

# The Conservative and Unionist Party Manifesto 2024

**CLEAR PLAN**  
**BOLD ACTION**  
**SECURE FUTURE**

## Conservative Manifesto - Analysis

One recent YouGov poll found nearly nine in ten people thought crime was one of the most important issues facing the UK. Crime and justice has returned as a key general election battleground, after taking a back seat as a policy issue during previous campaigns dominated by other issues.

With all major parties making headline pledges on law and order, we've asked our in-house think tank Crest Insights to take a closer look by measuring how well they match up overall against the stark challenges facing the criminal justice system, as detailed by our Director of Research Sophie Davis. We've also suggested what other policies may be needed to complement or support what's on offer and what we think is missing.

In this document, we examine the crime and justice commitments of the Conservative Party set out in its manifesto published on 11 June. The Conservatives have traditionally prioritised being seen by voters as 'the' party of law and order. But in polls asking people which party is strongest on this issue they entered this campaign ten percentage points behind Labour and will hope the policy offer goes some way to close this gap.

The analysis we've done follows the independent and non-party approach which Crest Insights and the rest of Crest Advisory applies to all its work. It draws on independent reports published directly from our Insights research and includes learning from the consultancy support we've given to police forces, Mayors, Police and Crime Commissioners and the wider criminal justice system in recent years.

We hope you find our contribution to an evidence-led and informed election debate on crime and justice helpful and look forward to any feedback or views you may wish to share with us.

Best wishes

Gavin Lockhart-Mirams, Executive Chair



## The state of the criminal justice system

The criminal justice system is at a breaking point.

The police are facing a crisis of confidence. A recent poll found that only four in ten people trust their police force and a poll conducted for Crest and the Tony Blair Institute (TBI) found that the police are now trusted less than social services and the courts. Baroness Casey's review of standards and culture within the Metropolitan Police revealed multiple and severe organisational failings, and concluded that the force was institutionally homophobic, racist and misogynistic. All 43 police forces need substantial reform to renew public confidence in policing. In addition, the police are now facing an operating landscape that is shifting, with a rise in tech-enabled crimes and increasing severity of overall crime. In their current capacity, our forces lack the resources, expertise and experience to tackle these issues.

As a result, despite more crimes being reported and recorded, the response is limited. In the last year, the proportion of crimes resulting in a charge and/or summons was just under 6%, meaning that over 94% of reported crimes go unsolved. Investigations are also taking much longer than they did a decade ago, with the average time taken to bring a case to charge or summons rising from just over two weeks in 2016 to six weeks in 2024. This has likely increased the public's concern about crime levels and a poll run for Crest and TBI found that nationally 45% of the public think that crime is a problem in their area. The poll also found that 41% of people who experienced a crime did not report it to the relevant authorities.

If reporting levels and the charge rate were to improve, it would only further exacerbate the backlogs facing the courts. In total, the Crown Court backlog reached 67,573 cases at the end of last year and, in March 2024, the Magistrates Court backlog reached 370,731. This leaves both victims and suspects facing long waits for justice: the average time taken to bring an offender to justice has increased by 46% since 2010.

Prisons are full to capacity. There are now 16,000 people in cells waiting for a trial or to be sentenced after being found guilty - a 50-year record. In March 2024, the prison population in England and Wales reached 87,699 individuals, 10,000 higher than official capacity, and the Ministry of Justice anticipates the overall prison population will reach 106,300 by March 2027, pushing the prison system to the brink of collapse. Due to the overcrowding levels, prisons are less safe and less rehabilitative, which then only exacerbates reoffending levels, repeatedly facilitating the ongoing cycle straining the justice system. The prisons crisis also makes it more difficult for the backlog to be resolved.

In response to the wide array of challenges, government has taken a series of measures to begin to address the problem. Early release schemes in prisons have been introduced, police numbers have been uplifted by 20,000 and in October 2021, ministers set a target to reduce the backlog to 53,000 by March 2025. The MOJ had also tried to ease the pressure on courts by expanding courtroom capacity and increasing the mandatory retirement age for judges from 70 to 75. Nevertheless, these issues persist and are only increasing. Any future government will face a complex range of interconnected problems that cannot easily be fixed.

