

November 2023

Shifting gears on levelling up

Putting the public and
communities in the
driving seat



**More in
Common**



**power to
change**

About More in Common

More in Common is a think tank and research agency working to bridge the gap between policy makers and the public and helping people in Westminster to understand those voters who feel ignored or overlooked by those in power. Our British Seven segmentation provides a unique lens at understanding what the public think and why. We've published groundbreaking reports on a range of issues from climate and refugees to culture wars to crime. We are a full-service research agency offering polling and focus group research and are members of the British Polling Council.

About Power to Change

Power to Change is the independent trust that strengthens communities through community business. We use our experience to bring partners together to fund, grow and back community business to make places thrive. We are curious and rigorous; we do, test and learn. And we are here to support community business, whatever the challenge.

This report was commissioned by Power to Change and carried out in partnership between staff at More in Common and Power to Change. More in Common is grateful to Power to Change for commissioning this work and for their insights and perspectives throughout the research and analysis.

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Foreword

For all of the political tumult that has gripped the United Kingdom since the Brexit referendum there has been one indisputably positive development - a recognition that our social, democratic and economic settlement wasn't working.

In the years since deindustrialisation the UK had slipped into a vicious cycle where London, the South East and a handful of other cities were treated as the drivers of growth, innovation and progress and the rest of the country was expected to live on their handouts.

The result was that provincial towns fell into a spiral of neglect. Across the North and Midlands of England and parts of Scotland and Wales, young people were told that if they wanted a future they had to move away, high streets became threadbare and derelict, parks were left vandalised and local transport networks withered. The Brexit vote in 2016 was as much a rebellion by communities that felt overlooked and left behind as it was anything to do with the European Union.

It seemed politicians had got the message. Four years ago this week Boris Johnson launched his 2019 manifesto in Telford in the West Midlands with a promise to 'level up' the country. Since then, the policy has enjoyed extraordinary cut through with a level of public recognition far surpassing most Whitehall initiatives. A significant number of new Conservative voters say that it will be central to how they vote at the next election.

But if the diagnosis was correct, the delivery of levelling up has not lived up so far to its promise. The public are not unrealistic about the challenge and time scale of turning round decades of decline. They are also willing to give the Government the benefit of the doubt for lost time during the Covid-19 pandemic. But they still feel that the policy is at risk of becoming another broken promise.

The Prime Minister's Long Term Plan for Towns and the move to an endowment model of levelling up, rather than the much criticised 'begging bowl' approach to funding allocation, will have reassured some that he has not scrapped his predecessor's flagship policy. However, having also announced the end of High Speed 2 North, and with the public cynical that the money will really be reinvested into local transport projects, he has risked creating the impression that the Government no longer cares about communities north of Birmingham. If the Conservatives are to regain public trust, demonstrating a renewed commitment to levelling up is key.

Nor is levelling up solely a concern for the Conservative Party. The exodus of voters that the Labour Party suffered between 2005-2019 was driven by multiple factors, but among them was a feeling that the Party had become overly focused on metropolitan concerns, overlooking those working class voters outside of big cities. The Labour leader's own conference pledge to back community potential and respect every contribution is an

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important part of reversing that trend. But Labour still need to go further to set out their own distinctive approach to levelling up.

But the importance of levelling up matters beyond party politics. Across the country, there is a pervasive sense that nothing is working in Britain any more - three in five Britons hold that view, three quarters say things are worse now in Britain than they were in the past, and only a third say they are optimistic about Britain's future.

If levelling up becomes simply another broken promise it will do more than contribute to the pervasive sense that politicians cannot be trusted, but instead poses a threat to people's faith in our democratic system as a whole. If people don't think that their community is getting the investment, support and attention it deserves, they will either switch off or turn to populist voices who promise to upend the system.

What then can convince the public that levelling up is back on track? To answer that question, More in Common and Power to Change spent the summer talking to the public about their verdict on the delivery of levelling up to date, and what they want to see going forward.

In doing so, we have identified a series of five practical tests that should guide a levelling up reset. The public want to know that levelling up will have a direct impact on their neighbourhood and that they'll be in the driving seat of deciding what their community needs. They want to see their high streets given a chance to thrive - with more ways for community groups, businesses and elected officials to collaborate in what that looks like - rather than a top down approach from local and central Government. They want parks and green spaces, that became a haven to many during the pandemic, to be properly looked after and maintained. And above all, they want to make sure that any new investments are respected and protected for the community, with anti-social behaviour and vandalism tackled and deterred.

All of which is to say that the next stage of levelling up should be thought of less as a central government initiative delivered by local government, and instead an approach that combines top down support, funding and expertise, with bottom up community knowledge and enthusiasm.

Such an approach could finally unlock the full potential of the levelling up agenda and convince a cynical public that their concerns have not just been heard, but are now at last being addressed. There is a clear political prize for the party that can best demonstrate it has a plan to do this, but an even greater prize for the state of our democracy and social fabric for demonstrating the system can and does deliver for every community.

Executive Summary

Public support for levelling up

Seven in ten Britons (71 per cent) have heard of levelling up and more than two in five Britons (43 per cent) can explain what it means. Around two in five Britons (38 per cent) say levelling up should be either the 'top priority' or one of the 'top priorities' of the government—this prioritisation of levelling up commands strong support across the political spectrum.

The importance of delivering on levelling up

The proportion of Britons who believe that their local area is neglected has remained unchanged since 2021 — stuck at 42 per cent. That more than two in five Britons describe their area as neglected has significant implications for economic growth, trust in politics and social cohesion.

When asked to describe Britain in 2023 in a word, the public's overwhelming response is 'Broken'. When asked to describe their local area in a word, the public's responses are much more positive. The localisation (or hyper-localisation) that is at the heart of the levelling up agenda provides an opportunity to inject hope, optimism and a sense of purpose back into British politics and debates about the future of our country and communities.

Lessons should be learnt from the scrapping of the Birmingham to Manchester leg of High Speed Rail 2 (HS2). Most of the public (71 per cent) don't expect the money saved from scrapping HS2 Birmingham-Manchester will be used on local transport projects - but there is a danger of the wrong lessons being learned from HS2. HS2 has never been a popular project and the public prioritise local road, bus and rail projects over major national infrastructure projects. Instead, the scrapping of HS2 should be a lesson in the danger of broken or undelivered promises - particularly whenever offering alternatives that voters don't buy or think are too far off.

The votes to be won on levelling up

The next election will be a referendum on politicians' plans to fix 'Broken Britain'. Alongside the cost of living, NHS and the immigration system, levelling up will form a core part of how voters make their choice. Around half the public (47 per cent) say the government's record on levelling up will play a role in how they vote at the next General election - even higher for Red Wall (Loyal National) voters.

The perception of a failure to deliver levelling up is a key reason why the Conservatives are bleeding voters to other parties. When asked why they've switched to other parties, lack of delivery on 'levelling up' comes fourth after failures on small boats, NHS waiting lists and general government incompetence.

Labour is more trusted than the Conservatives to deliver on levelling up (holding a 19-point lead) - but more work is needed from Labour to show how they can deliver their own vision of levelling up. If Labour abandons the levelling up agenda due to its cautious approach to pre-election public finances, there is a risk that they miss the moment and show they haven't learnt from the mistakes of previous Labour governments who were perceived to have neglected these areas.

Five tests to shift gear on levelling up

From *More in Common* and *Power to Change's* research, five tests emerge for how the public will judge the success or failure of any reset of the levelling up agenda.

Test 1: Does levelling up have an impact in my neighbourhood?

The public's expectations for levelling up are hyper-local. Those who rank levelling up as a top government priority are more likely to think of their local area at the hyper-local level. A hyper-local focus for the levelling up agenda can also be an opportunity to restore pride in local areas. To do this, however, the investment model needs to be the right one. There is much to be welcomed in the Long-Term Plan for Towns endowment style funding support model, but its scope needs to be expanded further.

Test 2: Does levelling up put local communities in the driving seat?

The public think that when local people are given more of a say - change is more likely to happen and it is more likely to be the right sort of change. Seven in ten Britons think that local and national governments do not give residents and community groups the freedom to bring about improvements in their local area. Creative and novel ways are needed to empower local communities at the hyper-local level to work together to improve their local community.

A serious commitment to putting local communities in the driving seat means giving communities some power to control investment and shape local budgets. The public are more than 11 times more likely to think that participatory budgeting is a good idea (68 per cent) than a bad idea (six per cent).

Community businesses can be a key vehicle to drive forward improvements and regeneration at the local level. Almost half of community businesses (48 per cent) operate in the the 30 per cent of the most deprived areas in England, they employ local staff and community-owned spaces and contribute £220 million to the UK economy. The concept is supported by the public - four in five Britons like the idea of a 'community business' and see community business leaders as decent people looking to do good in their community.

Test 3: Does levelling up give my local high street its future back?

For many people, nothing epitomises local neglect more than the state of their local high street. High streets matter to the public because they form the backbone of community life. While the challenges facing high streets from an oversupply of retail space, out-of-town shopping centres and online shopping are clear, so too is the centrality of the high street to how the public view the success or failure of levelling up.

More work is needed to imagine what the future of a non-retailed dominated high street looks like in communities across the country. Giving local communities the power to improve high streets for themselves through a community right to buy property on the high street, along with a buyout fund to support purchasing those properties, is exactly the kind of policy that can put communities in the driving and help them build high streets that respond better to their needs and expectations - and is one that also commands broad public support.

Test 4: Does levelling up protect our local parks and green spaces?

Parks and green spaces are what Britons say make them proud of their local areas. The public want a greater focus on local parks in their neighbourhood rather than just bigger parks in town centres. They want a return to basics which focuses on children's play areas and tackling safety and vandalism before focusing on art installations. They also trust local community groups rather than local councils to decide what should be in local parks and green spaces by a margin of 2:1.

Test 5: Does levelling up help my community to help safer?

The public identify tackling crime and anti-social behaviour as the route to turning around their communities. Most people (54 per cent) don't trust the police to tackle crime locally. The public tell us that feeling safe in your local area and not having to worry about crime on or beyond your doorstep are basic prerequisites for feeling pride in place, and necessary precursors for any successful levelling up agenda.

Policy Recommendations

To meet these tests, Power to Change has devised a series of policy recommendations to better respond to the public's hyper-local expectations on levelling up:

- **Establish Community Covenants** - Community Covenants are a neighbourhood level decision-making structure through which local people and community organisations could take on powers (including the power to allocate resources) that affect their local area.

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- **Introduce a Community Right to Shape Public Services** - A Community Right to Shape Public Services would allow communities to trigger a joint review of a local services alongside providers, service users and local community organisations
- **Back community businesses by introducing a business rates relief** - Business rates relief could be expanded to provide rates relief for community businesses of 75 per cent, financed by closing the 'box shifting' loophole that leads to £250m of business rates revenue being lost each year and contributes to high street vacancy.
- **Introduce a Community Right to Buy** - A Community Right to Buy would expand the Right to Bid by giving community organisations more time to raise funds and introduce a right of first refusal so that if the community raises the required funds, judged by an independent valuator, they would be able to purchase the asset without competition.
- **Establish a British High Streets Investment Vehicle** - This vehicle would purchase vacant high street property to transfer into community ownership over time. Leveraging £250 million in commercial and social investment to restore 200 strategically important high street assets across England

This report uses More in Common's British Seven segments. Those segments are:

- **Progressive Activists:** A passionate and vocal group for whom politics is at the core of their identity, and who seek to correct the historic marginalisation of groups based on their race, gender, sexuality, wealth, and other forms of privilege. They are politically engaged, critical, opinionated, frustrated, cosmopolitan, and environmentally conscious.
- **Civic Pragmatists:** A group that cares about others, at home or abroad, and who are turned off by the divisiveness of politics. They are charitable, concerned, exhausted, community-minded, open to compromise, and socially liberal.
- **Disengaged Battlers:** A group that feels that they are just keeping their heads above water, and who blame the system for its unfairness. They are tolerant, insecure, disillusioned, disconnected, overlooked, and socially liberal.
- **Established Liberals:** A group that has done well and means well towards others, but also sees a lot of good in the status quo. They are comfortable, privileged, cosmopolitan, trusting, confident, and pro-market.
- **Loyal Nationals:** A group that is anxious about the threats facing Britain and facing themselves. They are proud, patriotic, tribal, protective, threatened, aggrieved, and frustrated about the gap between the haves and the have-nots.
- **Disengaged Traditionalists:** A group that values a well-ordered society, takes pride in hard work, and wants strong leadership that keeps people in line. They are self-reliant, ordered, patriotic, tough-minded, suspicious, and disconnected.
- **Backbone Conservatives:** A group who are proud of their country, optimistic about Britain's future and who follow the news, mostly via traditional media sources. They are nostalgic, patriotic, proud, secure, confident, and engaged with politics.

More detail about the British Seven segments is found in Annex A

Section 1: The public’s verdict on levelling up

Strong support for the levelling up agenda

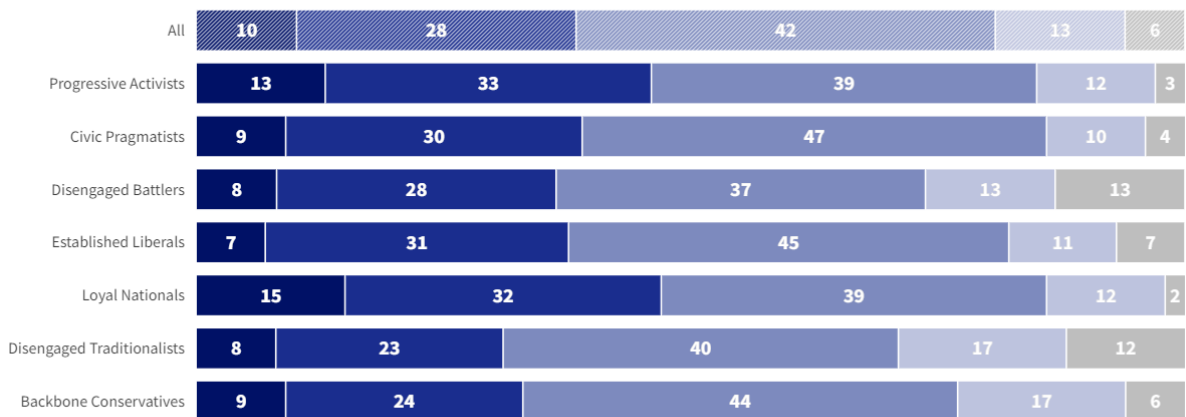
Four years on from the Conservative’s 2019 manifesto commitment to level up left-behind parts of the country, public support for the agenda remains strong. Around two in five Britons (38 per cent) say levelling up should be either the ‘top priority’ or one of the ‘top priorities’ of the government, only slightly down from the 42 per cent who said the same in 2021. Only 13 per cent think that it should not be a priority at all. That levelling up continues to be so important to the public is all the more striking in the context of the cost of living crisis, post-pandemic waiting lists and significant public concern about the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East.

Levelling up is also unique in that unlike many other policy agendas which divide public opinion, support for the government’s prioritisation of levelling up commands strong support across the political spectrum – particularly among the Loyal National segment (the group of socially conservative voters who switched from Labour to the Conservatives in 2019 delivering their victories in the Red Wall) – the key swing group heading into the next election.

