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

Chapter 6

Fault Lines



Míriam Juan-Torres
Tim Dixon
Arisa Kimaram

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Fault Lines

30 per cent feel that the labels of left and right in politics are still valid and help them when they vote

53 per cent describe themselves as being in the centre of the political scale

71 per cent of Britons think that young people feel too entitled to an easy life, whereas only 33 per cent think that older generations don't realise that they had it easier

80 per cent of people think that too much in our country is decided in London

Half of Britons feel that the area where they live has been neglected for a long time

Introduction

The United Kingdom is a land of differences, from the origins of the people of its four nations and the distinctive local histories of its regions, to the landscapes, industries, and identities of modern Britain. This diversity makes the tapestry of the modern UK more distinctive and more resilient. But differences can also create tensions, and can become dangerous social divisions. This has happened at many points in British history. Separate from the historic conflicts over territory that shaped today's United Kingdom, our social fabric has been torn by deep internal divisions, including periods of violent conflict over religion and power. Divisions between haves and have-nots have also erupted into violence on many occasions, as far back as the 1381 Peasants' Revolt.

This chapter looks at three fault lines in modern Britain, each of which have the potential to be sources of division and even polarisation: the ideological fault line between left and right; the intergenerational fault line between older and younger people (which is connected to the increasingly important fault line of university education), and the regional fault lines within and between the nations of the United Kingdom. While crucial, these three fault lines are not an exhaustive list of the sources of difference in Britain today. Other key areas of difference in identities and viewpoints are explored in other chapters, including sections on class and more in Chapter 8 and Chapter 9.

A key assertion of this chapter is that differences among people may constitute fault lines – potential sources of social fracturing – but that these are not the same as divisions. Differences do not necessarily create an identity that becomes all-encompassing to the extent that opinions across a range of issues coalesce around that identity, and that conflict is extended from one issue to another. When groups define themselves in opposition to another group, they can be drawn into the negative cycle of 'us-versus-them' divisiveness which the UK witnessed during the Brexit years.

One of the most powerful defences against difference becoming transformed into deeper divisions is creating opportunities for people to recognise the many cross-cutting identities that connect them to people on the 'other side' of an issue or identity disagreement. Those cross-cutting connections may come from many aspects of people's lives and ties with each other: family, faith, local community, language, school, sports, rituals and traditions, hobbies or leisure activities, and even being fans of a celebrity. The diversity of these cross-cutting identities strengthens our tapestry and creates resilience against forces that might otherwise more easily pull us apart.

6.1 The left/right fault line

Relying on a left/right spectrum to understand how people in Britain think about politics is like seeing a tapestry as only a black and white image. It misses much that is distinctive about people's beliefs and values today. For one, it erases the importance of the libertarian-authoritarian axis that cuts across both wings of the classical political spectrum. It also cannot capture levels of trust and suspicion, or engagement and disengagement.

Political differences have been defined in terms of the left and right for generations, as an essential short-hand to compare individuals, parties, and countries. Despite these terms still being the standard reference point for media conversations about politics, the findings in this section suggest that these terms themselves have lost much of their relevance to most voters – with the one

exception of the two groups whose identity is partly defined by their politics, and who see themselves as left or right. The lens of the segments helps explain why the left/right fault line has become less useful in understanding our differences and potential divisions today.

In the wide-ranging conversations with focus groups and individuals for this project, we were struck by how little the framing of left and right came up in discussing national issues with most of the segments, with the exception of Progressive Activists and Backbone Conservatives.

30% feel that the labels of left and right in politics are still valid and help them when they vote

- Only 30 per cent feel that the labels of left and right in politics are still valid and help them when they vote. By contrast, More in Common's research has found that twice as many people in Germany (60 per cent) still consider those labels relevant.¹
- 41 per cent say that the labels of left and right in politics feel irrelevant to them today.
- The two population segments most likely to think that left and right terms are relevant are the two groups with the strongest left-wing and right-wing identities, Progressive Activists and Backbone Conservatives.
- Progressive Activists are the only group for whom a majority (53 per cent) feels that those labels are relevant. They are the most left-wing segment, based on their self-evaluation.
- The labels are considered relevant by 36 per cent of Backbone Conservatives, who are the most right-wing segment, again based on their self-evaluation.

Many people do not follow politics closely and do not have a strong left or right identity. Only one in five people describe themselves as either 'very' or 'fairly' left- or right-wing:

- 15 per cent describe themselves either as 'fairly left-wing' or 'very left-wing'.
- 8 per cent describe themselves either as 'fairly right-wing' or 'very right-wing'.
- 53 per cent describe themselves as 'centre', 'slightly left of centre', or 'slightly right of centre' (23 per cent describe themselves only as 'centre').

