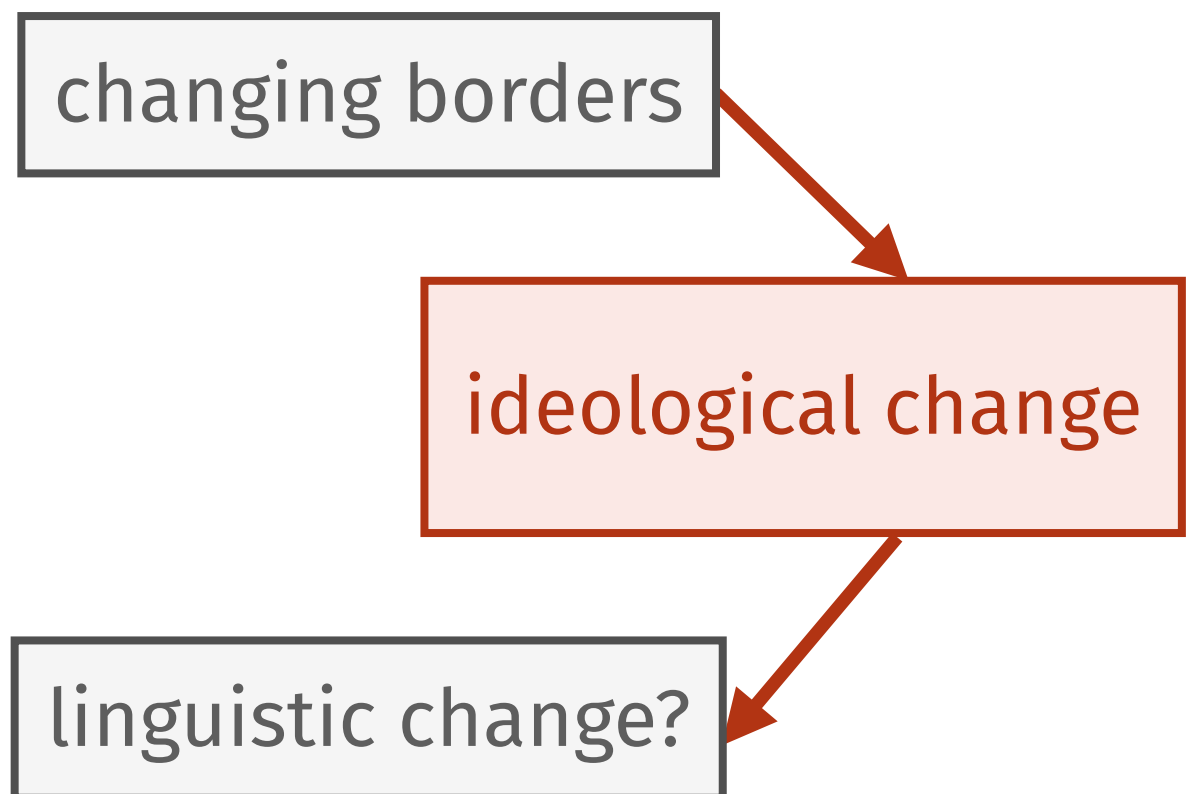
- Data collection: ongoing dialect survey that started in 2013

- Covers lexical, phonological and morphosyntactic variables

- Over 14,000 respondents, all raised in UK between ages 4–13

  - split into two age cohorts: born before/after 1970 (before/after boundary changes)

- Responses geocoded by postcode district (>2800 across England, Scotland and Wales)

- Geospatial 'hotspot' analysis: smooth over raw data to highlight significant areas of high and low variant usage

  - local spatial autocorrelation using Getis-Ord Gi*
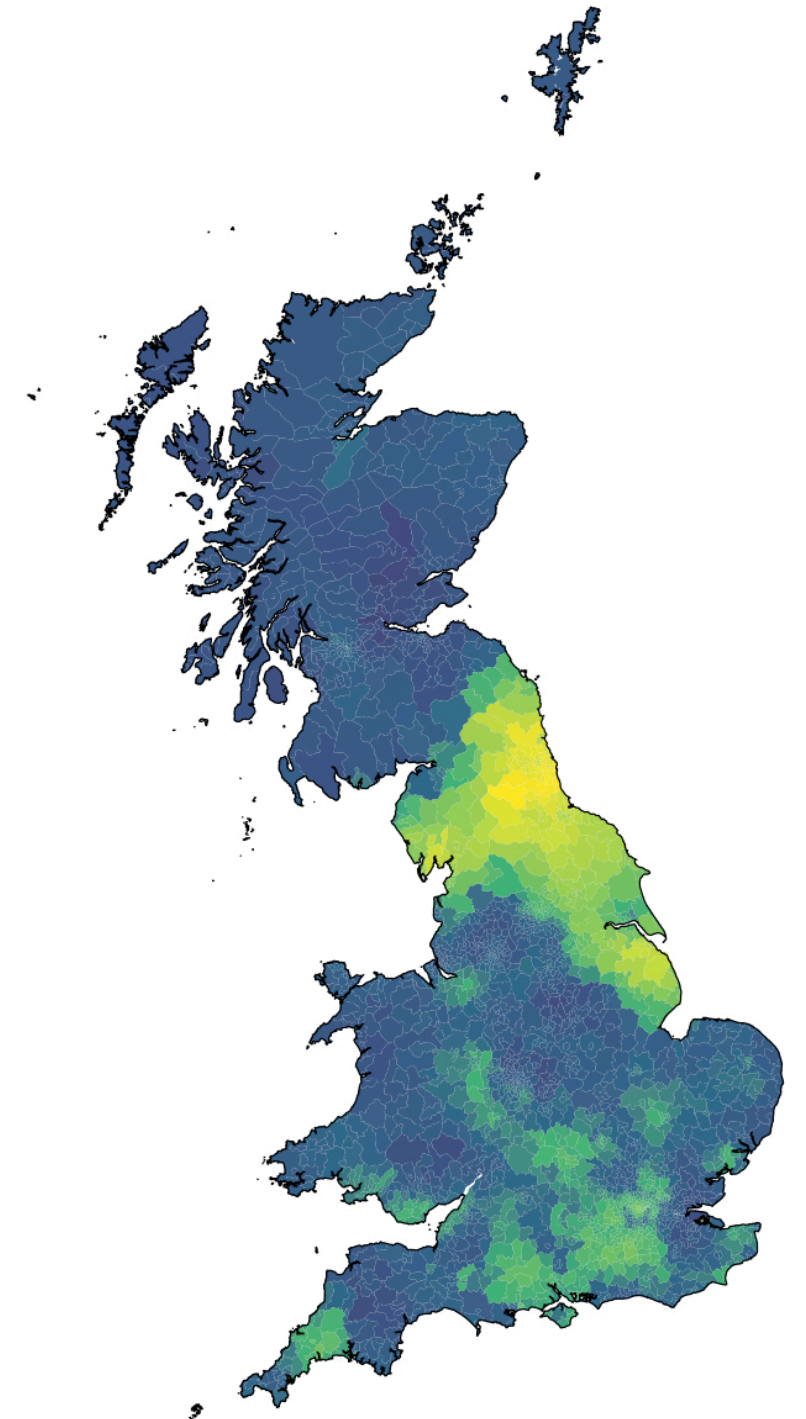
Results