Two in five think levelling up should be a top government priority - largely consistent for last 2 years

Support is highest among Progressive Activists and Loyal Nationals

How much of a priority should levelling up be for the government when considered against other priorities such as the NHS, or Education? ● The top priority ● One of the top priorities ● One of many priorities for the Government ● A fairly low priority ● Don't know



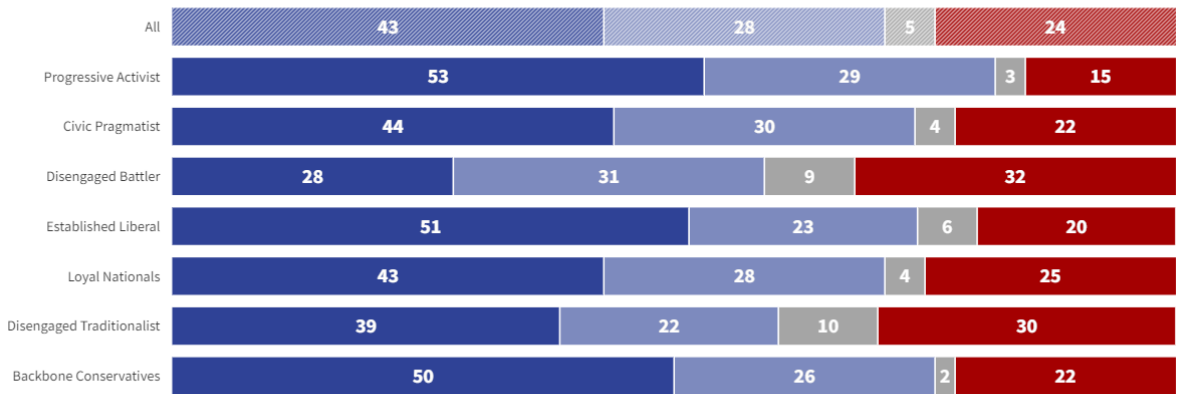
Source: More in Common, July 2023

Remarkable cut through for the levelling up agenda

In More in Common’s polling and focus group conversations over the past three years, the levelling up agenda has had a striking degree of cut through – far more than most Whitehall policy initiatives. Seven in ten Britons (71 per cent) have heard of levelling up and more than two in five Britons (43 per cent) could explain what it meant.

Seven in ten Britons have heard of levelling up - remarkable cut through for a government policy agenda

Have you heard of the term ‘levelling up’? ● Yes - I've heard it and know what it means ● Yes - I've heard it but don't know what it means ● Don't Know ● No - I haven't heard of it



Source: More in Common, November 2021

In focus group conversations it is clear that the levelling up agenda makes sense to voters – particularly those in the North and Midlands. Many Brexit voters explain that their vote in 2016 was not only a vote to leave the European Union but was also a way for them to express their dissatisfaction with a status quo that had neglected their communities, leaving them to decline. The levelling up agenda is the right response to that dissatisfaction. And although these voters are reserving judgement on levelling up until they see tangible improvements in their community, they think that politicians spending more time talking about regenerating their local area, park, or high street, and fixing an economy that focuses too much on London is long overdue.

In their own words... what is 'levelling up'?

Levelling up to me means looking at the inequality between the North and the South, wherever you draw that line. Trying to make better opportunities for people that live in the North. Better transport connections, a better standard of living, higher wages. That'd be nice... And if we're truly talking about levelling up then there's got to be better transport across the Pennines north, east to west. It's not just a case of everything flowing into London, Birmingham, the big centres in the Midlands and the South

Shirley, Loyal National, Stoke

I think like everything else it's going to take some time. I haven't seen no change in my area as of yet, but if it's going to make some, I'd definitely welcome them

Kira, Established Liberal, Gloucester

I always imagined levelling up was helping the infrastructure and creating more jobs and more equal pay compared to down south really. As I was saying, it's coming in bits and bobs. There is lots of talking about it, very little action at the moment. And I think like you say, it's down to money, isn't it?

Prav, Loyal National, Hartlepool

I mean the whole point of levelling up is that the suburbs or the areas in the local town get the majority of money or investment, not necessarily just through money, but for other means to bring them up to certain levels. So there should be a way that it's means tested to be invested in the correct areas

Ashley, Civic Pragmatist, Gloucester

The remarkable level of cut through of the levelling up agenda is not without risk. The damage to trust in politics, some of which is already evidenced by a failure to deliver, or worse, that the Government never really meant to deliver, could be significant.

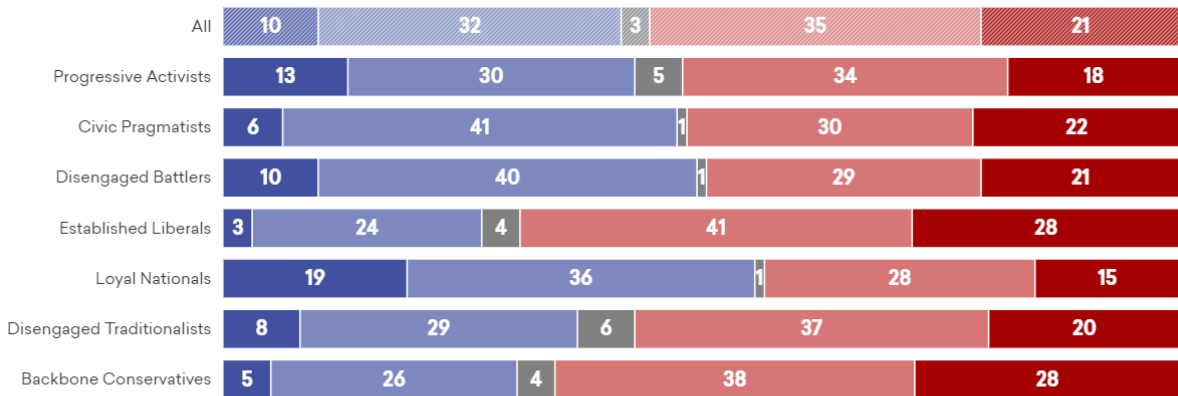
The importance of delivering on levelling up

Despite the cut through and strong support for the levelling up agenda and some popular individual local investment and regeneration projects, many Britons don't feel they have yet seen enough tangible changes and improvements from the policy.

The proportion of Britons who believe that their local area is neglected has remained unchanged since 2021 – stuck stubbornly at 42 per cent. That more than two in five Britons describe their area as neglected has significant implications for economic growth, trust in politics and social cohesion.

Two in five think their area is neglected - though major differences between Red Wall and Blue Wall voters

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The area where I live is neglected



Source: More in Common, July 2023

Feelings of community neglect have a number of different drivers. Socio-economic factors play a large role – Disengaged Battlers (the most economically deprived of the segments) are more likely to say their area is neglected, while wealthier segments (such as the Established Liberals) are the least likely to see their area as neglected. Age also plays a role with younger people more likely to say their area is neglected – millennials are more than twice as likely (52 per cent hold this view) than those aged over 75 (only 24 per cent hold this view). For many young people that sense of neglect manifests itself in few good employment opportunities in their area and the feeling that they have to move away to get ahead.

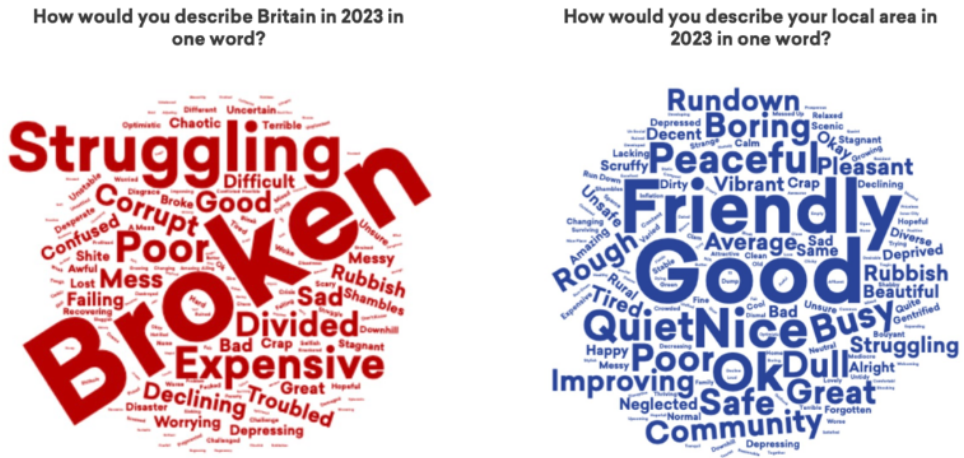
Social psychology also shapes feelings of neglect. Loyal Nationals (a good proxy for typical “Red Wall” voters) are the most likely to say their area is neglected, while Established Liberals (a good proxy for “Blue Wall” voters) are least likely to say their area is neglected. The key distinguishing characteristic of these segments is threat perception – Loyal Nationals have the highest threat perception of any segment, while Established Liberals have the lowest. For the levelling up agenda to be successful this high-threat perception group needs their local communities to feel safer and more secure.

Failure to tackle and cut those feelings of neglect also reinforces the view among the public that nothing works in Britain any more. Three in five Britons (58 per cent) say that “nothing in Britain works any more”, three quarters (76 per cent) that “things in Britain are worse now than they were in the past”, and only a third (30 per cent) are optimistic about the future of

Britain.¹ If the promises that politicians made to voters on levelling up are diluted or forgotten about, it will only intensify those feelings of pessimism.

However, people are much more positive about their local area than Britain as a whole. When asked to describe Britain in 2023 in a word, the public’s overwhelming response is ‘Broken’. When asked to describe their local area in a word, the public’s responses are much more positive.

Britons are pessimistic about the country, but more positive about their local area



Source: More in Common

The localisation (or hyper-localisation) that is at the heart of the levelling up agenda provides a major opportunity to inject hope, optimism and a sense of purpose back into British politics and debates about the future of our country and communities. As such, levelling up will be far more credible if it is locally rooted and delivered by trusted local leaders. However, grasping that opportunity of local optimism requires a credible and thorough plan to tackle feelings of local neglect.

¹ More in Common polling for the New Britain project, May 2023

Learning lessons from the scrapping of HS2

In addition to recognising the importance of levelling up, the government should learn from the mistakes it has made on levelling up over the last few years. The recent decision to scrap the Birmingham–Manchester leg of High Speed 2 rail (HS2) is a case in point. HS2 has never been a particularly popular project and pre-cancellation the public were evenly divided on whether the Birmingham–Manchester leg of HS2 should be scrapped. Although voters in the North West who would have benefited most from the Birmingham–Manchester leg were supportive, the public generally tend to prioritise more investment in local roads, buses and regional rail projects rather than large-scale infrastructure projects such as HS2 with large budgets and delivery dates far in the future.

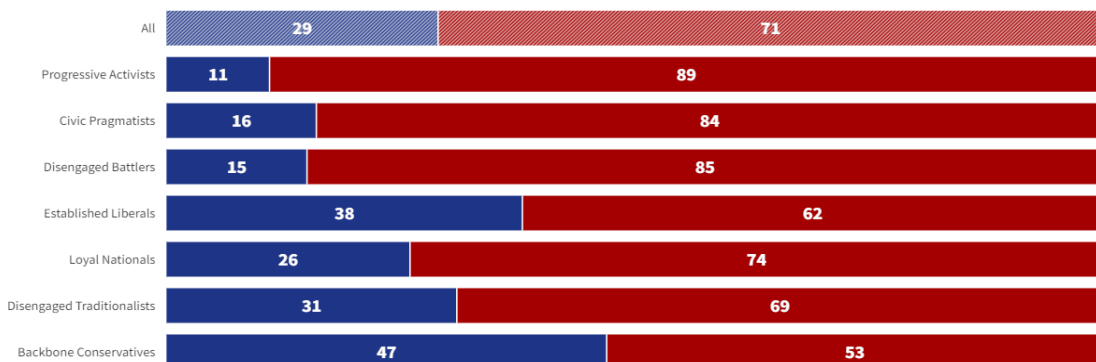
However, there are broader lessons to be learned about the risks of the government rowing back on its promises. The message that the public took when the HS2 project was cancelled was not that this was a re-prioritisation of investment towards local transport projects, but instead that the Government didn't care about the North. The subsequently promised projects were either seen as too far in the future to be credible or likely to become just another broken promise. In fact, seven in ten Britons do not believe that money saved from scrapping the northern leg of HS2 will end up being spent on the promised Network North improvements.

If any levelling up reset is to meet the public's expectations, it needs to be locally rooted for it to feel close and relevant to those voters in communities which feel the most deprived. It also needs to be on a timescale that people think will benefit them.

Most don't think money saved from HS2 scrapping will be invested in Network North

At the Conservative Party Conference the Prime Minister announced that the High Speed 2 (HS2) rail link between Birmingham and Manchester would be scrapped, and committed to reinvesting the £36 billion expected cost in improving local transport. Which comes closest to your view?

- I believe that the money from scrapping High Speed 2 will end up being invested in local transport links
- I don't believe the money from scrapping High Speed 2 will end up being invested in local transport links



Section 2: The politics of levelling up

Given the popularity of the levelling up agenda and the imperative to see it delivered how might it factor into the next General Election?

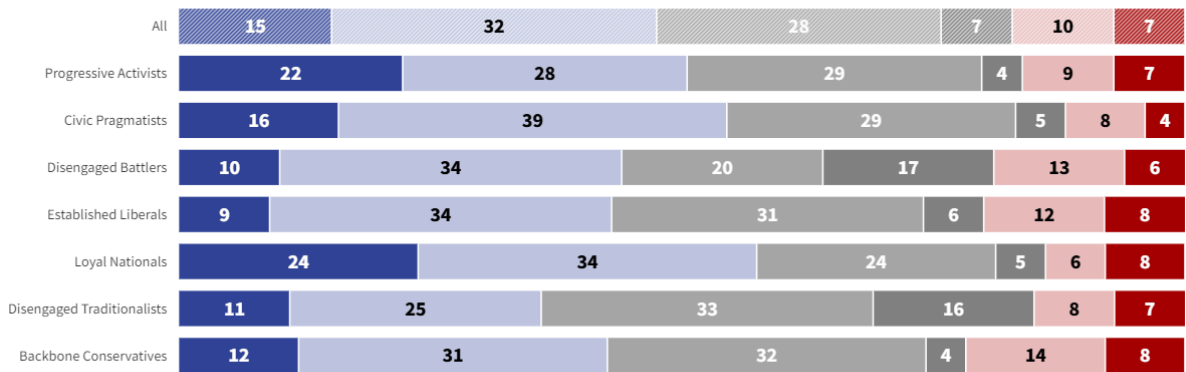
Votes to be won on levelling up

If the 2019 election was about responding to voters dissatisfaction with the status quo, the 2024 election will be a referendum on the parties’ plans to fix Broken Britain. Along with the cost of living, the NHS and the immigration system, the Government’s record and Labour’s plans on levelling up will form a core part of how voters make that judgement. Around half the public (47 per cent) say the government’s record on levelling up will play a role in how they vote at the next General election – even higher for typical Red Wall voters (Loyal Nationals) who are key to Labour’s path to power or for any prospect of a Conservative bounce back ahead of the next general election.

Almost half say government's record on levelling up will influence how they vote at the next general election - even higher among Red Wall voters

How important will the Government’s record of delivery on its promise to “level up” the country be to your decision on what party you vote for at the next general election?

