

GDWe:

A spotlight on democratic wellbeing



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1. The case for Gross Domestic Wellbeing (GDWe)

At Carnegie UK we advocate for collective wellbeing, which is realised when everyone has what they need to live well, individually and together. As a wellbeing-focused organisation, we believe it is time to go beyond the use of narrow measures of progress such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), towards a holistic approach to assessing wellbeing.

More than health and wealth, collective wellbeing includes having friends and loved ones, the ability to contribute meaningfully to society, and the ability to set our own direction and make choices about our own lives. It is connected to concepts of sustainable development, inclusive growth, quality of life, happiness, and going 'beyond GDP.' Collective wellbeing is made up of, and places equal weight on, social, economic, environmental, and democratic (SEED) outcomes. We define these SEED outcomes as:

- **Social wellbeing:** we all have our basic needs met
- **Economic wellbeing:** we all have a decent minimum living standard
- **Environmental wellbeing:** we all live within the planet's natural resources
- **Democratic wellbeing:** we all have a voice in decisions that affect us

In order to offer an alternative measure of social progress to the dominant measure GDP, Carnegie UK developed a methodology to enable collective wellbeing in England to be measured and reported as a single figure: Gross Domestic Wellbeing (GDWe). GDWe takes into account evidence from across the SEED domains, to include not just economic concerns but also how we feel about our

relationships, our environment, our local neighbourhood, and more. Our analysis uses the framework and data in the Office for National Statistics (hereafter ONS) Measures of National Wellbeing Dashboard¹. In 2020, Carnegie UK also undertook a thematic review of over 873 recommendations from 48 commissions and inquiries since 2010 – from Marmot to Grimsey, Dilnot to Taylor, to identify key themes and gaps in the ONS framework for measuring wellbeing.

In December 2020, we published the first GDWe score, along with the thematic review of recommendations from commissions and inquiries². Our analysis of ONS data showed that GDWe in England was declining, and it was already doing so before the COVID-19 pandemic began. In comparison with GDP over the same six year period, whilst GDP steadily increased, Gross Domestic Wellbeing had slowed and started to move in the opposite direction.

In August 2021, Carnegie UK published the updated GDWe score for England for 2019/20³. This score covered the period right up until the point when the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020.

- 1 Office for National Statistics.,2021. Measures of National Wellbeing Dashboard. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/measuresofnationalwellbeingdashboard/2018-04-25>.
- 2 Wallace, Ormston, Thurman et al.,2020. Gross Domestic Wellbeing (GDWe): an alternative measure of social progress. Available at: <https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/gross-domestic-wellbeing-gdwe-an-alternative-measure-ofsocial-progress/>.
- 3 Wallace, Ormston et al, 2021. Gross Domestic Wellbeing 2019/20. GDWe score release. Available at <https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/gross-domestic-wellbeing-gdwe-2019-20-release/>

The GDWe score published in August 2021 for the 2019/20 period was 6.79 out of 10. This compares to 6.89 the previous year, demonstrating that wellbeing in England was in decline even before the wide ranging impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic⁴.

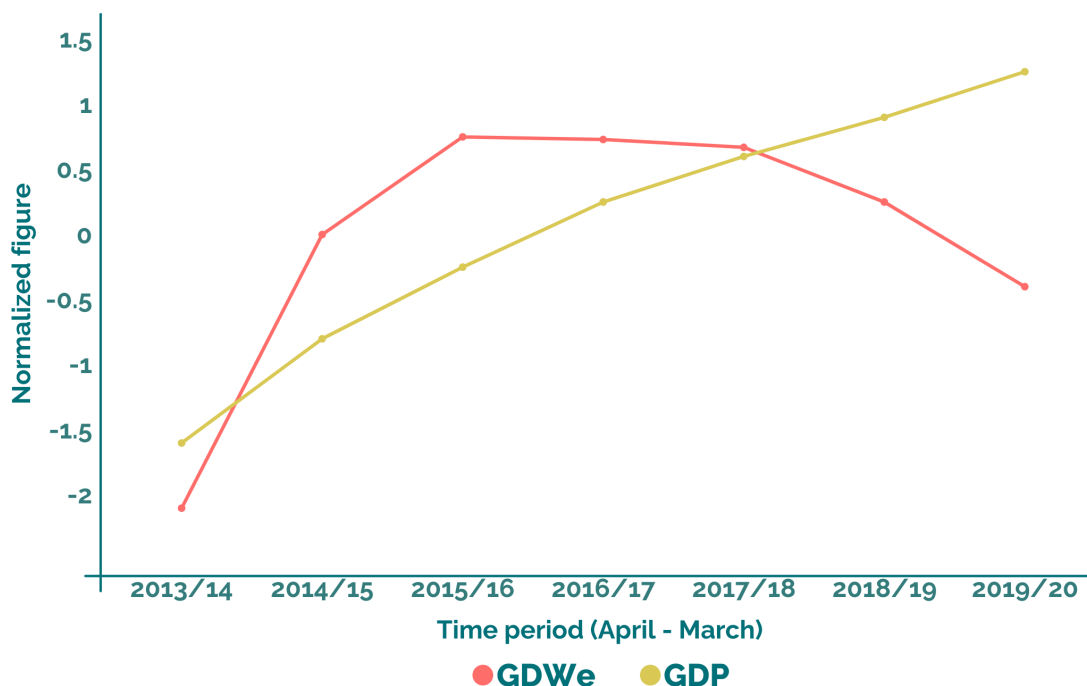
From Graph 1, we can see that while GDP increased, GDWe continued to dip between April 2019 and March 2020. This analysis shows that well before the COVID-19 pandemic, wellbeing in England was lagging behind economic growth.

