



UK OPEN
GOVERNMENT
CIVIL SOCIETY NETWORK

GOVERNMENT
AFTER SHOCK

NEW ORDERS

The balance of power post-pandemic

EVENT SYNOPSIS

Report author | Kevin Keith

This event is part of the *Government After Shock* initiative, a collaborative initiative supported by:



1.0 Background

1.1 Government After Shock event was a collaborative initiative led by the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development's Observatory of Public Sector Innovation. It was also supported by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 870913.

The event had two parts: a distributed global network of events on November 17th from which learnings would feed into global discussion on November 18th.

This report is a brief synopsis of New Orders, an event organised in collaboration with the UK Open Government Network, that took place on November 17th (see Appendix One for Background).

The event focussed on public purpose and what the COVID-19 crisis has revealed about the role of government, now and into the future. It sought to answer three questions:

- i. What do we need to leave behind?
- ii. What do we want to keep?
- iii. What should we do differently?

1.2 Speakers included:

- i. Lord Michael Heseltine, former UK Deputy Prime Minister
- ii. Andy Burnham, Mayor, Greater Manchester Combined Authority
- iii. Professor Arpana Verma, Head of the Division of Population Health, Health Services Research and Primary Care at The University of Manchester
- iv. Jacqui McKinlay, CEO, Centre for Governance and Scrutiny

1.3 A total of 126 people registered to attend the event and include representatives from central and local government, universities and civil society organisations. Of those who responded to poll questions (see Appendix Two):

- i. The majority were interested in national politics over local;
- ii. A strong majority felt national politics had the most impact on their life over local;
- iii. A majority felt regional could influence national politics;
- iv. A strong majority felt empowered to influence change;
- v. A very strong majority felt government must change post-pandemic;
- vi. Leadership was identified as the biggest barrier to transformational change;
- vii. A strong majority felt the Government would revert to the status quo post-pandemic;
- viii. A majority felt the pandemic is making governments more proactive in their approach to complex challenges arising in society.

A further breakdown of attendees is available upon request.

1.4 A full video of the event has been uploaded to YouTube with links to content as follows:

- i. FULL video available here: <https://youtu.be/9dwy-i5YOzg>
- ii. Australia Link-Up here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9dwy-i5YOzg&t=506s>
- iii. Professor Arpana Verma: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9dwy-i5YOzg&t=1849s>
- iv. Lord Michael Heseltine: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9dwy-i5YOzg&t=2403s>
- v. Jacqui McKinlay: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9dwy-i5YOzg&t=2908s>
- vi. Andy Burnham: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9dwy-i5YOzg&t=3331s>
- vii. Panel Discussion: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9dwy-i5YOzg&t=4377s>

2.0 Question One | What do we need to leave behind?

Almost all (98%) of respondents polled during the event (Appendix Two) felt the government had to change as result of the pandemic.

Professor Verma, Head of the Division of Population Health, Health Services Research and Primary Care, at The University of Manchester, felt an over reliance on big data should be left behind, as it ‘masked all the key inequalities that we were trying to deal with and combat,’ in terms of the ‘critical and crucial components of the pandemic and being able to plan services.’ Professor Verma made a plea for ‘small and medium data’ too.

For Lord Heseltine, it was the imbalance of power that must be left behind, declaring ‘London and the power baronies of Whitehall’ as ‘too powerful, too remote, and too disjointed to grip and lead the diverse qualities and talent of the local economies.’

Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester, agreed stating that the limitations ‘of top-down, centralising, decision-making’ have been felt this year more than ever before, and that ‘we have seen how it doesn’t deliver for people.’

Jacqui McKinlay, the CEO of Governance and Scrutiny, supported this view and felt there has been ‘a competitive language of them and us’ when it came to regional and central government and that this should be left behind.

3.0 What do we want to keep?

Professor Verma said that, for the first time in her life, ‘policy making on health and wellbeing has been centre stage during this pandemic.’ For her it is vital that this is kept beyond the crisis.