● Very important ● Important ● Neither important nor unimportant ● Don’t know ● Unimportant ● Very unimportant



Source: More in Common, July 2023

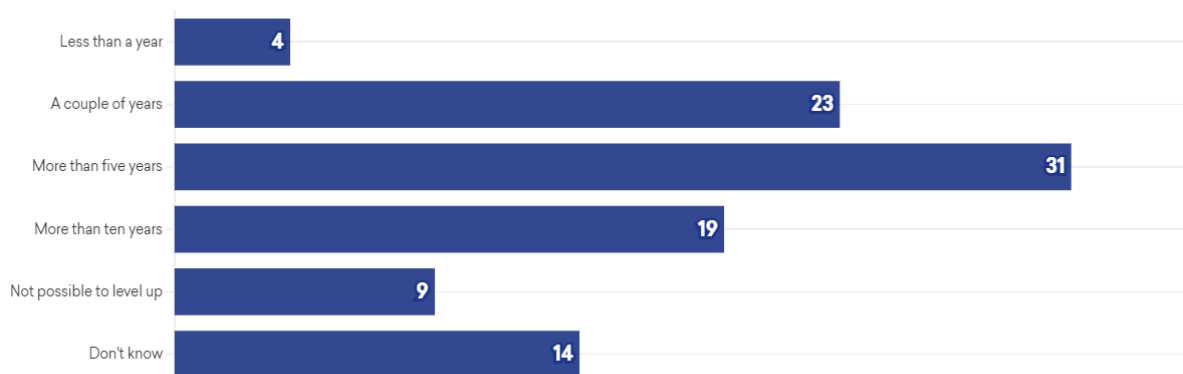
What’s more, those voters who are not yet feeling the benefits of levelling up are more likely to be turning away from the Government. 2019 Conservative voters who say their area is neglected are less likely than other Conservative voters to say they will stick with the party at the next election (37 per cent of this group intend to turn away from the Conservatives at the next election compared to only 27 per cent of those who don’t). Both the context to levelling up, and the promise of levelling up, will shape who voters will support at the next general election.

The timescale for levelling up

While the public want to see plans that can be delivered quickly and make a tangible difference to their communities, they don't think it is realistic to expect the problems that their communities' face to be fixed overnight. Instead, what they want to see from the government is a clear plan on how their community will start improving soon and some tangible, hyper-local signs that those improvements are on their way. From Labour, they expect an outline of how they would do a better job, avoiding the mistakes of past governments that focused too much on the priorities of metropolitan cities and honesty about when any alternative plan could be delivered.

The public think levelling up will take some time

Levelling up means raising living standards, improving public services and restoring pride in areas that feel left behind across the country. How long do you think it will take to 'level up' areas that feel left behind or neglected?



Source: More in Common, November 2021

While there is clearly a shared impetus for both main parties to set out a clear and convincing plan on levelling up, there are also distinct challenges and opportunities that each party faces in how it manages the politics of levelling up in the lead up to the general election.

The Conservative Party and levelling up

The 2019 Conservative Coalition was a broad but often disparate one, brought together by the promise of ending all-consuming debates about Brexit and stopping Jeremy Corbyn. Reuniting that coalition is not easy, but levelling up is one of the few policies that manages to do so.

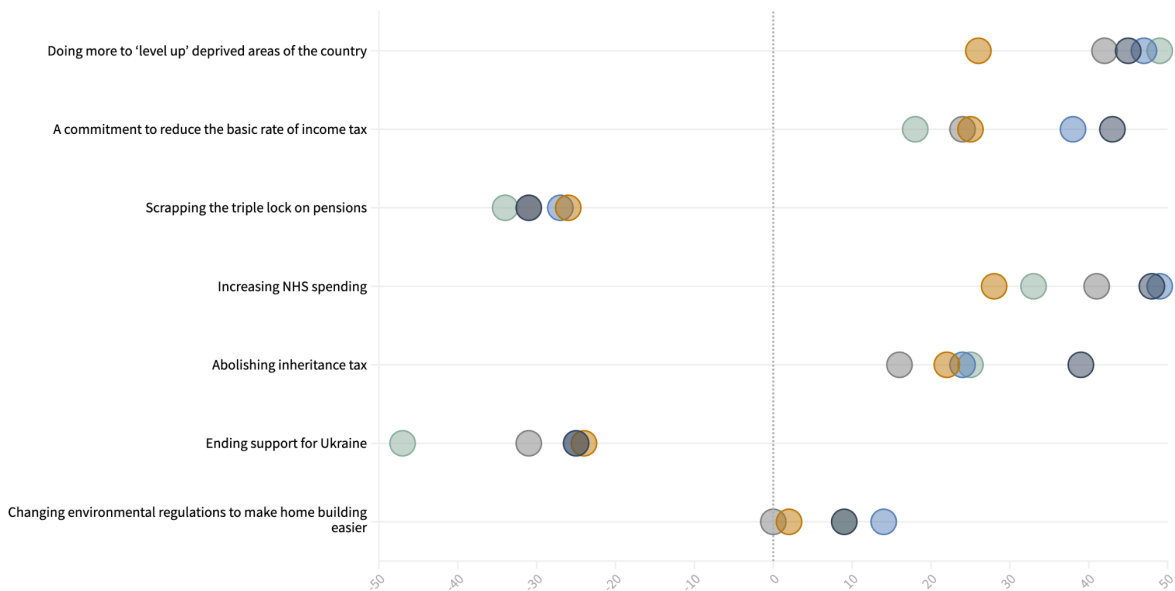
Shifting gears on levelling up

Doubling down on the levelling up agenda — telling the story on what has been delivered and what needs to be delivered next — is the closest thing that the Conservatives have to a silver bullet to unite their electoral coalition. Of a whole series of manifesto policies tested, the levelling up policy was the manifesto policy most likely to make voters more likely to vote Conservative and to attract support from across the different wings of the 2019 Coalition.

Levelling up is the closest thing the Conservatives have to an electoral silver bullet

Thinking about each of the following potential manifesto commitments, do they make you more or less likely to vote for the Conservative Party?

● All ● Established Liberals ● Loyal Nationals ● Disengaged Traditionalists ● Backbone Conservatives

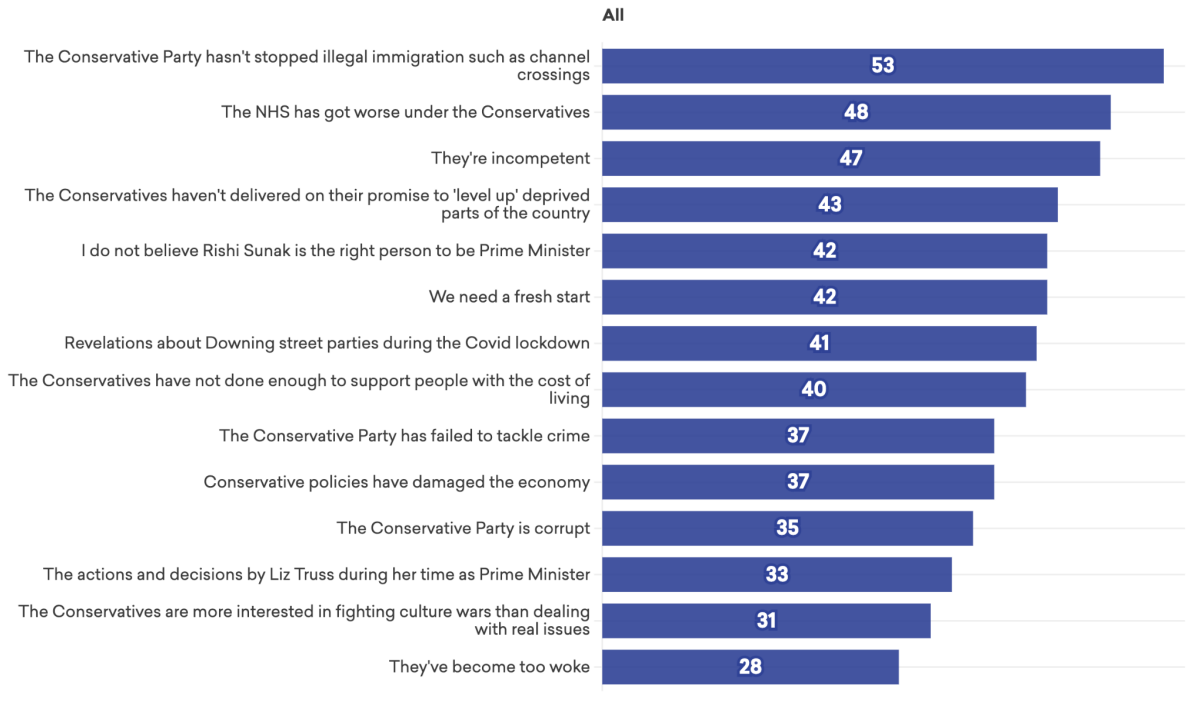


Source: More in Common (September 2023)
Net responding more likely minus less likely

A perception of failure to deliver on levelling up is also one of the key reasons why the Conservatives are bleeding voters to other parties. When 2019 Conservative voters are asked for the main reason why they are no longer voting Conservative, a failure to deliver on the promise to 'level up' deprived parts of the country comes fourth — after failures on small boats, pressures on the NHS and general government incompetence.

Failure to deliver on levelling up one of the top reasons for Tory switchers abandoning the Conservatives

You said you voted for the Conservative party in 2019, but now no longer intend to. Which of the following are the main reasons for this? Select all that apply



Source: More in Common, November 2023 • Answers below 25% not shown

The Labour Party and levelling up

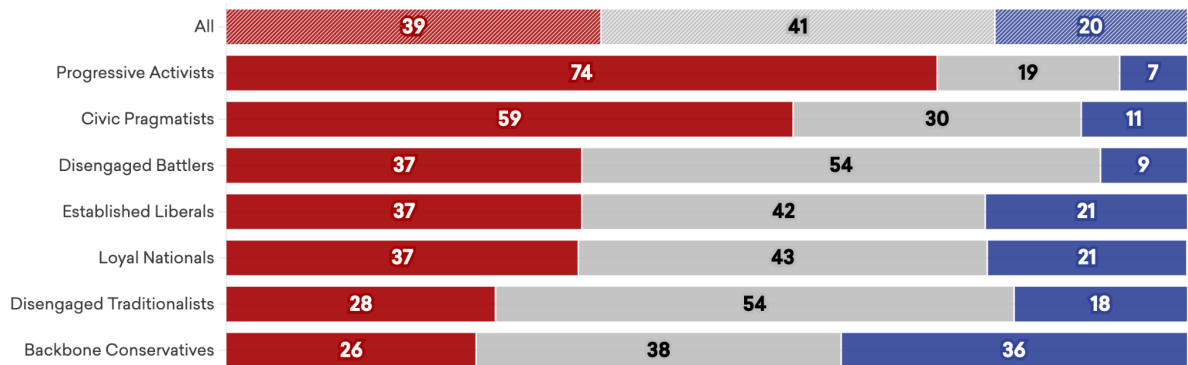
The Labour Party currently holds a 19–point lead over the Conservatives on which party is most trusted to deliver levelling up. This is the third biggest Labour lead over the Conservatives (Labour only have a larger lead on supporting the NHS and housing on the issues tested). This shows the opportunity for the party to lean into a promise to get levelling up back on track and deliver on its promise in the lead up to the next general election.

However, trust in Labour’s ability to deliver on levelling up is much higher among its base voters (Progressive Activists and Civic Pragmatists) than the swing voters in its coalition (Loyal Nationals and Established Liberals) – who are more likely to say they do not know who they would trust. Labour need to do more to set how they would go about turning around the fortunes of deprived areas across the country with a distinctively Labour Party approach to levelling up. While a cautious approach on the public finances will likely shape Labour’s economic policy pre–election, there is a risk that Labour miss the moment on levelling up and to show they have learned the lessons of the mistakes of previous Labour Governments in being perceived to have neglected these areas.

Labour hold a 19 point lead over the Conservatives on levelling up

Which party do you trust most on the issue of levelling up deprived areas of the country?

● Labour ● Don't know ● Conservatives



Source: More in Common, September 2023

Clearly, Labour will need to develop its own distinctive framing for levelling up. While the slogans and soundbites will be different, Labour's substantive approach should focus on how they will deliver on the, so far, missed promise of levelling up rather than abandoning the agenda completely.

Section 3: Shifting gear on levelling up – five tests

In the polling and focus group research conducted by More in Common and Power to Change over the past six months, five key tests emerged for how the public will judge the success or failure of the levelling up agenda. These five tests provide a starting point for how the levelling up agenda should be rebooted and reset. They are:

- **Test 1: Does levelling up have an impact in my neighbourhood?**
- **Test 2: Does levelling up put local communities in the driving seat?**
- **Test 3: Does levelling up give Britain's high streets their future back?**
- **Test 4: Does levelling up protect local parks and green spaces?**
- **Test 5: Does levelling up help communities to help safer?**

This section outlines how these tests were developed, alongside policy recommendations from Power to Change on how to best respond to the public's expectations on levelling up.

Test 1: Does levelling up have an impact in my neighbourhood?

The Levelling Up White Paper and its metrics largely judge the success or failure of levelling up using a regional model. However, the public's expectations are much more hyper-local.

Only one in ten Britons think about their 'local area' as their region (5 per cent) or county (6 per cent). Instead, for most of the public, their local area is a much smaller geographic unit – their town or city (43 per cent) or their neighbourhood or village (33 per cent). Around one in twelve Britons (8 per cent) think of their local area as their street – though these people are slightly more likely to live in urban areas.

What does this mean for the delivery of levelling up? When the public are thinking about neglect in their local area, they are more than likely thinking about their town, neighbourhood or village rather than their county or region.

Those who rank levelling up as a top government priority are even more likely to think of their local area at the hyper-local level – they are twice as likely to think about their local areas as their street and are the group that most strongly personally identify with their streets. Broadly speaking, this means that for the groups most likely to see levelling up as a top government priority, their geographic focus for the success or failure of the policy agenda is much more hyper-local than how most politicians or policymakers are currently measuring it. Thought should be given to incorporating more local granularity into larger regional analyses.

The hyper-local lens is also important in identifying ways to restore pride in place. While similar proportions of Britons say they are proud of their local area (58 per cent) and proud to be British (63 per cent), those people who say their area is neglected are five times more likely to say they are not proud of their local area than those who live in areas which they say have not been neglected. Restoring pride in place is a key pillar of the Government's levelling up agenda – however, making that restoration of pride a reality will require further localisation of the agenda.

Investment at the local level

A key part of ensuring that levelling up does have an impact at the local neighbourhood level is putting the right investment model in place. There is much to be welcomed in the Government's recent [Long-Term Plan for Towns](#), both in the endowment-style funding model and the power and responsibility it gives to local communities to decide their own priorities. A move away from what West Midlands Mayor Andy Street called a begging bowl culture, is essential to properly empowering local communities to decide their future.

Shifting gears on levelling up

The Long-Term Plan for Towns is a step in the right direction in this regard, and more work is needed to expand that model to communities, particularly those that feel most neglected, across the country.

In focus groups across the country, voters delivered a mixed verdict on the levelling up investments in their community to date. In places such as Telford and Stoke, voters were positive about the benefits levelling up funding was having in their communities – tidying up areas that had been neglected, injecting life back into the high street and creating new focal points for the community to come together. In other places, such as Grimsby, voters questioned the logic behind some of the levelling up investments - and often criticised the council for not putting the best case forward for greater investment. In many other areas, participants said they had yet to see any new evidence of levelling up investment in their community.

The appeal of various levelling up funding models was also explored in the focus groups. Participants generally preferred a funding model that sought to deliver the investment needed to tackle neglect and years of underinvestment at the local level, built on the strengths of local communities and sustainability in the future. Participants felt that either handouts from Westminster or highly competitive funding rounds didn't respond to what was needed to make those improvements at the local level. The Levelling Up Partnership model is a positive step in this regard providing expertise and scrutiny from national Government with on the ground knowledge and local ownership.

