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Common

# Doom Loop

Britons and The  
Budget

# Executive Summary

Heading into the Budget this Autumn, Britons are deeply worried. **68 per cent say they are pessimistic about the Budget** and the word cloud on the budget shows how concerned people are. The top words used to describe how people feel about the budget are **“worried”, “nervous”, and “apprehensive”**. Such emotional tension before a scheduled budget event is deeply unusual.

After the hugely unpopular changes to Winter Fuel Allowance, this Budget is a chance for Rachel Reeves to reset her relationship with the public - **her approval rating has fallen 32 points since the General Election** and now stands at -29.

The public's key test for the current Government is fixing the NHS, but at this Budget **53 per cent say the priority should be keeping taxes low compared to 32 per cent who prioritise investing in public services** - putting the Government in a difficult bind.

While the Government has sought to manage expectations for the Budget, the public rejects the 'tough choices' narrative: **56 per cent believe Rachel Reeves can avoid both tax rises and spending cuts in the Budget, despite Government warnings** - creating a dangerous expectation gap.

Many of the rumoured measures for this year's budget are deeply unpopular. **Scrapping the £2 cap on bus fares, for example, is opposed by almost two to one.** The Chancellor's challenge is to identify the least unpopular policies - there is more room to bring the public on board with changes to Capital Gains Tax and employers' National Insurance Contributions.

# Introduction

Far from the usual post-election honeymoon, the new Government is off to a rocky start with the public. Keir Starmer - once the most popular politician in the UK - has seen his personal approval ratings fall faster than any new Prime Minister other than Liz Truss. Just 100 days into government Labour was already tied with the Conservatives in our national voting intention polling. While Labour promised 'change' at this election, the public are twice as likely to say that our new Government represents more of the same.

The gloomy public mood extends beyond politics. 70 per cent say that things in the UK are getting worse, only ten per cent say the economy is in a good state, and 47 per cent - the highest since the start of the cost of living crisis in 2022 - say they are now not sure the cost of living crisis will ever end. In focus groups across the country, the public speak about the upcoming Budget with a sense of dread. Even normally politically disengaged groups have told us they are deeply worried about what Chancellor will announce this week. It is not normal for so many people to have such strong concern to an upcoming budget and their reaction feels far from the 'politics that treads lighter' on their lives that the new Government promised. Without careful handling, this Budget could push Britain further into a sort of doom loop - where persistent negativity about the country's prospects becomes embedded and a fearful public loses faith in the possibility of positive change and further withdraws from mainstream politics.

The Budget presents Labour with an opportunity to correct these perceptions before they crystallise in the public mind. But the Chancellor will have to walk an extremely tight path to pull that off. The Government has promised to fix public services, and voters rank cutting NHS waiting lists as the key test for this Labour Government, but funding this will be difficult when 53 per cent say that keeping taxes low should be the focus of the Budget above cutting the deficit or investing in public services.

Many cost-saving measures trailed ahead of the Budget are deeply unpopular. Changes to the Winter Fuel Allowance went down exceptionally poorly with voters, and other tax increases or spending cuts could receive a similar reaction. In many ways, that means the Chancellor's job will be choosing the least unpopular options to secure the country's finances and meet the task of repairing 'broken Britain'. But given the gloomy public mood they will also be looking for a sign of a positive vision for what a renewed Britain might look like and what the years of tough choices since the financial crash have been in aid of. It is an unenviable task.

# Labour's challenge

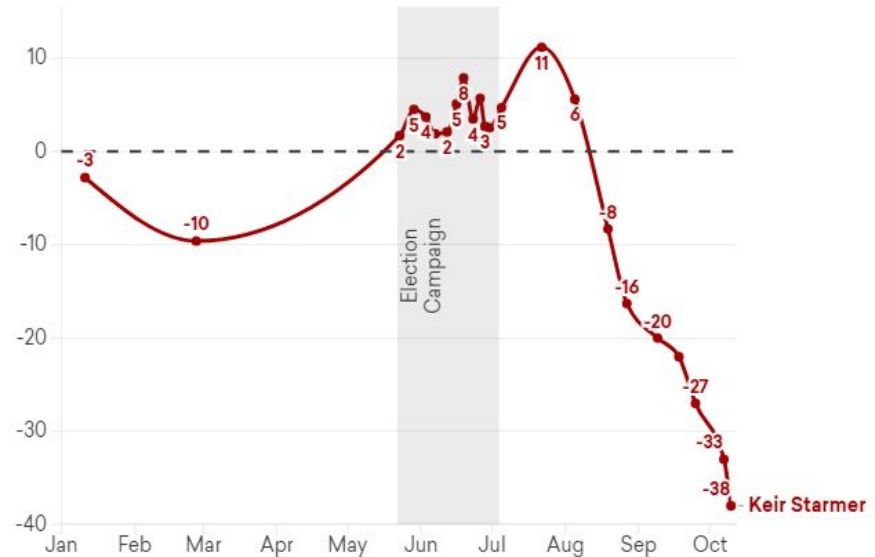
Since their historic General Election win, Labour's vote share in national voting intention polls has dropped. They are now essentially neck-and-neck with the leaderless Conservative opposition. While voting intention polls are less significant this far out from a General Election, the data matches focus group responses which suggest real dissatisfaction with the new Government.

More significant, voting intention polls expose the public's mounting discontent with the political system as a whole - it has become the norm for no party to receive more than 30 per cent of the vote share, reflecting a fragmented and divided electorate.

Rebuilding trust with the public will be difficult. The 2024 General Election was the third election in short succession where the public demanded change (after the 2016 EU referendum and 2019 General Election). Failure to deliver on the promise of change at this Budget will deepen dissatisfaction with our political class.

## Keir Starmer Approval Tracker

Net approval rating



Source: More in Common • Proportion who think Starmer is doing a "somewhat good" or "very good" job, minus those who think he is doing a "somewhat bad" or "very bad" job  
Last fieldwork: 9-10 October.

# Into the doom loop

So far, the Government has been unable to deliver on their promise of change. 65 per cent of the public say the Government feels like “more of the same” - including 45 per cent of those who voted Labour in July.

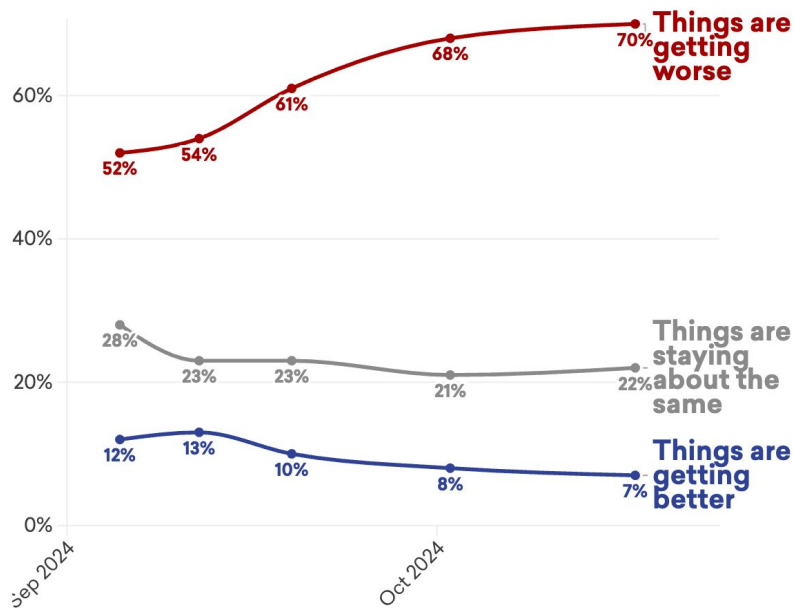
70 per cent of the public believe things are getting worse, whereas only seven per cent believe things are getting better. This is the most pessimistic the public have been this year.

Despite significant negative sentiment toward the previous Conservative Government, nostalgia is already kicking in: 30 per cent of the public think it would be better if the Conservatives had won the election, compared to 24 per cent who think it would have been worse and 25 per cent who think it would be the same.

The impacts of this go beyond negative opinions of the Labour Party. Less than a third of Britons now think British democracy is working, and only a fifth think our politicians are up to the challenges our country faces. If Labour can't prove this pessimistic public wrong, many more voters will turn away from mainstream politics altogether.

