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Common

# Voters' expectations of Labour on tackling hardship

October 2024

# Executive Summary

**Tackling hardship is a unifying issue for Labour's diverse coalition.** Half of Labour's new voters come from socially conservative groups, while only a third of current Labour voters are from traditional left-leaning segments. Hardship and cost of living concerns are one of the only issues that all sides of the coalition agree on and will be used to judge the success of the Labour Government.

**So far, the public aren't impressed with what they've seen from Labour.** While many voted for change, they feel that they are seeing more of the same, and early decisions like means-testing the Winter Fuel Allowance have given the impression that Labour aren't committed to supporting those who are struggling. Some Labour voters are already expressing regret over their voting decision, especially those who switched from other parties.

**Tackling hardship is a big opportunity to win votes and stave off the threat of populism.** 70 per cent of Labour voters would consider not voting for the party again if progress isn't made on hardship. The October Budget is an opportunity to reset the narrative, re-engage disillusioned voters and prevent the fragmentation of the Labour coalition.



# Labour's fragile coalition

# The British Seven Segments

## Progressive Activists



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

## Civic Pragmatists



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

## Disengaged Battlers



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

## Established Liberals



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

## Loyal Nationals



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

## Disengaged Traditionalists



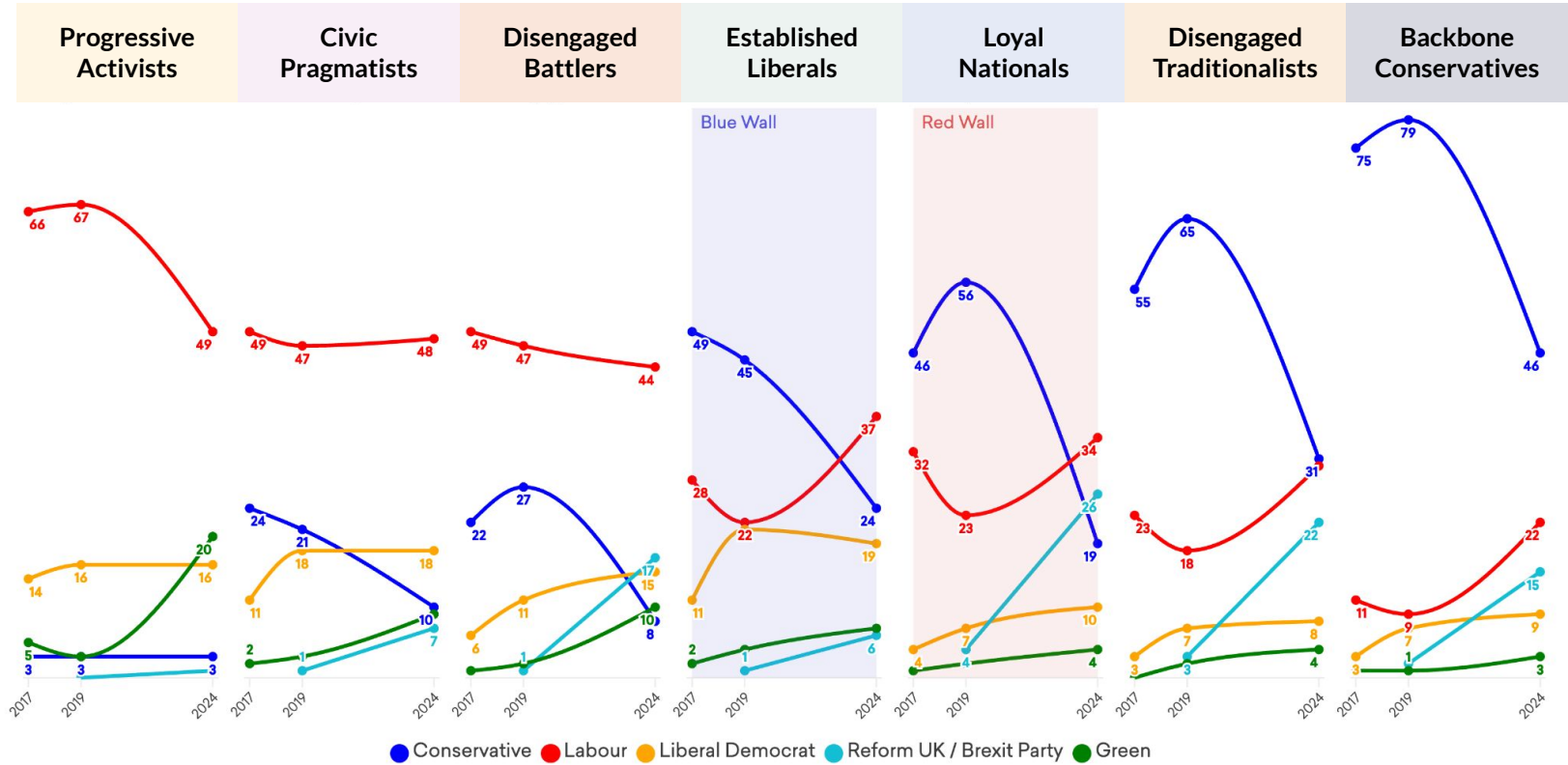
...a group that values a well-ordered society and prides in hard work. They want strong leadership that keeps people in line