GDWe has the potential to be a powerful communications tool that is used to guide decision making and by decision makers as a holistic alternative to Gross Domestic Product. GDWe has also gained significant cross-party support⁵.

However, **large gaps in data rendered our attempt to update the score for 2020/21 impossible**. There are 41 indicators across the 10 domains in the ONS Wellbeing Dashboard. In addition to the two-year time lag for data to become available across all of the domains, updated data for over half of these indicators (25 in total) has been delayed or postponed. Many of these delays are attributed to problems caused by COVID-19, however economic data has continued to be collected and published during the same time period. It is difficult to understand how the ONS is able to monitor wellbeing in the UK with such incomplete and inadequate data.

- 4 See, for example, the resources collated by the Health Foundation at <https://www.health.org.uk/what-we-do/a-healthier-uk-population/mobilising-action-for-healthy-lives/covid-19-impact-inquiry/evidence-library>
- 5 UK Parliament, 2020. Early Day Motions: Gross Domestic Wellbeing. Available at: <https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/57830/gross-domestic-wellbeing>.

Graph 1: GDWe vs GDP scores



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It is over 10 years since the ONS Wellbeing Dashboard⁶ was created. If its purpose - as stated - is to 'monitor and report how the UK is doing by producing accepted and trusted measures for the different areas of life that matter most to the UK public' - then it urgently needs to be reviewed and updated. Carnegie UK's review of commissions and inquiries highlighted that not only are the indicators within the domains insufficient, but the data that is purportedly collected is done so inconsistently and sporadically. In the context of COVID-19 and the climate emergency, understanding collective wellbeing has never been so important. Yet the ONS Dashboard itself has not been updated since before the pandemic began.

In the face of the gaps in ONS data, the Carnegie UK team reviewed the indicators used in the ONS Wellbeing Dashboard, and their alignment with the SEED domains. Our aim was to identify areas where the review of commissions and inquiries had identified additional wellbeing measurement categories, and to explore whether data was available to fill these gaps⁷.

In our review of the ONS Wellbeing Dashboard, we noted an imbalance in favour of the Social and Economic domains, with little attention paid to the Democratic domain. The ONS Wellbeing Dashboard measures were simply trust in government and voter turnout. With the voter turnout measurement only taking into account General Elections, this data is not frequently updated, and does not adequately reflect the range of elements that contribute to democratic wellbeing. Carnegie UK therefore decided to explore potential additional measures and provide up to date data on democratic wellbeing

6 Office for National Statistics, 2021. Measures of National Well-being Dashboard.

Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/measuresofnationalwellbeingdashboard/2018-04-25>.

7 Wallace, Ormston, Thurman et al., 2020. Gross Domestic Wellbeing (GDWe): an alternative measure of social progress. Available at: <https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/gross-domestic-wellbeing-gdwe-an-alternative-measure-of-social-progress/p.60>

2. Why focus on democratic wellbeing?

At Carnegie UK, when we talk about measuring democratic wellbeing we are referring to the extent to which we all - collectively - have a voice in decisions that affect us. Wellbeing cannot be 'done to' people, it has to be done by and with them. Emerging methods of public participation and citizen engagement, such as citizens' assemblies and participatory budgeting, seek to increase individual and collective voice and choice. And while in recent years much of the attention given to participatory democracy has focused on the methods chosen to engage citizens, it is the purpose of these processes that gives us important insights for wellbeing: each aims to give greater power to individuals and communities. They are collaborative, context specific, and outcomes focused in their approach⁸.

