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# A Respect Crisis

How Labour failed to deliver to change



More in  
Common



Policy Lab

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## Foreword

Even in our tumultuous political times, the collapse in public approval for Sir Keir Starmer and his government has been extraordinarily precipitous.

Starmer has gone from winning the second largest Labour parliamentary majority ever, just two years ago, to set to lose up to three quarters of his councillors, to fail to unseat an unpopular SNP government in Scotland, and to lose power in Wales for the first time in the history of the devolved settlement.

This report suggests that there is one major explanation for this failure: respect.

Respect is about bridging the gap between people and politics. The gulf between technocratic jargon or insider gossip and the public's desire to change their place and country. It also involves government trusting people to take their own decisions, shape their own communities more and tackle their everyday concerns.

Starmer's election victory was built on a promise that his government would do what his predecessors had failed to do and show respect to the population of Britain in this way. Throughout his period as Leader of the Opposition, Starmer spoke of respect in terms of propriety in government, a policy agenda that mapped on to the everyday concerns of the British people and a political style that demonstrated that those in government were determined to narrow the gap between them and the broader electorate.

The new Prime Minister was clear about all of these intentions in his words on the Downing Street steps after his general election victory.

“When the gap between the sacrifices made by people and the service they receive from politicians grows this big, it leads to a weariness in the heart of a nation; a draining away of the hope, the spirit, the belief in a better future that we need to move forward together. Now, this wound, this lack of trust, can only be healed by actions not words. I know that. But we can make a start today with the simple acknowledgment that public service is a privilege and that your government should treat every single person in this country with respect.”

The collapse in popularity for the government, the pages that follow set out, has its root in a consistent failure on its part to live up to that standard. The Starmer government has not restored trust in politics and the electorate across Britain does not believe that it is now properly respected by those in power.

If this analysis is right, of course, it not only explains why the current government finds itself in so much trouble, but it also sets out a path for politicians to build a recovery.

Most British people do not want to burn everything down, or radicalism for the sake of it. They have simply grown tired of a politics that fails to respect their hard work; that is unconcerned with the challenges of their everyday lives; that seems false or fake; and that is not as clear, transparent or as honest as it should be.

Put these things right and the lack of faith the public currently clearly feels will be corrected for now and the future.

*Marc Stears, Director of the UCL Policy Lab and Luke Tryl, Executive Director of More in Common UK*

## Executive Summary

Nearly two years into government, the public resoundingly believe that Keir Starmer's Labour Government has, above all, failed to deliver on the politics of respect the Prime Minister promised on the steps of Downing Street after his election victory.

In 2023 More in Common and UCL Policy Lab launched “The Respect Agenda” an analysis of why the public had turned so dramatically against the Conservatives, despite Boris Johnson having secured a landslide just four years earlier, and what the public most wanted from the next Government. Above all else, it found Britons had a clear and simple test for a new administration: they wanted politicians, public servants and decision makers to respect them.

The defining elements of the agenda are:

- **Empathy** - Leaders who can empathise with the experiences of ordinary people are more likely to be able to show respect to ordinary people too. In focus groups, Britons bemoan the decline in politicians who come from ordinary backgrounds and say they would feel more respected by politicians who understand their everyday struggles.
- **Authenticity** - For Britons ‘being yourself’ is a sign of respect. The leaders that the public identify as respecting ordinary people are those who show their true self when in public and don’t try to pretend to be something they are not. Rather than ‘identikit’ politicians, the politicians who command respect are those who are seen to have character.
- **Honesty** - The public do not want to be patronised by politicians who assume they are incapable of understanding that the country faces tough choices. Instead, Britons want politicians who level with the public and are honest about the challenges Britain faces.
- **Valuing hard work** - The public want to see respect being offered based on an individual’s contribution to society rather than their social status or education level. That means showing respect to those who work hard, play by the rules and play a part in their community and a greater recognition that success comes in different forms and isn’t just about having a highly paid white-collar job.

Only 19 per cent think the Government respects people like them, and three in four (73 per cent) say it respects them only a little or not at all. This goes deeper than a failure to tick off manifesto pledges, instead the Government has failed to convince the public it is on their side.

### *The public feels disrespected because they believe politicians are self-serving*

The main reason that four in ten (42 per cent) of people feel disrespected is not a failure of delivery, but because they feel politicians look after their own interests rather than people like them.

This is cited more often by the public than concerns about broken promises or lack of progress on the big issues facing the country; it would be wrong to assume their problems can be solved by “deliverism” alone.

### *Scandals are defining the Government more than its policies*

Britons are positive about a range of Labour policies which are seen to address the cost of living, including reducing energy bills, and freezing prescription charges and rail fares. However, these have had low cut-through with the public.

The incidents that have had the highest cut-through are those that have left people feeling most negative. More often than not, these are scandals or policy missteps. Majorities point to Keir Starmer accepting high-value gifts from Labour donors, the mistaken release of an asylum seeker from prison and the appointment of Peter Mandelson as US Ambassador as evidence that the Government does not respect them.

The Mandelson scandal has fuelled a sense for three in four (72 per cent) that there is one rule for those with wealth and status and another for everyone else.

Half the public now believes Labour is more chaotic than the previous Conservative Government, including a third of those who voted Labour in 2024.

### *The social contract is under strain*

Central to the failure to deliver a Respect Agenda is that people do not believe their contribution to society, through hard work and paying taxes, is being properly valued.

Around half of Britons (51 per cent) now say that hard work does not pay, a sentiment that crosses the political spectrum. In focus groups, people talk about paying more than ever to the state while receiving diminishing returns, struggling with the basics and seeing milestones like homeownership move ever further out of reach.

This generates resentment and zero-sum thinking: that others (namely the wealthy, those on benefits or asylum seekers) are being better looked after by the state.

## *Neither traditionally mainstream party currently holds the respect mantle, and insurgent parties are filling the vacuum*

Failing the respect test perpetuates a cycle we have seen repeatedly in recent years. The Conservative Government had a net respect score of -29 by 2023. Labour has now fallen to -34. Combined support for the two main parties has collapsed from 73 per cent three years ago to just 42 per cent in 2026, as voters have become increasingly convinced that they are unable to show ordinary people the respect they deserve.

It is insurgent parties, Reform UK and the Green Party, that are now seen as more likely to respect people who work hard, do the right thing and contribute to their community, albeit from very different perspectives and appealing to very different segments of the public.

## *A roadmap back to respect*

The same four demands that defined the original Respect Agenda remain. People want politicians to demonstrate genuine empathy by engaging seriously with the issues that matter most to them; to show up as their authentic selves rather than hiding behind party lines; to be honest when things go wrong; and to make hard work pay.

On empathy, only 10 per cent of the public believe Keir Starmer has a clear plan to solve the problems that matter most to them. On authenticity, 57 per cent think the Prime Minister only tells people what they want to hear. On honesty, just 11 per cent think he sticks to his promises. And on hard work, 51 per cent believe it simply does not pay in Britain today.

The politicians who the public are more likely to think respect them, currently Andy Burnham, Nigel Farage and Kemi Badenoch, all share a quality that the Prime Minister currently lacks. The public believe they genuinely understand, care about people and are willing to be their authentic selves.

## *The crisis of respect is not limited to politicians*

People also can often feel disrespected in their day-to-day interactions with institutions and public services.

The NHS, military and schools continue to command high levels of trust and respect. Similarly there has been a significant positive change in the proportion who think the Bank of England respects them, the Bank having recovered from a low point in 2023 after interest rates were raised in the wake of Liz Truss' mini-Budget.

However, the Labour Party has seen the biggest decline of any institution tested, with its net trust falling 29 points and net respect dropping 33 points since 2023. It is now in a position comparable to where the Conservatives were three years ago.

The lessons for institutions remain: the public want them to do the job they are meant to do and genuinely listen to people.

### *The opportunity to seize the Respect Agenda remains*

The Respect Agenda is not impossible. The public does not expect politicians to be perfect; they just want them to be transparent and take responsibility.

When asked how a politician can show they are able to address the country's problems, the top answer, selected by 42 per cent, is that they take responsibility when things go wrong. This will also make the public more likely to credit a party when they are seen to do the right thing and introduce policies they like.

# Chapter 1: The Labour Government and Respect

## The Respect Agenda

The “Respect Agenda” was launched in 2023 after research showed what Britons wanted most from politicians, public servants and decision makers was to feel respected by them. The demand for respect only grew towards the end of the last Parliament as voters endured a series of scandals from “Party Gate” to the Prime Minister leaving D-Day celebrations early, alongside a cost-of-living crisis exacerbated by the mini-budget and repeated changes of Prime Minister.

Feeling respected by a politician is not simply a proxy for whether people like or trust them. Instead, it is about ordinary people feeling seen, heard and appreciated by those in positions of power. The agenda and its defining elements are:

- **Empathy** - Leaders who can empathise with the experiences of ordinary people are more likely to be able to show respect to ordinary people too. In focus groups, Britons bemoan the decline in politicians who come from ordinary backgrounds and say they would feel more respected by politicians who understand their everyday struggles.
- **Authenticity** - For Britons ‘being yourself’ is a sign of respect. The leaders that the public identify as respecting ordinary people are those who show their true self when in public and don’t try to pretend to be something they are not. Rather than ‘identikit’ politicians, the politicians who command respect are those who are seen to have character.
- **Honesty** - The public do not want to be patronised by politicians who assume they are incapable of understanding that the country faces tough choices. Instead, Britons want politicians who level with the public and are honest about the challenges Britain faces.
- **Valuing hard work** - The public want to see respect being offered based on an individual’s contribution to society rather than their social status or education level. That means showing respect to those who work hard, play by the rules and play a part in their community and a greater recognition that success comes in different forms and isn’t just about having a highly paid white-collar job.

This agenda could have been taken up by any political party at the last General Election. However, with the public having made up its mind about the

Conservatives after 14 years in government, the Labour Party were best placed to offer a “Respect Reset” as the likely next government.

It would involve Britons’ hard work being recognised, politicians being transparent and some demonstrable progress on fixing the country’s problems and meeting the public’s priorities.

Three years on and a change of government later, has Keir Starmer delivered this?

## **Failing the Respect Test**

Keir Starmer may have won the 2024 General Election in a landslide, but voters still needed to be convinced that he respected them. His shallow vote share, winning with only 34 per cent of the vote, pointed to an election that was more about defeating Conservatives than about a wholehearted endorsement of Labour’s offer and passing the respect test.

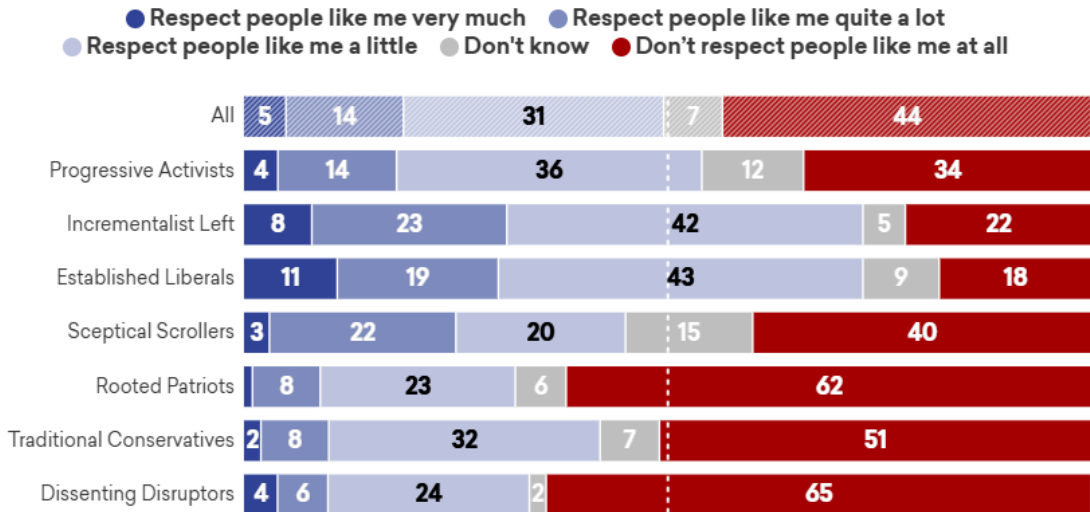
More in Common and UCL Policy Lab’s post-election analysis in ‘Change Pending’ found that while the public were willing to give the new Government the benefit of the doubt, they had a lot to prove and quickly. It seemed that the Prime Minister recognised that urgency to prove his case to the public as he declared on the steps of Downing Street that he would seek to “restore service and respect to politics”.

Nearly two years into government, the public resoundingly believe that Keir Starmer is failing this test. Only 19 per cent think that the Government respects people like them ‘quite a lot’ or ‘very much’, with just five per cent choosing the most positive option.

Three in four (75 per cent) say the Government only respects them ‘a little’ or ‘not at all’. Most of these (44 per cent) select the most negative option, including the majority of people aged over 45, and more than 60% of More in Common’s Rooted Patriot and Dissenting Disruptor segments.

# 44 per cent of Britons say that the government "does not respect people like me at all"

To what extent do you think the government respects people like you?



