February 2025

Progressive Activists

More in Common

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

This research was conducted in Autumn 2024. Full methodological information can be found at the end of the report.

About the British Seven segments

This report uses our British Seven segmentation to categorise participants. This is a psychographic, values-based segmentation of the British public which in many cases is more predictive of beliefs on certain issues than other demographics. The seven segments are:

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

Civic Pragmatists: A group that cares about others, at home or abroad, and who are turned off by the divisiveness of politics. They are charitable, concerned, exhausted, community-minded, open to compromise, and socially liberal.

Disengaged Battlers: A group that feels that they are just keeping their heads above water, and who blame the system for its unfairness. They are tolerant, insecure, disillusioned, disconnected, overlooked, and socially liberal.

Established Liberals: A group that has done well and means well towards others, but also sees a lot of good in the status quo. They are comfortable, privileged, cosmopolitan, trusting, confident, and pro-market.

Loyal Nationals: A group that is anxious about the threats facing Britain and facing themselves. They are proud, patriotic, tribal, protective, threatened, aggrieved, and frustrated about the gap between the haves and the have-nots.

Disengaged Traditionalists: A group that values a well-ordered society, takes pride in hard work, and wants strong leadership that keeps people in line. They are self-reliant, ordered, patriotic, tough-minded, suspicious, and disconnected.

Backbone Conservatives: A group who are proud of their country, optimistic about Britain's future and who follow the news, mostly via traditional media sources. They are nostalgic, patriotic, proud, secure, confident, and engaged with politics.

More information about the segments can be found at
https://www.britainschoice.uk/segments/

Acknowledgements

More in Common would like to thank all of the Charity CEOs and senior leaders who spoke to More in Common anonymously for this report. We would also like to thank the Pears Foundation for supporting the research.

As always, More in Common has maintained full editorial control over this research and the views expressed within it are solely our own.

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Foreword

For some, President Donald Trump's election victory over Vice-President Harris in the 2024 Presidential election symbolised something more than simply one country's election result. Instead, commentators have speculated it marked a deeper and more universal turn against progressive politics across western democracies. Elections in 2025 in Germany and Canada look set to usher in similar shifts to the right. Meanwhile centre-left Governments in the United Kingdom and Australia have experienced precipitous drops in their popularity.

The turn against progressivism appears not to be limited to electoral politics. In the mid-2020s, a range of traditional progressive causes - from tackling climate change, to diversity and inclusion initiatives, and refugee and asylum policies - appear to be on the back foot. Meanwhile a series of progressive organisations have found themselves having to deal with internal turmoil and conflict, in particular around (though far from limited to) how and whether they should respond to the conflict in Gaza.

Of-the-moment analysis has a tendency to overstate these trends and a wider view suggests that politics is thermostatic. Public opinion tends to move to the right when policy has been moving to the left, and vice versa. Put another way, when those in power get 'too progressive' the public switch the radiator thermostat to a more conservative level. History tells us that talk of the death of progressivism or of conservative dominance is likely to be wide of the mark. What's more, trends are rarely universal at global level: the United Kingdom is not the United States and is markedly more 'progressive' (and less polarised) on a range of issues.

That said, it is worth reflecting on why progressives have not had as much success as they might like in shaping public opinion in the UK and elsewhere in recent years. In some cases it seems progressives have alienated allies through what has been perceived as unnecessary (ideological) 'purity tests', and incurred backlash against what has been seen as progressive excess in tactics and goals. Meanwhile, some progressives seem more disillusioned by and despairing of the social contract in Britain than ever before. This report seeks a greater understanding of these issues by focusing on the segment of the population that More in Common's British Seven segmentation has named 'Progressive Activists'.

This group makes up around 10 per cent of the population and sits on the ideological left in both economic and cultural outlook. While the economic views of Progressive Activists align with those of some other groups in the population, their approach to societal change, radically and structurally, does not. Meanwhile their views on social and cultural issues such as immigration and free speech often sit at odds with those of the rest of the population.

Despite that exceptionalism, Progressive Activists have an outsized role in shaping the political agenda. They are particularly likely to work in fields including academia, arts and culture and the charity sector. They are also the most likely to engage in political discussions online.

Progressive Activists' energy and drive to improve the world forms the backbone of much of UK civil society. Understanding how they differ from the rest of the population, as well as their motivations and how these play out in workplaces and campaigns, helps illuminate societal dynamics about how some social changes happen in the UK. This understanding can also help identify ways to make their campaigning efforts more effective.

More in Common's interest is not in advancing either progressive or conservative causes. We seek to enable all of those with an interest in working for social good to better appreciate the points of view of the wider public, and in particular those of groups who are less vocal in debates in Westminster or on social media. In the coming months, More in Common will publish a further report, which will focus on those who are more engaged on the 'right' of politics, with a similar focus on how their views align with and diverge from the wider public.

Our hope is that this report can enable progressive campaigners to better build big tents and to avoid inadvertently reinforcing 'us versus them' dynamics. We also hope to help workplaces (in particular the charity sector, purpose-led businesses or parts of the civil service) to better understand and get the best out of their more progressive workforces. However, More in Common does not pretend to have all of the answers to the challenges campaigners face, nor do we claim to have more expertise in campaigning or policy development than those at the coal face. Instead, this report is designed to contribute to the ongoing discussion about how to harness passion for social change as effectively as possible.

To return to the United States, in a recent piece for *Public Notice* on the failures of Joe Biden's Presidency[1], Stephen Robinson pointed to the words of Glinda the Good, the deuteragonist in the 2024 film adaption of the musical *Wicked*. In the song 'Popular' Glinda reminds us that popularity is everything saying: 'It's not about aptitude, it's the way you're viewed, So it's very shrewd to be very very popular'. The lesson clearly applies beyond Joe Biden's presidency and could be said for Progressive Activists in general, where the temptation to insist on multi-cause ideological purity, the use of inaccessible language and a tendency towards absolutism come at the expense of building popular support for their causes.

[1] https://www.publicnotice.co/p/joe-biden-tragic-presidency-2025

This report therefore explores how Progressive Activists might redress that balance by better meeting the public where they are and taking the public on a journey of persuasion rather than inadvertent alienation.

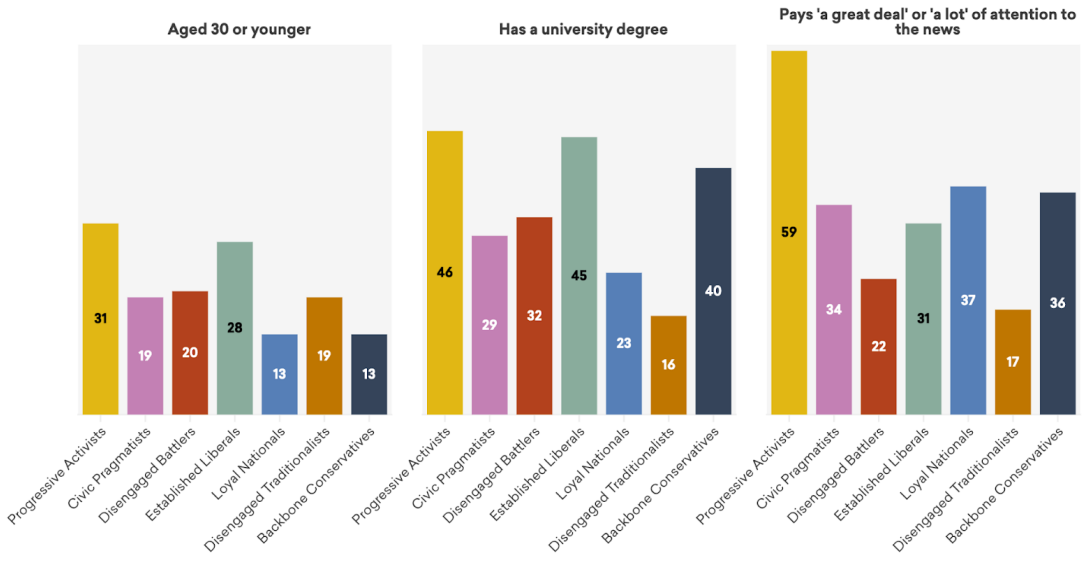
Executive Summary

This report is a deep-dive into the worldviews and attitudes of **Progressive Activists,** one of the British Seven segments identified by More in Common in 2020. Progressive Activists are the most politically engaged group in society, and often the most vocal participants in social and cultural debates. This report looks at what makes Progressive Activists unique and what motivates their particular world view, how campaigners can harness the energy and passion of progressives without alienating other audiences and how workplaces where Progressive Activists are highly represented can best manage the dynamics that this entails.

Who are Progressive Activists?

Progressive Activists make up eight to ten per cent of the UK population. They are younger than average, more likely to be graduates and highly represented in charity and public sector organisations. While they are not defined by their demographics, Progressive Activists are the youngest of Britain's seven segments, with an average age of 41 (although 30 per cent are older than 50). They are more likely to have spent time in higher education: 46 per cent have degrees and a fifth have postgraduate degrees. Their level of education means that many Progressive Activists have high incomes, but because very few of them own a home and many of them are in student debt, they are a lower wealth segment.

Progressive Activists by age, education, and political engagement



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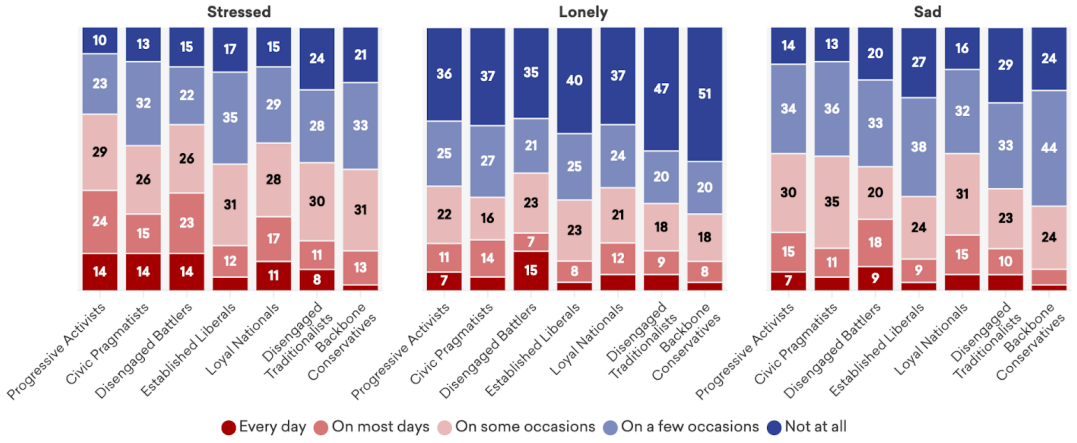
Source: More in Common • Fieldwork: November 2024

Progressive Activists have a pessimistic outlook on their future. Forty one per cent of Progressive Activists say their parents will have a more comfortable life than they will live; Progressive Activists express lower satisfaction with their housing, finances and work lives than average. Fifty two per cent of Progressive Activists say they have suffered from mental health problems, and they are among the segments most likely to say they are often stressed, lonely and sad.

Progressive Activists feel more stressed, lonely and sad than most other segments

In the last month, how often have you felt...



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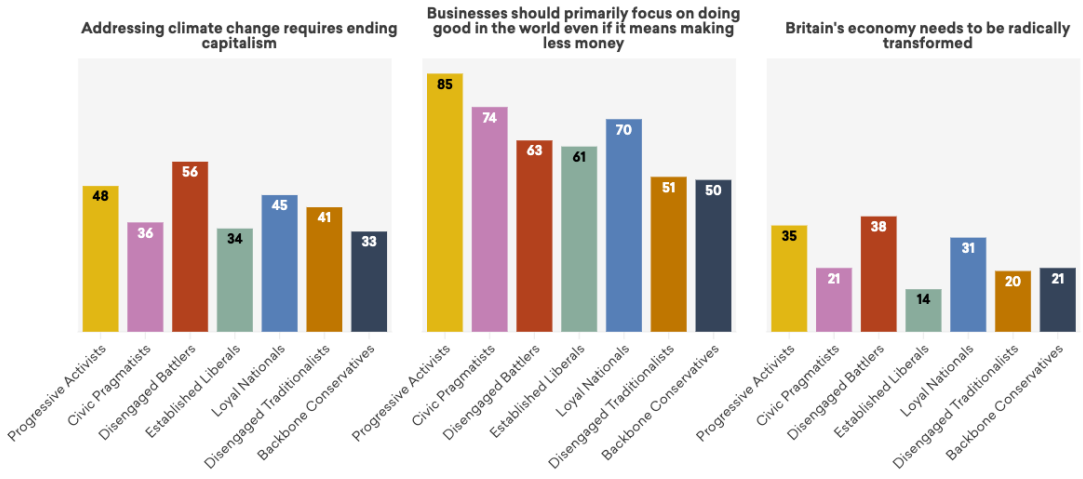
Source: More in Common • Fieldwork: November 2024

Progressive Activists share similar economic views with other left-leaning segments. Their starting points on the role of business, the impact of capitalism and the scale of change needed in our economy is shared with other economically left-leaning groups such as Disengaged Battlers and 'Red Wall' Loyal Nationals, who all favour a more interventionist state and are sceptical about big business.

Progressive Activists' starting points on the economy are comparable to other left-leaning segments

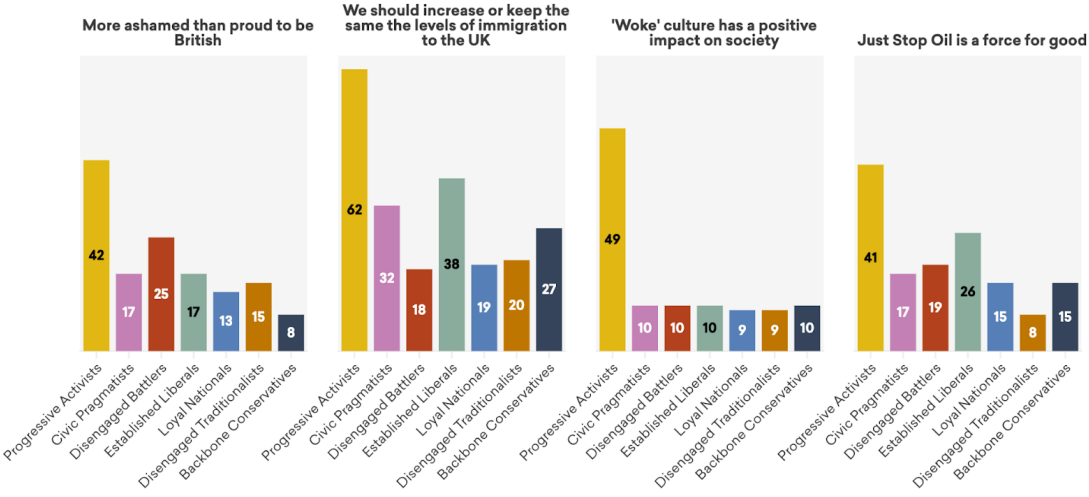


More in Common

Source: More in Common • Fieldwork: November 2024

However, Progressive Activists diverge from the rest of Britain in their attitudes to many cultural and social issues. They are more than twice as likely than the rest of the country to say they are ashamed to be British and are the only segment to say that Britain should be ashamed of the legacy of the British Empire. Progressive Activists are also the only segment in which a majority say we should increase or maintain levels of immigration to the UK.

Progressive Activists are distant from the rest of the country on many cultural issues



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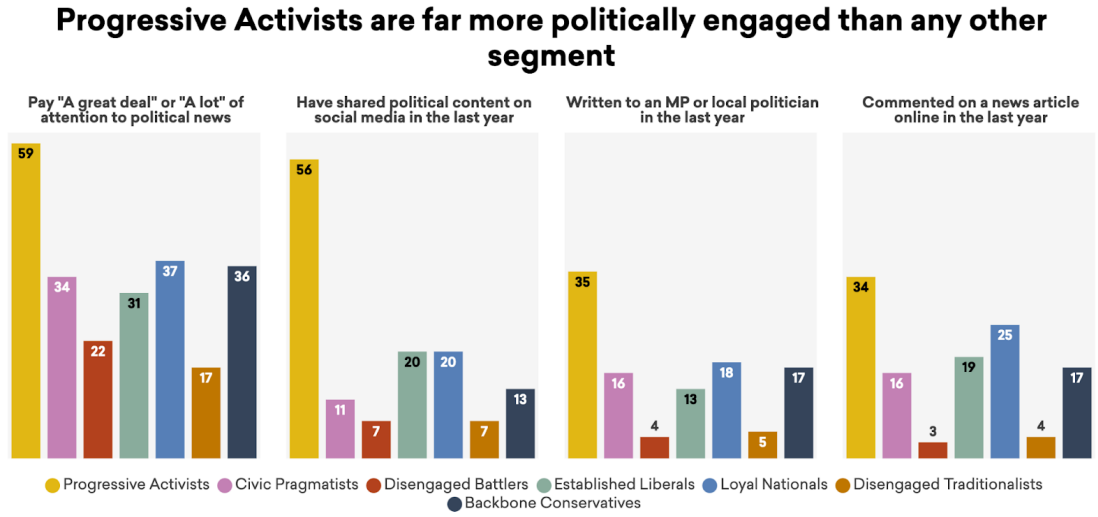
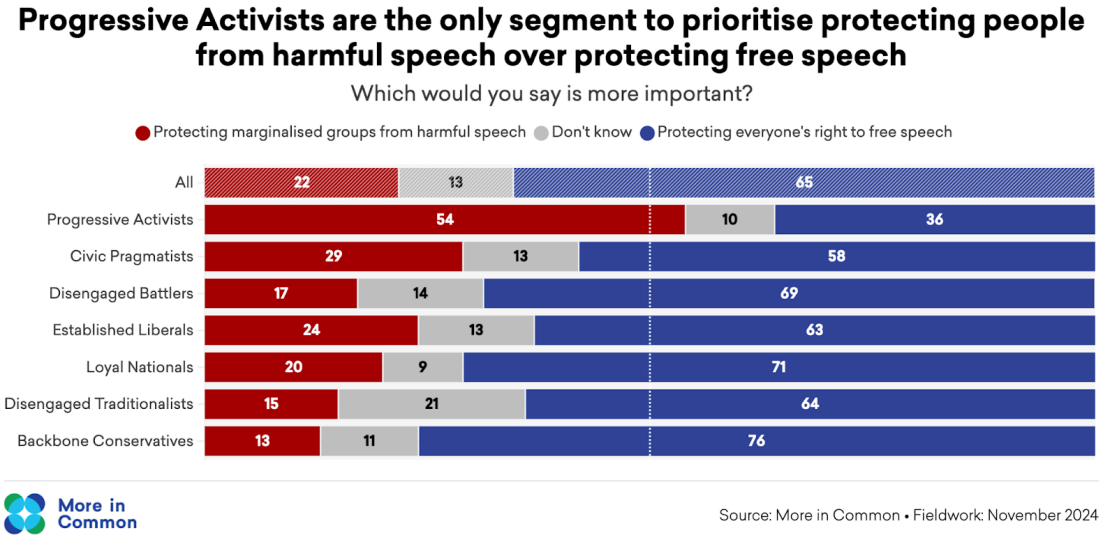
Source: More in Common • Fieldwork: November 2024

Progressive Activists are also the most vocal group in many political debates. Fifty six per cent of Progressive Activists say they have shared political content on social media in the last year, compared to just 14 per cent of the rest of the population. Similarly, Progressive

Activists are almost three times more likely to have written to their Member of Parliament or local politician in the last year compared to the other six segments, and are twice as likely to have commented on a news article online.



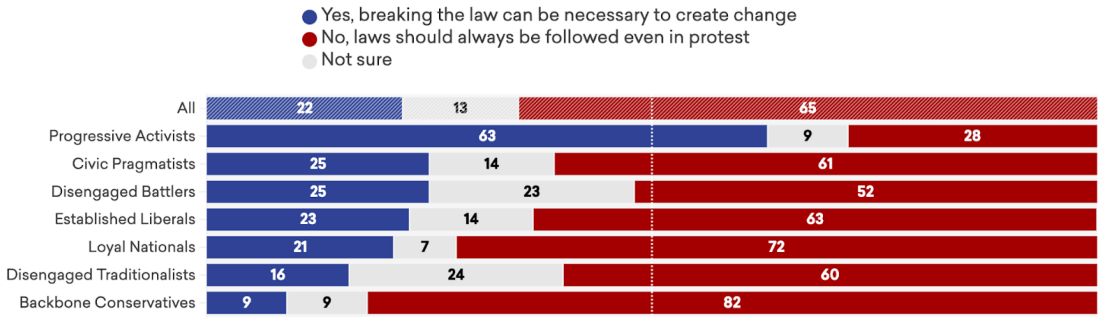
Progressive Activists are less willing than other groups to make space for debate on divisive issues. Progressive Activists are the only segment to say we should prioritise protecting people from hate speech over protecting freedom of speech, and are more likely than other groups to believe that some issues should not be subject to debate at all.



Progressive Activists are much more supportive of disruptive forms of protest. For example, they are the only segment to see Just Stop Oil as a force for good. Sixty five per cent of the public believe that blocking roads is never an acceptable form of protest, compared to just 25 per cent of Progressive Activists.

Progressive Activists are the only segment to think breaking the law can be necessary for social change

Do you believe that breaking the law (e.g., through sit-ins, trespassing, or defying court orders) is a legitimate way to protest an unfair system?



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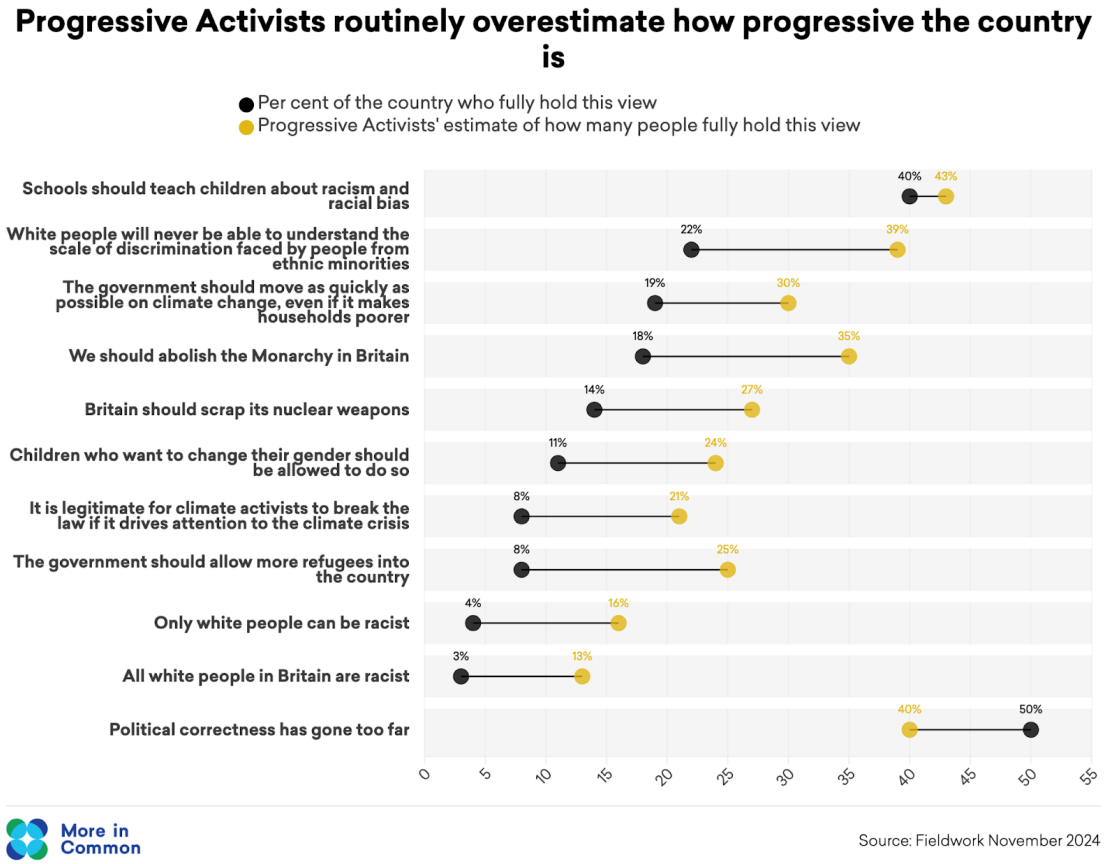
Source: More in Common • Fieldwork: November 2024

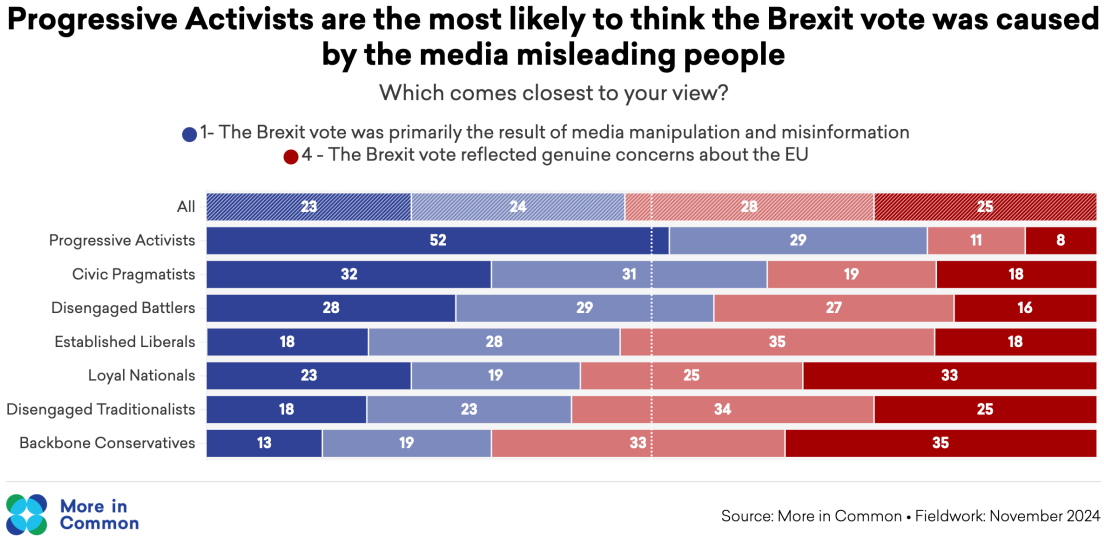
Inclusive and effective campaigning

Progressive Activists - like all campaigners - can more effectively advocate for change if they take steps to understand others' stances and motivations, rather than assuming that everyone shares their world view or denigrating the motivations of those who hold different views to their own. With a greater focus on those with different starting points, campaigners across the political spectrum can avoid reinforcing 'us versus them' dynamics. Doing so will often involve:

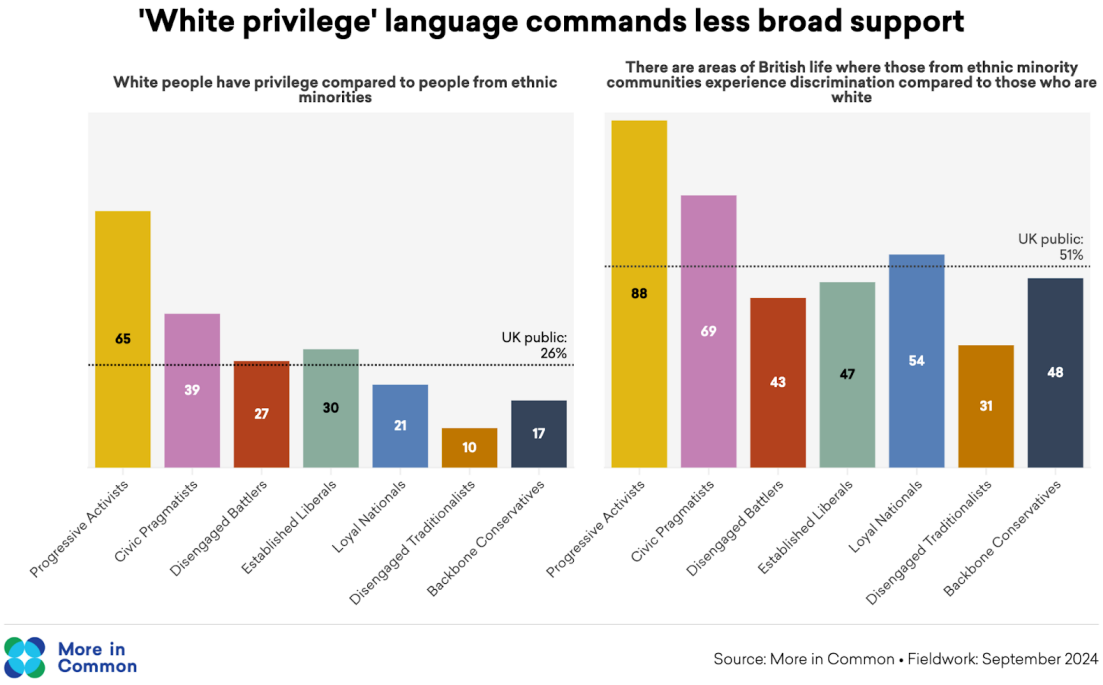
Knowing your audience: Progressive Activists tend to overestimate the extent of support for progressive causes in Britain by a factor of two or three. This can mean campaigners are less likely to see the need to expand their coalition. Campaigners who overestimate their starting support are more likely to focus on messages and tactics designed to 'activate the base' and which command 'in-group approval' rather than persuading those who are more agnostic and sceptical. For many campaigns, the starting point should be persuasion and listening.



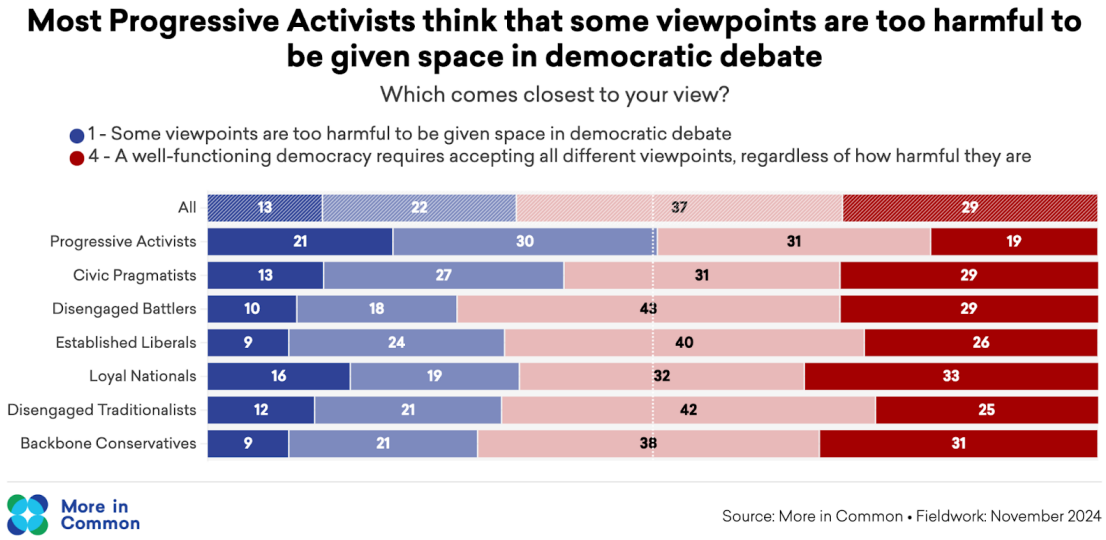
A contributory factor will be an understanding that the groups with which Progressive Activists disagree are not necessarily informed by misinformation or prejudice. It is important to understand properly *why* people with opposing views hold the beliefs that they do and to try to empathise with their starting points.



Using inclusive framing: Much of the language used by Progressive Activists is popular with other Progressive Activists and effective at mobilising their support, but falls flat with other segments. The persistence of racial discrimination is recognised across society, but the concept of white privilege is not. Using framings which reinforce 'us versus them' dynamics undermines support for progressive causes.

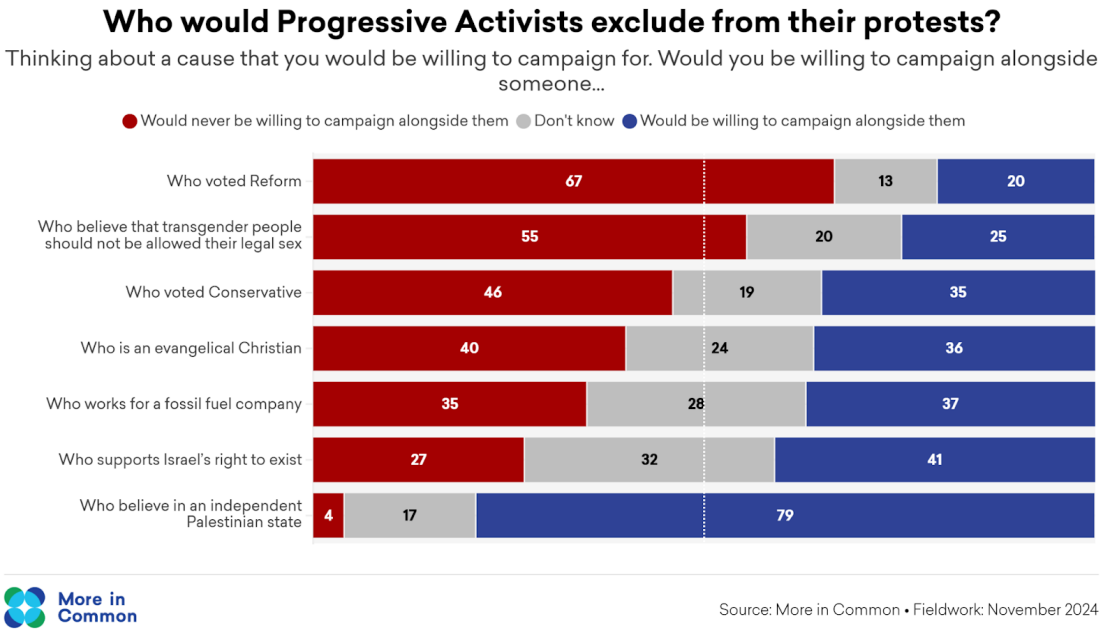


Making space for debate: Progressive Activists are unique amongst the seven segments in their greater likelihood to believe that certain viewpoints are not a legitimate feature of democratic debate. They are the only segment in which a majority (51 per cent) believe some viewpoints are too harmful to be given space in democratic debate, compared to just 33 per cent across other groups.

