

Attitudes to the challenges facing Britain

Public research for Engage Britain

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Ipsos MORI



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Executive summary

- Ipsos MORI was commissioned by Engage Britain to conduct a series of workshops and discussion groups with the general public. The purpose was to explore public understanding of the challenges facing Britain today and learn more about how these challenges are discussed.
- Across the groups there was a strong feeling of pessimism, with participants reflecting on a large number of challenges facing the country, including a sense of division. Participants struggled to articulate what was going well in Britain, explaining that as a country we are going in the wrong direction.
- Although Brexit was seen as important, there was little appetite to discuss it. Instead participants wanted to discuss wider themes such as the health service, education and policing. There was broad consensus that the challenges facing these public services were the most important for the country.
- Participants wanted to see changes to the decision making process in Britain, arguing for greater public involvement to find solutions. They discussed three challenges in more depth, identified in previous Engage Britain research: health and care, poverty and struggling families, and immigration.

Health and care

There was a clear and shared understanding of what health means, but less clarity around the definition of care. This was often associated with caring for each other and support in a community rather than specific public services. The future of health and care was identified spontaneously as a key challenge for Britain today. However, there was less agreement on how it could be tackled, with discussions covering themes beyond funding such as the structure of services, sharing good practice and local decision making.

Poverty and struggling families

Participants recognised that many people are struggling to afford the basics in Britain today. This was recognised as a challenge, with many participants feeling that the use of foodbanks and homelessness has risen in recent years. Discussions explored different language including the meaning of the term 'poverty'. Participants preferred the phrase 'struggling to afford the basics', as they felt people would feel more comfortable using it to describe themselves.

Immigration

Immigration was the most divisive of the three themes. This was something participants anticipated and they were cautious about discussing the topic. There was disagreement about what Britain's priorities should be for a future immigration system. However, there was widespread (although not uniform) support for Britain having greater control over immigration. Control was often used as a way of talking about other factors such as skilled immigration and the fair treatment of refugees.

Methodology

Introduction

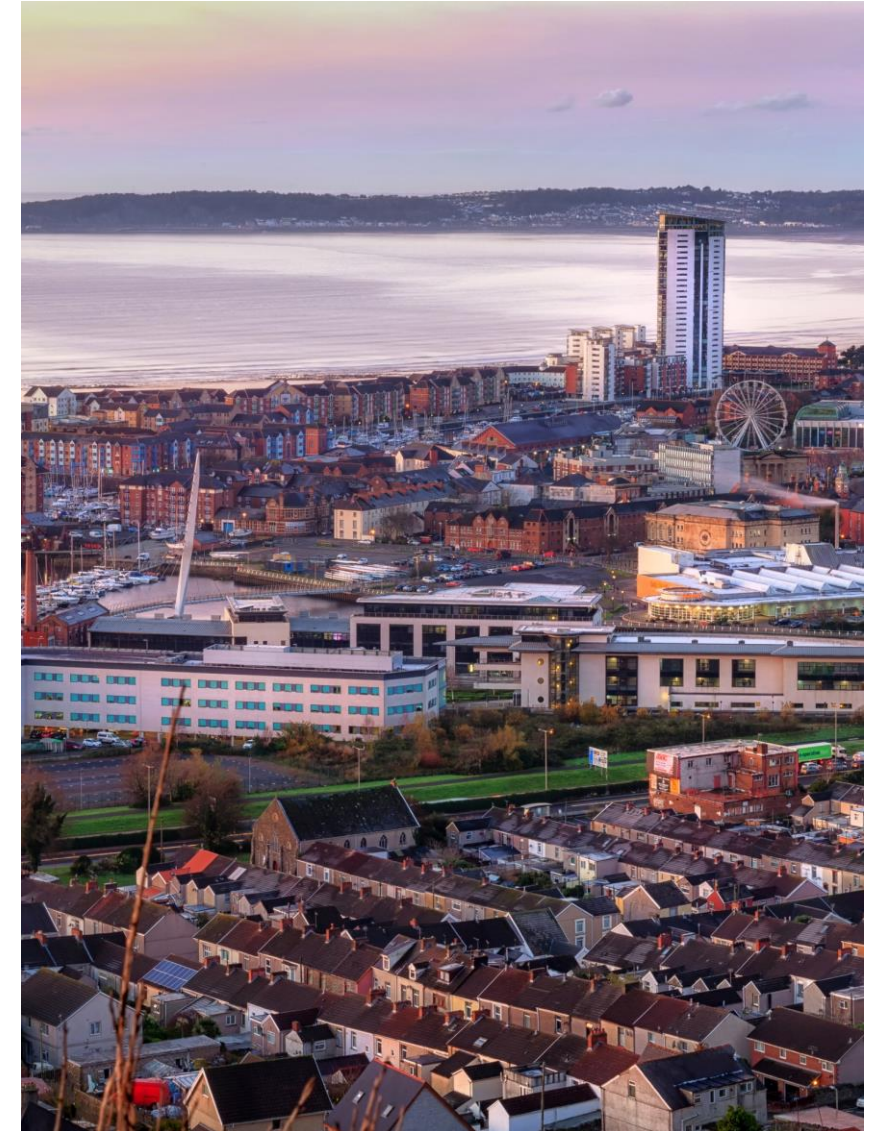
- Ipsos MORI was commissioned by Engage Britain to conduct a series of workshops and discussion groups with the general public in five locations across Great Britain: Falkirk, Liverpool, Swansea, Peterborough and London.
- The purpose was to explore public understanding of the challenges facing Britain today and learn more about how these challenges are discussed. Our approach built upon [previous quantitative work](#) commissioned by Engage Britain exploring the public's priorities and attitudes on key issues. These priorities formed the research questions for this piece of work which are listed at the beginning of each relevant chapter.
- Fieldwork was conducted throughout September and early October 2019.
- Qualitative research is designed to be exploratory and provide insight into people's perceptions, feelings and behaviours. The findings are therefore not intended to be representative of the views of all people who may share similar characteristics. Anonymised verbatim quotes have been used to help illustrate key findings but these quotes do not necessarily summarise the views of all participants that we spoke to.

