

From Security Comes Hope

Politics in the Age of Insecurity

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Labour  Together

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Foreword..... 3

Summary.....5

Introduction..... 7

Part One: The Causes of Insecurity..... 8

 From order to disorder.....8

 The blunders of our governments..... 9

Part Two: Insecurity in Britain..... 11

 An insecure electorate.....11

 How insecurity feels..... 13

 Why we value security..... 19

Part Three: The Politics of Security.....21

 Building a new politics of security..... 21

 Drawing on Labour’s past.....24

 Playing to Labour’s advantage..... 25

Conclusion.....28

Appendix..... 29

About Labour Together

In Labour's wilderness years, Labour Together was founded by a group of MPs fighting to make the party electable again: Rachel Reeves, Wes Streeting, Shabana Mahmood, Steve Reed, Bridget Philipson, Lucy Powell, Lisa Nandy and Jon Cruddas. Today, Labour Together is a think tank offering bold ideas for Britain under a Labour government.

www.labourtogether.uk

About the Author

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All and any mistakes are the author's own.

Foreword

A few months ago, one of us knocked on the door of a young family in Lancashire, half an hour north of Manchester. The couple had lived in the area for most of their lives, with the mum working in Morrisons and the dad as a delivery driver.

She opened the door after work, looking anxious and drained. They had just received a letter with the interest rates they would have to pay when her fixed-term mortgage expired in a few months. We talked about how she would manage it alongside the other pressures on her household budget. Her energy bills had doubled. It was costing more for her to feed and clothe her children. Her wages had not gone up in years. “I just feel so tired”, she said, “so fed up of not knowing what’s around the corner, what will hit me next. I just want to do the fun things again: go on holiday once, buy my kids a present, make our home nicer instead of watching it crumble.”

While researching this paper, we met many families exhausted by ceaseless insecurity. Some blamed rising mortgages and Liz Truss’s economic mismanagement. Others thought the Conservatives had neglected our country: letting schools and hospitals fail; failing to invest in buses, trains and roads; and squeezing household budgets to breaking point - leaving them unable to withstand a cold winter or hot summer.

A few reached for a deeper explanation: to the times that we live in. They were right to do so. Think about the underlying drivers of that family’s experience. Like many in the transport sector, the dad used to have a stable, well-paid job in a local company. Now he works at an international conglomerate where an algorithm decides the shifts he works and the routes he takes. The family’s energy bills have spiked as war has returned to Europe. For almost half a century, an international order made it almost unthinkable for a major power to invade another sovereign nation in Europe. That order is creaking, even collapsing.

We are at the early stages of an era in which two global superpowers - America and China - will square up to one another and mankind attempts the fastest and most significant energy transition in history. As these imperatives become increasingly important to how people, goods, and services move across the world, prices will rise further. Whether toy cars made in China, fresh fruit and vegetables, or going on an annual holiday, it will become that bit harder to do and buy much of what we have taken for granted. All the while, the rapid pace of technological change offers immense opportunities to confront these challenges with confidence and hope.

This paper is about that deeper explanation of insecurity. And it begins to answer one of the defining political questions of our time: what does it mean to win and govern in the age of insecurity?

We are confident this government is not the answer. It has shown itself to be the opposite of a safe pair of hands: leaving Britain fraying at the seams, unprepared for the crises we have experienced and those to come. For too long, the Conservatives have governed Britain with an eye for the next 100 days in Westminster, not the well-being of workers, families and communities across our country.

That much is clear. But what is the right politics to win and govern at this moment? In an age when governments often find themselves behind the curve of change, how should Labour address the biggest challenges and grasp the most significant opportunities that lie ahead?

This paper argues that a new ‘politics of security’ could answer this call - a political project based around lifting the weight of insecurity off people’s shoulders, and thereby giving them the freedom to pursue their hopes and ambitions once more.

Of course, security is not an answer to everything. Like all ideas, it comes with its own political risks. The overwhelming presence of insecurity can sometimes be used as an excuse for a poverty of ambition. The push for greater security can become another false promise of protection, producing the dangerous expectation that governments can shield people from forces far beyond their control.

What security can do, however, is encourage true political courage. It represents a willingness to square up to the enormity of the challenges our world and our country are experiencing, and develop ambitious ideas about how to address them. It necessitates an impatience to embrace change, to understand what drives it, so it can be harnessed for the benefit of everyone.

We also think it can provide an orienting goal for policy. Labour’s policy offer must strive to appeal to the full breadth of the coalition that can be built around security: home owners as well as private renters, the old as well as the young, rural areas as well as big cities. Security is demanding: ensuring everyone has the real conditions of freedom, the capacity to pursue their hopes and dreams with confidence. It can cost money but it can also involve institutional reforms that shift a distribution of power that has failed too many for too long, encompassing regulatory changes that restructure markets and unlock capital, and reforms to employment, pensions, planning, and infrastructure. It also invites us to rethink how policy is made, away from centralised command and control and towards greater experimentation, iteration, and gradual improvement.

Above all, we hope this paper will serve as a provocation. It is an invitation to jump into a political idea that invites thought and debate. It will be the first in a series that will, over the coming months, explore the central ideas animating the Labour Party led by Sir Keir Starmer and Rachel Reeves.

Josh Simons and Andrew Cooper

Summary

We live in an age of insecurity. War has returned to the European continent. Political upheaval has disrupted some of the most stable democracies in the world. A rising China is destabilising the old, America-centric global order.

In this new era, Britain has been uniquely exposed. Cutting hard and fast after the financial crisis, our economy has been starved of investment. Growth has flatlined. Our public services are crumbling. Our councils are going bankrupt.

In this paper, we show that insecurity defines the lives of millions of Britons across the country. Their insecurity begins at home, with family finances stretched to breaking point. It reaches into their local community, where crime goes unpunished and shuttered shops line the high street. It extends to a failing British state, with school ceilings collapsing and our healthcare system on its knees. It reaches our borders, where our asylum system has failed and hotels fill with unprocessed migrants. It lurks beyond our borders, where global tensions and temperatures rise.

Meeting these challenges calls for a new politics of security. Its aim is first to restore certainty and stability to people's lives. Those who have lived a life of poverty or precarity understand that security is a value in its own right. Those with the luxury of taking it for granted are quick to dismiss it as unambitious, even defensive.

Security is intrinsically important, but it is more than that too. Security is also important because it makes other things in life possible. A secure life is one where we have the ability to look to the future. No longer held back by the catastrophic cost of failure, we have the freedom to pursue our ambitions, to take calculated risks, to find hope. By addressing our age of insecurity, we can forge a new age of possibility.

Our research shows that voters want security for many reasons. Some simply want to enjoy life again. Others want to create a fairer and more caring society. Some want their hard work to be rewarded. Others want to pass on a better world to their children.

Because security is the foundation for a wide range of hopes and dreams, a politics built around security unites a wide coalition of voters, who share experiences of insecurity but whose aspirations are wide-ranging. The pluralism of security as a value is what underpins its political strength. By giving people the chance to pursue their own ambitions again, security is a political idea that binds us together.

Insecurity is broad, and that breadth is both its strength and its weakness as a political idea. With insecurity so rife, it is hard to know where to start. Based on the public opinion research that underpins this report, we suggest five conditions of a secure life that could guide a future Labour administration:

1. A secure job and a decent wage
2. Bills that are predictable and under control
3. A decent home you can grow old in
4. Everyday services that you can depend on
5. Safe streets and strong communities

In Britain's age of insecurity, each of the above seem distant. Within the fiscal constraints that a future Labour government might inherit, achieving them feels harder still. A politics built around security will therefore require prioritisation and trade-off, often setting short-term fixes against long-term cures. It will require that we govern differently, no longer relying on the approaches we took in past, more prosperous times. Perhaps most importantly, building security will take time. This will not be the work of a single-term. Nor should it be presented to a rightly sceptical public as such.

The hunger for greater security is real though. And Labour enjoys a wide lead over the Conservatives. Of the 25 issues that contribute most to people's sense of insecurity, Labour is more trusted than the Conservatives to tackle all but two. When asked who they trust to make their lives more secure in general, voters back Labour by a margin of 13 points, and back Starmer over Sunak by 9 points.

This lead, however, is fragile. Asked to pick between the two parties and 45% of voters cannot do so. Amongst one group of voters, Labour's lead is particularly delicately poised. In April 2023, Labour Together identified 'Stevenage Woman' as the voter who holds the next election in her hands. A financially insecure, young mother, she represents the largest group of voters in key Labour-Conservative marginals. Asked about who she trusts to make her more secure, Labour leads by 11 points and Starmer leads by 5 points. One of the most volatile voters in the electorate, Stevenage Woman votes on who will best address her concerns, not according to long-term party loyalty. Under the Conservatives, her life has grown increasingly insecure. Labour must prove that they can reverse that.

In the months to come, Britain will head towards its next election. Insecurity will still define life in Britain then and the promise of security will still bind voters together. While Labour may lead on this defining issue today, the race is not yet run. This paper points to how a new politics of security could help Labour gain power, and - ultimately - bring hope where today there is fear.

Introduction

This paper explores Britain's age of insecurity. In part one, we look for the causes of insecurity, finding them in a dangerous and disordered world, and in the blunders of our recent governments. In part two, we explore what insecurity really feels like and where it is felt most keenly. In part three, we look at what a government can do to address insecurity, and why the Labour Party is well positioned to do so.

Along the way, we take a broad definition of the terms insecurity and security. In doing so, we follow the lead of the electorate. Gather voters around a table for a couple of hours and ask them about their insecurity, as we did many times while researching this paper, and you scarcely need to ask another question.

In this sense, the public's intuitive understanding of the word matches the broad way in which academics and thinkers have tended to treat it. To the psychologist Abraham Maslow, security was a wide "syndrome of feelings" that include "being at home in the world, calm, safety, self-esteem, self-acceptance, courage, and strength." Maslow did not doubt its importance, placing it second only to our physiological requirements (e.g. to be fed, watered, rested and clothed) in his famous "hierarchy of needs".¹

The word's origins are Latin and point to one meaning. "*Se*" and "*cura*" means, literally, "free from care". Its etymology leads us to one way in which security has been understood. The historian Emma Rothschild, for instance, has described security as "freedom from... [the] fear of personal violation."² In this telling, security is best described as the absence of negative pressures - it is our freedom *from* insecurity.

Monique Wonderly, an academic at the University of California, considers this reductive. She notes that "the person who feels secure is without (significant) worry, fear, or anxiety. But so, too, are the comatose, the dead, the grapefruit, and the lamppost, and they do not feel secure." Instead, she argues that our definition of security should be extended to define it as a positive force too. It is, she says, the freedom to look to the future and say: "Ok, go ahead."³

Echoing Isaiah Berlin's "two concepts of liberty"⁴, security is not just our *freedom from* something negative; it is also our *freedom to* do something positive. Security is what gives us the confidence to plan for our future. It is the foundation, and necessary condition, of hope. While insecurity draws in our horizons, security gives us the ability and opportunity to expand them. In this paper, we explore the degree to which our horizons have been narrowed, and describe how a new politics of security might widen them again.

¹ Abraham Maslow, 'The Dynamics of Psychological Insecurity-Security', *Journal of Personality*, 1942

² Emma Rothschild, 'What is Security?', *Daedalus* 124, 1995

³ Monique Wonderly, 'On the Affect of Security', *Philosophical Topics*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (FALL 2019), pp. 165-182

⁴ Isaiah Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', 1958

Part One: The Causes of Insecurity

From order to disorder

To understand how Britain entered an age of insecurity, we must first understand how insecurity marks the modern world.

At the turn of the millennium, a little over twenty years ago, few would have imagined that this would be the case. The West had won the Cold War, morally and materially, and America was the sole underwriter of global peace and prosperity. Liberal democracies were confident and on the rise. The globalised economy was spreading wealth and opportunity widely, lifting billions out of poverty in the developing world, while delivering cheap goods to Western shores. Digital technologies seemed to herald a new, and more equitable, industrial revolution.

Britain itself was thriving. Our economy was growing. A New Labour government was modernising and improving public services. We might no longer have ruled the waves, but Britannia was cool. We even seemed to have found our post-Imperial place in the world, at the spearhead of a liberal, interventionist movement. We were a confident nation in what seemed like an era of unprecedented, and lasting, order.