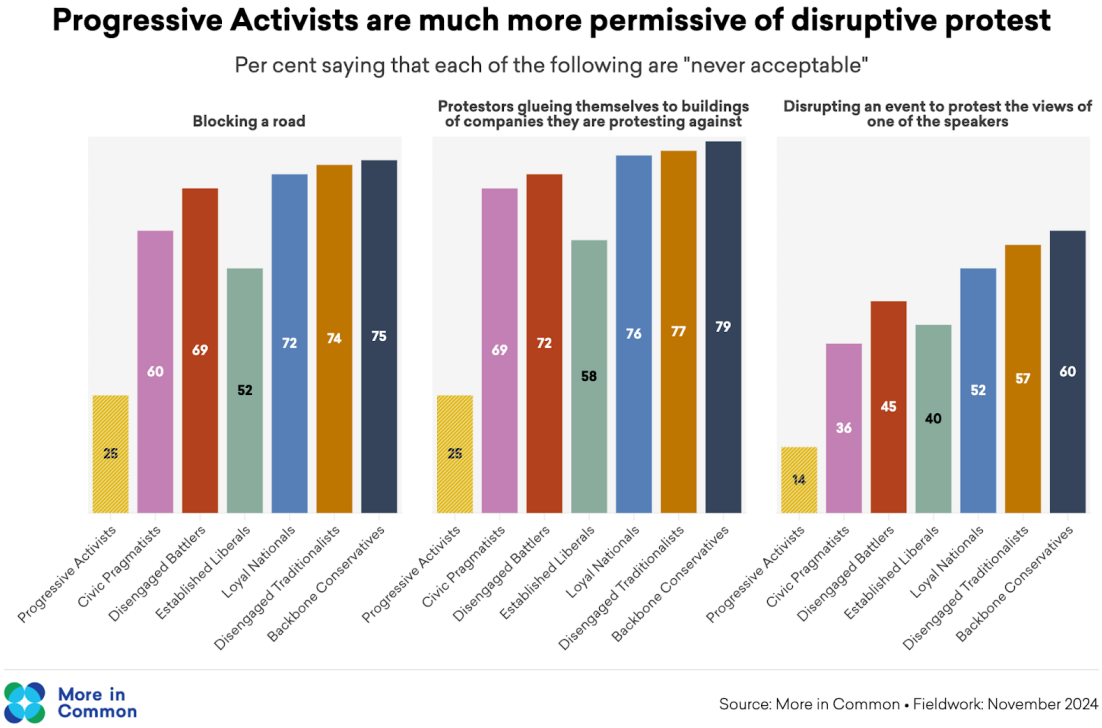


While this stance often comes from a well-meaning desire to protect marginalised groups, it can be counterproductive to campaigning goals. For example, 75 per cent of Progressive Activists consider it offensive to say immigration is making the country worse, yet this is something 66 per cent of the population either fully or somewhat believe. By writing off or refusing to engage with such widely held views, Progressive Activists not only lose opportunities to persuade, but also risk backlash for being seen to hold the views of others in disdain.

Build broad coalitions: Progressive Activists have a tendency to require comprehensive ideological alignment in their campaigns. In fact, public opinion rarely aligns perfectly along fixed ideological lines. For example, many support climate action while opposing immigration, or favour decriminalisation of drugs while supporting capital punishment. Yet nearly half of Progressive Activists would be unwilling to campaign for a cause they believe in alongside a Conservative. Perhaps more shocking still, 27 per cent would not campaign alongside somebody who believes in Israel's right to exist. By demanding complete ideological alignment, progressive movements artificially limit their potential support base.



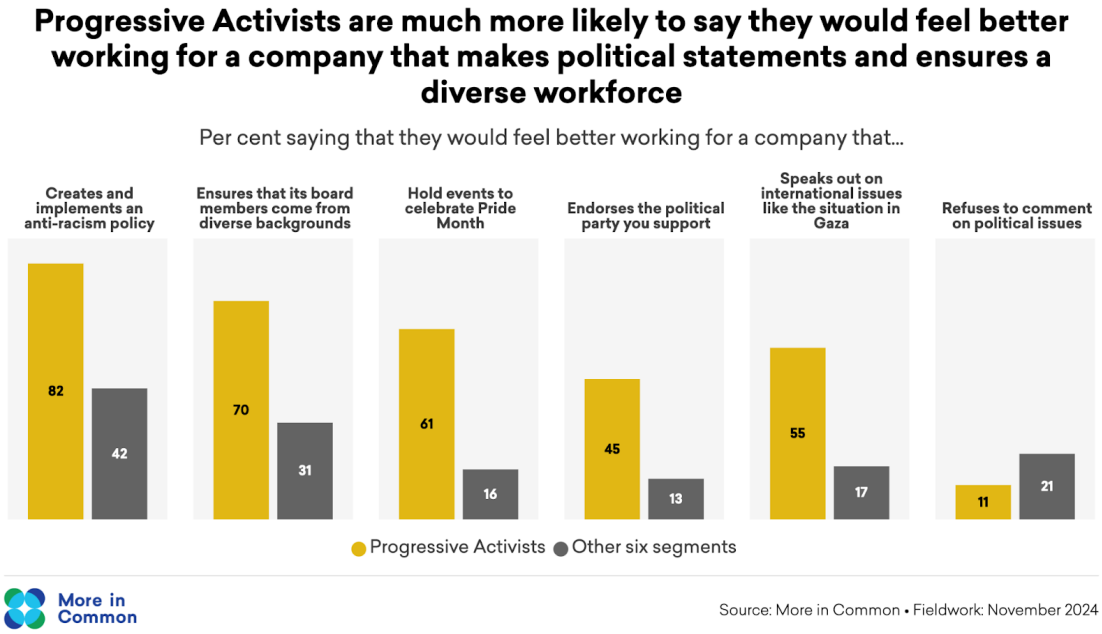
Not all publicity is good publicity: Progressive Activists and the general public view protest differently. Sixty five per cent of the public say road blocking is never an acceptable form of protest, compared to only a quarter of Progressive Activists. When protesters clash with police, Progressive Activists typically blame police while the public sides with law enforcement. What Progressive Activists see as heroic activism, the public often views as criminal behaviour.



As a result, maximising media coverage through disruptive tactics can actively harm rather than help progressive causes, even when the underlying issues have broad public support, such as the need for action to tackle climate change. This suggests that there is a need for more strategic consideration of when disruptive protest is truly effective.

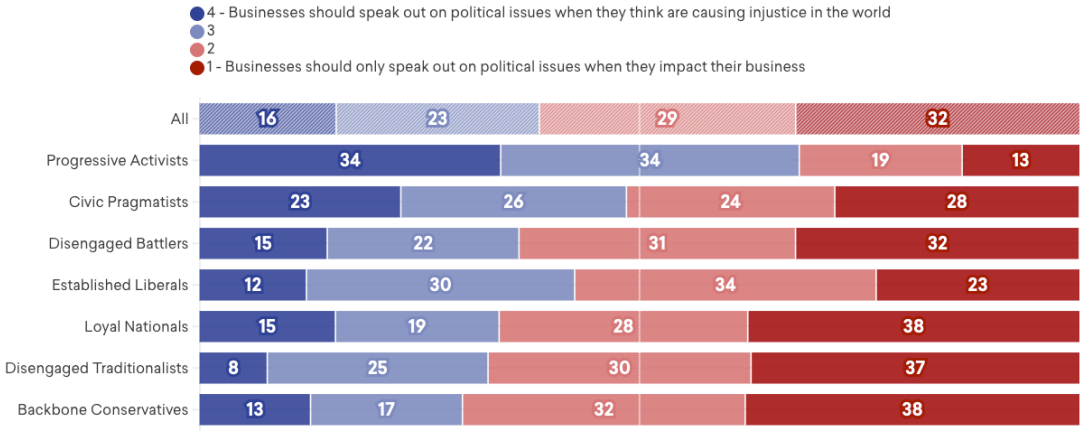
Progressive Activists in the workforce

Progressive Activists have unique expectations of their workplaces. They are much more likely than average to prioritise having a job which makes a positive impact on the world, where there is ability to influence management decisions and where the employer speaks out publicly on important social issues.



Progressive Activists' desire for businesses to speak out on political issues can hinder the progress of civil society organisations. Progressive Activists are the only segment to think that businesses should speak out on political issues not related to their core activity or function. Conversations with charity leaders highlight a growing number of fraught internal discussions about the boundaries of a charity's mission. In some cases these discussions about what it is and is not appropriate for a charity to publicly comment on has led to internal conflict and distracted charities from delivery of their stated mission.

Progressive Activists are the only segment to think that businesses should speak out on political issues even if they do not impact their business



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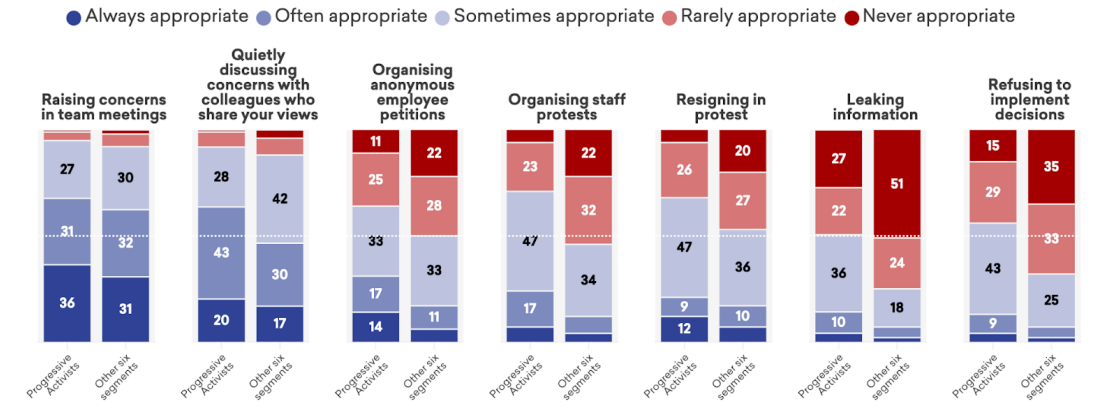
Source: More in Common • November 2024

Progressive Activists are more comfortable with disruptive internal activism within organisations. Progressive Activists are almost twice as likely as other segments to say that it is often or always appropriate to organise employee protests or anonymous petitions, or refuse to implement decisions when staff disagree with management. They are also uniquely likely to raise their political views in the workplace. Thirty eight per cent of Progressive Activists say that it is better to speak out against colleagues' political views at work, compared to much lower rates among other segments. Greater levels of remote working seem to have exacerbated some of these dynamics, with activist staff more likely to behave more aggressively in online staff forums or message boards than they would in person.

Progressive Activists are much more supportive of disruptive workplace protest

When employees disagree with decisions made by management, how appropriate or inappropriate would you say each of the following responses are?



More in Common

Source: More in Common • Fieldwork: November 2024

After polling of over a thousand Progressive Activists and holding one-to-one conversations with a dozen charity leaders, we have identified a number of steps that may prove useful to organisations with a largely a progressive workforce:

- Make space for constructive conversations and feedback: Create regular, in-person forums for staff to raise concerns. Be clear that, once discussions have occurred, decisions by senior management are final, therefore minimising the need for informal channels for communicating concerns.
- Instill a culture of boundaries: Where staff think that it is important to speak out on political issues beyond an organisation's core mission, it can be helpful to be able to rely on agreed guidelines for when this is and is not appropriate, minimising the need for a new discussion every time a topic of political or social controversy emerges.
- Build robust boards: Trustees and non-executive directors should ultimately approve guidelines on what organisations will and will not speak out on. When those policies have been approved, senior management should know that they have the backing of the board to enforce them.
- Use inductions effectively: Information on organisational focus and boundaries can form part of employee inductions, setting clear expectations at recruitment stage of what is and is not acceptable within the workplace.
- Recruit a diverse workforce: Organisations should review their hiring practices to ensure that they are not inadvertently screening out candidates who share the organisation's core mission but have different perspectives and worldviews. Interview panels should include diverse viewpoints, including charity beneficiaries where appropriate. Creating an environment where reasonable disagreement is acceptable and dominant viewpoints do not become so entrenched that alternative perspectives are dismissed without consideration.

Three Progressive Activist archetypes

Drawing on a study of over 1,000 Progressive Activists, this report also introduces a framework for better understanding dynamics within Progressive Activist groups, through three Progressive Activist archetypes:

Undogmatic Progressives

This group holds more moderate progressive views and see politics as less central to their identity. They are more open to compromise on certain issues, and less restrictive about who should or should not be involved in progressive campaigns.

Quiet Ideologues

Hold strong progressive beliefs and share the same fundamental worldview as Vocal Ideologues, but prefer not to express these views publicly or challenge authority directly. Despite their strongly held convictions, they are more likely to work within existing organisational structures and avoid workplace confrontation.

Vocal Ideologues

The most outspoken and activist-oriented of the three groups, they see their political beliefs as central to their identity and feel compelled to speak out against perceived injustice wherever they encounter it. They are more willing to challenge authority, and support disruptive tactics, and believe that organisations have a responsibility to take a stand on social justice issues beyond their immediate mission.

Introduction

Why study Progressive Activists?

In 2020 More in Common released 'Britain's Choice', one of the largest studies to date into the social psychology and moral worldviews of the British public. At the heart of the study was a segmentation of British public opinion drawn up not on demographic lines or a simple left and right axis but according to people's upstream beliefs and values. We call this the British Seven segments.

As an organisation focused on amplifying the voices of groups normally overlooked in Westminster and media discussions, much of More in Common's work in the intervening years has centred on exploring the attitudes of groups that are more politically disengaged and have low levels of trust in politics and institutions (Disengaged Battlers and Disengaged Traditionalists). These disengaged groups feel excluded from mainstream political conversation and often only become the focus of elite attention after an unexpected political event, such as the vote to leave the European Union. More in Common's work has also focused on those segments who have been most decisive in shaping the course of UK politics and campaigning, in particular the Loyal Nationals (a socially conservative and economically left-leaning segment), who best reflect the group of voters that shifted from Labour to the Conservatives during the 2010s delivering Boris Johnson's majority in 2019, but abandoned the Conservatives in 2024.

The focus of this report is different. It looks at the most politically engaged and vocal of the British Seven Segments: Progressive Activists. Despite making up around 10 per cent of the population, Progressive Activists have an outsized influence on social discourse due to their active presence on social media and their tendency to work in activism, the arts and culture and politics. Progressive Activists are also outliers in their views, particularly on social and cultural issues. Sometimes that means that they are harbingers of social progress, while at other times it can lead to them becoming combatants in so-called 'culture wars'. Progressive Activists most often come into conflict with other groups either through directly instigating clashes with more socially conservative audiences or by triggering backlash against what have become known as their more 'woke' perspectives.

Activists are an important part of any democracy. At their most effective, activists can mobilise wider swathes of the public to take action on issues overlooked by elites. This in turn can drive meaningful change in policies and attitudes. A healthy democracy requires effective activists, on the right and the left, to drive change. Without activists, many of the moves towards making the UK a fairer and more equal society over the last century would not have happened.

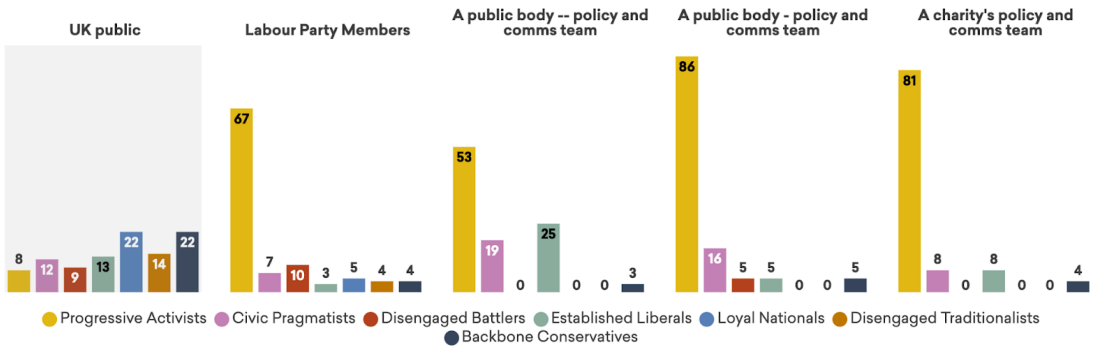
Outside of direct activism, Progressive Activists are important because more than other segments they are motivated by doing jobs which they see as contributing to social good.

As such, they provide the backbone to much of the charity sector, particularly national campaigning organisations. More in Common workshops with charities have found that advocacy and campaigning teams in particular tend to be dominated by Progressive Activists. These organisations would not be able to function without a large group of people willing to forgo potentially better paid roles in order to work on causes they care about.

More in Common's workshops with public sector bodies has found that Progressive Activists also tend to be overrepresented in policy and communications roles in these organisations. These jobs also often involve sacrificing higher pay available in the private sector and so rely on people with a greater desire to work in a mission-centred role and/or where they can have influence over policy. Progressive Activists are also more likely to work in public bodies because they, by inclination, are more likely to believe in the power of the state (rather than simply individuals or businesses) to solve social issues.

Progressive Activists are overrepresented in certain workplaces and membership organisations

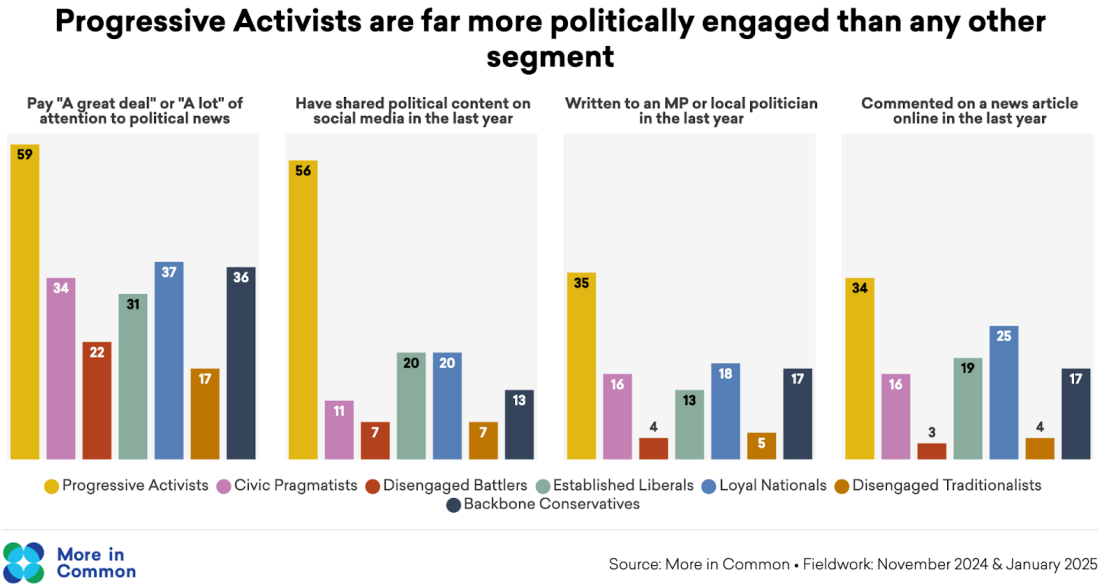
Makeup off each group



More in Common

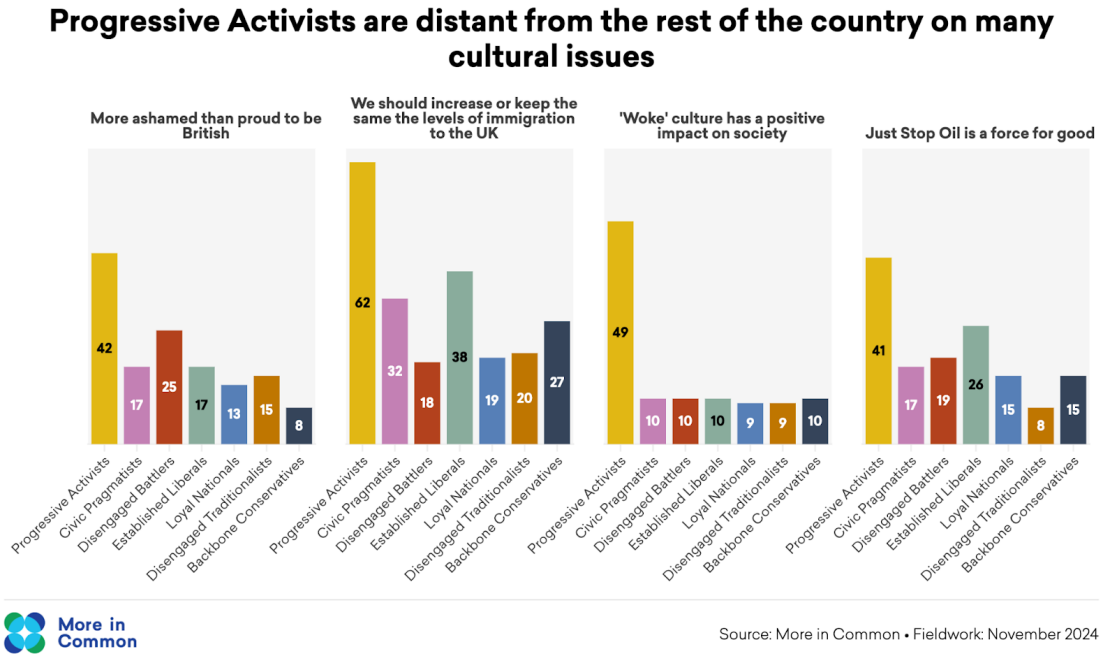
Source: More in Common • UK public fieldwork: November 2024
Based on polling of Labour Party members and organisations that have taken the Seven Segments questionnaire

Progressive Activists are also the most vocal group in many political debates. Fifty six per cent of Progressive Activists say they have shared political content on social media in the last year, compared to just 14 per cent of the rest of the population. Similarly, Progressive Activists are almost three times more likely to have written to their Member of Parliament or local politician in the last year compared to the other six segments, and are twice as likely to have commented on a news article online.



The consequence of that overrepresentation on social media or in political debates can lead to an assumption that a larger group of the public share Progressive Activists' views than actually do. That in turn can distort political consideration or media coverage of an issue or, through the echo-chamber effect, risks Progressive Activists themselves thinking that more people share their views than do so in reality. The adage 'Twitter is not Britain' was borne out of correcting this way of thinking. It is therefore helpful to have a more forensic understanding of how and where Progressive Activists' views differ from those of others, and where they overlap; otherwise, we risk having a warped view of UK public opinion.

A further reason to study Progressive Activists in more detail is that their views appear to be drifting further away from mainstream British public opinion. On questions about British society and history, Progressive Activists' views are worlds apart from mainstream opinion, as are the attitudes they tend to hold towards the more socially conservative viewpoints held by broader swathes of the public.



If campaigners are to be effective, it is important to be aware of the differences between the views of campaigners and those of the wider public. Ignoring these divergences risks campaigners speaking only to themselves and becoming ever more distant from mainstream opinion, rather than persuading more people to support a cause and making real progress.

Indeed, in recent years more progressive campaigns have faltered because of their inability to build a broad-based coalition for change. This is most visible in the success of Donald Trump in the 2024 US election. Trump's election was, for some voters, a reaction against what they saw as progressive excess and an unnecessarily large focus on issues the majority might consider more fringe, at the expense of fundamental issues such as the economy. More in Common's post-election research in the US found that voters were likely to think that Democrats prioritised progressive social issues over economic concerns.

There are examples of this in the UK too. For example, the proportion of people supporting transgender people's right to change their legal sex has fallen from 58 per cent in 2016 to just 30 per cent in 2022, in spite of the fact that campaigning on this issue has been its most vocal during that period.

The tone, absolutism and prioritisation of some campaigns have undoubtedly hampered progressive causes in recent years. So too has the desire to seek in-group approval over reaching out to create a broad-based coalition for change. Of course, Progressive Activists are not solely to blame for the rise of so-called 'culture wars'. By their nature, these conflicts involve combatants on both sides and conflict entrepreneurs from across the political spectrum who have incentives to weaponise issues to sow division. Indeed, sometimes it

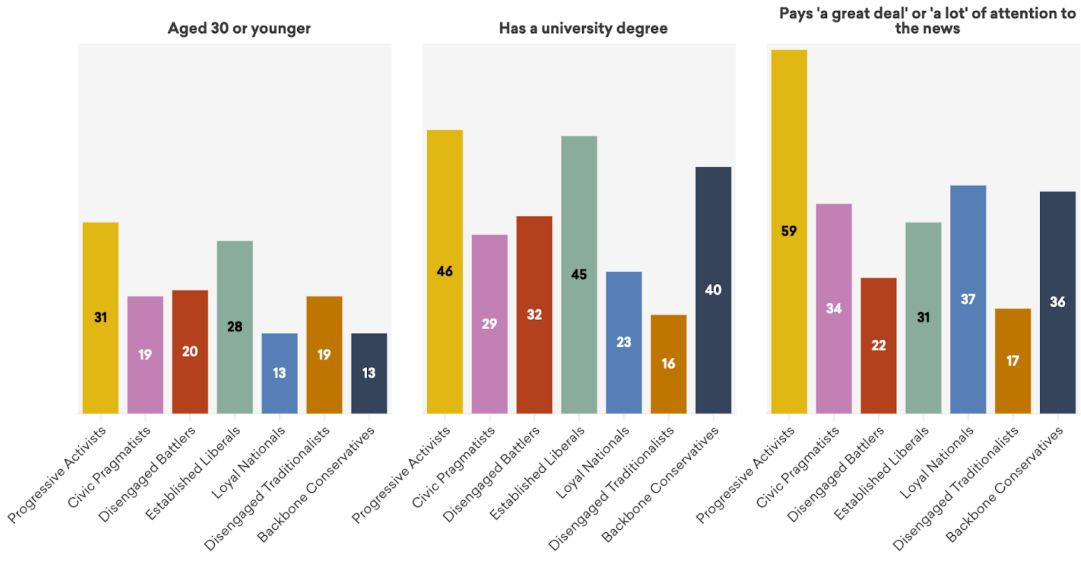
can feel as though progressives and those on the right are deliberately working to inflame one another on some of these issues. That said, the work of social change is often more complex than to just maintain the status quo and greater introspection could help make Progressive Activists' campaigning more effective, particularly in a landscape where the pendulum seems to be swinging against some progressive causes.

Who are Progressive Activists?

Progressive Activists are the youngest of the British Seven segments, but Progressive Activists can be found in every age group and generation. The average age of a Progressive Activist is 41 and 31 per cent of Progressive Activists are over 50.

Progressive Activists are found across Britain, but they are most concentrated in urban centres, particularly in university towns and cities. They are the most likely of any segment to have higher education qualifications: 46 per cent of Progressive Activists have a degree, including 20 per cent who have a postgraduate degree. Their worldview is dominant in academia. Their qualifications mean that many Progressive Activists have high incomes, yet very few of them own a home and many are in student debt, making them a lower wealth segment.

Progressive Activists by age, education, and political engagement



More in Common

Source: More in Common • Fieldwork: November 2024

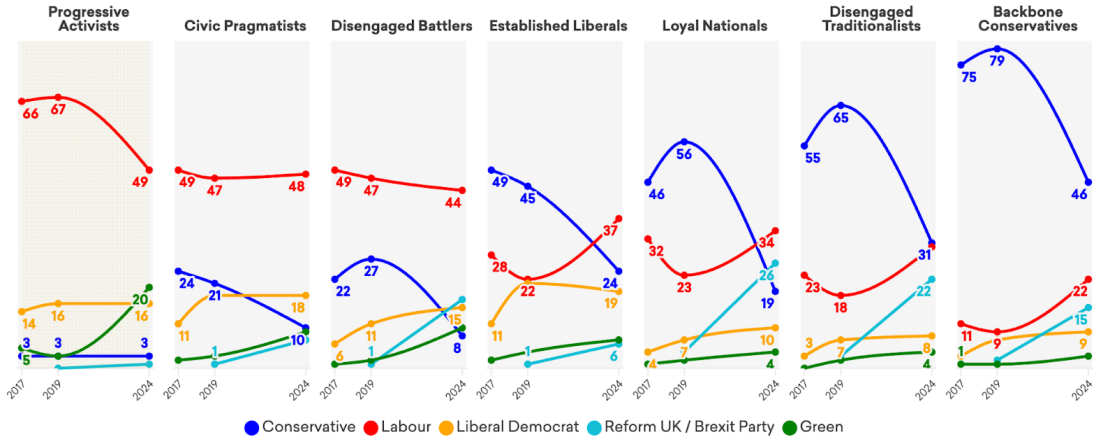
Making up around eight to ten per cent of the British adult population, Progressive Activists are among the smallest of the segments.

Progressive Activists, however, are not defined by demographics. Instead, what unites them are their unique beliefs and worldviews. This has been identified using More in

Common's core values research, which draws on a range of theories from social psychology.

Progressive Activists think globally and are motivated to fight inequality and injustice. Their sense of personal identity is connected to their strong political and social beliefs. They are often supporters of Labour, the Greens and, in Scotland, the SNP, although the proportion of Progressive Activists supporting Labour fell in the 2024 General Election, even as the party made gains elsewhere. Progressive Activists like to take part in debates and have their voice heard. They are far more active than any other group in posting about politics on social media and are big consumers of news from many sources, with The Guardian newspaper a favourite.

Progressive Activists swung away from Labour more than any other segment at this year's General Election



More in Common

Source: More in Common, July 2024

About the British Seven segmentation

Progressive Activists are just one segment within our British Seven segmentation. Every member of the British public falls into one group. This is a psychographic, values-based segmentation of the British public which in many cases is more predictive of beliefs on certain issues than other demographics. The seven segments are:

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

Civic Pragmatists: A group that cares about others, at home or abroad, and whose members are turned off by the divisiveness of politics. They are charitable, concerned, exhausted, community-minded, open to compromise and socially liberal.

Disengaged Battlers: A group that feels that they are just keeping their heads above water, and who blame the system for its unfairness. They are tolerant, insecure, disillusioned, disconnected, overlooked and socially liberal.

Established Liberals: A group that has done well and means well towards others, but also sees a lot of good in the status quo. They are comfortable, privileged, cosmopolitan, trusting, confident and pro-market.

Loyal Nationals: A group that is anxious about the threats facing Britain and facing themselves. They are proud, patriotic, tribal, protective, threatened, aggrieved and frustrated about the gap between the haves and the have-nots.

Disengaged Traditionalists: A group that values a well-ordered society, takes pride in hard work, and wants strong leadership that keeps people in line. They are self-reliant, ordered, patriotic, tough-minded, suspicious and disconnected.

Backbone Conservatives: A group who are proud of their country, optimistic about Britain's future and who follow the news, mostly via traditional media sources. They are nostalgic, patriotic, proud, secure, confident and engaged with politics.

More information about the segments can be found at
https://www.britainschoice.uk/segments/

How to read this report

This report has three sections. The first explores the unique viewpoints and values of Progressive Activists and how they overlap with those of the wider public and where they differ. This section also introduces a new segmentation of Progressive Activists, which helps explain some of the key dynamics but also differences within this group.

The second chapter explores how progressives (and all those interested in social change) could make their campaigning and advocacy more inclusive and effective. The lessons and recommendations should be applicable to campaigns and campaigners regardless of their political persuasion - but with a particular focus on some of the common pitfalls in modern progressive campaigns. The chapter explores how to build an advocacy approach that encourages rather than chastises, and that meets people where they are rather than expecting them to be fully aligned with the cause in question from the outset. Such an approach could help Progressive Activists avoid falling into the trap that has led to so many culture war escalations and defeats in recent years.

The third chapter considers the unique position of Progressive Activists in the workplace. This chapter draws on over a dozen interviews with CEOs of charities and senior leaders in organisations that employ large numbers of Progressive Activists, as well as on focus group conversations and polling of Progressive Activists themselves. The chapter attempts

to explain why so many of these workplaces have found themselves embroiled in toxic internal divisions and how internal activism has ultimately stifled their ability to drive change in the world. It provides recommendations for both leaders and employees of these organisations of ways in which they could resolve these tensions and become more effective.

Chapter 1: What do Progressive Activists think?

British public opinion cannot be divided neatly along a left-right axis. The British Seven segments instead illustrate how British public opinion clusters and diverges across different issues in different combinations, much like a shifting kaleidoscope. It does not make sense to think of the Progressive Activist worldview as simply at one of the 'extreme' ends of a linear spectrum, with the other segments neatly lined up behind them from left to right.

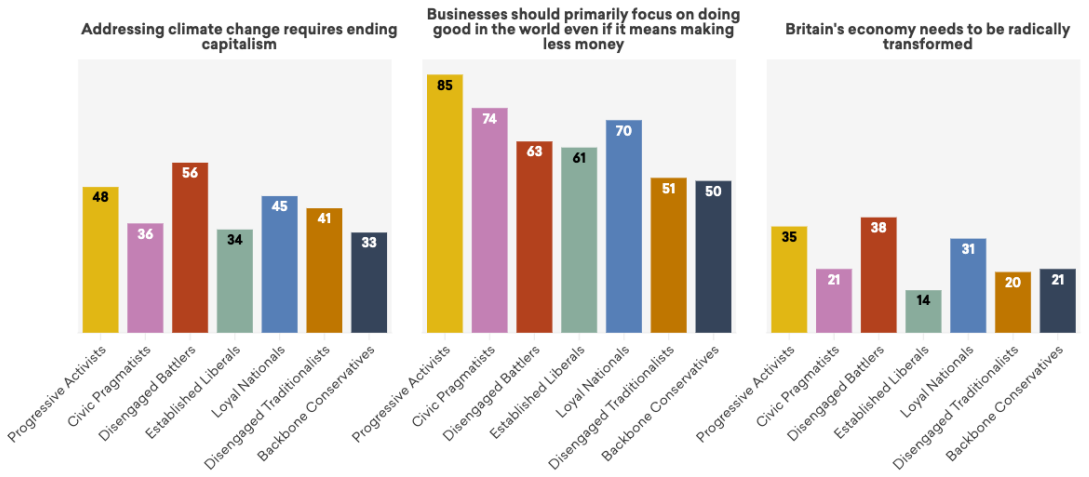
On some issues, particularly those relating to the economy, Progressive Activists' opinions are close to the public median. Where opinions diverge tends to be on cultural and social issues.

