



More in
Common

Britons on welfare and the two child limit

May 2025

Summary

Labour's welfare trap

In voters' minds, how the Government tackle the cost of living is one of the key tests of Labour's success. But so far the Government's policies have been perceived to benefit the rich, at the expense of pensioners, the disabled and the working class.

In particular Labour's position on welfare runs the risk of alienating the party's left flank, and is likely to also be unpopular among right-leaning segments of the party's coalition.

The two child limit

At a national level, voters' initial instinct is to support the two-child limit, though Labour voters oppose it.

However there is a distinction between the 3 second and 3 minute take on the limit. Qualitative research reveals more nuanced feelings about the policy. While some feel that family planning should be a matter of parental responsibility, in focus groups this argument can give way to questions about what happens when family circumstances change, and the impact on children.

Choosing the right words

Public support for removing the two child limit increases if removal is framed around the principle that all children deserve a good start in life, and that benefits should be provided alongside non-financial support

This message frame substantially increased support for removing the limit among Labour's progressive base, as well as the key 'Red Wall' swing group.



The public's verdict on the government's record

The British Seven Segments

Progressive Activists



...a group for whom politics is an important part of their identity and who seek to correct longstanding injustices

Civic Pragmatists



...a group that cares about others, at home or abroad. They wish for less conflict and more compromise

Disengaged Battlers



... a group that are just getting by. They blame the system for its unfairness, but not other people

Established Liberals



...a group that has done well and means well towards others, but also sees a lot of good in the status quo

Loyal Nationals



...a patriotic group, who worry that our way of life is threatened and also feel our society has become more unfair

Disengaged Traditionalists



...a group that values a well-ordered society and prides in hard work. They want strong leadership that keeps people in line

Backbone Conservatives



... a group who are proud of their country, optimistic about Britain's future outside of Europe, and who keenly follow the news

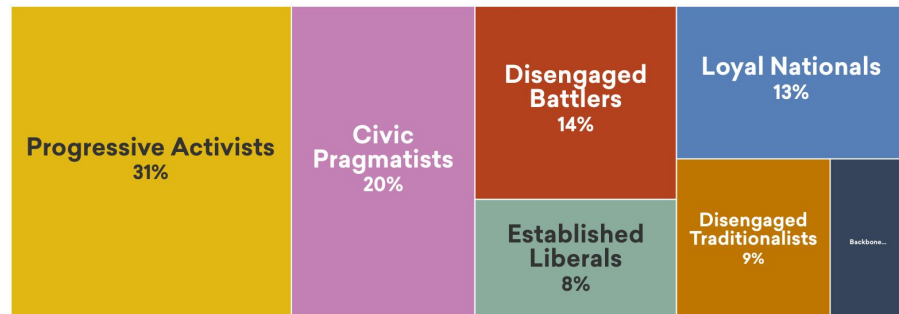
Labour's electoral coalition is fragile

In 2019, Labour's voters drew from a relatively uniform base - half of their supporters stemming from the most left-leaning segments, Progressive Activists and Civic Pragmatists.

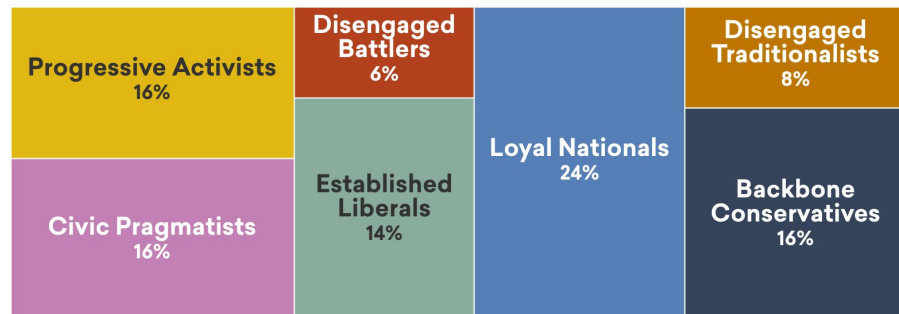
The success of the 2024 strategy means Labour's voter coalition is much broader, but potentially more unwieldy - the two progressive segments only make up a third of Labour's new voter base, while half of their voters are from socially conservative Loyal National, Backbone Conservative and Disengaged Traditionalist groups.

Labour's challenge resembles that of wheeling an overloaded wheelbarrow down a narrow path - lean too much one way to appeal to just one segment and the whole lot might spill out.

