

Moving Mindsets: Emerging opportunities to shift culture on health, wealth and government

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Overview

Throughout 2024, FrameWorks UK tracked public thinking on social issues across our four nations. Amidst the rising cost of living, a rapidly changing political landscape, and global conflict, how we reason about our world and how it works has changed.

This new quantitative and qualitative research, including a first-of-its-kind survey, reveals that we are at an inflection point. **Individualism** – the assumption that what happens to us is primarily a consequence of our own choices – remains dominant in public thinking. But more systemic mindsets are emerging, like **designed economy** – the assumption that laws and policies shape how our economy works and who it benefits. And old mindsets are being applied in new, more systemic ways.

Across ages, ethnicities and income levels, people favour bold, more ambitious government action on issues like health and wealth. But are increasingly sceptical of the politicians tasked with taking action.

This report contains six key findings about the state of British culture – and what this could mean for those of us working to change culture nationwide.

1. Individualism is our default – but not when we get issue-specific

If we want to make space for bold social change, we must first strengthen the idea that what surrounds us, shapes us. Unchecked, individualism may be one of the biggest barriers to progressive culture change.

2. Precarity is seen as our new normal – and people support bold action on extreme wealth

The existence of poverty is no longer a contested idea: people are acutely aware of growing insecurity and hardship throughout our four nations. At the same time, people are paying more attention to the consequences of wealth disparity – and what should be done about it.

3. More of us believe the economy is rigged

The idea that laws and policies shape how our economy works is no longer a contested one. We have a new set of ideas to contest: who gets to make decisions about the systems that make up our economy, who benefits from them – and how decision makers are held to account when those systems are falling short.

4. We see health as a national resource

Health is understood as not only an individual concern, but a collective one. Now is the time to strengthen and reinforce this more systemic thinking on health – and the more ambitious policies and practice it makes space for.

5. Politicians are seen as ‘not like us’

An immediate priority for communicators wanting to see government action on social issues – from welfare, to housing policy – must be to build understanding of the systems and mechanisms of government.

6. Some mindsets cluster together, with major implications for social change work

A concentrated effort to move one 'lynchpin' mindset – through framing and other culture change work – will have a positive spillover effect. Communicators working across issues, or with limited resources, can maximise their impact by coordinating action around a single lynchpin.

Mindsets – and moving mindsets – are at the heart of cultural and social change

Mindsets are deep, assumed patterns of thinking that shape how we see the world and how we act within it. Multiple mindsets are present in a culture, across groups, or even within individuals. What matters is the relative strength of each mindset – and how it is brought to bear on the issue at hand.

Mindsets can normalise or problematise our existing social order. So that when mindsets move, they open up new possibilities for change in behaviour, policy and institutions.

Mindsets move in multiple ways, each advancing new possibilities.

- **A change in strength**, as mindsets become more or less dominant in public thinking. Efforts to move mindsets on climate change, for example, have shifted the cultural battleground: from whether or not climate change is caused by human activity, to what action should be taken and by who.
- **A change in boundaries**, as people use existing ways of thinking to make sense of new realities. For example, equal marriage campaigners in the United States, who extended existing ideas about marriage as a loving, long-term commitment to include same-sex couples ahead of *Obergefell v. Hodges*.
- **A permanent displacement**, as one mindset is replaced with another. For example, the establishment of the British post-war welfare state, which replaced previous notions of public welfare as a charitable pursuit with the possibility, then expectation, that welfare is our government's responsibility.

Methods

We used a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods to understand if and how mindsets were moving across the UK. This was a pilot study focused on two research questions:

- i) if mindsets are moving in the UK; and
- ii) if mindsets are moving, how we can best understand and track this movement over time.

How mindsets research differs from public opinion research

Public opinion research examines the explicit attitudes people hold about specific issues. Mindsets research explores the deeper, underlying patterns of thinking that shape and explain these patterns in public opinion. Whereas public opinion research examines *what* people think, mindsets research examines *how* people think.

For example: public opinion research might show that people support health education programs more than policies to promote access to healthy homes. Mindsets research explains why this is, revealing the role that the mindset of **health individualism** plays in driving these opinions and preferences.

Tracking survey

We fielded a regular online tracking survey using a nationally representative sample (min. 1,500 per wave, total of 7,496) in February, May, August and November 2024. This survey was a first-of-its kind for the UK, enabling us to measure and track mindsets across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Mindsets tracked included foundational mindsets like **Individualism** and issue-specific mindsets on health and wealth like **Self-made**. Where possible, any newly identified mindsets were added to subsequent waves. Tracking these measures over time allowed us to analyse any emerging trends.

Peer discourse sessions

We conducted 12 peer discourse sessions across England, Scotland and Wales in February and July 2024, involving 72 people with a range of backgrounds. Peer discourse sessions are a form of focus group designed to explore mindsets on major issues in society, centred on health, wealth, and inequality. This allowed us to explore whether the same questions elicited similar conversations or if different patterns emerged.

Cultural mindsets interviews

We also drew on existing insights from cultural mindsets interviews in 2016 ([on poverty](#)¹), 2017 ([on the economy](#)²) and 2018 ([on health inequality](#)³). Cultural mindsets interviews are one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. They allow us to capture the mindsets that participants use to make sense of a concept or topic area. This meant that we could compare mindsets at over time – and identify any changes relative to earlier research.

A full description of the methods and samples used is available as a supplement to this report.⁴