EIGHT–ATE merger

Typically associated with Lancashire towns, but shows a notable 'retreat' from those that later became parts of Greater Manchester

pre-1970 → post-1970
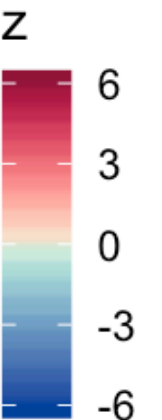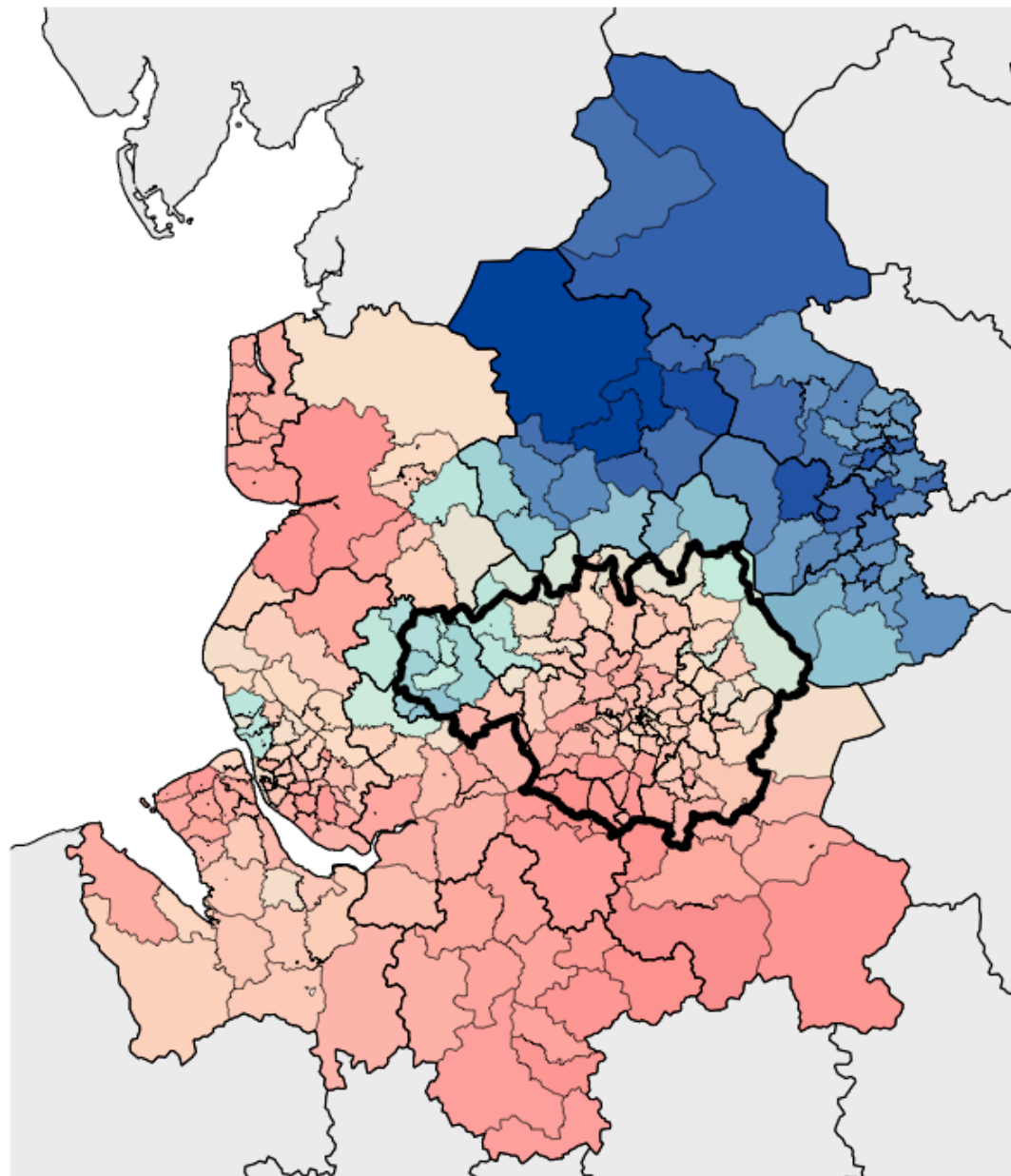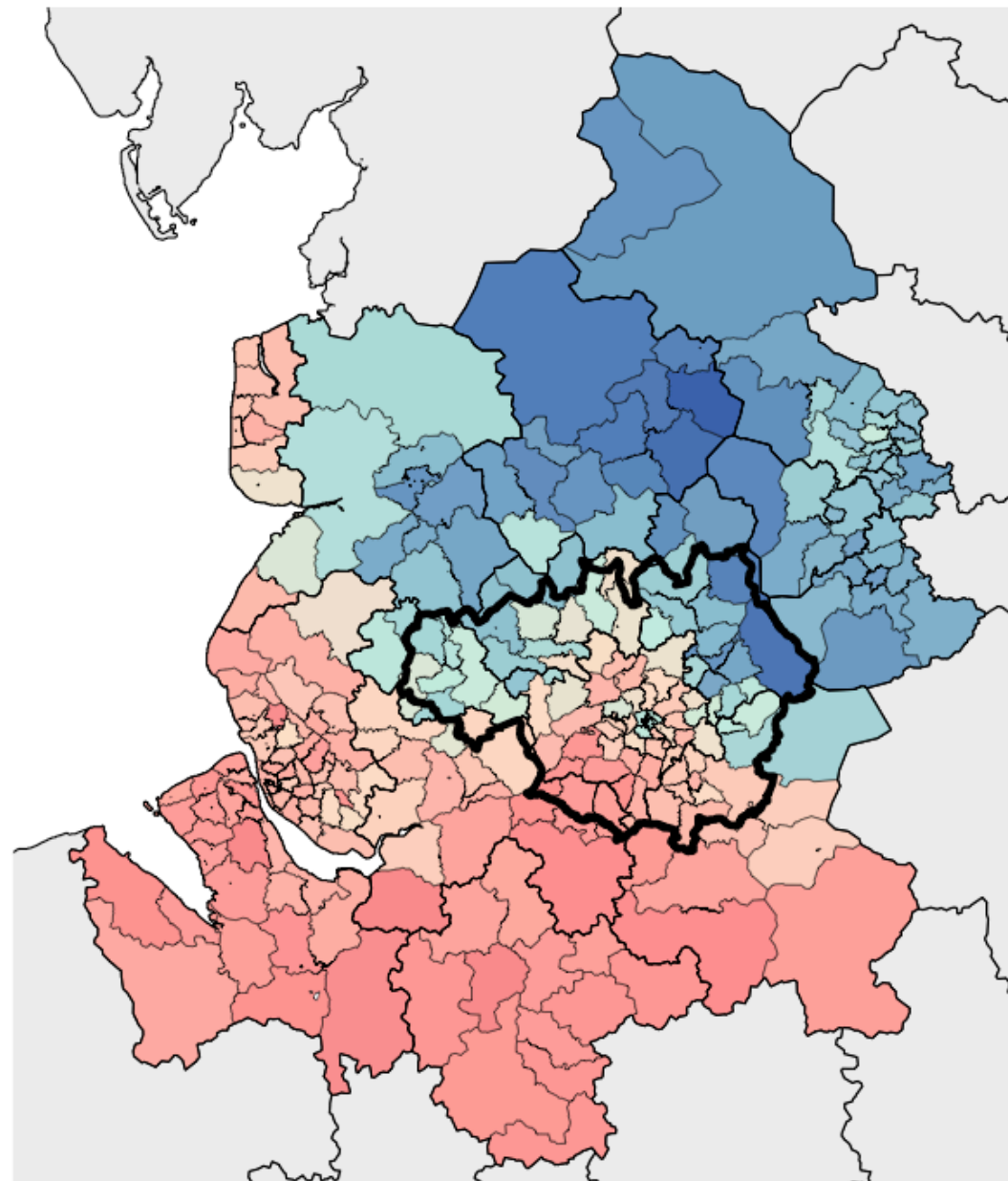
blue = distinct

EIGHT-ATE merger

old | **young**

Borough: Wigan, Trafford, Tameside, Stockport, Salford, Rochdale, Oldham, Manchester, Bury, Bolton

