



The political importance of private renters

**Voters' views on renting,
as surveyed by Opinium for
the Renters' Reform Coalition**

Renters' Reform Coalition members



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ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS FOR REFORM NOW


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Safer Renting


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Foreword



The next Prime Minister will need to appeal to a broad electoral coalition: not just traditional Conservative Party voters such as retirees and people living in the South of England, but also those in 'red wall' constituencies who voted Conservative for the first time at the 2019 General Election.

The Renters' Reform Coalition speaks to far too many people unhappy with the status quo. There is an urgent opportunity for a new Prime Minister to tackle the state of permanent insecurity experienced by a group who make up a fifth of UK households: private renters.

Prioritising the Renters' Reform Bill is a sure-fire way for the new Prime Minister to appeal to all voters – including past, current and future Conservative voters.

For the first time, the polling summarised in this briefing demonstrates the sheer scale of public support for reforming private renting. **79% of the public, 80% of Conservative voters and 86% of voters aged over 65 support greater protections for private renters.**

In particular, they want to see an end to no-fault evictions, through measures that would require landlords to provide proof of the reasons used to evict tenants. These results are comforting to those of us campaigning for a fairer private rented sector. But they shouldn't be a surprise.

Modern conservative principles aren't just about the free market, they're about sensible regulation and creating equal opportunities. An unregulated rental market flouts all of these principles, as well as hugely increasing the mental and financial strain of the cost-of-living crisis for those who face eviction with little notice and no justification.

We welcome the government's Renters' Reform White Paper, published in June 2022, as a decisive step in the journey to a better system of private renting. We are calling on the next Prime Minister to bring forward the Renters' Reform Bill as a priority. Renters have waited three years for the government to end 'no-fault' evictions, meanwhile a lack of security and soaring rents are making private renting intolerable.

There is still a way to go to ensure the Renters' Reform Bill delivers the transformation to private renting that's desperately needed. The Renters' Reform Coalition looks forward to working with parliamentarians and our partners across sectors to secure the reforms that renters are waiting for.

About the Renters' Reform Coalition



The Renters' Reform Coalition is a coalition of 20 organisations committed to working together to ensure the Renters' Reform Bill delivers the safety, security and improvements needed for the 11 million private renters in England.

We are united in our mission to reform the private rented sector so that everyone who relies on it for their home can prosper. Our members have a broad range of expertise on housing and associated issues. They represent all parts of the renters' movement, and campaign for policy change both inside and outside of the Renters' Reform Coalition.

We have come together to offer solutions for change, with the purpose of shaping the government's approach to the Renters' Reform Bill.

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About Opinium



Opinium is an award-winning strategic insight agency built on the belief that in a world of uncertainty and complexity, success depends on the ability to stay on pulse of what people think, feel and do.

They work with organisations to define and overcome strategic challenges – helping them to get to grips with the world in which their brands operate.

They use approach and methodology to deliver robust insights, strategic counsel and targeted recommendations that generate change and positive outcomes.

Methodology



The Renters' Reform Coalition commissioned Opinium to survey 4000 English adults. Of this total, 1329 rented their homes, and 664 of these were private renters. Fieldwork was conducted between 2-10 June 2022.

All data has been weighted to be representative of age, gender, region, 2019 General Election vote, EU referendum vote, ethnicity, political attention, highest education qualification, and working status.

Key findings

1. "Conservative renters" are a particularly important voter group because they have been moving away from the Conservatives since 2019. A majority of renters who backed the Conservative Party in 2019 have either switched to another party or are undecided.
2. Voters as a whole are much more likely to believe there should be more flexibility and security for tenants, even if this comes at the expense of private landlords. This is also true of key voter groups, such as 'red wall' voters and voters in the North of England who voted to leave the European Union.
3. Voters think the dramatic increase in private renting in England has been bad for the country, especially when it comes to the overall quality of housing, the personal financial situation of those living in rented accommodation, and local communities.
4. Voters, including Conservative and 'red wall' voters, are supportive of all 11 pro-tenant policies we tested.

