

# New research highlights issues with Londoners' quality of life, trust in the Met and attitudes to COVID

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Londoners are generally pessimistic about life in the capital, according to new research from Queen Mary University of London's Mile End

Institute ahead of local elections in May. Polling revealed serious trust issues around the police force, with most saying the Met is racist and sexist—and also around COVID, with many hesitant or complacent about vaccination and social distancing.

Of more than 1,000 Londoners polled, 64% felt life in the capital had worsened over the last four years, with only 7% saying it had improved. Almost a third are less happy with London life since the pandemic, showing the impact of lockdown on city living. Dissatisfaction is highest in the middle age bracket (25–49), but younger people are most likely to have made plans to leave the capital soon; overall, 19% plan to move out in the next two years, rising to 29% for those aged 18–24.

When asked how best to make London a more "livable" city, people highlighted the need for more affordable housing (51%), tackling anti-social behavior (38%), lower taxes (31%), better air quality (25%), more council housing (23%) and better public transport (22%). Researchers say the findings reflect long-standing concerns about housing and the cost of living in the capital.

Though 42% think their local council does a good job, compared to 35% who believe they're doing badly, councilors up for election in May cannot assume an easy ride. Londoners are broadly unhappy about the prospect of council tax rises, with 64% saying it's not justified, compared to 20% who believe it is. This follows decisions by most London councils to raise council tax by 2.99% and the Mayor to raise the GLA precept by a record 8.8%, meaning the average home in the capital will cost almost £2,000 a year in council tax alone.

Dr. Patrick Diamond, professor of public policy at Queen Mary and Director of the Mile End Institute, commented: "Most Londoners are happy with their council's performance, which is a sign of confidence in London local government. However, councils face a real challenge in the

next four years. Londoners' unwillingness to pay more council tax means that local leaders will face tough decisions on how to fund the services residents need while addressing concerns about quality of life."

Most (58%) Londoners feel the capital is a safe place to live, but the new research shows they have limited faith in the police force tasked with making sure this is the case. Around half (49%) declared little to no trust in the Met, rising to 52% among female Londoners and 54% among those from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Around two-thirds believe the Met is institutionally racist and sexist, showing the uphill struggle facing a new Commissioner. Overall, 63% called the Met sexist, rising to 67% in ethnic minority groups and 68% for women. Similarly, 64% said the Met is racist, rising to 68% for women and 72% in ethnic minority groups.

Many (45%) said Mayor Sadiq Khan was right to remove his support for Cressida Dick; just 23% said he made the wrong decision and 32% were unsure. Black, Asian and minority ethnic Londoners were more likely to back the Mayor's decision, with 50% in favor of the removal of his support which led to Dick's resignation. Younger Londoners were also more likely to be supportive.

Farah Hussain, research fellow at Queen Mary and Labor local councilor in the London Borough of Redbridge, explained: "It's clear that women and ethnic minority Londoners don't have much trust in the police force meant to keep them safe. The Met has a lot of work to do to build that trust and convince Londoners it has their best interests at heart—and this gives councilors much to think about ahead of all out elections in two months' time.

"Between the rape and murder of Sarah Everard by a serving Met officer; the conviction of serving Met officers over their treatment of

the bodies of murdered Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman; the revelations of bullying, discrimination, racist and sexist behavior at Charing Cross Police Station; the longer-term issues of racism within the Met... the next Commissioner will have a hard job convincing Londoners they can fix the Met's broken culture and make it a force the community can trust."

The research also suggests that younger Londoners and those from ethnic minority backgrounds face higher COVID risks due to vaccine hesitancy. While the vast majority (70%) of people in the capital are fully vaccinated, rates fall to more like half among Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups (55%) and even lower for 18- to 24-year-olds (46%). Most (70%) said they would likely have future COVID vaccines if recommended, but again this figure drops in younger and ethnic minority groups (58%).

The biggest obstacles to people taking the COVID vaccine are mistrust and misinformation, rather than religious beliefs. Of those who have not yet had a jab, 43% said they did not trust the vaccine, while 39% did not think they needed it and 22% believed they were already immune due to having had the virus already. Just 3% cited religious reasons, while 17% opposed vaccinations in general.

Prof. Sophie Harman, Queen Mary's professor of international politics, explained: "Vaccine hesitancy is not something that just goes away with time—it is rooted in issues of trust, sources of information, and inequalities in society and healthcare provision. The success of the COVID-19 vaccine rollout in the UK mitigates some aspects of vaccine hesitancy but not all. More needs to be done to find out why people are hesitant, and to not patronize or insult them, but engage them in ways that encourage vaccine uptake.

"What's concerning about this new data is the potential shift from

[vaccine hesitancy](#) to vaccine complacency, where people do not see the need for vaccination. The idea that COVID is over in the UK lowers the stakes; those who have held out against the vaccine may think they've got through the worst so why get it now? The data from this poll could be a worrying canary for future [vaccine](#) complacency."

The poll also found that revelations about Downing Street parties in lockdown had some impact on the willingness of people to follow government restrictions and rules on [social distancing](#). If it is found that the Prime Minister did indeed break the law, most Londoners (61%) said they would continue to follow the rules, but a significant number (22%) admitted they would be less likely to do so.

Dr. Patrick Diamond added: "While most Londoners are willing to keep making sacrifices to tackle any more waves of the COVID-19 pandemic, our results show that over a fifth would be less likely to follow further social distancing measures if the Prime Minister is found to have broken lockdown rules. This may well mean that future waves of the virus are less likely to be contained, and the NHS may come under increased pressure."

The research also reveals a strong belief that outer London is less well served by government and public services. 35% said inner London is treated better than outer London, while 13% think outer London is treated better and 25% believe they're treated the same. Interestingly, more people living in inner London think it's treated better than outer London (30%) than believe it's treated equally (27%).

Over the next four years, Londoners said they want their [local council](#) to prioritize tackling crime and anti-social behavior (56%), building more council houses (41%), improving cleaning and waste disposal (38%), investing in social care (35%), and improving the fabric of their local high street (30%).



People broadly oppose increasing fares on [public transport](#), with 7 in 10 (69%) unwilling to pay more for buses, trains and tubes. Almost half (45%) support the introduction of low traffic neighborhoods or "LTNs," but there was greater resistance from older people (around half of over-50s opposed LTNs) and those in outer London.

Ahead of London local elections in May, Labor's position has strengthened marginally since 2018, but it looks unlikely that many local councils will swap hands; 34% of Londoners intend to vote Labor while 17% will vote Conservative, compared to 38% and 23% respectively at the last election in 2018.

Provided by Queen Mary, University of London

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