Getis-Ord Gi* z-score
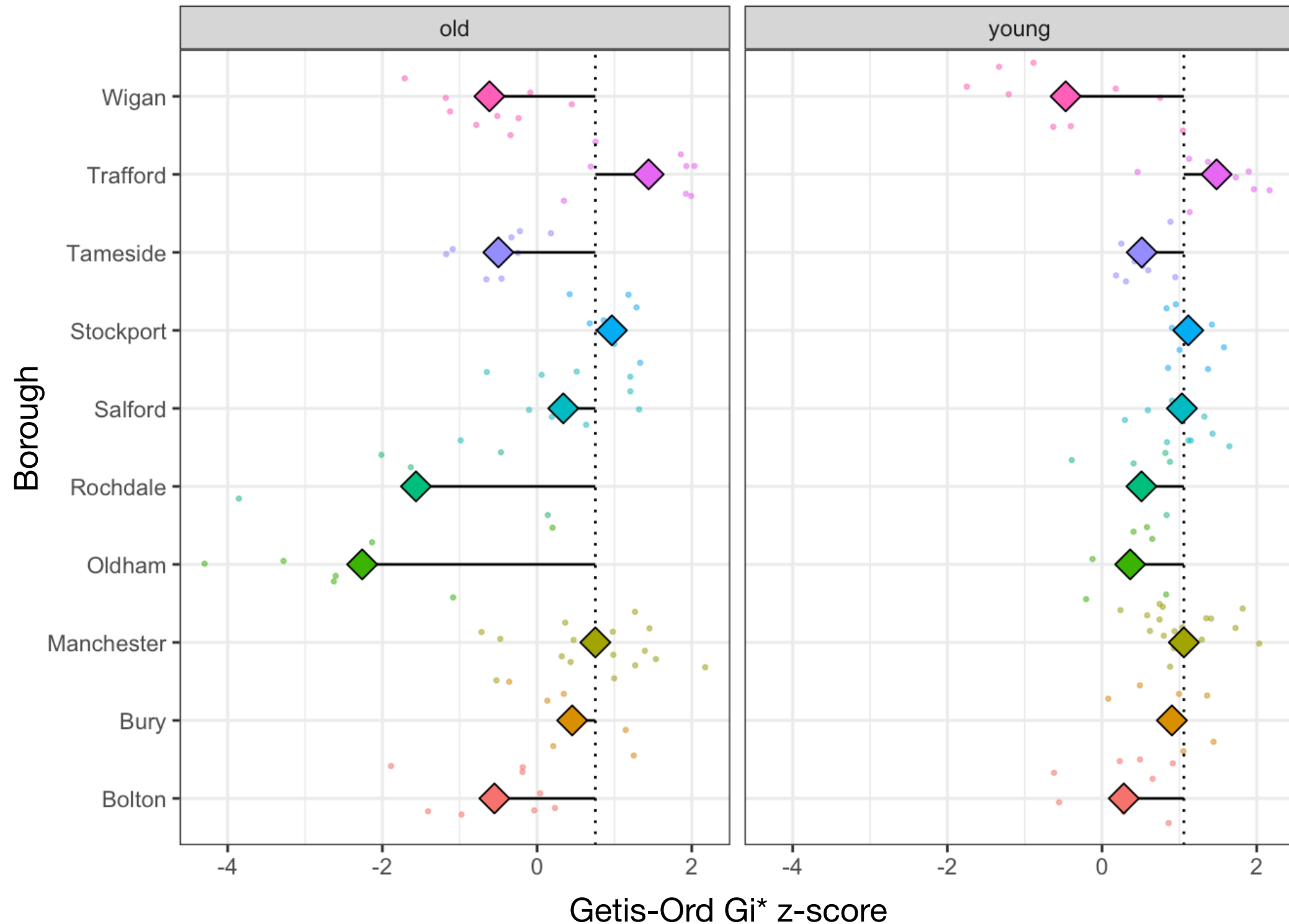
tea cake for bread roll

Previously found in the likes of Oldham and Rochdale, but again lost completely now since they became part of Greater Manchester

