

BFPG

British Foreign Policy Group

UK Public Opinion on Foreign Policy and Global Affairs

Annual Survey – 2025

Evie Aspinall and Eliza Keogh



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Foreword by Sir Philip Barton



I am delighted to introduce the British Foreign Policy Group's Annual Survey of UK Public Opinion on Foreign Policy and Global Affairs. It provides unique and detailed insights into the British public's attitudes to the key international issues of the day. Now in its seventh year, the report both presents an up-to-date snapshot and describes how attitudes are changing over time. These trends are as important as the latest picture for all those who want to understand the public mood and where it is heading.

Unsurprisingly, given the high pace of international developments over the last twelve months, the survey found growing interest in international affairs across the UK. Over the last few years, the divide between domestic and international issues has become increasingly blurred. Russia's invasion of Ukraine had a direct impact on the UK population, with higher energy prices driving cost-of-living pressures. The new United States administration's approach to tariffs threatens jobs and livelihoods in the UK, while trade deals with India and others provide new opportunities. Developments in the Middle East resonate in a variegated way across the country. The UK public's appreciation of the connection between what happens overseas and their economic prosperity and security at home is driving this increased interest.

The Survey also highlights two significant shifts and two potential disconnects between opinion and policy.

The most significant shift is the increased, now strong support for a closer UK relationship with the European Union. The Survey suggests that the hang-over from the "Brexit" years is passing and the UK's relationship with the European Union has become less toxic in the public's minds. The detailed results show that people's views are based on their perception of UK national interests and judgement as to whether they are being effectively pursued or defended, rather than an ideological view of "Europe".

Within this more positive public perception of Europe is a striking change in attitudes to individual European countries, notably France, which has seen an 11 percentage point increase in trust in just two years. So President Macron's State Visit and the Government's plans to reach a landmark bilateral treaty with Germany should resonate with a public desire for better bilateral relations with key European countries, not just the European Union itself.

Increased support for a stronger partnership with Europe is mirrored by the change in the public's view of the UK's relationship with the United States following the election of President Trump. The significant decline in trust in the United States reflects the Trump Administration's approach to international relations and is tempered by a majority supporting either a closer UK relationship with the United States, or maintaining the status quo. Nevertheless, given the fundamental importance of the bilateral relationship with the United States to the UK's security and prosperity, declining trust in the United States matters.

For policy-makers, one of the most valuable aspects of the Survey is what it tells us about disconnects between policy and public opinion. In the long run, these aren't sustainable, as we have seen with UK development spending, which has lacked broad public support for many years and has been significantly reduced as a result. In such cases, either public opinion changes or policies are amended.

This year's Survey found two disconnects of particular note.

First, there is a gap between the government's view of the threat from Russia as one of the main drivers of the need for increased defence spending and public perceptions. This should not surprise us. Our understanding of the threat is often based on sensitive information that

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is hard to share in public and it is still seen as relatively far away. Nevertheless, closing this perception gap will be important as the fiscal choices involved in increasing the defence budget become starker and for the “whole of society” approach set out in the Government’s recent National Security Strategy to come about.

Second, the Survey shows a worrying decline in public support for Ukraine. This remained remarkably high during the first two years of the conflict despite the economic impact on UK households. The passage of time, emergence of other crises and general war weariness, made some fall in support inevitable. Nevertheless, if this continues, the Government’s significant commitment to Ukraine, including of resources, will come under pressure.

The Survey is a mine of further data warranting more detailed analysis. As the United States diplomat, Richard Haass, nearly said: “Understanding foreign policy begins at home.” This Survey makes an important contribution to that endeavour.

Sir Philip Barton, GCMG, OBE

About Us



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.

About Us

The Authors



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Acknowledgements

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

Methodology

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 conducted in 2019. This year's survey was drafted by BFPG and the fieldwork for this report was conducted by J.L. Partners between the 27th and 29th May 2025. This is the third year in which J.L. Partners have conducted the fieldwork for this report. Prior to this, fieldwork was conducted by BMG Research (2019) and Opinium (2020 - 2022). 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 2132 people, using quotas, with the data weighted to be nationally representative. Full editorial control and responsibility belongs to the British Foreign Policy Group, as do any mistakes.

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%), or 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.

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- **Younger Britons are much more supportive of cooperation with China than older Britons.** Almost 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.

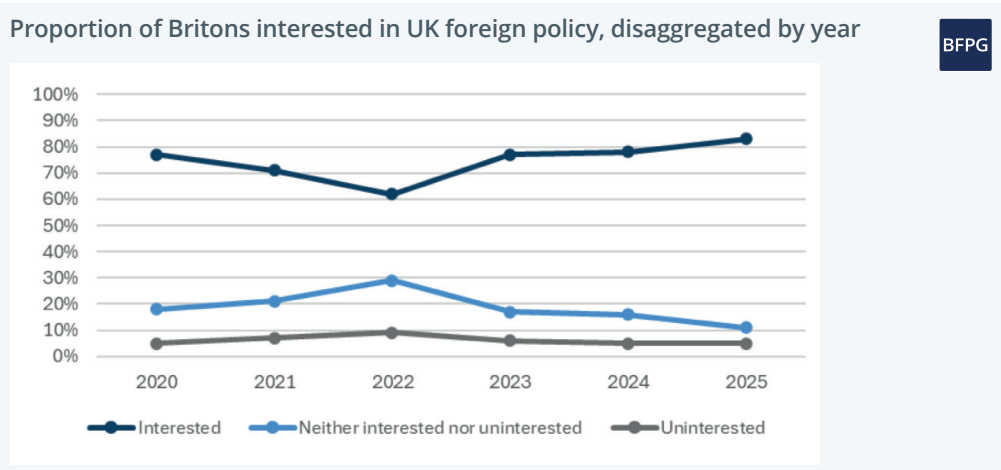
International Engagement

With the ongoing war in Ukraine, conflict in the Middle East, and the United States' retrenchment from the global order, it has been a very turbulent year for global politics. It is against this backdrop that Britons' interest in, and understanding of, UK foreign policy has grown over the last year, as Britons become more acutely aware of the importance of international events and the impact they can have on Britons' day-to-day lives.

As the global order evolves, and as Britons become more aware of these changes, Britons' views of the world and their role within it are in flux. Britons' sense of patriotism, Europeanness and global citizenship have therefore all grown in the last year, as Britons try to scramble to find grounding for the UK's role in the world.

Interest in the UK's International Activities

With global crises dominating the headlines, the proportion of Britons who are interested in the UK's international activities is now at the highest it has been since we began polling on this in 2020. Indeed, 83% of Britons now report being interested in UK foreign policy, including 34% of Britons who are very interested. Meanwhile, 11% of Britons are neither interested nor uninterested and just 5% of Britons are uninterested in UK foreign policy.

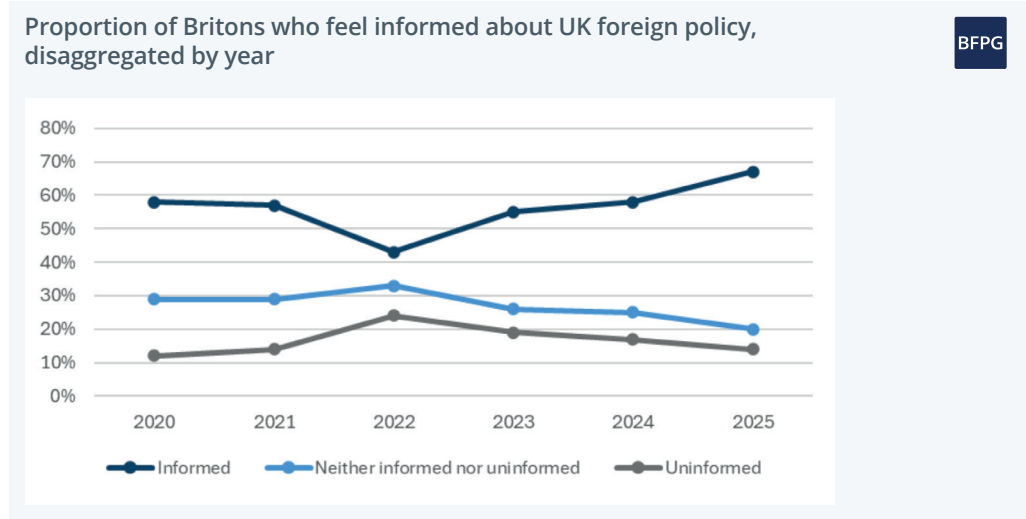


Interest in the UK's international activities rose dramatically in 2023, from 62% to 77%, in the first polling we conducted after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and has risen steadily since, with interest increasing another five percentage points this year alone. This growing interest is likely a response to the proliferation of global crises, which have made Britons acutely aware of the importance and impact of global events.

While the overwhelming majority across all demographic groups are interested in the UK's international activities, levels of interest vary. The sharpest divide is socioeconomic, with those in higher (ABC1) socioeconomic grades (90%) more often interested in UK foreign policy than those in lower (C2DE) socioeconomic grades (76%). Residents in London (90%), 2024 Labour voters (90%) and 26-35-year-olds (89%) are also particularly interested in the UK's international activities, while residents in Eastern England (79%) and those aged 56-65 (78%) are less often interested.

Self-Reported Foreign Policy Knowledge

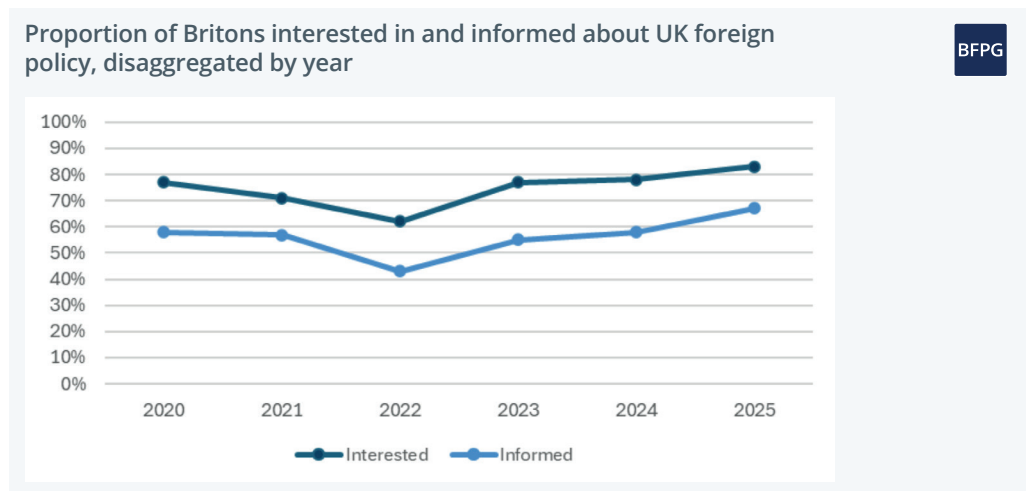
This increase in interest in UK foreign policy is mirrored by an increase in self-reported understanding. A majority (67%) of Britons therefore feel informed about UK foreign policy, while just 20% feel neither informed nor uninformed and only 14% feel uninformed.



As with levels of interest, this year the proportion of Britons that feel informed about UK foreign policy is the highest it has been since we began polling on this in 2020, and marks a nine percentage point increase in self-reported understanding of foreign policy over the last year alone. This increased level of self-reported understanding emerges despite the growing complexity in the world order and highlights how prominent global events can push Britons to engage more with foreign policy, and how this engagement can, in turn, make Britons feel more informed about foreign policy as well.

Demographic trends in Britons' self-reported understanding of UK foreign policy broadly demographic mirror trends in interest in UK foreign policy. Men (75%) more often feel informed than women (60%) about UK foreign policy, as do those in higher (ABC1) socioeconomic grades (75%) relative to those in lower (C2DE) socioeconomic grades (59%). A particularly high proportion of residents of London (77%) feel informed about UK foreign policy, as do those aged 26-35 (77%).