## Most think things are getting worse

Thinking about the UK today, would you say...



# **Gloomy Britain**

The state of the economy in  
2024

# Checking in on the economy

The public agrees with the Government that the economy is in a perilous state. Asked to describe the state of the economy in a word, “poor”, “bad”, and “dire” are the most popular options

*“I kind of just feel that the country's in such a state of crisis and economic downturn that we've kind of gone down a spiral ... it's a massive mountain to climb for any government to come out of that and get some sort of stability.”*

- Emma, Leigh

While a plurality - 38 per cent - say that Labour are exaggerating the scale of the challenge they face with this budget, 23 per cent say they are being honest and 19 per cent say they are understating the scale of the problem

*“I think it's important to see what's going on, but I think sometimes they do exaggerate a bit, that puts everybody in a bit of doom and gloom situation.”*

- Lisa, Leicester

More than a third (36 per cent) of the public think the UK is currently in a recession (46 per cent think we are not in a recession; 19 per cent don't know).

**In a word or two, how would you describe the state of the British economy at the moment?**



# The state of public services

Britons from across the political spectrum agree that public services are in poor condition. Over two thirds (68 per cent) of the public believe services are in a bad state and only 12 per cent consider them to be in good shape.

Labour voters are most likely to say that public services are in a good state, Reform voters are the least satisfied, with only eight per cent saying that public services are in a good state.

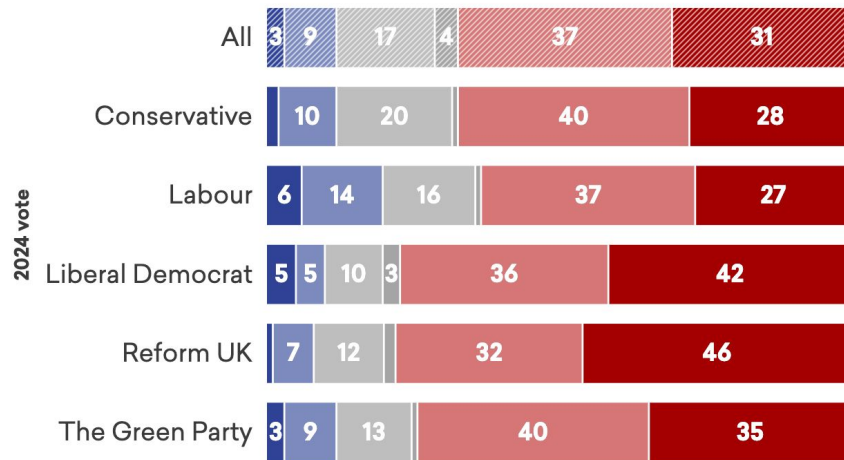
*“You look at the way that everything's almost falling apart. Nothing seems to be invested in ... the infrastructure's old, the buses are old, the trains are old.”*

- Matthew, Woodford

## 68% of Britons think public services are in a bad state.

Would you say that UK public services are in a good or bad state at the moment?

● Very good ● Somewhat good ● Neither a good nor bad ● Don't know  
● Somewhat bad ● Very bad





# The state of public finances

The public are equally gloomy about the state of public finances. 69 per cent of the public feel that government finances are in a bad state and only eight per cent say that government finances are in a good state.

This will make it easier for the Chancellor to convince the public that tough decisions are needed, but at the same time there is clear demand from the public for the Government to start telling a more optimistic vision about the future of the British economy.

There is a risk, becoming apparent in focus groups, that further negativity risks creating a doom spiral.

## Most think that government finances and the British economy are in a bad state

For each of the following, would you say they are in a good or bad state at the moment?

● Very good ● Somewhat good ● Neither a good nor bad ● Don't know  
● Somewhat bad ● Very bad



# The never-ending cost of living crisis

For the most part, the deep sense of gloom about the economy is experienced most tangibly by the public in their weekly shop and monthly bills. For more than the last two years, the cost of living has been Britons' top issue in every single MiC tracker

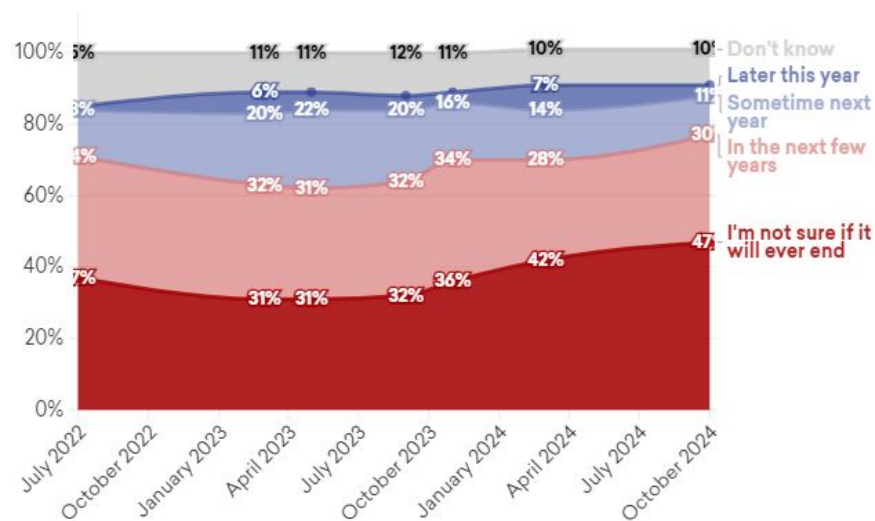
If anything, the public think the crisis is getting worse, not better. 47 per cent they are unsure the cost of living crisis will ever end - the highest this pessimism has been since the start of the crisis. In comparison, only three per cent believe the cost of living crisis will end this year, while 11 per cent believe it will end next year - the lowest numbers on this question.

*"I would really hope things will be better because it just looks really gloomy at the moment and everyone's looking at October [for the Budget], then Christmas, then it just seems like it's never ending at the moment and people are just fed up and it just seems like Groundhog Day"*

Charlene, Basingstoke

## 47 per cent now say they are not sure the cost of living crisis will ever end

While economic conditions are difficult to predict, when do you expect the cost of living crisis to end?

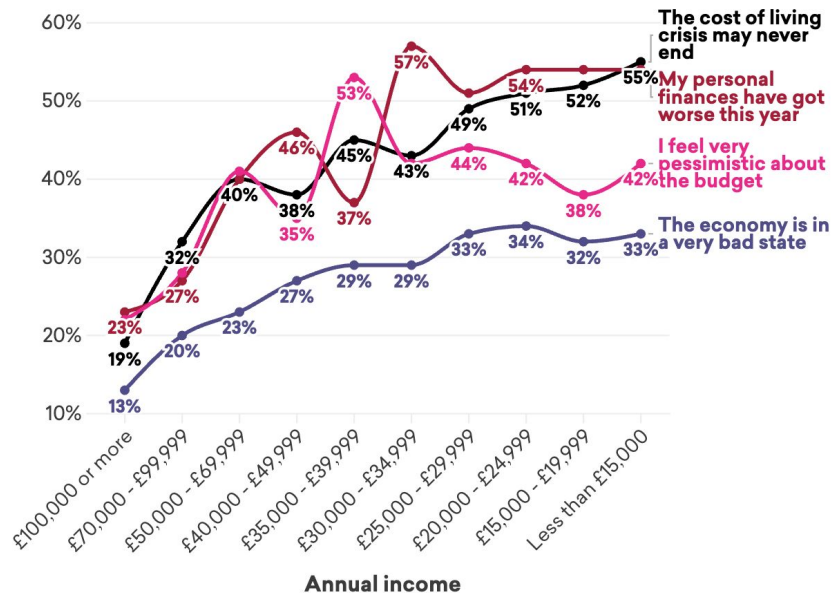


# The distribution of gloom

While most feel negatively about the economy, the extent of concern is not distributed evenly across the country. Those on the lower end of the income scale feel the cost of living crisis most acutely and are least likely to feel optimistic about their future or the future of the country.

