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Britain's Choice:
Common Ground and
Division in 2020s Britain

Chapter 8

The Haves and Have-nots



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The Haves and Have-nots

73 per cent of Britons believe inequality is a serious problem in the UK today

2 in 3 people believe that ‘in the UK, the system is rigged to serve the rich and influential’

Only 13 per cent believe that ordinary working people get a fair share of the nation’s wealth

Almost 3 in 4 Britons believe that there is one law for the rich and one for the poor

58 per cent of people say that the pandemic made them more aware of the living conditions of other people in the country

Over 90 per cent of Britons support the idea that if businesses receive government support, they should have a responsibility to society. This includes paying their taxes in full and not using offshore tax havens to avoid paying tax, paying fair wages, onshoring jobs, and reducing carbon emissions

Introduction

Social class has historically been regarded as the greatest fault line in British society, which was memorably described by George Orwell as ‘the most class-ridden country under the sun’. It was through the lens of English class divisions that theories of alternative economic systems were developed in the late 18th and 19th centuries. It was likewise about those class divisions that great English novelists of that era wrote, and class remains an issue of sustained interest to this day.¹



It's always the other people at the top, the people that have money, the people that can afford things. But what about the people at the bottom? How do they thrive? How do they get help? The poor people on the street? It just frustrates me that [the government] don't want to help anybody except for people that benefit them or people that give money to them. They just don't look after us at the bottom.

Renee, Disengaged Battler, 18, Yorkshire and the Humber



In 2020s Britain, the nature and significance of social class has changed. Much of the conversation about social class has been replaced by a conversation about inequality, or more commonly in the language of participants in our research, the ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’. Three in four people in Britain today agree that Britain has a serious problem with inequality. Yet a person’s experience of inequality – or more precisely, their income, class, or social grade – is today a weak predictor of their values or attitudes on many of the most prominent national debates. This does not mean that class is no longer relevant, but rather that many debates do not play out simply along the lines of class, and many people do not have a strong sense of belonging or attachment to their social class. In other words, for many, social class does not dominate their identity. People might have similar social backgrounds but a very different sense of their in-group

and out-group. A person’s experience of privilege or disadvantage is deeply formative in their lives, but it interacts with many other factors in shaping their identity and sense of belonging.

This chapter explores whether, in 2020s Britain, it is time to think of inequality differently. Instead of seeing class and inequality as causes of division in British society, perhaps the work of creating a fairer society is something that can bring us together. Concern about inequality is shared remarkably widely across British society – it was a Conservative Prime Minister who, in the opening address of her premiership in 2016, contributed the phrase ‘burning injustices’ to Britain’s political lexicon. While the seven segments emphasise different aspects of the problem of inequality, there is a consensus on the need to address inequality that transcends political divisions and reflects majority views. While there are differences on what measures are needed to reduce inequality, those do not reflect a polarisation between binary alternatives.

Just as there may be an opportunity to bring society together around tackling Britain’s burning injustices, there are equally risks if those injustices are ignored. Among Disengaged Battlers and Loyal Nationals in particular, we find frustration, distrust, and a sense of resignation about how entrenched those injustices are, as well as how hard it is to change them. If those frustrations are not addressed in coming years, democracy may be profoundly discredited and disrupted in the future.

8.1 The diminished role of social class in shaping identity

Today, 89 per cent of people in Britain self-identify as belonging to a social class (50 per cent working class, 39 per cent middle class). But for most, their sense of class identity is a less clearly defined part of their identity than it was for past generations. The decline of skilled occupations in manufacturing and mining has no doubt contributed to the erosion of working class identity. It is estimated that only 14 per cent of people belong to the traditional working class as defined by such occupations, in contrast to a much larger group defined by multifaceted measures of economic, cultural, and social capital.²

12% of Britons say that their class is a very important aspect of who they are (40 per cent consider it important)

Only 12 per cent of Britons say that their class is a very important aspect of who they are (40 per cent consider it important). Of course, for some people a strong working class identity remains important. Sixty-one per cent of working class people say they have a sense of pride in their class identity (though only 26 per cent describe it as strong); by comparison, 39 per cent in the middle class feel proud of their identity.

The class system still has relevance to how people think about inequality, but its role is less explicitly recognised than in the past. When asked about the causes of the divisions in the UK today, the class system is ranked fifth, after political parties, social media, immigration, and traditional media. Only 26 per cent of people cite the class system as a cause of division. In the conversations we held with people across Britain, we found that people often describe their social class with a shrug of the shoulders, suggesting it did not carry much personal significance for them. Those conversations consistently revealed strong views about the injustices of British society, but the language that people use about inequality is as often about the differences between haves and have-nots (if not more) as it is about social class explicitly. When people talk about these differences, they often focus not just on economic differences between haves and have-nots, but the disconnection between people from these two categories:

‘I think there are definitely the haves and the have nots and I think that's quite disturbing in the twenty first century that there is such a difference between people with money and people without money. Do you know what I mean?’

Lily, Civic Pragmatist, 47, North East

‘I think there’s a lot of people that are very privileged and don’t appreciate the other side or the working class. For instance, the Grenfell fire, down the road, all those houses that are worth millions and people like that... the social difference in class...seems to be huge.’

Kelly, Disengaged Battler, 39, North West

As the profile of the seven segments shows, people of the same class or social grade are distributed across all segments and hold a diversity of views. Knowing a person’s class tells us little about how they might think about many of the most pressing issues in Britain today. Voting, as a moment when attitudes and beliefs turn into behaviour, illustrates this point. The 2019 General Election, where the culmination of a long-term erosion of support finally led to parts of Labour’s ‘Red Wall’ in the North and Midlands collapsing, showed only weak relationships between voting behaviour and social class. Indeed, this study finds that (self-identified) class is associated with only minor differences in voting patterns for the largest parties:³

- Working class and middle class voters account for almost nine in ten votes nationally (50 per cent of voters identify as working class, 39 per cent as middle class).
- Between working class and middle class voters, there was no difference in the Conservative vote (both were 44 per cent).⁴
- In Scotland the SNP achieved exactly the same level of support among working class and middle class voters (46 per cent).
- Contrary to media narratives of Labour’s support base having shifted towards metropolitan elites, Labour’s vote share was actually 6 percentage points stronger among working class than middle class voters (35 per cent compared to 29 per cent).
- Class plays a larger role for the Liberal Democrats’ base (receiving 17 per cent support among middle class voters, compared to just 7 per cent among working class voters).
- While noting the sample size is very small, the 1 per cent of the population in our data identifying as upper class overwhelmingly voted Conservative (58 per cent to Labour’s 27 per cent).

A similar analysis applying the commonly used NRS social grades to 2019 voting patterns also finds little evidence that social grade is predictive of voting behaviour:

- There was higher support for the Conservatives than Labour in every social grade.
- The largest margin of Conservative over Labour votes was found in the third lowest social grade (C2, with a margin of 49 to 29 per cent).
- The top social grade A, which comprises 4 per cent of the population, recorded a large gap of 19 per cent in favour of Conservatives (45 per cent) over Labour (26 per cent).
- However, the smallest margin between the two parties was found in the second highest social grade (B).
- In Scotland, support for the SNP also cuts across all social classes, with lower support at both ends of the social grade scale (38 per cent among grade A and 39 per cent among grade E), and highest support in the middle (50 per cent among grade C1).

