

Fragmented politics: the issues defining today's electoral coalition

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Polling by YouGov Blue

Introduction

We live in an age defined by contradictions. Institutional politics has been hollowed out, but at the same time it feels that politics is everywhere. We are surrounded by the rancour of conflict. Political tribes are defined as much by who people want to stop as by what people want to build.

This is the reality of our current technicolour politics. But must we be content to accept that the politics of division must prevail? Or is it possible to find some common ground – some ideas that can unite us across difference?

This report, the product of a collaboration between us at the UCL Policy Lab, University of Oxford and Greenberg Research, seeks to understand our moment, how key figures are shaping it and some of the key questions defining today's politics.

It builds on an earlier UCL Policy Lab report, *A polarising Britain? How value divides are shaping British politics*, which framed the growing nature of political division and the importance of uniting political blocs. Since that report was published, we have had a new prime minister assume office. For now, Andy Burnham appears to have restored Labour's electoral standing, with broader signs that he is uniting forces on the political centre-left.

We have also seen further indications of a deepening fragmentation of the right, with both Reform and Restore shaping the political agenda. In contrast to a left politics that is beginning to coalesce behind a Burnham-led Labour government, the right's direction is more uncertain. It is an increasingly open question whether it will be Kemi Badenoch or Nigel Farage who will be the dominant figure of Britain's right.

People and ideas shaping our age

For both sides of politics, our analysis offers clear lessons on how leaders can make a positive case to their respective blocs.

We have found a set of issues that have become totems for both the left and right. Donald Trump remains a central figure, as does the approach to childhood poverty, the war in Ukraine, Europe and the ongoing war in the Middle East. Our research further underlines the requirement for any political leader to make clear statements of values on these central touchstone issues.

For the centre-left, there is an opportunity for Prime Minister Burnham to broaden what is meant by a progressive agenda, away from some of the narrowness of post-COVID identity politics towards a broader coalition that speaks across identities. As our analysis shows, on issues such as Trump and the war in the Middle East, the new Prime Minister will need to renew and remake his case to the progressive voters he has lost to the Greens and Liberal Democrats.

On the conservative side, we've seen a reversal of fortunes for Kemi Badenoch and a faltering position for Nigel Farage and Reform. Yet it remains unclear which leader will come out on top: much depends on the politics of issues such as immigration and identity.

Equality and cultural issues as universal

This report also examines the question of equalities and attitudes towards the Equality Act and DEI. Few matters wield as much totemic significance in our politics. The second Trump administration's repeal of DEI in the US has set the tone, with conservative and right-leaning actors elsewhere seeing an opportunity to wind back recent diversity pushes.

Amid increasing focus on an alleged 'two-tier state', and more targeted attacks on DEI (or EDI) as failing to address the disadvantage experienced by white working class males,

Reform has promised to repeal the Equality Act 2010. The Conservatives, meanwhile, have committed to abolishing the Public Sector Equality Duty. The Labour government has, by contrast, recently moved to establish a new class unit in the Office of Equality and Opportunity, and is seeking to bring into force a socio-economic duty under the law.

The British public's views on such matters are, in many respects, clear. We find in this report majority support for the pursuit of equality. Nearly 60% have positive views of the Equality Act and of public institutions doing more to promote equal opportunity. A majority want the UK to avoid following the US in rolling back DEI.

That said, the political label of DEI – historically an American term, but increasingly used to describe institutional efforts on equality here – is proving to be more divisive. This highlights a need to think beyond the current progressive conventional wisdom on such matters. If the politics of diversity is proving more challenging, it could as much be the result of a drift away from equality as a universal ideal as the result of a right-wing backlash. And it may reflect a deeper desire among the public to see class and opportunity more visibly represented in equality and diversity efforts.

United by a demand for agency and respect

Where we do see voter majorities, which begin to cut across voter blocs, is over the idea that for too long politics, government and big business have failed to listen to ordinary people. As we continue to explore in other work, this is partly about respect but also about agency.

Our report found the strongest support for a political message and platform that recognised that often the state and country had ignored and let down ordinary people. Crucially, returning “the British state back to the service of the people” resonated with people's perceived lack of agency.

Right now, politics and the wider political ecosystem must deliver actions and ideas

that address this. In big ways and small, the “system” needs to show that the voices and talents of everyday people can shape the life of their communities.

Our analysis shows that the British public have little time for political figures such as Donald Trump. The cost of living and immigration are felt as urgent challenges to people's lives. Leaders will be judged for their ability to respond to people's increasingly frustrated concerns. The economic and political system, very simply, isn't seen to be working. The British public is looking for political leaders and parties ready to fix it.

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Methodology and background

- YouGov Blue: 2,000 UK adults, 17 to 20 July
- The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+), with results filtered to show responses for a likely electorate in a General Election
- Respondents rated British values, equal opportunity and the narrative messages on a University of Michigan National Election Survey 100 degree thermometer scale that has been replicated in years of surveys in multiple countries

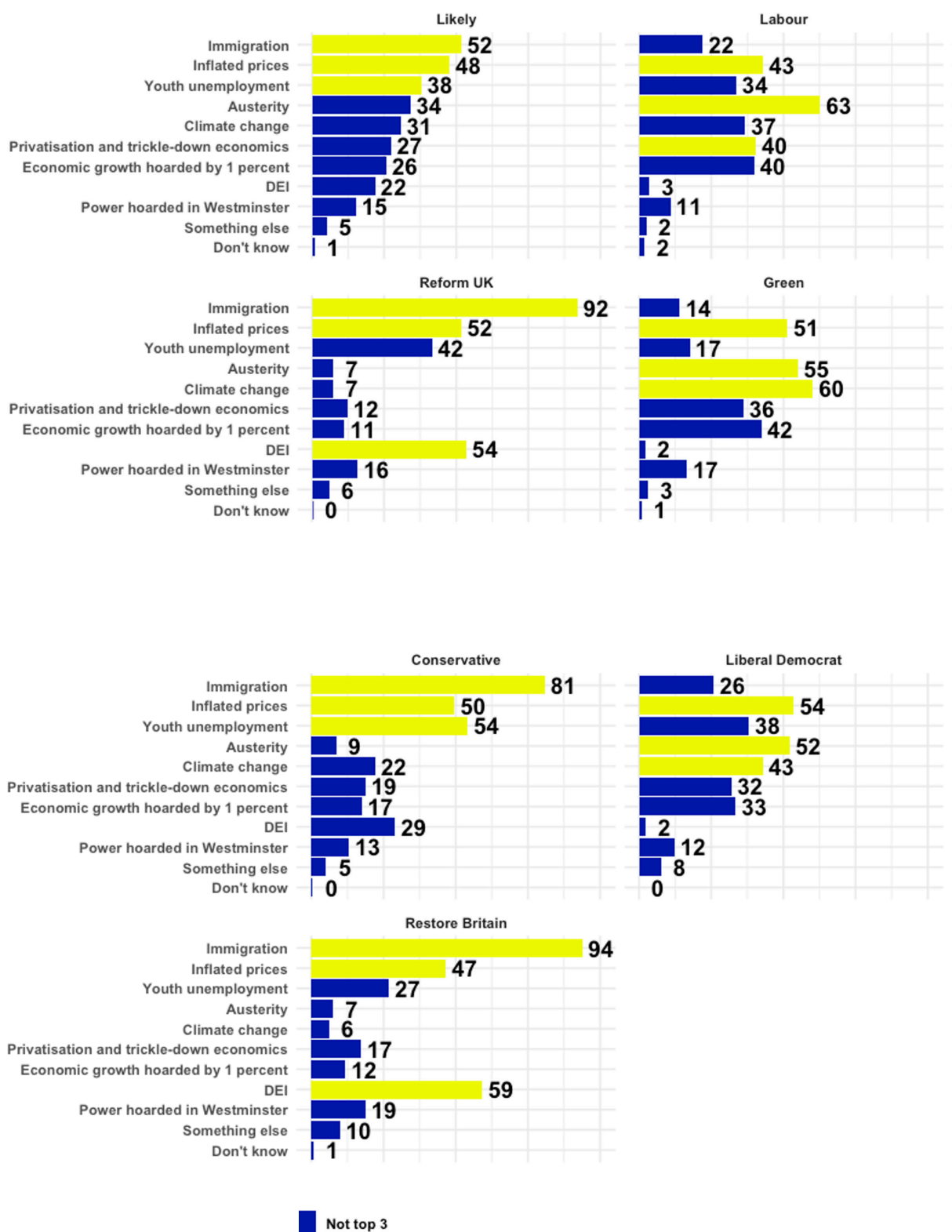
Key findings

- The mood: grave doubts about the state of the country, shaped by a cost of living crisis & demand for lower taxes and action on immigration and social care
- The Labour Party vote jumped to 24 percent. The crash of Nigel Farage's Reform UK and fracturing of the far-right nationalist bloc put Labour in the lead for the first time since June 2025
- 31 percent are "hopeful" for the country and now have a favourable view of Burnham
- After hearing Burnham's messages on recapturing public services for the people and being honest with Trump, Labour vote surprisingly jumps 6 points to 29 percent
- Donald Trump unites the right in strongly wanting to end "woke policies on gender, climate and history"
- Nearly 60 % have positive views of the Equality Act and the government doing more to promote equal opportunity. And large majorities want the UK to avoid following the US in rolling back DEI
- The public is about equally divided between favorable and unfavorable feelings about DEI — diversity, equity and inclusion
- There is a strong appetite for talking about British values and linking it to performance of government and local institutions

