

# POLITICAL ANIMALS

*THE DEMOCRATIC AND ELECTORAL CASE FOR STRONG ANIMAL WELFARE POLICIES IN  
UK GENERAL ELECTIONS*

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Humane Society International UK (HSI/UK) and other leading animal protection organisations commissioned Focldata to poll the British public during August 2023.<sup>1</sup> This is an independent report written by Dr Steven McCulloch, Professor Paul Chaney, and Dr Lisa Riley, commissioned by HSI/UK, which presents and analyses the results of the Focldata 2023 polling, together with other survey results and data from parliamentary petitions.<sup>2 3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Polling was carried out by Focldata, with 6,050 total respondents between 19-23 August 2023. Using the polling data, Focldata completed a constituency-level analysis using MRP polling. Humane Society International UK, "Polling Reveals Millions of Brits Put 'Protecting Animals from Cruelty' Amongst Top Three Most Important Policies That Will Influence Their Votes," news release, 2023, <https://www.hsi.org/news-resources/polling-reveals-millions-of-brits-put-protecting-animals-from-cruelty-amongst-top-three-most-important-policies-that-will-influence-their-votes/>.

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<sup>3</sup> Thanks to Matt Chennells at Focldata for very helpful discussion about the 2023 polling data, to Jessica Webb at HSI/UK for providing information on media coverage of animal welfare issues in Britain, and to Amro Hussain, Claire Bass and Rosie Beer Timms for assistance in editing and proofreading the report.

## Summary

Polling consistently demonstrates a supermajority level of British public support for significant reform of government animal welfare policies. There is high level majority support across political parties, nations, regions, demographics, and constituencies – including in key target seats for the 2024 general election. This report examines the level and type of support that exists amongst voters for policies to prevent cruelty and protect animal welfare. It is argued that despite **substantial and consistent public support for stronger and more progressive government policy on animal welfare, this is not sufficiently reflected in British political discourse, policy commitments and government policymaking.** Parties and candidates pledging to implement such progressive policies could speak to a significant cohort of voters in the 2024 general election, which could influence outcomes in tightly contested constituencies.

### Key findings

- **In Britain, polling consistently reveals a supermajority level of support for progressive animal welfare policies,** where a supermajority is considered as at least two thirds of the voting population.<sup>4</sup> For instance, Focaldata 2023 polling found that 68% of British voters felt that a political party announcing a policy to pass more laws designed to improve animal welfare and protect animals from cruelty would have the right priorities.<sup>5</sup> Levels of support ranged from 57% in Birmingham Hall Green and Moseley to 75% in Torridge and Tavistock, with rural constituencies tending to show higher levels of support.<sup>6</sup>
- **There is supermajority support across British nations, with 71% of English voters, 71% of Scottish voters, and 73% of Welsh voters supporting more laws to protect animal welfare.**<sup>7</sup> Across Britain, 71% would like to see the UK Government pass more laws designed to improve animal welfare and protect animals from cruelty and YouGov 2023 polling found that 83% agreed with the statement “Animal welfare should be protected by the government through legislation”.<sup>8</sup>
- **There is supermajority support across voters for all main political parties at the 2019 general election.** In the Focaldata 2023 poll, voters were asked to consider a party passing more laws designed to improve animal welfare and protect animals from cruelty.<sup>9</sup> In response, over two thirds of those who voted for the Conservatives (67%), Labour (71%), the Scottish National Party (SNP) (73%), the Liberal Democrats (71%), the Green Party (68%) and Plaid Cymru (73%) believed the party would have the right priorities.
- **Focaldata 2023 polling found majority support for a political party announcing more laws to prevent cruelty and protect animal welfare across key demographics - age, gender, ethnicity, religion, and household income groups.**<sup>10</sup>
- **In a YouGov 2023 poll, nearly one third (32%) selected animal welfare as one of their top three most important causes.**<sup>11</sup> Based on Focaldata 2023 polling, **almost one in ten (8.9%) people rank “whether or not a party will protect animals from cruelty” as one of the top two most important policies that will influence which party they vote for, and one in six (15.4%) ranked it as one of their top three concerns.**<sup>12</sup>

<sup>4</sup> To put these figures in context, the 2015 Conservative Government was elected with 36.9% share of the vote and the 2019 Conservative Government with a 45% vote share. The UK left the European Union following a 52% majority leave vote in the 2016 referendum.

<sup>5</sup> Focaldata, "Animal Welfare - Pre-Election Poll - Data Tables - 27092023," Focaldata, [https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Vzk7xeRPXijWB6ZtsZTrvPPORgDbHBB9TVS\\_49eezeE/edit#gid=0](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Vzk7xeRPXijWB6ZtsZTrvPPORgDbHBB9TVS_49eezeE/edit#gid=0).

<sup>6</sup> Focaldata, "HSI MRP Results 11/09/23: Constituency," Focaldata, <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1yF9vsS4sWmalNkYVXJeOOaxcr0Uo858xaSQmD-LYofQ/edit#gid=361639163>. mapbox, "Animals Matter: Find out How Much Animals Matter to British Voters," mapbox, <https://maproom.net/c/animal-welfare/2.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Voters who felt a political party that announced a policy to legislate to prevent cruelty and protect animal welfare had the right priorities in English regions: North east (69%), North west (69%), East Midlands (69%), East of England (69%), Greater London (63%), South east (69%), South west (72%), Yorkshire and the Humber (69%), and West Midlands (65%).

<sup>8</sup> Briony Gunstone, Prescott-Smith, and Zöe Chamberlain, "RSPCA Kindness Index 2023," (YouGov, 2023).

<sup>9</sup> Focaldata, "Animal Welfare - Pre-Election Poll - Data Tables - 27092023".

<sup>10</sup> Age, 60% (18-24) to 74% (55-64); gender, male 60%, female 74%; ethnicity, 53% (black, black British, Caribbean or African) to 69% (white); religion, 56% (prefer not to say) to 73% (Buddhist); and household income, 62% (£90,000-£104,999) to 70% (£15,000-£29,999 and £45,000-59,999). [Ibid.](#)

<sup>11</sup> Briony Gunstone, Prescott-Smith, and Zöe Chamberlain, "RSPCA Kindness Index 2023," (YouGov, 2023).

<sup>12</sup> Focaldata, "HSI Pre-Election 2023 Poll - Survey Dashboard," Focaldata, <https://dashboard.focaldata.com/public/a1154b0d-f8f8-4378-8c21-a4c19ef770f9>.

- **Members of Parliament often report that they receive more correspondence on animal welfare from their constituents than on any other issue<sup>13</sup> and political failure to keep animal protection pledges generates significant media interest.** For example, following the Conservative Government’s 2023 decision to withdraw the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill, 65 articles critical of the Government appeared in national press from across the political spectrum. Media coverage by the BBC, Sky News, and others focused on the theme of “betrayal”, indicating the strength of public desire to see progressive animal welfare policies.<sup>14</sup>
- In addition to correspondence with MPs, **there were over six million parliamentary petition signatures in support of animal protection between 2010-2019.** While not the subject of as many petitions as policy areas such as health and education, animal welfare petitions often attracted more signatures than topics such as immigration, transport, overseas/foreign aid, and waste recycling over the same period.
- **Government policies, however, generally do not reflect this high level of public support.** A 2022 YouGov poll asked respondents to what extent they would support or oppose the government introducing legislation to ban the import and sale of animal fur.<sup>15</sup> Nearly three quarters (73%) supported a ban on the import and sale of fur. Despite this strong support and the negligible impact of a ban on the British economy, a fur import ban has not been introduced nor have the two largest parties yet made commitments to do so.
- **There is a large citizen-governance gap and democratic deficit in UK animal protection policy, most notably in farmed animal welfare.** For example, Focaldata 2023 polling finds that **63% of the British public believe the government should legislate to phase out intensive farming.**<sup>16</sup> **And YouGov 2020 polling finds that 77% support a complete ban on cages for farmed animals.**<sup>17</sup> **Despite this, 85% of farmed animals in the UK are reared intensively,** including 25% of laying hens being continuously caged during their laying years and 60% of breeding pigs being severely confined in farrowing crates for nearly a quarter of their adult lives.<sup>18</sup>
- Recognising the citizen-governance gap and addressing it could make a difference to electoral chances in the 2024 general election. **In the case of the Labour Party and Conservative Party’s top ten target seats, the number of voters who signed a sample of ten parliamentary animal welfare petitions from 2017-2019 was higher than the number of swing voters needed to win key marginal constituencies.**<sup>19</sup> This suggests that in tightly contested seats, animal protection policies are likely to contribute to decision making by undecided or swing voters.
- **Strong animal protection policies also speak favourably to voters in more general terms.** 64% of voters associate political parties and candidates who pursue progressive animal welfare policies with competence, 68% see these parties as being in touch with ordinary people, and 71% believe that such a party would be showing “compassion and concern” for those who do not have the power to protect themselves.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>13</sup> For example, the Labour MP Maria Eagle stated, “I can say for sure that over the years I have been a Member—as I say, it is now 26 years—the postbag I have received, either by letter or more recently by email, text and social media, has been overwhelmingly dominated by those constituents who write to me about improving animal welfare. I suspect my experience is not dissimilar to that of many other Members.” [HC Deb](#), “Animal Welfare (Import of Dogs, Cats and Ferrets) Bill,” *Hansard* 747, no. col 593 (2024).

