



AUGUST 2025

UNDERSTANDING RURAL BRITAIN

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

i.	TABLE OF CONTENTS
1.	ABOUT LRRG
2.	INTRODUCTION
3.	THE RURAL POLITICAL LANDSCAPE
5.	RURAL IDENTITY

ABOUT LRRG

The Labour Rural Research Group (LRRG) is a group of 25 rural Labour MPs. Its mission is to ensure that Labour policy is grounded in the lived experiences of rural communities, reflecting the specific challenges and opportunities of life in our countryside and rural areas. The group works to bring a clear and consistent rural perspective to national decision-making, helping to shape policies that are relevant, inclusive and responsive to the needs of the countryside.

Members of the Labour Rural Research Group:

Sadik Al-Hassan, MP for North Somerset
Lee Barron, MP for Corby and East Northamptonshire
Matt Bishop, MP for Forest of Dean
Julia Buckley, MP for Shrewsbury
Markus Campbell-Savours, MP for Penrith and Solway
Torcuil Crichton, MP for Na h-Eileanan an Iar
Maya Ellis, MP for Ribble Valley
Anna Gelderd, MP for South East Cornwall
Jodie Gosling, MP for Nuneaton
Amanda Hack, MP for North West Leicestershire
Terry Jermy, MP for South West Norfolk
Jayne Kirkham, MP for Truro and Falmouth
Noah Law, MP for St Austell and Newquay
Perran Moon, MP for Camborne and Redruth
James Naish, MP for Rushcliffe
Samantha Niblett, MP for South Derbyshire
Richard Quigley, MP for Isle of Wight West
Jenny Riddell-Carpenter, MP for Suffolk Coastal
Sam Rushworth, MP for Bishop Auckland
Michelle Scrogham, MP for Barrow and Furness
Cat Smith, MP for Lancaster and Wyre
David Smith, MP for North Northumberland
Henry Tufnell, MP for Mid and South Pembrokeshire
John Whitby, MP for Derbyshire Dales
Steve Witherden, MP for Montgomeryshire and Glyndŵr

INTRODUCTION

The 2024 general election resulted in a landslide win for the Labour Government, with some of the biggest majorities being overturned in our rural heartlands, such as in South West Norfolk (26,195), South East Cornwall (20,871), and Suffolk Coastal (20,533).

If Johnson's 2019 election win was defined by breaking down the 'Red Wall', the 2024 result smashed the 'Rural Wall', which has historically turned out for the Conservatives.

A political realignment is in progress – rural voters more open to change, more divided about historic loyalties and, therefore, more significant in shaping future national election outcomes.

Understanding and responding to this shift is critical. We must ensure that rural communities, left behind by successive Conservative governments, are front and centre of the Labour Government's mission for inclusive growth and opportunity.

Much of the Government's ambition for growth and prosperity will be facilitated by, or hosted in, our rural communities. New housing, energy, and transport infrastructure will largely be coming through or built in our rural heartlands, while food security and the delivery of both net zero and nature can only be delivered with rural communities on board. This must be recognised.

This report, which polled 1,412 rural voters across the UK between June 30th and July 14th 2025, seeks to understand the priorities and concerns of people living in rural areas. These voters tend to be older, as younger people often move away from the countryside in search of jobs and broader opportunities.

For the most part, many of their political concerns are similar to that of their urban neighbours – however, there is a particularly strong sense of identity in rural Britain. People are proud of the countryside, lifestyle, and values it represents. They believe this sense of place deserves greater recognition – and that future policy, development, and infrastructure must be shaped with a deeper understanding of this rural identity, which has for too long been misunderstood and overlooked by policymakers.

Over the next year and beyond, the Labour Rural Research Group will be producing deep-dive policy papers aimed at identifying the opportunities that rural areas present, whilst ensuring that their needs and concerns are heard and understood at the heart of government.

Jenny Riddell-Carpenter MP
Member of Parliament for
Suffolk Coastal
LRRG Chair

THE RURAL POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

1. Political priorities of rural voters.

For the 1,412 rural voters polled, health was by far the most critical political priority, highlighted by 59.6% of respondents. Healthcare in rural Britain is often far more challenging to access, and an older demographic means that services have to stretch further, both to address complex health needs and to cover large geographies. Rurality must therefore be a key factor in all conversations about public service reform.

