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Britain talks trust in science

More in Common

Archie Herrick
Luke Tryl
Mark Henderson

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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, 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.

This research was conducted between November 2025 and March 2026. Full methodological information can be found at the end of the report.

About Wellcome

Wellcome is a charitable foundation supporting researchers around the world to make discoveries and build a healthier future for everyone. We support science to solve the urgent health challenges facing everyone by investing in research, engaging people and influencing change.

We have programmes of work in discovery research; to find solutions for the challenges of mental health, climate and health and infectious disease; to enhance science in Africa and Asia; and to explore the cultural dimensions of health and science through Wellcome Collection, our museum and library

You can find out more information about Wellcome here.

Foreword

Trust in science has long been one of the UK's quiet strengths: a stable foundation beneath political cycles, economic shifts, and moments of national crisis. At first glance, that foundation still appears reassuringly solid. Headline indicators continue to show that the public broadly trusts science and believes it plays a positive role in society. But look more closely, and a more complex and unsettled landscape comes into view; one shaped by shifting values, deepening social divides, and a decades-long erosion of trust in institutions of every kind.

This report was commissioned to understand that landscape in greater depth. Traditional ways of categorising public attitudes, the old left–right spectrum or the familiar political compass, no longer tell us what we need to know about how people form their opinions and beliefs. Views about science do not necessarily correlate with political identity and are also shaped by deeper psychological and moral foundations: perceptions of threat, notions of fairness, feelings about authority, and beliefs about what, and who, is worth trusting.

This is why More in Common's segmentation model is so valuable. It moves beyond demographic assumptions and offers a richer picture of the UK's social constellations. For Wellcome, the segmentation offered an opportunity to understand not just whether people trust science, but why, how, and under what conditions that trust is earned.

The timing for this work is important. Though trust in science remains comparatively high in the UK, there are early indicators, subtle but significant, that this trust is becoming more fragile. And it's certainly not stable across segments. Several long-term trends are converging. The decline in trust in institutions since the 2008 financial crisis has affected almost every part of public life, and science is no exception. Some people view scientific organisations as part of an establishment that does not always act in their interests. When trust in institutions falters, trust in science falters with it.

On top of this, Covid-19 acted as a magnifier. During the first weeks of the pandemic, trust surged as people looked to science for clarity and reassurance. But as advice necessarily evolved and political communication struggled to keep pace with scientific uncertainty, trust began to fall. Many people came away feeling that they had been spoken to with an over-confidence that later proved damaging. Others saw scientific advice blurred with political calculation or felt that important social values such as personal freedoms, children's wellbeing or economic survival, had been sidelined or dismissed.

The cumulative effect is not that people have lost faith in science itself, but that they are increasingly attentive to how it behaves, how it communicates, and whether it understands their concerns.

One of the most striking findings in this piece of research is the strong relationship between trust in science and a person's sense of optimism about the future.

When people feel hopeful, when they believe the system works for them, they are more likely to value the institutions that uphold it. But when people feel the system offers them no viable future, they have little reason to trust the institutions within it. In those conditions, even the tangible benefits of science struggle to land.

For science, this presents both a challenge and an opportunity. There is an urgent need not only to articulate what science makes possible, but to demonstrate clearly how those possibilities translate into real improvements in people's lives. At the same time, science must shift how it engages with people. The British public is not a homogenous block, and relationships to science and scientific advice vary greatly across segments. Some people feel they have been spoken down to or presumed to be misinformed or irrational. But values across society are legitimate, even when they do not align with the values prevalent in the scientific community.

Indeed, the scientific community itself is not representative of the UK population. It is heavily concentrated in a small number of segments and leans left compared to the public at large. There is nothing inherently wrong with that, but it does mean that scientists must consciously reach beyond their own worldview. Trust cannot rest on the support of a narrow set of groups. Science needs a broad, inclusive licence to operate; one built on respect, understanding, and long-term relationship-building.

This report is designed to help. It offers a lens through which the scientific community can better understand the public's values, concerns, and expectations, and act in ways that earn trust across all segments of society. The goal is not simply to prevent trust from declining, but to strengthen the relationship between science and society for the future.

Mark Henderson, Executive Director of Corporate Affairs and Engagement, Wellcome

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We would also like thank all those who completed the surveys and spoke to More in Common across the focus groups we held as part of this project. It is a privilege to be able to hear Britons talk about science and what it means to them.

Executive Summary

1. Trust in science remains high, but it is becoming more fragile, and it is very uneven across different groups

84 per cent of Britons say they have at least some trust in science. Only two per cent say they do not trust science at all. But beneath this headline figure, there are emerging fractures in Britons' levels of trust.

While 34 per cent now say they trust science 'a lot', in 2020 this figure was 63 per cent[1]. There is a substantial movement of people who once held strong confidence in science now expressing much more qualified levels of trust.

Trust is not uniform across the population, and varies significantly according to Britons' values, worldview and which of More in Common's Seven Segments they belong to.

- The segments most in favour of 'burning down' existing institutions, rather than preserving and improving them (Dissenting Disruptors and Sceptical Scrollers) are the least trusting in science and scientists.
- Even among these lower-trust groups, outright rejection of science remains rare. Only 30 per cent of Sceptical Scrollers and 16 per cent of Dissenting Disruptors, the lowest trust segments, say they do not trust science much, or not at all.

Where scepticism does emerge, it tends to centre on two interconnected concerns. Firstly, political influence: around three in ten Britons think science has become too closely associated with political causes. This concern is most acute among Dissenting Disruptors (41 per cent) and Traditional Conservatives (33 per cent).

Where people think there is bias within scientific organisations, they are more likely to perceive this as being from the left, rather than right-wing bias. Reform UK voters are the most likely to perceive a left-wing bias in scientific organisations, with 32 per cent holding this view.

While distinct from their political beliefs, in many cases the underlying social values of the scientific community do appear to be distinctly different from that of Britain's overall. Two-thirds (65 per cent) of the scientists polled belong to More in Common's two most left-

[1] From Wellcome Global Monitor Whose methodology used landline calling, includes Northern Ireland, Field dates, Oct 19 – Nov 16, 2020, Sample size=1,000

leaning, socially liberal segments; the impact these underlying values could inadvertently have on the way scientists act and communicate should be kept in mind.

Second is financial influence. Over a third of Britons (36 per cent) believe that scientists' research agendas and conclusions are ultimately shaped by the interests of those who fund them. Among Dissenting Disruptors, nearly half hold this view.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

The pandemic has had a profound impact on Britons relationship with science and scientists. While for some, the pandemic was a time when scientists provided security, and appeared far more relatable than they had before, for others a perception of changing advice and an association between politicians and science was damaging to trust.

Meanwhile, almost all segments expressed at least some concern about the speed of the delivery of the COVID-19 vaccine, even if many were supportive of the development of a vaccine itself.

Trust in scientists themselves

Expertise is not the sole criteria which determines people's trust in science. As well as being seen as transparent, benevolent and competent, scientists who are perceived to share people's values and to speak with respect, rather than talking down to their audience, are more likely to be trusted. Demonstrating transparency and making findings genuinely accessible to the public are, by a clear margin, the most powerful actions scientists could take to strengthen public trust.

2. Trust in science is linked to optimism about the future

Across public life, Britons often say things are getting worse, that life is too hard, the next generation will have a worse quality of life than the one before, and even that Britain is broken.

Science, for many, bucks this trend. Most Britons feel science gives them a sense of optimism and hope for the future.

When asked what makes them hopeful about the future, Britons' most popular answers are all anchored in research: medical advances, technology and scientific innovation.

- For those with high trust in science, two in five believe their children will have better lives than they did. Among those with low trust, only one in five share this hope.
- For those who have lower levels of trust in science, when asked what made them optimistic for the future, nothing was the most popular option.

This connection between scientific trust and personal optimism makes science different from other sectors. Where Britons often feel that things in public life are getting worse, science stands out as a domain where progress can be visible, tangible and real.

Seizing opportunities to demonstrate innovation and to show how science has improved people's lives is among the most powerful levers available for sustaining trust.

However, the potential for science to foster optimism is not even across the population.

- Dissenting Disruptors and Sceptical Scrollers, two of the segments most in favour of radical change are also the least trusting in science. This lower trust has real-world consequences, with these two segments the least likely to have received the COVID vaccine.
- Even among those who broadly trust science, trust alone does not translate into optimism. Direct experience of struggling public services - especially healthcare, despite supposed medical advances - leads some to question whether scientific progress improves their own lives.

Those who are most comfortable and satisfied with their lives are both more likely to trust science and to be optimistic for the future

For the sector, the challenge is not to defend science's reputation. Instead, it is how best to demonstrate transparency and independence, and the positive impact science has on Britons' lives. Trust in science is not a given, nor a right. It can be weakened through concerns over the influence of profit and politics, as well as a perceived disconnection from individuals' and communities' lives.

3. Coping with information overload, a fragmenting media landscape and communicating uncertainty

Despite the fragmentation of the media landscape and rise of new, online media, Britons remain more likely to hear about science from traditional media, and to trust those within scientific institutions, or those they know offline, to deliver accurate scientific information. Nearly four in ten Britons (38 per cent) say there is now too much information available to know what is true about science. This is far more than the 12 per cent who say they actively do not trust science much or at all.

This sense of being overwhelmed is particularly acute among Dissenting Disruptors, Sceptical Scrollers and Rooted Patriots. It is both a consequence of the fragmenting media landscape and a driver of disengagement with news about science and research.

Amid this fragmented landscape, the information needs of Britons are different:

- The public say that in the instance of a 'crisis' or 'when a situation is uncertain', they are in favour of clear advice. However, experiences during Covid demonstrate the potential damage that can come from perceptions of frequently changing advice.

- When asked in the abstract, two thirds would prefer clear actionable advice from scientists over an understanding of the trade-offs.
- However, the least trusting are more likely to value communication of the limits of scientific knowledge. The net score of preferring clear actionable advice for those that trust science is + 51 per cent, while for those that trust science 'not much' or not at all, this falls to +23.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

For scientists, science communicators and scientific organisations

Seize opportunities to show how science has led to improvement in people's lives. Highlighting the impact that science has had, and continues to have, can foster trust in science and lead to a greater sense of optimism among groups who are otherwise downbeat about the state of the country and national institutions. Engage with those who do not feel science has an impact on their lives by making findings genuinely accessible and demonstrating evidence of impact. Consider how the impact of scientific innovation can be demonstrated to those who do not feel science has an impact on their lives.

Recommendation 2

For scientists, science communicators and scientific organisations

Remain vigilant to the risk of a perceived political bias in science. Remember that the views and values that prevail in your institution and professional community are unlikely to be representative of the broader public. Demonstrate trustworthiness through openness and transparency surrounding finances and research agendas. Reinforce independence of findings from government and politicians where possible. Scientists must exercise caution when speaking alongside political figures and avoid presenting value judgements or trade-offs with other areas, such as the economy, as "the science".

Recommendation 3

For scientists, science communicators and scientific organisations

Be alive to the risk of being perceived as talking down to audiences. Consider how to demonstrate that scientists share values with those who feel further away from science, by showcasing the human stories behind the work and the wider context that motivates it. Ensure social conservatives do not feel that adherence to the science requires signing up to a series of left or liberal leaning causes beyond pure science.

Recommendation 4

For scientists, science communicators and scientific organisations

Consider your audience. Science interacts with Britons' worldviews and politics in various ways - fostering and bolstering trust with different groups may require engaging strategically with different media and tailoring messages to address specific concerns. For example, Rooted Patriots value a sense of security amidst chaos whereas personal accounts carry more weight for the Incrementalist Left.

Recommendation 5

For scientists, science communicators and scientific organisations

If you are leading with actionable advice in communications, then also provide people with a way to find more information about the research and how to weigh it up. Acknowledge uncertainty where any may exist. Do not assume that scientific authority will be enough. Support people to 'do their own research' and independently cross-reference information if they desire to do so.

This is particularly important for communicating to less trusting groups (Sceptical Scrollers and Dissenting Disruptors) who are not 'anti-science' but should be supported in verifying information independently.

Recommendation 6

For politicians and government

Be aware of and value the importance of scientists' impartiality and embed opportunities to demonstrate this where appropriate. This could be done by allowing scientists to showcase independence from government or publishing independent scientific recommendations to the government.

The Seven Segments in Brief

Using extensive research into Britons' core beliefs, their values and behaviours, More in Common has developed a unique segmentation of the British public. This segmentation allows us to look upstream not just at what different groups think, but why they think it, reflecting fundamental differences between groups in how they relate to authority, change, community and the future.

More in Common's analysis produces Seven Segments within the British population, which are referred to throughout this report:

Progressive Activists - 12 per cent of the population

A highly engaged and globally minded group driven by concerns about social justice. Politically active but feeling increasingly alienated from mainstream party politics, they prioritise issues such as climate change and international affairs. Occasionally outliers on social issues, they maintain a strongly held and sometimes uncompromising approach to their beliefs.

Incrementalist Left - 21 per cent of the population

A civic-minded, community-oriented group holding views which are generally left-of-centre but with an aversion to the extreme; they prefer gradual reform over revolutionary change. They trust experts and institutions yet are largely tuned out of day-to-day politics and can be conflict-averse, stepping away from issues they see as particularly fraught or complex.

Established Liberals - 9 per cent of the population

A prosperous, confident segment who believe the system broadly works as it is and who trust experts to deliver continued progress. They have a strong belief in individual agency which can make them less empathetic to those who are struggling. Institutionally trusting, they maintain faith in democratic processes and have a strong information-centric way of engaging with issues.

Sceptical Scrollers - 10 per cent of the population

A digitally native group whose unhappiness with the social contract means they have lost faith in traditional institutions and seek alternative sources of truth online. Often shaped by their experience of the COVID pandemic, they prefer individual influencers over mainstream media and are increasingly drawn to conspiratorial thinking.

Rooted Patriots - 20 per cent of the population

A patriotic but politically untethered group which feels abandoned and overlooked by political elites and yearns for leaders with common sense but does not want to overthrow the system as a whole. They are particularly concerned about community decline and the pressures of migration. Interventionist on economics but conservative on social issues, they have shaped much of Britain's politics over the past decade.

Traditional Conservatives - 8 per cent of the population

Respectful of authority and tradition, Traditional Conservatives believe in individual responsibility and established norms that have served them well. Nostalgic for the past but optimistic about the future, they are deeply sceptical of many forces of change such as immigration or the path to net-zero.

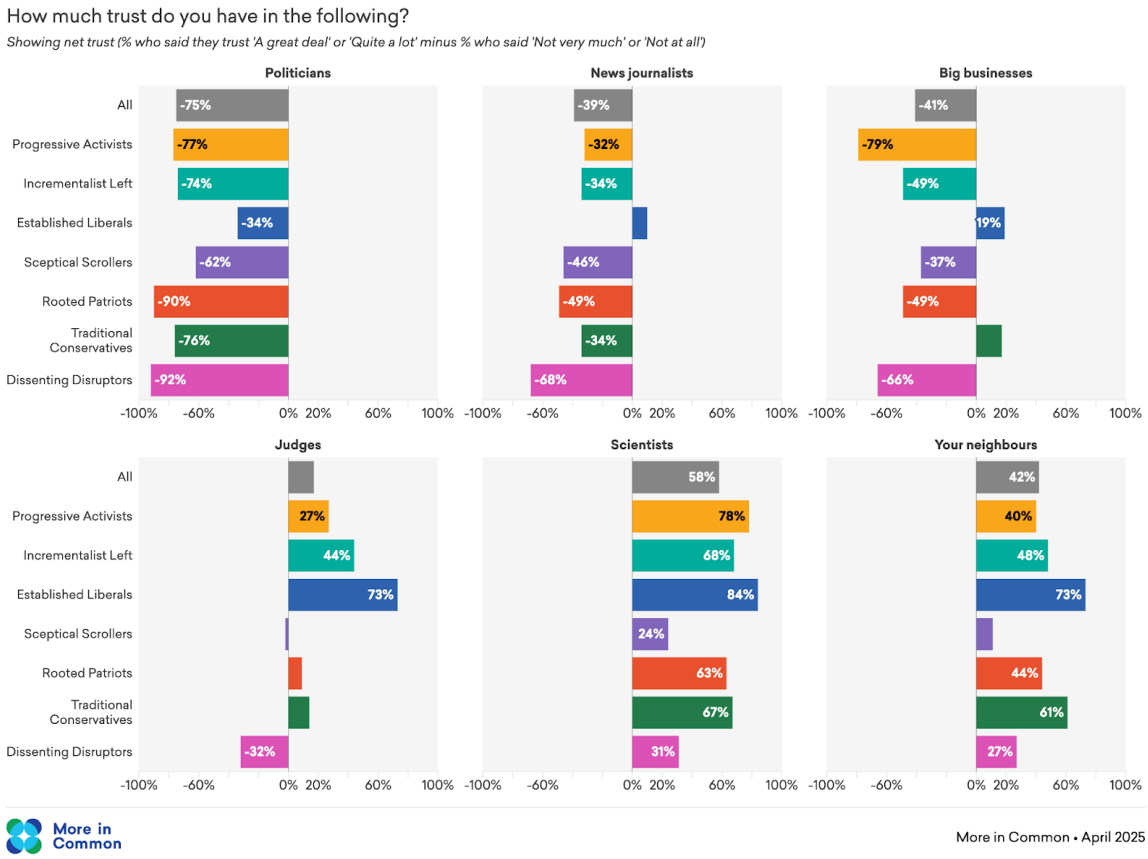
Dissenting Disruptors - 20 per cent of the population

Frustrated with their circumstances and with an appetite for radical solutions, Dissenting Disruptors crave dramatic change and strong leadership. Highly distrustful of institutions, opposed to multiculturalism and feeling disconnected from society, they are drawn to political movements that promise to overhaul the status quo and put people like them first.

Introduction

Britons' faith in many of our national institutions has collapsed. This extends beyond a healthy scepticism of politicians to distrust of our shared national institutions, and the motives and competence of the people who work in them. The media, police, business and the judiciary are all strongly distrusted by a significant proportion of the public. This matters - institutions that are responsible for reporting the news, upholding our laws, and stewarding the economy simply cannot function in the absence of strong and broad public trust. Without it, people are less likely to believe the information they see and read, comply with the law, follow government guidance, or see the economy as working in their interest.

However, amid this rising tide of distrust, two areas remain above water: the NHS and scientists. The country's scientific expertise, the research institutions that house them, and the health service, are not just unique because of the high levels of trust Britons have in them, but they are also rare, shared points of pride.



But that lack of polarisation in attitudes to science and high trust in science and scientific institutions is not a given, as discourse in other Western democracies shows. Those who want to preserve science's privileged position in the UK should heed the example of the United States, where science has become a politicised and polarised topic.

In this instance, a lack of trust in scientific institutions and experts is not just an abstract or philosophical issue, but has had real world consequences, from falling vaccination rates to reduced funding for research organisations.

For now, most Britons do not think science is politically biased. Each of the Seven Segments of Britain, whether they are left or right leaning or whether they favour radical overhaul or preservation of our institutions, say they trust scientists to provide accurate information. However, there is a danger of complacency here - some Britons are concerned about the bias of science and scientific institutions, others have a more general distrust of the incentives and motives that shape scientific outputs.

These concerns exist even among high trusting segments, for Progressive Activists, the role of financial incentives is a concern, for Traditional Conservatives, political pressure on science is a bigger worry. For Rooted Patriots - there is a sense that the business of science is far removed from the lives of people like them, while the amount of information about science is overwhelming. Scientists need to be aware of these differences and needs, not least because some of these segments are highly under-represented within the scientific community itself.

