



POLICY LAB



More in
Common



Change Still Pending
March 2025

Foreword

In the summer of 2024, the British people voted decisively for change. Dissatisfaction was the prominent emotion of the time, combined with a deep, gnarling sense that whichever way they turned, disappointment might follow.

In the six months since, that view hasn't shifted. They are worried about the direction of the country, anxious that the NHS won't be there for them when they or their families need it, frustrated by an immigration system that feels out of control and uncertain that the economy will pick up in a way that will meaningfully impact their lives.

It is no surprise in this context that **arguments have mounted inside government for a more urgent or "insurgent" style.** Briefings have suggested that some at the centre of Downing Street admire the dramatic style of Donald Trump and Elon Musk across the Atlantic. And there has been talk of a turn within Number 10 to thinkers who suggest that dramatic shifts on immigration, national security and a host of other concerns are required to rebuild the relationship between the governed and the government.

In our shared work immediately after the election, **we predicted that the country's hunger for change would, indeed, be difficult to satiate.** We noted that the 2024 election was only the most recent of a series of moments at which the country has expressed a desire for a new direction, a series which began with the Brexit referendum but also included the landslide election victory of Boris Johnson. In each of these previous moments, millions of people in the country have reported being disappointed by promises of change going unhonoured. **At the last election, the public voted for action not just promises on the cost of living, NHS waiting lists and immigration and will turn to alternatives if such promises continue to go unfulfilled.**

The talk of the need for a new urgency at the heart of government thus makes considerable sense. Nonetheless, there remain reasons for thinking that the direction of travel increasingly proposed is unlikely to provide the fillip to the government's fortunes that many predict.

Foreword

In particular, our research, presented here, suggests that the **country is not enthusiastic about disruptive populism**. And there are two clear reasons why the government would be well-advised to steer clear of it.

First, **the vast majority of the country remains committed to an orderly political process**, one that works with the grain of Britain's political traditions and established practices rather than tries to throw them out and start over. This is not true of those who support Reform, where anti-system feeling has taken a deep hold on people's political imaginations. But it is true of the supporters of all of the other political parties. There is no enthusiasm whatsoever for political approaches that seek to move fast and break things or that prefers gimmicks over sustained and real reform.

Second, the coalition of support that Labour drew together in the 2024 election was extremely broad, drawing together voters that had previously identified with a wide range of other parties and none. As a result, the government is equally as likely to lose support to the Liberal Democrats as it is to Reform, with the Greens and the Conservatives also picking up those who are discontented. **Any strategy of insurgency – strategy of change – must, therefore, speak to the diverse interests of this wide coalition**. And what they largely have in common is a concern about the health service, the cost of living and a controlled immigration system, rather than any concern in up-ending the British political order.

This is an important moment for politics across the world. There are growing forces in many established democracies that are suggesting now is the time for a dramatic drift to an unorthodox populism. The British government is rightly nervous that those trends might engulf the United Kingdom too. The evidence we present here suggests that the case is currently different here than it is elsewhere and that the response should be too. **The British people are looking for change, but not chaos, radicalism, but not recklessness**.

Marc Stears (UCL Policy Lab) and Luke Tryl (More in Common)



Section 1

State of public opinion at the start of 2025

“Broken Britain” feeling is pervasive

In one or two words, how would you describe the UK today?



Perhaps the most defining feature of politics in 2025 is a sense of disillusionment.

In focus groups, people share everyday experiences of life feeling more and more of a struggle. For the public, there is an increasing sense that everything in Britain - from public services to high streets - is broken.

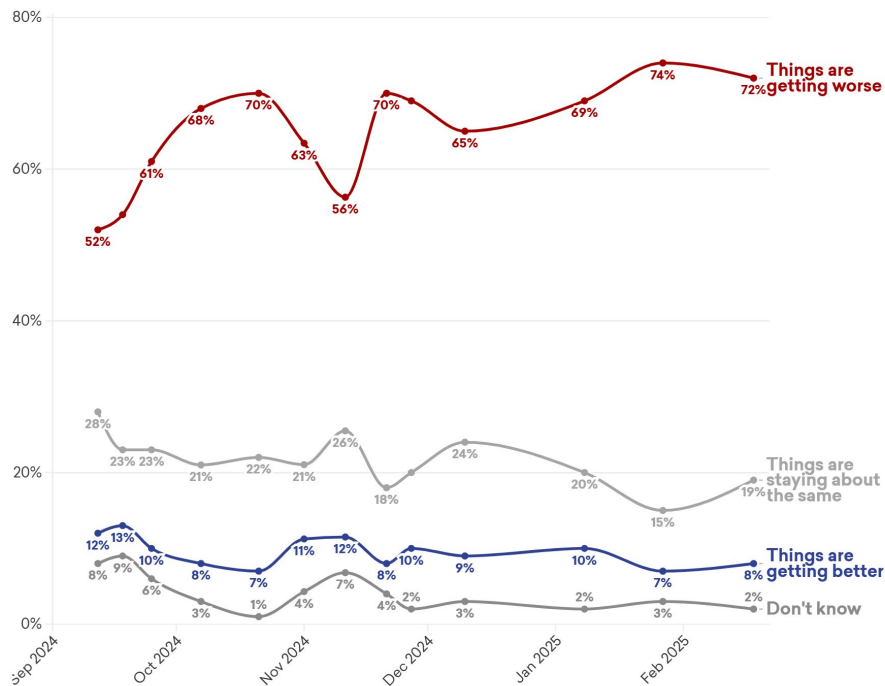
"Out here we're all struggling. I see it every day. I see it in classrooms, I see it on the street, I see it in my husband's industry. I see it in people I talk to."

Paula, teacher, Banbury

The public are pessimistic about the future

Most think things are getting worse

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



Britons have little faith in a brighter future.

When asked if things in the UK are improving or getting worse, 72 per cent say they are going downhill, while only eight per cent believe they are getting better.

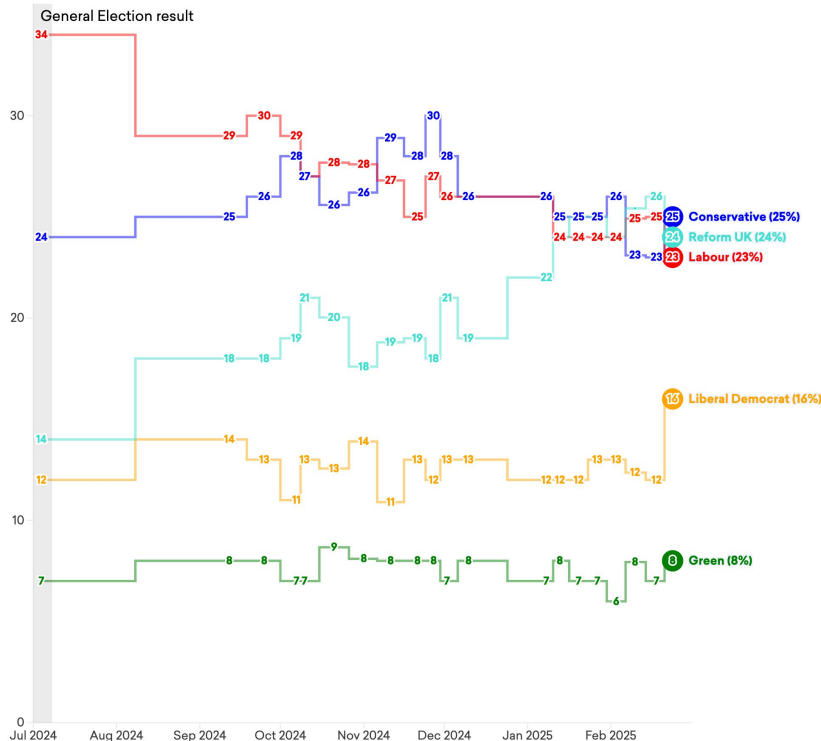
The proportion of Britons who think things are getting worse has increased by twenty points since September 2024.

“Everything is in a mess. Benefits, education, NHS, armed forces, overseas, global warming. The list is endless. And how are we going to take ourselves out of it?”

