

December 2023

# More than choosing sides

## How Britons are navigating the Israel- Palestine conflict



**More in  
Common**

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## About More in Common

More in Common is a think tank and research agency working to bridge the gap between policy makers and the public and helping people in Westminster to understand those voters who feel ignored or overlooked by those in power. Our British Seven segmentation provides a unique lens at understanding what the public think and why. We've published groundbreaking reports on a range of issues from climate and refugees to culture wars to crime. We are a full-service research agency offering polling and focus group research and are members of the British Polling Council.

We are grateful to the Pears Foundation for commissioning this research. More in Common has retained full editorial control over this report.

This research was conducted just prior to the pause in fighting in late November. Full methodology information and timings can be found at the end of the report.

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## About the British Seven segments

This report uses our [British Seven](#) segmentation to categorise participants. This is a psychographic, values-based segmentation of the British public which in many cases is more predictive of beliefs on certain issues than other demographics. The seven segments are:

**Progressive Activists:** A passionate and vocal group for whom politics is at the core of their identity, and who seek to correct the historic marginalisation of groups based on their race, gender, sexuality, wealth, and other forms of privilege. They are politically engaged, critical, opinionated, frustrated, cosmopolitan, and environmentally conscious.

**Civic Pragmatists:** A group that cares about others, at home or abroad, and who are turned off by the divisiveness of politics. They are charitable, concerned, exhausted, community-minded, open to compromise, and socially liberal.

**Disengaged Battlers:** A group that feels that they are just keeping their heads above water, and who blame the system for its unfairness. They are tolerant, insecure, disillusioned, disconnected, overlooked, and socially liberal.

**Established Liberals:** A group that has done well and means well towards others, but also sees a lot of good in the status quo. They are comfortable, privileged, cosmopolitan, trusting, confident, and pro-market.

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**Loyal Nationals:** A group that is anxious about the threats facing Britain and facing themselves. They are proud, patriotic, tribal, protective, threatened, aggrieved, and frustrated about the gap between the haves and the have-nots.

**Disengaged Traditionalists:** A group that values a well-ordered society, takes pride in hard work, and wants strong leadership that keeps people in line. They are self-reliant, ordered, patriotic, tough-minded, suspicious, and disconnected.

**Backbone Conservatives:** A group who are proud of their country, optimistic about Britain's future and who follow the news, mostly via traditional media sources. They are nostalgic, patriotic, proud, secure, confident, and engaged with politics.

More information about the segments can be found in Annex A.

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## Introduction

The consequences of Hamas' brutal act of terror on October 7 marked the latest tragic development in a conflict that has no winners - threatening the security of the world's only Jewish state and at the same time setting back the path to Palestinian self-determination. But as the past 50 days have shown the consequences have reverberated far beyond the Middle East, reaching the UK's shores.

It is natural, healthy and important in an outward-facing country for those of us here in Britain to have a view on tragic events overseas. However, the way in which debates are playing out and being presented poses very real risks to both community relations and individuals' safety in the UK.

In the time period since October 7th, we have seen Jewish businesses and properties vandalised, Jewish students targeted on campus, and children afraid to go to school. While the vast majority of pro-Palestinian protests have been peaceful, a minority have engaged in direct antisemitic rhetoric.

At the same time, politicians who ought to know better have sought to label peaceful pro-Palestinian marchers as 'hateful', while the far-right has sought to take advantage of the opportunity to try and stir up anti-Islamic sentiment in the UK.

Even beyond extreme acts of violence, prejudice and discrimination, there is a risk that the way the Israel-Hamas conflict is being portrayed on traditional and particularly social media risks deepening division. Young people in particular told us that they feel constantly pressured to take a side, and worried about the consequences of not doing so. Some other adults have clearly started to buy into some of the dangerous conspiracy theories about the conflict that are being promoted online and are at risk of radicalisation.

Yet the truth is that the portrayal of a country split into two warring camps - those who 'side' with Israel and those who 'side' with Palestine does not reflect where most Britons stand on or think about the conflict. Instead, most Britons have found themselves simultaneously angry about the actions of murderous terrorists, concerned for civilians in both Israel and Gaza, and profoundly worried about what the situation means for community relations here in the UK.

Such a perspective might not garner many likes on social media, or make for the most engaging broadcast content or print spread - but our research suggests it is what the median member of the British public believes.

That is not to pretend that the broader Israel-Palestine debate and the current Israel-Hamas war are not issues that arouse strong passions in sections of the public. However our research finds that even those who are among the strongest advocates of either Israel's right to take a robust approach to self-defence or the Palestinians' right to self

determination, can and do have empathy and concern for those on the other side of the debate.

This report draws on quantitative opinion research and a series of targeted focus groups conducted over the month of November. While some of the focus group discussions were specifically convened with Muslims, the majority of the research did not focus specifically on views of Muslim and Jewish communities, but on the views of the public at large; the quantitative research is based on a nationally representative sample. There would be value in further quantitative research specifically into the views and experiences of minority ethnic groups - not just on this but many other issues.

However, we should not see the stewardship of debates about the conflict as the responsibility of minority groups or an issue that is solely about Jewish and Muslim communities. Indeed, the number who do express sympathy for a particular side in the conflict (about ten million on each side) far outnumber the population of British Muslims, of whom there are about four million, and British Jews, of whom there are around 300,000. Many (but not all) of those with either a family or faith link to the region (including some Christians) are more likely to feel a specific allegiance. Yet millions of others lean to one side of a conflict as a result of their views, values, politics, and life experience, beyond personal religious identity. Therefore this report also explores how we can handle differences across generations, and between political perspectives about protest and politics, alongside the important concerns about minority relationships and safety.

Why is More in Common interested in this issue? Firstly because too much of the coverage of British attitudes to the conflict is at once both reductive and distorting. Dividing the country into stark binaries cedes discussion to those with the loudest voices and silences the views of the majority of Britons. That in turn risks polarisation on this issue becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy where ordinary Britons feel forced to choose and double down. It also gives licence to a small but vocal fringe of conflict entrepreneurs and extremists to use the conflict as an opportunity to sow discord and hate. We have seen examples of this already with attacks on Jewish places of work and study, a rise in anti-Muslim hate, and a rise in far right activity. At their most extreme, both far right and Islamist radicalisation have led to the murders of two Members of Parliament in the past decade, Jo Cox who inspired the formation of More in Common, and more recently Sir David Amess.

The vast majority of even the most passionate advocates of the Israeli and Palestinian causes would never dream of engaging in acts of bigotry, let alone violence. Yet the more this debate polarises, the harder it becomes to have reasoned discussion and to protect community relations.

As much as possible, this report attempts to faithfully report the different shades of public opinion on Israel-Palestine rather than the perspectives of the authors, who themselves have different views about the issues involved.

## More than choosing sides

Our hope is that by showcasing the views of different Britons - their deep concern for both what is happening in the Middle East and fears for minority relationships and safety at home - we can play a small role in fostering a better approach to how we handle the implications of that conflict here in the UK. Such a discussion would recognise that people can and do have multiple sympathies, but most of all want different groups of Britons to get on; that silence is far more likely to signify an aversion to conflict rather than complicity; and that taking their own steps to protect community relations in Britain is the most important thing that ordinary Britons can do.

## Executive Summary

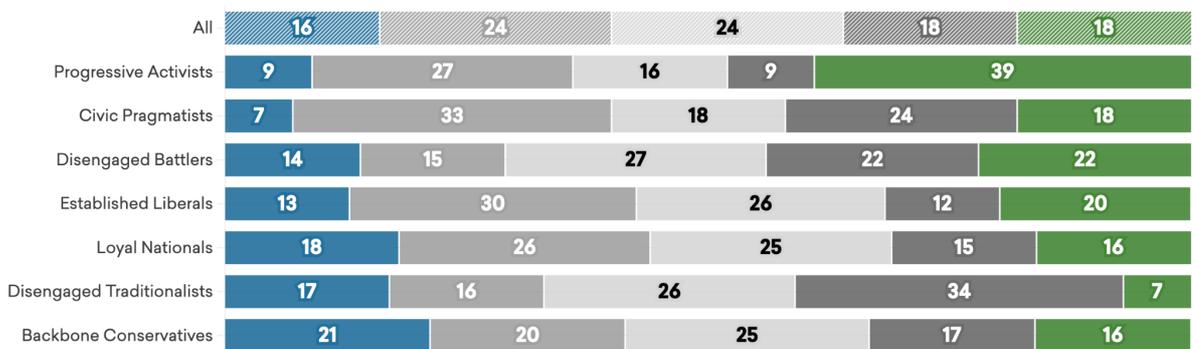
**People express a range of strong and passionate views on the Israel-Palestine conflict. But in contrast to heated debates in the media and online, most Britons haven't taken a 'side' on the conflict.** 16 per cent say they sympathise more with the Israeli side and 18 per cent with the Palestinian side. But far more people - two thirds of Britons - sympathise with neither side, both sides equally, or aren't sure which side they sympathise with more.

Figure 1

### Most Britons have not taken a side in the Israel-Palestine conflict

Which side in the Israel-Palestine conflict do you sympathise with more?

● The Israeli side ● Both sides equally ● Neither side ● Not sure ● The Palestinian side



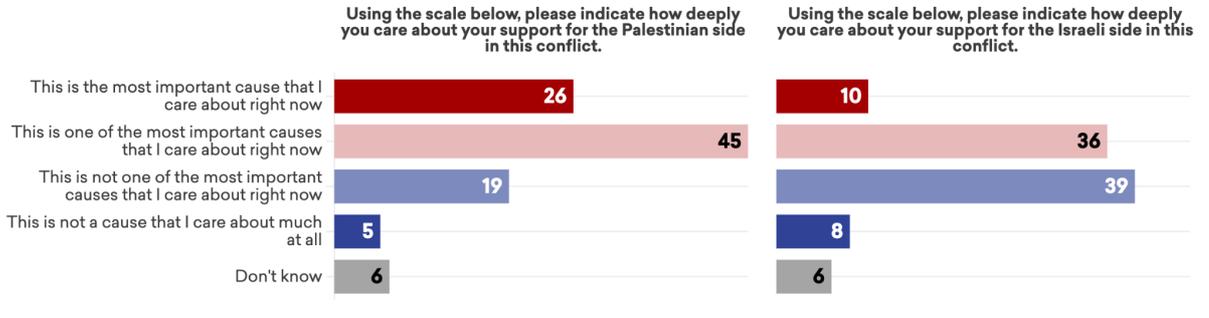
Source: More in Common, November 2023

**Rather than seeing the conflict through a pro-Palestine or pro-Israeli lens, most of the public approach the conflict from their shared starting point of disgust at terrorism and deep concern for civilians.** The public are uncomfortable with the way that some have framed debates about the conflict as a binary issue, when they are more likely to talk about their shared concerns for civilians in both Israel and Gaza.

**Support for either side is equal in size, but not intensity.** Those who sympathise more with the Palestinian side are much more likely to say this is an important cause to them than those who sympathise more with the Israeli side. They are more than twice as likely to have attended a protest about the conflict, more than five times as likely to have signed a petition relating to the conflict, and three times as likely to have posted on social media about the conflict, as compared to those who sympathise more with the Israeli side. This asymmetry can distort perceptions as to how ordinary Britons think about the conflict.

Figure 2

**Those who sympathise more with the Palestinian side are more passionate in their support than those who sympathise more with the Israeli side**



Source: More in Common, November 2023

**Support for either side is not unconditional.** Britons hold negative views of Hamas, including a majority of those who say they sympathise more with the Palestinian side. And Britons do not think that Hamas represents the views of ordinary Palestinians. At the same time, Britons do not think that Israel’s response should break international law, including a majority of those who sympathise more with the Israeli side.

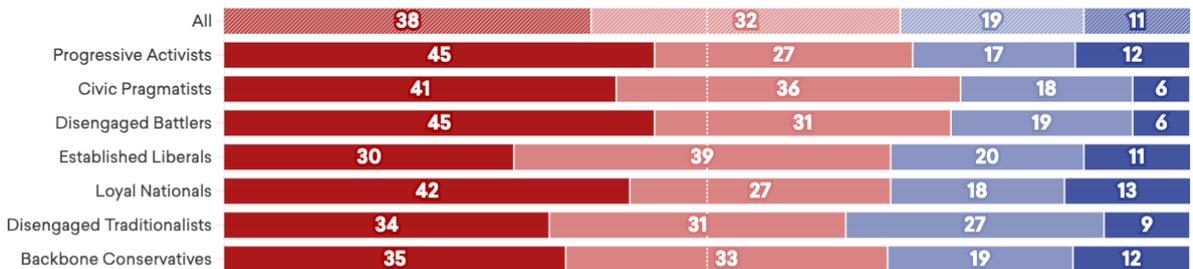
**Britons think that the most extreme voices are drowning out moderate voices in this conflict.** The groups who represent the majority of the population and don’t side with one side more than another feel left out of conversations about the conflict.

Figure 3

**The public think that extreme views are drowning out moderate voices on the conflict**

Please use the scale below to describe which of the statements you agree with more, where 1 means you completely agree with the first statement and 4 means you completely agree with the second statement

- 1 - People with the most extreme views on Israel-Palestine tend to crowd out the voices of people with more moderate views
- 2 -
- 3 -
- 4 - People with more balanced voices are heard the same as people with more extreme views



Source: More in Common, November 2023

**Young people in particular feel forced to ‘pick a side’.** Young people explain that they worry about being attacked or pigeon holed if they don’t sign up to a particular side and are frustrated about assumptions based on their background about who they should support. Information shared on Instagram and TikTok makes young people particularly alert to division on this issue in the UK.

**There is a risk that opinionated stances on the conflict become part of people’s personal identities, forming the basis of ‘stacked identities’ and driving polarisation.** Some of the people who are most passionate about the topic are becoming actively hostile to those who disagree with them, which makes constructive conversations significantly more difficult. Polarisation and radicalisation of the debate are making a minority of Britons more willing to engage with often highly prejudiced conspiracy theories.

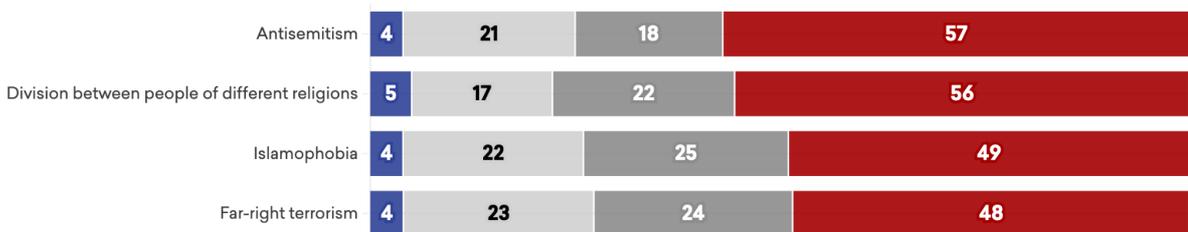
**Britons are deeply concerned about rising antisemitism and Islamophobia in the UK as a result of the conflict.** Britons worry that antisemitism and Islamophobia will get worse in the UK if the conflict continues, and express concerns that conflict entrepreneurs are using the war in Israel and Gaza to sow hatred of and between Britain’s religious communities.

Figure 4

### Britons worry about religious discrimination and division getting worse if the conflict continues

Do you think the following are likely to become more or a problem, less of a problem, or stay about the same, if the war in Israel-Palestine continues?

● Get better ● Don't know ● Stay about the same ● Get worse



Source: More in Common, November 2023

**The public have been let down by some politicians, who they think have been exploiting the crisis for political gain and unnecessarily dividing the country.** Many people are frustrated by the way politicians harness moments like this for their own purpose, and want leadership against antisemitism, anti-Muslim hate, and extremism, rather than attempts to divide the public into two groups.

**The public want peace in the Middle East, but there is disagreement on how best to get there.** While around a third of Britons support a ceasefire, others support different approaches including a temporary pause in the fighting and many feel that they don’t know

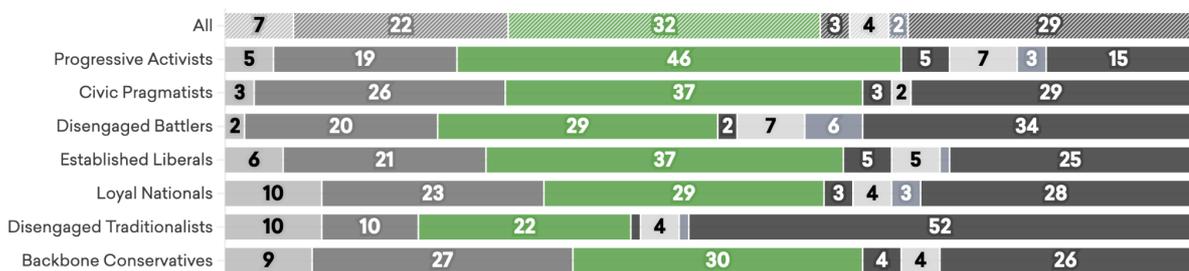
enough to say. Even those advocates of a ceasefire are sceptical that either side would stick to it.

**Figure 5**

### A ceasefire is Britons' most popular solution to the conflict, but it does not command a majority

Which of the following do you think should be the government's policy on the conflict in Israel and Palestine?

- Increased military support for Israel
- Call for a temporary pause in the fighting to allow humanitarian aid into Gaza
- Call for a ceasefire while diplomatic solutions are found to the conflict
- Military support for Palestine
- Impose sanctions on Israel
- Something else (please specify)
- Don't know enough to say



Source: More in Common, November 2023

**The public do not think that schools and universities are equipped to handle the conflict.** Many Britons worry that schools are not doing enough to tackle bullying or peer pressure related to the conflict. Further up the education system, the public think that universities are failing to create a safe space for discussion, particularly for Jewish students.

**While most Britons see some benefits of social media in providing information and communicating about the conflict, overall they tend to have negative views on the role it has played.** Young people are the most likely to use social media to understand the conflict, but are particularly concerned about its ability to spread both misinformation and bullying relating to the conflict.

**Those engaged in debates about the conflict can play a constructive role in helping create the space for better discussions by:**

- **Remembering that most Britons hold nuanced views** - social media can distort perspectives of the most vocal minority as representing majority opinion.
- **Recognising that many don't have strongly fixed views** - create space for open, respectful debate and questioning without pressure to 'pick a side'.
- **Acknowledging that some are uncomfortable engaging** - their silence often stems from concern about civilian suffering rather than disengagement.
- **Being aware that divisive rhetoric spreads rapidly online and into classrooms** - those with the biggest platforms should consider the wider impact of their words.

