More in Common

Who Gets to Speak Freely?

Britons' views on freedom of speech

Introducing the Seven Segments of Britain

Introducing the Seven Segments

The British Seven Segments were developed to move beyond traditional left-right or party-based analysis by exploring the deeper psychological, cultural, and value-driven foundations that shape public opinion.
This approach helps explain why political loyalties have fractured and offers a more nuanced understanding of what drives attitudes on issues like immigration, climate, and the economy—enabling more effective engagement with the public across a fragmented political and social landscape.



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Progressive Activists



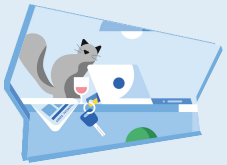
...an outspoken group that is politically engaged and globally minded, championing social justice but feeling alienated from mainstream politics

Incrementalist Left



...a group that leans left and trusts institutions, often stepping back from the news and avoiding politically fraught debates

Established Liberals



... a prosperous group that is confident in institutions, values expertise, and believes the system broadly works

Sceptical Scrollers



...a disengaged group that has lost trust in mainstream institutions and increasingly looks online for sources of truth

Rooted Patriots



...a patriotic group that feels overlooked by elites and wants leaders with common sense to protect local identity

Traditional Conservatives



... a nostalgic group that respects tradition, authority and personal responsibility, while remaining sceptical of rapid change

Dissenting Disruptors



... a frustrated group that craves radical change and backs strong leaders who promise to shake up a broken system

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How do the segments think about free speech?

 **Progressive Activists**	Most likely to say a party's stance on free speech will affect their vote. This segment especially values freedom of the press and the freedom to defend minority groups.
 **Incrementalist Left**	This segment values debate and narrowly says most government restrictions have been good for freedom of speech. They take a more negative stance on calling protests thuggery.
 **Established Liberals**	This group is supportive of freedom of speech but slightly less motivated by it than others. Broadly thinks recent restrictions on protest have been a good thing for freedom of speech.
 **Sceptical Scrollers**	The least engaged group and the least motivated by free speech. Broadly think all recent free speech measures have been good for free speech, though not references to 'hate marches' or 'thuggery'.
 **Rooted Patriots**	The only segment whose most valued aspect of free speech is the freedom to speak with friends, family or colleagues without falling out. Broadly think most recent restrictions on protest are good for free speech.
 **Traditional Conservatives**	More likely than most segments to value the freedom to express views that some people see as unpopular and make jokes about any issue. Think some protest restrictions are good for free speech but others bad.
 **Dissenting Disruptors**	Overwhelmingly believe the government only protects speech that it agrees with and think the political left is shutting down free speech in Britain today. Also in favour of expressing controversial opinions.

Most voters say they would take into account a party's position on free speech at an election

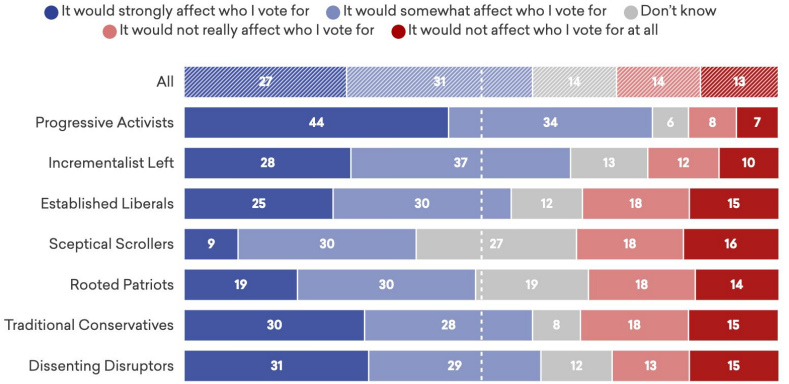
A majority of Britons say a political party's position on free speech would affect how they vote at a general election (58 per cent, including 27 per cent who say it would strongly affect who they vote for).

A majority of supporters of **all major parties** say this, as do a majority of **every age bracket.**

Progressive Activists (78 per cent) and the Incrementalist Left (65 per cent) are the most likely segments to say that a party's position on the issue would affect how they vote. Contrary to the narrative that free speech is an issue that animates the right more than the left, these findings show that left leaning voters are driven by the issue too.