New PM and shifting politics

Inflated prices, austerity, and climate change top long-term problems with progressive voters

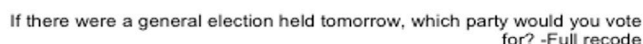
Reform UK and Restore Britain voters are laser focused on immigration, and the only ones that focus on DEI.



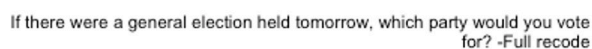
Top 3 Issues - Vote Intent With Squeeze

Left bloc: issues and ideas

Undecideds scatter evenly among the top 5 major parties Restore Britain only major party with no growth from pushing undecideds.

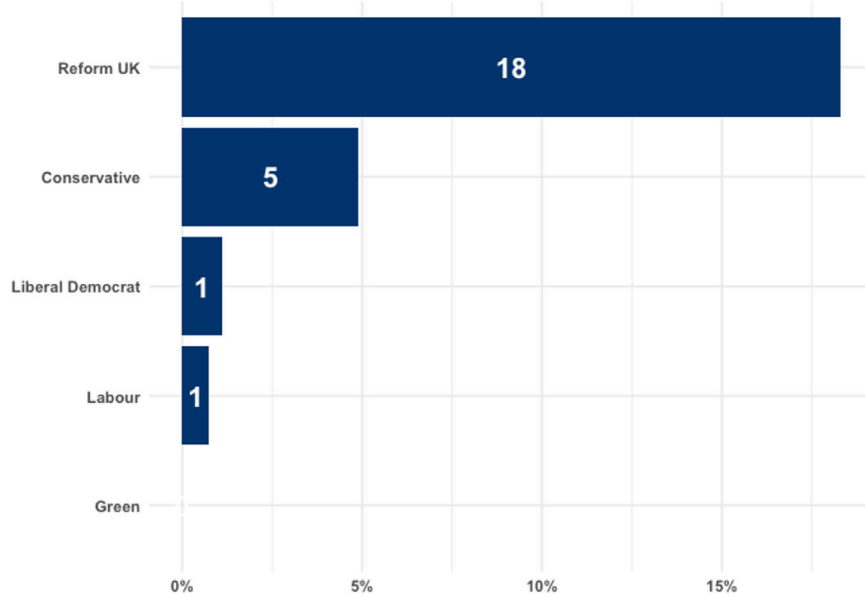


Burnham has not produce a larger progressive bloc, but first lead since June 2025.



Almost one in five Reform UK supporters would consider voting for Restore Britain

Five percent of Conservative voters would also consider Restore Britain.

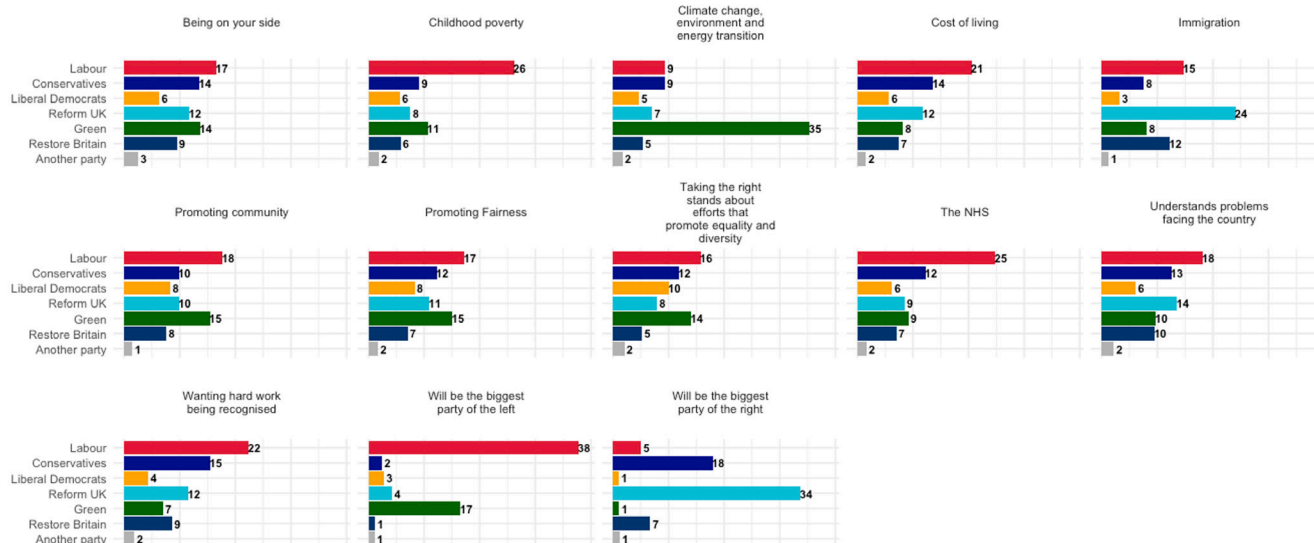


Even though you are not supporting Reform UK now, what are the chances that you might support Reform UK at the next general election - [is there a fair chance, a small chance, just a very slight chance, or no chance at all] that you might support Reform UK?

Labour regains lead on most issues, including childhood poverty, the NHS, hard work being recognised and cost of Living, though only first above vote

A growing bloc of 38 percent think Labour will be the biggest party of the left.

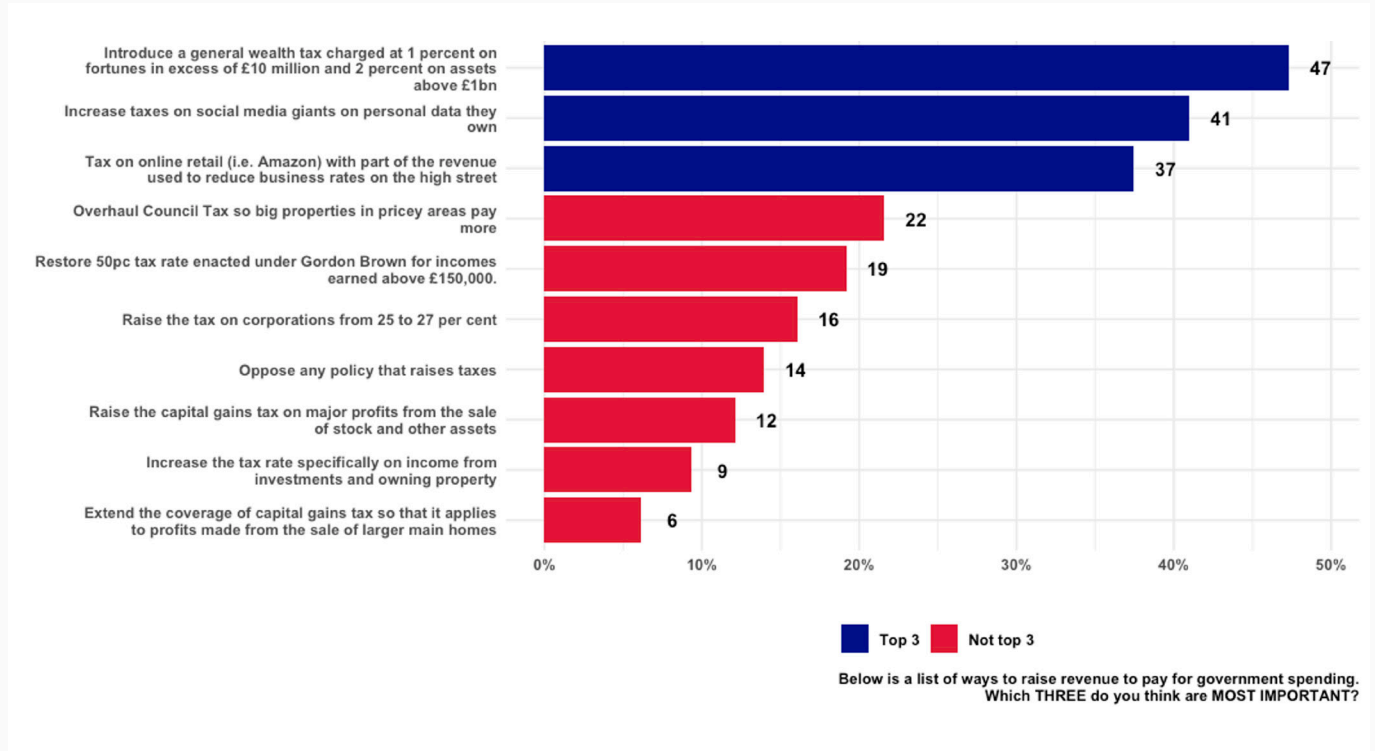
Which party will be best for...



