

DEMOS

A PLACE FOR PRIDE 2026

THE COLLAPSE OF PRIDE IN
BRITAIN - WHERE TO FIND IT
AND HOW TO REBUILD IT

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

Demos is Britain's leading cross-party think tank. Our mission is an upgraded democracy with a new deal to mend the broken relationships between state, institutions and citizens. This report speaks directly to that mission. It makes the case that local, institutional and national pride is not a soft or sentimental add-on in politics; it is the relational oil in our democratic system, anchoring and sustaining the relationship between citizen and state, between citizen and institutions, and between citizens themselves. Rebuilding pride is at the very core of reversing the democratic doom loop.

A Place for Pride 2026 builds on an extensive body of Demos work seeking to rebuild our democratic relationships, cutting across each of our four pillars. Pride, from the local to national level, strengthens the democratic practices and institutions that we explore in the **Everyday Democracy** pillar. Pride in institutions is the bedrock for the person-centred, preventative services we advocate for in the **Public Service Reform** pillar. Pride can fuel economic legitimacy and build social capital, fuelling the long-term economic system-change we call for in the **Citizen Economy** pillar. And pride in the state and institutions is critical if we are to break the cycles of misinformation that fuel democratic decline, as we explore in the **Resilient Information Ecosystems** pillar. Rebuilding pride - local, institutional and national - will strengthen the social relationships on which this whole agenda depends.

A Place for Pride 2026 returns Demos to ground it first broke in 2011. Max Wind-Cowie's original report, *A Place for Pride*, made the acute case that pride is a serious civic and political asset, not a relic of nostalgia. We are grateful to Pears for funding that prescient research, and to Max Wind-Cowie and the team at Demos in 2011 for the intellectual foundation on which this report builds.

We would also like to thank many of our colleagues at Demos. In particular, thanks to Chloe Burke, Lucy Bush, Polly Curtis, Miriam Levin and Lottie Skeggs for their input, guidance and support.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2011, the Demos report ‘A Place for Pride’ warned that mainstream politics ignored the human yearning for pride at its peril. Failing to connect emotionally with citizens, it argued, would fuel a growing ‘pessimism gap’ between the public and the political system. The research identified a self-reinforcing ‘Chain of Pride’: daily local experiences shape pride in community, which in turn shapes pride in institutions and the nation and, ultimately, engagement with democracy. Pride, on this account, is not simply an emotional by-product. It gives emotional force to the social and political relationships on which our democracy depends. It is the relational oil in our democratic system: anchoring and sustaining the relationship between citizen and state, between citizen and institutions, and between citizens themselves.

Fifteen years on, that 2011 warning has been starkly realised. Wage stagnation and declining living standards, failing public services, an unprecedented run of political crises and churn, and an increasingly fragmented information ecosystem have combined to fuel a ‘democratic doom loop’, in which a lack of public trust leaves mainstream politics unable to tackle major challenges. Trust is then eroded further. Successive political projects have tried to rebuild a shared, unifying sense of national pride – from Levelling Up to Pride in Place to the 2025 ‘Raise the Colours’ flag movement – but none has succeeded. Confidence in democracy continues to fall.

In his first speech as Prime Minister, Andy Burnham asked the public to work with him to “build a new national sense of unity, of common purpose and positivity”.¹ Restoring pride has to be at the very core of that mission, or it will fail. And with a devolution agenda moving power closer to communities, institutional reforms like No10 North, and a new national narrative promising hope, the new Prime Minister has the potential to shape the landscape of pride from the local, to the institutional, to the national.² The question is, how should it be shaped?

To understand the state of pride in 2026, how pride has changed in the past 15 years, and how the new government could restore pride as a unifying national force in increasingly polarised times, this report renews Demos’s 2011 project for the world of today. By repeating Demos’s original 2011 polling, it tracks how pride in Britain has changed over a decade-and-a-half of profound social, political and economic upheaval, and sets out what the new government should do in response.

¹ Prime Minister’s Office, 10 Downing Street. (2026). Andy Burnham’s first speech as Prime Minister: 20 July 2026 [Speech transcript]. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/andy-burnhams-first-speech-as-prime-minister-20-july-2026>

² Prime Minister’s Office, 10 Downing Street. (2026). PM: ‘From today Britain will value the hard hat as much as the graduation cap’ [Press release]. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-from-today-britain-will-value-the-hard-hat-as-much-as-the-graduation-cap>

A FRAGMENTATION IN THE CHAIN OF PRIDE

The data from 2026 reveals that the Chain of Pride has fundamentally fragmented. Rather than a unifying resource, pride has become politically and socially contested, heavily divided along generational and socioeconomic lines. In this world, pride becomes zero-sum; one group's source of pride becomes another's source of shame.

Where Britain's institutions and national story once offered a shared sense of belonging to different social groups, they have now become sites of much fiercer contestation. A particular rift has emerged between groups proud of Britain's civic and democratic institutions (such as Parliament) and groups proud of Britain's traditionalist or 'national-symbolic' institutions (such as the monarchy).³ In this context local pride - which is inherently fragmented by geography - has been sustained and even reinforced, but institutional and national pride have collapsed.

- **Over the past 15 years, national and institutional pride have collapsed, but local pride bucks the trend.**
 - **National pride:** Net agreement with being proud of British citizenship has fallen from 74% (2011) to 47% (2026). Pride in British history fell from 65% to 39%, and pride in Britain's place in the world collapsed from 35% to 13%. 45% of the public now believe "Britain's best days are behind her", up from 21% in 2011.
 - **Institutional pride:** Net pride in the BBC fell from 48% to -11%. In Parliament it fell from 23% to -11%. For the monarchy, net pride more than halved, from 54% to 25%.
 - **Local pride:** In direct contrast, pride in one's local community jumped from 29% to 40% over the past 15 years, accompanied by a slight rise in neighborhood trust. Local attachment no longer reinforces national pride; the two have decoupled.
- **Underlying the collapse in pride is a highly fragmented landscape of institutional and national pride, split along political, generational and socioeconomic divides.**
 - **Political:** Net pride in British history is 84% among Reform supporters but -25% among Green supporters. For the BBC, it's 8% among Green supporters but -65% among Reform supporters.
 - **Generational:** People aged 65+ report significantly higher pride in traditionalist and national-symbolic institutions (e.g. the monarchy 54%) but feel relatively alienated by civic institutions (e.g. the NHS 51%). 18-24 year olds display the inverse: negative pride in the monarchy (-11%) but higher pride in institutions like the NHS (74%).
 - **Socioeconomic:** People in high deprivation areas report lower levels of pride across most aspects of British life and particularly its civic and democratic institutions. Net pride in British people is 18% in high deprivation neighbourhoods, compared with 42% in areas of low deprivation neighbourhoods. For the BBC, it's -29% in high deprivation neighbourhoods, compared to 5% in low deprivation neighbourhoods.

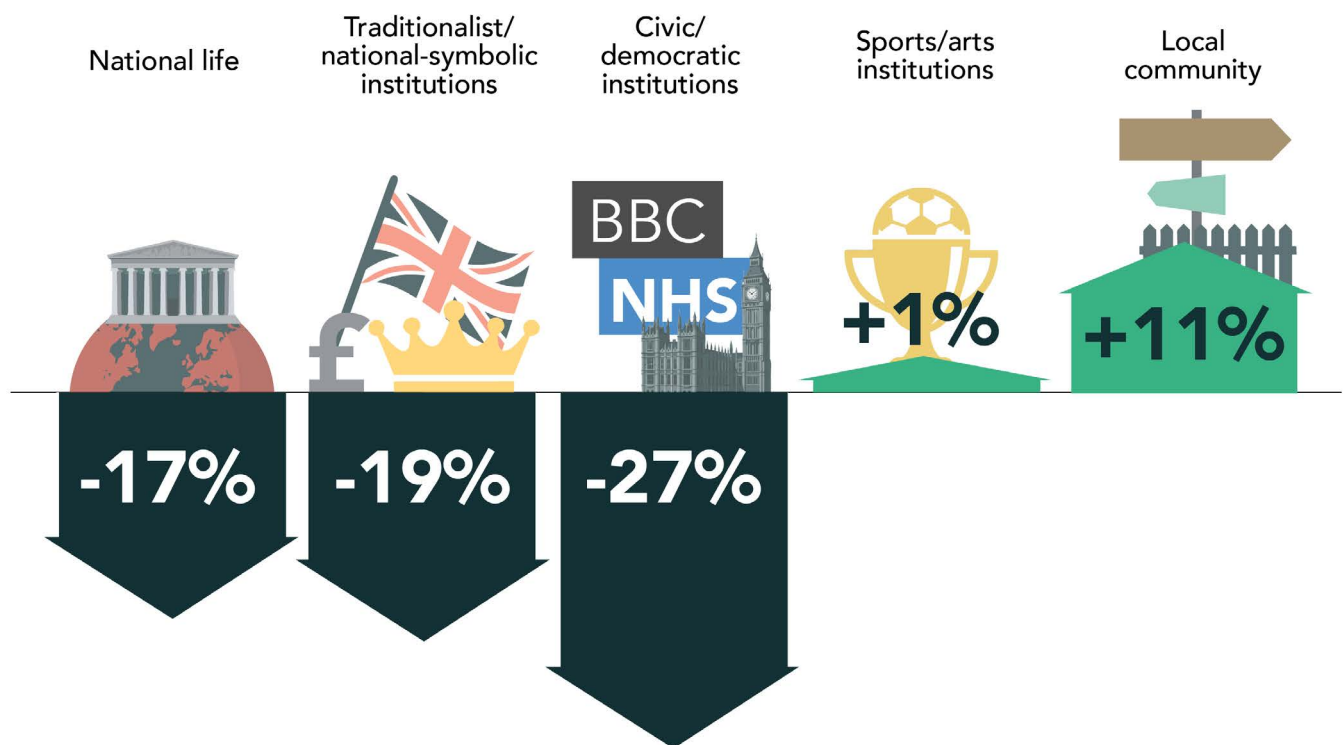
³ The starkest shift in the data since 2011 is the collapse in pride in previously treasured national institutions. As many institutions have become sites of fiercely contested culture wars, they now represent a more essential intermediary between citizen and state. Building on the 2011 characterisation of the Chain of Pride from personal to local to national pride, our analysis therefore characterises institutional pride as a distinct link in that chain. Our analysis discusses the importance of personal pride, but given that it is rarely targeted directly by policy, personal pride is not the focus of our policy analysis.

- **Fragmentation has dramatically deepened over the past 15 years.**
 - **Generational gaps:** In 2011, net pride in British history was 54% among young people and 70% among older people - a gap of 16 percentage points. But 15 years on, net pride in British history has collapsed to -4% among the young, while staying relatively steady at 66% among the older - creating a 70 percentage point gap.
 - **Socioeconomic gaps:** While higher and lower socioeconomic groups once expressed the same level of net pride in the Union Jack, pride among the higher socioeconomic group has since fallen by 26 percentage points, while pride among the lower group has remained steady. The reverse is true for civic institutions. For the NHS, net pride fell by 8 points among people in lower socioeconomic groups, but grew by 11 points among people in higher socioeconomic groups.

CHART 1

While pride in national life and institutions has collapsed, pride in local community has risen

Average change in net pride, by theme,* 2011 to 2026



*Each score represents the average change in net pride across a range of aspects of national life or a range of institutions:

- National life: being a British citizen, Britain's role in the world, how Britain looks, British culture, British history, British people, how Britain treats differently lifestyles and how Britain treats gay people
- Traditionalist/national-symbolic institutions: the Armed Forces, the pound, the Union Jack and the Monarchy.
- Civic/democratic institutions: the Legal System, BBC, Parliament and the NHS.
- Sports/arts institution: Shakespeare and British sporting achievements.

Net pride in local community was captured in a single question, so it is not an average

The fragmentation of the Chain of Pride over the past 15 years, and how that undermines pride as a unifying force, puts Britain on shaky ground. The relationship between citizens, and between citizen and state, suffers. The public's willingness to contribute to the common good, accept trade-offs for others, or engage in democracy is dampened.

To reunify the Chain of Pride, we must understand why it has fractured. At the core of that problem, we argue, is social fragmentation.

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL FRAGMENTATION

This report makes the case that fragmentation in the Chain of Pride reflects a broader shift from a period of social connection to one of greater social fragmentation. Evidence shows how technological advancement has dampened 'bridging' across different social groups, while 'bonding' within groups stayed resilient.^{4,5} Meanwhile many of the community spaces that could maintain social bridging - libraries, youth clubs, pubs, trade unions, sports clubs, faith organisations - have eroded. This advances polarisation. Over a third of young people now struggle to be friends with people with opposing views.⁶

As Robert Putnam argued, while 'bonding' social capital fosters in-group loyalty and creates safety nets for "getting by" during tough times, 'bridging' social capital is critical for fostering broader social integration, dampening division, and strengthening the social contract.⁷

Putnam's distinction is critical in helping explain why local pride has strengthened while institutional and national pride have fallen. While strong local pride can be retained based on the resilience of 'bonding' social capital, institutional and national pride rely on broad social integration. The growing generational and socioeconomic divides we see in institutional and national pride are consistent with a decline in 'bridging' capital across society - one which limits collective sense-making and experiences, be it of institutions like Parliament or aspects of national life like British history.

As illustrated below, in this fragmented landscape, institutions increasingly appear to represent only some communities rather than the whole. The divide is most stark between traditionalist institutions and civic institutions. As different social groups have diverging experiences of Britain's institutions, the national moments capable of uniting across divides have become rarer, more transient and more contested. The foundation of shared national pride is then eroded. For example, in the absence of 'Cool Britannia' as a unifying symbol, different groups diverge in their understanding of British culture. With greater divisions in institutional and national pride, social disconnection is compounded. A vicious cycle is formed.

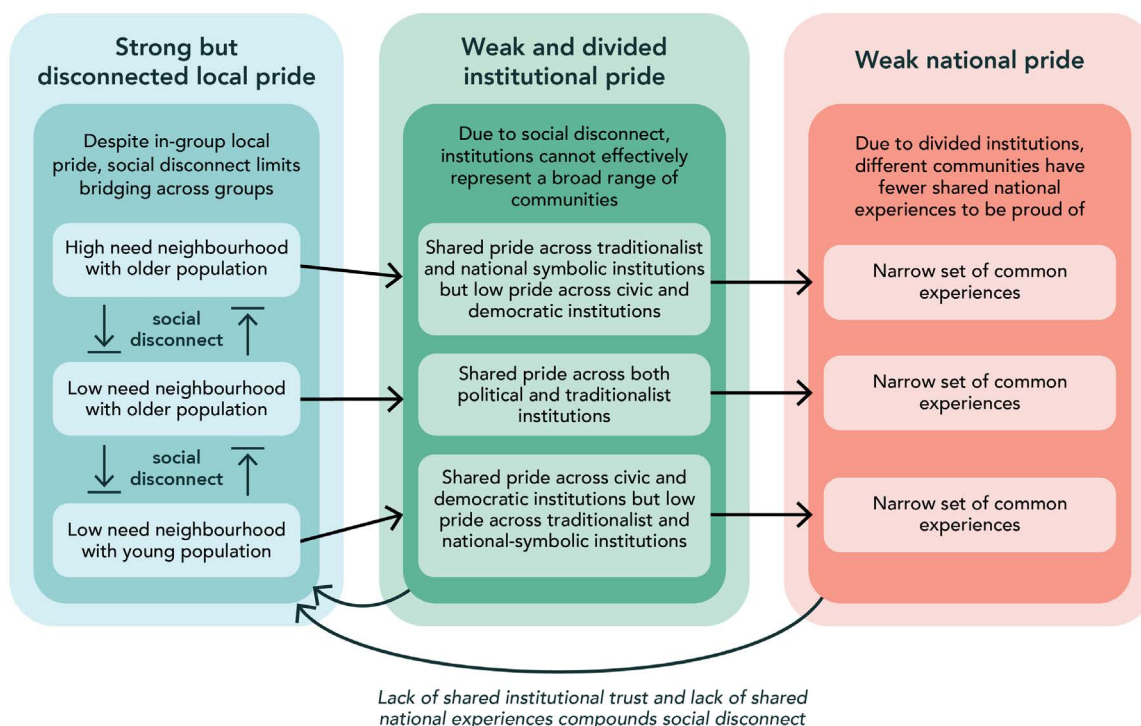
The result is a country in which most people still feel pride, but rarely the same pride, at the same time, for the same reasons. In this context, mainstream politics is left without a shared emotional framework through which to connect with citizens and broker their buy-in for challenging and long-term policies. The result is frantic and scattergun political short-termism, as major parties attempt to appeal to disparate groups of voters, whilst gaining the trust of none.

4 Sabatini et al. Faster Internet displaces social capital in the UK. VoxEU, CEPR. 12 February 2022. <https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/faster-internet-displaces-social-capital-uk>

5 BIT. How to connect communities to create opportunities. 3 December 2025. <https://www.bi.team/publications/social-capital-in-the-united-kingdom/>

6 Farber A. "Gen Z struggle to make friends with people who have 'different views'". The Times. 5 February 2026. https://www.thetimes.com/uk/media/article/gen-z-relationships-bbc-poll-3n7mq3qh0?eafs_enabled=false

7 Putnam, R.D. (2000) Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community. Simon and Schuster, New York. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/358916.361990>

FIGURE 1**THE CHAIN OF PRIDE IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL FRAGMENTATION**

In 2011, Demos charged the major political parties with overlooking the need to prioritise pride. This is no longer the case. From Levelling Up to Pride in Place, numerous policy programmes and political projects have since sought to promote pride. Each has been devised, however, with little grasp of how pride has changed or is now experienced at local, institutional or national levels, and have been developed by policy machinery that is not equipped to manage emotional states.

Restoring pride as a unifying force demands an ambitious new agenda, focussed on bridging people, and creating shared experiences, at the local, institutional and national levels.

At the local level, we need political and social infrastructure which enables communities to bridge across political, socioeconomic or demographic divides. By generating shared experiences of Britain's institutions and national life, social bridging at the local level is central to strengthening institutional and national pride.

Burnham's devolution agenda will be critical to drive that change. A centralised politics does not have the tools or insights to generate social bridging across all of Britain's diverse towns and neighbourhoods. But devolution cannot stop at the mayor's office or the town hall. While strategic authorities and councils will inevitably play a role, community organisations and hyper-local neighbourhoods are, in many communities, the real engine of social bridging.

But even bridging at the local level will not be enough. As digital technologies, economic transformation, and demographic change will continue to place pressure on social connection, fragmentation is, to a degree, here to stay. In this context, Britain's institutions and national experiences must adapt. We need institutions to forge more active relationships across different groups, countering accusations of 'capture' and building a sense of shared ownership. We need a new national story, speaking to values and generating experiences which the British public as a whole can get behind.

To reforge the Chain of Pride, create common ground and rebuild trust in democracy, the government should use three strategies: building the Local Bridge, the Institutional Bridge, and the National Bridge.

TABLE 1
STRATEGIES TO REBUILD PRIDE

CURRENT SITUATION	SOLUTION	POLICIES
Local pride		
Local pride without social bridging means citizens increasingly have different foundations for their pride - deepening social fragmentation. 'Top down' policy responses to this fail to create the sense of collective local ownership needed to unite local people. While devolution is critical, it has too often stopped at the town hall, overlooking local communities and place-based civic infrastructure. Valuable opportunities to create 'bridging' social capital are then missed.	The Local Bridge The devolution agenda must be designed to build and sustain social bridging and, in turn, local pride. It must strengthen public participation and civic foundations at a local level, giving communities a sense of collective, place-based ownership over local life.	Design devolution to strengthen a sense of collective local ownership, by advancing: 1. A 'Marshall Plan for Civic Life': As Demos argued in The Preventative State, we need to rebuild civic infrastructure to create shared spaces.⁸ Doing so demands an ambitious new approach to civic funding. A Marshall Plan for Civic Life means developing a coherent set of innovative financing mechanisms - across public contributions, philanthropy, investment and value capture, and tax and spending - which builds a sustainable, resilient funding system for local civic life across Britain. 2. Participatory policy development: Broaden and strengthen public participation in decision-making by (1) utilising new technology to improve the speed and scale of participation, (2) embedding participatory budgeting into English devolution, and (2) strengthening the skills pipeline for neighbourhood governance structures and developing an adaptive 'test and learn' approach. 3. Measurement of pride: Develop new measurement frameworks for pride-promoting policy.

⁸ Glover B, Curtis P, and O'Brien A. The Preventative State: Rebuilding our local, social and civic foundations. Demos. 25 April 2023. <https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/the-preventative-state.pdf>

CURRENT SITUATION	SOLUTION	POLICIES
Institutional pride		
With decreased social bridging locally, different social groups experience different sets of institutions. Those institutions then face a vicious cycle whereby they only appeal to, or are only associated with, a specific social group within the public. Other groups disengage. This compounds trust among the in-group and mistrust among the out-group, meaning the institution becomes evermore associated with a specific group. Rather than unifying forces, institutions become sites of political and social contestation, particularly divided between traditionalist and civic institutions.	The Institutional Bridge Institutions must become more flexible and adaptive, able to provide a sense of collective ownership to a wide range of communities and social groups across the nation.	Reform institutions to provide a sense of collective ownership which bridges across social groups, through: 1. Devolution - moving institutions geographically closer to people, thereby bridging communities across a place rather targeting specific social groups 2. Decentralisation - creating more routes for bottom-up influence of institutions 3. Participation - involving the public directly in institutional decision-making 4. Relationality - engaging with the public in face-to-face contact and forming relationships 5. Epistemic security - developing resilient information supply chains that guard against misinformation and disinformation

CURRENT SITUATION	SOLUTION	POLICIES
National pride		
With decreased social bridging and a divided institutional landscape, shared national experiences and sense-making is few and far between. Like institutions, different aspects of national life - be it Britain's culture, history, or role in the world - stop acting as unifying forces, and instead become sites of social and political contestation.	The National Bridge Our national culture, politics and economy must each tell a story about Britain as a nation - its talents, strengths and values - which can generate a set of shared experiences for the public.	Generate a new narrative for culture, politics and the economy which bridges across divides through: 1. Investment in shared cultural experiences such as our built environment and natural heritage, music and arts, and sport. Unlock the power of parks, street parties, and cultural events for moments of national unity. To enable this, we need new methods for evaluating cultural activities - particularly in the Treasury - which account for their social and instrumental returns. 2. Renewed issue-based alliances with middle powers and a strengthened soft power strategy, focussed on the BBC World Service, world-renowned British universities and schools, and British music, arts and entertainment. Both should tell a confident national story about Britain's role in the changing world, grounded in national values, strengths and sovereignty. 3. Embedding the reindustrialisation narrative with new economic institutions and a story which speaks to the values of British workers at large - (e.g. graft, supportiveness, and entrepreneurialism) rather than just values of the specific sector.

