

May 2024

No place like home

Navigating public opinion on housing



**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 by 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 for understanding what the public think and why. We've published groundbreaking reports on a range of issues from climate and refugees to culture wars and crime. We are a full-service research agency offering polling and focus group research and are members of the British Polling Council.

We are grateful to the Wates Family Enterprise Trust for supporting this research. More in Common has retained full editorial control over this 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 in Annex A.

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Foreword

The Wates Family have been building homes across our country for more than 125 years. We know that good quality housing is essential to support individuals, communities and our country to thrive. However, too often too many people are locked out of the housing market – either with poor quality rented accommodation or struggling to get on the property ladder.

The Wates Family Enterprise Trust supports thought leaders across the UK to provide new and refreshing perspectives to the challenges of housing quality and housing supply in the UK today. With our support, thought leaders help start new debates and contribute to ongoing debates about how we can make good housing a reality for all in Britain today.

Making progress on ensuring the right quantity of good quality housing across the UK will require a multi-faceted approach. Extensive and robust public opinion testing on what the public really think about housing and housebuilding is one of the under-explored areas of efforts to deliver good quality housing in the UK.

This is partly because many who work in housing see public opinion as more of a hindrance than a help to unlocking progress and momentum to build good homes for all in the UK today.

More in Common's *No Place Like Home* – which the Wates Family Enterprise Trust has been happy to support – challenges that assumption. It shows that with the right approach public support can be leveraged to build momentum for building more good quality homes.

The report also shows the extent to which so many people across the country are worried about the state of housing in Britain, and demonstrates a strong public mandate to take action to deal with our country's housing shortage and housing problems.

We welcome this contribution to our broader debate about housing in Britain today and look forward to continuing this conversation in the time ahead.

Tim Wates
Lead Trustee, Housing, Wates Family Enterprise Trust

Felicity Mallam
Director, Wates Family Enterprise Trust

Executive Summary

There's no place like home. Housing is more than just a roof over our heads – important though that is. Home is where we unwind, a place that we make our own, where we raise families and make memories.

However, for many in Britain today, housing is more a source of stress and insecurity than stability. For much of the public, our housing model seems broken. Rents are increasing faster than incomes can keep up, and the prospect of buying a home has become further and further out of reach for a larger group of younger Britons.

The insecure, scarce and unaffordable housing that so many experience is not only holding the country and economy back – it's damaging our cohesion too. With short-term tenancies communities become more transient, fewer people put roots down in their local area. And without that sense of attachment, activities like volunteering, participating in civic life or even forming relationships with neighbours become less appealing. Intergenerational fairness also takes a hit when young people feel that the opportunity to own their own home afforded to previous generations is not being given to them.

However, much of the debate around housing seems to conclude that the public are the problem – that Britain is a nation of NIMBYs (not-in-my-back-yard) who have no one to blame but themselves. And it is left to a group of enlightened YIMBY (yes-in-my-back-yard) outriders to make the case for housing.

The polling and focus group research conducted for this report finds a more nuanced picture. It shows how public support (and sometimes indifference) can be leveraged and opposition more effectively managed to put spades in the ground, cranes in the air, and get Britain building again.

Drawing on nationally representative polling of more than 4,000 people and focus groups conversations across the country, this report sets out the public's starting points on housing and housebuilding. It shows some of the opportunities and risks on leveraging public support for housebuilding, and tests a broad policy agenda that could help kick-start a new generation of housebuilding.

Our key insights include:

- **While the media and political debate on housebuilding is polarised between 'builders' and 'blockers', most people see themselves as 'balancers.'** They think that housebuilding is a good thing for the country in principle but have misgivings about how some local developments are being done.
- **Britons are concerned that housing is unaffordable.** But they do not always see a clear link between house prices on the one hand and supply and demand on the other.

- **People's policy preferences do not always match those of pro-housebuilding campaigners.** Planning reform and building on the Green Belt are only moderately popular, the public are much more supportive of more interventionist demand-side measures, like rent controls.
- **People don't feel like housebuilding benefits them.** Housing developments are perceived as an inconvenience, something to be endured for the sake of others.
- **Neither political party can really claim to 'own' housing as an issue.** Trust in Government and politicians is low and scepticism of promises is high. The public don't believe that either political party will deliver on their housebuilding pledges.

Our findings have several implications for policymakers and campaign groups navigating public opinion on housing:

- **Take concerns seriously.** People raise valid concerns about losing green space and overwhelming local public service capacity. Pro-housebuilding campaigners should focus on addressing and assuaging these worries, and designing housing developments in practical and sustainable ways. Otherwise, arguments in favour of development risk falling on deaf ears.
- **Focus on balancers – not builders, or blockers.** In order to motivate the large majority of 'balancers' to support housebuilding, campaigners should take care to talk about housing in ways that resonate with them – rather than over-indexing on more niche policy preferences of their most ardent supporters, or focusing too much on rebutting the more active opponents of housebuilding.
- **Make more winners.** If people feel like local housebuilding leaves them worse off, policymakers should look for creative ways to ensure that existing residents benefit from developments. Tell a broader story about how housebuilding provides a place for their children and grandchildren to live. When development is done right it can strengthen local community ties, create places where kids can safely play together and cultivate a sense of local pride.

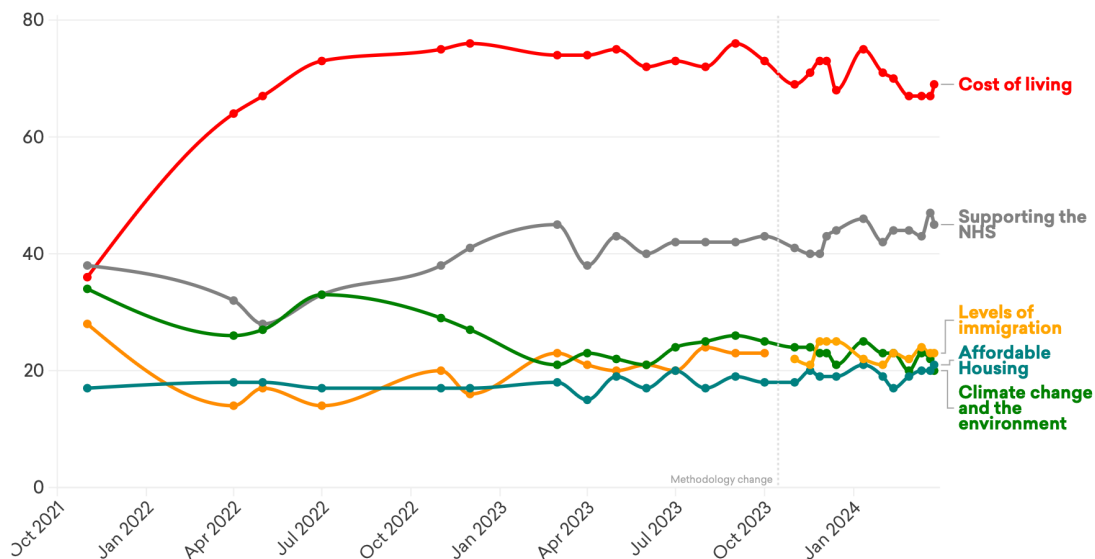
It is not just young people who experience housing unaffordability. Most people are either struggling themselves or know someone who is struggling with their housing situation. Although Britain is not a nation of NIMBYs, there are deep-seated concerns around public service capacity and protecting the natural environment that give people pause for thought. Many of the 'balancers', could be won over with a policy offering that engages constructively with their concerns and actively mitigates the drawbacks of development.

Section 1: The public's starting points on housing

Britons' concerns about housing today

Housing (and the affordability of housing specifically) consistently ranks in the top half of the public's list of top concerns. Asked to rank them, the public place housing just after the cost of living, the NHS, climate and immigration. What's more, more than seven in ten Britons (72 per cent) think there is a housing crisis in Britain, while less than one in ten (eight per cent) think there is no housing crisis.

Britons' big issues over time



Source: Latest fieldwork: 23rd-24th March 2024

Concern about housing affordability is shaped by people's everyday experiences.

Two-thirds of people report that they are either struggling themselves, or know someone who is struggling with their housing situation. This view is reflected in focus group conversations with the public, where everyone has a story to share about housing – having to move out as rents became unaffordable, or deep worries about mortgages as interest rates rocketed up. However, no two stories are the same.

My two boys, well they're grown men now, they can't afford mortgages. They rent both of them. One in Manchester, one in London and they're older than I was when I got my first house with a mortgage. So yes, it's extremely difficult for people.

Michelle, Loyal National, Darlington

For the young people now coming up, I just feel so sorry for them because the deposits they request are just ridiculous. The young ones, they just don't have a chance.

Julie, Progressive Activist, South Cambridgeshire

I've got friends who are coming to the end of fixed mortgages, they've got kids now, life has taken normal progression and they are freaking out for when their mortgage rates end because that can be like £500 plus short a month and that's not on doing anything any different other than just paying the interest on the new rent mortgage. So yeah, it's got to be scary if you're in that position.

Jacob, Disengaged Traditionalist, Milton Keynes

I don't know when it changed but you hear 30, 40, 50 couples going for one rental property, or people getting chucked out of their houses through no fault of their own in rented accommodation and they might have got a couple of kids, both work, and you just think to yourself, is it fair?

Kirstie, Civic Pragmatist, Milton Keynes

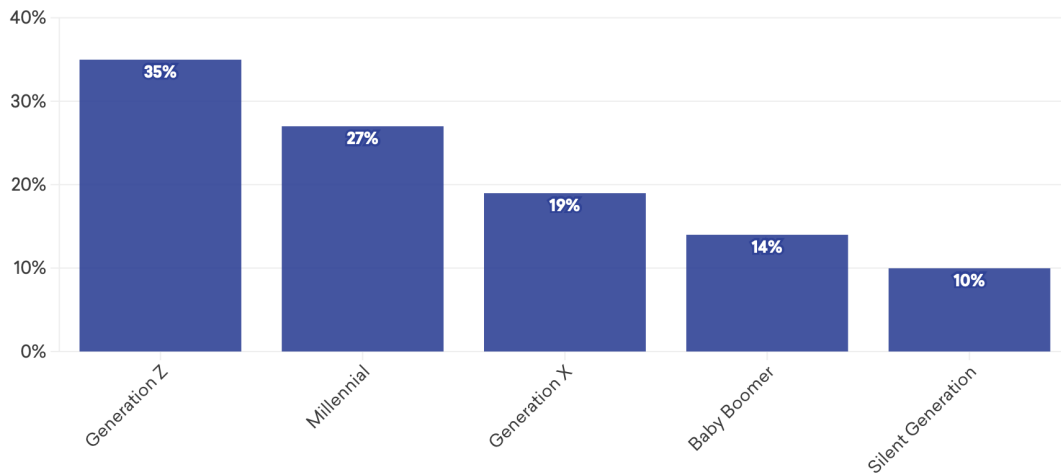
Some feel the pinch more than others. People who say that both they and their friends and family are struggling are much more likely to think that housing is a top issue than those who feel secure in their housing situation. A quarter (24 per cent) of the insecure, struggling group chose housing as a top issue. For those who say that neither they nor their friends and family are struggling, just 14 per cent consider housing to be a top issue.