This under-representation risks creating blind spots - where the assumptions and experiences that shape scientific culture diverge from those of the very groups whose trust is most conditional, complacency about their concerns becomes easier and more likely.

As a sector, science alone can't change underlying issues around institutional trust. However, the sector does have the ability to engage proactively with audiences in ways that could make a positive difference and attempt to alleviate these concerns.

This report explores the foundations of the strong level of public trust Britons have in science and the upstream values that drive this. It seeks to understand why, compared to other areas, trust in science and scientists has remained strong and how this may be protected and bolstered. However, it also looks at where and among whom cracks in trust are starting to develop - and the potential flashpoints which could undermine broad based trust in scientific output and advice.

As Baroness O'Neill argues, trust is not an inherent good; it should be placed thoughtfully in people and institutions that demonstrate trustworthiness. By examining the elements of science and scientists' trustworthiness across different contexts and issues, we can better understand why science remains broadly trusted - and how it can remain so.

Trust in science is key given that science plays a central role in people's everyday lives, from the medicine they take to the technology they use.

Up until now that trust has largely been taken for granted, but if debates around science become more contentious, it will require harder thinking about how to shore it up in an era when distrust is the norm.

Chapter 1: The Seven Segments and Science

While most Britons have a robust base level of trust in science, different segments engage with and react to science and scientific content in specific ways.

The section below explores how each of the British Seven Segments relate to science. Starting with the most trusting - Established Liberals - to the least - Sceptical Scrollers - and provides a roadmap to understand each segment's relationship with science, and the best ways to engage with them about it.

Established Liberals (9 per cent of the population)

Where we spoke with them: Twickenham and St Albans

This group has very high trust in science, institutions and technology. They are unique in having a high level of trust in science even when science is associated with government and are comfortable with a profit motive in science.

As the most affluent segment, and also the one with the highest life satisfaction, Established Liberals are the most optimistic of the Seven Segments. This sense of optimism is reflected in their trust in institutions and science - Established Liberals are the most likely to take up new technologies and see innovation as a key driver of progress.

The resilience of this segment's trust in science emerges strongly in focus groups. Established Liberals could give examples of where scientists had been open about mistakes and errors they had made, but actually saw this as a reason to trust science more - believing the discipline naturally self-corrects.

However, similar to other segments, some Established Liberals expressed some vaccine hesitancy and a retrospective scepticism about COVID vaccines, principally due to the speed they were developed. This suggests that their trust in science, though high and resilient, is not without 'hairline fractures' if not the wider 'cracks' we see among other segments.

> *"It has to be rigorous proofs. It can't just be theories or conjectures, you can just say anything, but it needs to be proved, and it needs to be tested. The proofs have to be tested and double checked and that makes anything that any scientist across any field comes up with acceptable and reliable."* - **Steven, food business owner, Middlesex**

> *"[Science is] Something for the future. So, trying to improve things for the future, but also for the now as well. So, it is not just about the future. So, improvements, further understanding, learning, exploration, discoveries."* - **Belinda, virtual assistant, Twickenham**

How they find out about science: Established Liberals are engaged with and trusting of mainstream news sources, many regularly watching broadcast news such as the BBC, as well as reading broadsheet newspapers such as the Times. They are more likely than average to engage with sector-specific resources, with one in five saying they learn about science through museums and journals.

Key concerns: While they are the segment most likely to say they strongly trust science and scientists, they do not want individuals and government to rely on science unquestioningly and are more likely than average to want the government to take other factors, such as economic considerations, into account during decision making than other high trust segments.

Lead with: Rigorous evidence and institutional credibility

Channel: TV news and broadsheet newspapers (primary), supplement with outreach via museums and journals

Tone: Balance scientific rigour with acknowledgement of broader considerations (e.g. economics, policy context)

Progressive Activists (12 per cent of population)

Where we spoke with them: Hackney, Shoreditch, Bristol

Alongside Established Liberals, Progressive Activists have one of the highest levels of trust in science. What is unique among this segment is the extent to which science plays a role in their daily lives - two-thirds say that science plays a role in their work or studies, and they are the most likely segment to say that science shapes their understanding of the news. Progressive Activists may also just come into contact with scientific institutions more as they are the most likely to live in university towns.

While Progressive Activists often described science as being traditionally a white, male and privileged sector, in focus groups, they do see science as becoming more accessible and democratic over time. However, overall, Progressive Activists are more concerned with the process of science than the people conducting it and are more likely to place a premium on the trustworthiness of the scientific process over that of scientists themselves.

That does not mean they do not value scientists themselves - Progressive Activists are the more likely than the British public to say that scientists are experts at what they do, they are also the segment with the second highest proportion saying that scientists share the same values as them. This group is the most comfortable of any segment with science having an influence over their lives and government decisions. They prioritise the government listening to scientific evidence when making decisions. A key example of this emerges in their views on climate - previous research by More in Common shows that Progressive Activists tend to be highly engaged with debates around the environment and prioritise government policy reflecting the scientific consensus.

> *" [Science is] Not just some very wealthy person in a lab coat who's got a load of funding to do something very particular-maybe actually that is a bit more community based than it used to be."* **- Daisy, support worker, Bristol**

> *"I generally do trust the science over time. It will come out to be true or false. I think scientists are quite quick to call out each other as well when they see something that's false. Obviously, it should all be peer reviewed and repeatable under repeatable conditions."* - **AJ, maintenance engineer, Bristol**

How they find out about science: The most likely segment to actively seek out scientific information, with one in four saying that they find out information directly from journals and scientific publications. Overrepresented amongst students, one in five Progressive Activists say they learn about science through college or university.

Key concerns: Distrustful of big business, Progressive Activists' otherwise strong trust in science wavers if there's suspicion of a profit motive that might shape scientific output. For this reason, Progressive Activists are split on trust in pharmaceutical companies - just as many Progressive Activists distrust pharmaceutical companies as trust them. Only Dissenting Disruptors are more sceptical of pharmaceutical companies than Progressive Activists.

Lead with: Focus on scientific process and democratic accessibility

Channel: TV and mainstream news (primary) plus digital platforms like podcasts, newsletters, and scientific journals and publications

Tone: Address profit motive concerns where appropriate; highlight diversity and democratisation in scientific fields

Incrementalist Left (21 per cent of the population)

Where we spoke with them: Edinburgh, Hove and Stevenage

The Incrementalist Left are generally a high trust group, and science is no exception: only seven per cent say they do not trust science much or not at all. However, unlike the two other high trust segments (Progressive Activists and Established Liberals), they are far less engaged with the news and politics, and they rely more on personal networks to determine what information they trust than the average Briton.

Their trust in science is also less robust. While, overall, few of the Incrementalist Left do not trust science, only four in ten say they trust science 'a lot', compared to half of Progressive Activists.

The Incrementalist Left's approach to science is nuanced and context dependent. Less engaged with news and current affairs, they described statistics in marketing and advertising as a common entry point to engagement with science.

This segment's focus on close relationships and local networks means the relatability of scientists - and the respect they show to their audience - is a key factor in determining how much trust they place in them and their findings. The Incrementalist Left is 26 points less likely to say scientists think they are equal to other people than Progressive Activists, another high-trust segment.

> *"I believe the scientists that are working behind the scenes, I think they, a lot of them, as long as it's the right cause, obviously not a bomb... but like the medical side, I think it's very much they are trying to help people."* - **Ben, group risk insurance, Brighton**

> *"Yeah, I mean if it's funded through the university or something like that, I would trust that as independent research because they don't have a foot in any camp. They can go either way in any form of research."* - **Graham, music business owner, Edinburgh**

> *"I think the goalpost changing was the problem [during the Covid pandemic]. I find that difficult. I understand that it was really fast paced and they needed to communicate things to people, but I think often that the discrepancies in what you're told or the goalpost moving."* - **Gemma, psychologist and publican, Stevenage**

> *"So, if it's somebody getting awarded a Nobel Prize or something, I'll generally trust them. But if it's a far-right organisation in America that backs Trump and they're telling you the science is not for vaccines, I'd be a bit more cynical."* - **Graham, music business owner, Edinburgh**

How they find out about science: Alongside Progressive Activists, the Incrementalist Left is the segment most likely to encounter information about science through social media. They are also distinguished from the other high trust segments by the value they place on personal and local connections to science - they are the most likely to trust their family and friends when discussing science, and are the group most likely to say that being able to trust the people involved is the most important factor in deciding whether to trust science.

Key concerns: The Incrementalist Left describe being increasingly disengaged from the news and traditional media. As they turn away from mainstream sources, personal accounts, whether positive or negative, are likely to carry more weight in shaping their views on science than they would have previously.

Lead with: Trust in people and institutions through personal connection

Channel: TV news (primary), supplement with social media, personal networks, and trusted voices within their communities

Tone: Use relatable messengers; be transparent about uncertainty; avoid a sense of shifting messaging

Traditional Conservatives (8 per cent of the population)

Where we spoke to them: Oxfordshire, Wiltshire, Brecon and Monmouthshire

Traditional Conservatives are strong institutionalists, with higher trust in government, scientists and independent public bodies than the average Briton. As a result, this segment wants the government to rely on science when making policy decisions, but alongside factors such as economics.

Hierarchy and credentials also shape Traditional Conservatives' level of trust in science. Traditional Conservatives' trust varies between scientists according to the authority of their position, with deferential references to those at 'the top of their field' made during focus groups.

Alongside Established Liberals, Traditional Conservatives are also one of the two segments that are most confident with a role for the private sector in science and in focus groups participants gave examples of where science, done for profit, had benefited society overall.

Despite having a strong level of trust in science overall, Traditional Conservatives do have some concerns about how the sector interacts with charities and non-profit organisations.

Traditional Conservatives' level of faith in much of the third sector is below average, often because of concerns about mismanagement or liberal bias, which they are worried could bleed into the 'science they use' and the sector in general. One in five Traditional Conservatives say scientific organisations have a left-wing bias, a higher proportion than Briton as a whole.

> *"I see it as scientists fundamentally have inquiring minds. So, if I came to an unknown then I would try to go further into it and inquire and look further into it to try and understand it."* **- Graham, retiree, Monmouthshire**

> *"Well yeah, I mean just take COVID, Whitty and Vallance, I guess they were considered eminent in their field and that's why the government employed them. So yeah, they're not taking someone just out of uni in that. You can't really sit in a top job like that if you don't fill those credentials."* - **Steve, retiree, Monmouthshire**

How they find out about science: Traditional Conservatives are the least likely to learn about science through new media sources such as podcasts, preferring mainstream broadcast and print news, and are one of the segments with the highest trust in how the news reports on science. They are more likely than average to say they are not so overwhelmed with information as to not be able to find out the truth about science.

Key concerns: Alongside Dissenting Disruptors, the other most right-leaning segment, this group is among the most concerned about political bias in science. A third of Traditional Conservatives are concerned that science is too engaged with political and social causes.

Lead with: Credentialled experts and institutional authority

Channel: TV news (primary), supplement with social media, personal networks, and trusted voices within their communities

Tone: Focus on expertise hierarchy; address political bias concerns; highlight private sector scientific innovation

Rooted Patriots (20 per cent of the population)

Where we spoke to them: Merthyr Tydfil, Bury, Newport and Newcastle

Rooted Patriots are the segment for which science and scientists seem the most remote from their day-to-day lives and decision making.

They are the least likely to say they learn about science through museums or journals and often see scientists themselves as very different to people like them. This segment is one of the least likely to say that scientists are relatable or talk to them with respect.

This segment's broad distrust of politicians also affects their views of science - while more distrusting of government scientists and advisors than average, they tend to be more positive about independent public bodies that have greater distance from Westminster.

However, this otherwise sceptical group had very high trust in science during the COVID pandemic. Rooted Patriots are more likely than other segments, despite their reservations about scientists overall, to say that during the pandemic scientists saw the public as equals and spoke to them with respect.

Rooted Patriots are also more likely to say that the UK's COVID-19 response was based on science, not politics, and to cite the response to COVID-19 as a major reason for trusting scientists more. In times of uncertainty, such as the pandemic, Rooted Patriots appear to seek guidance from experts. This aligns with their higher-than-average threat perception, as this segment tends to rely more on guidance and reassurance from authorities when situations feel risky or unstable.

There is a clear opportunity for scientists to engage with this group and offer a sense of stability in an increasingly uncertain world. This is particularly important given that, in focus groups, this segment often expresses anxiety about the sheer volume of scientific information available, making it difficult for them to determine what is true, particularly without guidance on how to do so.

> *"You'd have to be a scientist yourself to be able to judge and merit their work... there's a lot of smoke and mirrors now where nobody really trusts it and there's been that much misinformation. It's difficult for a layman HGV driver to fully question what a scientist is doing."* - **Mike, HGV driver, Bury**

How they find out about science: Alongside Traditional Conservatives, Rooted Patriots are the most likely to find out about science through legacy media, with seven in ten saying they come across science from watching the news on TV. A third of Rooted Patriots (the second highest proportion of any segment) say they come across information about science by talking to someone that they know.

Key concern: Science is distant for this group - they do not feel that scientists think of them as equals and are more likely than the average Briton to say that scientists talk down to people. While Rooted Patriots are in line with the British public in saying that you can trust what you see in the news about science, they're more likely to say there is too much information nowadays to know what is true.

Lead with: Practical, tangible benefits, association with the NHS

Channel: TV news and local legacy media (primary), face-to-face conversations and trusted community figures

Tone: Demonstrate the stability and security that science can provide in a changing world which feels increasingly threatening - nine in ten Rooted Patriots feel the world is becoming a more dangerous place. While making information accessible, communicate a sense of respect and deliver information in a way that is not seen to be talking down to people

Dissenting Disruptors (20 per cent of the population)

Where we spoke to them: Dudley, Great Yarmouth and Newcastle

Dissenting Disruptors have a relatively lower trust in science and voices from the medical establishment. Their distrust should not be overstated, only a minority of Dissenting Disruptors actively distrust scientists, but the proportion is higher than among other segments. More broadly, Dissenting Disruptors are extremely sceptical of the role of political and financial motives, and do not trust scientists associated with the government or business interests.

This segment is also the most concerned about political bias within science. Most Dissenting Disruptors still accept the general outlines of scientific consensus.

In focus groups conducted in 2025, just after President Trump's statement linking Paracetamol to an increased risk of autism in pregnant women, they were the only segment that felt there might be some truth in this suggestion, and the Dissenting Disruptors did not immediately dismiss comments from Trump in the same manner as other segments did.

Transparency is key for assuaging concerns that this group has about science - Dissenting Disruptors are especially sceptical of scientists' role during COVID, and do not think they were open and transparent throughout the pandemic. The distrust that some Dissenting Disruptors express toward science is further rooted in a view that scientists do not respect people like them, do not see them as equals, and are detached from 'real life'. For example, they are also the only group who think that scientific organisations make inequality worse.

> *"I just think since COVID, I don't know about anyone else, but I just lost all trust. Don't watch the news. Do the opposite of what the government says. Basically. I just completely cannot believe the levels that they went to. The goalposts continually moved."* - **Tom, mechanical design engineer, Great Yarmouth**

> *"I think everyone respects scientists. I know some people don't. [believe in] that climate change, so not everyone, but everyone respects them and the trust side of stuff."* - **Liam, operations manager, Newcastle**

How they find out about science: Dissenting Disruptors are less likely to hear about science through traditional media sources and are instead more likely than the average Briton to find out about it through social media and podcasts, such as The Joe Rogan Experience and Diary of a CEO. When watching TV, Dissenting Disruptors are less likely to watch TV news channels like BBC News and Sky News, and more likely to tune into GB News.

Key Concerns: Dissenting Disruptors are the most concerned about political influence in science, or science being 'woke' or overly concerned with political causes. They are also the least likely to think that science can be independent of funders' influence.

Lead with: Independence and transparency about funding and motivations

Channel: TV and mainstream news (primary), though increasingly turn to podcasts and alternative media

Tone: Separate scientific advice from political narratives and avoid government or corporate framing. Do not stereotype as unreachable, despite their concerns the majority of this group trust science and scientists

Sceptical Scrollers (10 per cent of the population)

Where we spoke to them: Birmingham, Glasgow and Luton

Sceptical Scrollers are a low trust group in general, and science is no exception.

Young and urban, this segment is more likely than average to say that science plays a role in their career or studies. However, many in this segment had their formative years shaped, usually for the worse, by the pandemic. It is likely this has had an impact on their perceptions of science - Sceptical Scrollers notably see scientists as less competent, benevolent, and transparent than all other segments.

This group is the most likely to say there is too much information out there about science to distinguish what is true. Despite this, being able to 'do your own research' matters to this group - they are the least likely to trust information they hear from their friends and family, or from members of the public with personal experience of scientific issues. Their scepticism of elites means this group feels the need to validate what is true across different sources.

> *"I think when scientists start off being scientists and learning, they have all the right intentions, but I think we'll only hear about what government controls and what will benefit massive companies and stuff... I think there'll be cures to certain things that we won't know of because some industries will lose a lot of money if they cure something."* **- Autumn, gym manager, Birmingham**

How they learn about science: Sceptical Scrollers are the least likely to learn about science through more traditional mediums such as television and radio. This segment tends to be more sceptical of mainstream sources and instead prefers to 'do their own research'. This segment is more likely to trust content creators they follow on social media than the British public as a whole.

Key Concerns: Sceptical Scrollers are the segment least likely to think that research done for profit can still benefit everyone and are concerned about the role of money in science. This manifests in concerns around the COVID vaccine. When they come across science, it is more likely to be from online sources than traditional outlets fuelling this segment's belief that there is too much information nowadays to know what is true.

Lead with: User-empowered research tools and accessible data

Channel: TV and mainstream news (primary), despite the fact they are overall less likely to tune into these than other Britons. Also more likely to engage with independent journalists and online platforms than other Britons.

Tone: Support independent thinking; provide access to data and evidence in an accessible way, communicate uncertainty and limitations of data.

Chapter 2: How do Britons feel about science, and where are their concerns coming from?

The British public have high levels of trust in science - but it is also clear that science is not immune to the broader crisis of trust in political and establishment institutions in general.

While 84 per cent of the public say they have at least some trust in science, one in ten (12 per cent) say they do not trust science much, or not at all. At the height of the pandemic in 2020, the Wellcome Global Monitor[2] found almost twice as many Britons said they trust science 'a lot' than in this research conducted in late 2025. Compared to the Wellcome Global Monitor data from six years ago, the number of Britons saying they don't trust science has doubled from 6 to 12 percent.