As well as levels of interest and self-reported understanding of foreign policy both increasing, the disparity between the two has also narrowed, from 22 percentage points in 2023 and 20



International Engagement

percentage points in 2024, to 16 percentage points in 2025. This further reinforces how even when global issues are complex, if they are particularly prominent in both politics and the media, it can increase public engagement and, in turn, lead to Britons feeling more connected to, and like they understand, UK foreign policy.

While the disparity between Britons' interest and self-reported understanding of foreign policy has narrowed, it remains particularly persistent among some demographics. As in previous years, the gap between interest and understanding of foreign policy is particularly high among women (21 percentage points) and over-66s (21 percentage points), speaking to the enduring challenge of effectively engaging these demographics on foreign policy and the need for targeted communications and efforts to engage these demographics more effectively on international affairs, in order to strengthen public engagement with UK foreign policy.

International Identities

In this fast-changing global environment, the UK, like many others, is frantically trying to define what its role in this changing global order should be and what partnerships, values and opportunities it should leverage to maximise its position on the world stage. Key to this is how the UK, and its citizens, position themselves in the world.

This year, of the three identities polled, the highest proportion of Britons identify as a patriot (56%), followed by a European (55%) and a global citizen (49%). Association with all three terms has risen over the last year, as Britons look to juggle multiple - sometimes competing, sometimes complementary - identities to find a place in this challenging global environment.



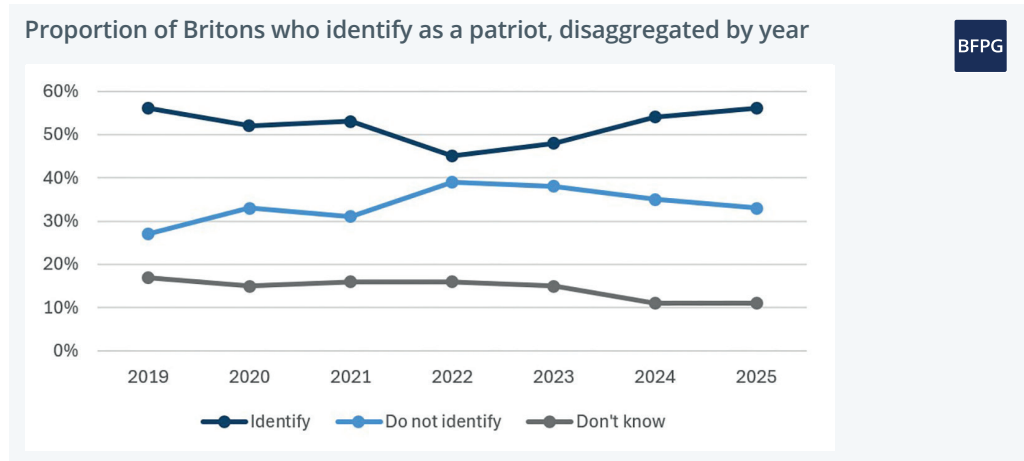
Patriotism

After several years of flux, including a point in 2022 when almost as many Britons did not identify as a 'patriot' as those that did, association with the term has risen consistently over the last three years and is now the case that a majority (56%) of Britons identify as a patriot. Only 33% of Britons do not identify as a patriot, while a further 11% of Britons 'don't know' whether they identify as such.

There are a number of potential drivers for this growing association with the term patriot, including distance from the UK's departure from the EU and the Covid-19 pandemic and pride in the UK's response to conflict in Ukraine. It is also the case that external threats often lead to increased feelings of patriotism and the insecure global environment may therefore also be contributing to a growing association with the term.¹

¹ Hutchinson, J. (2017). *Nationalism and war*. Oxford, England. Oxford University Press.

International Engagement

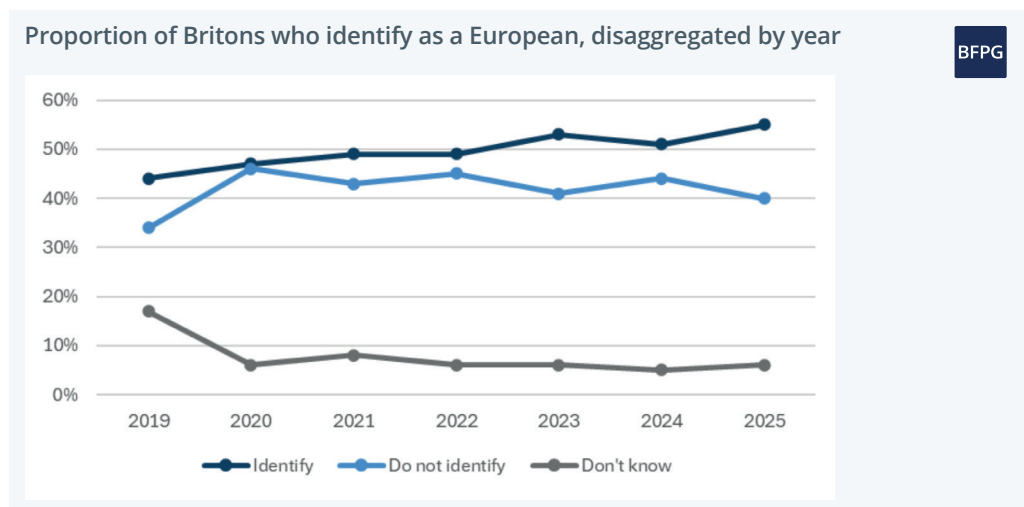


Nevertheless, patriotism is by no means universally felt across the UK and there are significant demographic differences in association with the term. The sharpest of these emerges across political preferences, with 73% of those who voted Reform UK and 71% of those who voted Conservative in the 2024 General Election identifying as a patriot, compared to 53% of those who voted Labour, 51% of those who voted Liberal Democrat and just 36% of those who voted Green.

The differences in association with the term across age groups are also particularly high, with 74% of over-66s identifying as a patriot, compared to 41% of 18-25-year-olds. However, while the same proportion of 18-25-year-olds identify as patriots (41%) as those who don't (41%), the proportion of 18-25-year-olds who identify as patriots has increased substantially since last year, when a much higher proportion of 18-25-year-olds did not identify as a patriot (47%) than did (35%). This is likely driven by the affinity many younger Britons have for the current Government, as well as concern about the wider global environment which is driving increased patriotism across all age groups.

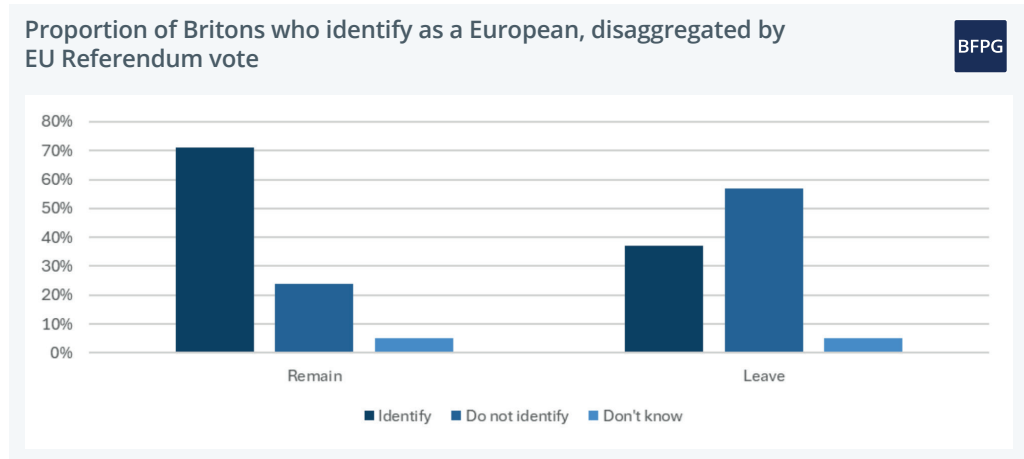
European Identity

As the UK moves closer to the EU and Europe once more, the majority (55%) of Britons now identify as European, up from 51% last year and from just 44% in 2019. This steady increase in identification with the term is likely driven by distance from the UK's departure from the EU, which made the relationship between the UK and the EU very fraught for a number of years, as well as conscious efforts from both the UK and Europe to strengthen and improve relations over the last few months and years, which have served to shift Britons' attitudes towards Europe.



International Engagement

Despite association with the 'European' identity increasing, it nevertheless remains divisive, with 40% of Britons not identifying with the term. A further 6% of Britons 'don't know' whether they identify as European. It is particularly divisive along political fault lines. While 71% of those who voted Remain in the EU referendum identify as European, just 37% of those who voted to Leave the EU do. Indeed, a notably higher proportion of Leave voters do not identify (57%) as European than do (37%). Similarly, while 66% of 2024 Labour voters and 64% of 2024 Liberal Democrat voters identify as European, just 37% of those who voted Reform UK do.

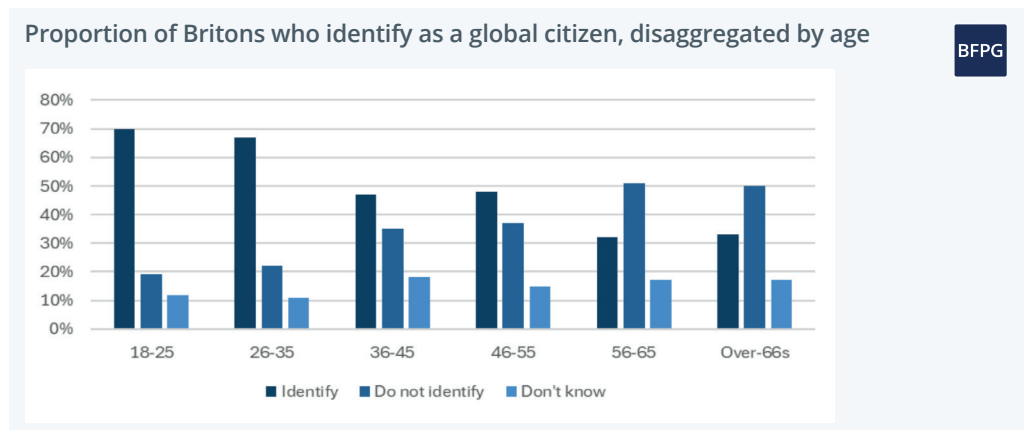


Global Citizenship

'Global citizen' remains the least popular of the three identities polled. Nevertheless, almost half (49%) of Britons identify as a global citizen, while only 36% of Britons do not. A further 15% of Britons 'don't know'.

Affiliation with the term global citizen tends to be the most stable of the three identities polled but this is the most popular the term has been since BFPG began polling on this in 2019, when 44% of Britons identified as global citizens. The term is substantially more popular among younger Britons than older Britons, with over twice as many 18-25-year-olds (70%) identifying with the term than over-66s (33%) or 56-65-year-olds (32%). Indeed, half of 56-65-year-olds (51%) and over-66s (50%) do not identify as global citizens.

Identification as a global citizen is also higher in Northern Ireland (67%) and London (65%) than in the South East (40%) and Yorkshire and Humberside (37%), and among Britons from higher (ABC1) socioeconomic grades (57%) relative to those from lower (C2DE) socioeconomic grades (39%).



Britain Reconnected

Against the backdrop of a complex and fast-changing global environment, the UK Government is seeking to chart a path for the UK that simultaneously protects its national security, its economic prosperity and its global influence, even as these interests sometimes diverge.