## Backbone Conservatives



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

# How did the Seven Segments vote?



Labour's 2019 coalition

Labour's 2024 coalition

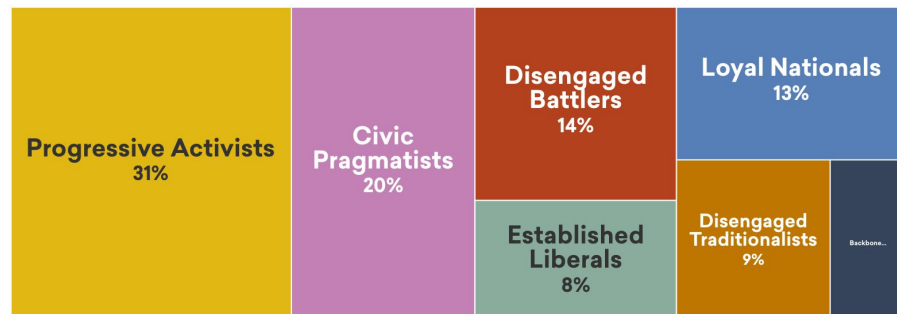
# Labour's electoral coalition is fragile

**In 2019, Labour's voters drew from a relatively uniform base** - half of their supporters stemming from the most left-leaning segments, Progressive Activists and Civic Pragmatists.

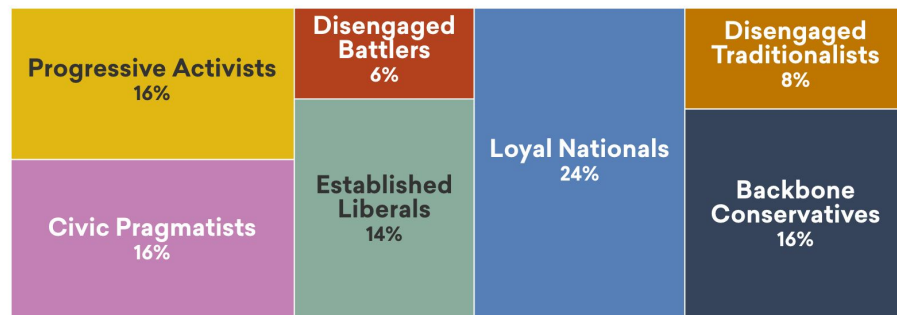
**The success of the 2024 strategy means Labour's voter coalition is much broader, but potentially more unwieldy** - the two progressive segments only make up a third of Labour's new voter base, while half of their voters are from socially conservative Loyal National, Backbone Conservative and Disengaged Traditionalist groups.

**Labour's challenge resembles that of wheeling an overloaded wheelbarrow down a narrow path - lean too much one way to appeal to just one segment and the whole lot might spill out.**

## Segment of 2019 Labour Voters



## Segment of 2024 Labour Voters



# Labour can't afford to stand still

The fragmented electorate means that Labour must increase its vote share at the next General Election.

Under a modest scenario - where the Conservatives persuade some non-voters back to vote and some Reform voters are tempted back to the Conservatives - the Conservatives would end up as the largest party with 20 more seats than Labour unless Labour finds new votes from elsewhere.

It's also possible that the Conservatives recover in other ways - for example lower rates of anti-Tory tactical voting could decrease the efficiency of Labour's vote and make it easier for the Conservatives to win some seats.

A modest Conservative recovery scenario:

*If the Conservatives ...*  
**Encourage 10% of 2024 non-voters to vote for them...**  
*And*  
**Win back 50% of 2024 Reform voters...**



*Then at the next General Election*  
**Labour has 273 seats**  
**Conservatives have 293 seats**

*Assuming no other changes in votes or turnout.*

# Labour's vote share needs to be a floor not a ceiling

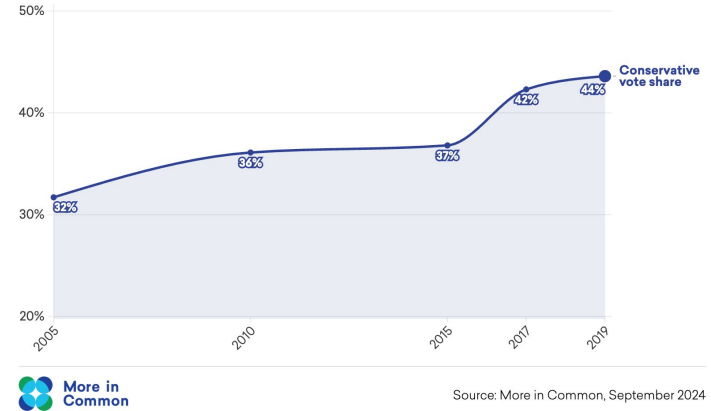
To avoid the risk of being challenged by a 'unite the right' strategy Labour needs to aim for a 36 per cent vote share which would enable it to hold at least 350 seats in parliament.

This is not unachievable - the Conservative Party increased their vote share at every election from taking office in 2010 up to and including 2019. Particularly by cannibalising UKIP, they increased their vote share by more than 5 points between 2015 and 2017. Moreover, even while challenged on the right between 2010-2015, they still managed to modestly increase their vote share.

While much depends on the efficiency of any new voters that Labour wins over, Labour needs to see its current vote share of 33 per cent as a baseline, not the high point for the next election.


Under this modest Conservative Recovery scenario, **Labour needs roughly a 36% vote share** to maintain a workable majority with 350 seats in parliament

The Conservatives increased their vote share for three elections in a row after being elected



36% is a rough target assuming proportional swing to Labour from a mix of the Conservatives, Liberal Democrats, Greens and independent candidates. More efficient combinations of these parties would lower the vote share target, and more uniform swing or less efficient new voters means a higher vote share would be needed for 350 seats.