5 locations across Britain



Research themes

- Engage Britain wanted to open up the conversation about the challenges facing the country, enabling people to contribute their own ideas and discuss these with others. The research was designed to better understand the issues that really matter to people and the language they use to describe them.
- Beyond this, they wanted to gather further insight into the challenges they already know matter to people. These challenges were identified through previous research involving focus groups and a nationally representative survey designed to understand the priorities of UK adults about the challenges facing the country today.
- The report begins with a discussion of the mood of the nation and the most important challenges identified by participants, before exploring three specific challenges in more detail: **health and care, poverty and struggling families, and immigration.**
- As part of each workshop, participants were asked to discuss several case studies highlighting some of the themes related to health and care and families living in poverty. During these discussions, participants wanted to understand more about the background and reasons why someone might be facing a difficult situation, bringing the policy themes to life. This changed the conversation, moving participants on from a more abstract issue to the potential experiences of people living in Britain. Throughout, participants made judgements on the particular circumstances of a case. They often shared their own related experiences, adding complexity and nuance to the discussions.



Our approach

- Different policy themes were explored in each location, as outlined in the table on the right. This means our analysis of each theme may lean more heavily on insights from the locations where detailed conversations took place.
- During fieldwork, we adapted discussion guides to reflect the conversations from earlier workshops, building on the language and framing used by participants throughout the research. This enabled us to explore and test different wording of the key questions Engage Britain was interested in. The overall flow of the discussion guide remained the same. Tracked versions of these discussion guides are [available online](#).

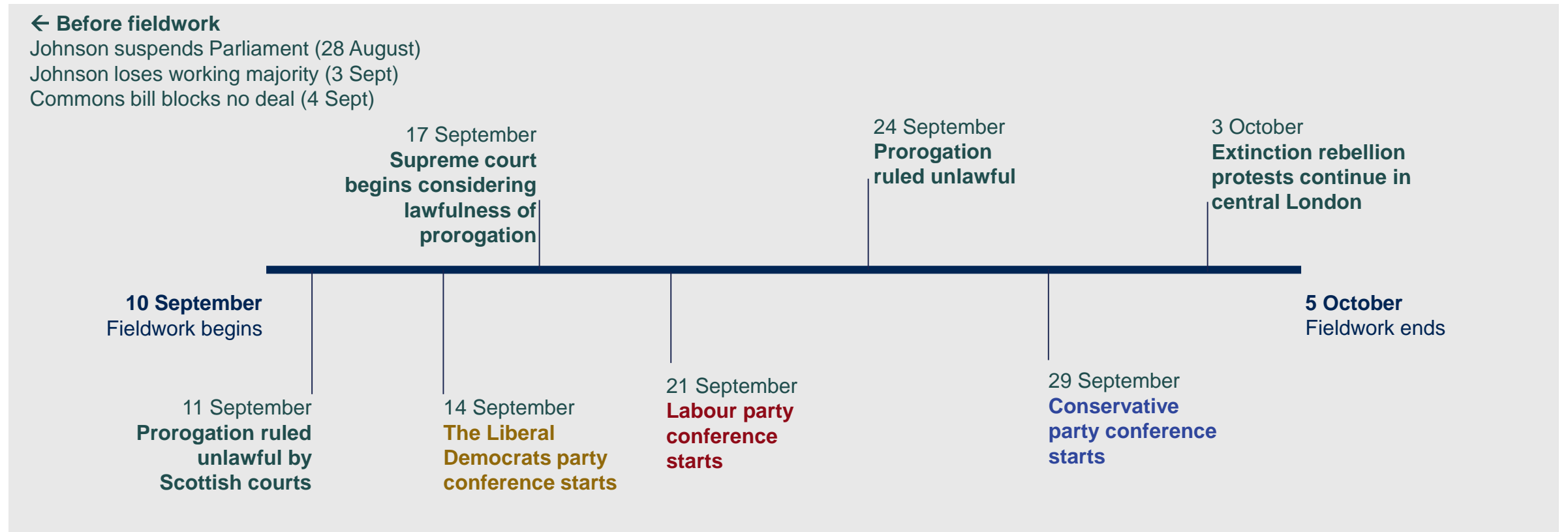
Health and care	Poverty and struggling families	Immigration
Liverpool (workshop) Swansea (workshop) Falkirk (workshop)	Liverpool (workshop) Swansea (workshop) Falkirk (workshop) Peterborough (focus group)	London (focus group) Peterborough (focus group) Falkirk (workshop)