Segment of 2019 Labour Voters



Segment of 2024 Labour Voters



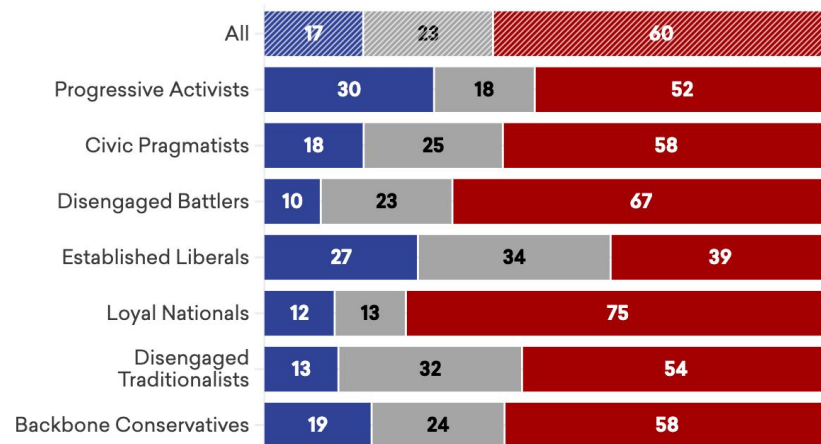
The public thinks the Government is going in the wrong direction on tackling the cost of living

A majority of the public believes that the Government is going in the wrong direction on tackling the cost of living crisis and hardship. This view spans the political spectrum.

Britons are more likely to say the government is going in the wrong direction on the cost of living and hardship today than in October (net -43 per cent saying the right direction in March, compared to net -38 in October).

Would you say that the Government is going in the right direction or the wrong direction on tackling the cost of living crisis and hardship?

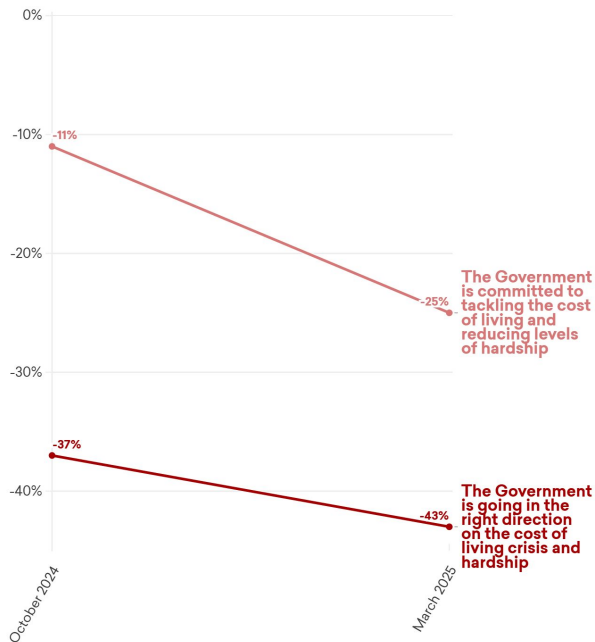
● Right direction ● Don't know ● Wrong direction



Perceptions of the Government's approach to hardship and the cost of living are worsening

Fewer Britons now believe that the government is committed to tackling hardship

(Net agreement with each statement)



For many Britons, perceptions of the Labour government on hardship and the cost of living are beginning to harden — and time may be running out to shift them.

Back in October 2024, many already felt that Labour lacked a clear commitment to tackling hardship, and most believed the government was going in the wrong direction.

Over the past six months, these concerns have only deepened. Now, three quarters of those who voted Labour in 2024 say they would consider voting for a different party if Labour doesn't tackle hardship.

"I just think in general, life seems to be getting more and more difficult ... there's a lot of more red tape and a lot less funding coming in."

- Bernadette, Barnsley

Labour could lose up to three quarters of their voters if they don't tackle hardship

If Labour doesn't successfully reduce the cost of living and tackle hardship by the time of the next election, which of the following would you consider doing?

(Shown only to 2024 Labour voters)

2024 General Election vote

If Labour does not tackle cost of living and hardship



The political risk facing Labour

For many, Labour at its best is defined by its approach to supporting the least well off - including the working class and those in poverty

Asked what the Labour Party looks like at its best the public say it is being a party that looks after the working class, improves public services and tackles poverty.