## More than choosing sides

Some individuals, groups and institutions have a particularly important role in maintaining community relations here in the UK:

- **Politicians:** Avoid escalating tensions or framing the debate as us-versus-them; build understanding of complex histories and work towards shared desire for peace.
- **Universities:** Firmly address antisemitism on campus while enabling open debate that builds students' capacity and respect for disagreement.
- **Schools:** Tackle antisemitic and anti-Muslim bullying, help young people develop their voice in a way that is healthy, creating opportunities to show support for positive community relations and tackling discrimination.
- **Protest organisers:** Make clear that hateful elements are not welcome and establish clear expectations around forms of protest.
- **Police:** Take a proactive approach to antisemitic and anti-Muslim hate crimes to reassure groups living in fear.
- **Social media firms:** Flag misinformation, increase transparency around the origins of viral content, and provide support for young people in relation to bullying and peer pressure.

## Chapter 1: Britons' starting points on the war

The nature of traditional and social media and the need to focus on what is most 'newsworthy' means it risks creating a distorted perspective of the extent of divisions on contentious issues. Rarely has that been more true than in how Britons are thinking about the Israel-Palestine conflict. Newspapers, bulletins, and social media feeds are dominated by stories of tension and conflict that suggest a Britain split between two camps - those who 'side' with Israel and those who 'side' with Palestine.

The reality, however, is that although most Britons are aware of, animated by and worried by the events they see unfolding in the Middle East, most are not choosing a side.

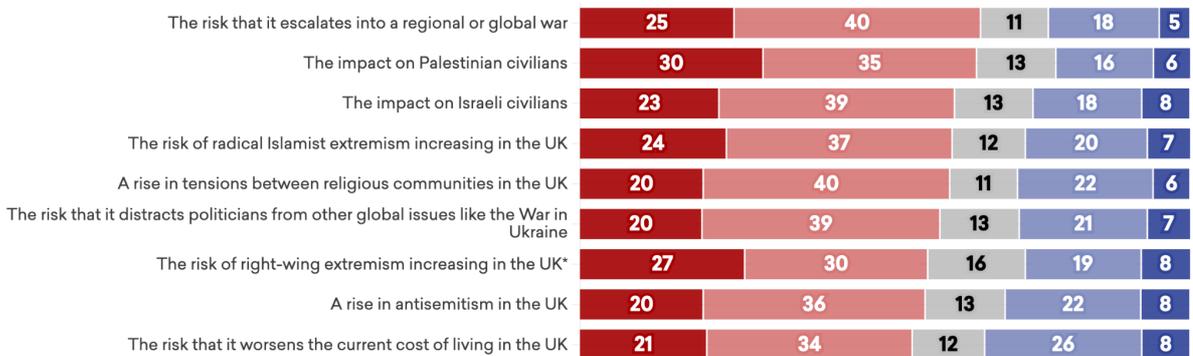
Instead, far from polarising between the two parties, most Britons have a starting point of deep concern, fear and sympathy for civilians, Israeli and Palestinian alike, who have been displaced, injured, kidnapped, or killed since 7th October.

Figure 6

### Britons are worried about the war's toll on civilians and risks of broader escalation

How much do you worry about the following impacts of the Israel-Palestine conflict?

● A great deal ● Quite a lot ● Don't know ● Not very much ● Not at all



Source: More in Common, November 2023 • \*Asked separately

In focus group conversations, Britons are much more likely to speak about their anger at the acts of terrorism committed against Israel and sadness at the humanitarian situation in Gaza than they are to litigate the political or historical aspects to the conflict.

*It just makes me feel really sad that basically innocent people are dying but also helpless. If you're just one person, it's so difficult to help what's going on.*

Sally, Established Liberal, Islington

## More than choosing sides

*The sad thing is that people don't learn from history. This kind of conflict - there's never a winner.*

**Louise, Progressive Activist, Oxford**

*We all have children of our own, and we're seeing children. It's a really hard watch.*

**Khadija, Disengaged Battler, Bradford**

Alongside this concern for civilians trapped in the heart of the conflict, there are real worries about the situation escalating into a global or regional war. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Britons explain their worries that the conflict could escalate to the UK. That worry of escalation is palpable again in focus group conversations about the Middle East. The public have real worries about what the conflict means for them and their families at home:

*It's really scary how often things like this are happening. And having to explain what's going on to my children and getting them to understand - it's really difficult and really scary.*

**Nancy, Progressive Activist, Oxford**

*Children [in the UK] are not allowed to be children any more ... they shouldn't be exposed to stuff like this.*

**Louise, Progressive Activist, Oxford**

In other cases, people see the war in Ukraine, rising tensions with China, and conflict in the Middle East as part of growing international instability, which drives a sense of insecurity. Many people talk about wanting to disengage from the news entirely, because it is either too depressing or too overwhelming:

*Ukraine and Russia was too much to me, so I've jumped onto my hobby of football, and paid less attention to the news.*

**Robert, Progressive Activist, Oxford**

*You see all these pictures and things, it's heartbreaking. And a lot of times I just switch it off because, or turn to another page because if you keep on watching it, you get desensitised. And I don't want to become desensitised to it all.*

**Doris, Civic Pragmatist, Camden**

*When the death counts started increasing on both sides I found it quite distressing, so I cut down how much I'm watching it.*

**Bill, Wycombe**

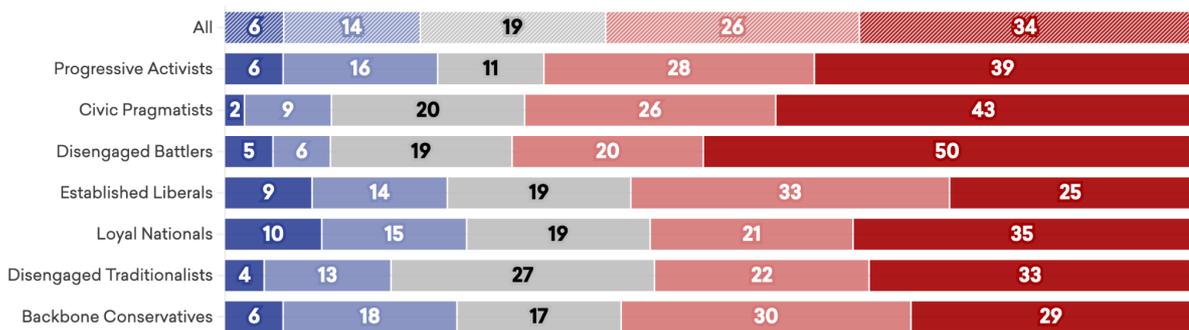
That sense of pessimism and insecurity leaves Britons, regardless of whether they have taken a side in the debate or not, thinking it is unlikely that the conflict in the Middle East will end any time soon. Only 20 per cent of Britons think that it is likely that the conflict will be resolved within the next ten years. Britons' concern about the humanitarian impact of the war is in turn shaped by this sense that a political resolution is not on the horizon.

**Figure 7**

### Britons do not think the conflict is likely to end any time soon

Based on what you have seen and read, how likely do you think it is that the conflict between Israel and Palestine will be resolved within the next ten years?

● Very likely ● Somewhat likely ● Don't know ● Somewhat unlikely ● Very unlikely



Source: More in Common, November 2023

For most Britons, then, the war is a reminder of the evil of terrorism and violence, and of a humanitarian disaster that is deeply distressing and a driver of insecurity. These starting points are shared across the population, even among those who are inclined to take a particular side in the conflict.

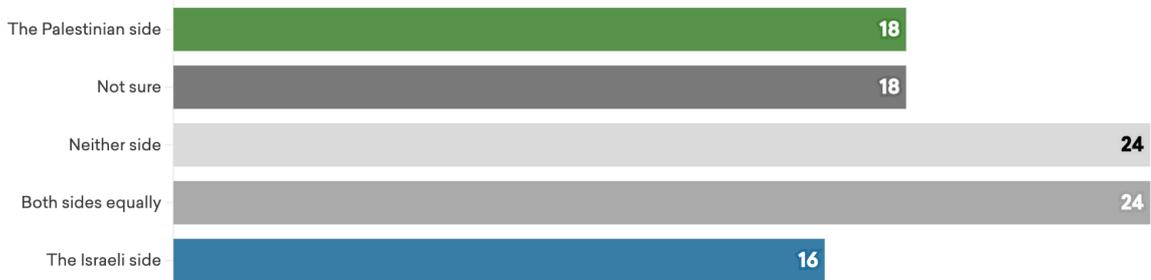
### Taking sides

Asked whether they sympathise with Israel or Palestine more, Britons are evenly split between the two - 16 per cent say they sympathise more with the Israeli side and 18 per cent say they sympathise more with the Palestinian side.

**Figure 8**

## Most Britons have not taken a side in the Israel-Palestine conflict

Which side in the Israel-Palestine conflict do you sympathise with more?



Source: More in Common, November 2023

While one in three Britons pick a side, a much larger body of people who do not take a side at all. In this group are almost a quarter (24 per cent) of the public who say they sympathise with neither side, another quarter (24 per cent) who say they sympathise with both sides equally, and 18 per cent who say they don't know which side they sympathise with more.

That nearly seven in ten Britons don't pick a side should not be seen as a simple 'both sidesism'. Instead our conversations with Britons find that most start from a common position of:

- Anger and despair at the loss of civilian life
- Disgust at Hamas' terrorism and belief in Israel's right to defend itself
- An expectation that Israel uses force proportionally, in line with international law
- A commitment to a pathway to Palestinian self-determination, and concern about the difficulties Palestinians face in their day-to-day lives

In short, most see the war as a humanitarian disaster and desperately want a peaceful resolution, but don't see the need to endorse one side or the other.

These views are less likely to be represented on television debates about the conflict, or in the most viral social media posts, but they represent how the large majority of Britons think about and engage with the conflict.

In fact, many Britons' choose not to take a side because they feel they will never know enough to make an informed and objective opinion, because they sense that neither side is morally perfect, and because they don't want to play a part in amplifying division.

### A lack of information

For many Britons, the last few weeks have been the first time they have seriously engaged with or even heard about the Israel-Palestine conflict in depth. Even those who are inclined to side with either Palestinians or Israelis are quick to point out the limits of their knowledge, and appreciate that this is a deeply complex issue that many of us in Britain may never fully understand.

*I haven't really educated myself on it too much. I know that there's a lot of history. I know that a lot of celebrities are talking about it. But I haven't educated myself too much on it to be honest.*

**Eleanor, Civic Pragmatist, London**

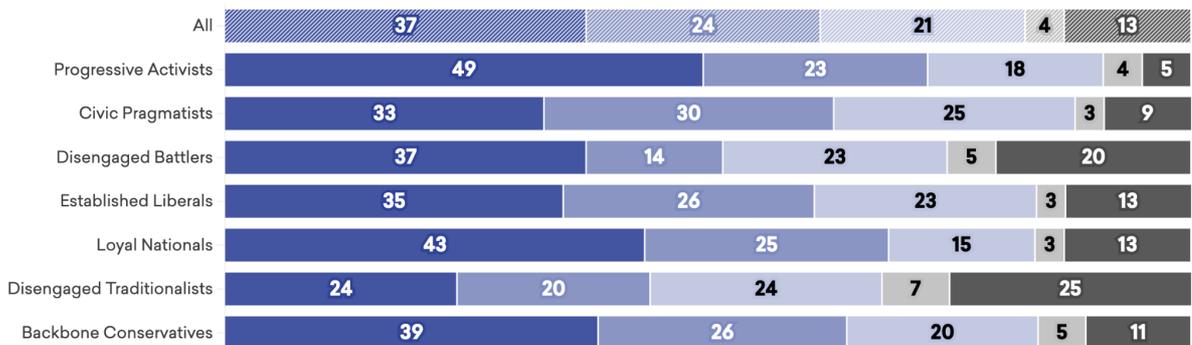
This is not to say that Britons have not been engaging with the conflict. 61 per cent of Britons say that they are reading or watching news about the conflict at least every day - an extraordinarily high cut-through for an international news story.

**Figure 9**

### Most Britons have been reading about the conflict at least once per day

Over the last week, how often have you read or watched news stories about the Israel-Palestine conflict?

● Multiple times per day ● Once per day ● A couple of days, but not every day ● One day ● Not at all



Source: More in Common, November 2023

But while some issues are clear, such as the evils of terrorism or the need to protect civilians, news stories about the wider context of the conflict serve to remind many people of the complexity of the issues involved. This complexity can itself lead to people thinking it is not their place to take a side.

*I don't live in Israel, I don't live in Palestine, so it's not on me to have my view - I've got no stake in it. But I think the violence against civilians is terrible.*

**Jack, Progressive Activist, Oxford**

*Sometimes it's about not taking a side, because we don't know what this conflict is about, we don't live it, we don't have the full evidence ... None of us know the history there because we're not Palestinian, we're not Israeli. I'm not saying we should sit back and ignore it but [we should be honest about what we do and don't know].*

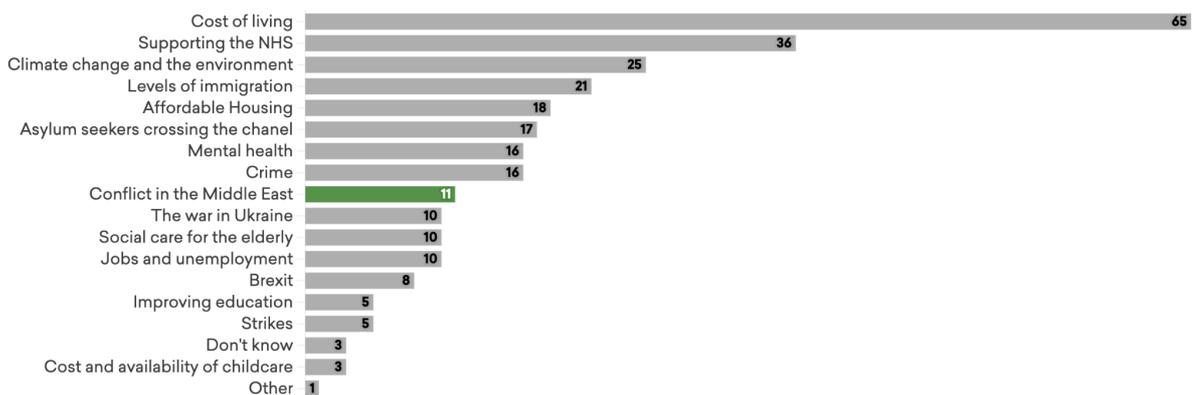
**Charlie, Progressive Activist, Oxford**

The other truth is that, for many Britons, the conflict is a tragedy, but not at the forefront of their day-to-day thoughts and concerns. Around one in ten (12 per cent) have deliberately blocked out news on the conflict because they find it too upsetting. Meanwhile for many others, domestic issues which affect them personally are simply more pressing. When asked to indicate importance of a range of issues facing the country at the moment, Britons rank conflict in the Middle East ninth, placing it below issues closer to home such as the cost of living and NHS.

**Figure 10**

### The war in Israel and Gaza is not top of mind for most Britons

In your opinion, which are the most IMPORTANT issues facing the country today? Please select up to three.



Source: More in Common, November 2023

### A sense that neither side is perfect

Footage of violence against civilians in both Israel and Gaza has driven a sense among many people that neither side is perfect. This is particularly true for the segments of the population who say they sympathise with both or neither side.

## More than choosing sides

*I sympathise with both sides because atrocities have happened on both parts ... You read about the hostages and the awful things that has happened to babies, but I don't think that Israel's response has been proportionate.*

**Lily, Disengaged Battler, Midlands**

*I understand both sides, because either way people are dying in both countries and both sides are doing things wrong. Everyone needs to have sympathy for both sides and say that both sides are just trying to protect themselves.*

**Amelia, Progressive Activist, London**

*I've seen those stories about soldiers going into people's houses and stuff like that. And I saw a story where a soldier went into someone's house and went on Facebook Live, this was someone's grandmother and the granddaughter saw her go Facebook live and get killed. So it was just sort of, I think both of them are just really not ideal. I dunno.*

**Eleanor, Civic Pragmatist, London**

### A dislike of amplifying division

When asked which side they sympathise with more, the largest group of the British public are those who say they sympathise with both sides equally. While this group are generally well informed and well attuned to the news coming from Israel and Gaza, they want to be sure about the facts before taking a side. Most Britons are reluctant to associate themselves with a cause that might be amplifying divisions in the UK.

*I've got Jewish friends, I've got Arab friends, I feel like my hands are tied in terms of talking about it. I've never felt comfortable. I don't feel like I've got depth of knowledge enough to talk about it with any sort of certainty.*

**Max, Civic Pragmatist, Islington**

*One of my friends has been to all the pro-Palestine marches and stuff, and I feel like she's trying to be like "This is the right opinion" onto all of our friends - which is fine because she feels strongly about it. But ... I don't know enough of the detail. My opinion is that what is wrong is killing innocent people. And it seems like that's happening from both sides ... So it is difficult to have a definitive answer.*

**Sally, Civic Pragmatist, Islington**

## More than choosing sides

Those who say they sympathise with both sides equally are not disengaged; in fact, they express the highest total levels of concern for Israeli and Palestinian civilians but feel least comfortable talking about the conflict on social media and elsewhere because they dislike how vitriolic the debate has become.

In conversations, these balancers express frustration that language about the conflict has become so divisive and targeted that it makes it impossible to have rational and constructive conversations about the topic.

### **Britain's divide**

While the majority of the public do not sympathise more with one side or another in this war, a smaller proportion do so. This group is important because they shape public discussion about the war and because they are becoming increasingly divided on even the most fundamental facts about the conflict.

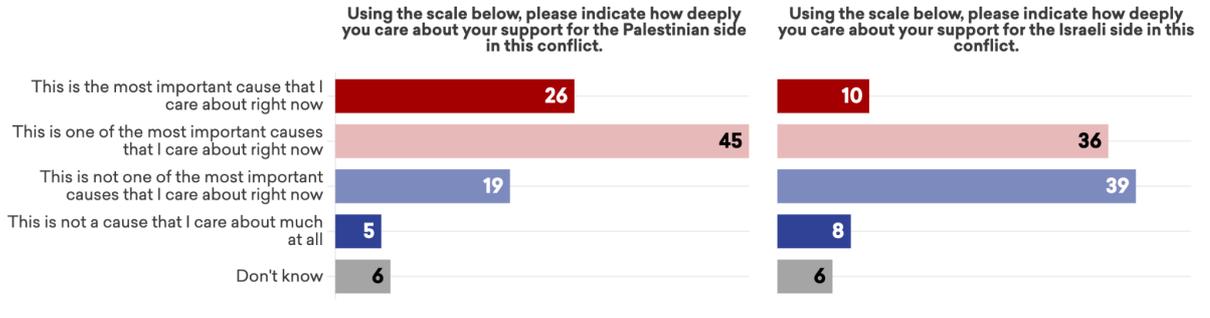
The divide between those who sympathise more with the Palestinians and those who sympathise more with the Israelis is roughly equal: 16 per cent of the public sympathise more with Israel and 18 per cent with Palestine.

