Article

Measuring national well-being: An analysis of social capital in the UK

This article provides a baseline analysis of social capital in the UK, using the latest available data. The data are based on 25 headline measures proposed by ONS, which cover four key aspects of social capital: personal relationships, social network support, civic engagement and trust and cooperative norms.

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1 . Introduction

This article gives a baseline assessment of social capital in the UK using the latest data available. The data are based on the draft headline measures proposed by ONS in July 2014, and further developed following user consultation (ONSb, November 2014). The 25 measures have been developed using a framework that covers four key aspects of social capital: personal relationships, social network support, civic engagement and trust and cooperative norms.

In general terms, social capital represents social connections and all the benefits they generate. Social capital is also associated with civic participation, civic-minded attitudes and values which are important for people to cooperate, such as tolerance or trust. "Social capital is the glue that holds societies together and without which there can be no economic growth or human well-being" (Grootaert, 1998). Without the social connections that link people to each other and lead them to exchange resources, without trust and other cooperative norms of behaviours, society could not function. The networks of individual relationships with family and friends, local community and through civic engagement, form the fabric of a cohesive society.

Recent government evidence, submitted by the Cabinet Office to the UK Parliament's Environmental Audit Committee as part of their inquiry on well-being, recognised that social capital is one of the three pillars of sustainable development to be considered together with natural capital and human capital. It highlighted the need for better evidence and further in-depth research to better understand social capital. The current ONS work, as part of the Measuring National Well-being Programme, is helping to build the evidence-base to better understand social capital, using data from existing sources.

ONS will continue to develop and refine its measures on social capital based on feedback from users and plan to carry out further analysis, in particular to highlight inequalities in social capital.

2 . Key points

- Around 1 in 10 people (11%) in the UK reported feeling lonely all, most, or more than half of the time in 2011/12

- Just over a third of people in the UK reported that they wish they could spend more time with their family (36%) and have more social contacts (36%) in 2011/12

- Nearly 1 in 5 people (19%) in the UK reported looking after or giving special help to someone sick, disabled or elderly inside their household (7%), outside their own household (10%) or both (1%) in 2012/13

- Nearly a fifth (19%) of people in the UK had given unpaid help or worked as a volunteer in a local, national or international organisation or charity in the last 12 months in 2012/13

- Half of people (49%) in the UK reported being very or quite interested in politics in 2012/13

- Around two-thirds (65%) of people in the UK thought people in their neighbourhood could be trusted in 2011/12. Nearly three-quarters of people in the UK felt people in their neighbourhood get along with each other (72%) and are willing to help each other (71%) in 2011/12

3 . Personal relationships

Table 1: Headline measures for Personal Relationships

Measure	Geographical coverage	Source	Latest year	Latest data
Proportion of people who have at least one close friend	United Kingdom	Understanding Society	2011 /12	95%
Proportion of people who meet socially with friends, relatives or work colleagues at least once a week	United Kingdom	European Social Survey	2012 /13	63%
Proportion of people who have felt lonely all, most or more than half of the time (over previous two weeks)	United Kingdom	Eurofound, European Quality of Life survey	2011 /12	11%
Proportion of people who belong to a social network website	United Kingdom	Understanding Society	2011 /12	46%
Average rating of satisfaction with family life	United Kingdom	Eurofound, European Quality of Life survey	2011 /12	8.2 out of 10
Average rating of satisfaction with social life	United Kingdom	Eurofound, European Quality of Life survey	2011 /12	7.1 out of 10
Proportion of people who regularly stop and talk with people in neighbourhood	United Kingdom	Understanding Society	2011 /12	66%

This aspect of social capital aims to measure characteristics of personal relationships, such as the composition and the size of people's networks, or people's satisfaction with their relationships. The relationships an individual has with relatives and friends (described as 'strong ties' or 'bonding ties'), work colleagues or neighbours (described as 'weak ties' or 'bridging ties') are all important for personal well-being.

'People who have close friends and confidants, friendly neighbours and supportive co-workers are less likely to experience sadness, loneliness, low self-esteem and problems with eating and sleeping... Subjective well-being is best predicted by the breadth and depth of one's social connections' (Helliwell and Putnam, 2004).
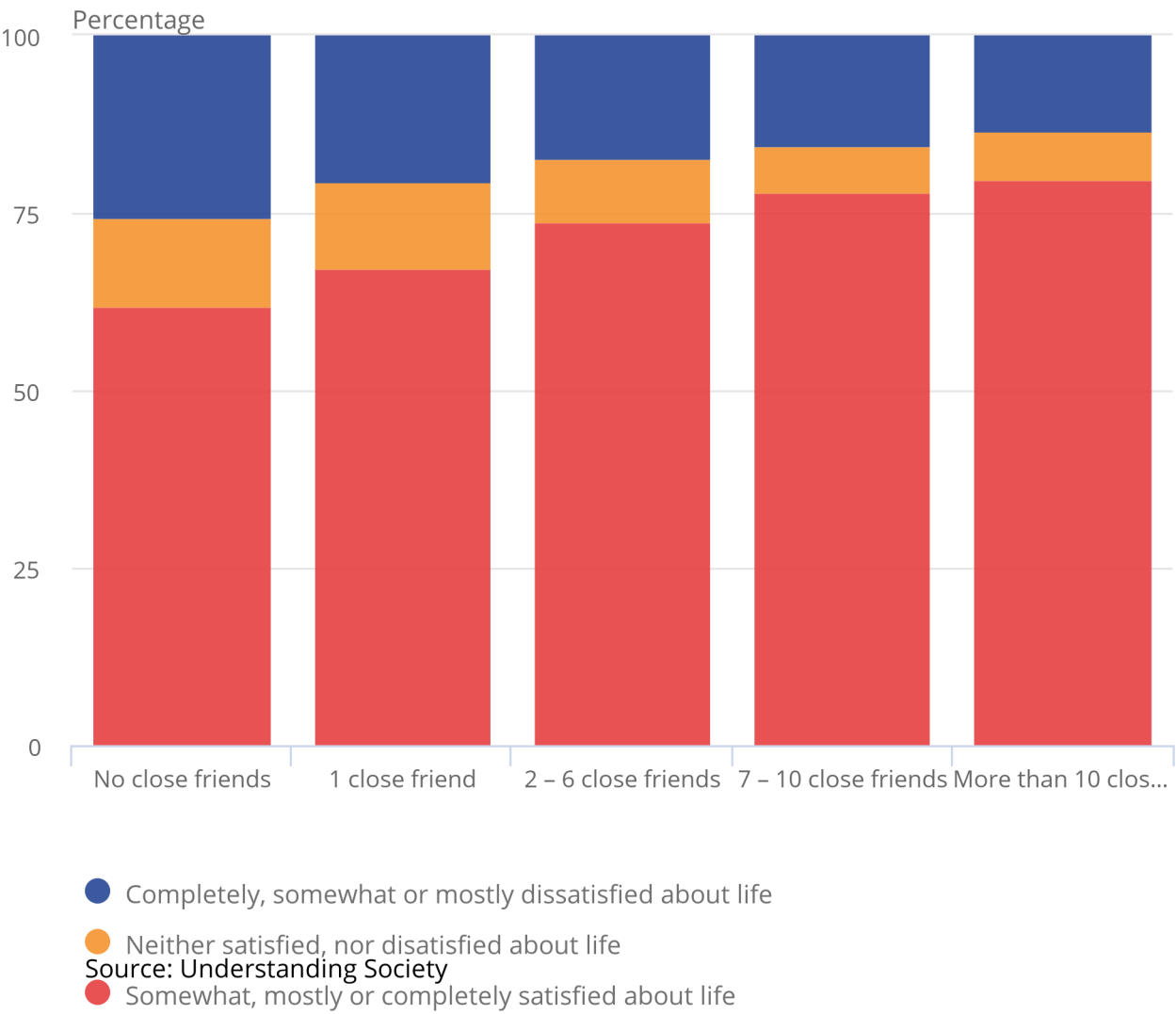
Friends and relatives

One important aspect of personal relationships is the size of people's networks such as the number of close friends. Most people (95%) reported having at least one close friend, with a majority (68%) having between 2 and 6 close friends (Source: Understanding Society, 2011/12). The proportion of people reporting being dissatisfied with their life increases as the number of close friends decreases. A quarter (26%) of people with no close friends reported being mostly, somewhat or completely dissatisfied about their life compared to 21% of those having 1 close friend, 17% of those having 2-6 close friends and 14% of those having more than 10 close friends (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Overall life satisfaction by number of close friends, 2011/12

United Kingdom

Figure 1: Overall life satisfaction by number of close friends, 2011/12

United Kingdom

Percentage

- ● Completely, somewhat or mostly dissatisfied about life
- ● Neither satisfied, nor disatisfied about life
Source: Understanding Society
- ● Somewhat, mostly or completely satisfied about life

Source: Understanding Society

The frequency of contact with others has been highlighted as an important indicator of people's well-being (The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2013b and 2011). Just over a third of people reported that they wish they could spend more time with their family (36%) and have more social contacts (36%) (Source: European Quality of Life Survey, 2011/12).

A large majority reported being in touch (by visiting, telephoning or any other mode of contact) with their closest friend very regularly, either on most days (34%), or at least once a week (38%) (Source: Understanding Society, 2011/12).

According to the European Social Survey 2012/13, 63% of people met socially with friends, relatives or colleagues at least once a week, but 13% of people did so less than once a month or never. The main reasons for not going out socially or visiting friends were: the lack of time (as mentioned by 31% of those who did not go out socially), a health condition, illness or impairment or disability (26%), financial reasons (19%) and caring responsibilities (18%), or no one to go with (9%) (Source: Understanding Society, 2011/12).