Graham, civil servant, Doncaster

The government's vote share is falling

Westminster voting intention over time



Source: More in Common • Latest fieldwork: 21 - 24 February 2025

Labour are holding scarcely two thirds of their 2024 vote, losing votes to the left, right and centre.

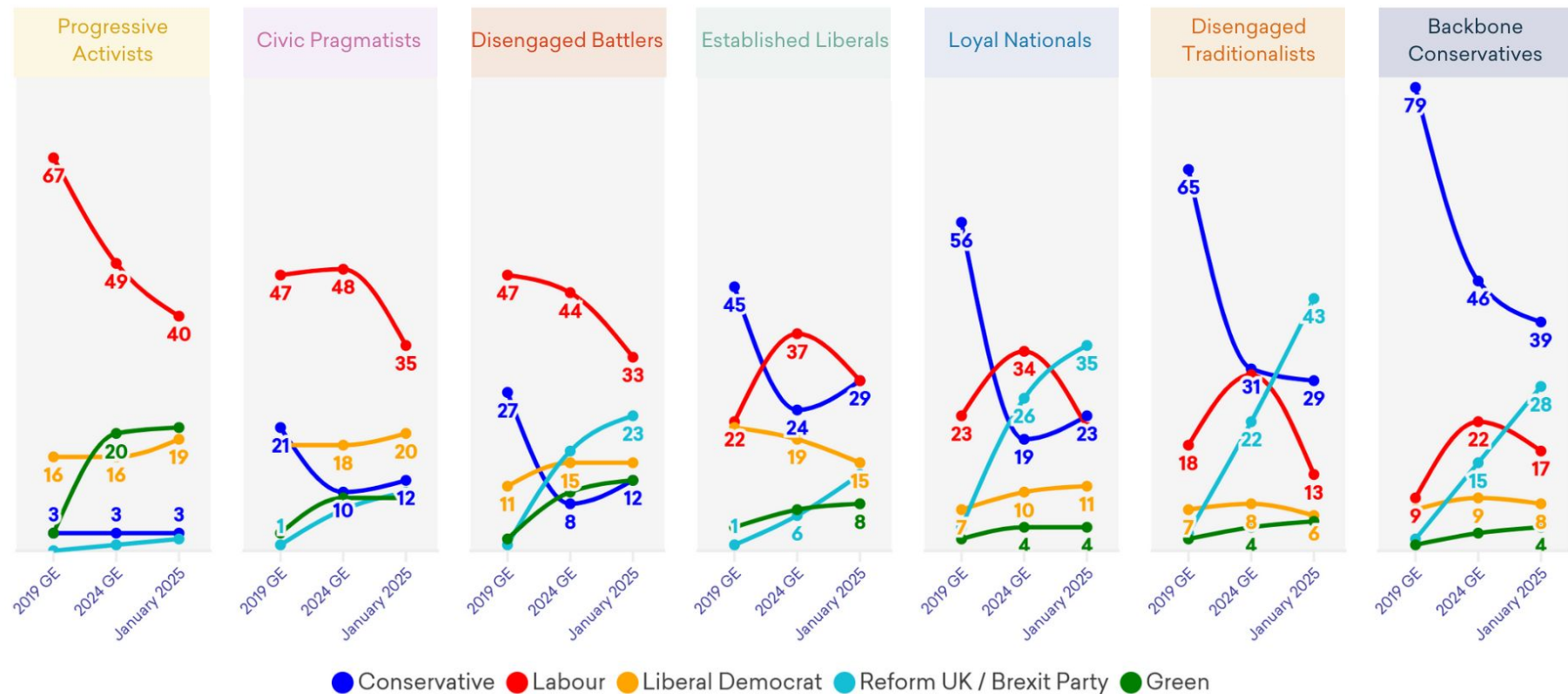
The British electorate is currently best understood as being split into four fairly equally sized voter blocks - core Labour and core Conservative voter blocks, a progressive voter block unhappy with the direction of the government (combining Greens and Liberal Democrats) and a populist right voter block made up of Reform UK voters.

That fragmentation is also well captured through the lens of More in Common's British Seven segments and their shift in voting intention since last July.

"Yeah, lifelong Tory voter, first time voting Labour because I'd just had enough of the sleaze from the Tories, and these guys have just told a pack of lies to get in and they're pretty much doing the same thing."

George, plumber, Finchley

The government's voter coalition is fragmenting

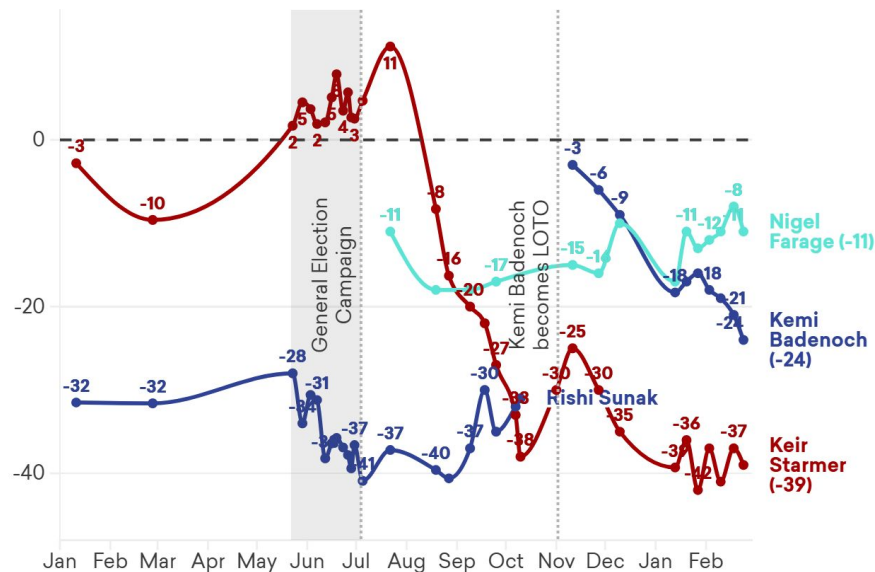


For more detail on the More in Common's segments, see annex A

Keir Starmer's leadership in question

Party Leader approval tracker

Net approval rating



Source: More in Common • Proportion who think each leader is doing a "somewhat good" or "very good" job, minus those who think they are doing a "somewhat bad" or "very bad" job
Last fieldwork: 21 - 24 February 2025

Keir Starmer's personal approval has dropped dramatically since the election, faster than any newly elected Prime Minister in living memory. The Prime Minister's approval even briefly dropped below where the former Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's approval stood on the eve of the General Election.

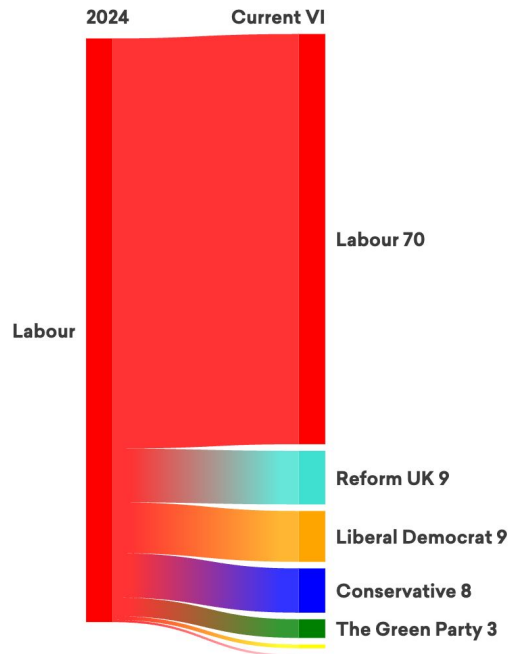
"I know they want to be seen to be tough but do things gradually, do positive things first. Give the country a positive feel. He's come out and he said, 'I'm not here to be Mr. Popular' - why not? Why not try and be popular? Get off on the right foot."
Kevin, machine operator, Birmingham

Labour under challenge from both Reform and the Liberal Democrats

Just seven in ten Labour 2024 voters would vote for the party if an election were held tomorrow.