But these balanced levels of support are distorted by the asymmetry of intensity of feeling and levels of action around the conflict.

Those who sympathise more with the Palestinian side are far more likely than those who sympathise more with the Israeli side to say that the cause is one of the most important causes they care about. Over seven in ten of those who say they sympathise more with Palestine say that this is one of the most important causes they care about right now, compared to less than half of those who say they sympathise more with the Israeli side. In fact, those who sympathise more with Palestine are more than twice as likely as those who sympathise more with Israel to say that this is the cause they care about most.

Figure 11

### Those who sympathise more with the Palestinian side are more passionate in their support than those who sympathise more with the Israeli side



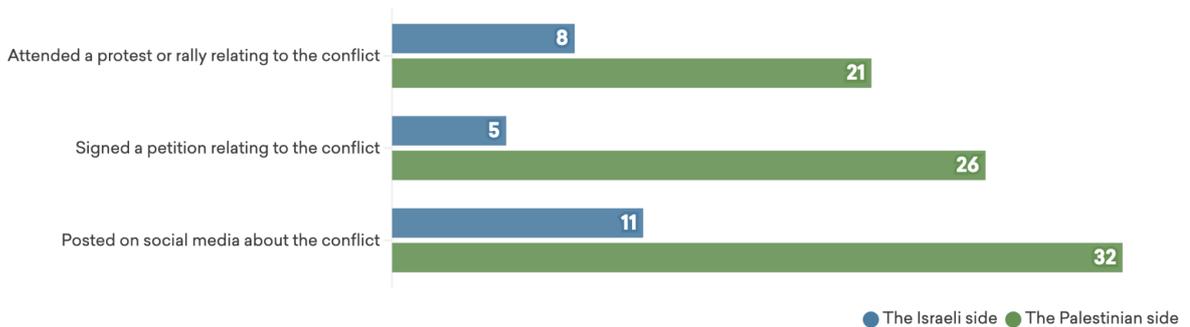
Source: More in Common, November 2023

This asymmetry tends to make supporters of Palestine more vocal than those who support Israel, and manifests itself in action. Those who sympathise more with the Palestinian side are more than twice as likely to have attended a protest about the conflict, more than five times as likely to have signed a petition relating to the conflict, and three times as likely to have posted on social media about the conflict, compared to those who sympathise more with the Israeli side.

Figure 12

### Those who sympathise more with the Palestinian side are far more likely to have taken action about the conflict than those who sympathise more with the Israeli side

Thinking about the Israel-Palestine conflict, in the last few weeks have you...



Source: More in Common, November 2023

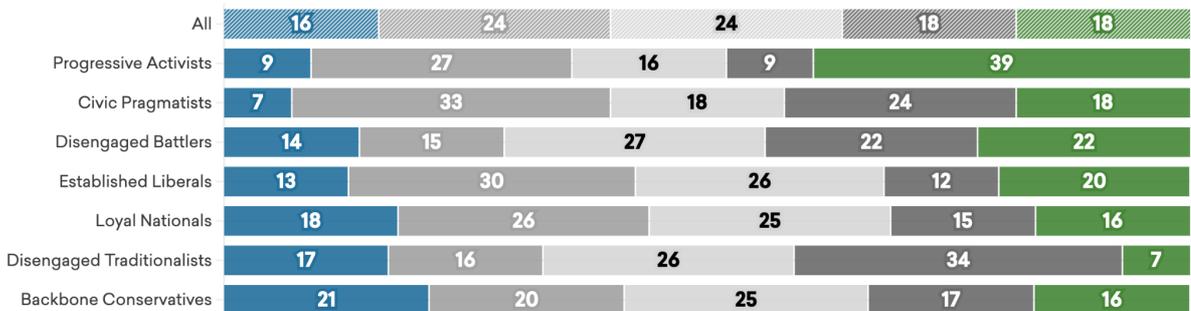
This imbalance in behaviour between the respective supporters of the two sides can be explained, in part, by the segment profiles of each group. Progressive Activists are far more likely to sympathise more with the Palestinian side than any other segment. This group is highly politically engaged, and talking about political issues online and taking part in political activities are core parts of their identity. In contrast, those who sympathise more with the Israeli side are more spread across segments, albeit with slightly higher representation within the Backbone Conservative and Loyal National segments.

**Figure 13**

**Most Britons have not taken a side in the Israel-Palestine conflict - but support for the Palestinian side is dominated by Progressive Activists**

Which side in the Israel-Palestine conflict do you sympathise with more?

● The Israeli side ● Both sides equally ● Neither side ● Not sure ● The Palestinian side



Source: More in Common, November 2023

Loyal Nationals and Backbone Conservatives tend to have strong and passionate beliefs, but in contrast to Progressive Activists they are unlikely to think that protests or social media posts are a meaningful way to influence change on major national issues. Instead they are more likely to express their views either privately or through the ballot box.

As such, it should be no surprise that turnout at pro-Palestine marches is much higher than turnout at pro-Israel marches, even when support for both sides is roughly equal. This can have a distorting effect on coverage of the conflict and should serve as a reminder that turnout at marches or posts on social media are not a good reflection of overall public opinion on issues.

### Who sympathises more with the Palestinian side?

Those who say they sympathise more with the Palestinian side can be found within all segments – for every segment other than Disengaged Traditionalists more than 15 per cent say they sympathise more with the Palestinian side.

But Progressive Activists are much more likely to sympathise more with the Palestinian side than any other segment. 39 per cent of Progressive Activists fall into this group, compared to 18 per cent of the wider population.

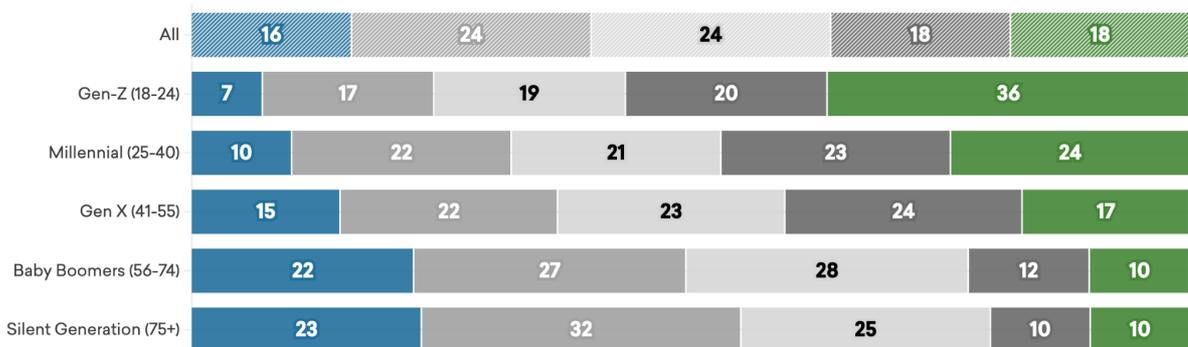
A number of other demographic features also mark out the group who sympathise more with the Palestinian side. Age is especially significant: 36 per cent of Gen-Z (aged 18-24) and 24 per cent of Millennials (aged 25-34) say they sympathise more with the Palestinian side. Support for Palestine is also high among students (aged 18+) at 32 per cent.

Figure 14

### Younger people are much more sympathetic to the Palestinian side

Which side in the Israel-Palestine conflict do you sympathise with more?

● The Israeli side ● Both sides equally ● Neither side ● Not sure ● The Palestinian side



Source: More in Common, November 2023

Beyond age, support for Palestine is also associated with being a graduate: degree-holders are twice as likely to sympathise more with the Palestinian side than those without a degree. Sympathy for the Palestinian side is also higher in London than in any other region, higher in cities than in urban areas or towns, and higher among people with higher household incomes.

British Muslims are also much more likely to sympathise more with the Palestinian side than the public as a whole, with 71 per cent of Muslims in our panel falling into this group. And the Muslims we spoke to in focus groups were more closely aligned with the Palestinian side than others.

*I've actually studied the history behind Palestine Israel, and I've always been following it. It's something that's quite close to every Muslim's heart. It's a religious place. It's not just for Christianity or Jews. It's also an Islamic holy land. So it's been something that I've been following for quite some time. I find that the normal news coverage is always biased towards Israel, so I get most of my stuff from Instagram*

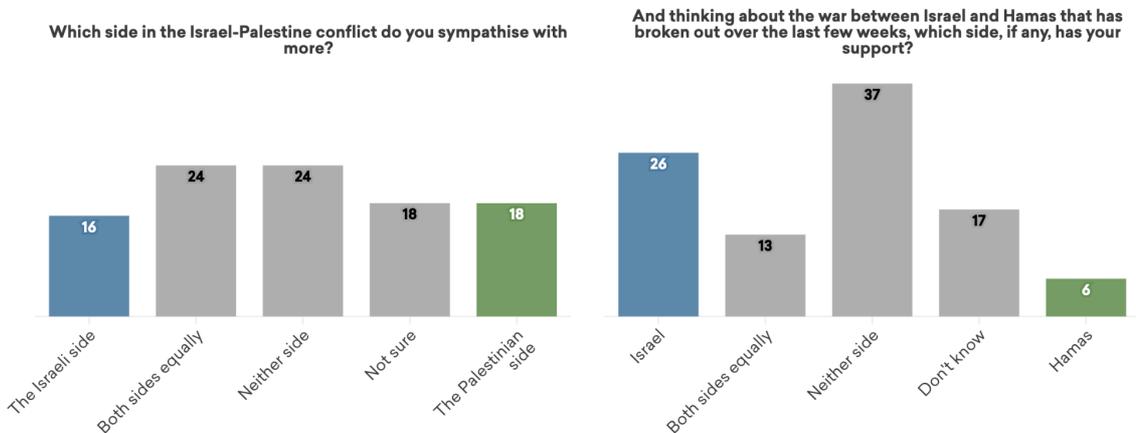
**Hambi, Wycombe**

Despite this, it is clear that sympathy for Palestine does not equate to support for Hamas. Only 12 per cent of the public think that Hamas represents the views of ordinary Palestinians; a majority (51 per cent) think that it does not.

Britons have an extremely negative view of Hamas, being almost five times more likely to say they support Israel than Hamas when given the choice. Framing the question in this way also significantly increases the number of people who say they support neither side, increasing it from 24 per cent to 37 per cent.

**Figure 15**

**Support for each side changes drastically when framed against Hamas**



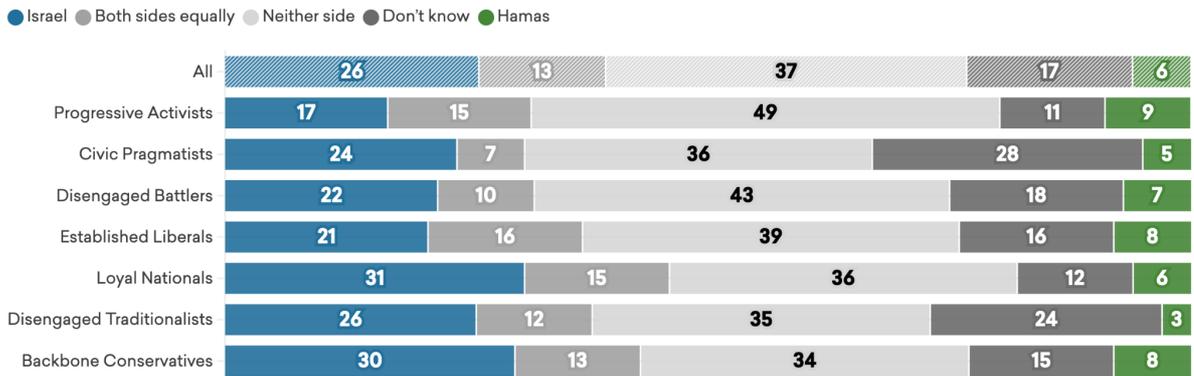
Source: More in Common, November 2023

Opposition to Hamas holds across all segments, with every segment far more likely to say they support Israel than Hamas, albeit with support reaching close to 10 per cent in some more politically engaged segments.

Figure 16

### Britons are four times more likely to support Israel than Hamas

Thinking about the war between Israel and Hamas that has broken out over the last few weeks, which side, if any, has your support?



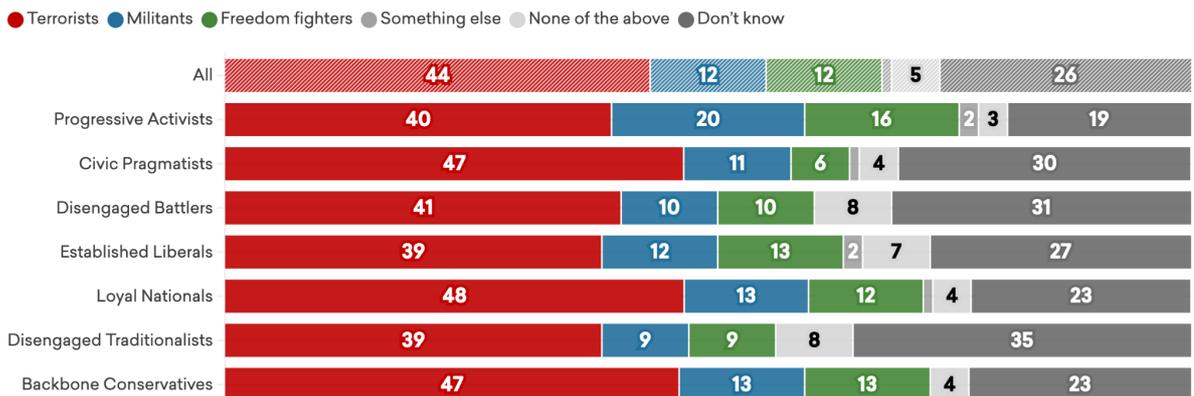
Source: More in Common, November 2023

At the same time, the public are much more likely to describe Hamas as 'terrorists' (44 per cent) than 'militants' (12 per cent) or 'freedom fighters' (12 per cent), although 26 per cent don't know. Again, this holds true across all seven segments.

Figure 17

### Britons are more likely to describe Hamas as terrorists than anything else

Which of the following words would you say is most accurate to describe Hamas? Select one.



Source: More in Common, November 2023

## More than choosing sides

In focus group conversations people have high awareness of the atrocities of 7th October, and people are quick to share their disgust at the atrocities committed by Hamas on that day.

*They're not representing the people of Palestine at all. The people of Palestine are not terrorists and Hamas are a terrorist organisation.*

**Amir, Disengaged Battler, Bradford**

*Hamas is doing most of the horrible crimes and they're the ones that are killing innocent people and they're the ones that are going into Israel. Whereas the Palestinians might not agree with what Hamas is doing. And I don't think it's fair to blame the Palestinians for what Hamas is doing because what Hamas is doing is beyond horrible and the Palestinians don't deserve to be blamed for that.*

**Amelia, Progressive Activist, London**

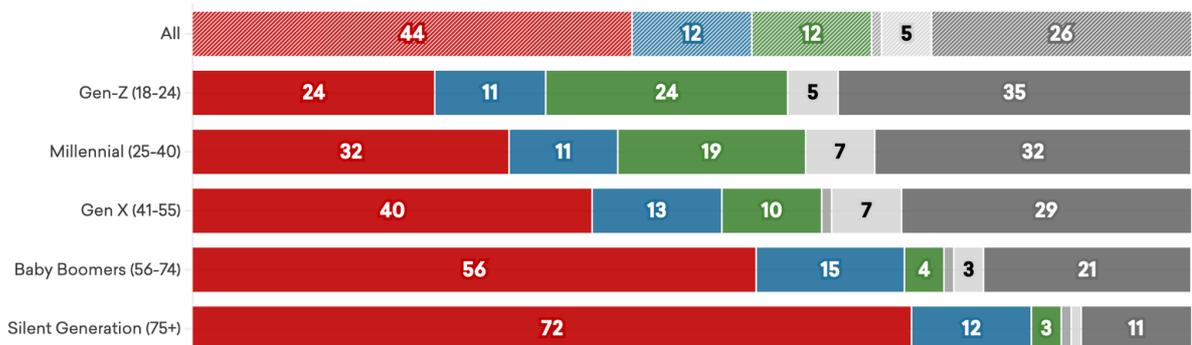
In spite of this widespread condemnation of Hamas, there are pockets of sympathy for the group which suggests a need to do more to tackle the risk of radicalisation as a result of the conflict. Gen-Z (aged 18-24) are as likely to describe Hamas as 'freedom fighters' as to describe them as 'terrorists', although only one in four of them use this term. A higher number say that they don't know which word is most appropriate – more than any other age group.

**Figure 18**

### Young people are much less likely to describe Hamas as terrorists

Which of the following words would you say is most accurate to describe Hamas? Select one.

● Terrorists ● Militants ● Freedom fighters ● Something else (specify) ● None of the above ● Don't know



## More than choosing sides

Similarly, of those who say they have attended a rally or protest relating to the conflict, 35 per cent say 'freedom fighters' is the best word to describe Hamas, compared to only 20 per cent who would use the word 'terrorist'. Again, this suggests that those who have attended rallies are not representative of the average Briton in terms of their perception of actors in the conflict.

### **Who sympathises more with the Israeli side?**

Whereas one segment (Progressive Activists) is much more likely to sympathise with the Palestinian side than any other, sympathies with the Israeli side are more evenly balanced across the segments.

At the top of this list are Backbone Conservatives, of whom one fifth (21 per cent) sympathise more with the Israeli side. 18 per cent of Loyal Nationals and 17 per cent of Disengaged Traditionalists also say they sympathise more with the Israeli side. (Disengaged Traditionalists are far less likely to say they sympathise with the Palestinian side than any other segment, making their *net* sympathy with Israel higher than any other segment, but a large majority don't know or don't pick a side).

Sympathies with Israel are split along age lines in the UK, with older groups more likely to say they sympathise more with Israel than their younger counterparts. 22 per cent of Baby Boomers (aged 56-74) and 23 per cent of the Silent Generation (aged 75+) say they sympathise more with Israel, compared to 16 per cent of the UK population.