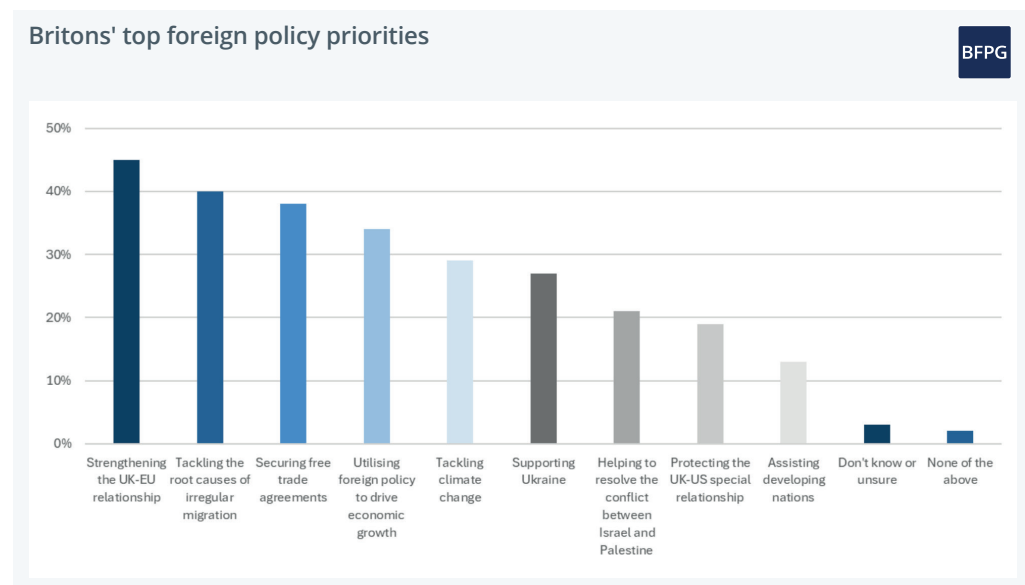
Britons' assessment of the Government's approach to these challenges so far is mixed. While Britons' priorities for foreign policy - not least around Europe and trade - broadly align with the Government's, the majority of Britons distrust the Government when it comes to delivering foreign policy that is in the public's interests. And while some facets of the Government's approach to foreign policy, especially when it comes to the United States and the European Union, are widely endorsed, their approach to key conflicts is more widely critiqued. There is therefore more work still to be done to rebuild public trust in the Government's foreign policy decision-making and to bridge the gap between public and elite opinion when it comes to foreign policy.

Foreign Policy Priorities

As the global environment evolves, and the UK tries to find its position within it, the UK is juggling a number of priorities. These priorities will often complement each other but, on occasion, they can come into tension and it is therefore essential that the UK creates a clear sense of prioritisation for these ambitions. This year, in an effort to understand where Britons believe the UK should focus its energies, we therefore asked Britons what they believed the UK's top three foreign policy priorities should be.

Of the nine potential priorities polled, the most widely endorsed priority is 'strengthening the UK's relationship with the EU', with 45% of Britons believing this should be a top foreign policy priority for the UK. This is the most widely endorsed priority by five percentage points, reflecting the clear desire among many Britons for the UK to focus firmly on the UK-EU relationship.

The second and third most widely endorsed priorities are 'tackling the root cause of irregular migration' (40%) and 'securing free trade agreements' (38%). This is followed by 'utilising foreign policy to drive economic growth' (34%), 'tackling climate change' (29%), and 'supporting Ukraine' (27%).



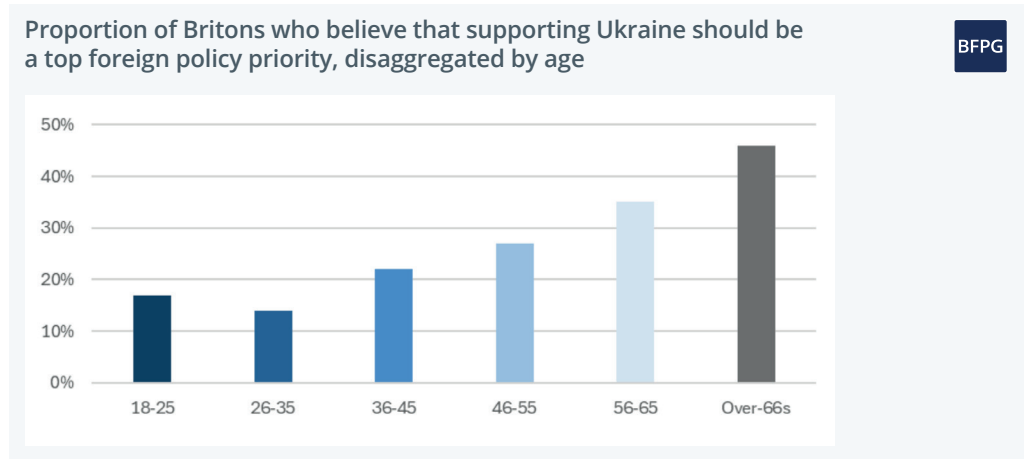
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The three areas least often seen as top priorities are 'helping to resolve the conflict between Israel and Palestine' (21%), 'protecting the special relationship with the United States' (19%) and, at just 13%, 'assisting developing nations e.g. through international development and aid'.

These priorities show broad alignment with the Government's foreign policy priorities, especially around the EU, trade and the economy. The low level of prioritisation placed on assisting developing nations also aligns with the level of prioritisation placed on international development by the Government, with recent cuts to the international development budget highlighting how, in an increasingly hard-power world, international aid and development has fallen down the list of Government priorities.

Tackling the root causes of irregular migration is perhaps the area where there is the greatest divergence between Government and public priorities. While the FCDO has stepped up its efforts to tackle the root causes of irregular migration, within Government this is nevertheless seen primarily as the purview of the Home Office, and few in Government would argue that tackling the root causes of irregular migration is the second most important goal for UK foreign policy.² Similarly, the public's relatively modest emphasis on supporting Ukraine (27%) contrasts with the UK Government's strong and sustained backing for the country since the Russian invasion in 2022. The fact that support for Ukraine is only slightly more frequently prioritised than resolving the Israel-Palestine conflict (21%) suggests that, while there is some public backing, it may not be as central to Britons' foreign policy concerns as it is to the Government's agenda.

Perhaps the biggest challenge for Government though, is the sharp demographic differences in priorities that underlie these overall figures. For example, while the most widely cited priorities among over-66s are tackling the root cause of irregular migration (54%), supporting Ukraine (46%) and securing free trade agreements (45%), none of these feature in the top priorities for 18-25-year-olds. Instead, among 18-25-year-olds the most widely cited priorities are strengthening the UK's relationship with the EU (47%), utilising foreign policy to drive economic growth (37%) and tackling climate change (36%).



The largest divergence in priorities across age groups emerges in relation to supporting Ukraine, which is the second most widely endorsed priority, of the nine options, among over-66s (46%), but the least commonly cited priority among 18-25-year-olds (17%) and 26-35-year-olds (14%). This speaks to a growing disconnect between young people and support for Ukraine. At the heart of this, and which has been consistently seen in BFPG's focus groups, is a sense among young people that the crisis in Ukraine has received disproportionate attention relative to issues and conflicts elsewhere in the world. This is exemplified by the fact older Britons view

² Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office & Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street. (2024, July). *UK steps up work to reduce illegal migration*. UK Government. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-steps-up-work-to-reduce-illegal-migration>

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supporting Ukraine as a much higher priority than helping resolve the conflict in Israel and Palestine, with 46% of over-66s viewing supporting Ukraine as a top priority, compared to 20% of over-66s who view helping resolve the Israel-Palestine conflict as a top priority. In contrast, among 18-25-year-olds helping resolve the Israel-Palestine conflict (26%) is more frequently seen as a top priority than supporting Ukraine (17%).

There is also very little overlap in preference across different voter groups, with no two voter groups in the 2024 General Election having more than one or two top priorities in common. Particularly notable is that tackling the root causes of irregular migration, which is the most widely cited priority among 2024 Reform UK (59%) and Conservative (52%) voters, does not feature among even the top three priorities for 2024 Liberal Democrat (30%) and Green (23%) voters. Similarly, while strengthening the UK's relationship with the EU is the most widely cited priority for 2024 Liberal Democrat (57%), Labour (55%) and Green (54%) voters, it does not feature in the top three priorities among 2024 Conservative (36%) and Reform UK (20%) voters.

Britons' top foreign policy priorities, disaggregated by 2024 General Election vote		BFPFG
Conservative voters	1. Tackling the root causes of immigration (52%)	
	2. Securing free trade agreements (48%)	
	3. Strengthening the UK's relationship with the EU (36%) / Utilising foreign policy to drive economic growth (36%)	
Labour voters	1. Strengthening the UK's relationship with the EU (55%)	
	2. Tackling climate change (37%)	
	3. Securing free trade agreements (35%) / Tackling the root causes of irregular migration (35%)	
Liberal Democrat voters	1. Strengthening the UK's relationship with the EU (57%)	
	2. Securing free trade agreements (33%)	
	3. Tackling climate change (32%)	
Green voters	1. Strengthening the UK's relationship with the EU (54%)	
	2. Tackling climate change (53%)	
	3. Helping to resolve the conflict between Israel and Palestine (33%)	
Reform UK voters	1. Tackling the root causes of irregular migration (59%)	
	2. Securing free trade agreements (45%)	
	3. Utilising foreign policy to drive economic growth (39%)	

This lack of consensus, whether it be across age, voter groups or other demographics, makes it very difficult for the Government to design a foreign policy that meets the needs, and aligns with the priorities of, a broad spectrum of the British public.

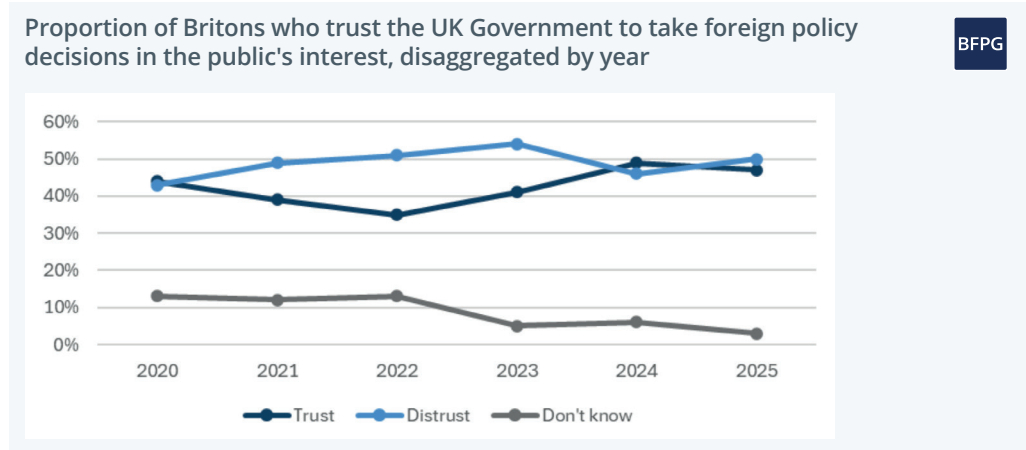
Trust in the UK Government on Foreign Policy

It is against this backdrop, combined with a wider sense of distrust towards the Government, that Britons more often distrust (50%) than trust (47%) the UK government to make foreign policy choices in the public's interest.³

While trust in the Government on foreign policy is higher than it was at any point between 2020 and 2023, levels of distrust in Government on foreign policy have risen relative to last year, when more Britons trusted (49%) than distrusted (46%) it. Work is therefore needed to continue to rebuild public trust in the government's foreign policy decision-making.

Trust in the Government on foreign policy closely mirrors Britons' wider political beliefs and voting patterns, with those who voted Labour in the last election (67%) more often trusting the Government on foreign policy than those from any other party, but particularly those who voted Reform UK (24%).