Notably, the environment ranked second as a key political issue,

cited by 54.2% of respondents. Many rural voters expressed deep concern about the state of rivers, water pollution, and nature loss in their local areas. It should come as no surprise that rural dwellers are acutely aware of what is happening to – and in – the natural environment around them.

The economy also ranked highly, with 44.7% of respondents viewing it as a political priority, followed closely by the cost of living at 41.7%. Immigration and asylum (34.2%), education (30.1%) and tax (29.6%) completed the list of priority policy areas for rural voters.

2. Where the Government should spend more – and less.

Rural voters are clear that they want to see greater investment in the NHS, with 59.6% identifying it as a top priority for increased

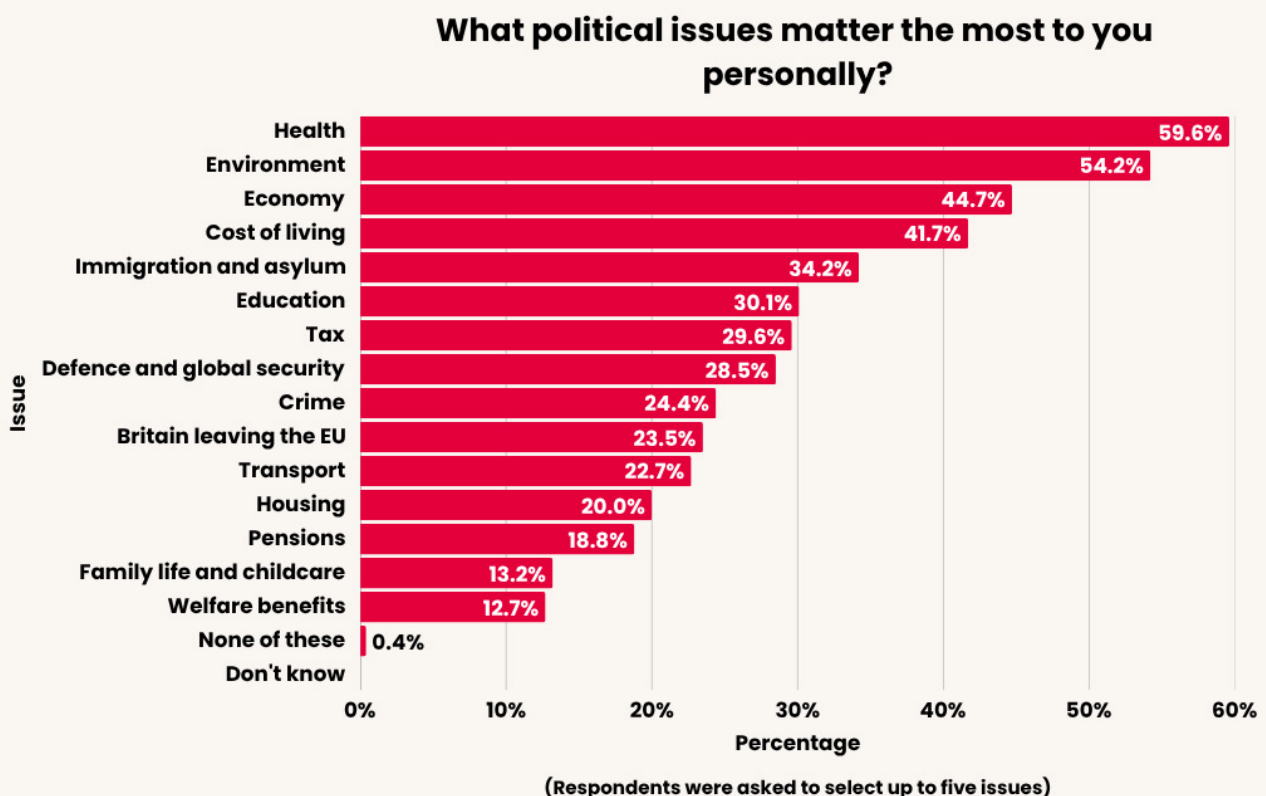


Fig. 1. Rural voters most important political issues.

funding. This aligns with the Labour Government’s focus on investment in healthcare, notably the additional £22 billion uplift to the NHS budget announced in the Autumn Budget 2024.