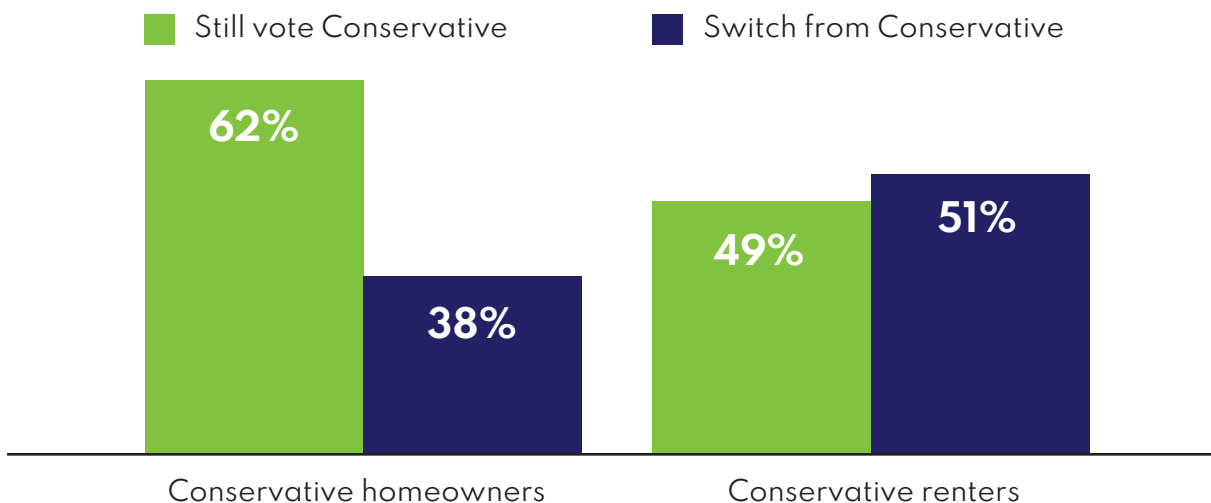
The political importance of private renters



Historically, private renters have often been overlooked as part of the Conservative Party electoral coalition, mainly because they are in the minority. While approximately one in three adults in England rents, this falls to just one in four of those who backed the Conservatives at the last election.

However, this analysis misses a critical element. Elections are decided by swing voters – the people who voted for you at the last election but might consider defecting from you next time.

This polling data indicates that renters are currently much more likely to be defecting away from the Conservatives and are disproportionately responsible for their recent drop in the polls.



Of those who voted Conservative at the 2019 General Election and own their home, 62% would still vote for the Party, while 38% have switched away or are now undecided. Among those who rent their home, 49% have stuck with the Conservatives, while a majority (51%) have switched away.

Among private renters more specifically, 47% have stuck with the Conservatives, while 53% have switched away from the Party. 12% of private renters who backed the Conservatives at the last election now say they would vote Labour instead.

This is equivalent to 1.8 million renters who backed the Conservative Party in 2019 now looking elsewhere to place their vote. While private renters may be a minority of the Conservative electoral coalition, they are a minority that the party would not have won a majority without.

That they are moving away from the Conservative Party quicker than homeowners shows why Conservative private renters are going to be critical in deciding who wins the next election.

Voters are “Team Renter”



Putting aside the political importance of Conservative private renters as a voter group, it is also important to note that voters as a whole are on the side of private renters over landlords.

The flexibility versus security debate

We gave respondents two statements to try and measure general feeling towards private renters and landlords:

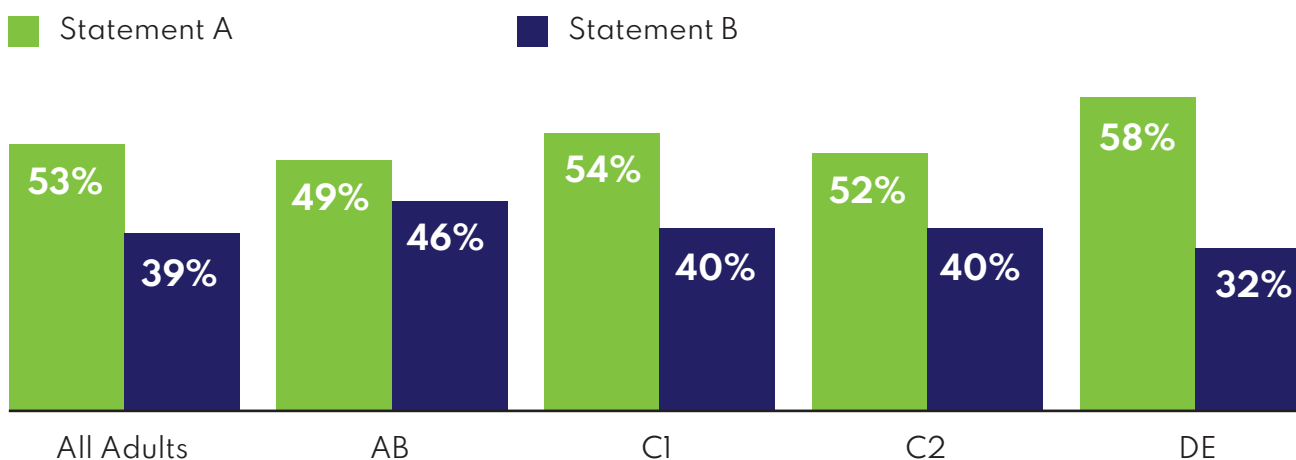
STATEMENT A (pro tenant) – “Tenants who are renting from private Landlords need security in their tenancy, so once they have decided to rent a property, they should be able to stay for as long as they like unless there is a justifiable reason for evicting them (such as damage to the property or anti social behaviour).”

STATEMENT B (pro landlord) – “Private Landlords need flexibility with the properties that they own, so if they want to have short term tenancy agreements (such as a few months or up to a year) with their tenants they should be allowed to do so and to remove tenants from their property at the end of that period.”

By 53% to 39%, voters picked the pro tenant statement over the pro and lord statement.

While homeowners were divided (44% to 49% pro landlord), renters were overwhelmingly pro-tenant (71% to 22%).

Given this, there was wide support for statement A from most demographic groups – and all significant political groups. People from all social grades were more likely to select the pro tenant statement. Support was weakest among the top AB social group and highest among the CI and DE groups.



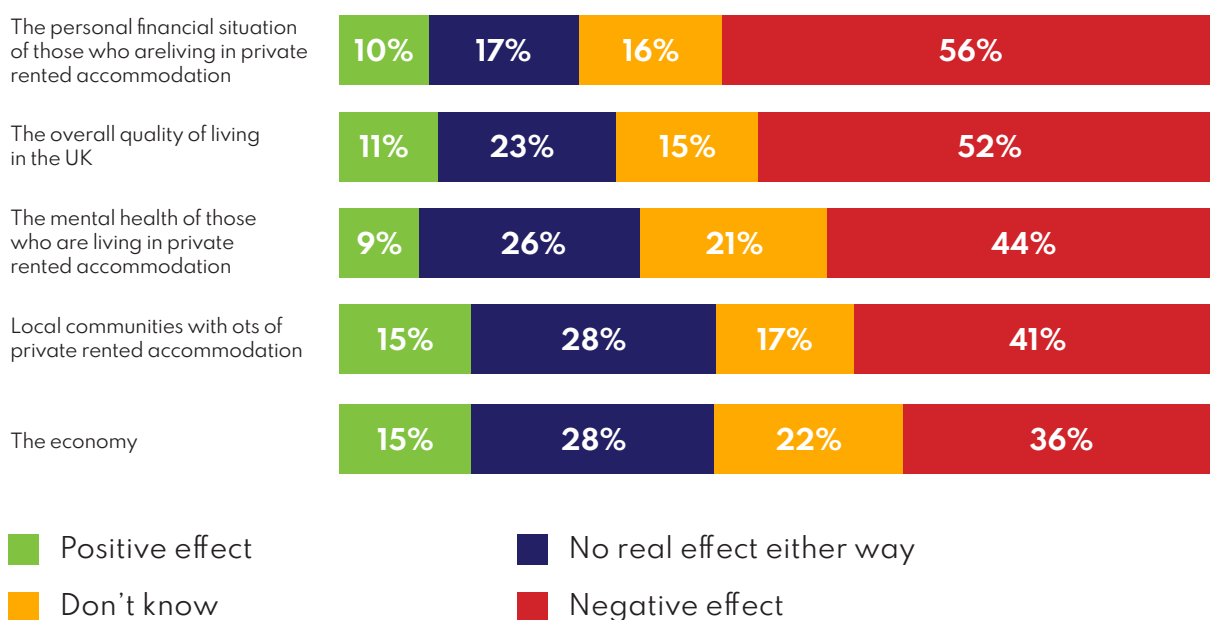
There was also an important regional divide with voters in the North and Midlands being more likely to select the pro tenant statement. Because of this, critical voter groups were also more likely to pick the pro tenant statement, including 'red wall' voters (60% to 30%) and voters in the North of England who voted to leave the European Union (55% to 39%).

