



State of **Britain,** 2023: Experiences, reflections, hopes.

Compassion
in Politics

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Summary

Compassion in Politics conducted a nationally representative survey of the public to understand:

- The public's evaluation of the last twelve years of Conservative government;
- Their experience of Christmas during a cost-of-living and energy crisis;
- Their hopes for 2023.

The polling was conducted by Opinium in December 2022. They surveyed 2000 UK nationals.

Overall we found a large degree of scepticism about the success of government policy during the last twelve years. Brexit, austerity, education reform, and NHS management were overwhelmingly considered to have failed. This was further reflected in the "report card" we asked the public to assign the government: two in five (the majority) rated the last decade of Conservative rule to have been a failure.

This is no doubt in part because of the extreme pressure many are experiencing right now. 1 in 10 will not be exchanging gifts this Christmas because of the cost-of-living crisis. 2 in 5 are also heating their

homes less than they were last year due to the impact of rising energy prices.

As with our November report on the cost-of-living crisis, this does mean the public appear open to ideas for transformative change. A majority (25%) said that the policy they most want to see introduced in 2023 is one granting the public a guaranteed right to food, income, and housing. A further 21% say the government should introduce a universal basic income.

Looking back

School report

2 in 5 (52%) say they would rate the last twelve years of Conservative government as a "failure".

- This includes 19% of Conservative voters.
- Just 8% would give the party an A* or A grade. Nearly a third (29%) rated them C or D.