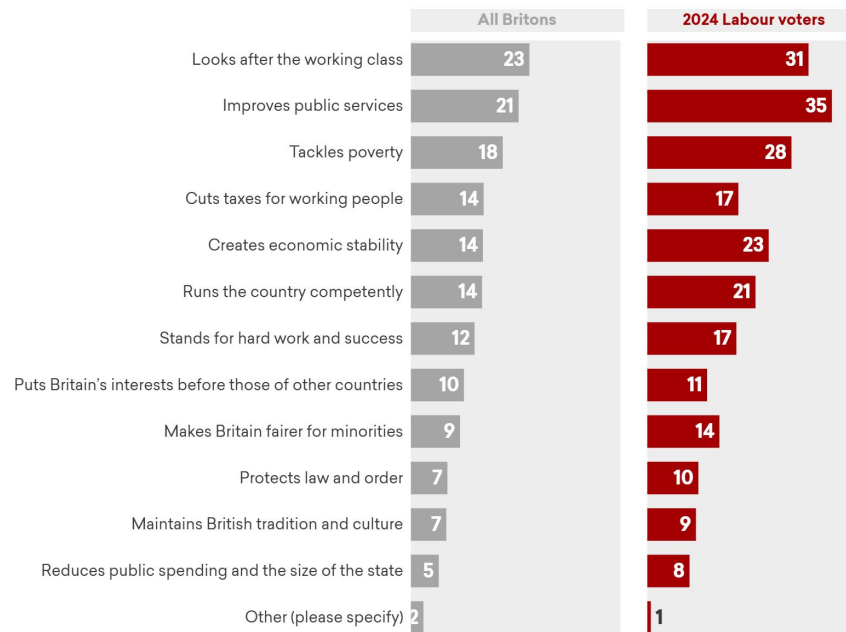
But Labour are not perceived as meeting this expectation: only a third believe that Labour is committed to tackling the cost of living crisis, while 60 per cent think they are going in the wrong direction on tackling hardship.

"Labour used to be the party of the working class. I haven't got a clue what it is now"

Richard, retired welder, Merthyr Tydfil

Labour at its best... looks after the working class, improves public services and tackles poverty

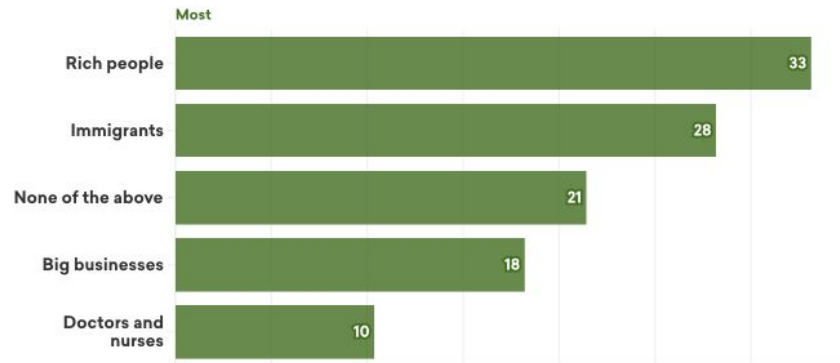
When the Labour Party is at its best, what does it do?



So far the government has been seen to help the rich at the expense of the working class

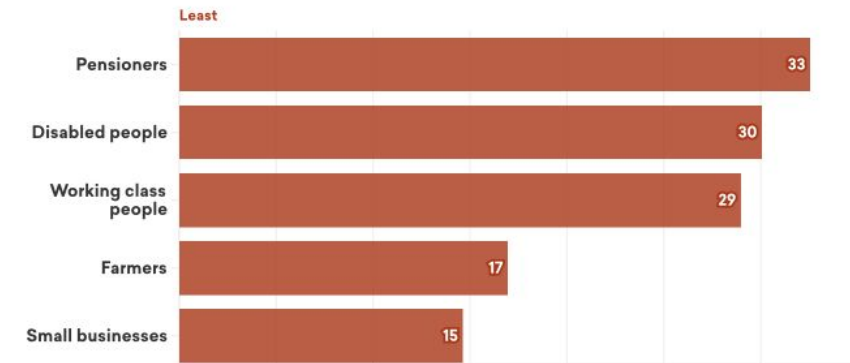
The public believe that those benefiting least from the Labour government's policies are pensioners, the disabled, and the working class.

Which of the following groups do think are benefiting MOST from the actions and policies of the Labour Government that was elected last year?



Source: More in Common (March 2025)

Which of the following groups do think are benefiting LEAST from the actions and policies of the Labour Government that was elected last year?



