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How do we successfully advocate for change?

Thrive conference – Heading upstream – tackling causes, not consequences

19TH November 2025

TIM HARRISON-BYRNE
Co-Managing Director

01

Do we have permission to advocate for change?

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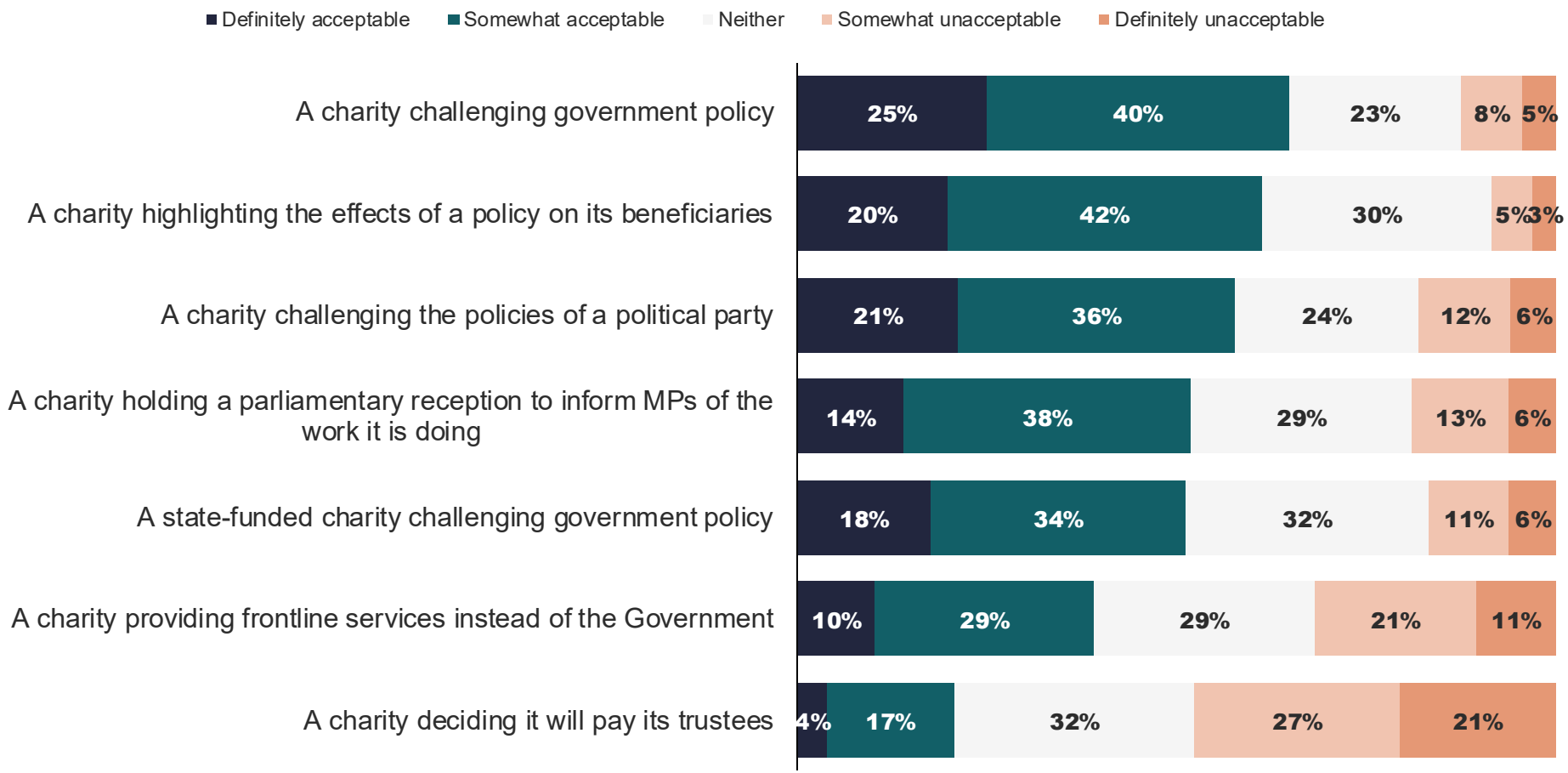
Yes - the public believe challenging policy is seen as central to what charities do

"Please rate how acceptable or unacceptable you find each of the below actions."



Source: nfpIntelligence December 2023 | Base: 1000 respondents 16+, Great Britain

