

How prominent is peace in political discourse and which of its areas are being covered?

1. Introduction and methodology

Due to increasing aggression around voting and a more hostile societal atmosphere, the question of the absence of peacefulness in the political discourse has emerged in recent years. This research project focuses on the presentation of different perceptions of peace in the political discourse through manifestos. It aims to answer the question of how prominent peace is in political discourse and which areas of it are covered. The literature around peacefulness of UK manifestos is not very varied and focuses on rating the peacefulness of parties. It is also mostly aimed at rating this peacefulness in the context of one single sector, instead of aiming to grasp a party's full approach to peace<sup>1</sup>. The sector that is usually focused on is demilitarisation and geopolitical peace. Aiming to branch out, this research looks at the peacefulness of UK party's electoral manifestos by focusing on the areas of peacefulness that are most and least mentioned. The aim is to not only consider policies which are specifically labelled as peaceful, but instead get an overview of the parties overall perception of peace, even if it is not categorised under the word "peace". The purpose is to get a heuristic understanding of the party's approaches to peace as mentioned in their electoral manifestos, ergo as presented to their potential voters. The perspectives on peace presented, shape the political discourse by bringing them into conversation and policy-making. This party manifesto research can therefore be used in formulating an initial judgement about peace perceptions in the political discourse surrounding voting, while acknowledging the influence of other factors.

The methodology used in this research consists of looking at four party manifestos and one party website (all from 2019/ from 2023 in case of the website). The party manifestos analysed are from the Conservative and Unionist party, the Labour party, the Green party, the Liberal Democrats and the Peace party. Across these manifestos, word searches were conducted. It is a mixture of quantitative and qualitative approach, analysing both the number of mentions of certain words, alongside the context in which they are mentioned. 60 words in total were used, sorted through four categories that approach peace from different perspectives. The perspectives utilised were: war and conflict, crime and stability, social development, environmental development as well as mindfulness and harmony. These areas form an overview of a variety of different approaches to peace, relevant to societal as well as individual peace.

|                  |                     |                         |                           |                         |
|------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| War and conflict | Crime and stability | Social development      | Environmental development | Mindfulness and harmony |
| Peace            | crime/ criminal     | education               | nature                    | team/ group             |
| violence         | illegal             | healthcare              | climate (change)          | integrate, integration  |
| war              | law                 | migration               | park                      | aid                     |
| nuclear          | order               | human rights            | green space               | help                    |
| conflict         | stability           | development/ developing | restore                   | harmony                 |



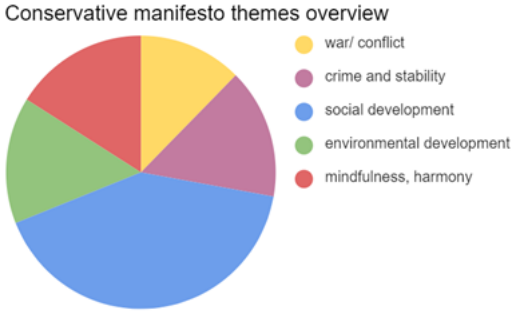
Conservative party's top-down approach to peace but this tends to be neither sustainable nor durable<sup>4</sup>. Peace and security is also supposed to be furthered through increased defence spending. This instead furthers division and exclusion on the interior, scapegoating marginalised groups<sup>5</sup>. On the exterior, this can lead to arms races and increasing militarisation of the international sphere, counterproductive to peace processes.

Another central aspect of peace in the Conservative and Unionist party perception is the reduction of crime. This is pursued through their crime-combating strategy, based on deterrence over rehabilitation. The "rise of crime" mentioned multiple times across the manifesto is used to harness public support for increased policing and heightened prison sentences<sup>6</sup>. This has been shown to be ineffective, since rehabilitation and more community-based punishments lead to lower rates of reoffending compared to crime-reduction through fear<sup>7</sup>. Even though crime is one of the most mentioned words in the Conservative party manifesto, there is barely any mention of hate crime towards f.ex. minority groups, even though this type of targeted violence has seen a significant rise<sup>8</sup>. The Conservative and Unionist party therefore does not show a commitment for sustainably lowering rates of hate crime against vulnerable groups.