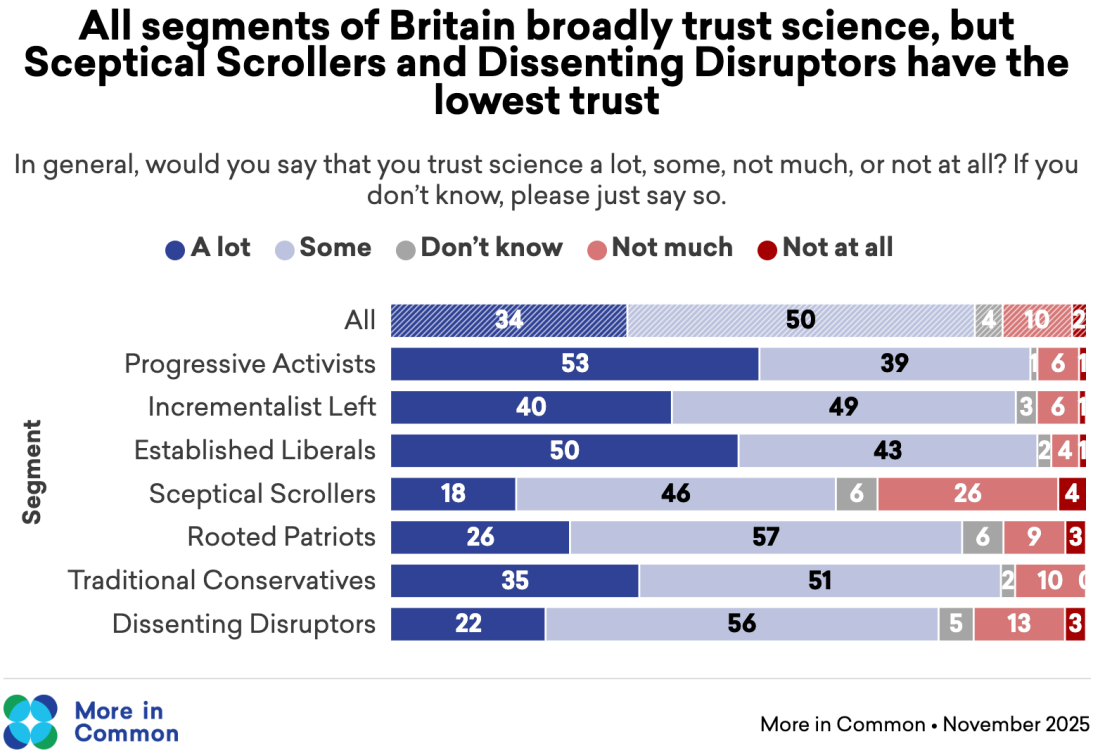
This change is not simply a result of marginal increases in scepticism over time. Rather, it reflects a substantial movement of people who once held strong confidence in science now expressing much more qualified levels of trust. The pandemic seems to have been a catalyst. Concerns about the policy response to COVID-19 and development of the vaccine, along with broader worries about science being too closely involved with politics and the influence of money and corporate funding have undermined trust in science for some. While most Britons still trust science and large-scale scientific denialism remains rare, there are increasing signs of fragility.

Patterns of trust are not solely demographic. While there are some patterns along demographic lines - those with a degree, for example, are more likely to trust science than their peers - this research shows that trust in science is strongly shaped by people's worldviews and values - that is levels of trust in science are deeply connected to people's broader social and political opinions.

> *"Yeah, I would feel pretty confident in that. Particularly ones that say that is their field, they've got the backing I guess when things like there's a hole in the ozone layer. The scientists worked out how they could stop that, and I can't remember how exactly they stopped it, but they did stop it and it repaired itself and that was due to science and research. So, in terms of climate change, yeah, I trust scientists."* - **Shaun, befriending coordinator, Glasgow, Sceptical Scroller**

[2] Whose methodology used landline calling, includes Northern Ireland, Field dates, Oct 19 – Nov 16, 2020, Sample size=1,000

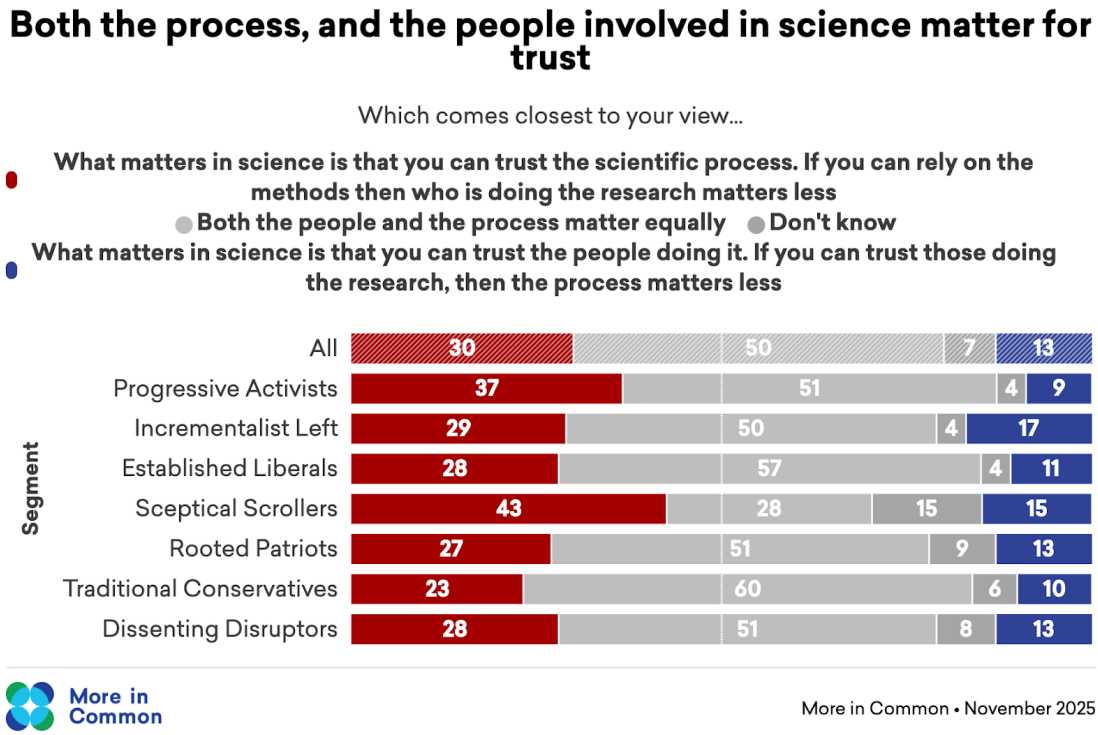
> *"I think the trust is gone now. Yeah. The point making- Everything you see, it's not about the science, the little, little aspects of people's life. It's affecting everything. It's just getting difficult for everybody."* - **Salha, SEND teaching assistant, Luton, Sceptical Scroller**



Trust in the science versus scientists

Both the science and the scientists matter when it comes to people's trust in the sector - but the relative importance of the enterprise and the people within it matters in different ways to different groups. British opinion mostly splits between those who value both equally (50 per cent) and those who say what matters is to trust the process more than the people (30 per cent). A small minority (13 per cent) say what matters most is trust in the people conducting the research. Fundamentally, most people want to be able to trust both the people involved, and the scientific process equally.

The youngest segments, Sceptical Scrollers and Progressive Activists, stand out as being more likely than average to say trust in the process of science, rather than trust in scientists themselves matters most.



Yet though few Britons say that the trust in people doing science matters more than the process, many of the drivers of distrust identified in this research centre on individuals themselves - particularly perceptions about what motivates scientists' work, and the biases they may bring to their research.

Loss of trust: the impact of perceived political and financial influence

Looking at the United States, some have argued that there is a 'crisis of conservative trust in science'. The reasons for this polarisation of trust in science have been attributed to a spillover from a collapse in trust in the government and the perceived political identities of scientists.

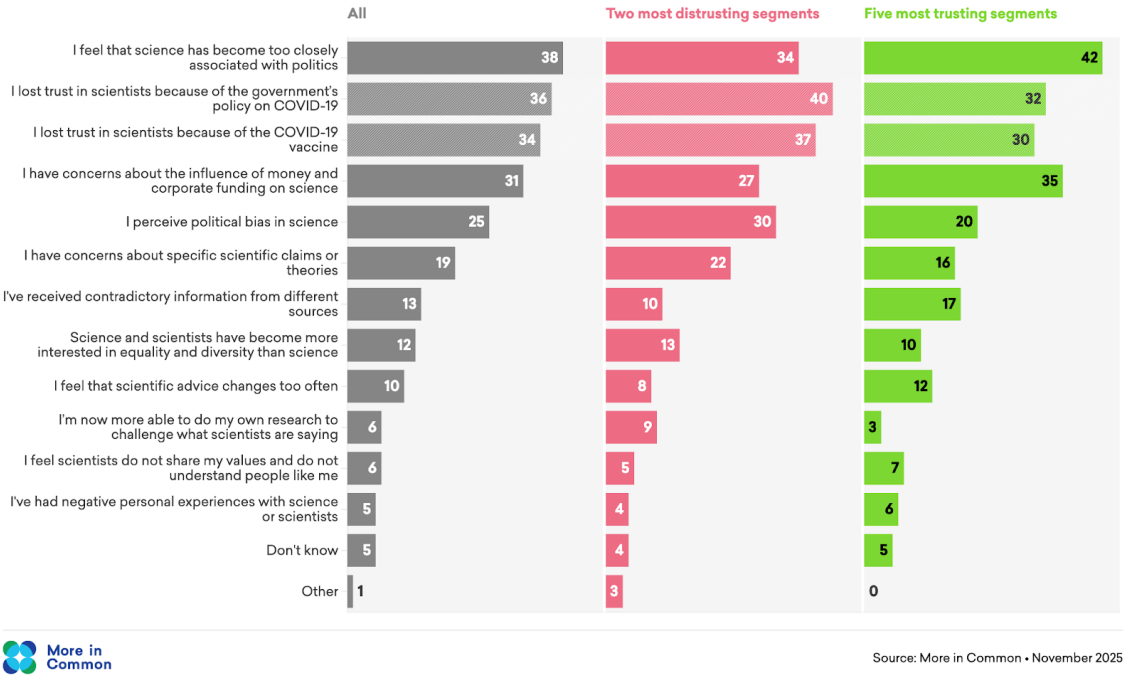
In this respect, Britain is not America - most people in the UK do not see science as biased. Only 13 per cent say that science has a left-wing bias. Meanwhile one in twenty (6 per cent) say that science has a right-wing political bias.

However, those Britons who have lost trust in science in recent years often cite the association of science with politics, government policy on COVID-19 and the influence of money and corporate funding as reasons why. The two least trusting segments, Dissenting Disruptors and Sceptical Scrollers, are more likely to list concerns around COVID-19 as reasons for the lost trust.

The political response to COVID-19, and the role science played in this, has had an outsized impact on the world views of these two segments

Many of those who have lost trust in science are concerned about politicisation - Dissenting Disruptors and Sceptical Scrollers are more likely to list concerns about COVID-19 policy and the vaccine

You said that you feel scientists are less trustworthy than you used to. What has contributed to this change?



More broadly, a significant minority - three in ten - say that science is too concerned with social and political causes, while nearly two in five (38 per cent) of those who say they now see scientists as less trustworthy than previously say that this is because they feel that science has become too associated with politics. One quarter said it was because they thought science was politically biased.

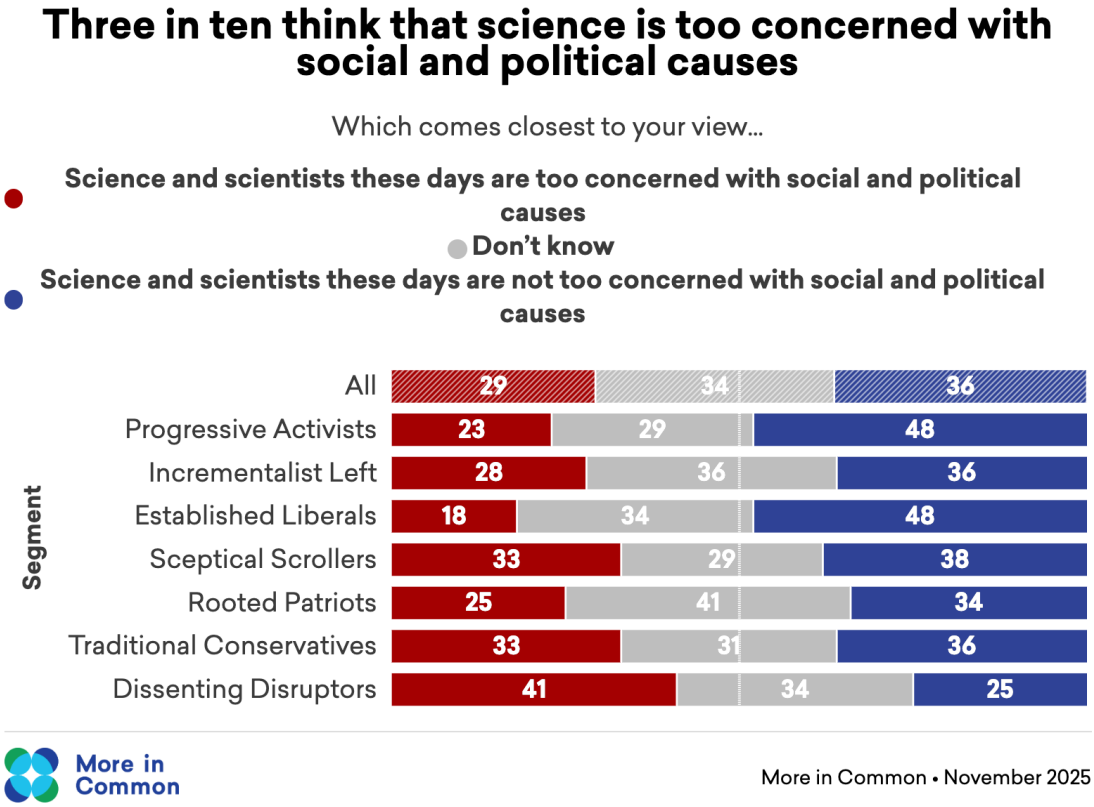
In terms of the nature of this political bias, many Britons believe that everyone has their own biases which then bleed into our professional lives and even research. Britons do not necessarily believe there is an overarching institutional bias in science per se, but the fact that many scientists share particular backgrounds and social circles may mean they bring similar biases to their work. The particular sets of values of scientists are explored later in this report.

> *"So regardless of whether or not you are a teacher or a scientist or the lollipop lady, it doesn't matter how you're brought up and unfortunately how politics does, you may have a huge interest in politics, you might have none, but it still shapes you as a person. And I think that still influences them [scientists] and their decisions about what they do and how they do it."* - **Holly, pest controller, Edinburgh, Incrementalist Left**

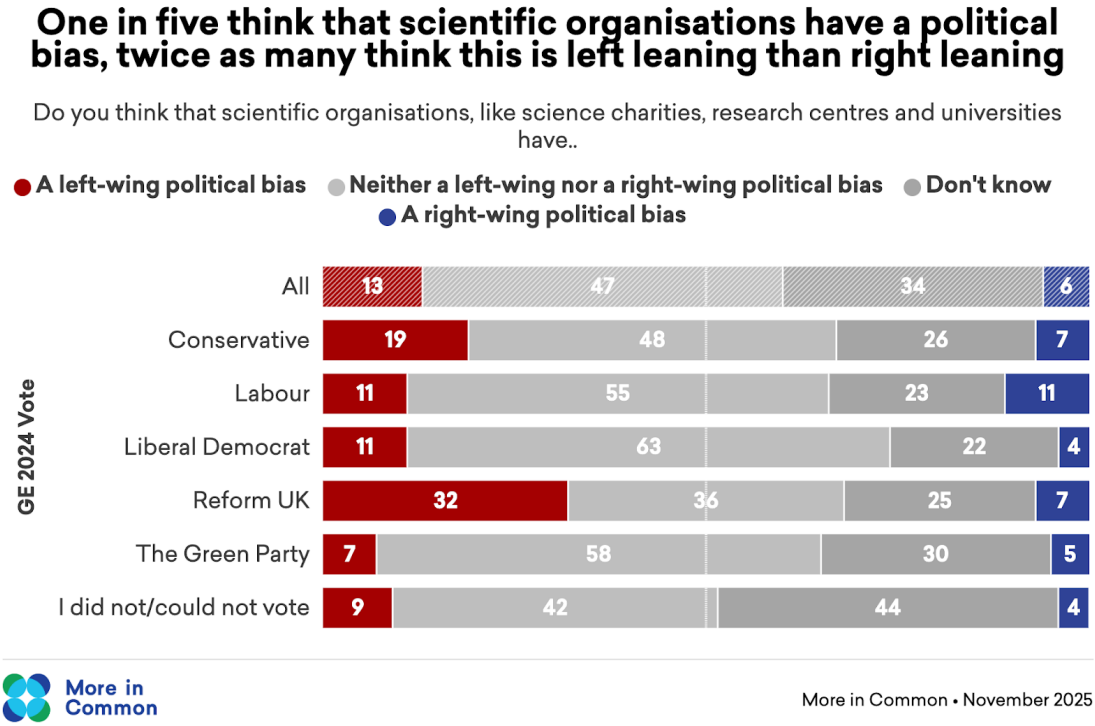
> *"I would say it's probably impossible to not let some of your own biases affect your interpretation, but I also think scientists are quite quick to call out each other as well when they see something that's false."* - **AJ, maintenance engineer, Bristol, Progressive Activist**

> *"I think obviously everyone is biased in their own that we don't mean to be, we have unconscious bias, but I do believe that I mean bear in mind I'm really not a scientist."* - **Autumn, gym manager, Birmingham, Sceptical Scroller**

It is predominantly those on the political right who are more likely to see bias within science as an institutionalised issue. This is just one indicator of how, while Britain is not currently as polarised as the US in attitudes to science, there are some warning signals about the direction in which things may be heading. The more right-leaning segments tend to show a higher level of concern about scientists' political bent than those on the left. Four in ten Dissenting Disruptors and three in ten Traditional Conservatives, as well as three in ten of the 'post-political' Sceptical Scroller group, think that science and scientists these days are too concerned with political causes.

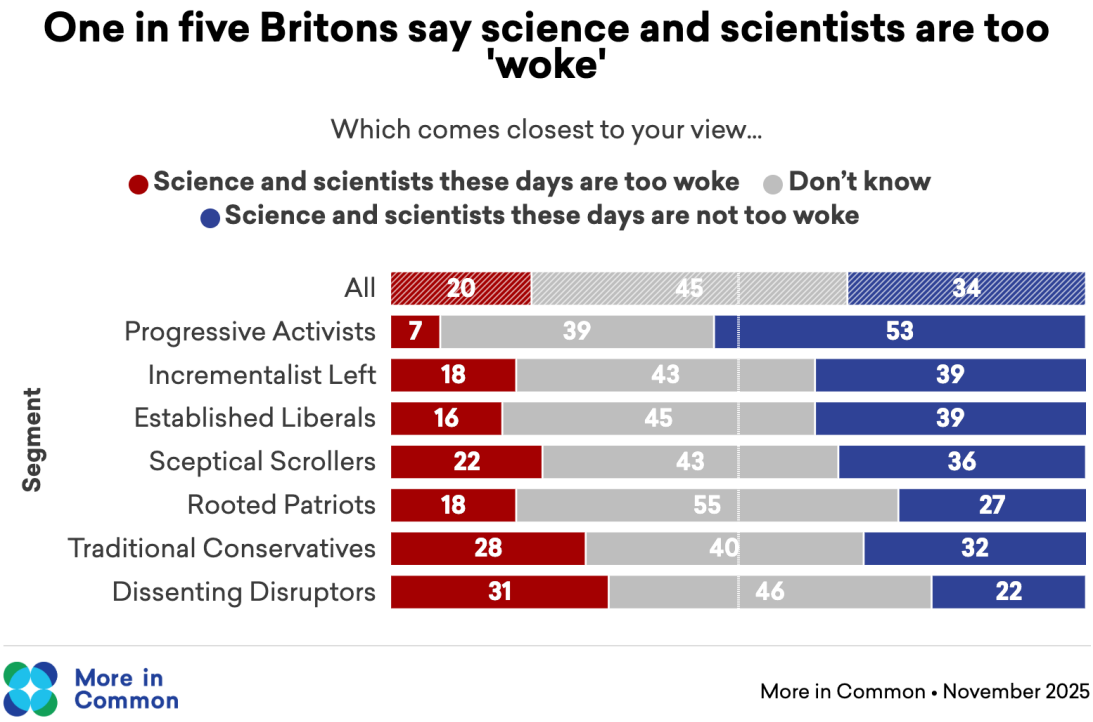


Those on the political right, including those who voted for Reform UK in 2024 are among the most likely to think that scientific organisations have a political bias, with a third (32 per cent) of those who voted for the party saying that science has a political bias.