Age also drives concern about housing. Younger age groups are more concerned about housing affordability than older groups. Many Generation Z and younger Millennials struggle with the cost of renting. The typical under-30 year-old spends a quarter of their take-home pay on rent.¹ Many find themselves stuck on the renting treadmill, looking on as both house prices and rents continue to rise faster than their incomes. Rapid inflation in the private rented sector means that people don't have the capacity to save for a deposit on their first home. And at the same time, house price inflation means that the amount they would need to save for a deposit keeps increasing. In the 1990s, a prospective first-time buyer could save enough for a deposit in five years. By 2019, it would take a renting family 21 years to save enough money for a deposit.²

¹ ONS ([link](#))

² Resolution Foundation ([link](#))

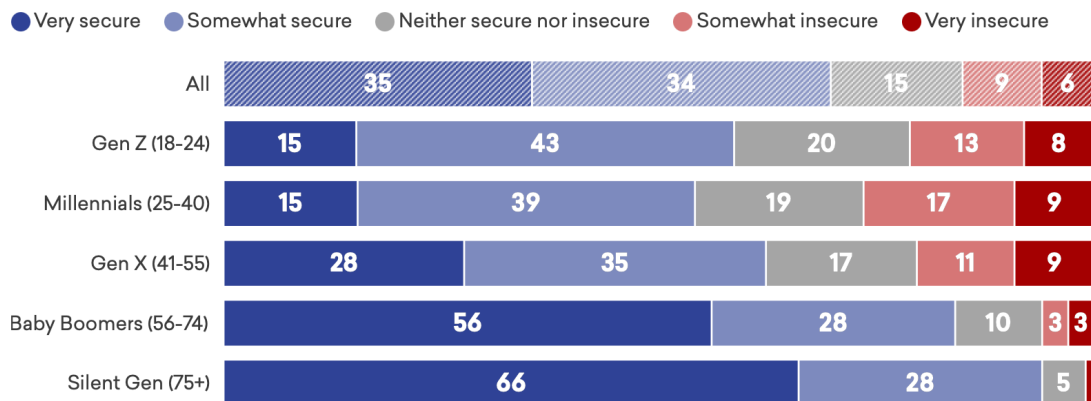
Per cent who think Affordable housing is a top issue facing Britain



Source: More in Common, March 2024

The contrast between young groups and Baby Boomers is stark. Older people tend to be more insulated from the rise in housing costs, or are direct beneficiaries of it because they own their own home. This is why more than four in five (84 per cent) of Baby Boomers feel somewhat or very secure in their housing situation, compared to just over half (53 per cent) of their children -the Millennial generation – who say the same.

My housing situation is...



Note: Excludes "don't knows"

Source: More in Common, November 2023

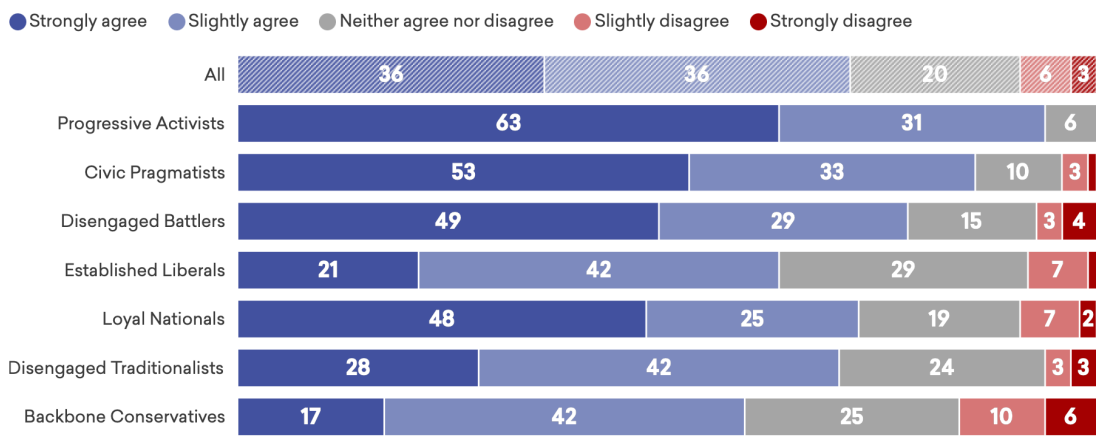


In the focus group discussions, older participants do express their sympathy with Millennials and Generation Z and their struggles to get on the housing ladder. As Julie, a Baby Boomer Progressive Activist from South Cambridgeshire, said, “the young ones, they don’t have a chance.” But for many older Britons, their own high rate of homeownership give them more security and leads to their being less concerned about future generations.

These differing experiences of housing insecurity also shape views about how bad the housing situation in Britain is today. Even though very few people think that housing is affordable, there are significant differences between More in Common’s seven segments on the strength of feeling about the extent to which Britain is facing a housing crisis.

A majority agree across all the British Seven segments that Britain is in a housing crisis, the intensity of that agreement varies significantly by segment. Left-leaning groups such as Progressive Activists believe more strongly that Britain is in a housing crisis, compared to the economically right-leaning and more secure groups of the Established Liberals and Backbone Conservatives.

There is a housing crisis in Britain

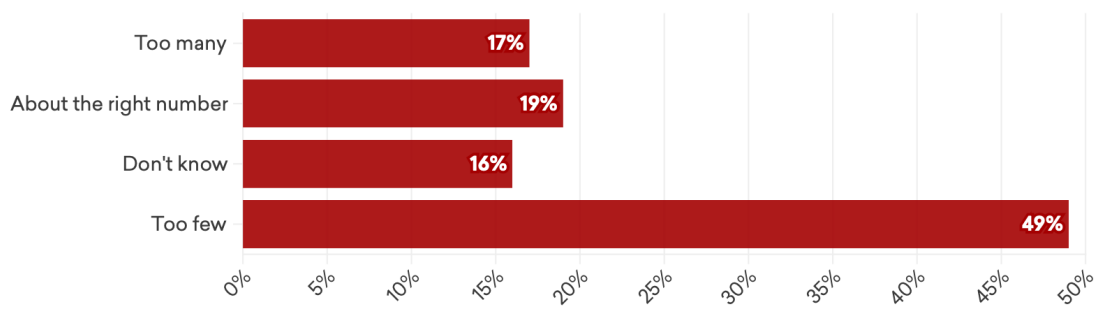


Source: More in Common, November 2023

Britain doesn't build enough homes

The public think that housebuilding is too low nationally, but not locally. By three-to-one, the public think we build too few rather than too many homes. However, there is still a large minority (35 per cent) who aren't convinced either way – either because they don't know or because they think we get the scale of house-building about right.

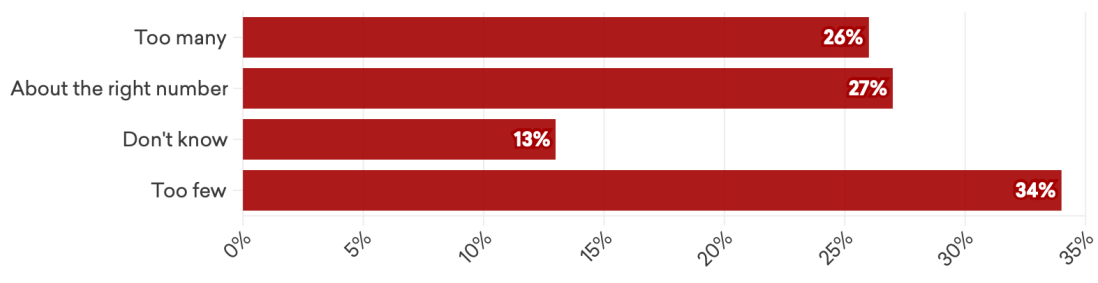
Do you think that in the UK we are currently building too many, too few or about the right number of new homes for people to live in?



Source: More in Common, September 2023

For many people, this is a 'national' housebuilding crisis, not a 'local' housebuilding crisis. While Britons tend to agree that there is a national housing crisis, they are much less likely to say there is a housing crisis in their local area. This is true for every single segment of the population. For many, more homes must be built, but just not in their backyard. Whereas 49% think too few homes are built nationally, only 34% think there are too few homes built locally.

Do you think that in your local area we are currently building too many, too few or about the right number of new homes for people to live in?



Source: More in Common, September 2023

Of those who said that we are building too few homes nationally, only three in five (59 per cent) also thought there were too few homes built in their local area. And of those who said that more house-building would ease the crisis, a similar proportion (61 per cent) also thought that this also applied to their local area.

The relationship between supply and affordability

One of the challenges around responding to broad public concern about affordability is that the public are more interested in outcomes (affordability) than on the causes such as supply and demand. In focus groups, not everyone made the link between affordability on the one hand and supply on the other.

Affordability was clearly an issue and emerged unprompted in discussions – but the public are worried that more construction would simply lead to more expensive houses being built. If new housing is not cheaper than what is already on offer, then there is no point building it. In other words, their perception is that supply of housing has little-to-no impact on the price.

Britons across the country – in conversations from Darlington to Milton Keynes to Cambridge – explained their views on new builds are informed by personal experiences. Britons see new, edge-of-town housing estates being built where the asking price was around half a million pounds. When these types of homes are more expensive than many of our participants could afford, the argument that the overall levels of supply will help reduce house prices for everyone didn't make sense to them. Participants were also sceptical about developers trying to make a "quick buck" rather than solving the problem of housing supply.

I think there's plenty of housing out there, I just think it's not affordable.

Becky, Loyal National, Darlington

Not enough affordable houses being built, period.

Julie, Progressive Activist, South Cambridgeshire

Yeah, I think it's brilliant if people can afford it. But if people can't, you're just building more houses, taking up more room, that could have been put there to help people that actually need it.