Another important aspect that the Conservative perception of peace is based on is autonomy. Mostly mentioned in freeing Britain from EU influence, it is seen as a driver for improvement in a variety of sectors. Autonomy is most commonly mentioned in the legal sector: the word "law" is used in the context of freeing UK laws from EU influence and "taking back control" over them. This is central in the manifesto, even though only 3 exclusive implementations of EU legislation have taken place between 2010 and 2013<sup>9</sup>. Another area where control and autonomy is to be regained is borders. This ties into the mentions of the word "migration" alongside the words "fair" and "justice". The connection is made by equating migrants with free-riders. The Conservative party mentions it being "right and fair" that people cannot access welfare before having paid taxes. Refugees were not portrayed as in need of aid but as people entering the country to exploit social services and British taxpayers. This portrayal of migrants as "cadgers" excludes them from society, counteracting social inclusion processes and leading to rises in hate crime and a hostile atmosphere<sup>10</sup>.

Not only is self-empowerment and local grassroot peace-building not encouraged, it is actively discouraged. The word "strike" appears only once in the Conservative manifesto, in the context of having a minimum service operation during rail strikes. Strikes are labelled as "undermining the livelihoods of others" and not considered a valuable and important instrument for more social mobility and increased democratic tendencies<sup>11</sup>. This combined with "poverty" being barely mentioned (and if, then only internationally) shows that local peace-building through social justice is not encouraged. The manifesto prioritises keeping the status quo over encouraging the change needed to further more peace within British society.

In the environmental development sector, the preservation of the status quo continues: economic growth is prioritised over environmental protection. Climate change stays mostly at the background of this manifesto and it is relegated to the margins of the economy. It is assumed to be possible to stop climate change in our current economic system. This is a questionable assumption since the very essence of capitalism centres around resource exploitation and continuous growth, which is contrary to the working patterns of nature<sup>12</sup>. Since there is no mention of holding businesses accountable or any other trade-off of the economy in prioritising ecology, economy simply takes primacy over ecology in the manifesto, which cannot build the base for a sustainable approach to peace.



### 3. The Labour party

The Labour party’s most mentioned words are “protect”, “climate”, “equal”, “security” and “environment”<sup>13</sup>. Peace was mentioned 15 times in the manifesto, mostly in connection to geopolitical peace and peace abroad. Most mentions of “peace” are in the context of security, foreign policy and diplomacy. This overlaps with the Labour party’s general perception of peace, which centres around a mix of non-violent top-down and bottom up approaches on the international level, a mix of securitization and education on the internal level and the inclusion of minority groups for social peace-building.



The Labour party’s conception of international peace is based on a hybrid approach. Diplomacy and adherence to international law are mentioned as the primary peace-pursuit strategies. While

these are non-violent, unlike military interventions, their success rates in implementing long-lasting peace are very low<sup>14</sup>. This is due to the approaches still following a top-down, impositional model that is not connected to the local groups involved in peace-building. Especially in connection to the widespread perception of diplomacy being an elitist project, it is difficult for local groups to get involved. On the other hand, the party also mentions peace-building through investment in local capacities. While this is not the party's primary approach, it promotes local and bottom-up peace-building in affected countries. Especially by investing into young people's capacities and their education, a sustainable and long-lasting peace is more likely to be kept<sup>15</sup>.

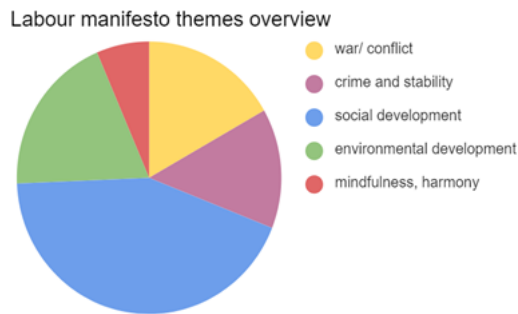
Even though part of the party's peace perception is a commitment to stop international military interventions, disarmament is not a part of their peace strategy. A need for a heightened defence spending is mentioned. So while military interventions are denounced, there is a continuous spending plan fixed for the military. This persists even though British popular opinions on military spending as a government priority are traditionally low, along with its negative impact on international disarmament<sup>16</sup>. Furthermore, there arguably is no imminent external threat that justifies an immense military spending. The party takes a similarly mixed approach to nuclear weapons: while the Labour party is committed to nonproliferation of nuclear arms on the international level, there is no mention of abolishing Trident on the national level. This lack of disarmament leads to a vicious circle of armament and makes other countries less likely to pursue non-proliferation, thus harming peace<sup>17</sup>.

The absence of crime is equated to interior safety, which is supposed to be achieved through strengthening the police and employing more officers. Emphasising rising rates of crime is used as a justification for interior securitisation<sup>18</sup>. Yet the securitisation approach used is significantly less effective than crime reduction through rehabilitation and education<sup>19</sup>. This coincides with the second part of the party's approach, which focuses on extensive police education. Minority groups are mentioned in both being disproportionately targeted by crime as well as overrepresented in the criminal justice system<sup>20</sup>. Recognising this and offering inclusion in social services as well as education as a counter effort is important in ensuring equal societal participation and countering racism, making way for a more just society.