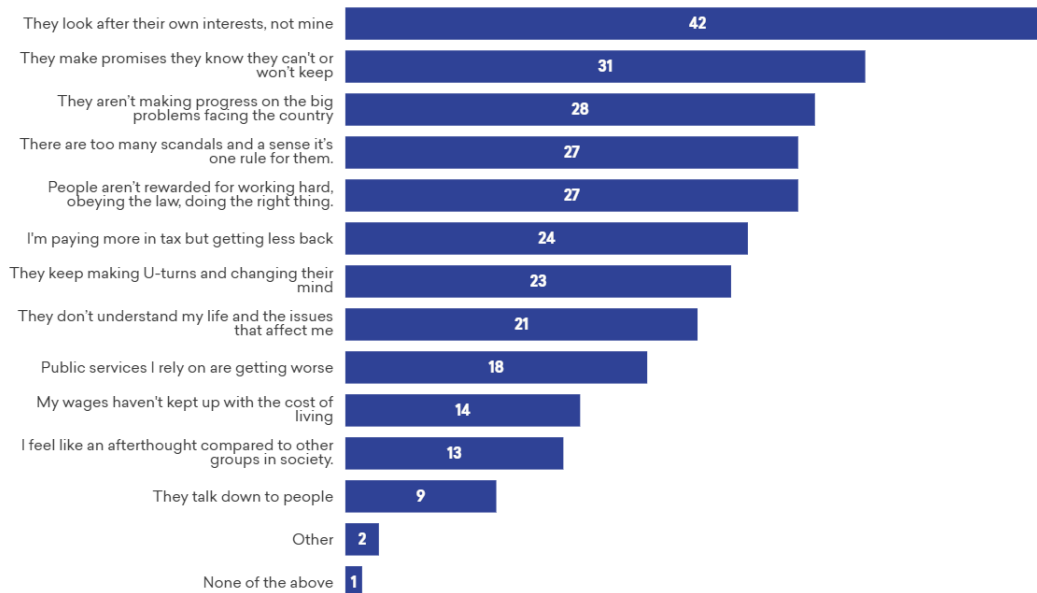
Source: More in Common • March 2026

The main reason that people feel disrespected is because they believe politicians are self-serving and failing to represent ordinary people. Forty-two per cent say the Government does not respect them, looking after their own interests rather than those of people like them.

These frustrations come above concerns about delivery. Thirty-one per cent say they feel disrespected because politicians make promises they cannot keep, and 28 per cent because they are not making enough progress on the big issues facing the country. It is wrong to assume people's frustration with the Government could be solved solely through 'deliverism'.

## The most common reason why people feel disrespected by government is because they feel those in power only look after their own interests

You said that the government does not respect people like you. What shows you this? Please select up to three of the following.



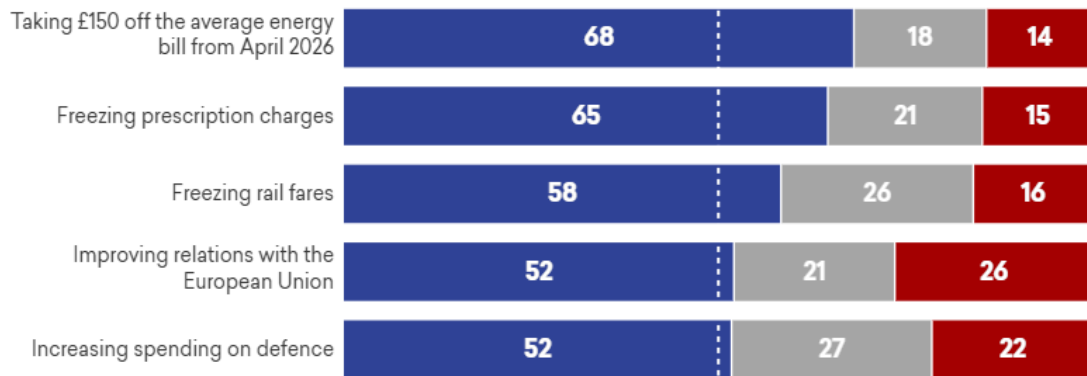
## Labour's policy platform

There is a disconnect between the public instinctively feeling disrespected by the Government and how they feel about specific policies they have introduced. When people are shown Labour's policies, many believe they demonstrate the actions of a Government that respects people like them. The policies which are most effective in showing this have helped ease the cost of living. Two in three feel positive about measures to reduce energy bills and the freeze on prescription charges and rail fares. The problem is that these policies have had low cut-through with few having heard of them, and the public thinking it has taken too long to introduce them.

# Tangible cost of living measures make a majority of Britons feel respected

The following is a list of actions taken under the current government. For each action, would you say they show more that Keir Starmer does or does not respect people like you?

- Shows that Keir Starmer respects people like me
- Don't know
- Shows that Keir Starmer does NOT respect people like me

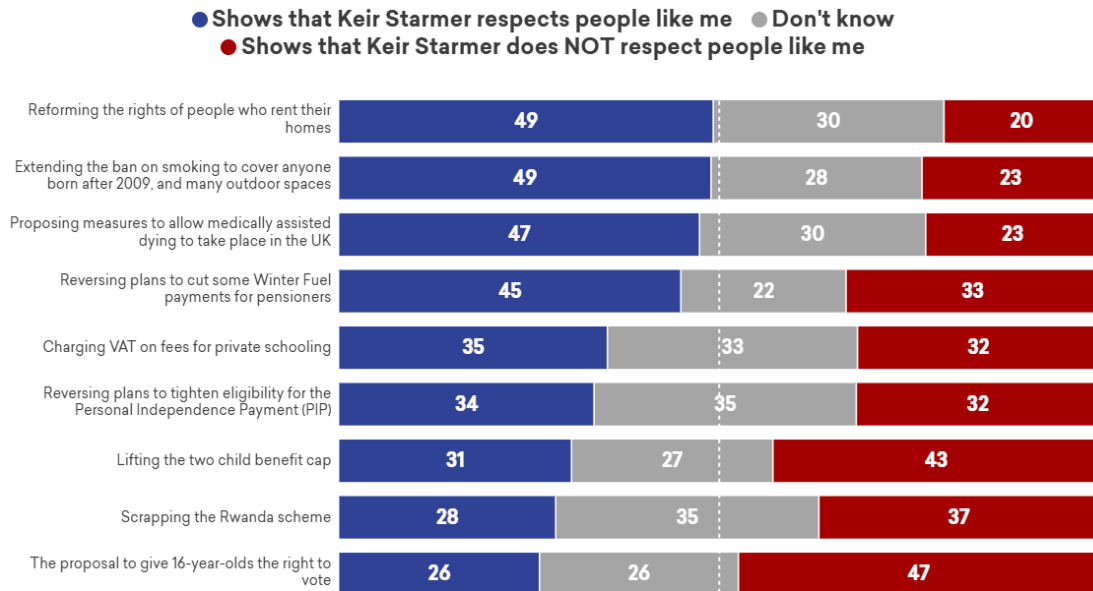


Source: More in Common • March 2026

The public is more divided on policies which are less universal in their impact and are seen to target specific groups. For example, Britons are nearly equally split on whether charging VAT on private school fees was respectful. They feel similarly about reversing proposed reforms to disability benefits and lifting the two-child benefit cap.

## When it comes to respect, measures that target specific groups in the population tend to divide the public

The following is a list of actions taken under the current government. For each action, would you say they show more that Keir Starmer does or does not respect people like you?

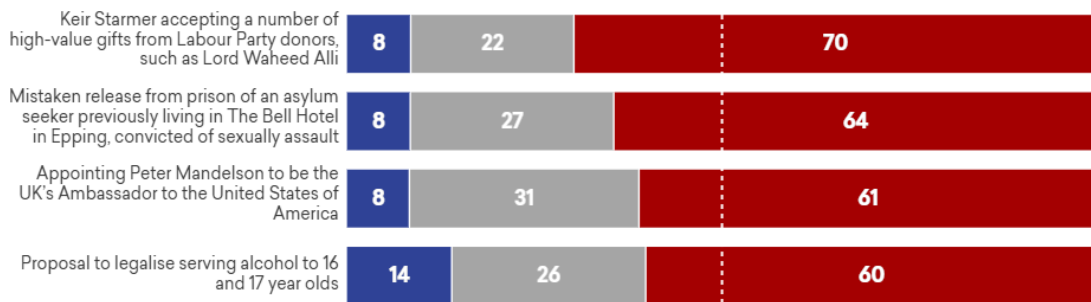


However, beyond the attempt to make changes to the Winter Fuel Allowance during Labour's early days in government, there are few policy decisions where voters feel openly disrespected by the Prime Minister. Instead, the public is most aggravated by missteps and scandals. Around three in five point towards Keir Starmer accepting high-value gifts from Labour donors (70 per cent) as evidence of disrespect. This is followed by the mistaken release of an asylum seeker from prison (64 per cent) and the appointment of Peter Mandelson as US Ambassador (61 per cent).

## Scandals consistently make a majority of Britons feel disrespected

The following is a list of actions taken under the current government. For each action, would you say they show more that Keir Starmer does or does not respect people like you?

- Shows that Keir Starmer respects people like me
- Don't know
- Shows that Keir Starmer does NOT respect people like me



Source: More in Common • March 2026

## The continuation of chaos

The problem for the Government is that in the absence of making enough headway on tackling the public's biggest problems - or effectively communicating progress - they are instead being defined by their entanglement in scandals. In focus groups, people often voice that the scandals seem endless and distract the Government from delivering.

*"They [the Labour government] don't seem to have time to do anything to change the country or try and make it better. They're too busy covering the backside."*

Richard, Rooted Patriot

*"Just as somebody said in the beginning, you just get fatigue after a while. It's just scandal after scandal. You just can't keep track of it all."*

Marcus, Established Liberal

This contributes towards half of the public believing that Labour is currently more chaotic than the previous Conservative Government under Rishi Sunak, a

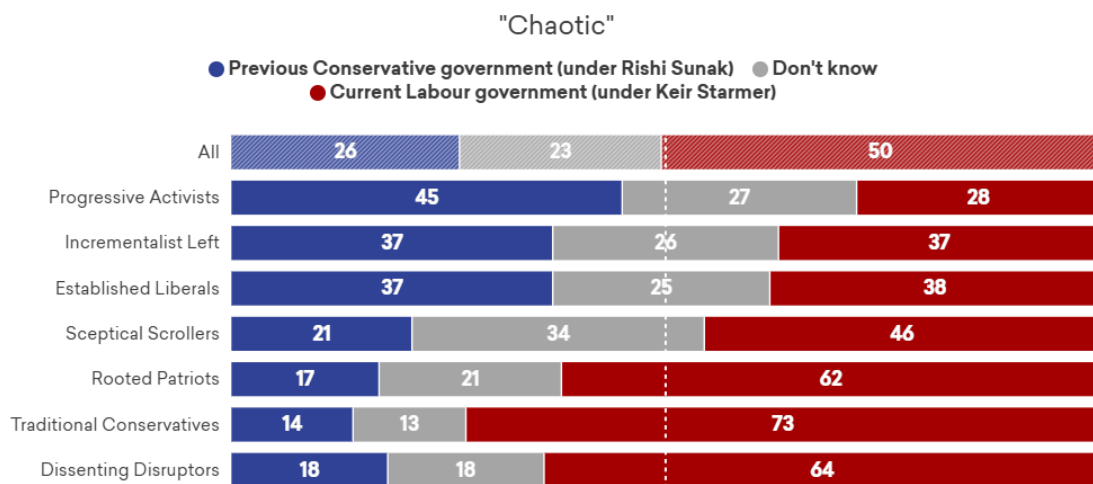
sentiment even shared by just under a third of 2024 Labour voters. People voice frustration that, rather than fulfilling their promise to restore respect, the Labour Government is instead more of the same, and for some, worse.

*"They've got no shame...look what they did to Boris... now people doing 10 times worse"*

Martine, Rooted Patriot

## Half of Britons think the current Labour government is more chaotic than the previous Conservative government

When you think about each of the following descriptions, do you think they best apply to the previous Conservative government or the current Labour government?



### Case study: The Mandelson Scandal

The scandal surrounding the appointment of Peter Mandelson as the UK's Ambassador to the United States and his subsequent dismissal is another example of where the public has felt disrespected by the current Labour Government.

Revelations about Mandelson's relationship with Jeffrey Epstein in late 2025 and early 2026 led to the Ambassador being dismissed in September 2025. His dismissal and revelations about the process behind his appointment dominated

the media agenda and had high cut-through with 7 in 10 (71 per cent) saying it reflected badly on the Government.

The public remains unconvinced by Keir Starmer saying he did not know the true extent of Mandelson's relationship with Epstein. They assume Starmer is lying to the public because even they questioned Mandelson's character. In focus groups, participants referenced his nickname as "the Prince of Darkness" and reasoned "you don't get that nickname for nothing". They used this as evidence for thinking that Keir Starmer is a poor judge of character.

*"What a shambles! How have they let themselves in for it? I've tried to look at this and think was there a good reason to appoint somebody who clearly was flawed?... Even I knew that he was a bad egg! 'Prince of Darkness' he was called, isn't it? Prince of Darkness."*

John, Rooted Patriot

*"When somebody has a chequered past and you give them another chance, there is always the chance of it going really wrong."*

Olivia, Progressive Activist

The other school of thought among the public is that Keir Starmer and his team were at least conscious of Mandelson's reputation, but chose to ignore what they knew. This is seen as dishonest.

*"I think they always know. It's like Boris Johnson and the COVID thing. He knew. The thing with Starmer and Epstein. He knows. I think they all know really."*

Becca, student, Edinburgh

The scandal fuels the sense, felt by 71 per cent of Britons, that there is one rule for those with wealth and status, and another rule for those without. In the public's view, Mandelson already had a bad reputation, but this didn't stop his appointment into a role of power and influence, because he is part of a class of political elites who look out for each other. If Mandelson were an ordinary member of the public, such a reputation would bar him from such opportunities.

*This current system is failing. Primarily (because of) self-interest in politicians. They're not really there to do the best job and to do the best for the country. They're there to secure jobs for their friends, family and business associates."*

Stuart, Incrementalist Left

*"With my job, if I do something wrong and I've done it a few times or get my little warning, after that you're pretty much out the door. I think they should have that same sort of system."*

Carl, Rooted Patriot

This creates a sense of unfairness: someone the public thinks has not acted with integrity or played by the rules has managed to get ahead. Meanwhile, those who do the right thing, contribute to society, and work hard feel increasingly downtrodden. To the public, this appointment shows that contribution no longer earns the respect it deserves.