That order did not last. The financial crisis of 2008 exposed profound weaknesses within the developed economies. Globalisation revealed its many losers, visible in the struggling industrial heartlands of developed nations. A rising China unbalanced the global order, turning a unipolar world into a bipolar one, with nations caught in a ceaseless balancing act between the two great powers. For the first time since the Second World War, major power conflict has returned to Europe, with Russia's long and bloody invasion of Ukraine causing further upheaval in global markets. Conflict all over the globe has displaced more people in a single year than at any point in recent history.⁵ Meanwhile, climate change is gathering pace and beginning to leave its mark, with temperatures warming and forest fires raging.⁶

Amongst these strong international currents, Britain has found itself adrift, unable to chart a steady course. Britain has in fact found itself uniquely exposed, and Britons have suffered more than their international peers. In 2007, on the eve of the financial crisis, the average British household was wealthier than its peers in France and Germany. Within just ten years, the situation had reversed. By 2018, Britons were living on incomes that were 9% lower than in France and 16% lower than in Germany.⁷ Britain is experiencing insecurity more acutely than other nations. We must be doing something wrong.

⁵ UNHCR Refugee Statistics, 2022, <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/statistics>

⁶ See: Jason Bordoff and Meghan L. O'Sullivan, *The Age of Energy Insecurity*, Foreign Affairs, June 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/world/energy-insecurity-climate-change-geopolitics-resources>

⁷ Resolution Foundation, *Stagnation Nation: The Economy 2030 Inquiry*, <https://economy2030.resolutionfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Chapter-one-interim-report.pdf>

The blunders of our governments

To understand why Britain has suffered so acutely, we have to look at what British governments did and did not do in the years after the financial crisis. In that period, there were three notable blunders. The first was austerity. Britain cut harder and faster than other countries, sapping investment from its economy and public services.⁸ The second was Brexit without a plan, detaching Britain from its closest trading partner without knowing how it might be replaced. The third was instability. British politics froze for three years after the EU Referendum. Boris Johnson's administration was always haphazard and often chaotic. Liz Truss's 49 days in office were downright disastrous, triggering a market crash. Four Prime Ministers and six Chancellors in four years stalled every major government initiative.

The impact is writ large on Britain's economy today. Investment is the lifeblood of a healthy economy, and in Britain both its public and private sources have been persistently low.⁹ Productivity - the output per hour worked - has been stagnant, as other countries have pulled ahead.¹⁰ Wages, always tied closely to productivity, have been flat.¹¹

To look only at the national picture disguises the true scale of the problem. Britain is, in truth, a two-track economy, with wealth and opportunity disproportionately held by a few places and people. It has one of the highest levels of income inequality in the developed world.¹² And it is one of the most geographically unequal.¹³

These long-term weaknesses became particularly acute when an economic crisis struck in 2022, stretching low incomes thin. Following the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian, energy bills soared to record highs. In March 2023, food price inflation hit a 45 year high, at 19.2%.¹⁴ Low-income households were hit hardest, with 27% reporting to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in May that they were unable to heat their homes, 53% that they had to cut spending on food, and 31% going without three or more essential items.¹⁵

Britain's economic failure has left its mark across society. Starved of investment, Britain's public services are stretched to breaking point. The NHS is particularly illustrative of that fact.

⁸ The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Government at a Glance*, 2021, available from: <https://data.oecd.org/gga/general-government-spending.htm>

⁹ IPPR analysis of OECD, 2022, available here:

<https://www.ippr.org/blog/cutting-corporation-tax-not-magic-bullet-for-increasing-investment>

¹⁰ Stansbury, Turner, Balls, *How to tackle the UK's regional economic inequality*, 2023,

<https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/how-tackle-uks-regional-economic-inequality-focus-stem-transport-and-innovation>

¹¹ See Stansbury and Summers, 2018, *Productivity and Pay: Is the link broken?*, <https://www.nber.org/papers/w24165>

¹² Data from OECD, 2021, <https://data.oecd.org/inequality/income-inequality.htm>

¹³ See IFS, *Levelling Up*, 2020,

https://ifs.org.uk/sites/default/files/output_url_files/CH7-IFS-Green-Budget-2020-Levelling-up.pdf

¹⁴ ONS data,

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/personalandhouseholdfinances/expenditure/articles/impa-ctofincreasedcostoflivingonadultsacrossgreatbritain/februarytomay2023>

¹⁵ JRF data, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/unable-escape-persistent-hardship-jrfs-cost-living-tracker-summer-2023>

Patients arriving at A&E should be seen within four hours. In 2011, just 5% missed that target. By 2019, a quarter did. By December 2022, more than half did.¹⁶ Cancer patients should receive their first treatment within 62 days. In 2015, 85% did. Today, just 55% do - a record low.¹⁷

Chronic underinvestment in Britain's schools has now become dramatically apparent too, with the sorry sight of hundreds of schools closed for fear of collapsing ceilings. The very state itself is struggling, with local councils – including Birmingham's, the largest in Europe – declaring effective bankruptcy. More are expected to follow.¹⁸

Our streets are also growing less safe. Robberies are up 13% and knife crimes are up 5%. Even more notable than the rise in crime is the reduction in cases solved. In 2015, the Home Office introduced a new reporting framework, announcing that a paltry 16% of crimes resulted in prosecution. That figure has since collapsed further, now sitting at 5.7%.¹⁹ In 2020, the government's own inspector of the constabulary offered a withering view of the state of justice in Britain today: “most of the public simply give up reporting because the chances of anything positive happening are so slim.”²⁰

Economic stagnation. Low wages and rising prices. Crumbling public services. Bankrupt local councils. A disordered and dangerous world. These are the elements that, taken together, describe our age of insecurity. But while insecurity is always caused by what happens in the world around us, it is also something that we *feel*. Insecurity is subjective. To fully understand it, we must see it through the eyes of those who experience it.

¹⁶ NHS Statistics, 2023, <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7281/CBP-7281.pdf>

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ The Economist, 'Why More English Councils Will Go Bust', 2023, <https://www.economist.com/britain/2023/09/14/why-more-english-councils-will-go-bust>

¹⁹ Home Office statistics, 2023, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/445753/hosb0115.pdf

²⁰ The Guardian, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/feb/07/police-watchdog-warns-confidence-in-forces-being-damaged>

Part Two: Insecurity in Britain

An insecure electorate

To explore the depths of insecurity in Britain today, we travelled across the country, speaking to voters in Cumbria, Manchester, the Midlands, London and the South Coast, and also polled the views of thousands, spread across every part of England and Wales.

Our analysis was grounded in an evaluation of the electorate first put forward in *Red Shift*, the report that relaunched Labour Together in April 2023. Then, we described the six groups of voters who make up the English and Welsh electorate, distinguished by their attitudes to social and economic issues. In doing so, we showed that two groups of voters will be essential to determining the outcome of the next election.

The first, we called the Patriotic Left. They are often characterised as “Red Wall” voters, living disproportionately in the old Labour heartlands that voted for Brexit and were lost to the Conservatives in the 2019 General Election. They are older voters, mostly men, whose attitudes are socially conservative but economically left-wing. They are also the most financially insecure group of voters in the electorate. Borrowing from the centre-right think tank Onward, we called these voters ‘Workington Man’, nodding to that post-industrial constituency on Cumbria’s coast. If Labour is to reverse the losses of 2019, it must win back Workington Man.

The second group, newer to popular debate, we called Disillusioned Suburbans. These voters, disproportionately younger women, live in towns and suburbs across the country, particularly in the new towns in the south and the midlands. They tend to be balancers in their political views, leaning a little towards social conservatism and a little to the left on economics. Not attached to any particular dogma, their views are defined by two things. Firstly, like the Patriotic Left, they are financially insecure. Secondly, they are disillusioned by politics and its empty promises. To bring this voter to life, we christened her ‘Stevenage Woman’, representing a bellwether seat that has always returned an MP from the governing party. If Labour is to win an outright majority at the next election, it must win the vote of Stevenage Woman.

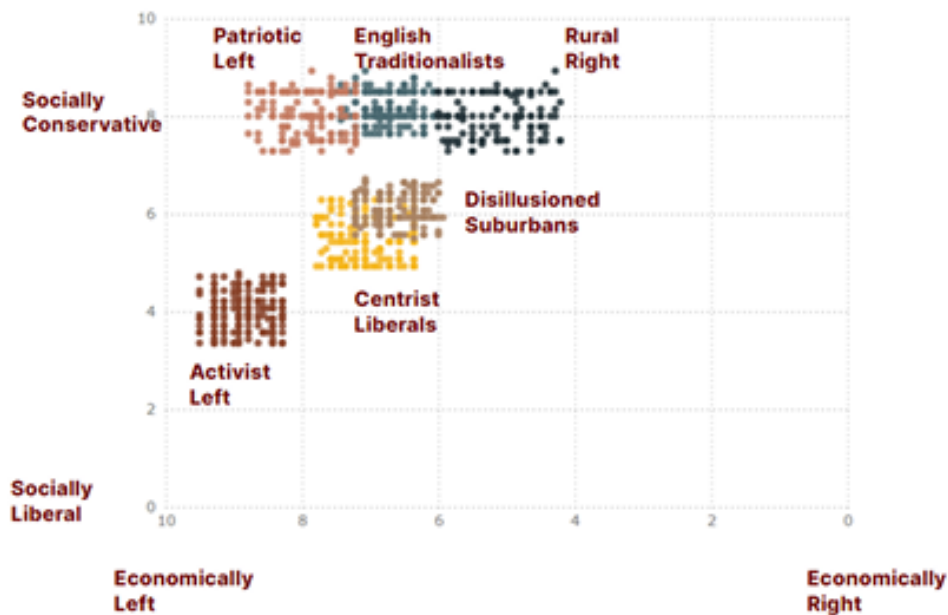


Figure A - Labour Together's voter segmentation²¹

In *Red Shift*, we noted that Labour's two target voters were united by one thing. Workington Man and Stevenage Woman are the most financially insecure voters in Britain, with the lowest incomes, the smallest savings, and the least resilience to a financial shock (40% of voters in both of these groups would not be able to pay an unexpected bill of £300). In this paper, we extend that analysis, exploring how insecurity marks the lives of almost every voter in the electorate.

²¹ This segmentation divides the electorate according to their attitudes to social/cultural and economic issues. At the 2019 election, Labour won the support of just one group (the young, urban voters we call the 'Activist Left'). Today, Labour enjoys majority support amongst four groups: the Activist Left, Centrist Liberals (a group of mostly urban progressive professionals), the Disillusioned Suburbans and Patriotic Left (both described above). The Conservatives have retained majorities only amongst their most loyal supporters: two groups of older, more financially secure, rural voters who we called the 'English Traditionalists' and 'Rural Right'. For more, see 'Red Shift: Labour's Path to Power', <https://labourtogether.uk/report/red-shift>

How insecurity feels

Insecurity is evident across the electorate. When we polled voters in September 2023, just 16% said they felt “more secure” now than they did five years ago. When asked about the country as a whole, just 10% believed Britain has become “more secure”.²²

Figure B highlights the ways in which this insecurity is most commonly experienced:

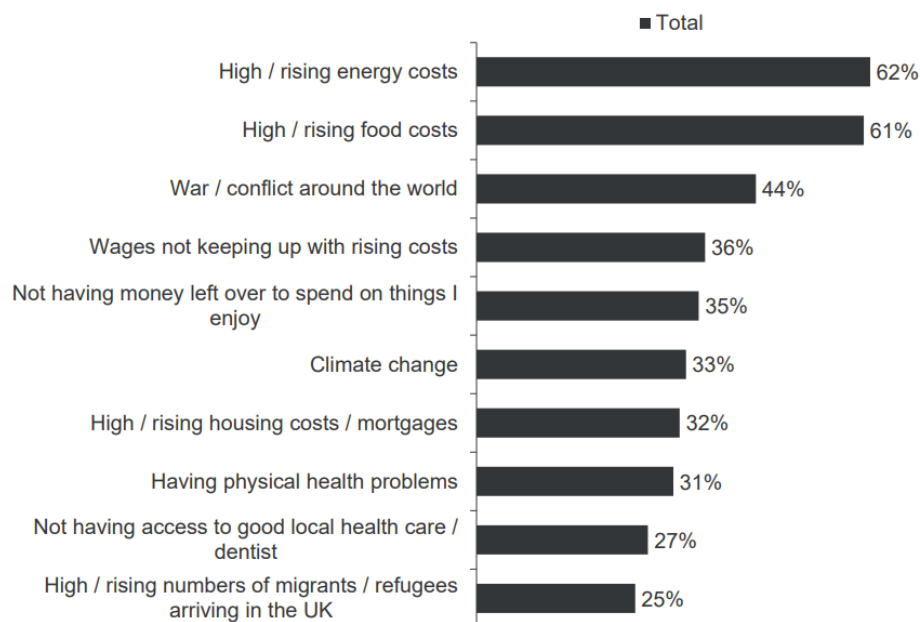


Figure B - What has made you feel less secure in your day-to-day life? (all voters)

Parlous household finances are the greatest cause of insecurity in Britain today. Of the ten most common causes of insecurity recorded by voters, half relate to their personal finances: rising energy bills, food price inflation, flat wages, a lack of disposable income and rising housing costs.