One of the fundamental columns to peace for the Labour party is an inclusion of minority groups and their voices into wider society. In the social development sphere, one of the most mentioned words is "access", especially to different social services. Access to education and health care for vulnerable groups is mentioned particularly often. The education sector includes plans of teaching about marginalised groups, tackling stereotypes at the root. This is important to counteract xenophobia, assuring that all voices are heard and focusing on peaceful learning approaches instead of furthering ignorance and therefore hate<sup>21</sup>. The party also focuses on poverty, with marginalised communities mentioned as being especially impacted and commitments made to plan to assist and aid these communities.

"Climate change" is one of the words most mentioned in the manifesto, being part of a variety of policies, future predictions and more. The party makes a commitment to ecologically sustainable peace-building, which is central for its peace-approach to be future-oriented. Since the natural environment is one of the most important future conflict sources but also a chance to increase cooperation and sustainable living, it should be central in contemporary political peace efforts<sup>22</sup>. On this note, the word "help" in this manifesto is not only used to describe helping disadvantaged groups access a variety of social services, but also includes a part on social responsibility of companies. While the Labour party's climate plan is not prioritised over the framework of a capitalist system, it adds a social and environmental role to company responsibilities, extending their responsibilities beyond just creating wealth. Achieving

environmental sustainability in a system of continuous growth is made more feasible by attributing responsibility to the biggest polluters of the environment, international corporations<sup>23</sup>.

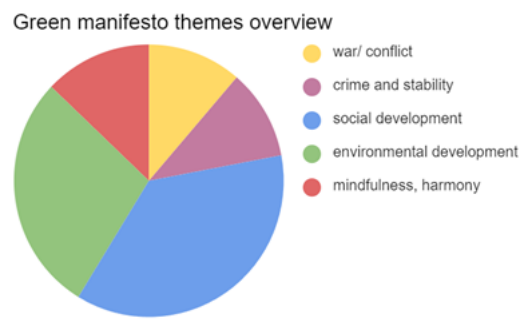


#### 4. The Green party

The top mentioned words in the Green party manifesto are “climate”, “create”, “help”, “environment”, “access” and “crime”<sup>24</sup>. The word “peace” is mentioned 10 times, mostly in the context of collaboration with the EU, promoting peace through foreign policy and protecting the right to protest. This connects to the Green party's peace perception, based on nuclear disarmament, security through inclusion and education, economic redistribution and public ecological awareness.



The word “climate” is the most mentioned word in the manifesto, mentioned in a variety of contexts and throughout different domains, including in education, housing and health. An example of this is the mention of parks as essential infrastructure and of tree planting as a priority. These green spaces significantly heighten both individual and collective wellbeing, improving both physical and mental health<sup>30</sup>. This furthers peace both on an individual and on a collective sphere. Furthermore, ecological learning and public nature awareness is portrayed as a priority. Examples of this are introducing an “ecocide” law criminalising harm to the environment. This introduces environmental protection into the legal sphere and presents nature as a finite resource, worthy of protection. The education sector also includes ideas of introducing sustainable and ecological education into school curricula. This can lead to increased awareness of nature and climate change for young people. While peace education is not directly mentioned, sustainable education can lay the foundations for mutual understanding and harmony with nature<sup>31</sup>.



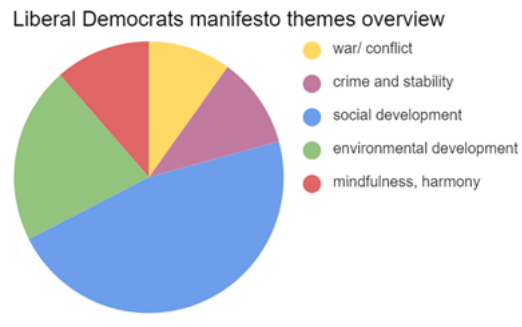
## 5. The Liberal Democrats

The Liberal Democrat’s most mentioned words in their manifesto are “climate”, “education”, “protect”, “help” and “environment”<sup>32</sup>. The word “peace” appears 7 times in the manifesto, solely in the geopolitical sense. The EU is mentioned as a peace project, the peace processes in Northern Ireland and Palestine are included, alongside the neoliberal order as peaceful. This overlaps with the overall Liberal Democrat peace perception, which centres around international securitisation in a neoliberal world order, a hybrid approach to crime as well as social inclusion of minorities and environmental protection in a capitalist system.





innovation). Similar approaches are taken in regards to the word “nature”, where the focus is on placing the environment in a system of continuous growth instead of changing the system to include a predetermined space for the natural environment. The focus of the word “development” also lies within the sphere of green innovation, especially in developing climate-friendly technologies. Green developments are therefore only pursued if they are in line with capitalism. This technology-centred shallow ecology approach is arguably not very productive and does not have a futuristic outlook for peace<sup>38</sup>.