pre-1970 → post-1970
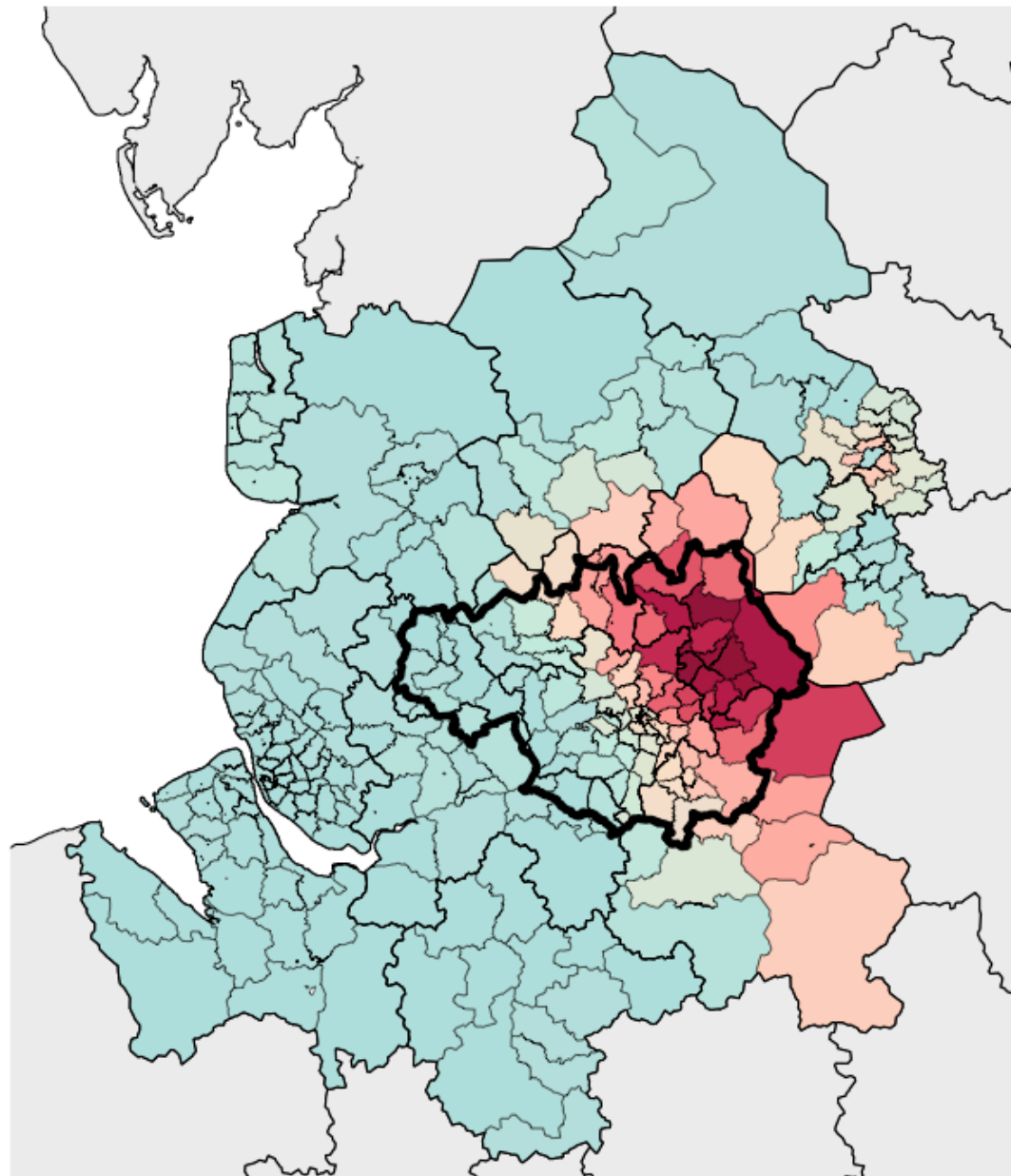
z
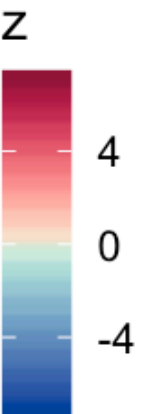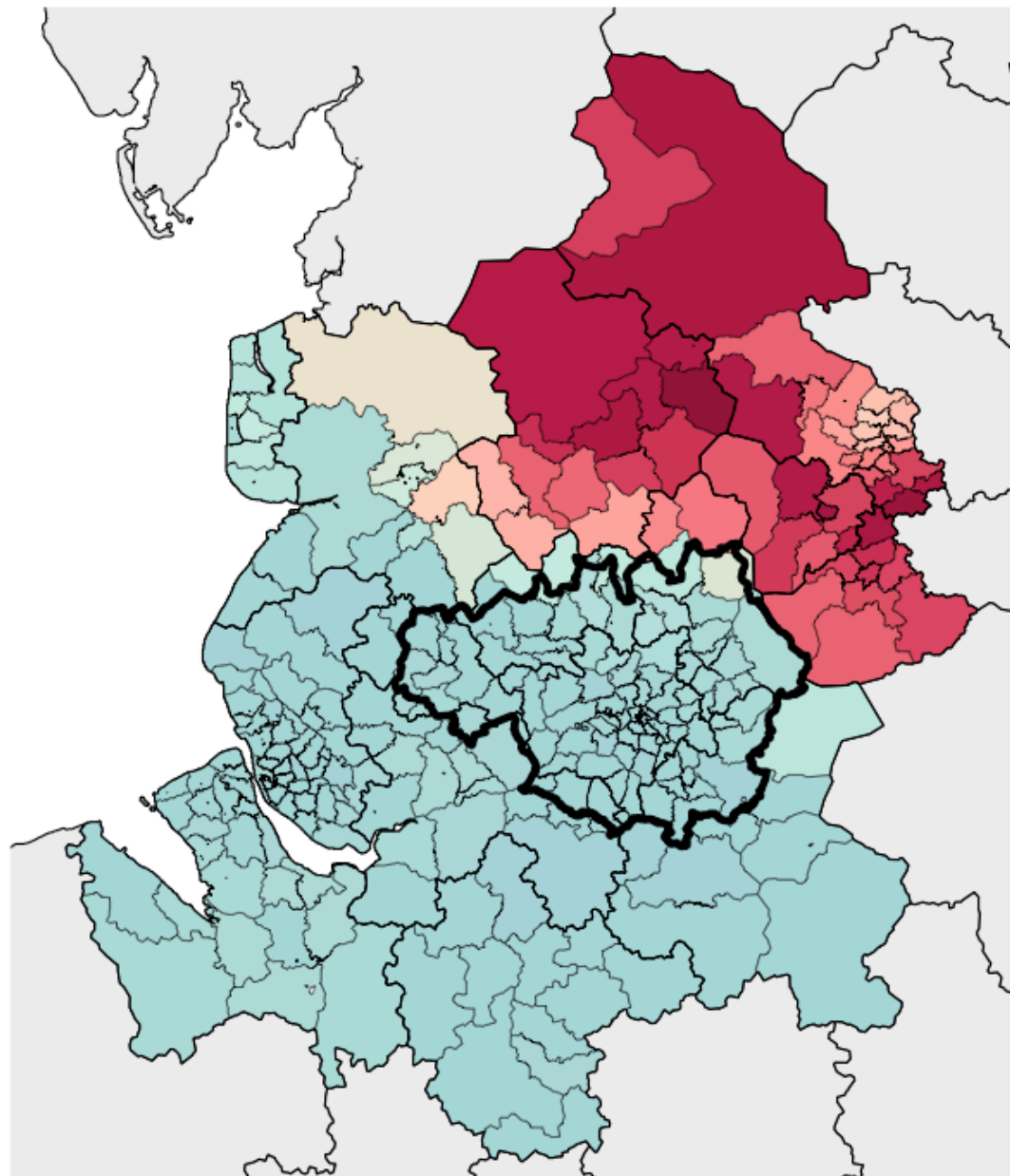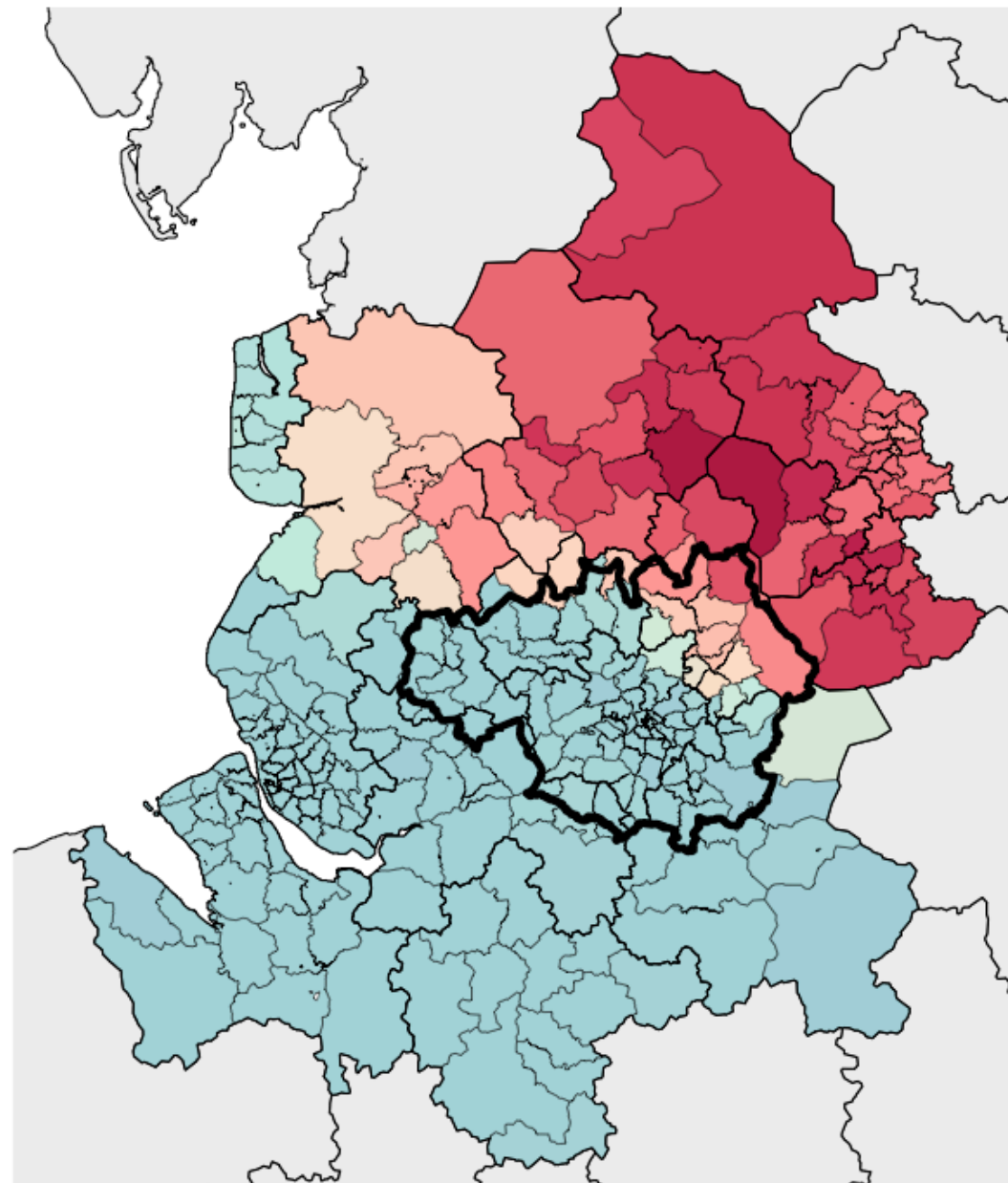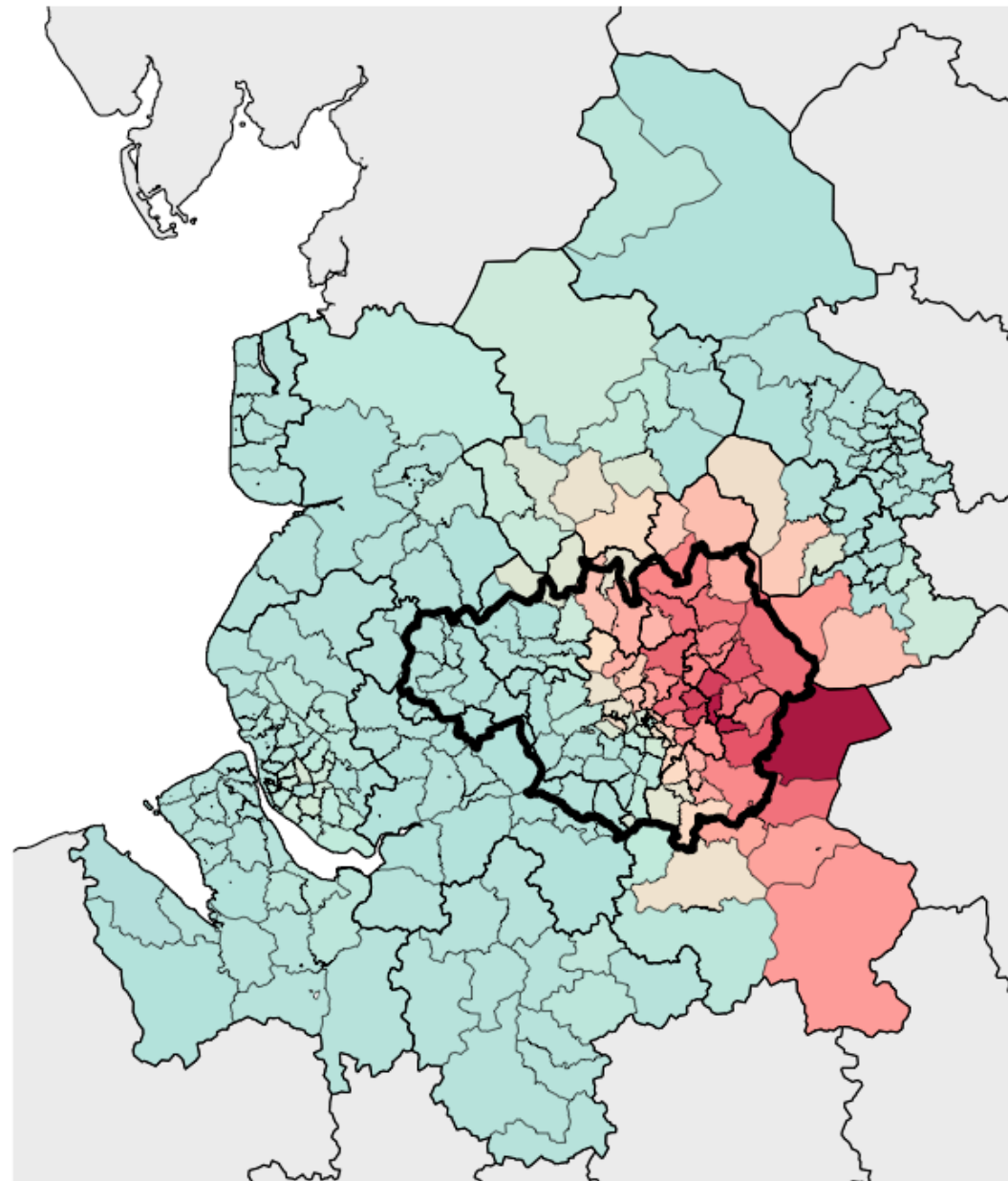
red = more *tea cake*