Yet, **in order for people to feel positive about participating in democratic processes and decision making, it is essential to have public trust in government.** As the OECD states, trust is the foundation of a functioning democratic system, and is crucial for maintaining political participation⁹. Apathy can be attributed to a lack of trust in the political system, as citizens may not get involved if they think their opinion will not influence decision-makers¹⁰. Importantly, the delivery of effective public policy, such as that concerning public health, making progress towards the climate emergency, and tackling social inequality, requires a certain level of public confidence in the Government

and the political system. Low levels of trust can place compliance with decisions made by Government at risk¹¹. As we have noted in our work on wellbeing in Northern Ireland, democratic wellbeing is both a means to greater social, economic and environmental wellbeing AND an end in itself, impacting directly on personal wellbeing¹².

This research was conducted at a time when there has been heightened focus on levels of trust in government¹³. **We have found that democratic wellbeing is under severe threat.**

- 2 in 5 people in England (41%) now say that democracy is not working. People see the biggest current threat to our democracy as a loss of trust (32%) followed by corruption (16%).
- 76% of the public in England don't trust MPs, while 73% don't trust the UK Government.

These findings exemplify why **a lack of updated information from official statistics limits the UK Government's ability to check the temperature of the nation** and get early warning when weaknesses in our system of democracy are impacting on our collective wellbeing. In addition to a loss of trust, we also identified issues with current levels of participation in decision-making, with misinformation, and with a misalignment between commonly held public values and perceptions of those in governance roles.

8 Involve UK, 2021. Introduction to planning participation. Available at: <https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/knowledge-base/how-do-i-plan-participatory-process/introduction-planning-participation>.

9 <https://www.oecd.org/gov/trust-in-government.htm>

10 Yunsoo Lee & Hindy Lauer Schachter (2019) Exploring the Relationship between Trust in Government and Citizen Participation, International Journal of Public Administration, 42:5, 405-416, DOI: 10.1080/01900692.2018.1465956

11 Clery, E., Curtice, J., Frankenburg, S., Morgan, H., and Reid, S. 2021. British Social Attitudes: The 38th Report. London: The National Centre for Social Research.

12 Woods, J., Doran, P. and Wallace, J., 2015. Towards a Wellbeing Framework: Background Report <https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/towards-a-wellbeing-framework-background-report/>

13 Financial Times, 2021. 'Partygate' strains trust in Boris Johnson's government. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/b50bc1cd-8de4-4a88-b444-c7f5913000c8>.

3. Methods

Using YouGov polling, Carnegie UK was able to measure quickly the temperature of democratic wellbeing across a sample of 1453 adults in England. Using our own indicators, informed by the review of commissions and inquiries, we were able to look more broadly at the mechanisms that give citizens a voice in decisions that affect them. The next section outlines our findings. They depict a turbulent time for democratic wellbeing in England.

Working with YouGov¹⁴, and taking inspiration from other sources such as the OECD and searching the UK Data Service for previously used questions, we designed a questionnaire to ascertain the state of democratic wellbeing in England in December 2021. As noted above, this turned out to be a particularly turbulent time with widespread media reporting of accusations that the UK Government had committed breaches of COVID-19 lockdown rules earlier in the year¹⁵.

At Carnegie UK we discussed whether this remained an appropriate time to 'take the temperature' of democratic wellbeing. We decided to proceed as planned; what we present here is a snapshot taken at a particular time. Given the prevailing context, we hope that this reflects a particularly low moment for trust in government.

However, this survey was not merely about trust in government; we were also interested in whether mechanisms for participatory democracy had broken through to the mainstream and whether concerns about misinformation, online behaviours and self-censorship were backed up by public opinion and experience. We have reported these findings by age group as this was where further analysis found the most difference. Where other statistically significant correlations were identified these are noted in the text.

As with all research methods, there are a number of caveats to bear in mind when reviewing the findings. This is an online survey. It is weighted to be representative of the population in England at the present time, but there is an inbuilt bias on digital inclusion. For this reason, we limited our questions on online engagement to experience of the online world, rather than exploring digital inclusion directly. There are also population groups not well covered by this methodology, for example those who are not fluent in English or those who are experiencing homelessness.