## 6. The Peace Party

The Peace party’s most mentioned words are “peace”, “education”, “justice”, “law” and “conflict”<sup>39</sup>. It mentions peace 54 times, making it the party with the most peace mentions by far (but 23 of these mentions are within the name of the party). The word is mentioned across the sectors of inner and outer peace, internationally and nationally and in connection with ecological and social sustainability. The main focus still stays within the military and disarmament sphere. The Peace party’s peace conception centres around demilitarisation, idealism, restorative justice and reintegration into society.



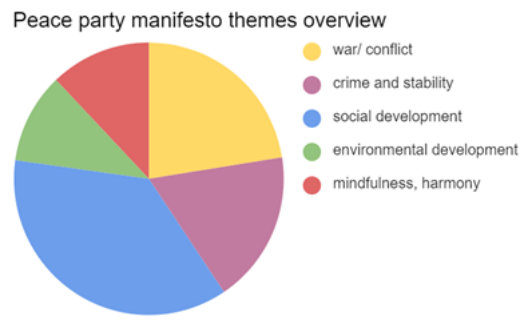
The most important part of the Peace party's conceptualisation of peace is demilitarisation. The party advocates for a complete dismissal of the army for military purposes and a full disarmament of the UK. The manpower of the army should instead be used to help disaster mitigation in affected countries. The total dissolution of the army would follow in the footsteps of for example Costa Rica, internationally recognised for its peacebuilding efforts<sup>40</sup>. On the international level, diplomacy and dialogue should be used for conflict resolution and armed conflict should always be discouraged. Furthermore, the party stands for an absolute prohibition of arm production, selling and design. This would significantly influence peace on the international sphere, since the UK is one of the top 5 weapon producing countries<sup>41</sup>. The Peace party is the only party with such an intense commitment to demilitarisation and assumes that peace can never be pursued sustainably through military means.

The social sector focuses on the upkeep of human rights around the world as well as on the national level. This is not supposed to be achieved through securitisation and interventionism, but instead through diplomacy and dialogue on the international stage. Still, the party's notions on this stay quite broad and do not link back to any concrete plans. The word "human rights" is mostly mentioned in the manifestos "visions" section, which talks about the party's vision of the world in idealistic terms. Unlike other parties, the Peace party uses idealism to advance its ideas for the wider future instead of focusing on the next election term. This is a very forward-looking approach to peace, which focuses on the longevity needed for sustainable peacebuilding.

The party's approach to crime is based on a sustainable approach. Crime and reoffending are supposed to be reduced through education, restorative justice and community-based approaches to punishment. This prioritises the reintroduction of offenders into society over harsh punishments and does not include the introduction of more police force. This tactic has been recognised as one of the most sustainable approaches to combating crime and is associated with reduced rates of reoffending<sup>42</sup>. The Peace party is also one of the only parties to mention violence performed by the police in their manifestos and is committed to stopping it. This is important because it promotes accountability for police institutions and sheds light on problematic tendencies within the institution<sup>43</sup>.

An important part of peace mentioned by the party is harmony between nature and humanity. The Peace party sees humans as part of nature and therefore as inherently connected with it. This kind of view challenges the traditional Western view of nature as being oppositional to its "artificial", "human-created" counterpart<sup>44</sup>. This view and ideal connects to the party's ambitious climate goals of reducing pollution in the atmosphere to mid 19th century levels. While this target

is quite challenging to reach, the party presents a variety of policies to tackle it. The ideas mentioned are quite idealistic, focusing on global peace and harmony with nature instead of quantifiable goals. This has its positives in bringing out broad, future-oriented approaches and aiming to change the fundamental nature of our relationships and understandings. It takes inspiration from non-traditional approaches to peace, therefore challenging dominant perceptions. Furthermore, the Peace party is the only party that draws a link between inner peace, the environment and wider society. It does so through invoking inter-human and human-nature relations based on harmony, then connecting them to inner peace. This makes it the only party that aims to introduce inner peace into politics as well as connect individual welfare with the protection of green spaces and the wider environment<sup>45</sup>.