On ‘culture war’ issues, social grade similarly correlates less powerfully with opinions than the core beliefs segmentation. A study of political correctness in the United Kingdom published by Sophia Gaston in 2019 tested responses to seven polarising ‘culture war’ statements, and found only weak correlations between socio-economic grade and people’s views on those issues. More significant differences were observed by age and region.⁵

For this study, people were asked whether they agree or disagree with the proposition that ‘political correctness is a problem in our country’. Overall, 73 per cent of Britons agreed and 20 per cent disagreed, and the variation among the social grades was very small, ranging from a low of 68 per cent (social grade B) to a high of 74 per cent (C2). In contrast, it ranged widely among the segments, from 28 per cent (Progressive Activists) to 90 per cent (Loyal Nationals). These findings underscore how much more people’s core beliefs predict their views on cultural debates than social class or other demographics.

8.2 ——— Uniting around the goal of a fairer society

‘An awful lot of low paid workers are literally running this country for us as we speak. The likes of delivery drivers, supermarket workers, care workers, all on minimum wage that everybody takes for granted and they’re literally putting themselves in the firing line daily while a lot of us, I would say 99 per cent of my friends, are sitting at home with the luxury of 80 per cent wages on furlough. All they have to do is stay at home, it’s not a hard job and they’re all losing their minds. And I’m thinking, to be fair, you could be out doing a 12-hour shift in a supermarket, you know, literally running the gauntlet every day, but they are kind of unaware of that. And they take it for granted that they’re going to be there doing that...

I think that people who are like on minimum wage are definitely treated as second class citizens compared to those that are on a better wage, usually by people that are on the better wage.’

Lily, Civic Pragmatist, 47, North East

The problem of the gap between the haves and have-nots in British society is widely recognised. While views on class differences might once have been a cause of division among people in Britain, today there is a remarkable level of agreement that British society has a serious problem with inequality – a view shared by almost three in four people.

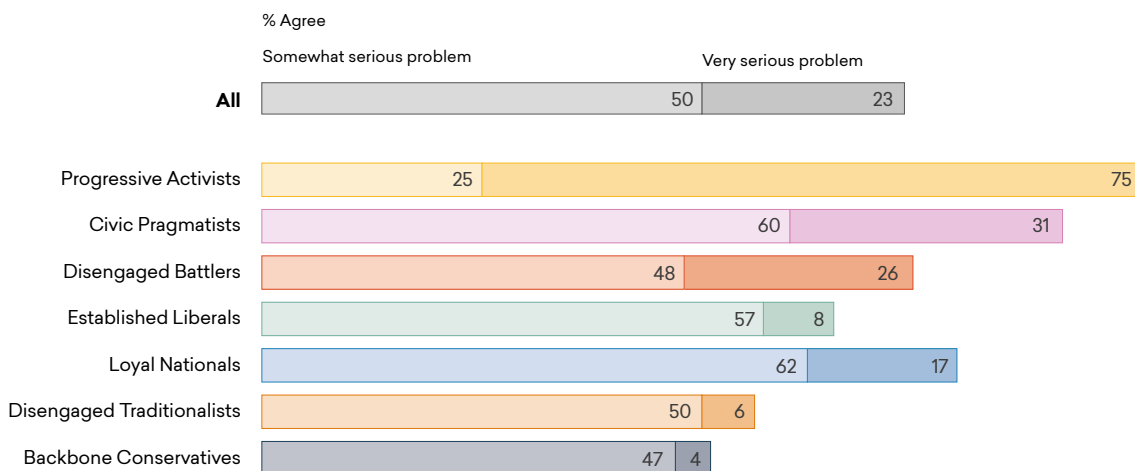
3 in 4 agree that British society has a serious problem with inequality

Although concern about inequality is stronger among segments that are more likely to support left-wing parties, it is shared by a majority of people in every population segment. Agreement ranges from half of Backbone Conservatives and Disengaged Traditionalists, to all of Progressive Activists (of whom 75 per cent regard it as very serious).

Figure 8.1.

Inequality in the UK

In all segments, a majority agrees that inequality is a serious problem



Qu. To what extent is inequality a problem in the UK today? February 2020.
Source: More in Common 2020.

Concern about the unfairness of British society is deep-rooted. Two in three people believe that ‘in the UK, the system is rigged to serve the rich and influential’, compared to one in three who say that ‘in the UK, the system works for the majority of people’ (67 to 33 per cent agreement). Only among two segments does a majority disagree: Backbone Conservatives and Established Liberals, who tend to be most supportive of the status quo. Even then, only 22 per cent of Backbone Conservatives strongly agree with the proposition that the system works for the majority of people.

2 in 3 of people believe that ‘in the UK, the system is rigged to serve the rich and influential’

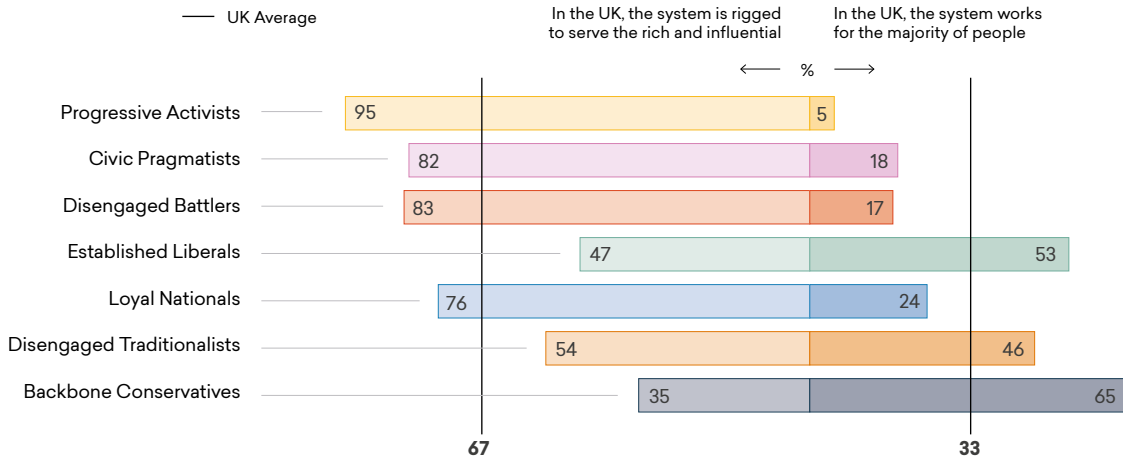
Likewise, in every population segment more people agree than disagree that the UK’s economic growth has not benefitted most people they know, with more than 70 per cent of Progressive Activists, Civic Pragmatists, Disengaged Battlers, and Loyal Nationals holding this view.

Figure 8.2.

Frustration at the system

Only Backbone Conservatives and Established Liberals believe the system works for most people

Is the system rigged or does it work?



For full question texts see Appendix 2.1, February 2020.
Source: More in Common 2020.

13% believe that ordinary working people get a fair share of the nation's wealth

Across British society, there is common ground that the economy is not working fairly or giving enough opportunities for people who work hard or need help. Only 13 per cent believe that ordinary working people get a fair share of the nation's wealth. Backbone Conservatives are more likely than others to agree, but even among this segment only a third have such confidence. Along with Established Liberals and Disengaged Traditionalists (the other segments more supportive of the status quo), Backbone Conservatives are more likely to be neutral, neither agreeing nor disagreeing that wealth is distributed evenly among the working population.

