

# “NOTHING HAS CHANGED...”

A report from a survey of political activists targeted by undercover police in the UK.

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# Executive Summary

Large-scale undercover policing of political activism in the UK has seen more than a thousand political groups spied on since 1968. Unlike ‘typical’ undercover policing operations, seeking to gather evidence towards criminal prosecutions, the focus of these infiltrations has been intelligence gathering, seemingly with the purpose of monitoring and disrupting the democratic right of political groups to protest. We know that undercover officers (or ‘spycops’) have spent years at a time infiltrating political campaigns. Whilst undercover, spycops have engaged in a range of harmful practices, including deceiving activists into sexual relationships, law breaking, appearing in court under false names, spying on children, and adopting the identities of dead infants without consent of their families. An ongoing official inquiry has been tasked with investigating the spycops scandal in depth. More than a decade on from the first spycops exposures, many of the impacts of these deployments remain uncertain.

During the summer of 2021 an anonymous online survey was launched, inviting responses from activists who were impacted by spycops infiltrations. The survey sought to explore the impact of spying on activists themselves, as well as exploring their perceptions of the ongoing Undercover Policing Inquiry (UCPI) and other related issues. The survey received n= 74 responses. Key findings can be summarised as follows:

## On the Undercover Policing Inquiry (UCPI):

- Respondents expressed an almost unanimous desire for the UCPI to succeed (>90%).
- However, respondents were similarly united in their view that the UCPI is performing poorly across the board. This includes in relation to its speed, independence, transparency, impartiality and communication. This was consistent across the sample, irrespective of whether respondents said they were engaged as core-participants in the UCPI or not.

## On Human Rights:

- More than 80% of respondents felt their human rights had been infringed by spycops.
- The survey found ~30% of the women who responded said they were less willing to engage in romantic relationships following the spycops exposures. The figure for men was ~3%. This demonstrates the extremely gendered human rights implications of these infiltrations, and the harmful impact on women subject to deception.

## On Spirits, Morale, and Other Impacts

- More than 70% felt that spycops had damaged bonds of trust in social movements.
- More than 60% of respondents said that they personally became less trusting of new faces within activist movements.
- More than 50% said that they became less trusting in general, indicating a broader impact.

#### On Activism:

- Following the spycops revelations downward trends can be observed in relation to: levels of engagement with activism in general; levels of risk activists were willing to take; as well as changes in the types of campaigns activists were involved with.
- The most frequently cited issue having influenced the above changes was 'getting older/changing life course', cited by 50% of respondents. The influence of spycops was the second most frequently cited factor (cited by more than 40%).
- There was evidence that some activists were derailed away from certain forms of activism (e.g. environmentalism) towards anti-state surveillance activism.
- Very few respondents said their activism had stopped altogether since the spycops revelations, indicating that most activists surveyed remain politically active in some way today.

#### Conclusions:

Whilst a modest sample, the survey demonstrates the need for drastic change within the UCPI to ensure it can regain and retain trust and faith among those impacted by the harms it purportedly seeks to investigate. In addition, the survey also demonstrates the enduring impact of spycops, as well as the enduring political agency of those impacted by spying, in the present, more than a decade on from the first exposures.

## Context

In 2010 a group of activists discovered that a central figure in their activist and social circle ‘Mark Stone’, was in fact Mark Kennedy. He was a spy who had intimately infiltrated their lives, as well as the wider environmentalist movement, for more than seven years, as part of a secretive national police unit called the National Public Order Intelligence Unit (NPOIU). In 2003, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) described the NPOIU as performing “an intelligence function in relation to politically motivated disorder (not legitimate protests) on behalf of England, Wales and Scotland...” According to HMIC this entailed “the national collection, analysis, exploitation and dissemination of intelligence on the extremist threat to public order”. It appears that a tacit aim of Kennedy’s deployment, like other similar deployments, was not to preserve public order but, in fact, to gather intelligence in order to repress democratic protest. Whilst undercover, Kennedy engaged in a range of harmful practices, most notoriously, deceiving female activist targets into sexual relationships. This was routine practice for spycops, with dozens of women having been targeted in this way, demonstrating the specifically gendered dimensions of these deployments (Police Spies Out Of Lives, 2020). Activists have described being victims of this practice as like having been “raped by the state” (Lewis, Evans and Pollak, 2013). Kennedy’s exposure set in motion further widespread investigative efforts, within and beyond the targeted activist community, which in turn quickly led to the exposure of other suspected spycops. These included Bob Lambert (cover name ‘Bob Robinson’) who fathered a child with an activist whilst undercover. Lambert operated as part of a similar unit to the NPOIU called the Special Demonstration Squad (SDS). It is now believed as many as four children have been born out of relationships involving spycops (Evans, 2021). Other practices which spycops engaged in include law breaking, appearing in court under false identities, spying on children, and adopting the identities of dead infants without consent of their families. Eventually, an ex-Metropolitan Police officer turned whistle-blower, Peter Francis, admitted to having been instructed to spy on and smear the family of murdered teenager Stephen Lawrence during their campaign for justice. This led to the establishment of the Undercover Policing Inquiry (UCPI) in 2014. This ongoing inquiry seeks to investigate police infiltration of political and protest groups since 1968, which involved a minimum of 138 officers spying on over 1000, mostly left-wing, political groups. The UCPI’s first formal meeting was spring 2015.

Since being announced the UCPI has made remarkably slow progress. It was initially supposed to report in 2018, but the first hearings did not take place until late 2020. At present the proposed timeline for publication of findings is not expected until at least 2027 (12 years after being announced), probably later. Activists contend that the UCPI’s slow pace is a result of deliberate obfuscation by London’s Metropolitan Police, which has been actively facilitated by Inquiry Chair Sir John Mitting (Campaign Opposing Police Surveillance, 2021). The UCPI has come under significant criticism for its lack of transparency, with closed hearings, limited access for participants, excessively redacted evidence, and many spycops being granted anonymity by Mitting on questionable grounds (Lawrence and McDonnell, 2018; Evans, 2019). The inquiry chair has also been beset by criticism on the grounds that he is not fit to lead an inquiry focussing on institutional sexism, owing to his own past judgements, statements, and behaviour (Webb, 2017). These shortcomings appear to

confirm what Schlembach (2016: 57) had previously described as a “legitimacy deficit” within the inquiry.

Significantly, external to the UCPI, in October 2021 Kate Wilson, an activist deceived into a sexual relationship by Mark Kennedy, won a landmark tribunal against the Metropolitan Police, having brought the case for egregious and serious violations of her human rights (Tobin, 2021). In its concluding remarks, the Tribunal acknowledged that the police had violated five different Articles of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), including her right not to be discriminated against based on her gender. The Tribunal said: “this is not just a case about a renegade police officer who took advantage of his undercover deployment to indulge his sexual proclivities... Our findings that the authorisations... were fatally flawed and the undercover operation could not be justified as ‘necessary in a democratic society’, as required by the ECHR, reveal disturbing and lamentable failings at the most fundamental levels” (Kate Wilson v. (1) The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis & (2) National Police Chief’s Council, 2021: 128).

## Methodology

The rationale for this study was to better understand the enduring impact of these infiltrations. An anonymous online survey was conducted to examine spied-on activists’ perceptions of the impacts of undercover policing on their activism, human rights, and of the UCPI. The methodology drew from Ramsay et al’s (2016) approach and explored some themes that had emerged from my own previous research (Stephens-Griffin, 2021). Respondents comprised a purposive, self-selected sample of spied-on activists. Anyone who had been spied on, either directly or indirectly, by police or other forms of undercover surveillance (e.g. corporate spying) in the UK, could participate. The Undercover Research Group (URG) provided guidance and feedback on drafts of the survey during its design. The survey was mainly multiple-choice, attitudinal questions, with optional open text boxes for further elaboration. Acknowledging the sensitivity of the topic, participation was voluntary, anonymous and all questions were optional/skippable, with very limited demographic questions.

The survey ran online throughout the summer of 2021. It was shared via internal networks of impacted activists, in private networks, and on social media. The purpose of the survey was explained to participants on the landing page. Participants had to click to confirm that they had read this, and that they gave their informed consent to complete the survey. With so many groups having been targeted over such a long period of time, there was a potentially large pool of activists who met the sampling criteria. Whilst over 1000 people clicked on the link to the survey landing page, a much smaller total of  $n = 74$  respondents completed the survey. This is a modest sample, and as such there are limits to the generalisability of the data. This is an obvious weakness of the research. Nevertheless, the responses of those who did participate are extremely valuable. This data is mostly quantitative, as well as including some more qualitative open text box responses. The quantitative survey data was analysed using descriptive statistical analysis, and qualitative responses were analysed using thematic analysis. The project was reviewed by and received ethical approval from Northumbria University ethics committee before

commencing. Feedback from impacted activists was used to try to ensure questions were appropriately worded and non-invasive. Impacted activists hold a diverse range of perspectives on a diverse range of issues, including on the value of a survey such as this. Whilst most responses were positive, it is important to acknowledge that some prospective participants said that they felt a survey of this kind should not be conducted, on the grounds that information like this could be used against activists by the state or police. Nevertheless, many activists impacted by the spying have exerted considerable energy telling their stories, and it is hoped that this survey contributes to the broader aim of helping to reveal the complex impacts of political surveillance, and to support activists in holding the state accountable.

