

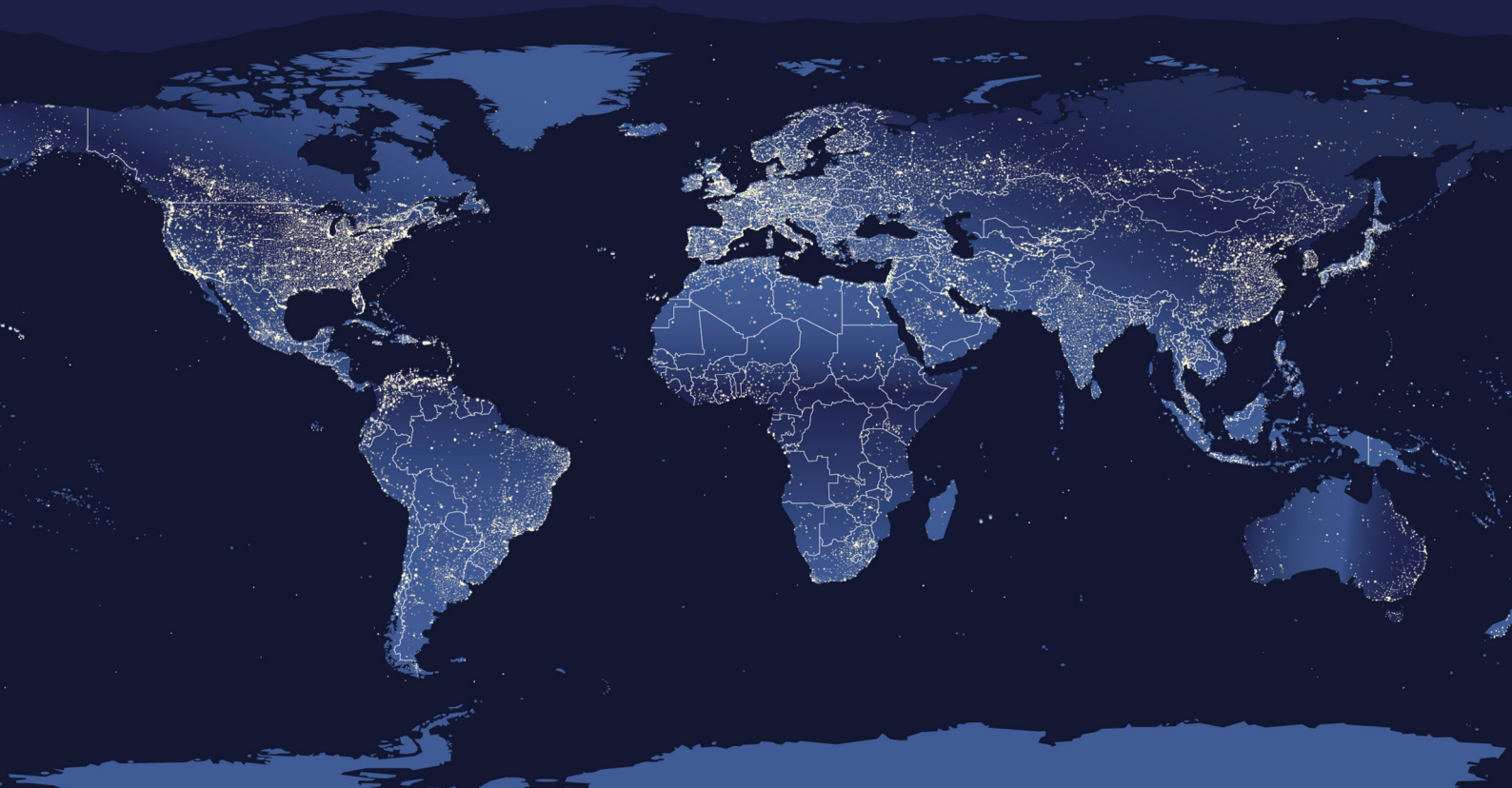
**BFPG**

British Foreign Policy Group

# UK Public Opinion on Foreign Policy and Global Affairs

## Annual Survey – 2024

Evie Aspinall and Eliza Keogh



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# About this Report



## The British Foreign Policy Group

The British Foreign Policy Group (BFGP) is an independent, non-partisan think tank dedicated to advancing the UK's global influence, at a crucial time in the nation's modern history. Our core objective is to bridge the link between the domestic and international spheres – recognising that Britain's foreign policy choices are shaped by our social, economic and democratic landscape at home. Our mission supports Britain as a strong, engaged and influential global actor. We promote democratic values, liberal societies, and the power of multilateralism – and we recognise Britain's critical international responsibility to uphold and extend these throughout the world. The BFGP believes that a strong and united nation at home is the essential foundation of an effective and cohesive UK foreign policy.



## Critical Publics

Critical Publics is a transnational network of intelligence-based strategy consultants. Headquartered in London, Critical Publics comprehensively implements agenda-assurance solutions internationally. We help our clients achieve their objectives through, amongst other things, resilient and proven actionable intelligence, substantiated strategy development, consistent planning and discreet implementation. We work with outstanding strategic associates and partners to ensure that our clients receive highly specialised support across a wide range of services, constantly growing our network of domain experts and strategic business collaborations.

It is a privilege to have the opportunity to support BFGP to run the 2024 Survey on UK Public Opinion on Foreign Policy. The survey's insightful and comprehensive findings offer a thorough knowledge source that facilitates reliable analysis and render it a significant component for sound policymaking, on an array of issues concerning and affecting Britons now and into the future.



## J.L. Partners

J.L. Partners is a global market and public opinion research company with offices in London and Washington D.C. J.L. Partners is an accredited member of the British Polling Council and Market Research Society.

## About this Report

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### The Authors



**Evie Aspinall** is the Director of the British Foreign Policy Group. She is a social and political researcher specialising in UK foreign policy. Her primary research interests centre around building domestic consent for the UK's international activities and she has worked on BFPG's public opinion work, including its annual survey, since 2020. Other research focuses include future trends in foreign policy, international development and the UK's relationship with strategic rivals. She holds a BA from the University of Cambridge and an MSc from King's College London.

[evie.aspinall@bfpg.co.uk](mailto:evie.aspinall@bfpg.co.uk)



**Eliza Keogh** is a Researcher and Programmes Manager at the British Foreign Policy Group, supporting BFPG's research output and external relationships, and managing its programme of events and activities. Her primary research interests are climate change, aid and international development, and UK soft power. She studied Political Science at the University of Exeter and the University of Sydney.

[eliza.keogh@bfpg.co.uk](mailto:eliza.keogh@bfpg.co.uk)

### Acknowledgements

With thanks to Critical Publics for their support in making this year's survey possible. Thanks also to our polling partners J.L. Partners and to our designer Nadia Nelson for bringing this paper to life. All mistakes are the authors' own.

### Methodology

This report presents the findings of the 2024 Survey of UK Public Opinion on Foreign Policy and Global Affairs, authored by The British Foreign Policy Group. This is the sixth edition of this annual survey of public opinion on foreign policy, which was first conducted in 2019. The fieldwork for this report was conducted with J.L. Partners between the 31st July and 5th August 2024. In previous iterations of the survey, fieldwork was conducted by BMG Research (2019) and Opinium (2020 - 2022). The 2023 survey was also conducted by J.L. Partners. In all editions of the survey we have conducted a nationally representative online survey but panel effects may vary between partners.

The report presents findings based on descriptive analysis of a nationally representative sample of 2043 people, using quotas with the data weighted to be nationally representative.

All conclusions drawn are the authors' own and full editorial control and responsibility belongs to the British Foreign Policy Group.

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# Executive Summary

As the new Labour Government settles in, this year's BFGP Annual Survey of UK Public Opinion on Foreign Policy, the sixth edition of the survey, explores the British public's support for Labour's ambitions for a 'reconnected' Britain, as well as Britons' wider visions for the UK's place in the world. Against the backdrop of growing global insecurity, it finds that Britons are deeply cautious of engagement with nations whose values may not always align with their own, and particularly of engagement with the UK's strategic rivals Russia and China.

Britons' caution about the world we are living in does not translate into significant support for increased spending on national security or international development though, with Britons very concerned about the domestic economic costs of any such uplift. Instead, Britons believe the answer lies with the UK's traditional allies, not least the United States and the European Union, and they now overwhelmingly support cooperation with the EU across a wide range of areas. Given the importance placed on the UK's traditional allies, the United States presidential election is therefore viewed with some trepidation, with Britons concerned about the effect that a second Trump presidency would have on the bilateral relationship, as well as wider global security.

## International Engagement

- As global conflicts continue to dominate the headlines, the majority of Britons remain interested (78%) in the UK's international activities. This engagement has contributed to a higher proportion of Britons feeling informed (58%) about the UK's international activities than at any other point since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- In this highly contested world, Britons' sense of international identity remains in flux. This year a higher proportion of Britons identify as a patriot (54%) than as a European (51%) or a global citizen (47%). However, these terms remain deeply divisive, and only marginally more Britons do identify as European (51%) than do not (44%).

## Britain Reconnected

- The election of a new Government has brought with it renewed trust in the UK Government's international activities. While distrust remains high, for the first time since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Britons express a higher level of trust (49%), than distrust (46%), in the UK Government to make foreign policy decisions in the public's interest.
- It is also the case that almost half of Britons (49%) believe that the change in government has had a positive effect on the UK's reputation overseas.

## The UK's International Partnerships

- Britons are very comfortable with the UK's partnerships with its traditional allies, particularly the United States and the EU. The majority of Britons trust both the EU (58%) and the United States (53%) to act responsibly in the world and the United States is also overwhelmingly seen as the UK's closest ally (54%).
- However, Britons are very cautious of engagement with less traditional allies, whose values may sometimes differ from their own. For example, Britons more frequently distrust (37%) than trust (21%) India to act responsibly in the world, and 46% of Britons believe that the UK should trade less with Saudi Arabia.

### The Future of UK-EU Relations

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- Britons are strongly supportive of a 'reset' of relations and closer cooperation with the EU, particularly cooperation to reduce irregular migration (77%), reducing barriers to trade (75%), joint research collaboration and academic exchanges (74%) and signing a UK-EU security pact (69%).
- Even among those who voted Leave in the EU Referendum, a majority now support strengthening UK-EU cooperation across a range of areas including, but not limited to, cooperation to tackle irregular migration (79%), reducing barriers to trade (69%) and signing a UK-EU security pact (57%).
- The majority of Britons (60%) support the UK being a member of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). However, those who voted Conservative in the 2024 General Election are deeply divided over membership of the ECHR, with 38% opposing membership, while 37% support it.
- Britons are also willing to accept a number of potential trade-offs in order to strengthen UK-EU relations, and a majority of Britons would support strengthening trade relations if it meant aligning more closely with EU standards and regulations (60%) or signing new youth mobility agreements (58%).
- Nevertheless, Britons also have clear red lines. Almost half (48%) of Britons oppose strengthening trade relations with the EU if it makes it harder to trade with non-EU nations, while 41% oppose strengthening trade relations if it means allowing the EU to fish more in UK seas, limiting the new Government's scope for trade negotiations.

### The United States Presidential Election

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- Britons are firm believers in the 'special relationship' and are confident that a potential Kamala Harris presidency would have a positive effect on UK-US relations (55%), global security (48%) and European security (44%).
- Conversely, Britons are apprehensive about a potential second Trump term, which Britons believe would have a negative effect on global security (54%), European security (50%) and UK-US relations (45%).

### Defence and National Security

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- While, at a surface level, Britons support (71%) increasing defence spending to 2.5% of GDP at some stage, the majority of Britons oppose increasing defence spending if it requires spending less on the NHS (64%), education (53%) or welfare (51%), limiting the Government's scope for increasing defence spending.
- Ahead of the Strategic Defence Review, Britons believe investment in critical skills for defence should be the top priority for defence spending (35%), followed by investing in the latest weaponry and technology (23%) and increasing the number of UK troops (16%).
- Britons' support for Ukraine endures and a plurality (47%) of Britons believe the UK should support Ukraine for as long as it takes. Just 8% believe the UK should withdraw support.
- Britons are very cautious of engagement with China. Just 13% of Britons support allowing Chinese technology companies to operate in the UK, while just 8% support China building infrastructure in the UK, such as nuclear plants and 5G technology.

### The Conflict in the Middle East

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- The majority (62%) of Britons distrust Israel to act responsibly in the world. This is just nine percentage points lower than the proportion of Britons who distrust China (71%).
- There is strong support among Britons for calling for an immediate ceasefire (71%), increasing aid to Gaza (52%), and to a lesser extent, for suspending arms sales to Israel (44%) and recognising a Palestinian state (43%).

### International Development and Climate Change

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- The UK's commitment for returning to spending 0.7% of GNI on international development remains contentious. Britons are highly sceptical of the benefits the UK's international development and aid programmes bring - 56% do not believe it helps tackle irregular migration and 45% do not believe it makes the UK safer. Britons do believe it improves global perceptions of the UK (52%) and that it creates new trading opportunities for the UK (49%), but this is not enough to compel substantial support for increasing development spending.
- Britons believe the rollout of domestic green policies in the UK (43%) should be the UK's top priority in tackling climate change, while just 15% of Britons believe the UK should prioritise limiting the potential economic costs of climate policies.

# International Engagement

2024 has been another year of significant geopolitical upheaval, with war continuing to rage in Ukraine, major conflict in the Middle East and uncertainty about the future of American leadership on the world stage. The conflict in the Middle East, particularly, has led to significant domestic debate, with widespread protests, boycotts and occupations emerging across the UK in reaction to the crisis.<sup>1</sup>

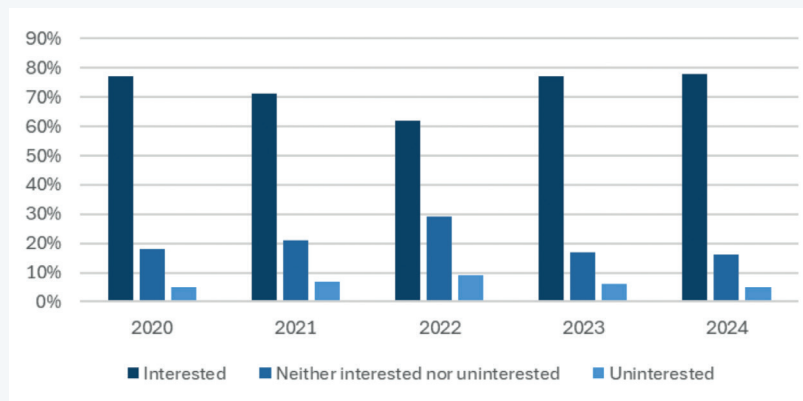
However, despite several independent MPs winning their seats on pro-Gaza platforms, foreign policy failed to gain significant political traction in the 2024 General Election. Instead, the General Election discourse was dominated by domestically-focused debates, not least the high cost of living and debates around levels of taxation. This isn't particularly surprising; the most immediate and day-to-day concerns often receive the most political attention during elections.

Yet, our research shows that in today's turbulent geopolitical environment, and as Britons' understanding of the world, and their position within it, remains in flux, Britons have significant interest in, and desire to understand more about, the UK's international activities. There is a clear opportunity, then, for the new Government to engage more proactively with the British public on foreign policy and build domestic consent for its international agenda moving forward.

## Interest in the UK's International Activities

Britons' levels of interest in UK foreign policy tend to fluctuate in line with the salience of global issues in the media. As a result, Britons' levels of interest in the UK's international activities were particularly high at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and after gradually declining over the years in between, rose again in 2023 in our first polling following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Both the COVID-19 pandemic and the invasion of Ukraine highlighted to Britons the significant domestic consequences global events can have, sparking increased interest in international affairs among the British public.

Proportion of Britons interested in UK foreign policy, disaggregated by year



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<sup>1</sup> Jackson, S. (October, 2023). Israel-Hamas war: Around 100,000 people descend on central London for pro-Palestine march. *Sky News*. Retrieved from: <https://news.sky.com/story/israel-hamas-war-around-100-000-people-attend-pro-palestine-protest-in-central-london-12989058>; Nagesh, A. (May, 2024). Students occupy UK university campuses in protest over Gaza. *BBC*. Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-68938763>

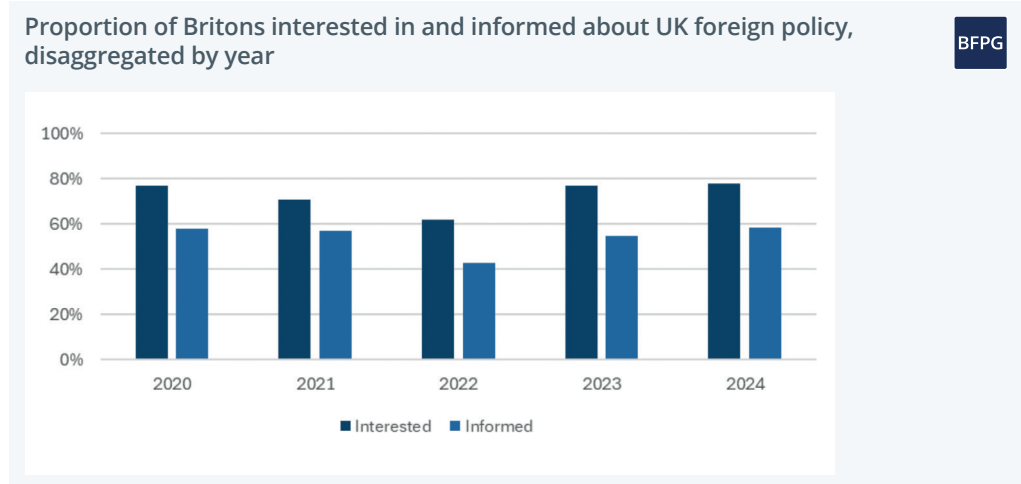
## International Engagement

While Russia's invasion of Ukraine has fallen down the news headlines, the proliferation of global challenges, including the conflict in the Middle East and questions about the future direction of the United States, has helped to ensure that the spike in Britons' interest in UK foreign policy seen in 2023 has been maintained through to 2024. It is now the case that 78% of Britons are interested in the UK's international activities. A further 16% of Britons are neither interested nor uninterested in the UK's international activities, while just 5% of Britons report being uninterested.