Kyra, Established Liberal, South Cambridgeshire

I feel like there are a lot of houses being built, but I don't think that's the issue. I think it's people being able to afford what's being built. I think all developers are trying to obviously make that bang for their buck.

Jacob, Disengaged Traditionalist, Milton Keynes

That entrenched belief that supply is irrelevant (or even exacerbates) unaffordability is a major challenge for pro-building arguments. Anti-development groups can easily point to expensive new developments and argue that their existence is making housing no more affordable. Such arguments often become entwined with people's concerns about gentrification and new housing being unaffordable for local residents.

The longer that demand for housing continues to outpace supply, the harder it could become to advance the argument that 'more homes' is the solution to Britain's affordability problems.

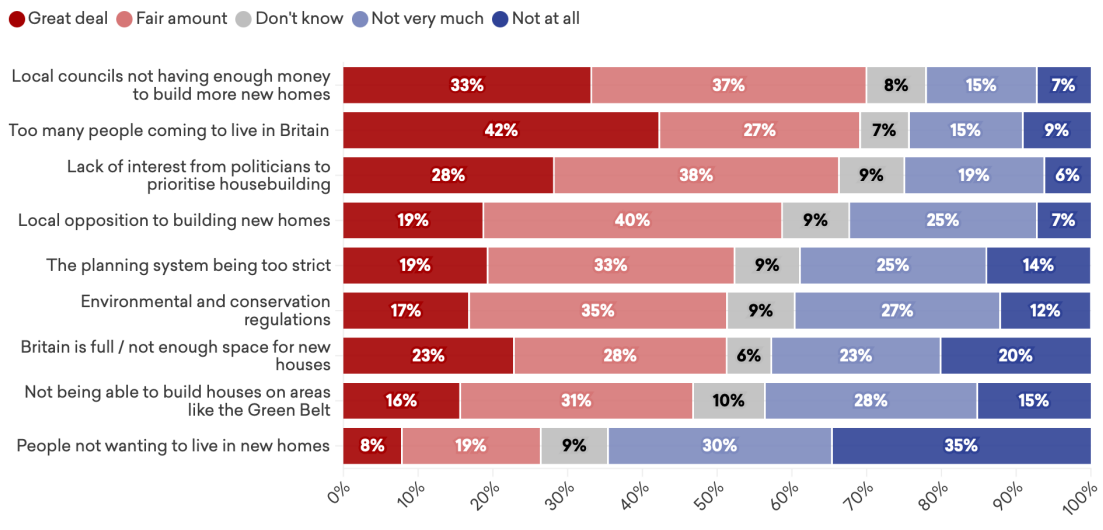
The focus on affordability – without the context of why homes are so expensive – helps explain the public's strong preference for social housing. Social housing is seen as an antidote to rising prices in the private sector without tackling the thorny issue of why housing is so expensive in the first place. And for some people, the decline of social housing is itself a cause of rising prices.

I think as well there's a lack of social housing, so people have been forced into private rents, which the prices for private rents have gone sky high, so people are struggling to find that money. People bought up a lot of, especially in London, people bought up their council properties at really cheap rates. But now it's just created a lack of council properties so there's nowhere for people to go who need social housing.

Serena, Civic Pragmatist, Milton Keynes

In the mind of most Britons, the key causes of worsening affordability are a lack of housebuilding combined with significant population growth. When asked about why housing had become so expensive, the public identify two main causes: a lack of resources to build and high immigration. People also blame politicians and 'blockers' for holding back housebuilding. In contrast to the settled views of many housing policymakers and campaigners, the public believe the planning system and green belt planning restrictions specifically are less likely to contribute to Britain's current housing problems.

How much have the following contributed to Britain's housing crisis?



Source: More in Common, September 2023

The other side of the ‘not enough homes’ equation is ‘too many people’ for the number of homes we have. In focus groups, participants feel confident that homes were being built but they didn’t believe that they were keeping up with the increase in the UK population. Many Britons talk quite freely about the impact of large-scale immigration on house prices. And almost seven in ten (69 per cent) of Britons believe that immigration contributes to the housing crisis.

I think the population has increased by quite a few million over say the last ten, fifteen, twenty years. I think it's gone up maybe five, six, seven million in that period of time. So again, I don't think that the houses are being built quick enough, enough to fill that demand.

Leigh, Loyal National, Darlington

I feel like there are plenty of houses being built. I think everywhere you look, wherever you go there's developments. I don't know that buildings are necessarily the issue. I think it is just literally the growing population.

Jacob, Disengaged Traditionalist, Milton Keynes

Getting more difficult now with a lot of people moving into the country, especially with the council housing... I mean my mom obviously was an immigrant, came to this country years ago and I said for a joke, okay that's it, let's not bring more people, you're the last person. But obviously we've had so many people come to the country and that is kind of part of the problem too.

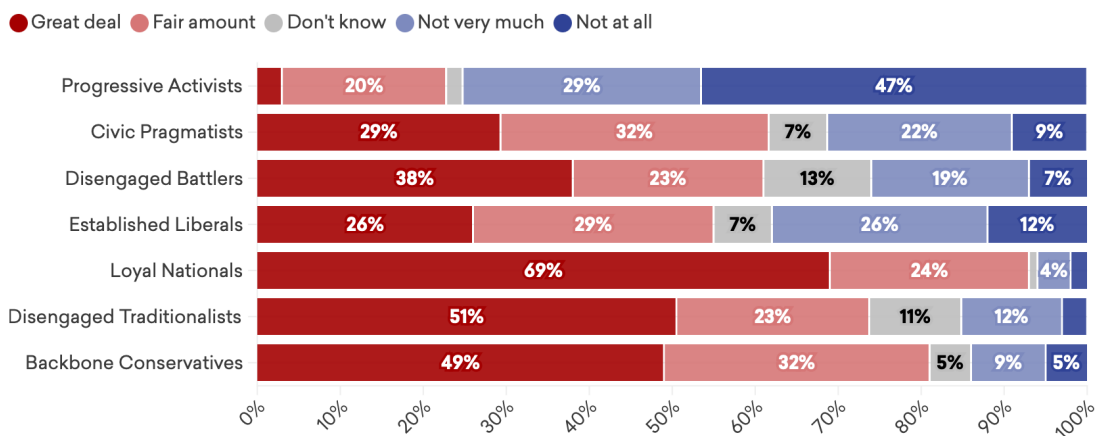
Saeefa, Disengaged Traditionalist, Milton Keynes

Immigration over the years has not helped things. The crisis with Ukraine and people coming over from places like that and everything's just an influx on us. We're already struggling with the crisis but they keep on letting people come over.

Michelle, Loyal National, Darlington

The relationship between population increases and the housing crisis polarises opinion among the segments. While majorities in six of the seven segments (excluding the Progressive Activists) think that ‘too many people coming to Britain’ contributes to the housing crisis, there are significant differences between the segments – from almost unanimous agreement among Loyal Nationals (93 per cent), falling to 56 per cent of Established Liberals and a minority of Progressive Activists (23 per cent).

How much has [too many people coming to live in Britain] contributed to Britain's housing crisis?



Source: More in Common, September 2023

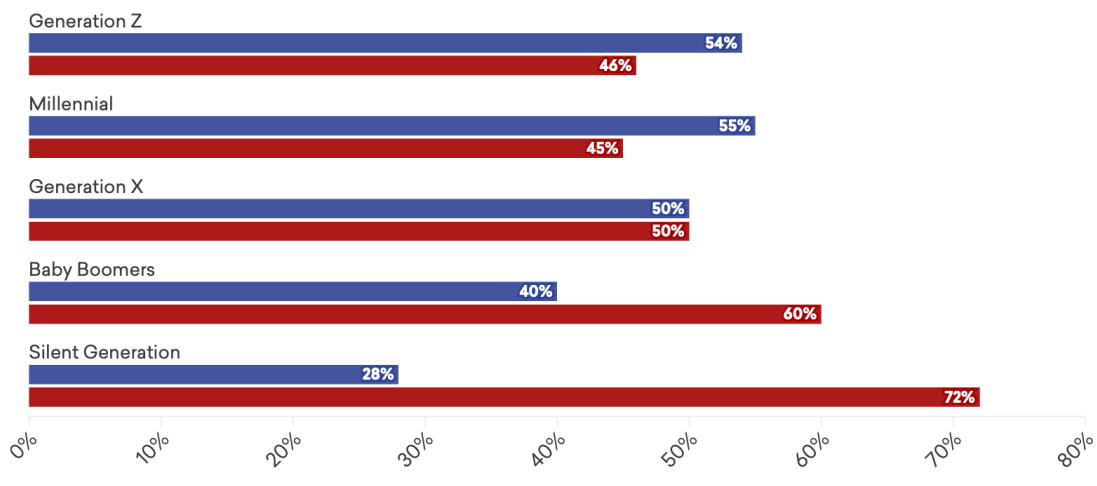
Commitment to a home-owning democracy

Younger generations are not turning away from the principle of a home-owning democracy. Even in the face of insecurity and worsening housing affordability, Generation Z and Millennials are more likely than older people to believe that “everyone should be able to own their own home.”

This means that the very people who are least likely to own homes are among the most likely to think it is important. Perhaps the easier access to homeownership that older generations enjoyed when they were young explains why they value it less than those for whom ownership is a distant luxury. For those aged under 35, housing is much more of a scarce resource today than it was in the 1980s.³

Which of the following comes closer to your view?

- Everyone should be able to own their own home
- As long as you have somewhere to live, doesn't matter if you own it or not



Source: More in Common, September 2023

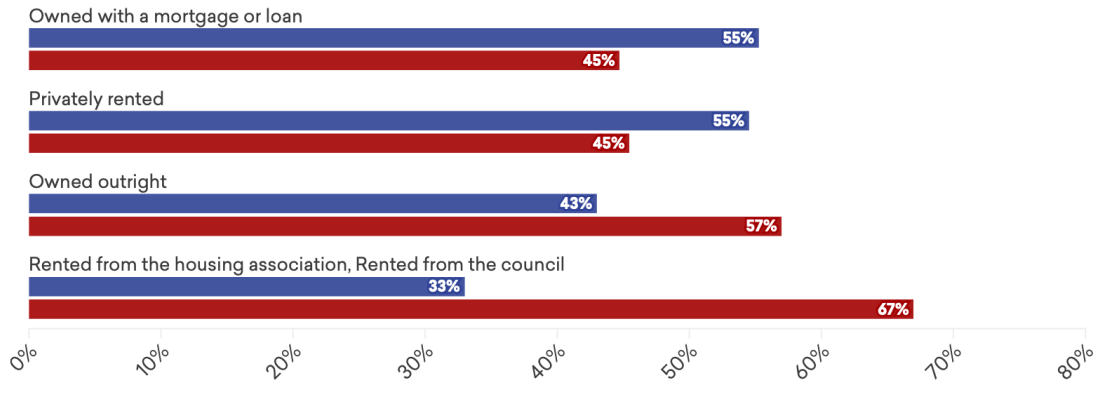
Housing tenure is also closely linked to pro-ownership values. Private renters and mortgaged homeowners are the most pro-ownership, whereas outright owners and social renters view ownership as less important. In some ways this is unsurprising. Those with greater security are more likely to take for granted the benefits that owning a home can bring. Conversely, private renters, not eligible for subsidised accommodation see and feel the pressures first hand of market conditions. And mortgaged homeowners, who tend to

³ Resolution Foundation ([link](#))

be younger, will be more aware of the greater stability and peace of mind that they recently acquired, compared to their time in the private rented sector.

