UKEDRC

UK Extremism and Democratic Resilience Centre

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Britain Under Strain

The Broken Social Contract, Democratic Distrust and the Mainstreaming of Extremism

Authors: Dame Sara Khan DBE and Dr Matthew Godwin

An inaugural report by the UK Extremism and Democratic Resilience Centre (UKEDRC)

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The UK Extremism and Democratic Resilience Centre

UKEDRC is Britain's first independent organisation dedicated to countering extremism, building social cohesion and strengthening democratic resilience — mobilising a whole-society approach built on public-health principles.

There is a significant gap in assessment, research and practical action across the full spectrum of social division, declining trust in democracy, and extremist narratives and violence. The Centre will close this gap — supporting government, policing, intelligence and civil society partners with crucial independent evidence, analysis and technical expertise.

Our vision is a strengthened, robust and resilient Britain — where extremism and threats to cohesion are understood and countered, where communities have the necessary capability and support, and where democratic institutions are protected rather than eroded.

WHAT WE DO

01	**Monitor**	Track and analyse trends and threats, including through the UK's first Extremism and Democratic Resilience Index.
02	**Convene**	Bring together government, civil society and international partners for a coordinated response.
03	**Advise**	Develop evidence-based strategies and advise on policy and strategy.
04	**Communicate**	Translate research into public outputs that counter disinformation and extremist narratives.
05	**Enable**	Equip practitioners and communities with tools, training and resources to build resilience.

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About the authors

Dame Sara Khan DBE

Dame Sara Khan DBE is a leading expert and policy specialist on counter extremism, societal resilience and human rights. She was Britain's first Counter Extremism Commissioner in 2018 and in March 2021, Sara was appointed by the Prime Minister as the government's Independent Adviser for Social Cohesion and Resilience. She has published independent reports and reviews for the UK government including Challenging Hateful Extremism (2019), Operating with Impunity (2021) and The Khan Review (2024).

Dr Matthew Godwin

Dr Matthew Godwin holds a PhD from UCL and focuses on hostile state destabilisation in the UK. He has previously worked at the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change's extremism policy unit and as a researcher in the House of Lords. Godwin has been published in leading peer-reviewed journals on a range of topics including far-right extremism, diaspora influence on foreign policy and political institutions.

> *"Boldness is required. This means committing to a fundamental reset in how these issues are framed and understood — where extremism, social cohesion and democratic resilience are treated as first-order national security issues, not peripheral policy concerns."*

Participant, Wilton Park dialogue

Building a new counter-extremism and democratic resilience approach for today and the future · Wilton Park, 27–29 April 2026

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Foreword

I have spent much of my career working on extremism, social cohesion and democratic resilience. Yet I have never been more concerned than I am today about the challenges facing our country.

Dame Sara Khan DBE
Executive Director, UKEDRC

The threat now facing us is more serious, and more deeply rooted, than when I was Counter Extremism Commissioner. This is not a passing dip in confidence but a structural crisis as a result of a chronic erosion of trust in institutions, now fuelling a broken social contract. A majority of the public believe the bond between citizens and the state has broken down, and that belief cuts across income, age and party. Related to this, the cordon sanitaire, the consensus that extremist narratives and conspiracy theories should not be allowed to pollute the mainstream, is also broken. Ideas once confined to the fringe are held by large minorities, and in places majorities, of the public.

This is cause for serious concern, not least because extremists and malign actors know it too. They are exploiting this collapse with patience and precision, turning legitimate grievance into permanent disillusionment, and disillusionment into something more dangerous still - a task made easier by the fact that today a quarter of the population is open to siding with Britain's enemies.

Nowhere is this strain more visible than in the contested question of national identity. What it means to be British, and who that identity belongs to, has become a genuine fault line, not confined to any one political tribe, generation or region. Concern that diversity is eroding national identity is now a mainstream view, held by a majority of Britons. Beneath that broad anxiety sits a harder minority view: support for traditional extremist beliefs such as ethnonationalism and remigration are held by a meaningful share of the public. A small but consequential number of citizens have already crossed into accepting political violence or rejecting democratic norms altogether.

These attitudes shape how people see their neighbours, how willing people are to respect the rule of law and the legitimacy of the state and the government. This distrust provides a fertile climate for extremists and hostile states to recruit people into a story of betrayal and enemies, representing a serious threat to our democratic and national security.

What is at stake is not a policy area or a department's remit. It is our democracy itself, and the kind of country we want it to be. Seeing the scale of the problem clearly is not the same as giving up. If anything, it is the precondition for doing something about it. There is much to be concerned by, but this report also shows how much desire there is across the country for our democracy to flourish and deliver: where politicians act with integrity rather than point-scoring, institutions delivering, and that the country works fairly for those who contribute to it. These are not fringe demands. They are held, in one form or another, across nearly every political segment in this report.

Britain's divisions are real, and the contest over what this country is, and who belongs to it, will not resolve itself on its own, especially in our polluted information environment, where online platforms and AI-generated content play an increasingly powerful role in shaping what people believe. But the common ground beneath our disagreements is real too, and wide enough to build on — if we choose to.

Democracy does not maintain itself. It survives only because, generation after generation, enough of us choose to defend it, repair it and renew it, rather than let it crumble through neglect or be captured by those who would replace it with something harder, narrower and less democratic. The relationship between citizens and the state has frayed badly, and the contest over identity and belonging has frayed it further. But it can be rebuilt through the unglamorous work of institutions doing better, and by citizens who refuse to walk away when it would have been easier to do so.

This report is offered in that spirit, and as a call to action. We write it with hope, not despair. It is a clear-eyed account of where we now stand, and the beginning of a shared effort to repair what has broken. The country we want to be is still within our reach but only if we are willing to fight for it, together.

Dame Sara Khan DBE

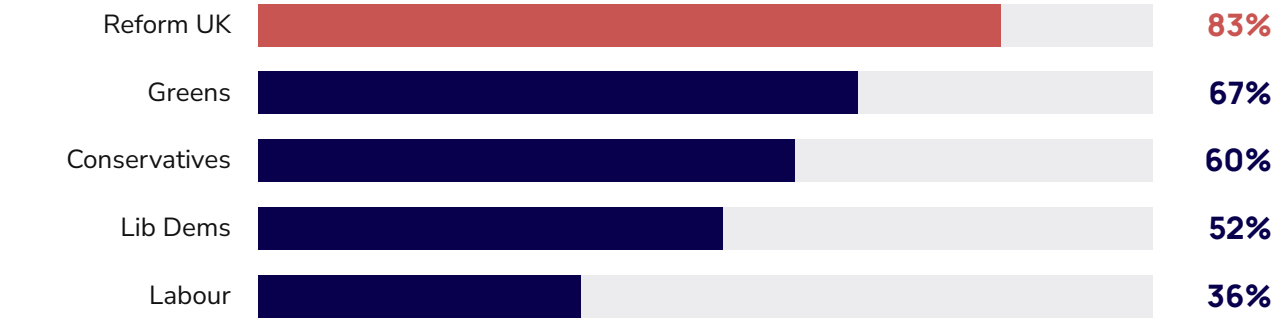
Executive Director
UK Extremism and Democratic Resilience Centre (UKEDRC)

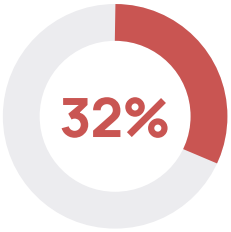
A Broken Contract

61% believe the social contract is broken

Only **23%** think it's working.

Believe the contract is broken — by 2024 vote





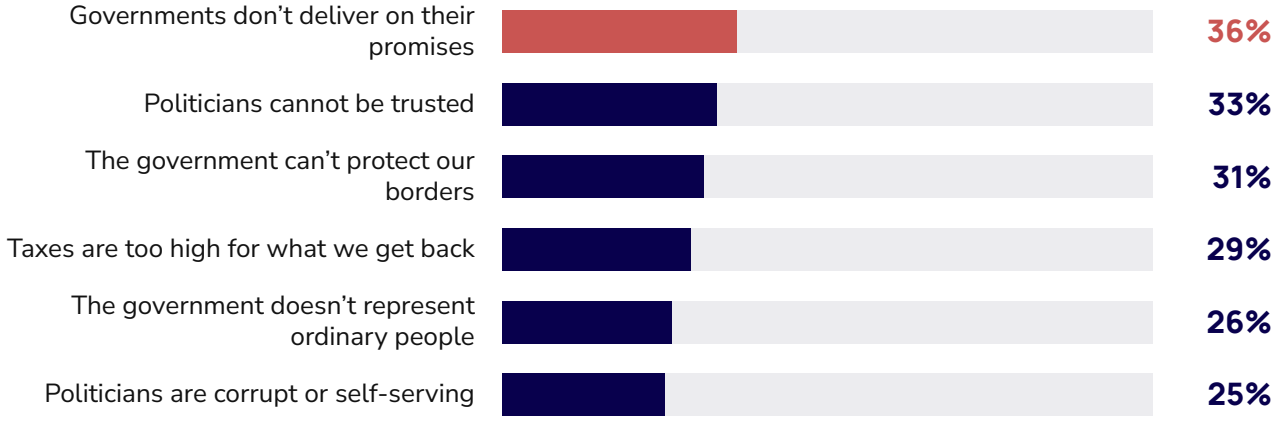
believe capitalism has failed

and we need a "communist revolution"

28%

say we should ignore the institutions and rules that get in the way of change, rising to 34% of those who feel the social contract is broken

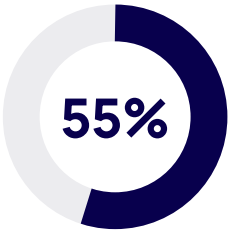
Why people say the social contract is broken



Source: UKEDRC, with More in Common and Yonder.

A STATISTICAL SNAPSHOT

Contested Identity



Believe national identity is disappearing because of diversity

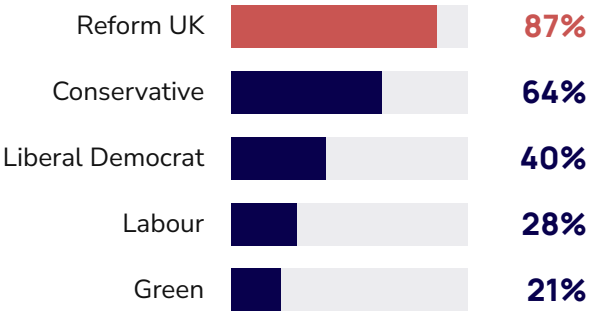
45% say it strengthens it

Support for remigration

– compelling migrants to leave the UK

Feel national identity is disappearing

BY PARTY



BY ETHNICITY

How Britons saw the 'Unite the Kingdom' march, 2025

60% — A nationalist march, attended mostly by extremists and racists

40% — A show of patriotism from people with valid concerns about migration, diversity and the future of the country

31%

are open to the view that non-white people will never be as English/Scottish/Welsh as white people

42%

disagree that British Muslims can integrate into British society

41%

say Britain is built on Judeo-Christian values that should be defended. In contrast, 59% feel the UK is a secular country not based on any single faith

15%

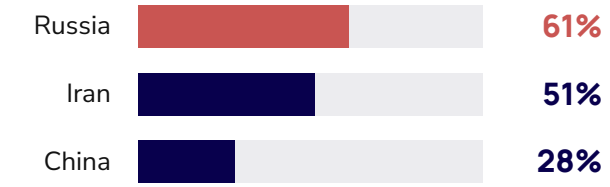
believe some races are born less intelligent than others

Source: UKEDRC, with More in Common and Yonder.

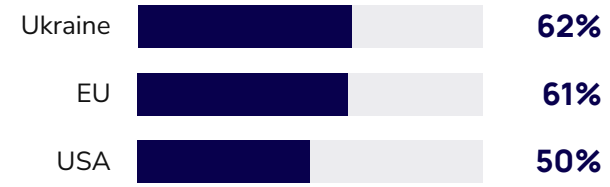
Distrust & Allegiance

24% are open to siding with the UK's enemies in some circumstances

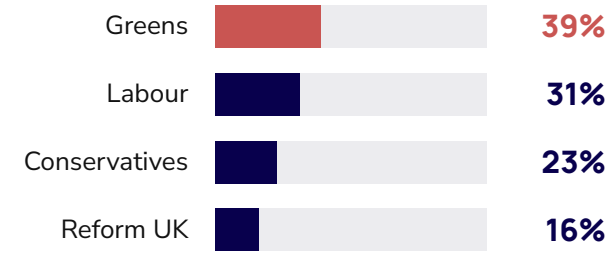
Identified as an enemy of the UK

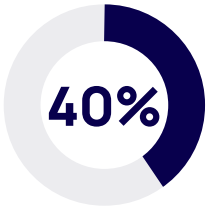


Identified as an ally of the UK

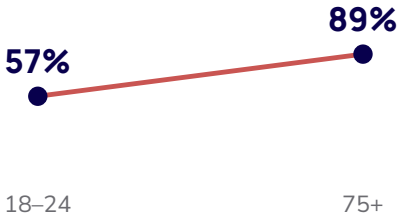


Open to siding with the UK's enemies — by party





Say democracy doesn't work now, but could with the right leaders



Is voting patriotic?

A **32-point** generational gap — 57% of 18–24s versus 89% of over-75s. 81% say fighting for your country is patriotic.

28%
believe Jewish people hold most of the world's wealth and power

85%
of British Muslims favour integration — only 2% would like to live in a separate Islamic area, subject to Sharia Law

27%
of British Muslims say the Holocaust is invented or exaggerated

38%
think the UK is a safe place for Jewish people — the least of any group

Source: UKEDRC, with More in Common and Yonder.

Extremist narratives and conspiracy beliefs

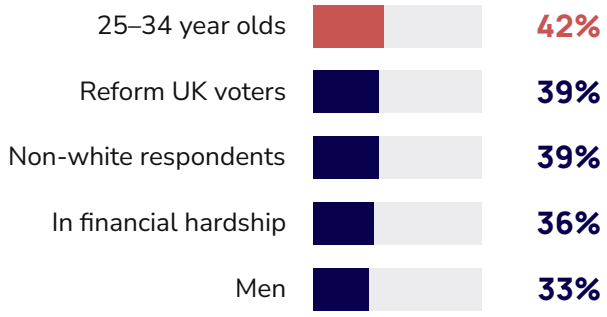
40% believe a secret group of people controls major world decisions

15% 1 in 7 believe political violence is acceptable in at least some situations

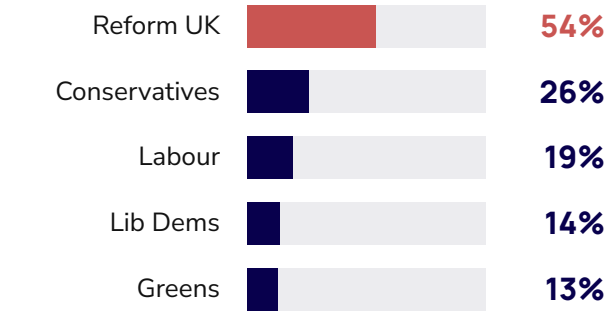
believe in **the 'Great Reset'** conspiracy theory*

believe in **the 'Great Replacement'** conspiracy theory†

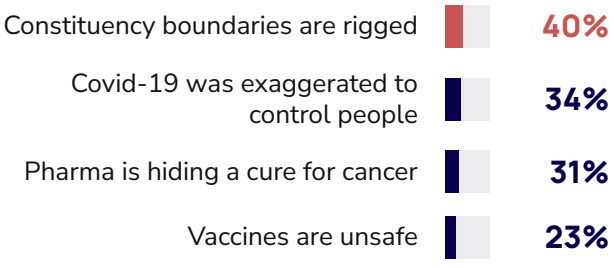
Belief in 'Great Reset', by group



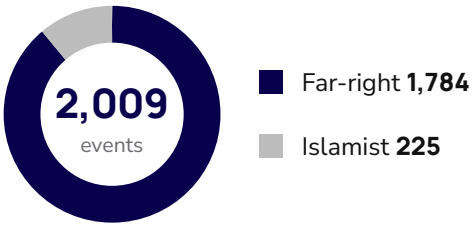
Belief in 'Great Replacement', by 2024 vote



Other conspiracy beliefs entering the mainstream



Offline extremist events monitored, Mar 2025 – Mar 2026



* The 'Great Reset' — the false theory that global elites are exploiting crises to seize control and impose a new world order.

† The 'Great Replacement' — the false theory that elites are deliberately replacing the native-born population through immigration.

Source: UKEDRC, with More in Common and Yonder.

The British Seven Segments

THE BRITISH SEVEN SEGMENTS

DEVELOPED BY

More in Common

Throughout this report we read public opinion partly through **More in Common's British Seven Segments** — a values-based segmentation that maps the UK population by core beliefs rather than the old left–right spectrum. Built on polling of more than 20,000 people, it helps explain not just *what* Britons think, but *why*.

Progressive Activists

12%

Idealistic and globally minded, driven by social justice

Incrementalist Left

21%

Civic-minded; gradual reform over revolution

Established Liberals

9%

Prosperous and confident; the system works

Sceptical Scrollers

10%

Digitally native; distrustful, seeking truth online

Rooted Patriots

20%

Patriotic but overlooked; common-sense politics

Traditional Conservatives

8%

Respectful of tradition; sceptical of change

Dissenting Disruptors

20%

Alienated and radical; crave dramatic change

More about the segments is available at www.moreincommon.org.uk/seven-segments

Where do the Seven Segments sit?

An overview of each segment's position on political violence, conspiracy, the social contract and patriotism, based on exclusive new research for this report.

12%

Progressive Activists

Highly politically engaged. While not all hold the most radical views, this is the segment where the most extreme left wing perspectives are concentrated. PAs are consistently to the left of the average Briton across economic, social, and immigration issues, and their politics is filtered through a systemic injustice lens. They have a broad definition of hate speech and are more sympathetic to civil disobedience than other segments. They reject traditional antisemitic tropes, but for a minority, their passionate defence of Palestine can sometimes tip into it.

21%

Incrementalist Left

Pragmatic and moderate, with decent life satisfaction. They favour rules, institutions, and capitalism over more radical alternatives. Support deplatforming and see diversity as a national strength, but hold more moderate social views on issues like integration and migration than PAs. They are among the least likely of any segment to hold Islamophobic views. They strongly oppose political violence and are unsympathetic to civil disobedience. Where they see the social contract as broken, they attribute this to government failure, moreso than systemic injustices.

9%

Established Liberals

Content and system-affirming — the only segment where a majority feel the social contract is working. Strongly patriotic, pro-capitalism, and deeply institutionalist, with low belief in conspiracy. Liberal on diversity and British identity, but generally moderate rather than activist. Where there is tension about the state of the nation, they attribute any worries to taxes and government underdelivering, rather than inequality or injustice. Their high trust in institutions and low grievance levels make them highly resistant to extremist messaging from any direction.

10%

Sceptical Scrollers

The smaller, younger, more online group, shaped by financial hardship and anti-establishment grievance, where far-right sympathies cluster. Deeply disengaged and uncertain across many issues, they are among the most likely to hold racist views and to believe in conspiracy theories like the Great Replacement. Their openness to political violence, low institutional trust and conspiracy theories stems not from any coherent ideology but more from disengagement and a sense of nihilism.

20%

Rooted Patriots

Defensively patriotic and pro-capitalist, they hold restrictive views on national identity and who counts as truly British. A majority support remigration and many express scepticism toward Islam and British Muslims. Their conservatism runs through institutions rather than against them — they are less conspiracy-minded, strongly opposed to political violence, and the least accepting of civil disobedience. Where they do countenance political violence, they are most likely to cite tackling communism or unpatriotic views as justification, seeing the ideological left and disloyalty to country as threats.

8%

Traditional Conservatives

Culturally conservative and strongly patriotic, viewing the UK as built on Judeo-Christian values. Sees the social contract as broken through a nationalist lens, with migration and diversity as their mobilising issues. Most feel national identity is threatened by diversity, and many support remigration. They show stronger Islamophobic tendencies than other segments. However their patriotism is rooted in civility — they strongly oppose political violence and support deplatforming, and are less anti-establishment and anti-institution than other right-leaning segments.

20%

Dissenting Disruptors

The most alienated and anti-establishment segment, and one of two primary groups where far-right sympathies cluster. Hold hardest views on identity, migration and diversity. Majorities feel national identity is threatened, support remigration, and a smaller core hold Islamophobic or Antisemitic views. They are among the least trusting of institutions, are highly conspiracy-minded, and more accepting of civil disobedience and political harassment than most other segments, making them open to more confrontational politics.

Source: More in Common, based on exclusive research for this report, 2026.

THE REPORT

Executive Summary

The headline findings, the numbers behind them, and the five recommendations that follow.

Executive Summary

This report reveals the extent to which the shared foundations of British democracy are now under considerable strain and are being exploited by malign actors to further erode our nation.

Britain's social contract is broken for a majority of citizens; distrust and disillusionment with our institutions is the norm and anxiety about national identity and diversity are now mainstream concerns.* A collapsed ***cordon sanitaire*** which traditionally kept extremist narratives and conspiracy theories confined to the margins are now held by large minorities, and in some cases majorities, of the population. Ethnonationalist views are now held by a substantial minority, as is active disengagement from democratic norms altogether. A small but consequential minority of the public has crossed into accepting political violence. Hostile states and domestic extremists are deliberately accelerating these fractures to further destabilise Britain. The central finding of this report is that these are not isolated phenomena but interlocking symptoms of a single underlying condition: a democracy whose foundational bargain with its citizens is failing and whose institutions are unable to treat that failure as a first-order national security threat that the evidence shows it to be.

At the core of this crisis lies a breakdown in the relationship between citizens and the state. Our research demonstrates that the perceived erosion of the social contract is a strong predictor of democratic dissatisfaction. Importantly, this loss of confidence transcends economic circumstances, reflecting a broader belief that institutions are failing to deliver and that political leaders cannot be trusted.

This erosion of trust has created a self-reinforcing cycle in which declining confidence fuels support for anti-establishment alternatives and increasing political fragmentation making effective governance more difficult. As institutions struggle to demonstrate responsiveness and accountability, scepticism deepens further. A significant minority of citizens now question whether institutional rules should be respected if they are perceived to impede change.

* We define the social contract as the implicit reciprocal relationship through which citizens accept laws, pay taxes and, when necessary, serve their country in return for security, rights and access to public services. Strong relationships between citizens, institutions and the state are therefore essential to a functional and healthy democracy.

At the same time, contested narratives around identity, fairness and belonging have become increasingly central to public debate. Concerns about national identity are widespread. Persistent antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred, and the emergence of digitally driven forms of radicalisation demonstrate that extremist attitudes no longer conform neatly to traditional ideological or demographic patterns. In particular, younger and highly online groups show a concerning openness to extremist ideas even in the absence of clearly defined grievances. Abuse and intimidation directed at elected representatives have intensified, while younger generations are showing weaker connections to civic participation, patriotism and democratic responsibility than previously seen in the post-war era. These internal vulnerabilities are being actively exploited by hostile states and malign actors by amplifying social divisions and undermining social cohesion.

Yet despite this, the United Kingdom lacks the whole-of-society capabilities required to understand and address these interconnected challenges. Existing approaches are either siloed, disjointed or remain largely reactive, limiting the state's ability to respond effectively during periods of heightened tension. These trends cannot be addressed through fragmented interventions. While downstream strategies exist to counter state threats or improve protection of parliamentarians, there is insufficient consideration given to reducing extremism, polarisation and institutional distrust within our country and which require an upstream coordinated response. This is critical in building societal and democratic resilience to help weather the many threats we face. It will require stronger institutional capability, real-time analytical infrastructure and sustained investment in protecting our democracy.

Rather than treating extremism, social cohesion, polarisation and democratic decline as peripheral issues which they often are, this report calls for a fundamental reframing of this challenge as a democratic and national security threat. The central conclusion is clear: unless these interconnected challenges are addressed as a single strategic problem, the continued erosion of trust and democratic confidence will impose growing costs on the stability and resilience of the United Kingdom.

THE EVIDENCE BASE

This report brings together evidence from three major original research programmes conducted between 2025–26: a nationwide public attitudes survey of 4,094 adults and focus groups in Great Britain by More in Common, a specialist survey of 1,300 respondents and focus groups of British Muslim opinion by Yonder Consulting and a twelve-month online monitoring of the UK extremism landscape between March 2025-March 2026. These findings informed discussions over three days at Wilton Park in April 2026, where senior government officials, parliamentarians, academics, civil society representatives and international partners assessed the changing threat environment facing the United Kingdom.

Key Findings

1. The Social Contract Is Broken — and Democracy Is Paying the Price

- **61%** of Britons believe the social contract is broken; only 23% think it's working.
- This is highest among Reform UK voters (83%), followed by Greens (67%), Conservatives (60%) and Lib Dems (52%) — Labour voters are least likely to agree.
- The top three reasons given: governments don't deliver on promises (36%), politicians can't be trusted (33%) and the government can't protect our borders (31%). Distrust of politicians overall rises to 58% if combined with 25% of the public who believe they are corrupt or self-serving. The picture that emerges is rather than frustration with any one single issue, there is broad disillusionment with politics, a distrust of politicians and a view that the current system is incapable of meaningful change.
- Even the "very financially comfortable" mostly agree (51%) that the social contract is broken, showing this isn't purely an economic grievance.
- The strength of the social contract is tied to democratic resilience where those who are more optimistic about the social contract also broadly have more faith in democratic institutions too. 69% of those who feel the social contract is working are satisfied with democracy in the UK, compared to only 9% who aren't.
- Supporters of Reform and the Greens stand out in the intensity of their feeling that democracy isn't working. 47% of Reform UK supporters and 48% of Green Party supporters feel it isn't working right now, but could with the right leaders. This aligns with the wider narrative that support for insurgent parties is driven by dissatisfaction with the status quo — this is fundamental to driving the change in our politics.
- **40%** say democracy "doesn't work now, but could with the right leaders", while 5% say it can never work. One group that does register higher than average scepticism toward democracy are those who express some degree of openness to political violence, with 11% outright believing that democracy does not and cannot work.
- **28%** believe we should ignore rules and institutions that get in the way of change. While the majority of the public still have faith in the system, a significant minority are so desperate for change they feel comfortable disregarding rules, institutions and norms. Of those who feel the social contract is broken, the proportion who think we should ignore rules and institutions rises to more than 1 in 3 (34%).

- **32%** of Britons believe capitalism has failed and we need a "communist revolution". While our data does suggest economic circumstances do play into this opinion, their radical stance on dismantling the system stems from disillusionment with the country and disengagement from its politics, rather than from an orientation toward far-left ideology. Seven in ten (70%) feel that the social contract in this country is broken while nearly four in ten (38%) say they typically pay little or no attention to political news. Nearly half did not (or could not) vote in the 2024 General Election (47%). They want radical change no matter what its origins.

2. National Identity is Contested and Anxiety About it is Mainstream

- **55%** believe Britain's national identity is disappearing because of diversity - a view held across age groups, regions, and political affiliations. This is not a fringe anxiety or the view of any one political tribe, but a majority position. 45% feel diversity strengthens it. White Britons feel national identity is disappearing far more (61%) than non-white Britons (23%).
- When breaking the data down by voting intentions: Reform (87%) and Conservatives (64%) feel that national identity is disappearing because of diversity. The Greens (79%), Labour (72%) and Lib Dems (60%) feel the country's national identity is strengthened by diversity. The divide is not merely political — it is civilisational in character, reflecting fundamentally different visions of what Britain is and what it should become.
- On ethnonationalism, 69% still believe national identity isn't ethnically defined — but **31%** of the whole population show some openness to the view that non-white people will never be as English/Scottish/Welsh as white people. White Britons (33%) are slightly more likely than average to hold this view, while 21 per cent of non-white Britons do so as well. Among those who are white and hold this view, education rather than age is a better predictor, with those with a degree and who identify as White British less likely to hold this view (25%). Supporters of remigration are also more likely to support ethnonationalism.
- Reform UK is the only major party split evenly (50%) on ethnonationalist identity. Supporters of every other major party express majority opposition to the ethnonationalist position: 91% of Green voters, 84% of Labour voters, 78% of Liberal Democrats, and 66% of Conservatives.
- **45%** of Sceptical Scrollers — a younger, disengaged segment — show ethnonationalist openness, well above what their general profile predicts, potentially linked to their high level of engagement with social media.

- **52%** see protecting "Christian values" as patriotic (cutting across left and right); 41% agree Britain is built on Judeo-Christian values that should be defended compared to 59% who feel the UK is a secular country and isn't based on any single faith — a view driven more by attitudes to diversity than by personal faith.
- Those who hold a more ethnoreligious conception of British identity, who believe national identity is threatened by diversity, that people who are non-white will never be as British as white people, and that Britain is built on Judeo-Christian values are mostly over the age of 45, male (54%), and almost eight in ten did not go to university (77%). Six in ten identify as Christians (61%). Politically, they are right leaning. While over a third (36%) did not vote in 2024, those that did, voted Reform UK (21%) or Conservative (18%). More than three quarters (77%) also hold the view that the social contract is broken.
- **60%** of Britons felt that the 'Unite the Kingdom' 2025 was a nationalist march attended by extremists, whereas 40% felt it was a show of patriotism attended by people with valid concerns.
- Two distinct pathways to receptivity to radical and ethnonationalist rhetoric on the right: a larger group driven primarily by concerns about immigration, national identity and social change. They remain largely accessible through conventional political engagement. A smaller but more concerning group is shaped less by traditional political identities and more by economic insecurity, anti-establishment grievance and immersion in online information ecosystems, resulting in deeper institutional distrust and, in some cases, more extreme views on race and identity. Recognising the difference between these audiences is critical, as they require fundamentally different approaches to engagement and response.
- The data does not show that social media on its own causes extremism. It does show that those who consume political information primarily through social media are consistently more likely to hold extreme views, more likely to believe conspiracy theories and more likely to express openness to political violence and harassment.

3. Racism, Remigration and Muslim Integration

- **85%** reject racial theories of intelligence but support for this idea is higher - at 25% - among current Reform voters and 31% among Sceptical Scrollers. 15% of Britons do adopt the outright racist view that some races and ethnicities are born less intelligent than others. This figure rises among those open to ethnonationalism, 33% of whom believe different races are born with different intellectual capacities.
- **33%** support the notion of remigration and compelling migrants to leave. Calls for remigration originate from extreme right wing ideologies and have been more widely interpreted to include all non-white people.
- **58%** believe British Muslims can integrate; 42% disagree (45% among white Britons). 71% of Reform UK supporters feel British Muslims are incapable of integrating into British society, 46% of Conservative supporters hold this view, 28% of Liberal Democrats, 25% of Labour supporters and 18% Green supporters.
- **51%** of those who feel the social contract is broken believe Muslims cannot integrate, compared with just 25% of those who feel it is working. This suggests that scepticism about Muslim integration is part of a wider disillusionment with public life rather than a standalone religious or cultural concern.
- Polling of British Muslims tells a contrasting story: 85% favour integration, 88% mix comfortably with other faiths, 85% feel free to practise their religion. Only 2% would like to live in a separate Islamic area in Britain, subject to Sharia Law. This sharply contradicts claims of Muslim separatism and the desire to live in parallel communities. Support for full integration in all aspects of life has risen from 38% in 2024 to 45% in 2026, evidencing increasing integration. However 64% and 56% of British Muslims believe white people and Jews are “working against Muslims” respectively.
- Many Britons reject the idea that Islam is a religion of violence rather than peace, with 44% saying this is false. Additionally a majority (53%) believe Muslims make a positive contribution to British society, and 69% recognise that Muslims experience anti-Muslim hatred in the UK.

4. Antisemitism is Present and Cross-Cutting

- Jewish people are perceived as the least safe minority in Britain — only 38% think the UK is safe for them.
- **28%** of Britons believe Jewish people hold most of the world's wealth and power. Non-white Britons generally show higher antisemitic sentiment than white Britons — a pattern not explained by age or political leaning.*
- Among British Muslims, **27%** agree the Holocaust has been "invented or exaggerated"; only 17% say coexistence is possible with "all Jews and Zionists".
- When it comes to the Muslim community, interfaith interaction does not translate very strongly into greater positivity towards Jews or impact on antisemitic tropes.