³ National Centre for Social Research. (2024, June). *Trust and confidence in Britain's system of government at record low*. Retrieved from: <https://natcen.ac.uk/news/trust-and-confidence-britains-system-government-record-low>



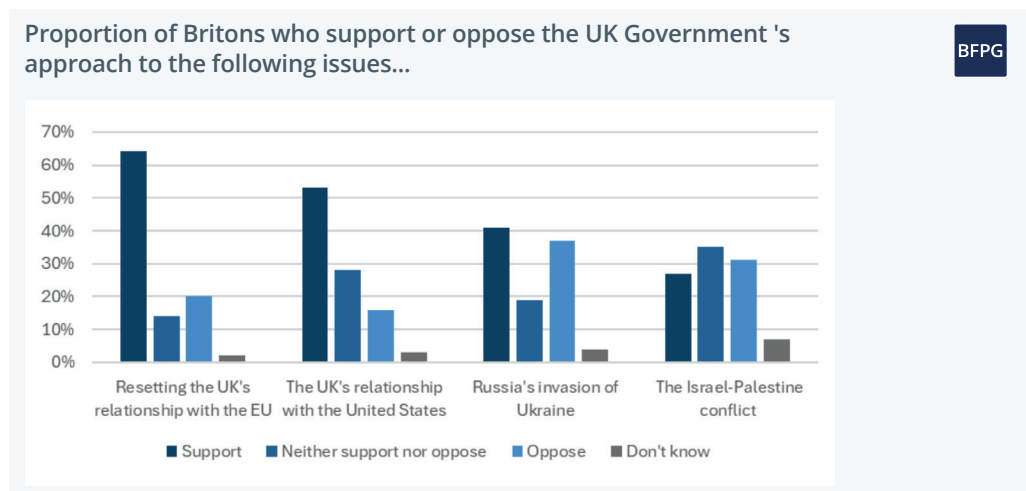
There are some demographic trends in levels of trust though that persist regardless of the party in Government. As in previous years, those in lower (C2DE) socioeconomic grades (58%) more often distrust the Government on foreign policy than those from higher (ABC1) socioeconomic grades (43%), as do women (54%) relative to men (45%).

Both women and those in lower (C2DE) socioeconomic grades also consistently show particularly low levels of interest and self-reported understanding in foreign policy and is therefore significant benefit to be derived from further research exploring how levels of engagement and understanding may be connected to levels of trust in foreign policy decision-making, and vice versa, to help identify innovative routes through which to engage with these groups.

Government Responses to Foreign Policy Challenges

Britons' views on how the UK Government is approaching these key foreign policy challenges is similarly mixed. The UK's approach to resetting the UK's relationship with the EU, an approach which even a few years ago would not have been politically viable, is widely endorsed, with 64% of Britons supporting the Government's approach. The Government's approach to the UK's relationship with the United States is also supported by a majority (53%) of Britons, showing that there is a firm foundation of support for some of the key cornerstones of the Government's foreign policy agenda.

However, the Government's approach to Ukraine and the Israel-Palestine conflict are less widely supported, with 41% of Britons supporting the UK's approach to Ukraine and only 27% of Britons



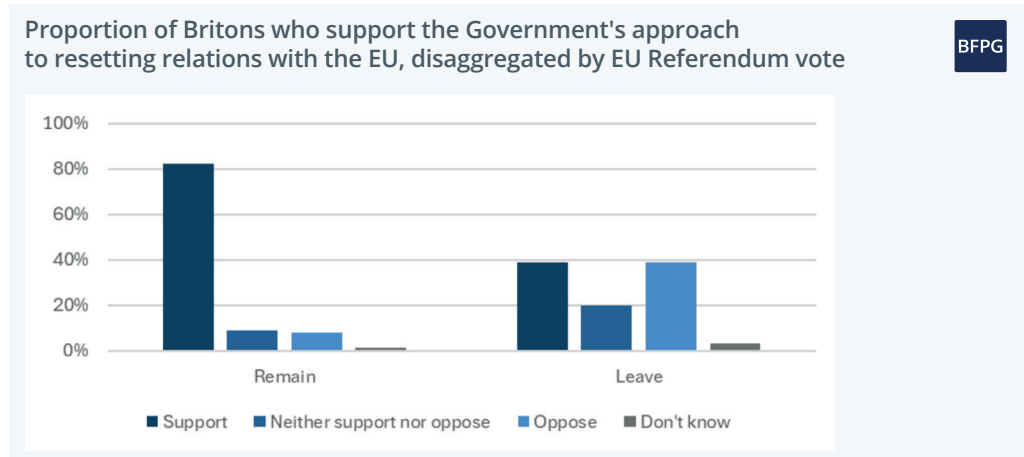
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supporting the UK's approach to the Israel-Palestine conflict. Indeed, Britons more often oppose (31%) than support (27%) the Government's approach to the Israel-Palestine conflict. There are, therefore, key areas of UK foreign policy where the Government has failed to bring the public with it in its decision-making and where it is essential the Government works to bridge the divide between public opinion and government action.

Resetting the UK's Relationship with the EU

Over the last year, the UK Government has sought to 'reset' its relationship with the EU, strengthening cooperation across a wide range of areas and culminating in the UK-EU Summit which was held in May 2025. This decision to reset the UK's relationship with the EU is widely endorsed, with 64% of Britons supporting the Government's approach, including 30% of Britons who strongly support it. Only 20% of Britons oppose how the Government is resetting relations, while 14% neither support nor oppose it and 2% don't know. The breadth of support for the Government's approach and the relatively low levels of opposition highlight a clear appetite among the British public, echoed throughout this report, to strengthen and improve UK-EU relations, which Britons view as increasingly critical to UK security and prosperity.

Support for the reset is very high among 2024 Labour (78%), Liberal Democrat (78%) and Green (70%) voters and is markedly lower among 2024 Conservative (49%) and Reform UK (33%) voters. Notably though, while those who voted Remain (82%) are, unsurprisingly, more supportive of the approach than those who voted Leave (39%), the same proportion of those who voted Leave support the approach (39%) as oppose it (39%). This is a striking sign of how the debate around the UK's relationship with the EU has evolved in recent years, with even those who voted to Leave the EU warming to the idea of closer cooperation with the EU.



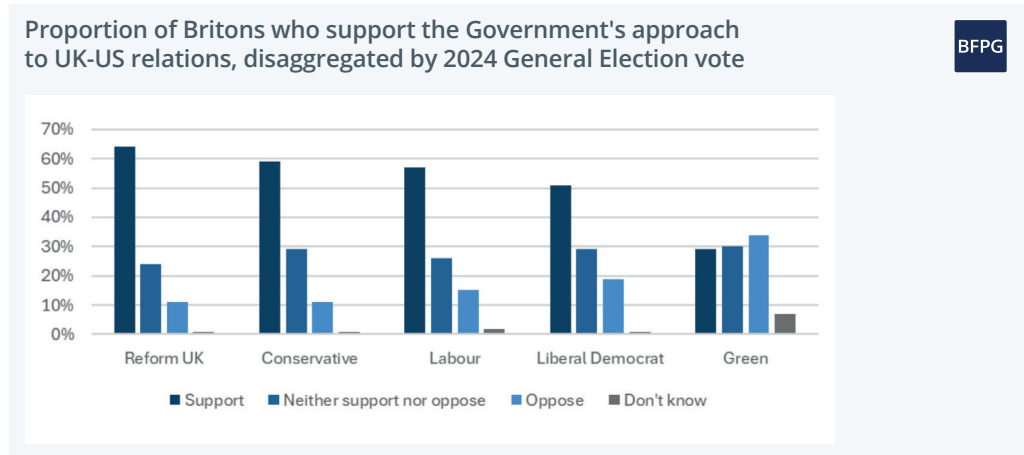
Meanwhile, younger Britons, particularly 26-35-year-olds (75%), are particularly supportive of the reset, as are residents in Northern Ireland (75%) and Britons in higher (ABC1) socioeconomic grades (68%).

The UK's Relationship with the United States

In the first few months of President Trump's second term in office, he has dramatically pivoted the United States' approach to international affairs, upending international rules and norms and testing the United States' relationship with key allies. This has stimulated significant debate in the UK about the future of the UK-US relationship. The UK's approach has, so far, been to walk a careful line down the middle - finding opportunities to improve relations with the United States where possible, be it through state visits or free trade, while also forming new coalitions elsewhere and gently distancing itself on key issues where needed.

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This approach is endorsed by the majority (53%) of Britons and opposed by just 16% of Britons. A further 28% of Britons neither support nor oppose it, while 3% of Britons don't know. This clear support, and lack of direct opposition, to the Government's approach reflects a recognition among the British public that even though they may be concerned about the consequences of President Trump's actions and may dislike President Trump himself, which is evident across this and other research, they nevertheless accept the need for a degree of pragmatism and for continued cooperation with President Trump and the United States.⁴



This pragmatism produces some interesting coalitions of support for how the UK is approaching its relationship with the United States, with 2024 Reform UK (64%), Conservative (59%) and Labour (57%) voters the most supportive of the approach. As much as anything, this likely reflects 2024 Reform UK and Conservative voters' higher levels of tolerance for President Trump and 2024 Labour voters' instinctive support for the Government they voted for. Notably, despite Liberal Democrat leader Ed Davey's vocal opposition to the approach, it is nevertheless endorsed by the majority (51%) of 2024 Liberal Democrat voters and opposed by just 19% of them.⁵ It is only 2024 Green voters who more often oppose (34%) than support the UK's approach to UK-US relations (29%).

Geographically, aside from Eastern England (46%), support for the UK's approach to its relationship with the United States is lowest among the devolved nations, with 50% of residents in Wales, 49% of residents in Northern Ireland and 47% of those in Scotland supporting the approach.

Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

Perceptions of the UK's approach to Russia's invasion of Ukraine are decidedly more mixed, and while 41% of Britons support the UK's approach, almost as many Britons oppose it (37%). A further 19% neither support nor oppose and 4% don't know.

While this is the first time we have asked Britons specifically for their own views on the UK's overall approach to the invasion of Ukraine, in previous years we have asked Britons about their support for individual policies within the UK's response and how they believed the UK's approach impacted the UK's international reputation. On all occasions the response has been resounding support. Last year, for example, 56% of Britons thought the UK's approach was having a positive impact on the UK's international reputation overseas and 47% believed the UK

⁴ YouGov (n.d). Donald Trump fame & popularity tracker. Retrieved from: <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/trackers/fame-and-popularity-donald-trump>

⁵ Keate, N. (2025, February). *Meet the UK party that thinks Trump-bashing is a vote-winner*. POLITICO. Retrieved from: <https://www.politico.eu/article/uk-party-donald-trump-liberal-democrats-house-of-commons-british-vote/>

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should continue to support Ukraine for as long as it takes (while just 8% thought the UK should immediately withdraw support).⁶

Three years on from the start of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, and with a differently framed question, it is clear that support for the current approach is not as robust. For some Britons, the longevity of the war and the significant resources the UK has already provided has dampened their support for Ukraine and for some this is compounded by a belief that attention on Ukraine has limited the support given to other crises around the world. Conversely, other Britons may believe the UK's approach has not been strong enough and has failed to give Ukraine what it needs to win the war, and their opposition to the Government's approach may therefore be driven by a desire to see support increased instead.

Demographically, support for the UK's approach to Russia's invasion of Ukraine is highest among those aged over-66 (54%), and lowest among those aged 18-25 (29%), likely reflective of the belief held by many younger Britons that Ukraine has been given outsized attention relative to other conflicts. Meanwhile, Britons in higher (ABC1) socioeconomic grades (45%) more often support the UK's approach than those in lower (C2DE) socioeconomic grades (35%), as do men (45%) relative to women (36%).

The Israel-Palestine Conflict

The only area of UK foreign policy polled in which a higher proportion of Britons oppose (31%) than support (27%) the UK Government's approach is the Israel-Palestine conflict. However, with a plurality (35%) of Britons neither supporting nor opposing the UK's approach, the highest across the foreign policy areas polled, a sizable proportion of Britons do not have a strong opinion on the UK's approach to the conflict, likely reflective of the fact that, as our focus groups have found, many Britons find the issue in the Middle East difficult to navigate.