*"When an MP is found to have done something wrong, get rid of them straight away. You don't give them chance after chance after chance and then allow them to resign so that they get a golden handshake and they're allowed to get absolute tens of thousands of pounds rather than sacking them."*

Darka, Rooted Patriot

Following further revelations, both the then-Number 10 Downing Street Chief of Staff (Morgan McSweeney) and the then-Permanent Secretary at the Foreign Office (Olly Robbins) lost their jobs. Broadly speaking, the public has not been impressed with these decisions, believing that it should be Keir Starmer, not one of his staff, who bears the responsibility for the appointment. In a head-to-head with Olly Robbins, 53 per cent say that the Prime Minister should take the most responsibility for the appointment, while 16 per cent believe it should be the former civil servant. In focus groups, Olly Robbins was commonly seen as a scapegoat by people who think the Prime Minister should have taken responsibility.

*“The buck should stop with the person at the top - the Prime Minister.”*

April, retired, North Berwick

*“(Starmer’s) the one who made the appointment, so he has to take the responsibility for this.”*

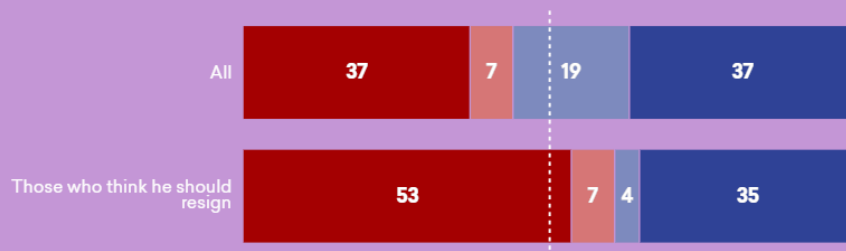
Stuart, NHS manager, Midlothian

The scandal has been damaging for the Prime Minister. Three in five (57 per cent) think opposition party leaders were right to call for his resignation, and 44 per cent of the public say the Prime Minister is not a decent man. It has cultivated the impression that doing the right thing and being honest are not priorities for the Government, who instead are seen to prioritise their own interests over those of the public.

### A majority of those who think Starmer should resign think he is not a decent man, and is not cut out for the job

Which of the following statements comes closest to your view?

- Not a decent man, not cut out for PM
- Not a decent man, is cut out for PM
- Decent man, is cut out for PM
- Decent man, not cut out for PM



The public does not always remember all of a government's new policies. Yet when recalling specific ones, instead of focussing on successes, people typically talk about “U-turns” the Government has made. After around a dozen policy reversals in his first eighteen months, ranging from the Winter Fuel Allowance to

welfare, people openly question whether the Prime Minister has any conviction. For many, this indicates a lack of principle, strength and authenticity.

*"I just couldn't trust him [Starmer]. Everything he said was just excuses and blaming other people. Nothing he seems to say has got any credence or positive or productive or moving forward ideas. It always seems to be a lot of blame and wriggling out stuff. Just don't trust him at all."*

Julie, Rooted Patriot

*"I couldn't find myself able to vote for Keir because he just moves like the sand and he always has done."*

John, Rooted Patriot

*"They say what they think that people want to hear to protect themselves. And you see that in the flipping backwards and forwards in terms of policy decisions and what was in their manifesto. I don't agree with everything that's in their manifesto, but I'd respect 'em a lot more if they actually just ploughed on and pushed for what they said they were going to do, but they don't."*

Kris, Incrementalist Left

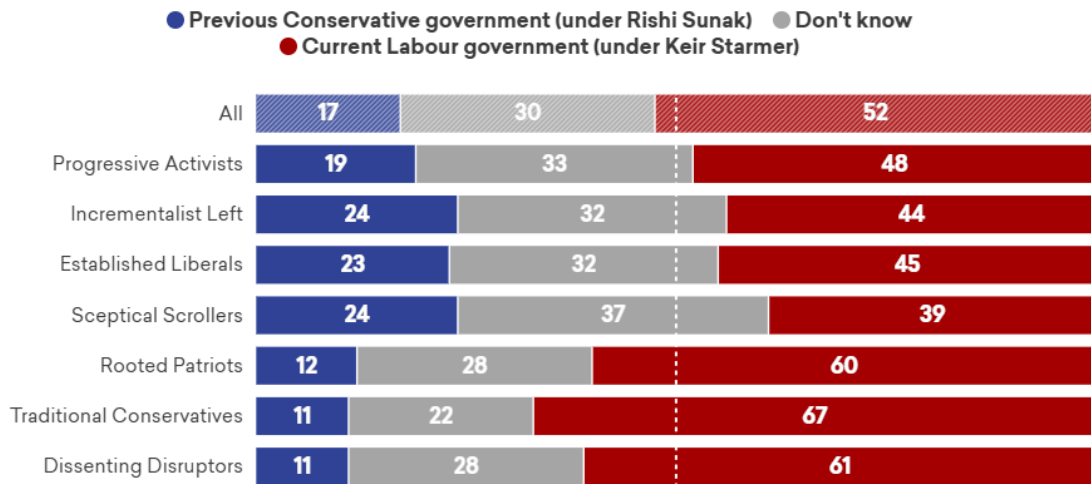
After these policy reversals, the majority now say that the Labour Government is too worried about coming up against opposition to get anything done (52 per cent), which is three times higher than the proportion saying this description applies more accurately to Rishi Sunak's Government (17 per cent), when the two governments are placed in a head-to-head. All segments, regardless of their political leanings, are more likely to say it is more Keir Starmer's Labour Government that is too worried about coming up against opposition.

In focus groups, people often talk about this "opposition" as Labour backbenchers, after they blocked plans to reform the welfare system. The public is left questioning why the Government launched policies they had not thought through or decided how to best communicate with the public or their own MPs. They are seen as unable to follow through on difficult decisions.

# Britons think Labour are too worried about opposition to get anything done

When you think about each of the following descriptions, do you think they best apply to the previous Conservative government or the current Labour government?

"Is too worried about coming up against opposition to get anything done"

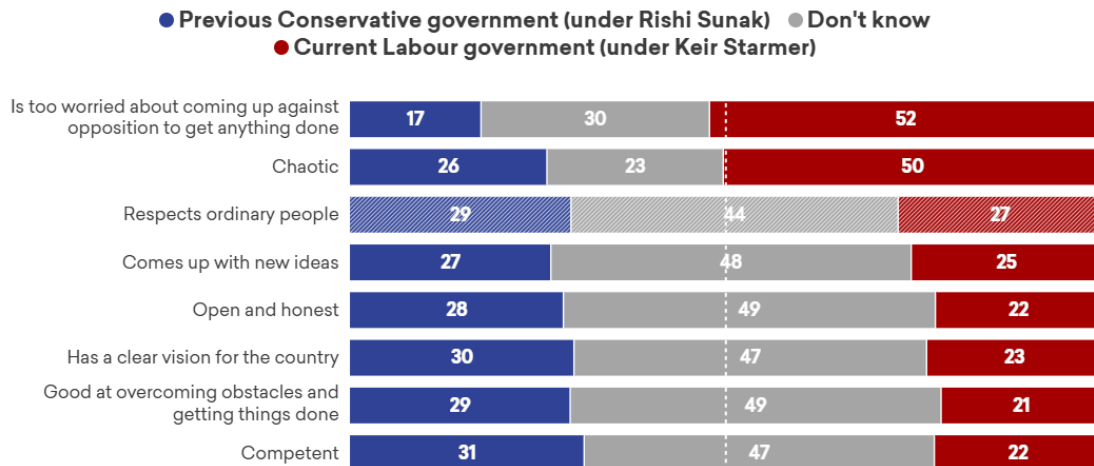


In fact, Labour is trailing the previous Conservative Government on a range of measures which are fundamental to the Respect Agenda. The previous Government narrowly leads on being seen as competent (31 per cent versus 22 per cent), overcoming obstacles and getting things done (29 per cent versus 21 per cent) and being open and honest (28 per cent versus 22 per cent).

Although most telling might be that, despite the Prime Minister's promises the morning after the election and the extent to which voters felt undervalued by the Conservatives, the public is unable to say if either Sunak's Government or Starmer's Government had more respect for ordinary people – around 3 in 10 opting for both. More than 4 in 10 picked 'don't know'.

## The public are unable to say if either Sunak’s Government or Starmer’s Government had more respect for ordinary people

When you think about each of the following descriptions, do you think they best apply to the previous Conservative government or the current Labour government?



## The strained social contract

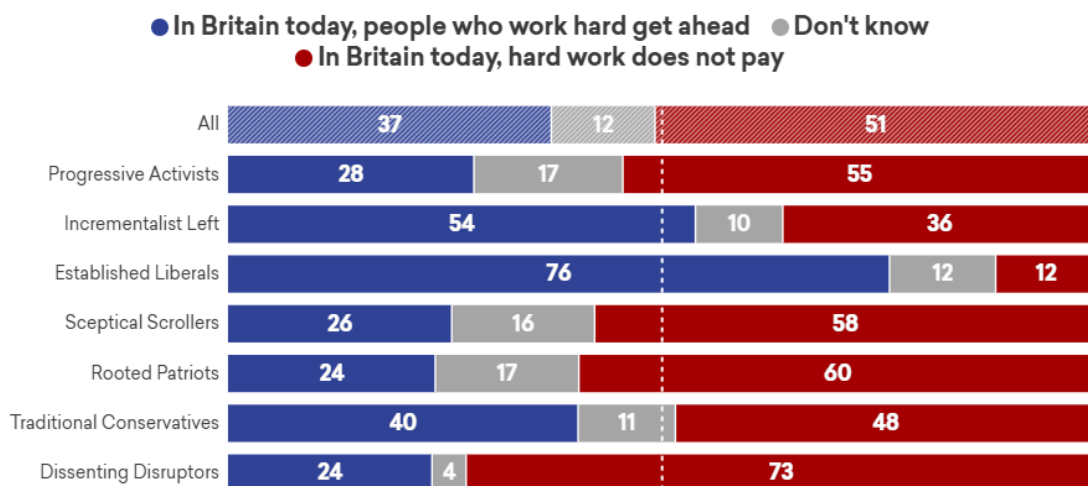
Central to the failure to deliver a Respect Agenda is that the public does not think people’s role in society – through working hard and paying taxes – is being properly valued. In discussion it quickly becomes clear the social contract is under strain across the country.

Many are paying more than ever to the state through taxes, but think they are getting increasingly diminishing returns on their hard work. In focus groups, people explain their disappointment with public services, and how they struggle to get GP appointments or worry about whether there are enough police in their local area. There are also concerns about visible decline, from untreated potholes to shuttered high streets.

Around half of the public (51 per cent) now say that in Britain today, hard work does not pay. This sentiment unites the political spectrum with most of the typically left-leaning Progressive Activists and right-leaning Dissenting Disruptors in agreement. The only segments who still believe that hard work can pay are the Incrementalist Left and Established Liberals.

## Most Britons feel hard work doesn't pay these days

Which of the following comes closest to your view?



For most, what defines a broken social contract is that even though they are working hard, they are going backwards. Many talk about struggling to afford the basics, saying that luxuries or small rewards are a “no no”, and that milestones like home ownership seem well out of reach for them or their children and grandchildren. It is a sentiment expressed even by those who, on paper, are in high income brackets. Almost everyone seems to have experienced some degree of quality-of-life degradation in recent years.

*“It’s about not chasing to earn as much as you can just to have a semi-decent life... A six-figure salary used to get you a house, now it’s just getting you by.”*

Alex, electrician, South London

*“It’s all sort of stacked against you. The people that are working hard and earning a decent wage, trying to get childcare costs under control... it just becomes a bit of a vicious cycle in the end. And you sort of question why you’re doing what you’re doing.”*

Hayley, assistant headteacher, Aldershot

This in turn manifests itself into frustration when they perceive others as being looked after by the state with their tax money, for example those on benefits or asylum seekers. The rise of zero-sum thinking means many now believe others get

a better deal and quality of life than they do. This generates resentment. When asked who Labour respects, the most popular answers are: the rich (mentioned by 58 per cent), asylum seekers (50 per cent), immigrants (48 per cent) and big businesses (47 per cent). Britons are not ungenerous to those in need or to the most vulnerable, but also want to know that the incentives are toward work and doing your bit, rather than the reverse.

*"There's no point working more hours, because the tax man gets it all (...) why should people be penalised for grafting, while there are people sitting on their arse."*

Chelsea, social worker, Hull

*"I'm frustrated by the money side of it sometimes. I mean, I work hard for what I get. I'm really dedicated to my job, but unfortunately, our customers, 99% of them do not work. And don't get me wrong, some of them, it's very justified. They need those top-ups ... but it amazes me how easy they get that. I have some young girls who are coming out with not much less than what I am for working and they're not doing anything."*

Lisa, housing officer, Manchester

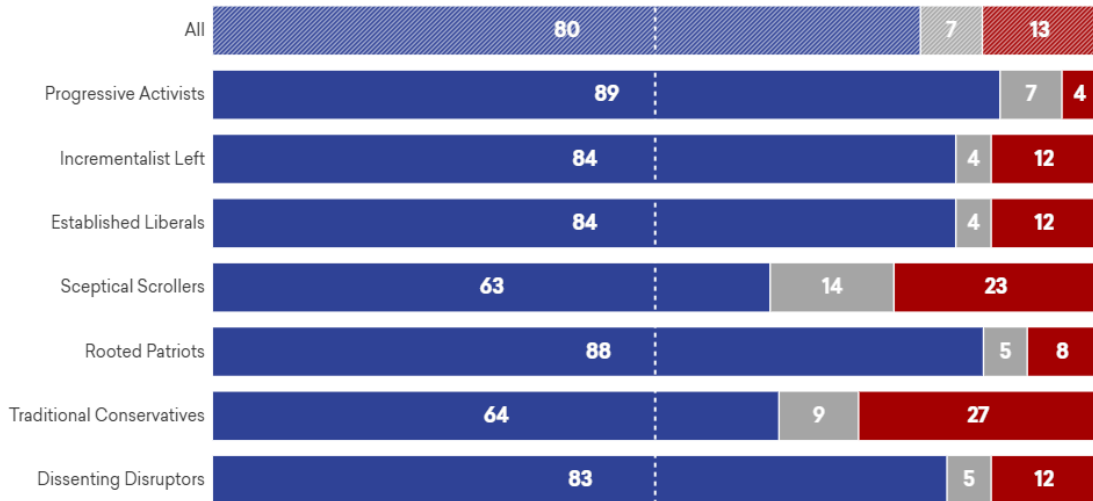
Anger then turns toward the Government because people think they are keeping their side of the bargain, while the state is instead perpetuating a rigged system. This frustrates them because 8 in 10, and majorities across every segment, think the role of government is to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to live a decent life.

