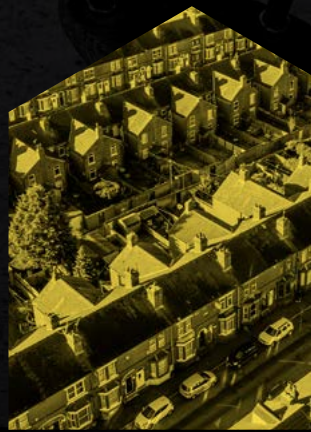


# Holding on to HOPE: Lessons from

## Community

## Britain



**HATE**  
**HOPE**  
**HATE**



**co-operative  
party**

**Polling Report**

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Co-written and Co-published by the  
Co-operative Party and HOPE not hate.

Promoted by Joe Fortune on behalf of  
the Co-operative Party, both at Unit 13,  
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Methodology:

The figures and statistics in this report  
come from two polls conducted by Focaldata  
on behalf of HOPE not hate: 1. January 2025:  
30 November 2024 – 8 January 2025, n=22,502  
2. March 2025: 21 – 24 March 2025, n=3264.

Focaldata is a member of the British  
Polling Council and the Market Research  
Society. Participants are recruited on  
Focaldata's online platform, which plugs  
into a global network of panels and uses  
machine learning to automatically detect  
and screen out disengaged and inconsistent  
respondents.

This report is co-published by the Co-operative Party and HOPE not hate, as a collaboration between our two key campaigns: Community Britain and Hold onto HOPE. What both our organisations have in common is a clear focus on the power and potential of communities, and a belief that harnessing community power is vital for progressive politics, particularly at this political moment.

We asked people about their perceptions of both national politics and their own community. What emerged were two clear pictures, one bleak and one hopeful. On one hand, too many people feel let down by politics. They see decisions made far away, feeling ignored, unheard and increasingly disconnected by the system that should be there to represent them. And yet, amid this frustration, something powerful remains – a deep sense of pride in place and a connection with community, and a desire for the power to improve local places. This is where politicians seeking to reconnect with people should start.

The two stories told by this report are neatly summed up by a week in July last year. Far-right riots sweeping the country last July represented a deep disillusionment and ultimate radicalisation. But represented too was a strong community response, neighbours coming together to clean the streets, repaint shops and protect one another. Politics today has a choice between those two pictures – a path of division and extremity, or a path of community power, hope and solidarity.

In almost exactly one year's time, most voters across the country will go again to the polls, for local elections in many places and for devolved parliament elections in both Scotland and Wales. Much has been written already about the significant threat from the populist radical right, but far less has been offered in the way of solutions. This report makes the case for a renewed political focus on communities as a route to reconnection with voters from the ground up.

May 2025



**Joe Fortune**  
General Secretary  
the Co-operative Party



**Nick Lowles**  
Chief Executive Officer  
HOPE not hate

It has long been the case that, when asked, people have more positive feelings about their immediate local community than they do the country as a whole. This isn't surprising – so much of our individual identity is shaped by the place we're from, the football team we still support, the jobs our families did.

Despite this strong association with the local, political parties of all shades have generally focused on the national. Party manifestos are, for the most part, made up of national policies, political communications are dominated by national media and politicians tend to seek national solutions to national problems. In reality, many of the most effective solutions happen at a micro-local level. The Co-operative Party's recent Stories from Community Britain project highlights stories of local pubs with targeted anti-loneliness projects, local churches and mosques who work together to tackle homelessness, local energy projects harnessing clean energy for the good of the community. These aren't just nice stories, they are incredibly effective interventions with genuine and ongoing results.

Why is it that politics seems yet to grasp the power of these local solutions? Why doesn't our political system harness not only the initiatives themselves, but the instincts of the people involved with them? Why, if people feel more connected to the local, does politics not seek to start there and make tangible improvements to people's lives at that local level?

In this research, we sought to explore these questions and come to some conclusions about how politics might reconnect with voters and rebuild broken political trust. As part of the research, we also consider both financial situation and voting intention. HOPE not hate's Fear and HOPE work shows that there is a strong correlation between economic pessimism and social pessimism: those who report feeling financially desperate or worried about their financial future also have higher levels of political distrust, and this is explored in this report. Voting intention matters in understanding what issues motivate people of different political persuasions, and what policy or political approaches might be effective in winning back the trust of these different groups.

The findings can be divided into two clear categories: national decline and community pride, a negative picture and more positive, hopeful one.