The sharpest divide in views on the UK's approach to the conflict emerges around geography, with residents in Northern Ireland (44%) the most often opposed, while residents in the North East of England (35%) are the most often supportive of the UK's approach. Support for the UK's approach is also particularly high among 26-35-year-olds (32%) and over-66s (32%), while opposition is highest among 46-55-year-olds (34%).

⁶ Aspinall, E., & Keogh, E. (2024, September). 2024 Annual Survey of UK Public Opinion on Foreign Policy. *British Foreign Policy Group*. Retrieved from: <https://bfp.org.uk/2024/09/2024-annual-survey-of-uk-public-opinion-on-foreign-policy/>; Aspinall, E., & Keogh, E. (2023, July). 2023 Annual Survey of UK Public Opinion on Foreign Policy. *British Foreign Policy Group*.

International Partnerships

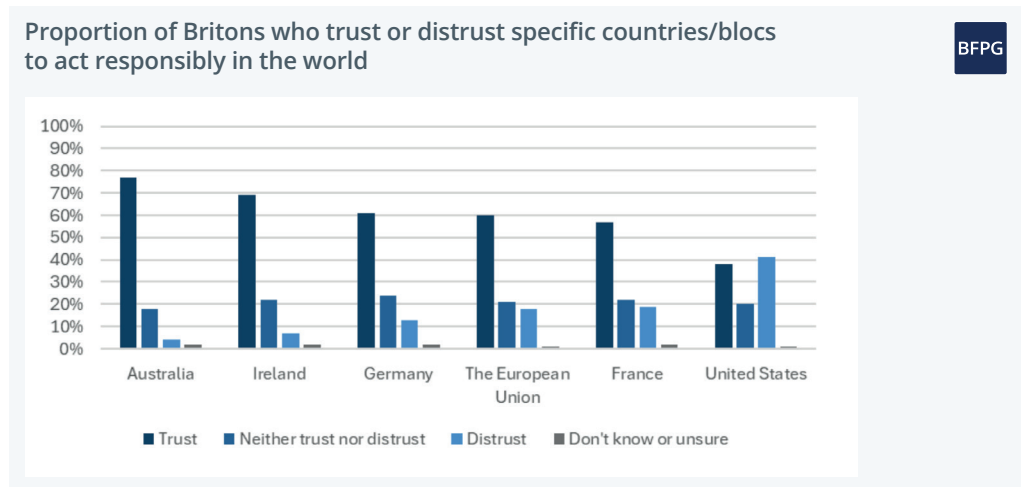
This year, Britons' views of the UK's international partnerships, and indeed of the global environment more generally, are defined by Britons' concerns about the United States. Even as the United States is still (narrowly) seen as the UK's closest ally, the majority of Britons no longer trust the United States to act responsibly in the world, and instead are turning to other nations and blocs who they feel they can trust to deliver, and deliver consistently, for the UK.

In its place, in the public's mind, rises Europe and the EU, the popularity of which have surged in recent years, with Britons seeing Europe and the EU as increasingly reliable and important strategic partners. Here, then, public and elite opinion are increasingly aligned, as the UK Government shifts its focus on to its role as a European partner.

Trust in International Partners

Every year we ask Britons about their levels of trust in key international partners. It is a useful yardstick for understanding Britons' belief in the benefits of international partnerships generally, and their perceptions of specific nations and regions as well.

This year, of the nations/blocs polled, Britons display the highest levels of trust in Australia (77%), followed by Ireland (69%), Germany (61%), the European Union (60%) and France (57%). The United States is the only one of the UK's traditional allies polled where a higher proportion of Britons (41%) distrust than trust (38%) it to act responsibly in the world.



Australia

Australia is the most widely trusted ally of those polled, with 77% of Britons trusting Australia to act responsibly in the world, while just 4% distrust it. A further 18% of Britons neither trust nor distrust Australia and 2% don't know or are unsure. This high level of trust reflects the relative stability in the UK-Australia relationship, which has been strengthened in recent years by the UK-Australia trade deal and by AUKUS. It also likely reflects Australia's broad alignment with the UK's international values, its geographical distance from the UK and its quieter international profile, all of which reduce the chances of Britons perceiving Australia as acting in a way contrary to their views.

This high level of trust in Australia is a positive sign for AUKUS, at a difficult time for the programme - which is currently under review by the new administration in the United States

International Partnerships

- and suggests there is likely to be public appetite for continued cooperation with this trusted partner, regardless of AUKUS' future.

Trust in Australia is higher among older Britons, with 83% of over-66s trusting Australia, compared to 67% of 18-25-year-olds. A particularly high proportion of 2024 Conservative voters (82%), residents in Scotland (81%) and men (80%) trust Australia to act responsibly in the world, while trust is lower, although still very high, among 2024 Green voters (72%), residents in London (70%) and residents in Northern Ireland (70%).

Ireland, France and Germany

Of the three European countries polled, Ireland (69%) is the most widely trusted, followed by Germany (61%) and then France (57%). Despite trust in France being the lowest of the three nations polled, it has increased 11 percentage points in the last two years, from 46% in 2023 to 57% in 2025, with trust in the nation rebuilding as UK-France cooperation strengthens across a range of foreign policy challenges, not least around Channel migration, an issue Britons care passionately about.

Trust in all three nations follows broadly similar trends. When it comes to age, 26-35-year-olds are the age group which most often trusts all three nations, with 74% trusting Ireland, 65% trusting Germany and 65% trusting France. Meanwhile, 56-65-year-olds are the age group who least often trust each of the nations, with 61% trusting Ireland, 57% trusting Germany and 48% trusting France.

Similarly, Scotland is the region which most often trusts all three nations, with 75% trusting Ireland, 68% trusting Germany and 67% trusting France. In contrast, the West Midlands is the region which least widely trusts Germany (55%) and France (49%). Meanwhile, London (60%) is the region which least widely trusts Ireland.

Unsurprisingly, there are also significant demographic differences in levels of trust in individual European nations based on the 2016 EU referendum vote. This is most apparent when it comes to France, with 72% of those who voted Remain trusting France to act responsibly in the world, compared to just 44% of those who voted Leave. The proportion of Remain voters (74%) who trust Germany is also 23 percentage points higher than the proportion of Leave voters (51%) who do. For Ireland, the disparity narrows to 17 percentage points, with 78% of those who voted Remain trusting Ireland to act responsibly in the world, compared to 61% of those who voted Leave.

European Union

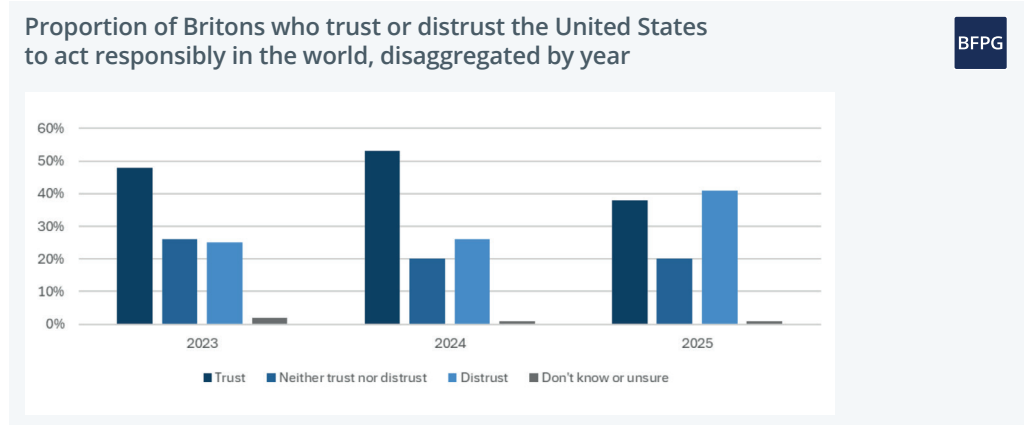
A clear majority (60%) of Britons trust the EU to act responsibly in the world. Trust in the EU has risen substantially over the last two years, with trust in the EU up from 53% in 2023 to 60% in 2025, as the UK 'resets' its relationship with the EU. Meanwhile, 21% of Britons neither trust nor distrust the EU, while only 18% of Britons are distrustful of the EU's ability to act responsibly in the world. This high level of trust, and lack of active distrust, towards the EU marks a sizable shift in Britons' perceptions of the EU, now that the heat has been taken out of the Brexit debate, and opens up space for closer collaboration between the UK and the EU.

The demographic trends seen in trust in individual European countries are mirrored in levels of trust for the EU, with trust in the EU highest among 2024 Labour voters (76%), 26-35-year-olds (73%) and residents in Scotland (68%). Meanwhile, twice the proportion of Remain voters (78%) as Leave voters (39%) trust the EU to act responsibly in the world, highlighting how, while the majority of Britons now trust the EU, there is still work to be done to rebuild trust, particularly among those who voted to Leave the EU.

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United States

The United States is no longer viewed as a trustworthy international partner, with more Britons distrusting (41%) than trusting (38%) it to act responsibly in the world. This marks a sharp deterioration in Britons' trust in the United States, which has fallen 15 percentage points in the last year, from 53% in 2024 to 38% in 2025, a dramatic illustration of how the volatile actions of United States President Donald Trump have impacted the United States' reputation internationally, including among its key allies.



Demographically, levels of trust in the United States invert many of the trends in Britons' trust in the EU and European nations. As such, while residents in Scotland are the regional grouping who most often trust each of the European nations polled, a majority (51%) of residents in Scotland distrust the United States. Political trends are also inverted, and 2024 Reform UK voters - the voter group who most often distrusted each of the European nations polled - are the voter group who most often trust the United States (58%). Meanwhile, just 19% of 2024 Green voters trust the United States to act responsibly in the world.

The exception to this is when it comes to age, with 26-35-year-olds (53%) being the age group who most often trust the United States - just as they are for the European nations polled. This suggests that the high levels of trust in both European nations and the United States among 26-35-year-olds is as much a result of their high general levels of trust in international partners, and wider feelings of security in the world, as about their views about the specific nations themselves.

The UK's Closest Ally

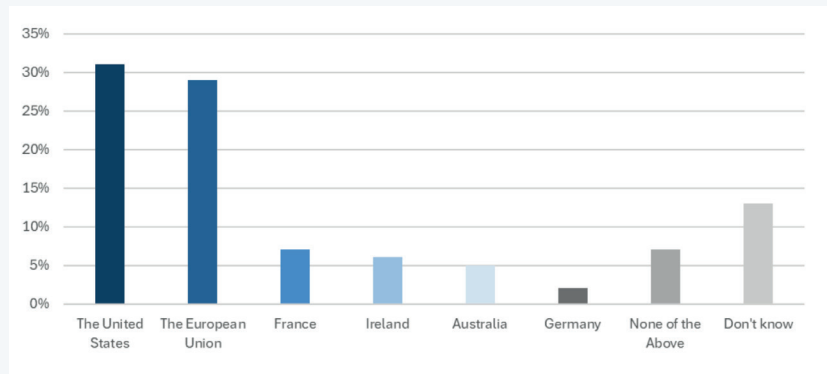
Of the six of the UK's closest nations/blocs polled, the largest proportion of Britons view the United States (31%) as the UK's closest ally, followed closely by the EU (29%). All other nations - France (7%), Ireland (6%), Australia (5%) and Germany (2%) - are relatively rarely seen as the UK's closest ally. A further 13% of Britons 'don't' know and 7% believe none of the options provided are the UK's closest ally.

While the United States is still (narrowly) the most widely seen as the UK's closest ally, the proportion of Britons who believe this has fallen 23 percentage points over the last year, from 54% in 2024 to 31% in 2025. In turn, the proportion of Britons who believe the EU is the UK's closest ally has risen 12 percentage points, from 17% in 2024 to 29% in 2025. All other nations are seen to be the UK's closest ally by 1-4 percentage points more Britons this year than last year.