**Cost of living binds all  
parts of the coalition  
together**

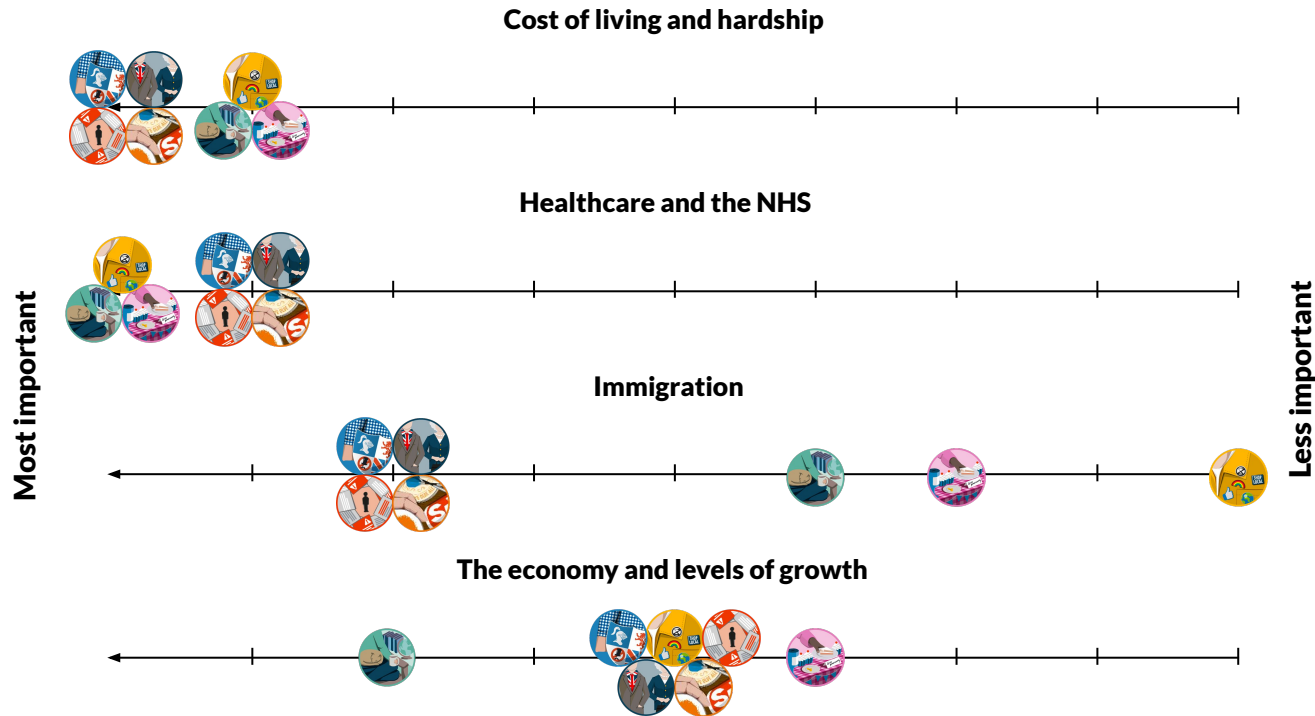
# Cost of living and hardship are the public's top concern

Labour's electoral wheelbarrow means that appealing to one side of the coalition risks alienating the other side.

Along with the NHS, the cost of living and hardship is an area which unites Labour's coalition around a shared concern.

*"I think it's one of the most important issues, **probably the most important**, because there are so many issues that stem from it."*  
Ellie, Calder Valley

In your opinion, which are the most IMPORTANT issues facing the country today?  
Please select up to three

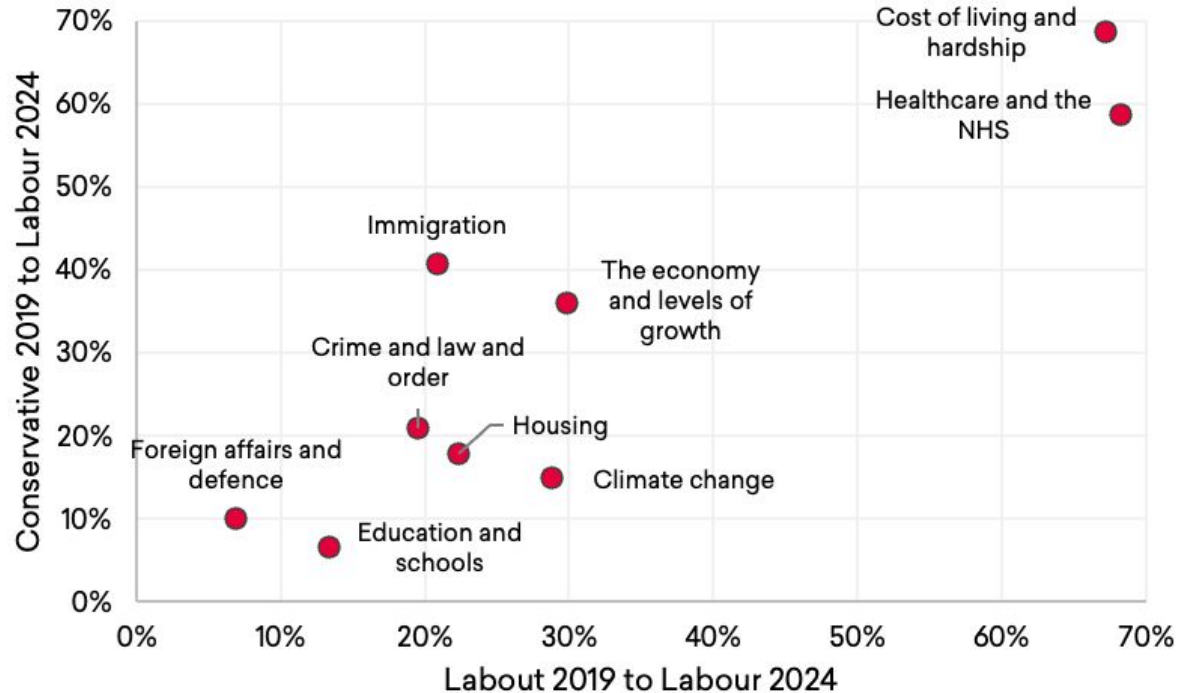


# United on living standards, divided on culture

Alleviating cost of living pressures and improving public services are the issues that unite Labour's two key groups: (1) the core vote, retained from 2019, and (2) Con-Lab switchers. Other issues pale in comparison to these two, and were what motivated former Tories to switch to Labour.

