

# How to Talk about Poverty in the United Kingdom

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A FrameWorks MessageMemo

In partnership with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation

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## Introduction

Now is the time to use all means at our disposal to solve poverty in the United Kingdom. Major strides have been made in recent decades in reducing UK poverty, but these gains are currently in jeopardy. We have recently seen the first sustained increases in poverty in 20 years.<sup>1</sup> This backslide, however, is not inevitable; we *can* prevent it. Building on lessons from the past and armed with new ideas for the future, leading antipoverty campaigners are pushing initiatives to solve poverty in the United Kingdom. Enacting these bold and innovative measures will require widespread public support, engagement and action. To be sure, experts, advocates, activists, policymakers and others cannot eradicate poverty on their own; they also need a mobilised public that has access to new and innovative thinking about how to prevent – and solve – poverty. This requires a major shift in how British people think about and understand poverty – and how they act in response to it.

This report shows that the way the public currently thinks about poverty is undermining antipoverty efforts. People believe that ‘real’ poverty no longer exists in their country. They think it is, in large part, a problem of the past – and a problem of the present only in other parts of the world, such as the Global South. On the plus side, people believe their government has a responsibility to address economic inequality. But they blame rising rates of domestic poverty on individuals rather than society. They fault people in poverty for failing to seize opportunity, make ‘good’ decisions or persist in efforts to achieve financial security. Poverty risks becoming a less salient issue when people are faced with news about Brexit, ongoing conflict in the Middle East and other major world events. With so much upheaval, the public may well doubt their country’s ability to tackle *any* major social issues, let alone one as long-standing and pervasive as poverty. Antipoverty campaigners are currently using communications practices designed to convince the public that poverty exists, such as leading with prevalence data, crisis stories designed to elicit hyper-emotional responses or highly politicised messages. The research detailed in this report found that these strategies may in fact *support* existing, unproductive patterns of public thinking.

For these reasons, antipoverty campaigners need a new narrative – one that fully explains the societal causes and consequences of poverty and shows how the British public can prevent and end it. The good news is that the research underpinning this report showed that shifting public thinking *is* possible. Our research found that strategic framing helps people of all backgrounds understand poverty as a matter of moral concern. The right frames help people interpret rising poverty levels as an indication that we are not living up to our moral obligations to support one another. Framing can also help people see antipoverty initiatives as compassionate and just – rather than a drain on social resources. Using a moral lens to reframe poverty is not grounded in pity for people in poverty or paternalistic charity. Rather, the framing strategy outlined here is based on the recognition of the humanity in all people, and of the moral ties that bind us to each other, to our society and to our world – a worldview that Britons share, regardless of political ideology.

Importantly, the research reported here found that advocates do *not* need to avoid conversations about benefits. This report does, however, explain how advocates across social issues – even those who don't directly work in the field of poverty reduction – can frame conversations about benefits to build public support for them. Poverty is a politicised and polarised issue, and proposed improvement and expansion to the social benefits system can even more deeply divide the conversation. One of the most important findings of our research is that antipoverty campaigners *can* include proposed expansions to the benefits system in their story. But how they do this matters. Communicators must define poverty, frame it as moral issue, better explain its relationship to the economy and posit benefits as an important solution. They need to invite the public into deeper thinking about antipoverty initiatives, including proposed improvements to the benefits system, that help to ease economic constraints.

Antipoverty campaigners can help people see that poverty exists and understand its impact. They can build support for a robust welfare system and inspire widespread belief that change is possible. People will work to end poverty when antipoverty campaigners mobilise action to do so.

Communicators can do this by telling a new story that:

- Makes the moral case for tackling poverty.
- Uses unexpected messengers, as well as messengers who embody these values.
- Addresses poverty head-on.
- Explains how the economy restricts and restrains people in poverty, or channels them into poverty.
- Explains how poverty can be solved, by positioning:
  - the economy as a designed system – one we can redesign;
  - benefits as a way to ease and loosen the constraints of poverty.
- Uses examples to show that poverty exists and to demonstrate its characteristics and impacts.
- Shows how we all rely on public systems and paints a clear picture of what they look like.
- Counters fatalism with clear solutions that make a tangible difference.

## What Communications Research Does a Sector Need to Reframe an Issue?

**What does the research on poverty say?** To distil expert consensus on poverty, the FrameWorks Institute conducted interviews from November 2015 to February 2016 with 16 leading UK poverty experts. These data were supplemented by a review of relevant academic and advocacy literature and refined during a series of feedback sessions with leaders in the field, grassroots organisations and people with experience of poverty.

**How does the public think?** To document the cultural understandings the public draws on to make sense of poverty, FrameWorks conducted in-depth cognitive interviews and analysed the resulting transcripts to identify the implicit, shared understandings and assumptions that structured public opinion. Forty interviews were conducted in London, Liverpool, Manchester, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast, which included people with experience of poverty.

**Which frames can shift thinking?** To identify effective ways of talking about poverty, FrameWorks' researchers developed a set of candidate messages and tested them. Three primary methods were used to explore and refine possible reframes:

- On-the-street interviews involving rapid, face-to-face testing of frame elements for their ability to prompt productive and robust understandings and discussions on poverty issues. A total of 52 were conducted in 2016.
- A series of experimental surveys involving a nationally representative sample of 12,448 respondents to test the effectiveness of a variety of frames on public understanding, attitudes and support for programmes and policies.
- A series of qualitative tests with a total of 54 people to explore how the most effective frames worked in conversational settings. Peer discourse sessions and persistence trials investigated the frames' effectiveness with members of the public.

In addition, this work integrated data analysis from another project that explored public thinking and effective framing about the economy. FrameWorks conducted this research in partnership with the New Economy Organisers' Network, the New Economics Foundation and the Public Interest Research Centre. It included qualitative and quantitative research with 7,500 members of the British public.<sup>1</sup>

All told, more than 20,000 people from across the United Kingdom were included in this research. See the Appendix for a more detailed methods discussion.

## Anticipating Public Thinking: How Does the British Public Currently Think about Poverty and Why Does This Matter?

The public brings a rich and complex set of cultural models<sup>2</sup> – widely shared but implicit patterns of understanding – to thinking and talking about poverty. Dominant thinking about poverty in the United Kingdom often runs counter to expert analysis and recommendations. This creates a tough backdrop and makes it all the more important that communicators and campaigners understand and anticipate public thinking.

FrameWorks’ research provides a systematic assessment of how people think about poverty – their assumptions, beliefs and the stories they tell themselves. This maps the terrain communicators face when talking about poverty.

It’s important to note that these patterns of thinking – which are often contradictory and competing – coexist and compete in the minds of the British public. But when a particular model is activated, it hijacks the story being heard, blocking certain conclusions and wider understanding.

In 2016, FrameWorks’ researchers interviewed members of the public to elicit ways that they think and talk about issues related to poverty. This research is explained in detail in our 2016 report, *How experts and the public understand poverty in the United Kingdom*.<sup>3</sup> The following table provides a brief summary of that research.

Table 1: Dominant Cultural Models

COMMON ASSUMPTIONS AND BELIEFS AMONG THE BRITISH PUBLIC	IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNICATING POVERTY
<b>‘Post-poverty’</b> – People assume UK society is prosperous and sees poverty as a thing of the past or only experienced in other parts of the world.	People dismiss poverty’s existence, which makes it difficult for them to engage with antipoverty initiatives.
<b>‘Self-Makingness’</b> – People view individuals’ situations as the sole result of their motivation and choices.	When triggered, this line of thinking makes ‘try harder’ and ‘work more’ the only sensible solutions. People can’t see the ways that contexts shape lives.
<b>‘Non-negotiable needs’</b> – People feel poverty means a lack of the basics: food, shelter and clothing.	All other things are understood as ‘wants’ or luxuries. This can help garner support for a limited welfare system that meets basic needs and helps with the costs of housing. But it undermines support for a more robust welfare state and leads the public to focus on tightening up the benefits system.
<b>‘Poverty romanticism’</b> – People romanticise	This way of understanding poverty directly prevents

poverty as a simpler way of life and a form of freedom from unnecessary material goods and modern concerns.	thinking about it as a serious social problem that must be addressed.
<b>'The System Is Rigged'</b> – People believe we are all at the mercy of elites, who manipulate the system to keep others down for their own gain.	This fatalistic way of thinking prompts people to disengage altogether because they believe nothing can or will ever change.
<b>'Economic Naturalism'</b> – People view the economy as shaped by mysterious market forces beyond individual or societal control.	This leads people to see major limits to the ability of society or the government to reduce or eliminate poverty by affecting the economy, compounding people's sense of fatalism about addressing poverty.
<b>'Culture of poverty'</b> – People perceive that certain communities have a set of shared norms and values – particularly laziness and worklessness – which result in an unbreakable intergenerational cycle of poverty.	This shifts blame from the individual to the community and undermines support for any solution other than fundamentally changing cultural norms among certain groups of society. It leads members of the public to support a tightening of the benefits system to prevent exploitation.
<b>'Opportunity structures'</b> – People understand poverty to be caused by a lack of adequate opportunities, such as good education and strong social networks.	This set of assumptions enables people to appreciate the impact of social structures on the chances of someone experiencing poverty. It can move people beyond a 'basic needs' view of poverty and increase receptiveness to education and skills development policies.
<b>'Spectrum of Self-Determination'</b> – People reason that material resources are important because they satisfy needs and enable people to determine their own path in life.	This way of thinking allows people to see a spectrum of poverty, where fewer resources means less self-determination. This expands public thinking about the support people need to live an autonomous life. It also brings attention to a wider range of the effects of poverty, including impacts on mental wellbeing and social isolation.

## Evidence-Based Reframing Strategies

To elevate poverty as a salient social issue, communicators need framing strategies they can count on to dislodge unproductive cultural models and open new, more productive ways of thinking. Existing public understanding poses multiple challenges to antipoverty campaigners; reframing poverty will require multiple *frame elements*, or different communications cues, that can be deployed for specific purposes.

### Which Frame ‘Works’? That’s an Empirical Question

To arrive at a set framing tools and tactics that advocates can use with confidence, FrameWorks’ researchers designed a series of qualitative studies and quantitative experiments that tested the effects of different frame elements on communicating expert perspectives on poverty. The frame elements included different ways of using values, explanatory metaphors, messengers and exemplars.

To determine the effects of alternative frames, researchers first created short messages that incorporated one or more frame elements. From a large, nationally representative sample, a survey experiment randomly assigned participants to different messages, and then asked them to complete a survey probing their knowledge, attitudes and policy preferences about poverty issues.

A frame ‘works’ when it leads to the desired communications outcome. To determine the effects of different frame elements, researchers tested alternative frames head-to-head, and looked to see which messages made the most difference to questions like those illustrated in Table 1 above.