3 in 4 believe that there is one law for the rich and one for the poor

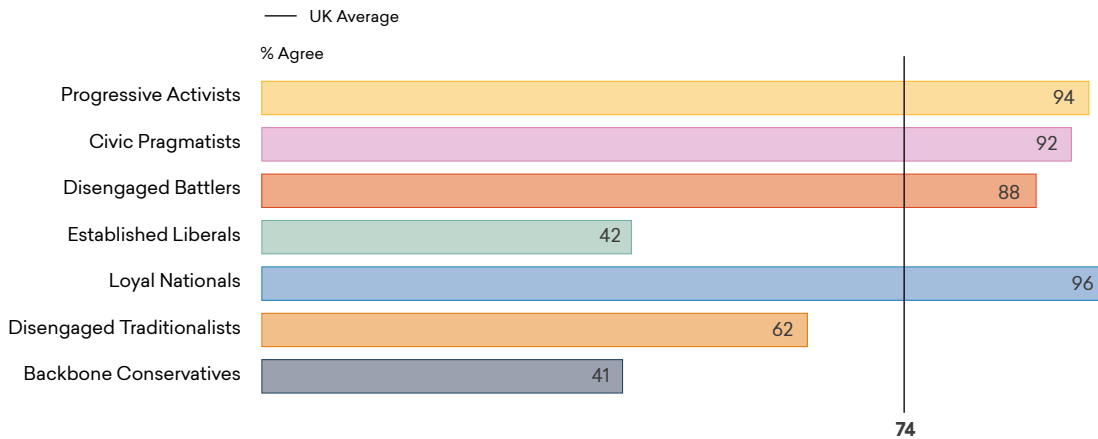
On the other hand, in each of the other four segments – Progressive Activists, Civic Pragmatists, Disengaged Battlers, and Loyal Nationals – more than 80 per cent disagree. Figure 8.3 shows that almost three in four Britons believe that there is one law for the rich and one for the poor. Among four of the seven segments, nine out of ten people agree. Loyal Nationals feel this sense of injustice most acutely, with 96 per cent in agreement.

Figure 8.3.

Inequality between rich and poor

Most Britons feel there is one law for the rich and one law for the poor.

There is one law for the rich and one for the poor



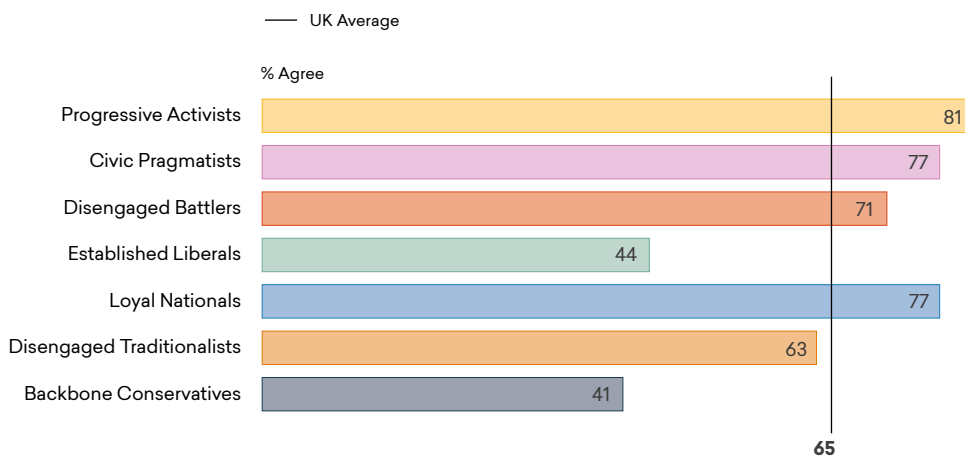
Qu. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? There is one law for the rich and one for the poor. February 2020.
Source: More in Common 2020.

Figure 8.4.

Inequality and distribution of wealth

Two-thirds believe the benefits of economic growth have not been fairly distributed.

The UK's economic growth hasn't benefitted most people I know



Qu. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The UK's economic growth hasn't benefitted most people I know. February 2020.
Source: More in Common 2020.

58% of people say that the pandemic has made them more aware of the living conditions of other people in the country

The salience of inequality in the UK has increased as a result of Covid-19. Some 58 per cent of people say that the pandemic has made them more aware of the living conditions of other people in the country. In particular, people became more aware of the critical role played by key workers in healthcare, social care, retail, delivery, and public transport, as well as other jobs. Many of these jobs are low-paid and involve irregular hours, as well as a heightened exposure to risk of infection. Almost nine in ten people praise frontline medical staff and other key workers for the role they are playing during the Covid-19 pandemic. Some also express concern about whether British society fails to care for its more vulnerable members, such as people with disabilities and the aged, that have been exposed by the pandemic:

‘There’s an awful lot of people noticing the big division between the haves and the have nots... You’ve got the people who have all they could ever need and all the family close by that they could ever need. And then you’ve got the disabled people, the people with chronic conditions who can’t get out and who rely on social services. And unfortunately those services are not able to be done for one reason or another because of coronavirus. And it was just kind of like: “Well, everybody else is getting on with it so you’ve got to find a way”. And it felt like, hmmm, that’s painful and sobering.’

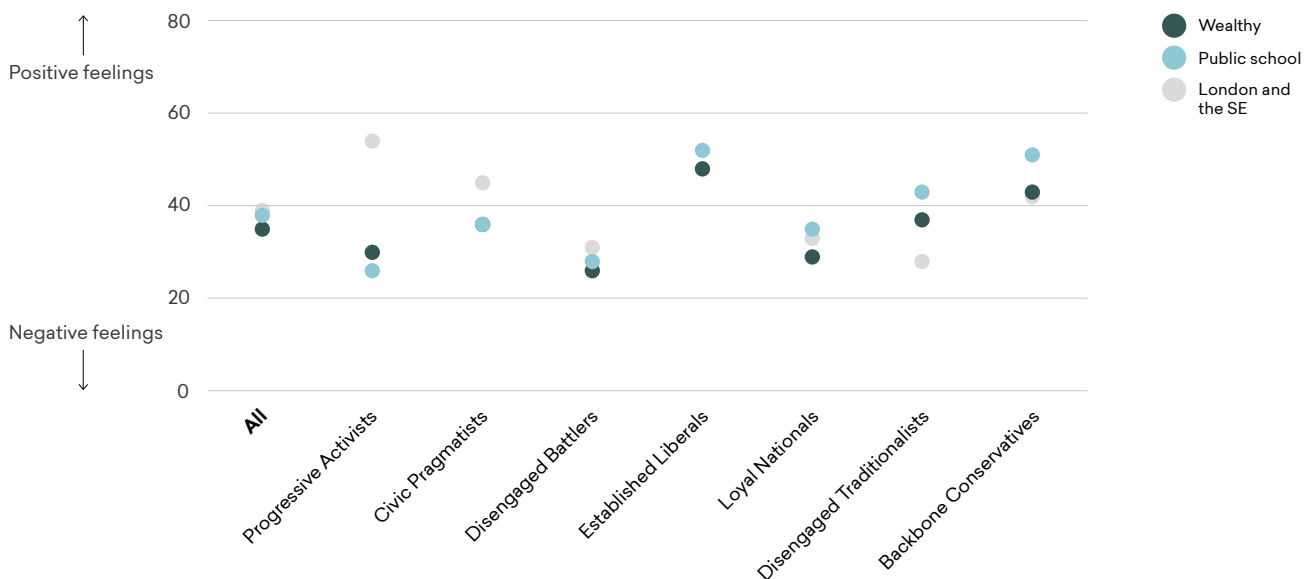
Jodie, Disengaged Traditionalist, 39, South East

Figure 8.5.