The primary concern of the groups - and the Britons - who think there is some sort of political bias among scientists is that the sector is too left wing. Attitudes are somewhat polarised between the socially liberal and socially conservative segments - while 23 per cent of Progressive Activists say that science and scientists are too concerned with social and political causes, this rises to 33 per cent of Traditional Conservatives and 41 per cent of Dissenting Disruptors.

When the same question is asked differently - with the framing being 'woke' rather than 'concerned about social and political causes' - fewer Britons say that science and scientists are too 'woke'. While just seven per cent of Progressive Activists think scientists are too 'woke', 28 per cent of Traditional Conservatives and 31 per cent of Dissenting Disruptors share that view. This partially reflects a stronger sense of polarisation in the use of the word 'woke' and also likely a lower familiarity with the term. It was not defined in the polling question, allowing respondents to apply their own understanding or (lack of) to the term. At least one in five (18 per cent) of every segment has concerns that science is too involved with political causes. Concerns about science being too 'woke' are less prevalent and more polarised.



More broadly, Britons are concerned that science as a sector may be unable to resist political influence or political pressures. Individual scientists' own world views are one thing - and most tend to think this only shapes things at the margins. Instead, a deeper concern is that scientists might be being pressured by other institutions or that politicians may be using them to try and advance their own political agenda.

> *"If the green is this green and climate and climate change, classic example, isn't it? If you've got an Ed Miliband, Labour Government who want to smash full on into it and spend billions, all our bills are going up because of it. They're going to get wherever scientific group to agree with them. If you get the next government in and they think it's a load of tosh, then they'll spend money on a load of different scientists to say it's a load of tosh wherever their agenda is and wherever they want to steer you on that road of political nonsense."* - **Ray, vacuum repair business owner, Great Yarmouth, Dissenting Disruptor**

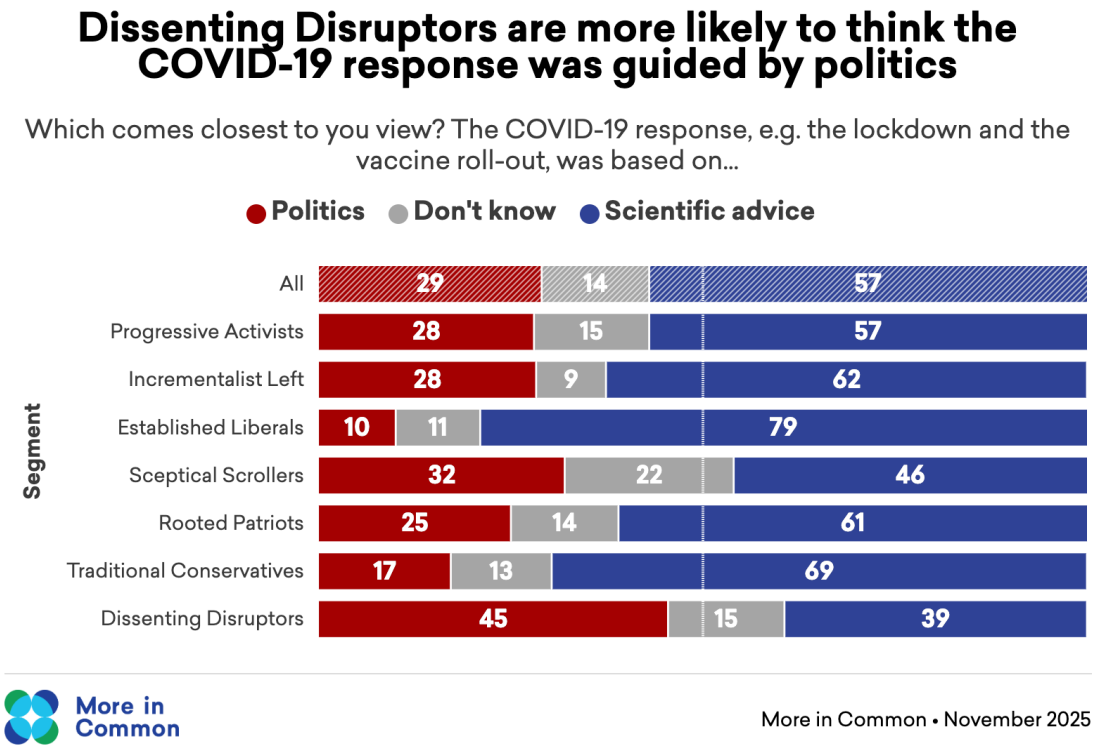
> *"I think you only get involved with the politics side of it once you have a sort of following or an audience... If you have an influence over what people think about your claims and they believe you, that's when someone might come to your door in a suit and be like, 'Look, you're going to say this and you're going to say this.'"* - **Martin, construction worker, Luton, Sceptical Scroller**

> *"So, I think that's where politics crosses over into science, which is wrong in my opinion very wrong, dangerous."* - **Anton, retirement lifestyle planner, Newbury, Traditional Conservative**

> *"Your politicians and your scientists will overlap. They feed into each other and it's about the whole economy and stuff. So, I don't think it's as straightforward as the scientists are left alone."* **- Gurdeep, employability advisor, Glasgow, Sceptical Scroller**

> *"So if you didn't really follow this and didn't know of RFK Junior and what's happened at CDC (US Centers for Disease Control) with people, they're the lifelong experts that resigning or being fired, I guess a lot of people would just trust that and just say, oh, well, that's what head of A CDC says, so it must be right. Which, yeah, it's just so unhelpful, so worrying. But I think it creates a complete lack of trust in those institutions that you do kind of need to... And not just for America before, for the rest of the world really. As always, we tend to follow their lead."* - **Danny, office worker, Hackney, Progressive Activist**

> *"I'm always curious as to initiatives and who they're driven by. So, when medics and scientists are looking at things, is that driven by medics that are doing that based on evidence and what they see as an area of need in terms of research or innovation or whatever, or is that driven by politicians or government or whoever? I don't know."* - **Gemma, psychologist and publican, Stevenage Incrementalist Left**



The sense of distrust that many have in politicians and the political process contaminates the public's view of scientists when they are associated with politics. In focus groups people describe how scientists don't have the power to resist either political or wider elite influence. Even where science and scientists themselves were seen as trustworthy, some felt they weren't sufficiently independent.

> *"I think a lot of them [Scientists] that are presented to the media are media trained, so they'll be like politicians who are also media trained and they are, they're able to babble in a way that, yeah, someone just said that confuses everyone and doesn't really address the point at hand. So yeah, I think that's a lot of the time what happens"* - **Danny, office worker, Hackney, Progressive Activist**

> *"So, if they're saying for example, this vaccine works, again, back it up with evidence and be forthcoming with it... So, if you ask the question, they'd answer it and not be like a politician in dodge it."* - **Kath, admin clerk, Newcastle, Rooted Patriot**

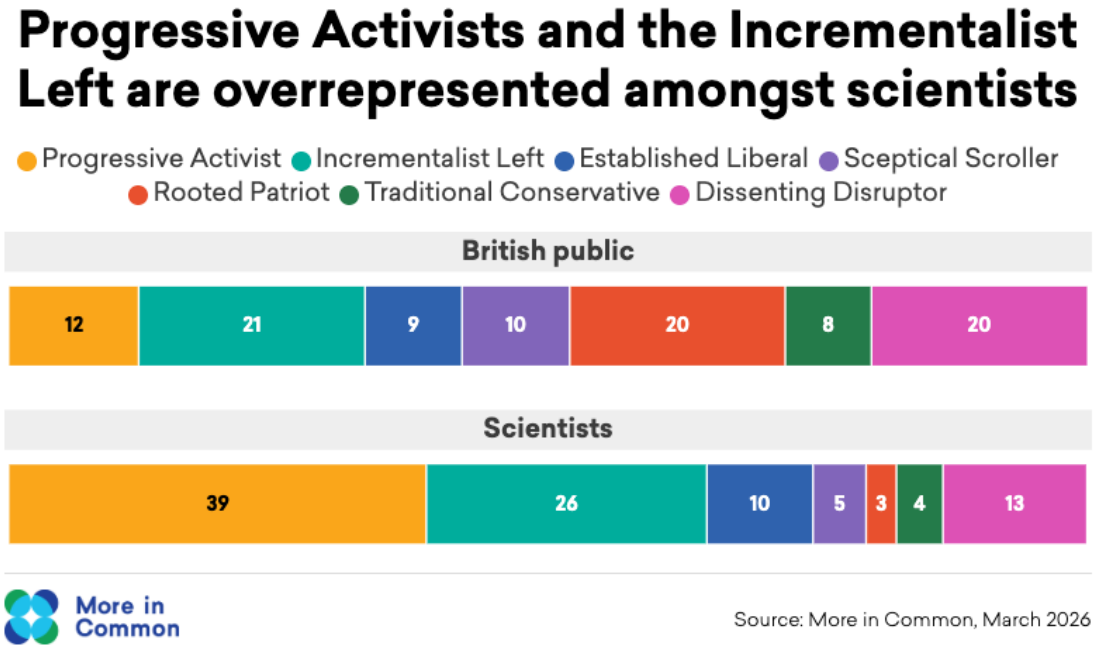
The concern about the role of political agendas in influencing science and scientists, explains much of the scepticism for the COVID response, especially in the least trusting segments. Those segments (the Dissenting Disruptors and Sceptical Scrollers) are the most likely to think that the COVID response was based on politics and not on science.

Dissenting Disruptors are the only segment where more think that the response was based on politics rather than scientific advice. This perception in turn shapes these groups' lifestyle choices - these segments are significantly less likely to have been vaccinated against Covid 19.

The views and values of scientists in practice

It is indeed true that, as a community, people who work in the field of science are significantly different to the profile of Britons in general. More in Common polled people working in the scientific sector to examine how its segment breakdown compares to that of the general public. The sample was been carefully designed to reach a precise and niche group of scientists, achieving 142 interviews overall. While this will result in a large margin of error, for a specialist, hard-to-reach group this is a sufficient sample to support broad inferences and identify emerging patterns.

Though findings should be treated as indicative rather than statistically definitive, the results do suggest that scientists' motivations, values and life experiences tend to differ meaningfully from those of the broader public.



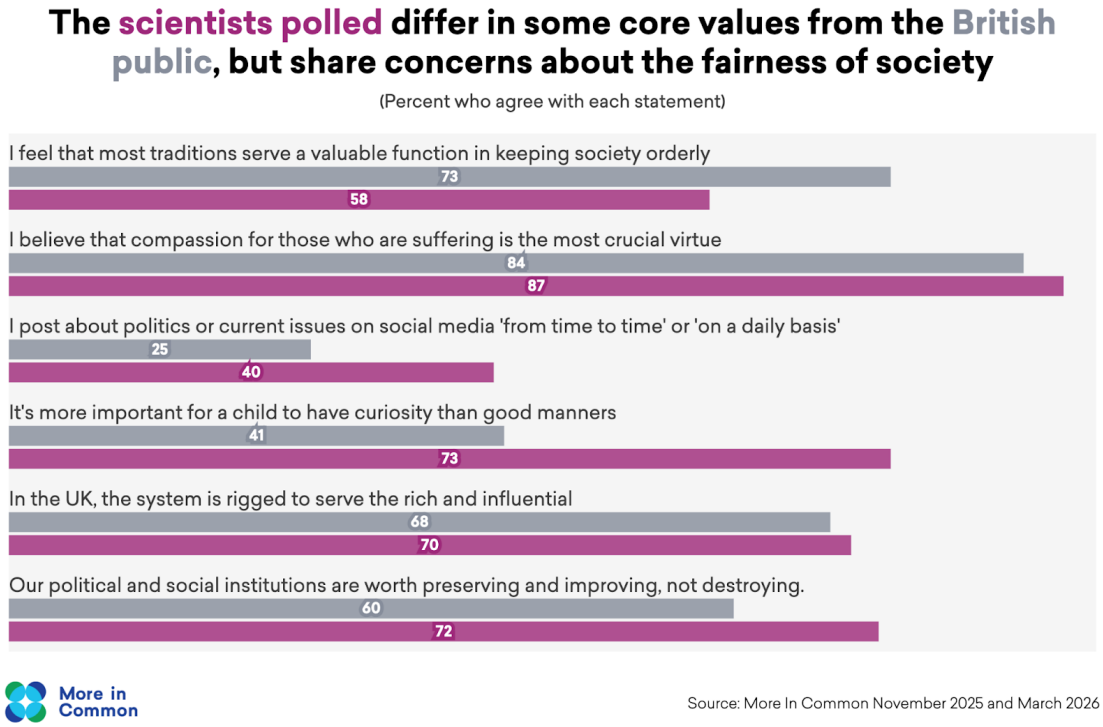
In fact, almost two-thirds (65 per cent) of scientists polled belonged to the two most left leaning segments, compared to 33 per cent of the public. In turn, the more socially conservative segments - Rooted Patriots, Traditional Conservatives, and Dissenting Disruptors - are all significantly underrepresented. The latter three segments make up almost half of the British population (48 per cent), but only 20 per cent of the scientists polled.

On underlying values, scientists differ in their parenting preferences, being far more likely to prioritise children having curiosity over good manners (73 per cent of the scientists polled compared to 41 per cent of the population).

Questions such as these are designed to explore upstream moral foundations and value sets - the fact that most scientists would prefer curiosity, should perhaps come as no surprise given the nature of their work - but also suggests that they lean more socially liberal and less authoritarian than the broader public.

The polling of scientists and those working in the science sector referred to in this report was conducted in March 2026. This data was unweighted, and any statistics referred to are based on the raw sample of 142.

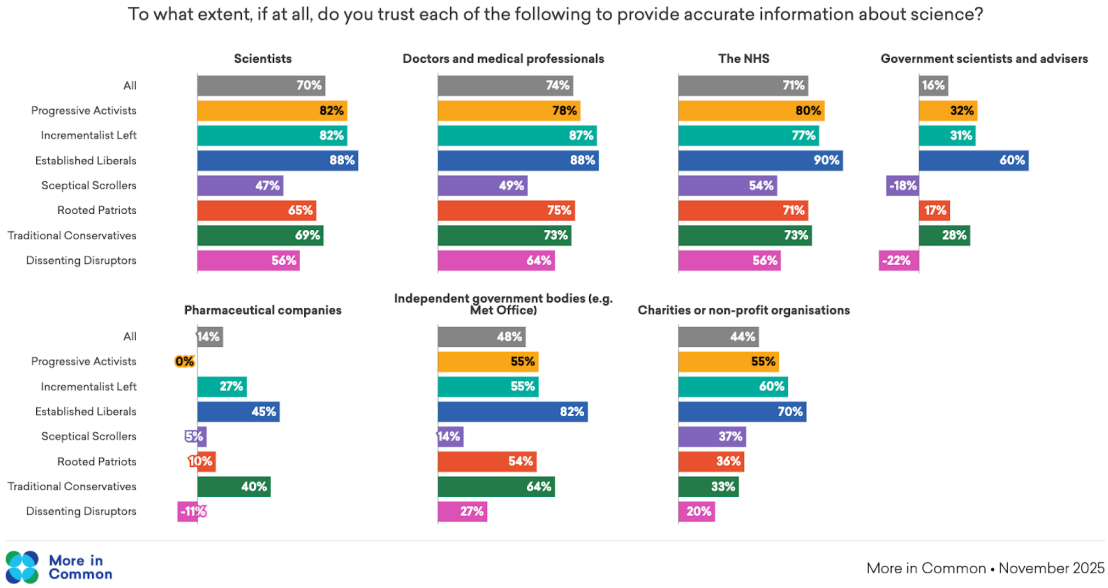
However, in other areas the scientists polled were broadly in line with the British population. 70 per cent of the scientists said that in the UK the system is rigged to serve the rich and influential - for the British public this number is 68 per cent. This indicates scientists share the same underlying dissatisfaction with the status quo - and a sense that the system does not work fairly for the majority of people in modern Britain. While scientists and Britons as a whole may share a diagnosis of where systems are unfair, the different ideological skew of scientists will often mean they differ in their preferred solutions and treatments to the general public.



Scientists, science and financial influence

Concerns about the role of money, and corporate funding was selected as a reason by a third (31 per cent) of those who say they now trust scientists less. Science and scientists need funding - the challenge is how different sources of funding, and independence from financial motives is communicated to segments of Britain that have different concerns.

Britons are somewhat sceptical about the motives of private companies in science and research. Pharmaceutical companies are slightly more likely to be trusted than distrusted when it comes to providing information about science (net +14 per cent trust) - but they are less trusted than other organisations or institutions, and with some stark differences in levels of trust across segments.

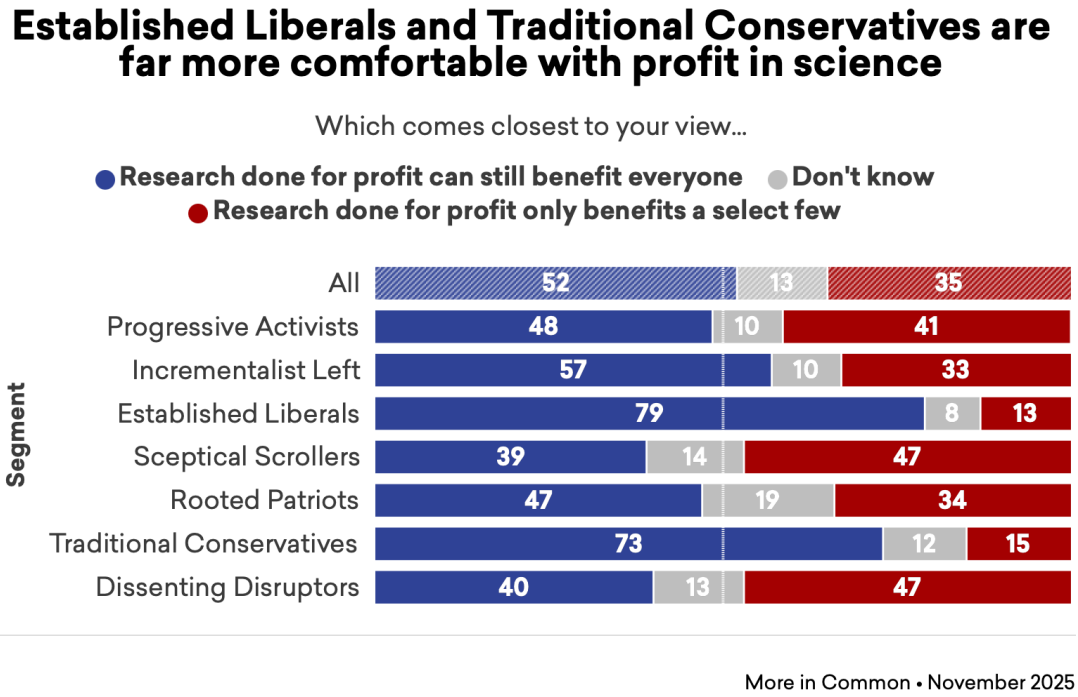


The two most economically right-wing segments, Established Liberals and Traditional Conservatives, are naturally the most comfortable with the profit motive in science, and the benefits that privately funded science can deliver. In these segments, three in four feel that research done for profit can benefit everyone, rather than only benefiting a select few. In focus group conversations, while they do not universally endorse all the practices of every private company, participants from these segments expressed a far higher level of comfort in the social good and role that a private interest can play in funding research than other segments.