In their own words...levelling up funding

I certainly think the regeneration of the towns, Wellington has certainly got a lot better. Yes, it's full of charity shops but smaller businesses through this pride in the community and getting grant funding to start new businesses, there are quite a lot of new businesses coming into the town. There's been a lot of regeneration of the area such as New Street Furniture. I think they've redone Market Street and redone all the road and the upkeep of it is nice.

Dawn, Loyal National, Telford

I think the money's more accessible now. If you've got a Tory government and a Labour seat, which we've had on and off a number of years, and everything seems to have been on the slide, whereas all of a sudden now, there seems to be somebody's opened a tap of money somewhere. It can't do any harm, can it?

Lee, Disengaged Traditionalist, Stoke-on-Trent

A cinema just up in Cleethorpes which is not far away and we used to have another cinema in Freeman Street that closed down because no one went to it. So what's the point in spending all that money on another cinema when the one in is still fairly new and... no one

ever went to. So yeah, we're just gonna spend all that thousands of pounds or much. It is on something that we've already got. We don't really need another one

Tom, Disengaged Battler, Grimsby

I think it's like a lottery. I think it's who can write the best, who can present the best, who's got the best proposal? Always wins. But that's not necessarily who needs it. So I think there needs to be a way of looking into the areas and the funds and the communities that need it and an unbiased person or group of people to go and look at that and assess whether it's founded or not.

Kira, Established Liberal, Gloucester

Even with all the money they're getting from the government, they're not investing in the local villages, they're just investing in their own main town. And a lot of people that live in that area get pissed off by it. Excuse my language. But yeah, it should be means tested and it should be spent in the correct areas.

Ashley, Civic Pragmatist, Gloucester

I think that there should be a bid or a pledge from the local authority to say this is what we want to spend the money on. But then the government should hand the money over to the local authority to do that. But I think as a community we should be able to see what our local authorities have pledged for and what improvements we should see from that money and then whatever timeframe it should be.

Olivia, Loyal National, Stoke

Test 2: Does levelling up put local communities in the driving seat?

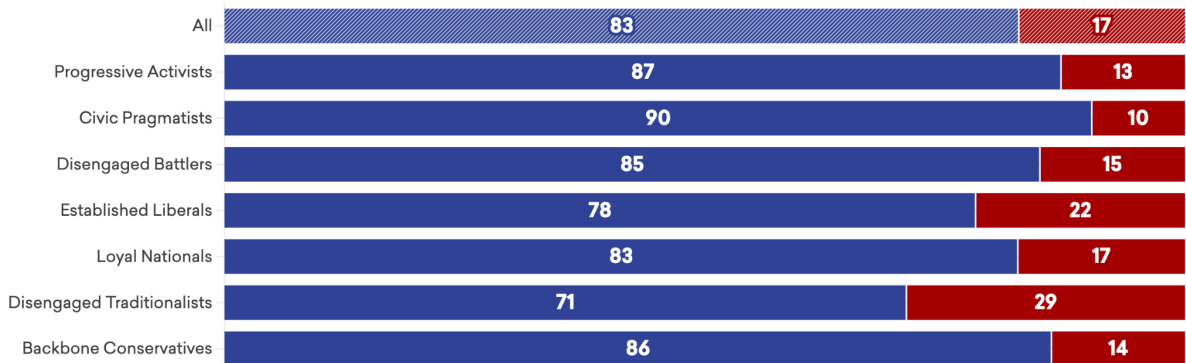
To shift gears on levelling up local communities need to be in the driving seat. This means going beyond local communities simply having a theoretical right to have a say in what goes on in their community, but trusting local people and local communities to play a role in delivering decisions that affect and can improve local communities. The public supports a community-driven approach to levelling up for two reasons. First, with local people in charge, the public trusts that change will actually happen. Second, without remote politicians or bureaucrats, the public are more confident that when the change comes, it will be the change they want to see.

The public believe that local residents and community groups have the skills and ideas to improve their local area, but they are frustrated that local and national governments don't give residents or community groups the freedom they need to make those improvements. For the levelling up agenda to be successful, it needs to correct that imbalance.

The public think that locals have ideas to improve their communities

Which of the following statements do you most agree with?

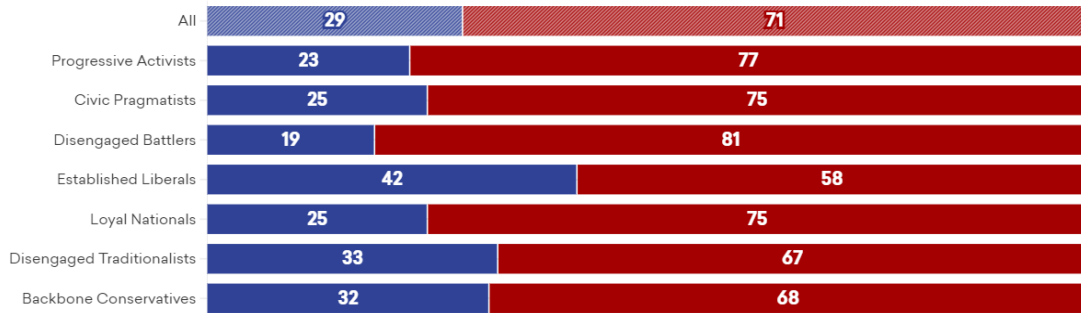
- Local residents and community groups have ideas and skills that could improve the local community
- Local residents and community groups do NOT have ideas and skills that could improve the local community



Few think that the Government gives residents the freedom to bring about local improvements

Which of the following statements do you most agree with?

- Local and national government gives residents and community groups the freedom to bring about improvements to our area
- Local and national government do NOT give residents and community groups the freedom to bring about improvements to our area

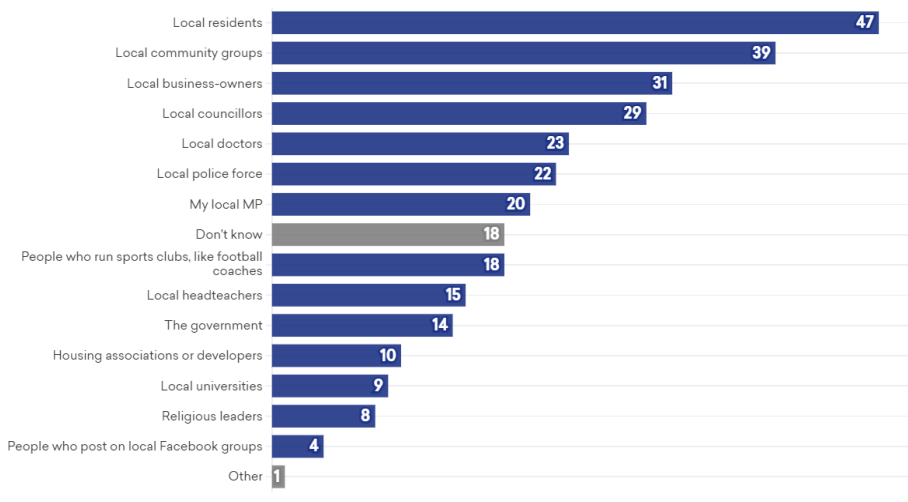


Source: More in Common, August 2023

Putting local communities in the driving seat isn't just about giving more powers and funding to local councils – not least given that many Britons see local government bureaucracy as part of the problem. While trust in local councillors is generally higher than in national politicians, people trust local residents, local community groups and local business-owners even more to make decisions that affect local areas. The public also think that local community groups are much more likely to listen to what local people want from their area, understand what change is needed and bring that change about.

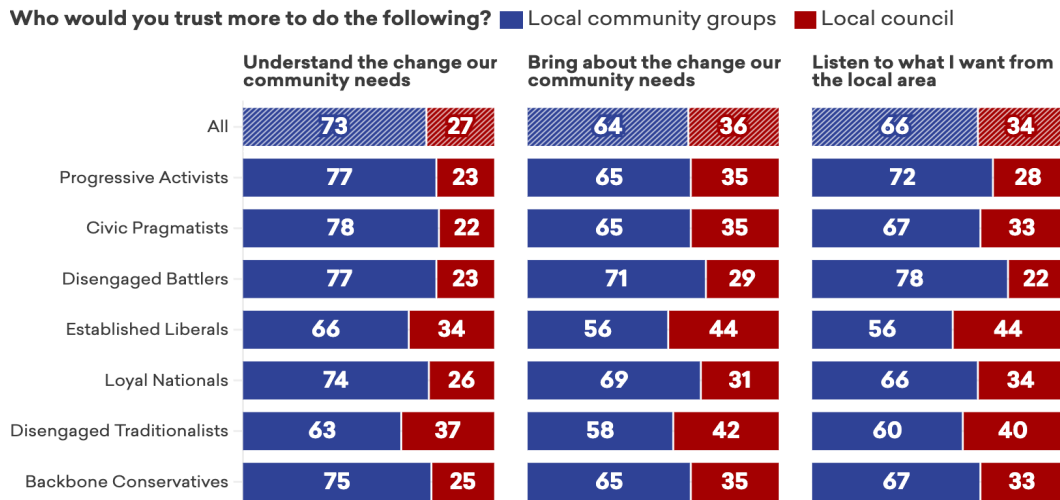
More than anyone else, Britons trust locals to make decisions that impact their area

Who do you trust to make decisions that affect your local area? Select all that apply.



Source: More in Common, July 2023

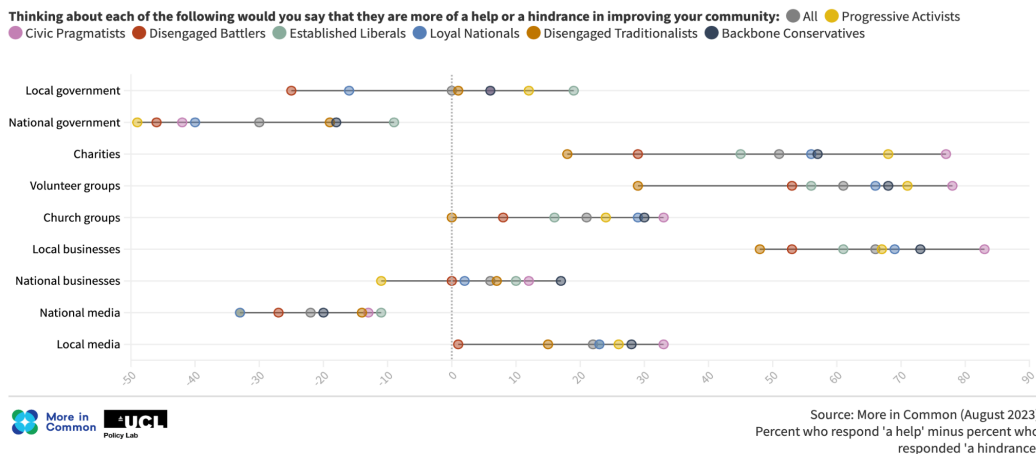
The public back local community groups over their local council to understand and bring about change in their local area



Source: More in Common and UCL Policy Lab, 2023

The public also take a much more favourable view of charities, volunteer groups and local businesses as being a help rather than a hindrance in improving local communities. That is in stark contrast to local government, national government and the media. In short, the success of the levelling up agenda depends on moving away from a model where local and national government's councils act as gatekeepers restricting community power. Instead it requires exploring models of partnership that allow local groups, councils and residents to pool their expertise, genuinely collaborate, and make decisions on bringing about community change.

Charities, volunteer groups and local businesses seen as more of a help than hindrance in improving local communities



That means finding creative and novel ways to empower communities at the hyper-local level. The public don't want yet another level of complex local government bureaucracy, but they do want and expect spaces to be made where community groups, local businesses, local councils and local residents can work together to improve their local community.

Power to Change Policy Recommendation: Establish Community Covenants

Community Covenants are a neighbourhood level decision-making structure through which local people and community organisations could take on powers (including the power to allocate resources) that affect their local area. In practice, Community Covenants would involve a power sharing agreement between the local community and a local authority.

Involving local authorities – who are directly accountable electorally – is key for the legitimacy of Community Covenants. Alongside the local authority, covenant partners may include parish councils, Neighbourhood Forums, community anchor organisations, or local alliances of community organisations. Together, the partners would enter into an agreement with the local authority to exercise powers and receive resources.

For community covenants to work, Covenant Partners would be required to meet five accountability tests: earning and maintaining the trust of the whole community, supporting local people to participate in community decisions in an inclusive and equitable manner, practising ongoing community participation, relationships and local action and avoid reducing accountability to only voting or consultations, promoting interests of local people, and identifying and addressing shared local concerns and issues.

Community Covenants help make neighbourhood-level decision making a reality – but done in a way that is legitimate and accountable and can be a trusted track to devolve power and resources to communities.

In addition to 'Community Covenants', More in Common and Power to Change tested a series of 'community rights' proposed by the ['We're Right Here'](#) campaign including the community right to shape services, the community right to control investment (participatory budgeting) and the community right to buy (and corresponding community buyout fund). The public's starting points on the first two 'rights' is explored in this section, while the community right to buy/buy out fund will be explored in the next.

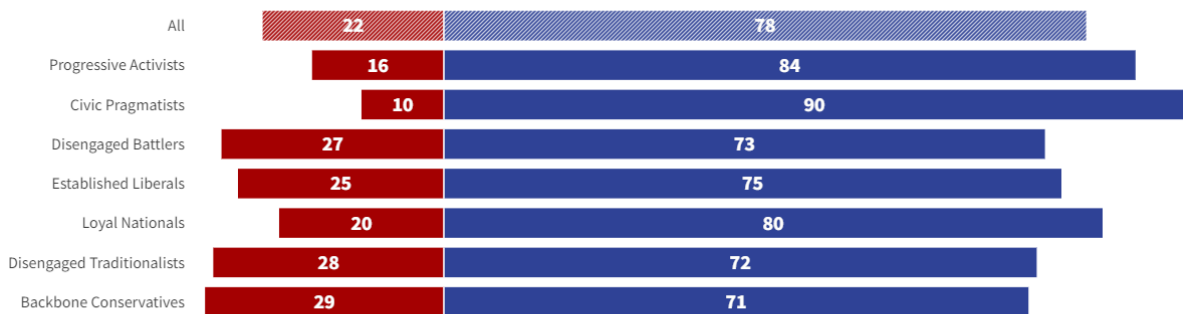
Community right to shape services

The idea: greater collaboration between communities and public institutions when designing, commissioning and delivering local services, including those not currently run by Local Authorities.

The principle that those who are affected by public services should have more of a say in how they are run is supported by the vast majority of the public (78 per cent) – with more than 70 per cent support in each of the British seven segments. The ‘nothing about us without us’ principle has been readily applied in many healthcare settings for some time. This polling shows the potential to expand this right to other forms of decision making in local communities across the country.

Strong support for a community right to shape services

Which of the following comes closest to your view? ● The people who use the services/are directly affected by them should have more control over the decision-making
● The government and local authorities should have more control over the decision-making



More in Common, July 2023
Excludes 'don't knows'

Power to Change Policy Recommendation: Introduce a Community Right to Shape Public Services

A Community Right to Shape Public Services would allow communities to trigger a joint review of a local services, that the local authority – or other public body – would be required to undertake with local community organisations, service users, and the provider. This would trigger a set period of community consultation and co-design, with the option to trigger a full commissioning exercise.

This new right would apply beyond services run by local authorities, enabling local residents to trigger joint reviews of not just local authority-run services, but also services provided by health authorities, public institutions with responsibility for the provision of housing, education and skills training services, and bodies with responsibility for local business policy.

The new right would establish a more collaborative approach to local services. When the community thinks that a service is not delivering, responsibility would be placed with the local authority – or other responsible body – to work with the community to consult on and codesign changes to the service, rather than the community explicitly challenging the local authority.

