



Keeping Britain safe: How to rebuild the Conservatives' record on security

Conservative Party Conference Fringe Event 2024

Progressive Activists



Civic Pragmatists



Disengaged Battlers



Established Liberals



Loyal Nationals



Disengaged Traditionalists



Backbone Conservatives



...a group for whom politics is an important part of their identity and who seek to correct long-standing injustices

...a group that cares about others, at home or abroad. They wish for less conflict and more compromise.

... a group that are just getting by. They blame the system for its unfairness, but not other people.

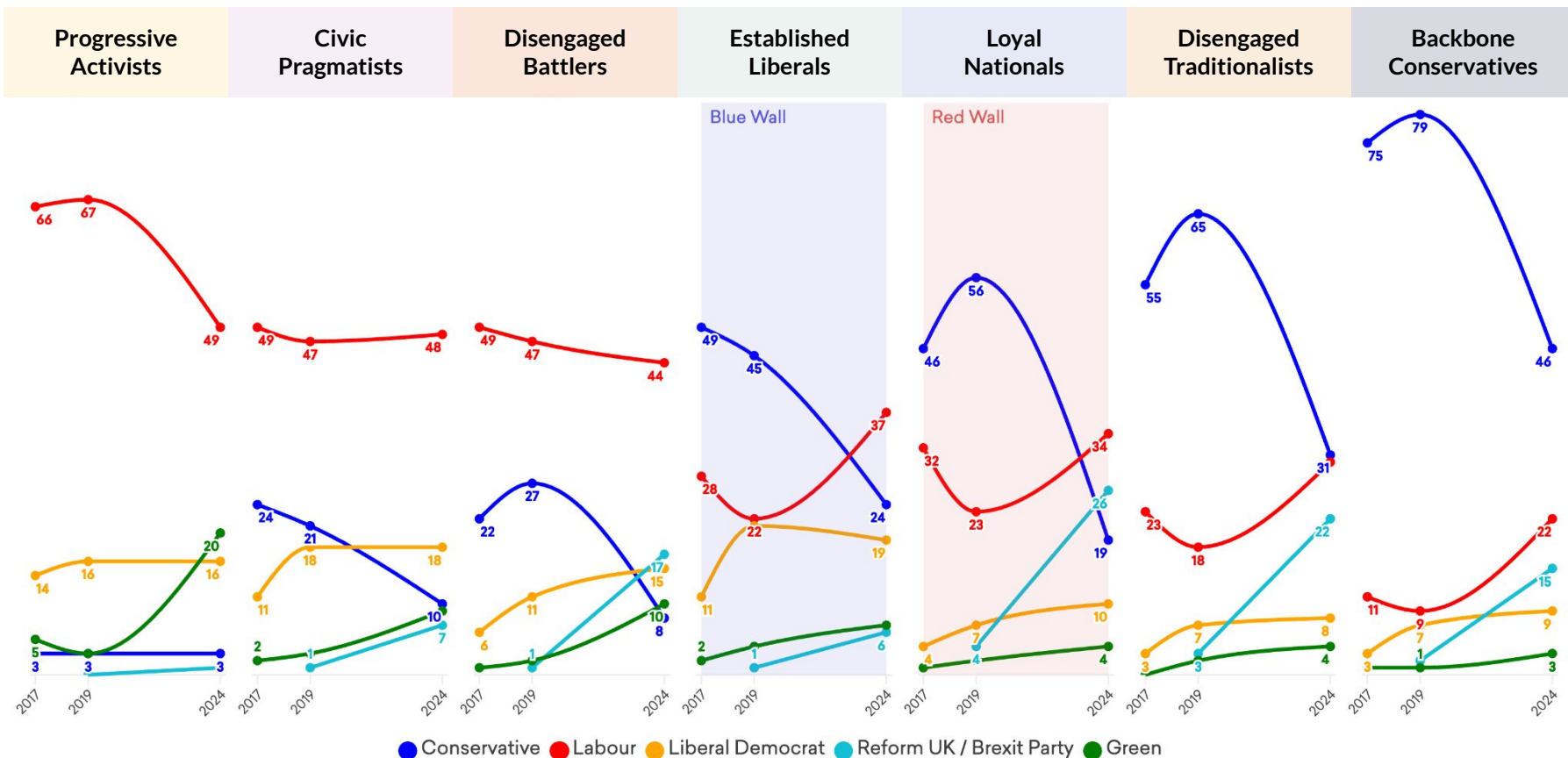
...a group that has done well and means well towards others, but also sees a lot of good in the status quo.

