

**THE BIG
ISSUE**

**TODAY FOR
TOMORROW**
FUTURE GENERATIONS BILL

FACING OUR FUTURE:

Learning the lessons of Covid and embedding long-termism
into the heart of policymaking for our children and grandchildren



I applaud The Big Issue for raising these critical issues, which are about the future of our children and grandchildren



Boris Johnson

Prime Minister of the United Kingdom

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FOREWORD

I beat the odds.

In 1946, I was born into what were the slums of Notting Hill, into insecurity and into an all-consuming poverty. I went on to spend spells as a prisoner, a rough sleeper, a dishwasher, a minicab driver and did every job under the sun to just get by. Not an unusual life in a country which ranks 21st within the World Economic Forum's Global Social Mobility Index.

And yet, come February 2016, I – unassuming Johnny 'Tony' Bird – beat all the odds by being nominated to join the House of Lords; invited to pour out my views alongside the upper echelons of our society.

Observing our institutions at work during the years that followed made it apparent to me that large swathes of Government time seemed to be spent dealing with only the symptoms of poverty, not the causes. Having founded The Big Issue almost 30 years ago, I was well acquainted with this way of thinking – taking someone socially engineered to fail and giving them a plaster to patch up their problems. Prevention, as a solution, began screaming at me – morally effective, but most importantly, cost effective.

The unintended consequences of short-termism continued to manifest before my eyes, until 2019, when I stumbled upon Wales' elegant solution:

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) 2015 Act.

Inspired by the Welsh model, my team and I began drafting a version to apply to the whole of the United Kingdom (adding and subtracting components as appropriate to fit Westminster's political context). My mission was clear: to eradicate short-termism; a symptom of our beautifully imperfect democracy and a trait intrinsic to human nature.

No small feat but thanks to research conducted by Portland Communications, mid-pandemic, in July 2020, I have realised it is one that is very politically viable. My Private Member's Bill on the Wellbeing of Future Generations was drawn first in the House of Lords' ballot. Consequently, it should have the best opportunity to succeed during this parliamentary session. So, I implore the Government to take an urgent look at this report – and then, take action.

Lord John Bird MBE

Co-founder of The Big Issue



EXECUTIVE

SUMMARY

In October 2019, Lord John Bird introduced a Private Member's Bill entitled the Wellbeing of Future Generations into the House of Lords. The Bill is inspired and modelled after the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, but has been extended to suit the Westminster political setting and adapted to account for the lessons learned since the Welsh Act's implementation and a growing body of international experience.

The Today for Tomorrow campaign, which was launched by The Big Issue in October 2019 is the campaign which backs the Bill and promotes its principles. These are: embedding long-termism, prevention and the interests of future generations at the heart of UK policy-making, with the belief that this will help to tackle the defining issues of our time, including the climate crisis, poverty and pandemics.

Principally, the Wellbeing of Future Generations UK Act would enshrine in law:

- A requirement on (non-devolved) public bodies, including the UK Government, to balance the needs of the present with the needs of the future, and to work preventatively, with a long-term focus;
- The existence of an independent UK Commission for Future Generations to promote the future generations principle amongst public bodies and hold public bodies to account;
- A duty on one Minister from each Government department to promote and protect the future generations principle within central Government.

This would require the UK Government to:

- Act to protect future generations from existential and environmental threats;
- Work preventatively, and with foresight, to solve societal problems;
- Account for, and seek to increase, its preventative spending.

This report examines the findings of research conducted by Portland Communications, mid pandemic, in July 2020. This research sought to identify how passing legislation such as the Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill would be politically relevant to the current Conservative Government. Through four 90-minute virtual focus groups and 15-minute online surveys completed by 1,000 members of the public and 500 political proxies. Political proxies refer to individuals who consume news at least every day, earn £50k+, have a degree education or higher and are active in their local community (e.g. through volunteering or other means). Portland then found that:':

- More than two thirds of the public (69%) want the Government to do more to plan and prepare for long-term threats, rising to three quarters (73%) when looking purely at swing voters.
- Some 61% say that this expectation increases with the length of time a party is in power, and also presents an opportunity to build a positive shared legacy that both Government and its people will be remembered for.
- The aspects of long-termism that resonate the most with people are:
 - COVID as a lesson to learn and adapt from; if we can predict quite accurately future threats, we should prepare for them to the best of our ability.
 - We must work for a better future for our children and grandchildren.
- The public want to see considerable reform to the political system to make this happen, with nearly two thirds (62%) calling for greater accountability of ministers.

Therefore, the Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill is highly relevant to a Government looking not only to recover and adapt to a post-pandemic world, but also to retain and build upon the so-called former Labour 'red wall' constituency seats it won in the 2019 General Election.

Main Recommendations

- Implementing a Future Generations Bill would answer calls from 66% of voters who'd like to see the Government demonstrate a stronger commitment to long-termism, especially after so much focus has been given to immediate relief (such as furlough) this year;
- Formulating national wellbeing goals would be a useful mechanism to address key concerns on voters' minds such as inequality and climate change, and could be used as a way to lay out an accessible long-term vision for the country;
- Ensuring a futures and forecasting report is completed every five years to increase the UK's preparedness for existential risks, which is an increasingly important matter for voters post-pandemic. It would also provide a mechanism to increase engagement with younger generations which is something that emotionally resonates with the public;
- Establishing a Future Generations Commission consisting of experts and young people would embed younger generations' views within decision making;
- Extending the remit of the Office for Budget Responsibility to ensure sustainability and wellbeing indicators are part of its analysis of the Treasury – this is especially relevant post-pandemic as the country faces a wellbeing crisis;
- Setting up a Future Generations Joint Committee within Parliament and implementing the preventative spending clauses of the Bill to demonstrate the Government's commitment to political reform to combat short-termism;
- Placing responsibilities on an existing Minister in each Government department to safeguard future generations' interests, illustrating to voters that there will be accountability within central Government to ensure political reform will be taken seriously.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context

Many of the issues that require a collaborative response at UK level involve the interests of future generations. Matters as varied as environmental legislation aimed at implementing the principles of sustainable development; policy and legislation on fiscal balances; political responses to demographic shifts, including pensions and health care provision; and a variety of other challenges; all implicitly or explicitly involve action that has implications not just for current generations – including those younger than the legal voting age – but for those not yet born¹.

However, policymakers tend to respond to the wishes and needs of current electorates, working in two to three-year policy cycles so that they can deliver upon promises made at the last election and in time for the next one. They are also very much focussed on the problems of the here and now, whether that be a financial crash, Brexit or, as we witness at the moment, a pandemic, without being able to look much further into the future than the present day. Consequently, they are predominantly receptive to the interests of present generations.

There is therefore a high likelihood that the needs of future generations will be compromised, in the absence of specific mechanisms to redress the balance²

Long-term preventative thinking is crucial in tackling the root causes of society's most challenging and cyclical problems. Therefore, Lord Bird formulated the Prevention, Emergency, Coping and Cure (PECC) framework to examine how organisations working to combat poverty and other societal problems operate, by asking the question: 'do their actions address prevention, emergency, coping or cure?' Most resources and efforts currently fall under the 'emergency' and 'coping' categories, which often alleviate the effects of long-term problems without addressing their root causes. By contrast, the PECC framework is an analytical tool which focuses on the need for the 'upstream thinking' which is necessary to tackle these perpetual problems, once and for all.

The Bill is devolution-aware with respect to the constitutional arrangements with Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Each of these devolved legislatures has developed their own wellbeing frameworks³ and this Bill does not seek to duplicate that important work. The powers and duties are conferred on the UK Government (which includes all reserved areas of policy and legislation) and public bodies in England only. The Future Generations Commission brings together experts and citizens from around the UK to ensure that experience from the four nations is harnessed to promote better policy-making.

¹ Laybourn-Langton and Hill, 2019 ² Caney, 2019 ³ Wallace, 2019

CASE STUDY

In the spring of 2021, the Scottish National Party included in their manifesto a commitment to 'bring forward a Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Bill to make it a statutory requirement for all public bodies and local authorities in Scotland to consider the long term consequences of their policy decisions.'

The recent mandate granted to the SNP in the May 2021 elections means that if this legislation is passed in Holyrood, Scotland would become the second devolved administration in the UK after Wales to have a legislatively binding commitment to ensure that all public bodies and local authorities act for the long-term.