We adopted slightly different approaches between the workshops and focus groups. This involved holding **ten conversations** across:

- **Three evening workshops** (lasting three hours) in locations across Britain with c.16 participants split into separate groups across two tables. These workshops focused mainly on the themes of health and care, and poverty and struggling families. Participants were recruited to reflect the demographics of the area the research was being conducted in.
- **Four evening discussion groups** (lasting 90 minutes) in London and Peterborough with c.8 participants in each. These focus groups mainly explored the topic of immigration. The locations were selected as areas which have seen high levels of immigration. Any first generation immigrants were screened out during recruitment, and participants were profiled on their attitudes towards immigration to ensure the group's views reflected current national opinion.

Fieldwork timeline

Fieldwork took place in September and October 2019. The timeline below sets out some of the key events which occurred during this period, providing context to the research findings described in the rest of this report.



Mood of the nation

Participants identified a range of challenges facing Britain

What do you think are the most important challenges that need to be tackled to make Britain a better place to live?



- Many of the challenges identified by participants focused on the state of public services, with frequent reference to the health service, policing and education. There was a strong feeling of pessimism, with the sense that problems had been getting worse. At times, this was linked to the impact of austerity.
- Participants struggled to articulate what was going well in Britain. However, there was recognition of an upturn in public engagement on topics such as climate change, which they felt was positive.



Not a single thing going well, we're the laughing stock of the world."

London



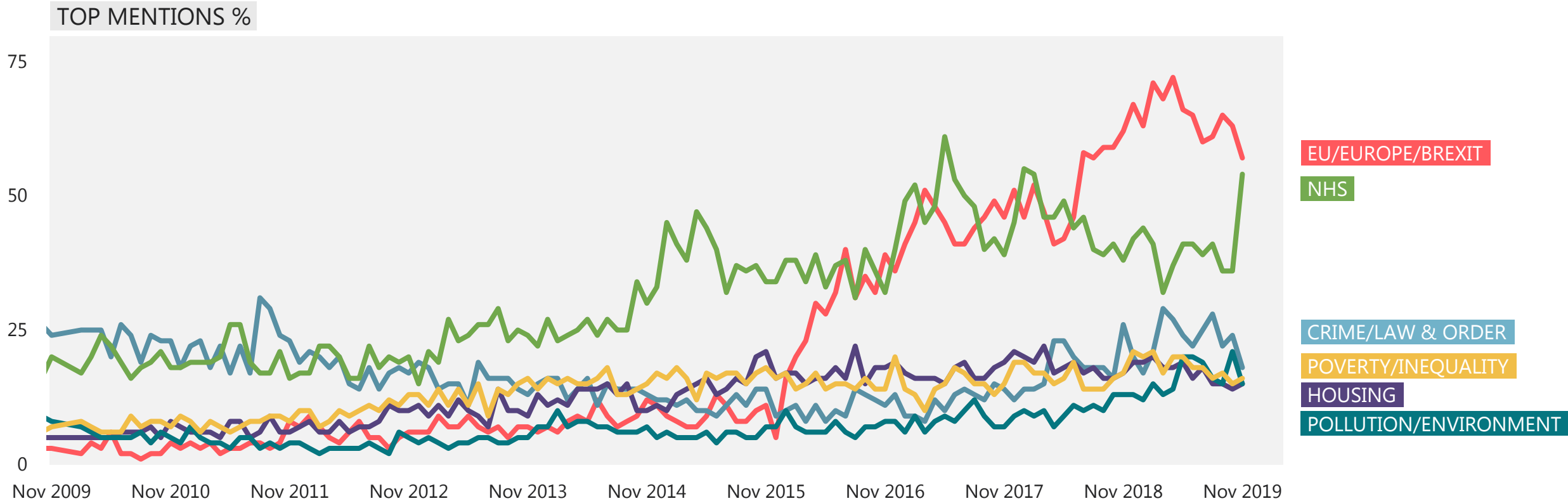
The climate change protest is something we should get on top of and it is good that people are believing in it."