The fact that **only 23 per cent of British people have a clear left or right identity** demonstrates that these are not identities around which the country has become polarised. This does not make left and right unimportant, since these established identities cut across a wide range of economic, social, and cultural issues and are meaningful for many who engage most strongly in political issues. For example, those who describe themselves as left-wing are likely to see political parties, the class system, traditional media, and the economic system as the leading causes of division in the UK. In contrast, those who describe themselves as right-wing blame levels of immigration, social media, political parties, and traditional media for divisions. However, what might be true for a group of less than one in four people may not be true for the population more generally.

While asking people to describe themselves in terms of left and right has its limitations,² responses to a standard set of questions used by British social scientists, and developed by Evans, Heath, and Lalljee, finds that many people hold a combination of views associated with *both* the left and right (see Chapter 3, Section 3.5). This may be one reason why most people describe themselves as being on or close to the centre in politics. Across different issues, segments can shift between what are generally regarded as left and right positions, usually reflecting the difference between left and right views on economic issues versus social or identity issues.

The segment that transitions most starkly between strong left and right positions is the Loyal Nationals, who are also more likely than any other segment to describe themselves only as belonging to the centre. Loyal Nationals typically have a mix of views. On inequality, the loss of working class jobs, and support for government intervention they often align with the most consistently left-wing segment, Progressive Activists (and with Civic Pragmatists and Disengaged Battlers). On the other hand, they hold the strongest anti-immigration views of any segment (56 per cent say the impact of immigration on the UK is negative, compared to an average of 30 per cent) and strongly supported Brexit, both policy stances associated with the right and held by Backbone Conservatives and Disengaged Traditionalists. Little wonder that they do not fit into consistently left or right categories:

- Only 5 per cent describe themselves as ‘fairly’ or ‘very’ left-wing, and 10 per cent as ‘fairly’ or ‘very’ right-wing
- 30 per cent say that they do not know – although this is not as high as the two Disengaged groups, it is unusually high for a group as engaged and opinionated as the Loyal Nationals.

The finding that left and right does not represent a strong fault line that captures key dynamics in our society is reflected in three other findings highlighted by the segments:

- The left/right spectrum does not capture the dimensions of disengagement, loss of trust in the system, and detachment from community. This characteristic unites the Disengaged Battlers and Disengaged Traditionalists who otherwise often differ on policy issues. This translates into being most alike in certain behavioural patterns, such as being least likely to vote or most likely to say they will refuse a Covid-19 vaccine even if it is safe and effective. They are also alike in perceptions, such as being the only two segments that are less likely than average to agree that people in their local area are generally kind.
- The Established Liberals reflect the difference between what is understood as being conservatism and liberalism. They are in several respects conservative in their disposition, and have high levels of trust in the system, a strong sense of personal security, and less desire for change. But their core beliefs are socially liberal – for example, their positive attitudes towards immigration. On issues of how children should be raised, Established Liberals share the approaches of Progressive Activists and Civic Pragmatists in strongly favouring self-reliance over obedience, curiosity over good manners, and independence over respect for elders. The latter values are all strongly preferred by Backbone Conservatives, Disengaged Traditionalists, and Loyal Nationals. Their socially liberal values, associated with the left, are firmly established, but on issues relating to the economy and the wider social system, their views are associated with the right (in the 2019 General Election, twice as many Established Liberals voted Conservative as voted Labour).

- The binary left/right scale does not capture a distinct finding that the Progressive Activists are often further away from the average for the population than any other segment. They hold very strong feelings on many issues, including support for immigration, opposition to Brexit, and pessimism about the future. They are also more likely to live in a ‘bubble’ of like-minded people than other segments, reflected in the fact that almost all of their friends have the same level of education as they have (degree-level), and hold the same political views they do (68 per cent compared to 44 per cent on average).

The left/right spectrum is still relevant in describing the tribal identities and views of highly-engaged partisans. But we do not find that it is often spoken about outside of those partisan groups, and nor does it capture the dynamics of the most highly-charged issues. Analysing the population by segment, we find that most people are in population segments with characteristics that in some significant ways detach them from reliable left or right groups. For Loyal Nationals and Established Liberals this is true on economic versus identity issues (where they have opposite positions), and for the Disengaged Battlers and Disengaged Traditionalists this is true on measures of trust and participation. Little wonder that, outside of the tribal Progressive Activist and Backbone Conservative segments, fewer than one in three people agree that ‘the labels of left and right in politics are still valid and help me when I vote’.

6.2 Intergenerational fault lines

‘Although before Covid there was almost full employment, you still got the feeling that a lot of people, a lot of youngsters, didn’t feel there was any hope for them. I could aspire to owning a house in my twenties. If you were still at home at twenty-one in my era, you were a loser. And now people are staying at home into their thirties because they can’t afford to move out.’