Labour's lost voters have splintered in three directions - roughly of equal size - to Reform UK (9 per cent of 2024 Labour voters), the Liberal Democrats (9 per cent) and the Conservatives (8 per cent).

Current VI among 2024 Labour Voters



A fragmented electorate

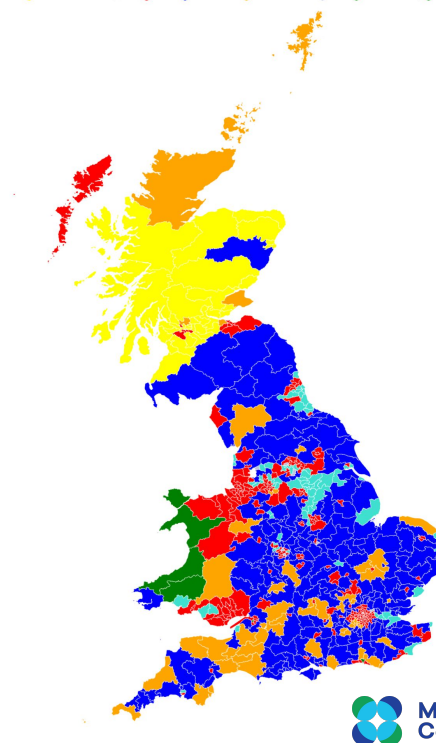
Labour's majority is large but highly marginal. Leaking votes on any side of their coalition could damage Labour electorally.

Based on a uniform swing model, a swing of just one point from Labour to Reform on current voting intention would make the Conservatives the largest party, with 195 seats.

A swing of one and a half points from Labour to the Liberal Democrats meanwhile would increase the Conservatives' lead, with 200 seats.

MRP projection based on voting intention
(December 2024)

Reform UK Scottish National Party (SNP) Labour Conservative Liberal Democrat Other The Green Party Plaid Cymru



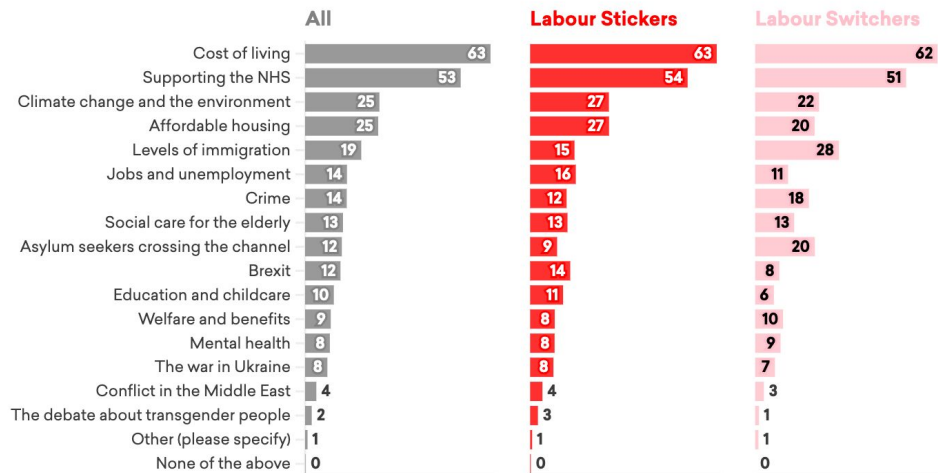
The Labour switchers

Many of those who have abandoned Labour since the election were Conservative to Labour switchers at the last election (34% compared to 19% of all 2024 Labour voters).

Compared to voters still sticking with the party, this group is older. In focus groups, many tell us this abandonment has been driven by changes to the Winter Fuel Allowance. These older voters are also more concerned about immigration.

On who would make better Prime Minister, this group is most likely to say none of the leaders of the three parties currently leading the polls.

In your opinion, which are the most IMPORTANT issues facing the country today? Please select up to three
% selecting issue as one of the most important issues facing the country today

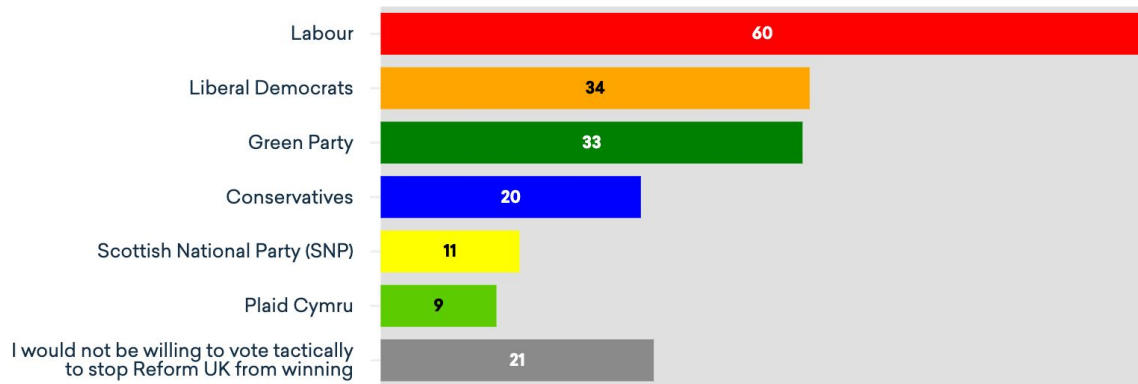


Most Labour switchers would return to keep out Reform

Most Labour switchers would return to keep out Reform

If Reform UK were in contention to win your constituency, which parties if any would you be willing to vote tactically for to stop Reform from winning?

(Labour switchers)



Even though many progressive Labour switchers are frustrated at the slow pace of change or the tilt of the government's agenda, many say they would return to vote for Labour tactically to stop Reform for winning in their constituency.



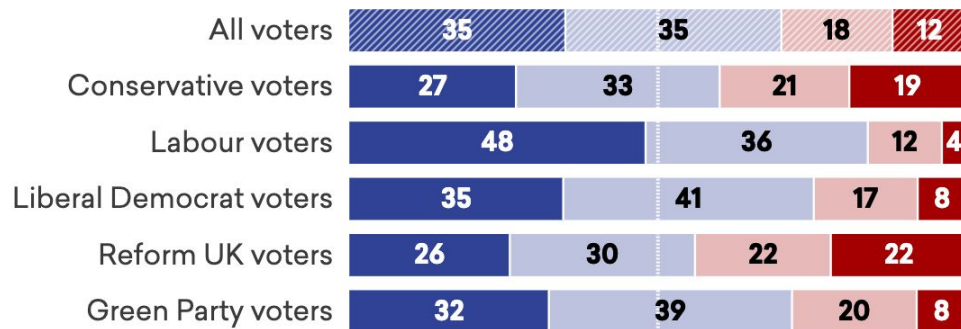
Section 2

Labour's mandate for change

The government's mandate for change

Which comes closest to your view?

- 1 - The election result gives Keir Starmer a mandate to radically change Britain
- 2 -
- 3 -
- 4 - The election result does not give Keir Starmer a mandate to radically change Britain



Change was not only the slogan of Labour's election campaign but was the key driver for their victory.

Four in ten voters say Labour won because 'the country needed a fresh start'. In polling just after the election, the public identified this as the clearest reason the government won so many seats at the General Election.

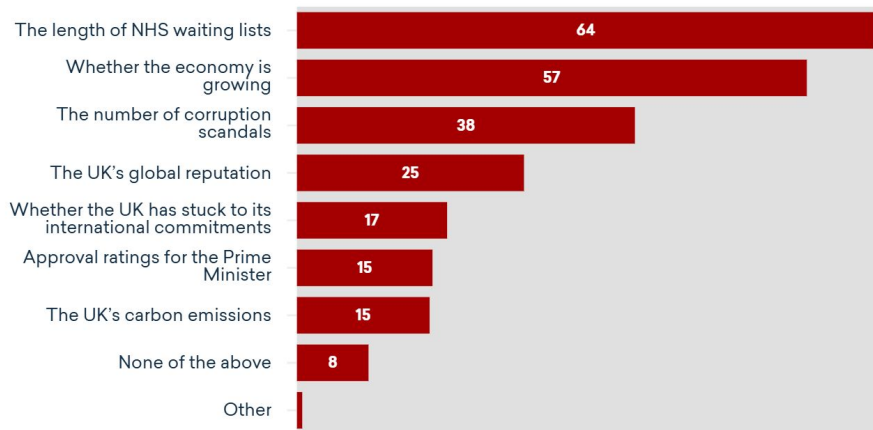
Seven in ten voters (for any party) said the General Election gave Starmer a mandate to radically change Britain. For those 2024 Labour voters, the mandate for change in the NHS and on the economy were strongest.