Falkirk

*Each issue has been roughly scaled based on approximately how often it was mentioned across the research. The larger the issue the more frequently it was mentioned. Please note this is based on qualitative analysis and is not intended to be a precise quantification of the themes.

These challenges broadly reflect national polling

What do you see as the most/other important issues facing Britain?



Base: representative sample of c.1,000 British adults age 18+ each month, interviewed face-to-face in home

Source: Ipsos MORI Issues Index

There was little appetite to discuss Brexit

- Although Brexit was seen as important, participants said they felt fatigued discussing it, and were hesitant to raise it during the groups.
- While participants recognised that the Brexit debate dominated the news, many did not see how it impacted their everyday lives in the same way discussions about healthcare or crime might. They explained how they do not tend to discuss Brexit with friends or family because of misinformation, potential disagreements and a lack of influence over the final outcome.
- When Brexit was raised, participants generally agreed they wanted it over and done with so the country could focus on the issues facing public services including the NHS, the education system, and policing. These were seen as the most important challenges that need to be tackled to make Britain a better place to live.
- Views of Brexit were dominated by feelings of uncertainty and incredulity about what was happening. Participants thought it was hard to keep up with seemingly constant developments in the debate. They were familiar with key terms such as 'backstop' and 'no deal', but the conversation seldom explored what these meant in detail.
- Beyond finding the uncertainty personally frustrating, participants discussed how Brexit might have an impact on the British economy and businesses.



I don't talk about it because whatever you say it's not going to make the slightest bit of difference."

Peterborough



Brexit isn't a day to day issue. The NHS affects me everyday."

Swansea



Brexit is the elephant in the room and we dodge around it. I'm sick of hearing about it."

Liverpool

Participants wanted a greater say and to feel listened to

What participants wanted to see more of in politics

Representation

Transparency

Civil debate

Accountability

Honesty

Devolution

Education about politics

Investment in local services

- Participants anticipated divisions when discussing politics, reflecting their perception that the country is often divided in current debates. However, during discussions there was significant consensus amongst participants around the most important challenges facing the country.
- In contrast, there was a sense of separation between the public and politicians. Participants wanted politicians to be more concerned with local issues, with most feeling that people like them do not have a say in key decisions. The current political environment was described as too fast-paced and confusing, making it difficult to understand what is happening day to day.
- In response, a number of participants wanted to see more involvement of members of the public in decision making, increased transparency and more accessible information about key policy decisions.



More transparency. An awful lot goes on behind closed doors and we don't understand."

Swansea



We should be consulted and there should be spaces for people to have their voices heard. But those spaces don't exist."

London

Participants discussed how people might get more involved in finding solutions

- While participants acknowledged there were not always easy solutions to the challenges facing the country, they felt that engaging in conversations could challenge prejudices and change opinions. Recognising this, participants saw the importance of genuine discussion.
- Throughout the research, participants shared their experiences and knowledge, reflecting on the value this kind of conversation can bring to the policy making process. Having constructive conversations with a broad range of people was seen as a key way forward for the country, which could move beyond simply discussing challenges to actually finding solutions.
- Participants had a number of suggestions for increasing the role of the public in politics and policy making. This included having a greater role in holding politicians to account, for example, through local MPs hosting roundtable groups with their constituents.
- Likewise, participants identified a need for more education about politics and parliamentary procedure to improve the nature of public discussion and increase political awareness. This was seen as a way of supporting members of the public to get more involved in decision making outside of elections. However, others questioned the feasibility of getting members of the public more involved in politics, arguing that some simply did not want to.



A lot of people here are talking about the same issues, the same problems.”

Liverpool



I’ve been very surprised hearing some of the views of other people... I’d made a judgement and thought ‘they’ll totally be on the same page as me’ and they haven’t been.”

Liverpool



One thing that could actually help change or move government in a different way is to actually have lay members of the public involved at all stages of creating legislation etcetera. That way they will find new or innovative ways to tackle a solution that perhaps they wouldn’t have thought of themselves.”

Falkirk

Health and care

In previous research for Engage Britain, health and care was identified as one of the most widely held priorities for the country, irrespective of demographic and political differences. As such, this research was designed to understand more about how participants understood the challenge:

“What is the right way to fund health and care for people when they get older?”

This included exploring how participants viewed ‘care’ in contrast to ‘social care’ and whether funding was seen as the main challenge for this theme. Discussions explored:

- What do people understand by the word ‘care’ in this context?
- What do people understand about the provision of care services?
- Is there an alternative way of raising issues around care?
- Does the conversation around health and social care move on to the structure of provision?