Director of Research, Crest Insights, Sophie Davis



The Conservative Party Manifesto has one section addressing the criminal justice system and focuses on three specific issues:

1. Tackling violence against women and girls
2. A justice system that delivers for victims and the public
3. A plan to counter extremism and protect our streets

Crest Insights' Manifesto Review adds context to the policy pledges detailed throughout the manifesto and for each section offers tailored, evidence-based analysis drawn from our understanding of the criminal justice system.

## Our plan for safer streets and justice for victims of crime

» The Conservatives will always back our brave police and security services with the powers and resources needed to keep our country safe and we will always work to deliver a justice system that is fair to victims and sees offenders repay their debt to society.

Under the Conservatives, violent crime has fallen by 44% since 2010 and neighbourhood crime is down 48%. Reoffending has fallen from over 30% in 2010 to 25%. We have recruited 20,000 police officers, delivered 6,000 prison places as part of the largest prison expansion since the Victorian era and deported over 18,000 foreign national offenders since 2019 alone. We will:

- » Give every neighbourhood an additional police officer by recruiting 8,000 more police officers to patrol communities and catch criminals in every ward in the country. These full time, fully warranted officers will be dedicated to neighbourhood policing.
- » Back the police, by giving officers new powers and tools to catch criminals, including technology like facial recognition and powers to seize knives and track down stolen property. We will always back the police in the lawful and professional use of force, alongside a fair and proportionate accountability system.
- » Restore public trust in policing. We will license police officers for specialist roles, as we do already for firearms officers. We will legislate to ensure officers are appropriately vetted during their service and those who fail can be sacked.

We will foster greater collaboration between the National Crime Agency and Counter Terrorism Policing. We will urgently introduce Martyn's Law, in tribute to Martyn Hett, who was tragically killed alongside 21 others in the Manchester Arena terrorist attack in 2017. This will ensure premises are better prepared for terrorist attacks by requiring them to take proportionate steps to mitigate risks.

We will toughen up community sentencing by increasing the use of community payback and electronic tagging, so criminals pay their debt to society and communities witness justice being served. We will fund every police force to roll out Hotspot Policing, which has cut anti-social behaviour by up to 50% in some areas.

We will keep turning the tide against fraudsters. In the last year we have reduced fraud by 13%, including through our new National Fraud Squad with 400 officers now in post. We will ban SIM farms, which are used to send bulk messages for fraudulent texts, and ban cold calls on financial products so fraudsters cannot dupe people into buying fake investments.

The same data shows that between 1995 and 2010 violent crime had already fallen by 59%, and neighbourhood crime by 61%, indicating it is not a specific success of this government. This also doesn't account for rises in other types of crimes, such as fraud.

Taking reoffending statistics at face value can be misleading as they rely on offences being detected and sanctioned. The fall in reoffending figures may be due to fewer arrests and a lower charge rate.

Between 2010 and 2018 police officer numbers dropped from about 143,000 to 122,000, and personnel numbers are still lower than in 2010. In addition, a large proportion of the workforce lacks experience and a review by the National Police Chiefs Council found that capacity increases had often been used reactively to shore up "problem" areas.

Polling suggests that the public both favour expanding police powers and have misgivings about the way they are applied. Crest has made recommendations on how to improve the use of stop and search by introducing a new framework with 'threat levels' which more specifically outlines when Section 60 powers are required and improving training for officers around the traumatic impact of stop and search.

Successive polling shows that trust in policing is falling (a Crest poll found that only 62% of the public trust the police, dropping even lower for Black adults). Implementing the recommendations of the Casey review (which Crest worked on), should be prioritised.

Crest was among the first to recommend – in 2017 – that community sentences be toughened. Community sentences can be more effective to rehabilitate offenders but their use has more than halved in the last decade.

Fraud now accounts for 41% of all crime in England and Wales and Crest research found this is likely to be an under-estimate and highlighted the significant emotional, and financial, impact on victims. While the 2023 strategy is a start, more ambition – and resources – are needed to tackle the scale of the problem.

**Crest Insights:** The 8,000 new police officers are welcome, but nowhere near enough. Crest estimates suggest that to maintain the same ratio we had in 2010 there would need to be an additional 32,000 police personnel (and that doesn't account for the increase in recorded crime). Numbers alone won't be enough: the focus on productivity and outcomes needs to be maintained, and police structures need to be reformed, so forces are more agile and responsive to current priorities. The crisis in confidence, driven by poor standards, needs a comprehensive strategy to tackle it with real impetus from the heart of government.