The key tests for Labour switchers

Labour switchers will judge Labour on how much they reduce NHS waiting lists

The Labour government has promised to restore service and respect to politics. At the next election, what would indicate to you whether or not they have done this?

(Labour switchers)



For those who have abandoned Labour since the General Election, their willingness to return will largely depend on concrete progress on economic growth and improvements in public services.

Many feel they are being asked to make sacrifices - through the impact of spending cuts, such as the winter fuel allowance, or rising taxes - without yet seeing a personal benefit.

To win back these voters, the government must not only talk about improvements but provide visible proof points for how things are getting better.

"The NHS is currently buckling under the system with huge waiting times (...) Things seem to be being cut all the time. We'll be being asked to pay more, but yet I'm not seeing it in the public services"
Paula, teacher, Banbury

Many expected change to be felt by now

Voters did not want to give the government a long honeymoon period.

Two in three Labour voters (and nearly half of all Britons) expected to start seeing a difference from Labour's policies within six months to a year.

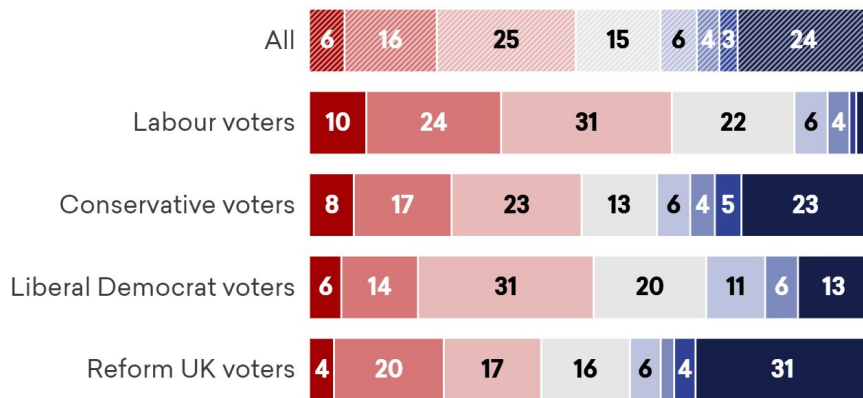
"It's been a really weird six months to be honest. And I think that a lot of people who, including myself, who voted for labour are actually quite disappointed with how things have been going so far (...) it just feels like they're in a sort of a bit of a limbo at the moment."

Phillip, HR director, Chipping Barnet

Labour does not have much time to make a difference

After how long do you expect to start seeing a difference from Labour's policies, if at all?

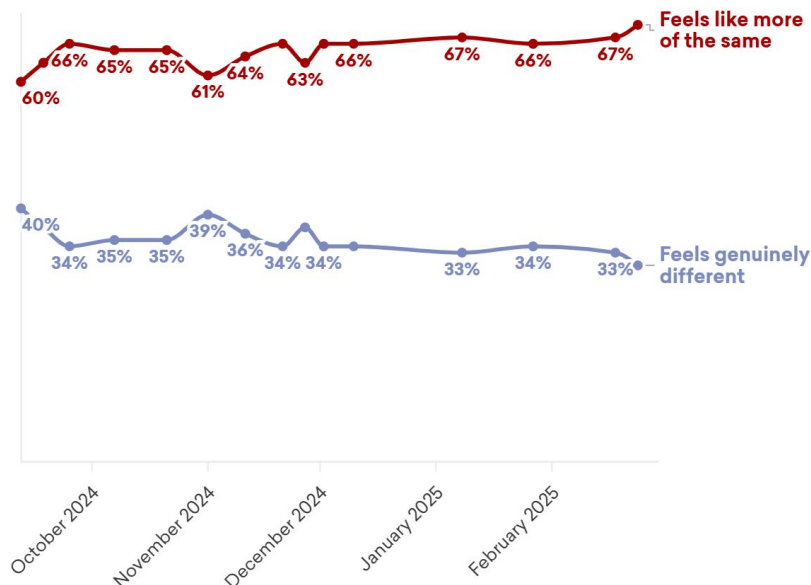
● Immediately ● Less than 6 months ● 6 months to a year
● 1-2 years ● 2-3 years ● 3-5 years ● 5 or more years ● Never



The government is not yet associated with change

Labour still feels like "more of the same"

Compared to our previous Conservative government, would you say that our new Labour government...



The public is twice as likely to say that the Labour government feels like “more of the same” compared to the previous Conservative government than they are to say the government feels genuinely different.

As time has passed, this sense of continuity over change has not shifted. Instead the reverse has happened. Those saying the current Government feels like more of the same has risen from 60 per cent to 69 per cent since October 2024.

“Exactly the same, if I'm honest, deceitful all with their own agendas, and want their own money and greed.”

Lauren, Admin assistant, South Norfolk

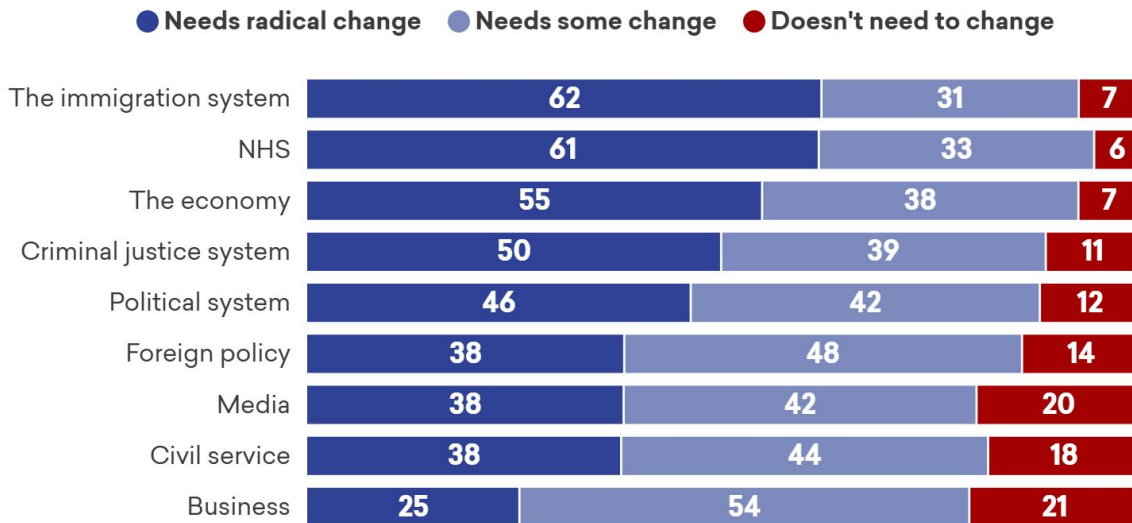
There remains a broad appetite for change

Notwithstanding the impatience for change and low confidence in the government's ability to deliver it, there is a broad sense among Britons that many areas of public life are in need of change.

A majority think that the immigration system, NHS, the economy and the criminal justice system are in need of radical change.

Those intending to vote Reform UK believe that most aspects of Britain are in need of radical change.

Thinking about the following aspects of the UK, which if any do you think needs to change?