While Conservative voters were as likely to select the pro landlord statement (47%) as the pro tenant statement (47%), they are still more likely to believe that private landlords have "too much flexibility...at the expense of the security for tenants who rent from private landlords" (32%) than believe that tenants have "too much security...at the expense of flexibility for private landlords" (20%).

People think the increase in people private renting has been bad for Britain

Perhaps one of the key driving forces behind this is a view that the increase in people private renting has had a negative effect on Britain.

Across all the five areas we tested, people are much more likely to think an increase in private renting has had a negative effect than a positive effect, including on the personal financial situation of those who are living in private rented accommodation (56% to 10%), the overall quality of housing in the UK (52% to 11%), the mental health of those who are living in private rented accommodation (44% to 9%), local communities with lots of private rented accommodation (41% to 15%), and the economy (36% to 15%).



This trend is consistent across all voter groups. Those who voted Conservative at the last election also thought the increase in private renting has had a negative effect on all five areas, as well as leave voters and those who live in the red wall.

Those living in 'red wall' constituencies thought that the increase in private renting has had a negative impact on local communities by 45% to 10%.

What is the biggest problem to fix?



Overwhelmingly, voters think the biggest problem with private renting in the UK is the high rent costs (54%). Nearly three quarters (73%) of English voters think this has got worse over the last decade, while just 6% think it has got better. There isn't a political divide on this, with 72% of Conservative voters also thinking it has got worse under a Conservative government.

However, while high rent is clearly the biggest issue, people are concerned about all aspects of private renting. Two thirds (67%) think a lack of security for private renters is a serious problem, while 74% think poor quality homes in the private sector is.