Both Professor Verma and McKinlay, highlighted the burst of community support that the pandemic has generated. McKinlay also highlighted other positives which she would like to continue including ‘brilliant examples of organisations, places and partnerships finding new ways to open-up decision-making’ through technology. This included virtual citizens

assemblies, democracy commissions, and housing associations embedding the voice of residents in their governance.

McKinlay also highlighted that the pandemic has increased the 'visibility and understanding of the role and value of local democratic leaders.'

4.0 What should we do differently?

i. Andy Burnham

'The best thing they could have done earlier this year was to localise rather than centralise,' said Burnham. 'If they had shared the burden of decision-making, shared responsibility and the accountability that came with that, it would have been the best thing they could have done.'

Burnham sees the possibility of a completely different political culture, 'a politics based on place rather than party.' He explained that place is a unifying force whereas party is divisive. 'When you always do everything through the prism of party politics, I think you end up with a very divisive approach to things. I also think you end up with short term thinking. Fads and fashions. Political ideas that burn brightly and then go away.'

Burnham also had firm views about how the recovery should take place. 'It has to be driven from the bottom up,' he said. 'You cannot level up top down. It's as simple as that basically. You have to build from the bottom up. Otherwise, places will never have ownership of the things you are trying to do.'

For Burnham, a strategic approach from government was also necessary, insisting that the Prime Minister and cabinet must make the promise of levelling up 'real in every possible sense, including empowering people at the local and regional level to achieve it.'

'Surprise people with the scale of your ambition to get proper energy behind it,' he declared, suggesting that paying lip-service to levelling-up would lead to an 'embattled government struggling through this parliament' with little political authority, agency or momentum.

ii. Professor Arpana Verma

For Professor Verma, focus must expand beyond big data. 'There has been a lot of work on big data. But I am here with a plea for small to medium data. I think this is where the key information lies which can help with policy, with practice and more importantly with planning.'

Her view was that it must start with the importance of local, neighbourhood-level data, building up to city or town level, then city regions, then regional and national. To her, it has felt as if it has been the other way around.

‘When we have analysed our big datasets, they actually masked all the key inequalities that we were trying to deal with and combat, in terms of the critical and crucial components of the pandemic and being able to plan services.’

Professor Verma also advocated for the co-production of interventions going forward, so people feel like things are being done with them and not just to them. She, like Burnham, advocated for a place-based approach and highlighted a Greater Manchester strength of linking up the academic, policy and practice side.

‘That would be the plea for devolution,’ she declared. ‘Because we have this fantastic partnership - the strength within our ecosystem of being able to do the whole circuit, from understanding what the problem is, working out the solutions based around co-production with our communities, and then evaluating and seeing if it works or not.’

Public health, explained Professor Verma, is integral to every aspect of society from ‘the social, the political, the economic.’ She highlighted that, like climate change, there must be a systemic approach and concluded with a powerful message about citizens power to affect change. ‘The thing is, we have that power,’ she said. ‘And we have to empower our communities by being that voice going forward. And I think that is one of the key things for the call to action. Making that change now as we cannot wait for anyone else to do it.’

iii. Jacqui McKinlay

McKinlay felt that transparency and involvement must be at the heart of what we are doing going forward and advocated for ‘new models of scrutiny’ designed to ‘add value, and give the public, and local and national leaders, value for money and impact.’

She hoped that ‘we are entering a time of more mature conversations, a recognition of what it takes to deal with complex problems’ and that society must be more ‘open to listening to everyone’s views.’

iv. Lord Michael Heseltine.

‘If you’re sitting in London making decisions about what should happen, how do you vary the requirements of Manchester and Liverpool?’ Lord Heseltine argued. ‘How in London do you sit there and say, I have a policy and here in Plymouth, and in Bristol, and in Oxford, Cambridge and in Newcastle, and on the Tees Valley, and in Liverpool and in Manchester – here is my solution. How do you do that with any sense of credibility with the local people concerned?’

Lord Heseltine was clear about the need for the greater devolution. But he also believes that beneath the coronavirus crisis is another: Brexit. For Heseltine it is the decision to voluntarily ‘abandon our relationships with our most important economic partner’ that in the longer term will see ‘serious parts of our economy seriously threatened with job losses, loss of investment, all those things.’