Jessica, 60, Civic Pragmatist, South West

Age is frequently discussed as one of the most crucial dividing lines in the United Kingdom. Age differences in the vote on the Brexit referendum and recent elections have been well documented, and a surprisingly linear relationship can be found on aspects of other issues, such as race and immigration. Our research also finds that age is a good predictor across a range of topics, and past comparative work has found that differences associated with age are greater in the UK than most other western nations. Those differences may also be compounded in the future by the impact of the diverging health and economic experiences of young and old during the Covid-19 pandemic, the subject of recent research by the think tank British Future.³

Yet the evidence points to an important distinction between differences in attitudes and divisions between people. Those differences do not necessarily create generational divisions or conflict. Even on issues such as Brexit, where age differences were decisive – even leading to charges that older generations had stolen young people’s futures – focus group conversations did not find either Leavers or Remainers seeing the result of the referendum through the lens of intergenerational conflict. While further research into affective polarisation between generations is needed, this study does not find any evidence that ‘us-versus-them’ dynamics between old and young people are taking hold.

A surprising finding of the qualitative work is that the idea of an intergenerational divide seems to be far more alive amongst pundits, academics, and media commentators than in the minds of ordinary Britons. One reason for why differences between people across age groups have not taken hold is that most people discuss these dynamics in the realm of the personal: differences are mediated by family and friendship bonds. Generalisations about ‘the young’ and ‘the old’ also fail to capture the wide range of views within each group. Views are more often influenced by underlying values and core beliefs rather than the year of someone’s birth, as will be further explored in this chapter.

Age-based differences on issues

In the United Kingdom, the differences in the views of younger and older people are more pronounced on issues of identity and diversity, reflecting the social changes that have taken place during the lives of older generations and the way those changes can be perceived as a threat to things that they value. These differences are significant, but as with the examples below they mostly do not exceed 30 per cent - a much smaller span of difference in opinion than is found between segments that are opposed to one another.

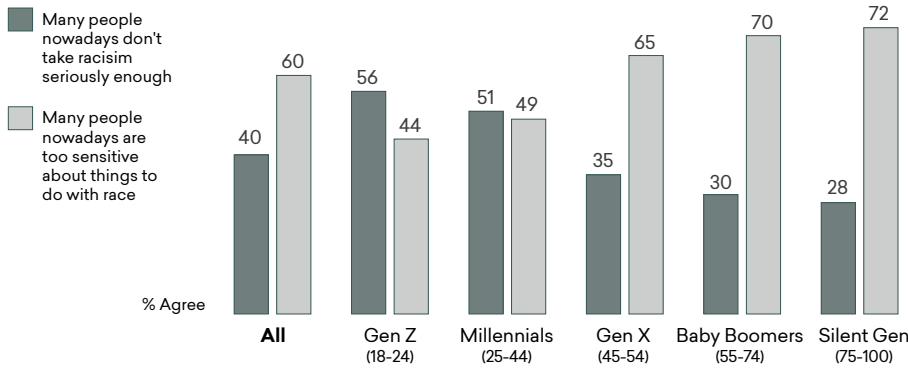
- Younger generations are more likely to think that people do not take racism seriously enough, whereas older generations are more likely to think that people are too sensitive about things to do with race. Figure 6.1 shows a difference in opinions of 30 per cent between the youngest and oldest age groups.
- Younger and older generations disagree on how to treat or confront British history. While seven in ten older Britons see little point in going over the rights and wrongs of British history, six in ten of the young think we cannot move forward as a nation if we do not acknowledge the historic mistakes we have made.
- Younger generations are not as certain about the kindness of others in the UK (e.g. 56 per cent of Generation Z and 66 per cent of Millennials agree that most in the UK are kind, in contrast to 82 and 89 per cent of Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation respectively).

Figure 6.1.

Seriousness of racism

Older and younger generations are split on how issues of racism are treated nowadays

Seriousness of racism



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

How do young and old people view each other?

'I think there is a generational divide, but I'm not sure it's one that causes a lot of bad blood, if you know what I mean. It doesn't cause a lot of aggression.'

Peter, Civic Pragmatist, 37, North West

Popular narratives about how young and old people view each other are somewhat reflected in generational differences over generational questions, but with caveats.

71% of people perceive that young people feel too entitled to an easy life

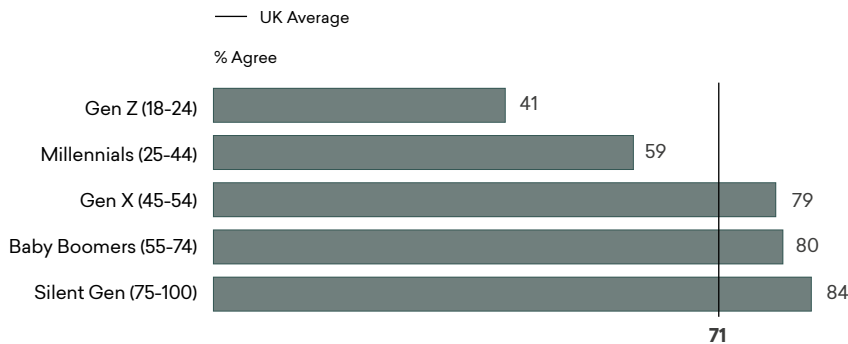
- While these views are more strongly held among over 45s, there is no strong opposition to this statement, even among those in the 18-24 age bracket. We find that young British people are rather critical of themselves.
- Younger generations are much more likely to believe that older people are being selfish with the political choices they are making, but less than 60 per cent of Gen Zs and Millennials share that view. Views are spread relatively evenly across generational cohorts.
- Almost three times as many people in the younger two cohorts than those above 55 feel that older people do not realise they have had it easier in their lives.

