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Research Summary for the Welsh Parliament Inquiry on Social Cohesion

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This document provides a summary of key findings from work I co-chaired or directed working with The British Academy (BA), the Nuffield Foundation, and Belong – the Cohesion and Integration Network. Sections are: Links to BA reports on Cohesion, Summaries of my own research team's work, summaries of the BA Covid Decade reports on which I was academic lead.

Links to British Academy Reports on Social Cohesion

<https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/cohesive-societies-local-actions-reduce-health-inequalities/> (Multiple authors, led by Anthony Heath, 2014)

<https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/cohesive-societies-nation-test-identity-belonging/> (Ash Amin and Patrick Wright, 2018)

<https://medium.com/whose-society-whose-cohesion> (2019) a series of provocations...

<https://medium.com/whose-society-whose-cohesion/whose-society-whose-cohesion-f61224d31631> (Alan Bowman and Greg Woolf)

<https://medium.com/whose-society-whose-cohesion/the-left-behind-and-pessimistic-nostalgia-d5828833c280> (Colin Crouch)

<https://medium.com/whose-society-whose-cohesion/rethinking-cities-from-the-ground-up-73d92059b15f> (David Wengrow)

<https://medium.com/whose-society-whose-cohesion/social-cohesion-in-athens-myths-and-realities-1e01b43f68ac> (Carol Atak)

<https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/cohesive-societies-literature-review/> (Imogen Baylis, Harris Beider and Mike Hardy, 2019)

<https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/cohesive-societies-scoping-concepts-priorities/> (The British Academy, 2019)

<https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/cohesive-societies-faith-and-belief/> (Madeleine Pennington, 2020)

COVID Decade reports to GO-Science

<https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/projects/covid-decade/>

<https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/covid-decade-understanding-the-long-term-societal-impacts-of-covid-19/>

<https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/shaping-the-covid-decade-addressing-the-long-term-societal-impacts-of-covid-19/>

Synopses of Principal Research Publications on Social Cohesion during the Pandemic.

1. Abrams, D., Lalot, F., Broadwood, J., Davies Hayon, K., Platts-Dunn, I. (2020). *The social cohesion investment: Local areas that invested in social cohesion programmes are faring better in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic*. Project report. University of Kent, Canterbury, UK [10.22024/unikent/01.02.84003](https://doi.org/10.22024/unikent/01.02.84003). (doi:[10.22024/unikent/01.02.84003](https://doi.org/10.22024/unikent/01.02.84003)) (KAR id:84003) and <https://www.belongnetwork.co.uk/resources/the-social-cohesion-investment-local-areas-that-invested-in-social-cohesion-programmes-are-faring-better-in-the-midst-of-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

Measurement of social cohesion: In total, 2,924 respondents completed an on-line questionnaire; data collection ran from 10th June to 7th July 2020. We compared the sense of social cohesion reported by the Integration Area respondents (**Blackburn with Darwen, Bradford, Peterborough, Walsall and Waltham Forest**, as well as **Calderdale**) versus other respondents coming from places with no specific local integration programme in place (**Wales, Scotland, and the county of Kent**).

Relations between the individual and the state 1) Trust in the government 2) Perception of governmental restrictions and decisions as appropriate 3) Engagement in social activism (e.g., engaging in a local campaign online, signing a petition, volunteering, donating to a cause) *Relations between the individual and their fellow citizens* 4) Attitudes towards immigration 5) Trust in other people to respect social distancing measures in place 6) Density of social relations during lockdown (the quality and quantity of social connections with friends, family and neighbours)

respondents in the six local authority areas were less cynical about the political system: they were less likely to agree that politicians “are in politics for their own benefit” (57% agreement in the six local authority areas vs. 64% in other places) or that they “think they don’t need to respect the law as much as normal citizens do” (57% agreement vs. 62%)

- perceived the current governmental restrictions are more appropriate (8% higher on average) - were more supportive of the decision to reopen schools in England on 1st June (8% higher) - were less likely to report conspiracy beliefs (i.e., that the official version of the Covid-19 pandemic given by the authorities hides the truth) than respondents in other areas (7% lower on average)

stronger sense of connection with their family, friends, colleagues, and neighbours during lockdown (7% higher). Compared with those from other areas, the local authority respondents also expressed a more positive orientation toward people from different social groups across society, as shown in: - greater trust in all sorts of people to respect the Covid-19 restrictions in place, especially in young people (5% higher) - more positive attitudes towards immigrants in the UK (attitudes expressed towards legal and illegal immigrants, asylum seekers and seasonal workers (4% higher) Finally, these respondents were substantially more likely to have engaged in different forms of social activism during the past month. Most common actions included signing a petition, supporting a social media campaign, boycotting specific products, making a donation, and volunteering (overall 62% higher on average)

2. Abrams, D., Lalot, F., Broadwood, J., & Platts-Dunn, I. (2020). Beyond Us and Them: Perception of Covid-19 and Social Cohesion – July 2020 Report. <https://www.belongnetwork.co.uk/resources/beyond-us-and-them-perception-of-covid-19-and-social-cohesion-july-2020-report/>

June survey: 57% of respondents agreed that ‘most politicians think they do not need to respect the law as much as normal citizens do’, while 21% disagreed and 22% do not take position. However, 43% did report that they trust their local MP to represent their interests. Trust in people in general was mixed (29% trust a lot or completely) whereas trust in people living in

one's neighbourhood was higher (38%), demonstrating **higher trust in local people than in the general population**. There is high degree of trust in older people (67%) but a **much lower level of trust in younger people (15%)**, higher amongst men than **women**, higher amongst people living in cities than those living in **towns or villages**, and higher amongst people with a higher income than those with **lower incomes**.

51% respondents reported a loss of connection with their friends and 54% with work colleagues. But 47% reported increased connection with their family, 45% with neighbours, and 31% with people from their local area, as shown below. **Older people** reported feeling less connected than did younger people to their friends and family. People with **lower incomes** reported feeling less connected to others in general than did those with higher incomes

49% perceived the UK as a whole as becoming more divided, with smaller numbers perceiving no change (16%) or more unity (35%). In contrast, 44% viewed their local area as becoming more united or with no change (34%), and only 22% viewed it as becoming more divided (22%).

55% respondents perceived the UK as becoming more opposed to the rest of Europe, only 14% perceiving greater unity, and 31% perceiving no change. Division within the UK emerges as 42% of respondents viewed London as becoming more opposed to the rest of the country, only 16% seeing it as more united, the remainder seeing no change. Young and old people are also viewed as being increasingly opposed by 40% of respondents, 22% seeing greater unity and 38% no change.

Key workers were feeling more detached than other people. Keyworkers report less compassion for those most vulnerable to Covid-19, less trust in politicians, and experiencing less connection with their family than are non-keyworkers

people who had **volunteered** in the context of the pandemic reported higher trust in all people to follow the guidelines, higher trust in the government, higher compassion for people living in their local area, and stronger connections with their family, friends, colleagues and neighbours, as compared to people who had not volunteered

