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The Respect Switchers

Election Briefing Paper
Series – Paper 1



More in
Common



Policy Lab

Executive Summary

New research from the UCL Policy Lab and More in Common conducted during the first stages of General Election campaign terms finds that voters are placing a “respect test” on political parties.

The research reveals that one of the biggest drivers of those who have switched their vote from Conservative to Labour since 2019 is a feeling that Keir Starmer and Labour are more likely to ‘respect voters like them’. UCL Policy Lab and More in Common have called these voters the ‘Respect Switchers’.

Voter’s respect test

This election cycle ‘showing respect to ordinary people’ is the most important attribute that the public want in a politician - even above having new ideas and getting things done. This ‘showing respect to ordinary people’ test is emerging a key electoral test in this election campaign.

The importance of ‘respect for ordinary people’ is something that unites the segments that make up Labour’s base - Progressive Activists who were among the strongest supporters of Jeremy Corbyn 2019 and also Civic Pragmatists who reflect Labour’s soft-left support. However, the respect frame also appeals particularly strongly to the Loyal National segment. The group of socially Conservative voters who abandoned Labour in 2019, leading to their defeats in the Red Wall.

The Respect Switchers

Keir Starmer and the Labour Party are currently passing the ‘respect’ test. Conservative to Labour ‘Respect Switchers’ were far more likely than not to say that under Jeremy Corbyn, Labour did not respect people like them (65% of these voters said Jeremy Corbyn’s Labour did not respect people like them, and only 14% said that Corbyn’s Labour did respect them). For this group, that feeling has entirely reversed under Keir Starmer’s ‘changed Labour Party’ with these switchers now significantly more likely than not to say they feel respected (69% of this group say Starmer’s Labour Party respects people like them versus 15% who say it does not).

Much of that shift in voters feeling respected by Labour is down to Keir Starmer’s approach. Respect Switchers are more likely than other groups to say that Starmer respects people like them - 76 per cent of this group say that Starmer respects people like them, almost twice as high as the national average of 41 per cent.

Conservative-Labour switchers also overwhelmingly say (69 per cent) think Starmer puts country before party, double the national average of 35 per cent.

Sunak lags behind on the 'respect' test

Sunak and the Conservatives have alienated these voters because they are seen to have disrespected them. These Conservative-Labour switchers currently feel significantly more disrespected by the Conservative Party under Rishi Sunak (84% say the Conservative Party under Rishi Sunak does not respect people like them) than they did under Boris Johnson (72 per cent say the Conservative Party under Boris Johnson did not respect people like them).

Many think Farage doesn't respect them

Only the most Conservative segment of the electorate (Backbone Conservatives) say that Nigel Farage respects people like them, six of the seven segments are more likely to say Nigel Farage does not respect people like them.

The politics of respect can be an antidote to cynicism

A politics of respect can be an antidote to the pervasive anti-politics feeling among the public. Only 12 percent of the country say they are optimistic about politics in the country.

While it is clear that there is significant demand for change, the polling shows that after the instability of recent years, the public are more likely to favour everyday improvements to their lives, rather than bold or radical plans.

78 per cent of the public say that stability should be the goal of the next Government, higher than any other metric, while 74 per cent simply want the Government to 'avoid chaos'. 65 per cent say the next Government needs to bring about change and 72 per cent want to see 'fresh thinking'

A new respect index

The UCL Policy Lab and More in Common are launching a brand new index to measure how well the two campaigns are connecting and speaking with the hopes, concerns and issues of ordinary people. Measuring five different dimensions of the public's relationship with politicians, this new 'respect index' will track on a weekly basis the extent to which the two campaigns are managing to convince the public that they get it.

In week one, we find the Labour campaign scores 4.6 out of 10 on the Respect Index and the Conservatives combined score of 3.5 out of 10. Highlighting both Labour's advantage and the work both parties have to do to properly convince the public that they respect people like them.

Throughout this briefing paper, More in Common's British Seven segments are used as part of the analysis.