Loneliness

Social exclusion is a growing concern across Europe (Eurofound, 2012), with new policy measures required to tackle its causes and effects. Around 1 in 10 people (11%) reported feeling lonely all, most, or more than half of the time (Source: European Quality of Life Survey, 2011/12). There was a strong relationship between loneliness and other negative experiences, such as feeling left out of society, feeling that things done in life are not worthwhile and feeling a lack of recognition by others (Figure 2).
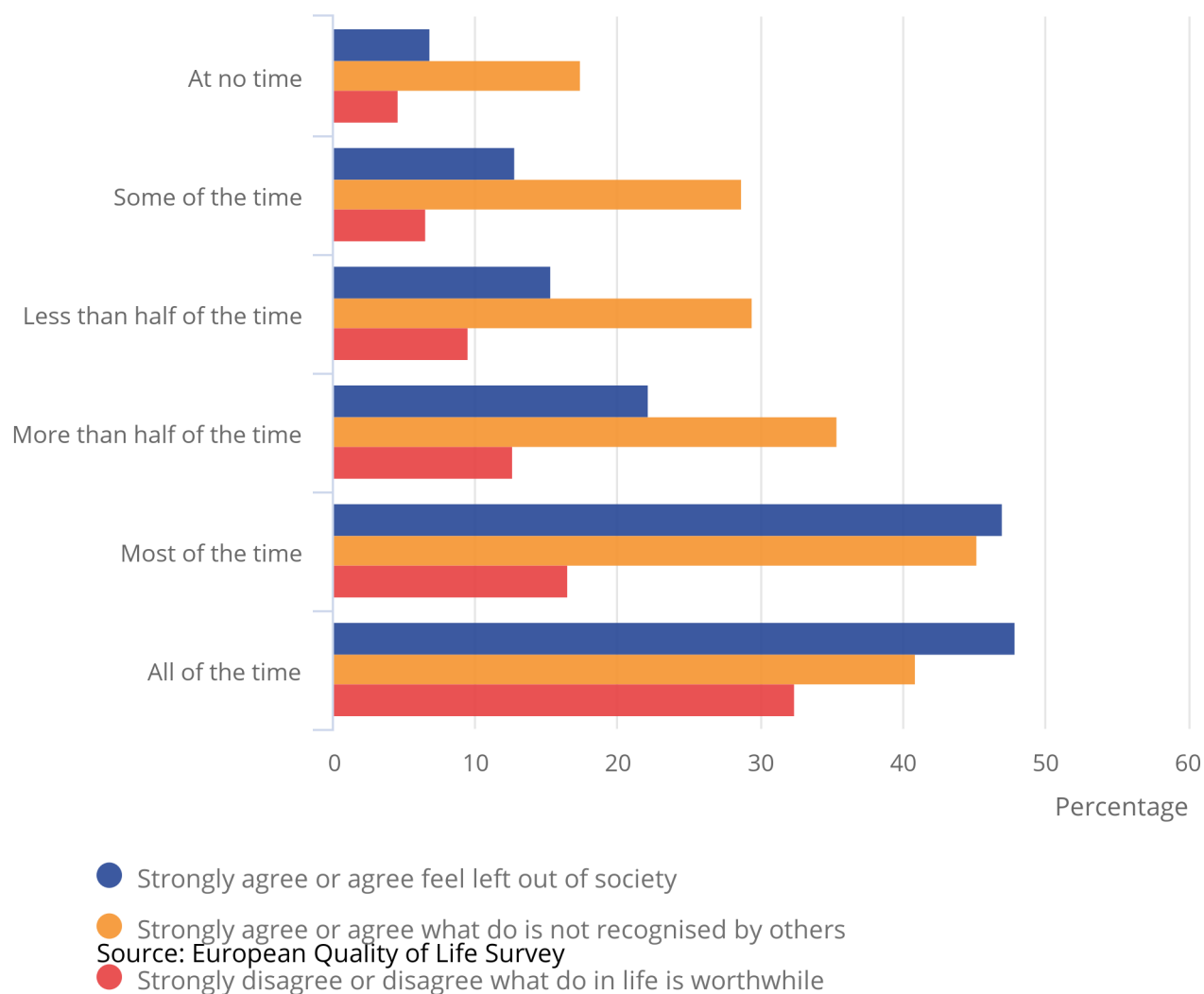
Among those reporting feeling lonely all of the time, nearly half (48%) also reported feeling left out of society, while 4 out of 10 (41%) reported feeling that what they do is not recognised by others and 3 out of 10 (32%) feeling things they do in their life are not worthwhile. In comparison, among those reporting never feeling lonely, 7% reported feeling left out of society, 17% feeling that what they do is not recognised by others and 5% feeling that what they do in their life is not worthwhile.

Figure 2: People's negative personal well-being by feeling of loneliness, 2011/12

United Kingdom

Figure 2: People's negative personal well-being by feeling of loneliness, 2011/12

United Kingdom

● Strongly agree or agree feel left out of society

● Strongly agree or agree what do is not recognised by others
Source: European Quality of Life Survey
● Strongly disagree or disagree what do in life is worthwhile

Source: European Quality of Life Survey

Social Networking

Belonging to a social network website could help build social capital, by maintaining links with family and friends and widening existing social networks. Half of people (46%) reported belonging to a social website (Source: Understanding Society, 2011/12). Among those who belonged to a social website, half of people (53%) spent less than an hour per day on week days interacting with friends through social websites, while a quarter (24%) spent between 1-3 hours per day interacting with friends through social websites on week days.

Quality of relationships

Subjective measures of satisfaction could reflect the quality of relationships an individual has with family and friends. Satisfaction with both family life and social life has been shown to have a positive correlation with life satisfaction and happiness (Eurofound, 2012). The average ratings for satisfaction with family life and social life (as published in the National Well-being Wheel of Measures) were 8.2 and 7.1, respectively, out of 10 (Source: European Quality of Life Survey, 2011/12). Figure 3 shows the distribution of ratings for satisfaction with family life and with social life. A higher proportion of people (53%) rated their satisfaction with family life as very high (rating of 9 or 10 out of 10), compared to their satisfaction with social life (30%). A higher proportion of people (15%) rated their satisfaction with their social life as low (rating of 1 to 4 out of 10), compared to their satisfaction with family life (6%).

Figure 3: Distribution of satisfaction with family life and satisfaction with social life ratings, 2011/12

United Kingdom

Figure 3: Distribution of satisfaction with family life and satisfaction with social life ratings, 2011/12

United Kingdom
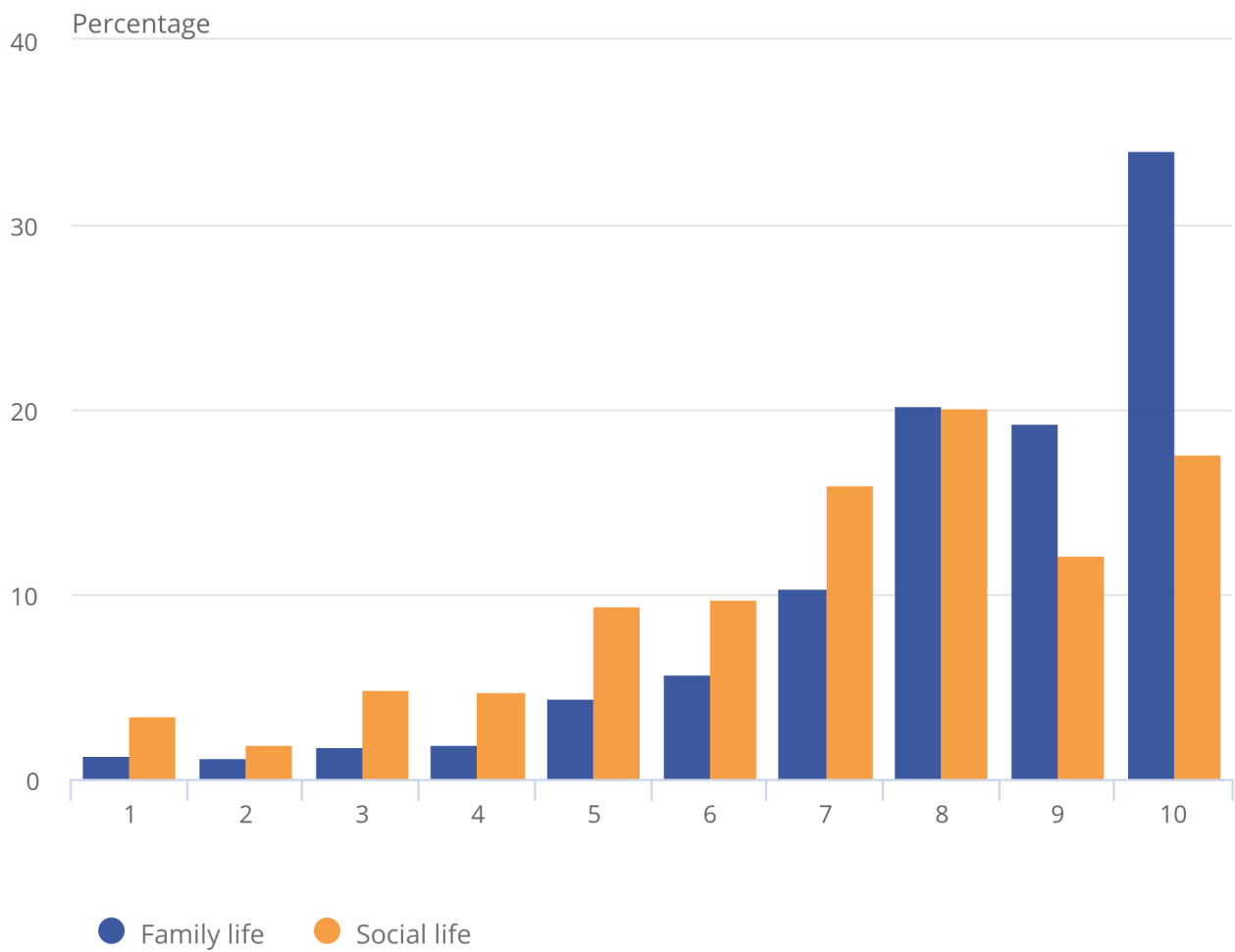
Source: European Quality of Life Survey

Source: European Quality of Life Survey

Notes:

1. 1 = very dissatisfied

2. 10 = very satisifed

Talking to neighbours

Around 2 out of 3 people (66%) reported that they regularly stop and talk with people in their neighbourhood (Source: Understanding Society, 2011/12). A large proportion (85%) of those for whom having a local friend is important, reported stopping and talking regularly with people in their neighbourhood. In comparison, only 24% of those for whom having local friends is not important reported stopping and talking regularly with people in their neighbourhood (Figure 4).
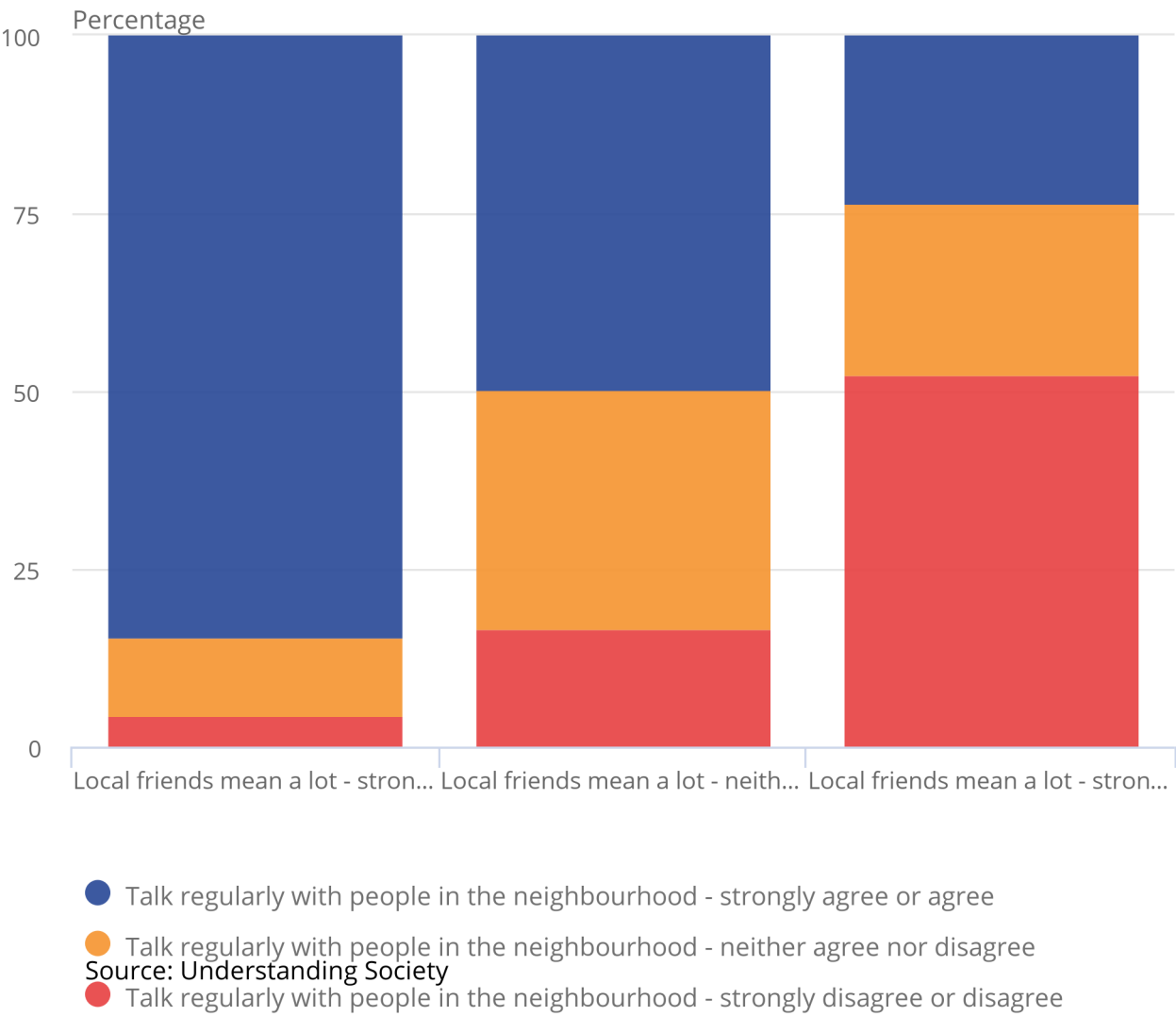
It has been highlighted before that for people to form interconnected social networks in their local area, residential stability is very important (Buke and Rabe, 2011). Data from Understanding Society 2011/12 suggest that most people (94%) liked their present neighbourhood and 67% of people planned to stay in their neighbourhood.