Lord Heseltine, like Burnham, would like less party politics, giving examples of his cordial and professional relationships and place-based approach with mayors, council leaders and leading city officials in Liverpool, Manchester and across the UK.

‘When they bombed Manchester in the nineties, I had already created a partnership called City Challenge which rebuilt the Hulme Estate,’ he said. ‘It took about an hour to agree with Richard Leese [Manchester City Council Leader] how we would approach the rebuilding of the centre of Manchester. I can never remember a row or a difference of opinion. We were in it for Manchester. We knew what the problem was. We were going to apply solutions. We didn’t throw huge sums of money at it. We just threw human ingenuity and determination.’

Lord Heseltine also stressed that Whitehall must listen. And that if they did, change could happen quickly. ‘I can tell you a Minister so-minded, could agree with Andy Burnham a strategy, an industrial strategy for Manchester, in about 24 hours,’ he said.

That change can happen quickly and yet does not is in part due to challenges related to applying affective pressure to politicians, believes Heseltine. ‘There is a psychology of subservience in this country for all sorts of very human reasons, so many career structures, so much patronage, so many money flows depend on the nods from Whitehall, so people go awfully quiet. I don’t think that would happen in any other country because they have real power bases. No leaders and no real power base. The system just goes on. Needs to change.’

5.0 Key quotes

- i. **Andy Burnham:** ‘I often talk about the difference between my old job as Health Secretary and my current job as Mayor of Greater Manchester with a degree of health devolution, as this: in my old job I could see numbers not names; in my current job I can see names not numbers. I cannot tell you what a world of difference there is between those two things. When you start from place and build upwards it’s just a completely different ball game from the current way of running the country.’
- ii. **Andy Burnham:** ‘...when it comes to recovery, I think it has to be driven from the bottom up. You cannot level up top down. It’s as simple as that basically. You have to build from the bottom up. Otherwise, the places will never have ownership of the things you are trying to do.’
- iii. **Jacqui McKinlay:** ‘...there have been very few signs that Whitehall is learning the harsh lessons of a centralised approach to COVID-19, and very few, if any signs that they are actively looking to learn those lessons to shift power, accountability and resources locally... We are talking about decades of inbuilt centralists systems, processes and a bias that we need to overcome.’
- iv. **Professor Verma:** ‘The amazing response to the pandemic has been integrated within our communities. I think we are honour-bound to be advocates for those without a voice and looking at what we need to continue is health in all policies. At the forefront of both local policy-making and the devolution of the policy-making to local communities and city regions.’

v. **Lord Michael Heseltine:** ‘London and the power baronies of Whitehall are too powerful, too remote, and too disjointed to grip and lead the diverse qualities and talent of the local economies.’

vi. **Lord Michael Heseltine:** ‘There is nowhere in the world with an economy like ours where there is not devolution to elected people in charge of relevant local economies – we are the only one that keeps saying you do this, we have decided, we are in charge. It doesn’t work.’

vii. **Lord Heseltine:** ‘I can tell you a Minister so-minded could agree with Andy Burnham a strategy, an industrial strategy for Manchester, in about 24 hours. Of course, you couldn’t implement it in that time. But if they were to coordinate the endeavours of Whitehall. If they were to listen to what Andy can say on behalf of the local community. You could have a strategy of recovery, building on the strengths and opportunities of Manchester, greater Manchester, in about 24 hours.’

viii. **Lord Heseltine:** ‘There is a psychology of subservience in this country for all sorts of very human reasons, so many career structures, so much patronage, so much money flows, depends on the nods from Whitehall, so people go awfully quiet. I don’t think that would happen in any other country because they have real power bases. No leaders and no real power base. The system just goes on. Needs to change.’

ix. **Andy Burnham:** ‘What I see is the possibility of building a completely different political culture in our country. A politics based on place rather than party. When you always do everything through the prism of party politics, I think you end up with a very divisive approach to things. I also think you end up with short term thinking. Fads and fashions. Political ideas that burn brightly and then go away. And you create a difficult environment for business to engage with as it is all about the agendas of party politics. When you come at it a different way, with place... place is by definition is a unifying force where party is a divisive force. All people in GM, however they vote politically in a general election, have an interest in the place doing well, the place prospering. And that I think is just a different starting point where you can build a much more positive political culture and bring people together rather than constantly trying to create divisive debates.’

x. **Andy Burnham:** ‘Don’t expect devolution to be easy. Don’t expect everyone to be on bended knee with a begging bowl. If you create these roles expect people to use them, to use their voice. Whitehall likes devolution as long as they control what it means... Devolution is about letting the country speak for itself and the nations in all of its richness. Sometimes that will bring turbulence but, in the end, it will build a more energised, invigorated, a more enfranchised UK.’