5. Political Violence and Civil Disobedience

- The British public is largely opposed to political violence, with **80%** of Britons saying that it is never acceptable, 12% saying it is acceptable in some situations and 3% saying it is acceptable in most situations. A slightly higher share (17%) say it is acceptable to verbally harass someone for the same reason.
- Age is one of the strongest drivers of these attitudes. 18–24s and 25–34s are more likely than average to consider political violence acceptable (28% and 29%) and political harassment acceptable (29% and 31%), dropping to single digits among older groups.
- Sceptical Scrollers are the most tolerant segment of both violence (33%) and harassment (31%) but notably less able to articulate why, suggesting generalised nihilism rather than grievances.
- Two distinct constituencies justify violence/harassment: a left-leaning group (Progressive Activists) justifying it against fascism (57%), racism (48%) and homophobia (37%); and a right-leaning group (Dissenting Disruptors) justifying it against Islamist (46%) or pro-migration (12% for violence) views.
- **47%** say campaigning outside a politician's home is never justified, 43% say it is sometimes, 10% it is always. Two-thirds (66%) of Green supporters say this is acceptable, a near inverse of Conservative supporters, (61%) of whom say the opposite. A majority of under-45s consider it acceptable (67%) while a majority of over-45s said it is not (58%).

* More in Common's methodology gave respondents a binary choice between identifying as 'white' or 'non-white'.

6. Patriotism is Fragmenting Generationally

- **81%** consider fighting for one's country patriotic; but only 57% of 18–24s consider voting patriotic versus 89% of over-75s — a 32-point gap.
- A quarter (25%) of Britons are open to siding with the UK's enemies in some circumstances, for instance in opposition to perceived international injustice. An openness to siding with Britain's enemies is highest among Green supporters (39%), lowest among Reform supporters (16%), with Conservatives (23%) and Labour (31%).
- Russia (61%) and Iran (51%) are the only two countries that a majority of the public identify as enemies of the UK, with China at (28%). Majorities identify Ukraine (62%) and the EU (61%) as allies of the UK, with half of Britons (50%) also identifying the USA as such.
- Our data suggests Britain does not share a single, unified sense of patriotism, but rather three distinct forms:
- **Traditional** - most common among older and right-leaning Britons, rooted in loyalty to national institutions, history, military service, and cultural continuity. This form of patriotism is largely unconditional.
- **Conditional, values-based** - more prevalent among progressive and left-leaning groups, based on loyalty to Britain's principles rather than its institutions or history alone. Support for the country is seen as contingent on Britain acting justly and upholding progressive values.
- **Political alienation** - a relationship to Britain characterised by disengagement from institutions, civic rituals and the belief that the state has any legitimate claim on loyalty or participation. This group is neither traditionally patriotic nor principled in its dissent; it is simply absent from the political community in ways that are difficult to reach and potentially dangerous to ignore.

7. Conspiracy Theories Have Gone Mainstream

- **40%** believe a secret group controls major world decisions, which is a belief often associated with the 'Great Reset' and classic antisemitic tropes. 40% believe constituency boundaries are rigged and 23% believe vaccines are unsafe.

- Belief in the 'Great Reset' conspiracy itself sits at nearly a third of the overall population at 29%. While belief in this cuts across political lines — 24% of Conservatives and 27% among Labour voters — it is particularly strong among Reform UK voters (39%), men (33%), 25–34 year olds (42%), non-white respondents (39%), and those experiencing financial hardship (36%). Those who feel the social contract is broken are also notably more likely to believe it is true (36%).
- The 'Great Replacement' conspiracy is seen as true by 29% of the overall population. It is supported by 26% of Conservatives, 19% of Labour voters, 14% by Lib Dems and 13% among Greens. Belief is more pronounced at 54% for Reform UK voters.

8. Hostile States and Domestic Extremists are Actively Exploiting the Fracture

- Russian and Iranian propaganda overlaps considerably with domestic far-right and Islamist extremist narratives, where it is clear they are actively accelerating extremism in the UK.
- Over a twelve month period between March 2025–March 2026 we identified 1,784 far-right offline events across the country and 225 Islamist events. It is clear that these hostile states are supporting offline mobilisation at events associated with domestic extremists.
- Russia and Iran are using periods of tension, contentious issues and trigger events to accelerate distrust in institutions and sow division between communities. Russia – for instance - has cultivated far-right networks (e.g. the "Brotherhood of Academists") promoting "White Lives Matter" narratives with documented links to mosque attacks and the 2024 Southport riots.
- Both states are described as recruiting "disposable agents" from domestic extremist pools to achieve deniable, low-cost disruption. Domestic extremists are actively cavorting with these hostile states where their ideologies align.
- Domestic extremists are key drivers of rising hatred facing minorities in Britain, especially Muslims and Jews. They are actively spreading antisemitic and anti-Muslim hate through social media as well as during large protests.
- Domestic extremists are key drivers of destructive conspiracy theories, particularly those aimed at eroding confidence in institutions like the 'Great Reset' conspiracy as well as those with specific ideological alignment, like the far-right's support for the 'Great Replacement' conspiracy.

Summary of recommendations

The five recommendations set out in this report provide an initial framework for tackling rising extremism and rebuilding democratic resilience in the UK.

01 Reframe the Challenge as a National Security and Democratic Defence Priority

Formally designate extremism, social cohesion, strengthening of the social contract and democratic resilience as core national security and democratic defence priorities — reflected in the National Security Strategy and in how resources are allocated across government.

02 Develop and Disseminate Compelling Alternative Narratives

A national programme of compelling alternative narratives: mobilising the 'silent majority', building alternative in-groups that compete with extremist communities, supporting trusted local and national voices — and investing in AI to counter disinformation, conspiracies and extremist narratives in real time.

03 Mobilise Advocates for Democracy

A proactive strategy in defence of democracy and its values — contesting extremist narratives and disseminating new and compelling narratives about democracy.

04 Reform Online Platforms and Build Digital Resilience

Acknowledge that the current policy and regulatory framework for digital platforms and AI is increasingly unsatisfactory, and develop a new strategic approach that reflects their evolving impact on society, democracy and extremism.

05 Restore Trust Through Agency and Local Collaborative Democracy

Give people genuine agency in local decision-making, repair the relationship between citizens and public services, and rebuild civic education — with collaborative democracy, online and offline, at local level.

01

CHAPTER 01

The Social Contract and Dissatisfaction with Democracy

Why a majority of Britons no longer believe the state holds up its side of the bargain — and what that erosion of trust means for democratic resilience.

The foundation of democracy

The social contract is foundational to democracy because democratic government rests on the premise of governance by consent. It is the implicit reciprocal relationship through which citizens accept laws, pay taxes and, when necessary, serve their country in return for security, rights and access to public services. Strong relationships between citizens, institutions and the state are therefore essential to a healthy democracy. When governments are seen as unable to control borders, ensure security, maintain public services, protect rights or uphold trust in elected officials, the social contract comes under strain.

The consequences of a broken social contract can be severe and include democratic backsliding, rising populism, civil unrest and loss of institutional trust. Concern has been increasingly rising in the UK pertaining to a severely diminishing social contract, resulting in a democratic doom loop and even a 'democratic emergency'.[1]

It is vital therefore that governments, policy makers and citizens regularly assess the health of the social contract. Yet as our polling shows, there is serious cause for concern. Our research in particular sought to understand the extent of the broken social contract, its relationship with institutional trust in the political system including disillusionment with government and whether it is fuelling support for extreme and anti-democratic views outside the political mainstream. Furthermore, we wanted to assess to what extent this is instigating support for extremist and violent activity that would pose a serious threat to not just the social fabric of our country but the integrity of our society as a whole and thereby our national security. As we demonstrate, dissatisfaction with political institutions has become mainstream rather than being confined to politically marginal groups. The perception that the social contract is broken extends across political, economic and demographic divides, indicating the existence of a broad-based legitimacy challenge facing British democracy.

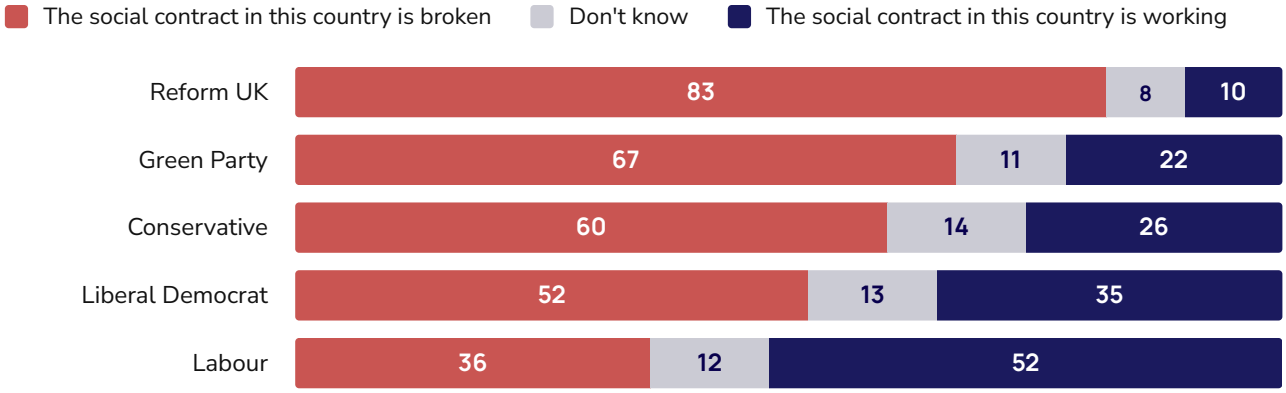
Who feels the social contract is broken and why

A majority of Britons feel that the social contract is broken: 61 per cent say they believe this is the case, while just 23 per cent feel that the social contract is currently working. While this holds across all economic and political strata, the belief that the social contract is broken is highest among current supporters of Reform UK (83 per cent) followed by supporters of the Green Party (67 per cent), the Conservatives at 60 per cent and the Liberal Democrats at 52 per cent. Labour supporters are least likely to believe the social contract is broken.

FIGURE 1.1

Almost 2 in 3 Britons see the social contract as broken

Which of the following comes closest to your view?



Source: More in Common for UKEDRC, March 2026. By current voting intention.

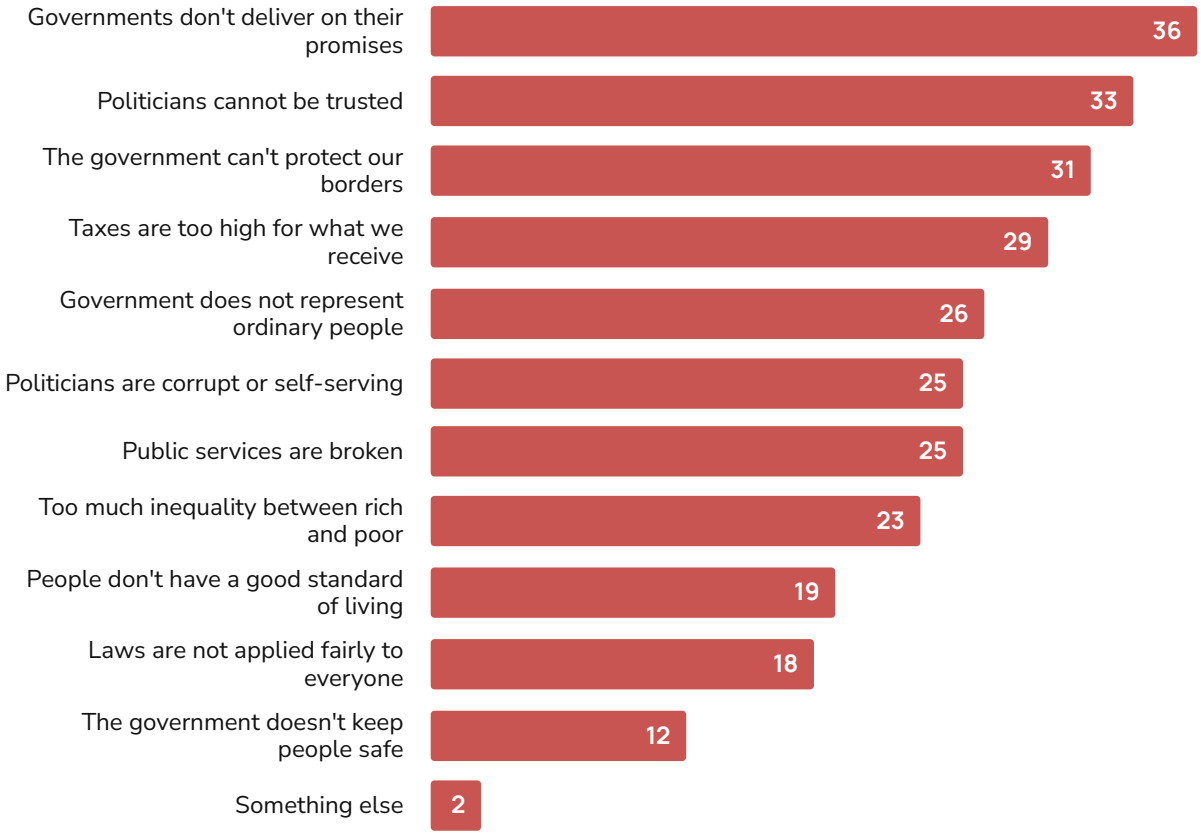
When those who feel the social contract is broken are asked why, the most common answer is that 'governments don't deliver on their promises' (36 per cent), followed by 'politicians cannot be trusted' (33 per cent). If this is added to the view that 'politicians are corrupt or self-serving', overall discontent for the country's politicians rises to 58 per cent.

A further 31 per cent chose 'the government can't protect our borders' — a view particularly prevalent among more socially conservative segments for whom migration is a salient concern. More in Common's segmentation of the population identifies Dissenting Disruptors as the stand out group in how extensive they feel the social contract is broken (82 per cent). This is a group that is particularly likely to feel actively disparaged by elites and those in power and also frustrated with the perceived inability of successive governments to reduce immigration; it would appear their faith in the system and the social contract has been seriously damaged as a result.

FIGURE 1.2

Britons see the main reasons why the social contract is broken as being tied to failures on delivery

You said the social contract is broken. Why is that? Please choose up to three options from the list below.



Source: More in Common for UKEDRC, March 2026.

This sense of the breakdown of the social contract is also strong among another socially conservative segment, Rooted Patriots, who are typically older and often found in post-industrial and coastal 'red wall' communities. More than seven in ten of this group feels that the social contract is broken (72 per cent), despite holding broadly more moderate views and showing less appetite for tearing up the existing order than Dissenting Disruptors.

Looking at the most disillusioned progressive group in More in Common's segmentation, Progressive Activists, their top reason for why the social contract is broken is inequality between the rich and poor (54 per cent) with just 23 per cent of Britons as a whole identifying it as a cause. They are distinctive in viewing structural inequality, rather than political failure or migration, as the root explanation for why the system is broken.

The lack of confidence in elected officials is also expressed when respondents were asked who they think are more likely to get away with breaking the law. After the rich (54 per cent), 53 per cent believe politicians are most likely to get away with breaking the law. This feeling that politicians are able to escape justice harks back to what we have seen on the social contract — that above all else, Britons are losing faith in the system and the state. In fact, amongst those who feel the social contract is broken, politicians score higher than the rich when it comes to escaping justice, with 59 per cent of this group saying that politicians are less likely to be held accountable than the average person under the law. Dissatisfaction with the state of politics bleeds into the public's perception of the law too.

The reasons respondents provide for believing that the social contract is broken reveal a profound crisis of political trust. The picture that emerges is one of broad disillusionment with politics and politicians rather than frustration with any single issue. **What unites these otherwise very different groups is less a common politics than a common contempt for the political class, where key drivers are disillusionment with the government's ability to deliver and distrust in institutions. This is a strong indicator of just how little faith many people have in the system and the government's ability to deliver meaningful change.**

Focus group analysis

Across all of our focus groups which represented a wide range of backgrounds, there was near unanimity that the social contract is broken. They were clear that the country is not working. Words used unprompted included “unstable,” “chaotic,” and “broken.” This feeling was less about any single issue and more about a simultaneous collapse across multiple fronts, including policing, public services, cost of living, foreign policy, and crime, with no sense that any of these are being adequately addressed. Several participants said they would seriously consider not having children given the state of the country.

> *‘I’m 25 looking at buying a house soon with my missus, and we’re at a point where we’re both on a very stable income, both do well for ourselves. And it’s like, do I want to move out in today’s day and age? No, not at the moment, not with everything that’s going on. And then we’re also at an age where you think you might be having children soon. Do I want to bring a child into this world at the moment? No, not at all. And we should be looking forward to the future a little bit, we’re both stable enough to do so. Everything about the country at the moment’s just putting us off it.’*
>
> **— Alex, personal trainer, Oldham**

Those in work described feeling penalised compared to those who don’t contribute to the system, with specific frustration about the gap between what working people pay in and what they get out versus those on benefits. Several describe visible social decline. Politicians of all parties were widely distrusted, with many saying they were no longer loyal to any party. Several participants described becoming more politically engaged precisely because things have deteriorated to the point where they feel they can no longer ignore politics, or just trust a party to get on with the job.

Progressives who showed sympathy for more radical left-leaning views than the average Briton described how, in their view, working hard no longer guaranteed security — people working full-time still need food banks, cannot afford housing and are struggling with debt. By contrast, those on the right, including Reform UK and Conservative voters, are more likely to emphasise issues of border control and lack of trust in politicians.

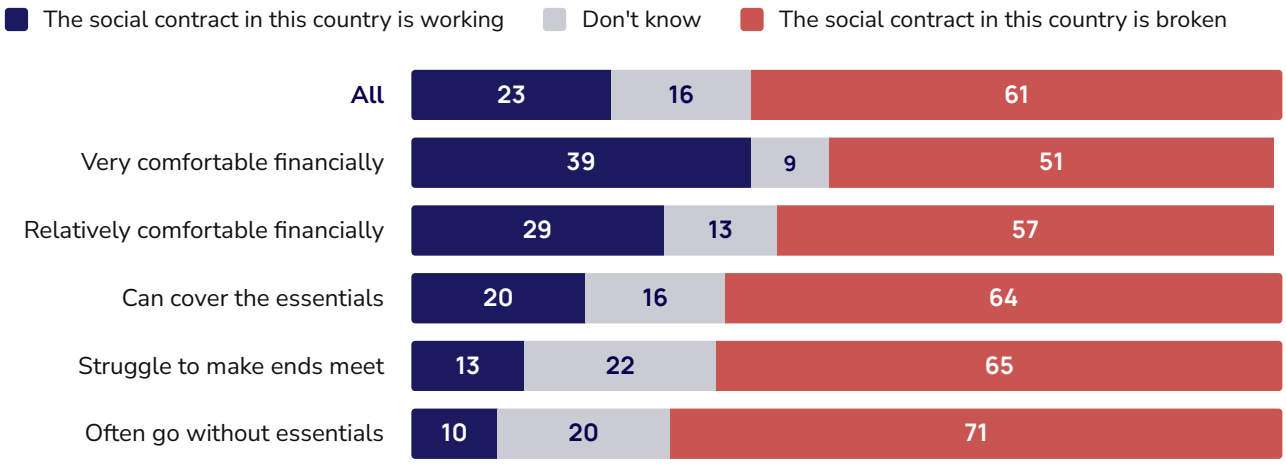
Even those financially secure believe the social contract is broken

While those who describe themselves as 'very comfortable financially' are less likely to feel the social contract is broken, it is still a significant figure at 51 per cent showing this is not purely an economic grievance. Those who describe themselves as 'often having to go without essentials' or who 'struggle to make ends meet' stand at 71 per cent and 65 per cent respectively. This shows how widespread the feeling that politics is not delivering is and that while financial insecurity plays a key role in the intensity of that feeling, it is not the only factor at play.

FIGURE 1.3

Even a majority of the most financially well-off see the social contract as broken

Which of the following comes closest to your view?



Source: More in Common for UKEDRC, March 2026.

Dissatisfaction with democracy and a broken social contract

Dissatisfaction with democracy in Britain appears to be driven less by rejection of democratic principles and more by a perceived breakdown in the social contract, with citizens losing confidence in the ability of existing institutions and leaders to deliver effective outcomes, while largely retaining faith in democracy itself. 69 per cent of those who feel the social contract is working are satisfied with democracy in the UK, compared to only 9 per cent who aren't. This is a strong indication that those who are more optimistic about the social contract also broadly have more faith in democratic institutions too. Among those who feel the social contract is broken there is a huge reduction in satisfaction with democracy. Only 15 per cent express satisfaction with democracy in this country, compared with 55 per cent who say they are unsatisfied.

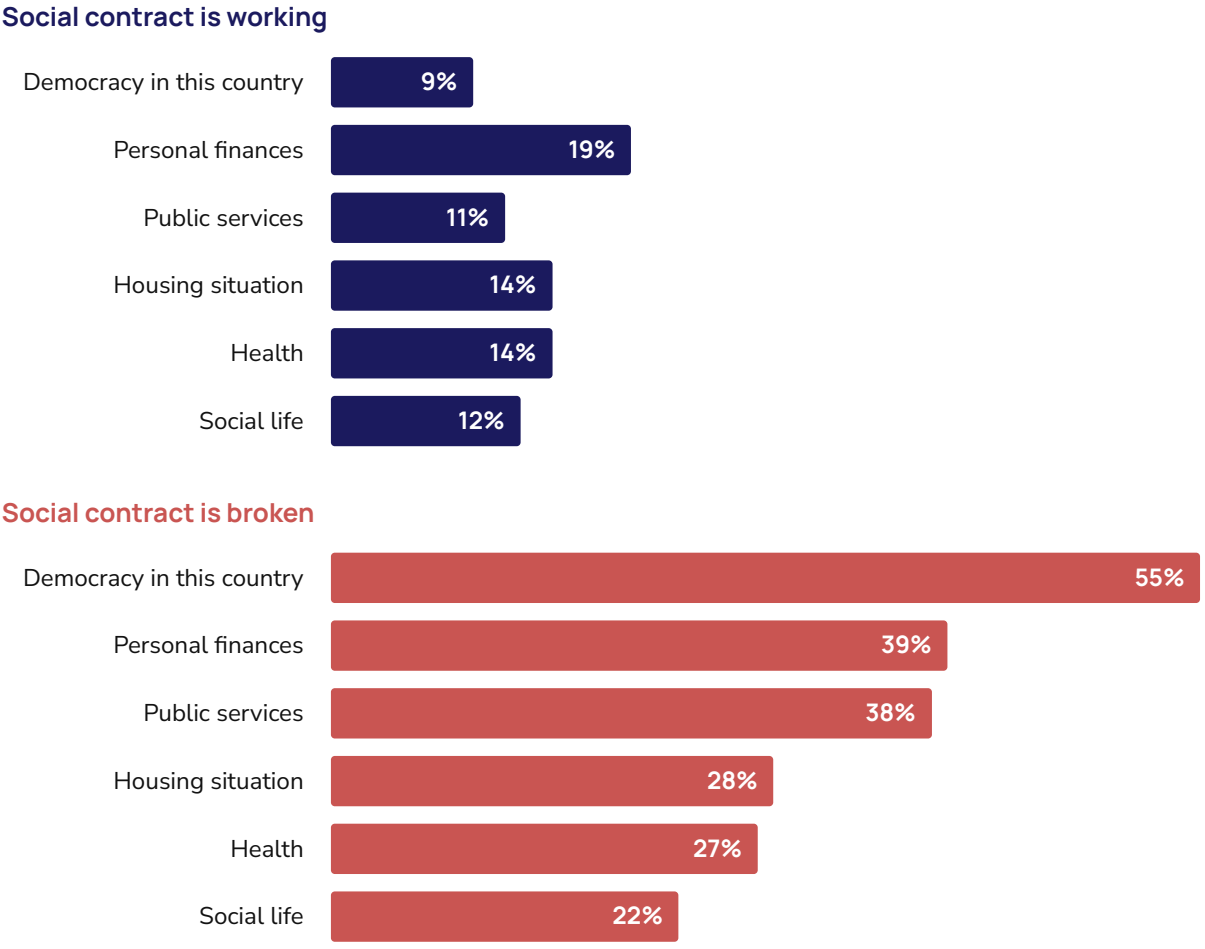
38 per cent of those who say the social contract is broken are unsatisfied with public services, for example, compared to 11 per cent among those who think the social contract is functioning. People's perception of and interactions with the state play a key role in influencing their views on the social contract overall. Citizens do not separate democratic institutions from government effectiveness. When public services fail, many people interpret this as evidence that democracy itself is failing, even if the democratic process remains intact. People can be dissatisfied with how democracy functions while still supporting democracy as a system.

FIGURE 1.4

Those who think the social contract is broken are much more likely to be unsatisfied with democracy in the UK

To what extent are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the following aspects of your life?

Those who said 'very unsatisfied' or 'quite unsatisfied'.



Source: More in Common for UKEDRC, March 2026.

40 per cent of Britons feel that the problems we are facing as a country demonstrate that democracy does not work at the moment, but can with the right leaders, whereas 39 per cent say the problems have nothing to do with democracy. This is a strong indication of disillusionment with democracy and the political system amongst a plurality of Britons, especially as a further 5 per cent of Britons state that democracy does not and cannot ever work. This shouldn't be over-stated though, as this is still an indication that roughly 4 in 5 Britons retain some faith in democracy, with the proportion that has outright abandoned it being very small indeed.

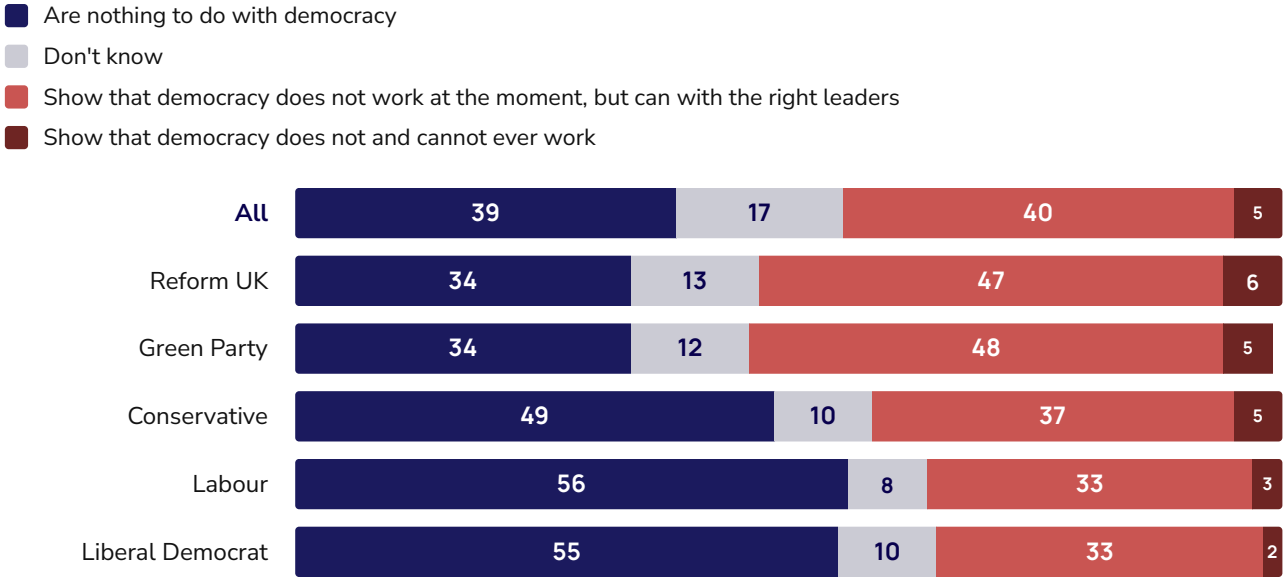
This feeling that democracy doesn't work at the moment, but could with the right leaders rises to 46 per cent with those who feel the social contract is broken, although this is only a moderate rise, considering this group's substantial dissatisfaction with democracy in the UK. The fraction that feel democracy cannot work only rises from 5 per cent to 6 per cent with those who feel the social contract is broken, which, if anything, indicates how strong support for democracy is among the public.

When looking at differences between the supporters of major parties, it is supporters of the insurgent parties like Reform and the Greens that stand out in the intensity of their feeling that democracy isn't working. 47 per cent of Reform UK supporters and 48 per cent of Green Party supporters feel it isn't working right now but could with the right leaders. This aligns with the wider narrative that support for these more radical insurgent parties is driven by dissatisfaction with the status quo, as supporters of the more established parties are all less likely to feel democracy isn't working. As such, while the public still largely retains faith in the democratic system, it is in part the public's dissatisfaction with democracy that is driving the change in our politics, with those who are most dissatisfied looking to more radical parties for solutions.

FIGURE 1.5

Most Reform UK and Green Party supporters feel democracy isn't working at the moment

The problems we're facing as a country...



Source: More in Common for UKEDRC, March 2026.

Sceptical Scrollers stand out as the segment with the least faith in the current system, as they are the least likely to say the UK's problems are not tied to democracy (22 per cent), while simultaneously being the most likely to think that democracy can never work (11 per cent).

Dissatisfaction is also visible in the public's attitude towards the country's national institutions, with 28 per cent of Britons feeling that we ought to be ignoring rules and institutions that impede change. That is a significant minority, and while further research would be needed, it could indicate a greater susceptibility among this cohort towards violence and/or antidemocratic ideologies.

However while this shows dissatisfaction with the status quo, more than double (72 per cent) still feel we should respect institutions and rules that give us stability. This is still cause for concern as a significant minority of the population are so desperate for change that they feel comfortable disregarding rules, institutions and norms, all of which are essential for a functioning democracy.

We see further evidence for this when looking at those who feel the social contract is broken. Among this group, the proportion who think we should ignore rules and institutions rises to more than 1 in 3 (34 per cent). This would indicate, as seen above, that some of this dissatisfaction with institutions and rules is driven by a feeling that the system isn't working.

Anti-establishment sentiment exists on both the left and right with both Dissenting Disruptors (40 per cent) and Progressive Activists (52 per cent) showing elevated support for ignoring institutions. One of the youngest segments, Sceptical Scrollers, also shows higher rates who feel we should ignore rules and institutions, with 34 per cent saying we should do so. However, this figure does not change much when looking at Sceptical Scrollers who think the social contract is broken, which could point toward a more deep-seated scepticism of rules and institutions.

While such attitudes should not be interpreted as evidence of widespread authoritarianism, they nevertheless highlight the potential risks associated with prolonged dissatisfaction. Democratic systems depend not only on electoral legitimacy but also on public commitment to rules, procedures and institutional constraints. As trust declines, this creates an environment where support for these norms may weaken.

Demographic factors do play a role. Those struggling financially, those without a degree and those aged 45–74 — the age bracket who are often caring for children who have not or cannot yet leave home, alongside their responsibility for elderly relatives — are more likely to see the social contract as broken than those who are below 45, who are more educated or more economically secure.

At the most extreme end of public opinion, a striking third of the British public think capitalism has failed and that we need a communist revolution (32 per cent). While our data does suggest economic circumstances do play into this opinion, their radical stance on dismantling the system stems more from disillusionment with the country and disengagement from its politics, rather than an inclination toward Marxism. Seven in ten (70 per cent) of those who support this view feel that the social contract in this country is broken while four in ten (38 per cent) say they typically pay little or no attention to political news.

This group feels let down by the system as it is. That much is clear from the reasoning they give for saying the social contract is broken, laying blame at the feet of politicians who they deem corrupt (31 per cent) and not to be trusted (32 per cent), with governments failing to deliver on their promises (31 per cent) and a growing gulf between the rich and the poor (31 per cent). It's no surprise that a group so firmly distrustful of the political class are three times more likely to be dissatisfied with democracy in this country than satisfied (49 per cent to 16 per cent). Arguably, rather than being inclined toward a communist ideology, or any other, this substantial minority wants rapid, radical change to the country's institutions.

Despite the breadth of concern about the social contract, there is no clear direct relationship between believing it is broken and supporting political violence or harassment. Instead, this belief appears to reflect a more generalised sense of dissatisfaction rather than a specific driver of violent attitudes.

However, this widespread sense of grievance does appear to be associated with some more radical political views — particularly on the right. Those who believe the social contract is broken are more likely to support policies such as remigration, endorse theories like the 'Great Replacement', express a willingness to bypass democratic institutions and view Muslims as unable to integrate into British society.

At the same time, while those who believe the social contract is broken tend to express stronger support for extreme views redistribution and concerns about inequality — for example, being more likely to say the UK needs a communist revolution or to support the forcible redistribution of wealth — this does not translate into holding more 'extreme' left-wing views on other topics. However, within groups already predisposed to be receptive to more radical left-wing rhetoric, belief that the social contract is broken is associated with a greater likelihood of holding more radical positions.

What is not fully understood is to what extent those who believe the social contract is broken and support extreme beliefs are susceptible to supporting extremist activity if targeted by malign actors and within a permissive environment.

The Emergence of a Democratic Doom Loop

These findings collectively point towards the emergence of what is described as a democratic doom loop. This process begins with declining government performance — including the trustworthiness of elected officials — or the perception that institutions are failing to meet public expectations. As confidence in government falls, trust in political institutions declines. Citizens become increasingly dissatisfied with democracy and more willing to support anti-establishment alternatives. Political fragmentation subsequently increases, making effective governance more difficult. Continued policy failures then reinforce public distrust, further accelerating the cycle.