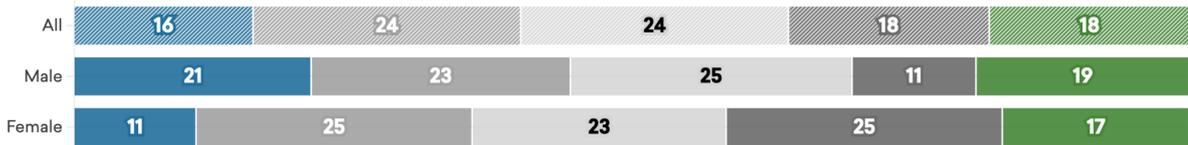
Gender also seems to play a role in sympathies towards Israel. Men are ten percentage points more likely than women to say that they sympathise more with the Israeli side, with 21 per cent of men and 11 per cent of women holding this opinion. This is not true for the Palestinian side; there is no statistically significant difference in the number of men and women saying they sympathise more with the Palestinian side. Instead, the difference is driven by women being more likely to say they are 'not sure' which side they sympathise with more, and men more likely to say they sympathise more with the Israeli side. When pushed to pick a side, even if they didn't choose one on first asking, women are then much more likely to say they prefer not to say.

Figure 19

### Men are much more sympathetic to the Israeli side

Which side in the Israel-Palestine conflict do you sympathise with more?

● The Israeli side ● Both sides equally ● Neither side ● Not sure ● The Palestinian side



Source: More in Common, November 2023

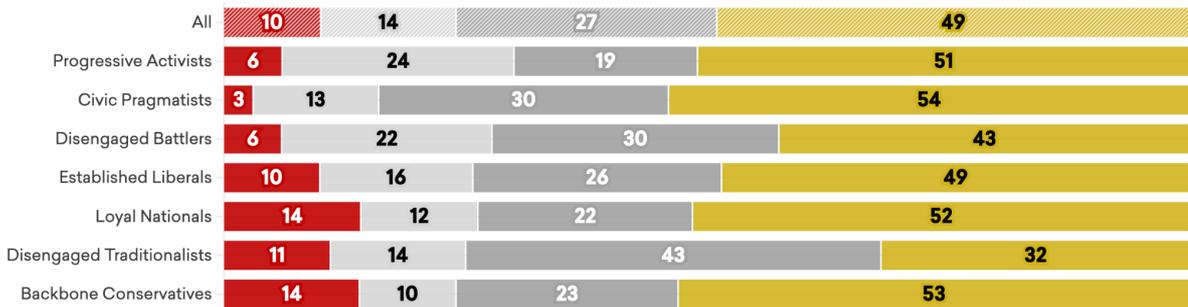
Support for Israel is not the same as unconditional support for every action taken by the Israeli Government or army in the conflict. While the public generally think that Israel has a right to defend itself and ensure attacks from Hamas don't happen again, they do not support Israel breaking international law to do so – only one in ten Britons adopt a “blank cheque” approach. This commitment to international law also holds across all seven segments.

Figure 20

### Britons want Israel's response to stay within international law

Thinking about how Israel should eliminate the risk of further attacks from Hamas, which of the following comes closest to your view?

● Israel should do all that it takes, even if that risks breaking international law ● Neither ● Don't know ● Israel should do all that it takes, but must follow the rules set in international law



Source: More in Common, November 2023

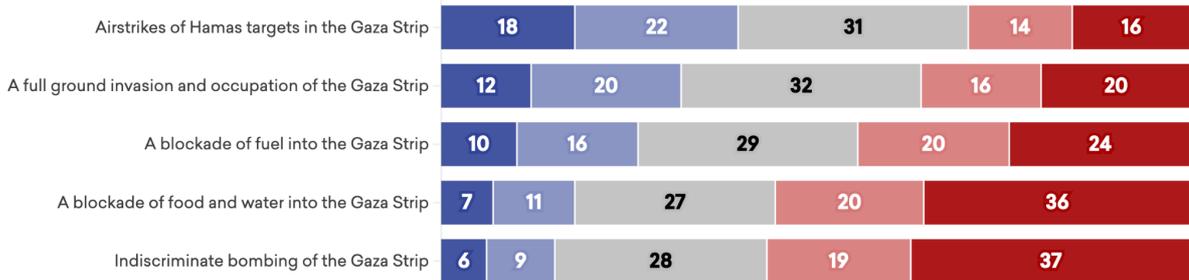
Furthermore, while the public think it is broadly reasonable for Israel to target Hamas positions in the Gaza strip, they do not think that indiscriminate bombing or a blockade of fuel and water are appropriate. Again, almost a third of the public say they don't know, reflecting the fact most Britons realise that this is a complex and rapidly evolving conflict.

Figure 21

## While many don't know, Britons tend to only support responses from Israel that are targeted at Hamas

Which of the following do you think the following are a reasonable or unreasonable response from Israel, given Hamas' attacks on Israel earlier this month?

● Completely reasonable ● Somewhat reasonable ● Don't know enough to say ● Somewhat unreasonable ● Completely unreasonable



Source: More in Common, November 2023

While the public do tend to follow the lead of the Government on international affairs, the inclusion of more extreme elements in the current Israeli governing coalition is undoubtedly an additional concern for those Britons who might otherwise unambiguously support Israel.

Some groups do believe that Israel should be able to go further in its response. Compared to the rest of the public, those who say they sympathise more with the Israeli side in the conflict are three times as likely as the wider public to say that Israel should do whatever it takes, even if that means breaking international law (although people who sympathise with the Israeli side still mostly say that Israel should follow the rules set in international law). They are also more than twice as likely to think that a blockade of fuel and water is a reasonable response from Israel, and almost three times more likely to think that indiscriminate bombing is an appropriate response (although on the whole, more of them think it is not appropriate).

## Chapter 2: Talking about the war in the UK

Many Britons don't feel comfortable talking about the Israel-Hamas war. Nearly three in ten (29 per cent) say they feel uncomfortable discussing the conflict with their friends, 20 per cent with their family, and 34 per cent with their colleagues. 45 per cent feel uncomfortable talking about it on social media. Levels of discomfort are high across all segments, including Progressive Activists who are often the most outspoken on contentious issues (see Figure 23).

*I think it's hard to talk to people about some of this stuff because either people are either really opinionated or they don't know enough information and so sometimes when you might have a debate about it, it cannot necessarily be a hundred percent progressive.*

**Jordan, Established Liberal, Islington**

In focus groups, people explain that while they have discussed the conflict with close friends and family, many feel that these debates were too heated and too complicated for them to feel comfortable talking about them. One common concern is from people who say they do not have enough information to take a side in the conflict, but feel pressured into expressing a view from those with stronger opinions on it:

*I hate it because you do feel like you should take a stance. And I mean ultimately, I suppose in any conflict if you saw the right or the wrong things, you could easily be led down a certain way. But there is an argument to say that we don't actually have to, especially as the everyday person, we don't actually have to have an opinion on this. We can see the atrocities happening, we can agree that that's wrong and support people whether Israeli or whether Palestinian.*

**Mark, Civic Pragmatist, Islington**

*It's easy just to go around blaming everyone. But blame doesn't actually resolve anything. And thinking about all these things about "which side are you on?" - there's people on both sides, Jews, families, children, there's people on the other side, families, children, they're all just normal people living their lives and I don't think any of them want the killing to happen.*

**Noora, Peterborough**

In other cases, people speak about the stress of feeling the need to be extra cautious about what they do say for fear of making it look like they support a side. This fear of doing or saying the wrong thing is particularly strong among young people who say that social media posts they've seen make them concerned that using a certain TikTok filter or shopping at coffee chains that Palestinian campaigners are trying to boycott, would mark them out as having taken a side.

*I've seen a lot of my friends posting things [on social media] that are divisive. I can understand where the passion is coming from ... but I think the route of going down promoting your side is not helpful, because we're just deepening divisions*

**Geraldine, Progressive Activist, Oxford**

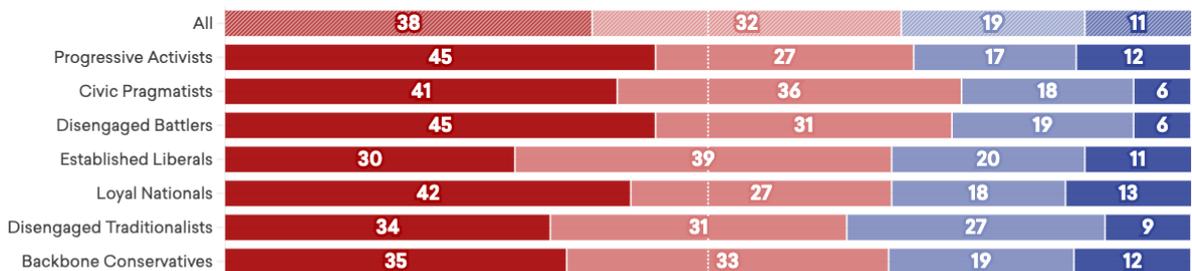
In general, people who acknowledge that they are not well-read on the conflict themselves are frustrated by others insisting that they need to rush to form an opinion, and want greater space to discuss the conflict where they could be comfortable in admitting that they don't know the facts and don't have the solutions.

**Figure 22**

### The public think that extreme views are drowning out moderate voices on the conflict

Please use the scale below to describe which of the statements you agree with more, where 1 means you completely agree with the first statement and 4 means you completely agree with the second statement

- 1 - People with the most extreme views on Israel-Palestine tend to crowd out the voices of people with more moderate views
- 2 -
- 3 -
- 4 - People with more balanced voices are heard the same as people with more extreme views



Source: More in Common, November 2023

This forms part of a broader worry that those with the most extreme voices tend to crowd out those with more moderate opinions. 70 per cent think that people with more extreme voices are more likely to be heard, in contrast to only 30 per cent who think that people with more balanced voices are heard equally.

### How are Britons talking about the war with friends and family?

Offline, conversations about the war are causing tensions between friends and families. One in ten Britons say they have had a heated conversation or argument about the war in recent weeks, including almost one in three (28%) people aged 18-24.

## More than choosing sides

In our conversations, Britons shared their stories of arguing with friends and family members, over the dinner table, at school, or at work. Many say that they deliberately avoid bringing up the conversation for fear that it could become heated.

*I don't really understand [the conflict] and everyone gets quite emotive about it so I kind of remain off the subject. But we had a dinner party and everyone got quite vocal about it. I think everyone feels a bit unstable from it*

**Holly, Established Liberal, Surrey**

*My brother supports Palestine and my dad supports Israel, so it's kind of become a family feud... Everyone in my year [at school] is arguing about it online*

**Tara, Progressive Activist, London**

Many people feel that, even if they wanted to discuss the war, conversations would be too risky. Those who are less likely to take a side say that, in many cases, it is difficult to discuss the conflict with people who have stronger opinions or who seem to be better informed because they don't give others space to share their view or to learn further.

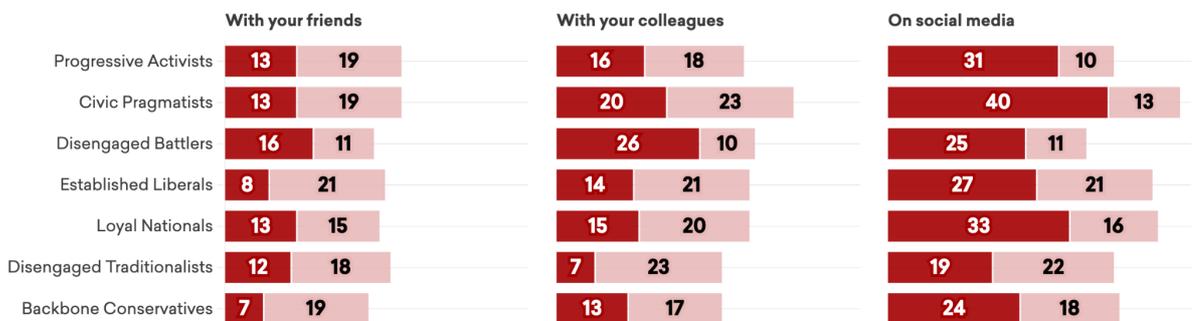
This is particularly true of Civic Pragmatists, the group most likely to say they sympathise with both sides in the conflict. Civic Pragmatists are reading news about the conflict more than the average Briton, but are also more likely than any segment (along with Disengaged Traditionalist) to say they feel uncomfortable talking about the conflict with friends or colleagues, or on social media.

**Figure 23**

### Civic Pragmatists are among the most uncomfortable talking about the conflict

How comfortable do you feel talking about the Israel-Palestine conflict...

● Very uncomfortable ● Somewhat uncomfortable

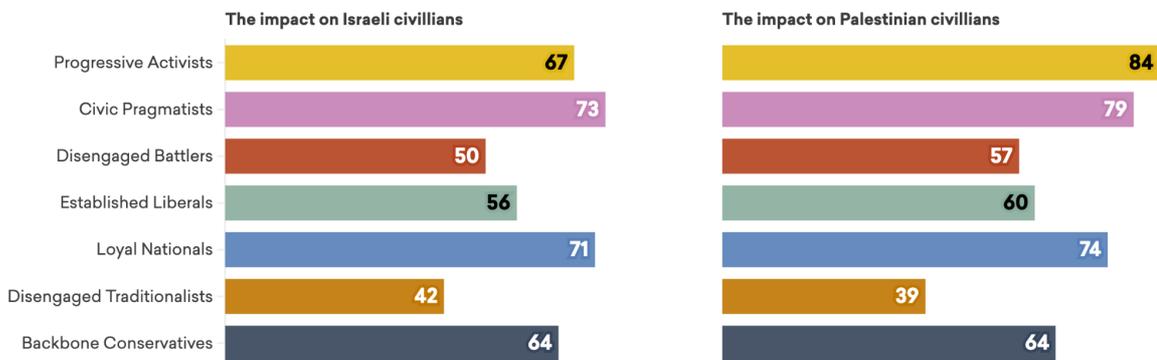


Civic Pragmatists are emblematic of a wider view that is common in many of the less opinionated segments of the British public. They care deeply about the conflict and its impact on civilians - more so than any other segment - but are not prone to reflexively align themselves with a 'side' when it comes to issues like this. Many Civic Pragmatists are actively averse to language that splits people into groups, or that ties up political viewpoints so strongly with personal identity.

**Figure 24**

### **Civic Pragmatists have the highest total concern for civilians on both sides of the conflict**

How much do you worry about the following impacts of the Israel-Palestine conflict? [A great deal or quite a lot]



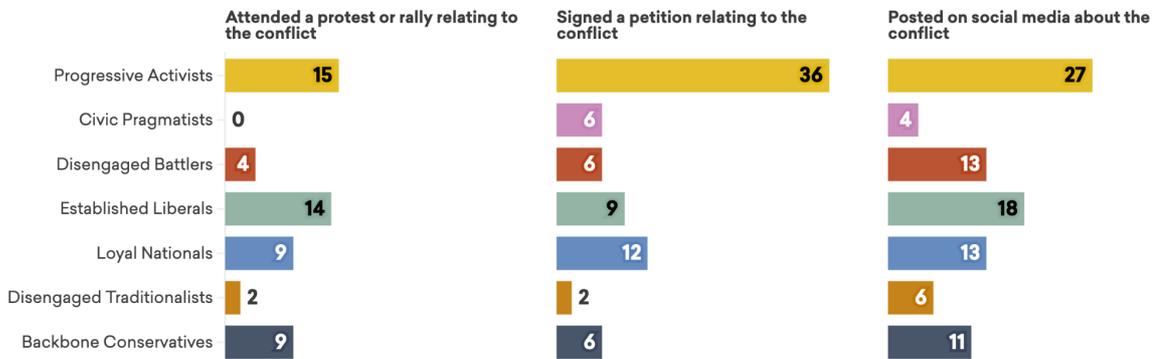
Source: More in Common, November 2023

Civic Pragmatists are also most resistant to the claim that not taking a side on the conflict is a sign of lack of compassion for those suffering. They have the highest levels of overall concern for Israeli and Palestinian civilians, but are the least likely to participate in protests or post on social media about the conflict.

**Figure 25**

## Despite having the highest concern for civilians in the conflict, Civic Pragmatists are least likely to have taken actions about it

Thinking about the Israel-Palestine conflict, in the last few weeks have you...



Source: More in Common, November 2023

Another concern is that those with the strongest views will often unfairly assume which ‘side’ of the conflict someone falls into and make assumptions as a result. This includes those from ethnic minority backgrounds, some of whom explain it is often just assumed they would support the pro-Palestine side, and that they are treated differently as a result.

*I'm brown, so most people think I'm pro-Palestine, but I don't actually have an opinion on it much. I was in a lesson and someone was like, "I'm Israeli". And I was like, "Oh, that's cool". And then he looked at me, he was like, "Oh is it?". I feel like everyone's on their toes when it comes to this. Always ready to say something back. You feel like everyone's kind of against you.*

**Tara, Progressive Activist, London**

Conversations with Britons find that people are increasingly uncomfortable with the growing number of heated interpersonal arguments about the conflict. Britons who feel distressed by the situation for civilians in Israel and Palestine feel more pressured into taking sides, and that extreme voices are crowding out their more moderate views.

This is particularly true on social media, the arena in which the public feel most uncomfortable talking about the conflict.

## How are Britons talking about the war on social media?

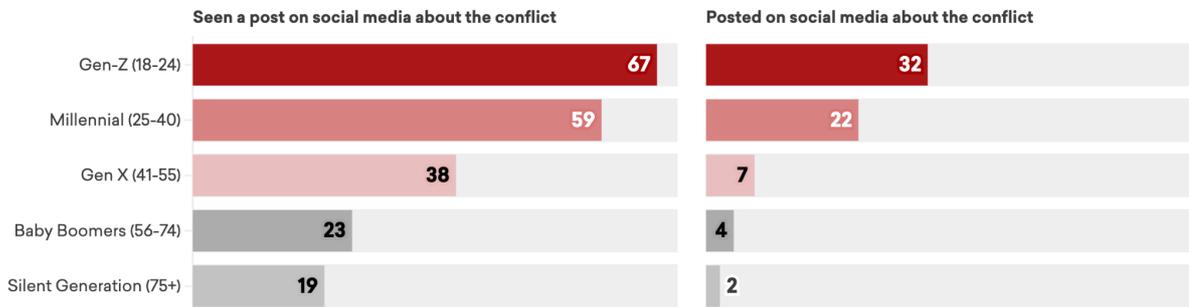
Four in ten Britons have seen a post on social media about the conflict, and 12 per cent of Britons have themselves posted on social media about it. But these social media users are not representative of the public, and are instead drawn from distinct groups.