...a patriotic group, who worry that our way of life is threatened and also feel our society has become more unfair.

... a group that values a well-ordered society and prides in hard work. They want strong leadership that keeps people in line.

... a group who are proud of their country, optimistic about Britain's future, and who keenly follow the news.

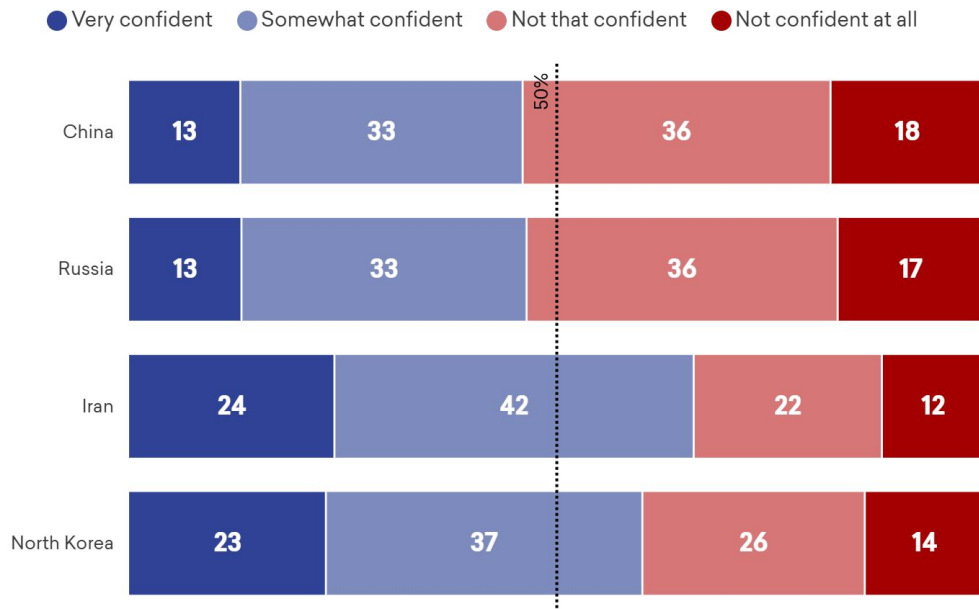
How did the Seven Segments vote?



The public's starting points on security

Confidence in Britain's ability to defend ourselves

How confident are you that the British military, with support from its allies, could defend the UK from military threats from...



Public confidence in Britain's ability to defend itself is low .

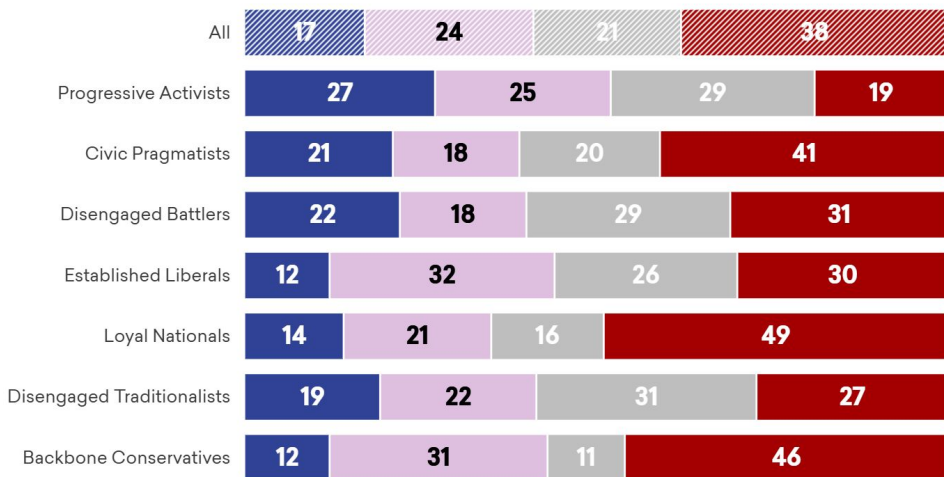
More than half the public say they are not confident that Britain could defend itself from military threats from China or Russia.

