

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

# Conclusion



Miriam Juan-Torres  
Tim Dixon  
Arisa Kimaram

# Conclusion

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**We hope this study of British society in the 2020s points the way towards better understanding ourselves, the reasons for our differences, and the way forward in building common ground.**

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Too often our differences are overstated and common ground underestimated, as this report has shown. But the fact that division is not inevitable does not assure us that Britain will not continue down a path of polarisation throughout the 2020s. There are powerful forces pushing us down that path in Britain as in other countries: disinformation, the ways that social media exploits our psychological vulnerabilities, the elevation of the most strident voices in forums such as Twitter, and the profit-making models of partisan media. Those forces are strengthened by public frustration with elites and with our political system, society's failure to resolve entrenched injustices, feelings of disrespect and grievance among population groups, and by leaders and influencers who see division as a means to advance their own goals. It is not easy to resist these forces of division.

One example of the day-by-day threats that lie ahead are the so-called 'culture wars' debates exported from the United States to the United Kingdom and other countries. Politicians, opinion-makers, and social media activists can be quick to pick up on symbolic issues that inflame the differences between groups in society, create false choices between opposing extremes, and then polarise groups around those false binaries. Politicians and media influencers face constant temptations to ignite such conflicts, and the tribal outrage machine of social media ensures engagement around them no matter how trivial the issues. Over time, such conflicts can spawn extremism on opposing sides, while alienating and frustrating the rest of the population, which finds such conflict exhausting and irrelevant to their lives. We need to be smarter in calling out these efforts to divide us for what they are.

Resisting such efforts to divide starts with better understanding each other. We hope that the story of Britain's seven segments told in this study contributes to that end. It reflects the rich tapestry of British society. One of the privileges of undertaking a project such as this is the opportunity to speak to a far more diverse range of Britons than is normally encountered in one person's family, work, or community. Listening to others and hearing about the experiences and beliefs that shape them have reminded us how valuable and enriching those stories are. We need to find new ways for people in Britain to hear them. So often the 'backstory' of someone else's life is critical to build empathy and understanding for who they are now, and why they believe what they do. But the pace of our public debates today – or perhaps more accurately, their shallowness – means that we so often encounter others' views without the wider context of their lives and experiences.

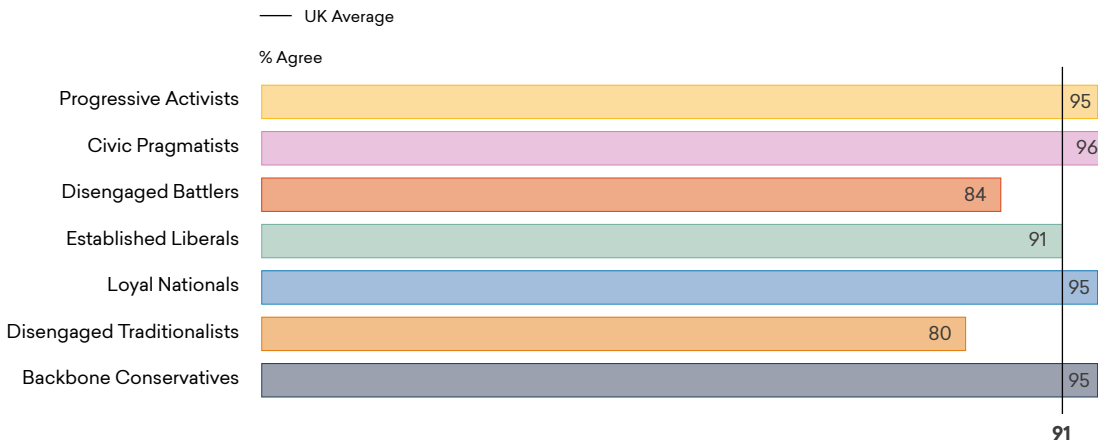
Amidst the suffering and disruption of Covid-19, Britain has been provided with a glimpse of the kind of society that we could become in the 2020s, if we can find better ways to navigate our differences and prevent them turning into deeper divisions. Our research has found that even those who had felt profoundly pessimistic about society, have been surprised and deeply affected by what we could become. It is easy for us to believe the worst about others, especially those different from ourselves. Finding ways to re-build our confidence in each other is vital in building our resilience against efforts to divide us. That way, we can disagree without giving up on each other – as nine in ten Britons agree we should be able to do.