Figure 6.2.

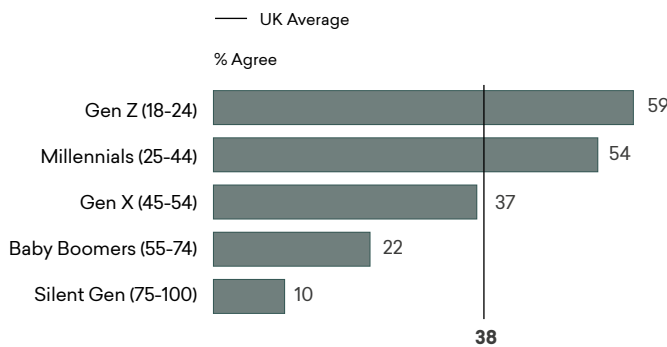
Intergenerational differences

Older and younger generations hold differing views of each other

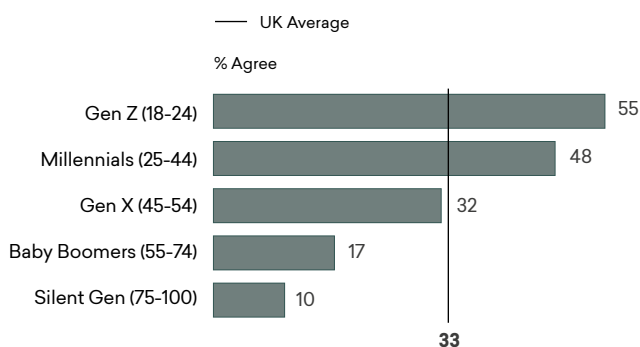
Younger people feel too entitled to an easy life



Older generations are being selfish with the political choices they are making



Older generations don't realise that they had it easier



Qu. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? February 2020.
Source: More in Common 2020.

Despite real political differences, qualitative research finds that while people make general criticisms of other groups in society (including the young and the old), when asked whether generational divides exist, most people say no. More often than not, they said no: they pointed to differences of opinion rather than unbridgeable divides or impossible relationships. **An 'us-versus-them' narrative between generations does not seem to have taken hold.**

‘Do you know, I've never really thought of that. If you were going to have a division, I would say age is probably the least division you'd have. A lot of my friends span from, I don't know, seventeen years old up to seventy – especially when I go to the local pub. I'll have all sorts of conversations with all sorts of different people.’

Jake, Disengaged Traditionalist, 47, South East

‘My parents have different views from me and occasionally they'll say things that are pretty questionable and I have to call them out on. But it's almost as if they can't keep up with what's politically correct. I think it's because of their age rather than it being any kind of malicious personality issues.’

Alex, Disengaged Battler, 42, Wales

Comparing the influence of age versus core beliefs

The differences between the seven segments are significantly greater than the differences between age groups on a range of issues. In fact, even on some generational issues, such as whether young people feel too entitled to an easy life, the differences between segments are greater. There is a 71 percentage point gap between Progressive Activists (24 per cent agreement) and Loyal Nationals (95 per cent) on this question, almost twice as large as the gap between the younger and older age groups.

One issue that demonstrates the divergence in opinion by age group in comparison to segments is the question of people taking offence too quickly, an issue that is often seen through a generational lens because of the activism of student groups on university campuses (the ‘cancel culture’ debate). Agreement that ‘people are too easily offended nowadays’ ranges from 56 per cent among the 18-24 year cohort up to 88 per cent among over 75s. Educational achievement is sometimes referenced as a key fault line (partly explaining the age effect, given the much higher rates of university attendance among younger generations), but in this instance the difference in agreement between those with no formal qualification (87 per cent) and those with a postgraduate degree (69 per cent) is not as great as between age groups.

Differences are much greater among the seven segments, with agreement ranging from 47 per cent among Progressive Activists to 94 per cent among Loyal Nationals who hold similar views regardless of age (as do Backbone Conservatives). On this matter, age only has a slight effect among the other segments, with differences of around ten percentage points. The greatest difference is found among Disengaged Traditionalists: older members of this group agree with this statement at a level of 90 per cent, compared to 74 per cent among younger members.