6.0 Conclusion

'Now, when the war is abolishing landmarks of every kind, is the opportunity for using experience in a clear field,' wrote Sir William Beveridge in his eponymous report of 1942. 'A revolutionary moment in the world's history is a time for revolutions, not for patching.'

It would be wrong to compare the horror of war with the tragedy of this pandemic. But there are lessons in recovery and rebuilding, in finding light amidst the heat of debate, in transforming despair into possibility and purpose.

The Beveridge Report led to the creation of the welfare state. But to get there it identified what were called 'five giants on the road to reconstruction.' Want. Disease. Ignorance. Squalor. Idleness. In answering what we should keep, what should stay the same, and what should change, as a result of the pandemic, could it be that a new Beveridge could be revealed? Did Government After Shock identify five new giants to help rebalance power in the UK?

I think it did.

Firstly, **DATA**. Professor Verma made the case for small and medium data, alongside big data, to enhance decision-making. Her view was that it must start with local and end with national or beyond.

Second is a shared giant with Beveridge: **IGNORANCE**. Lord Heseltine declared Whitehall 'too remote,' McKinlay feared it was not learning the lessons of over centralisation, and Burnham explained why you cannot level-up top-down. 'Devolution is about letting the country speak for itself and the nations in all of its richness,' he said. This only works if what is spoken is listened to and understood.

Third, is **PLACE**. McKinlay identified a language of them and us, prompting Burnham to set out his hope for a new place-based politics. 'Place is by definition is a unifying force,' he said. 'Party is a divisive force.' Heseltine agreed. 'We were in it for Manchester,' he said describing cross-party work to rebuild the city post an IRA bombing. There must be more place in politics.

Fourth is **PRAGMATISM**. A Minister could agree an industrial strategy for Manchester with Burnham in about 24 hours, if he or she really wanted to, said Lord Heseltine. Leaders of regions are traditionally pragmatic; leaders of nations are traditionally ideological. More of the former is required.

Finally, **DEMOCRACY**. Lord Heseltine warned of subservience and that 'people go awfully quiet.' No more. As Professor Verma said: 'We have that power, and we have to empower our communities by being that voice going forward... Making that change now as we cannot wait for anyone else to do it.'

If these five giants could serve as building blocks upon which to build a better future for the UK. And if like the original Beveridge, all five were embraced simultaneously, then maybe it could redress the balance of power amongst regions? And as a new world order forms post-Trump, maybe a new national order could form in the UK too.

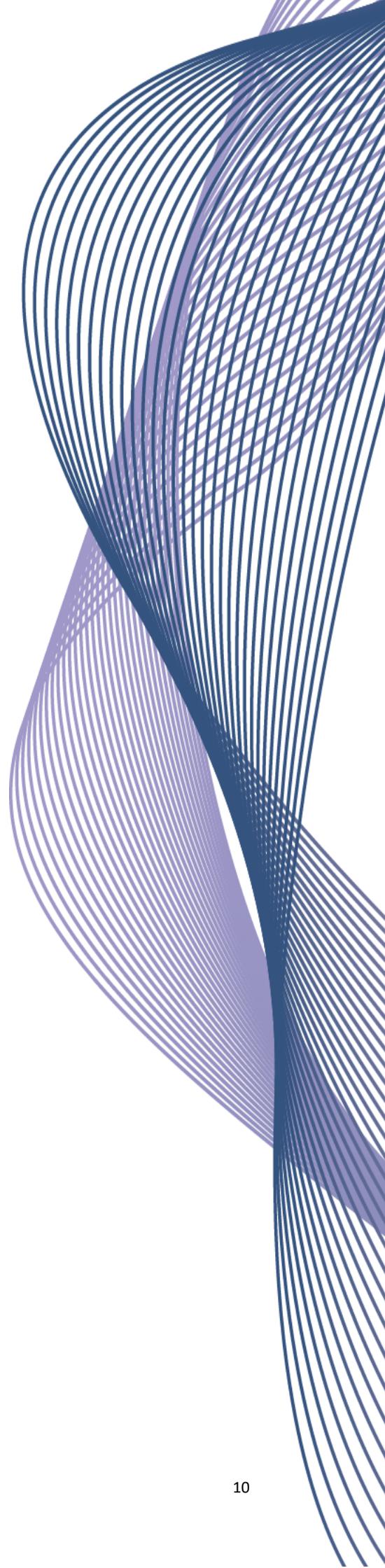
All of the findings in this report have been sent to the OECD and will form part of a global Call to Action to be published later this year.