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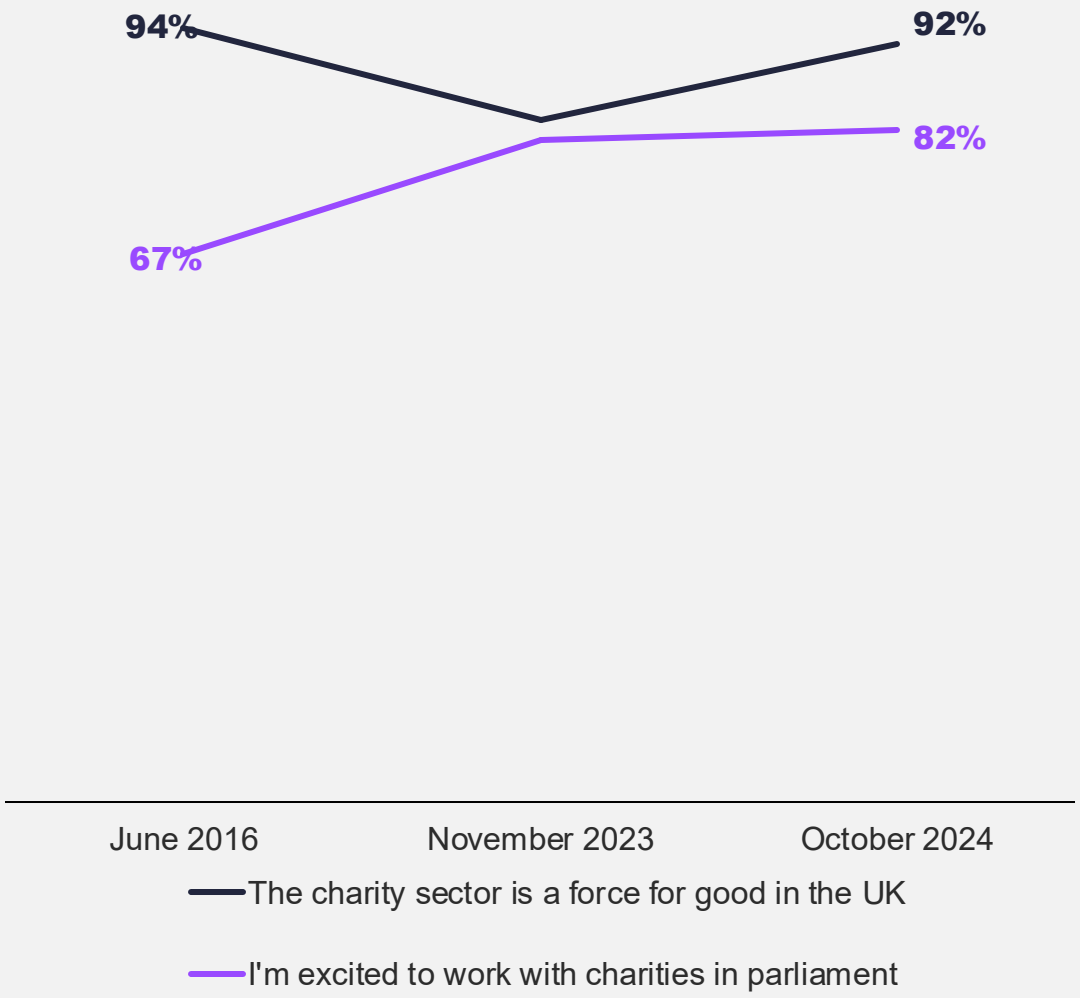
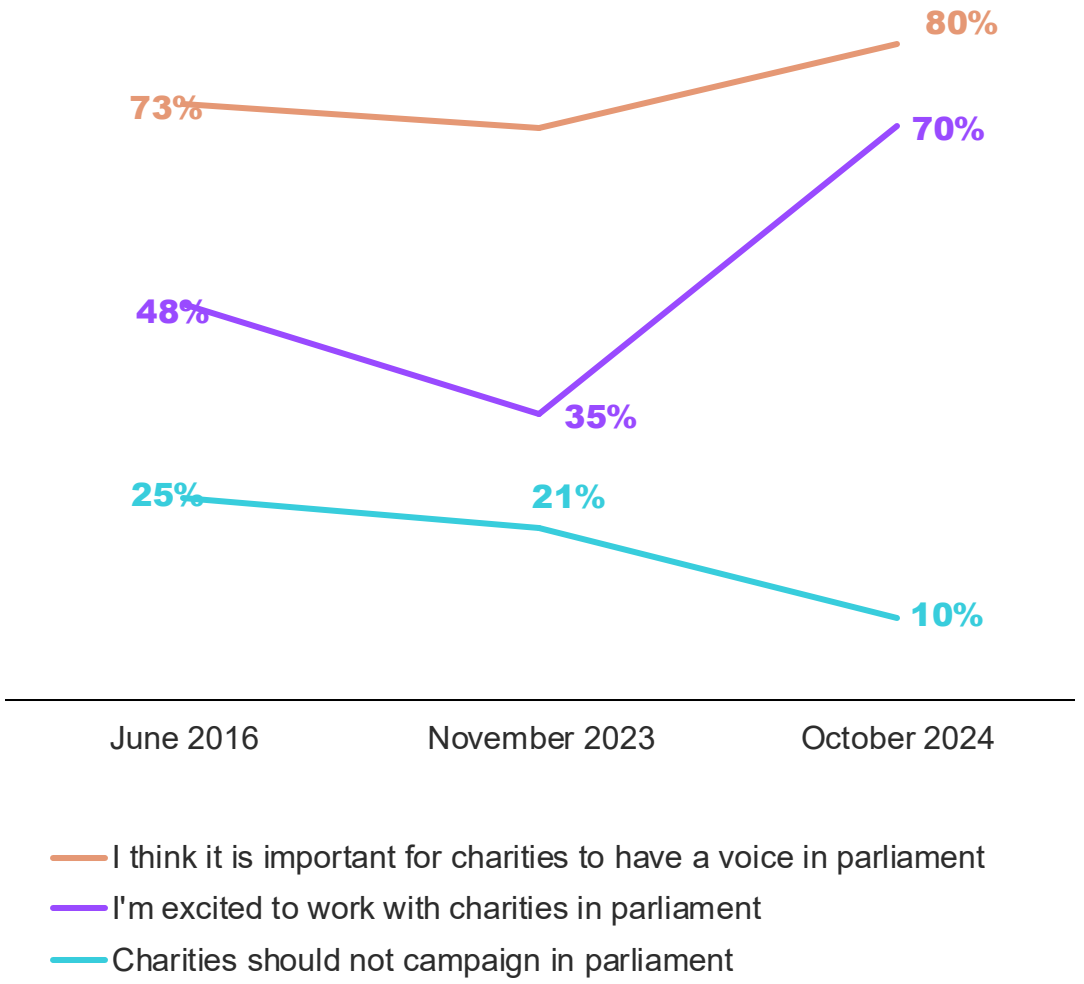
LABOUR MPS ARE VERY POSITIVE TOWARDS CHARITIES