A party's stance on free speech has more impact on how left-leaning segments vote than right-leaning segments

How much, if at all, would a political party's position on free speech affect how you vote at a general election?



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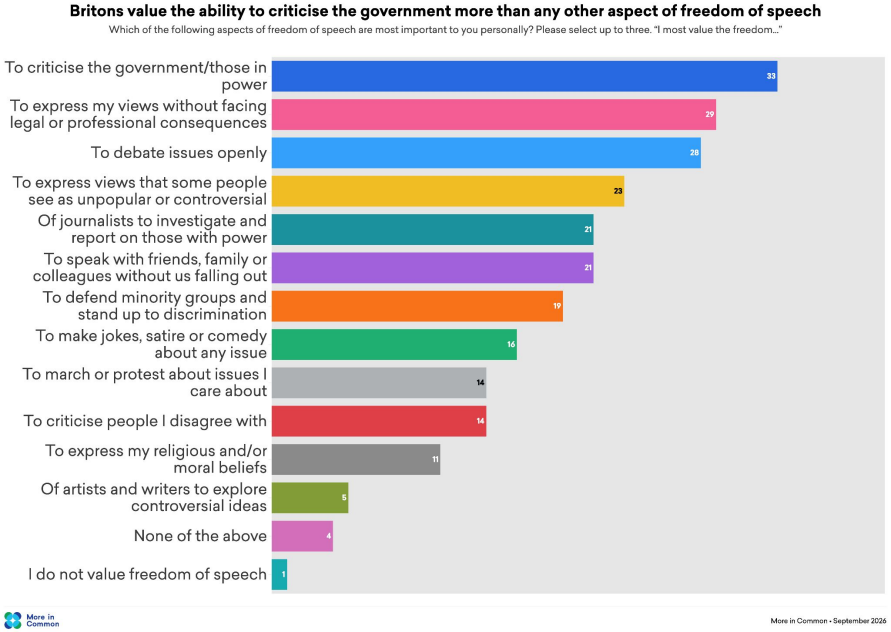
Holding the powerful accountable is the most valued element of free speech

The aspect of freedom of speech that Britons most value is the ability to criticise the government/those in power (33 per cent).

In focus group discussions, participants across the political spectrum highlighted how, in their view, this is what separates the UK from more repressive states around the globe. Participants who came to Britain from such countries, or whose family members did so, were particularly keen to highlight this. Participants thought that free speech was so inherent to Britain's identity that we sometimes take it for granted.

I think freedom of speech is the most important thing to stop an authoritarian government or corporation from taking over all rights.

Faisal, 26, PA, Unemployed



Britons value debate – and fear it being stifled

The next most valued aspects are the **freedom to express views without legal or professional consequences** (29 per cent) and to **debate issues openly** (28 per cent). **In fact, nearly two in three Britons (63 per cent) lean toward the view that it is important to discuss every topic, no matter how strongly we disagree.**

However, **most Britons (62 per cent) believe it is becoming more difficult to disagree in Britain today.** In focus group conversations, left- and right-wing participants both emphasised the importance of debate and hearing views that don't align with your own – something both groups feared was being lost.

They also highlighted how a perceived **fear of negative professional, social or legal repercussions has caused some Britons, especially on the political right, to not air their views**. It indicates a gap between what Britons say they want – open debate – and the current environment, which some find stifling.

> *I won't voice my opinion. I'll just keep it to myself just for fear of losing my job, basically.*
>
> **Nick, 43, Dissenting Disruptor, Regional Manager**

> *I think what people often forget nowadays that the freedom of speech originally started as the freedom to debate, essentially, and I think that's how it's evolved over time.*
>
> **Charli, 30, Progressive Activist, Risk Officer**

> *You're not going to please everyone with your opinion. And I think that's where probably freedom of speech comes in is that you can find something offensive, you just don't have to act and be violent towards it...when you are debating, I think that's fine.*
>
> **Moeen, 29, Incrementalist Left, Civil Engineer**