The Bill requires public bodies and Government departments to reinvent their current working and decision making processes. PECC provides a framework for this ambition, promoting a shift towards preventative, long-term thinking.

1.2 Defining the problem

At present, favouring the current generation is an overriding feature of democracy. Policymakers frequently disregard anything beyond the electoral cycle, with decision-making processes often failing to consider the importance of long-term sustainable thinking⁴. This is problematic because as it increases the prominence of issues whose solutions require a longer-term lens, such as environmental degradation, putting the quality of life of future generations' at risk. It is challenging to represent future generations in democracies, as citizens in the future are unable to have a role in creating the laws that will affect them⁵.

Prioritising the present means that public bodies and Government departments are frequently unwilling to risk sacrificing the livelihood of current generations in order to meet future long-term objectives. However, this can have lasting negative effects if the wellbeing of future generations is at risk.

The Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill aims to put long-termism at the heart of decision-making, by ensuring that actions meet the needs of the present, without negatively affecting the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

⁴ Laybourn-Langton and Hill, 2019 ⁵ Spijkers, 2018

1.3 Why does short-termism in policymaking exist?

It is widely believed that natural relationships will ensure that the interests of future generations are protected⁶. People care about their children and grandchildren, and both citizens and their representatives tend to care about sustaining democratic institutions. However, it is often the case that the further communities look to the future, the weaker and more indeterminate the conclusions. For example, many policies have their most significant effects a century or more in the future⁷.

There is also a general assumption that special attention to future generations is unjustified⁸. This is because some predict that future generations are likely to be better off, as they benefit from the knowledge and capital handed down from previous generations, along with the benefits attached to the rapid development of technology. Again, this argument can be dismissed as the claim fails to consider the significance of increasing environmental concerns. Furthermore, while every generation has enjoyed higher living standards than the one before, millennials are the first to be poorer than their predecessors, after taking housing costs into account⁹. They have smaller savings accounts than prior generations, they have less money invested and they own fewer houses to refinance or rent out or sell¹⁰.

These disparities in generational wealth will be exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and any further lockdowns as unemployment is disproportionately felt by youth. The 2021 Office of National Statistics (ONS) Labour Market Overview found that 63% of payrolled jobs lost during the COVID-19 pandemic were held by workers under the age of 25¹¹.

Environmental concerns such as climate change are causing large and potentially irreversible harms, which are highly likely to continue being inflicted upon communities in the future to an even greater extent than they already are⁷.

And the communities worse impacted are those that are poorer, both here in the UK and across the world.

Of course, it would be significantly easier to give weight to the needs of future generations if policymakers knew what their needs will be. As there is uncertainty here, policymakers often contend that they are unable to reliably act in their interests². But it is worth taking into consideration that at least some future requirements are predictable. For example, even in the distant future, public bodies and Government departments can reasonably assume that citizens will not want to live with toxic chemicals, foul air, and chronic disease, not to mention worsening poverty and inequalities, or some aspects of artificial intelligence and biosecurity, nuclear threats or indeed, pandemics.

A study conducted by Graham and White further challenges the above 'presentist' arguments with a variety of research experiments. The results suggested that people actually preferred policies where the benefits increased progressively from the current generation to two generations further on. They concluded that citizens tend to have strong ties to younger family members, as well as a broader social ethic around protecting future generations¹².

² Caney, 2019 ⁶ Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies, 2019 ⁷ Intergenerational Foundation, 2019 ⁸ Graham and White, 2017
⁹ Financial Times, 2018 ¹⁰ The Atlantic, 2020 ¹¹ Office of National Statistics, 2021 ¹² Graham and White, 2017



1.4 The Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill

The United Kingdom faces a number of challenges both now and into the future, including climate change, the quantity and quality of jobs, poverty and health inequalities. This is on top of recovering from Covid-19, as well as any future pandemics, which are predicted to become increasingly prevalent and are detrimental to economies when coupled with lockdowns.

In order to safeguard and balance the interests of current and future generations, the Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill aims to ensure that public bodies, including UK Government departments, are required to think about the long-term impacts of the decisions they make.

The Bill places a duty on public bodies, including English local authorities and the UK Government, to carry out “sustainable development”. This means that each public body, as defined in the Bill, must work to improve the economic, social, environmental, cultural and democratic wellbeing of the populations they serve.

CASE STUDY

Tracy Brabin, Mayor for West Yorkshire since May 2021, included in her manifesto a pledge to appoint a set of Future Generations Commissioners:
(see full text below).

“ Appoint a set of Future Generations Commissioners, drawing on lessons from the Welsh Labour Government. The commissioners would be drawn from across our area – including businesses, trade unions and representative of our local community. They would be responsible for ensuring that decision-making in West Yorkshire takes greater account of long-term impact and sustainability. ”

This is a really interesting way of applying the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act to a large area, and many will be keenly watching to see how this idea is implemented.

CASE STUDY

This idea has already unanimously been approved by the three parties and four independents of Brighton & Hove City Council when a Notice of Motion on Wellbeing of Future Generations was passed in January 2021¹³.

The motion demonstrates the council's support for a Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and associated impact locally. It is to ask the Chief Executive to write to Government to request that local authorities are given the funding and powers needed to take action on the wellbeing of future generations, by implementing climate and ecological emergency action by 2030, further to the meeting of COP 26 in the UK this year. The council will also call on the Policy and Resources Committee to address the wellbeing of future generations in the city by:

- Agreeing to commission a report to review options for how the council can ensure, through cross-party and city-wide collaboration, that the impact of decisions on future generations are adequately understood, risk assessed and analysed;
- That as part of this work, councillors agree to review, through the annual KPI report and other processes, a yearly appraisal of long-term economic, social, environmental and cultural trends, and to use these trends to publish additional future generations impact assessments in council reports for decision.

The 'future generations principle' is at the core of the Bill. Drawing upon long-standing United Nations research on sustainable development, it requires public bodies to act 'in a manner which seeks to ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. Protecting future generations also preserves resources, reduces both short and long-term costs, and ultimately ensures that prevention exists at the centre of UK policy making¹⁴.

The Bill seeks to do this because, over the longer term, preventative measures tend to have much greater financial and social returns than measures solely designed to tackle poor outcomes¹⁵. For example, analysis conducted by the UK Early Intervention Foundation on the costs of delayed intervention – the costs of failing to take effective preventative action – estimated that picking up the pieces from damaging social problems affecting young people (such as mental health problems, going into care, unemployment and youth crime) costs the UK Government almost £17 billion a year¹⁵. This analysis specifically highlights the need to expand preventative interventions, with the potential to improve outcomes and reduce costs in the long term.

Failing to take effective preventative action costs the UK Government almost **£17 billion a year¹⁵**

¹³ Brighton and Hove City Council, 2021 ¹⁴ Laybourn-Langton, Rankin and Baxter, 2019 ¹⁵ Chowdry and Oppenheim, 2015

The Bill aims to legislate for:

1. The Provision of National Wellbeing Goals and Indicators

Under the Bill, a Secretary of State is to come up with wellbeing goals and national indicators in order to measure those goals. A public consultation is then held around these goals to give a representative population the chance to feedback and hence, buy-in to these goals. The legislation stipulates that the public consultation must engage the diversity of communities across the population, with particular focus on young people and children from a range of social backgrounds. Given the existence of legislative frameworks in Scotland and Wales that require similar approaches (and a non-legislative framework in Northern Ireland), the national wellbeing goals are to be set for England-only. Where areas of policy are reserved to the UK Government (most notably macroeconomic policy) the Secretary of State should have regard to the frameworks in the devolved nations.

This process is repeated every five years to ensure the wellbeing goals are up to date with the population's values. Every financial year, the Secretary of State must publish an annual wellbeing report on the progress made towards the achievement of the wellbeing goals, by reference to the national indicators and interim milestones.

