

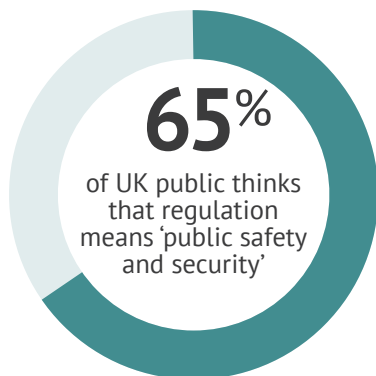


Worker Protections

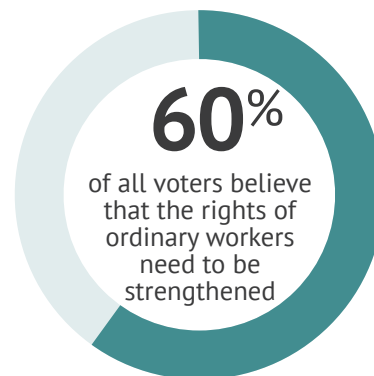
what does the public think?

Polling by Unchecked UK and others consistently [shows](#) high levels of public support for regulation. But what do British people think about labour market protections? Do they believe that employers are burdened by too many rules? Do they think that job creation is hampered by protections? And do they see red tape as a factor holding back the UK economy?

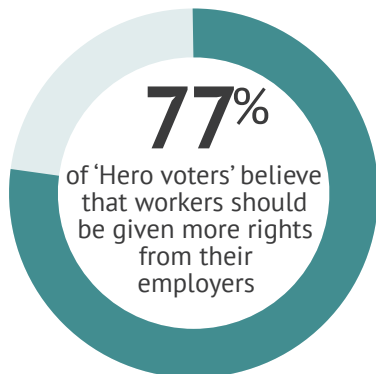
This edition of Unchecked UK's public opinion review sets out to answer these questions. Drawing on public opinion data since the 2024 general election, we find that **a strong majority of voters support worker protections, and believe that current levels of labour market regulation should be strengthened.** Concern about the economic impact of labour market regulation remains confined to a small minority of the electorate. At the same time, and despite the ongoing [media](#) focus on the threat which new protections pose to growth, we find that new protections included in the Government's Employment Rights Bill garner high levels of public support, especially among the voter groups which determined the outcome of the election in 2024.



(Centre for Policy Studies)



(IPPR / Persuasion)



(Stonehaven)



(YouGov)

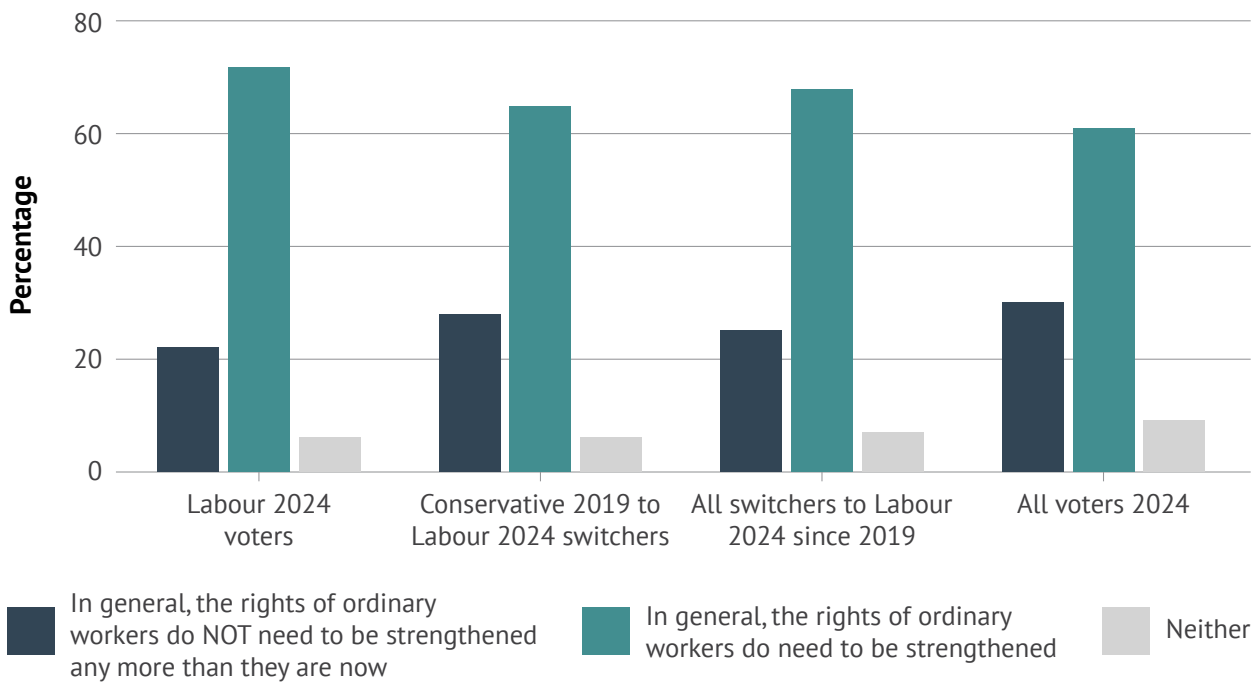
"Voters have wised up to the deal of growth vs rights"
Chris Hopkins, Savanta

1. The public wants strong worker protections

Polls carried since the election shows that stronger worker protections are widely supported.