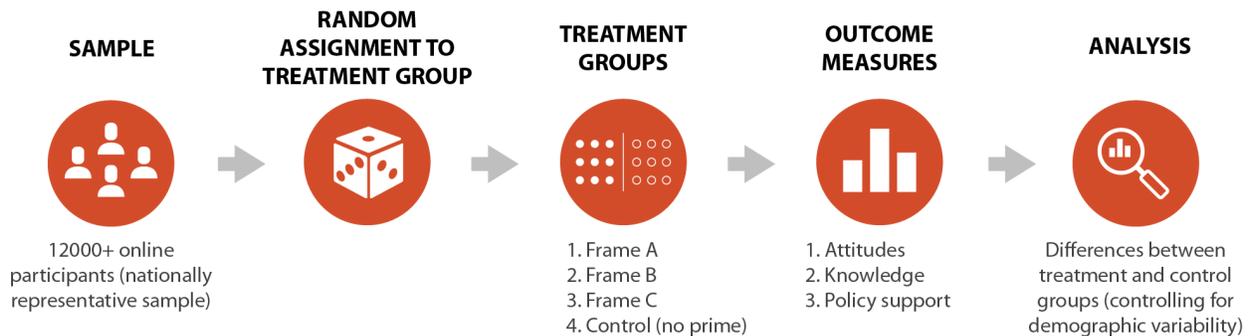
**Table 2:** Desired Communications Outcomes: Improved Knowledge, Attitudes and Policy Preferences

OUTCOME SCALES	SAMPLE QUESTIONS
Definitional understanding of poverty	People who have food, clothing and shelter can be in poverty if they don’t have the resources to participate in social and leisure activities that most people do. ( <i>Strongly disagree; disagree; slightly disagree; neither agree nor disagree; slightly agree; agree; strongly agree</i> )
Causal attributions for poverty	How important do you think discrimination against Black and other minority ethnic groups is in explaining why there are people in poverty in the United Kingdom? ( <i>Not at all important; slightly important; moderately important; very important; extremely important</i> )
Collective responsibility for reducing poverty	How much of a responsibility do you think businesses and corporations have to reduce poverty? ( <i>No responsibility at all; a very small responsibility; a small responsibility; a moderate responsibility; a large responsibility; a very large responsibility; an extremely large responsibility</i> )

Collective efficacy about reducing poverty	How optimistic or pessimistic do you feel that we, as a society, can reduce poverty? ( <i>Extremely pessimistic; pessimistic; somewhat pessimistic; neither optimistic nor pessimistic; somewhat optimistic; optimistic; extremely optimistic</i> )
Attitudes towards the benefits system	How effective do you think benefits are in helping to reduce poverty? ( <i>Not effective at all; somewhat effective; moderately effective; very effective; extremely effective</i> )
Support for the benefits system	In your view, to what extent should the amount of benefits that people can receive be increased or decreased? ( <i>Significantly decreased; decreased; slightly decreased; kept about the same; slightly increased; increased; significantly increased</i> )
Support for welfare state/social policies	To what extent do you personally favour or oppose the government providing child care and early-years education at no charge? ( <i>Strongly oppose; oppose; slightly oppose; neither favour nor oppose; slightly favour; favour; strongly favour</i> )
Support for economic policies	To what extent do you personally favour or oppose requiring energy companies to provide lower rates to people in poverty? ( <i>Strongly oppose; oppose; slightly oppose; neither favour nor oppose; slightly favour; favour; strongly favour</i> )
Political and civic participation to reduce poverty	If you were asked to do so, how likely would you be to contact your local Member of Parliament to advocate for programmes to reduce poverty in the United Kingdom? ( <i>Not at all likely; slightly likely; moderately likely; very likely; extremely likely</i> )
Salience of poverty as an issue	In your view, how serious of a problem is poverty in the United Kingdom? ( <i>Not at all serious; slightly serious; moderately serious; very serious; extremely serious</i> )
Perceived norms	To what extent do you think Britons oppose or support increasing benefits? ( <i>Strongly oppose; oppose; slightly oppose; neither support nor oppose; slightly support; support; strongly support</i> )

The results associated with each frame were compared with each other and with the responses of a control group, which received no messages but answered the same survey questions. This design allowed researchers to pinpoint how exposure to different frames affected people’s understanding of and attitudes towards poverty, and their support for relevant policies. In addition, researchers controlled for a wide range of demographic variables (including age, race, class and gender of respondents) by conducting a multiple regression statistical analysis, to ensure that the effects observed were driven by the frames rather than demographic variations in the sample. A breakdown of the sample by demographics is included in the Appendix.

## A Sound Experimental Design for Determining Effective Frames



This sound experimental design – a hallmark of Strategic Frame Analysis® – allows researchers to be confident that any differences between treatment groups are due to the frame and not extraneous factors.

### RECOMMENDATION:

#### Show Why Poverty Matters by Making a Moral Case

It is common for people to think of poverty as an intractable social problem or one of personal responsibility. When communicators talk about poverty by appealing to the deeply held values of *Compassion* and *Justice*, we bypass these patterns of thinking. These values spark aspirational thinking about what society *should* do to address this issue and, as shown in detail below, help people think that something *can* be done. Appealing to moral values is far more effective than arguing against the belief that poverty no longer exists or trying to disprove it with statistics.

Making a moral case for poverty is the most effective way of framing this issue for a broad audience. But this doesn't mean asserting moral superiority, claiming the moral high ground or highlighting the moral failures of others. It means calling to mind the moral obligations we all have to fellow community members. And, as explained in detail below, *how* communicators call to mind this sense of moral obligation depends on the audiences they are trying to reach.

Figure 1: Effects of Values on Attitudes

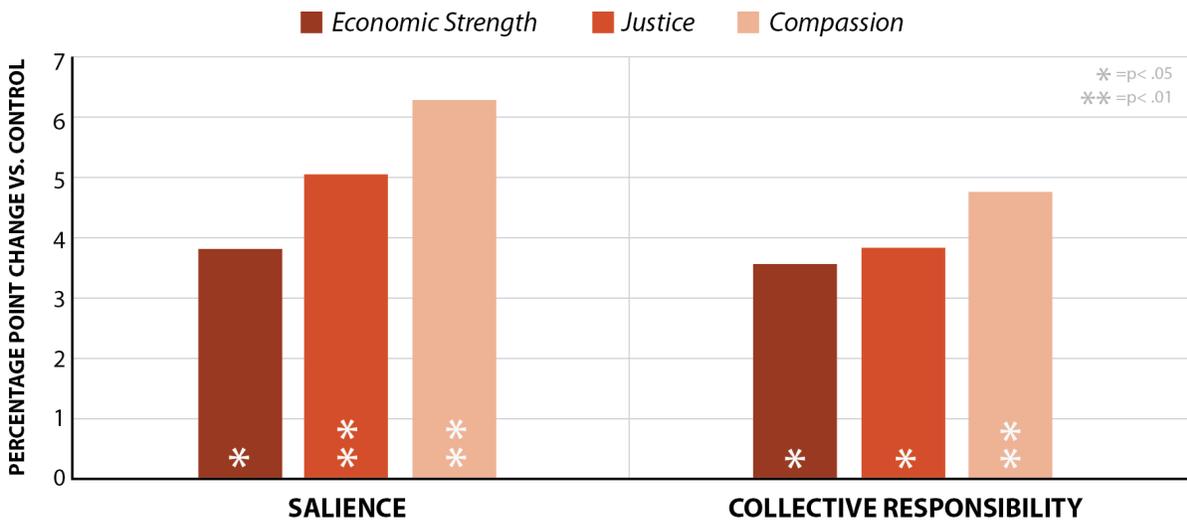
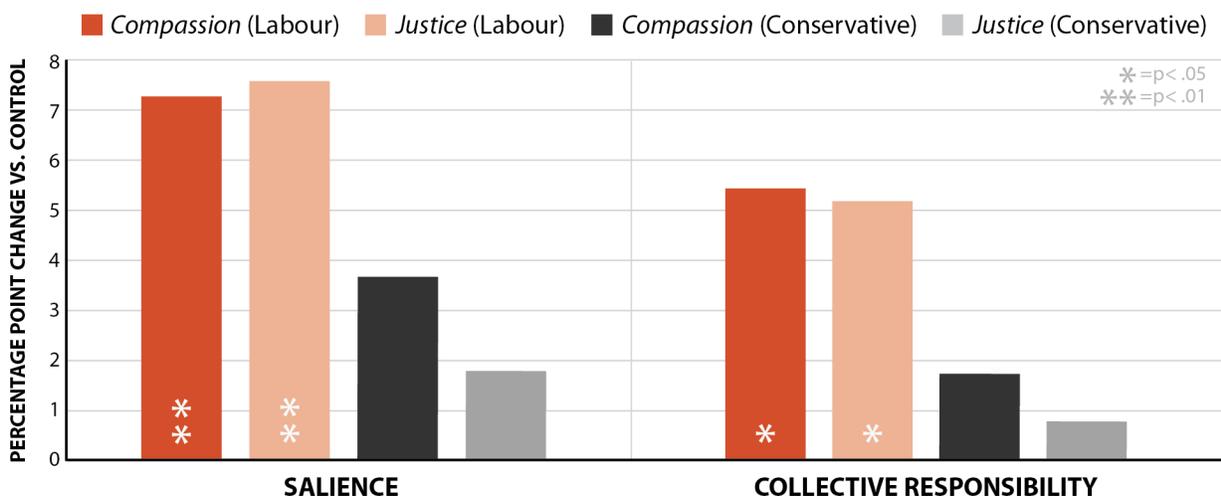


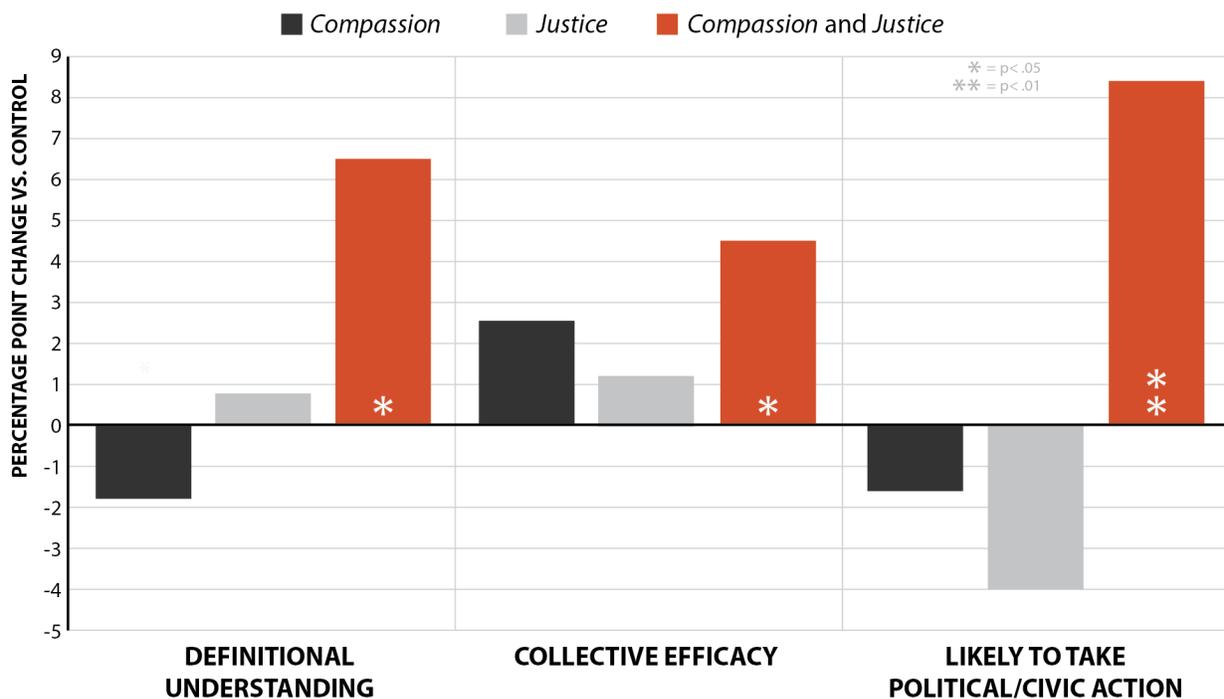
Figure 1 shows the impact of the values of *Compassion* (an appeal to people’s sense of shared responsibility to help and protect one another) and *Justice* (an appeal to the idea that all people deserve access to opportunities). These values are slightly more effective when compared with the value of *Economic Strength*, which focuses on the need to address poverty to secure and advance the economy. All messages included a *Poverty* frame – language that marks poverty as a salient issue. Figure 1 shows that the values of *Compassion* and *Justice* increase the salience of poverty and people’s sense of collective responsibility for reducing it.<sup>4</sup>

Figure 2: Effects of Values by Political Party



To measure whether these values were working across the sample, researchers separated responses by political party. Figure 2 demonstrates that, while the *Compassion* and *Justice* values were effective among Labour voters, as separate values they had no effect on Conservative party voters. However, in a subsequent phase of controlled testing, researchers combined the *Compassion* and *Justice* values. This iteration not only referenced our shared humanity and people’s moral obligation to others but also emphasised the importance of equal access to opportunities. Figure 3 shows that combining these values expanded Conservative voters’ definitional understanding of poverty, and increased their sense of collective responsibility and likelihood to take political action against poverty.

Figure 3: Effects of Values among Conservative Party Voters



By making poverty a moral matter as well as a matter of justice, communicators can activate the belief that something should be done to address it, sparking people’s willingness to act. The *Compassion* value inoculates against the tendency to see people living in poverty as ‘other’ or deserving of blame for their circumstances. It demonstrates that, by failing to address poverty, current policies are not allowing people to fulfil their moral obligations to others, and positions antipoverty policy as a way to realise those obligations. It is important to note that making a moral case is *not* asking people to pity those living in poverty or invoking a charitable response. Rather, using the value of *Compassion* reminds people of our shared human dignity and responsibility to people in our communities.