Figure 4: Talk regularly with people in neighbourhood by local friends mean a lot, 2011/12

United Kingdom

Percentage

[Bar chart with three stacked bars, y-axis from 0 to 100]

- Local friends mean a lot - stron…
- Local friends mean a lot - neith…
- Local friends mean a lot - stron…

● Talk regularly with people in the neighbourhood - strongly agree or agree

● Talk regularly with people in the neighbourhood - neither agree nor disagree

Source: Understanding Society

● Talk regularly with people in the neighbourhood - strongly disagree or disagree

Source: Understanding Society

4 . Social network support

Table 2: Headline measures for Social Network Support

Measure	Geographical coverage	Source	Latest year	Latest data
Proportion of people who have a spouse, family member or friend to rely on if they have a serious problem	United Kingdom	Understanding Society	2010 /11	87%
Proportion of people who give special help to at least one sick, disabled or elderly person living or not living with them	United Kingdom	Understanding Society	2012 /13	19%
Proportion of parents who regularly receive or give practical or financial help from/to a child aged 16 or over not living with them	United Kingdom	Understanding Society	2011 /12	Receive: 42% Give: 63%
Proportion of people who borrow things and exchange favours with their neighbours	United Kingdom	Understanding Society	2011 /12	41%

Social network support is both about the perceived and the actual support that people give to and receive from others. Support can be derived from many different sources, such as family, friends and neighbours (but also more formally, from organisations). A strong support network can reflect the extent to which an individual has strong ties within his own social network of family, friends, and neighbours. There are different types of social support an individual can give or receive, such as emotional support, practical or financial support, but also advice or guidance.

Social support has been shown to be associated with better physical health (Uchino, 2009 and Uchino, 2004). People with higher social support have a lower risk of death (Uchino, 2004) and an increased likelihood of survival (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010). Social support is also associated with better mental health (Taylor, 2011). People with higher social support cope better with stressful times and are less likely to suffer from anxiety or depression (Taylor, 2011). The support provided by family, friends or neighbours has also an important economic value (ONS, 2013a; Understanding Society Insights, 2014).

Someone to rely on

Family and friends are important because of the support they can provide, either in times of need (because of a serious problem occurring), or on a more regular basis. It has been shown that perceived support is consistently linked to better mental health, independently from the actual support received (Uchino, 2009).
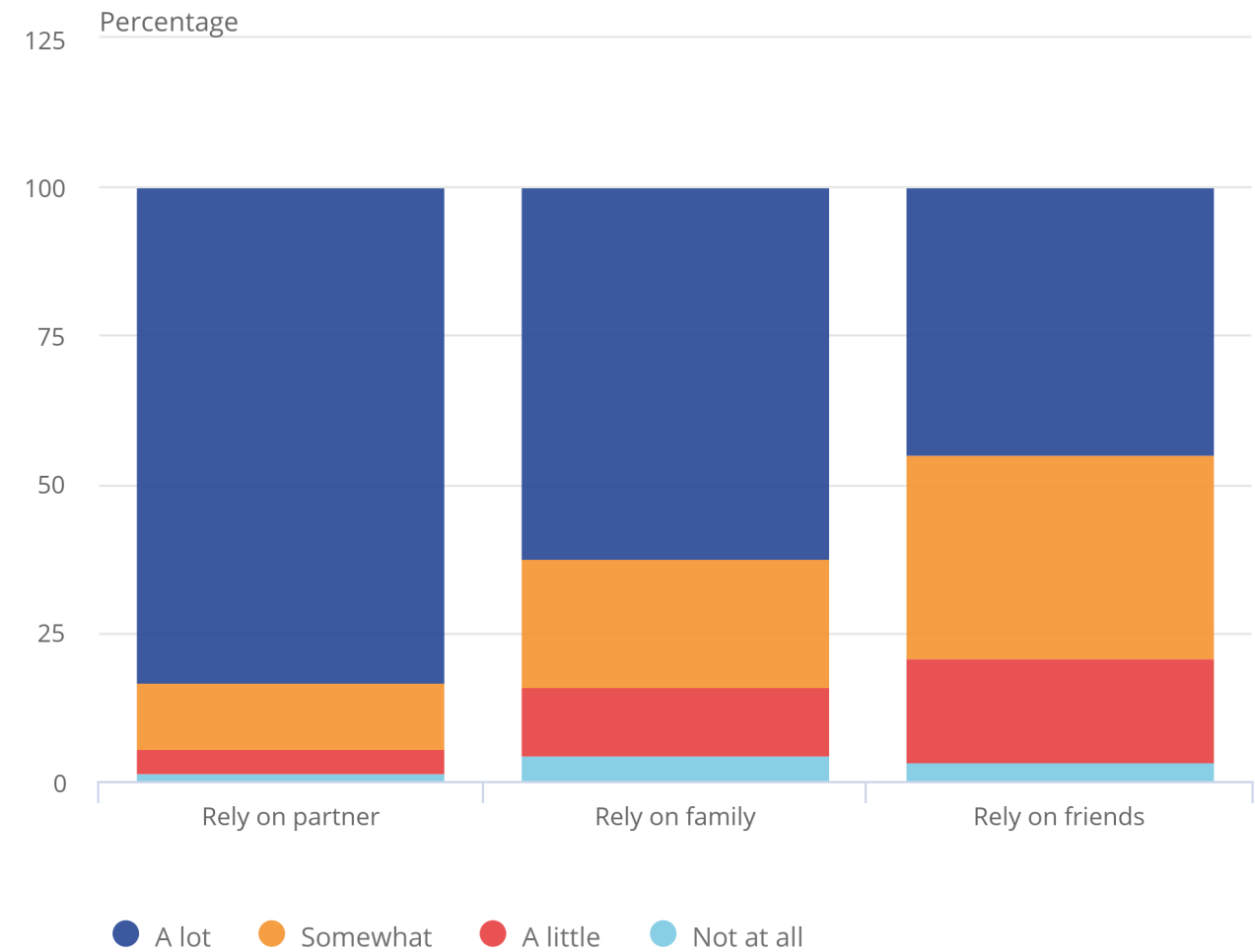
Most people (87%) reported feeling being able to rely a little, somewhat or a lot on their partner, family or friends in case of a serious problem (Source: Understanding Society, 2010/11). People reported being able to rely a lot on their partner (83%) and on their family (62%), but less than half of people (45%) felt they could also rely a lot on their friends (Figure 5).

United Kingdom

Figure 5: People's feeling of being able to rely on their partner, family or friends in case of a serious problem, 2010/11

United Kingdom

Percentage

Rely on partner Rely on family Rely on friends

● A lot ● Somewhat ● A little ● Not at all

Source: Understanding Society

Source: Understanding Society

Caring and family support

The UK care system is currently heavily dependent on the informal care provided by family and friends (Pickard, 2013), particularly in the context of an ageing population.

Nearly 1 in 5 people (19%) reported looking after, or giving special help, to someone sick, disabled or elderly inside their household (7%), outside their own household (10%) or both (1%). (Source: Understanding Society, 2012/13). Around 7 in 10 carers spent up to 19 hours a week caring, 1 out of 10 carers between 20 and 99 hours, and 1 out of 10 carers reported giving continuous care (100 hours or more per week) (Table 3).

Among those giving help to people outside their household, 3 out of 4 people (76%) gave help to one person only, usually a relative (78%), a friend or neighbour (19 %) or someone else through voluntary organisations and others (3%).

Table 3: Number of hours per week spent by informal carers (providing help to someone sick, disabled or elderly), 2012/13

United Kingdom	Percentage
Number of hours per week	**Informal carers**
0 – 4	38
5 – 9	19
10 – 19	13
20 – 34	7
35 – 49	3
50 – 99	2
More hours per week/continuous care	9
Variable number of hours per week	9

Source: Understanding Society

The different generations within a family can support each other by exchanging regular practical and/or financial help. This can be especially important in difficult economic times; it has been shown that the number of grandparent childcare hours have risen by nearly 35% between the recession years 2009-10 and 2010-11, for example (Understanding Society Insights, 2014).

Table 4 shows that a third of parents (32%) who had children over 16 living outside the household reported exchanging help (both giving and receiving help) with at least one of their children (Source: Understanding Society , 2011/12). Parents were more likely to give help to their children than receive help (63 % compared to 42%).

Table 4: Proportion of parents reporting giving help to at least one of their children and/or receiving help from at least one of their children over 16 living outside the household, 2011/12

United Kingdom				Percentage
		Parents receiving help from at least one of their children[1]		**Total**
		YES	NONE	
Parents giving help to at least one of their children[1]	YES	32	31	63
	NONE	10	27	37
Total		**42**	**58**	**100**

Source: Understanding Society

1. Children over 16 living outside the household

Table 5 gives details of the type of help given and received by parents. The most common type of help given to children was financial help (as reported by 31%) and looking after grand children (31%). It has been previously reported that 63% of all grandparents with a grandchild under 16 look after their grandchildren (Understanding Society Insights, 2014).

The most common type of help received from children was giving lifts in cars (24%) and shopping for them (19%) (Table 5). As many parents reported receiving help than giving help with decorating, gardening or house repairs (13%).