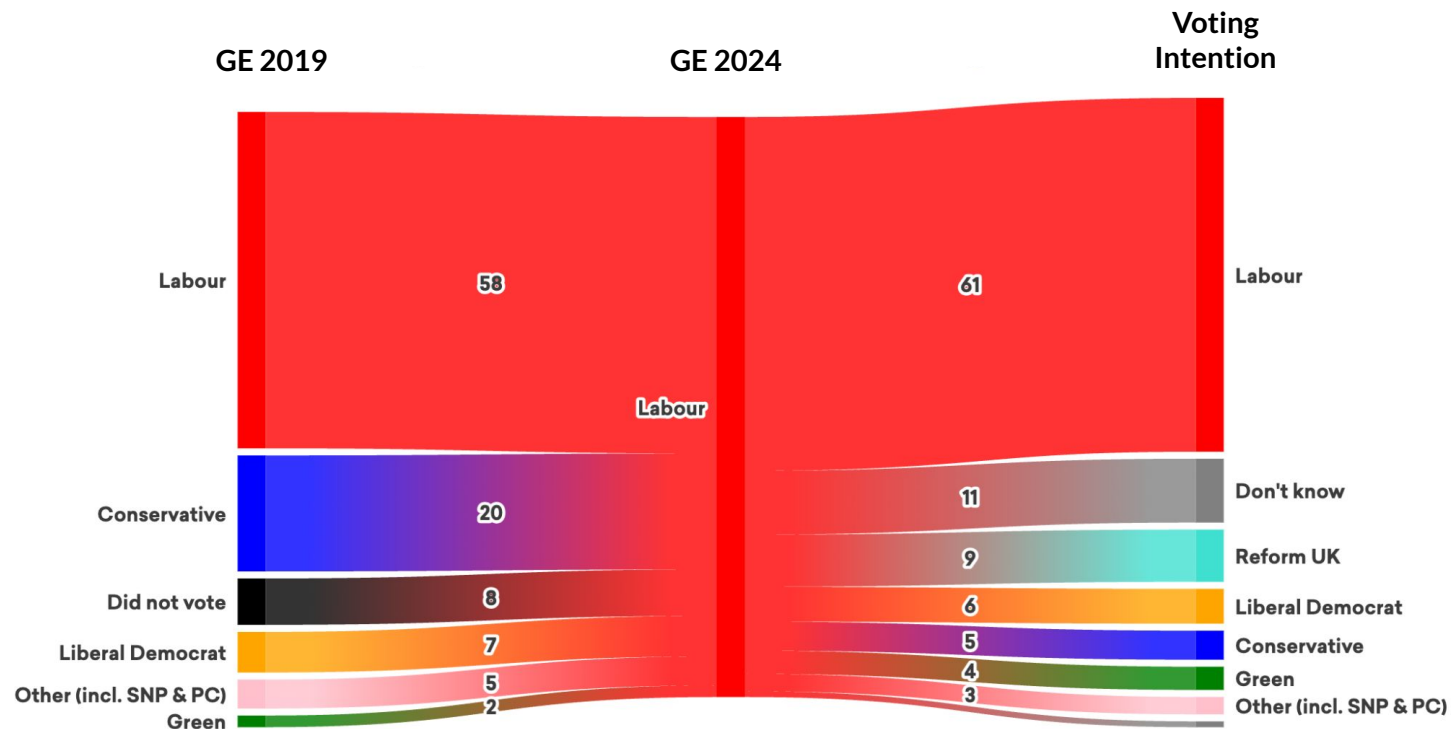
Source: More in Common (March 2025)

“So much is focused on immigration and the NHS and things like that, but before we even get to that, if people can't afford to eat, if people can't afford to clothe their children, I do think it needs prioritising far more” - Bernadette, Barnsley



Key voter groups for Labour

Labour's 2024 voters formed a diverse coalition



Key voter groups for Labour

Progressive Defectors

2024 Labour voters who would now vote for another left wing party - the Liberal Democrats, Greens, SNP, or Plaid Cymru. As of March, they represented 12 per cent of Labour's 2024 voters, but other research shows the potential ceiling for this group is much higher.

Labour Base

48 per cent of 2024 Labour voters. Long-term Labour, these are the voters the party would be most likely to retain in an election tomorrow. They voted Labour in 2019 and 2024.

Roughly three quarters say they would vote Labour again tomorrow, while others are unsure or would not vote.

Borrowed Conservatives

2019 Conservatives who switched to Labour. They represent 20 per cent of Labour's 2024 voters.

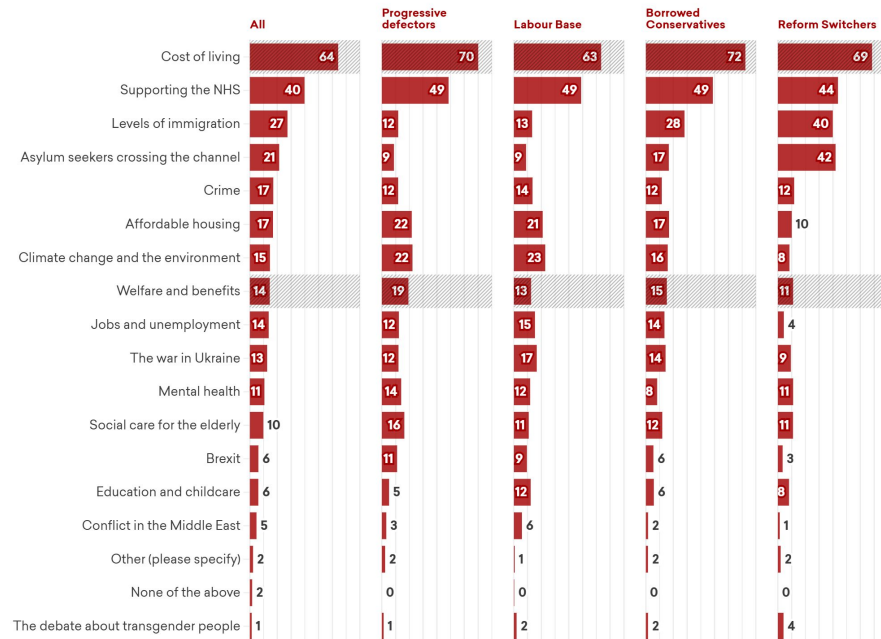
While this voter group overlaps with Reform switchers (roughly 3 in 10 of the voters Labour borrowed from the Conservatives in 2024 would now vote Reform), there is also a risk of losing Borrowed Conservatives to the Liberal Democrats, particularly in Southern 'Blue Wall' seats where Labour made gains in the General Election.