Which of the following comes closer to your view?

- Everyone should be able to own their own home
- As long as you have somewhere to live, doesn't matter if you own it or not



Source: More in Common, September 2023

Section 2: Britons and housebuilding

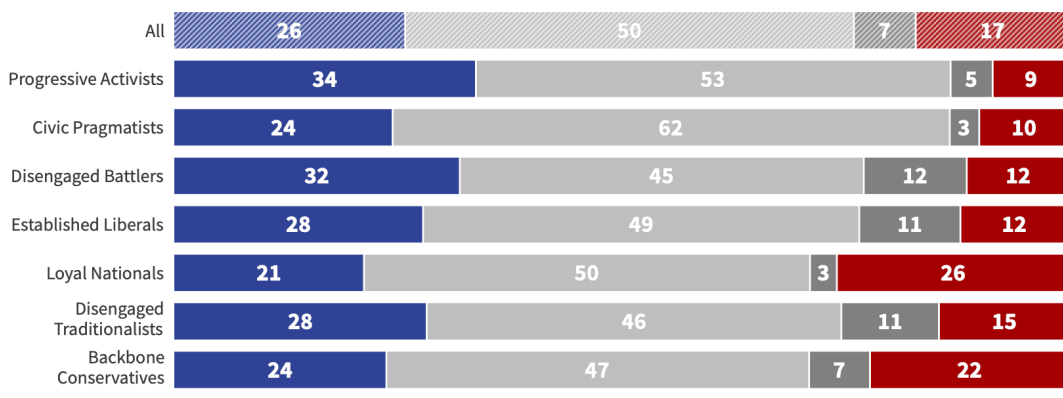
Despite broad concern about housing affordability, public opinion is often assumed to be a block rather than bolster housebuilding projects on a local and national level. As across so many topics, the debate is less binary and more nuanced than this. There are opportunities to leverage public opinion to unlock support and navigate opposition to housebuilding.

Most people are balancers, not blockers or builders

In contrast to a political and media debate that sees housebuilding through either NIMBY or YIMBY lens, half the public (50 per cent) say their view on any development would depend on the merits of the proposal – a view that unites all seven segments. Less than a fifth of the public (17 per cent) have anti-housebuilding instincts, and pro-building instincts are not widely popular either – only a quarter of people would support housebuilding regardless of its impact (26 per cent). NIMBY is not a term that the public are familiar with and very few people talk about NIMBY in focus group conversations.

If there were proposals to build new homes in your local area, which comes closest to your view?

- I would likely support - any new development would likely be good for my local area and local residents
- My view would likely depend on the specific proposal - new development could be good or bad for my local area and local residents depending on how they do it
- Don't know
- I would likely oppose - any new development would likely be of detriment to my local area and local residents

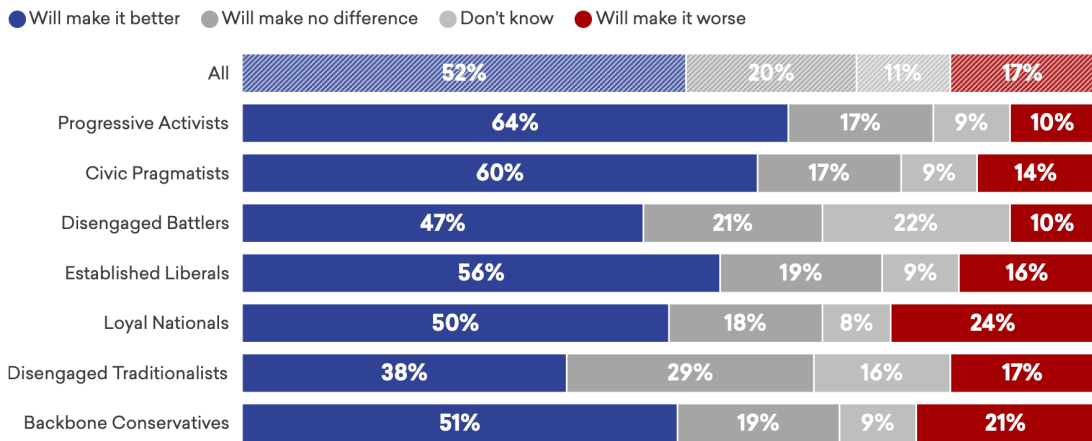


Source: More in Common, November 2023

Broadly speaking, people are three times more likely to think that housebuilding will make the UK a better place (52 per cent) than a worse place (17 per cent) – though just under a third either don't hold a view or don't think it will make a difference. This is fairly consistent across the seven segments. The two 'disengaged' groups are the least convinced about the benefits of housebuilding, but that is partly due to apathy, as they are the most likely to say that they don't know or that it will make no difference.

This reflects the idea that most Britons are balancers on house-building. A small minority are opposed in almost all cases, a small minority are supportive in almost all cases, but most reserve their judgement to the development in question. The instinct of most Britons is that home building makes the country better, but a significant minority don't know, and soft supporters of housebuilding often make their decisions on specific proposals, rather than abstract notions of whether to build or not.

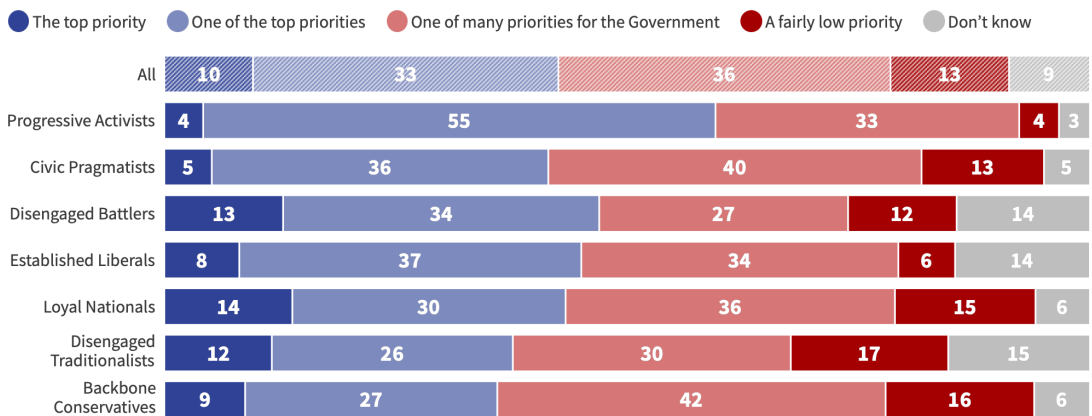
Do you think that more housebuilding in the UK...



Source: More in Common, November 2023

More than two in five Britons (43 per cent) think housebuilding should be one of the top priorities for Government. Different segments place different levels of priority on housebuilding. In only one segment – the Progressive Activists – do most people place housing as a top government priority (60 per cent). Among some segments, as few as a third think housebuilding should be a priority.

How much of a priority should increased housebuilding be for the Government?



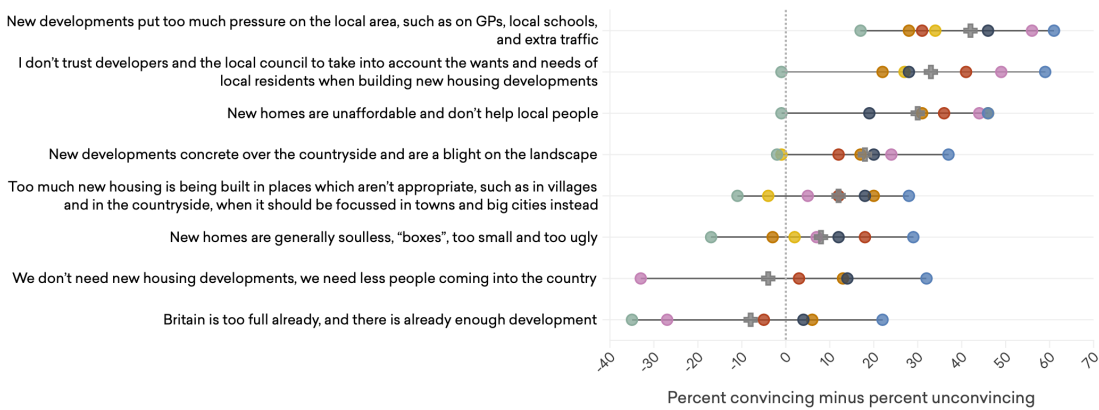
Source: More in Common, November 2023

Navigating opposition to housebuilding

Public support for housebuilding is conditional on people believing that there is a broader benefit of housebuilding for them and their community. Currently many Britons feel that existing residents lose out from housebuilding in their area. They see development as a sacrifice, rather than a benefit. The fact that houses are built anyway, without allaying locals’ concerns, makes people feel ignored. Housebuilding which is done *with people*, not *to* them is likely to be one which can drive support for more houses being built.

Below are a set of reasons for opposing new housing developments. Please say for each how convincing or unconvincing an argument you think it is

● All ● Progressive Activists ● Civic Pragmatists ● Disengaged Battlers ● Established Liberals ● Loyal Nationals ● Disengaged Traditionalists ● Backbone Conservatives



Source: More in Common, November 2023

Allaying local concerns about pressure on local infrastructure and local public services is key to building the community mandate for housebuilding.

In focus groups, Britons share their frustrations about how new homes and developments would pop up in their area, without the subsequent infrastructure upgrades or improvements to public services to support a growing population. While many are sympathetic in principle to the need for more housebuilding – including in their local area – they are put off by the lack of answers to practical questions about how local schools or GPs will cope with increased demand on their services or roads withstand the extra traffic.