Section 1 of this report explains why pride matters and, drawing on Demos's 2011 research, the importance of the Chain of Pride. Section 2 discusses the policy context on pride, highlighting why efforts to reforge pride have failed. Drawing on a 2026 Demos survey, Section 3 finds that the Chain of Pride has since fragmented along political, generational, and socioeconomic lines. Section 4 discusses why the Chain of Pride has fragmented. Section 5 lays out a blueprint to reforge the Chain of Pride across the local, institutional and national context.

SECTION 1

WHY PRIDE MATTERS

WHAT IS PRIDE

Pride is a fundamental human emotion, with evolutionary significance and universal expression.⁹ Decades of psychological and sociological evidence has demonstrated both the human yearning to feel pride, and the powerful impact of the presence or absence of pride on identity, attitudes and behaviour.¹⁰

An individual experiences pride at multiple levels - individual, local or civic, and national. Individual pride speaks to the extent to which a person's daily life brings them feelings of satisfaction and self-respect and is shaped by - amongst other things - a sense of achievement, of contributing some social good, financial security, social connection and being valued by others.^{11,12} Even at the individual level, the places we live, work and connect with others are fundamental to pride: it is an inherently social emotion, shaping our identity in relation to the world around us.¹³

Pride at a local level speaks even more strongly to a sense of belonging to a place and a community and is founded in shared experiences.¹⁴ It is rooted in social connection, opportunity to contribute, shared community spaces and services, the physical environment, cultural experiences, shared memories and heritage.^{15,16}

9 Tracy, J. L., & Robins, R. W. (2007). Emerging insights into the nature and function of pride. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 16(3), 147–150. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8721.2007.00493.x>

10 Tracy, J. L., Mercadante, E., & Witkower, Z. (2024). The evolved nature of pride. In L. Al-Shawaf & T. K. Shackelford (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of evolution and the emotions*. Oxford Academic. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197544754.013.9>

11 Tracy, J.L. & Robins, R.W. (2007). The psychological structure of pride: A tale of two facets. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 92(3), 506–525.

12 Anderson, C., Hildreth, J.A.D. & Howland, L. (2015). Is the desire for status a fundamental human motive? *Psychological Bulletin*, 141(3), 574–601.

13 Sznycer, D. and Cohen, A.S. (2021) 'How pride works', *Evolutionary Human Sciences*, 3, e10.

14 Collins, T. (2019) 'Towards a more emotional geography of civic pride: a view from an English city', *Social & Cultural Geography*, 20(3).

15 Manzo, L. C., & Perkins, D. D. (2006). Finding common ground: The importance of place attachment to community participation and planning. *Journal of Planning Literature*, 20(4), 335–350.

16 Lewicka, M. (2011). Place attachment: How far have we come in the last 40 years? *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 31(3), 207–230.

National pride is shaped by shared narrative, experiences, symbols and institutions:

- National narratives of economic success (Britain as the 'Workshop of the World' in the 1950s), cultural movements (e.g. Cool Britannia of the late 1990s) or heritage (the 'Blitz Spirit') can shape national pride. Sporting or cultural moments - like the Lionesses 2022 Euro triumph, the 2012 London Olympics, or the 2012 Diamond Jubilee celebrations for Queen Elizabeth - can create powerful shared moments of national pride.
- Symbolic pride may be connected to artifacts such as the pound, symbols such as the flag or concepts such as the monarchy.
- Institutional pride may be linked to enduring systemic actors such as the NHS, Parliament or the BBC, and involves a sense of collective ownership.

Each of these sources of national pride lend themselves to a different tenor of emotional experience. Symbols, by their nature, are more enduring but more distant from daily life than sporting or cultural moments which provide tangible experiences of collective emotion (whether nerves, excitement or joy) but that are necessarily fleeting. On the other hand, institutional pride may be linked to a sense of ownership or relationship - 'our NHS', or the BBC as 'auntie' - yet is more reliant on - and therefore vulnerable to - levels of trust and a sense that the institution is competent and is 'delivering'.

A NOTE ON DEFINITIONS

NATIONAL PRIDE VS NATIONALISM

National pride and nationalism are often treated interchangeably, and definitions are subject to intense sociological, political and psychological debate. However, for the purposes of this paper we define the two as distinct in terms of behavioural and psychological implications.

'National pride' is defined as a positive emotional attachment to a nation, and might manifest as appreciation for a nation's culture, history, institutions, landscape and nature, cuisine, perceived values, democratic or political system, or sporting achievements. National pride does not require unwavering loyalty, but is consistent with criticism of the nation, or aspects of national identity, and does not involve comparison with other nations or assessment of superiority.¹⁷

'Nationalism', conversely, is a political ideology or doctrine that prioritises the perceived interests, identity and sovereignty of a nation. It can be associated with loyalty to the nation, perceived superiority to other nations, and, at extremes, protectionism, exclusion and aggression.¹⁸

Within the framework of *A Place for Pride* and this research, national pride is understood as a constructive and democratic attachment between citizens, community and nation.

¹⁷ Huddy, L. (2023). National Identity, Patriotism, and Nationalism. In L. Huddy et al. (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*.

¹⁸ Huddy, L. (2023). National Identity, Patriotism, and Nationalism. In L. Huddy et al. (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*.

Pride gives emotional force to the social and political relationships on which our democracy depends. It is the relational oil in our democratic system: fuelling the relationship between citizen and state, between citizen and institutions, and between citizens themselves.

A PLACE FOR PRIDE (2011)

"The yearning that exists for patriotism is the same as the yearning for pride in oneself, a complex and emotional response to human existence. It has not been fulfilled by Britishness in modern times and so it has been filled by alternatives."

A Place for Pride (2011)

In 2011, the Demos report 'A Place for Pride' explored everyday experiences of pride - individual, in community and in the nation - and how these intersected with civic life and politics. Quantitative and qualitative research with people in England, Scotland and Wales revealed pride to be a profound, emotional connection with reciprocal impact not just on relationships and attitudes to others, but on behaviour and engagement with civic, political and democratic life.

The research painted a picture of the relationship between different levels of pride (personal, local, national) as self-enforcing: daily experiences of what it is like to be British and pride in daily surroundings and near community positively or negatively informs a person's sense of national pride, and vice versa. This so-called 'Chain of Pride' was multi-directional: an increase in pride at one end of the chain acts as a gateway to improve pride at the other, and is borne out in psychological and sociological research into the nature of pride.^{19,20}

The research - using logistic regression analysis - demonstrated that daily experiences and interactions (with family, in the home and community) were positively correlated with levels of local pride. Similarly, a key finding of the 2011 work was that national pride was not experienced abstractly, but was fundamentally relational, experienced through work, neighbourhood interactions, public services and participation in civic life.

Local pride - and the daily experiences which underlie it such as interactions with community - were then found to be strongly associated with national pride. The authors' regression analysis found that

"People who are proud of their community and region are much more likely to be invested in British identity, to feel positive about Britain as a whole, and to feel confident and comfortable with their Britishness".²¹

19 Howcroft, M., Marsh, N., & Owen, J. (2025). Levelling Up, affective governance and tensions within 'pride in place'. EPC: Politics and Space, 43(2), 387–405. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23996544241268342>

20 Rooij, E.A., Reeskens, T., & Wright, M. (2012). Does Pride in the Nation Foster Participation? Evaluating the Link between National Identity and Political Engagement across 29 European Societies.

21 Wind-Cowie, M. (2011). A place for pride. Demos. <https://demos.co.uk/research/a-place-for-pride/>

This also correlated with community trust and involvement. The 2011 survey revealed that respondents who felt people in their neighbourhood are generally trustworthy were almost 20 percentage points more likely to strongly feel proud to be a British citizen. People who had increased their involvement in their community in the prior five years were almost twice as likely to be proud to be a British citizen than others.

‘A Place for Pride’ concluded by arguing that pride has an important and often overlooked place in public policy making. Pride is both an important measure of political health of the nation - the extent to which politics is delivering for and connecting with citizens - and is an important policy end in and of itself. Pride promoting policies play a valuable role in improving the daily experiences of British citizenship (for example, in policies that promote good work), improving social cohesion and promoting pro-social behaviour (policies that invest in social infrastructure), and in providing an emotional connection between citizens and national politics.

PRIDE AS THE RELATIONAL OIL IN THE DEMOCRATIC ENGINE

‘A Place for Pride’ and associated literature reveals pride to have strong psychological and behavioural influence at citizen, political and democratic levels. These observations go beyond a description of pride as a set of emotional responses, but paint a picture of pride as the ‘relational oil’ in the democratic engine - linked to both trust in politics and the state, and in propensity to engage in democratic life. We argue that pride therefore has a crucial role in reversing the democratic doom loop through:

- Motivating pro-social behaviour and a sense of collective ‘ownership’ or belonging amongst citizens
- Driving democratic engagement such as voting
- Creating a positive bargaining zone between state and citizen

Motivating pro-social behaviour and a sense of ‘ownership’ amongst citizens

The Demos research and broader evidence finds that people with high civic and national pride are more likely to trust their neighbours and contribute to their local community, for instance through volunteering. Pride also serves another interesting psychological and behavioural role with implications for citizenship, less explored in the original ‘Place for Pride’ paper, and with particular pertinence to the current challenges of the breakdown of trust and democratic disengagement.

Research from the fields of organisational and social psychology has demonstrated a reciprocal relationship between pride and a sense of ownership: people are more likely to feel proud of projects or endeavours if they feel a sense of ownership of the work, and vice versa.²² This in turn has important behavioural impacts: a sense of ownership has been shown to increase engagement and ‘stewardship’ behaviours.²³ In the workplace, employees who feel pride in their organisation are more likely to demonstrate ‘organisational citizenship’ behaviours.²⁴

This dynamic has important implications for democratic life. Reversing the democratic doom loop requires all actors to play an active role. The question for citizens isn’t ‘how can the government solve this?’, or ‘what can the state do for me?’, but also ‘what is my role?’. A

22 Greving, H., Bruckermann, T., Schumann, A., Stillfried, M., Börner, K., Hagen, R., Kimmig, S. E., Brandt, M., & Kimmerle, J. (2026). The influence of psychological ownership on pride in a Citizen Science project on wildlife ecology. PLOS ONE, 21(4), Article e0345321. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0345321>

23 Nijs, T., Martinovic, B., & Verkuyten, M. (2024). The two routes of collective psychological ownership: Rights and responsibilities explain intentions to exclude outsiders and engage in stewardship behavior. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 50(2), 270–284. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672221129757>

24 Sturm, R. E., Jolly, P. M., & Williams, S. D. (2022). It’s a matter of organizational pride: How perceptions of organizational virtuousness and competence affect employee behaviors. Journal of Business and Psychology, 37(5), 1079–1097. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-021-09786-9>

healthy democracy requires a shared understanding of the roles and responsibilities of citizens, from participation in formal democratic processes to engagement (where possible) in local community life.

Ultimately rebuilding democratic legitimacy will therefore require a sense of collective ownership in the project that is 'governing Britain' in order to give permission to any government to make the difficult choices needed. When large swathes of the population feel powerless, alienated and disconnected from institutions, many effectively 'opt out' and disengage from democratic participation altogether. Regaining a sense of ownership may therefore be a necessary first step in rebuilding the relationship between citizen and state.

Driving democratic engagement

Pride serves an even more fundamental democratic role, and here the risks inherent in neglecting the role of pride are laid bare. 'Constructive' national pride, characterised by overall positive, but 'critical', loyalty to nation and national institutions, has been shown to be associated with democratic values, behaviour that seeks to increase political knowledge and engagement, and ultimately lead to higher voter turnout.²⁵ Conversely, 'blind pride' or nationalism - rigid and unquestioning loyalty - has been linked to authoritarian values, intolerance for dissent, and to decrease democratic participation.^{26,27}

Exploring this distinction within the framing of the Chain of Pride, the 2011 research revealed an overall cohesive picture of national pride that aligned with constructive pride, where higher levels of national pride were associated with pro-social behaviour, measures of inclusivity and a sense of common purpose.

Creating a positive bargaining zone between state and citizen

The 2011 report made the case that pride as a motivator of pro-social behaviour has potential beyond acts of volunteerism at a local level. The pro-social behaviour and sense of collective ownership that pride is associated with could potentially extend to willingness to accept trade-offs or policies in the interest of the 'greater good' or that benefit a particular group in society.²⁸ This common ground is currently lacking in today's polarised political debate and in the face of the increasingly complex challenges faced by the government.

The 'wicked' challenges facing modern government - the climate crisis, stagnant economic growth, fragmented and insecure information ecosystems - dwarf traditional policy levers at the government's disposal. Fiscal incentives, taxation and spending or prohibition, regulation and licensing to control behaviour and access are focussed, discrete interventions that deploy the rule of law or economics to mechanically shift or constrain behaviour.

Yet where policy goals require decades of action, such as net zero, or are decades in the making, such as current levels of economic inactivity in the UK, the government must ask citizens for patience and trust. And where financial pressures require deep trade-offs across different spheres of public policy, or a shift of resources away from immediate pressures towards preventative action, the government must ask citizens to buy-in to a more holistic vision rather than simple objectives. Facing these more complex negotiations, pride could have an important role to play, creating a positive bargaining zone between the government and citizens.

25 Hur, A. (2022). *Narratives of civic duty: How national stories shape democracy in Asia*. Cornell University Press.

26 Finell, E., & Zogmaister, C. (2015). Blind and constructive patriotism, national symbols and outgroup attitudes. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 56(2), 189–197. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sjop.12193>

27 Schatz, R. T., Staub, E., & Lavine, H. (1999). On the varieties of national attachment: Blind versus constructive patriotism. *Political Psychology*, 20(1), 151–174. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0162-895X.00140>

28 Qari S, Konrad KA, Geys B (2012) Patriotism, taxation and international mobility. *Public Choice* 151(3): 695–717.

Whatsmore, this common ground at a national level coupled with the pro-social motivating power of local pride, offers a far more powerful driver of cultural or behaviour change at a population level than policy or economics alone. The early months of COVID provide clear insight into this reciprocal relationship between local and national pride, and how this can facilitate bold government decision-making power and drive behaviour en masse. Faced with the vast, shared challenge of the pandemic, pro-social acts to nearest neighbours sat alongside a shared willingness to sacrifice freedoms and social connection to support the national response to the virus. Weekly 'Clap for the NHS' provided moments of shared national pride, and reinforced faith in the institutions that were serving the public.

Pride therefore, should be considered a powerful political and civic asset. But through the seismic political, social and economic ruptures of the past 15 years - in the UK and globally - how has pride been experienced? And if we accept that the yearning to feel pride - in individual life circumstances, in community and neighbourhood, and ultimately as a citizen of the nation - is a powerful driver, then how does mainstream politics meet this need today?

THE 2011 "CHAIN OF PRIDE"

In 2011 the Chain of Pride functioned as the 'relational oil' in the democratic engine - higher levels of pride at either end of the Chain, local or national, flowed into the intervening levels and positively impacted behaviour and attitudes.

Crucially, whilst demographics such as age or socioeconomic group impacted how pride was experienced, the Chain of Pride was a broadly collective phenomenon: whoever you were, and wherever you lived, broadly speaking, if you felt proud and trusting in your local community, you were more likely to feel constructive national pride, and therefore more likely to engage in democratic systems or have trust in institutions, and vice versa.

But given the seismic political, social and economic ruptures of the past 15 years - in the UK and globally - how is pride experienced today in the UK? Is the Chain of Pride still relevant in today's fractured political context and fragmented information ecosystem? And if we accept that the yearning to feel pride - in individual life circumstances, in community and neighbourhood, and ultimately as a citizen of the nation - is a powerful driver, then how does mainstream politics meet this need today?

SECTION 2

MAINSTREAM POLITICS & THE FAILURE ON PRIDE

MAINSTREAM POLITICS AND PRIDE

The 2011 Demos report 'A Place for Pride' made the case that mainstream politics was failing to connect with people's experiences of pride, or to take seriously the deep human desire to feel pride in self, in community and at a national level. With remarkable prescience, the authors warned that both major political parties ignored pride at their peril.

Mainstream politics, they said, had become queasy about addressing pride directly. Both on the left and the right, the mainstream parties were, for different reasons, dismissive of the need to offer a unifying narrative about what it meant to be proud of Britain. The authors warned that mainstream politics, in failing to take pride seriously risked fuelling a 'vicious circle of self-doubt' which would cause citizens to 'drift away from civic responsibility'. Citizens were at risk of increasing alienation driven by a lack of emotional connection between politics and what mattered most to them. This in turn would fuel lack of trust and the 'pessimism gap': scepticism that mainstream politics could make Britain a better place'. In 2011, 21% of people agreed with the statement 'Britain's best days are behind her'.

A 'PESSIMISM GAP' TO 'DEMOCRATIC DOOM LOOP'

The 2011 predictions have been more than borne out. Five years after the publication of 'A Place for Pride', the Brexit referendum acted as an outlet: a moment for large swathes of the population, notably older people, people on lower incomes or living in 'left-behind' areas, to vent frustration that the status quo was not delivering.²⁹

29 Ipsos. (2016, September 5). How Britain voted in the 2016 EU referendum. <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/how-britain-voted-2016-eu-referendum>

The Leave campaign narrative of a distant bureaucracy limiting freedom and eroding national identity was strongly threaded with a desire to feel proud once more: of Britain and British culture, of individual life circumstances, and to regain some sense of connection with Westminster, which was characterised as out of touch with everyday life and in thrall to the EU.

Whether it was the Brexit referendum itself, or the chaotic extrication of the UK from the EU and accompanying intense political churn that followed, 2016 marked a seismic shift in the relationship between state and citizen in the UK.³⁰ What at the beginning of the 2010s could be aptly described as a 'pessimism gap' became something far more rapidly evolving, with power to radically reshape our political landscape, trust in institutions and engagement with democracy itself.

15 years on from 'A Place for Pride', in a pattern mirrored across Europe, in the US and further afield, the political centre in the UK is in collapse, accompanied by record-low economic optimism and record-high mistrust of politics and democratic institutions. Where the 'pessimism gap' once described a fault line between mainstream politics and the electorate, there now exists a yawning chasm. In this void, populist actors gain ground, appealing to frustration and pessimism, with promises to 'tear it all down'.

This is the 'democratic doom loop', a rapidly accelerating downward spiral in which mainstream politics, lacking the trust of citizens, is paralysed and unable to tackle the grand challenges of our times, further exacerbating distrust. Westminster and the institutions once held dear in national consciousness, such as the BBC, are perceived as distant and operating in a bubble. Stagnant economic growth, worsening living standards and pervasive precarity cements the feeling that the state, politics and, ultimately, democracy itself, is not delivering. Reversing the doom loop will require a rebuilding of the broken relationships across our democratic system - between state and citizen, citizen and institutions and between citizens themselves.

THE EVOLUTION OF PRIDE IN POLITICS AND POLICY

Facing the deepening pessimism gap, we have seen a remarkable shift in the role of pride in political and policy discourse since 2011. The 2011 thesis that mainstream politics was not concerned with pride is no longer the case: 'Take Back Control' (Leave campaign, Brexit referendum 2016), 'Pride in Britain' (Labour's local election campaign, 2026) and in the US, 'Make America Great Again' (Trump, 2016 and 2024), are all campaign slogans that promise a restoration of pride and a sense of belonging. Sitting below the headlines are policies and programmes that explicitly seek to engineer pride: Pride in Place, Northern Powerhouse, Levelling Up and more.

On policy, the Johnson government's 'Levelling Up' agenda was a flagship agenda geared towards embedding local pride to address the 'geography of discontent' revealed by Brexit.^{31,32} The Levelling Up agenda was accompanied by over £10billion of funding and included specific (if flawed) metrics of pride as a policy objective. The 2024 Labour government has rebadged, reshaped and expanded this agenda, with policies such as Pride in Place, Test, Learn and Grow and Neighbourhood Health within the 10 Year Health Plan.^{33,34,35} The Devolution and

30 Moss J, Robinson E, Watts J (2020) Brexit and the everyday politics of emotion: methodological lessons from history. *Political Studies* 68(4): 837–856

31 Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. (2022, February 2). Levelling up the United Kingdom. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-the-united-kingdom>

32 McCann, P. (2020). Perceptions of regional inequality and the geography of discontent: Insights from the UK. *Regional Studies*, 54(2), 256–267. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2019.1619928>

33 Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government. (2025). Pride in Place. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/pride-in-place>

34 Cabinet Office. (2025). Communities across the country to benefit from 'innovation squads' to re-build public services. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/communities-across-the-country-to-benefit-from-innovation-squads-to-re-build-public-service>

35 Department of Health and Social Care, & NHS England. (2026). Neighbourhood health framework. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/neighbourhood-health-framework/neighbourhood-health-framework>

Community Empowerment Act (May 2026) and accompanying guidance established strategic authorities and expanded powers for mayors and local authorities, alongside specific measures to increase community ownership (Community Right to Buy) and input into development of local high streets.³⁶ Notably, these policy initiatives have largely focussed on local pride. National and institutional pride, on the other hand, have been largely overlooked.

However, despite the growing prominence of pride, these policies have struggled to bridge the growing pessimism gap and build a unifying sense of pride at national or local level. Herein lies a fundamental challenge: pride does not operate like a traditional policy target. Pride is an emotional state, experiential and shaped powerfully by local context and the texture of daily life, but also by the nature and experience of institutions and the story of the nation. This creates a tension at the heart of policy to promote pride. Policy design, evaluation and implementation is fundamentally ill equipped at present to engineer changes in emotional states or responses to narrative and discourse. And with the rise of populist and increasingly nationalistic rhetoric, we urgently need a better understanding of the levels and nature of national and institutional pride (in both positive and negative forms) and how policy can, in line with the 2011 Place for Pride thesis, leverage pride for democratic resilience. To interrogate whether pride could play an instrumental role in reversing the democratic doom loop, this research repeated the 2011 polling, exploring how pride has changed in Britain over the past 15 years.

