ONLINE DISCUSSIONS ON 2026 UK BUDGET

Social intelligence research

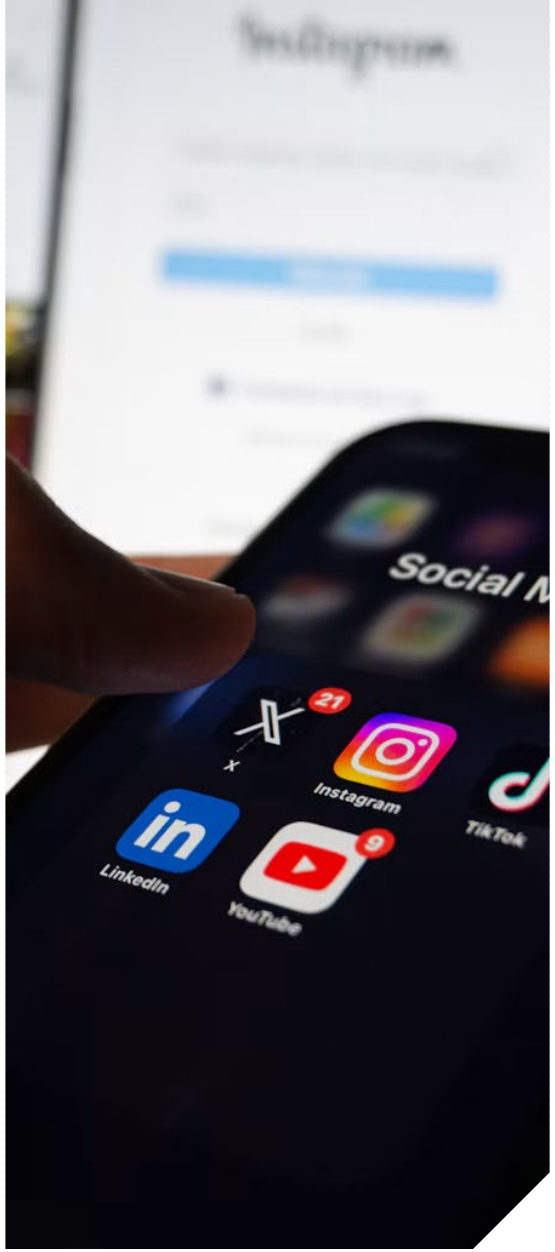
Ipsos Synthesio



© Ipsos | Online discussions on 2026 Labour Budget | October 2026 | Version 1| Public

Understanding social media data

- Social media data should not be read simply as "conversation" but rather as an act of expression. When someone posts, comments, shares, reacts, reviews, or complains online, they are not merely answering a question in a survey questionnaire; they are making a deliberate choice to put a feeling, opinion, experience, or reaction into the public domain.
- This is what makes social intelligence valuable. It captures unsolicited, unprompted, and often emotionally charged expressions. Unlike surveys or interviews, where respondents answer a structured set of questions designed by a researcher, social intelligence data is unstructured. People decide what matters enough to say, how they want to say it, and when they want to say it. As a result, it can surface issues, language, emotions, frustrations, needs, and cultural signals that structured research may not anticipate.
- Social media data can also skew negative emotions, especially with sensitive topics and narratives. This should not be seen as a flaw. Negative experiences, frustration, disappointment, or concern often create a stronger impulse to speak publicly. In that sense, negativity in social data is not just "bias"; it can be a meaningful signal of what people feel strongly enough to express.
- Various studies show that emotional social media content (e.g., negative, provocative) can be amplified and become viral through social sharing affordances. Therefore, social media publication is best interpreted as a window into expressed / active opinion, not silent/reflective opinion.
- Social intelligence shows what people are motivated to say publicly, how they want to be perceived, based on the language they use, the emotions they attach to topics, and the issues they want others to notice.
- It should be understood, therefore, that social media data is not the same as a representative survey of the population; not everyone is on social media, and the topics those who are choose to talk about on social media may not be a representative selection of all the experiences they face. Instead, its value is in uncovering the stories and narratives that they do want to talk about, and what this reveals about their experiences and attitudes.