Reform Switchers

2024 Labour voters who now intend to vote Reform. They represented 9 per cent of Labour's 2024 voters in March.

What is on the minds of Labour's key groups?

Biggest issues for the UK Public, and key Labour groups



The cost of living remains the main concern for each of those groups. Both Labour's left and right flanks care about this issue more than the average Briton.

Though the cost of living and NHS remain the top considerations across Labour voter blocs, there are key differences between their wider concerns. The Labour Base are more concerned about housing and climate change. Their Left Flank share these concerns and also prioritise welfare and social care. On the right flank of the party - Borrowed Conservatives are the group most concerned with the cost of living while Reform Switchers are more sensitive to immigration and asylum seekers.

It is an ongoing challenge for Labour to address the diverging concerns of their 2024 voter coalition.



Welfare reforms - an emerging problem?

Public supports increasing Universal Credit, but many say the Government should have gone further

The recently announced increase to Universal Credit is broadly popular with the public.

Six in ten think UC should be increased by at least the £3 announced by the government - including a plurality of every voter group.

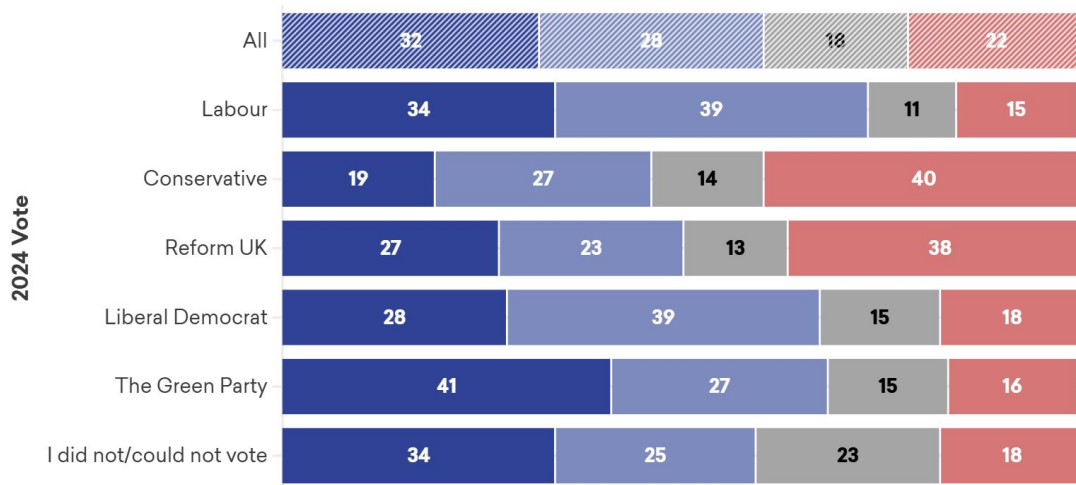
Yet many think the uplift does not go far enough (32 per cent, compared to 28 per cent who support the change and 22 per cent who think it should not be increased).

"You are penalising people who are often really hard working, have paid into the system for years and the amount that you get on universal credit is not high. Universal credit amount for a single adult is lower than the pension amount, which everyone knows is low anyway."

Emily, Trainee Clinical Psychologist, Bury St. Edmunds

The basic rate of Universal Credit is intended to cover the cost of essentials such as food, utility bills, clothing, travel, basic toiletries and household goods. It is currently £91 a week for a single adult. As part of recently announced reform to benefits, the government proposed to increase the basic rate of Universal Credit by around £3 a week. Which comes closest to your view?

- This is a bad idea - the increase should be more than £3 a week ● This is a good idea ● Don't know
● This is a bad idea - the basic rate of Universal Credit should not be increased



Benefit cuts have high cut-through and strong opposition

The recently announced cuts to disability benefits are among the most high cut through negative policies of the Labour Government.

83 per cent of the public have heard about the recently announced cuts to disability benefits. Only 32 per cent of Britons believe that the cuts to disability benefits are a good idea, compared to 58 per cent who believe they are a bad idea.

Sitting alongside policies such as means testing the Winter Fuel Allowance (a policy most Britons would like to see reversed), the risk for Labour is that welfare reforms feed broader concerns around whether the Government is not serious about tackling poverty. Some go so far as to say the Government is targeting the vulnerable.