Table 5: Most common types of help parents receive from or give to children over 16, living outside the household, 2011/12

United Kingdom

	Help received from children [1]			Help given to children [1]	
Rank	Type	Percentage	Rank	Type	Percentage
1	Lifts in your car	24	1	Financial help	31
2	Shopping for them	19	2	Looking after grand-children	31
3	Providing/cooking meals	14	3	Providing/cooking meals	20
4	Decorating, gardening or house repairs	13	4	Lifts in your car	19
5	Dealing with personal affairs (eg. paying bills, writing letter)	6	5	Shopping for them	14

Source: Understanding Society

1. Children over 16 living outside the household

Support from neighbours

Aside from family and friends, neighbours can provide support, by looking after the house while away on holidays or lending things, for example. Around 4 out of 10 people (41%) strongly agreed or agreed that they borrow things and exchange favours with their neighbours (Source: Understanding Society, 2011/12). People were more likely to borrow things and exchange favours with their neighbours if they also reported regularly stopping and talking to their neighbours.
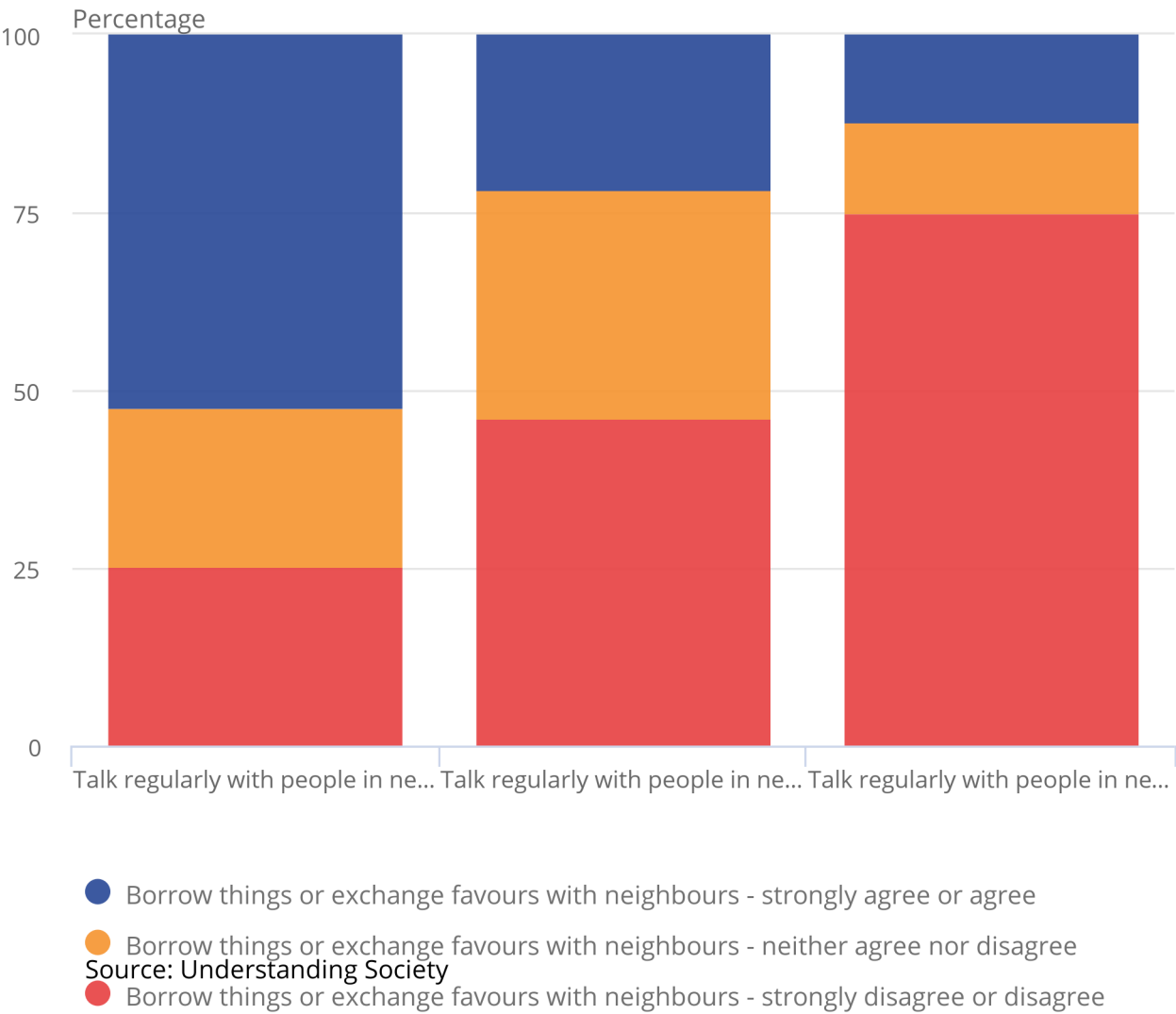
Half of those (52%) who reported regularly stopping and talking to their neighbours also borrowed things and exchanged favours with their neighbours. In comparison, only 1 in 10 people (12%) of those who did not regularly stop and talk with neighbours borrowed things and exchanged favours with their neighbours (Figure 6).

United Kingdom

Figure 6: Borrow things and exchange favours with neighbours by talk regularly with people in neighbourhood, 2011/12

United Kingdom

Percentage

[Stacked bar chart with three bars showing percentages from 0 to 100. X-axis labels: "Talk regularly with people in ne..." (repeated three times). Y-axis: 0, 25, 50, 75, 100]

● Borrow things or exchange favours with neighbours - strongly agree or agree

● Borrow things or exchange favours with neighbours - neither agree nor disagree

Source: Understanding Society

● Borrow things or exchange favours with neighbours - strongly disagree or disagree

Source: Understanding Society

5 . Civic engagement

Table 6: Headline measures for civic engagement

Measure	Geographical coverage	Source	Latest year	Latest data
Proportion of people who volunteered in the last 12 months	United Kingdom	Understanding Society	2012 /13	19%
Proportion of people who are members of organisations, whether political, voluntary, professional or recreational	United Kingdom	Understanding Society	2011 /12	52%
Proportion of people who have been involved in at least one social action project in their local area in the previous 12 months	England	Community Life Survey	2013 /14	18%
Proportion of people who definitely agree or tend to agree that they can influence decisions affecting their local area	England	Community Life Survey	2013 /14	34%
Proportion of people who voted in the UK General Elections	England	The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance	2010	61%
Proportion of people who have been involved in at least one political action in the previous 12 months	United Kingdom	Eurofound, European Quality of Life Survey	2011 /12	34%
Proportion of people who are very or quite interested in politics	United Kingdom	European Social Survey	2012 /13	49%

Civic engagement refers to "the actions and behaviours that can be seen as contributing positively to the collective life of a community or society" (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2013a). Civic engagement includes activities such as volunteering, political participation and other forms of community actions. Such activities are important for democratic and cohesive societies, and also have an important role in preventing social exclusion (Eurofound, 2012).

It has been suggested that high levels of civic engagement encourage more efficient and less corrupt public governance institutions (Putnam, 1993) and help individuals to develop their skills and social values (Putnam, 1993). As reported by the OECD (2011), 'civically engaged people tend to be happier (Morrow-Howell et al., 2003), report better health status (Borgovoni, 2008) and have a greater sense of purpose in life (Greenfield and Marks, 2004)'.

The data provided in this article gives more detail about the types and levels of civic engagement in the UK.

Volunteering

This aspect of social capital has been set out as a government priority by the Giving Green and White papers (Cabinet Office, 2011). Volunteering is important for personal well-being and benefits the society as a whole, by improving the lives of others, the community or the environment. Volunteering is an opportunity for people with very different backgrounds to work together. Volunteering is also important for the economy: the value of voluntary activity in the UK for 2012 has been estimated to be £23.9 billion, approximately 1.5% of GDP (ONS, 2013b).

In 2012/13, around one in five (19%) of people had given unpaid help or worked as a volunteer in a local, national or international organisation or charity in the last 12 months (Source: Understanding Society, 2012/13). This compares to 17% of people who reported volunteering in 2010/11.

Half (49%) of the volunteers reported doing something to help local, national or international organisations or charities at least once a week or more.

Around two-thirds (67%) of all people reported having donated money to charities or other organisations in the last 12 months (Source: Understanding Society, 2012/13). Half of those donating money to charities or other organisations (52%) did so at least monthly.

Membership of organisations

Organisations (whether political, voluntary, professional or recreational) are the social fabric that can create bonds between people who have common interests (for example, sport) and bring together people who have very different backgrounds. They play a very important role for democracy.

Half of people (52%) reported being members of organisations among those listed in Table 7 (Source: Understanding Society, 2011/12). Sports clubs were most popular (33%) followed by religious groups or church organisation, trade unions and professional organisations (all 21%). Only 4% of people reported being members of a political party.

Table 7: Proportion of people who are members of organisations by type of organisations (political, voluntary, professional or recreational), 2011/12

United Kingdom	Percentage
Organisations	**Members**
Sports club	33
Religious group or church organisation	21
Trade Unions	21
Professional organisation	21
Other	17
Social club/working men's club	12
Voluntary services group	11
Tenants/residents group or neighbourhood watch	8
Other community or civic group	6
Parents/school association	5
Environmental group	5
Pensioners group/organisation	4
Political party	4
Women's institute/townswomen guild	2
Women's group/feminist organisation	2

Source: Understanding Society

Social action and community engagement

The Community Life Survey Statistical Bulletin 2013-14 (Cabinet Office, 2014) describes social action as "people getting together to cover a community project in their local area", such as:

- Trying to set up a new service or amenity to help local residents

- Trying to stop the closure of local service or amenity

- Trying to stop something happening in the local area

- Running local services on a voluntary basis (e.g. childcare, youth services, parks and community centres)

- Organising a community event such as a street party.

Just under a fifth of people (18%) were involved in at least one social action project in their local area in England in 2013/14. This was a significant decrease compared to 2012/13, where 23% of people were involved in at least one social action project in their local area (Cabinet Office, 2014).

If individuals within a local area feel they can influence decisions in their local area, local community empowerment is more likely. This is where community empowerment refers to the process of local communities taking ownership and action for shaping the services and the environment in the area where they live.

In 2013/14, 34% of people felt they could influence decisions affecting their local area in England (Source: Community Life Survey). This is a significant decrease compared to all years since 2011 (Cabinet Office, 2014).

Political engagement

The proportion of people voting in UK General Elections as a proportion of those registered to vote, represents an important indicator of the vitality of a democracy and the degree of civic engagement. Voter turnout is part of the National Well-being Wheel of measures. 61% of people voted in the UK General Elections 2010 compared to 58% in 2005.

Around one-third of people (34%) reported having been involved in at least one political action in the previous 12 months (Source: European Quality of Life Survey, 2011/12). The most common type of political action, in which people got involved, was signing a petition, including an email or an online petition (29%), and contacting a politician or public official, other than routine contact, arising from use of public services (11%) (Table 8).

According to the European Social Survey 2012/13, 19% of people also reported having boycotted certain products in the previous 12 months. The boycott for political, ethical or environmental reasons is regularly characterised as an example of new political engagement (Yates, 2011).

Table 8: Proportion of people who have been involved in at least one political action in the previous 12 months, by type of political action, 2011/12

United Kingdom	Percentage
Type of political action	
Attended a meeting of a trade union, a political party or a political action	7
Attended a protest or demonstration	4
Signed a petition, including an email or an online petition	29
Contacted a politician or public official (other than routine contact arising from use of public services)	11
Any of above	34

Source: European Quality of Life Survey

Interest in politics is a subjective measure, which indicates how much people are engaged with the democratic system. Half of people (49%) reported being very or quite interested in politics, while a quarter (23%) reported not being interested at all (Source: European Social Survey, 2012/13).