This chapter sets out how the Progressive Activist worldview aligns with and differs from those of other segments. It then explores the drivers of these differences, comparing Progressive Activists with the other segments in terms of living situations and life satisfaction, and their social psychology and drivers. The end of this chapter introduces three Progressive Activist archetypes, a new segmentation of Progressive Activists that helps better explain the dynamics within this group.

Progressive Activists on the economy

While Progressive Activists' views on social and cultural issues diverge significantly from those of the rest of the British population, there is more common ground when it comes to the economy.

Progressive Activists' starting points on the economy are comparable to other left-leaning segments



More in Common

Source: More in Common • Fieldwork: November 2024

To highlight this, Progressive Activists can be compared to the other three segments with broadly left-leaning economic views - Civic Pragmatists, Disengaged Battlers, and Loyal Nationals:

Civic Pragmatists

On many issues, Civic Pragmatists are the most similar segment to Progressive Activists, the most significant difference between the two being that Civic Pragmatists see politics as much less important to their personal identity than Progressive Activists and tend to express themselves through civic, rather than political, engagement. Civic Pragmatists also have a tendency to avoid conflict, which can mean they vacate the field in heated debates leaving those with more polarising approaches to dominate discussions.

On the economy, Civic Pragmatists are most aligned with Progressive Activists on the role of businesses in society. Both segments take a sceptical view of big business, and think that corporations ought to prioritise social value over seeking profit. This is a view held by all seven segments, but is most pronounced among Progressive Activists and Civic Pragmatists. Both segments believe that people have limited individual agency and that institutions and organisations are therefore the most effective drivers of social change.

That said, Civic Pragmatists are less likely to agree with Progressive Activists on the scale of change to the current economic system that is needed. Progressive Activists are more likely to believe that a radical approach is required and to argue that the whole economic system needs to be rebuilt from scratch. Civic Pragmatists are more cautious in their approach to change and more likely to support incrementalist adjustments to the status quo.

Disengaged Battlers

Disengaged Battlers are the most economically insecure group. Their lived experience of insecurity informs their views on the economy; they are the segment of society most disadvantaged by the status quo. Along with Progressive Activists, Disengaged Battlers are the group most likely to say the system is not working, that big business is a force for bad in the UK and to express a negative opinion of capitalism.

Disengaged Battlers are also the most likely to be working multiple jobs, say that they often have to go without essentials like food and heating and to think that the cost of living crisis will never end. When Progressive Activists talk about the victims of inequity and social injustice, they tend to be thinking about Disengaged Battlers.

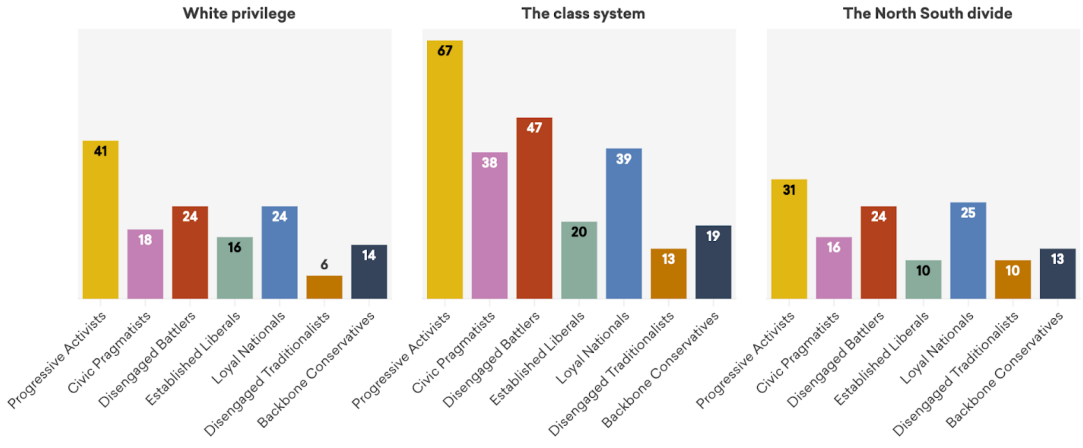
It is unsurprising therefore that Disengaged Battlers often express the most radical solutions for the country's current economic malaise. They are the most likely to say that our economy needs to be radically transformed and, along with Progressive Activists, are the only segment to say that we should focus on ending capitalism rather than on trying to

make capitalism more ethical. While their personal struggles often translate to apathy and not voting (Disengaged Battlers were the segment least likely to vote in the 2024 General Election),they also express this radicalism and desire to tear up the system at the ballot box. Reform UK received the second highest number of votes from Disengaged Battlers in the July 2024 election, with a 17 per cent vote share of this group's votes (beaten only by Labour). Pro-Gaza independent candidates also performed strongly with this group in many parts of the country.

While Disengaged Battlers share Progressive Activists' radicalism on economic change, few are actively involved in campaigning. In part, this is simply because Disengaged Battlers are a time-poor segment, often working multiple jobs and therefore having little time to get involved in activism. Yet it is also because Disengaged Battlers do not see societal problems through the same structural or abstracted lens as Progressive Activists.

Progressive Activists take a more structural understanding of inequality in Britain

Proportion saying that each of the following power structures have "a great deal of influence" in Britain today



More in Common

Source: More in Common • Fieldwork: November 2024

Progressive Activists tend to see inequality in society through the lens of the large power structures they believe enforce inequality: white privilege, the class system, systemic racism et cetera. Most other segments do not see the world in this conceptual way. Disengaged Battlers are more likely to blame a specific employer or their local council for a perceived unfairness, that is to say, organisations that they interact with on a daily basis and have a tangible relationship with. Disengaged Battlers can be alienated by progressive language that seeks to universalise their struggle or to explain it as part of a larger systemic struggle, because they see problems and seek solutions that are more immediate and personal to them.

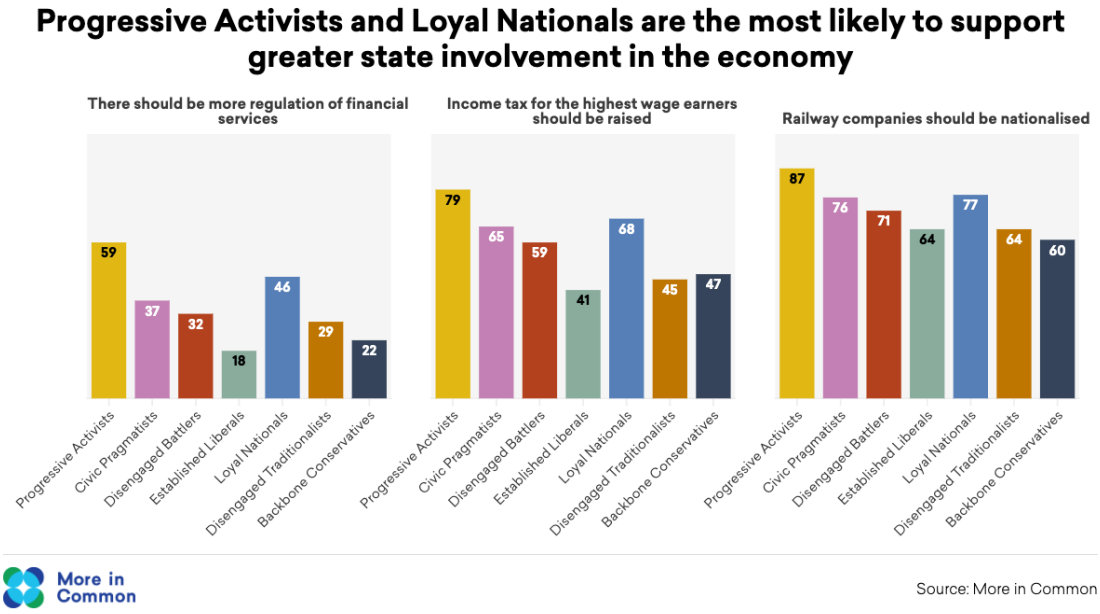
> "But it's a class system as well and that has always kept people poor (...) And that's one of the biggest issues. Equality issues in this country as well as a class system"
> Diane, Progressive Activist

> "I think something like 80% of CEOs are male, white male people. So yeah, I think it's important that we have diverse views as we know that we've got women and people who marginalised their genders and different race and ethnic backgrounds and more like to be in lower level positions and positions of power"
> Josephine, Progressive Activist

Loyal Nationals

Loyal Nationals are the segment that most resembles the typical 'Red Wall' voter. This group shifted dramatically from Labour to the Conservatives throughout the 2010s and then to Labour and Reform UK in 2024. On many issues, Loyal Nationals and Progressive Activists diverge significantly. Fifty four per cent of Loyal Nationals list immigration (either levels of overall immigration or channel crossings in particular) as one of the top three problems facing Britain today, but 81 per cent of Progressive Activists say that concerns about immigration are mostly driven by racism. A quarter of Loyal Nationals voted for Reform UK and they are the segment most likely to have a positive view of Nigel Farage; 78 per cent of Progressive Activists say they have a negative view of people who vote for Reform UK.

However, on the economy Loyal Nationals and Progressive Activists share consistently similar views and are generally the segments most likely to support interventionist policy solutions, be it through higher taxes, targeting harmful business practices or public health regulations and bans.



While much of this report emphasises the differences between Progressive Activists and the other six segments, the views they share with Loyal Nationals on the economy, the largest segment (accounting for more than a fifth of the population), are striking . In focus groups, Progressive Activists will often describe the economy in almost exactly the same language as Loyal Nationals.

> "Well, [businesses are] just going to claw everything back they can... So they're just going to make people redundant, charge consumers more because that's what they've been dealt... Like lots of companies are making people redundant now because of it"
> Carla (Charity Worker), Progressive Activist

> "I feel like [the people the economy works for has] typically been like the upper wealthier class, but now it just kind of feels like it's kind of all up in arms. But it's definitely not working for the working class. I would say, like, yeah, working class living in Manchester, you can see the real distinction between the classes and you can see that in a lot of the countries. So definitely like the people at the bottom who it's not, it's not working for. At all"
> Craig, Loyal National

> "I think capitalism just breeds inequality, like the only way people can get so rich is by exploiting people. Yes. I'd like to see something more equal"
> Sara, Progressive Activist

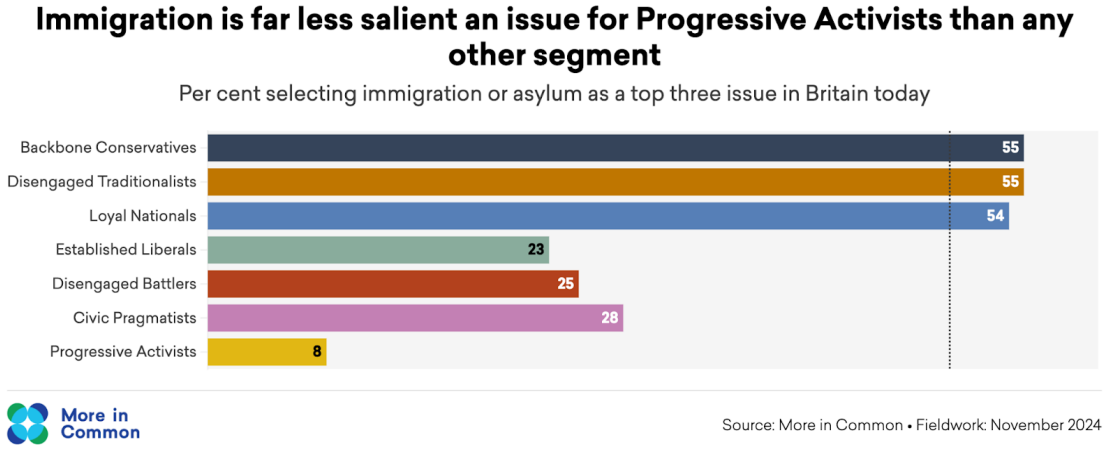
The two segments' similar economic starting points are, in part, driven by their relatively high levels of comfort with a more interventionist state, as well as heightened perceptions of injustice and unfairness in society. Both segments are particularly attuned to abuses of power: Loyal Nationals and Progressive Activists are the segments most likely to say, for example, that management will always try to get the better of employees if they get the chance, or to think that there is one rule for the rich and another for the poor.

However, economic and public health issues are where the similarities between Progressive Activists and Loyal Nationals end. The next section of this chapter highlights the extent to which Progressive Activists differ significantly from Loyal Nationals in their attitudes to social and cultural issues.

Progressive Activists on social and cultural issues

Immigration

The single issue where Progressive Activists diverge most from the rest of the population is their attitudes to immigration.



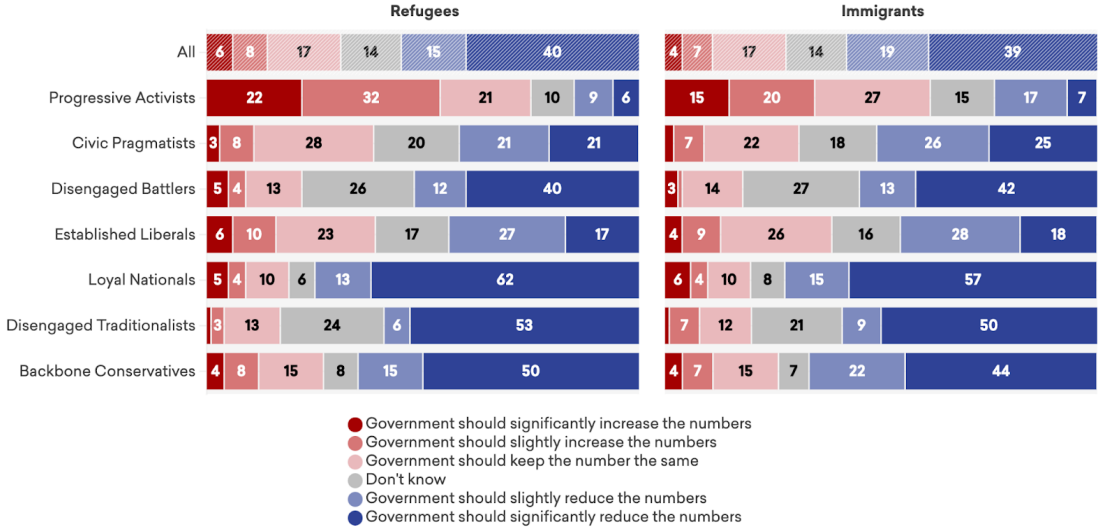
This is most visible when looking at what each segment believes are the most important issues in Britain today. While every segment lists the cost of living and the NHS among the top issues, socially conservative segments are much more likely to cite immigration. In contrast, left-leaning segments are more likely than others to list jobs and unemployment, affordable housing and mental health. Yet even among the three more socially liberal segments - Established Liberals, Disengaged Battlers and Civic Pragmatists - around a quarter give immigration as a top-three priority. In contrast, fewer than 10 per cent of Progressive Activists say the same.

The low salience of immigration is driven by Progressive Activists' unique views on the issue. Progressive Activists are the only segment more likely to believe we should take in more immigrants or maintain the current level of immigration than to think we should

decrease the level of immigration. Sixty two per cent of Progressive Activists think we should increase or maintain levels of immigration to the UK, compared to just 28 per cent across the other segments.

Progressive Activists' views are even more divergent on the topic of refugees. Fifty four per cent of Progressive Activists think that we should increase the number of refugees who are taken into Britain each year, compared to just 10 per cent of the rest of the population.

Progressive Activists the only segment more likely to think we should increase than decrease the number of refugees and immigrants accepted into the country each year



More in Common

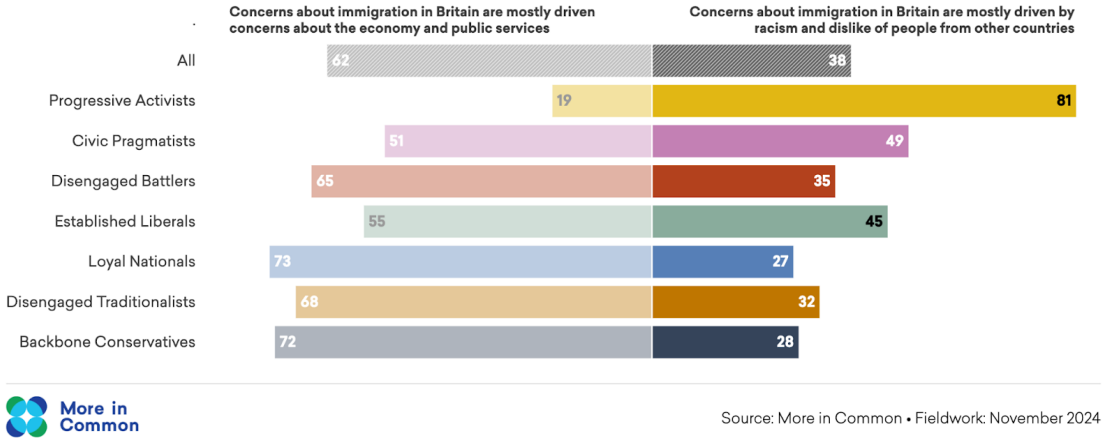
Source: More in Common • Fieldwork: November 2024

This is not to say that other groups are unconcerned about those fleeing conflict, or that they do not see economic value in a certain level of immigration. Instead, they think that the current balance is wrong, that the downsides are outweighing the benefits, and that politicians have failed to deliver on their repeated promises to control immigration. To be explicitly *pro* higher immigration is an increasingly rare view in British public opinion and is now largely confined to this Progressive Activist segment.

Another unique aspect of Progressive Activists' views on immigration is an inability to empathise with those concerned about immigration or to seek to understand the reasons for this concern. Of those who want to cut the numbers of immigrants coming to the UK, the primary reasons listed are increased pressure on public services and on the housing market. Yet Progressive Activists are more likely to say that anti-immigration concerns are expressions of racism: 81 per cent of Progressive Activists say that concerns about immigration in Britain are mostly driven by racism and by dislike of people from other countries rather than concerns about the economy or public services, a view that is held by

just 34 per cent of people in other segments and just 18 per cent of people who list immigration among their top-three issues facing Britain.

Progressive Activists are the only segment more likely to say that concerns about immigration are more driven by racism than economic concerns



More in Common

Source: More in Common • Fieldwork: November 2024

In focus groups, Progressive Activists are much more likely to say that people oppose immigration because they have been misled (by the media, misinformation or opportunistic politicians) than they are to take people's concerns about immigration seriously and at face value.

> "I think underlying this, there is an awful lot of misinformation, disinformation going on. They're persuading a lot of people that life's not great for them and as usual, pointing at the immigrants as one issue and saying it's all the immigrants' fault. I feel we've got a lot of inequality in this country. I think the cost of living is still biting hard for a lot of people. Housing is a massive issue for all ages really, but especially for the young adults. And so I think they're big issues for the UK, but I think that some media and some online voices, politicians, I think they're persuading people that this is all down to immigration"
> Steve, Progressive Activist

> "I think they [people who oppose immigration] failed to realise how valuable the immigrants are in the country, like NHS care homes and all the big, big companies, all have immigrants working there. So they're basically a powerhouse to the country and they fail to realise"
> Shria, Progressive Activist

This unwillingness to appreciate the spectrum of reasons for which people oppose immigration in good faith makes it much more difficult for progressive campaigners who want to advocate for a more open immigration policy to make a persuasive argument.

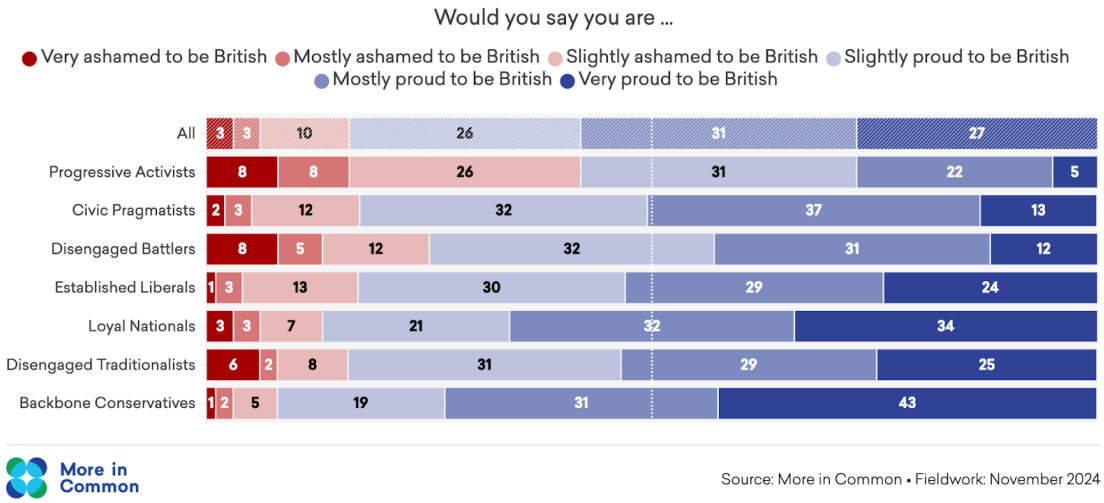
Given that most Progressive Activists' starting point is that concerns about immigration are driven either by prejudice or misinformation, it is harder for them to develop campaigns and messaging that address the concerns of the more persuadable sections of the population.

Britain in the world

Progressive Activists' outlier views on immigration sit alongside unique views on Britain's role in the world, in both history and the modern day.

While the majority of Progressive Activists say that they are proud to be British, they are much less likely to say this than any of the other segments: 58 per cent of Progressive Activists say they are proud to be British, compared to 86 per cent across other groups. Meanwhile, Progressive Activists are almost six times less likely to say they are 'very' proud to be British when compared to the rest of the nation (five per cent versus 28 per cent).

Progressive Activists are much more likely to say they are ashamed to be British



Asked about Britain's role in the world, Progressive Activists are much more likely to focus on what they regard as the oppressive nature of Britain's institutions over the centuries rather than on the achievements of Britain or Britons.

> "The effects of slavery have actually gone on very long. I believe the British state was still paying compensation to the estates of slave slaveholders until the 1990s, so it's not that long ago. I think one of the aspects of British history that's often not spoken up enough as well as all of the negative aspects"
> Matt, Progressive Activist

> "This is a very hard question for me to answer because I am not that brushed up on our history. I'll be honest, but my instinct would really to say I'm a little bit ashamed of our history"
> Ceri, Progressive Activist

> "Yeah, I mean there are some things that we should be proud of and there are some things that we should be terribly ashamed of. If you look at the wealth of this country, the majority of it is linked to slavery and we're turning around and not acknowledging that"
> Michael, Progressive Activist

> "The fact that for me, if you look at what we're taught with schools as well, the biggest part of the history that you taught schools is about war programmes about war. We won the war, we're the best, we're the best fighters. We ruled the waves and all that sort of stuff. Yeah, and I think that's a bit of a shame"
> Paul, Progressive Activist

That said, there are many things that do make many Progressive Activists proud to be British, including the NHS and Britain's historic leadership on civil rights issues such as universal suffrage and workers' rights.

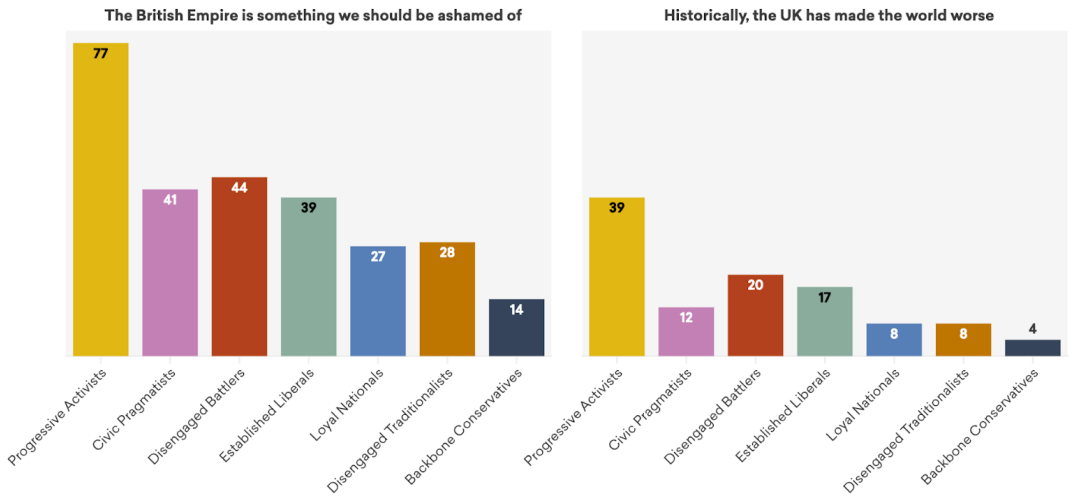
> "The introduction of the welfare state from the Liberals and then Labour in the post-war settlement. And that's actually something where British people have actually done things that were really something that other countries could copy or that really drove things forward. And until recent decades, the NHS was actually considered world beating"
> Matt, Progressive Activist

On the whole, however, Progressive Activists' perception of Britain's role in the world is significantly more negative than that of the rest of the country. For example, the majority of people in every other segment say that the British Empire is something we should be proud of, compared to just 23 per cent of Progressive Activists. Progressive Activists are also the only segment that tends to say that Britain historically has made the world a worse place, whereas every other segment says Britain has made the world better.

> "We've got to look at generational trauma as well and we need to be looking at how we can sensitively keep what happened with slavery and other issues in the forefront of our consciousness collectively in order to learn from those mistakes (...) Street names need to be changed, statues need to go. I think that we do need to basically

> make a stand on how we feel as a society about this and not push it under the carpet"
> Elizabeth, Progressive Activist

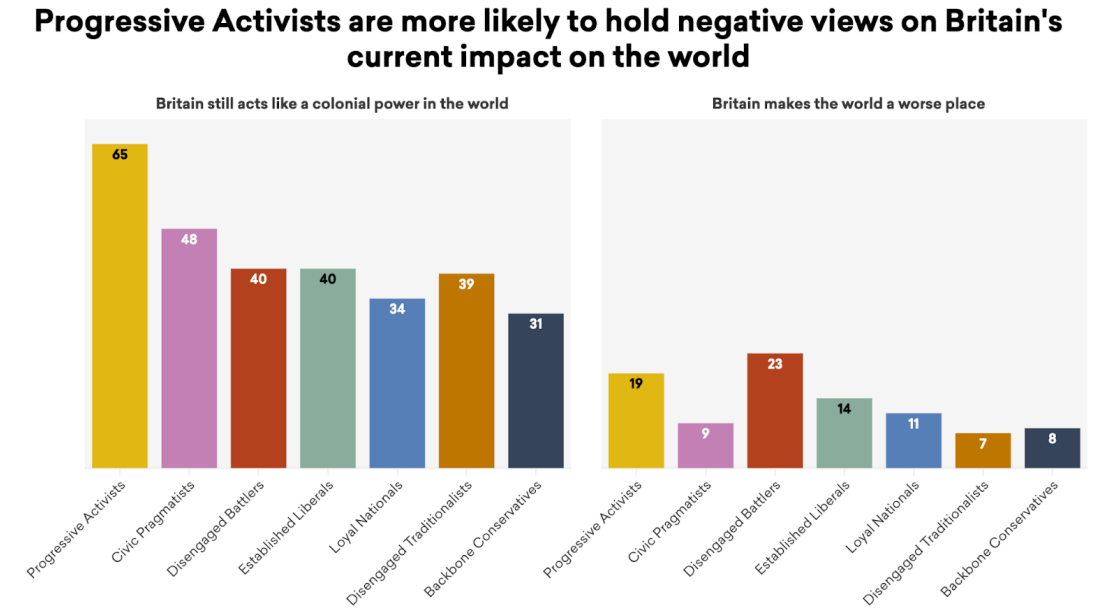
Progressive Activists are almost twice as likely to hold negative views of the historical impact of Britain in the world than any other segment



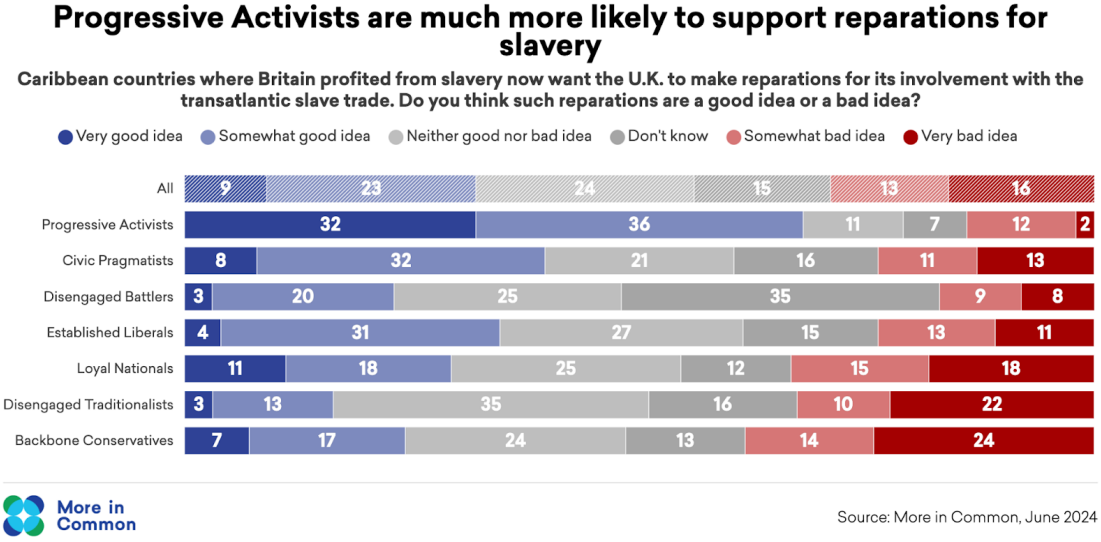
More in Common

Source: More in Common • Fieldwork: November 2024

This critical vision of Britain's impact extends to the present day. Progressive Activists are the only segment where a majority say that 'Britain still acts like a colonial power in the world', and they are less likely than any other segment to say that Britain currently makes the world a better place.



This more negative perception of British pride and Britain's role in the world makes Progressive Activists more likely to be cynical of displays of patriotism from politicians and also makes them more supportive of restorative measures overseas, such as reparations, which they see as atonement for Britain's historical guilt.



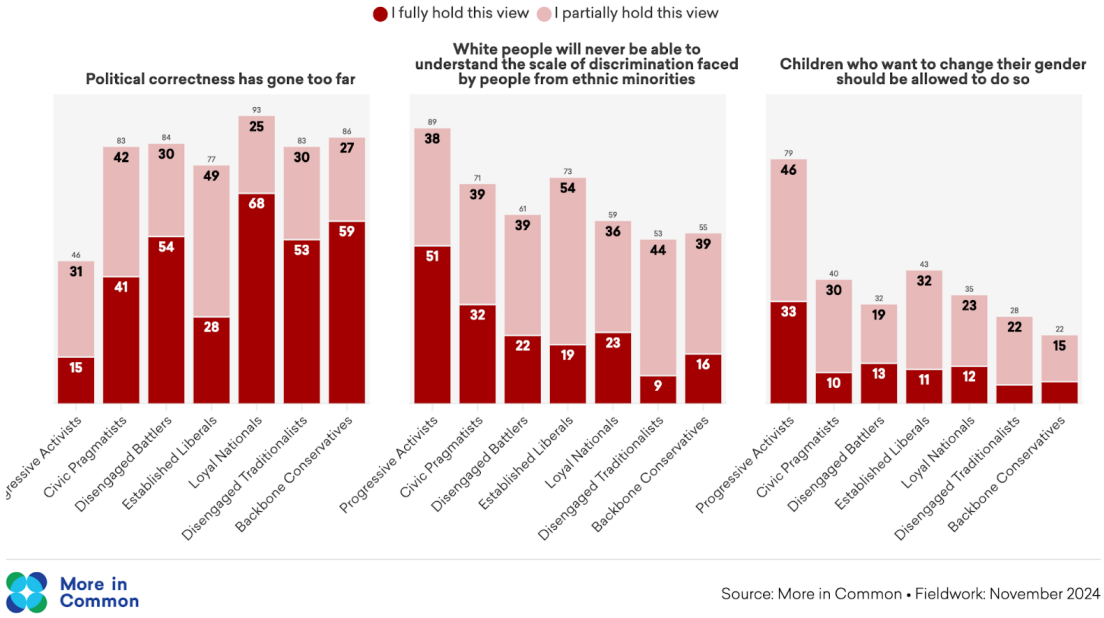
Social justice

The difference between Progressive Activists' starting points on social issues and the positions of the wider public and other left-leaning segments is broad and spans a range of topics.

For example, 79 per cent of Progressive Activists say that children who want to change their gender should be allowed to do so, a figure far higher than seen in the next most supportive segments, Established Liberals and Civic Pragmatists of whom 43 per cent and 40 per cent, respectively, share that view.

Similarly, three quarters (75 per cent) of Progressive Activists fully or partially hold the view that we should abolish the monarchy in Britain; this is noticeably higher than the 59 per cent of Disengaged Battlers and 46 per cent of Established Liberals (the next most abolitionist segments) who hold the same view.