14 The survey was carried out by YouGov. Total sample size was 1,746 adults but this report only refers to the responses from people living in England (the focus of GDWe), therefore the sample size was 1453 adults in England. Fieldwork was undertaken between 12th - 13th December 2021. The survey was carried out online. The figures (both UK and England) have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).

15 See, for example, BBC News, 2021. 'Downing Street Party: No 10 staff joked about party amid lockdown restrictions'. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-59572149>.

4. Findings: What do we know about democratic wellbeing in England

The polling for this report took place during a time where the news agenda was particularly focused on trust in and truthfulness of the current UK Government¹⁶. Yet it was also against a backdrop of a long-term decline in political trust in Britain. The British Social Attitudes Survey comments that political trust in Britain fell to an “all-time low” during 2019, due to the parliamentary stalemate over Brexit, and how this was handled¹⁷. However, findings in 2020 found that levels of trust and confidence had risen back to pre-Brexit levels, which could be attributed to the delivery of Brexit and the handling of the pandemic in the early, crisis phase¹⁸. While the long-term trend on trust in government is unclear, it does appear that recovery from low points is possible.

16 Financial Times, 2021. ‘Partygate’ strains trust in Boris Johnson’s government. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/b50bc1cd-8de4-4a88-b444-c7f5913000c8>.

17 Clery, E., Curtice, J., Frankenburg, S., Morgan, H., and Reid, S. 2021. British Social Attitudes: The 38th Report. London: The National Centre for Social Research.

18 Clery, E., Curtice, J., Frankenburg, S., Morgan, H., and Reid, S. 2021. British Social Attitudes: The 38th Report. London: The National Centre for Social Research.

4.1 Perceptions of UK Democracy

Overall, the respondents were split with 45% reporting that it works fairly or very well and 41% reporting that it does not work very well or not well at all.

As Table 1 shows, older people (over 65 years old) were most likely to say that democracy was working very well (9% compared to an overall population rate of 4%). Men were also more likely than women to have an opinion about the state of UK democracy (15% of men compared to 5% of women).

There were some differences for social grade (comparing ABC1 social grade with C2DE) - with those in social grade C2DE less likely to report that democracy is working very well or fairly well (39% compared to 49% of those in social grades ABC1¹⁹).

19 We have followed the standard convention of referring to social grades as ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ but do so with some concerns about the judgments that this places on people.

Table 1: Perceptions of how well UK democracy is currently functioning by age (percentage, England only)

	18-24	25-49	50-64	65+	Total
Very well	1	2	4	9	4
Fairly well	41	34	46	47	41
Not very well	18	30	22	26	26
Not at all well	15	17	16	12	15
Don't know	25	16	11	7	14

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Those from lower social grades were more likely to report that they don't know how democracy is faring at the moment (22% of those in social grades C2DE answered don't know in comparison to 8% of ABC1s). Younger people were also more likely than all other age groups to report that they didn't know how well democracy functioned in the UK.

Those who reported low life satisfaction (0 to 3 on a ten point scale) were more likely to report that UK democracy was not functioning well, or not functioning at all (63% compared to 34% with high life satisfaction scores of between 7 and 10).

We provided respondents with a list of 11 potential threats to democracy and invited them to select the one that they thought was the most significant at present²⁰. The top

four (loss of trust in government, corruption, disinformation and immigration) are set out in Table 2 by age. Both immigration and fake news/disinformation were more likely to be selected by older people (over 50s) than younger and middle aged people. There was also a sizable don't know proportion amongst the youngest age group.

Interestingly, although immigration made the list, it came far lower than we expected given that it is often reported as one of the main factors driving UK politics over the past decade.

Those who reported low levels of life satisfaction (scoring 0-3 on a ten point scale) were more likely to identify corruption as a threat to wellbeing (23% compared to 14% of those with medium and high life satisfaction scores).

²⁰ The full list of potential threats to democracy given to respondents were: fake news/disinformation; corruption; loss of trust in Government; Lack of social connection within and between communities; immigration; poverty; globalisation; the electoral system; the political system; political polarisation; none of these; don't know; other.

