

BFPG

British Foreign Policy Group

UK Public Opinion on Foreign Policy and Global Affairs

Annual Survey – 2025 | Executive Summary

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About this Report

The 2025 Survey

This report presents the findings of the 2025 edition of the British Foreign Policy Group's Annual Survey of UK Public Opinion on Foreign Policy and Global Affairs. This is the seventh edition of this annual survey, which was first produced in 2019. This year's survey was designed by the British Foreign Policy Group (BFPG) and the fieldwork for this report was conducted by J.L. Partners between the 27th and 29th May 2025.

Full editorial control and responsibility belongs to BFPG, as do any mistakes. We are grateful to Critical Publics for their support which has made this research possible. Thanks also to our polling partners J.L. Partners for conducting the fieldwork and to our designer Nadia Nelson for bringing this paper to life.

To arrange a briefing or to discuss the findings of this report please contact us at hello@bfpg.co.uk.



The British Foreign Policy Group

The British Foreign Policy Group (BFPG) is an independent, non-partisan think tank focused on the intersection between the domestic and the international, recognising that the UK's international decision-making is shaped by our domestic social, economic and democratic landscape. BFPG therefore believes that a strong and united nation at home is the essential foundation of an effective and cohesive UK foreign policy. Since BFPG's inception, public opinion has formed a key pillar of its work, and we are proud champions of the importance of building domestic consent for UK foreign policymaking. To this end, every year since 2019 we have produced an annual, publicly available, survey on the state of, and trends in, public opinion on UK foreign policy. We supplement this work with focus groups, targeted polling and citizens' assemblies throughout the year.



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 once again have the opportunity to support BFPG to run the 2025 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.

Executive Summary

Since 2019, the British Foreign Policy Group's Annual Survey of UK Public Opinion on Foreign Policy and Global Affairs has charted changes in public perceptions of the UK's international activities through a period of major transition, from the UK's departure from the EU, to war in Europe, and a shifting global balance of power.

This year's survey was conducted at the end of May 2025, under the spectre of the ongoing war in Ukraine, conflict in the Middle East, and the retrenchment of one of the UK's most important international partners - the United States - which threatens to upend the international laws and norms that have long held the international system together, and which will test the UK's commitment to the so-called 'special relationship'.

It is in this context that this survey finds a public in transition, searching for a new position in the world as the UK scrambles to protect its security, economic and political interests in an increasingly volatile world order and difficult fiscal environment. It is no longer the case that these interests are seen to always be critically aligned and intertwined with the United States, with President Trump's actions not only seen to be negatively affecting the UK's national interests, but also causing deeper damage to Britons' trust in, and support for, the 'special relationship' more broadly.

For Britons, the answer to this volatile international environment is increasingly seen to lie with Europe and the EU instead. Not only is support for closer cooperation with the EU now broad and deep, even among Leave voters, but the majority of Britons now identify as European, as the war in Ukraine, challenges over Brexit, and the retrenchment of the United States, push the UK back towards its European partners. In this shift, Britons hope to find both economic and security solutions to the challenges facing the UK, as the turbulent global environment pushes Britons towards a more hard-nosed, self-interested foreign policy, on everything from international development to trade, partnerships and global leadership.

But while Britons are adopting a more hard-nosed foreign policy approach, it is, nevertheless, clear that the public is not aware of, nor prepared for, the scale of the national security challenges the UK faces. Despite the proliferation of global challenges, Britons feel increasingly secure in the world, and their support for defence spending is very superficial, buckling under the pressure of potential spending trade offs. This challenge is particularly acute among young people, who are increasingly disengaged from the conflict in Ukraine and unfazed by the potential challenges posed by China. In part this speaks to young people's disillusionment from a foreign policy that they feel fails to reflect their priorities. It is also, perhaps, a reflection of their youthful optimism. Either way, it is increasingly clear that if the UK really does want to move to a position of 'war-readiness', more work is needed to bring the public onboard.