As in previous years, there are, however, differences in levels of interest in the UK's international activities across different demographic groups. Men (83%) remain more interested than women (74%), as do those from higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades (85%), relative to those from lower (C2DE) socio-economic grades (72%). Interest is also particularly high among those living in London (87%) and is higher among those who voted Remain (85%) in the EU Referendum than those who voted Leave (76%).

## Self-Reported Foreign Policy Knowledge

Over the last five years, BFPG research has consistently found that Britons' levels of interest in, and self-reported understanding of, UK foreign policy trend in the same direction. As interest in UK foreign policy has remained high this year, so too have levels of understanding of UK foreign policy. It is now the case that 58% of Britons feel informed about UK foreign affairs. Meanwhile, 25% of Britons feel neither informed nor uninformed, while 17% do not feel informed about the UK's foreign affairs.

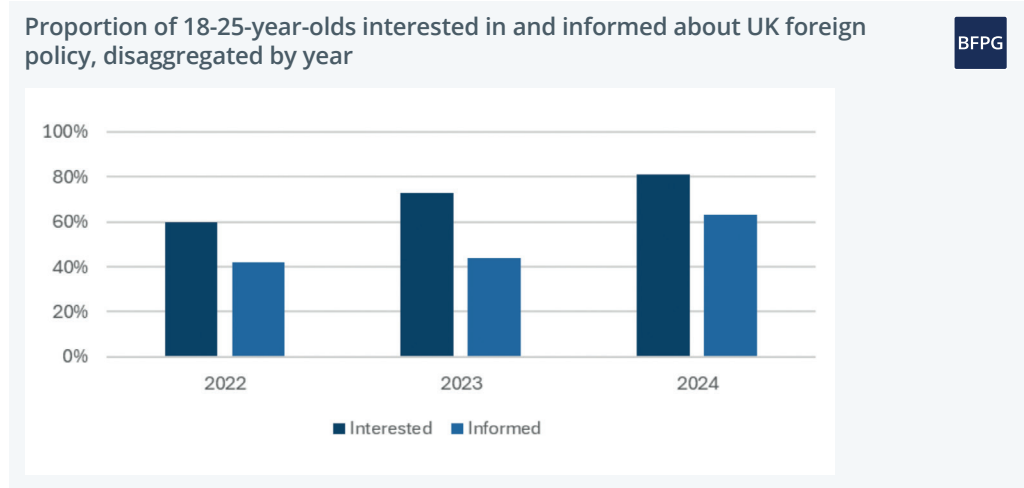


While this poll reflects Britons' self-perceptions of their understanding of foreign policy, rather than assessing actual levels of understanding, it is striking how the proportion of Britons who feel informed about the UK's international activities has risen despite the proliferation of major global conflicts and challenges this year. This highlights how self-reported understanding of foreign policy is highly contingent on the prominence of international affairs in the media and public debates, rather than necessarily on how much Britons actually understand the complexities and nuances of current global challenges.

Demographic variations in self-reported knowledge of foreign policy broadly mirror levels of interest. Men (68%) more frequently feel informed than women (49%) about the UK's international affairs, as do those from higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades (66%) compared to those in lower (C2DE) socio-economic grades (50%). Britons who voted Remain (64%) in the EU Referendum also more frequently feel informed than those who voted Leave (57%). Meanwhile, residents in London (70%) more frequently feel informed than those living elsewhere in the country.

## International Engagement

While interest and self-reported understanding trend in the same direction, there is still a gap though - of 20 percentage points - between Britons' interest in, and self-reported understanding of, UK foreign policy. Disparities between levels of interest and knowledge of UK foreign policy are particularly high among women (25 percentage points) and those aged over 66 (25 percentage points).



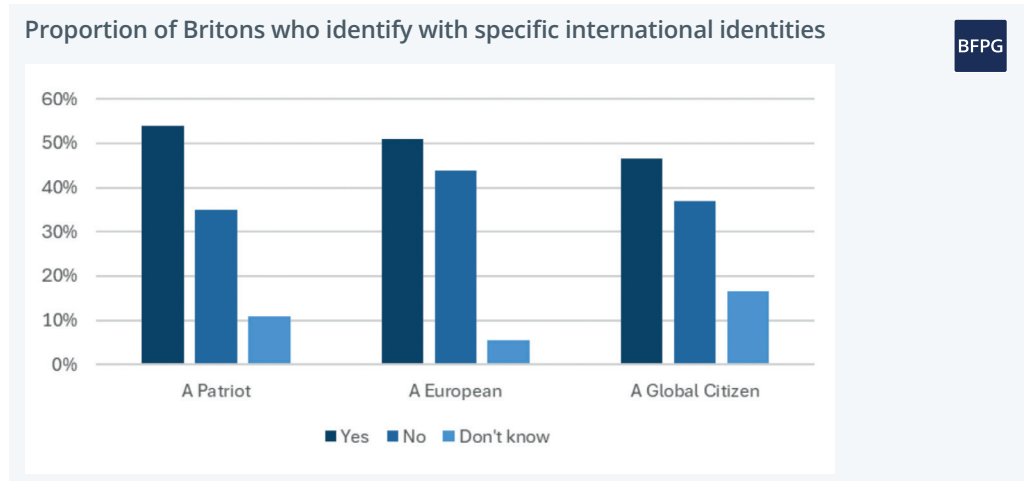
Particularly striking is the fact that, in 2023, 18-25-year-olds had a 29 percentage point gap between levels of interest and self-reported understanding of foreign policy - the biggest gap of all the age groups. This year that gap has narrowed to 18 percentage points, the second lowest of all the age groups. This likely reflects how ongoing global challenges, not least the conflict in the Middle East, have mobilised and engaged younger Britons, and how this engagement has brought with it higher levels of self-reported understanding of the UK's international activities among younger Britons.

## International Identities

As the new UK Government begins to set out its vision for the UK's role in the world, it finds itself juggling a variety of commitments - not least to UK, European and global security, values and prosperity - all at once. Often these commitments are complementary - the link between European and UK security and prosperity, for example, has been made particularly evident by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Similarly, leading the global climate transition could generate significant domestic economic benefits.<sup>2</sup> However, these commitments are not always fully aligned. Providing military and economic aid to Ukraine is important for national and international security but it does incur financial costs at a time of economic challenge in the UK. Similarly, while there are economic benefits to be gained from climate leadership, the transition will impose some domestic costs, which may not always be evenly distributed.

In understanding how Britons view these different priorities, it is helpful to first explore how Britons view their position in the world. In a fast-changing global environment, there have been significant fluctuations in Britons' sense of international identity in recent years. This year, for the first time since 2021, of the three terms polled - global citizen, patriot and European - a larger proportion of Britons (54%) identify as a patriot than identify as a European (51%) or a global citizen (47%).

<sup>2</sup> Ralston, J. (February, 2024). Two years of Russia's war on Ukraine: the gas crisis, price rises and energy security. *ECIU*. Retrieved from: <https://eciu.net/insights/2024/two-years-of-russias-war-on-ukraine-the-gas-crisis-price-rises-and-energy-security>; The Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment (March, 2022). How will acting on climate change affect the economy? *Imperial College London*. Retrieved from: <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/grantham/publications/climate-change-faqs/how-will-acting-on-climate-change-affect-the-economy/>



However, while a plurality of Britons identifies with each of the terms, a substantial proportion of Britons do not identify with them. Indeed, there is only a seven percentage point difference between the proportion of Britons who do identify as European (51%) and those who do not (44%). This, combined with the year-on-year fluctuations in identification with each of the terms, will make it difficult for the new Government to create a broad vision for UK foreign policy that secures support across a divided British public, whose own views on the world, and their role within it, remain in flux.

### Patriotism

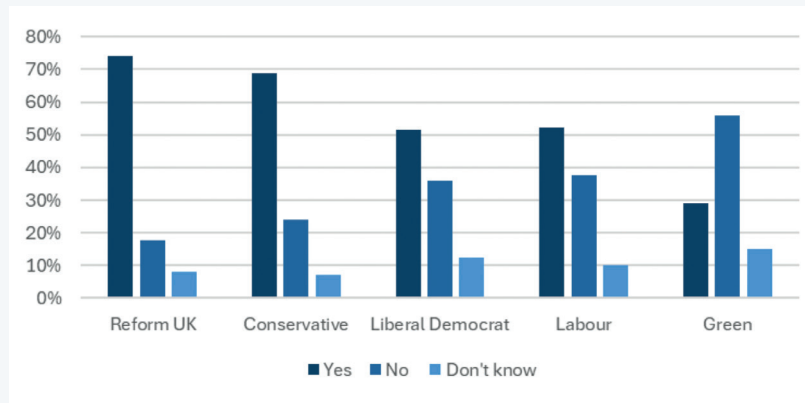
For the first time since 2021, it is now the case that a majority of Britons (54%) identify as a patriot. This marks a continuation of an uptick in Britons' identification with the term patriot after it dropped to a low of 45% in 2022. Identification with the term then rose three percentage points to 48% in 2023 and has risen a further six percentage points this year. Meanwhile, 35% of Britons do not identify as a patriot, and 11% don't know whether they identify as one.

There are several potential drivers for this increase in Britons' sense of patriotism over the last two years, including the election of a new Government in the UK, widespread public support for the UK's approach to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the coronation of King Charles III, as well as the fact that this year's polling was undertaken during the 2024 Olympic Games. With the far-right riots, which were widely condemned by the vast majority of Britons, also occurring during the period in which this polling was conducted, it would be interesting for further research to explore how this may also have impacted Britons' sense of patriotism in both the short- and long-term.<sup>3</sup>

Identification with the term patriot is deeply divided across demographic groups. The most striking of these is in regard to the 2024 General Election vote, with 74% of those who voted Reform UK and 69% of those who voted Conservative identifying as a patriot, compared to 29% of those who voted Green. Indeed, those who voted Green are the only voter group in which a majority (56%) do not identify as a patriot.

<sup>3</sup> Difford, D. & Smith, M. (August, 2024). The public reaction to the 2024 riots. *YouGov*. Retrieved from: <https://yougov.co.uk/politics/articles/50257-the-public-reaction-to-the-2024-riots>

Proportion of Britons who identify as a patriot, disaggregated by 2024 General Election vote

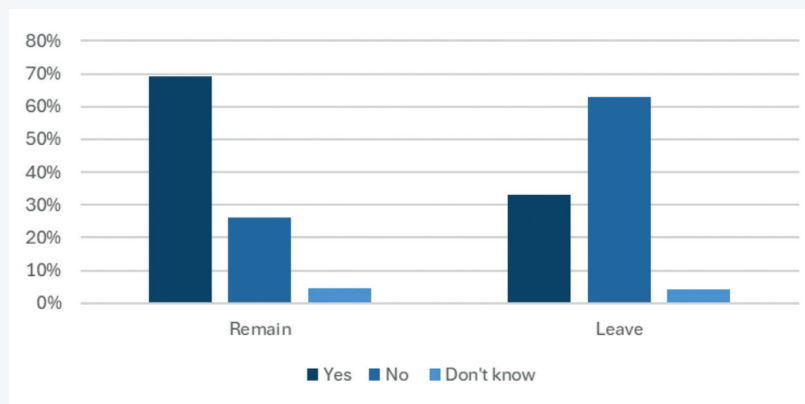


There are significant age disparities as well, with 65% of over-66s identifying as patriots, compared to 35% of 18-25-year-olds. Indeed, 18-25-year-olds are the only age group who more frequently do not identify as a patriot (47%) than do (35%). Meanwhile, although Britons living in the devolved nations still more often than not identify as patriots, they do so with much less frequency than Britons in any of the regions of England. For example, while 61% of those living in London identify as patriots, only 47% of residents in Northern Ireland, 47% of residents in Wales and 45% of residents in Scotland identify as such.

### European Identity

While a majority of Britons identify as European (51%) it is the most contested of the identities polled, with 44% of Britons not identifying as European - just seven percentage points fewer than the proportion who do. Britons are also more confident in their positions on their European identity than they are on the other identities polled. For example, while 17% of Britons are unsure whether they identify as a global citizen, just 5% of Britons are unsure whether they identify as European. The confidence with which Britons are able to answer this question, and the sharp divides in association with the term European, reflect the ongoing dominance of conversations about the UK-EU relationship post-Brexit, which has been further reinforced by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Proportion of Britons who identify as a European, disaggregated by EU Referendum vote



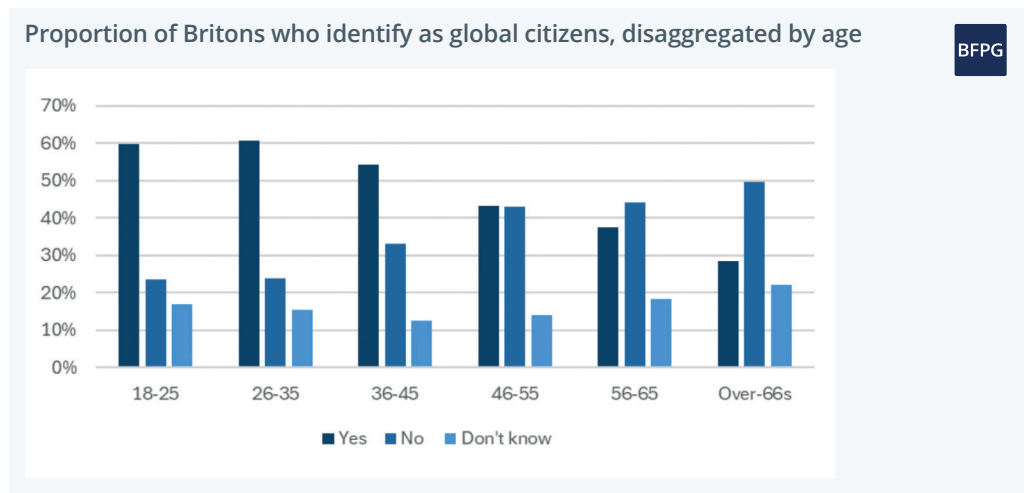
## International Engagement

As in previous years, EU Referendum voting continues to be a very sharp dividing line in European identification, with 69% of those who voted Remain identifying as European, compared to 33% of those who voted Leave. A particularly high proportion of 18-25-year-olds (60%), those from higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades (58%) and residents in London (57%), Northern Ireland (57%) and Scotland (56%) identify as European.

## Global Citizenship

'Global citizen' remains the least popular of the identities polled, and this year it is the only identity which less than half of Britons identify with (47%). Meanwhile, 37% of Britons do not identify as global citizens and 17% of Britons don't know whether they identify as such.

Of the three identities polled, identification as a global citizen has, however, been the most stable across the six years this survey has been conducted, with 47% being the highest proportion of Britons who have identified with it (seen in 2023 and 2024), and 42% the lowest (seen in 2020 and 2022).



The term is particularly popular among younger Britons, with 61% of 26-35-year-olds and 60% of 18-25-year-olds identifying with the term, compared to 28% of over-66s. It is also particularly popular among residents in London (65%), those who voted Green in the 2024 General Election (62%), and those who voted Remain in the EU Referendum (59%).

Identification as a global citizen is closely tied to identification as European, with 64% of those who identify as European also identifying as a global citizen. Just 29% of those who do not identify as European identify as global citizens.

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# Britain Reconnected

The election of a new Government brings with it an opportunity for the UK to redefine its position in the world. While many of the new Government's foreign policy priorities are still being fleshed out, with strategic defence and development reviews being developed over the next few months, Labour's broad ambitions for UK foreign policy had been outlined even before the election was called.<sup>4</sup> Summarised in the slogan 'Britain Reconnected', and under the mantra of 'progressive realism', the new Government hopes to strengthen the UK's credibility as a trustworthy, generous and reliable international partner. Under progressive realism the new Government will strive to take a pragmatic approach to a complex and competitive global environment, working with a wide range of international partners and leaning into nations' self-interest, to help achieve progressive ends.<sup>5</sup>

While Britons were not polled on their perspectives on the concepts of 'Britain Reconnected' or 'progressive realism', not least because government foreign policy buzzwords rarely have much cut-through with the British public, they were asked in the broadest sense about their views on the new Government's foreign policy ambitions. Britons' views on many of the priorities that are expected to form a part of progressive realism, and the new Government's wider foreign policy, are then explored later in this report.

Overall, there is some excitement for the new Government's foreign policy, with trust in the Government to make foreign policy decisions in the public's interest increasing relative to last year. The election of a new Government is also seen to have improved the UK's international reputation. However, with trust in the new Government on foreign policy still relatively low, the new Government will have to work hard to prove their reliability to a wide variety of Britons and win long-term support for their foreign policy ambitions.

## Trust in the UK Government on Foreign Policy

For the first time since the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, Britons more frequently trust (49%) than distrust (46%) the UK Government to make foreign policy decisions in the public's interest. This is a substantial increase in levels of trust, which has risen from 41% in 2023 and 35% in 2022. Meanwhile, levels of distrust have fallen eight percentage points, from 54% in 2023. A further 6% of Britons don't know or are unsure whether they trust the UK Government on foreign policy.

This renewed trust is a positive sign for the new Government and some of this uptick will be the result of genuine enthusiasm and trust in the new Government. However, it is also likely partly driven by a post-election bounce in support which, as is common, may wear off over time as the Government beds in.