Feelings thermometer towards ‘the haves’

Privileged groups attract colder feelings from most Britons

Warmth towards ‘the haves’



Qu. How positively or negatively do you feel about each of the following, where 0 means very negative, and 100 means very positive. February 2020.

Source: More in Common 2020.

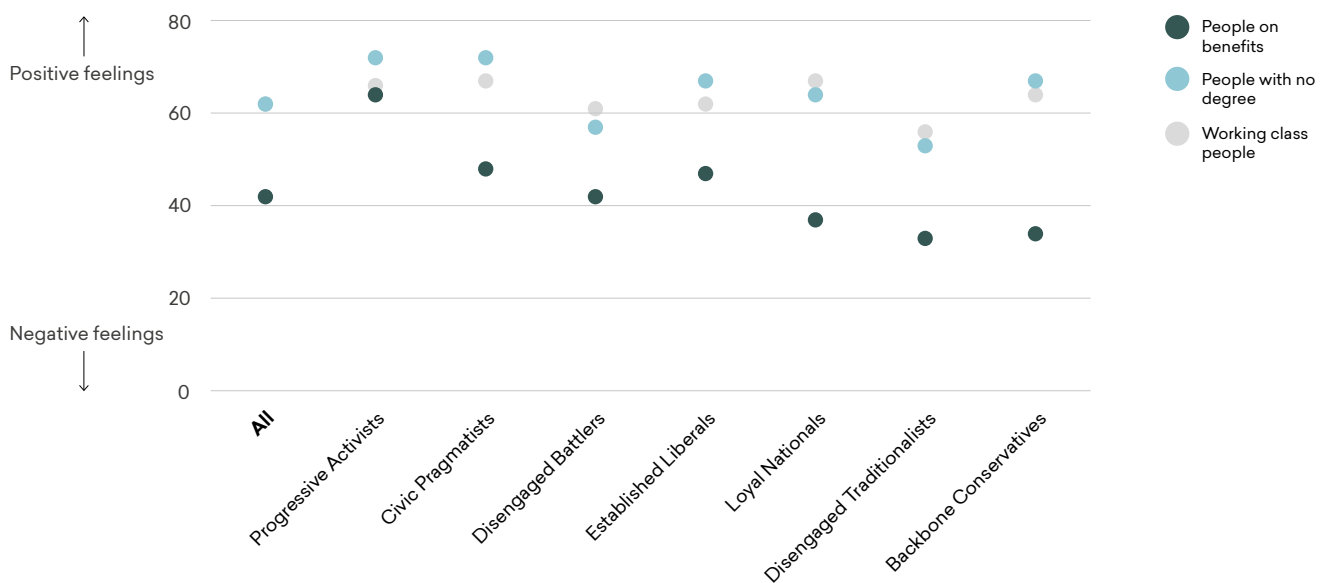
Another indicator of the depth of concern about inequality is found in the strength of anti-elite sentiment in Britain, reflected in feelings thermometers for the haves and the have-nots. Feelings thermometers allow respondents to provide a value from 0 to 100 to describe how 'cold' or 'warm' they feel towards a specific group (0 refers to cold feelings, while 100 refers to warm feelings).

- No segment of the British population holds warm feelings towards the wealthy. Established Liberals feel the warmest with an average of 48, while Disengaged Battlers are coldest (average of 26).
- Measuring the warmth of feelings towards each of the privileged groups according to social grade shows a narrower range of feelings than the segments – for example, sentiment towards wealthy people by social grade ranges from warmer feelings among grade A (39) down to the coldest feelings from grade E (28).
- Feelings towards public school graduates are fairly cold, with average warmth reaching only 38.
- All segments have cold attitudes towards politicians, with an average warmth of 25 for those at Westminster, and 30 for local politicians.
- All segments but Progressive Activists have cold attitudes towards those who live in London and South East England, areas where wealth and power are concentrated (an average of 39). Progressive Activists are more likely to live in London, although Progressive Activists outside of London also feel warmer towards people who live in the capital.

Figure 8.6. Feelings thermometer towards 'the have-nots'

There are warmer feelings towards less privileged groups

Warmth towards the 'have-nots'



Qu. How positively or negatively do you feel about each of the following, where 0 means very negative, and 100 means very positive. February 2020. Source: More in Common 2020.

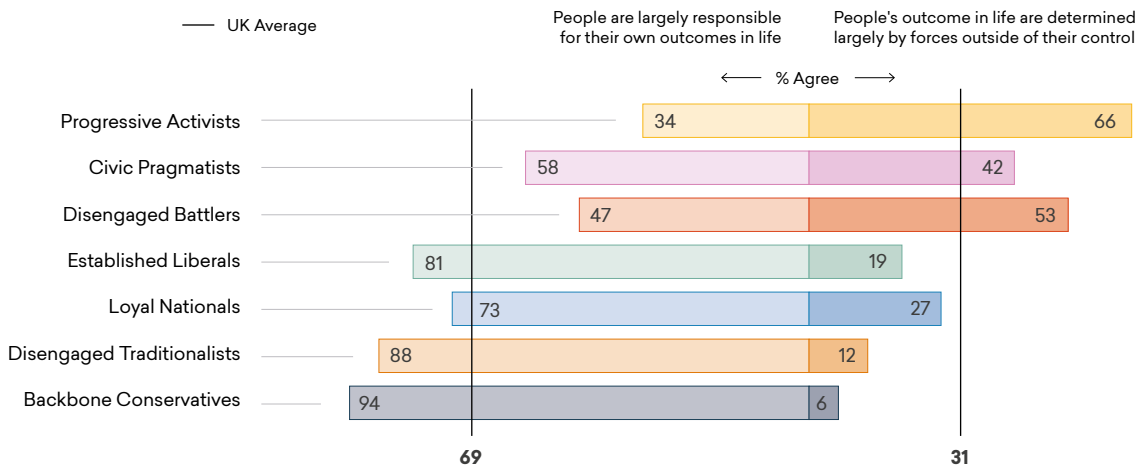
There are generally warmer feelings for the have-not groups in society.

- There are warm feelings towards the working class, with an average warmth of 62 across the population. The coldest feelings towards the working class are held by Disengaged Traditionalists, with a warmth of 56, even though there is an above-average proportion of working class people within this segment.
- Those on benefits are not as well regarded as working class people or those without degrees (an average of 42). Progressive Activists are the only segments with warm feelings for those on benefits (above 50).
- The coldest feelings are held by Disengaged Traditionalists and Backbone Conservatives. Disengaged Traditionalists value hard work and self-reliance, and are sensitive to perceptions that others within society are not following the rules. Despite having an above average proportion of people in the lowest social grade (E), Disengaged Traditionalists have the most negative perceptions of those on benefits.
- Differences in people's attitudes to have-nots become more visible by looking at the segments rather than by looking at the views of people in different social grades – for example, sentiment towards benefit recipients by social grade only varies from 39 (grade D) to 45 (grade E).
- The two Disengaged segments have generally colder feelings towards both the haves and have-nots, but their feelings towards have-nots are warmer than their feelings towards haves.