- **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 on these segments is available on More in Common's [website](#)

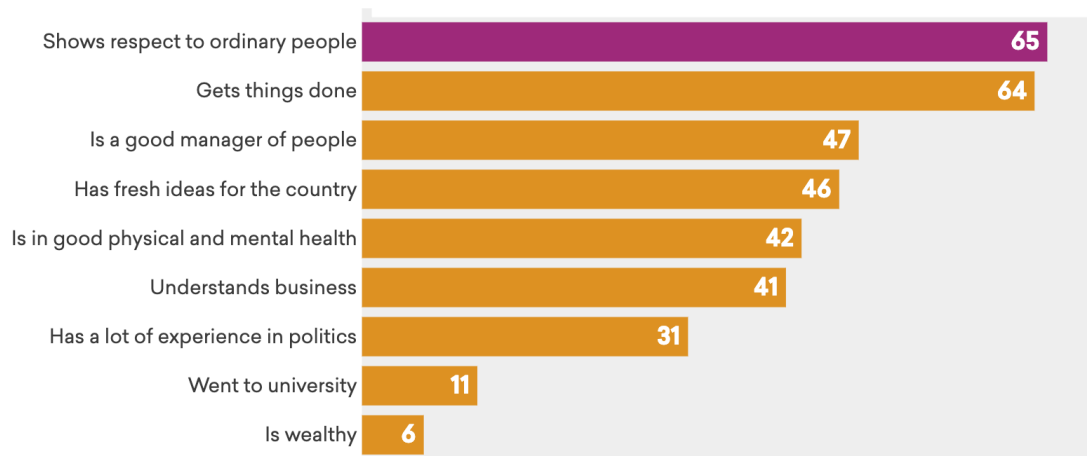
The Respect Test

The public wants politicians to show them respect. The attribute ‘shows respect to ordinary people’ is the most important attribute the public think a political leader should have from the attributes tested. Two thirds of the public (66 per cent) consider it to be a very important attribute - higher than ‘gets things done’ and is a ‘good manager of people’.

Figure 1

On a scale of 0-5 where 5 is very important and 0 is not important at all. How important is it that a political leader...

% selecting '5' very important



More in Common’s seven segments of the electorate help to shed a new light on the extent to which passing a ‘respect test’ is allowing Labour to stitch together a broad based coalition of voters.

The importance of ‘respect for ordinary people’ is something that unites the segments that make up Labour’s base - Progressive Activists who were among the strongest supporters of Jeremy Corbyn 2019 and also Civic Pragmatists who reflect Labour’s soft-left support. However, the respect frame also appeals particularly strongly to the Loyal National segment. The group of socially Conservative voters who abandoned Labour in 2019, leading to their defeats in the Red Wall. 72 percent of this group say showing respect for ordinary people’ is a very important attribute for a political leader. In short, Starmer’s focus on respect is uniting urban progressives and Red Wall voters in towns across the country - giving Labour their broadest electoral coalition in decades.

Figure 2

On a scale of 0-5 where 5 is very important and 0 is not important at all, how important is it that a political leader...shows respect for ordinary people