tea cake for bread roll
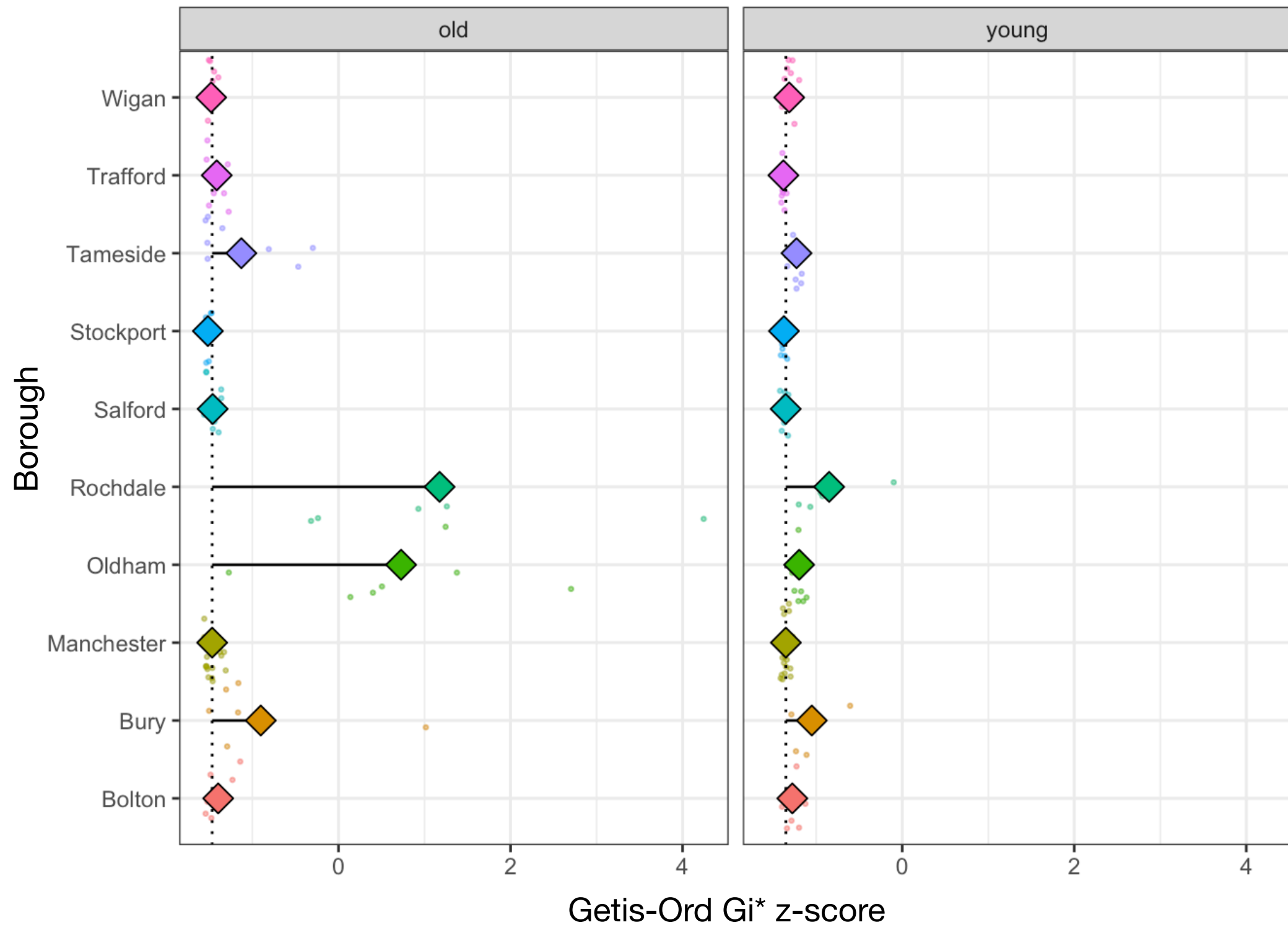
muffin for bread roll

Conversely, forms with a 'centre of gravity' closer to central Manchester remain largely stable across the county

pre-1970 → post-1970
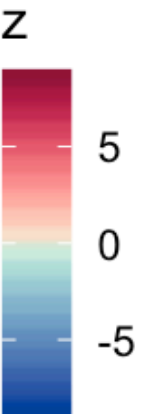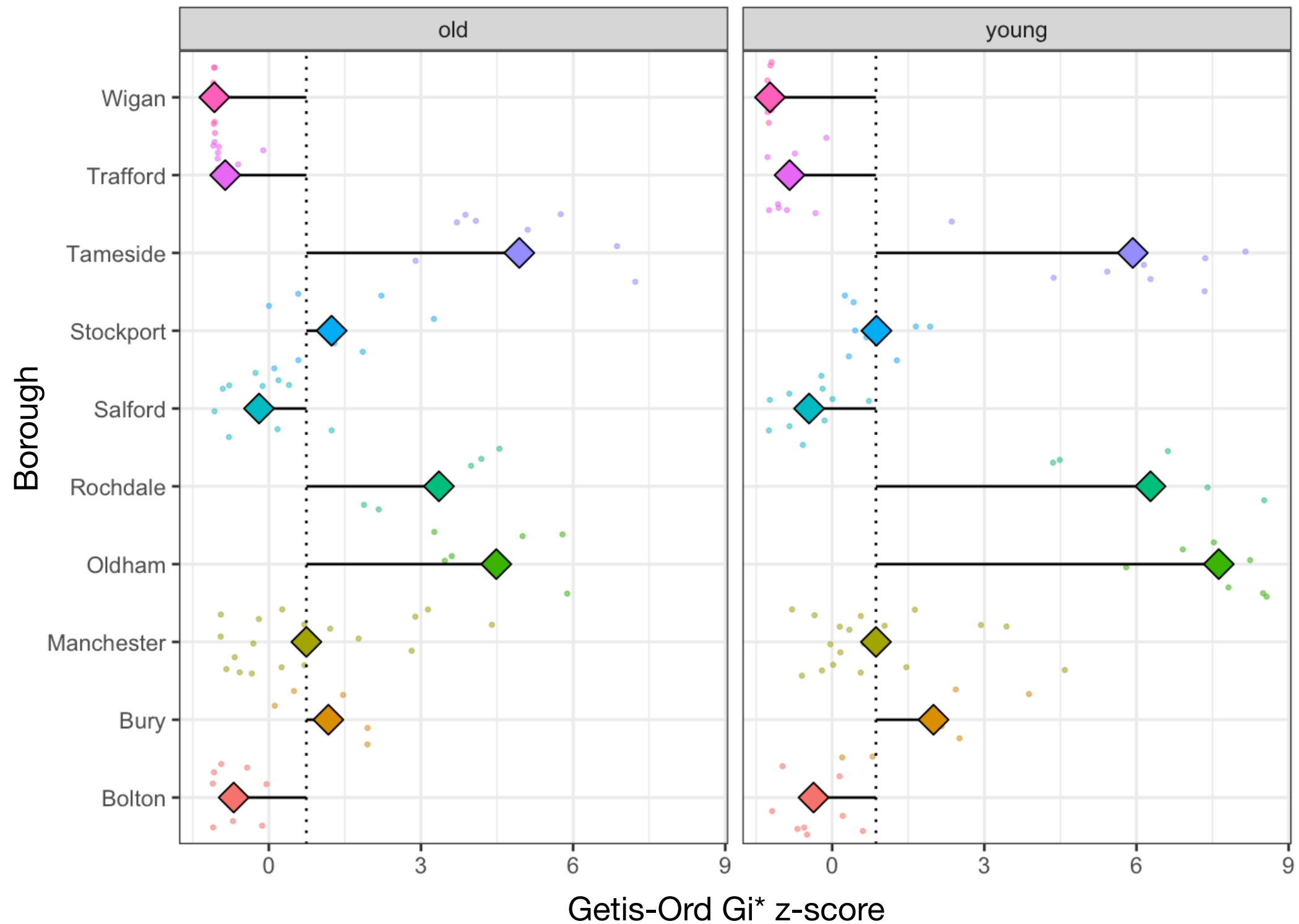