Note that Labour will now be led by Burnham, Conservatives by Badenoch, Reform UK by Farage, Liberal Democrats by Davies, the Greens by Polanski and Restore Britain by Lowe. Which of the six main parties do you think would do the best job on each of the following?

Strong support for general wealth tax and taxes on social media and online retailers

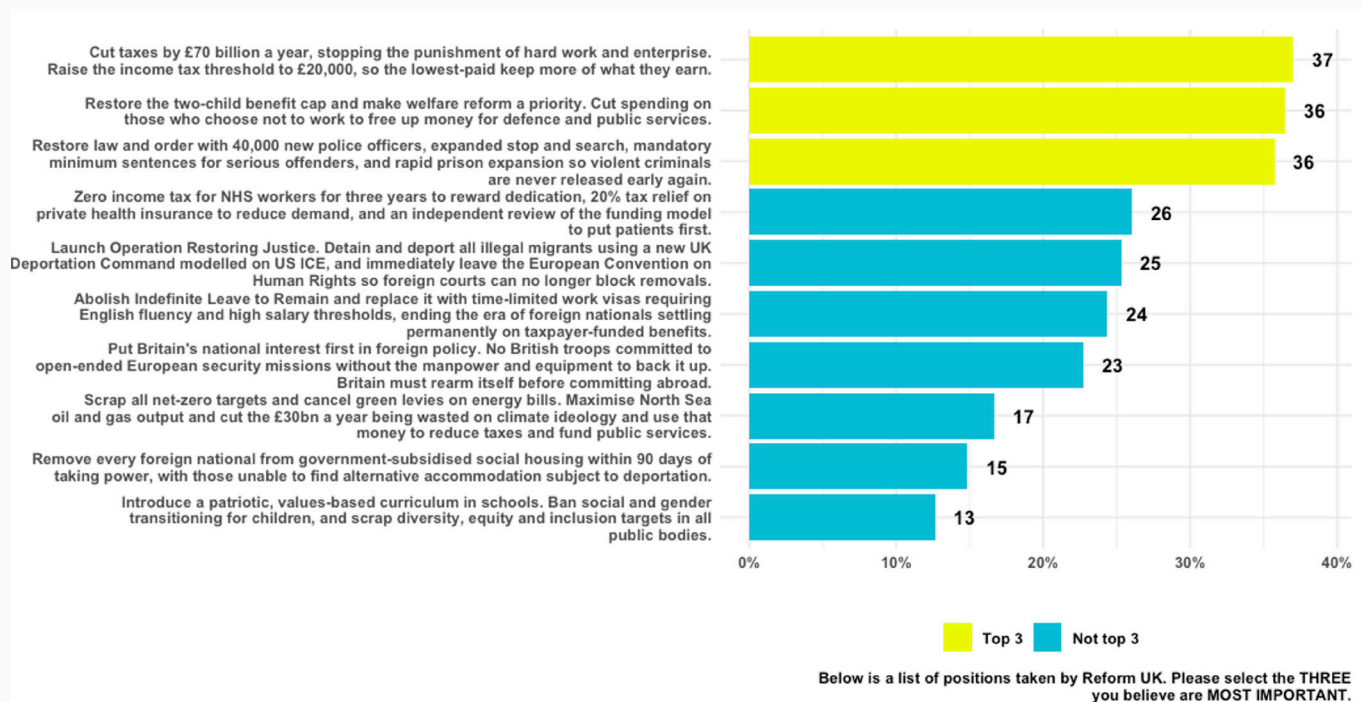
At top of next cluster of policies is overhaul of Council Tax.



Right bloc: Issues and ideas

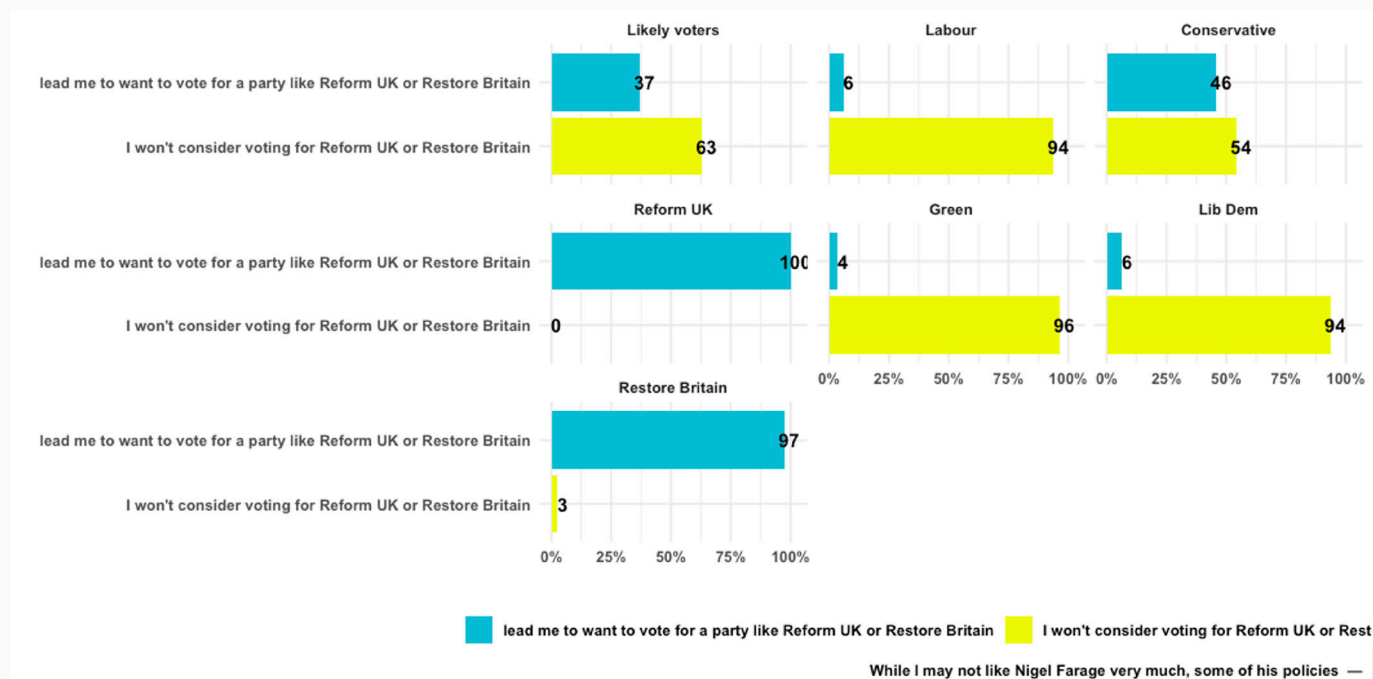
Reform UK most important positions are cutting taxes, welfare reform to support defence and new police officers, not Operation Restoring Justice

Patriotic curriculum the least important for voters.