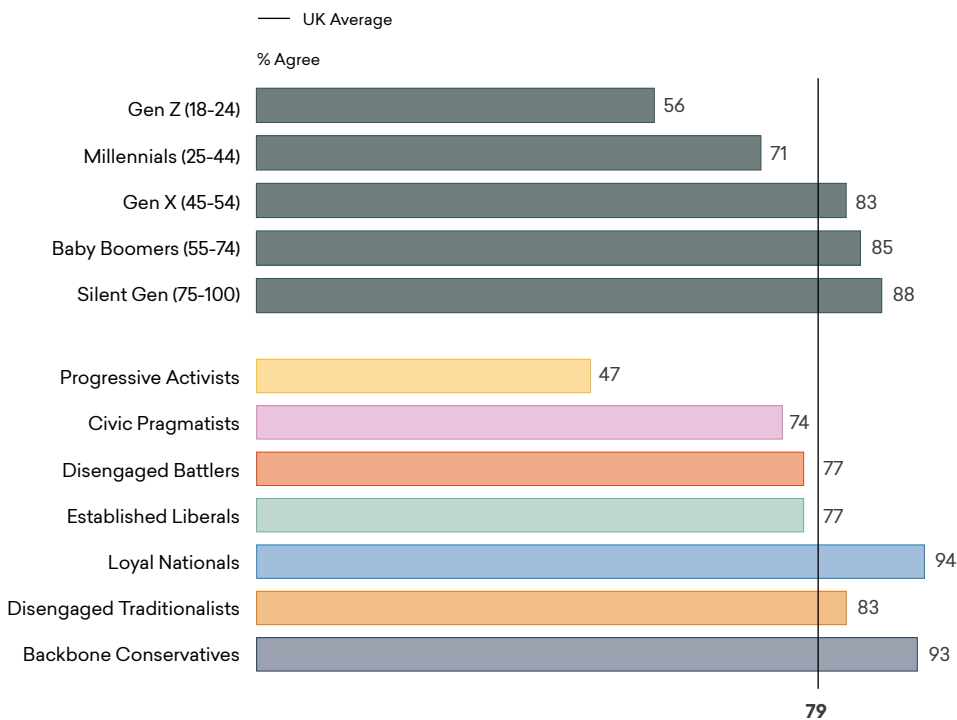
While there are differences of opinion between the different age groups, the seven segments are more cohesive in their core beliefs, and this results in members of the segments sharing similar attitudes regardless of age. **Underlying values and psychology shape individuals' views more than their age.**

Figure 6.3.

Intergenerational differences versus differences by segments

The segments show greater differences in opinions to questions that are often seen through a generational lens

People are too easily offended nowadays



Qu. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: People are too easily offended nowadays. February 2020.
Source: More in Common 2020.

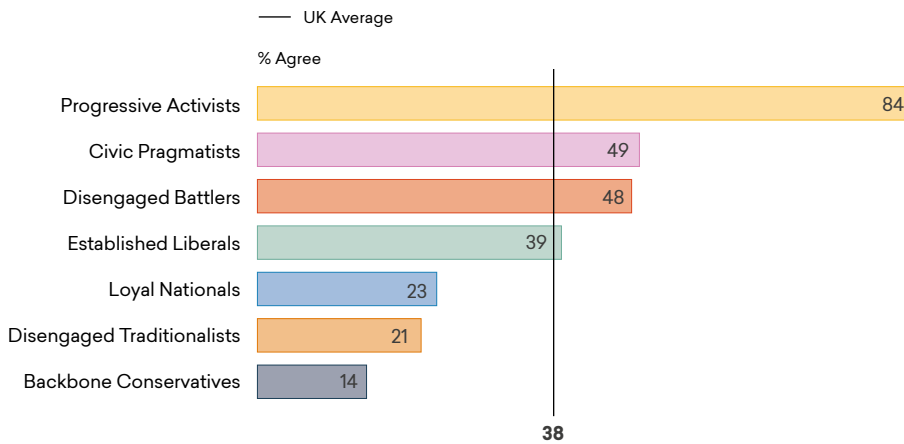
As Figure 6.4. shows, in some instances there is greater divergence between the seven segments than between different age groups, even on generational issues. Progressive Activists differ from other segments in the strength with which they feel that older generations are being selfish with their political choices. This is mirrored by the strength of opposite opinion among Loyal Nationals, Disengaged Traditionalists, and Backbone Conservatives. The segments can also provide insights that transcend generational differences – such as Jamie, a 76-year old Progressive Activist from the East Midlands, who said that older generations ‘got in Parliament and pulled the ladder up after them’.

Figure 6.4.

Intergenerational differences and political choices

Progressive Activists stand out in their conviction

Older generations are being selfish with the political choices they are making



Qu. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements: Older generations are being selfish with the political choices they are making. February 2020.
Source: More in Common 2020.