For rural voters, the NHS 10-Year Health Plan – which will put healthcare back into the community – has the potential to provide a step change in the delivery of local health services in harder-to-reach, disconnected, and often cut-off rural communities. This is a real opportunity for Government and rural voters’ aspirations to align – and for rural communities to really see the benefit from this Government’s NHS reform. But this will only be realised if we fully acknowledge the specific barriers to delivering healthcare in rural areas – and act decisively

to deliver quick, tangible improvements alongside the longer-term reform that will take time to embed.

Improved access to NHS dentistry, delivering more health care and screening services locally, and investing in mental health support are all just as important as the transition to digital and the wider reforms planned for the future of the NHS.

Beyond healthcare, there is a clear desire among rural voters to see increased spending in the rural economy and agriculture, with 51.3% of voters polled identifying this as a key priority – a reminder that rural livelihoods, food production, and land stewardship must be properly supported. Education also featured prominently, with

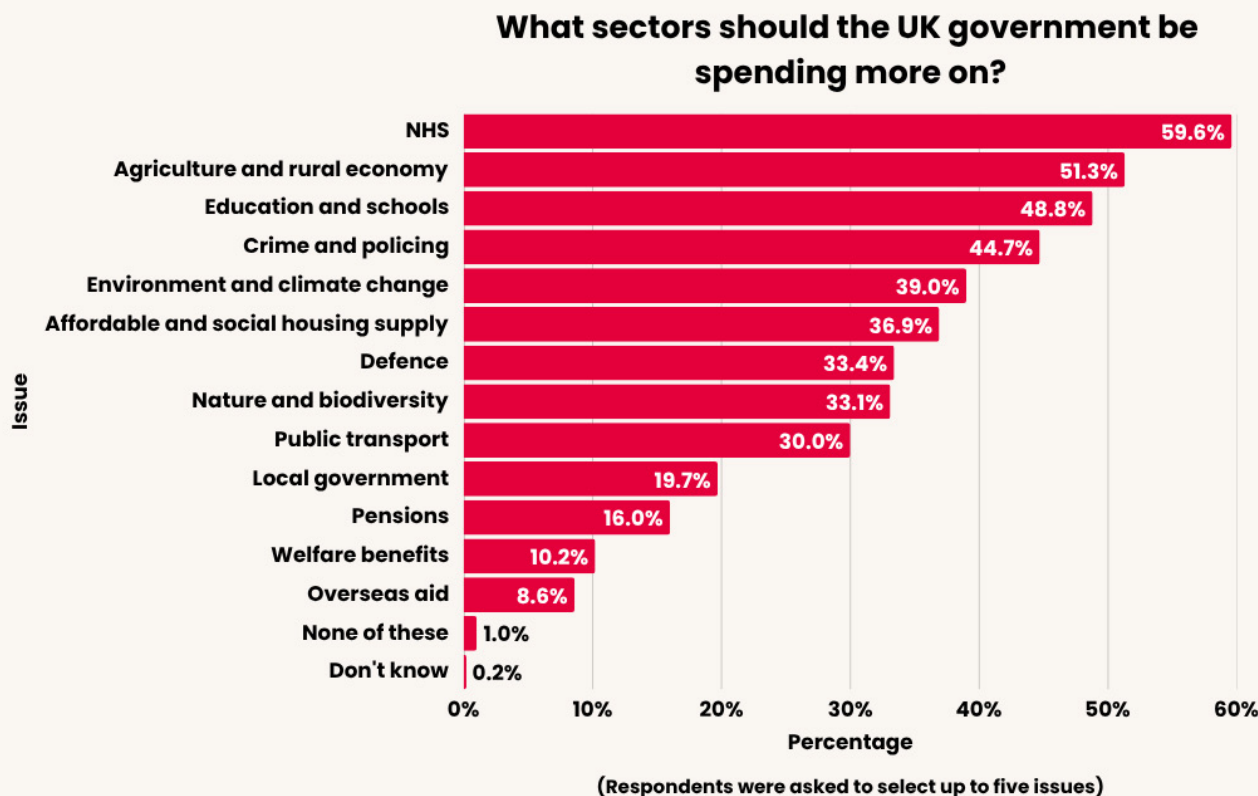


Fig. 2. Areas where rural voters want increased government spending.