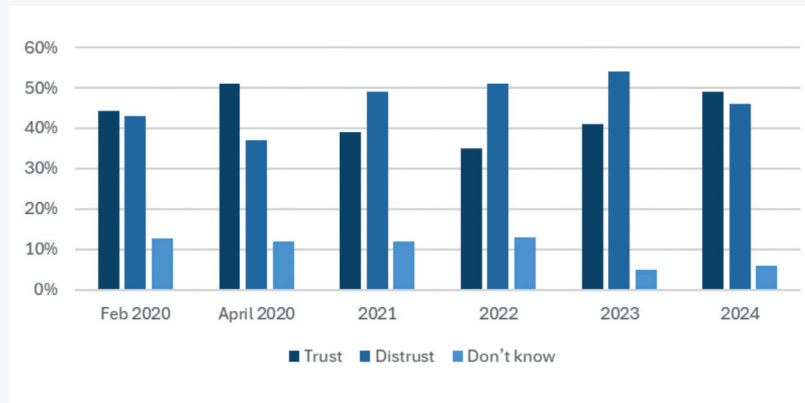
Trust in the UK Government on foreign policy often reflects wider political divides and there has therefore been a reversal this year in some of the types of Britons who trust the new Government most when it comes to foreign policy. In 2023, under a Conservative Government, those who voted Conservative in 2019 more often trusted the Government on foreign policy (58%) than those who voted Labour (32%). Meanwhile, in 2024, with a Labour Government now in place, this trend has been reversed, with 66% of those who voted Labour in the 2024

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<sup>4</sup> Lammy, D. (March, 2023). Britain Reconnected: A foreign policy for security and prosperity at home. *Fabian Society*. Retrieved from: <https://fabians.org.uk/publication/britain-reconnected/>

<sup>5</sup> Lammy, D. (April, 2024). The Case for Progressive Realism. *Foreign Affairs*. Retrieved from: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/uk/case-progressive-realism-david-lammy>

Proportion of Britons who trust the UK Government to take foreign policy decisions in the public's interest, disaggregated by year



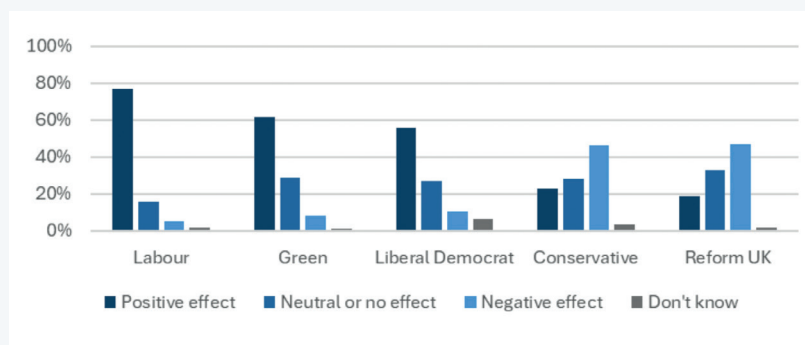
General Election trusting the Government on foreign policy, compared to 49% of those who voted Conservative. Similarly, over-66s have gone from being the age group who most often trust the Government to act in the UK's best interests internationally (55%) to the age group who least often do (41%).

However, some demographic trends haven't changed at all, despite the change in government. It is still the case that a higher proportion of men (52%) than women (45%) trust the Government to act responsibly in international affairs, and that a higher proportion of those in higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades (54%) trust the Government in this regard than those in lower (C2DE) socio-economic grades (42%). This reflects the high levels of distrust some demographics, not least women and those from lower (C2DE) socio-economic grades, have in all governments on foreign policy, regardless of the government's political persuasion.

### Reputational Effect of the New Government

It is also the case that almost half of Britons (49%) believe that the change in government has had a positive effect on the UK's reputation overseas. A further 26% of Britons believe it has had a neutral or no effect, while just 22% believe it has had a negative effect. While the fieldwork for this research was carried out only a few weeks into Labour's new administration, only 4% of Britons don't know what they believe the election's effect on the UK's international reputation to be.

Britons' perceptions of the effect of the election of a new government on the UK's international reputation, disaggregated by 2024 General Election vote



## Britain Reconnected

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As with levels of trust, Britons who voted Labour (77%) in the 2024 General Election, and therefore for the new Government, much more frequently believe the election has had a positive effect on the UK's reputation overseas than those who did not. A majority of Britons who voted Green (62%) or Liberal Democrat (56%) in the 2024 General Election also believe this. In contrast, just 23% of those who voted Conservative and 19% of those who voted Reform UK believe the election of a new Government had a positive effect on the UK's international reputation. Almost twice the proportion of 26-35-year-olds (62%) and 18-25-year-olds (61%) believe the change in government has had a positive effect on the UK's overseas reputation, relative to over-66s (32%).

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# The UK's International Relationships

Partnerships, including with nations whose interests and values do not always align with the UK's, are at the heart of the new Government's mantra of progressive realism. However, while Britons' trust in the UK's traditional allies has increased, and the United States and the EU are seen as critical to UK security and prosperity, Britons are distrustful of nations they are less familiar with, or whose values differ from their own. If the UK is going to focus more on engagement with these types of nations, Britons believe economic benefit and national security should be prioritised in these relations.

Nevertheless, even where the economic benefits are relatively clear, such as in trade, Britons remain largely unconvinced about strengthening relations with nations whose values do not neatly align with their own. The new Government will therefore have significant work to do to persuade Britons of the benefits of diverse international partnerships, if it wishes to secure public support for its foreign policy ambitions.

## Trust in Other Nations/Blocs

This year Britons were polled on their levels of trust in two of the UK's key partners - the United States and the European Union - and two of its biggest strategic rivals - China and Russia. This year India and Israel were also included - India, due to its status as a fast-growing and increasingly important partner to the UK, and Israel, due to the ongoing conflict in the Middle East.

Of the nations polled, the European Union is the most widely trusted by Britons to act responsibly in the world, with 58% of Britons trusting the European Union. This is followed closely by the United States, which is also trusted by a majority (53%) of Britons to act responsibly on the world stage. Meanwhile, a large majority of Britons distrust the UK's strategic rivals Russia (83%) and China (71%), with distrust for Russia remaining higher than for China. A clear majority of Britons (62%) also distrust Israel to act responsibly on the world stage. India is the nation which elicits the least strong perceptions - with the largest proportion of Britons (40%) neither trusting nor distrusting the nation.

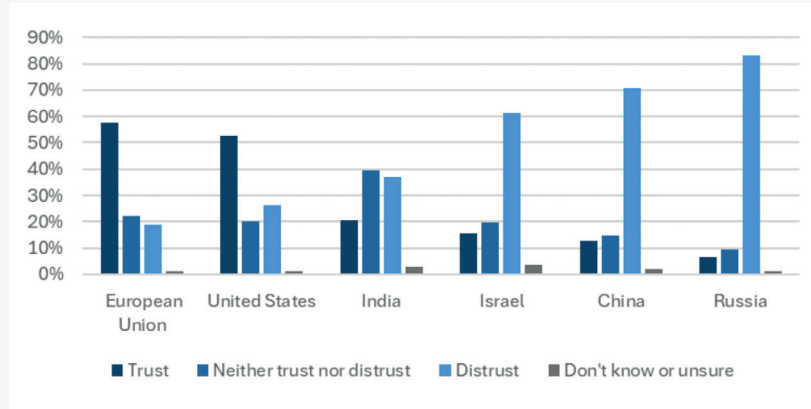
Across the four nations/blocs that were also polled last year - the EU, the United States, China and Russia - trust in each nation has risen across the board by between two and five percentage points over the last year. This is particularly striking given it represents an increase in trust for both the UK's strategic rivals and allies alike. For the EU this likely reflects the improvement in UK-EU relations in recent years, and for Russia and China, it likely reflects the relative de-prioritisation of concerns about the two nations as attention shifts towards the Middle East. The causes of the five percentage point increase in trust in the United States are less clear, especially given Britons' unease about a potential second Trump presidency.<sup>6</sup> However, among other things, it may reflect optimism about a potential Harris presidency, endorsement of Biden's eventual success in securing more support from the United States for Ukraine, or distance from the United States' withdrawal from Afghanistan which many Britons viewed very negatively.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ipsos. (August, 2024). *Britons more favourable towards Kamala Harris than Joe Biden or Donald Trump - but half believe Trump will win*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/britons-more-favourable-towards-kamala-harris-ipsos-us-election-2024-poll>

<sup>7</sup> Gaston, S. (June, 2022). 2022 UK Public Opinion on Foreign Policy and Global Affairs Annual Survey. *British Foreign Policy Group*. Retrieved from: <https://bfp.g.co.uk/2022/06/2022-annual-survey/>

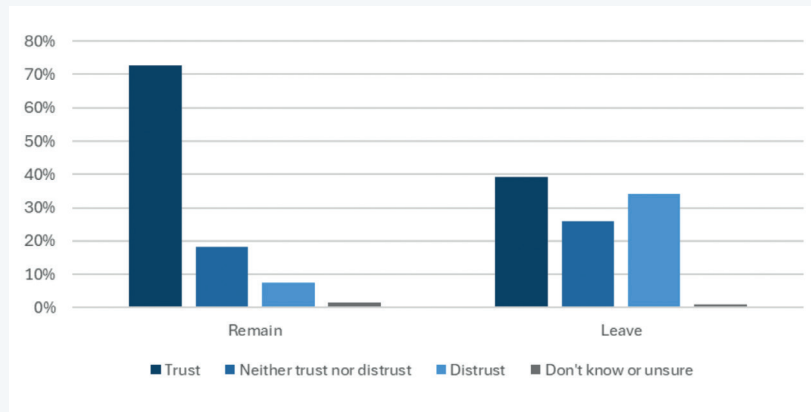
Proportion of Britons who trust or distrust specific countries/blocs to act responsibly in the world



### The European Union

Even amidst the ongoing challenges in the UK-EU relationship following the UK's departure from the EU, of the nations polled, the EU is the UK's most widely trusted partner, with a majority (58%) of Britons trusting the EU to act responsibly in the world. This is a five percentage point increase in trust in the EU compared to 2023. Meanwhile, 22% of Britons neither trust nor distrust the EU, 19% distrust and 1% don't know or are unsure whether they trust the EU to act responsibly in the world.

Proportion of Britons who trust or distrust the European Union to act responsibly in the world, disaggregated by EU Referendum vote



Certainly, sharp divides persist between how much those who voted Remain (73%) and those who voted Leave (39%) in the EU Referendum trust the EU to act responsibly in the world. Notably, though, those who voted Leave still more frequently trust (39%) than distrust (34%) the EU, and trust in the EU among those who voted Leave has risen by seven percentage points over the last year, from 32% in 2023. This improvement in levels of trust suggests that, while policymaking remains very challenging, those who voted to leave the EU are slowly softening their views on the EU, potentially opening up opportunities for more constructive conversations about UK-EU relations moving forward.

## The UK's International Relationships

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Trust in the EU is also higher among younger Britons, with 76% of 18-25-year-olds and 69% of 26-35-year-olds trusting the EU to act responsibly in the world, compared to 48% of over-66s. Trust in the EU is also particularly high among those who voted Labour in the 2024 General Election (73%) and particularly low among those who voted for Reform UK (30%).

## The United States

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Trust in the United States has bounced back this year, with 53% of Britons trusting the United States to act responsibly in the world, after dropping to 48% in 2023. Meanwhile, 26% of Britons distrust the United States, 20% neither trust nor distrust the United States and 1% of Britons don't know or are unsure.

Trust in the United States to act responsibly in the world is highest among those who voted Conservative in the 2024 General Election (67%), men (59%) and those aged over 66 (58%). Geographically, trust in the United States to act responsibly in the world is highest in the North East (60%) and Yorkshire and Humberside (58%) and lowest in Northern Ireland (40%).

## India

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Visiting New Delhi just three weeks after his appointment as Foreign Secretary, David Lammy has made clear that “resetting” and strengthening UK-India relations is a top priority for the new Government, with the long-awaited UK-India Free Trade Agreement that eluded the last Government, viewed as the floor, rather than the ceiling, of future UK-India relations.<sup>8</sup>

However, Lammy may face some resistance from the British public in this ambition, with just 21% of Britons trusting India to act responsibly in the world. In part, this is driven by the fact that a plurality of Britons (40%) neither trust nor distrust India. However, it is also the case that a much higher proportion of Britons distrust (37%) India than trust it (21%) when it comes to acting responsibly in the world.

Distrust is particularly high among older Britons, with 48% of over-66s and 46% of 56-65-year-olds distrusting India to act responsibly in the world, compared to 26% of 18-25-year-olds and 25% of 26-35-year-olds. Distrust in India is also particularly high in Scotland (48%) and the North West (45%) and among those who voted Leave in the EU referendum (44%).

This distrust is likely driven by Britons' wider distrust of nations they know relatively less about, or who aren't traditionally a close ally of the UK. It may also reflect specific concerns about growing authoritarianism in India, as well as caution over the UK-India Free Trade Agreement which has caused significant domestic debate about increasing the number of UK visas granted to India. It is therefore clear that if India is going to be a key partner for the UK moving forward then more must be done to build Britons' trust in India.<sup>9</sup>

## Israel

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With the conflict in the Middle East at the centre of global politics, Britons have very high levels of distrust in Israel to act responsibly in the world, with 62% of Britons distrusting Israel in this regard. This is just nine percentage points lower than the proportion of Britons who distrust China to act responsibly in the world. This places public trust in Israel much closer to levels of

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<sup>8</sup> British Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (July, 2024). Foreign Secretary travels to India to cement stronger partnership on tech, climate and growth. *GOV.UK*. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-travels-to-india-to-cement-stronger-partnership-on-tech-climate-and-growth>

<sup>9</sup> Aiyar, Y. (March, 2024). Yamini Aiyar laments the damage done to Indian democracy under Narendra Modi. *The Economist*. Retrieved from: <https://www.economist.com/by-invitation/2024/03/23/yamini-aiyar-laments-the-damage-done-to-indian-democracy-under-narendra-modi>

## The UK's International Relationships

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trust in the UK's strategic rivals - Russia and China - than to its major allies - the United States and the EU. A further 20% of Britons neither trust nor distrust Israel, 16% trust Israel, and 4% are unsure whether they trust the nation to act responsibly in the world.

While (with the exception of the EU) women are consistently less trusting of other nations than men, the disparity in levels of distrust in Israel between women (67%) and men (56%) is particularly high. Distrust in Israel is also particularly high among Britons who voted Green in the 2024 General Election (80%), residents in Scotland (72%), 18-25-year-olds (68%) and those who voted Remain in the EU Referendum (67%).

### China

While it is still the case that a large majority of Britons distrust China, distrust has fallen again this year. In 2022, 81% of Britons distrusted China to act responsibly in the world. This fell to 74% in 2023 and now sits at 71%. A further 15% of Britons neither trust nor distrust China, 13% trust China, and 2% of Britons are unsure whether they trust the nation to act responsibly in the world.

Older Britons more often distrust China than younger Britons, with 89% of over-66s distrusting China, compared to 49% of 26-35-year-olds. Britons who voted Reform UK in the 2024 General Election (82%) and residents in the South East (78%) and South West (78%) are also particularly distrustful of China's ability and willingness to act responsibly in the world.

### Russia

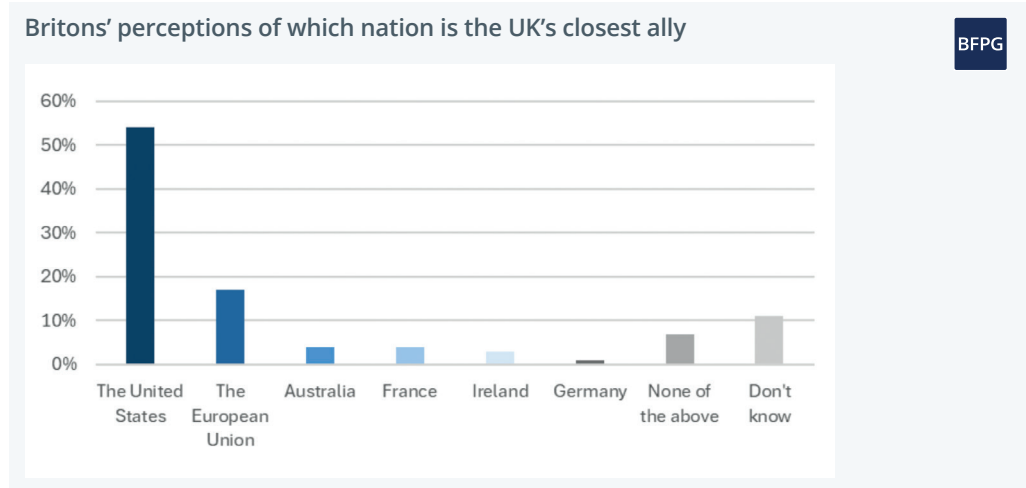
Of the nations polled, Britons remain the most distrustful of Russia, with 83% of Britons distrusting Russia to act responsibly in the world. This includes 69% of Britons who strongly distrust the nation, while just 7% of Britons trust Russia. A further 9% of Britons neither trust nor distrust the nation and 1% are unsure of their view. While distrust of Russia remains very high, it has subsided somewhat over the last two years - from 91% in 2022 to 86% in 2023 and now 83% in 2024 - as the war in Ukraine wears on.

As with China, older Britons more often distrust Russia than younger Britons, with 96% of over-66s distrusting Russia, compared to 65% of 26-35-year-olds. Women (86%) are more frequently distrustful of Russia than men (81%), and regionally, residents in the South West (89%) are the most frequently distrustful of Russia.

### The UK's Closest Ally

When asked which out of six of the UK's closest nations/blocs - the United States, the European Union, Australia, France, Ireland and Germany - they perceive to be the UK's closest ally, a majority of Britons (54%) view the United States to be the UK's closest ally. This is followed by the EU at 17%. All other nations - Australia (4%), France (3%), Ireland (3%) and Germany (1%) - are rarely seen as the UK's closest ally. Meanwhile, 11% of Britons don't know who they regard as the UK's closest ally and 7% believe it is none of the options provided.

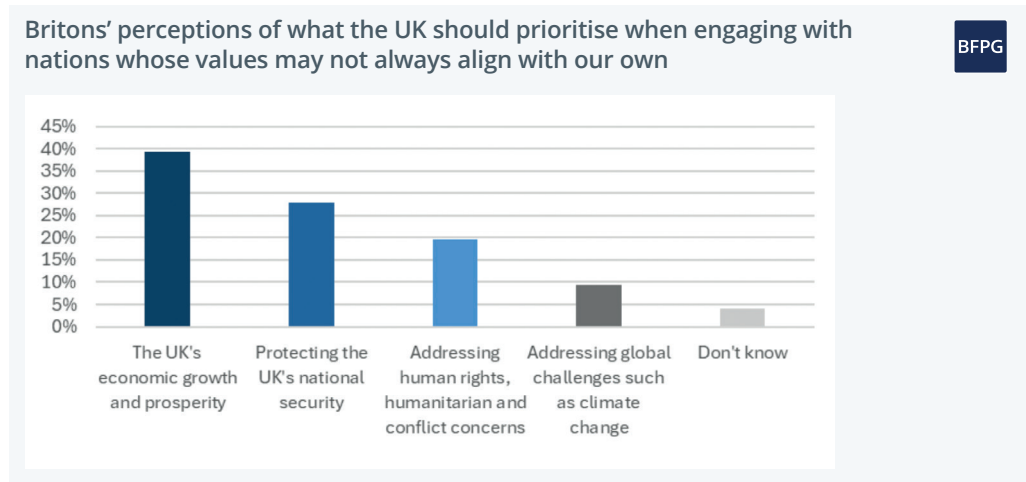
Over the last five years, this question has been asked in a variety of forms, from including an option that the UK has no particularly close allies, to previously asking a slightly different question about who the UK's 'best friend' is, to this year including the EU for the first time. In every form the question has taken, and despite political turbulence in the United States over recent years, the United States has consistently topped this type of question, with Britons consistently seeing the United States as a close and essential ally, speaking to the enduring strength of the 'special relationship'.



