

Opinium Political Polling

The Iran conflict and British public opinion



Key findings

9 March 2026

Project details

PROJECT ID	VI 07 01 2026
TITLE	The Iran conflict and British public opinion
SERIES	Opinium Political Polling
EMAIL	politicalsocial@opinium.com

Introduction

This briefing document presents findings from the latest Opinium / Observer polling series examining UK public attitudes towards the escalating conflict involving the United States, Israel and Iran. The research explores how the British public interprets the conflict, its perceived legitimacy and consequences, and what role, if any, Britain should play.

It covers:

- Public support for or opposition to the US–Israeli military action in Iran, including perceptions of the motives and legality of the intervention.
- How voters interpret the conflict, including responsibility for escalation and views on Iran’s retaliatory strikes.
- Public concern about the wider consequences of the conflict, including impacts on energy supplies, the UK economy, and the risk of Britain being drawn into the conflict.
- What role the British public believes the UK should play, including attitudes towards diplomatic engagement, humanitarian support, and potential military involvement.
- The domestic and geopolitical context surrounding the conflict, including assessments of UK political leaders and longer-term attitudes towards the United States, Israel and Iran.

The findings provide insight into how the British public understands the current conflict, the limits of public support for UK involvement, and how wider shifts in geopolitical trust may be shaping attitudes towards Western military action.

Methodology

This study was conducted online by Opinium as part of the long-running Opinium/Observer polling series, amongst a nationally representative sample of 2,050 UK adults, between 4th and 6th March 2026.

Attitudes towards the conflict

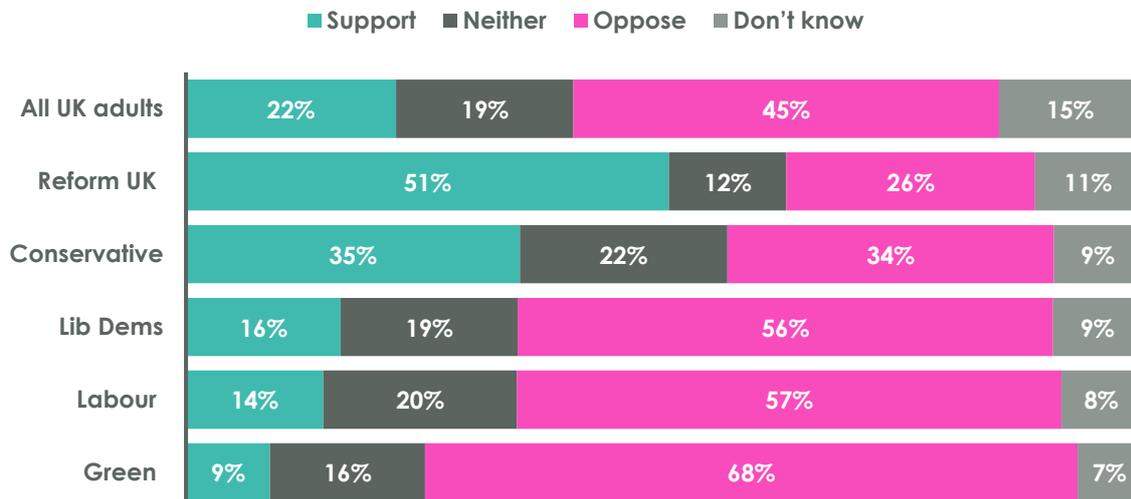
Public opinion is broadly opposed to the US–Israeli military action in Iran

The UK public leans clearly against the military strikes carried out by the US and Israel. Opposition outweighs support by roughly two to one, indicating that the conflict begins from a position of public scepticism.

Support is highly uneven across the electorate. Reform voters stand out as strong supporters of the action, while Green voters show overwhelming opposition and Labour and Liberal Democrat voters also lean clearly against it. This divide reflects a wider ideological split between more interventionist and more critical foreign policy outlooks.

- 22% support the military action, while 45% oppose it.
- Support among 2024 Reform voters is highest (51% support vs 26% oppose).
- Opposition among 2024 Green voters is highest at (68% oppose vs 9% support), followed by 2024 Labour voters (57% oppose vs 14% support).

Support for the US-Israeli action in Iran
 (by 2024 past vote)



Scepticism about the motives and legality of the intervention

Beyond general opposition to the military action itself, many voters also question the motivations behind the intervention and its legal legitimacy. The most common view is that the US acted for the wrong reasons, and relatively few people believe the strikes were legal under international law.

This pattern suggests the conflict is framed by many voters through a lens of mistrust about the intentions behind Western military action. Importantly, uncertainty remains high on legal questions, indicating that public understanding of the legal basis of the conflict is still developing.

- 42% say the US acted mainly for the wrong reasons, compared with 16% who say the right reasons. A quarter (24%) think the action involved a mix of right and wrong reasons, and 17% are not sure.
- Only 9% believe the strikes were clearly legal under international law, while two in five (39%) believe they were illegal. A further 26% say legality is disputed, and 26% are not sure.