"They're targeting the wrong people. Pensioners, the disabled. It seems to be the groups that can't fight back."

Chris, mechanic, Hull

Labour's successes and failures

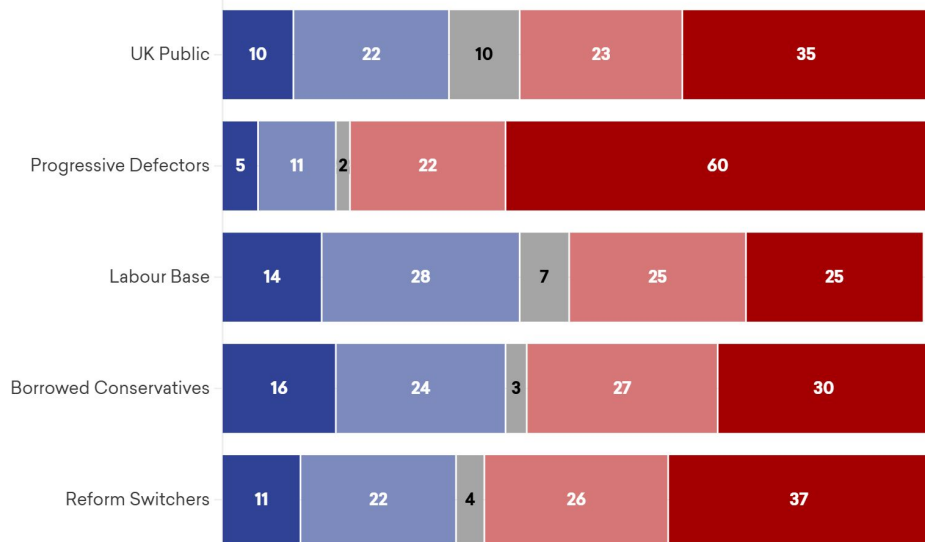
Lighter colours indicate greater ambivalence (more people expressing neither a negative nor positive view of the event)



Labour's voter groups on disability benefits

In your view, do you think the cut to disability benefits is a good idea or a bad idea?

■ This would be a very good idea ■ This would be a somewhat good idea ■ Don't know
■ This would be a somewhat bad idea ■ This would be a very bad idea



Each of Labour's voter blocs are more likely to see the disability benefit cuts as a bad rather than good idea.

The cuts are most strongly opposed by Labour's Progressive Defectors - 82 per cent of this group say the disability benefit cuts are a bad idea.

Yet even among Labour's Base and the voter blocs they risk losing to the right, most see the cuts as a bad thing.

Cutting disability benefits may therefore be a policy that risks pulling voters from Labour on the left, and won't be popular among their right-leaning supporters.



The two child limit

While Britons tend to support the two child limit, Labour voters want it removed

Views on the two child limit are mixed. At a headline level, Britons tend to oppose lifting the limit - 49 per cent say it would be a bad idea, compared to 36 per cent who think it it would be a good idea.

Among Labour's 2024 voters, a plurality support removing the two child limit (48 per cent compared to 44 per cent who oppose it).

In focus group conversations many share nuanced considerations of the policy - raising concerns around fairness and the impacts on children.

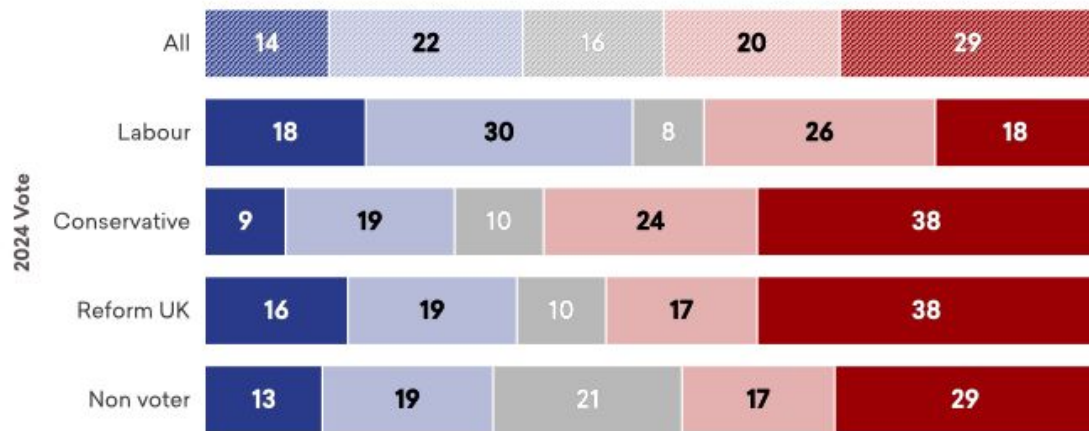
This is an example of the '3-second, 30-second, 3-minute' rule in polling.