## Tackling violence against women and girls

VAWG-related crimes represented at least 16% of all recorded crime (and this is likely to be a significant under-estimate, with much of VAWG going unreported). His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) has described VAWG as an "epidemic" and recommended a national policing strategy to coordinate the response.

We have made violence against women and girls a strategic policing requirement for the first time, making clear to the police that these crimes are as significant as terrorism, serious and organised crime and child sexual abuse.

We have strengthened the law to punish predators with new offences for stalking, controlling or coercive behaviour, non-fatal strangulation and suffocation, sharing of intimate images or 'revenge porn', non-consensual taking of images of a woman breastfeeding, 'up skirting' and raised the maximum penalties for harassment. We will legislate to create new offences for spiking, the creation of sexualised deepfake images and taking intimate images without consent.

Although the Domestic Abuse Act was an important step forward for victims, three years later significant progress is still needed. Crest has recommended taking a whole system approach to domestic abuse (DA), with organisations such as police, courts, probation, voluntary sector services and housing working together to support victims.

We will support victims of domestic abuse including through our Domestic Abuse Act, which created a statutory definition of domestic abuse and gave new powers to police and the courts.

To ensure tougher sentences are effective, we first need to ensure that perpetrators are charged and convicted. Conviction rates for DA offences are far lower than that of other crimes and have been on a downward trend. Last year, less than 7% of DA offences recorded resulted in a charge.

We will toughen sentencing for murders that take place within the context of domestic abuse with new aggravating factors, such as if they involve coercive and controlling behaviour or gratuitous attacks. We will introduce a 25-year prison term for domestic murders, regardless of whether a weapon is used. Those who kill their domestic abusers will not face the same starting point. This will be accompanied by a review of homicide sentencing, looking to close loopholes that allow some killers to get off lightly.

We will introduce an aggravating factor for murders that happen in the context of 'rough sex', so it is never used as an excuse to get a lighter sentence.

It remains the case that the vast majority of rape cases don't go to court. In the year ending September 2021, 1.3% of rape cases recorded by the police resulted in a charge, compared to 7.1% of all other recorded crime. In 2020, the former Victims' Commissioner Vera Baird stated that we are witnessing the effective decriminalisation of rape.

We have increased rape prosecutions by 56% since 2010 and we will ensure rape victims get the justice and support they deserve, with a new investigatory model for rape for police forces and prosecutors and pre-recorded cross-examination for victims in all Crown courts.

We will carefully consider the recommendations of Baroness Bertin's Independent Review of Pornography and ensure we have the right safeguards in place to protect against any harmful impacts of the industry.

**Crest Insights:** The scale and extend of VAWG requires it to be treated as a national priority. The addition of VAWG as a national policing requirement is welcome but this is not solely a policing issue: it needs greater commitment and drive from the top to coordinate a whole-system response. Measures to ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice cannot be piecemeal, they need to go hand in hand with wider reform of the criminal justice system – prosecuting offenders and increasing the severity of sentencing is only effective if they actually end up in prison. Finally, to really tackle the scale of VAWG there needs to be a greater focus on prevention – one that goes much wider than the levers available within the criminal justice system.

## A justice system that delivers for victims and the public

We will toughen sentencing for the worst offenders. We have already ended Labour's automatic halfway release for violent and serious sexual offenders. We will make life imprisonment without parole mandatory for more of the most heinous murderers and require rapists and other serious sexual offenders to spend the whole of their sentences behind bars.

We will toughen sentences for knife crime, grooming gangs and assaults against retail workers and combat the ability of serious organised crime gangs to use new technology to harm the public. We will prioritise further measures to **crack down on hyper-prolific offenders**.

We will empower judges to require offenders to attend hearings or face an increased sentence. We will stand firmly behind the legal doctrine of joint enterprise meaning that those who assist in crimes, from the getaway driver to the weapon supplier, can be held accountable.

We will **build four new prisons**, completing our programme of 20,000 new prison places by 2030. We will make it easier to build prisons in appropriate places by scrapping legacy EU rules and streamlining the planning system.