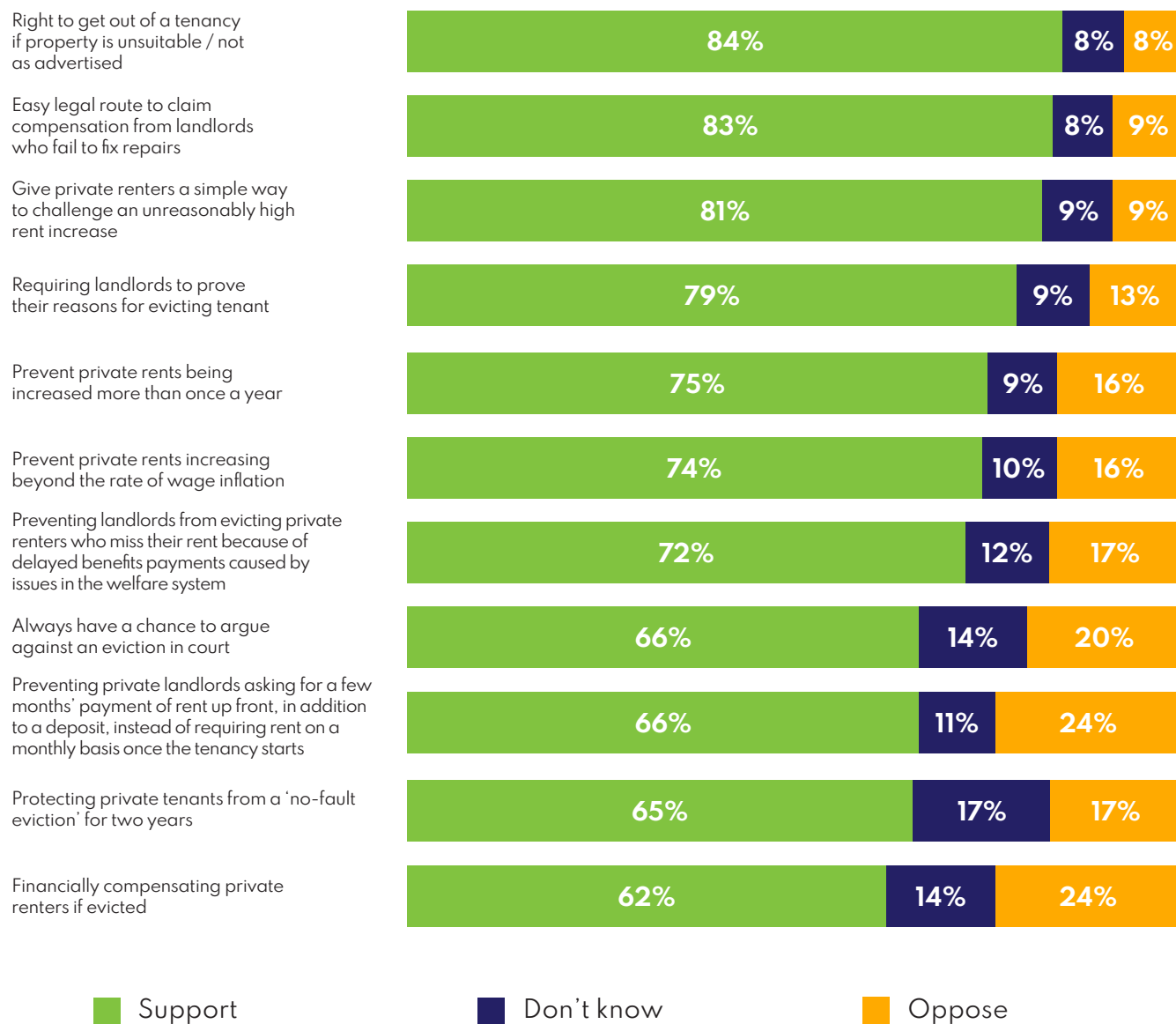
What policies do voters support?



Finally, while voters are overwhelmingly "Team Renter" it is also important to test the strength of these opinions. One of the ways to do is to see which renter-supporting policies they would back. To do this, we tested the following 11 policies:

1. Preventing private landlords asking for a few months' payment of rent up front, in addition to a deposit, instead of requiring rent on a monthly basis once the tenancy starts
2. Preventing landlords from evicting private renters who miss their rent because of delayed benefits payments caused by issues in the welfare system
3. Requiring landlords who want to evict a private renter to first prove their reasons for doing so
4. Ensuring private renters always have a chance to argue against an eviction in court, no matter what reason the landlord gives for evicting them
5. Giving private renters an easy legal route to claim compensation from landlords who fail to fix repairs in their home
6. Give private renters a simple, quick, and easy way to challenge a rent increase that they believe to be unreasonably high
7. Prevent private rents being increased more than once a year
8. Prevent private rents increasing beyond the rate of wage inflation
9. Protecting private tenants from a 'no-fault eviction' for the first two years of their tenancy
10. Give private renters the right to get out of a tenancy within three months if they find the property to be unsuitable or not as advertised
11. Financially compensating private renters if they are evicted because the landlord wants to sell / refurbish the property, or move themselves or a family member into the property

A majority of people supported each policy, including a majority of Conservative 2019 voters, a majority of those living in 'red wall' constituencies, and a majority of people in the North who voted to leave the European Union.



The most controversial policy was the final one, “Financially compensating private renters if they are evicted because the landlord wants to sell / refurbish the property, or move themselves or a family member into the property”, but even then, 62% of respondents supported it, over twice the 24% who opposed.

Red wall voters supported it by 67% to 21%, while Conservative voters supported it by 56% to 30%. Leave voters in the north of England supported it by 58% to 28%.



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