# 4 in 5 think it's the government's role to ensure everyone has the opportunity to live a decent life

For each of the following, would you say this should or should not be part of the role of government?

"Ensuring everyone has the opportunity to live a decent life"

● Should be the role of government ● Don't know ● Should NOT be the role of government



# Chapter 2: Political parties and leaders

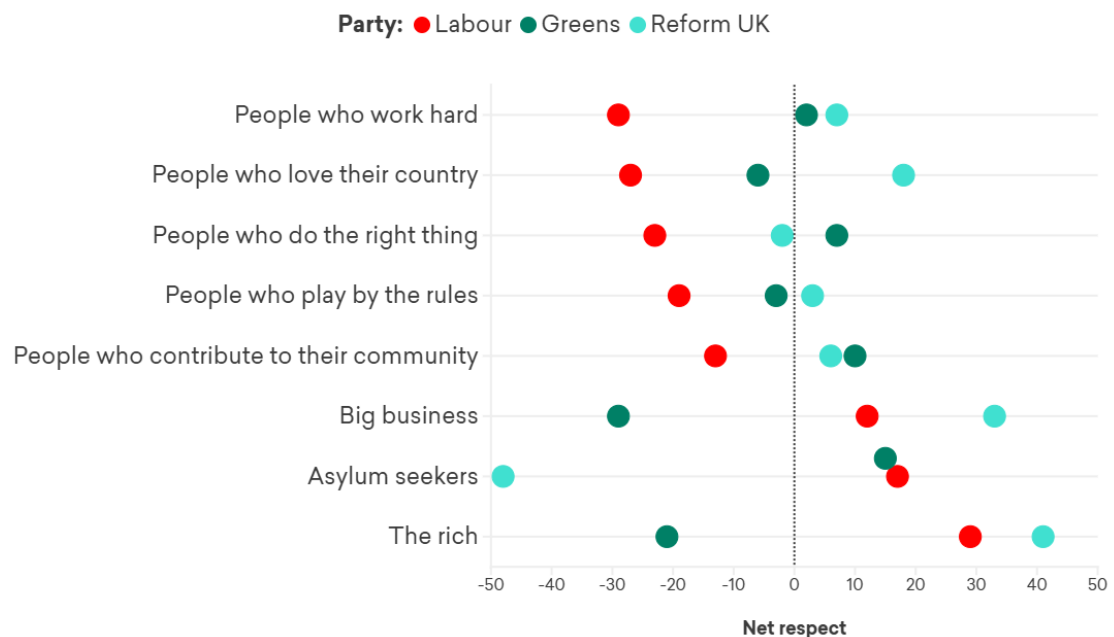
## Political parties

The central failure of the Starmer Government is that they have failed to govern in a way that convinces the public they understand ordinary people. Most say the Government does not respect people who work hard (59 per cent), people who do the right thing (54 per cent) and people who contribute to their community (48 per cent). Britons are more than twice as likely to think that the Labour Party respects the rich than respects hardworking people.

Meanwhile, people are more likely to think that Reform and the Greens respect people who work hard, contribute to society, do the right thing and play by the rules.

### Britons think that The Labour Party does not respect people who do the right thing, work hard or love their country

To what extent would you say The Labour Party/ The Green Party/ Reform UK respects the following groups of people?  
Net respect calculated by subtracting "Respects a little" and "Doesn't respect at all" from "Respects quite a lot" and "Respects very much"



Failing the respect test perpetuates a cycle we have seen repeatedly in recent years. Despite a promise in the run up to and after the 2019 General Election to respect voters who had felt overlooked and respected by the political class, by 2023, the Conservative Government had a -29 net respect score.

Today it is newer parties that have the potential to 'own respect'. This, in part, helps explain why these insurgent parties are climbing in polls, while Labour is seeing its vote share collapse. Three years ago, 73 per cent of voters were either Conservative or Labour supporters; this has fallen to just 42 per cent of voters in 2026 - as the electorate becomes increasingly convinced that the traditional mainstream is either unwilling or unable to offer 'respect'.

However, while those insurgent parties are succeeding in convincing the public that they respect ordinary people, they are doing so from very different perspectives. Reform is achieving this by convincing people that it is the party which respects people who love their country, (49 per cent), and is not seen to be prioritising asylum seekers. This message resonates with the Traditional Conservative and Dissenting Disruptors segments who worry about a changing social order and a loss of British identity.

Meanwhile, the Green Party is promising to end "rip off Britain" and to make it "a country that everyone can afford". Hannah Spencer echoed this after winning the Gorton and Denton by-election, voicing her frustration that "working hard used to get you something". Today, 40 per cent say the Greens respect "people who do the right thing".

## Party leaders

The perception that the Labour Party does not respect ordinary people is embodied in the Prime Minister. Half (49 per cent) think that Keir Starmer 'does not respect the public', compared to a quarter (24 per cent) who think he does, a net respect score of -25. Off the back of the ongoing Mandelson scandal, 53 per cent now say that the Prime Minister should resign.

Other Labour Party politicians face a similar respect challenge. While former Labour Deputy Leader Angela Rayner was previously able to convey respect to voters who traditionally felt overlooked and even disparaged by the mainstream, that seems to have changed. In the wake of her tax affairs scandal, Angela Rayner receives the lowest respect score of any of the tested politicians at -28. Ed Miliband and Wes Streeting, too, face negative respect scores - though the latter only narrowly at -3.

*"(Wes Streeting) has done an okay job in health. In the time that he's been in, he has had good arguments in Parliament, so has a bit about him."*

Kris, Incrementalist Left

The one Labour politician tested who receives positive respect ratings is Andy Burnham on +19. In focus groups, participants described his passion for Manchester, clear vision for the city and his authenticity, seeming like a “genuine guy”.

*“(Compared to Starmer, Burnham has) So much more energy and passion. He sounds like he really, really means it and he believes it.”*

Darren, Established Liberal

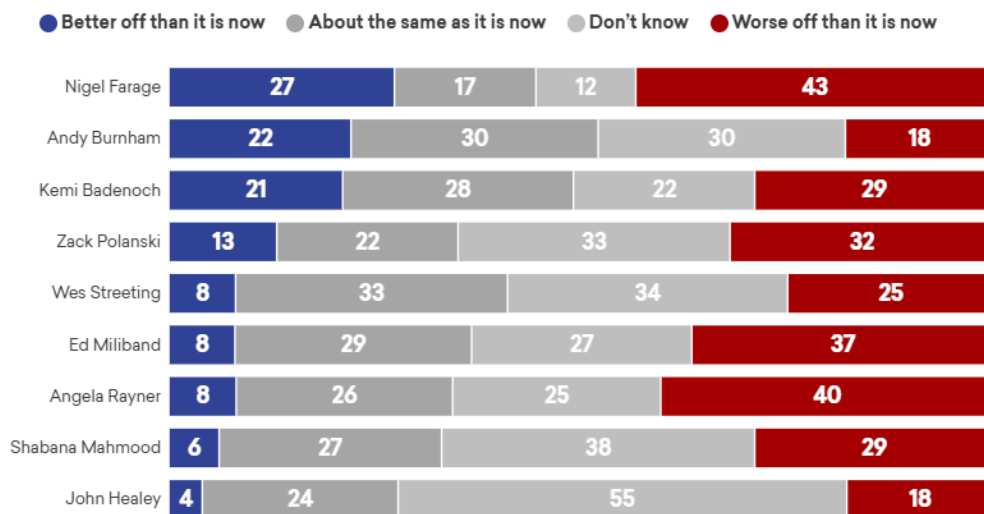
*“At least he (Burnham) cares about people and he's had hands-on experience trying to sort things out and do a good job... I think Andy Burnham's a very genuine guy. He's not my party, but the end of the day I'd sooner have someone like him have a go and then someone that's just a wet lettuce.”*

Richard, Rooted Patriot

These respect scores are reflected in the public's estimations of whether a range of Labour politicians would leave the UK better or worse off than it is now if they were in charge.

## Britons don't agree on who they think would do a better job than Keir Starmer

Do you think that the UK would be better off, worse off, or about the same as it is now with the following politicians in charge?



Reform UK's Nigel Farage, and the Conservatives' Kemi Badenoch both also score well, with 27 per cent and 21 per cent, respectively, believing the UK would be better off with them in charge. Farage is a more divisive figure, however, with 43 per cent who believe the country would be worse off with him in Downing Street.

When the public considers the qualities associated with these politicians, a pattern emerges. Burnham and Badenoch in particular score higher than others for 'respects the public' on 37 per cent and 32 per cent, respectively. In other words, the politicians Britons think will be able to improve the country are the same politicians they think respect the public.

*"I would agree. I think Kemi came into the job, as you say, she was a little quiet, but I can see now what she was doing. She was feeling the room and now she's got the feel for the room and worked out who she's dealing with. She's found their weak spots and she knows exactly how to go for it. In my view, is highly intelligent and excellent at the job she does."*

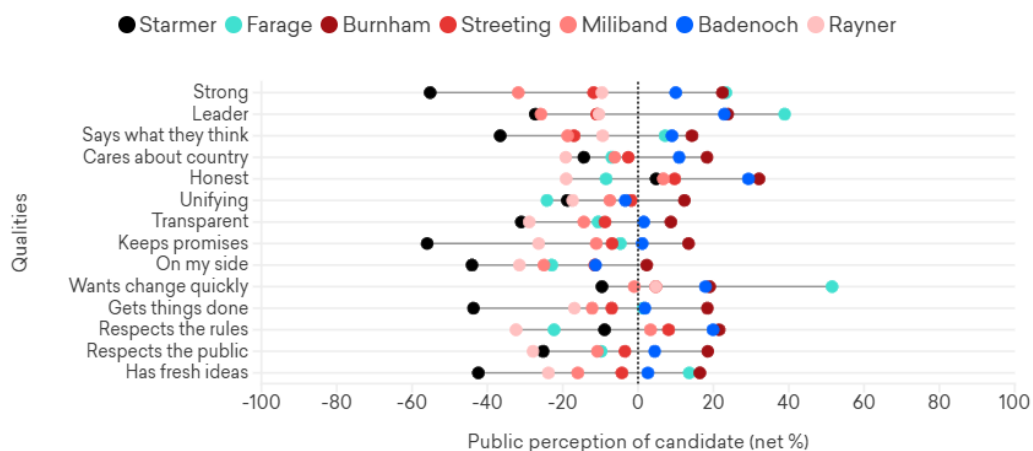
Mike, Braintree

*"(It's not my cup of tea) but she's good at what she does. And as much as I hate Alan Shearer, he was good at what he did and you've got to respect someone that's good at what they do."*

Mick, Sunderland

## Andy Burnham and Kemi Badenoch are the politicians most likely to be seen to respect the public

Which of the following attributes do you associate more with Kemi Badenoch/ Andy Burnham/ Nigel Farage/ Ed Miliband/ Angela Rayner/ Keir Starmer/ Wes Streeting?



Andy Burnham in particular tends to emerge on top for a lot of the qualities tested: caring about the country, being transparent, keeping promises, being 'on my side'. As an outsider to the cabinet in Westminster, he appears able to escape being tarnished with the same brush as ministers when it comes to respect for the public. In turn however, this does mean that his relatively good reputation does not appear to be translating into improved favourability for the wider Party. Whether this pattern would hold if he were to return to Westminster remains to be seen. To avoid the mistakes of the Starmer administration, the Manchester Mayor will likely want to double down on the focus on place, community and delivery on every day concerns that has, to date, convinced the public he respects them.

## Chapter 3: Institutions and Respect

The crisis of respect isn't limited to political leaders. In fact for most people the sense of disrespect they feel day to day is not in their interactions with politics, but with institutions and organs of the state. Failure to tackle the pervasive sense of institutional disrespect is likely to see institutions lose legitimacy among the public.

Yet institutions are not all viewed in the same way. When asked why public services underperform, people point first to Westminster: nearly half of Britons (45 per cent) believe public services are mismanaged by politicians.