While this analysis only touches lightly on some key insights, it suggests that even though there are differences of opinion, there is little outright hostility between the generations. Differences in views often relate to loosely held, low salience beliefs that have probably existed since the beginning of time: even Aristotle and Socrates wrote about the old thinking that the young are lazy and the young thinking that the old are selfish. **The age fault line is one of differing opinions, rather than a division that is splitting society apart.**

6.3 Regional fault lines

‘Listen to the average Joe on the street. The choices that they’re making down in London are affecting people nationally and globally as well and they don’t seem to care. They seem to be all about them, all about their party and all about what’s best for them. It would be nice to be heard a little bit more in the North West and probably in Scotland and everywhere else as well. It would be nice to be heard and have a bit more of an impact.’

Daniel, Civic Pragmatist, 34, North West

A consistent thread through Britain’s long history is regional difference, with many distinct identities, geographies, and ways of life crowded into a relatively small collection of islands. This section touches on the UK’s regional fault lines, with a focus on their role in bringing people together or driving them apart in the years ahead, and to what extent ‘us-versus-them’ dynamics are at play.

There are several dimensions to the fault lines across regions in the United Kingdom, most obviously North versus South, and tensions between England, Scotland, and Welsh or discussions about centralisation. This section touches only lightly upon them, with a focus on the differences and commonalities between England, Scotland, and Wales and between north and south, recognising that analysing those fault lines is a study of its own.

The dataset for the issues in this study can be broken down into analysis by nations (England, Scotland, and Wales) or other regional subdivisions (e.g. North East England), but that is beyond the scope of the current report. However, we hope to examine those issues further in future partnerships and can share findings with interested partners and organisations.

England, Scotland, and Wales

In analysing the views of people across the various regional fault lines of Britain, we find broadly similar patterns in views and beliefs across those fault lines, but disagreements over the relationship between those on opposite sides of the 'divide'. A key insight from the data on regional differences is that a very strong majority view that too much decision making is centralised in London – a view so widely held, that even a majority of Londoners agree with this sentiment.

Across a wide range of issues that are not specifically related to regional relationships, people in England, Wales and Scotland mostly have similar experiences and hold very similar views on different issues. For example:

- Asked about how things compare now to three years ago, the responses of people in England, Scotland and Wales are either the same or within 2 percentage points of each other.
- Asked about the most important issues facing the United Kingdom today, people from all three nations gave remarkably similar answers, with Scotland making poverty and inequality a slightly higher priority, Wales making jobs and the economy a higher priority, and England emphasising crime and housing more highly.
- Asked about their views on immigration, people in Scotland tend to be around 10 points more positive in their views of issues such as integration.

The key takeaway from the survey is that while there are differences of opinion between people in the three countries, they are relatively small. These differences are mostly explained by the different composition of the Scottish, English, and Welsh populations. In Scotland, Progressive Activists comprise 17 per cent of the population, compared to 13 per cent in England and 14 per cent in Wales. Scotland also has a higher proportion of Civic Pragmatists and a lower proportion of Backbone Conservatives and Disengaged Traditionalists (see the Appendix for the full data tables).

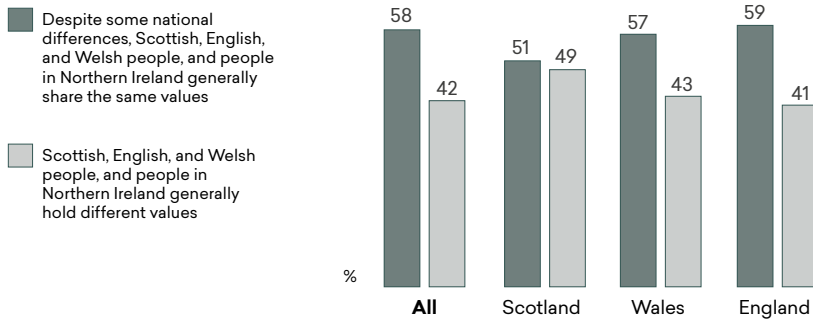
A majority of people across England, Scotland, and Wales agree that the values of people in the three nations are similar, with an overall margin of 58 to 42 per cent. However, views are almost evenly divided in Scotland (see Figure 7.5). Looked at through the lens of the seven segments, there are two clusters. Although a majority in all segments agree that the three nations share values, particularly high agreement is found in a cluster comprising Civic Pragmatists, Established Liberals, and Backbone Conservatives – a group that demonstrates a kind of civic optimism on this and other issues. The four other segments – the Progressive Activists and Loyal Nationals, with their strong left-wing economic views but diverging views on patriotism and migration, as well as the two Disengaged segments, demonstrate a kind of civic pessimism, and are less confident of the similarity of values across the nations. The variation between the Civic Pragmatists and the Disengaged Traditionalists is almost 20 percentage points.

Figure 6.5.

Do we share similar values across the nations of the United Kingdom?

More people think that we share values across the UK than think each nation holds its own values – with Scottish people most divided on this question

Do we share similar values across the nations of the United Kingdom?