Although they are more confident about fending off threats from Iran or North Korea.

Public twice as likely to think we spend too little on defence

Do you think the amount the government spends on defence is...

- Too much
- About the right amount
- Don't know
- Not enough



The public are more than twice as likely to think that the government doesn't spend enough on defence (38 per cent) than too much (17 per cent). Only among Progressive Activists do more people think we spend too much and than too little.

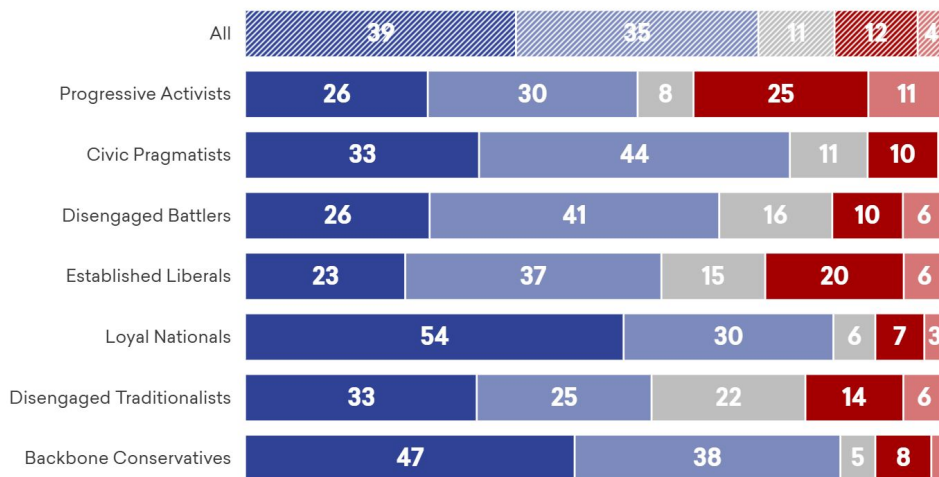
This is a view held most strongly among Red wall (Loyal National) voters who will be key to a Conservative comeback.

Strong public support for increased defence spending

How important would you say each of the following are to ensuring Britain's national security?

Increasing the amount we spend on defence

Very important Somewhat important Don't know Not that important Not important at all



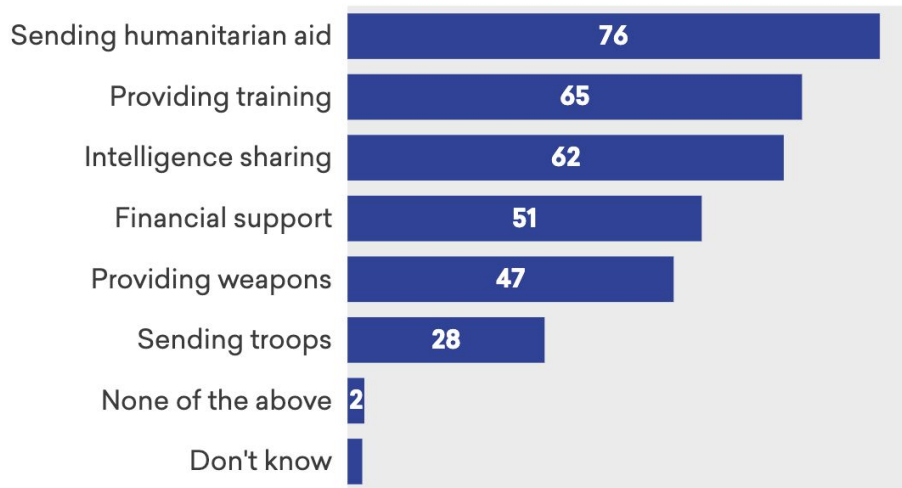
While the public are unsure whether defence spending will increase or not - they see such an increase as integral to Britain's national security.

This is a view that commands support across our seven segments - but most particularly among Red Wall Loyal National voters.

How should Britain intervene overseas?

Britons want the UK to take a humanitarian approach before military intervention

You said that the UK should sometimes intervene in some global conflicts. Would you support the UK intervening in the following ways in some global conflicts?