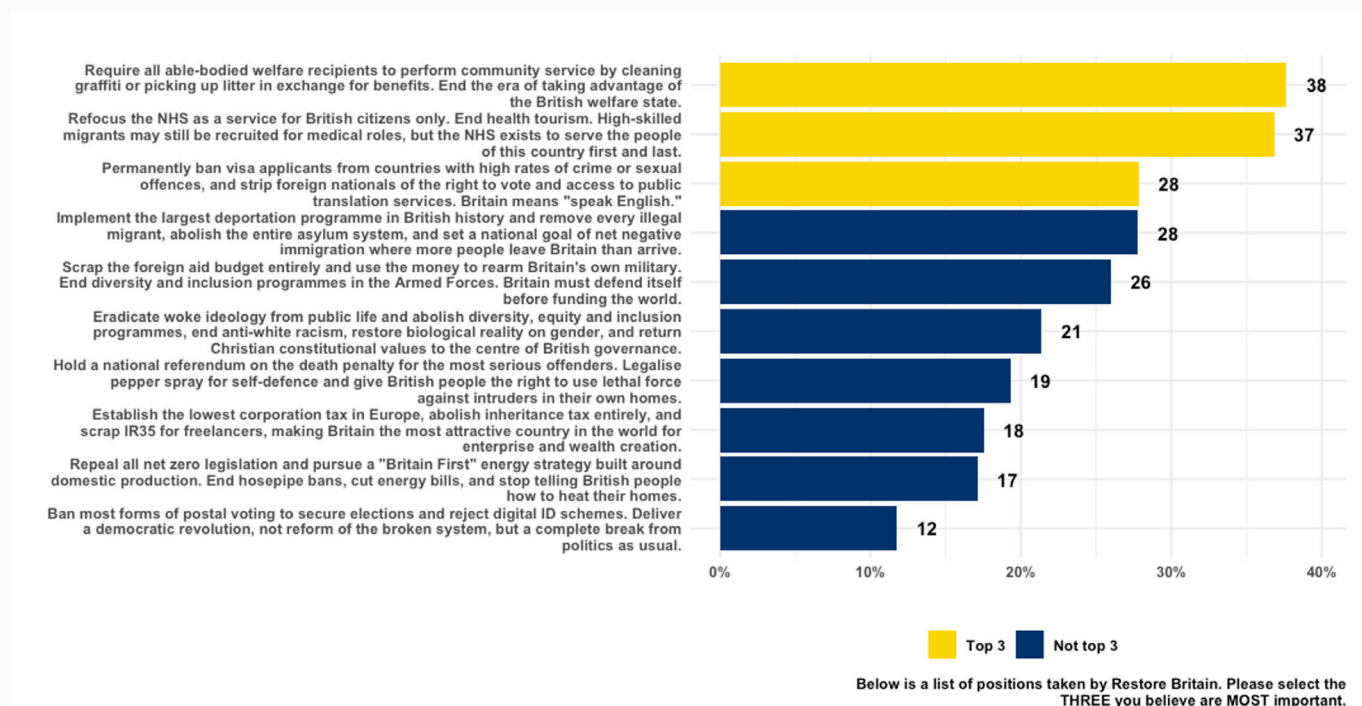
Farage's policies tempt 5 percent of progressive voters and 46 percent of Conservative to vote Reform UK or Restore Britain

Almost half of Conservative voters consider voting for the nationalist parties.



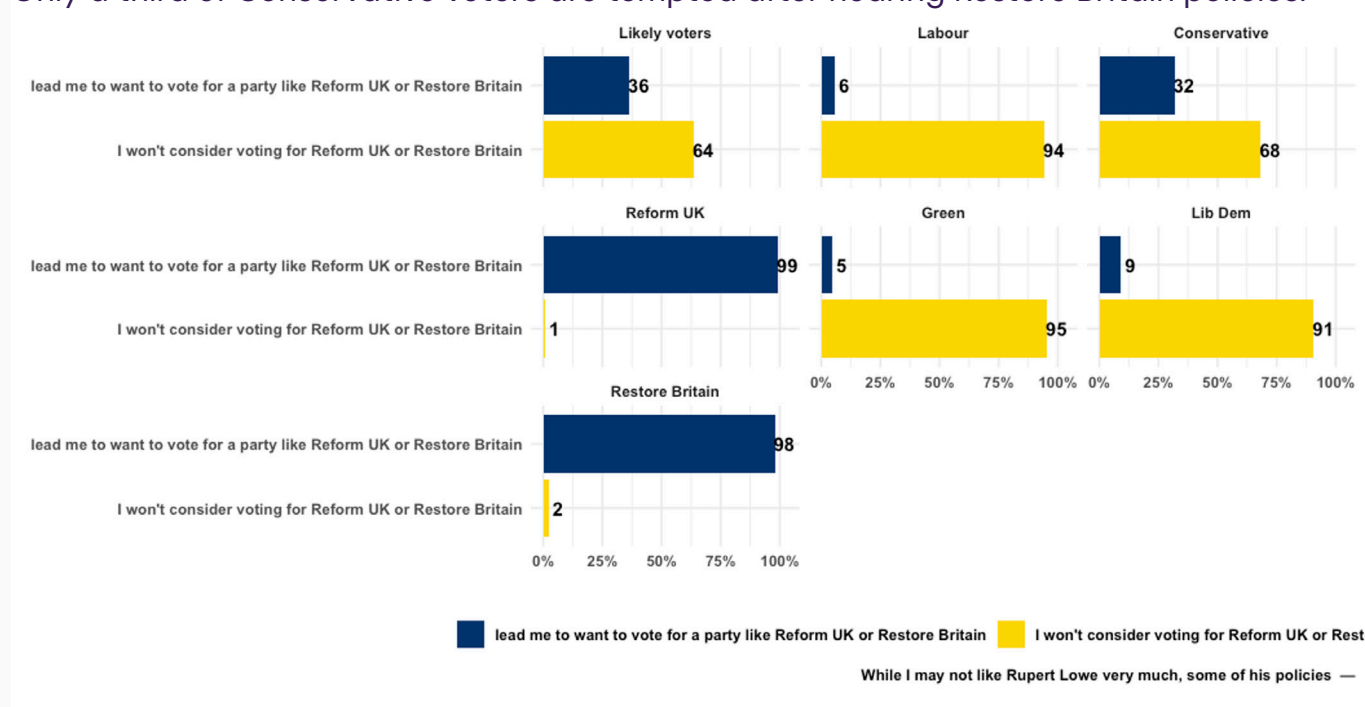
Work requirement for welfare most important Restore Britain policy, followed by the NHS being for British citizens only

Then comes its policy to restrict visas and deport.



Restore's policies tempt 6 percent of progressive and less than a third of Conservative to vote for Reform UK or Restore Britain

Only a third of Conservative voters are tempted after hearing Restore Britain policies.

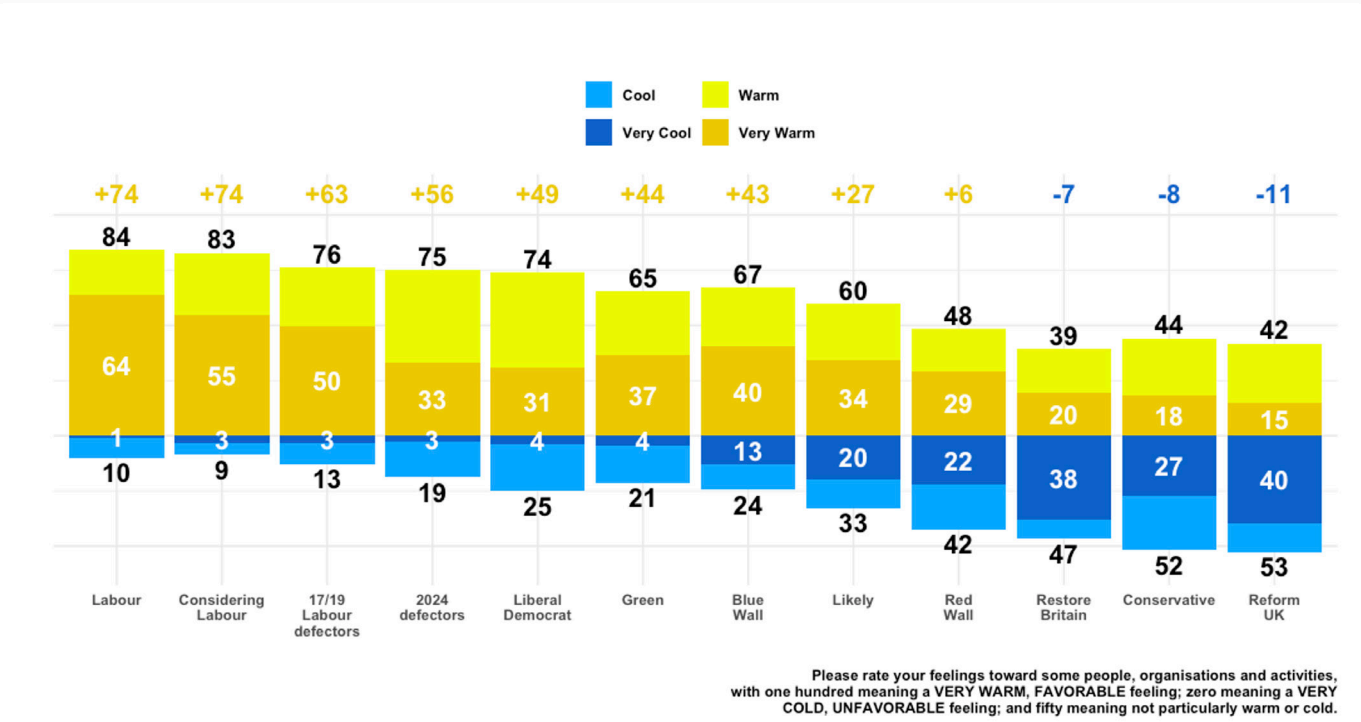


A demand for agency and respect: how can we find common ground across politics

Burnham’s Message on Britain Great but...