<sup>14</sup> For example, [Helen Catt and Kate Whannel](#), “Ministers Accused of Betrayal after Animal Welfare Bill Scrapped,” *BBC News*, 25 May 2023. [Helena Horton](#), “Tories Accuse Sunak of Breaking Pledge after Animal Welfare U-Turn,” *The Guardian*, 25 May 2023. [David Wilcock](#), “Ministers Accused of ‘Astonishing Betrayal’ after Scrapping Boris Johnson’s Animal Welfare Law That Would Ban Live Exports and Criminalise Puppy Smuggling as Labour Is Accused of Sabotaging Legislation,” *Mail Online*, 25 May 2023.

<sup>15</sup> [YouGov](#), “Yougov / HSI Survey Results,” (YouGov, 2022).

<sup>16</sup> [Focaldata](#), “Animal Welfare - Pre-Election Poll - Data Tables - 27092023”.

<sup>17</sup> [YouGov](#), “Compassion in World Farming Survey Results,” (YouGov, 2020). Compassion in World Farming, “88% of UK Public Think Cages Are Cruel,” CIWF, <https://www.ciwf.org.uk/news/2020/12/88-of-uk-public-think-cages-are-cruel>.

<sup>18</sup> Compassion in World Farming, “Factory Farming Map,” <https://www.ciwf.org.uk/our-campaigns/factory-farming-map/>. [S. McCulloch](#), “Banning Farrowing Crates in the UK: Transitioning to Free Farrowing to Meet the Welfare Needs of Pigs,” (UK: Conservative Animal Welfare Foundation, 2022).

<sup>19</sup> For instance, the Conservative-held seat of Burnley has a majority of 127 (0.2%), but 1690 (2.3%) constituents signed sample animal welfare petitions. Similarly, the Labour-held Warrington South seat has a majority of 65 (0.1%), but 2116 (2.8%) constituents signed sample animal welfare petitions.

<sup>20</sup> [Focaldata](#), “Animal Welfare - Pre-Election Poll - Data Tables - 27092023”.

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## Summary of key polling of the British public on animal welfare policy

Table 1: Summary of key polling of the British public for animal welfare legislation and policy.

	Survey question	UK/GB	Poll	Positive response
<b>Government responsibility</b>	Animal welfare should be protected by the government through legislation.	UK	YouGov 2023 <sup>21</sup>	83%
<b>More government legislation</b>	I would like to see the UK Government pass more laws designed to improve animal welfare and protect animals from cruelty.	GB	Focaldata 2023 <sup>22</sup>	71%
<b>Political parties' priorities</b>	Passing more laws designed to improve animal welfare and protect animals from cruelty shows a party has the right priorities.	GB	Focaldata 2023 <sup>23</sup>	68%
<b>Intensive farming</b>	The government should bring in legislation to phase out intensive farming to protect the environment and animals.	GB	Focaldata 2023 <sup>24</sup>	63%
<b>Cages</b>	To what extent would you support or oppose a ban on keeping farmed animals in cages?	UK	YouGov 2020 <sup>25</sup>	77%
<b>Subsidies to phase out farrowing crates</b>	The government providing financial assistance to support farmers to move from using farrowing crates in pig farming to cage-free farming methods.	UK	Survation 2023 <sup>26</sup>	68%
<b>Method of production labelling</b>	Do you think that meat and dairy products should or should not be labelled to show the conditions that animals have been reared in, similar to the way shell eggs are currently labelled?	UK	Opinium 2021 <sup>27</sup>	68%
<b>Bans on lower welfare imports</b>	When we ban a type of farming in the UK for being too cruel, we should also ban imports of products produced in the same way overseas.	GB	Focaldata 2023 <sup>28</sup>	77%

<sup>21</sup> Gunstone, Prescott-Smith, and Chamberlain, "RSPCA Kindness Index 2023." The Gunstone, Prescott-Smith, and Chamberlain (2023) PowerPoint document was provided by the RSPCA.

<sup>22</sup> [Focaldata](#), "Animal Welfare - Pre-Election Poll - Data Tables - 27092023".

<sup>23</sup> [Ibid.](#)

<sup>24</sup> [Ibid.](#)

<sup>25</sup> Respondents were provided the following information: "In the European Union (EU), more than 300 million farmed animals (e.g. hens, pigs, rabbits, ducks, geese, calves etc.) are kept in cages to be raised for food. Some people argue that the confinement and restriction of natural movement caused by cages is not justifiable. Other people argue that cages are necessary for economising farming as it allows animals to be farmed on a large scale."

[YouGov](#), "Compassion in World Farming Survey Results." Compassion in World Farming, "88% of UK Public Think Cages Are Cruel," CIWF, <https://www.ciwf.org.uk/news/2020/12/88-of-uk-public-think-cages-are-cruel>.

<sup>26</sup> [Survation](#), "Topical Poll March 2023: Conducted by Survation on Behalf of Humane Society International," (Survation, 2023).

<sup>27</sup> Compassion in World Farming, "Overwhelming Majority of British People Want Clear Labelling Showing How Their Meat and Dairy Was Produced, New Poll Finds," <https://www.ciwf.org.uk/media/press-releases-statements/2021/12/overwhelming-majority-of-british-people-want-clear-labelling-showing-how-their-meat-and-dairy-was-produced-new-poll-finds>.

<sup>28</sup> [Focaldata](#), "Animal Welfare - Pre-Election Poll - Data Tables - 27092023".

<b>Ban on import of animal fur</b>	To what extent would you support or oppose the government introducing legislation on each of the following? Banning the import and sale of animal fur.	GB	YouGov 2022 <sup>29</sup>	73%
<b>Ban on import of hunting trophies</b>	To what extent would you support or oppose the government introducing legislation on each of the following? Banning imports of wildlife hunting trophies.	GB	YouGov 2022 <sup>30</sup>	81%
<b>Replacement of animals in research</b>	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The UK Government should commit to 'phasing out' the use of animals in scientific research and testing.	UK	Savanta 2023 <sup>31</sup>	77%
<b>Ban on harmful selective breeding in dogs</b>	Would you support or oppose a ban in the UK on the following: The selective breeding of dogs, where selective breeding results in serious health issues, like breathing problems or increased cancer risk.	GB	YouGov 2022 <sup>32</sup>	71%

## British voters demand more laws for animal welfare

British voters were asked to respond to the following statement: "I would like to see the UK Government pass more laws designed to improve animal welfare and protect animals from cruelty."<sup>33</sup> Over seven in ten British voters (71%) agreed with the statement, with 38% strongly agreeing and 33% somewhat agreeing. A minority of voters (10%) disagreed with the statement, with the remaining respondents neither agreeing or disagreeing. Figure 1 illustrates support for the UK Government passing more laws in England (71%), Scotland (71%), and Wales (73%).<sup>34</sup>

<sup>29</sup> [YouGov](#), "Yougov / HSI Survey Results."

<sup>30</sup> [Ibid.](#)

<sup>31</sup> [YouGov](#), "Yougov / Animal Free Research UK Survey Results," (2023).

<sup>32</sup> [YouGov](#), "Yougov Survey Results," (YouGov, 2022).

<sup>33</sup> [Focaldata](#), "Animal Welfare - Pre-Election Poll - Data Tables - 27092023".

<sup>34</sup> For many polling questions on the UK or British public there is a large majority, generally over 67%, in favour of stronger protection. It is important to note that in many cases a large minority of the remaining respondents are uncertain, with often a much smaller minority being opposed. The Focaldata 2023 question in Figure 1 is a good example of this. Across Great Britain, 71% supported more laws to improve welfare and protect animals from cruelty. The second largest category of respondents (18%) neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. Only a small minority (10%) disagreed with the statement and so were opposed to the government passing more laws to improve animal welfare and protect animals from cruelty.