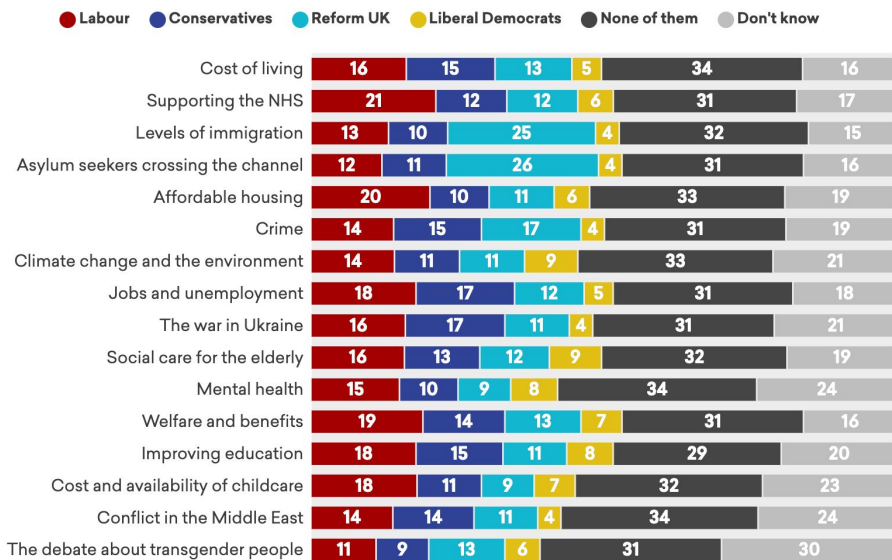


Britons have little trust on the most important issues

Who do Britons trust on the biggest issues?

Which party do you trust most on each of the following issues?

(Issues ranked based on how many Britons consider them to be one of the most important issues)



The government's strongest areas are the NHS and affordable housing, but even here its lead is thin. On the cost of living - the public's top issue - Labour also holds a narrow lead, but again is trusted by just 16% of Britons.

This lack of trust stretches across all parties. On every issue, at least half of Britons select "none of them" or "don't know."

The Government's perceived failure to deliver is contributing to a wider narrative that politicians of all parties are unable or unwilling to address the issues the public cares about."

"The cost of living crisis, they can't keep their homes warm, they can't afford food. It's just the rich are getting richer and poorer, getting poorer and it's the same old story but under a different guise of being in red instead of blue."

Marrienne, education officer, Worcester

Slow progress blamed on political leadership, not rules and regulations

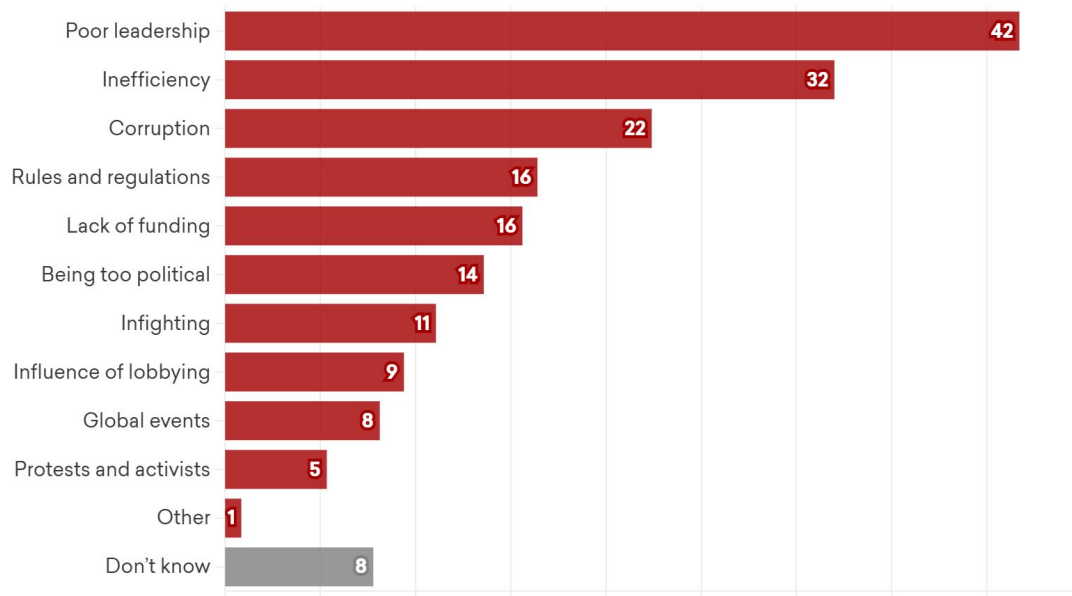
Poor leadership, inefficiency and corruption are cited as the key barriers stopping the UK government getting things done.

Britons think that government ministers have most control over what happens in the country (50 per cent) followed by big businesses (29 per cent) and banks and the financial sector (27 per cent).

The public is more likely to say the civil service delays the government getting things done (41 per cent) rather than helps (31 per cent), and government inefficiency is also seen by many as a block to progress.

However, blame for slow the pace of change is seen to lie primarily at the feet of Britain's political leaders.

In your view, what stops the UK government from getting things done?





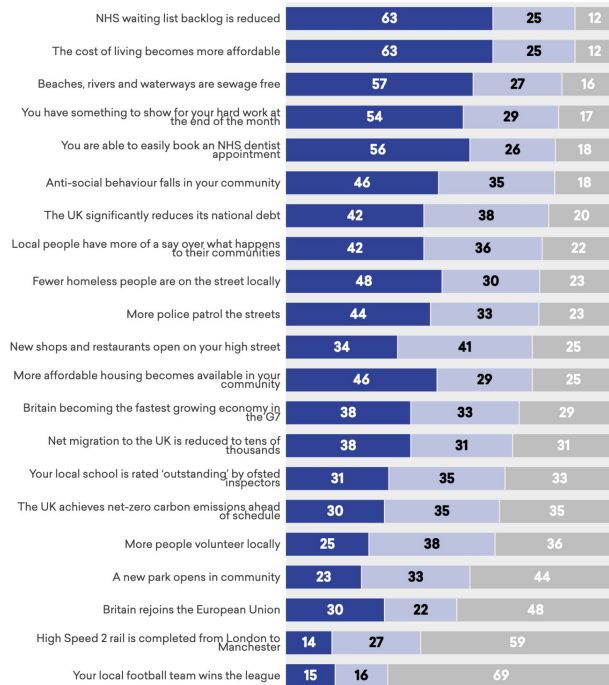
Section 3

Delivering on the mandate for change

Delivering tangible improvements

For each of the following, would this make you more or less hopeful for the future?

● Much more hopeful ● Bit more hopeful ● Not much difference



The solution to low confidence in the Government's ability to deliver on their mandate for change is being able to point to tangible and visible improvements to public services and local communities.

When asked what would make the public more hopeful for the future, top responses focused on improvements to public services and relief from the cost of living crisis.

While economic targets are seen as important - such as achieving the highest growth in the G7 and reducing national debt - visible improvements in public services and local communities are much more important. These are the strongest antidotes to the cynicism and disillusionment that many voters have with politics today.

"But I think one of the main issues and why people were so angry and dismayed with their situation was the cost of living crisis. And I don't think (Labour) have done anything whatsoever to address that. Nothing tangible, nothing that you can actually see. So yeah, I think that's made me quite annoyed, I would say."

Ellie, student, Manchester

Radicalism not recklessness

Which of the following comes closer to your view?

- The government should change things carefully, even if means going slower
- Don't know
- The government should change things quickly, even if it means making mistakes



- Rules and regulations are an important part of how government gets things done
- Don't know
- Rules and regulations get in the way of government getting things done



While the mandate for radical change is clear, there is limited public support for an approach that disregards rules and order, or breaks things for the sake of it.

Instead, most Britons want to see government change things carefully - even if that means going more slowly, or making fewer improvements.

Delivering on the Government's mandate requires an approach which prioritises radicalism not recklessness and change over chaos.

Frustration at the speed of progress

However, caution isn't the same as speed in the public's eye. An approach which delivers change cautiously should not be seen to excuse slow delivery of the government's agenda.

Three in five say the Government does things too slowly - including a majority of every voter group.

Confidence is low that the government has things under control - with almost three in four voters who believe it does not have things under control.

The Government faces a twin challenge of convincing the public that they can deliver change at the pace they expect, and that they can do so in a way that gives confidence to the public that they are in control of their agenda - rather than being buffeted by external forces.