2. Wellbeing Duty on Public Bodies

Future generations duties on (non-devolved) public bodies, including the UK Government, to:

- a. Set and work towards wellbeing goals in accordance with the future generations principle. In order to accomplish the goals, public bodies must set and publish wellbeing objectives. These must be reviewed if the wellbeing goals are amended, or if the future trends of and risks to the country change (reported on every five years by the Secretary of State via a forecasting report that this Bill would establish).
- b. Demonstrate how they are acting in accordance with the future generations principle in seeking to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing of the UK. This is combined with corresponding rights of legal redress to hold public bodies to account.
- c. Publish impact assessments of the likely impact on future generations of a proposed change in expenditure, policy or legislation.
- d. Report their progress in achieving their wellbeing objectives annually via a wellbeing objectives report. It would build on other work to minimise additional burdens.

Whilst doing the above, they are to incorporate a series of seven (sub-principles or) ways of working into their practices, namely:

- Balancing short-term and long-term needs
- Acting preventatively
- Planning long-term (25+ years into the future)
- Forecasting and managing emerging risks
- Considering the impact of a public body's wellbeing objectives on each of their wellbeing goals or on the objectives of other public bodies (an integrated approach)
- The importance of involving a diverse range of people or bodies with an interest in achieving the wellbeing goals
- Working collaboratively with other bodies

These are exemplars and the precise elaboration of these ways of working need to draw on international best practice, including the Gross Domestic Wellbeing (GDWe) cornerstones of wellbeing: prevention, participation, equalities, localism, integration and long-termism¹⁶.

¹⁶ Wallace, J., Ormston, H., Thurman, B., Diffley, M., McFarlane, and M., Zubairi, S. Gross 2020

3. Preventative Spending

The Bill mandates each public body (including UK Government departments and Her Majesty's Treasury) to produce a report on preventative spending, including the categorisation of their spending into acute spending, current and future spending and preventative spending with their justifications. By justifying their spending categories, it inherently forces a consideration into what the longer-term approach would be. This clause is not included in the Welsh Act, and was designed to not only reinforce long-term preventative thinking, but to also ensure that a proportion of the annual budget held by public bodies is specifically designated to preventative work.

4. Futures and Forecasting Report

Future generations duties on the UK Government to publish a futures and forecasting report, which must take into account the views of the UK Committee on Climate Change, the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, and young people via a continuous engagement exercise (e.g. a portal, perhaps via a platform already known to them, that they can write into at anytime) which is checked and reported on every two years.

5. Extending the Remit of the Office for Budget Responsibility

The Bill renames the Office for Budget Responsibility the Office for Budget and Future Responsibility. It updates the role of the Office for Budget Responsibility to also check that the milestones set in relation to the national indicators are being met across Government and to estimate the likelihood of severe economic downturn and of total economic, environmental or democratic collapse, accounting for the futures and forecasting report. This will translate into advice to Her Majesty's Treasury to influence its spending proposals.

6. Comptroller and Auditor General

Future generations duties on the National Audit Office by giving the Comptroller and Auditor General the ability to review public bodies, assessing the extent to which a body has acted in accordance with the future generations principle when setting and meeting their wellbeing objectives. They must report on the results of these examinations every five years and the Future Generations Commission (see below) would choose how to deal with the outcome.

7. The Joint Committee on Future Generations

A parliamentary Joint Committee on Future Generations, made up of parliamentarians from both Houses. This would be able to scrutinise the legislation that it chooses, looking into its effect on future generations, hold UK Government ministers accountable for short-term decision-making, and report on the efficacy and relevance of the national indicators, which would be set by the Government.

8. The Future Generations Commission

A UK-wide Future Generations Commission, composed of individuals who hold authority in this field, appointed by the Prime Minister, in consultation with the First Minister of Scotland, First Minister of Wales and the First Minister and deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland, and advised by a rotating panel of citizens. Its primary duty will be to act as a guardian of future generations' needs, and to advise on and enforce the wellbeing duty on public bodies. This cross-UK body will provide a formal opportunity for the nations of the UK to share experiences on policy for future generations, ensuring that we learn from local innovations to improve wellbeing across the UK as a whole.

This Commission will be able to instigate meetings with the Joint Committee and Ministers at any reasonable time to review the relevance and progress of the national indicators.

9. Ministers for Future Generations

This responsibility will be tacked onto the responsibilities of existing Ministers within each Government department, to ensure the wellbeing goals and the national indicators are properly and routinely considered across central Government, when formulating policy. They will ensure the futures and forecasting report builds on the horizon scanning work that the Government Office of Science already undertakes, and is incorporated into the long-term vision of each department's policy agendas.

They too can instigate meetings with the Joint Committee and Commission at any reasonable time to review the relevance and progress of national indicators. This creates a feedback loop for the implementation of the wellbeing-goals-approach within central Government.



1.5 Our study

Upon writing the strategy for the Bill, Lord Bird's office hired an external political consultancy, Portland Communications, to inquire into public attitudes on long-termism.

(See Appendix for Methodology).

Portland

KEY

FINDINGS

2.1 Do the public care about long-termism in politics?

A key finding which emerged from the data is that people seemed to perceive short-term thinking in politics as the norm, defined by favouring short-term solutions rather than lasting, strategic long-term action. Politicians are felt to prioritise the maintenance of power by focussing on the next election, rather than the lasting, best interests of the UK.

As shown in the table below, this is felt to be influenced by a multitude of factors: amongst Conservative proxies, the primary one was thought to be external influences such as the media. This result has been reflected in other studies, where it's been suggested that rapid news cycles trap Government and media alike in 'a short-term, reactive hamster-wheel that prioritises sensation over substance'¹⁷.

The next two highest ranking causes were allocated to human nature and election cycles.

“ They don't know if they are going to be there for a long time. There could be a snap election like last year, and they have a million other things to deal with. So they don't bother thinking too far into the future. ”

Factors preventing long-termism (net very / extremely)

		Con Proxies	Lab Proxies
1	Media focus on short-term issues	69%	56%
2	Human instinct to focus on immediate needs	67%	49%
3	Short electoral cycle between General Elections	66%	54%
4	Politicians' ego and ambition	52%	72%
5	Limited capacity and resources	51%	46%
6	Lack of interest from the public	43%	39%

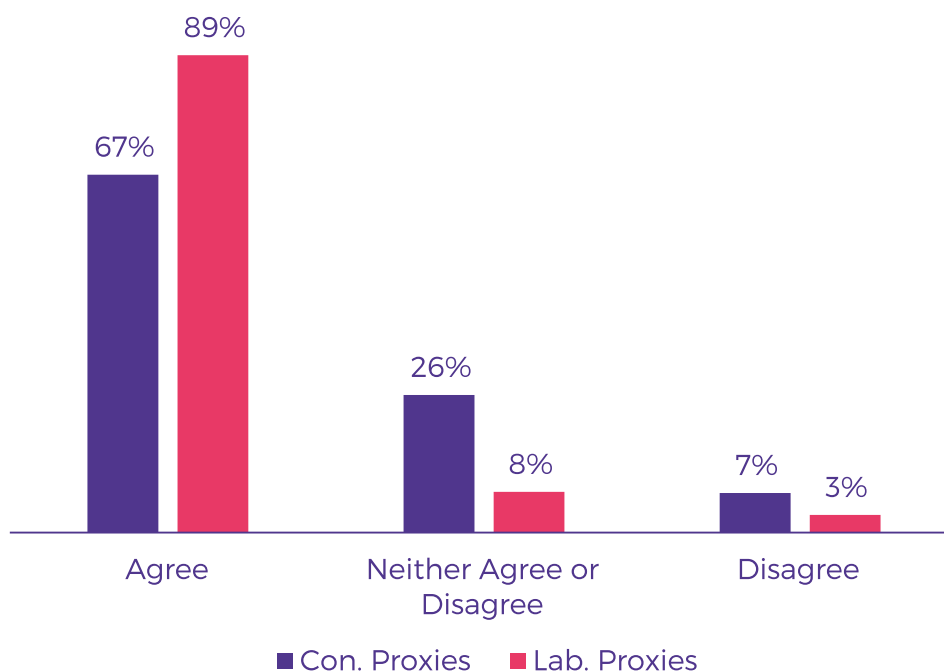
Question: To what extent do you think each of these factors prevent politicians from focussing more on long term issues?
Base508 Proxy MPs (175 Conservatives, 119 Labour)

All this becomes a problem for the Government when combined with the finding that the public want more long-term planning in politics. **Within the survey, two in three Conservative proxies and nine in 10 Labour proxies agree that more needs to be done to plan and prepare for long-term threats.** This is a long-acknowledged need that is unlikely to face much opposition in theory.