● 0 - Not important at all ● 1 ● 2 ● 3 ● 4 ● 5 - Very important



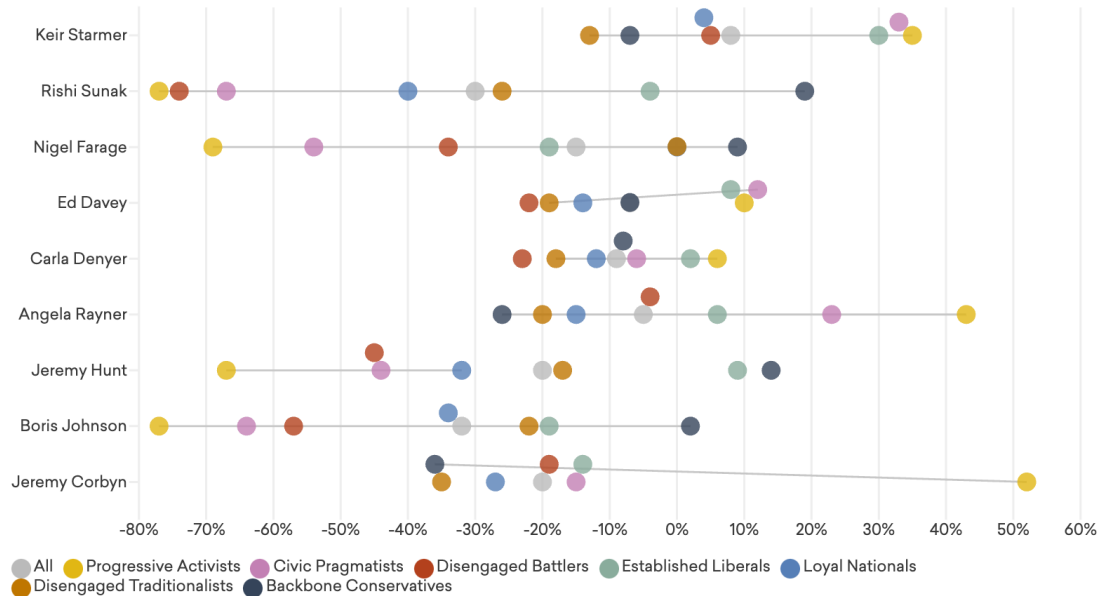
Source: More in Common, June 2024

The only politician with a net positive respect score (+8 points) is Keir Starmer. Overall five of the seven segments of the population say that Keir Starmer respects people like them - far more than say the same of any other politician. Progressive Activists and Civic Pragmatists who make up the Labour base, more economically insecure Disengaged Battlers, Established Liberals, the more liberal, economically right leaning voters, who will determine the fate of the blue wall and Red Wall Loyal Nationals.

Figure 3

Thinking about each of the following politicians in Britain, which of the following comes closer to your view?

(Net respect = respects people like me minus does not respect people like me)



Source: More in Common, June 2024

In contrast, only the most Conservative of the seven segments (Backbone Conservatives) of the population say that Nigel Farage respects people like them, the same segment are also the only group to say that Rishi Sunak respects people like them. In contrast, Jeremy Corbyn only has a positive net respect score with the most left leaning of the seven segments of the electorate - Progressive Activists

The Respect Switchers

At the heart of Starmer and Labour's consistently high polling leads over the last two years are Conservative-Labour switchers. These are voters who voted Conservative in 2019, but are now intending to vote Labour.

Electorally, Conservative-Labour switchers have an outsized impact on Britain's electoral geography for two main reasons.

- **These voters count-twice:** In most Conservative-Labour seats, these voters count double in easing Labour's path to power - they both take a vote away from the Conservatives and give a vote to Labour.
- **Voter efficiency:** Given the current distribution of the Labour vote and the relatively well-distributed vote of the Conservatives in 2019, Conservative-Labour switchers are more concentrated in the marginal seats key to delivering any Labour majority. The size of the Labour majority will be determined - in part - by these Conservative-Labour switchers.

The UCL Policy Lab/More in Common research finds the 'respect test' is a key reason why these voters have switched over the course of the last Parliament - both because these voters think the Conservative Party no longer respect them, and they are starting to feel that the Labour Party does respect them.

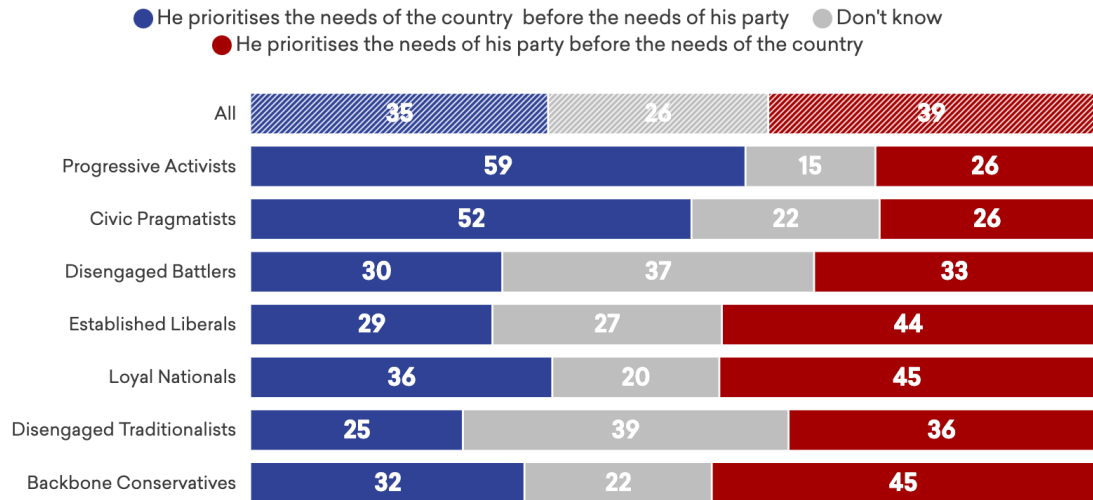
Conservative-Labour switchers think Starmer respects them and puts country before party