The houses will go to the highest bidders and the roads there will probably get jammed up because they never build in more road capacity for all the extra people that do end up in those houses. So it just means longer stuck in traffic jams ... If you look at all the new builds have put up, you've not got any new roads, you've got no new transport.

Mark, Established Liberal, South Cambridgeshire

Houses are being built, but they're not providing more GPs, they're not providing more schools. The roads can't take it. The roads are getting busier because new houses are being built in.

Serena, Civic Pragmatist, Milton Keynes

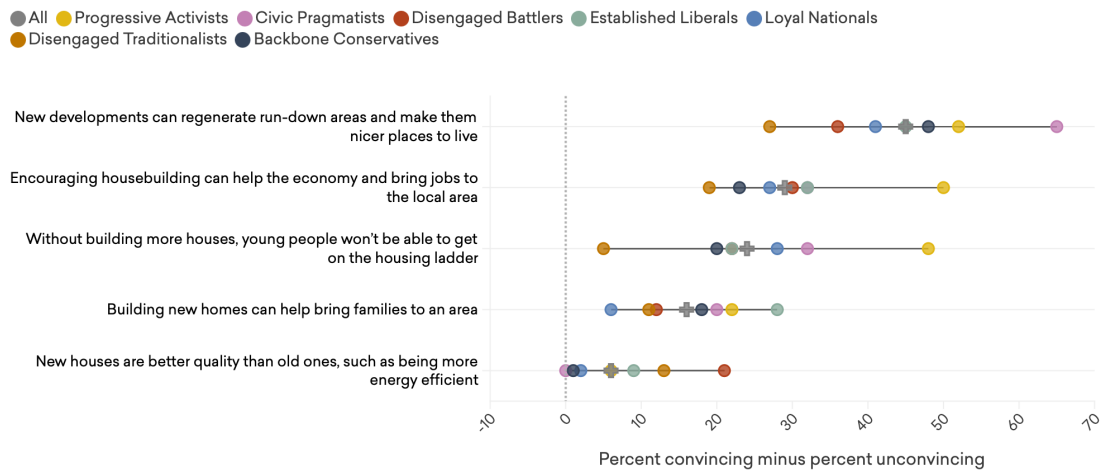
There is only one school there and they're trying to build more houses around that area and the school itself is oversubscribed, the doctors are oversubscribed. So it's not just about putting people in a house, it's them being able to provide local amenities to just even the basics of an education and being able to access a doctor. And I don't think that's just a local thing. I think that's everywhere up and down the country that it's all right giving people's houses, but it is servicing those people at the same time that they need to make sure that they can have access to everything else. Shops, supermarkets, doctors, hospitals, education, jobs, it's everything in between that that's all affected. And I think that's why a lot of councils are pushing back because they simply don't have the funding to do everything else that goes along with housing these extra people.

Luke, Loyal National, Darlington

Building support for housebuilding

To navigate often divisive issues around housing, it is important to understand both the sources of public concern with housebuilding and the opportunities for public support. The primary benefits of housebuilding are centred on its contribution to the local economy. The most convincing argument is that new developments have the potential to regenerate run-down areas and bring in more jobs. The more that housing can be tied to the levelling up agenda more broadly, the more popular it will be. Helping young people get onto the housing ladder only ranks third on this list. Although the vast majority of the public sympathise with renters and those struggling to get onto the housing ladder, most people still want to personally benefit from development.

Below are a set of reasons for supporting new housing developments. Please say for each how convincing or unconvincing an argument you think it is



Source: More in Common, November 2023

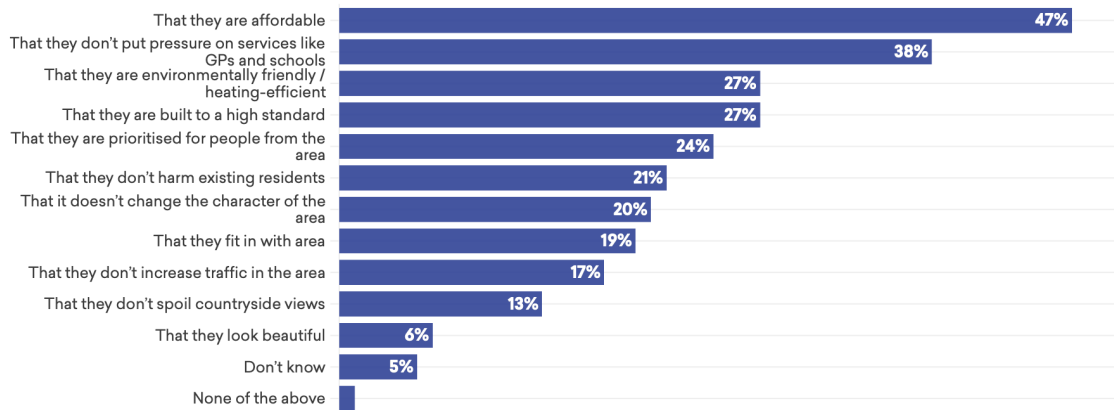
One of the most interesting – though perhaps obvious - insights from this research is that to unlock support for housebuilding, an approach is needed where people can imagine living in the houses themselves. This has important implications for the ‘build beautiful’ policy proponents. While there might be very valid reasons for housing policy to prioritise aesthetic quality, without fixing the other fundamental issue of affordability, it is unlikely to drive up public support for housebuilding overall.

Looking at examples of housing developments which emphasise aesthetic quality and character – specifically King Charles’ development in Poundbury and Government proposals for the New Cambridge Quarter – the public respond that although they look beautiful, they are not houses that would be in reach for people like them. Instead, they tend to assume that these model examples of beautiful building would be so unaffordable only the rich would be able to buy them.

'Beauty' is the lowest priority for the public, when thinking about new developments. Instead, addressing concerns about affordability and pressure on public services are at the top of people's minds.

This does not mean that housing should be 'cheap and nasty,' but that affordability functions as a permission issue. In other words, until people are convinced that new homes will be affordable, they will be reluctant to entertain arguments for the other benefits of building.

Thinking of new-build houses and estates, what aspects do you think are most important to prioritise? Please select up to three



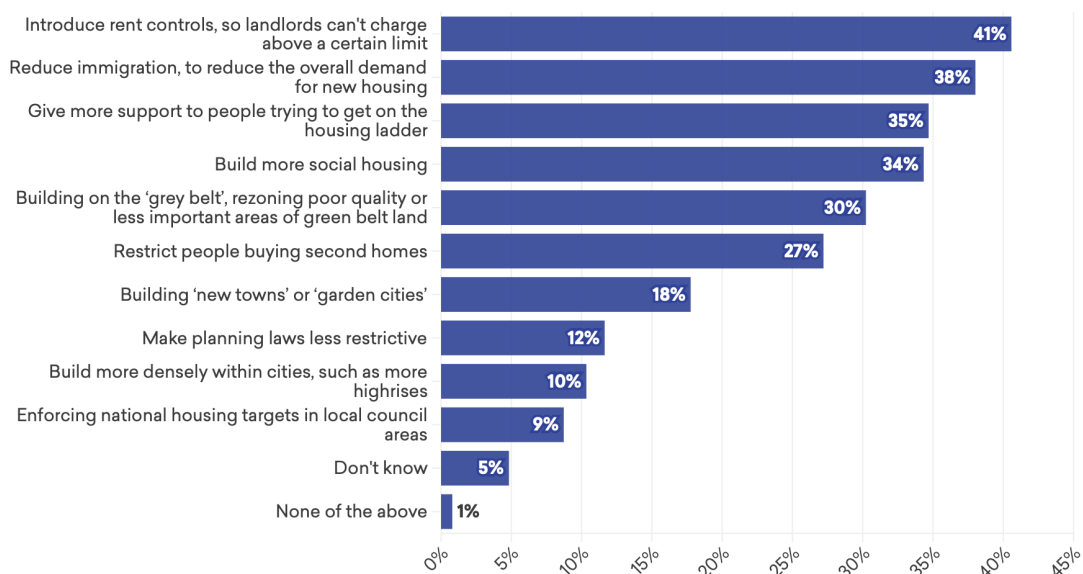
Source: More in Common, November 2023

Section 3: A policy agenda to get Britain building by bringing the public on board

Having established the nuances of public opinion on developments, what could increase support for housebuilding? The median British voter leans left on economic issues and right on social issues, it should therefore come as little surprise that the public's top policies to solve the housing crisis were introducing rent controls and cutting immigration.

While there are broader considerations in housing policy than only public opinion, there is a noteworthy level of disconnect between the policies favoured by campaigners and policymakers (planning reform and densification) and those favoured by the public – reducing immigration and introducing rent controls.

Which of the following solutions to the housing crisis should the Government prioritise?



Source: More in Common, November 2023

Different combinations of policies appeal to different segments. Twisting this 'policy kaleidoscope' helps identify different coalitions for reform. For instance, rent controls, more social housing, and restricting second homes would bring together an alliance of Progressive Activists, Civic Pragmatists, and Loyal Nationals, who are likely to make up a substantial part of Labour's new electoral coalition. Other policies would divide those groups - building on the green belt would lose the support of Loyal Nationals, while cutting immigration alienates the Progressive Activists.

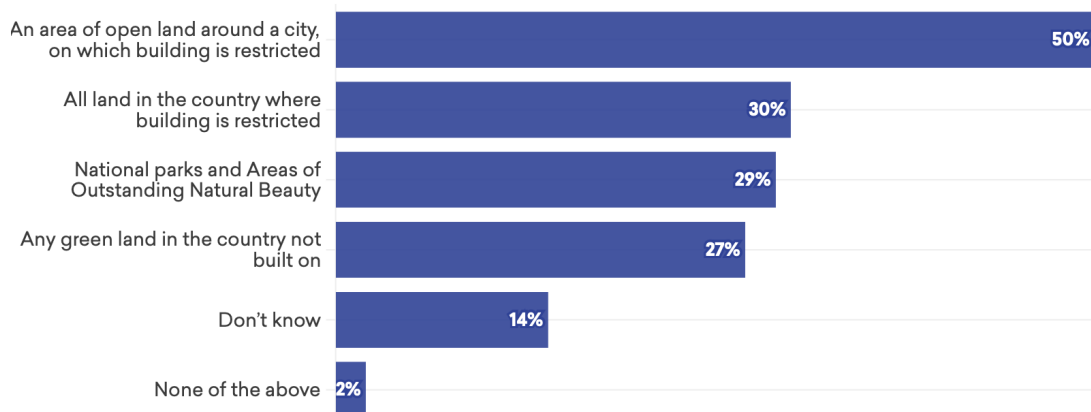
Similarly, Established Liberals agree with Progressive Activists on building garden cities, relaxing planning rules, and densifying urban areas. But if we twist the ‘policy kaleidoscope’ to include restricting second home ownership or introducing rent controls, the Established Liberals strongly oppose these measures and would find themselves at odds with the Progressive Activists.