Six key findings about the state of British culture

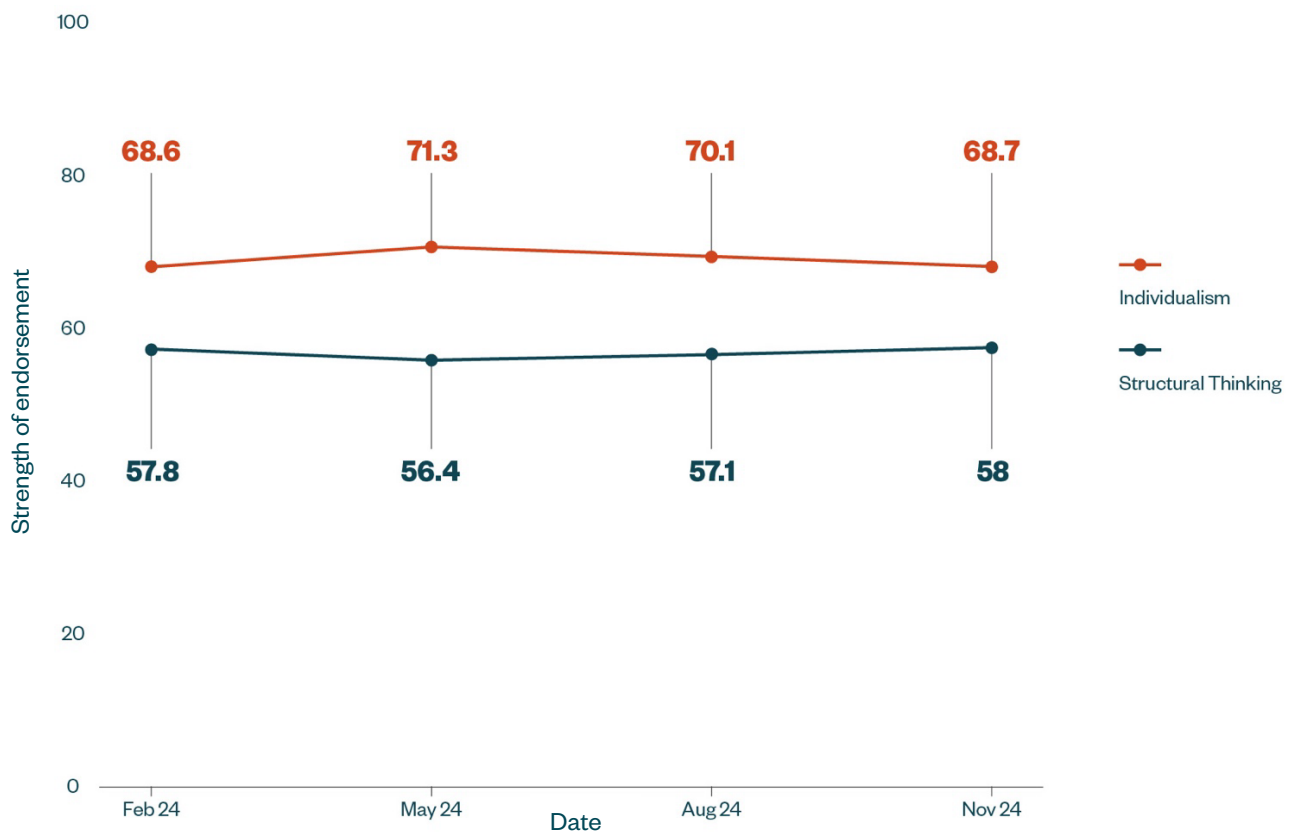
1. Individualism is our default – but not when we get issue-specific

When people reason about British society in general terms, *individualism* dominates (Fig 1.1, 1.2). *Individualism* is the assumption that our outcomes are primarily a product of individual choices and willpower. When this way of thinking is active, people reason that hardships are a matter of personal responsibility – and blame individuals or specific groups for falling short.

“If they don't want to work, they're not going to. You can't make them shop somewhere that's less [unhealthy]. You can't make them give up smoking, drinking. You can't make them give up gambling.”

– Participant, Wales

Fig 1.1: Individualism vs Systemic thinking (composites)



Note. Average endorsement of mindsets across 4 trackers, on a scale from 0-100.

Higher numbers = more endorsement. Effects can be interpreted as follows: 0-50 = very weak endorsement;

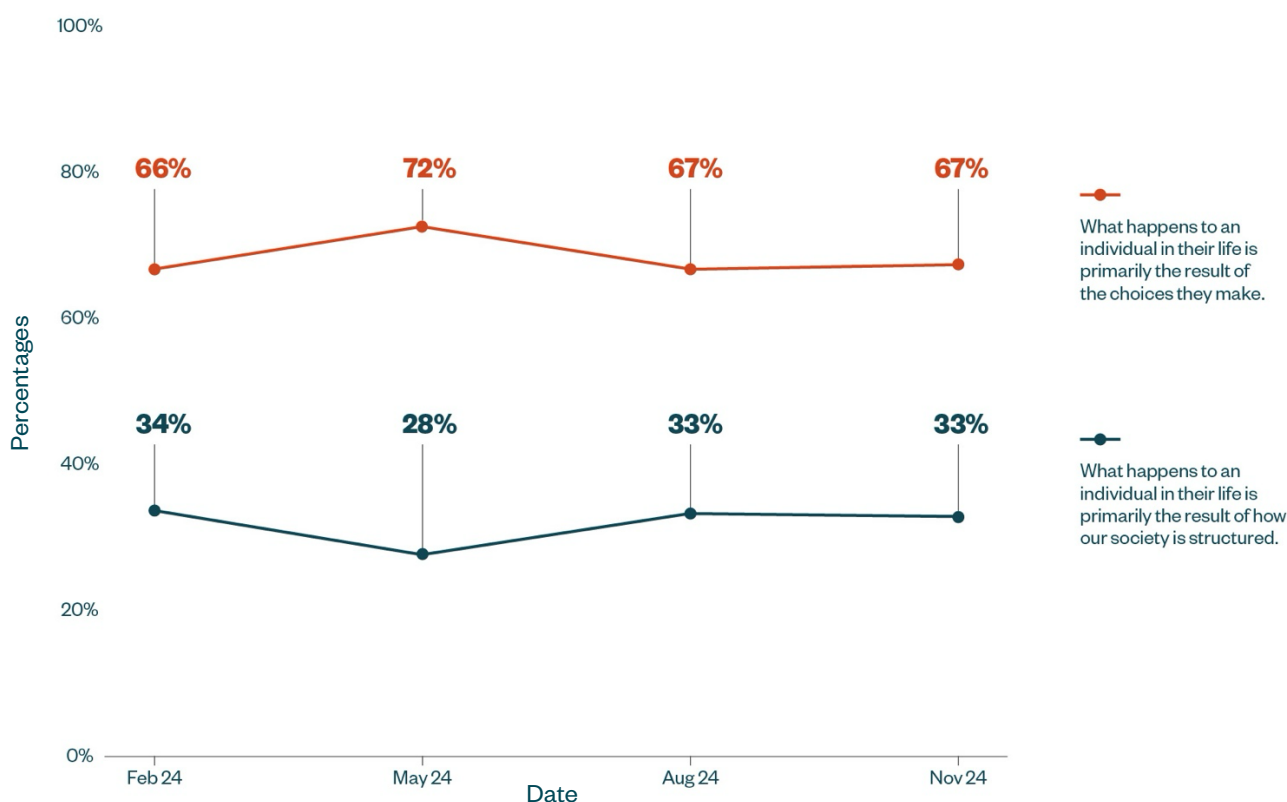
51-67 = weak endorsement; 68-83 = moderate endorsement; 83-100 = strong endorsement.

The dominance of *individualism* across British culture, from depictions of government (see finding 5), to 'hero's journey' narratives in TV shows like *Black Doves* (2024), has significant implications for social change work. It means that people look first to individual choices to explain why social problems arise – and how they can be solved. *Individualism* normalises inequality by obscuring how systems and conditions shape our lives.