Conservative-Labour switchers are most likely to think that Starmer respects people like them - 76 per cent of this group say that Starmer respects people like them, almost twice as high as the national average of 41 per cent.

Most Conservative-Labour switchers think Starmer puts 'the needs of the country, before the needs of the party' - 69 per cent of Conservative-Labour switchers think Starmer puts country before party, double the national average of 35 per cent. In contrast, most Conservative-Labour switchers think Sunak puts party before country. This group of voters are also much more likely than average to think that Rishi Sunak prioritises the needs of his party before the needs of the country (81% v 56% average).

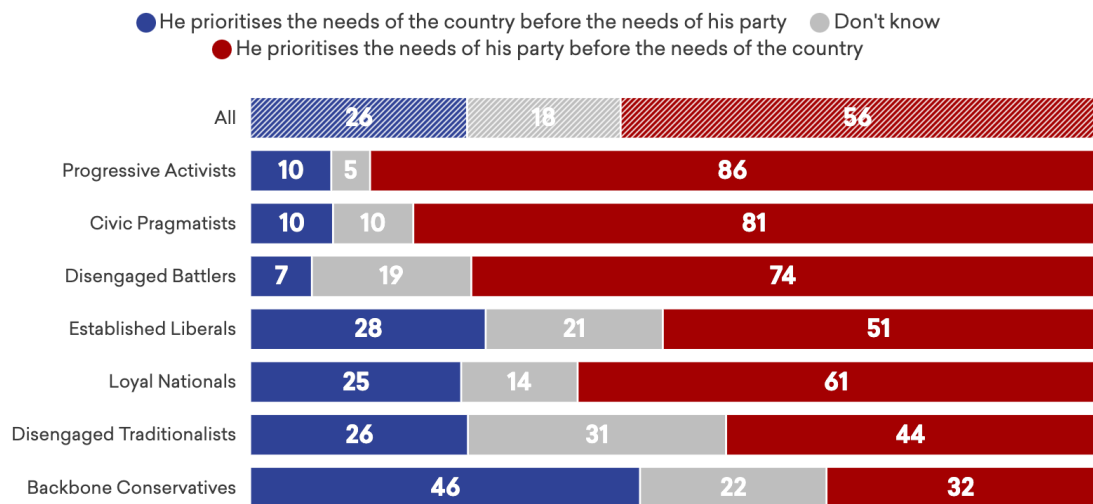
Figures 4 and 5

Thinking of Keir Starmer, which of the following comes closer to your view? of the following comes closer to your view?



Source: More in Common, May 2024

Thinking of Rishi Sunak, which of the following comes closer to your view? of the following comes closer to your view?



Source: More in Common, May 2024

The ‘changed Labour Party’ and the ‘Respect Switchers’

The public are significantly more likely to think that the Labour Party under Keir Starmer respects people like them (36%) versus the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn (24%), and significantly more likely to think Corbyn’s Labour Party did not respect people like them (49%) compared to Keir Starmer’s Labour Party (41%). The difference in net feelings of respect between the party under the two leaders is 20 points.