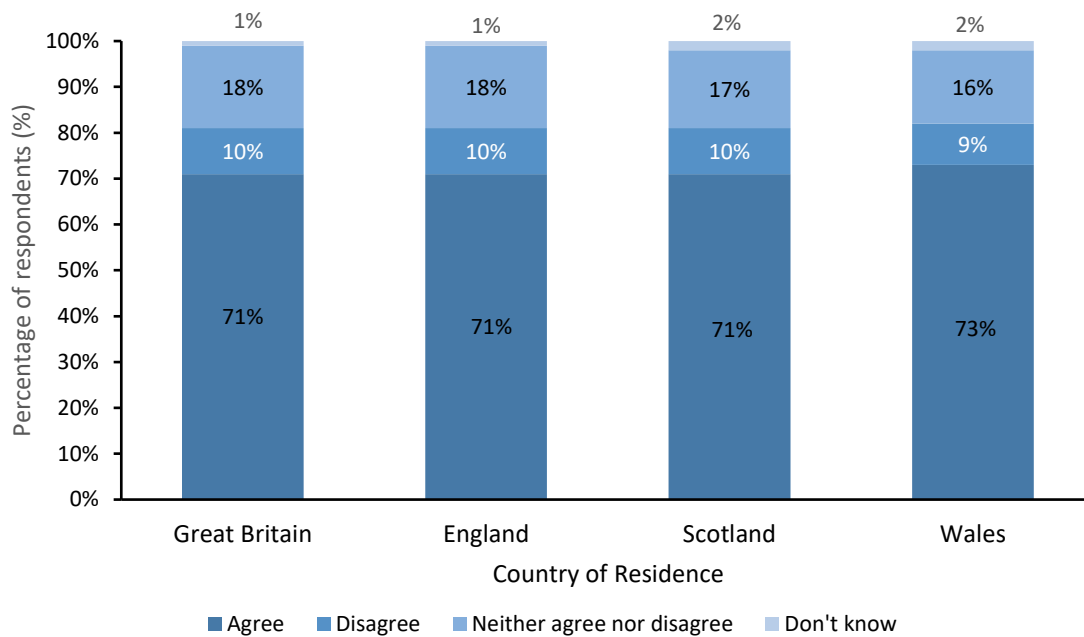


Figure 1: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “I would like to see the UK Government pass more laws designed to improve animal welfare and protect animals from cruelty.”<sup>35</sup>

## British voters’ perceptions of political parties with strong animal welfare policies

Focldata 2023 polling reveals that the British public support political parties and governments with strong animal protection policies.<sup>36 37</sup>

- Over two thirds (68%) of voters believed that a political party announcing a policy to pass more laws designed to improve animal welfare and protect animals from cruelty has the right priorities.
- The majority of British voters associated a political party endorsing progressive animal welfare policies with positive attributes. Respondents believed a political party endorsing such policies is compassionate (71%), has the nation’s best interests at heart (69%), is in touch with ordinary people (68%), represents what most people think (65%), represents people like them (68%), and is competent (64%).<sup>38</sup>
- From an electoral perspective, these figures are clearly important, given that 58% of the British public consider whether a party’s values align with their own as one of the factors that matter most to them when they are choosing which party to vote for.

<sup>35</sup> [Focldata](#), "Animal Welfare - Pre-Election Poll - Data Tables - 27092023".

<sup>36</sup> [Ibid.](#)

<sup>37</sup> “Animal protection” is used as an umbrella term in this report to include both animal welfare and species conservation policy issues.

<sup>38</sup> [Focldata](#), "Animal Welfare - Pre-Election Poll - Data Tables - 27092023".



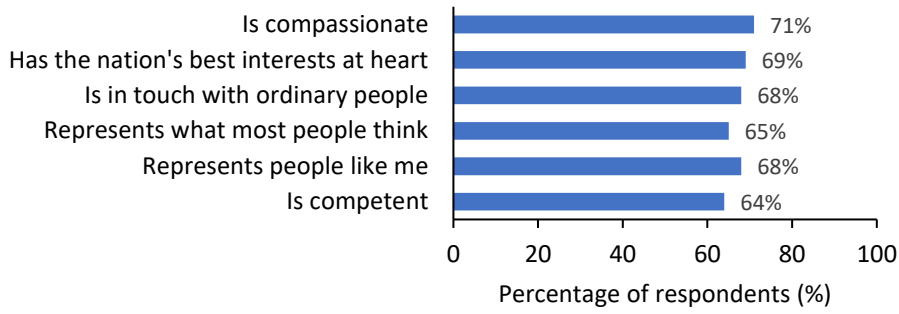


Figure 2: British voters' beliefs about the value attributes of a political party endorsing progressive animal welfare policies.<sup>39</sup>

### British citizens' voting behaviour and animal welfare

Based on 2019 general election voting behaviour, supermajorities of voters for all main political parties believe a party with a policy to pass more laws to improve animal welfare and prevent cruelty has the right priorities. Figures were seven voters out of ten for the Labour Party (71%), the Scottish National Party (SNP) (73%), the Liberal Democrats (71%) and Plaid Cymru (73%).<sup>40</sup> Two thirds of Conservative Party (67%) and Green Party (68%) voters, and half of Brexit Party (50%) voters, also believed a party with such a policy had the right priorities.

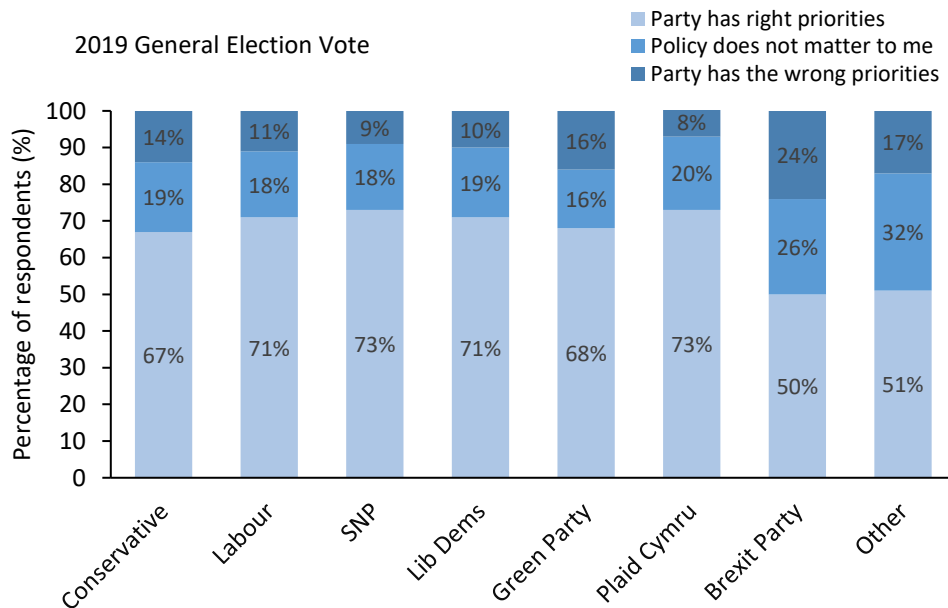


Figure 3: General election 2019 vote: Imagine a political party announcing the following policy: "We will pass more laws designed to improve animal welfare and protect animals from cruelty."<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> [Focaldata](#), "Animal Welfare - Pre-Election Poll - Data Tables - 27092023".

<sup>40</sup> [Ibid.](#)

<sup>41</sup> [Ibid.](#)

## Political saliency: Where does animal welfare rank on voters' list of priorities?

The RSPCA commissioned YouGov to conduct its annual UK Animal Kindness poll in 2023, which found:<sup>42</sup>

- Over four in five respondents (83%) agreed with the statement “Animal welfare should be protected by the government through legislation”.
- Less than a quarter of respondents (23%) agreed with the statement “Animal welfare is not an important issue for the country right now”.
- Nearly one third (32%) selected animal welfare as one of their top three most important causes. Animal welfare was the third most important cause after mental health (39%) and conservation and the environment (34%). The YouGov poll finding is significant for legislation and government policy on animal welfare in particular because it was selected by more respondents than poverty in the UK (31%), physical health (29%), human rights (27%), education (26%), children and young people (24%) and global poverty (12%).<sup>43</sup>

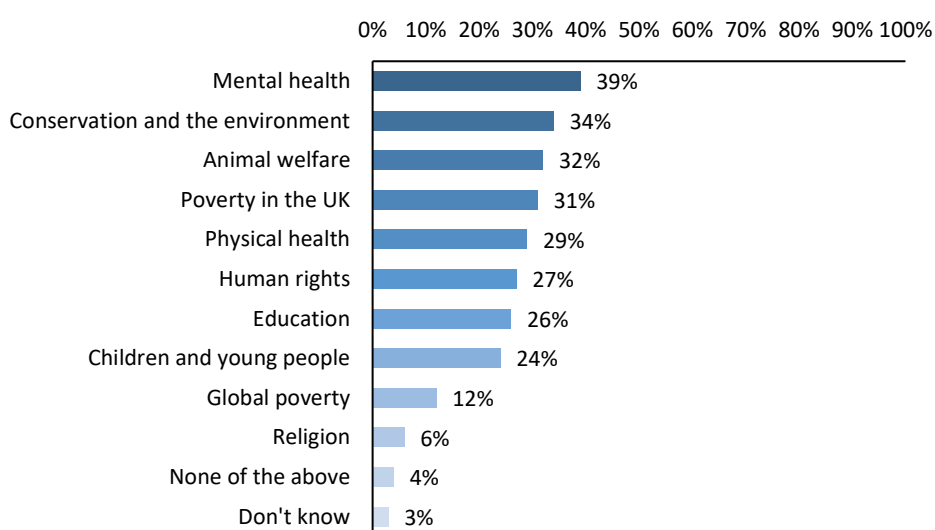


Figure 4: Which, if any, of the following causes are important to you? Please select up to three. Graph amended from Gunstone, Prescott-Smith, and Chamberlain (2023).<sup>44</sup>

In a Focaldata 2023 poll nearly one in ten British voters (9.8%) ranked animal welfare as one of the top five most important issues facing the country at the time; for comparison, 30% of respondents chose “crime” as one of their top five most important issues.<sup>45</sup> Over eight in ten voters (81%) believed that animal welfare policy should be a priority for political parties to focus on, with nearly half (47%) believing it should be an important (30%) or urgent (17%) priority.