Unchecked, *individualism* may be one of the biggest barriers to progressive culture change. And rebalancing *individualism*, one of our most effective ways to unlock it (see finding 6).

Our tracking survey indicates that the strength of *individualism* is consistent across most demographic groups. But its relative salience – that is, how quickly people reach for this mindset over another – may be more responsive to external changes. In February 2024, 66% of participants chose the statement “What happens to an individual in their life is primarily the result of the choices they make” over a more systemic explanation. In May 2024, shortly after Rishi Sunak’s election announcement, this rose to 72%. And by November 2024, this fell back to 67%.

Fig 1.2: Individualism vs Systemic thinking (forced choice)



Note. Across 4 trackers, participants asked to choose which statement comes closer to their own view.

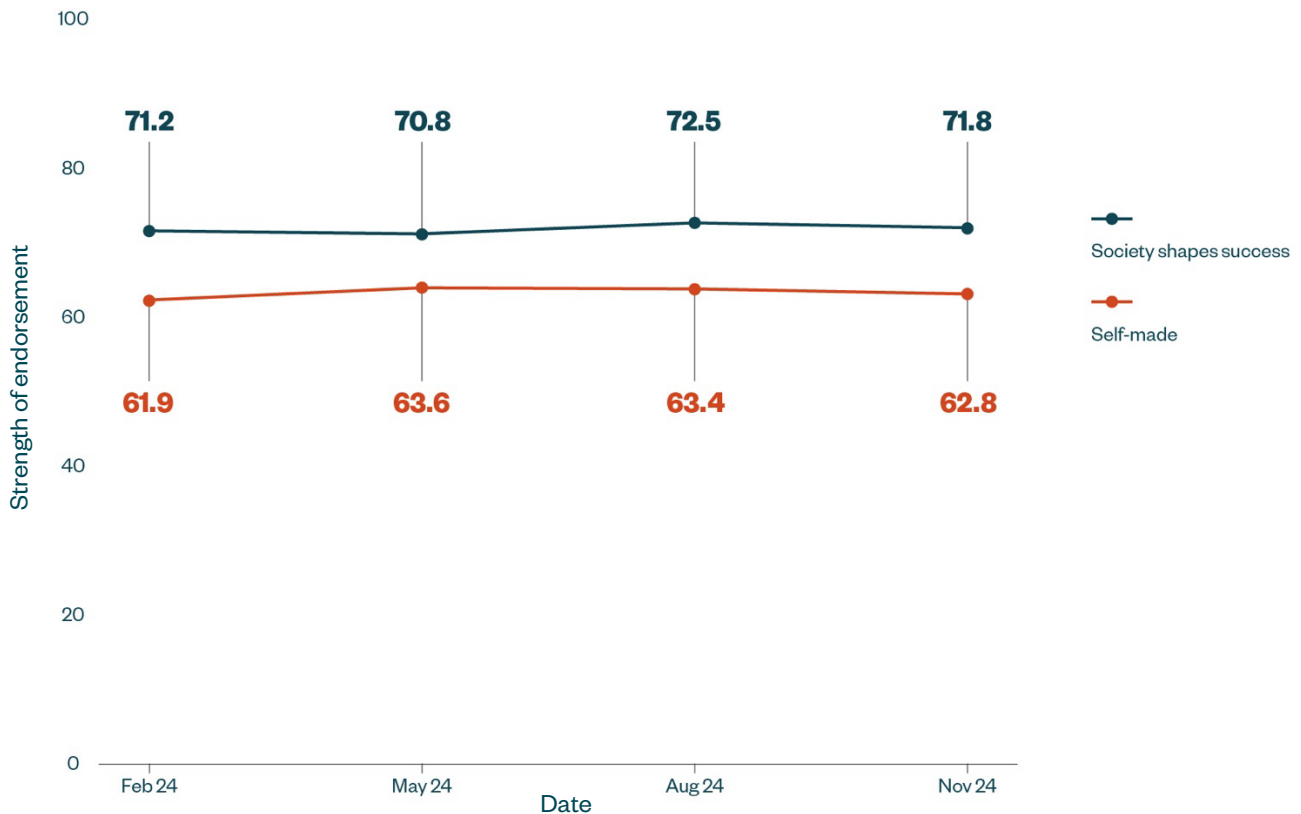
The dominance of *individualism* in British culture is not then unchallenged – or fixed. Indeed, our quantitative and qualitative findings show that when people think about specific issues, individualistic thinking is often balanced with a more systemic perspective.

For example, when people reason about wealth (see finding 2), the mindset of *society shapes success* – that is, the assumption that financial success is a product of how society is structured – is more strongly held than the idea that success is *self-made* (Fig 1.3).

“[Rural poverty is caused by] a lack of new industries. They can’t get away because the bus services have been reduced. It’s not like they can go and pick up a job further away.”

— Participant, Scotland

Fig 1.3: Self-made vs Society shapes success (composites)



Note. Average endorsement of mindsets across 4 trackers, on a scale from 0-100.

Higher numbers = more endorsement. Effects can be interpreted as follows: 0-50 = very weak endorsement; 51-67 = weak endorsement; 68-83 = moderate endorsement; 83-100 = strong endorsement.

This stronger systemic perspective does not necessarily displace individualistic thinking on a given issue. But instead creates more balanced thinking about how our lives are shaped by both individual and structural factors.

Implications

If we want to make space for bold social change, we must first strengthen the idea that what surrounds us, shapes us. Communicators can leverage the more balanced thinking present at an issue-specific level by positioning individual hardships in their broader, national context.

To make the most of these openings:

- 1. Place individual stories in context.** Name the systems and conditions that aren't working – and how they could work differently
- 2. Tell interconnected stories** of different individuals to show how systems can shape lives at scale
- 3. Explain** what is missing from our environments that makes it harder for people to thrive – and what can put this right. Instead of “choices,” talk about our “options” and “opportunities.”

For more on how to rebalance individualism with thinking about policies, systems and context, take a look at findings 2, 3 and 4.

2. Precarity is seen as our new normal – and people support bold action on extreme wealth

Insecurity and precarity has become a new norm across the UK.

[Research by FrameWorks](#) in 2016⁵ revealed a population that saw Britain as comfortably ‘post-poverty’ – and able to dismiss it as a problem only for other countries. As we move into 2025, this understanding has changed: poverty is understood to exist, here and now.

In focus groups, participants connected direct and anecdotal experiences of hardship to broader national trends: from avoiding putting the heating on, to using food banks for the first time. Conversations were shaped by a newly identified mindset: ***poverty creeps upward***. This is the assumption that poverty is a real and growing threat throughout the UK. Past guarantees of stability, such as employment or class status, are no longer enough.