36 UK Parliament. (2025). English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill. Parliamentary Bills. <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/4002>

SECTION 3

THE NEW PICTURE OF PRIDE

The 15 years since the 2011 research, 'A Place for Pride', have been anything but uneventful in the UK. Living standards have faced a historic stagnation. We left the European Union. We have seen intense political churn, with seven Prime Ministers in the last decade. Queen Elizabeth's death ended the reign of the world's longest ever serving monarch and the Royal family has been rocked by continuous drama and scandal. Our two party-system - a constant of the British political system for over 100 years - looks more like a five party system. The percentage of the public with a smart phone has increased from less than half to almost everyone.³⁷ And globally, a pandemic shook the world, Trump was elected to the White House twice, global alliances have been reshaped, and multiple conflicts have shaken the world.

In this context, the Chain of Pride in the country has been dramatically reshaped. We see a general collapse in both national and institutional pride, underlied by a fragmentation in how the Chain of Pride is experienced. Different groups with different social experiences now have very different feelings about pride - with particular divides across politics, place and generation.³⁸ Views diverge most strongly around civic and democratic institutions on the one hand and traditionalist and national symbolic institutions on the other.

We put this down to social fragmentation. Politics has become more polarised. Place-based divides have widened. Generational inequalities have increased. All these gaps map onto different experiences of pride. As such, the shared foundation required for broad institutional or national pride has been hollowed out.

37 Ofcom. (2025). Share of smartphone users in the United Kingdom (UK) from 2011 to 2024 [Graph]. In Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/300398/smartphone-usage-in-the-united-kingdom/>

38 While the survey questions provide some insights into pride in relation to race, ethnicity and immigration issues, it is not a key focus because the research repeated the 2011 polling, when the issue was less salient. Further exploration into this aspect of pride would be valuable.

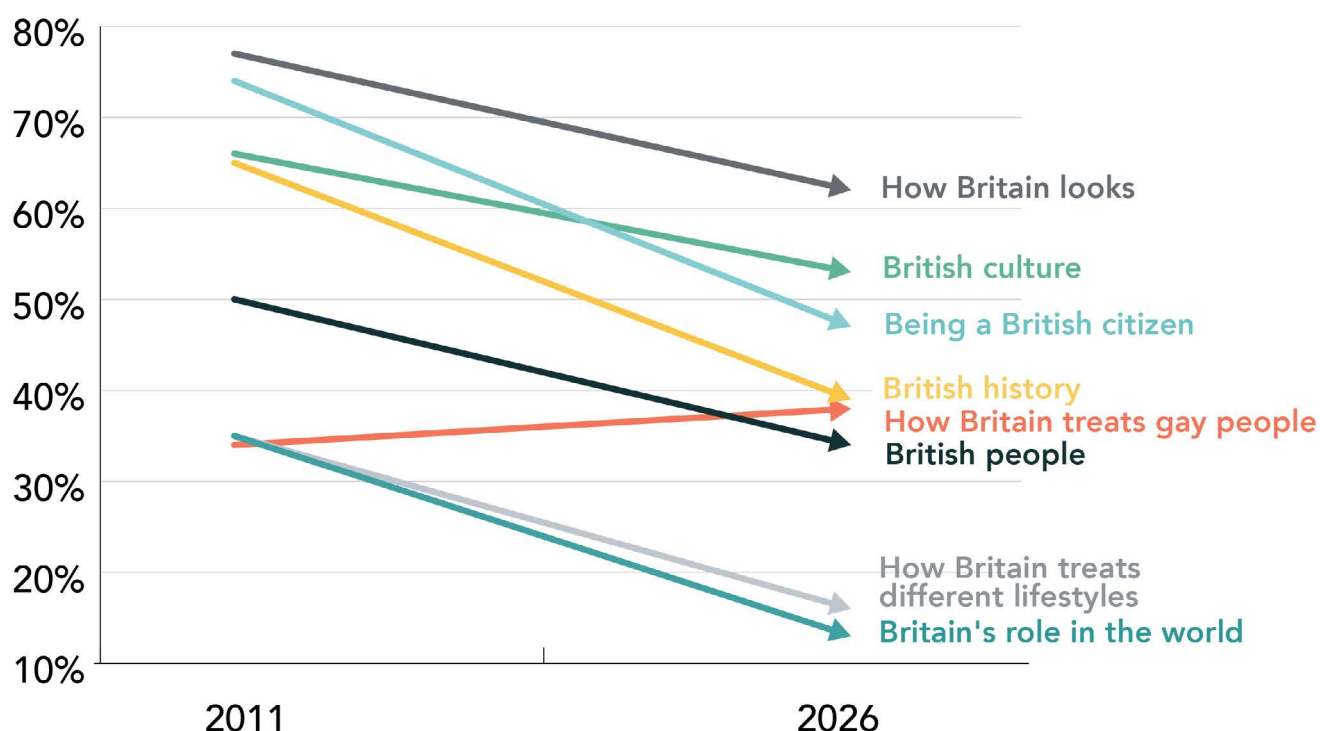
NATIONAL PRIDE HAS FALLEN

Pride in almost all aspects of the British nation has plummeted since 2011: be it pride in British people, culture, history, citizenship, or our role in the world. Pride in being a British citizen (measured by net levels of agreement with the statement "I am proud of...") has fallen from 74% to 47%. Pride in British history has fallen from 65% to 39%. Pride in Britain's place in the world has fallen from 35% to 13%. The only exception to this collapse is pride in 'how Britain treats gay people'.

CHART 2

Pride in British national life has almost universally collapsed, with Britain's treatment of gay people being the only exception

"I am proud of..." - Net Agreement



INSTITUTIONAL AND SYMBOLIC PRIDE HAS FALLEN, PARTICULARLY IN SOME AREAS

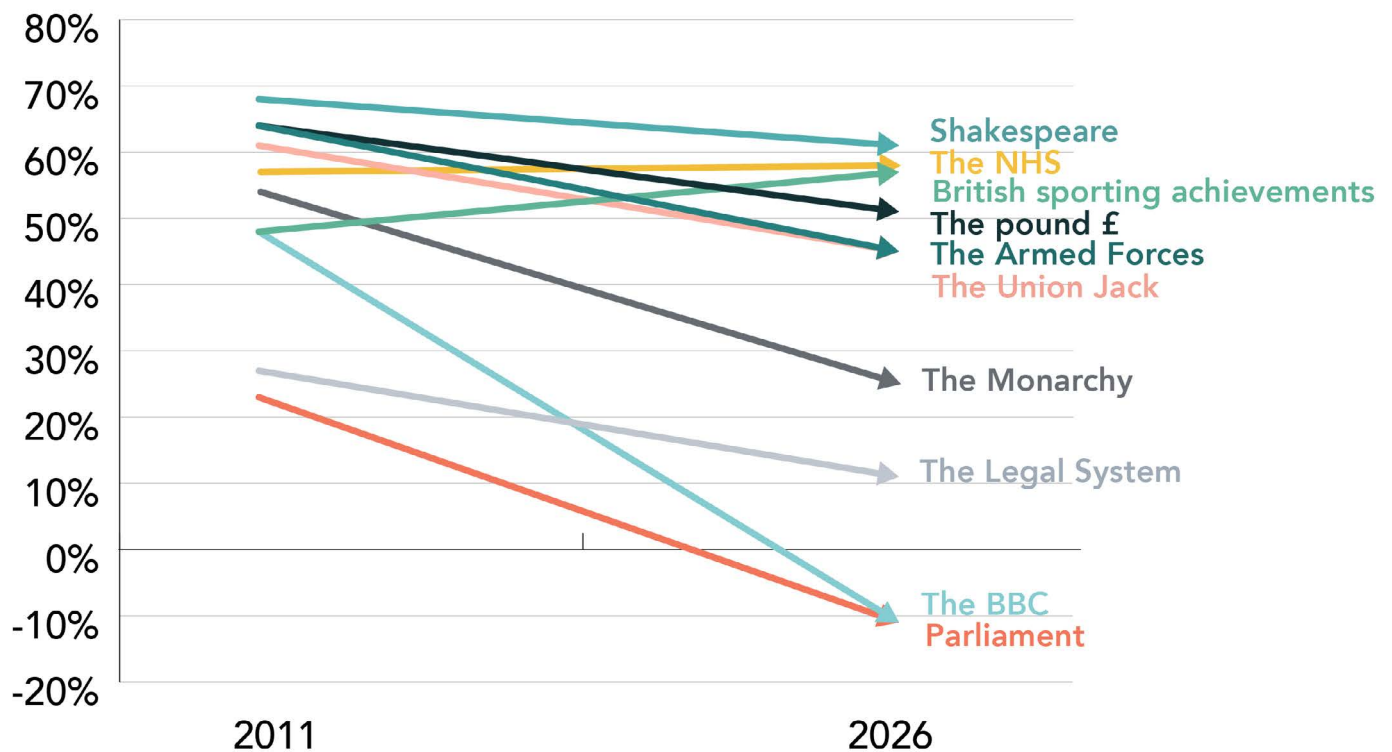
Alongside pride in national life, pride has fallen in the institutional and symbolic markers of nationhood - from the Union Jack to the pound to the monarchy (the latter falling dramatically from 54% to 25%). The fall is furthest for those markers most closely associated with mainstream politics and the institutions at the heart of our democracy - notably Parliament (from 23% to -11%) and the BBC (from 48% to -11%). This suggests the political state has had a particularly rough 15 years.

But this is not just a story of political disillusionment. With pride in the pound falling (from 68% to 51%) and even Shakespeare taking a hit to an extent (from 68% to 61%), the data suggests a deeper thinning of shared national meaning. In this context, it is no surprise that pessimism about Britain has also risen. The proportion of people saying 'Britain's best days are behind her' has more than doubled, from 21% in 2011 to 45% in 2026.

CHART 3

Pride in institutions and symbols of Britain has almost universally collapsed, particularly in the BBC, Parliament and the monarchy

"I am proud of...as a symbol of Britain" - Net Agreement



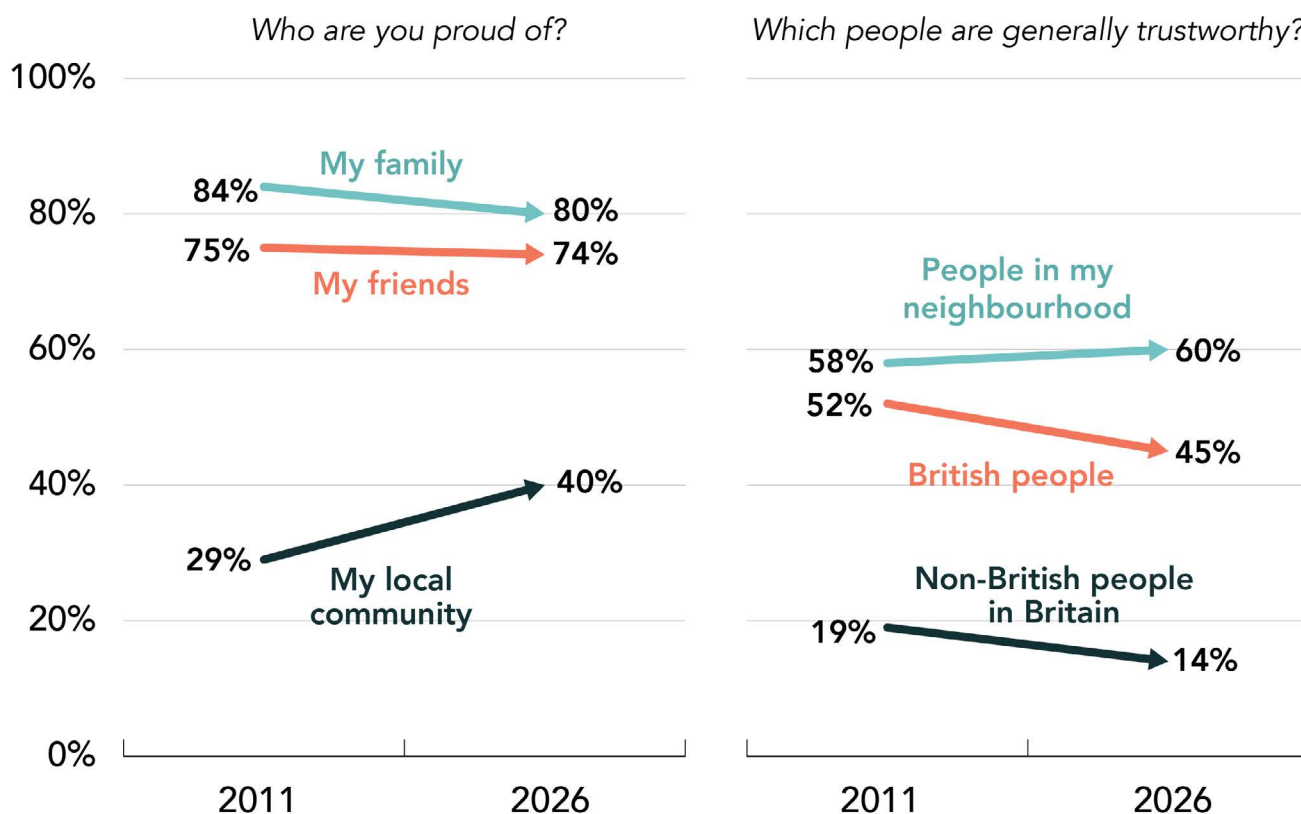
Taken together, these trends point to a hollowing-out of the higher end of the Chain of Pride - the national perspective, as well as the institutional and symbolic perspective.

BUT LOCAL PRIDE BUCKS THE TREND

As national pride has fallen, local pride and trust has bucked the trend. While pride in family and friends has, respectively, declined slightly or stayed level, people feel much more pride in their local community, jumping from 29% to 40%. Similarly, while trust in British people and non-British people have both declined, trust in people in one's neighbourhood has increased slightly.

CHART 4

Pride in local community and trust in neighbours has bucked the trend



The conflicting trends for local and national pride suggests a decoupling in the Chain of Pride. In 2011, strong local attachment, institutional pride and national pride tended to reinforce one another. Today, that link seems weakened.

GREEN AND REFORM SUPPORTERS HAVE PARTICULARLY LOW PRIDE IN KEY NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND SYMBOLS

The recent surge in the polls for Reform UK and the Green party has shaken British political debate. The rise of both parties - which are further right and left respectively than any other main party - is seen as a rejection of the status quo. But to what extent is that associated with a lack of pride in British life, its institution and its symbols? Our analysis finds that supporters of each party have extremely low pride in key aspects of national life and our institutions, but in different ways.

Reform supporters tend to have very high levels of pride in the 'intrinsic' aspects of the British nation - those which are associated with the nation itself, rather than how the nation interacts with the world. They express high levels of pride in British history, culture, citizenship and people. In contrast, Reform supporters have relatively low levels of pride in the 'relational' aspects of the British nation - about how the nation relates to different cultures and the world.

This is expressed in low levels of pride in how Britain treats people with different lifestyles and Britain's role in the world.

Underlying this is their high levels of pride in some national institutions and symbols such as the Union Jack, the pound, and the Armed Forces. These institutions and symbols share the quality of being traditionalist (they refer to long-established norms, values and practices) and/or designed to be symbolic of the nation, with the Union Jack being the clearest case. But this pride in traditionalist and nation-symbolic institutions coexists with deep scepticism towards institutions such as the NHS, and particularly the legal system, the BBC and Parliament. These institutions are similar in their civic and democratic nature - they are designed to strengthen our civil society and democracy. Across this picture, we see pride among Reform voters tends to be anchored in a *symbolic and intrinsic idea of the British nation*, but without confidence in its civic infrastructure or how it relates to different cultures or the world.

Green supporters, in contrast, display low levels of pride across the board. For every aspect of national life, Green supporters display the lowest level of pride of any of the main party supporters. Underlying this, we see Green supporters expressing a mixed bag of pride in civic and democratic institutions - low for Parliament, relatively moderate for the BBC and legal system, and high for the NHS. But perhaps more notably, Green supporters have extremely low levels of pride in traditionalist and national-symbolic institutions, with negative net pride in the monarchy, armed forces, and the Union Jack.

CHART 5

Pride in the nation is highly fragmented across party supporters

"I am proud of..." - Net Agreement by Westminster VI (2026)

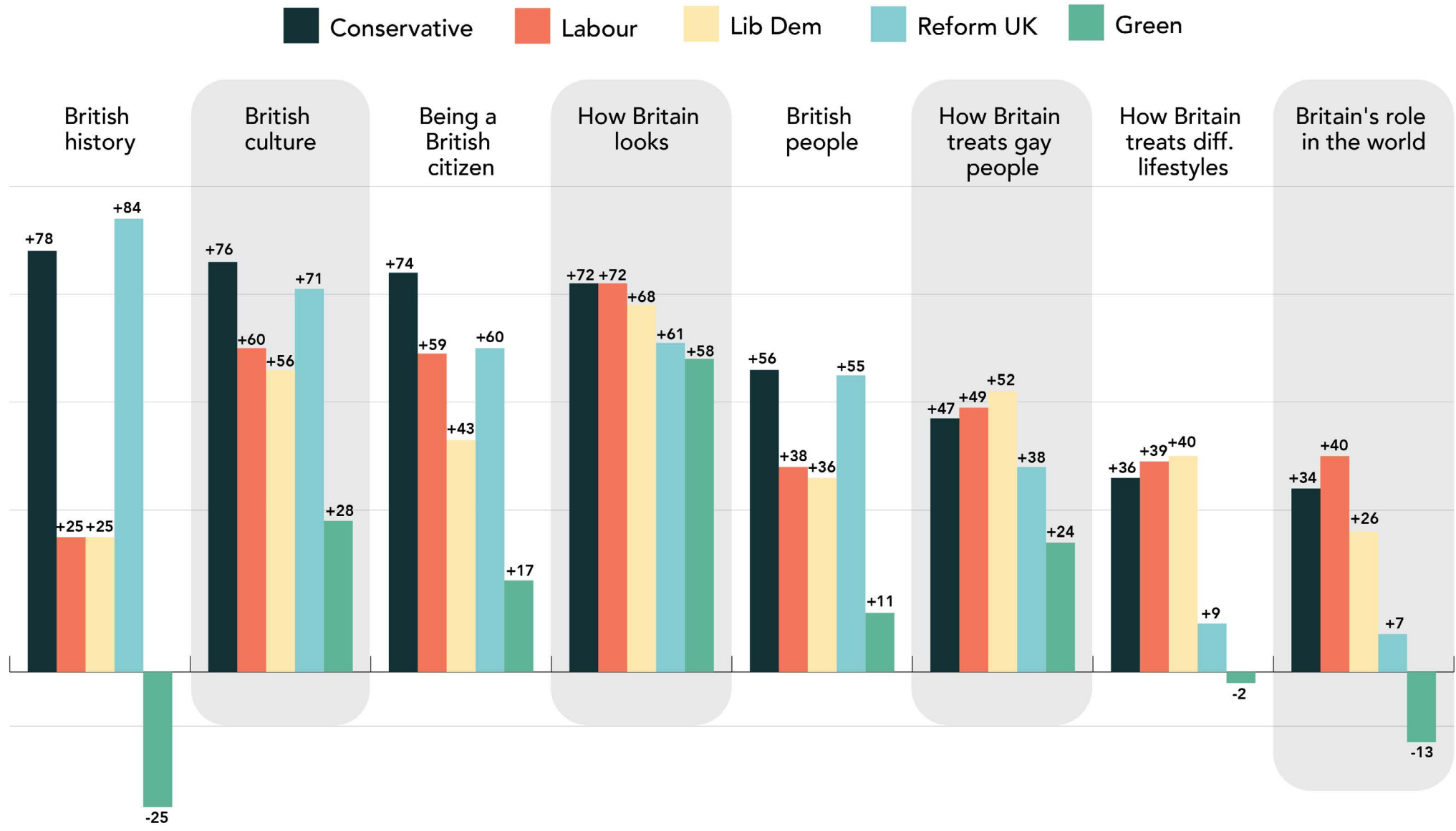
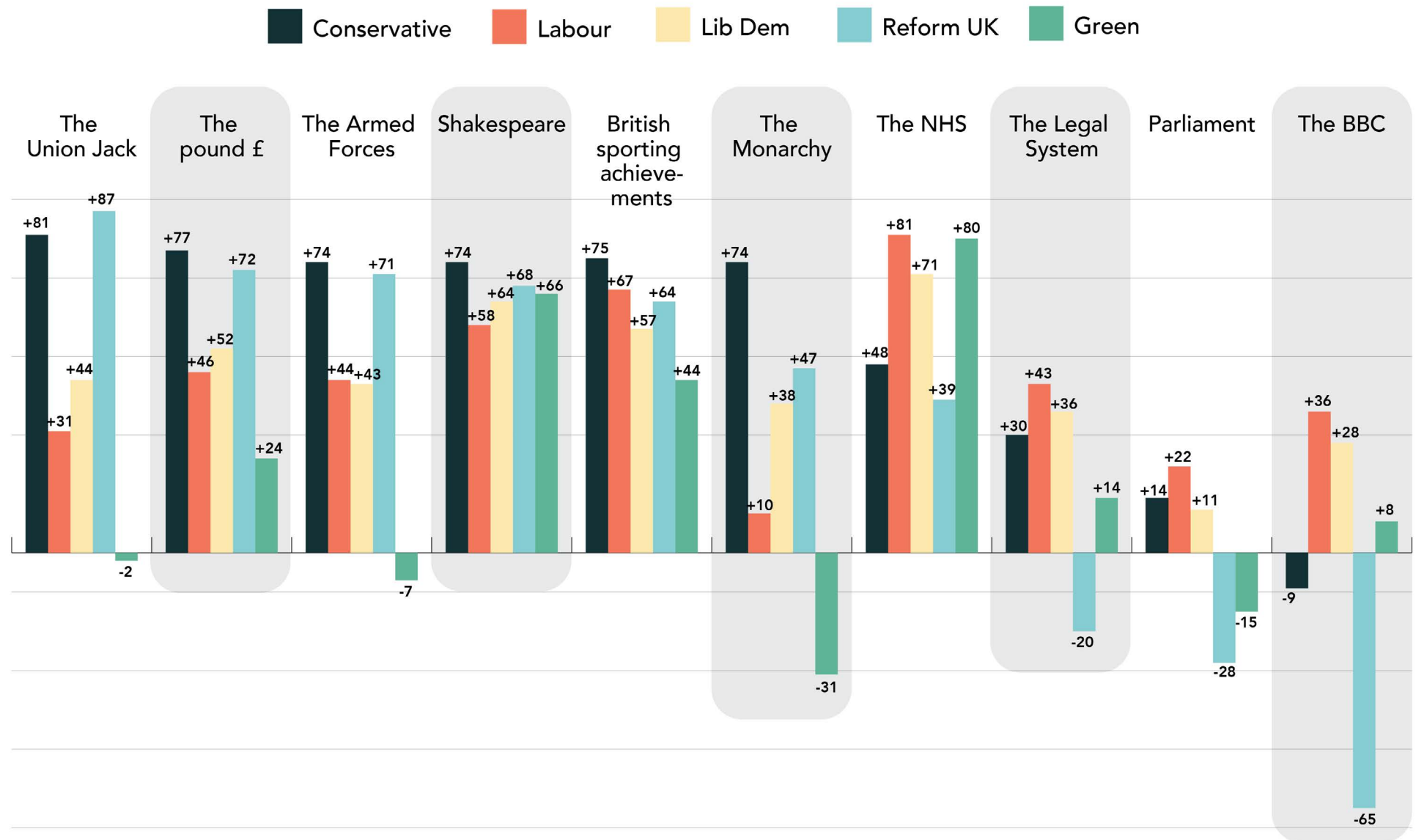