## Findings and Discussion

### *On the Undercover Policing Inquiry (UCPI):*

As discussed, n= 74 people responded to the survey. Respondents were asked about their perceptions of the ongoing UCPI. As shown in Figure 1, respondents were overwhelmingly invested in the inquiry's success, with 92.9% (n= 66 ) agreeing with the statement "I am very keen for the UCPI to succeed". Not a single participant disagreed with this statement, and only 7% (n= 5) neither agreed nor disagreed. This is a good indication of the strength of feeling within the community, in relation to the UCPI. Impacted activists overwhelmingly want the UCPI to succeed. However, the findings were otherwise overwhelmingly negative in relation to participants' perceptions of the inquiry. For example, 75.7% (n= 56) agreed with the statement "the UCPI looks likely to be a whitewash". Participants also felt external political factors had damaged the inquiry, for example 81.1% (n= 60) agreed with the statement "the passing of the Covert Human Intelligence Sources (CHIS) Act has undermined the spycops inquiry".

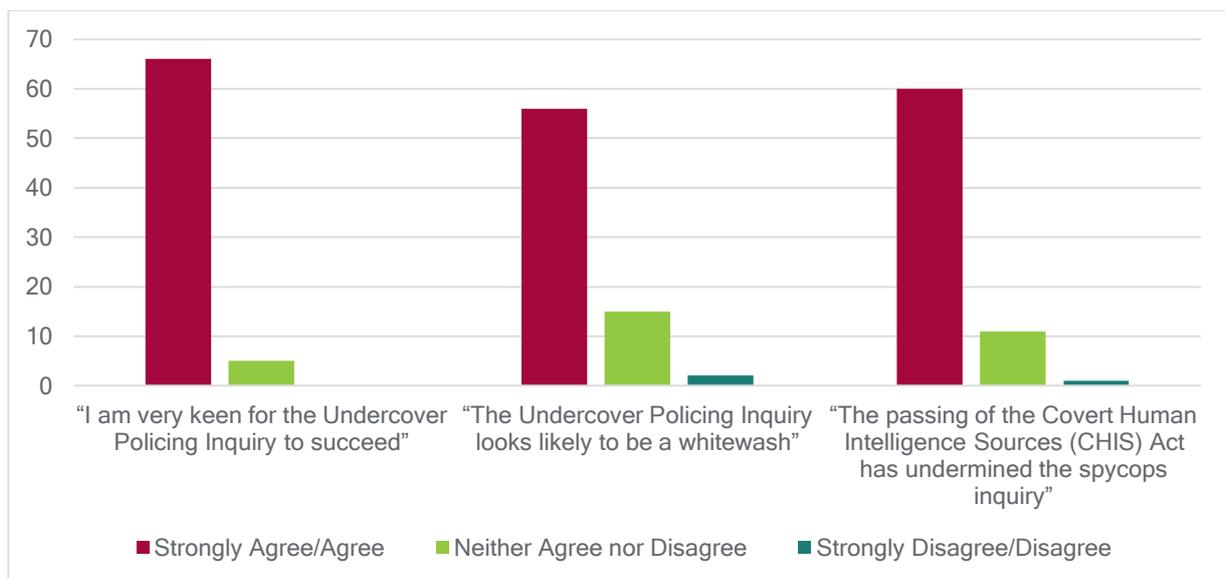


Figure 1- The UCPI

With regards to specific aspects of the inquiry, the following bar chart (Figure 2), demonstrates the extent to which respondents felt negatively about the UCPI. Participants were overwhelmingly more likely to rate every aspect of the inquiry as ‘poor/very poor’ than ‘good/very good’. On the issues of ‘independence’ and ‘transparency’ not a single participant rated the inquiry as being good/very good. Though still negatively perceived, the inquiry performed slightly better in terms of its use of technology, and its adaption to the Covid-19 pandemic, the two categories with the lowest ‘poor/very poor’ scores. Cross-tabulating this, with the data around respondents’ engagement with the inquiry, indicates that the UCPI scores poorly across the sample, irrespective of whether respondents are core-participants in the UCPI or not. 78.6% (n= 11), of the 14 UCPI core participants who responded, rated the inquiry as poor/very poor overall, compared to 80.4% (n= 37) of the 46 who are not core participants. 78.6% (n= 11) of those who preferred not to say, whether they were core participants or not, felt the UCPI was performing poor/very poor overall.

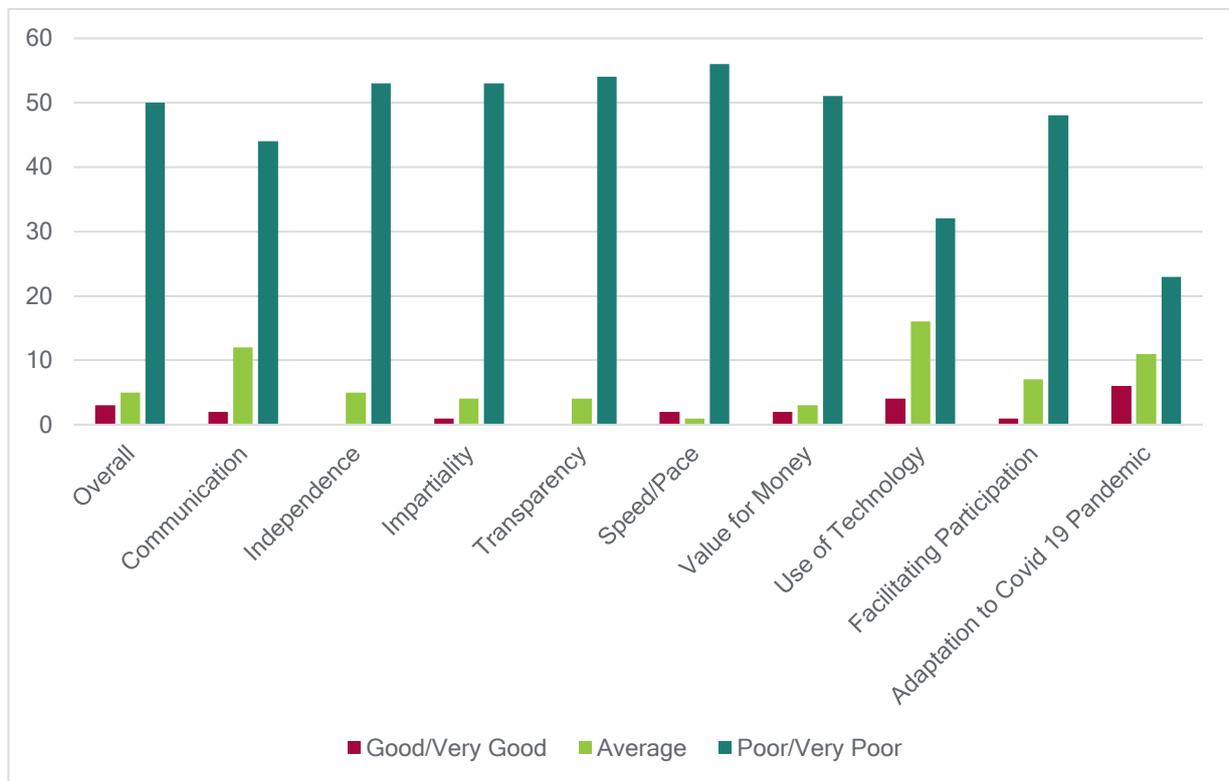


Figure 2- Participants Perceptions of the UCPI

In line with the above discussion, the results outlined in Figure 3 illustrate that participants are overwhelmingly hopeful for the success of the UCPI, whilst also being simultaneously very pessimistic about its potential success. Similarly, 64.9% (n= 48) feel that spied-on activists are “unlikely to achieve their aims through an inquiry of this kind”. The same number 64.9% (n= 48) agreed that the UCPI represents an “imperfect means to a desirable end”. Rather than reflecting inconsistency on the part of respondents’ views, this could be evidence of a pragmatism in relation to engagement with the UCPI. Respondents believe that the UCPI is unlikely to provide a path to truth and justice, but are nevertheless engaging, still hoping that it might.

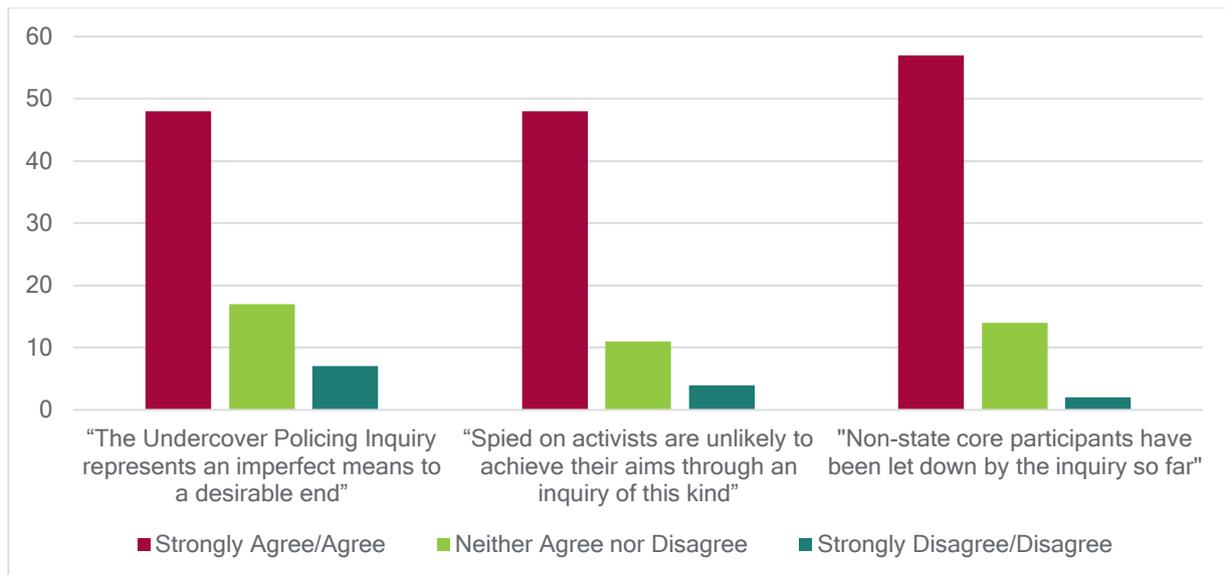


Figure 3- UCPI and Activist Goals

The above dynamics may also indicate a wider scepticism about the criminal justice system, police, and the state. As respondent #3 put it:

"I was under no illusion that the justice system protects the vulnerable and marginalised prior to the spycop infiltration. Nothing has changed but maybe some people are more aware that the police behave improperly now."