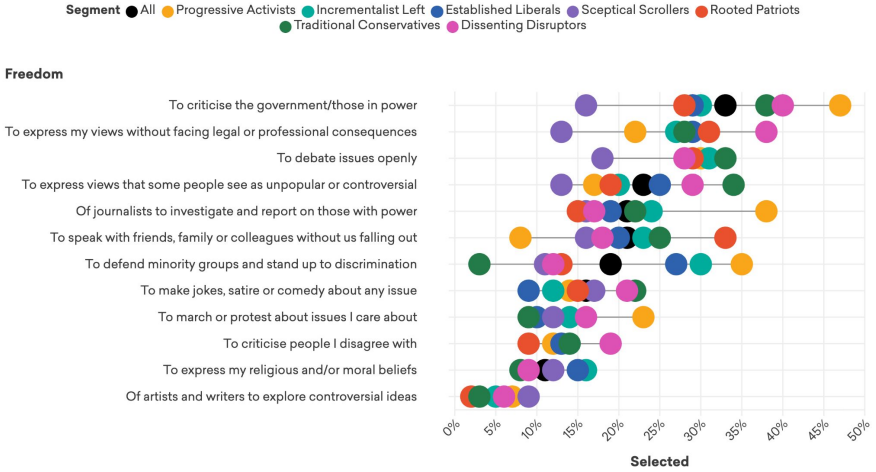
Labour's key segments vary in the aspects of free speech they prize most

Progressive Activists' second and third most valued elements are the **freedom of journalists to investigate and report on those with power (38 per cent)** and **the freedom to defend minority groups and stand up to discrimination** (35 per cent). They're also more likely than all other segments to value the freedom to march or protest about issues they care about (23 per cent). Meanwhile, **the Incrementalist Left most value the freedom to debate issues openly** (31 per cent).

For **Rooted Patriots, it is the freedom to speak with friends, family or colleagues without falling out** (33 per cent). Meanwhile, **Traditional Conservatives** and **Dissenting Disruptors** are more likely than other segments to **value the freedom to express views that some people see as unpopular or controversial and to make jokes or comedy about any issue.**

Segments value varied aspects of freedom of speech, from the freedom to debate, protest and protect minorities on the left, to the freedom to joke and say controversial things on the right

Which of the following aspects of freedom of speech are most important to you personally? Please select up to three. I most value the freedom...

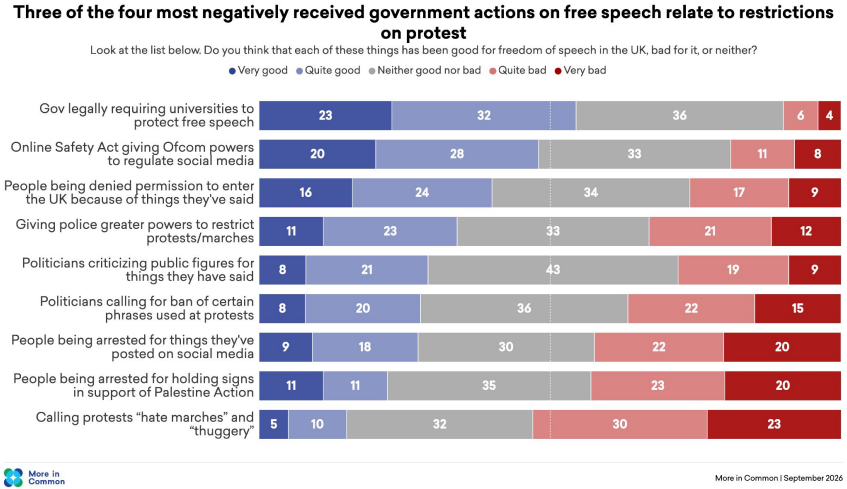


Labour's progressive base is divided over the party's actions on free speech

The left flank of Labour's voter coalition is split over the party's actions on free speech since coming into government.

Restrictions on protest are seen as overwhelmingly bad for free speech by Progressive Activists, while the Incrementalist Left is split. For example, politicians calling for certain phrases used at protests to be banned is viewed as bad for free speech by Progressive Activists, but the Incrementalist Left are more likely to say it is good. The same is true for denying people entry into the UK to speak because of things they've said.

