

**MY LIFE
MY SAY**



Insights
with impact

YOUTH INDEX POLL: 5 YEARS ON

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE REALLY THINK



INTRODUCTION



Welcome to the **Youth Index Poll: 5 Years On**, a landmark report unpacking five years of polling collaboration between non-partisan charity My Life My Say and strategic insights agency Opinium for the Youth Index. For half a decade, our partnership has tracked how 18 to 24 year-olds

view our society, governments and politics, providing an evidence-based picture of where young people feel change is needed most. Above all, these five years reveal one central reality: young people's trust in our political institutions is broken.

The political landscape over the past five years has seen frequent turnover and persistent economic pressure. Against this backdrop, our polling shows that young people's confidence in politicians and political parties has remained consistently low across the board. Frequent changes in leadership have done little to rebuild faith, leaving a generation feeling sidelined and convinced that government decisions regularly serve the interests of the super-rich over their own.

Yet, despite this deep disillusionment with political leaders, young adults draw a sharp distinction between politicians and democracy itself. Faith in democratic values remains strong, and most young people still view voting as a meaningful way to drive change. They have not given up on the democratic process, but their continued engagement cannot be taken for granted.

We also recognise the real obstacles that persist. A perceived lack of political knowledge continues to hold young people back, while those disengaged from the process are increasingly at risk of feeling that elections do not matter at all. Addressing these hurdles is central to our mission at My Life My Say. This report serves as a reminder that despite the consistent failures of politics to build trust with young adults, young people still believe in democracy, they still believe their vote matters, and they are willing and ready to engage with a politics which works for them. The challenge now is for political institutions to give them a reason to trust again.

About My Life My Say

My Life My Say (MLMS) is a national, non-partisan, youth-led organisation working to make democracy more inclusive, accessible and representative. The organisation amplifies young people's voices, particularly those underrepresented in decision-making, and creates opportunities for them to influence the issues and decisions that affect their lives. Through programmes, campaigns, research and events, MLMS connects young people with decision-makers and supports them to understand and shape democracy.

About Opinium

Opinium is a multi-award-winning strategic insight agency, twice recognised Market Research Society (MRS) 'Agency of the Year' in the past five years. With offices in London, New York, Amsterdam, and Cape Town, Opinium delivers insights with impact, evidence-based understanding that drives clarity, action, and meaningful change.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report examines and summarises the results of the Youth Index Tracker, run by Opinium in partnership with My Life My Say.

Each wave comprised around 1,000 UK adults aged 18–24.

Quotas were implemented in the survey, and weighting was applied during data processing to ensure all samples were nationally representative by age, gender, region and employment status.

Details of each of the waves are shown below:

Wave	Fieldwork	Sample size	Referred to in this report as
Wave 1	March 24th – April 1st 2022	1000	April 2022
Wave 2	9th – 16th November 2022	1000	November 2022
Wave 3	4th – 11th April 2023	1000	April 2023
Wave 4	6th – 15th November 2023	1000	November 2023
Wave 5	10th – 12th April 2024	1000	April 2024
Wave 8	30th June – 7th July 2026	1000	July 2026

Most tracked questions in this study are scale questions. For these, the report leads on the NET SCORE, which is the balance of opinion: the positive NET minus the negative NET. A NET SCORE of +20 means the positive response outweighs the negative by twenty percentage points; a score of –20 means the reverse. For example, if for a certain topic 40% thought it a good idea and 30% a bad idea, as a NET score this would be expressed as ‘NET: +10 good idea’. This is a more stable and more readable measure for trend commentary than either NET on its own, because it captures movement on both sides of the scale simultaneously.

Multi-response and single-response questions (Q15, Q16, Q7, Q12, Q13) are reported on raw percentages, since NET SCORES do not apply.

Throughout this report, any mention of ‘young adults’ will be referring to the sample of 18–24 year olds surveyed at each wave for this tracking report.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarises five years of tracking with UK 18–24s, covering six waves from April 2022 to July 2026. Across this period, young adults' economic concerns have hardened and their trust in political actors has weakened, but their support for democracy as a system has strengthened.

Trust in political institutions and parties has remained very low in the past few years

Politicians and the government have consistently ranked as two of the most distrusted institutions in every wave of the tracker. Decline in trust in the Labour Party is one of the most notable findings of the research. Trust in them peaked in November 2022 and has fallen at every wave since, with their entering government nor Andy Burnham becoming leader improving levels of trust in them. Despite this, young adults remain strongly supportive of democracy as a system of governance, highlighting a distinction between dissatisfaction with political actors and steadfast support for democratic institutions.

Cost of living dominates as the most important issues for young adults

The cost of living has topped every wave. It was selected by half of young adults in April 2022 and rose sharply in November 2022, likely driven by price inflation of everyday essentials, and has remained consistently high since. Immigration has become far more salient recently, more than doubling in the latest wave to become the fourth most-cited issue, whilst energy and power have fallen away considerably since their peak.

Young adults feel the government prioritises the needs of the wealthy over their own

The super wealthy are considered the group whose wants and needs are prioritised most by the government in every wave, whilst those on lower incomes and 'people like you' are consistently thought of as the least considered. This is reinforced when we asked about the record of those who have run Britain in the past few decades. Perceived performance on secure and well-paid jobs for young people has declined sharply, and affordable housing sits at its worst score of the series.



