

Community spirit dwindling amongst British public during lockdown says new poll

June 18 2020



Findings showed that less than a quarter of the British public have given their time to benefit others during the crisis. Credit: Victoria Dawe

The UK public feel that any sense of 'community togetherness' that has been built during the coronavirus crisis will disperse as soon as it is over

says a new study commissioned by the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues at the University of Birmingham.

A [poll](#) undertaken by Populus of 2,088 adults in the UK found that [older generations](#) and women have felt a stronger sense of community togetherness recently, compared with [younger generations](#) and men, who have not felt this to the same degree. Conversely, there was the opposite generational gap identified in terms of those who agreed that community togetherness would disappear after the [crisis](#) is over, with those aged 45-64 being most negative (61%), compared with less than half of those aged 18-24 (46%).

This suggests that there has been a marked generational divide in how people have responded to the crisis. This is highlighted further in responses from 18-24 year olds to the valuing of health of older generations today over longer-term economic prosperity. Younger people disagreed with this statement in [larger numbers](#) (13%) than those aged over 45 (9%).

The importance of character in times of crisis was highlighted, as 68% of the British public valued 'being compassionate/caring' in their top three most valued [character strengths](#) seen in those around them—an identical figure to a preliminary poll conducted in April 2020; they also valued it the most in terms of personal well-being (25%). Yet, concerns over the lack of community spirit were further emphasised.

Findings showed that less than a quarter of the British public have given their time to benefit others during the crisis. Of those who have, 18-24 year olds and those aged 55-64 have volunteered the most, with women volunteering more than men, and the East Midlands and South East being the areas of the country where people have volunteered the most.

There was a decline in the value placed on the civic character strengths

of 'being of service' and 'having community awareness' in the people around us, compared to the April 2020 poll. Instead, the British public placed [greater value](#) on 'being resilient'; this is suggestive that the public mood has moved to one of self-preservation over community togetherness.

Commenting on the findings, Aidan Thompson, director of strategic initiatives in the Jubilee Centre, said: "Strengths of character have helped everyone to negotiate a path through these uncertain and unprecedented times. This poll reflects the continued importance of character in how we treat those around us and those we look up to. Good character development benefits both the individual and the community, so whilst notions of 'community togetherness' may seem as though they are dwindling, continuing to provide opportunities to serve the public good are essential to cultivate a [character](#)-full society."

Other notable findings include:

- Good judgement is valued more by older generations than younger ones as important to one's wellbeing;
- Older people have felt a stronger notion of community togetherness during the crisis than [younger people](#), but were more likely to agree that it would disappear once the crisis is over;
- The public value having 'good judgement' (71%) and 'being wise' (40%) in senior leaders and politicians in greater numbers than in the first poll;
- A large majority (71%) of the public support following government lockdown guidelines as an expression of civic duty, though only 56% of 18-24 year olds agreed, compared with 87% of those over 65 years.

Provided by University of Birmingham

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