Figure 8.7. Inequality and personal responsibility

The segments view what determines people's outcomes from different perspectives

How are people's outcomes determined?



For full question texts see Appendix 2.1. February 2020.
Source: More in Common 2020.

While there is common ground on the idea that the UK has a serious problem with inequality, most people also believe that personal responsibility plays a larger role than systemic factors in shaping the lives of individuals. These issues have been researched and debated for well over a century, going back to Charles Booth's studies in London and Seebohm Rowntree's in York in the late 19th century.⁶ Given the choice between two contrasting views, 69 per cent believe that people are largely responsible for their own outcomes in life, compared to 31 per cent who say that people's outcomes in life are largely determined by forces beyond their control. Only among Progressive Activists and Disengaged Battlers do a majority believe that external forces determine a person's life outcomes more than their own actions (for more on causal attribution see Chapter 3).

Personal responsibility is especially important to the value system of Established Liberals, Disengaged Traditionalists, and Backbone Conservatives. In conversations, people in these segments are especially likely to cite experiences of knowing other people who blamed circumstances rather than taking responsibility for their own lives, something which they see as a character flaw.

'I think it depends where you sit in society. I think it is very much attitudinal. However, you look at a lot of those who rely on benefits and social housing and their argument will be that it's very much still down to class. Whereas as we all know, you get out of life what you put into it. And if you don't put anything in, you're not going to get anything out. Unfortunately, until people change their attitude about it, they're not going to change themselves.'

Being a police officer, the majority of people that we end up dealing with are those on benefits or in social housing. And it's almost an attitude of, "I want it, I'm having it" as opposed to, "I want that. I'm going to work to get it". And it's become far too easy a life choice for people to just say, "someone else can pay for me to do that. And if I'm not going to be able to afford to buy a house around here, I'll have a kid and then I'll get given a house". And that's almost a life choice at sixteen, seventeen for a lot of people nowadays. They realise that rather than putting any effort in and trying to achieve something, they look around at their peers and their parents and just go, "they've got it all. They've got a massive telly; they've got a house. Therefore, I'll just do that because it's easier".'

Paul, Backbone Conservative, 38, South East

What is striking is how much common ground there is between those who emphasise systemic inequality and those who emphasise personal responsibility. Most believe that the economy does not afford enough opportunity for those who work hard and want to get ahead. Indeed, part of the reason for public frustration with Britain's economic system is the perception that many of the people working in some of the toughest and most unattractive jobs are the most inadequately paid. Among younger people, this frustration is particularly acute in connection with the cost of housing and getting a mortgage:

'I think housing is a big concern. Something that I see shared around Facebook right now a lot is a meme that talks about how people are paying more in rent than they would in their mortgage, if only they were given the opportunity to actually be accepted for a mortgage... it's difficult to get any opportunity to prove your reliability and responsibility, because the pricing is just not fair to people who are asking for very little. Just even a one bed flat for a couple instance, is incredibly expensive for many of my friends who work in London but live at home or live in flat shares... you feel like you're paying off somebody's second or third property and it feels like the cards are stacked against us.'

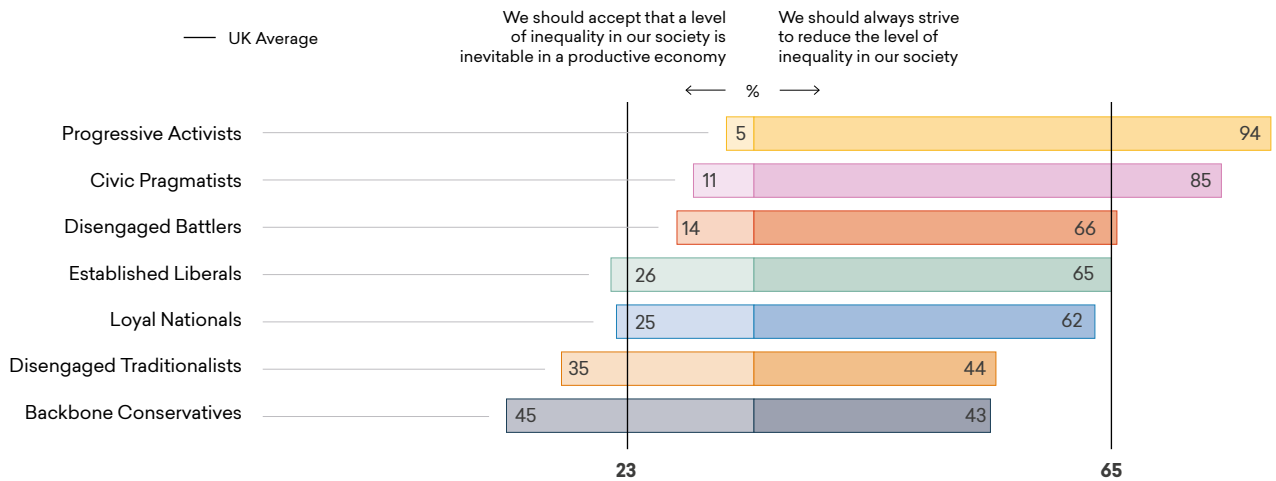
Ellen, Established Liberal, 27, London

Figure 8.8.

Preference for reducing inequality rather than accepting it

Most feel that we should always keep striving to reduce inequality

Inevitability of inequality



Qu. Which do you agree with more? February 2020.
Source: More in Common 2020.

By a margin of almost three to one, people in Britain think we should always aim to reduce inequality further, rather than accepting its inevitability. Only among Backbone Conservatives does a majority believe that we should accept inequality as inevitable and not strive to reduce it. While public debates are often played out through the lens of the opposing views of Progressive Activists and Backbone Conservatives on issues, most British people hold more nuanced views that integrate a belief in personal responsibility alongside the need to do more to reduce inequality.

Loyal Nationals and Inequality

Eighty per cent of Loyal Nationals believe there is a serious problem with inequality, compared to a population average of 73 per cent. Despite generally aligning with Backbone Conservatives and Disengaged Traditionalists on questions of national identity, immigration and social values, on inequality the Loyal Nationals align with Disengaged Battlers, Civic Pragmatists, and Progressive Activists. Personal experience may influence their strong views on inequality and fairness, as there are more people from the C2/D/E social grades in the Loyal Nationals segment than any other (52 per cent of Loyal Nationals, compared to 42 per cent of the overall population).

‘I think the huge gap between the haves and the have nots... trying to live on a budget is becoming much harder. The cost of living is getting higher. So that worries me. Especially, I suppose, how the economy recovers after things like the coronavirus. But in general, I think, how do you continue to make ends meet, when the cost of your bills is increasing but you’re not necessarily earning more money to cover that?’