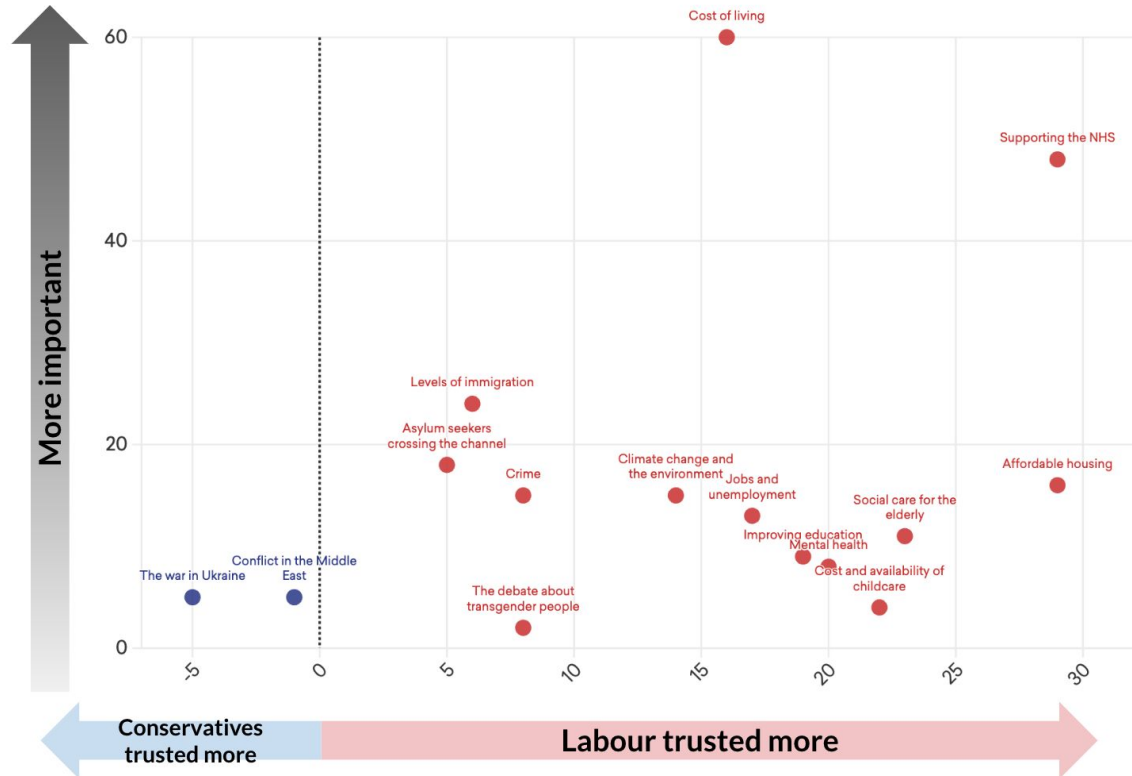
Britons are pragmatic about war. Their instinct on all conflict is to want peace, but they are not pacifists, and appreciate that sometimes confrontation is necessary to secure Britain's interests and longer-term peace.

Increasing the visibility of humanitarian and non-military interventions will increase support for military interventions when they are necessary.

The politics of national security

Conservatives are naturally more trusted on security

Going into this election, Labour were more trusted on every issue apart from foreign affairs - where the Conservatives had a slight lead that has only increased since the election.



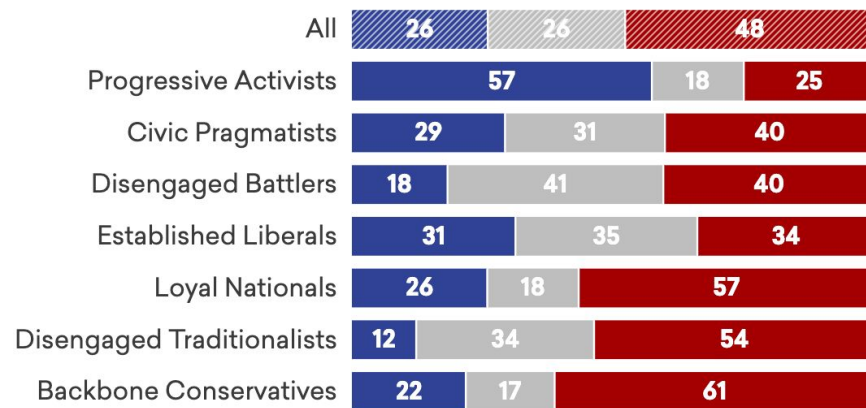
Labour is currently not trusted on national security

Almost half the country say that Labour is not a safe pair of hands on national security - with Blue Wall Established Liberals and Red Wall Loyal Nationals both more likely to think this than not.