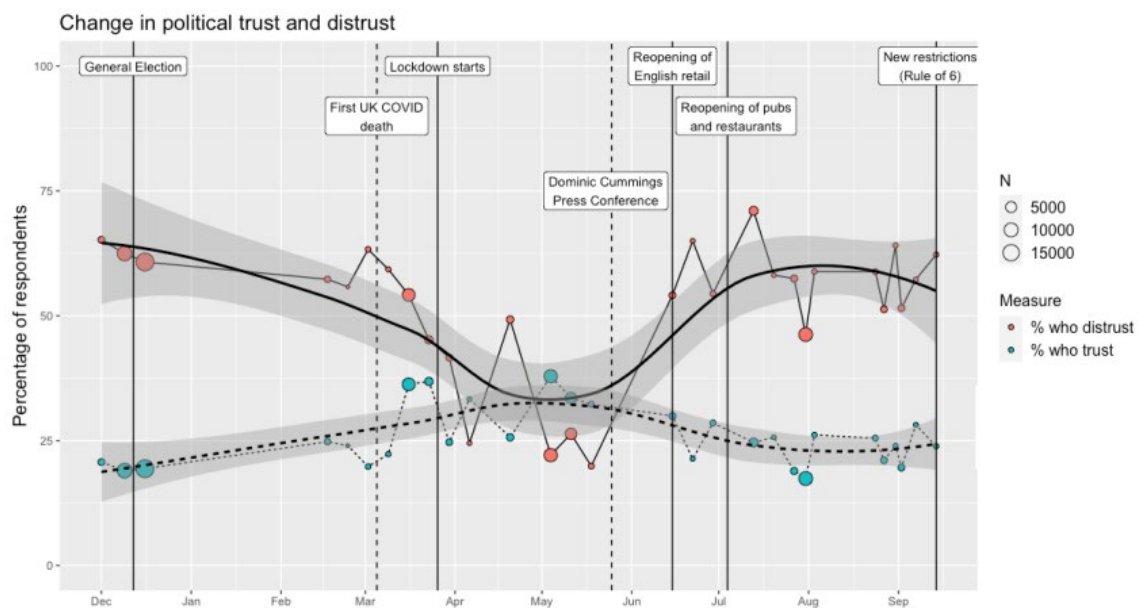
- Abrams, D., Lalot, F., Broadwood, J., & Platts-Dunn, I. (2020b). All in it, but not necessarily together: Divergent experiences of keyworker and volunteer responders to the Covid-19 pandemic. (August 2020). <https://www.belongnetwork.co.uk/resources/all-in-it-but-not-necessarily-together-divergent-experiences-of-keyworker-and-volunteer-responders-to-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

Keyworkers	Lesser family connection	Greater perception of local area deprivation	Lower political trust	Lower optimism for the future
Volunteers	Greater family connection	Lesser perception of local area deprivation	Higher political trust	Higher optimism for the future

4. Lalot, F, Davies, B. & Abrams, D. (2020). 'Trust and cohesion in Britain during the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic across place, scale and time'. *The British Academy*.
<https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/covid-decade-trust-cohesion-britain-2020-pandemic-place-scale-time/>

Quantitative evidence from 17 surveys involving nearly a quarter million respondents between December 2019 and October 2020

Figure 1. Change in political trust and distrust from December 2019 to October 2020



Key findings. Trust • political trust displayed curvilinear trajectories over the year - low following the 2019 General Election, rose during the months of March and April following the UK lockdown, and then gradually fell during the remainder of the year, to the extent that trust in political leadership fell back to pre-COVID levels by October; •

There was a sharp spike in political distrust following Dominic Cummings' trip to Durham during coronavirus lockdown restrictions (May);

From June onwards, a higher percentage of respondents distrusted than trusted the Government and political leadership.

Community Belonging and Division • Community connection rose to its highest level during the months of June and July following the easing of coronavirus restrictions; • People generally feel that their local area is more united than divided. In contrast, people generally feel that the UK is more divided than united.

Levels of local unity are considerably more stable than national levels of unity; •

Perceived divisions between the UK and Europe, and between Remainers and Leavers, fell substantially at the beginning of the pandemic, but gradually rose again by October returning to

their pre-pandemic levels. The perceived division between Remainers and Leavers was even stronger in October 2020 than it was in December 2019.

Implications for policy We propose eight implications for policy. Central to these are: • Well prepared advanced planning is needed to enable government and leadership to act quickly and consistently in the early phases of crisis. This increases its opportunities to capitalise on temporarily heightened trust and social unity for both short- and longerterm objectives; •

Trust and cohesion are vital elements of a well-functioning society. The pandemic's impact may have deepened fractures across different parts of society and it is crucial to address these directly and early to prevent avoidable harms other than direct vulnerability to COVID-19; •

Mitigation strategies in response to coronavirus, and other crises, may be more effective when national strategy can effectively include and embrace the strength of cohesion that is achievable at more local levels; • National investment to build trust and cohesion and that also focuses and capitalises on local structures is likely to provide the greatest resilience and capacity to emerge strongly from the challenges of the pandemic.

5. Lalot, F., Davies, B., & Abrams, D (2021). 'What has happened to trust and cohesion since Tier 4 restrictions to the third national lockdown (December 2020 – March 2021)? Further evidence from national surveys.' *The British Academy*, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/covid-decade-what-happened-trust-cohesion-tier-4-restrictions-third-national-lockdown/>.

Trust • Through December political distrust rose from 57 to 61%. Trust dropped from 24 to 21% to March 5th 2021.

Distrust in local MPs from 36% to 40% by March 2021. Trust in local MPs reduced from 39% to 36% between December to 33% by March 2021. •

Through December to January, 60% of the UK population continued to doubt the UK government's competence in tackling the pandemic. Only 25-27% thought the government was competent. In contrast, only 24-28% thought their local councils lacked competence and 43-38% believed they were competent.

By March 2021 when 30% of the population had been vaccinated and a timetable announced for unlocking, 54% still doubted the government's competence whereas only 21% doubted their local councils' competence. 5 •

Continuing the trends observed earlier in the pandemic, a majority show distrust in the UK government whereas only a minority show distrust at the local level. Trust levels remain higher in local competence than in national competence to handle the pandemic. Unity and Division •

Between December 2020 and January 2021, the percentage of people that perceived national divisions to be growing changed from 60% to 57%. The percentage that perceived national unity to be growing changed slightly from 20% to 23%. In March 2021, 78% of respondents perceived national divisions to be growing and only 10% perceived national unity to be growing. • Between December 2020 and January 2021, the percentage of people that perceived local divisions to be growing changed from 24% to 26%. The percentage that perceived national unity to be growing changed slightly from 29% to 30%. In March 2021, 26% of respondents perceived national divisions to be growing and 23% perceived national unity to be growing. • These data show that the **large difference in perceptions of division and unity observed during 2020 have persisted**. By March 2021, despite some closing of the national division/local unity gap during December 2020, people perceived substantially more division at the national than the local level, and greater unity at the local than the national level.

Implications for policy Consistent with our earlier report, there are further implications for policy. Central to these are: • Trust and cohesion are vital elements of a well-functioning society. The

pandemic's deepening of fractures across different parts of society mean that it is crucial to address these directly and soon to prevent avoidable harms other than direct vulnerability to COVID-19; • Efforts to build trust and cohesion that focus and capitalise on local structures as much as national ones are likely to provide the greatest resilience and capacity to emerge strongly from the challenges of the pandemic.

6. Abrams, D., Broadwood, J., Lalot, F., Davies Hayon, K., & Dixon, A. (2021) *Beyond Us and Them - Societal Cohesion in Britain Through Eighteen Months of Covid-19*. Project report. University of Kent (doi:10.22024/UniKent/01.02.92899) (KAR id:92899) (143pp) and <https://www.belongnetwork.co.uk/resources/beyond-us-and-them-societal-cohesion-in-britain-through-eighteen-months-of-covid-19/>

Between May 2020 and June 2021, across different parts of Britain, we collected more than 39,000 responses in a series of 8 on-line surveys. We surveyed people living in different nations of the UK (Scotland, Wales and England), people in six local authority areas within England that have prioritised social cohesion and been supported by extra investment to do so. We also surveyed people who were strongly engaged in community activities. From December 2020 we also surveyed in 4 metropolitan areas and large numbers of Black and Muslim people in order to capture their experiences. We also conducted repeat focus groups and one-to-one interviews in our sample areas over the course of the pandemic, conducting 61 focus groups and 256 one-to-one interviews in all.

Sense of national unity – In the early days of the crisis, there was a perception of growing national unity (43%) with only 32% perceiving growing division. But this quickly faded from June 2020 onwards. By June 2021, 64% perceived growing division in the country and only 16% growing unity. • **Sense of local unity** – By contrast, throughout 2020 more people thought their local area was becoming more united than thought it was becoming more divided and by June 2021 roughly equal numbers perceived growing local unity (26%) as perceived growing local division (22%). •

Divisions between groups – Perceptions of division between certain groups - wealthier vs poorer, Scotland vs England, Leavers vs Remainers, younger vs older - all rose sharply between May 2020 (42%) and October 2020 (60%). All remained high thereafter, except division between younger and older people, which fell consistently from (from 51% in October 2020 to 39% in June 2021, others averaging 63%). • **Division and the media** – A recurring theme in interviews and focus groups discussions was the media's perceived role in promoting narratives of division.