Most apparent when it comes to social media use and the conflict is the age divide. Two thirds of Gen-Z (age 18-24) have seen information on social media about the conflict, compared to only one fifth of those aged 55 and above. Gen-Z are similarly most likely to have posted on social media about the conflict, with 32 per cent of Gen Z having done so compared to 12 per cent of the wider population.

**Figure 26**

### Younger generations are much more likely to have engaged with the conflict on social media

Thinking about the Israel-Palestine conflict, in the last few weeks have you...



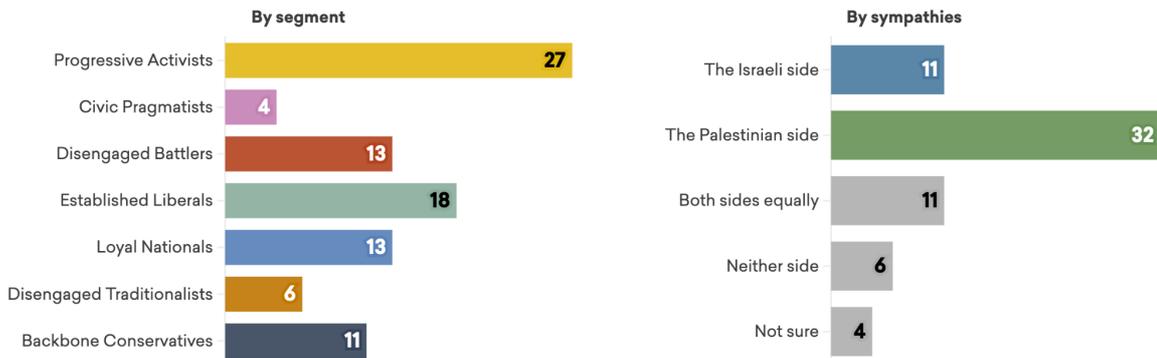
Source: More in Common, November 2023

However, age divides can be obscuring: social media is a main source of news about the war for all generations, not just the youngest. Other divides reveal more about the sort of people who are likely to use social media to actively discuss the conflict. For example, Progressive Activists, who are far more likely to share political content on social media in general, are also far more likely to have posted about this conflict on social media compared to any other segment. People who say they sympathise more with the Palestinian side are three times more likely to have posted on social media about the conflict than those who say they sympathise more with the Israeli side.

Figure 27

### Progressive Activists and Palestine supporters are much more likely to have posted on social media about the conflict

Thinking about the Israel-Palestine conflict, in the last few weeks have you posted on social media about the conflict?



Source: More in Common, November 2023

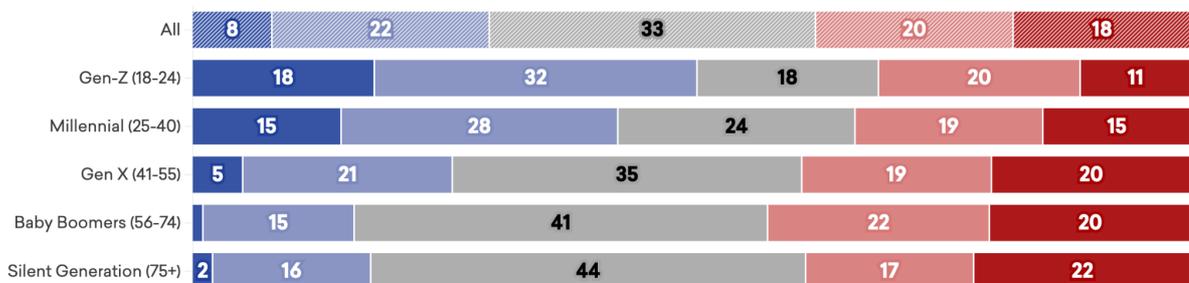
It is no surprise, then, that young people, Progressive Activists, and those who sympathise more with the Palestinian side have much more positive views about the role that social media has played in shaping discussions about the conflict. Whereas the wider public say that social media has been unhelpful in helping them understand the facts of the conflict, and has had a negative effect on debates about the conflict in the UK, these three more ‘online’ groups have the opposite view.

Figure 28

### Britons generally have a negative view about the role that social media has played in the conflict, but younger generations are more positive

Do you think that social media has been helpful or unhelpful in helping you understand the facts about the Israel-Palestine conflict?

Very helpful   Somewhat helpful   Don't know   Somewhat unhelpful   Very unhelpful



Source: More in Common, November 2023

## More than choosing sides

In focus groups, many people identify some benefits of using social media as a source of information about the conflict. Some prefer social media because it is less sanitised than more curated traditional news media. Other Britons believe you are more likely to get a wider range of opinions on social media than in mainstream news. But people also have concerns about the quality of the information they see on social media:

*I think we have to be careful on social media because it's easy not to be educated and easy to think you're being educated, but a lot of it is false information really.*

**Naomi, Established Liberal, Camden**

*I think there is a good and bad side with something like TikTok. You see the unfiltered side, but you also see a lot of prejudiced, fake information.*

**Eleanor, Civic Pragmatist, London**

Overall, a quarter of the public say they have seen information about the conflict on social media which they later learned to be false - this is more than half of the total number of people who have seen information about the conflict on social media at all.

Britons are most concerned about the information that young people are getting about the conflict from social media. For example one participant, a primary school teacher in Oxford was worried that children on social media are coming to conclusions without having the full information:

*[Social media] is promoting this radicalisation of children. It's all over social media, a lot of it's not factual. And you've got children of eight or nine years-old who are saying, I'm with the Palestinians. And you're thinking - You are eight or nine, how on earth do you know what they've said? They are so influenced.*

**Nancy, Progressive Activist, Oxford**

Speaking to young people also highlights the stress that social media is placing on them. While social media is the preferred news source for this group, many young people are also concerned that information on Instagram and TikTok is biased or doesn't necessarily represent the whole truth. Many of them want social media companies to do more to provide them with reliable information, provide context to claims made on their platforms, or to provide more transparency about the accounts posting certain information.

*I think that - the way on some social media platforms it says that "we can't fact check this" or "this is false information", I think that would be really beneficial [on other social media platforms] because sometimes you don't know who's behind it. And whatever side is posting you're going to have something that slams the other side and makes it out like they are the enemy. So if it could be fact-checked then it would stop the spread of false news to do with the conflict.*

**Lily, Disengaged Battler, Midlands**

## Protests and demonstrations

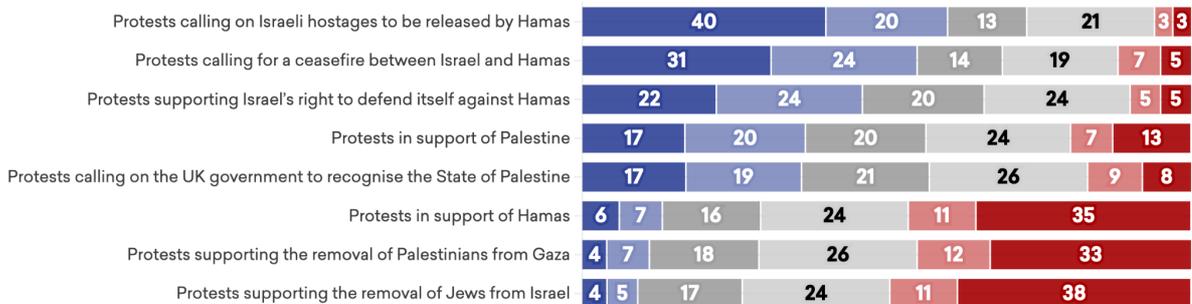
At the forefront of debates about how Britons should be talking about the conflict are discussions about the protests that have occurred in London and cities around the country since the start of this wave of the war. Britons are clear about which protest messages are and are not acceptable.

Figure 29

### Britons have a clear sense of which protests are acceptable or not

In the last few weeks, there have been a rise in protests in the UK in support of either side of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Of the following forms of protest, do you think they are acceptable or not?

● Completely acceptable ● Somewhat acceptable ● Neither acceptable nor unacceptable ● Don't know enough to say ● Somewhat unacceptable ● Completely unacceptable



Source: More in Common, November 2023

Protests supporting Israel's right to defend itself, showing support for Palestine, or calling for a ceasefire are all clearly deemed acceptable. But Britons are strongly opposed to any conflict which incites support for Hamas or for the removal of Gazans or Jewish Israelis from their homes.

Britons were most likely to be concerned about the disruptive spillover effects of protests on others, such as the risk of disruption to Remembrance Day services or to the lives of other people in their city:

*I think the protests up in London at the weekend were quite concerning. That was our National Day of Remembrance and for it to be treated like that I think was very bad.*

**Benjamin, Established Liberal, Surrey**

*I know the London protests really caused a lot of disruption for everybody. For me personally, my mum couldn't get to a hospital appointment for a really important one.*

*There's got to be better ways to go about it. They [protestors] should definitely do stuff like that, but do it in a way that it's not going to bring London to a standstill.*

**Eleanor, Civic Pragmatist, London**

However most also understand why some people felt the need to protest. They were also concerned at attempts by some politicians to label all those protesting as 'hate marchers' or to tar peaceful protestors with the same brush as the disruptive few. Some explicitly said that they thought Suella Braverman's description of the protests as hate marches was a deliberate attempt to divide the country and to demonise ethnic minorities.

*What was she [Suella Braverman] trying to do? I think she was trying to grow her own base of political supporters by making a kind of us versus them statement ... I think her agenda was purely self-motivated and the idea behind it was essentially that the pro-Palestinians - the majority of which would probably be Muslim or at least Middle East and North Africans, so a minority in that sense - should be seen as opponents protesting against Western values.*

**Sammy, Civic Pragmatist, Islington**

*I feel like Suella Braverman is bringing a lot of hate in this country.*

**Sammy, Civic Pragmatist, Islington**

Participants also expressed dismay at protests that had become violent or intimidatory. This includes those who were more sympathetic to Palestine, who thought that personal attacks or hateful language from a small number of protestors were weakening their cause. Instead of pouring fake blood over MPs' offices, they were much more moved by peaceful forms of protest such as praying outside of Downing Street.

*I don't think that tactics should ever be violent or aggressive or threatening. I think that everyone has a voice. We've got freedom of speech. We're very lucky in the United Kingdom that we have freedom of speech. We can stand up and say, this is not, we don't agree with this. We want this to be changed. But I don't believe in using blood and the extraordinary lengths that some people go to. I think mostly Muslims and Christians and Jewish people, they're not violent people. We're quite sane and we know how to go about and protest, et cetera. But you'll always find a fraction of whatever protest it is. Sometimes they're not even people who care about it, they're just people who are a little bit extra and they will do silly or extraordinary violent things. I don't agree with it at all. I believe that when everyone went to Downing Street and just prayed outside, that moved me to no end because I think that's what a protest should be. Totally peaceful.*

**Noora, Peterborough**

*I think the peaceful protest is something which in this country has always been good, and it'll always continue to be good that people have a right to speak out. But the issue is that if some individuals, they may not necessarily be from the real pro Palestinian side. If you remember years ago, we used to have a problem with football [hooliganism]. It was only handful of people, but they used to create so much trouble for the peaceful people who used to go and watch the game. The same thing is happening here.*

**Majid, Peterborough**

The views of the protestors themselves are slightly different to those of the wider population. Protestors rank different sorts of protests roughly the same in terms of how acceptable they are - and are still least likely to support protests in support of Hamas or removing Jewish Israelis and Palestinians from their homes compared to other forms of protest.

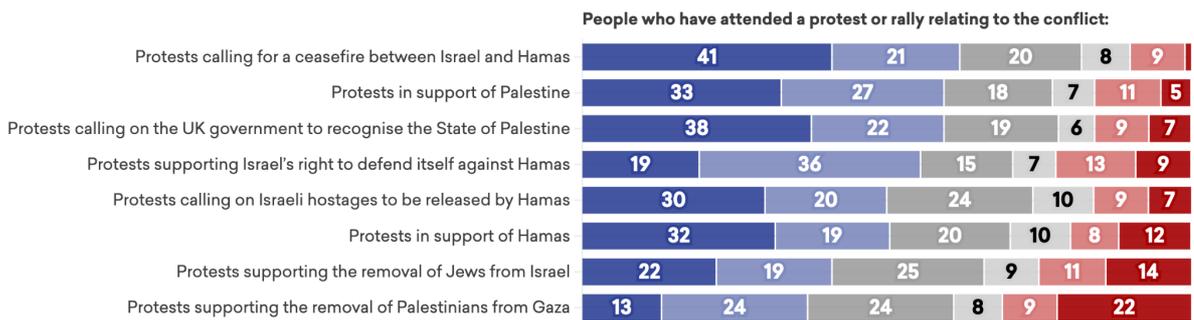
This group is however more likely to think that all forms of protest, in general, are acceptable. As such, they have fewer red lines than the public as a whole in terms of which protests are acceptable and not, and are less likely to describe protests in support of Hamas as unacceptable.

**Figure 30**

### Protestors are more likely to think that all forms of protest are acceptable

**In the last few weeks, there have been a rise in protests in the UK in support of either side of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Of the following forms of protest, do you think they are acceptable or not?**

● Completely acceptable ● Somewhat acceptable ● Neither acceptable nor unacceptable ● Don't know enough to say ● Somewhat unacceptable ● Completely unacceptable



## Chapter 3: Antisemitism, Islamophobia and radicalisation

While many Britons feel uncomfortable discussing the conflict with friends and family, they believe that this moment is hardest for Muslims and Jewish people living in Britain. Over six in ten (61 per cent) say they worry a great deal or quite a lot that the conflict will lead to a rise in division between religious communities in the UK, and 55 per cent think that if the conflict continues these divisions will get worse. This is particularly true in London and in multi-ethnic towns and cities, where people are more likely to have a mix of Jewish and Muslim friends and colleagues.

At the same time, 57 per cent think antisemitism in the UK is likely to get worse if the conflict continues, and 49 per cent think the same of Islamophobia. Their concern is borne out by rising incidents of hate crime. Compared to October of 2022, the Metropolitan Police has recorded a 1341 per cent increase in antisemitic incidents and a 324 per cent rise in islamophobic incidents.

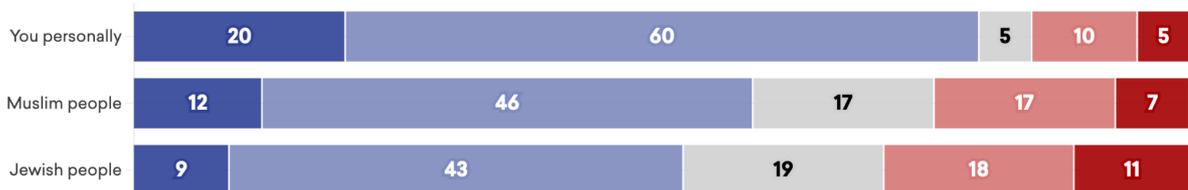
The public as a whole already think that the UK is less of a safe place for Jews and Muslims than it is for them personally. Around one in ten people think that the UK is a very unsafe place for Jews and Muslims, compared to only one in twenty who would say the same for themselves. Overall nearly 30 per cent of the public think that the UK is either very or mostly unsafe for Jewish people and almost a quarter (24 per cent) say the same for Muslim people.

**Figure 31**

### How safe is Britain for Muslims and Jewish people?

Do you think the UK in 2023 is a safe or unsafe place for...

● Very safe place ● Mostly safe place ● Don't know ● Mostly unsafe place ● Very unsafe place



## Antisemitism

Even if they had not experienced antisemitism personally, many Britons in focus groups have heard stories of hate against Jews in recent weeks passed on from Jewish friends.

*One of my really close friends is Jewish and she says everyone that she knows who's Jewish is feeling so low at the moment because they're having to deal with not getting answers from their friends and family [in Israel]. They don't know what's to happen with them. And then at the same time having to deal with stuff [at home] as well. I think it was her local bakery just down the road, someone smashed into it and broke into it. She is scared to even walk around because she lives in quite a Jewish area, even to walk around the area because she's scared that something's going to happen.*

**Sally, Established Liberal, Islington**

*I've heard from my friends who are Jewish that they've had to take time off school because of how badly they've been treated. And a few blocks down the road there are Jewish shops which have been smashed up. Which is really wrong because Jews aren't responsible for what Israel is doing.*

**Amelia, Progressive Activist, London**

Across all segments people are more likely to say that antisemitism is a serious problem in the UK than not. Progressive Activists and those who sympathise more with the Israeli side or both sides equally are the most likely to see antisemitism as a serious problem, but those who have attended pro-Palestine marches are no less likely to describe antisemitism as a problem than the UK as a whole.

But there was a sense from some participants, particularly those from more ethnically or religiously diverse parts of the UK, that antisemitism is not taken as seriously as other forms of racism in the UK.

*I was born and raised in North London. It was quite a big Jewish community and you'd see the difference. We had a Jewish kid in our class and everyone always got a little bit of picking on from time to time ... But I think sometimes that it wasn't the same level of respect [for Jewish people]. Like you'd say "you can't say that," for example, "he's black". Or "you can't say that, that's racist about his religion". But it felt like it kind of slid when people would take the mickey out of a Jewish person.*

**Charlie, Progressive Activist, Oxford**

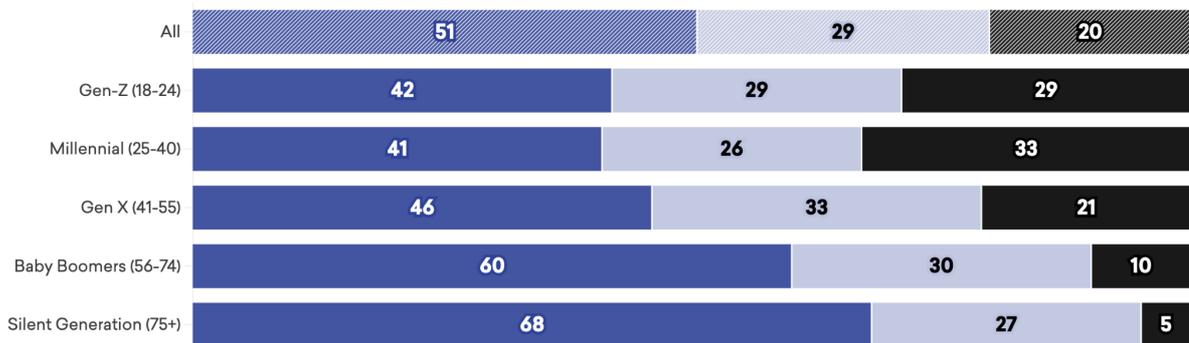
One definitional challenge is that many Britons don't know what antisemitism actually means. While 79 per cent say they have heard the term antisemitism before, only half of the public (50 per cent) say they are confident they could explain what the term actually means.