Con-Lab switchers are twice as likely to prioritise immigration as those 2019 Labour voters who stayed with the party in 2024 (41% vs 21%). And Labour's loyal core voters are twice as likely to prioritise climate change as Con-Lab switchers (29% among the former vs 15% among the latter).

In your opinion, which are the most important issues facing the country today?



# Concern about hardship is felt by all segments

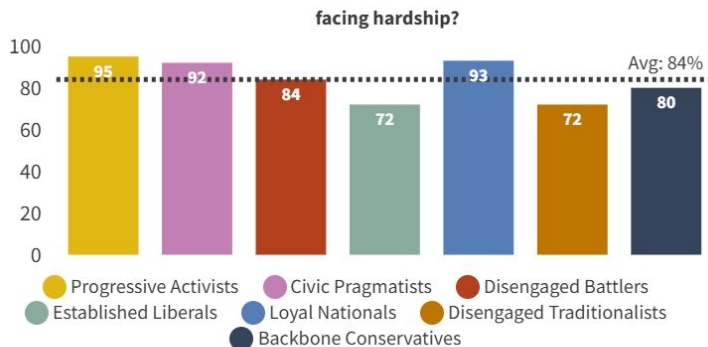
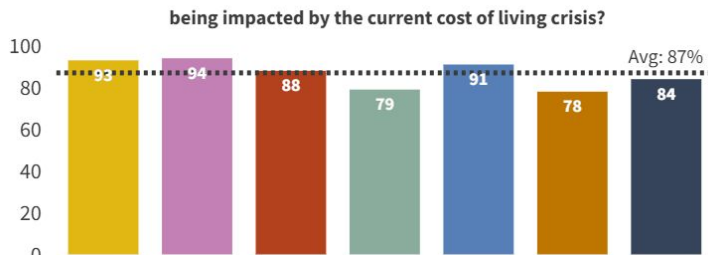
It is rare to find a policy issue that unites the public to the extent that cost of living and hardship does. The experience of having to make sacrifices and making difficult choices due to the rising cost of living is felt almost uniformly across all the segments.

On top of concerns about the personal impact of the cost of living, the public are deeply concerned about the sheer number who are facing hardship and are unable to afford the essentials. They see hardship as an issue which has knock-on effects on other areas, such as the NHS, crime rates and levels of economic growth.

*“The cost of living is far too much. **Even people with jobs have to use food banks** . That blows my mind.”*  
John, Glasgow

*“There’s decisions where **I’ve had to make decisions between certain bills** . And I’m lucky with where I work.”*  
Hannah, Hackney

## To what extent are you concerned about people in the UK...



# The public expect action from the government

The strong public appetite for change was part of the reason Labour won in July. Many voted for Labour, in some cases for the first time ever, because they wanted to get the Conservatives out of government and wanted a new administration to make progress on issues like the cost of living. Indeed, the second most important metric by which the public say they will judge the success of the Labour Government is whether they have lowered the cost of living in five years time.

Many express confusion over how Britain can be one of the largest economies in the world, and yet so many people are still struggling, and place it down to lack of government support.

*“Having to choose between heating and eating - **that shouldn't have to be in this day and age** .”*

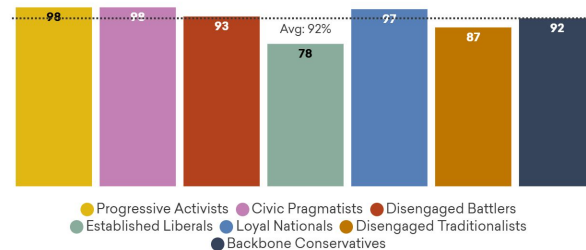
Katie, Basingstoke, Loyal National

*“They've got the keys to open all the locks, so **there's really no excuses** .”*

Derek, Leigh, Loyal National

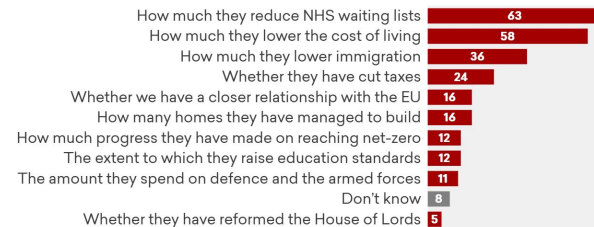
## How important should tackling the cost of living and reducing levels of hardship be for the Government?

% responding 'very' or 'somewhat' important



Source: More in Common, October 2024

## Which of the following will be most important to you in judging the success of the Labour Government after 5 years? Select up to three.



Source: More in Common, July 2024

# Hardship is a visible sign of ‘broken Britain’

Even if people aren't experiencing hardship personally, seeing visible signs of hardship in their communities compounds the feeling that the country is going through a cost of living crisis and that our democracy is not working. The public connect hardship with the other problems they are seeing in their communities as both a cause and consequence.