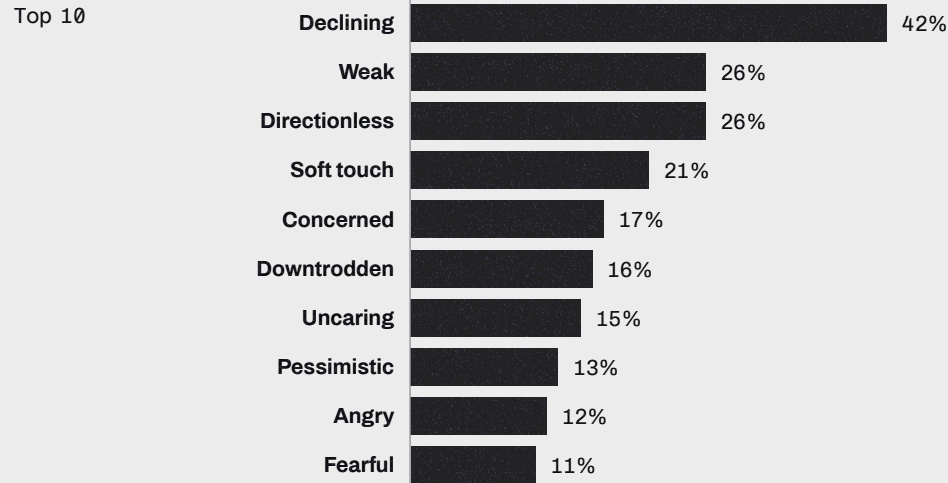


# National Decline

When asked to describe the country today, the most common word people choose is “declining”. This speaks to more than an economic diagnosis, but an emotional verdict felt about the version of the country people see and interact with daily. It speaks to more than a decade of underinvestment; local services stretched to breaking point, pubs, leisure centres and youth clubs that no longer exist and a growing sense that nothing in the country really works in the way it should.

### What words do you most associate with Britain today?

January 2025, n=22502



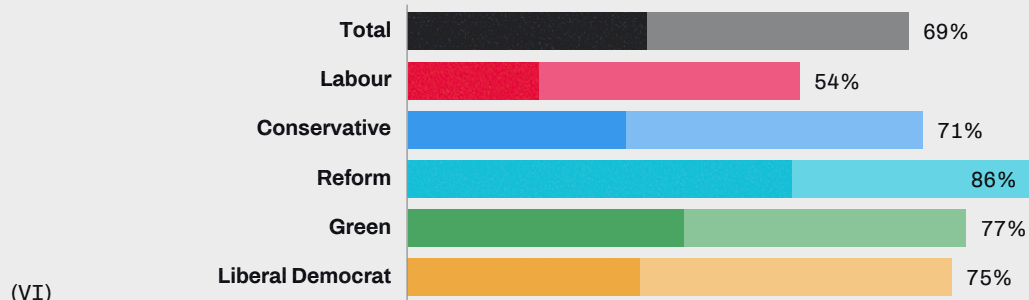
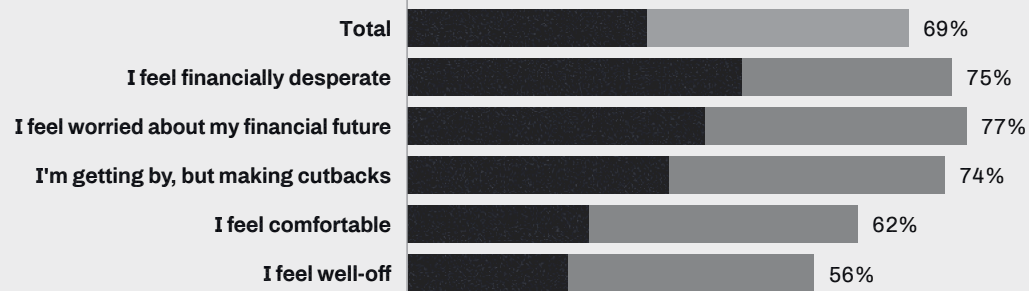
The sense of decline isn't just material, it's also about the connection people feel to the political system. Nearly 70% of people feel ignored by politicians, and for those in the greatest financial need – those worried about how they'll afford the next bill – the figure increases. The less secure people feel in their lives, the less they feel heard by those in power. The figure soars higher again for those currently intending to vote for Reform UK, reaching a huge 86%, but remains above a majority across all voting intentions.

When it comes to explaining Britain's decline, voting intention reveals a real divide in reasoning that speaks to fundamental differences in approach. 80% of Reform UK voters blame Britain's decline on immigration and 68% on the idea that the Government is appeasing minorities. Reform UK and Conservative voters also selected options which blame Britain's decline on individual characteristics, such as work ethic and respect towards authority. Meanwhile, characteristically left-wing voters blame Brexit and climate change. The real picture of national decline is complex and cannot be captured by a single question in a poll, but it also cannot be explained away by scapegoating and catastrophising.