CONSERVATIVE MPS ARE MORE POSITIVE THAN THEY HAVE BEEN IN A LONG TIME



"To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about work with charities?"
sSource: nfpPolitics Westminster June 2016 to October 2024 | Base: 176 Labour MPs

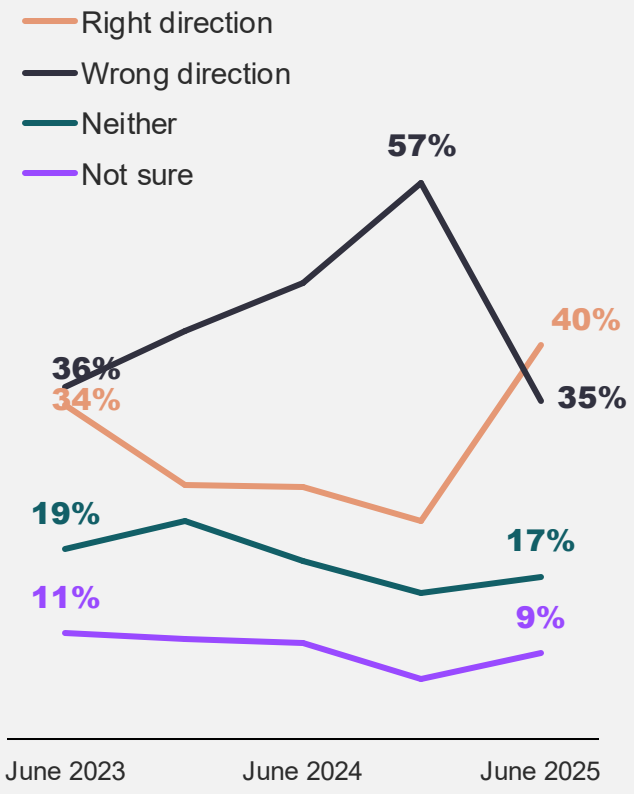
Source: nfpPolitics Westminster June 2016 to October 2024 | Base: 125 Conservative MPs

02

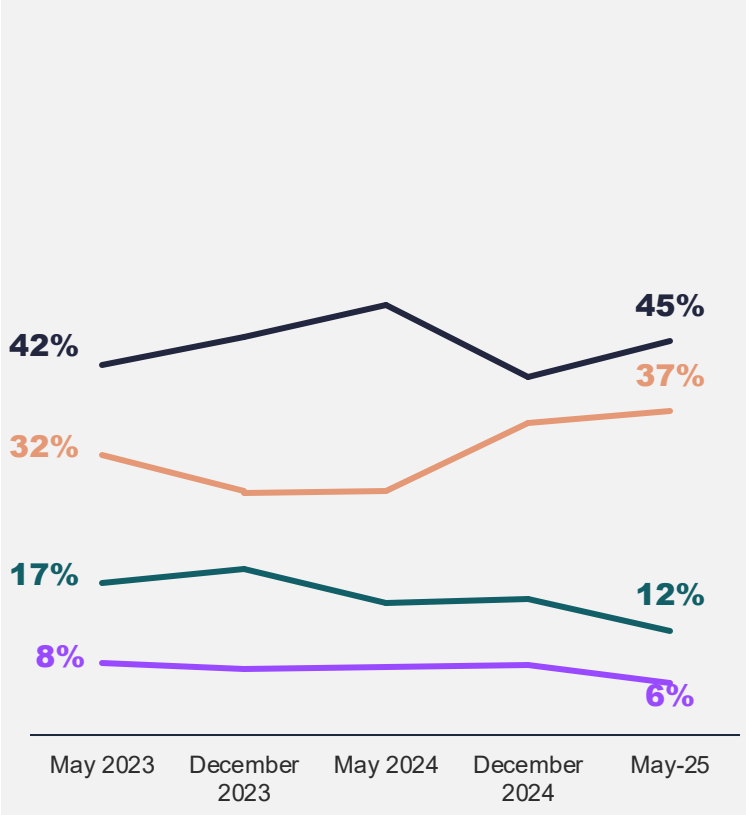
Understand the context we're operating in

THE PUBLIC IS PARTICULARLY PESSIMISTIC IN THE UK

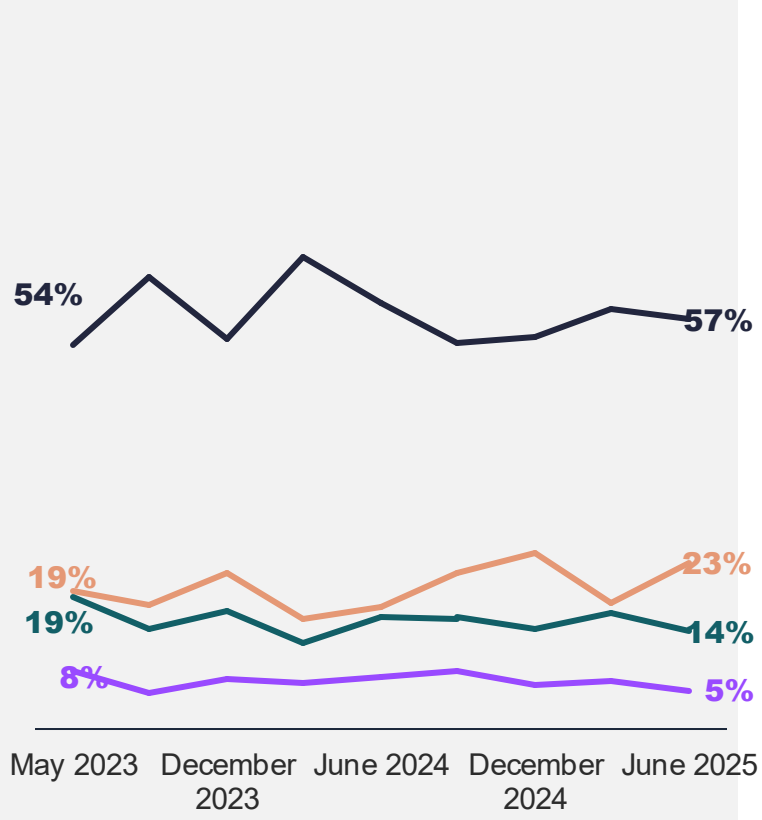
CANADIAN PUBLIC



IRISH PUBLIC



UK PUBLIC



"In general, do you think things in Canada / Ireland / the UK are heading in the right or wrong direction?"