Which of the following comes closer to your view?

- The government has things under control ● Don't know
- The government does not have things under control



- The government does things too quickly ● Don't know
- The government does things at the right pace ● The government does things too slowly



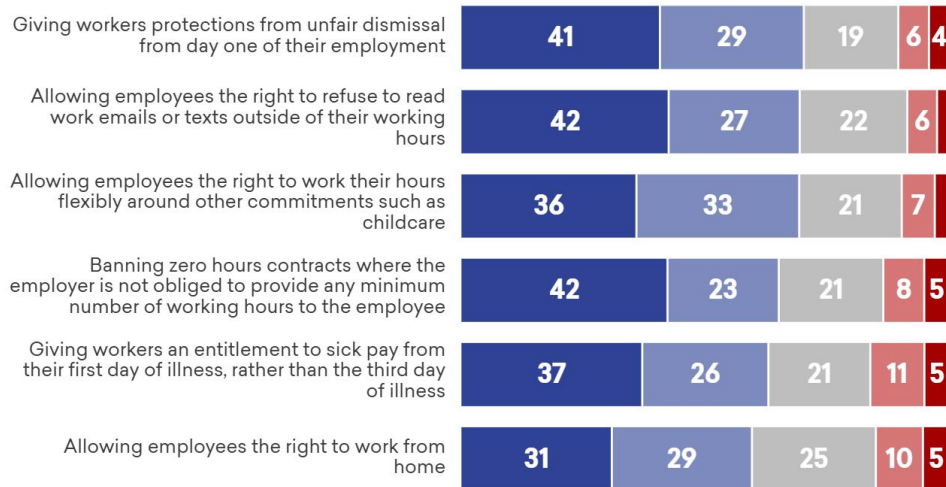
The government's policies are individually popular

Despite the overall negative judgement on the Government's performance - many of the early announcements are individually popular.

This includes the employment rights bill, stricter penalties for water company executives who pollute and raising the minimum wage - all of which command broad public support.

Please indicate to what extent you support or oppose the following proposals.

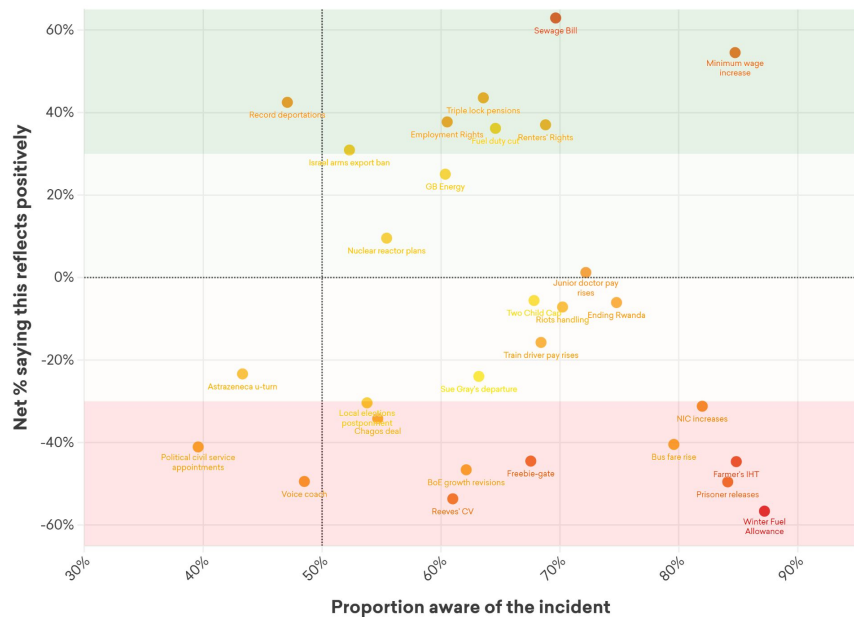
● Strongly support ● Somewhat support ● Neither support nor oppose
● Somewhat oppose ● Strongly oppose



Unpopular decisions have tainted the Government

Labour's first months: Successes and failures

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



Part of the challenge the Government has faced in delivering on the mandate for change has been that many of their more popular policies have been overshadowed by more unpopular spending cuts or tax increases.

Most damaging to public sentiment has been the cut to the Winter Fuel Allowance - mentioned in nearly every focus group (by both recipients and their children and grandchildren) since it was announced and which has left many voters feeling deeply betrayed.

Resetting the Government's change agenda will require a more laser-like focus on removing barriers to progress and avoiding the missteps of the first months in office.

"And it's been very disappointing and for all the reasons that are being mentioned, whether it's more recently WASPI or whether it's more at the start with the budget and sort of the winter fuel payment within days are coming into power and cutting that. So it's just been a disaster from start to finish."

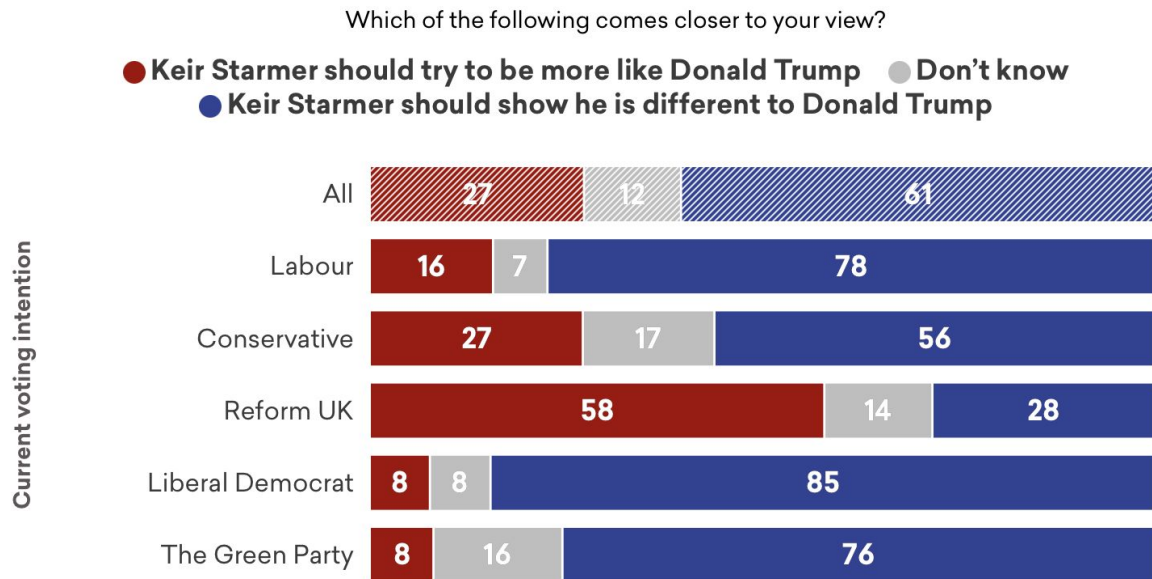
Andrew, business owner, Fulham

Few favour an approach that apes Trumpism

Despite the desire for more rapid delivery of 'change', the public are not hankering for Keir Starmer to emulate Donald Trump.

In fact, voters are more than twice as likely to think the Prime Minister should show how he is different to Donald Trump than try to be more like Donald Trump. This is true across all voters groups - bar Reform UK voters.

"I mean, we all know Trump's just mad as a box of frogs"
George, plumber, Finchley



Populist policies fragment Labour's coalition

For each of the following policies a political party in the UK could support, please indicate whether this would prevent you from voting for that party.

% responding 'Would prevent me from voting for that party'



As well as avoiding aping Trumpism in approach, the public have very clear lines on the Government differentiating themselves from the new American administration on private healthcare and access to abortion.

More broadly, populist policies risk fragmenting Labour electoral coalition from 2024. For many Labour voters - around two in five - backtracking on climate commitments, weakening commitments on migration or stopping DEI programmes would be deal breakers for voting for the party at the next election and risk fragmenting their coalition..