Young adults overwhelmingly think of democracy as the best system of governance

Democracy is the most positively rated system in every wave and reaches its strongest score in the latest wave, suggesting that although young people may be increasingly sceptical of politicians and governments, they still have faith in democracy as a system. Socialism has shown the strongest upward trend of any ideology, whilst rejection of fascism has solidified. That said, around three in ten young adults have selected the dictatorship option in our forced-choice question in every wave, and judgements on commonly thought of authoritarian countries have softened somewhat.

Confidence in voting fell to its lowest point in April 2024 before recovering

Perceptions of whether voting makes a difference weakened between late 2022 and April 2024, before recovering in the latest wave. Views on whether voting can meaningfully change things follow the same pattern, reaching a series high most recently. Among those unlikely to vote, however, the proportion saying they do not think elections change anything has more than doubled, the largest increase of any measure tracked.

Levels of civic participation have remained steady throughout the tracker

Giving money to charity remains the most common activity and is the least volatile measure tracked. Voting in local elections dipped in April 2024 before rebounding to match its highest recorded level.



COST OF LIVING DOMINATES AS THE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FOR YOUNG ADULTS

Most important issues for young adults						
	Apr 22	Nov 22	Apr 23	Nov 23	Apr 24	Jul 26
Cost of living	49%	64%	61%	63%	59%	65%
Health / NHS	40%	38%	44%	42%	39%	36%
Housing / house prices	26%	23%	22%	25%	25%	26%
Economy	24%	29%	28%	22%	23%	23%
Immigration	9%	6%	9%	12%	11%	23%
Crime	12%	12%	14%	18%	17%	22%
Inequality	14%	10%	11%	12%	10%	13%
Education	17%	12%	16%	13%	13%	12%
Environmental issues	20%	16%	12%	17%	13%	12%
Energy / power	19%	25%	15%	9%	9%	6%
Public services / benefits	9%	8%	8%	7%	8%	8%
EU and Brexit	11%	6%	7%	7%	8%	6%
Terrorism	6%	4%	4%	5%	6%	5%
Defence	5%	2%	2%	2%	4%	3%
Foreign affairs (excluding the EU)	4%	2%	2%	3%	3%	3%
Constitutional issues / Devolution	3%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%

Q:Q15. "Which of the following are the most important issues facing the country? Please select up to three options."
Base: all respondents.
Figures are the percentage selecting each issue. Respondents select up to three options.
Note: 'Don't know' was not available as an option for this question in Wave 1 but added in subsequent waves. Analysis of the results suggests had little impact on the overall pattern of responses observed across subsequent waves of the tracker.

In our ‘most important issues’ question, cost of living has led throughout as the most important issue selected in every wave. It was selected in April 2022 by half (49%) of respondents and rose sharply to 64% seven months later in November 2022, likely driven by price inflation of everyday essentials such as food and energy, which peaked at 11.1% in October. Since then, it has been consistently high, continuing to top every wave with around three in five respondents choosing it as one of their most important issues.

Health and NHS consistently place as young adults second most important issue, with around two in five (36% – 44%) respondents choosing it each time. Housing has remained stable throughout, placing in third or fourth place in every wave and ranging 22–26%.

Immigration has become more salient for young adults recently. When tracking began in April 2022, it was the 11th most important issue for young adults, being chosen by one in ten (9%), with similar results for the next four waves. This figure however more than doubles to 23% when most recently asked in July 2026, overtaking economy, housing and education to become the fourth most-cited issue.

Conversely, the issues that have declined in importance are energy and environmental issues. Energy and power spiked in November 2022 at 25% when energy prices were highest following the Russian invasion of Ukraine and has since fallen to just 6% in July 2026. Environmental issues have fallen in salience for young adults, weakening by 8 points (20% in April ‘22 to 12% in July 2026).

YOUNG ADULTS ARE SCEPTICAL OF BOTH POLITICIANS AND GOVERNING PARTIES

Trust in various different institutions (NET score)						
	Apr 22	Nov 22	Apr 23	Nov 23	Apr 24	Jul 26
Teachers	+48	+56	+49	+51	+47	+54
Academia / Universities	+40	+40	+38	+44	+40	+48
The British Army	+36	+25	+33	+33	+33	+30
The Green Party	-	-	-	-	-	+26
Businesses	+11	+13	+14	+17	+12	+12
The Police	+17	+8	+6	+16	+16	+8

Trust in various different institutions (NET score)

	Apr 22	Nov 22	Apr 23	Nov 23	Apr 24	Jul 26
The Labour Party	+17	+23	+18	+12	+9	+4
The Monarchy	-10	-10	-11	-11	-9	-12
News on Social Media	-13	-11	-13	-7	-9	-11
The Media	-13	-22	-16	-16	-12	-13
Influencers	-15	-16	-17	-16	-17	-16
Landlords	-7	-15	-9	-13	-11	-18
The Government	-23	-32	-26	-25	-23	-21
The Conservative Party	-25	-36	-26	-30	-24	-23
Reform UK	-	-	-	-	-	-34
Politicians	-34	-34	-34	-32	-35	-35

Q:Q1. "Generally, what level of trust or distrust do you have in the following?"