Belief that the United States is the UK's closest ally is particularly high among those who voted Conservative (64%) or Reform UK (64%) in the 2024 General Election, those who voted Leave in the EU Referendum (61%), men (59%) and 46-55-year-olds (58%).

### Engagement with 'Middle Ground Powers'

It is clear then that Britons value and trust the UK's traditional partners, particularly the United States and the European Union. However, in the current geopolitical environment and under the new Government's philosophy of progressive realism, the UK will increasingly have to engage with nations outside its traditional spheres of friendship.

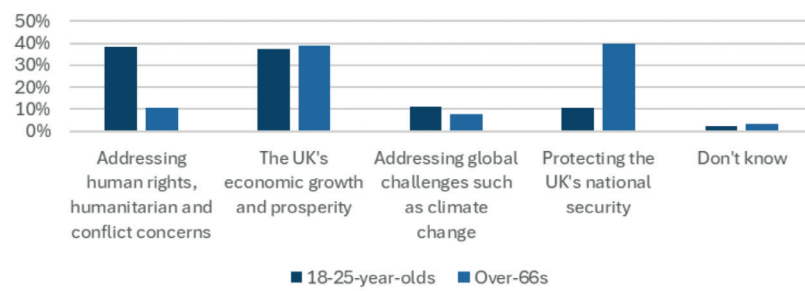


In such engagements, and in line with Chancellor Rachel Reeves' firm focus on growth, a plurality of Britons (39%) believe that the UK's priority in these engagements should be the UK's economic growth and prosperity. This is followed by protecting the UK's national security (28%) and then by addressing human rights, humanitarian and conflict concerns (20%). Just 9% of Britons believe addressing global challenges such as climate change should be the UK's top priority when engaging with these nations.

However, it is not the case that the largest proportion of Britons in every age group view growth and prosperity as the top priority. A higher proportion of 56-65-year-olds believe protecting the UK's national security should be the top priority (39%) than believe economic growth and prosperity should be (33%). The same is true for over-66s - 40% believe protecting UK

Britons' perceptions of what the UK should prioritise when engaging with nations whose values may not always align with our own, disaggregated by age

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national security should be the top priority, while 39% believe it should be economic growth and prosperity. Meanwhile, just 11% of 18-25-year-olds believe protecting the UK's national security should be the top priority, highlighting significant generational differences in how Britons believe the UK should engage with more complex partners. Instead, younger Britons place greater emphasis on addressing human rights concerns, with an equal proportion of 18-25-year-olds believing addressing humanitarian and conflict concerns (38%) and economic growth and prosperity (38%) should be the top priority.

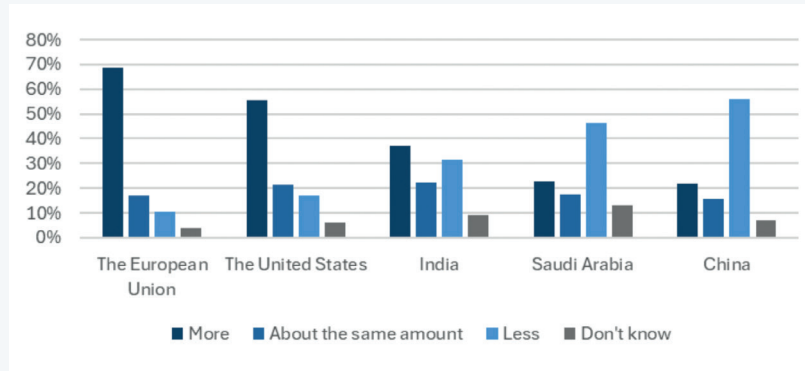
Men (43%), more often than women (36%), believe economic growth and prosperity should be the top priority, while women (23%), more often than men (16%), believe addressing human rights, humanitarian and conflict concerns should be the top priority. A plurality of those who voted for Reform UK in the 2024 General Election (46%) believe protecting national security should be the priority in engagement with nations whose values differ from their own, while a plurality of those who voted Green (40%) believe that addressing human rights, humanitarian and conflict concerns should be the top priority.

### UK Trading Partners

However, while Britons would like to see economic growth and prosperity prioritised in these engagements, when asked which nations they support the UK strengthening its trading relationships with, Britons exhibit discomfort with increasing trade with many of these less conventional partners. Out of the five nations polled - the European Union, the United States, India, Saudi Arabia and China - only the European Union (69%) and the United States (55%) receive endorsement from the majority of Britons for increasing bilateral trade. Britons do more frequently believe that the UK should trade more (37%) with India, than less (31%), although support for increasing trade is not particularly high. Meanwhile, Britons are profoundly uncomfortable with the UK's trading relationships with Saudi Arabia and China, with 56% of Britons believing the UK should trade less with China and 46% of Britons believing the UK should trade less with Saudi Arabia. This includes 32% of Britons who believe the UK should trade much less with China and 26% of Britons who believe this with regard to Saudi Arabia.

As such, while, in principle, Britons may wish to see economic growth and prosperity prioritised when engaging with a diversity of nations, wider perceptions about specific nations may, in practice, drive opposition to improving relations with nations whose values do not always align with the UK, even if there are potential economic and trade benefits of doing so.

Proportion of Britons who believe the UK should trade more, less, or about the same amount with specific nations



Across the board, men more frequently than women believe that the UK should increase trade with the specific nations polled, reflecting women's wider caution about international engagement. The sharpest gender disparity emerges in relation to the United States, with 65% of men believing the UK should strengthen trading relations with the United States, compared to 46% of women. Similarly, across the board, support for strengthening trading relations with each of the nations specified is higher among those in higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades than those in lower (C2DE) socio-economic grades.

Consistently, a particularly high proportion of residents in London believe the UK should trade more with each of the nations polled, while a particularly low proportion of residents in the South West support increasing trade with each of the nations polled. The starkest of these disparities emerges in relation to China. Residents in London more frequently believe the UK should trade more with China (43%) than that the UK should trade less with China (41%). Meanwhile, residents in the South West overwhelmingly believe the UK should trade less with China (62%), with four times as many believing this than believing that the UK should trade more with China (13%).

In terms of age, 26-35-year-olds and 18-25-year-olds are consistently the most supportive of strengthening trading relations across all the nations polled, while over-66s are the least supportive. For example, 43% of 26-35-year-olds believe the UK should trade more with China, compared to 7% of over-66s.

The picture is a little more mixed when it comes to voting preferences though, with value judgements about specific nations sometimes conflicting with different voter groups' wider perceptions of free trade. As such, support for increasing trade with the EU is highest among those who voted Green (85%) in the 2024 General Election and support for increasing trade with India is highest among those who voted for Labour (40%). Meanwhile, support for increasing trade with the United States is highest among those who voted Conservative (64%) or Reform UK (64%).

# The Future of the UK-EU Relationship

The new Government has made clear its ambitions to “reset” UK-EU relations and deepen ties across a broad range of areas such as trade, security and climate action.<sup>10</sup> Such a proposal would have been deeply divisive just a few years ago, in a political environment dominated by Brexit fissures.

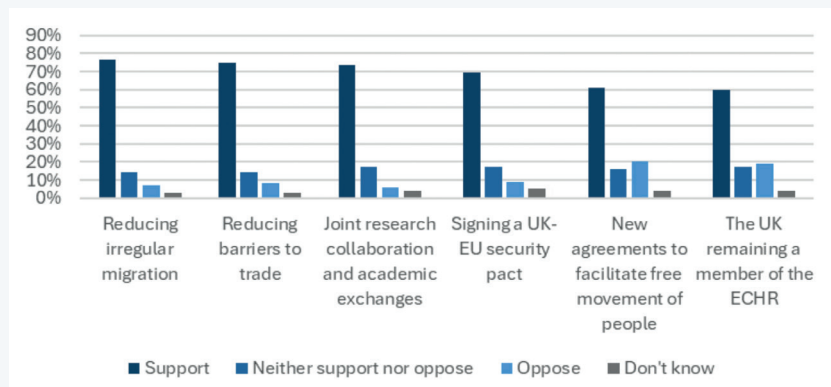
However, with a war on the European continent and growing recognition of some of the challenges that have emerged following the UK’s departure from the EU, there is a very strong basis of support among the British public for resetting the UK-EU relationship. This includes very high levels of support for a wide range of cooperation with the EU and some willingness to make the trade-offs that may be needed to strengthen relations.

Nevertheless, there are still some clear red lines for the British public when it comes to UK-EU relations, particularly around fishing rights and the impact on trade with non-EU nations, which the new Government will have to carefully navigate to maintain public support for strengthening relations.

## Cooperation with the European Union

There is broad and deep public support for enhancing cooperation with the EU. All the forms of engagement polled - from trade and academic cooperation to security and membership of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) - are endorsed by the majority of Britons. This provides a very strong foundation of public support for the new Government’s ambitions around UK-EU cooperation.

Proportion of Britons who support or oppose cooperation with the EU on...



The most popular forms of engagement with the EU are cooperation to reduce irregular migration (77%), reducing barriers to trade in goods and services (75%), joint research collaboration and academic exchanges (74%) and signing a UK-EU security pact (69%). New agreements to facilitate the free movement of people (61%) and the UK remaining a member of the European Convention on Human Rights (60%) are slightly less popular but are each endorsed by at least 60% of the population.

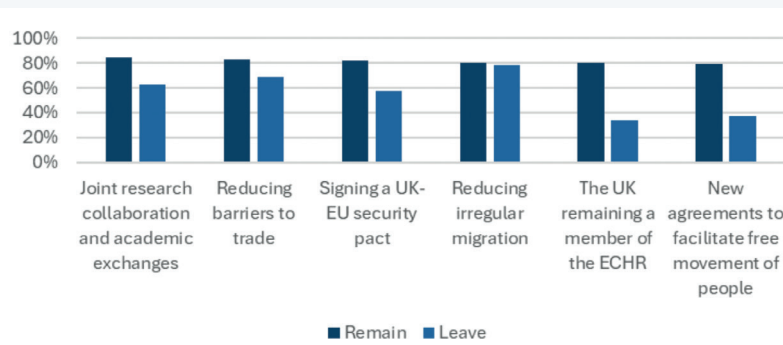
<sup>10</sup> Lammy, D. (July, 2024). It's time to reset Britain's relations with Europe. *GOV.UK*. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/its-time-to-reset-britains-relations-with-europe-article-by-david-lammy>

## The Future of the UK-EU Relationship

The strength of support for UK-EU cooperation across a broad range of areas is remarkable and is likely driven by several factors, including the improved tone of UK-EU relations in recent years, particularly following the signing of the Windsor Framework, as well as external events such as the prospect of a potential second Trump presidency and developments in both Ukraine and the Middle East, which have necessitated closer cooperation between the UK and the EU. The warm manner with which the Labour Party spoke about the EU in the run-up to the 2024 General Election may also have helped shift the dial in public perceptions of UK-EU relations and helped to normalise the idea of closer relations.

There are, however, some very substantial variations across demographics in support for cooperation with the EU. Those who voted Remain in the EU Referendum, those who voted Liberal Democrat or Green in the 2024 General Election, younger Britons, those from higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades, and residents in London are consistently among the most supportive of cooperation with the EU. Meanwhile, those who voted Leave in the EU Referendum, those who voted for Reform UK in the 2024 General Election, older Britons, those from lower (C2DE) socio-economic grades, and residents in Wales and the South West tend to be less supportive of cooperation. These variations can be very substantial. For example, 86% of Britons who voted Green in the 2024 General Election support the UK being a member of the ECHR, while just 22% of those who voted for Reform UK support this.

Proportion of Britons who support the following types of cooperation with the EU, disaggregated by EU Referendum vote



Nevertheless, there are several areas of cooperation for which there is still majority support, even among demographics less inclined to support UK-EU cooperation. For example, a majority of those who voted Leave in the EU Referendum support cooperation to tackle irregular migration (79%), reducing barriers to trade in goods and services (69%), joint research collaboration and academic exchanges (63%) and signing a UK-EU security pact (57%). Similarly, a majority across other demographics less inclined to support cooperation with the EU, including those who voted for Reform UK in the 2024 General Election, over-66s, and those from lower (C2DE) socio-economic grades, also support these four types of cooperation, providing clear areas of cooperation for the new Government to focus its engagement efforts.

### Reducing Irregular Migration

Cooperation to reduce irregular migration is the most widely supported form of UK-EU cooperation, with 77% of Britons supporting UK-EU cooperation to reduce irregular migration, including 44% of Britons who strongly support this. This likely reflects the fact that migration, particularly irregular migration, is one of Britons' biggest concerns in general, and Britons are therefore willing to endorse a wide range of engagements that they believe may help reduce irregular migration.<sup>11</sup> A further 14% of Britons neither support nor oppose cooperating

<sup>11</sup> Smith, M. (December, 2023). To what extent is immigration a top issue for Britons?. *YouGov*. Retrieved from: <https://yougov.co.uk/politics/articles/48056-to-what-extent-is-immigration-a-top-issue-for-britons>

## The Future of the UK-EU Relationship

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with the EU to reduce irregular migration, 7% of Britons oppose it and 3% of Britons don't know their view.

Cooperation with the EU to reduce irregular migration produces some particularly interesting demographic differences and reverses many of the wider demographic trends in perspectives around UK-EU cooperation. For example, while a particularly high proportion of those who voted Green in the 2024 General Election support all other types of UK-EU cooperation, those who voted Green are the voter group in which the lowest proportion (68%) support cooperation over irregular migration. Similarly, while those who voted Remain and those who voted Leave in the EU Referendum exhibit substantial differences in support for other areas of UK-EU cooperation, there is relatively little divergence when it comes to support for cooperation over irregular migration, with support sitting at 81% for those who voted Remain and 79% for those who voted Leave. This likely reflects the fact that many of the demographics who are less supportive of UK-EU cooperation are very passionate about reducing irregular migration, making them far more willing to engage with the EU on this issue than they are in other areas.

## Reducing Barriers to Trade in Goods and Services

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Three-quarters of Britons (75%) support reducing barriers to trade in goods and services with the EU, while just 8% of Britons oppose this. A further 14% of Britons neither support nor oppose this and 3% of Britons don't know.

Support for reducing barriers to trade is particularly high among those who voted Liberal Democrat (88%) in the 2024 General Election, and those who voted Labour (78%) or Green (78%). Support is also particularly high among residents in Scotland (80%) and the North East (80%) and lowest among residents in Wales (69%).

## Joint Research Collaboration and Academic Exchanges

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Joint research collaboration and academic exchanges with the EU are supported by 74% of Britons, including 39% of Britons who strongly support this. A further 17% of Britons neither support nor oppose this, while 6% oppose and 4% don't know.

Support for joint research collaboration is particularly high among young people, with 81% of 18-25-year-olds supporting this, compared to 66% of over-66s. Those from higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades also show particularly high levels of support (81%) relative to those from lower (C2DE) socio-economic grades (66%). In both cases, this likely reflects these demographics' wider views of UK-EU cooperation but also the relative benefits different demographic groups are likely to directly derive from academic cooperation with the EU.

## Signing a UK-EU Security Pact

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A key cornerstone of the new Government's plans for strengthening cooperation with the EU is signing a UK-EU security pact. This pact is expected to be broad-ranging and so support may vary based on the scope and nature the eventual pact ends up taking. Nevertheless, the new Government will likely welcome the fact that a large majority (69%) of Britons support signing a UK-EU security pact, with just 9% of Britons opposed to this. A further 17% of Britons neither support nor oppose this and 5% of Britons don't know.

Interestingly, given this is a Labour policy, it is those who voted Liberal Democrat in the 2024 General Election (85%) who are most supportive of the proposed security pact, although support is still very high among those who voted Labour (81%) and among those who voted Green (77%). Support is lower among those who voted Conservative (59%) or Reform UK (52%), although a majority of both voter groups still support the policy.

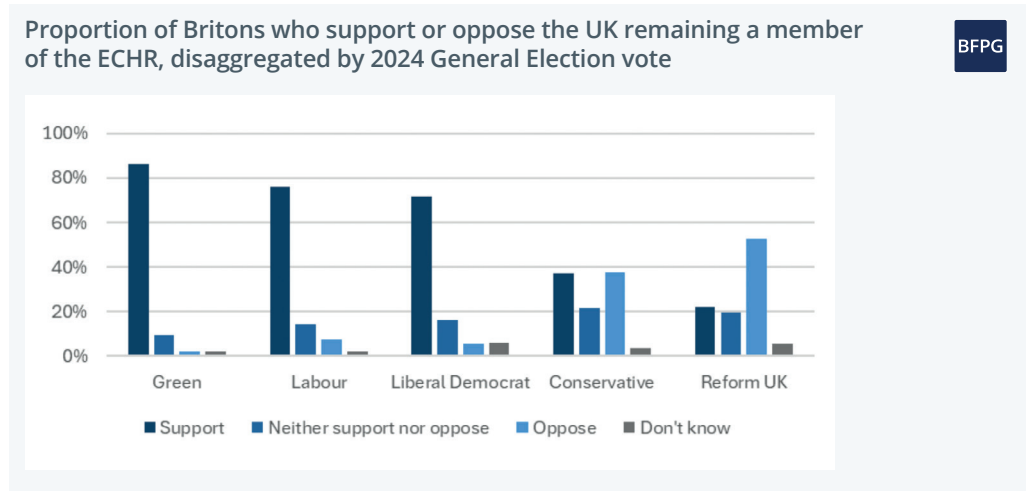
## New Agreements to Facilitate UK-EU Free Movement of People

Developing new agreements to facilitate UK-EU free movement of people is also widely supported, with 61% of Britons supporting this. However, at 20%, this is also the most widely opposed form of cooperation of the options polled. This relatively high level of opposition likely reflects Britons wider concerns about migration, as well as how divisive the debate about migration became during the EU Referendum. Meanwhile, 16% of Britons neither support nor oppose new agreements to facilitate the free movement of people and 4% of Britons don't know.