Progressive Activists' views on social issues are often far from the other segments

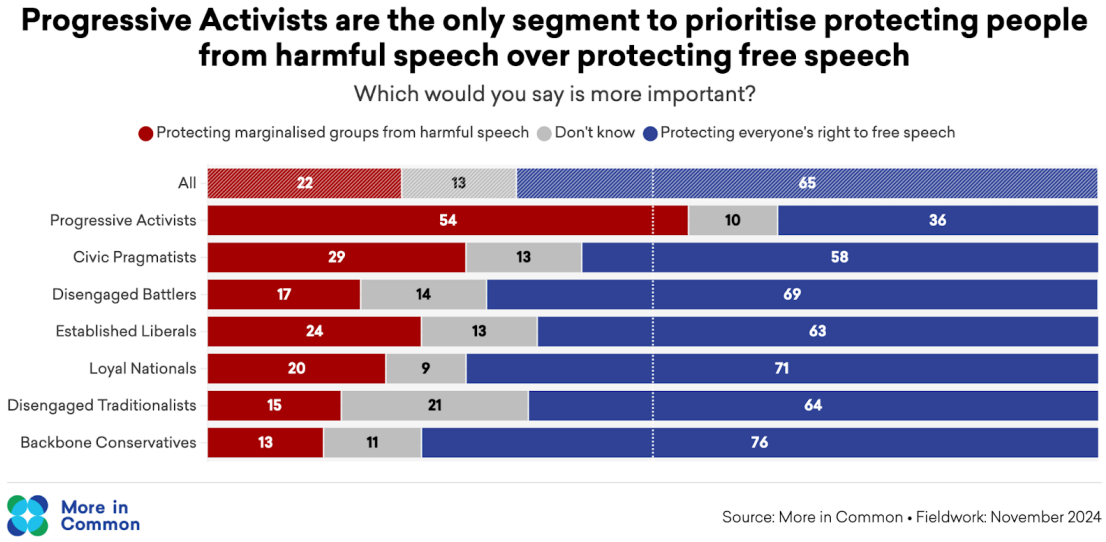


There is, of course, nothing inherently wrong with Progressive Activists holding different views from the rest of the population but, given that they are such a vocal group and shape many political debates, understanding that they are outliers is important - not least in how those views are reported. Understanding that difference can also help campaigners understand how to build bigger tent coalitions rather than alienating those who think differently to them. It is particularly important given that Progressive Activists routinely overestimate how progressive British public opinion is, as explored in Chapter 2.

More than any other segment, Progressive Activists are concerned about the discrimination faced by minority groups in Britain. While every segment recognises racism as an issue in Britain, Progressive Activists are most likely to believe that other rights should be limited in order to avoid harm to minority groups.

For example, Progressive Activists are the only group in Britain more likely to think that the priority should be protecting marginalised groups from harmful speech rather than

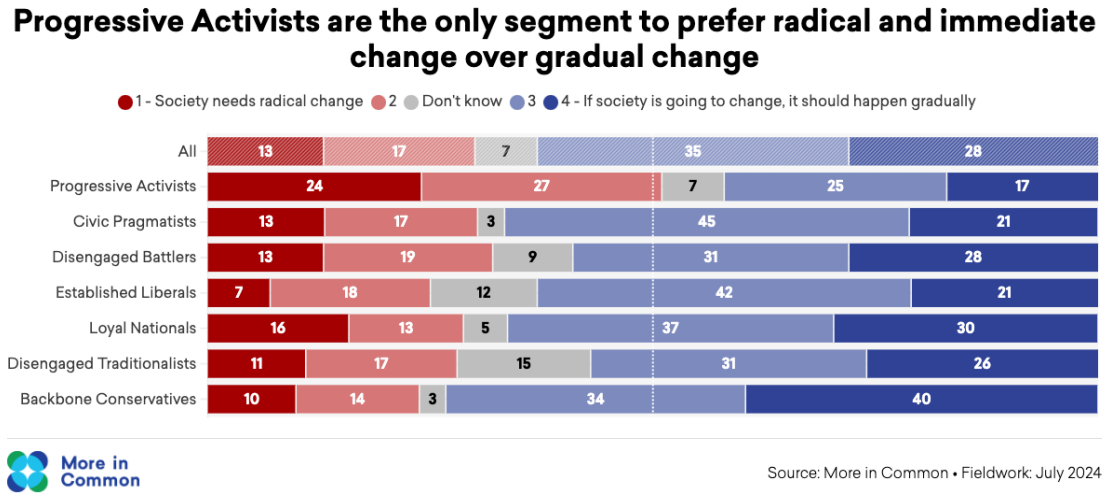
ensuring everyone's right to free speech. Similarly, just over half of Progressive Activists (51 per cent) say that some viewpoints are too harmful to be given space in democratic debate, a view that is held by only a third (33 per cent) of the rest of the population.



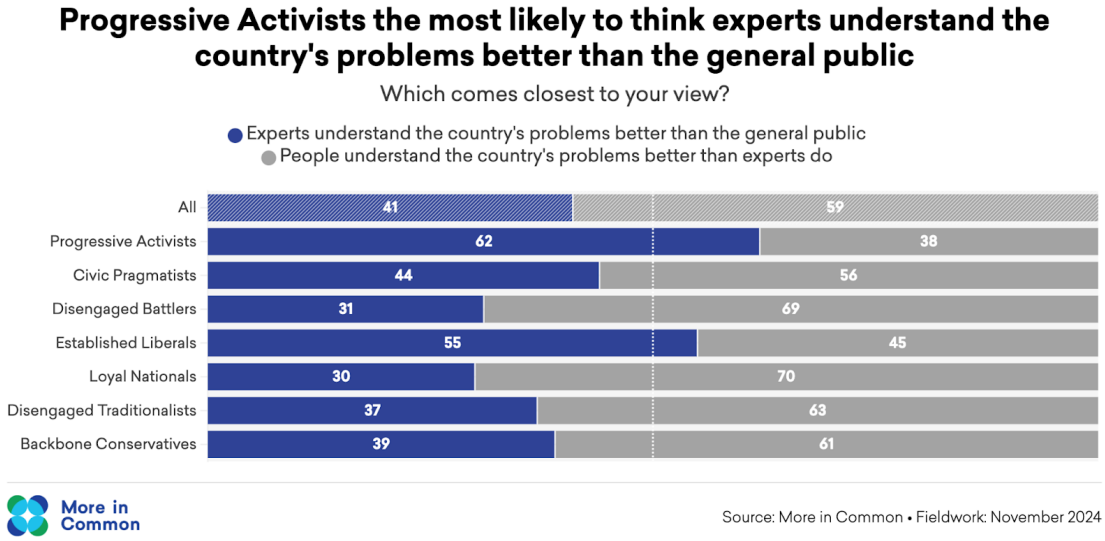
Taken together, this combination of opinions on social justice that are not shared with the rest of the country and the belief that some views are not worthy of debate makes it difficult for some progressive campaigners to persuade the very people they are trying to reach. It also creates a dynamic in which not only are Progressive Activist worldviews different from the rest of the country, but where they also hold normatively negative views or 'outgroup animosity' towards people with different viewpoints to their own. This has a number of consequences, including making it harder for progressives to see where their views do overlap with other segments, such as on economic issues, as well as hampering their ability to build broad movements around the causes they care about.

Progressive Activists' approach to change

Progressive Activists are often impatient for change on the issues they feel strongly about, and while British public opinion tends to favour gradual incremental shifts on most issues, Progressive Activists can be more demanding about the pace and scale of change they would like to see.



Progressive Activists also tend to be more dismissive of the role of public opinion or the need to seek public support to enact change. Alongside Established Liberals, Progressive Activists are the only segment more likely to believe that experts understand the country's problems better than the general public do.



In focus groups, Progressive Activists frequently explain that they think voters in Britain are manipulated by the media to vote against their own interests, and that voters don't actually vote in their own interests, a view that is held by two thirds of Progressive Activists (66 per cent) and 44 per cent of the rest of the country.

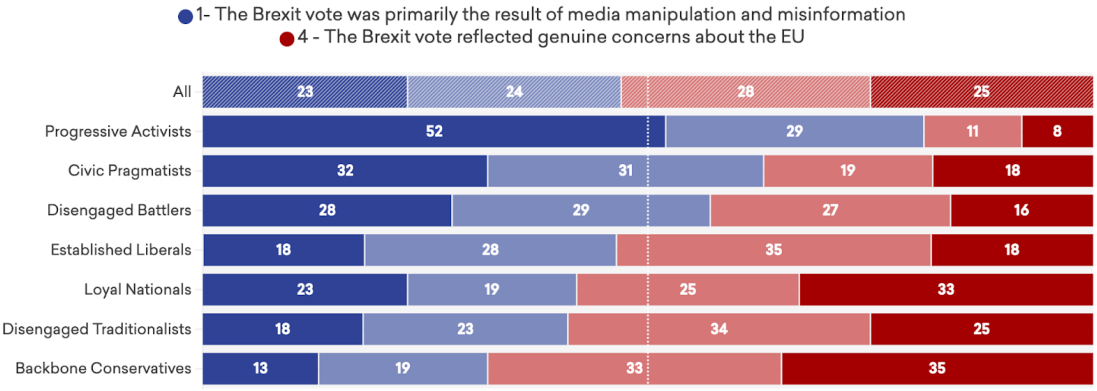
> "[To fix Britain's problems] I guess the whole paradigm would need to shift really, wouldn't it? People would need to start to care and they won't care whilst there are culture wars going on and they're dominating the headlines. So I don't know. I think that the first step would be to defund the media and to look at how we can get more truth and more information that's more truthful really, and then people will make their

> own minds"
> Elizabeth, Progressive Activist,

Brexit provides a good example of this tendency: Progressive Activists are significantly more likely to say the result of the referendum was a result of media manipulation and misinformation than to cite genuine concerns about the EU. This in turn leads to a perception among some Brexit voters that progressives are sneering at them for being hoodwinked and that they do not really understand their concerns.

Progressive Activists the most likely to think the Brexit vote was caused by the media misleading people

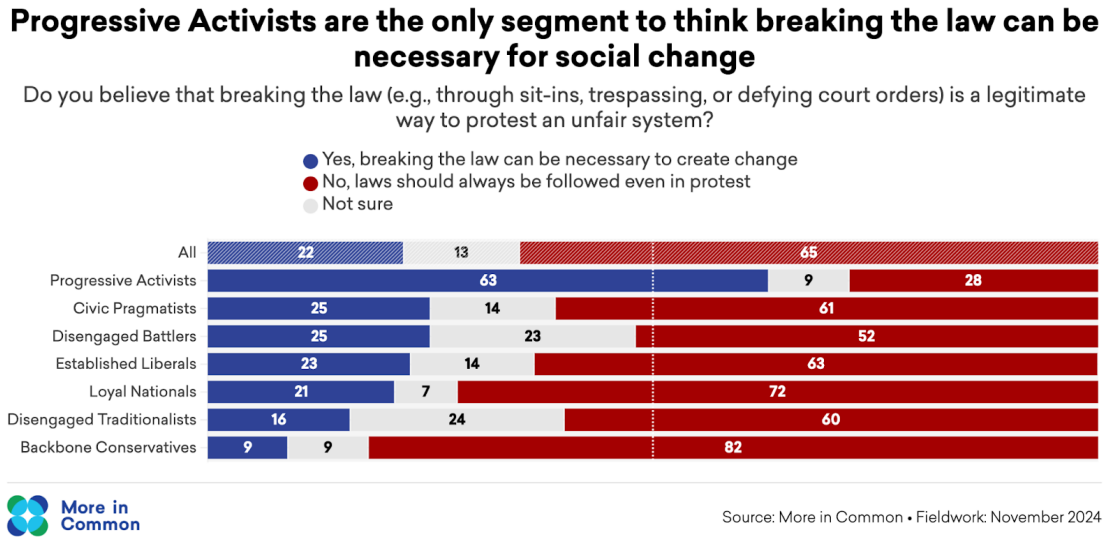
Which comes closest to your view?



More in Common

Source: More in Common • Fieldwork: November 2024

Progressive Activists' desire for social change and general perception of a rigged system means that they are willing to justify more extreme action to force change. They are considerably more likely than average to believe that disruptive protest is acceptable and stand out as the only segment in which a clear majority believes that breaking the law can be necessary to effect change.

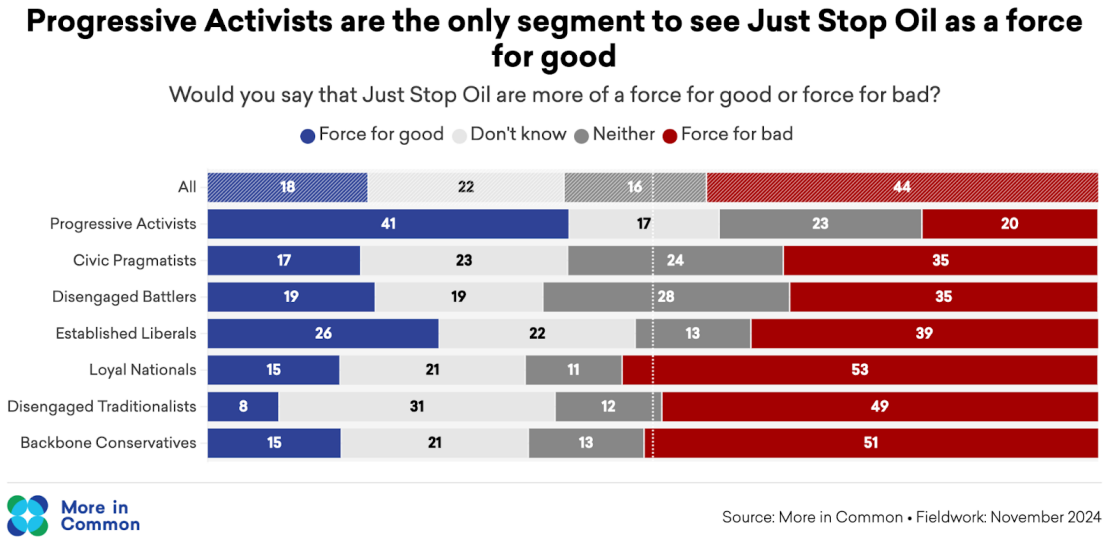


In focus groups, this difference becomes clear when discussing activist groups such as Just Stop Oil. Progressive Activists are not oblivious to the shortcomings of Just Stop Oil: a fifth see them as a force for bad and, in focus groups, most appreciate that disruptive protest will put some people off the environmental movement more generally.

> "I feel like it's giving climate activists a bad image when it starts affecting, like everyday people that just want to live their lives, like, you know, stopping them from travelling"
> Jo, Progressive Activist

> "I do think they do. I don't think they turn people off their cause. I think the fact that everyone focuses on them so much when they do something like throwing soup at a painting, like the average person does not care about that painting. They probably didn't even know it existed, but it's all over the news, turns people off. And I do think that some of their spokespeople are not the most... Not that many people in the UK can identify with them. I think the average person can look at them and think, oh, they're just like lefty hippies"
> Joe, Progressive Activist

Yet on the whole, Progressive Activists are much more positive about Just Stop Oil than any other segment. In focus groups, Progressive Activists explain that the disruption is essential to attract attention to their cause and that any level of disruption is insignificant compared to the threat of climate change. However no other segment sees Just Stop Oil in the same way.



Given that Progressive Activists have a much greater desire for rapid, large-scale social change, and less concern for public opinion and respect for the law in making their case, their approach to campaigning can harm outsiders' perceptions of them.

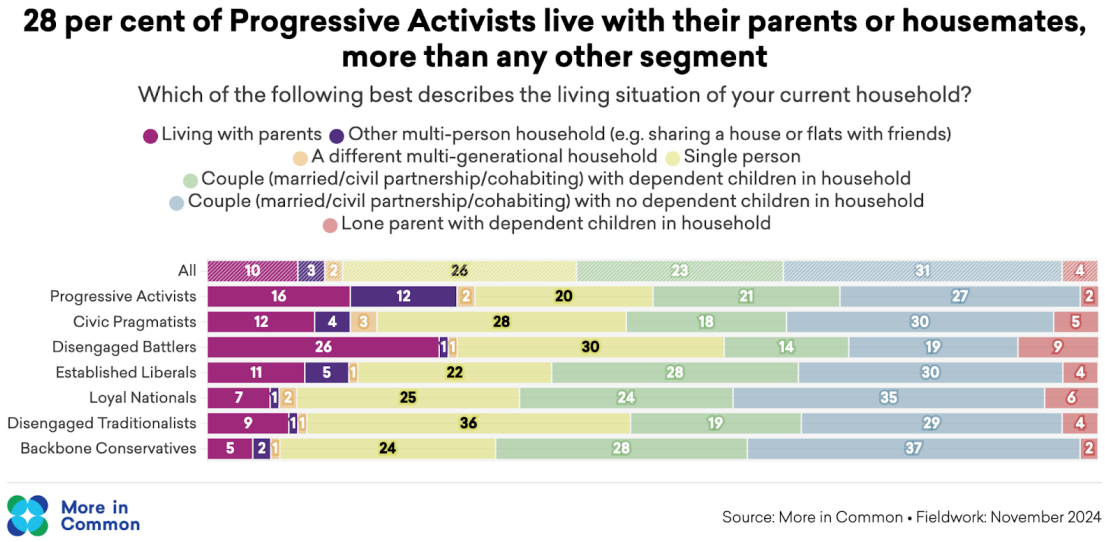
There are a number of examples where progressives' impatience for social change has driven meaningful progress on their aims, but it can also be the case that the disruption and noise of protest attract more attention than the actual causes being campaigned on.

The personal is political

Progressive Activists' views do not exist in a vacuum. Younger people have long held the most progressive social views in British society, but the economic environment that young people in particular now find themselves in means that certain social views and radical solutions to social problems have become more enticing.

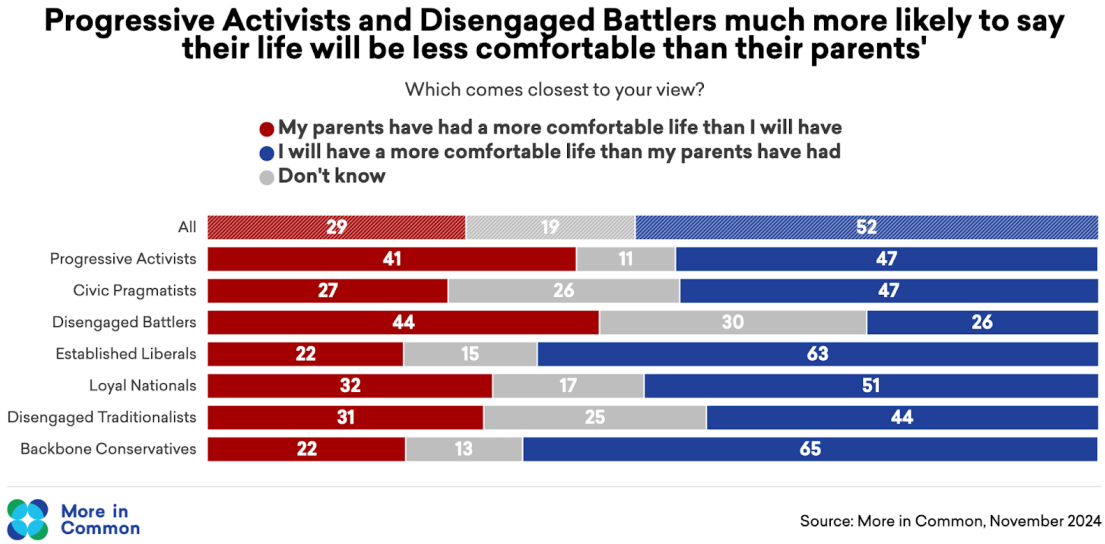
For many Progressive Activists, there is a sense that the social contract has failed them. Many have higher education qualifications: 46 per cent have a degree compared to 31 per cent of the rest of adults in the country, and 20 per cent of Progressive Activists have a postgraduate degree.

Yet for many this has not translated into the quality of life they were expecting: 26 per cent are in student debt (13 per cent also have an overdraft in their bank account) and 28 per cent live with their parents or with flatmates, more than twice the rate of the rest of the country. Forty per cent are dissatisfied with their financial situation, 22 per cent are dissatisfied with their job and 20 per cent are dissatisfied with their housing - all above the national average.

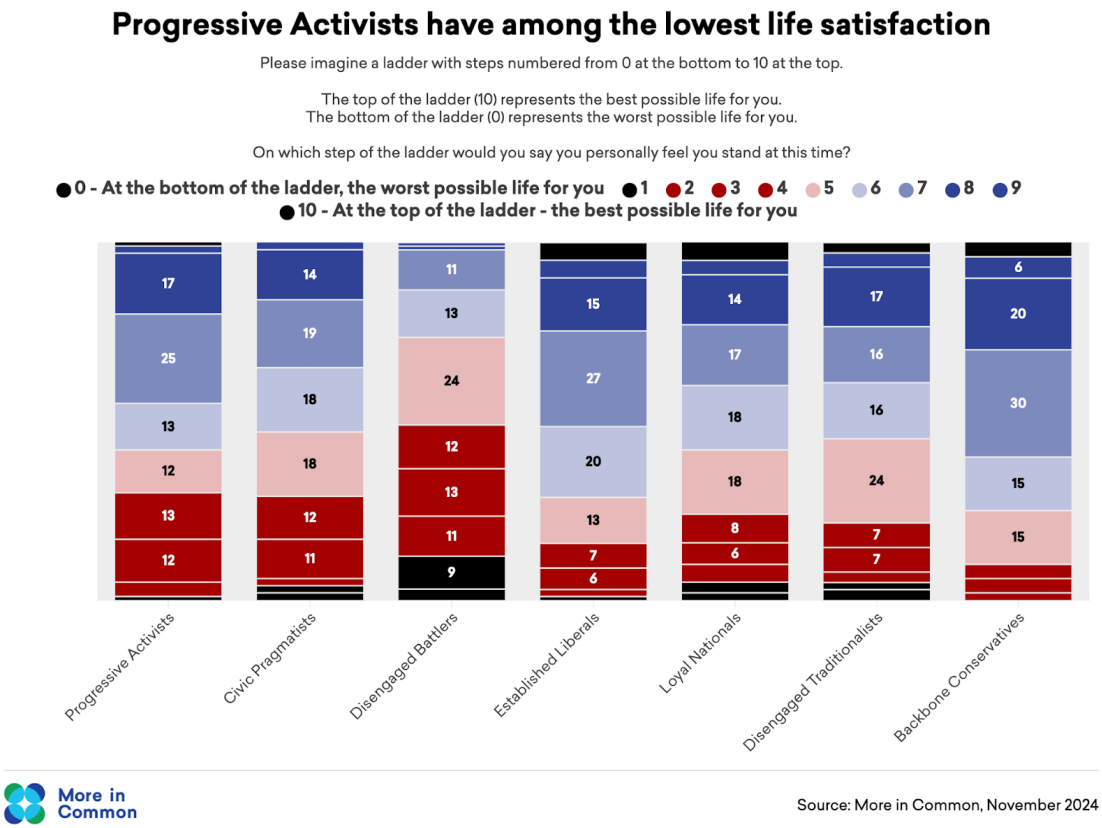


Along with Disengaged Battlers, Progressive Activists are more likely than other segments to have a gloomy outlook for the rest of their lives: 41 per cent think that their parents will have a more comfortable life than they will have, compared to just 29 per cent of the rest of the population.

Stagnation in living standards and failure to increase prosperity between generations is often cited as a breeding ground for extreme politics on the right, particularly among voters in deindustrialised towns. Yet among younger urban graduates this failure of the status quo can lead them to more radical solutions on the left.



Asked to rank their life satisfaction on a scale of zero to ten, Progressive Activists are the most likely of any segment other than Disengaged Battlers to give a score between zero and four. Progressive Activists score particularly low on measures of satisfaction with housing and financial security.

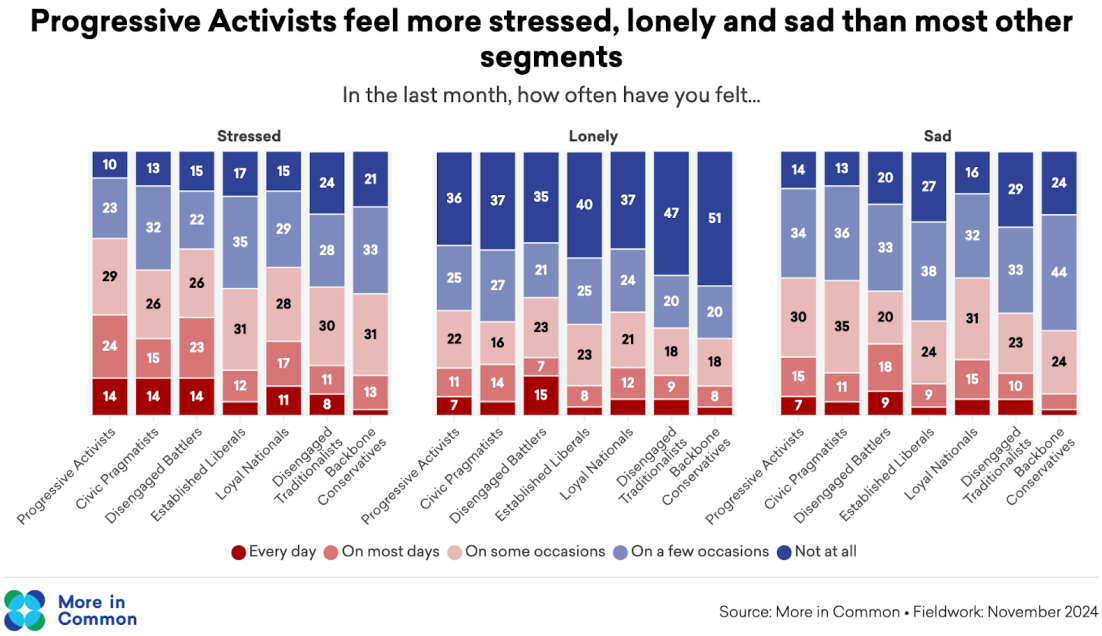


More in Common

Source: More in Common, November 2024

What makes Progressive Activists unique is the breadth of life satisfaction scores across the segment. Unlike Disengaged Battlers, where very few if any express the highest levels of life satisfaction, Progressive Activists are just as likely to put themselves on the upper rungs of the ladder as the bottom ones. This inequality within the segment means that many of the least satisfied Progressive Activists, stuck living with parents and deep in student debt, also spend a lot of their time (given tendencies for sorting by educational attainment and ideology) with high-achieving, high-income Progressive Activists with much higher life satisfaction. This in itself can be a further trigger for resentment.

Progressive Activists are more likely than any other segment to say that they regularly feel stressed and they are also more likely than the rest of the country to say they feel lonely or sad. They are also the segment most likely to say that they have experienced mental health issues with more than half (52 per cent) saying they have suffered from such conditions.



Economic and social conditions do not tell the full story of why Progressive Activists adopt their worldviews, but it is not difficult to see how financial insecurity, low life satisfaction and high levels of stress inform their desire for radical change. Many Progressive Activists will feel that they expected an expensive university education to guarantee them a secure start in life and better future, but almost half now think that their parents' lives will be easier than theirs. For many Progressive Activists, there is no reason to have an attachment to the status quo, because they perceive the status quo as having failed them. As they campaign to make the world a better and fairer place, Chapter 2 considers how Progressive Activists can avoid repeating the mistakes of recent campaigns that have, in many cases, set progressive causes back.

Three Progressive Activist archetypes

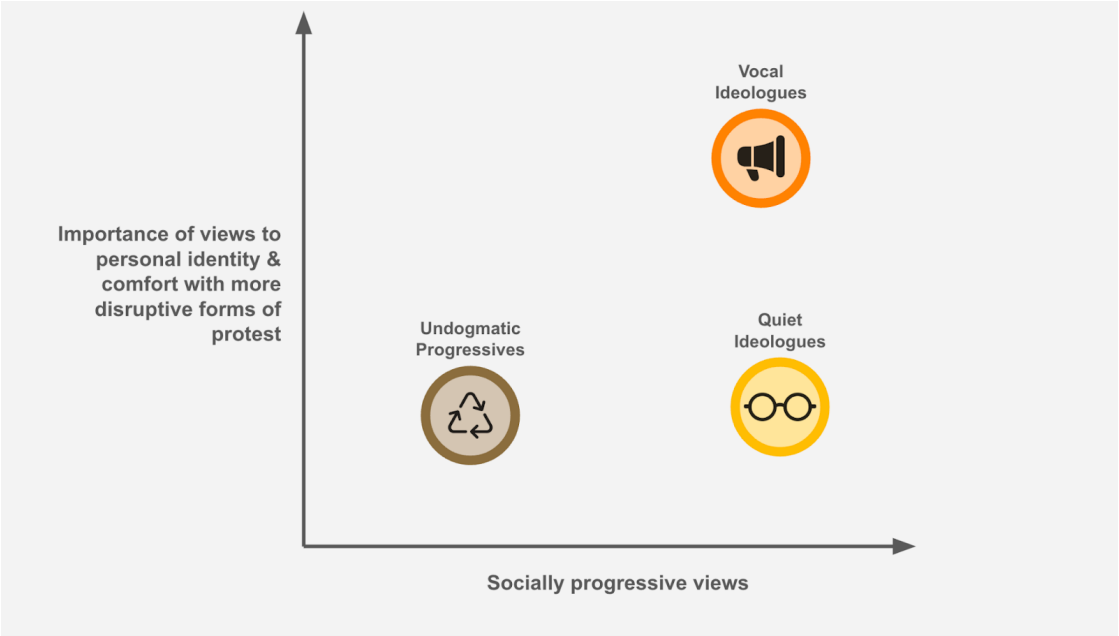
A segmentation is by definition a broad brush way of viewing groups within society and it is certainly true that Progressive Activists are not a monolithic bloc. Some are more politically engaged than others and there are some political issues (for example, gender identity) where the most engaged Progressive Activists can take very different stances.

With that in mind, More in Common has produced a sub-segmentation of Progressive Activists, drawing on a survey of over 1,000 individuals who fit into this segment. As with the British Seven segmentation model, the sub-segmentation does not draw on demographic characteristics. Instead, it divides Progressive Activists according to seven aspects of their beliefs and worldviews:

- Cultural progressivism
- Economic interventionism / statism

- Outgroup hostility (emotively negative feelings towards non-progressive groups and organisations)
- Views about the role of disruptive protest in driving change
- Views about free speech versus protection from hate speech
- Views about workplace hierarchy
- Views about the role of business in driving social change

Using the same clustering methodology that produced the original British Seven segmentation, this model identifies three Progressive Activists archetypes, each roughly equal in size: Undogmatic Progressives, Quiet Ideologues and Vocal Ideologues.



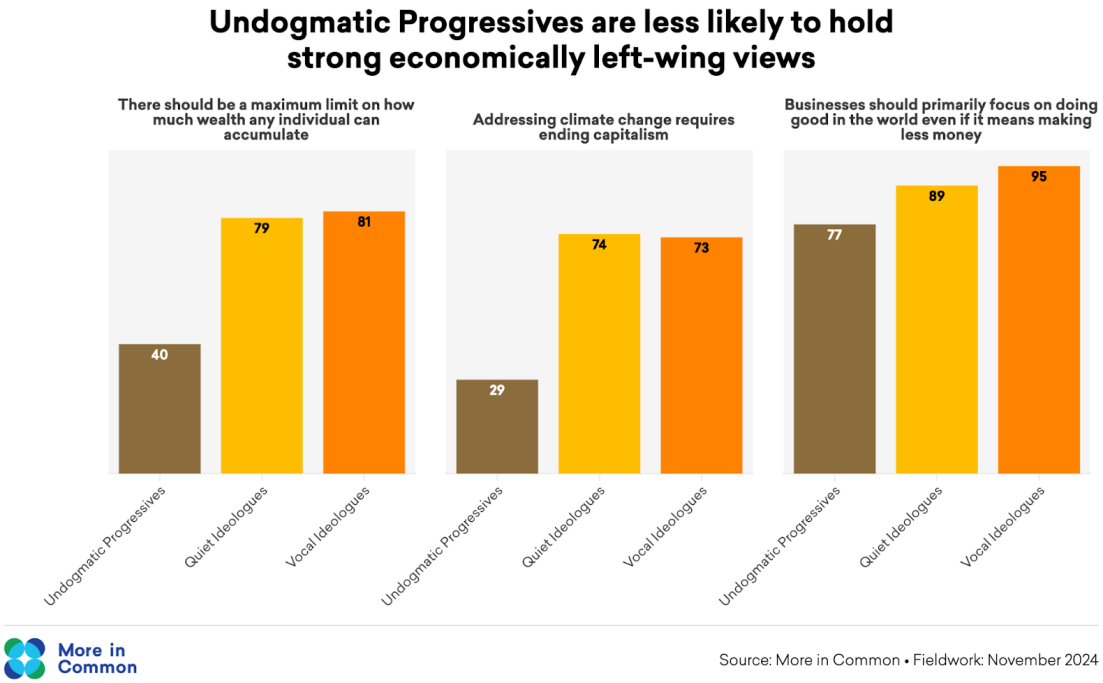
The sub-segmentation provides a valuable lens not only for adding more nuance in understanding what Progressive Activists think, but also for explaining the dynamics within Progressive Activist groups and networks. In particular, for those working in and managing workplaces where Progressive Activists are overrepresented, it can be useful to understand the dynamics between the different Progressive Activist archetypes - which is why the segmentation model takes into account their views on workplace hierarchy and the role of business. For more information about Progressive Activists in the workplace, see Chapter 3.

It is worth noting that, while the three archetypes are distinct from one another, they are all undoubtedly Progressive Activists: even if Undogmatic Progressives differ from Vocal Ideologues, these two archetypes are still much closer to each other than they are to a Loyal National or Backbone Conservative, for example.

Undogmatic Progressives

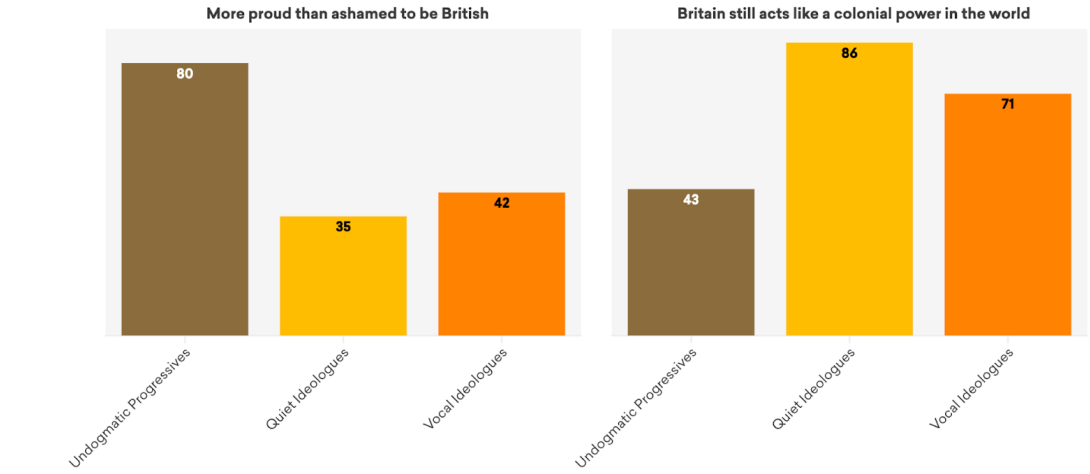
Undogmatic Progressives are mostly distinguished from the other two archetypes because they simply hold fewer left-leaning views on cultural and social issues and hold those views less strongly.