This right would build on the existing ‘Community Right to Challenge’. This is where community organisations are able to submit an expression of interest to run a service currently being delivered by local authorities or fire and rescue services. If the expression of interest is accepted by the authority, then a procurement exercise is run and the interested community organisation party must compete with others to run the service. This current right has two major drawbacks. First, the process of challenging the local authority can be oppositional and antagonistic and can damage the relationship between local authorities and community groups. Second, the scope of the range of services to which the Right to Challenge applies is too limited.

A new Community Right to Shape Public Services would both strengthen and expand the Right to Challenge.

Community right to control investment (participatory budgeting)

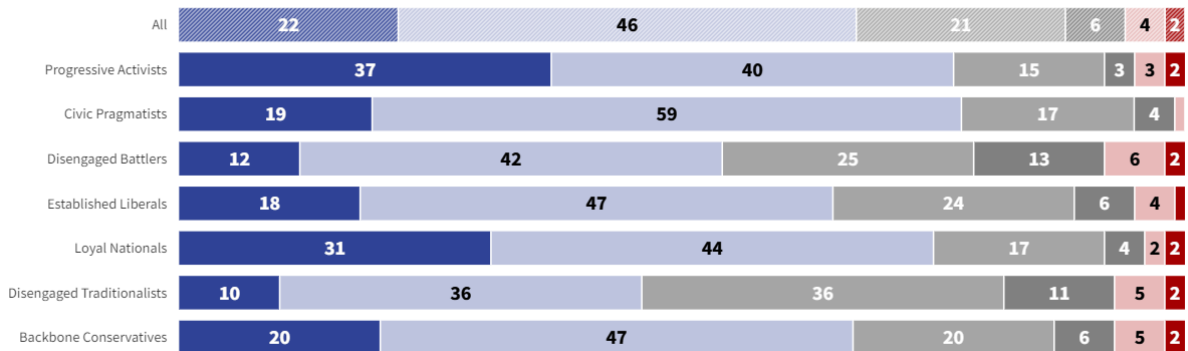
The idea: Local communities should have a seat at the table in designing local budgets

A serious commitment to putting local communities in the driving seat for levelling up means giving those communities some power to control investment or shape budgets. The idea of ‘participatory budgeting’ is one that finds strong support among Britons right across the country. Unsurprisingly, only a tiny minority (8 per cent) of Britons know about and can explain ‘participatory budgeting’ unprompted, but when the concept is explained, the public are 11 times more likely to think it is a good idea (68 per cent) than a bad idea (6 per cent).

Most Britons support participatory budgeting

Participatory budgeting is a process in which community members come together to work with the local council to decide how to spend part of a public budget for their local area. In general, do you think this sounds like a...

Very good idea Somewhat good idea Neither good nor bad idea Don't know Somewhat bad idea Very bad idea



Source: More in Common, July 2023

What's more, a significant proportion of the public say that they would be keen to take part in participatory budgeting. More than two in five Britons (44 per cent) say they would take part or would consider taking part in the participatory budgeting process. Those who say they would definitely participate are drawn from a cross section of the British Seven – including Loyal Nationals, Progressive Activists, Civic Pragmatists and Backbone Conservatives. However, Disengaged Battlers and Disengaged Traditionalists are less likely to want to participate – more work is needed to engage these groups so that participation does not become a participation of the usual suspects.

While the public are much more likely than not to support participatory budgeting in the abstract, they are divided on whether they trust ordinary people to make budgeting decisions in their community – two in five (41 per cent) trust people in their community to make budgeting decisions a great deal or quite a lot, while a similar proportion (43 per cent) have not very much or no trust at all. The polling showed that the public were concerned that a vocal and unrepresentative minority would dominate the participatory budgeting process, or that funds would be misused or misallocated.

This was also reflected in focus group conversations about participatory budgeting. While participants generally welcomed the concept in the abstract, they moved quickly to question how participatory budgeting schemes would work in practice, what democratic oversight there would need to be, and whether this represented local government passing the buck to communities or whether this was a genuine attempt to engage and empower communities.

The principle of participatory budgeting clearly receives broad support from the public, but the success of its rollout and execution will depend on ensuring that broad swathes of the community really are involved, that there are ways to genuinely involve those who are unwilling or unable to devote significant time to the process and that they are suitably prepared to make the best decisions for their community.

In their own words...participatory budgeting

I mean the thing is if you end up with a panel of people making that decision, then you still have a separate body of people making that decision and who makes the decision, who's on the panel? And I like the idea of it all being community and all kind of egalitarian. But I think the reality is that you will get the same group of people probably making all the decisions and there will be a hierarchy and there will be a selection of people that's been selected by somebody or so. I don't know how fair that is really. It's a nice idea

Abby, Established Liberal, Hastings

For me it'd be who these people that are not being voted in, who's given them the power, how they getting the power and therefore are they trusted with the power

Ashley, Civic Pragmatist, Gloucester

Well again, I think even if you're harnessing local enthusiasm, someone has still got to put those local enthusiasts in charge of this amount of money, haven't they? It's just, I dunno, it's like having another council almost, isn't it?

Frank, Established Liberal, Hastings

I'm sure with the right supervision and whatnot and the right local inclusion, I think including local people, I think it could work nicely

Cian, Civic Pragmatist, Hastings

Sounds to me, I don't know anyone's heard of passing the buck, but to me it's passing the buck from the councils. They should be the people that are doing that and I think that what they're trying to do is pass the buck to us, to get communities together because the local council should know exactly where money should go and how to use it. But no, it's a great idea but I think it's passing the buck definitely on that one. So that's too negative.

Lee, Loyal National, Stoke

Yeah, I mean the idea is really good, isn't it? But I'm just worried about the accountability here and call me cynical. But if this goes wrong and somebody is not in this for the right reasons, it's going to cause problems. You've got to have trust and honesty and in the world we live in, that isn't always there. So handing money over to provide services, it needs monitoring, it needs to be done carefully.

Shirley, Loyal National, Stoke

The public's caution on participatory budgeting reflects common concerns about community rights and community power more generally: one that vocal and unrepresentative minorities can dominate participatory processes and that there can be a lack of legitimacy and accountability built into how these rights operate.

To make community rights work, community power advocates need to take these concerns seriously and find ways to build up public confidence by answering the public's practical questions to avoid undermining that high support for community involvement in the abstract.

The public don't currently have a clear idea about the people in their community who would use these community rights - that is both an opportunity and a risk. The opportunity is that the public don't see those participating in participatory budgeting, for example, as being do-gooders or busybodies, a charge that is often made towards community power advocates. However, the risk is that they don't have a clear idea of the people participating either so find it harder to trust.

Britons do trust local people (local residents, local community groups and local business-owners) to make decisions that affect their area. However, there are different levels of trust when it comes to the specific individuals who might be involved in participatory budgeting. Participants found it easier to trust those who already had particular responsibilities in their community (such as GPs or Headteachers) or people who had a particular skill set that would make them good at making local decisions. This made participants more comfortable with devolving power to communities themselves. To make the public case for more community power to local communities, more attention should be devoted by advocates of community power to define the 'who' question – who is involved in community power actions.

In their own words...trust in local people

Maybe retired doctors or solicitors or local magistrate, that sort of thing where somebody who's got a bit of a stature and all also is upheld in the local community quite well looked upon. I think because they live in the local area, they've been there and they've served the local community, it's a role that doesn't have to be a full-time role. There can be two or three of them, but a local retired accountant would be able to look after the books as such, the magistrates and solicitors, they'd be able to sort of control it because they've probably got that kind of experience anyway. And then bringing local people that are maybe in other professions who can then contribute towards it...but keeping it small though, so it doesn't go back to being either a parish council or local council so that it's all more sort of gets involved back into the sort of politics and the paperwork of it all

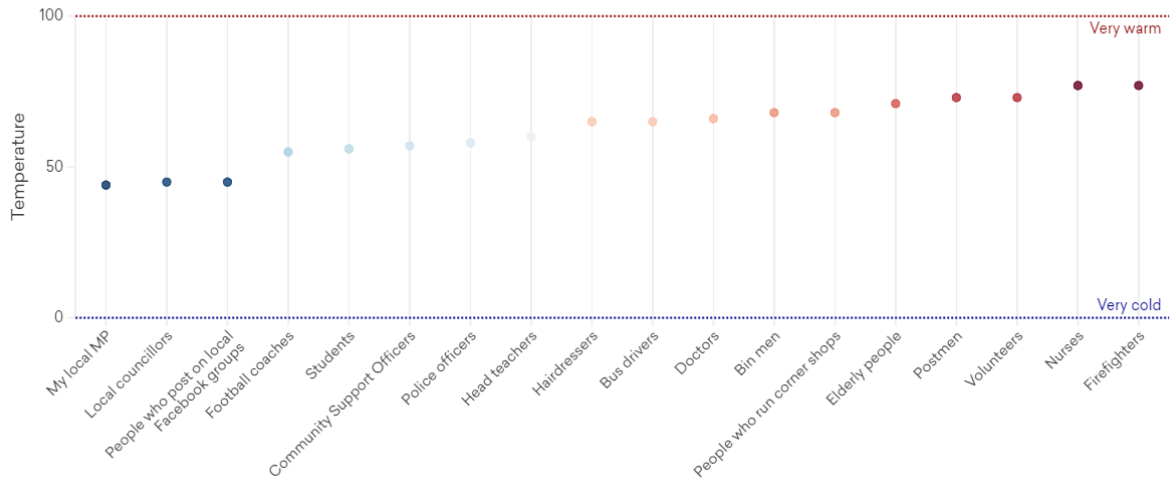
Prav, Loyal National, Hartlepool

I think it's the skill set of that person or group of people that needs to be looked at. You're looking at leadership skills, project management skills, budgets, accountancy skills, as well as the attitudinal stuff of the dynamism and the resilience to keep on going that keep it small by all means, but you've got quite a wide range of skills that you need within that group to be able to get that project done

Shirley, Loyal National, Stoke

Community characters: Feeling thermometer

On a scale of zero to one hundred, where zero means very cold and one hundred means very warm, how do you feel about the following people in your local community?



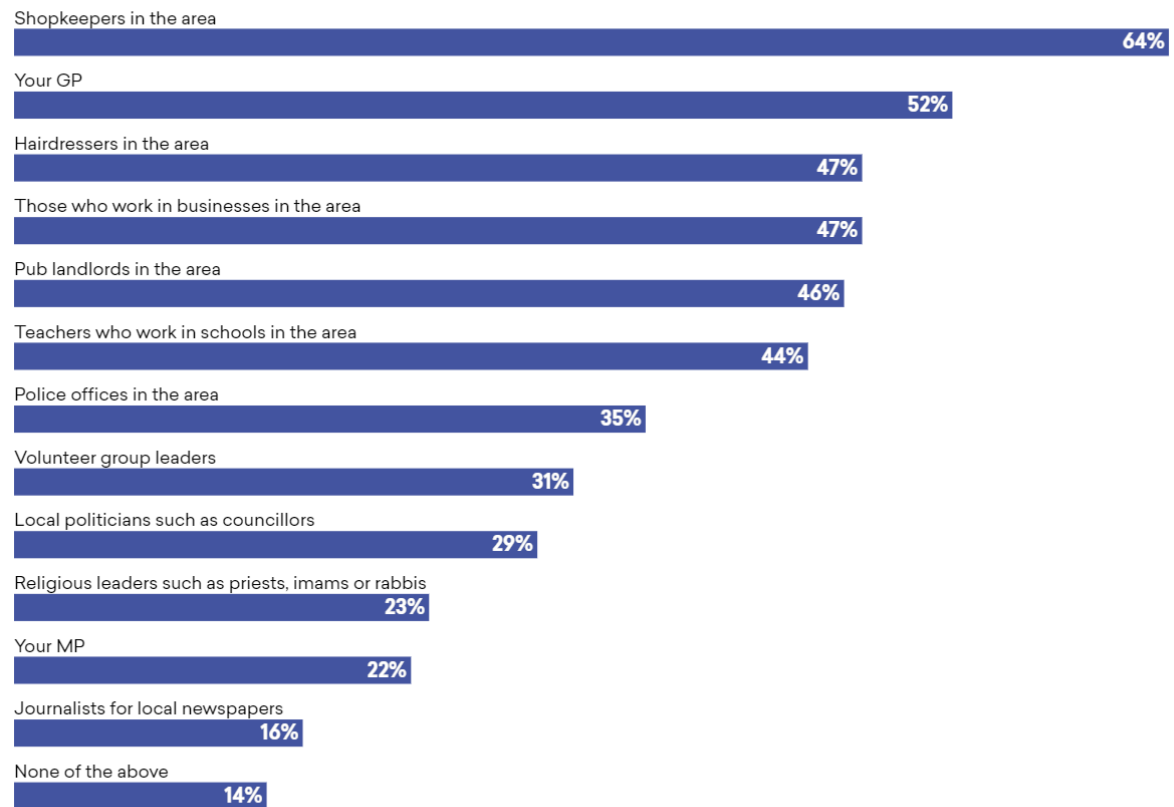
More in Common, July 2023

Those in community service roles such as firefighters, nurses, volunteers and postmen are more likely to be viewed warmly by the public, while those who are seen to be too political or noisy and complaining (such as those who post on local Facebook groups) are more likely to be viewed less warmly. While feelings of warmth to community characters will not necessarily or directly translate into trust in leading community power initiatives like participatory budgeting exercises, it does give us an indication of the people that the public will be most receptive to in holding leadership positions in their community.

On top of this, Britons are more likely to see shopkeepers, local GPs, hairdressers and those who work in local businesses as being part of, and rooted in, their communities. In making the case for community power, these groups and pillars of local communities should be front and centre.

Shopkeepers most likely to be seen as part of the community

Which of the following do you see as part of your community? Select all that apply.



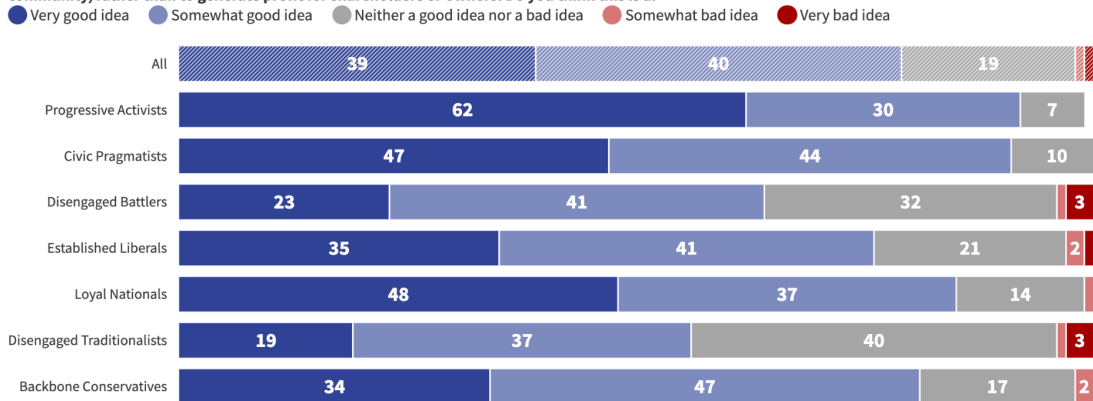
The potential of community businesses

Another tool for putting communities in the driving seat, that commands broad public support, is devolving power and resources to community businesses, giving them the backing to create the conditions for them to thrive.

The concept of 'community business' is relatively new to the public; only 13 per cent say they could explain what one was, and only 15 per cent could explain what a social enterprise was. However, when it was explained, an overwhelming majority (79 per cent) said it was a good idea, including two in five (39 per cent) who consider it to be a very good idea. Support for community business stretches across left-right divides with Progressive Activists and Loyal Nationals the most supportive.