CHART 6

Pride in nation symbols is highly fragmented across party supporters

"I am proud of...as a symbol of Britain" - Net Agreement by Westminster VI (2026)



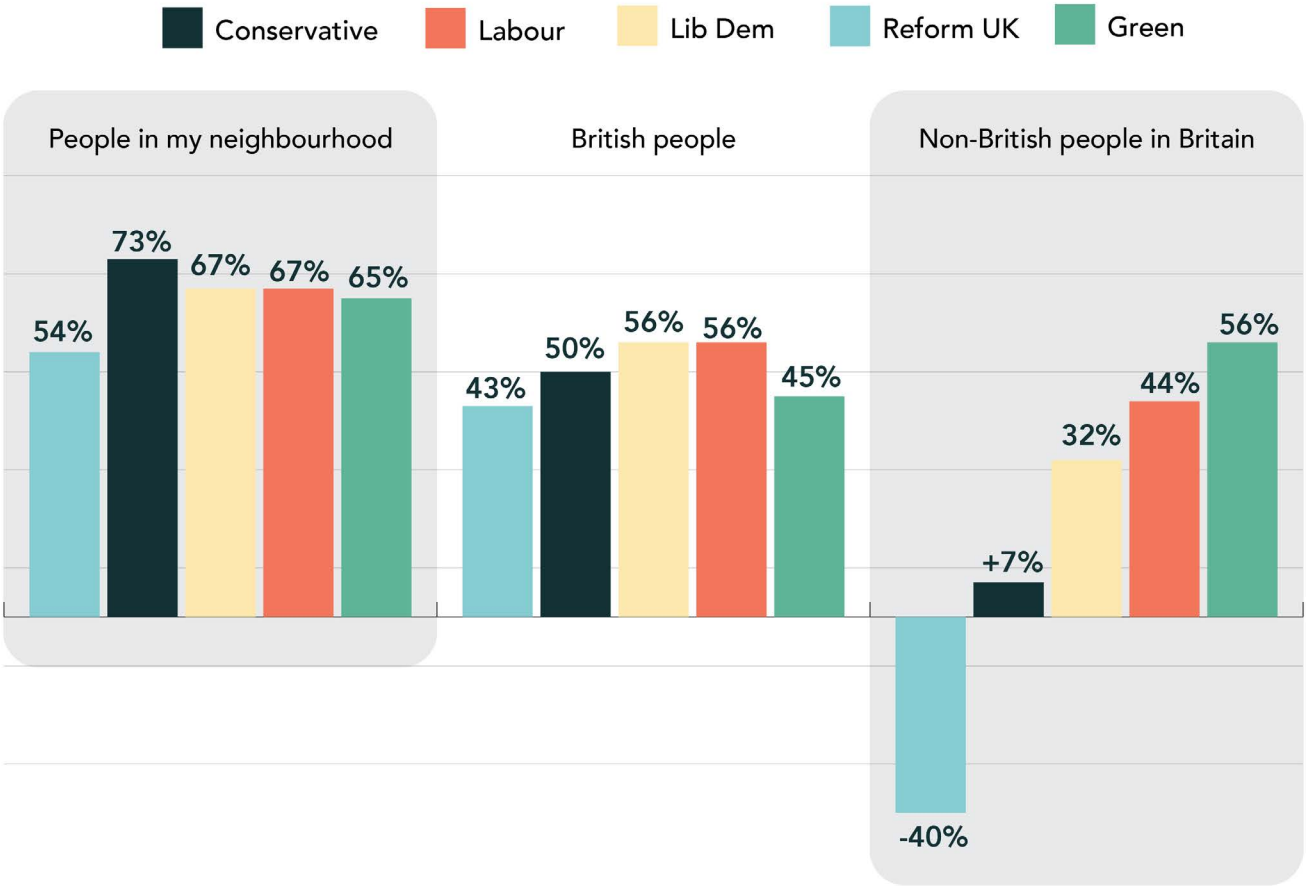
A shared territory for Green and Reform supporters does emerge in their low levels of pride in the local community. Among Reform supporters and Green supporters, net pride in their community is 37% and 38% respectively. This contrasts with other party supporters. The figure is, for example, 59% among Conservative supporters, 49% among Labour supporters, and 45% among Lib Dem supporters. Green supporters and Reform UK also have slightly lower levels of trust in British people (45% and 43% respectively) than supporters of all other parties (e.g. 56% among Labour supporters).

Where the camps dramatically diverge, however, is in views on non-British people. Net agreement that non-British people in Britain are trustworthy is -40% among Reform supporters, compared to +56% among Green supporters. This points to a widely discussed, highly contested ground.

CHART 7

Levels of trust in non-British people is highly fragmented across party supporters

"Are people generally trustworthy? - Net Agreement by Westminster VI (2026)



The evidence demonstrated that Reform and Green supporters are divided in their experience of the Chain of Pride, with low pride in many areas.

	LOCAL	INSTITUTIONAL	NATIONAL
Reform supporters	Low local pride and low interpersonal trust - but particularly low trust of non-British people.	High traditionalist and national-symbolic pride but extremely low civic and democratic pride.	High pride in intrinsic aspects of national life but low pride in relational aspects.
Green Supporters	Low local pride and low interpersonal trust - but particularly high trust of non-British people.	A mixed bag in terms of civic and democratic pride, but extremely low traditionalist and national-symbolic pride.	Low pride in both intrinsic and relational aspects of national life.

The substantial rise of these parties over the past year - with supporters sharing a lack of pride in key areas of national life - demonstrates how pride is becoming less of a unifying national resource, and more a site of political contestation. A myriad of different values and beliefs will underlie this divergence, which is a topic of extensive political debate. But one critical factor is divergent social experiences. Green and Reform supporters have very different demographic makeups, particularly across generational and socioeconomic lines. The next sub-sections explores how generational and socioeconomic divides are, likewise, a fundamental part of the picture of pride.

UNDERLYING POLITICAL FRAGMENTATION IN PRIDE ARE GROWING GENERATIONAL DIVIDES

Among 18-24 year olds, just one in every 14 intended to vote for Reform at the start of May 2026, while almost half intended to vote Green.³⁹ Among people aged over 65, the figures were reversed - around a third intended to vote Reform, while just one in every 25 intended to vote Green. On socioeconomics, Reform polls almost twice as high among people with routine jobs than those with high socioeconomic status jobs, and three times as high among people with lower levels of education (GCSEs or lower) than with graduates. The opposite is true for Greens - although to a lesser extent. They poll slightly higher among people with high socioeconomic status, but more than twice as high among graduates than people with GCSEs or lower.

These demographic divides - and the different experiences they are associated with - hold some explanatory power for why Green and Reform party supporters hold different forms of pride.

Older cohorts report significantly higher levels of pride than younger people in almost all aspects of national life. We see this across pride in British culture (68% for over 65s vs 34% for 18-24 year olds), British history (67% vs -10%), being a British citizen (59% vs 39%) and British people (45% vs 25%). On institutions and symbols, the picture is more complex. Older people also have much higher levels of pride than young people in traditionalist and national-symbolic institutions than younger people, particularly the armed forces, the Union Jack and the monarchy. Young people then have higher levels of pride in all of the civic and democratic institutions we asked about barring the legal system, including the NHS, Parliament, and the BBC.

39 YouGov. (2026). Voting intention, 4–5 May 2026: Ref 25%, Lab 18%, Con 17%, Grn 15%, LD 14%. YouGov. <https://yougov.com/en-gb/articles/54701-voting-intention-4-5-may-2026-ref-25-lab-18-con-17-grn-15-ld-14>

While older people have higher net pride in the monarchy than the NHS, among young people net pride in the monarchy is a massive 84 percentage points lower than net pride in the NHS.

CHART 8

Older people have more pride in British culture, history, citizenship, and people

"I am proud of..." - Net Agreement by age

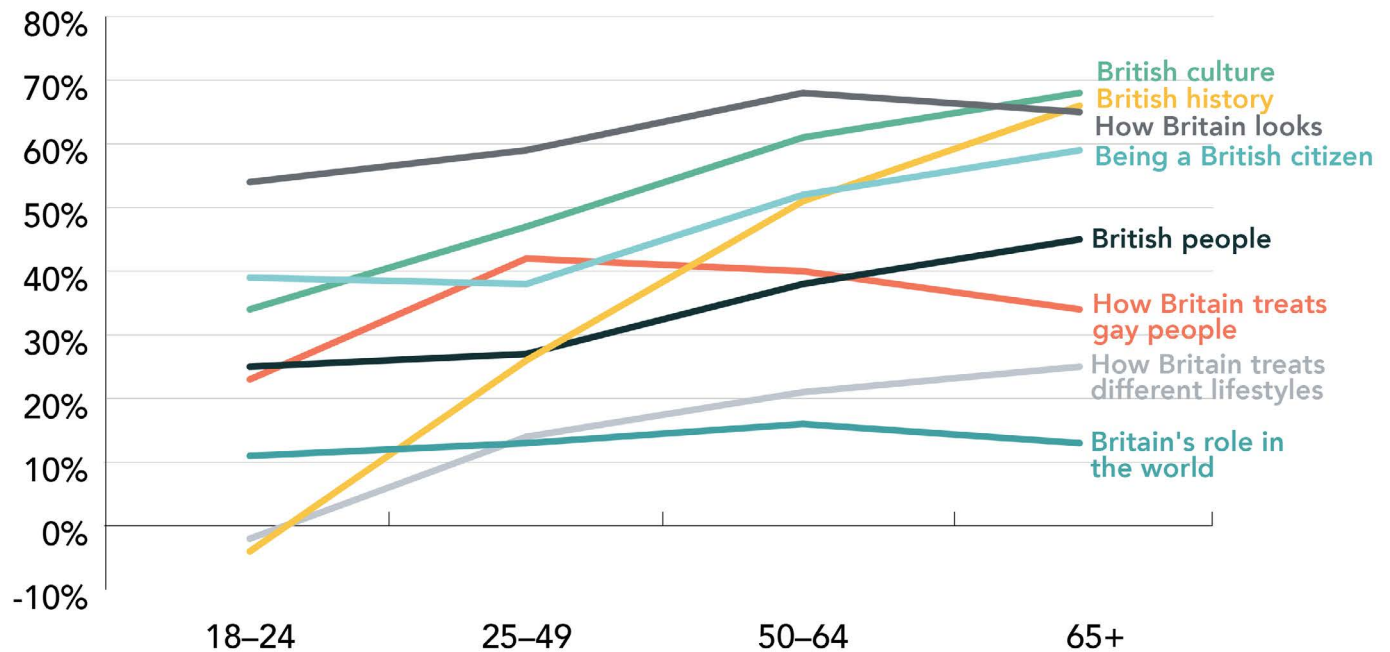
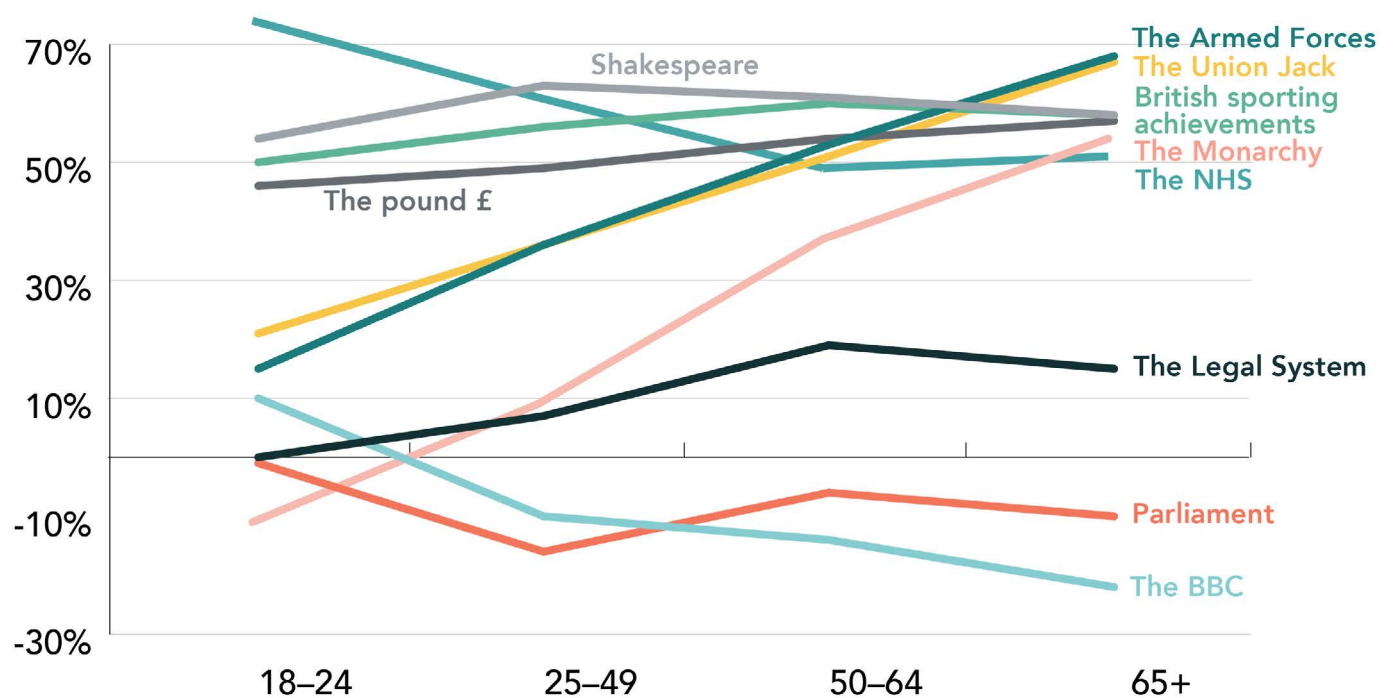


CHART 9

Older people have more pride in national symbols but less pride in institutions like the NHS, BBC and Parliament

"I am proud of...as a symbol of Britain" - Net Agreement by age



The generational gaps we see today have, to a large degree, arisen in the past 15 years. In 2011, the gaps in pride between young people (18-24 year olds) and older people (65+) were moderate, but these have widened dramatically since. In 2011, net pride in British history was 54% among young people and 70% among older people - a gap of 16 percentage points. Fast forward to 2026, and net pride in British history is -4% and 66% respectively - a 70 percentage point gap. On pride in how Britain treats people with different lifestyles, a 4 percentage point gap in 2011 (39% net pride among the young and 35% among the old) has surged to a 27 percentage point gap today (-2% among the young and 25% among the old). We see a similar story of growing generational divides across all areas of pride in national life, barring pride in treatment of gay people, where the divide has more than halved.

CHART 10

The old and young have become much more divided on pride in Britain since 2011

"I am proud of..." Net agreement by age, by year

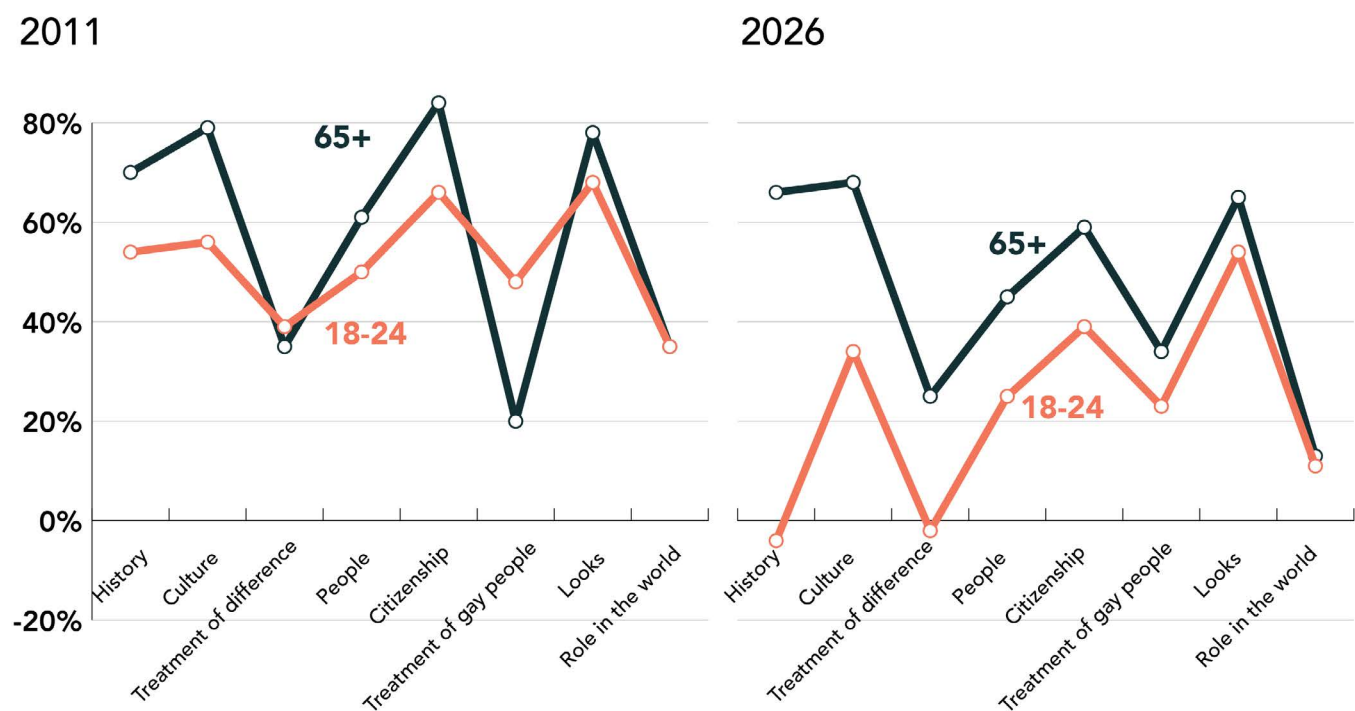
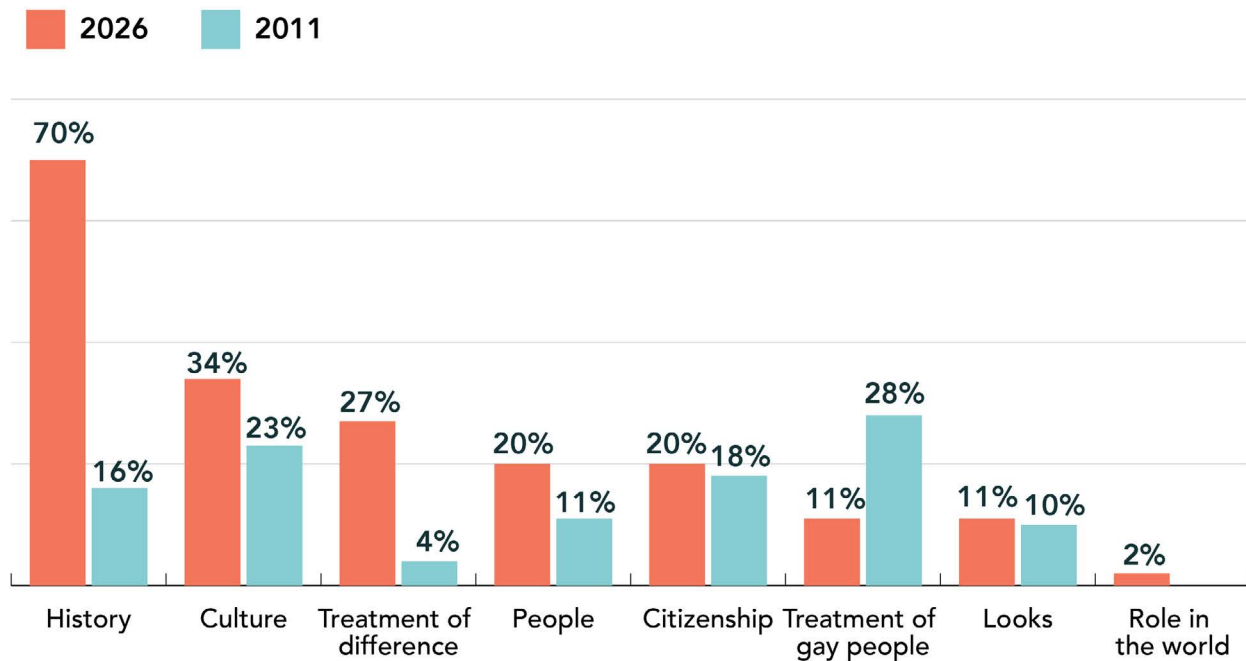


CHART 11

Gaps in pride between 18-24 and 65+



Alongside growing divides across pride in national life, we see growing divides in institutional pride. Among traditionalist and national-symbolic institutions, pride has collapsed among the young. Net pride in the monarchy has, among the young, fallen from 46% to -11%, but among older people it has remained fairly steady (falling from 61% to 54%). A 15 percentage point gap between generations has therefore grown to a 65 percentage points gap. The gap for the Union Jack, meanwhile, has grown from 14 percentage points to 46 - with net pride among the young falling from 57% to 21%. For civic and democratic institutions, pride has fallen across the board, but more dramatically among the old. Pride in the BBC, for example, fell by 71 percentage points among people aged over 65s. For Parliament, it fell by 49 percentage points.