Respondents want the UCPI to succeed but are pessimistic about the prospects of this happening. Given their treatment and experience, this stands to reason.

### *On Human Rights:*

The verdict of Kate Wilson's IPT brought to attention human rights dynamics that have always been central aspect of the spycops case, from the perspective of those targeted. Respondents were asked several questions related to the issue of human rights. As shown in Figure 4, respondents overwhelmingly felt that the spycops infiltrations had significant implications with regards to human rights. 81.1% (n= 60) felt that their human rights had been infringed by spycops. Respondents, 93.2% (n= 69) of respondents also agreed that "some activists' right to start a family were negatively impacted by spycops". Whilst 64.9% (n= 48), of the participants in the study, disagreed that the case damaged their ability to start a family, and 54% (n= 40) disagreed that they were less willing to engage in romantic relationships following the revelations, it is quite significant and an indication of how harmful these infiltrations were, that that some participants agreed. 9.4% (n= 7) said that the case damaged their ability to start a family, and 17.6% (n= 13) said they were less willing to engage in romantic relationships following the exposure of spycops.

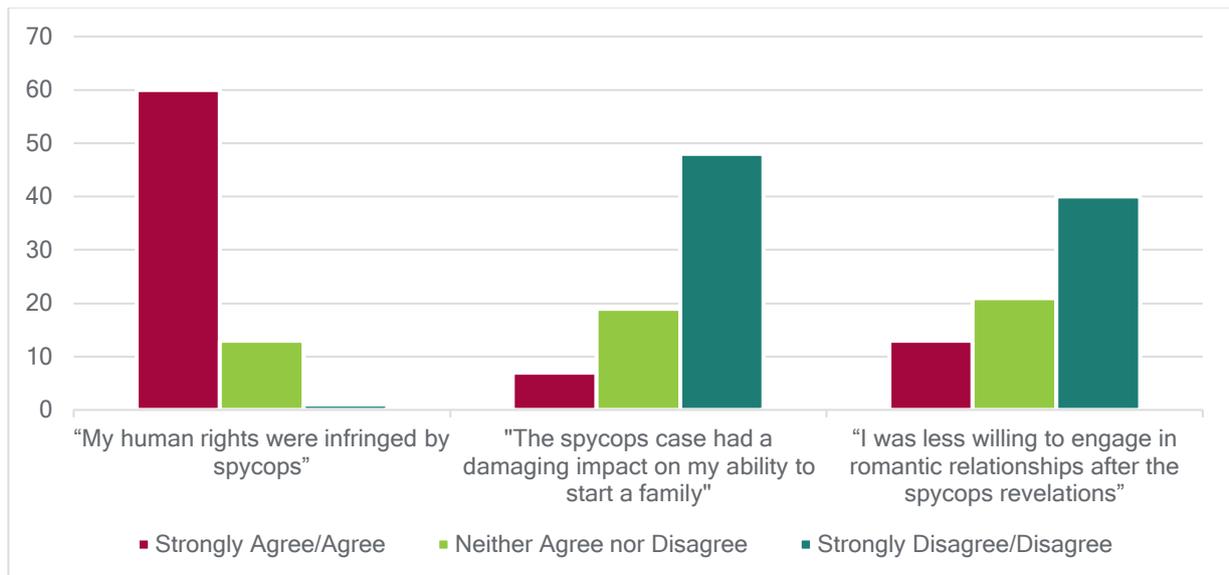


Figure 4- Personal Human Rights Impacts

The gendered dynamics of this harm is particularly significant here, 29% (n= 9) of the 31 women surveyed said they were less willing to engage in romantic relationships following the spycops revelations. This contrasts with just 2.9% (n= 1) of the 35 men. 1 of the 3 non-binary respondents agreed with the statement. This shows quite a markedly clear gendered impact of the infiltrations on women's right to a private and family life. It also related to the fact that some women who responded had, themselves, been deceived into relationships by spycops. The case has not impacted male activists' willingness to engage in romantic relationships to anywhere near the same extent. In addition, 87.1% (n= 27) out of the 31 women surveyed said that their human rights were infringed by spycops, as opposed to the slightly lower figure of 71.4% (n=25) of the 35 men. The 3 non-binary respondents all said their human rights had been infringed. These findings support the claim that the case represents a significant infringement of human rights as protected by the Human Rights Act, including the right to a private and family life. In addition, 97.3% (n= 72) of respondents agreed with the statement "spycops using fake identities to sleep with activists without their informed consent is comparable to rape and/or sexual abuse". Notably, 86.5% (n= 64) said they 'strongly agreed' demonstrating the strength of feeling within the impacted activist community. However, respondent #49 also commented on the potential problems of drawing such comparisons.

"Some of these questions require more nuanced answers than it is possible to give here. For example, with comparisons to rape and torture, the answer is both yes and no. It is important to find ways to convey the legal wrongs and personal damage caused by this particularly weird form of state abuse, without relativising the experience of people were violently tortured or brutally raped."

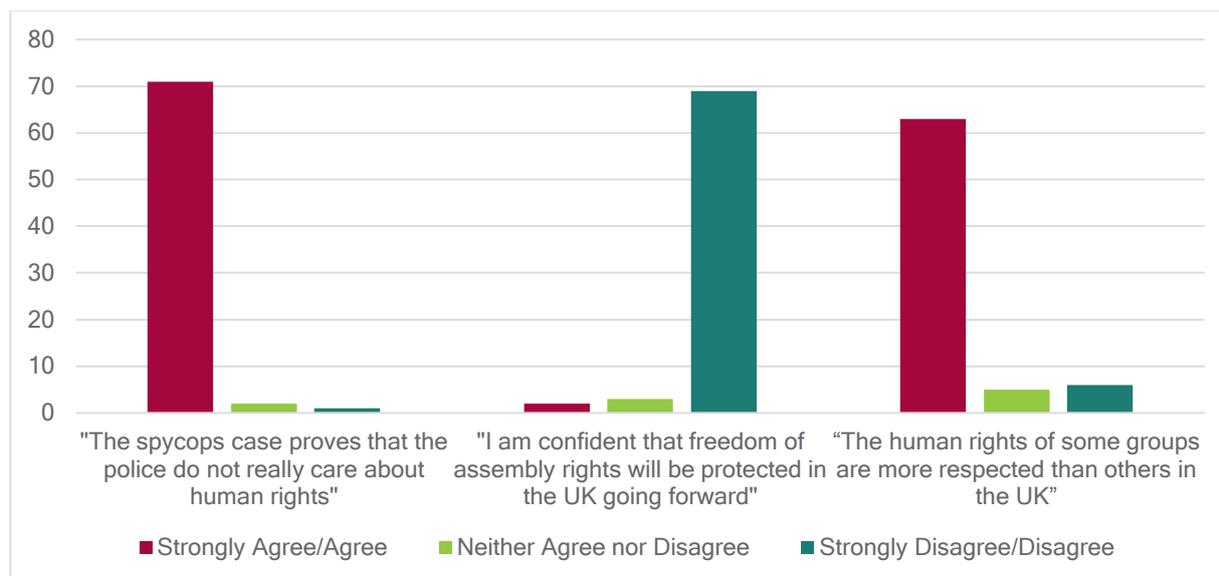


Figure 5- Perceptions of Wider Human Rights Issues

Figure 5 shows respondents' perceptions of the wider human rights implications of the case. 95.9% (n= 71) of respondents felt that spycops infiltrations had demonstrated that the police "do not really care about human rights issues". 93.2% (n= 69) disagreed that they felt confident that "freedom of assembly rights will be protected in the UK going forward". 85.1% (n= 63) felt that "the human rights of some groups are more respected than others in the UK". This is a snapshot of some headline results in relation to human rights, but the findings paint a starkly negative picture of both the personal human rights impact that spycops had, as well as the wider human rights implications. 94.6% (n= 70) agreed with the statement "I am concerned about the future of human rights in the UK". As respondent #3 put it: "The UK has become more authoritarian and shows no signs of stopping."

### *On Spirits, Morale and Other Impacts:*

As shown in Figure 6, the findings provide further evidence of the corrosive impact that the spycops case has had on activism in the UK, particularly in relation to trust, as others have demonstrated (Lubbers, 2012; Loadenthal, 2014). Lubbers (2012: 25) discusses the immense damage done by spycop infiltrations, and "the trail of ruined friendships and relationships... left behind."