Half of Britons don't trust Labour on national security

Which of the following comes closest to your view?

- The Labour Party is a safe pair of hands on the global stage
- Don't know
- The Labour Party is not a safe pair of hands on the global stage



But the Conservatives' reputation is more mixed

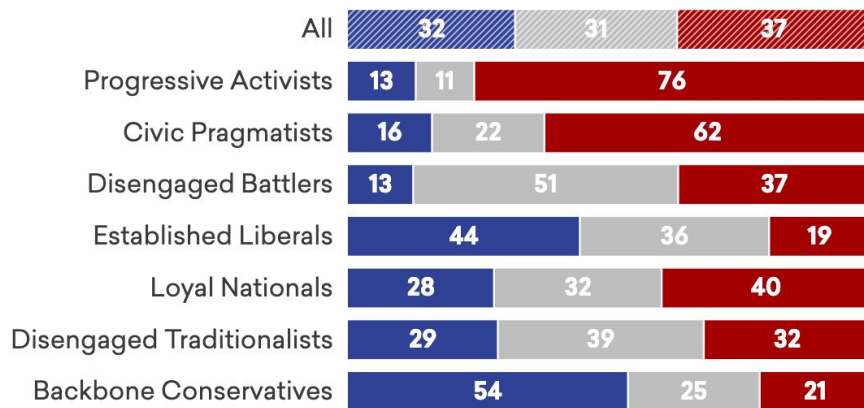
In contrast, the Conservatives are more trusted by everyone apart from the two most progressive segments.

That said, while the Conservatives are trusted more than Labour, Red Wall Loyal National voters are still skeptical that the Conservatives are a safe pair of hands.

The public are split on whether to trust the Conservatives on national security

Which of the following comes closest to your view?

- The Conservative Party is a safe pair of hands on the global stage
- Don't know
- The Conservative Party is not a safe pair of hands on the global stage



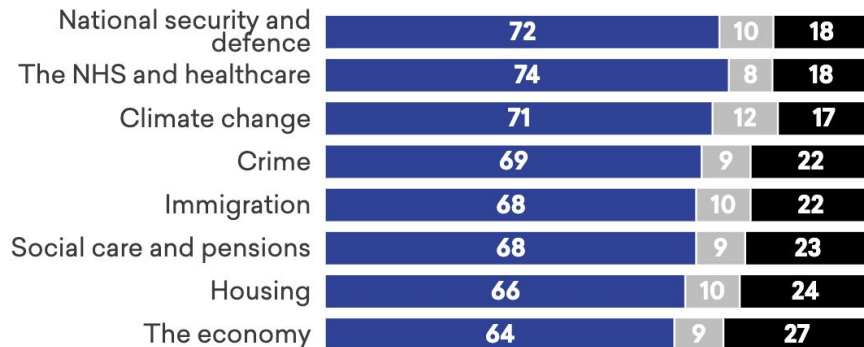
But foreign affairs is not a traditional “political” issue

Very few Britons want to see political parties set out and debate distinct positions on foreign policy - they would much rather see the government and opposition work together on these issues (more so than any issue other than the NHS).

The public want parties to work together on national security and defence

For each of the following issues, please indicate whether you would like to see political parties set out their own views and debate or whether they should work together and come to an agreement

- Parties should work together and come to an agreement
- Not sure
- Parties should set out and debate their own positions



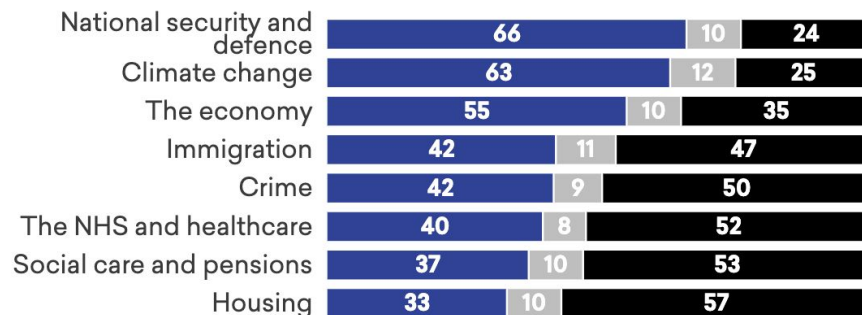
The role of public opinion in discussion about defence

Unlike most other issues, the public are happier for the government to listen to experts on national security than to listen to them. In focus groups, people struggle to say what they think the government should do on most international security issues because they assume the government are privy to much more intelligence and generally trust that the government will be able to make better decisions.