“You take your eye off the ball for a few days, because you're just about getting enough money in, you take your eye off the ball, and you could be slipping into poverty.”

– Participant, England

For those of us working to change culture, this mindset has mixed implications. It offers a vital alternative to the idea that poverty does not really exist, or only affects other people. But it fails to account for *how* poverty happens and who is most at risk. In focus groups, people drawing on this mindset tended towards zero-sum thinking – focusing first on their own and their loved ones’ risk of poverty. Without an understanding of where and why poverty is increasing, ***poverty creeps upward*** leaves room for people to turn inward, and to reject support being targeted toward those of us most affected by poverty.

Significantly, when asked what should be done to address poverty for all, people drew on a newly identified mindset: ***share the wealth***. This is the assumption that a more fair and proportionate distribution of wealth would help address poverty and other social challenges. Paying taxes and reducing tax avoidance are two ways to help share the wealth.

“There is a big gap between those who have and those who don’t... wealth needs to be redistributed and reinvested in a way that it works for everybody.”

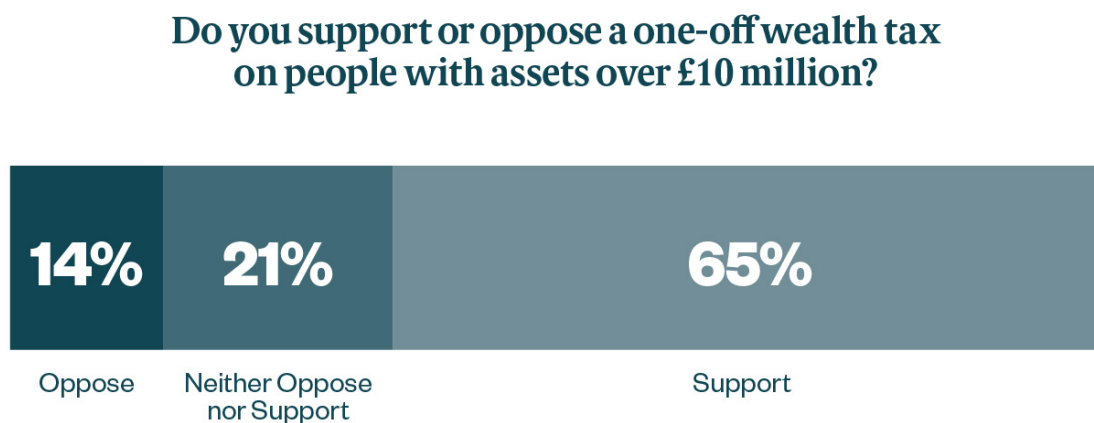
– Participant, Scotland

When reasoning from this mindset, people critique not just the existence of extreme wealth, but also the existence of extreme wealth *disparities*. In focus groups, people contrasted high-profile examples of wealthy corporations and individuals with families forced to use food banks. People referenced – and echoed – the sentiments of Centrica CEO Chris O’Shea on BBC Breakfast, that his £4.5 million salary is “impossible to justify” when people are struggling to pay heating bills. It is not then surprising that a majority of participants in our tracking survey support a wealth tax (a one-off tax on people with assets over £10 million) (Fig 2.1) – or that higher endorsement of ***share the wealth*** is correlated with greater support for this tax. Support is highest among Labour voters (75%) and in Scotland and Northern Ireland (both 79%).

“You know these wealthy people, with Shell and all that... It's about the redistribution of wealth in some way. And far above me how it could be done, but how it is now is not right.”

– Participant, England

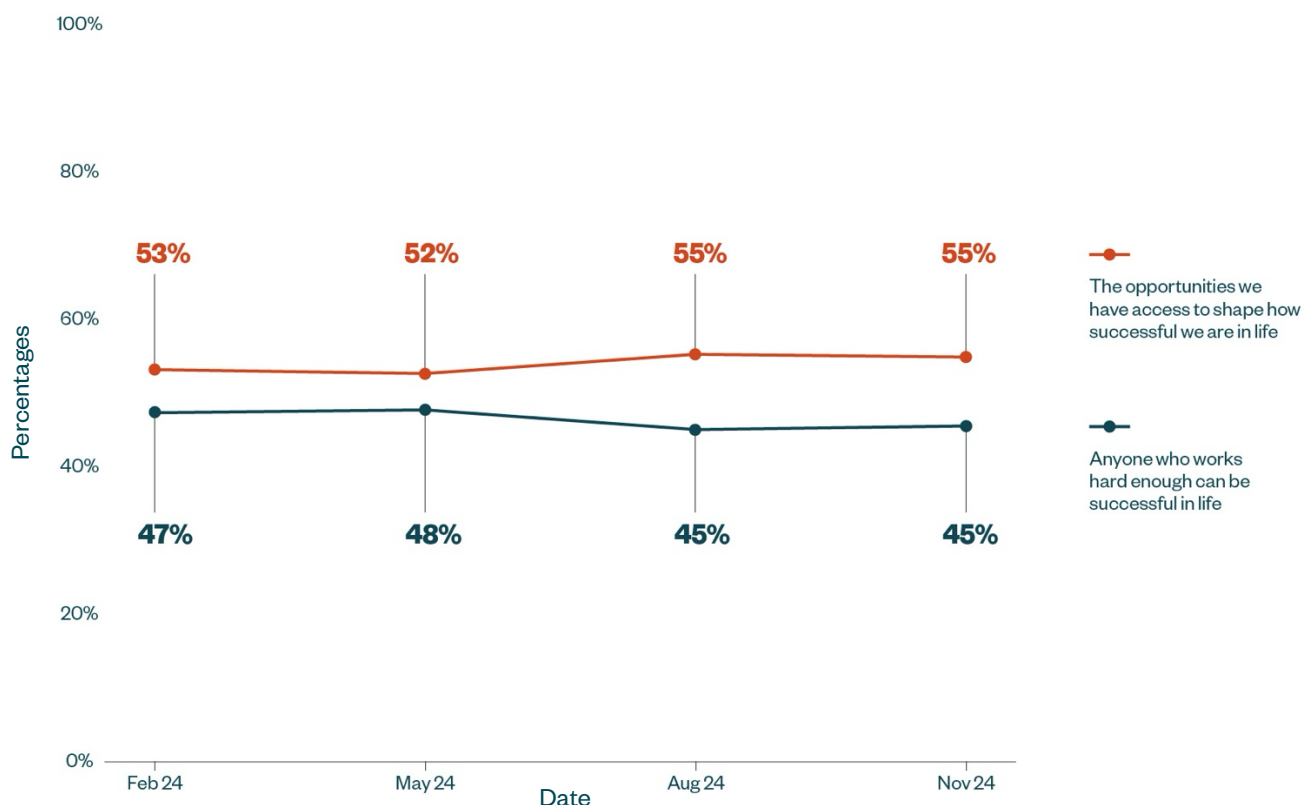
Fig 2.1: Support for a wealth tax, Aug 24



This may indicate a deeper change in how people think about wealth and financial success. In [our 2016 research](#), people drew on the idea that success is ***self-made*** as readily as the idea that ***society shapes success***. But in 2024, there are promising signs that this balance is shifting: for many, a £4.5 million salary cannot be explained by hard work. When asked to choose, a majority of participants in our tracking survey endorsed the idea that success is shaped by access to opportunities over the view that anyone who works hard can succeed (Fig 2.2).