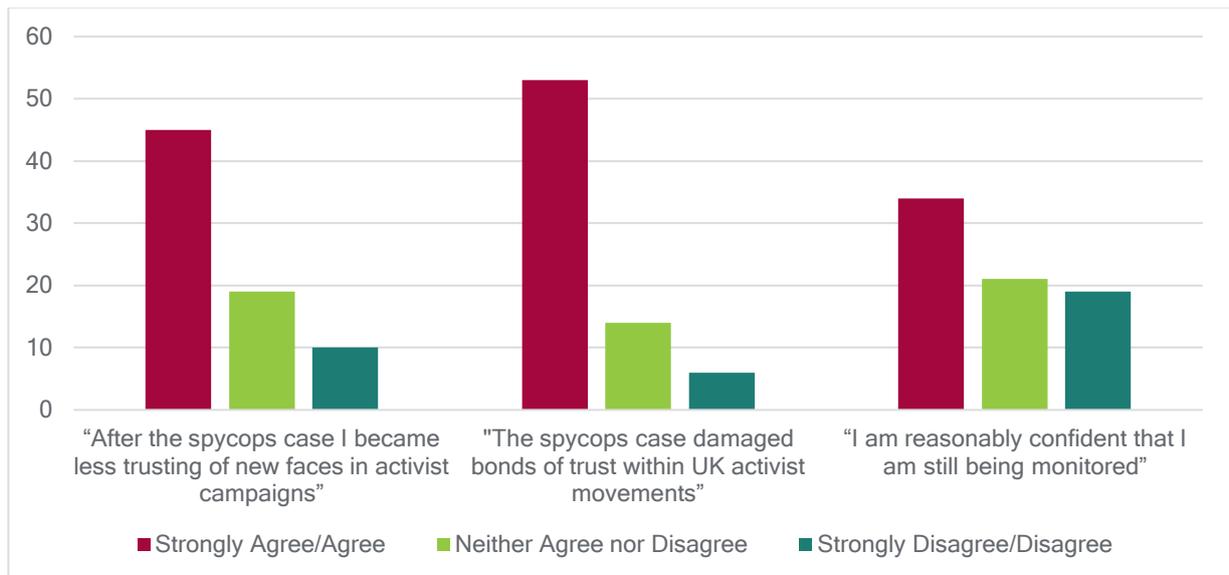


Figure 6- Spycops Impact on Trust

This is supported by the survey data, in which 60.8% (n= 45) became less trusting of new faces in activist campaigns, following the spycops revelations; 71.6% (n= 53) said that the spycops case damaged bonds of trust within UK activist movements, and 54.1% (n= 40) of respondents agreed with the statement "finding out about spycops made me less trusting in general".

In addition to this, 45.9% (n= 34) respondents felt reasonably confident that they were personally still being monitored and 97.3% (n= 72) of respondents agreed with the statement "I suspect that spycops are still actively monitoring non-violent political campaigns". Whilst the above findings indicate a corrosive impact on relations of trust, which are vital to the success of activist campaigns, the overwhelming expectation that spying is still going on also, arguably, suggests a healthy distrust on the part of activists. This may indicate that institutional explanations for spycops wrongdoing, which have positioned spycops as both a temporary aberration, and a result of individual 'bad apples', have not been internalised by activists. Responses appear to align with the view that state counter-subversion programmes are unceasingly persistent (Woodman, 2021). Respondents are not complacent, they disagree with 'bad apple' explanations.

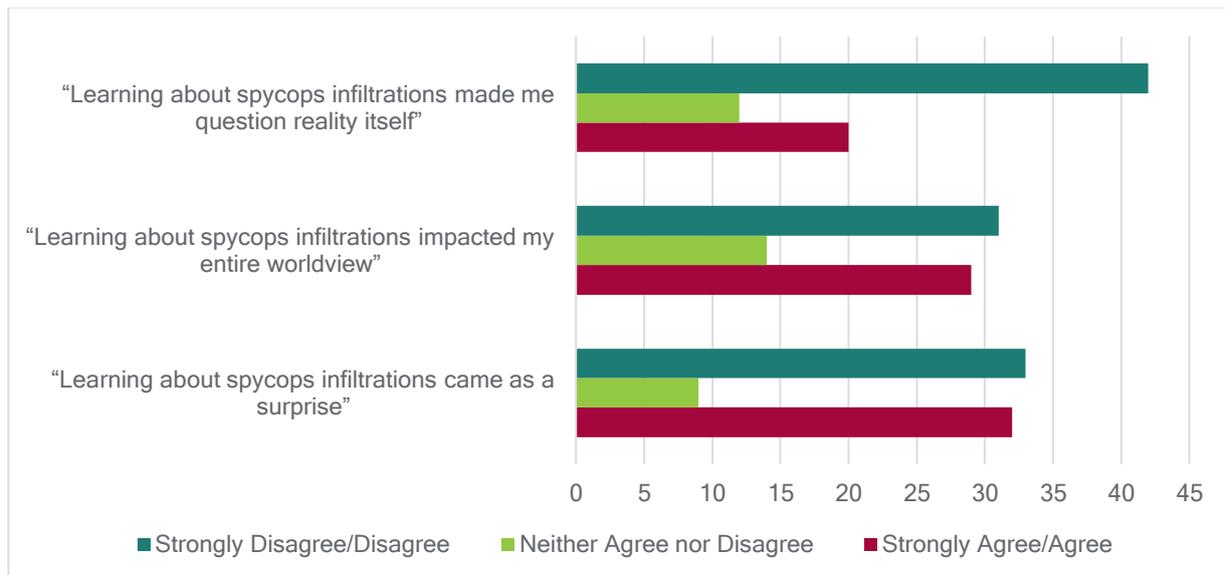


Figure 7- Response to Spycops Revelations

As Figure 7 shows, responses were more diverse when it came to how activists responded the revelations around spycops. This data broadly supports findings from a previous study (Stephens-Griffin, 2021), which found that the infiltrations had an extreme impact on some activists' perception of reality, whilst others were less shocked. These findings show that 43.2% (n= 32) were surprised by the infiltrations, where a similar amount of 44.6% (n= 33) were not surprised. This was broadly similar in relation to the impact it had on participants' worldviews, with 39.2% (n= 29) agreeing that the infiltrations had impacted their entire worldview, whilst 41.9% (n= 31) disagreed. The survey found that 27% (n= 20) of participants agreed that the infiltrations made them question "reality itself", whilst a majority of 56.8 (n= 42) disagreed. This speaks to the complexity of the impacts on individuals, with some having expected infiltration. Relatedly, respondent 30 said:

"I personally suspected infiltration. Although I was surprised at the scale. I find the information we have gained on how spycops operate is very helpful to my practice of activism. I was lucky not to be very badly affected on a personal level and I'm aware that others have suffered greatly."

Controlling for proximity to spycops, in relation to the above three questions, provides further nuance. As Figure 8 shows, those who were closer to spycops were more likely to agree that the case had altered their entire worldview. Those who were more distant, were more likely to say that it had not. In Figure 9, we can see that a similar trend is visible in response to the statement about the infiltrations coming as a surprise. 68.4% (n= 13), of the 19 who were close to spycops, agreed that the infiltrations came as a surprise, whilst just 15.8% (n= 3) disagreed. Of the 17 respondents with an indirect connection to spycops, the answers were almost the inverse, with 52.9% (n= 9) disagreeing that the infiltrations were a surprise, whilst just 29.4% (n= 5) agreed. Figure 10 shows that those closest to spycops were more likely to agree than disagree that the spycops revelations made them "questioning reality itself", whilst for those with a medium, distant, or indirect connection, respondents were more likely to disagree than to agree.

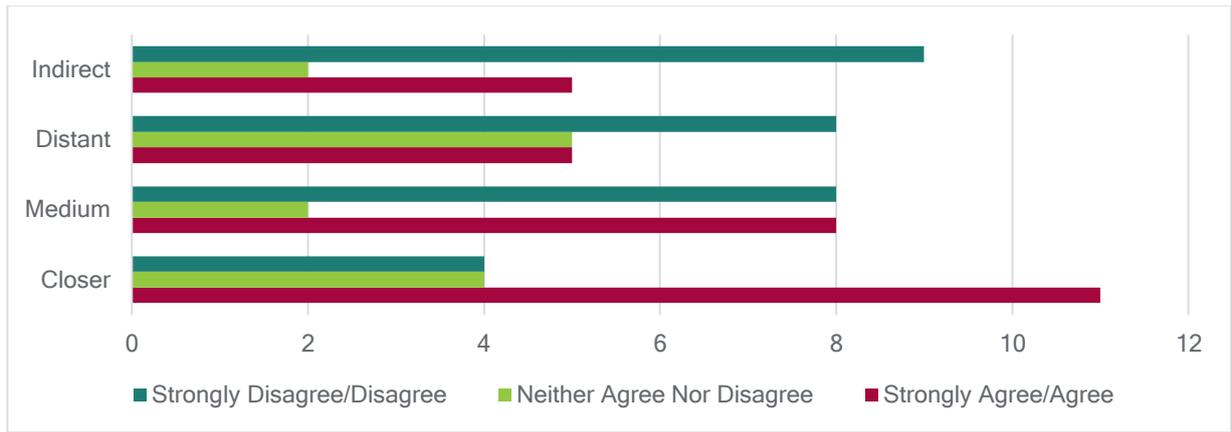


Figure 8- “Learning about spycops infiltrations impacted my entire worldview” (by proximity to spycops)

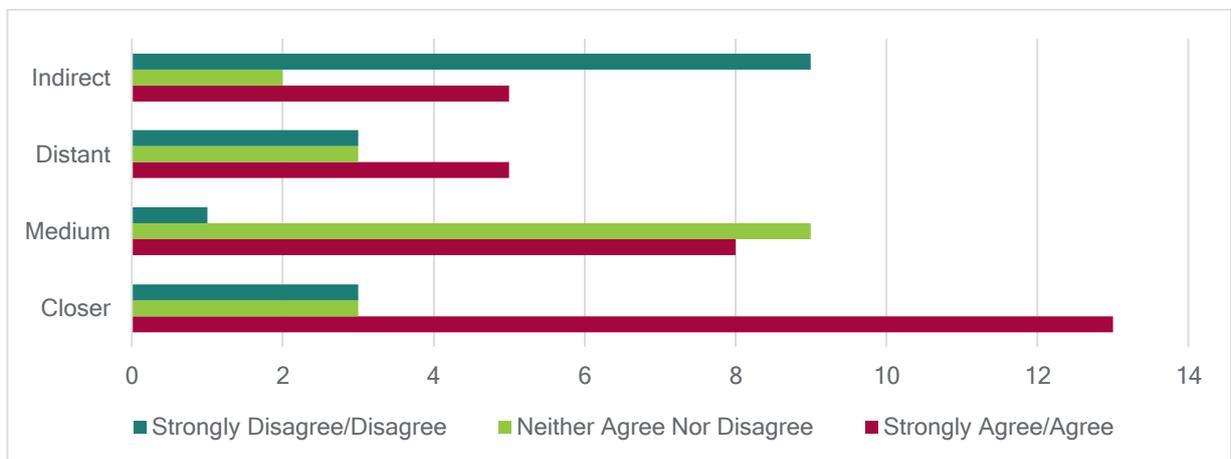


Figure 9- “Learning about spycops infiltrations came as a surprise” (by proximity to spycops)