Table 2: Top four threats to democracy in the UK right now by age (percentage, England only)

	18-24	25-49	50-64	65+	Total
Loss of trust in Government	20	31	34	38	32
Corruption	20	19	13	10	16
Fake news/disinformation	3	11	15	15	12
Immigration	6	4	11	13	8
Don't know	29	11	5	4	10

Table 3: Views on citizens' ability to hold governments to account by age (percentage, England only)

	18-24	25-49	50-64	65+	Total
Citizens should have more power to hold Governments to account	51	74	75	71	71
Citizens should have less power to hold Governments to account	4	2	2	1	2
Citizens currently have about the right amount of power to hold Governments to account	18	7	18	24	15
Don't know	26	17	4	4	12

Our question on whether we, as citizens, could adequately hold government to account was derived from our previous work on the Enabling State²¹. We know from this work that giving more power to citizens is essential to address stubborn inequalities. Here, predictably, few felt that citizens as a whole should have less power. In line with findings about how well democracy currently functions, older people were most likely to feel that citizens currently have the right amount of power to hold governments to account. Interestingly, the younger age group (18-24 years old) were not as likely as the other age categories to voice the view that citizens should have more power - with the biggest difference appearing in the don't know category.

We found a relationship between wellbeing and the desire to hold government to account. Those with low life satisfaction were more likely to report that citizens should have more power to hold government to account (83% compared to 68% of those with high life satisfaction).

21 Wallace, Brothie & Ormston, 2019. The Enabling State: Where are we now? Available at: <https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/the-enabling-state-where-are-we-now-review-of-policy-developments-2013-2018-summary-report/>.

Holding to account requires accurate information on social progress. Given our focus on collective wellbeing, we are particularly interested in the use of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a simplistic measure of 'how life is' in the UK. GDP is common in traditional media and in political debate, but we were interested in the extent to which it is used by the public. We identified a question used previously by the OECD on GDP usage²² and replicated it here. We asked: Have you ever used or referred to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for any purpose, such as for study, work, or personal interest? We found that the majority of the public had not had any practical use for GDP statistics (72%) in the past, with 8% referring to these in the past 3 months and a further 13% more than 3 months ago.

We went on to ask what type of information would be the most useful for capturing how well governments are performing (here we included local, devolved and national governments). We provided short descriptions for each measure of social progress to aid the respondents and asked them to select the most useful measure only.

22 OECD, 2011. Model survey questionnaire on how to monitor trust in official statistics. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/sdd/50021100.pdf>.

Table 4: Most useful measure of social progress identified by age (percentage, England only)

	18-24	25-49	50-64	65+	Total
Gross Domestic Wellbeing	15	19	18	18	18
Trust in government	15	14	14	19	15
Poverty levels	8	14	14	11	13
Life satisfaction	10	9	8	3	7
Gross Domestic Product	3	4	6	10	6
Unemployment level	3	3	5	4	4
Meeting climate targets	4	2	2	3	3
Life expectancy	1	1	1	2	1
None of these	7	10	7	9	9
Don't know	34	23	25	22	24

The findings in Table 4 provide interesting reading. The standard methods commonly used by policy makers for measuring social progress (GDP, unemployment, life expectancy) were not selected by many people (7% or less in each case).

Life satisfaction, much discussed as a replacement to GDP, is not embraced by the population as a whole (only 7% selecting it) as the most useful measure of social progress. The top three identified measures were a composite index (Gross Domestic Wellbeing); trust in government, and poverty levels. Interestingly, those in social groups ABC1 were as likely to identify poverty levels as an indicator of social progress as those in C2DE. When we analysed against life satisfaction it became clear that those with low life satisfaction scores were more likely to select poverty metrics than those with high life satisfaction scores (22% compared to 11%).

4.2 Trust in society

As identified in Table 2 and Table 4, the loss of trust in government institutions is identified as a key issue in relation to the functioning of UK democracy. In this section we explore this in more detail.

Table 5: To what extent, if at all, do you trust each of the following to make decisions that will improve your life and the lives of other people like you? (percentage, England only)

	Trust a great deal/ Trust a fair amount	Do not trust very much/ Do not trust at all	Don't know
MPs	17	76	7
UK Government	20	73	6
Local government	32	60	9

As Table 5 shows, MPs were identified as particularly untrusted, although there is not much difference between the feelings expressed about MPs as a whole and the current government, suggesting that the voting age population may have determined 'a plague on all their houses'. Local government does fare slightly better, but here there is still a sizeable majority of respondents saying that they do not trust local government very much, or at all. Due to the high level of agreement amongst people, there was little difference between the responses from different ages, genders and social grades.

We did find a difference in trust between those who experience low life satisfaction and those who experience medium or high life satisfaction scores. For example, for trust in MPs, 88% of those with a low life satisfaction rating (scoring themselves 0-3 on a ten point scale) reported that they did not trust UK Government very much or at all, compared to 70% of those with a high life satisfaction score (of between 7 and 10). The difference was even greater for trust in the UK Government with 90% of those with low life satisfaction scores indicating that they did not trust the UK Government very much or at all, compared to 68% of those with high life satisfaction scores.