On giving police greater powers to restrict protests, the Incrementalist Left broadly sees this as good for free speech (42 vs 25 per cent) while Progressive Activists do not (14 vs 61 per cent). **Where both wings agree is being opposed to arrests for people holding signs saying they support Palestine Action - a majority of each segment sees this as bad for free speech in the UK.**



Labour and Reform voters see the government's record on free speech differently

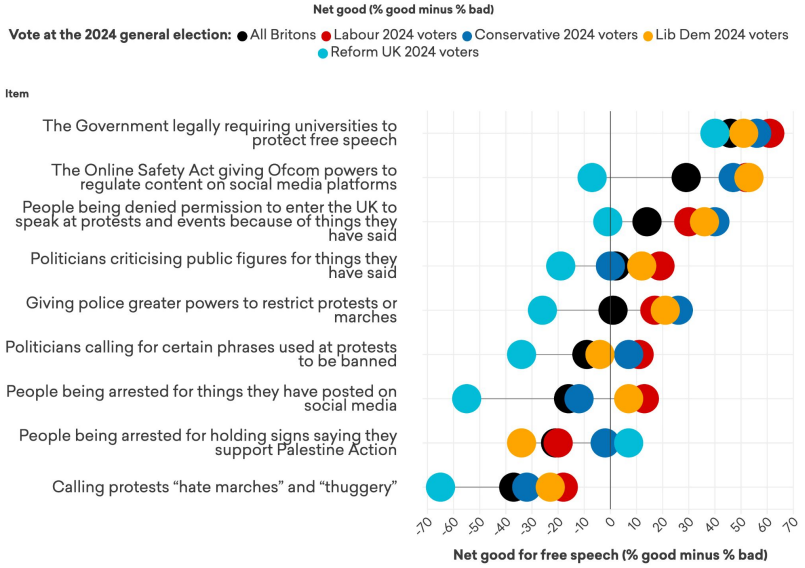
Voters of all major parties think it is good for free speech that universities are legally required to protect free speech and bad for free speech that politicians have called protests “hate marches” and “thuggery”.

For every measure tested - other than “hate marches” and Palestine Action - **Labour 2024 voters are more likely to see Labour’s record as mostly good for free speech in the UK.** Meanwhile, 2024 Reform voters are more likely to see almost every government measure as bad for free speech - though particularly those relating to protest. Reform voters see giving police greater powers to restrict protests or marches, politicians calling for certain phrases used at protests to be banned, politicians criticizing public figures for things they have said, the ‘hate marches’ line, and people being arrested for things they have said online as bad for free speech. However, **they think the arrests over Palestine Action signs are *good* for free speech.**

> *I don't think people should be arrested for saying their opinions, even if I massively disagree with them.*
>
> **Charli, 30, Progressive Activist, Risk Officer**

2024 Labour voters are consistently supportive of most government measures on free speech; Reform 2024 voters are consistently opposed – but these voters invert on Palestine Action

Do you think that each of these things has been good for freedom of speech in the UK, bad for it, or neither?
By vote at the 2024 general election



Labour and Reform voters see the government's record on free speech differently

Looking at the difference in response to these policies among Labour 2024 voters and current Labour supporters, the actions that have a more than five point difference are:

- Giving police greater powers to restrict protests or marches, which current Labour supporters are more likely to say is good for freedom of speech than 2024 Labour voters (25 vs 17 per cent)
- Calling protests “hate marches” and “thuggery”, which current Labour supporters are more likely to say is bad for freedom of speech than 2024 Labour voters (-10 vs -18 per cent)
- Opposition to arrests over holding Palestine Action signs, which current Labour supporters are more likely to say is *bad* for freedom of speech than 2024 Labour voters (-27 vs -20 per cent)