If the Government manages to maintain a consideration for the long-term in their formulation of policy, it's equally as important to relay this information back to the public. As the graphs below show, 66% of voters agreed that they wanted to hear more about Government efforts to plan and prepare for long-term issues such as climate change and inequality.

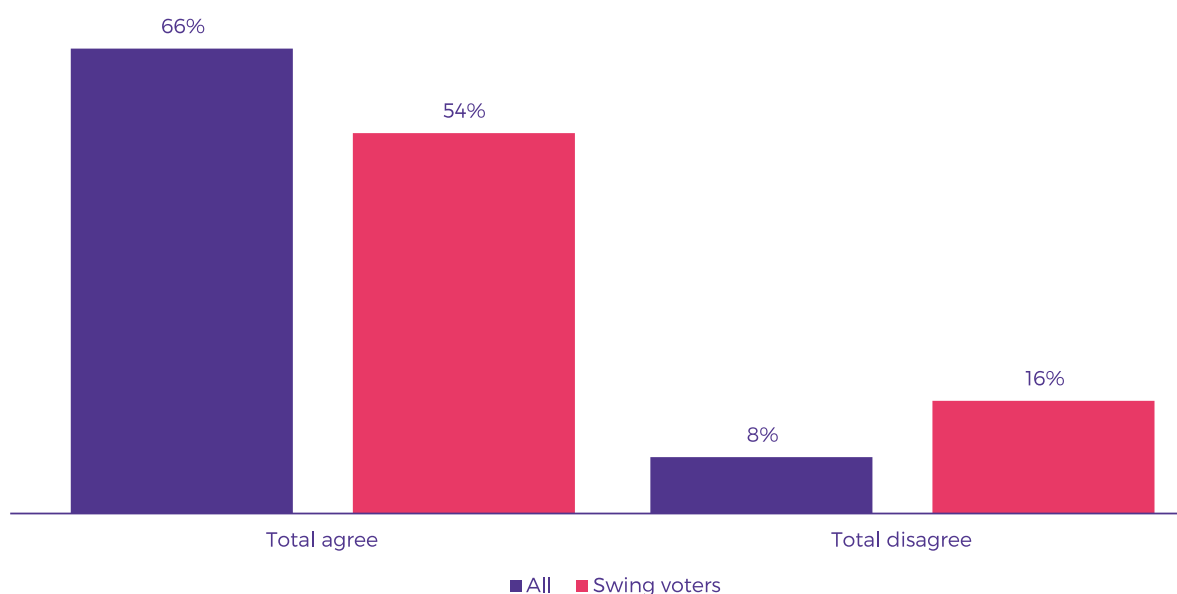
“ We and future generations deserve better. We need to think long term rather than just for now. We need to act now as the current short-term measures and short-term thinking have not been successful. ”

The Government must do more to plan and prepare for long-term threats than it is at the moment



Question: To what extent do you agree / disagree with the following statements?
The Government must do more to plan and prepare for long term threats than it is at the moment
Base: 508 Proxy MPs (175 Conservative, 119 Labour)

I would like to hear more about the Government's efforts to plan and prepare for long term issues such as climate change, inequality and pandemics

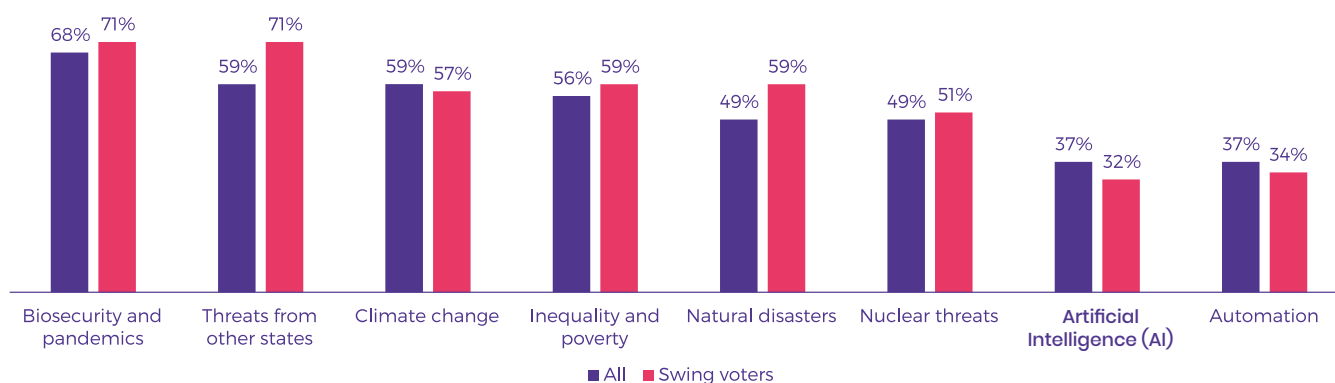


Question: To what extent do you agree / disagree with the following statements?

I would like to hear more about the Government's efforts to plan and prepare for long-term issues such as climate change, inequality and pandemics
Base: 1,047 general public, 68 swing voter (New Conservative voter in the 2019 general election)

Amongst the issues which most concern the public are biosecurity and threats from other states.

Issue is 'very/extremely' important for Government to plan and prepare for

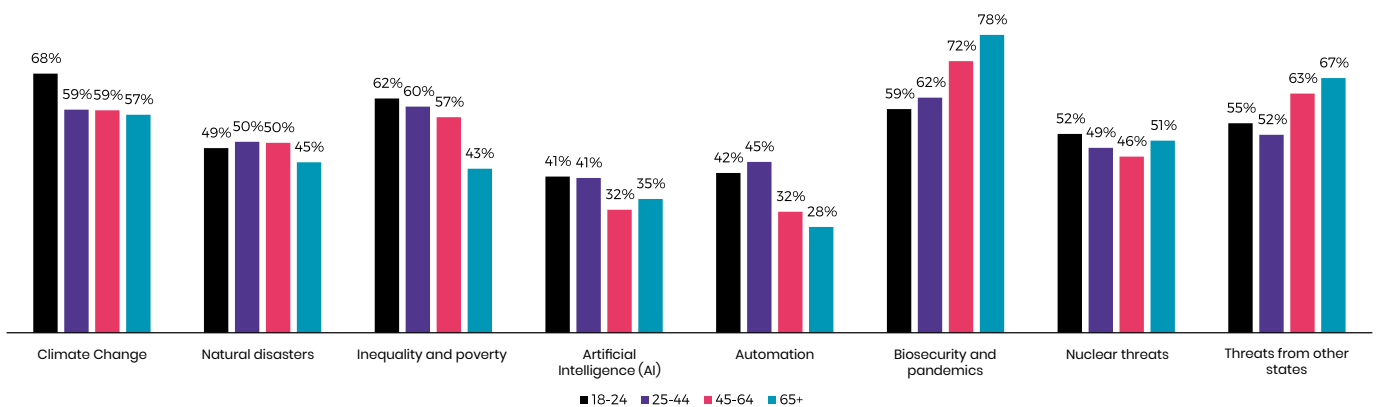


Question: In your opinion, how important is it that the Government plans and prepares for these issues?
Base: 1,047 general public, 68 swing voter (New Conservative voter in the 2019 general election)

Once broken down into age brackets, one can see that amongst younger voters however, climate change and inequality are top priorities for the longer term.