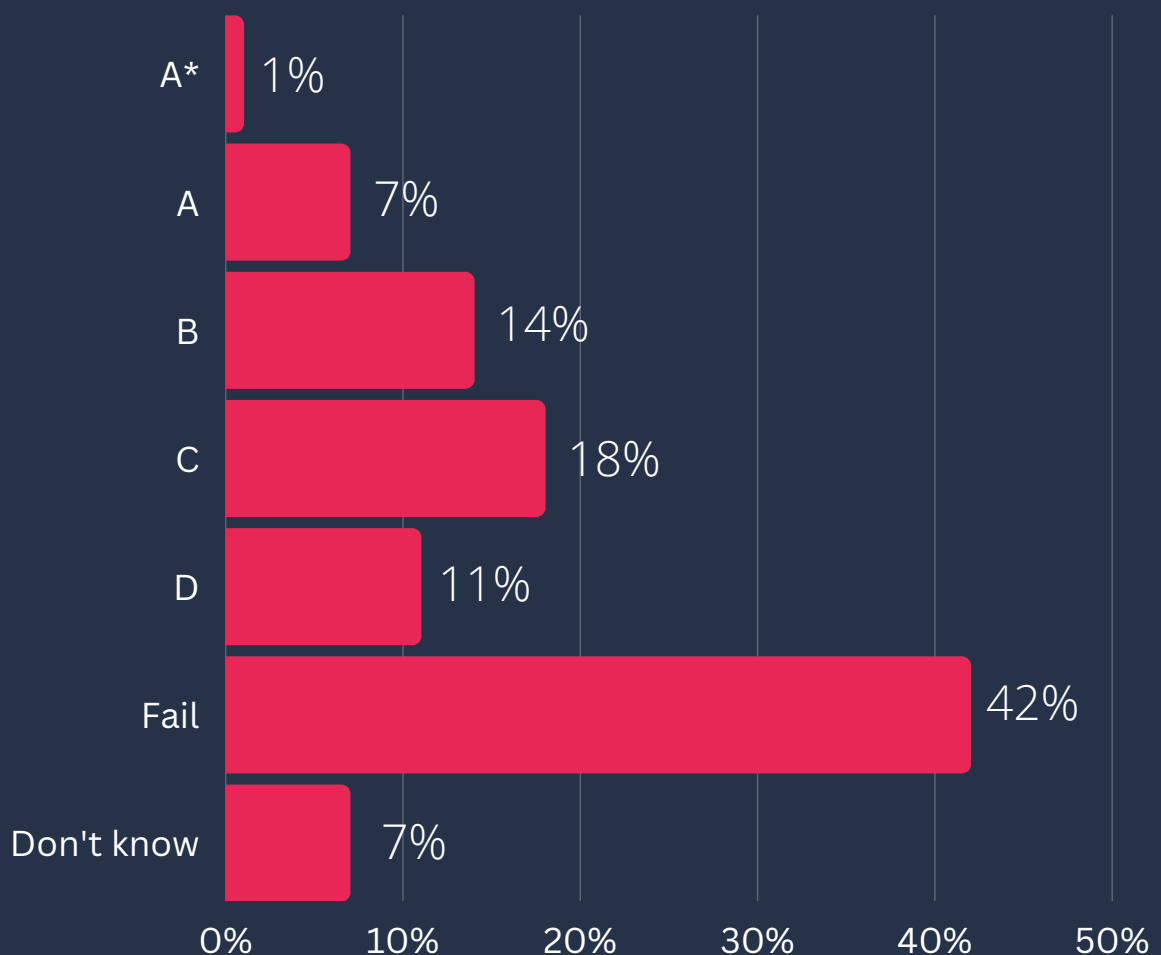


Figure 1: School report on the government's performance over the last twelve years

Rating policies

Brexit, austerity, NHS management, and education reform are all deemed to have been a failure.

- More than half (57%) think austerity and Brexit have failed. Nearly half of Conservative voters (47%) think austerity was a failure and, overall, just 16% think austerity was a success.
- 71% say NHS management has failed. 53% think the same of education reform.