International Engagement

- **Britons' interest (83%) in, and self-reported understanding (67%) of, foreign policy continues to grow.** As global crises proliferate, Britons are becoming more interested and engaged in UK foreign policy. The current geopolitical turbulence therefore creates an opportunity, and need, to communicate frankly and openly with the public about the UK's foreign policy, to strengthen understanding and engagement with foreign policy for the long-term.
- **The proportion of Britons who identify with key international identities, including as a patriot (56%), European (55%) and a global citizen (49%), have all increased in the last year.** This is despite these identities sometimes being in tension, as Britons cling on to multiple competing identities in the hopes of finding a clearer position in the world.

Britain Reconnected

- **Britons believe the UK's top three foreign policy priorities should be strengthening the UK's relationship with the EU (45%), tackling the root causes of irregular migration (40%) and securing free trade agreements (38%).** Of the nine options polled, the two policy areas least widely regarded as a top priority are protecting the special relationship with the United States (19%) and assisting developing nations (13%).
- **However, the Government's record on key foreign policy issues is seen to be mixed.** While Britons support the UK's approach to resetting relations with the EU (64%) and its approach to the UK-US relationship (53%), the Government's approach to Ukraine (41%) and the Israel-Palestine conflict (27%) are less widely supported. Indeed, Britons more often oppose (31%) than support (27%) the UK's approach to the Israel-Palestine conflict, while Britons only just more often support (41%) than oppose (37%) the UK's approach to the war in Ukraine, despite the latter having been seen very positively in previous BFIG surveys.
- **As a result, half of Britons distrust (50%) the Government when it comes to delivering on foreign policy.** This reflects Britons' wider distrust in this Government, and governments and politics as a whole, as well as their perceptions of the Government's foreign policy itself.

International Partnerships

- **Britons' trust in European partners continues to increase.** The proportion of Britons who trust France to act responsibly in the world has risen from 46% in 2023 to 57% in 2025. Meanwhile, the proportion of Britons who trust the EU to act responsibly in the world has risen from 53% to 60% over the same time period, as growing cooperation with the EU and Europe shores up Britons' confidence in those relationships and in the potential for future collaboration to deliver for the UK.
- **As Britons waver on the United States, they are increasingly turning towards the EU.** While the United States is still (narrowly) seen as the UK's closest ally (31%), the proportion of Britons who view it as such has fallen 23 percentage points over the last year. In its place, Britons are increasingly turning towards the EU, with 29% of Britons now viewing the EU as the UK's closest ally, up from 17% last year. Furthermore, the majority of Britons (59%) now believe that the UK's relationship with the EU is more important than the UK's relationship with the United States, as questions over the reliability of the United States and growing opportunities for cooperation with the EU shift Britons' perceptions of the UK's international partners.

The UK-EU Reset

- **There is wide and deep support for the UK's efforts to reset and strengthen the UK's relationship with the EU, not least through the UK-EU Summit.** The majority (58%) of Britons believe the Summit was good for the UK and the agreements made at the UK-EU summit are very widely endorsed, particularly the agreements to strengthen cooperation on defence and security (83%), reducing barriers to importing and exporting food and drink (79%) and British passport users being able to use ePassport gates in Europe (78%).
- **Even among Leave voters, there is relatively strong support for closer collaboration with the EU.** For example, a majority of Leave voters support agreements made at the UK-EU Summit to strengthen cooperation on defence and security (78%) and reduce trade barriers around food and drink (70%).
- **Moving forwards, the majority (51%) of Britons believe the UK's top priority in its relationship with the EU should be strengthening trade relations.** Given the 'reset' has so far focused heavily on defence and security, this creates plenty of scope for the Government to find opportunities to strengthen trading relations when the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement is reviewed next year.

The UK-US 'Special Relationship'

- **Britons believe President Trump is negatively impacting the UK.** President Trump's actions are seen to be having a negative effect on the UK economy (53%), UK-US relations (49%) and the UK's national security (41%).
- **Indeed, more Britons view the actions of President Trump as a major challenge to UK national security (33%), than view terrorism (32%) or the rise of China (25%) as a major national security challenge.** Of the nine potential threats polled, the actions of President Trump are the fourth most widely seen as a major national security challenge.
- **In turn, the United States is no longer seen as a trustworthy international partner.** Britons' trust in the United States has fallen dramatically over the past year, from 53% in 2024 to 38% in 2025, and it is now the case that Britons more often distrust (41%) than trust (38%) the United States to act responsibly in the world.
- **However, Britons are divided over how to respond to the United States moving forwards.** While some Britons favour maintaining the status quo of the relationship (34%), many Britons believe the UK should now move closer (33%) to the United States, while a sizable proportion of Britons believe the UK should now move further away (28%) from the United States. This speaks to Britons' differing levels of concern about President Trump and differing assessments of how best to respond to his actions.