Polling by IPPR and Persuasion UK shows that just over 60% of all voters believe that the rights of ordinary workers need to be strengthened (see figure 1). Their **analysis** finds that **every UK constituency has a plurality of voters backing stronger workers' rights**. Other **polling** by IPPR also shows that over 50% of people think their mental health is suffering because of work.

Figure 1



SOURCE: Make work pay: the government's mandate to strengthen workers' rights (IPPR, 2024)

Although support is shared across the electorate, the polling suggests that it tends to be stronger in key voter segments. According to **Stonehaven**, **Labour's 'Hero voters' (swing voters who brought the party to power in 2024¹) are among the staunchest supporters of strong labour market projections. 77% of these voters believe that workers should be given more rights from their employers. These voters also tend to be among the more sceptical about big business: 85% believe that big business needs to do more to contribute to society and 74% agree that workers are vulnerable to exploitation.**

“Unlike in 1997 when the parliamentary party was to the left of the new voter coalition, attitudes to work and workers' rights have shifted as scepticism toward big business has increased.”

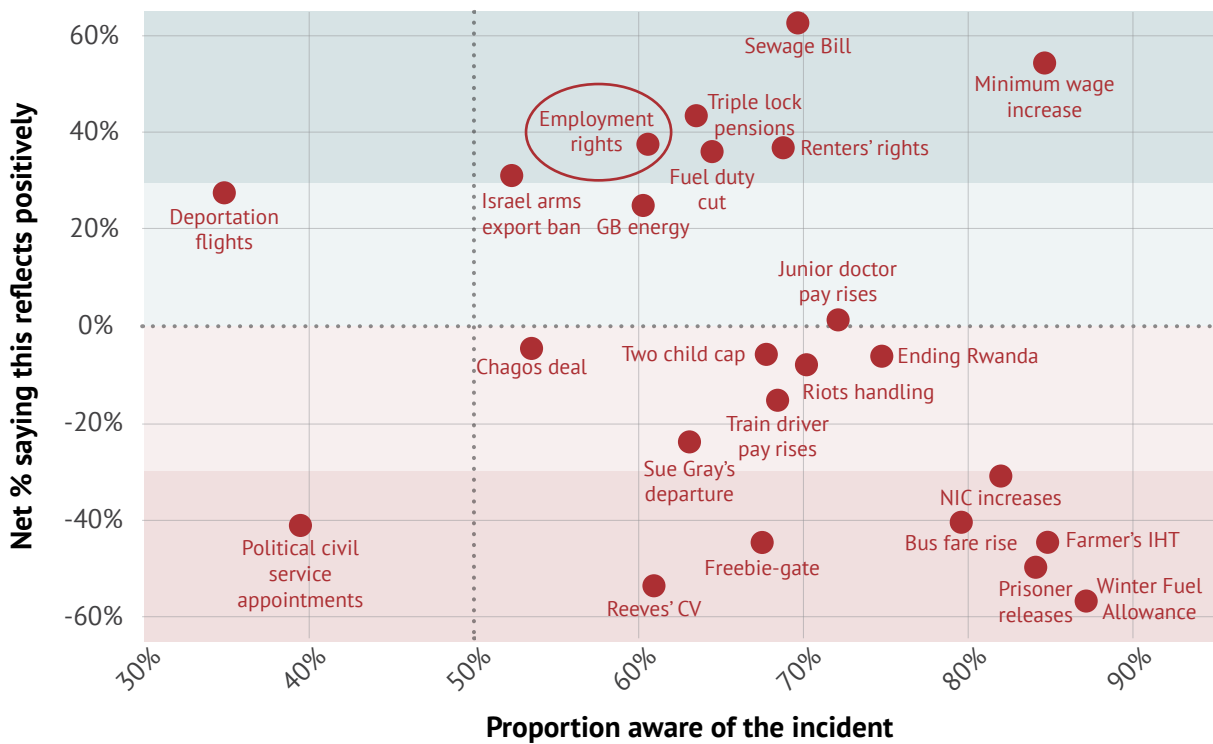
Keir Cozens, Stonehaven

¹ Hero Voters are the people that Labour needs to consolidate as supporters if the party is to have a chance at winning a second term. They comprise around 13% of the electorate – some 6.7 million people, and are broken into five segments by Stonehaven: 'Reform UK-inclined Professionals' (42%); 'Optimistic Globalists' (18%); 'Pragmatic Starters' (14%); 'Measured Realists' (12%); and 'Grounded Youth' (14%).