Source: nfpIntelligence June 2023 to June 2025 | Base: 3,000 respondents per wave 18+, Canada
Source: nfpIntelligence May 2023 to December 2024 | Base: 1,000 respondents per wave 16+, Ireland
Source: nfpIntelligence May 2023 to March 2025 | Base: 1,000 respondents per wave 16+, United Kingdom

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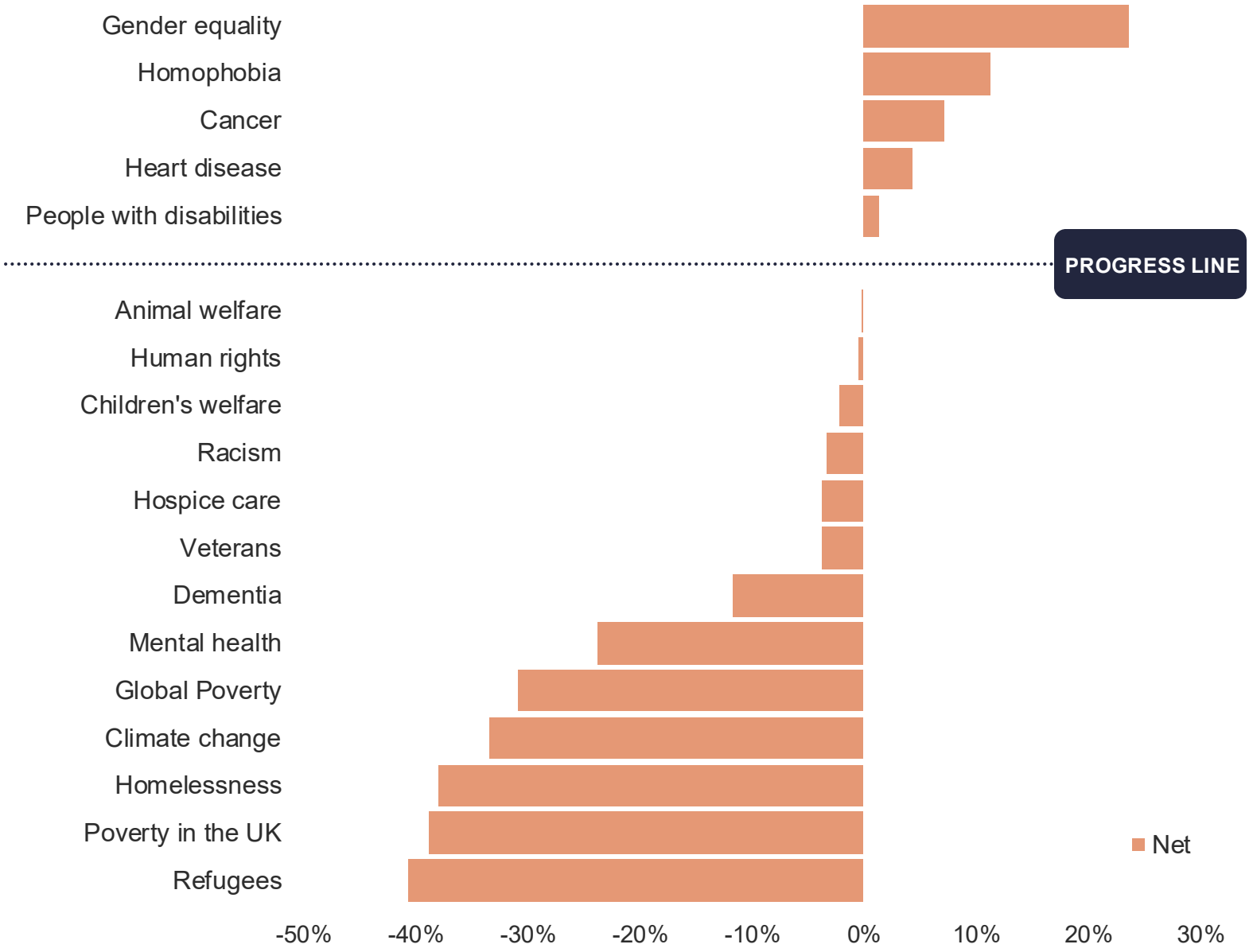
THE PUBLIC ARE NOT SEEING PROGRESS ACROSS A RANGE OF DIFFERENT AREAS

To what extent do you think that the situation has changed for the better or worse for the following issues or groups in the last twenty years?”