The other five sources of insecurity are more varied. Nearly half of voters cited international conflict as a cause of their personal insecurity, and a third said the same of climate change. Just under a third said their physical health was a cause of insecurity, and just over a quarter cited the unavailability of local healthcare (an issue that recurred particularly regularly in group discussions). Exactly a quarter cited migrant numbers as a source of their insecurity.

²² The survey was conducted by Labour Together. Fieldwork was conducted 4th -12th September. We interviewed 2180 GB adults, who are weighted to be representative of the adult population.

Here, it is helpful to break down the same set of results using Labour Together’s voter segments, as we do in *Figure C*. Doing so gives us a greater understanding of who, exactly, prioritises what:

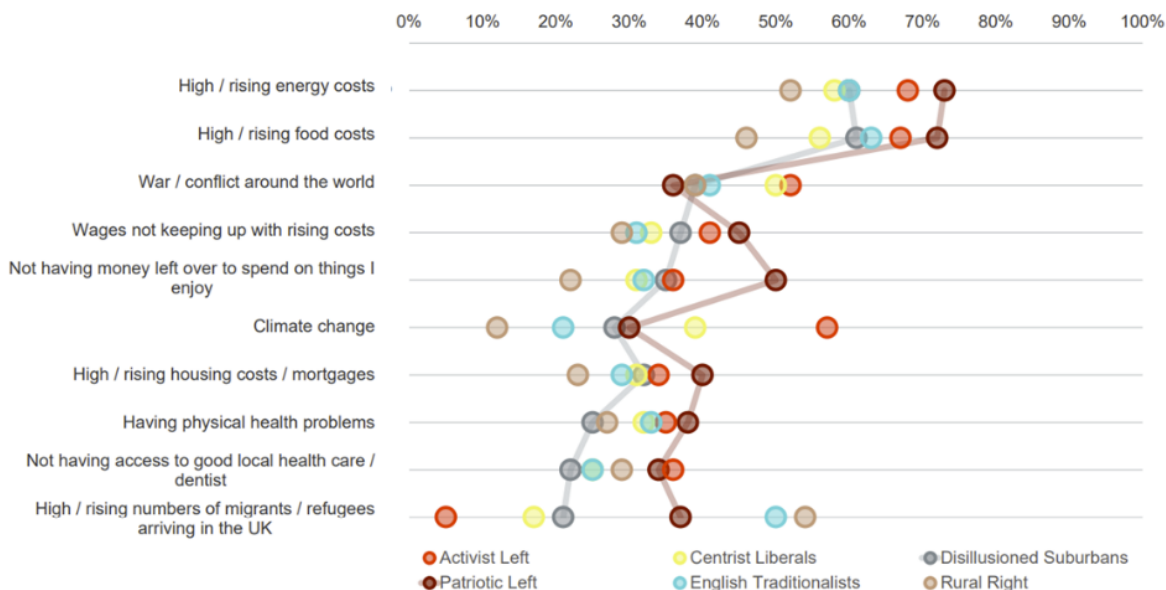


Figure C - What has made you feel less secure in your day-to-day life? (by segments)

The two groups who rank international conflict and climate change highest are the two segments who represent the Labour Party’s metropolitan base: the Activist Left (younger voters at the leftward extreme on economic and social issues) and Centrist Liberals (the progressive, professional classes). For the majority, international events resonate only when they reach into people’s lives. War in Europe is only a top priority when it causes energy costs to rise. Climate change features only when temperatures or flood waters rise. This aligns closely to the discussions we held across Britain, which were exclusively with the two target voter groups set out earlier in this paper: the Patriotic Left (Workington Man) and the Disillusioned Suburbans (Stevenage Woman). The dialogue below came at the end of a free-flowing 90-minute discussion on insecurity, which touched on everything but climate change. It bears repeating in its entirety:

“Interviewer: Some people think that climate change is a big thing that makes them feel insecure about the future. Does that ever cross your mind as being something to be worried about?

Respondent 1: No.

Respondent 2: We're too selfish. We're just bothered about our own family and the now.

Respondent 3: I do a little bit, I do the recycling, but I don't worry about the rest of it... Until they went on strike. Now, everything just goes in the normal bin.

Respondent 4: There's more important things to worry about...”²³

This exchange is not to say that these voters necessarily disregard the threat of climate change. Members of the same group noted that we “are not moving fast enough”. But with life so difficult in the here and now, most voters feel they have “more important” - and more immediate - “things to worry about”.

Breaking the analysis down by voter segments also helps us explore the degree to which an issue like migration is a source of insecurity. As noted above, a quarter of all voters consider migration to be a cause of their insecurity. However, this figure is skewed by the particular importance the issue holds for the core Conservative segments: the English Traditionalists and the Rural Right.



Figure D - Top five sources of insecurity for English Traditionalist and Rural Right voters

²³ Focus group discussion with Patriotic Left voters, Workington, July 2023

The Patriotic Left, sitting at the most socially conservative end of Labour’s coalition of voters, also consider immigration to be a cause of insecurity. However, it sits low on their priorities, the top five of which are all related directly to their household finances. This is unsurprising, as they are the most financially insecure voters in the country.

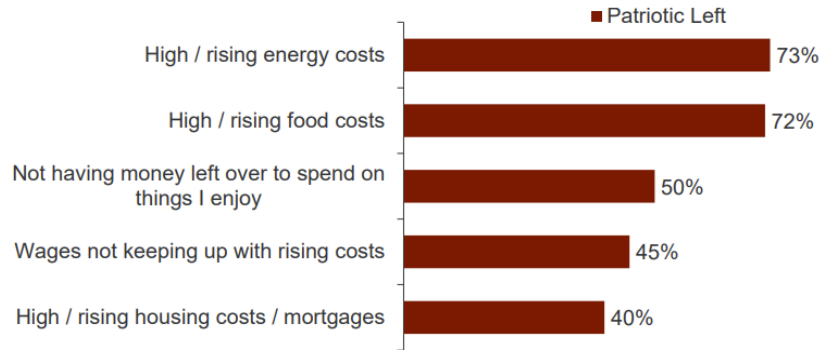


Figure E - Top five sources of insecurity for Patriotic Left voters

When we changed the way we asked our question – from defining causes of insecurity to suggesting solutions to create security – we broadened our understanding of how people experience security a little more.



Figure F - What would make you feel more secure in your day-to-day life? (all voters)

Again, financial security tops our list, with three in five hoping prices fall and two in five hoping their wages rise. Now, though, health rises high up the list of priorities, related to people’s own health (52%), the provision of good local health-care (37%) and mental health (34%) services. Crime also rises in importance, significantly, with 38% saying they would feel more secure with more “police on the streets” and 30% generally looking for a safer local neighbourhood.

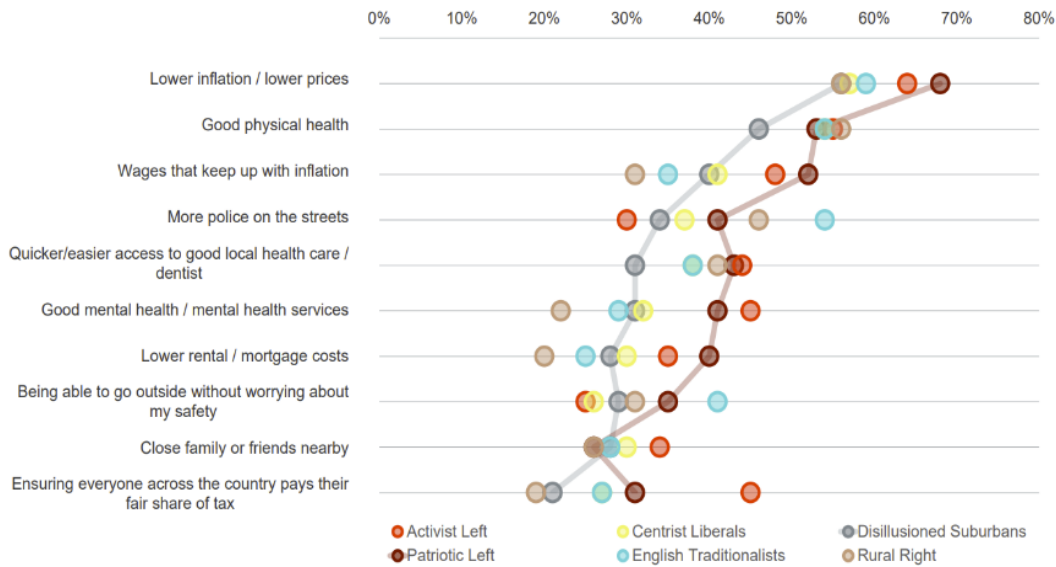


Figure G - What would make you feel more secure in your day-to-day life (by segments)

When we introduce our voter segments into the analysis, in *Figure G*, the picture does not dramatically change. Health remains a top-five priority for every voter. The desire for “more police” is a top-five priority for every group bar the most left-wing segment (the Activist Left).²⁴ Reducing migrant numbers, meanwhile, is a priority for the core Conservative vote (a top-two concern for both of the Conservative’s most loyal voters: the Rural Right and English Traditionalists).

This broader focus marries closely to the experience of holding focus groups which dissect people’s experiences of insecurity and security. In these groups, financial insecurity was undoubtedly the primary concern. Voters were worried about making ends meet while costs rose. They wanted to know they could afford the roof over their heads and to provide for their families. But they also spoke at great length about the security that they felt in belonging to a local community and knowing they had people to rely on. Again, healthcare featured regularly, particularly the difficulty of seeing a GP and a dentist. And physical security was a common concern at a time when anti-social behaviour seems to go unpunished. The quotes in *Figure H* give a good sense of the breadth with which voters experience insecurity in Britain today.

²⁴ See appendix for top priorities for each voter group



Figure H - "What does security mean to you?" (verbatim from focus groups)

Why we value security

A political project built around providing security is sometimes cast as a negative way of viewing the world. In part one of this paper, we set out a definition of security that refutes this. Security isn't defined only by its negative conception (freedom *from* insecurity). It is also a positive idea, about creating the conditions in which people have the freedom *to* pursue their own hopes and dreams. If you ask the public why they think security matters to them, both its negative and positive meanings are clearly evident, as *Figure I* shows.

Top 10 most common responses (amongst full sample)

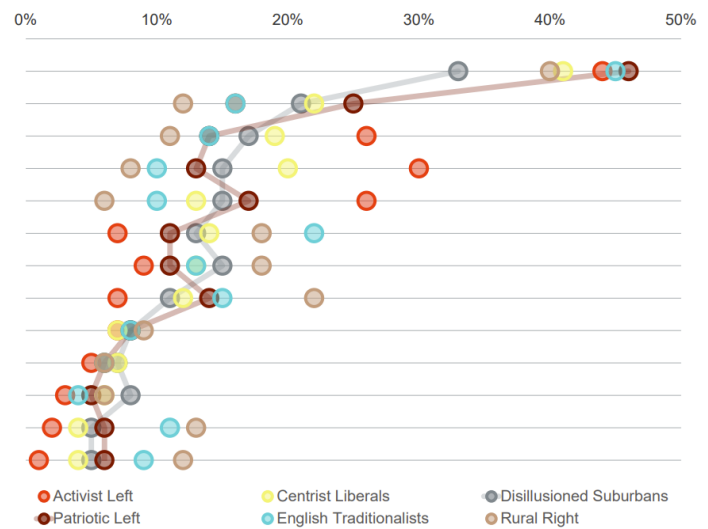


Figure I - The values that underpin security (by segment)

When asked to describe the “values” that underpin our desire for security, most gravitate immediately to a belief that they have a “right to live without fear or worry”. This is the conception of security as freedom from insecurity (and its popularity suggests that voters consider it worth pursuing).