The lowest earners are more than twice as likely as the highest earners to believe the cost of living crisis will never end (55 per cent compared to 23 per cent) and twice as likely to feel very pessimistic about the budget (40 per cent to 19 per cent). Additionally, they are four points more likely than average to believe the UK is currently in a recession.

## Lower income Britons are much more pessimistic about the economy



# Trust in Labour on the economy

In the week of the General Election, Labour were more trusted than the Conservatives on tackling the cost of living by 15 points. Today, Labour maintains their lead, but it has fallen to six points. Crucially, the Conservatives are now trusted more on the cost of living with important voter groups such as the 'red wall' Loyal National segment.

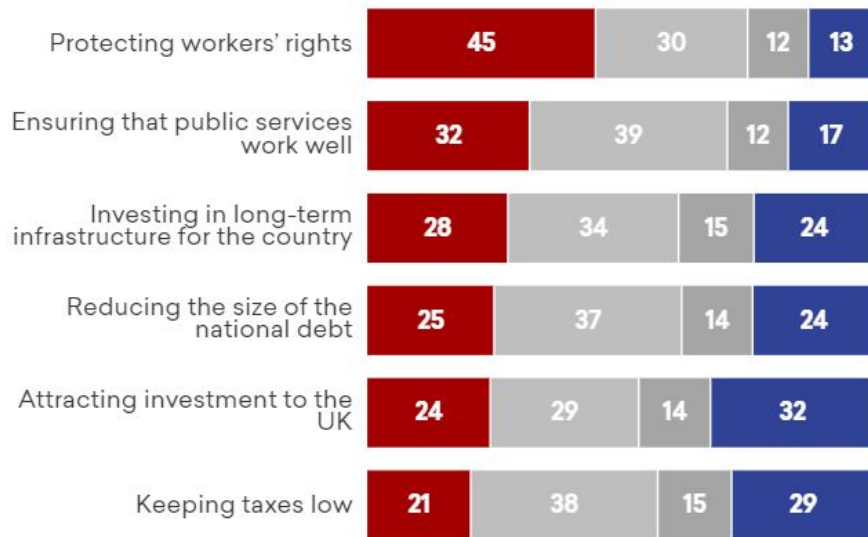
That said, on most economic issues, the largest proportion of people chose "neither" when asked which party they trust more.

Voters tend to trust Labour more on protecting workers' rights and managing public services, while they trust the Conservatives more on keeping taxes low and attracting investment to the UK. But other than workers' rights, there is no economic issue where a majority trust Labour more.

On keeping taxes low, the Conservatives now enjoy a nine point lead.

## Which Party do you trust more on each of the following issues?

● Labour ● Neither ● Don't know ● Conservatives



**Things can only get worse**  
Starting points on the budget



# Optimism is low

Only 12 per cent of Britons say they are feeling optimistic about the Budget and 68 per cent say they are pessimistic. In some sense, this speaks to a successful expectations management exercise from the Government, but it also reinforces the general sense that things only seem to get worse.

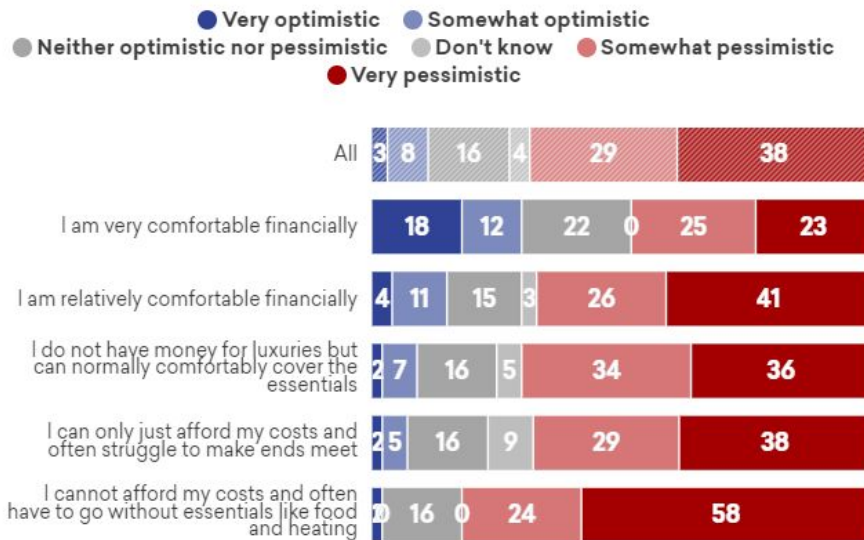
*“They painted such a bleak picture, so then when they do the announcements, it won't impact the financial markets so it's kind of like, what's the word? Damage limitation.”*

*- Danesh, South Ribble*

Optimism about the Budget is linked to financial wellbeing: 30 per cent of the most financially comfortable group are optimistic, compared to just 2 per cent of those who are struggling financially.

## Few Britons are optimistic about the budget

Would you say you are feeling pessimistic or optimistic about the upcoming budget?



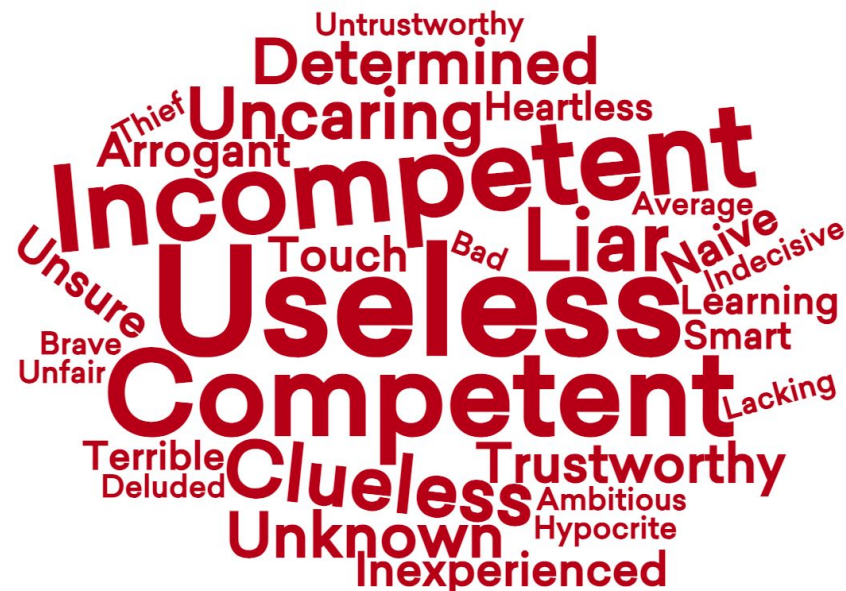
# Rachel Reeves' second chance?

Most voters took their first impression of Rachel Reeves from her decision to means-test the Winter Fuel Allowance - and it was not a positive one. Of the top five words that people now use to describe the Chancellor, four are negative: “useless”, “incompetent”, “liar” and “clueless” - although “competent” is also in that list.

Reeves' net approval rating is currently at -29, a drop of 32 points since July.

Given the close attention that voters are paying to the Budget, this is the Chancellor's best opportunity to correct the negative impression she has made among voters and indeed the Government's best chance to course correct from an unpopular start more defined by their missteps than their plan for Government.

## What word would you use to describe Rachel Reeves, the Chancellor?





# An ideal budget

Shortly after the General Election, the public set out how they would assess the Labour Government's success after five years. The most popular response—chosen by 63 per cent—was that Labour would be judged on how much they reduce NHS waiting lists.