> *"The pharmaceutical companies, if you think about the drugs that they produce after much research for illnesses... when they produce a drug and it's successful through the research, then the amount of money that will follow that drug and it can be sold to other companies, sorry, other countries in the world as well. I wouldn't say it's, it's the main motivating factor, but I would say probably top of the list is to make money. Even with Formula one, there's millions and millions of pounds made. Yes, there's millions of pounds invested, but the outcome is also very profitable as well."* - **Shirley, retired NHS nurse, Torfaen, Traditional Conservative**

> *"And the cars, the formula one's a primary example. We have RBS breaking. So, if you've got an electric car for instance, when you take your foot, the accelerator, you're charging your battery. That was designed in Formula One. So, I do think science, whilst a lot of it is done, I think for profit, I think the after effect is that we will benefit from that in slightly different versions."* - **Anton, retirement lifestyle planner, Newbury, Traditional Conservative**

> *"I think some of the private investors, not all, are just out of it for fame and profit, whereas others might just be wanting to do good and put their money to good use. So, I don't think everyone that invests has the same objective."* - **Sarah, administrator, St Albans, Established Liberal**



More than half of the Incrementalist Left segment agrees that profit-driven research can benefit everyone, and they are more likely to trust pharmaceutical companies to provide information than to distrust them. However, in conversations with the Incrementalist Left about pharmaceutical companies' role in science a degree of discomfort emerges. Given their relatively low engagement with science, a significant entry point for Incrementalist Left participants' day to day experience of science is through marketing, and in particular the beauty industry. This commercial entry point appeared to shape their broader scepticism.

> *"It's like when you see on the commercials at the end of when they're trying to sell a product and it goes, oh, 97 per cent of people recommend this thing and then you look and they've got a number of, they did a research and it was like 67 people they chose. It's like, well why did you choose 67 people not a hundred or 50? Oh it's because 67 reached a perfect amount to make it so you could have that percentage, which is obviously a scientist's way of doing it, of going well if we just proportion it until we get the figure that we want it to match and then we'll publish it as that which we're always going to have unfortunately is very much like Ruby said. They will tell you*

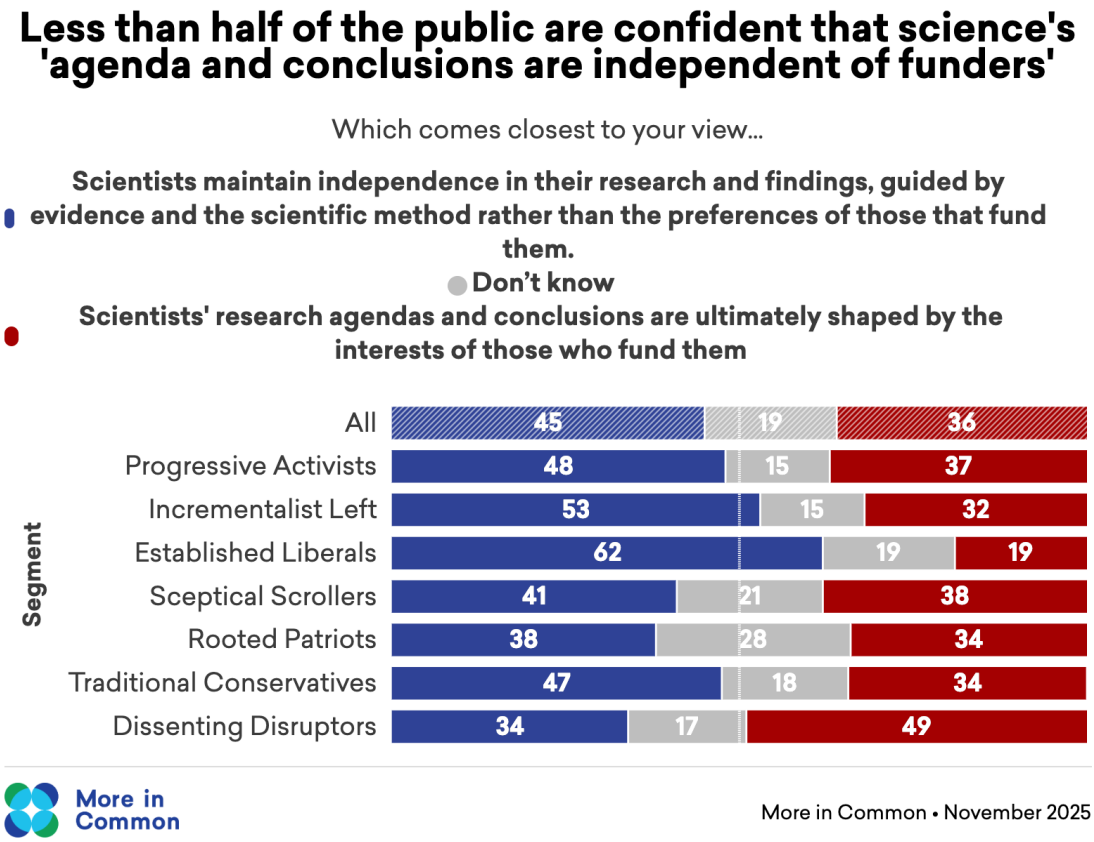
> *what they want to tell you by using their ways of doing it. But that's just one of the ways, as soon as I see down a commercial, I'm like, well that's obviously fixed."* - **Ben, group risk insurance officer, Brighton, Incrementalist Left**

> *"I think that if it's for hair and makeup or beauty products, then the figures can be manipulated. And it's like what Ben said that they will get a certain amount of people and then they can say that 95 per cent of people agree who are tested. They don't say how many people were tested, they just give the high figure, 98 per cent agree. But if it's for something stricter, I don't think the figures should be, and I don't think they are. I don't know if I'm too naive, but I don't think they are manipulated in the way that they are with beauty products."* - **Mumtaz, housing options team leader, Brighton, Incrementalist Left**

> *"I think I kind of feel there's always a bit of a stigma behind privately funded medical science because there always seems like there's a bit of an agenda, whether it be someone is funding maybe the next best thing and whether or not that comes through false information and they manage to get the next viral, say youthful product that I might need or that kind of thing. I feel publicly it's a bit more trusted because it feels like it's got the public's interest behind it may be a bit more, I don't really know, but I feel there's always a bit of scepticism behind privately funded science projects."*- **Holly, pest controller, Edinburgh, Incrementalist Left**

For some segments, concerns about profit are central to their wider perception of scientific research. Dissenting Disruptors are particularly wary of financial interests - nearly half believe that scientists' research is ultimately shaped by the priorities of funders - a view shared by 36 per cent of the public overall. Progressive Activists, by contrast, generally maintain high levels of trust in science, but four in ten see financial interests as influencing research agendas and conclusions. Both groups are also more sceptical than average about the influence of big business and wealth in public life, reflecting their deeper doubts about whose interests science ultimately serves.

Britons do not think about all 'funders' in the same way - concerns are dependent on both a segment's values, and the nature of the funding itself. Across focus groups and the polling shown above, concerns about the influence of pharmaceutical companies and charities and non-profit organisations are different, both in the degree of concern, but also the segments that are most concerned about the 'funders' influence.



Interestingly concerns about financial interests do not automatically necessitate distrust in science per se. Among those who say that financial interests ultimately shape agendas and conclusions, seven in ten (69 per cent) still say they trust scientists to provide accurate information.

It may be that people who hold both these beliefs have some cynicism towards the influence of funding yet trust the process of science. While Britons may think the direction of travel might be influenced by financial considerations, this didn't entirely undermine the trustworthiness of research.

> *"I think that feeds back to also how the previous question, how believable a scientist would be is where their study money is from, whether they're academic, whether they're working in a public sector for a, not university, but you know what I mean, charity or government run research or private, it all kind of ties back in."* - **Yvette, product developer, Hackney, Progressive Activist**

> *"I think a scientist and someone in the pharmaceutical industry is doing different things, but the scientist ultimately is there to do good. That's how I perceive them... Because then that's about money, so there's a difference and then the more money that's involved, the less I trust them."* - **Jen, health care assistant, Newcastle, Dissenting Disruptor**

How the British public views scientists

A 2021 review[4], drawing on previous research measuring trust in scientists, identified key markers of trustworthiness: competence, benevolence, openness and transparency.

Looking at each of these key elements of trustworthiness the public are more likely to say scientists display each of them than they do not. The majority of the British public see scientists as competent, benevolent, open and transparent.

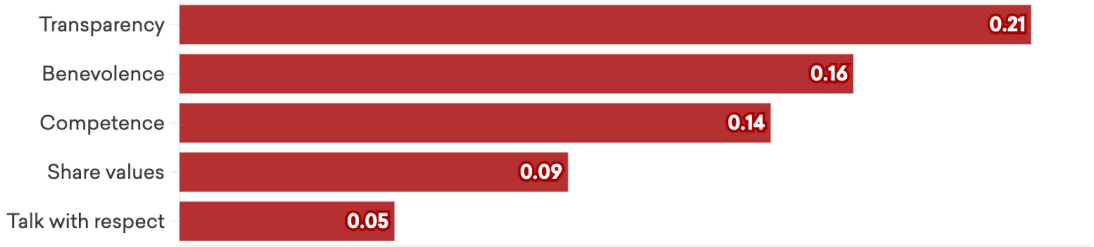
As expected, and in accordance with the literature, seeing scientists as being competent, benevolent, open and transparent is associated with trusting scientists to provide accurate information about science.

However, regression analysis reveals that there are other factors, less directly associated with scientific expertise, which are also predictive of whether they are trusted to share accurate information. These include whether a scientist is seen to share a person's values and whether they talk to others with respect.

4 Besley, J. C., Lee, N. M., & Pressgrove, G. (2021). Reassessing the Variables Used to Measure Public Perceptions of Scientists. *Science Communication*, 43(1), 3-32.

All elements of trustworthiness correlate with trusting scientists. Sharing values and talking with respect are significant predictors of trustworthiness.

Standardised coefficient of each element of trustworthiness in a regression model of individual responses



More in Common

Source: More in Common, February 2026

In focus groups across different segments, it is clear that scientists are generally seen as competent, clever and highly educated - even by those who are sceptical of scientists' motives and transparency.

Participants cite credentials, education, appointed positions and respect from peers as evidence of scientists' competence. For Traditional Conservatives, the perceived hierarchy of science, and their views of the work ethic and academic skill of those working in it, meant that they saw those in leadership and senior positions within the sector as especially competent. Across focus groups, Britons ultimately wanted scientists to be expert sources of advice - and generally saw scientists as competent.

When you think of scientists, what comes to mind? (one or two words)

More in Common, November 2025

> *"It's a lot of time, a lot of dedication, a lot of studying. It's a lot of work before you actually get to that professorship or whatever they call it, scientist."* - **Ray, vacuum repair business owner, Great Yarmouth, Dissenting Disruptor**

> *"As long as they're the best. Yeah, as long as you're getting the right information from the most qualified person."* **- Colin, bricklayer, Newcastle, Rooted Patriot**

> *"I feel there's a hierarchy within science, so I would look to more eminent scientists like you said about if your peers are all saying that this is the greatest mind in some certain subject, then I tend to put more validity or weight in that."* **- Steve, retiree, Monmouthshire, Traditional Conservative**

The segments who tend to be more trusting of science and scientists also have greater faith in scientists' ability to find out 'truth' through rigorous research and their expertise.

When asked what scientists would do when they did not know something, Established Liberals and Traditional Conservatives respond that scientists would do their best to find out the answer. For these segments, their faith in scientists' competence makes them less concerned about questions of transparency - their expertise overrules everything else.

> *"If they didn't know something, I think they would try and find the answer before they're saying they didn't know. Do you know what I mean? Because they're scientists."* - **Vicki, police strategic manager, South Oxfordshire, Traditional Conservative**

> *"Yeah, I think so because when they run into a dead end, they tend to go into collaboration with others that are looking at the same topic again."* - **Steven, food business owner, Middlesex, Established Liberal**

That faith in the expertise of scientists is widespread, but not universal. Sceptical Scrollers' trust in scientific expertise is particularly weak. This group is less likely than average to view scientists as competent, and just 58 per cent acknowledge scientists as experts, while one in ten actively reject this. This group has a base level of distrust in and lack of automatic deference towards elite institutions and their intentions, shaped in part by their experience of the pandemic.

> *"And you think they can't even cure the common cold yet. And that's been about for so long, they can't cure that and then they tell you they can cure cancer and other things. I think you have to be sceptical because we all understand that not everything is curable."* - **Phil, unemployed, Luton, Sceptical Scroller**

For Rooted Patriots and Dissenting Disruptors, their faith in scientific expertise is tempered by a view that scientists are distant and cannot relate to them. Rooted Patriots and Dissenting Disruptors, for example, are less likely than average to think that scientists share their values, talk to them with respect, or see them as equals than the average Briton.

> *"It's difficult for a layman HGV driver to fully question what a scientist is doing because it's not my world. "* - **Mike, HGV driver, Bury, Rooted Patriot**

This view of scientists is linked, for some, to the fact many are seen as 'posh', or from more privileged backgrounds - which in turn has an impact on how relatable they are perceived to be. One in three Britons (29 per cent) claim scientists think themselves better than other people.

Many people also think that science speaks in a different 'voice' to them. In focus groups, Rooted Patriots and Dissenting Disruptors - those segments who often feel that scientists are remote from them and their daily lives - are particularly likely to say that scientists do not sound like them.

> *"You don't associate a Geordie accent with science; there are no Scouse scientists are there?"* - **Colin, IT worker, Newcastle, Dissenting Disruptor**

That said, most Britons do not think that where a scientist comes from or what they sound like necessarily shapes whether they can be trusted. In their own words, Britons believe that what ultimately matters is what a scientist does, not where they come from.

> *"I can imagine that they are very educated people and that actually talk in terms that I probably wouldn't necessarily relate to."* - **Ashleigh, fashion buyer, Newcastle, Rooted Patriot**

> *"So, my best friend's daughter is doing biomedical science at uni, and she's developed a posh voice. I think it's a uni voice rather than a science voice."* - **Claire, training manager, Newcastle, Dissenting Disruptor.**

> *"I think you take it more seriously if you have got that BBC accent or if you're talking science, not if you've got the strongest Geordie accent on the planet, nobody's going to take you seriously."* - **Colin, IT worker, Newcastle, Dissenting Disruptor**

> *"I don't think it should make a difference, but I do feel like if you talk to somebody, if they sound well spoken, I don't think it necessarily matters what the accent is, but if they're well spoken they're not talking in slang, I think I would trust them more."* - **Heather, nursery manager, Newcastle, Dissenting Disruptor**

> *"So I don't know that any sort of regional dialect would make any difference to how I would view them. I think their intentions are clear from the fact that they're doing that for a living."* - **Emma, contact centre advisor, Newcastle, Dissenting Disruptor**

What is clear however is that people's values, experience and ability and willingness to speak with them with respect are all associated with trusting scientists to provide accurate information. When it comes to communicating science, this can matter.

Views of scientists across the Seven Segments: The impact of Covid

The scientific and policy response to the COVID pandemic had a profound impact on how Britons think about scientists. This was, for many, a time where science suddenly went from something remote and distant to something that played a big role in their day-to-day lives.

But a story of 'COVID reduced trust in science among everyone' does not accurately reflect the experiences of the British public writ large. In fact, for many, the work of scientists and those who communicated their research fostered trust, not least for those - such as Rooted Patriots - who tend to have a higher threat perception and relied on scientists as a source of reassurance and stability during a time of uncertainty.

> *"I think they worked hard and gave everything they could in that period of time [The pandemic]."* **- Margaret, retired teaching assistant, Newcastle, Rooted Patriot**

> *"I think when it was during COVID we were all used to turning the TV on at five o'clock every day and listening to scientists now, how often do you tune into a TV programme and you are hearing scientists talk about current evidence, things that are happening. I think we got so used to it back then and then all of a sudden that's not the norm for us anymore."* - **Miriam, special needs teacher, Hampton, Established Liberal**

However, the pandemic also further catalysed the fragmentation of Britons' information landscape. By disrupting in person social networks, and driving Britons online, the pandemic led to more atomised media diets and weakened collective sources of truth.

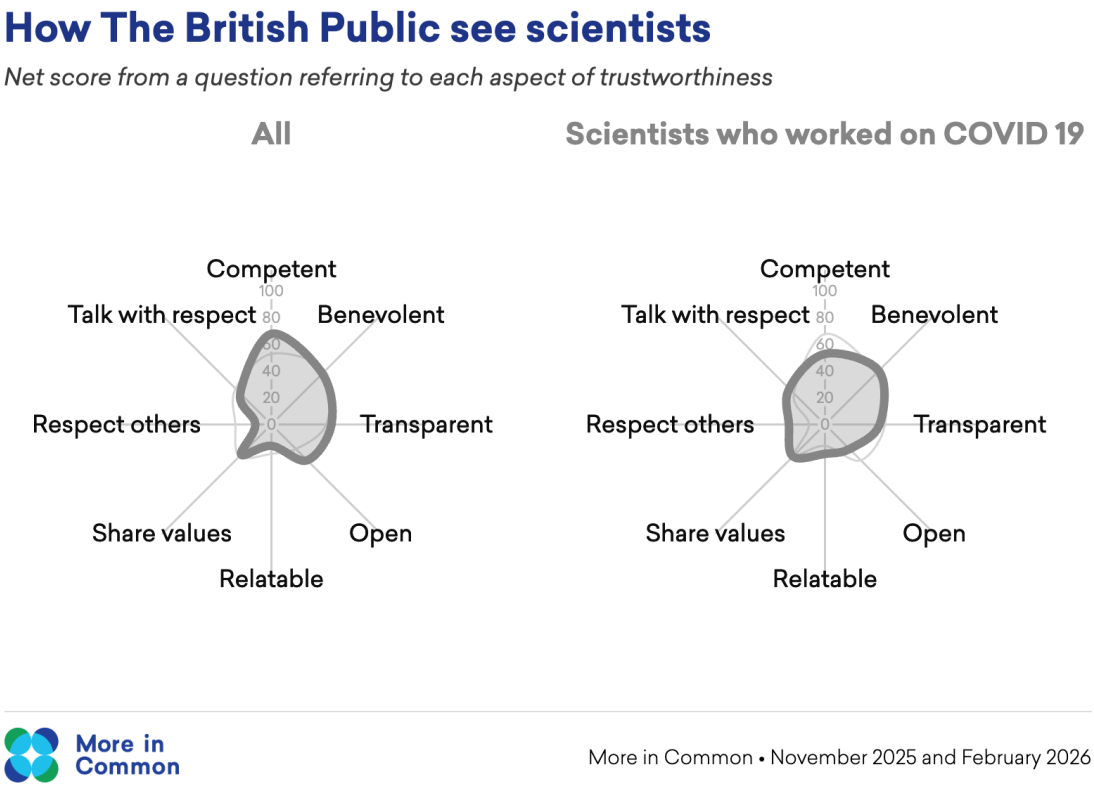
For some segments, particularly Sceptical Scrollers and Dissenting Disruptors, the pandemic played a formative role in reshaping how they see not only science but politics and the world at large.

The sense that decisionmakers were poorly qualified to handle a global crisis has become foundational to the outlook of how many in these two segments view science. A significant minority of Sceptical Scrollers (26 per cent) and Dissenting Disruptors (27 per cent) thought scientists who worked on the pandemic were not experts at what they did. This was reinforced by their perception of how scientific guidance shifted, the way certainties became uncertainties, and the pace at which explanations seemed to change. Some wondered whether scientists were following evidence, or whether something else was driving their advice and response.

Scientists who worked on the pandemic are, on average, seen as less competent and less transparent than other scientists - the two most important factors in shaping trust.