Base: all respondents

NET SCORE = NET Trust minus NET Distrust. Positive scores indicate net trust; negative scores indicate net distrust.

We asked young adults how much trust they have in various different institutions, organisations and groups across the UK. The ranked order of how much young adults trust various institutions has remained fairly stable across the past five years. Teachers are the most trusted institution in every wave (+47 to +56), followed by academia (+38 to +48) and the British Army (+25 to +36).

At the other end of the scale, politicians consistently rank as the most distrusted group across all waves (-32 to -35), while the government itself has also remained firmly in negative territory (-21 to -32). These findings suggest that distrust is not confined to a single political party but extends to the political system more broadly.

One of the most notable findings of the research is the decline in trust in the Labour Party. Trust in Labour peaked at +23 in November '22 but has fallen in every wave since. Entering government has not improved trust in Labour. Instead, the party's trust score has continued the downward trend that was already underway, reaching just +4 in the most recent July 2026 wave. The Conservative party is strongly distrusted by young adults in every wave it was tracked (-23 to -36). Taken together with the previous paragraph, these findings suggest a broader scepticism of those who govern, rather than dissatisfaction with one particular party.

In the most recent wave, we started tracking how much young adults also trust the Greens and Reform UK. The Greens are by a considerable margin the most trusted party in the UK (+26), while Reform UK are the most distrusted (-34).

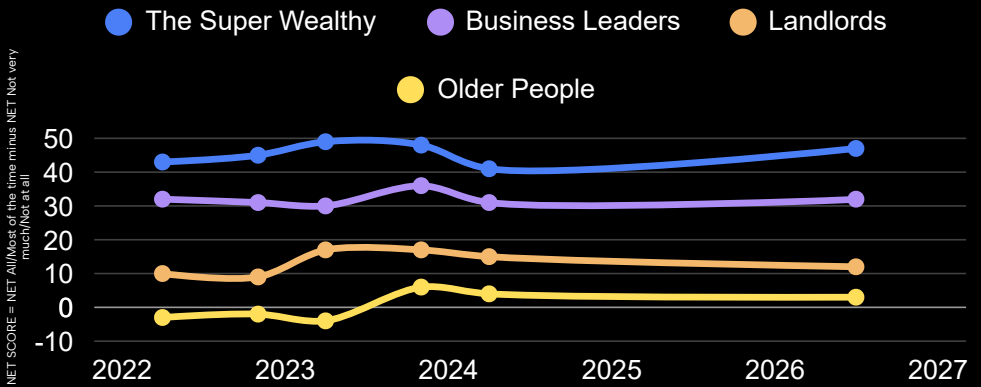
Trust in the police fluctuates, ranging from +6 to +17 without a clear direction, and closes the series at +8. Landlords show a steady deterioration from -7 to -18, the second largest decline in the question and ties into young adults' dissatisfaction with the current state of housing expressed through other questions. The Monarchy is static at around -10 throughout. Media-related institutions such as the media, social media news and influencers all cluster in a narrow band between -11 and -17 and show no meaningful trend in either direction.

YOUNG ADULTS FEEL THE GOVERNMENT PRIORITISES THE NEEDS OF THE WEALTHY OVER THEIR OWN

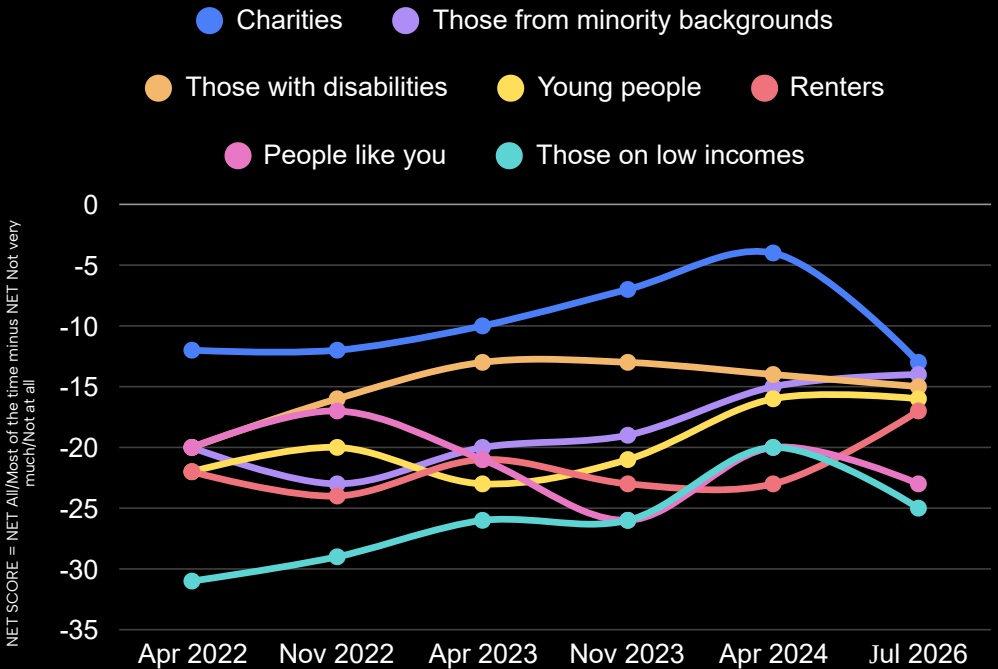
Trust in various different institutions (NET score)						
	Apr 22	Nov 22	Apr 23	Nov 23	Apr 24	Jul 26
The Super Wealthy	+43	+45	+49	+48	+41	+47
Business leaders	+32	+31	+30	+36	+31	+32
Landlords	+10	+9	+17	+17	+15	+12
Homeowners	+2	0	+6	+4	+4	-1
Newspaper owners	+6	+4	+5	+2	0	-2
Older People	-3	-2	-4	+6	+4	+3
Trade Unions	-6	-7	-3	-4	0	-1
Charities	-12	-12	-10	-7	-4	-13
Those from ethnic minority backgrounds	-20	-23	-20	-19	-15	-14
Those with disabilities	-20	-16	-13	-13	-14	-15
Young people	-22	-20	-23	-21	-16	-16
Renters	-22	-24	-21	-23	-23	-17
People like you	-20	-17	-21	-26	-20	-23
Those on low incomes	-31	-29	-26	-26	-20	-25