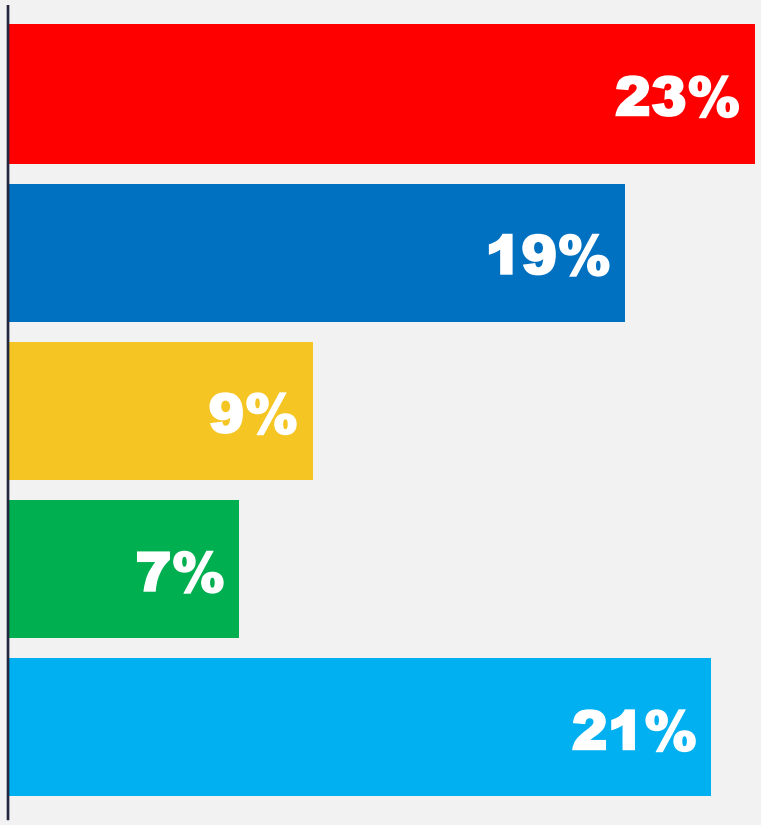
It has improved minus it has gotten worse



Source: nfpIntelligence March 2025 | Base: 1,017 respondents 16+, United Kingdom

THE ELECTORATE IS LOOKING FOR ALTERNATIVES. IS REFORM THE ANSWER?

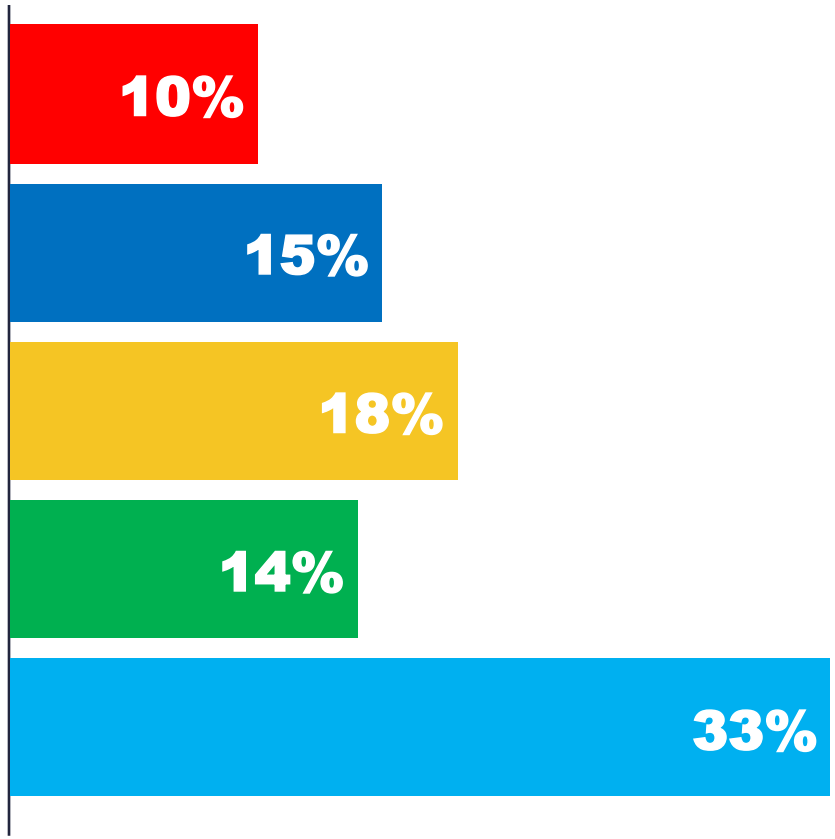
If there were a general election tomorrow, which party would you vote for?



Source: nfpIntelligence March 2025 | Base: 1,017 respondents 16+, United Kingdom

33% OF REFORM VOTERS DON'T BELIEVE 'UK CHARITIES ARE REPRESENTATIVE OF PEOPLE LIKE ME'

Disagree



Source: nfpIntelligence August 2023 | Base: 1,017 respondents 16+, United Kingdom