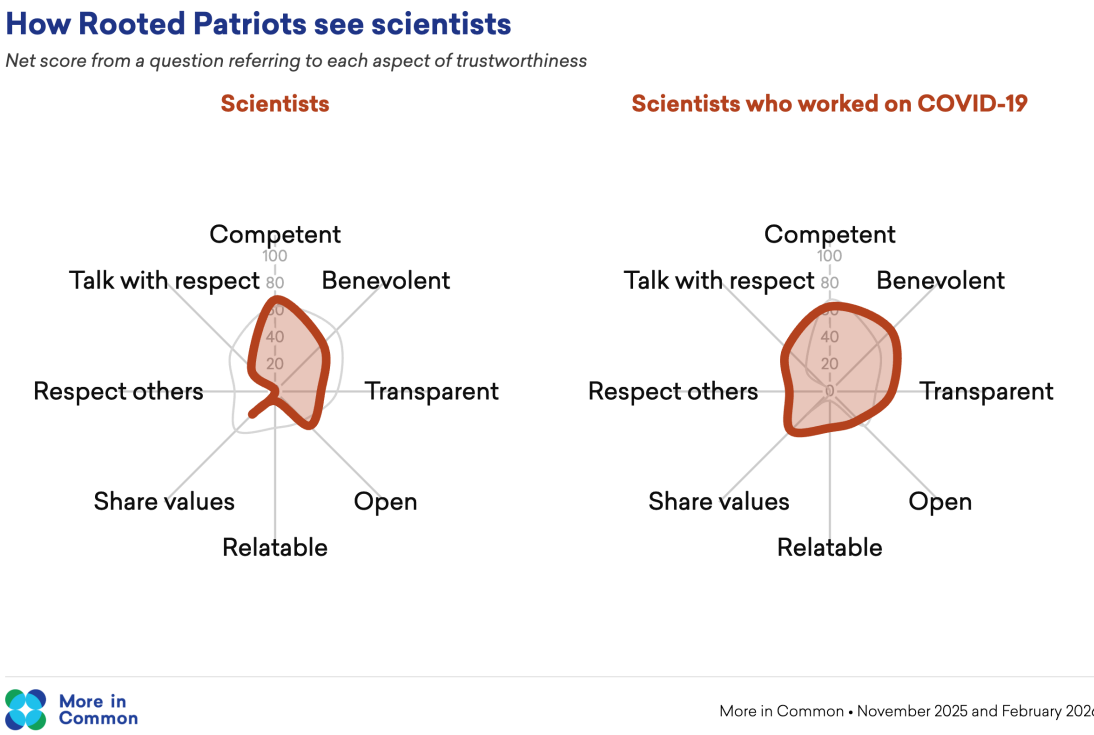
However, the flipside is that they are also perceived to be more accessible - potentially because of the visibility of many of those working on the COVID response.

For different segments, the experience of the pandemic, bringing science into their daily lives and dominating their conversations with friends and family, had opposing effects on how they saw scientists and their trustworthiness.



Rooted Patriots see the scientists who worked on COVID more positively than they do scientists in general. To this risk averse/high-threat perception segment, who are the most likely to say science plays no role in their lives in general, the scientists who worked on COVID are seen to be more transparent, speak more with respect and share their values more than others in the sector. When asked whether scientists think they are better than everyone else, over a third (37 per cent) of Rooted Patriots say they do.

However, when asked about scientists during the pandemic, this perception of elitism falls considerably. By a clear margin, Rooted Patriots say the scientists who worked on COVID thought they were equal to other people (46 per cent, versus 16 per cent who say the COVID-19 scientists believed themselves superior to other people).



This could, to an extent, be driven by this segment's deep affection for the NHS, and the role that those working in the health service played during the pandemic - the trust they place in the NHS may have benefitted scientists by association.

> *"If it is NHS, I think they're doing the best job they can. Through COVID they did. We've never been through a pandemic like that, and I think it's wrong to accuse them of doing wrong things...but yes, I agree with the guys. If it's a financial gain like Botox or anything, I steer clear of them"* - **Colin, farm salesman, Merthyr Tydfil, Rooted Patriot**

However, the biggest driver of Rooted Patriots' greater trust in scientists who worked on the pandemic response is likely to be their threat perception, risk aversion and desire for stability. Rooted Patriots were among the most likely segments to support strict and lasting lockdowns - being willing to trade off more personal freedom to ensure the pandemic could be properly controlled. The fact that scientists were at the forefront of responding to and diminishing the threat from COVID meant that they provided this group with the reassurance they needed during a time of crisis.

In contrast, Dissenting Disruptors see scientists who worked on COVID more negatively than other scientists. Dissenting Disruptors are less likely to see scientists who worked on COVID as willing to be transparent than scientists in general, while Rooted Patriots are more likely to say that the Scientists who worked on COVID-19 were open and transparent than scientists in general.

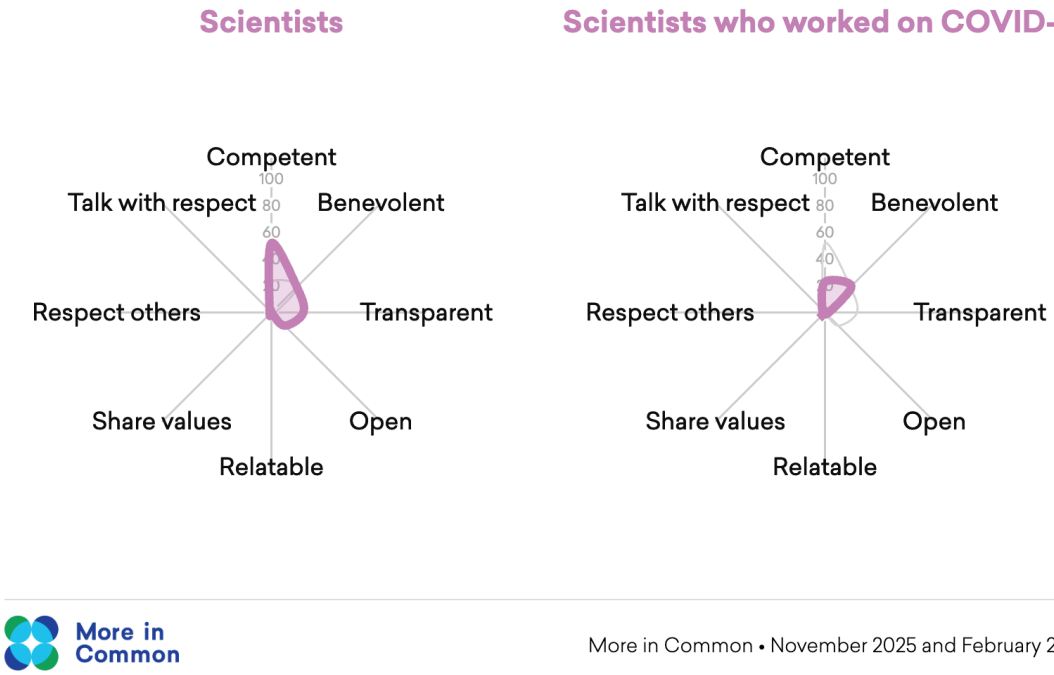
For Dissenting Disruptors, the fact that the pandemic intertwined science with an institution they deeply distrust - namely the government and world of politics - seems to have negatively affected their views of COVID scientists themselves. In focus groups, it was those who did not see a separation between scientists and government who were the most suspicious of the motives of scientists.

Stepping back, as opposed to the risk aversion of Rooted Patriots, Dissenting Disruptors have a much higher preference for individual freedom over government structures and a much greater tolerance for chaos. While Rooted Patriots found the lockdown measures and scientific advice comforting, Dissenting Disruptors were more likely to see them as authoritarian and motivated by a desire to control people. The fact scientists were at the forefront and - in some cases - the nature of those measures clearly had an impact on trust.

> *"There was a lot of controversy regarding COVID when we all had the jabs or for those people who did have it to try and control the population. We still haven't got definitive proof to say that it works."* -**Manjit, security business owner, Halesowen, Dissenting Disruptor**

How Dissenting Dissruptors see scientists

Net score from a question referring to each aspect of trustworthiness



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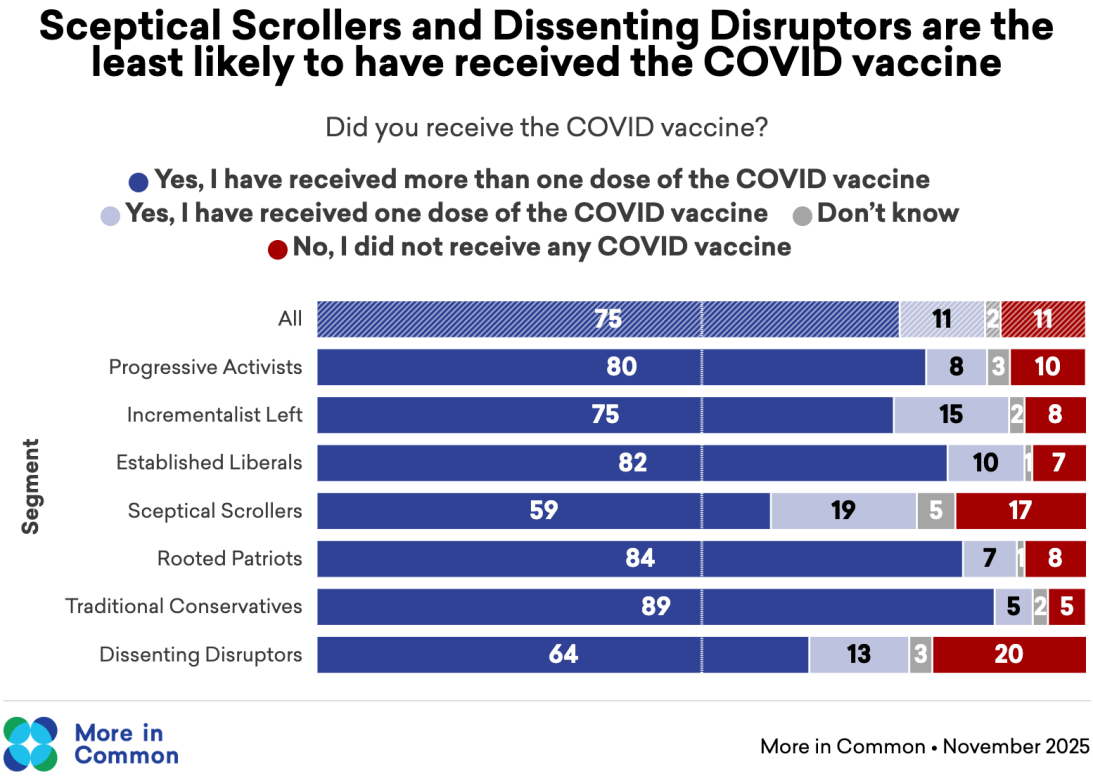
The long-tail impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic was a crisis during which the scientific evidence base developed rapidly and was rapidly translated into emergency policy action. It is inevitable that the long shadow of the pandemic continues to shape how Britons think and talk about science, given it was likely the shared experience that most made science relevant to their daily lives.



Across focus groups, Britons pivot their reasons for trusting, or distrusting science in their experience of COVID-19 and the resulting scientific and policy response. Across different segments - even those groups who have exceptionally high trust in science - scepticism towards the COVID vaccine emerges in discussion, with participants either doubtful of the science behind the vaccine itself or of the process that led to changing advice over the rollout of the vaccination programme.

This shared perspective across society provided a type of natural experiment and revealed how the different segments approached a changing scientific evidence base, and how they now look back on it.

Looking at the most trusting segments, there were concerns about the development of the COVID vaccine, but this was generally limited to the speed of the development and testing of the vaccine, and a perceived lack of information about how things were able to move so swiftly. Even when expressing doubts about the testing and safety of the COVID vaccine, participants were keen to express their confidence in the safety of other vaccines.

> *"Funnily enough, I actually volunteered in a vaccine centre. Everyone was so excited when the COVID vaccine was available and it feels rather bizarre looking back on it now.... I probably, I won't have it again because I just feel uncomfortable about the development time on that particular vaccine. But I would have flu and my kids are all vaccinated for various things and my now grown up."* - **Louise, volunteer and carer, Hampton, Established Liberal**

> *"I am not necessarily anti-vaccine. I just think that with newer vaccines that are coming out, I think that they should be tested for longer than some of them are."* - **Charlotte, project manager, Bristol, Progressive Activist**

Established Liberals and Progressive Activists, the two segments with the highest trust in science, contrast the rapid development of COVID vaccines with more typical scientific processes. For these segments their faith in the safety of medicines is bound up in the reassurance provided by the usual approval process. However, the fact that the risks of the COVID vaccine or any potential harms were publicised and out in the open ultimately underlined the transparency of the process, overriding concerns about pace.

> *"As soon as the blood clot issue came out, for example, that wasn't covered up, it was all out in the open. So that was an example of something they didn't expect to happen. And I guess again, because it was rushed out, maybe if it had gone through the normal 20 years or however long it would've taken, they would've found out and they would never have released the vaccine, that particular version anyway. But I didn't feel like we were being kept in the dark about that. It came out very soon, as soon as there was an issue with that vaccine."* - **Peter, retired homemaker, Teddington, Established Liberal**

Other segments also highlight COVID as an exceptional time when they more unquestioningly followed scientific guidance, in a way they may not in future. Some Britons have spent time evaluating the evidence they were presented with retrospectively and now view it in a different light than they did in a time of crisis where the sense of threat was higher. Some now feel the information they were presented with was communicated as more 'definite' than it probably was - this overreach has led to greater scepticism in how they view scientific information today.

> *"I think it was just a scary time, and nobody really knew what they were doing. I think because everyone thought that was the best thing to do. We just all went with it, didn't we?"* - **Emma, office manager, Bury, Rooted Patriot**

For the groups with the lowest level of trust in science - Sceptical Scrollers and Dissenting Disruptors - the development of the COVID vaccine and the information they had surrounding this process is a singular moment where the motives of science and scientists came into question. For these groups, the sense that they had to follow scientific advice unquestioningly during a time of crisis - despite concerns about the transparency of the information, which they now feel was presented as more certain than it actually was - has had a lasting impact on their trust in science and research.

> *"Yeah, it all goes back to COVID. Prior to that I was never really thought about it. And during COVID I was like, you know what, I'll have the injections. But then on reflection you sort of go, actually was there any much science behind it? Yeah, it just makes you think, doesn't it?"* - **John, data analyst, Dudley, Dissenting Disruptor**

> *"I don't think some of them are [honest], Just because of the whole COVID thing. I felt a lot of it was about control."* - **Karen, neonatal nurse, Birmingham, Sceptical Scroller**

Witnessing the same events, and same changing evidence has had drastically different impacts on trust across segments.

Looking back retrospectively, those with the highest trust see the level of transparency and the science 'updating' with emerging evidence as proof of the trustworthiness of the process overall, even if they do have some reservations about how 'certain' scientific evidence was presented as during the pandemic. Others see COVID vaccines as an understandable acceleration of normal processes involved in vaccine approval. But for many of those with the lowest trust, COVID is seen as the tipping point where they lost trust in science.

For the latter group, it is the information that was provided to them during the pandemic, the certainty it was communicated with, and the developments in scientific understanding since the pandemic that have instilled a greater desire to 'do their own research'. This perspective is common with Sceptical Scrollers. It is possible that enabling this group with greater agency to investigate and cross reference evidence, instead of asking them to unquestioningly follow scientific guidance, may have avoided the pandemic's negative impact on their trust in science.

Overall, reflecting on experiences of COVID, two clear themes emerge that drive people's retrospective hesitancy either toward the vaccine or toward scientific evidence during this period: the speed of vaccine development and the evolving nature of the evidence base.

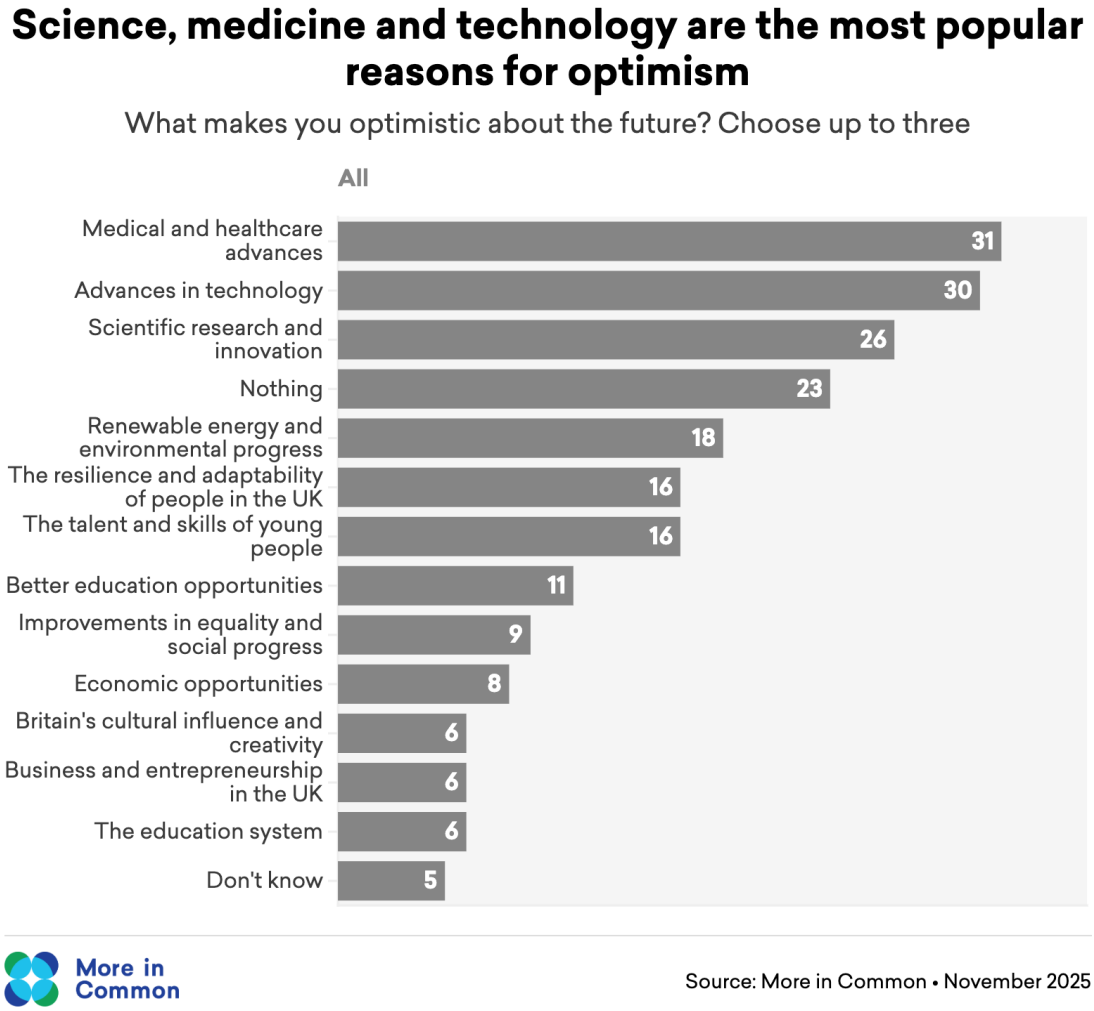
For science communicators, this may serve as a cautionary tale. Scientific advice and communication can have a long tail beyond the public's immediate behavioural decisions. While many Britons express a desire for clear and definitive guidance, acknowledging uncertainty may ultimately create more robust foundations for trust, even if it results in less short-term behavioural change.