Evidence of this process can be observed throughout the data. The high proportion of respondents who believe the social contract is broken (61 per cent), combined with widespread negativity and distrust of politicians (58 per cent) and growing support for bypassing institutions (28 per cent), suggests that many citizens are sceptical of the British state and its institutions.

Conclusion

The findings presented in this chapter reveal a profound crisis of confidence within British politics. A majority of citizens believe that the social contract has broken down, while trust in politicians and political institutions has reached historically low levels. Dissatisfaction extends across ideological, economic and demographic divisions, indicating that concerns regarding governance and institutional effectiveness have become deeply embedded within public opinion.

Data currently suggests that Britain is experiencing one of the most distrustful periods in recent decades. Trust remains relatively high in some non-political institutions (courts, statistics agencies, parts of the civil service), but confidence in elected political institutions — government, Parliament, political leaders and media institutions — is markedly weaker. The combination of low political trust, dissatisfaction with public services, support for electoral reform, among other issues, provides strong statistical evidence of public disillusionment.

Citizens have not abandoned democracy. Rather, they have become increasingly sceptical that democratic institutions are capable of fulfilling the obligations that underpin the social contract. A key driver of distrust is leadership, where many of those currently sceptical of institutions could change their view with more accountable political leadership. Restoring public confidence will therefore require more than policy reform alone. It will require governments to demonstrate competence, responsiveness and the capacity to deliver tangible improvements in citizens' lives.

Ultimately, the future health of British democracy will depend upon rebuilding trust between citizens and institutions, particularly where citizens interact with public services. Unless this legitimacy gap is addressed, dissatisfaction may continue to fuel political fragmentation, anti-establishment sentiment and declining confidence in democratic governance.

As the next chapters will demonstrate, this deep sense of dissatisfaction and disillusionment not only encourages some to seek out extreme alternatives to democracy, it also provides a fertile climate for hostile states, domestic extremists and bad-faith actors to exploit with the goal of further unravelling our democracy.

The challenge for policymakers is therefore not simply to defend democracy in principle, but to ensure that democracy delivers in practice, to strengthen trust between citizens and institutions and diminish the permissive environment that allows extremism to take root.

02

CHAPTER 02

It’s Not (Just) ‘the Economy, Stupid’: Diversity and National Identity in Britain Today

Who feels threatened by diversity and why, ethnonationalist sentiment, and how faith intersects with national identity.

Questions of personal and national identity have grown increasingly prominent in British politics in recent decades. What it means to be British — and what the British nation is and should be — is a live debate, shaped in no small part by the realities of a more diverse, multi-faith and multi-ethnic society. This chapter examines the contours of that debate: who feels threatened by diversity and why; where ethnonationalist sentiment begins and ends; how faith and faith traditions intersect with national identity; and what attitudes toward different minority communities reveal about the deeper fault lines running through British public opinion.

This chapter also shows that concern over national identity and diversity is not confined to the economically insecure, the poorly educated, or the old. It runs through every class, every age group and every corner of the political spectrum, held by a majority of the public rather than a fringe. What separates people is not their bank balance but their worldview: a settled, coherent sense of what Britain is and who belongs to it. The picture that emerges is a nation genuinely divided over who it is, for reasons that have far more to do with belief than with economic security.

The Mainstream Anxiety: Diversity and National Identity

The starting point for understanding this debate is a striking and often underappreciated fact: concern about diversity's impact on national identity is not confined to any particular political tribe, age group or region; it is mainstream. A majority of Britons — 55 per cent — believe that Britain's national identity is disappearing because of diversity, while 45 per cent feel that diversity strengthens it. These are not fringe positions clustering at the extremes of the political spectrum; they are two roughly balanced camps within the British public, separated by a chasm of worldview.

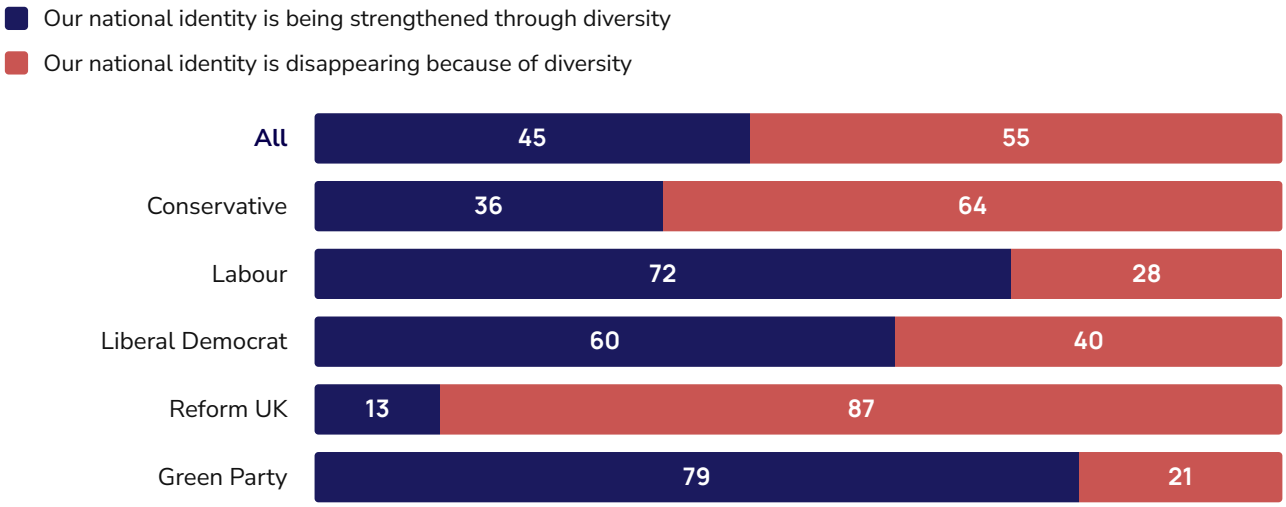
The political dimension of this divide is sharp but not total. Reform UK supporters are the most likely to feel that national identity is under threat from diversity, at 87 per cent, followed by 64 per cent of Conservative voters. Among those more sympathetic to diversity, Green Party supporters lead at 79 per cent, followed by Labour at 72 per cent and Liberal Democrats at 60 per cent.

FIGURE 2.1

Scepticism over diversity is mainstream in most UK political parties

Please indicate which statement you agree with more

1–4 scale: respondents chose which statement was closer to their view; bars combine the two points nearest each.



Source: More in Common, March 2026. By current voting intention.

Race and ethnicity sharpen the picture considerably. Among white Britons, nearly two in three (61 per cent) feel that diversity is eroding national identity, compared to just 23 per cent of non-white British respondents. Age and education also matter: older Britons and those without degrees are more likely to hold this view. But neither variable is determinative. More than a third of graduates and of the youngest Britons share this concern — a finding that undermines any comfortable assumption that these attitudes will simply diminish as educational attainment rises or as older cohorts leave the electorate.

When the lens shifts from demographics to worldview, the picture becomes even clearer. The data reveals a deeply polarised public in which political and social values are far stronger predictors of attitudes to diversity than age or income. Among left-leaning segments, rejection of the view that diversity threatens national identity is near-unanimous: 92 per cent of Progressive Activists, 75 per cent of Established Liberals and 72 per cent of the Incrementalist Left feel that diversity strengthens national identity. Among right-leaning segments, the inverse holds with equal force: 91 per cent of Rooted Patriots, 90 per cent of Traditional Conservatives and 84 per cent of Dissenting Disruptors believe diversity is eroding it. The divide is not merely political — it is civilisational in character, reflecting fundamentally different visions of what Britain is and what it should become.

Ethnonationalism: Where Concern Ends and Exclusion Begins

Almost a third of Britons (31 per cent) express at least some openness to the view that people of different ethnicities will never be as English/Scottish/Welsh as white people. This is not a trivial figure. White Britons are slightly more likely to hold this view (33 per cent), but the fact that 21 per cent of non-white Britons also express some openness to it complicates any simple racial framing.

Widespread anxiety about diversity and national identity does not, in itself, indicate a belief that Britishness is ethnically defined. Indeed, a notable majority of Britons — 69 per cent — believe that a person can be English, Scottish or Welsh regardless of their ethnic background. This suggests that for most of those who feel diversity threatens national identity, the concern is cultural or civic rather than racial in origin.

The data reveals an important asymmetry. Most people open to ethnonationalism do not also subscribe to theories of racial intelligence differences as discussed further below. But almost all of those who do hold such racist views also hold ethnonationalist views on identity. While racism is a prejudiced and harmful individual and societal ill, ethnonationalism is rooted in an extreme right-wing political ideology grounded in systemic exclusion, threatening the concept of equal citizenship which is essential to pluralist democracy and leaves supporters potentially more open to far-right, antidemocratic narratives. The approach to combating ethnonationalism is fundamentally different to the anti-racism campaigns of the past.

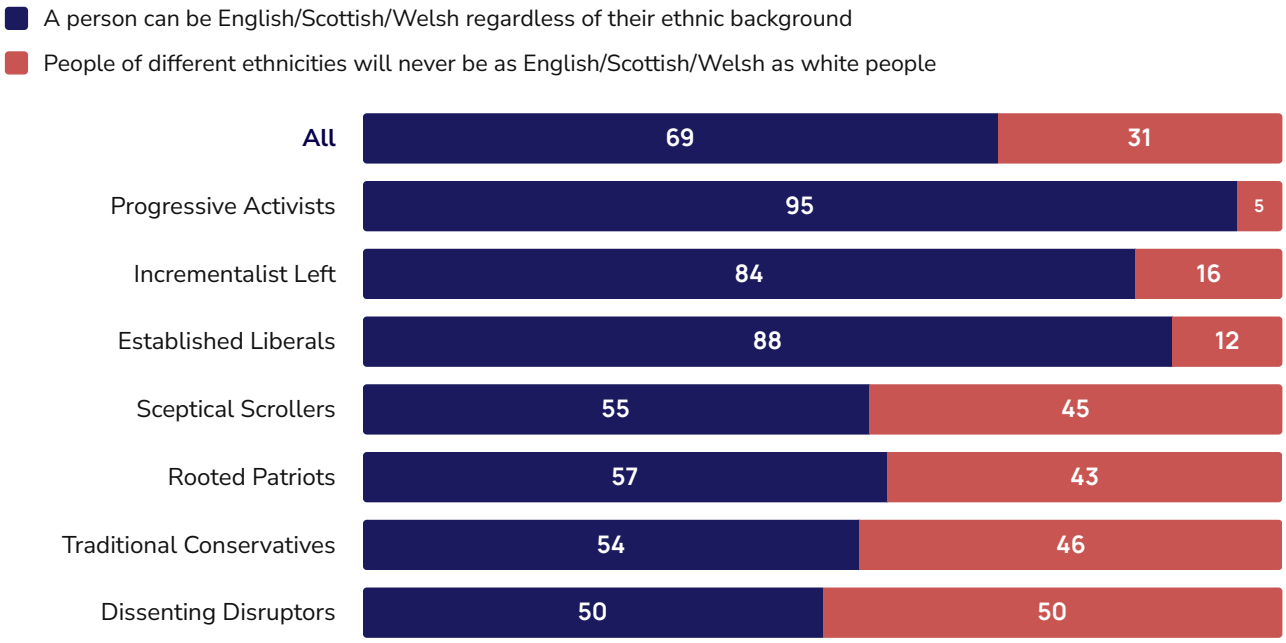
Among political party supporters, Reform UK stands apart as the only party whose supporters do not clearly reject an ethnically defined conception of British identity — though they are now evenly split at 50 per cent. By contrast, majorities of supporters of every other major party reject the ethnonationalist position: 91 per cent of Green voters, 84 per cent of Labour voters, 78 per cent of Liberal Democrats and 66 per cent of Conservatives.

FIGURE 2.2

Over two thirds of Britons reject an ethnonationalist view of national identity

Please indicate which statement you agree with more

1–4 scale: respondents chose which statement was closer to their view; bars combine the two points nearest each.



Source: More in Common, March 2026. By British Seven segment.

A particular warning sign in the data concerns the Sceptical Scroller segment. This younger, politically disengaged group does not share the consistent social conservatism of Rooted Patriots or Dissenting Disruptors, yet 45 per cent express openness to ethnonationalism — a figure higher than their general profile would predict. The data points to social media exposure as a plausible driver, with this group's unfixed worldview making them susceptible to online radicalisation. Ethnonationalist ideas are not confined to the old and disaffected; they are finding purchase among younger, digitally-engaged Britons who have not yet formed settled political identities.

Faith, Nation and the Judeo-Christian Question

Faith occupies a distinctive and often misunderstood place in British national identity. Unlike in the United States, where religious affiliation is a prominent axis of political life, faith in Britain is typically personal rather than political. Yet Christianity — or at least a Christian tradition — plays a more significant role in how many Britons conceive of national identity than is commonly acknowledged.

The idea that the UK is a country of Christian values, and that protecting those values is patriotic, commands broad cross-cutting support — 52 per cent of Britons agree, including significant numbers in centre-left segments such as Established Liberals (55 per cent) and the Incrementalist Left (51 per cent). This breadth makes it a poor indicator of sympathy with far-right attitudes. Protecting Christian values, as a frame, belongs to mainstream national sentiment rather than to the radical fringe.

The picture sharpens considerably when the question turns to whether the UK was built on Judeo-Christian values that should be actively defended. Here, 41 per cent agree while 59 per cent describe Britain as a secular country, not based on any single faith. Crucially, this is not simply a reflection of religious identity: Christians themselves are almost evenly split (52 per cent in favour, 49 per cent opposed), suggesting that the real driver is not personal faith but a broader worldview — specifically, whether one sees diversity and multiculturalism as a challenge to national identity.

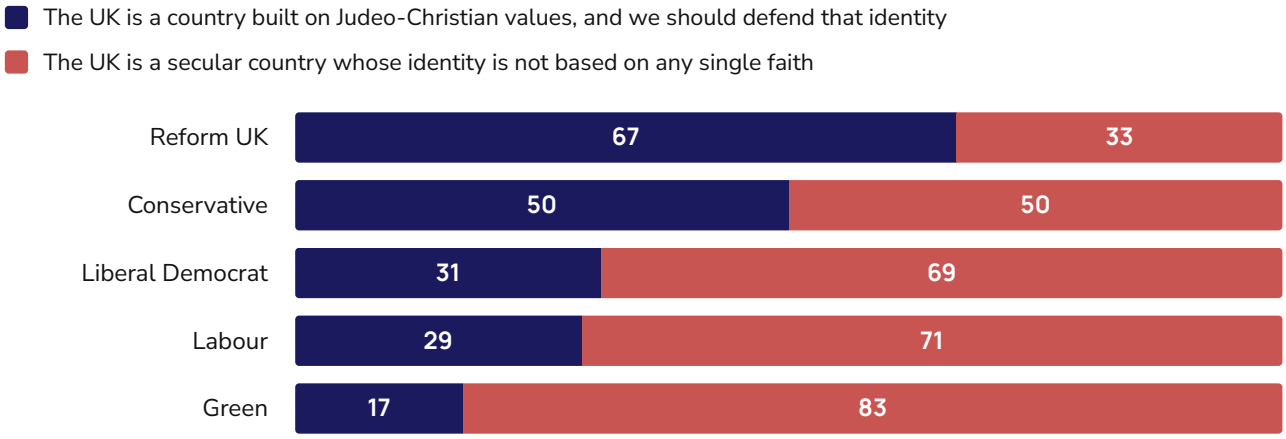
The correlation with ethnonationalist attitudes confirms this. Among those open to the ethnonationalist view of Britishness, 64 per cent also support the idea that the UK's Judeo-Christian identity should be defended. Conversely, 79 per cent of those who feel diversity strengthens national identity also see Britain's identity as secular. Whether someone views the UK as a Judeo-Christian nation appears to be far more a product of their stance on diversity and belonging than of any theological conviction. The following chart shows the views amongst different political party supporters.

FIGURE 2.3

Judeo-Christian or secular, by party

Please indicate which statement you agree with more

1–4 scale: respondents chose which statement was closer to their view; bars combine the two points nearest each.



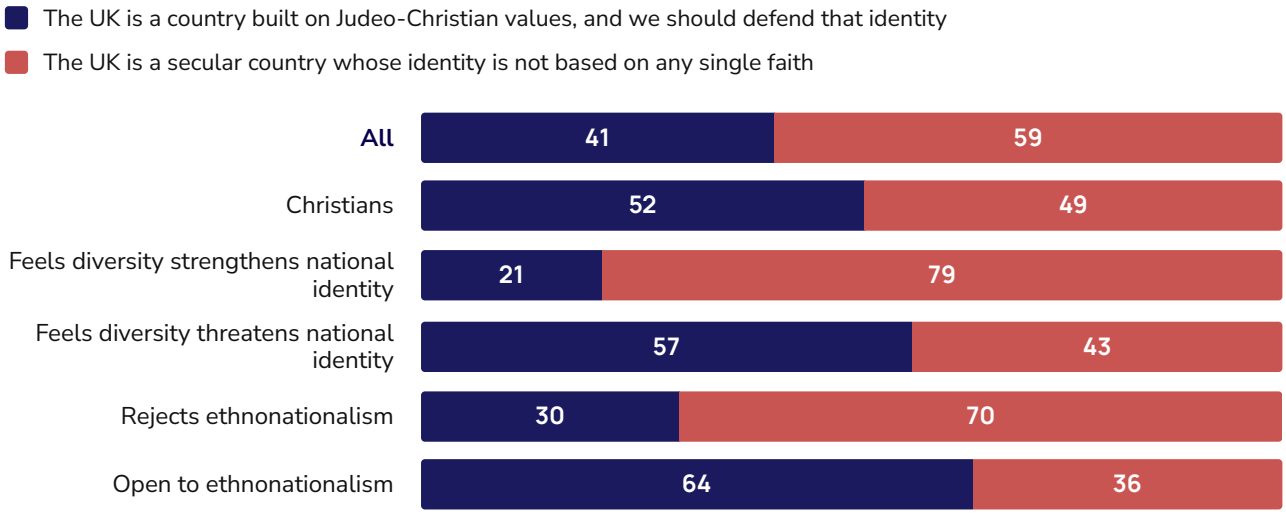
Source: More in Common. By current voting intention.

FIGURE 2.4

Those open to an ethnonationalist view of identity are most likely to see the UK as having a Christian identity

Please indicate which statement you agree with more

1–4 scale: respondents chose which statement was closer to their view; bars combine the two points nearest each.



Source: More in Common, March 2026.

Taken together, these findings point to a distinct and internally coherent set of views on British identity held by a consistent minority: those who see national identity as tied to ethnicity, resistant to diversity and rooted in a Christian cultural inheritance. This is not a random clustering of opinions. It reflects a particular vision of Britain held with genuine conviction — and held by a meaningful share of the public.

Race, Intelligence and Remigration

Racial theories of intelligence

The view that different races or ethnic groups are born with different levels of intelligence is deeply unpopular in Britain. 85 per cent of the public reject it outright, with only 15 per cent adopting what the data describes as an outright racist position. Yet within certain groups, this figure rises markedly. A quarter of current Reform UK supporters hold this view (25 per cent), rising to 31 per cent among those who voted for the party in 2024. Among the segments, Sceptical Scrollers (31 per cent) and Dissenting Disruptors (27 per cent) are the most likely to hold this view.

Within these groups, the conventional predictors — age, education — offer little explanatory power. Instead, financial insecurity, social media use and belief in race-based conspiracy theories, such as the Great Replacement, emerge as the key drivers. This points to a radicalisation pathway that operates somewhat independently of socioeconomic background, running through online ecosystems and ideological frameworks rather than material circumstance.

Remigration

While framed by its advocates as a form of immigration control, it is important to understand the historical root of remigration. As a key white supremacist policy concept, it calls for the forced removal of immigrants, refugees and their descendants — including legal residents and citizens — based on race, ethnicity and/or culture and religion. Once relegated to neo-Nazi and white supremacist circles, remigration has in recent years moved into mainstream and far-right politics in many countries.

Remigration is the policy solution to the white supremacist 'Great Replacement' conspiracy theory, which falsely claims that white populations are being intentionally replaced by non-white migrants and refugees.

Key concepts include immigration representing an existential threat to Western civilisation and demographic change as deliberate and coordinated, rendering demographic reversal as the only solution. The theory is rooted in antisemitism, frequently blaming Jews for orchestrating demographic change, and is increasingly used in anti-Muslim discourse among the extreme right.

Support for remigration stands at 33 per cent. However, while representing a third of the country, even among those who believe diversity damages the country, many draw a line at the explicit removal of legal residents. Support is strongest among Dissenting Disruptors (55 per cent), Traditional Conservatives (53 per cent) and Rooted Patriots (46 per cent), and is associated with being white, believing the social contract is broken and voting Reform.

Notably, social media use and online consumption are not significant drivers of support for remigration. Both those who support remigration and those who oppose it are equally likely (35 per cent) to use social media for political news. This suggests that support for remigration is less a product of online radicalisation than of deeper, pre-existing grievances about fairness, belonging and the perceived failures of mainstream politics.

Falling on deaf ears? Muslims embracing integration

A majority of Britons (58 per cent) believe that British Muslims can integrate into British society but 42 per cent do not — a figure that rises to 45 per cent among white Britons. This is not a fringe position; it is, however, a composite one, encompassing a wide spectrum from those with specific, articulable concerns to a smaller group for whom hostility to Islam functions as a vehicle for broader racial and ethnonationalist sentiment.

Among those who believe Muslims cannot integrate, common predictors include living in rural or small-town settings, being white, not holding a degree and being older. These are also predictors of a broader sense that Britain is broken and that mainstream institutions have failed. Indeed, 51 per cent of those who feel the social contract is broken believe Muslims cannot integrate, compared with just 25 per cent of those who feel it is working — suggesting that scepticism about Muslim integration is part of a wider disillusionment with public life rather than a standalone religious or cultural concern.

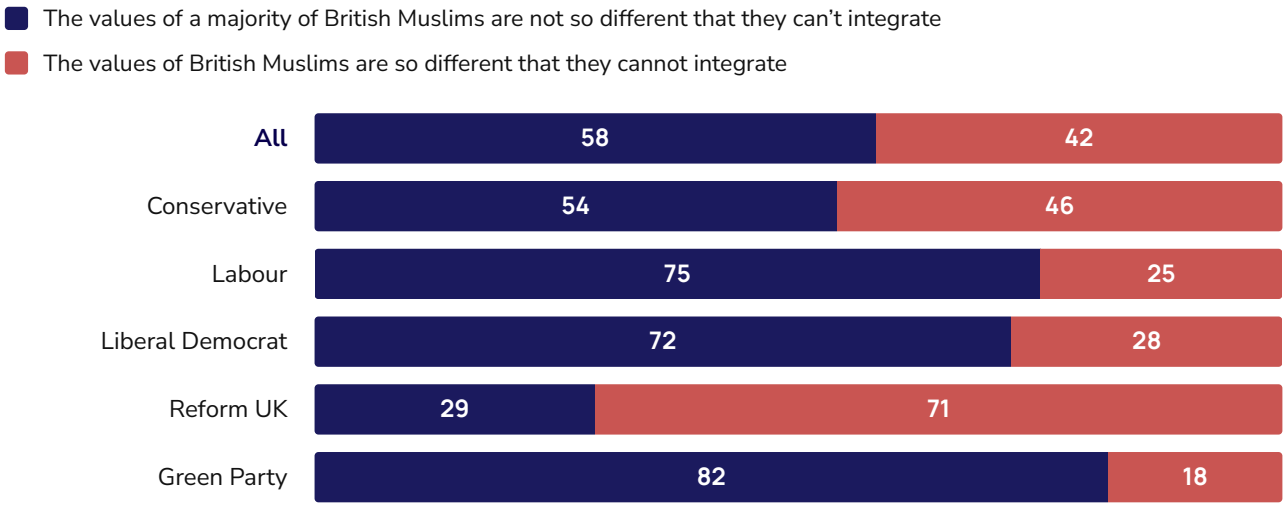
Some anti-Muslim attitudes extend well beyond the right-leaning segments and cut across conventional demographic lines in ways that immigration and diversity questions do not. The belief that British Muslims will always see themselves as Muslims first and Britons second is held by 60 per cent of the public — with strikingly little variation by education or financial situation.

FIGURE 2.5

Nearly 3 in 4 Reform UK supporters think Muslims are unable to integrate into British society

Please indicate which statement you agree with more

1–4 scale: respondents chose which statement was closer to their view; bars combine the two points nearest each.



Source: More in Common, March 2026. By current voting intention.

There is also a clear political dimension to this view. Reform UK stands apart from other groups of party supporters: 71 per cent of its current supporters feel British Muslims are incapable of integrating into British society, making it the only party whose supporters hold this view by a majority. Beyond Reform UK, the picture is broadly graduated by political leaning: 46 per cent of Conservative supporters hold this view, falling to 28 per cent of Liberal Democrats, 25 per cent of Labour supporters and 18 per cent of Green supporters. That the figure declines steadily from right to left is perhaps unsurprising, but it is notable that even among Green Party supporters, nearly one in five feel British Muslims are unable to integrate.

Yet the picture is not uniformly negative. A majority of Britons (53 per cent) believe Muslims make a positive contribution to British society and 69 per cent recognise that Muslims face anti-Muslim hatred in the UK. Most Britons firmly reject the idea that Islam is a religion of violence rather than peace (44 per cent say this is false, though 25 per cent are uncertain and 31 per cent agree). The picture that emerges is of a public that holds genuine concerns about integration and cultural compatibility while simultaneously recognising Muslim contributions and the discrimination Muslims face — a more complex and contradictory stance than simple Islamophobia.

At the extreme end sits a smaller group for whom hostility to Islam is inseparable from broader ethnonationalist sentiment. Among those who hold comprehensively negative views of Islam and of Muslim contributions to society, 77 per cent also believe that people of different ethnicities will never be as British as white people and just over half believe some races are born smarter than others.

Analysis: British Muslims — A story of integration and challenges

In contrast to the perception that Muslims cannot or will not integrate, polling by Yonder evidences the majority of British Muslims support or at least accept democratic and liberal values as part of living in the UK. They also view their British and Muslim identities as being complementary rather than in conflict. Asked about the main challenges facing the country, British Muslims largely resemble the rest of the country. The top 5 concerns include the cost of living, NHS, the economy, unemployment and energy costs.

FIGURE 2.6

The most important issues facing Britain, among British Muslims

What do you see as the most important issues facing Britain today? Showing top three mentions.

	2024	2026	Most radical	Middle ground	Most moderate
Cost of living / Inflation	64%	65%	53%	68%	70%
NHS / Healthcare	43%	39%	33%	43%	48%
Economy	28%	26%	28%	28%	27%
Jobs / Unemployment	18%	23%	24%	22%	20%
Energy costs	33%	20%	16%	20%	23%
Immigration	14%	19%	18%	16%	22%
Crime / Policing	14%	18%	21%	16%	16%
Tax	15%	17%	23%	20%	13%
Racial discrimination	10%	15%	16%	15%	17%
Religious discrimination	n/a	13%	17%	12%	10%
Climate change / The environment	9%	7%	9%	7%	7%
Benefits / Universal Credit	7%	6%	7%	7%	5%
Public services	7%	6%	5%	3%	7%
Foreign affairs	7%	5%	6%	2%	3%
Social care	5%	3%	3%	3%	2%
Transport	3%	2%	4%	1%	n/a
Role of technology	2%	1%	2%	1%	1%

Source: Yonder, 2026.

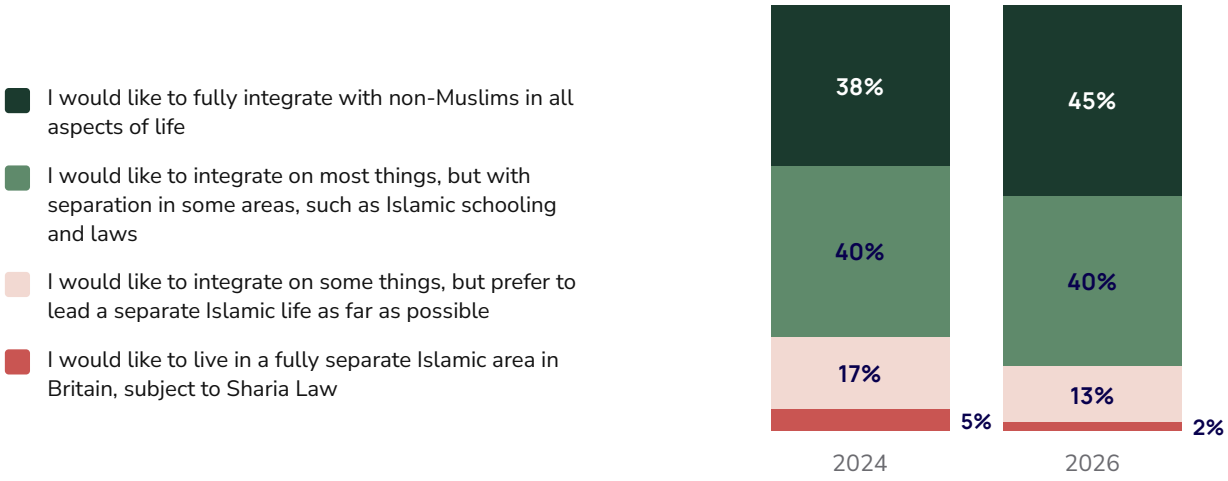
Most British Muslims (85 per cent) favour integration with wider society, with 5 in 6 supporting either full integration or integration with limited separation. Only a small minority (2 per cent) support living in fully separate Islamic communities subject to Sharia Law. This sharply contradicts claims of Muslim separatism and Muslim parallel communities. Support for full integration in all aspects of life has risen from 38 per cent in 2024 to 45 per cent in 2026, evidencing increasing integration.

FIGURE 2.7

British Muslims increasingly favour full integration

If you had the choice, which one of the following would you consider to be the ideal way for you to lead your life in Britain today?

In 2026, 85% would integrate mostly or fully.



Source: Yonder, 2026.

Most British Muslims report high levels of social integration and religious freedom. A large majority (88 per cent) agree that they mix and engage with people from different religions and backgrounds and feel comfortable doing so. Positively, 85 per cent agree that they are able to practise their religion as freely as they want. At the same time, many recognise that some practical limits exist. Around 58 per cent agree that there are limits to the extent they can practise their religion but accept these as part of living in Britain, while 21 per cent disagree with this view.

Across British Muslims, the NHS is the most positively viewed institution, with 45 per cent rating it positively and just 5 per cent negatively. The Premier League is also viewed favourably, with 39 per cent positive and 5 per cent negative. The British Army (28 per cent positive) and the police (23 per cent positive) still attract more positive than negative views, though levels of support are lower than for the NHS or Premier League. The Royal Family is seen positively by 1 in 5 (22 per cent) while 16 per cent view it negatively. The BBC is the most polarising, with 24 per cent positive and 18 per cent negative views, reflecting a degree of distrust among some Muslims toward these institutions and the agendas they are perceived to represent.

Focus groups found British Muslims view themselves as well-integrated into British society and respondents felt they had proven it. Many pointed to their contributions through setting up businesses, becoming embedded in local communities and moving into middle-class professions. Integration is seen as something that has developed organically over time rather than through external pressure, particularly in more culturally diverse cities where everyday interaction between communities is common.

There is also a strong sense that the existence of mosques and halal food provision, for example, provide the infrastructure needed for religious life. As a result, many Muslims feel able to maintain their religious identity while also integrating and participating fully in wider British society. However, there is a growing sense of insecurity among British Muslims around racial and religious discrimination where the proportion who see racial discrimination as a top tier issue stands at 15 per cent in 2026. Religious discrimination emerges as a significant concern in 2026 and ranks among the top three issues for around one in seven Muslims.

Focus group analysis

Among our focus group of British Muslims, British values were described positively including hospitality, courtesy, diversity, a sense of community, and institutions like the NHS that serve people regardless of background. Several expressed nostalgia for a more cohesive past. However, some were more conflicted about Britishness, finding it difficult to reconcile any national pride with Britain's colonial history, stance on asylum, and its tendency to involve itself in conflicts abroad. Few felt there was a conflict between Britain's Christian heritage, identity and its multiculturalism and diversity.

> *'I think as I've grown up with what I've been studying and just my research about British history, I think I'm really conflicted. There's certain topics where I'm just a bit like, there should be acknowledgement of what the British involvement was in how things are laid out. With how it usually has a reputation of getting involved in countries and causing conflicts and then retreating from that country and then saying, "Hey, well, we can't take in people from that country." And I think that's something that really is unsettling to me. I think if we are not going to get involved in countries, then we shouldn't get involved completely, not supplying weapons to that country and saying, "Well, hey, we are not going to take you in anymore." So I think I'm really conflicted in whether I'm not embarrassed.'*
>
> **— Rabia, paralegal, Hall Green**

On anti-Muslim hate, our focus group of British Muslims felt rates of it are increasing, and see this as a personal concern. Reform and Tommy Robinson were seen as key drivers of hate, as well as the US president. Social media was also seen as amplifying Islamophobic voices that previously would have had no platform. Mainstream media's association of Muslims with terrorism and extremism were seen as the structural cause underlying all of this, and all political parties were seen as failing to challenge it adequately. For several participants, the experience of anti-Muslim hate has made them feel genuinely less safe and less welcome in the UK.