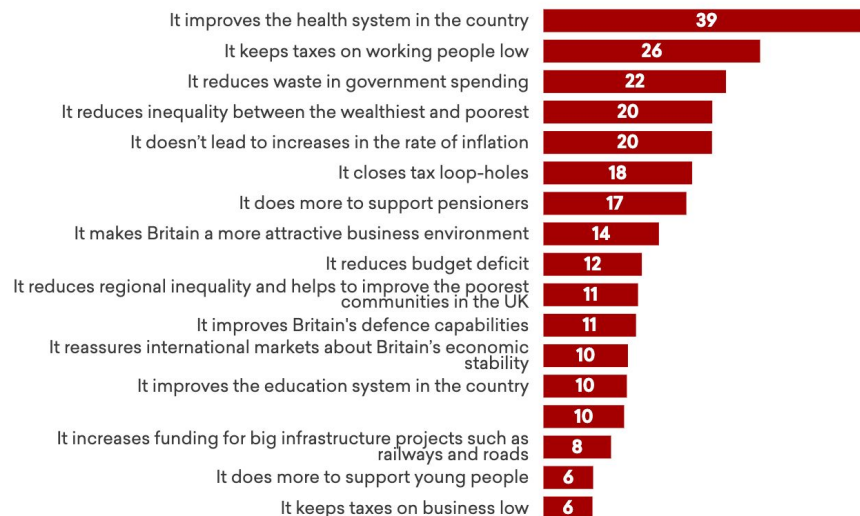
It is clear that this expectation will also apply to Labour's first Budget. Improving the health system is a central aspect of the public's ideal Budget, with 39 per cent of people selecting it as a priority.

However, 26 per cent also want a Budget that keeps taxes low, while 22 per cent believe reducing wasteful spending is crucial.

The Chancellor now faces the challenge of delivering prompt, tangible improvements to the health system without raising taxes to a level that further disillusion the public.

## Britons' ideal budget improves health, keeps tax low, and reduces waste

In your view, which of the following are the MOST IMPORTANT features of a government budget? Select up to three.



# Tax and spend

A shift that seems to have occurred since the General Election is that the public are now more concerned about the possibility of tax rises.

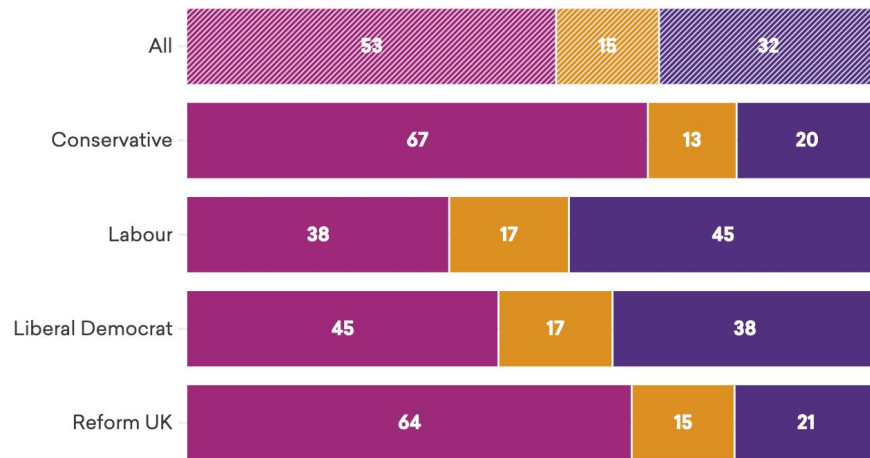
Asked to weigh up the balance between investing in public services and avoiding further tax increases, the majority (53 per cent) want the Government to tip the scales in favour of keeping taxes low, while 32 per cent prioritise public service investment.

Conservative voters lean most strongly towards low taxes (67 per cent), while Labour voters are more inclined to prioritise investment (45 per cent).

## The public want the Chancellor to prioritise keeping taxes low

Which of the following should be more of a priority for the Chancellor in the upcoming budget?

● Avoiding further tax rises ● Reducing the budget deficit ● Investing in public services



# Who is paying too much tax?

When asked which groups are overtaxed, most people point to pensioners, families, and those on low-to-middle incomes, with roughly half of the public believing these groups pay too much tax.

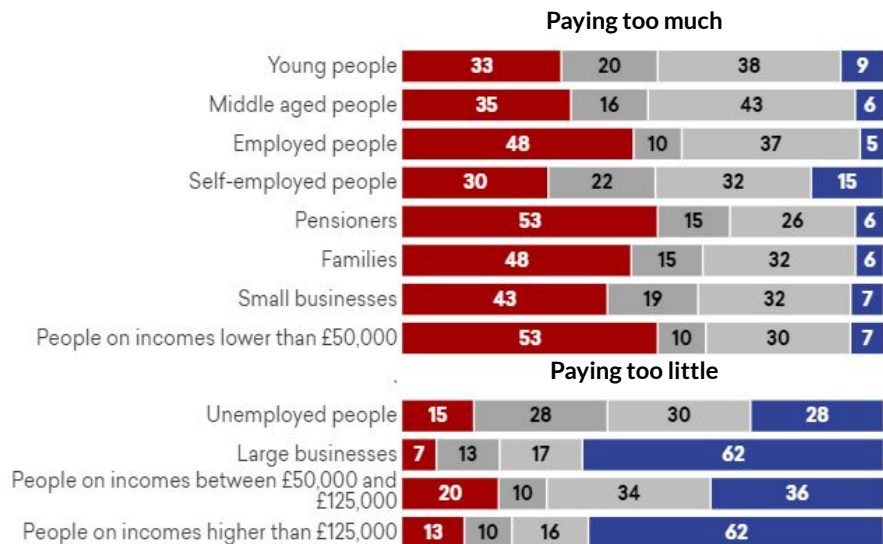
On the other hand, 62 per cent of Britons feel that large businesses and high earners don't pay their fair share and should be taxed more.

*“Make the rich pay. They’ve got the money to do it.”*

Karen, Glasgow

## Which of the following groups do you think pay too much or too little in taxes at the moment?

● Too much ● Don't know ● About the right amount ● Too little



# Lived experience

Perceptions of the tax burden vary significantly by lived experience; people tend to believe that the taxes they pay are too high.

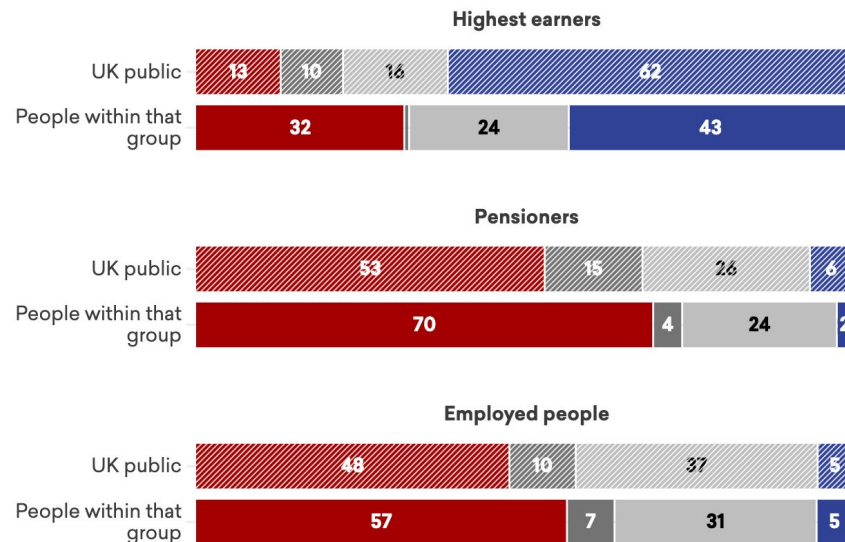
For example, while only 13 per cent of the public think the highest earners are overtaxed, this perception is more than twice as common among high earners themselves, with 32 per cent feeling that they pay too much.

(Although the Chancellor should take some solace in the fact that earners in the highest tax brackets are more likely to say they are under- than over-taxed).

While most people (48 per cent) believe pensioners pay too much tax, this is significantly higher (57 per cent) among pensioners themselves.