*“I think it's one of the most important issues, probably the most important, because **there are so many issues that stem from it** . If people are in hardship, for example, if they're so poor they can't afford to eat, then that's going to have a knock on effect.”*

Ellie, Calder Valley

*“That state that we're living in, I feel like **I'm seeing a lot more homeless people on the streets** and I feel like I'm also getting asked more from random people if I've got spare change or anything.”*

Anya, Bristol

*People aren't spending money, going to the pub on a Saturday night... so **you're kind of seeing things close down around you** and it brings morale down I think, for everybody.”*

Kerry, Calder Valley

*“Eating healthy is really expensive, junk food is so easily accessible... **If people are actually able to eat well, then I think that would solve at least a bit of the NHS's problems** .”*

Henry, Hackney

*“**Poverty causes crime, doesn't it?** If I was starving and I had no money to buy food... I would steal.”*

Calvin, Llanelli



# **The first 100 days: the verdict**

# The public are not convinced that Labour is committed to tackling hardship

Only one in three believe that Labour is committed to tackling hardship or improving the lives of the worst-off in society. This is higher among Labour's core base of Progressive Activists and Civic Pragmatists, and the Cameronite Established Liberals who swung to Labour at this election. However, these three groups are now a minority of Labour's Coalition and the belief that Labour are not committed to tackling hardship is widespread.

*"Obviously everything takes time, but **they sort of promise a lot of stuff and you don't really see anything happen.**"*

Ellie, Calder Valley

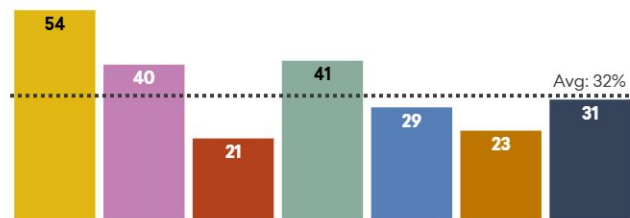
*"[Labour] is the party that I put my faith in that was going to recover this all and make it better for my generation, the next generation, the old generation, but **that faith is depleted quite quickly.**"*

Katie, Basingstoke

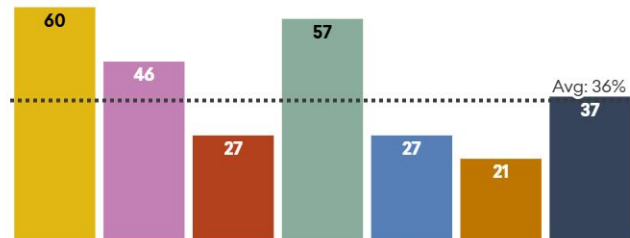
*"Going up to the election it was pretty much the usual, **we'll say whatever we need to get you to vote for us... but we've not really got any intention of actually getting with that.**"*

David, Basingstoke

How committed do you think the Labour Government is to tackling these issues? (% committed)



Labour politicians are committed to improving the lives of the worst-off in society (% agree)



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



# The new Government is currently failing the public's test on cost of living

Whilst Labour have not been in office for long, a clear majority think that so far they are going in the wrong direction on tackling the cost of living and hardship. Early decisions, like means-testing the Winter Fuel Allowance, have left the public with the impression that Labour aren't serious about helping the worst-off.

*"You have so much hope there's going to be change and then right away they start kind of attacking older people.. I'm actually shocked by that and disappointed and it worries we where its going, what's coming next. **It hasn't been a great start for them.**"*

Kerry

*"I went for Labour this time around for a change. And it just seems **the first few months has been more of the same.** More negative, more cuts here, cuts there."*

Kevin

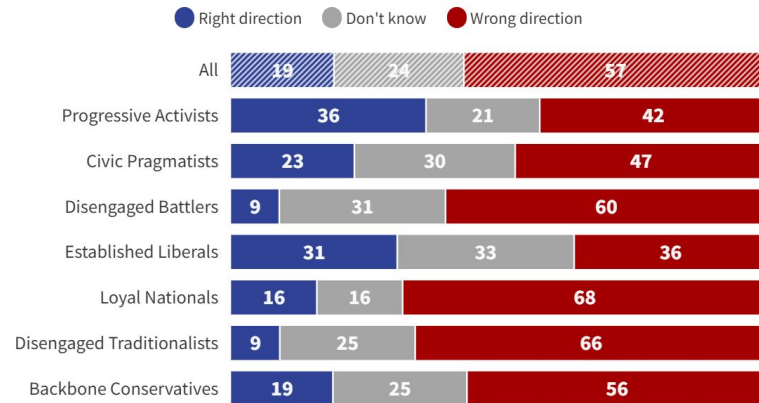
*"It's just not in line with the things you'd expect from a Labour government."*

Henry

*"With the new government that's come into place, there has been a lot of negative impact with the public at the moment... so I think **they're not really started off really well at the moment.**"*

Sophie

## Would you say that the Government is going in the right direction or the wrong direction on tackling the cost of living crisis and hardship?



# Winter Fuel Allowance has cut through

The removal of the Winter Fuel Allowance for some pensioners has had significant cut through with the public, not only among pensioners. Pensioners and working age people alike feel that the elderly - particularly those just above the threshold or who do not know they are eligible for pension credit - will struggle without this benefit. The public largely believe that pensioners have worked hard their whole lives and now deserve to be looked after by the government.