The following graph (Fig 2.2) illustrates the gap in relative salience between these mindsets – that is, how quickly people reach for ***society shapes success*** over ***self-made***. This gap is slight, but seems to be widening. This could indicate that more people are rejecting the idea that British society is a meritocracy, in favour of a growing understanding that society is set up so that some have better chances to succeed.

Fig 2.2: Society shapes success vs Self-made (forced choice)



Note. Across 4 trackers, participants asked to choose which statement comes closer to their own view.

This effect seems driven by particular groups of people – particularly women, those in our lowest and highest income brackets (less than £20,800 and more than £62,401 per annum), and people who identify as Black/Black British/African/Caribbean.

Despite the dominance of *individualism* at a general level (see finding 1), then, more people across the UK reason about financial success in systemic ways. Indeed, strengthening the idea that *society shapes success* may be one of our most effective ways to unlock progressive culture change (see finding 6). Longer term tracking of these mindsets would reveal definitively if this is the start of a trend. Or if this is only a temporary shift in salience, influenced by rising living costs and the increased visibility of extreme wealth.

Implications

The existence of poverty is no longer a contested idea: people are acutely aware of growing insecurity and hardship throughout our four nations. At the same time, people are paying more attention to the consequences of wealth disparity – and what should be done about it.

To make the most of these openings:

1. **Focus less on stories that illustrate the existence of poverty.** Instead, find stories and storytellers that highlight extreme wealth disparities.
2. **Make a moral case for big picture change:** from action to address poverty, to demands to share the wealth. Invoke our shared values of [compassion and justice](#)⁶.
3. **Be ambitious.** Support for bold policies, like a wealth tax, is widespread.

For more on how to frame poverty and wealth disparity, take a look at:

- [Toolkit: talking about poverty](#)⁷
- [How to talk about poverty](#)⁸
- [Talking about poverty: how experts and the public understand poverty](#)⁹
- [Talking about homes: what we can learn from homelessness and poverty research](#)¹⁰

3. More of us believe that the economy is rigged

More of us than ever recognise the role of systems and institutions in shaping how our economy works – and who benefits from it.

[Research by FrameWorks](#)¹¹ in 2017 showed that thinking on what shapes our economy is fuelled largely by ideas of **economic naturalism**. This is the assumption that governments cannot control the economy – rather, it exists naturally and independently. When drawing on this mindset, people reason that economic outcomes are largely shaped by impersonal forces.

“Sometimes [the pound is] worth more than the Euro, some days it’s less... compared to other currencies it goes down, you can get less for your money than you could before.”

- Participant, *Framing the Economy* (2017)

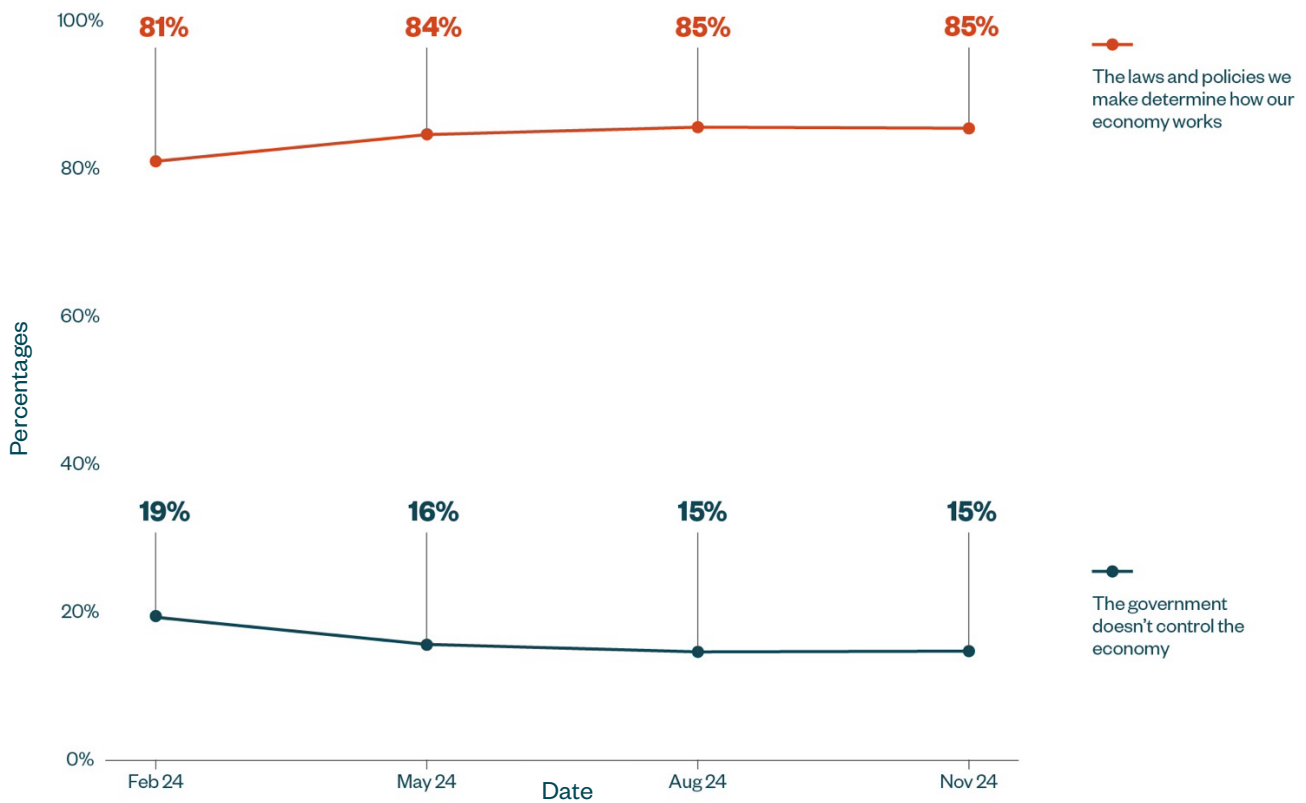
Our 2024 research has identified a promising alternative: an emerging recognition that our economy is designed. **Designed economy** is the assumption that laws and policies shape how our economy works and who it benefits. Economic outcomes are then a product of both political intention and specific policy choices.