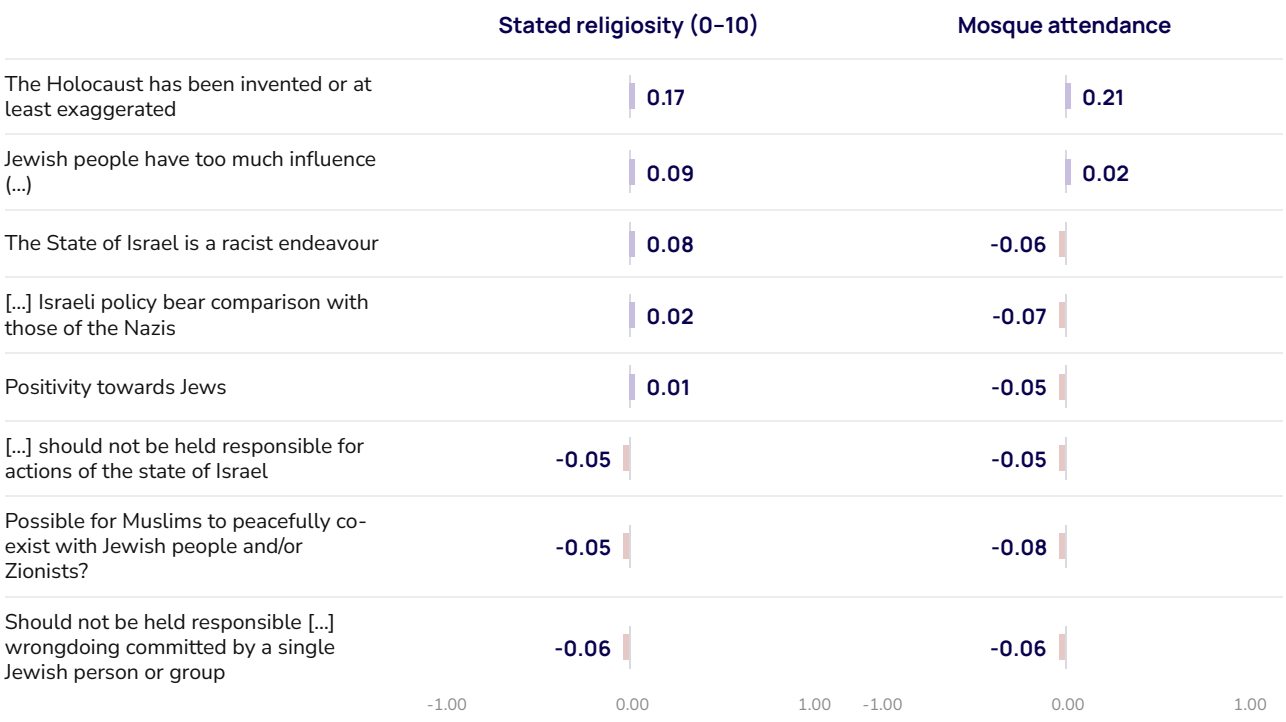
> *'I think we do have it on the national media with people like Tommy Robinson and I also think the political parties like Reform and also you've got Donald Trump. People in political power also can be quite racist to people. And the comments from the Conservative Party to Muslims — yeah, I think that just only adds anger.'*
>
> **— Samira, retail manager, Perry Barr**

There has been much debate about the link between religiosity and mosque attendance over the years. The table below examines correlations between stated religiosity (where 0 is not religious at all and 10 is fully devout) and frequency of mosque attendance, examining whether this correlates with various attitudes (-1 or +1 showing complete correlation; 0 showing a complete absence of correlation). What we can see is that the relationship is negligible between religiosity and positivity towards Jews.

FIGURE 2.8

Religiosity and mosque attendance are weak predictors of British Muslims' attitudes to Jewish people

Correlation with each attitude (–1.00 = complete negative correlation; 0 = none; +1.00 = complete positive).



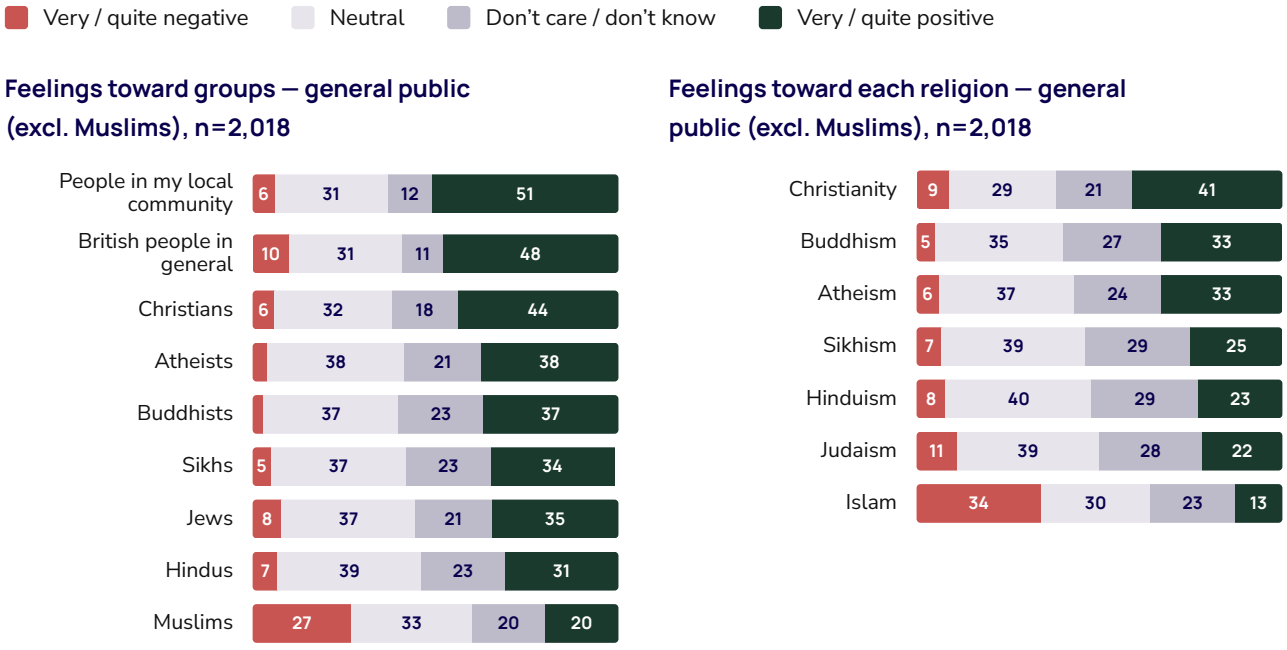
Source: Yonder, 2026.

There is, however, a growing sense of insecurity among British Muslims around racial and religious discrimination, who increasingly feel like victims of scapegoating. The feeling of hostility isn't baseless — according to Yonder, more than a quarter of non-Muslims have negative views of Muslims and a third are negative about Islam. British Muslims feel they have been cast as scapegoats for Britain's economic struggles and social issues. This narrative is seen to be perpetuated by political figures and amplified by the media, which consistently highlights skin colour and religion in relation to Muslims.

FIGURE 2.9

The general public views Muslims, and Islam, least favourably of the groups and religions tested

How positive or negative do you feel towards each group in society, and towards each religion itself?



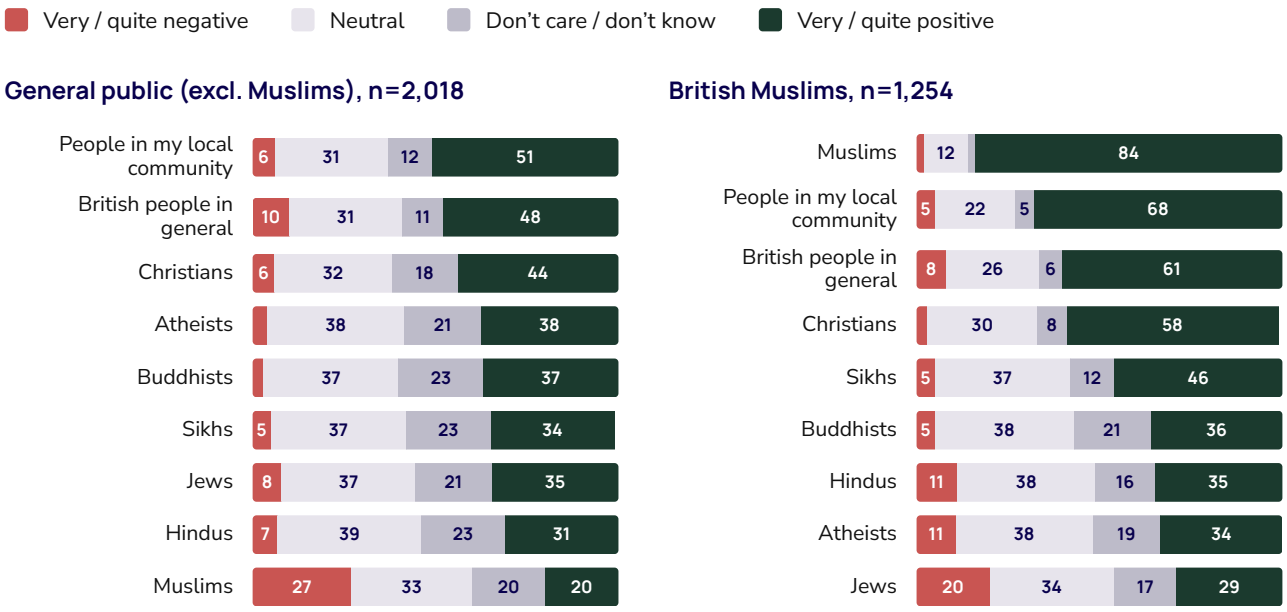
Source: Yonder, 2026.

This is more negative than British Muslims' views of Jews.

FIGURE 2.10

Muslims view Jews least favourably of the faith groups tested — as the wider public does of Muslims

In general, how positive or negative do you feel towards each of the following groups in society?



Source: Yonder, 2026.

There is, however, cause for concern on views regarding the Jewish community. Antisemitic beliefs are present and elaborated further on in this chapter. Furthermore, despite mostly feeling comfortable interacting with non-Muslims (and positivity towards those groups increasing), most British Muslims believe that Zionists, white people and Jewish people are working against Muslims in Britain today. These perceptions have increased since 2024, with the proportion who believe that white people are working against Muslims increasing from 53 per cent to 64 per cent and Jewish people working against Muslims increasing from 49 per cent to 56 per cent. A majority of British Muslims (64 per cent) believe white people are working against Muslims to at least some extent (17 per cent to a great extent). Only 20 per cent say this is not the case at all. Given polling referenced earlier, these views may not be without foundation.

Among our focus group of British Muslims, the group distinguished between antisemitism and anti-Zionism, arguing the two are being deliberately conflated and that the rise in criticism of Israel is being mislabelled as antisemitism. One participant said that antisemitism as such has not increased, but attributed attacks on Jewish people in the UK to individuals from countries directly affected by Israeli military operations. This is framed as a geopolitical and geographical reaction rather than religious hatred. However, no participants personally condoned attacks on Jewish people and all explicitly rejected antisemitic violence.

With regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Gaza was the dominant political and emotional issue for this focus group. All participants felt strongly that what is happening is morally wrong, with civilian deaths, particularly those of children, going beyond a conventional conflict. The group largely said that they follow coverage of the conflict through Al Jazeera and social media rather than mainstream outlets, which they feel are failing to report on it adequately or honestly. There is frustration that the intensity of public attention has faded.

Segmentation of British Muslims: The small radical subgroup

While our polling demonstrates that the majority of Muslims hold mainstream views on issues like integration and British institutions, views in regard to the Jewish community remain problematic and this is especially so with the more radical quintile in our survey population. This group tends to be younger, between 18–34, and slightly more religious, where 58 per cent identify as devout versus 45 per cent of the total population. They are slightly more likely to use social media for international news (55 per cent as opposed to 45 per cent overall) and to use alternative media platforms like Islam channel (16 per cent for UK news), with 8 per cent using Five Pillars for international news. 77 per cent believe white people are working against them, as opposed to 64 per cent of the total; are less likely to view British people positively (49 per cent vs 61 per cent) and only 20 per cent view Jews positively and 25 per cent prefer a theocracy, compared to 14 per cent of the overall Muslim population.

Attitudes Toward Jewish People

Despite widespread disillusionment with UK institutions, the public generally views Britain as a safe place for most groups. However, Jewish people are perceived as the least safe: only 38 per cent believe the UK is safe for them, while 24 per cent consider it unsafe. This is notably lower than for any other group and likely reflects the series of high-profile antisemitic incidents in recent years. Perceptions also vary by race, suggesting a racial divide in views on Jewish safety. Transgender people are also widely seen as vulnerable, with almost a quarter of Britons (23 per cent) believing the UK is not a safe place for them.

Beyond this broad consensus, perceptions diverge along ideological lines. Socially progressive groups are more likely to view transgender people and Muslims as under threat, while more socially conservative groups — and white respondents in particular — are more likely to see Jewish people as being at risk. This points to a worrying trend in which perceptions of minority safety are increasingly shaped by ideological predispositions rather than a shared assessment of evidence.

Antisemitic sentiment represents a distinct but significant thread within British public opinion. 28 per cent of Britons believe Jewish people hold most of the world's wealth and power — a classically antisemitic trope — while 43 per cent reject this and 30 per cent express uncertainty. Dissenting Disruptors stand out across virtually every measure of negative sentiment toward Jewish people: 42 per cent hold this view of Jewish wealth and power, compared to 28 per cent of the wider public. 38 per cent of Dissenting Disruptors believe Jewish people do not care about anyone but their own kind — a view rejected by a majority of the public overall but which splits this segment almost down the middle.

Yonder's polling also surveyed the British general population on perceptions pertaining to the Jewish community and found that the minority of Muslims holding antisemitic views are far from outliers where 40 per cent of Britons believe "some aspects of current Israeli policy bear comparison with those of the Nazis" and only 33 per cent disagree with the view that Jewish people have too much influence. While our polling confirms that Holocaust denial remains repugnant for the vast majority of Britons, the situation is different when it comes to youth.

A separate and distinct pattern emerges in the general population among non-white, non-Muslim Britons who show similarly elevated levels of negative sentiment toward Jewish people across virtually every measure. This is not explained by age or political leaning and it stands in contrast to non-white Britons' generally more favourable attitudes toward Muslims. It is a distinct pattern, likely shaped by specific geopolitical contexts and community dynamics, that resists easy categorisation within conventional left-right frameworks. Antisemitism in Britain, the data suggests, has multiple and sometimes divergent sources.

When it comes to the Muslim community, polling by Yonder suggests that antisemitic views are more pronounced than other groups. Attitudes toward other religious groups are generally positive, including Christians (58 per cent), Sikhs (46 per cent) and Buddhists (36 per cent). Muslims continue to view Jews least favourably among the faith groups tested, though positivity has increased from 25 per cent in 2024 to 29 per cent. Negative sentiment towards Jews remains higher than towards other faith groups. However, most British Muslims avoid assigning collective blame to Jewish people for the actions of Israel or individual actors.

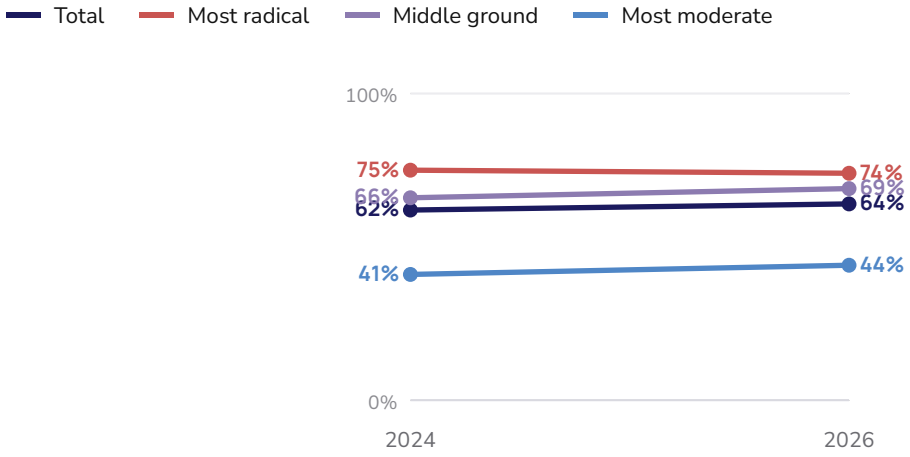
A minority (17 per cent) of British Muslims say it is possible for Muslims to coexist with all Jews and Zionists, while a further 17 per cent believe coexistence is possible with some Jews and some Zionists. The largest share, two fifths (40 per cent), say coexistence is possible with some Jews but not with Zionists and a further 13 per cent say it is impossible for Muslims to coexist with any Jews or Zionists.

A plurality of Muslims disagree with the statement that the Holocaust has been invented or exaggerated by Jewish people, though a significant minority agree. In 2026, 27 per cent agreed with the statement, broadly unchanged from 28 per cent in 2024. However, views that Jewish people have too much influence remain widely held among British Muslims.

FIGURE 2.11

Belief that Jewish people have too much influence has risen among British Muslims

"Jewish people have too much influence in areas like the media, the economy, politics and wider society" (% strongly / tend to agree)



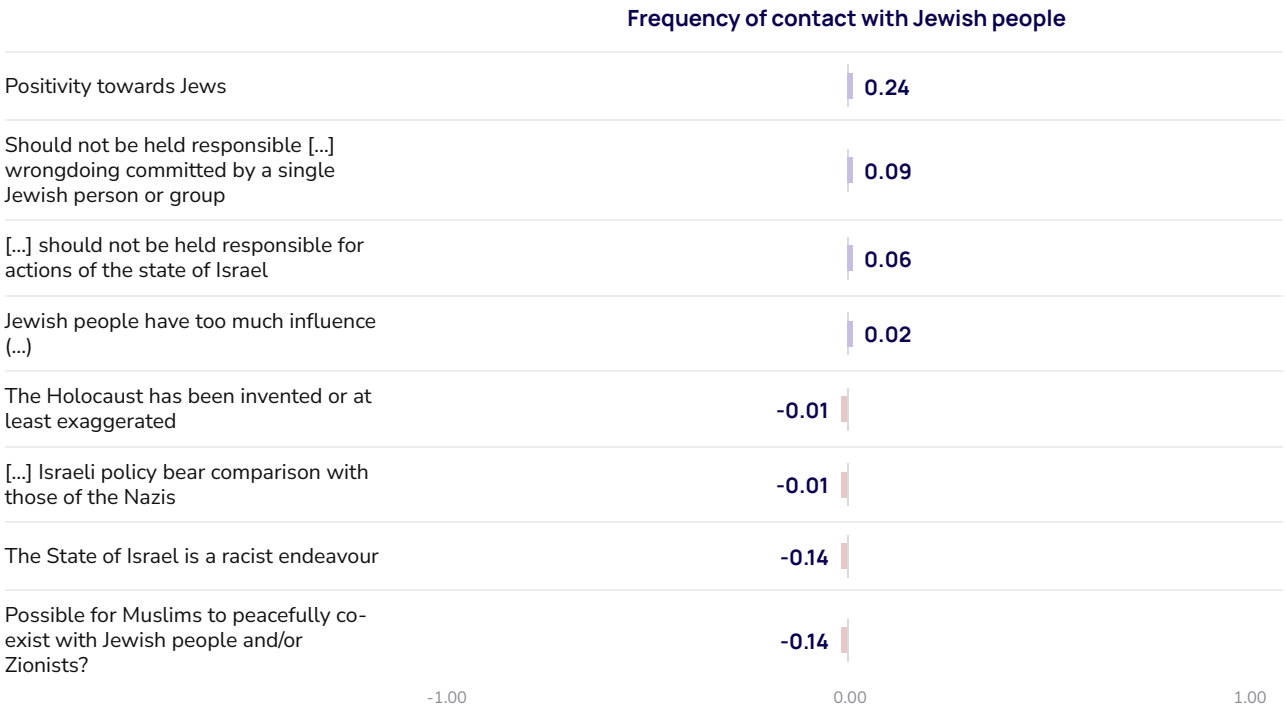
Source: Yonder, 2026.

The Yonder polling indicates that interfaith interaction does not translate very strongly into greater positivity towards Jews or impact on antisemitic tropes. The table below examines correlations between frequency of contact with Jewish people and various attitudes (-1 or +1 showing complete correlation; 0 showing a complete absence of correlation). Interaction and positivity has a small positive correlation. In other words, an increase in the frequency of interaction is weakly linked to feeling more positive towards Jewish people. It is well established that the quality of the interaction is more important than the quantity. However, this does bring into question the effectiveness of government funded interfaith projects and whether they are sufficient in building bridges.

FIGURE 2.12

More contact with Jewish people is only weakly linked to more positive attitudes

Correlation between frequency of contact with Jewish people and each attitude.



Source: Yonder, 2026.

Reform UK and the Radical Right

Reform UK occupies a unique position in this landscape. As noted above, it is the only major party whose supporters do not clearly reject an ethnically defined conception of British identity. In addition, it is the party whose supporters are most likely to believe Muslims cannot integrate, most likely to hold racist views on intelligence (25 per cent) and most sympathetic to the idea that the 2025 'Unite the Kingdom' march was a legitimate patriotic expression, rather than a nationalist gathering of extremists. 60 per cent of Britons took the latter view; 40 per cent the former — a substantial minority, concentrated heavily among those who hold consistent ethnonationalist and racially hierarchical views.

Support for the 'Unite the Kingdom' 2025 marches broken down by political parties can be seen below.

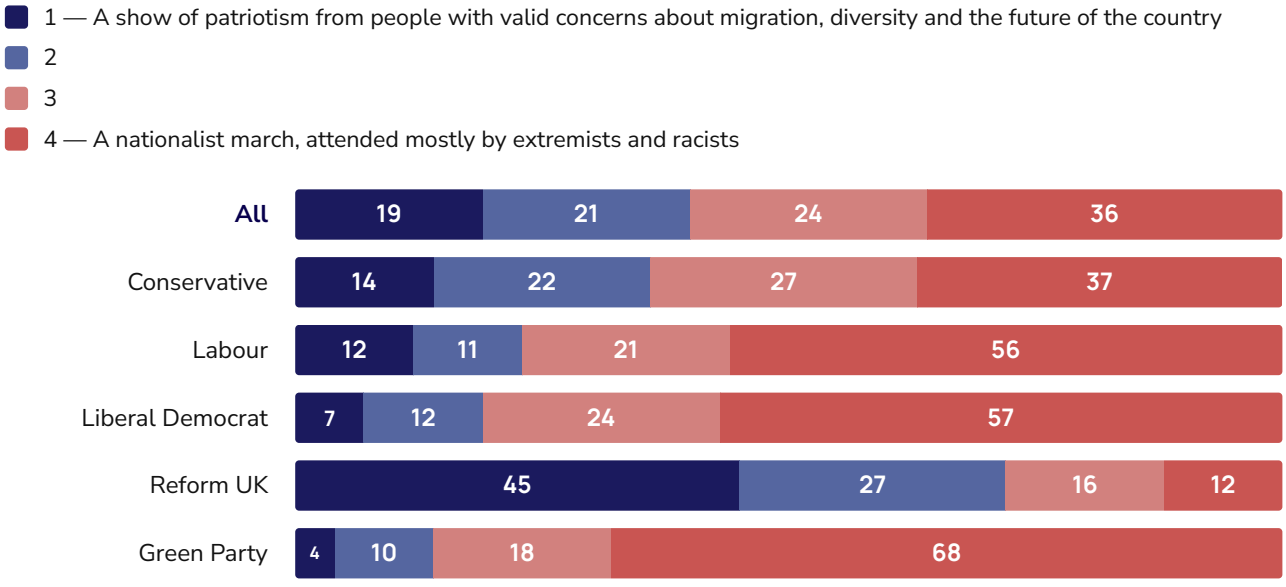
The core of Reform's ethnonationalist support is made up overwhelmingly of Dissenting Disruptors, skewing male, not notably defined by financial hardship (they are marginally more likely to be financially comfortable than struggling) but deeply and comprehensively dissatisfied with public services, democracy and the trajectory of the country. The grievance that drives them is not primarily material; it is systemic and political: a conviction that Britain has been changed without consent, that borders have been left uncontrolled and that no mainstream political force has represented their interests. Reform has filled that vacuum.

FIGURE 2.13

Only among Reform UK supporters do a majority see the 'Unite the Kingdom' march as patriotic

Please indicate which statement you agree with more

1–4 scale between the two statements, by current voting intention.



Source: More in Common, March 2026. By current voting intention.

Focus group analysis

In a right-leaning focus group, X/Twitter was the dominant source this group used for political information. Many described X as what newspapers used to be, i.e. the first place to go to find out what's actually happening, particularly for news stories participants feel the mainstream media is downplaying or suppressing. The BBC was deeply distrusted, with institutional scandals (e.g. Savile, Rolf Harris, Huw Edwards) cited as evidence of a broader culture of cover-up in the organisation. Several also felt that the BBC downplays or misreports stories involving crime and race or religion. GB News was a preferred TV news outlet. Overall, the group shared a general belief that all mainstream media has an agenda and is owned by powerful interests.

> *'The problem with the news channels and the media, they're all owned by massive conglomerates now and you just don't know who's telling the truth. You don't know who is telling you what is going on. It's crazy.'*
>
> **— Matt, retired, Sutton Coldfield**

A Portrait of Ethnonationalist Believers

The data allows a relatively precise portrait of the group that simultaneously believes national identity is threatened by diversity, that non-white people will never be as British as white people and that Britain's identity is rooted in Judeo-Christian values. This is not a large group — it constitutes a meaningful but distinct minority — but it is an internally coherent one. They tend to be over 45, mostly male (54 per cent) and the vast majority did not go to university (77 per cent). 6 in 10 identify themselves as Christians themselves (61 per cent). Financially, they are more likely to describe themselves as comfortable than struggling — which complicates narratives that frame these views primarily as a product of economic deprivation. Yet more than three quarters feel the social contract is broken (77 per cent), most often citing the government's failure to control borders and a deep distrust of politicians as the primary reasons.

Politically, they lean heavily to the right. Over a third did not or could not vote in 2024; of those who did, Reform UK and Conservative voters dominate. Since 2024, 55 per cent now say they would vote for Reform. They are concentrated in the Dissenting Disruptor (39 per cent) and Rooted Patriot (24 per cent) segments.

Despite their alienation, they are not straightforwardly anti-institutional. More than 6 in 10 still consume mainstream television news (64 per cent) and they are more likely to say rules and institutions should be respected than ignored. The radicalism is not one of method but of grievance: they feel excluded and unrepresented within a system they have not entirely abandoned faith in. That combination — institutional deference alongside deep systemic disillusionment — makes them simultaneously susceptible to conventional political mobilisation and highly resistant to the centrist consensus on diversity and identity.

Two distinct Rights, not one

The data reveals two overlapping but meaningfully distinct audiences on the right who are more likely to be sympathetic to radical or ethnonationalist rhetoric. The first and larger of these is primarily animated by questions of migration and national identity. Concern that diversity is eroding national identity, support for remigration and a defensive conception of patriotism are all positions concentrated among Traditional Conservatives, Rooted Patriots and Dissenting Disruptors — particularly white, non-graduate Britons within these groups who are disproportionately likely to vote Reform UK and who feel the social contract is broken.

The second is a smaller and more distinctive group, defined less by traditional demographic markers and more by a combination of financial precarity, online information consumption and a connection to figures like Tommy Robinson. Sceptical Scrollers appear consistently in this profile, alongside the more explicitly right-wing segments. This is not simply a harder version of the first group. It has a distinct pathway to radical views — shaped by digital media environments and anti-establishment grievance rather than by the settled cultural conservatism of the first group — and its views on race and identity are in some cases more extreme despite its less consistent ideological profile.

This distinction matters enormously for how these audiences are understood and engaged with. The first group is largely reachable through conventional politics: their concerns about immigration, national identity and cultural change are mainstream enough that most centre-right politicians feel the pull of addressing them. The second group is substantially harder to reach because its radicalism is less a product of considered political conviction than of immersion in online ecosystems that have eroded trust in all established institutions — including the political parties that might otherwise speak to their economic grievances.

The Radical Left: Who holds far-left views and why

The far-left in Britain is not a unified movement. It is a dispersed set of overlapping groups — younger Green-voting Progressive Activists, non-white progressives, Corbynista remnants within Labour and politically disengaged Sceptical Scrollers — who share some rhetorical markers without sharing an ideology. The consistent demographic across almost all measures of radical left-leaning attitudes is younger Progressive Activists who vote Green, though even within this group genuinely extreme views are held by a minority.

Progressive Activists are the most politically engaged and the most economically alienated of More in Common's seven segments. Their worldview is rooted in a near-unanimous belief that the system is rigged: 96 per cent say working people don't get their fair share, 95 per cent believe that big business exploits ordinary people and 88 per cent say that the UK serves the rich. Since 2024, they have drifted sharply leftward — Green voting intention has tripled from 12 per cent to 42 per cent, while Labour support has fallen from 34 per cent to 26 per cent. They vote at above-average rates (79 per cent versus 69 per cent on average), sign petitions at nearly one and a half times the national rate (62 per cent versus 42 per cent) and 17 per cent attend protests (17 per cent versus 10 per cent).

Their diagnosis of Britain's problems differs fundamentally from the public's. While the wider population cites political dishonesty and border failures as the primary causes of the broken social contract, 54 per cent of Progressive Activists point to inequality between rich and poor — a figure nearly double the national average. Only 3 per cent cite border failure as the primary cause, compared to 31 per cent nationally. This is not a different emphasis within a shared framework; it is an almost entirely different analytical language.

When it comes to accessing information and among our focus group of those sympathetic to far-left views, most participants in this group described moving away from traditional news outlets towards social media, particularly X/Twitter, TikTok and Instagram. The shift was often described as deliberate, with mainstream outlets (including the BBC, tabloids, and broadcast news) widely distrusted because of perceived bias, the influence of their owners or funders, or other political interests. Several described trusting content creators or independent journalists who 'back up' their claims with evidence.

There was, however, an awareness that the shift to social media may mean that people find themselves in 'echo chambers', with one participant expressing concern that people are increasingly consuming content that only reinforces what they already believe.

> *"I think what the problem is, is that there are becoming smaller pockets of people that are just following things that they already believe in, that's reinforcing what they already believe and people aren't making informed decisions."*
>
> **— Sharon, welfare rights officer, Blackpool**

Case study: The far-left and Gaza, Israel and the limits of anti-Zionism

The most acute expression of radical left sentiment in the data concerns Israel and Gaza. Among Progressive Activists aged 18–34, 34 per cent consider 'Death to Israel' an acceptable thing to say and the same proportion say it is never acceptable to say Israel has a right to defend itself. Thirty-nine per cent say political violence can be justified; 45 per cent say political harassment can be. Among Green-voting Progressive Activists, 75 per cent say Israel is committing genocide — the same proportion who consider 'from the river to the sea' an acceptable phrase — while around a third say expressing support for Hamas is acceptable.

What is analytically striking is that these extreme rhetorical positions do not translate into traditional antisemitic views. Among younger Progressive Activists, only 18 per cent believe Jewish people hold most of the world's wealth and power — substantially below the national figure of 28 per cent. Only 11 per cent say Jewish people don't care about anyone but their own kind. They direct intense hostility at the Israeli state while largely rejecting the racial and religious stereotypes applied to Jewish people as a group. The hostility is political and geopolitical; it is about what Israel does, not what Jewish people are.

The exception is among non-white Progressive Activists, who show meaningfully greater tendencies to hold traditional antisemitic views alongside strong pro-Palestinian positions. Forty-one per cent believe Jewish people hold most of the world's wealth and power, a figure nearly three times the figure for white Progressive Activists (14 per cent) and above the national average. This appears to be driven by distinct community dynamics, geopolitical narratives and media ecosystems rather than by the political radicalism that characterises younger Green voters, and represents an important distinction within the broader progressive coalition.

Focus group analysis

The conflict in Gaza was undoubtedly a key issue for participants in a progressive-leaning focus group. Most in the group described what is happening in Gaza as a genocide, not a war. There was deep frustration with Keir Starmer's position on the conflict, with Starmer seen as a hypocrite given his human rights lawyer background. The government's position was attributed to Israeli lobbying, financial ties between MPs and pro-Israel groups, and pressure from the US. The BBC was also seen as biased against Palestine.