Q:Q2. "Now we'd like to think about different groups in society. To what extent to you do think the UK government considers the wants and needs of the following groups when it makes decisions?"
Base: all respondents
NET SCORE = NET All/Most of the time minus NET Not very much of the time/Not at all.

Extent to which young adults think the government prioritises the wants and needs of following groups (POSITIVE SCORES ONLY)



Extent to which young adults think the government prioritises the wants and needs of following groups (NEGATIVE SCORES ONLY)



Young adults strongly and consistently believe that the wants and needs of the wealthy are the groups prioritised most by the government. The super wealthy are considered to be the single group prioritised most, topping our list in every wave (+41 to +49). They are followed by business leaders in second place (+30 to +36) and landlords third (+9 to +17).

At the other end of the spectrum, people on lower incomes (-20 to -31) and 'people like you' (-17 to -26) are consistently thought of as the two groups least considered of by the government in every wave. Renters, young people, those with a disability and ethnic minorities form the next cohort of groups not thought to be adequately considered by the government, all sitting consistently in the range of -13 to -24. There is little change between waves among this group, with the exception of ethnic minorities whose perceived consideration by the government has improved slightly in recent waves, although still with a negative net score.

Older people have gone from negative consideration when we started tracking (-3 in April 2022) to positive now (peaked at +6 in Nov 2023, now at +3 in July 2026). Young adults viewing the UK government as prioritising the wants and needs of older people (+6 to +3) more so than younger people (-22 to -16) highlights the generational divide in perceived treatment.

The findings from this question provide important context for understanding why trust in politicians and government remains so low among young adults. In every wave, young adults feel the government prioritises the wants and needs of the super wealthy, business leaders and landlords above those of ordinary people. By contrast, young people, renters, those on low incomes and 'people like themselves' are among the least considered groups. This distrust may be driven not only by dissatisfaction with specific parties, but with the political system as a whole that they feel does not adequately represent them.



YOUNG ADULTS OVERWHELMINGLY THINK OF DEMOCRACY AS THE BEST SYSTEM OF GOVERNANCE

Views on various systems of governance (NET score)						
	Apr 22	Nov 22	Apr 23	Nov 23	Apr 24	Jul 26
Democracy	+40	+36	+46	+44	+32	+53
Socialism	+16	+26	+18	+26	+22	+35
Liberalism	+14	+12	+15	+17	+14	+22
Libertarianism	+5	+2	+3	+7	+5	+5
Technocracy	+2	-2	+3	+2	+7	+2
Neoliberalism	-5	-11	-4	-7	-6	-7
Republicanism	-7	-9	-6	-4	-10	-11
Capitalism	-10	-14	-7	-14	-10	-13
Conservatism	-11	-21	-13	-14	-11	-14
Monarchism	-14	-16	-16	-18	-11	-21
Communism	-16	-13	-14	-12	-15	-19
Anarchism	-20	-18	-16	-19	-16	-20
Imperialism	-19	-19	-9	-16	-13	-19
Fascism	-36	-35	-30	-36	-28	-47

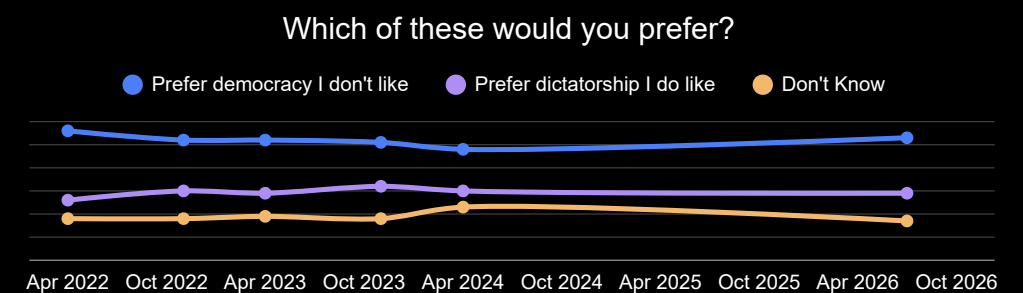
Despite the low levels of trust in politicians, political parties and governments seen elsewhere in the tracker, democracy remains the most positively rated system of governance in every wave. It reaches its strongest score in the latest wave (+53, July 2026) after its lowest score in the prior wave (+32, April 2024). Socialism is the second most positively viewed form of governance and has displayed the strongest upward trend of any ideology during tracking, rising from +16 in April 2022 to +35 most recently in July 2026. Liberalism is also positively thought of among young adults, ending the series at +22 rating.