Security in this negative sense is a value in its own right. Fear of insecurity is the animating force behind most of the great books written about politics, and indeed, many of the revolutionary moments that spawned the modern age. Aristotle, Hobbes, Montesquieu, Burke, even Marx were all preoccupied with avoiding the descent into social unrest, civil conflict, and war, that is both driven by insecurity and makes it endemic. Those who have lived through war or acute poverty know that security is a value in itself. In the age we live in, we would be wise not to dismiss that value too hastily.

While a desire for a life “without fear and worry” unites all of us, we are more widely spread across a wide range of positive values: the things that security gives us the freedom to pursue.

Some of us are hedonistic, prioritising “fun” and “joy”. Some are altruistic, seeking “a better world” or a more “caring” and “fairer” society. Some are traditionalists, desiring “respect” and “order”. Others are libertarian, seeking a life “without interference”. The list goes on. We value security not only because it gives us freedom *from* insecurity, but also because of what it gives us the freedom *to* do.

This illustrates the potential for a broad, pluralistic politics that is built around security, underpinned by a winning electoral coalition. Security unites people who want to be free from insecurity so that they are free to pursue the things that matter most to them. Security unites those who aspire to live quite different lives. A political philosophy built only around these specific positive values – joy, altruism, traditionalism, liberty - would have more limited appeal. By giving a broad range of people the opportunity to pursue their own hopes and ambitions, security is a political idea that binds.

This finds its visual expression in *Figure J*. This approach, called “laddering”, maps people’s everyday experiences of insecurity to the values they hold most dear. As such, it shows how a government that prioritises addressing people’s day-to-day concerns could both free them *from* insecurity, and free them *to* pursue their wider hopes and dreams.

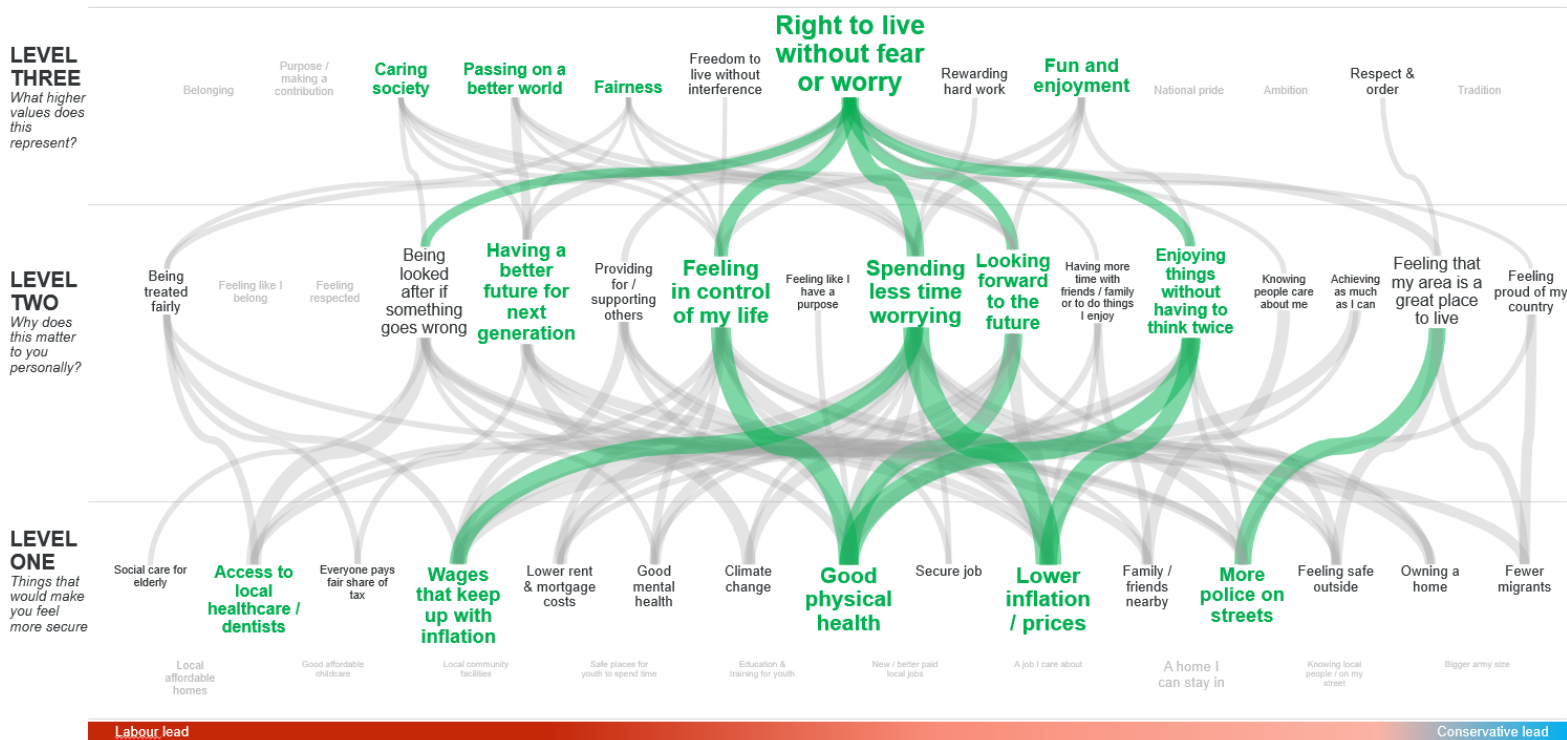


Figure J – How experiences of security “ladder” up to our values (all voters)²⁵

²⁵ In July 2023, Labour Together and Yonder Consulting conducted detailed research into voters’ attitudes towards the issue of security and ‘feeling secure’. First, we conducted focus groups with the Disillusioned Suburban and Patriotic Left segments. These focus group discussions allowed for a detailed examination of security and ‘feeling secure’. We explored the numerous different ways people considered the subject of security, what they thought could help them feel more secure in their day-to-day life, and what that increased feeling of security would mean to them. The focus groups uncovered dozens of day-to-day issues, their consequences, and the ultimate values underpinning them, ranging from the personal to the local and the national. We then presented these ideas to >4,000 nationally representative adults (across England & Wales) in a poll and invited people to choose the suggestions that would increase their sense of security, to associate them with consequences, and then consider potential explanations and higher values relating to their responses. This so-called “laddering” approach allowed us to identify the pathways that respondents follow as they consider the subject of security, and the ultimate benefits and values that could emerge from a greater sense of security.

Part Three: The Politics of Security

Building a new politics of security

The purpose of this paper has been to show the ways in which insecurity defines life in Britain today, and that a new political project based around building security could unite a wide coalition of voters. However, for security to be an idea that survives longer than a single election campaign it must be a promise that can be realised. Trust in politics has collapsed in Britain in recent years. Tired of empty promises, two-thirds of Britons now believe that their politicians are “out for themselves”.²⁶ The same sentiment echoed throughout the focus groups we conducted in researching this paper. A promise of security must not simply be another example of politicians writing cheques they cannot cash.

If a politics of security is going to be converted into good policy, this paper proposes three principles to guide policymakers:

A security agenda cannot be defensive. After the turmoil of the Industrial Revolution, Labour was created to deliver security for the many, not just the few. It did not try to turn back the tide of industrialisation, but instead promoted security for working people within an industrialised economy. From its founding, however, Labour has on occasion fallen into a small-c conservatism that sees security as protecting people from the perils of the present and the future, be that global markets, conflict, or new technologies. A policy agenda animated by security must reject protectionism of any form. The state cannot simply step in and eradicate insecurity. No government can or should seek to protect its citizens from the world.

Economic Security, a recent paper published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, points to how this might be done.²⁷ The paper shows that there is more we can do to limit people’s “exposure to insecurity”. There are regulations that could be updated to create a better safety net, such as increasing the minimum wage and employers’ contributions to their workers pensions. But the paper also notes that the goal of a security agenda should not be protection, but instead resilience. Graeme Cooke, its author, shows a number of ways in which a government could re-shape markets that promote individuals’ resilience and therefore their capacity to build their own prosperity. We could, for instance, establish a master housing developer to accelerate the construction of affordable homes and make it easier to get on the property ladder. We could also capitalise local institutions to provide affordable credit to people in areas where mainstream lenders do not operate, unleashing the potential of thousands of would-be

²⁶ IPPR polling, November 2022,

<https://www.ippr.org/news-and-media/press-releases/revealed-trust-in-politicians-in-free-fall-after-year-of-chaos-poll-reveals>

²⁷ Graeme Cooke, JRF, ‘Economic Security’, July 2023,

<https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/economic-security-foundation-dignity-opportunity-and-hope-age-uncertainty>

entrepreneurs. Notably, neither of these ideas requires a major investment of state spending, which points to the importance of a security agenda being a realistic one.

A security agenda must prioritise given limited resources. “There is”, as one Conservative minister repeats ad nauseam, “no money”. The next government will inherit taxation at record highs while public services crumble. A security agenda will have to be pursued within the constraints of the fiscal situation that the next government inherits, not railing against that reality.

There are two clear implications of this. The first is that policymakers must be creative. The paper cited above is an illustration of the good policy ideas that are possible within financial constraints. An incoming government will also have to make use of all the tools at its disposal. That means regulatory reform to restructure markets and remove impediments, like the labyrinthine planning processes that stop so much from happening in Britain today. It means changes to employment protections and pensions. And it means embracing a different way of doing government, whether that is through wide-scale embrace of digital technology in government or by pushing more power out from the centre, to local governments and communities themselves.

The second implication of limited resources is that prioritisation is vital. This is, undeniably, difficult. As this paper has already shown, security’s pluralism is its great political virtue. It stretches from those who experience acute poverty, living in housing conditions many of those reading this may never have experienced, to those who were moving up in the world but found themselves suddenly struggling to afford spiralling mortgage costs and energy bills. This pluralism means that security policies must speak to home ownership as well as social housing, and to the insecurity of professional work as well as the gig economy.

This paper has already illustrated the many ways in which insecurity is felt in Britain today, by voters across the country. Five possible ‘conditions of a secure life’ emerge from that process, uniting insecure voters across the electorate, and imply at least the first step towards setting policy-making priorities. These conditions, so absent for so many in Britain today, are:

1. A secure job and a decent wage
2. Bills that are predictable and under control
3. A decent home you can grow old in
4. Everyday services that you can depend on
5. Safe streets and strong communities

There must be a further layer of detail beyond this – not just in deciding *what* we prioritise, but also *when*.

A security agenda should prioritise long-term security – and be presented to the public as such. Building security implies an inevitable tension between security in the short and

long-term. Investing to promote long-term security may not bear fruit immediately. Equally, decisions to reduce short-term insecurity might divert funds from long-term causes. The funding required to cap household energy bills, for instance, addresses an immediate source of household insecurity, but it fails to address the long-term cause: an over-reliance on foreign energy markets, which requires greater domestic energy production. A politics of security might also push you towards protecting against insecurity in one form, while simultaneously exposing you to insecurity of a different kind. A number of governments, including Germany's, have recently decided to reduce their reliance on China, for instance. In doing so, they reduce their long-term exposure to an increasingly belligerent power, but will likely increase prices (and therefore short-term insecurity) for German consumers in the process.

This paper began by setting out some of the blunders of recent British governments. It is important to note that these blunders were not malign. They were, instead, misguided – primarily because they prioritised some short-term goal over a long-term plan. This paper argues that a security agenda must prioritise long-term security, even if that sometimes occurs at the expense of addressing insecurity in the short-term. The true causes of insecurity in Britain have built up over many years. The solutions will have to be delivered over a similar horizon.

This long-termism, it should be noted, is already written into Labour's commitment to government by "missions".²⁸ The missions themselves line up closely to the 'conditions' set out here. A secure job and decent wage flow from a growing economy. Predictable bills will follow from Labour's energy mission. Services you can rely on are the promise of both Labour's education and health missions. "Safe streets" are the precise wording of Labour's crime mission. On many occasions, Keir Starmer has committed to a style of government that gets beyond "sticking plaster" solutions. A politics of security can deliver on that promise by deciding not to sacrifice long-term security at the altar of short-term reward.