Four in five Britons like the idea of community businesses

A community business is a type of business that is owned and managed by the local community it serves. These businesses operate primarily for the benefit of the community, rather than to generate profit for shareholders or owners. Do you think this is a:



Source: More in Common, July 2023

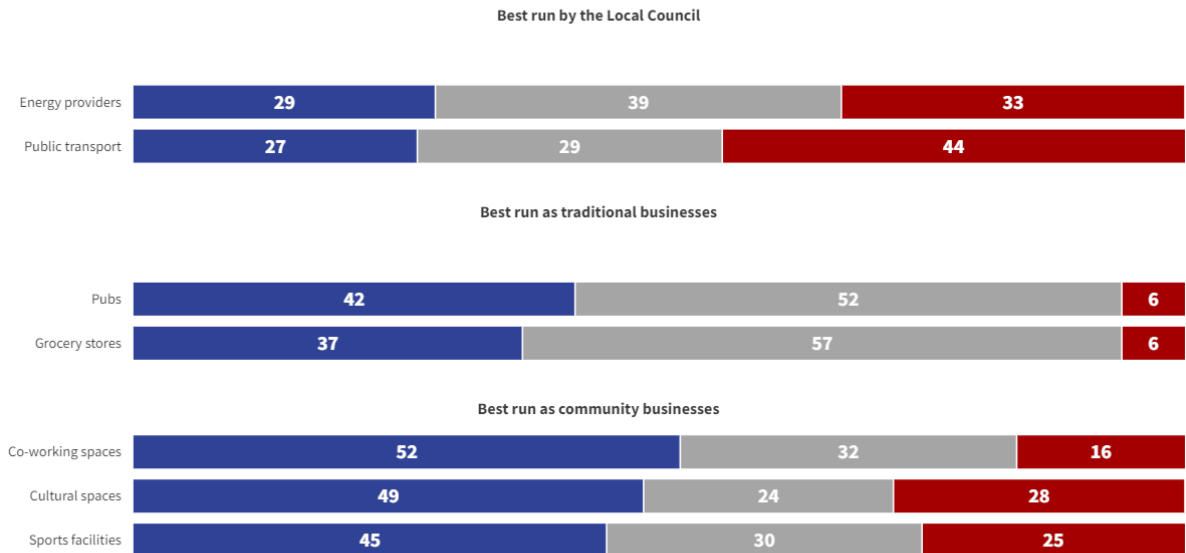
Some commentators dismiss community business leaders, and the broader movement of people involved in community power, as sharp-elbowed middle class people with too much time on their hands who are looking to consolidate influence in their community. However, these criticisms do not resonate among the wider public. Britons agree by three to one that people who run community businesses have the community at heart in their decision making (72 per cent) rather than only looking out for themselves (28 per cent). By a similar proportion, the public see community business leaders as “decent people looking to do good” (76 per cent agree) rather than “busybodies with too much time on their hands” (only 25 per cent agree). While focus groups conversations find scepticism about how community-orientated any ‘business person’ would ever really be, these feelings do not appear to be widespread.

The public see community businesses as the best model for running cultural spaces, sports facilities and co-working spaces. While majorities think that pubs and grocery stores run better on a traditional business for-profit model, significant minorities have confidence that community businesses operating on a not-for-profit basis would do a better job.

Britons support a wide variety of community businesses

For the following types of businesses and services, do you think they would be better ...

- Run by locals as a community business on a not-for-profit basis
- Run by companies as a traditional business on a for-profit basis
- Run by the government or the local council



More in Common, July 2023

The contribution of community business

Power to Change has conducted extensive research on the role and impact of community businesses across England. Key findings from their research include:

Community businesses operate in areas that have often been forgotten and where markets are broken. 48 per cent of community businesses operate in the 30 per cent most disadvantaged areas in England.²

Community businesses employ and are accountable to local people. 86 per cent of paid staff live locally and these tend to be people further from the labour market.³ Community businesses disproportionately employ more people with long-standing physical or mental illness or disability, people with caring responsibilities and people who have experienced unemployment.

Community businesses create and keep profit and wealth in the local economy, supporting other local businesses. Community-owned spaces contribute £220 million to the UK economy and 56p of every £1 they spend stays in the local economy, compared to

² Power to Change. (2022). *Community Business Market Report*. Available at: <https://www.powertochange.org.uk/impact/market-report-2022/>

³ Ibid

just 40p for larger private sector firms⁴, as well as acting as ‘destination spaces’ that drive footfall to other businesses.⁵

Community businesses combine the social productivity of the charity sector with the economic productivity of traditional businesses. The vast majority of community businesses – 83 per cent – generate earned income through trading.⁶

Community businesses improve the physical fabric of their area through owning assets that are accessible to the local community. 56 per cent of community businesses own or manage at least one fixed asset.⁷

On the high street, Community businesses also act as ‘destination spaces’ that drive footfall to other businesses⁸ and help to reduce vacancy rates.⁹

Power to Change Policy Recommendation: Back community businesses by introducing a business rates relief

Community businesses have the potential to lead the way on a levelling up reset that focuses more on communities – but the contribution community businesses make needs greater recognition from the government and policy makers.

For too long, community businesses have been sandwiched between the charity sector and the traditional business sector. Business rates relief is a recent example of where community businesses can fall between two stools. Charities receive 80 per cent of business rates relief, while small businesses in retail, hospitality and leisure industries receive a business rates relief of 75 per cent.

Many community businesses are Community Interest Companies (CICs) or Community Benefit Societies (CBS), entities which have to rely on discretionary rates relief which can often be administered inconsistently and makes it difficult for community businesses to plan ahead and thrive.

⁴ Harries, R. and Miller, S. (2021). Community Business: The Power on your Doorstep. Available: <https://community-business.powertochange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Power-on-your-doorstep-Full-Report.pdf>

⁵ Lee, N. and Swann, P. (2020). Saving the high street the community takeover. Available: <https://www.powertochange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Saving-the-HighStreet-thecommunity-takeover-Report.pdf>

⁶ Power to Change. (2022). Community Business Market Report. Available at: <https://www.powertochange.org.uk/impact/market-report-2022/>

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Lee, N. and Swann, P. (2020). Saving the high street the community takeover. Available: <https://www.powertochange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Saving-the-HighStreet-thecommunity-takeover-Report.pdf>

⁹ Brett, W. and Alakeson, V. (2019) Take Back the High Street Putting communities in charge of their own town centres, Available: https://www.powertochange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/PCT_3619_High_Street_Pamphlet_FINAL_LR.pdf

Shifting gears on levelling up

Community businesses encompass the strengths of charities and small businesses – the social purpose of the charity sector with the entrepreneurial spirit of the private sector.

National non-domestic rates relief (commonly known as business rates relief) should be expanded to provide rates relief for community businesses of 75 per cent, and this could be financed by closing the ‘box shifting’ loophole that leads to £250m of business rates revenue being lost each year and contributes to high street vacancy.¹⁰

More broadly, work is needed to raise awareness of community businesses and mainstream the concept among the public, politicians and policymakers.

¹⁰ Power to Change (2023). *A Manifesto for the Age of Localisation*. Available at: <https://www.powertochange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Power-to-Change-Manifesto-1.pdf>

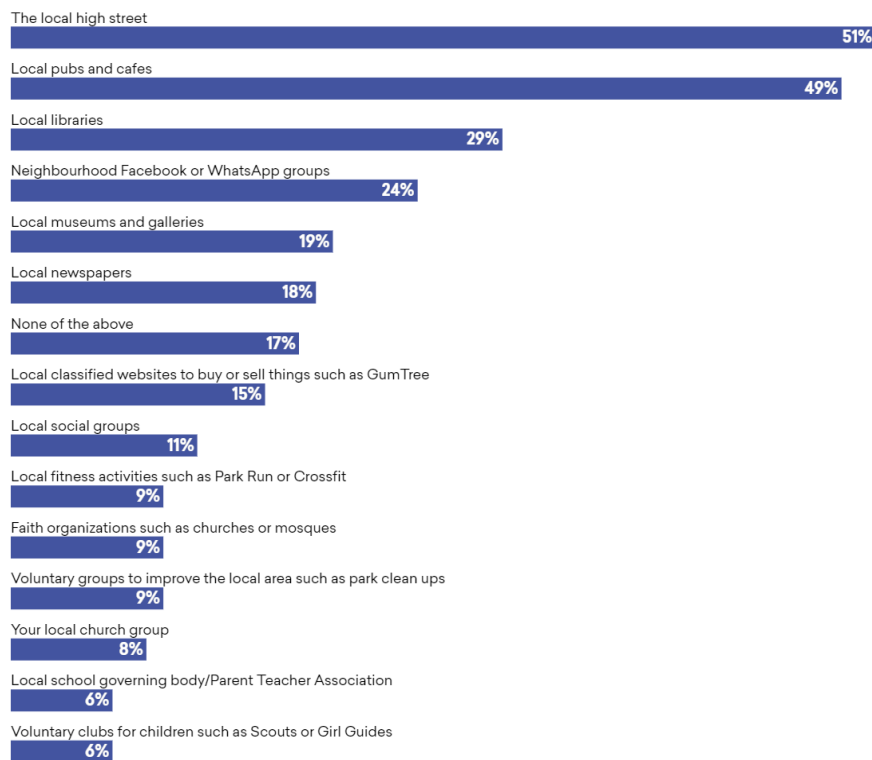
Test 3: Does levelling up give Britain’s high streets their future back?

For many people, nothing epitomises local neglect more than the state of their local high street. Focus group conversations with Britons across the country on levelling up almost always turn to empty high street units, the prevalence of charity and betting shops and vandalism and graffiti .

High streets matter to the public because they form the backbone of everyday community interaction, and they want to see them at the heart of the levelling up agenda. More than half the public (51 per cent) say they or their family use or buy things from their local high streets. More than three quarters of Britons (77 per cent) shop on their high street at least once a month, and almost three in five Britons (61 per cent) shop there almost once a week¹¹.

High streets are the key areas that people use in their community

Which of the following organisations do you or your family use, buy from or take part in locally? Please select all that apply.



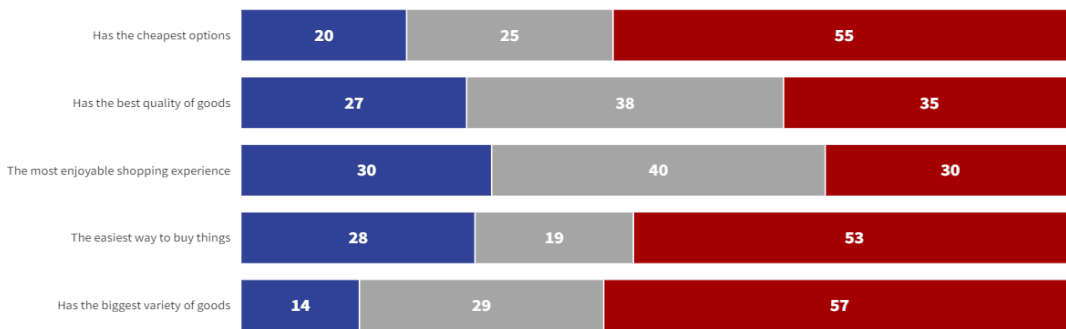
¹¹ Source: More in Common Polling, November 2021

While the public value their high streets they are often no longer living up to their potential. More Britons say their high street does not have most of the things they need (52 per cent), than say that it does (43 per cent). Most ominously for the future of the high street, more people look first to online or out-of-town shopping centres when they need to buy something (67 per cent) than the quarter of people who visit their local high street first (27 per cent). Across a whole range of factors from ease to cost to enjoyability of shopping experience, the public say they prefer shopping online or out-of-town compared to shopping in high streets.

High-streets lose to out-of-town shopping centres and online shopping across a range of measure

Thinking about different places you might go shopping, which do you think is best for each of the following options

■ My local high-street ■ An out-of-town shopping centre ■ Online



More in Common, July 2023

Any levelling up agenda reset on high streets will need to balance a series of competing factors. Given the oversupply of retail spaces across the country, the future of the high street will need to move from a retail-dominated model to a model which embraces a range of uses on the high street including retail, commercial, residential and other civic spaces. High street regeneration needs to balance the public’s changing shopping behaviours (which favour online shopping and out-of-town shopping over high street shopping) with the importance that the public consistently place on high streets.

In their own words...the state of the high street

The town centre at Hastings is becoming very poor. I think it's quite rundown. It's like everywhere it's lost its high street shops and so you are left with kind of town shops and charity shops and yeah I think it's pretty depressing actually

Sue, Civic Pragmatist, Hastings

I think the High Street has changed a lot, especially since Covid because there's a lot more of this hybrid working. The footfall just isn't there anymore really. And when you talk to local businesses and that you can see that their figures have gone down and they do struggle and I think that's that's going to carry on forward really

Prav, Loyal National, Hartlepool

They're going to really struggle to ever earn enough to make those rates work. And then you've got the charity shops that get the reduced rates. So they tend to come in lots of phone shops, chain phone shops and just the service industries. I think if you want to entice businesses in, it's not just a case of a short term help with the rent or with the business rates. It's got to be a more permanent fix than that so that we can start to plan over a longer term

Shirely, Loyal National, Stoke

Are high streets improving or getting worse?

Britons not only think their high streets are in a bad state, many think they are getting even worse. More people are likely to say that their local high street is getting worse (32 per cent) than those who say it is improving (23 per cent).

Kick-starting regeneration on the high street is key to tackling local community neglect. Those who say that their high street is getting worse are more likely to say that their local area as a whole has been neglected, and those who describe their local high street as vibrant and exciting are far more likely to be proud of their local area.

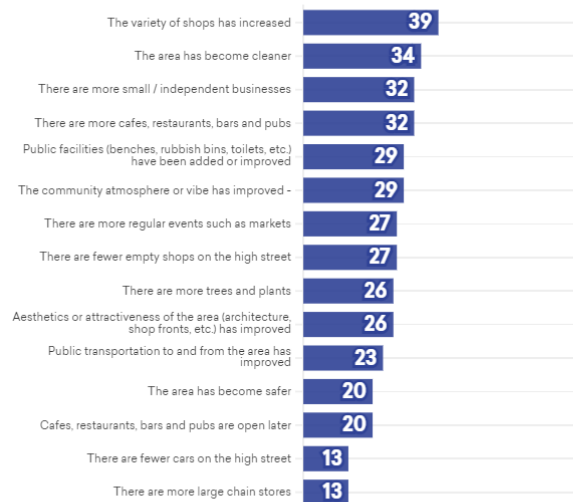
As such, the success of a levelling up agenda reset will be measured, to a large extent, by the ways in which it is able to deliver positive outcomes for high streets across the country. Giving local communities the power to improve these high streets for themselves is a key way to ensure that high street regeneration is done right. To do that, the government should back community groups and community businesses with the powers and resources they need to turn their high streets around.

A way out for high street decline

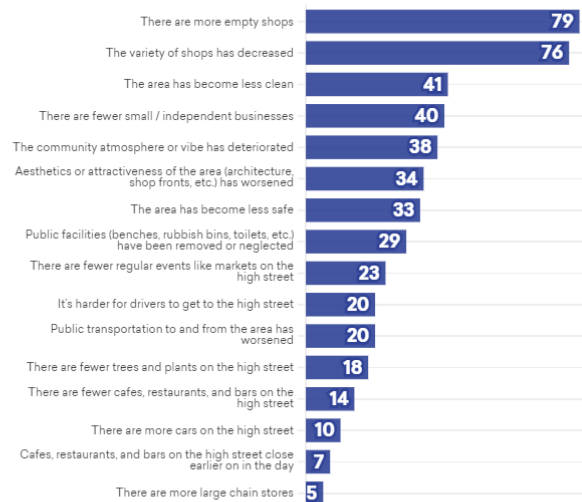
The public cite a wide range of reasons for why their local high street has been improving – including a better variety of shops, a cleaner high street, and more places to eat and drink (e.g. cafes, restaurants and pubs). In contrast, the public see the drivers of high street decline coming from just two factors: more empty units and decreased variety of shops.