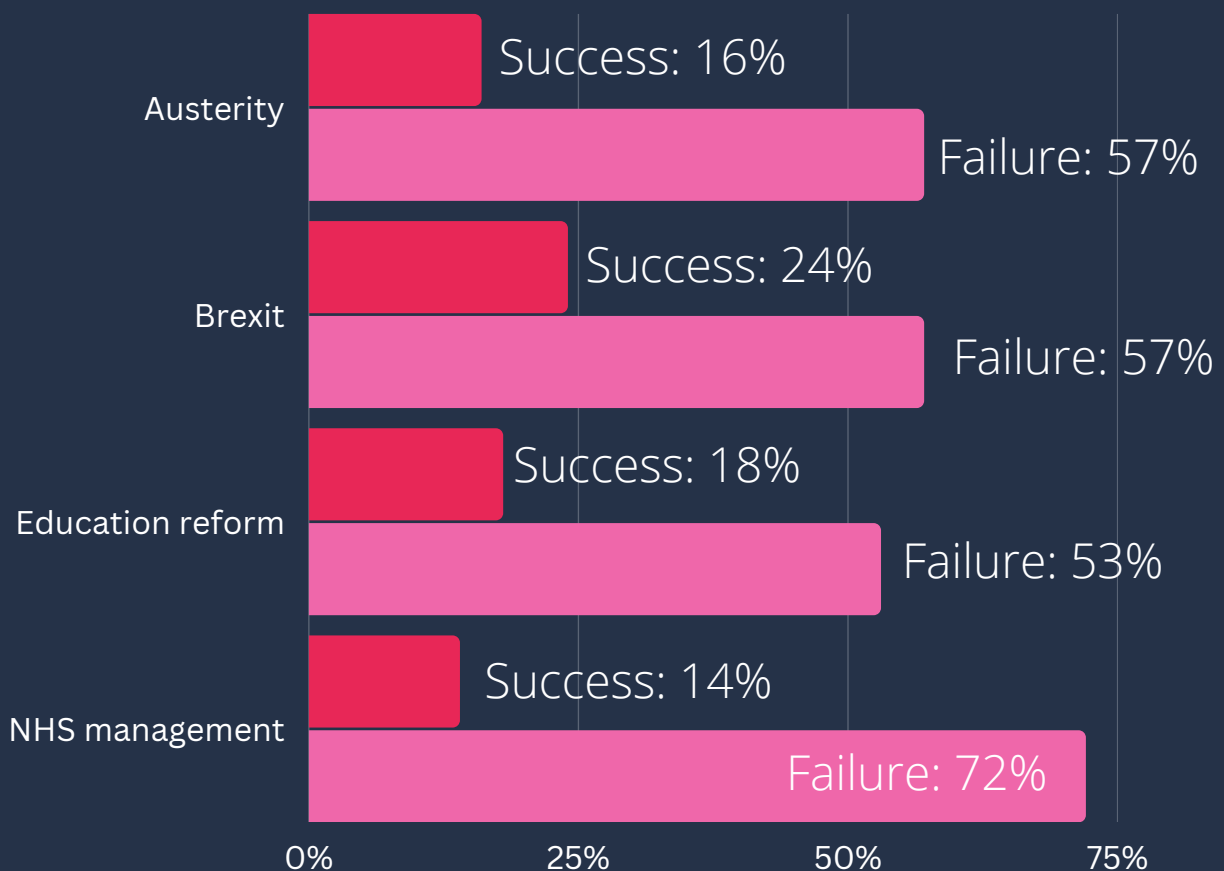


Figure 2: Rating major policies as a success or failure.

Experience now

Christmas crunch

1 in 10 have not bought any presents this Christmas due to the cost-of-living crisis.

- A further 1 in 5 (19%) have cut back on presents for children and a quarter (23%) have reduced the food they will eat on Christmas Day.
- 1 in 7 (13%) have decided not to travel to see family in order to save money.