> *"Even when talking about what's happening in Gaza, I use very particular language, so I don't believe that it's a war actually. I believe that it is a genocide because I think a war is completely different to what's happening there."*
>
> **— Yasmeen, psychologist, Hammersmith**

> *"You hear about the Israeli lobbyists and who's paying … Keir Starmer's a friend of Israel. My MP is a friend of Israel. You find various MPs across the board on Friends with Israel. Why do friends of Israel? They're getting lobbied, they're getting paid. Being an MP now is a career. It used to be someone fighting for their community, but it's a career and they're all careerists."*
>
> **— Terry, concert promoter, Uxbridge**

While antisemitism was acknowledged as a real and worsening problem, participants felt that media coverage can inflate the issue or skew it — for example, one participant referred to how coverage of the Golders Green attack did not mention the Muslim victim.

Sceptical Scrollers: transgression, not conviction

Sceptical Scrollers complicate the picture further. Their tolerance for slogans like 'globalise the intifada' and 'death to Israel', combined with above-average antisemitic trope beliefs and the highest agreement of any segment that British foreign policy is colonialist and racist (31 per cent), superficially resembles a coherent radical-left position. It is not. This group has no consistent progressive policy worldview; it is anti-establishment, online and conspiratorial — drawn to transgressive content not out of political conviction but as an expression of generalised disengagement from all institutional authority.

This distinction has significant practical implications. Progressive Activists are reachable through argument and political mobilisation, and their engagement is high. Sceptical Scrollers represent a more fundamental challenge — their radicalism is dispositional rather than ideological, shaped by the media environments they inhabit rather than by settled political convictions. Standard political messaging is poorly suited in reaching them.

Conclusion

Several overarching conclusions emerge from the data in this chapter. The first is that anxiety about diversity and national identity is genuinely mainstream in Britain. Dismissing 55 per cent of the public as extremists or fringe figures is both analytically wrong and politically counterproductive. The concern is real, widely distributed and held across age groups and political affiliations.

The second conclusion is that this mainstream anxiety coexists with — and must be carefully distinguished from — a harder ethnonationalist core. Most Britons who feel diversity threatens national identity do not believe that Britishness is ethnically defined; most who are sceptical about Muslim integration do not hold comprehensively hostile views of Islam; most who are anxious about immigration do not support remigration. The distance between concern and extremism is real, and conflating the two forecloses the political dialogue that addressing these anxieties requires.

The third conclusion concerns the limits of conventional demographic explanations. Education moderates these views but does not determine them. Economic insecurity correlates with some of the more extreme positions but is not their primary driver. Age matters, but younger Britons are far from immune. What predicts these attitudes most powerfully is worldview — a settled, internally coherent vision of what Britain is and who belongs to it. That makes these views both durable and resistant to the kinds of material or educational interventions that public policy can most readily offer.

Fourthly, the asymmetry between the radical right and radical left is real and analytically important. The radical right's hard core is embedded in a much larger constituency of cultural conservatism and anti-establishment grievance, and is increasingly well-served by a political party — Reform UK — that has demonstrated remarkable success in attracting ethnonationalist voters without being primarily defined by ethnonationalism. The radical left's hard core is smaller, more concentrated, more ideologically coherent and more institutionally engaged — but is showing signs of radicalisation on specific issues, particularly Israel-Gaza, that create new challenges for the centre-left parties that have historically contained it.

Finally, the social media dimension demands sustained attention. The Sceptical Scroller finding — a younger, politically disengaged group expressing unexpectedly high openness to ethnonationalism — points to online ecosystems as a possible radicalisation pathway. For a group whose political identity is not yet fixed, exposure to ethnonationalist ideas online appears to be shaping their conception of British identity in ways that conventional political and demographic variables do not predict. This is a structural challenge that cuts across the left-right divide and will require responses that go well beyond conventional political messaging.

The data does not show that social media on its own causes extremism. It does show that those who consume political information primarily through social media are consistently more likely to hold extreme views, more likely to believe conspiracy theories and more likely to express openness to political violence and harassment. That correlation, whatever its causal direction, demands sustained attention from anyone seeking to understand where British politics is heading.

03

CHAPTER 03

Allies, Enemies and Patriotism

How Britons divide the world into allies and enemies — and what patriotism now means across the generations.

What does it mean to be patriotic in modern Britain? How do Britons understand their country's place in the world; who are its friends, who are its enemies and under what circumstances might a citizen legitimately side against their own government? These questions, once the preserve of foreign policy specialists and constitutional scholars, have become live terrain in British public debate; they are shaped by a decade of political upheaval, deepening institutional distrust and a fragmentation of shared civic identity. The data examined in this chapter reveals a Britain that is neither uniformly patriotic nor uniformly cynical, but one in which the meaning of loyalty to country has become deeply contested — and differently understood depending not just on political affiliation, but on how fundamentally a citizen has come to distrust the state itself.

Siding with the Enemy: Distrust and its Limits

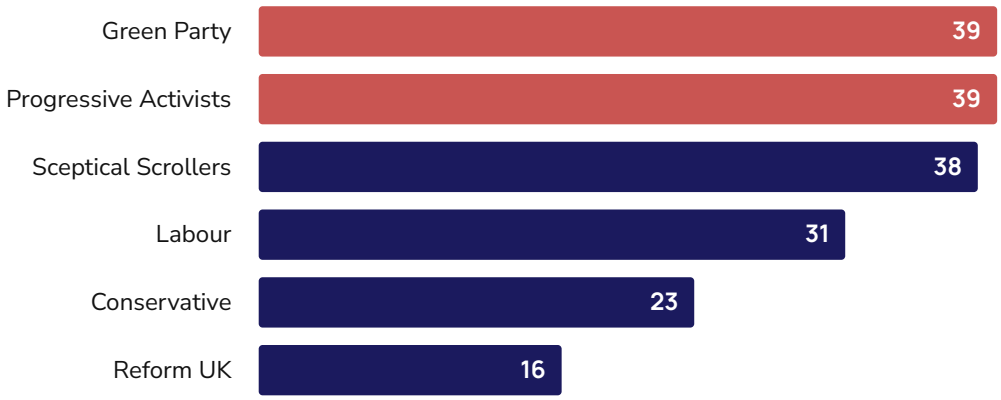
One of the more striking findings in the data is that a quarter of Britons express some openness to siding with the UK's enemies if they disagree with the government's actions. 22 per cent of the public say that this is acceptable, while an additional 3 per cent say it is always acceptable to side with the UK's enemies. This is not a fringe position in statistical terms, but it requires careful interpretation. It is, in part, an expression of the deep systemic distrust documented throughout this research: a willingness, among a meaningful minority, to withhold unconditional loyalty from a state they feel has failed them or acted wrongly.

Reform UK supporters are the least willing to side with Britain's enemies (16 per cent), followed by Conservatives (23 per cent) and Labour (31 per cent). Green Party supporters are the most open to doing so, at 39 per cent — a plurality, with only 36 per cent of Green supporters saying it is never acceptable. This is a significant finding: the party whose supporters are most committed to internationalist and progressive values is also the one whose supporters are most willing to countenance alignment against their own country's interests.

FIGURE 3.1

Green, Progressive Activist and Sceptical Scroller groups are the most open to siding with Britain's enemies

% who say it is sometimes or always acceptable to side with the UK's enemies if they disagree with the government's actions. By current voting intention and British Seven segment.



Source: More in Common for UKEDRC, March 2026. National figure: 24%.

Two segments account for most of this openness: Progressive Activists (39 per cent) and Sceptical Scrollers (38 per cent). These groups arrive at the same position through very different routes. For Progressive Activists — younger, highly educated, politically engaged and left-leaning — the willingness to side against the UK appears rooted in a framework of international justice. They are not indifferent to Britain; rather, they subordinate national loyalty to broader ethical principles. Within this group, it is the graduates, the financially comfortable and the most politically engaged who are most likely to say siding with enemies is sometimes acceptable. This is not alienation driving the position; it is conviction.

Sceptical Scrollers present a quite different picture. Their openness to siding against Britain appears to stem not from ideological principle but from a generalised anti-establishment disengagement. Crucially, among Sceptical Scrollers, greater political attention works in the opposite direction from Progressive Activists: those who pay more attention to political news are more likely to say it is never acceptable to side with Britain's enemies. For this group, the position is less a considered political stance than a reflexive expression of disillusionment — and one that becomes less pronounced as political engagement increases. This distinction matters enormously for how these two groups might be reached and how their positions might evolve.

Who Are Britain's Enemies? Who Are Its Friends?

The question of who Britons identify as enemies and allies of the UK reveals a public whose geopolitical instincts are broadly conventional but fractured at the edges by political allegiance — particularly on the question of America, Israel and, to a lesser extent, Russia.

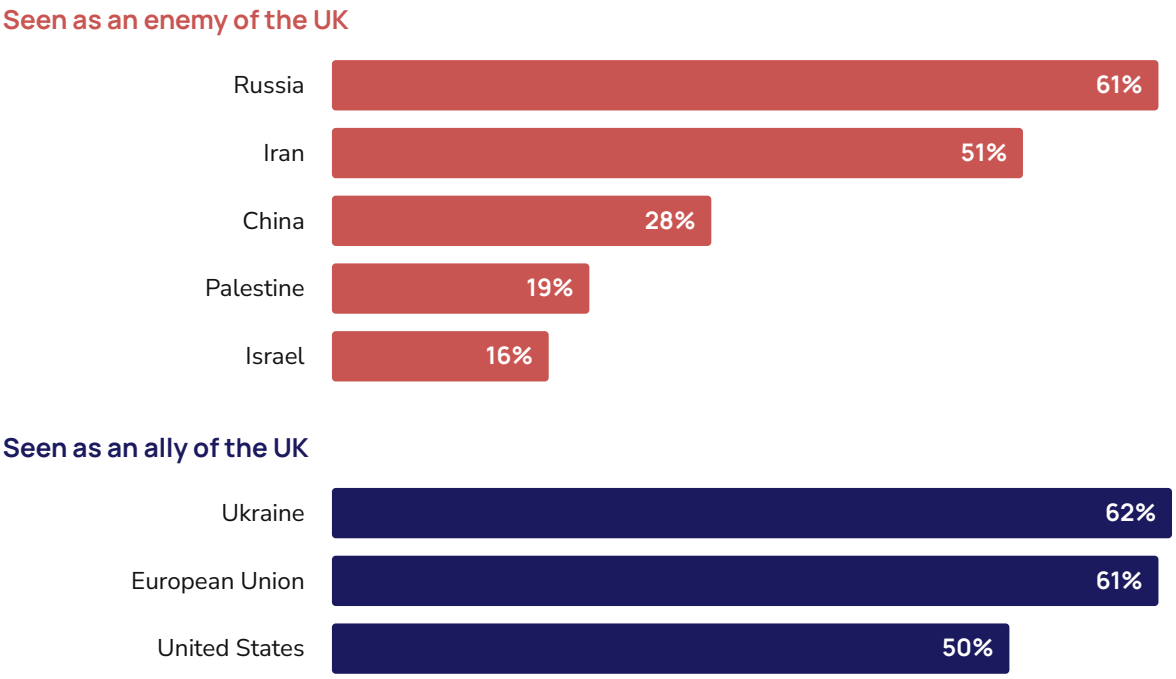
Russia (61 per cent) and Iran (51 per cent) are the only two countries that a majority of Britons identify as enemies of the UK. China is identified as an enemy by 28 per cent — a lower figure than might be expected given the volume of political attention directed at China in recent years, suggesting that public perception has not yet caught up with the foreign policy establishment's assessment of the threat it poses. Palestine (19 per cent) and Israel (16 per cent) are both identified as enemies by notable minorities, reflecting the polarising impact of the Gaza conflict on British public opinion.

On the allies side, Ukraine (62 per cent) and the EU (61 per cent) are identified as allies by majorities — a finding that sits in some tension with the legacy of Brexit, given that a substantial portion of those identifying the EU as an ally will have voted to leave it. The United States is identified as an ally by half of Britons (50 per cent), but that figure conceals significant variation.

FIGURE 3.2

Russia and Iran are the only nations a majority of Britons call enemies

Which of the following countries do you consider to be an enemy — or an ally — of the UK?



Source: More in Common for UKEDRC, March 2026.

The partisan divides on enemies and allies are sharp and revealing. Reform UK supporters are markedly more likely to identify Russia (71 per cent) and Iran (72 per cent) as enemies, and are far more likely to see the United States as an ally (71 per cent). Green Party supporters, by contrast, are less likely to see Russia and Iran as enemies (54 per cent and 34 per cent respectively), are more likely to see the United States as an enemy (26 per cent) and are more likely to identify Israel as an enemy (31 per cent). These are not marginal differences. They reflect genuinely divergent geopolitical worldviews running through the British electorate, shaped by attitudes toward American foreign policy, the Israel-Gaza conflict and the perceived nature of Western interests.

The relatively low identification of China as an enemy across all groups is a notable gap between elite discourse and public perception. It may reflect the complexity of the economic relationship with China, the relative salience of other issues, or simply lower media attention compared to Russia and Iran. Whatever the cause, it suggests that the public's threat perception around China remains substantially underdeveloped relative to policymakers' concerns.

Among focus groups participants sympathetic to some far-left views, the US/UK "special relationship" was regarded with scepticism, with the UK seen to be beholden to the US. A country like Iran was not seen as a natural enemy, with participants questioning why the UK should treat it as hostile primarily because the US does. Britain's colonial history was raised as a significant complicating factor in any claim to 'moral authority' on the world stage — participants mentioned the Caribbean, Ireland, and other contexts where Britain's historical role is seen as having caused long-term damage.

Patriotism: Consensus, Generation and Contest

The broad consensus

There is more agreement about what counts as patriotic in Britain than the country's political temperature might suggest. 81 per cent of Britons consider fighting for your country to be patriotic; 74 per cent say the same about voting; 67 per cent about removing failed elected leaders; and 61 per cent about protesting for one's beliefs. These figures reflect a broadly shared civic vocabulary — a common understanding that patriotism encompasses both military service and democratic participation.

Yet these headline figures conceal divisions that, on closer inspection, are considerable. The consensus is real but shallow in places: a substantial minority dissents from each of these positions, and the gaps between age groups, political segments and worldviews on what patriotism means are some of the largest recorded anywhere in the data.

The generational chasm

Nowhere are the fault lines starker than across generations. On almost every measure of patriotism tied to national institutions, history or civic duty, there is a dramatic gap between the oldest and youngest Britons — one that goes well beyond the familiar truism that young people are less conservative than their elders.

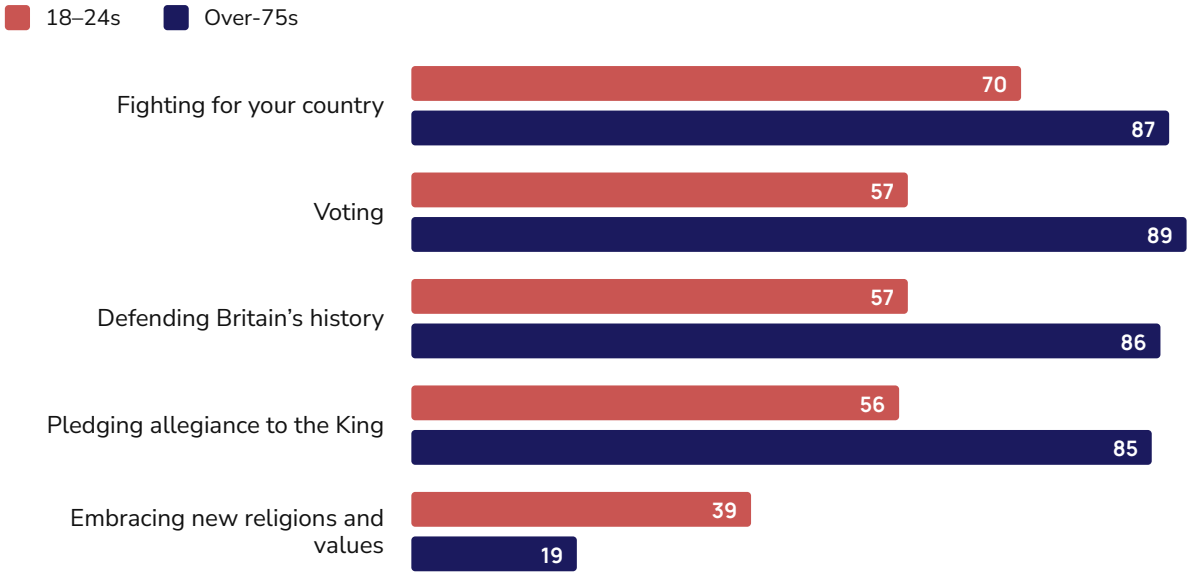
On fighting for one's country, 87 per cent of over-75s consider it patriotic against 70 per cent of 18–24s — a 17-point differential that is meaningful but not alarming. The gap widens considerably on questions of institutional and historical attachment. Defending Britain's history is considered patriotic by 86 per cent of over-75s but only 57 per cent of 18–24s — a 29-point gap. Pledging allegiance to the King produces a near-identical split: patriotic for 85 per cent of over-75s and barely a majority of 18–24s at 56 per cent.

The most consequential gap may be on voting itself. Eighty-nine per cent of over-75s consider voting a patriotic act; only 57 per cent of 18–24s agree. This 32-point differential is not simply a reflection of lower youth turnout. It suggests that for a large share of young Britons, the act of democratic participation has become decoupled from any sense of civic or national obligation. Voting, for this group, is no longer self-evidently patriotic. The implications for democratic health over the medium term are significant and underexplored, and suggests that lowering the voting age may be insufficient absent parallel efforts at increasing agency among young people in political institutions will also be required.

FIGURE 3.3

A generational chasm in what counts as patriotic

% who consider each act patriotic, by age group.



Source: More in Common for UKEDRC, March 2026.

The one area where younger Britons are markedly more expansive in their conception of patriotism is on the question of embracing new religions and values. 39 per cent of 18–24s consider this patriotic, compared to just 19 per cent of over-75s. This reflects a fundamentally different understanding of what the national community is and who belongs to it — one that is more pluralist and less historically anchored. The generation gap on patriotism, in other words, is not simply about levels of national pride; it is about the content of national identity itself.

Immigration, multiculturalism and the patriotism divide

On immigration and multiculturalism, the data reveals both a striking division and a curious anomaly. 41 per cent of Britons consider opposing immigration and multiculturalism to be patriotic, while 40 per cent do not — the public is almost exactly evenly divided. Among the segments, the ideological gulf is vast: 67 per cent of Dissenting Disruptors see opposing immigration as patriotic, against just 9 per cent of Progressive Activists.

The anomaly lies in the relationship between attitudes to immigration and patriotism among younger Britons. Despite majority support for diversity and migration among all age brackets under 45, most age groups other than 25–34s are more likely to consider supporting immigration unpatriotic than patriotic. This suggests a meaningful distinction in how younger Britons hold these views simultaneously: pro-immigration sentiment and a sense that immigration is nonetheless separable from — or even in tension with — their conception of patriotism. The two positions are not logically contradictory but the gap between them points to a more complex relationship between identity, values and national belonging than simple attitudinal surveys can easily capture.

Protecting Christian values is considered patriotic by 52 per cent of Britons, while 45 per cent consider embracing new religions to be unpatriotic. These figures track predictably across the left-right spectrum, with right-leaning segments most likely to hold both views and left-leaning segments least likely. But the sheer scale of the numbers — majorities or near-majorities on both sides of the cultural divide — underscores how questions of religion and cultural inheritance have become embedded in British conceptions of national identity.

In focus groups, among those sympathetic to some far-right views, there was a broader sense of anxiety around demographic change. There were views shared about the country 'not looking like England' anymore, and a clampdown on Christian values as a result of migration.

> *"You go to certain towns now and your country is not looking like England. It looks like [another participant — 'India'] or Bangladesh. And I'm not being rude, don't get me wrong. I have a lot of Muslim friends. I don't have a problem with Muslims. I don't have problems with Indians. But there's a million of them and your country is not looking like England anymore. It's a problem. When's it going to end? So what's the end game? Civil war, no English people."*
>
> **— Ian, recruitment director, Altrincham**

However, within this group, a distinction was made between legal, working migrants who integrate into British society (these were cast as acceptable, even necessary, with several acknowledging the NHS' workforce shortages) and illegal migrants, who are seen as coming to the UK to abuse the welfare system.

Progressive Activists and Sceptical Scrollers: Two Models of Disengagement

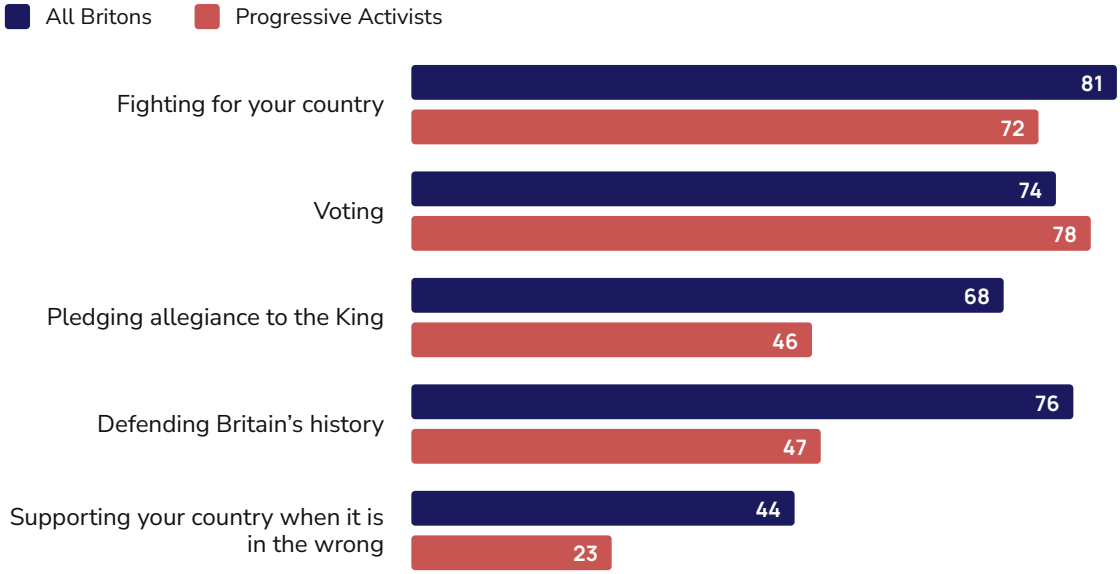
The data on patriotism brings into sharp relief the divergent profiles of Progressive Activists and Sceptical Scrollers — the two segments that most consistently depart from national norms, but in ways that reflect fundamentally different relationships to the state and to political life.

Progressive Activists are not unpatriotic in any straightforward sense. 72 per cent still consider fighting for one's country to be patriotic — an overwhelming majority, if slightly below the national figure. 78 per cent consider voting patriotic, above the national average. What distinguishes them is not disengagement but selectivity: they engage with the state on their own ideological terms, reserving patriotic feeling for acts that align with their values. Supporting one's country when it is in the wrong is patriotic for only 23 per cent of them, compared to 44 per cent nationally. Pledging allegiance to the King (46 per cent) and defending Britain's history (47 per cent) are similarly below the national figures (68 per cent and 76 per cent respectively). For Progressive Activists, patriotism is conditional — contingent on the state behaving in accordance with the principles of international justice and progressive values that they hold dear.

FIGURE 3.4

For Progressive Activists, patriotism is conditional

% who consider each act patriotic: all Britons vs Progressive Activists.



Source: More in Common for UKEDRC, March 2026.

In our focus groups, those sympathetic to some far-left views, found topics of patriotism and 'Britishness' uncomfortable to discuss. Several said they struggle or are unable to feel proud to be British right now, and in part associated national symbols (St George's flag, Union Jack) with the far right, making them feel unable to use them. One black British participant described being told to "go back where you came from" despite being born here. Other reasons for not feeling British included the country being divided, the impact of Brexit, and Britain's place on the international stage. Patriotism as blind loyalty is rejected, with criticism of the government seen as a democratic right, not an unpatriotic thing to do — even if this means showing some sympathy for actors the UK has a poor relationship with.

> *"I wouldn't describe myself as a patriot by any stretch of the imagination at all. And so yeah, a lot of the, I guess, patriotic beliefs don't really apply to me. I think for me as well, it feels like an added layer of complexity because Britain has a really complicated relationship with the Caribbean and a lot of where my roots are. And so I struggle to pledge allegiance to Britain, when actually Britain and the ruling class and the powers within this country have been really harmful in many parts of the world, and actually have created a lot of wars and contributed to a lot of conflict and things that we're seeing now. And so I would also really question having a blind loyalty to the UK, personally."*
>
> **— Yasmeen, psychologist, Hammersmith**

There was clear affection for 'multicultural Britain', and the country's diversity and the impacts of immigration on British society. Many see the current political climate as failing to value this contribution and threatening it.

> *"We should embrace them, not marginalise them. It's great. This is why it's great to be British sometimes, because it's so much diversity, the food, everything."*
>
> **— Terry, concert promoter, Uxbridge**

Sceptical Scrollers occupy an entirely different position. Their disengagement is not selective or principled in the same way; it is pervasive. Only 60 per cent consider fighting for one's country patriotic and 26 per cent actively consider it unpatriotic — the sharpest opposition to that statement of any segment. Only 50 per cent see voting as patriotic, 43 per cent see protesting as patriotic and 48 per cent see removing a failed elected leader as patriotic. Even the acts most associated with challenging or correcting the state fail to register as patriotic for much of this group. This is not opposition rooted in ideological conviction; it is a comprehensive alienation from the political process itself — one in which the state, its institutions, and even the acts designed to hold it accountable have all been drained of meaning and legitimacy.

The distinction between these two groups matters for how each might be engaged politically. Progressive Activists are reachable through argument — their positions are principled and their political engagement is high. They may disagree profoundly with more conventionally patriotic conceptions of Britain, but they are not disengaged from the political process. Sceptical Scrollers, by contrast, present a more fundamental challenge. Their alienation is not primarily ideological; it is existential. Standard political mobilisation strategies are less likely to reach them.

Tommy Robinson, the Marches and Patriotic Populism

The 'Unite the Kingdom' marches led by Tommy Robinson provide a useful lens through which to examine the relationship between populist nationalism and mainstream patriotism. More than half of Dissenting Disruptors (67 per cent), Traditional Conservatives (53 per cent) and Rooted Patriots (51 per cent) consider the marches a patriotic expression. Sceptical Scrollers score notably high as well, with 45 per cent viewing them as patriotic — though a majority of this segment (55 per cent) still characterises them as a nationalist march.

Across the country as a whole, however, a majority saw the march as a nationalist gathering, not a patriotic one.

How Britons as a whole saw the 'Unite the Kingdom' march, 2025

- **60%** — A nationalist march, attended mostly by extremists and racists
- **40%** — A show of patriotism from people with valid concerns about migration, diversity and the future of the country

Within the right-leaning and sympathy-adjacent segments, those most likely to view the marches as patriotic are younger, more likely to consume news through social media, white, non-graduate and financially precarious. This demographic profile is consistent with patterns seen elsewhere in the data and suggests that Tommy Robinson's appeal may be reaching a distinct, radicalised audience rather than simply the broader migration-sceptic mainstream. The overlap with the Sceptical Scroller profile is particularly notable: this is a group whose political identity is not yet fixed, who are heavily exposed to online ecosystems and whose conception of patriotism has not coalesced around conventional civic norms.

FIGURE 3.5

Right-leaning and disengaged segments are the most likely to call the 2025 marches patriotic

% who consider the 'Unite the Kingdom' marches a patriotic expression, by British Seven segment.

Source: More in Common for UKEDRC, March 2026.

The marches, and the response to them, encapsulate a broader dynamic in British patriotism: a growing willingness among a minority to look outside conventional politics for patriotic expression, and a corresponding alarm among a majority who see that expression as nationalism rather than love of country. The line between the two — always contested — has become one of the defining fault lines in British political culture.

In our focus groups, among those sympathetic to some far-right views, there was a strong sense of patriotism. However, several felt that they could no longer express their pride in their country without being labelled racist, with the St George's flag cited as something that's been 'taken away' from them and cannot be used publicly. Figures like Ant Middleton, GB News presenters and Tommy Robinson (the latter with some caveats) were seen to be patriotic.

> *"You're not allowed to be [patriotic] anymore, are you? That's the problem. You will just be racist if you've got a flag and you're waving it. You're going to offend people."*
>
> **— Lisa, administrator, Erdington**

Conclusion: Three Patriotisms

What emerges from the data on allies, enemies and patriotism is not a single, coherent national sentiment but something more fragmented and more revealing: three distinct relationships to the idea of Britain and what loyalty to it might mean.

1 · A traditional patriotism

The first is a traditional patriotism, most strongly expressed among older Britons and right-leaning segments, rooted in institutional attachment, historical pride, military service and a broadly defensive conception of national identity. For this group, patriotism is unconditional in important respects — it does not depend on the government's behaviour and it is bound up with a sense of cultural and historical continuity that diversity and immigration are felt to threaten. It is this group that is most alarmed by what they see as the erosion of the Britain they recognise and most drawn to political voices that promise to defend it.

2 · A conditional, values-based patriotism

The second is a conditional, values-based patriotism, most strongly expressed among Progressive Activists and the broadly left-leaning segments. For this group, loyalty to Britain is genuine but contingent — contingent on Britain behaving well, upholding progressive values, and earning the allegiance of its citizens through just action rather than demanding it through historical tradition or institutional authority. It is from within this group that openness to siding with Britain's enemies — in the specific sense of withholding support from a government acting wrongly — is most intellectually grounded. They love Britain, but they love justice more.

3 · Alienation from the political community

The third is not really patriotism in any traditional sense, but a generalised alienation from the political community itself. Most clearly embodied by Sceptical Scrollers, this is a relationship to Britain characterised by disengagement — from institutions, from civic rituals, from the idea that the state has any legitimate claim on loyalty or participation. This group is neither traditionally patriotic nor principled in its dissent; it is simply absent from the political community in ways that are difficult to reach and potentially dangerous to ignore.

Together, these three patriotisms reveal a Britain in which the shared civic vocabulary of loyalty, belonging and national identity is under serious strain. The words remain — fighting for one's country, voting, defending history — but their meaning is no longer held in common. Understanding that divergence, and the very different routes by which Britons have arrived at it, is essential to any serious engagement with the state of British democracy.

04

CHAPTER 04

Political Violence and Civil Disobedience

A public that overwhelmingly rejects political violence — but a disaffected minority open to confrontation.

The 10th anniversary of the murder of Jo Cox MP by a far-right extremist and the 5th anniversary of the murder of Sir David Amess MP by an Islamist extremist recall the most heinous manifestations of extremism and the severe threat it poses to British democracy. Political harassment, intimidation and violence have worsened in the years since these attacks. Since then, constituency offices have been targeted with arson and campaign offices vandalised. Reports of crimes against MPs have more than doubled since 2019, reaching almost 1,000 last year, with the spike driven by allegations of harassment, criminal damage and threats to kill.[2] Activists associated with extreme protest movements have threatened or intimidated politicians in the streets around the Palace of Westminster. Protestors from the anti-lockdown and anti-vaccine movement, for example, are among those who have harassed MPs in Westminster.[3]

The 2024 general election was rife with harassment, intimidation and violence against candidates. While verbal assault was the most common form of political intimidation faced by candidates, more than half of candidates also reported people following them or loitering around their home or office, threatening them, touching them against their will, damaging their offices or property or physically assaulting them.[4] Half of MPs have said abuse and intimidation has made them feel anxious or depressed (49 per cent) and a similar proportion unsafe (52 per cent). They worry about their staff and families and adapt working practices to increase their sense of safety. Perhaps most troubling, 1 in 3 MPs surveyed by the Speaker's Conference has said they have considered not standing for re-election and 1 in 6 have considered resigning from public office.