CHART 12

The old and young have become much more divided on institutional pride since 2011

"I am proud of... as a symbol of Britain" Net agreement by age, by year

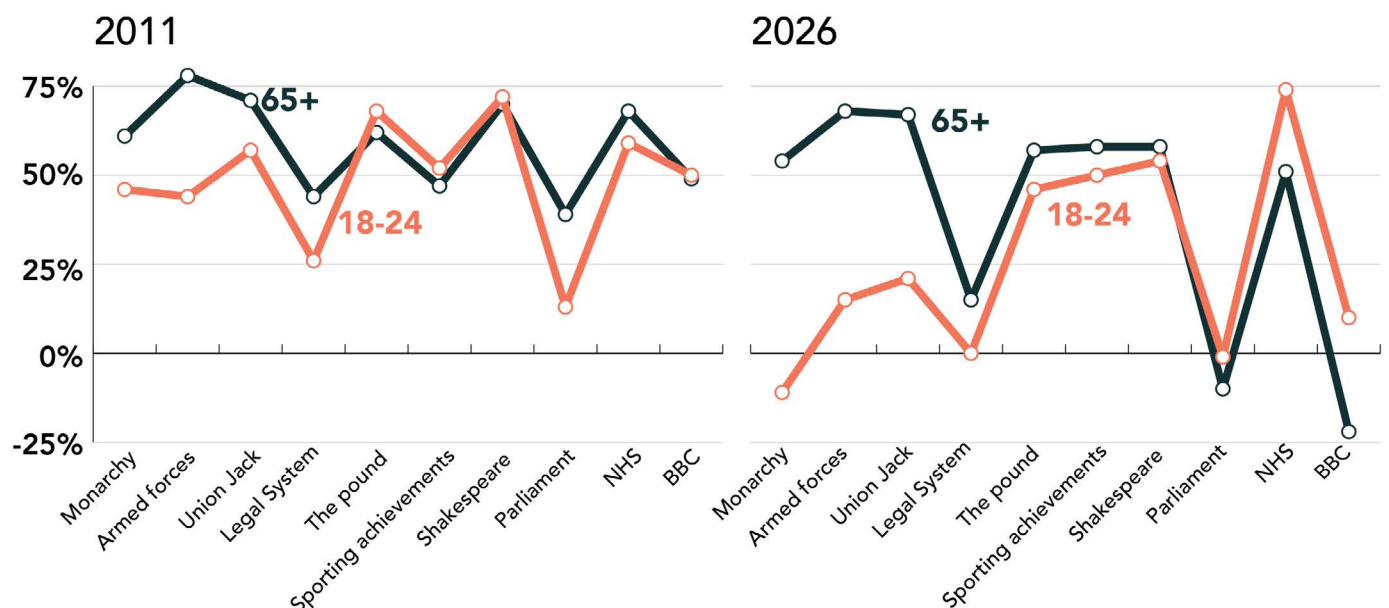
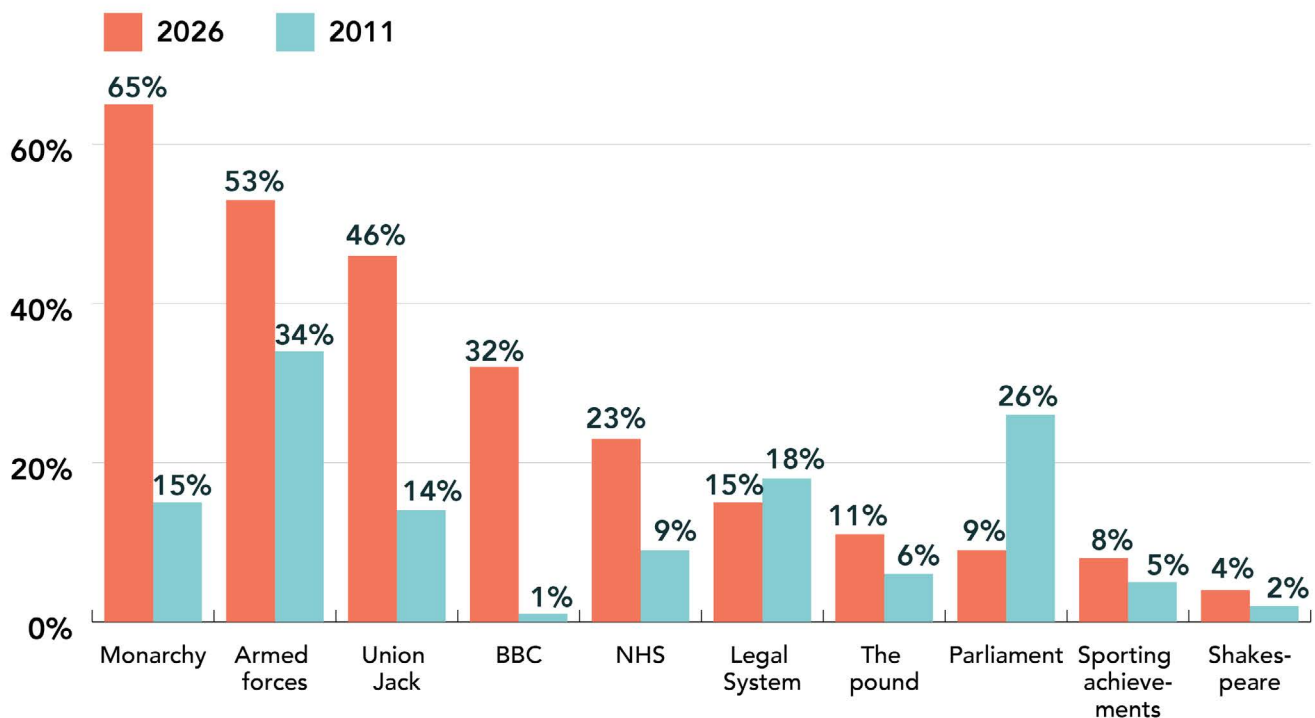


CHART 13

Gaps in pride between 18-24 and 65+



3.5 GROWING SOCIOECONOMIC DIVIDES ALSO UNDERLIE THE POLITICAL FRAGMENTATION

Socioeconomic divides add an extra layer to patterns in pride. The charts below measure socioeconomic status through the index of hyper-local need - which assesses levels of need in a neighbourhood in relation to the government's missions (on economic growth, clear energy, crime, social opportunity and health). We find that people in higher-need neighbourhoods have consistently lower levels of pride in British life, including how Britain looks (51% for highest-need decile vs 75% for lowest-need), British culture (36% vs 58%), British people (18% vs 42%) and Britain's role in the world (6% vs 24%).

Across national institutions and symbols, the picture is slightly more complicated. Neighbourhoods with different levels of need have similar levels of pride in traditionalist and national-symbolic institutions like the armed forces (36% for the highest need neighbourhoods vs 42% for the lowest need), but very different levels of pride in others like the monarchy (6% vs 34% respectively). But critically, bar the NHS, higher need neighbourhoods have lower levels of pride in all the civil and democratic institutions: the legal system, BBC and Parliament.

CHART 14

People in neighbourhoods with higher levels of need have less pride in Britain

"I am proud of..." Net agreement by decile on hyper-local need index (1=most need)

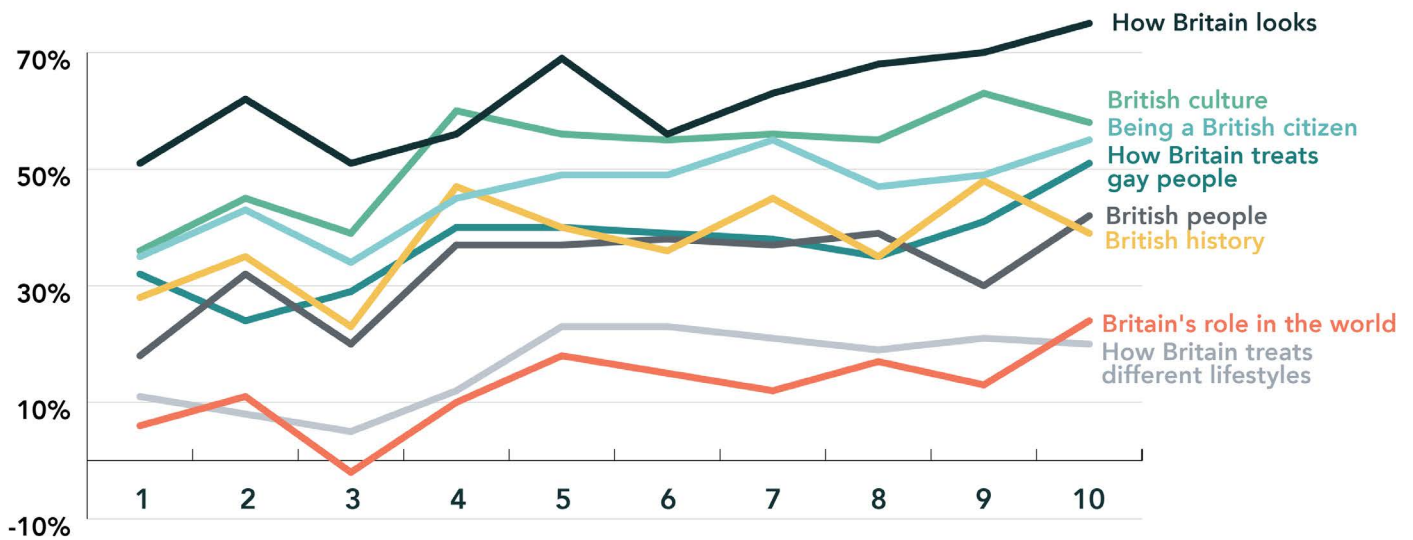
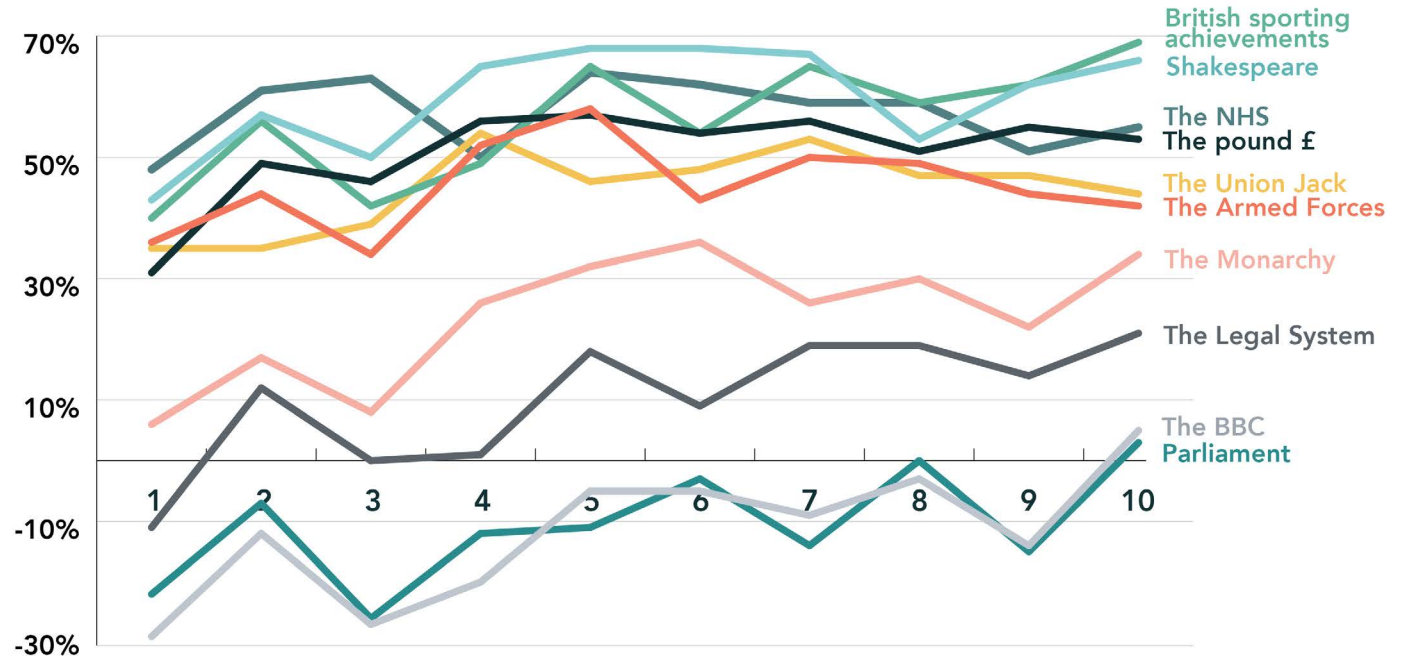


CHART 15

People in neighbourhoods with higher levels of need have less pride in symbols of Britain

"I am proud of...as a symbol of Britain" - Net agreement by decile on hyper-local need index (1=most need)



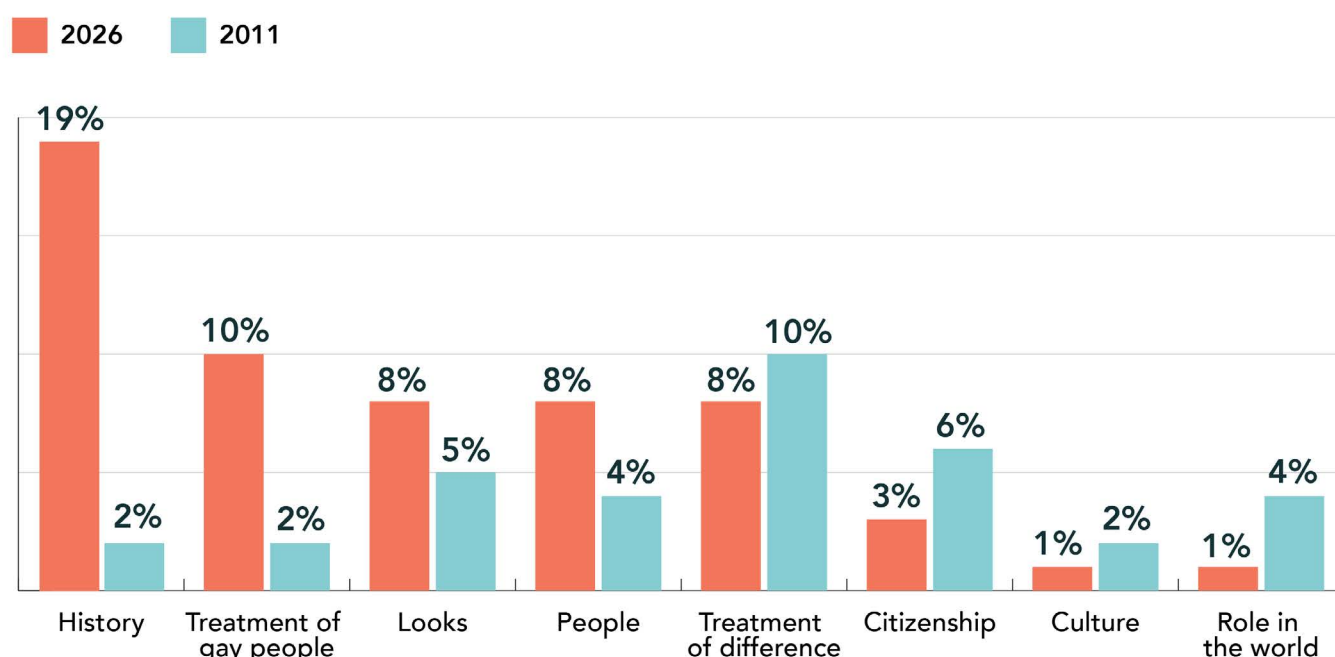
Once again, these divides have grown over time. On British history, the gap in net pride between people in higher socioeconomic classifications ('professional or higher technical worker' or 'manager or senior administrator') and lower socioeconomic classifications ('skilled manual worker' or 'semi-skilled or unskilled manual worker') has grown from 2% to 19%. This is largely because net pride among people in higher socioeconomic groups has almost halved

(from 59% to 30%), while net pride among people in lower socioeconomic groups has remained slightly steadier (from 61% to 49%). A similar story is seen on net pride in British people. The gap has doubled from 4% to 8%, with a particularly large drop among people in higher socioeconomic groups (from 46% to 31%). A contrasting story is seen for pride in treatment of gay people. The gap has grown from 2% to 10%, but because net pride among people in higher socioeconomic groups has grown more rapidly (from 32% to 46%) than among people in lower socioeconomic groups.

CHART 16

Higher and lower socioeconomic groups have become much more divided on pride in Britain since 2011

Gaps in pride between people of higher and lower socioeconomic groups



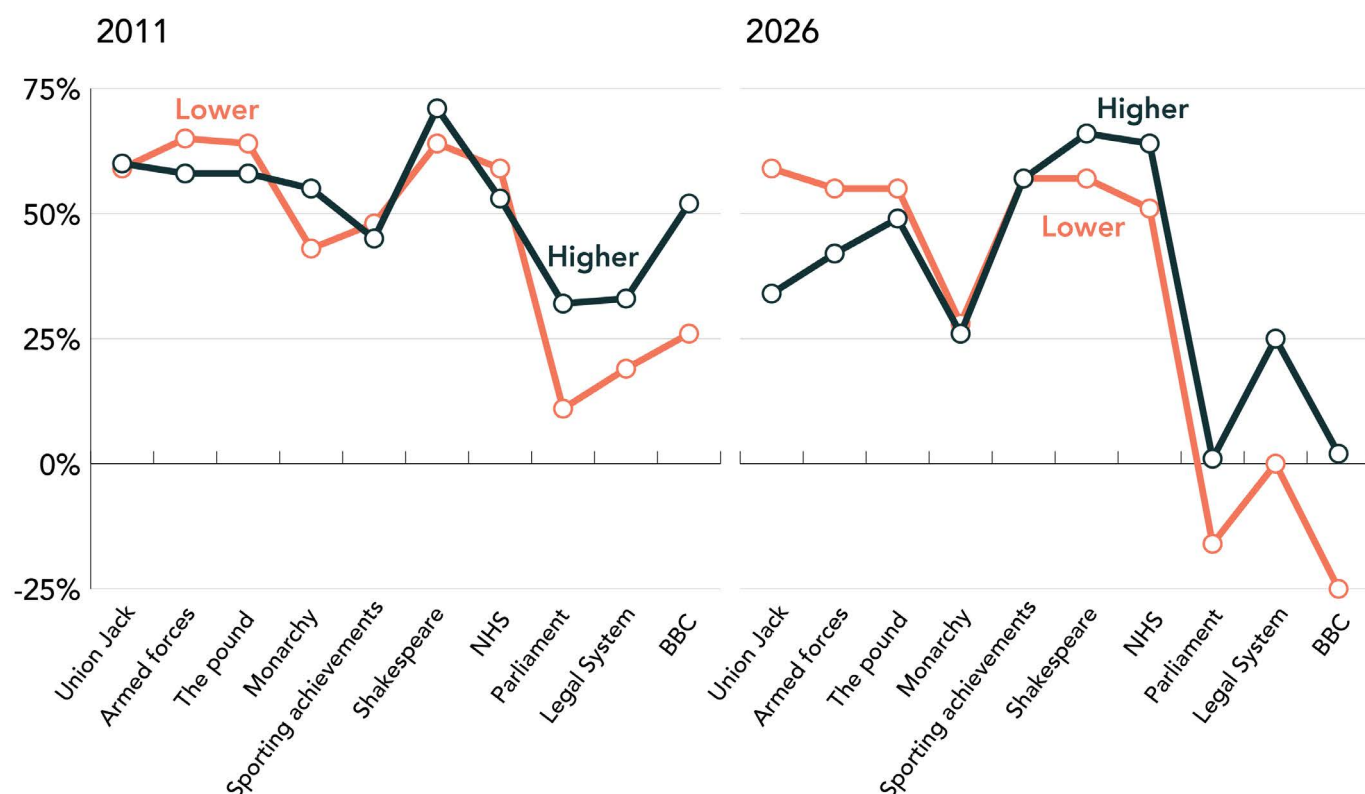
Once again, institutional pride follows a similar trend of growing division. Among traditionalist and national-symbolic institutions, pride has fallen largely among higher socioeconomic groups. Where the Union Jack once saw almost exactly the same level of net pride among higher and lower socioeconomic groups, pride among the former has since fallen by 26 percentage points, while pride among the latter has remained steady. A similar story, albeit less extreme, is seen for pride in the armed forces.

Among civic and democratic institutions, pride has fallen dramatically among both higher and lower socioeconomic groups - but often slightly more so among lower socioeconomic groups. For the legal system, net pride fell by 19 percentage points among lower socioeconomic groups but just 8 points among higher groups. For the NHS, net pride fell by 8 points among the lower socioeconomic group, but grew by 11 points among the higher socioeconomic group.