Among the systems included in the question, capitalism stands out as it describes an economic system young adults encounter in their day-to-day lives compared to some of the other more abstract systems tested (such as anarchism). Across the tracker, perceptions of capitalism have been consistently negative, with net scores ranging from -7 to -14. This negative sentiment appears to align with the broader economic dissatisfaction seen elsewhere in the tracker.

Young adults view many of the other ideologies that we asked of as bad forms of governance. Imperialism, Anarchism, Communism, Monarchism, Conservatism and Republicanism all have negative scores in every wave, ranging from scores in the most recent July 2026 wave of -21 to -11. Fascism is by a considerable margin thought of as the worst system of governance in all waves. Young adult’s rejection of it solidifies in the final wave, dropping from -28 to -47.

Preference of democracy or dictatorship						
	Apr 22	Nov 22	Apr 23	Nov 23	Apr 24	Jul 26
Live in a democracy where I don't like the government	56%	52%	52%	51%	48%	53%
Live under a dictatorship where I do like the government	26%	30%	29%	32%	30%	29%
Don't know	18%	18%	19%	18%	23%	17%
NET SCORE	+30	+22	+24	+20	+18	+24

Q:Q4. If you were forced to choose, which of these would you prefer?
Base: all respondents
Percentage figures are the percentage selecting each issue.



A majority of young adults say they would prefer to live in a democracy they don’t like than a dictatorship where they like the government. However, the strength of this preference has weakened slightly since we first asked about it. Around half of young adults have selected the democratic option each wave and this has ranged from 56% at its highest in April 2022 to 48% in April 2024, recovering to 53% in the last July 2026 wave. The NET score consequently follows the same pattern, declining from +30 to +18, before rising to +24.

The number of young adults who prefer the dictatorship option in this forced-choice question remains stable across all waves, ranging from 26% – 32%. In other words, around three in ten young adults choose the dictatorship option in this forced-choice question, provided they like that specific government.

THE UK IS THOUGHT OF AS THE MOST DEMOCRATIC COUNTRY AMONG ALL TESTED

Young adults' views on whether the following countries are democratic or undemocratic (NET score)						
	Apr 22	Nov 22	Apr 23	Nov 23	Apr 24	Jul 26
UK	+49	+44	+43	+42	+38	+49
France	+39	+39	+36	+34	+34	+44
Germany	+40	+38	+36	+37	+32	+42
New Zealand	+42	+39	+46	+35	+34	+41
Australia	+42	+36	+39	+41	+38	+38
Sweden	+39	+30	+32	+38	+30	+37
Italy	+34	+26	+24	+29	+27	+34
USA	+32	+24	+29	+30	+25	+21
India	-2	-9	-7	-1	-7	-3
UAE	-15	-12	-12	-10	-9	-9
Venezuela	-16	-13	-14	-9	-10	-11
China	-33	-26	-25	-20	-25	-16
Israel	-17	-18	-18	-21	-22	-24
Russia	-40	-28	-33	-28	-27	-23
North Korea	-42	-35	-37	-33	-29	-29

The UK is rated as the most democratic country we asked of in five of the six waves. Its score declined steadily in the first five waves (+49 in Apr 2022 to +38 in Apr 2024), with its score recovering to +49 in the most recent July 2026 wave. Other Western European countries as well as Australia and New Zealand are all thought of as strongly democratic, mostly following the same trend with their scores declining mid-series and recovering most recently.

The United States is the only established democracy that has experienced a sharp decline since the start of tracking. When we started tracking in April 2022, it had a score of +32 and has now fallen by 12 points to +21, meaning it sits below the previously mentioned democracies by a clear margin. Israel was viewed as undemocratic when tracking started (-17 in Apr 2022) and has since come to be seen as even less democratic (-24 in Jul 2026).

Perceptions of the democratic nature of several countries have become somewhat less negative over time. Between April 2022 to July 2026, Venezuela's score has risen by 5 points to -11, China's by 17 points to -16, Russia's by 17 points to -23 and North Korea's by 13 points to -29. Despite these movements, all four countries continue to receive strongly negative scores overall, indicating that young adults still tend to view them as undemocratic. However, the strength of those negative perceptions has reduced compared with when tracking began.