Labour Party | Conservative Party | Liberal Democrat | Green Party | Reform UK

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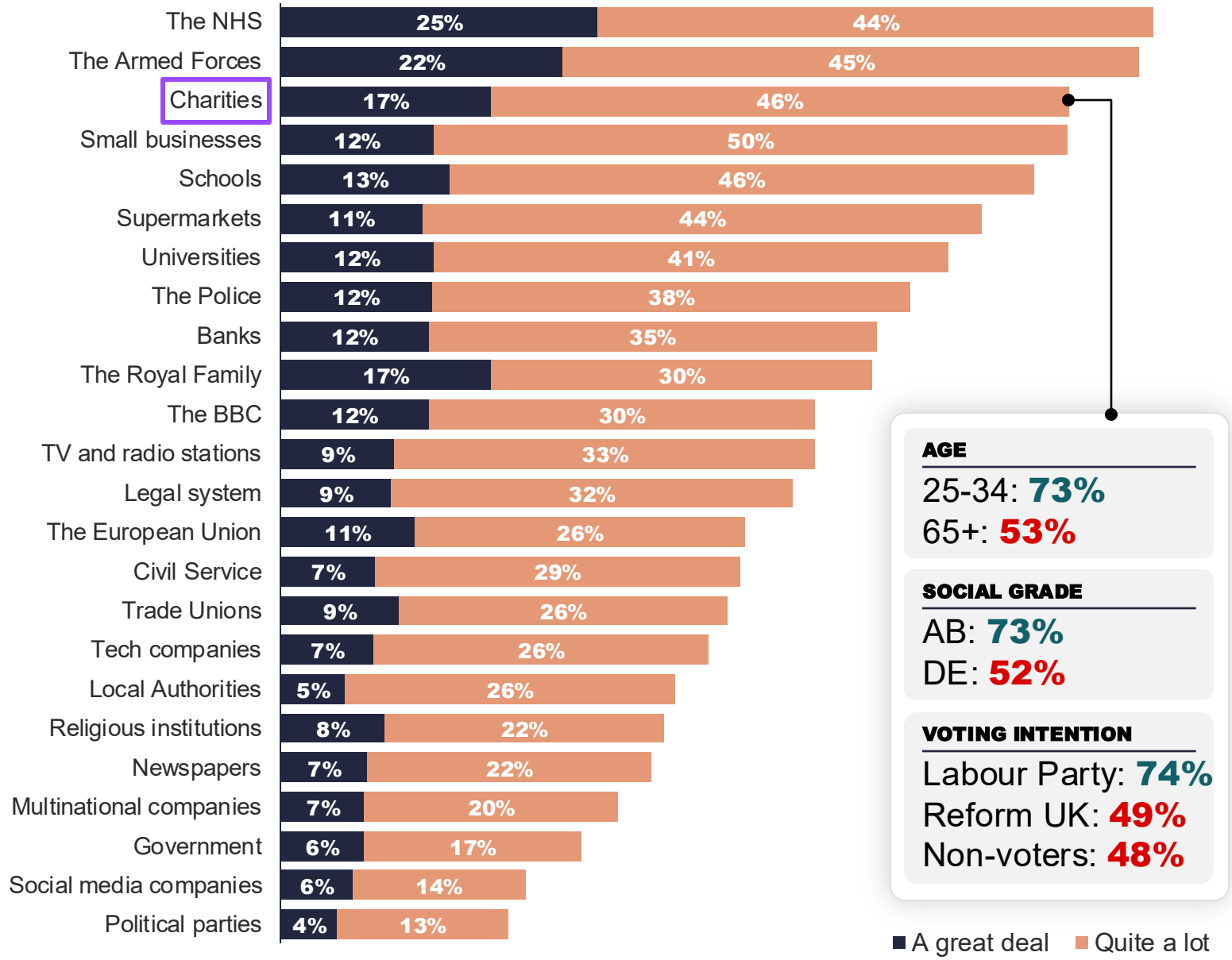
CHARITIES RANK AMONGST THE MOST TRUSTED INSTITUTIONS IN THE UK...

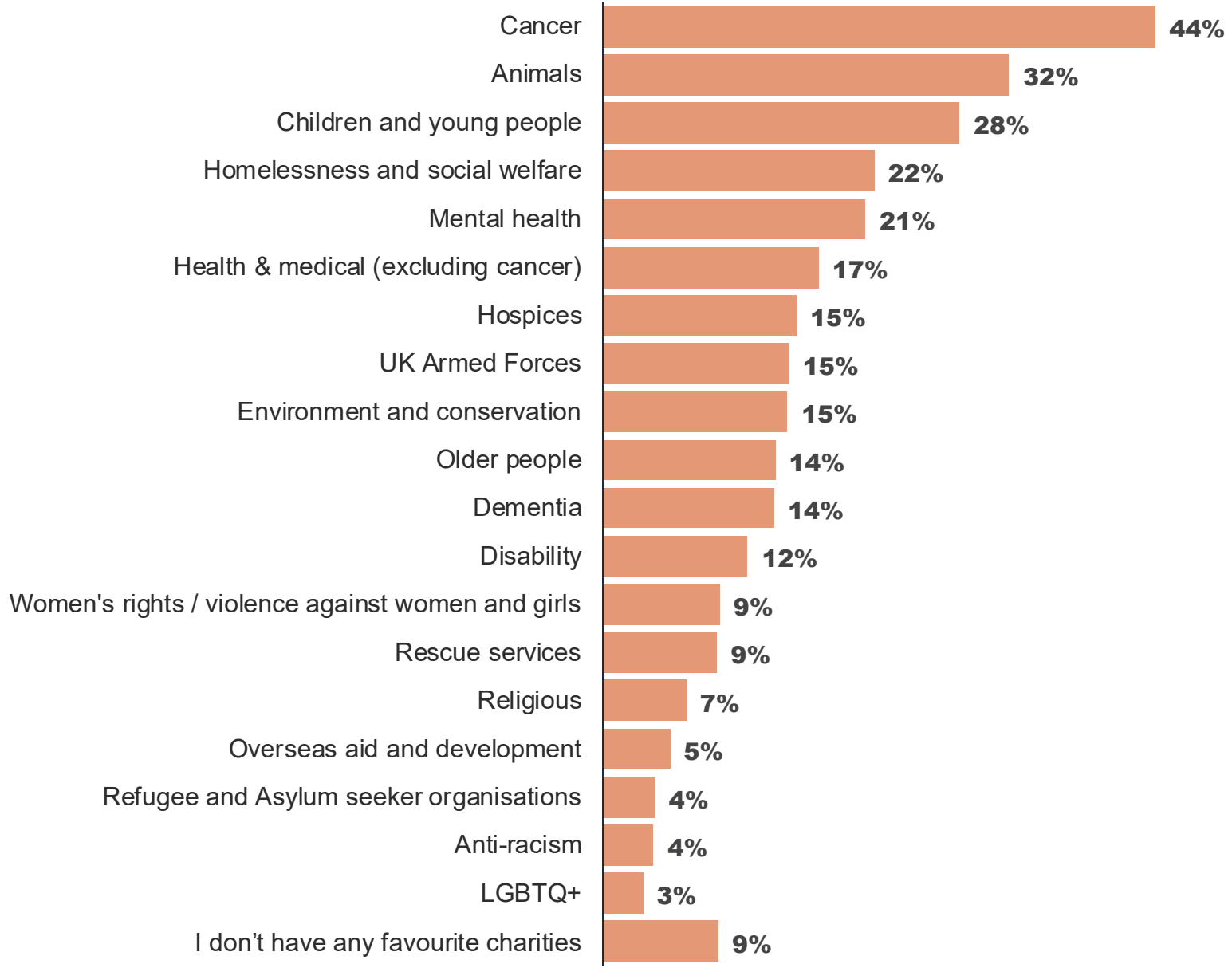
Please indicate, by ticking in the appropriate column, how much trust you have in each of the bodies."