CHART 17

Higher and lower socioeconomic groups have become more divided on institutional pride since 2011

"I am proud of...as a symbol of Britain" Net agreement by socioeconomic classification, by year



GENERATIONAL AND SOCIOECONOMIC DIVIDES MAP ONTO DIFFERENT LEVELS OF SOCIAL TRUST AND, IN TURN, POLITICAL SUPPORT

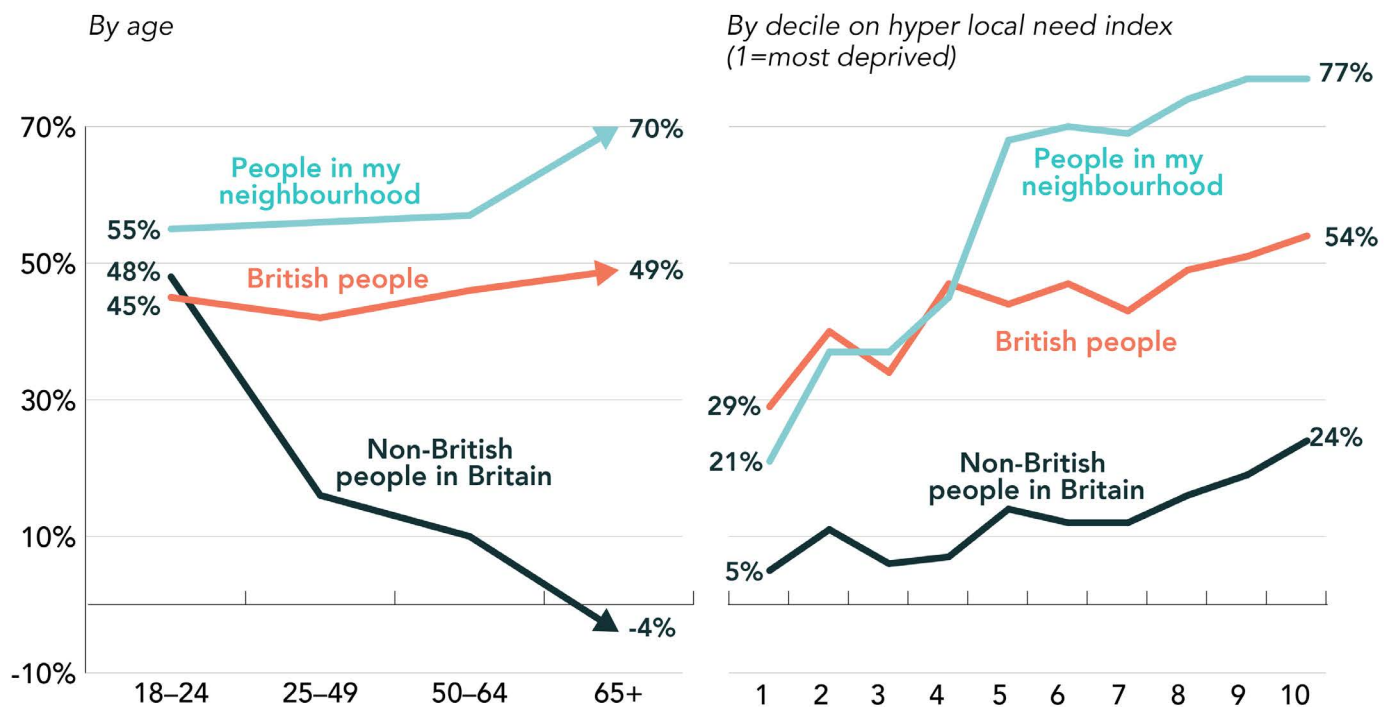
The generational and socioeconomic divides we have seen are associated with different approaches to trust in local people, British people, and non-British people. Older people - who have higher levels of pride in national life and traditionalist institutions, but lower pride in civic and democratic institutions like the BBC and NHS - are more likely than younger people to trust people in their neighbourhood but much less likely to trust non-British people in Britain. They are, as we have noted, more likely to support Reform. Younger people, meanwhile, are more likely to support the Green party.

On the socioeconomics, higher need neighbourhoods (or people in lower socioeconomic classifications) have lower levels of pride both in national life and traditionalist institutions, and in civic and democratic institutions. Correspondingly, we see that higher need neighbourhoods have less trust in all people, be it people in their neighbourhood, British people or non-British people in Britain. They too, are more likely to support Reform, while people in lower-need neighbourhoods are more likely to support Green.

CHART 18

The elderly are less trusting of non-British people, while people from high-need neighbourhoods are less trusting of all people

"[___] are generally trustworthy" (net agreement)



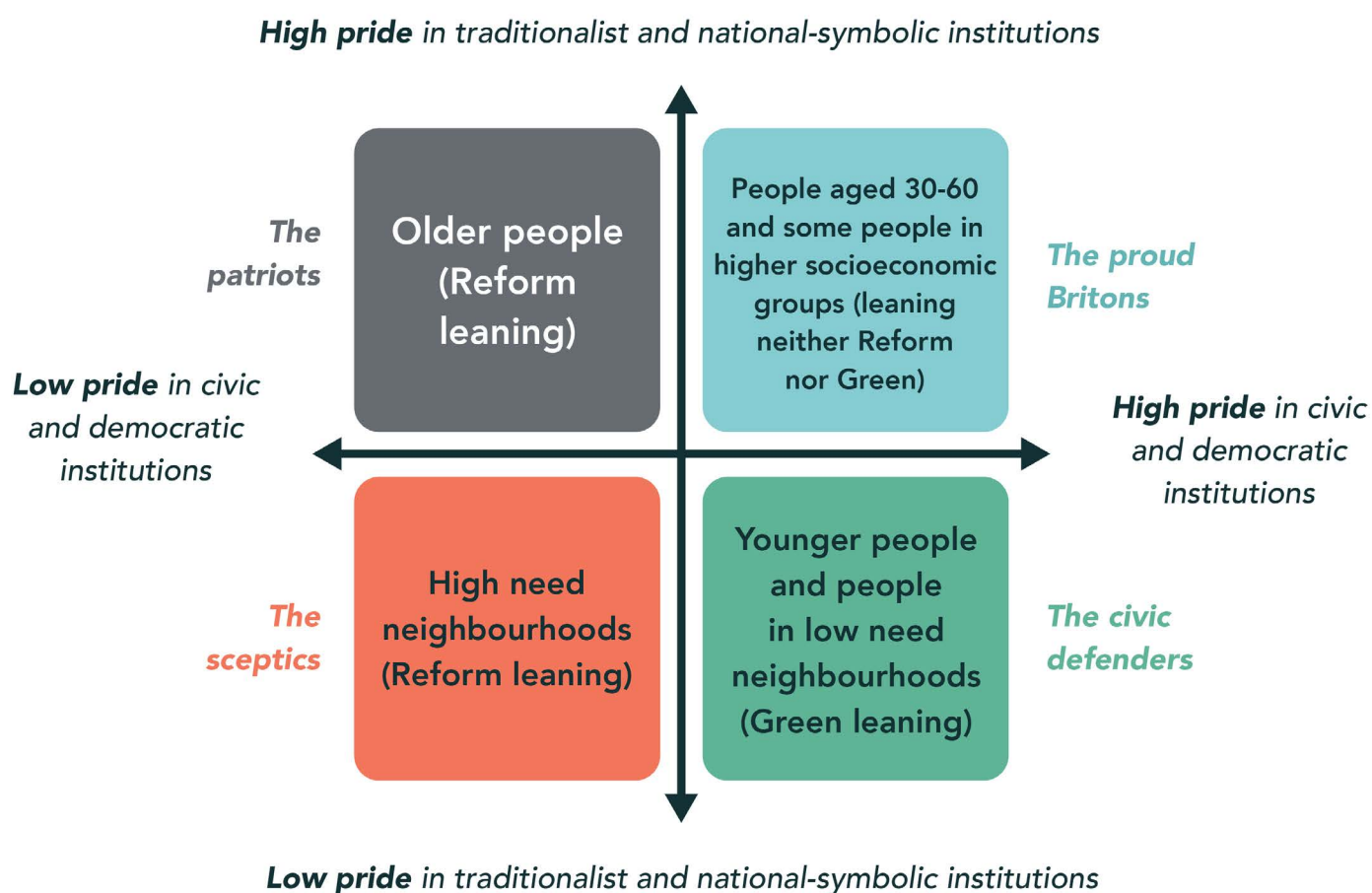
Across these dimensions, a common pattern emerges. The political divide in pride maps onto different experiences of Britain, shaped by their age, economic position, and lived experience. The divide across pride in institutions is most stark, but is associated with different feelings about interpersonal trust, local pride and pride in national life.

- **The patriots** - more likely to be older people - see Britain as a nation with a proud past and positive national symbols, but with failing civic and democratic institutions. This group tends to have high pride in the intrinsic aspects of national life but low local pride and low interpersonal trust. They lean more towards Reform relative to the average person.
- **The civic defenders** - more likely younger people, and some in low-need neighbourhoods or high socioeconomic groups - see Britain as a set of civic and democratic institutions just about worth defending, but without a compelling or inclusive national identity. This group tends to have low pride in national life but high interpersonal trust - particularly in non-British people. While the younger generation in this group have less local pride, people in low-need neighbourhoods tend to have high local pride. Either way, they lean more towards the Greens than the average person.

- **The sceptics** - particularly people in high-need neighbourhoods - sit at the negative intersection, seeing both the traditionalist institutions and the civic and democratic institutions as falling short. This group tends to have low levels of pride both in national life and their local area, and low interpersonal trust. They tend to lean Reform relative to the average person.
- **Lastly, the proud Britons** - particularly people neither under 30 nor over 60, and some in low-need neighbourhoods or high socioeconomic groups - do not share the concerns that other groups have to such a great extent. They see Britain as a nation both with a proud past and positive national symbols, and a set of civic and democratic institutions worth defending. They are more likely to lean away from either Reform or Green.

FIGURE 2

COMPASS OF INSTITUTIONAL PRIDE (FOR INDICATIVE PURPOSES ONLY)



Across these cases, the Chain of Pride is increasingly fragmented, as discussed in the next section. To tackle deepening social division and reverse the democratic doom loop, we need an agenda which can build shared pride from the local to the institutional to the national, and **reforge the Chain of Pride.**

SECTION 4

WHY THE CHAIN OF PRIDE HAS FRAGMENTED

Understanding the status of pride in Britain today serves a fundamental role in reversing the democratic doom loop. A deeper understanding of emotional responses to individual, community and national circumstances gives insight into the changed and fast-evolving political landscape in the UK, in which the electorate is fracturing into new and less predictable factions. Understanding where these emotional responses are shared across political, socioeconomic or generational divides indicates where it might be possible to rebuild community cohesion at local level, rebuild public trust in institutions, and support the political centre to reconnect with large swathes of the electorate.

As a psychological driver of behaviour and engagement, pride should be at the centre of efforts to rebuild relationships across the democratic system and redefine what 'citizenship' means in the New Deal between citizen and state.

THE RISE OF SOCIAL FRAGMENTATION

The findings of this research are clear: the Chain of Pride has become increasingly fragmented. Despite the variation in the 2011 levels of pride across demographic groups such as age, the 2011 Chain of Pride showed a broadly shared pattern of experiences and relationships between different levels of pride across the population. But the political, social and economic upheaval of the past 15 years have reshaped our emotional responses to our individual life circumstances, neighbourhoods and nation in fundamental ways.

Yet, the fragmentation of the Chain of Pride is not unique. With the rise of digital technologies and substantial cultural change over the past 15 years, fragmentation is now a defining feature of modern life.

In his foundational analysis, Robert Putnam famously distinguished between 'bonding' social capital - (i.e. within social and demographic groups) and 'bridging' social capital (i.e. across different social and demographic groups). While 'bonding' social capital fosters in-group loyalty and creates safety nets for "getting by" during tough times, 'bridging' social capital is critical for fostering broader social integration, dampening division, and strengthening the social contract.⁴⁰

The UK has recently seen a specific decline in social bridging, accelerated by technology. A 2022 paper by Geraci et al finds that, as fast internet reached places across the UK, engagement in "time-consuming activities oriented to pursuing the common good" fell.⁴¹ These are the activities that Putnam identifies as most important for bridging social capital. Yet, relationships between people who know each other well were not affected. Faster, more targeted online spaces make it easier than ever to find and stay within an 'in-group', but harder to build sustained contact and trust with people from different social groups.

This technological shift has coincided with a hollowing-out of the physical spaces that have the potential to counter a decline in social bridging. Over the past 15 years:

- Over **750 youth clubs** have closed.⁴²
- Over **10,000 pubs** have closed.⁴³
- Trade union membership has fallen by around **4%** of the UK workforce.⁴⁴

Over around the past 10 years:

- Over **180 council libraries** have closed or been transferred to volunteer management, with deprived communities four times more likely to lose a library than affluent ones.⁴⁵
- Over **3,500 churches** have closed.⁴⁶
- The percentage of people formally volunteering at least once a year has fallen from **45% to 28%**.
- Participation in **grassroots sports clubs** has declined.⁴⁷

This decline is not simply an erosion of leisure or welfare services. These were the spaces social 'bridging' could occur in spite of technological advancement. Demos research in 1996, discussing public libraries, highlighted "the very wide crosssection of use by different groups in the community and the range of needs they sought", whereby "there does seem to be something different about life in the free, noninstrumental sanctuary of the library or the park, where one is a citizen rather than a consumer".⁴⁸ Quantitative evidence has since shown how

40 Putnam, R.D. (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Simon and Schuster, New York. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/358916.361990>

41 Geraci, A., Manaresi, F. & Rodríguez-Pose, A. (2022). Faster internet displaces social capital in the UK. CEPR VoxEU. <https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/faster-internet-displaces-social-capital-uk>

42 Institute for Fiscal Studies (2026). How cuts to youth clubs affected teen crime and education. <https://ifs.org.uk/articles/how-cuts-youth-clubs-affected-teen-crime-and-education>

43 Statista Research Department. Number of public houses operating in the United Kingdom from 2000 to 2024 (in 1,000s). Statista. 8 April 2025. https://www.statista.com/statistics/310723/total-number-of-pubs-in-the-united-kingdom/?srsltid=AfmBOooXo2t5bERbopNpAe_Sxqt0qCt4Uip1yZ8RUaGDRR-Ytlwpyrns

44 Department for Business and Trade. Trade union statistics 2025. 28 May 2026. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/trade-union-statistics-2025>

45 The decline of public libraries: losing a lifeline for communities. Concrete (UEA Student Newspaper), March 2025. <https://concreteuea.co.uk/2025/03/18/the-decline-of-public-libraries-losing-a-lifeline-for-communities/>

46 Gomez AJ. 3,500 churches have closed over the last decade. But is this a problem or a path forward? Premier Christianity. 30 April 2025. <https://www.premierchristianity.com/news-analysis/3500-churches-have-closed-over-the-last-decade-but-is-this-a-problem-or-a-path-forward/19361.article>

47 Wilson J. Grass-roots sports clubs are dying out. The Telegraph. 29 November 2025. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/2025/11/29/grass-roots-sports-clubs-are-dying-out/>

48 Worpole K and Greenhalgh L. The Freedom of the City. Demos. 1996. <https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/thefreedomofthecity.pdf>

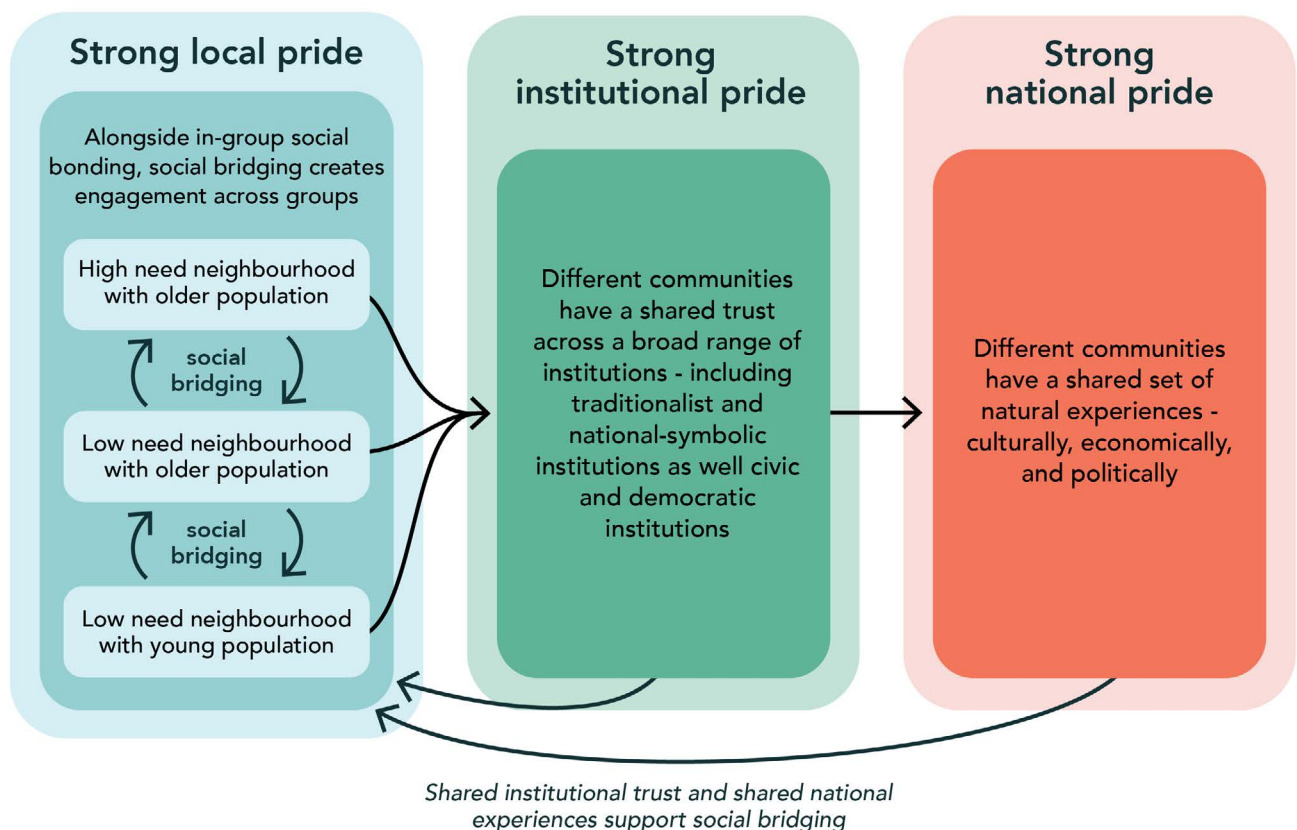
people have a much greater tendency to form cross-class relationships in sports and arts groups than in school, university or their local area.⁴⁹

SOCIAL FRAGMENTATION AND FRAGMENTATION IN THE CHAIN OF PRIDE

The rise of social fragmentation is critical in explaining our findings. In a society of high social connection, social bridging at the local level facilitates shared experiences and sense-making of institutions. Evidence from the UK shows how social bridging across political divides, for example, increases empathy and willingness to engage with people with opposing views.⁵⁰ Evidence from the US shows how people who live in neighborhoods with more socioeconomic connectedness similarly are more accepting of people with opposing views.⁵¹ By encouraging engagement across social and political divides, social bridging can generate more shared experiences and a more common understanding of our national institutions - from the BBC to Parliament to the monarchy.

A shared experience and understanding of institutions act as a foundation for a shared set of national experiences, whether in culture, politics, or the economy. When different social groups trust the same sources of information, respect the same public figures, and have common cultural experiences, there are more moments for national unity - underpinning strong national pride. In turn, the unified picture of institutional and national pride generates more social bridging. As strong local pride once again strengthens institutional and national pride, the chain becomes reinforcing.

FIGURE 3
THE CHAIN OF PRIDE IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL CONNECTION



49 Harris et al. Social capital in the United Kingdom: evidence from six billion friendships. BIT. March 2025. <https://www.bi.team/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Social-Capital-in-the-United-Kingdom-Research-summary.pdf>

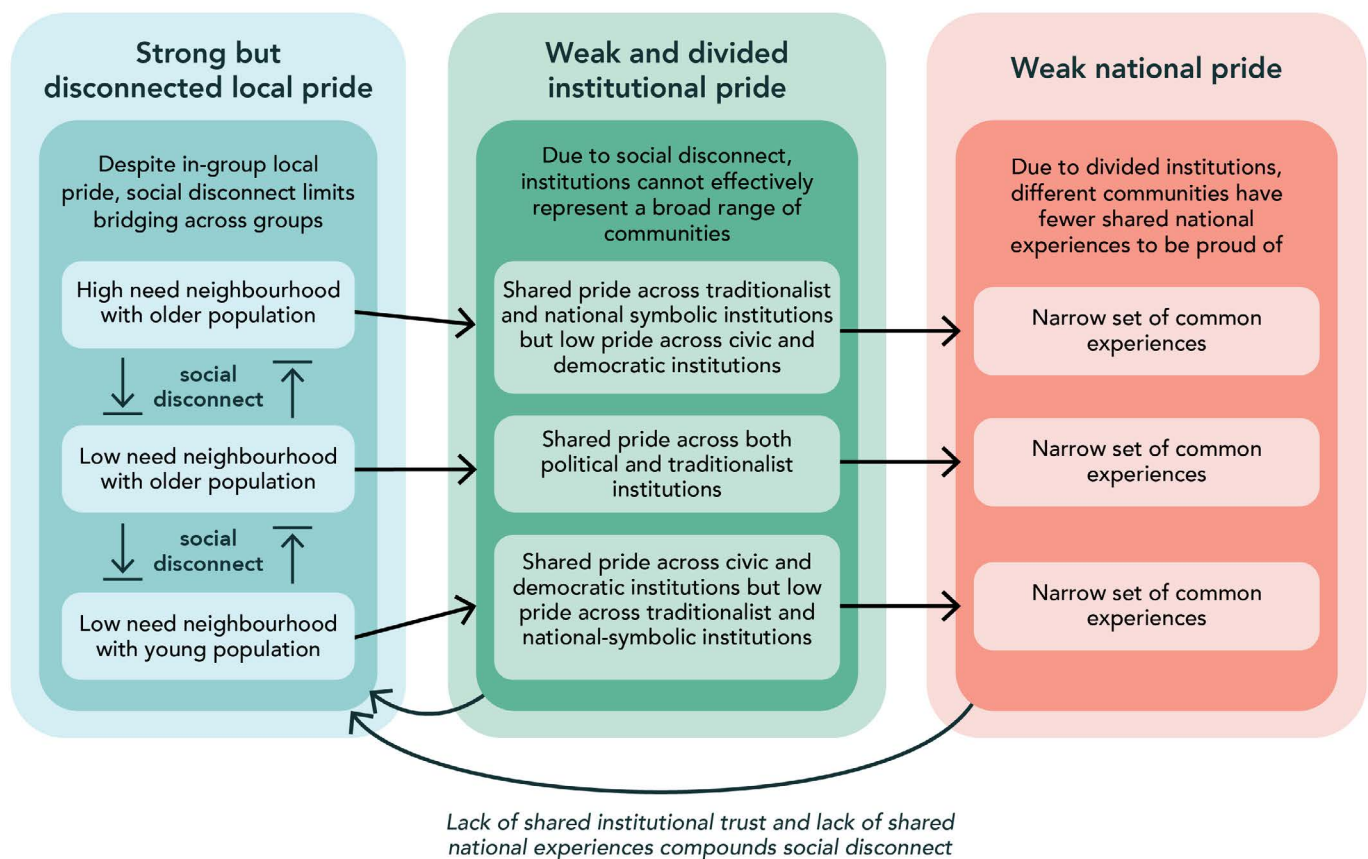
50 De Jon J. Cross-partisan discussions reduced political polarization between UK voters, but less so when they disagreed. Communications Psychology. 5 January 2024. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s44271-023-00051-8?>

51 Campbell D. Because It Can Strengthen Communities. Why Social Science. 28 June 2024. <https://www.whysocialscience.com/blog/2024/6/28/because-it-can-strengthen-communities>

Yet, in the context of social fragmentation, social bridging is diminished. Local pride proves the most resilient link in the Chain of Pride precisely because it can be sustained through bonding: people can maintain strong, positive local attachments within relatively homogenous networks, even as wider social contact declines. Social fragmentation may increase bonding, as increasingly niche social, news and cultural spaces create echo chambers that reinforce confirmation bias and can generate significant bonding.