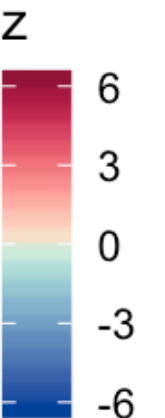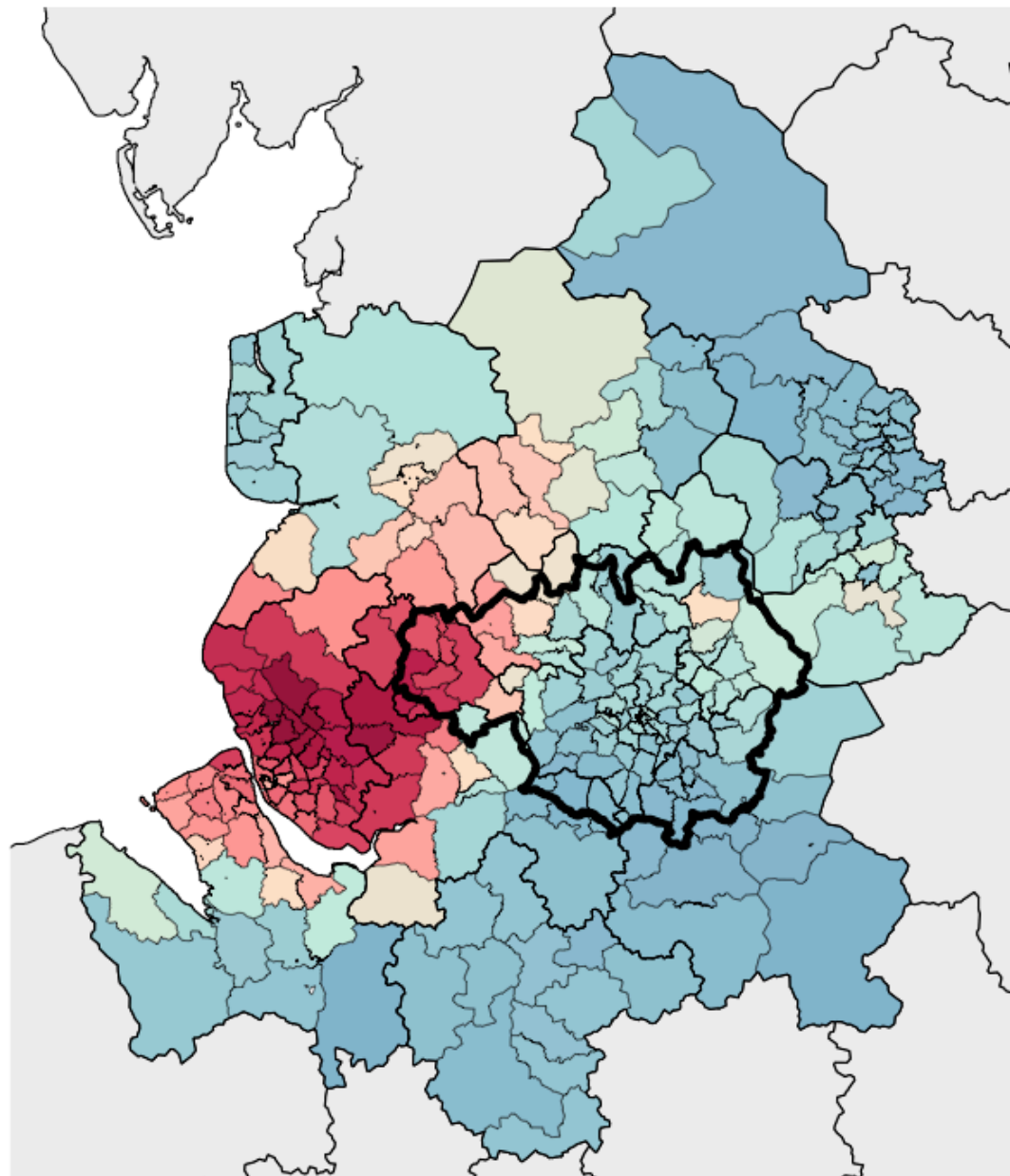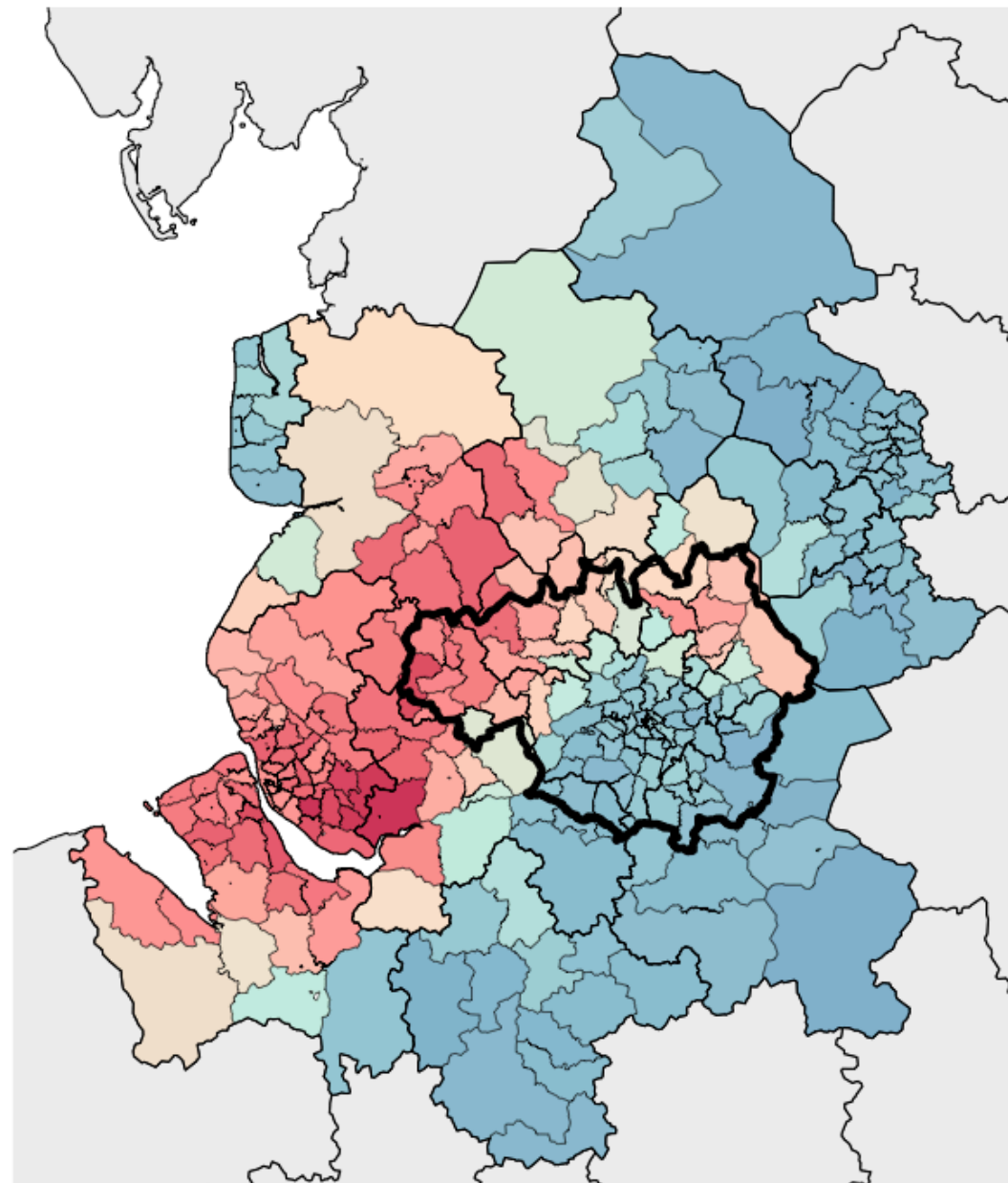**red** = more *muffin*