High street improvements can come from a range of factors, but decline is overwhelmingly driven by empty shops

You said that your local high street has been improving. Why is this?



You said that your local high street has been getting worse. Why is this?

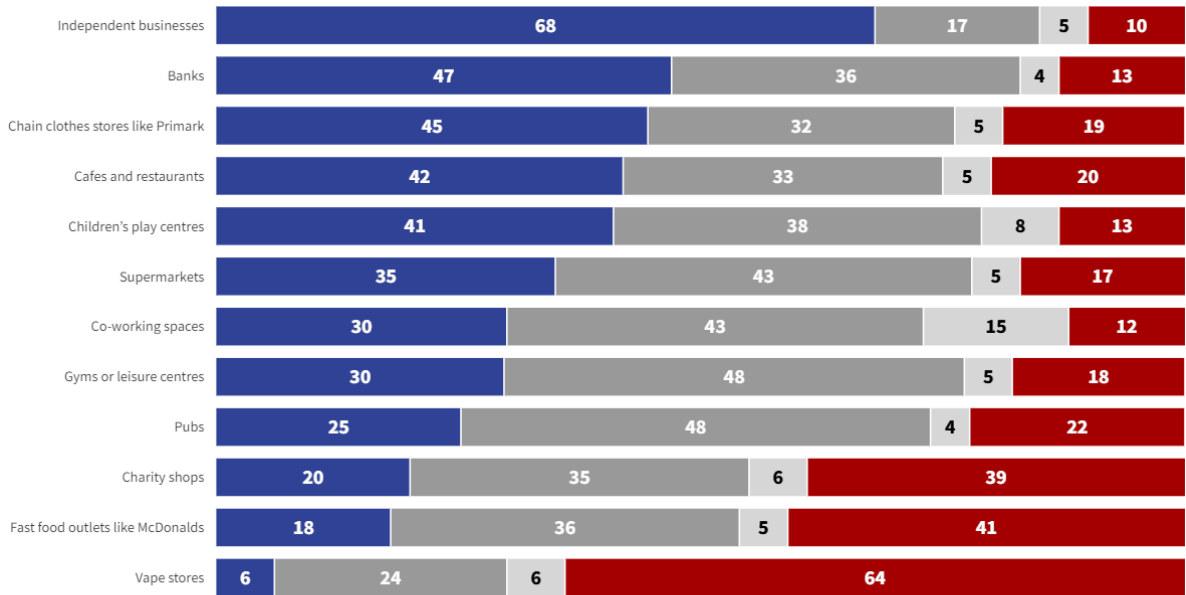


Source: More in Common and Power to Change, 2023

Halting high street decline means finding ways to tackle the rising number of vacant shops. Some of this might be converting retail space to other uses. However, a community buyout fund and community right to buy (outlined further below) would help communities take control of some of these empty shops as well, to use them for the community benefit and in ways that local communities want. Such an approach would have the secondary benefit of increasing the number of independent businesses on the high street, the thing the public most say they would like to see more of on the high street. The public's clear view that they want to see fewer vape stores (and to a lesser extent charity shops) on their high streets suggests support for banning these types of units on high streets might command public support.

Britons want more independent businesses, banks, and clothes stores on their high streets

Which of the following comes closest to your view? To improve my local high street we should... ● ...have more of these ● ...have fewer of these ● Would make no difference ● Don't know



More in Common, July 2023

The potential of a Community Right to Buy and Community Buy Out Fund

Britons are more likely to say they don't mind who owns buildings on their local high street (48 per cent) than say it is important that high streets are owned by local people from their local area (39 per cent). While the idea of distant or foreign owners may not animate the public, it is significant that two in five Britons want to see locally owned and locally-run high streets.

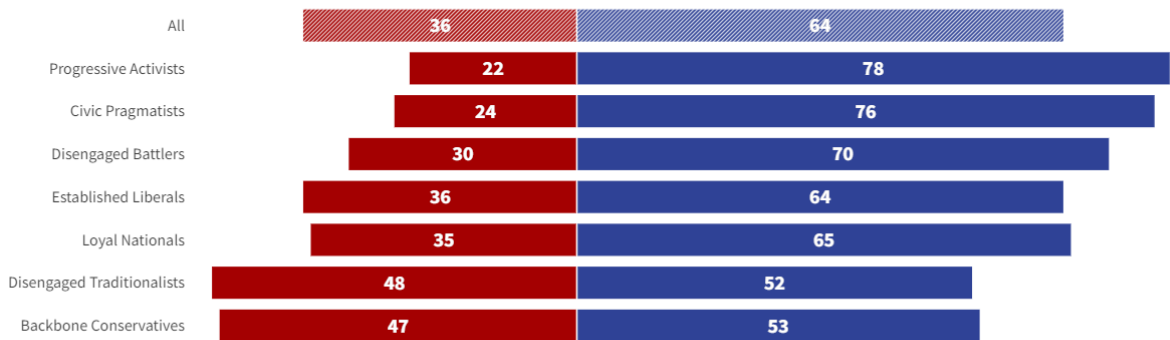
One way of tapping into this support for locally-owned and locally run high streets is an idea proposed by the 'We're Right Here' campaign as well as other organisations in the community sector – a community right to buy. This new right would give community groups extra time to raise funds to purchase important community spaces such as pubs or green spaces when they are vacant or when they come up for sale, and give them a 'right of first refusal' on the purchase of these assets.

Almost two thirds of Britons (64 per cent) support the idea of a community right to buy, compared to a third (36 per cent) who oppose (excluding "don't know" responses). While support is strong among progressive groups, there is majority support for a community right to buy across all of the British Seven segments.

Strong mandate for supporting community businesses and community organisations with a 'right to buy' important community venues and vacant properties

Which of the following comes closest to your view?

- Community organisations should have a “right to buy” important community venues if they come up for sale, where they are given more time to raise the funds if necessary
- Community organisations should be treated like everyone else when community venues come up for sale



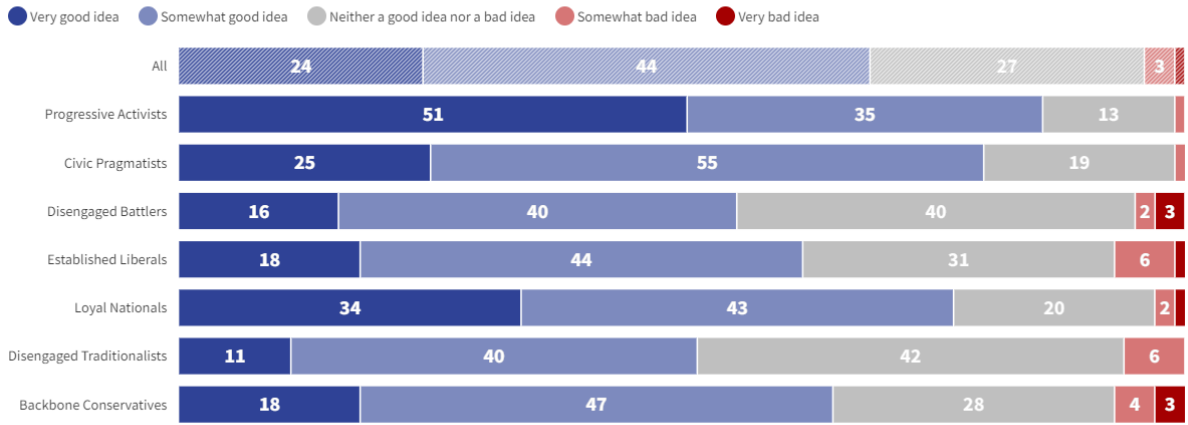
Source: More in Common, July 2023 • Excludes “don’t knows”

To support communities to take over important local spaces, some have suggested the government creates a ‘community buyout fund’ which is a source of funding which allows local communities to buy vacant retail spaces and encourages the opening of community businesses. When this proposal is put to them, the British public strongly supports it. Two thirds of Britons (68 per cent) said a ‘community buy out fund’ sounds like a good idea, while only 4 per cent describe it as a bad idea.

While the ‘community right to buy’ enjoys relatively consistent support across the board, the community buyout fund is the proposal that brings together the most interesting mix of segments in support of the fund – with strong support coming from socially liberal groups such as the Progressive Activists and Civic Pragmatists as well as the more socially conservative Loyal National group.

Most Britons think that a community buyout fund is a good idea

Some people have proposed the creation of a “community buyout fund” by the government - a source of funding to allow local communities to buy vacant retail spaces on their high street and open community-run businesses. In general, do you think this is a...



More in Common, July 2023

In implementing a community buyout fund, voters will need to be reassured about the financial practicalities of such a policy. The public’s two main concerns about a community buyout fund are that community businesses might not be financially sustainable (43 per cent), and that there would be a lack of transparency and fairness in how the fund was used (32 per cent), concerns that are shared across all seven segments. In contrast, few feel the money could be better used elsewhere (16 per cent), and even fewer feel negatively towards the people who step forward to set up community business.

Power to Change Policy Recommendation: Introduce a Community Right to Buy and establish a British High Streets Investment Vehicle

Introduce a Community Right to Buy

Asset ownership forms the basis of many strong community businesses, run and owned by local people. It provides security as it allows income to be generated that can be reinvested and can be used as leverage for further investment. It provides a long-term space from which to operate and deliver the services the local community needs. It also has the potential to increase the number of independent businesses.

High streets with greater community ownership have lower levels of vacancy than those with fewer community-owned spaces. Community-owned assets also act as ‘destination spaces’ that drive footfall to other businesses. With greater community ownership, it is possible to strengthen and increase the number of community businesses, and other independent businesses, operating on the high street.

A Community Right to Buy is an evolutionary policy change to increase community ownership. In practice, a Community Right to Buy would require legislative changes —

either by amending current legislation or introducing new legislation – to strengthen and build on the existing Community Right to Bid.

The Right to Bid, outlined in the Localism Act 2011, triggers a six-month moratorium on the sale of a listed Asset of Community Value (ACV) when it comes to market, during which time local community organisations are able to raise funds to submit a bid to purchase a property. At the end of this moratorium, the property owner is under no obligation to accept a bid from the local community organisation. The combination of a six-month moratorium – which is often too short a period for community groups to raise the required funds – and the fact the property owner can opt for another buyer, who in many cases can raise the capital quicker, means that the Right to Bid has been largely ineffective. Only 15 of every 1,000 assets listed as ACVs make it into community ownership. It is no wonder then that there is little incentive for communities to list cherished local assets like The Crooked House in Dudley, because there is little chance of securing community ownership at the end of the process.

A Community Right to Buy would extend the moratorium period from six to 12 months, giving communities more time to raise the required funds. It would also introduce a right of first refusal so that, if the community raises the required funds – as judged by an independent property value evaluator – they would be able to purchase the asset without competition.

Establish a British High Streets Investment Vehicle

Power to Change has developed the idea for a British High Street Investment vehicle that would purchase vacant high street property to transfer into community ownership over time.

Investment in the form of government subsidy in a British High Street Investment Vehicle could leverage a further £250 million in commercial and social investment, which could purchase and restore a diversified portfolio of around 200 strategically-important high street assets across England. The Vehicle would move quickly, at the pace of private capital, to purchase high street property, holding them until community organisations were able to take on ownership.

This would provide a much-needed source of patient and flexible capital for community ownership and meet demand for an impact investing opportunity on a scale attractive to institutional investors.

As Power to Change have developed the policy, the main concerns of the public surrounding a community buyout fund have been anticipated. The investment vehicle would be run and managed by combining commercial property expertise combined with on-the-ground community intelligence, so that high street property is purchased

Shifting gears on levelling up

according to local demand. The process for selecting assets to invest in would be transparent, and local intelligence will ensure that it suits the needs of local communities.

Government subsidies could provide revenue support and help community groups to build their skills and business plans to ensure purchased assets are transferred into sustainable and long-term community ownership. This will ensure that community businesses have the capacity and financial capability to take on the asset.

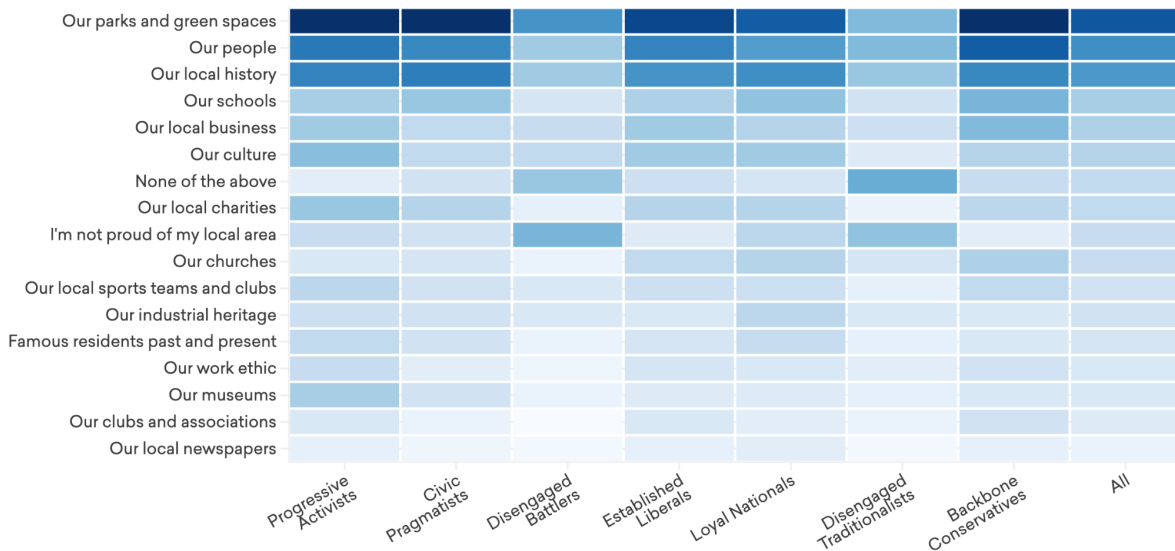
Clearly communicating these parts of the policy will be key to addressing the concerns from the public regarding financial sustainability and transparency and fairness in how the funds are allocated.

Test 4: Does levelling up protect local parks and green spaces?

More than anything else, Britain’s parks and green spaces are what make people proud of their local area – and they are something that helps foster pride among all seven segments. At the same time, people who say their town, village, or city has improved in recent years are most likely to list improved parks and green spaces as the reason why. Clearly, improving Britain’s parks can play an important role in restoring pride in the country’s left-behind communities.

More than anything else, Britons are proud of their parks and green spaces

What, if anything, are you proud of about your local area? Select all that apply.