The Green Belt is unassailable - the ‘grey belt’ is not

Local political campaigns are awash with pledges to protect the Green Belt. Having endured since 1947, the green belt might be one of the most difficult aspects of planning policy to overturn or change. Pro-housebuilding campaigners complain that the term is misleading, conjuring up images of picturesque rolling fields or precious ancient woodland.

It turns out that they are partly right – only half of people do in fact know the correct definition of the green belt. The most common response (50 per cent) was that the Green Belt is an area of land around major cities on which house-building is restricted. But a third of the public simply think the Green Belt refers to any green space, or national parks or areas of outstanding natural beauty (AONB).

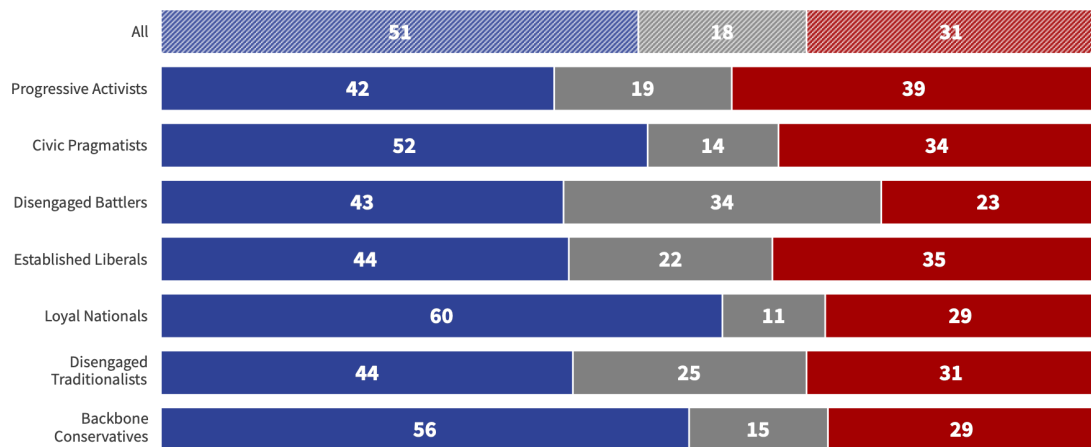
Which of the following definitions do you think accurately describe the green belt? Please select all that apply



The Green Belt is also one of the least politically contentious housing policies. Across all seven segments, the public would prefer to preserve the Green Belt in its current state. So much so that even Progressive Activists, the most pro-building segment, are still more likely to favour protecting the Green Belt than building homes on it.

Which of the following comes closest to your view?

- We need to retain the current green belt, even if it restricts the country's ability to meet housing needs
- Don't know
- We need to prioritise meeting the country's housing needs, even if we have to build on some green belt land



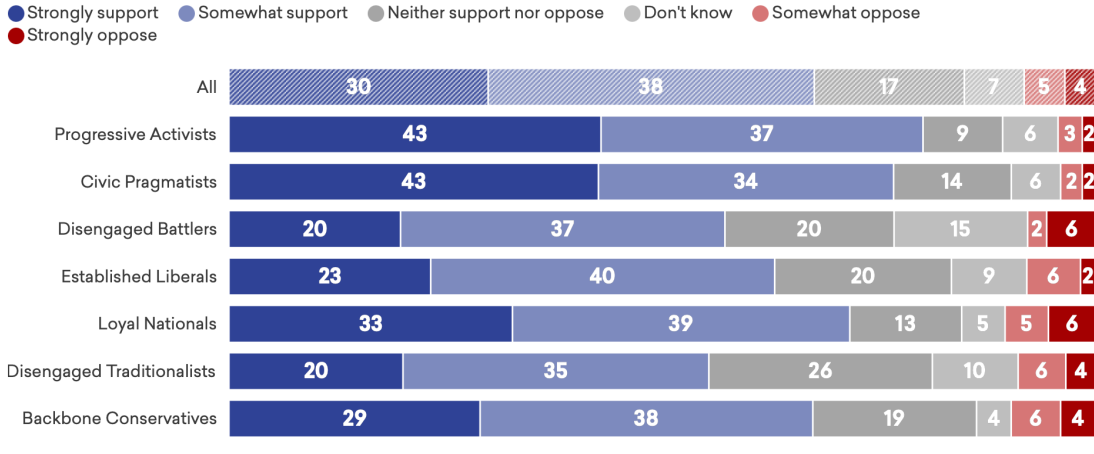
Source: More in Common, October 2023

Even if this misconception could be corrected, it may not change the levels of support for the Green Belt. The public's understanding of the policy bears little relation to their support for it. Three-in-five (60 per cent) of those who can correctly define the Green Belt as a policy to restrict urban sprawl say that it should be completely protected, compared to just a third (33 per cent) who would rather build some homes on it. This is the same as those who think the Green Belt refers to national parks and AONB – almost two thirds (63 per cent) want it protected versus just over a quarter (27 per cent) who would rather see housebuilding. But it could be that when people think of “open land outside cities,” they instinctively imagine green fields rather than brownfield sites.

Some have suggested moving the goalposts, taking the ‘green’ out of Green Belt.

Labour has proposed building homes on the ‘grey belt’, rezoning poor quality Green Belt land such as disused car parks or industrial sites. This proposal commands high levels of support among the public. Almost seven in ten people (68 per cent) support the idea, compared to fewer than one in ten (9 per cent) who opposed it.

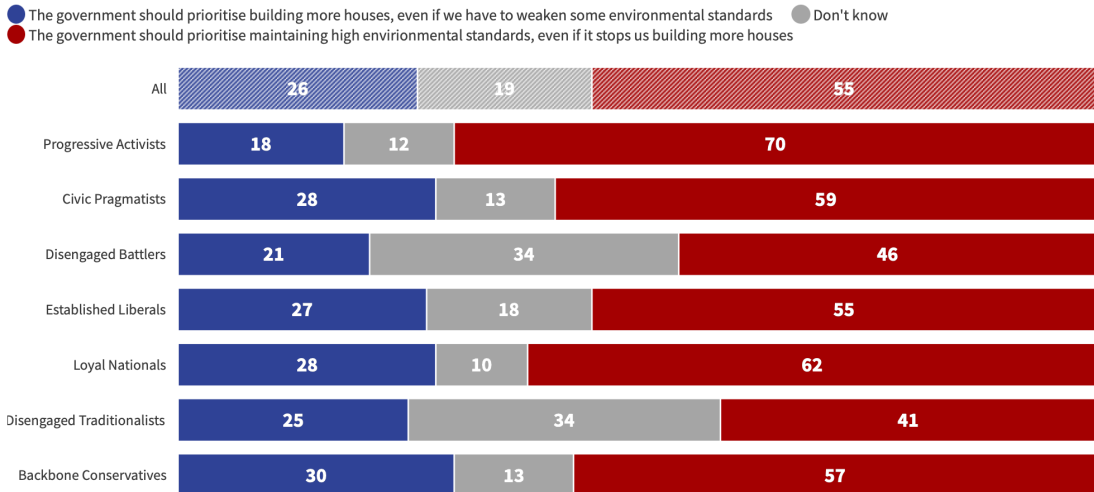
Support for "Building on the 'grey belt', rezoning poor quality or less important areas of green belt land, such as disused car parks or industrial sites, to provide more land for homes to be built on"



Source: More in Common, November 2023

The popularity of the 'grey belt' policy shows that the Government could build more homes while simultaneously respecting people's deeply-held views about preserving Britain's natural environment. For instance, when pitted against environmental protection, housing often loses. By two-to-one, Britons say they would rather maintain high environmental standards even if it stops us building more houses. Progressive Activists are the most likely to say this, despite being the group that is generally more in favour of development.

Which of the following comes closest to your view?



Source: More in Common, October 2023

Parks and green spaces are an important source of local pride. 41% of the public feel proud of local green space, more than any other aspect of their community. But few tend to think that their neighbourhood is seriously lacking in green space. Whereas 24% of people want the Government's Levelling Up agenda to focus on improving "green spaces like parks," 36% want "better quality housing." Policy should work with the grain of public opinion, not against it. So, advocates of 'grey belt' housebuilding should take care to stick to the promise of only developing poor quality sites and protect the parks and green spaces that people value.

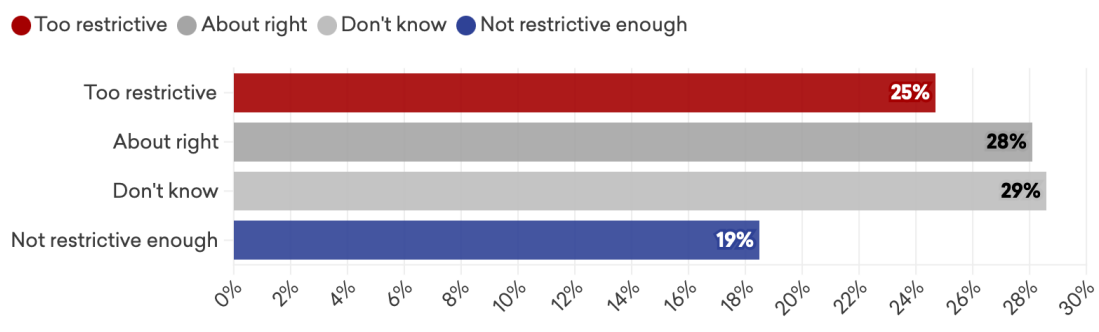
Planning rules for a reason

Most Britons generally believe that there are good reasons for the rules in Britain's planning system. They favour strict rules-based systems on everything from migration to climate policy. It is therefore no surprise that the idea of loosening planning laws is not well received in conversations with the British public.

Any proposals to loosen the rules risk giving the impression that corners are being cut, or that developments which would have been rejected for good reasons would be allowed to slip through, subject to less scrutiny.

A majority of Britons (57 per cent) say our planning rules are 'about right' or that they 'don't know' whether they are too restrictive or not restrictive enough. Only a small minority (19 per cent) think planning is not restrictive enough, and a similar minority (25 per cent) think the planning rules are too restrictive.

Thinking about planning permission for new houses, do you think the rules are...