International Partnerships

Britons' perceptions of which nation is the UK's closest ally

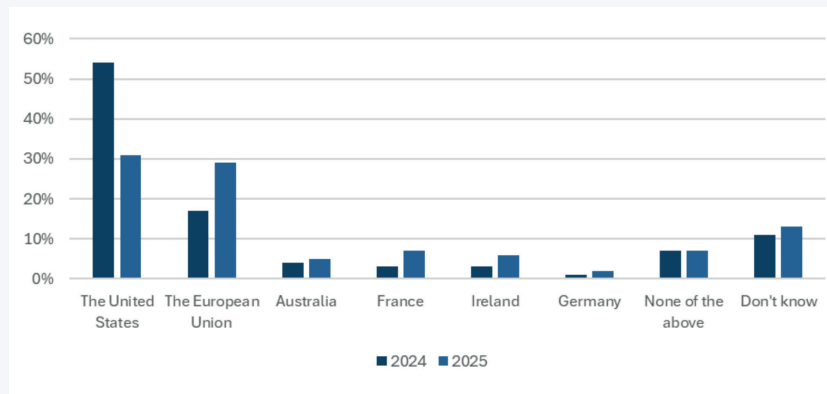
BFPG



This significant decline in the proportion of Britons viewing the United States as the UK's closest ally likely reflects both Britons' concerns about United States President Trump's actions and his reliability as an international partner, as well as the UK's recent shift towards a more collaborative approach towards the EU.

Britons' perceptions of which nation is the UK's closest ally, disaggregated by year

BFPG



Across voter groups, there is a divide between those who believe the United States and those who believe the EU is the UK's closest ally, with the largest proportion of 2024 Reform UK (54%) and Conservative (36%) voters viewing the United States as the UK's closest ally, while the largest proportion of 2024 Liberal Democrat (45%), Green (42%), and Labour (37%) voters view the EU as the UK's closest ally. Meanwhile, a plurality of Remain voters (44%) believe the EU is the UK's closest ally, while a plurality of Leave voters (39%) believe the United States is the UK's closest ally.

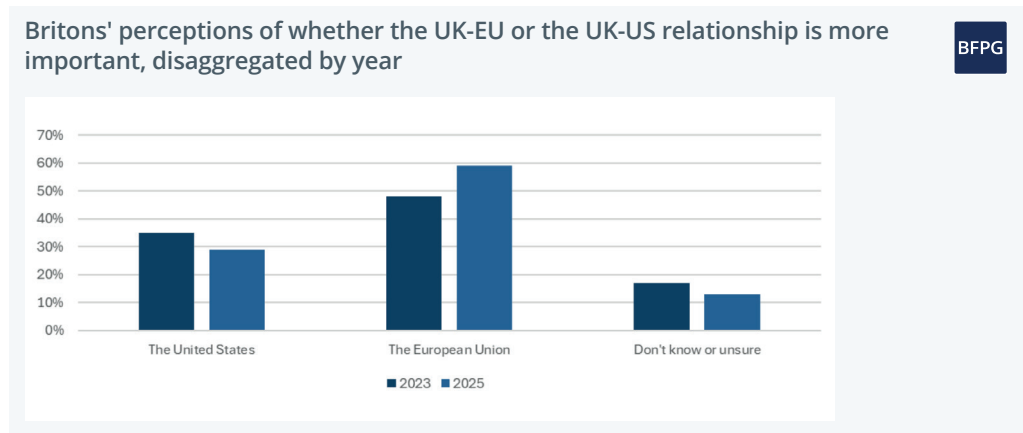
This divergence reflects how individuals' beliefs about who is the UK's closest ally are shaped not only by perceptions of power or strategic ties, but also a values-based assessment of the nation's actions and its reliability as an international partner, which makes people more inclined to identify nations/blocs they like as the UK's closest ally.

Elsewhere, belief that the United States is the UK's closest ally is particularly high among residents in Yorkshire and Humberside (37%) and men (36%). Meanwhile, belief that the EU is the UK's closest ally is particularly high among those in higher (ABC1) socioeconomic grades (34%) and 26-35-year-olds (32%).

The UK's Relationship with the United States and the EU

Despite viewing the United States as the UK's closest ally, the majority of Britons (59%) believe that the UK's relationship with the EU is more important than its relationship with the United States. Meanwhile, just 29% of Britons believe that the UK-US relationship is more important than the UK-EU relationship, while 13% of Britons don't know.

This disparity between who is regarded as the UK's closest ally and who is regarded as its most important partner is likely the result of a few factors. The term 'ally' is more associated with security contexts than the term 'relationship'. The term 'ally' is also seen to have more of a historical connotation - in part because of its association with security - while reflecting on the 'more important relationship' invites Britons to express what they would like the UK's relationships to look like in the future. This disparity therefore suggests that Britons recognise that the United States has been a longstanding critical partner for the UK, particularly when it comes to national security, but that, moving forwards, Britons would like to move closer to the EU.



The proportion of Britons who believe the UK-EU relationship is the more important of the two, has risen 11 percentage points since we last polled on this in 2023, when 48% of Britons believed this, and is up 17 percentage points from 2022, when 42% of Britons believed this, highlighting how much perceptions of the UK-EU relationship, and its importance, have shifted in recent years.

Demographic trends in relative prioritisation of the United States and EU relationships mirror trends in views about the UK's closest ally, with demographics more inclined to believe the EU is the UK's closest ally also more often believing that the UK-EU relationship is more important than the UK-US relationship, and vice-versa.

As such, younger Britons more often believe the UK-EU relationship is the more important relationship than older Britons, with 65% of 26-35-year-olds believing this, compared to 53% of over-66s. Residents in the devolved regions also more often believe the UK-EU relationship is the more important relationship than residents in the regions in England, with 69% of residents of Scotland, 63% of residents of Wales and 63% of residents of Northern Ireland viewing the UK-EU relationship as most important, compared to, for example, 54% of residents in the South West of England.

The sharpest divide though is along political lines, with 2024 Green (76%), Liberal Democrat (74%) and Labour (69%) voters much more often viewing the UK-EU relationship as the more important of the two than 2024 Conservative (45%) and Reform UK (33%) voters. Remain voters (75%) also prioritise the UK-EU relationship over the UK-US relationship almost twice as often as Leave voters (38%). Indeed, a larger proportion of Leave voters view the UK-US relationship (45%) as the more important relationship of the two than view the UK-EU relationship as more important (38%).

The UK-EU Reset

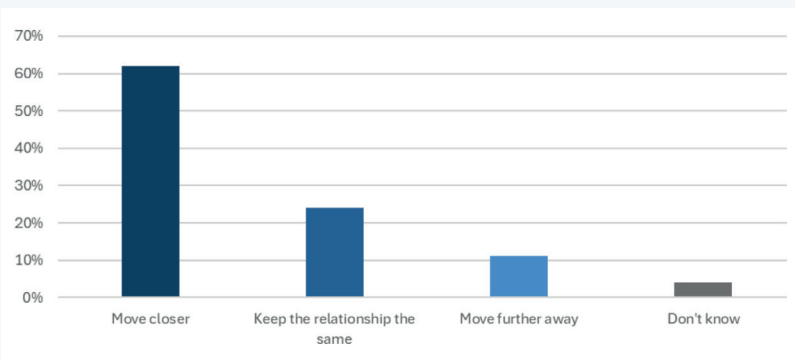
The UK Government has made clear its ambition to reset and strengthen the UK's relationship with the EU, viewing it a critical economic and security partner. And it is clear that Britons agree. Across a wide range of areas, and crucially even among traditionally sceptical Britons, there is now strong support for closer cooperation between the UK and the EU. In part, this is the result of the current geopolitical context, with the EU seen as a trustworthy partner in a challenging global environment and in a world where the UK cannot always rely on other key partners. It also reflects distance from the UK's departure from the EU, which has made the idea of cooperation with the EU more palatable again, as well as the very real progress towards improved relations made in recent years, which have shown the potential benefits of closer cooperation.

The UK's approach on how to reset relations is also well received. The UK-EU Summit is widely regarded as a success and the policies agreed at the summit, particularly around defence and trade, are widely supported. There is a particularly strong appetite for strengthening trade relations with the EU and there is therefore broad scope for the Government to strengthen trading relations, heading into the 2026 review of the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA).

Proximity to the EU

With Britons increasingly distrustful of the United States, the majority (62%) of Britons now believe that the UK should move closer to the EU in response to the actions of United States President Donald Trump, including 29% of Britons who believe the UK should move much closer to the EU. A further 24% of Britons believe the UK should keep its current level of relationship with the EU, while only 11% of Britons believe that the actions of President Trump mean the UK should move further away from the EU. This highlights that while Britons' appetite for collaboration with Europe and the EU is grounded in genuine desire for closer cooperation with the EU in and of itself, the actions of President Trump are also pushing Britons closer towards the EU as well.

Proportion of Britons who believe that, in response to the actions of President Trump, the UK should move closer to, or further away from, the EU in its foreign and security policy



Younger Britons are more inclined than older Britons to believe that the UK should move closer to the EU, as a result of the actions of United States President Donald Trump, with 74% of 26-35-year-olds believing so, compared to 54% of over-66s.

Support for moving closer to the EU in response to the actions of President Trump is also particularly high among residents in Northern Ireland (71%) and is lowest among residents in Yorkshire and Humberside (54%) and Eastern England (54%). Britons in higher (ABC1) socioeconomic grades (68%) are also more inclined than those in lower (C2DE) socioeconomic grades (55%) to support moving closer to the EU as a result of President Trump's actions.

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The divides in perceptions are sharpest along political lines though, and while 2024 Green (79%), Labour (75%) and Liberal Democrat (75%) voters overwhelmingly endorse moving closer to the EU as a result of President Trump's actions, 2024 Conservative (48%) and Reform UK (30%) voters are much less convinced. Indeed, a higher proportion of Reform UK voters believe the UK should now move further away from the EU (32%) than move closer (30%). The divides along 2016 EU Referendum voting lines are just as clear, with 80% of Remain voters believing the UK should now move closer to the EU, compared to 38% of Leave voters. This reflects both differences in appetite for closer collaboration with the EU among different voter groups, as well as differing levels of concern about President Trump.

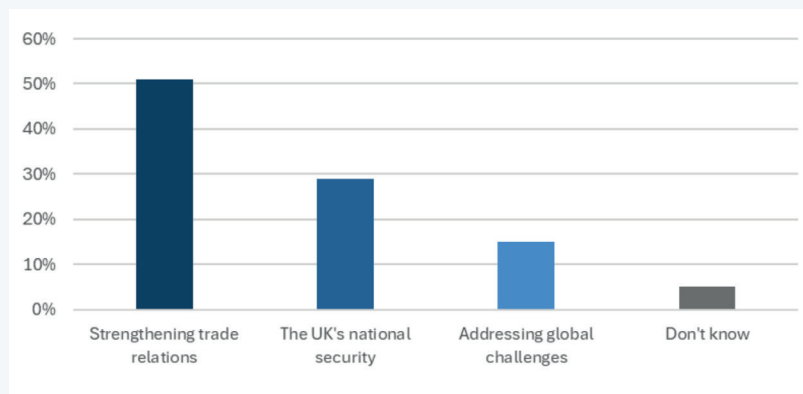
Priorities within the UK-EU relationship

With Britons viewing the EU as such a close ally and important partner, and widely believing that, in the current context, the UK should move closer to the EU, there is a clear appetite for strengthening UK-EU relations. So far the Government has prioritised defence and national security - in the broadest terms - in the resetting of its relationship with the EU, culminating in the signing of a UK-EU Defence and Security Agreement in May 2025, which includes commitments to regular consultations and cooperation on foreign and security policy.⁷

However, the majority (51%) of Britons believe that the UK should prioritise strengthening trade relations when resetting relations with the EU. Meanwhile, only 29% of Britons believe the UK should prioritise national security, and 15% believe it should prioritise addressing global challenges. A further 5% of Britons don't know.