Trust in national government - Trust in the UK government's response to the crisis started out high (51% of people in May 2020), but dropped sharply after June 2020, hitting its lowest point in October 2020 (21%) and never recovered to the level of May 2020. - In England, trust in the UK government's response revived somewhat during late 2020 and early 2021. - In Scotland and Wales, trust in the UK government's response also declined sharply from June to October 2020, but unlike in England, it failed to recover. • **Trust in local government** – Respondents consistently trusted their local authority's response to COVID-19 more than they did the UK government, remaining at 41% in June 2021. This was true in all places. • **Trust in other people** – **Trust in other people** (to abide by COVID-19 restrictions) fell during the summer of 2020 (to 19%), but recovered strongly in autumn 2020 and was still stronger in June 2021 (to 43%) than it had been in May 2020. • **Conspiracy theories** – A substantial proportion of people entertained conspiracy theories about the pandemic, but the strength of these beliefs reduced significantly in the second half of 2020 and less than a fifth (18%) of respondents accepting them by June 2021.

National identities – Respondents from England consistently express stronger British identity than respondents from Wales and Scotland. - Respondents from Scotland and Wales expressed moderate British identity up until June 2020, but it weakened sharply after this. - Respondents from Scotland consistently expressed the least strong British identity of all. •

Neighbourliness – People’s sense of neighbourliness rose sharply in the early months of the pandemic, peaking in June 2020. - Neighbourliness then declined during the rest of 2020, but rose back up from December 2020 to March 2021, falling back again afterwards.

The experience of **volunteers** – Those who engage in volunteering express greater trust in local and national government, greater sense of neighbourliness, and greater optimism for the future than nonvolunteers. • Volunteering and trust – Higher levels of local political trust were significantly and reliably associated with greater rates of positive social engagement. - There is a similar but weaker relationship between helping behaviour (that is, volunteering and donating) and higher levels of national political trust.

The impact of investing in social cohesion

Higher trust in national and local government (June 2021) Social investment areas expressed higher levels of trust in the national government (+10%), and local government’s response to the pandemic (+4%). • Higher levels of volunteering consistent and twice as high as in other places, much greater active social engagement in general (i.e. volunteering, donating, signing petitions) by a differential of +17.4%. • Higher levels of social connection – had closer relations with their family, friends, colleagues and neighbours than people from other areas (+19%). • High levels of neighbourliness – stronger sense of neighbourliness than those in other areas.

Deprivation, Discrimination and Intergroup Contact

- Respondents perceived all forms of discrimination as becoming increasingly serious between May and June 2020. - race or ethnicity as the most serious

- Consistently warmest towards older people and coldest towards migrants to the UK.

- Experience of discrimination - Four fifths of Black respondents (81%) and three quarters of Muslim respondents (73%) reported having experienced some form of discrimination against themselves in the last month, compared with 53% of White respondents. - Women were a fifth more likely than men to report having experienced discrimination. Young people (aged 18-24) were almost twice as likely as older people (45+) to report having experienced discrimination.

- Where intergroup contact is associated with more positive attitudes towards others, this is 11 times as much linked to the quality of the contact as to the simple quantity of contact.

Policy recommendations:

1. Leadership and narratives that stress interdependence
2. Actively build trust within every community and between communities
3. Empower local government to build cohesion, trust and resilience
4. Support a sustained uplift in volunteering.
5. Tackle deprivation and discrimination

In conclusion, the majority of the British public want to put aside the divisions and polarisation that has marked British society in recent years. People are weary of being at odds with each other and desire greater unity. We now know from our findings that investing in cohesion works in terms of building trust between groups and individuals and between citizens and their local and national institutions. There has never been a more important moment to do so, if we are to emerge from this crisis more united and ready to face the challenges ahead.

7. Abrams, D., Broadwood, J., Lalot, F., & Davies Hayon, K. (2021) *Public Perceptions of UK and Local Government Communication about COVID-19*. Project report. University of Kent (doi:[10.22024/UniKent/01.02.92935](https://doi.org/10.22024/UniKent/01.02.92935)) (KAR id:92935) (19pp)

Our research examined (May-June 2021) whether over 9000 respondents from across the UK found communication about COVID-19 honest and credible, empathic, clear, accessible, and whether it met the needs of their community

Both UK and local government communications were perceived on average as fairly clear and as using understandable language. However

- 52% perceived the UK government communications as being low in honesty and credibility and low in empathy (50.2%). Only 19.9% of the public attributed high honesty and credibility and high empathy to the UK government communication.
 - In contrast only 36% perceived local government communication as being low in honesty and credibility or low in empathy (38.7%). With more attributing high honesty and credibility (26.3%) and high empathy (24.4%) to local government communication.
 - Nearly half of respondents (47.9%) thought UK government communication did not meet their community's needs, whilst a notably smaller proportion (35.9%) thought local government communication did not meet those needs. Conversely nearly 6% more thought local government communication met the community's needs (26.0%) than thought UK government communication did so (20.2%).
 - UK government communications surpassed local government in only one area: 44.8% viewed government information as highly accessible and easy to find, whereas only 23.7% viewed local government information as highly accessible and easy to find.
 - Different regions and nations of the UK perceived UK and local government communications differently, with respondents in Wales, Scotland, Greater London, Greater Manchester and West of England viewing local government communications more positively. Whereas West Midlands and, on some measures, Kent finding much less difference between the two.
 - **Those people who strongly identify with Britain or their local area are more likely to view both UK government and local communications more positively.** Results for the devolved nations of Scotland and Wales communication was more closely related to how strongly they identified with the local area, whereas their positive view of UK government communication was more closely related to how strongly they identified with Britain as a whole.
8. <https://www.belongnetwork.co.uk/resources/the-social-cohesion-investment-local-areas-that-invested-in-social-cohesion-programmes-are-faring-better-in-the-midst-of-the-covid-19-pandemic/>
9. Abrams, D., Broadwood, J., Lalot, F., & Davies Hayon, K. (2021) *Public Perceptions of UK and Local Government Communication about COVID-19. Results for the Devolved Nations of Scotland and Wales*. Project report. University of Kent (5pp) https://www.belongnetwork.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Belong_PublicPerceptions_appendix_FINAL.pdf
10. Broadwood, J., Davies Hayon, K, Abrams, D., & Lalot, F. (2021) *Beyond Us and Them: Policy and Practice for Strengthening Social Cohesion in Local Areas*. Project report. University of Kent, University of Kent (doi:[10.22024/UniKent/01.02.92936](https://doi.org/10.22024/UniKent/01.02.92936)) (KAR id:92936) (43pp)
11. Abrams, D., Broadwood, J., Lalot, F., & Davies Hayon, K. (2021). *How accepting is the British public of COVID-19 vaccine passports, and why?* Project report. University of Kent (doi:[10.22024/UniKent/01.02.92940](https://doi.org/10.22024/UniKent/01.02.92940)) (KAR id:92940) (10pp)

March-April 2021. We measured respondents' perception of vaccine passports with two questions, the first assessing their global opposition/support for such documents, and the second related to the perception of passports as introducing unfair discrimination. Specifically, the questions read, "Would you support a proposal to introduce vaccine passports?" and "To what extent do you believe a vaccine passport could create unfair disadvantages for certain groups and individuals?" (1 = Not at all, 5 = Completely). 4 How do people feel about vaccination passports?

Opinions on vaccination passports appear divided. 28.0% were somewhat or strongly opposed, and 51.8% were somewhat or strongly supportive. On whether passports would unfairly discriminate, 41.6% thought passports would not discriminate and 35.1% thought they would do so. Support for vaccination passports is probably based more on people's perceptions of fairness than on the balance of practical or material advantages.

Black respondents (identifying as Black, Black British, African or Caribbean) were much more likely to oppose vaccine passports (29.3% support, and 50.4% opposition) and consider them as unfairly discriminating certain people and groups (58.4%)

people reporting 'a lot' to 'complete' trust in the government, approval of vaccine passports was 64.5%, compared with only 43.1% amongst people reporting 'little' to 'no' trust in the government. Perception of the passports as unfairly discriminating was nearly twice as high (45.4%) amongst people who did not trust the government as amongst those who did trust the government (25.0%)

Those who had already received the vaccine were more positive about vaccine passports (67.6%) than those who had not (39.8%). Those who had already received the vaccine were also half as likely to say that passports would be unfair (22.4%) than those who had not received the vaccine (44.7%). But both amongst those who had and those who had not received the vaccine, perceptions that vaccine passports would be more unfair remained significantly associated with being younger, being Black, having lower social status and having lower trust in government.