**Figure 32**

### Understanding of the term "antisemitism" is low

Before today, had you heard of the term "antisemitism"?

● Yes, and I'm confident I could explain what it means ● Yes, but I'm not sure I could explain what it means ● No, I have not heard this term before



Source: More in Common, November 2023

In focus groups, the term antisemitism is rarely raised organically; instead, the public use language that describes the sadness and fear of their Jewish friends, and the hate and discrimination they are subject to. People are most likely to talk and be concerned about Jewish children not being able to attend school, and Jewish people in the UK being blamed unfairly for the actions of a foreign government.

*Kids are kind of scared to make their own way to school - especially if they're wearing any religious item. It can be scary and I think it's a shame for kids to feel like that and for parents to worry about their children going to school.*

**Naomi, Established Liberal, Camden**

*These people who are living in the UK, they've got nothing to do with the choices that are being made, but then they're getting scrutinised and judged for it.*

**Sally, Established Liberal, Islington**

While some of the antisemitic behaviour that we have witnessed in recent weeks has been overt and conscious - for instance the targeting of Jewish people outside synagogues, vandalism or bullying - other behaviour has been less overt but is also harmful. That includes some of the language and framing used by some groups of pro-Palestinian protestors that Jewish groups have repeatedly expressed their concerns about, referring to

Israeli citizens as 'colonisers' or using chants such as 'From the River to the Sea'. Some use this language in full knowledge that it has anti-semitic connotations, whereas others may well be caught up in the passion of the protest and their emotional response to the images they are seeing from Gaza. However, protest organisers in particular should be under no illusion that such language and framing are deeply distressing to many Jewish people and damaging to community relations.

## Islamophobia

Britons are concerned about antisemitism and anti-muslim hate, but they are more likely to make the connection between how debates about the conflict in the UK could lead to increased antisemitism than they are to a rise in Islamophobia. Almost half of the public (47 per cent) are aware of increased hate crime against Jews over the last few weeks, whereas only 30 per cent say the same about increased hate crime against Muslims.

But in our conversations with Muslims in Bradford, Peterborough, and Wycombe, there was no shortage of stories about Islamophobia experienced in day-to-day lives:

*If I'm about to board a plane they would ask me where I'm going but they wouldn't ask another person ... They are profiling people based on their appearance.*

**Bill, Wycombe**

*When I was at school there was a lot of covert Islamophobia. Where girls would say snarky comments about groups of people, or they'd actively exclude Muslim girls ... But it's more of an ignorance than Islamophobic - and when it was Islamophobic it was very covert.*

**Ruby, Wycombe**

*I think the relationship in my city since October 7th, especially since the [former] home secretary's statements - has created more friction.*

**Majid, Peterborough**

Much of the conversation was less about violent anti-Muslim hate than about how political leaders talk about and engage with British Muslims. Many of the Muslims we spoke to have a sense that politicians don't listen to their concerns about Islamophobia. This has been reinforced by the fact that while they have seen politicians talk about the issue, they have not noticed any tangible changes, driving further distrust and disengagement.

*Over the last weeks how much Islamophobia and Islamophobic comments have Muslims been receiving? I think Boris Johnson and I think previous prime ministers have always promised that they'll come up with a strategy for Islamophobia, but there's never ever been one being put in place. I mean there are some processes in place, but there's never anything substantial ever been put in place. And I think for that reason Muslims are a little bit sick and tired because for many years, Muslims have been experiencing Islamophobia. And so for that reason, I personally think the question that should be asked is, is Islamophobia even important in the UK? Is anything being done about it?*

**Jameel, Civic Pragmatist, Bradford**

*Again, it's a political thing. And what's going on in the UK where the media is trying to rile people up on a sort of religious scale, I feel that's wrong because regardless of religion, we are all human beings. And as human beings, our responsibility is not to see another human being or animal - or a tree for that matter - as lesser. Because being Muslim personally, we're all aware of our duty and responsibility to another human being, to an animal, to the earth and to everyone in general. So I think that this question about taking sides, I think that's in effect is very inflammatory as well.*

**Noora, Peterborough**

Despite all this, the Muslims we spoke to are optimistic. One bright spot is the increasing representation of Muslims in parliament. However, even this is tempered to a degree by a feeling that it is a sign of Muslims fighting against the odds of an Islamophobic system, rather than a mark of progress when it comes to tackling discrimination against Muslims.

## Interfaith relations

Looking to the future, Britons are split on whether to be optimistic or pessimistic about the future of relations between religions in the UK. On the one hand, people see generally good relations between people of different religions in their own communities (particularly in London) as a sign that divisions are not inevitable.

*Are we all going to agree? No. So you've got to learn to agree but disagree, and people are entitled to their opinion and that's how I see it now. I don't want to enter rows because you're not going to agree. You've got your religious beliefs, you've got your culture, whatever. So you have to learn. We're learning to live with each other and learning to accept things. That's what I feel*

**Zoe, Loyal National, Islington**

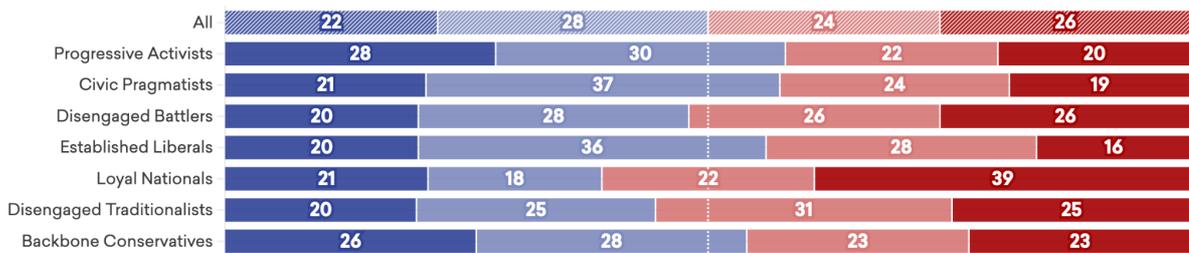
On the other hand, there are many Britons who think that there will always be tensions between Jews and Muslims in the UK so long as they disagree on the conflict in Israel and Palestine. This is especially true among Britons who see the world through the lens of groups and group identities – most clearly represented by the Loyal National segment of the population.

**Figure 33**

### Britons are split on whether divisions between British Jews and Muslims on Israel-Palestine are insurmountable

Please use the scale below to describe which of the statements you agree with more, where 1 means you completely agree with the first statement and 4 means you completely agree with the second statement

- 1 - British Jews and British Muslims can live harmoniously together, even if they disagree when it comes to Israel-Palestine
- 2
- 3
- 4 - There will be tensions between British Jews and British Muslims so long as they disagree with each other when it comes to Israel-Palestine



Source: More in Common, November 2023

Some Britons also think that certain commentators and politicians deliberately stoke tensions between Britain’s religious communities or invoke far-right groups for political gain. The notion that conflict entrepreneurs are deliberately trying to disturb community cohesion in Britain is widely shared.

*We all, within the United Kingdom, need to work together and ignore the politicians' views - and especially views of politicians like the former home secretary - who have done more damage to the community relations within our country. ... We've [Muslims and Jews] been living here together. We don't have any issues. We didn't have any issues. But by making some of those political speeches, politicians have created more friction between our communities and that is not healthy*

**Majid, Peterborough**

Britons are clearly worried about increased hatred and prejudice against Muslims and Jews, and many fear that this is likely to get worse before it gets better. People want to see tangible action against this prejudice. They also think that the way the debate has been

framed to date - as two distinct and binary sides - has contributed to undermining community relations between people of different religions and races in the UK.

## Radicalisation and polarisation

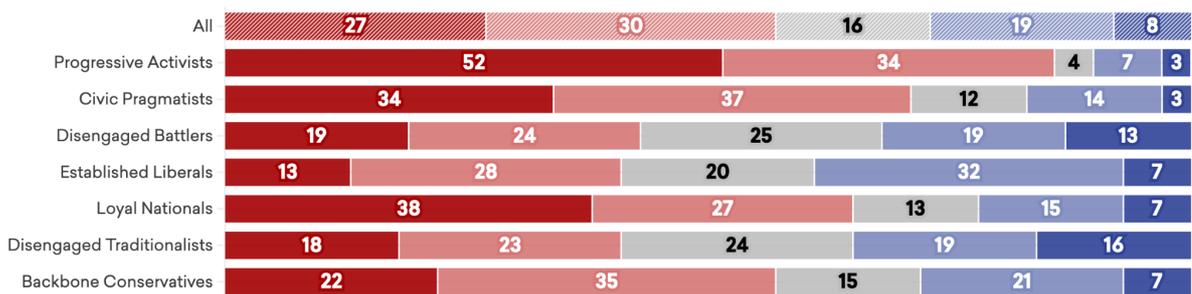
Britons were deeply concerned by the actions of far-right protestors on Remembrance Sunday this year. Before those events unfolded, 48 per cent of Britons predicted that the risk of far-right terrorism was likely to get worse if the conflict in Israel and Palestine continued. In the week after the protest, 57 per cent said that they worried a great deal or quite a lot about the risk of right-wing extremism increasing.

Figure 34

### Most Britons worry about the risk of right-wing extremism increasing in the UK

How much do you worry about the following impacts of the Israel-Palestine conflict? [The risk of right-wing extremism increasing in the UK]

● A great deal ● Quite a lot ● Don't know ● Not very much ● Not at all



Source: More in Common, November 2023

Scenes from Remembrance Day of far right extremists attempting to storm the cenotaph and engaging in violent brawls on Whitehall highlight the extent to which these groups are attempting to use the conflict to incite inter-community hatred.

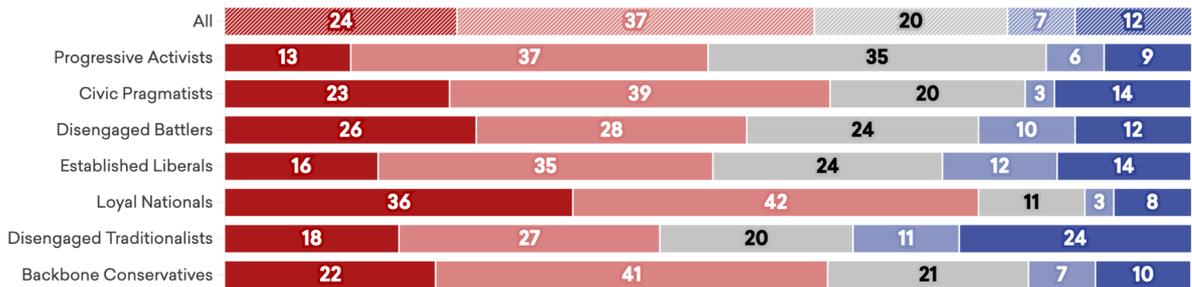
The public is equally concerned that the conflict might lead to a rise in Islamist extremism. Since 7th October there have been numerous examples of a small minority trying to hijack the conflict to push a violent, extremist agenda. This includes prayers in mosques calling to heal Israel 'from the usurping Jews', Jewish students being harassed on campus, chants on marches that call for the destruction of Israel as well as a wave of anti-semitic vandalism.

Figure 35

## Most Britons worry about the risk of radical Islamist extremism increasing in the UK

How much do you worry about the following impacts of the Israel-Palestine conflict? [The risk of radical Islamist extremism increasing in the UK]

● A great deal ● Quite a lot ● Not very much ● Not at all ● Don't know



Source: More in Common, November 2023

While extremists do not speak for the overwhelming majority of British Muslims, there is a risk that hyper-polarisation of the debate bleeds into the wider community. Our conversations with Muslim residents in Bradford found that a small number are now paying serious attention to conspiracy theories such as idea the BBC is funded by Israel, or that anti-semitism is being exaggerated in the UK for political reasons. This suggests a greater need for community leaders and groups as well as institutions such as mosques, schools, colleges and councils to provide a counter-narrative to those being pushed by extremists.

While people are most concerned by the hateful actions and rhetoric of the far right and Islamist extremists, they have a broader concern that as people become more and more opinionated on this subject, they will become more set in their views and division in the UK will only increase.

One of the most positive features of political discourse in Britain, compared to other Western democracies, is the lack of so-called 'stacked identities'; with a person's opinion on an individual topic usually following from how they perceive most other contentious political issues, leading to fixed tribes. In Britain, our political landscape is better seen as a kaleidoscope, where diverse groups of people unite on specific issues, but may diverge on others. Instead of forming rigid blocks with fixed positions on multiple contentious issues based on their identity, people in Britain tend to be more flexible and issue-focused in their political engagement.

But on Israel-Palestine, there are warning signs that this kaleidoscope is starting to splinter as identities stack up around specific sides of the conflict. In some cases, people with limited knowledge of the conflict are feeling pressure to take a side and are therefore falling in line with the views of their peers or those they see on social media. Those who are very

## More than choosing sides

engaged are increasingly likely to see media that disagrees with them as biased, and less willing to make space for others who hold alternative points of view.

Language from one block suggesting that supporting a ceasefire is letting terrorists get away with murder, or from another block claiming that opposing a ceasefire is tantamount to genocide, divides the country into two groups and ignores that fact that Britons' shared starting point on this issue is concern for civilians. Britons want compassion, and recognition of that fact that many of us may not know what the right solution is. Forcing people into groups of 'right' or 'wrong' according to their views on the conflict ignores the fact that most people simply don't have a view beyond the need to improve conditions for civilians on the ground. Britons don't want this to become an us-versus-them conflict in the UK and want space to allow different solutions to the situation to be put forward.

The scenario to avoid is one where views on Israel-Palestine become markers of personal identity rather than personal opinion, where outgroup hostility from those with strong views on the conflict reaches a point where meaningful discussion between those with different views becomes impossible.

Divisive language from politicians, commentators and other public figures, increasingly fragmented news consumption and distrust in mainstream media sources is encouraging a minority to take extreme and, in the worst cases, hateful views of Britain's different religious communities. These views are often founded on partial and inaccurate facts about the origin and history of the conflict. Our institutions need to lead in tackling this division. That involves uniting the country by building on our shared concern for civilians, for tackling terror, and for peace in the Middle East, and desire to maintain our uniquely strong community relations at home.

## Chapter 4: Britain's institutions

In the face of a wave of disinformation, increasing antisemitism and Islamophobia, and conflict entrepreneurs seeking to promote division, our leaders and public institutions have a vital role to play in helping the country process what is happening in the Middle East.

And yet despite this clear need for institutions to step up and show leadership, our conversations and polling finds that the public have found their actions to date wanting.

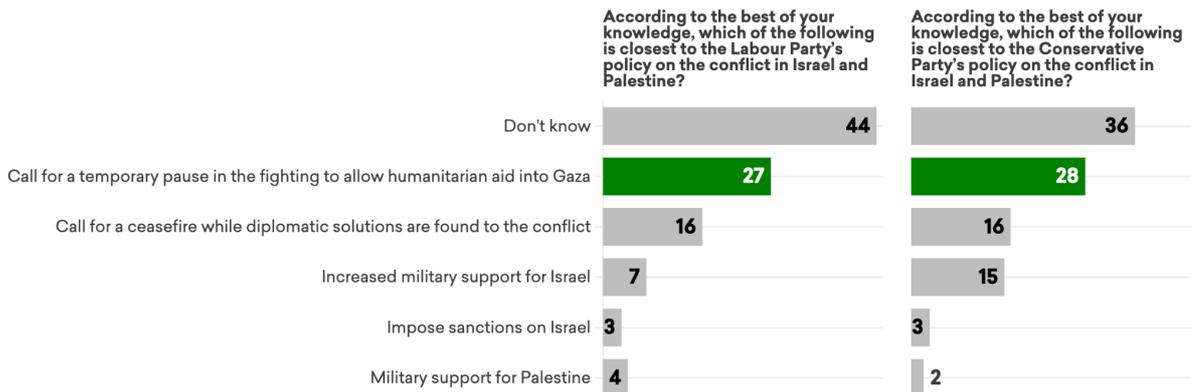
### Politicians

While there are very many passionate campaigners working to persuade politicians to align with their view of the conflict, and many politicians who have taken clear stances on the Israel-Hamas war, the majority of the public do not see party politics as particularly relevant to the conflict.

Asked what they have heard or seen about the war, the public talk about images coming out of Gaza, not the arguments within the Labour party or the halls of Westminster. In fact, fewer than three in ten Britons are able to correctly identify the Labour or Conservative parties' positions on the conflict.

Figure 36

### Most Britons can't identify the Labour or Conservative parties' positions on the Israel-Palestine conflict



Source: More in Common, November 2023

When the public do speak about the role of British politicians in this conflict, it is often talking about the divisive language that other politicians have used.

## More than choosing sides

*I also think that both of the parties, Labour and the Conservatives, have failed in their responsibilities and their duties, and they're creating more friction within this country. And that is not very healthy for this country.*

**Majid, Peterborough**

There are some Labour voters who would like the Labour party to take a firmer pro-Palestine stance on the conflict. In particular, some Muslim voters we spoke to told us that they feel the Labour party isn't being strong enough on the conflict:

*Our family's always voted Labour. But because of this situation I just don't think I'll be voting at all.*

**Aisha, Bradford**

*The majority of the Muslims do vote Labour, but I think the only way it would stay the same is if another leader was elected who was more humanitarian.*

**Zack, Bradford**

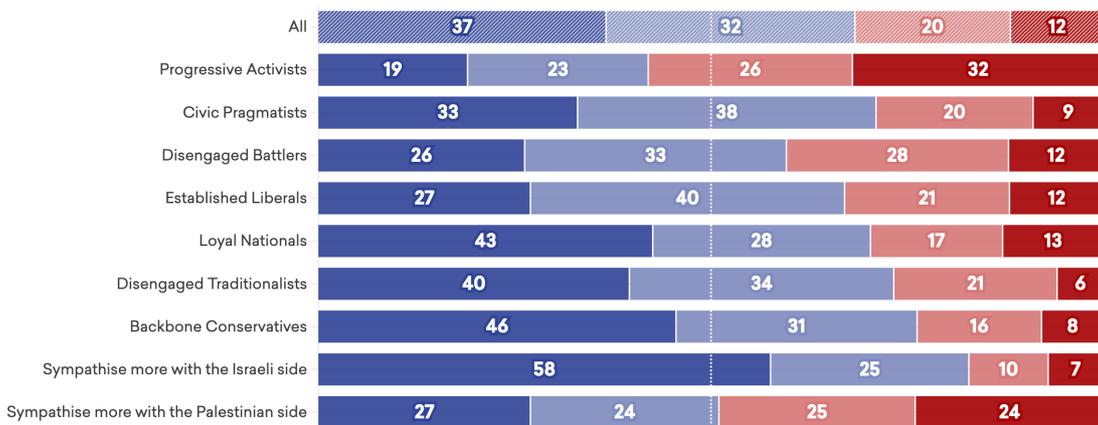
But for most people this is not like other issues in British politics where the public want to see different politicians advocating for a range of different approaches. In fact, a significant majority of the British public do not want the Labour Party to carve out a distinctive position from the Government. Instead the public overwhelmingly would prefer both main parties to present a united front on their stance towards the war. This even includes a narrow majority of those who say they sympathise more with the Palestinian side of the conflict.