### Politicians don't listen to people like me

March 2025, n=3264

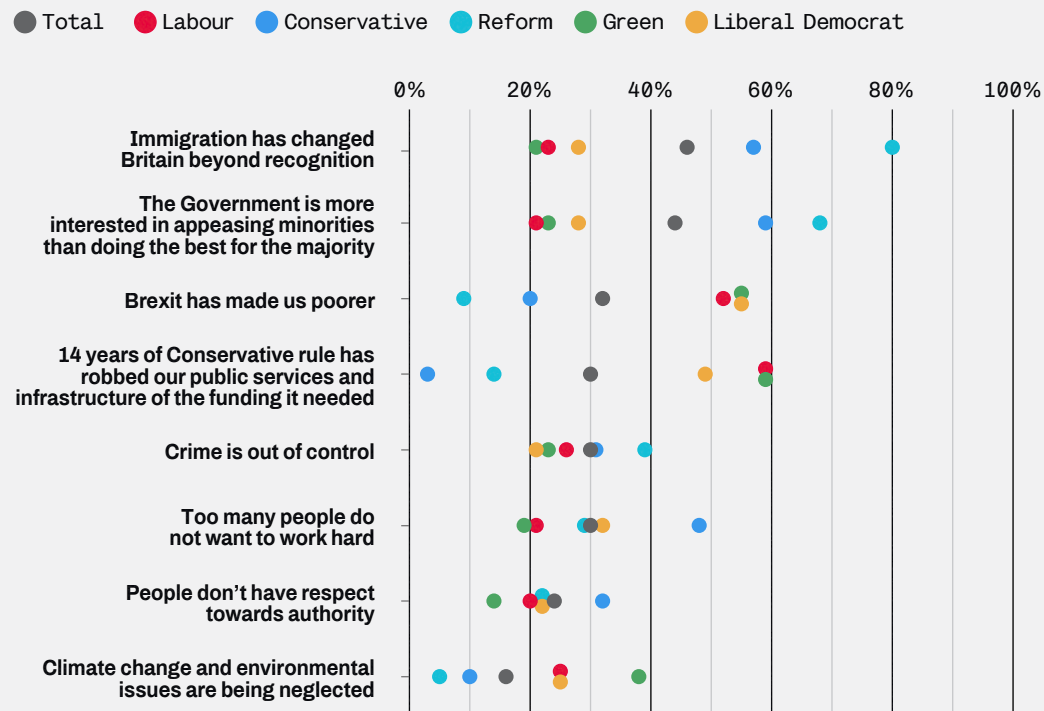
● Strongly agree ● Agree



(VI)

## Why is Britain declining?

January 2025, n=9516

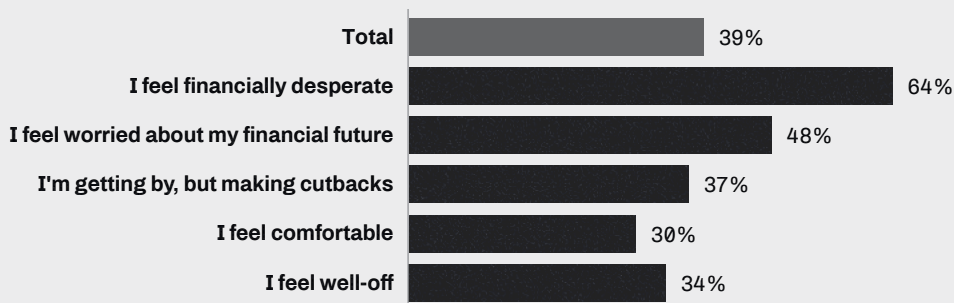


We identified feelings of decline associated with the local as well as the national. Four in ten people say their neighbourhood has declined, with the proportion again significantly increasing for those in financial difficulty. It's not just about physical decline, it's social infrastructure too. Four in ten also say the number of community organisations in their area has declined. These groups, often small, voluntary and deeply connected, are the fabric keeping communities together and their absence is deeply felt. When they disappear, so too do the networks of trust, support and shared identity that are vital for community resilience. The backdrop of austerity and cuts to both local Government and to the voluntary sector has had a clear impact on communities, reflected here.