If the primary goal of a politics of security is long-term security, it must be presented to the public as such. There is reason to believe that this can be done. The public opinion research that informed this paper was inspired by the approach taken by the Conservatives in advance of the 2015 general election campaign (and was even conducted by the very same person: Andrew Cooper, David Cameron's former Director of Strategy). The findings of that research led to the promise of a "long-term economic plan", which won the Conservatives the 2015 election. While that plan may have long since vanished, along with its architect David Cameron, the example remains instructive. The British public are not as impatient as some suppose. A politics of security must address insecurity in the long-term, and can be presented to the public as such. The age of empty promises is over.

²⁸ <https://labour.org.uk/missions/>

Drawing on Labour's past

Labour can draw on rich heritage in building a new politics of security. To know a little political history is to know that security - in the broad sense that we have set it out in this paper - has run through every single Labour government.

It was evident in the 1945-51 Labour government, in legislation like the Family Allowances Act (1945), which paid a regular allowance to mothers. The same instinct lay behind a million new council homes and the creation of the New Towns, creating secure housing for a nation rebuilding from the rubble of war. It was evident in the creation of NATO, driven by an indefatigable Ernest Bevin as Foreign Secretary.

It was evident in the 1964-70 government of Harold Wilson. A Rent Act provided security of tenure to renters. The Equal Pay Act of 1970 decreed that women must be paid as much as men for the same work. Roy Jenkins may have created the permissive society in the 1960s, but by 1974, under Wilson's second administration, he brought in the Prevention of Terrorism Act in response to attacks on British soil.

Security was central to the New Labour governments. A minimum wage had been a decades-long aspiration for Labour before Tony Blair introduced one. The Child Tax Credit and Pension Credit picked up from Attlee's Family Allowance Act and lifted a million children and pensioners out of poverty. New Labour was tough on crime, as well as its causes.

Labour's commitment to security has been security for the many and not the few. Every Labour Prime Minister has acknowledged that security matters and that the disadvantaged are disproportionately affected by it, and have acted accordingly. Labour has always been committed to true, rather than simply notional, freedom: the ability to exercise your freedom that security gives you. Attlee described the Labour Party as "a movement for freedom in its widest sense."

Tom Price, Labour MP for Westhoughton, put this more memorably in 1968: "It is constitutionally open to any British citizen to walk into the Ritz Hotel, the Savoy, the Carlton Towers or any other plush establishment. He has the same right as any Hon. Member who is a millionaire. But in fact he cannot do so because he cannot discharge the bill." Security, for Labour, has always meant providing working people with freedom *from* insecurity. That hasn't just meant paying the gas bill on time. It has meant paying your bill at the Ritz too.

With each new generation, the precise nature of our insecurity has changed. Labour has been at its best, electorally and for the country, when it has adapted to that changing reality. At its least effective, it has failed to.

Playing to Labour's advantage

On the 25 issues that voters most associate with a sense of security, Labour currently leads on all but two. This includes wide leads on the topics that one would expect Labour to lead, like social care (+27 pts), affordable housing (+26 pts), childcare (+24 pts) and healthcare (+24 pts). It also extends to areas where one might expect Labour to be less likely to lead, like increasing police numbers (+8 pts), safety in the community (+7 pts) and home ownership (+3 pts). The Conservatives only lead on increasing the size of the army (+8 pts) and reducing migrant numbers (+11 pts).

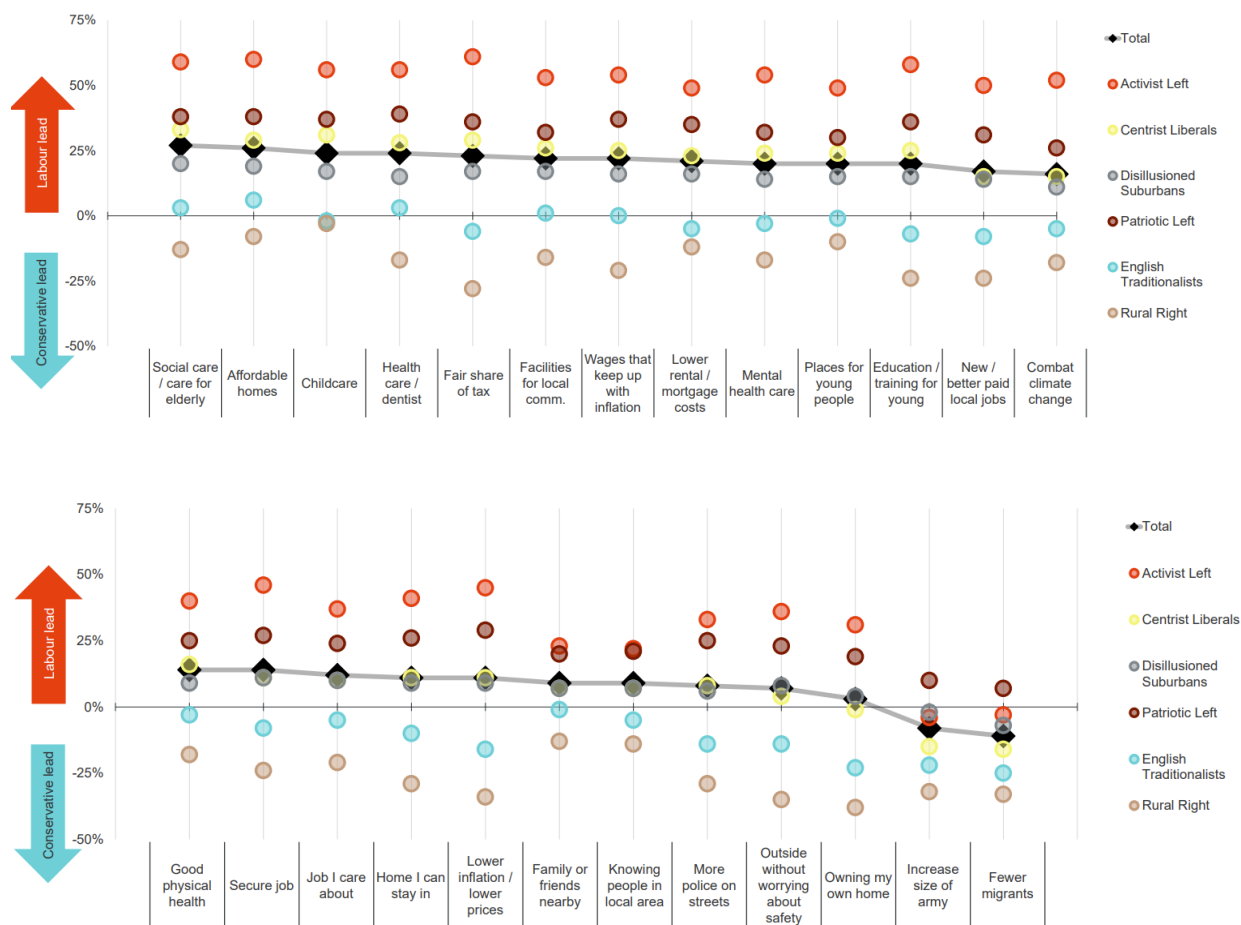


Figure K

When asked who voters trust more on the question of security more broadly, Labour enjoys a wide lead. Labour currently has a 13-point lead over the Conservatives, including leads amongst both groups of target voters: the Patriotic Left (a lead of 30 points) and Disillusioned Suburbans (a lead of 11 points).

Keir Starmer also holds a personal lead over Rishi Sunak on security. Amongst all voters, the Prime Minister trails by 9 points. Amongst the Patriotic Left, Starmer leads by 25 points. Amongst Disillusioned Suburbans, his lead is 5 points.

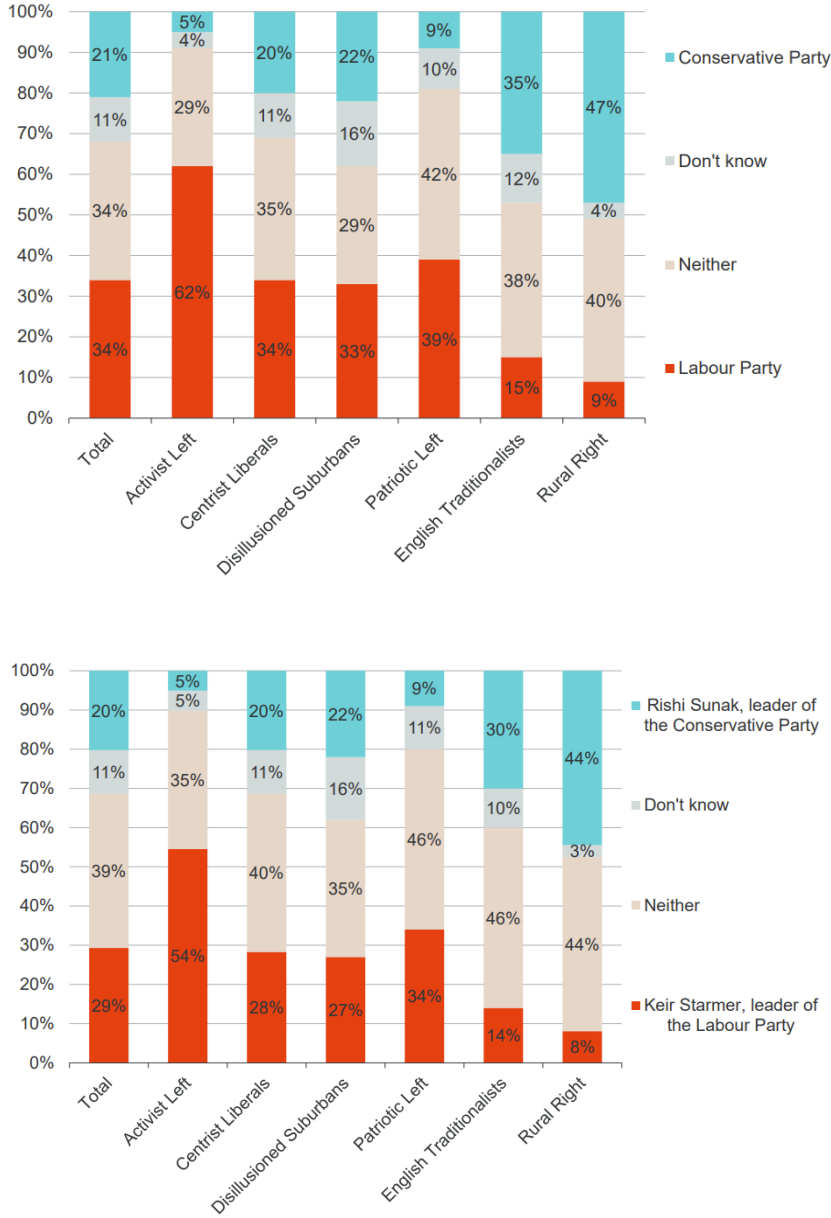
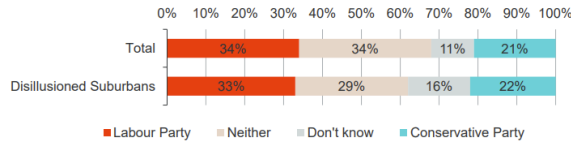


Figure M - Which party and leader do you trust more to make you feel more secure?

In both cases, however, one thing is notable. While Labour and Starmer lead, a plurality of voters remain undecided. Asked which party they trust more, 45% of the public reply “neither” or “don’t know”. This is particularly true of one group of voters, whom Labour Together has previously identified as the voter who will determine whether Labour wins a working majority at the next election: Disillusioned Suburbans (otherwise known as Stevenage Woman), the financially insecure, young mother we met in the first part of this paper.

Labour vs Conservative (Disillusioned Suburbans)



Starmer vs Sunak (Disillusioned Suburbans)

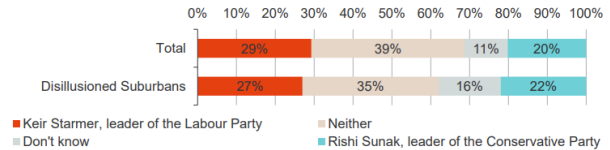


Figure N - who do you trust to make you more secure, Labour/Conservative and Starmer/Sunak (Disillusioned Suburbans only)

As *Figure N* shows, Labour’s 11-point lead over the Conservatives amongst these voters is dwarfed by the 45% who answer either “don’t know” (16%) or “neither” (29%). When the comparison is between Keir Starmer and Rishi Sunak, the lead is lower (5 points) and 51% answer “don’t know” (16%) or “neither” (35%). Stevenage Woman represents the largest group of voters in Labour-Conservative marginal seats. She is also one of the most volatile voters in the electorate, often living in a bellwether seat and changing her vote regularly at each passing election. A five-point personal lead for Starmer, and even an eleven-point lead for Labour, is a lead that could be overturned, on the issue that - this paper has argued - will determine the next election. Labour may lead today, but the race is not yet run.