48.8% of respondents wanting greater funding for schools. Other key spending priorities included crime and policing (44.7%), the environment and climate change (39.0%), and the supply of affordable and social housing (36.9%).

When asked where government spending should be reduced, 53.1% of respondents pointed to overseas aid, while 44.8% supported less being spent on welfare benefits. Earlier this year, the Government announced that spending on overseas aid would fall to 0.3% in 2027, in order to fund an increase in defence spending – a move that, among rural voters polled, reflects a broader acceptance that this is a necessary cut in light of the challenging financial circumstances facing the UK today.

RURAL IDENTITY

1. Investment in rural areas.

Three quarters (74.4%) of rural voters polled believe their communities have been neglected over the past 15 years, and that the needs of rural communities have not been prioritised. Similarly, three in five people (60.7%) feel that their rural communities are in decline.

43.3% of rural voters polled feel that in order for young people to succeed, they must leave their rural communities behind. Among Labour switchers, this is notably

higher – with one in two (52.0%) believing that leaving rural areas is the only way for young people to get on and succeed.

There is a clear desire for rural areas to be recognised as distinctive by the Government. Over three-quarters (82.7%) of voters polled see the need for a defined rural strategy given the simultaneous challenges of delivering public services across vast geographical areas, addressing skills gaps, and creating lifelong opportunities for rural dwellers.

If implemented, a rural strategy could provide a real opportunity to power the rural economy, strengthening sectors like farming and agriculture, food production and tourism – while tackling rural poverty and creating opportunities for those who have been left behind for far too long.

2. Housing.

The housing crisis is not confined to urban areas – it is a growing concern in rural communities across the UK. With soaring house prices across the country, including in rural heartlands, many voters are increasingly worried about housing affordability. 80.7% of rural voters are concerned that the next generation won't be able to buy their own home – a figure that rises to 86% among Labour switchers.

The lack of affordable housing – both private sale, and affordable social housing – is often cited by young people as a key reason for

leaving the rural area they grew up in. This trend not only depletes rural areas of younger generations, but also risks further contributing to declining birth rates, as young people relocate in search of both housing and job opportunities elsewhere.

3. Development and rural identity.

Much of the UK Government's ambition for growth – driven by development – will be facilitated or hosted in our rural communities. These areas often have higher housing targets than their urban neighbours, and are hosting nationally significant energy projects and grid upgrades, essential for delivering a clean energy transition as part of our ambition for growth. For many rural voters, this is something that they are increasingly aware of, as they witness new infrastructure and developments appearing in their locality.

The rhetoric in today's political world and media, which tends to focus on dividing lines, often pits rural against urban, and NIMBYs (Not In My Back Yard) against YIMBYs (Yes In My Back Yard). YIMBYs are often presented (in the media at least) as proud urban voters, whilst NIMBYs are seen as people living in rural or semi-rural communities.

However, we need to challenge this narrative – and we should be clear that rural voters do not identify as NIMBYs. In fact, 56.2% say they

firmly do not see themselves as NIMBYs, whilst only 16.1% do. Additionally, 65.2% of all rural voters polled agree that development in their area should proceed, as long as it is delivered thoughtfully, and with consideration for local needs and identity.

This is perhaps the most unifying rural value, for 90% of rural voters polled say that protecting the countryside is important to them, almost regardless of their own political identity. For development to succeed in rural areas, it must respect and reflect the deep connection to land, nature and local identity.

4. Trust in politicians.

Political trust among rural voters is low, with 65% of those polled expressing little trust in politicians across all parties. This should serve as a clear warning sign to all parties: disillusionment in rural Britain runs deep, and restoring trust will require more than promises – it must be backed by visible, long-term local action rooted in authenticity.

For the 'Rural Wall', and the rural MPs who have spent time listening and engaging with their voters, this reality is well understood. The 2024 general election brought a wave of goodwill towards newly elected rural MPs, particularly those Labour MPs that broke the mould and reshaped the rural political landscape.