12. Abrams, D., Lalot, F., Broadwood, J., & Davies Hayon, K. (2021). *Community, Connection and Cohesion During Covid-19: Beyond Us and Them Report*. Project report. University of Kent (doi:10.22024/UniKent/01.02.92937) (KAR id:92937) (61pp)

May-December 2020 (interim report) monthly surveys involving over 3000 people across two countries and one English county (Scotland, Wales, Kent), in six local areas (Blackburn with Darwen, Bradford, Peterborough, Walsall, Waltham Forest and Calderdale)

Trust is stronger at the local than the national level

, in December the average level of trust in the UK government's response to COVID-19 was 10.6% higher in the six local authority areas as compared to other places. Back in June, the level of trust in the UK government's response was already 6.6% higher in the six local authority areas. Similarly, in December, the average level of trust in local government's response was 10.4% higher in the six local authority areas.

Areas that invested in social cohesion remained more cohesive than elsewhere as the crisis persisted. Local authority areas are still showing stronger evidence of cohesion in a variety of forms including their sense of **neighbourliness**; levels of active **social engagement**; and **sustained inclusiveness** towards other groups including migrants to the UK. Those who **engage in volunteering are faring better**

People who are volunteering are more protected from some of the worst effects of the pandemic than others. They reported **greater connection with family and friends** (10.5% higher on average), greater general **political trust** (10.6% higher), a greater sense of **neighbourliness** (16.5% higher) and were less likely to perceive their local area as deprived (6.5% lower). They also expressed **greater trust in other people** (to respect COVID-19 restrictions; 12.2% higher), higher **subjective wellbeing** (5.3% higher) and greater **optimism for the future** (5.6% higher).

Suffering and concern for others: focus groups and interviews shows that, despite the limits placed on social interaction, people are becoming increasingly aware of the challenges and hardships faced by others. Indeed, the huge levels of social isolation and hardship have evoked deep empathy - and this is a concern that traverses individual, socio-cultural and economic divides

13. Abrams, D., Broadwood, J., Lalot, F., Dixon, A., & Davies Hayon, K. (2022). *Discrimination, Prejudice and Cohesion – Intergroup relations among Black, Muslim and White People During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Project report. University of Kent (June 2022, approx. 36 pp) <https://www.belongnetwork.co.uk/resources/discrimination-prejudice-and-cohesion-intergroup-relations-among-black-muslim-and-white-people-in-britain-in-the-context-of-covid-19-and-beyond/>

The main data for this report are from the final part of a series of surveys and interviews collected between 25th May 2021 and 28th June 2021. The report focuses on comparison of experiences amongst White, Black and Muslim respondents. Wave 8 analyses included 6919 White respondents, and 612 who described themselves as Black but not Muslim, and 622 who described themselves as Muslim but not Black.

During this period, the UK was under lockdown restrictions due to a surge of the Delta variant. On 14th June, Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced a delay to the final lifting of coronavirus restrictions, dubbed “freedom day” by the media and originally scheduled for 21st June 2021. The government’s roadmap for easing restrictions was delayed to 19th July in order to allow a larger proportion of the population to be vaccinated. On 26th June 2021, the then Health Secretary Matt Hancock resigned his post after it was discovered he had broken social distancing rules with one of his aides. Amongst other controversies, the government increasingly faced accusations of adopting a ‘one rule for us and other approach for them’ approach to government guidance.

Perception of division and unity between different groups in society

Despite a sense of unity between different groups early in the pandemic, from the summer of 2020 onwards, at least a third of respondents perceived groups based on age, nationality or ethnicity as being in opposition or strong opposition to other groups in society.

- Over 40% of both Black and non-Black respondents perceive Black people as feeling opposed rather than united with others in the UK.
- Perceptions that Muslims feel in opposition to other groups, are significantly more common among non-Muslim respondents (47%) than among Muslim respondents (35%).
- Muslim respondents also perceive younger and older generations to be significantly more united than do either Black or White respondents respectively, though between 38% and 45% of people perceive the generations to be opposed or strongly opposed.

Perception of discrimination as a serious issue

People’s perceptions of the seriousness of discrimination of almost all types increased during the summer of 2020. This is likely to reflect the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement following George Floyd’s murder and the growing awareness of the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on ethnic minorities and discrimination more generally.

- Discrimination based on race/ethnicity is perceived as being the most serious, and that based on age as being the least serious. This difference persists across all surveys.
- Black respondents

regard discrimination based on race to be more serious than do Muslim respondents, who in turn regard it as more serious than do White respondents. • Muslim respondents regard discrimination based on religion to be more serious than do Black respondents, who in turn regard it as more serious than do White respondents.

- Women regard discrimination based on race, religion or gender as being more serious than do men. This is true regardless of respondents' own religious or ethnic background. • Black respondents are more likely than either Muslim or White respondents to rate gender discrimination as serious.

Perceptions of deprivation (defined as struggling more than others and having less access to resources)

The acuteness of deprivation is perceived much more keenly by those directly affected. • Half of all Black respondents perceive Black people as being deprived, and a quarter of Muslim respondents perceive Muslims as being deprived. • However, White respondents are only a quarter as likely to perceive Black or Muslim people as being deprived. Black and Muslim respondents are also only half as likely to see one another's groups as deprived than their own.

- Across all ethnic/religious memberships women are about a third more likely to consider women as being deprived than do men.

Attitudes towards White, Black and Muslim people

A "feeling thermometer" where respondents indicate how cold or warm they feel towards a specific group.

- attitudes toward Black people are consistently more favourable than those toward Muslim people, and that people feel more favourable toward older people than other groups, and less favourable toward migrants than other groups.

- White, Black and Muslim respondents, regardless of whether male or female, each feel warmer toward their own group than towards other racial/ethnic groups. Overall, the data reflect that there is greater positive emotion felt within than between different groups.

Experiences of discrimination

Levels of discrimination reported by Muslim and Black respondents are extremely high. Vulnerability to discrimination becomes cumulatively greater the more protected characteristics one has.

- Four fifths (81%) of Black respondents, both male and female, report having experienced some form of discrimination in the last month, compared with about half (53%) of White and three quarters (73%) of Muslim respondents.

- There is a strong age gradient in experiences of discrimination, with 78% of the 18-24-year-olds reporting at least one experience of discrimination, whereas 44% of the 45-year-olds and older do so.

- Both younger and female respondents in our surveys generally report experiencing more discrimination than others. Gender and age discrimination are also avenues for other types of discrimination. Being young, female and Black or Muslim represents a very different set of experiences of discrimination than being White, male, middle-aged, or all three.

Intergroup contact between White, Black and Muslim people.

Because of the demographics of the UK and the distribution of ethnic minority people geographically, Black and Muslim respondents are much more likely to have intergroup contact (i.e. with members of religious or ethnic outgroups) than are White respondents.

People's intergroup attitudes are more positive when they have had contact with members of those groups and we find the quality (positive experience) of contact to be nearly ten times more strongly linked to attitudes than is the simple number of those contacts.

However, our research shows that positive experiences of contact are less likely among Black and Muslim respondents. than White respondents.”