Participants had a clear and shared understanding of ‘health’

Health	
NHS	Doctors
Hospitals	Nurses
Emergency services	Universal healthcare
Prescriptions	Eating right
Mental health	Exercising

- Participants made immediate associations with health, mentioning services such as the NHS, hospitals and GPs. Healthcare was seen as focused on treating specific conditions or injuries, in contrast with care which was seen as broader, more long-term and socially focused.
- They spontaneously raised and defended the concept of universal healthcare, recognising that health services were funded by their taxes. There was widespread support for healthcare that is free at the point of use.
- Participants also linked health with individual behaviours such as healthy eating and regular exercise, alongside lifestyle choices such as deciding whether to smoke, drink or take drugs. They recognised the importance of lifestyle and saw individuals as responsible for taking their own preventative health measures.



Health is about what you eat, whether you smoke or eat fatty foods. If people don't make the right choices, then that will impact on their health and so healthcare."

Falkirk



Health is your mental health or physical health and when you go into hospital."

Liverpool

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'Care' was seen as a much broader term

Care

Community

Charities

Independent
living

Elderly people

- Care was more closely associated with community and looking after each other. Discussions often started by identifying support for older people as a form of care, as well as wider care for people across a community including neighbours, friends and family.
- As they considered care further, participants felt it was a broad term that captured support for children, vulnerable people and the elderly, with a focus on supporting people to live independently.
- Participants were not confident attributing specific services to care. It was easier for participants to discuss the challenges facing care, particularly as they associated it with a shortage in funding.
- They felt responsibility for care often fell outside the public sector, to the local community, families or voluntary organisations.



Health needs doctors and nurses, medication, people that know exactly what's wrong with you. Care is people that care for other people.”

Swansea



We have individual responsibility to care for individuals.”

Liverpool

'Social care' was more closely associated with public services

Social care

Social workers

Care homes

Vulnerable people

- In contrast, participants who made a link with social care felt this was more closely associated with healthcare. They described how it should be a government provision delivered by professionals.
- When asked specifically about 'social care', participants were more confident attributing specific services to the term. However, their associations were still broad, with references to care homes and social workers.
- There was confusion about how services associated with social care were funded, with participants unsure whether social care was paid for by the government or individuals. This contrasted with their clear understanding of how the NHS is funded through taxes.
- Mental health was mentioned by participants, although there was confusion about whether this fell into health or care. There was consensus that mental health was increasingly recognised as a pressing challenge.



If the government said they'd put £100 million into social care, well where?"

Liverpool




Providing care on a more social level, visiting at home or social workers looking after vulnerable adults."

Swansea


Societal changes were seen as putting pressure on health and care

- Participants described how Britain's ageing population places increased demand on an already stretched health and care system. They raised concerns about capacity in terms of the availability of hospital beds, care home placements and staffing. Participants emphasised how more care could be provided in the community or from family members, something they felt is not happening as frequently as in the past.
- Immigration was also regarded as placing pressure on the NHS, with participants arguing that immigrants were moving to Britain and benefiting from free healthcare without paying into the system. However, this was balanced with a recognition that the health and care system relied on immigrants to help staff and run hospitals. This was something further reflected in discussions about skills based immigration [page 29].
- Participants often wanted mental health to be given parity with physical healthcare, seeing this as a pressing and emerging issue. For example, they discussed the impact of social media and technology on younger generations. They voiced concerns about long waiting lists for appointments and a lack of expertise within the system on how to deal with mental health problems, sharing their personal experiences of this.
- Participants felt that societal changes were leading to increasing demand on health and care. However, they suggested these pressures had not resulted in additional funding or increases in the size of the workforce, exacerbating the pressure on the system. This was a key concern for participants who saw health and care as one of the most important challenges for the country to tackle.




The population demographic is getting older and older. The capacity. There are not enough hospitals or care homes.”

Liverpool



Immigration means hospitals are overpopulated and understaffed.”

Swansea



I always think I work and so I should be supported, but if you think about the effect of the ageing population, there may have to be a radical change up.”

Falkirk

Funding was widely recognised as a key challenge

- Although participants argued there is currently too little resource available for health and care services, there was significant resistance to moving away from healthcare that is free at the point of use. These discussions were driven by a sense of fairness. Participants argued that because the public contribute to the system through taxes, they should be able to rely on services when needed.
- Likewise, participants emphasised how individuals should be responsible for their own health, but they did not believe lifestyle choices should influence the health and care people receive. This reflected a belief that people should be treated equally, and a recognition that individuals might have paid increased taxes when buying alcohol or tobacco.
- Instead, they argued that the government should do more to promote preventative lifestyle choices such as increasing taxes on unhealthy food (referencing the sugar tax), educating children about healthy lifestyles and discouraging smoking and drinking.
- There were also calls for social care to become free for those needing additional support. At the very least they wanted a system that treats everyone equally irrespective of their financial situation. Participants felt it was unfair for older people to have to sell their homes. There was a sense of injustice that the government would be taking away assets that these people had worked hard for and wanted to pass onto their family.
- There was also frustration that those who had not contributed to the system through paying taxes might receive their care for free, while others who had contributed would have to pay. Participants held these views even though there was a recognition that the health and care system needed more resources.