## For each of the following groups, say whether they pay too little or too much in taxes

● Pay too much ● Don't know ● About the right amount ● Pay too little



# Which taxes need to change?

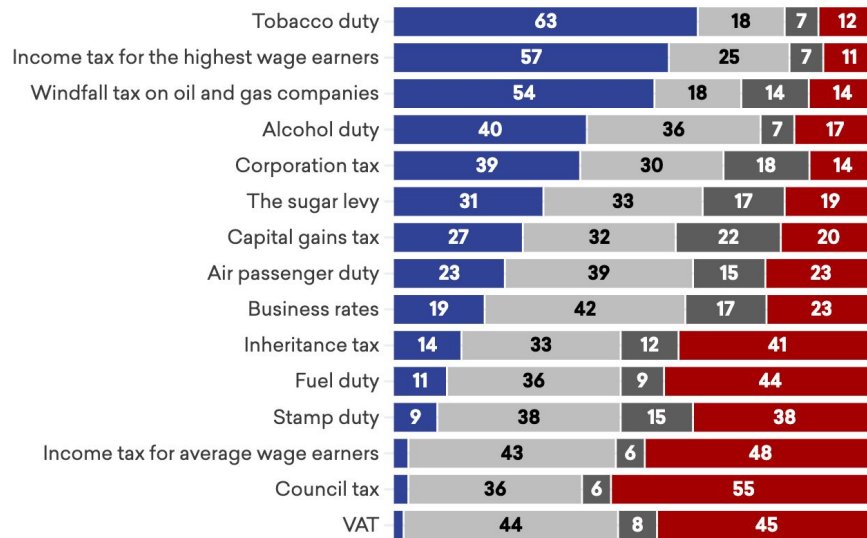
As the Chancellor searches for ways to raise revenue without further damaging the Government's popularity, the Chancellor's decision to rule out tax rises on working people seems sensible as income tax and VAT rises are the least popular.

By 48 per cent to three per cent, the public are more likely to think that income tax for average earners should be cut rather than raised; people feel the same way about VAT by a margin of 45 per cent to 2 per cent. However it is council tax that is, by far, the tax people are most likely to want to see cut with almost six in ten supporting a reduction.

On the other hand, the public has a higher tolerance for so-called "sin taxes" - almost two thirds (63 per cent) support increasing tobacco duty, and four in ten (40 per cent) think we should increase alcohol duty. There is also high support for increased windfall taxes on oil and gas companies (44 per cent), and raising income tax for higher earners.

For each of the following taxes, please indicate whether you think they should be cut, raised, or kept the same.

● Should be raised ● Should be kept the same ● Don't know ● Should be cut





# Difficult decisions

# Does the Chancellor have a choice at this budget?

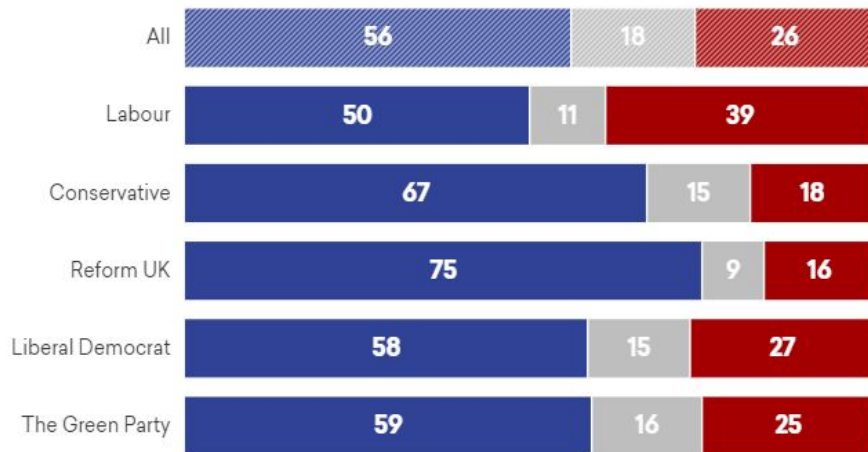
While the public is divided on whether the Government should opt for more spending cuts or tax hikes, most people don't view it as a necessity.

56 per cent believe that Rachel Reeves can avoid both tax increases and spending cuts, while only 26 per cent think she has no other options - leaving a disconnect between voter's desire to avoid further difficult choices and the fiscal position the Government is trying to convey.

Labour voters are the most likely to believe that the Chancellor must resort to either cutting spending or raising taxes, 50 per cent hold this view. Reform UK voters are the most sceptical, 75 per cent of Reform voters believe the Chancellor can avoid making these tough decisions.

## Most think the Chancellor could avoid tax rises and spending cuts if she wanted to

- There are ways the Chancellor could avoid making spending cuts or increase taxes
- Don't know
- The Chancellor has no choice but to make spending cuts or increase taxes



# Fiscal rules

The public are unsure and potentially apprehensive about changes to fiscal rules, a likely legacy of the Truss Mini Budget.

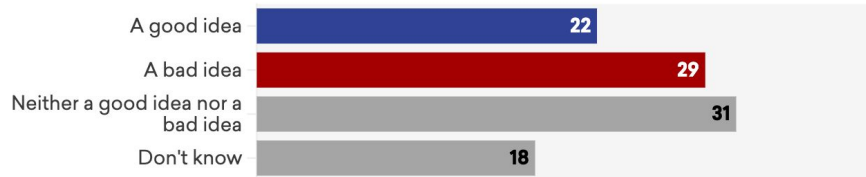
Support for the notion that day-to-day spending should be covered by tax revenue is relatively low at 22 per cent compared to 29 per cent who are opposed, although nearly half (49 per cent) have no opinion.

However, Rachel Reeves' proposed changes to capital spending rules face slightly more opposition, with over a third (36 per cent) calling it a bad idea, and just 26 per cent support it.

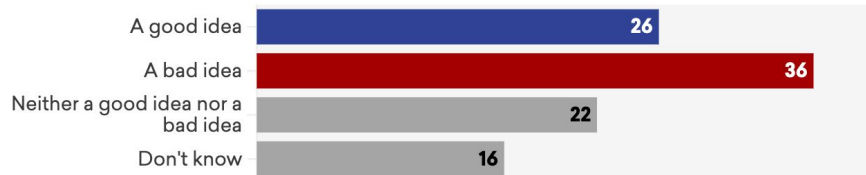
The high numbers who either don't know or who are neutral on these questions suggests that, in the absence of a negative reaction from the markets, the complexity of fiscal rule adjustments could well mean the changes pass the public by.

## Changes to the fiscal rules do not command broad support

To control government spending, the Chancellor has introduced a new rule where all day-to-day spending on things like running public services has to be covered by money raised in taxes. Do you think this is...



In order to invest more in long-term projects like infrastructure, the Chancellor has proposed changing the government's current rules, to allow them to borrow more money. Do you think this is..





# NHS: Reform or spend?

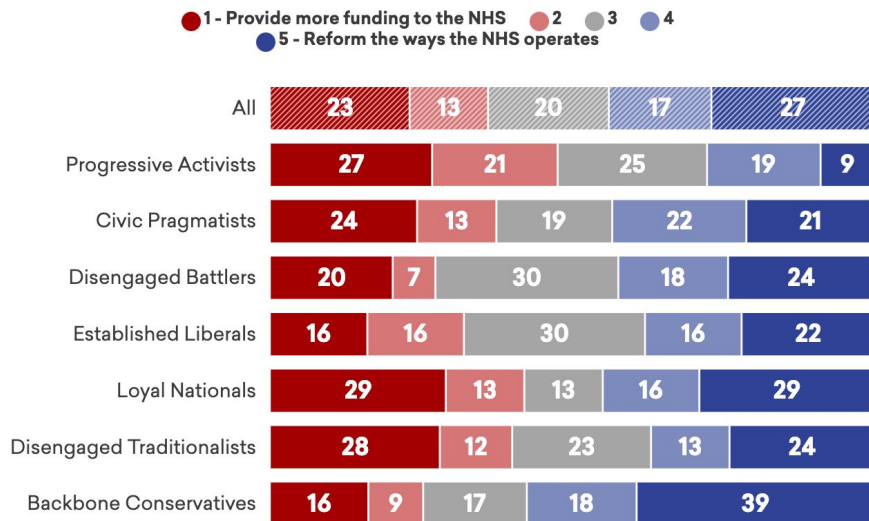
While the public agree that the NHS should be the top priority for the Government, public opinion is split on how to achieve improvements. 36 per cent think the NHS needs more funding, whereas 44 per cent think the focus should be on reforming how the NHS operates.

Opinions on the NHS reflect the public's wider economic views. Left-leaning segments - particularly Progressive Activists - are the most supportive of extra spending (48 per cent), whereas the fiscally right-wing Backbone Conservatives are the most likely to prioritize reform (57 per cent).

The data suggests that the public can be convinced by the Health Secretary's insistence that the NHS needs to change how it operates in order to receive additional funds.