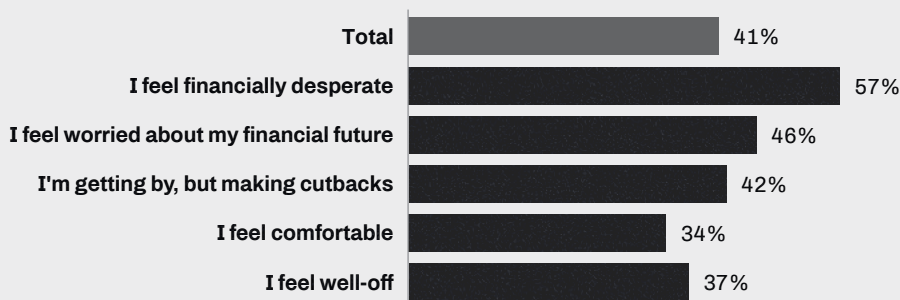
## Local decline

March 2025, n=3264

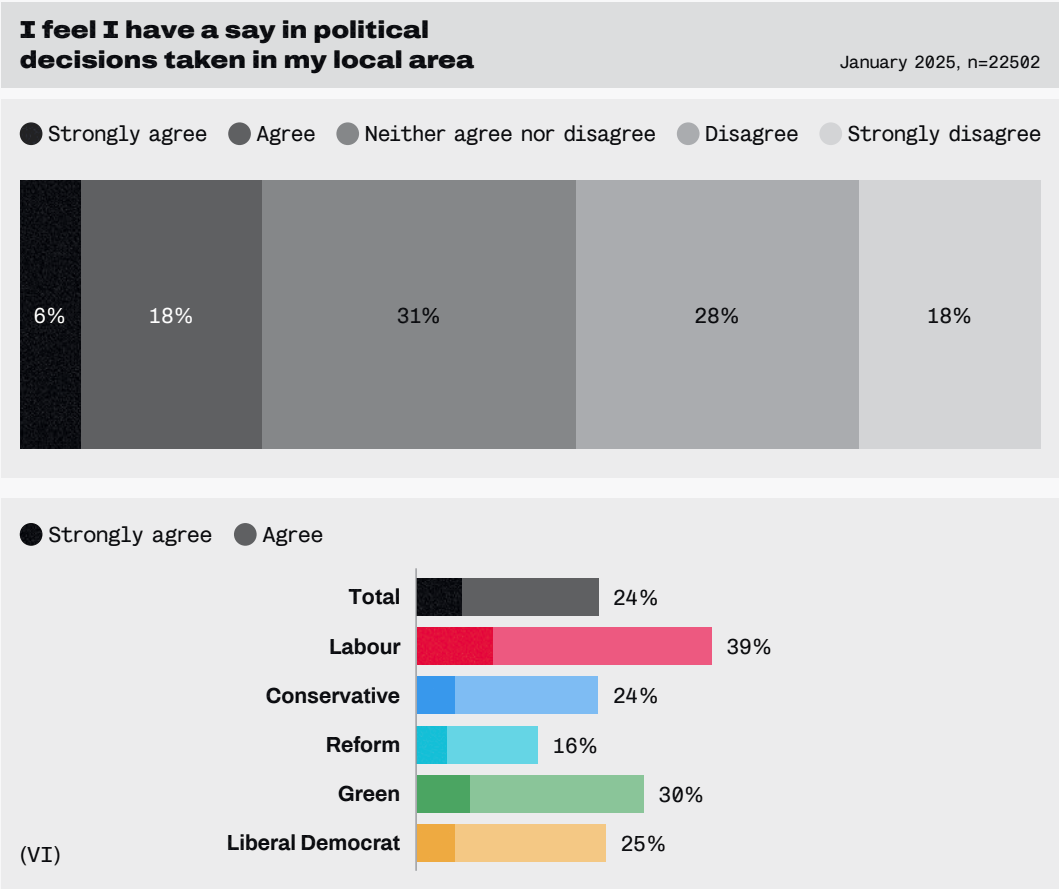
### My neighbourhood in which I live has declined in recent years



### The number of community and voluntary organisations have declined over the last 10 years in my local area



For many, politics feels distant and disconnected, and the issue doesn't begin and end with national politics. People feel cut off from political power at every level - only one in four feel they have a say in local decision-making, and almost half actively disagree with this statement. Reform voters far less likely to feel they have a say in decisions, speaking to the disillusionment with traditional politics felt by these voters.



The combination of low engagement with local elections with a low sense of control over local decision-making suggests people do not necessarily see local democracy as a route to power. This may be about a general lack of understanding about local Government and its role, but may also speak to a desire for alternative, more direct forms of power and decision-making for local people over local issues.



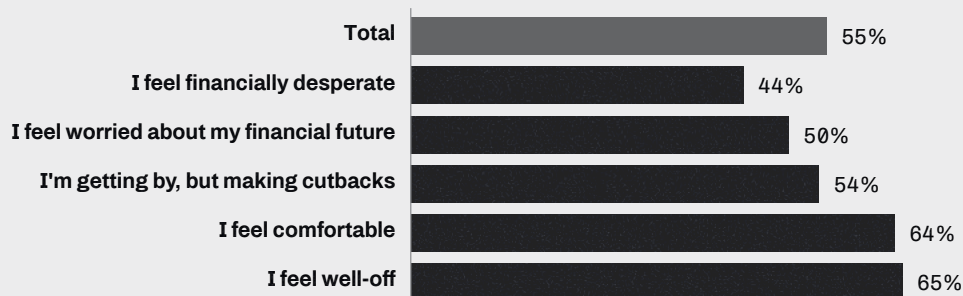
# Community Power

Despite perceptions of decline at both a local and national level, community spirit persists. Perceptions of community have remained stable over time, with a clear majority of the public saying they, along with their neighbours, are proud of where they live. With the exception of those in the most significant financial difficulty, the majority remains across financial situations. Similarly, a majority of the public agrees that there are ways to be involved in the local community, and again these figures remain high across financial situations and voting intentions.