**Figure 37**

### Britons want the Labour and Conservative parties to present a unified position on the conflict

Please use the scale below to describe which of the statements you agree with more, where 1 means you completely agree with the first statement and 4 means you completely agree with the second statement

- 1 - The Labour should stand behind the Government to present a unified position on international issues like the Israel-Palestine conflict
- 2 -
- 3 -
- 4 - The Labour party should set out a distinct position from the Government on the Israel-Palestine conflict



Source: More in Common, November 2023

Avoiding party politics does not mean that politicians should not listen to the concerns of their constituents - particularly those from the Jewish and Muslim communities who feel they are not being listened to. Instead, it means that politicians should be clear what their views are, and set out a position that seeks to address the concerns of all their constituents, rather than emphasising division for personal or political gain.

Regardless of their stance on the conflict, politicians need to communicate in a way that does not inflame tensions further. It is clear from all of our discussions that divisive language from political leaders spills into school playgrounds, social media, and elsewhere - having real consequences in particular for Britain's Jews and Muslims.

Instead of stoking division, there is space for politicians on all sides to emphasise the public's shared concerns about the conflict - particularly the humanitarian impact on civilians - and to emphasise our country's shared position that much more is needed to be done to help both civilians on the ground in Gaza and ensure Israel's long-term security.

Differences in opinion on how to best achieve those aims are inevitable and can be healthy. But language that artificially divides the country into different camps based on differing views on how to get to peace risks undermining the consensus we do have and makes meaningful progress towards peace less likely.

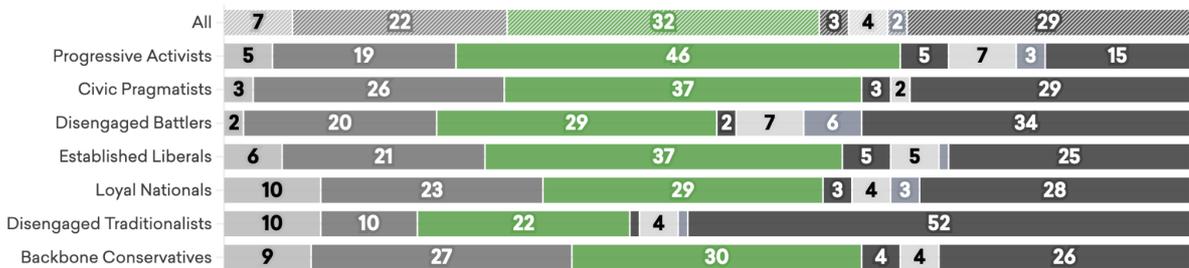
Political debates about a ceasefire, including the recent parliamentary vote, have been emblematic of this. Around a third of the public think the government should call for a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, the most popular option tested. But many more people support an alternative solution or don't know what the solution should be.

Figure 38

### A ceasefire is Britons' most popular solution to the conflict, but it does not command a majority

Which of the following do you think should be the government's policy on the conflict in Israel and Palestine?

- Increased military support for Israel ● Call for a temporary pause in the fighting to allow humanitarian aid into Gaza
- Call for a ceasefire while diplomatic solutions are found to the conflict ● Military support for Palestine ● Impose sanctions on Israel
- Something else (please specify) ● Don't know enough to say



Source: More in Common, November 2023

The suggestion that those calling for a ceasefire are the only people who truly care about civilian lives is clearly not true given the UK public's broad concern for civilians in the conflict but more limited support for a ceasefire. In fact, the public have a series of practical concerns about whether a ceasefire is the right solution, starting with the fact that most don't think it likely that either side would respect it.

Figure 39

### Britons think that the Israeli military and Hamas are unlikely to keep to any ceasefire

If a ceasefire was implemented in Gaza, how likely do you think the Israeli military are to keep it?



If a ceasefire was implemented in Gaza, how likely do you think Hamas are to keep it?



- Very likely ● Somewhat likely ● Don't know ● Somewhat unlikely ● Very unlikely



Source: More in Common, November 2023

In recent weeks, the ceasefire debate has become unnecessarily personal. Demonising people on either side of the ceasefire debate only serves to stoke division. While the ability to lobby MPs is a core part of the UK's democratic system, targeting individual MPs and their staff through noisy and occasionally violent protests at constituency offices, or acts of vandalism have no place in our democratic discourse.

Instead what is needed is greater recognition that those who support and oppose a ceasefire care about the lives of civilians equally. Finding agreement about ending this conflict demands mutual respect for both sides rather than using a single vote to divide politicians into two camps.

## The media

Just as politicians are shaping the discourse about the conflict in the UK, the media shapes Britons' understanding of the facts. And when it comes to the facts about this conflict, many people find themselves stuck in a state of deep confusion:

*Something else that Nicole just touched on is my distrust in footage, imagery and facts from both sides. Obviously propaganda is huge and both sides are always going to try and win public opinion with facts and opinions and images and stuff. And ... I'm looking at things, I'm like, I have no idea, no way of verifying anything here. And even if it is from the BBC or another trusted or mainstream news source, it's very hard to know if it's coloured in any way or weighted in either side. So yeah, I've definitely felt a disengagement from everything just to try and save myself from being duped*

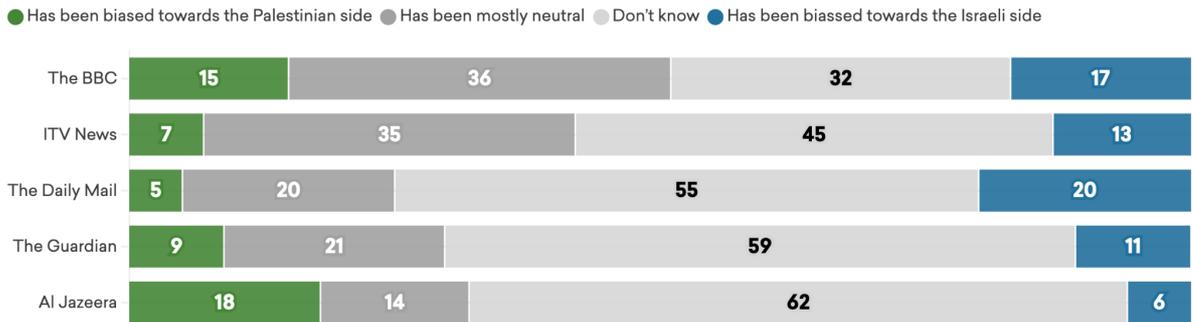
**Mark, Civic Pragmatist, Islington**

The public are well aware of large amounts of misleading or false information being shared on social media, and in other circumstances might look towards the BBC for an unbiased account of the conflict. In this case, roughly the same number of people say that the BBC is biased towards the Israeli side as say that the BBC is biased towards the Palestinian side. The BBC gets a more equal distribution of responses here than any other media source we tested and people are more likely to say that it takes a neutral outlook than any other news source we tested.

Figure 40

### Bias of different news sources

In their response to the Israel-Palestine conflict, do you think the following have been biased towards the Israeli side, the Palestinian side, or been mostly neutral?



Source: More in Common, November 2023

Indeed, some of the more engaged participants in our conversations have been deliberately trying to seek out reporting from a range of media outlets, such as Fox News, CNN, GB News, Al Jazeera, Press TV, and TRT (Turkish Radio and Television Corporation). They tend to conclude that the BBC is more balanced.

But seeing conflicting information on social media means that people are increasingly sceptical of our broadcast media, even despite its higher evidentiary thresholds. Some Britons - primarily those with strong views on the topic - believe that social media gives them alternative sources through which to find out 'the truth', driving increased distrust in institutions like the BBC. Many people told us that, even if they thought the BBC is more trustworthy than other mainstream media organisations, that it is in some way biased or not telling the complete truth.

*Our media is one-sided, the BBC, the ITV news networks and the UK networks are really, really one-sided. And I don't think that we get the whole story on anything anymore.*

**Alan, Established Liberal, Camden**

*Regarding social media, there's bound to be some false news or stuff that's been fabricated. But I think what's different this time is that the mainstream media are losing their voice and trying to control their audience. I think they've had their golden years and now social media has come and you [don't need mainstream media].*

**Zack, Progressive Activist, Bradford**

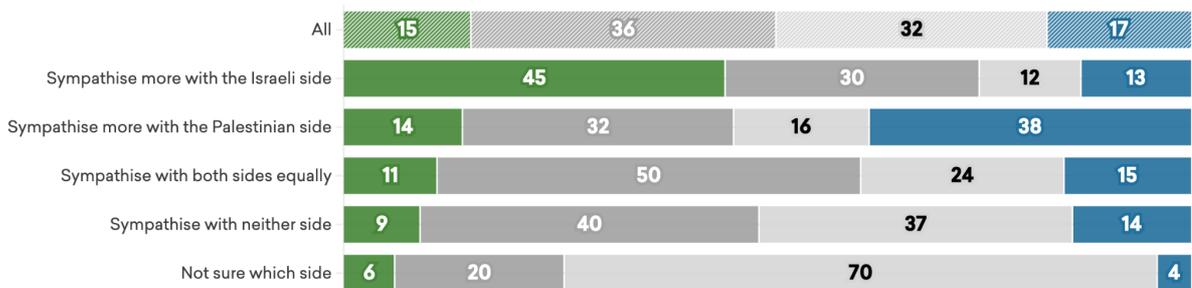
This distrust in BBC impartiality is shared across those who sympathise more with either the Israeli or Palestinian causes. 45 per cent of those who say they sympathise more with the Israeli side say that the BBC has been biased towards Palestinians, while 38 per cent of those who say they sympathise more with the Palestinian side say the BBC has been biased towards the Israeli side.

**Figure 41**

### Trust in the BBC is split according to which side of the conflict people sympathise with more

In their response to the Israel-Palestine conflict, do you think the following have been biased towards the Israeli side, the Palestinian side, or been mostly neutral? [The BBC]

● Has been biased towards the Palestinian side ● Has been mostly neutral ● Don't know ● Has been biased towards the Israeli side



Source: More in Common, November 2023

While there is no overall sense of bias one way or the other from the BBC, accusations of bias from groups taking a side in the conflict are dangerous because individuals are then more likely to switch to partisan sources that validate their own opinions. That in turn drives different sides of the debate into echo chambers where they are not exposed to the same facts as each other, which makes finding common ground harder and can drive extremism and polarisation.

*[The BBC] are quite known to be anti-Israel, so you kind of know what they're going to show. And then if you watch the Israeli news channels, which I do quite a bit, you see that actually [the BBC] have got the story totally wrong.*

**Naomi, Established Liberal, Islington**

*The BBC in their own way try to balance things, but the narrative is being driven by the Americans ... Al Jazeera is basically real time footage of what's actually going on.*

**Rasheed, Wycombe**

## More than choosing sides

In place of the BBC, many of those with the strongest views on the conflict have switched to social media (and particularly Instagram) as their source of information about the war. While most accept the problems of social media, there is a strong sense that social media is less 'sanitised' and can be closer to the truth because posts contain footage direct from people on the ground.

*I don't really watch mainstream media like BBC or Sky News. I'm mainly on social media. There's people in Israel and Palestine, who are able to show us what's actually going on.*

**Aisha, Progressive Activist, Bradford**

*I'm an older person and social media wasn't something I took to automatically, but since I've been retired and I've got a little bit more time I actually prefer to catch up on the news using my phone and Instagram. And I notice when I get on one [piece of information] it makes me question and there might be a link to something else and it opens something else and I learn something different. So it's never one-sided. I mean it's multiple sides. So I'm confusing myself even more, but I feel that I'm learning a lot more and about things that you wouldn't perhaps see on news on the TV, which could be a bit more biased or sanitised in many ways.*

**Samantha, Civic Pragmatist, Islington**

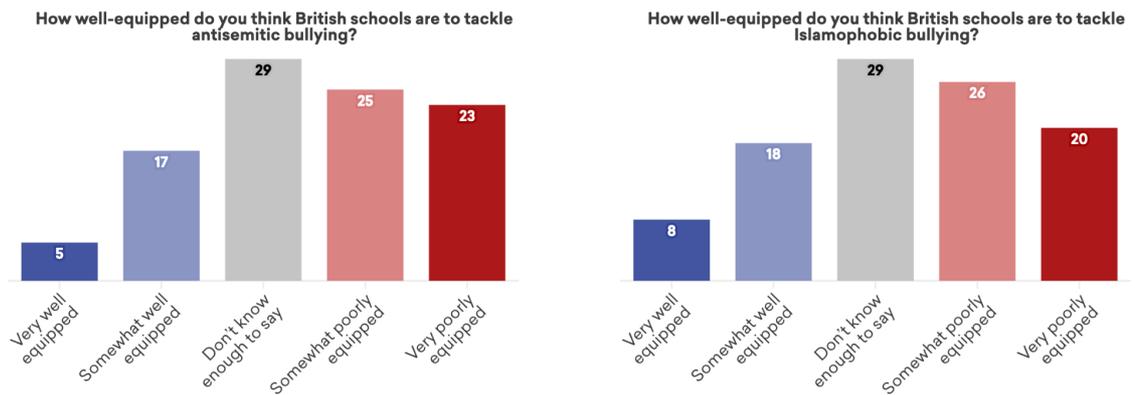
Reporting objectively and accurately from any conflict is an immensely difficult task, particularly when new contradictory information can spread so quickly via social media. And media organisations are under increased pressure given the divisiveness of this war in particular. But there is a risk that low trust in the BBC from those with strongly held pre-existing views on the conflict means the most opinionated Britons end up with no shared facts to inform their debates about the conflict. This will only entrench division and make it harder for people in the UK to find common ground.

## Schools and universities

Parents, teachers, and students in focus groups all had stories about an increase in antisemitic and Islamophobic bullying in schools. One primary school teacher, for example, noted an increase in people using the word 'Jew' as an insult. Others talked about how some of their Jewish and Muslim friends increasingly felt unsafe coming into school. National polling shows that the public do not think that schools are well equipped to tackle either antisemitic or Islamophobic bullying.

Figure 42

### Britons don't think our schools are well-equipped to deal with antisemitic or Islamophobic bullying



Source: More in Common, November 2023

More broadly, school students noted an increase in division that extends beyond hate towards Jewish and Muslim pupils. Many explained how students in classes felt pressured into taking one side or another - particularly on social media, where students explained that other students would harass them for not posting in support of Palestine.

*I think at my school most people are more pro-Palestinian. So for me and some other people as well, if I say something that's pro-Israel I feel like I could get hate for that...And on TikTok as well, I know there's a filter, it's like a little game, and if you use it it donates money to Palestine. And TikTok hasn't made one for Israel, so some people are against using that. But I think everyone should do what they can to help Palestine as well as Israel. And some people are scared to post things using the filter or to not use the filter if they don't feel like they should. They can get hate or forced [into do it, things like that.*

**Amelia, Progressive Activist, London**

*One of my friends got loads of messages [on Instagram] saying why are you not picking a side? People are dying and if you're not speaking out you're siding with the oppressor. And if you don't speak out people are a bit funny about it.*

**Lily, Disengaged Battler, Midlands**

Students think schools need to be taking action against Islamophobic and antisemitic bullying, and some had seen their schools doing so. But students generally thought that

not enough was being done to tackle arguments in the classroom, on the playground, and particularly on social media. Some mentioned that their school had held assemblies warning people to be careful about their social media use, but this had little effect.

While schools should not be taking a stance on either side of the conflict, they ought to be responsive to divisions among their pupils. Schools have a responsibility to teach students on how to disagree well, particularly on social media. This means taking a firm position against bullying, but not avoiding discussion of what has and is happening. The best schools are those which create spaces for students to learn about and debate the conflict safely and in a constructive manner.

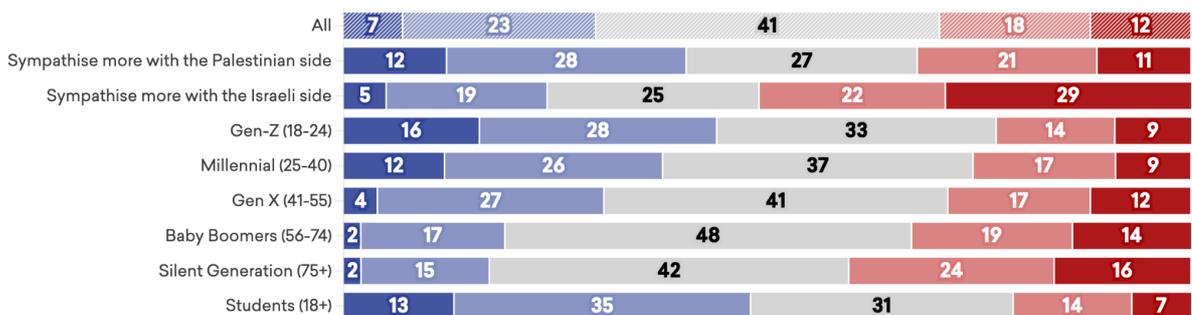
Against a backdrop of broader debates about free speech on campus, public confidence in universities to make a space for students to debate the Israel-Palestine conflict openly is lower than it should be with the public entirely split on whether they trust universities to do so. This is particularly true for people who sympathise more with the Israeli side, and is perhaps unsurprising given the tone and actions of some university protests and treatment of some Jewish students on campus.

Figure 43

### The public are genuinely split on whether they trust universities to make space for open debate about the conflict

How much do you trust British universities to make space for students to debate the Israel-Palestine conflict openly?

● A lot of trust ● Some trust ● Don't know ● Not much trust ● No trust at all



Source: More in Common, November 2023

But among younger people and students, confidence in universities is much higher. In focus groups, university and college students were less concerned about the space for opinionated people to debate on campus, and more concerned about people with strong views on the conflict dominating discussion and pushing otherwise neutral people into taking a side in the debate.