Figure 12.1.

## Learning to disagree

Britons believe it is important that we can disagree and still come together

### We are able to disagree without giving up on each other



Qu. How important is it to you that the UK become a society where...We are able to disagree without giving up on each other. February 2020.  
Source: More in Common 2020.

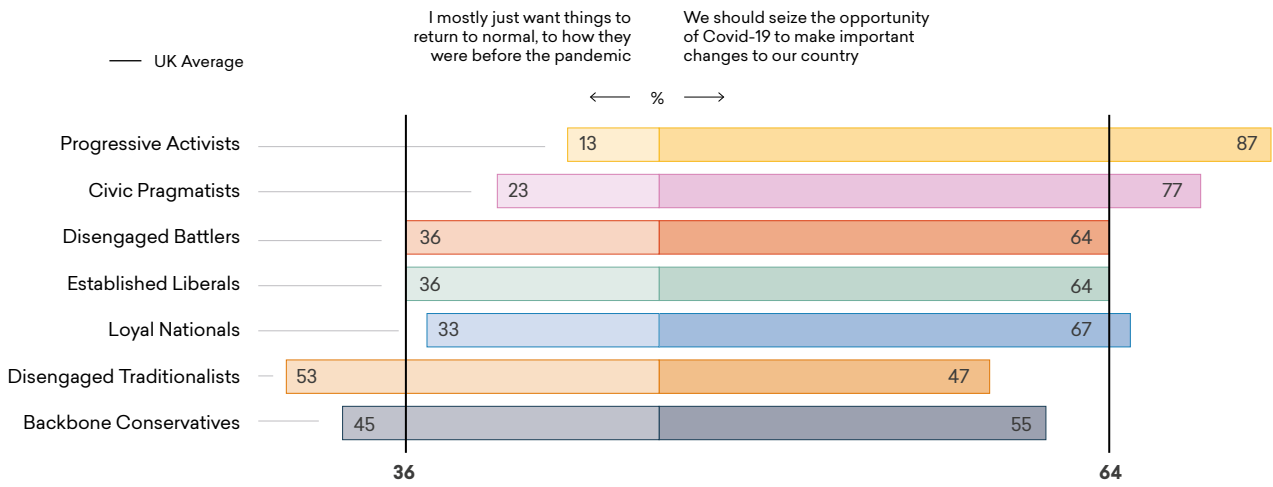
This report is not a comprehensive analysis of the issues it has touched upon, but we hope it provides new insights into the divisions and the common ground in the United Kingdom today. The dataset prepared for this study is unusually large, and because its focus is not on current issues but underlying values, we anticipate the analysis of the seven groups remaining relevant for several years. More in Common will be releasing more detailed findings from this dataset in the months to come, and we look forward to working with partner organisations to further test the insights that arise from this study.

This study is about a choice that Britain faces – a choice about the path ahead in the 2020s. One path leads to the deepening polarisation that is being experienced in other countries, where ‘us-versus-them’ dynamics shape our national debates, causing distrust and even hate between people on either side of the divide. The other path leads to a more cohesive society where we build on our common ground, and focus our energies on fixing the burning injustices that are so widely recognised and agreed upon.

The Covid-19 pandemic has strengthened our belief that this is a moment for change. There is a rare opportunity to bring people in Britain together around new agendas for the 2020s in which we fix what we know is broken in our society, while also preserving those things that we most highly value. We cannot find another major western democracy where the appetite for change is stronger than it is in the UK. Britain has remarkable potential. Now is a moment for leaders at every level of society and for local communities to step up. We hope More in Common can be one small part of a much larger story of a nation coming together.

Figure 12.2.

## Appetite for change



Qu. Which of the following statement do you agree with more: We should seize the opportunity of Covid-19 to make important changes to our country. June 2020.

Source: More in Common 2020.