“[We need] governments, regulators, the people that are making the laws to have the will, have the knowledge, to put laws and regulations in place that have the best interests of people and not the interests of big corporations that are making money.”

- Participant, Scotland

Compared to [our 2017 research](#)¹², where this mindset was not identified, **designed economy** is dominant across the UK. In our tracking survey, people endorse the idea of a **designed economy** more strongly, and more consistently, than the idea of an economy we cannot control (Fig 3.1). This mirrors our [findings in the United States](#)¹³, where we have identified a general movement away from free market ideologies.

Fig 3.1: Designed economy vs Economic naturalism (forced choice)



Note. Across 4 trackers, participants asked to choose which statement comes closer to their own view.

The answer to ‘what shapes our economy?’ is not then a contested one. For the British public, ***economic naturalism*** has been displaced by the idea that our economy is designed – and so can be redesigned by those with the power and will to do so. Highly visible political moments, like Liz Truss’ mini Budget, are likely responsible for some of this change. In focus groups, participants made both explicit and veiled references to the political choices that had fueled “our further economic demise, particularly with mortgages.” It is not then surprising that stronger endorsement of the ***designed economy*** mindset is correlated with support for ambitious action: the belief that governments should do more to shape the economy to meet our needs, and calls to ***share the wealth*** (see finding 2).

The answer to why some groups benefit more from our economy than others is more contested. In 2017, this question was answered largely by a single mindset: the ***system is rigged***. This is the assumption that the systems that fuel wealth and power are rigged to benefit some people and disadvantage others.

System is rigged thinking remains widespread and shared across the UK, although with variation across political affiliation. The idea that our economy is rigged by and for the powerful is held most strongly by people voting for Labour, the Liberal Democrats, and Reform UK (Fig 3.2) – significantly more than people voting for the Conservatives.¹⁴

Fig 3.2: System is rigged (composite means by political party), Nov 24

Average	Conservative	Labour	Liberal Democrat	Reform UK
System is rigged	59.5	67.3	67.8	72.1

Note. Endorsement of mindset, on a scale from 0-100. Higher numbers = greater explicit endorsement. Effects can be interpreted as follows: 0-50: very weak endorsement; 51-67 = weak endorsement; 68-83 = moderate endorsement; 83-100 = strong endorsement.

In 2017, ***system is rigged*** was used to reason about the economy in vague and individualistic ways: people focused first on shadowy figures manipulating ‘the system’ to benefit themselves. The economy was seen not as a series of interconnected systems able to incentivise or constrain behaviour, but as a system easily manipulated by the few.

“The economy is set by men in suits basically and they will always profit from it, and profit enormously.”

– Participant, *Framing the Economy* (2017)

When reasoning in this way, people become highly fatalistic. If ‘the system’ is shaped by unaccountable elites, with no interest in creating a fair economy, then ordinary people can do nothing. It becomes harder for people to see a better economic future from within society – and easier to reach for something outside of existing norms to create change (see finding 5). And without an explanation of *who* is rigging the system and *how*, ***system is rigged*** leaves room for people to turn to racist and xenophobic conspiracy theories – and blame minoritised groups for shaping systems at the expense of ‘ordinary people.’

Newer uses of this mindset, however, show signs of a promising change. In some focus groups, people used ***system is rigged*** to critique how poorly designed economic systems are open to abuse by unscrupulous individuals. And to actively call for changes to those systems.

“Having rented for many years, the system is so skewed to the person renting out that house. You have to fill out forms and give so much away... and you find out nothing about your landlord [who is] just only after money.”

– Participant, England

As we move into 2025, then, thinking about rigged systems has moved. In stark contrast to our 2017 research – and [recent findings in the United States](#)¹⁵ – ***system is rigged*** in the UK is now only weakly correlated with fatalism. Further research is needed to reveal if this is an emerging trend – and how to best respond to this moment.

Implications

The idea that laws and policies shape how our economy works is no longer a contested one. We have a new set of ideas to contest: who gets to make decisions about the systems that make up our economy, who benefits from them – and how decision makers are held to account when those systems are falling short.

To make the most of these openings:

1. **Reinforce the idea that poorly designed systems harm us all.** Set the expectation that systems can and should be designed to meet our needs.
2. **Get specific:** explain *how* economic systems are rigged – and how they can be ‘unrigged’ for our collective benefit.
3. **Match the scale of our solutions to the scale of the problems we identify.** This might mean advocating for transformative change to our economy, or highlighting parts of existing economic systems that can be improved.

For more on how to frame the economy, take a look at:

- [Framing the economy](#)¹⁶
- [How to talk about homes](#)¹⁷
- [Communicating about housing in the UK](#)¹⁸

4. We see health as a national resource

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only raised the salience of health in our cultural consciousness, but also made space for us to think differently about what shapes health.

In focus groups, participants drew on a newly identified mindset: ***health as a national resource***. This is the assumption that national and personal health are linked – and that the health of the nation depends on the health of its people. When this way of thinking is active, people reason that without good health (or health and social care services), it’s harder to take part in society.

“[Health] feels like the sort of cornerstone of everything, isn’t it? Good health. Everybody needs to be in good health to give back to the country.”

- Participant, England

For those of us working to change culture, ***health as a national resource*** shows potential. It is held strongly across demographic groups (Fig 4.1, 4.2). It is correlated with more systemic thinking on different issues. And it suggests an emerging understanding that health is not only an individual concern, but a collective one. When asked about government priorities, for example, people drew on ***health as a national resource*** (alongside other systemic mindsets) to argue for a collective response to health disparities – reasoning that a healthy and supported people can better contribute to the collective good.

“It’s not about necessarily more ambulances, more beds, bigger hospitals. Because the reason that people are going into those environments... is because of what hasn’t happened upstream. That’s where we need to focus. Talk with children, [address] poverty, have decent warm homes... to build the next society of healthier citizens.”

- Participant, Wales

Fig 4.1: Health as a national resource (composite means by political party), Nov 24

Average	Conservative	Labour	Liberal Democrat	Reform UK
Health as a national resource	70.3	74.2	74.2	70.5

Note. Endorsement of mindset, on a scale from 0-100. Higher numbers = more endorsement. Effects can be interpreted as follows: 0-50: very weak endorsement; 51-67 = weak endorsement; 68-83 = moderate endorsement; 83-100 = strong endorsement.