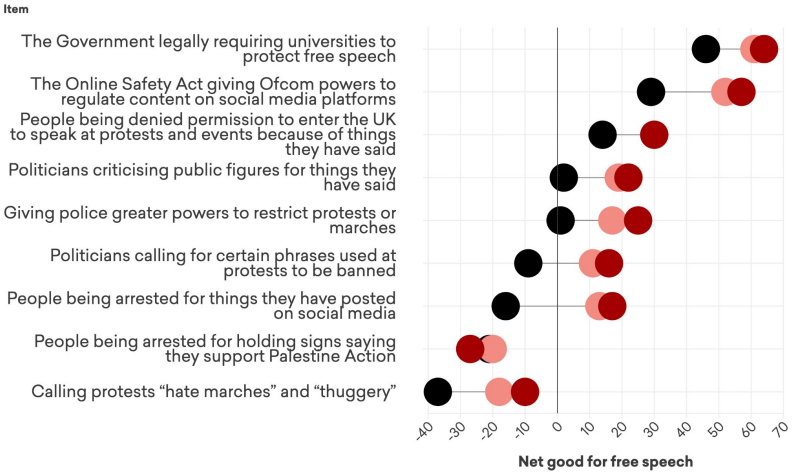
Labour’s current voters are demonstrably more likely to think the party’s approach is good for free speech than its 2024 coalition. For every measure other than arrests over Palestine Action signs, current Labour supporters are as or more likely to think it is good for free speech than 2024 Labour voters.

Labour’s current supporters are slightly more positive about restrictions on speech than its 2024 coalition, except on Palestine Action

Do you think that each of these things has been good for freedom of speech in the UK, bad for it, or neither? 2024 Labour voters vs current Labour supporters

Net good (% good minus % bad)

Group: All Britons Labour 2024 voters Current Labour supporters



Andy Burnham is not viewed as especially more supportive of free speech than Keir Starmer

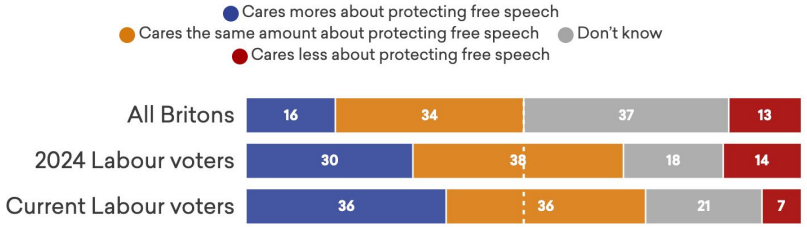
There's no consensus as to whether Andy Burnham cares more about protecting free speech than Keir Starmer. The wider public is practically evenly split. Meanwhile, **30 per cent of 2024 Labour voters think that Burnham cares more than Starmer about protecting free speech, while 14 per cent think he cares less,** and 38 per cent think he cares the same amount – notably above average.

Current Labour voters are slightly more likely to think Burnham cares more, with 36 per cent saying this against just 7 per cent who say he cares less. 36 per cent think he cares the same amount, again above average.

Ultimately, while the public see Burnham as a reset to Starmer on many issues, **the British public principally view him as a continuity candidate on free speech,** as do current and 2024 Labour voters.

Current Labour voters are slightly more likely than 2024 Labour voters to think Andy Burnham cares more about free speech than Keir Starmer

Compared to Keir Starmer, do you think Andy Burnham cares more about protecting free speech, less, or cares the same amount?



The public sees the government as selectively protecting free speech

> *They're very selective on who they let protest…So what's right and what's wrong?*
> **Karl, 38, Dissenting Disruptor, Project Manager**

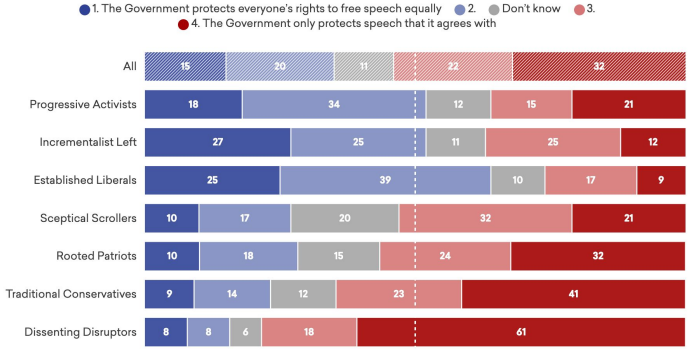
A majority of Britons believe the government only protects speech that it agrees with (54 per cent). A third of the public believe this in the strongest possible terms (32 per cent).