Scope of the analysis: data collection principles and limitation

We analysed publicly available online discussions relating to the 2026, 2025 and 2024 Labour Budgets.
2026 mentions were only captured where The Budget or taxes were referenced near to Labour, Burnham or Healey.
2025 and 2024 mentions were only captured where The Budget or taxes were referenced near to Labour, Starmer or Reeves

Illustrative examples:

- *"Andy Burnham's budget" → Included (for 2026)* ☑
- *"Rachel Reeves' taxes" → Included (for 2024, 2025)* ☑
- *"Burnham" (without reference to the 2026 Budget) → Excluded* ☒
- *"Starmer" (without reference to 2024 or 2025 Budgets) → Excluded (from 2024, 2025)* ☒

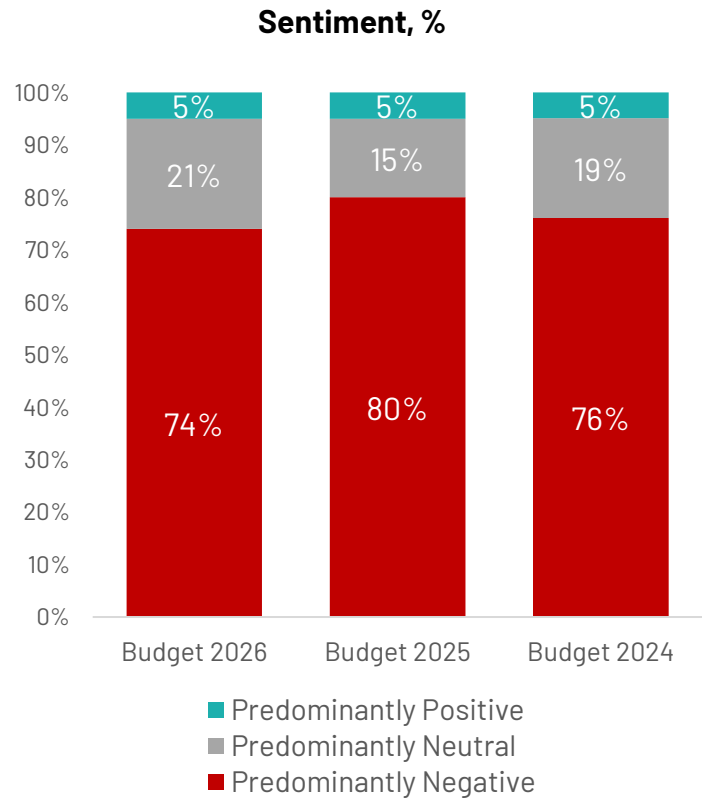
Boolean queries used to identify budget-related discussions across online sources

Political Party	Boolean Query
2026 Budget	(labour OR Healey OR Burnham) NEAR/7 (budget* OR taxes OR tax OR VAT OR CGT OR IHT)
2025 Budget	(labour OR Reeves OR starmer) NEAR/7 (budget* OR taxes OR tax OR VAT OR CGT OR IHT)
2024 Budget	(labour OR Reeves OR starmer) NEAR/7 (budget* OR taxes OR tax OR VAT OR CGT OR IHT)

The 2026 Budget generated lower volumes of discussion online compared to previous years, although with all three the balance of sentiment remained similarly predominantly negative

The UK Labour Budget 2026 generated 158K mentions online in the 32-day period from 30 days before the Budget to the day after, less than half (down 56%) compared to the 2025 Budget, and around two-thirds (down 36%) compared to the 2024 Budget.

	Budget 2026	Budget 2025	Budget 2024
End date	29/10/2026	27/11/2025	31/10/2024
Start date	28/09/2026	27/10/2025	30/09/2024
Total Number of mentions* for the period	158,251	**359,148**	246,311
Average N of mention per day	4,945	**11,223**	7,697
Views*	40,745,045	**136,544,077**	105,653,169
Average views per day	1,273,283	**4,267,002**	3,301,662