Source: nfpIntelligence March 2025 | Base: 1017 respondents 16+, United Kingdom

UNDERSTAND HOW POPULAR YOUR CAUSE IS

When you think about your favourite charities, which category do they fall into?”



Source: nfpIntelligence March 2025 | Base: 1,017 respondents 16+, United Kingdom

SOME OF THE LEAST POPULAR CAUSES ARE SEEN AS THE MOST ADEQUATELY FUNDED

Please indicate the extent you agree or disagree that there is adequate funding in the UK for charities working in each of the following sectors.” **NET agreement**

Source: nfpIntelligence December 2024 | Base: 1,019 respondents 16+, United Kingdom

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03

How to effectively advocate for change

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To influence you need a relationship

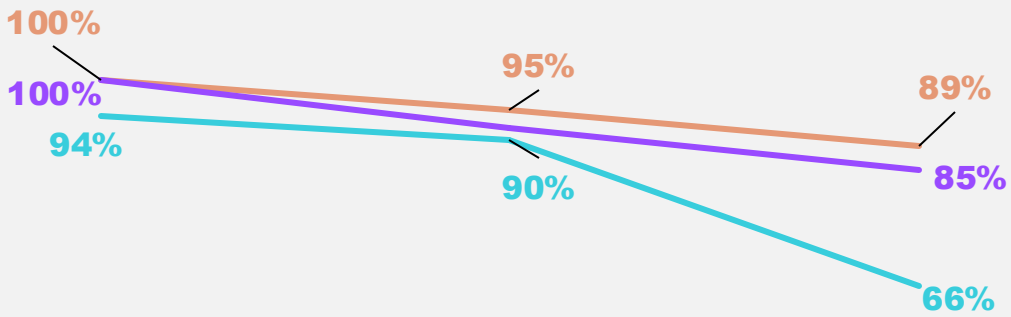
Influencing cannot happen without some form of engagement and relationship building at its foundation.

- Examples of **light-touch engagement** included an organisation inviting council leaders / senior staff to regular informal coffee meetings, dinners, and events such as ribbon cutting. These could also be light-touch updates on your work.
- Form relationships at different levels within a Council / NHS / Local Authority.
- More in-depth engagement could be hosting a roundtable on a specific topic, providing data / evidence on local area or running local pilots.
- Light engagement facilitated more communication and better relationships between the council and the charity. In turn this led to higher levels of awareness of the charity and trust in its work.

What gets in the way?

- Time
- Internal (dis)unity / trustee reticence
- Inadequate planning / stakeholder mapping
- No tangible results / impact
- Staff turnover
- Council / Local Authority / Westminster / civil service staff turnover
- Personality
- Politics / values

WHILE LABOUR MPS REMAIN POSITIVE ABOUT CHARITIES CHALLENGING GOVERNMENT, WE ARE SEEING SOME CHANGES



> **They're going to have to work with us. They're going to have to bear with us. That's why I think they're stakeholders, not partners."**

Sector reacts as Wes Streeting vows to 'break the culture' of charities lobbying government

04 Feb 2025 News

Starmer 'greatly encouraged' by response to Civil Society Covenant consultation

06 Jan 2025

Civil Society

Photo Sources:
By Lauren Hurley / No 10 Downing Street - Number 10 Flickr page, OGL 3, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=150044527
Picture by Simon Dawson/ No 10 Downing Street
https://www.flickr.com/photos/number10gov/53836009867/

"Please rate how acceptable or unacceptable you find each of the below actions?" Definitely + Somewhat acceptable combined
Source: nfpPolitics Westminster June 2016 - October 2024 | Base: ~100 MPs

New Labour MPs being very careful to prioritise what they're working on

"Not a priority issue I am focusing on."

New Labour MP

"Trees, when 50% of the children in my constituency live below the poverty line?! Whatever."

New Labour MP

"I wish they would stop emailing and getting their supporters to email, I am not an animal rights person."

New Labour MP

"It's not government policy."