*[Taking away the WFA] won't affect me that much but it will so many people and it's just heartbreaking to think how many people depend on this money and they've taken it from them* .” Leslie, Pensioner, Norfolk

*“I thought, well, I'll vote for a change, I'll vote Labour. I wish I hadn't done that.”* Andrea, Pensioner, Norfolk

*“It's the last time I will ever, ever vote Labour. Last time.”* John, Pensioner, Norfolk

*“I never thought I'd see the day where we'd see the Labour Party, Labour government, removing benefit from pensioners instead of actually taxing people who can well afford to be taxed.”* Vincent, Hackney

*“Not after what he's done with the winter fuel payments, no, because I thought he was for the working people and like someone else said, like, people have worked all their lives and they need a bit of help now that they're not earning that income.”* Christopher, Calder Valley

Below are a number of controversies about political leaders that have happened in the last few weeks. For each of the following, how much have you heard about this?

I've heard a great deal about this



# The 'gloom trap' of the public's low expectations

Labour faces a twofold challenge in public expectations: demonstrating that they are not “typically self-interested politicians” and second, showing that they are different from the Conservatives. The public mood is one of “a plague on all houses” with widespread distrust in the political system and the belief that politicians are all in it for themselves. The public do not automatically perceive major differences between Labour and the Conservatives, presenting Labour with a challenge in differentiating themselves and making a case for change. Part of this challenge is expressed in a belief that many metrics surrounding hardship will worsen over the course of this Parliament.

*“It would be an issue for me if Labour did not reduce poverty. But **I don't have much hope.**”*

Niamh

*“They all say what they think you want to hear... so they can get into power, get your votes, **how many many things will they actually deliver that they promised to deliver?**”*

Colin

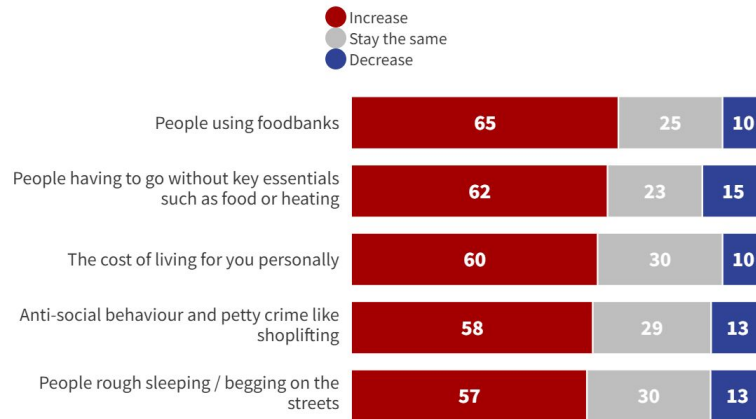
*“It just **seems a bit Tory-lite** at the moment, and all the things that kind of happened with creating austerity.”*

Gareth

*“I don't mean Labour separate from the Tory party, because **it looks like they've joined forces a long, long time ago** .”*

Calvin

**Do you expect each of the following to increase, decrease or stay the same over Labour's first term in government?**





# **The end of Labour's honeymoon**

# Voters' remorse?

100 days into the new Government, some Labour voters are already expressing regret over their decision. This sentiment is much higher among those who switched from Conservative to Labour at this election. Losing these voters would mean reversing the most efficient gains that Labour made in this year's election.

"I voted Labour this time, first time for many years, and **it's the biggest regret I've ever had.** "

Leslie, Norfolk

"I thought, well, I'll vote for a change, I'll vote Labour. **I wish I hadn't done that.** "

Andrea, Norfolk

"I've vote Labour for the first time ever in my life... **and I wish I hadn't voted for them.** "

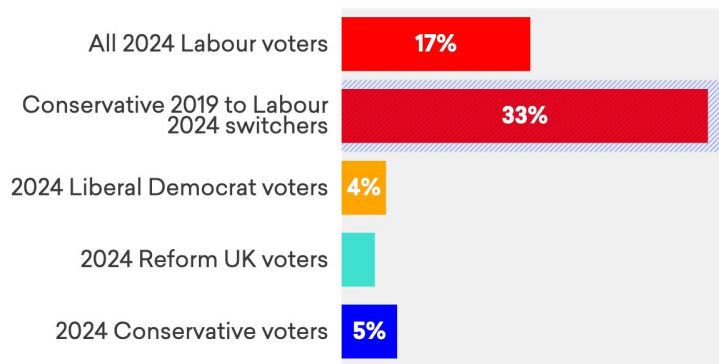
Colin, Leigh

"And if it means then what Labour are doing in terms of tackling everything, then I think people are going to be very upset because then they told them something completely different and **they are going to think that we have wasted our votes and we should have not voted for Labour** ."

Sophie, Calder Valley

## Conservative to Labour switchers are the most likely to regret their vote

Per cent saying they regret their vote



# Failure to tackle hardship can chip away at votes

For many Labour voters it was their first time voting for the party. Labour will need to hold onto these switchers to maintain a majority. Failure to reduce the cost of living and tackle hardship would be seen as a broken promise by many voters - and may have the same salience in voter attitudes to Labour as the Liberal Democrats' broken promise on tuition fees, or the growing NHS waiting lists under the Conservatives - who would then consider switching to other parties.

70 per cent of those who voted Labour say they would consider not voting for Labour again if they don't make progress on hardship - this rises to 83 per cent among those who did not vote for Labour in 2019. Losing these switchers would threaten Labour's margins especially in the constituencies where the Labour vote was the most efficient.