Conclusion

The American novelist John Steinbeck once wrote that “we spend our time searching for security, and hate it when we get it.” He was half right. Until you have it, insecurity is all you can see. It draws in your horizons and consumes your life. Instead of getting on, you can only get by. In place of hope, you fear.

But once we get security, we don't hate it. Instead, we stop noticing it at all. The moment we are secure, we think about other things. We pursue an ambition or interest or some higher calling. We have some money to spend, providing the demand that a growing economy relies upon. We seek a new job, start a family, retire and enjoy our final years. We can see friends, go out to dinner, or away on holiday. Security isn't a condition, it is a precondition. But until we have the precondition, there is little point in talking in grand terms about what a brighter future might look like. Hope is impossible without the security that underpins it.

This report has tried to show the extent of Britain's age of insecurity. We have defined its causes: An age of global disorder. A long period of economic stagnation. Vast regional inequality. Public services that have been starved of funding.

We have explored the many ways in which security is experienced in Britain today: A nation beset by a cost-of-living crisis. Insecurity that extends beyond your door, to streets where crimes mostly go unpunished. It is felt in every A&E department and on every NHS waiting list. It is the insecurity at our borders. And it reaches far beyond them, to tensions mounting and temperatures rising.

Rising to this challenge will not be easy. Insecurity in Britain is both wide and deep. The British public have grown weary of politicians making promises that they do not keep. No government can simply reach into people's lives and make them more secure. Promoting security will necessitate prioritisation and a constant balancing act between today's needs and tomorrow's. It will take time to reduce insecurity and build the foundations on which people can be hopeful again, and we must level with the public on that score. The politics of security is not a one-year or even one-term idea. It is a project that, if it is to achieve anything lasting, must itself last.

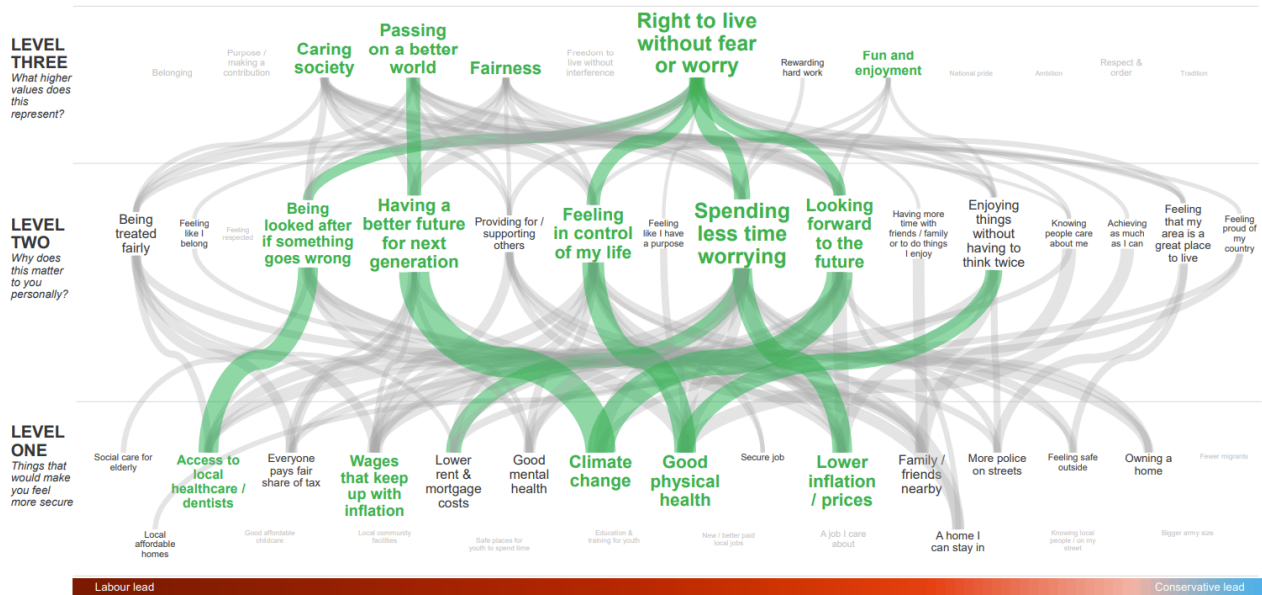
Just twenty years ago, we lived in a very different world. In Britain, it was a time of fresh hope and a new dawn, and it had a hopeful politics to match. Today, life is very different, and a politics of security responds to that. It shows that a modern government's first duty is to seek to lift the weight of insecurity off the shoulders of hard-working Britons. It also shows that doing so is not negative or unambitious, but instead that security can be transformative. This paper seeks to show that while insecurity in Britain is great, security is possible. And from that security, hope emerges.

Appendix

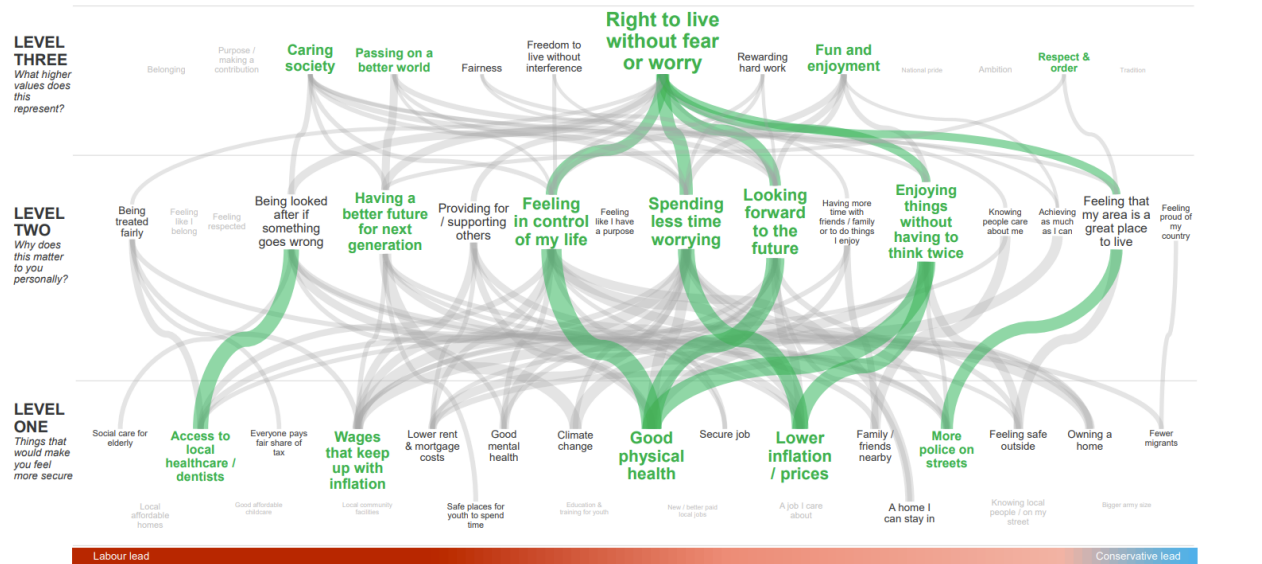
Fieldwork for the below was conducted 28-30th July 2023. Yonder Consulting interviewed 4,017 adults in England and Wales, who are weighted to be representative of the adult population.