Britons' perceptions of what the UK's top priority should be in its relationship with the EU

BFPG



This disparity between Government and public priorities is as much about pragmatism as values. For the Government, defence and national security are an easy route into closer collaboration, particularly given the ongoing war in Ukraine, because the need for cooperation is more urgent than it is in other areas. Meanwhile, the British public tend to take an economics-first approach to foreign policy in general, not least because the most apparent way they experience foreign policy day-to-day (particularly during peace time) is through its impact on the economy and their own back pocket. This desire to focus on strengthening trade relations however, gives the Government plenty of scope to look to strengthen relations when the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement comes up for renewal in 2026.

There is broad consistency across demographic groups in priorities for the UK-EU relationship. Across all demographic breakdowns, but one, the largest plurality believe the UK should

⁷ Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office & Ministry of Defence. (2025, May). Security and defence partnership between the European Union and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. *UK Government*. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-eu-security-and-defence-partnership/security-and-defence-partnership-between-the-european-union-and-the-united-kingdom-of-great-britain-and-northern-ireland>

The UK-EU Reset

prioritise strengthening trade relations, although the extent to which they believe this varies. For example, while 65% of residents in Northern Ireland believe the UK should prioritise trading relations, no doubt, in part, reflecting the significant trade challenges Northern Ireland has faced since the UK's departure from the EU, in Eastern England just 46% of Britons believe this. In turn, residents in Eastern England (32%) more often than those who live in Northern Ireland (23%) believe that national security should be the top priority. Similarly, while 59% of 46-55-year-olds believe the UK should prioritise trading relations, 18-25-year-olds are more divided on this, with 40% believing trading relations should be the top priority but 31% believing it should be national security. A further 25% of 18-25-year-olds believe addressing global challenges e.g. climate change should be the top priority.

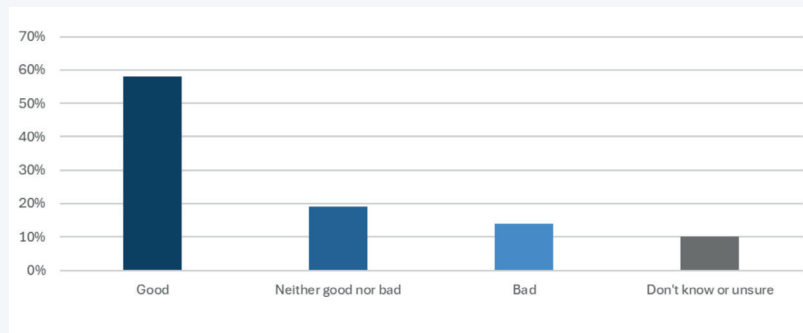
The exception is 2024 Reform UK voters, a majority (51%) of whom believe national security should be the UK's top priority in its relationship with the EU, while just 30% believe strengthening trade relations should be prioritised. This reflects 2024 Reform UK voters' wider concerns about closer cooperation with Europe, and their desire therefore to focus more narrowly on the most urgent forms of cooperation, such as defence and security.

The UK-EU Summit

In May 2025, the UK hosted the first UK-EU Summit since the UK withdrew from the EU. The Summit was pitched as a landmark moment in the UK's attempts to reset relations with the EU, and a number of key agreements and plans for future cooperation were made at the summit, on everything from national security and defence to trade in food and drinks, and access to ePassport gates.

The Summit was seen by Britons to be a clear success, with 58% of Britons believing the Summit was good for the UK, while just 14% of Britons believe the Summit was bad for the UK. A further 19% of Britons believe it was neither good nor bad and 10% don't know or are unsure.

Proportion of Britons who believe the UK-EU summit was good or bad for the UK



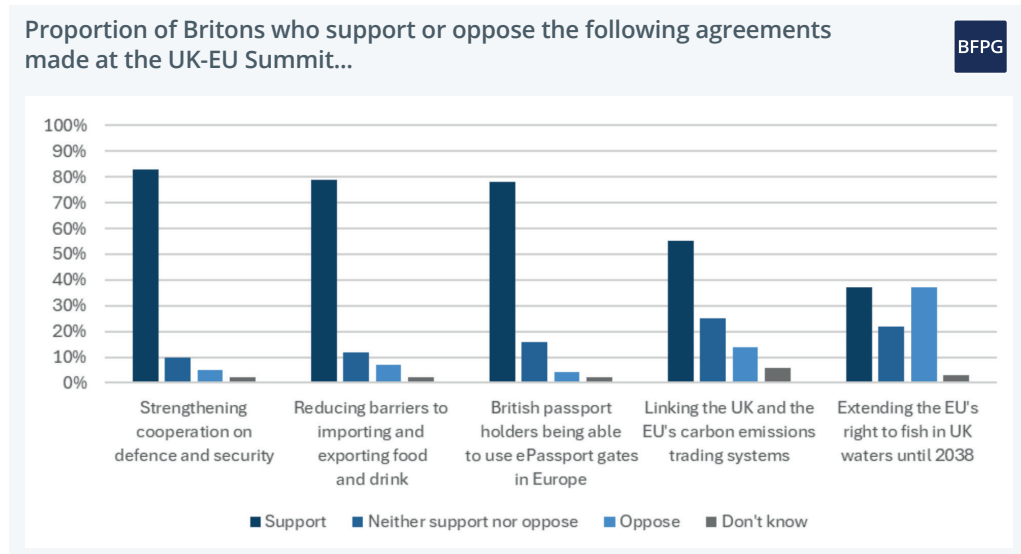
Across demographic groups, there is wide support for the Summit and, with the exception of 2024 Reform UK voters, the largest proportion of every other demographic group believes the Summit was good for the UK. Even among those who voted Leave in the 2016 EU Referendum, a plurality (40%) believe the Summit was good for the UK, with only 28% of Leave voters believing the Summit was bad for the UK. This is a remarkably broad consensus across demographics, showing how far the debate around the UK's relationship with the EU has come in recent years, and the clear appetite across the UK for collaborating with the EU.

Younger Britons feel particularly positively about the Summit, with 70% of 26-35-year-olds and 70% of 18-25-year-olds believing the Summit was positive for the UK, with just 6% and 3% of each group respectively believing the Summit was bad for the UK. Britons in higher (ABC1) socioeconomic grades (67%) also more often feel positively about the summit than those in

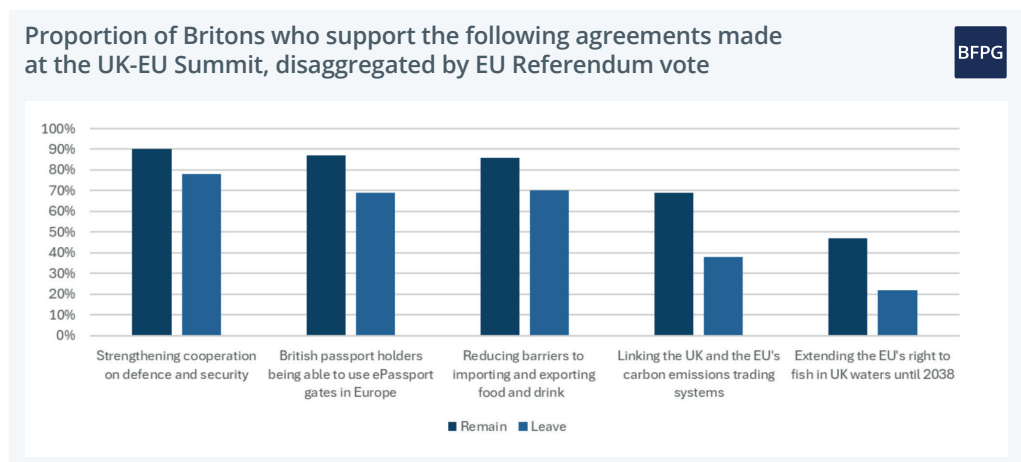
The UK-EU Reset

lower (C2DE) socioeconomic grades (47%). So do residents in Northern Ireland (69%), London (66%) and the North East (66%), particularly compared to residents in the West Midlands (51%), who least often feel positive about the Summit, although a majority still do.

Furthermore, there is broad and deep public support for all but one of the agreements made at the Summit that we polled on, providing a very strong endorsement of the Summit. Indeed, three of the agreements made during the Summit are endorsed by over 75% of Britons - strengthening cooperation between the UK and the EU on defence and security e.g. cyber and counterterrorism (83%), reducing barriers to importing and exporting food and drink between the UK and the EU (79%) and British passport users being able to use ePassport gates in Europe (78%). A majority (55%) of Britons also endorse plans to link the UK and the EU's carbon emissions trading systems. Given the broad ranging nature of these agreements, and very high levels of support for them, it is clear there is broad support for wide-ranging cooperation between the UK and the EU.



The only agreement which proves particularly divisive is extending the EU's right to fish in UK waters until 2038, which is supported by the same proportion of Britons (37%) as those who oppose it. This reflects the deeply politicised debate around fishing rights but also the fact the agreement made around fishing rights was very much a compromise, which the UK agreed to in order to secure agreements and cooperation on other areas. Nevertheless, it is important the Government remains attune to the strength of feeling among Britons around fishing rights and the clear red lines it presents, as it continues its efforts to strengthen relations with the EU.



The UK-EU Reset

As well as viewing the Summit overall particularly positively, Remain voters, Britons in higher socioeconomic grades, and 2024 Labour, Liberal Democrat and Green voters are particularly supportive of all of the Summits' outcomes.

However, while Remain voters are more supportive of all components of the agreements made at the Summit, a majority of Leave voters nevertheless support key elements of the Summit's agreements, including the agreement to strengthen cooperation on defence (78%), reducing trade barriers around food and drink (70%) and British passport holders being able to use ePassport gates in Europe (69%), showing the breadth of support for the Summit and for cooperation between the UK and the EU more broadly.

Strengthening cooperation between the UK and the EU on defence and security

The Summit had a firm focus on defence and national security, as Europe faces growing pressure from the United States to step up on defence. The Summit therefore led to agreements around closer cooperation on a wide range of defence and security areas including Ukraine, cyber, hybrid threats and more. These agreements are widely and strongly supported. Indeed, this is the most supported component of the Summit, with 83% of Britons supporting the Summit's agreement to strengthen cooperation with the EU on defence and security, including 47% of Britons who strongly support it. A further 10% neither support nor oppose, while only 5% of Britons oppose it.

Notably, the wider trend across age groups of younger Britons being more supportive of the Summit announcements than older Britons, is inverted when it comes to strengthening cooperation on defence and security, with over-66s (88%) the most supportive of this and those aged 18-25 (79%) the least supportive. This likely reflects older Britons' higher levels of concern about national security and defence and the greater emphasis they therefore place on defence and national security across the board, relative to younger Britons.

Reducing barriers to importing and exporting food and drink between the UK and the EU

The Summit also led to an agreement to work towards a common Sanitary and Phytosanitary Area which would work to remove red tape around the importing and exporting of food and drink between the UK and the EU. This is also widely endorsed, with 79% of Britons supporting the agreements made at the Summit to reduce barriers to importing and exporting food and drink between the UK and the EU, including 41% of Britons who strongly support this. Meanwhile, 12% of Britons neither support nor oppose, while just 7% oppose the decision.

This is the least divisive Summit agreement of those polled, in part because Britons are particularly supportive of foreign policies across the board which they believe may help improve their own economic position. Nevertheless, the largest divide in support for the agreement emerges between 2024 Labour (83%) and Reform UK voters (66%), although even among 2024 Reform UK voters, a clear majority still support the agreement.