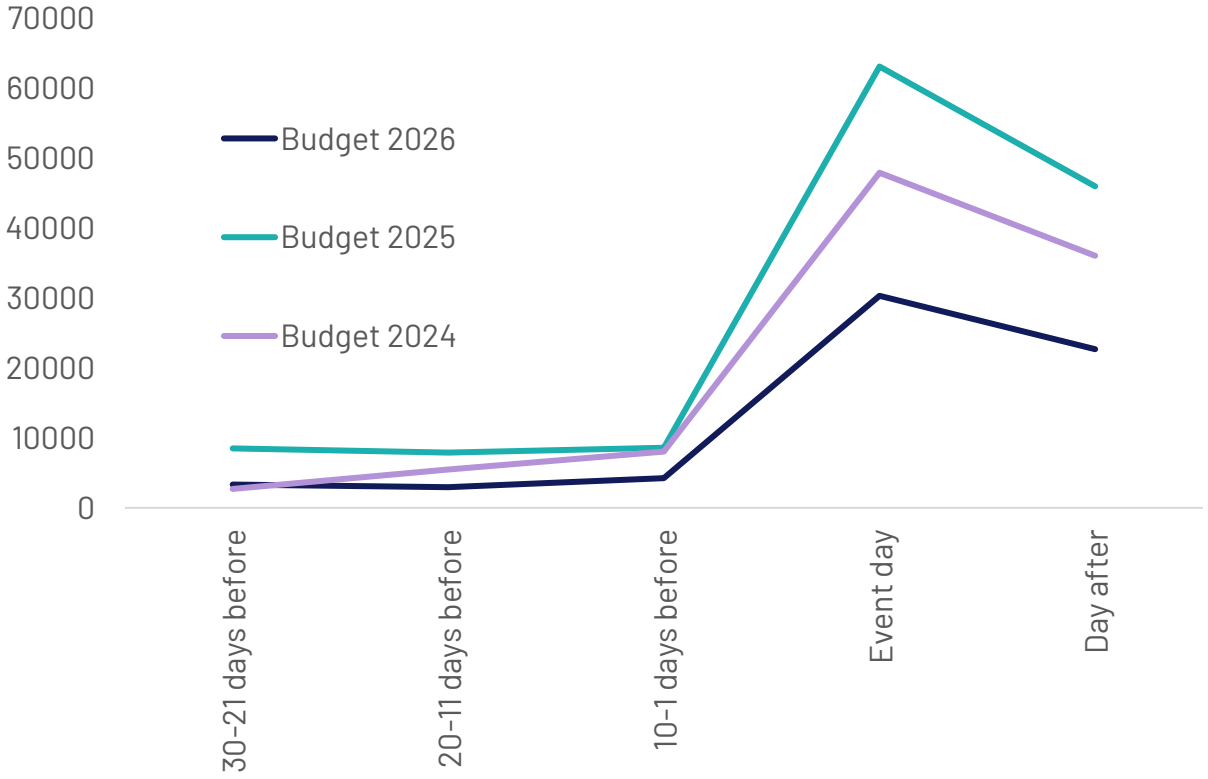
* Mentions are publicly available posts that the Synthesio platform detected online.

** Views show how many people have viewed/ were exposed to these mentions.

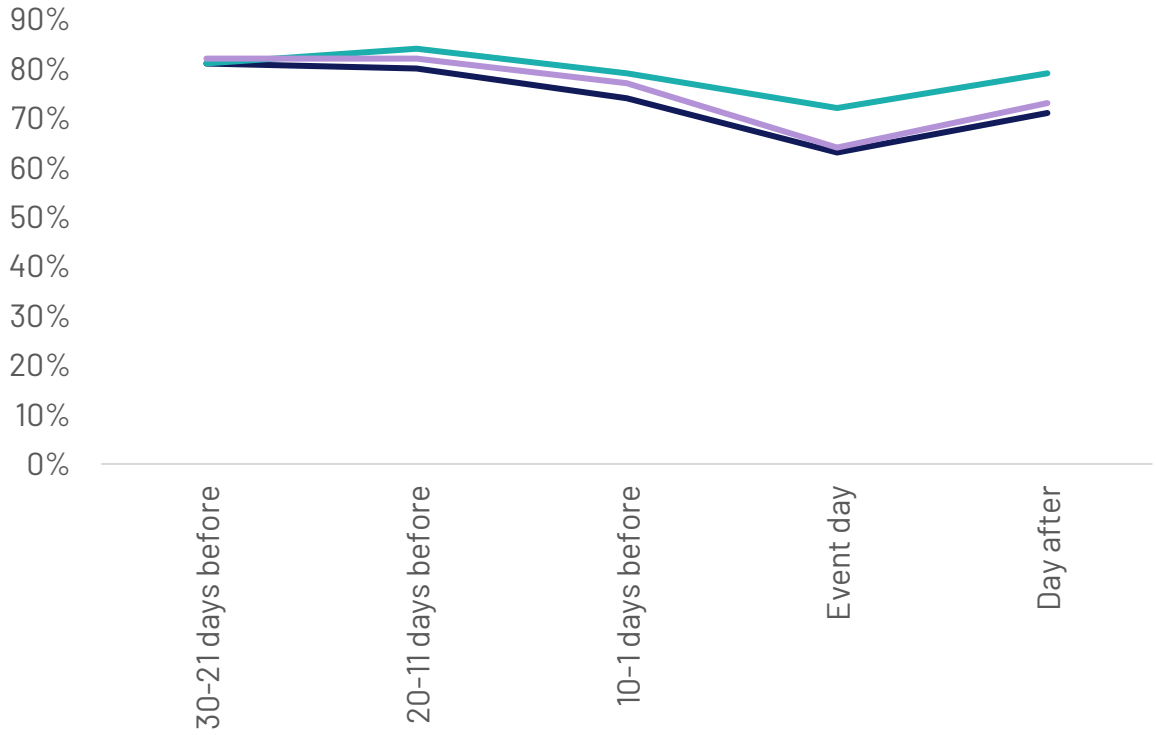
Source: *Public posts from X, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Reddit, Forums, Blogs, Professional news, Institutional and business platforms via Synthesio Budget 2026* – 158,251, *Budget 2025 - 359,148*, Budget 2024 = 246,311.