New agreements around free movement are also one of the more politically divisive forms of cooperation. Twice the proportion of Britons who voted Green (78%), Liberal Democrat (76%) or Labour (75%) during the 2024 General Election support new agreements to facilitate the free movement of people, compared to those who voted for Reform UK (34%). Similarly, twice the proportion of Britons who voted Remain in the EU Referendum (79%) support the idea, compared to those who voted Leave (38%). The divergence in views across generations is also striking - 73% of 18-25-year-olds support cooperation over new agreements to facilitate the free movement of people, compared to 49% of over-66s.

## The UK Remaining a Member of the European Convention on Human Rights

A majority of Britons (60%) support the UK remaining a member of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), with just 19% of Britons opposed. A further 17% neither support nor oppose the policy, while 4% don't know. The sharpest divides in support for membership emerge along political fault lines. Britons who voted Green in the 2024 General Election (86%) support membership four times as frequently than those who voted for Reform UK (22%). Support for ECHR membership is also very high among those who voted Labour (76%) and Liberal Democrat (72%). However, those who voted Conservative are deeply divided in their views - with 38% of those who voted Conservative opposing membership, while 37% support it. Britons who voted Remain in the EU Referendum (80%) much more frequently support membership than those who voted Leave (34%).



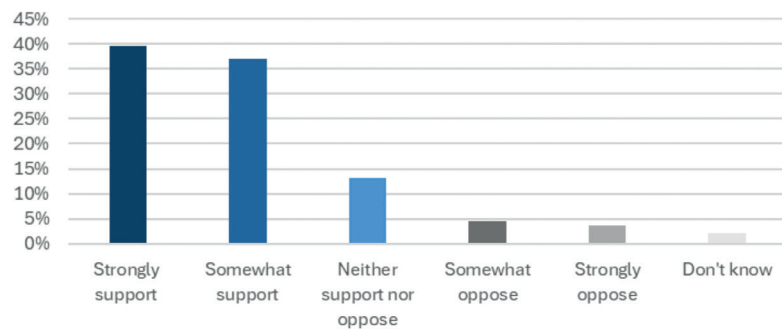
Beyond political lines, younger Britons are much more frequently supportive of ECHR membership than older Britons, with 76% of 18-25-year-olds and 74% of 26-35-year-olds supporting membership, including 50% of 18-25-year-olds who strongly support this. In contrast, just 40% of over-66s support ECHR membership, while 36% oppose it. Support for membership of the ECHR is also higher among those in higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades (68%) than those in lower (C2DE) socio-economic grades (51%) and among women (63%) than men (57%).

### Future of UK-EU Trade

With the EU-UK Trade Cooperation Agreement (TCA) set to be renegotiated in 2026, there is a clear opportunity for the UK and the EU to strengthen their trading relationship. Britons are likely to be eager for the UK to utilise this opportunity, given that 77% of Britons support the UK strengthening its trading relationship with the EU. This includes 40% of Britons who strongly support strengthening UK-EU trade relations and 37% who somewhat support this. Just 8% of Britons oppose strengthening trade relations with the EU. Meanwhile, 13% of Britons neither support nor oppose this and 2% of Britons don't know.

Proportion of Britons who support or oppose the UK strengthening trading relationships with the European Union

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A substantially higher proportion of those who voted Remain (93%) in the EU Referendum, than those who voted Leave (58%), support the UK strengthening trading relations with the EU. Nevertheless, just 18% of those who voted Leave oppose strengthening trade relations with the EU.

Meanwhile, 90% of those who voted Liberal Democrat, 88% of those who voted Labour, and 87% of those who voted Green in the 2024 General Election support strengthening trade relations, compared to 65% of those who voted Conservative and 55% of those who voted for Reform UK. Younger Britons also more frequently support strengthening trading relations with the EU than older Britons, with 86% of 18-25-year-olds and 85% of 26-35-year-olds supporting this, compared to 65% of over-66s.

However, while there is substantial variation in support for strengthening trade relations across different demographic groups, a majority of Britons within every demographic segment support the UK strengthening trading relations with the EU. As such, while levels of support may vary, support for strengthening trade relations is nevertheless very broad, providing significant opportunities for the new Government to strengthen UK-EU trading relations.

### Scenario Testing

Of course, any effort to strengthen trading relations with the EU will require negotiation and compromise with the EU. A leaked document has highlighted eight demands the EU is expected to make on the UK to strengthen relations, most of which pertain to how existing agreements have been implemented.<sup>12</sup> However, securing new commitments around cooperation will also require going beyond the implementation of existing agreements and will require new negotiations. While the exact content of these negotiations is unknown, some of the likely sticking points are well-understood. Government officials expect greater EU access to UK fishing waters to be a priority for the EU, and ministers have already been approached with, and ruled

<sup>12</sup> Foster, P. & Bounds, A. (August, 2024). EU issues UK with list of demands if it wants better relationship. *The Financial Times*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ft.com/content/43593399-6e31-4b9f-81ec-a06851938706>

## The Future of the UK-EU Relationship

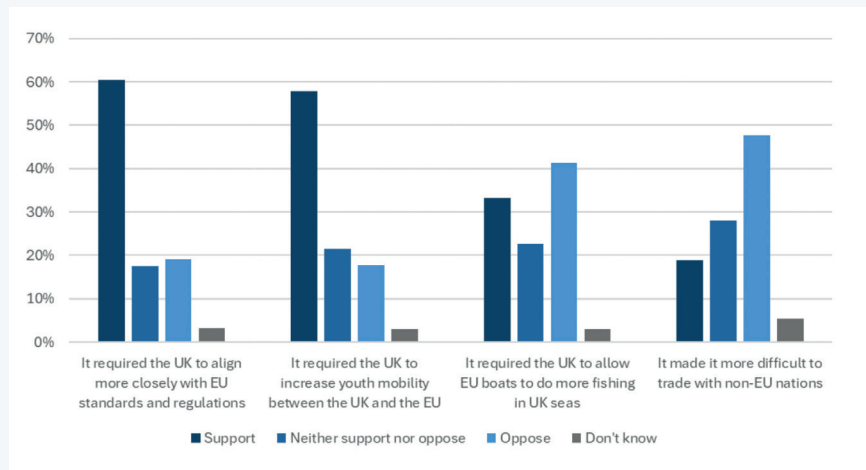
out, a potential youth mobility scheme.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, plans for closer alignment with the EU on regulatory standards were announced in the King's Speech.<sup>14</sup>

In a number of these potential scenarios, support for strengthening trade relations endures - 60% of Britons would support strengthening trade relations if it also means aligning more closely with EU standards and regulations, and 58% would support strengthening trade relations if it also requires agreements to increase youth mobility. However, there are also clear red lines. Almost half (48%) of Britons would oppose strengthening trade relations with the EU if it makes it harder for the UK to trade with non-EU nations, while 41% of Britons would oppose strengthening trade relations if it requires the UK to allow the EU to do more fishing in UK seas.

There is, of course, some logical incoherence here - aligning more closely with EU standards (which the public widely supports) will make it harder for the UK to trade with at least some non-EU nations whose standards and regulations differ from the EU (which the public opposes). This speaks to the need for the Government to effectively convey the impact that decisions may have, to ensure Britons are fully abreast of the implications of strengthening trade relations with the EU.

Proportion of Britons who would support or oppose strengthening trade relations with the EU if...

BFPG



This opposition to strengthening trading relations in certain circumstances is particularly striking given how strongly Britons support strengthening trading relations with the EU when they are not explicitly asked about potential trade-offs. It highlights how, while there is plenty of theoretical appetite and a foundation of support, the new Government will nevertheless have to carefully navigate the public's red lines to maintain support for strengthening trade relations in practice.

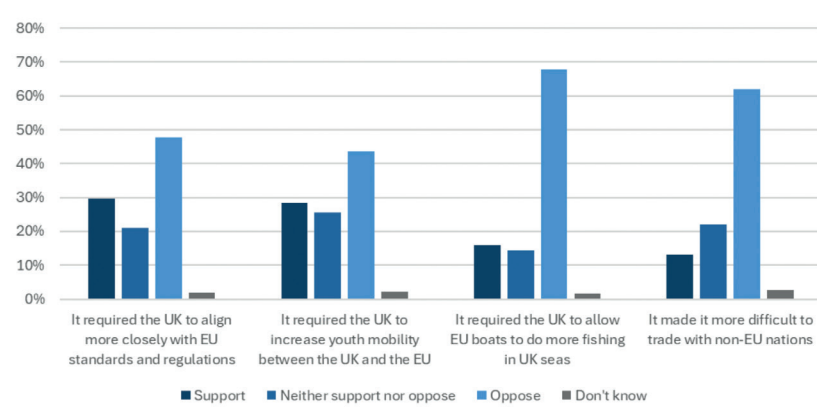
This will be made all the more difficult by the fact that while a majority across all demographic breakdowns support strengthening trade relations with the EU, willingness to accept the potential trade-offs of doing so varies substantially. The most extreme example of this emerges in relation to those who voted for Reform UK in the 2024 General Election. While a majority of those who voted for Reform UK (55%) support strengthening trade relations with the EU, they more frequently oppose than support strengthening trade relations in all four of the scenarios polled.

<sup>13</sup> Barnes, J., Crisp, J. & Gutteridge, N. (July, 2024). EU 'wants access to UK fishing waters' as Starmer seeks relationship reset. *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/07/20/eu-wants-access-to-uk-fishing-waters-as-starmer-seeks-reset/>; Walker, P. & O'Carroll, L. (August, 2024). UK ministers rule out joining youth mobility scheme with EU. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/article/2024/aug/22/uk-ministers-rule-out-joining-eu-youth-free-movement-scheme>

<sup>14</sup> Rea, A. (July, 2024). Starmer Plans Law Change to Simplify UK Alignment With EU Rules. *Bloomberg*. Retrieved from: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-07-17/starmer-plans-law-change-to-simplify-uk-alignment-with-eu-rules>

Proportion of 2024 Reform UK voters who would support or oppose strengthening trade relations with the EU if...

BFPG



Older Britons are also substantially less willing than younger Britons to support strengthening trade relations in the potential scenarios posed, by between 17 and 35 percentage points across the board. Britons who voted Leave in the EU Referendum are also less supportive than those who voted Remain of strengthening trade relations in the potential scenarios posed, as are those from lower (C2DE) socio-economic grades compared to those from higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades. However, unlike for those who voted for Reform UK, for all these demographics there are at least one or two scenarios where a plurality still supports strengthening trading relations.

### Aligning with the EU on Regulatory Standards

With 60% of Britons supporting strengthening trade relations with the EU, if it also means aligning more closely with the EU on regulatory standards, such as product safety, it is the scenario in which strengthening trade relations is the most widely endorsed. Just 19% of Britons would oppose strengthening trading relations with the EU in this circumstance, while 18% would neither support nor oppose it and 3% of Britons don't know. This likely reflects the fact that the challenges posed by a lack of regulatory and standards alignment post-Brexit have been well documented and highly visible, not least through long queues at Dover, particularly in the early days post-Brexit.<sup>15</sup> It is also likely due to how the idea has been relatively normalised within public discourse, not least due to Prime Minister Keir Starmer outlining plans for greater regulatory alignment in the King's Speech in July 2024.<sup>16</sup>

However, it is this scenario which most sharply divides voters along EU Referendum voting lines - with 80% of those who voted Remain in the EU Referendum supporting strengthening trading relations if it means aligning with the EU on regulatory standards, compared to 36% of those who voted Leave. The partisan voting divides are even sharper, with 81% of those who voted Green in the 2024 General Election supporting strengthening trading relations in this scenario, alongside 75% of those who voted Labour and 72% of those who voted Liberal Democrat. However, just 43% of those who voted Conservative and 30% of those who voted for Reform UK would support strengthening trade relations in this scenario.

<sup>15</sup> Morris, C. (January, 2022). Dover queues: The firms struggling with Brexit red tape. *Bloomberg*. Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-60161094>

<sup>16</sup> Cabinet Office (July, 2024). King's Speech 2024: background briefing notes. *GOV.UK*. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/kings-speech-2024-background-briefing-notes>

### Increasing Youth Mobility Between the UK and the EU

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A majority of Britons (58%) would support strengthening trade relations with the EU if it means increasing youth mobility between the UK and the EU. A further 21% of Britons would neither support nor oppose strengthening trade relations in this situation, 18% would oppose and 3% don't know. To give some flavour as to what increased youth mobility might look like, this question listed the example of 18 to 30-year-olds being allowed to freely come to work or study in the UK, an example designed to reflect, in simple terms, the youth mobility scheme that the EU proposed in April 2024.<sup>17</sup> The high levels of support for this then are striking, and suggest that, despite Britons' wider concerns about migration, there may be some room for the UK to use youth mobility as part of potential negotiations around trade.

Of the four scenarios posed, this scenario produces the sharpest partisan political divides, with 80% of Britons who voted Green in the 2024 General Election, 72% of those who voted Liberal Democrat, and 69% of those who voted Labour supporting strengthening trade in this scenario, compared to 46% of those who voted Conservative, and just 28% of those who voted Reform UK.

While strengthening trade is widely supported by younger Britons in this scenario, particularly 18-25-year-olds (78%), over-66s show much lower levels of support (46%). This likely reflects the fact that younger Britons are more likely to directly benefit from a potential youth mobility scheme, as well as generational differences in support for strengthening trade relations with the EU more generally. This scenario also produces the sharpest socio-economic divides seen across the scenarios posed, with 67% of those in higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades supporting strengthening trade if it means increasing youth mobility, compared to 48% of those in lower (C2DE) socio-economic grades. Again, this likely reflects how much different demographics are likely to directly benefit from a youth mobility scheme, as well as different socio-economic grades' wider views about engagement with the EU.

### Allowing EU Boats to Fish More in UK Seas

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However, Britons more frequently oppose (41%) than support (33%) strengthening trading relations with the EU if it means the UK is required to allow EU boats to do more fishing in UK seas. A further 23% of Britons would neither support nor oppose strengthening trade relations in this situation and 3% of Britons don't know. This high level of opposition likely reflects the very divisive debate around fishing that has emerged since the UK departed the EU, the well-publicised challenges facing the fishing industry, environmental concerns, as well as the perception that EU fishing in UK seas impedes on the UK's right to protect what happens on its own territory, including to its marine life. With the UK and France already at loggerheads over fishing rights, and the EU expected to make demands around fishing a key part of any trade negotiations, this could prove to be a particularly challenging sticking point in negotiations.

Of the scenarios posed, the sharpest regional disparities emerge in this scenario. Support for strengthening trade relations if it means allowing EU boats to fish in UK seas is highest among residents in London (49%) and lowest among residents in Wales (29%), the South West (28%) and Eastern England (25%). With London contributing just 1% of the UK's fishing output, it is perhaps unsurprising that support for strengthening trade relations in this scenario is relatively high, as the impact on local industry of increased EU access to fishing in UK seas would be more limited than elsewhere in the UK.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> European Commission (April, 2024). *Commission proposes to open negotiations to facilitate youth mobility between the EU and the UK*. Retrieved from: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_24\\_2105](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_24_2105)

<sup>18</sup> Uberoi, E., Hutton, G., Ward, M. & Ares, E. (October, 2022) UK Fisheries Statistics. *House of Commons Library*. Retrieved from: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN02788/SN02788.pdf>

### Making it More Difficult to Trade with Non-EU Nations

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Britons are particularly cautious of strengthening trade relations with the EU if it impacts UK trade with non-EU nations, with 48% of Britons opposing strengthening trade relations in this scenario. Just 19% of Britons support strengthening trade if it makes it more difficult to trade with non-EU nations. A further 28% of Britons neither support nor oppose this, while 5% of Britons don't know what their perspective on this is. This is particularly interesting given Britons are very supportive of trading more with the EU and, aside from the United States, are very cautious about trading more with the other nations polled. More research is needed to ascertain precisely who, if anyone, Britons believe the UK should be trading more with, outside of the United States and the EU, and if doing so would be compatible with strengthening trade relations with the EU.

Britons are, in relative terms, fairly united in their perspective on this scenario. For example, there is a 16 percentage point difference between the proportion of Britons who voted Leave (59%) in the EU Referendum, and the proportion of those who voted Remain (43%), who oppose strengthening trade relations if it makes it more difficult to trade with non-EU nations. By comparison, there is a 44 percentage point gap between those who voted Remain (80%) and those who voted Leave (36%) in support of strengthening trade relations if it means greater regulatory alignment with the EU.

# The United States Presidential Election

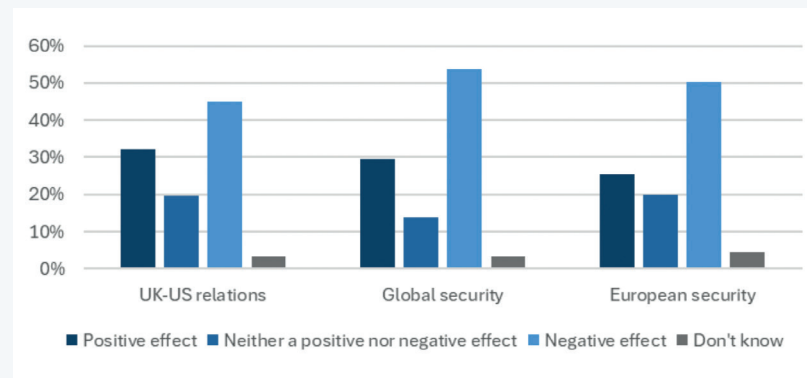
The UK-US 'special relationship' has long been a key cornerstone of the UK's foreign policy and, as this report has shown, Britons continue to strongly value the relationship. However, the upcoming United States presidential election brings the relationship to a critical juncture. Vice-President Kamala Harris and former President Donald Trump have vastly different visions for America and its position in the world and the election result will fundamentally impact the actions that the United States takes on the world stage, the UK's response to them, and the future of the bilateral relationship.

Of the two potential next American Presidents, Britons hold substantially higher levels of scepticism of Donald Trump's potential international impact, with the largest proportion of Britons believing a second Trump term would have a negative effect on global security (54%), European security (50%), and UK-US relations (45%). Scepticism is replaced with relative confidence among Britons regarding a Kamala Harris presidency, with the largest proportion of Britons instead believing that a Harris presidency would have a positive effect on UK-US relations (55%), global security (48%), and European security (44%). It is clear then that for Britons the outcome of the American election is seen to have significant ramifications for the UK and the world. All that Britons can do though is sit and wait.