Researchers suspect that the addition of *Justice* was particularly effective with Conservative party voters because it includes a strong call to action. It reminds people of the idea that is not right or just to live in poverty, and that we have a shared responsibility to address it. Furthermore, the *Justice* value emphasises the importance of equality of opportunity, which may land well with Conservative voters.

Taken together, these findings show that reminding people of a deep moral obligation towards others is an effective framing strategy. Communicators can be even more effective when talking to Conservative voters if they also remind them that addressing poverty is an essential part of realising a just society. Below are examples of how communicators can make shifts in their poverty-focused communications to emphasise the values of *Compassion* and *Justice*.

**BEFORE**

*'We may think of poverty as something from the industrial past, or a problem that exists in the Global South, but it's happening right here and right now in the United Kingdom.'*

**AFTER (FOR A BROAD AUDIENCE)**

*'In our society, we believe in showing compassion towards others, and protecting each other from harm. Yet, right now, many live in poverty. We share a moral responsibility to ensure that everyone in our country has a decent standard of living.'*

**AFTER**

*'As a society, we believe in justice and compassion. But, right now, millions of people in our country are living in poverty. We share a moral responsibility to make sure that everyone in our country has a decent standard of living and the same chances in life, no matter who they are or where they come from.'*

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**Choose Messengers Strategically**

Messengers and spokespeople can help bring these values to life and build public will. *Anglican Bishops*, for example, amplified the effects of making a moral case for addressing poverty. In addition, *Conservative Politicians* with antipoverty messages shifted public thinking in important ways.

**Figure 4: Effects of Messengers on Knowledge, Attitudes and Action**

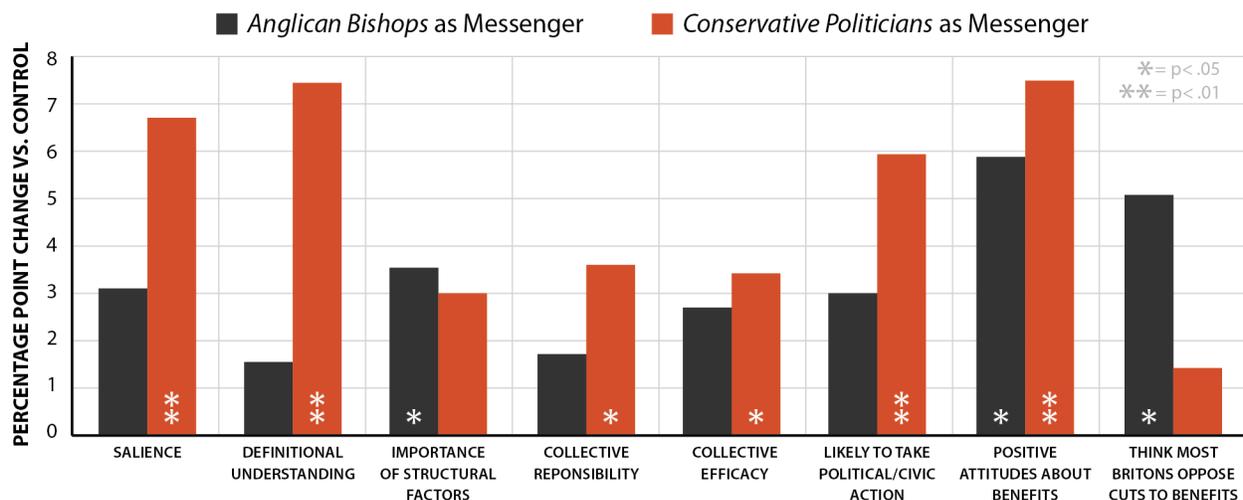


Figure 4 shows in detail how strategically selecting messengers can enhance frame effects. In a controlled experiment, participants were asked to read passages in which different types of messengers were directly quoted. When *Anglican Bishops* were quoted and used as a messenger, this led to statistically significant increases across three outcomes: recognition of the importance of structural factors related to poverty, perceived efficacy of benefits and support for the idea that most Britons oppose cuts to benefits. *Conservative Politicians* were also effective messengers, increasing the salience of poverty; expanding a definitional understanding of poverty; increasing a sense of collective efficacy and responsibility; increasing the likelihood of taking political action; and increasing the perceived efficacy of benefits.

When thinking about when and how to use messengers, it is important to understand *why* these specific messengers are effective. As moral leaders, *Anglican Bishops* are obvious candidates to make the moral case for addressing poverty. People are likely to have heard antipoverty messages from similar kinds of faith-based spokespeople; in this case, the message and messenger align, which results in positive message effects.

*Conservative Politicians* as messengers likely work for precisely the opposite reason – they are novel and unexpected messengers on this set of issues. Because the Conservative Party is not often associated with antipoverty policies, they are unexpected messengers and appear to depolarise the issue. Again, it is important to note that *Conservative Politicians* did *not* have a backfire effect among Labour voters. This unexpected combination of messenger and message seemed to inoculate against people’s scepticism about government action to address poverty, and helped them to focus on effective solutions – importantly, the expansion of the benefits system.

Reframing poverty will require that experts and advocates in different spaces communicate a new story about why poverty exists and the measures required to address it. The recommendation here is not that *Anglican Bishops* or *Conservative Politicians* should be the *only* messengers in antipoverty communications. Rather, when selecting messengers, communicators should consider *alignment* with the values described above, or find voices that are *unexpected* purveyors of poverty messages.

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

### **Address Poverty Head-on**

If well-framed, messages that lead with poverty as the issue to be addressed can help people to simultaneously see poverty as a pressing social problem and feel a sense of collective responsibility to solve it. On the other hand, messages that lead with benefits prompt people to shut down and tune out. Without careful framing, benefits are a mental shortcut to blame and disdain. They invite people to examine whether individuals *deserve* society’s support rather than to focus on the flaws in the system. Using *Poverty* as the ‘issue frame’ – clearly stating that the message is about poverty – avoids these problems and opens up more productive conversations.

Figure 5: Effects of Issue Frames on Knowledge and Attitudes

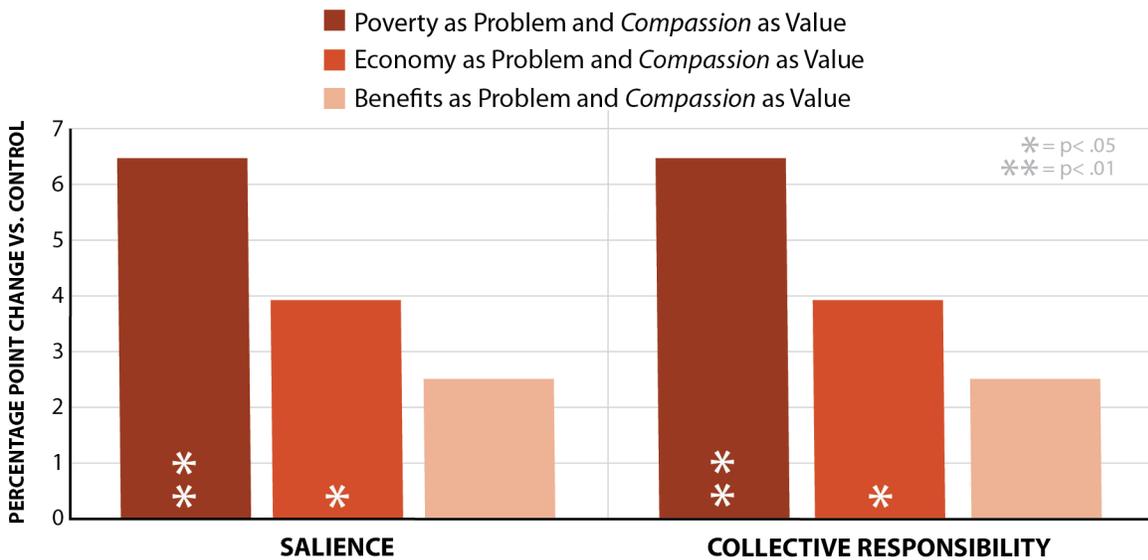


Figure 5 shows the effects of three different ways of introducing messages: one that focuses on *Poverty* as a problem in itself, one that leads with *The Economy* and one that positions *The Benefits System* as the top-line issue. The message that defined poverty as the problem to be addressed was the most effective issue frame. The message that connected poverty rates to economic downturns was less effective, but still increased issue salience and people’s sense of collective responsibility. When cuts to the benefits system were framed as the problem, it had no effect on those outcomes. The difficulty of incorporating benefits into antipoverty messages was further substantiated in our qualitative research.

These findings indicate that an effective antipoverty narrative is *about* poverty or economic inequality, and that the benefits system is an ineffective top-level issue in these messages. Early in communications, poverty needs to be defined as the problem to be addressed. These findings do not indicate that communicators should *avoid* talking about benefits, but rather that they cannot *lead* their messages with benefits. The research detailed below shows that there *are* effective ways to include benefits in antipoverty communications – in short, benefits must be the solution to a larger issue, not the problem to solve.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**Explain How the Economy Locks People in Poverty**

Communications that explain how something works are powerful – they create a stronger and longer-lasting impression than those that simply describe a problem. Earlier phases of this research showed that people often think of poverty as the result of lack of motivation or the product of poor choices. By changing *how* people understand causes of and solutions to poverty and giving them a memorable mental picture, people can consider new policies and solutions.

Explanatory metaphors are powerful tools that communicators can use to expand thinking and create these mental pictures. Explanatory metaphors help people think and talk about complex concepts in new ways or see issues from new perspectives. By comparing an abstract or unfamiliar idea to something concrete and familiar, explanatory metaphors make information more understandable, ideas more accessible and solutions easier to consider.

It is important that explanatory metaphors are tested so that communicators can be sure they work and do not lead people to unexpected and counterproductive perspectives on the issue. We tested different explanatory metaphors, including likening benefits to ladders, bridges, keys, catalysts, scaffolding, weatherproofing, manufacturing and structural supports. We tested messages that described poverty as an obstacle and a weight. We also tested messages that compared the benefits system to other social systems, including the National Health Service (NHS) and the pension system. Two metaphors had consistently productive effects on people's thinking about poverty.

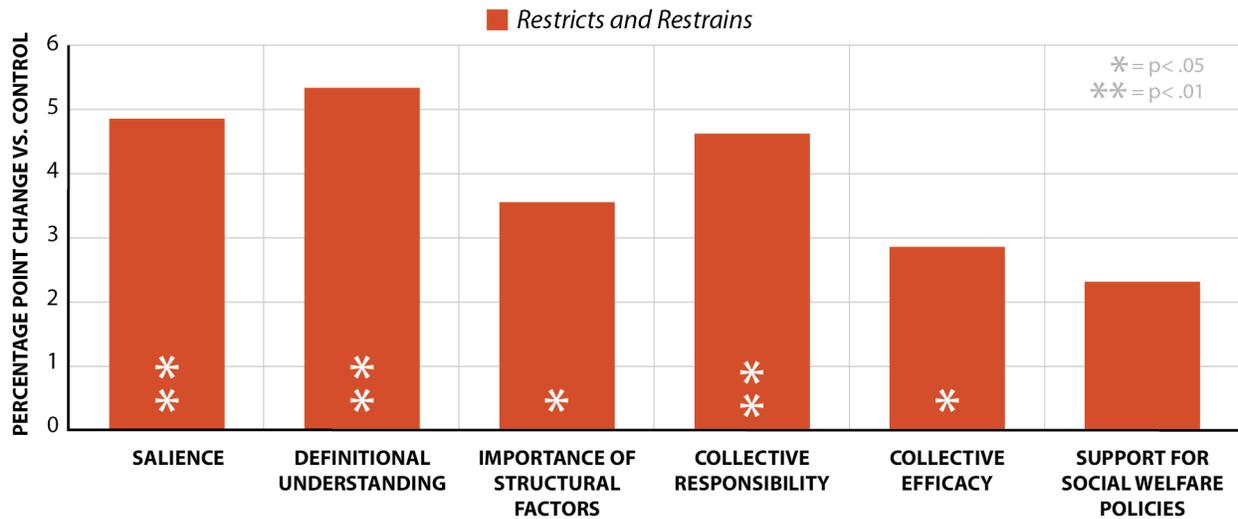
The *Restricts and Restrains* metaphor emerged as most effective. It was designed to explain the economic sources of poverty and improve people's ability to consider systemic solutions to the issue – especially the expansion of the benefits system. By cuing the productive *Spectrum of Self-Determination* cultural model described above, the *Restricts and Restrains* metaphor helps people see that features of the economic system lock people in poverty, limiting opportunities and choices and shaping outcomes.