The 2026 Budget generated less online conversation than in 2025 or 2024. All three Budgets saw a peak in conversation on Budget day itself, which continued the day after (albeit tailing off slightly). Sentiment for all remained predominantly negative throughout the period, though slightly worse in 2025.

Number of mentions over time, average per day



Share of predominantly negative mentions over time, average per day %



Source: *Public posts from X, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Reddit, Forums, Blogs, Professional news, Institutional and business platforms via Synthesio*
Budget 2026 – 158,251, *Budget 2025 - 359,148*, Budget 2024 = 246,311.

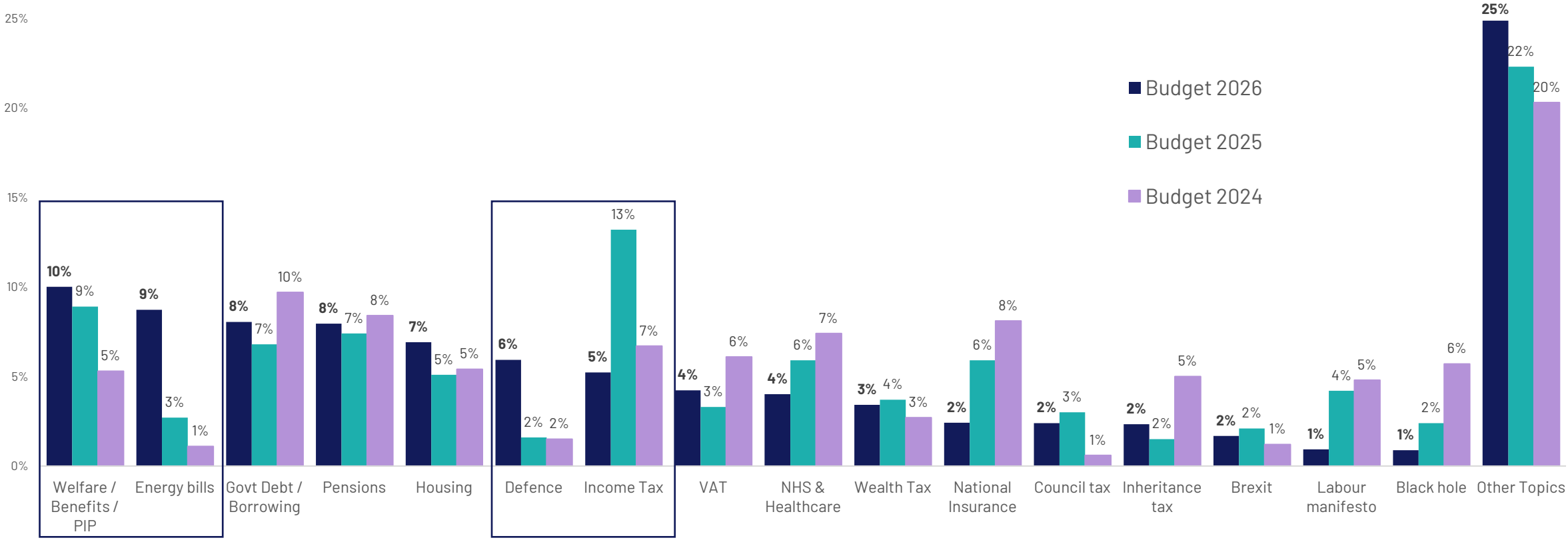
The immediate online reaction to the 2026 Budget was quieter and slightly less negative compared to the 2025 Budget



Pain Points	Positive reactions
Cost of living measures are not enough to make a real impact (e.g., tariff removals only making a small impact on grocery bills).	Support for energy bills through £100 payments, VAT relief on electricity and ending the gas standing charge.
Lack of answers to address underlying issues of weak economic growth and living standards through economic expansion rather than redistribution.	Other support such as 5p fuel duty cut extension, minimum wage increase, more paternity pay, and restoring cash ISA allowances.
Higher earners – even those who feel they have had only modest financial success – feeling penalised through higher taxes (eg on property and savings).	Support for small businesses through business rate relief for high streets, while the public sector can benefit from improved investment in technology.
Pressure on businesses through minimum wage increases and still high business rates.	Fiscal devolution and more regional control over local spending decisions.
Lack of extra defence spending – especially when the government is otherwise telling citizens to stock-up on essentials.	£432 million allocated for rough sleeping, with more investment in affordable housing.