This divides cleanly along left-right lines. A majority of Progressive Activists, the Incrementalist Left and Established Liberals think the government protects everyone's rights to free speech equally - the two segments who are most likely to say they factor a party's stance on free speech into their vote (Progressive Activists and Incrementalist Left) think the government protects all free speech equally.

However, a majority of Sceptical Scrollers, Rooted Patriots, Traditional Conservatives and Dissenting Disruptors think they don't. This is important given Rooted Patriots and Sceptical Scrollers are the principal segments of Labour's 2024 coalition to have drifted to Reform. Current Reform supporters are the most likely to believe the government only protects speech it agrees with (74 per cent).

Left-leaning segments think the government protects all free speech rights equally; right-leaning segments think it only protects speech it agrees with

Which of these best describes your view of the UK Government's approach to free speech at the moment? Place yourself on the scale.



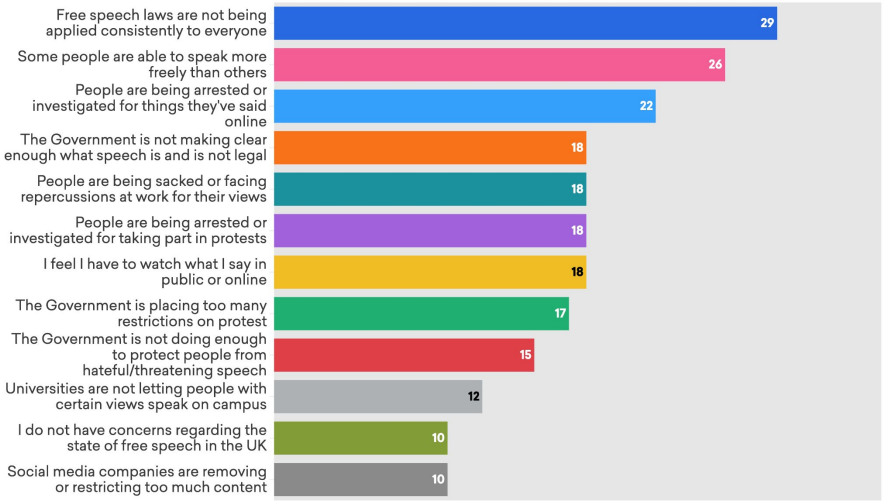
The public is concerned that laws around free speech aren't applied equally

A sense of 'selective protection' came through frequently when asked what concerns, if any, respondents have regarding the state of free speech in the UK. Much of the public seems to believe that **there is one set of rules for one group of people and another set of rules for another.**

The **two principal concerns** of the public regarding the state of free speech in the UK are that **free speech laws are not being applied consistently to everyone** (29 per cent) and that **some people are able to speak more freely than others** (26 per cent). The notion that free speech laws are not being applied consistently to everyone is the **number one concern among voters of all major parties.** That, or the notion that some people are able to speak more freely than others, is **the number one concern of all segments too.**

Britons' principal concern around free speech is that laws are not applied consistently

What concerns, if any, do you have regarding the state of free speech in the UK? Please choose up to three reasons from the list below.



Inconsistent application of free speech laws concerns the public

There are differences between the concerns of Labour's progressive and more moderate base. **Progressive Activists are the least likely group to feel they have to watch what they say in public or online (7 per cent). Rooted Patriots are more than three times as worried by this (23 percent).** Meanwhile, **Progressive Activists are more than twice as likely as Sceptical Scrollers to worry about restrictions and arrests around protests**, and eight points more likely to worry about this than Rooted Patriots.

This relates to the aspects of free speech each segment values. **Progressive Activists value protest and worry about anything that might be perceived to threaten it. Rooted Patriots are more like to value and be concerned by the social and interpersonal fallout of free speech restrictions.** Labour must balance both concerns to pull back Reform switchers.

Both ends of the political spectrum worry most that free speech laws aren't applied equally

What concerns, if any, do you have regarding the state of free speech in the UK? Please choose up to three reasons from the list below.