## A Donald Trump Presidency

Proportion of Britons who believe the election of Donald Trump would have a positive or negative effect on the following...

BFPG



Britons are very apprehensive about the possible implications of a potential second Trump presidential term. Concern is highest when it comes to global security, with over half of Britons believing the election of Donald Trump would have a negative effect on global security (54%). This includes 32% of Britons who believe it would have a strongly negative effect, which in itself is higher than the proportion of Britons who believe it would have a positive effect to any degree (30%). Similarly, half of Britons (50%) believe the election of Donald Trump would have a negative effect on European security, and a higher proportion of Britons believe that it would have a strongly negative effect (28%) than those who believe it would have a positive effect to any degree (26%). Meanwhile, a plurality of Britons believe that a potential second Trump term would have a negative effect on UK-US relations (45%), compared to 32% of those who believe it would have a positive effect.

## The United States Presidential Election

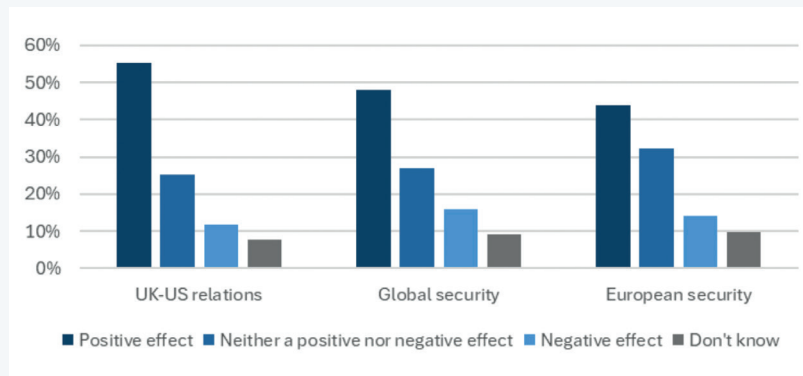
Across the options polled, women are more cautious about the consequences of a potential Trump presidency than men, displayed most clearly when considering Trump's effect on global security, with 61% of women believing Trump's election would have a negative effect on global security, compared to 46% of men. Similarly, older Britons tend to be more concerned about a potential Trump presidency than younger Britons, with 67% of over-66s believing the election of Donald Trump would have a negative effect on global security, compared to 35% of 26-35-year-olds. In both cases, this seems to reflect these demographics' wider feelings of insecurity in the world, as much as their specific views on Donald Trump himself, not least because younger Britons' values tend to diverge fairly substantially from those of Donald Trump.

Britons who voted Green and Liberal Democrat in the 2024 General Election are particularly concerned about the implications of a Trump presidency, while those who voted Reform UK are the least. For example, while 70% of those who voted Liberal Democrat and 68% of those who voted Green believe the election of Donald Trump would have a negative effect on UK-US relations, just 24% of those who voted for Reform UK believe this. Indeed, the majority (52%) of those who voted for Reform UK in the 2024 General Election believe the election of Donald Trump would have positive effects on UK-US relations.

## A Kamala Harris Presidency

Proportion of Britons who believe the election of Kamala Harris would have a positive or negative effect on the following...

BFPG



Britons have much higher levels of confidence that a potential Kamala Harris administration will have a positive effect on the United States' international positioning than they do about a second Trump presidency. Over half of Britons (55%) believe that a potential Harris presidency would have a positive effect on UK-US relations, compared to just 12% who believe it would have a negative effect. Just under half of Britons believe that a potential Harris presidency would have a positive effect on global security (48%), compared to 16% who believe it would have a negative effect, and a plurality of Britons believe that it would have a positive effect on European security (44%), while 14% believe it would have a negative effect.

Across the board, Britons more often believe a Harris presidency would have neither a positive nor negative effect across these areas than they do for a Trump presidency. For example, 32% of Britons believe a Harris presidency would have neither a positive nor negative effect on European security, compared to 20% who believe this about a Trump presidency. This reflects how Harris is seen to be the continuity candidate to President Biden, who would tinker at the edges of American foreign policy rather than fundamentally change it. Meanwhile, the lower proportion of Britons who believe Trump's election would have neither a positive nor negative effect likely reflects the turbulence of his first term in office and his more radical views around the United States' role in the world.

## The United States Presidential Election

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Britons' perceptions of the effects of a potential Kamala Harris presidency diverge much less strongly along demographic lines, than seen in respect to a potential Trump presidency, although they do persist. Britons who voted Remain in the EU Referendum, those who voted Labour in the 2024 General Election, those in higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades, and residents in London consistently show particularly high levels of belief that a Harris presidency would have a positive effect across a range of factors.

# Defence and National Security

In today's turbulent geopolitical environment, Britons feel increasingly unsafe, with Britons particularly concerned about the threats posed by international terrorism and continued Russian aggression. In this context, Britons' support for Ukraine continues to endure, while Britons' appetite for constructive engagement with alternative partners and strategic rivals, not least China, is very low, as Britons prioritise focusing on strengthening relationships with the UK's trusted partners.

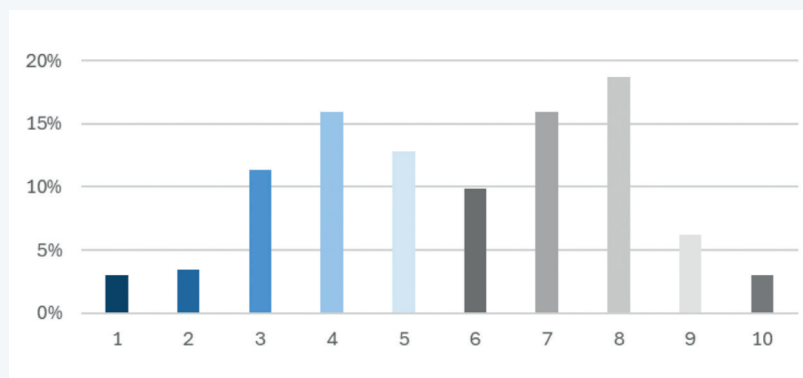
Strikingly though, while Britons feel increasingly unsafe, support for increasing defence spending is very superficial. While Britons support increasing defence spending at a general level, they oppose increasing defence spending if it would impact levels of spending on other areas of public expenditure, including education, the NHS and welfare. This leaves the new Government in a difficult position. The challenges the UK faces are proliferating, and Britons recognise, and are nervous about, the consequences of this increasingly turbulent geopolitical environment, but are limited in their willingness to shoulder the necessary costs to address these issues.

## Perceptions of Safety

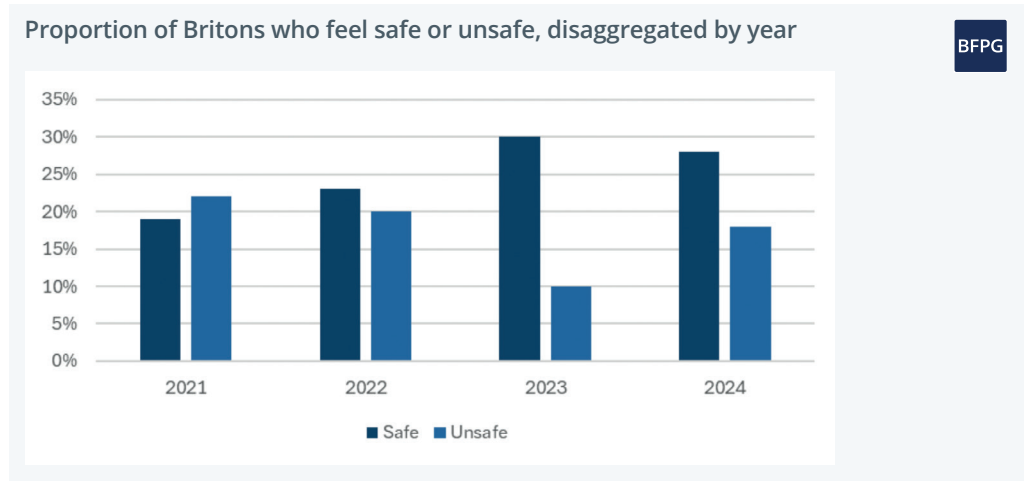
When asked to score on a scale of 1-10 how safe they feel in the world, given the direction of travel of world events, the average (mean) score given by Britons is 5.77, with Britons therefore, on average, leaning slightly more towards feeling safe than unsafe. Britons' feelings of safety tend to cluster around the middle, although Britons more frequently report feeling safe (28%) (scores 8-10) than unsafe (18%) (scores 1-3).

Britons' perceptions of their personal safety, with 1 being extremely unsafe and 10 being extremely safe

BFPG



However, while a higher proportion of Britons feel safe than unsafe, the proportion of Britons who report feeling unsafe has risen eight percentage points over the last year, from 10% in 2023. This brings the proportion of Britons feeling unsafe closer to the levels seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, with 22% of Britons feeling unsafe in 2021 and 20% feeling unsafe in 2022, although the proportion of Britons who feel actively safe remains higher than during the pandemic.



There are likely a few drivers of this increase in the proportion of Britons feeling unsafe. The effects of the post-COVID-19 bounce in feelings of security seen in 2023 have likely subsided, the outbreak of conflict in the Middle East, the ongoing war in Ukraine and Britons' high levels of concern about a potential Trump presidency all likely play a part. Domestic factors will also have had an impact, not least the fact that the fieldwork for this research was conducted during the 2024 summer far-right riots. BFPG focus groups have found that even when asked about their feelings of safety in a global context, it is domestic factors such as terrorism and levels of knife crime which act as the primary drivers of how safe Britons feel in the world. The far-right riots are therefore likely to have contributed to a feeling of unease and fear among Britons, particularly among those demographics more likely to be targeted by the far-right.

Older Britons more often feel unsafe than younger Britons, with 21% of over-66s and 21% of 56-65-year-olds feeling unsafe compared to 12% of 26-35-year-olds and 12% of 18-25-year-olds. Britons from lower (C2DE) socio-economic grades (21%) also more often feel unsafe than those from higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades (15%). In terms of political perspectives, the proportion of Britons who feel unsafe is highest among those who voted for Reform UK in the 2024 General Election (28%) and lowest among those who voted for Labour (13%), with feelings of safety among the latter group likely to have been boosted by the election of a government aligned with their views.

### Threats to UK National Security

Every year, BFPG asks Britons what, out of 11 potential threats, they believe to be the three biggest threats to UK security. Of the options polled, international terrorism (50%) is the most frequently seen as a top three threat to the UK - viewed as such by half of Britons. This is followed by continued Russian aggression, which is regarded as one of the three biggest threats to the UK by 48% of Britons. These two threats are much more widely viewed as a top threat by Britons than any other threats, making clear the scale of relative concern about these two particular threats.

Cyber-attacks from other countries (39%), climate change (27%), the rise of China as a world power (27%), a nuclear arms race (17%), the emergence of a new global health pandemic (15%) and foreign interference in UK politics and democracy (15%) are the next most frequently seen as top threats to UK security. The development of advanced artificial intelligence (13%) and the break-up of the union of the United Kingdom (10%) are the least frequently viewed as a top threat to UK security.

Comparing this to last year's results, concern about terrorism has risen significantly over the last year, with the proportion of Britons regarding international terrorism as a top threat rising to 50% in 2024, up from 34% in 2023. This again is likely, in part, a result of the far-right riots that emerged in the UK in July and August of 2024. Although the knife attack in Stockport which was the catalyst for the riots is not, as of the time of writing, being treated as terror-related, online misinformation and disinformation led to the widespread belief that this was a terror attack, and to renewed concerns about terrorism, as did the violence enacted in the riots themselves. The increased sense of global instability, and the backlash in the Middle East and beyond to the UK and its allies' response to the Israel-Palestine conflict, may also be contributing to increased concern about terrorism.<sup>19</sup>

Concern about cyber-attacks from other countries has also risen, with the proportion of Britons viewing it as a top threat rising to 39% in 2024, from 30% in 2023. Cyber-attacks by other nations have featured prominently in the media in recent years, in particular, recent Russian attempts to interfere in UK political processes and a Chinese attack on the UK's Ministry of Defence were widely documented and have likely contributed to this increase in concern.<sup>20</sup> The Cyberstrike outage in July 2024 which grounded flights, closed businesses and caused widespread disruption across the UK and the world, will also likely have contributed to this sense of threat, even though the outage was not the result of a cyber-attack. It did, however, highlight to Britons the importance of cybersecurity and the potential vulnerabilities in the UK's cyber infrastructure.<sup>21</sup>

Britons' increased focus on the threat posed by terrorism and cyber-attacks has meant that other threats have been deprioritised. In particular, the proportion of Britons who view the rise of China as a world power as a top threat has fallen from 39% in 2023 to 27% in 2024. In part, this is driven by greater concern about other threats but is also likely due to distance from the COVID-19 pandemic, which was a major driver of Britons' concerns about China.<sup>22</sup>

There are sharp variations in threat perceptions across age groups. Older Britons place significantly greater emphasis on the threats posed by Russia and China than younger Britons. For example, continued Russian aggression is viewed as a top three threat by 65% of over-66s. Meanwhile, less than a third (31%) of 18-25-year-olds view it as a top threat. Similarly, while 43% of over-66s see the rise of China as a world power as a top threat, just 16% of 18-25-year-olds do so. Meanwhile, younger Britons display higher levels of concern about climate change, with 43% of 18-25-year-olds viewing this as a top threat, compared to 16% of over-66s.

Britons who voted Green in the 2024 General Election also have very distinct threat perceptions. Among those who voted Green, 58% view climate change as a top threat, compared to 11% of those who voted for Reform UK. In turn, relative to other voter groups, those who voted Green in the 2024 General Election display much lower levels of prioritisation of other threats. For example, while 59% of those who voted Conservative and 59% of those who voted Liberal Democrat view continued Russian aggression as a top threat, just 38% of those who voted Green do. Similarly, while 63% of those who voted Reform UK view terrorism as a top threat, just 30% of those who voted Green do.

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<sup>19</sup> Dodd, V., Al-Othman, H. & Halliday, J. (July, 2024). Police searching for motive for Southport stabbings focus on suspect's mental health. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/article/2024/jul/30/police-searching-for-motive-for-southport-stabbings-focus-on-suspects-mental-health>; Millward, D. (October, 2023) Queen Rania of Jordan hits out at the West's 'double standards' over Israeli bombing. *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2023/10/25/queen-rania-jordan-accuses-west-double-standard-gaza-israel/>

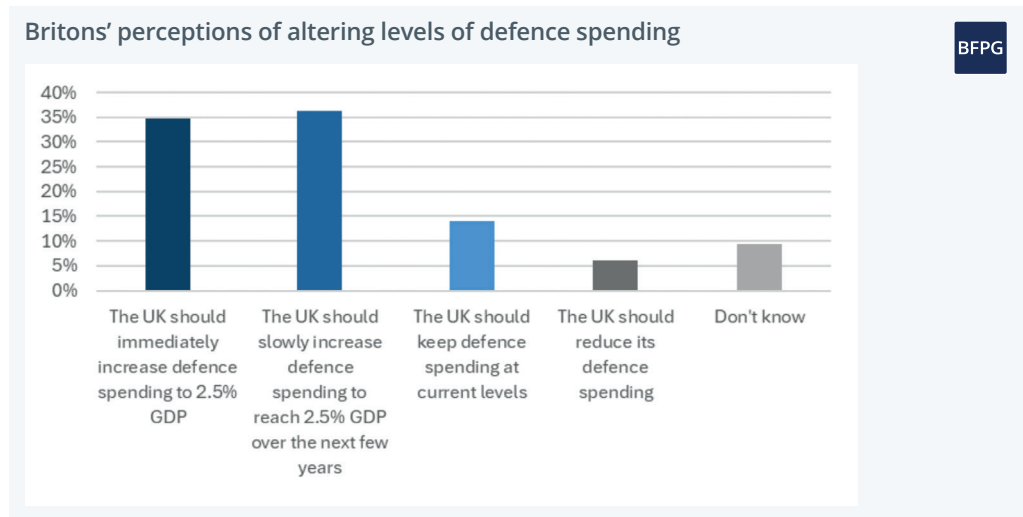
<sup>20</sup> National Cyber Security Centre. (December, 2023). *UK and allies expose Russian intelligence services for cyber campaign of attempted political interference*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/news/uk-and-allies-expose-cyber-campaign-attempted-political-interference>; Sengupta, K. (May, 2024). MoD cyberattack: Three-week hacking operation 'by China' exposed details of 270,000 armed forces personnel. *The Independent*. Retrieved from: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/mod-hack-china-data-breach-sscl-uk-b2540863.html>

<sup>21</sup> Kollwe, J., Lay, K., Topham, G. & Goodley, S. (July, 2024). From trains to retail, how CrowdStrike outage caused havoc across industries. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/article/2024/jul/19/from-trains-to-retail-how-crowdstrike-outage-caused-havoc-across-industries>

<sup>22</sup> Gaston, S. & Aspinall, E. (February, 2021). 2021 UK Public Opinion on Foreign Policy and Global Affairs Annual Survey. *British Foreign Policy Group*. Retrieved from: <https://bfpog.co.uk/2021/02/2021-annual-survey/>

## Defence Spending

With global challenges proliferating, and the UK's military capabilities depleted, the Labour Party committed during the 2024 General Election campaign to spending 2.5% of GDP on defence "as soon as we can".<sup>23</sup> Since coming into office the new Government has reaffirmed this commitment, although Prime Minister Keir Starmer has since stated that an increase in defence spending must happen within the new Government's fiscal rules and only following the completion of a Strategic Defence Review, which will provide a roadmap to increasing defence spending.<sup>24</sup>



At a top level, there is very clear public support for increasing defence spending, with 71% of Britons believing the UK should increase defence spending to 2.5% of GDP at some stage. This includes 36% of Britons who believe the UK should increase spending slowly and reach a 2.5% of GDP spending target over the next few years, and 35% of Britons who believe the UK should immediately increase defence spending to 2.5% of GDP. Just 14% of Britons believe defence spending should be kept at current levels and 6% believe defence spending should be reduced further. Meanwhile, 9% of Britons don't know what the UK should do when it comes to levels of defence spending.

Support for increasing defence spending at some stage has increased substantially over the last year, to 71% from 59% in 2023. This likely reflects the turbulent geopolitical environment the UK is operating in and Britons' growing feelings of insecurity within this context. It also likely reflects the cut-through of messaging, particularly from those around the Ministry of Defence, on the need to invest further in the UK's defences to maintain its long-term security.