14. Abrams et al (as above). A further 10 individualised short reports have been provided to individual metropolitan areas and local authorities including the Greater London Authority, West Midlands Combined Authority, West of England Combined Authority, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, and the following local authorities: Blackburn with Darwen, Bradford, Calderdale, Peterborough, Walsall, Waltham Forest.
15. Abrams, D., Broadwood, J., Lalot, F., & Davies Hayon, K. LSE Blogs- British, Politics and Society, (August 17th, 2021, 15 shares). <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/government-communication-covid19/> People largely perceive local government communications about COVID-19 as embodying greater honesty, credibility, and empathy than those of the UK government.
16. Broadwood, J., Lalot, F., Abrams, D., & Davies Hayon, K. LSE Blogs British Politics and Society, (May 24th 2021). <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/social-cohesion-covid19/> The government must work with local government to support a place-based approach that puts social cohesion at the heart of levelling up (99 shares).
17. Abrams, Dominic, Davies, Ben, Horsham, Zoe (2023) *Causal Connections: Secondary Data Analyses of the Links Between Volunteering and Social Cohesion in the UK*. Report number: [10.22024/UniKent/01.02.101531](https://doi.org/10.22024/UniKent/01.02.101531). University of Kent and Belong Network, 34 pp. (In press) (doi:[10.22024/UniKent/01.02.101531](https://doi.org/10.22024/UniKent/01.02.101531)) (KAR id:[101531](https://doi.org/10.22024/UniKent/01.02.101531))

This report, conducted with Belong for the UK DCMS (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport) presents findings from analyses of three large-scale surveys assessing the relationship between social cohesion and volunteering, and the factors that may encourage or hinder them. The three surveys cover a combined total of approximately 77,000 respondents and cover time periods from 2014-2021. Using multilevel and other analyses we find that horizontal cohesion (cohesion within society) has a bidirectional relationship with volunteering. Volunteering is associated with subsequently greater feelings of cohesion and greater cohesion is associated with a subsequently higher likelihood of volunteering. Vertical cohesion (cohesion with the state) has a unidirectional relationship with volunteering. Volunteering is associated with subsequent feelings of cohesion, but initial feelings of vertical cohesion do not anticipate higher volunteering. The cohesion-volunteering relationship was stronger for formal than for informal volunteering, and there was more variability in the relationship at more granular levels of locality than larger (e.g. regional) levels. The relationship did not vary consistently by demographic categories (gender, age, faith, ethnicity, disability). Time constraints and the COVID pandemic inhibited volunteering as well as social contact. Volunteering to support others was associated with perceptions of higher social cohesion, volunteering to prevent harm was associated with perceptions of lower social cohesion.

18. Abrams, Dominic and Horsham, Zoe and Davies, Ben (2023) *Literature Review - Linking Volunteering and Social Cohesion: Causal Evidence in the UK and Beyond*. Project report. University of Kent and Belong Network [10.22024/UniKent/01.02.101468](https://doi.org/10.22024/UniKent/01.02.101468). (In press) (doi:[10.22024/UniKent/01.02.101468](https://doi.org/10.22024/UniKent/01.02.101468)) (KAR id:[101468](https://doi.org/10.22024/UniKent/01.02.101468))

This review, conducted with Belong for the UK DCMS (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport) systematically assesses the academic and grey literatures on the relationship between

social cohesion (including social capital) and volunteering. It first considers definitions and ways of evaluating cohesion and volunteering, then examines evidence on how each can influence the other. The review also considers the role of relevant demographic factors in volunteering and barriers to volunteer recruitment. Evidence is drawn from a broad literature focusing primarily on evidence in the US and UK from the year 2000 onwards to determine both what may be generalisable and what might be specific to different contexts. From an initial trawl of over 400,000 items of evidence, we identified 101 that could directly address the causal relationships between volunteering and cohesion. We conclude that there is a bi-directional causal relationship, that the impact of formal volunteering is greater than that of informal volunteering on social cohesion, and that barriers to either cohesion or volunteering may adversely affect the other.

19. Abrams, Dominic and Davies, Ben and Horsham, Zoe (2023) *Rapid Review: Measuring Social Cohesion*. (Khan Review report, 96pp). University of Kent and Belong Network [10.22024/UniKent/01.02.101469](https://doi.org/10.22024/UniKent/01.02.101469). (doi:[10.22024/UniKent/01.02.101469](https://doi.org/10.22024/UniKent/01.02.101469)) (KAR id:101469); https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65fd7230f1d3a0001132adc4/Rapid_Review_Measuring_Social_Cohesion.pdf

This rapid review conducted for Dame Sara Khan's Independent Review of Social Cohesion and Resilience, collates and synthesises a wide collection of measures used to capture social cohesion within the UK. We review measures used across 23 different data sources, taken from the academic and grey literatures, and from several large-scale social surveys administered in the UK. We draw on the British Academy's prior reviews on Cohesive Societies to provide the conceptual framework. Across the different sources we identified 300 different measurement items and 23 different aspects of cohesion, which we organised into the six themes of trust, identity, local connections, prejudice and intergroup relations, politics and social order, and external indicators. We identified limitations in the existing measurement array. These include inconsistency of operationalisation, levels of locality, and comparability across time and place. We recommend greater attention to ensuring both intergroup and intragroup aspects are measured, that change over time is assessed more systematically, and that measures at different levels of geographical scale are coordinated using a layered approach to optimise both frequency and coverage.

Other papers on cohesion and arising from the project:

1. Lalot, F., **Abrams, D.**, & Travaglino, G.A. (2021) Aversion amplification in the emerging COVID-19 pandemic: The impact of political trust and subjective uncertainty on perceived threat. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, 31, 213–222. doi:10.1002/casp.2490

We conducted a cross-sectional survey amongst the general population of Scotland ($N = 188$) in the early period of the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK. We hypothesised that high political trust should ameliorate the threat-elevating impact of uncertainty, thereby reducing the perceived threat from a high to moderate level.

2. **Abrams, D.**, Lalot, F., & Hogg, M.A. (2021) Intergroup and intragroup dimensions of COVID-19: A social identity perspective on social fragmentation and unity. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 24, 2, 201-209. doi: 10.1177/1368430220983440

Based on theories of self and social identity uncertainty, subjective group dynamics, leadership, and social cohesion, we argue that this intergroup layer has important implications for people's perceptions of their own and others' situation, political management of the pandemic, how people are influenced, and how they resolve identity uncertainty. In the face of the pandemic, initial national or global unity is prone to intergroup fractures and competition through which leaders can exploit uncertainties to gain short-term credibility, power, or influence for their own groups, feeding polarization and extremism. Thus, the social and psychological challenge is how to sustain the superordinate objective of surviving and recovering from the pandemic through mutual cross-group effort.

3. Davies, B., Lalot, F., Peitz, L., Heering, M.S., Ozkececi, H., Babaian, J., Davies-Hayon, K., Broadwood, J., & **Abrams, D*** (2021). Changes in Political trust in Britain during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020: Integrated public opinion evidence and implications. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communication*, 8(166) (9pp), <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-021-00850-6>. (see reports earlier)

4. Peitz, L., Lalot, F., Douglas, K., Sutton, R.S., & **Abrams, D.** (2021). COVID-19 conspiracy theories and compliance with governmental restrictions: The mediating roles of anger, anxiety, and hope. *Journal of Pacific Rim Psychology*, 15, 1-13, doi: 10.1177/18344909211046646. links between COVID-19 conspiracy beliefs, emotions (anger, anxiety, and hope), attitudes towards government restrictions, and self-reported compliant behaviour. Results of a cross-sectional survey amongst a large UK sample ($N = 1,579$) provided support for the hypothesis that COVID-19 conspiracy beliefs showed a polarizing relationship with compliant behaviour through opposing emotional pathways. The relation was mediated by higher levels of anger, themselves related to a lesser perceived importance of government restrictions, and simultaneous higher levels of anxiety, related to a greater perceived importance.

5. Lalot, F., **Abrams, D.**, Broadwood, J., Davies Hayon, K., & Platts-Dunn, I. (2022). The Social Cohesion Investment: Communities that invested in integration programmes are showing greater social cohesion in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 32 (3), 536-554. doi:10.1002/casp.2522 (see reports earlier)

6. Lalot, F., Heering, M.S., Rullo, M., Travaglino, G. A., & **Abrams, D.** (2022). The dangers of distrustful complacency: Low concern and low political trust combine to undermine compliance with governmental restrictions in the emerging Covid-19 pandemic. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 25(1), 106-121. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430220967986>

We conducted a survey amongst Italian and French participants ($N = 372$) in March 2020 while both countries had imposed full lockdown. Moreover, a subsample of participants reported on their actual levels of compliance one week later ($N = 130$). We hypothesised that either concern or trust should be sufficient to sustain participants' willingness to comply and actual behaviour, but that the absence of both (distrustful complacency) would reduce compliance significantly. Results supported this hypothesis.