There is a weak relationship between interest in politics and trust in politicians. Among those who rated their trust in politicians as low (ratings 0 to 4 out of 10), 46% were very or quite interested in politics. For those who rated their trust in politicians as medium (ratings 5 and 6 out of 10), 56% were very or quite interested in politics and for those who rated their trust in politicians as high or very high (ratings 7 to 10 out of 10), 57% were very or quite interested in politics (Source: European Social Survey, 2012/13).

However, there was a strong relationship between interest in politics and voting in the last national elections (Figure 7). 88% of those who said they were very interested in politics also reported voting in the last national elections, compared to only 43% of those who said they were not at all interested by politics (Source: European Social Survey, 2012/13).

United Kingdom

Figure 7: Voted in last national elections by interested in politics, 2012/13

United Kingdom

Percentage

Voted   Didn't Vote
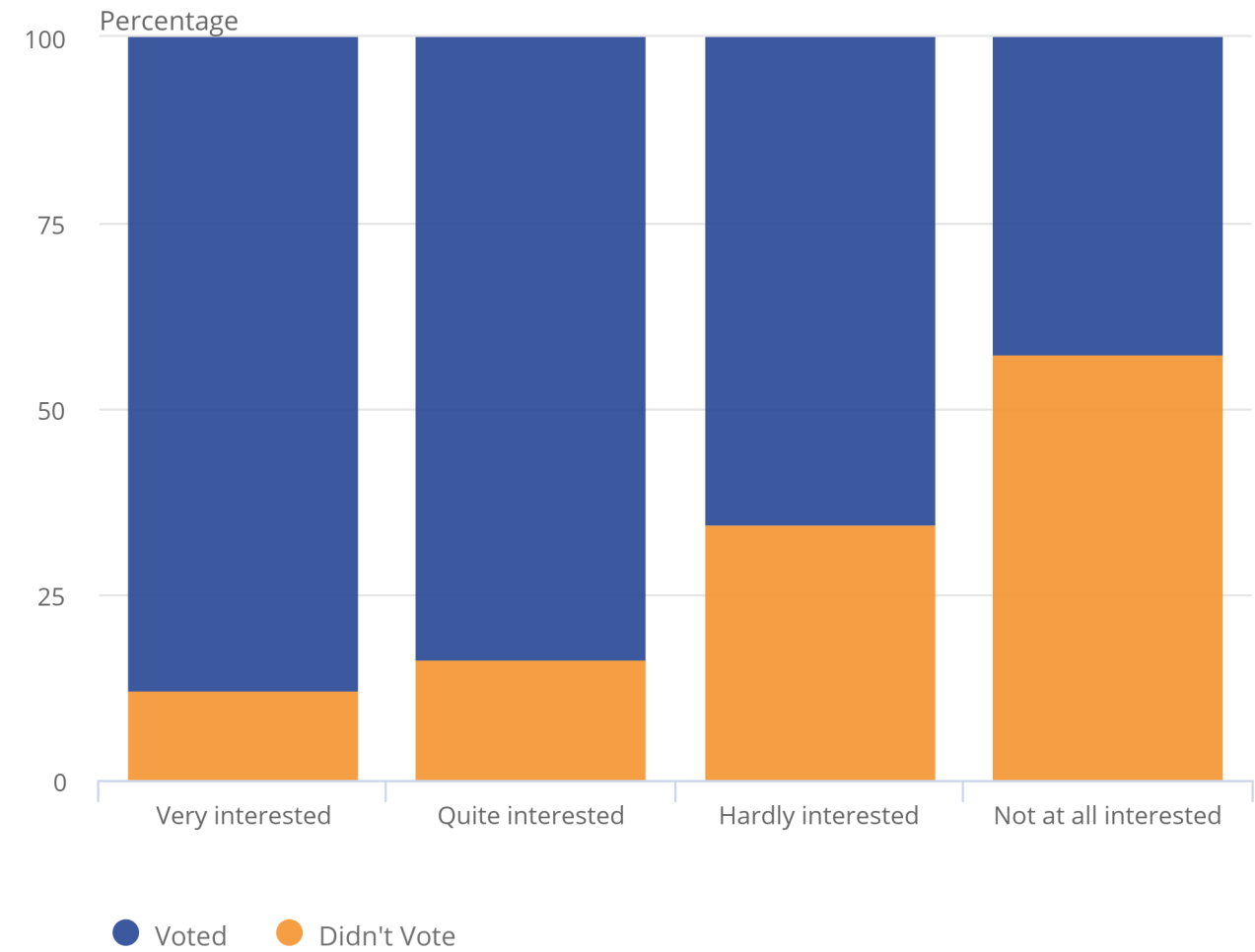
Source: European Social Survey

Source: European Social Survey

6 . Trust and cooperative norms

Table 9: Headline measures for Trust and Cooperative Norms

Measure	Geographical coverage	Source	Latest year	Latest data
Proportion of people who have trust in national government	United Kingdom	Eurobarometer	November 2014	31%
Proportion of people who would say that most people can be trusted	United Kingdom	Understanding Society	2009/10	35%
Proportion of people who would say that most people in their neighbourhood can be trusted	United Kingdom	Understanding Society	2011/12	65%
Proportion of people who definitely agree or tend to agree that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together	England	Community Life Survey	2013/14	85%
Proportion of people who feel very or fairly walking alone at night in their local area	England and Wales	The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)	2013/14	M:85% F: 58%
Proportion of people who agree or strongly agree that people around whether they live are willing to help their neighbours	United Kingdom	Understanding Society	2011/12	71%
Proportion of people who agree or strongly agree that they feel they belong to their local area	United Kingdom	Understanding Society	2011/12	63%

This aspect of social capital encompasses trust and cooperative norms, such as willingness to help each other, reciprocity, tolerance or respect. It has been shown that people living in places characterised by higher levels of institutional trust or trust in others have higher levels of personal well-being (Hudson, 2006; Helliwell and Putnam, 2004).

Trust and other cooperative norms are important for the functioning of the society at all levels. Trust in national government and trust in other institutions are key to credible, healthy governance and to the effective running of a country. Trust is fundamental to any economy involving transactions, in particular in a globalised world where transactions occur within a range of different countries with different institutions and cultures.

Trust in Government

Only a third (31%) people reported that they "tended to trust" national government in November 2014 (Eurobarometer).This compares to 24% of people who "tended to trust national government" in November 2013. There is a concern in the UK and across Europe that trust in politicians and governments has been declining since 2002, as reported by several international surveys (ONS, 2014c; NatCen report, 2013; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report, 2013c).

With a low trust in national government, effective public policies and regulations might be more difficult to implement, consumers and businesses might be more reluctant to invest and take risks, and economic activities might slow down. The OECD has proposed a framework of 6 areas for government to win back trust. A report (' Stemming the trend of declining trust') published by Eurofound in 2014 suggested that key determinants in trust in institutions are:

- people's levels of satisfaction with the quality of public services

- how people perceive the economic situation in their country

- a perceived absence of corruption in public life.

Figure 8 shows that the proportion of people who rated their trust in government as low (ratings 1-4 out of 10) was higher among those who were dissatisfied (ratings 1-4 out of 10) with their standard of living (74%) and the economic situation of the country (63%). Only 1 in 10 (9%) of those who were dissatisfied with their standard of living and 14% of those who were dissatisfied with the economic situation of the country rated their trust in national government as high (ratings 7-10 out of 10).

However, 34% of those who were satisfied (ratings 7-10 out of 10) with the economic situation and 46% of those who were satisfied with their standard of living rated their trust in national government as low (ratings 1-4 out of 10).

Figure 8: Trust in national government by satisfaction with standard of living and economic situation, 2011/12

Satisfaction with standard of living
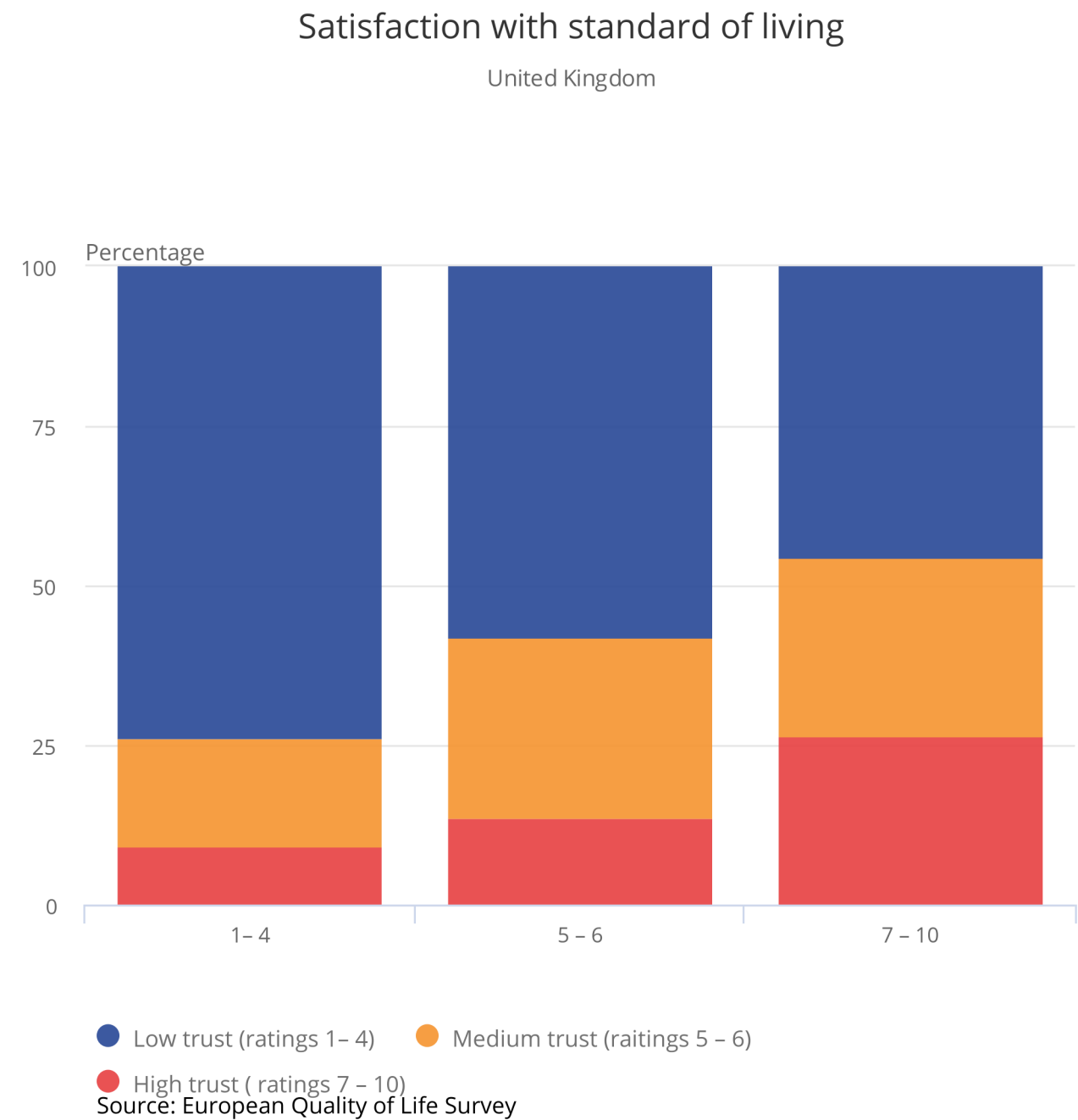
United Kingdom