<sup>42</sup> The survey was conducted online 30 March-12 April 2023. Quotas were set to ensure a representative sample of the UK population. The total sample was 4,019 UK adults and results were weighted to be representative of the UK population aged 18 and over. Gunstone, Prescott-Smith, and Chamberlain, "RSPCA Kindness Index 2023." The Gunstone, Prescott-Smith, and Chamberlain (2023) PowerPoint document was provided by the RSPCA.

<sup>43</sup> Analysis conducted by Gunstone, Prescott-Smith, and Chamberlain (2023). Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> [Focaldata](#), "HSI Pre-Election 2023 Poll - Survey Dashboard".

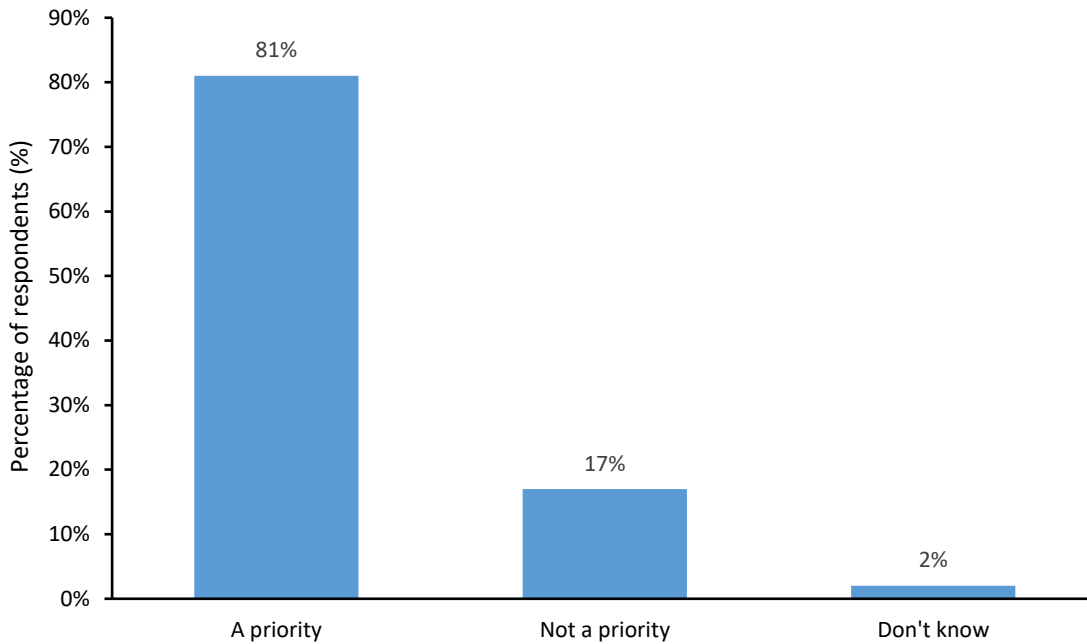


Figure 5: British voters on whether animal welfare should be a priority for political or policy focus.<sup>46</sup>

British voters were also provided with a list of issues and asked to rank which were the most important policies that would influence which party they would vote for. The list included support for the NHS, low wages and the cost of living, immigration, crime, and affordable housing. Around one in six (15.4%) ranked protecting animals from cruelty as one of their top three concerns, with nearly one in ten (8.9%) ranking it within their top two concerns.<sup>47</sup> One in 25 (4%) ranked protecting animals from cruelty as the most important policy influencing which party they would vote for.

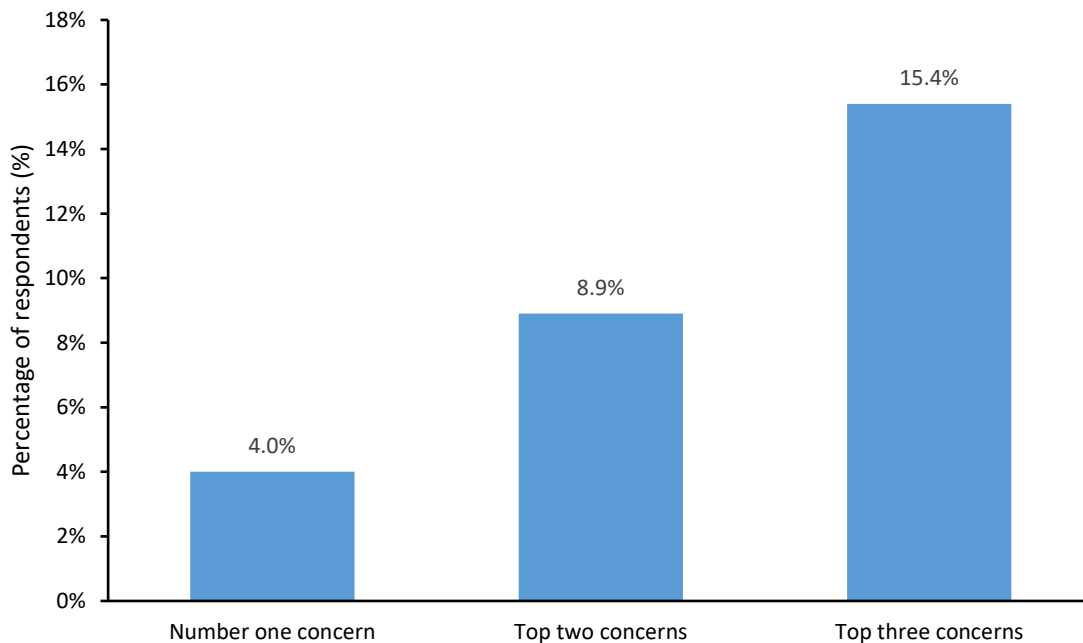


Figure 6: Percentage of British voters who stated that animal welfare is the most important policy in terms of influencing which party they vote for.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> [Focaldata](#), "HSI Pre-Election 2023 Poll - Survey Dashboard".

<sup>47</sup> [Ibid.](#)

<sup>48</sup> [Ibid.](#)

## Media interest in animal welfare

Given such high levels of public support, it is not surprising that the British media frequently cover a wide range of animal protection issues and that failure to deliver on pledges to protect animal welfare generates significant media interest. For example, the Government under Boris Johnson introduced the Kept Animals Bill in June 2021 to deliver a raft of key manifesto pledges and commitments from its 2021 “Action Plan for Animal Welfare”.<sup>49 50</sup> However, the Bill was later withdrawn under Rishi Sunak’s administration.<sup>51</sup>

Around 65 articles critical of the Government appeared in national newspapers and online publications across the political spectrum following the withdrawal. The BBC published “Ministers accused of betrayal after animal welfare bill scrapped”; *The Guardian* ran with “Tories accuse Sunak of breaking pledge after animal welfare U-turn”; and the *Mail Online* wrote “Ministers accused of ‘astonishing betrayal’ after scrapping Boris Johnson’s animal welfare law that would ban live exports and criminalise puppy smuggling as Labour is accused of sabotaging legislation”.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, "Government Launches Second Animal Welfare Bill to Protect Pets, Livestock and Wild Animals," news release, 8 June, 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-launches-second-animal-welfare-bill-to-protect-pets-livestock-and-wild-animals>.

<sup>50</sup> [The Conservative and Unionist Party](#), "Get Brexit Done: Unleash Britain's Potential: The Conservative and Unionist Party Manifesto 2019," (London, UK: Conservatives, 2019). [Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs](#), "Our Action Plan for Animal Welfare," (London: DEFRA, 2021).