Elizabeth, Loyal National, 39, Scotland

A defining characteristic of Loyal Nationals is that, perhaps more than any other segment, they see the world through the lens of in-groups and out-groups. They are especially sensitive to being excluded or left behind by groups that they perceive as powerful or influential, such as the wealthy, people in London, and cultural elites. Loyal Nationals have the highest moral foundations scores for both Care and Loyalty. They care strongly about the problem of inequality, while also feeling a sense of victimhood (that is, belonging to a group that has been badly treated). This is evident in the fact that on many issues they hold the strongest feelings of exclusion (or being an out-group) and think of issues through the lens of competing groups:

- In comparison to an average of 74 per cent, 96 per cent of Loyal Nationals believe that there is one rule for the rich and another rule for the poor in Britain.
- Compared to an average of 51 per cent, 63 per cent of Loyal Nationals believe that the areas they live in (more likely to be in the North of England and Wales) have been neglected, with almost twice as many believing this strongly.
- As noted above, Loyal Nationals hold the coldest feelings towards the wealthy as a group.
- 88 per cent of Loyal Nationals think people in London live in a bubble and are not aware of what it is like to live in the rest of the country.
- 77 per cent of Loyal Nationals say that economic growth has not benefitted most people they know (only just below Progressive Activists on 81 per cent).
- An overwhelming 79 per cent of Loyal Nationals believe that we care more about immigrants’ rights than about British citizens today (compared to 43 per cent of the population overall), an issue explored further in Chapter 9.

Although they share the concerns about inequality found among Disengaged Battlers, Civic Pragmatists, and Progressive Activists, Loyal Nationals can differ in their views about policy solutions. For example, they are more supportive of public spending cuts than average, with 61 per cent in favour versus 50 per cent of the total population. This might reflect their belief that governments prioritise groups that exclude them, such as migrants, or spend too much money on international aid.

Loyal Nationals' feelings of being neglected or excluded translates into a strong 'anti-system' sentiment and distrust of those who are seen as elites. They perceive those who are rich or in positions of leadership as lacking in loyalty towards people like them. Alongside Disengaged Battlers, they are also most distrustful of employers, perceiving them as wanting to exploit their employees. Their sense of distrust and betrayal often shapes how Loyal Nationals respond to problems.

'I think the government are doing this on purpose: choosing different environments to make better than others. Round my way, you can go down the road and there'll only be three shops open out of the fifteen. They're all boarded up. You go to Cambridge, not one shop's messy. There's no rubbish anywhere. It seems like they're picking and choosing places to make horrible, really...I go from Essex to Cambridge and it's completely different. It's like, why do they let us live in an area like this with rubbish everywhere and then let people somewhere else have nice places to live?'

Emily, Loyal National, 33, London

8.3 Finding common ground to reduce inequality

In post-Covid Britain, the objective of reducing inequality and building a fairer society has the potential to bring people together from across social and political divides. There is, for example, strong majority support (71 per cent in research cited in 2018) for increasing the minimum wage.⁷ Even policies that are framed in traditional terms of redistribution from the rich to the poor ('Government should redistribute income from the better off to those who are less well off') are supported by more than twice as many people as who oppose them (51 per cent agree, 22 per cent disagree, and 27 per cent neither agree nor disagree).

There is a significant opportunity to bring society together around initiatives that aim to address Britain's burning injustices. Many challenges lie ahead in re-building the economy for a world whose work practices have potentially been permanently changed by the Covid-19 pandemic, but those changes might also provide an opportunity to tackle longstanding issues such as regional inequalities, decarbonising the economy, and improving the security of work and income. The solutions to entrenched inequality require implementation over time periods that will extend across the terms of government and leaders. This is difficult in a policy-making environment that is stuck in short-term cycles, and where politicisation and polarisation are more often rewarded than cross-party efforts to reach compromise.

In this context, such policies have a much greater chance of gaining public support if they are developed with an understanding of the core beliefs of different population segments, both in their design and communication. For example:

- Policies intended to address inequality need to combine tackling systemic factors with genuinely creating opportunity and rewarding work and responsibility – an approach that can hold together support across all segments.
- Whereas Progressive Activists and Civic Pragmatists favour an approach to equality that prioritises equal access to universal education, more conservative segments support the idea of selective education that allows those with greater potential for academic ability to thrive and transcend humble beginnings. Policies on this issue should be driven by empirical evidence and demonstrate a commitment to tackling the problem of inequality, rather than favouring the beliefs of supporters of whichever party is currently in government.
- Measures to tackle inequality need to be developed with a sensitivity to the low levels of trust and confidence in government, particularly among the Disengaged segments, which perhaps points to the importance of place and localisation.
- Measures to address inequality perceived as providing entitlements without reciprocal obligations have much less resonance across segments, although some still attract more support than criticism. For example, 50 per cent of Britons are in favour of a Universal Basic Income with 32 per cent against, although support is stronger among progressive segments.

Policy measures based on the principle of reciprocity have potential for support across all population segments.

90% of Britons support the idea that if a government is providing support to a business or industry as part of economic support and recovery measures, it should make demands of them in return. These include paying their taxes in full and not using offshore tax havens to avoid paying tax, paying fair wages, onshoring jobs, and reducing carbon emissions.

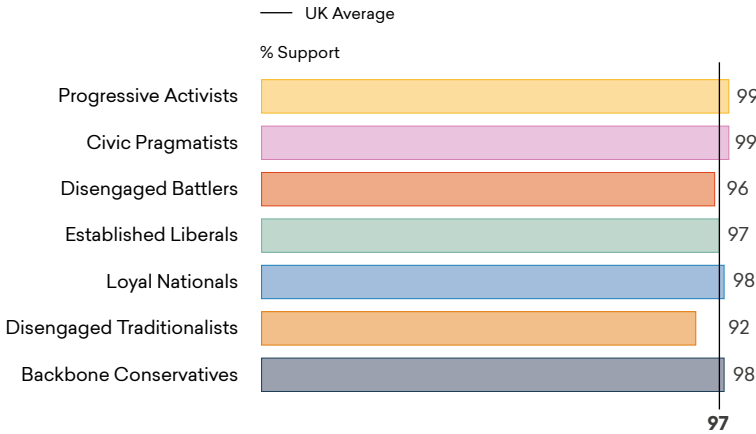
Caps on executive pay were also strongly supported across most segments (with slightly lower support from Established Liberals, the group to which many of those executives would likely belong). These policies integrate values and priorities that resonate across segments. They reflect progressive notions of fairness in making powerful interests more accountable to society. They also reflect the give-and-take value of reciprocity which, in terms of the moral foundations framework, is important to how many people think about fairness. In addition, they reflect the value of loyalty (around offshore tax havens and local manufacturing) that is especially important to Loyal Nationals.

Figure 8.9.

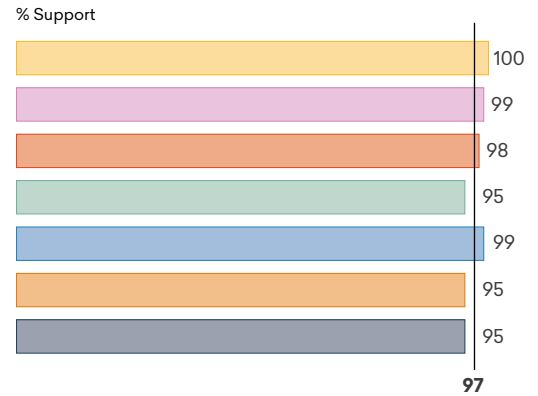
Business responsibility to society

Consensus on the reciprocal obligations of businesses

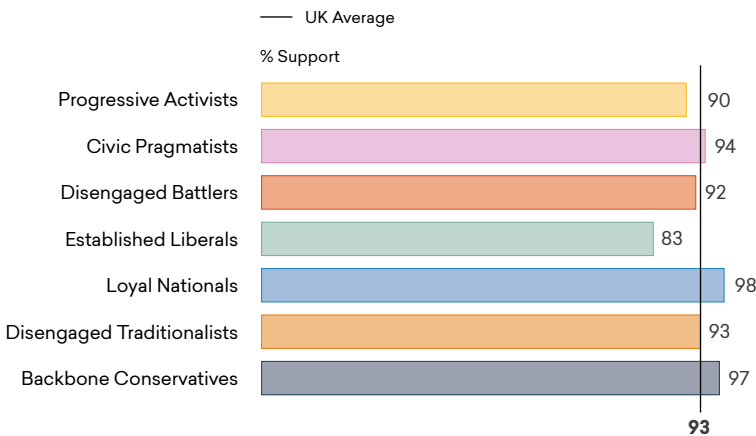
Stop using overseas tax havens and pay proper taxes in the UK