Source: More in Common, May 2023

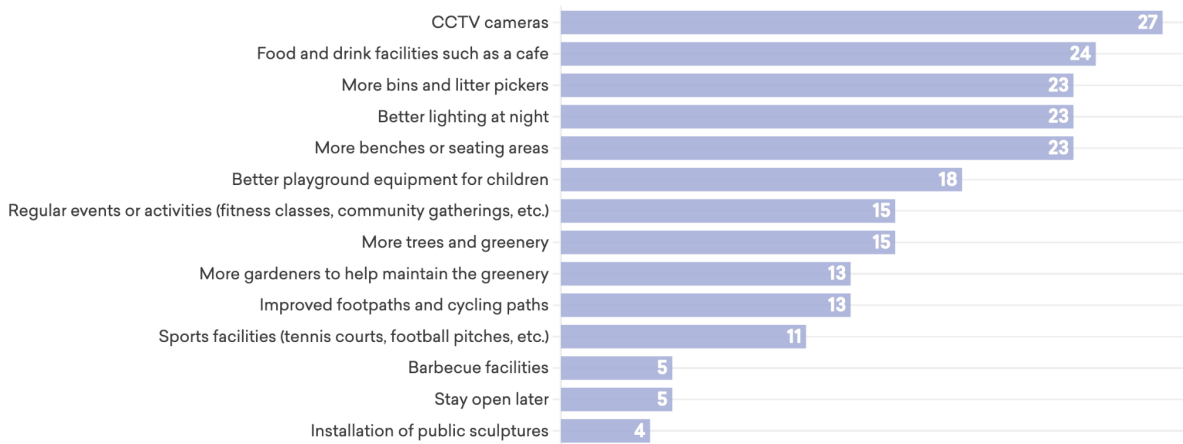
To improve their local parks, the public wants the basics to be right. Before any attempts to provide innovative or novel improvements to local parks, the public have a series of everyday concerns that need to be addressed.

Top of this list is making parks safer – with people choosing “CCTV cameras” as the number one item they think would improve local parks. In focus groups, people regularly tell us that there is no point in investing in expensive park improvements if they feel unsafe to go to that park, that their children will be stepping on needles or broken glass, or that the park will be vandalised as soon as the improvements are made.

After more CCTV cameras, the public want their parks to become spaces where they can spend more time - through food and drinks facilities such as cafes, better lighting at night, and more bins and litter pickers. In focus groups, participants say that these basic things are falling behind in their parks, and driving a sense that their area is left behind.

Britons back a range of everyday measures to improve their local parks

Which of the following, if any, do you think would improve your local park? Select up to three.



Source: More in Common, July 2023

The public trusts community groups more than the local councils to make the improvements to local parks. By two to one (67 per cent vs 33 per cent), the public are more likely to say they trust local community groups rather than the local council to decide what should be in our parks and green spaces.

Parks are important for the public because they are used so regularly. Almost two thirds of the public (63 per cent) use their park or green space at least once a month. In focus groups, the public tells us that parks matter in particular for those who don't have outside space, or for a much needed break in the middle of a busy day. Interestingly, in focus groups, the public say that it's the park at the end of the street rather than the main park in the town centre that matters most to them. The park that they can walk to rather than need to drive to – a more hyper-local approach on identifying the types of parks that matter most to the public, and focus on basic improvements to those neighbourhood parks rather than elaborate investment in central parks in towns across the country.

In their own words...the state of local parks and green spaces

What's the point in making the area look nice if it's just going to end up getting vandalised in a couple of months?

Ellie, Loyal National, Oldham

They can fund a park and put all this new equipment in, but if then somebody comes a week later and graffiti it, where does that money come then to replace it? They're trying to put funding to make it a better place, but if the kids then don't respect it, actually they're the ones that lose a really good service.

Dawn, Loyal National, Telford

I think the little parks, the estate parks, that's where the kids hang out. That's where they go. They don't go to town park because there's too many adults, they hang out on the little ones on the estates, they're all together. But I also, I do blame them for the graffiti and the damage and everything they cause, but there's nothing for these young kids nowadays to do. And I'm not condoning what they do by smashing things up, but I think bring back youth clubs. I used to run a youth club years ago on our estate and the kids had so much respect for me and now obviously they're older and they've got kids of their own and they've still got respect for me. But then I go and pick my grandchildren up from school and see the kids coming out of school and the effing and blinding and they're actually swearing at the teachers and everything and the teachers are just, there's nothing they can do and it's like that wouldn't have been ever happened years ago, never.

Jayne, Loyal National, Telford

Test 5: Does levelling up help communities feel safer?

The final key element to restoring pride in place and delivering levelling up is tackling crime and anti-social behaviour. The public identify tackling crime and anti-social behaviour as the route to turning around their communities.

Britons think that crime and anti-social behaviour are getting worse and that the police are failing to tackle it:

- Most people (54 per cent) don't trust the police to tackle crime locally.
- Nearly seven in ten (68 per cent) believe the police have given up on trying to solve crimes like shoplifting and burglaries altogether.
- Most Britons (61 per cent) believe that anti-social behaviour should be treated as a serious crime, only 26 per cent think the police are doing a good job dealing with it.
- Britons consistently report that graffiti and vandalism are dragging their communities down – 46 per cent believe that vandalism and graffiti should be treated as a serious crime, including 60 per cent of Loyal Nationals.
- One in two Britons (48 per cent) feel that their local areas have become increasingly dangerous – no group feels this stronger than Loyal Nationals, among whom 63 per cent say their area has become more dangerous, a number that is almost four times more than Established Liberals (16 per cent) and almost twice as much as the number of Backbone Conservative (33 per cent).

These findings are damning in and of themselves, but they also shape how the public think about levelling up. Feeling safe in your local area and not having to worry about crime on or beyond your doorstep are basic prerequisites for feeling pride in place, and are necessary precursors for any successful levelling up agenda.

For many communities, particularly in the North and Midlands, dealing with anti-social behaviour has simply become the norm. Many Britons lament the fact that anti-social behaviour and vandalism go unpunished; any investment or improvements made in town centres or across regions will quickly be vandalised and ruined. Participants felt that vandalism going unpunished meant that widespread vandalism in communities was inevitable. Policies which require vandals to clean up their own mess command strong support from the public – and were the most popular of any crime and levelling up policies tested.

If the government is to ensure that levelling up is more than just a series of piece-meal investments in place-based projects, it needs to actively focus on the factors that contribute towards feelings of being both insecure and unsafe. For Britons, crime and anti-social behaviour is a problem that flows both ways – crime begets decline and decline

begets crime. Britons see run down, vandalised and dirty high streets and town centres and closed down youth clubs as creating the perfect conditions for crime and anti-social behaviour to increase, as well as making it harder to attract new investment, amenities and people to their area.

This levelling up test matters electorally as well. Loyal Nationals are the key electoral target for the government's flagship levelling up programme. They are the group most likely to say their area has been neglected (56 per cent) and crime is the top reason Loyal Nationals give for why their area has declined over the last decade.

In their own words...safety in the community

You don't get road sweepers anymore. I mean you used to get work road sweepers every week. And the mess in the streets is terrible. The council doesn't do enough anymore in that department and there are definitely these parks that need some attention, that could do with something new, like the swings and things. Just renew them, make them look inviting for people to want to take their children to. Lived here where I am eight years and I have never seen a road sweeper once.

Gill, Loyal National, Grimsby

You make something look really nice and the next minute somebody trashes it just for the sake of it. And that's an education thing, and that's a family thing. It's almost as though there are a lot of parents now that just don't care where their kids are or what they're doing. And the punishments for these antisocial crimes basically just aren't good enough.

Lee, Disengaged Traditionalist, Newcastle-under-Lyme

A key policy for making communities feel safer and driving up trust in the police is increased police visibility. More public visibility of the police in communities is a shared priority across the public – more police on the beat and hiring more officers are the approaches which best command the support and confidence of the public. Beyond that, there is also strong support across segments to focus on other bread and butter policing investments such as more local police stations or higher charging rates for criminals.

Conclusion

When the Conservatives launched their levelling up agenda in their 2019 manifesto four years ago, it wasn't a new idea. Politicians and policymakers had been trying for years, without much progress or success, to address the complex causes and challenges that the agenda seeks to address. But many voters, particularly across the North and Midlands of England, felt listened to for their first time. Their decades-long experiences of neglect and decline acknowledged. The chance for a fresh start for their community, closer than before.

Four years on, many of those voters feel let down. While they are realistic about the timescales it takes to achieve something that could be credibly called 'levelling up,' and aware of the challenges the pandemic posed for government bandwidth, they feel that the promise of levelling up has not yet been matched in delivery.

Clearly, this is a problem for the Conservative Party who made those levelling up promises to voters across the country. Insufficient progress on levelling up is one of the top reasons why so many of those 2019 voters have now abandoned the party.

But it would be a mistake to think this lack of delivery on levelling up is a problem that starts and ends with the electoral prospects of the Conservative Party. Voters hold Westminster and the broader political system responsible for not delivering for them. The failure to address the challenges that levelling up sought to address started well before 2019. Voters rightly hold generations of political leaders - Labour and Conservative alike- responsible for ignoring and neglecting their communities.

The public do not think levelling up has been a failure and many can point to signs of progress in their own communities. But they are frustrated at its pace and that the diagnosis outlined in the manifesto and White Paper have not been matched with the resources and freedom to deliver. The challenge now is how to shift gears as we enter the next phase of levelling up. Voters want, and need, this agenda to succeed - it's matters more than politics and electoral cycles, it matters for the future of high streets across the country, it matters for families who want to take their children to the park without feeling unsafe, it matters to not having to choose between staying in your community and getting ahead.

Using More in Common's public opinion analysis and Power to Change's policy expertise, this report has outlined a path to resetting the Levelling up agenda that can respond better to the public's expectations - a more hyper-local levelling up, a levelling up which puts communities in the driving seat, a levelling up that puts the future of high streets front and centre, a levelling up which cleans up the parks and greens spaces that mean the most to us, and a levelling up which makes our streets and our neighbourhoods feel safer.

Shifting gears on levelling up

For anyone interested in fixing Broken Britain - whether you talk about long term decisions for a brighter future or giving Britain its future back – resetting the levelling up agenda is the place to start.

Annex A: British Seven Segments

In pursuit of a more evidence-based understanding of how we find common ground on polarising issues, More in Common launched the Britain's Choice project in 2020. This project centres its analysis of issues on the values, identity and worldview of Britons, captured in seven population segments through a methodology designed in partnership with data scientists, social psychologists and other experts. It integrates insights from six dimensions of social psychology that shape the way that people see the world and orient themselves towards society. This mapping has been carried out using multiple waves of quantitative and qualitative research, building on the approach used by More in Common in other major western democracies. The six areas of social psychology are:

- **Group identity and tribalism:** the extent to which people identify with different groups based on nationality, gender, political party, ethnicity, and other factors
- **Group favouritism:** views on who is favoured and who is mistreated in society
- **Threat perception:** the extent to which people see the world as a dangerous place
- **Parenting styles:** research suggests that basic philosophies regarding people's approach to parenting can have predictive power in explaining their attitudes towards public policies and authority more generally
- **Moral Foundations:** the extent to which people endorse certain moral values or 'foundations', including fairness, care, purity, authority, and loyalty
- **Personal agency:** the extent to which people view personal success as the product of individual factors (i.e. hard work and discipline) versus societal factors (i.e. luck and circumstance)

The 'British Seven' segments are often more useful in understanding people's views across a wide range of issues than standard ways of categorising people, such as their voting history, partisan identity or demographic characteristics such as age, income, social grade, race or gender. Understanding the specific 'wiring' of each of these groups 'upstream' allows us to better understand and predict how they will respond to different sets of issues 'downstream'.

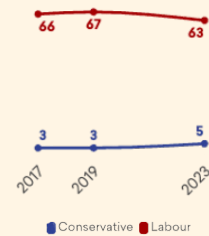
Progressive Activists

A passionate and vocal group for whom politics is at the core of their identity, and who seek to correct the historic marginalisation of groups based on their race, gender, sexuality, wealth, and other forms of privilege. They are politically engaged, critical, opinionated, frustrated, cosmopolitan, and environmentally conscious.

Progressive Activists are often outliers on values – unlike other groups, they primarily see the world through the moral foundations of care and fairness and have much lower reliance on the moral foundations of purity, loyalty and authority. Compared to other groups, Progressive Activists feel less threatened in the world and in their community. They consider that outcomes in life to be more defined by social forces and less by personal responsibility. Although they are a higher-earning segment, many of them consider this to be down to good luck than individual effort. They have the lowest authoritarian tendencies of any group.



Changing voting intention 2017-2023
Progressive Activists



Civic Pragmatists

A group that cares about others, at home or abroad, and who are turned off by the divisiveness of politics. They are charitable, concerned, community-minded, open to compromise and socially liberal. Civic Pragmatists have a similar values foundation to the Progressive Activist group in prioritising care and fairness, but they channel their energies into community and voluntary work, rather than political activism. They are also set apart from Progressive Activists (and some of the other segments) by their higher-than-average levels of threat perception.



Changing voting intention 2017-2023
Civic Pragmatists

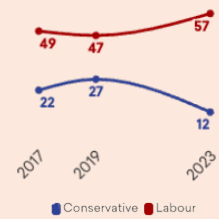


Disengaged Battlers

A group that feels that they are just about keeping their heads above water and who believe their struggles are the result of an unfair, rigged system. They are insecure, disillusioned, disconnected, overlooked but also tolerant and socially liberal. They are a low-trust group with a tendency to ignore civic messaging (they are joint most likely to have not been vaccinated for Covid-19). Their overarching sense that the system is broken drives their disengagement from their communities and the broader democratic system with which they see 'no point' in engaging.



Changing voting intention 2017-2023
Disengaged Battlers



Established Liberals

A group that has done well with an optimistic outlook that sees a lot of good in the status quo. They are comfortable, among the more privileged, cosmopolitan, trusting, liberal, confident and pro-market. They have low authoritarian tendencies and the lowest threat perception of any segment – which is reflected in their broad support for diversity, multi-culturalism, and sense that their local community is neither dangerous nor neglected.



Changing voting intention 2017-2023
Established Liberals

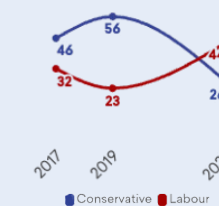


Loyal Nationals

A group that is anxious about the threats facing Britain and themselves. They are proud, patriotic, tribal, protective, threatened, aggrieved and frustrated about the gap between the haves and the have-nots. They feel the 'care' and 'fairness' moral foundations more strongly than other groups. Their key orientation is that of group identity – belonging to a group (and particularly their nation) is important to Loyal Nationals. This strong in-group identity shapes their equally strong feelings of threat from outsiders. This in turn can drive their support for more authoritarian, populist leadership.



Changing voting intention 2017-2023
Loyal Nationals



Disengaged Traditionalists

A group that values a well-ordered society, takes pride in hard work and wants strong leadership that keeps people in line. They are self-reliant, ordered, patriotic, tough-minded, suspicious, and disconnected. They place a strong emphasis on personal responsibility, are mindful of others' behaviour and rely much more on individual rather than systemic explanations for how people's lives turn out. When they think about social and political debates, they often consider issues through a lens of suspicion towards others. They value the observance of social rules, order, and a British way of doing things, but don't play an active role in their communities – they are the least likely to eat out, visit museums or go to local libraries. They often have views on issues but tend to pay limited attention to current debates. Disengaged Traditionalists are similar to Loyal Nationals in their more authoritarian predisposition.



Changing voting intention 2017-2023
Disengaged Traditionalists



Backbone Conservatives

A group who are proud of their country, optimistic about Britain's future outside of Europe, and who keenly follow the news, mostly via traditional media sources. They are nostalgic, patriotic, stalwart, proud, secure, confident, and relatively engaged with politics. They want clear rules and strong leaders and rely heavily on individual explanations for how life turns out, with this shaping how they respond to questions about deprivation and discrimination in society.



Changing voting intention 2017-2023
Backbone Conservatives





More in
Common



power to
change