Satisfaction with standard of living

United Kingdom

Percentage

Source: European Quality of Life Survey

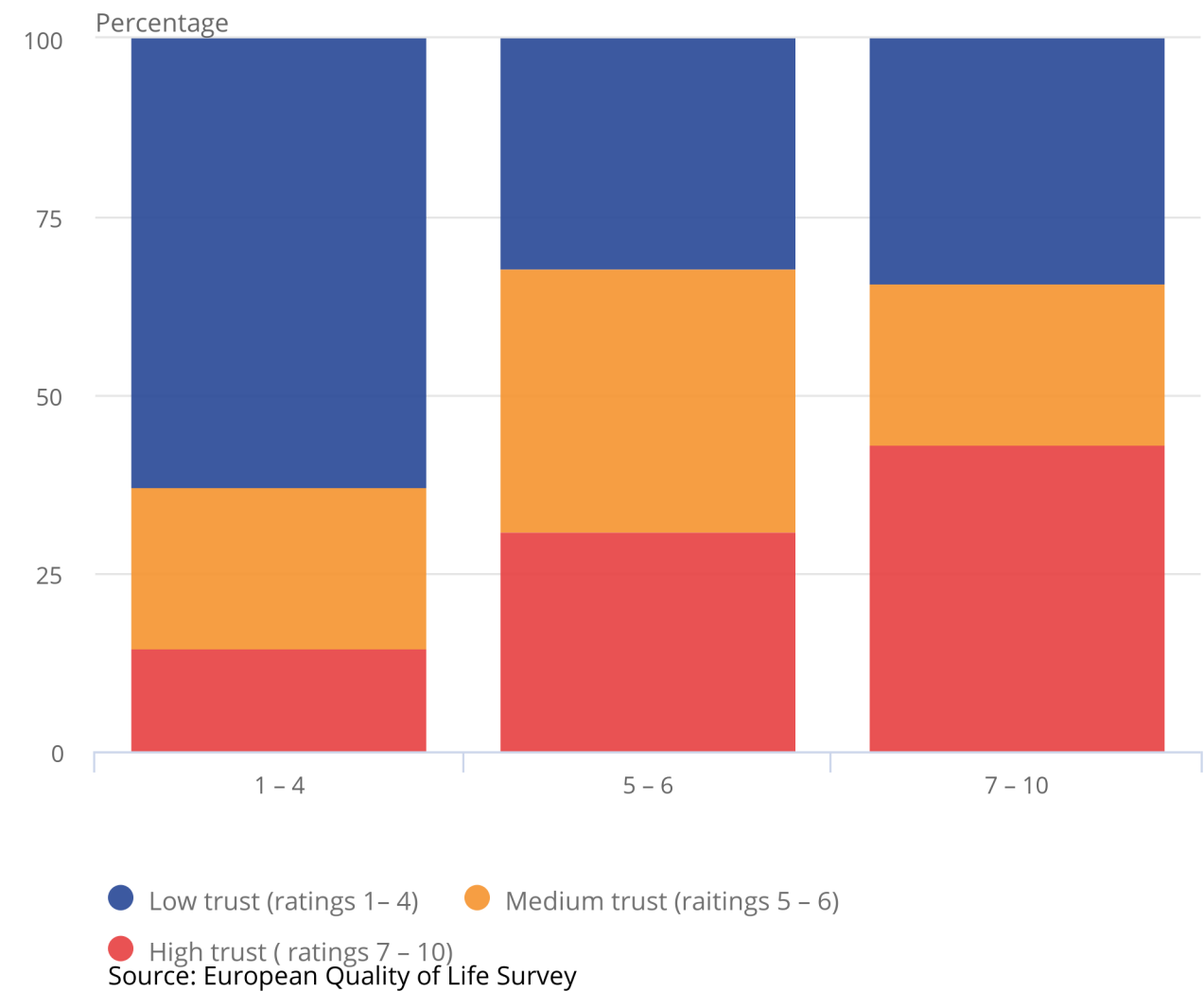**Source: European Quality of Life Survey**

Notes:

1. Respondents are asked to give their answers on satisfaction on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is 'very dissatisfied' and 10 is 'very satisfied'. Respondents are asked to give their answers on trust on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is 'do not trust at all' and 10 is 'trust completely'.

Satisfaction with economic situation

United Kingdom

Satisfaction with economic situation

United Kingdom

Percentage

Source: European Quality of Life Survey

Source: European Quality of Life Survey

Notes:

1. Respondents are asked to give their answers on satisfaction on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is 'very dissatisfied' and 10 is 'very satisfied'. Respondents are asked to give their answers on trust on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is 'do not trust at all' and 10 is 'trust completely'.

Trust in people

Generalised trust refers to trust in all other people, including strangers. It usually reflects people's perception of how much others share values and norms of behaviour or are reliable. If people trust each other, they are more likely to interact and to cooperate with each other.

Trust in others, for example in their personal commitment, their knowledge and their integrity, play a fundamental role in the workplace when people have to work together to complete projects or provide services. Trust in others increases the capacity for collective action, for example, through voluntary organisations in the community. At an individual level, trust in others is important to build strong, lasting and supportive relationships.

Research has also shown that people who trust others also have the highest levels of confidence in public institutions, such as the police, the legal system, parliament and politicians (ESS findings).

Just over a third (35%) of people reported that they would say that most people can be trusted (Source: Understanding Society, 2009/10). Around 4 in 10 people (42%) reported that they would say "you can't be too careful" and another 23 % reported that "it depends".

Data from the European Social Survey (2012/13) shows that the proportion of people who rated as high or very high (7 or more out of 10), on a scale of 0 to 10, was: 34% for trust in others, 38% for thinking that most people try to be helpful and 40% for thinking that most people try to be fair.

Neighbourhood

At a neighbourhood level, trust is important for people to live together harmoniously in local communities. People can have different backgrounds in terms of age, sex, socio-economic group, ethnicity, nationality or beliefs. If people of different backgrounds get on well together in a local area, one can reasonably assume more social contact between people of different backgrounds in the local area, and some shared social values of trust, tolerance and respect within the community.

Around 65% of people felt people in their neighbourhood can be trusted (Source: Understanding Society, 2011 /12). A majority of people (85%) in England also thought that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together (Source: Community Life Survey, 2013/14). Nearly three-quarters (72%) of people in the UK felt that people in their neighbourhood get along with each other (Source: Understanding Society, 2011/12). Around 7 in 10 people (71%) reported strongly agreeing or agreeing that people in their local area are willing to help their neighbours (Source: Understanding Society, 2011/12).

Measures of regularly stopping and talking to neighbours and trust in others in the local area were related. Three quarters (74 %) of those who regularly stopped and talked to neighbours reported trusting others in their local area, compared to 39% of those who did not regularly stop and talk to neighbours.

Measures of whether people are getting on well with others in local area were related to both trust in others in the local area and the feeling that people are willing to help their neighbours.

Data from Understanding Society, 2012/13 suggest that among those feeling that people in their neighbourhood get along with each other, three-quarters (77%) reported trusting others in their local area, and only 3% not trusting others in their local area. On the other hand, among those who reported feeling that people in their neighbourhood do not get along with each other, 42% did not trust others in their local area (Figure 9).
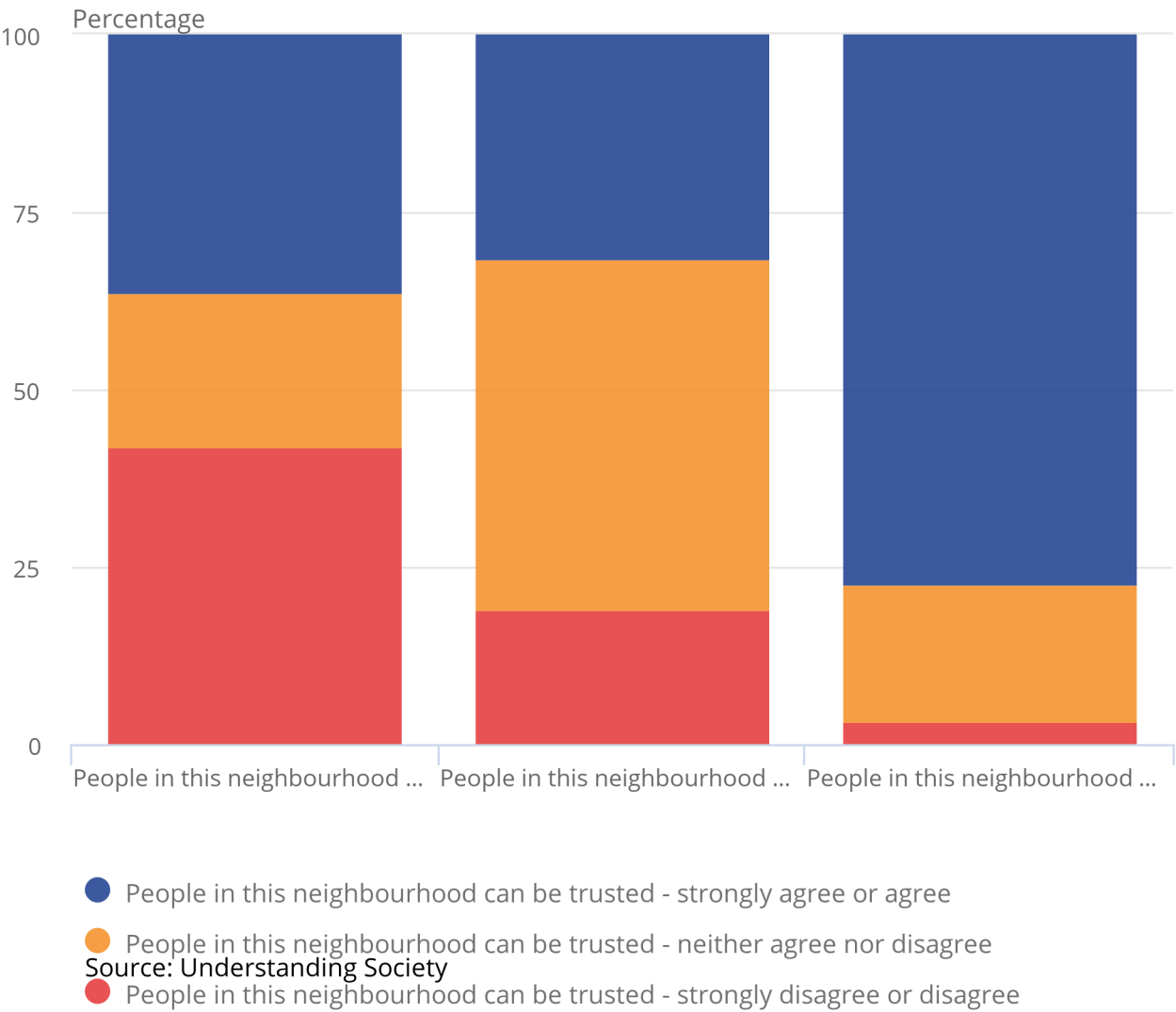
Similarly, among those feeling that people in their neighbourhood get along with each other, 8 out of 10 (82%) reported that people in their local area were willing to help their neighbours. Among those who reported feeling that people in their neighbourhood did not get along with other, only 4 people out of 10 (42%) reported that people in their local area were willing help their neighbours.