Britain is a great country but... The state is supposed to represent the interests of the people. But for too long working people have been treated with contempt. The truth is we’ve lost control of the fundamentals of our economy. That’s why everything is so bloody expensive. They sold off the family silver: water, council housing, energy. British Rail. Royal Mail. That’s our national wealth. Every time, they drive up costs. That’s more of our taxes going towards filling gaps or shareholder profits instead of improving things. But we’ll never change the way our country works until we return the British state to the service of the people. We will make the basics of life affordable again, so you know that your country has your back. Our national assets are the foundation. We will get them back, rebuild our national wealth and revive British ambition. Let this be a country where hard and honest work is respected and rewarded once again.

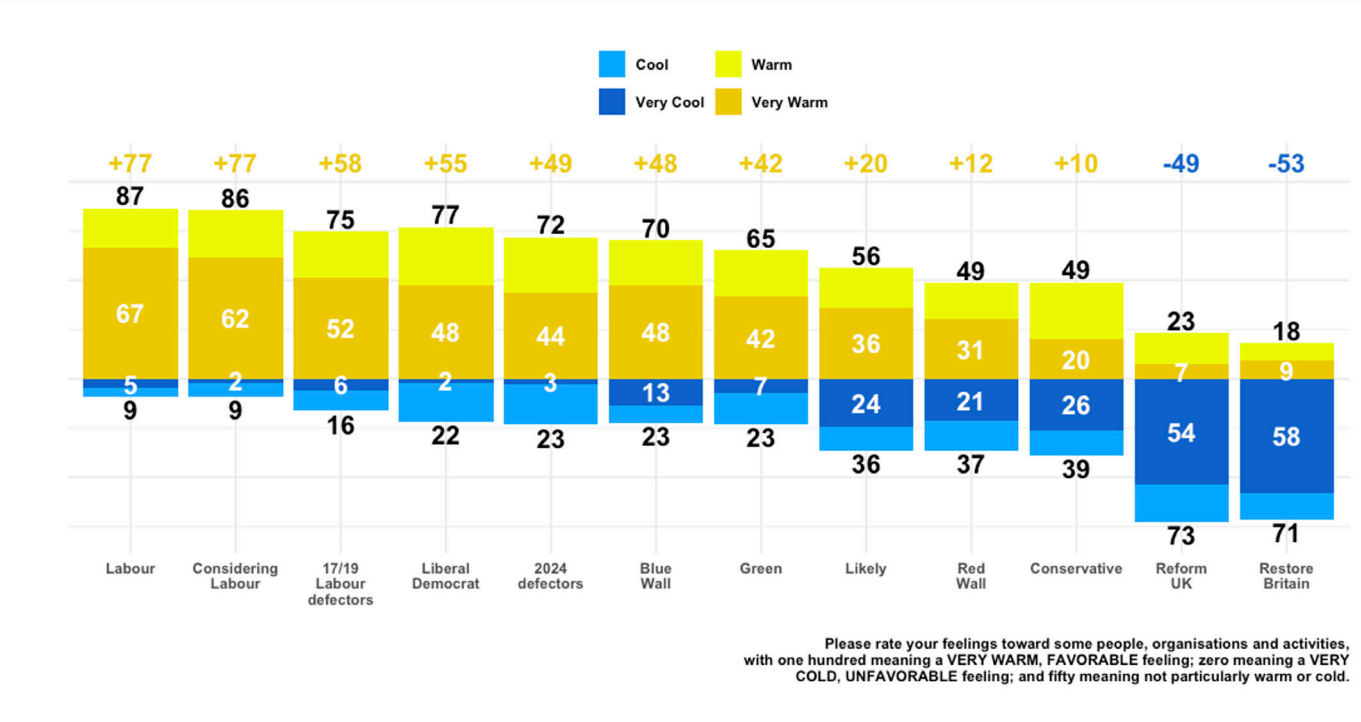
Returning British state to people again got strongest response, especially progressive voters and a big majority of those considering Labour



Burnham’s message regarding US President Trump

We must keep our long-standing ties with the United States, but Britain must be honest with Donald Trump. Our leaders must say: Vladimir Putin is a tyrant that must be opposed. We will ally with the democracies of Europe. Climate change is not a hoax. Vice President Vance said the police handling of the Henry Nowak murder is the result of waves of immigration and that Britain should battle for Western civilisation against woke policies on diversity, equity and inclusion. Farage retweeted those comments. We do not accept any Donald Trump role in our politics.

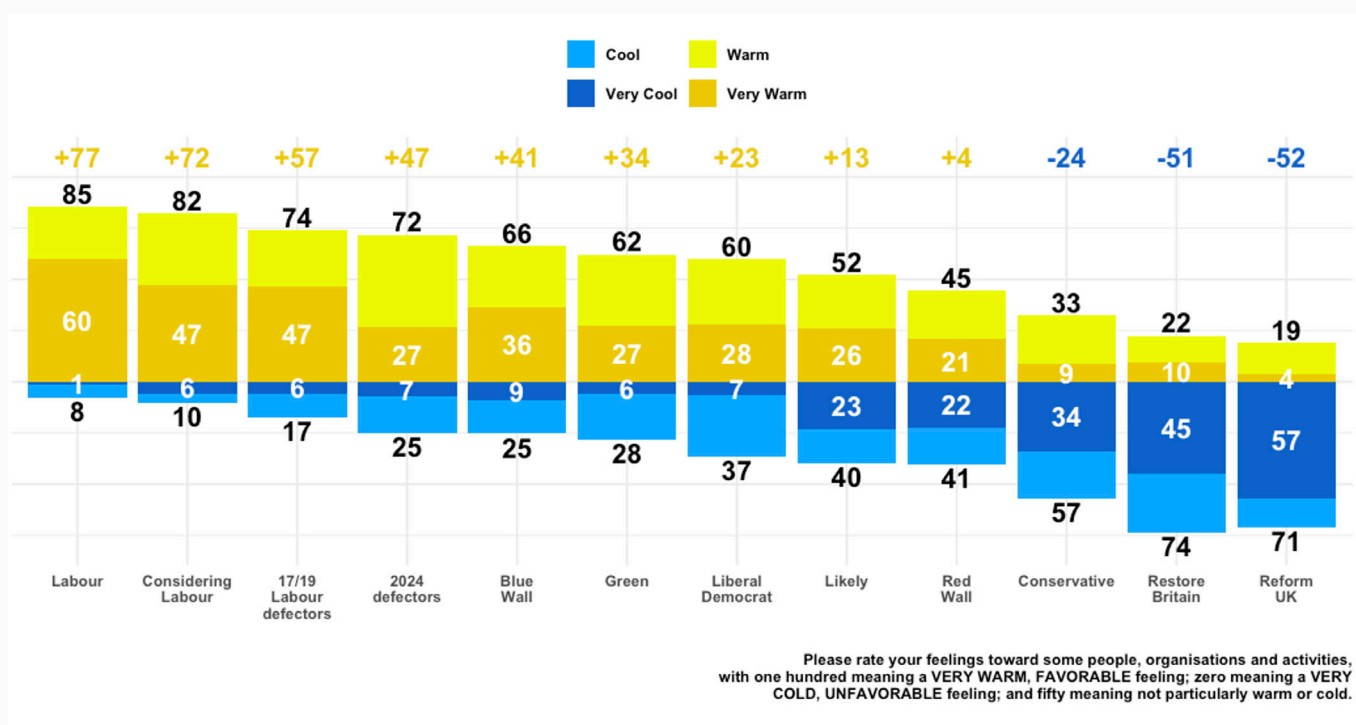
Being honest on Donald Trump produces intense positive result, including winning Conservatives by 10 points and a quarter of Reform voters



Labour's message on devolution

Britain has been run from the top down for too long. Power hoarded in Westminster and Whitehall has left places forgotten, ambitions unfulfilled, and living standards falling for a generation. The answer is not more of the same – it is a fundamental rewiring of how this country works. Good growth in every postcode. A secure home as the foundation for a good life. Technical education valued as highly as a university degree. British industry backed by British procurement. Power flowing to the regions, the cities, the towns and the people who know best how to use it. It is a model for every part of this United Kingdom. Westminster can be fixed, but only by doing things differently. By trusting people and places. That is the mission – and it is a ten-year commitment to make Britain a country that finally works for the many, not just those who already have the most.