Thank you again for your involvement.

Kevin Keith
Chair | Open Government Network
www.opengovernment.org.uk



APPENDICES



Appendix One – Background

‘I think they have been treating the North with contempt...but I think this is an important moment actually in the political life of our country... People are fed up of being treated in this way. The North is fed up of being pushed around. We aren’t going to be pushed around anymore.’ Andy Burnham, the Mayor of Greater Manchester Combined Authority, on Thursday October 15th.

When Britain signed the Atlantic Charter with the United States, it did two things. It spelled the end for British Empire with a stated aim to return ‘sovereign rights and self-government.’ And it sought to secure for all ‘improved labour standards, economic advancement and social security.’ The result was a British government whose focus moved away from governing overseas, towards directing domestic policy. The Welfare State was created (following the best-selling Beveridge Report of 1942) including a national health service, motivated by the growing political power of the poor and the working classes. The Welfare State transformed citizens’ expectations of central government’s role in their lives and it marked the beginning of Britain becoming one of the most centralised democracies in the developed world. As power and authority moved upwards within the political system it moved away from local government which previously (particularly during the Victorian age) solved the majority of local challenges, including building and running schools, public health and hospitals, constructing sewers, public parks, public transport, electricity and gas infrastructure.

The centralisation of power within government combined with post-war industrial decline in many towns and cities has led to a power imbalance particularly acute in the north of England. A series of inquiries and initiatives have sought to address this, from City Challenge to the Regional Development Agencies, Northern Way and Northern Powerhouse, to the 2070 Commission, but often focus has been on increasing money from central government and not an appropriate transfer of power.

Beyond England, the referendums of 1997 established the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly of Wales, and devolution was a key part of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

It has been noticeable that countries within the United Kingdom have taken a different approach to dealing with the coronavirus, highlighting tensions that exist between the centralised and decentralised model.

These tensions have been further exacerbated by calls for localised data, localised track and trace schemes, and adequate funding for centrally determined lockdowns.

So where to following this crisis? What is the optimum power balance between North and South, central and regional / local government, the UK parliament and devolved governments? What role does transparency, accountability and the participation of citizens have in this process?

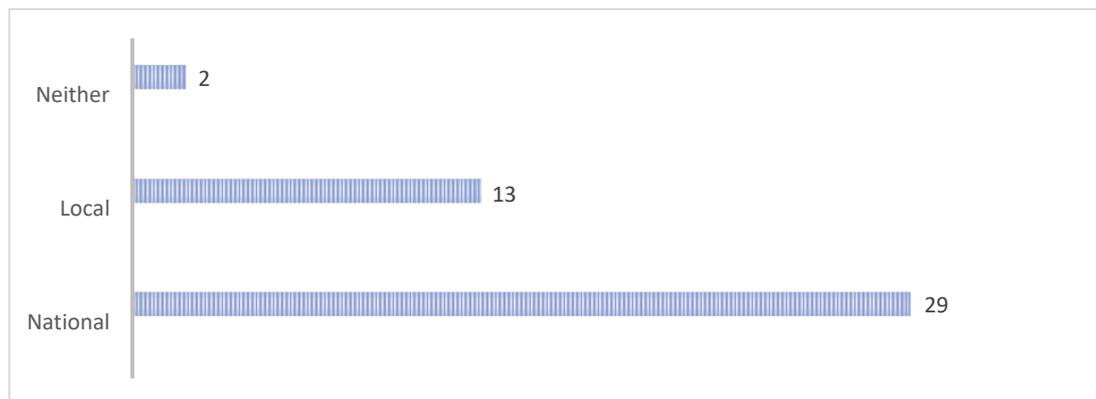
What do governments need to leave behind? What are the things that no longer fit with the world we are heading into, what are the structures and processes that have revealed themselves to be inadequate, unsuited or inappropriate for the world emerging from the crisis? What did the crisis show was no longer appropriate, or what has emerged from or been exacerbated by the crisis that we need to stop doing?