A LARGE NUMBER OF YOUNG ADULTS DO NOT THINK PREVIOUS GOVERNMENTS HAVE REPRESENTED OR HAD A POSITIVE IMPACT ON THEIR LIVES

How good or bad a job people who have run Britain in past few decades have done on the following (NET score)	Apr 22	Nov 22	Apr 23	Nov 23	Apr 24	Jul 26
Providing good quality education for young people	+10	+5	+11	+4	+9	+4
Positive impact on the lives of older people	+7	-3	+7	+6	+7	+5
Providing affordable education for young people	+4	+0	+3	-0	+6	-7
Ensuring secure and well-paid jobs for young people	-6	-18	-7	-14	-14	-28
Positive impact on the lives of young people	-9	-20	-8	-18	-14	-22
Representing people like you	-22	-26	-16	-23	-19	-21
Providing affordable housing for young people	-22	-35	-27	-29	-25	-37

Q:Q6. "Regardless of your view on the current government specifically, and thinking about all the people who have run Britain over the past few decades... How good or bad job do you think they have done in...?"
Base: all respondents
NET SCORE = NET Good job minus NET Bad job.

Our question asking about how good or bad a job people who have run Britain have done in the past few decades reveals a clear generational divide. In five of the six waves we have run, previous governments are considered to have had a positive impact on the lives of older people, finishing most recently in July with a score of +5. By contrast, most of the measures relating to young people perform much worse and have deteriorated as the series continues.

The most direct example is when asked about their impact on young people, scores remain deep in negative territory, ranging from -8 to -22 in the latest wave. Perceived performance on economic measures for young people is similarly poor. Young adults do not think people who have run Britain in the past few decades have provided secure and well-paying jobs for young people. This score has declined significantly from -6 when first asked in April 2022 to -28 in the most recent wave in July. Attitudes are similar on whether they have done a good job to provide affordable housing to young people (ranging from -22 to -37).

The only measure that young adults think people who have run Britain have done a good job on is having provided a quality education for young people. However, this rating has decreased lately, from its highest recorded in April 2023 (+11) to +4 in July this year. The results of this question suggest that young adults feel let down by successive governments of both parties on the issues most important to them, helping to explain the lack of faith they have in the political system as a whole.

YOUNG ADULTS FEEL MUCH MORE PESSIMISTIC ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE COUNTRY THAN THEIR OWN

When looking at optimism amongst young adults in the future of the UK and their own futures, both measures collapsed significantly between April and November 2022 and have failed to recover to their opening levels since.

Optimism toward the state of the country fell by 36 points from -4 in April to -40 in November 2022. It has improved steadily since this decline, reaching -29 in July 2026. The modest improvements in NET score since November 2022 are being driven by changes in both directions: optimism has increased from 16% to 20% and pessimism has fallen from 56% to 49%, whilst the neutral group has remained relatively consistent over time.

Optimism about the future of the country						
	Apr 22	Nov 22	Apr 23	Nov 23	Apr 24	Jul 26
NET: Optimistic	32%	16%	19%	18%	20%	20%
Neither optimistic nor pessimistic	32%	27%	27%	30%	28%	31%
NET: Pessimistic	36%	56%	54%	52%	52%	49%
NET SCORE	-4	-40	-35	-34	-33	-29

Q:Q8. How optimistic or pessimistic are you about the future of the country?
Base: all respondents
Percentage figures are the percentage selecting each issue. NET SCORE=NET Optimistic minus NET Pessimistic.

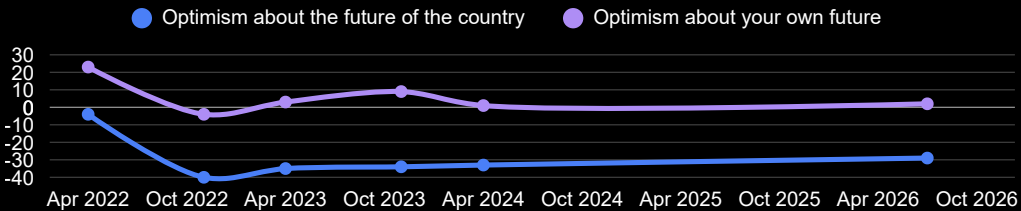
Optimism towards young adults’ own futures have improved somewhat since the low point recorded in November 2022, where the NET score fell by 27 points from +23 to -4 compared to April that year. The latest wave recorded a NET score of +2, with roughly equal proportions indicating they were optimistic (35%) and pessimistic (33%) about their own future. However, optimism has not returned to the levels seen in April 2022 and has generally weakened over time.

Optimism about their own future

	Apr 22	Nov 22	Apr 23	Nov 23	Apr 24	Jul 26
NET: Optimistic	47%	31%	35%	40%	36%	35%
Neither optimistic nor pessimistic	29%	33%	32%	30%	28%	32%
NET: Pessimistic	24%	36%	32%	30%	36%	33%
NET SCORE	+23	-4	+3	+9	+1	+2

Q:Q9. How optimistic or pessimistic are you about your own future?
Base: all respondents
Percentage figures are the percentage selecting each issue. NET SCORE=NET Optimistic minus NET Pessimistic.

NET optimism about own future and of the country among young adults



Young adults are consistently more optimistic about their own future than the future of the country as a whole. Whilst sentiment toward both declined sharply in 2022, personal optimism has remained considerably more positive than national optimism, breaking into positive figures from April 2023. This gap suggests that many young adults continue to have greater confidence in their own abilities to navigate future challenges personally than in the country’s wider prospects.

YOUNG ADULTS STILL REMAIN CONFIDENT THAT THEIR VOTES MATTER IN ELECTIONS AND HAS THE POWER TO CHANGE THINGS

Young adults were asked how much, if at all, they feel their vote matters when voting in an election. Despite widespread scepticism toward politicians and governments, over half of young adults consistently feel that their vote matters, emphasising their faith in the democratic process itself.