Fig 4.2: Health as a national resource (composite means by ethnicity), Nov 24

Average	White	Asian/Asian British	Black/African/ Caribbean/ Black British
Health as a national resource	72.3	75.9	82.0

Note. Endorsement of mindset, on a scale from 0-100. Higher numbers = more endorsement. Effects can be interpreted as follows: 0-50: very weak endorsement; 51-67 = weak endorsement; 68-83 = moderate endorsement; 83-100 = strong endorsement

Health as a national resource also shapes thinking on the role of government. Across the four nations, the responsibility of government to meet communities' health needs is unquestioned: only local and national governments are seen to have both the ability and the duty to act in the collective interest (see finding 5). In focus groups, participants remained sceptical of private actors or corporations' motivations – and actively opposed the perceived 'Americanisation' of healthcare.

"You can see [privatisation] happening in healthcare massively – that terrifies me. If anybody can look at the US and think that is a way that healthcare should be run..."

– Participant, England

Thinking on what shapes health is fuelled by two competing mindsets, first identified [in 2018](#)¹⁹: **health individualism**, and **society shapes health**.

Health individualism is the assumption that personal choices, typically diet and exercise, shape health outcomes. When this mindset is active, people reason that ill health and demands on health services are caused by individual failures.

"If we looked after our health we wouldn't need to go to the hospital. We wouldn't need to have all these appointments and delays."

– Participant, Wales

Society shapes health is the assumption that our health is shaped by the way society is structured – and the resources available to us. Health disparities, then, are a product of context and circumstance.

“If there’s economic inequality, based on race, then that has a knock on effect. Meaning that if you have less money, you’re more likely to be unhealthy... with those structures that are in place.”

– Participant, England

Our tracking survey indicates that **health individualism** is still dominant across most demographic groups. But our focus groups reveal that its dominance has shifted over the last six years. Now, people draw on **society shapes health** more quickly and more often than in [our 2018 health research](#).

The experience of lockdown in particular may have increased awareness of how context shapes decision-making. When asked about barriers to health, participants talked about a lack of green spaces and rising food prices – alongside caring responsibilities and the demands of working multiple jobs – as unfair societal constraints on healthy behaviours.

“During lockdown, everyone was doing these workouts. And that’s free. But you [can] still do that... again, it’s finding the time.”

– Participant, England

Long term tracking of these mindsets would reveal if this shift has emerged from a rising trend or is only temporary, influenced by the pandemic and rising cost of living.

Implications

Now is the time to strengthen and reinforce this more collective and systemic thinking on health – and the more ambitious policies and practice it makes space for.

To make the most of these openings:

- 1. Position public health as national initiatives and needs.** Reinforce the idea that when all of us have what we need to be healthy, our communities thrive.
- 2. Explain how what surrounds us shapes our health.** Explain how differences in our environments and resources can hold us back from good health.
- 3. Set the expectation that our government can and must do more.** Connect action on health with other issues where government has taken effective action.

For more on how to frame health as a systemic issue, take a look at:

- [Toolkit: how to talk about the building blocks of health](#)²⁰
- [A matter of life and death: explaining the wider determinants of health](#)²¹
- [Mapping the gaps between expert and public understandings of health](#)²²
- [Toolkit: reframing how we talk about children’s health and food](#)²³
- [Talk about food-related ill-health](#)²⁴

5. Politicians are seen as ‘not like us’

People are increasingly unhappy with local and national government – but aren’t sure how to put this right. Support for bold action is tempered by cynicism and mistrust.

Thinking about the character and qualities of government is shaped by two mindsets: **main character** and **alien politicians**.

Main character models ‘the government’ as its politicians and leaders. Governments are seen not as complex systems of interconnected mechanisms, but are instead reduced to high-profile individual actors. Despite stepping down in 2022, for example, Boris Johnson was repeatedly referenced in focus group conversations. When this mindset is active, people assume that the character and background of politicians shapes the functioning of government at large.

“The man was a clown... He’s a liar... is that the man we want to run the country?”

– Participant, Scotland

Alien politicians is the assumption that those in government are fundamentally different to the rest of us. Politicians are drawn from privileged groups or experience privilege as politicians in ways that separate them from ordinary life. When this mindset is active, people are unable to trust that those in government can relate to, or properly meet, our needs.

“I don’t think anyone in a government level can be in touch with reality that we, as normal people, have to deal with. It’s a different world. So how can you have confidence in that? It’s a different species.”

– Participant, England

Existing mechanisms of accountability (like judicial review, collaborative deliberation or parliamentary scrutiny) are seemingly absent from public thinking. It is not then surprising that even after the July general election, focus groups were characterised by frustration and mistrust:

“Our government, there’s no accountability for their actions. There is no trust in anything anymore.”

– Participant, Wales

Together, these mindsets limit how people think about governments, how they work, and how they can be improved. They obscure flaws in our current political system in favour of presenting individual politicians as heroes or villains. And this means that when government falls short, people look first to a change in leadership. And to politicians who position themselves as more ‘like us.’ It becomes harder for people to see the possibility of change beyond yet another election.

Limiting government to its **main character** can also lead people to doubt the effectiveness of government. Measured against significant challenges, one person cannot possibly do enough. As of November 2024, this mindset was negatively correlated with **government efficacy** – the belief that government can and will act to improve our lives.

*“What should Keir Starmer focus on first? Gun crime, reform, transport, energy, water. And I just thought, ‘Oh, my Chr*st, he’s got so much to do.’ It all feels f*cked.”*

– Participant, England

For those of us working to change culture, then, these two mindsets offer a warning. Our tendency to look to individual leaders, combined with scepticism towards established politicians, can lead people to seek a new leader who rejects established norms. This could in turn make space for a charismatic, authoritarian leader, perhaps one campaigning for a revolt against an ‘out of touch’ political class.

Despite evident frustration with local and national governments, however, people rarely question the need for effective government in the UK – or its responsibility to act in the best interests of citizens. Unlike [FrameWorks’ findings in the United States](#)²⁵, government is not seen as a body that stands in opposition to what people want and need. Across countries (Fig 5.1) and political parties (Fig 5.2), people in the UK want more – better – government, not less.

Fig 5.1: Support for expanded or limited government (composite means by nation), Nov 24

Average	England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland
Expanded government	74.6	74.4	76.7	69.5
Limited government	50.3	45.4	47.3	47.7

Note. Endorsement of mindset, on a scale from 0-100. Higher numbers = more endorsement. Effects can be interpreted as follows: 0-50: very weak endorsement; 51-67 = weak endorsement; 68-83 = moderate endorsement; 83-100 = strong endorsement.