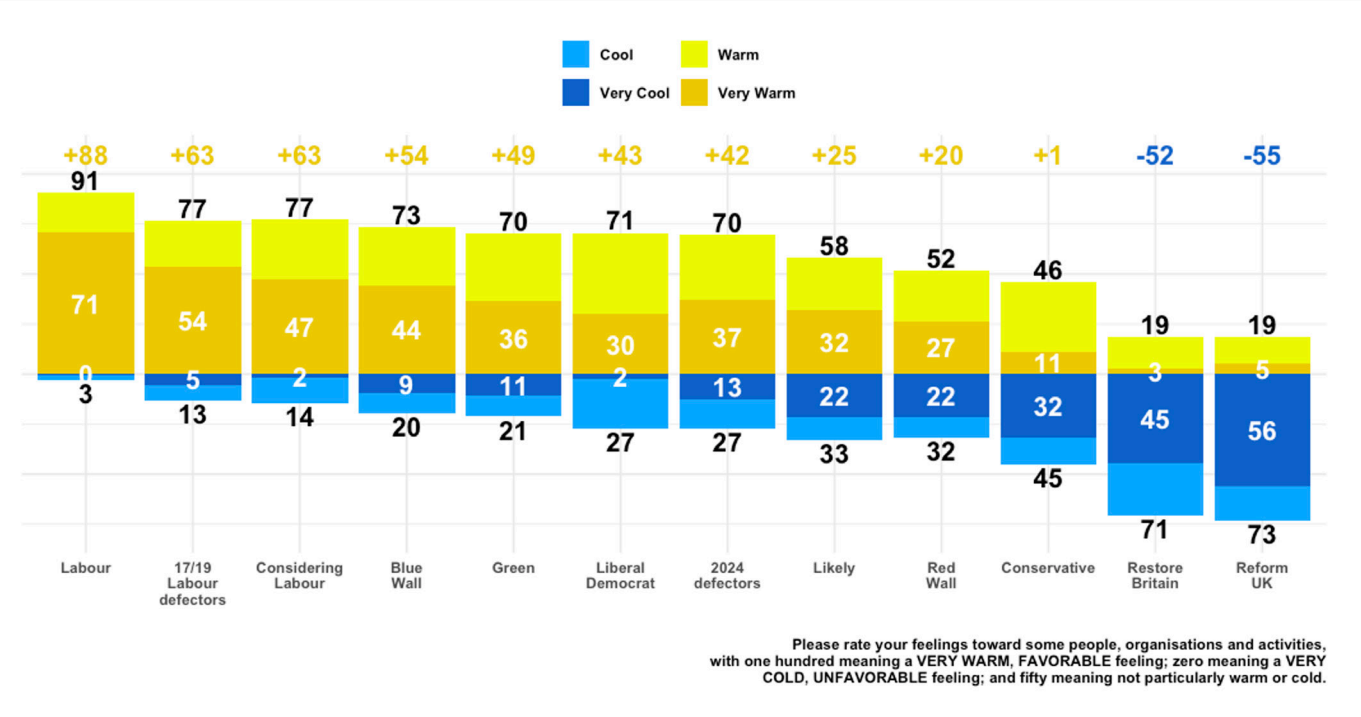
Responses to devolution message wins a small majority of warm responses and only tepid in “Red Wall” constituencies



Powerful narrative where Britain can't be broken and divided and champion Britain that is fair, work brings dignity and people look out for one another. We have so many identities, shared history and values that unite us

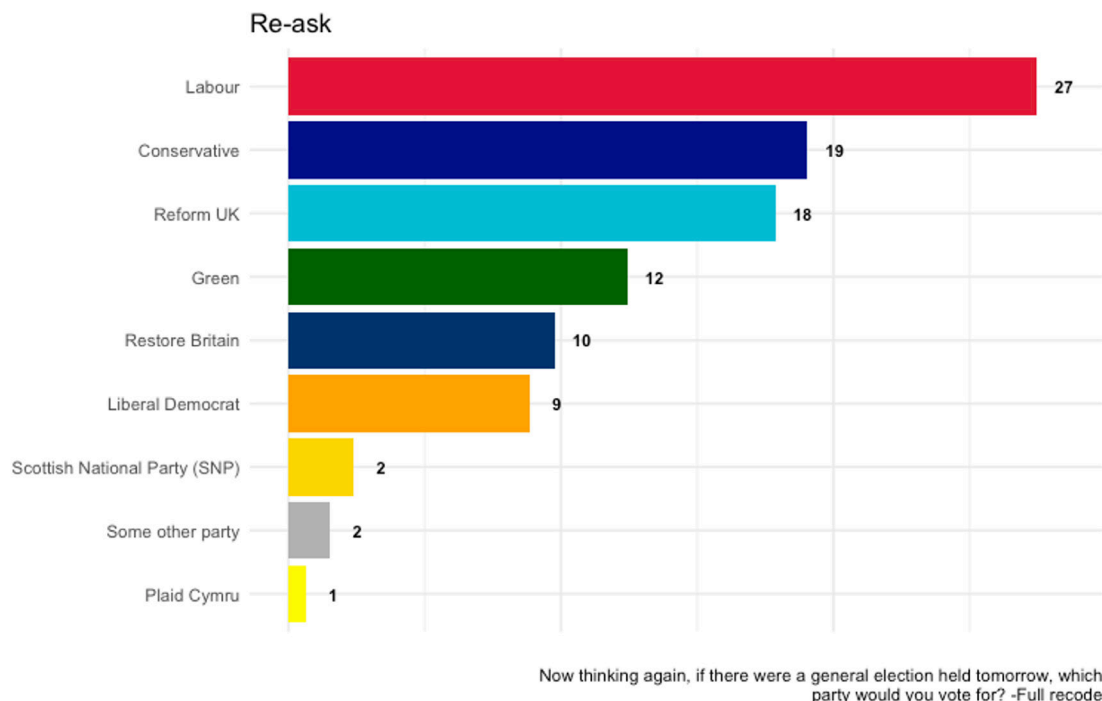
People are right to want a Britain that does not feel broken, divided, respected or where fairness not guaranteed, hard work not rewarded and community life allowed to erode. We champion a Britain that is at its best when it is fair, when work brings dignity and when people look out for one another. We have so many identities. Protestant, Jewish, Catholic, Muslim. Scottish, Welsh and English. Generations of immigrants. Different ethnic communities. Even a wealth of football clubs. But we are united by a love of Britain that seeks to be a fairer country where people get health care they need, home they can afford, a decent education and fair chance in life. We are a country that respects hard work with strong communities. That is our work ahead. We want to live in a Britain where children are raised to be kind and to play by the rules. To check in on their neighbours and stand up to bullies. To be true to themselves and to take pride in where they come from. That's why 75 years ago we invented the NHS – and why we'll never let people suffer the indignity of ill health without care. It's why we stood against the Nazis. We won't allow the weight of an uncertain world to divide us.