For example, on the economy, 29 per cent of Undogmatic Progressives say that addressing climate change requires an end to capitalism, compared to 74 per cent of Quiet Ideologues and 73 per cent of Vocal Ideologues. Similarly, 40 per cent of Undogmatic Progressives think there should be a limit set on personal wealth, compared to 79 per cent of Quiet Ideologues and 81 per cent Vocal Ideologues.



On social issues, Undogmatic Progressives also have less strong views than the other archetypes do - with Undogmatic Progressives leaning more closely towards traditional 'soft left' attitudes. 80 per cent of Undogmatic Progressives say they are proud to be British, compared to just 35 per cent and 42 percent of Quiet Ideologues and Vocal Ideologues respectively. Similarly, 43 per cent of Undogmatic Progressives think that Britain still acts like a colonial power in the world, compared to 86 per cent of Quiet Ideologues and 71 per cent of Vocal Ideologues.

Undogmatic Progressives have more positive views of Britain's impact on the world



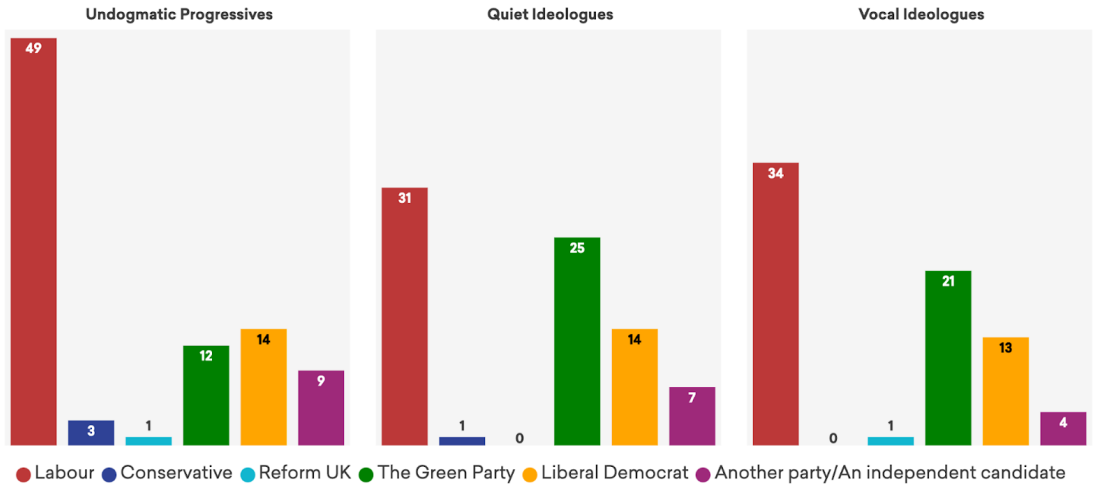
More in Common

Source: More in Common • Fieldwork: November 2024

Undogmatic Progressives are slightly older on average and tend to have the highest levels of life satisfaction and economic comfort. Members of this group are more likely to work in the private sector and occupy senior organisational roles, reflecting their relatively established professional and financial status.

In this year's General Election, half (49 per cent) of Undogmatic Progressives voted for Labour, a considerably higher number than seen among the other archetypes, which were more likely to vote for the Green Party.

2024 General Election Vote by Progressive Activist Archetypes



More in Common

Source: More in Common • Fieldwork: November 2024

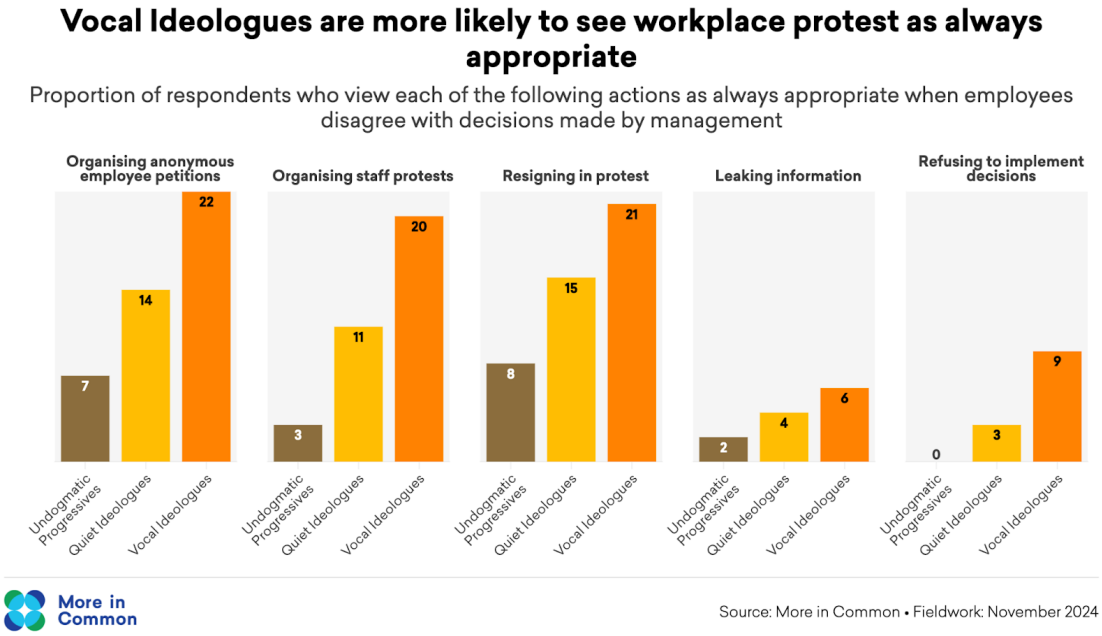
Quiet Ideologues

Compared to Undogmatic Progressives, Quiet Ideologues are defined by their strong progressive beliefs, although they are less likely to express these views in public forums or in settings such as the workplace. In the workplace, Quiet Ideologues are more likely than Vocal Ideologues to accept decisions made by management.

This archetype skews younger than the others, with a significant proportion still pursuing higher education. Many Quiet Ideologues also work in the charity sector, where they make up 40 per cent of Progressive Activists in the workforce, comfortably the largest among the archetypes.

As discussed, this group holds some of the most hardline progressive views, surpassing Undogmatic Progressives in their intensity. They also have the strongest sense of outgroup hostility. For example, 80 per cent of Quiet Ideologues say they could never be in a romantic relationship with someone who votes Conservative, compared to 42 per cent of Undogmatic Progressives and 66 per cent of Vocal Ideologues. Similarly, 71 per cent of Quiet Ideologues say they have a negative view of people who voted for Brexit, compared to 60 per cent of Undogmatic Progressives and 68 per cent of Vocal Ideologues.

While Quiet Ideologues and Vocal Ideologues share similarly intense social and economic political attitudes, they are distinguished from each other most starkly in their approach to driving change within organisations. Quiet Ideologues are generally more respectful of office hierarchy: 39 per cent say that workplace hierarchies make workplaces better compared to just 19 per cent of Vocal Ideologues. They are also less likely to want to talk about politics at work with 41 per cent saying that it is appropriate to talk about politics at work compared to 61 per cent of Vocal Ideologues. Combined, these two facts make Quiet Ideologues more resistant to extreme forms of workplace protest, even though they hold some of the most extreme political views.



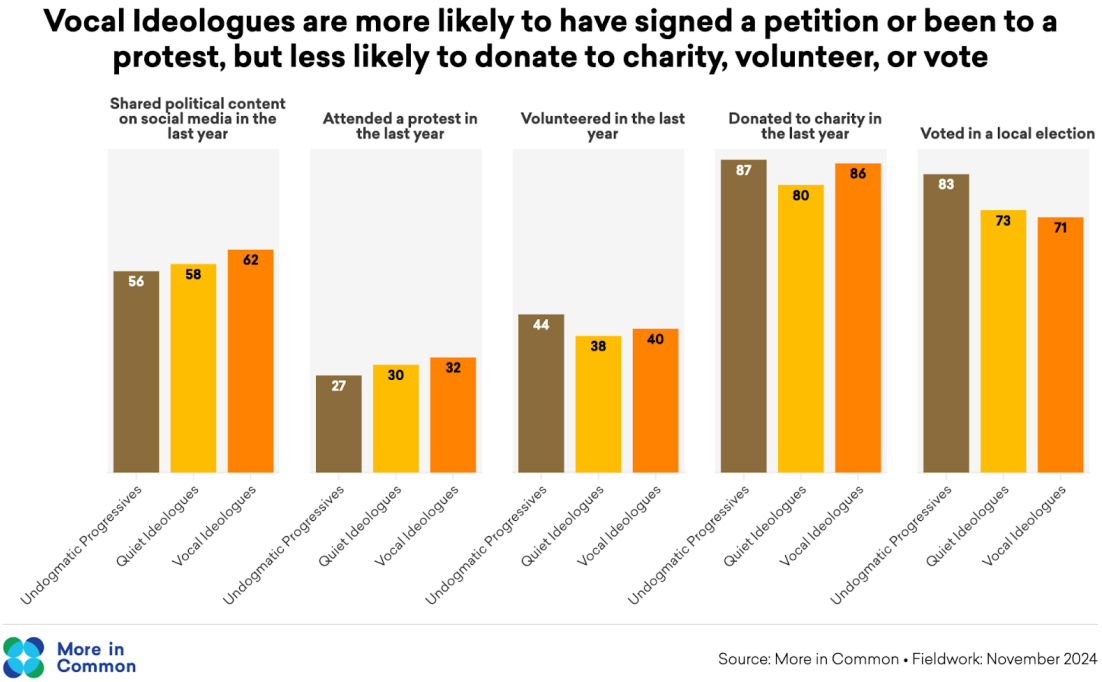
Vocal Ideologues

Vocal Ideologues share the same strongly held left-leaning worldviews as Quiet Ideologues but differ in their willingness to express these views in a wide range of settings and to support disruptive forms of protest, particularly in the workplace.

Vocal Ideologues are younger than Undogmatic Progressives, but older than Quiet Ideologues. They are also slightly more likely to occupy senior positions in their organisations compared to Quiet Ideologues.

Vocal Ideologues perceive workplace and personal contexts as equally appropriate for expressing political views, partly because they see their political beliefs as more integral to their personal identity. Asked to rank the importance of social causes they care about on a scale of one to seven, where seven means they are very important to their identity, 87 per cent of Vocal Ideologues choose six and above, compared to 61 per cent of Quiet Ideologues.

Vocal Ideologues are also far more active in publicly supporting their causes, whether through posting on social media, signing petitions or attending protests. In the last year, 62 per cent of Vocal Ideologues have shared political content on social media, 82 per cent have signed a petition and 32 per cent have attended a protest. In all cases these numbers are higher than seen in the other two archetypes. In other less public or visible ways of driving change, Vocal Ideologues are less engaged. For example, slightly fewer of them have donated to charity or voted in local elections compared to Undogmatic Progressives.



In workplace settings, Vocal Ideologues are more likely to push for having political disagreements openly. For example, 48 per cent of Vocal Ideologues say, "If I disagree with someone's political views at work, it is better to speak out and discuss that", compared to just 27 per cent of Quiet Ideologues. They are also more likely to see employee protests or anonymous petitions as appropriate ways to challenge management decisions, reflecting their belief in the power of direct action to create change.

This archetype is characterised by their higher tolerance for confrontation and their belief in the necessity of disruptive actions to achieve their goals. Unlike Quiet Ideologues, who tend to navigate workplace hierarchies more cautiously, Vocal Ideologues are often unafraid to challenge authority, making them more visible and, at times, more polarising within organizational and activist spaces.

In addition to this, Vocal Ideologues are 'absolutists' in that they see their campaigning as all-encompassing. Of all the archetypes, they are the least likely to say they would be willing to campaign alongside someone who voted Conservative or who is gender critical, for example. Similarly, whereas the two other archetypes are more likely to believe that charities should have a tight focus on issues directly relating to their work, Vocal Ideologues are the only archetype to think that charities can have a greater impact if they address issues indirectly related to their mission, with a stronger desire for charities to embrace a more all-encompassing approach.

In some cases, Progressive Activists simply take distinct positions from the rest of the country, but in other cases the dynamics between these Progressive Activist archetypes drive a social dynamic which artificially pulls Progressive Activists even further from the

mainstream. For example, Quiet Ideologues do not resist the more militant instincts of Vocal Ideologues, and Undogmatic Progressives assume that they are in the minority, therefore - often for well meaning reasons - following the demands of Vocal Ideologues. The following chapters explore in more detail how these archetypes interact with each other and the rest of the country in the context of activism and the workplace, respectively.

Chapter 2: Inclusive and effective campaigning

Social media has enabled grassroots movements to make their arguments to more people than ever before. Yet even as activism has become more accessible, and protest movements more visible, it seems that many progressive movements have stagnated or, worse, backfired.

For many progressives, this became most apparent with Donald Trump's 2024 re-election as US President. Trump's electoral success was driven by a range of factors, many economic, but there is also good evidence to suggest that it was at least partly the result of a backlash against what some saw as progressive excesses. That swing to the right is not limited to the United States: in many western democracies from Canada to Italy it has appeared that progressive campaigners might be losing the argument and that the pendulum is swinging towards conservatism.

Some will regard that swing towards conservatism as a good thing, while others will not. The purpose of this report is certainly not to take a view, nor to endorse nor repudiate specific progressive or conservative causes. Indeed, many of the recommendations in this chapter should be useful to campaigners across the political spectrum, whether on the right or left. However, given that much of civil society - and advocacy organisations in particular - is dominated by Progressive Activists, there are lessons to be drawn on how progressive campaigners can build more inclusive campaigns that better meet the public where they are and which avoid reinforcing the dynamics of division.

While debates about gender identity and sex-based rights do not fit neatly onto a left-right spectrum, it is striking that support for transgender causes has actually fallen in the UK in recent years. Just a few years ago, there was a majority view in Britain that people should be able to change their legal sex if they wanted to, a majority that has evaporated in a few short years. According to the British Social Attitudes Survey, in 2016, 58 per cent of Britons supported trans people's right to change their legal sex and 17 per cent said they felt 'a little' or 'very' prejudiced towards transgender people. By 2022, the number supporting legal sex changes halved to just 30 per cent and the number expressing prejudice towards transgender people rose to 33 per cent. Yet this collapse in support for basic transgender rights has occurred at a time when activism on transgender issues has been the most visible.

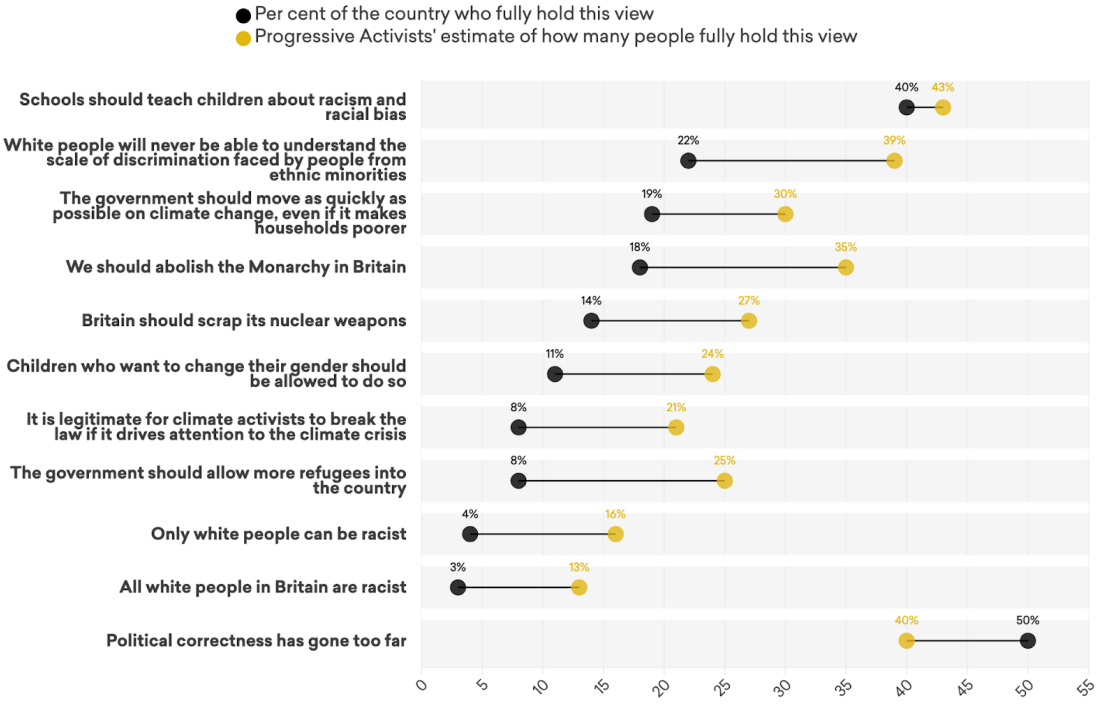
Of course, this backlash cannot be blamed solely on campaigners; it is undoubtedly the case that in some instances conflict entrepreneurs in the media and politics have used division over transgender rights as a means to sow division and create 'us versus them' dynamics for political or financial gain. However it is also undoubtedly the case that policies such as 'no debate', the treatment of those with gender critical views and the absolutist areas of focus of some activists have alienated support for trans rights.

One reason why progressives have failed to convince more people to support their causes in recent years is that a significant chunk of the public do not feel welcome in progressive circles, even when they share the same concerns or politics. For example, 63 per cent of Britons say they are worried about the impact of the war in Gaza on Palestinian civilians, but only 26 per cent say that the pro-Palestine movement in the UK is welcoming to people like them. Similarly, 66 per cent of Britons say they are worried about climate change, but only 46 per cent say the climate movement in the UK is welcoming to people like them. By failing to adopt a more inclusive 'big tent' approach, advocacy movements shut themselves off from people who in fact support their causes, and who are vital to bringing about the change they want to see.

Know your audiences

A key step towards successful inclusive campaigning is to understand your audience. That progressive campaigners routinely overestimate how progressive the country is on a range of issues or how many people 'think like them' is a contributory factor of their struggles in recent years. For example, the average Progressive Activist thinks that 35 per cent of the country fully believes we should abolish the monarchy; in fact this number is just 18 per cent. Similarly, Progressive Activists believe that 25 per cent of Britons want to increase the number of refugees allowed into Britain, yet the true figure is just eight per cent.

Progressive Activists routinely overestimate how progressive the country is



More in Common

Source: Fieldwork November 2024

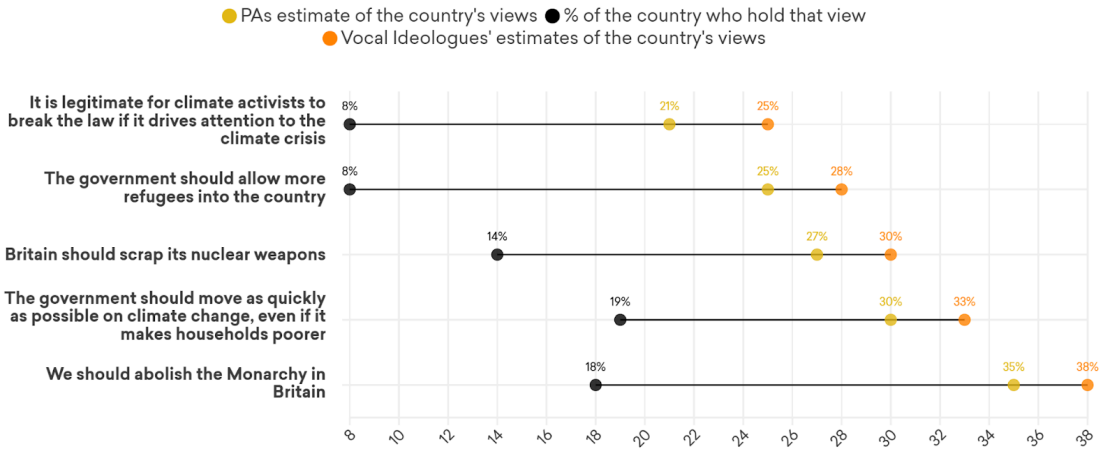
This pattern repeats across a range of issues from nuclear disarmament to systemic racism to gender reassignment. Importantly, it is not the case that Progressive Activists assume their viewpoints are the mainstream or are held by a majority of Britons. Instead, they overestimate support for their views by a more modest degree, on average overestimating the prevalence of their beliefs by 10 to 15 percentage points.

This is nonetheless a significant gap (often a factor of two or three) because the assumption of campaigners that they have more supporters than they actually do informs and shapes the strategies they take when advocating for change. Having 35 per cent support already in hand entails much less need for compromise and outreach than having 19 per cent support. With a larger base, it makes more sense to focus strategies on speaking to those supporters in order to maximise the attendance and noise of protest movements and to showcase support. In an electoral context, motivating 35 per cent can be enough to guarantee victory. Yet because support for their causes is actually more limited than many Progressive Activists believe, it could well be strategically more fruitful to focus more time on actively persuading new people of the merits of their arguments rather than relying on 'activate the base' strategies.

Vocal Ideologues - the Progressive Activists archetype most likely to be involved in coordinating campaigns - are even more likely than other Progressive Activists to overestimate the proportion of Britons who share their view.

In contrast this pattern is not mirrored at the other end of the ideological spectrum; socially conservative segments tend not to underestimate the proportion of the public with progressive views.

Vocal Absolutists are more likely to overestimate how progressive the country is



More in Common

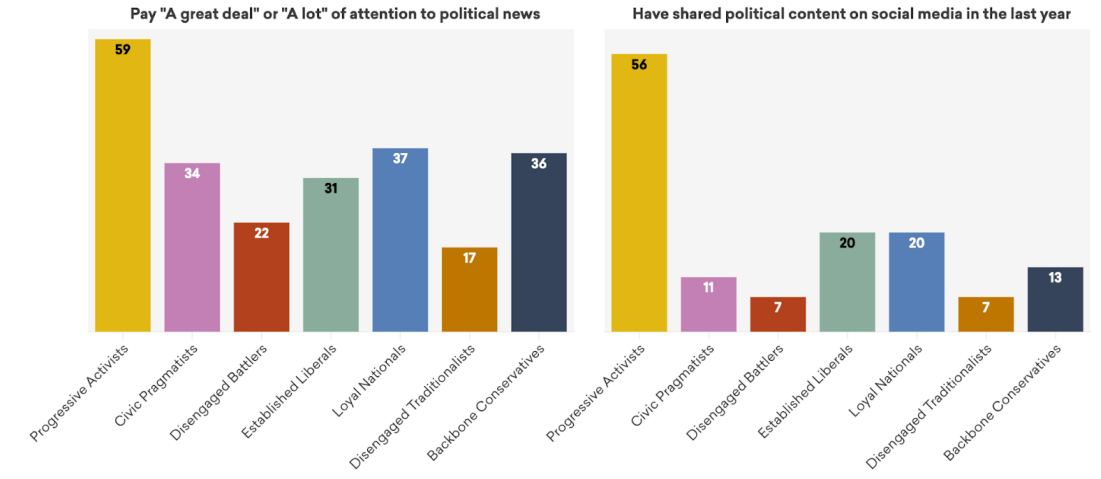
Source: More in Common • November 2024

Equally important to effective campaigns is having a clear grasp on how 'politically engaged' the intended audience is. The starting point for that is a recognition of the vast gulf between Progressive Activists and the wider population in terms of this type of engagement.

Progressive Activists are the only segment in which a majority say they pay "a great deal" or "a lot" of attention to political news. Their higher level of awareness of political issues means that they may take some knowledge among the general population for granted, skipping the informing and explaining phase of campaigning. Likewise, Progressive Activists are four times more likely than any other segment to have shared political content on social media in the last year and may fail to see how that level of political engagement makes them unique.

In turn, because that engagement - particularly online - tends to be dominated by more progressive voices, it leads to Progressive Activists overestimating how many people share their views, sometimes confusing likes and reposts with popular support.

Progressive Activists are far more politically engaged than any other segment

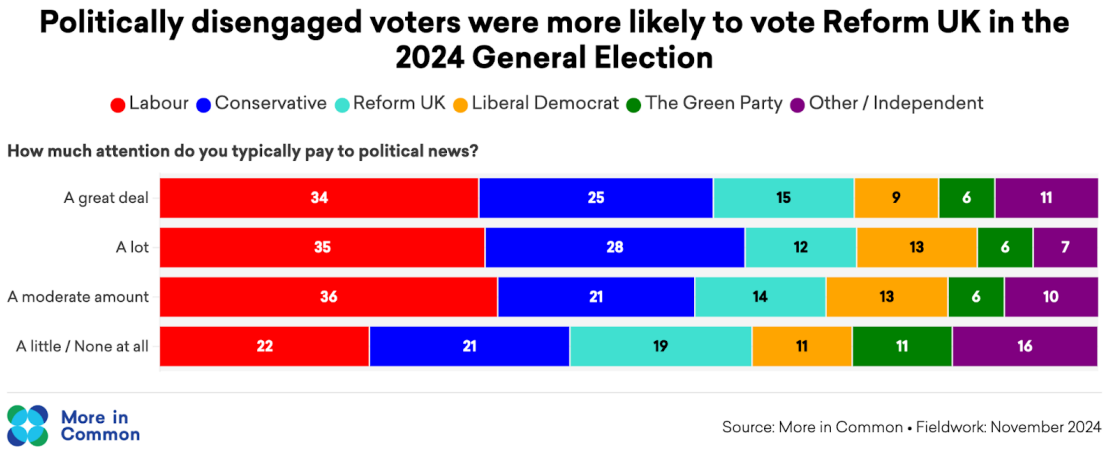


More in Common

Source: More in Common • Fieldwork: November 2024

Greater empathy for and understanding of more politically disengaged groups would help progressives understand how to reach those groups and avoid backlash, because backlash against progressive causes can be most pronounced among politically disengaged groups. A quarter (24 per cent) of Progressive Activists say they have a negative view of people who don't talk about politics, compared to just 11 per cent of the rest of the population. Similarly, 46 per cent of Progressive Activists say they have a positive view of people who talk about politics a lot, compared to just 22 per cent of the rest of the country.

Communicating with lower-engagement groups using less 'political' language can make campaigns more effective. In the US in 2024, people who pay less attention to political news were much more likely to vote for Donald Trump. Meanwhile, in the UK, a fifth of people who say they pay little or no attention to political news voted for Reform UK.



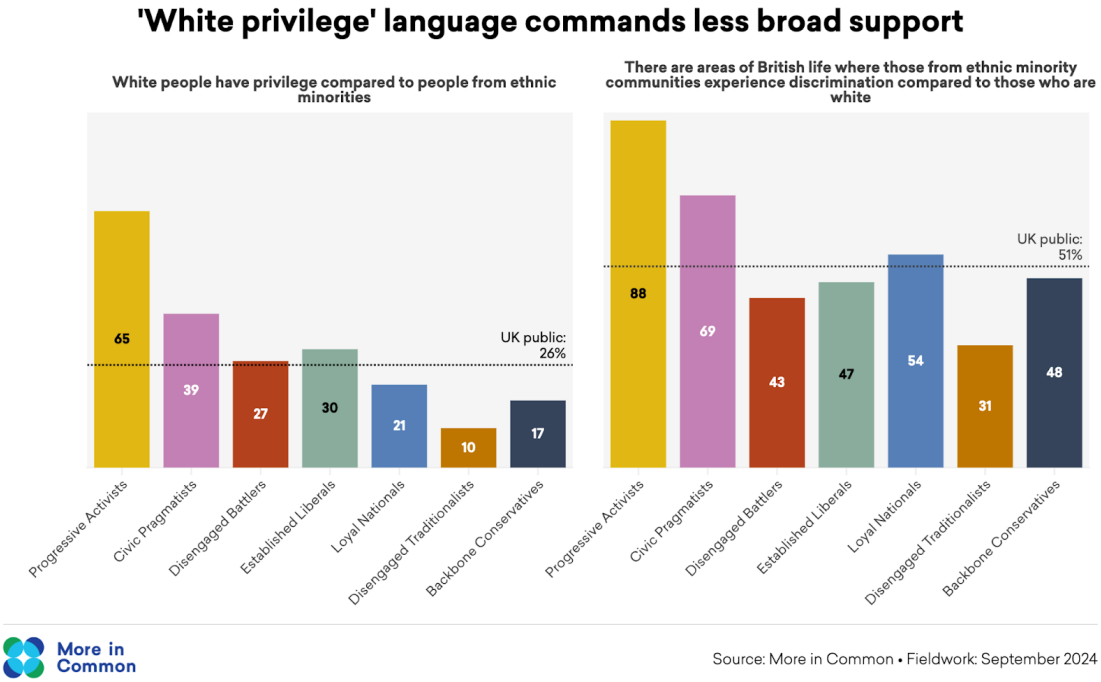
Use inclusive framing

Focusing on audiences requires a disciplined approach to using language that speaks to a broader swathe of the public, rather than just those who are already on side.

One example of the importance of language is the phrase white privilege. When a cross section of the seven segments are asked whether "white people have privilege compared to people from ethnic minorities", only Progressive Activists are more likely to agree than disagree. In focus groups, many people reject the idea of white privilege, responding to that framing with variants of "I've never had privilege in my life". For many white people, the frame of white privilege diminishes other axes of inequality in Britain and makes them feel as if they are being blamed for something over which they have little control.

> I wouldn't think it's white privilege because this country is historically a white countyr. It's more the opposite – black inequality as opposed to white privilege...
> Dave, Established Liberal

This does not however mean that Britons do not acknowledge racial discrimination. Making the same point that "there are areas of British life where those from ethnic minorities experience discrimination compared to those who are white" commands significantly more public agreement, with higher support across each of the seven segments. Framing the discussion around discrimination faced by those from minorities rather than privilege of white people has a significant impact on how the point is received, as does emphasising that some areas of British life are different from others in this regard.



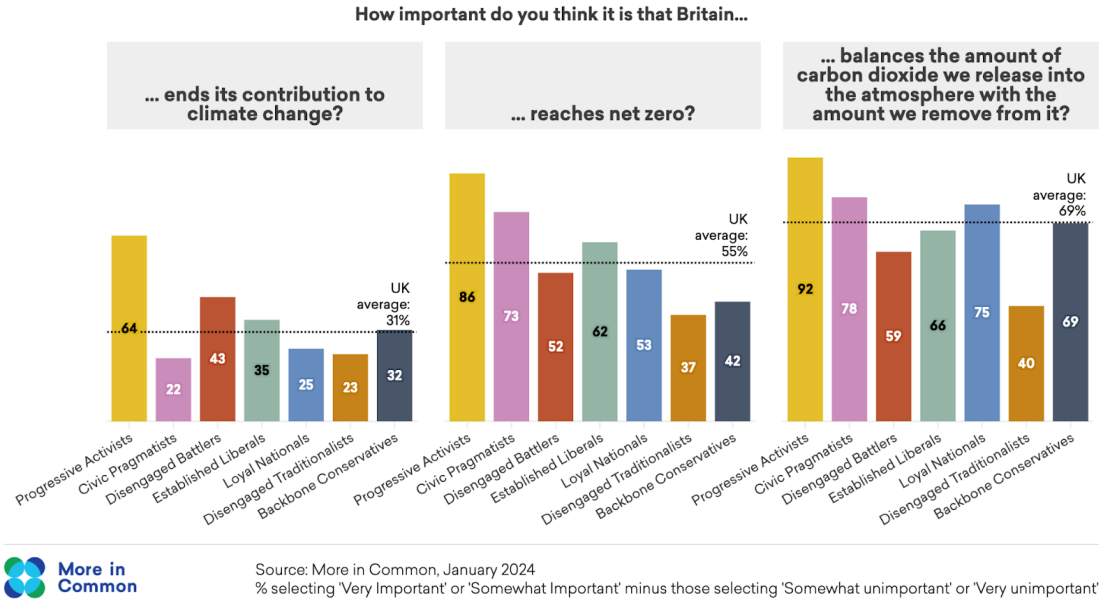
There are other areas where mainstream public opinion may support progressive causes but the framing and language used by progressives actively deters those who would otherwise be actively supportive, or at least sympathetic. Some have suggested that the white privilege framing is useful because it challenges white people to reflect on their own role in systemic racism, yet it is more likely to make people feel either excluded or defensive. If the aim is to make as many people as possible reflect on racial inequality in Britain, it would be more effective to use language and frames that resonate with wider sections of the public.

There can be a tendency in some progressive circles to dismiss any attempts to criticise the language with which progressive causes are communicated as 'tone policing'. However many progressives speak about their causes in a jargon-heavy way that is inaccessible to those not up-to-date with the latest terminology. Progressive campaigners also have a tendency to use inflammatory language in order to solidify in-group approval from other progressives rather than to win over would-be supporters, actively reinforcing 'us vs them' dynamics. In many campaigns, *more* tone and language discipline and accessibility would help communicate progressive messages more effectively.

Talking about climate change is another area in which accessible language matters. Public support for reaching net zero (which is already high) increases by 14 points, and draws support from more segments of the population, when framed as 'balancing carbon emissions' instead of 'net zero'. This is particularly true for the more socially conservative Loyal National and Backbone Conservative groups, who are less receptive to other mainstream arguments on net zero. The reason for this is twofold. First, the absolute language of the term 'zero' feels negative and unachievable for many Britons, with an

implication that reaching net zero will require significant sacrifice. Second, the balancing language is simply less jargon-heavy, and requires less specialist knowledge (only a third of Britons can accurately identify what 'net zero' means). Campaigners should not assume that everyone shares the same knowledge base on an issue as they do.