How much young adults think their vote matters in elections

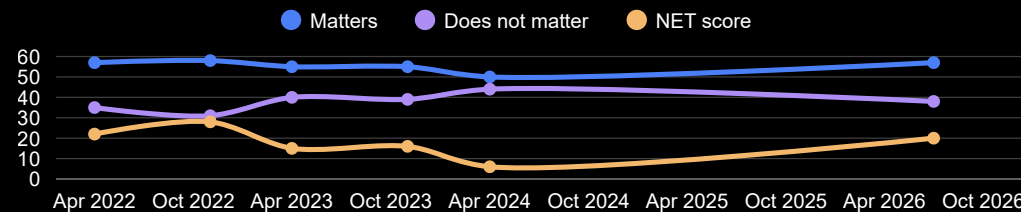
	Apr 22	Nov 22	Apr 23	Nov 23	Apr 24	Jul 26
It matters a lot	19%	20%	24%	26%	26%	23%
It matters a little	38%	38%	33%	32%	33%	34%
It doesn't matter much	24%	23%	28%	27%	28%	26%
It doesn't matter at all	9%	7%	16%	14%	15%	12%
NET: Matters	57%	58%	55%	55%	50%	57%
NET: Does not matter	35%	31%	40%	39%	44%	38%
NET SCORE	+22	+28	+15	+16	+6	+20

Q:Q10. How much, if at all, do you think your vote matters in an election?
Base: all respondents
Percentage figures are the percentage selecting each issue. NET SCORE: NET Matters minus NET Does not matter.

In 2022, nearly six in ten young adults felt that their vote mattered. However, in subsequent waves, this confidence weakened, falling from a high of +28 in November 2022 to a low of +6 in April 2024. The decline reflected a gradual shift away from the belief that voting makes a difference, with fewer young adults feeling their vote mattered and more feeling it did not. As a result, perceptions of electoral efficacy were at their weakest point by April 2024.

The measure recovered substantially in the most recent wave, with the NET score increasing by 148 points to +20. This improvement was driven by a decline in the proportion who felt their vote did not matter, with the combined measure falling from 44% to 38%. At the same time, the overall proportion saying it matters increased from 50% to 57%. Whilst perceptions have fluctuated over time, the latest results suggest that confidence in the value of voting remains relatively resilient amongst young adults.

Views on whether young adults' vote matters



Views on whether voting can meaningfully change things in Britain have also fluctuated over time, remaining positive overall, although with a sizeable minority sceptical. Across all waves at least half of young adults agreed that voting can bring about change, although confidence weakened between 2022 and 2024.

Views on whether voting has the power to change things						
	Apr 22	Nov 22	Apr 23	Nov 23	Apr 24	Jul 26
Yes, it does have the power	55%	55%	52%	54%	48%	58%
No, it does not have the power	29%	33%	33%	31%	32%	27%
Don't know	17%	12%	15%	15%	20%	16%
NET SCORE	+26	+22	+19	+23	+15	+32

Q:Q11. Do you think that voting in elections does or does not have the power to meaningfully change things in Britain?
Base: all respondents
Percentage figures are the percentage selecting each issue. NET SCORE: Yes minus No.

In April and November 2022, 55% of young adults in each wave felt that voting had the power to meaningfully change things in Britain (NET scores of +26 and +22, respectively). This confidence declined gradually over the following two years, reaching a low point in April 2024 when fewer than half (48%) believed voting could drive meaningful change, producing a NET score of +15.

These findings suggest that young adults draw a distinction between the value of their own participation and the ability of the political system more broadly to deliver change. Whilst both measures weakened between 2022 and 2024, confidence that an individual vote can make a difference declined more sharply than belief that voting as a whole has the power to change things. This suggests perceptions of the broader power of voting may be somewhat more stable than views on the impact of an individual's vote. The recovery in both measures in the latest wave indicates a partial reversal of the declines seen earlier in the series.



PERCEIVED LACK OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT POLITICS IS THE BIGGEST BARRIER TO YOUNG ADULTS VOTING

Barriers to voting among young adults unlikely to vote						
	Apr 22	Nov 22	Apr 23	Nov 23	Apr 24	Jul 26
I don't know enough about politics to vote	40%	31%	30%	37%	36%	38%
I don't think elections change anything	13%	25%	28%	20%	22%	30%
I didn't think my vote will make any difference	28%	28%	27%	31%	34%	22%
I don't like any of the parties	27%	22%	29%	25%	24%	19%

Q:Q12. Earlier in the survey you said you would be unlikely to vote if there were a general election tomorrow. Why is this the case? Please select all that apply.
Base: Those unlikely to vote in a general election.
Figures are the percentage selecting each issue.

Of young adults who said they were unlikely to vote, a perceived lack of political knowledge is the most commonly cited barrier throughout the series. Between 30% and 40% of young adults unlikely to vote consistently say they do not know enough about politics to vote, and the figure sits at 38% in July 2026, remaining the leading reason for non-participation.