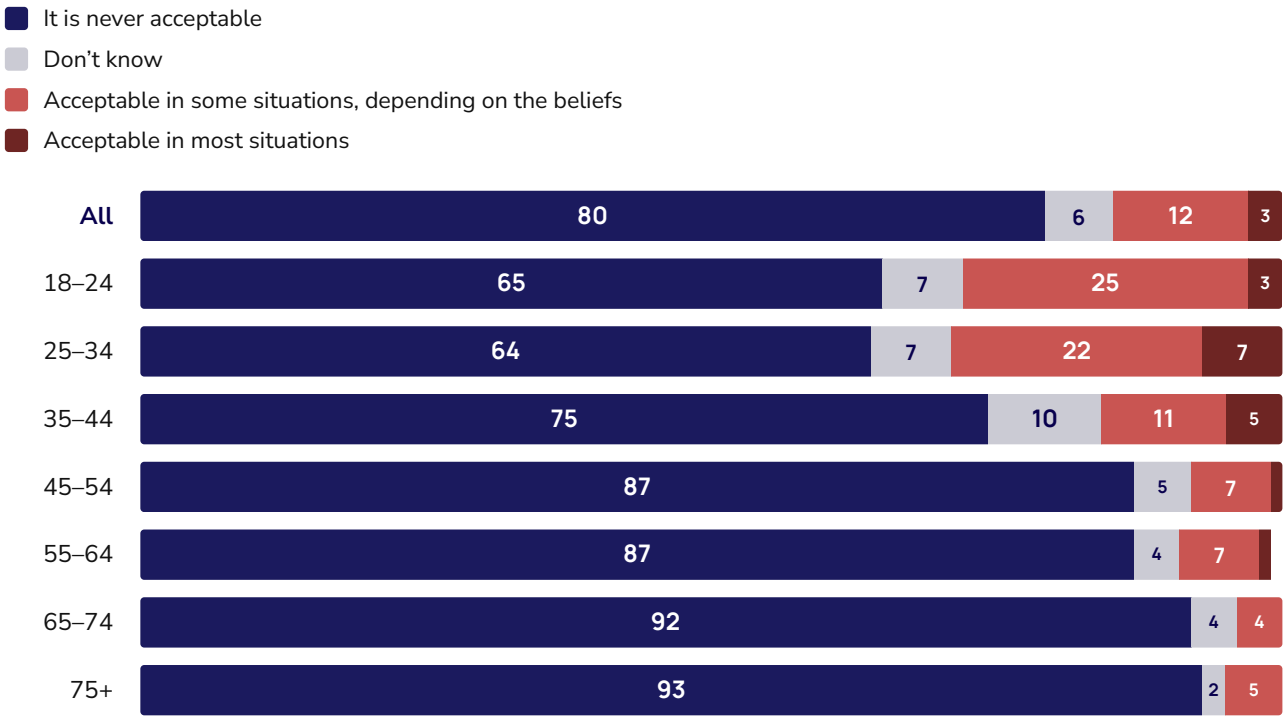
According to our data, the British public is largely opposed to using physical violence against someone because of their political beliefs, with 80 per cent of Britons saying that it is never acceptable. However, 1 in 7 say it is acceptable in at least some situations (12 per cent in some situations and 3 per cent in most situations). A slightly higher share (17 per cent) say it is acceptable to verbally harass someone for the same reason. This is a rejection of violence and harassment in British politics by the majority of the public and an indication that most people think it has no place in our public affairs. A survey carried out by Lord Walney, the government's former independent advisor on political violence and disruption, revealed a similarly widespread disavowal of violence.[5]

Age is one of the strongest drivers of these attitudes. Both 18–24s and 25–34s are more likely than average to consider political violence acceptable (28 per cent and 29 per cent respectively) and political harassment acceptable (29 per cent and 31 per cent respectively), with support dropping to single digits among older groups. Younger Britons also tend to be more broadly accepting of civil disobedience than those who are older. While young Britons are not more likely to believe the social contract is broken than older generations, suggesting this is not necessarily a driver of this sentiment, they are particularly likely to use social media to access political information — this is one of the biggest divergences between them and older generations. 73 per cent of 18–24s and 70 per cent of 25–34s are likely to use social media to get political news, compared to 42 per cent of the wider population, while 33 per cent and 40 per cent respectively are likely to get political news from podcasts, compared to 22 per cent of all Britons. Meanwhile men are somewhat more tolerant than women of both violence (17 per cent versus 12 per cent) and harassment (23 per cent versus 12 per cent).

FIGURE 4.1

Younger Britons express greater openness to political violence

Do you think it is ever acceptable to use physical violence against someone because of their political beliefs?



Source: More in Common for UKEDRC, March 2026.

Focus group analysis

When it came to political violence and civil disobedience, our general focus group, composed of participants from a mix of all seven of More In Common's segments, treated peaceful protest as a fundamental democratic right with broad support. The line into unacceptable territory was drawn primarily at violence, threats, looting, and antisocial behaviour. The 2011 London riots were cited as a clear example of protest that became opportunistic disorder, while the Belfast riots were cited as another example of going too far.

Road-blocking protests were broadly criticised, particularly for the risk to ambulances and emergency services; this was a hard line for several participants. However, disrupting events was treated more sympathetically, with farmers' protests mentioned approvingly as a legitimate form of pressure when other channels have been exhausted. The group justified disruption of institutions or events when people's concerns are being ignored, but that putting individual members of the public at risk crosses a line.

> *"I have issues with the oil protests, those type of stuff sitting in front of ambulances and stuff like that, people take things literally too far. The paintings, all of those type of things. It's just ridiculous. But then some laws are a bit silly, so I'm not sure. But most of the time."*
>
> **— Aliyah, social worker, Beckenham**

On targeting individuals (e.g. harassing politicians or public figures online, protesting at their homes, or publishing personal details) the group was unanimously opposed, with no one offering any justification for it. Violence against individuals was rejected entirely. However, points of friction emerged around free speech and protest. Some were strongly against people being arrested for tweets and social media posts, seeing this as a disproportionate state response to free expression.

Edelman's Global Barometer 2025 reveals the UK is far from the only country where political violence is becoming increasingly normalised. 4 in 10 would approve of one or more of the following forms of hostile activism: attacking people online, intentionally spreading disinformation, threatening or committing violence and damaging public or private property.[6] Aligned with our findings, this sentiment is most prevalent among respondents ages 18–34 (53 percent approve of at least one).

Case study: Young people — hotheads or hard done by?

Our research demonstrates that susceptibility to extremism is far from just a 'youth' problem. This is visibly evident in the multi-generational character of far-right linked riots and protests, as well as those associated with far-left extremism. However, our data also shows that young people are feeling particularly aggrieved and willing to take extreme action, where those segments showing the most openness to extreme views — Progressive Activists and Sceptical Scrollers — are generally younger.

Both 18–24s and 25–34s are more likely than average to consider political violence acceptable (28 per cent and 29 per cent respectively) and political harassment acceptable (29 per cent and 31 per cent respectively), with support dropping to single digits among older groups. Younger Britons also tend to be more broadly accepting of civil disobedience than those who are older. When it comes to support for Tommy Robinon's 'Unite the Kingdom' rallies and within the right-leaning and sympathy-adjacent segments, those most likely to view the marches as patriotic are younger and more likely to consume news through social media. They also have very different ideas of what it means to be patriotic, where only 57 per cent of 18–24s see voting as patriotic and barely a majority of 18–24s at 56 per cent see allegiance to the King as patriotic.

But is this just a function of young people being hotheads? Our polling also reveals that those who are financially insecure are the most likely to support insurgent parties, feel the social contract is broken and to support a communist revolution.

More than one million young people are now not in education, employment or training (NEET), the highest level in more than a decade.[7] Over the past two decades, Britain has lost around 1.6 million lower and mid-skilled jobs. Hospitality vacancies have halved in just four years. The proportion of 16 and 17 year olds in paid work has collapsed from 35 per cent in 2006 to just 19 per cent today. Nearly one in nine under-25s is on worklessness benefits.[8]

In response to the challenges facing the UK, some young people are voting with their feet. It is estimated that 136,000 more British nationals left the country than returned in the year to December 2025, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS). Among young people aged 16 to 34, 75,000 more left than returned in that period.[9] The young people in our focus groups felt particularly 'locked out' with home ownership, paying off student debt and financial independence all feeling unachievable.

Where economic insecurity is a factor frequently associated with holding more extreme positions, it is possible that the insecurity and hopelessness associated with young Britons is explanatory.

In a similar vein, those segments most open to extreme opinions — Progressive Activists and Sceptical Scrollers — are also the most digitally active and social media is a major source for information consumption. Unsurprisingly, young Britons are particularly likely to use social media to access political information. 73 per cent of 18–24s and 70 per cent of 25–34s are likely to use social media to get political news, compared to 42 per cent of the wider population.

Those who get their information about news and politics from more informal rather than mainstream media sources such as podcasts, social media, family and friends and their places of worship, are also more likely to say there are instances when political violence can be justified. The 'Unite the Kingdom' marches and being more disposed to ethnonationalism are also more likely to find support from those who consume news primarily through social media, as are those who support conspiracy theories such as the Great Reset and Great Replacement.

For this reason, it isn't helpful to view age as necessarily a predictor of extremism and, instead, taking into account underlying grievances combined with habits of information consumption is a more worthwhile consideration when working to identify those most susceptible to extremism.

When considering which segments of the population are most likely to condone political violence, More in Common's Sceptical Scrollers stand out. This digitally native group with low trust in institutions, and who are exposed to lots of conspiratorial online content, are the group most broadly tolerant of both violence (33 per cent) and harassment (31 per cent) because of someone's political beliefs. Yet, when asked to justify exactly when violence or harassment is acceptable, they are less likely than other groups to give a specific instance. This indicates that their permissiveness is not rooted in any particular set of grievances, but rather a more general tolerance for confrontational politics and a more nihilistic approach to extremism. Sceptical Scrollers' additional support for disruptive protest tactics, such as graffitiing buildings (54 per cent) and campaigning outside politicians' homes (65 per cent), suggests the same.

Sceptical Scrollers: possible susceptibility to nihilistic extremism?

Our polling identifies a distinct, non-ideological constituency of extremist thinking among those categorised as "Sceptical Scrollers", who display elevated levels of conspiracy belief, anti-institutional sentiment and openness to political violence. Unlike traditional ideological extremists, this group exhibits few consistent policy preferences or coherent ideological commitments, but instead appears driven by a broader sense of grievance, alienation and a willingness to "burn it all down". This aligns with expert characterisation where the Institute for Strategic Dialogue identifies an emerging form of "nihilistic extremism", in which extremist beliefs and acts are motivated less by a defined ideology than by a misanthropic worldview and a fascination with violence itself. While lacking a centralised organisational structure, this ecosystem includes online networks such as 764, No Lives Matter and the True Crime Community, which glorify violence and mass casualty perpetrators irrespective of ideology. The centrality of violence to this form of extremism was illustrated in the case of Axel Rudakubana, whose possession of a wide range of extremist material, spanning antisemitic to anti-Muslim content, appeared secondary to a broader fixation with violence itself.[10, 11]

As Britain seeks to understand the emergence of ideologically fluid and nihilistic forms of extremism, the "Sceptical Scrollers" cohort warrants further investigation.

Looking at the data more broadly, two distinct groups emerge among those who are more likely than average to justify political violence or harassment. One is left-leaning and sees confrontation as justified in defence of marginalised groups (for example, against those expressing racist, fascist, homophobic, transphobic or Islamophobic views). The other is a more right-leaning group that justifies confrontation in defence of national or cultural identity — against Islamist views, pro-migration positions or 'unpatriotic' actions.

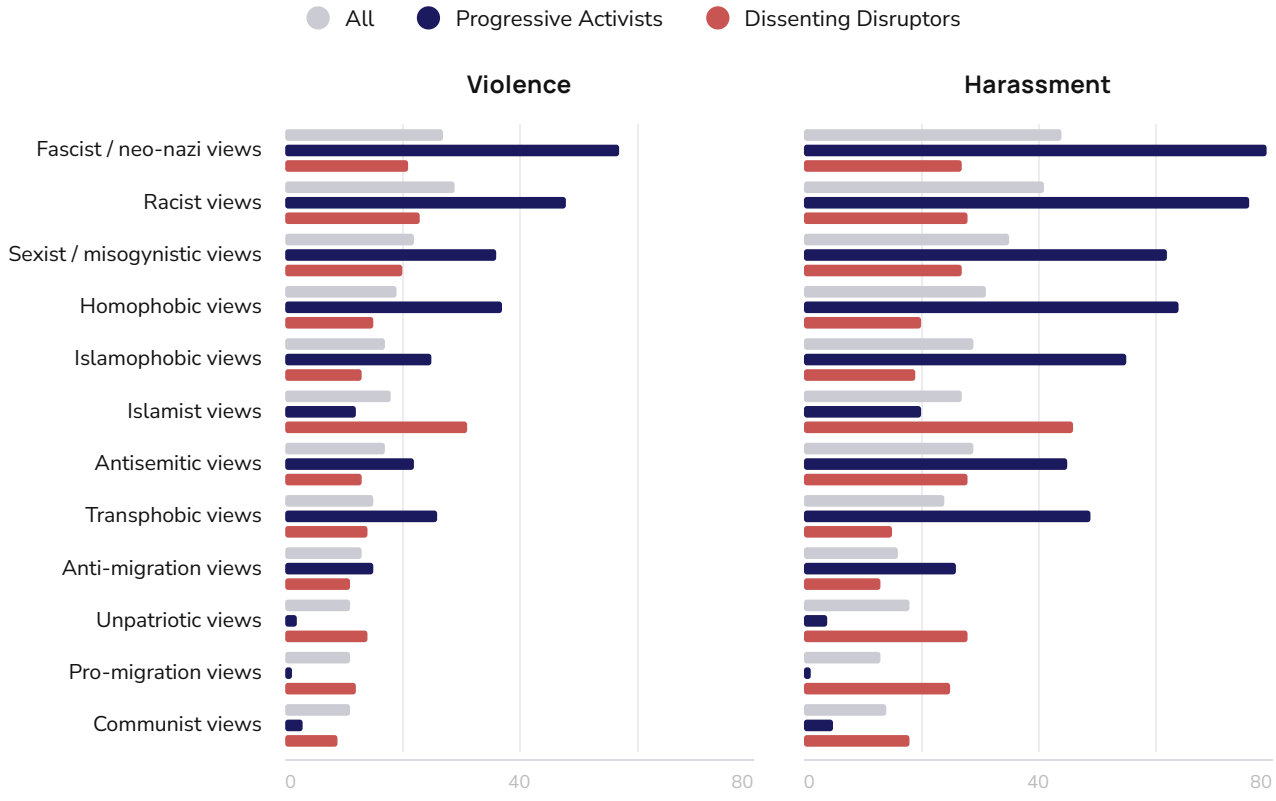
The former group is primarily composed of Progressive Activists, a highly engaged and globally minded segment driven by social justice concerns, that is significantly more socially liberal than the wider population. Incrementalist Left respondents also appear within this group, though they tend to be more conflict-averse.

Among Progressive Activists who find violence justifiable, majorities justify it in response to fascism (57 per cent), racism (48 per cent), homophobia (37 per cent), sexism (36 per cent) and Islamophobia (25 per cent). This group has a particularly low tolerance for what they see as harmful speech. Politically, this group is most likely to support the Greens, though their attitudes are driven more by social values than party allegiance. Those within this group who condone political violence tend to be younger, highly politically engaged, heavy social media users and are more likely to view the social contract as broken. In focus groups, while political violence was broadly rejected, the most progressive participants showed some reluctance to condemn it outright when the target was seen as a purveyor of hateful speech.

FIGURE 4.2

Progressive Activists permit violence to protect marginalised groups, while Dissenting Disruptors do so against unpatriotic or Islamist views

In what situations is it acceptable to use physical violence against / verbally harass someone because of their political beliefs? Select all that apply.



Source: More in Common for UKEDRC, March 2026.

This group also tends to be the most permissive of all forms of protest, reflecting the views of a group that sees civil disobedience as a legitimate political tool.

By contrast, Dissenting Disruptors who are frustrated with their circumstances, distrustful of institutions and multiculturalism and open to radical change, are more likely to justify harassment against those holding Islamist (46 per cent) or 'unpatriotic' views (28 per cent) and both harassment and violence against those with pro-migration views (25 per cent and 12 per cent). They are less likely to think racist views justify harassment (28 per cent versus 41 per cent of those open to political harassment), however, it remains the second most chosen justification for political harassment among Dissenting Disruptors. Their attitudes are more strongly tied to a political identity, with a more radical core of Reform UK voters particularly likely to align with them. However, those within this group who tend to be the most accepting of political violence tend to be under 44, relatively well educated and engage with news through social media and podcasts.

Among those in our focus groups sympathetic to right-leaning positions, there is an outright rejection of violence in the abstract. Yet in some circumstances, such as the disturbances following the Southport attack or protests outside asylum hotels, while few condoned these actions directly, some expressed understanding of, or sympathy with, the frustrations that drove people to them. Rejection of violence was often paired with broader grievances about human rights law, the legal system or government inaction.

Conclusion

The data set out in this chapter point to a troubling normalisation of political violence and harassment in British public life, even as the overwhelming majority of the public continues to reject it outright. That two MPs have now been murdered within the past decade, and that crimes against parliamentarians have more than doubled since 2019, should be treated as a standing warning rather than a series of isolated tragedies. The toll this is taking on our democracy is visible not only in the anxiety and fear reported by MPs themselves, but in the very real prospect that capable people will simply choose not to stand for office, or not to stand again.

What this chapter makes clear is that susceptibility to violence and harassment is not confined to one part of the political spectrum, nor adequately explained by age alone. Both a left-leaning group, motivated by opposition to hateful speech, and a right-leaning group, motivated by concerns over identity and migration, show greater willingness to justify confrontation than the population as a whole. A third, more nihilistic group, are defined less by ideology than by distrust and digital immersion, are more tolerant of violence. This suggests that grievance, isolation and information environment, rather than political affiliation in itself, are the more useful predictors of who is drawn towards extreme action.

Younger Britons' greater openness to political violence and civil disobedience cannot be separated from the economic insecurity many of them face, nor from the fact that they increasingly form their political understanding through social media and podcasts rather than more traditional sources. This is not an excuse for violence, nor does it absolve individuals of responsibility for their actions. But it does mean that addressing the conditions that make extreme action feel justified including economic precarity, institutional distrust, exposure to conspiratorial content, must be treated as integral to any strategy for reducing political violence, not a separate undertaking from it.

The rejection of violence by the vast majority of the public is grounds for some confidence, but it should not be mistaken for security. Where sympathy for those who resort to disorder coexists with rejection of disorder itself, and where institutional trust continues to erode, the conditions for further escalation remain in place. Protecting those who serve in public life, and the democratic process itself, will require sustained attention to both the immediate security of politicians. But this alone will not be sufficient. Ultimately, the underlying grievances that make violence and harassment thinkable in the first place must also be countered strategically.

05

CHAPTER 05

The Disordered Information Ecosystem

Institutional distrust, conspiracism and narrative warfare — how a broken information environment lets extremist narratives spread through the mainstream.

If legitimate grievances are the kindling for extremism and extremist actors the spark, conspiracy theories are the dry wind that spreads and accelerates destructive ideologies and hatred. From a shadowy global elite controlling world affairs to claims that 5G towers spread Covid-19, conspiracy theories are now a primary threat to democratic institutions, social cohesion and public health. They are not simply a fringe curiosity; they are a symptom and an accelerant of something more structural: a disordered information ecosystem in which distrust of mainstream and institutional sources has become the fertile ground in which extremists cultivate alternative, and often hateful and anti-democratic realities.

This chapter sets out the case that the collapse of trust in mainstream media and institutions, combined with the unrestricted spread of disinformation, misinformation and malinformation online, is directly fuelling the mainstreaming of conspiracy theories in the UK. It further shows how extremists — domestic and foreign, far-right and Islamist alike — are exploiting this disordered information ecosystem as both a mobilising tool and a battleground in what experts increasingly describe as narrative warfare: a deliberate contest over whose version of reality the public will believe.

A Mainstream Phenomenon, Not a Fringe One

Conspiracy theories, once marginalised to the fringes of society, are now mainstream in the UK. Having tested several different theories, our polling reveals that at least 23 per cent of Britons believe each one to be true. The most widely held are the belief that a secret group controls major world decisions (40 per cent) and that parliamentary constituency boundaries are drawn to prevent certain candidates from winning (40 per cent). Belief that vaccines are unsafe is the least widely held of the theories tested (23 per cent) — still close to a quarter of the population.

Crucially, our polling shows that susceptibility to conspiracy theories tracks closely with distrust in authorities and institutions, which is precisely what makes conspiracism such an effective instrument for extremists seeking to weaken confidence in democratic institutions. Extremist movements are often coalitions of conspiracies, where objectively unrelated distortions of fact and history are woven together into an alternative ecosystem of reality. Conspiracy theories are therefore not only a symptom of distrust but a primary vector for mobilising and legitimising hatred and extremism.

Levels of institutional trust are the single clearest driver of belief. Dissenting Disruptors are the population segment most consistently likely to say each theory tested is true. Traditional Conservatives, by contrast, are consistently among the lowest-scoring segments, despite sharing with Dissenting Disruptors a higher likelihood of holding hard-line views on migration and national identity. Traditional Conservatives' comparatively higher trust in institutions and authority makes them more sceptical of conspiratorial framing, placing the two segments at opposite ends of the same ideological family. Sceptical Scrollers, meanwhile, hold distinctly conspiratorial views on specific issues, notably health-related conspiracies and the 'Great Reset' and 'Great Replacement' theories. Party affiliation is, by comparison, a weak predictor of conspiracy belief relative to its dominant role in shaping far-right and far-left attitudes more broadly — though Reform UK voters are more likely to believe political conspiracies than supporters of other parties, without a corresponding pull toward health or vaccine conspiracies.

Two Transnational Conspiracies: The 'Great Reset' and the 'Great Replacement'

Two transnational conspiracy theories stand out for the scale of attention they have attracted. The 'Great Reset' is rooted in the World Economic Forum's Covid-era policy initiative, which extremists rapidly recast as a covert plan to enforce lockdowns, engineer economic collapse, or install global socialist authoritarian rule.[12] At its core it belongs to a long tradition of anti-elite, anti-globalist and often antisemitic 'new world order' conspiracies, with utility for both far-right and far-left extremists.

The 'Great Replacement' theory — also known as White Replacement or White Genocide theory — holds that the white race faces deliberate extinction at the hands of Jews and other minorities, who are said to be orchestrating mass non-white immigration into white-majority countries. Variants differ on the alleged architects: some cast Jews as the clandestine organisers, others frame Muslim-majority migration as a demographic conquest of Europe. In every variant the theory is deeply antisemitic, anti-Muslim and ethnonationalist, and it has been explicitly cited as motivation for extreme right-wing terrorist attacks, including the 2018 Pittsburgh Tree of Life synagogue shooting and the 2019 Christchurch mosque attacks.[13]

Linked to the 'Great Reset' conspiracy, 40 per cent believe a secret group controls major world decisions. Belief in the 'Great Reset' conspiracy itself sits at nearly a third of the overall population at 29 per cent. Belief is cross-cutting politically – where 24 per cent of Tories back the idea as well as 27 per cent of Labour, 16 per cent of Lib Dems and 23 per cent of Green voters, but institutional trust is again the strongest predictor. It is particularly strong among Reform UK voters (39 per cent), men (33 per cent), 25–34s (42 per cent), non-white respondents (39 per cent) and those experiencing financial hardship (36 per cent). Those who feel the social contract is broken are markedly more likely to believe it (36 per cent), suggesting the theory functions as a proxy for a deeper sense of institutional betrayal; a conviction that powerful actors are reshaping society without the consent of ordinary people.

It also resonates with both Sceptical Scrollers, among whom social media use is the main driver with few strong demographic breaks, and Dissenting Disruptors, among whom non-white respondents, the financially struggling and social media users are all more likely to believe it. The 'Great Reset' therefore operates as a meeting point between two distinct pathways into conspiracism: one rooted in financial precarity and anti-establishment grievance, the other in an online information diet and distrust of mainstream institutions.

The 'Great Replacement' theory follows a similar but sharper pattern. It is seen as true by 29 per cent of the overall population, as well as 26 per cent of Conservatives, 19 per cent of Labour voters, 14 per cent by Lib Dems and 13 per cent among Greens. Belief is more pronounced at 54 per cent for Reform UK voters, 38 per cent of Sceptical Scrollers and 59 per cent of Dissenting Disruptors. Within both the Sceptical Scroller and Dissenting Disruptor segments, degree holders and those who are financially comfortable are more likely to reject the theory, while those who feel the social contract is broken and who rely on social media for news are more likely to accept it. In both segments, then, an anti-establishment worldview combined with either economic grievance or a social-media-shaped information diet is the strongest predictor of belief — reinforcing the chapter's central argument that institutional distrust and a disordered media diet compound one another.

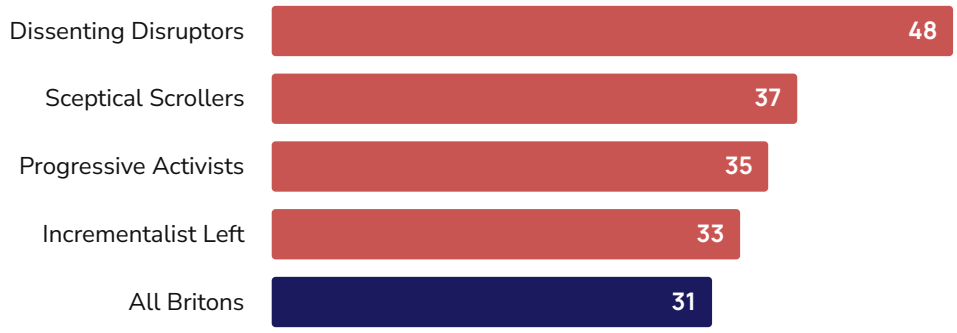
Health and Pharmaceutical Conspiracies

A related cluster of beliefs concerns health and pharmaceutical institutions: that Covid-19 was exaggerated to control people (34 per cent), that pharmaceutical companies are hiding a cure for cancer to protect profits (31 per cent), and that vaccines are unsafe (23 per cent). These beliefs cluster together but with different demographic profiles. Belief that Covid was exaggerated is highest among young people, non-white respondents and those with experience of financial hardship, and particularly pronounced among Dissenting Disruptors who are also financially struggling or who feel the social contract is broken. The belief that pharmaceutical companies are suppressing a cancer cure has broader appeal across the ideological spectrum: it is highest among Dissenting Disruptors (48 per cent) but also notable among Progressive Activists (35 per cent) and Incrementalist Lefts (33 per cent) — evidence that anti-corporate sentiment, unlike most conspiracy belief, is not anchored on the right.

FIGURE 5.1

Belief that pharmaceutical companies are hiding a cure for cancer is not anchored on the right

% who believe pharmaceutical companies are hiding a cure for cancer to protect profits, by British Seven segment.



Source: More in Common for UKEDRC, March 2026.

Sceptical Scrollers stand out as the segment for whom health and pharmaceutical conspiracies are most consistently accepted as true. Alongside Dissenting Disruptors, they are the most likely to believe vaccines are unsafe (36 per cent), that Covid was exaggerated (44 per cent) and that pharmaceutical companies are concealing a cancer cure (37 per cent). Social media use within this segment is a significant driver, reflecting both a heavier online media diet and the fact that health misinformation represents a particularly accessible entry point into wider conspiratorial thinking.

A Convergent and Mobilising Instrument for Extremists

Conspiracy theories are a primary mobilising instrument for extremists of every ideological stripe. The Great Replacement theory has been deployed extensively by the far-right, coupled with remigration and wider anti-immigrant narratives that bleed easily into mainstream, ostensibly legitimate debates on immigration. Online discussion of immigration, political elites and global conflict is routinely reinterpreted through a 'deep state' lens, frequently in coded antisemitic terms linked to the Great Replacement theory. This allows domestic grievances to be absorbed into a totalising worldview in which societal decline is framed as intentional design rather than incidental drift.

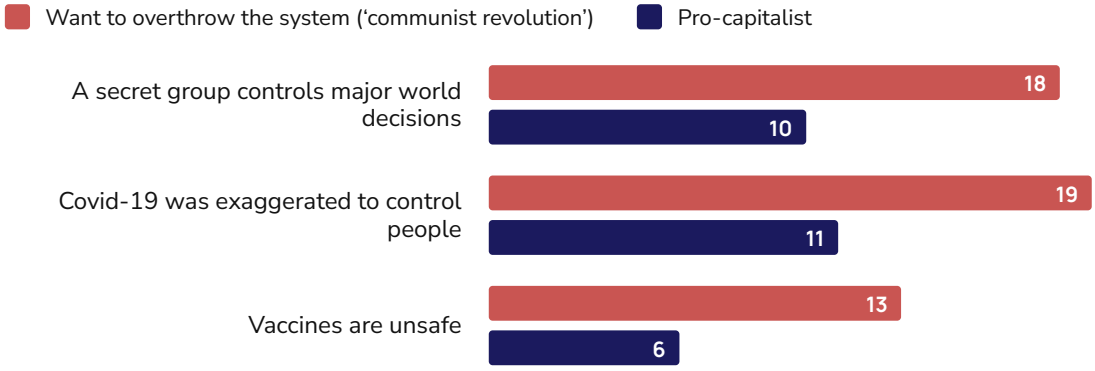
Conspiracy theories are also where seemingly opposed extremist ideologies converge. Our twelve month analysis of online ecosystems shows Islamist extremism and the far-right meeting around a shared framing of global politics as controlled by hidden elites, often articulated through references to 'Zionist' or 'globalist' influence, with Israel positioned in both ecosystems as a key driver of UK foreign and domestic policy. Distinct communities arrive at near-identical conclusions from opposite starting points: Islamist extremist ecosystems embed this within narratives of Western aggression against Muslim populations, while far-right spaces frame it as loss of national identity, sovereignty and betrayal by political elites. During the war between Iran and the US and Israel, both ecosystems simultaneously amplified claims of undue Israeli control over Western governments and military decision-making, alongside a resurgence of older conspiracies including 9/11 revisionism.

The relationship between conspiracism and appetite for institutional overthrow is measurable. Those who want to overthrow the current system through a 'communist revolution' are roughly twice as likely as 'pro-capitalists' to say it is definitely true that a secret group controls major world decisions such as going to war (18 per cent versus 10 per cent), that Covid-19 was exaggerated to control people (19 per cent versus 11 per cent), and that vaccines are unsafe (13 per cent versus 6 per cent). A heavier online media diet among this group is a plausible driver of these more extreme conclusions — a pattern that points directly to the role of the information ecosystem itself, examined next.

FIGURE 5.2

Those who would overthrow the system are about twice as likely to hold conspiracy beliefs

% who say each statement is 'definitely true'.



Source: More in Common for UKEDRC, March 2026.

The Collapse of Trust in Mainstream Media

The UK's disordered information ecosystem is providing fertile ground for conspiracy theories, where those consuming information through non-traditional sources, especially online are more likely to encounter disinformation, which is being spread rapidly by extremists, both domestically and from hostile states.

The disordered information ecosystem — the largely unrestricted circulation of disinformation and misinformation — is flourishing precisely because trust in institutions and authorities is so low. Mainstream media once served as an authoritative filter on the flow of information and opinion, bound by formal and informal standards that social media platforms are not. That filtering role is now in crisis. According to the Edelman Trust Barometer, media and government are the two least-trusted institutions globally, ranking below both business and NGOs.[14]

Our polling indicates that distrust in mainstream news is itself a driver of far-right sympathy: audiences sympathetic to far-right views have a deep distrust of mainstream media as a source of political information and are heavily drawn to social media instead. Among our focus group participants showing some sympathy to far-right views, the BBC — once one of Britain's most trusted institutions — is now viewed with particular suspicion across the political spectrum, with institutional scandals (Jimmy Savile, Rolf Harris, Huw Edwards) repeatedly cited in our focus groups as evidence of a broader culture of cover-up.

> *"The problem with the news channels and the media, they're all owned by massive conglomerates now and you just don't know who's telling the truth. You don't know who is telling you what is going on. It's crazy."*
>
> **— Matt, retired, Sutton Coldfield**

Several participants believed the BBC downplays or misreports stories involving crime, race or religion. Views of the BBC among British Muslims are polarised, with 18 per cent expressing negative views — not markedly different from the general population. Underlying all of this is a broader belief that mainstream media as a whole is agenda-driven and controlled by powerful interests, reinforcing the finding elsewhere in this research that reliance on social media for political information predicts a more ethnonationalist conception of British identity.

This flight from mainstream sources is not confined to the right. Progressive Activists, situated at the opposite end of the spectrum, have also moved decisively away from traditional outlets toward X/Twitter, TikTok and Instagram, with our focus group of those sympathetic to some far-left views describing the shift in focus groups as deliberate: the BBC, tabloids and broadcast news were distrusted for perceived bias, owner influence or political agenda, with many expressing a preference for independent creators who visibly 'back up' their claims. Distrust in institutional media is therefore both cause and effect: extremists work assiduously to pull audiences away from mainstream media toward unregulated sources, while simultaneously harnessing that same distrust to spread disinformation and conspiracy theories once audiences arrive there.