The following is an example of the *Restricts and Restrains* metaphor:

*'Our economy is locking people in poverty. Low-paid, unstable jobs mean more and more families can't put food on the table. With costs of living on the rise, many are kept in a daily struggle to make ends meet, unable to think about a different future. It is hard to break free from the restrictions our economy places on people.'*

This metaphor can be used to highlight specific aspects of the economy, such as the labour or housing markets, as well as more general economic trends. This metaphor foregrounds the ways in which systemic economic forces constrain people's opportunities and life chances.

Figure 6: Effects of Metaphor on Knowledge and Attitudes



As Figure 6 demonstrates, in a controlled survey experiment the *Restricts and Restrains* metaphor increased salience, expanded definitional understanding and increased people’s sense of the importance of structural causes of poverty and increased people’s sense of collective responsibility and collective efficacy. These effects ranged from almost 3 per cent (efficacy) to over 5 per cent (definitional understanding).

This metaphor taps into a deeply held belief that people should have autonomy and agency over their life circumstances. Outside forces, including the way our economy works (rather than individual choices), restrict people, constrain their choices and push them into poverty. Earlier phases of the research demonstrated that people often have a romantic view of poverty. According to this way of thinking, poverty represents a state of greater freedom because people living in poverty do not experience the toxic effects of modern consumer culture; they live a simpler, more authentic life. This model makes it difficult for people to think about how poverty itself constrains choices and autonomy. The *Restricts and Restrains* metaphor counters this romanticism and individualism by giving people a clear sense of the way that contextual forces can shape individual lives and outcomes.

The *Restricts and Restrains* metaphor brings the economy into the antipoverty narrative as a primary causal factor. By explaining how economic downturns limit people’s material resources, which then limits autonomy and self-determination, the metaphor gives people a clear picture of the effects of poverty on wellbeing. Reasoning with the metaphor, people recognise that economic conditions are outside of an individual’s control, constrain choices and ultimately threaten economic and more general wellbeing. As discussed in more detail below, the metaphor offers a narrative structure to introduce systemic solutions, and creates space for people to consider the merits of expanding the benefits system.

To use the *Restricts and Restrains* metaphor’s explanatory power, communicators should:

- **Make economic conditions and external factors the source of constraints.** Communicators can

use this language to explain how economic factors are related to poverty rates. Communicators can bring the economy into a poverty narrative by positioning it as the force that traps and constrains people in poverty.

- **Point to specific aspects of the economy.** Communicators should be very concrete about the aspects of the economy, such as the labour market, that constrain people’s choices.
- **Make connections between economic constraints, poverty and people’s wellbeing.** Communicators should be very explicit about the links between economic trends, rates of poverty and the impact of poverty on people’s life circumstances and opportunities.

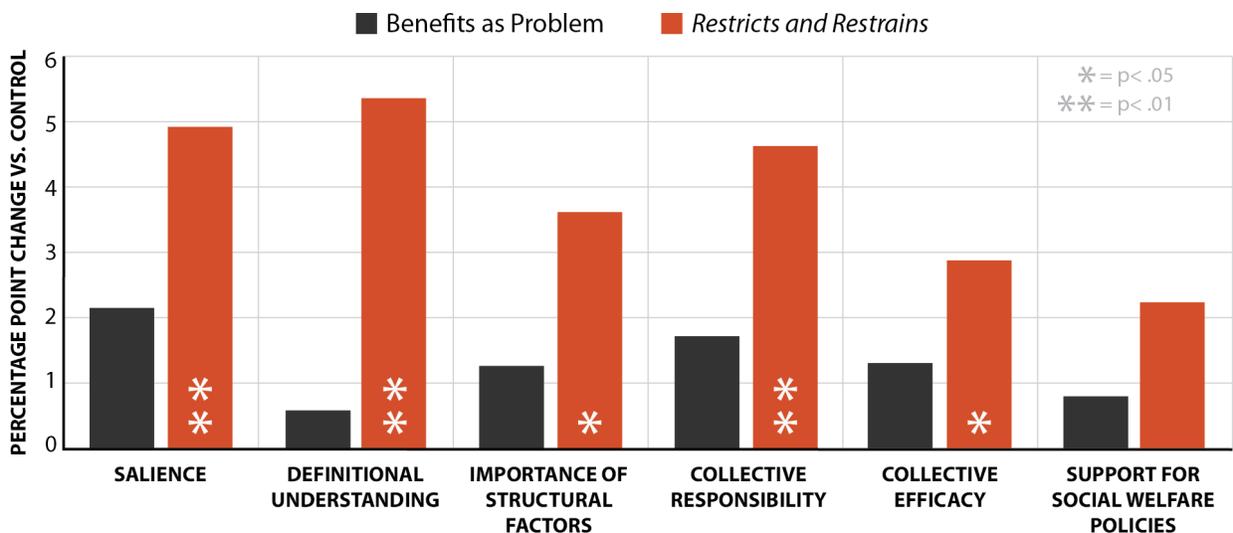
Communicators can use this metaphor flexibly – with different words and images, and more or less emphasis and emotion – depending on the communication’s purpose and audience.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**Talk about How Benefits Loosen Economic Constraints**

A central finding of this research is that communicators can talk about benefits, but that benefits are most productively positioned as part of the *solution* to issues of poverty – not the *problem* to be addressed. In our qualitative research, even when participants were sympathetic to the challenges people living in poverty experienced, they assessed the deservingness of people on benefits, which quickly derailed conversations. The quantitative research showed similar results.

Figure 7: Effects of Benefits Frames on Knowledge and Attitudes



As Figure 7 shows, messages that introduced the *Restricts and Restrains* metaphor and positioned expansion of the benefits system as the solution were effective on a number of different outcomes. More specifically, this message increased people’s ability to identify poverty as a salient issue and improved their understanding of what poverty is and how it works, as well as their recognition that structural factors are important causes of poverty. The message also increased people’s belief that poverty is an issue that everyone in society is responsible for, and their sense that actions *can* be taken to address the issue. In contrast, messages positioning the benefits system as the problem had no effect on these outcomes.

The *Restricts and Restrains* metaphor offers a highly effective way of making benefits a part of an antipoverty narrative. When communicators make benefits the story’s conclusion and explain how *Benefits Loosen Economic Constraints*, they can avoid the unproductive – and even toxic – effects of benefits being the issue or problem in the story. The example below shows how communicators can shift to identify the economy as the source of problems related to poverty, and position benefits as a way to loosen these economic constraints.

**BEFORE**

*‘The benefits system is broken and must be fixed. Benefits are vital for people in poverty – including those who work. We need to stop cutting benefits so the system is fit for purpose.’*

**AFTER**

*‘We can solve poverty by loosening the constraints our economy places on people. Benefits are a key part of freeing people from these constraints.’*

**BEFORE**

*‘Cuts in the name of austerity are ravishing communities and leaving thousands of people destitute. Instead of endlessly debating the issue, the government must act now to empower people by investing in our welfare state.’*

**AFTER**

*‘As a society, we believe in justice and compassion. But, right now, economic conditions mean that millions of people in our country are trapped in poverty and their opportunities are limited. Benefits can help.’*

**RECOMMENDATION:**

## Talk about Poverty as a *Current*

A second metaphor that enables people to see the effects of poverty is *Currents*. This powerful visual metaphor works in a similar way to *Restricts and Restrains*: It makes outside forces and their impact an unavoidable feature of poverty. It was designed to counteract the public’s belief that solving poverty is simply a matter of individuals opting to work harder and make better choices. The *Currents* metaphor advances a new understanding of *how* this issue works, enabling people to see how poverty curtails choices and control.

In our qualitative research, respondents reacted strongly to the powerful and visual nature of this

metaphor, gesturing with their hands and articulating the metaphor using different but conceptually congruent words and phrases like *channels, the tide, swept up, pulled along, pulled under, stay afloat* and *stream*. Because respondents could see and feel the forceful power of a current, they could see and feel that poverty is not something people can easily and quickly opt out of.

The following is an example of the *Currents* metaphor:

*'Our economy creates powerful currents that can pull people into poverty, like low wages or increasing living costs. And sometimes things happen that threaten to pull us under, like losing a job, coping with a disability or leaving our home to get out of an abusive relationship.'*

The *Currents* metaphor also enables communicators to talk productively about changes in poverty rates that happen as a result of economic conditions.

#### **BEFORE**

*'Austerity has put one in five Brits in the shadow of poverty as cuts make it impossible to make ends meet.'*

#### **AFTER**

*'One in five Brits have been pulled into the rising tide of poverty as a result of low wages and high living costs. We must make changes to help people stay afloat.'*

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

## **Explain How the Economy Can Be Redesigned**

The *Restricts and Restrains* metaphor shows how important it is for communicators to talk about economic factors when focusing on poverty. However, people often picture the economy as big, complicated and unmovable. It's viewed as a natural part of our lives – it just is the way it is and does what it does. At the same time, people often express the ideas that *The System Is Rigged* and government is set up to serve the interests of the wealthy. They express little faith that sound economic policy can make a difference. If not well-framed, discussion of the economy can quickly backfire, preventing members of the public from engaging in conversations about proposed solutions.

To avoid triggering this fatalism and instead instil a powerful sense of pragmatism, talk about the economy as a designed system – and therefore one that we can redesign.

The following is an example of how to do this:

*'Our economy is like a computer program that's been designed. The impact it has on our lives is a result of the choices that are made in the design process. We need to redesign the system so the economy works for everyone.'*