If you pay taxes, you should all be entitled to the same treatment. The government should be responsible.”

Swansea



Whether someone's caused it by smoking, it doesn't matter.”

Falkirk



Does it say how many bedrooms the house is? She could get into a smaller over 50s apartment. That house could then be available for a family.”

Liverpool



They have scrimped and saved to get that house. They have paid their taxes. They said when people needed help, no addendum, when you need it, it will be there for you.”

Liverpool

Participants suggested solutions beyond increased taxation

Reducing waste

Participants felt the healthcare system was overly bureaucratic and that hospitals outsourced simple tasks. They argued the system could reduce the number of managers, cut red tape and reduce the use of private contractors as ways of making savings.

Supporting the workforce

There was a shared respect for people working in healthcare and participants felt they should be paid more to try and raise staff morale. Participants worried about the NHS not having enough skilled workers and had concerns about the level of turnover. They emphasised the importance of supporting the workforce as a way of improving services.

Redirecting funds towards health

Participants suggested the government could make savings in other policy areas, allowing these funds to go toward the health system instead. This included tackling tax evasion, reducing the foreign aid budget and redirecting money being spent on leaving the European Union.

Sharing good practice

There were calls for Britain to learn from good practice in other parts of the world and share learning from across the UK as a way of improving the efficiency of the health system. This could include adopting new technologies as a way of making savings.

Greater local say

There was support for distributing funding to match demand across different regions based on local need. Participants argued that local authorities could play a greater role in the health and care system to reflect this.

Participants also wanted increased transparency on how decisions are made. Some thought the general public should be invited to sit on hospital boards to ensure decisions about funding are made sensibly and without any vested interest. Although questions were raised about whether the public would be suitably qualified.

Poverty and struggling families

Providing better opportunities for families living in poverty also emerged as a key priority across demographic groups in Engage Britain's previous research. In this study, we wanted to learn more about how participants understood the challenge:

“How can we provide better opportunities for families living in poverty in Britain?”

This included exploring what participants understood by the term ‘poverty’ and whether alternative phrases such as ‘struggling to get by’ and ‘struggling to afford the basics’ resulted in similar or different discussions. This is why the phrasing of the question changed during the research so that different phrases were tested in different locations. Discussions explored:

- What do people understand by the word ‘poverty’ in this context?
- Is there a better word or phrase to use instead of ‘poverty’?
- What do people understand by the word ‘opportunity’ in this context?

Poverty was associated with not being able to afford the basics

Poverty	
Causes	Consequences
Low wages	Homelessness
Zero hours contracts	Foodbanks
Housing costs	Forgoing food for family
Benefit sanctions	Unable to heat a home

- When discussing poverty, participants often started by describing people accessing foodbanks or struggling to feed themselves or their family, and rising levels of homelessness. This was a consistent and recurring theme.
- Participants also associated poverty with employment practices, low wages and the high cost of housing. These pressures were seen as making it harder to afford things regarded as necessary for daily living including food, energy, fuel, sanitary products and clothes. In turn, this was described as trapping people in a situation where they find it hard to get by.
- The high cost of living was seen as particularly acute in London and the South East – both by participants living in the capital and those in groups across the country.
- Participants in Liverpool and Falkirk also emphasised the impact of the transition to Universal Credit on poverty in their areas. They described how the policy had led to people losing their benefits due to sanctions or reassessments, or having to wait a long time to receive support.



It's even people who are working who can't afford to feed their families."

Liverpool



If you're on a zero-hour contract, it's impossible to budget for that. You need money for your electricity and food."

Falkirk

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The term ‘struggling to afford the basics’ was seen as easier to identify with compared to the term ‘poverty’

Poverty

Participants felt that poverty was a term people would not feel comfortable using to describe themselves. It was seen as reflecting a situation where someone has nothing at all, usually including no home or access to basic goods.

In some cases, participants felt that poverty defined in this way did not exist in the UK, where the benefits system provided a safety net. For them, poverty was a situation only seen in other parts of the world.

However, participants struggled to identify a phrase that they felt was better to describe this kind of situation.

Struggling to afford the basics

There was greater support for this term as participants argued it effectively described the situation facing those in the UK who live on the lowest incomes. This includes those on zero hours contracts and reliant on benefits, as well as those with larger outgoings because of the size of their family or the affordability of the area they live in.

By focusing on ‘the basics’, participants felt the phrase emphasised an inability to afford food or heating and not just a difficulty affording desirable goods.