*"It would be really disappointing if nothing had changed and nothing had happened... I suppose **if Labour didn't do anything to sort it out, I think I'd feel a bit hopeless** in some respects because I don't know where I'd turn next."*

Ben, Bristol

***"I think if they don't [tackle hardship] there's going to be a lot of trouble.** I think there's going to be people protesting, like, literally at the end of the tether."*

Chelsey, Calder Valley

# Budget anxiety

The lack of an immediate summer Budget and narratives around hard choices has created an uneasy feeling among voters as they wait for this October's Budget, with even disengaged groups saying they are paying close attention to rumours about what might be announced. Concern is high, with a majority of Britons believing that the decisions taken in the budget will make cost of living and hardship worse. For many of Labour's key voters, the October Budget will be an opportunity to reset the narrative, set out a positive vision for the country, and start to show that they are listening to voters' concerns. Getting the narrative right on issues like hardship will go a long way to reassure voters that Labour cares about their concerns.

*"I remember listening to the debate last year or this year and Rishi saying they're just going to put taxes up and I thought he was just saying that, but the few things I'm hearing it does make me think are they thinking about it. I don't know but **I've just got a horrible feeling** that might be the case now."*

Tom

*"I makes you wonder what they're going to put in the budget. I mean, because **they've taxed us to death, they're taking the winter fuel, they're targeting the pensioners, the working class** ."*

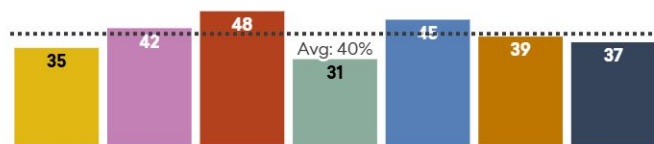
Kaz

*"I speak to friends, family, people I work with commercially as well. **I think a lot of people are anxious** ."*

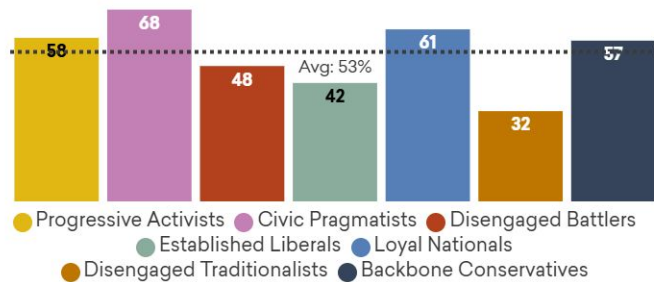
Max

**The Government has talked about tough decisions it needs to take at the Budget later this month to fill a gap in public finances and bring economic stability. How does this make you feel?**

% selecting 'Concerned it may affect my finances'



% selecting 'Concerned it may affect people who can't afford it'





# **The path forward: cementing Labour's coalition**



# Electoral benefits of reducing hardship

Taking action on the cost of living and reducing hardship would not only cement, but possibly expand the Labour coalition. For those who already vote Labour, this would reassure the progressive flank that Labour cares about hardship, and differentiate them from the Tories. For those who did not vote for Labour, hardship is one of the most visible signs of state failure and tackling it would deal with one of the key issues behind 'Broken Britain.' Indeed, many who did not vote for Labour this time around would consider doing so in the next election if Labour made progress on this agenda.

*“Cost of living would be better, which is your best sign of knowing whether their backs have been successful... because people will have a bit more residual money to do things, to buy things and the economy will go up and they're happier because they're doing it... **it's a win win win situation.**”*

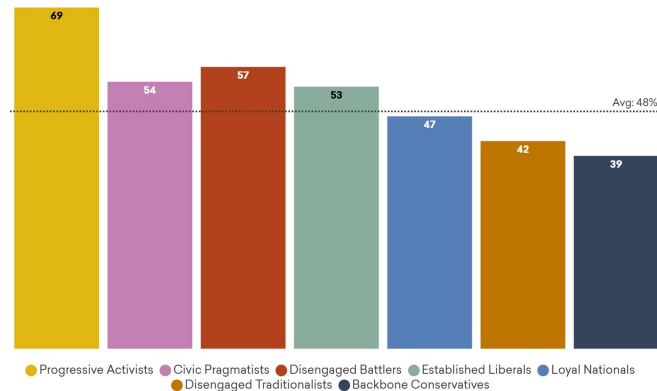
Theresa

*“If they do focus on [poverty] as part of their four years in power, then I think **it's only going to benefit the country and themselves** going forward for future elections.”*

Tom A

**If Labour successfully reduces the cost of living and tackles hardship by the time of the next election would you consider switching your vote to Labour?**

% of non-Labour voters who would consider switching



# Tackling hardship can stave off populism and fragmentation

Labour faces threats from all sides of their coalition. On the one hand, failure to tackle hardship would be seen by some as a failure to be progressive enough and would cause some to leave for the Green Party - we have already seen this in the 2024 General Election among Progressive Activists.

On the other hand, Labour risks losing voters to Reform UK if they become disillusioned with a political system they feel isn't working for them. The best defence against populism is a strong working democracy - and one of the most visible signs that democracy isn't working is people living and begging on the streets. It would be a mistake to assume that Labour voters wouldn't be tempted by Reform - economically insecure Disengaged Battlers, one of only three segments to break for Labour in 2019, are becoming increasingly tempted by Reform.

*"I voted for the Green Party because I didn't really have much faith in any other party... **I feel like [Labour] used to be for the people, but it's not really like that anymore** . And the Green Party's policies suited what I believe in more."*

Anya, Bristol

*"That was the main reason I voted for the Green Party, **because I was at a loose end** ."*

Kevin, Bristol

*"I do think next time I would certainly be considering Reform as well, just **based on what the Tories have done and what Labour's doing, it's just not working.**"*

Kerry, Calder Valley

*"When the next general election comes around, I think there's going to be a lot of people looking for something like [Reform]... **I think they're a party that a lot of the UK would put their vote towards** in the hope that you would see someone make some real changes to the bottom end of society."*

Tom, Bristol

# Views are not cemented

While there is skepticism that Labour are committed to making a difference to the cost of living and hardship, many recognise that it will take time to see improvements and are willing to give Labour a few years to make progress. However, in the meantime and before seeing tangible improvements, people will largely base their judgements on the policy choices that Labour make - which will provide an early indication of their commitment to the most vulnerable.