7. Imada, H., Lalot, F., & **Abrams, D.** (2022) Does COVID-19 threat relate to intergroup attitudes. A test in the UK. *Evolutionary Behavioral Sciences* (9pp). <https://doi.org/10.1037/ebs0000311>

evolutionary mechanism that facilitates pathogen avoidance behavior: the behavioral immune system (BIS). Previous studies have revealed that the BIS yields negative attitudes toward out-group members. Given the clear relevance of pathogen-avoidance psychology to individuals' reactions to the COVID-19 global pandemic, the present research examined whether attitudes toward potentially pathogenic outgroups during the pandemic would reflect the BIS. Using large-scale panel data ($N = 1,548$) collected in May 2020 in 3 of the U.K.'s devolved nations (England, Scotland, and Wales), we examined whether perceived COVID-19 threat was associated with negative attitudes toward 2 different national outgroups linked to the initial outbreak (Italy and China), as well as the in-group (the U.K.). Failing to support the BIS hypothesis, mini-meta-analyses on results from the 3 nations revealed that COVID-19 threat was only very weakly associated with attitude toward the U.K., Italy, and China. Results suggest that implications from pathogen psychology might be more limited than previously thought and apply only to specific out-group members

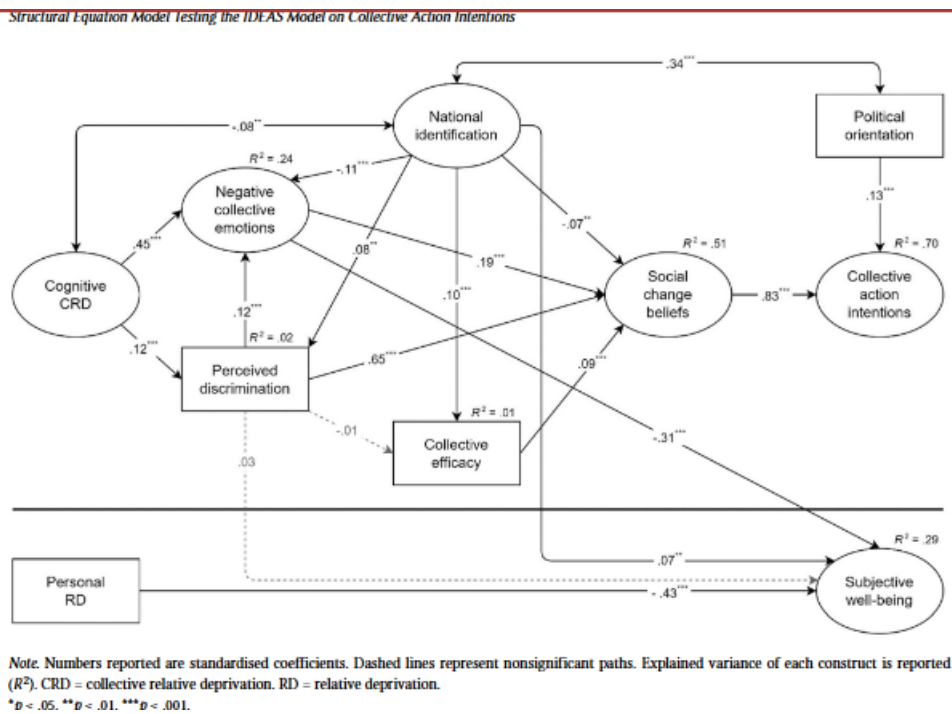
8. Lalot, F., **Abrams***, D., Heering, M.S, Babaian, J., Ozkececi, Hl, Peitz, L., Davies-Hayon, K., & Broadwood, J.. (2023). Distrustful complacency and the COVID-19 vaccine: How concern and political trust interact to affect vaccine hesitancy. *Political Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12871>

Across two studies, 9,695 respondents from different parts of Britain reported their level of concern about COVID-19, trust in the UK government, and intention to accept or refuse the vaccine. Multilevel regression analysis, controlling for geographic area and relevant demographics, confirmed the predicted interactive effect of concern and trust. Across studies, respondents with *both* low trust and low concern were 10%–22% more vaccine hesitant than respondents with *either* high trust or high concern, and 26%–29% more hesitant than respondents with *both* high trust and high concern. Results hold equally among White, Black, and Muslim respondents, consistent with the view that regardless of mean-level differences, a common process underlies vaccine hesitancy, underlining the importance of tackling distrustful complacency both generally and specifically among unvaccinated individuals and populations.

9. Lalot, F., Marinthe, G., Kasper, A., & **Abrams, D.** (2023). Mobilising IDEAS in the COVID-19 pandemic: Predicting anti-lockdown protests and well-being with the Identity-Deprivation-Efficacy-Action-Subjective well-being model. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 11,(1), 145-166. <https://doi.org/10.5964/jspp.8351>

We tested how well the Identity-Deprivation-Efficacy-Action-Subjective-wellbeing (IDEAS) model predicts citizens' intentions to engage in collective action opposing their government, and their subjective well-being. Representative samples from Scotland, Wales, and the county of Kent in England were surveyed during the COVID-19 pandemic in October 2020 ($N = 1,536$). Results largely support our preregistered hypotheses, confirming that the IDEAS model offers a valid explanatory framework for how relative deprivation predicts both collective action opposing one's government and levels of subjective well-being. In the case of collective action, there were significant effects of collective relative deprivation (cognitive and affective) and collective efficacy on social change beliefs, which in turn positively predicted collective action intentions. The role of national identification was more nuanced, revealing both negative indirect

effects via collective efficacy and relative deprivation, and a positive indirect effect via political orientation. Findings also suggest interesting directions for future research on national identification.



10. Lalot, F., **Abrams**, D., Jessop, C., & Curtice, J. (2023). Compliance in crisis: Concern, trust and distrustful complacency in the COVID-19 pandemic. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 17 (7), e12752. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12752>.

Two studies tested a *distrustful complacency* hypothesis, according to which either concern or political trust would be enough to sustain law-abiding attitudes and compliance with health-protective policies during the COVID-19 pandemic; but the absence of both concern and trust would result in markedly lower support and compliance. Study 1 supported this hypothesis with NatCen nationally representative sample of Great Britain ($N = 2413$; weighted regression analyses), focussing on law-abiding attitudes. Study 2 (preregistered) replicated these findings with a representative sample ($N = 1523$) investigating support for COVID-19 policies and compliant behaviour. Participants who were less concerned about the consequences of the pandemic (for themselves and for others) and simultaneously less trustful of the government expressed weaker law-abiding attitudes and reported less compliance with COVID-19 restrictions. These findings have implications for policy and public health strategies in time of crisis.

11. Lalot, F., & **Abrams**, D. (2023). "A stranger or a friend? Closer descriptive norms drive compliance with COVID-19 social distancing measures. *Zeitschrift für Psychologie*, 231, (2), 149-160. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1027/2151-2604/a000524>

A growing volume of work suggests a positive impact of descriptive norms on health-protective behavior in the COVID-19 pandemic. However, past work has often been correlational and has rarely compared the effect of different group norms. In the present paper, we present the results of a longitudinal study ($N = 1,051$) that addresses these gaps by testing the cross-sectional and cross-lagged effects of norms and directly compared three different norms (close circle, neighborhood, and country) on compliance with COVID-19 regulations. The results revealed a positive effect of

the close-circle norm (associated with more compliant behavior both cross-sectionally and longitudinally), no effect of the neighborhood norm, and a negative effect of the national norm (associated with less compliant behavior). Compliant behavior also led to a greater close-circle norm longitudinally, suggesting that both feed into each other. We discuss not only the challenges but also the chances this research highlights for norm-based interventions

12. Davies, B., **Abrams**, D., Horsham, Z. & Lalot, F. (2024). The causal relationship between volunteering and social cohesion: Secondary analysis of large scale longitudinal data. *Social Indicators Research* (Accepted Nov 13th 2023). doi: 10.1007/s11205-023-03268-6 (see earlier reports)
13. Horsham, Z., **Abrams**, D., Davies, B., & Lalot, F. (2024). Social cohesion and volunteering: Correlates, causes and challenges. *Translational Issues in Psychological Science* (May 2023 – Accepted Nov 15th 2023) doi: 10.1037/tps0000387. (see earlier reports)

Covid Decade report summary

(parts of text from CO Covid Inquiry Presentation, August 2nd 2023)

The British Academy is the UK's national academy for the humanities and social sciences.

In September 2020, Sir Patrick Vallance approached us: What are the long-term societal effects of COVID-19?

Work was conducted late 2020 and published spring 2021,

We are facing a COVID Decade defined by how governments, as well as business, civil society, communities and individuals respond to the long-term effects of the social crisis it created.

We synthesised and integrated a lot of evidence, The COVID decade, draws together all of the evidence we reviewed and integrated – it's about understanding the impacts.