We will remove more Foreign National Offenders by increasing removals under the Early Removal Scheme and negotiating more Prisoner Transfer Agreements. We will maintain the ban on prisoners voting from jail. We will turn criminals away from the cycle of reoffending, **investing in rehabilitative services such as drug treatment**, education and employment. We will deliver our ten-year drugs plan to cut crime and help people rebuild their lives away from crime.

Our **Victims and Prisoners Act** ensures victims are protected and supported, including that those affected by major disasters such as Hillsborough, the Manchester Arena bombing and the Grenfell Tower fire can get the help they need, when they need it, through a permanent Independent Public Advocate. We will expand the provision of legal aid at inquests related to major incidents where the Independent Public Advocate is appointed or in the aftermath of terrorist incidents.

We will bring the mandatory reporting provisions of the Criminal Justice Bill into force as soon as possible. We will design a redress scheme for the victims of child sexual abuse in institutional settings that reflects their needs. We will ensure this includes the victims of grooming gangs and make a national apology to grooming gang victims. We will ensure sex offenders cannot evade justice or conceal their identity by restricting sex offenders from changing their names.

We will **cut the Covid court backlog** by keeping open Nightingale courtrooms, funding sitting days and **investing in court maintenance**. And we will continue to digitise court processes and expand the use of remote hearings. We will match fund 100 criminal law pupillages to speed up justice for victims and will continue to ensure access to justice through legal aid provision.

We will expand our Pathfinder Courts pilot in family court proceedings and continue mediation vouchers to help more families resolve private law child arrangements without an acrimonious court battle. We will support our world class legal services sector, including through an Arbitration Bill. We will help individuals and small businesses bring cases against wealthier opponents with legislation to support third party funding of litigation.



Ministry of Justice statistics suggest that just under a tenth (9 per cent) of offenders are responsible for around half of total crime. A number of experts have recommended wrap around monitoring and support for these offenders to ensure compliance with probation conditions and minimise reoffending.



Plans to build additional prison capacity are significantly behind schedule. In 2021, the Government promised 20,000 more prison places "by the mid-2020s". However, it is anticipated that only 8,000 new places will be delivered by 2025.



Estimates suggest that 81 per cent of prolific offenders are involved in drug misuse and 40 per cent lack settled accommodation.



Crest has worked to improve the experience of victims across the criminal justice system, including with the Crown Prosecution Service and HMICFRS. Our research highlights that, from a lack of timely communication to a victim-blaming culture and ineffective referral pathways, much of the CJS is currently not working for victims. The Victims and Prisoners Act is a good start but it needs to be strengthened and properly enforced. Mandatory reporting was recommended by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (which Crest worked for). However, Chair Professor Alexis Jay CBE has described the provisions of the Bill as "a fudge" while campaigners say it contains 'get out' clauses and will not force people working with children to report suspicions of child abuse.



The Crown Court backlog has more than doubled in the last five years. Latest figures suggest that there are over 65,000 cases waiting to be heard. This is far above the government's target of reducing the backlog to 53,000 by March 2025.

**Crest Insights:** Prisons are at full capacity and not rehabilitative. New prisons alone are insufficient; the government should also consider measures to increase the use of non-custodial sentences and reduce the use of remand and recalls (which could be quicker and less expensive). The measures to tackle the courts backlog are sensible but do not go far enough; the next government should consider initiatives to divert offenders away from court, improve the court's efficiency and adequately invest in the courts system. The changes to courts and prisons cannot be considered in isolation, and there is a need for joined up thinking when introducing reforms to any element of the criminal justice system.

Extremism is a significant and growing threat to our country. While there is consensus around the need to tackle it, there is a lack of clarity about how the government – and agencies – should respond. Crest research highlighted a worrying level of confusion about how forces ought to respond to extremism within their community. The government needs a vision and strategy for countering extremism as a whole – one that isn't limited to the policing of protests or preventing acts of terrorism.

Between October and December 2023, Operation Brocks (the Met's response to protests about the ongoing conflict in Israel and Gaza) has been estimated to cost £18.9 million and to have required 26,121 officers (to police demonstrations and vigils).

People in the UK report generally feeling safe in their local communities. However, women and ethnic minorities typically feel less safe. Crest also found that Black adults in the UK were more concerned about crime in their local area than other ethnic groups.