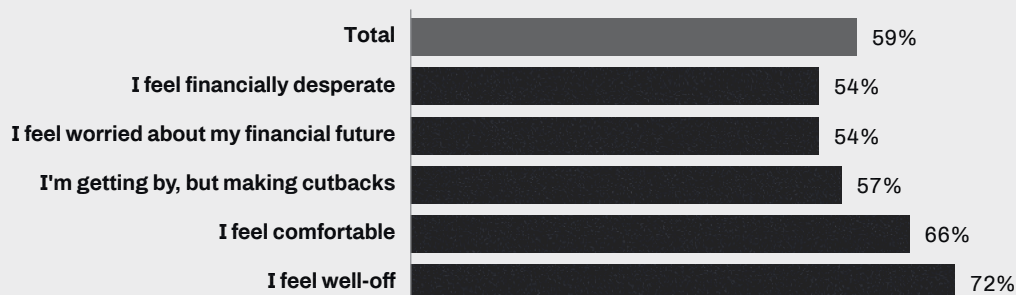
### Local pride and opportunities

January 2025, n=22502

#### Most people where I live are proud of their area

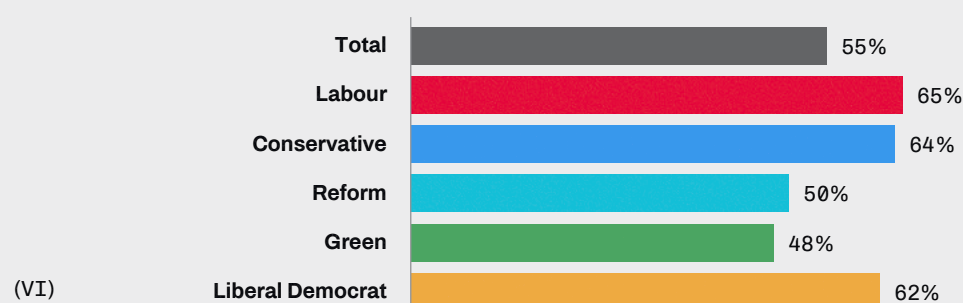


#### There are ways to get involved and socialise with my local community

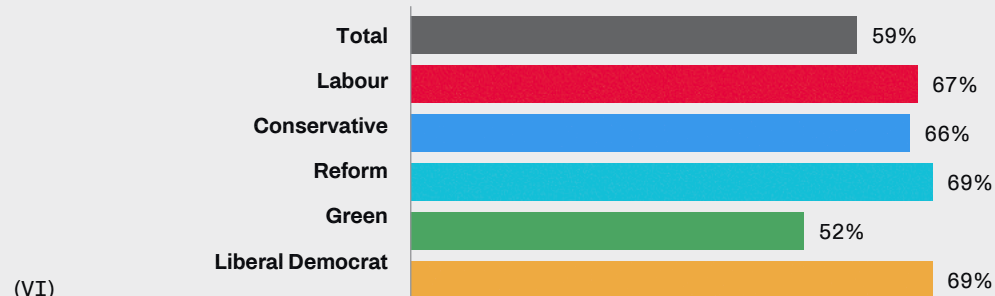


These positive associations with community speak to more than warm feelings - this sense of pride really matters, and should be the foundation for a rebuilding of trust. People who are proud of and invested in their community are more likely to engage in local activities, make use of existing shared spaces and take responsibility for the general wellbeing of their local area.