Source: More in Common, November 2023

The current Renters Reform Bill is popular

The public overwhelmingly think that landlords have too much power over their tenants. A majority (55 per cent) say that landlords have too much power, and only 14 per cent say that tenants have too much power, with the rest expressing a neutral opinion. This pattern holds across all of the seven segments - as well as those who live in both rented and owned accommodation.

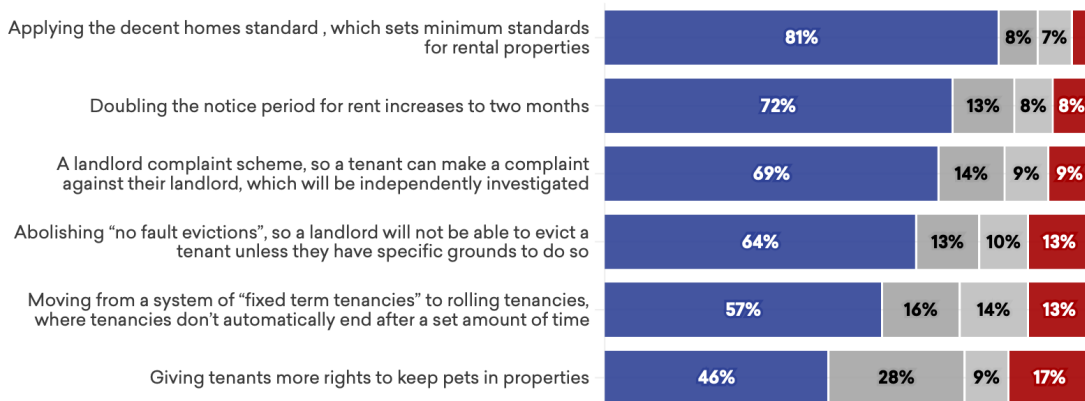
The public want the Government to legislate to create more rights for renters – with three in five (59 per cent) saying they should do this, and less than one in five (19 per cent) saying they should not. All of the measures that we tested from the Renters Reform Bill were popular, and some were extremely appealing to the public:

- 81% support applying the decent homes standards to rental properties
- 72% support doubling the rent increase notice period to two months
- 69% support the new complaint scheme
- 64% support abolishing no-fault evictions - just 13% oppose this
- 57% support ending fixed term tenancies - just 13% oppose this
- 46% support giving tenants more rights to keep pets in properties - just 17% oppose this

Every renters reform policy tested was popular with the public

The Government is currently proposing a series of measures to reform how renting works. For each of the following measures can you please say if you think they are a good idea or bad idea?

● Good idea ● Neither good idea nor bad idea ● Don't know ● Bad idea



Section 4: The politics of housing

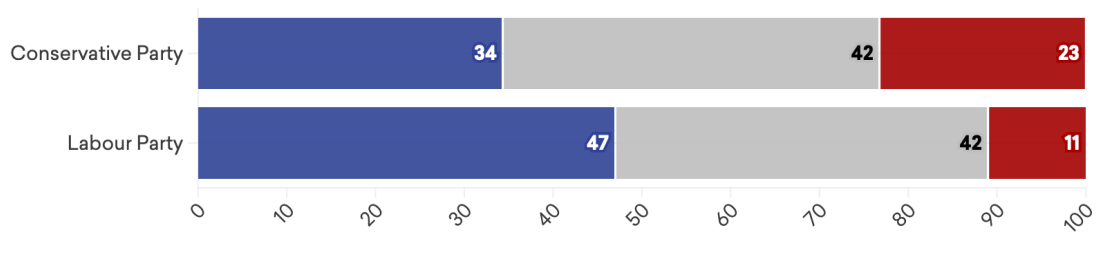
Labour has a small advantage on housebuilding, but neither party is doing well

Britons are unconvinced that either main party really wants to build more homes. Two in five (42 per cent) said they don't know if Labour or the Conservatives want to build more houses or not. However, Labour holds a small advantage. Nearly half the public believe Labour wants to build more homes, compared to a third that believe that the Conservatives do. Britons are twice as likely to think that the Conservative Party opposes house-building than the Labour Party.

Neither party is seen as pro-housebuilding

In general do you think that the [Conservative Party / Labour Party]...

- Wants to build lots more houses
- Don't know
- Opposes building lots more houses



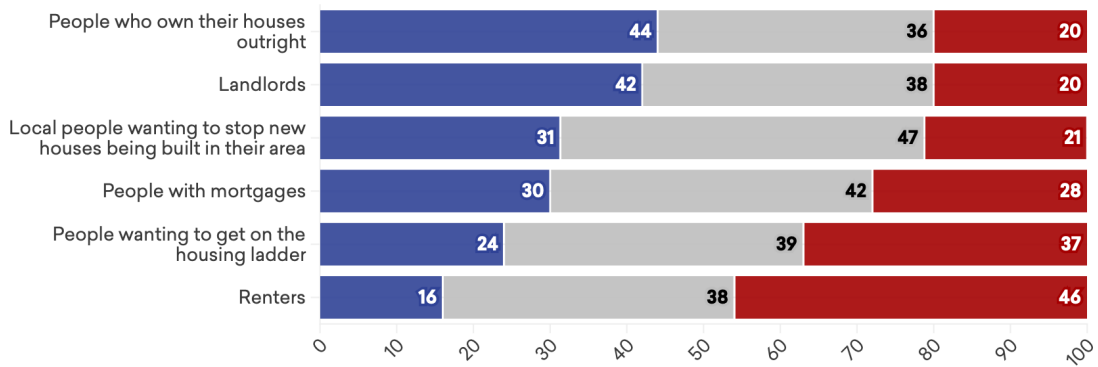
Source: More in Common, September 2023

Britons believe that the parties represent different interest groups. They think that the Conservatives represent the interests of landlords, homeowners who have paid off their mortgages, and people who want to stop new housing from being built. Labour instead are seen to represent renters and people who want to get on the housing ladder. Both parties are neck-and-neck when it comes to representing people with mortgages – particularly important, given polling suggests that mortgaged homeowners are the key swing group that could determine the outcome of the next election.

Conservatives represent owners, Labour represent renters

For each of the following groups, which party do you think best represents their interests?

- Conservatives
- Don't know
- Labour



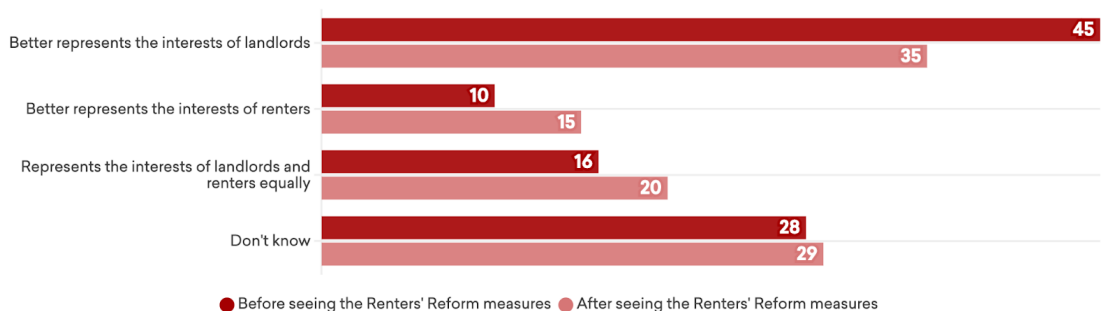
Source: More in Common, September 2023

Conservatives' Renters Reform Bill can undo their image as the party of landlords

Although the public tend to think of the Conservatives as representing landlords rather than renters, this perception can be changed. More in Common ran a question order experiment, where one group of respondents were shown a question about whether the Government better represented landlords or renters *before* being shown the Renters Reform Bill measures. The other group were shown this question *after* seeing the measures in the Renters Reform Bill.

People are more likely to think that the government better represents the interest of landlords when they have not seen the Renters Reform measures

Would you say that the current government...



Source: More in Common, March 2024

The results show that the Government would do well from both delivering and talking up their Renters Reform measures. Before the public know about the proposals, 45% of them think that the Government better represents the interests of landlords over renters. But this falls 10 points to 35% once shown the measures, creating a more balanced pattern where 35% think the Government better represents the interests of landlords, 15% renters and 20% both equally.

The Conservative Party still have an opportunity to change the perception that they have little to offer to non-homeowners and in doing so to revive their fortunes with younger Britons.

Anti-politics is the order of the day

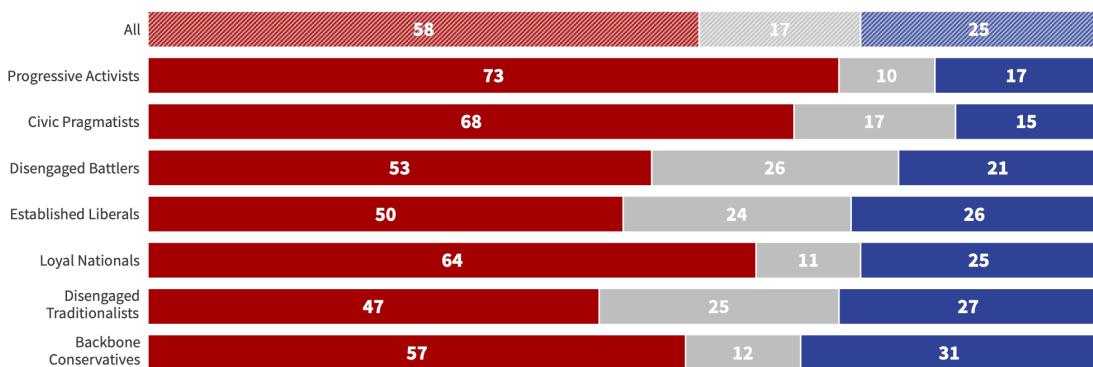
Britons have little faith that political promises will be delivered. Focus group participants were scathing of politicians pledging to build more homes. There was little trust that either of the main party's promises on housing could be believed – “a plague on both houses.”

When asked how likely it is that a major political party would achieve their aim to build more homes, most (58 per cent) thought it would not happen. Only a quarter (25 per cent) thought it was likely to happen. Progressive Activists, the group most enthusiastic about housebuilding, are also the most pessimistic about their goals being achieved.

Most people don't believe housebuilding promises

Both major political parties plan to significantly expand housebuilding, one proposal being to build 1.5 million new homes in the next 5 years. To what extent to you think this is likely to happen?

- This is not likely to happen
- Don't know
- This is likely to happen



On housing, the public see all politicians as the same, and few entertained the idea at all that Labour may be different. Even when presented with the argument that Labour have not been in power for 14 years, and perhaps should not be blamed for current policy failure, few were interested – the initial response was disinterest and distrust.