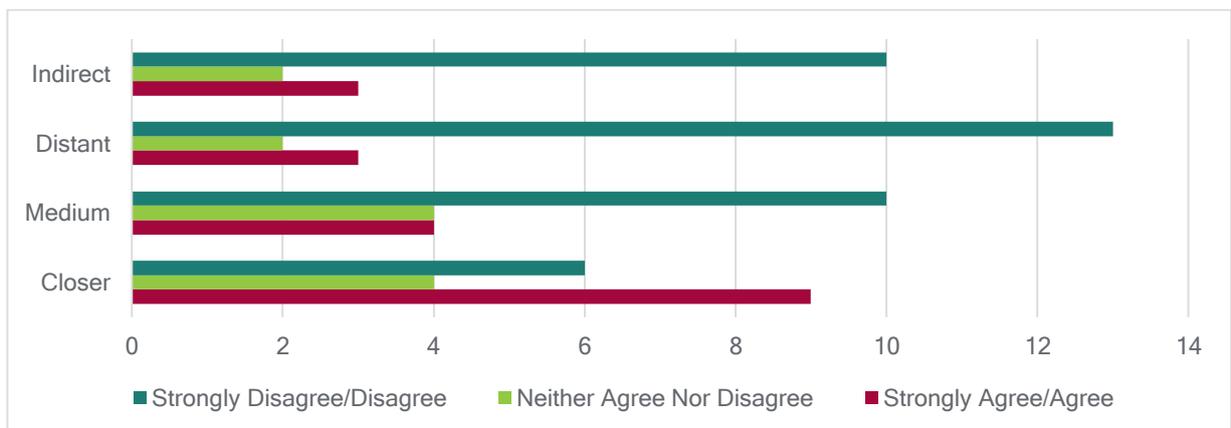


Figure 10- “Learning about spycops infiltrations made me question reality itself” (by proximity to spycops)

The survey findings also demonstrate the damaging impact that the case had on activist morale and spirits within the community. 55.4% (n= 41) of respondents agreed with the statement: “Since learning about spycops infiltrations I find I am more pessimistic about the

potential for activists to achieve their aims", whilst 23.6% (n= 17) disagreed. Respondent #3 offered the following reflection on the way in which the infiltrations contributed to a sense of defeatism among some activists, as well as exacerbating other forms of harm and trauma experienced by activists.

"I have very little faith that individuals and activist groups can change anything now. The corporate state and the corporate media control is almost absolute. I have struggled with anxiety and depression since. I knew there were possibly police spies for years, in other groups, previous to them being discovered in our group, but I didn't realise what a terrible effect the knowledge that women were tricked into sex would have on me as a survivor of sexual assault."

In addition, as shown in Figure 11, the survey found that 73.0% (n= 54) of respondents felt that they have been more security conscious since learning about the spycops infiltrations. This suggests that the revelations, which were driven by activists own investigatory work, have resulted in an increase in awareness of security concerns in activist contexts.

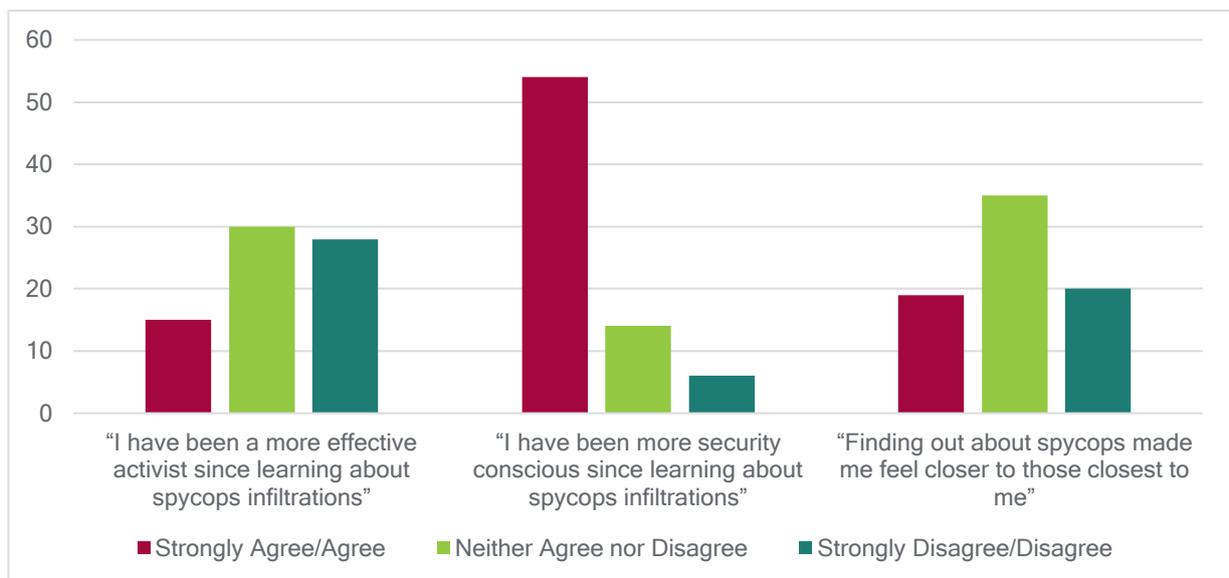


Figure 11- Other Impacts of Spycops

### *On Activism:*

Previous research on state surveillance has highlighted the chilling impact of the spycops case on activism (Ramsay et al, 2016). Figure 12 gives a clear indication of the impact spycops has had on the way respondents engage in activism, and is useful in illustrating the complexity of the impact of undercover policing. Whilst there is indeed evidence that activists desisted from activism because of spycops infiltrations, for some, the infiltrations had the impact of redirecting their energy away from other causes towards anti-state surveillance activism. Figure 12 indicates that whilst 67.6% (n= 50) of activists who completed the survey said that learning about spycops has changed how they engage in activism, in some way, 58.1% (n= 43) said that learning about spycops had not impacted the types of political causes they support with activism. When cross tabulating these results, 18.9% (n= 14) of respondents answered 'yes, significantly' to both questions. This

represents a noteworthy section of the sample, for whom spycops had the effect of changing both the way they engaged in activism and the causes for which they were active.

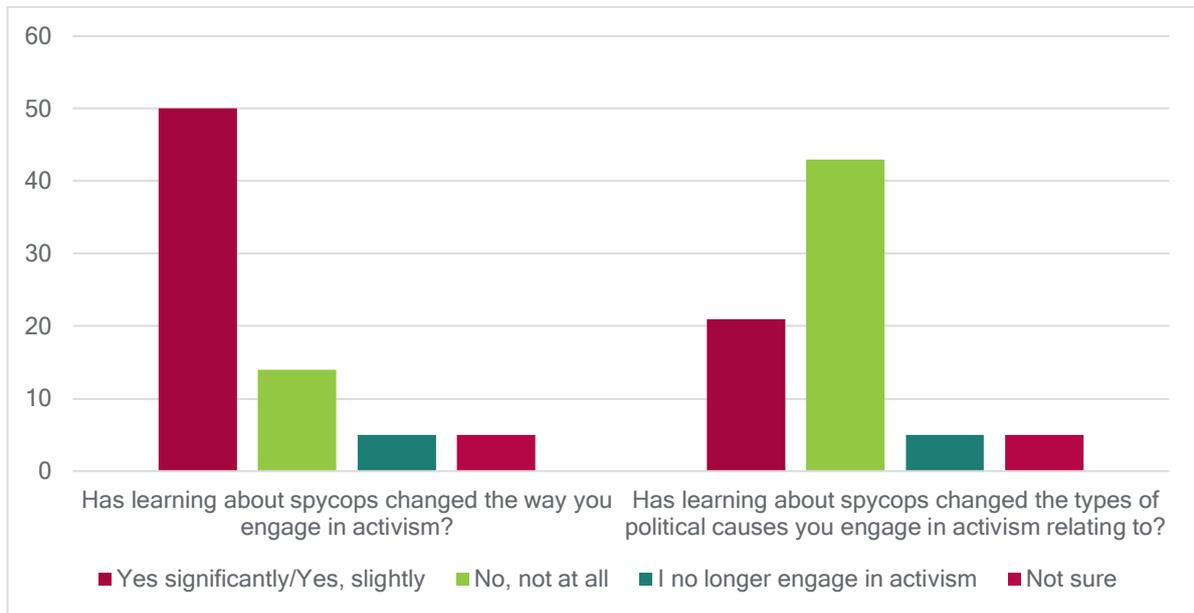


Figure 12- Impact of Spycops on Activism

Controlling for proximity to spycops reveals that 52.6% (n=10), of the 19 respondents who said they had a ‘closer’ relationship to spycops, answered ‘yes’ to spycops impacting the causes they were likely to be active within. In other words, activists who had a closer relationship with spycops were about as likely to say that spycops had impacted the types of political causes they engaged in as they were to answer otherwise. Those who said their relationship to spycops was ‘medium’, ‘distant’, or ‘indirect’ were less likely to say that spycops had impacted the types of causes they were involved in. As well as evidencing the diversity of experience of those impacted, these findings potentially also reflect the fact that many of those most closely impacted have become active within campaigns to hold spycops accountable.