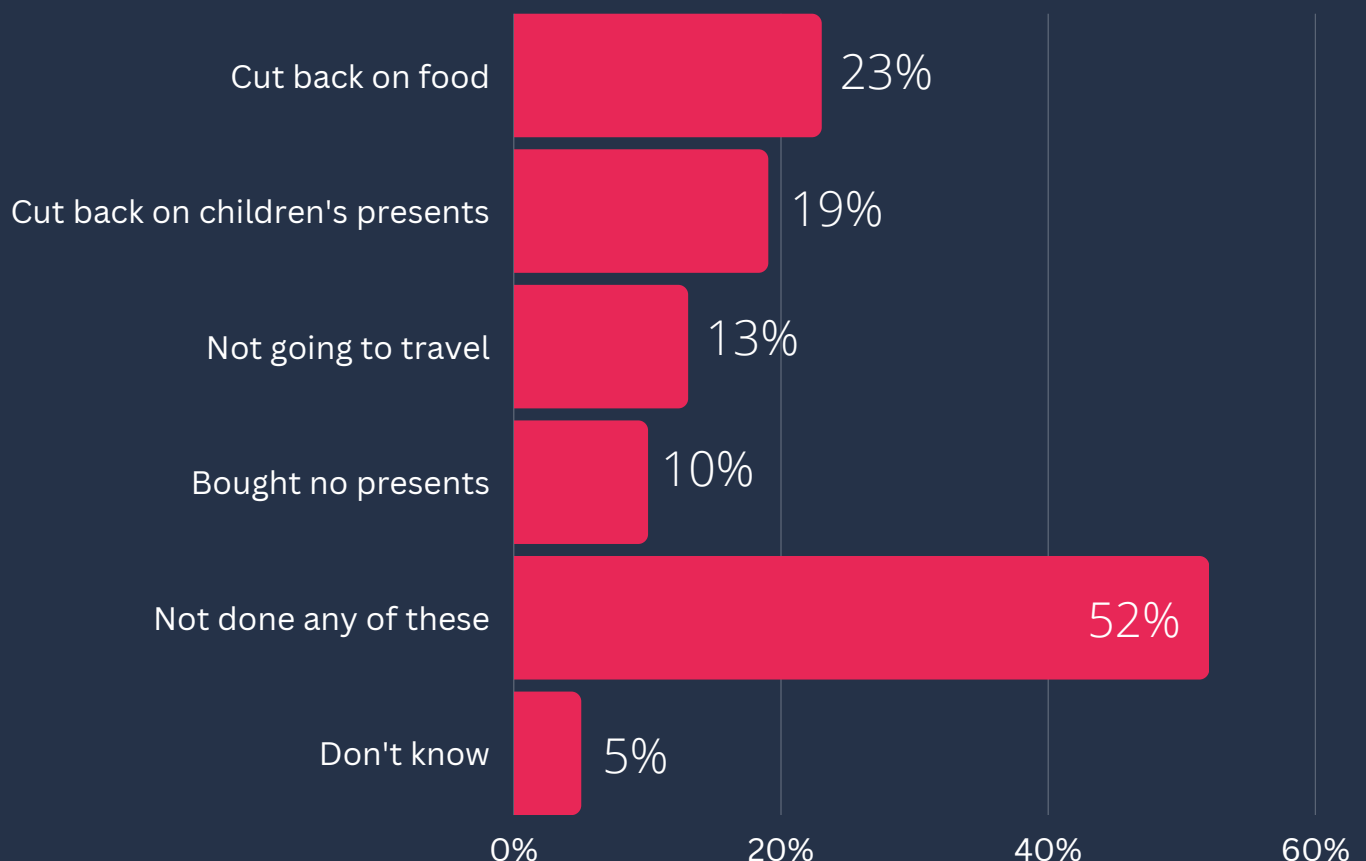


Figure 3: How cost-of-living crisis is impacting on Christmas

Energy crisis

2 in 5 (43%) are heating their home less than last year.

- During the recent cold period, one-third (31%) heated their home to the same extent as they did last year.
- 6% did not use central heating last year or this year.