Support for increasing defence spending at some stage is higher among men (77%) than women (65%). It is also higher among older Britons, with 82% of over-66s believing the UK should increase defence spending to 2.5% of GDP at some point, compared to 62% of 18-25-year-olds. A particularly high proportion of those who voted Liberal Democrat (81%) and Conservative (80%) in the 2024 General Election support increasing defence spending at some stage, as do those who voted for Reform UK (77%) and Labour (72%). In contrast, only 56% of those who voted Green support increasing defence spending at some stage.

However, these top-level findings are a little deceptive. While Britons say they are supportive of increasing defence spending, they are very uncomfortable with the potential trade-offs that

<sup>23</sup> The Labour Party. (June, 2024). *Labour's defence policy: How we will provide strong national defence for Britain*. Retrieved from: <https://labour.org.uk/updates/stories/labours-defence-policy-how-we-will-provide-strong-national-defence-for-britain/>

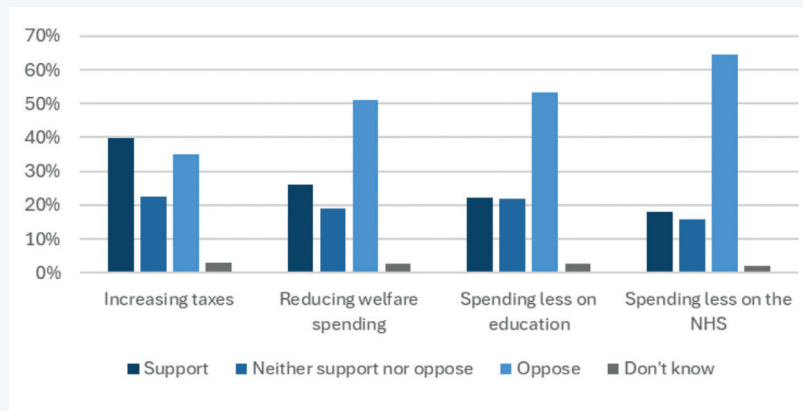
<sup>24</sup> Mason, C. (July, 2024). PM says defence spending commitment 'cast iron'. *BBC*. Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ceqd2x5793no>

## Defence and National Security

increasing defence spending may entail. While Britons more frequently support (40%) than oppose (35%) increasing defence spending if it requires increasing taxes, when measured against a variety of other potential spending commitments, defence spending loses out. The majority (64%) of Britons oppose increasing defence spending if it requires spending less on the NHS, while just 18% of Britons support this. Similarly, the majority of Britons (53%) oppose increasing defence spending if it means spending less on education and the majority of Britons (51%) also oppose increasing defence spending if it means the UK has to reduce welfare spending. With the new Government cautious about raising taxes, this leaves it in a challenging position.<sup>25</sup> Without tax increases, and with little public money to spare, increasing defence spending will require tough choices when it comes to other public sector services. It is not clear that the public is willing to bear these costs.

**Proportion of Britons who would support or oppose increasing defence spending if it requires...**

BFPG



Britons' willingness to shoulder the potential trade-offs of increasing defence spending also varies. Sometimes this mirrors different demographics' wider prioritisation of defence spending. Men, for example, are consistently more supportive than women of increasing defence spending in the scenarios posed, which is consistent with the fact that men (77%) are more frequently supportive than women (65%) of increasing defence spending at a general level.

However, it is not always consistent. While those who voted for the Liberal Democrats (81%) in the 2024 General Election are the voter group most supportive of increasing defence spending at some stage, it is those who voted for Reform UK in the 2024 General Election who most often support increasing defence spending in the scenarios polled, with the exception of increasing taxes. For example, 41% of those who voted for Reform UK would support increasing defence spending if it also means having to reduce welfare spending, while only 27% of those who voted Liberal Democrat support this. Similarly, while 35% of those who voted for Reform UK in the 2024 General Election would support increasing defence spending even if it requires spending less on education, only 18% of those who voted Liberal Democrat would do so. This variation between overall support and support in specific scenarios reflects different demographics' relative prioritisation of other areas of government spending - those who voted for Reform UK, for example, are highly sceptical of spending on welfare in general.<sup>26</sup> The challenge for the Government is that those demographics that are superficially supportive of increasing defence spending, cannot necessarily be relied upon to endorse increased defence spending in practice.

<sup>25</sup> The Labour Party. (June, 2024). *Labour will not raise taxes on working people*. Retrieved from: <https://labour.org.uk/updates/stories/labour-party-tax-policy-how-we-will-make-the-tax-system-fairer/>

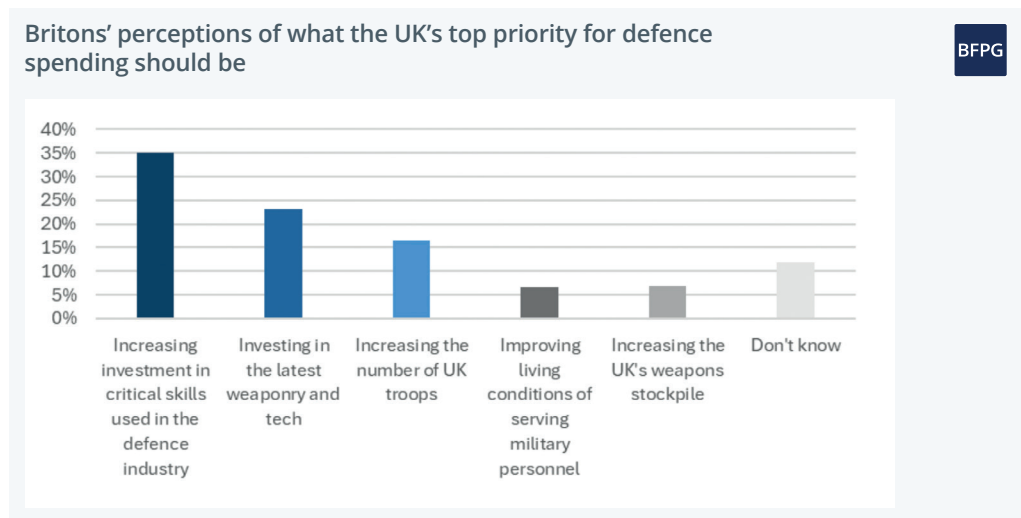
<sup>26</sup> Smith, M. (July, 2024). What do Reform UK voters believe?. *YouGov*. Retrieved from: <https://yougov.co.uk/politics/articles/49887-what-do-reform-uk-voters-believe>

## Defence and National Security

The kinds of trade-offs Britons are willing to make to enable an increase in defence spending are also heavily contingent on their personal interests. For example, support for increasing defence spending if it requires increasing taxes is substantially higher among over-66s (46%) (who will likely bear less of the brunt of tax increases than the working-age population) than it is among 18-25-year-olds (31%). However, when it comes to spending less on the NHS to increase defence spending, support is higher among 18-25-year-olds (19%) than among over-66s (15%), the latter of which tend to be far more reliant on the NHS. As such, while Britons in theory support increasing defence spending, they are relatively unwilling to shoulder personal costs in terms of public sector spending to enable this.

### Priorities for Defence Spending

With this in mind, the question becomes what should the UK prioritise within its existing, or any increased, defence budget? This is the question the Government's upcoming Strategic Defence Review will seek to cover, by providing a pathway and a set of priorities for any uplift in defence spending. Of the five options given, all of which reflect some of the likely debates which will be explored during the development of the Strategic Defence Review, the largest proportion of Britons (35%) believe the UK should prioritise increasing investment in critical skills used in the defence industry (e.g. apprenticeships in cybersecurity and upskilling existing personnel to better utilise AI). This is followed by investing in the latest weaponry and technology for UK defence (23%) and increasing the number of UK troops (16%). Increasing the UK's weapons stockpile (7%) and improving the living conditions of serving UK military personnel (7%) are the least frequently prioritised. With 12% responding 'don't know', levels of uncertainty about what the UK should prioritise in defence spending are relatively high.



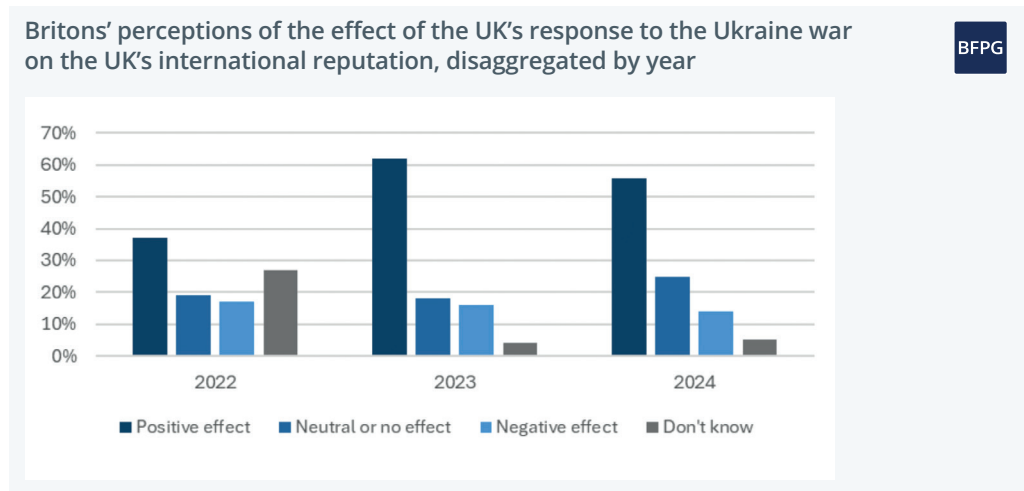
A challenge for building support for the new Strategic Defence Review will be that Britons' priorities when it comes to defence spending also vary substantially along demographic lines. The largest proportion of 18-25-year-olds (46%), 26-35-year-olds (42%), 36-45-year-olds (40%) and 46-55-year-olds (35%) view investment in critical skills for the defence sector as the top priority. However, just 27% of 56-65-year-olds and 24% of over-66s view it as such. Instead for over-66s (36%) and 56-65-year-olds (33%), investment in the latest weaponry and technology is most frequently seen as the top priority.

Support for prioritising investment in critical skills for defence is highest among those who voted for Labour in the 2024 General Election (45%) and lowest among those who voted for Reform UK (23%). Meanwhile, those who voted for Reform UK (27%) believe increasing the number of UK troops should be the top priority over three times as often as those who voted Green (8%).

## Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

Britons remain deeply cautious of Russia, with 83% of Britons distrusting Russia to act responsibly in the world. Russia's invasion of Ukraine remains firmly imprinted in the minds of the British public and continued Russian aggression is therefore viewed as the second biggest threat to UK national security, as concerns about Russia's invasion and its consequences for Ukraine, Europe and the UK continue to abound.

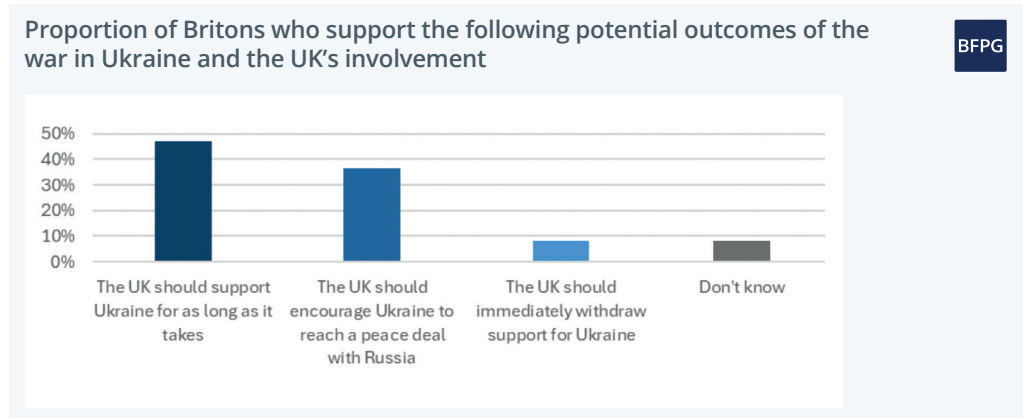
Britons believe the UK has responded well to the crisis though, with the majority (56%) of Britons believing the UK's response to the crisis has had a positive effect on the UK's reputation overseas. A further 25% of Britons believe it has had a neutral or no effect, while just 14% of Britons believe it has had a negative effect. Belief that the UK's response to the invasion has had a positive effect on the UK's reputation is particularly high among Britons who voted Green in the 2024 General Election (71%), residents in Northern Ireland (62%), 18-25-year-olds (61%) and Britons in higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades (61%).



However, the proportion of Britons who believe the UK's response to the crisis has had a positive effect on global perceptions of the UK has fallen six percentage points, from 62% in 2023 to 56% in 2024. This is driven primarily by the fact that the proportion of Britons who believe the UK's response to the crisis has had a neutral or no effect on the UK's reputation has increased to 25% in 2024, from 18% in 2023. This likely reflects the fact that Ukraine continues to fall down the headlines as other geopolitical issues, not least the conflict in the Middle East, take up additional bandwidth.

Despite the proliferation of global issues and the ongoing economic challenges in the UK, Britons' support for Ukraine remains relatively robust. A plurality (47%) of Britons believe the UK should support Ukraine for as long as it takes. A further 37% of Britons believe that the UK should encourage Ukraine to reach a peace deal with Russia and just 8% of Britons believe the UK should immediately withdraw support from Ukraine. A further 8% of Britons don't know what outcome the UK should pursue.

This does represent a fall in the proportion of Britons who believe the UK should support Ukraine for as long as it takes - from 53% in 2023 to 47% in 2024. Meanwhile, the proportion of Britons who believe the UK should encourage Ukraine to reach a peace deal with Russia has increased, to 37% from 33% in 2023. Nevertheless, it is remarkable how, even as the invasion of Ukraine falls down the headlines, only 8% of Britons believe the UK should immediately withdraw support for Ukraine, and while some Britons may be particularly eager for a resolution to the conflict, Britons' support for Ukraine remains strong.



Support is more enduring among some demographics though. While 62% of over-66s and 55% of 56-65-year-olds believe the UK should support Ukraine for as long as it takes, just 37% of 26-35-year-olds and 36% of 36-45-year-olds believe this. Indeed, 26-35-year-olds (46%) and 36-45-year-olds (38%) more frequently believe the UK should encourage Ukraine to reach a peace deal with Russia than believe the UK should support Ukraine for as long as it takes.

A majority of those who voted Liberal Democrat (57%), Conservative (54%) and Green (53%) in the 2024 General Election believe the UK should support Ukraine for as long as it takes, as do 48% of those who voted Labour. However, those who voted for Reform UK as frequently believe the UK should encourage Ukraine to reach a peace deal with Russia (38%) as they believe the UK should support Ukraine for as long as it takes (37%).

### UK-China Relations

The new UK Government has committed to conducting an audit of UK-China relations. Reflecting upon the complexity of the relationship between the UK and China, the audit will assess how the UK should balance its economic and national security interests, as well as the UK's values, in both the long- and short-term, in its relationship with China.<sup>27</sup> This is no mean feat and will require careful and strategic balancing from the new Government.

Britons' views on how the UK should engage with China are similarly complex. When it comes to engagement with China, of the 11 options provided, the most popular (43%) is for the UK to reduce its dependence on Chinese technology and resources. However, this is followed by cooperation on shared global challenges such as climate change (39%) and challenging China on its human rights record (38%). All other forms of potential engagement are supported by less than a third of Britons - 26% support Chinese economic engagement and financial investment in the UK, 21% support Chinese students attending UK universities and higher education and 20% support deploying security resources to contain China's aggression in the South China Sea. Just 13% of Britons support allowing Chinese technology companies to operate in the UK (e.g. TikTok) and 8% support China building infrastructure in the UK such as nuclear plants and 5G technology. Meanwhile, 13% of Britons do not support the UK Government having any engagement with China.

This paints a rather complex picture. It suggests that Britons have a rather sceptical view of China, with particular concerns about supply chains, security and human rights, but that nevertheless there are some issues, particularly global challenges, where it is recognised that some cooperation is needed. Other forms of bilateral cooperation such as around education, infrastructure and technology are viewed with a high degree of scepticism and garner very little

<sup>27</sup> Hughes, D. (July, 2024). Starmer prepared for possibility of 'robust challenge' with China. *The Standard*. Retrieved from: <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/keir-starmer-china-prime-minister-government-washington-b1169921.html>

## Defence and National Security

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public support, presumably because it is not seen to be worth the security risks, or because these are seen to be non-essential forms of cooperation for which Britons are not willing to compromise their values.

Having increased in 2023, support for constructive collaboration with China has fallen across a range of issues this year. For example, the proportion of Britons who support Chinese students attending UK universities and higher education institutions has fallen from 28% in 2023 to 21% in 2024, the lowest proportion since BFGP polling began on this in 2021. Similarly, the proportion of Britons who support China building infrastructure in the UK has fallen from 15% in 2023 to 8% in 2024. This may well be a response to revelations about Chinese cyber-attacks and high-profile accusations of Chinese spying in the UK, as well as concerns about a potential breakdown in US-China relations if there is a second Trump presidency.<sup>28</sup>

Older Britons take a much more sceptical approach to engagement with China than younger Britons, with 23% of over-66s opposing all UK Government engagement with China, compared to 6% of 18-25-year-olds. The sharpest difference between generations appears in relation to Chinese technology companies, with 25% of 18-25-year-olds believing Chinese technology companies should be allowed to operate in the UK, compared to 4% of over-66s. This likely reflects the fact younger Britons more directly engage with and benefit from, Chinese technology, not least TikTok.

Regionally, residents in London are the most supportive of the collaborative forms of engagement posed. For example, 49% of residents in London support cooperation with China on shared global challenges such as climate change, with the next highest support seen in the East Midlands (40%). Meanwhile, just 33% of residents in the North East and South West support such cooperation. Similarly, 36% of residents in London support Chinese economic engagement and financial investment in the UK, compared to 20% of those in the South East.

Meanwhile, Britons who voted Green in the 2024 General Election are consistently among the most supportive of collaborative forms of engagement with China, while those who voted for Reform UK are among the least. For example, 36% of those who voted Green support Chinese students attending UK universities and higher education, compared to 25% of those who voted Liberal Democrat, 23% of those who voted Labour, 18% of those who voted Conservative and 17% of those who voted for Reform UK.