Emphasizing Unity and British Values receives nearly the warm response, including almost half of Conservative voters and a fifth of the Reform UK and Restore Britain



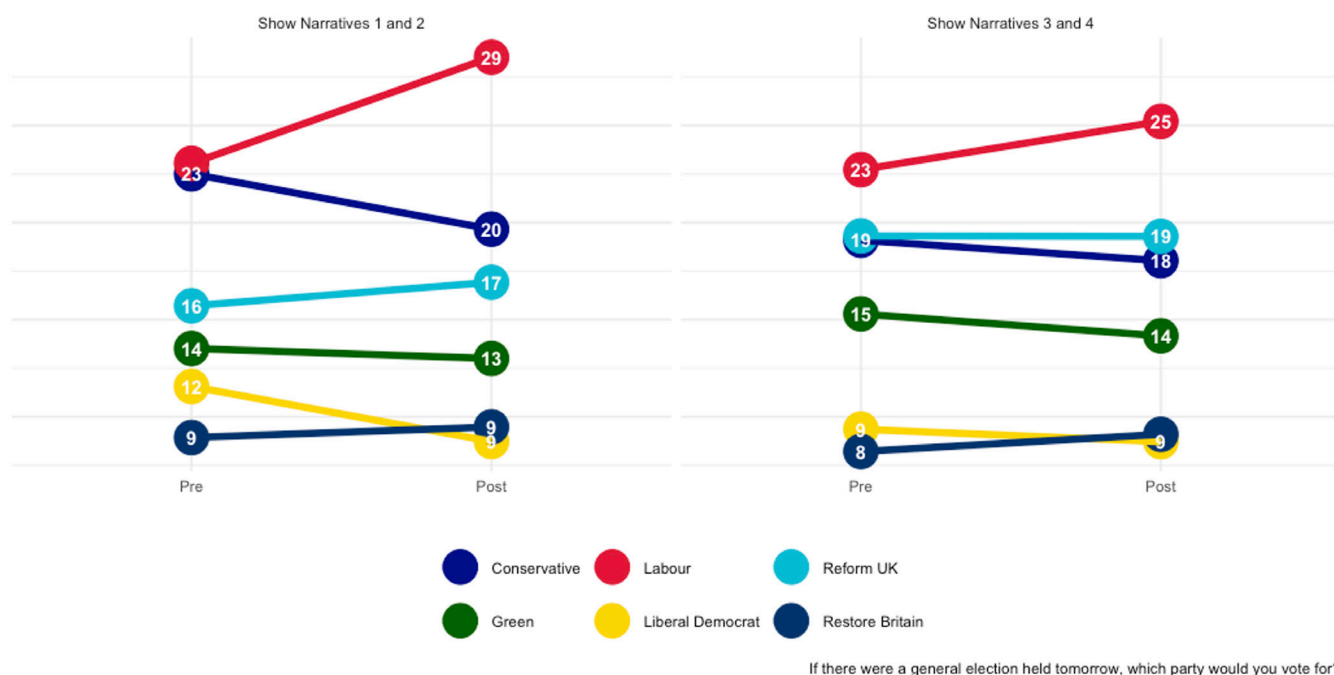
Post-survey, Labour lead grows by 3 points among likely voters, but no change in blocs

Shifting votes in a survey are not very common



Labour sees biggest surge of 6 points from nationalisation and anti-Trump messages

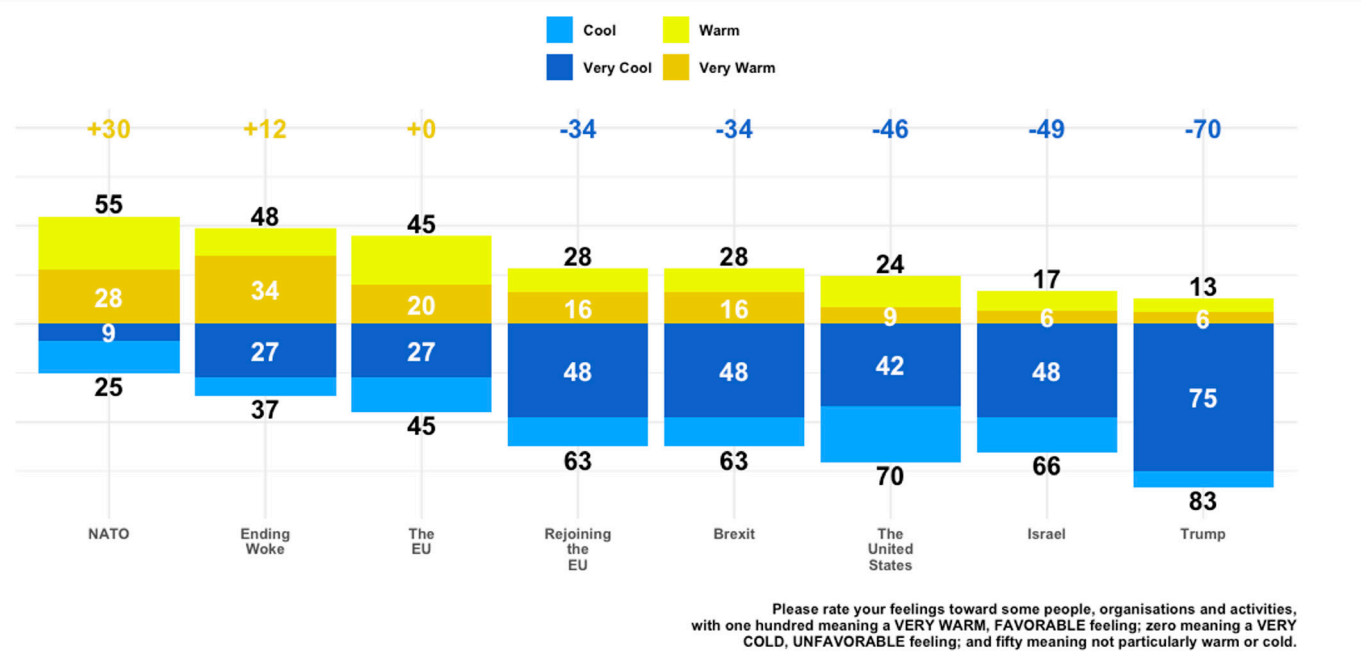
Respondents shown messages about re-nationalizing industries and opposing Trump saw a larger spike in Labour vote than those who saw messages emphasizing regional devolution and celebrating British diversity.



Speaking across voting blocs: culture and social dynamics

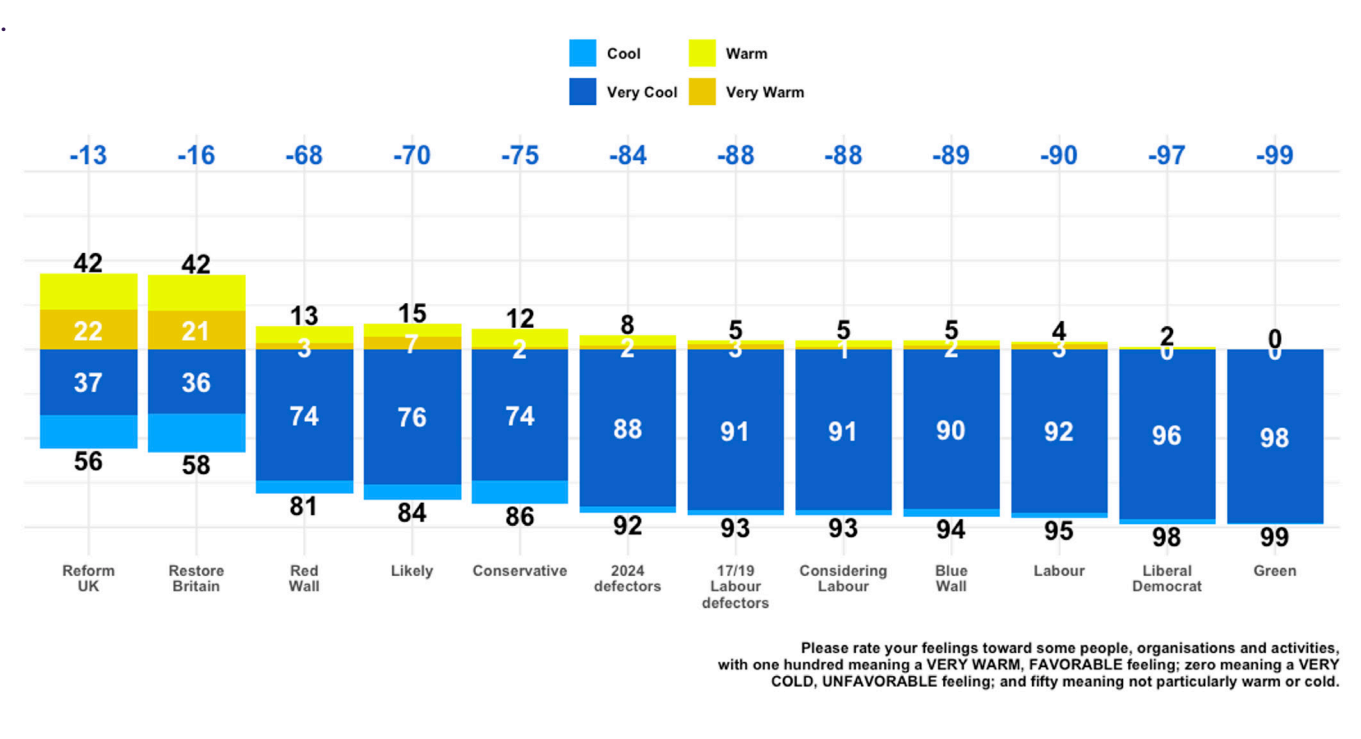
Cold attitude towards Israel, the United States, and Trump intensifies

NATO, the EU and rejoining the EU see small increase in warm attitudes.