We wanted to probe this lack of trust in relation to values. Specifically, to explore whether this deficit was linked to a dissonance between a set of values viewed by the public as being important for elected office, and their perception of how these values were manifesting themselves at the time of asking. We identified nine values commonly associated with behaviours desired and expected from those in public life and asked people which they felt was the most important, and whether they felt the current UK government exemplified their chosen value (people were only able to select one). The top three values selected are shown in Table 6²³.

²³ The values not commonly selected were: inclusivity and tolerance; strength and security; compassion and kindness; nationalism and tradition; respect and dignity and individual liberty and personal responsibility. Each had 5% or less supporting the value as the most important

Table 6: Top three values of government selected by extent to which this government holds them (percentage, England only)

	% selecting value as important	% of those that selected this value that believe UK Government holds this value		
		Completely reflects this value / Largely reflects this value	Slightly reflects this value/Does not reflect this value at all	Don't know
Honesty and integrity	46	8	89	3
Fairness and equality	11	11	81	8
Openness and transparency	12	7	90	3

Given that there were nine options to choose from, the fact that almost half of people selected 'honesty and integrity' suggests that feelings around this issue were strongly-held at the time. The next most common responses (fairness and equality and openness and transparency) were selected by 11% and 12% respectively.

The vast majority of those selecting honesty and integrity felt that the current UK Government only slightly reflects this value, or does not reflect this value at all. This dissonance is also at play in the other two 'top' values of fairness and equality and openness and transparency (81% and 90% respectively reporting that the UK government only slightly holds or does not hold these values at all). People with low life satisfaction were more likely to report that they did not believe the UK Government reflected the values that they selected (73% compared to 48% of those with high life satisfaction).

Our interest in how people come to trust the information that they receive, led us to ask a further question on sources of information. As with other surveys of this kind, we found high levels of distrust in media and social media but national statistics and public services in general were trusted sources for information.

Table 7: To what extent, if at all, do you trust the information you see or hear from each of the following? (percentage, England only)

	Trust a great deal/Trust a fair amount	Do not trust very much/ Do not trust at all	Don't know
Media	18	75	7
Social media	8	86	6
National statistics from recognised sources e.g. unemployment figures, GDP etc	61	29	10
Public services e.g. doctors, transport etc	71	23	6
Businesses I use e.g. supermarkets	51	39	10

The youngest age group (18 to 24 year olds) were more likely to report trusting the media a great deal or a fair amount (27% compared to a population rate of 18%). This youngest group was also the most likely to report trusting social media a great deal or a fair amount (20% compared to a population rate of 8%). They were the least likely age group to trust business a great deal or a fair amount (40% compared to a population rate of 51%).

Women were less likely to trust the media than men: 16% of women trust the media a fair amount or a great deal compared to 21% of men.

4.3 Participatory democracy

We asked people about the extent to which they feel involved in local decision making, for example by taking part in consultations, focus groups or discussions about local services. On a four point scale, the majority of people reported that they were not involved at all or were only slightly involved (89%, of which 74% reported being not involved at all).

Table 8: Level of involvement in local decision making by age (percentage, England only)

	18-24	25-49	50-64	65+	Total
Fairly involved or very involved	15	6	3	6	6
Slightly involved or not involved at all	68	86	96	9	89
Don't know	16	8	1	2	5

Younger people were more likely than other age groups to be fairly or very involved in local decision making (15% if those aged 18 to 24 years old). On further analysis, we found that people with low levels of life satisfaction were more likely to report that they were not involved at all, compared to those with high levels of life satisfaction (83% compared to 70%).

We then asked a similar question related to whether people were interested in taking part in local decision making, (Table 9) identifying an even split between those who were fairly or very interested and those not very interested or not interested at all (45% compared to 43% respectively).

Combining the findings of the two questions, we can see that of those who reported that they were not involved at all, 43% reported that they were very or fairly interested in taking part in the future. In terms of social grade, those in grades C2DE were more likely to report that they were not interested in participating in local decision making.

We are advised by YouGov that it is normal for people to overstate their interest in this type of activity due to a social desirability bias in answering surveys. However, we have reported this to make the point that the issue in relation to participatory democracy at a local level is not consultation fatigue or apathy, as is often reported, but a more complex interplay of knowledge and invitation.