Conceptual framework – 3 societal areas of **health, community and knowledge**, 5 forms and the context of evidence – attending to **scale, place and time**, across all evidence.

- **Governance** - relationships between national and local actors, accountability for decisions, and freedom of the individual (Eg responsibilities for regional welfare, use of devolved powers, politicians vs experts, individual citizens' voices.)
- **Trust** - society's relationship with information, data, the media and the role of experts. (Eg trust in government, institutions, technology, information, and in research)
- **Cohesion** - relationships within and between communities of people and ideas. (Eg cohesion when facing change, in making decisions, as a day-to-day practice (e.g. being neighbourly) vs as a societal 'glue' (e.g. shared values).
- **Inequalities** - (Eg inequalities in place, religion and belief, sex and gender, economics and class, race and ethnicity, health and disability.)
- **Sustainability** - How we think about, and the importance we attribute to, issues of sustainability. (Eg the long-term health of the environment, value of green spaces, impact of political decisions, institutions and practices.)

BA put all the evidence it collected through a series of scenarios based on what we felt could realistically happen over the course of the decade. Experts at a set of workshops discussed the scenarios and considered the impact and interventions across the different societal and policy areas.

It appears that what has happened is somewhere between scenario two and three. Covid is persistent but manageable, but there has been wider social and economic disruption, though not all of this is attributable to the pandemic.

Our resilience test is perhaps the most alarming, as **none of our experts felt the country would be in a position to respond effectively to another major emergency for some period of time and without major improvements to planning and preparedness.**

First is **health and wellbeing**

COVID-19 has exacerbated existing structural and social inequalities, with particularly negative health outcomes for those already disadvantaged or who have been most adversely impacted by economic shocks. (Q1 is the most deprived.)

Greater exposure to societal stressors which may adversely affect immunity, accelerate immune system ageing, and increase susceptibility to infection – increasing their risk from COVID-19 and potential future health crises.

Following the pandemic, the cost of living crisis will have put further economic and social pressures on the least advantaged groups. The current economic situation makes it all the more difficult to address these health inequalities.

- As pandemic waned, public confidence in health services, and government handling of health has steadily declined to record lows.
- This contrasts with continued high levels of trust in the NHS itself, but low levels of trust in government.
- Impact of strikes in the health sector. Health workers expect recognition for the role they played during the pandemic.

And then, we pulled together evidence on **communities, cohesion and trust**.

- A central theme vital importance of community-led responses that draw upon local knowledge and resources, and build capacities and connections between government, community organisations and the public.
- Communities that entered the pandemic with such infrastructure in place have been in the best position to respond..
- While measures of trust saw a substantial rise at the onset of the first UK lockdown and in the subsequent month, these declined across the year to return to pre-pandemic levels. Through December 2020, levels of general political distrust rose from 57% to 61%, and those expressing trust dropped and these levels have persisted through to 5 March 2021.
- Indeed, even with the subsequent roll-out of vaccines, 60% of the population continued to question the UK Government's competence in tackling the pandemic and only 25-27% thought it was competent. In contrast, only 24-28% thought their local council lacked competence and 38-43% believed they were competent.
- National unity and local unity, coupled with data around political trust and distrust.

Foundation of trust within local communities. Perceptions of local unity are generally higher than perceptions of national unity and remained more stable throughout 2020. In contrast to the national picture, where most people perceived the UK as becoming more divided, a greater proportion of people consistently perceived their local area as becoming more unified.

Illustrative example of evidence, from a deep-dive analysis across multiple social surveys during 2020

- Through December, levels of general political distrust rose from 57% to 61%, and those expressing trust dropped from 24% to 21%. These levels persisted through when we re-surveyed on 5 March 2021.
- Indeed, even with the subsequent roll-out of vaccines, 60% of the population continued to question the UK Government's competence in tackling the pandemic, only 25-27% thought it was competent. In contrast, only 24-28% thought their local council lacked competence and 38-43% believed they were competent. Even by the time 40% of the population had been vaccinated and a timetable announced for unlocking, 54% doubted the government's competence whereas only 21% doubted their local council's competence

Prior to London and the South of England entering Tier 4 status at short notice on 19 December 2020, and in the five weeks that followed, between 57% and 60% of people perceived national division to be growing and only 20-23% perceived growing unity. In contrast, approximately the same proportion regarded local division as increasing (24-26%) as thought local unity was increasing (29-30%).⁴⁰¹

Moreover, even once 40% of the population had received a first vaccine and following an annual budget that committed further support to individuals and businesses, people across Britain continued to regard local unity as gaining ground faster (23%) than national unity (10%) and local division to be growing much less (26%) than national division (78%) – continuing the patterns and trends observed towards the end of 2020. In other words, although the national picture is one of division, there is a valuable foundation of unity within local communities. Local unity also appears to be far more stable, with approximately 50% of people perceiving no change, as compared with only 12-20% perceiving no change at the national level.

Government have a dilemma in that people tend to trust each other, but they do not trust the people they elected to represent them.

Framing was also considered by the research to be very important in determining levels of trust. Value- and interest-based framing (as observable in clean traffic zones, for example) tends to reduce the traction of science in shaping policy decisions. Indeed, where values or interests are seen as prevalent, science is likely to become politicised and less trusted as 'impartial'.

Finally we have a range of evidence on **inequalities in education, skills and incomes** in the UK and the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic

COVID-19 has had significant and unequal effects depending on where in the UK people live, their level of education, type of employment and socioeconomic status. Wider issues around the national economy, educational infrastructure and the social security system have compounded these impacts.

Viewing correlation between GDP per capita and the numbers of people still going to work during lockdown. Not only are there regional differences in economic resilience to the pandemic, based on the balance of sectors, but those regions that have been hardest hit are those already suffering from low productivity, low levels of capital intensification and lack of investment.

For example, London and the South East have the highest proportion of people working in the two most knowledge-intensive, high-value-added sectors – professional, scientific and technical activities, and information and communication.

These two sectors are those in which workers are most able to work from home and therefore most cushioned from economic shock. They account for 22.4% of people in London, compared with just 8.5% in Wales and 9.5% in the North East.

The *sector least able to work from home is hospitality*, with low numbers able to do so in construction, wholesale and retail, and manufacturing.

Cost of living has only intensified the problems for low-income families that were already exacerbated by the pandemic.

This has also made it more difficult for government to allocate resources in a place-sensitive way. Focus has been on blanket measures of financial support to soften the impact of rising energy costs. Treasury has intervened in levelling up agenda, tightening control on spending.

What is the future of levelling up? How does the government respond to the widening regional inequalities?

- Widening and exacerbated inequalities;
- Increased importance of local communities, but strains on supporting them;
- Lost – and likely unrecoverable – access to education, training and skills development at all levels.

These are not exhaustive, but they are all significant, and they will require coordinated effort to overcome.

9 Significant areas of long term impact

1. Increased importance of local communities	2. Low and unstable levels of trust	3. Widening geographic inequalities
4. Exacerbated structural inequalities	5. Worsened health outcomes and growing health inequalities	6. Greater awareness of the importance of mental health
7. Pressure on revenue streams	8. Rising unemployment and changing labour markets	9. Renewed awareness of education and skills

Which leads to the second report... .. **Shaping the COVID Decade**. Here we suggest **seven strategic goals for policymakers** to pursue which require a systemic and systematic approach involving actors from across society.



The tensions between localised and centralised governance are longstanding. But the current crisis has highlighted both a clear justification and a unique and powerful opportunity for a thorough, transparent and bipartisan assessment and reform of the role and powers of central and local government – and, crucially, how they interact across a range of policy issues and areas of service provision.

Evidence from history suggests that specific, resourced local and community knowledge, including within local government, is vital to combating and recovering from epidemics and other public health crises.

For example, the structural challenges of the swine flu epidemic, particularly the confusion between agencies at a local level and disagreements over communication strategies, have been shown to have hindered containment of the outbreak.

Trust in central government and in politicians generally, despite showing a longterm slow decline, is quite responsive to national- or international-level events, but through this pandemic we find that trust at more local levels (such as in local MPs or local authorities) tends to be higher and more stable than trust in central government. Therefore, national strategies to deal with the crisis and mitigate its effects are likely to have greater success if interpreted, reinforced and implemented at the local level, by local agents and institutions.