*"I look at Kier and most of the other leaders and I think effectively they're managing a pot of cash and they're trying to do the best they can. Unfortunately it seems like we've got a trend where they mismanage everything."*

Stuart, Incrementalist Left

*"Don't lie about saying that you can save the NHS. There is no saving the NHS, it's gone. Those days have gone. People who pay their stamp every month, you won't get anything out of it, trust me. And if you do get some sort of service, you will be waiting a hell of a long time. It's forcing the arm of the normal person, so don't lie. When they say that they can save it, please don't lie because it's gone, it's dead. Just be honest and say it's going."*

Martine, Rooted Patriot

*"If I look at some of the decisions that the council, the local council have made, they're not particularly good decisions... We pay a lot of council taxes in Reading a hell of a lot... they've squandered it."*

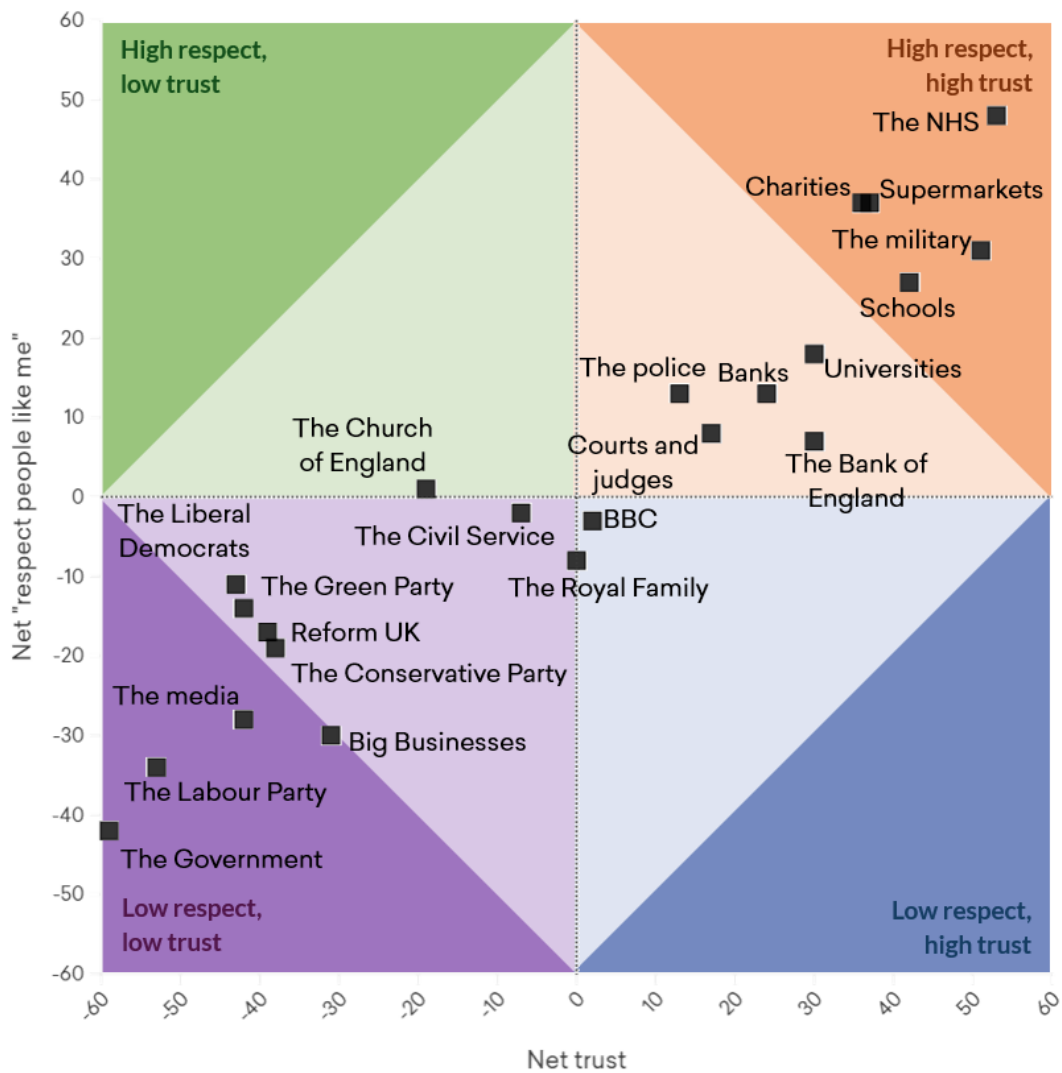
Lakeish, Incrementalist Left

However institutions do not escape blame entirely. A similar proportion of the public, 41 per cent, believe the problem is that these services do not listen enough to ordinary people.

## The Four Quadrants of Institutional Trust and Respect

The Respect Agenda (2023) introduced a quadrant analysis which plotted the extent to which the British public trusts and feels respected by institutions. New analysis explores how attitudes have shifted in the intervening years.

### The Four Quadrants of Institutional Trust and Respect



As in our previous report, six clusters of institutions emerge from this analysis:

**High trust, high respect:** This grouping contains a mixture of traditional public services – the NHS, military and schools – alongside charities and supermarkets which serve or help the public in their function. This cluster is relatively static: the position of these institutions has not changed significantly since 2023, and no other institutions have entered into this cluster. Supermarkets have seen a dip in respect but not trust, likely due to the ongoing cost-of-living crisis and inflation impacting food prices the most.

*“Although the NHS isn't in a good position because of underfunding from the Tory government, if you look at it compared to the American market and other countries, third-world countries which don't have it, we are still extremely privileged. I don't think Britain's broken.”*

Ellen, Established Liberal

Each of these institutions features at the top of the list for “respects people like me” across every segment. The priority for them should be protecting their status as high trust and high respect institutions. Other institutions may be able to learn from the success of these groups in sustaining respect and public trust.

**Medium-high trust, medium-high respect:** The second cluster is dominated by legal and financial institutions with the police, courts and judges sitting alongside banks and the Bank of England. Universities are also in this cluster. They have net positive levels of both trust and respect for ordinary people but could be performing better.

The key challenge for this group is to avoid complacency and to focus on how to further build trust and respect. For universities, in a world where Artificial Intelligence is displacing the graduate job market, this means demonstrating that degrees can still lead to good outcomes and are worth the tuition fees and, as previous More in Common and UCL Policy Lab research shows, demonstrating that non-graduates benefit from universities too.

*“In hindsight, if I could go back, I probably would not go to university because reason being, because like I said, I'm working with people who have not been to university, but we're on same salaries, but the difference is I've got a hundred grand debt and they don't.”*

Wasif, pharmaceutical manager, Manchester

*"(In universities) I know there must be research on medicine, safety, robotics and stuff like that, but I don't know much information on how it affects us, what they do because I've never been, I don't really look into it. I don't know what they offer. "*

Mark, sales assistant, Worcester

For the police and courts, it means that there is more work to show that they deliver justice fairly and in a timely manner.

**Medium trust, medium respect:** The BBC and the Royal Family sit in the middle of the four quadrants - they tend to divide the public on both trust and respect. When it comes to the BBC, 39 per cent say the broadcaster respects them and 41 per cent think it does not. Dissenting Disruptors and Rooted Patriots are the most negative, compared to Established Liberal and Incrementalist Left who are the most positive. However, the BBC is slightly more trusted than it was in 2023. To improve its standing, the BBC needs to consistently demonstrate its dedication to impartiality across broadcasting, an area in which there is no doubt that the Trump editing scandal has undermined confidence.

*"I think as well it's worth of mentioning this Trump that's suing BBC. And I've seen this mantra that as much as I don't like this man, I really want him to win, I really want him to win this money because they clearly, that was the best example of creating content. So they took one few words connected with the other and he didn't sound like he did and they just made it completely different."*

Maciek, Boston, factory trainer, Dissenting Disruptor

With regards to the Royal Family, its unique role might situate it far removed from the lives of ordinary people in the eyes of the public and put it in the 'low respect' half - and there has been little change on this dimension. While the Royals used to enjoy a net positive trust score, the public is now equally split with revelations about Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor having undermined their standing. The challenge going forward and to move on from the former Prince's relationship with Jeffrey Epstein is to demonstrate how the Royals work in the interest of all of the British public and to find ways to communicate that they understand the challenges facing ordinary people.

*"Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, where's he gone now? It's all smoke and mirrors."*

Paulette, Sunderland

**Low trust, medium respect:** This pairing includes the Civil Service and the Church of England. Public opinion on whether these institutions respect them is mixed, but more Britons do not trust them than trust them. Attitudes towards these institutions are muted – few have either strong trust or strong distrust in either institution – and one in four are unsure about whether the institutions respect them, perhaps as most people do not directly interact with these organisations. Justin Welby’s resignation as Archbishop of Canterbury, and subsequent revelations about abuse cover-ups in the Church of England, might also be contributing to this division of opinion. As in 2023, the challenge for these institutions will be to continue showing how they can positively benefit communities and improve people’s lives; increased trust is likely to follow.

**Low trust, low respect:** The cluster with the biggest challenges includes all political parties that our surveys included – the Conservatives, the Greens, Labour, the Liberal Democrats and Reform UK – along with the media and big businesses. The public has deep levels of distrust in these institutions and does not feel respected by them either. Businesses have seen some improvement in trust and respect since 2023, but still remain in a very negative position.

While all of the political parties we tested fall into this cluster, the Labour Party finds itself below the grouping of the other political parties. With a net respect score of -34%, it is no coincidence that it is currently the party dropping down through the ranks of public opinion polls. For all political parties, and particularly the traditionally mainstream parties, the focus must be placed on earning back the trust of the public by demonstrating respect.

## **Who’s up and who’s down? Changes in perception over the last 3 years**

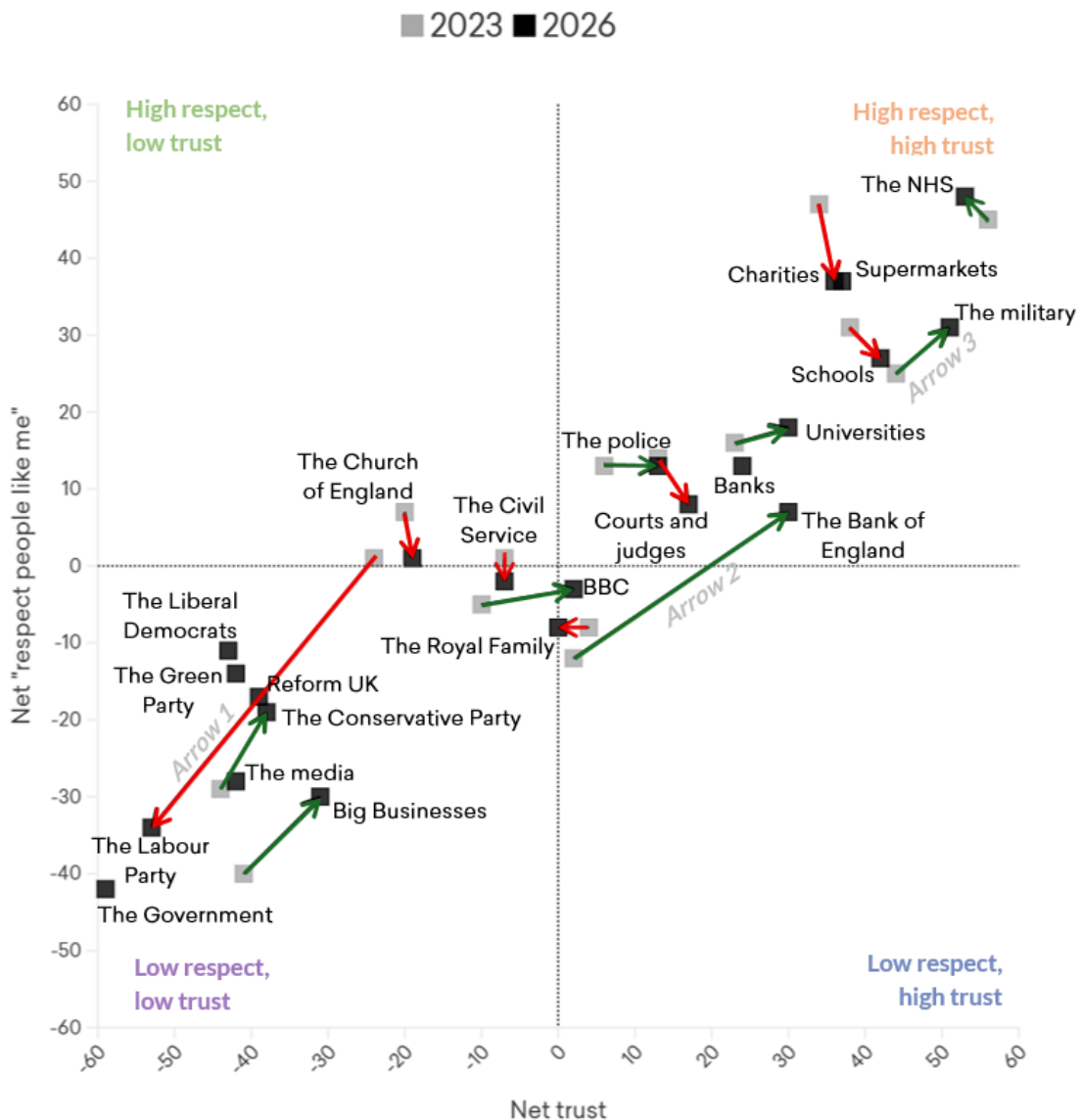
Looking at most institutions, there has not been much change over the past three years in whether the public trusts them or feel respected by them.

The Labour Party stands out as seeing the biggest decline. The struggles of its first 18 months in power have negatively impacted its standing on this quadrant; while the public had low levels of trust in the Party previously, they did express medium levels of respect. Since then, Labour’s net trust has fallen further by 24 points and net respect has dropped 33 points (shown by arrow 1).

Labour now finds itself in a similar position to the Conservative Party in 2023, a position from which the Conservatives have been unable to recover in the intervening three years. In focus groups, people describe losing faith not only in

individual politicians but in politics more generally, believing that leaders are only in it for themselves and either cannot or will not act on the priorities of the public.

## How has the relationship between trust, respect and institutions changed over the last 3 years?



Other institutions have experienced greater success, seeing public perceptions of respect and public trust improve. The Bank of England is one such story (shown by arrow 2), improving its net trust by 29 percentage points, and shifting its net respect by 19 percentage points, moving from a negative score into a positive one. This is likely connected to the 2023 study being conducted closer

to Liz Truss' mini-budget and the Bank's role in bringing down interest rates since then. This appears to have been especially effective among the institution-trusting and more free market-facing Established Liberals and Traditional Conservatives.