Issue is 'very/extremely' important for Government to plan and prepare for



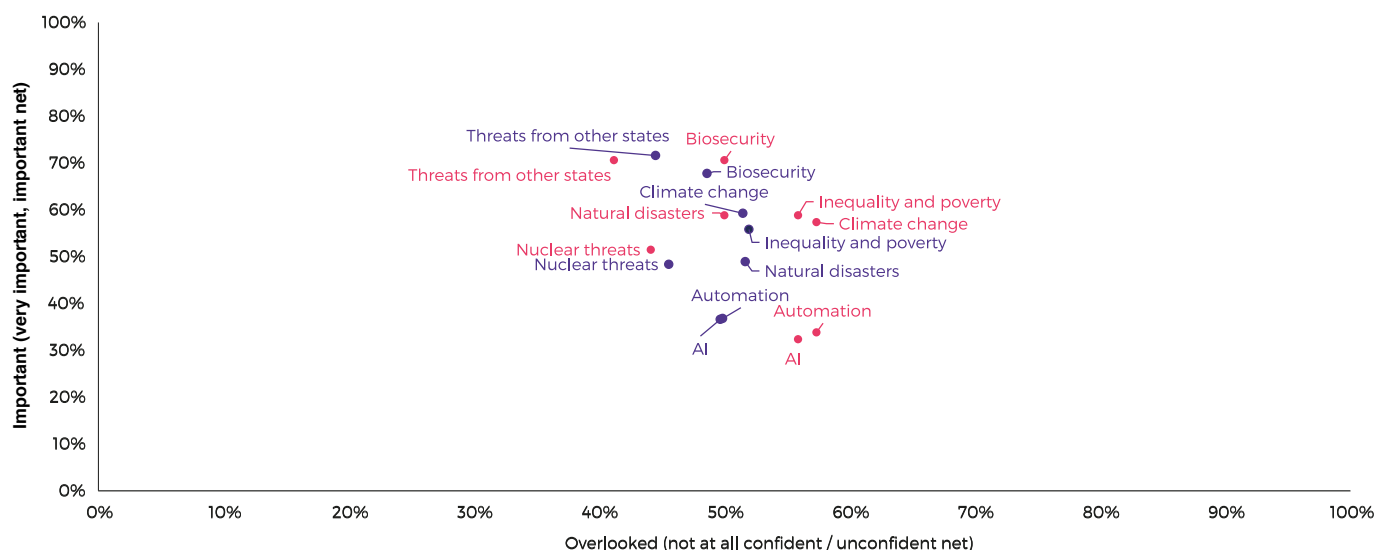
Question: In your opinion, how important is it that the Government plans and prepares for these issues?
 :Base: 107 aged 18-24, 378 aged 25-44, 386 aged 45-64, 176 aged 65+

Among swing voters, these same issues (climate change and inequality) are the ones believed to be most likely to be overlooked by the Government. The Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill aims to address these issues via establishing national wellbeing goals, which in Wales involve environmental wellbeing and social mobility as separate targets to be considered by all public bodies. All threats are mitigated by the Bill as forecasting and preparing for future risks (as part of the futures and forecasting report) is a key element.

This graph indicates that, amongst Conservative voters, the public's perception of short-termism within politics is less a complaint of politicians themselves, but more a natural symptom of the system that democracy propagates. Hence, the Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill poses as a suitable solution amongst Conservatives, as it seeks to implement institutional change by altering policy processes to counteract human nature which discounts the future¹⁸. The benefits are compounded by the fact that there is sufficient appetite amongst voters to see a change in Government's planning for the long-term.

¹⁸ Dasgupta & Maskin, 2005

Long-term issues (All = purple, Swing = pink)



All of this is not to discount the present, however. Portland found that a dynamic balance must be struck between long-term and short-term policy. Reactive and flexible short-term policy making is viewed as important in the everyday political process, and cannot be overlooked.



Too much long-term thinking can be at the cost of immediate Government. Too many think tanks forget about people right now – it's not the way to go.

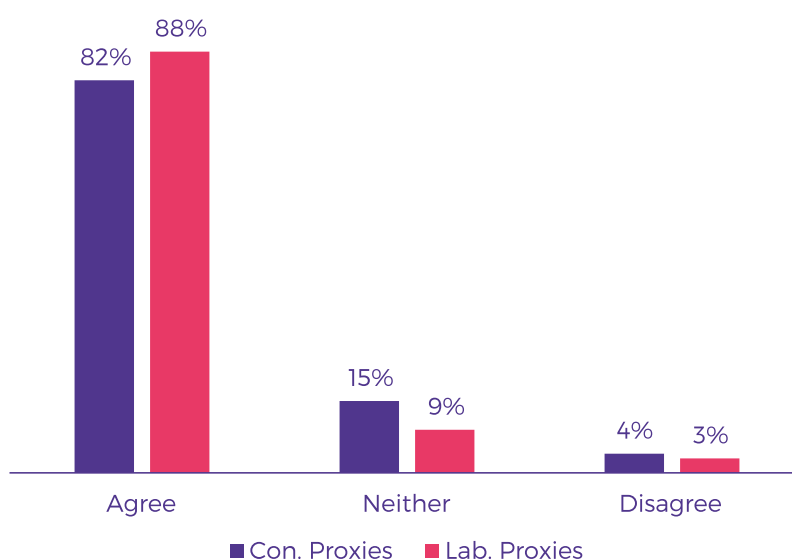


A new balance therefore needs to be struck which increases the importance of long-term thinking, whilst continuing to address short-term challenges and relief, especially post-pandemic.

This is therefore an opportune time to implement the Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill as fiscal support on the Covid-19 pandemic **totals at least £407 billion¹⁹**, showing the Government has naturally been disproportionately considering short-term immediate relief for the past year, with an estimated budget deficit of **£394 billion in 2020–21²⁰**. The Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill is especially relevant here as it places an added responsibility on the Office for Budget Responsibility to assess how the Government's budget affects the national indicators.

¹⁹ GOV.UK, 2021 ²⁰ OBR, 2021

The Government should be equally responsible for addressing both the immediate and more long-term issues facing the country



Question: To what extent do you agree / disagree with the following statements?

The Government should be equally responsible for addressing both the immediate and more long-term issues facing the country

Base: 508 Proxy MPs (175 Conservative, 119 Labour)

Expectations to do so may be stronger for the current Government, as Portland found that the public assumes Governments strike this balance better, the longer they have been in power. Some 61% of all voters (and 63% of swing voters) agreed they'd expect better planning for the long-term from a Government whose party has been in power for a while, such as the Conservatives, than one that's just been elected.

“As a party if you deliver in the short-term, you are then given the chance to work on the long-term strategy.”

Implementing the Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill would therefore rebalance these scales, reaffirming the Government's commitment to long-term thinking, especially since the Bill focuses on changing the institutional frameworks within Government to ensure we're accounting for the future; an especially relevant issue as the pandemic and our response to it has shone a bright light on the weaknesses in our preparedness.

Main Recommendations

- Implementing a Bill in general to demonstrate the Government's commitment to long-termism;
- National wellbeing goals as a means to address the key concerns on voters' minds;
- Future and forecasting report to increase the UK's preparedness for existential risks, an increasingly important matter for voters post-pandemic;
- Extending the remit of the Office of Budget Responsibility to ensure wellbeing is part of Treasury analysis.

2.2 What aspects of long-termism resonate the most with the public?

It is apparent from the research that attitudes are much more conducive to long-termism after Covid-19. The idea that the Government can use the pandemic to learn lessons that can inspire positive action resonated with participants.

“ I think it’s a unique opportunity with Covid to bring it to the attention of people as a relevant issue. It’s the mood of the people who support it and he [Johnson] got that opportunity to make a change. ”

There was strong agreement amongst focus groups that we were poorly prepared for the pandemic and have fared badly as a result, making this a highly pertinent example of the issue.

“ We were not prepared for Covid, more needs to be done in the future. ”

Acknowledging our failure is an important first step, but messages become more powerful if they focus on suggested optimistic future changes. The Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill poses an opportunity to demonstrate that the Government has reflected on mistakes made during this period. For example, when it disbanded a team of senior Ministers charged with preparing the country for a pandemic six months before the outbreak of the coronavirus²¹. The futures and forecasting report section within the Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill is most relevant to this finding, as it aims to forecast future, trends, risks and opportunities to the UK over a 25 year period – which is a much longer timeframe than is currently conducted by most of Government via the Cabinet’s Risk Register which focuses on five-year periods. Detailed plans of action are then expected to be created.

“ [A pandemic] had been predicted, so why has it been handled so badly? ”

What works less well? Despite being a popular phrase of the Government, the term ‘build back better’ was felt to be too short term in its nature and connoted infrastructure development, without an immediate link to long-term strategy. This longer-term vision can instead be created via the Bill’s national wellbeing goals and made more meaningful via a public consultation, as it enables the country to root around certain ideals that all public service providers aspire to.