Institutional and national pride, in contrast, prove far more vulnerable to fragmentation. Different social groups - even if sharing in-group experiences - increasingly have different social experiences between one another. They experience different types of institutions, and understand those institutions in diverging ways. Institutions then come to be increasingly associated with specific groups - meaning some feel a growing sense of belonging or ownership within those institutions, while others feel increasingly detached. As our data shows, a particular divide emerges between civic and democratic institutions on the one hand and traditionalist and national symbolic institutions on the other, with institutions increasingly viewed through the lenses of culture wars and polarisation.

FIGURE 4
THE CHAIN OF PRIDE IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL FRAGMENTATION



For example, institutions such as the BBC - previously affectionately referred to as 'Auntie' - are increasingly seen as the preserve of particular groups rather than institutions that belong to the nation as a whole. This decline in collective ownership takes varied forms. It may be the sense that an institution has been 'captured' by one group:

"BBC's liberal elite still don't get it – the Corporation has fallen victim to woke groupthink"

The Sun (2025)⁵²

In the case of the police, the institution itself could be pitted against multiple groups, with fierce accusations of a lack of accountability and bias from both sides: the police is simultaneously lambasted with damning evidence of institutional racism, and at the time of writing, following high profile coverage and widespread anger following the murder of teenager Henry Nowak, is again the subject of furious public protests that claim the police does not serve the needs of white citizens.

A fragmentation of institutional experiences then means collective national moments of unity become rarer, more fleeting, and met with greater scepticism. The political centre hasn't been able to offer a vision or narrative that has the ability to bridge between disparate groups. Instead, ever more detailed polling, message testing and the triumph of rhetoric over policy has seen political communications seek to appease all groups at once, resulting in a bewildering barrage of promises, claims and counter-claims. The result - inconsistent, sound bite-heavy politics fuelling increasing polarisation - is that no group is convinced and trust in politics plummets. It is no surprise that social isolation is associated with a tendency to support populist politics.⁵³

The divergence in experiences of the nation undermines shared national pride. This, in turn, further undermines social bridging. The Chain of Pride fragments.

REFORGING THE CHAIN

Understanding the fragmented Chain of Pride in the UK today offers routes to reverse the doom loop. As a fundamental human emotion with a powerful impact on behaviour, pride - associated with a sense of ownership, collective endeavour, belonging, optimism and engagement - remains at the heart of what 'citizenship' in a healthy democracy could and should mean.

The 2011 Demos thesis that policy making should treat pride as both an end in itself, and as a means to an end - encouraging pro-social behaviour at a local level and maintaining democratic engagement at a national level - is more pertinent than ever. Yet the levers to do so are far more complex now: policy can no longer simply choose which link in a causal chain - individual, neighbourhood or national pride - to act upon.

Crucially, social fragmentation is now an undeniable and irreversible part of modern life. From information ecosystems through which we access news and information, to arts and culture increasingly mediated via global streaming and algorithms, shared experiences are giving way to more segmented and self-reinforcing worlds. The response needs to be on expanding social 'bridging' - fostering a shared sense of belonging, ownership and trust amongst disparate groups. The power of pride is no longer in the vertical association - national to local -, but in linking across social and demographic divides where mainstream politics is failing to do so.

⁵² The Sun. BBC's liberal elite still don't get it – the Corporation has fallen victim to woke groupthink, not a right-wing coup. 10 November 2025. <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/37277365/bbc-liberal-elite-woke-groupthink/>

⁵³ Filsinger M. Bringing Emotions In: How Anger Shapes the Relationship Between Social Isolation and Populist Attitudes. *American Behavioral Scientist*. 28 March 2024. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/00027642241241133>

SECTION 5

A NEW AGENDA FOR PRIDE

Today's fragmented Chain of Pride requires a much more nuanced approach. The aim should not be to raise pride at just one end of the chain, and trust that the ripple effect will kick in. The policy response needs to address the fundamental fragmentation of daily experiences of being a citizen in this country. It is only through bridging citizens together at a local, institutional and national level that we can move past polarisation, create common ground in which to conduct political discourse, rebuild trust in politics and re-engage increasingly disconnected voters with democracy. Pride offers both a lever and useful measure of success in this endeavour. Three approaches are key:

- **THE LOCAL BRIDGE:** Design devolution to not stop at the town hall, but instead strengthen public participation and civic foundations at a local level, giving communities a sense of collective, place-based ownership over local life.
- **THE INSTITUTIONAL BRIDGE:** Making national institutions more flexible and adaptive, flexible and adaptive, able to provide a sense of collective ownership to a wide range of communities and social groups across the nation.
- **THE NATIONAL BRIDGE:** renewing the narrative within our culture, politics and the economy to tell a story about Britain as a nation - its talents, strengths and values - capable of generating a set of shared understanding for the public.

THE LOCAL BRIDGE

While local pride has proven uniquely resilient over the past 15 years, it is no longer driving a unified institutional and national pride as it did in 2011. In a more socially fragmented world, social groups have an increasingly fragmented experience of pride - which drives a delinking between local pride on the one hand, and institutional and national pride on the other. For local pride to once again strengthen institutional and national pride, it must be generated through local bridging, with communities united around a common local good.

The devolution agenda offers a generational opportunity to advance this agenda. The government's 'Rewiring the State' statement in July 2026 set out such a generational shift, committing to transfer major powers, funding and resources from Westminster to elected mayors and local authorities by the end of this Parliament. This is a landmark step, and the right starting point.

The risk, however, is that ambition stops at the town hall. The agenda is currently pitched largely at the level of mayors and strategic authorities, with little-to-no mention of neighbourhoods, communities, or civic life. Overlooking this would not only miss the opportunity to draw on community contribution and insights, but fail to properly bridge communities together in a sense of collective, place-based ownership over local life. The pledge to replace 'consultation by default' with 'new and modern forms of public participation' is promising, but the devil is in the detail. Alongside improved and more democratic decision making, public participation could play a critical role in strengthening social bridging at the local level, and in turn local pride.

To bridge local communities together, the devolution agenda must properly and sustainably fund civic life through a Marshall Plan-style approach. It must strengthen participatory policymaking with tech-powered participation, participatory budgeting, and skilled, dynamic neighbourhood governance. And it must develop a new place-based, participatory approach to measuring pride.

Ambitious, new civic funding - A Marshall Plan for Civic Life

To provide the social infrastructure that enables connections and social bridging, we need a stronger set of civic foundations - as Demos argued in *The Preventative State*.⁵⁴ The government's Pride in Place programme is currently geared towards this objective, but is funded through general taxation, on a ten-year time horizon and in a limited set of areas. Without a more diverse and durable funding settlement behind it, there is a real risk that this pioneering work cannot be scaled to more communities, or sustained once its ten years are up.

Civic organisations across the entire UK need access to a larger, more sustainable funding pipeline. The ongoing Demos and Kinship Works project, a Marshall Plan for Civic Life, offers a way forward. It outlines the ambition for a time-bound sprint of new financing mechanisms with the aim of building, in the long-term, a resilient funding system for civic organisations across the country.⁵⁵

The choice to model this on the Marshall Plan is deliberate. The original Plan succeeded in its objective of rebuilding the economic foundations in Europe because of critical design features. It had a theory of recovery, not just of need. It was designed for catch-up and then sustainability, treating the initial sprint and long-term maintenance as different tasks. It built coordination and trust between recipients rather than zero-sum competition. It used a multi-

54 Glover B, Curtis P, and O'Brien A. *The Preventative State: Rebuilding our local, social and civic foundations*. Demos. 25 April 2023. <https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/the-preventative-state.pdf>

55 Kinship Works & Demos (2026). *A Marshall Plan for Civic Life: A survey of financing mechanisms*. <https://marshall-plan.netlify.app/>

layered, polycentric governance model, rather than top-down control or fragmented localism. The funding of civic life has lessons to learn.

Drawing lessons from the original Marshall Plan, the Marshall Plan for Civic Life points to the need for funding mechanisms which generate and retain resources within communities, embed contribution, co-ownership and local decision-making, direct support to communities that need it most, provide stable and predictable support, protect diversity of civic form, and can withstand political and economic shocks. No single funding mechanism scores well against every principle, which is why a resilient settlement needs a diversity of funding sources.

The Marshall Plan sets out a financial settlement spanning four quadrants:⁵⁶

- Public contributions - membership models, community shares, crowdfunding, civic dividends
- State and fiscal instruments - levies, tax reliefs, dormant assets
- Philanthropy - foundation, corporate and individual giving, legacies
- Investment and value capture - impact investment, Business Improvement Districts, developer contributions, pension funds.

These quadrants work best when combined rather than in isolation. For example, dormant assets legislation capitalised Better Society Capital, which went on to build the wider social investment market. Each mechanism should be judged not just on how much it raises, but on its value to civic organisations - be that in the resilience of funding, whether it fosters local long-term ownership, or how it is directed towards those needing it most.

Participatory policy development - tech-powered participation, participatory budgeting, and skilled, dynamic neighbourhood governance

Given the close relationship between sense of ownership and pride, it is vital that policies to embed pride consider how to generate local ownership of initiatives. Sure Start - neighbourhood hubs introduced in the late 1990s to provide holistic support for families with young children - dramatically improved social, educational and health outcomes.⁵⁷ Parental and community involvement was a core design principle, and qualitative evidence demonstrated that where parents felt a sense of 'ownership' of their centres, outcomes improved.^{58,59} Conversely, analysis found that weak local control and lack of local participation fatally undermined the success of the Levelling Up agenda.^{60,61}

While half the population feel it is important that they can influence local policymaking, just a quarter feel able to.⁶² Embedding local ownership requires moving beyond consultation towards institutionalised community power: giving residents enduring authority over budgets, assets, service design and neighbourhood priorities rather than simply inviting feedback on centrally designed programmes. The success of Pride in Place will depend on whether neighbourhood

56 Kinship Works & Demos (2026). A Marshall Plan for Civic Life: A survey of financing mechanisms. <https://marshall-plan.netlify.app/>

57 Cattani, S., Conti, G., Farquharson, C., Ginja, R., & Pepler, L. (2022). The short- and medium-term effects of Sure Start on children's outcomes. Institute for Fiscal Studies. <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/short-and-medium-term-effects-sure-start-childrens-outcomes>

58 Melhuish E, Belsky J, Anning A, Ball M, Barnes J, Romaniuk H, Leyland A; NESS Research Team. Variation in community intervention programmes and consequences for children and families: the example of Sure Start Local Programmes. *J Child Psychol Psychiatry*. 2007 Jun; 48(6):543-51.

59 Eisenstadt, N. (2011). Providing a Sure Start: How government discovered early childhood. Policy Press.

60 Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee. (2023). Funding for levelling up. House of Commons. <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/1647/funding-for-levelling-up/>

61 Richards, D., Newman, J., Westwood, A., Diamond, P., & Sanders, A. (2023). The challenges of Levelling Up: A critical examination of funding and governance. The Productivity Institute. <https://www.productivity.ac.uk/news/the-challenges-of-levelling-up-a-critical-examination-of-funding-and-governance/>

62 Department for Culture, Media and Sport. (2025).. Community Life Survey 2024/25: Civic engagement and social action. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/community-life-survey-202425-annual-publication/community-life-survey-202425-civic-engagement-and-social-action>

governance structures, such as the Neighbourhood Boards, will rest on the extent to which local places feel genuinely engaged, invested and empowered in delivery.

Realising this in practice requires progress on three key fronts: making participation itself easier through technology, giving residents direct control over how resources are allocated, and ensuring new neighbourhood governance structures have the skills and flexibility to use their powers well.

Technology to scale up participation

Demos's Waves programme is testing whether AI-powered technology can resolve a long-standing trade-off in public participation.⁶³ Citizens' assemblies allow deep, informed deliberation but are expensive and reach only a small, curated sample of people. Digital consultation platforms, meanwhile, can reach thousands, but rarely allow for the genuine back-and-forth that builds real consensus. Waves, an Demos innovation currently being trialled in councils, uses digital tools and AI to enable deliberation on local issues both at scale and in depth. The process includes a series of 'waves', some engaging with the public at scale and rapidly synthesising findings, others digging into issues in great depth with smaller groups.

The programme draws inspiration from Taiwan's vTaiwan digital democracy model, adapted for local government policymaking. If proven at scale, tools like Waves could make the open-ended, iterative consultation that genuine neighbourhood governance requires - on budgets, priorities and services - dramatically cheaper and faster to run, removing one of the practical barriers that has so far confined deep participation to resource-rich councils and one-off pilots.

Participatory budgeting in English devolution

The funding allocation process for Levelling Up demonstrated that even where intention is to devolve decision-making and funding to local areas, structural biases in decision-making, funding flows and accountability between the centre and regional and local government tend towards central control. Local authority stakeholders involved in the Levelling Up funding application process described the process as disempowering, confusing and rushed - ill suited to promote local empowerment and innovation.⁶⁴ Compounding these dynamics is the relatively short-term and discrete nature of many place based or pride promoting initiatives, particularly given the churn of UK politics, with an average ministerial tenure under two years.

In an effort to embed long-termism, the Pride in Place programme has mandated Neighbourhood Boards - involving residents and local faith, business and community leaders - to develop a 10-year 'Neighbourhood Vision' and allocate £20 million per area. The longer timescale and staggered funding are a genuine opportunity to embed lasting community ownership, provided the structures and systems underpinning outlast any single government

Participatory budgeting offers one such way to scale-up a sense of community ownership over funding decisions at local level. This approach is advocated for by the Local Government Association, and Scotland is already paving the way. In 2017, a landmark framework mandated that 1% of Scotland's local authority budgets be allocated according to participatory budgeting.

Strategic authorities in England should adopt the Scottish participatory budgeting framework, top-slicing a minimum of 1% of core devolved budgets to be allocated via direct public deliberation and votes. Central government should actively support this shift through targeted secondary legislation and national statutory guidance under the Devolution and Community Empowerment Act, providing strategic authorities with standardised delivery models, data transparency toolkits, and guidance on digital voting infrastructure.

⁶³ Demos (2026). Waves: Tech-powered democracy. <https://demos.co.uk/waves-tech-powered-democracy/>

⁶⁴ UK Parliament. Levelling up policy will fail without long-term substantive funding for councils, say MPs. 26 May 2025. <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/17/levelling-up-housing-and-communities-committee/news/195434/levelling-up-policy-will-fail-without-long-term-substantive-funding-for-councils-say-mps/>

Local skills and dynamism within Neighbourhood Governance

The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill creates a statutory duty on local authorities to put in place 'appropriate arrangements for effective governance of any neighbourhood area'.⁶⁵ Secondary regulations, due after Royal Assent, will set direction rather than detail - leaving a real window to shape what neighbourhood governance becomes in practice. The central design challenge is to create neighbourhood bodies empowered enough to matter, but sufficiently integrated into existing structures to avoid duplication or confusion. Success will depend on the strength of the models chosen, and their ability to be both locally radical and properly connected to the wider democratic architecture.

Two things will determine whether this succeeds. First, the government needs to strengthen the skills pipeline into neighbourhood governance. To succeed, neighbourhood governance structures will need people with an understanding of community needs, strong local relationships, an understanding of governance, and experience of managing services or assets. A critical pipeline for these skills is through community organisations. As upcoming Demos research - part of the Nation of Neighbours programme - will show, community organisations play a critical role in identifying talent in communities, building up confidence, and upskilling. Many other community leaders will arise through other routes - be it in Parish councils, local authorities, or local businesses. Neighbourhood governance structures should be linked up to these networks to ensure they attract the right skills

A second important requirement of neighbourhood governance is dynamism. Providing novel governance structures with extensive local responsibility and resources comes with risks. Managing that risk without simply restricting responsibility and resources demands taking a test-and-learn approach. All structures should begin with a moderate level of responsibility and resources, but then expanded over time for those who prove they manage it well. This embeds both risk management and a genuine incentive for neighbourhood governance structures to deliver.

Measurement of pride - Place-based, participatory measurement frameworks for pride-promoting policy

While policymakers have increasingly treated local pride as both a policy objective and an indicator of successful renewal, the concept remains poorly operationalised within policy and evaluation frameworks, and robust approaches to measuring and tracking pride remain underdeveloped.⁶⁶

Levelling Up funding criteria employed proxies to measure pride. These included perceptions of anti-social behaviour, perceptions of local attractiveness, participation in cultural, heritage or sport activities and composite measures such as the Social Fabric Index.⁶⁷ Other measurement frameworks for pride in place have looked to measures of housing security or incidence of serious crime as proxies.⁶⁸ The wide range - and conceptual inconsistency - of these proxies highlights the absence of an agreed understanding of what "local pride" actually constitutes and how it should be assessed.

This points to the first major challenge: local pride is inherently place-specific. The sources, meanings, and expressions of pride are shaped by local history, identity, and social context, and therefore differ significantly between communities. It is to no surprise that research with

65 Society of Local Council Clerks. (2025). English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill published. Society of Local Council Clerks. <https://www.slcc.co.uk/english-devolution-and-community-empowerment-bill-published/>

66 Howcroft, M., Marsh, N., & Owen, J. (2025). Levelling Up, affective governance and tensions within 'pride in place'. Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space, 43(2), 387-405.

67 Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. (2022, February 2). Statement of Levelling Up Missions. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-white-paper>

68 Howcroft, M., Marsh, N., & Owen, J. (2025). Levelling Up, affective governance and tensions within 'pride in place'. Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space, 43(2), 387-405

council staff and stakeholders involved in the Levelling Up bid process revealed confusion about how 'pride' was defined centrally.^{69,70} Staff spoke of the rushed and chaotic process to identify appropriate metrics at local level. Another study found that residents in Southampton associated local pride primarily with the city's arts, culture, and heritage offer, whereas residents in Darlington identified local sports clubs and community participation as central to local identity and pride.⁷¹

Therein lies the second challenge: pride is an emotional phenomenon. Conventional public policy evaluation frameworks, particularly those designed for large-scale programmes such as Levelling Up, are generally better suited to measuring material outputs and behavioural outcomes than subjective emotional states. Existing approaches struggle to capture how people feel about their communities, how these feelings change over time, and how they are collectively experienced within different local contexts. This limitation is especially significant where the meaning and expression of pride vary substantially between places.

For pride to be a meaningful policy objective, we need more intelligent, participatory approaches to measuring it - built from local perspectives rather than imposed centrally. Without this, political prioritisation of local pride risks becoming a shallow, cynical device for connecting with 'left behind' voters rather than a genuine basis for policy.⁷² Evidence is growing that participatory and deliberative approaches are well equipped to generate collectively owned, authentic definitions.⁷³

THE INSTITUTIONAL BRIDGE

The data in this report tells a stark story about the decline in institutional pride over the past 15 years. Pride has collapsed among young people, and to some extent people in higher socioeconomic groups, in traditionalist and national-symbolic institutions. For civic and democratic institutions, pride has fallen across the board, but most dramatically among older people. As such, overall levels of pride in our institutions have collapsed. Net pride in Parliament dropped from 23% to -11%, the BBC from 48% to -11%, the legal system from 27% to 11%, and the monarchy from 54% to 25%.

Specific institutions have of course had specific problems, be it Parliament's chaotic management of Brexit, or various scandals within the monarchy. Yet, the general crisis in institutional pride, and the inability of our institutions to bridge across social divides in the era of fragmentation, has more fundamental roots.

Three problems are key:

1. Exclusion of the public voice
2. Lack of social and demographic representation
3. Fragmented communication with the public.

69 Marsh, N., Howcroft, M., & Owen, J. (2025). Pride in place beyond the metrics: Insights from the Feeling Towns project (AHRC Place Programme Policy Brief Series). University of Southampton. <https://andtowns.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/109142-A4-Policy-Brief-Feeling-Towns-Joseph-Owen-WEB-pages.pdf>

70 Howcroft, M., Marsh, N., & Owen, J. (2025). Levelling Up, affective governance and tensions within 'pride in place'. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 43(2), 387-405.

71 Owen, J., Marsh, N., & Howcroft, M. (2025, January). Written evidence submitted by Dr Joseph Owen, Professor Nicky Marsh and Dr Michael Howcroft (CCI0015). House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee. <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/135788/pdf/>

72 McKee, R., Pope, T., & Coggins, M. (2023). 'Levelling up' from the centre: Six tests for a government serious about reducing regional inequalities. Institute for Government. <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/levelling-up-from-centre>

73 Marsh, N., Howcroft, M., & Owen, J. (2025). "Pride in place" beyond the metrics: Insights from the Feeling Towns project (AHRC Place Programme Policy Brief). University of Southampton. <https://doi.org/10.5258/SOTON/PP0096>

The first root of the crisis is that institutions are seen as no longer reflecting the voice of the people they serve. The OECD finds that Britons who feel the political system allows people like them a say are around three times as likely to trust the government than people who feel they don't have a say - a substantially bigger divide than those along election turnout, financial security, education, gender or age.⁷⁴ And only one in five Britons believe the political system allows people like them to have a say - ten percentage points below the OECD average. It is no coincidence that the BBC has seen a collapse in pride and is also scored relatively poorly by the public on providing unbiased information or 'representing people like me'.⁷⁵

The second is about social and demographic representation: institutions are seen as not properly representing the social experiences and backgrounds of the different communities they serve. A 2025 study published found that trust in political institutions (Parliament, politicians and the legal system) is eroded when there is overrepresentation of those from private education, with privately educated political actors seen as less warm, more forceful, and less trustworthy than their state-educated equivalents.⁷⁶ Studies confirm similar effects for ethnic representation.⁷⁷ Parliament is the clearest example. A 2016 study which found that the decline in electoral turnout (which is associated with pride in political institutions) among the working class is strongly associated with the proportion of politicians from working-class backgrounds.⁷⁸

The third root cause is communication: the fragmentation of the information environment means institutions face much greater challenges in communicating with the public, and much more competition from non-institutional actors. Ofcom's research shows that "people who consume news primarily via social media are less knowledgeable, more polarised and have lower trust in democratic institutions compared to people who consume news via traditional media."⁷⁹ A 2025 experimental study from the US found that criticisms of institutions most damaging to trust - i.e. those attacking institutional integrity - are also those most likely to attract social media engagement, suggesting structural causes of this problem inherent in online media.⁸⁰

This solution demands broad institutional reform

Reversing this decline in institutional pride will require more than communication strategies or incremental reforms. It requires a structural rethink of how institutions relate to the public, from civic institutions like the BBC, Parliament and national legal institutions, to the hundreds of public bodies in Britain, to traditionalist or national-symbolic institutions like the monarchy and armed forces. Each must move from a model of top-down, centralised broadcast to the public, to one in which citizens feel directly engaged, building a sense of belonging and ownership across different groups.