A. Security ladders, Labour core voters

SECURITY LADDER: ACTIVIST LEFT

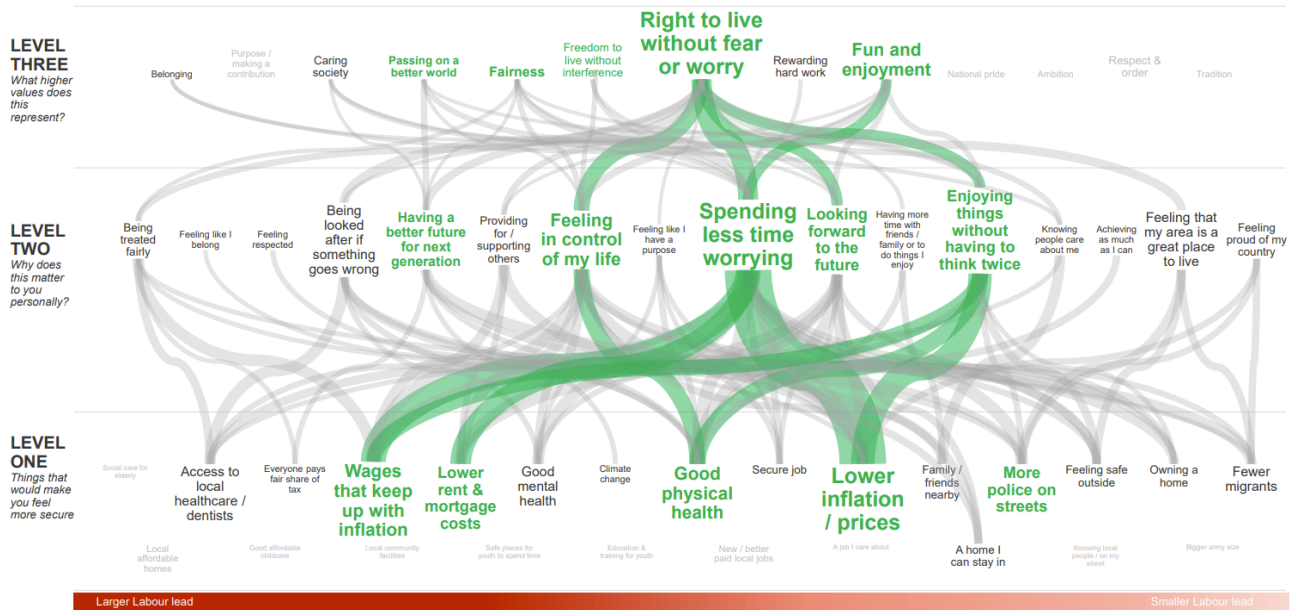


SECURITY LADDER: CENTRIST LIBERALS

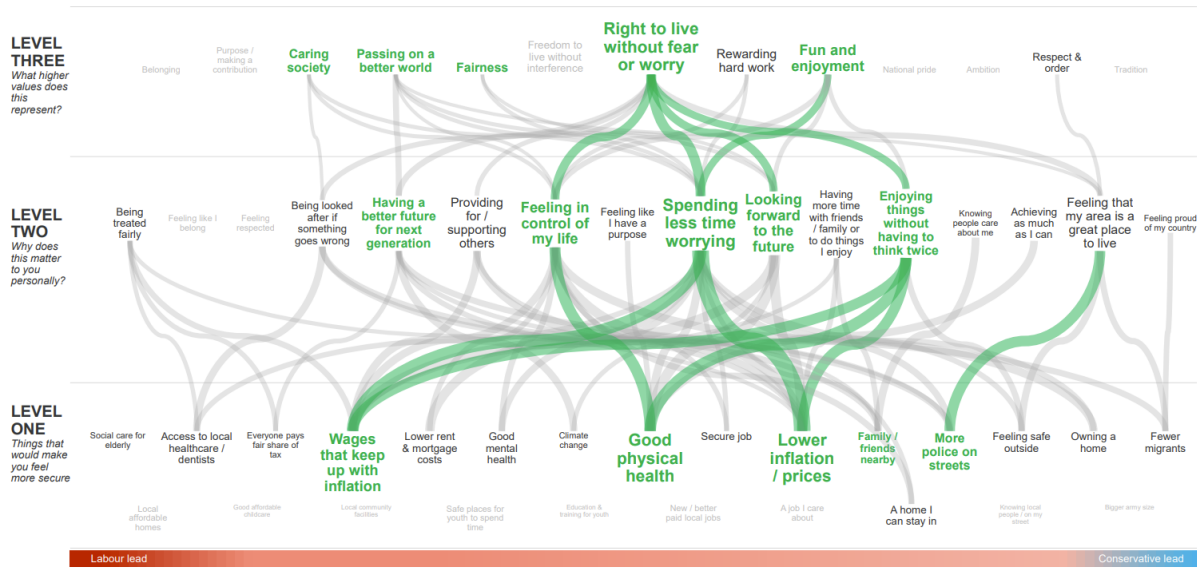


B. Security ladders, target voters

SECURITY LADDER: PATRIOTIC LEFT

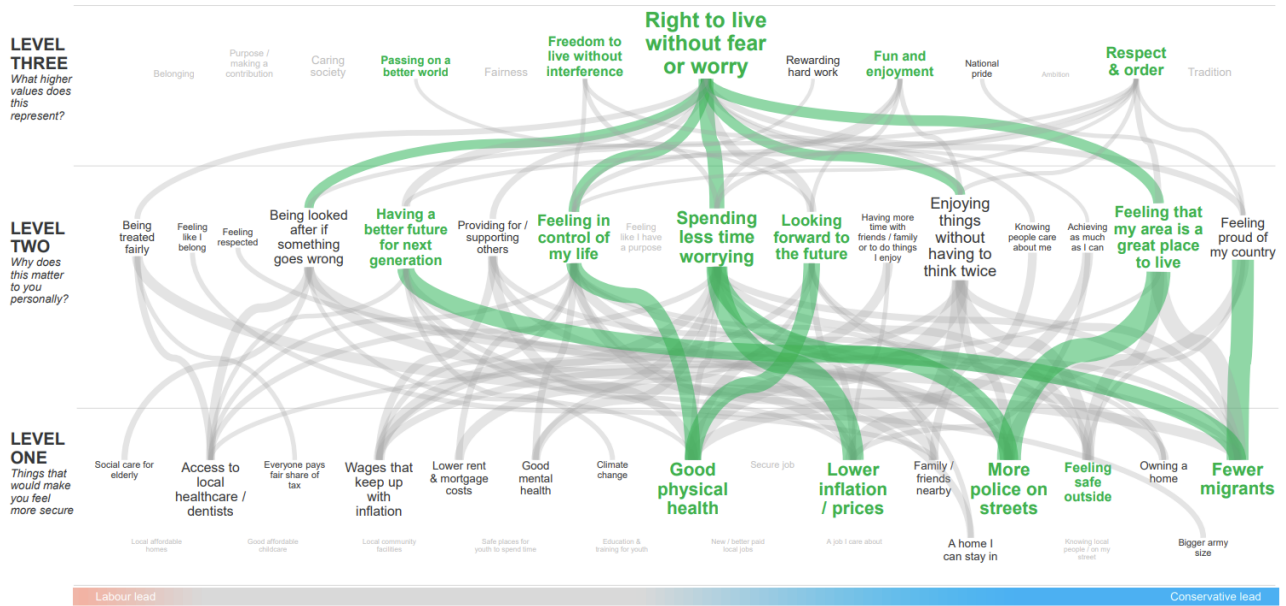


SECURITY LADDER: DISILLUSIONED SUBURBANS

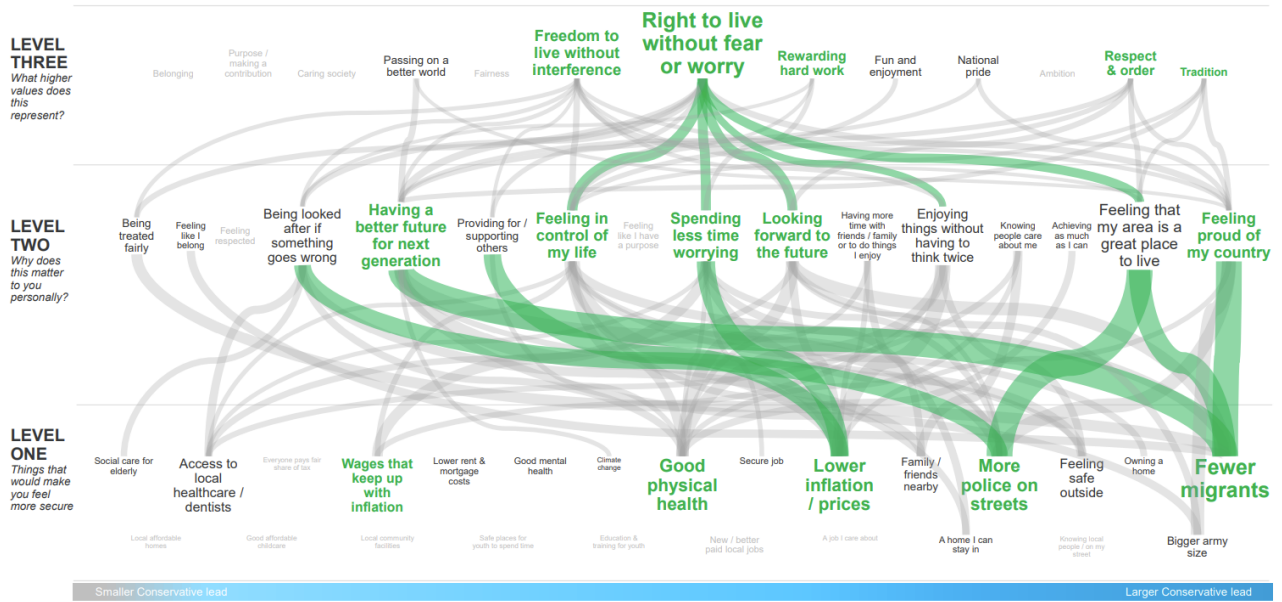


C. Security ladders, Conservative core voters

SECURITY LADDER: ENGLISH TRADITIONALISTS



SECURITY LADDER: RURAL RIGHT

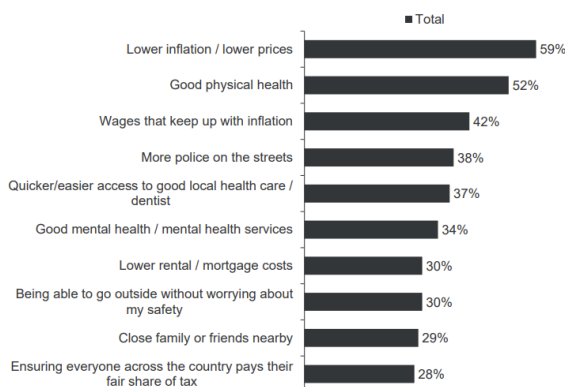


D. Causes of insecurity

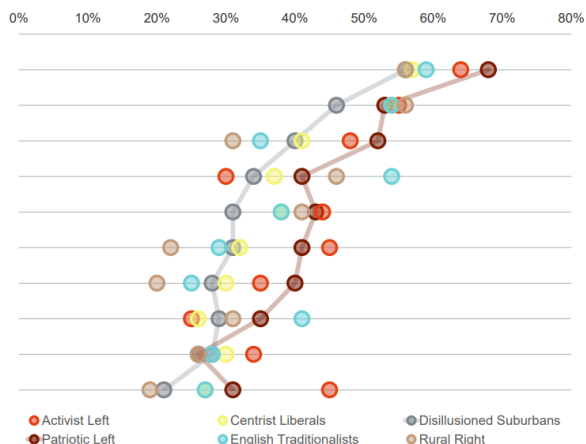
Ladder tier 1: an improved sense of security would come from lower prices and good physical health

Q. Which of the following things do you think would be likely to make you feel more secure in your day-to-day life?

Top 10 most common responses (amongst full sample)



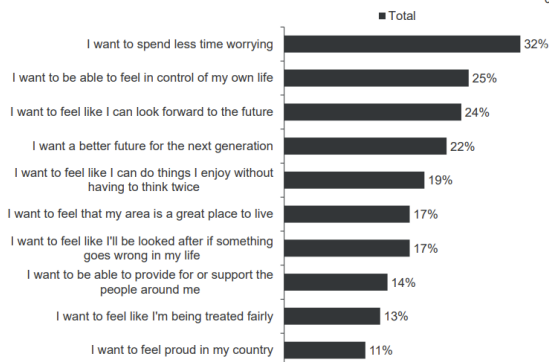
Segment scores



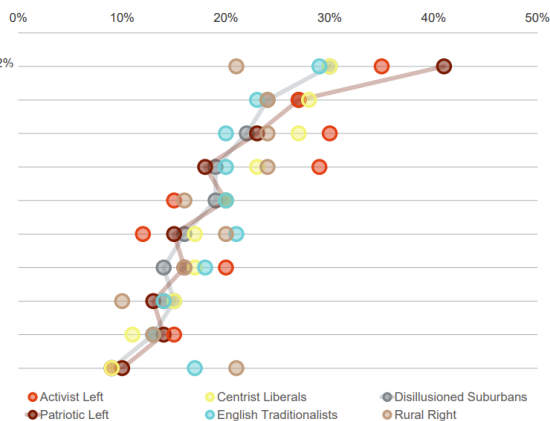
Ladder tier 2: tier 2 decisions depend on tier 1 priorities, but priority consequences include spending less time worrying

Q. Why does this matter? Thinking about the consequences this would have on your day-to-day life, please select the options that fit best, even if none of them fit perfectly.

Top 10 most common responses (amongst full sample)



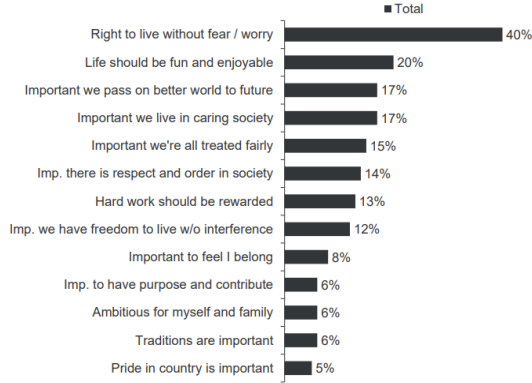
Segment scores



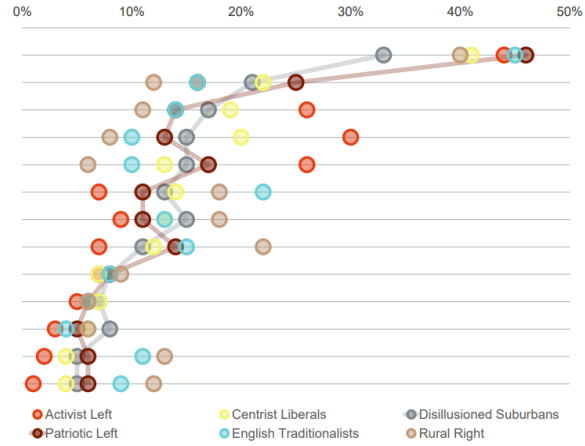
Ladder tier 3: all segments prioritise the right to live without fear and worry

Q. Which of the following potential explanations do you think best explain why you have said that these issues are important to you and your sense of security?