The most notable change over time relates to perceptions of whether elections can bring about change. The proportion of non-voters saying they do not think elections change anything more than doubled between April 2022 and July 2026, rising from 13% to 30%, making it the second most commonly cited reason for not voting in the latest wave. This represents the largest increase of any measure tracked and suggests that scepticism about the effectiveness of elections has become increasingly salient among those least likely to participate.

In contrast, several reasons linked to dissatisfaction with political choices on offer have become less prominent over time. The proportion saying they are unlikely to vote because they do not like any of the parties fell from 27% in April 2022 to 19% in July 2026, whilst the proportion citing dislike of political leaders fell from 20% to 15%. This suggests that non-participation is becoming less associated with dissatisfaction with specific parties or politicians and more associated with broader doubts about the effectiveness of engaging with the political system.

The proportion saying they do not think their vote would make a difference remained relatively stable between 2022 and 2024, fluctuating between 27% and 34% before falling sharply to 22% in the latest wave. This 12-point decline from its peak in April 2024 represents the largest movement between the two most recent waves of research. This, combined with the increase in those believing elections do not change anything, suggests that whilst fewer non-voters are questioning the value of their own individual vote, a growing proportion remain sceptical whether elections as a whole lead to meaningful change.

LEVELS OF CIVIC PARTICIPATION HAVE REMAINED STEADY THROUGHOUT THE TRACKER

Levels of civic participation have remained mostly stable across the tracker, with the frequency of participation in activities asked of showing only minor fluctuations.

Giving money to charity is the most common form of civic participation, with a consistent majority of young adults reporting having done so in each wave. Participation in this wave has remained stable, ranging between 55% and 58%, standing at 55% in the latest wave. It is the least volatile measure tracked, suggesting that charitable donation represents an established and enduring form of civic engagement among young adults.

Voting in local elections is the second most common activity, whilst also showing variation over time. Participation via this method remained steady between April 2022 and November 2023 but declined sharply by 7 points to 30% in Apr 2024. However, it rebounded to 40% in the latest wave, matching the highest level recorded across the tracked waves. Consequently, despite fluctuations, there is little evidence of a long-term decline in voting in local elections when comparing the first and most recent waves.



Forms of civic participation young adults have done

	Apr 22	Nov 22	Apr 23	Nov 23	Apr 24	Jul 26
Given money to charity	55%	58%	57%	56%	55%	55%
Voted in a local election	40%	38%	37%	37%	30%	40%
Volunteered in the local community	27%	27%	28%	29%	28%	30%
Been on a protest or demonstration	16%	19%	17%	17%	19%	16%
Written to an MP or local politician	15%	16%	20%	15%	19%	16%

Q:Q13. Have you ever done any of the following? Please select all that apply.

Base: All respondents

Figures are the percentage selecting each issue.

Other forms of civic participation have shown smaller but notable changes. Volunteering in the local community has remained relatively consistent, fluctuating from 27% in the first wave to 30% in the most recent wave.

By contrast, participation in protests or demonstrations has remained largely unchanged. Having peaked at 19% in November 2022 and April 2024, the metric fell to 16% in the latest wave, matching the level recorded at the start of the series. This indicates that whilst public demonstrations do appeal to a minority of young adults, there is little evidence that it is becoming a more prevalent form of engagement over time.

Similarly, contact with elected representatives has fluctuated around a small baseline. The proportion reporting that they had written to an MP or local politician ranged between 15% and 20% across the tracker, reaching a high of 20% in April 2023 before falling to 16% in the latest wave.

These findings suggest that civic participation amongst young adults has been characterised more by stability than change. Traditional forms of engagement such as donation or voting are most common, whilst mo

CONCLUSION

Looking back across five years of Youth Index data, the main takeaway is clear. Low trust among young adults is not caused by indifference. It is the result of a political system that feels out of reach and unsupportive on the issues that affect their daily lives. Young people still care about their communities and their future, they still believe in democracy, but politics needs to start delivering for them.

At My Life My Say, our work is built around turning democratic interest into practical action. Our non-partisan voter registration campaign, Give an X, has reached millions of young people and generated hundreds of thousands of registrations across local, devolved, and national elections. At the same time, we are pushing for systemic change through our Votes at 16 campaign, supporting the Representation of the People Bill as it moves through Parliament to make voter registration simpler and more accessible.

Casting a ballot is only part of the picture. Young people also need spaces to speak directly to those in power and the tools to make their voices heard. Our national Next Gen Conference creates accessible opportunities for young people to engage directly with decision-makers. Meanwhile, The Squad network and its year-long Leadership Programme provide young people, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds, with the practical skills, mentorship, and networks needed to lead change in their own communities.

This report shows where young people stand and what needs to improve. The research proves that young adults have not given up on democracy. Our work at My Life My Say shows that when politics is proactive, removes barriers of engagement and goes to the spaces where young people are, they're ready to engage. The responsibility now rests with political institutions to listen to these findings, remove the barriers holding young people back, and start restoring trust.



GET INVOLVED

On our mission to engage young people in democracy, we're always open to working with new organisations and brands. If you want to learn more about MLMS' work or have any ideas on how to reach young people across the county, please email us at: info@mlms.org.uk.

We also encourage you to join our mailing list via our website www.mylifemysay.org.uk

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**IF YOU
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POLITICS,
POLITICS
WILL DO
YOU**