What should governments keep? What do we hold dear or value from before or during the crisis that we want to keep or sustain? What things might we cherish but need to adapt to the changed context?

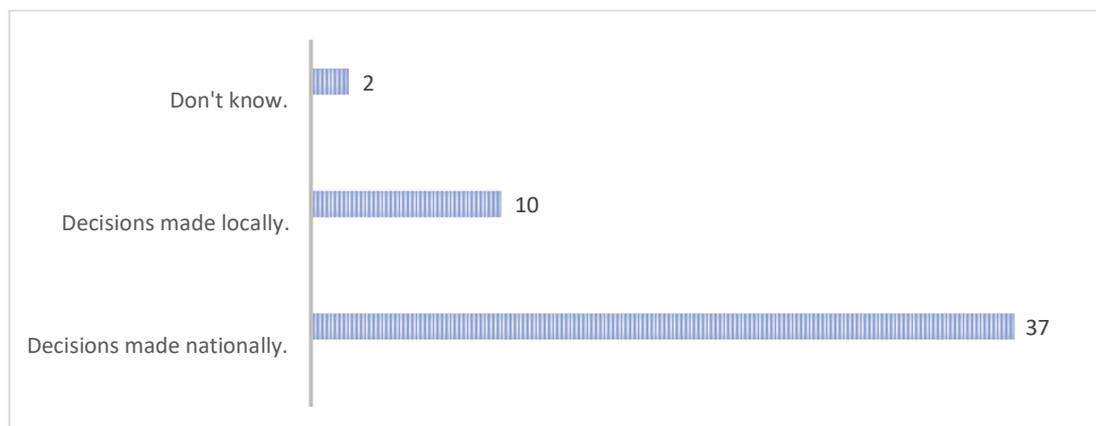
What should governments do differently? What could we do differently, given what has been revealed by the crisis? What should we change, what should we experiment with and what should we attempt now?

Appendix Two – Poll Results

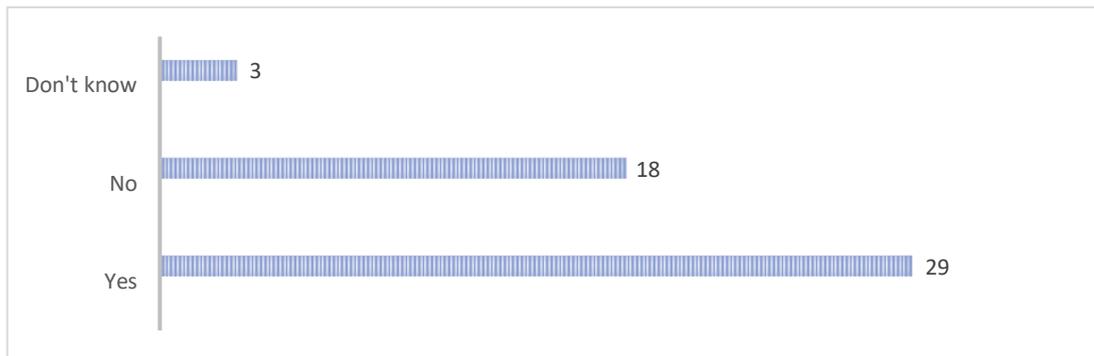
1. Are you more interested in local politics or national politics?