Support for net zero increases by 14 points when framed using the language of 'balancing emissions'

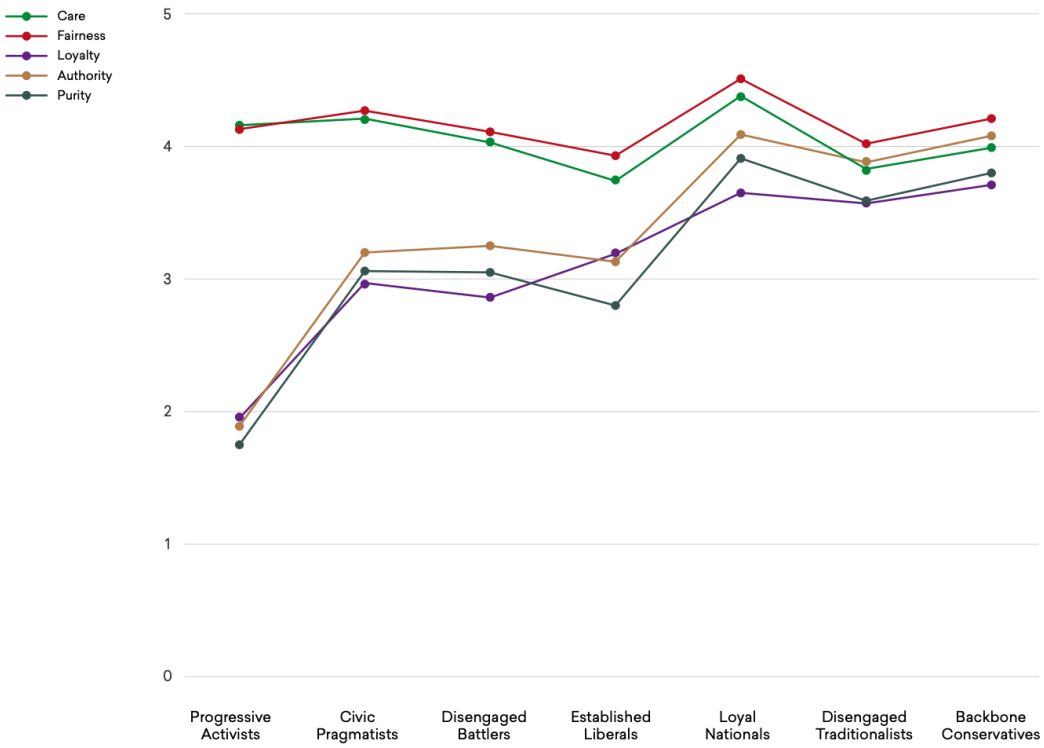


More in Common

Source: More in Common, January 2024
% selecting 'Very Important' or 'Somewhat Important' minus those selecting 'Somewhat unimportant' or 'Very unimportant'

Campaigners are most effective when they are able to identify frames that appeal to a broad audience. Doing so will often require reflecting on how their own worldviews and values differ from the people they are trying to reach.

Jonathan Haidt's moral foundations theory is instructive here. This framework identifies five core psychological values which are prioritised to different degrees by different groups. When these core values are tested with the seven segments, Progressive Activists, along with all other segments, place a large emphasis on **fairness** and **care** in their moral decision making. As such, building on both of these moral foundations is essential to building broad support for a policy proposal or idea. However, Progressive Activists are less instinctively likely to draw on other moral foundations such as **loyalty**, **authority** and **purity**, which appeal much more to other segments, particularly more socially conservative segments.

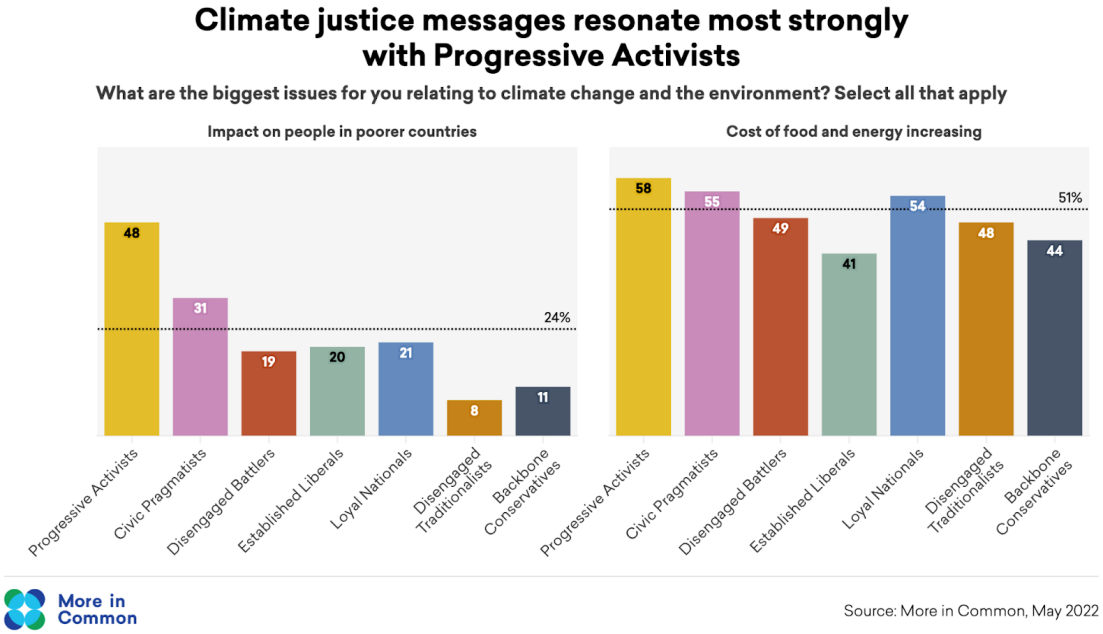


The most effective campaigns are able to speak to all five moral foundations. For example, campaigns to legalise same-sex marriage not only focused on the **care/compassionate** arguments for gay marriage ("it's hurtful that gay people can't get married") or the **fairness** argument ("everyone should be able to marry the person they love"), but additionally also focused on **authority** ("allowing gay people to marry strengthens the institution of marriage, brings more people into it and codifies their relationship"), **purity** ("there is nothing unnatural about gay relationships which have existed throughout history and marriage will allow gay people to make a life long commitment to one another") and **loyalty** ("gay people are part of our community as sons, daughters, cousins, aunts and uncles").

In contrast, campaigns which focus exclusively on the **fairness** or **care** moral foundations may have strong appeal to progressive activists but struggle with other segments. Attitudes towards those who cross the channel in small boats to seek asylum in the UK are one example. Progressives would tend to focus on **compassionate/fairness** arguments ("we have a duty to help anyone who seeks asylum in the UK"). But this rubs up against notions of **authority** ("people who crossed the channel have jumped the queue/broken the rules") and **loyalty** ("our responsibility is to British citizens first and foremost").

An approach to asylum seekers that appeals to all the moral foundations would stand to command broader support: rather than defending the status quo, it would create a more orderly system that both tackles channel crossings, and provides legal routes and means of integration for people to become part of local communities (for instance through community sponsorship).

Progressive Activists have a tendency to think about fairness on a much larger scale which, to the other segments, can seem remote - and often as being to the detriment of more local or personal concerns. Progressive Activists are much more animated about global inequalities than other segments, who are more likely to worry about inequality on a more local or national scale. An example of this is the extent to which arguments that frame climate action around the concept of 'global climate justice' are effective at rallying Progressive Activists, but do not resonate with other segments. More effective ways of framing the topic relate to the more local, tangible and personal impacts of climate change in the UK.

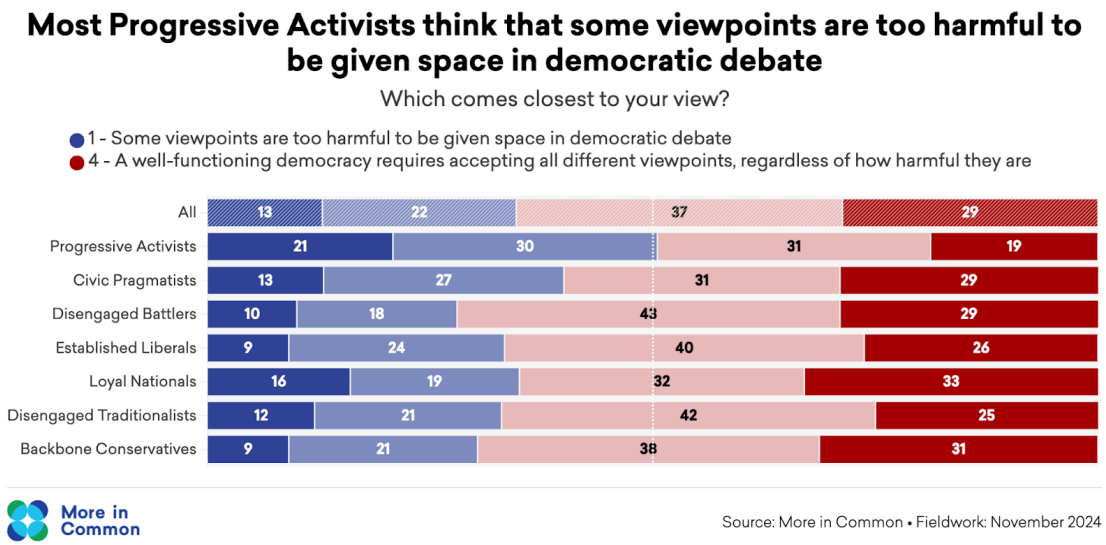


In summary, there are a number of ways in which progressive campaigns could make their arguments more inclusive. First, they should avoid frames such as white privilege that actively reinforce 'us versus them' dynamics, when there are other ways to frame an idea that have the same meaning and resonate with greater effect. Second, it's helpful to avoid jargon and absolutist language, such as 'net zero'. Third, campaigns are more effective when they can speak to a range of moral foundations broader than just care and fairness. Progressive Activists should challenge themselves to find arguments that appeal to the more right-leaning moral foundations of authority and loyalty. Finally, framings are more effective when they are tangible and local: talk of 'global justice' is compelling to Progressive Activists but, for most of the population, is abstract and distant.

These strategies do not intend to dilute progressive values but to recognise the existing positions and viewpoints of the broader public and communicate in a way that forges common understanding. By using inclusive, relatable and accessible language, campaigners can build bridges across ideological divides, making their causes resonate with a wider audience.

Make space for debate

Because Progressive Activists feel so passionately about many of their causes, others can feel that there is no space to speak up or question these ideas. There is clearly some truth to this as Progressive Activists are the only segment in which more than half think that some viewpoints are too harmful to be given space in democratic debate.



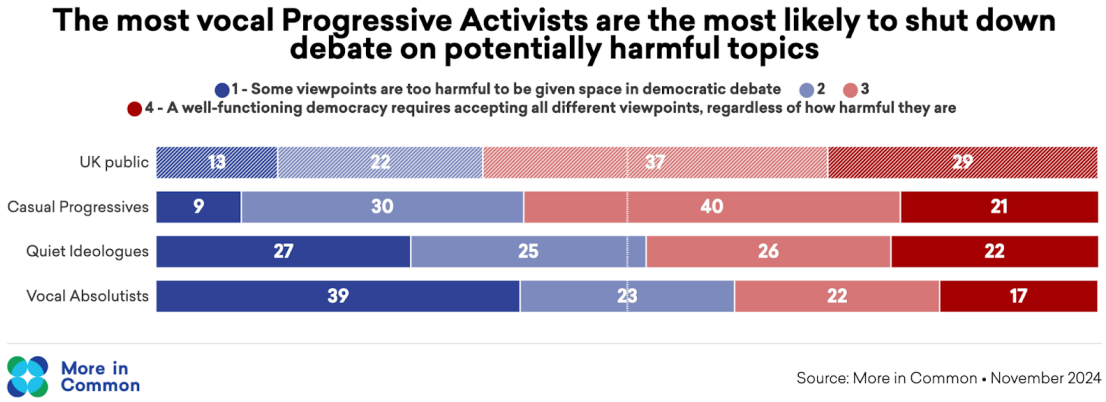
This does not mean that all viewpoints need to be considered equally or given platforms everywhere. However, for campaigners whose job it is to persuade people who disagree with them, adopting a blanket 'no debate' position can be harmful to a campaign's goals. 'No debate' makes progressives appear dogmatic; as though they fail to appreciate genuine concerns that might be held by persuadable but uncertain groups; can give the impression that progressives are worried about their ideas not holding up to scrutiny; and cedes the power to persuade the reachable groups entirely to the opposing side.

For many progressives, the impetus for limiting debate on certain issues emerges from a well-meaning desire to protect marginalised groups from harmful or offensive speech. Occasionally, other segments will agree with them on this: the public are more likely than not to think that Holocaust deniers should be denied a platform, for example. Yet Progressive Activists have a more expansive definition of what counts as offensive speech, which means that they meet many widely held views in Britain with the response "you can't say that", even occasionally equating the language with violence rather than a constructive challenge or debate.

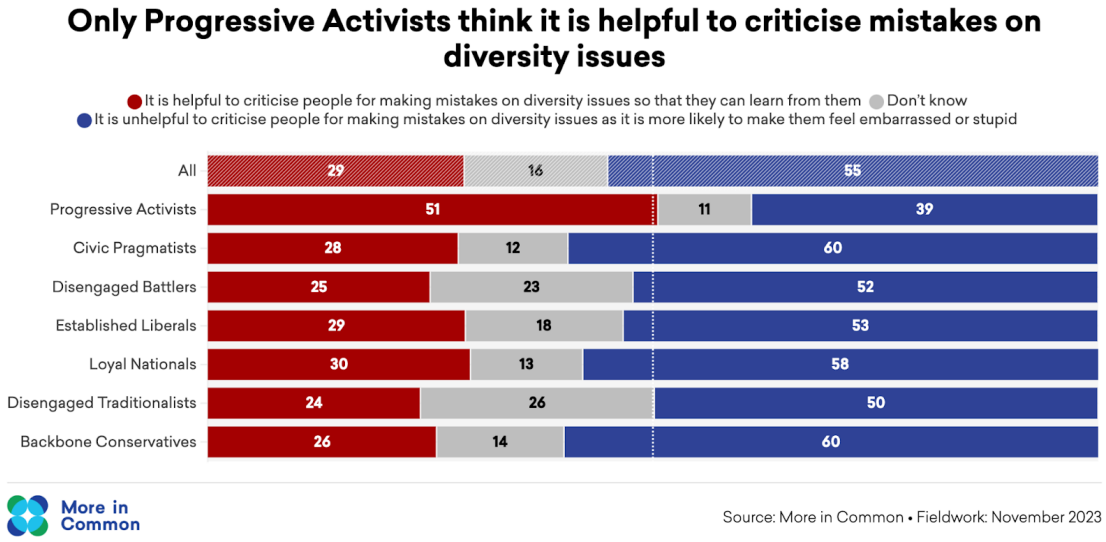
For example, 75 per cent of Progressive Activists think it is offensive to say that immigration is making the country a worse place. Regardless of whether or not this view is offensive, it is a view held fully or partially by two thirds (66 per cent) of Britons. To dismiss this viewpoint as harmful and not grant it debate offers no opportunity for challenge or to those who want to persuade people of the benefits of immigration. Making space for people to respectfully

challenge progressive ideas without fear of consequence means that they are more likely to engage in the debate in good faith, engage with the ideas and, potentially, be persuaded by them.

Within progressive circles, Vocal Ideologues are much more likely than not to say that harmful ideas need to be excluded from all democratic debate, and Quiet Ideologues tend to agree. As a result, Undogmatic Progressives - who are more likely to hold the opposite view - may be reluctant to challenge assumptions made by more ideological Progressive Activists for fear of causing upset. The lack of challenge among different progressive archetypes can then end up reinforcing Progressive Activists' tendencies to shut down debate.



In other cases, people who are not actively opposed to a progressive argument but simply know less about a topic - or who want to ask questions or have concerns allayed - worry about misspeaking and saying 'the wrong thing'. This problem is particularly acute because Progressive Activists are the only segment more likely than not to believe that it is helpful to criticise people when they make (perceived) mistakes on issues like diversity and inclusion. Every other segment is more likely to think it is unhelpful to criticise people for making mistakes on diversity issues because it is likely to make them feel embarrassed, stupid or, in some cases, resentful.



No one likes to feel bad, so the urge of progressives to criticise 'mistakes' results in people feeling further alienated from progressive causes and unwelcome in progressive circles, even if they are earnestly trying not to offend and share the same views as Progressive Activists. There are a number of high-profile examples of people having asked questions or posed respectful challenges to a progressive cause, only to be met by abuse and criticism in response. Such a response from progressives serves only to push people further away from the cause in question and, in some cases, actively turn them against it. For example, in Britain only 42 per cent of people say that the climate movement is welcoming to people like them.

Driven by the fact that Progressive Activists simply pay more attention to politics than most others, there are many issues where Progressive Activists hold different opinions to other segments not because other segments are expressing opposite opinions, but because the other segments simply say they 'don't know' or haven't formed an opinion on that topic. Campaigners who are looking to attract more people to their cause should allow undecided or unengaged people to take their time to come to an opinion, rather than chastising them for their lack of a clear stance and pressuring them to pick a side immediately.

This dynamic is perhaps most clear in the Israel-Palestine debate. Civic Pragmatists - the 'soft-left' segment - are consistently the segment that shows the highest, or among the highest, levels of concern for civilians in Gaza. However, they are also the least likely of any segment to have signed a petition on the conflict or posted online about the conflict and are the most uncomfortable talking about the conflict with friends and family. Pro-Gaza campaigners have had a tendency to describe those who do not speak out on Gaza as uncompassionate or even enabling. Yet in focus groups, those who are concerned about civilians on both sides of the conflict often say that their hesitation to discuss the conflict is driven by a fear of saying the wrong thing. Demands for particular forms of expression to describe the conflict, or an unwillingness to recognise suffering on the Israeli side, mean

that otherwise highly concerned groups feel excluded from the very movement that some Progressive Activists are trying to build.

> "You see all these pictures and things, it's heartbreaking. And a lot of times I just switch it off because, or turn to another page because if you keep on watching it, you get desensitised. And I don't want to become desensitised to it all"
> Doris, Civic Pragmatist

> "I've got Jewish friends, I've got Arab friends, I feel like my hands are tied in terms of talking about it. I've never felt comfortable. I don't feel like I've got depth of knowledge enough to talk about it with any sort of certainty"
> Max, Civic Pragmatist

> "One of my friends has been to all the pro-Palestine marches and stuff, and I feel like she's trying to be like "This is the right opinion" onto all of our friends - which is fine because she feels strongly about it. But … I don't know enough of the detail. My opinion is that what is wrong is killing innocent people. And it seems like that's happening from both sides … So it is difficult to have a definitive answer"
> Sally, Civic Pragmatist

> "I hate it because you do feel like you should take a stance. And I mean ultimately, I suppose in any conflict if you saw the right or the wrong things, you could easily be led down a certain way. But there is an argument to say that we don't actually have to, especially as the everyday person, we don't actually have to have an opinion on this. We can see the atrocities happening, we can agree that that's wrong and support people whether Israeli or whether Palestinian"
> Mark, Civic Pragmatist

In focus groups, Progressive Activists often explain away opposing arguments as the product of media misinformation rather than listening to the reasoning of people who hold them. Of course, different media outlets inevitably play a role in fomenting different viewpoints among the public, but a dismissal of people's views as 'misinformation' makes it much harder to engage with and persuade those who hold these views.

> "I think underlying this there is an awful lot of misinformation, disinformation going on. They're persuading a lot of people that life's not great for them and, you know, as usual, pointing at the immigrants as one issue and saying it's all the immigrants fault. I feel we've got a lot of inequality in this country. I think the cost of living is still biting hard for a lot of people. Housing is a massive issue for all ages, really, but especially for the sort of young adults. And so I think they're sort of big issues for the UK, but I think that some media and some online voices, I think they're, they're persuading people that this is all down to immigration"
> Steve, Progressive Activist

> "Yeah, I think culture wars really, it's largely a one sided war because I think it's the biggest distraction, not the biggest problem. It's. It's using wedge issues and kind of dog whistles to get people angry about things that they don't understand or that they might disagree with. And it's to heighten division rather than actually focus on things that are genuinely important. That's not to say that the rights of the people who are being attacked in minority groups are not important, but it's the issues that are often being debated are very like the issue of like trans athletes for example. Unless that was on, in the media, on social media, most people never think about this. So these are manufactured issues that people are. That people are highlighting. And for most people's day to day issues, these are things like being able to afford to eat and heat their housing and have good housing and be in a situation where they're safe. And that's the real priority for a lot of people. There's millions of people in the country in poverty and these kinds of issues are not. Not the issues that are the fundamental to most people"
> Matt, Progressive Activist

Making space for debate means that Progressive Activists - while not abandoning their desire to improve Britain's information ecosystem - need to accept that people may have many reasons for holding particular views and to listen to those reasons in good faith.

Creating space for debate is not about endorsing or amplifying those who set out to be deliberately harmful, but about fostering an environment in which genuine engagement can take place. For Progressive Activists, this means recognising that dismissive responses or over-policing of language can alienate not only those with opposing views but also potential allies who share their goals but fear their criticism. Respectful debate allows for ideas to be constructively challenged and provides an opportunity for persuadable audiences to feel heard rather than dismissed. Building a broad coalition of support often requires striking a balance between protecting marginalised groups from harm and engaging in dialogue that persuades, educates and builds mutual understanding. By meeting people where they are and addressing their concerns in good faith, progressive movements can grow stronger and more inclusive.

Build broad coalitions

One often remarked-upon difference between some left-wing campaigners and those on the right lies in how they build support for their causes. Right-wing campaigners, it is often said, tend to adopt a more open approach, welcoming supporters who agree with them on a single issue, even if those supporters disagree with their broader worldview. In contrast, left-wing campaigners frequently expect a more comprehensive alignment, where supporters are implicitly or explicitly asked to subscribe to a suite of interconnected causes to be considered part of the movement.

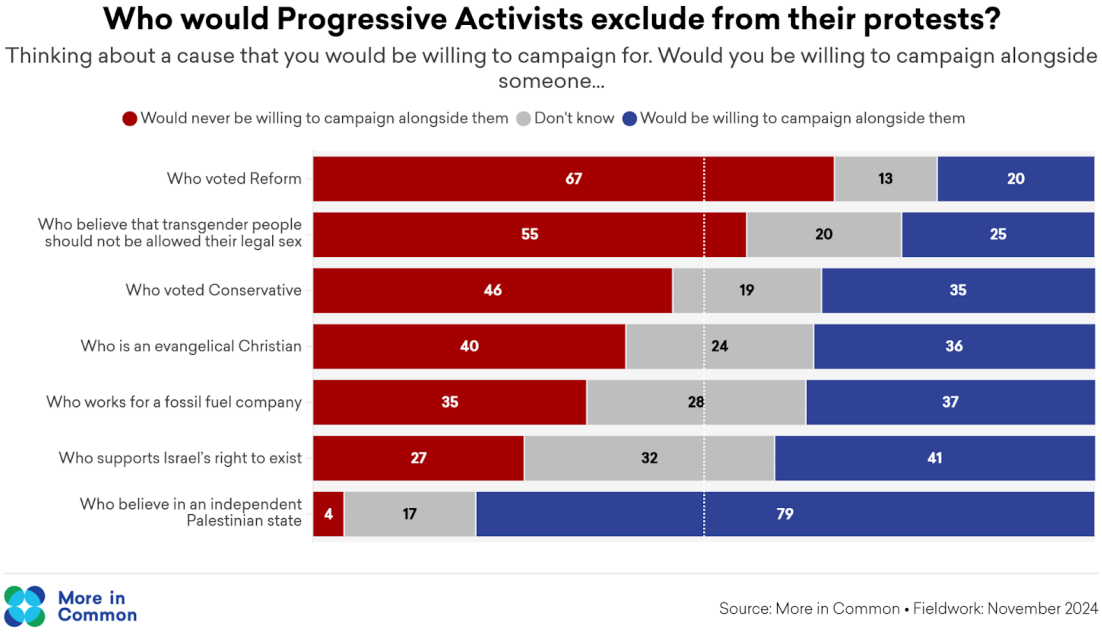
This is often closely related to the importance Progressive Activists place on what has become known as 'intersectionality', the idea that different types of social category (race, class, gender etc) and of oppression (racism, classism, sexism) are not separate, but intersect and interact with one another. The intersectional view suggests that inequities and the progressive causes that seek to tackle them cannot be viewed in isolation. As a description of society, intersectionality is relatively uncontroversial; the life and experiences of a gay woman from an ethnic minority are likely to be different to those of a gay woman who is white. Yet when it is used to suggest that progressive campaigners must also back a series of 'ideologically consistent' causes, problems can emerge. The expectation of ideological consistency can alienate people whose worldviews don't adhere to a strict left- or right-wing framework.

Ideological consistency is, in fact, unusual. Britons' views are often a patchwork of beliefs shaped by their experiences, values and priorities, and which don't always align neatly with one pole of the political spectrum. A staunch supporter of climate action might have reservations about immigration (this view is typical with 'Red Wall' Loyal Nationals). Another individual might support the decriminalisation of drugs while being in favour of the death penalty (a surprisingly widely held view among Reform UK voters). These combinations might seem contradictory - particularly by those who are more politically engaged and who tend to be more ideologically stacked - but they reflect the complexity of public opinion. Expecting people to adopt an all-or-nothing position on progressive causes risks excluding potential allies who could otherwise help push forward specific issues.

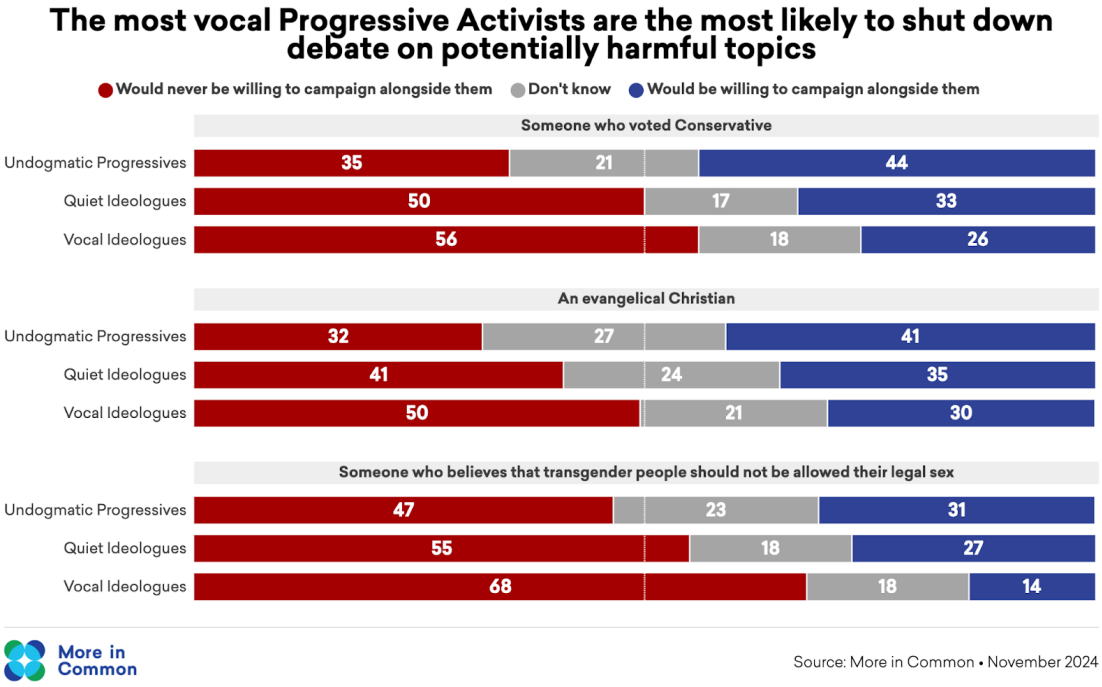
Support for issues can be thought of as a Venn diagram; insisting that all supporters occupy the intersection of agreement across a range of progressive causes inevitably reduces the pool of people willing to engage.

The more litmus tests imposed by progressive campaigners, whether overtly or through social expectations, the smaller the coalition will be.

Forty six per cent of Progressive Activists say they would never be willing to campaign alongside someone who voted Conservative, 27 per cent say they would never be willing to campaign alongside someone who supports Israel's right to exist, 56 per cent say they would never campaign with someone who believes that transgender people should not be allowed to change their legal sex, and 66 per cent would never campaign with someone who voted for Reform UK. It would of course not make sense to bring every voice into every campaign movement, but ruling people out completely sets severely restrictive caps on the size that a protest movement is ever able to reach.



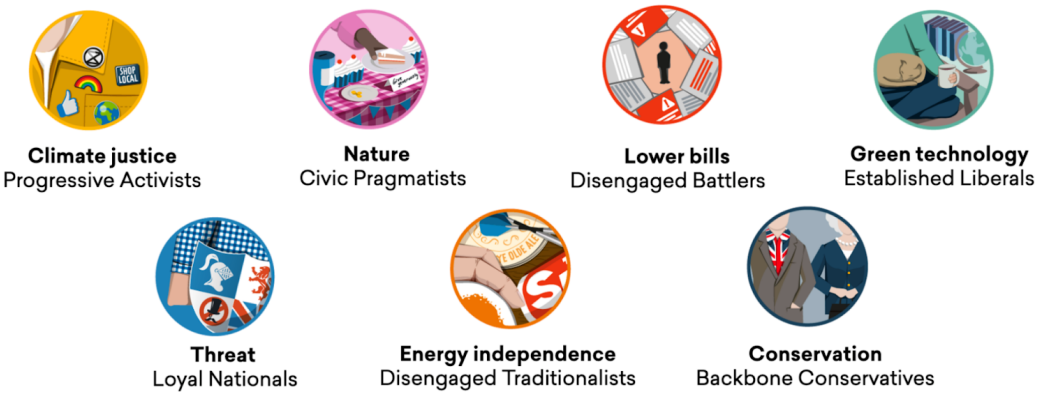
As with other aspects of progressive campaigning, excessive policing of who is 'allowed in the tent' by the Vocal Ideologue group risks narrowing the definitions of who should be able to participate in protest. Vocal Ideologues are much less willing than the other Progressive Activist archetypes to campaign alongside people with opposing viewpoints.



The most effective campaigns build broad coalitions by allowing for multiple 'ways in' to support a cause, rather than rejecting potential campaigners because they don't align on all other issues. To some extent, the climate and environment movement in the UK was

able to build mainstream support by doing just this - speaking to a variety of different starting points on environmental issues that apply beyond just the Progressive Activist base, moving away from exclusively talking about climate justice but also addressing some more conservative-aligned concerns such as conservation and energy independence.

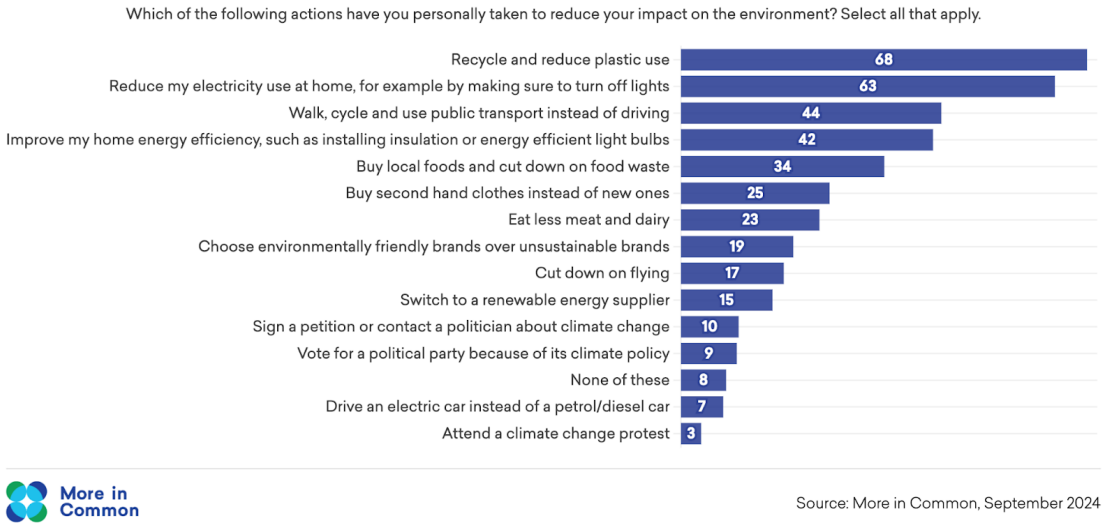
Seven starting points on environmental issues



Additionally, a more inclusive progressivism would accept into a movement people at different stages of their journey of levels of support for a cause. One of the most effective ways to do this is by abandoning 'all or nothing' definitions of what counts as success and banking incremental wins from persuadable audiences rather than dismissing them as 'not good enough'.

A clear example of this is recycling. Britons take pride in their recycling and rank it as the best thing they personally can do for the environment. It also appeals to Britons' desire for easy-to-follow rules. Climate activists have a tendency to be dismissive of recycling because its carbon benefits are minimal. And yet it is very rare to hold a focus group about climate change where people do not bring up recycling as an example of personal climate action of which they are proud. Building on this success - rather than dismissing it - offers a shortcut for bringing more people into the environmental movement, showing them that the actions they are already taking are part of the solution and gently pointing them towards further avenues for actions.

Building on everyday contribution – recycling as a way into mainstream environmentalism



The example of recycling and climate change points to a particular irony in Progressive Activists' approach: they can overlook the progress that has already been made. Progressive Activists are by nature impatient to change the status quo and want to move onto the next goal. The difficulty here is that, in not talking about progress that has been made, progressives' causes can appear fruitless to the wider public. Put another way, a tendency to say the world is always burning is more likely to leave people apathetic and paralysed than motivated to make a difference.

International aid campaigning can fall into the same category of issues for which stories of success can go uncelebrated. In focus groups, the UK public will often ask why they are seeing the same types of imagery in campaigns about poverty in the developing world as they were seeing 30 years ago, and whether this shows that "all that aid hasn't really made a difference". The reality is of course that global poverty has decreased significantly in the past 30 years and international aid has played a role in that. Yet campaigners often seem unwilling to tell that story, preferring the 'burning platform' to one of steady progress.