## People are more likely to think the NHS needs Reform rather than more funding

Which of the following do you think is most important for the Government to do to improve the NHS?



# Benefit reform

The data points to a clear path for building public support for welfare reform: linking benefits more closely to work history. By a margin of 57 to 25 per cent, voters want the Budget to prioritise support for those in employment over benefit recipients - and a contributions-based system that rewards work history could help bridge this divide - and show that contribution is rewarded.

This approach, where benefit levels reflect how long someone has paid into the system, commands majority support at 53 per cent. Perhaps most significantly for Labour's electoral coalition, it appeals across traditional political divides. Conservative voters are particularly enthusiastic, favoring it by a decisive margin of 68 to 25 per cent. While Green voters are more evenly split, with 44 per cent supporting and 43 per cent opposing. The broad appeal of this reform suggests it could help build the kind of consensus needed for lasting welfare reform.

## A more contribution-focused benefits system would help restore some trust

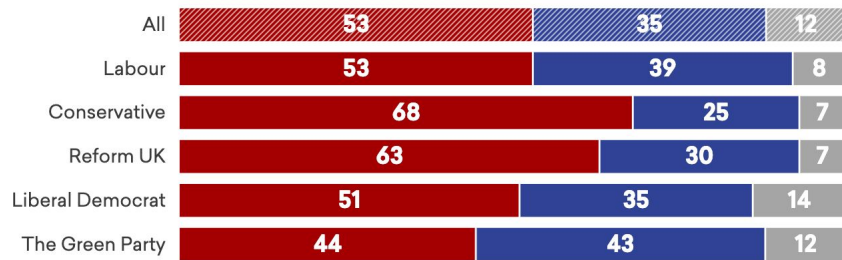
Which comes closest to your view? At the budget the government should focus more on...

● Helping those in work ● Helping those on out-of-work benefits ● Don't know



When people become unemployed do you think...

● The benefits they are entitled to should be tied to how long they have worked - so if someone has worked for longer their level of unemployment benefits is higher  
● Everyone should be entitled to the same level of benefits regardless of how long they have worked for  
● Don't know



# National Insurance

Increasing Employers' National Insurance contributions is one of the mooted tax rises that is likely to receive only minimal opposition.

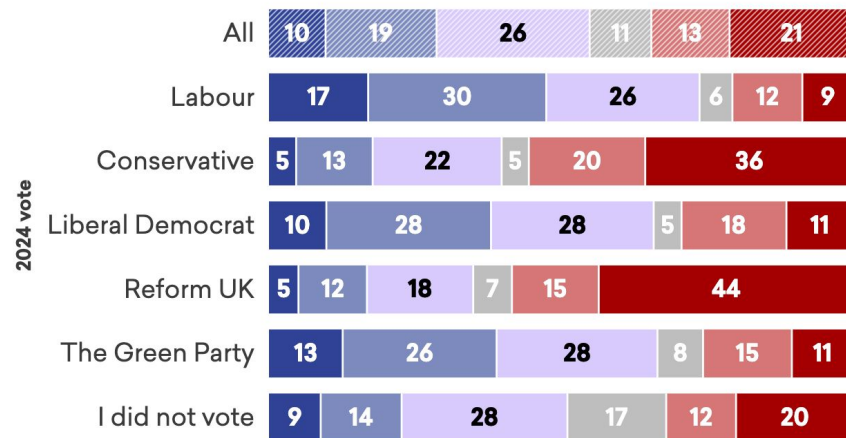
Those not in favour of increases in employers' National Insurance Contributions is limited to around a third of the public. A majority (56 per cent) would either support or feel neutral towards such a move. Only 21 per cent of those who voted Labour would oppose a rise in employers National Insurance.

Additionally, the public don't see this as a breach of Labour's manifesto promise. Only a third of people (34 per cent) feel that Labour's manifesto ruled out an increase in employers' National Insurance, as opposed to 47 per cent who said that it only ruled out an increase for employees.

## Limited opposition to increasing employers' National Insurance Contributions

If as part of the Autumn Budget, Labour now increases the amount of National Insurance employers have to pay, to what extent would you support or oppose this?

● Strongly support ● Somewhat support ● Neutral ● Don't know  
● Somewhat oppose ● Strongly oppose



# Income tax thresholds

The public believes that tax thresholds should rise with inflation - by a margin of almost two to one.

However, the public wouldn't consider frozen tax thresholds to be a broken manifesto promise. Only 36 per cent of the public feel that retaining the current tax thresholds would break Labour's manifesto pledge, whereas 41 per cent believe it is in line with their promise not to raise taxes on working people.

## Most want income tax thresholds to rise in line with inflation

*In order to raise more money for government spending, the salary thresholds at which people start paying the basic and higher rate of income tax have been frozen since 2021, this means they have not risen in line with inflation, meaning more people now pay higher rates of income tax. Thinking about the forthcoming budget, what comes closest to your view?*



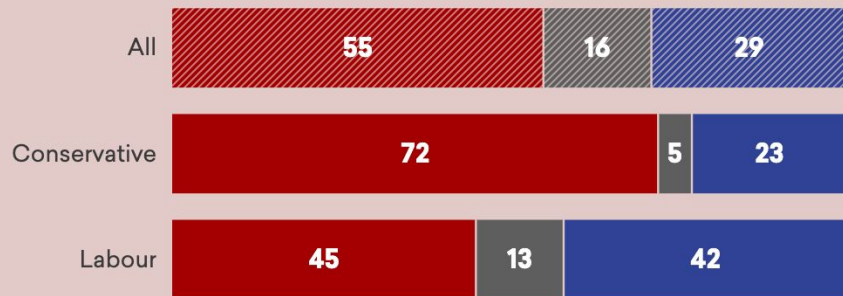
# Fuel duty

Most people would oppose the decision to reverse previous cuts to fuel duty. 55 per cent believe this would be the wrong decision, while only 29 per cent would support it - Conservative voters are much more likely to oppose this.

## Opposition to increasing fuel duty

*Rishi Sunak reduced fuel duty by 5p when he was Prime Minister. There are suggestions that the government could raise money by reversing that 5p cut. Do you think that would be...*

● The wrong decision ● Don't know ● The right decision



# Taxing pension allowances

The public is strongly against reducing pensioners' tax free allowances, with more than half of the public (55 per cent) saying that this a bad way to increase revenue, while only 26 per cent support it.

This policy would likely add to the broad and significant dissatisfaction with Labour's approach to pensioners, as 64 per cent of the public believe pensioners have had a bad deal from the Government.

*"They seem to have it in for pensioners for some reason, I think it's absolutely disgusting" - Colin, Leigh*

## Strong opposition to decreasing pensioners' personal allowance

Currently, pensioners can withdraw £250,000 from their pension without paying tax on it. There is a proposal to lower this threshold to £100,000 in order to raise more money for the government. Do you think this would be a...



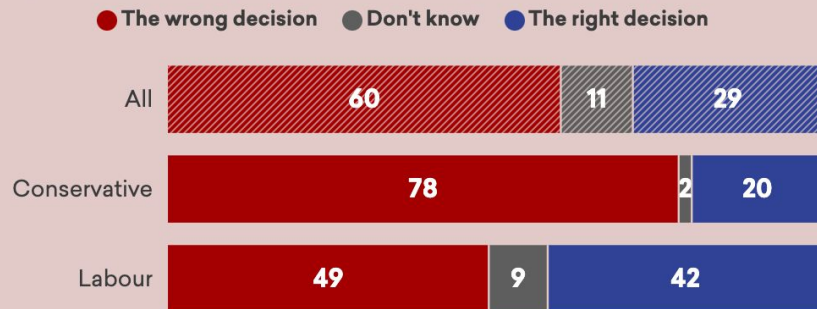
# Winter fuel allowance

In focus groups, the decision to means test Winter Fuel Allowance emerges time and time again, with many viewing it as a betrayal by the new Government.

Six in ten believe that this was the wrong decision; among 2024 Conservative voters, this is almost eight in ten. Even Labour voters are more likely to oppose it (49 - 42 per cent). The winter fuel decision is also the most well known decision Labour has taken since coming to office.