While it might pass the 3-second test of a poll question, the two-child limit becomes less popular when discussed and reflected on in detail.

Universal Credit is a benefit designed to support people on low incomes. Families with children get help with their first two children, but do not receive anything for a third child or any additional children. This policy is called the two-child limit.

Imagine the Government announced that they were going to remove the two-child limit. Which of the following comes closer to your view?

- This would be a very good idea ● This would be a somewhat good idea ● Don't know
● This would be a somewhat bad idea ● This would be a very bad idea



Voters on the two child limit

"I think it's quite unfair for people to continue to go and have it bigger and bigger families. They expect each one as the new child's born to be paid for by the state. But on the other side of the coin as well is in say 20 years, we'll be trying to recruit people with skills from overseas because we can't find enough young people in our own country."

- **Stewart, Customer Service, Kirkcaldy**
(Voted SNP in 2019 but Labour in 2024)

"Why should everybody else pay for somebody else to have more children if they can't afford 'em? If you having children, you should be responsible enough to be able to pay for 'em"

- **Paul, Electrician, Barnsley**
(2024 Labour voter who would now vote Reform)

"It's different from maybe say up to 10 years ago when you were having maybe 3, 4, 5 kids because you could afford it, but the problem is now you can't because things have shifted."

- **Debbie, NHS Administrator, Glasgow**
(Voted SNP in 2019 but Labour in 2024)

"Yeah, I wasn't aware of it. And again, I think it's really unfair. There are obviously families that need the help regardless of how many children they have. So why say you've got more than two so we can't help you anymore."

- **Hazel, Assistant Project Manager, Shinfield**
(2024 Labour voter who would now vote Conservative)

Messaging shifts support for the limit

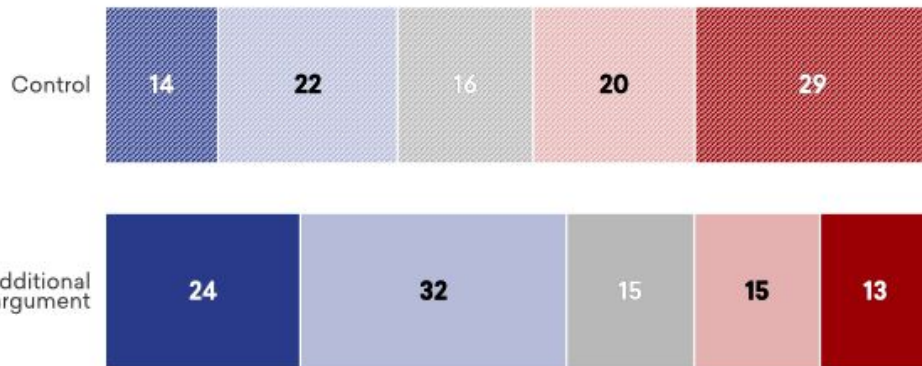
In discussions around removing the limit, support is highly contingent on how the policy is framed.

In a randomised control trial survey experiment, the following message increased net support for lifting the two-child limit by a striking 41 points:

“Every child deserves the best possible start in life and that means growing up in a stable environment, with good food and a secure home. But too many families are struggling right now. This is why we are stepping up advice and support to families who need help with budgeting or problem debt as well as removing the two-child limit, to ensure all children receive support when their families are struggling, helping to give them a fair chance at success.”

Imagine the Government announced that they were going to remove the two-child limit. Which of the following comes closer to your view?

- This would be a very good idea ● This would be a somewhat good idea ● Don't know
● This would be a somewhat bad idea ● This would be a very bad idea



How this framing lands with voters

"I think it's very positive. It is supporting, it's supporting children, it's getting people out of poverty. It's what I thought the Labour Party were about... I don't think anybody would disagree with the message."

Mark, Retired, Burnley

(2024 Labour voter who would now vote for Reform UK)

"I think it's a little bit patronising... removing the two child limit... shouldn't be a success. It should be a right. It shouldn't be something that should be celebrated... It's unfair it, it's putting kids into poverty. We're taking it away."

Dawn, Facilities manager, Burnley

(2024 Labour voter)

"No, I think the top part is spot on yeah, I do agree with that. The bottom bit could probably be worded differently, but to me it's still encouraging, and it'd be better than what the current situation is. Some people might obviously take it in the wrong way. But I think overall people would be pleased if they announced this tomorrow"

Jaffa, project manager, Burnley

(2024 Labour voter who would now consider voting independent)

"I think it's positive, but I was picking up that it's not just about the cap, it's also about advice and support.. it's also maybe sometimes people just need a bit of help on, I dunno, I've been watching the thing about budget cooking, like low cost batch cooking and things like that. Just maybe some of those little things can give people real help that are struggling."