Figure 8: Effects of Metaphors on Knowledge and Attitudes

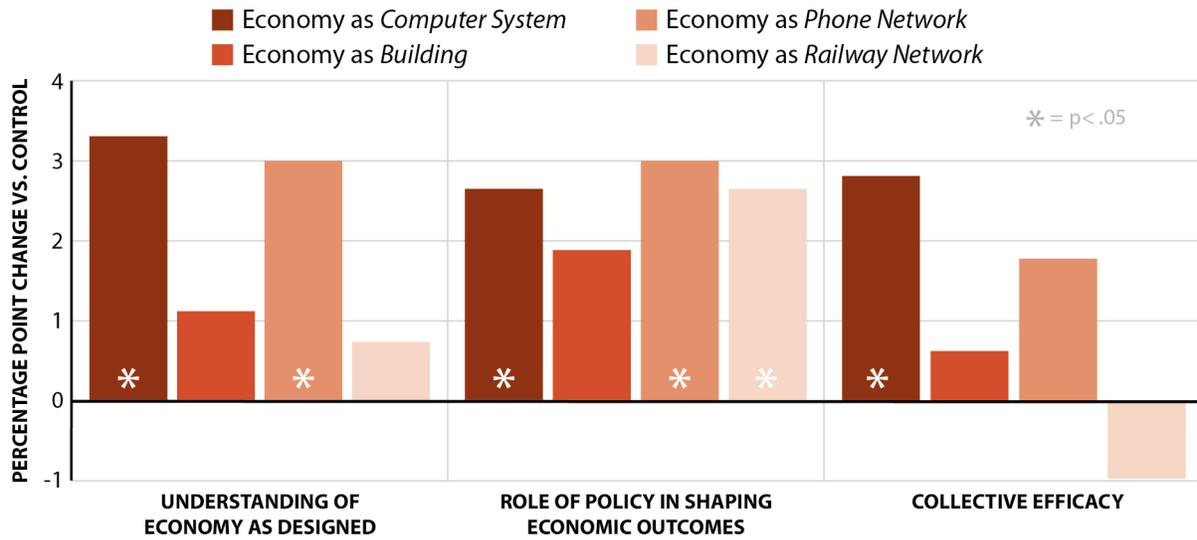


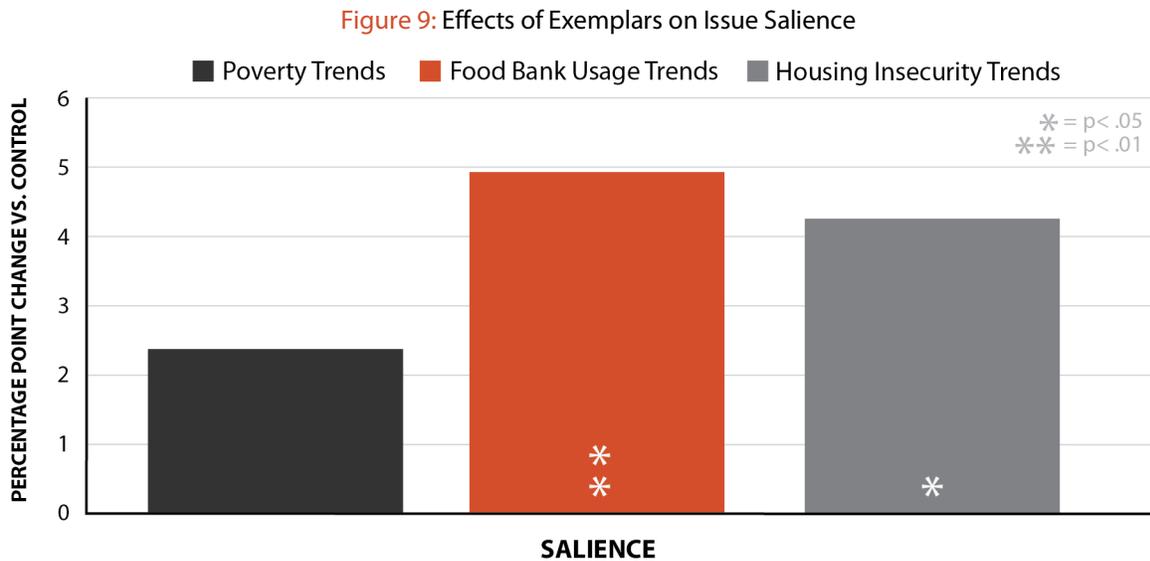
Figure 8 shows the effects of different metaphors on people’s understanding that the economy is designed and the role of public policy in shaping the economy, as well as people’s sense of efficacy in making positive changes to the economy. The metaphors tested included likening the economy to a computer system that can be reprogrammed, a building that can be renovated, a phone network that can be rewired and a railway network that needs new tracks. The figure shows that the *Reprogramming the Economy* metaphor worked across all three outcomes measures and was the most effective.

Communicators can flexibly use the *Reprogramming the Economy* metaphor to engage in discussions about the relationship between economic factors and poverty rates. This metaphor inoculates against the *Economic Naturalism* model – the idea that the economy is an immutable force beyond the control of policy action. Unlike the other tested metaphors, *Reprogramming the Economy* productively leverages *The System Is Rugged* cultural model, while helping people see the role of policy in addressing economic inequality. In the metaphor, policy is the code that determines how the program will run. The idea that the economy can be controlled through collective action – just like the ability to reprogram a computer system that is not working optimally – increases people’s sense of collective efficacy. People had difficulty thinking through system redesign with the other tested metaphors. Antipoverty campaigners can use this metaphor not only when directly addressing poverty but also when explaining other poverty-related economic issues.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Use Data That Reflect the *Experience* of Poverty to Illustrate the *Existence* of Poverty

Talking about rising food-bank use and insecure housing as evidence of poverty’s existence can have a powerful impact on public attitudes. It’s important that these illustrations are connected to our wider poverty narrative rather than presented as standalone issues, and that they give people a concrete sense of the lived experience of poverty.



In this part of the experiment, we tested three ways to communicate the rise of poverty: rising rates of food-bank usage, rising rates of housing insecurity and data about the rise in poverty itself. As illustrated in Figure 9, the *Food-Bank Usage Trends* and *Poverty Trends* and the *Housing Insecurity Trends* increased issue salience by 5 and 4 percentage points respectively. In contrast, communicating data about the prevalence of poverty itself had no effect on issue salience.

Earlier phases of the research showed that people in the United Kingdom struggle to see that ‘real’ poverty exists there, or that it is an issue they should engage with. Concrete evidence that demonstrates that poverty not only exists but also is rising helps people think about poverty as an issue of concern. But it is important to note the *kind* of examples that worked to increase salience. Rather than data about the *prevalence* of poverty, examples that draw people’s attention to the *experience* of poverty – having to rely on food banks or the stress of experiencing housing insecurity – are more effective. This does not mean communicators can only draw on data about food banks or housing insecurity to help people understand that poverty exists. Rather, the general framing strategy is to use data that helps people to understand people’s lived experience of poverty.

## BEFORE

'Hundreds of thousands of children and older people have been plunged into poverty in the past four years. Fourteen million people now live in poverty in the United Kingdom – over one fifth of the population.'

## AFTER

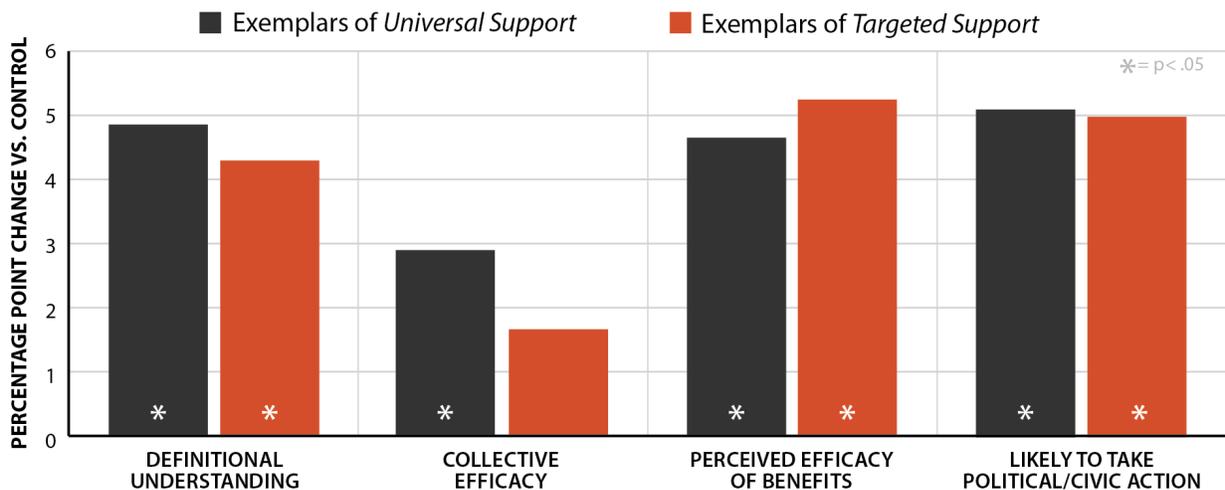
'In our society, we believe in justice and compassion. It is not right that one fifth of our population live in poverty and that more people are relying on food banks every week. We need to redesign the way our economy works to free people from the constraints of poverty.'

## RECOMMENDATION:

### Make Public Services Visible and a Force for Good

It is also important that communications remind people of the public services we rely on day-to-day. This means drawing attention to the public systems that are part of the fabric of everyday life for us all, and showing how vital they are for people who are struggling. By doing so, antipoverty campaigners can effectively leverage people's very productive understanding that the government has a responsibility to address long-standing issues, including poverty and economic inequality.

Figure 10: Effects of Universal vs. Targeted Support Exemplars on Knowledge, Attitudes and Action



In the survey experiment, we compared two types of messages: one that focused on public services directed towards certain populations, such as social housing, child benefit or jobs seekers' allowance (*Targeted Support*), and another that called to attention to the idea that the state provides goods and services to everyone (*Universal Support*). Figure 10 shows that both messages were effective in improving people's understanding of poverty, increasing their perceived efficacy of benefits and likelihood to take political action to address poverty by more than four percentage points. In addition, the *Universal Support* message increased people's sense of collective efficacy by almost three percentage points.

Earlier qualitative research indicated that people did understand that the government should and must play a role in addressing poverty, but struggled to talk in detailed ways about what that role should be. Making public services visible is an important part of an antipoverty narrative because it fills in this dominant, but thin, sense of government responsibility. This means communicators cannot simply state that government is responsible for addressing poverty. Rather, they need to name the services that both support people living in poverty and help everyone maintain a level of economic wellbeing.

**BEFORE**

*'The rise in poverty shows that our safety net is failing. Instead of helping people get by, our public systems and services are keeping people down.'*

**AFTER**

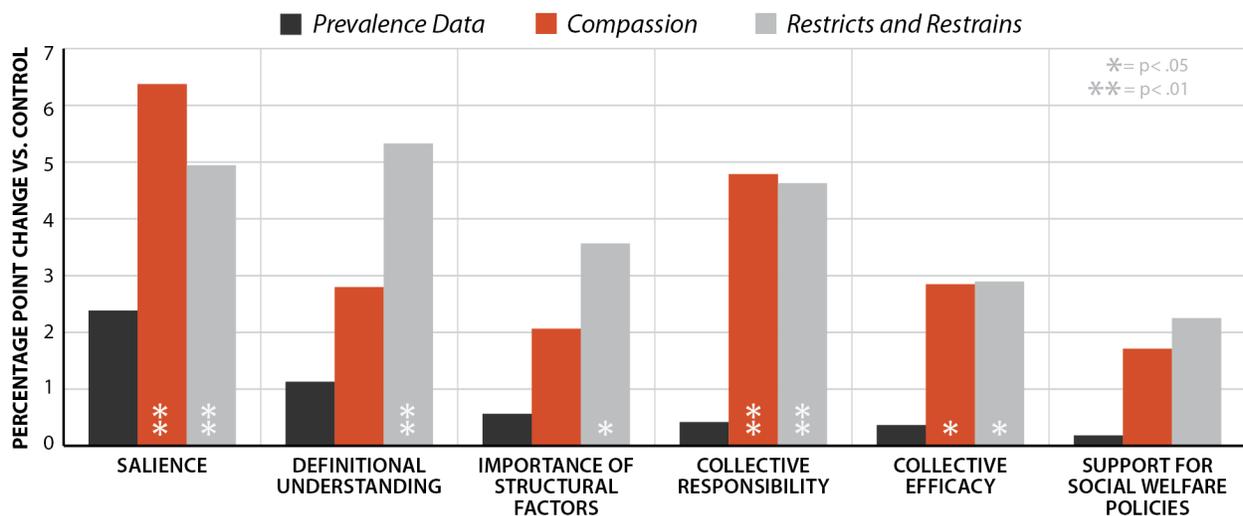
*'We all rely on publicly funded services and support systems like education, roads, railways and the NHS. Our public services are especially important to people who are struggling. We need to strengthen them to end poverty and make sure everyone has a decent life.'*

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**Don't Lead with Facts about Prevalence**

For poverty campaigners, it often feels as if statistics speak for themselves. But people need help to make meaning of statistics and see the bigger picture that a story points to. Data need to be a character in the story, rather than the story itself.

**Figure 11:** Effects of Prevalence Data, Values and Metaphors on Knowledge, Attitudes and Policy Preferences



In a controlled experiment, we compared a message that led with *Prevalence Data* to the *Compassion* value and the *Economic Constraints* metaphor. As demonstrated in Figure 11, leading with prevalence data had no significant effect on issue salience, people's understanding of what poverty is and that

structural factors impact poverty, their sense of collective responsibility and efficacy or their support for more robust social welfare policies. In other words, leading with data is the same as saying nothing at all.

When people hear statistics and facts about poverty, they often need help knowing what they mean. By connecting numbers to the values of *Justice* and *Compassion* and explaining the way the economy constrains people's lives, we help steer people towards – not away from – the changes needed to tackle poverty.

**BEFORE**

*'Poverty rates are rising for the first time in two decades. The sharp rise in the number of pensioners and children experiencing poverty is alarming.'*

**AFTER**

*'We believe in showing compassion in our country, and yet increasing numbers of people are locked in poverty and are forced to rely on food banks.'*

## Conclusion

Public debates about poverty continue to be polarised along ideological and political lines. In such an environment, poverty can be dismissed, without reconsideration or reflection, as a ‘political’ issue. Unless antipoverty campaigners deliberately and intentionally break through the ‘argument culture’, messages are likely to be written off as one more manifestation of intractable political debate. To overcome this tendency, antipoverty campaigners need to use all the tools available to them – especially their myriad communications with the public and policymakers – to build public support and ensure effective policy measures are carried out.