## Strong opposition to means testing Winter Fuel Allowance

The Government has announced that Winter Fuel Allowance, which is currently paid to all pensioners, will now only be paid to those receiving pension credit. Do you think this was...



# Capital gains tax

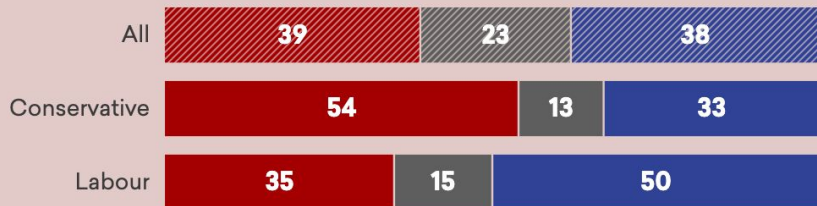
The public is divided on whether capital gains tax should be charged at the same rate as income tax: 38 per cent support this change, while 39 per cent oppose it.

While private renters lean in favour of increasing capital gains tax (45 per cent support while 30 per cent oppose), those who own their homes outright are more likely to oppose the change (37 per cent support while 46 per cent oppose).

## Public split on bringing capital gains tax in line with income tax

Capital gains tax is charged when people's property or assets are sold at a higher value than they were bought for. It is currently charged at a lower rate than income tax. Which of the following comes closest to your view?

- Capital gains tax should remain lower than income tax
- Don't know
- Capital gains tax should be brought in line with income tax



# Inheritance tax

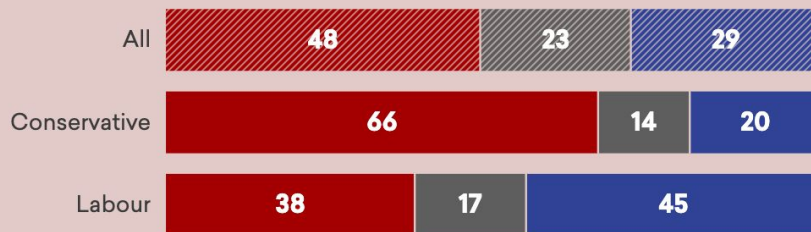
There is low public support for removing exemptions to inheritance tax - nearly half of the population (48 per cent) believe this would be the wrong decision.

This issue is sharply divided by party support, with two thirds (66 per cent) of Conservative voters opposing the change, while Labour voters are more likely to support than oppose it by a margin of 45 to 38 per cent.

## Opposition to increasing inheritance tax - with more support from Labour voters

Currently, most people are exempt from paying inheritance tax and only around 4% of deaths result in an inheritance tax charge. The government could remove some exemptions to increase the amount it collects from inheritance tax. Do you think this would be...

- The wrong decision
- Don't know
- The right decision



# Bus fare cap

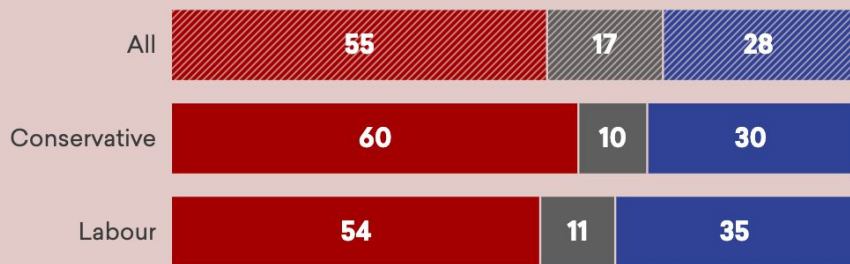
A majority (55 per cent) of the public oppose scrapping the £2 bus fare cap, a view shared across political parties.

This is also the second most unpopular policy from the list of difficult decisions mooted for this Budget - something that could backfire particularly badly with older voters living outside London.

## Strong opposition to scrapping the £2 bus fare cap

One way the government could reduce government spending is to end the current scheme where some bus fares are capped at £2. Do you think that this would be...

● The wrong decision ● Don't know ● The right decision



# HS2

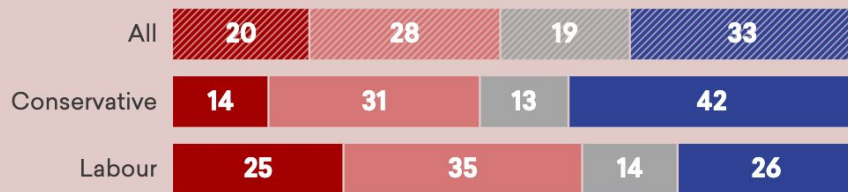
The public is divided on HS2. While one in five believe that we should reinstate the full HS2 route to Manchester, 28 per cent would prefer the plan to build the cheaper but slower alternative to the scrapped section. One third believe that we shouldn't build the Northern leg at all.

Support for the Northern leg is much higher in the North West of England, where 65 per cent back either of the plans, compared to 49 per cent nationally.

## Mixed support for the Northern leg of HS2

To save money, the previous Government scrapped plans to build the High Speed Rail 2 (HS2) leg from Birmingham to Manchester, keeping only the London to Birmingham route. Do you think the current government should...

● Bring back original plans to build HS2 in full to Manchester  
● Build a cheaper, less fast route from Birmingham to Manchester  
● Don't know ● Continue the policy of not building a route at all



# Public opposition to scrapping the £2 bus fare cap

The decision to end the £2 bus fare cap could further destabilise Labour's voter coalition by alienating key segments of its base.

While each of our seven segments believe that it is the wrong decision, opposition to the policy is highest among **Progressive Activists** - our most left-leaning segment - who Labour risk losing to the Green Party.

Additionally, over two thirds (68 per cent) of **Disengaged Battlers** - our most economically insecure segment - oppose the policy. We've increasingly seen evidence of them being drawn toward Reform UK.

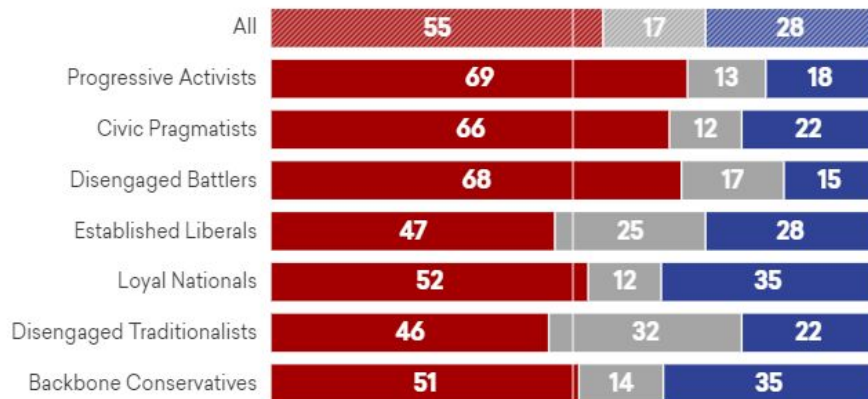
*"My mum knows all about the two pound bus fare, she goes on about it all the time. She's never mentioned anything political to me before, but the two pound bus fair genuinely had an effect on her life, something like that. Something like that is simple and easy will stick with you and that's why people like it."*

Greg, Manchester

## Scrapping the £2 bus fare cap is most unpopular with Disengaged Battlers and Progressive Activists

One way the government could reduce government spending is to end the current scheme where some bus fares are capped at £2. Do you think that this would be...

● The wrong decision ● Don't know ● The right decision





# Making difficult decisions

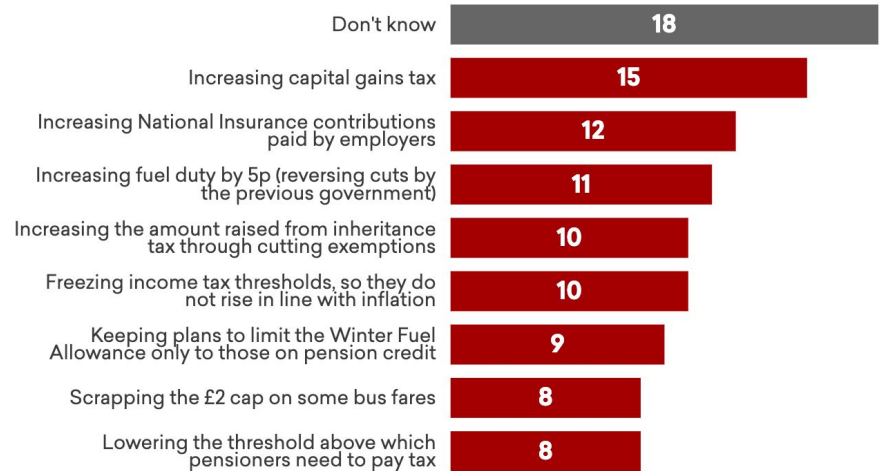
Faced with a list of potentially difficult decisions and asked to choose the best proposal, nearly one in five people (18 per cent) selected “Don’t know”.