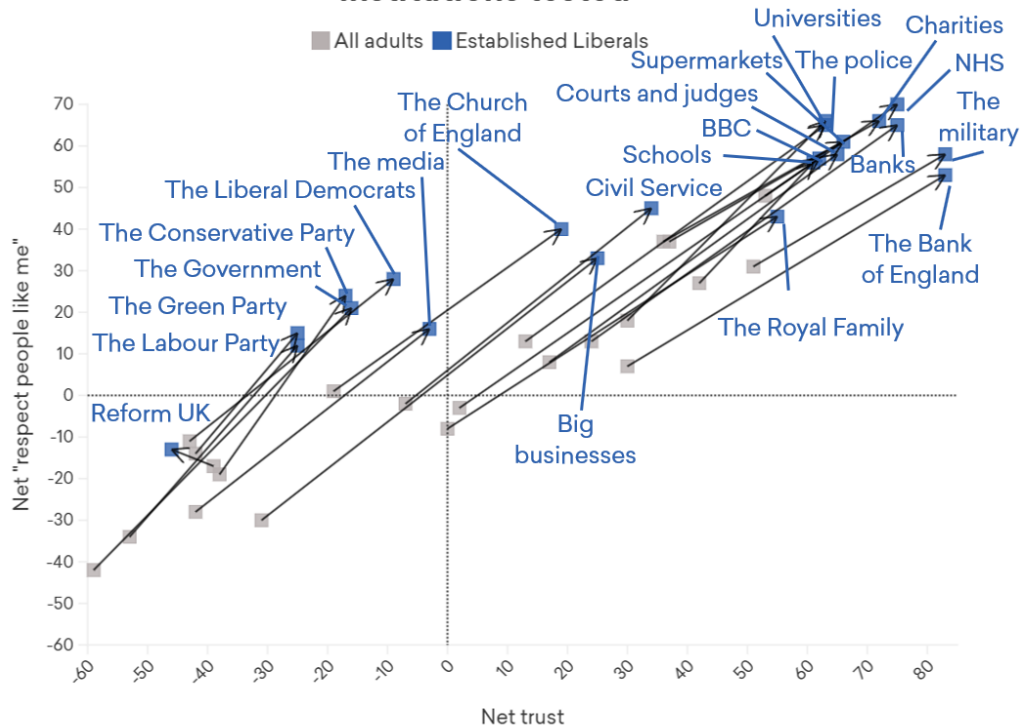
The military has also grown marginally in trust and respect, reflecting a renewed interest in our armed forces in a time of international uncertainty (marked by arrow 3). The risk-conscious Traditional Conservatives and Rooted Patriots in particular are driving this improvement in public perceptions.

### **Positive segments: Mostly trusting and feel respected**

Feelings of trust in and respect from national institutions are not distributed evenly across the different segments of the public. A group of three segments - the Established Liberals, Incrementalist Left and Traditional Conservatives - are more likely than others to feel respected by most institutions, and trust them too.

Every single institution the public was asked about, bar Reform, received a stronger score for trust and respect from Established Liberals than from the general population. A comfortable, secure segment who have faith in democratic processes, they remain optimistic about the future, and trusting in institutions. This institutionalist segment, disproportionately university-educated and wealthy, feel a sense of respect even from institutions they do not trust, like the Conservative Party and the Church of England.

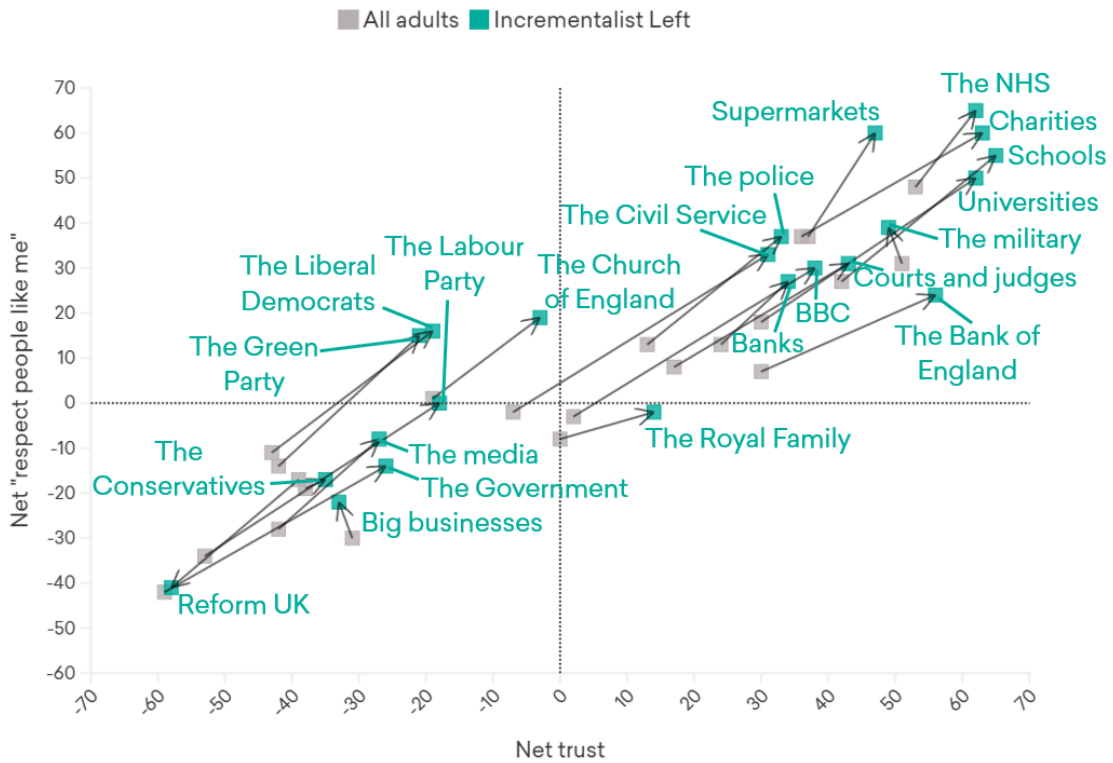
## Compared to Britons generally, Established Liberals have a stronger trust and respect perception of almost all institutions tested



In part, this might simply be a reflection of the fact that the Established Liberals are far more likely to occupy leadership positions within these institutions and to see themselves reflected within them. However the dominance of Established Liberals may also explain why other segments, who don't see themselves reflected, are more likely to feel these institutions 'don't get it'.

The Incrementalist Left segment, too, are much more trusting in, and feeling respected by, most institutions than the general public, although to a slightly lesser extent than the Established Liberals. They are a less engaged segment than the Established Liberals: tuned out of day-to-day politics and conflict averse, they tend to steer clear of issues they see as particularly complex or fraught. As a broadly satisfied segment, they appear content with the role institutions currently play in their lives, albeit not quite as enthusiastically as Established Liberals are. They are disproportionately likely to trust, and feel respected by, the current powers-that-be: the Government, the Labour Party and the Civil Service.

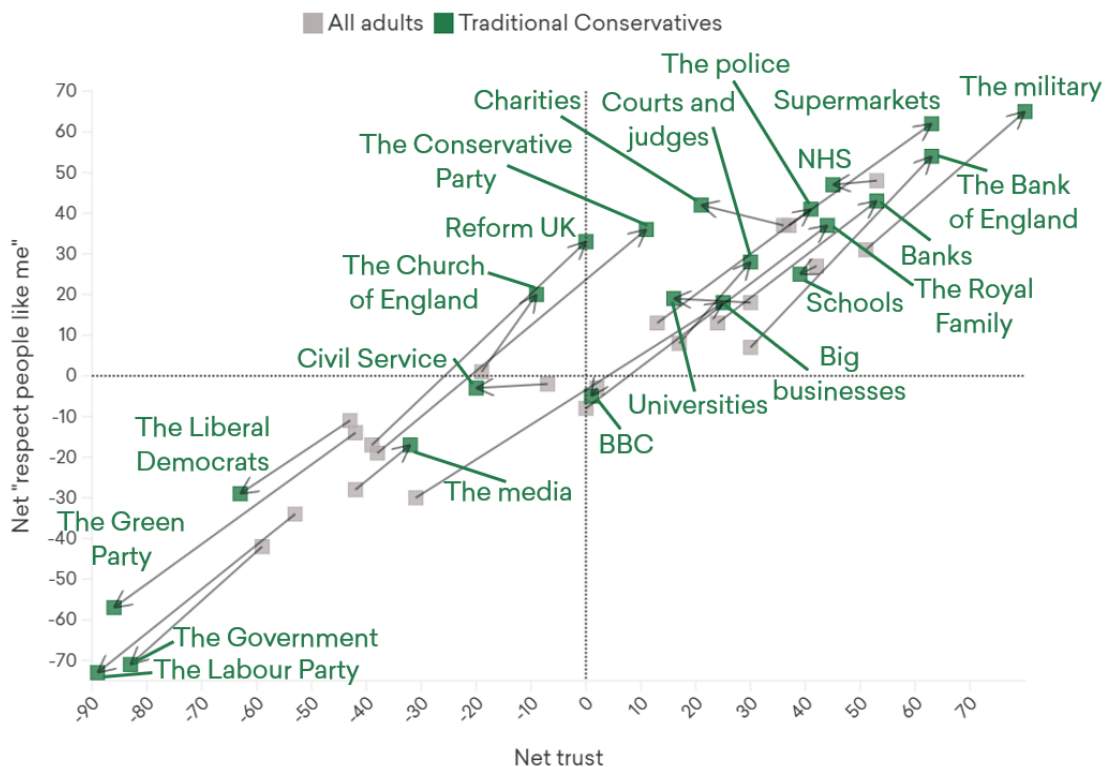
## The Incrementalist Left are more likely than most to trust, and feel respected by, institutions, especially the Government, the Labour Party and the Civil Service



Established Liberals and Traditional Conservatives - in particular - share a very positive perception of financial institutions (banks and the central bank) as well as big businesses. These economically conservative, and affluent, segments place greater value than other segments on the existing financial system.

Traditional Conservatives are also the only segment for whom the military comes out above all other institutions - including the NHS - for trust and respect (with net scores of +80 and +65, respectively). This segment often prioritises what might be seen as military values - respect for authority, meritocracy - and worry about breakdown in the traditional social order.

## Traditional Conservatives have a much stronger trust and respect perception of the military and the Royal Family than Britons generally

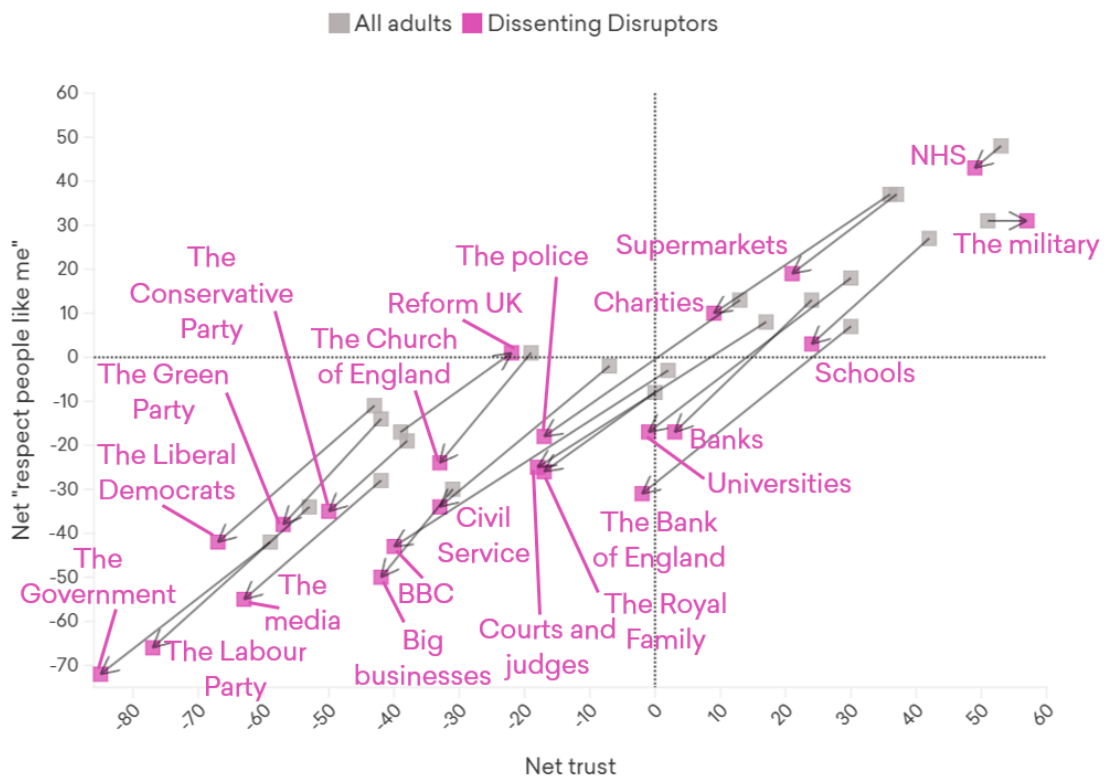


### Negative segments: Dissatisfied with the status quo

A second group of segments - namely the Progressive Activists, Sceptical Scrollers and Dissenting Disruptors - is much less satisfied with the status quo, and scores most of the institutions lower than the rest of the population for respect and trust.