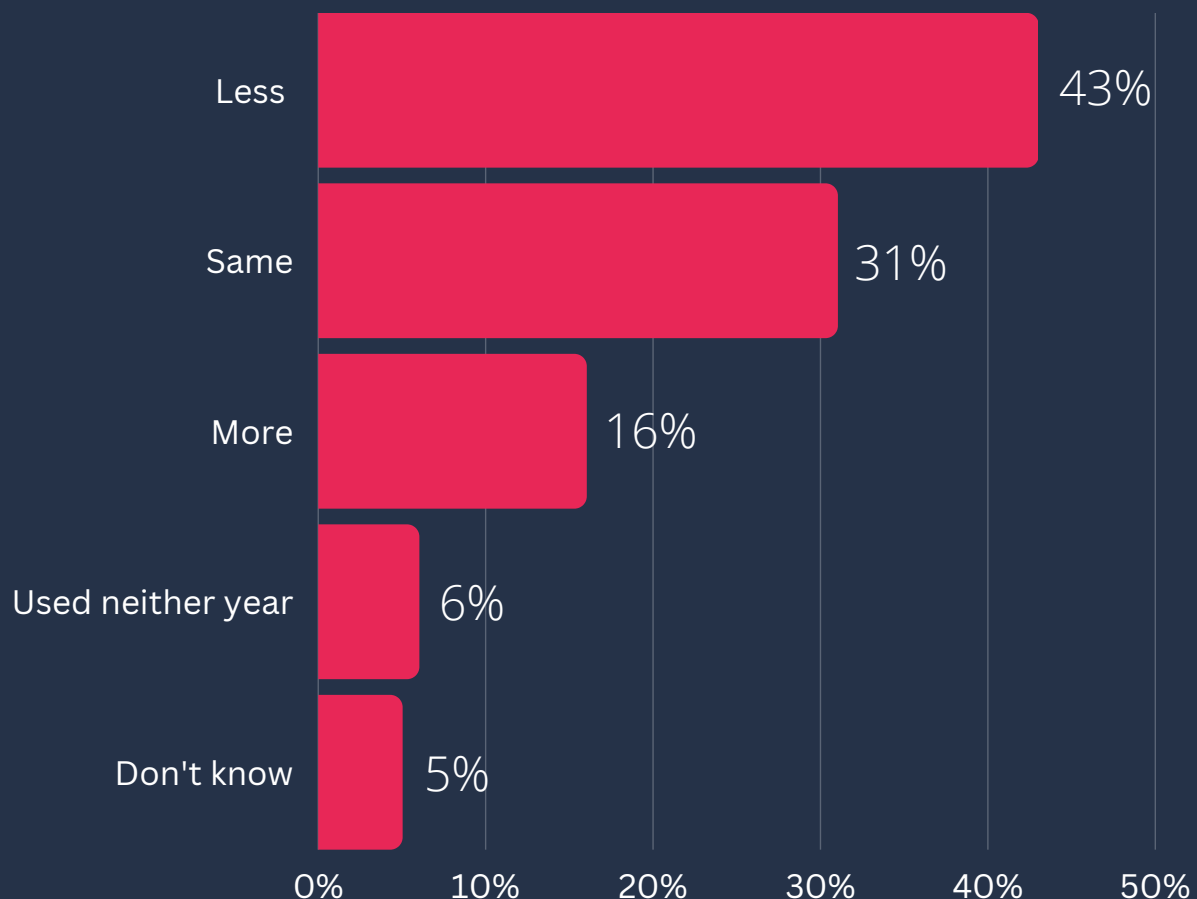


Figure 4: Whether people are heating homes more, less, or the same compared to last year

The strikes

2 in 5 (41%) think the government is responsible for the strikes.

- This includes 19% of Conservative voters.
- Overall, a third (35%) blame the unions and 11% blame employers.