The research presented here has shown that engaging members of the public in productive conversation about poverty is possible when antipoverty campaigners:

1. Remind people that they feel a deep commitment and obligation to all people in their communities;
2. Name economic shifts as the source of poverty; and
3. Position social benefits as an effective antipoverty measure.

This broad narrative structure also leaves room for communicators to tell this story in creative ways. Messengers should be strategically deployed depending on the communications context, but the research shows that messengers who align with the values, or who are novel and unexpected, are especially effective in overcoming polarisation. The explanatory nature of the story can be deepened and expanded through use of the *Restricts and Restrains* and *Reprogramming the Economy* metaphors. Antipoverty campaigners can make their messages more powerful by using exemplars, such as *Food-Bank Usage Trends* and *Housing Insecurity Trends*, that help people understand the lived experience of poverty.

The general strategy presented here is not for antipoverty campaigners to all say the same thing, but rather for them to articulate different versions of a unified and coherent story about addressing poverty. A rich body of scholarship on social movements suggests that movements that coalesce around a *unified* framing strategy are better able to counter opposing messages and mobilise the public to action.<sup>5</sup>

## Appendix: Methodology

To determine the effects of different frames, three online survey experiments were conducted between September 2017 and January 2018, which a total of 12,900 respondents completed. Each of these survey experiments was completed by a sample of adults (individuals over age 18) from the United Kingdom matched to national demographic benchmarks for gender, race/ethnicity, income, education, age, country of residence and political party. The tables below provide a demographic breakdown of the sample for each survey experiment.

In each experiment, respondents were randomly assigned to receive a message treatment or to a null control. After reading the message (or, in the case of those assigned to the null control group, no message at all), all respondents were asked an identical series of questions designed to measure knowledge, attitudes and policy preferences relating to poverty. Each battery consisted of multiple questions. Questions were Likert-type items with seven- or five-point scales. With the exception of those measuring salience, which came first for all respondents, the order of all questions was randomised.

The first experiment tested 10 message treatments to understand how exposure to these frames affects public opinion about poverty. We tested five values (*Compassion, Justice, Interdependence, Freedom and Economic Strength*) and five explanatory metaphors (*Bridges, Weatherproofing, Currents, Freedom from Rule and Loadbearing Supports*).

In the second experiment, we tested 13 message treatments: nine messages containing one of three values (*Compassion, Justice and Economic Strength*) and one of three issue frames (*Poverty, The Economy and The Benefits System*); three messages containing different variations of one explanatory metaphor (*Constraints of Poverty, Constraints of the Economy and Constraints of the Economy, Benefits Loosen Them*); and one message with an additional explanatory metaphor (*Weight of Poverty*).

The third and final experiment tested 16 message treatments: four messenger treatments (a base message drawing on the values of *Compassion* and *Justice* attributed to no messenger, and three treatments that attributed a similar message to one of three messengers: *Conservative Politicians, Anglican Bishops and Conservative and Labour Politicians*; three narrative combination treatments (*Compassion and Constraints of the Economy, Constraints of the Economy and Compassion* and a message drawing on *Current Practice*); three contested message treatments (a base, a counter-narrative message arguing against the existence of poverty in the United Kingdom and two additional treatments in which a *Constraints of the Economy* and *Compassion* message preceded or followed this base message); and six exemplar treatments (*Food-Bank Usage Trends, Food-Bank Usage Trends and Poverty Trends, Housing Insecurity Trends, Housing Insecurity Trends and Poverty Trends, Universal Support and Targeted Support*).

Multiple regression analysis was used to determine whether there were significant differences in responses to questions between the treatment groups and the control group. To help ensure that any observed

effects were driven by the frames rather than demographic variations in the sample, all regressions controlled for the demographics mentioned above. A threshold of  $p < 0.05$  was used to determine whether treatments had any significant effects.

## Demographic Breakdown

<b>SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS: WAVE 1 SURVEY EXPERIMENT</b>	
(Total n=3,351)	
<b>Age</b>	<b>Per Cent of Sample</b>
18–29	16.4%
30–44	27.6
45–59	26.2
60 and older	29.8
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	46.8
Female	53.2
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	
White	86.9
Asian/Asian British	7.1
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	3.0
Bi- or multi-racial/ethnic	3.0
<b>Income</b>	
Less than £10,400	9.0
£10,400–£20,799	24.5
£20,800–£31,199	21.8
£31,200–£51,999	25.8
£52,000 or more	18.9
<b>Political Party</b>	
Conservative	40.2
Labour	41.9
Liberal Democrat	6.9
Scottish National Party	3.2
Green	1.3
Democratic Union	0.3
Sinn Fein	0.1
Plaid Cymru	0.4
Other	5.7

<b>SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS: WAVE 2 SURVEY EXPERIMENT</b>	
(Total n=4,250)	
<b>Age</b>	<b>Per Cent of Sample</b>
18–29	17.2%
30–44	27.0
45–59	26.0
60 and older	29.8
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	49.2
Female	50.8
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	
White,	87.1
Asian/Asian British	6.9
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	3.0
Bi, or multi-racial/ethnic	3.0
<b>Income</b>	
Less than £10,400	9.3
£10,400–£20,799	23.7
£20,800–£31,199	22.0
£31,200–£51,999	27.2
£52,000 or more	17.9
<b>Political Party</b>	
Conservative	40.1
Labour	41.1
Liberal Democrat	7.7
Scottish National Party	3.1
Green	1.6
Democratic Union	0.4
Sinn Fein	0.1
Plaid Cymru	0.2
Other	5.7

<b>SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS: WAVE 3 SURVEY EXPERIMENT</b>	
(Total n=4,850)	
<b>Age</b>	<b>Per Cent of Sample</b>
18–29	11.1%
30–44	28.9
45–59	28.2
60 and older	31.8
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	55.3
Female	44.7
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	
White	86.2
Asian/Asian British	7.4
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	3.1
Bi, or multi-racial/ethnic	3.3
<b>Income</b>	
Less than £10,400	9.0
£10,400–£20,799	22.8
£20,800–£31,199	22.8
£31,200–£51,999	27.8
£52,000 or more	17.6
<b>Political Party</b>	
Conservative	42.3
Labour	39.0
Liberal Democrat	7.0
Scottish National Party	2.2
Green	1.8
Democratic Union	0.5
Sinn Fein	0.1
Plaid Cymru	0.5
Other	5.8

## Experimental Treatments

Note that participants receiving experimental messages were also provided the following instructions: *Below, we have provided a brief selection from an article that recently appeared in the news. Please read this carefully. In the questions that follow, you will be asked for your thoughts and opinions about the topics and ideas that the article raises.*

### Figures 1, 2, and 3

#### *Compassion*

In our society, we believe in showing compassion towards others, and helping and protecting each other from harm. Yet, right now, millions of people are in poverty. We have a moral responsibility to ensure that all people in our country have a decent standard of living.

Poverty in the United Kingdom today is higher than it was a decade ago, and that isn't right. Poverty affects people of all ages and situations – children, young adults, adults in and out of work, people with disabilities and pensioners. Because people in poverty lack the means to participate in their communities, they are often socially isolated. And the stress that goes along with poverty creates mental and physical health problems. Demonstrating compassion as a society means making sure that people don't experience this kind of harm.

If we truly believe in helping each other and protecting one another, then we must work to prevent poverty. We must make sure that all people have a decent standard of living by reducing the cost of living, raising incomes for the least well-off and providing extra support when people need it. Simply put, making sure that we address poverty is the right and moral thing to do.

#### *Justice*

In our society, we believe in justice and making sure that everyone has the same opportunities in life, no matter who they are or where they come from. Yet, right now, our country doesn't provide equal opportunities for everyone, and, as a result, millions of people are in poverty. To realise justice, we must ensure that opportunities are equal.

Poverty in the United Kingdom today is higher than it was a decade ago, in large part because not everyone has the same opportunities in our society. Poverty affects people of all ages and situations – children, young adults, adults in and out of work, people with disabilities and pensioners. Because people in poverty lack the means to participate in their communities, they are often socially isolated. And the stress that goes along with poverty creates mental and physical health problems. This is the result of our country not doing enough to make sure all people have equal opportunities to do well.

If we are truly committed to justice, then we must make sure that all of us have the same opportunities, so that people aren't pushed into poverty. We must expand people's opportunities by reducing the cost of

living, raising incomes for the least well-off and providing extra support when people need it. Simply put, we must ensure everyone has equal opportunities in order to address poverty.

### *Economic Strength*

In our society, we need a strong economy that works for everyone. Yet, right now, millions of people are in poverty, which hurts our whole country by wasting people's potential contributions and making our economy less productive. To strengthen our economy, we need to make sure everyone can participate in it fully.

Poverty in the United Kingdom today is higher than it was a decade ago, which prevents our economy from working as well as it should. Poverty affects people of all ages and situations – children, young adults, adults in and out of work, people with disabilities and pensioners. Because people in poverty lack the means to participate in their communities, they are often socially isolated. And the stress that goes along with poverty creates mental and physical health problems. This limits people's ability to build a good life and contribute to the economy.

If we want our economy to be strong, then we must work to prevent poverty, so that all of us are able to contribute and put money back into the economy. We must invest in people by reducing the cost of living, raising incomes for the least well-off and providing extra support when people need it. Simply put, we need to address poverty in our society so that our economy is strong.

### **Figure 3 (also both *Compassion* and *Justice* messages listed above for Figures 1 and 2)**

### *Compassion and Justice*

As a society, we believe in justice and compassion. But, right now, millions of people in our country are living in poverty. We have a moral responsibility to make sure that everyone in our country has a decent standard of living and the same chances in life, no matter who they are or where they come from.

Poverty in the United Kingdom is higher today than it was a decade ago. This is, in part, because not everyone has the same opportunities. This isn't right. Poverty affects people of all ages and situations – children, young adults, people in and out of work, people with disabilities and pensioners. Because people in poverty don't have the means to participate in their neighborhoods and communities, they are often isolated and cut off from society. And the stress that goes along with poverty can create mental and physical health problems. Showing compassion as a society means making sure all people have the same opportunities to do well and that no one has to endure the harm that poverty brings with it.

If we believe in doing the right thing, we have to help each other when we're in need and make sure that we all have the same chances to do well in life. We must reduce the cost of living, guarantee decent wages for all jobs and provide extra support when people need it. This is the right and moral thing to do.

## Figure 4

### *Anglican Bishops as Messenger*

#### **Anglican Leaders Proclaim Need to Address Poverty in the UK [formatted as headline]**

A group of Anglican bishops recently released a statement calling for increased action to address the issue of poverty in the United Kingdom. In the statement, the church leaders say that we have a moral responsibility to take steps as a society to address poverty. Here is the full statement:

As a society, we believe in justice and compassion. But, right now, millions of people in our country are living in poverty. We have a moral responsibility to make sure that everyone in our country has a decent standard of living and the same chances in life, no matter who they are or where they come from.

Poverty in the United Kingdom is higher today than it was a decade ago. This is, in part, because not everyone has the same opportunities. This isn't right. Poverty affects people of all ages and situations – children, young adults, people in and out of work, people with disabilities and pensioners. Because people in poverty don't have the means to participate in their neighborhoods and communities, they are often isolated and cut off from society. And the stress that goes along with poverty can create mental and physical health problems. Showing compassion as a society means making sure all people have the same opportunities to do well and that no one has to endure the harm that poverty brings with it.

If we believe in doing the right thing, we have to help each other when we're in need and make sure that we all have the same chances to do well in life. We must reduce the cost of living, guarantee decent wages for all jobs, and provide extra support when people need it. This is the right and moral thing to do.

### *Conservative Politicians as Messenger*

#### **Conservative MPs Proclaim Need to Address Poverty [formatted as headline]**

A group of Tory MPs recently released a statement calling for increased action to address the issue of poverty in the United Kingdom. In the statement, the MPs say that we have a moral responsibility to take steps as a society to address poverty. Here is the full statement:

As a society, we believe in justice and compassion. But, right now, millions of people in our country are living in poverty. We have a moral responsibility to make sure that everyone in our country has a decent standard of living and the same chances in life, no matter who they are or where they come from.