Table 9: Level of interest in local decision making by age (percentage, England only)

	18-24	25-49	50-64	65+	Total
Fairly or very interested in taking part	40	45	46	47	45
Not very interested or not interested at all	33	41	48	49	43
Don't know	26	12	5	3	9

Table 10: Awareness and engagement with different mechanisms for participatory democracy (percentage, England only)

	I have been invited by government or public services to take part in this within the last 2 years	I have heard about this, and know a lot about it / know something about it	I have heard about this, but don't know anything about it / I have never heard about this	Don't know
Consultations	7	30	63	7
Focus groups²⁴	2	27	66	7
Town hall meetings	2	33	61	6
Citizen Juries	1	10	84	7
Citizen Assemblies	1	9	84	7
Citizen Panels	2	9	85	6
Participatory Budgeting	1	4	88	7
Charettes	1	4	89	8

²⁴ We specifically asked people not to include groups organised by polling organisations or private sector companies to avoid bias by using the YouGov panelbase.

The striking thing about the response to questions on the type of engagement methods (Table 10) is the very low numbers who have been invited to take part in participatory democracy activities at all. 80% reported that they had not been invited to take part in any of these mechanisms and a further 7% reported that they did not know whether they had been or not - meaning that only 13% of the adult population of England is aware of being actively involved in decision making by governments and public service.

We found that the traditional engagement mechanisms of consultation, focus groups and public (or town hall) meetings were the best known methods of engagement (30%, 27% and 33% respectively). The International Association of Public Participation's Spectrum of Participation²⁵ would suggest that these mechanisms are at the lower end of the participation spectrum (information and consultation) rather than the more active end of the spectrum where the newer, but lesser known methods such as Citizen Juries, Citizen Assemblies and Participatory Budgeting mechanisms sit (known by 10% or less of the population).

²⁵ International Association for Public Participation, 2021. <https://www.iap2.org/mpage/Home>

For those organisations that promote participative democracy (including our own) the gap between the knowledge in the sector and the awareness and experience of the majority of citizens is something that warrants more attention.

4.4 Online behaviours

Carnegie UK has long been interested in the ability of individuals to participate meaningfully in the online world, from our decade of work in digital inclusion²⁶ to our more recent programme on tackling online harm²⁷. The latter focuses on systemic or design solutions to foreseeable risks and issues such as misinformation, online abuse and financial scams.

Our survey found that 12% of people in England identified fake news/disinformation as the major issue facing UK democracy (see Table 2). The survey was conducted online and therefore has a bias towards those

26 Bowyer, Grant and White, 2020. Learning from lockdown: 12 steps to eliminate digital exclusion. Available at: <https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/learning-from-lockdown-12-steps-to-eliminate-digital-exclusion/>.

27 Carnegie UK, 2021. Online Harms and a statutory Duty of Care. Available at: <https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/programmes/tackling-online-harm/>.

who are digitally included. Our questions therefore focused on behaviours of those who are digitally active rather than questions around digital inclusion itself.

As Table 11 shows, the majority of people (6 in 10) report that they self-censor when they communicate online. There is a difference in response by age with people more likely to report that they self-censor always or frequently rising with age. Women were also more likely to report that they would always or frequently self-censor when online (63% of women compared to 59% of men).

For those who did report that they always or frequently self-censor online, we asked them why they did so. In this case we provided 9 options with the four most popular selected outlined in Table 12 (we allowed people to select more than one reason for this question). Table 12 shows that the most common responses were concern about abuse and not wanting to get into an argument (44% and 47% respectively). Just under a third of people (32%) reported simply not wanting the hassle and one in five (20%) reported concerns about the impact if their educational institution or employer saw the content.

Table 11: Self-censoring of online behaviour by age (percentage, England only)

	18-24	25-49	50-64	65+	Total
Always/ Frequently	44	57	66	67	61
Rarely/ never	33	29	25	26	28
Don't know	23	14	8	7	12

Table 12: Top 4 reasons for self-censorship by age (percentage who reported that they self-censored always or frequently, England only)

	18-24	25-49	50-64	65+	Total
Concern about abuse from responses such as nasty comments, harassment, pile-ons or doxing	30	44	50	41	44
Don't want to get into an argument	38	52	50	41	47
It's too much hassle	43	38	26	24	32
Thinking about impact if employer or educational institution saw the content	24	31	19	5	20

While age has a significant effect on each of these options, it is not a clear linear relationship. Concern about abuse peaks in the 50-64 age group, while concerns about impact on employment or education were higher amongst the under 50s.