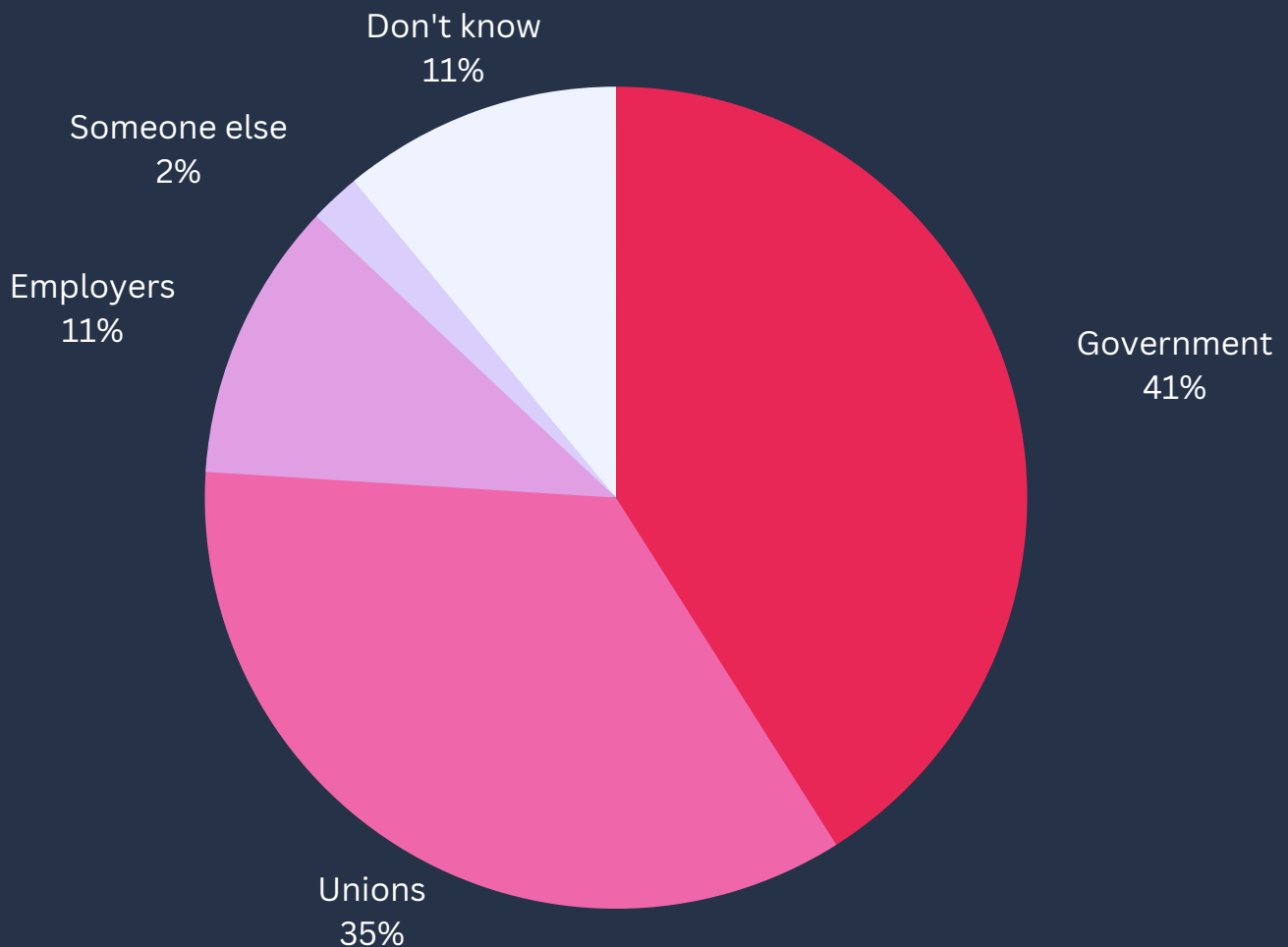


Figure 5: Who public perceive as being responsible for strikes.

Looking forward

Policies for 2023

Asked which policy they *most* want introduced, 1 in 4 (25%) said socio-economic rights.

- Other policies preferred included a universal basic income (21%), law requiring politicians are honest (18%), and citizens assemblies (8%).