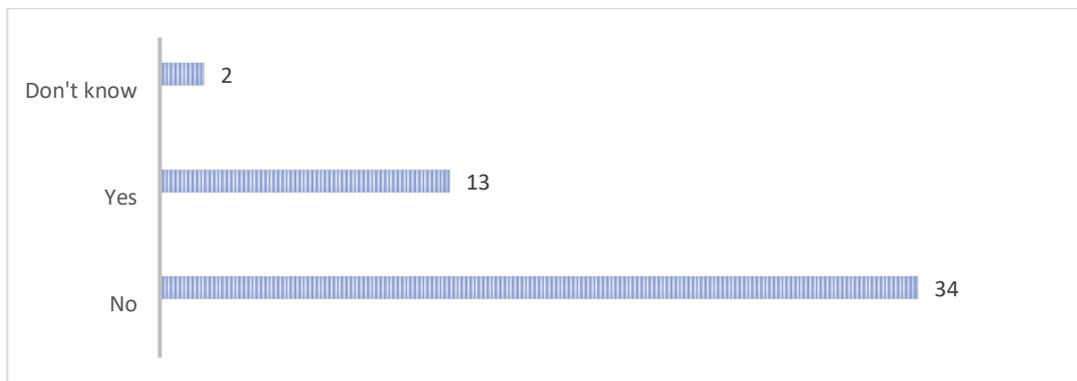
2. Which do you think has more impact on your life?



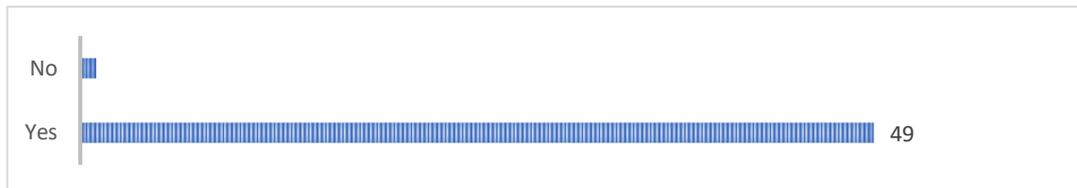
3. Do you think your region can influence national decision-making?



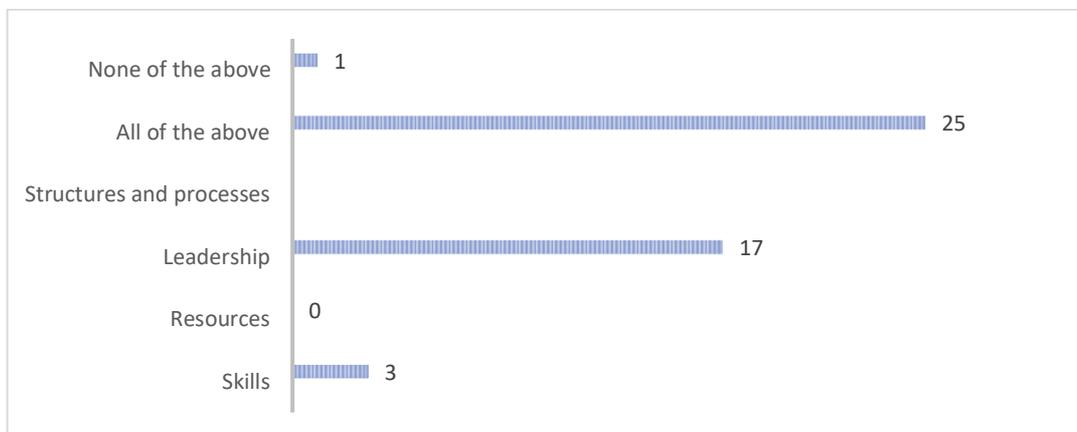
4. Do you individually feel empowered to influence decision-making?



5. During the pandemic, has it become apparent that central or local government must change?



6. What do you think is the biggest barrier to government transformation or change?



7. Spectrum Question: Beyond the crisis, do you think that government will:



8. Do you think that COVID-19 is making governments take a more proactive (less reactive) approach to complex challenges that are arising in society?