Participants were more comfortable with this phrase, feeling that people who were struggling to get by might describe themselves in this way.

Struggling to get by

The term ‘struggling to get by’ was seen as covering a broader range of experiences than poverty. It was seen as encompassing families having to make tough choices, or live on a very tight budget, and not just those who have nothing.

However, participants argued that anyone could describe themselves as struggling to get by, seeing this as a relative term that reflects someone’s expectations in life. For example, they suggested that someone who could not afford the latest technology might see themselves as struggling to get by.



You hear the word poverty and you think on the streets, no food. There could be a nicer way to describe it.”

Swansea



I think they would say they’re struggling to afford the basics. They’re skint, they’ve got no choice.”

Falkirk



Struggling to get by might mean you can’t afford to put petrol in your car that week, or you can’t afford nice food.”

Peterborough

Getting into work and developing budgeting skills were identified as opportunities for struggling families

- Participants focused on the role of individuals in improving their circumstances, something that came out strongly during the case study discussions. Reflecting the view that life is hard for many living in Britain today, participants emphasised the responsibility of individuals to support themselves. They wanted to understand the background of the individuals described in the case studies and used the information to build a picture of the reasons why they may live in poverty.
- Participants reiterated the importance of contributing to wider society, through paying taxes and supporting the community. Benefits payments were not seen as a way of providing opportunities for struggling families. Instead, discussions often centred on the importance of finding employment opportunities. This included conversations about apprenticeships and wider training as an alternative to going to university.
- However, participants recognised that many existing job opportunities are insecure or low paid, and mentioned the struggle of finding childcare while working. As such, there was also some support for a living wage or a universal basic income as a way of ensuring families can get by.
- Education and developing skills for managing money were also regarded as key ways of increasing opportunities for struggling families. Participants argued that many people no longer know how to save or budget effectively, and that a greater focus should be placed on this in schools. Building these life skills was seen as a way of preventing people from avoiding a situation where they may struggle to get by later in life.
- Likewise, participants felt that more could be done to raise awareness of the benefits and services available for those struggling, as some people may not know about the support they are eligible for.



If you're desperate, you'll take any job, as long as money comes in. Sometimes you can't be too choosy."

Falkirk



There's a lot of pressure on young people coming out of school to go to university. In reality their time would have been better spent doing an apprenticeship as a plumber or an electrician."

Peterborough



You don't see any stuff about pensions or income insurance from the government."

Swansea

Immigration

Previous research for Engage Britain found that immigration was seen as the most divisive challenge facing Britain. This division was echoed in views on its importance – a significant minority saw it as a very important challenge, while others saw it as being completely unimportant.

As such, discussions around this theme were more exploratory than those on health and care or poverty and struggling families, where we were confident participants would see both themes as a challenge that needed to be tackled. Instead, participants were asked to review a number of challenges related to immigration and give each a score from most important to least important (these are listed on the right). For each of these challenges, participants considered:

- Were they comprehensible?
 - Did people think they were important?
 - Did they bridge across divides?
- **How can we make sure we are always able to control who enters the country? / How can we best control who enters the country?**
 - **What more can we do to offer a safe home for refugees fleeing persecution and violence?**
 - **How can we ensure that immigration leads to less pressure on housing and public services?**
 - **How can we make sure that immigrants with the skills we need can come to Britain?**
 - **How should we make sure that immigrants in the UK can always afford the basics like housing, food and heating?**
 - **How can we make sure that immigrants who are committed to British values are generally able to come to the UK?**

Immigration was recognised as a divisive topic

- Although immigration came up spontaneously as one of the most important challenges facing the country, participants were wary about debating the topic in detail.
- Immigration was seen as a divisive issue, and participants anticipated that their views may not match those of others. This meant participants were often careful about the language they used to discuss the topic and were often cautious about expressing their views.
- Participants felt that there were multiple misperceptions about immigration. For example, they questioned whether immigrants can claim benefits without having worked in the UK.
- Immigration and identifying as an immigrant was seen as a positive association for some participants. Often this was linked with a strong personal identity, with participants reflecting on their background as second or third generation immigrants and the wider history of the UK.
- However, immigration was also seen as having more negative connotations, with some participants associating it with racism. As a result, some participants were noticeably more wary when expressing their views on the topic.
- Participants also linked discussions around immigration with the Brexit debate, suggesting that the decision to leave the EU was tied to anti-immigration attitudes.



There is a challenge with immigration when it comes to certain demographics and their lack of assimilation into the UK. It's only in pockets and certain areas and certain types of people immigrating. That is a challenge.”

Liverpool



We are seen as a very PC country, it is hard to get it all out in the open and have a debate.”

London



People are very sensitive about politics or opinions, if you don't say the right thing you are labelled as something. You are just making an observation but you are labelled and put in a pigeon hole.”