Fig 5.2: Support for expanded or limited government (composite means by political party), Nov 24

Average	Conservative	Labour	Liberal Democrat	Reform UK
Expanded government	72.4	77.0	74.0	72.0
Limited government	54.0	47.6	45.5	55.0

Note. Endorsement of mindset, on a scale from 0-100. Higher numbers = more endorsement. Effects can be interpreted as follows: 0-50: very weak endorsement; 51-67 = weak endorsement; 68-83 = moderate endorsement; 83-100 = strong endorsement.

The *Main character* and *alien politicians* mindsets do not reflect anti-state sentiment, or even small state sentiment. Instead they arise from gaps in understanding about how our government works. Without more, and more effective, explanation of the systems and mechanisms of government, these gaps create dangerous limitations in our ability to reason about what isn’t working, to recognise what is – and to hold power to account.

Implications

An immediate priority for communicators wanting to see government action on social issues – from welfare, to housing policy – must be to build understanding of the systems and mechanisms of government. From how decision-making happens, to how politicians can be held accountable for their decisions.

This means:

1. **Focus on how we can and should hold leaders to account** – and explain tools available to us.
2. **Balance critique with competence.** Call on leaders to act – and set the expectations that action is responsible and right.
3. **Avoid positioning the government as fundamentally distinct from citizens.** Instead, talk about “our government” or “decisions we make as a country”.

6. Some mindsets cluster together, with major implications for social change work

Many of the mindsets we use to make sense of our world and how it works are connected. Long-term tracking of mindsets has revealed an important pattern in our data: that thinking across the UK is typically shaped by two distinct – and mutually reinforcing – clusters of mindsets.

The more strongly people hold one mindset within a cluster, the more likely they are to hold other mindsets within the same cluster. And the less likely they are to hold mindsets within the other cluster.

These clusters describe two broad orientations towards British society. One ‘*zooms in*’ towards the role and responsibilities of individuals and in/out groups. The other ‘*zooms out*,’ seeking changes to systems and conditions. In practice, people will often move between clusters – sometimes drawing from mindsets within one cluster, sometimes from mindsets within another.



Our first cluster describes a tendency to **exclude** and ‘**zoom in**.’ Mindsets within this cluster link success to individual action – and position government as at best unnecessary, and at worst harmful, to our lives. Together, they help uphold the status quo: when drawing on this cluster, people reason that hardship and inequality are a product of individual failings and outgroup norms.

This cluster includes several mindsets and attitudes:

- **Individualism:** the belief that outcomes are a product of individual choices and willpower
- **Self-made:** the belief that financial success is a product of individual choices and willpower
- **Health individualism:** the belief that health is shaped by lifestyle choices
- **Culture of poverty:** the belief that poverty is caused by the norms and values of specific groups
- **Racist attitudes:** a set of harmful and racist attitudes about people from minoritised ethnic groups
- **Anti-immigrant attitudes:** a set of attitudes that position immigrants are harmful to British society

- **Cultural norms shape health:** the belief that health is shaped by the norms and values of specific groups
- **Britain first:** the belief that government should stop prioritising others and put British citizens' needs first
- **Limited government:** the belief that government should play a limited role in our lives.

Our second cluster describes a tendency to '**zoom out**'. Mindsets within this cluster link success to our context and resources – and see a greater role for government in improving our lives. Together, they help to challenge the status quo: when drawing on this cluster, people reason that changes to systems and conditions are vital for all people to do well.

This cluster includes several mindsets:

- **Systemic thinking:** the belief that outcomes are a product of how our society is structured
- **Society shapes success:** the belief that financial success is a product of how our society is structured – and the opportunities available to us
- **Designed economy:** the belief that laws and policies shape how our economy works and who it benefits
- **Society shapes health:** the belief that our health is shaped by the way society is structured – and the resources available to us
- **Expanded government:** the belief that government should do whatever it takes to ensure people have what they need
- **Government is held back:** the belief that government is held back by inefficient processes, traditions, or past governments
- **Held back from health:** the belief that our health is limited by external factors that make it harder to adopt healthy habits
- **Environments shape health:** the belief that natural and built environments shape health
- **Share the wealth:** the belief that wealth redistribution would help address poverty and other challenges.

Some mindsets, like *system is rigged*, do not fit into either cluster and remain contested. For example, the idea that systems are rigged could be used to villainise specific groups – or to argue for transformative change (see finding 3).

Our initial analysis suggests that *individualism* and *self-made* act as 'lynchpin' mindsets for our first cluster. That is, they cue and strengthen other mindsets within the *exclude* and '*zoom in*' cluster even if those mindsets are not focused on directly. For those of us working to change culture, then, the most effective way to move all mindsets within this cluster is to counter the mindsets of *individualism* and *self-made*. A concentrated, coordinated effort to weaken the idea that success is *self-made*, for example, will have a ripple effect – decreasing the strength of seemingly unrelated ideas like *Britain first*.

For our second cluster, our lynchpin mindsets are *systemic thinking*, *society shapes success* and *designed economy*. The most effective way to move all mindsets within this cluster is then to strengthen *systemic thinking*, *society shapes success* and *designed economy* across the UK.

Implications

A concentrated effort to move one 'lynchpin' mindset – through framing and other culture change work – will have a positive spillover effect. Moving 'lynchpin' mindsets can move others on seemingly unrelated and unmentioned issues. Communicators working across issues, or with limited resources, can maximise their impact by coordinating action around a single lynchpin.

To make the most of these openings:

- 1. Prioritise stories and storytellers that counter the idea that success is 'self-made'**
– particularly as they relate to poverty and wealth.
- 2. Prioritise stories and storytellers that focus on systems and conditions –**
particularly about the decisions that shape our economy and who it benefits, and how 'society shapes success'.

Conclusion

This research has identified a series of openings for those of us working to change culture. But also a series of challenges. Our initial focus on health and poverty expanded as other issues, particularly government, the economy and immigration, rose in salience. More research is needed to definitively understand and respond to these moments as we move through 2025 and beyond.

This pilot shows that it is possible to track changes in our culture over time – and to identify the openings and challenges that emerge. If sustained, this tracking would allow us to:

- collectively assess the impact of cultural and narrative change work
- use our resources more effectively, identifying ‘lynchpins’ and trends; and
- better understand, then navigate, the turbulent times in which we live.

About FrameWorks UK

FrameWorks UK is a not-for-profit, mission-driven organisation, specialising in evidence-based communication strategies that shift hearts and minds.

We help charities and other organisations communicate about social issues in ways that create progress, through practical guidance underpinned by our framing research. We’re the sister organisation of the FrameWorks Institute in the US, which has been conducting framing research for more than 25 years. FrameWorks started working in the UK in 2012. And we established FrameWorks UK in 2021.

Change the story. Change the world.

Learn more at frameworksuk.org

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Endnotes

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