The murders of MPs Jo Cox, in 2016, and David Amess, in 2021, have highlighted safety concerns for elected representatives. Crest research highlighted that the rise in online abuse, including that aimed at MPs represented a risk to democratic institutions. The government recently announced a £31m package to counter the threat to MPs' security.

Religiously motivated hate crime accounted for 5% of all hate crime last year: 67% was racially motivated and 16% motivated by sexual orientation. While action on religiously motivated hate crime is needed, a similar focus on other types of hate crime is also necessary. In April 2024, the Home Affairs Select Committee criticised the government for dropping plans to publish a new hate crime strategy.

## A plan to counter extremism and to protect our streets

In recent months we have seen shocking increases in protests being used as a cover for extremist disruption and criminality. We cannot allow a small and vocal minority to destroy our democratic values. That is why we unveiled a new extremism definition under which certain groups that promote an ideology based on violence, hatred or intolerance will be blocked from government funding and meeting officials.

We have passed tough new laws to curb disruptive protests. Our Public Order Act 2023 gave the police new powers to intervene where protests cause serious disruption to communities, leading to the arrests of over 600 Just Stop Oil and Extinction Rebellion protestors in London alone. We will introduce further powers to ban face coverings, pyrotechnics and climbing on war memorials.

We will strengthen police powers to prevent protests or marches that pose a risk of serious disorder, by allowing police to take into account the cumulative impact of protests. We will ban protests outside schools to stop mobs from intimidating teachers and children.

We will always support teachers to uphold and promote fundamental British values and ensure they are protected from accusations of blasphemy.

We will place a duty on the police and prosecutors to publish regular guidance on the statements, chants or symbols, for example, the swastika or the term 'jihad', that in the context of political protest may constitute an offence. We will explore ways for the police to recover some of the costs of policing disruptive protests from the groups that organise them.

We will also ensure our elected representatives get the protection needed to represent their constituents without fear.

Abuse or discrimination based on religion is unacceptable. We will not tolerate antisemitic hatred in any form. We have pledged £54 million for the Community Security Trust to give Jewish schools and synagogues the security measures they need and allocated additional funding to support schools and universities to understand, recognise and tackle antisemitism. We will get the UK Holocaust Memorial built.

We do not tolerate anti-Muslim hatred and will seek to stamp it out wherever it occurs. We have committed to provide £117 million over four years for the Protective Security for Mosques scheme and are proud to support and help fund Tell MAMA's vital work.

**Crest Insights:** The last counter – extremism strategy was published nearly ten years ago. Since then, the landscape of extremism has undergone significant shifts: the growing use of online spaces for radicalisation, the shift towards younger and more vulnerable cohorts, the rise in lone actors and a changing international landscape all require new strategies to deal with them. In this context, it is surprising that this section of the manifesto focuses to a large extent on the policing of street protests. We need a comprehensive strategy to address today's threats, including a shared understanding of the problem, clear objectives and accountability and the right tools to enable agencies to respond.

## Outstanding issues

While it wouldn't be possible for manifestos to address every single issue pertaining to policing and justice, we feel that the following gaps in the Conservative Manifesto are worth highlighting:

1. Serious and organised crime (SOC) now affects more people, more often, than any other national-security threat and the threat from SOC is both rising and changing. Despite a new strategy being published at the end of last year, SOC is largely absent from the manifesto.
2. Children and young people are disproportionately likely to be victims of some of the most serious crime types, including child abuse, exploitation and gang-related violence. However, there is little to address this in the manifesto.
3. The scale and nature of today's threats (VAWG, fraud, SOC) mean that, while we need to continue to pursue offenders, an approach based on enforcement alone is unlikely to be successful. Much of the manifesto relies on enforcement to reduce crime and there is very little on how a Conservative government would address the drivers of crime.
4. A combination of factors have meant services lack the sufficient resources to tackle the scale of challenges. Although money is not a guarantee of better outcomes, the manifesto is unclear how a future government would invest in the necessary resources required to manage the issues.
5. Overall, the manifesto would benefit from more ambition and joined-up thinking to increase the likelihood of its policies successfully dealing with the entrenched and complicated issues within the criminal justice system.

If you have views or questions about this analysis or would like to hear more about Crest Insights, please email [Sophie.davis@crestadvisory.com](mailto:Sophie.davis@crestadvisory.com).



The Conservative and Unionist Party Manifesto 2024

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