Gemma, Events officer, Woodley

(2024 Labour voter who would now consider voting Liberal Democrat or Green)

"People will take advantage of just being given the money, but if there's a chance of actually being given the support and the advice, I think that sometimes goes further than just the money."

Hazel, Assistant project manager, Shinfield

(2024 Labour voter who would now vote Conservative)

Effect of message by segment

More in Common tested the “Every child deserves a best start” message across the British Seven Segments - including both the left-leaning core segments of Labour’s base (Progressive Activists and Civic Pragmatists), who tend to have higher levels of support for removing the two-child limit - as well as the right-leaning segments who tend to oppose the idea.

The framing that every child deserves a good start in life, alongside a commitment to provide additional support, boosted support for removing the two-child limit across all British Seven Segments.

Alongside Labour’s progressive base, the message also boosted support among Loyal Nationals (‘Red Wall’ voters who form a crucial part of Labour’s 2024 voter coalition). Among this group, support for removing the limit almost doubled, from 32 per cent to 60 per cent.

For Labour 2024 voters overall, this frame results in a large majority in support: 71 per cent in favour of scrapping the two child limit; 22 per cent against.

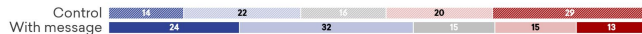
Control: Imagine the Government announced that they were going to remove the two-child limit.

Message: Imagine the Government announced the following: Every child deserves the best possible start in life and that means growing up in a stable environment, with good food and a secure home. But too many families are struggling right now. This is why we are stepping up advice and support to families who need help with budgeting or problem debt as well as removing the two-child limit, to ensure all children receive support when their families are struggling, helping to give them a fair chance at success.

Which of the following comes closer to your view?

- This would be a very good idea ● This would be a somewhat good idea
● Don't know ● This would be a somewhat bad idea ● This would be a very bad idea

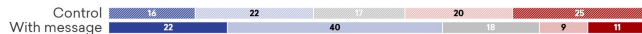
All



Progressive Activists



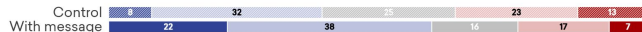
Civic Pragmatists



Disengaged Battlers



Established Liberals



Loyal Nationals



Disengaged Traditionalists



Backbone Conservatives



Responding to the responsibility argument

The most powerful frame in favour of retaining the two-child limit appears to be responsibility.

When More in Common stress-tested different arguments, the strongest argument against lifting the limit is that **'Parents should take responsibility for providing for their family and not have more children than they know they can afford'**.

However, in focus groups even this view was mutable when conversation turned to the many factors beyond parents' control. Participants mention unexpected life events like illness or job loss, which families cannot foresee or prepare for. Others pointed to broader national and global events - such as the pandemic and the cost of living crisis - as evidence that even the most responsible planning has its limits.

Therefore, using an element of the 'it could happen to anyone' message may provide the strongest rebuttal to the responsibility argument.

"And surely you've got to consider the whole cost of living. But if you have a child five years ago - however many years we've been suffering with this - but the financial situation was very different globally to what it ended up being. No one knew there'd be a pandemic. No one knew that all of these things would impact on people and then the whole cost of living. You could buy a loaf of bread two years ago for X amount and now you can't. But you didn't know that that was going to happen. You didn't foresee that. So some things that are really massive and global or even just national can have an impact on you that you again are not to do with your own."

Gemma, events officer, Woodley

"I've seen too many circumstances and situations where people have been affected by things that are way out of their control. A bereavement in the family, the main income earner having an accident, critical illness. You can't chastise people for what they don't know is going to happen and then blame them for not being able to afford to manage their family situation."

Dawn, facilities manager, Burnley

"Well, you can budget and say right, okay, I can afford two children. And then you go to have a second child and you have twins and then all of a sudden, obviously the cost is then so much more than you thought. And it's sort of, again, it's something else that's out of your control, along with illness and not being able to work and being made redundant."

Hazel, assistant project manager, Shinfield



Methodology

Locations

- Polling was conducted of a nationally representative sample of 3,981 people between 22 0 27 March 2025.
- Focus groups were conducted between February and April 2025 in the following locations:
 - **Earley and Woodley:** All 2024 Labour voters, with a mix of current voting intention, including Labour, Liberal Democrat and Conservative.
 - **Burnley:** All 2024 Labour voters, with a mix of current voting intention, including Liberal Democrat, Labour and Reform UK.
 - **Leeds South West and Morley:** Labour 2024 voters, current voting intention Reform
 - **Bury St Edmunds:** Labour 2024 voters, Conservative 2019 voters
 - **Barnsley:** Conservative 2019 voters, current voting intention mix between Labour, Conservative and Reform
 - **Mix of Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath and Glasgow South-West constituencies:** SNP 2019 and Labour 2024 voters; Half Progressive Activist segment