<sup>51</sup> Mark Spencer, "Oral Statement to Parliament: Animal Welfare Statement " Gov.UK, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/animal-welfare-statement>.

<sup>52</sup> [Catt and Whannel](#), "Ministers Accused of Betrayal after Animal Welfare Bill Scrapped." [Horton](#), "Tories Accuse Sunak of Breaking Pledge after Animal Welfare U-Turn." [Wilcock](#), "Ministers Accused of 'Astonishing Betrayal' after Scrapping Boris Johnson's Animal Welfare Law That Would Ban Live Exports and Criminalise Puppy Smuggling as Labour Is Accused of Sabotaging Legislation."

## British voters in England, Scotland and Wales on animal welfare

Focaldata 2023 polling reveals widespread support for strong government policies to prevent cruelty and promote animal welfare across Great British nations and English regions.<sup>53</sup> Polling finds that 68% of voters in England, 66% in Scotland, and 71% in Wales believe a party that announces a policy to pass more laws to improve animal welfare and protect animals from cruelty would have the right priorities. In the English regions, support ranges from 63% in Greater London to 72% in South West England.<sup>54</sup>

Table 2: Nations and regions analysis table.<sup>55 56</sup>

	Great Britain	England	Scotland	Wales	North East England	North West England	East Midlands	East of England	Greater London	South East England	South West England	Yorkshire and the	West Midlands
Animal welfare is an important part of our country's future.	70%	70%	71%	72%	70%	65%	73%	73%	65%	71%	72%	72%	69%
Passing more laws designed to improve animal welfare and protect animals from cruelty shows compassion, and concern for those who don't have the power to protect themselves.	71%	70%	73%	71%	69%	68%	73%	70%	67%	71%	73%	74%	69%
Animal welfare is an issue that concerns everyone.	67%	66%	71%	69%	70%	67%	70%	67%	58%	68%	68%	68%	67%
The government should bring in legislation to phase out intensive farming to protect the environment and animals.	63%	63%	64%	63%	62%	64%	65%	65%	62%	64%	63%	59%	65%
When we ban a type of farming in the UK for being too cruel, we should also ban imports of products produced in the same way overseas.	77%	76%	81%	82%	78%	77%	77%	76%	69%	79%	79%	76%	74%
"We will pass more laws designed to improve animal welfare and protect animals from cruelty." This policy shows the party has the right priorities.	68%	68%	66%	71%	69%	65%	69%	69%	63%	69%	72%	69%	65%
"We will pass more laws designed to improve animal welfare and protect animals from cruelty." This policy reflects my values.	71%	70%	72%	75%	73%	68%	72%	72%	66%	73%	72%	72%	69%
I would like to see the UK Government pass more laws designed to improve animal welfare and protect animals from cruelty.	71%	71%	71%	73%	74%	73%	72%	69%	69%	72%	73%	72%	69%

<sup>53</sup> [Focaldata](#), "Animal Welfare - Pre-Election Poll - Data Tables - 27092023".

<sup>54</sup> [Ibid.](#)

<sup>55</sup> [Ibid.](#)

<sup>56</sup> England weighted averages calculated and provided by Focaldata.

## MRP polling: What do voters think at the constituency level?

Focldata conducted constituency-level MRP polling for the following survey question: Imagine a political party announcing the following policy: “We will pass more laws designed to improve animal welfare and protect animals from cruelty.”<sup>57</sup> <sup>58</sup> Voters were asked whether the policy shows the party has the right priorities, it does not matter to them, or the policy shows the party has the wrong priorities. To see how each individual constituency polled, please visit the “Animals Matter” Maproom webpage [here](#).<sup>59</sup>



Figure 7: MRP polling: Percentage polled who feel that a political party announcing plans to "pass more laws designed to improve animal welfare and protect animals from cruelty" would have the right priorities.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Mapping opinion poll data onto smaller geographical areas, using Multilevel Regression with Post-stratification (MRP). MRP can be used to explore patterns in responses across constituencies with similar characteristics. Focldata, "HSI MRP Results 11/09/23: Info," Focldata, <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1yF9vsS4sWmalNkYVXJeOOaxcr0Uo858xaSQmD-LYofQ/edit#gid=1397440975>.

<sup>58</sup> Variables used in the MRP regression model for individual-level effects were constituency, region, general election 2019 vote, religion, age, and ethnicity. Variables for constituency-level effects were agriculture percentage (rural control), population density, percentage EU 2016 referendum leave vote, historic support for fur ban, and general election 2016 turnout. (Matt Chennells, Focldata, pers. comm.)

<sup>59</sup> [Focldata](#), "HSI MRP Results 11/09/23: Constituency".

<sup>60</sup> [Ibid.](#)

**Focaldata MRP polling found a majority of voters in all British constituencies believed such a party had the right priorities.** Support ranged from 75% of voters in constituencies such as Torridge and Tavistock, to 57% in Birmingham Hall Green and Moseley.

The “Animals Matter” map illustrates how constituencies in Scotland and Wales tend to have higher levels of support for more laws to improve animal welfare and protect animals from cruelty compared to England, as documented in earlier parts of this report, although throughout England there is still majority support and some regions poll particularly strongly.

Constituencies in the southwest, southeast coastal areas, East Anglia, and Yorkshire and the Humber tended to have higher levels of supportive voters, at 70-75%. The southwestern constituencies of St Ives, South Devon, and Torridge and Tavistock had the highest levels of supportive voters at 75%. Constituencies within major cities, such as Tottenham in Greater London (61%), tended to have the lowest level of supportive voters, though still a majority at 60-65%. Constituencies outside of these areas, such as Stratford-On-Avon (67%), tended to have levels of support at 65-70%.

For Scotland, constituencies in the south, such as Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (70%), and constituencies in the north, such as Inverness, Skye and West Ross-shire (70%), had high levels of supportive voters, at 70-75%. Orkney and Shetland was the Scottish constituency with the highest level of supportive voters at 75%. Constituencies in central Scotland, such as Stirling and Strathallan (66%), tended to have levels of support at 65-70% or over. Constituencies in major cities, such as Edinburgh West (62%), had the lowest levels of supportive voters, at 60-65%.

Welsh constituencies tended to have the highest levels of support for more laws to improve animal welfare and protect animals from cruelty. Ceredigion Preseli in west Wales had the highest level of supportive voters at 75%. Most of the other geographically larger constituencies, located in central and northern Wales, had levels of support at 70-75%, such as Montgomeryshire and Glyndwr (74%). Constituencies in the south of Wales, such as Cardiff East (63%) and Swansea West (67%) had the lowest levels of supportive voters, though still significant overall majority support.

## **Animal protection, parliamentary petitions and MRP constituency polling**

Public support for animal protection can be gauged in a variety of ways. Parliamentary e-petitions data is an important new metric to assess the public’s desire for engagement with and influence over Westminster, which did not exist before 2010.

According to the Hansard Society “more than one-in-five people had signed an e-petition in the last year. Since 2015 there have been more than 31 million signatures... This is a significant number of individuals getting involved with parliamentary processes”.<sup>61</sup>

There were over six million petition signatures in support of animal protection between 2010-2019. When compared with the level of attention to other policy issues, over the period 2010-2019, petitions data shows animal welfare to be a mainstream policy issue. While not the subject of as many petitions as key policy areas such as health and education, it nevertheless often attracted more signatures than topics such as immigration, transport, overseas/foreign aid, and waste recycling.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> [Hansard Society](#), "Audit of Political Engagement No.14: The 2017 Report," (London, UK2017).

<sup>62</sup> Based on an indicative keyword search of the UK Parliament Petitions database 2010- present ('All Petitions') <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions?state=all>. Number of matches: Animal Welfare (266), hunting (101), Habitat (166), Pet (841), Wildlife (517) Total = 1,891. Immigration (501), Migrant (215), Asylum (319), Refugee (409) Total = 1,444. Foreign aid (110), Overseas aid

The most popular theme in animal protection petitions, accounting for over a fifth of petitions (21.7%), was calls for stricter general regulation of animal welfare (to be achieved by new laws, regulatory bodies and strengthened monitoring and enforcement measures).

Prior to the 2019 general election, there were 93 mass support animal welfare petitions (10,000+ signatures).<sup>63</sup> In only two cases between 2010-2019 did the government respond to 100,000+ signature petitions saying a policy change was planned in line with the petition. These were for “End the export of live farm animals after Brexit”<sup>64</sup> (100,752 signatures), and “Recognise animal sentience and require that animal welfare has full regard in law” (103,918 signatures).<sup>65</sup>

Given that there were 23 animal protection petitions receiving over 100,000 signatures between 2010-2019, this again points to government policymaking failing to reflect the level of public support for the issue. As the following highlights, it is vital that political parties recognise the importance of animal protection to the electorate.