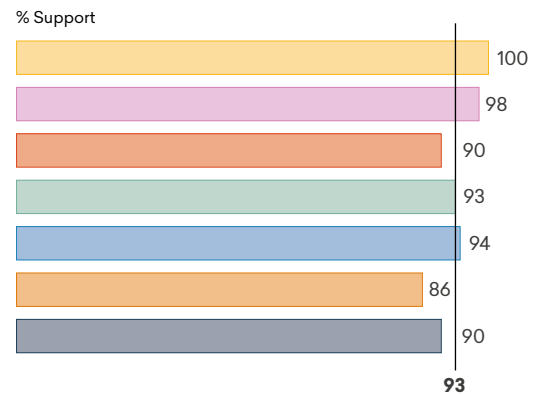
Guarantee fair wages for all their workers



Commit to shifting jobs back from overseas to the UK

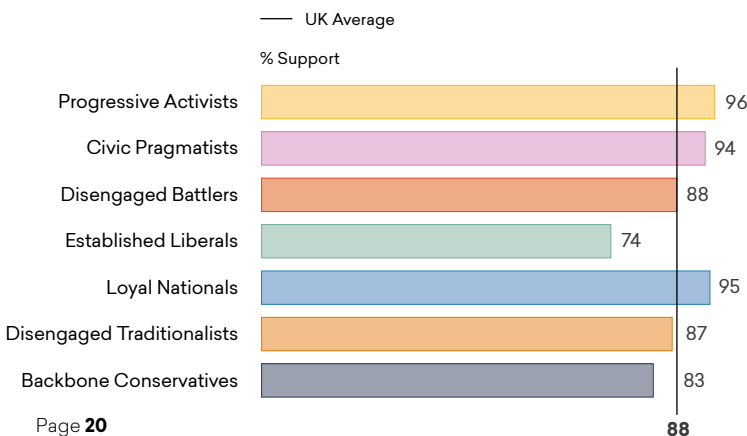


Make commitments to reduce their carbon emissions and protect the environment



For full question texts see Appendix 2.1. June 2020.
Source: More in Common 2020.

Put a ceiling on pay for senior executives



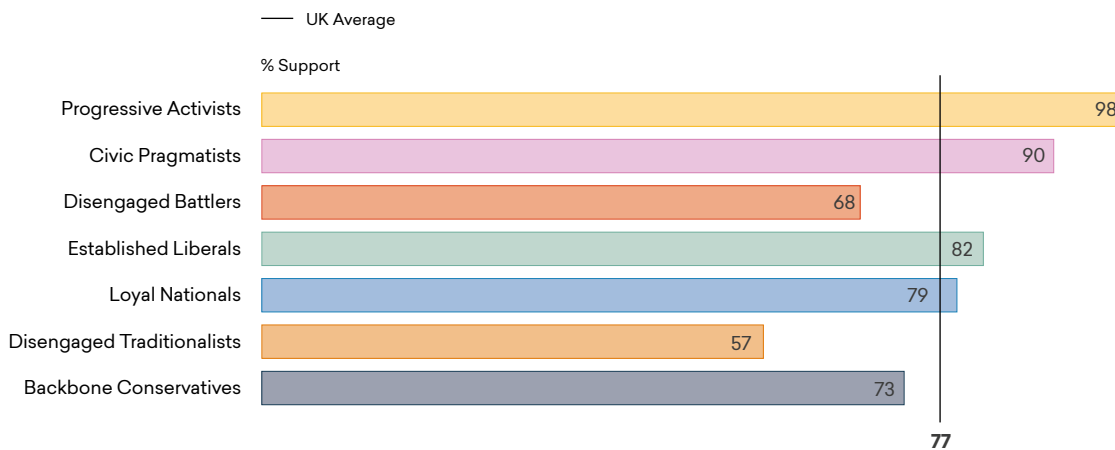
As Chapter 10 discusses in more detail, there is substantial common ground across the segments for measures that protect the environment, many of which could also play a role in creating opportunity and overcoming inequality. Support for a major green infrastructure and jobs policy, for example, extends to three in four people. Such policies will have greater support if they harness people’s sense of connection to the countryside, pride in British engineering, and job creation opportunities for younger people in local communities. All of these are higher priorities for Backbone Conservatives, Disengaged Traditionalists, Disengaged Battlers, and Loyal Nationals, who may not share the same confidence about the case for action on climate change than is found among Progressive Activists, Civic Pragmatists, and Established Liberals.

Figure 8.10.

Support for a Green New Deal

Three in four people in Britain would support developing a Green New Deal to make the economy more environmentally friendly

Developing a “Green New Deal” that makes large-scale government investments to make our economy more environmentally friendly



Qu. There is currently debate about different political measures. Would you support or oppose the following proposal: Developing a “Green New Deal” that makes large-scale government investments to make our economy more environmentally friendly. June 2020.
Source: More in Common 2020.

8.4 The role of education

‘I’m from a generation who’s graduated twice in the middle of a recession and was always raised to think that education will get you where you need to go. And then you get your education and you come out of the other side of it and you find that actually what businesses and employers are looking for now is education plus five years of experience plus three languages plus your own boat or whatever else it is, you know? And for very little return when you think about the cost of living versus that salary that you get from said job. So I feel a little bit disillusioned I suppose.’

Sally, Progressive Activist, 29, South East

This section touches on some key findings relating to education, which has historically been seen as a driver of class differences, and an instrument for economic opportunity and social mobility. Britain’s debate about educational inequities is generations old but it continues today, with elite public schools continuing to play a surprisingly dominant role in producing the nation’s future political leaders,⁸ suggesting that the vast expansion of higher education has not overcome structural advantages for those born into privilege. A different but related debate is the role that university education plays in widening cultural differences. University graduates differ from non-graduates in being more open to change, more liberal, and less patriotic in their values. They are also less centred on place, patriotism and traditional values, and take less pride in physical work.

Of all demographic factors, education levels correlate with the population segments perhaps more than any other:

- Disengaged Battlers are the only segment that is evenly spread across different education levels.
- 56 per cent of Progressive Activists are tertiary graduates, almost double the population average of 29 per cent (almost identical to the Progressive Activist segment that More in Common has identified in the US, of whom 59 per cent are graduates) – a significant finding, since whether it is a matter of correlation or causation, tertiary education levels map strongly to certain aspects of core beliefs.
- Non-graduates are substantially over-represented among Loyal Nationals and Disengaged Traditionalists, with around twice as many non-graduates belonging to those segments.
- Established Liberals and Civic Pragmatists are significantly above the population average in their proportion of graduates, while Backbone Conservatives are significantly below.