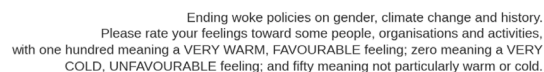


Donald Trump is viewed negatively across the UK political spectrum with astonishing intensity

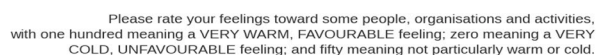
Aside from a chunk of Reform UK and Restore Britain supporters, few UK adults approve of Trump.



Warmth is intense for 79 percent of Restore Britain, 70 percent of Reform UK voters and 52 percent of Conservative.

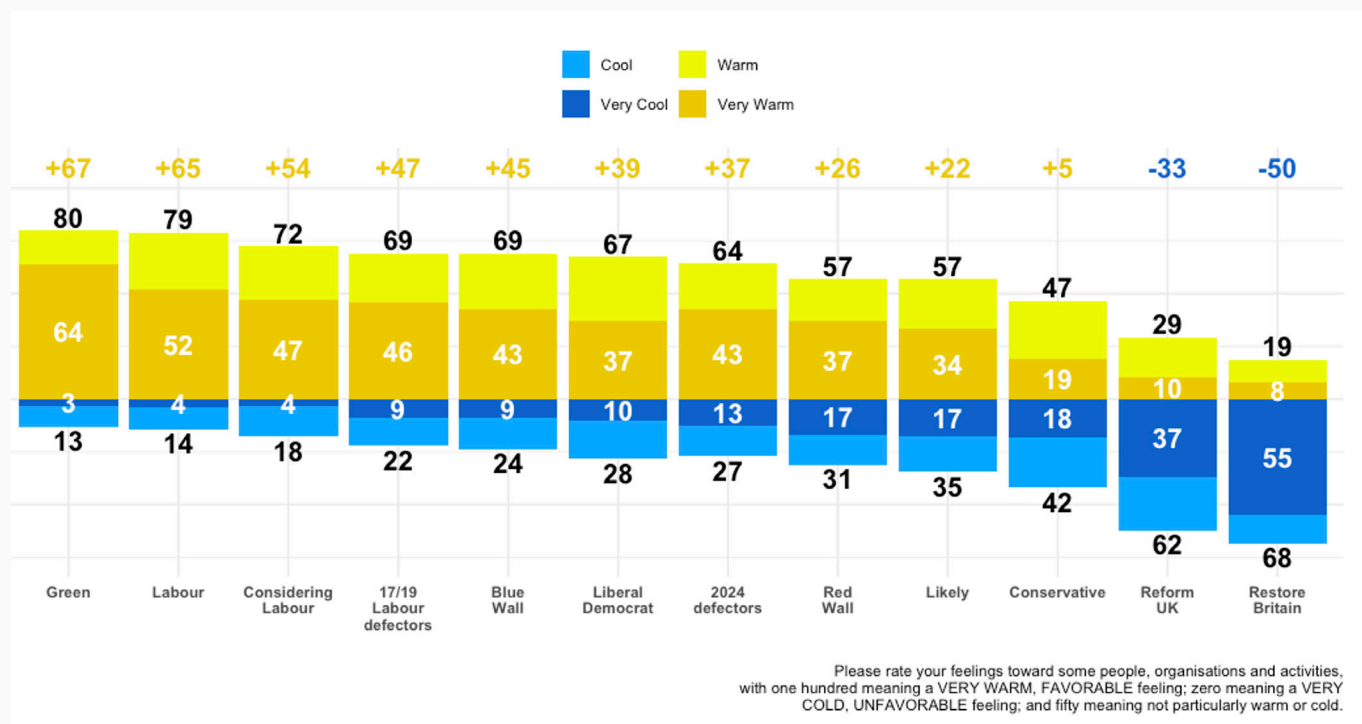


Equality Act and public institutions promoting equality of opportunity both broadly popular.



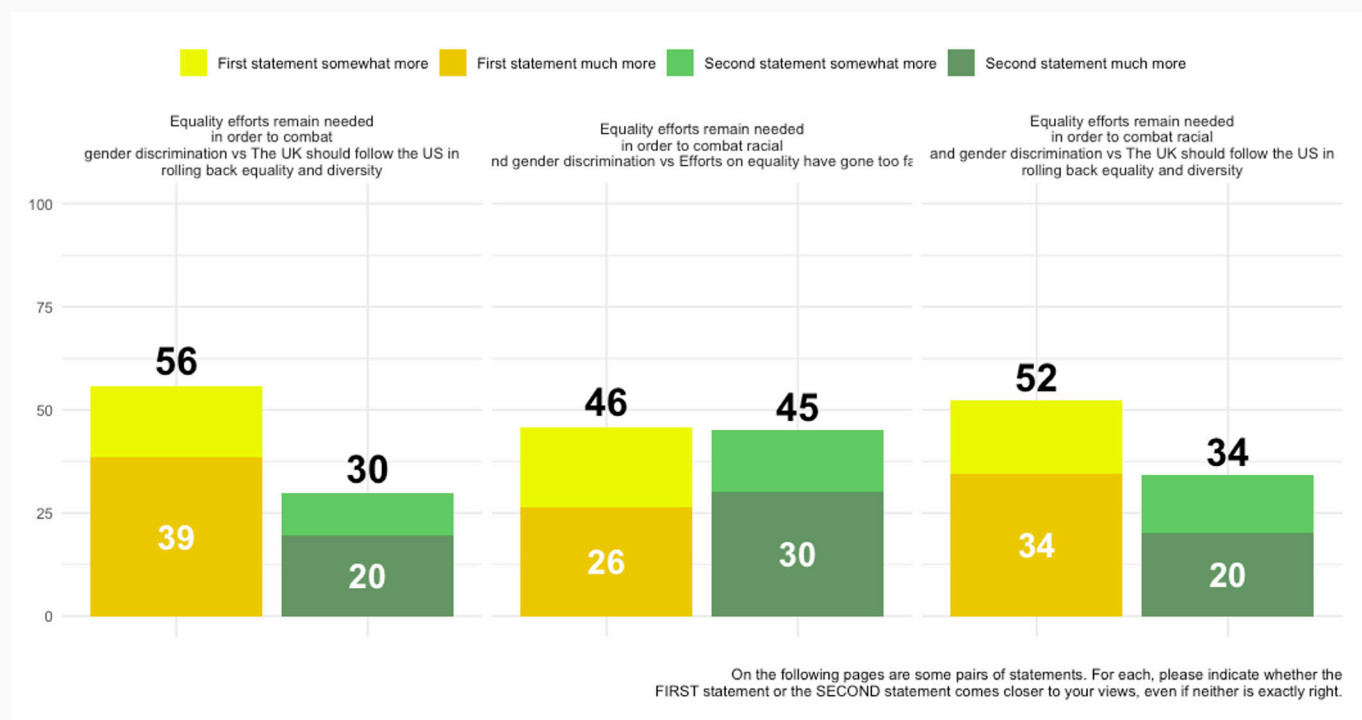
Promoting Equality of Opportunity Broadly Popular Outside of Reform and Restore Voters

Even Conservative voters are neutral to positive.



Strong majorities want to continue equality efforts to combat gender and racial discrimination, rather than follow the US in abandoning DEI

The UK equally divided on whether equality efforts remain needed or have gone too far.



About the Policy Lab

The UCL Policy Lab brings together ideas, individuals, and institutions in a collaborative method to understand and tackle the challenges facing communities in the UK and around the world. With diverse networks in politics, research, and communities, the Policy Lab facilitates dialogue between those addressing complex societal challenges.

If you have an idea or a challenge you're seeking to explore, get in touch with the team at

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