The Homes for Ukraine scheme offers a further example of this point. While the public are more likely to say that the UK should, overall, take fewer refugees rather than more, support for the Homes for Ukraine scheme (which allowed families in the UK to sponsor and provide accommodation to Ukrainians fleeing Russia's invasion) has been consistently high. Some progressives dismissed this support as exceptionalism, "because Ukrainians, unlike most refugees, are white Europeans". In dismissing support for this refugee sponsorship scheme, some progressives have failed to seize the opportunity provided by Homes for Ukraine to understand in greater detail the things that increase public support for taking in refugees. Under Homes for Ukraine, these have included: a clearly understood rationale that people were fleeing an invasion; the sponsorship model granting the public the agency to decide who and how many refugees to take rather than them being imposed by the Westminster Government; the sponsorship model providing refugees with stronger

routes to integration and into employment and the ability to contribute to the UK. These insights could be used by progressives to build support for a wider movement to welcome refugees.

Not all publicity is good publicity

Most people do not see protest through the same lens as Progressive Activists. Whereas Progressive Activists spend a lot of time reading and watching the news and are more likely to judge a protest's success in part by how much print space it occupies, more disengaged groups might only see the most disruptive part of the protest and pay little attention to the cause itself.

Progressive Activists are the only segment to think that Just Stop Oil is more of a force for good than bad; the rest of the public are more likely to describe the group as 'annoying','disruptive' or 'idiots'. This is not because the general public does not care about climate change. Instead, most Britons just don't think that the approach of blocking roads - and particularly inconveniencing innocent bystanders - is a fair or appropriate way to drive this change. Incidents such as blocking tube trains (which stopped early morning workers from getting to work) or, worse still, blocking roads and therefore stopping ambulances, placed Just Stop Oil firmly on the wrong side of public opinion.

How would you describe Just Stop Oil in one word?

More in Common

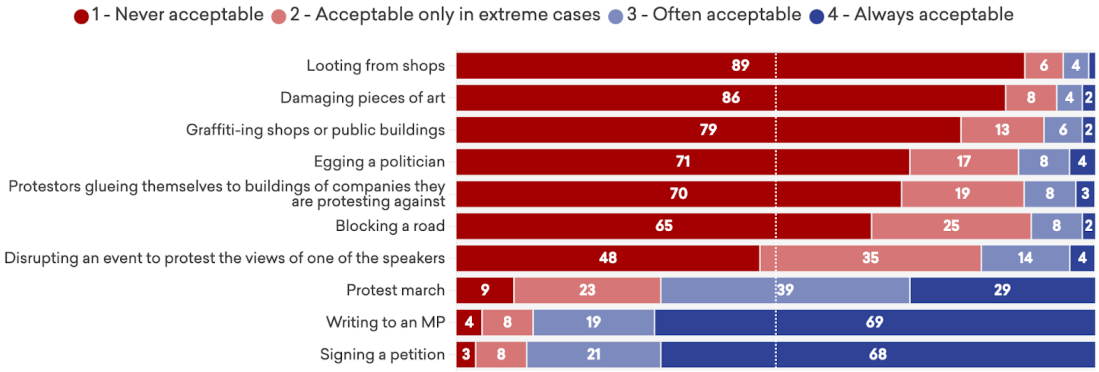
Source: More in Common • June 2023

> "It almost feels like they just want to get in the newspapers because having a silly protest on a road where people are going to shove them out the way isn't going to prove or do anything as far as I'm concerned. So yeah, I've noticed that, but I wasn't a hundred percent sure what they were protesting about"
> Simon, Loyal National

In general the British public take a very negative view of disruptive protest. Sixty five per cent say it is *never* acceptable for protesters to block roads. Seventy per cent say the same about protestors gluing themselves to buildings and 48 per cent say the same about disrupting speaking events.

Britons tend to see disruptive protest as never acceptable

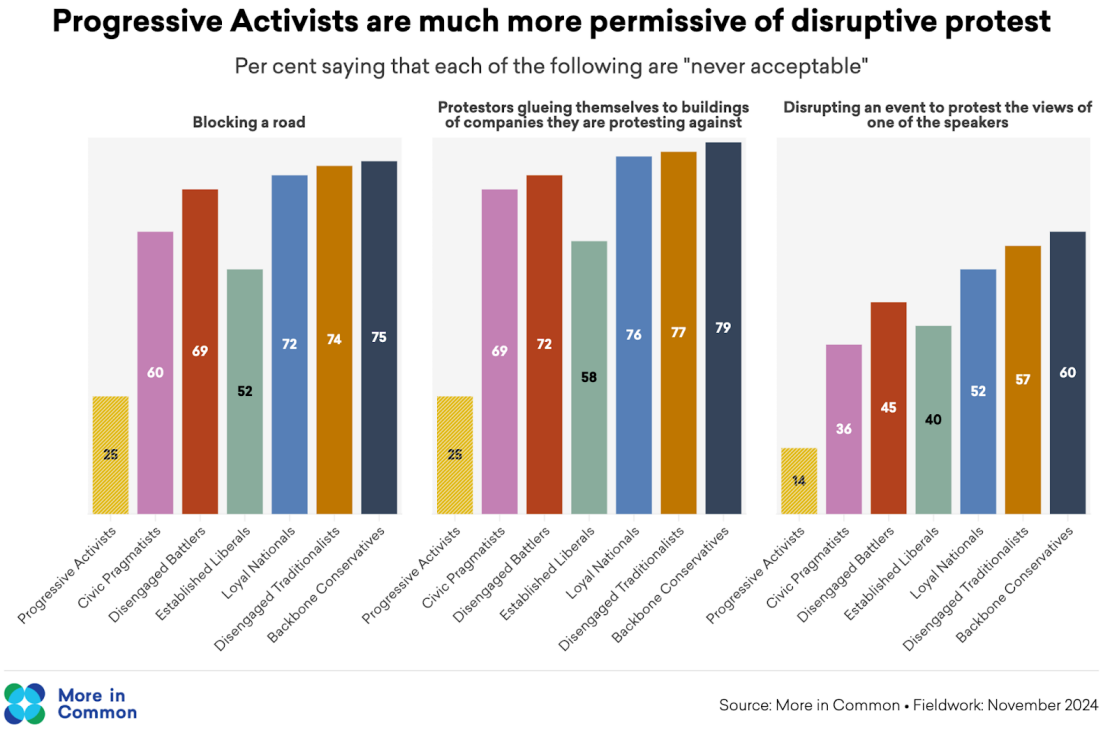
For each of the following forms of protest, would you say they are never or always acceptable in the UK?



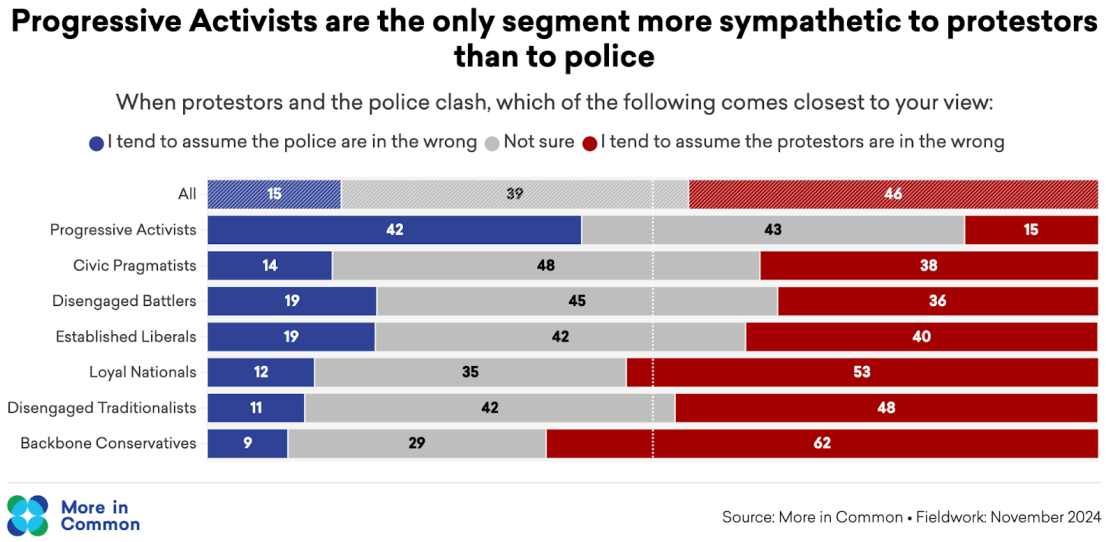
More in Common

Source: More in Common • Fieldwork: November 2024

Progressive Activists are the exception to this. They tend to agree with the general public that looting from shops, graffiti-ing shops and public buildings and damaging pieces of art should never be acceptable forms of protest. However, they take a much more permissive stance on disruptive non-violent protest. Only a quarter think that it is never acceptable to block a road as a form of protest, for example. These diverging attitudes on the acceptable limits of protest mean that Progressive Activists are much more likely to see the actions of groups such as Just Stop Oil as laudable and brave, whereas most of the public see the same actions as selfish and frustrating.



One of the reasons for which Progressive Activists may struggle to recognise how damaging the optics of groups such as Just Stop Oil can be is that they perceive protestors in different ways to the wider public. When protestors and police clash, Progressive Activists are more likely to assume that the police are in the wrong, whereas the rest of the country tend to believe that the protestors are in the wrong. Seeing television news footage of activists clashing with the police or in court receiving sentencing, Progressive Activists may perceive these people as heroes whereas the rest of the country sees them as agitators or criminals. As such, Progressive Activists think that maximising media coverage of protestors clashing with police is likely to increase sympathy for the protestors, when in reality the opposite is usually the case.



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Progressive Activists are of course not solely responsible for the challenges faced by progressive campaigns; these movements operate in a broader social, political and media context that shapes their success or failure. However, given that Progressive Activists have limited control of this context, it places an onus on campaigners who want to be successful to introspect and reflect on how to improve their strategies when they routinely seem to backfire.

Progressivism that alienates potential allies by making people feel guilty, ashamed or unwelcome, or that imposes an unreasonably high bar for participation, is inherently limited in its ability to build widespread support.

Movements centred on moral superiority and rigid ideological purity risk creating an exclusionary culture. When people feel that they must hold 'correct' views or be able to flawlessly articulate progressive ideals in order to participate, they are less likely to engage at all. This dynamic not only reduces the size of the movement but also limits its diversity, depriving it of the broad coalition needed to enact meaningful change as well as new and fresh ideas.

Successful campaigns embrace the complexity of human beliefs and recognise that people arrive at progressive causes on different paths, at different paces and often with incomplete or imperfect understanding. A more inclusive approach - one that allows for mistakes, encourages learning and welcomes incremental progress - stands a far greater chance of achieving its goals.

Many of these less inclusive views about campaigning are held most strongly by the Vocal Ideologue archetype within the Progressive Activist group. If Undogmatic Progressives and

Quiet Ideologues were to vocalise their less absolutist and more permissive views, it could enable greater debate about the best path to campaigning success.

In the end, the success of any campaign depends on its ability to connect with, inspire and mobilize a broad base of support. There will of course be times when more disruptive, 'in your face', protest is warranted and effective; there are countless examples throughout history where a more muscular and radical approach to securing change has sat alongside incrementalist strategies. In recent months, for example, the public have been more forgiving of farmers' protests blocking roads in Westminster, because it was seen as an exceptional one-off protest rather than continuous disruption.

> "I think the farmers was a legitimate protest. They didn't throw tomato soup over paintings. They didn't superglue themselves to roads. They didn't go to airports and spray paint everywhere. They did it in a nice peaceful manner and they didn't upset the general public . Unlike just stopping oil, [who do] all these crazy things just to annoy people. So the two are different. The farmers are more legitimate"
> Ray, Loyal National

The key to a successful campaign lies in getting the balance right and knowing where and when to deploy different tactics, rather than always defaulting to the most extreme approach. In general, campaigners and campaigns that uplift rather than chastise, and that meet people where they are rather than expecting them to be fully ideologically aligned from the outset, are likely to be far more successful in creating lasting change.

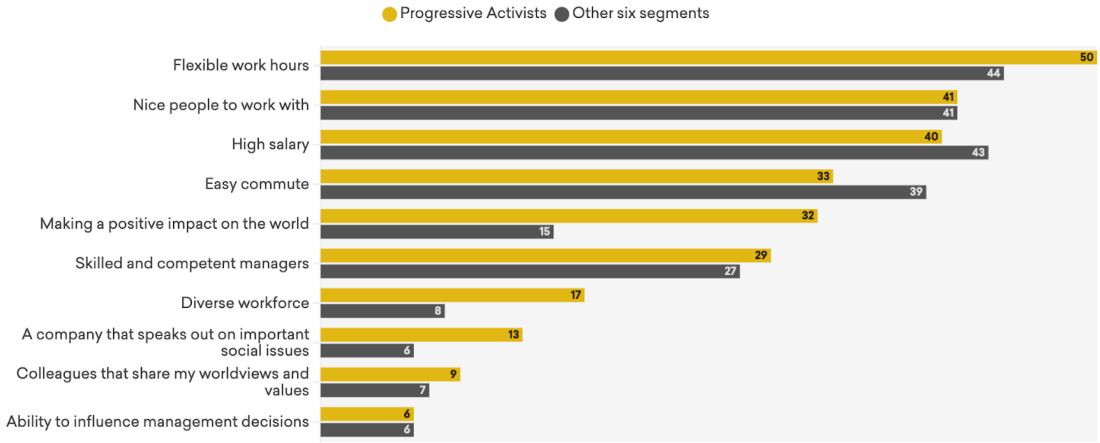
Chapter 3: Progressive workforces

Progressive Activists strongly believe that collective action and systemic change - rather than individual action - is necessary to drive progress. They also are more likely than other segments to tie their political and social engagement to their personal identity. These two facts mean that Progressive Activists are more likely than other segments to say that making a positive impact on the world is a priority for them when looking for a new job.

Asked to choose the top three most important things about a new job, a third (32 per cent) of Progressive Activists list a positive impact in the world, compared to just 15 per cent of the rest of the public.

Progressive Activists are more likely to value positive impact in their ideal job

Which of the following are most important to you in finding a new job? Select up to three



More in Common

Source: More in Common, January 2025

One consequence of this is that some workplaces have much higher concentrations of Progressive Activists in their workforce than others. Progressive Activists are twice as likely as the public as a whole to work in the charity sector (11 per cent versus 5 per cent nationally) and, despite making up around only a tenth of the country's working population, they make up a fifth of the charity workforce. More in Common surveys suggest that Progressive Activists are even more concentrated in policy, advocacy and communications roles within those charities, often making up a clear majority of staff in these roles. To some extent, the charity sector in the UK depends on this group of workers who are willing to sacrifice a potentially higher salary for a job that has a positive impact on the world.

That said, Progressive Activists work across a broad range of sectors and industries. Compared to the rest of the country, they are slightly more likely to work in hospitality, as freelancers in the private sector and to work from home compared to the rest of the working population. Additionally, no workplace is made up entirely of Progressive Activists

either. Even though Progressive Activists are overrepresented in the charity sector, for example, it is Established Liberals who make up the largest group of people working in the charity sector.

Progressive Activists bring distinct expectations to the workplace that can create unique challenges for those managing a largely Progressive Activist workforce, or for those working for Progressive Activist managers.

This chapter combines insights from polling and focus group discussions with Progressive Activists across Britain alongside interviews with CEOs and senior leadership from over a dozen UK-based civil society organisations, spanning various issue areas and sizes. The first half of this chapter considers what Progressive Activists want from their jobs, how this differs from the wider population and how this plays out in Progressive Activist-heavy workforces. The second half draws on the experiences of CEOs and senior leadership in charities in the UK to explore how these organisations can most effectively manage and get the most from a large Progressive Activist workforce.

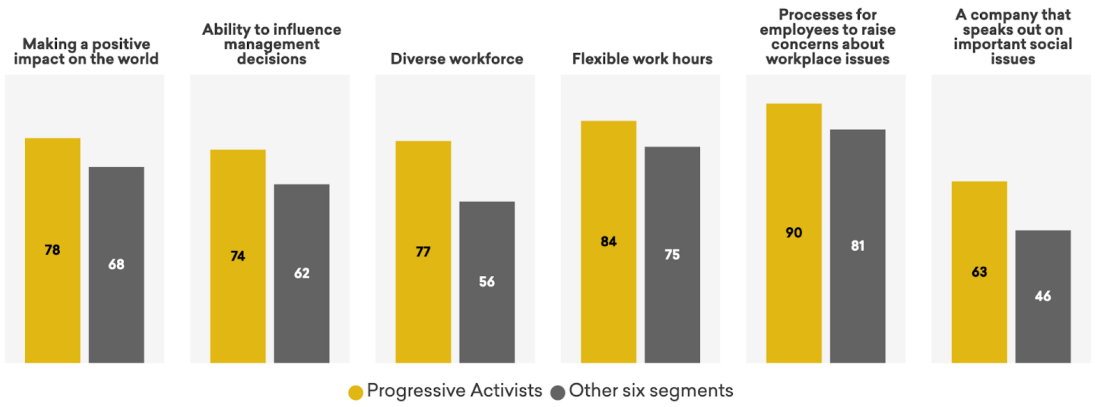
What do Progressive Activists want from their work?

Across the country, most segments - including Progressive Activists - prioritise flexible work hours, nice colleagues and a high salary above all else when considering a new job. However, Progressive Activists are unique in caring more about particular aspects of a job that are less important to other segments.

Progressive Activists are more likely to want to work for a politically active employer with a diverse workforce

Thinking about your ideal job, how important are each of the following?

(Per cent who selected 'very' or 'somewhat' important)



More in Common

Source: More in Common • Fieldwork: November 2024

Seventy eight per cent of Progressive Activists say it is 'very' or 'somewhat' important to them that their job makes a positive impact on the world, compared to 68 per cent of the

rest of the public. They are also much more likely than any other segment to say it is important to them that the company they work for speaks out on important social issues.

Beyond impact, Progressive Activists express a clear preference for less hierarchical workplaces: they are 12 percentage points more likely to say it is important that their work includes the ability to influence management decisions and nine points more likely to say it is important that there are processes for employees to raise complaints internally.

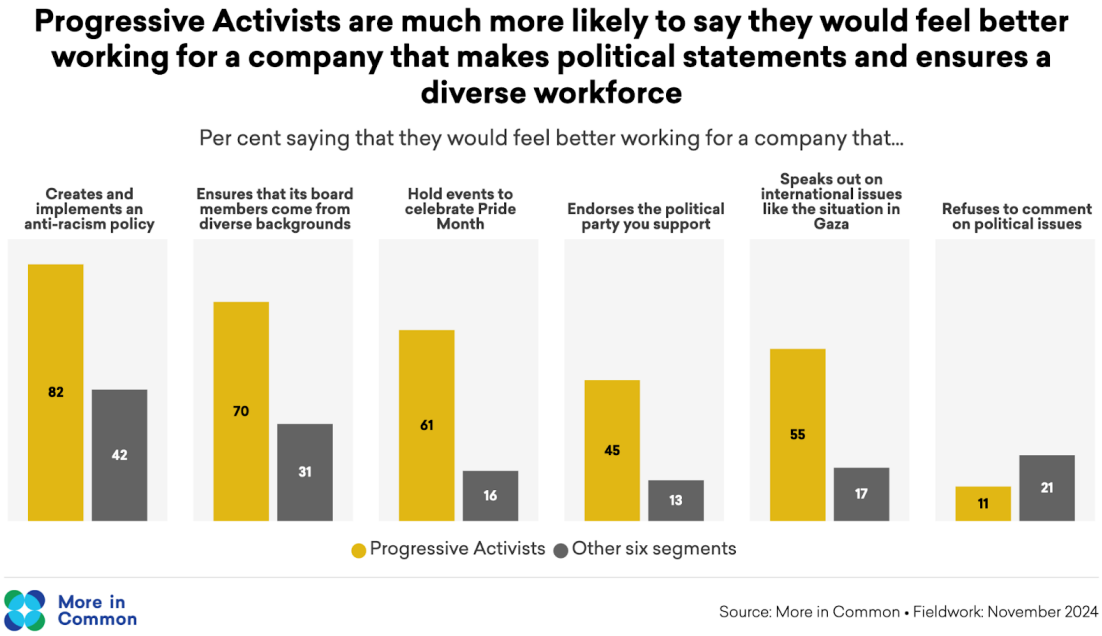
A positive impact on the world

In conversations with Progressive Activists, many say they feel unfulfilled doing a job that might meet practical needs in terms of work hours and pay but does not leave them with a sense that they are doing good in the world.

Progressive Activists think that businesses and organisations can and should have a positive impact on the world across all aspects of their work, spanning measures to promote internal diversity to speaking out on international issues. Whereas other segments of the population are more likely to expect businesses to stay out of political issues, Progressive Activists want businesses to take action on them.

More than half of Progressive Activists (55 per cent) say they would feel better working for a company that speaks out on international issues, such as the situation in Gaza, compared to just 17 per cent across the other six segments. Similarly, 45 per cent of Progressive Activists would feel better working for a company that endorses their preferred political party, but this would make only 13 per cent of the rest of the country feel better about their employer.

The demands of Progressive Activists for employers to speak out on social issues can cause a clash with other employees, or the customers or partners of an organisation. This can create tensions which are difficult to resolve, particularly if Progressive Activists are the more vocal members of staff or feel a moral obligation to speak out about the issues they care about.



Beyond external politics, Progressive Activists are also much more likely to say they would feel better working for companies actively seeking to address internal inequalities and discrimination. Such measures might include implementing anti-racism policies, ensuring board members come from diverse backgrounds and holding events to celebrate Pride month. These actions make a majority of Progressive Activists feel better about a workplace, yet across other segments more people express indifference.

The fact that some people are devoted to making sure that their work has a positive impact on the world is of course not a problem in itself. However, from conversations with leaders in the non-profit sector it is clear that tensions can emerge when workers take an uncompromising approach to what this should look like.

> "People who work in the charitable sector ... can be a bit more against capitalism, a bit against power. And maybe they don't always see the advantages that come with structure and capitalism and money [for a charity]"
> Aid Charity CEO

This rejection of the need for compromise, or for separating work and the political, is often visible in internal debates about fundraising. Compared to other segments, Progressive Activists are more likely to think that charities should turn down donations from donors whose business practices or background they disapprove of. For example, four in ten Progressive Activists think a charity should reject a donation from an oil or gas company, or from a family with links to the slave trade, rather than accept the money and spend it on charitable causes. A third of Progressive Activists say that charities should turn down donations if the philanthropist is also a large donor to the Conservative Party. In focus groups, some Progressive Activists said concerns about the ethics of fundraising were

important enough to them that they would consider leaving a job with a charity if it took a donation they disagreed with.

> "I think the charity sector is not there to ease rich bastards' consciences. It's there to do things that change the balance and inequality and inequity in society. And therefore they have to be scrupulous about where they get their money and they have to answer to it and be accountable to it. And it should be shared decisions by everyone not somebody just getting a little excited because somebody said we'll give you a bag of cash because we know that's actually happened"
> Vicky, Progressive Activist

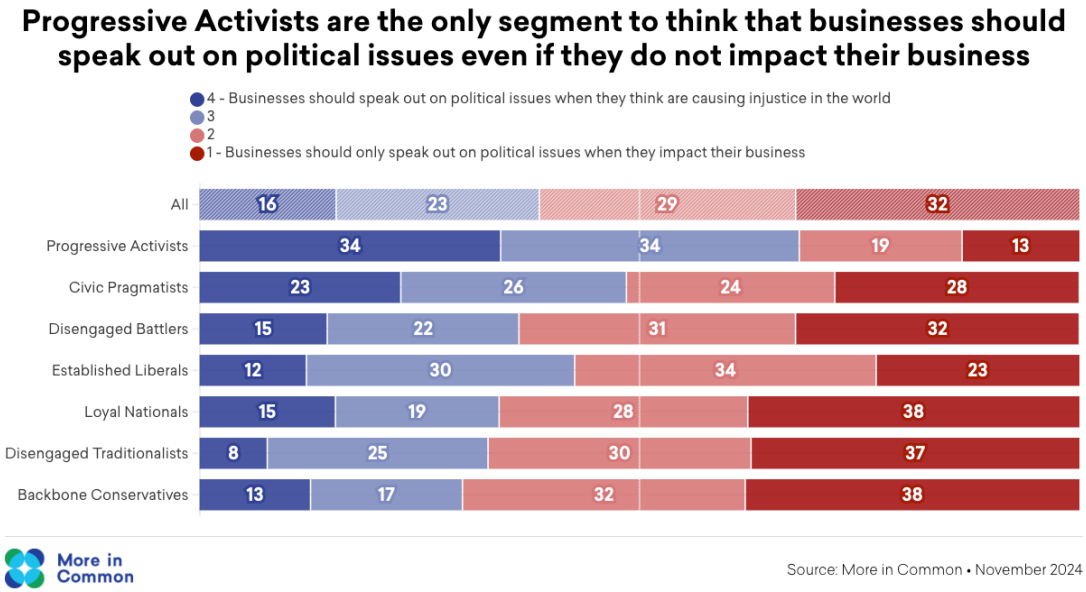
> "I was going to say I think it really matters. Obviously we're a major charity, we do a lot of due diligence and we don't accept large gifts from anyone who we don't deem ethical and aligned with our values. And just for an example imagine if you were a rape victim receiving support from a rape charity and you found out your funding had come from Mohammed Al Fayed. So that would be a really classic example of why you have to take such care"
> Rachel, Progressive Activist

It is entirely reasonable for charities to set parameters around acceptable sources of donations, but some charity leaders express frustration at pushback from staff members expecting the organisation to narrow the boundaries of acceptability beyond what leaders considered reasonable. In these cases, some felt that Progressive Activists' desire to turn away potential donors would have serious implications for the work of the charity by ruling out too many sources of income.

A company that speaks out on political issues

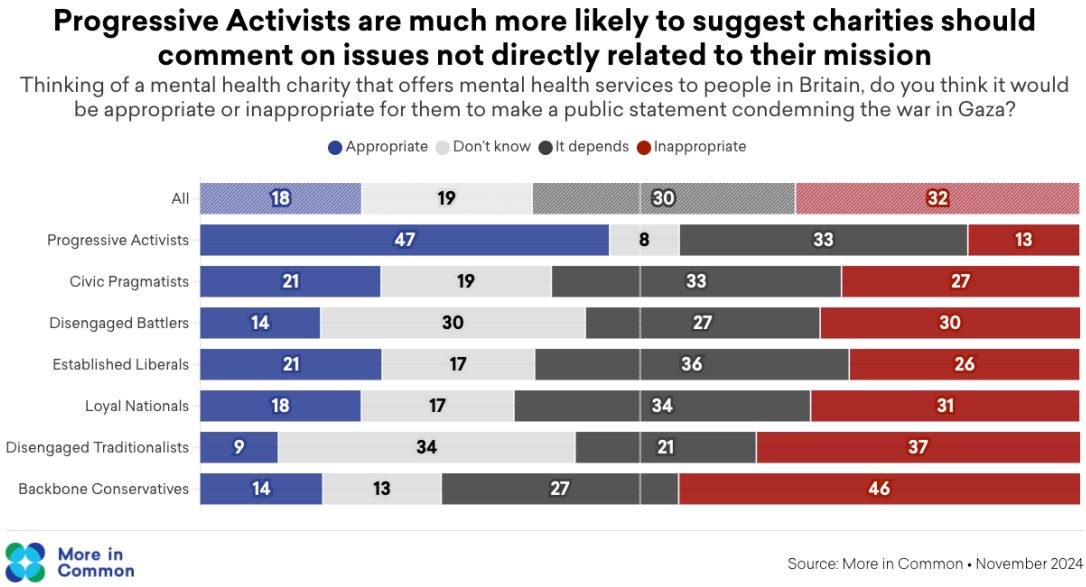
That said, questions about from whom charities should accept donations have played out over a number of years. The CEOs interviewed for this report said that, despite some pushback, these matters had been settled years ago through the creation of frameworks and guidelines for donations that staff were expected to abide by. The same cannot be said for debates about which political issues charities should and should not speak out on. After particular pressure to speak out on the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 and then on the Israel-Gaza war in 2023, many charities are now creating guidelines for when they should and should not make public statements on political issues.

Workforces with large numbers of Progressive Activists are more likely to experience fraught internal debates when speaking out on political issues because Progressive Activists are the only segment in which a clear majority think that businesses should speak out on any political issue they perceive to be causing injustice, rather than only on issues that relate to the work of the business.



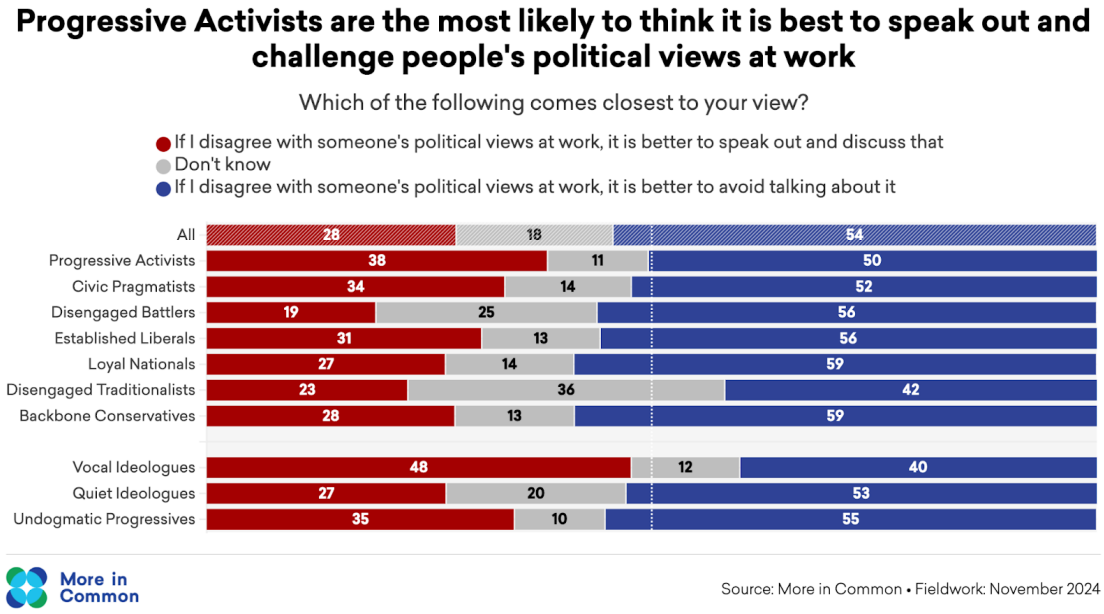
An example of the tensions that this can cause emerged from an interview with a health charity focused on improving health outcomes in Britain. Over the last year, a group of staff at this charity tried to pressure senior leadership into issuing a statement about the situation in Gaza, even though there was no direct link between the activities of the charity and the Israel-Palestine war. Senior leadership refused to do so, in part because doing so could jeopardise the neutrality of the charity in the eyes of some of the illness sufferers in the UK who depend on their services and might hold a range of views about Israel and Palestine. In response, some employees organised internal protests and there were some resignations.

This desire among Progressive Activists for charities to take a broad approach to their advocacy is widespread: almost half (47 per cent) of Progressive Activists think it is appropriate for a British mental health charity to publicly condemn the situation in Gaza, compared to just 18 per cent of the UK public as a whole. In some cases this broad approach to social justice jeapordises a charity's ability to achieve its more focused stated mission. This view is most strongly held by Vocal Ideologues, 63 per cent of whom think that it is appropriate for this hypothetical charity to speak out, compared to just 26 per cent of Undogmatic Progressives, who are more likely to say that it depends.



None of this is to say that Britons do not think businesses should speak out on political matters: 48 per cent of Britons say that it is important to them that the organisation they work for speaks out on important issues, but there is a clear gap in what constitutes 'important' for different segments of the public. Most people think it only makes sense for businesses to speak out on issues that impact their work directly, whereas Progressive Activists are overwhelmingly likely to think that businesses should speak out on *any* matter of social injustice. This belief is even more widely held by the Vocal Ideologue Progressive Activist archetype. Eighty seven per cent of them say that businesses should speak out on any issue causing injustice in the world, compared to 68 per cent of Progressive Activists as a whole.

Progressive Activists' expectations of advocacy extends to how they approach colleague relationships within their workplaces. Thirty eight per cent of Progressive Activists say that it is better to speak out if they disagree with a colleague's political views at work rather than avoid talking about politics with them, more than any other segment. This means that internal disagreements can become personal or overly heated in organisations which employ a relatively high proportion of Progressive Activists, or can lead to organisations hiring people only with the same worldview, for fear of stoking divisions further. This desire to challenge perspectives of colleagues who disagree with them on politics is even more strongly held by Vocal Ideologues.



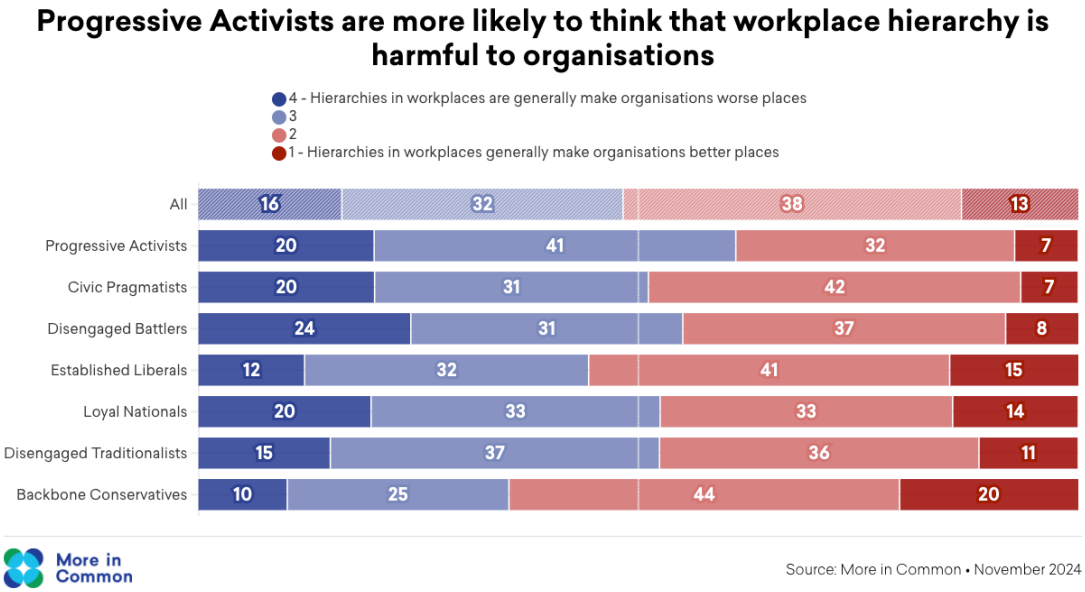
A process to raise complaints internally

Progressive Activists' strong views about when a company or organisation should speak out on political issues can also cause tensions because they are less likely to see the need for, or benefits of, workplace hierarchies or to believe that organisational leadership should have a veto over these types of issues.