Figure 9: Feeling that people in this neighbourhood can be trusted by feeling people in this neighbourhood do not get along with each other, 2011/12

United Kingdom

Figure 9: Feeling that people in this neighbourhood can be trusted by feeling people in this neighbourhood do not get along with each other, 2011/12

United Kingdom

Percentage

● People in this neighbourhood can be trusted - strongly agree or agree

● People in this neighbourhood can be trusted - neither agree nor disagree
Source: Understanding Society
● People in this neighbourhood can be trusted - strongly disagree or disagree

Source: Understanding Society

Feeling safe walking alone after dark and fear of crime can be very important factors in determining people's quality of life. The perception of safety is not necessarily directly correlated to crime rates. According to the Crime Survey for England and Wales 2013/14, 85% of men and 58% of women felt very or fairly safe walking alone in their local area after dark.

Feeling safe walking alone after dark and fear of crime are both linked to trust. Previous analyses, using European Social Survey data (2010/11), have shown that people who reported that fear of crime reduces their quality of have life, also had less trust in the police, and were less likely to think that the police are doing a good job.
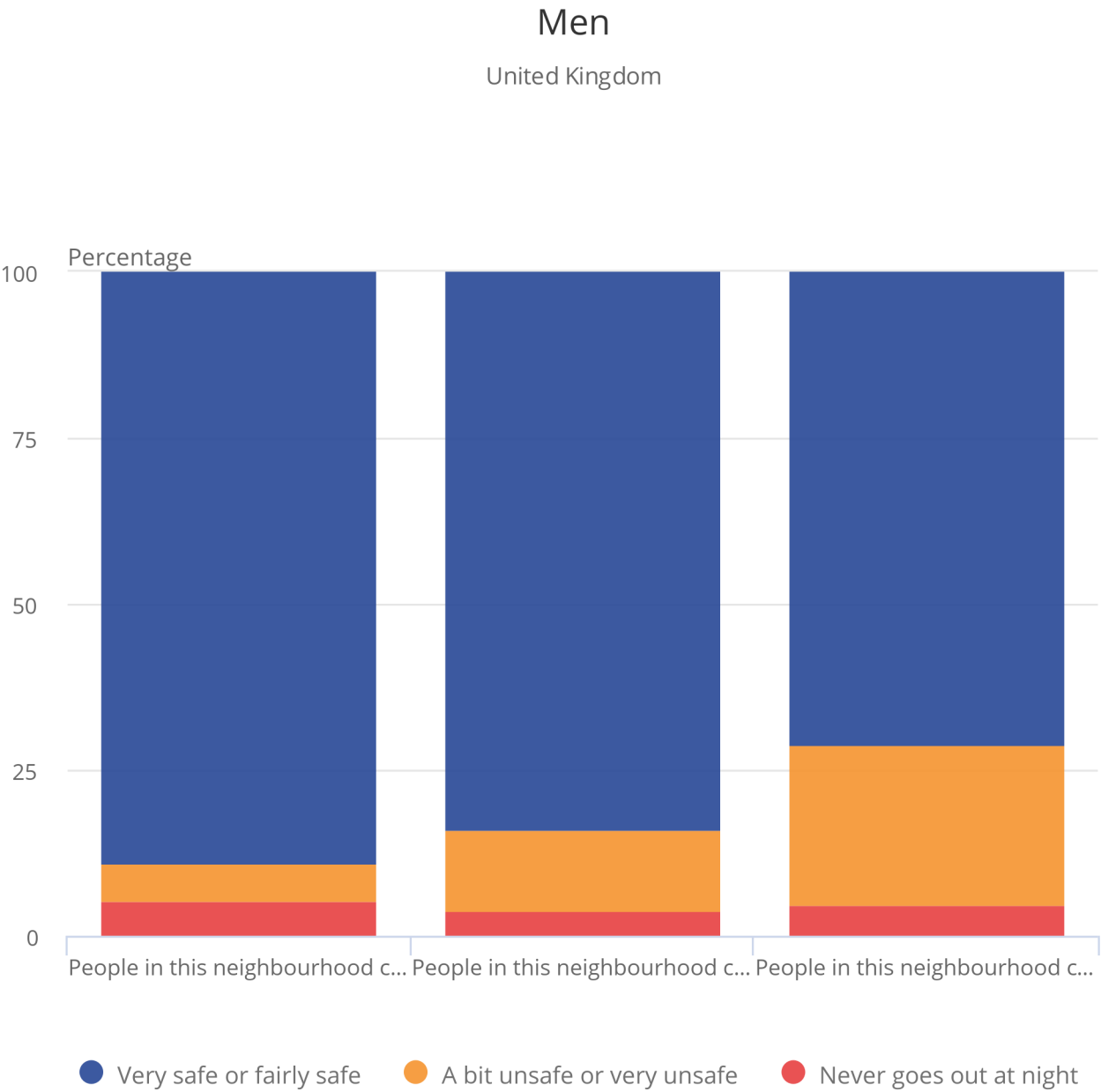
Data from Understanding Society 2011/12 (Figure 10) suggest that people (in particular women) reporting trusting others in their local area were more likely to feel very or fairly safe walking alone after dark in their local area, than those who did not. Around 7 out of 10 women (68%) who reported trusting others in their local area also felt very or fairly safe walking alone in their local area after dark, compared to 4 out of 10 women (40%) who reported not trusting others in their local area.

However, 40% of women and 71% of men who reported not trusting others in their local area nevertheless felt very or fairly safe walking alone in their local area. Similarly, 46% of women who felt that people in their local area did not get on reported feeling very or fairly safe walking alone after dark in their local area (Source: Understanding Society, 2011/12). Similar trends can be observed for the measure on feeling that the local area is a close-knit community; these findings suggest that although trust in others, feelings that people get on in their local area and forming a close-knit community are important, they are not enough to explain why people feel safe walking alone in their local area after dark.

**Figure 10: Feeling safe walking alone at night in local area by people in this neighbourhood can be trusted, 2011/12**

Men

United Kingdom

Men

United Kingdom

Percentage

- ● Very safe or fairly safe
- ● A bit unsafe or very unsafe
- ● Never goes out at night

Source: Understanding Society

Source: Understanding Society

Women

United Kingdom

Percentage

Source: Understanding Society

- Feeling safe walking alone at night - very safe or fairly safe
- Feeling safe walking alone at night - a bit unsafe or very unsafe
- Feeling safe walking alone at night - never goes out at night
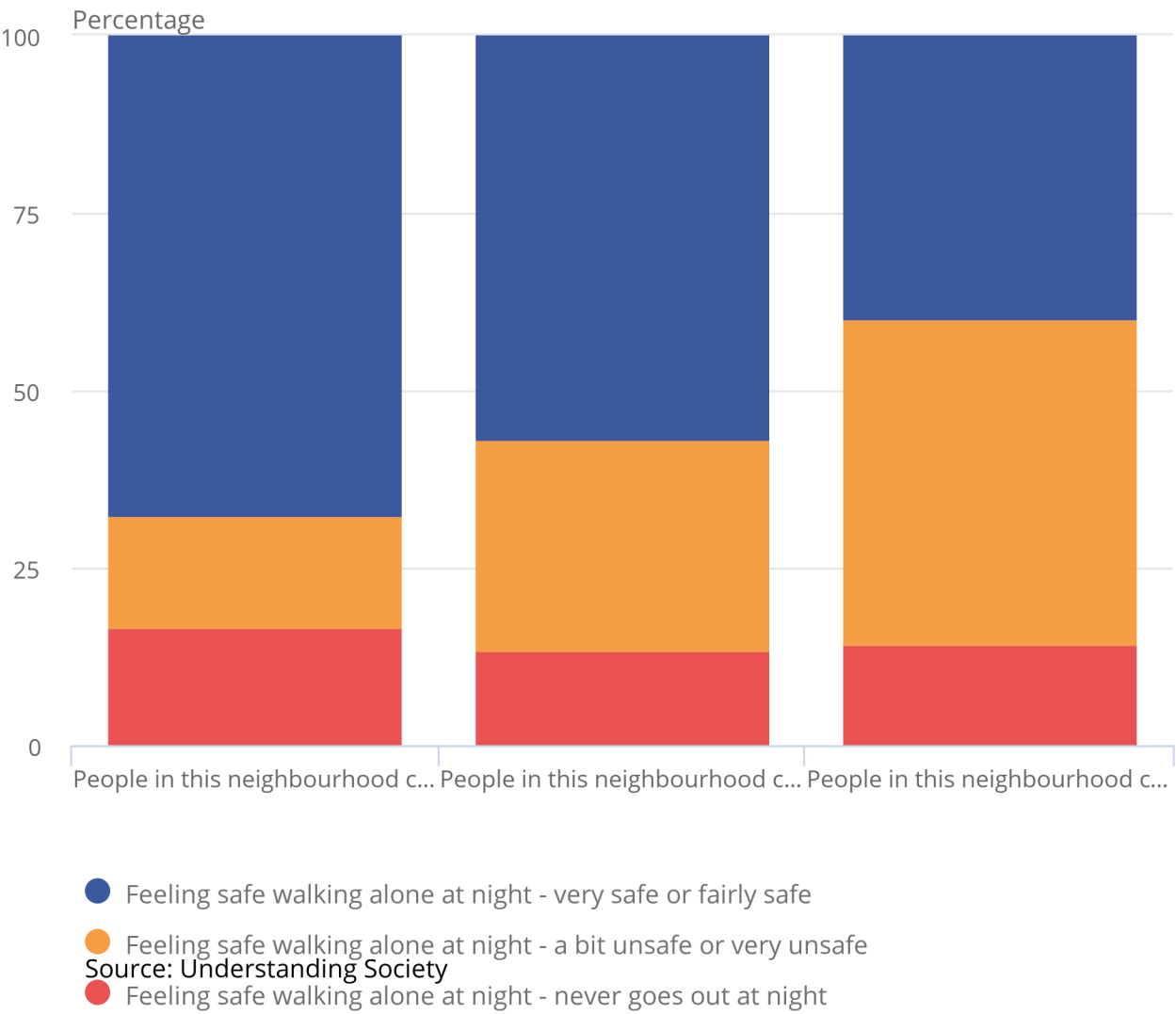
Source: Understanding Society