muffin for bread roll

NURSE–SQUARE merger

Merger appears to be retreating from parts of Greater Manchester and Lancashire → more confined and tightly clustered around Merseyside now
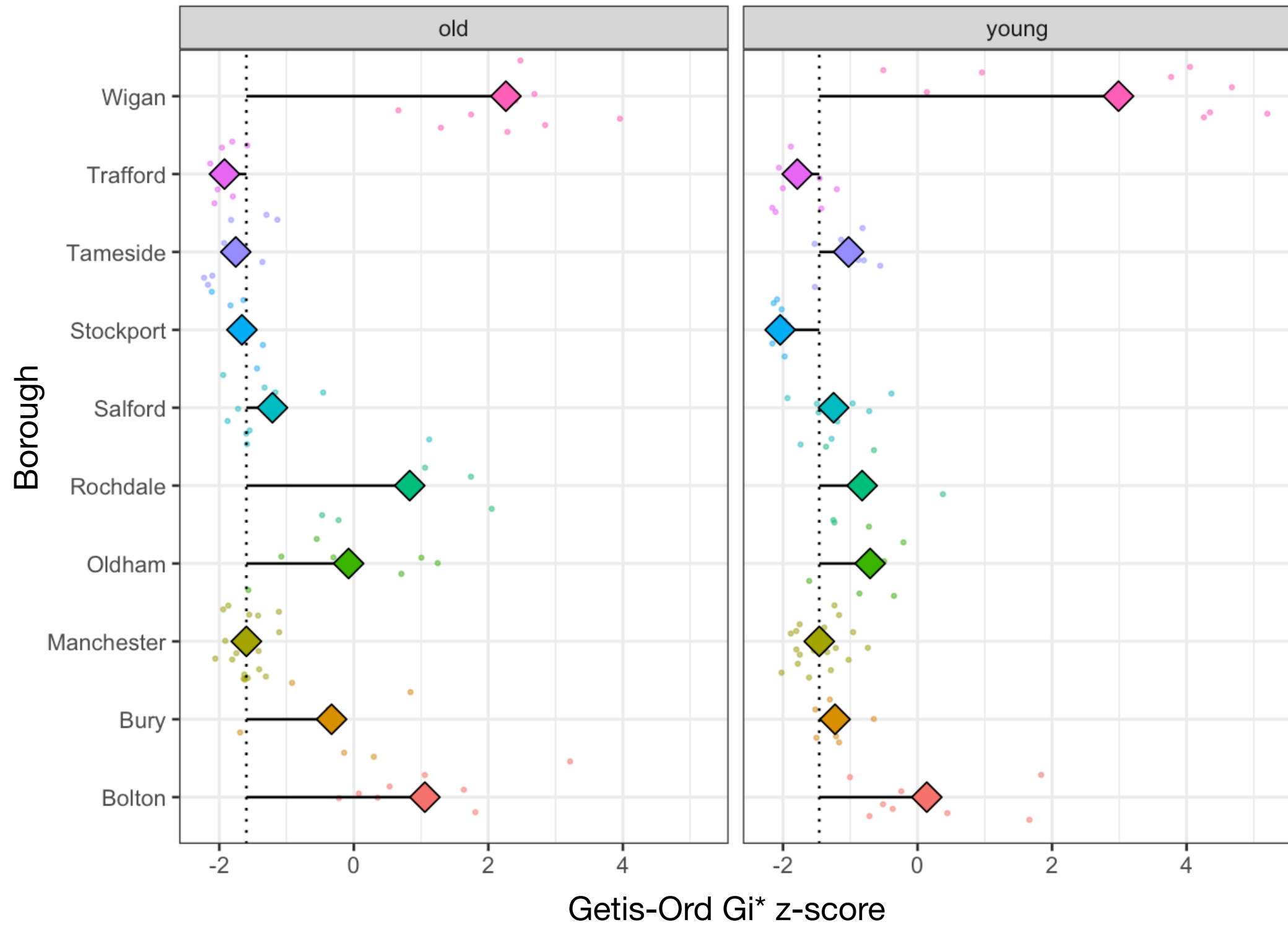
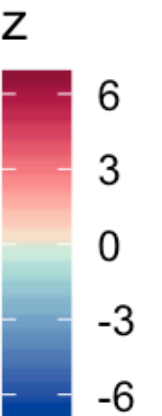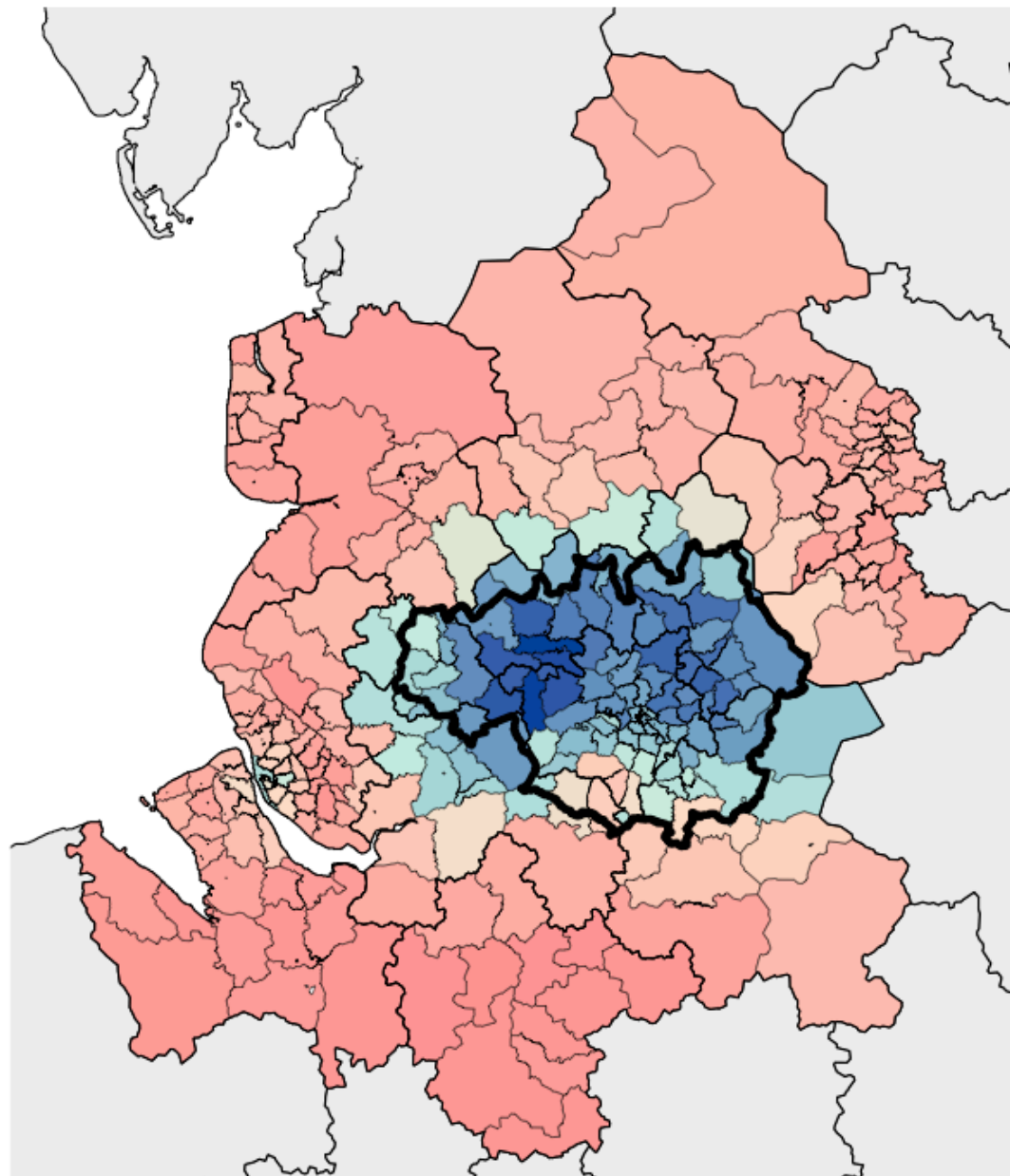pre-1970 → post-1970