²¹ Telegraph, 2020

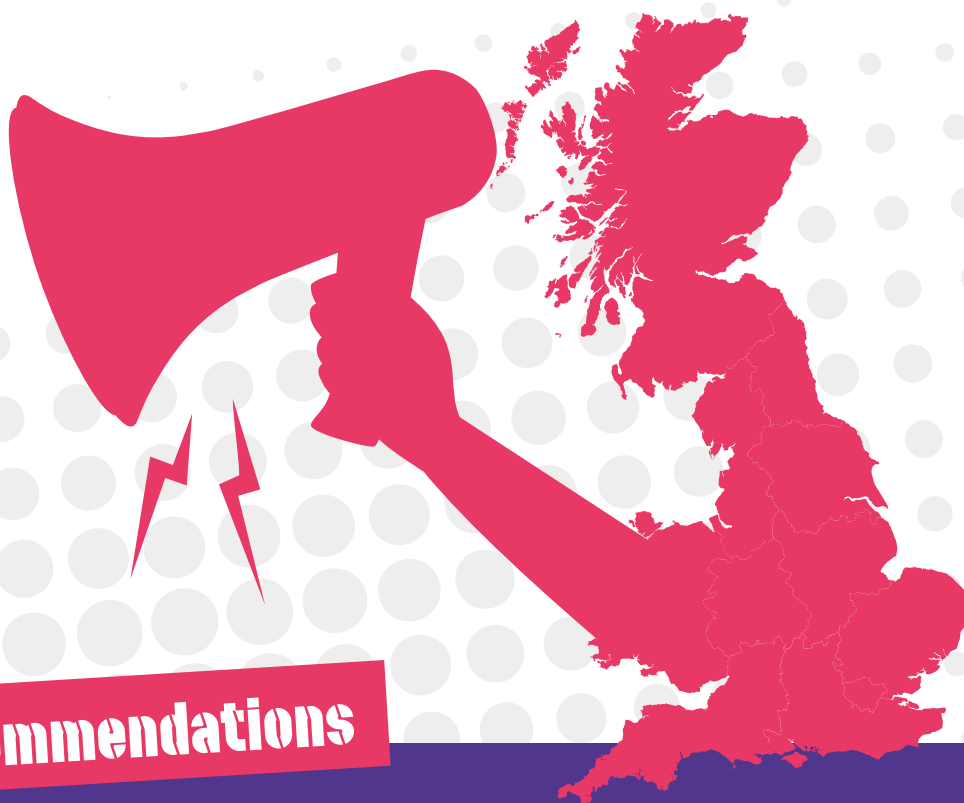
Those who were concerned by short-termism seemed most attuned by the impact it would have on the next generation or the generation after that, due to the consequences it would have on their children and grandchildren. Anything further in the future than this was a bit too abstract to evoke an emotional response.

“

When you have children or grandchildren you want to know that the planet will be protected for them. They are the future, so we want to have a planet left behind for them to enjoy.

”

This is reflected in the construction of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill as it mandates younger generations to have their say on wellbeing and sustainability. First of all, through ensuring that a young person from each of the four countries within the UK will be on the Future Generations Commission and secondly, ensuring in creating the futures and forecasting report, the views of 11 – 25 year olds on wellbeing are collected via an ongoing consultative exercise (reported on and checked every two years). These engagement exercises increase the public's buy-in as the Bill is likely to engage with their children.



Main Recommendations

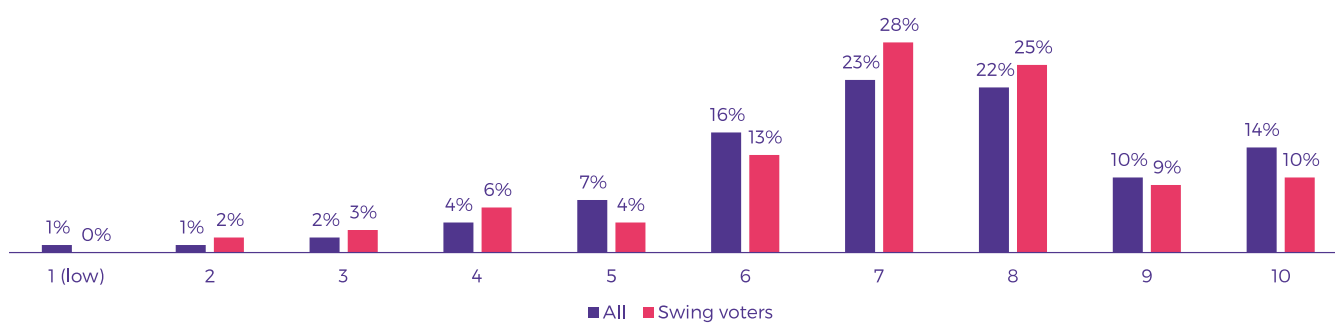
- National wellbeing goals as a means to create a long-term vision for the country;
- Futures and forecasting report, both for its forecasting and mitigation of risks and as a mechanism to engage with children;
- Future Generations Commission, as a mechanism to embed younger generations' views within decision making.

2.3 What change do the public want to see?

Participants who filled out the online survey felt that the political system needs considerable reform, as shown from the negative skew in the distribution below, with zero swing voters feeling that no political reform is needed.

The Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill appeals to this sentiment as it aims to embed checks and balances within institutions to combat the short-termist attitude that comes from five-year election cycles. By establishing a Joint Committee within Parliament with the power to review and propose amendments to any legislation the committee deems it appropriate, after considering its effects on the long-term, this ensures unintended consequences on future generations are mitigated. Furthermore, the Bill asks Government departments and public bodies to categorise their spending into prevention and immediate relief to ensure a long-term lens is being embedded into spending decisions.

Degree of change to political system required to focus on long-term issues



Question: How much do you think the political system would need to change to encourage a greater focus on longer term issues such as climate change, inequality and pandemics?
Base: 1,047 general population, 68 swing voters

Specifically, within Portland's findings, there was support for increased accountability, planning and transparency in the process, with 62% of all voters strongly supporting making Ministers accountable if their departments fail to hit long-term targets. The Bill addresses this finding by emplacing a responsibility on a Minister within each Government department to ensure the wellbeing goals and the national indicators are properly and routinely considered across central Government when formulating policy.



TODAY FOR TOMORROW

FUTURE GENERATIONS BILL

Support the following changes to the political system (net support / strongly support)

	All	Swing Voters
Make it so Ministers can be held accountable if their departments fail to hit long-term targets	62%	59%
Force the Government to report the impact its actions or policies will have on future generations	59%	50%
Require public authorities, when procuring goods, services or works, to take into account the impact it will have on future generations	59%	57%
Force companies to report the impact their activities will have on future generations	58%	49%
Set up a forum where members of the public can be consulted directly on future plans for the country	54%	56%
Establish a 'future generations' principle for Government: Not taking actions that benefit us now at the expense of future generations	53%	46%
Set up a new committee of MPs and Lords whose job it is to think about the impact of policy on future generations	50%	43%
Establish a new, independent Commissioner role, separate from Government, who can make recommendations in the interest of future generations	50%	44%

Question: To what extent would you support the following changes to the political system?
Base: 1,047 general population, 68 swing voters:

Main Recommendations

- Future Generations Joint Committee and preventative spending to demonstrate the Government's commitment to political reform;
- Ministers for Future Generations to illustrate to voters that there will be accountability within central Government to ensure these changes are taken seriously.



CONCLUSION

Today For Tomorrow believes that it is the right of us all, and for later generations, to have a positive future where our wellbeing is paramount. Only then will we become truly resilient and able to overcome some of the biggest cyclical challenges that society faces once and for all – from the way we treat our environment and climate change, to poverty and inequalities, as well as existential risks such as pandemics.

We've seen success around the world where countries have embedded wellbeing and sustainability into their policymaking processes, aiming to combat the key critique of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) that aiming to create boundless material wealth is inherently unsustainable²². Both Bhutan's Gross National Happiness Index and New Zealand's Wellbeing Budget made headlines for their brave steps to incorporate non-monetary dimensions into Government decision-making. In New Zealand, this has led to a preventative approach to mental health, which had previously cost that Government 5% of their GDP annually²³. In Bhutan, over the last 30 years, life expectancy has doubled, 100% of its children are enrolled in primary school, and due to its commitment to keep over 60% of its landmass under forest cover in perpetuity, they are also the only carbon negative country in the world²⁴. These countries provide an illustration of what can be achieved when re-examining a Government's metrics for success.