Poverty in the United Kingdom is higher today than it was a decade ago. This is, in part, because not everyone has the same opportunities. This isn't right. Poverty affects people of all ages and situations

– children, young adults, people in and out of work, people with disabilities and pensioners. Because people in poverty don't have the means to participate in their neighborhoods and communities, they are often isolated and cut off from society. And the stress that goes along with poverty can create mental and physical health problems. Showing compassion as a society means making sure all people have the same opportunities to do well and that no one has to endure the harm that poverty brings with it.

If we believe in doing the right thing, we have to help each other when we're in need and make sure that we all have the same chances to do well in life. We must reduce the cost of living, guarantee decent wages for all jobs, and provide extra support when people need it. This is the right and moral thing to do.

### **Figure 5 (*Poverty as Problem and Compassion as Value is listed above for Figures 1 and 2*)**

#### *Economy as Problem and Compassion as Value*

In our society, we believe in showing compassion toward others, and helping and protecting each other from harm. Yet, right now, our economy leaves millions of people struggling to get by. We have a moral responsibility to build an economy that ensures that all people in our country have a decent standard of living.

Over the last forty years, we have created an economy that doesn't work for many of us, and that isn't right. By cutting spending on training and social welfare, we have failed to live up to our responsibility to provide the support that people need to do well in our economy. We haven't done enough as a society to take care of one another by putting protections in place to make sure that jobs are stable and pay a decent wage. And our country has allowed housing and living costs to get out of control, causing many people to struggle to afford a decent life. These changes we have made to the economy have pushed many people into poverty, which is higher in the United Kingdom today than it was a decade ago. In our current economy, poverty affects people of all ages and situations – children, young adults, adults in and out of work, people with disabilities and pensioners. Because of our broader economy, many people are struggling to get by, are socially isolated, and are experiencing mental and physical health problems. Demonstrating compassion as a society means building an economy in which people don't experience this kind of harm.

If we truly believe in helping each other and protecting one another, then we must make sure our economy works for all of us. We must make sure that all people have a decent standard of living by reducing the cost of living, raising incomes for the least well-off and providing extra support when people need it. Simply put, making sure that our economy makes a good life possible for everyone is the right and moral thing to do.

#### *Benefits as Problem and Compassion as Value*

In our society, we believe in showing compassion toward others, and helping and protecting each other from harm. Yet cuts to benefits have left millions of people struggling to get by. We have a moral

responsibility to strengthen our benefits system so that all people in our country have a decent standard of living.

Over the last few years, the government has cut benefits and made it more difficult for people to claim benefits when they need them, and that isn't right. Benefits cuts have affected people of all ages and situations – children, young adults, adults in and out of work, people with disabilities and pensioners. While the cost of living continues to rise, the government has frozen benefits, which has left many people without the means to live a decent life and means that, as a society, we aren't doing enough to take care of one another. And by making it more difficult for people to claim benefits, many families have been cut off from support entirely, so our country is no longer protecting them. These cuts we have made to the benefits system have pushed many people into poverty, which is higher in the United Kingdom today than it was a decade ago. Because of our benefits system, many people are struggling to get by, are socially isolated and are experiencing mental and physical health problems. Demonstrating compassion as a society means making sure that people don't experience this kind of harm as a result of benefits cuts.

If we truly believe in helping each other and protecting one another, then we must make sure that our benefits system is strong. This means ensuring that benefits provide people with what they need and that people who need benefits can get them. We must make sure all people have a decent standard of living by reducing the cost of living, raising incomes for the least well-off and providing extra support when people need it. Simply put, strengthening our social welfare system is the right and moral thing to do.

## **Figure 6**

### *Restricts and Restrains Metaphor*

Our economy constrains our choices and limits our options. How the economy is built constrains the choices that we have. Because of the economy today, many of us are forced into low-paying, unstable jobs that don't provide enough to live on, or they can't find jobs at all. And the economy has driven up the cost of living, which forces people to focus on making ends meet and constrains the opportunities they have. Our current economy traps people in bad situations, and forces some people into poverty.

We need to break the constraints our current economy places on us. To break the bonds of our economy, we must make sure that all of us have the resources we need to have the freedom to pursue opportunities. This means taking steps to reduce the cost of living, raise incomes for the least well-off and provide extra support when people need it, so that none of us are trapped by the constraints of our economy or forced into poverty.

To remove the constraints our current economy places on us, we need a strong benefits system. By providing good benefits that give everyone real options in life, we can make it possible for everyone to do well. Strengthening benefits would enable the least-well off among us to escape the constraints of their circumstances and break out of poverty.

By expanding opportunities and strengthening benefits, we can create an economy that frees us so we can all build good lives.

**Figure 7 (also *Restricts and Restrains*, and *Benefits as Problem* and *Compassion as Value* listed above for Figures 5 and 6, respectively)**

*Benefits as Problem and Justice as Value*

In our society, we believe in justice and making sure that everyone has the same opportunities in life, no matter who they are or where they come from. Yet by cutting benefits for millions of people, we are undermining equality of opportunity in our country. To realise justice, we must strengthen our benefits system so all people have equal opportunities.

Over the last few years, the government has weakened people's opportunities by cutting benefits and making it more difficult for people to claim benefits when they need them. Benefits cuts have affected people of all ages and situations – children, young adults, adults in and out of work, people with disabilities and pensioners. While the cost of living continues to rise, the government has frozen benefits, which means that benefits aren't providing the support people need to pursue the kinds of opportunities that would improve their lives. And by making it more difficult for people to claim benefits, many families have been cut off from support entirely, which forces people to focus on immediate needs and leaves them without the opportunity to build a good life. These cuts we have made to the benefits system have pushed many people into poverty, which is higher in the United Kingdom today than it was a decade ago. Because of our benefits system, many people are struggling to get by, are socially isolated and are experiencing mental and physical health problems. This is the result of our benefits system not doing enough to make sure all people have equal opportunities to do well.

If we are truly committed to justice, then we must make sure that our benefits system is strong and provides all people with the opportunity to build a good life. This means ensuring that benefits provide people with what they need and that people who need benefits can get them. We must expand people's opportunities by reducing the cost of living, raising incomes for the least well-off and providing extra support when people need it. Simply put, we must strengthen our social welfare system so that a good life is equally possible for everyone.

*Benefits as Problem and Economic Strength as Value*

In our society, we need a strong economy that works for everyone. Yet by cutting benefits for millions of people, we are undermining our economy. Cutting benefits hurts our whole country by wasting people's potential contributions and making our economy less productive. To strengthen our economy, we must strengthen our benefits system.

Over the last few years, the government has cut benefits and made it more difficult for people to claim benefits when they need them, which makes it hard for people to engage in the kinds of activities that ultimately benefit the economy, like training or education. Benefits cuts have affected people of all ages and situations – children, young adults, adults in and out of work, people with disabilities and pensioners.

While the cost of living continues to rise, the government has frozen benefits, which limits people's ability to participate in the economy and to put money back into the economy. And by making it more difficult for people to claim benefits, many families have been cut off from support entirely, which forces people of all ages to focus on immediate needs rather than doing things that will enable them to contribute to the economy in the future. These cuts we have made to the benefits system have pushed many people into poverty, which is higher in the United Kingdom today than it was a decade ago. Because of our benefits system, many people are struggling to get by, are socially isolated and are experiencing mental and physical health problems. This limits people's ability to build a good life and contribute to the economy.

If we want our economy to be strong, then we must make sure that our benefits system is strong. This means ensuring that benefits provide people with what they need and that people who need benefits can get them, so that all of us are able to contribute and put money back into the economy. We must invest in people by reducing the cost of living, raising incomes for the least well-off and providing extra support when people need it. Simply put, we must strengthen our social welfare system so that our economy is strong and works well.

## **Figure 8**

### *Economy as Building Metaphor*

Our economy is like a building that hasn't been properly maintained. The parts of the economy that most people use have become run down. Over the last forty years, only the upper floors of the building, where the wealthiest people and corporations reside, have been renovated and kept up. This means our economy is barely livable for most people. And because we've neglected foundational parts of the economy and put most of our money into building out the highest floors, it isn't as stable as it should be – and this affects all of us. We need to renovate the economy and focus on the foundation so that it serves everyone's needs and lasts us a long time.

### *Economy as Phone Network Metaphor*

Our economy is like a phone network. The laws and policies we make determine how this network is constructed – where coverage is strong and the economy is easy to tap into, and where it's patchy. Over the last forty years, the wealthiest people and corporations have gained control of this network, pouring huge amounts of money into higher-speed connections for the City of London while leaving some areas without reliable access to the economy. We need to put control of our economic network back in the hands of the public, so we can get rid of these areas of poor signal and build an economy that is reliable for all users.

### *Economy as Computer System Metaphor*

Our economy is like a program that is constantly being revised and updated. Laws and policies are the code that determines how the economy runs – what it can be used to do, and for which users. Over the last forty years, the wealthiest people and corporations have gotten the password to the economy and gained the ability to revise policy and reprogram the economy so that it runs how they want it to. As a result, the economy has been programmed for corporate interests, while most of the public have been

locked out. We need to reset the password so that we can reprogram the economy to work for everyone.

### *Economy as Railway Network Metaphor*

Our economy is like a railway network – it's built to take people to particular places. The laws and policies that we make lay down tracks that determine where the economy takes people. Over the last forty years, the wealthiest people and corporations have gained more and more influence, so our economic tracks were built to get them where they want to go. Meanwhile, we haven't built tracks to get most people to their wants and needs, and people are stranded on a train that's heading in the wrong direction with no chance of getting off. We need to regain control over the train by laying down economic tracks that take everyone where they need to go.

## **Figure 9**

### *Food Bank Usage Trends Data*

The use of food banks in the United Kingdom has risen dramatically over the last three years, increasing by almost 30 per cent, and more and more people are at risk of going hungry. This steep rise shows the severity of poverty in the UK today and the extent of the problem. The number of Britons who are at risk of going hungry is a disgrace. There are neither enough food banks nor enough food at existing food banks to meet the rising demand for emergency food support. We need to take action now to address the number of people who are using food banks.

### *Housing Insecurity Trends Data*

Housing insecurity has risen dramatically in recent years, as more than a million households living in private rented accommodation are at risk of becoming homeless. The steep rise in housing insecurity shows the severity of poverty in the United Kingdom today and the extent of the problem. The number of Britons who are on the brink of homelessness is a disgrace. There is not enough affordable housing in the UK, nor do people make enough to afford safe, stable and healthy places to live. We need to take action now to address the number of people facing homelessness.

### *Poverty Trends Data*

As a society, we have a poverty problem and we are not making progress in tackling it. Today, there are 14 million people living in poverty in the United Kingdom. And things are getting worse. Poverty in the United Kingdom is higher today than it was a decade ago. Almost 400,000 more children and 300,000 more pensioners are now living in poverty than in 2012 and 2013. Poverty rates are increasing for working-age adults as well. Eight million people who are in poverty live in families where at least one person is in work. One in eight workers – that's 3.7 million people – live in poverty.

These numbers show the need to make sure that all people have the same opportunities to do well and that no one has to endure the harm that poverty brings with it.

Poverty is not a choice – it's a result of the way our economy is set up. Decisions we have made as a society have reduced people's choices and options. By weakening social housing, cutting benefits and

failing to guarantee access to stable, good-paying jobs, we have created an economy that takes away many people's choices and leads to poverty.

We need to make sure people have real choices in life. This means reducing the cost of living, guaranteeing decent wages for all jobs and providing extra support when people need it. We need to strengthen benefits in order to help people out of poverty.

Twenty-two per cent of all people in the United Kingdom are living in poverty. If we want to make a dent in this figure, we need to strengthen benefits and create an economy that gives each of us meaningful choices so we can lead a good life.

## **Figure 10**

### *Exemplars of Universal Support*

Each and every one of us relies on public services and support systems. This is a normal part of life. No one is successful on their own. Everyone's success relies on publicly funded services – things like health care, education, roads and railways and publicly funded scientific research that fuels progress and prosperity. We all use goods provided by the state all the time. And we all have access to benefits if we fall on hard times, which allows us to plan our lives without living in constant fear of destitution. These are things that our country provides and that we all depend on and benefit from. Without normal and everyday use of state support, none of us could be successful. The people who are doing well should benefit from their hard work, but since their success depends on public support, they should also contribute to the good of everyone now and of future generations to come by investing in a strong system of public support.