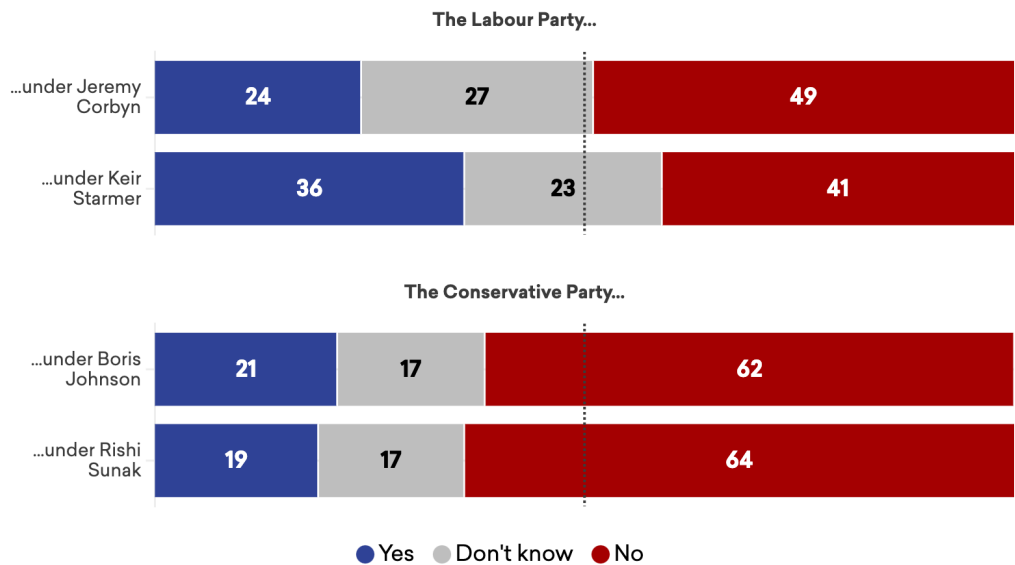
The most significant shift of any group is among Conservative-Labour switchers. Asked if this group felt respected by the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn just 14% said they did and 65% said they did not. In contrast today, 69% say they feel respected by Keir Starmer’s Labour Party compared to just 15% who do not.

These growing feelings of respect under Keir Starmer help explain why so many of these voters are turning to Labour again after the Corbyn years. This is partly driven by a return of those Red Wall voters (Loyal Nationals) who are now 29 points more likely to feel respected by the Labour Party

For other voters, the research shows that the public are less wary of Starmer’s approach than they were of Corbyn. Even among Backbone Conservative group (a group unlikely to vote for Labour or Starmer in this election) the number saying they feel disrespected by the Labour Party has fallen by 11 points

Figure 6

Thinking about each of the following, do you think they respect people like you?



The Conservative Party losing respect for voters

The public are three times more likely to think that the Conservative Party under Rishi Sunak does not respect people like them (64 per cent) than those who think it does (19 per cent). The gap between the Conservative Party under Rishi Sunak and the Conservative Party under Boris Johnson is also much less stark than the Corbyn-Starmer gap.

However, this group also felt as disrespected by the Conservatives under Boris Johnson as they did by Jeremy Corbyn's Labour - suggesting that their switch from the Conservative-Labour over the course of the last Parliament is not simply a case of the Conservative Party losing their trust, but also a case of Starmer earning their trust and respect.

The Respect Challenge

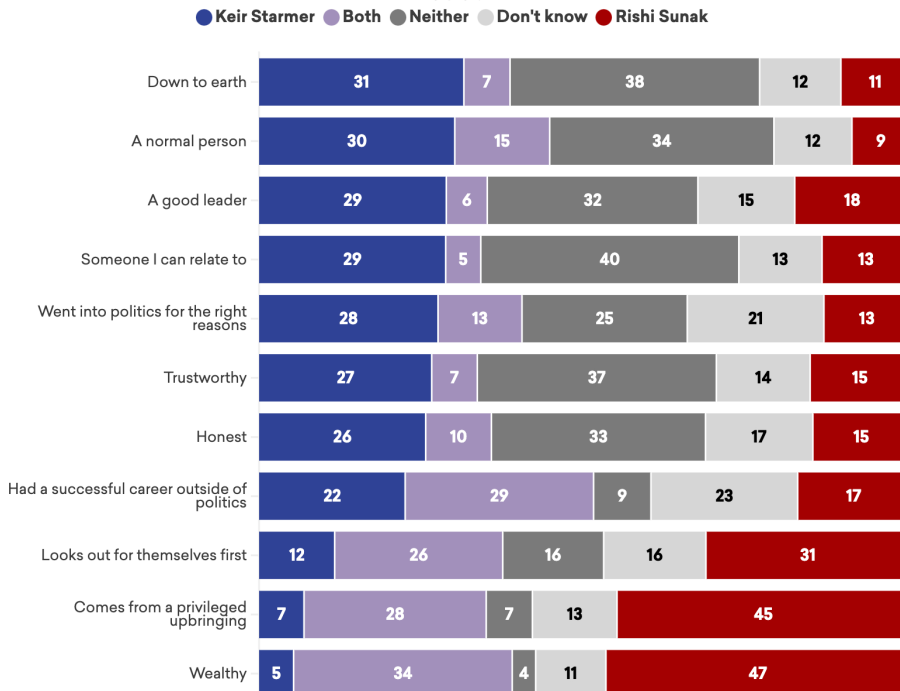
While feelings of respect are driving Keir Starmer and Labour’s poll lead - and motivating many Conservative-Labour switchers - the challenge then is how to turn a ‘respect frame’ into an agenda for Government.