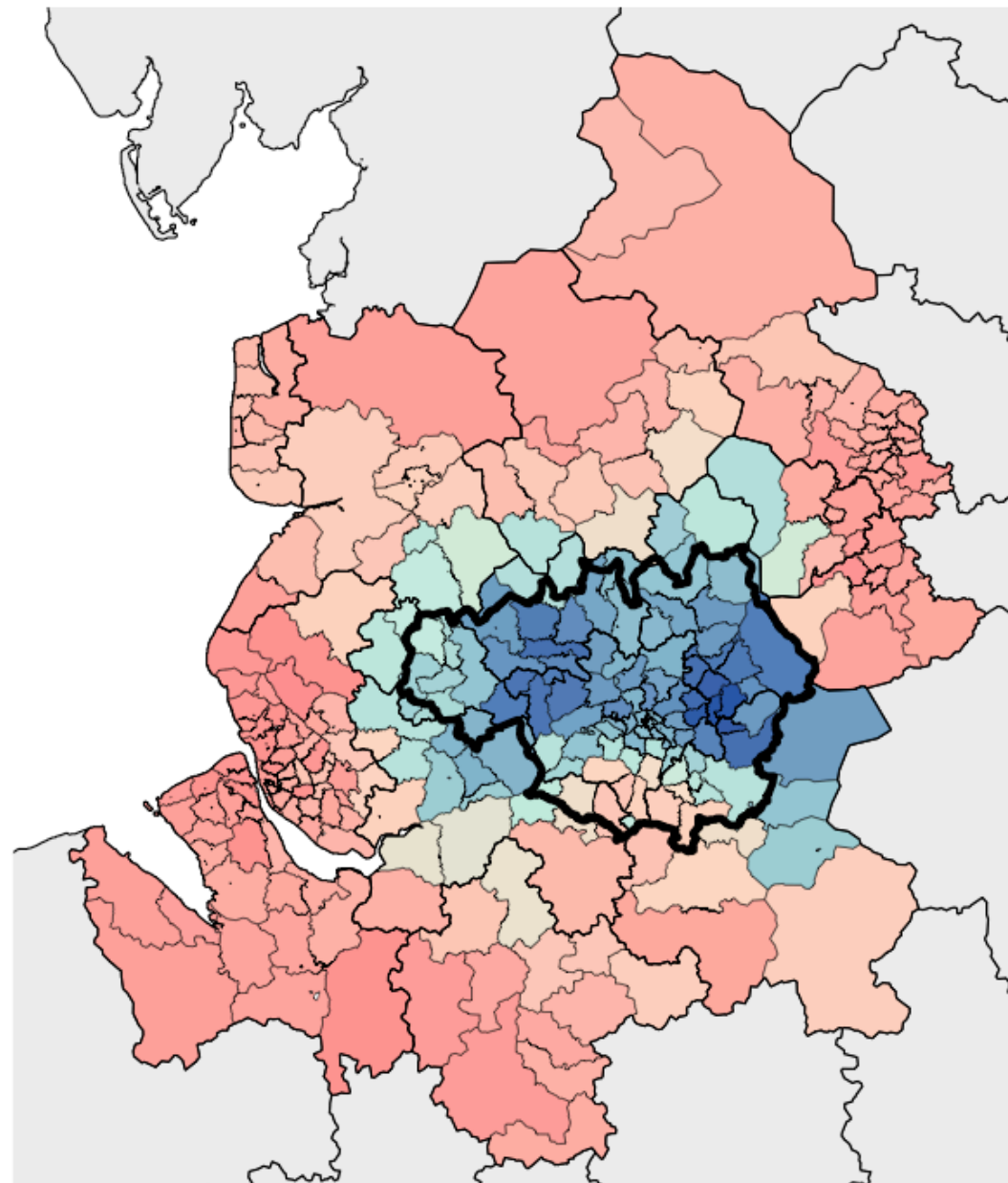red = merged

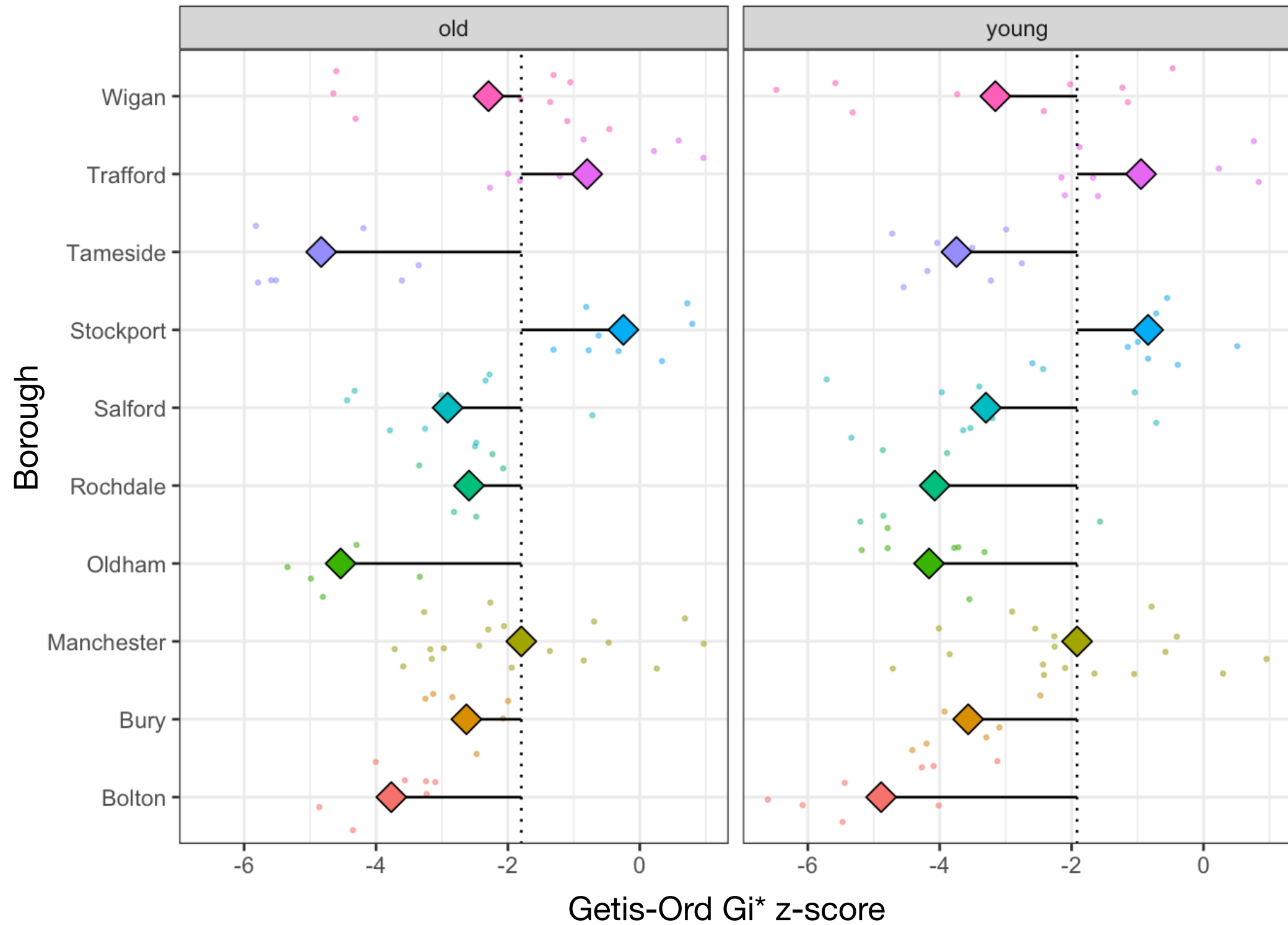# NURSE-SQUARE merger

NORTH-FORCE merger

pre-1970 → post-1970

blue = distinct

NORTH-FORCE merger

Summary

- Although some variables remain stable, there is a trend for a levelling of local accent features in the satellite towns surrounding Manchester

- Stability/change partly predicted by a variant's traditional 'centre of gravity' relative to the urban centre of Manchester

- Next steps:

  - identify 'control' regions to tease apart the effects observed here from more general dialect levelling attested across the UK (Williams & Kerswill 1999; Britain 2010; Strycharczuk et al. 2020)

  - explore the roles of contact and identity through analysis of census demographic data on migration/commuting patterns as well as attitudinal data (also social class, see Baranowski 2017)

Thanks!