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

We find the greatest differences between people in different nations on issues directly touching on the relationship between the nations. For example, on the question of a second Scottish referendum on independence (which was taken before the more recent increase recorded later in 2020), there was a 13 per cent gap between Scottish and English people (46 per cent v 33 per cent). Scots even support a referendum on Welsh independence more than Welsh people themselves (38 per cent compared to 28 per cent of Welsh respondents). While the 13 per cent difference between Scottish and English respondents on Scottish independence is significant, it does not point to a deep division between people themselves. Although affective polarisation between the nations was not investigated in the survey, qualitative research suggested that the frustrations of those who support independence in Scotland are focused on Westminster politicians and on London, but are not personalised to the English generally.

Centralisation and feelings towards the capital

Although regional differences are often thought of as a fault line within the United Kingdom, the striking finding from the survey is the **common ground across all regions that that too much is decided in London**. Four in five Britons, and large majorities in every region including London, think that the country is too centralised. This feeling is strongest in the North of England, with almost total agreement: 92 per cent say the country is too centralised, and 59 per cent feel this strongly. This feeling is even stronger than in Scotland (with 83 per cent agreement and 51 per cent strongly). Taking a different lens of towns rather than regions, we find that frustration is even higher in post-industrial towns across the UK – representative of ‘left behind’ communities that have been a focus of debate since the Brexit referendum vote. In post-industrial towns, 64 per cent strongly agree that too much is decided in London, compared to an average of 39 per cent of the population nationally.⁴

Frustration with the centralisation of decision-making in London goes beyond a criticism of administrative structures to a view that Londoners themselves are the problem. Across Britain, 80 per cent say that people in London live in

a bubble and are not aware of what life is like in the rest of the country, with similarly very high numbers in the North of England (89 per cent) and in Scotland (84 per cent). But even Londoners share this view, with 58 per cent in agreement, reflecting that while this is a fault line, the vast majority of the country is on the same side. Londoners seem to be on the same side of that fault line as the rest of the country – recognising the need for changes that shift decision making power to the local level.

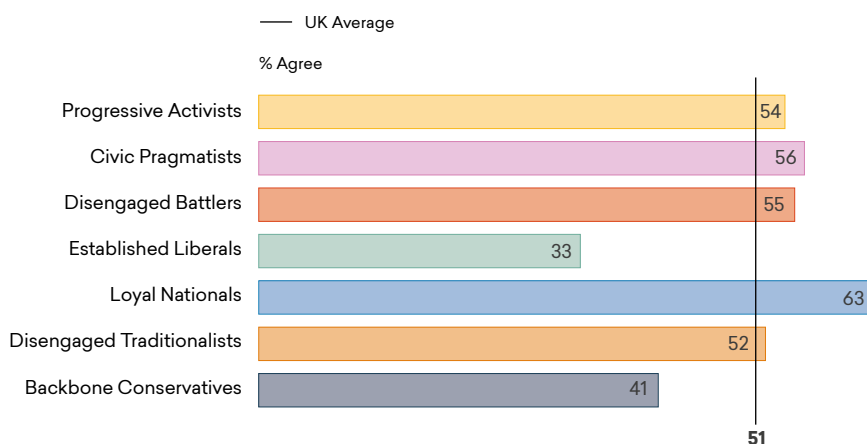
The rest of the country looks at people living in London and the South East with less warmth than they have for others. On average, warmth towards people in London and the South East ranks 39 on the temperature index. The coldest feelings come from Scots (32) and the warmest are from Londoners themselves, even though at 46 on this scale, they appear to have some self-doubt. This is one issue where Backbone Conservatives cluster alongside Progressive Activists, Established Liberals, and Civic Pragmatists, against another cluster with much cooler views of Londoners and the South East: Disengaged Battlers, Disengaged Traditionalists, and Loyal Nationals.

Figure 6.6.

Regional neglect

Sense of regional abandonment is highest among Loyal Nationals

The area where I live has been neglected for a long time



Qu. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements: The area where I live has been neglected for a long time. February 2020.
Source: More in Common 2020.

Regional neglect

A slightly different measure of regional fault lines is people’s sense of regional neglect. One in two people in Britain feel that **the area where they live has been neglected** for a long time.

- On this issue, the differences in the experience of people are large, with three in ten Londoners agreeing compared to seven in ten in North of England.
- People in Wales are more likely than other nations to say that their area has been neglected (59 per cent).
- Perception of neglect is even stronger in post-industrial towns, with three-quarters of Britons in such places sharing this view.

- Backbone Conservatives and Established Liberals, who are more concentrated in the South East and in London, are the only two segments who do not feel this sense of neglect.
- Large majorities of Disengaged Battlers and Loyal Nationals perceive their area to have been overlooked for a considerable period of time. To some extent, Loyal Nationals may simply perceive of immigration into a community as a sign of neglect, because while Progressive Activists welcome immigration as a sign of increased cultural diversity and dynamism, Loyal Nationals see it as a threat to their identity and worry about becoming a minority.
- Smaller differences in perceptions of local neglect exist between Leavers (54 per cent) and Remainers (48 per cent).