### *Exemplars of Targeted Support*

People who are struggling rely on public services and support systems. They need this support to be successful. People who are poor rely on publicly funded services to get out of poverty – things like social housing, child benefit, jobseekers' allowance and programs that provide job training. These services provided by the state enable people to get out of poverty and be successful. And we all have access to benefits if we fall on hard times, so they're there for us if we need them. These are things that our country provides and that many people depend on and benefit from. Without this support from the state, people in poverty wouldn't have what they need to be successful. People who are struggling can be working hard and still need additional support in order to do well, and since their success depends on public support, we all need to contribute to helping the least well off among us by investing in a strong system of public support.

**Treatments for Figure 11 can be found among treatments listed for other figures.**

## Survey Outcome Measures

### Saliience

1. In your view, how serious of a problem is poverty in the United Kingdom? [5-point Likert scale: 'Not at all serious'; 'Slightly serious'; 'Moderately serious'; 'Very serious'; 'Extremely serious']
2. How much of a priority do you think it should be to reduce poverty in the United Kingdom? [5-point Likert scale: 'Not at all a priority'; 'Low priority'; 'Moderate priority'; 'High priority'; 'Top priority']
3. How concerned are you personally about poverty in the United Kingdom? [5-point Likert scale: 'Not at all concerned'; 'Slightly concerned'; 'Moderately concerned'; 'Very concerned'; 'Extremely concerned']

### Definitional understanding

1. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement: People who don't have food, clothing and shelter are in poverty. [7-point Likert scale: 'Strongly disagree'; 'Disagree'; 'Slightly disagree'; 'Neither agree nor disagree'; 'Slightly agree'; 'Agree'; 'Strongly agree']
2. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement: People who have food, clothing and shelter can be in poverty if they don't have things that most other people in society have, like a washing machine or Internet access. [7-point Likert scale: 'Strongly disagree'; 'Disagree'; 'Slightly disagree'; 'Neither agree nor disagree'; 'Slightly agree'; 'Agree'; 'Strongly agree']
3. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement: People who have food, clothing and shelter can be in poverty if they don't have the resources to participate in social and leisure activities that most other people do. [7-point Likert scale: 'Strongly disagree'; 'Disagree'; 'Slightly disagree'; 'Neither agree nor disagree'; 'Slightly agree'; 'Agree'; 'Strongly agree']

### Causal attributions

1. How important do you think each of the following is in explaining why there are people in poverty in the United Kingdom? [Randomise order of attributions; 5-point Likert scale: 'Not at all important'; 'Slightly important'; 'Moderately important'; 'Very important'; 'Extremely important']
  - a. Lack of discipline or willpower
  - b. Lack of effort
  - c. Lack of thrift and good saving habits
  - d. Lack of natural talent
  - e. Cultural beliefs that devalue hard work
  - f. Low wages for low-skill jobs
  - g. High cost of living
  - h. Lack of educational opportunities

- i. Lack of available jobs
- j. Discrimination against Black and other minority ethnic groups
- k. Benefits levels are too low

### **Collective responsibility**

1. How much of a responsibility do you think we, as a society, have to reduce poverty? [7-point Likert scale: 'No responsibility at all'; 'A very small responsibility'; 'A small responsibility'; 'A moderate responsibility'; 'A large responsibility'; 'A very large responsibility'; 'An extremely large responsibility']
2. How much of a responsibility do you think our government has to reduce poverty? [7-point Likert scale: 'No responsibility at all'; 'A very small responsibility'; 'A small responsibility'; 'A moderate responsibility'; 'A large responsibility'; 'A very large responsibility'; 'An extremely large responsibility']
3. How much of a responsibility do you think businesses and corporations have to reduce poverty? [7-point Likert scale: 'No responsibility at all'; 'A very small responsibility'; 'A small responsibility'; 'A moderate responsibility'; 'A large responsibility'; 'A very large responsibility'; 'An extremely large responsibility']

### **Collective efficacy**

1. In your view, how much can we do as a society to reduce poverty? [7-point Likert scale: 'Nothing at all'; 'A very small amount'; 'A small amount'; 'A moderate amount'; 'A large amount'; 'A very large amount'; 'An extremely large amount']
2. How optimistic or pessimistic do you feel that we, as a society, can reduce poverty? [7-point Likert scale: 'Extremely pessimistic'; 'Pessimistic'; 'Somewhat pessimistic'; 'Neither optimistic nor pessimistic'; 'Somewhat optimistic'; 'Optimistic'; 'Extremely optimistic']
3. If we took action as a society to reduce poverty, how much of a reduction in poverty do you think we could see? [7-point Likert scale: 'No reduction at all'; 'A very small reduction'; 'A small reduction'; 'A moderate reduction'; 'A large reduction'; 'A very large reduction'; 'Complete reduction, or elimination']

### **Attitudes toward the benefits system**

1. In your view, to what extent does receiving benefits encourage people to become self-sufficient or dependent? [7-point Likert scale: '1. Strongly encourages dependency'; '2. Mostly encourages dependency'; '3. Somewhat encourages dependency'; '4. Encourages neither self-sufficiency nor dependency'; '5. Somewhat encourages self-sufficiency'; '6. Mostly encourages self-sufficiency'; '7. Strongly encourages self-sufficiency']

2. How effective do you think benefits are in helping to reduce poverty? [5-point Likert scale: 'Not effective at all'; 'Somewhat effective'; 'Moderately effective'; 'Very effective'; 'Extremely effective']

### **Support for benefits**

1. To what extent do you think government spending on each of the following should be increased or decreased? [Randomise order of items; 7-point Likert scale: 'Significantly decreased'; 'Decreased'; 'Slightly decreased'; 'Kept about the same'; 'Slightly increased'; 'Increased'; 'Significantly increased']
  - a. Benefits for unemployed people
  - b. Benefits for disabled people
  - c. Benefits for parents who work on very low incomes
  - d. Benefits for single parents
  - e. Benefits for retired people
  - f. Benefits for people who care for those who are sick and disabled
2. In your view, how much more or less strict should the rules about who can receive benefits be? Would you say they should be more strict, so that benefits are received by fewer people and for shorter amounts of time, or less strict, so that benefits are received by more people and for longer amounts of time? [7-point Likert scale: '1 Much less strict'; '2 Moderately less strict'; '3 Slightly less strict'; '4 Kept about the same'; '5 Slightly more strict'; '6 Moderately more strict'; '7 Much more strict']
3. In your view, to what extent should the amount of benefits that people can receive be increased or decreased? [7-point Likert scale: 'Significantly decreased'; 'Decreased'; 'Slightly decreased'; 'Kept about the same'; 'Slightly increased'; 'Increased'; 'Significantly increased']
4. To what extent do you personally favor or oppose requiring people to pass drug testing in order to receive benefits? [7-point Likert scale: 'Strongly oppose'; 'Oppose'; 'Slightly oppose'; 'Neither favor nor oppose'; 'Slightly favor'; 'Favor'; 'Strongly favor']

### **Support for social policies**

1. To what extent do you think government spending on improving school standards should be increased or decreased? [7-point Likert scale: 'Significantly decreased'; 'Decreased'; 'Slightly decreased'; 'Kept about the same'; 'Slightly increased'; 'Increased'; 'Significantly increased']
2. To what extent do you think government spending on job centres to help people in poverty find work should be increased or decreased? [7-point Likert scale: 'Significantly decreased'; 'Decreased'; 'Slightly decreased'; 'Kept about the same'; 'Slightly increased'; 'Increased'; 'Significantly increased']

3. To what extent do you think government spending on job-training programs for people who are in poverty should be increased or decreased? [7-point Likert scale: 'Significantly decreased'; 'Decreased'; 'Slightly decreased'; 'Kept about the same'; 'Slightly increased'; 'Increased'; 'Significantly increased']
4. To what extent do you think government spending on developing good quality housing that is affordable to people in poverty should be increased or decreased? [7-point Likert scale: 'Significantly decreased'; 'Decreased'; 'Slightly decreased'; 'Kept about the same'; 'Slightly increased'; 'Increased'; 'Significantly increased']
5. To what extent do you personally favor or oppose requiring councils to provide jobs for young people who are in poverty? [7-point Likert scale: 'Strongly oppose'; 'Oppose'; 'Slightly oppose'; 'Neither favor nor oppose'; 'Slightly favor'; 'Favor'; 'Strongly favor']
6. To what extent do you personally favor or oppose the government providing child care and early years education at no charge? [7-point Likert scale: 'Strongly oppose'; 'Oppose'; 'Slightly oppose'; 'Neither favor nor oppose'; 'Slightly favor'; 'Favor'; 'Strongly favor']

### **Support for economic policies**

1. To what extent do you personally favor or oppose increasing the minimum wage for workers of all ages? [7-point Likert scale: 'Strongly oppose'; 'Oppose'; 'Slightly oppose'; 'Neither favor nor oppose'; 'Slightly favor'; 'Favor'; 'Strongly favor']
2. To what extent do you personally favor or oppose prohibiting zero-hour contracts? [7-point Likert scale: 'Strongly oppose'; 'Oppose'; 'Slightly oppose'; 'Neither favor nor oppose'; 'Slightly favor'; 'Favor'; 'Strongly favor']
3. To what extent do you personally favor or oppose requiring energy companies to provide lower rates to people in poverty? [7-point Likert scale: 'Strongly oppose'; 'Oppose'; 'Slightly oppose'; 'Neither favor nor oppose'; 'Slightly favor'; 'Favor'; 'Strongly favor']

### **Likelihood to take political/civic action**

1. If you were directly asked to do so, how likely would you be to do each of the following? [Randomise order of activities; 5-point Likert scale: 'Not at all likely'; 'Slightly likely'; 'Moderately likely'; 'Very likely'; 'Extremely likely']
  - a. Donate to an organisation working to reduce poverty in the United Kingdom.
  - b. Speak at a community meeting held by your local Member of Parliament to advocate for programs to reduce poverty in the United Kingdom.
  - c. Contact your local Member of Parliament to advocate for programs to reduce poverty in the United Kingdom.

- d. Volunteer with an organisation working to reduce poverty in the United Kingdom.
- e. Contact a private business or company urging them to donate to an organisation working to reduce poverty.
- f. Buy products from a business or company that donates to an organisation working to reduce poverty.

### **Perceived norms around benefits system**

1. To what extent do you think that Britons oppose or support cutting benefits [reverse]? [7-point Likert scale: 'Strongly oppose'; 'Oppose'; 'Slightly oppose'; 'Neither support nor oppose'; 'Slightly support'; 'Support'; 'Strongly support']
2. To what extent do you think Britons oppose or support increasing benefits? [7-point Likert scale: 'Strongly oppose'; 'Oppose'; 'Slightly oppose'; 'Neither support nor oppose'; 'Slightly support'; 'Support'; 'Strongly support']
3. To what extent do you think support for benefits will or will not increase in the United Kingdom in the future? [5-point Likert scale: 'Will not increase at all'; 'Will increase a small amount'; 'Will increase a moderate amount'; 'Will increase a large amount'; 'Will increase an extremely large amount']

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2017). *UK Poverty 2017: A Comprehensive Analysis of Poverty Trends and Figures*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Retrieved from <https://www.jrf.org.uk/file/50890/download?token=3jsCmyhA&filetype=full-report>.

<sup>2</sup> Quinn, N. (2005). *Finding Culture in Talk: A Collection of Methods*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>3</sup> Volmert, A., Gerstein Pineau, M., & Kendall-Taylor, N. (2016). *Talking about poverty: How experts and the public understand poverty in the United Kingdom*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute. Retrieved from [http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/assets/files/PDF/JRF\\_UK\\_Poverty\\_MTG\\_2016.pdf](http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/assets/files/PDF/JRF_UK_Poverty_MTG_2016.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> We also tested the *Compassion* and *Economic Strength* values with an economy frame. *Compassion* worked and *Economic Strength* had no effects.

<sup>5</sup> Benford, R., & Snow, D.A. (2000). Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment. *Annual Review of Sociology* 26, 611–639.