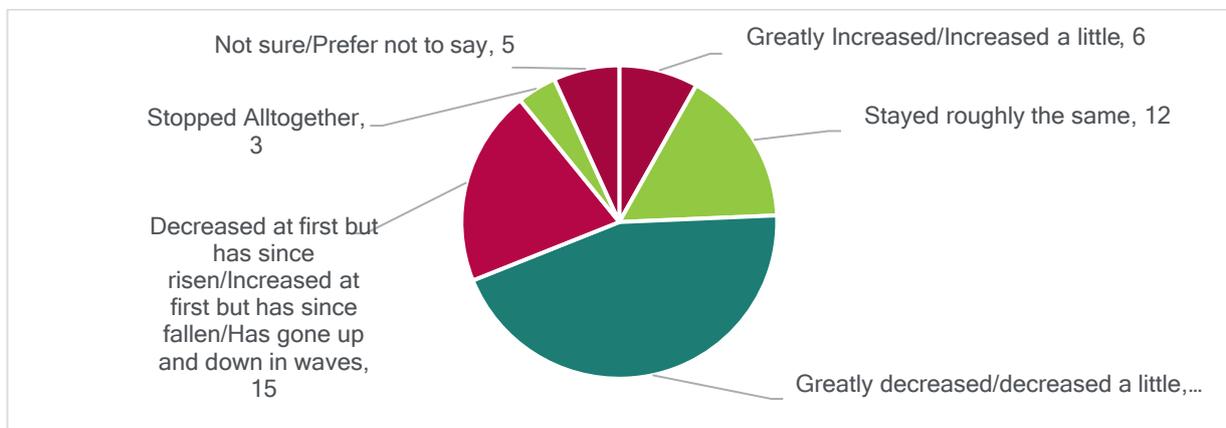


Figure 13- Since learning about spycops, the amount of time I have spent engaged in activism has...

Examining Figure 13, we can see an overall downward trend in respondents' engagement in activism overtime. 44.6% (n= 33) respondents said that their engagement in activism had decreased to some extent, compared to just 8.1% (n= 6) who said their engagement in activism had straightforwardly increased. We can also see that 20.3% (n= 15) found their activism to have fluctuated in some way. Just 4.1% (n= 3) said their activism had stopped altogether. In answer to another question, 65.9% (n= 48) said that when they were most politically active was before spycops revelations, further emphasising the decline following the revelations.

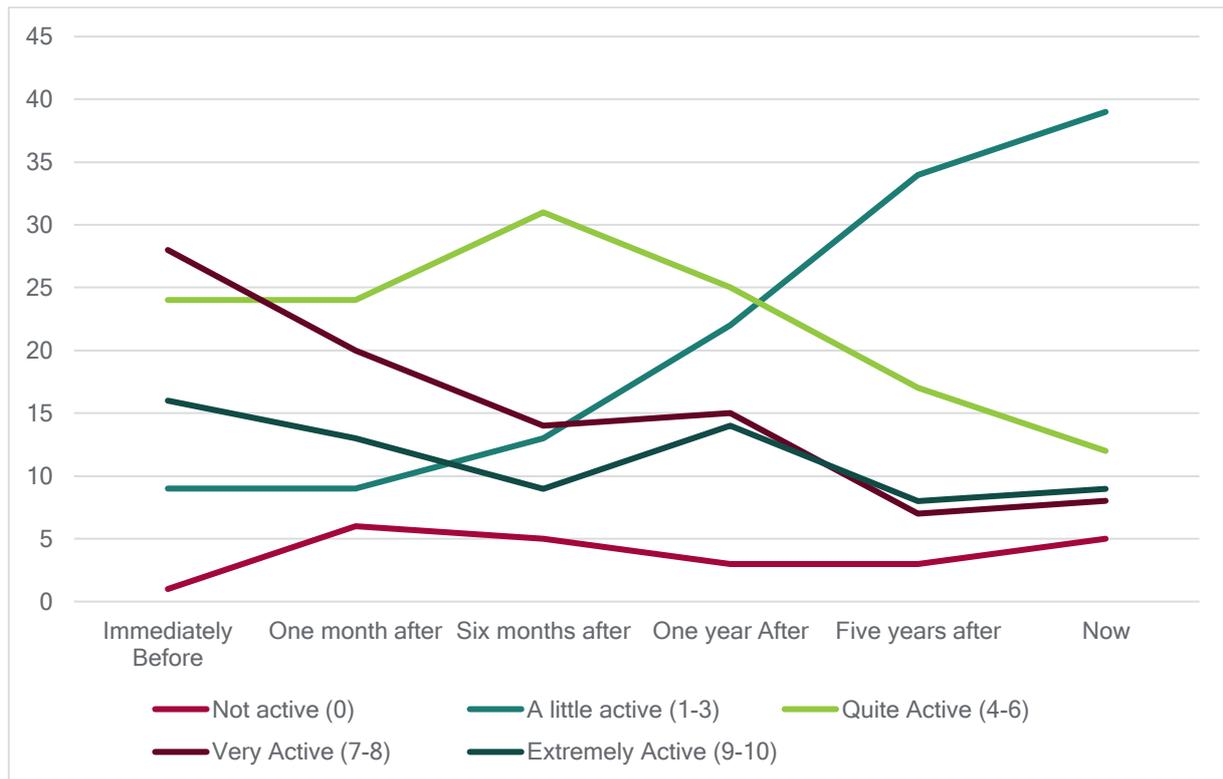


Figure 14- Changes in engagement in activism over time (before and after exposure of spycops)

Respondents were asked to rank their level engagement in activism over time out of 10. Looking at Figure 14, we can see that immediately before the exposure of spycops a majority of 37.8% (n= 28) of respondents ranked their engagement as very active (7-8 out of 10). Following the exposure of the first spycops, the number of activists rating their level of participation in activism as a little active (1-3 out of 10) increases from 12.2% (n= 9), immediately before the exposures, to 52.7% (n= 39) today. In contrast, as time progresses, the number of respondents regarding their engagement as quite active (4-6 out of 10), very active (7-8 out of 10) and extremely active (9-10 out of 10) falls over time. We can however see evidence of waves of activity across the different levels of engagement (e.g. a brief increase in those saying they were quite active and extremely active immediately following the exposures). This corresponds with the results shown in Figure 13, where 20.3% (n= 15) said their activism had fluctuated in some way. Whilst this paints a picture of declining levels of activism over time, it also evidences enduring activism across the sample of respondents, with only 6.8% (n= 5) of respondents no longer consider themselves to be politically active

today. Of those 5, 40% (n= 2) did not cite spycops as a reason for this. This means within the total sample we can only point to 4.1% (n= 3) respondents who (a) no longer consider themselves to be politically active and (b) cite spycops as a contributing cause. This demonstrates the enduring political agency of impacted activists in the present, despite the corrosive impacts of these harmful infiltrations.

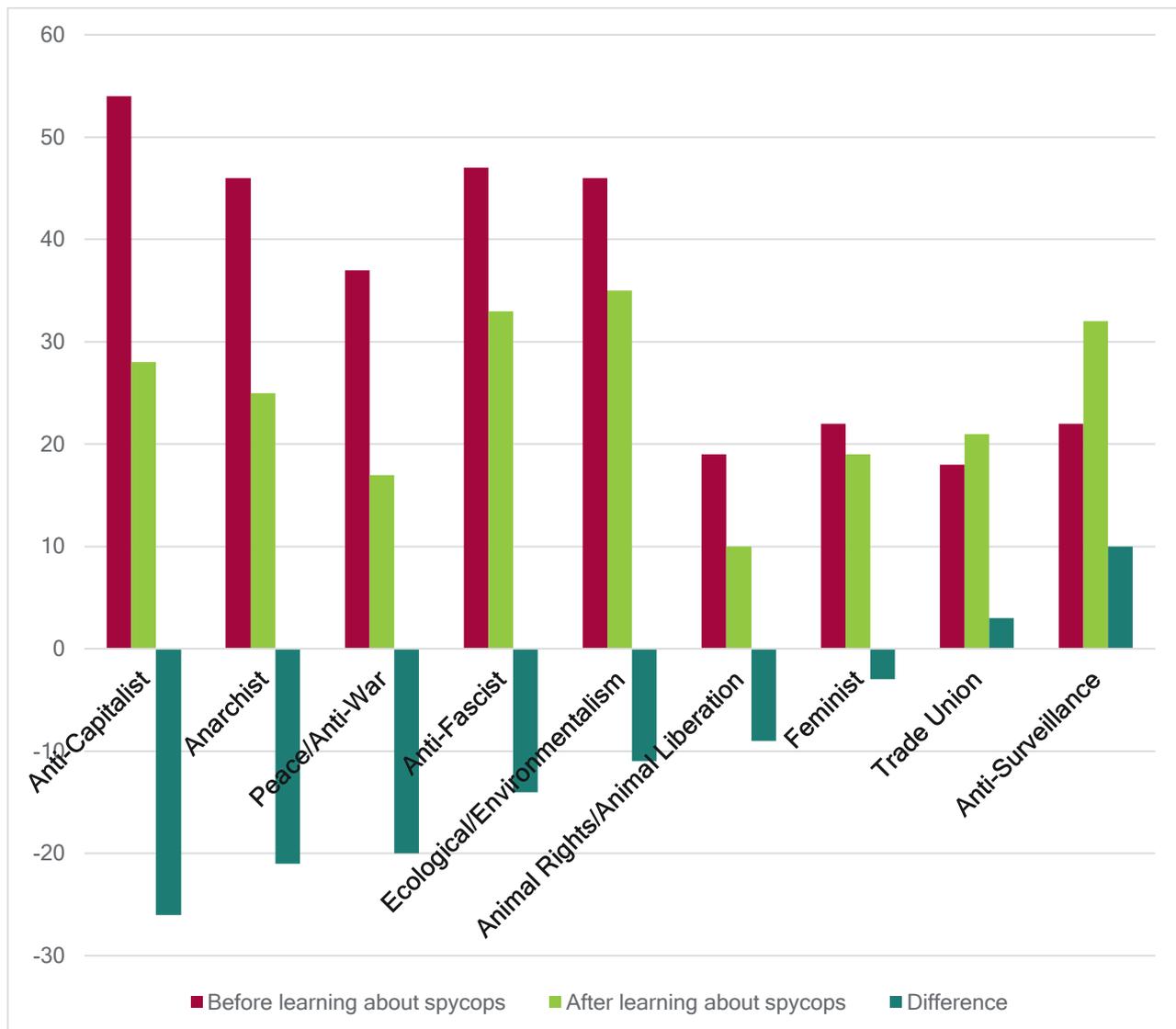


Figure 15- Causes for which respondents had engaged in activism, before and after learning about spycops