We propose a framework around five types of institutional reform. Each will be relevant to some institutions but not others.

74 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2024). OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions 2024 results: Country notes — United Kingdom. OECD Publishing. https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-survey-on-drivers-of-trust-in-public-institutions-2024-results-country-notes_a8004759-en/united-kingdom_cec47bf8-en.html

75 Department for Culture, Media and Sport. (2025, December 16). Value of BBC News. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/value-of-bbc-news/value-of-bbc-news>

76 British Psychological Society. (2025, April 8). Overrepresentation of elites in politics creates public distrust, reveals new study. British Psychological Society. <https://www.bps.org.uk/news/overrepresentation-elites-politics-creates-public-distrust-reveals-new-study>

77 Wimmer, A. (2017). Power and pride: National identity and ethnopolitical inequality around the world. *World Politics*, 69(4), 605–639. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887117000120>

78 Heath, O. (2018). Policy alienation, social alienation and working-class abstention in Britain, 1964–2010. *British Journal of Political Science*, 48(4), 1053–1073. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123416000272>

79 Ofcom. (2024). Online news: Research update. Ofcom. <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/multi-sector/media-plurality/2024/0324-online-news-research-update.pdf?v=356802>

80 Lee, J. Y. (2025). The effects of social media criticism against public health institutions on trust, emotions, and social media engagement. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 122(26), e2422890122. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2422890122>

- **Devolved institutions.** National institutions that operate from a single geographical location will inevitably struggle to represent the diversity of British life. The UK's highly centralised democracy compounds this problem, with trust tending to decline the further people are away from Westminster, and concentrated in places where people feel their area is marginal to society.^{81,82} The decline of local journalism exacerbates this dynamic. Weak local media is associated with lower civic engagement and worse public service delivery (as local news can highlight challenges to local authorities), which can erode pride.⁸³ The devolution agenda, the Pride in Place Strategy, investment in regional BBC programming, and No10 North represent steps in the right direction. Yet, more could be done on devolving institutions, particularly for financial institutions like the British Business Bank or National Wealth Fund.
 - **Decentralised institutions.** Institutions that engage with people not just from the top down, but through the texture of their daily lives - in local workplaces, public spaces, community organisations, sports clubs - carry potential to rebuild the connection between citizens and national life. Trade unions - which receive high rates of satisfaction and employee interest (and likely pride) - are a clear example.⁸⁴ The collapse in trade union membership not only impacts the economy; it removes a vital channel through which working-class communities once engaged with institutional life.⁸⁵ Re-embedding institutions in the workplace and community – for example, by connecting businesses and trade unions to community anchor institutions – increases the social proximity between citizens and institutions.
 - **Participatory institutions.** Research consistently shows that people trust institutional processes in which they, or the public at large, have had a genuine voice. A Demos survey found that the public are more trusting of political decisions if told that the decision was informed by public involvement (44% vs 35%). The Sortition Foundation found that 69% of 2024 Reform voters trust members of the public in citizens' assemblies to make policy decisions in their best interest - eight times more than those who trust MPs.⁸⁶
- The government should build on these lessons by building a new operating model for our institutions. This means participatory policy making in government departments to shape policy agendas. It means opening up difficult ethical issues on the national scale to citizen deliberation. It means publicly funded institutions like universities, regulators and arms length bodies using public governance models to enable greater citizen scrutiny and accountability. Demos has set out a model for doing this at the BBC as a bulwark against political capture and to reinforce trust in the institution by creating a 'public governance lock' on major constitutional changes.⁸⁷
- **Relational institutions.** Whether its MPs, healthcare professionals, or police officers and courts, research shows that it is not just outcomes that matter, but the personal interactions and relationships between institutional staff and the public.^{88,89,90} Where members of

81 Institute for Public Policy Research. (2021). Revealed: Trust in politicians at lowest level on record. <https://www.ippr.org/media-office/revealed-trust-in-politicians-at-lowest-level-on-record>

82 McKay, L., Jennings, W., & Stoker, G. (2021). Political trust in the "places that don't matter". *Frontiers in Political Science*, 3, Article 642236. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2021.642236>

83 Department for Culture, Media and Sport. (2026, March 17). Local news provision and local public service performance. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-news-provision-and-local-public-service-performance/local-news-provision-and-local-public-service-performance>

84 Davies, R., Felstead, A., Gallie, D., Green, F., Henseke, G., & Zhou, Y. (2025). Has the tide turned for trade unions? Findings from the Skills and Employment Survey 2024. Wales Institute for Social and Economic Research and Data, Cardiff University. <https://wiserd.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/3.-Has-the-Tide-Turned-for-Trade-Unions.pdf>

85 McAlevey, J. F. (2016). *No shortcuts: Organizing for power in the new gilded age*. Oxford University Press.

86 Sortition Foundation. (2025, May 8). New poll finds widespread support for replacing the House of Lords. https://www.sortitionfoundation.org/uk_poll_may_2025

87 Padania, S., Perry, H., & Curtis, P. (2026, January 21). Our BBC: A blueprint for a more independent and future-proofed BBC. Demos. <https://demos.co.uk/research/our-bbc-a-blueprint-for-a-more-independent-and-future-proofed-bbc/>

88 Goss, D., Huband-Thompson, B., & Curtis, P. (2024, October). *Trustwatch 2024: A playbook to rebuild trust in politics*. Demos. https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Trustwatch-2024_Report_October.pdf

89 Taylor, J. (2025, October 16). The human connection: Why relational continuity matters in general practice. Nuffield Department of Primary Care Health Sciences, University of Oxford. <https://www.phc.ox.ac.uk/blog/the-human-connection-why-relational-continuity-matters-in-general-practice>

90 Farrow, K. (2023). Legitimacy & confidence in policing. Cumberland Lodge. <https://www.cumberlandlodge.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Legitimacy-and-Confidence-in-Policing-SCREEN.pdf>

the public have personal interactions with an institutional representative, and feel the representative is friendly, is respectful, and thoroughly explains their decisions, they tend to be more trusting or prideful in that institution, regardless of outcomes. Previous Demos research has spotlighted how poor relationships between citizens and MPs erodes public trust in political institutions.⁹¹ Yet, of the few times people expressed pride in their MP, almost all were based on personal, face-to-face interactions. Recent Demos work has outlined a mode to pragmatically bring together constituents and their MP to identify and solve a problem together - strengthening that relationship.⁹²

- **Epistemically secure institutions.** The above reforms are undermined if institutions are unable to defend the shared factual and informational ground on which democratic discourse depends. As Demos has outlined in its Epistemic Security report, institutions that are resilient in the face of informational threats - disinformation campaigns, coordinated manipulation, and the algorithmic amplification of mistrust - are a democratic necessity.⁹³ This is particularly urgent where the public exists in radically different information environments - undermining the preconditions for collective pride through a shared sense of Britain's institutions.

THE NATIONAL BRIDGE

The picture of national pride that emerges from this research is one of decline and fragmentation. Emotional attachment to different aspects of national life - culture, history, Britain's role in the world - is extremely fractured along political, generational and socioeconomic lines. These symbols now strengthen social bonding rather than bridging, deepening the attachment of the already-committed while deepening the alienation of those outside.

To function as a democratic resource rather than a political weapon, national pride must be capable of creating shared meaning across socioeconomic and generational divides. The challenge for the government and for culture is therefore not simply to stimulate pride, but to create the conditions for a genuinely shared, experiential pride that does not require choosing a side.

We identify three domains in which the government can act to build national pride of this character: cultural, political and economic.

Cultural

Cultural pride - in Britain's history, values, art, music, built environment, sporting achievements and humour - occupies an important role because it can cut across political and social lines. Our data confirms this: the aspects of pride which have not fragmented across generational and socioeconomic lines are pride in how Britain looks (its buildings, landscape and natural environment), in Britain's sporting achievements, and in Shakespeare. These are shared experiential touchstones, and widely appreciated without one group asserting its identity at the expense of another.

History offers instructive precedents for when cultural pride has successfully served this purpose. The 2012 London Olympics provided perhaps the most striking recent example. Danny Boyle's opening ceremony told a story about British history, literature and music, while the Games reflected Britain's sporting achievements and cultural contribution on the international stage.

91 Goss, D., Huband-Thompson, B., & Curtis, P. (2024, October). Trustwatch 2024: A playbook to rebuild trust in politics. Demos. https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Trustwatch-2024_Report_October.pdf

92 Bush, L., Kapetanovic, H., & Malik, N. (2025, September 25). A two-way street: The decline of the MP-constituent relationship – and how to fix it. Demos. <https://demos.co.uk/research/a-two-way-street-the-decline-of-the-mp-constituent-relationship-and-how-to-fix-it/>

93 Seger, E., Perry, H., & Hancock, J. (2025, February 20). Epistemic Security 2029: Fortifying the UK's information supply chain to tackle the democratic emergency. Demos. https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Epistemic-Security-2029_accessible.pdf

Analysis of news discourse at the time found that the event intensified national identification, and generated a rare moment of constructive pride: one that emphasised “inclusion, tolerance, and creativity”.⁹⁴ More broadly, research by Public First shows how around two third of the public (64%) feel that events hosted in the UK “made them proud to live in the UK”.⁹⁵

While in the past sport has been found to be a relatively minor driver of national pride, with only temporary effects, our data shows that sporting achievements are one of the few areas where pride has increased over the past 15 years - surpassing the pound, the armed forces, the monarchy and the union jack.⁹⁶ Major sporting achievements in Britain - such as the Lionesses winning the Euros - have become more common and generated rare moments of shared national pride. The ‘football’s coming home’ phenomenon points to that hunger for national pride in our sporting achievement.

The power of public spaces in generating unified moments of pride should not be underestimated. From large cultural events in parks to street parties across the nation, these are moments where people feel connected to something bigger than themselves or their immediate social circles. Research by British Future found that a majority of the public felt that the Platinum Jubilee “with street parties and official events attracting large crowds, could be a unifying event which bridges divides.”⁹⁷ And as Demos argued in 1996, between 1850 and 1890:

“...public buildings and spaces were created as sites of reconciliation between hostile social groups and interests. Our own research into these very institutions nearly 150 years later has largely found the belief that public space is – or should be – socially neutral and non-judgmental still resonates. This ‘civic vision offered the working class a way of understanding itself in terms of a version of citizenship rather than class.”

The government should unlock the power of parks, street parties, and cultural events for moments of national unity.

Driving these shared experiences forward requires investment. The government should explore how to strengthen investment in Britain’s built environment, landscape and natural heritage - the things our data show are consistently and universally sources of pride (a finding echoed in external research).⁹⁸ Investment must also be strengthened for sports and the arts. For example, although 92% of the acts on a lineup for Glastonbury (a symbol of British cultural achievement) started their careers and developed performance skills in grassroots music venues, over a third of such venues in the UK have closed over the past two decades.⁹⁹ Identifying how to keep these sectors funded is critical.

Investment could be provided by the government, but substantial challenges remain. Britain’s cultural output has historically been one of its greatest sources of global reputation and domestic self-understanding, exemplified in the ‘Cool Britannia’ moment of the mid-1990s. Yet, these myriad benefits of arts and culture are too often overlooked in our political and economic decisionmaking. As the economist Marianna Mazzucato explains: “All cultural events and institutions, whether museums or carnivals, are assessed by ticket sales, not by the learning, well-being, and social connection they generate... what we measure shapes what we invest in, and our current metrics systematically undervalue the dynamic, long-run returns that culture

94 Vincent, J., Hill, J. S., Billings, A., Harris, J., & Massey, C. D. (2018). “We are GREAT Britain”: British newspaper narratives during the London 2012 Olympic Games. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 53(8), 895–923. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690217690345>

95 Stanton O, Arena M and Price A. Moments That Make us Proud: How UK-hosted events trigger national pride across the UK. July 2025. Public First. <https://spiritof2012.publicfirst.co.uk/>

96 Shibli, S., Ramchandani, G., & Davies, L. (2021). The impact of British sporting achievements on national pride among adults in England. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 21(5), 658–676. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2021.1916553>

97 Ballinger S, Katwala S and Rolfe H. Jubilee Britain: After a decade of upheaval, where are we going now?. *British Future*. 2022

98 Ibid.

99 Taylor A. Grassroots live music venues suffer ‘most challenging year’, report says. 24 January 2024. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-68050664>

generates.”¹⁰⁰ Fixing this demands reforms to the Treasury Green Book, OBR models, and other economic evaluations across national and local governments to reflect the dynamic returns to culture.

Political

Political pride - defined here as pride in Britain’s role in the world, its values and its alliances - has historically been one of the most powerful sources of national unity. The Second World War remains the archetypal instance, catalysing pride in what Britain stood for and against, and in the character and courage of the British people - shaping national consciousness for decades. The Falklands War, meanwhile, demonstrated a government stepping in to defend sovereignty and project national strength - generating a surge of national pride.¹⁰¹ This ‘rally around the flag’ effect is well evidenced across many countries.¹⁰² But how can such political pride be generated today?

Keir Starmer’s decision not to follow the US in military action against Iran is instructive. It generated a sense that Britain was capable of making an independent, principled judgement in the face of international pressure. Our data shows that, when asked about a moment people were proud of in the past year, Britain’s response to the Iran conflict was the single most commonly cited moment. Mark Carney’s firm stance against Donald Trump’s trade war and annexation rhetoric in 2025 is also worth attention. Pride in being Canadian jumped up, and Canadians rallied around a leader who embodied sovereign confidence.¹⁰³ What Carney offered was not nostalgia or blind nationalism, but an articulation of Canadian values, and an assertion that Canada will stand its ground on those.

The lesson for the UK is clear. To generate national pride in the increasingly multipolar world order, with renewed challenges on sovereignty, Britain needs a confident national story about its role in the world, its values and its alliances. The story should be grounded in British strengths, sovereignty and independence, resting upon clear principles about who and what Britain is aligned with and why, and backed up by meaningful action. To assert this story, it should use:

- Strategic alliances with other middle powers which reassert British sovereignty, values and strength. This should include new issue-based coalitions on the big global challenges, be it AI, climate change, and geopolitical and economic security. Britain’s role should draw on Britain’s strengths in these areas, be they AI safety, green finance, strong service exports, or our role as a permanent member on the UN Security council.
- Soft power strategy. The government’s current Soft Power Council provides a vehicle for change, but must be backed by sustained investment and strategy rather than rhetoric. The British Council has expressed alarm that competitor nations are increasing investment in cultural diplomacy as the UK has been cutting it. To remedy this, the government should look to the BBC World Service (with a weekly audience of around 467 million people), world renowned British universities and schools, and British music, arts, and entertainment - promoting them and valuing them in terms of the soft power they provide.

100 Mazzucato, M. (2025). The public value of arts and culture: Investing in arts and culture to reimagine economic growth in the 21st century. UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/sites/bartlett/files/2026-02/Public%20Value%20of%20Arts%20and%20Culture.pdf>

101 The Guardian. (1982). Patriotism has worked its old magic. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/1982/jun/16/thatcher.uk>

102 Feinstein Y (2010). War that Feels Good : A new explanation for the rally-round-the-flag phenomenon. Oxford University Press. https://www.democracy.uci.edu/files/docs/conferences/grad/Feinstein_DemocracyConf_Irvine2010.pdf

103 Morrison, C. (2025). Canadian pride surges in face of Trump’s tariff, sovereignty threats: Leger poll. CP24. <https://www.cp24.com/news/canada/2025/03/12/canadian-pride-surges-in-face-of-trumps-tariff-sovereignty-threats-leger-poll/>

Economic

Economic pride is about pride in what we make or do as a country, and why. Pride in Britain's economy has taken many forms through history. At one time Britain was described as 'the workshop of the world' based on its dominance in global manufacturing. After the second world war, Clement Attlee promised "not cease from mental fight... till we have built Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land", a reflection of Britain's surge in building new homes and towns. In the 1960s, we embraced "the white heat of the technological revolution", as Harold Wilson aspired to "replace the cloth cap [with] the white laboratory coat as the symbol of British labour".¹⁰⁴ Later in the 20th century we took pride in being 'a nation of shopkeepers' - referring to British entrepreneurialism and the small business ecosystem. Thatcher said: "We used to be famous for two things - as a nation of shopkeepers and as the workshop of the world. One is trade, the other is industry. We must get back our reputation".¹⁰⁵ As we entered the 21st century, Blair's focus on "education, education, education" characterised Britain's position as global leaders in the knowledge economy.

All of these speak to a sense of pride in workers across our nation in being at the global frontier of their sector. In the complex, modern service economy of the 21st century, this pride has waned. A renewed story about the workers of today is key to rebuilding it. The government must understand the economy of today and tell a story about what we make or do, and why.

The Starmer government made moves in this direction around AI. Keir Starmer said:¹⁰⁶

We are all proud of our history - the first industrial nation, the cradle of engineering innovation - and I want people to look back on this generation and be proud of what we started today. That we grasped the nettle of AI, that we ran with it, and made it work for working people. That's who we are as a nation.

While indicative of the approach we need - a historical thread of economic pride with a forward-looking story about what Britain makes and why - it is not enough. For the Burnham government - which has a sharp focus on reindustrialisation as its central economic story - the narrative must sit on three additional pillars: it must exemplify the character of Britain, be driven by an ambitious policy agenda, and be symbolised by new national institutions.

First, focussing on a specific part of the economy can be effective, even if most people do not work in that sector. Despite the successful 'workshop of the world' narrative, the share of British employees in manufacturing never rose above 40% since 1841.¹⁰⁷ But it is critical that the narrative speaks to aspects of our economy that all communities can feel proud of, including those most left behind. Successful narratives in the past - 'workshop of the world', 'nation of shopkeepers', 'education, education, education' - all spoke not to success in a sector, but to the character of Britain, as hardworking and having craftsmanship, as entrepreneurial and as grafters, and as intelligent and creative. A national economic narrative focused solely on AI risked being heard as a story only focussed on graduates in cities, without a clear sense of underlying values. Burnham's new economic narrative must, in contrast, make clear what values reindustrialisation reflects about Britain, its workers, and its economic strength.

104 Francis, M. (2013). Harold Wilson's "white heat of technology" speech 50 years on. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/science/political-science/2013/sep/19/harold-wilson-white-heat-technology-speech>

105 Thatcher, M. (1982). Speech to Conservative Central Council. Margaret Thatcher Foundation. <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/102496>

106 Starmer, K. (2025). PM speech on AI Opportunities Action Plan: 13 January 2025. Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street. <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-on-ai-opportunities-action-plan-13-january-2025>

107 Office for National Statistics. (2016). Five facts about... the UK service sector. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/economicoutputandproductivity/output/articles/fivefactsabouttheukservicesector/2016-09-29>

Second, the economic story has to be backed up by a policy agenda. Attlee's government did in fact build a million homes and established 14 new towns. Thatcher did raise entrepreneurialism. Blair did invest in education and in building out the UK's services sector. All of these were highly visible changes that the public could attach to the story. But beyond a few moments - for example the 2023 AI Safety Summit 2023 - there is no equivalent for AI. The government's 2025 Industrial Strategy, with its focus on advanced manufacturing and clean energy and other sectors, could offer an alternative narrative for Burnham's reindustrialisation agenda, but on its own is too broad. Flagship events, projects, and outcomes on reindustrialisation will be key to grasping the public imagination.

Lastly, the economic narrative should come alongside new institutions which symbolise it. The deep pride in national services like the NHS (symbolising Britain's supportiveness and collectivity) or in regional infrastructure like the Greater Manchester Bee Network (symbolising Manchester's sense of ownership) demonstrate the importance of this.¹⁰⁸ Both give the public a sense of belonging in the economy. The AI Safety Institute represents a candidate for the AI sector, and GB Energy for the energy sector. Both, however, lack mainstream exposure and provide no touchpoints for the public. They therefore lack public salience. The new government must build economic institutions around reindustrialisation which the public engage with and can feel a sense of belonging with. New public corporations - which are hot on the agenda of the new Prime Minister - offer one route to do so. Households, for example, could see the public corporation on their water bill. The nationalisation of steel offers another, if given media exposure. The new government must seize this opportunity for its reindustrialisation narrative.

108 Greater Manchester Combined Authority. (2025). Delivering the Bee Network: Network performance. Greater Manchester Combined Authority. <https://democracy.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/documents/s36803/11%20GMCA%2020250328%20Delivering%20the%20Bee%20Network.pdf>

CONCLUSION

Pride - and the ownership, collective endeavour, belonging, optimism and engagement it can foster - remains at the heart of what 'citizenship' in a healthy democracy should mean. The stark fragmentation in how pride is experienced speaks to the disparate and unequal realities of what it means to be a citizen in the UK today, and is borne out in increasing polarisation, mistrust of others, institutions and politics, and disengagement in democracy itself.

In contrast to 2011, mainstream politics is no longer guilty of overlooking pride as an important measure in the national project, but despite multiple political projects and policy programmes, lacks the language, policy machinery and emotional connection with the public to materially impact pride where it matters most for people.

This fragmentation of pride is both a symptom and a cause of the decline in social bridging capital - opportunities for different groups to share experiences, narratives and a sense of ownership, whether of local place, institutions or the national story. This is where the political project to rebuild pride, and restore its role as the relational oil in our democratic engine must start.

At local level, policymakers must ensure devolution does not stop at the town hall, but reaches local civic infrastructure, involving people and communities in decision-making to generate shared ownership and belonging. Institutions must expand their governance, geographical presence and opportunities for engagement with the public to develop broader legitimacy and build forms of belonging and ownership that can rise above the divisions of culture-war politics. And we need a renewed national story that creates a shared touchpoint for all communities across the country. With a new era of investment in culture, sport and heritage, new international alliances and strategy, and new economic stories and institutions, we can build more than just fleeting moments of shared experience. **We can begin to rebuild hopeful stories of what it means to be a citizen in the UK today.**

This **fragmentation of pride** is both a symptom and a cause of the decline in **social bridging capital**.

This is where the political project to **rebuild pride**, and restore its role as the **relational oil in our democratic engine** must start.

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