² Loyal Nationals are the key group who abandoned historic support for the Labour Party and supported the Conservatives in the 2019 election. Strongly in favour of Brexit at the referendum, their high threat-perception coupled with a more authoritarian outlook gives them a high concern for law and order but also an instinctive distrust of government.

High levels of support for labour market protections have remained relatively stable over time. Pre-election, leading pollster Chris Hopkins [argued](#) that **French-style employment laws were ‘liked a lot’ by 2019 Conservative voters**. These views were echoed consistently in Unchecked UK’s 2021 [focus groups](#) with Labour-Conservative switchers in ‘Red Wall’ seats and in 2022 [focus groups](#) with Loyal National² voters carried out with More in Common. Indeed, [according to More in Common](#), voters rank employment rights as one of the government’s most positive policies since the election (figure 2).

Figure 2
Labour’s first months: Successes and failures



SOURCE: More in Common, November 2024.

“Up until the election our advice would always have been to ignore your progressive wing because they are going to stick with you and they’re often out of line with the wider public. However, it is now clear Labour can’t afford to just ignore them because you’re not just bleeding votes on the right, you’re bleeding votes on the left. I think that is why you’ve got to have some kind of red meat – the minimum wage, renters rights and employment rights are all up there.”

Luke Tryl, More in Common

2. The public is strongly supportive of the measures in the Employment Rights Bill, and want the government to go further

Our review found positive attitudes to new protections included in the Employment Rights Bill.

A YouGov [survey](#) found that **68% of Britons were in favour of banning at least some types of zero hours contracts, against 11% who were opposed to restrictions**. Two thirds (65%) also wished to see people's right to work flexible hours expanded and just over six in ten (62%) were supportive of proposals to extend the legal right to sick pay, and to give employees protections against unfair dismissal as soon as they started a job (rather than after two years of employment as is currently the case). In both cases, less than one in five Britons (17-19%) were opposed to the plans.

More in Common's [polling](#) also found high support for the proposals in the Employment Rights Bill, with giving workers immediate protection from unfair dismissal top of the list (70% approval). Flexible working rights, bans on zero hours contracts and day one sick pay all commanded over 60% support. In focus groups, More in Common find that public attitudes towards sick pay have changed significantly since the pandemic. The public feel that it's wrong to expect people to go to work while ill - potentially jeopardising their own health and the health of others.

According to Focaldata [polling](#) for the TUC and Hope not Hate, 72% of UK voters support a ban on zero hours contracts. **Two in 3 Reform (65%) and Conservative (63%) voters support the ban**. The figure was higher for those saying they would vote Conservative (65%) and Reform (67%) if there was a general election held tomorrow. Just 15% oppose the policy. This polling also found high levels of support (above 70%) for the right to statutory sick pay from day one and protection from unfair dismissal. Although lower than for other voters, support is still very strong among those who voted Reform and Conservative at the 2024 general election.

Polling also found **high levels of support for the right to disconnect** (a proposal to limit employers' ability to contact workers outside working hours which was floated by Labour but dropped), suggesting that there may be appetite for the government to go further. Polling by YouGov found that this policy was favoured by seven in ten Britons (69%). This was the same in polls by the [New Statesman](#) and [Ipsos](#) - and is consistent with views in Unchecked UK's focus groups with More in Common. According to Ipsos, more than half of Britons in employment (56%) expected such a policy to improve their mental health; 46% thought it to have no impact on the British economy. According to [Stonehaven](#), the right to disconnect was supported by 86% of 'Hero Voters'.

Once again, these polls reflect long-standing trends in public support for labour market protections. [Polling](#) by IPPR after the EU referendum showed high levels of support for EU-derived employment rules, such as the Working Time Directive (with only 14% opting to remove this regulation) and Temporary Agency Worker Rights. Indeed, the polling found **strong support for worker protections among both Leave and Remain supporters**. This echoed earlier [research](#) by Unchecked UK which found that 60% of younger Leave voters wanted to see EU-derived limits on the number of working hours unchanged or tightened.

Conclusion

This review shows that championing strong, well-enforced labour market protections offers the government a huge opportunity, particularly among the voters whose support is most uncertain. The evidence cuts across a wide range of polls, and has been consistent through time. It is also corroborated by qualitative research. By focusing on this agenda, Labour has the opportunity to transform its fragile mandate into a more durable coalition, especially among the more socially conservative voters who could be tempted by Reform's message. At Unchecked UK, we believe this strategy not only aligns with voter preferences but also offers a positive vision for a well-regulated Britain that works for everyone.