Partnership with business on delivering change

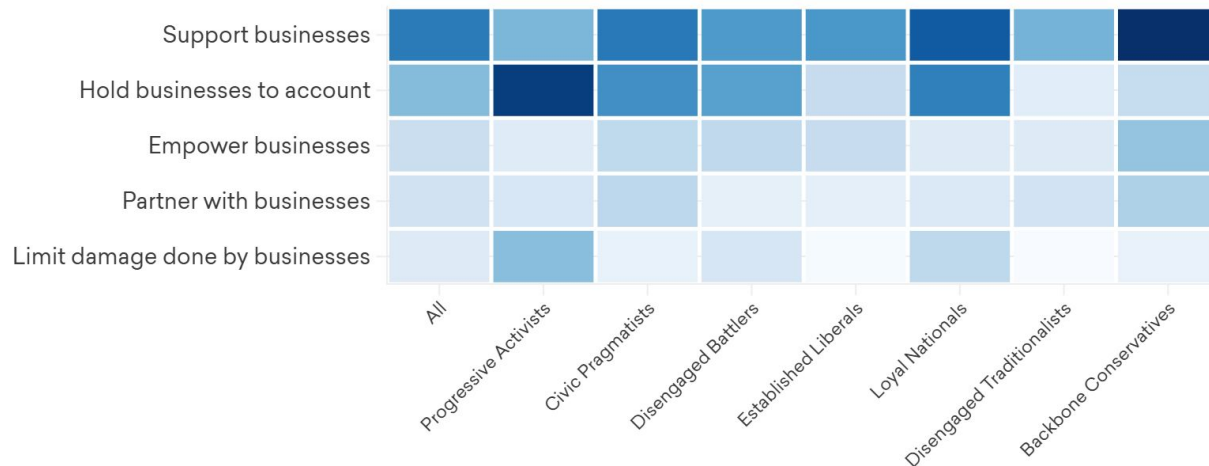
The public see businesses as an important partner rather than an adversary in delivering on the government's mandate for change.

The public tends to think that government should prioritise supporting businesses over holding them to account.

Progressive Activists and Loyal Nationals are more likely than average to think the Government should act to limit the damage done by business.

In your view what should the relationship be between the government and businesses? Governments should try to...

% agreeing 10  65





Section 4

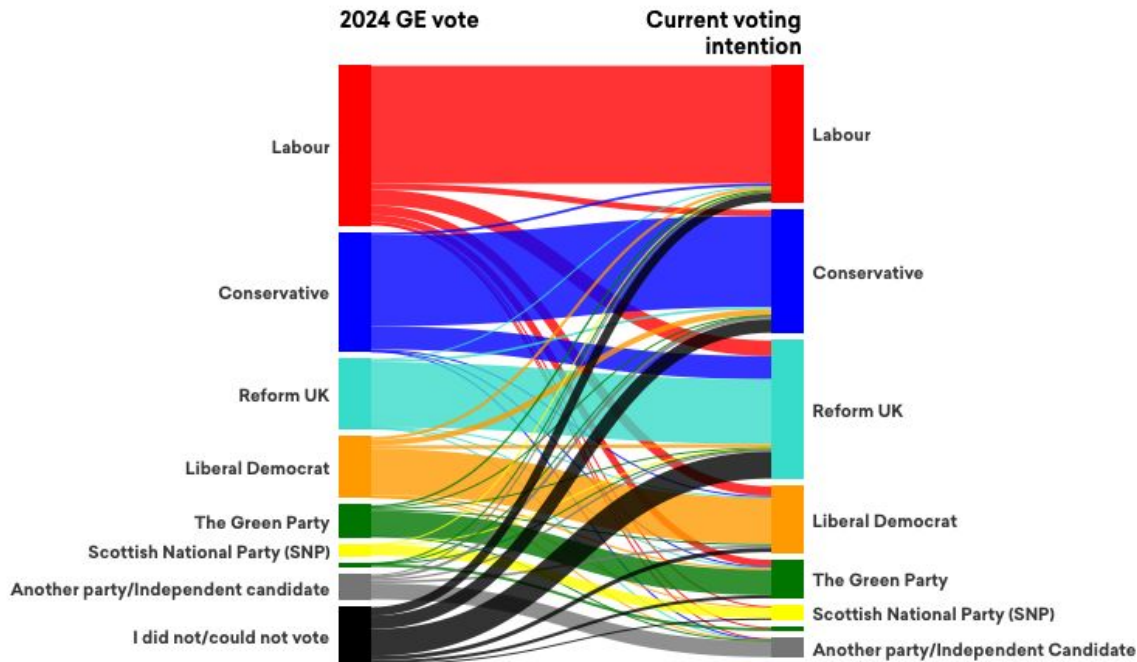
How the government responds with Reform

Non-voters are driving the rise of Reform

The rise of Reform is being driven by two main defecting voter groups as well as winning over those who didn't vote at the last election.

Around 1 in 10 Labour 2024 voters have defected to Reform, along with a greater number of 2024 Conservative voters. However Reform has also activated significant number of non-voters.

Changing voting intentions since General Election



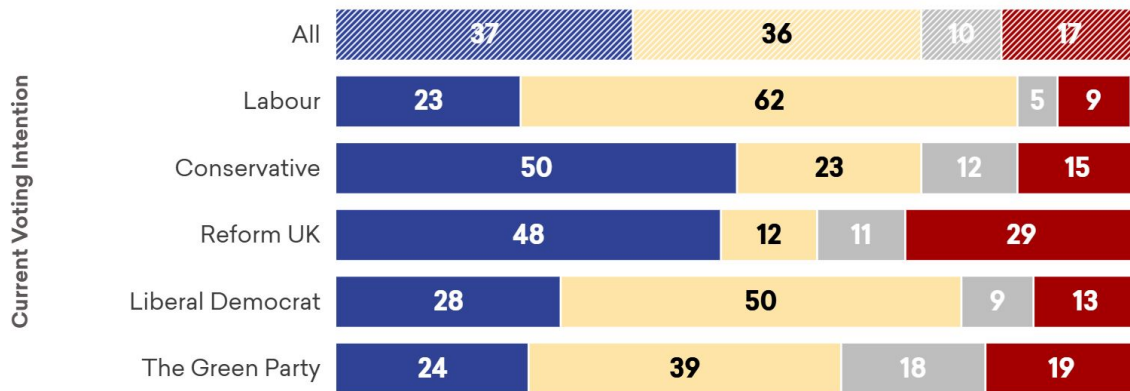
Reform voters' expectation of change

Voters for left-leaning parties are more likely to think that the Prime Minister wants to change things gradually, while voters of right leaning parties are more likely to think that the Prime Minister wants to to radically change things.

In engaging with Reform voters, the government faces the challenge of falling between two stools - Reform voters are more likely than average to both think Keir Starmer wants to radically change things and more likely to think Keir Starmer does not want to change things.

Which of the following comes closer to your view?

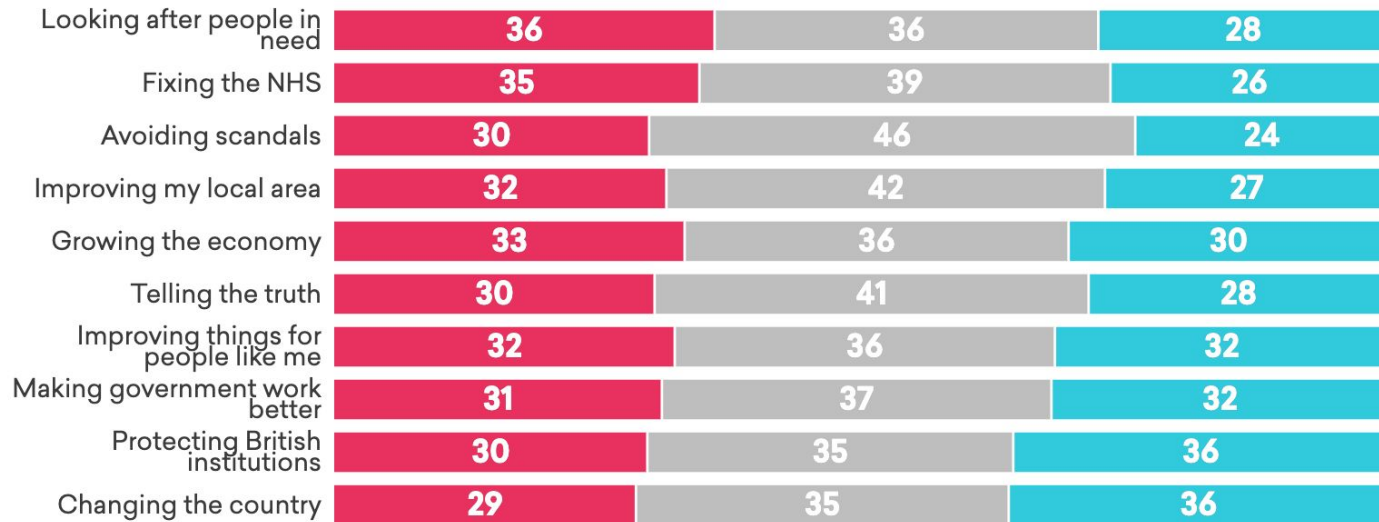
● Keir Starmer wants to radically change things ● Keir Starmer wants to change things gradually
● Don't know ● Keir Starmer does not want to change things