I'm fed up of things being said, they're going to be done just to get voted in and then nothing happens until right at the end when they're about to have the vote again and they're like, oh no, we're going to do this, we're going to do that. I just think I can only speak for people my age and younger who I know. I just think people are getting less and less interested in what politicians have to say, what mainstream media have to say about things. It's just tiring and boring and nothing gets done.

Jacob, Disengaged Traditionalist, Milton Keynes

Well obviously there's election next year and Labour are spouting that they are going to be doing this, that and the other. But again, I think most of the nation know that whatever party come out with a load of promises, they don't actually pull them off once being elected and stuff like that. So for me it falls on deaf ears.

Leigh, Loyal National, Darlington

[On Labour being different from the Conservatives] They all say that. They all say I'm different. That's their main slogan. I'm different. I've got a better idea, I can do it better. But then you just turn around and do the same thing.

Leon, Civic Pragmatist, Milton Keynes

Conclusion

Housing affordability is an issue that affects the vast majority of people in Britain, either directly or indirectly through the experiences of friends and family. Everyone has their own story of struggling with housing.

Although all seven segments agree that housing is unaffordable, and getting worse, few have a clear diagnosis of the problem or a concrete set of solutions in mind. This leaves some space for campaigners to help define the issue and shape the narrative around how to solve it. The following principles provide some guidance for building support.

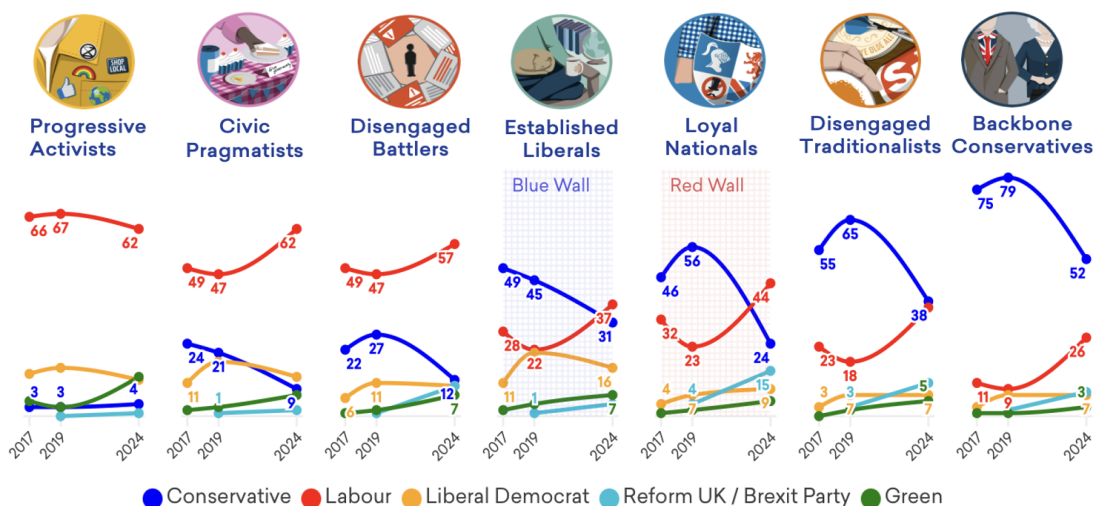
1. **Use moderate language.** In order to motivate the large majority of ‘balancers’ to support housebuilding, campaigners should avoid extremes. Words such as ‘crisis’ mainly appeal to those already engaged but turn off some people who are otherwise willing to agree that affordability is a growing problem.
2. **Assuage people’s concerns.** The public raise real (and valid) concerns about losing green space and overwhelming the capacity of local public services. If new developments do not come with a tangible plan to mitigate the downsides of building, other arguments risk falling on deaf ears.
3. **Understand incentives.** People are primarily motivated by their own and their community’s material interests, so policymakers and campaigners should look for creative ways to turn existing residents into winners. If development can put money in people’s pockets, much of the scepticism would melt away.
4. **Talk about smarter planning rules, not looser.** People tend to think that the rules are there for a reason, such as protecting them from rogue developers. This ties into the public’s general distrust of private sector housebuilders.
5. **Build on the ‘grey belt.’** Shifting focus from the Green Belt to the grey belt can simultaneously protect what people feel is important while delivering the new homes the country needs.
6. **Link housebuilding to regeneration and levelling up.** The most popular developments are those that ‘level up’ the area and visibly benefit the community. People want to see where they live improving, whether that be high-quality jobs, new amenities, or greater social connection.
7. **Do not rely on supply as the answer to affordability.** The economic case for boosting supply may be clear, but the public are not on the same page as YIMBY campaigners. People do not believe that building more homes will help stop price inflation, and sometimes they think it makes housing even less affordable.
8. **Promises count for nothing without results.** People are frustrated about what they see as the Government’s lack of action on housebuilding and this applies just as much to Labour as to the Conservatives. To regain trust, policymakers need to prove that they have a credible plan and, most important of all, to demonstrate delivery.

Annex A: British Seven Segments

In pursuit of a more evidence-based understanding of how we find common ground on polarising issues, More in Common launched the Britain's Choice project in 2020. This project centres its analysis of issues on the values, identity and worldview of Britons, captured in seven population segments through a methodology designed in partnership with data scientists, social psychologists and other experts. It integrates insights from six dimensions of social psychology that shape the way that people see the world and orient themselves towards society. This mapping has been carried out using multiple waves of quantitative and qualitative research, building on the approach used by More in Common in other major western democracies. The six areas of social psychology are:

- **Group identity and tribalism:** the extent to which people identify with different groups based on nationality, gender, political party, ethnicity, and other factors
- **Group favouritism:** views on who is favoured and who is mistreated in society
- **Threat perception:** the extent to which people see the world as a dangerous place
- **Parenting styles:** research suggests that basic philosophies regarding people's approach to parenting can have predictive power in explaining their attitudes towards public policies and authority more generally
- **Moral Foundations:** the extent to which people endorse certain moral values or 'foundations', including fairness, care, purity, authority, and loyalty
- **Personal agency:** the extent to which people view personal success as the product of individual factors (i.e. hard work and discipline) versus societal factors (i.e. luck and circumstance)

The 'British Seven' segments are often more useful in understanding people's views across a wide range of issues than standard ways of categorising people, such as their voting history, partisan identity or demographic characteristics such as age, income, social grade, race or gender. Understanding the specific 'wiring' of each of these groups 'upstream' allows us to better understand and predict how they will respond to different sets of issues 'downstream'.



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.

Progressive Activists are often outliers on values – unlike other groups, they primarily see the world through the moral foundations of care and fairness and have much lower reliance on the moral foundations of purity, loyalty and authority. Compared to other groups, Progressive Activists feel less threatened in the world and in their community. They consider that outcomes in life to be more defined by social forces and less by personal responsibility. Although they are a higher-earning segment, many of them consider this to be down to good luck than individual effort. They have the lowest authoritarian tendencies of any group.

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, community-minded, open to compromise and socially liberal. Civic Pragmatists have a similar values foundation to the Progressive Activist group in prioritising care and fairness, but they channel their energies into community and voluntary work, rather than political activism. They are also set apart from Progressive Activists (and some of the other segments) by their higher-than-average levels of threat perception.

Disengaged Battlers

A group that feels that they are just about keeping their heads above water and who believe their struggles are the result of an unfair, rigged system. They are insecure, disillusioned, disconnected, overlooked but also tolerant and socially liberal. They are a low-trust group with a tendency to ignore civic messaging (they are joint most likely to have not been vaccinated for Covid-19). Their overarching sense that the system is broken drives their disengagement from their communities and the broader democratic system with which they see ‘no point’ in engaging.

Established Liberals

A group that has done well with an optimistic outlook that sees a lot of good in the status quo. They are comfortable, among the more privileged, cosmopolitan, trusting, liberal, confident and pro-market. They have low authoritarian tendencies and the lowest threat perception of any segment – which is reflected in their broad support for diversity, multi-culturalism, and sense that their local community is neither dangerous nor neglected.

Loyal Nationals

A group that is anxious about the threats facing Britain and themselves. They are proud, patriotic, tribal, protective, threatened, aggrieved and frustrated about the gap between the haves and the have-nots. They feel the 'care' and 'fairness' moral foundations more strongly than other groups. Their key orientation is that of group identity – belonging to a group (and particularly their nation) is important to Loyal Nationals. This strong in-group identity shapes their equally strong feelings of threat from outsiders. This in turn can drive their support for more authoritarian, populist leadership.

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. They place a strong emphasis on personal responsibility, are mindful of others' behaviour and rely much more on individual rather than systemic explanations for how people's lives turn out. When they think about social and political debates, they often consider issues through a lens of suspicion towards others. They value the observance of social rules, order, and a British way of doing things, but don't play an active role in their communities – they are the least likely to eat out, visit museums or go to local libraries. They often have views on issues but tend to pay limited attention to current debates. Disengaged Traditionalists are similar to Loyal Nationals in their more authoritarian predisposition.

Backbone Conservatives

A group who are proud of their country, optimistic about Britain's future outside of Europe, and who keenly follow the news, mostly via traditional media sources. They are nostalgic, patriotic, stalwart, proud, secure, confident, and relatively engaged with politics. They want clear rules and strong leaders and rely heavily on individual explanations for how life turns out, with this shaping how they respond to questions about deprivation and discrimination in society.

Methodology

Quantitative Research

First poll

- Fieldwork dates: 24th to 27th November 2023
- Interview method: Online
- Sample size: 2,022
- Population effectively sampled: GB Adults (excludes Northern Ireland)

Second poll

- Fieldwork dates: 18th to 20th September 2023
- Interview method: Online
- Sample size: 2,019
- Population effectively sampled: GB Adults (excludes Northern Ireland)

Third poll

- Fieldwork dates: 8th March to 11th March 2024
- Interview method: Online
- Sample size: 2,027
- Population effectively sampled: GB Adults (excludes Northern Ireland)

In each case, data was weighted on several measures - age/gender interlocked, education, ethnicity, and region - all to nationally representative proportions. In addition, it is also weighted by 2019 GE vote (of registered voters)

Full data tables can be found at:

<https://www.moreincommon.org.uk/our-work/polling-tables/>.

Qualitative Research

Focus groups were held online in the following locations on the following dates:

- Darlington, 6th November 2023
- South Cambridgeshire, 7th November 2023
- Milton Keynes, 8th November 2023

Participants were recruited using a range of independent recruitment companies.



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