Systematised Online Amplification

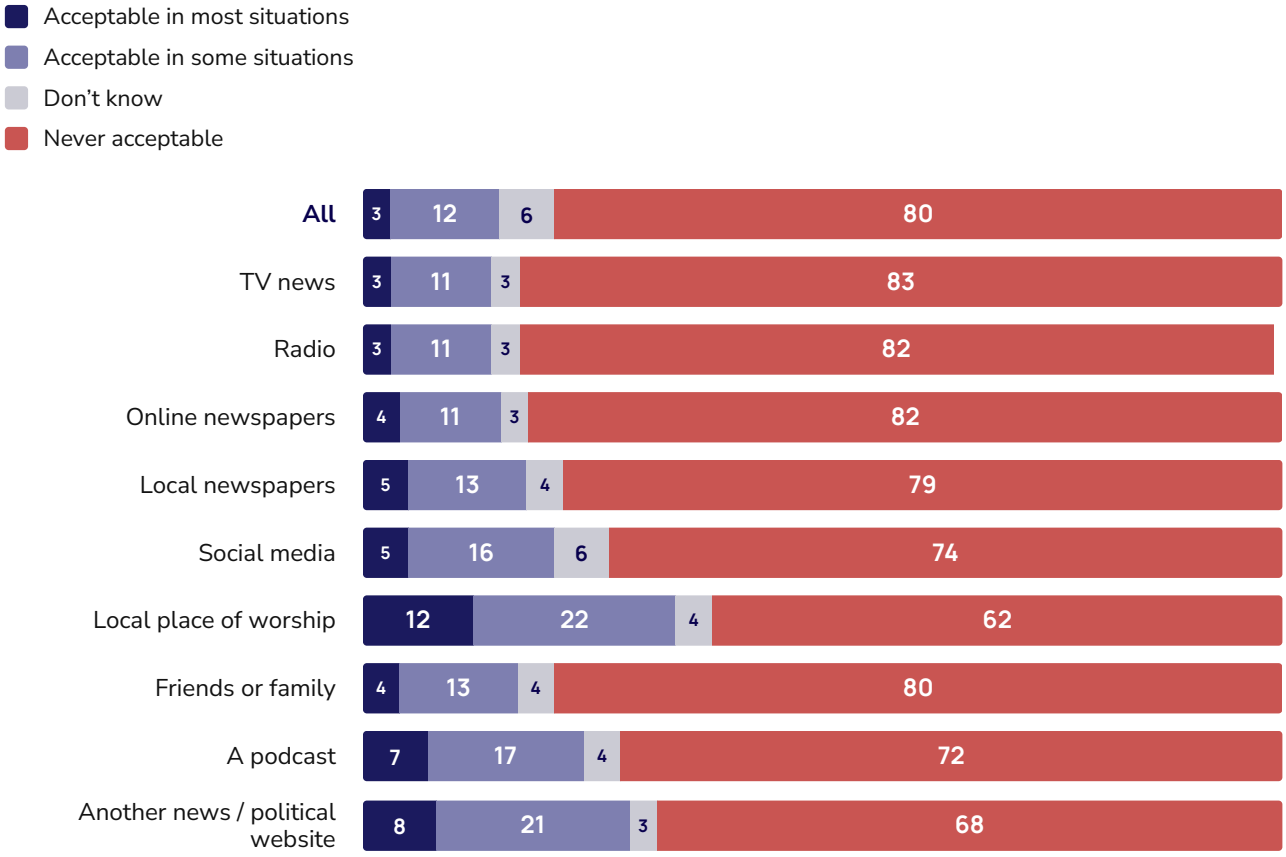
Our online assessment concluded that this is not an incidental drift but an organised strategy. For Islamist extremists, public-facing platforms such as X and YouTube function as amplification layers: X captures attention and redirects users into Telegram ecosystems, while YouTube offers a more accessible, longer-form space for outward-facing discussion. The movement of fringe narratives into the mainstream is cyclical rather than linear — seeded and refined in Telegram-centric spaces, selectively surfaced on more accessible platforms, then reabsorbed with greater perceived legitimacy following exposure. Extremists accelerate this cycle by anchoring content in trending and contentious issues, such as the war in the Middle East and debates on Islamophobia.

A parallel strategy operates on the far-right, where X and Telegram function as key nodes, particularly within higher-friction spaces linked to far right groups such as Patriotic Alternative and Britain First and to newer entities gaining traction. Within these spaces, narratives are constructed, reinforced and spread among core audiences through highly emotive content, strengthened by closed or semi-closed community structures. There is, further, a plausible connection between this disordered media diet and support for political violence: those who source news and political information from informal channels — podcasts, social media, family, friends and places of worship — are more likely to say political violence can sometimes be justified. The relationship is not simply causal in one direction, but it is clear that those holding more extreme views disproportionately rely on non-traditional sources.

FIGURE 5.3

Those who turn to their place of worship, alternative online sources and social media for news are the most likely to condone political violence

Do you think it is ever acceptable to use physical violence against someone because of their political beliefs? By source likely to use for information on news / politics.



Source: More in Common for UKEDRC, March 2026.

Narrative Warfare: A Daily Occurrence

Narrative warfare as we define it, is the strategic and deliberate use of competing or manipulative narratives by malign state and non-state actors to influence public perceptions, exacerbate social and political divisions, weaken institutional legitimacy and trust, and erode democratic resilience and social cohesion in pursuit of ideological, political or geopolitical objectives. Experts consulted for this research repeatedly argued that the UK is already in the midst of such a contest, with fundamental aspects of British life and values under sustained challenge from domestic and foreign actors offering compelling, divisive narratives that face little organised counter-argument. Many regard this as having reached crisis point, without a corresponding strategic response from central government or state institutions.

The concept is young — gaining prominence only in the last decade — and no universal definition yet exists, as the term straddles strategic communications, information warfare, cognitive warfare, psychology, international relations and military studies. Most converge on the idea that narratives are used strategically to shape perception, identity, legitimacy and behaviour, differing mainly on scope and mechanism. Ajit Maan, president of the Narrative Strategies Institute, frames it as the strategic use of stories to influence the perceptions, beliefs and behaviour of target audiences, arguing that modern conflict is increasingly fought through narratives that shape identity and psychological susceptibility rather than through physical force alone.[15] There is overlap with NATO's concept of cognitive warfare, which its Allied Command Transformation describes as deliberate, synchronised military and non-military activity designed to gain, maintain and protect cognitive advantage, manipulating perception and eroding public trust.[16]

Narrative warfare is arguably broader still: the deliberate amplification or creation of divisive narratives to erode social cohesion, undermine trust in institutions, and exacerbate political, cultural or ideological polarisation within democratic societies. On this reading, the preservation of social cohesion and a healthy social contract is itself a matter of democratic defence — a concept that should encompass not only the protection of territory and institutions but the shared social and democratic foundations that make democratic governance possible at all. In practice, this contest takes the form of exploiting existing grievances, spreading selectively framed disinformation and conspiracy theories to reinforce distrust, amplifying extreme voices through social media, undermining confidence in elections, courts, science and journalism, and encouraging mutually incompatible versions of reality that make compromise and consensus harder to reach. The objective is rarely to convince everyone of one single story; it is to generate confusion, distrust and radicalisation, and to fuel conflict that weakens democratic nations from within.

A Policy Vacuum

Despite the scale of this challenge, the UK government does not currently have an official, published definition of 'narrative warfare' in its national security, defence or resilience strategy — the term is largely absent from major doctrinal documents. The Integrated Review 2021, the Integrated Review Refresh 2023 and related defence documents describe a world of persistent competition below the threshold of war, hostile state activity, information manipulation and a blurring of the line between peace and conflict, but stop short of naming narrative warfare as a distinct concept. Instead, UK strategy documents rely on adjacent terms — information operations, strategic communications, state threats, hybrid threats, persistent competition, influence activities, disinformation and misinformation, integrated deterrence, and national resilience — none of which fully captures the phenomenon described in this chapter, nor commits any single institution to countering it.

Case study: Audrey Tang's collaborative technology model (Taiwan)

Not every response to a disordered information ecosystem need be defensive. Following Taiwan's 2014 Sunflower Movement — a citizen protest sparked by distrust in an opaque government trade deal — technologist Audrey Tang, then Digital Minister, built digital tools designed to rebuild trust between citizens and government: moving from polarisation to participation, and from mistrust to collaboration.

The core platform, Pol.is, works differently from typical social media. There is no reply button — participants can only agree, disagree or contribute a new statement, which sharply cuts down trolling and hate speech, and the tool maps where people actually agree rather than amplifying the loudest disagreements. Crucially, this was never mere consultation theatre: government ministries committed in advance that any proposal reaching over 85 per cent agreement across different groups would be acted upon, giving citizens a concrete reason to believe their input mattered. By 2018 the platform had processed 26 policy issues, with government action following in roughly 80 per cent of cases.[17] Presidential approval rose from a very low base to over 71 per cent by 2020,[18] and Taiwan became the least polarised nation in Asia while also ranking as the most free and most democratic, all achieved without restricting civil liberties.[19]

The model was also tested under crisis conditions. During an early pandemic mask shortage, the government published real-time data on mask-distribution points, allowing civic developers to build tracking apps on top of it, demonstrating that the approach could function live, not only in routine policymaking. Limitations remain: Taiwan is small and unusually digitally connected, which may complicate scaling to larger or less connected populations. But the underlying lesson is transferable. Trust did not come from technology alone; it came from pairing transparent, consensus-finding tools with a binding institutional response. Citizens engaged because they could see disagreement, common ground, and government action, in that order — precisely the sequence missing from the UK's current approach to its own disordered information ecosystem.

Conclusion: Conspiracies Are Far From the Fringe

It is deeply worrying that destructive conspiracy theories are being weaponised by extremists with impunity, and that the collapse of trust in mainstream and institutional media has created exactly the conditions in which this weaponisation thrives. Where conspiracy theories construct new sets of 'facts', they legitimise extremist narratives on the back of a convincing set of lies. Simply contesting baseless conspiracies with evidence is not, on its own, an effective strategy while such a large minority of the population distrusts the very institutions and authorities tasked with setting the record straight. Many of the conspiracy theories now circulating are designed specifically to erode that trust further, neutering the institutions best placed to correct them.
As the UK's information ecosystem becomes ever more disordered, and as narrative warfare continues largely unnamed and insufficiently countered in national strategy, each new crisis represents a fresh opportunity for conspiracy theories to accelerate their spread through the collective bloodstream of public life. Rebuilding trust — not merely rebutting falsehoods — must be the starting point of any effective response.

06

CHAPTER 06

An Enabling Environment — Hostile States and Domestic Extremists

How Russia and Iran exploit Britain's frayed social contract — and how far-right, Islamist and far-left extremists feed on the same grievances.

Britain's broken social contract and eroding institutional trust offer fertile ground for the country's rivals. States hostile to Britain — chiefly Russia and Iran — are exploiting this environment to hasten the erosion of democratic institutions, sow social discord and abet domestic extremism, as part of a wider strategy to disassemble the Western alliance.

Putin's imperialism extends to domestic theatres in Western countries, while the Islamic Republic has never recognised sovereign borders, viewing Jewish communities as a soft underbelly in its war with Israel. Both states weaponise domestic far-right and Islamist extremist constituencies, often using online-recruited "disposable agents" to exacerbate existing tensions with low cost and plausible deniability. The distinction between state and non-state threats is, for both regimes, largely one of convenience.

This activity is being felt in real time. MI5 director Ken McCallum reported a 35 percent increase in individuals under investigation for state threat activity last year, warning that Russian intelligence is seeking to generate "sustained mayhem on British and European streets".[20] MI5 has similarly tracked more than 20 potentially lethal Iran-backed plots in a single year, prompting annual expansion of counter-Iran operations.[21]

Russia's 'great game' in Britain

Russia has become adept at exploiting UK trigger events to stoke division. Brotherhood of Academists — a network of Russian far-right, neo-Nazi antisemitic extremists created under a sanctioned Putin-linked oligarch — has driven "White Lives Matter" propaganda around the murder of 18-year-old Henry Nowak.[22] The group, promoted by Tommy Robinson, forms part of a wider Russian state-linked campaign to sow division across the UK and Europe, amplifying material from the Russian-sponsored "Paladins International Sovereigntist League".

Elon Musk's father, Errol Musk, hosted Tommy Robinson during a visit to Russia for the St Petersburg International Economic Forum, the Kremlin's answer to Davos.[23] Robinson has endorsed Putin, stating "Russia is not an enemy" of Britain.[24] Mark Collett, founder of Patriotic Alternative, spoke at a Kremlin-convened summit of European extreme nationalist groups, the Forum of the International Anti-Globalist League.[25] These are illustrative of a wider identification with Russia among the Western far-right, who see it as white nationalism embodied.

Our online monitoring shows significant convergence between Russia-aligned ecosystems and the UK domestic far-right on antisemitic conspiracy theories, anti-migrant remigration advocacy and Great Replacement narratives. Both frame immigration as an existential "invasion" driving crime and state failure, with Kremlin-aligned actors selectively amplifying UK events to validate and scale these narratives.

A network of Russian-linked Telegram channels has encouraged UK residents to attack mosques and Muslims in exchange for cryptocurrency, linked to real-world incidents including anti-Muslim graffiti in east and south London and a fake bomb left outside a north London mosque in June 2026. Evidence of Russian involvement includes a Russian-language, GMT+3-configured X account shared by a channel admin, and Cyrillic script in messages; the accounts have also spread antisemitism.[26]

Far-right networks are increasingly used as a pool of "disposable agents", a strategy that gained importance after the expulsion of Russian diplomats from Western countries. Extremists recruited via GRU agents have been linked to attacks across Western Europe and the US, and to the Wagner mercenary group.[27]

Russia's hidden hand in stoking unrest around trigger events has long been suspected.[28] Former security minister Stephen McPartland suggested Russian involvement in the misinformation campaign that fuelled the 2024 far-right riots following the Southport murders.[29] Telegram accounts claiming Russian far-right backing urged protesters to "destroy" Muslims during the unrest, and a UK intelligence source said Russia-linked bot accounts stoked violence through "covert influence".[30] In 2025, far-right demonstrations in Epping targeting migrants were similarly accelerated by Russian-linked accounts, and Russian ecosystems have also supported Tommy Robinson's "Unite the Kingdom" rallies.[31]

The Islamic Republic and spreading the revolution to Britain

A core objective of the Iranian regime is exporting the Islamic revolution by weakening Western countries from within. Like Russia, it uses domestic extremists to advance its geopolitical and ideological aims, with the Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) using soft power to facilitate terrorism, Islamist radicalisation and antisemitism. Alongside Russian actors, the IRGC's Cognitive Design Production Centre sought to stoke sociopolitical tensions during the 2024 US presidential election, prompting further Biden-administration sanctions.

A recent report by Lord Walney found the Iranian regime had built soft-power infrastructure in the UK via roughly 30 charities used to spread Khomeinist ideology, foster antisemitism and conduct transnational repression, 10 of which face ongoing Charity Commission scrutiny.[32] The report identified overlapping governance and personnel with regime institutions, ideological alignment with Khomeinist doctrine, and links to Iranian state threat activity. Senior UK charity figures have held posts within bodies such as the Qom Seminary and Al Mustafa International University — the latter US-designated for IRGC Quds Force recruitment — which have hosted senior IRGC commanders and speakers pushing Holocaust distortion and antisemitic tropes.

The IRGC has also run disinformation campaigns and cyber-attacks to exacerbate Western divisions: a 2017 IRGC-linked hack compromised 90 UK parliamentarians' email accounts, and in 2021 Tehran-linked specialists reportedly targeted Scottish independence voters via fake pro-independence social media accounts. Following Iran's January 2026 internet blackout, aimed at suppressing a domestic uprising, these Scottish-independence-linked accounts went dark.[33]

Senior IRGC officers have directly targeted British audiences: commander Hossein Yekta told a British student group in a 2020 Instagram livestream that universities had become "the battlefront", urging students to become "soft-war officers".[34] In a January 2021 webinar, IRGC commander Saeed Ghasemi praised Qassem Soleimani, called the Holocaust "a lie and a fake", and urged British students to help "bring an end to the life of the oppressors and occupiers, Zionists and Jews across the world."[35] Ghasemi, per UANI, also commands an IRGC plain-clothes unit responsible for suppressing Iranian civilian protests.

Online monitoring again shows convergence between domestic Islamist extremists and Iranian ecosystems, chiefly around anti-Western grievance narratives framing the UK as complicit in Gaza and Middle East violence, and pro-Iranian "resistance" framing against Israel, reinforced with antisemitic tropes.

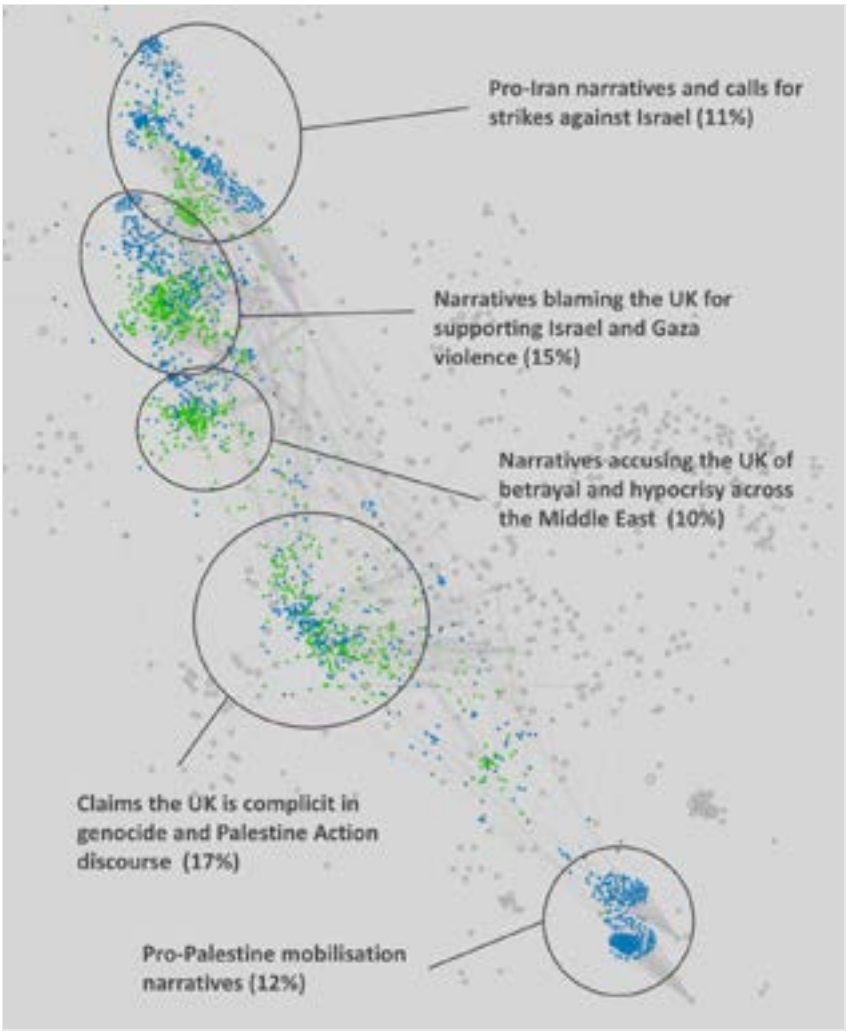


FIGURE 6.1

Communications map of Islamist extremist and Iran-aligned ecosystems. It highlights areas of convergence around multiple clusters, particularly narratives blaming the UK for supporting Israel, claims of complicity in Gaza-related violence, and broader framing of Western hypocrisy across the region. The overlap between UK Islamist extremists and Iran-aligned ecosystems is most pronounced around pro-Palestine mobilisation and anti-UK grievance narratives, indicating shared framing despite ideological differences. Peaks in activity align with key geopolitical flashpoints, notably the Iran-Israel conflict in June 2025 and renewed regional escalation in February to March 2026.

Iran-aligned actors embedded within or adjacent to UK Islamist ecosystems reinforced and scaled these narratives during geopolitical flashpoints, with messaging most synchronised around the Iran-Israel conflict and the war in Gaza. Iran matches Russia's sophistication in embedding UK infrastructure: IRGC-affiliated accounts posed as Scottish and Irish nationals, spending months building credibility on X, Instagram and Bluesky with anti-Labour, anti-Union, anti-Starmer and anti-Royal content, before pivoting to glorify the late Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and circulate AI-generated images purporting to show destroyed US military bases once war with Iran began.[36]

Domestic extremists online and on the streets

While foreign interference has abetted domestic extremism, homegrown extremists need little help stirring up hatred. The perceived collapse of the social contract has opened the door to extremists of all ideologies.

Mapping far-right and Islamist extremist events over the 12 months to March 2026 found 1,784 far-right events against 225 Islamist extremism-linked events. Far-right activity was widely dispersed across the Midlands, London and the South East; Islamist extremist events were fewer and more clustered in cities, with repeated mobilisation around Unite the Kingdom and Palestine protests, particularly in London.

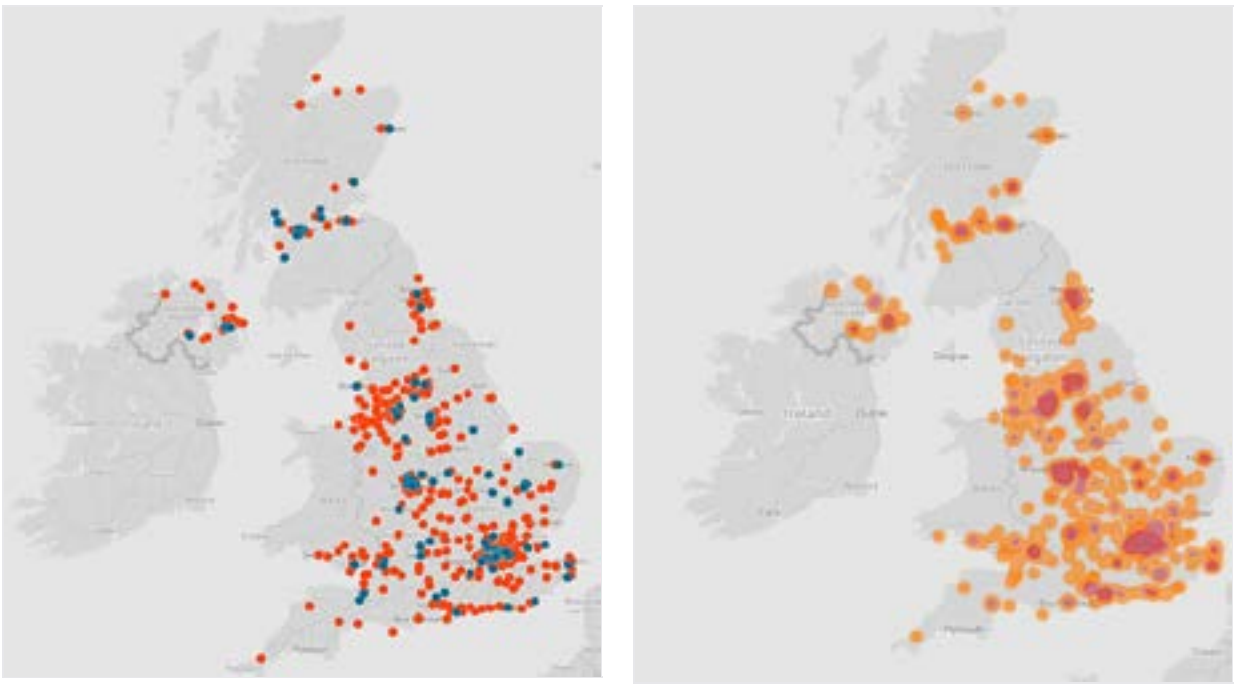


FIGURE 6.2

Events map of the UK showing Islamist extremist (blue) and far-right (orange) reported events over the 12-month reporting period. Note the significantly higher volume of far-right-reported events (1,784) compared to Islamist extremism (225), reflecting greater focus on UK-specific events. Far-right-attributed activity was dispersed widely across England, particularly in urban and suburban areas in the Midlands, London and the South East. Islamist extremist-attributed events are fewer and more clustered, with concentration largely in cities.

Far-right extremism

Far-right extremism is typically marked by sympathy for authoritarianism, an exclusionary ethnonationalist identity, hostility to Jews and Muslims, and conspiracy theories such as the Great Replacement. Legitimate concerns about immigration, integration and identity have been tactically reframed through this lens, growing the movement from a few hundred adherents a decade ago to tens of thousands today.

UK far-right source on X describes British girls as being targeted by 'jihadists' and blames diversity policies.

The online far-right ecosystem is a loosely connected network of extremist organisations, conspiracy communities and digital subcultures united by anti-immigration and anti-establishment grievance, though fractured over Israel — some factions are strongly pro-Israel, others antisemitic.

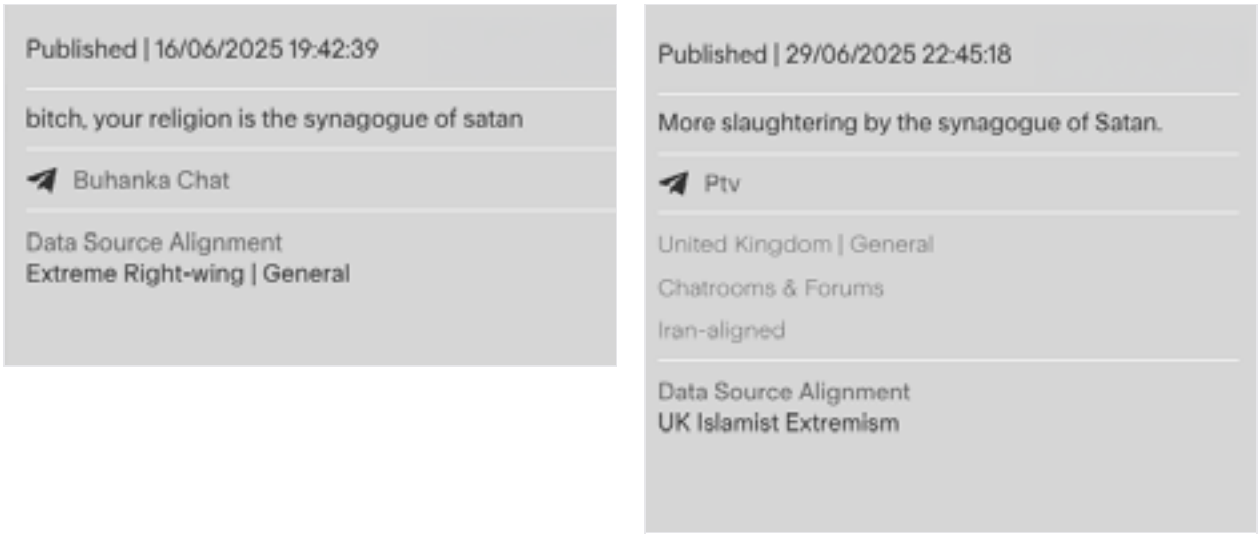
Following the murder of Henry Nowak and a Belfast knife attack, Tommy Robinson and others called for nationwide protests against the "invasion" of foreigners.[37] Isolated violent incidents involving visible-minority perpetrators repeatedly become mobilising flashpoints, with immigration the primary vector of exploitation. After the 2024 Southport murders, far-right figures — including Britain First and Patriotic Alternative supporters — exploited false claims that Axel Rudakubana was a Muslim asylum seeker, sparking riots across 27 towns and cities and hundreds of arrests.[38]

A year on, further anti-migrant mobilisation occurred in Epping, Norwich, Leeds, London and elsewhere, with groups including Patriotic Alternative, Blood and Honour, Homeland Party and White Vanguard demonstrating outside asylum hotels; immigration lawyers have been particular targets of far-right threats.[39]

Monitoring shows activity peaked in July–August 2025 around asylum hotel protests and anti-immigration sentiment, with further spikes tied to Reform UK's electoral success, "two-tier policing" debates, and Tommy Robinson-linked mobilisation ahead of the September 2025 "Unite the Kingdom" rally.

UK far-right sources on Telegram use 'Jew' as a slur, a common trope among both far-right and Islamist extremist ecosystems.

The 2025–26 "Unite the Kingdom" marches mark a turning point in the far-right's re-emergence: police estimated 150,000 attendees in September 2025 and 60,000 in May 2026. Demonstrators waved Union flags and wore "Make England Great Again" (MEGA) hats, repurposing patriotic symbols for ethnonationalist ends.[40] The protests carried a strong Christian theme, with wooden crosses and "Christ is King" chants.[41] The government blocked 11 foreign nationals, described by Keir Starmer as "far-right agitators", from entering the UK before the May 2026 march. Distributed flyers carried explicitly ethnonationalist, pan-European messaging ("brotherhood of White Europeans", "Unite the West"), suggesting a shift from English nationalism toward continental identitarianism.



Far-right (left) and Islamist extremist (right) sources on Telegram share the antisemitic 'Synagogue of Satan' conspiracy theory.

While many marchers hold legitimate concerns about immigration and identity, far-right extremists are clearly using these issues to mobilise support for authoritarian ethnonationalism — a pattern echoed in the "Operation Raise the Colours" movement, where genuine patriotic sentiment coexists with co-optation by figures including Tommy Robinson, Andrew Currien and Britain First.[42]

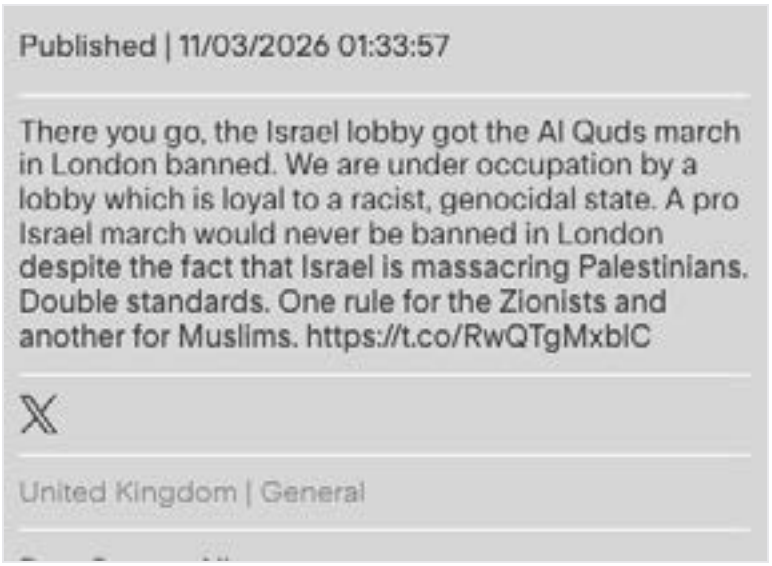
Focus group analysis

Our general focus group — drawn from across all seven of More In Common's segments — showed a more developed understanding of far-right than far-left extremism. Participants distinguished "genuine" far right (ethnic nationalism, opposition to all immigration) from those merely labelled far right for raising concerns about illegal immigration, with several feeling the label is applied too loosely. Nigel Farage and Donald Trump were named as genuinely far-right figures, and the far right was seen as a real social risk through its role in driving riots and unrest.

> *"I think Daniel summed it up actually quite well with the idea that you only have an indigenous population, that's kind of an extremist perspective on what a country should look like... if any of them are pushed, they tend to conflate illegal immigration with legal immigration and talk about hoards of people coming in. It's like, yeah, well, 90% of those people are legal. And if they weren't there, the whole system would start collapsing."*
>
> **— Sam, videographer, Holborn**

Islamist extremism

Islamist extremists are equally adept at exploiting contentious issues, with the Gaza conflict and wider Middle East instability proving a significant recruitment boon. Across Sunni, Shia and other traditions, Islamist extremists reject mainstream theology in favour of an ideology positing eternal struggle between Islam and disbelief, legitimising violence — including against other Muslims — against those who don't support a global Islamic state.[43] Islamist extremist campaigns in support of Palestine have historically masked hostility to the West, promoted antisemitism and glorification of terrorism, aiming, like the far right, to destabilise Britain's institutions.



Shia-aligned UK Islamist extremist source on X claims that the Al Quds march in London was banned due to Zionist influence, and claims that the UK is occupied by a 'racist, genocidal state'.

The Muslim Brotherhood has been a key vector, with a Cameron-era review finding a significant footprint within the Muslim community.[44] A similar conclusion was echoed by a more recent French review.[45] In the UK, the Brotherhood's primary goal is ideological and institutional dominance within Muslim communities and government, public bodies and civil society.[46] Analysis of 6,000 pieces of "mindset material" held by 100 convicted UK terrorists (85 Islamists) shows clear Brotherhood links,[47] with antisemitism, rooted in claims that Jews conspired behind Western colonialist expansion foundational to its ideology.[48]

Islamist extremists have capitalised on widespread and on often legitimate anger toward Israel's actions in Gaza and broader policies of the Netanyahu government. Hundreds of demonstrations have been held in many UK cities, attended by tens of thousands including far left and Islamist activists. While the majority of protesters do not subscribe to far-left or Islamist extremist ideologies, some of the demonstrations held have included placards and chants supporting proscribed terrorist groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah; calling for the destruction of Israel such as the "from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" chant, as well as advocating violence, including "globalise the intifada". The marches, some of them held at or near Jewish communal centres and places of worship, have been described as hateful against Jews.[49]

Our monitoring shows Islamist extremist communications are structured around persistent, interlocking frames — Gaza, Iran-Israel escalation, Middle East instability, religious content and antisemitic conspiracy — rather than discrete topics. A consistent throughline positions the UK and allies as hostile to Muslims globally, framed as genocide or systemic oppression and amplified during escalations. Antisemitism recurs both explicitly around Gaza and as a broader conspiratorial framework about Jewish or "Zionist" control of governments, media and institutions. This was illustrated by the October 2025 Manchester synagogue attack, which triggered a communications spike but was widely reframed by Islamist extremist sources as a "false flag" or Gaza distraction.