Source: *Public posts from X, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Reddit, Forums, Blogs, Professional news, Institutional and business platforms via Synthesio Budget 2026 , 28/10/2026, 12:30 onwards – 24,544, Budget 2025, 26/11/2025, 12:30 onwards – 48,715.*

In 2026, the top online conversations around the Budget focused on welfare and benefits, energy bills, government debt, pensions, housing and defence. Compared to previous Budgets, there was more focus on energy bills and defence, and relatively less on income tax and national insurance.



Source: *Public posts from X, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Reddit, Forums, Blogs, Professional news, Institutional and business platforms via Synthesio Budget 2026* - 158,251, *Budget 2025 - 359,148*, Budget 2024 = 246,311.

Definition of top 16 narratives in online discussion about the UK Budget

Synthesio applied best-in-class AI algorithms, curated by human analysis, to reveal and quantify key narratives/topics mentioned in online posts about the Labour Budget. This provides a solution for understanding which narratives dominate the online landscape and how exposed each budget since 2024 was to each narrative.
Narrative detection uses a linguistic approach (a lexicon of terms found in publications), so a narrative may include discussions of societal issues, as well as references to Labour and their politicians in connection to a topic alongside the budget (e.g. "*this Labour Budget will affect my welfare*" would be classified as a Welfare / Benefits / PIP narrative).
Some mentions may, therefore, appear in multiple narratives (e.g. "*the budget did not address pensions nor NHS waiting times*" would show up as in both Pensions and NHS & Healthcare).

Narrative	Definition
Welfare / Benefits / PIP	Mentions on universal credit, welfare, means testing, benefits and PIP.
Govt Debt / Borrowing	Discussions on borrowing, public finances, government debt, national debt or public debt.
Pensions	Mentions of pensions or pensioners.
Energy Bills	Conversations regarding energy, electricity, gas or utilities in relation to costs, prices or bills.
Housing	Discussions about all forms of housing, mortgages, rent, landlords, tenants and home ownership.
Defence	Discussions relating to country defence, military and the armed forces.
Income Tax	Conversations on income tax.
NHS & Healthcare	Mentions of the NHS and healthcare.
VAT	Mentions of value added tax (VAT).
Wealth Tax	Conversations regarding taxing the rich or wealthy.
Inheritance Tax	Discussions about inheritance tax.
National Insurance	Conversations relating to national insurance (NI).
Brexit	Mentions of Brexit.
Council Tax	Discussions on council tax.
Labour Manifesto	Conversations connecting Labour to their manifesto, promises or pledges.
Black Hole	Discussions about a "black hole", a term used to describe a gap between what the Government expected to spend and what it expects to receive.

Definition of social media metrics used in the report

Metric	Definition
Volume / Share of Voice	Volume (Share of voice) is a key quantitative metric that represents how often the Labour Budget, or a related topic was mentioned across social media platforms within a defined timeframe/subsample of mentions. In this study, volume (share of voice) was calculated as a percentage of all / averaged per day conversations discovered by the Synthesio and used as a comparative metric to evaluate the prevalence of each topic in the social media public landscape from the last three budgets.
Views	Views are calculated by how many times a post was played by users; Ipsos Synthesio currently uses YouTube social views to work out this metric. Therefore, in this study, views / average views per day have been collated from the total number of views on YouTube during the period tracked.
Sentiment	Sentiment is the metric of the emotional tone of each analysed mention. Sentiment analysis, based on Natural Language Processing (NLP), aims to detect the underlying emotional tone of posts and comments (mentions), categorising them as predominantly positive, predominantly negative, or predominantly neutral. Even where posts are (for example) predominantly negative, it is possible they may also make some positive comments. Unlike standard approaches that rely on keyword dictionaries (lexicons) or basic machine learning, Ipsos Synthesio employs best-in-class algorithms powered by Google BERT. Sentiment reflects the emotional tone of each mention and goes beyond "what" is being said to reveal "how" people feel.

For more information

Bairbre Cunningham
Ipsos Synthesio Service Line Lead
Bairbre.Cunningham@ipsos.com

Gideon Skinner
Research Director
Gideon.Skinner@ipsos.com

Pavel Lebedev
Research Director
Pavel.Lebedev@ipsos.com

© Ipsos | Online discussions on 2026 Labour Budget | October 2026 | Version 1| Public