### **General election 2024: Public petitions, target seats and MRP polling**

Our analysis shows that for the 2024 general election, the number of animal welfare petitioners in the top target seats are likely to exceed the number of votes needed to win the constituency from the incumbent party.

Target seats are those which had the smallest majority prior to the general election. It is widely accepted that “They aren’t necessarily the easiest seats for each party to win—there is no obvious measure of this—or the seats into which the parties directed their resources. But they are the seats where the lowest number of voters [are] needed to change their minds in order to win the seat”.<sup>66</sup>

Therefore, for candidates in marginal constituencies, their position on animal welfare—including absence of a clear position—could be a decisive factor in the election result.

The purpose of focusing on this is to illustrate that the equivalent number of people signing a sample of ten animal welfare petitions may “swing” a seat on a party target list. As noted, for this reason, parties contesting these constituencies would do well to present clear commitments and plans for tackling animal cruelty and safeguarding animal welfare in their election campaigning and manifesto commitments.

**Tables 3-5 below detail the top ten target seats for Labour, the Conservatives, and the Liberal Democrats.<sup>67</sup> For nearly all of these, the total number of people signing a purposive sample of just ten of the mass support animal welfare petitions (during the period 2017 to 2019) exceeds the**

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(20). Transport (1,188). Recycling (280). Education (3,611), School (6,042), Curriculum (803), Pupil (666), Exam (1,526) Total = 12,648. Health (6,759), NHS (5,418), Hospital (1,809), GP (332) Total = 14,318. The political saliency of petition topics fluctuates overtime. Keyword search of database conducted 06.06.2024.

<sup>63</sup> Since 2010.

<sup>64</sup> UK Government and Parliament, "End the Export of Live Farm Animals after Brexit," HMG, <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/200205>.

<sup>65</sup> UK Government and Parliament, "Recognise Animal Sentience & Require That Animal Welfare Has Full Regard in Law," HMG, <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/242239>.

<sup>66</sup> Carl Baker, "Target Seats: How Did Labour and the Conservatives Perform?," UK Parliament, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/target-seats-how-did-labour-and-the-conservatives-perform/>.

<sup>67</sup> These follow the definition by the House of Commons Library (Baker, 2017), noted above and detailed at Anon., "Election Polling," <https://www.electionpolling.co.uk/>. It is often the case that for stated “tactical reasons”, parties themselves refrain from publishing lists of target constituencies. Constituency data are from Electoral Calculus, "Homepage," <https://www.electoralcalculus.co.uk/homepage.html>.



**number of voters required to swing the constituency from the incumbent party.<sup>68</sup> Table 6 shows the target seats for the SNP.**

Tables 3-6 also report Focaldata 2023 MRP polling in the top ten target seats.<sup>69</sup> Voters were asked to imagine a political party announcing the following policy: “We will pass more laws designed to improve animal welfare and protect animals from cruelty.” The tables document the percentage of voters who felt that the policy shows the party has the right priorities.

For instance, Iain Duncan Smith’s Chingford and Woodford Green is the tenth-ranked Labour Party target seat. At the 2019 general election the Conservatives held the seat with a majority of 1604 (2.1% of the electorate). Focaldata MRP polling suggests 65% of Chingford and Woodford Green constituents feel a party with a policy to pass more laws to improve welfare and protect animals from cruelty has the right priorities.

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<sup>68</sup> The ten petitions are:

- i. Ban the sale of animal fur in the UK <https://petition.parliament.uk/archived/petitions/200888>.
- ii. Change the laws governing the use of fireworks to include a ban on public use <https://petition.parliament.uk/archived/petitions/201947>.
- iii. End the badger cull instead of expanding to new areas <https://petition.parliament.uk/archived/petitions/165672>.
- iv. Give status to Police Dogs and Horses as 'Police Officers' <https://petition.parliament.uk/archived/petitions/168678>.
- v. End the Cage Age: ban cages for all farmed animals <https://petition.parliament.uk/archived/petitions/243448>.
- vi. Ban Driven Grouse Shooting <https://petition.parliament.uk/archived/petitions/266770>.
- vii. Recognise animal sentience & require that animal welfare has full regard in law <https://petition.parliament.uk/archived/petitions/242239>.
- viii. Create a new independent welfare body to protect racehorses from abuse and death <https://petition.parliament.uk/archived/petitions/211950>.
- ix. End the export of live farm animals after Brexit <https://petition.parliament.uk/archived/petitions/200205>.
- x. Limit the Sale and Use of Fireworks to Organisers of Licensed Displays Only <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/319891>.

<sup>69</sup> [Focaldata](#), "HSI MRP Results 11/09/23: Constituency".

Table 3: Labour Party top ten target seats. (AW = animal welfare)

Target seat rank	Incumbent party	Constituency	Region or nation	Majority at 2019 election	Electorate	Total signatories for ten AW e-petitions (2017-2019)	% electorate signing one or more of 10 AW Parliamentary e-petitions 2017-2019	Existing majority as % electorate	MRP poll AW support (%)
1	CON	Burnley	North West	127	74722	1690	2.3	0.2	65
2	CON	Leigh and Atherton	North West	293	76369	1737	2.3	0.4	66
3	CON	High Peak	East Midlands	590	74264	2908	3.9	0.8	70
4	CON	Bangor Aberconwy	Wales	749	70127	1332	1.9	1.1	68
5	CON	Wolverhampton West	West Midlands	934	77127	1474	1.9	1.2	64
6	CON	Bury South	North West	935	75131	1852	2.5	1.2	65
7	CON	Bury North	North West	1282	77499	1758	2.3	1.7	67
8	CON	Bolton North East	North West	1278	77252	1483	1.9	1.7	66
9	CON	Watford	East of England	1300	70110	2041	2.9	1.9	64
10	CON	Chingford and Woodford Green	London	1604	75340	1575	2.1	2.1	65

Table 4: Conservative Party top ten target seats. (AW = animal welfare)

Target seat rank	Incumbent party	Constituency	Region or nation	Majority at 2019 election	Electorate	Total signatories for ten AW e-petitions (2017-2019)	% electorate signing one or more of 10 AW Parliamentary e-petitions 2017-2019	Existing majority as % electorate	MRP poll AW support (%)
1	LAB	Warrington South	North West	65	76256	2116	2.8	0.1	65
2	LAB	Coventry North West	West Midlands	208	75247	1680	2.2	0.3	64
3	LAB	Kensington and Bayswater	London	390	79095	1364	1.7	0.5	64
4	LAB	Alyn and Deeside	Wales	411	75403	1810	2.4	0.5	66
5	LAB	Wirral West	North West	455	71641	1799	2.5	0.6	66
6	LAB	Beckenham and Penge	London	631	76436	1626	2.1	0.8	64
7	LAB	Heywood and Middleton North	North West	680	72636	1749	2.4	0.9	64
8	LAB	Dagenham and Rainham	London	706	73233	1334	1.8	1.0	67
9	LAB	Coventry South	West Midlands	808	72674	1566	2.2	1.1	62
10	LAB	Warwick and Leamington	West Midlands	1169	75602	2060	2.7	1.5	65

Table 5: Liberal Democrats top ten target seats. (AW = animal welfare)

Target seat rank	Incumbent party	Constituency	Region or nation	Majority at 2019 election	Electorate	Total signatories for ten AW e-petitions (2017-2019)	% electorate signing one or more of 10 AW Parliamentary e-petitions 2017-2019	Existing majority as % electorate	MRP poll AW support (%)
1	CON	Carshalton and Wallington	London	629	73133	1585	2.2	0.9	65
2	SNP	Fife North East	Scotland	728	70255	1678	2.4	1.0	67
3	CON	Wimbledon	London	839	74718	1613	2.2	1.1	69
4	LAB	Sheffield Hallam	Yorkshire and the Humber	1108	76154	2165	2.8	1.5	64
5	CON	Cambridgeshire South	East of England	1498	75311	2649	3.5	2.0	67
6	CON	Cheltenham	South West	1421	76294	2780	3.6	1.9	68
7	SNP	Dunbartonshire Mid	Scotland	1986	73389	1772	2.4	2.7	62
8	CON	Cheadle	North West	2336	74578	1942	2.6	3.1	63
9	CON	Eastbourne	South East	2168	73000	2221	3.0	3.0	70
10	SNP	Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross	Scotland	2788	74896	1255	1.7	3.7	73

Table 6: SNP top target seats. (AW = animal welfare)<sup>70 71</sup>

Target seat rank	Incumbent Party	Constituency	Region or nation	Majority at 2019 election	Electorate	Total signatories for ten AW e-petitions (2017-2019)	% electorate signing one or more of 10 AW Parliamentary e-petitions 2017-2019	Existing majority as % electorate	MRP poll AW support (%)
1	CON	Aberdeenshire West and Kincardine	Scotland	843	72640	1963	2.7	1.2	70
2	CON	Dumfries and Galloway	Scotland	1556	76172	1913	2.5	2.1	72
3	CON	Aberdeenshire North and Moray East	Scotland	2399	71236	1281	1.8	3.8	72
4	LIB	Edinburgh West	Scotland	2888	75666	1780	2.4	4.0	62
5	CON	Gordon and Buchan	Scotland	3224	69002	1810	2.6	4.0	70
6	CON	Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale	Scotland	4338	70255	1661	2.4	6.3	70
7	CON	Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk	Scotland	5148	74518	1841	2.5	6.9	72
8	LIB	Orkney and Shetland	Scotland	2507	34210	1095	3.2	7.3	75
9	LAB	Edinburgh South	Scotland	10795	71688	1828	2.5	16.3	65

<sup>70</sup> The SNP can make a maximum of 9 gains. <https://www.electionpolling.co.uk/battleground/targets/snp>.