Only 12 per cent of the public are optimistic about politics. In none of the British Seven segments do more than 20 percent of people say that they are optimistic about politics in this country. A pervasive anti-politics sense runs through discussions with voters, with cynicism high and the feeling that Britain is broken. A politics of respect can be an antidote to this broad anti-politics feeling across Britain.

More of the public think both Starmer (39 per cent) and Sunak (56 per cent) put party first and country second, than those who think they put country first. Conservative to Labour switchers are significantly more likely to think Starmer puts country before party (69 per cent), however he still has a task to do to convince the wider public this is the case. The public are also more likely to choose ‘neither’ or ‘don’t know’ than choosing either Sunak or Starmer when asked which leader is: down to earth, a normal person, a good leader, trustworthy, honest or someone I can relate to.

Figure 7

Of the following attributes, please indicate whether you think they apply more to Keir Starmer, Rishi Sunak, both or neither?



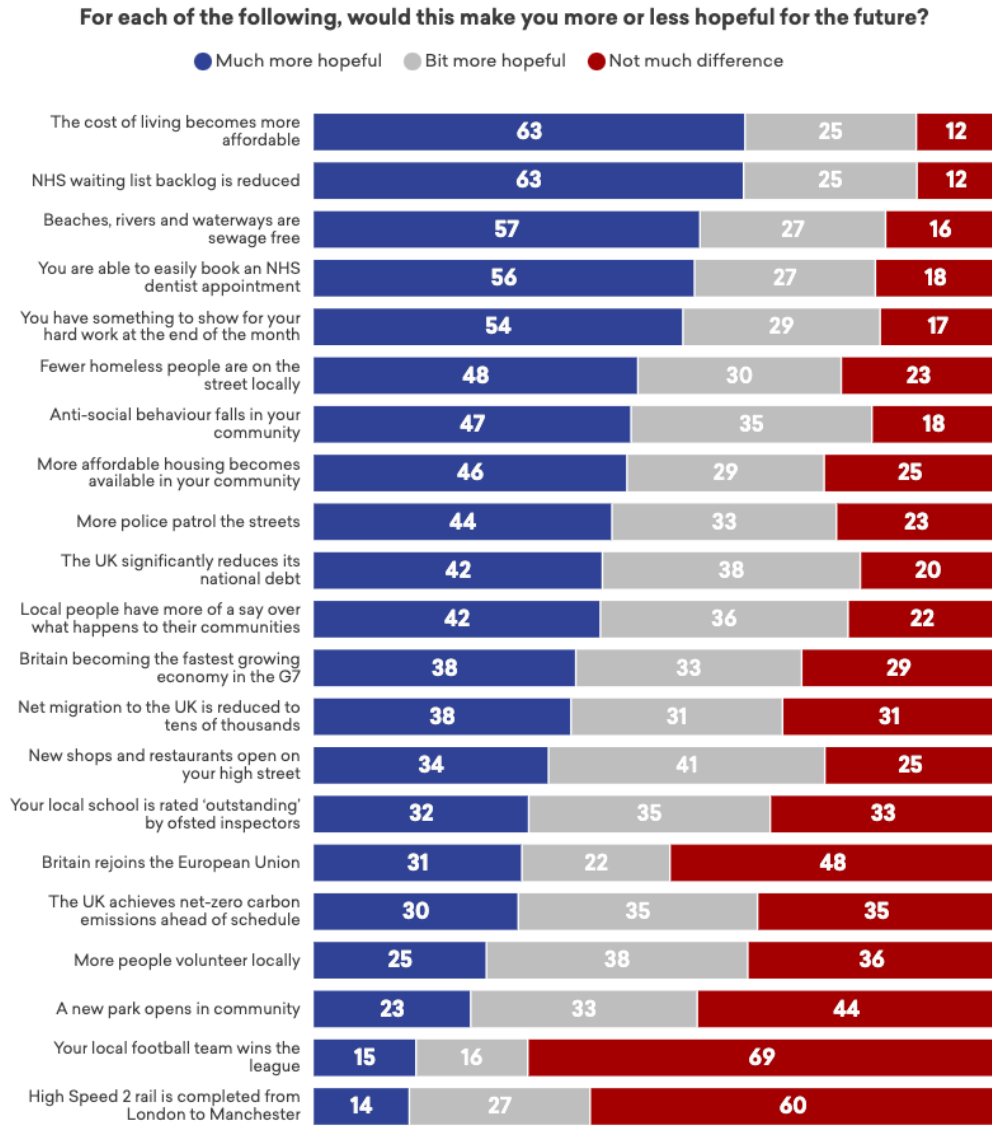
Respect and the Change Election

UCL Policy Lab and More in Common's polling and focus group research during the election campaign shows that ordinary and everyday improvements to people's day to day lives are what the public must want from the next Government, and can provide the antidote to the anti-politics mood.

Ordinary Hope