The public want the government to listen more to experts and less to the public on national defense

For each of the same issues, please indicate whether you think the government should be listening more to public ...

- The government should be listening more to experts with specialist knowledge
- Not sure
- The government should be listening more to the public



Remember that Reform are outliers

	Median Conservative voter	Median potential Conservative voter	Median Reform UK voter
Donald Trump:	-45 approval rating	-44 approval rating	+19 approval rating
Ending support for Ukraine:	-47% net oppose	-34% net oppose	+1% net support
Support for British intervention overseas:	+8% net support	+3% net support	-22% net oppose

On many foreign policy issues, Reform voters are directly opposed to both the Conservative base, and the voters that Conservatives need to win over. Chasing the more extreme Reform voters risks undermining the Conservatives' credibility with the wider public as a safe pair of hands on security issues.

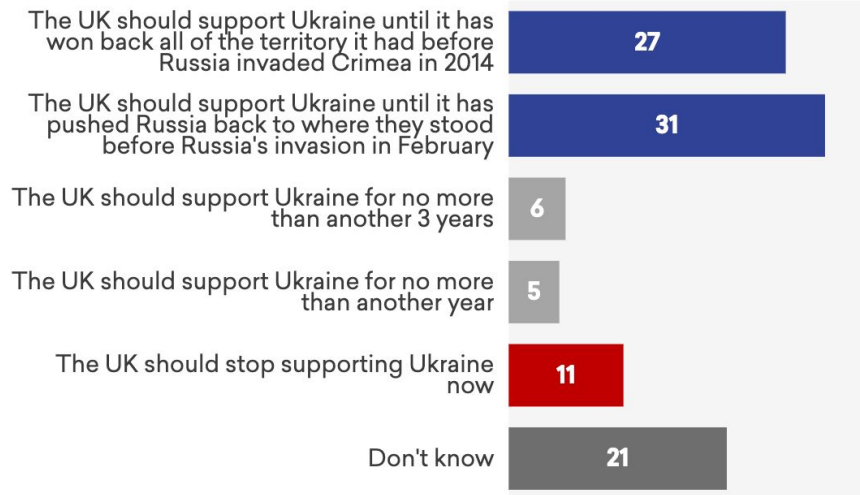
Global conflicts in focus

Support for Ukraine remains high

Two and a half years since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Britons' support for Ukraine has barely fallen, with the majority still saying we should back Ukraine until they have reclaimed their territory. Only one in ten say our support for Ukraine should end now.

Support for backing Ukraine until they have their territory back

And which of the following comes closest to your view?



British people see the importance of Ukraine to the UK

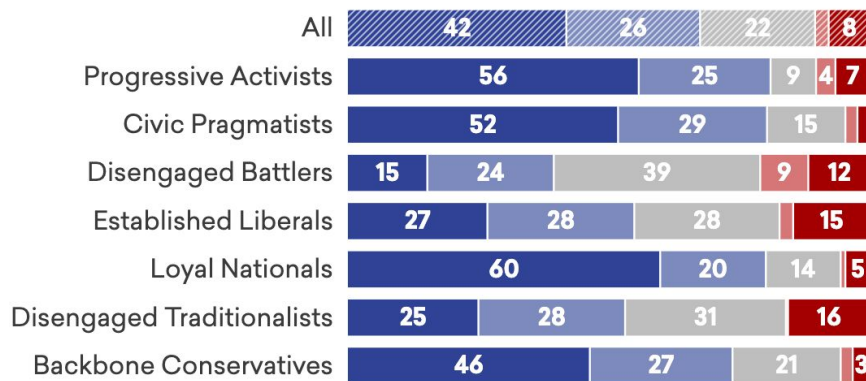
Seven in ten Britons say it is important to the UK that Ukraine defeats Russia - an ambition that unites Progressive Activists and Backbone Conservatives.