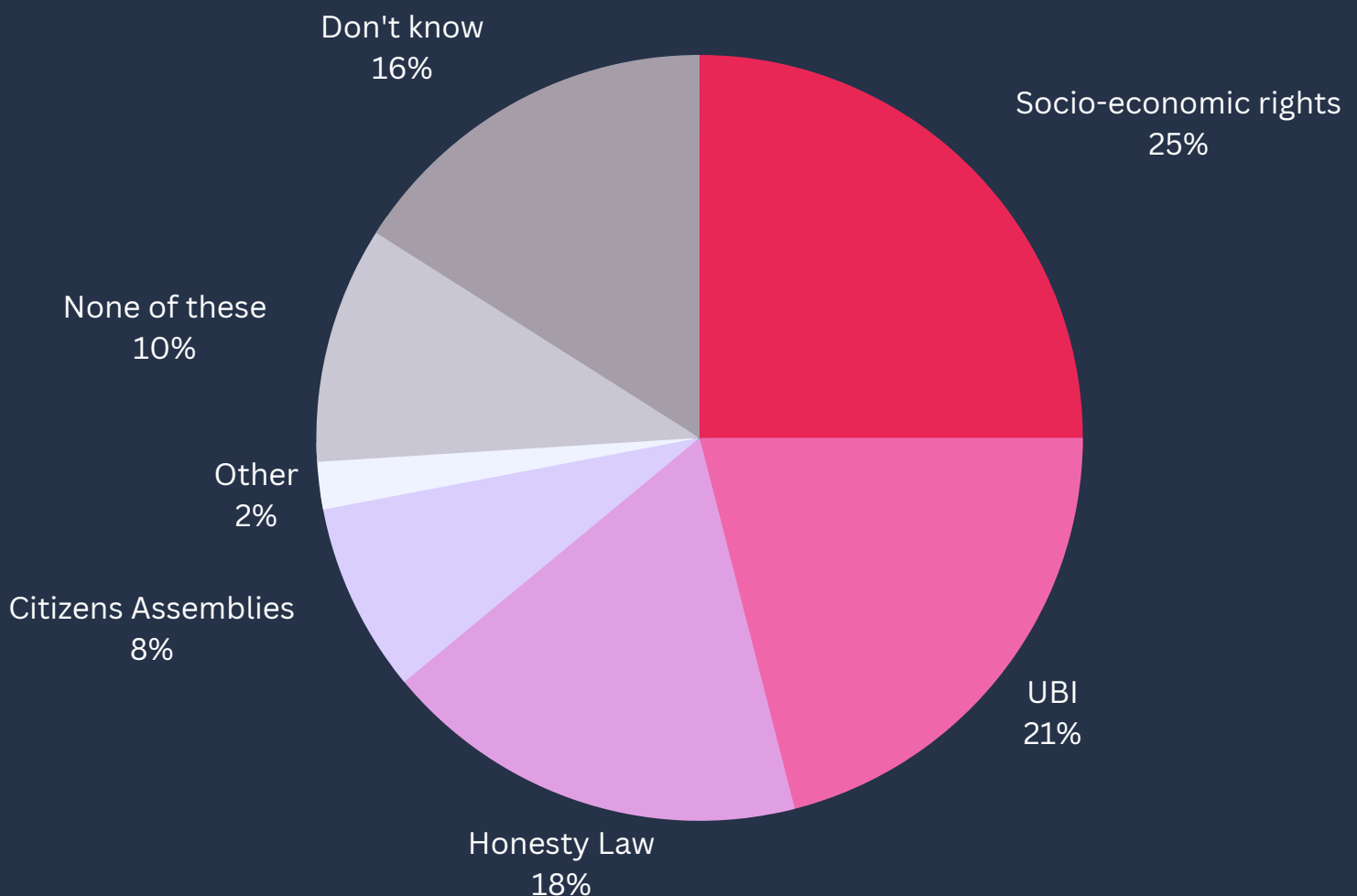


Figure 6: Policies the public most hope will be introduced in 2023.

Conclusion

In the last twelve years it feels as though the country has lurched from crisis to crisis: from the financial crash through Brexit to Covid and a cost-of-living emergency. It has undoubtedly been a testing time for the public and for those in government.

Clear lessons must be taken from this elongated period of discontent.

Firstly, values are central. They provide the compassion that can navigate a nation and its leaders through a storm, no matter how protracted. They act as a guardrail to steer policy-making and a vision for the kind of country that we want to be and live in. Those values have, to a large extent, become muddled. While the brief premiership of Liz Truss pulled the economy in one direction, the fledgling government of Rishi Sunak has headed in another. It is imperative that those in government - and the opposition - align on a common set of values and ambitions for Britain that will provide the steady and clear leadership the country needs.

We would suggest that those values align around compassion. At a time when people are feeling

dreadfully insecure and uncertain, they need to experience protection, care, and security. That is why we have welcomed the current government's emphasis on "compassionate Conservatism" - but these warm words need to be borne out in policy and action. This report, and our recent research on the cost-of-living crisis, indicate that one totemic way of achieving that would be to introduce a guaranteed right to food, housing, and income. This is a policy which the UK has nominally agreed to at an international level (by signing up the UN Covenant on Economic, Cultural, and Social Rights) but has never implemented into domestic law. This is an oversight that must be addressed.

Second, and relatedly, the market cannot be allowed to dominate every aspect of our lives. If our experience of the financial crash, Covid, and now a cost-of-living emergency has taught us anything it is that government has a vital and productive role to play in managing the economy. We live in the sixth largest economy in the world. It is a failure of policy - not a lack of resource - which results in continued and mounting hunger, homelessness, and financial anxiety. We need policies - like socio-economic rights, progressive taxation, and higher social security payments - to ensure that everyone can lead a good and healthy life.

Finally, and as many have said before us, the nature of politics needs to change. Not only do we need it to move away from the combative, winner-takes-all model we have inherited but we must also look to find new ways to engage and empower the public. If we are to overcome the fracturing of our body-politics and neutralise the toxicity of public debate we need to find new ways to constructively involve the public in major decisions and ensure their views, concerns, and ideas are properly represented. Citizen's assemblies, devolution, and participatory budgeting offer just some of the more obvious ways of achieving that ambition.

Contact

To request a full set of the data used in this report or to ask any queries you might have, please email info@compassioninpolitics.com.