That goodwill has not disappeared

entirely – in fact, it represents a critical opportunity. The role of rural MPs is now more important than ever – to advocate for their constituencies, and to work with the Labour Government to ensure that rural voices are heard. By bringing forward policies and opportunities that work for our rural communities, rural MPs can make sure that these communities feel seen, listened to, and that they are at the heart of Labour’s Plan for Change.

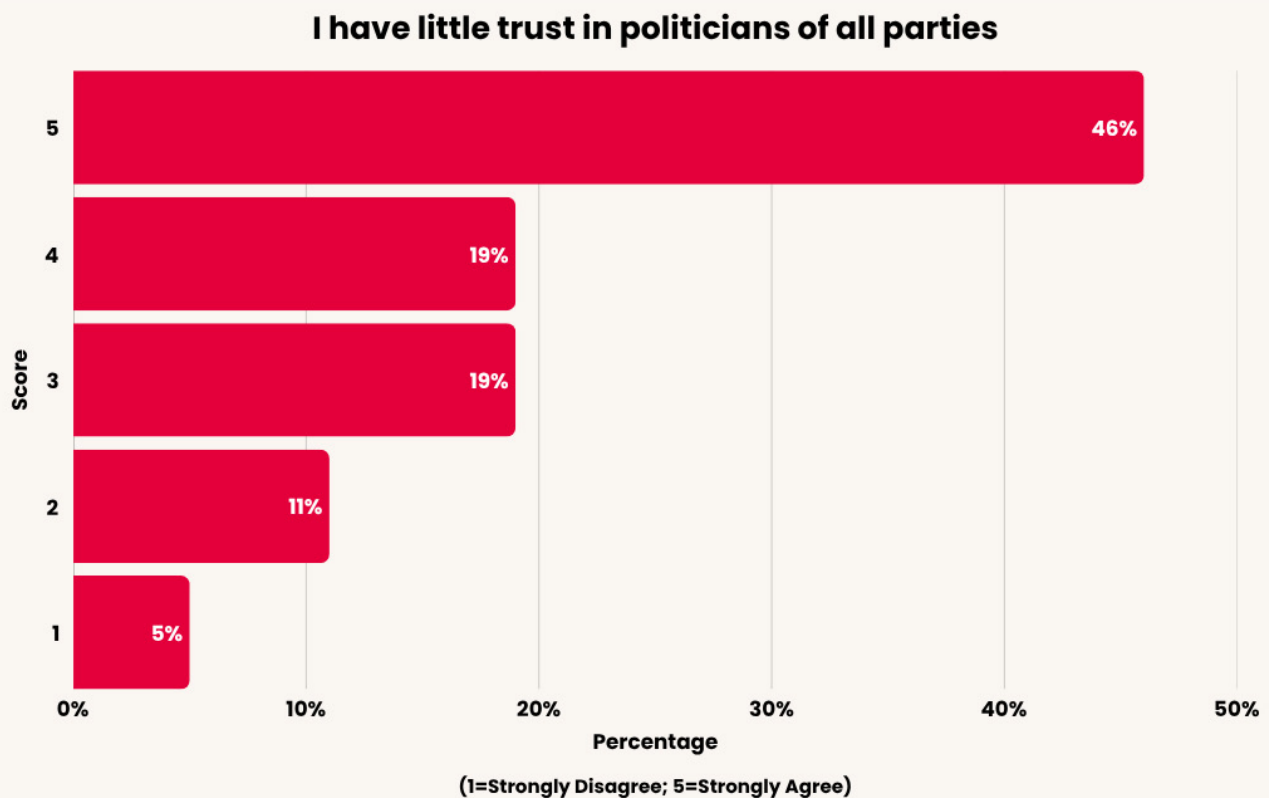


Fig. 3. Levels of trust in politicians of all parties among rural voters.

Table of figures.

Fig. 1. Rural voters most important political issues.

Fig. 2. Areas where rural voters want increased government spending.

Fig. 3. Levels of trust in politicians of all parties among rural voters.

Source: Labour Rural Research Group survey of 1412, conducted 30 June – 14 July.



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