*"I don't think we can actually say anything about the new Labour Government in the next 18 months, two years. **They've got a lot of work to do.**"*

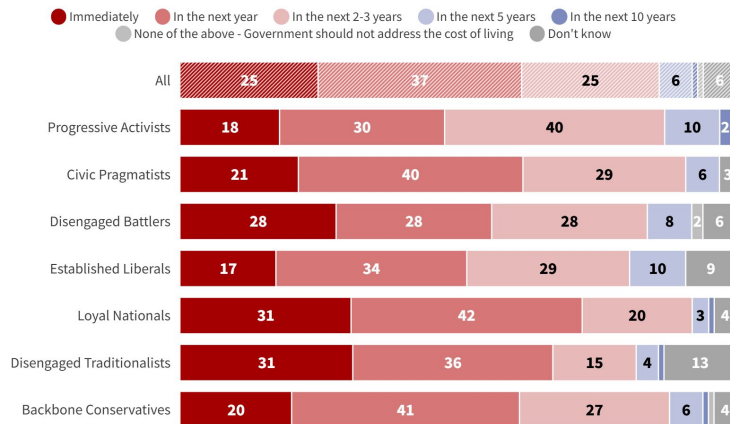
*"The way things are looking at the moment, it's not looking too great, but **hopefully if we have a decent backlash from the community, they will take a better direction** and what they're putting their money towards."*

Cameron, London

*"I'm hopeful that we'll see improvements within five years for the next **election**, and that they'll get the country to the point where they've built the trust in them."*

Pat, Basingstoke

## What would you say is a reasonable deadline for the Government to have made significant progress on reducing the impact of the cost of living in the UK?



# Building on Labour's brand reputation

Despite Labour's rocky start on hardship, brand reputation which has built up over decades doesn't disappear overnight - there are many voters who have a "gut feeling" that Labour better represent working people and those facing hardship. If Labour were to make progress on this agenda, those who have historically voted Labour but have recently felt disillusioned, would be more willing to support the party once again.

***"The whole idea of Labour is all about helping those that are less fortunate , isn't it"?***

Ukachi

***"Although Labour have and still do continue to disappoint, I vote with a sense of history . I vote for the party that did give us a national health service, that did give us public housing."***

Vincent

***"I feel Labour represents working people better... it's just a gut feeling. "***

Mandy,

***"I think [Labour] are always for the working class and middle class people... Every time they come in, they help the low income groups of the country. "***

Caelan, London



# **The October Budget: kick-starting a reset**

# JRF proposal: a Protected Minimum Floor in Universal Credit

This month's Budget provides a crucial opportunity for Labour to start to reset the narrative and demonstrate their commitment to tackling the cost of living and supporting the most vulnerable.

Alongside structural reform on issues such as social housing and energy – all of which will take time to feed through, it is vital that action is taken to start to make more immediate improvements in the situation of the worst off ahead of another difficult winter.

In light of this, JRF - along with Trussell, have developed a proposal for a **protected minimum floor** in Universal Credit. This low cost and quickly implementable policy would protect many of the lowest income families from unaffordable reductions to their UC payments caused by the benefit cap and debt deductions.

Recent research from Trussell found that 85% of people claiming UC who were subject to these reductions had gone without essentials, such as basic toiletries and prescriptions, in the past six months and data suppressed by the previous Government but published by the DWP in Oct found that two-thirds of benefit claimants with debts have gone without food.

A protected minimum floor would embed, for the first time ever, the positive principle of a **safety net below which no one should fall** into our social security system and help around **1.9 million families**, by around £48 a month on average. It would have an annual cost of around £150 million.

# Public support for a Protected Minimum Floor

The idea of taking deductions from Universal Credit does not sit well with the public, as it undermines the idea of a social security net. There is majority support for the Protected Minimum Floor in all five of the segments that voted decisively for Labour in 2024 and very low levels of opposition across all groups.

*“Well **there’s got to be some kind of safety net** , because if they don’t have enough... you can’t take them below what they need.”*

Trish, Norfolk

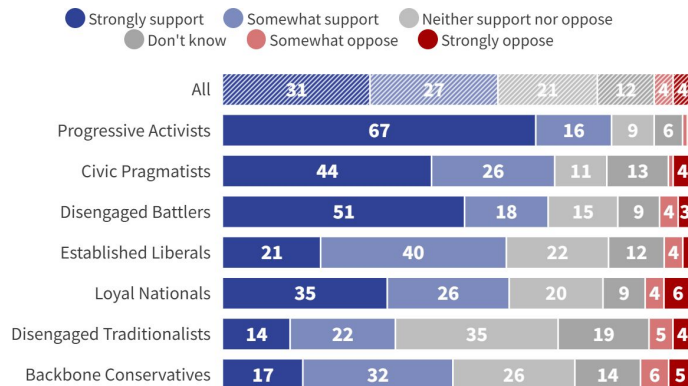
*“That’s the problem isn’t it? ... Yeah, we’re quite happy to borrow money when you’re stuck, **but then we’ll take it back when you’re getting back on your feet** , which is ridiculous.”*

Eifon, Llanelli

*“Why are they deducting any money when **it’s already impossible to live on?**”*

Danny, Hackney

**To what extent would you support the Government implementing a protected floor in Universal Credit to limit the amount of deductions that can be made, with the aim of protecting people from deep hardship?**





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