Women were more likely than men to report that they self-censored due to concern about abuse from responses (50% of women who self-censored compared to 38% of men). They were also more likely to self-censor because they don't want to get into an argument (51% of women compared to 44% of men) Men, on the other hand were more likely to report self-censorship because voicing their views online is too much hassle (37% of men compared to 28% of women).

Our final question related to the extent to which people feel their view is listened to online (see Table 13). Given that this survey related directly to democratic wellbeing, we were keen to ascertain whether the online environment provided a space for people to share their views openly and feel that their voice mattered. Overall, fewer than

10% of people (9%) felt that their views were always or frequently listened to online. There were very high and consistent reports of 'don't know' for this question which leads us to conclude that more work is required on honing a question that truly represents people's experiences in the online world.

Table 13: Percentage feeling that their view is listened to online by age (England only)

	18-24	25-49	50-64	65+	Total
Always/ Frequently	18	10	6	9	9
Rarely/ never	44	54	63	61	57
Don't know	38	36	30	30	34

However we do note that the youngest age group (18-24 year olds) report higher levels of online voice than the other age groups. Their experiences would merit further exploration to identify why this might be the case.

Men and women differed in their responses to this question too. Men were more likely to report that they were never or rarely listened to online (60% compared to 54% of women), while women were more likely to report that they don't know whether they were listened to online (37% compared to 30%). There is no difference to the rate that feel they were always or frequently listened to, with both men and women reporting around the average.

5. What do these findings mean for collective wellbeing?

We can no longer afford to be complacent about the state of our democracy

Our polling found that there is a loss of trust in MPs and the UK Government, as well as a clear split in how people felt democracy in the UK is working (45% positive versus 41% negative).

Our survey is not part of a longitudinal study and therefore it is not straightforward to compare results with other surveys to provide analysis over time, but the findings do suggest that the improvement to trust post-Brexit has not been sustained in the short term.

As we noted in our introductory remarks, loss of trust is linked to the ability of governments to function effectively. Clearly, this is an area that needs much greater attention given the scale and nature of the public policy challenges which UK Government will need to address in the years ahead.

What gets measured is what matters - so we must measure the health of our democracy

Given that the ONS Measures of National Wellbeing Dashboard currently only includes two measures of democratic wellbeing - 'voter turnout' and 'trust in government' - there is a need for official statistics (which we know are trusted sources of information) to look more broadly at what democratic wellbeing means to citizens. We have included in our survey some

suggestions of how this could be done more comprehensively. International experts such as the OECD have a wealth of experience to support the UK Government in this endeavour.

Data gaps and delays are inexcusable

There are 41 indicators across the 10 domains in the ONS Wellbeing Dashboard. In addition to the two-year time lag for data to become available across all of the domains, updated data for over half of these indicators (25 in total) has been delayed or postponed. We understand the problems posed by COVID-19 but we can't help but notice that economic data is still available while social data is delayed or discontinued. It is difficult to understand how the UK Government is able to monitor wellbeing in the UK with such inadequate data.

Given the extent of the collapse in wellbeing generally, and in trust in government and politicians specifically, we need more timely statistics on collective wellbeing, for example through a new bespoke survey. Our polling exercise shows how a large amount of information can be gathered from a representative sample of the population relatively quickly, albeit without the depth of national statistics. It is positive to see that citizens continue to regard official statistics from recognised sources as trusted sources of information. Statisticians and public policy experts should debate the trade-off between timeliness and robustness of data on collective wellbeing.

Increased public awareness of voice mechanisms is needed

Democratic wellbeing is a vital part of collective wellbeing. We should all have a voice in decisions that affect us, with greater power given to individuals and communities. Our survey findings demonstrate an urgent need to increase public trust in institutions, as well as knowledge about the ways that citizens can increase their voice in decision-making, such as through participatory approaches. Importantly, there is a clear need to promote why having this voice matters.

There is public support for using Gross Domestic Wellbeing, over Gross Domestic Product

When asked which measures should be used to capture whether as a society we are progressing, the top three measures chosen by the public were a composite index (Gross Domestic Wellbeing); trust in government, and levels of poverty. Gross Domestic Wellbeing was identified as the top measure, supported equally across all age groups, showing its potential as an alternative measure of social progress.

We reiterate here our call for the UK Government to explore fully composite indices like GDWe. Such transparent information, based on a public conversation about what should be included in GDWe, could contribute to collective wellbeing by increasing public trust and enabling citizens to hold government to account.





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