The survey also demonstrated changes in the political causes in which activists were involved, following the revelations. Respondents could select as many causes as were relevant. Examining Figure 15, we can see a downward trend in relation to engagement in most causes listed, with activists less likely to indicate that they had participated in anti-capitalist; anarchist; peace/anti-war; anti-fascist, ecological/environmental and animal rights/liberation activism following the spycops exposures. In contrast, more activists indicated they had been involved in trade union (rising slightly from 18 to 21) and anti-surveillance activism (rising more markedly from 22 to 32) following the spycops exposures than before. This is an interesting finding, which potentially also illustrates the shift of some

activists, away from the causes their original participation within resulted in them encountering spies, towards anti-surveillance activism.

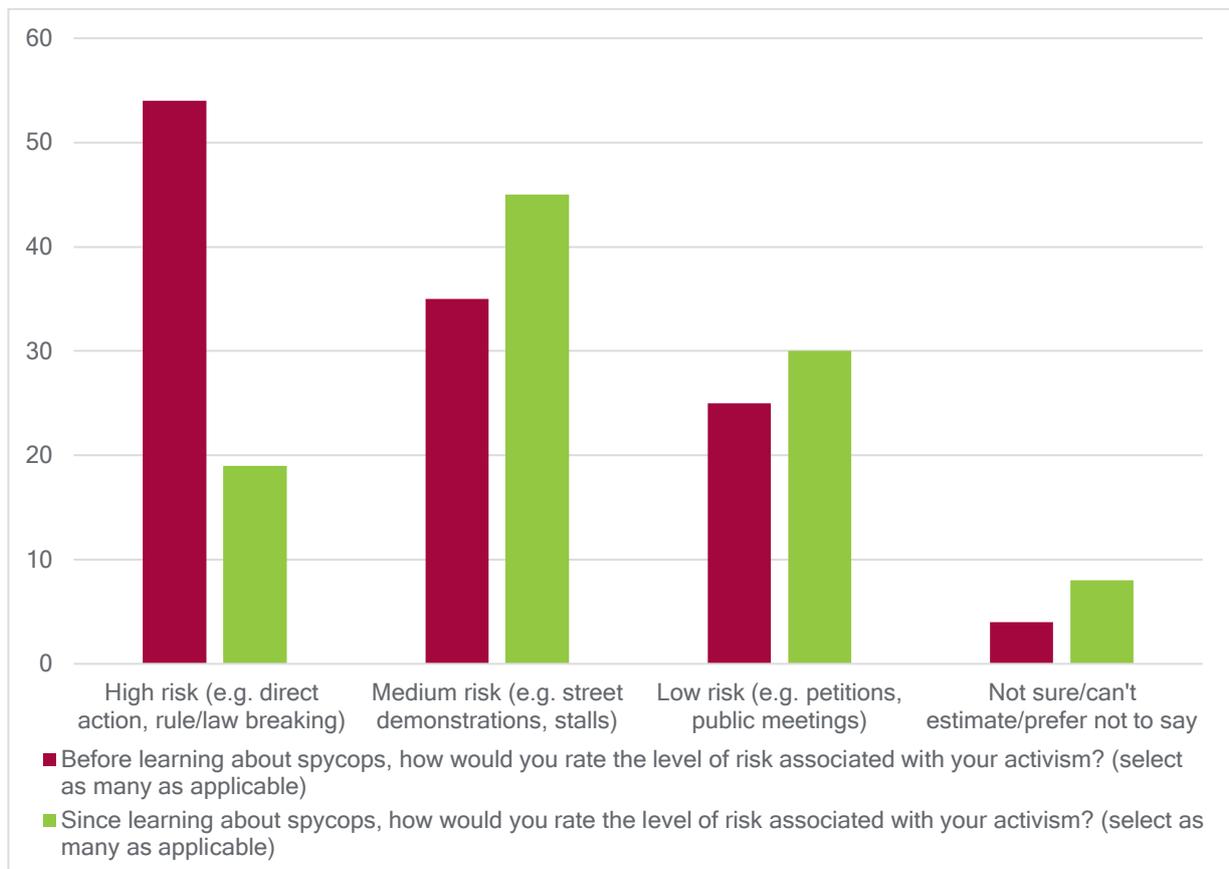


Figure 16- Risk Associated with Activism Before and After Spycops Exposures

Examining risk-taking and types of activism, we can see from Figure 16 that there has also been a downward trend in terms of the level of risk activists associate with their activism. Figure 16 shows that 73% (n= 54) activists had engaged in 'high risk' activism before learning about spycops, whereas Figure 17 shows that figure fall to 25.7% (n= 19) after spycops. So, whilst most respondents are still active, the above results show declining engagement in activism, changes in causes, and decreases in risk-taking following spycops.

There are of course various reasons why a person's engagement in activism might have changed beyond the impact of spycops (Ramsay et al, 2016), and so subsequent questions attempted to elicit more detail on this. Attributing cause to these changes in engagement in activism, or the changes in the campaigns within which respondents had engaged in activism, is very difficult. We obviously should not assume that all changes in respondents' activism are a result of spycops infiltrations. We should also account for the more subtle ways that spycops might have accelerated pre-existing trajectories away from activism. Respondent #22 explained the difficulties associated with establishing 'cause' precisely:

"It's hard to say what might have happened if I never found out. It certainly wasn't my intention to retire from activism, but I had already started a new career, and was looking to have kids."

However, as Figure 17 shows, ‘spycops’ was the second most common explanation selected by respondents for a decrease in their activism at 43.2% (n= 32). This was behind ‘changing life course/getting older’, which 54.1% (n= 40) selected, and ahead of ‘activist burnout’ which 37.8% (n= 28) selected. Couple these findings with Figure 12, in which 67.6% (n= 50) respondents said that learning about spycops has changed how they engage in activism in some way, and there is evidence here that spycops might account for some of the changes in overall engagement, levels of risk taken, and changes in the causes to which activists devoted their energy.