Top 10 most common responses (amongst full sample)



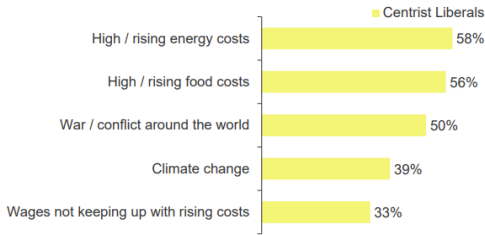
Segment scores



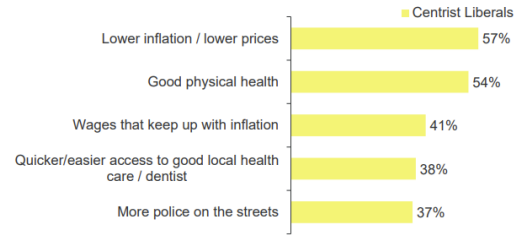
E. Security priorities, core Labour voters

Security for Centrist Liberals

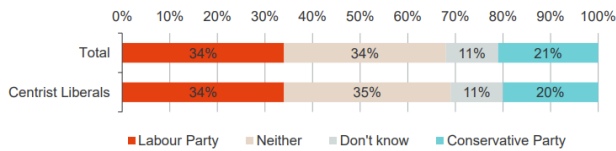
Top 5 causes of insecurity (Centrist Liberals)



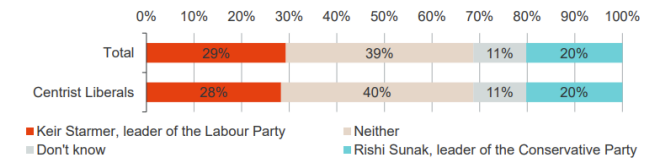
Top 5 requests for greater security (Centrist Liberals)



Labour vs Conservative (Centrist Liberals)

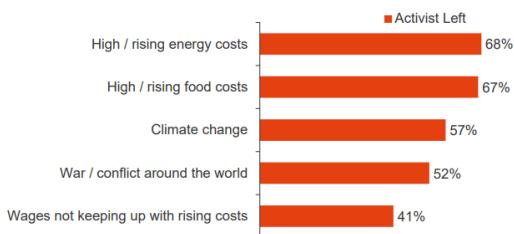


Starmer vs Sunak (Centrist Liberals)

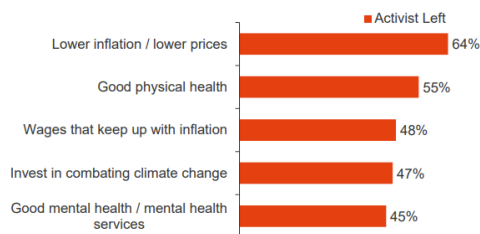


Security for Activist Left

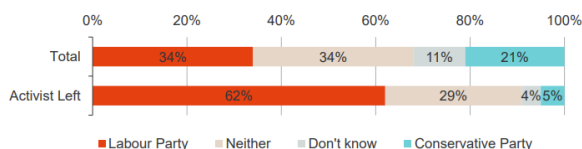
Top 5 causes of insecurity (Activist Left)



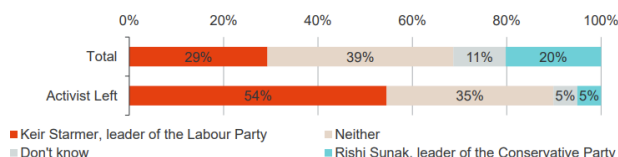
Top 5 requests for greater security (Activist Left)



Labour vs Conservative (Activist Left)



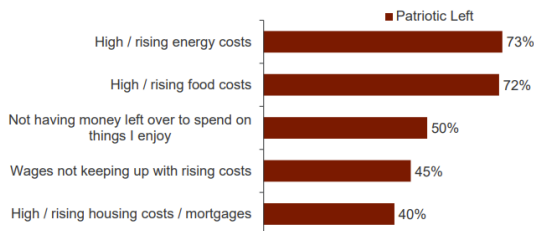
Starmer vs Sunak (Activist Left)



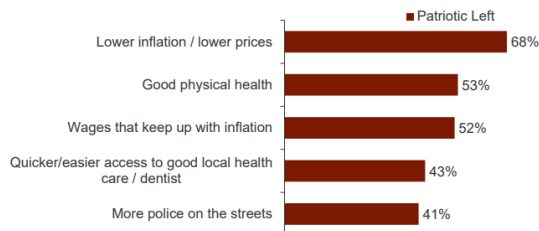
F. Security priorities, target voters

Security for Patriotic Left

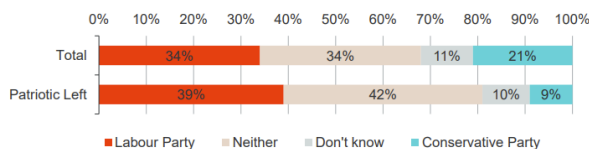
Top 5 causes of insecurity (Patriotic Left)



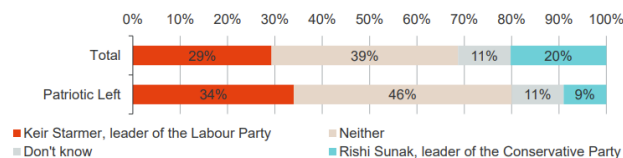
Top 5 requests for greater security (Patriotic Left)



Labour vs Conservative (Patriotic Left)

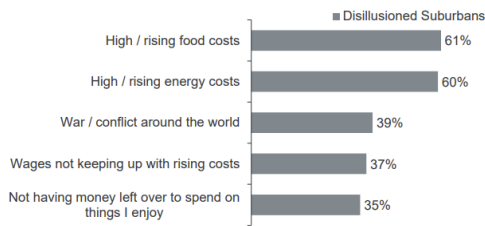


Starmer vs Sunak (Patriotic Left)

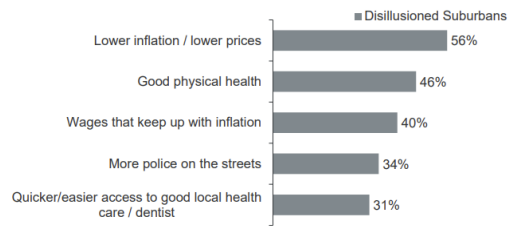


Security for Disillusioned Suburbans

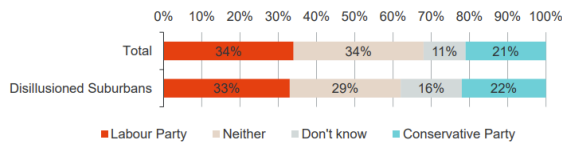
Top 5 causes of insecurity (Disillusioned Suburbans)



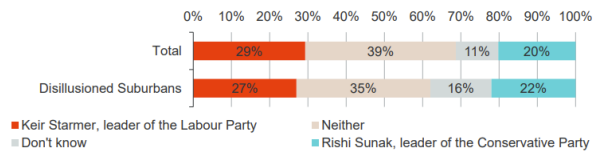
Top 5 requests for greater security (Disillusioned Suburbans)



Labour vs Conservative (Disillusioned Suburbans)



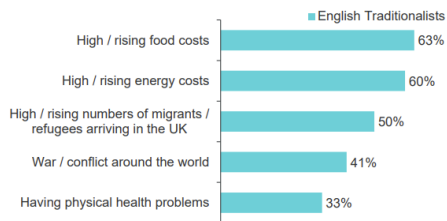
Starmer vs Sunak (Disillusioned Suburbans)



G. Security priorities, core Conservative voters

Security for English Traditionalists

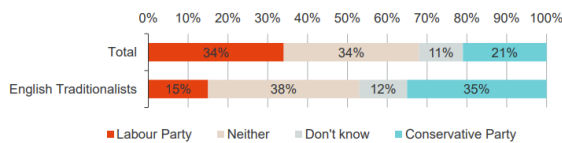
Top 5 causes of insecurity (English Traditionalists)



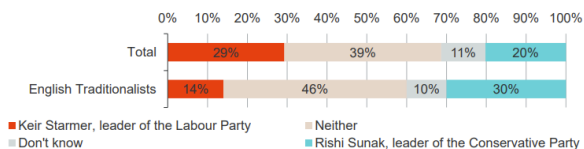
Top 5 requests for greater security (English Traditionalists)



Labour vs Conservative (English Traditionalists)

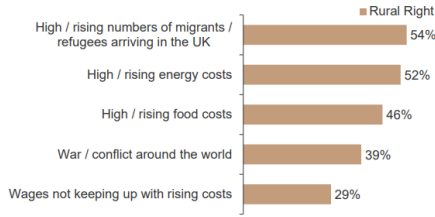


Starmer vs Sunak (English Traditionalists)

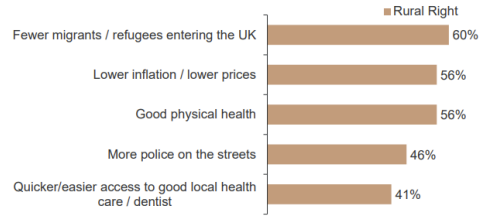


Security for Rural Right

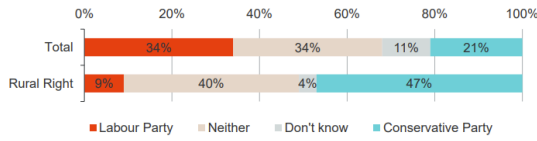
Top 5 causes of insecurity (Rural Right)



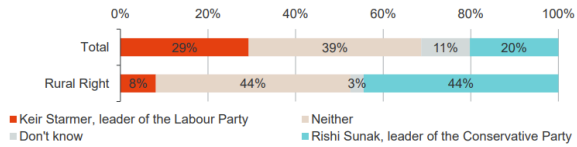
Top 5 requests for greater security (Rural Right)



Labour vs Conservative (Rural Right)



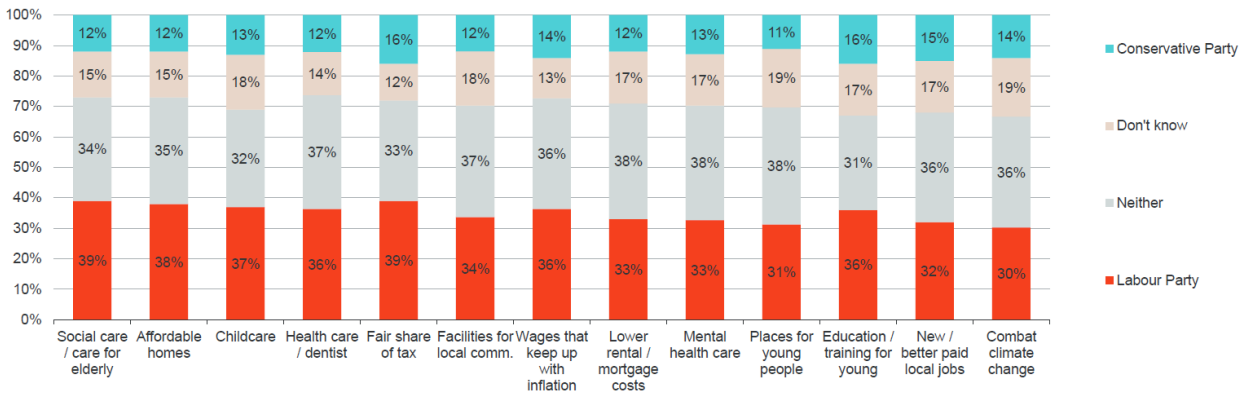
Starmer vs Sunak (Rural Right)



H. Security Issues - Labour vs Conservative

Q. Which of the two main political parties do you trust most to help with the following issues?

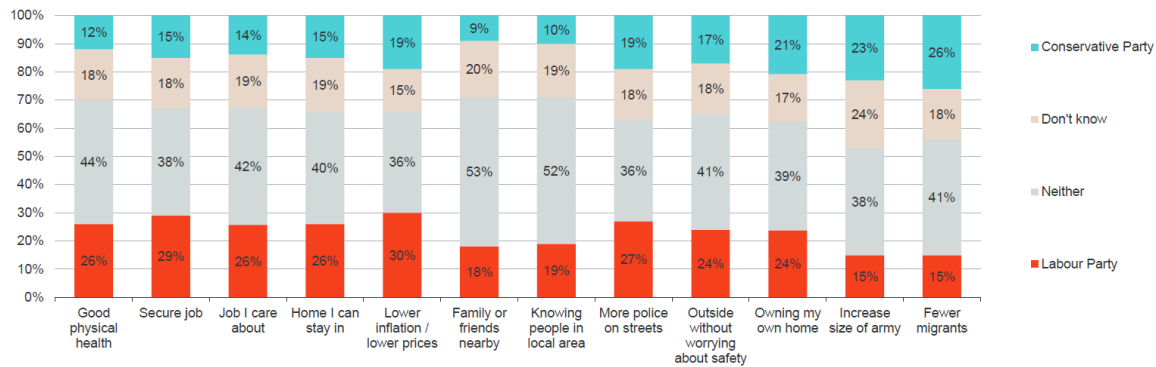
[13 issues with largest Labour lead over Conservatives]



Base: total survey respondents (4,017)

Q. Which of the two main political parties do you trust most to help with the following issues?

[12 issues with smallest Labour lead over Conservatives]



Base: total survey respondents (4,017)

I. How secure life feels in Britain today

Fieldwork for the following table was conducted 4th -12th September. We interviewed 2180 GB adults, who are weighted to be representative of the adult population. The survey was conducted by Labour Together.

Generally speaking, do you think your life feels more or less secure than it did 5 years ago?	
Much more secure	3 %
A little more secure	13 %
Neither more or less secure	20 %
A little less secure	27 %
Much less secure	33 %
Don't know	3 %
Prefer not to say	1 %
Generally speaking, do you think Britain as a whole feels more or less secure than it did 5 years ago?	
Much more secure	2 %
A little more secure	8 %
Neither more or less secure	21 %
A little less secure	32 %
Much less secure	35 %
Don't know	2 %
Prefer not to say	1 %