#### Most people where I live are proud of their area



#### There are ways to get involved and socialise with my local community

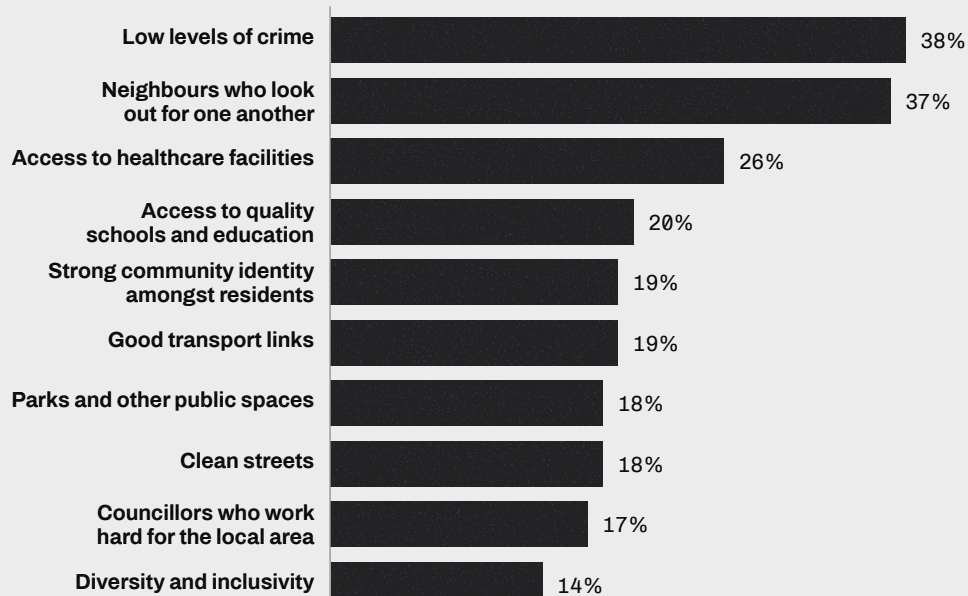


Asked what makes a good community, people know what they want. Access to high-quality local services ranks highly: reliable public transport, good local schools, accessible healthcare and safe streets all form the backbone of what is seen as a functioning neighbourhood. But people also place a strong emphasis on the social fabric that binds a community together. They value a sense of belonging and shared identity, the feeling that a place isn't just somewhere to live but something you are part of. That means having neighbours who look out for each other, public spaces where people can gather and connect, and local councillors who are visible, active and genuinely committed to the people they represent – all features which rank highly. This combination of practical infrastructure and social connection is what gives communities their resilience. It fosters trust, encourages participation, and creates the conditions where people feel both safe and proud of where they live.

### What are the most important elements of a good community?

January 2025, n=22502

Top 10

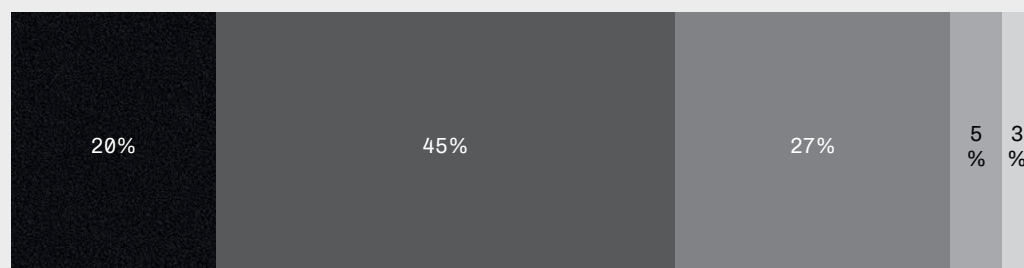


Despite low trust with the political system as a vehicle for change, there is a strong desire for more local power. 65% of people back more power for local Government and local people to allow locals to better influence how money is spent locally. People want to know that decisions are being made by those who know the community best - their neighbours, local leaders, and organisations that are embedded in the fabric of their daily lives.

### Local Government should be given more power and resources from central Government so local people can decide how best to prioritise public spending

March 2025, n=3264

● Strongly agree ● Agree ● Neither agree nor disagree ● Disagree ● Strongly disagree



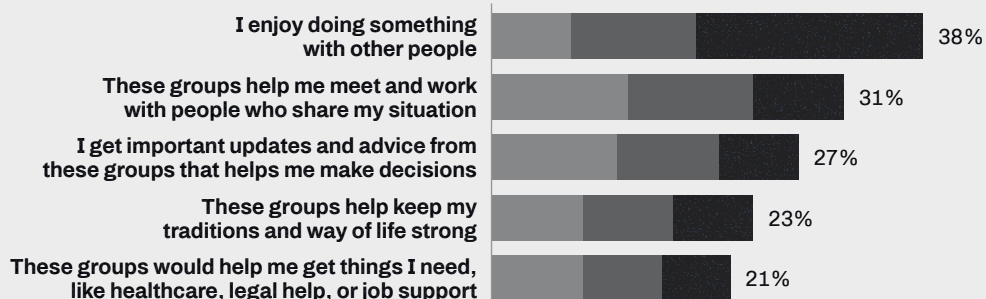
When asked the main reason for being involved in community groups, by far the top-ranked reason is connecting with others. This reflects a deep but often overlooked human need for belonging, recognition, and shared purpose. In an age where loneliness and radicalisation are rising and trust in institutions is falling, this desire for connection is politically significant. Community groups offer more than services or activities, they provide a shared space where relationships are built across divides, and where a sense of mutual responsibility can grow.

**What are the three main reasons you have for being involved in community groups?**

March 2025, n=2055

Top 5

● Ranked 1st ● Ranked 2nd ● Ranked 3rd





# The Path Ahead



Perhaps the most important overarching finding in this report is that, while people feel disconnected from national politics, it's clear they remain deeply connected to their communities. At the national level, trust in politics is low, and for many the system feels distant, unresponsive and uninterested in their lives. But underneath this frustration lies something more hopeful, a persistent belief in the places people call home. It is quite clearly at the local level that pride and connection still exist.