Asked what would counteract their feelings of pessimism about the country and make them feel more hopeful - more than half the public say the cost of living becoming more affordable (63 per cent), shorter NHS waiting lists (63 per cent), cleaning waterways of sewage (57 per cent), making it easier to book a dentist appointment (56 per cent) and having something to show for your hard work at the end of the month (54 per cent). This is in contrast to larger and more abstract policy promises such as net migration being reduced to the tens of thousands (38 per cent) or Britain rejoining the European Union (31 percent)

Figure 8



This is supported by focus group research throughout the campaign so far which finds that the public are broadly cynical about bold or radical promises, and are more likely to believe in and feel hopeful about more grounded and tangible forms of change.

What change should the next government aim for?

More than anything else after political rows about Brexit, the pandemic, partygate, the mini budget and the cost of living crisis, the public wants stability. Asked about a series of approaches the next Government should either aim for, 78% said the Government should aim for stability, while 74% said that the next Government should avoid chaos.

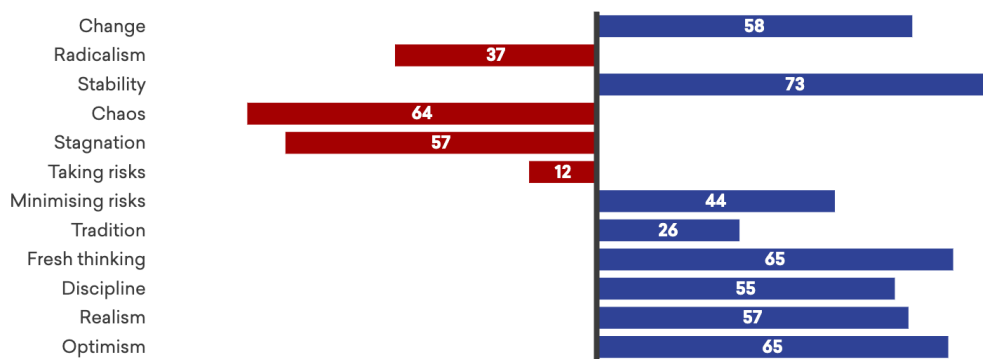
That desire for stability shapes how people are thinking about the type of change they want from the next Government. Overall 65% say the next Government should aim for change and 72% want to see fresh thinking. However, they don't necessarily want that change to be radical - only 14% say that is something the Government should aim for whereas 51% say it is something to be avoided.