> "There is just this sense that real leaders are bad, that they let you down, that there's always a hidden agenda"
> CEO, Mental Health Charity

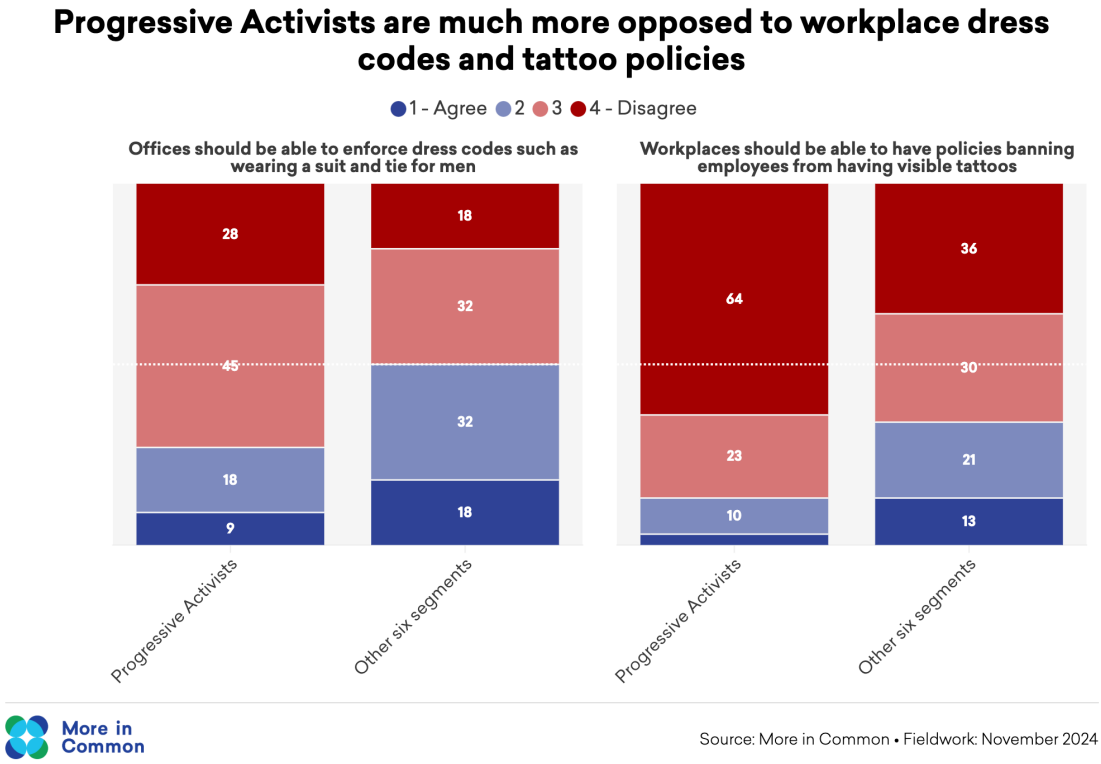
> "I think if you are a young progressive activist coming into the space, everything you are hearing is saying do more. Everything you're seeing manifest in the real world is saying you're not doing enough... and then you perceive your leadership to be failing in leading on many of the causes that you care passionately about because your environment is changing before your eyes"
> Environment charity senior leadership

Compared to the other six segments, Progressive Activists are 12 percentage points more likely to say that an ability to influence management decisions is an important consideration when looking for a job, and nine points more likely to say it is important to them that there are processes to raise complaints internally. However, these beliefs go further: Progressive Activists are notably more likely than other segments to believe that hierarchies tend to make workplaces worse places.



In practical terms, these views can lead to a rejection of some more traditional elements of workplace hierarchy. Progressive Activists are more likely than other groups to oppose the idea that offices should be able to set a staff dress code, for example.

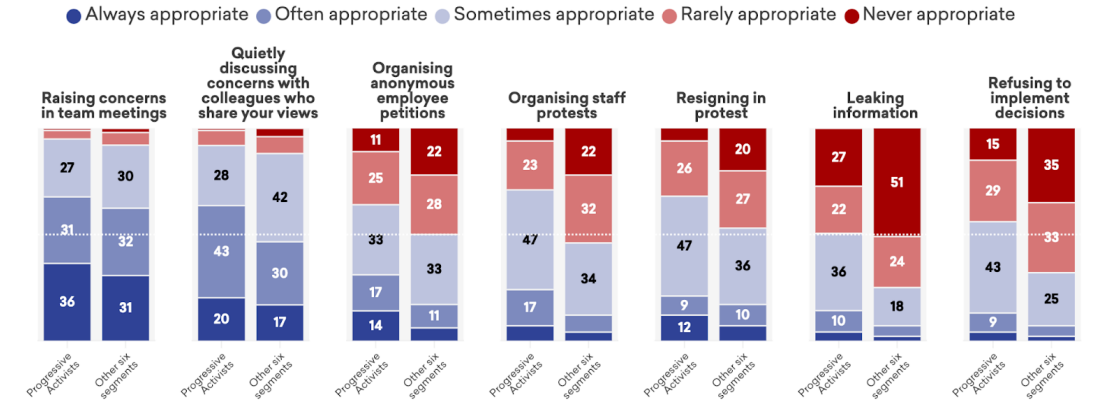
These views are generally shared across the three Progressive Activist archetypes, but are held most strongly by Vocal Ideologues - 81 per cent of whom think that workplace hierarchies make organisations worse places, compared to 61 per cent of Quiet Ideologues and 53 per cent of Undogmatic Progressives.



However, Progressive Activists' views on workplace hierarchy are most apparent from their views on workplace protest and approaches to driving internal change. Asked which responses are appropriate when employees disagree with management, the vast majority of Britons think it is at least sometimes appropriate to raise concerns in team meetings and quietly discuss concerns with colleagues. However, Progressive Activists are much more likely to see more extreme forms of workplace protest as appropriate. Compared to the other six segments, Progressive Activists are almost twice as likely to say it is often or always appropriate to organise anonymous employee petitions or staff protests, to leak information or to refuse to implement decisions.

Progressive Activists are much more supportive of disruptive workplace protest

When employees disagree with decisions made by management, how appropriate or inappropriate would you say each of the following responses are?



More in Common

Source: More in Common • Fieldwork: November 2024

Sometimes this willingness to challenge conventional workplace hierarchy can create a self-perpetuating cycle whereby employees who are more critical of workplace hierarchy move into third sector organisations where there is a stronger culture of internal debate and flatter hierarchies. One focus group participant, for example, explicitly explained her move to the charity sector as being driven by a desire to speak up against management on a greater number of issues:

> "I worked in … the luxury high end sports sector. And on a regular basis I would stick my head up over the parapet and say, this isn't okay, this needs to change, this isn't appropriate, this is not acceptable. And I spent my entire career being shot down. Which is why I essentially moved into the charity sector, because my career was ended by whistleblowing. But I ethically couldn't continue in that environment without saying what I believed needed to change"
> Lucy, Progressive Activist

> "I think if there's any sector where that kind of thing [open feedback] is going to be encouraged, it's going to be the charity sector… our experience working in this sector is going to be very different. I've spent most of my working career in the corporate sector where if you put your head above the parapet it gets shot at" Andy, Progressive Activist

Indeed, Progressive Activists who work in the private sector tend to be more moderate in their views, more open to compromise and more positive about workplace hierarchies than Progressive Activists who work in the charity sector. Undogmatic Progressives make up 46

per cent of the Progressive Activists working in the private sectors, compared to just 27 per cent of the Progressive Activists in the charity sector.

Flat hierarchies and challenges to institutional wisdom can sometimes drive innovation in organisations. Yet it is clearly a balancing act, and the important work of charities can be disrupted when they find themselves spending too much time resolving internal disputes.

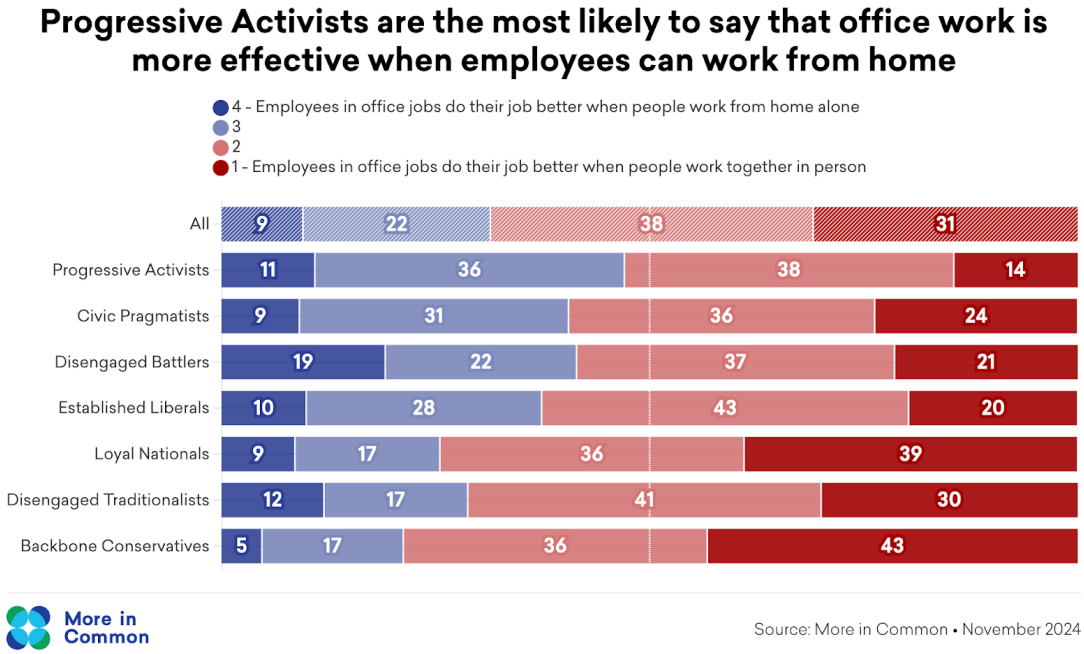
The strong political views of Progressive Activists, coupled with their greater comfort challenging workplace hierarchies, mean that some charity workplaces in particular can become entangled in internal conflicts that detract time and attention from achieving their mission.

One example covered in the media at the end of 2024 is the humanitarian charity ActionAid, which faced a moment of crisis when the co-CEO reportedly told a staff meeting "I honestly don't know what to do" about the organisation's increasingly toxic work culture. According to reporting in *The Times,* meetings - which had been set up as forums for staff to express their views on management decisions - had descended into increasingly hostile shouting matches, with many participants joining online. One staff member told *The Times* "We talk about developing feminist leadership behaviours, like speaking truth to power, but that has become an excuse for going after people in meetings; some senior staff have been really bullied". Clearly, it is important for staff to be able to relay legitimate concerns. Yet how those concerns are communicated matters, not least to stop charities from being distracted from their missions by internal conflict.

Flexibility

While demands for employers to speak out on political issues and a demand for flatter workplace hierarchies are not surprising given Progressive Activists' worldviews and values, it is notable that Progressive Activists are also more likely than other segments to value flexibility in their jobs. This is the top feature that Progressive Activists prioritise when looking for a new job: they are 11 percentage points more likely than the rest of the public to say it is important to them and 6 points more likely to list it among the top three qualities of their ideal job.

One element of this demand for flexibility is expressed in Progressive Activists' attitudes towards remote work. While every segment thinks that office workers are more effective when they work together in person, Progressive Activists are the most likely to believe that remote work is more effective and are 16 points more likely to think this than the population as a whole.



From conversations with charity leaders, it is clear that remote work, coupled with Progressive Activists' more confrontational approach to leadership decisions, can be a damaging mix for organisational culture. This challenge is most often expressed through staff members sending strongly-worded written communications to their colleagues when they have a disagreement, rather than talking through their concerns in person. Clearly online disinhibition effects can lead to people expressing their views in an email more vociferously than how they would express themselves in person. Moreover, remote working can also make it harder for employees to build the relationships that allow potential conflicts to be diffused, or to see the in-person social cues that communicate how someone is responding to a conversation.

> "It is a discussion we've had in the organisation about how do we resolve conflict? How do we have difference of opinion? How do we give each other feedback? So what we tend to find is that the mechanism for feedback in our organisation is often through chat functions at all-staff briefings or emails, with quite a hostile questioning of leadership and a cynicism about the intentions of leadership"
> Charity CEO

> "This has been exacerbated by hybrid working [because it's easier to send harsher messages via email] and to sit in your cupboard and not take responsibility, not take your personal responsibility for the harmony and culture of the organisation that you exist in. People would do well to write the email and then not send it. Why don't they pick up the phone? Or even better, why don't they come in and walk down the

> corridor?"
> CEO, Children's charity

A number of CEOs suggested that upwards bullying of middle management had increased since the pandemic when remote working policies were formalised or tightened. Among some CEOs, there was a suggestion that female management were more likely to be targeted by this upward bullying and some highlighted the higher churn of female leaders in the charity sector as a result of upward bullying and pressure since the Covid pandemic. A survey of employers, conducted by Aviva and Censuswide in 2023, found that 35 per cent of employers felt that work from home had increased conflict between employees.

Others suggested that forms of digital activism that were popularised during Covid lockdowns had spread to internal activism by employees, who might see posting on internal company message boards in the same way as sharing a post to an Instagram story.

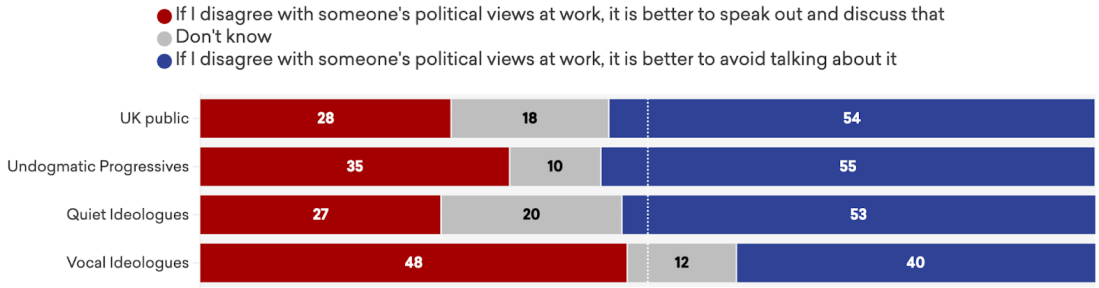
Progressive workforce dynamics

While Progressive Activists are overrepresented in certain sectors, they do not all arrive at work with the same views on the workplace or on what constitutes effective campaigning. The three Progressive Activist archetypes are instructive in explaining how internal dynamics in certain organisations, and in particular charities, can create a self-reinforcing cycle that stifles the organisation's ability to make progress on the issues they are working on.

This cycle starts with Vocal Ideologues, the most outspoken of the three progressive archetypes and the most willing to disrupt and unsettle workplace authority in order to drive internal change. While Quiet Ideologues mostly share the same strongly held progressive views, Vocal Ideologues are unique in the extent to which they are willing to challenge workplace orthodoxy to drive change within an organisation in order to have their views heard. Whereas a third of all Progressive Activists think that, if they disagree with someone's political views at work, it is better to speak out and discuss it, this view is held by almost half of Vocal Ideologues.

Vocal Ideologues are the most likely to think it is best to speak out and challenge people's political views at work

Which of the following comes closest to your view?



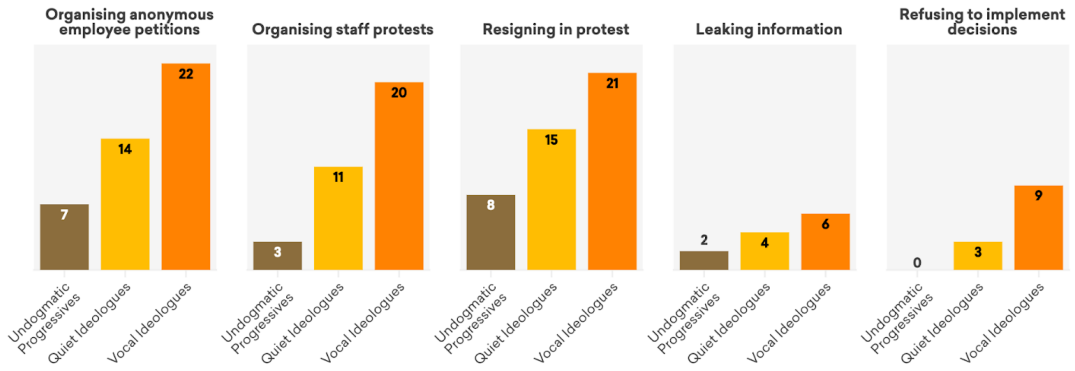
More in Common

Source: More in Common • Fieldwork: November 2024

Vocal Ideologues are also more likely to support more disruptive forms of internal activism. Compared to the average Progressive Activist, Vocal Ideologues are around twice as likely to say it is always acceptable to organise employee protests, refuse to implement decisions or set up anonymous petitions when staff disagree with management decisions.

Vocal Ideologues are more likely to see workplace protest as always appropriate

Proportion of respondents who view each of the following actions as always appropriate when employees disagree with decisions made by management



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The leadership of Vocal Ideologues in internal organising around controversial topics has the strongest effect on **Quiet Ideologues**. Quiet Ideologues broadly share the same beliefs and worldviews as Vocal Ideologues, even if their attitudes to workplace organising differs somewhat.

Quiet Ideologues and Vocal Ideologues are roughly equally likely to say they would feel better working for an organisation that speaks out over international issues such as Gaza, and they are equally likely to agree with economically or culturally progressive statements such as “Addressing climate change requires ending capitalism” or “Britain still acts like a

colonial power in the world" (in fact, in both of cases, Quiet Ideologues are actually slightly more likely to hold these views).

However, Quiet Ideologues do not agree that the workplace is the place for inflamed political debate or that disrupting workplace processes is an appropriate way to drive internal change. They are also the most likely of the three archetypes to occupy junior roles in their organisation, with 42 per cent in entry-level roles compared to 29 per cent of all Progressive Activists. Their aversion to workplace confrontation means they are less likely to actively instigate disruptive workplace protests, and are also less likely to challenge Vocal Ideologues head-on or call them out when they are disruptive or counterproductive.

Due to their strong desire to drive change in the work that they do, Quiet Ideologues are likely to go along with the actions of Vocal Ideologues, even if they wouldn't instigate it themselves. This leaves the third progressive archetype - Undogmatic Progressives - in the minority.

Undogmatic Progressives are unlikely to challenge or speak up when they think that internal activism is counterproductive or distracting an organisation from its mission. This is both because they do genuinely support many progressive causes and because they feel they are in the minority regarding views on workplace protest. As a result of some issues being framed as binaries or 'us versus them', Undogmatic Progressives may also not want to be seen as opposing a social cause they care about simply because they are concerned about the ways in which the cause is being presented. "I don't want to be a 'bad ally'" is a common refrain of Undogmatic Progressives, who go along with what Vocal Ideologues want because they "want to do the right thing". Undogmatic Progressives may feel uncomfortable when their colleagues take more militant actions in their drive for change in a workplace, but feel powerless to speak out against it. Given many Undogmatic Progressives are in leadership and management positions, this can help to explain why, despite some discomfort with the demands of more junior staff, senior managers and board members often follow their lead.

In addition to this, Progressive Activists are overrepresented in some workplaces, but very few are entirely made up of Progressive Activists. For example, in the charity sector Established Liberals are also overrepresented - and actually make up the largest segment of workers in the charity sector, even if they are not the most vocal in internal debates.

Like Progressive Activists, Established Liberals hold generally socially liberal worldviews. However, unlike Progressive Activists, their views on the economy favour free markets and a smaller state, and they are generally more trusting of national institutions so less likely to see protests as a necessary means of driving change.

Crucially, Established Liberals see politics as much less important to their personal identity compared to Progressive Activists - they are also more likely to avoid confrontation in heated political discussions. As such, Established Liberals are more likely to take a backseat

in internal company divisions, leaving the opinions of their Progressive Activist colleagues to gain disproportionate attention.

Disrupting these dynamics requires leaders of progressive workforces to ensure that the voices of Vocal Ideologues are heard but not distorted or inflated within the organisation, creating space for a broader range of opinions to be heard. The next section sets out what that can look like.

Managing progressive workforces

The unique characteristics of Progressive Activist employees create distinct management challenges, particularly in organisations or departments where they make up a significant portion of the workforce. However, the experiences of charity CEOs and senior leaders point to several strategies for getting the best out of Progressive Activist-heavy workforces while maintaining organisational effectiveness.

Make space for constructive discussions and feedback

Both focus group discussions with and polling of Progressive Activists show that - more than any other segment - they want to feel that their concerns are listened to by management at work and want greater input into the direction of the organisations that they work for. There is little use in trying to completely suppress these impulses. The experiences of charity CEOs, as well as conversations with Progressive Activists themselves, suggest that not creating fora for discussion is more likely to lead to staff members to take informal and more divisive measures, such as anonymous employee petitions, to express their concerns.

> "Even though I work in a very small charitable organisation now, the level of transparency amongst all of the people that are part of it is just unbelievably refreshing... I can pick up the phone to my CEO anytime and say, we need to change this because these following things I think are my concern"
> Lucinda, Progressive Activist

> "We have quite a lot of spaces in our organisation where there's a chance to do a bit of an anonymous Q&A with our kind of c-suite... So if there is that kind of frustration, we can obviously take it to our CEO who is very accessible and really open"
> Rachel, Progressive Activist

> "We know that it's the CEOs make the large decisions, including with funding. So I think support a challenge. And also if there's anything that offends or causes any harm, we need to be able to call it out"
> Josephine, Progressive Activist

Instead, those responsible for managing Progressive Activists should consider how they can channel their employees' desires to shape the direction of the organisation into a constructive source of internal improvement, rather than letting them spiral into unending internal disputes.

One way in which Progressive Activists say they would like to have their voice heard is through regular, in-person forums for staff to raise concerns and discuss organisational decisions. If these are organised regularly, there will be less of a need for staff to reach for more confrontational ways of driving change. Management should be able to use these fora to explain the rationale behind decisions that might clash with the instincts of some of their staff. In person fora can also be more effective than digital channels, which are driven by online disinhibition and can enable more confrontational communication styles.

However, for these discussions to be truly effective, organisations need to be clear that while staff input is valued and will be carefully considered, once decisions are made through proper channels they are final. The forums should not become endless platforms for repeatedly challenging decisions that have already been made.

Instill a culture of boundaries

The recent escalations in the Israel-Palestine conflict were a common driver of internal organisational tensions, particularly with regard to how direct each organisation should be in responding to the conflict. This was heard in almost all of the interviews with charity leaders.

For some organisations, such as a charity focused on delivering aid to children in war-torn areas, it makes absolute sense to provide a public comment on the war in Gaza and doing so caused little internal dispute. However, tensions were more likely to emerge when the connection to Gaza was indirect and staff wanted the charity to issue a public statement mostly as a way of using the organisation's platform to raise awareness rather than to deliver on outcomes related to the charity's mission. Because the conflict in Gaza is so emotive, many staff expressed feelings that their organisations were complicit in enabling the loss of civilian life in Gaza by refusing to speak out on these issues, even if speaking out was likely to have limited impact on the situation and could actively disrupt the charity's ability to pursue its stated mission.

In 2024 an organisation which campaigns for an anti-racist charity sector, released the findings of a survey showing that 'almost half of UK charities have not responded to the genocide of Palestinians in Gaza', pressuring more to make a statement.

Arguably, it was surprising that so many UK charities had commented on the situation in Gaza, given that most UK charities do not have a mission related to international affairs and that the majority of Britons themselves do not take a side on the Israel-Palestine conflict.

As such, to expect a majority of charities serving the general public to take a stance is potentially likely to alienate the people that the charities are trying to support.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the pressure on charities to speak out on a wide range of issues, regardless of connection to mission, risks making charity and campaigning groups less inclusive as they draw up an ever-growing list of requirements on political viewpoints.

To tackle this, it can help charities to establish clear guidelines on what the appropriate boundaries of comment beyond the core mission should be, in order to maintain focus. An example of where this has worked successfully is in a mental health charity interviewed for this report. After months of gridlock surrounding heated internal debates about how to comment publicly on the Israel-Gaza conflict, the charity set about producing 'speaking out guidelines' that would determine future decision making. To produce the guidelines, they created an internal working group with input from all levels of the organisation and allowed a wide range of employees to be heard in the creation process. The result was that less time was spent debating whether or not the organisation should speak out on certain issues and more time could be spent on its core mission. The guidelines also allowed the organisation to better communicate internally to staff who feel strongly about an issue the reasons why they might not comment on it publicly.

> "Focus, focus, focus I think is very important. And don't get roped into big discussions because it's a slippery slope... I think you aggravate the problem because to me, polarisation is one of the worst thing that you can have in society and in a workforce"
> CEO, Aid charity

> "[This charity] respects people's rights to conscience and freedom of speech, but not in the name of this organisation... they want to go and march, they should take leave to do that. We commend that as their right and appropriate, but not wearing a [branded] t-shirt that they will be disciplined for because it's not their job"
> CEO, children's charity

Build strong boards

A charity's guidelines on speaking out should be determined with input from and approval by the Board of Trustees. Trustees will often be able to bring external perspectives that can help strike the right balance on when and where to comment.

Once a policy has been determined, the executive team of a charity should know that they have the board's backing in enforcing it, as with any other policy. However conversations with some charity leaders and board members suggest this isn't always the case. In some instances, boards have seemed to side with more junior staff objecting to these policies or trustees have been less than convincing in their support of charity leadership.

> "Negative reactions and push back are now to be expected - internally and externally. We can no longer allow ourselves to be discombobulated by protests outside our events, a social media storm or a disgruntled member of staff. If the board has confidence in the leadership (and there are no credible performance concerns) then they need to back them and trust them to know when to push back and stand firm and when to change course"
> Experienced charity leader

In some cases this is borne out of a well meaning desire to recognise the views of more junior staff. In others it is borne out of a reputational concern for being seen to be preventing public statements on emotive causes. There are of course times when boards must play a role in considering employees' concerns, especially if there is a rift with senior management. However, unless there are performance issues, in not backing agreed policies, boards can inadvertently worsen internal charity dynamics and disempower senior staff, ultimately reducing organisational effectiveness.

Use recruitment and inductions

A CEO of a large humanitarian charity did not face the same tensions on 'speaking out' and attributed this to the culture of neutrality that had been established in the organisation. This is a culture that begins as early as the recruitment process, when interviewees are asked about how a humanitarian organisation should respond to politically-laden conflicts and where the principle of neutrality is also a core part of new employees' induction. Done right, this can benefit both employees and the organisation as a whole: the employee is aware of boundaries from the start so is less likely to become frustrated by constraints imposed by organisational mission, and the organisation itself is less likely to spend time mired in internal debates about whether or not to speak out on international issues. Some non-profit organisations will always see themselves as more 'political' than others, but it is worth reflecting on how recruitment and induction can be used to instill values and set agreed boundaries on the limits of each organisation's work.

> "It would shine through the interview [if a candidate was unable to set aside their political views in the work they do]. That is the first thing that we talk about is our fundamental principle is our ethos, the values. And that would normally be picked up during the interview"
> CEO, Aid charity

> "I think that we live in a country where people have a variety of perspectives and if I begin to take sides on the matters of the day, then I will alienate people who need the service. My job is not to just provide support to people whose politics I agree with. My job is to provide support to everybody. And if they feel that we in some way are not welcoming, not inclusive, then we can't do our job"
> CEO, Education Charity

> "We are very clear that these are the values. This is what you are being recruited to do and that is your jurisdiction. We're not a collective, don't vote on subjects"
> CEO, Children's charity

Recruit a diverse workforce

In recent years, workplaces have made positive strides in terms of the diversity of their workforce, particularly focusing on demographic groups that have historically discriminated against, including women and people from ethnic minorities. However, less attention has been paid to promoting diversity of thought in the workplace.

It is natural that certain workplaces will attract people with specific worldviews and in many cases this is useful to organisations who want to keep a coherent focus and minimise internal conflict. However, if an organisation has too little ideological diversity, this can create workplace cultures where certain viewpoints become so dominant that alternative perspectives are rarely voiced, impeding effectiveness in reaching and persuading broader audiences.

This can manifest itself in a number of ways. In communications and campaigning teams, a lack of willingness to listen to people with opposing views has meant that many progressive organisations have struggled in recent years to craft messages that resonate with supporters outside their core base (see Chapter 2). In fundraising teams, charities may prevent themselves from achieving the impact they would like if staff become unwilling to engage with donors who do not align perfectly with their political worldview.

Breaking this cycle requires intentional effort from leadership. Organisations should review their hiring practices to ensure that they are not inadvertently screening out candidates with different perspectives but who share the organisation's core mission and values. This might involve rewriting job descriptions to focus more on concrete skills and experience, ensuring interview panels include people with diverse viewpoints - including charity beneficiaries - and consciously valuing traits such as pragmatism and bridge building alongside passion for the cause.

It is also important to create an environment where reasonable disagreement is acceptable. Maintaining diversity of viewpoints isn't just about hiring: it's about creating a culture where people with different perspectives feel comfortable expressing their views constructively. This means actively modelling how to have respectful discussions about areas of disagreement and ensuring that dominant viewpoints don't become so entrenched that alternative perspectives are dismissed without consideration.

Conclusion

The foreword to this report quoted Glinda the Good's lyrics on the importance of popularity to success. Having now explored how Progressive Activists relate to the wider public, where their views align and diverge, and the dynamics among progressives, there is another lesson from *Wicked* relevant to this report. It related to the difference between campaigners and the public they are trying to persuade.

Progressive campaigners often approach their work by assuming that more of the public share their outlook than actually do, an outlook close to that of Wicked's protagonist, Elphaba. They assume that the public is motivated by the same revolutionary desire to take a stance against injustice, inequity and the status quo. Like Elphaba, many Progressive Activists believe that if only the wizard's curtain were drawn back (whether that be misinformation, false consciousness or broader power structures) most people would flock to their cause.

The truth is rather different. To continue the analogy from the film, Progressive Activists may find more people are like Elphaba's counterpart Glinda - nervous about disruption, uneasy with doing away with the status quo and fundamentally (and understandably) concerned about the implications of change in their life. What progressives are offering might at times appear appealing but, to the public, it often feels like they are pushing too hard to dismantle aspects of life that many people are comfortable with, value and take pride in. Strategies designed to appeal to Elphabas may instead ultimately alienate the Glindas that Progressive Activists are trying to reach.

Film analogies aside, it is worth stressing again that there is nothing wrong with the fact that Progressive Activists hold outlier beliefs. In the same way, there is nothing wrong with the Loyal National segment placing unusually high importance on in-group identity, the Backbone Conservative segment's unique emphasis on national history or Established Liberals' idiosyncratic optimism about the status quo. Yet understanding where and how Progressive Activists differ from other groups in the population can help them both to avoid inadvertently creating divisive 'culture war' dynamics and to have a better dialogue with more socially conservative and less engaged groups.

It is also helpful to understand that for many Progressive Activists, their desire for change is motivated by a deep frustration with what they see as the failings of the social contract. This frustration with the unfairness of the system is certainly not unique to Progressive Activists. However where other groups - particularly parts of the white working class in deindustrialised towns - have been more likely to embrace the populist right, younger city-dwelling graduates have shifted to the progressive left.

The challenge for Progressive Activists is that, rather than being able to unite other segments of the population with shared antipathy (particularly with the economic

settlement in the UK), an expectation of alignment on cultural issues or a tendency to view the concerns of social conservatives as either bigoted or naive actively prevents them from doing so.

A different approach does not require progressives (or campaigners of any stripe) to change their core values, nor should it lessen anger towards injustice or impatience for change. What this research suggests is that a fresh approach in both tone and tactics - plain English that is more welcoming and less absolutist, disruptive or chastising - is more likely to build support for the issues which Progressive Activists care about.

This is particularly true in the workplace, with case studies of charities and even some public bodies struggling to handle the dynamics between more progressive staff and organisational leadership. The result is that these organisations simply become less effective and more consumed by internal conflict than external delivery. Finding ways to allow more junior staff to express their views, while being very clear about the decision-making process is one way to steer organisations away from this. Equally important is that charity trustees back their staff. So too is ensuring that all organisations who engage with the public find ways - either through their hiring efforts, or research work - to ensure that they hear from a diverse range of perspectives, avoiding the dangers of groupthink.

There will be and have been occasions when a no-holds-barred, zero-compromise approach to campaigning is both necessary and the best or only route to securing change. Gradualism and universalism have their limits too. Yet the evidence is that those moments of more radical action are more effective if they are chosen carefully, selectively and with a bank of support already secured, rather than being the default 'go-to' option for campaigners. Progressive Activists have long been the drivers of social change in the UK and abroad and suggestions of a mid-2020s turn to the right does not imply that progressive causes are doomed, but rather that new ways of working are needed. These new ways should reflect on progressives' exceptionalism and be rooted in meeting people where they are, not where progressives might wish them to be.

Methodology

More in Common polled a nationally representative sample of 2,015 GB adults between 18-24 November 2024.

Additionally, More in Common polled 1,174 people previously identified as Progressive Activists between 18-29 November 2024. The three Progressive Activists archetypes were created using K-means segmentation of this sample.

Focus groups were conducted by More in Common throughout November 2024.

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

For further information contact ed@moreincommon.com.

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