Disengaged Battlers are the only segment where less than half agree this is important (with more expressing no view rather than seeing it as unimportant). Labour might be tempted to chase the generally more war-sceptical Disengaged Battler voters, but this would open them up to criticism from their new Loyal National base, which would leave open an opportunity for the Conservatives.

Most see it as important to Britain that Ukraine defeats Russia

Thinking about the war in Ukraine, how important is it for the UK that Ukraine defeats the Russian Invasion?

● Very important ● Somewhat important
● Neither important nor unimportant ● Somewhat unimportant
● Not at all important



Ukraine does not polarise Britain

Unlike the war in Israel and Gaza, the war in Ukraine does not polarise Britons and there is no mainstream pro-Russia segment of the population. Farage's comments about the Ukraine war are part of the reason the Reform Party seemed to hit a ceiling in this year's election campaign.

The Ukraine war does not polarise Britons

Which side in the conflict between Ukraine and Russia do you sympathise with more?

● The Ukrainian side ● Both sides equally ● Neither side ● Not sure ● The Russian 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



Storm Shadow and NATO

There is little resistance to the idea of Ukraine using British weapons to attack Russia on Russian soil.

Similarly, the public overwhelmingly back Ukraine joining NATO after the war - with 57% in support and 14% opposed

Britons are comfortable with Ukraine using British weapons in Russia

It should be up to Ukraine to decide how they use the weapons Britain has provided

45

It should be up to Britain to decide how Ukraine use the weapons Britain has provided

28

Don't know

27

It's acceptable for Ukraine to bomb targets inside of Russia

50

It's not acceptable for Ukraine to bomb targets inside of Russia

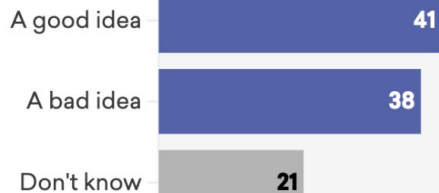
19

Don't know

31

China

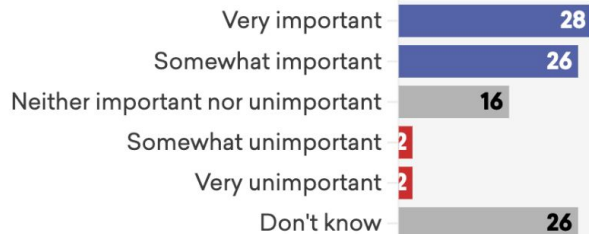
When David Cameron was Prime Minister, he pursued a close relationship with China, encouraging closer trade and investment between the two countries. In hindsight, do you think this was...



Which of the following comes closest to your view?



And thinking about Taiwan, how important is it for the UK that Taiwan remains independent of China?



The public are aware of the risks of a close relationship with China, but uncertain and divided on what to do about it.

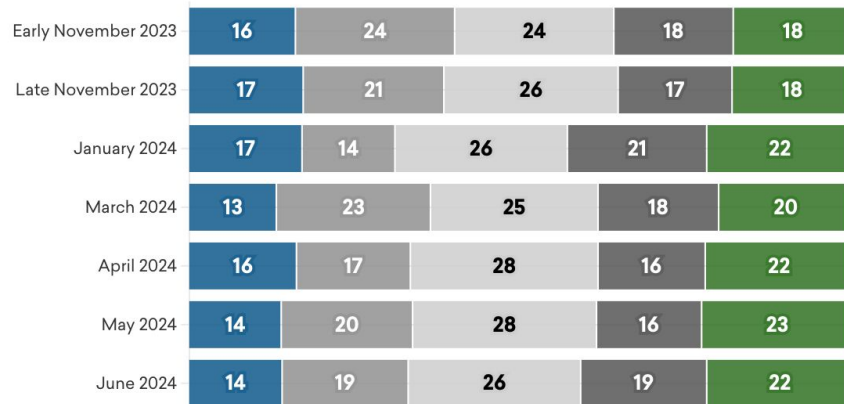
Middle East

Views on Israel-Palestine have remained remarkably stable in the year since Hamas' October 7 attacks. While there is a lot of noise in the UK about the conflict, most Britons have not taken a side and do not see their position on the conflict as part of their identity. They want to see civilians protected and a robust stance against terror.

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





**More in
Common**