In short, the public wants the next government to embrace realism, but err on the optimistic side of realism. Aiming for realism has a support of 65 per cent of the public, while optimism commands a support of 69 per cent.

Figure 9

For each of the following, do you think they are something the new government should be aiming for, or trying to avoid?

- Net aiming for
- Net avoiding



The Respect Index

The UCL Policy Lab and More in Common are launching a brand new index to measure how well the two campaigns are connecting and speaking with the hopes, concerns and issues of ordinary people. Measuring five different dimensions of the public's relationship with politicians, this new 'respect index' will track on a weekly basis the extent to which the two campaigns are managing to convince the public that they get it.

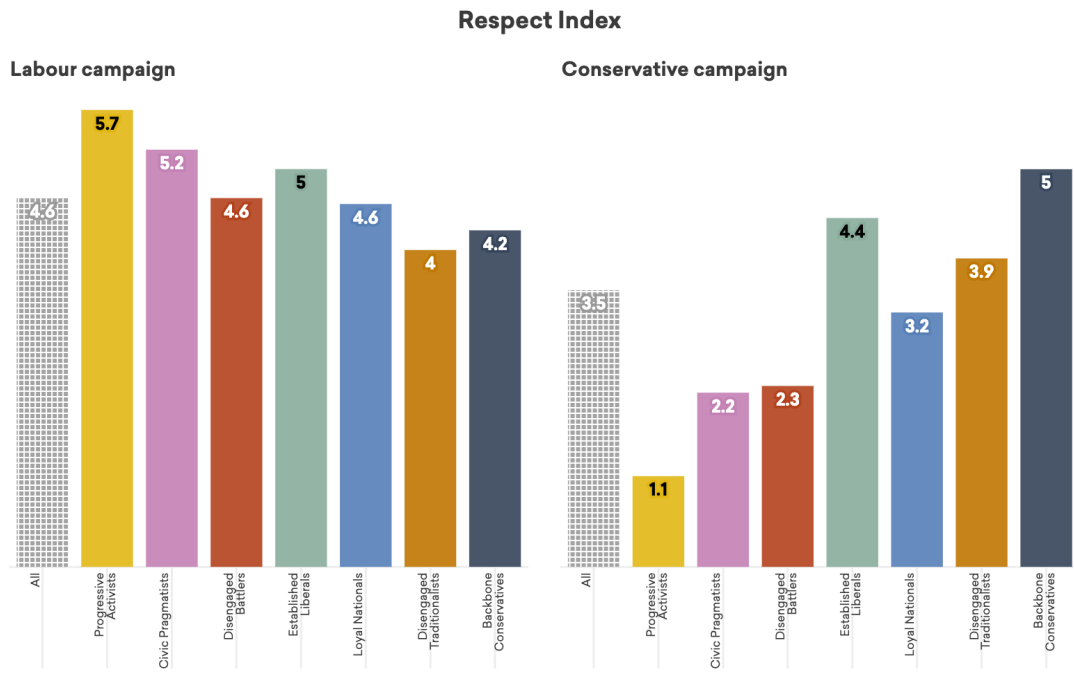
Over the course of the General Election, the UCL Policy Lab and More in Common are tracking whether the public think the campaign respects people like them using a 'respect index'.

The index uses five metrics to test whether the public agree or disagree whether the Conservative and Labour campaigns are: speaking to people like me; making me hopeful for the future; focusing on the issues that matter to my community; putting the country before their party, and being led by people who respect people like me.

In week one, we find the Labour campaign scores 4.6 out of 10 on the Respect Index and the Conservatives combined score of 3.5 out of 10 – highlighting both Labour's advantage and the work both parties have to do to properly convince the public that they respect people like them.

Using the lens of More in Common's British Seven segments shows that feelings of being respected by Labour are far less polarised, than feelings of being respected by the Conservatives. The range among the British Seven segments for the Labour campaign is 1.7, while the range for the Conservative campaign is 3.9. In contrast to some suggestions that the Labour Party is losing support among progressive voters, they are the group that give Labour the highest score on the Respect index.

Figure 10



Source: More in Common, June 2024



Policy Lab