Chapter 3: The role of optimism in building trust in science

Trust in science is fundamentally rooted in optimism about how science can change things for the better. Britons trust science more when they see it as driving innovation and delivering change for the better. This conviction shapes not only their confidence in scientists, but also their optimism about what lies ahead. When asked what makes them hopeful about the future, the most popular answers are anchored in research: medical and healthcare advances, advances in technology, and scientific research and innovation.

Science is not simply trusted; it is a principal source of British optimism, which is currently often in short supply.

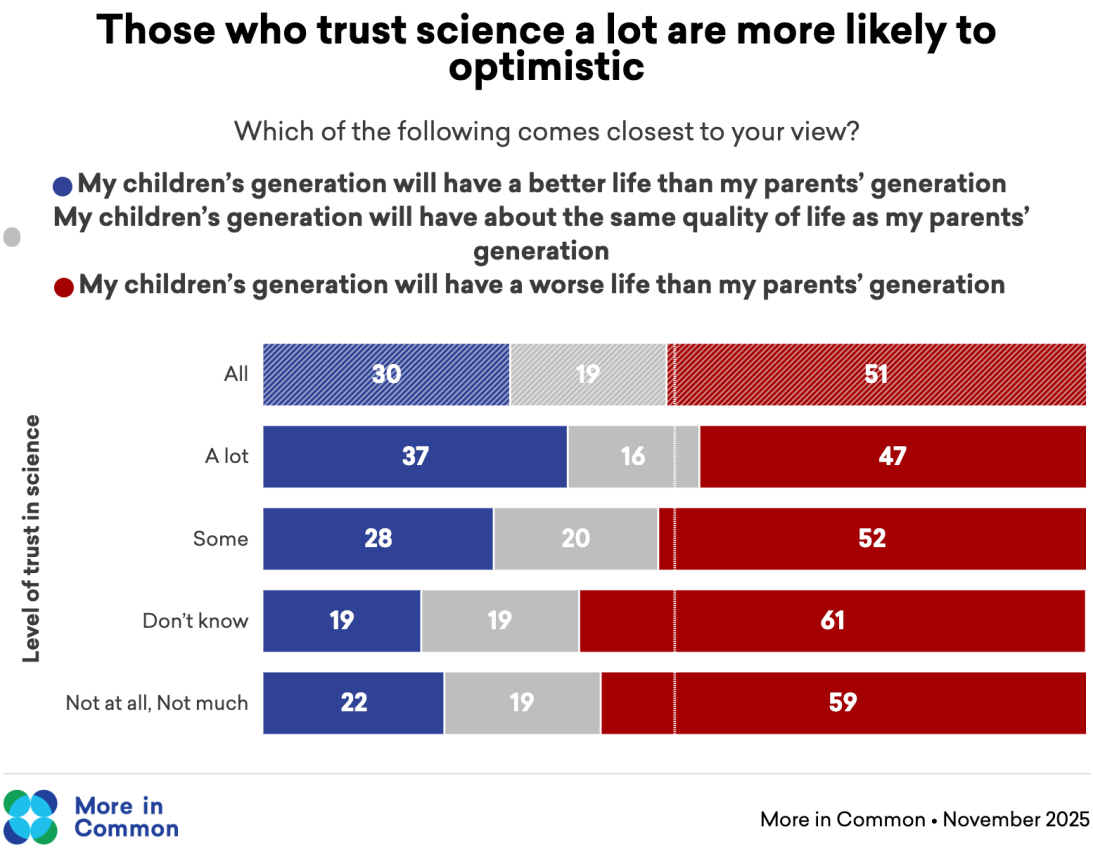
> *"There was somebody on the news the other day who would've gone blind, but they've done something that would give her a sight back and it's amazing. I can't remember all the details, but it was like a real pioneering miracle. I thought that when you hear things like that, you realise what more they're going to be able to do in 10, 20 years time with research."* - **Margaret, retired teaching assistant, Newcastle, Rooted Patriot**



Among those with lower levels of trust in science, the most common response when asked what made them optimistic about the future was "nothing." This suggests that trust in science is closely linked to a broader sense of hope and belief that progress is possible. If the sector can more clearly demonstrate the role science can play in driving positive real world change and in giving people a sense of agency to improve their lives, that in turn could (re)build trust among more sceptical segments of the population.

Established Liberals exemplify this. Their relative comfort with the status quo, confidence in institutions, and belief that things can improve align with their trust in science to deliver progress. This translates into better expectations for the future. Two in five of those with high trust in science believe their children will have better lives than they did. But only one in five of those with low trust share this same hope.

> *"[Discussing Nobel Prizes] One was something to do with trying to capture some of these bad emissions, CO2 and what have you in this new design. I was impressed that I could see why they were chosen. It's very much thinking for the future of mankind, the things they were looking at."* - **Peter, retired homemaker, Teddington, Established Liberal**



Demonstrating the positive real world impact of science on Britons' lives, must go beyond health and medicine, important as these areas are. This is particularly important as advanced treatments for cancer, or research into mental health, are juxtaposed with experiences of the NHS waiting lists and crumbling infrastructure. Improvements in medicine and medical research are difficult to square with people's struggle with the healthcare system as a whole.

> *"Now I don't know about figures, but I slightly disagree. My stepdad's got cancer at the moment. He's going through chemotherapy and every time it goes like cattle market it's like there is hundreds of people waiting, trapped and going through chemotherapy and it shocked me."* - **Claire, training manager, Newcastle, Dissenting Disruptor**

Optimism for the future is bound up with financial security, life satisfaction and confidence in public institutions. This points to an opportunity for science that extends well beyond medical advances. By demonstrating its capacity to improve everyday lives, science can help restore people's sense that change is possible and that they have a stake in shaping it.

The inverse is equally true. Where people feel that public services have failed them, that institutions have broken their promises, and that those in power have consistently let them down, it is difficult to see how progress in science can be translated to impact. For the most sceptical segments, rebuilding trust in science cannot easily be separated from the broader challenge of rebuilding faith that institutions can deliver for people like them.

The causal relationship between trust in science, and optimism for the future is not clear - the association between a sense that systems are not working for ordinary people, and a lower trust in science is.

Chapter 4: Information overload and communicating uncertainty - The information needs of Britons when it comes to science

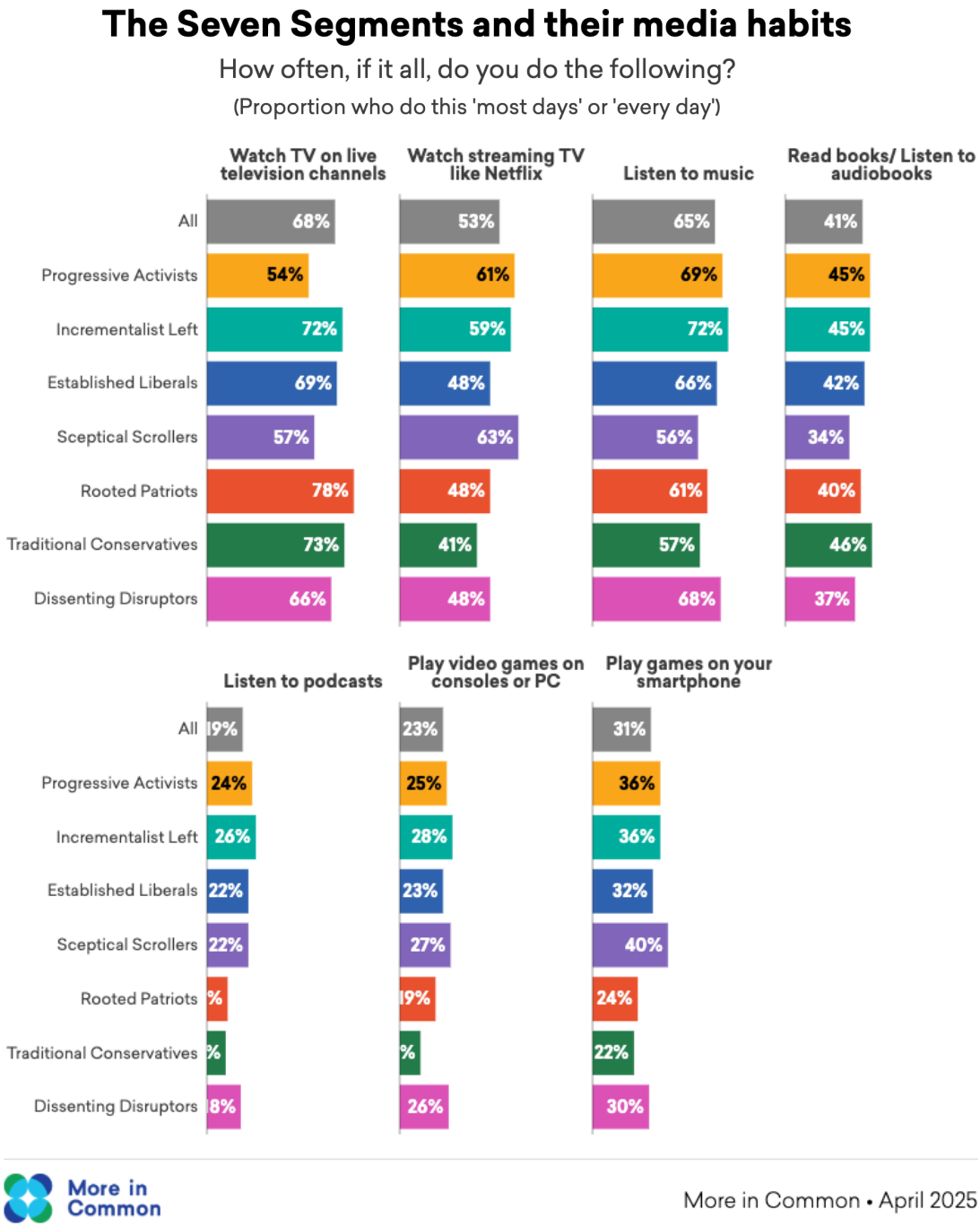
Where do Britons hear about science, and how do they engage with it?

Britain's media landscape has become fragmented. Digital dominance, an increased appetite for independent media and 'challenger channels' on traditional broadcast television have meant that Britons' media diets can look very different even to those of their friends, families or neighbours.

Despite this fragmentation, the primary channel through which most people learn about science is through television, and television remains the main way Britons get their news in general. After this, the most common way people learn about science is on social media, but propensity to engage with different outlets varies by segment.

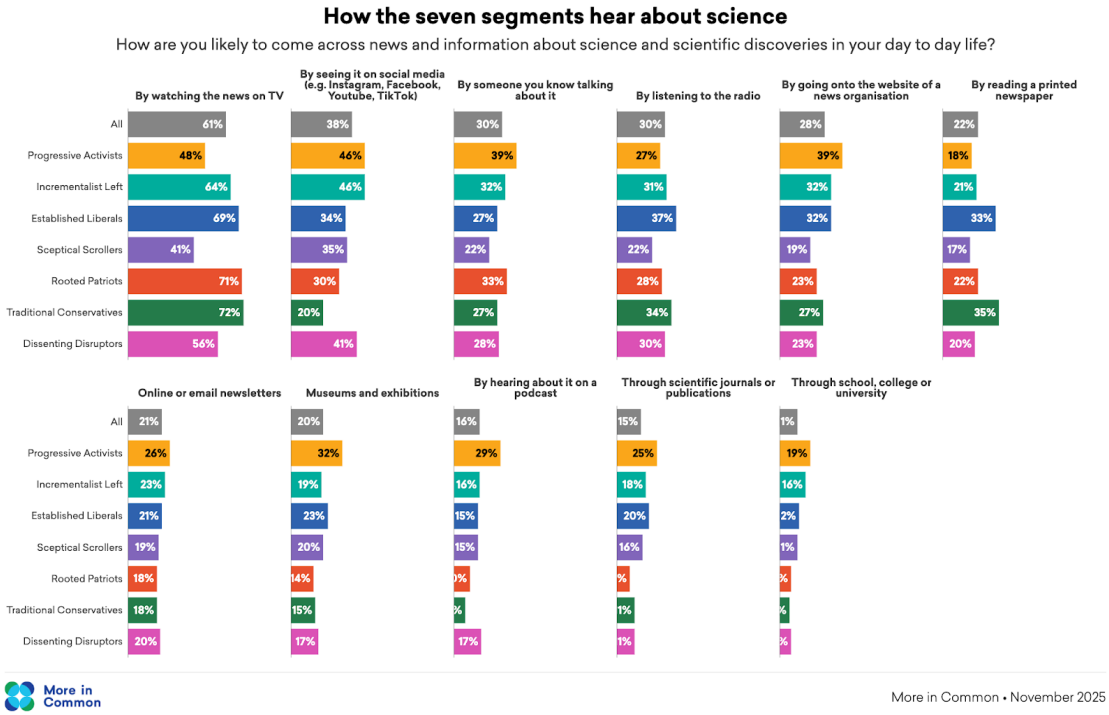
Rooted Patriots and Traditional Conservatives - the oldest segments - are most likely to watch television each day and thus are the most likely to learn about science in that way.

The segments most engaged with politics and news tend to consume more media and learn about science through it. Less engaged segments, by contrast, watch just as much TV as more engaged segments but are less likely to encounter science through this medium.



For some, such as the Incrementalist Left, their active disconnection from news and politics means science features less than would be expected from their everyday media diet. This disengagement is driven by a weariness with what they see as relentlessly negative news coverage.

The Incrementalist Left are more likely than average to discuss science with people they know and are the most likely to trust friends and family as a source of scientific information, rather than relying on media exposure.



> *"I don't watch the news. I don't scroll on [social media]. COVID. The anxiety I had from it's too depressing."* - **Jade, meditation teacher, Stevenage, Incrementalist Left**

> *"Since COVID, I don't watch the news. I got really disturbed by it on the news and a few other people and it's ... Yeah, wow. Yeah."* - **Barry, construction company director, Stevenage, Incrementalist Left**

Who else do Britons trust to speak about science?

Despite some reservations about scientists' relatability and some concerns about ideological or institutional bias, the public still prefers to hear information around science from 'expert' institutions than elsewhere. Britons tend to distrust non-scientific institutions providing information about science and are sceptical of the ability of politicians - both local and national – to be sources of information about science. Similarly, as discussed, despite hearing the most about science through the TV, many are sceptical of journalists' ability to provide accurate information about science.

However, greater personal connection to sources of information can also foster greater trust. Community groups and people with lived experience are, on balance, trusted by the average Briton to give scientific information, while friends and family are the most trusted non-expert scientific source of information.

Creators and influencers are the most distrusted sources of information, along with politicians. However, for Sceptical Scrollers - the most digitally native segment - knowing the creator, and having followed them online, does engender more trust. This segment makes a greater distinction between the trust afforded to social media influencers and content creators in general, and those that they already chose to follow. For this group, it's about being able to 'do their own research', having the ability and agency to assess who they think is providing them with valid information, and looking across a range of sources to verify what is true.

Following a specific content creator also has an impact on Established Liberals and Progressive Activists, who tend to be more likely to trust the content creators they follow than the British public overall. However, content creators still tend to be distrusted by these segments overall. It is sometimes assumed that embracing new media and content creators as a whole to deliver messages is a solution to the challenge of communicating a message in a more fragmented media landscape. But Britons remain more likely to hear about science from traditional media, and to trust those within scientific institutions, or those they know offline, to deliver accurate scientific information.

For groups like Sceptical Scrollers who do tend to trust the people they already follow online, there may be greater opportunities for scientists and scientific institutions to collaborate directly with trusted content creators.

More broadly, influencers and content creators can still shape the information landscape even if people do not engage with them directly. They may produce content that may not be seen as being the product of an 'influencer', that is read or engaged with by a family member or friend and then shared anecdotally. When a friend or family member discusses science - which most Britons see as a trusted source of information - it may be coming second hand from a source such as an online influencer.

> *"A lot of people and the ideas and now in society are influenced by social media. So, like you go onto TikTok, you go onto Instagram, they read one post, "Oh, now I believe that. " Do you know what I mean? Now people are influenced by social media in seconds, children, adults. You could say it's your experience, but it's not. It's what you've read online. And then you go, "Oh, I've heard that. I could make a Wiki page tomorrow about myself and the whole thing is false."* - **Oscar, glazier, Sceptical Scroller, Luton**

> *"I always research everything if I'm going to buy something. My daughter, she's a chemistry teacher, so she helps me. She's all into the science stuff and she's helped me look because I used to just believe anything on the internet. I used to believe anything and then I found out that it wasn't all true. Some can be true, some can't, et cetera. So, I always do my work behind, and I don't just go for the straight hit and yeah, I do my research and everything. I don't just accept the first thing I see."* - **Rebecca, carer, Birmingham, Sceptical Scroller**

Coping with information overload

Across some segments, there was a sense that there was now too much information available about science and that made it hard to decide what is true. Dissenting Disruptors, Sceptical Scrollers, Rooted Patriots and the Incrementalist Left all expressed a sense of stress and overwhelm at the mass of information available in modern life. This is despite these segments spanning different age groups, levels of engagement with different mainstream media, and their overall levels of trust in science.

This suggests that feeling 'overwhelmed' by information has little to do with the sources people engage with. For example, those people who primarily learn about science through social media are no more likely to feel overwhelmed by information than those who use traditional sources. While social media may shape how society discusses different topics, using it to learn about science doesn't itself make individuals feel overexposed to information.

The exception to this, however, is that those who learn about science through the two platforms with algorithmic feed of short form videos (TikTok and Instagram) are more likely to feel there is too much information than users of more text-based platforms (LinkedIn, Reddit and X).

> *"It's like you're damned if you do, you damned if you don't. And you don't know who's telling you the truth. And that's how I genuinely feel. That's why I'm not on social media, that's why I don't want to watch the news and I just kind of navigate it through the avenues that I've told you about because I think as a population we're really mistrusting because there's one message one minute, one the other. So and so Jane down the street's telling you this, the scientist is telling you this, blah, blah. It's really hard to navigate where the truth sits."* - **Gemma, psychologist and publican, Stevenage, Incrementalist Left**

> *"Too much information's overwhelming as well, I find."* - **Alan, estate agency, Stevenage, Incrementalist Left**

> *"You get told, 'take these vitamins. You think, 'oh my God, I better take these vitamins and make myself healthy'. But then on the other hand, you read something else and you think, 'Oh no, actually you're not going to have too much of that antibody."* - **Sally, waitress, Stevenage, Incrementalist Left**

> *"Yeah, I think it was more black and white originally compared to now. But I think that's just because of how technology's moved on and like I said, and how much information there is by so many different people and all these contradicting views that when I was younger and at school and learning science that it was, you did the experiment, you found out what it was, it either was A or was B, that was the end of it. Whereas now it's just like a minefield."* **– Sophie, foster carer, Great Yarmouth, Dissenting Disruptor**

Faced with an overwhelming volume of information, trying to determine what was true takes an emotional toll for some Britons. This sense of anxiety was shared within groups as they reflected on topics, like vaccination, where they can no longer be sure which information to believe.

Almost four in ten (38 per cent) now feel there is just too much information to know what is true about science, far higher than the 12 per cent who say they do not trust science much or not at all.