<sup>71</sup> MRP, petitions and majority data predate the boundary changes for GE2024 in some seats (Aberdeenshire West and Kincardine and Aberdeenshire North and Moray East) and have been applied on a best fit basis.

## **Demographic analysis of British voters' views on parties that pledge to protect animals**

**Focaldata 2023 polling reveals that most British voters, regardless of demographic characteristics, believe that a party planning to pass more laws designed to improve animal welfare and protect animals from cruelty would have the right priorities.<sup>72</sup>**

### **Age and gender**

Clear majorities of all age groups felt that such a party had the right priorities, ranging from 60% of 18–24-year-olds to 74% of voters aged 55-64. Nearly three in four female voters (74%) felt that a party that would pass more laws to improve animal welfare and protect animals from cruelty had the right priorities. The figure for males was lower at 60%, but still a clear majority of British voters.

### **Ethnicity and religion**

White voters were most supportive of the policy (69%) followed by mixed or multiple ethnic groups (64%), Asian or Asian British (60%), other ethnic group (60%), and Black, Black British, Caribbean or African (53%) voters. There was majority support for a political party's policy to pass more laws to improve animal welfare and prevent cruelty from voters of all religious faiths and none. Majority support ranged from Buddhist (73%), any other religion (71%), Christians (69%), those with no religion (69%), Jewish (65%), Hindu (61%) to Muslim (57%) and Sikh (57%) voters.

### **Education, social grade and household income**

Voters with qualifications at degree level or above were marginally more supportive of more animal protection and anti-cruelty laws (68%), compared to voters with below degree level qualifications (67%). In terms of social grade, over two thirds of ABC1 (67%) and C2DE (68%) respondents supported the policy. There was broad support for the policy across household incomes, ranging from 62% for total annual income £90,000-104,999 to 70% for both £15,000-29,999 and £45,000-59,999 categories. Respondents with lower and middle household incomes generally demonstrated higher levels of support for the policy compared to those with the highest three categories of household income.

### **Animal welfare as a priority for party or political focus**

In the 2023 Focaldata poll, respondents were asked, "Thinking again about some of these different issues. Could you say whether or what kind of priority for political or policy focus you think [animal welfare] should be?" In response, voters between 18-34 years (85-86%), females (85%), those who voted Labour (86%), SNP (86%) or Plaid Cymru (85%), and those who are Sikh (87%) or Buddhist (86%) were particularly likely to consider animal welfare as a priority.

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<sup>72</sup> [Focaldata](#), "Animal Welfare - Pre-Election Poll - Data Tables - 27092023".

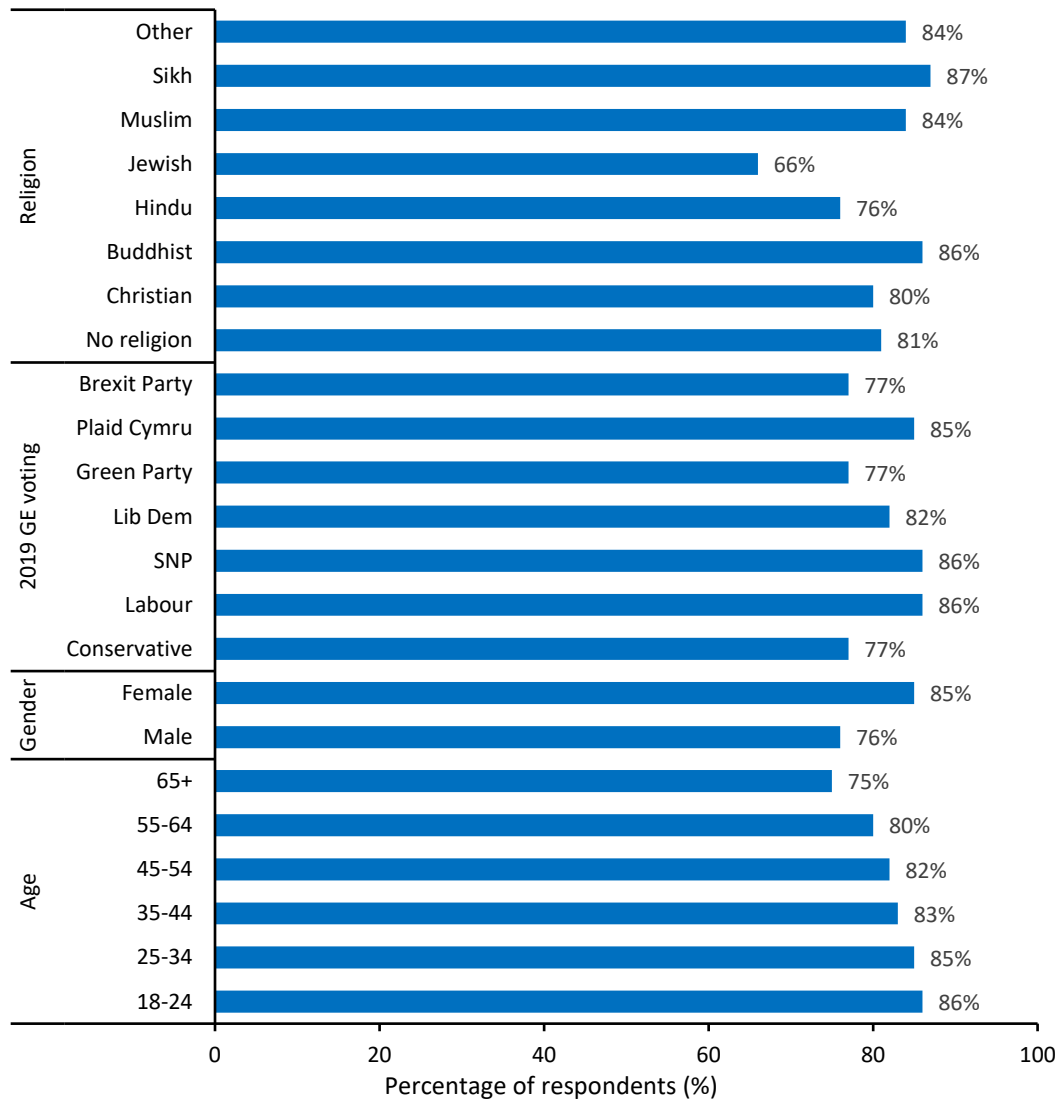


Figure 8: Percentage of respondents who considered animal welfare as a priority for party or political focus.<sup>73 74</sup>

### Voter demographics with the highest support for animal welfare

Focaldata 2023 demographic analysis suggests the type of voter most likely to believe that a party which plans to pass more laws designed to improve animal welfare and protect animals from cruelty is a party that has the right priorities is: 45-64 years of age, female, white, Buddhist or Christian, in either social grade (ABC1 or C2DE), with a household income of between £45,000-59,999, who lives outside of Greater London and the North West of England and who voted Labour, SNP, Liberal Democrats or Plaid Cymru in the 2019 general election.<sup>75 76</sup>

Respondents were asked to select the statement they most agreed with, either “animal welfare is an important part of our country’s future”, or “animal welfare is a distraction from more important issues facing our country”.<sup>77</sup> In response, there was a clear distinction between gender on whether

<sup>73</sup> [Focaldata](#), "Animal Welfare - Pre-Election Poll - Data Tables - 27092023".

<sup>74</sup> Percentages in Figure 8 are totals for “an urgent priority”, “an important priority, but not urgent”, and “a priority, but not amongst the most urgent or important”.

<sup>75</sup> [Focaldata](#), "Animal Welfare - Pre-Election Poll - Data Tables - 27092023".

<sup>76</sup> Identified both by eyeballing the data and inferential statistical analysis.