## 7. Overall findings and conclusion

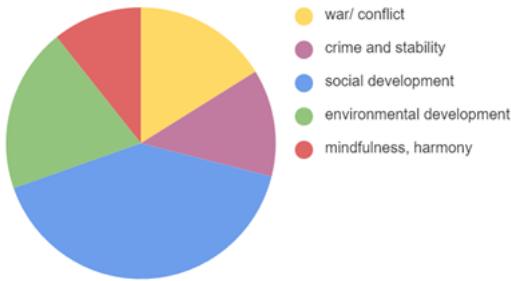


The most mentioned words in the party manifestos were “protect”, “help”, “climate”, “education” and “environment”. A few words were not mentioned at all, including “peace-keeper/ peace-keeping”, “reparations”, “living conditions”, “interaction” and “mindful”. The word peace was mentioned a total of 90 times across manifestos (for comparison, the word “protect” was mentioned 206 times), but it is important to note that 54 of these 90 mentions were within the manifesto of the Peace party. The areas of peace mentioned vary with each party, but there was an overwhelming concentration of peace in the war and conflict section. It was mostly used in the context of international peacemaking and often connected to either diplomatic or military interventions.

Overall, the research found that most parties that were looked at focus on a pragmatic and international approach to peace. While there were mixed approaches through military or diplomatic means, most of them were top-down approaches. Social access and minority protection as well as climatic concerns were also frequently mentioned but their importance was restricted by the centrality of keeping the economic status quo. Approaches to interior crime-combating strategies were mixed, from approaches ranging from total securitisation and deterrence to more regenerative justice and community-based sentences.

The biggest overall focus of the parties was within the social sphere (though it is important to note that this was also the category with the most words). Even though all five spheres were mentioned by all parties, the word “peace” was mentioned pretty much exclusively in the war and conflict category. It was used mostly in a pragmatist sense as a goal of international operations, yet staying vague due to its difficulties in measurement. The discourse of peace being almost exclusively and intersection with militarism refers to ideals of securitization and strengthens dominant understandings of peace, instead of expanding and challenging them. But since parties publish their manifestos to attract voters, their conception of peace is supposed to be relatable for a wide majority, which explains the lack of new ideas introduced. While a multiplicity of other aspects of peacebuilding are mentioned in the party manifestos, none of them are mentioned under the word “peace”, therefore there is no explicit connection made to peacekeeping. Mentioning peace explicitly in these contexts can help illuminate its importance and shift the perspective of it away from geopolitical concerns and to peace in daily life, inner peace and sustainability.

Manifesto themes overview



The peace perception as mentioned in political manifestos is essential for the political discourse in multiple spheres: firstly it shows the parties' standings on peace. This significantly impacts the discourse, since parties aim to introduce the ideas mentioned in their manifestos into parliament and ideally into laws. In a second sense, the peace approaches mentioned in the manifestos also show the perception of peace that parties believe the voting population focuses on. Even though these ideas might not reflect reality, it presents the beliefs of politicians regarding voters' peace priorities. Furthermore, the manifesto peace perceptions also carry the possibility of showing voters the central rhetorics around peace in the political discourse and the kinds of approaches that different parties pursue in regards to peace.

Since the British political system is dominated mostly by the party in power (currently the Conservative party), their perceptions of peace are much more significant in shaping societal perception than, for example, the Peace party's perception. This means that the primacy of mentions of their approach leads to it being much more entrenched in the societal mindset. This includes military interventions as approaches in international peace, inner securitisation and increasing police for security as well as an inclusion of minority groups and environmental factors only in limited terms and under the economic status quo. These kinds of ideas are constantly reproduced in people's minds and many of the other parties do not take a significantly different approach to peace, further reinforcing this.

For example, a pragmatic approach is taken by pretty much all of the political parties mentioned, feeding into the dominant idea of political peace. The only party that is an exception to this is the Peace party. It centres much more on idealism and brings the idea of inner peace into the political conception of peace, centring exclusively on outer peace. But even this party focuses its peace efforts largely on demilitarisation and international peace and the word "peace" is hardly mentioned in the social and environmental sphere. Introducing more parties like the peace party that disrupt our usual understanding of peace into the political discourse would significantly enrich

the political discourse and bring in different ideas of thinking about peace. This can be furthered even more by a closer cooperation and willingness to learn from grassroots groups about peace-building on the ground. A more multifaceted approach broadens the discourse and makes way for a more nuanced understanding. This is necessary to form a society that is open to embrace the change needed for a comprehensive and inclusive peace process.

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