The first decision the public would make is to increase the capital gains tax, which was chosen by 15 per cent of the public. This is followed by raising employers' National Insurance contributions, selected by 12 per cent. Raising capital gains tax and employers' National Insurance contributions are likely to be the least unpopular options for the Chancellor to gain public approval..

The public's views on these tough choices vary by party support. 13 per cent of Conservative voters would consider scrapping the bus fare cap, compared to only seven per cent of Labour voters. Additionally, Labour voters are six percentage points more likely than Conservatives to support an increase in capital gains tax.

## The difficult decisions the public would make first include increasing capital gains and NICs

Now, from this list of changes that the government might make in the upcoming budget in order to support our public finances, which of these would you say is the BEST proposal?



# Possible traps

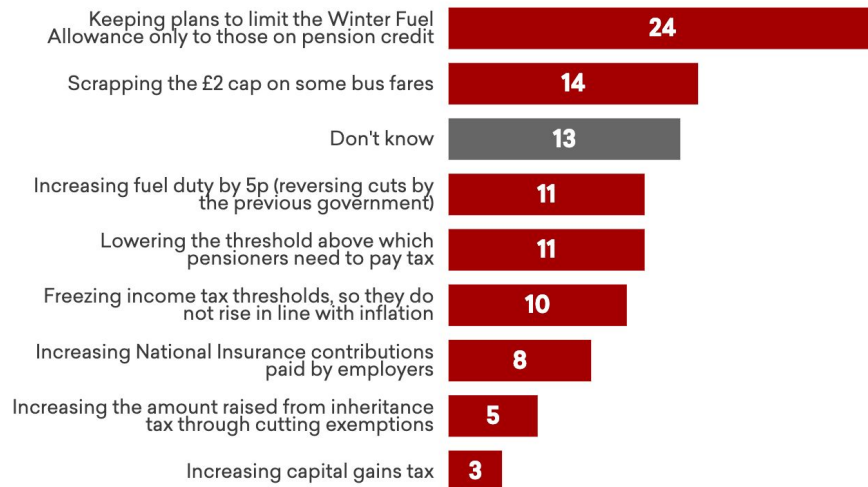
Public opposition to means testing the Winter Fuel Allowance remains extremely high, even when compared with other difficult policies.

The change to Winter Fuel Allowance was the worst fiscal proposal among broad swathes of voters beyond just pensioners - every generation other than Gen-Z chose changes to WFA as the worst option from the list.

Scrapping the £2 bus fare limit was the second most unpopular policy - with 14 per cent identifying it as the worst proposal on the list. The £2 bus fare cap was a popular policy that the Conservatives struggled to capitalise on while in government, but removing it could cause a backlash for Labour.

## Means testing WFA and scrapping the £2 bus fare are the budget measures the public want least

And which of these would you say is the WORST proposal?



# Public support for a green growth strategy

Our polling suggests that a broad coalition of voters believes in the economic benefits of the energy transition, and that Labour could command significant support for a green growth strategy.

Half of the public (49 per cent) agree that transitioning to renewable energy would boost economic growth and 47 per cent feel that it could help to alleviate the cost of living crisis.

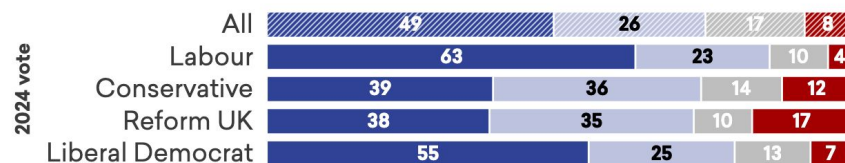
While approval is most strong among Labour's voter base (63 per cent), a green growth strategy could appeal to voters across the spectrum. Even among Conservative and Reform UK supporters, more than a third believe that green investment could boost the economy and reduce the cost of living.

Perhaps just as significantly, only eight per cent of the public believe green investment would actively hurt economic growth, and just 10 per cent think it would raise the cost of living. This suggests Labour has room to pursue a green growth strategy without risking voter support.

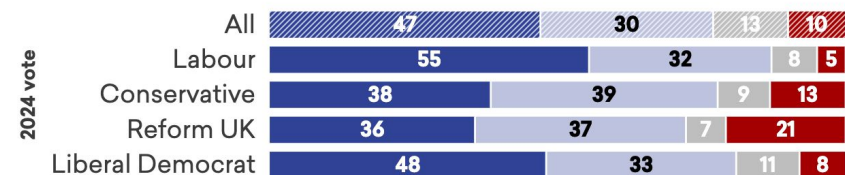
## The public sees green investment as a way to grow the economy and sort the cost of living crisis

If the UK generated more electricity from renewable energy like wind turbines and solar farms, what would you expect to happen?

● The UK economy would grow faster ● It would not affect the UK's economic growth  
● Don't know ● The UK economy would grow slower



● This would lower the cost of living ● This would make no difference to the cost of living  
● Don't know ● This would increase the cost of living



# Making polluters pay to fund the green transition

In order to build a broad public consensus for a green growth strategy, it's essential that people perceive the funding to be fair and proportional. Our polling shows that the public supports raising taxes on businesses and individuals who contribute most to pollution.

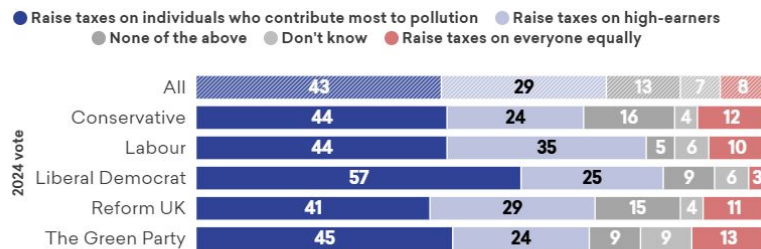
43 per cent of people support increasing taxes on individuals who are high polluters. Support is even stronger when it comes to businesses, with 56 per cent agreeing that polluting companies should help fund the green transition.

In contrast, less than ten per cent of the public think that the tax burden should be shared equally across the country. This principle resonates across the political spectrum, with voters of every major party favouring a “polluters pay” policy.

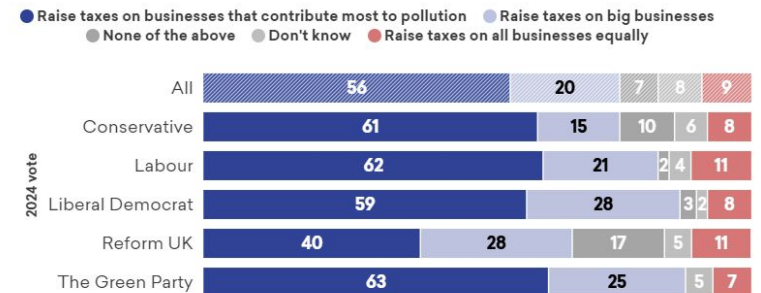
Separately, we find that talking about “investing” rather than “spending” on climate projects increases net support by 29 percentage points.

## The public supports taxing polluters to fund the green transition

If the UK Government needs to raise taxes on individuals and households to spend on protecting the environment, which approach would you prefer they take?



If the UK Government needs to raise taxes on businesses to spend on protecting the environment, which approach would you prefer they take?



## **Methodology**

More in Common polled 2,009 people, representative of GB adults between 19-21 October 2024.

*More in Common is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by their rules.*

**[www.moreincommon.org.uk](http://www.moreincommon.org.uk)**



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