*I think it actually is impacting my education. Because at my university there's students staging walkouts for Palestine, protests, marches, etc. And even at the Costa, someone stuck on their lampposts and on the wall pictures of beheaded children saying, if you go to Costa, you are supporting genocide. And it's a bit like you don't want to walk around with a Costa cup because you don't know what's going to be said back to you. And people at my university have taken it really seriously.*

**Lily, Disengaged Battler, Midlands**

While some mentioned the division between a pro-Palestine and a pro-Israel side on campus, the clearer source of division and discomfort seems to be coming from those who have taken a clear view and those who have not aligned themselves. The demand from students was not just for better spaces for people with strong opinions to debate the conflict openly, but to actively create spaces for people to be wrong, make mistakes and learn about the conflict without receiving personal intimidation or abuse for expressing a certain view.

## The Police

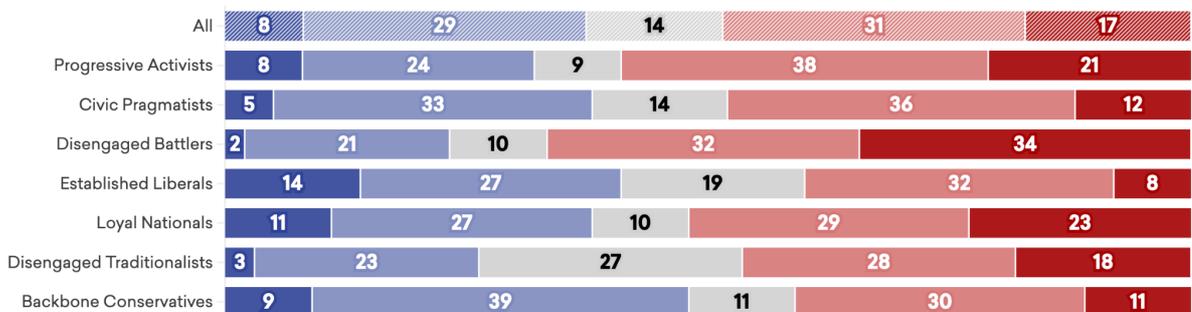
At a time when confidence in the police is at record lows, it should come as no surprise that the public do not trust the police to deal with a rise in antisemitic hate crime relating to the conflict, with almost half (48%) of the country saying they have not much trust or no trust at all.

**Figure 44**

### The public tend not to trust the police to deal with a rise in antisemitic hate crime

How much trust do you have in the police to deal with a rise in antisemitic hate crime in the UK?

● A lot of trust ● Some trust ● Don't know ● Not much trust ● No trust at all



## More than choosing sides

In London, where media attention has focused more heavily on the police, people are actually more trusting of the police force, with 54 per cent of Londoners saying they have complete trust or a great deal of trust in the police to deal with a rise in antisemitic hate crime, compared to only 37 per cent of the UK as a whole.

In focus groups, Londoners showed some sympathy for the police, and were understanding of the complexity that comes with policing protests and the balance that needs to be drawn between protecting free speech and tackling hate speech.

*I think there's a lot going on already before all of this stuff and it's just more on their plate and I think they can only deal with it to the best of their abilities and their understanding.*

**Jordan, Established Liberal, Islington**

The fact that Londoners feel slightly more positively about the police's responses in recent weeks is a sign that police visibility clearly matters in uncertain and unstable times. We found no widely held view that the police are giving preferential treatment to one side or another, and it is important that the police maintain this reputation - and be equally tough on extremists on all sides who are exploiting the conflict to spread hate towards Britain's Jews and Muslims. Politicians should recognise that the public appreciate the difficult job that police have, and back the police publicly to make the hard decisions they need to, even when challenging police chiefs behind closed doors.

## Conclusion and recommendations

We should not expect or want the British public to be silent about the events they see unfolding in the Middle East. Britons have never conformed to a 'Little England' stereotype and it should be of no surprise that we see despair and revulsion at acts of terrorism, and concern and anger at the loss of civilian life. Inevitably some have stronger views and see this conflict in the wider context of Jewish persecution and attacks on Israel or the plight of Palestinians and their long frustrated efforts to achieve self-determination. These views are all legitimate and the ability to accommodate those with strong opinions on contentious issues like this and those with none is a key tenet of our democracy.

What is not healthy and risks unfolding in this debate is for the loudest and often most extreme views to drown out more moderate, or less entrenched voices. We should avoid a situation in which individuals are expected to believe that one side is always right on every single issue and the other always wrong, where people are expected to take a fixed 'side'. This allows conflict entrepreneurs take advantage of the situation, whether to score more clicks or likes on social media, fuel their political ambitions or to actively encourage fundamentalist Islamist or far-right tendencies.

Most Britons recognise that this is a complex and difficult issue to understand. The public see heroes and villains within both the Palestinian and Israeli cause and know that there are many issues involved in finding a pathway to peace in the Middle East. But this is not simple 'both sidesism'. Almost everyone we spoke to condemned the evil of Hamas' attacks and recognized Israel's need and right to defend itself but they wanted it to do so in a way that was proportionate and respected civilian lives.

We should not expect or try to force people to 'pick a side' because, as this research shows, some of those with the deepest concern for civilians in Israel and Gaza are also the least likely to want to engage in acts of protest. Equating silence with complicity fails to recognise that some people are worried about speaking up and that for others it is just not in their nature to engage in these types of debate.

The public are frustrated at how binary debates are playing out in university campuses, classrooms and on social media. The debate about the desirability or need for a ceasefire is a case in point. While a number of Britons think that a ceasefire is an important step forward, they are not a majority and most also recognise the difficulty of ensuring either party maintains that ceasefire. Yet online debates have sought to either label those who don't support a ceasefire as supporting murder of civilians, or those who do of being useful idiots for Hamas. A better debate would start from the premise that most people want to find a solution that minimises loss of life and lays the groundwork for peace; for some, that will involve a ceasefire while for others it involves other solutions such as humanitarian pauses or more routes to providing aid.

The responsibility to foster a better approach for discussing - or not discussing - the issues involved falls across society, from local community groups up to national media. But it is perhaps our national institutions - our political system, our schools and universities and our police - that have the biggest role to play. Rather than framing the conflict as a debate between two sides with irreconcilable differences, they should focus as much time on amplifying the shared goal that spans across almost all of the British public - to tackle terror, prioritise humanitarian needs and find a new path to peace.

## How we can better navigate discussions about the Israel-Palestine conflict in the UK

Our institutions and leading voices in the discussion about Israel-Palestine have an important role to play in how this debate plays out in the UK. Their actions will determine whether there is passionate but healthy disagreement about how best to secure peace in the Middle East or whether the debate deepens divisions within UK society, encouraging radicalisation among a few and disengagement among many. Better stewardship from those with the highest profiles - whether in government, media, civil society, or elsewhere - will go a long way to ensuring it is the former not the latter that prevails. That means:

- **Remembering Britain isn't Twitter/X: While some people align entirely with pro-Israeli sentiment or entirely pro-Palestinian sentiment, most people do not.** The majority of Britons have not taken a 'side' in the conflict, and hold nuanced and complex opinions starting first and foremost with their abhorrence towards terror, concern for civilian lives and desire for peace. Those who are most engaged online represent the minority of Britons. And people with the most extreme views and loudest voices can often make it more difficult for those with less strongly held opinions to express their view.
- **Recognising that many people do not have strong fixed views on the conflict.** A new generation of Britons have grown up with relatively little familiarity with the dynamics of the Middle East and the history of Israel and Palestine. Bringing more into the conversation means creating a space where people feel comfortable to ask questions and learn more about the conflict and to make mistakes. People should be able to express a view that condemns terror, supports Israel's right to defend itself and also expects Israel to protect civilian lives - without being accused of taking a side.
- **Acknowledging that some are uncomfortable talking about the conflict but that their silence is most often driven by concern.** Some of those with the deepest concern for the loss of civilian lives are also those who are least likely to want to take part in debates, discussions or protests about the conflict. Their decision to not engage publicly in the discussion is more likely to be a product of despair at images from the Middle East, a sense that neither side is morally perfect and a desire not to fuel division rather than disengagement or lack of care.

- **Being aware that divisive language spreads into classrooms and across social media.** Those with high profile platforms should remember that their voice carries far beyond Twitter, Westminster or newspaper columns. We have already seen a violent fringe who want to exploit this conflict to pursue hate and engage in vandalism and violence. Young people in particular feel that the division of the country into warring camps is bleeding into their classrooms and campuses - leaving students feeling, at best, unable to discuss these issues and, at worse, actively unsafe.

Some individuals, institutions and activists have a particular responsibility for how the conflict is discussed and affects us here in the UK:

- **Politicians** have a responsibility not to turn this into an us-versus-them debate in the UK. While there is genuine disagreement among Britons on how to resolve the conflict, that does not need to inevitably spiral into community division. Instead, debates about the conflict require mutual respect for strongly held views on either side, working constructively towards our shared desire for peace in the region. Politicians should work to show they are listening in particular to the concerns of Britain's Muslim and Jewish communities, who feel ignored by many politicians. In calling out extremists, political leaders should also avoid tarring all protestors with the same brush and recognise that many protesters are most interested in protecting civilian lives.
- **Universities** in particular need to make sure that students feel safe. This means taking a tough stance against antisemitism and anti-Muslim hate on campus while creating spaces for students to debate the conflict openly and disagree respectfully on how to best resolve it. The recent spate of events that have actively targeted Jewish students should be dealt with swiftly and firmly by university disciplinary policies.
- **Schools** need to do more not just to address anti-semitic and anti-Muslim bullying but also to stop their pupils from being pressured into doing certain things to support one side in the conflict or another. At the same time, schools can help young people finding their voice who do want to advocate for either the Israeli or Palestinian cause - a healthy part of democracy - in the right and healthy way that takes account of the views, sympathies and perspectives of others. Schools can make clear the difference between solidarity against anti-semitism and anti-Muslim hate and taking a side in the conflict. Teachers should be supported by the Government to better explain the history and complexities of the conflict to their students in an unbiased and factual manner.
- **Protest organisers** have a responsibility for what happens at their marches. What might seem like passionate advocacy can quickly veer into prejudice. To maintain support for their cause, it is crucial that protest organisers don't let extreme and

fringe views dominate. The minority who want to use the marches to promote hate should be told they are not welcome. There should also be clear expectations set by organisers about what forms of protest are and aren't acceptable - including that targeting individual MPs' offices and harassing their staff is never acceptable.

- **Policing** needs to be more proactive on those pushing hate. It's important to community cohesion that Britain's Jewish and Muslim communities feel as safe as everyone else - that means taking a tough stance on and antisemitic and anti-Muslim hate crime.
- **Social media companies** need to take seriously the role they play in shaping the information landscape and discourse on the conflict. For many people, Instagram, TikTok and Whatsapp are their primary source of news on the conflict. People value being able to access a wide range of views on social media and don't want censorship, but they do want platforms to be flagging misinformation and providing the highest level of transparency about the origins of viral information. Social media companies must also recognise their duty to provide young users in particular with tools to deal with bullying and social pressure on their platforms.

## Annex A: British Seven Segments

In pursuit of a more evidence-based understanding of how we find common ground on polarising issues, More in Common launched the Britain's Choice project in 2020. This project centres its analysis of issues on the values, identity and worldview of Britons, captured in seven population segments through a methodology designed in partnership with data scientists, social psychologists and other experts. It integrates insights from six dimensions of social psychology that shape the way that people see the world and orient themselves towards society. This mapping has been carried out using multiple waves of quantitative and qualitative research, building on the approach used by More in Common in other major western democracies. The six areas of social psychology are:

- **Group identity and tribalism:** the extent to which people identify with different groups based on nationality, gender, political party, ethnicity, and other factors
- **Group favouritism:** views on who is favoured and who is mistreated in society
- **Threat perception:** the extent to which people see the world as a dangerous place
- **Parenting styles:** research suggests that basic philosophies regarding people's approach to parenting can have predictive power in explaining their attitudes towards public policies and authority more generally
- **Moral Foundations:** the extent to which people endorse certain moral values or 'foundations', including fairness, care, purity, authority, and loyalty
- **Personal agency:** the extent to which people view personal success as the product of individual factors (i.e. hard work and discipline) versus societal factors (i.e. luck and circumstance)

The 'British Seven' segments are often more useful in understanding people's views across a wide range of issues than standard ways of categorising people, such as their voting history, partisan identity or demographic characteristics such as age, income, social grade, race or gender. Understanding the specific 'wiring' of each of these groups 'upstream' allows us to better understand and predict how they will respond to different sets of issues 'downstream'.

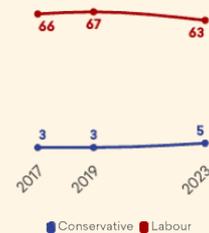
## Progressive Activists

A passionate and vocal group for whom politics is at the core of their identity, and who seek to correct the historic marginalisation of groups based on their race, gender, sexuality, wealth, and other forms of privilege. They are politically engaged, critical, opinionated, frustrated, cosmopolitan, and environmentally conscious.

Progressive Activists are often outliers on values – unlike other groups, they primarily see the world through the moral foundations of care and fairness and have much lower reliance on the moral foundations of purity, loyalty and authority. Compared to other groups, Progressive Activists feel less threatened in the world and in their community. They consider that outcomes in life to be more defined by social forces and less by personal responsibility. Although they are a higher-earning segment, many of them consider this to be down to good luck than individual effort. They have the lowest authoritarian tendencies of any group.



Changing voting intention 2017-2023  
Progressive Activists

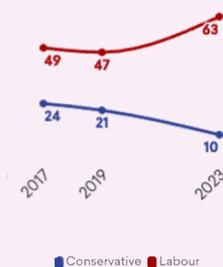


## Civic Pragmatists

A group that cares about others, at home or abroad, and who are turned off by the divisiveness of politics. They are charitable, concerned, community-minded, open to compromise and socially liberal. Civic Pragmatists have a similar values foundation to the Progressive Activist group in prioritising care and fairness, but they channel their energies into community and voluntary work, rather than political activism. They are also set apart from Progressive Activists (and some of the other segments) by their higher-than-average levels of threat perception.



Changing voting intention 2017-2023  
Civic Pragmatists

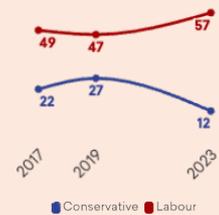


## Disengaged Battlers

A group that feels that they are just about keeping their heads above water and who believe their struggles are the result of an unfair, rigged system. They are insecure, disillusioned, disconnected, overlooked but also tolerant and socially liberal. They are a low-trust group with a tendency to ignore civic messaging (they are joint most likely to have not been vaccinated for Covid-19). Their overarching sense that the system is broken drives their disengagement from their communities and the broader democratic system with which they see 'no point' in engaging.



Changing voting intention 2017-2023  
Disengaged Battlers

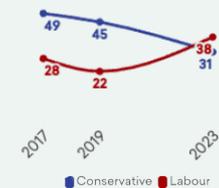


## Established Liberals

A group that has done well with an optimistic outlook that sees a lot of good in the status quo. They are comfortable, among the more privileged, cosmopolitan, trusting, liberal, confident and pro-market. They have low authoritarian tendencies and the lowest threat perception of any segment – which is reflected in their broad support for diversity, multi-culturalism, and sense that their local community is neither dangerous nor neglected.



Changing voting intention 2017-2023  
Established Liberals

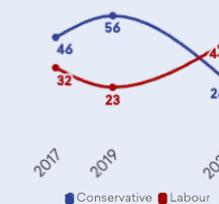


## Loyal Nationals

A group that is anxious about the threats facing Britain and themselves. They are proud, patriotic, tribal, protective, threatened, aggrieved and frustrated about the gap between the haves and the have-nots. They feel the 'care' and 'fairness' moral foundations more strongly than other groups. Their key orientation is that of group identity – belonging to a group (and particularly their nation) is important to Loyal Nationals. This strong in-group identity shapes their equally strong feelings of threat from outsiders. This in turn can drive their support for more authoritarian, populist leadership.



Changing voting intention 2017-2023  
Loyal Nationals

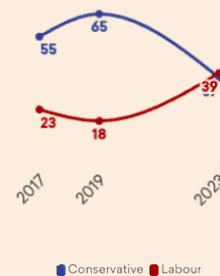


## Disengaged Traditionalists

A group that values a well-ordered society, takes pride in hard work and wants strong leadership that keeps people in line. They are self-reliant, ordered, patriotic, tough-minded, suspicious, and disconnected. They place a strong emphasis on personal responsibility, are mindful of others' behaviour and rely much more on individual rather than systemic explanations for how people's lives turn out. When they think about social and political debates, they often consider issues through a lens of suspicion towards others. They value the observance of social rules, order, and a British way of doing things, but don't play an active role in their communities – they are the least likely to eat out, visit museums or go to local libraries. They often have views on issues but tend to pay limited attention to current debates. Disengaged Traditionalists are similar to Loyal Nationals in their more authoritarian predisposition.



Changing voting intention 2017-2023  
Disengaged Traditionalists

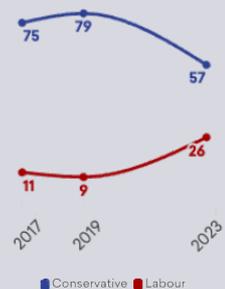


## Backbone Conservatives

A group who are proud of their country, optimistic about Britain's future outside of Europe, and who keenly follow the news, mostly via traditional media sources. They are nostalgic, patriotic, stalwart, proud, secure, confident, and relatively engaged with politics. They want clear rules and strong leaders and rely heavily on individual explanations for how life turns out, with this shaping how they respond to questions about deprivation and discrimination in society.



Changing voting intention 2017-2023  
Backbone Conservatives



## Methodology

### Quantitative Research

- Fieldwork dates: 3-6 November 2023
- Interview method: Online
- Sample size: 2,049
- Population effectively sampled: GB Adults (excludes Northern Ireland)
- Weighting method: The data is weighted on several measures - age/gender interlocked, education, ethnicity, and region - all to nationally representative proportions. In addition, it is also weighted by 2019 GE vote (of registered voters)

Additional fieldwork conducted 15-17 November and 24-27 November.

Full data tables can be found at <https://www.moreincommon.org.uk/our-work/polling-tables/>.

### Qualitative Research

Focus groups were held online in the following locations on the following dates:

- Bradford - 7 November
- Oxford - 7 November
- Surrey - 16 November
- Islington and Camden - 16 November
- Nationwide (16-24 year olds) - 16 November
- Peterborough and Wycombe - 20 November
- Walsall - 28 November

Pseudonyms have been used throughout the report to protect the confidentiality of our participants.

Participants were recruited using a range of independent recruitment companies.



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