Beyond terrorist-aligned actors, a softer but influential layer of UK-based Islamist networks avoids advocating violence but mainstreams adjacent narratives around Islamophobia, civil liberties and state overreach, particularly opposition to the Prevent counter-terrorism framework.

While superficially being miles apart ideologically, it is clear that when it comes to shared narratives involving hate, conspiracies and anti-West sentiment there is alignment between far-right and Islamist extremist ecosystems online.

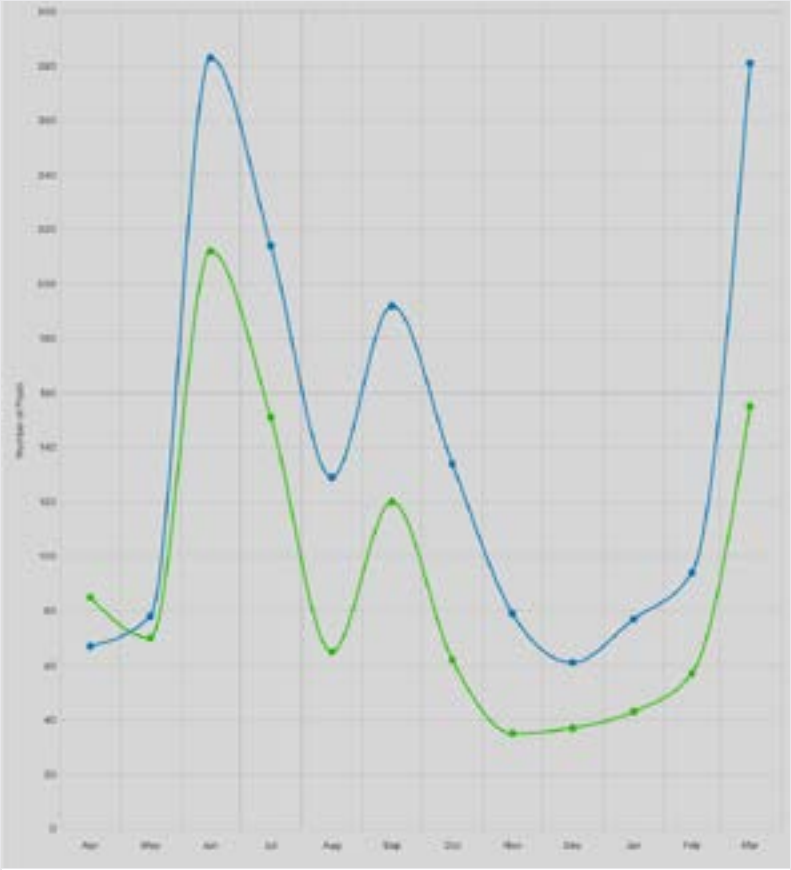


FIGURE 6.3

Communications of Islamist extremist (blue) and far-right extremist (green) ecosystems containing antisemitic rhetoric from 31 Mar 2025 to 31 Mar 2026. Both surge at key moments throughout the reporting period, in particular during the 12-day war between Iran and Israel in June 2025, and the war between Iran, the US and Israel in March 2026.

The far-left

Far-left extremism is comparatively less understood, typically combining vanguardism (elite-led revolutionary uprising), anti-imperialism rooted in antisemitic "international financier" tropes, and anti-capitalist, anti-democratic hostility to the West and Israel.[50] Like Islamist extremists, the far left has mobilised chiefly around Gaza, mapped onto an anti-Zionist, anti-Western worldview, with the cost-of-living crisis a shared mobilising grievance across both far left and far right.

The Walney Review categorised Palestine Action within the anti-Israel, far-left subculture.[51] Over a five-year campaign, the group was involved in at least 356 incidents, with 118 activists convicted of criminal offences (2020–2024) for attacks on Israel-linked British firms, hosting direct-action "training days" and costing government and defence-equipment firms an estimated £55mn.

Source on Telegram describes the 'entire media industry' in the West as 'infiltrated by Zionists'.

The far left has similarly exploited climate change concerns. While most participants in disruptive environmental action hold legitimate concerns, groups such as Extinction Rebellion and Just Stop Oil have used law-breaking and mass disruption tactics that have caused widespread damage, with links identified between this ecosystem and extremist anti-Israel activism.[52]

Conclusion

The picture that emerges from this chapter is not one of isolated threats but of a mutually reinforcing ecosystem. Hostile states like Russia and Iran are not simply passive observers of Britain's internal divisions — they are active participants, treating the country's frayed social contract as an opportunity to be cultivated rather than a domestic matter to be left alone. By blurring the line between state and non-state action, both regimes have found in Britain's far-right and Islamist extremist milieus a low-cost, deniable means of pursuing strategic aims that would be far riskier to pursue through conventional statecraft.

What makes this dynamic especially corrosive is the genuine overlap between externally driven narratives and homegrown grievance. Russian and Iranian-aligned messaging does not need to manufacture division from nothing; it succeeds because it can graft itself onto real anxieties — over immigration, integration, foreign policy, and the perceived failures of British institutions — and push them toward extremist conclusions. The same trigger events that mobilise domestic extremists are the ones hostile states move quickest to amplify, meaning foreign interference and homegrown radicalisation should increasingly be understood as two expressions of the same vulnerability rather than separate problems requiring separate responses.

This chapter also underscores that extremism in Britain today is neither confined to one ideological tradition nor cleanly separable from legitimate public debate. Far-right, Islamist and far-left movements each exploit distinct but structurally similar grievances — immigration and identity, foreign policy and religious solidarity, inequality and climate anxiety — and each risks dragging legitimate concern into extremist territory when trust in democratic institutions is already weak. The involvement of large numbers of people with genuine, non-extremist motivations in movements shaped or steered by extremists is itself a symptom of the broken social contract explored elsewhere in this report.

The implication for policymakers is that resilience against hostile state interference and resilience against domestic extremism cannot be treated as separate policy tracks. Addressing the enabling environment — rebuilding trust in institutions, ensuring fair and consistent enforcement, and closing the space in which foreign and domestic actors alike exploit unresolved grievances — is as much a national security imperative as it is a matter of social cohesion.

07

CHAPTER 07

Gaps in Current Government Approaches

What Whitehall's strategies get right about the threat to cohesion and trust — and where policy has yet to catch up with the problem.

Over the years numerous reports and independent reviews have evidenced gaps in Whitehall's approach to dealing with extremism, declining social cohesion and weakening democratic resilience. The Khan Review (2024) made clear that many local authorities lacked the capability, resources and expertise to deal with threats they were dealing with on a frequent basis.[53] These include extremism, support for disinformation and conspiracy theories, political intimidation and harassment and declining institutional trust. So severe were some of these challenges, it was causing democratic disruption in some local authorities and impeding the functioning of local authorities to carry out their democratic mandate.

These local authorities did not feel central government provided the training, guidance and support they required. This was largely due to a lack of any national strategic approach. The Khan Review identified gaps in Whitehall's approach including countering extremist narratives, strengthening social cohesion and democratic resilience. Neither the National Risk Register or the National Resilience Framework adequately addressed the chronic cohesion and democratic threats the Review identified.

Today many of these gaps continue to persist.

The National Security Strategy (2025) states that adversaries: "threaten societal cohesion and seek to erode public trust through the spread of disinformation, malign use of social media and stoking tensions between generations, genders and ethnic groups".[54] Disinformation campaigns, social media manipulation, attempts to polarise society and attacks on trust and democratic institutions are recognised as tools employed by actors to harm our democracy.

While it is the case the Strategy repeatedly refers to societal cohesion, public trust, democratic interference and threats to democracy and the UK's way of life, the diagnosis is far stronger than the prescription. A strategic framework is presented rather than a programme of action. There are comparatively few institutional, operational or policy mechanisms aimed at rebuilding trust, countering narrative warfare or addressing deeper causes of societal fragmentation.

The National Resilience Action Plan (2025) is principally a civil contingencies and preparedness document, concerned with how government, infrastructure operators, communities and citizens withstand shocks.[55] It contains quite detailed implementation measures including risk assessment reforms, resilience standards, public-sector governance, exercises and community engagement. However there are almost none aimed specifically at narrative warfare, disinformation ecosystems, democratic resilience, ideological extremism, rebuilding trust or preventing a breakdown in the social contract.

The Action Plan assumes that stronger institutional and community resilience will help society absorb these pressures, but it does not explicitly treat them as primary policy problems. In contrast, the National Security Strategy diagnoses attacks on trust and social cohesion much more clearly but provides fewer implementation mechanisms. Together, the two documents suggest that the Government sees societal fragmentation as a security concern, but has not yet developed a comprehensive policy architecture for countering it.

The Strategic Defence Review 2025 (SDR) addresses hybrid warfare, sub-threshold aggression and a whole-of-society approach.[56] The SDR states that the UK is already subject to daily attacks involving cyber operations, espionage, information manipulation, attacks on critical infrastructure and efforts that challenge social cohesion. Russia and other adversaries are described as combining military and non-military instruments to weaken societies.

The Review repeatedly refers to protecting democratic values, social cohesion, public resilience and rebuilding connections between defence and society. Information manipulation is repeatedly identified as a component of hostile activity and hybrid warfare. It emphasises the blurring between state and non-state threats. The Review recognises that adversaries use information operations to undermine societies and economies. It links these campaigns to broader attacks on social cohesion.

It argues that defence must adopt a whole of society approach, drawing lessons from Nordic and Baltic models of total defence. The UK population is viewed as part of national resilience rather than merely passive recipients of security.

Among the three documents, the Strategic Defence Review goes furthest in recognising hybrid conflict and the importance of societal resilience. It explicitly acknowledges that adversaries conduct information manipulation and seek to challenge social cohesion. It also contains significantly more implementation mechanisms than the National Security Strategy.

However, like the National Security Strategy and the Resilience Action Plan, the SDR stops short of developing a comprehensive framework for narrative warfare, counter disinformation, democratic resilience, societal trust, prevention of civic fragmentation and the renewal of the social contract.

Across all three documents, the threat to cohesion and trust is recognised, but the policy response remains concentrated on military, cyber and institutional resilience rather than on the social and informational foundations of democracy itself.

The Protecting What Matters (2025) action plan seeks to strengthen and protect social cohesion and counter extremism.[57] The Counter Extremism strategy (2015)[58] was scrapped in 2021 with nothing replacing it and there had been no concerted or strategic action plan for many years to build social cohesion or to develop resilience against threats that were eroding it as evidenced in the Khan Review.

Numerous reports have criticised the lack of a coherent or strategic counter extremism plan. Gaps in legislation that fall just below existing counter terrorism legislation, first outlined in 2021 continue to persist.[59] While there are overlaps, extremism and its harms are frequently conflated with terrorism. Countering extremist narratives and conspiracy theories that increasingly are becoming mainstreaming are not being countered strategically or effectively. The failure to have understood the societal and democratic threat from extremism has been a dereliction of duty to our democracy and security.

Protecting What Matters attempts to treat cohesion, trust and belonging as matters of national resilience and explicitly links them to hostile influence, extremism and democratic stability. The plan highlights the rapid economic, technological and demographic changes in the UK in recent years and the growing influence of extremism and geo-political actors in targeting institutions and fermenting division. It is also one of the very few documents that makes the case for 'resetting the social contract'. The government rightly argue that 'focus on social cohesion can sometimes seem like a 'nice to have', but a significant body of evidence shows that not only is it vital to the wellbeing of people across the country, but a key tool of national resilience in the face of a more uncertain world'.

Yet despite this declaration, Protecting What Matters has been criticised for not meeting the scale of the challenge the UK now faces and is continuing to take a dated and disjointed approach across government departments as opposed to taking a more centrally co-ordinated strategy. The APPG on Counter Extremism for example notes that the Action Plan does not go far enough in rising to the worsening threat the UK now faces.

The APPG on Counter Extremism's assessment of Protecting What Matters[60]

> *"...it could have provided a much needed strategic and joined up approach where interrelated challenges of rising extremism, eroding social cohesion, declining trust in institutions, increasing state threats and declining democratic resilience all play a part in eroding our democracy. The plan does not convey an understanding of the depth, complexity and severity of this challenge and will be limited in meeting what is being considered an existential crisis for British democracy. The UK is in the midst of a degraded information ecosystem contaminated with dis/misinformation, alongside an increasing spread of extremist beliefs and conspiracy theories, low levels of trust in democratic institutions and disillusionment with how democracy is delivering for Britons. Such an environment is exploited by both domestic extremists and hostile state and non-state actors, all of which pose a serious risk to our liberal democratic society and requires nothing less than a long term and dynamic whole of society strategy that works across departments and society".*
>
> **— APPG on Counter Extremism**

Finally the UK's Defending Democracy Taskforce (DDTF) is the UK Government's principal cross-government mechanism for protecting the integrity of the UK's democratic system.[61] Established in 2022 and operating under a renewed mandate, it is chaired by the Security Minister and brings together departments, intelligence agencies, law enforcement and electoral bodies to coordinate responses to threats against democracy.

Its main functions include protecting democratic institutions and processes by co-ordinating action to safeguard elections and electoral infrastructure; countering foreign interference and cyber-attacks.

The DDTF's remit is much narrower than the Nordic concept of Total Defence. Most of its focus is geared towards election security, foreign interference and the protection of elected representatives. This is also apparent from guidance produced by the National Cyber Security Centre where the focus is on protecting democratic processes and elections from adversaries.[62]

However the Taskforce's focus on protecting democracy is limited and does not seek to protect democratic freedoms and norms. When for example fifteen per cent of Britons believe it is acceptable to use physical violence against someone because of their political beliefs in at least some situations, it is clear this is a democratic threat that should be countered. Yet this is not the remit of the Taskforce.

Rethinking democratic defence and resilience

'Democratic resilience' and 'democratic defence' overlap substantially, but they are not identical. Democratic resilience refers to the capacity of democratic institutions, communities and citizens to absorb shocks, adapt and recover while preserving democratic norms, legitimacy and functionality. The emphasis is largely defensive and absorptive.

Democratic defence includes resilience but goes further and implies that democracy itself is an object that requires active protection against hostile actors and systemic threats. It is a whole-of-society approach to actively protecting and strengthening democratic institutions, social cohesion and public trust against internal and external threats. It includes deterrence, disruption, prevention, countering hostile influence, protection of democratic culture and identity, the breakdown of the social contract, societal fragmentation and attacks on national identity and shared values. It includes mobilisation of society and whole-of-government and whole-of-society responses.

National security is increasingly shaped not only by military threats, but by attacks directed at the social, civic and democratic foundations that enable societies to function. Hostile states, extremists and transnational networks increasingly seek to weaken democratic societies by exploiting grievances, amplifying division, eroding trust and undermining confidence in institutions, truth and shared values. In an age of strategic competition, social cohesion, public trust and democratic resilience are themselves assets of national security.

The most effective means of weakening democratic societies often lie below the threshold of armed conflict. Disinformation, foreign information manipulation, online radicalisation, identity-based polarisation and attacks on democratic institutions are designed to fracture consensus, weaken the social contract and reduce societal resilience. These pressures are amplified by technological change, information disorder and declining confidence in traditional institutions.[63]

Democratic defence recognises that the protection of a nation's security depends not only on military strength, but also on the resilience of its democratic institutions, civic culture and social fabric. Just as governments invest in military capability and critical infrastructure, they must also invest in the civic, social and institutional assets that sustain democratic societies. Societies characterised by trust, strong community connections, inclusive institutions and shared democratic values are better able to withstand external interference, extremism and periods of crisis.

Nordic Total Defence and NATO Democratic Resilience

The Nordic concept of Total Defence recognises that national security depends not only on military capability but on the resilience of society as a whole.[64] Originating in Finland, Sweden and other Nordic states, Total Defence integrates government, armed forces, businesses, civil society and citizens in a shared effort to prepare for and withstand crises, hybrid threats and armed conflict. It emphasises societal cohesion, public preparedness, protection of critical infrastructure, information resilience and the maintenance of democratic values and institutions.

Similarly, NATO's approach to democratic resilience recognises that security increasingly depends on the ability of democratic societies to resist coercion, disinformation, cyber-attacks, foreign interference and other forms of hybrid warfare.[65] Democratic resilience seeks to strengthen public trust, safeguard democratic processes and institutions, protect critical infrastructure and ensure that governments, communities and citizens are capable of sustaining social cohesion and national unity during periods of crisis or conflict.

Together, these approaches reflect a modern understanding of national security in which military preparedness, societal resilience, democratic integrity and public trust are mutually reinforcing components of a nation's overall defensive capability.

The UK lacks a whole of society approach to democratic defence

Taken together, the National Security Strategy, Strategic Defence Review, National Resilience Action Plan, Protecting What Matters, the Defending Democracy Taskforce recognise that:

- democratic societies are vulnerable to hybrid threats;
- hostile states exploit social divisions;
- disinformation and information manipulation matter;
- social cohesion is a strategic asset;
- whole-of-society resilience is important;
- extremism and hate are not purely security issues;
- resilience must involve communities, institutions and citizens.

Compared with a decade ago, there has been a significant shift in official thinking. Government increasingly recognises that attacks on trust, identity, cohesion and democratic legitimacy are themselves national security challenges. There is now an emerging “democratic resilience” agenda but the system still appears fragmented and root causes are underdeveloped. The biggest gap is the failure to recognise that declining trust and social fragmentation should primarily be seen as problems in themselves and not just as vulnerabilities to be exploited by malign actors.

Information resilience remains surprisingly weak and democratic defence is institutionally thin. Extremism and conspiracy ecosystems fall between departmental boundaries and there is very little if any counter extremism narrative work currently taking place. Furthermore, no single framework addresses the convergence of extremist narratives, conspiracy movements, hostile foreign amplification, online communities, anti-democratic mobilisation and social grievances. These phenomena are increasingly interconnected, but UK policy remains compartmentalised and disjointed which is contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the problem.

The UK does not appear to lack awareness. However, there remains a gap between diagnosis and doctrine. At present, the UK appears to possess multiple strands of policy that together amount to the beginnings of a democratic resilience architecture, but not yet a mature system of democratic defence comparable to Nordic Total Defence or NATO’s more developed resilience concepts.

The underlying paradox running through all these strategies is that they increasingly acknowledge that social cohesion, public trust and democratic legitimacy are strategic assets, yet the institutions and policies devoted to protecting those assets remain much less developed than those devoted to military power, cyber security and physical infrastructure.

In other words, the UK has begun to recognise that democracy itself requires defence, but it has not yet fully organised the state around that proposition. This must change to ensure the UK has the full capability it requires to withstand a growing threat to our democracy and national security that is emerging both within our own society and from external factors and activity.

Polling data: Who will stand up to extremism?

The Government's 'Protecting what Matters' action plan calls for a whole of society response and outlines some of the actions the government intends to take to counter extremism. But do Britons view it as their responsibility too? Our polling reveals very few would take individual action in response.

The action Britons are most willing to take is alerting a teacher if a child expresses extremist views, with 42 per cent saying they would do so and 28 per cent saying they would not. In every other scenario, willingness to act drops considerably. Around a third say they would challenge someone on their views directly (38 per cent), inform their partner or spouse (34 per cent) or alert the person's family (33 per cent), but in each case, roughly an equal share say they would not, with a further third neither likely nor unlikely to act, or simply unsure. The pattern is consistent: unless a child is involved, only around one in three Britons is likely to respond to extremism in any way.

Few Britons would personally act against extremism

% who say they would be likely to take each action in response to extremism

Source: More in Common for UKEDRC, March 2026.

Who will stand up to extremism? (continued)

There are really two key factors determining how one reacts to extremist speech: age and political engagement. In most circumstances, the percentage of young people who say they would intervene is roughly or exactly the same as the percentage of older people who say they would not. However, it should be acknowledged that this does not necessarily demonstrate an increased tolerance for extremism among older Britons; it may simply signify an increased aversion to conflict.

Meanwhile, when comparing among political engagement, the difference is striking. Those who pay a great deal of attention to political news are more than twice as likely to challenge someone to their face, on the phone or via text/social media than those who pay little or no political attention (respectively: 53 per cent to 22 per cent, 30 per cent to 13 per cent and 30 per cent to 11 per cent). Though it should be noted that when it comes to challenging via a phone call or text and social media, even the most politically engaged are more likely to say they would not intervene than that they would (30 per cent to 51 per cent and 30 per cent to 54 per cent respectively). They are also twice as likely to report the offender, whether to the authorities or to a family member, partner or employer.

To get a full sense of how important political engagement is to how someone reacts to extremist speech, it is best to take the group that reported being least likely to challenge someone's extremist views (Conservative voters) and see whether the most politically engaged of these voters are still unlikely to intervene. What emerges is that the most politically engaged Conservative voters are far more likely to challenge someone's extremist views than not (48 per cent to 33 per cent, compared with 34 to 40 per cent of all Conservative voters – a 14 point swing towards intervention). However, age may be an even more important indicator of reaction, with 60 per cent of Conservative voters aged 18-35 saying they would challenge someone to their face versus 24 per cent who would not. In other words, while political engagement drastically increases the likelihood that one will challenge extremist speech, youth is an even more important factor.

It is clear that on an individual basis, tackling extremism cannot be left up to the British public alone and that leadership from government will be required to take a systematic, whole of society approach to addressing this crisis.

08

CHAPTER 08

A Call to Reframe and Reset the Problem

Five recommendations to address declining social cohesion and democratic resilience as a national security priority.

Recommendations

Drawing on the pioneering research set out across this report — the polling, focus groups and twelve-month extremism monitoring — the following five recommendations set out the actions now needed to counter extremism and rebuild democratic resilience in the UK.

1

Reframe the Challenge as a National Security and Democratic Defence Priority

This report makes the case that extremism, social cohesion, strengthening of the social contract and democratic resilience must be formally designated as core national security and democratic defence priorities. This shift must be reflected in the National Security Strategy and in how resources are allocated across government.

2

Develop and Disseminate Compelling Alternative Narratives

Extremists are winning the narrative war not because their arguments are strong but because efforts to counter and provide alternative narratives are not being prioritised or invested in. A national programme to conceive and disseminate compelling alternative narratives, mobilising the 'silent majority', building alternative in-groups that compete with extremist communities and supporting local and national trusted voices, should be a central pillar of this new approach. Civil society and local communities should be supported and empowered to push back and challenge extremist beliefs. Evidence has demonstrated the effective role Artificial Intelligence can play in countering disinformation in real time and reducing susceptibility to extremist narratives and conspiracy theories. This should be invested in.

3

Mobilise Advocates for Democracy

The state has for too long assumed that democratic and liberal values are self-evidently desirable. Our report demonstrates that this assumption is no longer sustainable. During the Cold War, democratic allies adopted a proactive strategy in defence of democracy best reflected in Reagan's 1982 'Westminster speech' which countered competing Soviet narratives. A similar strategy is required today, where the UK and other democratic nations contest extremist narratives, disseminate new and compelling alternative narratives and bring to bear the lessons of those who lived under authoritarianism.

4

Reform Online Platforms and Build Digital Resilience

Our 12 month extremism monitoring data details the mechanisms by which extremist content achieves mainstream reach. These include the stacking strategy, the role of intermediary amplifiers and the resilience of narrative ecosystems against platform disruption. The Government should acknowledge that the current policy and regulatory framework for digital platforms and Artificial Intelligence is increasingly unsatisfactory. A new strategic approach that reflects their evolving impact on society, democracy and extremism should be developed.

5

Restore Trust Through Agency and Local Collaborative Democracy

The fundamental driver of susceptibility to extremism documented in this paper is the experience of a broken social contract: of being overlooked, unheard and unprotected. Restoring trust requires giving people more genuine agency in decision-making at the local level, repairing the relationship between citizens and public services and rebuilding civic education. Collaborative democracy, both done online and offline, is essential at a local level and on complex policy areas. Good practice has been documented and should be emulated especially across local government.

In terms of collaborative technology, the work of Audrey Tang is an example of good practice that can be adopted by UK state institutions and organisations.

09

CHAPTER 09

Conclusions

Why democratic resilience is a precondition for national security

The evidence assembled in this report does not describe a series of discrete problems that can be addressed in isolation. It describes a single, interlocking condition: a democracy whose foundational bargain with its citizens has broken down and whose institutions have not yet adapted to treat that breakdown as the first order national security threat the data shows it to be.

The starting point is trust. A majority of Britons believe the social contract between citizen and state no longer holds and this belief is one of the single strongest predictors of democratic satisfaction in the entire dataset — stronger than income, age or party. Crucially, it is not reducible to economic hardship: even among the most financially comfortable, more than half believe the contract is broken. This points to a deeper, more structural disillusionment, one rooted in a sense that governments do not deliver and politicians cannot be trusted. Once that belief takes hold, it does not stay contained. It feeds a "democratic doom loop" in which declining institutional performance fuels distrust, distrust fuels appetite for anti-establishment alternatives and the resulting fragmentation makes the competent governance needed to rebuild trust harder to achieve. A third of the country now believes that institutions obstructing change should simply be ignored.

Into that vacuum of trust, contested narratives about identity, fairness and threat have moved from the margins to the mainstream. Anxiety about national identity is not a fringe sentiment. A majority of Britons hold it and while most of this anxiety is cultural rather than racial, a meaningful minority on all sides show openness to explicitly ethnonationalist or conspiratorial framings. Antisemitism persists as a cross-cutting current that does not map neatly onto left or right, and is found among groups who otherwise share little in common politically or demographically. Perceptions of Muslim integration diverge sharply from Muslim communities' own lived experience, suggesting a widening gap between public perception and social reality that itself becomes a source of grievance on multiple sides.

Our data also reveals a strand of generalised nihilism most visible among younger, digitally native "Sceptical Scrollers" who are disproportionately open to extremist ideas without being able to articulate a specific grievance behind them, suggesting that online radicalisation now operates as a driver in its own right, independent of the conventional demographic and ideological patterns that once explained extremism. At a time when we are seeing growing cases of youth being drawn into extreme violence or supporting mixed, unstable extremist ideologies, this cohort should be examined in greater depth.

These domestic fractures are providing a permissive environment for those that seek to erode and unravel our democracy. Hostile states and non-state actors are deliberately working to widen them, cultivating domestic extremist networks, exploiting flashpoint events and recruiting 'disposable agents' to achieve deniable disruption at low cost. The state's own admission that it was 'flat-footed' during recent moments of crisis is a symptom of a deeper structural gap: Britain has no real-time, whole-of-society infrastructure to track extremism, conspiracy belief and democratic resilience, which means the warning signs catalogued in this report are visible in retrospective research but largely invisible to government in the moment they matter most.

The consequences of inaction are already measurable, not hypothetical. A small but consequential minority of the public has crossed into accepting political violence or active disengagement from democratic norms. Crimes against MPs have more than doubled in under a decade and a third of MPs have considered standing down because of the abuse and intimidation that exists in this climate. Patriotism itself is fragmenting generationally, with younger citizens decoupling democratic participation from civic duty in a way that has no precedent in the post-war polling record.

None of this is irreversible. But it will not reverse on its own and it will not be solved by treating extremism, polarisation and institutional distrust as separate policy verticals to be managed individually. The evidence points to a single underlying condition requiring a single, coordinated response: one that reframes social cohesion and democratic resilience as core national security priorities, that gives government the real-time data infrastructure to see fractures as they emerge rather than after they have hardened and that invests as seriously in rebuilding the social contract as it does in defending the country's borders.

The central message of the evidence is unambiguous: democratic resilience is not a by-product of national security; it is a precondition for it, and a society that loses the capacity to sustain trust, legitimacy and democratic belonging ultimately weakens the very foundations on which its security depends.

Methodology

More In Common

More in Common conducted a nationally representative poll of 4,094 adults in Great Britain between 12 March and 30 March 2026. The results have been weighted according to age/sex interlocked, region, 2024 General Election vote and education level.

More In Common carried out four online focus group discussions in June 2026. Recruitment to the focus groups consisted of the following criteria, and were composed of:

Right-leaning group

Belonged to the Dissenting Disruptor, Rooted Patriot, Traditional Conservative or Sceptical Scroller segments; mixed gender; all identify as White British; all non-graduates; all would currently vote for Reform UK, Restore Britain, or would not vote. Gave the indicated responses to at least two out of the three following questions:

> *Remigration is the idea that migrants — including those who came to the UK legally — should be encouraged or required to return to their countries of origin. To what extent would you support or oppose a remigration policy being introduced in this country? (Strongly support/Somewhat support)*

> *Do you think that the following statement is true or false?: The "Great Reset" announced by the World Economic Forum during the pandemic was a plan to impose a new world order (Definitely true/Probably true)*

> *Please indicate which statement you agree with more, using the 1 to 4 scale below. (1 — The 'Unite the Kingdom' march led by Tommy Robinson was a show of patriotism from people with valid concerns about migration, diversity and the future of the country / 4 — The 'Unite the Kingdom' march led by Tommy Robinson was a nationalist march, attended mostly by extremists and racists)*

Left-leaning group

Mostly Progressive Activists, with one Sceptical Scroller; mixed gender; at least four from an ethnic minority background; at least six have attended university or are current students; all would currently vote Green, Your Party, Plaid Cymru, or for an independent candidate. Gave the indicated responses to at least two out of the three following questions:

> *Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Physical force or harassment is justified if it is done to protect those belonging to minority groups (e.g. ethnic minorities, trans or LGBTQ+ people, religious minorities, etc.) from hate speech or discrimination against them (Strongly agree/somewhat agree)*

> *Which of the following statements about Members of Parliament (MPs) comes closest to your view? Ethnic minority MPs who support stricter migration or asylum laws... (Are always betraying their communities/are not betraying their communities if it's what their constituents want)*

> *Which comes closest to your view about other countries that the UK government would classify as hostile/working against the UK? (It is sometimes acceptable to support them if you disagree with the government/It is always acceptable to support them)*

General group

A mix of all seven segments; mix of genders; five graduates or current students, four without a degree; all voted Labour in 2024.

British Muslim group

All identify as Muslim; at least four under the age of 35; mixed gender; maximum of four graduates; all would currently vote or would consider voting for the Greens, Your Party or an independent candidate or smaller party; from a mix of areas in England.

Yonder

This polling was carried out between 19th – 31st January 2026, sampling 1,300 respondents.

In January 2024 Yonder developed a spectrum of British Muslim opinion based on attitudes towards integration and co-existence in British society, views of other ethnic and religious groups, stances on antisemitic tropes and feelings about protests and extremism. In 2026, Yonder revisited this study and expanded it.

In creating a spectrum of British Muslim public opinion, they took people's responses to questions on the degree of integration with or separation from the rest of British society they desired; support for, acceptance of or opposition to various aspects of equality and freedoms enjoyed by UK citizens; degree of sympathy for or condemnation of terrorist acts; views on the possibility of co-existence with Zionists and Jews; and agreement or disagreement with selected antisemitic tropes.

They then created a composite score giving equal weight to people's answers to these questions and normalised it so that someone who wanted complete separation from British society, opposed all the equality and freedoms presented to them, sympathised strongly with terrorist acts, thought coexisting with any Jews or Zionists impossible and agreed strongly with all the examples of antisemitism presented to them would score 100, and someone who believed in full integration with British society, supported all the equality and freedoms presented to them, condemned strongly terrorist acts, thought coexisting with all Jews or Zionists possible and disagreed strongly with all the examples of antisemitism presented to them would score 0.

With every respondent now having a score, they divided the overall sample into five bands of opinion based on top 20 percent of scores, the next highest 20 percent of scores and so on down to the lowest 20 percent. The third or middle quintile (band) is what they refer to as middle ground Muslim opinion.

METHODOLOGY

Extremism monitor

This analysis, conducted by a third-party supplier, examined the UK extremist landscape between 31 March 2025 and 31 March 2026 using structured analysis of publicly available online content. Data was collected from social media platforms, forums, messaging applications, linked websites, and the X API, with keyword-based Boolean searches used to identify and track relevant narratives and trends. Analysis focused on the scale, evolution, and dissemination of extremist activity and narratives.

Automated collection processes ingested publicly and commercially available data, with sensitive metadata and personally identifiable information (PII) removed prior to analysis. All research was conducted using publicly available information and in accordance with the UK GDPR, the Data Protection Act 2018, and the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA).

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