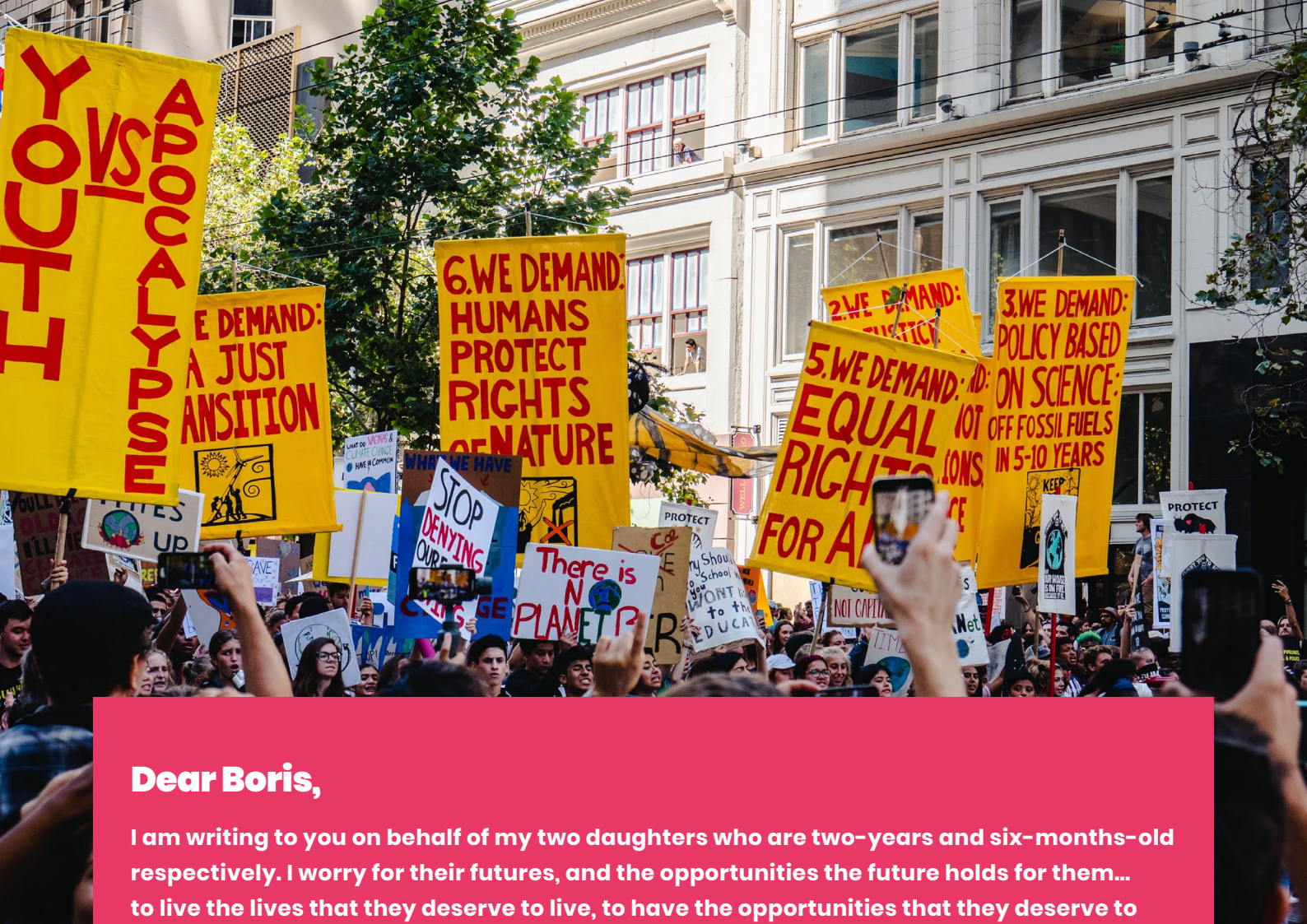
The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nation Member States in 2015 has never been more relevant in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic (and with COP26 on the horizon).

“ It provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries – developed and developing – in a global partnership. They recognise that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.”

The time is now for us to build upon these important goals and for the UK Government to be the first United Nations country to adopt a Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. If not, it will be to our children and grandchildren's detriment.

* <https://unosd.un.org/content/sustainable-development-goals-sdgs>

²² Thinley & Karp, 2019 ²³ Mintrom, 2019 ²⁴ Guardian, 2012



Dear Boris,

I am writing to you on behalf of my two daughters who are two-years and six-months-old respectively. I worry for their futures, and the opportunities the future holds for them... to live the lives that they deserve to live, to have the opportunities that they deserve to have, to breathe air that is clean, to be able to have their own children without having to weigh up if there will be enough resources to accommodate them.

Portland focus group participant's letter to Boris

Unless the Government implements some of the recommendations in the Bill, our future and the wellbeing of future generations will continue to be put at risk. We want to see a fairer UK where poverty and inequalities cease to exist, where we take account of our environment and don't exacerbate the climate crisis, as well as where existential risks such as pandemics, which are predicted to become more prevalent, are properly prepared for. And voters believe that not only is this the right thing to do, but it may also contribute to the Conservative Party holding onto the so-called 'red wall' constituency seats and, crucially, building upon them at the next General Election, whenever that may be.

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- The Body Shop
- The Foundation for Democracy and Sustainable Development
- Longview Philanthropy
- Carnegie UK
- The Centre for the Study of Existential Risk
- The Centre for Long-Term Resilience
- The All-Party-Parliamentary Group on Future Generations

Portland

Thank you also to Carnegie UK and the All-Party-Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Future Generations for their advice and input into this report.

The APPG, of which Lord Bird is Co-Chair, is currently running an Inquiry on Long-term Thinking in Policymaking (see call out box below), which will be published in the autumn.



About the APPG for Future Generations Inquiry on Long-Term Thinking in Policymaking

The APPG for Future Generations is currently running an inquiry looking at how to improve long-term thinking in policymaking. The Inquiry is being carried out jointly with the Centre for the Study of Existential Risk at the University of Cambridge, which provides the Secretariat for the APPG. It considers such questions as: To what extent is a lack of long-term thinking a challenge in policymaking? What are some of the root causes of failures in long-term thinking? How can we better incorporate long-term thinking in the policy-making process? The Inquiry has heard evidence thus far from senior leaders on topics ranging from economics to defence to healthcare. The report will be published in autumn 2021 and will provide recommendations as to how Parliament and Government can work more effectively for the long-term based on the findings from the expert evidence sessions.

APPENDIX

Methodology

Portland Communications, a member of the British Polling Council, launched qualitative and quantitative studies to test public attitudes towards political decision making and the need for greater long-termism; the study looked into which aspects of long-termism carry the most salience amongst the general public. All research was fully compliant with the guidelines of the Market Research Society and Government Social Research Service.

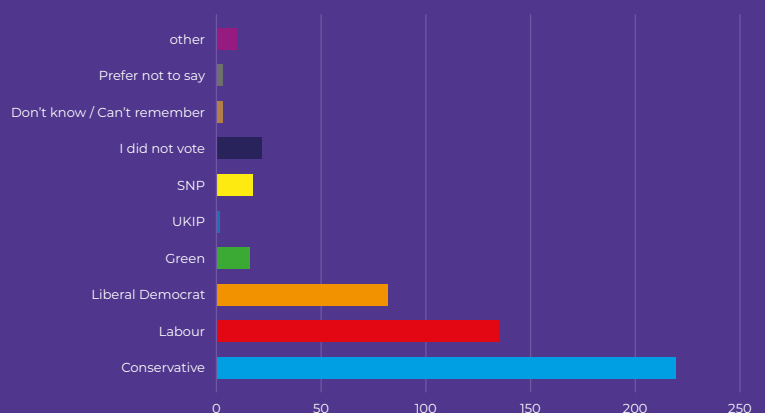
6.1 Qualitative Study – Focus Groups

Four 90-minute focus groups were conducted by Portland Communications during the week commencing 13th July 2020. Respondents were recruited to include a mix of age, gender, ethnicity and voting behaviour. All were identified as having above average news consumption (i.e. individuals who read the news multiples times per day). Respondents were then split into different groups according to their stated interests:

- **Opinion leaders with an interest in poverty and inequality**
- **Opinion leaders with an interest in climate change**
- **Opinion leaders with an interest in public health**
- **Opinion leaders with an interest in security**

Portland worked with recruitment agencies to acquire participants. The composition of the focus groups, by party affiliation (determined by how they voted in the last general election), was as follows:

Breakdown of how political proxies voted in the 2019 General Election



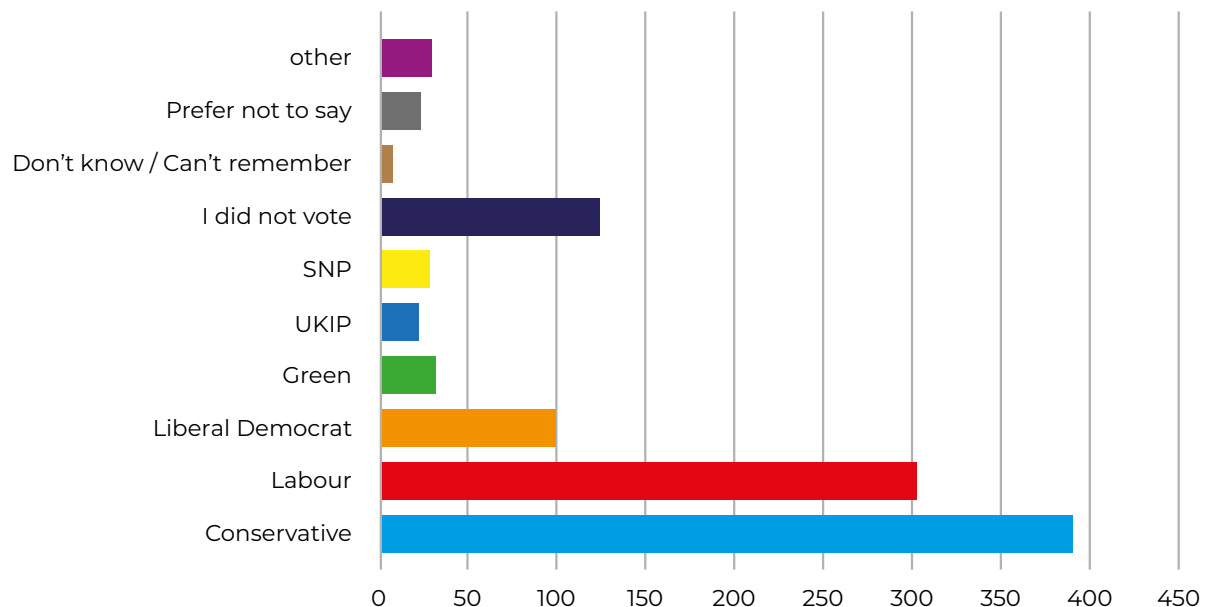
6.2 Quantitative Study – Questionnaires

A 15-minute online survey was conducted by Portland Communications the week commencing 27th July 2020. They surveyed 1,000 UK adults (aged 25+) online and 500 political proxies. These samples were representative of age, gender and location in line with the 2019 Office of National Statistics census. Location was based on the 11 regions of the UK – the South East, East of England, West and East Midlands, South West, London, Yorkshire and Humber, North East, North West, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

When quota targets within age, gender and location could not be reached, weightings were given to each group to ensure the data represented the original targets. Participants were found via sample providers which remunerate those who fill out questionnaires.

The sample was screened for voting behaviour to ensure a statistically significant sample of Labour and Conservative Party voters in the 2019 General Election; the breakdown is as follows:

Breakdown of how participants voted in the 2019 General Election



A 'swing' voter was defined as someone who voted Conservative in the 2019 General Election, but not in the 2017 General election – there were 68 of these within the quantitative survey.

Scripting:

Independent testing was carried out by three different members of staff, including the Director of Research. Two staff are there to verify that all questions and their pre-codes are present and correct, routing is correct, questions are single-code or multi-code as laid out in the questionnaire, write-in boxes are included at 'Other (specify)' questions, appropriate pre-codes or statements are randomised and text substitutions are working correctly. The third tester is a member of staff who is not familiar with the project and is there to comment on usability, flow and clarity from a respondent perspective.

Sampling:

For online research, Portland included an over-sample of 5-10% to allow to be extremely rigorous in terms of quality (i.e. removing as many suspect respondents as required).

They set detailed and interlocking quota targets to ensure the final sample is as representative of the true population of interest as possible. These are strictly enforced so that any weighting factors created during analysis can remain as small as possible (a survey is not representative if a collected set of results have to be nearly doubled during weighting).

Overloaded and under-rewarded respondents produce poor data so Portland ensures fair rewards are given (often double or triple the industry norm) and that respondents are not being sent surveys too often (e.g. one or two a week, max.).

Fieldwork:

Following the sign-off of the script, a 'soft launch' was completed where an initial 50 interviews were conducted; fieldwork was then paused to review the responses received at that stage. Amendments were made according to issues found with the data (or comments that revealed problems with a certain question) before completing the main body of fieldwork:

- **Straight-liners** – these are respondents who score the same answer on any given scale just to pass through the questionnaire with ease. Any respondent who ticks the same answer for more than 75% of scalar questions is flagged for review.
 - **Speeders** – The norm in the market research industry suggests that these are people who complete the survey quicker than a third of the average time (e.g. less than four minutes when the average is 12). Portland insists upon a minimum time determined by internal testing: 10 members of staff who have had no previous project involvement are given the survey link and asked to time themselves.
 - **Blacklist** – In addition to feeding back to panels any instances of their panellists failing the above tests (so that the person can be removed from the panel), a blacklist is maintained combining the IP addresses of panellists across the various UK panels who have previously failed one of the above tests in previous surveys.
- This controlled sample of people (who will read and answer for real) allows determination of an average time – if respondents are greater than 25% quicker than this time then they will not be counted as a valid complete.

Analysis:

Once survey collection is closed, the data is cleaned and quality assured, removing any rogue responses (highlighted above). Through rigorous quota control Portland keeps post-hoc weighting of the data to a minimum. Where required, they weight the sample back to be representative of the Office of National Statistics targets.

Multiple members of the team interrogate the same data and draw individual conclusions before coming together to discuss commonalities and differences in both their observations and interpretations.

Open-ended questions will be coded, and analysed for both topic and sentiment.

6.3 Scope and Language

In designing questionnaires, Portland Communications adheres to the following guidelines to ensure data collected is reliable and accurate:

- The cognitive load of each question is considered to ensure that respondents aren't being overwhelmed. Complicated concepts are built towards in stages;
- The flow of the questionnaire is such that the ordering makes sense and doesn't jump around or repeat itself;
- Multiple banks of statement style questions, typically with a five-point Likert scale as the answer for each, are avoided as respondent engagement is minimised and it is more limited to truly understand behaviour or attitudes.
- Needlessly complex language is avoided (as well as all the other common mistakes such as leading, double-barrelled and loaded questions);
- A couple of questions are placed near the start and end of the questionnaire and, when analysed together, act as a potential trap for people who actively contradict themselves from one to the other;
- Every questionnaire includes a couple of open-answer questions even if they're not necessary – the answers to these act as a quality check with those writing nonsense being removed;
- **Hidden filters** – many panel respondents are savvy in identifying early basic questions as filter questions which could remove them from the survey and render them ineligible for the incentive. These questions are sometimes written in a way that makes it quite clear what the "right" answer is and enables a fake respondent to easily carry on. This questionnaire hides filters in amongst a range of codes, many of which are irrelevant to the survey, but serve to hide what the true purpose of the survey is.
- Participants' postcodes are collected to be able to match with a wide array of open-source contextual data that may apply to that particular topic (e.g. health care provision; broadband speed, etc.);
- Fifteen minutes is the absolute maximum length to guarantee respondent engagement in the survey. Beyond this, quality and attention drop-away rapidly and lead to poor answering (industry standard can be anywhere up to 30 mins). If there is more content than 15 minutes allows, then we need to design the research more creatively (e.g. splitting samples, multiple dips of engagement, etc.).

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