National Security

- **The top three security challenges facing the UK are seen to be continued Russian aggression (44%), cyber attacks from other countries (42%) and irregular migration (34%).** However, there is very little overlap in national security concerns across generations. While over-66s view continued Russian aggression (60%), cyber attacks (55%) and the rise of China as a world power (35%) as the biggest security challenges facing the UK, none of these feature in the top three challenges for 18-25-year-olds, who instead believe climate change (36%), a global trade war (34%) and the actions of United States President Donald Trump (33%) are the biggest security challenges.
- **Younger Britons' interest and engagement in Ukraine is particularly low.** Just 17% of 18-25-year-olds view supporting Ukraine as a top priority for the UK, compared to 46% of over-66s. This is driven both by the fact only 25% of 18-25-year-olds view it as one of the top threats to the UK and by a belief that the UK's support for Ukraine has been disproportionate, relative to the attention and support given to other crises around the world.
- **At a top-line level, Britons support increased defence spending.** The majority (71%) of Britons believe the UK should increase defence spending to 3% of GDP either now or over the next few years.
- **However, Britons are not willing to accept the trade offs required to fund an increase in defence spending.** Indeed, most Britons would oppose increasing defence spending if it required reducing spending on the NHS (60%), education (47%), welfare (46%) or required increasing taxes (38%).

The UK-China Relationship

- **Levels of distrust in China continue to fall.** Distrust in China has fallen nine percentage points over the last year, from 71% in 2024 to 62% in 2025.
- **Despite this, Britons remain very cautious of engagement with China, particularly when it comes to national security.** As such, a plurality (39%) of Britons believe that the UK should prioritise national security when it comes to cooperation with China and while Britons support cooperation on shared global challenges (62%) and research (54%), they widely oppose (57%) Chinese companies owning parts of the UK's critical national infrastructure.
- **Younger Britons are much more supportive of cooperation with China than older Britons.** Twice the proportion of over-66s (81%) than 18-25-year-olds (41%) distrust China and in turn, younger Britons are much more supportive of wide-ranging cooperation with China. For example, 61% of 18-25-year-olds and 59% of 26-35-year-olds support Chinese technology companies operating in the UK, compared to just 12% of over-66s.

Free Trade

- **Britons are widely convinced of the benefits of free trade to the UK.** A majority (71%) of Britons believe that free trade has a positive effect on the UK as a whole. Although to a lesser extent, Britons also believe that it has a positive impact on them and their families (51%) and on their local area (47%).
- **The UK-US trade deal (57%) and the UK-India trade deal (53%) are supported by the majority of Britons.** This is despite Britons' wider scepticism of the United States and India more generally, highlighting the strength of Britons' support for free trade agreements, particularly when they are seen to deliver clear economic benefits for the UK.

International Development

- **There is little appetite to fulfil the UK's commitment to spending 0.7% of GNI on international development.** Only 18% of Britons support spending 0.7% of GNI or more on international development.
- **However, more Britons believe the UK's target spending on aid and international development should be higher than 0.3% of GNI (38%) than believe it should be lower (34%).** This suggests that there may be some appetite for a higher level of development spending than the Government's current commitment to spending 0.3% of GNI.
- **There is little consensus on what international development should prioritise.** While the largest proportion of Britons (37%) believe that the UK's international development activities should prioritise UK national interest, this is followed closely by addressing immediate humanitarian concerns (35%). Just 15% of Britons believe the top priority should be supporting other nations' long-term development.

The British Foreign Policy Group 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. To achieve this, we produce dynamic events and high-quality research, and facilitate networks amongst stakeholders with a vested interest in Britain's international engagement.

Our core objective is to bridge the link between the domestic and international spheres – recognising that Britain's foreign policy choices and obstacles are shaped by our social landscape at home. Through pioneering research into the UK's social fabric, we seek to build understanding of the nuances of public opinion, and how our foreign policy can become more inclusive, responsive and relevant to citizens' lives.



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