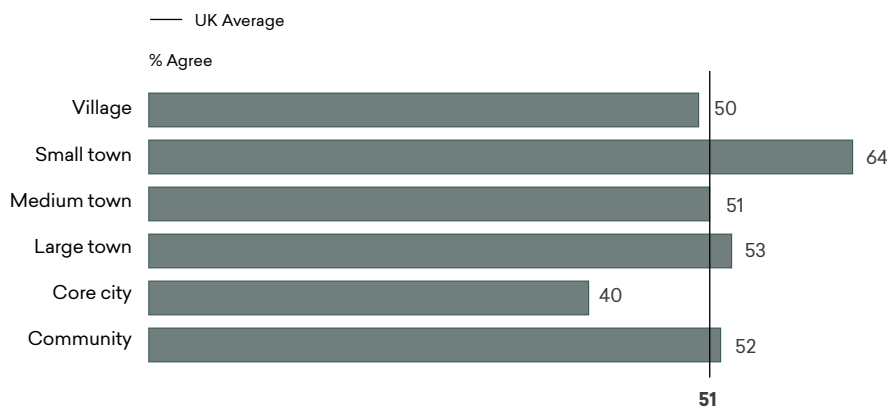
Analysis of findings through the lens of Britain’s towns, using the Centre for Towns’ typology, shows that rather than a single regional fault line such as North and South, there are multiple overlaying factors that contribute to attitudinal geographic differences. A sustained effort to ‘level up’ the inequalities in the UK needs to apply this place-based lens as well as a regional analysis. Sometimes the greatest differences might exist between a post-industrial town located not too far from a more prosperous urban centre. More analysis of the Britain’s Choice dataset could be done to explore this place-based dimension of the findings. Two examples of what a regional analysis through the lens of towns finds is that the highest level of agency (ability to change things in the local area) is found among people in villages; and that people in coastal towns are the only group that attribute blame for the country’s divisions on political parties first (compared to large city residents, who more often blame the country’s divisions on the UK being a very unequal society).

Figure 6.7.

Neglect of ‘where I’m from’

People who live in small towns feel their area has been much more neglected than people who live in large cities

The area where I live has been neglected for a long time



Qu. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The area where I live has been neglected for a long time? February 2020.
Source: More in Common 2020.

6.4 Key takeaways

This chapter notes that differences between people do not necessarily constitute social divisions. But divisions are created when a person's association with a group (whether a political party, a nation, or some other aspect of their identity) becomes all-encompassing, causing them to conform to what they perceive to be the group's beliefs and act with hostility towards those who disagree, who are seen as being in the out-group.

This degree of polarisation is not the case with any of the three fault lines discussed in this chapter, perhaps with the one exception of Scotland and the galvanising of Scottish identity around the growing independence movement (which has not been studied for this project).

Only one in five Britons has a clear left or right identity. Some 53 per cent associated themselves with the centre of political beliefs, either as centre-left, centre-right or centre.

Although real differences exist between different age cohorts, these differences are greatest on issues relating to the age gap. While there are differences of opinion, there is little outright hostility between the generations. The age fault line is one of differing opinions, rather than a social division.

Similarly, while there are significant differences between people across different regions, much of this is captured in the segment analysis. The greatest differences between regions also tend to be in connection with regional issues, while on many other issues there is much common ground, starting with the need to shift decision making power to people's communities and out of London. Even Londoners believe London is too influential on the nation.

Each of these are significant fault lines that are not going away and could widen in the future (especially around the push for independence in Scotland). Nevertheless, the common ground across these fault lines is strong and often underestimated. Focusing on that common ground, rather than on the fault lines, can help to build a more cohesive society.

Endnotes

- 1 Laura Krause and Jérémie Gagné, *Die Andere Deutsche Teilung: Zustand Und Zukunftsfähigkeit Unserer Gesellschaft* (More in Common, 2019).
- 2 Smith concludes that 'British politics is more fractured than ever before, with party loyalties in flux and the fault lines of left and right no longer holding sway (if they ever did); Matt Smith, 'Left-Wing versus Right-Wing: It's Complicated | YouGov', 2019 <<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2019/08/14/left-wing-versus-right-wing-its-complicated>> [accessed 5 October 2020].
- 3 Rutter, J. and Ballinger, S. (ed.) (2020) *Remember the kindness of strangers: division, unity and social connection during and beyond COVID-19*. London: British Future. Available at: <http://www.britishfuture.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/RememberingTheKindnessOfStrangersReport.pdf>
- 4 Use of Centre for Towns' typology by courtesy of the Centre for Towns and YouGov. The Centre for Towns' typology includes core cities, towns of various sizes, and villages. The data can also be broken down by type of area, including coastal, post-industrial areas, commuter belt, post-war new towns, university towns, and market towns.