Public opinion on responsibility and retaliation reflects complex feelings about the conflict

The public does not specifically attribute blame to Iran. Instead, the United States is most frequently identified single country as bearing responsibility for escalation, with Iran trailing behind.

At the same time, many believe Iranian retaliation against US or Israeli targets is at least partly justified. However, attacks on other Middle Eastern states are viewed far more negatively.

Responsibility for escalation:

- A third (32%) say the United States bears the most responsibility, while 13% say Israel does.
- Only 18% say Iran bears the most responsibility.

Justification of Iranian retaliation:

- 49% say attacks on US sites are at least partly justified.
- 46% say attacks on Israel are at least partly justified.
- Only 23% say attacks on other Middle Eastern countries are justified, while 47% say these are not justified at all.

There is strong concern about escalation and economic consequences

The conflict is widely perceived as a serious geopolitical event with potential economic consequences for the UK. Large proportions express concern about energy markets, the broader economy, and the risk of Britain becoming drawn into the conflict.

These findings suggest the conflict is being understood primarily through its economic and security implications rather than ideological or geopolitical positioning.

- 80% are concerned about impacts on global oil prices and energy supplies.
- 73% think the conflict will affect the UK economy at least a fair amount.
- 76% are concerned the UK could be drawn further into the conflict.

What should the UK's role be?

The public prefers a limited or non-military UK role in the conflict

When asked what Britain's approach to the conflict should be, the public shows a strong preference for limiting involvement. The most common response is that the UK should avoid involvement entirely, followed by approaches focused on economic interests, humanitarian aid, or diplomacy.

Only a small minority support the UK joining offensive military operations alongside the US and Israel. However, support for defensive military measures is higher, suggesting voters differentiate between defensive and offensive uses of force.

- 22% would prefer the UK to not get involved at all.
- 16% say the UK should prioritise protecting economic interests.
- 12% support humanitarian assistance only.
- 11% favour diplomatic de-escalation.
- Only 6% favour the UK joining offensive airstrikes.

Related questions reinforce this distinction:

- 42% support UK bases being used for defensive airstrikes, while 21% oppose.
- Only 24% support their use for offensive airstrikes, while 37% oppose.

The public supports military action primarily in self-defence

While appetite for offensive action is low, voters do support the UK using military force in clear defensive situations, particularly if UK territory or forces are attacked.

This indicates the public's support for military engagement is conditional and reactive rather than proactive. Intervention is most acceptable when framed as direct national defence rather than alliance solidarity or regional stability.

Circumstances where the UK should conduct offensive airstrikes:

- 47% if Iran attacks UK territory.
- 42% if Iran attacks UK military forces overseas.
- 15% if Iran threatens global shipping routes.
- 15% if Iran attacks civilian targets in the Middle East.

Domestic and geopolitical context

The conflict has not produced any clear gains for UK political leaders

Public evaluations of how UK leaders have responded to the crisis are generally muted. Keir Starmer's response receives the highest approval, but still faces net negative ratings. Opposition leaders receive low recognition, reflected in high "don't know" responses.

Among party supporters, responses tend to align strongly with partisan loyalties, particularly visible in the case of Nigel Farage, who receives strong approval among Reform voters but heavy opposition elsewhere.

Approval of leaders' handling of the conflict:

- Keir Starmer: 25% approve vs 36% disapprove.
- Kemi Badenoch: 18% approve vs 25% disapprove.
- Nigel Farage: 18% approve vs 28% disapprove.
- Zack Polanski: 14% approve vs 23% disapprove.
- Ed Davey: 14% approve vs 18% disapprove.

The conflict is occurring against a backdrop of relatively low trust in key Western alliances

Trend data indicates that British perceptions of the powers involved are mixed at best and often negative. Iran is strongly viewed as a threat and has consistently been perceived this way in recent years.

However, perceptions of traditional Western partners are more complex. While the current conflict appears to have brought the United States and Israel slightly closer to alignment with the UK in public perceptions, attitudes towards both remain noticeably weaker than they were a few years ago.

Notably, perceptions of the United States have declined compared with the period before Donald Trump’s second administration took office, reflecting broader scepticism about American foreign policy leadership.

Net perception as an ally vs threat:

- United States: +10 (March 2026), lower than before action in Venezuela but up from +2 (January 2026) before this latest conflict.
- Israel: –16 (March 2026), more negative than in October 2024 but up from –23 (January 2026) before this latest conflict.
- Iran: –66 net (March 2026), broadly in line with long-term perceptions of Iran.

This wider geopolitical context may shape how British voters interpret the current conflict, particularly their scepticism about US motivations and reluctance to support deeper UK military involvement.

Allies and threats to the UK (Net positive = ally, Net negative = threat)