<sup>77</sup> [Focaldata](#), "Animal Welfare - Pre-Election Poll - Data Tables - 27092023".

animal welfare is deemed an important part of our country’s future, showing that females are significantly more likely to agree that animal welfare is important (75% versus 64%) and males are significantly more likely to agree that animal welfare is a distraction (36% versus 25%).<sup>78</sup>

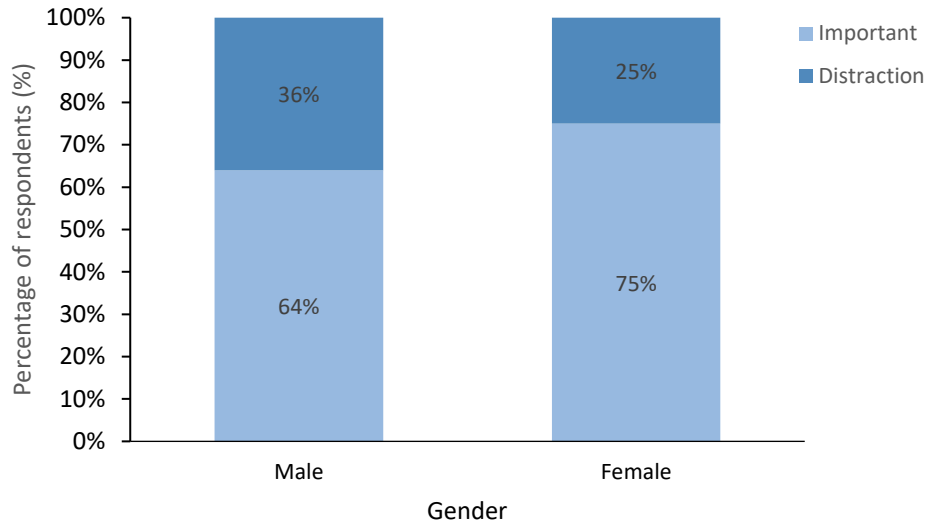


Figure 9: Gender analysis: Is animal welfare an important part our country’s future, or a distraction?<sup>79</sup>

Respondents were asked if a party was to have a policy to pass more laws to improve animal welfare, whether that policy would demonstrate compassion or be a distraction from more important issues. The voter profile with the highest agreement that the policy would demonstrate compassion was those aged between 55-64 years (75%), females (75%), those living in areas other than Greater London, North West England, North East England or West Midlands, white (72%), voted SNP (80%) or Plaid Cymru (81%) in the 2019 general election, have household earnings between £45,000-59,999, and voted remain (73%) in the EU referendum.

Respondents were asked if the government should bring in legislation to phase out intensive farming to protect the environment and animals. The highest support for legislation to phase out intensive farming was seen in respondents aged 45-64 years (67%), females (70%), white (64%) or “other” (70%) ethnicity, those who voted for the SNP in the 2019 general election (70%), those who voted remain in the EU referendum (70%), Hindus (70%) or “other” religion (75%) and those who have a household income between £60,000-89,999. Gender showed the most pronounced difference in agreement in support of legislation to phase out intensive farming.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>78</sup> A Person’s Chi-Square Test for Independence was performed to assess the relationship between gender and agreement. There was a significant relationship between the two variables ( $\chi^2$  86.57728 (1, 6050),  $p < 0.000001$ , Cramer’s V effect size 0.12 [small-medium]).

<sup>79</sup> [Focaldata](#), "Animal Welfare - Pre-Election Poll - Data Tables - 27092023".

<sup>80</sup> A Person’s Chi-Square test for independence shows gender and position on intensive farming are related. Females are significantly more likely to agree that the government should legislate to phase out intensive farming while males are significantly more likely to agree that intensive farming should be allowed ( $\chi^2$  = 127.8057 (1, 6050),  $p < 0.000001$ , Cramer’s v effect size 0.15 [small-medium effect]).



## Public support versus legal reality for animal protection: the citizen-governance gap

This report has found a consistent supermajority level of British public support for progressive animal protection policies, defined as 67% or over of the population. At the same time, this level of support is not reflected in government laws and policy.

Farmed animal welfare policy is a striking example of the gap between what British citizens want and the legal reality. Focaldata 2023 polling finds that 63% of British voters believe government should legislate to phase out intensive farming.<sup>81</sup> And a 2020 YouGov poll found 88% of British respondents believe the use of cages for farmed animals is cruel, with 77% supporting a complete ban on the use of cages.<sup>82 83</sup> Despite this, 85% of farm animals in the UK are reared intensively, a 12% increase from 2016 to 2023.<sup>84</sup>

In terms of trade, 77% of British voters believe that when the UK bans a type of farming for being too cruel, the government should ban imports of products produced in the same way overseas.<sup>85</sup> Examples would include fur from farmed mink and fox, foie gras produced from force-feeding geese and ducks, and pork and bacon produced in systems where sows are kept in sow stalls.

Similarly, a 2022 YouGov poll asked respondents to what extent they would support or oppose the government introducing legislation to ban the import and sale of animal fur.<sup>86</sup> Nearly three quarters (73%) supported a ban on the import and sale of fur. Despite this strong support, a fur import ban has not been introduced nor have the Conservative or Labour parties so far made commitments to do so.

If the UK bans a practice based on animal welfare grounds in the UK, it is inconsistent to continue to import products from other nations produced in the same way. As this report finds, the British public strongly supports legislation to ban such imports, presumably on the same grounds of moral consideration related to animal welfare and consistency in government laws and policy.

The UK is a liberal democracy and government policy should broadly reflect British public opinion about animal welfare.<sup>87</sup> Britain has a proud history as a leader in animal welfare, but today legislative standards are falling behind other leading nations.<sup>88</sup> This report's key conclusion is that the British public demonstrates supermajority support for major reform of government policy on animal welfare. There is a large gap between what British voters want and the legal reality: the citizen-governance gap in animal protection policy.

Economic considerations are sometimes cited to explain the citizen-governance gap. But political parties often fail to introduce publicly supported policies, which impose minimal costs on the public

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<sup>81</sup> [Focaldata](#), "Animal Welfare - Pre-Election Poll - Data Tables - 27092023".

<sup>82</sup> [YouGov](#), "Compassion in World Farming Survey Results." [Compassion in World Farming](#), "88% of UK Public Think Cages Are Cruel".

<sup>83</sup> In the UK, 25% of the national laying hen flock are kept in cages, and almost all indoor breeding sows, 60% of the national herd (around 200,000 pigs) are confined in farrowing crates for nearly a quarter of their breeding lives. [S. McCulloch](#), "Farm Animal Welfare in the UK: What Does the British Public Want?," (UK: Conservative Animal Welfare Foundation, 2023). [McCulloch](#), "Banning Farrowing Crates in the UK: Transitioning to Free Farrowing to Meet the Welfare Needs of Pigs."

<sup>84</sup> [Compassion in World Farming](#), "Factory Farming Map".

<sup>85</sup> [Focaldata](#), "Animal Welfare - Pre-Election Poll - Data Tables - 27092023".

<sup>86</sup> [YouGov](#), "Yougov / HSI Survey Results."

<sup>87</sup> For example, see discussion in [Stuart N Soroka and Christopher Wlezien](#), *Degrees of Democracy: Politics, Public Opinion, and Policy* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>88</sup> Some examples include bans on farrowing crates in Sweden (1988), Norway (2000), and Switzerland (2007). Germany and Austria have passed legislation for partial bans on crates, with limited temporary crating permitted. Enriched cages for laying hens are prohibited in Austria, Luxembourg and Switzerland. They will be banned in Germany from 2025, the Czech Republic from 2027, and Slovakia from 2030. France has banned the installation of new enriched cages. (James West, [Compassion in World Farming](#), pers. comm.)

purchase, business or consumers. For example, a 2022 YouGov found that over two thirds (71%) of respondents support a ban on the selective breeding of dogs that results in serious health issues like breathing problems or increased cancer risk.<sup>89</sup> Despite such overwhelming support, neither the Conservative nor Labour party have thus far committed to a ban.

Similarly, the three largest parties are yet to commit to mandatory method of production animal welfare labelling for meat products, despite the fact that a 2021 Opinion poll found that 66% of Conservative, 80% of Labour, and 71% of Liberal Democrat voters support method of production labelling.<sup>90</sup>

The British public demonstrate strong support for progressive animal protection policies. And regardless of economic considerations, the citizen-consumer gap, and the associated democratic deficit, is a major problem in a liberal democracy.

Policies that reflect such strong support are not only consistent with democratic governance, but can give political parties a significant advantage in tightly contested constituencies across the country. Given the widespread concern for animals in British society, policies to protect animals from cruelty and promote their welfare are a major opportunity for political parties at the ballot box.

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<sup>89</sup> [YouGov](#), "Yougov Survey Results."

<sup>90</sup> [Compassion in World Farming](#), "Overwhelming Majority of British People Want Clear Labelling Showing How Their Meat and Dairy Was Produced, New Poll Finds".

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