There is no doubt that rebuilding trust in politics must be a priority for Government - a plan for change can only be impactful if people believe that change via politics is possible. But if political trust is to be rebuilt, it must happen from the ground up. There is also a clear desire for more power, both for local Government and for local decision-making more generally. Communities are not passive recipients of policy, they are active networks of people with the knowledge, motivation, and lived experience to shape the future of their places. What they need is the tools, resources and decision-making power to do so.

Despite all this, politics too often still focuses on national solutions. In the aftermath of a difficult set of local and mayoral elections for Labour, there have been and will continue to be loud voices calling for a shift to the right on issues like immigration, an echoing of Reform UK's messaging. Immigration is undoubtedly a salient issue, but shifting to the right on immigration ignores the underlying reasons why people hold those concerns: fears about economic security and strained public services, hopes for safe and cohesive communities and fairness in the welfare system.

Aligning with Reform on immigration would fail to recognise the fundamental finding of this report: what people crave is tangible progress in their community and further power at a local level to make it happen, tapping into what already inspires feelings of pride.

HOPE not hate's previous research finds that there is no one type of Reform voter - those intending to vote for Reform do so for a variety of reasons, one of which is a distrust with mainstream politics. Simply making the same arguments as Reform won't change the weather, but a radical resetting of politics so that it is hyper-focused on communities might, because it sends a clear signal to voters that Labour wants to do politics differently. It offers people who have given up on politics as a whole a new type of politics to try.

Evidence from progressive campaigns around the world, including the 2010 campaign, led by HOPE not hate and others, to beat the BNP in Barking and Dagenham, shows that the best way to push back against far right narratives is to deliver for people at a local level. People care about what they see outside their front door, in the immediate world around them, and ensuring that politics - both the local and the national - is set up to deliver at that local level is imperative in beating the political forces which seek to divide communities.

The Labour Government has already begun to pursue both a devolution and communities agenda and has made some important steps forward. Taking strides forward in both community-owned energy and community-owned assets, as well as a Plan for Neighbourhoods delivering funding to communities are all good examples. But now is the time to go much further, not just in policy terms but also in shifting political attention towards communities and hyper-local delivery, and in putting more political power into community hands. Communities should no longer just be a soft issue or an optional extra, but as a political imperative, vital to the future health of our democracy.

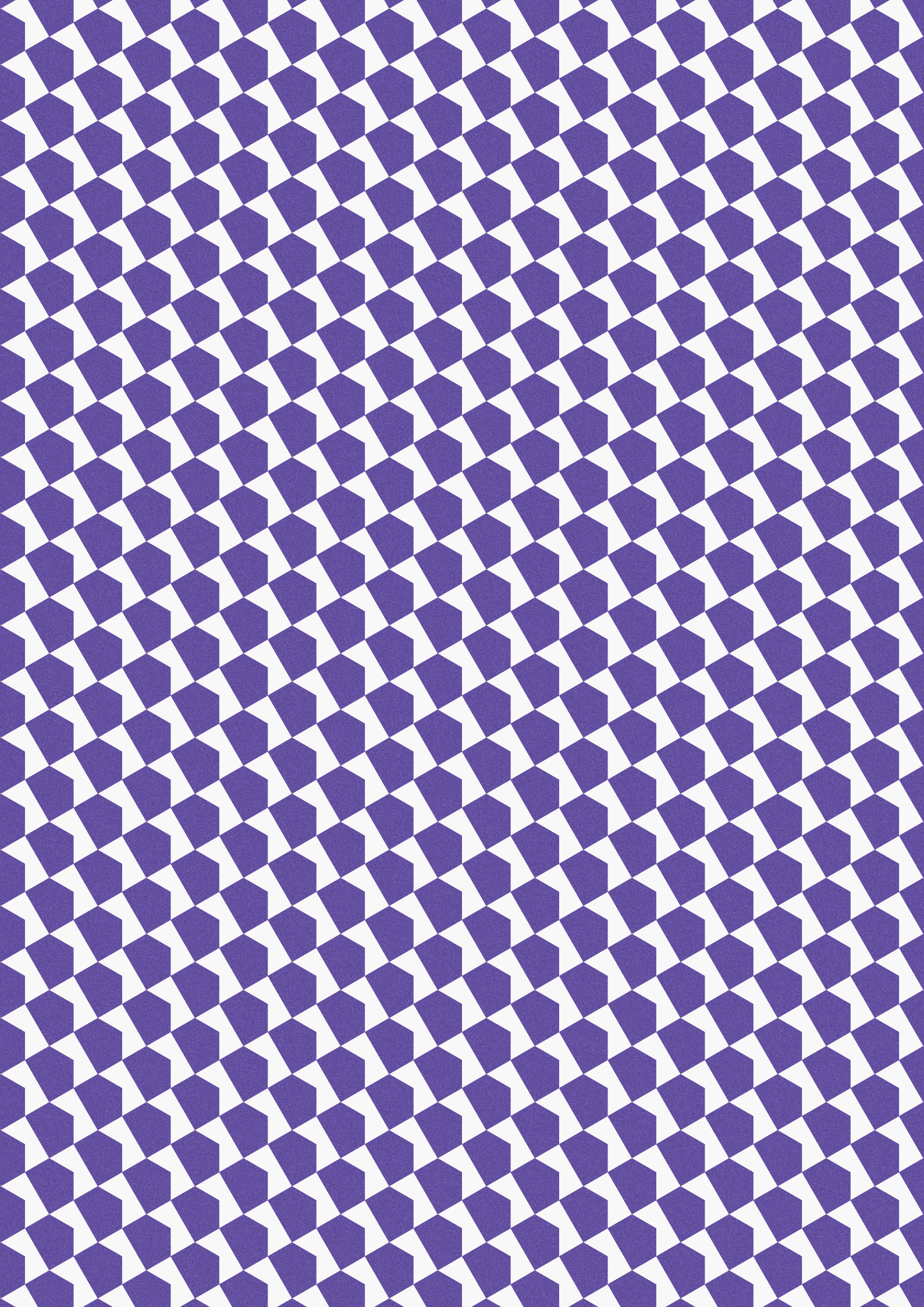
This begins with a renewed focus on community-level policy-making. This report has identified the things that matter to people in their community – targeted programmes in each of those areas would be a good place to start in showing people that national politics recognises what makes an impact locally. To further strengthen the communities policy offer, Government could:

- **Publish a comprehensive communities strategy** with input from across Government, and ensure effective implementation of the strategy at a local level.
- **Invest in communities**, continuing the positive steps set out in the Government's recent £1.5bn Plan for Neighbourhoods, which allows groups of local people to themselves direct local funding.
- **Continue to devolve real power to communities**, including implementing the Community Right to Buy and taking further steps to support communities wishing to save local assets through community ownership.
- **Develop clear definitions** of social connectedness and community cohesion with metrics for measuring cohesion at local and national levels to provide a framework for progress.
- **Encourage community ownership of key social infrastructure** like community centres, libraries, parks and pubs, to help put an end to the decade-long trend which has seen these spaces disappear from too many communities.
- **Actively support the development of participatory models** like co-operatives and community enterprises, which give local people a route to genuine decision-making, power and control.
- **Include the role of communities in Government's national resilience plans**, including the ongoing Cabinet Office review, reflecting the proven role of communities in responding to crises from pandemics to riots.
- **Focus on social as well as physical infrastructure**, reflecting the findings in this report around the aspects of community valued by people, which include access to shared spaces and community identity.

As well as a comprehensive policy programme, there must also be a fundamental shift in the approach our political system takes to communities. For too long, engagement with communities has either come only at a time of crisis, or when it is politically convenient. There has not been a sustained, credible approach to communities, community solutions or the lessons they may offer for national politics. This is something that should change and be reflected in everything from campaigning strategies to political communications.

It should be common sense that, if people feel a stronger connection with the local than the national, politics should aim to meet them there. The opportunity today is clear - people are still proud of where they live, they want to participate, they know what they need and want. What's missing is a political system that is equipped to take them seriously and recognise their political value.







## About Community Britain

Community Britain is a campaign that highlights the role communities are already playing in solving our nation's most pressing challenges and reclaims the role of communities as a serious political and economic force – not just a feel-good afterthought.

As *Stories from Community Britain* highlights, many communities are already pioneering solutions to important issues like climate change, economic stagnation and social cohesion. Taken together, they provide a blueprint of what our country could look like if every community had the power, ownership, and resources to shape the places they live – providing a direct alternative to division, disillusionment, and decline.

Community Britain asks government at every level not to step back, but to step forward. We're calling for policies that shift power and resources back to communities, ensuring they have the tools to take action, the ownership to drive change, and the backing of government to make their ambitions a reality.

## About the Co-operative Party

The Co-operative Party is the political voice of the co-operative movement. We believe businesses and organisations should be owned and democratically controlled by their members – workers, customers, and communities – rather than distant shareholders.

Whether that's workers owning their workplace, customers owning their local shop, or fans owning their football club, we want to create an economy and society where power and wealth are shared, and communities have a real stake in their future.

Since 1927, we've worked in partnership with the Labour Party to stand joint Labour & Co-operative candidates. There are over 40 Labour & Co-operative MPs and 1500 Labour & Co-operative elected representatives at every level of government, from MSs and MSPs to Mayors, Assembly Members and Councillors.

## About HOPE not hate

HOPE not hate is the UK's leading anti-fascist organisation. We build hope and counter the politics of hate through research, campaigning, and community engagement. We focus on the organised far right, the communities who are susceptible to them, and the issues and policies which give rise to them.