Communicating during times of uncertainty

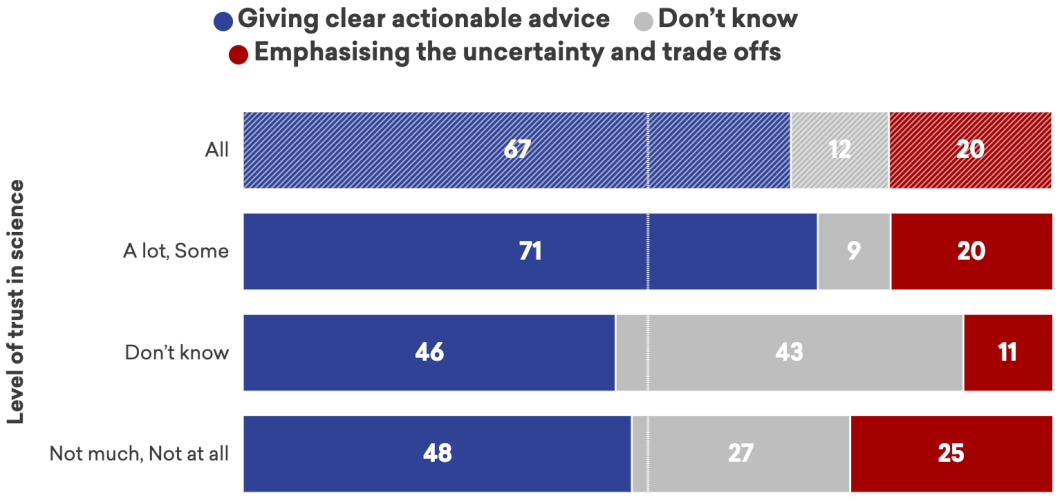
There is much existing research into communicating uncertainty. In this research, the British public has a nuanced, context dependent view on when they prioritise clear actionable advice, and when they prioritise emphasising uncertainty and trade-offs. Post-pandemic, some Britons recount how their trust in science was damaged by information appearing to change.

In the abstract, the British public wants scientists to prioritise clear advice, but understanding uncertainty is more important for those that are the least trusting.

In a 'crisis' or when a situation is uncertain, the public is even more in favour of clear advice - in this instance, two-thirds would prefer clear actionable advice from scientists to being given an understanding of the trade-offs facing them. However, those with the lowest level of trust in science are more likely to value scientists communicating about the limits of their knowledge. The net score for preferring clear actionable advice among those that trust science is +51 per cent, while for those who don't trust science, this falls to +23.

A majority of Britons prioritise clear advice, but those that trust science less are more likely to value understanding uncertainty

When in a crisis or when the situation is uncertain, what do you think scientists should prioritise?



More in Common

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In focus groups, Britons explain the balance between their desire for clear advice versus a full understanding of uncertainty and trade offs depends on context.

For some, overly confident messaging and advice that seemed too clear triggers an instinctive suspicion of being sold something, while others look back to the pandemic as a time of crisis when clear messaging was warranted.

Sceptical Scrollers, in weighing up clear actionable advice versus uncertainty, emphasise how post-COVID they are now more eager to understand limitations and uncertainty to help them come to their own decisions.

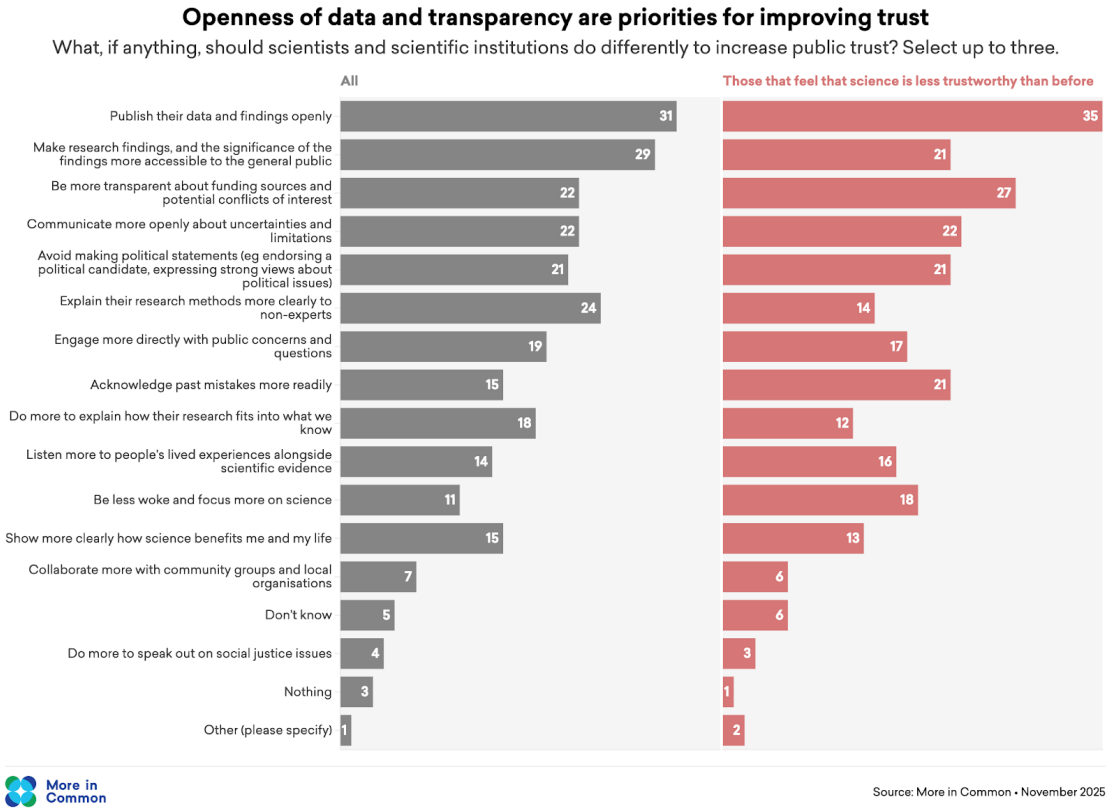
> *"I think you have to be sceptical because we all understand that not everything is curable. So, I think you just make the best informed decision on your own merits of what it can be before you take it."* - **Phil, unemployed, Luton, Sceptical Scroller**

Focus group discussions about the pandemic and how information was communicated during that time suggest that, in rapidly developing situations, clear advice may engender false certainty which - if advice then changes - turns out to be more damaging to trust in the long term. Britons often explain how the perception of 'moving goalposts' during the pandemic eroded trust and sowed confusion. When claims are ultimately proved wrong or changed, this casts doubt on other 'well-evidenced' scientific communication too. Without communicating uncertainty, scientific evidence risks being taken as definitive fact, rather than as the best available understanding at the time, which may evolve.

Transparency in communication

To improve trust, the public's primary request is transparency in communication from scientists. Showing the full picture, being open about processes, funding sources and limitations are all key ways that the public think that trust can be improved or rebuilt. This also means providing access to data and showing proof, with data, charts, peer review processes and multi-institutional review. Lower trust groups express a desire for support to independently verify information with third parties, and to cross-reference with other external sources of information. To many, scientists being transparent is what should distinguish them from politicians - the latter are widely perceived to avoid giving straight answers to questions.

Transparency is a particular priority for those whose trust in scientists has dropped. Low/declining trust groups express a greater desire for scientists to be clear about what they do and don't know, and to avoid 'over-reaching' in the conclusions they make.



For some participants transparency means scientists telling the story of their research, explaining how the research came to be and the journey to their conclusions rather than simply the end point.

> *"So I would probably believe a scientist talking to me who doesn't just talk in a singular manner in the sense of what they're doing is the only approach or that they create a picture, almost make it like a story in a sense of like, 'We've come from here to here and we've thought about X, Y, and Z, but we've landed here and this is why we're doing it this way.'"* - **Gemma, psychologist and publican, Stevenage, Incrementalist Left**

Part of that transparency the public expect is an openness in terms of funding and the role that any financial interests have or have not played in the research process.

> *"Yeah, it'd be nice to know who, if it's private work, who's actually funding them for the research because that's probably going to lead part of a pharmaceutical company who's telling them?"* - **Colin, bricklayer, Newcastle, Rooted Patriot**

To some, making information accessible is a core part of making science transparent. When information was presented in ways that were hard for a non-expert to understand, some Britons perceived a lack of care from those in science and medicine for their audiences. The public often want scientists to connect their statistics with the real-life impact and demonstrate empathy - showing the humanity of scientists, and evidence that they see the respect for the humanity of others.

> *"No empathy. They have no empathy doctors. And not saying that scientists have no empathy, but if we can't understand it, there's no empathy there, they just shut off and they're like, 'This is the medical explanation goodbye.' Whereas we'd be like, 'What?'"*
> - **Megan, compliance administrator, Luton, Sceptical Scroller**

> *"I think I'd want them to know the impact it would have on my life. So, if they were talking about something like a vaccine, I wouldn't want a statistic. I'd want them to think how it would impact everybody as a whole. So, like you said about the vaccines, I would like them to think about, if they were pregnant, would they give it to their wife? If the answer is yes, then tell us that, and equally, if not, that they wouldn't. I would just like to think that they acted as a human and a family person and a brother and a son, rather than just looking at a spreadsheet. "* - **Jen, health care assistant, Newcastle, Dissenting Disruptor**

If you could ask scientists or scientific institutions to prioritise one thing to strengthen public trust, what would it be?

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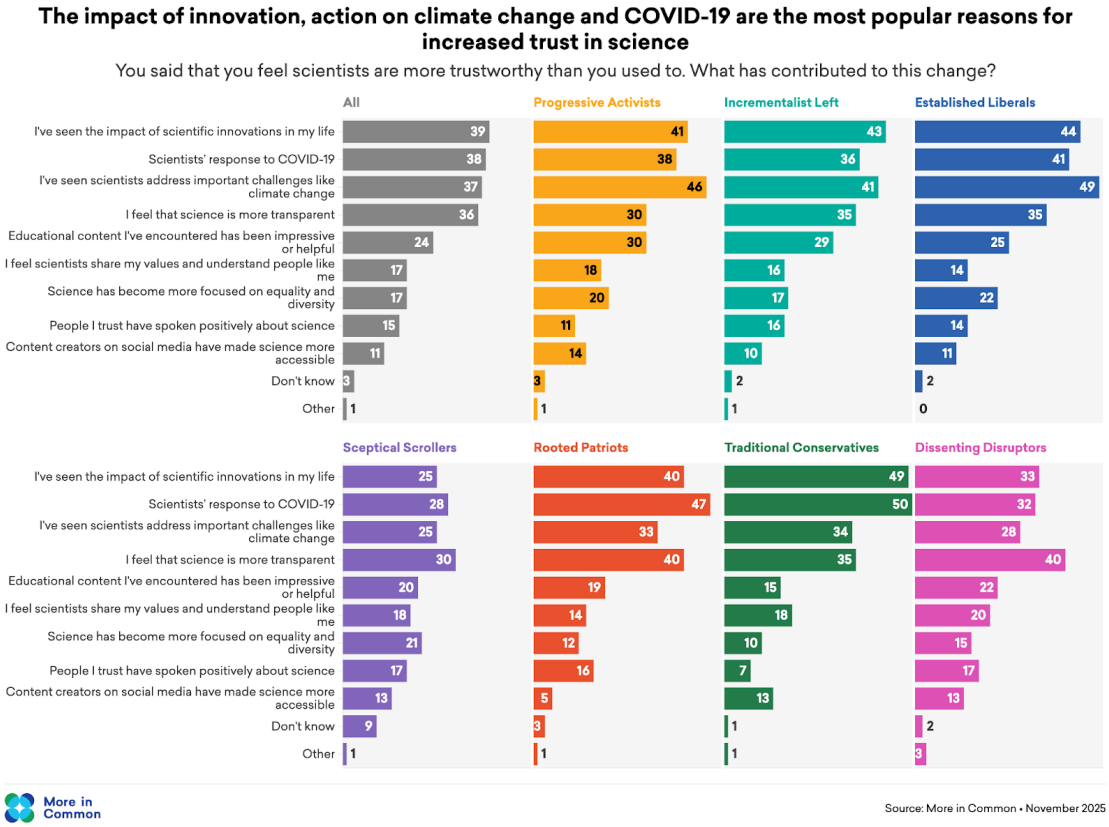
Chapter 5: Looking forward – telling a positive story about science

While trust in science may show signs of weakening, it is not declining uniformly across the population. While some groups report growing scepticism, others have maintained high levels of trust, and in some cases this trust has even increased in recent years. Only one in ten (9 per cent) say they now trust science and scientists less than a few years ago - amongst Established Liberals, this is less than one per cent.

Understanding the reasons behind this resilience is important as it provides a foundation on which future science communication efforts can build. Identifying what sustains trust among, and particularly within, certain groups has the potential to uncover the most effective ways of making a positive case for science.

A recurring theme throughout this report is the importance of the pandemic in formulating attitudes toward science. For those with strong trust in science there is no difference - those who now see science as more trustworthy than previously are most likely to say this is because of the impact that science has had on their life during COVID-19. However, their appreciation of scientific advancement is not limited to the pandemic. High trust groups also cite the role science has played in tackling global challenges - such as climate change - as leading to increased trust, along with a perception that science has become more transparent.



Progressive Activists and Established Liberals, already science's strongest believers, are particularly likely to point to scientists confronting what they see as those important global challenges such as climate change.

> *"I mean advocates for the backing of science, like environmental studies, I think are very much done by people that really care about the environment and they're usually funded by charities that also share the same views."* - **Lily, support worker, Bristol, Progressive Activist**

For the Incrementalist Left, their trust in science is more personal. This group starts from a position of having faith in science but are less concerned with the macro impacts of science on the world stage. The Incrementalist Left tends to trust scientists more because they have seen the positive impact of scientific innovation on their own lives and the lives of their family and friends. New technologies and practical improvements also frame how the Incrementalist Left segment sees science and are similarly responsible for their increased faith in it.

> *"I think it's science that's made us all get older. If you go back in time, the death rate was a lot lower in age, whereas now we're all living to 200 or whatever, and that could grow through science."* - **Barry, construction company director, Stevenage, Incrementalist Left**

Meanwhile, Rooted Patriots and Traditional Conservatives, the two oldest segments, who tend to be more sceptical of and distant from science overall, attribute increased trust to the sector's response to COVID-19. They saw scientists responding to an immediate crisis and that visibility mattered in tackling the threat.

For the 36 per cent of Dissenting Disruptors who say they now trust science more, they cite a feeling that science has become more transparent - something that particularly matters for this group, which is less inclined to trust authority by default.

Broadly across the segments, visibility has been key for building trust in science - around four in ten Britons say their trust in science has increased as a result of witnessing its impact first-hand and perceiving greater transparency. In this respect, science stands apart from many other areas of public life. People are able to see tangible improvements and look back at ways in which scientific advances have improved their own lives and those of their families, particularly in areas such as health and medicine. This contributes to science's distinctive value in the public imagination.

At a time when many feel that aspects of life in Britain are in decline, science stands out as an area where there remains clear potential for positive progress and meaningful improvements to people's lives.

Conclusion

Across public life, Britons often say things are getting worse, that life is too hard, the next generation will have a worse quality of life than the one before, and even that Britain is broken.

Science is by its nature a powerful tool to buck this trend. Britons feel that science gives them a sense of optimism - and hope for the future.

Demonstrating the difference that innovation can make to people's lives is an opportunity, not just for fostering a sense of trust in science, but in the ability of society and its institutions to actually be able to deliver a better future. At a time when many problems faced by the country feel intractable, Britons are frustrated with politicians and institutions that seem powerless to make change. Science can make change, and Britons readily acknowledge its impact. Showing the positives science can deliver can have a major effect, with ripples on trust that go far beyond just research. The challenge is to make this impact as accessible and visible to as many Britons as possible.

However, science is not immune to the issues of public trust we see afflicting many institutions. Amber warning lights are now flashing. Across the segments, the key concern is not scientists themselves, but the idea that they are influenced by those with particular financial or political interests. Association with politics and perceived political bias of scientific organisations is a real concern for a minority of Britons, particularly right-leaning segments. For some with the lowest trust in science, COVID-19 was a tipping point which made them more sceptical of science's efficacy and neutrality. For some, this was driven by a sense of evidence shifting without clear reasons why - a lesson for the sector when it comes to communicating the level of certainty of evidence.

Even among some of the higher trust groups, frustration with developments in politics in the UK and abroad is driving them to 'switch off' from the media. As they turn away from mainstream media, they are becoming disengaged from the channels that they have typically used to hear about science, and instead are turning to offline, more local information networks. As the way Britons hear about science changes, the way Britons think about science does too.

Overall, there seems to be no large, organised anti-science constituency in the UK. All of the seven segments of Britain say they are broadly trusting of science. When Britons do express openness to anti-science claims, this is typically rooted in suspicions about financial incentives and the role of commercial actors, rather than a fundamental distrust.

For the sector, the challenge is not to defend science's reputation. The challenge is in demonstrating transparency and independence, and the positive impact science has on Britons' lives.

Showcasing human stories behind the research can demonstrate scientists share values with those who feel further away from science. Scientists should also avoid confusing value judgements and trade-offs with other policy areas with scientific fact, and ensure science is not seen as becoming bundled up with a series of other political and social causes.

As with any institution, trust in science is not a given, nor a right. It can be weakened through concerns over the influence of profit and politics.

Science remains one of the few sectors with high public trust in Britain today. By engaging openly, respecting different values, and communicating both the benefits and the uncertainties, the scientific community can not only protect this trust but serve as a model for other institutions seeking to rebuild it.

Methodology

Quantitative Research

Polling in this report was conducted by More in Common, a member of the British Polling Council.

Respondents have been weighted according to age/sex interlocked, region, 2024 General Election vote, ethnicity, and education level to be representative of the adult population of Great Britain.

The segmentation analysis employed in this report is set out in Shattered Britain, published July 2025, and is available here.

The unique dynamics of community relations in Northern Ireland means that More in Common's segmentation does not include or apply to Northern Ireland. All polling conducted as part of the segmentation and for this piece of research was conducted in Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales) and does not include Northern Ireland.

Most of the analysis referring to the British public used in the report draws on polling conducted between 1-10 November 2025, with a sample size of 4050.

The report also draws on polling from:

- 14th March - 7th April 2025, N=13,464
- 13th February - 17th February 2026, N=2,018

The polling of scientists and those working in the science sector referred to in this report was conducted in March 2026, with a sample size of 142. This data was unweighted, and any statistics referred to are based on the raw sample.

Data tables for this research can be found on More in Common's website.

Qualitative Research

Eleven focus groups were conducted for this research. Seven took place over Zoom in October 2025, while four were conducted in person in January 2026. Participants for the focus groups were recruited to be broadly representative of each segment in terms of age, gender and ethnicity. Participants from the following constituencies took part in each of the groups:

Progressive Activists

Over Zoom:

Hackney South and Shoreditch

Hackney North and Stoke Newington

Bristol Central

Incrementalist Left

Over Zoom:

Hove and Portslade

East Worthing and Shoreham

Edinburgh North and Leith

Bathgate and Linlithgow

In Person:

Stevenage

Harpenden and Berkhamsted

Established Liberals

Over Zoom:

Twickenham

Brentford and Isleworth

St Albans

Harrow East

Traditional Conservatives

Over Zoom:

Didcot and Wantage

Swindon North

Henley and Thame

Newbury

Brecon, Radnor and Cwm Tawe

Torfaen

Monmouthshire

Rooted Patriots

Over Zoom:

Bury North

Merthyr Tydfil and Aberdare

Newport East

Newport West and Islwyn

In Person:

Tynemouth

Newcastle East-Wallsend

Cramlington and Killingworth

Sceptical Scrollers

Over Zoom:

Birmingham Erdington

Aldridge-Brownhills

Birmingham Perry Barr

Glasgow South

In Person:

Luton South and South Bedfordshire

Luton North

Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard

Dissenting Disruptors

Over Zoom:

Dudley

Stourbridge

Halesowen

Great Yarmouth

In Person:

Tynemouth

Cramlington and Killingworth

Newcastle upon Tyne East and Wallsend

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