Analysing public attitudes through the lens of people’s education levels finds strong correlations between education and views on many topics, although there are larger differences among the seven segments than there are between graduates and non-graduates, or between lower and higher education profiles. One of the surprising findings from More in Common’s work on these issues

in the United States was that higher levels of education are associated with increased misperceptions around the views of other Americans.⁹ This is an issue that More in Common may also explore in the UK in a future study, but it was not within the confines of this initial project.

Education plays important but complex roles in both reflecting and shaping the fault lines in British society. Public attitudes reflect these nuances. A clear majority of 61 per cent of Britons believe that the education system reinforces and worsens inequality in the country. Progressive Activists believe this very strongly, but it is only among the Backbone Conservatives that a majority does not believe that the education system as a whole worsens inequality (with Established Liberals being relatively equally split).

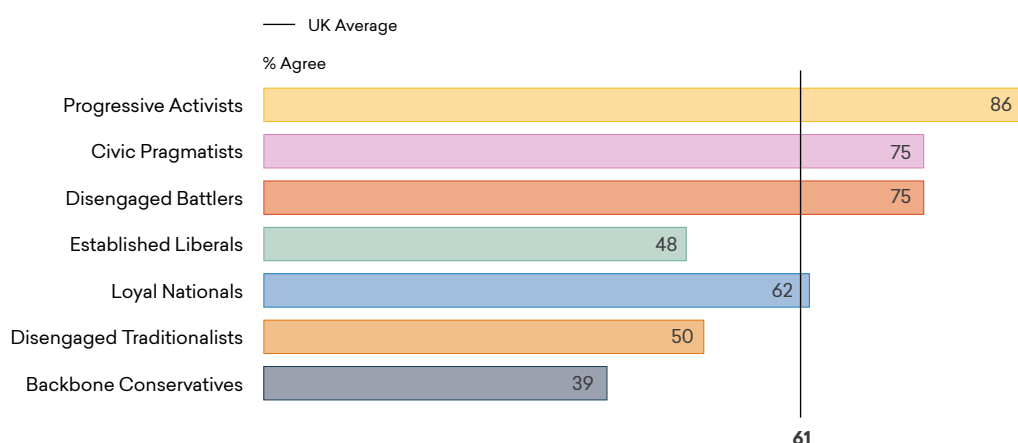
At the same time, 65 per cent say that the education system works for people like them, reflecting the fact that many have positive personal experiences within the system (with almost the same levels of satisfaction whether or not someone is a graduate). In addition, a clear majority believes that more grammar schools should be created, rather than believing that selective education makes the system more unfair. On this issue, public opinion is closer to the Backbone Conservatives than the Progressive Activists, of whom just 29 per cent support grammar schools, compared to 59 per cent of the public overall, perhaps reflecting a perception that grammar schools give better opportunities to lower income students who work hard. Even though education plays a role in society's divisions, public attitudes towards education are nuanced and do not align consistently with either strong progressive or strong conservative views.

Figure 8.11.

Inequality and the education system

Many believe the system is adding to inequality

The education system in this country makes our society less equal



Qu. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The education system in this country makes our society less equal. February 2020.
Source: More in Common 2020.

8.5 Key takeaways

An overwhelming majority of British people think that the economic system is rigged to favour the rich and powerful, and that ordinary working people do not get a fair share of the nation's wealth. But while most of us agree that Britain has a serious problem with inequality, this does not mean that we look at the world through a traditional lens of social class. More commonly, people see a nation unfairly divided into haves and have-nots, and a system that is not fairly rewarding many of the hardest working people who are doing the most essential jobs.

Social class today is less clearly defined than in the past, and expresses itself in a less explicit way than in previous generations. Individuals may have experienced financial struggle in their lives, but interpret it in different ways – some (such as Disengaged Traditionalists) reflect on inequality through the lens of the importance of hard work and self-reliance. Others (such as Disengaged Battlers) are more likely to reflect on the wider issues of systemic injustice. To understand how people think about inequality (and other issues), core beliefs may be more important than someone's social grade or other demographic characteristic

The task of addressing these injustices has the potential to bring people from across the different segments of British society together. Measures that do not only focus on redistribution but also reward hard work can speak to the values of different parts of the population. This chapter has shown that there is a surprisingly large amount of common ground between different parts of society on some of the measures that might be taken to overcome inequality.

Just as there is an opportunity to bring people together around efforts to tackle inequality, there are dangers if widely-held frustrations are not addressed. If progress is not achieved on Britain's burning injustices, confidence in the system could decline further and disruptive forces could grow even stronger, creating a more profoundly divided society and posing a serious threat to democratic norms in the decade ahead. Focused and sustained efforts to tackle inequality, transcending the limitations of short-term and polarising dynamics of party politics, are urgently needed to create a fairer society, build resilience against division, and restore faith in Britain's democracy.

Endnotes

- 1 For example, see the BBC Labs' Great British Class Survey, which attracted participation from over 161,000 people in Britain and identified seven, rather than three, separate social classes. Mike Savage and others, 'A New Model of Social Class? Findings from the BBC's Great British Class Survey Experiment', *Sociology*, 47.2 (2013), 219–50 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038513481128>>.
- 2 Claire Ainsley, *The New Working Class* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2018).
- 3 In this report's nationally representative population study, 39 per cent of people self-identified as middle class and 50 per cent as working class. By comparison, the British Social Attitudes in 2016 estimated 40 per cent middle class and 60 per cent working class: John Curtice, Miranda Phillips, and Liz Clery, *British Social Attitudes 33* (NatCen, 2016) <<https://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/latest-report/british-social-attitudes-33/introduction.aspx>>.
- 4 Using a more sophisticated categorisation of class, the British Election Study 2019 found a 21 per cent lead for Conservatives among working class voters, compared to the 15 per cent lead found in this study: Geoffrey Evans and Jonathan Mellon, 'The Re-Shaping Of Class Voting - The British Election Study', 2020 <<https://www.britishelectionstudy.com/bes-findings/the-re-shaping-of-class-voting-in-the-2019-election-by-geoffrey-evans-and-jonathan-mellon/#.X3dZbpNKjDJ>> [accessed 2 October 2020].
- 5 Sophia Gaston, *Outrage, Offence and Common Sense: Public Opinion on Political Correctness in the United Kingdom* (Opinium, 2019) <<https://www.opinium.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Outrage-Offence-and-Common-Sense-Public-Opinion-on-Political-Correctness-in-the-United-Kingdom.pdf>>.
- 6 Ainsley, *The New Working Class*.
- 7 Daniel Phillips and others.
- 8 The Sutton Trust's analysis of the composition of Prime Minister Boris Johnson's first cabinet announced in July 2019 found that 64 per cent were privately educated, nine times as many as the general population proportion of 7 per cent: Rebecca Montacute, 'Socio-Economic Diversity and the Educational Background of Boris Johnson's Cabinet', *British Politics and Policy at LSE*, 2019 <<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/the-educational-background-of-boris-johnsons-cabinet/>> [accessed 2 October 2020]; Rebecca Montacute and Ruby Nightingale, *Sutton Trust Cabinet Analysis* (Sutton Trust, 2019) <<https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/sutton-trust-cabinet-analysis-2019/>>.
- 9 *The Perception Gap: How False Impressions Are Pulling Americans Apart*, 2019 <www.perceptiongap.us>.