New Labour MP

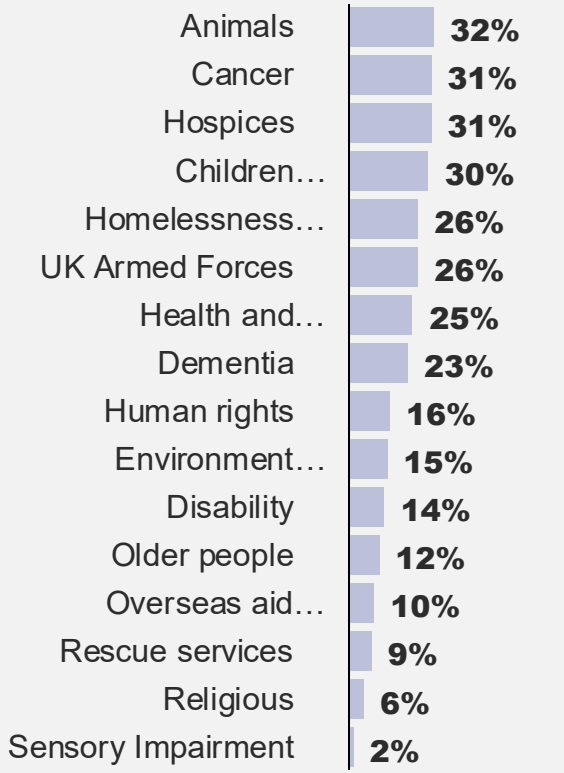
"Not always feasible as they're often rejecting policy off of the back of nature concerns, and I'm on a three-line whip."

New Labour MP

Source: nfpPolitics Westminster October 2024-March 2025 | Base: 100 MPs

WHAT IF YOUR CAUSE IS NOT A PRIORITY?

FAVOURITES



CONSTITUENTS

age UK
Let's change how we age

FRAMING

BATTERSEA
HERE FOR EVERY DOG AND CAT

OPPOSITION PARTIES

SWIFT BOXES AND REFORM UK

Source: nfpPolitics Westminster November 2024 | Base: 102 MPs

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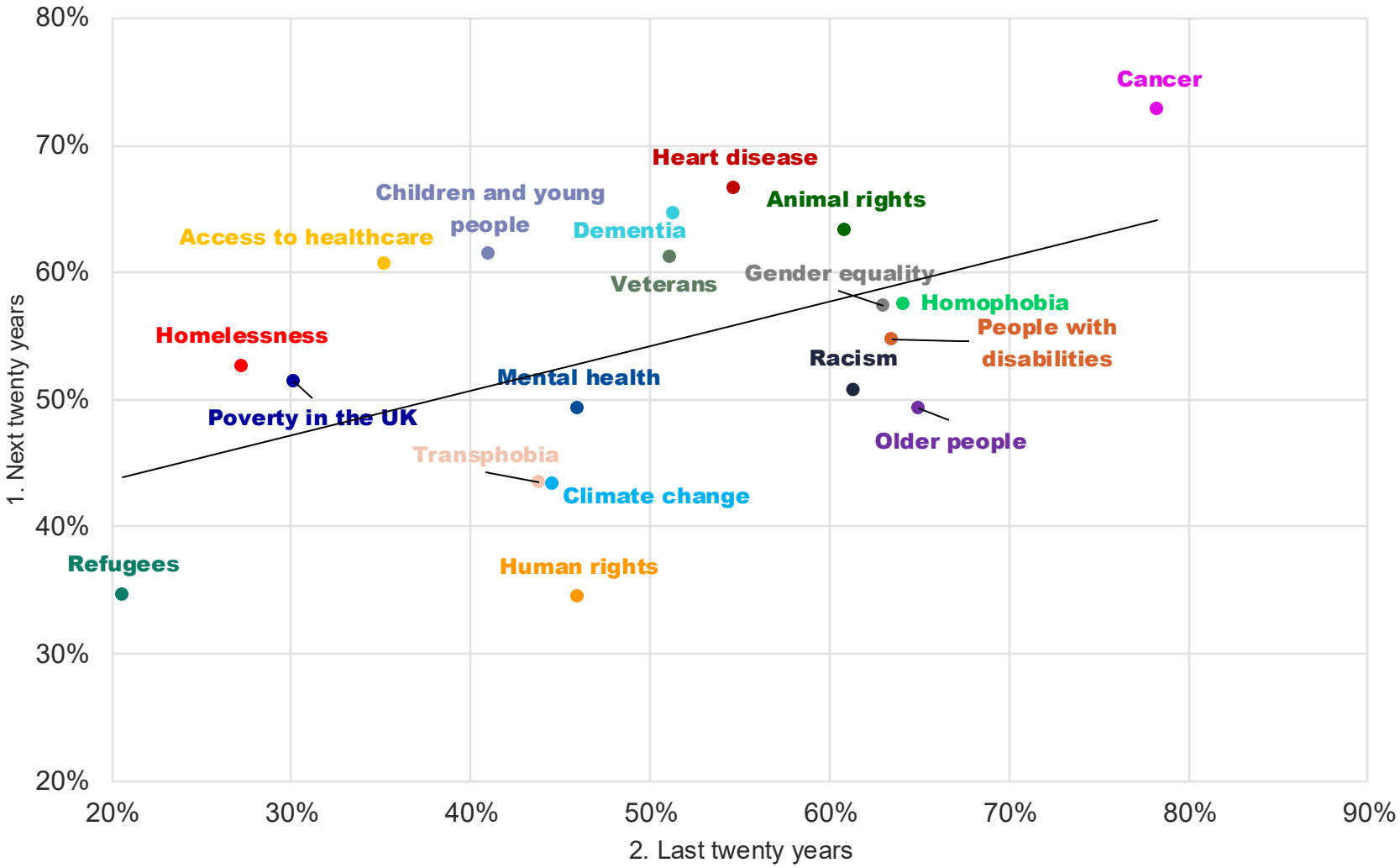
MPS ARE MORE OPTIMISTIC ABOUT PROGRESS:

LAST 20 YEARS VS. NEXT 20 YEARS

To what extent do you think that the situation will become better or worse for the following issues or groups in the next twenty years?”
/
“To what extent do you think that the situation has changed for the better or worse for the following issues or groups in the last twenty years?”



Source: nfpPolitics Westminster March 2025 | Base: 103 MPs

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Thank you

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