The Academy has looked at the role of governance in environmental policymaking through its programmes on net zero and *Where we live next*. There will be challenge in finding the resource to make multi-level governance work effectively. We've seen a number of local authorities get into financial difficulties; Covid hit the finances of local charities and civil society organisations, and this has been worsened by rising inflation and the growing need for support.

There are additional things to consider now with the utilisation of big data as well as large language models. The debates have reignited concerns over privacy and how to balance

individual rights against collective benefits. These issues are particularly acute in health and education.

Our technology and inequality report for the GCSA has recommended joining up data collection and strategy within a single cross-departmental unit. This was echoed in a recent House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee report.

The Academy has taken the insights from the Covid Decade on the role of social infrastructure to explore more around what social infrastructure is and how it can support policies aimed at recovery and renewal.

Many different types of spaces, both tangible and intangible, are used as social infrastructure by different members of the community. Social infrastructure needs to be seen as a combination of the different assets – including organisations, places and spaces – that enable communities to function. This can include both public sector and private sector organisations.

Covid Decade focused on community-led social infrastructures, but the social fabric of places is made up of more than just spaces provided by the public and voluntary sectors. Private sector actors play a key role in the social fabric of places, whether through anchor institutions such as supermarkets and shopping centres, or through the development and regeneration of spaces.

If policymakers are to engage with and make use of social infrastructure as vehicles for policy implementation, they need to understand the range of different purposes that people ascribe to social infrastructure.

An understanding of the different purposes that people use social infrastructure for requires policymakers and providers to work with communities to try and develop solutions that meet the needs of the widest range of people, whilst simultaneously addressing questions of power.

The Academy is now commissioning research aimed at understanding how we measure the value of social infrastructure.

The recent *effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on children* is perhaps one of the starkest examples of how children's voices are a crucial part of effective policymaking and the consequences should they be ignored.

Focus has been on formal education, especially academic progress and attainment. However, COVID-19 has led to a huge disruption to key elements of a child's autonomy and independence, such as the ability to play, explore nature, and socialise with peers.

A more balanced policy response could have accounted for these important aspects of 'being a child' while also looking to address the experience deficit caused by the pandemic. Such a policy might have, for instance, found ways to support social and emotional learning through increasing children's access to play-based and nature-based learning.

4. Reimagine urban spaces to support sustainable and adaptable local businesses, amenities and lifestyles.

The pandemic has created 'push' and 'pull' factors for migration out of cities and towns. Survey data suggests that around 14% of Londoners want to leave the city because of the pandemic. But

maintaining urban density is an essential part of creating more efficient, economically productive and sustainable towns and cities.

Density itself is not directly associated with the higher COVID-19 infection and death rates in cities: more likely it is structural inequalities and the specifics of COVID-19 response measures. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that denser cities will be more resilient to future health crises if they are efficiently and equitably designed.

Need to rethink the relationship between urban, rural and other environments with a more efficient and sustainable future in mind. Central and local governments must come to a consensus around a comprehensive but place-sensitive land use plan that creates a viable blueprint for the development of flexible, sustainable neighbourhoods, towns and cities.

The final point about *creating mechanisms for local engagement* is crucial to provide the right evidence and obtain buy-in for new urban policies. This is especially important in avoiding the overpoliticisation of issues such as low traffic neighbourhoods and the spread of misinformation.

Children are generally making progress to recover the learning they lost during the COVID-19 pandemic, but disadvantaged pupils remain further behind the expected level of attainment than other pupils.

There are wider issues in child development, behaviour and truancy that also need to be considered.

Giving schools the freedom to decide how to spend catch-up money is essential, but it also creates the issue of funding being used to plug existing shortfalls. The monitoring of this expenditure is fairly lax, and NAO has recommended tighter monitoring to ensure there is a focus on educational recovery.

Since the Covid Decade, the Academy published its childhood programme report.

We tried to conclude Covid Decade with a vision of what good policymaking might look like in 2030.

We suggested that recovery by 2030 requires the policy environment to be **CLEAR:** Communicative, Learning, Engaging, Adaptive and Relational.

Communicative

- clear and consistent information with a high level of trust
- government departments and agencies are communicating effectively and sharing information and data

Learning

- strong culture of mobilising information and evidence to inform policy embedded within all levels of government.
- Learning lessons from the pandemic to improve preparedness and resilience within democratic institutions.

- Taking account of a broader range of insights – not just behavioural science, but historical and social evidence

Engaging

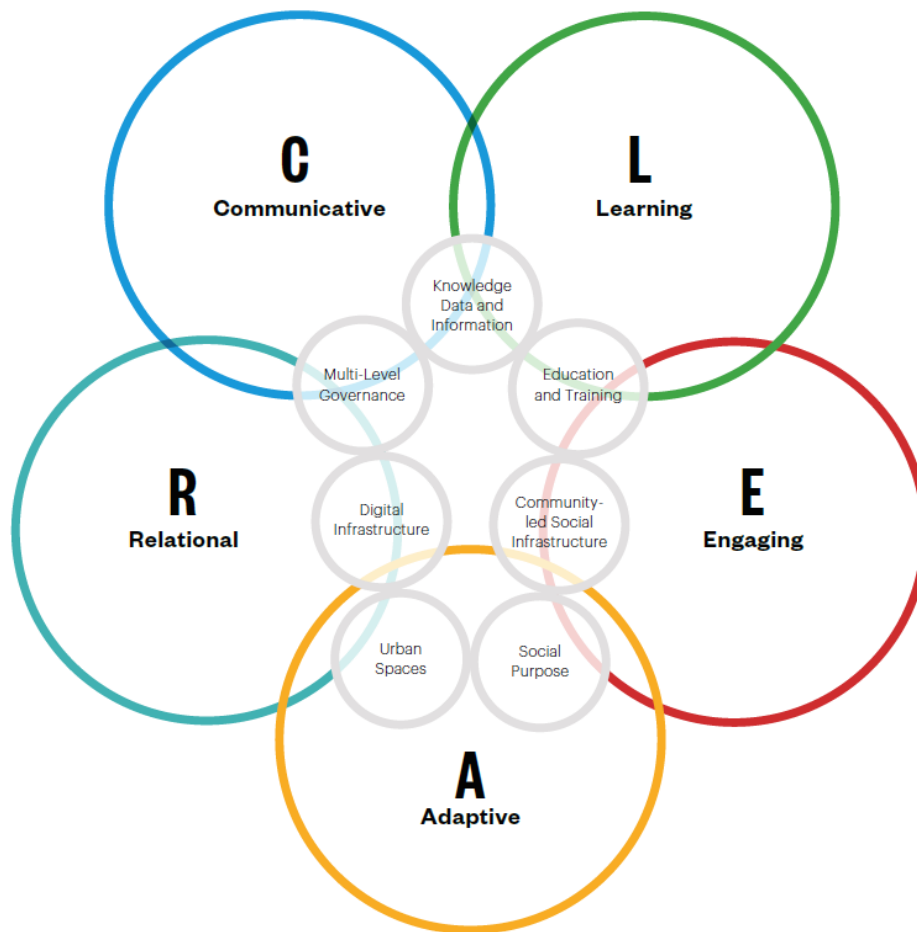
- Mechanisms for public participation
- transparency and trust in the decision-making processes of government at all levels, with clear levers for public scrutiny

Adaptive

- the right infrastructure, information and capacity to prepare effectively for threats on the horizon
- researchers, business leaders, policymakers, and civil society figures, collaborating and adopting problem-driven approaches to build local resilience and readiness

Relational

- Decision-makers have fully embraced the art of joining up strategies across different departments and at different levels of scale.
- awareness of knowledge and practice in different local and regional contexts, and the connections between different policy issues
- strong and supportive working relationships between different levels of government.



Conclusion

A central conclusion is that policy must be developed to address the interconnections and interdependencies among the impacts. Addressing each impact in a piecemeal way will always fail to deliver as much as it could.

And we have also found that many effects of COVID-19 are themselves an acceleration of existing trends – increasing inequalities, strains on our governance systems, pressures on communities.

And this isn't surprising because another lens running through our work is that of history, and history has shown us that pandemics are just as much social and economic crises as they are medical and health ones. And history also indicates that times of upheaval can be opportunities to reshape society, but this requires vision.