

Published: January 12, 2026, 5:15 pm

It is rare for this blog to promote anything related to the Adam Smith Institute, but there have to be exceptions to every rule. This week, they published new survey data on attitudes of young people towards authoritarianism and democracy.

[As they noted:](#)

As part of a series of polls into 18-30-year-olds, dubbed the Anxious Generation, Adam Smith Insights has explored young Britons' views of our political system.

The nationally representative poll of 18-30-year-olds reveals shocking levels of disillusionment with both political leaders and democratic institutions. The findings show that a significant number of young people no longer believe democracy is working and many would prefer a system where leaders can act without checks and balances.

According to the polling, a full third (33%) of 18-30 year olds say they would prefer an authoritarian system led by a decisive figure, even if it meant sacrificing some democratic freedoms. Just under half (48%) express clear support for the current democratic system.

Across all parties polled, young Labour and Conservative voters are on the same page. Over a third of 18-30-year-old voters from both parties say they would prefer an authoritarian system to our democratic one. But Reform voters are more adamant - half of them would prefer to sacrifice some freedoms for an authoritarian with fast decision-making ability.

It is unsurprising that so many young people feel disillusioned with the status quo. 59% of 18-30-year-olds believe politicians are not addressing the issues that matter most to them.

Their key findings are worth sharing:

A third of young people prefer authoritarianism over democracy

*

33% would prefer an authoritarian system with a strong leader who can act quickly,

even at the cost of democratic freedoms.

*

48% still prefer the current democratic system, while 20% remain undecided.

Support for authoritarianism is strongest among young Reform voters

*

50% of 18-30-year-olds who voted for Reform in 2024 would prefer an authoritarian system with a leader who could make decisions quickly, even at the cost of some democratic freedoms.

*

Only 33% of 18-30-year-olds who voted Reform in 2024 prefer the current democratic system.

*

34% of 18-30-year-olds who voted Labour in 2024 and 39% of 18-30-year-olds who voted for the Conservatives would support an authoritarian system.

59% of 18-30-year-olds feel that politicians are not addressing the issues that matter most.

*

White 18-30-year-olds show the highest levels of disillusionment, with a 62% expressing dissatisfaction with politicians.

*

Black 18-30-year-olds show the highest levels of satisfaction with only 34% expressing dissatisfaction with politicians.

Among young people, this disillusionment is cross-party.

*

54% of 18-30-year-old Labour voters are dissatisfied with how politicians address key issues.

*

52% of 18-30-year-olds Conservative voters share this dissatisfaction.

*

66% of 18-30-year-olds Reform voters feel the same way.

At one level, I want to be shocked by these findings, but at another, I am not.

What is very apparent is that both the Tories, over a period of 14 years, and now Labour have treated the people of this country with complete indifference.

The wages of most people have, in fact, stagnated.

The cost of living, and most particularly that part which might be described as being imposed by extraction, has risen.

By extraction, I refer to the cost of housing, rent, mortgages, essential utilities, transport and food. All of these are areas where monopoly power has been used to exploit the majority of people to advance the interests of a few in society, and inequality has risen as a result.

Politicians appear to be in the pockets of those people who have gained. They appear to have no interest in those who have lost.

People are angry as a consequence.

They also feel profoundly unrepresented when we have a political system that can return to power a Labour Party that is supported by no more than 20% of the people in this country, but who act as if they think they have the right to do whatever they wish without ever taking into consideration the concerns of anyone else, and most particularly, those who are suffering the most as a result of the austerity that they are so dedicated to supplying.

In that case, of course, people are disenchanted and angry.

And, of course, they are looking for political alternatives.

If supposed democratic politicians, such as those leading Labour, cannot understand this, they are either authoritarian already, or they have abandoned both the interest of democracy and the people of this country.

It is this which really worries me. This poll shows that democracy is in very deep trouble in this country. But what is most worrying is that those with the power to restore democracy are choosing to ignore the action that this evidence requires of them. And that is unforgivable, but also leads to the very plausible conclusion that this might be precisely what Labour's current leadership intends.