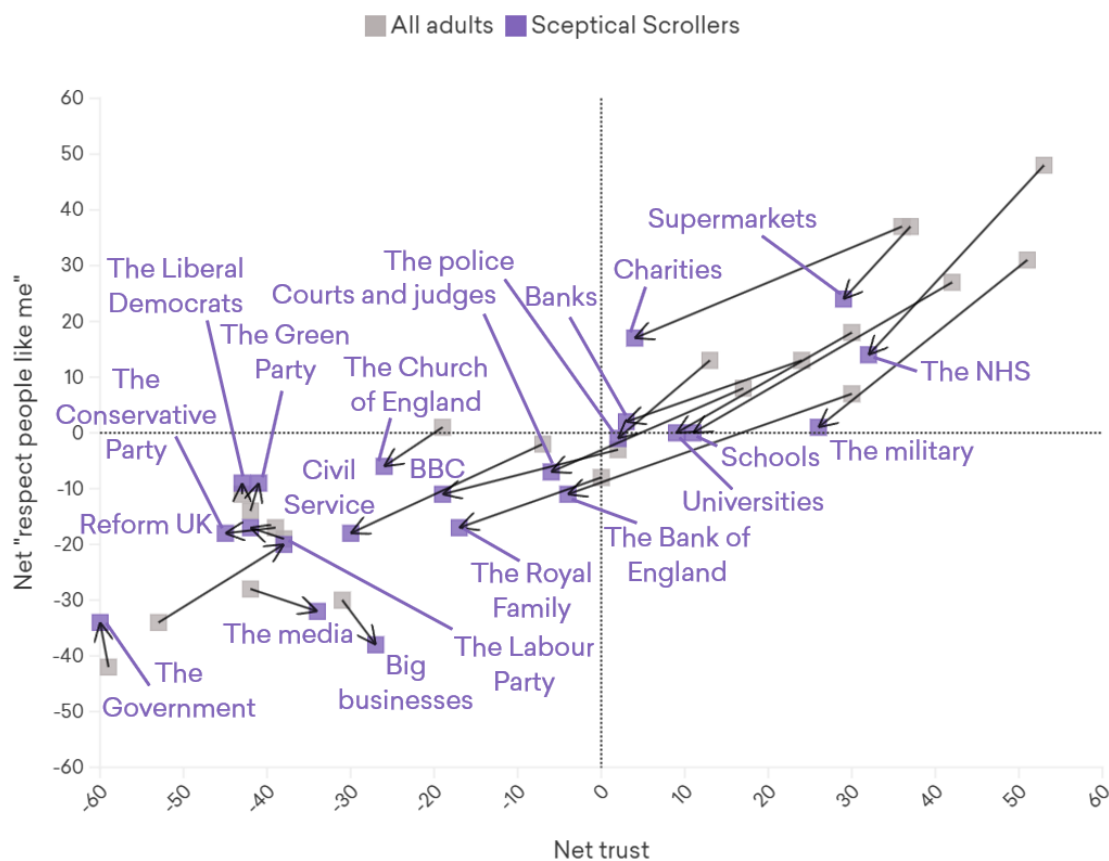
Almost exclusively, Dissenting Disruptors are less likely to trust in and feel respected by institutions than the general population. Frustrated and anti-establishment, this segment wants to overhaul the status quo and make a fresh start. As this segment made up the bulk of Reform UK's supporters in the 2024 General Election, it is unsurprising that the party is the one institution, of those the public was asked about, that this segment felt more positively about than the rest of the population.

## Dissenting Disruptors have a much lower trust and respect perception of most institutions compared to Britons generally



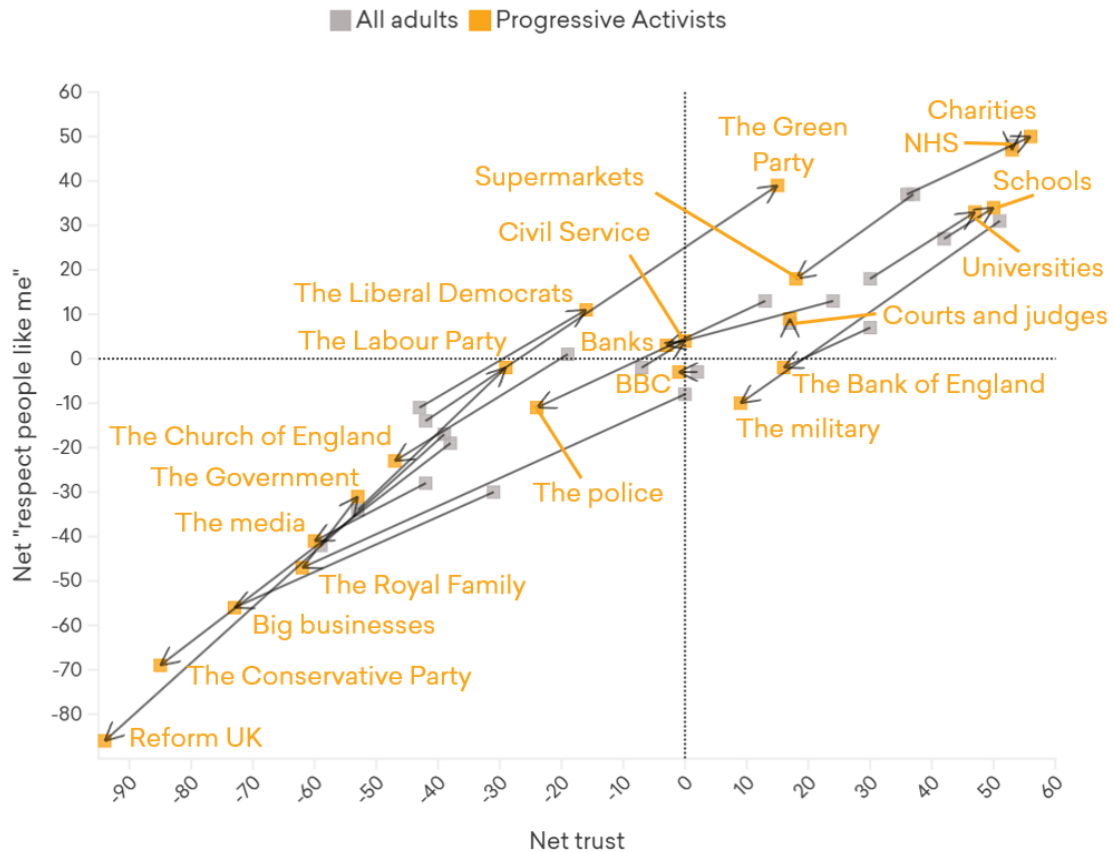
Sceptical Scrollers also tend to be less positive about most institutions, and more positive about Reform UK, but to a slightly lesser extent than Dissenting Disruptors. When it comes to institutions, the only real difference between these two segments is not in what they feel, but the strength of their feelings. This is likely because Dissenting Disruptors are a more engaged segment with a strong sense that the country has lost its way. The sense that institutions have either failed to avoid, or wilfully contributed to, this decline fuels an intense distrust. Sceptical Scrollers, on the other hand, are also unhappy with the social contract but - having spent their formative years in the pandemic - have very little experience of institutions ever working and respond to their dissatisfaction by disengaging from politics and wider civic life altogether.

## Compared to Britons generally, Sceptical Scrollers have a lower trust and respect perception of most institutions



The third institutionally-disapproving segment is the Progressive Activists. As with the Sceptical Scrollers, they have a negative view of traditional authority figures such as the military and the Royal Family. However, as a disproportionately degree-holding segment, they are more likely than most to feel positively towards educational institutions like schools and universities. Charities too tend to be thought of positively by the Progressive Activist segment - possibly because many of the segment have jobs in the third sector. Progressive Activists are slightly removed from the other two more disapproving segments in their sentiment towards political parties; they have a much more positive view of the Green Party, the Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party than Dissenting Disruptors and Sceptical Scrollers do. It seems then that, more than any other segment, what shapes Progressive Activists' views of respect is alignment with their politics and in particular whether institutions demonstrate those same social justice values.

## Progressive Activists have a much lower respect and trust perception of traditional authority figures, like the Royal Family and the military than Britons generally

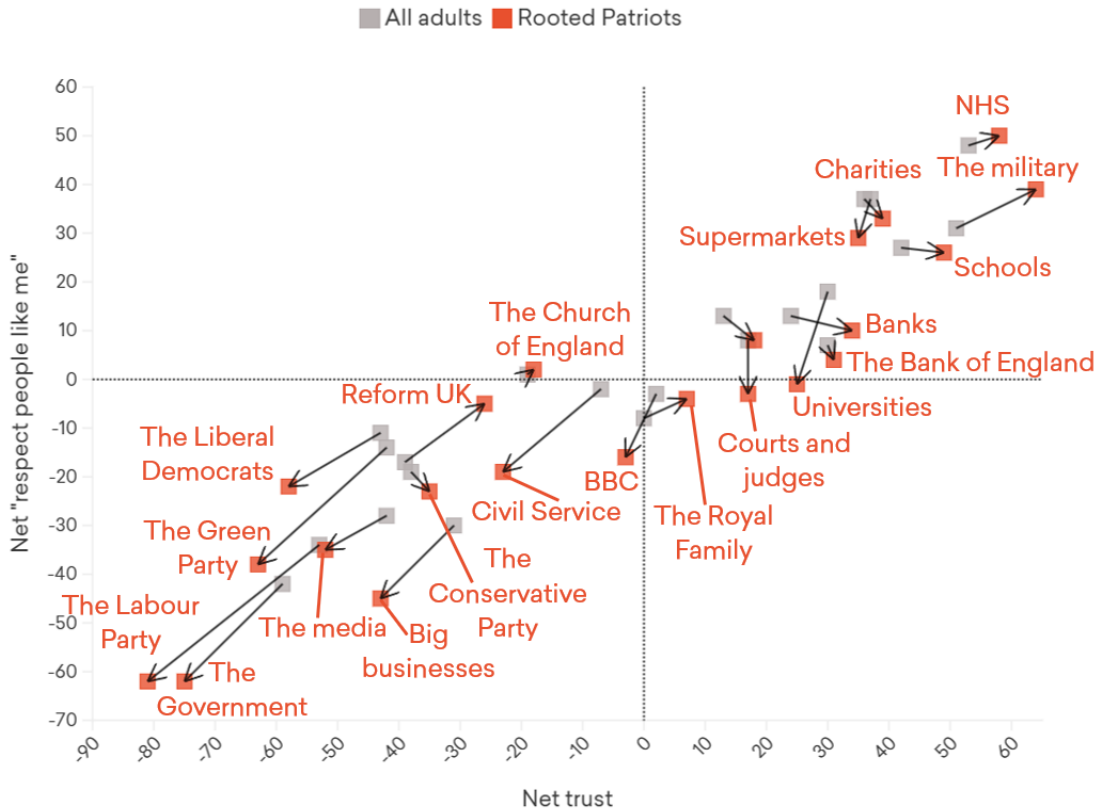


### Middling segments

The Rooted Patriots stand out from the other segments. For a number of institutions - namely supermarkets, universities, courts and judges, the BBC - their levels of trust are broadly in line with the rest of the population.

However, they feel disrespected even by institutions they trust, such as courts and judges, universities and the Royal Family. There are a few institutions that Rooted Patriots tend to feel a lot more negatively toward than the rest of the population, namely the Labour Party and the Civil Service. This speaks to a segment which does not want to overthrow political elites and systems but who currently feel ignored and overlooked by the people at the top.

## Rooted Patriots reflect similar levels of trust in, and respect from, institutions as other Britons



These voters are concentrated in what has become known as ‘the red wall’ seats in British politics and have an outsized influence on elections. Two election campaigns 2019 and 2024 have been focused on this group who have repeatedly had their trust shattered. If the traditional mainstream is to have any chance of gaining a second hearing it likely starts with this group - a failure to do so will see them put aside their traditional risk aversion and move instead to back newer, more insurgent parties.

## Chapter 4: A roadmap to respect

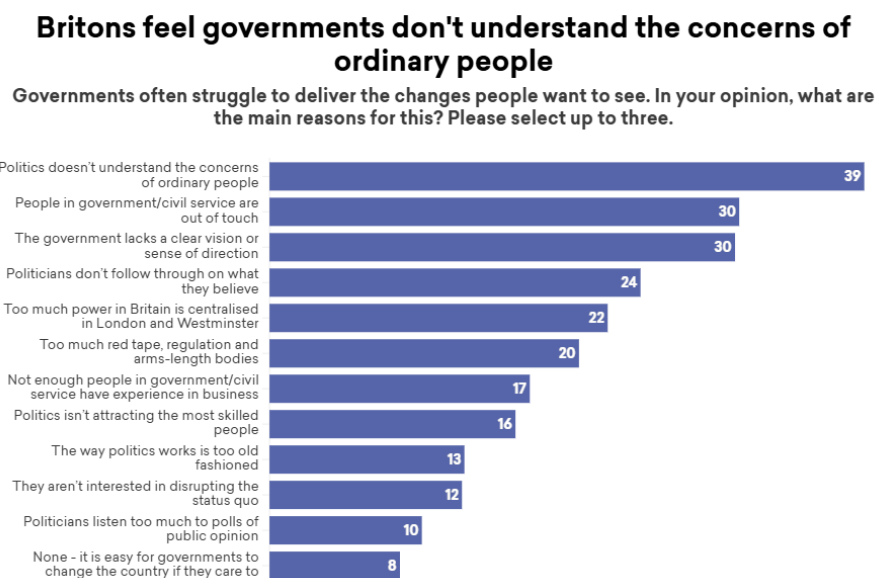
Across the country, ordinary people feel that those in power neither understand their lives nor act in their interests. Ultimately, they feel disrespected by politicians, institutional leaders and elites.

Many politicians will disagree with this and argue that the reason they got into politics was to represent their constituents. The problem is that the public doesn't buy it. What then can politicians do to start demonstrating the sense of respect they profess to embody?

In this research, as previously, four demands consistently emerge: that politicians demonstrate real empathy by engaging seriously with the issues that matter most to people; that they show up as their authentic selves rather than retreating behind party lines; that they are honest even when (or especially when) things go wrong; and that hard work pays.

### Show empathy by tackling the public's priorities

The public does not think politicians empathise with the everyday problems they have to face. They think the main reason that the government struggles to deliver change is because they do not understand the concerns of ordinary people, something that 39 per cent agree with, and that because people in government and the Civil Service are out of touch, selected by 30 per cent.