Threats to freedom of speech are seen as coming from across the political spectrum

The public is divided as to precisely who, if anyone, is putting pressure on people not to express their views in Britain today.

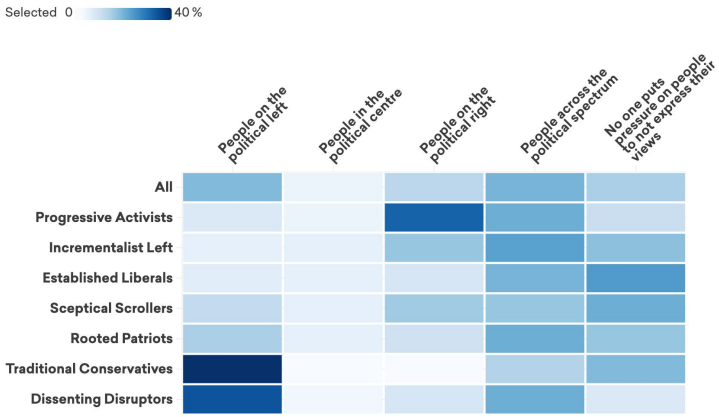
A plurality think it is people across the political spectrum (20 per cent), while 19 per cent think it's people on the political left and 13 per cent that it is people on the political right. 15 per cent think no one puts pressure on people about expressing their views.

Unsurprisingly, **the most right-leaning segments blame the political left while the most left-leaning segment blames the political right.** More interesting is the **consistent proportion in all segments who blame people across the political spectrum.**

Even though there is a Labour government in power, **Britons don't simply feel that the pressure being applied to free speech is coming solely from the left** – the problem is far more dispersed.

Traditional Conservatives and Dissenting Disruptors blame the left for pressure on free speech, while Progressive Activists blame the right

Thinking about political debate in Britain today, who do you think puts the most pressure on people not to express their views?



Source: More in Common | September 2026

People generally don't trust any political party to protect views they disagree with

When asked how willing, if at all, each of the UK's major parties are to defend people's right to express views they disagree with, **the public is split on every party.**

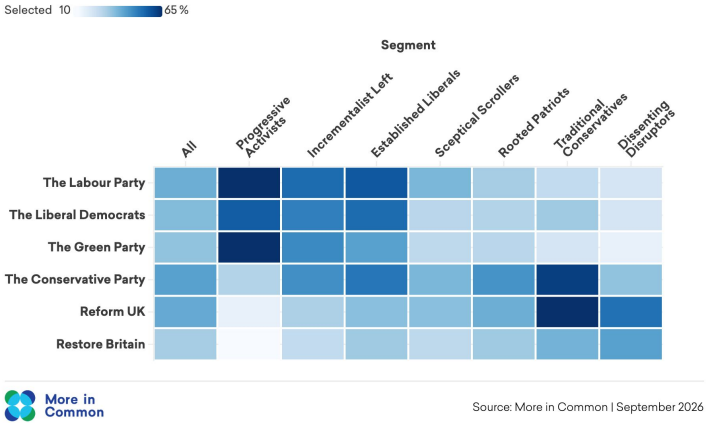
The party with the highest Net Score ('willing' minus 'unwilling') are the Conservatives (six per cent). The party with the lowest Net Score is Restore Britain (minus nine per cent). Labour's Net Score is minus one per cent.

Progressive Activists and Dissenting Disruptors are the least likely segments to say a party from across the ideological aisle would defend views they disagree with. However, **centrist, socially liberal segments** like the Incrementalist Left and Established Liberals **are more likely to say right-wing parties are willing to defend views they disagree with than socially conservative segments are to say the same about left-wing parties.**

Radical segments trust only their own side to defend free speech – the centre-left gives credit across party lines

How willing, if at all, do you think each of the following parties is to defend people's right to express views they disagree with?

The percentage that say 'willing'



Source: More in Common | September 2026

Maybe we don't utilise freedom of speech as much as the right, and that's why it's seen as more of a right-wing thing.

Charli, 30, Progressive Activist, Risk Officer

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