London

There was consensus around the need for control

- Having a sense of control over the UK's immigration system framed discussions, and was supported by participants with positive and negative attitudes towards immigration.
- Having control was often used as a way of discussing wider themes associated with immigration including attracting skilled immigrants, and preventing those with a criminal record from entering the country.
- This was linked to significant concerns about illegal immigration. In particular, participants were worried about who was entering the UK and whether they would contribute to the country while living here.
- More positively, participants wanted to have control over the immigration system so that the country could attract those with the right skills or offer a home to those with a genuine need.
- Without this control, participants argued that the country could not offer a fair immigration system. They wanted decisions about immigration to be made based on a set of rules that reflected who would add value to the country, rather than the current system which was perceived to be open to abuse.



There should be criteria for people coming in the country, every country needs to control it to a certain extent, but we do need to extend the hand when a country is in trouble."

London



We need to know where people are coming from, what their skillset is and why they are coming from the country."

Falkirk



We need a filtering system where we are letting people in who are truly being persecuted."

Peterborough

A system that takes account of UK public services was seen as important

- Reducing the pressure on housing and public services because of immigration was seen as particularly important by participants in London. They felt that the link between immigration and increasing pressure on services was often not discussed because it was seen as too politically sensitive or controversial.
- Across groups, participants argued that immigrants should not be given prioritised access to public services. They emphasised how they felt British people who have already put into the system should receive support first, reflecting wider concerns about the state of public services in Britain today. There were concerns about health tourism and immigrants getting access to free healthcare on arrival.
- However, this idea was also disputed, with participants arguing that immigrants often contribute through paying taxes, skilled work and wider contributions to the community. This linked to conversations about skilled immigration and Britain's reliance on immigrants for certain jobs. Even participants who were sceptical about immigration widely recognised the need for immigration to support particular sectors including the NHS.



You've got an elderly couple who have worked their whole life who have to pay thousands of pounds to be in a care home. You have people coming over and they get it for free."

Peterborough



Things like housing and public services are very important. There is a big shortage of them, supply and demand. Obviously because of immigration that is a major consideration."

London



It's the idea of someone coming in and not even paying into the system and we give out to them, then it becomes a charity. We are just paying for things that some natives don't even have."

Peterborough

Other factors linked to immigration were more divisive

Skills

There was an emphasis on creating an immigration system that attracted those with the skills needed by the country, with references made to the Australian points based system.

On the other hand, some participants felt that immigrants did not necessarily need to bring skills to the country, as they could develop new skills in the UK.

Refugees fleeing persecution

There was also support for offering a safe home to refugees fleeing violence and persecution, with participants arguing that the UK has the resources and capacity to support them and should meet international obligations.

However, there were concerns that refugees should not be prioritised above people born in the UK and that it was difficult to distinguish those with a genuine need without a stronger system.

British values

There was limited support for prioritising immigrants who shared British values due to uncertainty about what these are. Participants questioned whether there is a shared understanding of British values in the UK, seeing this as something which is often subjective and personal. Instead they argued that immigrants may create jobs or contribute to a community, which they felt was more important.

However, this was challenged by some participants who saw British values as very important and worried about losing these. There was a concern that British values were being undermined, linked not only to immigration but also with younger generations lacking an understanding and respect for the country.



It's not all about immigrants seeking asylum, it's also about getting people in to help the country."

Peterborough



You need to separate from political immigrants and illegal immigrants and those who are in need of a safe haven. Everyone's just coming through and saying they're political immigrants, that is blatantly not the case."

Peterborough



What are British values? When you ask an immigrant family what's important, they'll want a roof over the head, food, access to education so they can progress more than they did."

Falkirk

Conclusions

Conclusions

Health and care

- Although participants had a clear and shared understanding of what health means, there was less clarity around the definition of care.
- There was consensus that funding health and care is a key challenge facing the country, but less agreement on how this could be tackled.
- The term health and care led to discussions beyond funding, with participants talking about the structure of health and care services, sharing good practice, and greater local decision making.

Poverty and struggling families

- Participants recognised that many people are struggling to afford the basics in Britain today.
- This was recognised as a challenge during discussions, although 'poverty' as a term was not explicitly raised by participants as a spontaneous challenge facing the country.
- There was less consensus about the meaning of the term 'poverty', with discussion centring on whether this is a relative or absolute term.
- Participants preferred the term 'struggling to afford the basics' as a way of capturing the situation of many on lower incomes.

Immigration

- Immigration was the most divisive of the three themes. This was something participants anticipated and they were cautious about discussing the topic.
- Participants disagreed about what Britain's priorities should be for a future immigration system. There was widespread (although not uniform) support for Britain having greater control over immigration.
- The need for control was often used by participants as a way of talking about other factors such as skilled immigration and the fair treatment of refugees.

For more information

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