A sense of belonging to the local area indicates a feeling of connection and acceptance within the local community. People who feel they belong to their local area are likely to have established a social network within their neighbourhood.
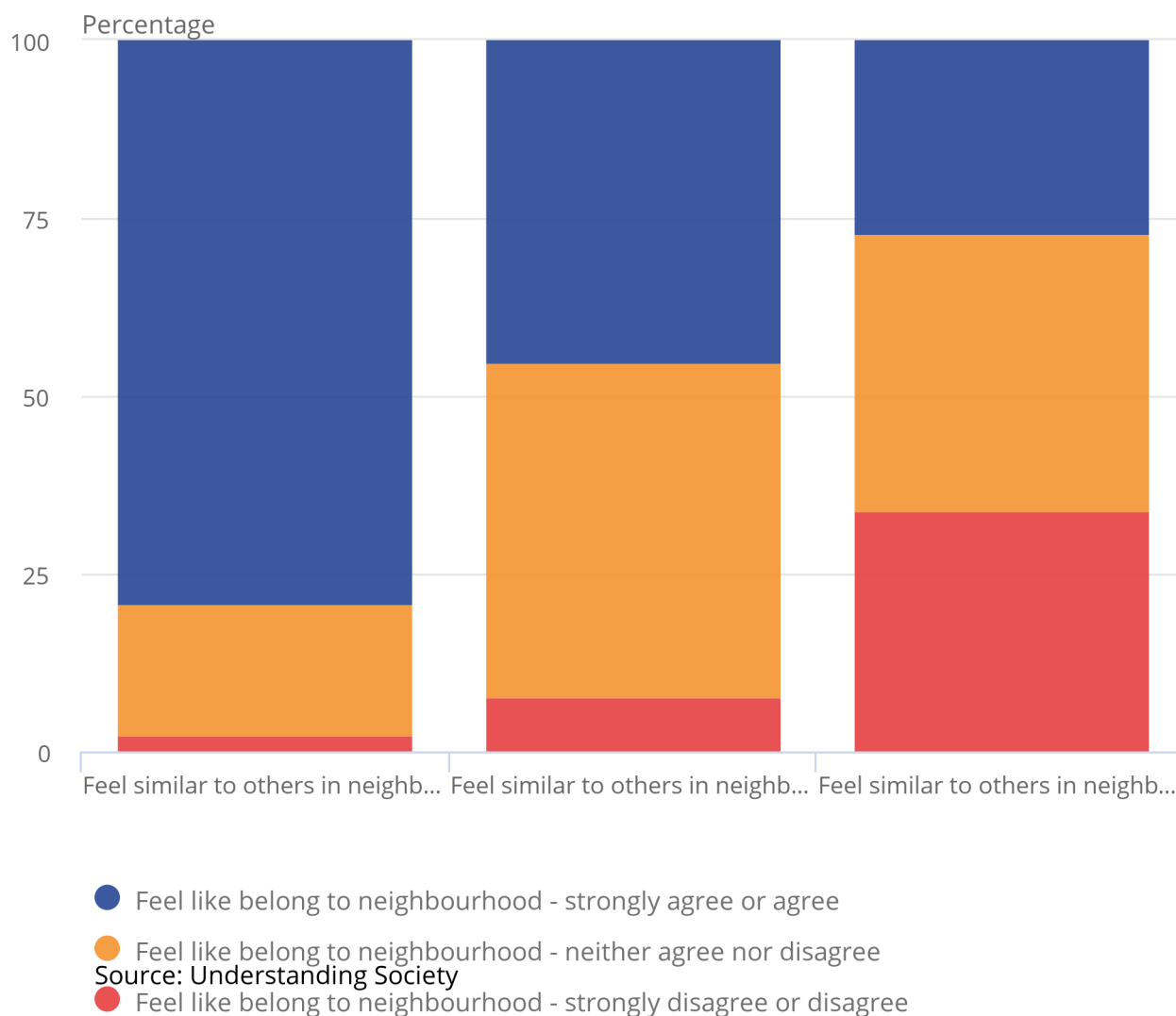
Data from Understanding Society 2011/12 indicate that nearly 2 out of 3 people (63%) feel they belong to their neighbourhood. There was an association between the feeling of belonging and feeling similar to others in the neighbourhood (Figure 11). Nearly 8 out of 10 (79%) of those who felt that they were similar to others in their neighbourhood also felt strongly that they belonged to their local area, compared to just under 3 out of 10 (27%) who did not feel similar to others in their neighbourhood.

Figure 11: Feel like belong to neighbourhood by feel similar to others in neighbourhood, 2011/12

United Kingdom

Figure 11: Feel like belong to neighbourhood by feel similar to others in neighbourhood, 2011/12

United Kingdom

Percentage

- Feel like belong to neighbourhood - strongly agree or agree
- Feel like belong to neighbourhood - neither agree nor disagree
Source: Understanding Society
- Feel like belong to neighbourhood - strongly disagree or disagree

Source: Understanding Society

7 . Uses of social capital data

Why social capital is important

Social capital is important for individuals. Several studies have shown that people who have a wide range of connections, hence access to greater resources, have a better personal well-being (Halpern, 2005; Helliwell and Putnam, 2004; Helliwell, 2003) and are healthier (Veenstra, 2002 and 2000). Civic participation can also help to prevent people from becoming socially isolated, improve the diversity of people's social connections (Putnam, 2000) and improve people's skills (Musick and Wilson, 2003).

The support provided by family, friends or neighbours also has an important economic value. For example, it has been estimated that the total value of informal adult care [1] in the UK has almost tripled in 15 years, from £21.5 billion in 1995, to £61.7 billion in 2010 (ONS, 2013a). The latest value of childcare provided by grand-parents is estimated to be £7.3bn (Understanding Society Insights, 2014).

Social capital is important for communities. The attitudes that people have towards each other, towards institutions, towards contributing to the "common good" through volunteering or political activities are all crucial for communities. Communities where people are integrated, feel more connected to each other, to their local area and its institutions can better shape their local environment (Cabinet Office , 2013). This in turn can have a positive impact on individuals who generate a network of friends for themselves.

Social capital is important for the nation and its economy. The norms and values which are important for individuals are also important for the effective running of institutions in a democracy (Eurofound, 2014a; The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report, 2013c). Social interactions based on trust lead to transactions, hence having an impact on the economy (Putnam, 2000 and Putnam, 1993).

A nation with a high national well-being, made-up of people with high personal well-being, is a society where social capital stocks are high: where people are connected, tolerant, help each other, trust others and institutions, and are empowered to shape the society they live in.

Social capital and policy making

A 2014 report on social cohesion and well-being in the EU (Eurofound, 2014b) has suggested that social capital is linked to inequalities: inequalities weaken social capital, which in turn decrease some aspects of well-being. Social capital and its concerns with social inequalities are embedded in the Europe 2020 strategy that defines social and economic policies in Europe.

Social capital is relevant across a range of possible social and welfare policies. Many area based interventions promote aspects of social capital and deal with inequalities. Examples of such government projects include:

- The Community First Neighbourhood Match Fund, a neighbourhood funding programme in which neighbourhood panels make decisions to fund local projects. For the programme as a whole, as of May 2014, panels had made 14,996 project recommendations, totalling £22,603,795 in funding. Many projects have focused on connecting local people together and encouraging people to get involved and volunteer. Some 4.7 million volunteering hours had been generated by May 2014.

- The Big Lunch, a one day get-together for neighbours.

- Our Place! Programme (formerly 'neighbourhood community budgets'), which give communities the opportunity to take control of dealing with local issues in their area.

- Neighbourhood Planning, which give communities more power in planning local development.

Examples of non-government projects include:

- [Timebanking](#), in which for every hour participants 'deposit' in a timebank (by giving practical help and support to others), they are able to 'withdraw' equivalent support in time when they themselves are in need.

- [Spice Time Credits](#), in which people are thanked with time credits for contributing time to their community. People use credits to access events, training and leisure services, or to trade time with neighbours.

- [Neighbourhood Watch](#), a voluntary network of schemes where neighbours come together, along with the police and local partners, to build safe and friendly communities.

- The [Social Integration Commission](#), which has been set up to explore key questions related to the UK's increasing diversity. The commission is also seeking to understand the financial and social benefits or costs associated with different levels of social integration.

Social capital can also be used to assess the policy implications of interventions such as understanding the impacts of policy on civic attitudes and trust. For example, policy makers can consider how their policies affect the four dimensions of social capital, with a view to minimise negative impact and, if possible, delivering policies in a way that will enhance the dimensions of social capital. Where policies are deemed to deplete social capital, mitigating actions can be taken to reinvest in and replenish stocks.

Notes for uses of social capital data

1. The help provided by people to family members, friends or neighbours in need of help because of a long-term physical or mental ill health, disability or problems related to old age.

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9. Background notes

1. If you have any comments on the ONS approach to measuring social capital and /or the presentation of the social capital data, please email us at: nationalwell-being@ons.gsi.gov.uk

2. The data analysed in this report were from collected from a variety of different sources: The UK Longitudinal Survey (UKHLS, also referred as Understanding Society); the European Quality of Life Survey (Eurofound, EQLS); the European Social Survey (ESS); the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW); the Community Life Survey (CLS).

3. The UK Longitudinal Household Survey (UKHLS) also referred to as Understanding Society study began in 2009, as a successor to the British Panel Survey (BHPS). It is conducted by the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) at the University of Essex and captures important information about the socio-economic circumstances, well-being and attitudes of people living in 40, 000 households. It is an annual survey of a nationally representative sample of individuals. Each person aged 16 or older answers the individual adult interview and self-completion questionnaire. Young people aged 10-15 years old are asked to respond to a paper self-completion questionnaire. Information from the longitudinal survey is primarily used by academics, researchers and policymakers in their work, but the findings are of interest to a much wider group of people. These include those working in the third sector, health practitioners, business, the media and the general public. More information can be found on the Understanding Society webpage.

4. The European Quality of Life Survey (Eurofound, EQLS) is carried out every 4 years since 2003. The survey in 2012 covered individuals aged 18 or older from 27 EU Member States and 7 non-EU countries. Questionnaires-based with interviews are conducted face-to-face in people's households in the national language(s) of the country. Data are collected on a range of subjects, such as employment and work-life balance, income and deprivation, education, housing and local environment, family and social contacts, perceived quality of society (such as trust in institutions), perceived quality of public services, social

exclusion, health and mental well-being, personal well-being (eg. happiness and life satisfaction). More information can be found on the EQLS 2012 webpage.

5. The European Social Survey (ESS) is a survey jointly funded by the European Commission and the European Science Foundation, covering 35 nations and carried out every 2 years since 2002. Individuals aged 15 years and over and resident within private homes are interviewed face-to-face The questionnaire include a core module which remain constant from round to round and some rotating modules repeated at intervals. The module captures a wide range of demographic and socio-economic information, including personal and social well-being, health, work, family, social exclusion, trust, political interest and participation, media use, governance and efficacy, citizenship and democracy. More information can be found on the European Social Survey webpage.

6. The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), previously known as the British Crime Survey (BCS) started in 1981. Up to 2001, the survey was conducted biennially and from April 2001, interviewing was carried out continually and reported on in financial year cycles. The survey covers a wide range of information covering demographics, crime, and crime-related subjects such as attitudes to the police and to the criminal justice system and perceptions of crime and anti-social behaviours. Questionnaires are mostly completed in a face-to-face interview within the respondent's household. Since 2009, the survey has been extended to children aged 10-15 years old. Further information may be found on the ONS Crime Survey for England and Wales webpage and for the previous BCS Methodology webpage.

7. The Community Life Survey (CLS) is an annual household survey which was first commissioned by the Cabinet Office in 2012-13. Individuals aged 16 years and over and resident in England are interviewed face-to-face, with a sample size of around 5-6,000 individuals per year. The survey provide data on behaviours and attitudes within local communities, such as volunteering, charitable giving, neighbourhood, civic engagement, social action and personal well-being. The aim of the survey is to inform and direct policies to encourage social action and empower communities. Further information may be found on the Community Life Survey webpage.

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