Labour is more trusted to look after people in need and fix the NHS, but more trust Reform UK to change things

Who do you trust more on the following - the Labour Party or Reform UK?

● Labour Party ● Don't know ● Reform UK



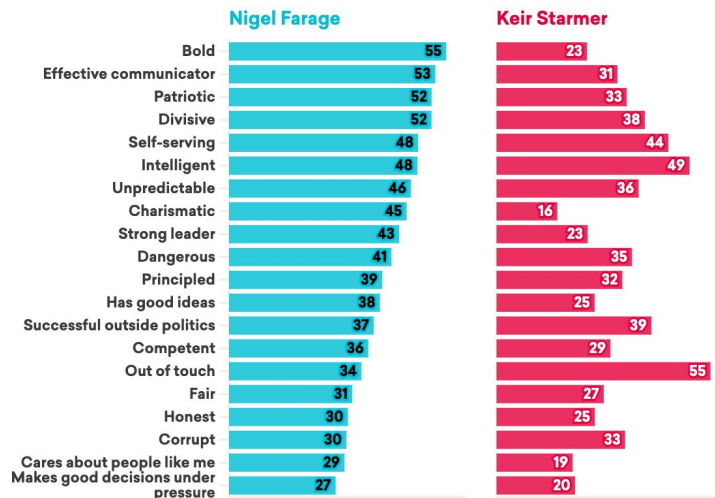
Farage is seen as bold, but also unpredictable

The public are more than twice as likely to think that Nigel Farage is bolder than Keir Starmer, and almost three times more likely to describe Farage as charismatic than Starmer.

Starmer is 20 points more likely to be seen as out of touch than Nigel Farage, but they are more likely to see the Reform leader as dangerous and unpredictable.

"I think (Farage) is a bit more straight talking. For me, when you listen to some of the leaders of the Labour and the Conservative party (...) they don't say anything significant."
Amy, college admin officer, Doncaster

For each of the following, please say whether or not you think they describe [...]



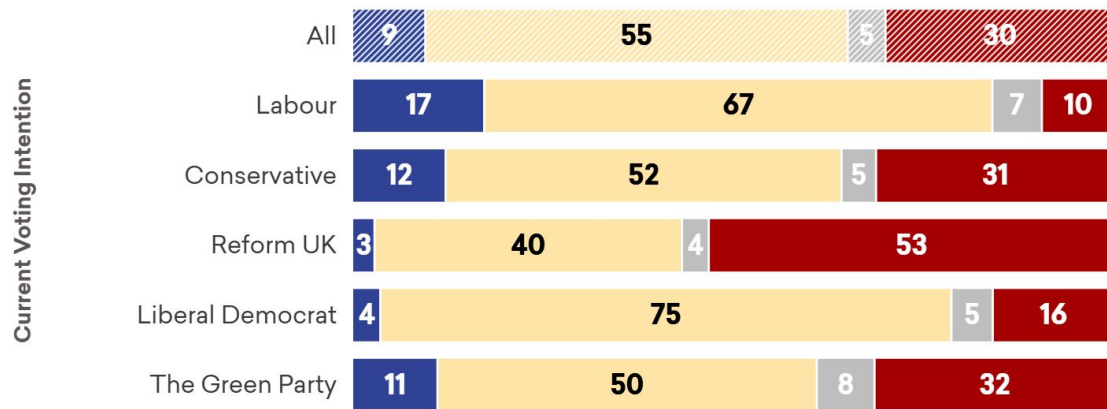
Only Reform voters want to 'start from scratch'

A clear majority of voters (85%) think that our systems of government need change - however, a majority favour a 'bit of change' than starting from scratch.

But while the general public tends to think the system needs tweaking to work better, Reform voters are more likely to say the systems need to be scrapped to start again.

Thinking about the UK, which comes closer to your view?

- The systems of government we have are working well and don't need to be changed
- The systems of government we have need to be changed a bit to work better
- Don't know
- The systems of government we have need to be scrapped so we can start from scratch





Annex A: The British Seven segments

Throughout this report, we used More in Common's British Seven segments.

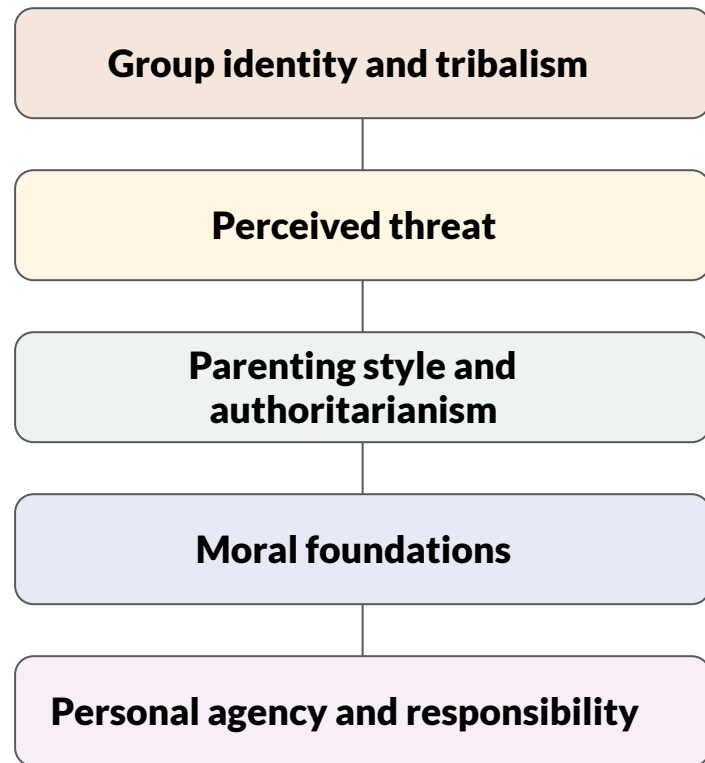
The 'British Seven' segments were formulated in More in Common's 'Britain's Choice' report, published in 2020

They are created entirely from questions around five areas of core beliefs, drawn from social psychology: group identity and tribalism, perceived threat, parenting style and authoritarianism, moral foundations, personal agency and responsibility

No demographic information (race, class, or gender) is used for the segmentation, though the segments created by this process often have demographic differences

Segmentation shows that values and beliefs are powerful in influencing how individuals form opinions about issues and their behaviour. Often, the segments are more predictive of beliefs than any other metric.

A summary of each of the segments is available on the following slide.



Progressive Activists



Civic Pragmatists



Disengaged Battlers



Established Liberals



Loyal Nationals



Disengaged Traditionalists



Backbone Conservatives



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Methodology

Fieldwork dates:	15-18 February 2025
Sample size	2,088
Population effectively represented:	GB adults (excludes Northern Ireland)
Sample detail:	Respondents have been weighted according to age/sex interlocked, 2024 General Election vote, ethnicity, and education level.