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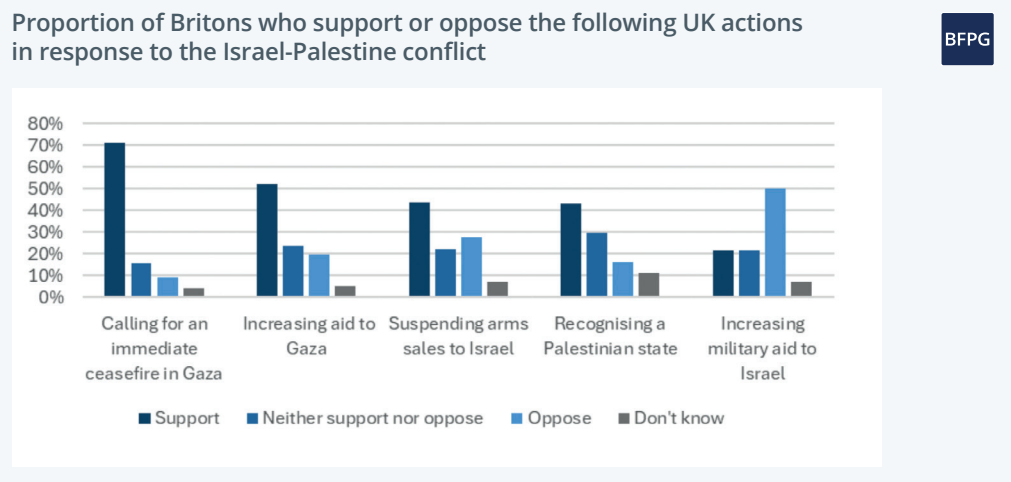
<sup>28</sup> Keast-Butler, A. (May, 2024). CYBERUK 2024 Keynote. *National Cyber Security Centre*. Retrieved from <https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/speech/cyberuk-2024-gchq-director-keynote-speech>; Gillett, F. & Comerford, R. (April, 2024). Two men charged with spying for China under Official Secrets Act. *BBC*. Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-68874822>

# The Conflict in the Middle East

The Israel-Palestine conflict has resulted in significant loss of life and upended regional security in the Middle East. Under the former Conservative Government, the UK's approach to the conflict broadly surmounted to condemning the attack by Hamas on October 7th, supporting a two-state solution to the conflict and, eventually, calling for a "sustainable ceasefire".<sup>29</sup> Since assuming office, the new UK Government has begun to shift the UK's approach to the conflict, restoring funding to the UNRWA, dropping its objection to the ICC arrest warrant for the Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, and, most recently (after this poll was conducted), suspending some of its arms sales to Israel.<sup>30</sup>

The UK's approach to the conflict so far is viewed with some scepticism. Our polling, conducted before the announcement of a suspension of some arms sales to Israel, which may have since shifted perceptions, found that a plurality of Britons believe the UK's response to the crisis has had a neutral or no effect (36%) on the UK's international reputation. However, Britons also more frequently believe the UK's response has had a negative (29%) rather than a positive (25%) effect on how the UK is perceived internationally. This stands in contrast to how Britons believe the UK's response to Ukraine is perceived, with the majority (56%) of Britons believing that the UK's Ukraine response has had a positive impact on how the UK is perceived internationally. Belief that the UK's response to the conflict in the Middle East has had a negative effect on how the UK is perceived internationally is highest among Britons who voted Green in the 2024 General Election (45%) and 18-25-year-olds (44%).

So what approach would Britons like the UK to take?



## Calling for an Immediate Ceasefire in Gaza

The majority (71%) of Britons believe the UK should call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, including 43% of Britons who strongly support the UK calling for an immediate ceasefire. Just 9% of Britons oppose calling for an immediate ceasefire. A further 16% of Britons neither support nor oppose calling for a ceasefire, while 4% of Britons don't know.

<sup>29</sup> House of Commons Library. (May, 2024). 2023/24 Israel-Hamas conflict: UK actions and response. Retrieved from: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9874/>

<sup>30</sup> Keate, N. (July, 2024). UK drops objection to ICC arrest warrant for Netanyahu. *POLITICO*. Retrieved from: [www.politico.eu/article/uk-drops-objection-icc-issuing-arrest-warrant-benjamin-netanyahu/](https://www.politico.eu/article/uk-drops-objection-icc-issuing-arrest-warrant-benjamin-netanyahu/); Landale, J. & Nevett, J. (July, 2024). UK suspends some arms exports to Israel. *BBC*. Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cd05pk95j2xo>

## The Conflict in the Middle East

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Support for a ceasefire is higher among women (73%) than men (69%), and among those in higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades (73%) than those in lower (C2DE) socio-economic grades (68%). It is also higher among Britons who voted Remain (78%) in the EU Referendum than those who voted Leave (65%).

## Increasing Aid to Gaza

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The majority (52%) of Britons support the UK increasing aid to Gaza, with just 19% of Britons opposed to this. Meanwhile, 23% of Britons neither support nor oppose this, while 5% don't know. Support for increasing aid to Gaza is substantially higher among younger than older Britons - 71% of 18-25-year-olds support the UK increasing aid to Gaza, compared to 45% of 56-65-year-olds and 41% of over-66s. Support for increasing aid to Gaza is also particularly high in London (58%) and the North West (58%), and lowest in the North East (40%).

## Suspending Arms Sales to Israel

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When this survey was conducted, before the Government's announcement in early September 2024 that it was suspending some arms sales to Israel, this survey found that a plurality (44%) of Britons support suspending arms sales to Israel, while 27% of Britons oppose this. A further 22% of Britons neither support nor oppose, and 7% don't know. It also found that a majority of residents in Northern Ireland (57%), those who voted Green in the 2024 General Election (57%) and 56-65-year-olds (51%) support suspending arms sales to Israel. Half of those who voted Liberal Democrat (50%) and Labour (50%) in the 2024 General Election also support suspending arms sales to Israel, while just 33% of those who voted Reform UK and 32% of those who voted Conservative support this. The Government's decision to suspend some arms sales to Israel therefore brings government policy closer in line with public opinion.

## Recognising a Palestinian State

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A plurality (43%) of Britons support recognising a Palestinian state, with just 16% of Britons opposed to this. Meanwhile, 30% of Britons neither support nor oppose this and 11% of Britons don't know. Recognition of a Palestinian state is particularly divisive along political lines. A majority of those who voted Green (73%), Liberal Democrat (55%) or Labour (51%) in the 2024 General Election support recognising a Palestinian state. However, just 28% of those who voted Conservative and 26% of those who voted Reform UK support this. Indeed those who voted Reform UK are more likely to oppose (33%) than support this (26%). Meanwhile, 54% of those who voted Remain in the EU Referendum support recognising a Palestinian state, compared to 30% of those who voted Leave.

## Increasing Military Aid to Israel

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The only policy suggested which is widely opposed is increasing military aid to Israel, with half of Britons (50%) opposed to this, while 22% of Britons support it. A further 22% of Britons neither support nor oppose this and 7% of Britons don't know.

Opposition to increasing military aid to Israel is also the least divided of the options polled, although there are still substantial political differences. Interestingly, while those who voted Labour in the 2024 General Election generally align with those who voted Liberal Democrat and Green when it comes to the Israel-Palestine conflict, on this they are much more aligned with those who voted for Reform UK and the Conservatives. While 71% of those who voted Green and 62% of those who voted Liberal Democrat oppose increasing military aid to Israel, just 47% of those who voted Labour, 46% of those who voted for Reform UK, and 45% of those who voted Conservative oppose this.

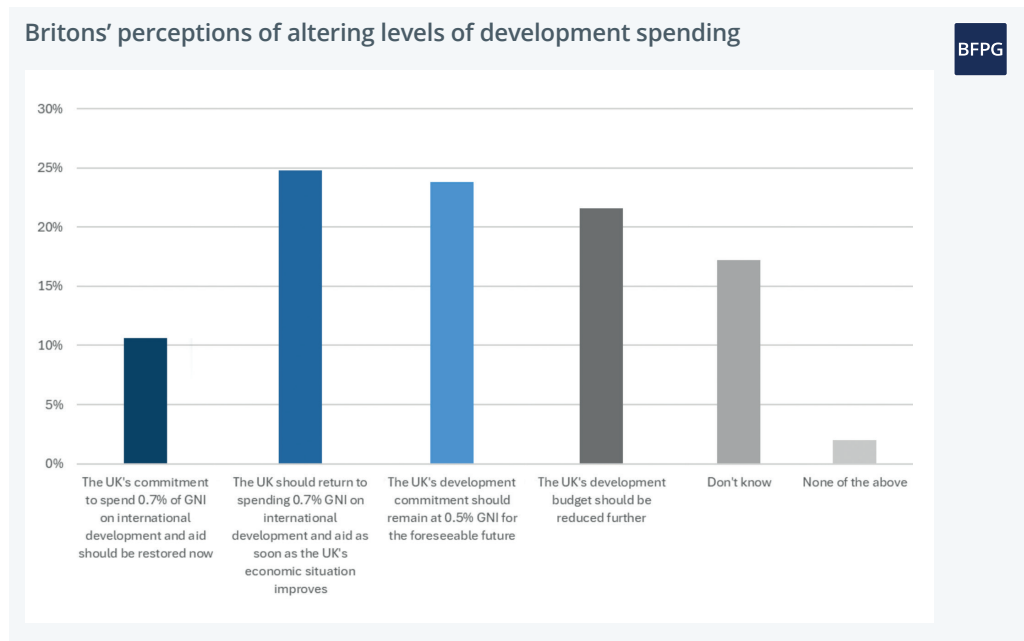
# International Development

In 2021 the UK reduced aid spending from 0.7% to 0.5% of Gross National Income (GNI) as a “temporary measure” in response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the UK economy.<sup>31</sup> Three years on, and still in a period of economic challenge, the new Labour Government has continued its predecessor’s pledge to restore the commitment to spending 0.7% of GNI “as soon as fiscal circumstances allow”.<sup>32</sup>

However, Britons remain highly sceptical of increasing aid and development spending. This is likely driven, in part, by their scepticism of many of the potential benefits of international development, particularly around its impacts on security and migration, although Britons have a greater appreciation of the potential benefits to the UK’s trading opportunities and international reputation.

## Return to 0.7%?

A quarter of Britons (25%) believe the UK should return to spending 0.7% of GNI on international development, but only when the UK’s economic situation improves, while 24% of Britons believe that the UK’s development commitment should remain at 0.5% of GNI for the foreseeable future. A further 22% believe that the UK’s development budget should be reduced further - twice the proportion of Britons (11%) who support the UK restoring its commitment to spend 0.7% of GNI on international development immediately. As such, just 36% of Britons believe the UK should return to spending 0.7% GNI on international development at some stage. A further 17% of Britons don’t know their views, while 2% of Britons do not agree with any of the statements provided.



<sup>31</sup> UK Parliament (November, 2020). Official Development Assistance: Volume 684: Debated on Thursday 26 November 2020. *Hansard*. Retrieved from: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2020-11-26/debates/A2442925-0DA2-4262-B564-1C6FEE24881A/OfficialDevelopmentAssistance>

<sup>32</sup> The Labour Party (n.d). *Change - Labour Party Manifesto*. Retrieved from: <https://labour.org.uk/change/>

## International Development

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Younger Britons more frequently support restoring the aid budget than older Britons, with 53% of 18-25-year-olds believing it should be restored now or when the fiscal situation improves, compared to just 21% of over-66s. In turn, support among over-66s (37%) for reducing the UK's development budget further is over six times higher than among 18-25-year-olds (6%).

Support for restoring the aid budget to 0.7% of GNI either now or once the UK's economic situation improves is higher among Britons in higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades (44%) than Britons from lower (C2DE) socio-economic grades (26%), as well as among those who voted Remain (48%) in the EU Referendum than those who voted Leave (21%). However, the starkest disparities emerge along political lines, with belief that the aid budget should be reduced further much higher among those who voted for Reform UK (50%) or Conservative (36%) in the 2024 General Election, than among those who voted Liberal Democrat (15%), Labour (11%), or Green (7%).

## Benefits of UK Aid

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When it comes to the key drivers and rationale for aid and development, Britons are relatively sceptical of the benefits that the UK's international development and aid programmes bring. Britons are most sceptical of its ability to bring down irregular migration, with over half of Britons (56%) not believing that aid spending helps tackle irregular migration, compared to just 25% of Britons who believe it does. A further 19% of Britons don't know whether it reduces irregular migration.

Britons are similarly sceptical over whether it makes the UK safer, with 45% of Britons believing it does not make the UK safer, compared to 38% of Britons who believe it does, and 17% of Britons who don't know what impact it has on safety in the UK. Scepticism is also high when it comes to the impact of international development on global security, with 42% of Britons not believing that international development improves global security, compared to 41% who do, and 18% who don't know.

There are, however, two areas in which Britons are more convinced of the benefits of international development to the UK. A majority (52%) of Britons believe international development spending improves global perceptions of the UK, while 33% of Britons do not believe this and 15% of Britons don't know. Almost half (49%) of Britons also believe that international development and aid spending helps create new trading opportunities for the UK, compared to 33% of Britons who do not and 18% of Britons who don't know. This suggests that some of the potential benefits of international development spending are appreciated by the British public and lessons can therefore be learned about the messaging around these areas to increase public awareness of the impact of international development on wider UK foreign policy and global security.

Men are consistently more convinced of the potential benefits of international development spending than women, as are those in higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades relative to those in lower (C2DE) socio-economic grades. Some of the sharpest dividing lines in opinions though emerge along generational lines, with younger Britons consistently more convinced of the potential benefits. For example, 64% of 18-25-year-olds believe international development spending improves global security, compared to 25% of over-66s. Similarly, 67% of 18-25-year-olds believe it helps create new trading opportunities for the UK, compared to 35% of over-66s.

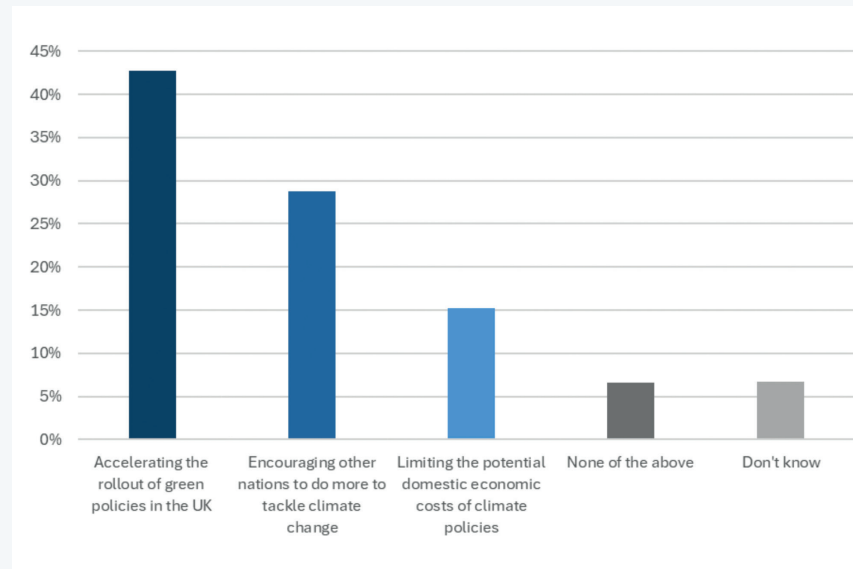
Meanwhile, those who voted Labour and Green in the 2024 General Election are more often convinced of the benefits than those who voted Conservative or Reform UK. In fact, those who voted for Reform UK in the 2024 General Election are the demographic segment that displays the highest levels of scepticism across all five rationales for aid spending. For example, when it comes to whether international development helps create new trading opportunities for the UK, those who voted Green (64%), Labour (61%) and Liberal Democrat (54%) much more frequently believe it does than those who voted Conservative (38%) or Reform UK (25%).

# Climate Change

With Russia's invasion of Ukraine worsening an already growing energy crisis, at the same time as annual global temperatures continue to rise, governments have been pulled in competing directions when it comes to addressing climate change.<sup>33</sup>

Britons' perceptions of what the UK should prioritise in tackling climate change

BFPG



However, when it comes to tackling climate change, Britons are clear. Previous research by BFPG has consistently shown strong public support for climate action, with 70% of Britons supporting the UK taking a leading international role in tackling climate change in 2023.<sup>34</sup>

When it comes to priorities for climate action, this year our research shows the largest proportion of Britons believe the UK should prioritise the rollout of domestic green policies in the UK (43%), such as increasing onshore wind capacity when it comes to addressing climate change. Meanwhile, 29% of Britons believe the UK should prioritise encouraging other nations to do more to tackle climate change. The higher prioritisation of domestic action suggests there is a widespread understanding of the UK's role in tackling the climate crisis and the potential economic and reputational benefits that could be derived from being at the forefront of the climate transition. Certainly, a proactive focus on tackling climate change is widely endorsed, with only 15% of Britons believing the UK should prioritise limiting the potential economic costs of climate policies. A further 7% do not endorse any of the three options provided, while 7% of Britons don't know.

Prioritisation of domestic action is highest among younger Britons, with over half (54%) of 18-25-year-olds supporting prioritising the rollout of green policies in the UK, compared to 34% of over-66s. Encouraging other nations to do more to tackle climate change is most popular among over-66s (32%) and 26-35-year-olds (32%), although the largest proportion of both age groups still prioritise accelerating the domestic rollout of green initiatives.

<sup>33</sup> Poynting, M. (February, 2024). World's first year-long breach of key 1.5C warming limit. *BBC*. Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-68110310>

<sup>34</sup> Aspinall, E. and Keogh, E. (July, 2023). 2023 UK Public Opinion on Foreign Policy and Global Affairs Annual Survey. *British Foreign Policy Group*. Retrieved from: <https://bfp.org.uk/2023/07/2023-annual-survey/>

## Climate Change

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Political views also present a clear dividing line in views on climate priorities - 74% of those who voted Green in the 2024 General Election, 55% of those who voted Liberal Democrat, and 52% of those who voted Labour, believe the UK should prioritise the domestic rollout of green policies, compared to 30% of those who voted Conservative and 21% of those who voted Reform UK. Meanwhile, those who voted Reform UK (30%) or Conservative (20%) are the voters who most frequently prioritise limiting the domestic economic costs of climate policies.



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