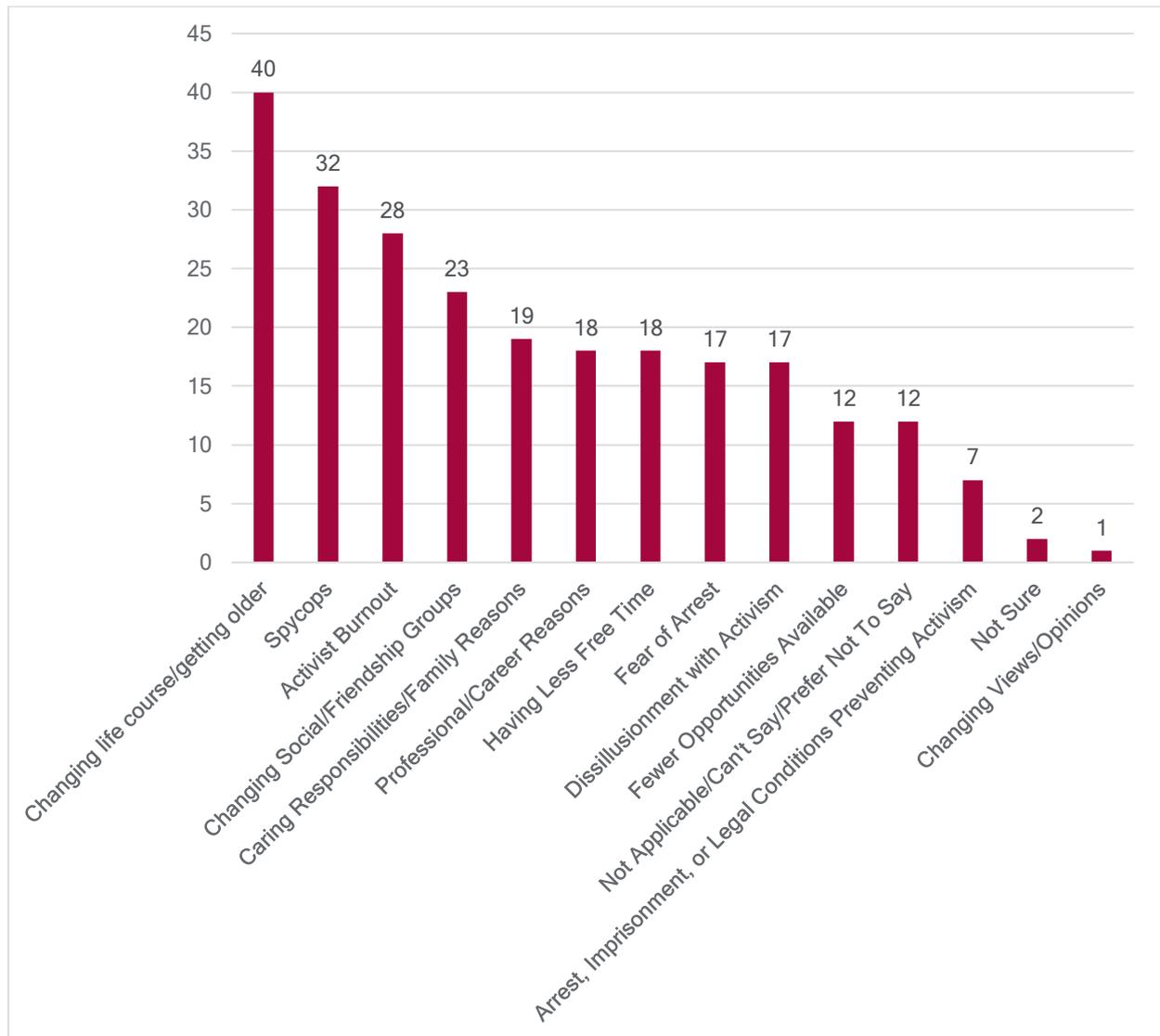


Figure 17- If your personal level of engagement in activism has decreased since you found out about spycops, which of the following factors impacted that change? (Select as many as applicable)

A simple cause-effect relationship between spycops and desistance from activism cannot be evidenced in this data. Figure 17 may indicate that spycops expedited a process of desistance from activism that might have otherwise been more organic and gradual. Looking more closely at how activists explain changes in their activism, just 5.3% (n= 1) of the 19

respondents who had a ‘closer’ connection to spycops, said that changes in their activism would have certainly happened anyway, irrespective of spycops. By comparison, 55.6% (n= 10) of the 18 who had a ‘medium’ connection, 27.8% (n= 5) of the 18 who had a ‘distant’ connection, and 31.3% (n= 5) of the 16 who had an ‘indirect’ connection said the changes would certainly have happened anyway. This supports the view that the closer an activist was to spycops, the bigger the impact spycops had on their activism.

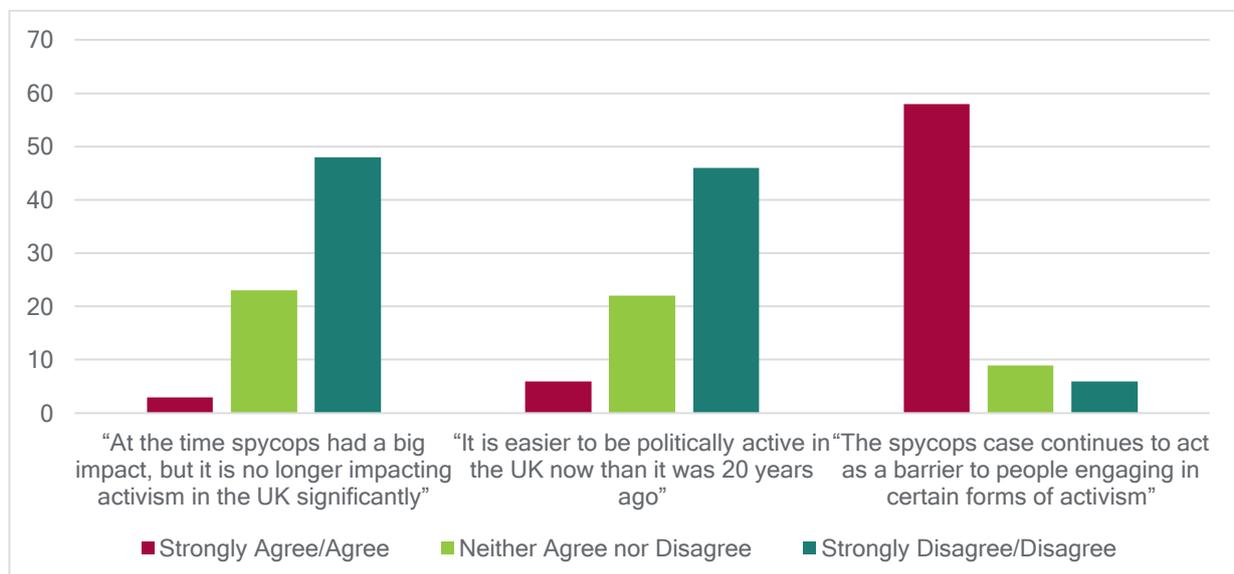
The survey also found that 49.4% (n= 36) respondents said that they agreed with the statement: “people around me became less likely to participate in activism following the spycops revelations”. Relatedly, 36.5% (n= 27) said that they found there were fewer opportunities to engage in activism following the revelations. 72.9% (n= 54) agreed that the spycops case has had a “chilling effect on political activism in the UK”. These results further demonstrate that, in addition to the above findings around the complex impact spycops had on respondents’ personal engagement in activism, respondents also perceived spycops to have had a wider chilling effect on activism. Qualitative comments provide further detail within which these shifts can be contextualised. For example, respondent #17 commented:

“I was quite young at the time I heard about the spycop who had infiltrated my mother and her friends. It deeply affected my trust and made me feel very angry towards the police and the government. As a teenager I was increasingly involved in direct action and this pretty much stopped after my flat was raided by the police, I believe on orders influenced by the spycops.”

Respondent #9 said:

“I still take part in direct action with trusted friends, but locally, not coordinated nationally or internationally. I do not attend meetings any more though, and did feel strangely about the openness of public meeting more recently.”

Whilst a chilling impact might therefore be evident in this data, this must not overshadow activists’ enduring political agency and resilience in the face of these harms. Survey responses reveal an overwhelming majority still engage in activism of some kind.



## Figure 18- Enduring Legacy of Spycops

Placing these impacts in a contemporary context, Figure 18 demonstrates the enduring legacy of the spycops case as perceived by respondents. 62.2% (n= 46) disagreed with the statement “It is easier to be politically active in the UK now than it was 20 years ago”, with just 8.1% (n= 6) agreeing. Similarly, 64.9% (n= 48) participants disagreed with the statement that “At the time spycops had a big impact, but it is no longer impacting activism in the UK significantly”, whilst just 4.1% (n= 3) agreed. Finally, and most emphatically, in response to the statement “the spycops case continues to act as a barrier to people engaging in certain forms of activism”, 78.4% (n= 58) respondents agreed, with just 8.1% (n= 6) disagreeing. This paints a clear picture that among the respondents to this survey, the harmful legacy of the spycops case endures, and continued to impact activism in 2021. In addition to this, 45.9% (n= 34) respondents felt reasonably confident that they were personally still being monitored and 97.3% (n= 72) of respondents agreed with the statement “I suspect that spycops are still actively monitoring non-violent political campaigns”.

## Conclusions

As discussed earlier, this is a small sample, particularly compared to the number of people who were impacted by spying. The sample cannot be shown to be representative, nor can the results be shown to be statistically significant. Nevertheless, the results do provide some interesting insights into the perceptions and strength of feeling among those who responded to the survey. The key findings are respondents’ overwhelming dissatisfaction with the UCPI, their perceptions of the human rights dimensions of spying, the gendered impacts of spying, their perceptions of the way spycops damaged trust within and beyond activist movements, the complex impacts on activism itself, as well as the enduring political agency of those impacted. These findings suggest that the ‘legitimacy deficit’, which Schlembach (2016) warned of, exists and remains a big problem for the UCPI.

Respondents were emphatic in their view that the inquiry was performing poorly across the board, including in relation to its speed/pace, independence, transparency, impartiality, communication, use of technology, facilitating participation and response to the Covid-19 pandemic. This was consistent across the sample, irrespective of whether respondents were engaged as core-participants in the UCPI or not. What is clear from these results, and from the wider context, is that impacted activists are extremely dissatisfied with the way the UCPI is progressing, and that significant change is needed if the inquiry is to succeed, and to regain and retain the trust of those subject to harmful surveillance. On the issue of human rights, the majority of those surveyed felt that their human rights had been infringed by spycops. As Kate Wilson’s IPT judgement has proven beyond doubt, spycops infiltrations were a breach of activists’ human rights, and these results may suggest impacted activists do view the case in these terms. Again, and in line with the Kate Wilson IPT judgement, the gendered nature of this harm was clear in the sample, with infiltrations having had a more significant impact on the willingness of women surveyed to engage in romantic relationships than men. The survey found that the majority of respondents felt the spycops’ case had

damaged bonds of trust in social movements, and said they personally became less trusting of new faces within activist movements following the spycops revelations. Significantly, more than half said they became less trusting in general following the revelations. This indicates a much broader and significant impact on well-being and happiness within targeted communities. Looking at how the spycops case appears to have impacted activism, a downward trend can be observed following the spycops revelations, in relation to levels of engagement with activism in general, the levels of risk activists were willing to take, as well as changes in the types of causes activists were involved with. The factor most frequently cited, as having influenced these changes, was 'getting older/changing life course', cited by around half of respondents. The influence of spycops was the second most frequently cited factor (cited by over 40%). Notably, just 3 respondents said their activism had stopped altogether since the spycops revelations, indicating that most activists impacted by spycops surveyed remain politically active in some way. This shows the enduring political agency of activists targeted by undercover police. Whilst a small sample, the survey provides useful data from which to demonstrate the enduring harmful impacts of spycops, and the need for significant change in order to correct the ongoing failures of the inquiry and earn the trust of people who have been harmed by spying, who, as had been shown, overwhelmingly want the UCPI to be successful.

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