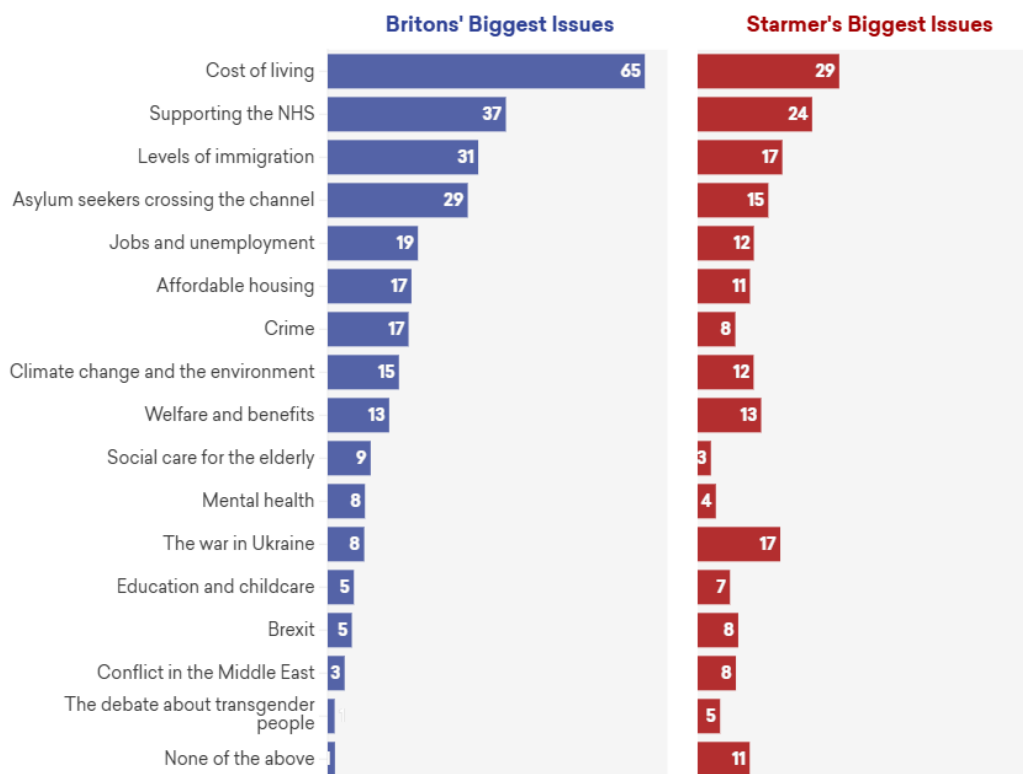
Any attempt to rectify this cannot assume “empathy” simply means a sympathetic tone in a speech but needs to be about politicians demonstrating that they genuinely understand the pressures that people are facing through their actions and policies.

In recent years the public has consistently identified the cost of living as the most important issue facing the country, followed by immigration and supporting the NHS. However, Britons doubt that the Prime Minister fully grasps the extent of their frustration or can empathise with it.

When asked to name Keir Starmer’s priorities, the public define a list that broadly matches the Britons’ own priorities but only a minority – fewer than 3 in 10 across the board – think he is focusing on them. Twenty-nine per cent say he is focusing on the cost of living, 24 per cent on supporting the NHS and 18 per cent say immigration. Around the same proportion, 26 per cent, are unable to identify any issue they think the Prime Minister is focusing on, saying either “don’t know” or “none of these”.

### Fewer than 30 per cent of Britons thinks Keir Starmer sees the cost of living as one of the most important issues

What do you think Keir Starmer believes are the MOST IMPORTANT issues facing the country today?/What do you think are the MOST IMPORTANT issues facing the country today?



This perceived lack of understanding leads to people feeling disrespected. Twenty-eight per cent of those who think the Government does not respect them say it is because the Government is not making enough progress on these big problems – a higher proportion than that of the general public with the same view.

The public calls for a clear plan with specific steps and timelines to overcome these problems, cited by 38 per cent as among the most important things a politician can do to show respect, which can be seen as an empathy demand. People want to know that the Government understands the problems facing everyday people deeply enough to have worked out how to solve it. However, at present, only 10 per cent of the public think Keir Starmer has a plan – including just 29 per cent of Labour’s own supporters.

## Be your authentic self

Common responses when focus group participants are shown excerpts of a politician speaking are complaints that they are not really saying anything or it is just a spiel they have heard before. Three in five (57 per cent) think that Keir Starmer is only willing to tell people what they want to hear, instead of explaining the trade-offs behind the difficult decisions he is making. This leads to the public feeling disrespected because politicians are not being authentic and levelling with them.

*“They say what they think that people want to hear to protect themselves... I'd like them to tell the truth regardless of whether it would be popular or not. But that's not the skill of being a politician.”*

Kris, Incrementalist Left

Leaders who the public identify as respecting ordinary people are those who are seen to be their true self in public. It explains why Andy Burnham, Kemi Badenoch and Nigel Farage are cited as examples of politicians who respect people, and the broader engagement that happens when politicians like Wes Streeting or Ed Miliband break from “party lines” in interviews.

*“She answers the question. She doesn't like to dance around things like all the others do.”*

Victoria, Sunderland

*"Her own personality as well comes across, she's not just trying to copy what everyone else is doing, which is again, like that's good because it's more interesting and represents different people as opposed to another carbon copy of the previous person."*

Richard, North Berwick

*"I can't stand Trump, I can't stand Farage - because I think they're two-faced and conceited. But that's why people find him interesting because they basically talk with passion. (Starmer) doesn't talk with passion and he needs to start showing that."*

Ali, Established Liberal

The connection between authenticity and respect also explains the fluctuating popularity of Angela Rayner. The former Deputy Prime Minister originally attracted supporters because she was seen as genuine, understanding of everyday people and not afraid to be herself. However, after revelations over her tax affairs, her reputation was damaged even more than others' would have been because of people's disappointment that she was now in their eyes "the same as the rest". Focus group participants started questioning whether her image had ever been authentic. It is a similar story to that of Boris Johnson, once seen as authentic, and the damage to his reputation following Partygate.

*"She just kind of epitomises the Labour Government at the moment where she says something and she acts in a completely different way."*

Lakeish, Incrementalist Left

Politicians should be careful not to conflate authenticity with a desire for a more Trumpian style of politics. Donald Trump is deeply unpopular in the UK in part because of his unpredictable style.

*"I don't respect Donald Trump at all."*

Katryn, Incrementalist Left

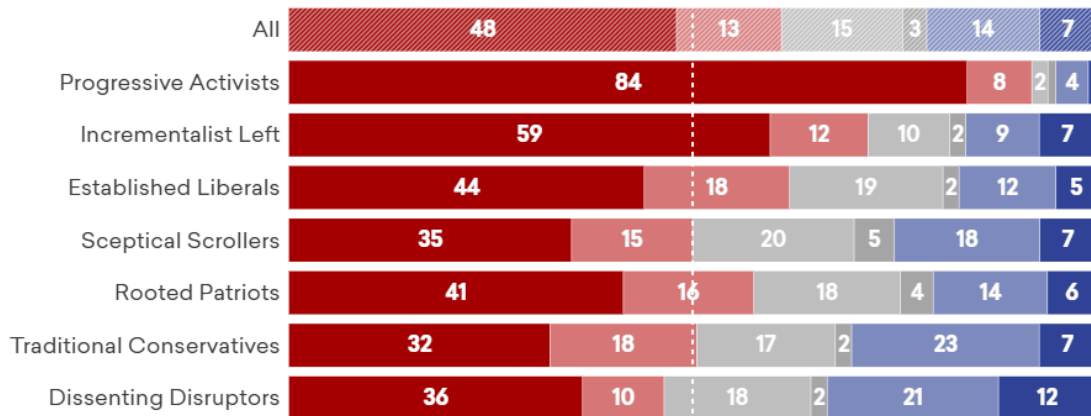
*"I think having somebody who has integrity, drive and strength, especially with the way the world's going, they need to stand up to the likes of Trump and not be afraid to do that. We need a Hugh Grant from Love Actually. That's what we need."*

Rebecca, Incrementalist Left

## Every Segment has a net negative view of Donald Trump

In general, do you have a positive or negative view of Donald Trump?

● Very negative ● Quite negative ● Neither positive nor negative ● Don't know  
● Quite positive ● Very positive



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The public believes that change takes time, with 62 per cent saying it is possible to bring about the change Britain needs in an orderly way, versus 26 per cent who say meaningful change would require disruption: ripping it all up and starting again. Authenticity is about being able to explain why this change may take time in a convincing and relatable manner to bring the public along with you.

## Be honest

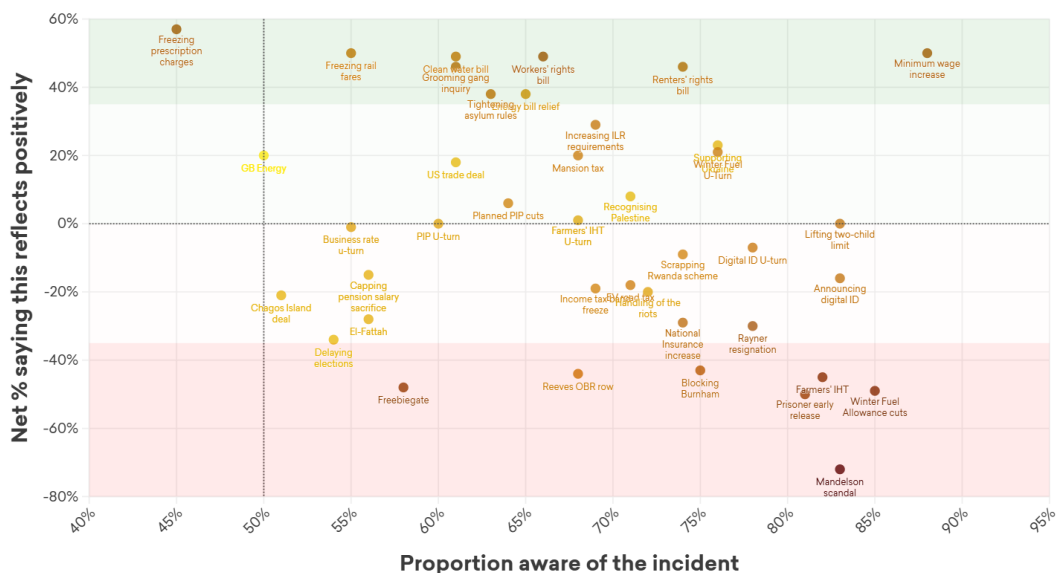
The public also wants honesty. This includes honesty about the scale of the challenges facing the country, but also greater transparency when it comes to explaining U-turns or scandals. In focus groups, when scandals break, people tend to assume they are not hearing the full story or are being lied to. For example, in the wake of Keir Starmer firing the Foreign Office Permanent

Secretary Olly Robbins, only 13 per cent believed the Prime Minister was telling the truth.

These scandals or missteps dominate the news agenda and mean that, in the eyes of the public, the Government is defined by its mistakes. This is demonstrated below in a chart which plots whether people have heard of a Government announcement or incident, against how positively or negatively it leaves them feeling.

### 18 months in: the Labour Government's successes and failures

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



Source: More in Common (January and February 2026) • Net % saying this reflects positively = % saying incident either reflects very or somewhat positively - % saying it either reflects very or somewhat negatively

The incidents with the highest cut-through are those which the public feels most negatively about. In evidencing why they feel disrespected, Britons are far more likely to name scandals where they feel politicians have been dishonest than unhappiness with policies. More than twice as many say Keir Starmer accepting high-value gifts from Labour Party donors made them feel disrespected compared to the reversal of Winter Fuel Payment plans, by a margin of 70 per cent compared to 33 per cent.

These scandals mean that achievements the Government could be talking about are being lost from view. As discussed above, there is a raft of positively received policies designed to tackle the cost of living that measure some of the lowest cut-through with the public. These include: freezing prescription charges and rail fares, the energy relief bill and the workers' right bill. Similarly, on immigration

there is potential to raise public awareness of steps taken by the Home Secretary to tighten asylum rules. Where these have not cut through, it leads to wider questions of trust. Only 11 per cent think that Keir Starmer sticks to his promises, against two in three (67 per cent) who say he breaks them.

The public does not necessarily expect politicians to be perfect. They just want them to be transparent and take responsibility. When asked how a politician can show they can address the country's problems, the top answer, selected by 42 per cent, is that they take responsibility when things go wrong.

## **Make hard work pay**

Politicians also need to overturn the perception currently shared by half of Britons that hard work does not pay (51 per cent). This does not necessarily have to come in the form of tax cuts. It could stem from making better progress on improving public services, or being able to better demonstrate value for money. The public says both would be effective in showing the Government respects them. Two in three would feel more respected if there were lower taxes on working people (65 per cent), and a similar proportion would feel more positive about a politician who tackles services that are not delivering for the public (71 per cent).

Similarly, when asked what any Prime Minister should stand for, public opinion is roughly split between saying the most important attribute would be tackling the cost of living (39%) and putting British people first (34%). People want to at least feel like their tax money is going to materially improve their own lives.

# Appendix 1: Methodology

## Quantitative

The data for this research comes from three different polls, each of a nationally representative sample of GB adults, excluding Northern Ireland.

The polling on trust in, and respect for, the Conservative Party, Green Party, the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats and Reform UK was conducted from 24th to 27th April, with a sample size of 2,041.

The polling on the Mandelson Scandal and Olly Robbins was conducted on 23rd April 2026, with a sample size of 1,015, for The Sunday Times.

The rest of the polling was conducted from 25th February to 2nd March 2026, with a sample size of 2,009.

In all polls, respondents have been weighted according to age/sex interlocked, 2024 General Election vote, ethnicity, and education level.

All results tables are available on More in Common's website. More in Common is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules.

## Qualitative

Four focus groups were conducted for this report. Those groups were recruited to be representative of four of More in Common's Seven Segments of Britain. One group was made up of Progressive Activists, another of the Incrementalist Left, another of Established Liberals who currently intend to vote Labour and fourth of Rooted Patriots.

The details of the segmentation can be found in appendix 2, or on More in Common's website.

The focus groups were conducted online between 9th and 10th February 2026.

## Appendix 2: The Seven Segments of Britain

This polling uses More in Common's new segmentation of the British public. Based on extended research into Britons' core beliefs, their values and behaviours, this segmentation allows us to look upstream not just at what different groups think, but why they think it. Going beyond a simple left-right spectrum, it reflects deeper differences in how people relate to authority, change, community and the future, which help explain why traditional party loyalties have weakened and political volatility has increased. Segmentation is a particularly powerful way of detecting and understanding differences and commonality in people's values and in their broader orientation towards society and the big issues facing the country.

The analysis produces seven segments within the British population:

### 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, this group craves 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.