British passport holders being able to use ePassport gates in Europe

The Summit also resulted in an agreement to allow British passport holders to use ePassport gates in Europe, helping Britons to avoid very long immigration queues when travelling. This is also widely endorsed, with 78% of Britons supporting this, including 44% of Britons who strongly support it. Meanwhile, 16% of Britons neither support nor oppose it and just 4% of Britons oppose the agreement. The decision to allow Britons to use ePassport gates was therefore a very effective optics win for the Government, which, while it will not result in a

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particularly substantive increase in cooperation between the UK and the EU, will alleviate one of the public's biggest post-Brexit frustrations, and help build support for the Government's wider efforts to strengthen cooperation.

Residents in the North East (85%) are the most frequent supporters of the decision to allow British passport holders to use ePassport gates in Europe, while residents in Northern Ireland (70%) are the least, despite being consistently among the most supportive of other agreements made at the Summit.

Linking the UK and the EU's carbon emission trading systems

The agreement made at the Summit to link the UK and the EU's carbon emission trading systems is supported by the majority (55%) of Britons, with a further 25% of Britons neither supporting or opposing it. Only 14% of Britons oppose the agreement.

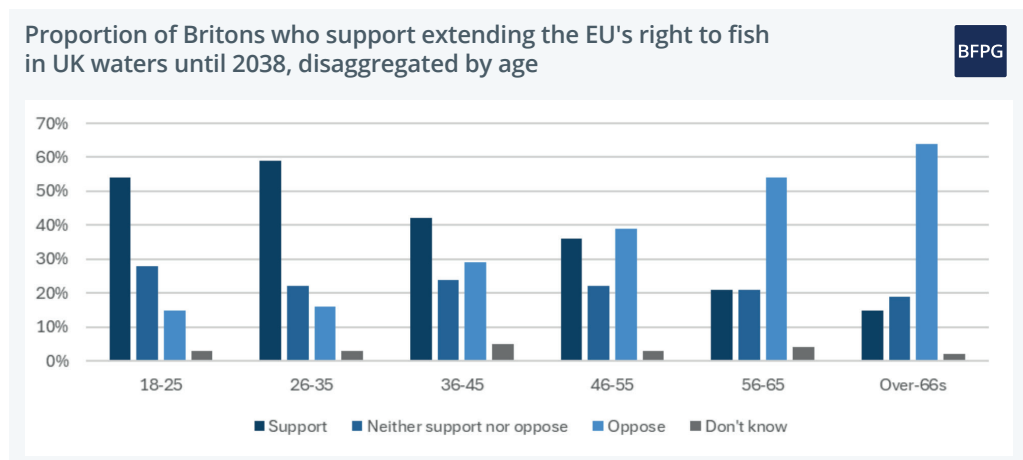
Despite a majority of Britons supporting the agreement, support within demographics varies quite significantly. For example, 26-35-year-olds (66%) and 18-25-year-olds (62%) are substantially more supportive of the agreement than over-66s (49%) and 56-65-year-olds (43%). Similarly, while the agreement is widely endorsed among 2024 Labour (67%), Liberal Democrat (66%) and Green (64%) voters, just 44% of 2024 Conservative voters endorse it, while 2024 Reform UK voters more often oppose (38%) than support (32%) it.

While, in part, these trends are driven by differences in different demographics' views of the EU, they are also exacerbated by different demographics' levels of prioritisation and concern about climate change - with younger and more left-leaning Britons both more supportive of cooperation with the EU and more concerned about climate change and energy security than older Britons and those who are more right-leaning.

Extending the EU's right to fish in UK waters until 2038

The agreement to extend the EU's right to fish in UK waters until 2038 is, by far, the most controversial element of the Summit, with 37% of Britons opposing it - the same proportion of Britons who support it. A further 22% of Britons neither support nor oppose it.

It also produces many of the sharpest demographic divides, including around age, region and socioeconomics. For example, while a majority of 26-35-year-olds (59%) and 18-25-year-olds (54%) support the agreement, a majority of over-66s (64%) and 56-65-year-olds (54%) oppose it. Similarly, while 47% of residents in the West Midlands and London support the agreement, just 29% of those in the South East and Northern Ireland do.



The UK-EU Reset

These divides in views reflect the very divisive nature of the debate around fishing rights. BFPG's 2024 annual survey showed how fishing rights are a firm red line for many Britons, with 41% of Britons in 2024 opposing strengthening trading relations with the EU if it required the UK to allow the EU to do more fishing in UK seas.⁸ This high level of concern about fishing rights has persisted since the UK's departure from the EU, with Britons concerned about the well-publicised challenges facing the fishing industry and the potential environmental consequences of over-fishing, and many Britons also believing that EU fishing in UK seas infringes on the UK's right to protect what happens on its own territory, throwing up questions of sovereignty. It is unsurprising then that this agreement was the least popular of the agreements made at the Summit, although the Government may have seen it as a reasonable price to pay to secure agreements in other areas which are widely endorsed by the public.

⁸ Aspinall, E., & Keogh, E. (2024, September). *Ibid.*

The UK-US ‘Special Relationship’

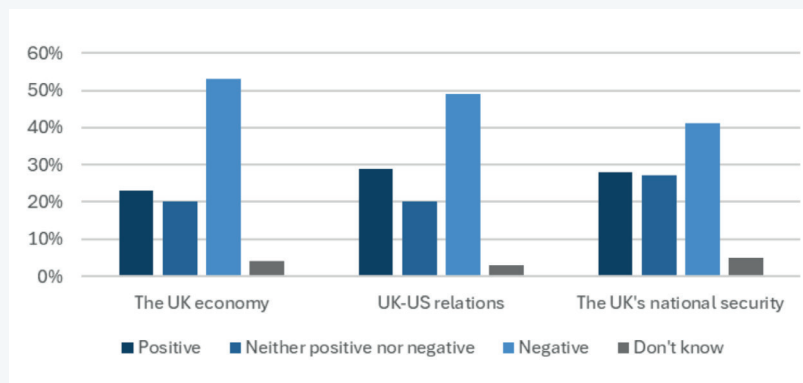
Since coming into office, United States President Donald Trump has upended global norms and standards by enacting major tariffs, withdrawing support from key multilateral institutions, and retreating from the United States’ traditional global leadership role. Britons are deeply concerned about the impact these actions are having on the UK and, as a result, no longer view the United States as a trustworthy international partner.

However, Britons are divided over how best to approach the UK-US relationship moving forwards. While there is broad agreement that concern about President Trump necessitates that the UK strengthen its relations elsewhere - not least with the EU - there are divisions over how to respond to President Trump himself. For some, the United States’ current volatility necessitates efforts to rely less on the United States, while for others, fear of the consequences of upsetting President Trump push them into favouring maintaining close relations with the United States.

The Impact of President Trump’s Actions

Britons are concerned about the impact that President Trump’s actions are having on the UK, with the majority (53%) of Britons believing that President Trump is having a negative impact on the UK economy. In contrast, just 23% of Britons believe his actions are having a positive impact on the UK economy, while 20% believe he is having neither a positive nor a negative impact.

Proportion of Britons who believe the election of President Trump is having a positive or negative impact on the following...



Despite the UK’s efforts to charm President Trump, which are widely endorsed, a plurality (49%) of Britons nevertheless believe that President Trump is having a negative impact on UK-US relations, while only 29% of Britons believe he is having a positive impact on UK-US relations.⁹ A further 20% of Britons believe he is having neither a positive nor a negative impact.

A plurality of Britons (41%) also believe that President Trump’s actions are having a negative impact on UK national security, while 28% of Britons believe he is having a positive impact on UK national security and 27% believe he is having neither a positive or negative impact. The lower proportion of Britons who believe President Trump is having a negative impact on UK national security, relative to other areas, likely reflects both Britons economic-first approach to foreign policy, as well as a lack of public awareness of how interconnected the UK and the United States’ defence capabilities are, and how reliant the UK is on the United States when it comes

⁹ See the ‘Free Trade’ chapter of this report.

The UK-US 'Special Relationship'

to defence. It may also reflect support for the fact President Trump's actions have helped push NATO countries, including the UK, to scale up defence spending.

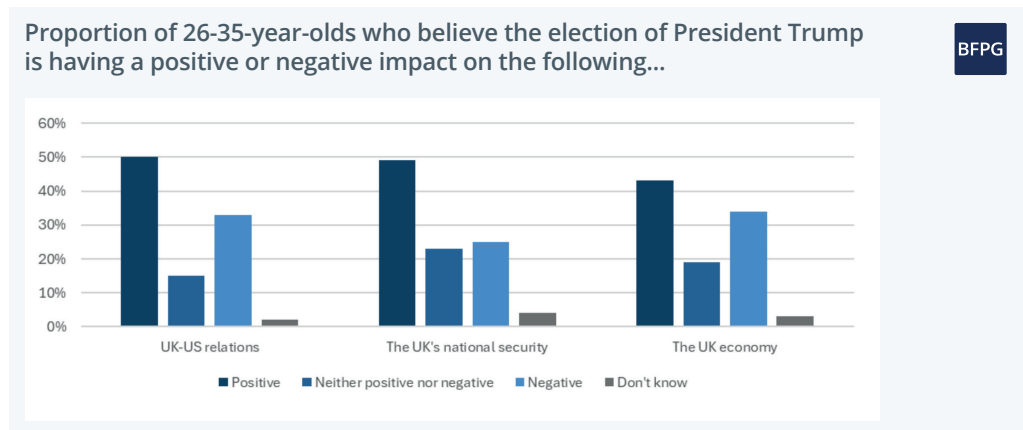
Across the three areas of potential consequences polled, there are clear consistencies in the degree to which Britons believe President Trump's actions are having negative consequences. The largest disparities emerge across political fault lines, with 2024 Green voters most often believing that President Trump is having a negative impact across the areas polled, and 2024 Reform UK voters least often believing this. When it comes to UK-US relations, for example, 70% of 2024 Green voters believe President Trump is having a negative impact on UK-US relations, compared to just 25% of 2024 Reform UK voters. In fact, almost twice the proportion of 2024 Reform UK voters believe President Trump is having a positive impact (49%) on UK-US relations as believe he is having a negative impact (25%). This disparity in views across voter groups is likely driven as much by Britons' personal views on President Trump as by any actual assessment of his impact on certain areas.

The one area where 2024 Reform UK voters are slightly more muted in their belief in the positive impact of President Trump's actions is in regard to the UK economy. While 2024 Reform UK voters are still far more inclined to believe the impacts of President Trump's actions to be positive for the UK economy than other voter groups, almost the same proportion believe the effects to be negative (34%) as believe them to be positive (35%), likely due to the significant emphasis that 2024 Reform UK voters place on the economy in foreign policy, and therefore their high levels of concern about anything that may disrupt it.

Meanwhile, women more often than men believe that President Trump is having a negative impact across the areas polled, with 52% of women believing he is having a negative impact on UK-US relations, compared to 45% of men. Britons from higher socioeconomic grades are also more inclined to believe this, with, for example, 44% of those in higher (ABC1) socioeconomic grades believing President Trump is having a negative impact on the UK's national security, compared to 37% of those in lower (C2DE) socioeconomic grades.

Older Britons are also more often concerned about the impact of President Trump's actions than younger Britons. Indeed, over twice the proportion of over-66s (72%) believe President Trump will have a negative impact on the UK economy than 26-35-year-olds (34%). Furthermore, over-66s (55%) believe that President Trump is having a negative impact on UK national security more than twice as frequently as 26-35-year-olds (25%). In fact, 26-35-year-olds more often believe that President Trump is having a positive impact on all three areas polled than that he is having a negative impact.

This likely reflects the fact younger Britons tend to feel less nervous and insecure in the world than older Britons, including when it comes to the United States, and the fact younger Britons are less concerned about the reconfiguring of the world order, especially if that means the UK moves closer to Europe, which they widely support.

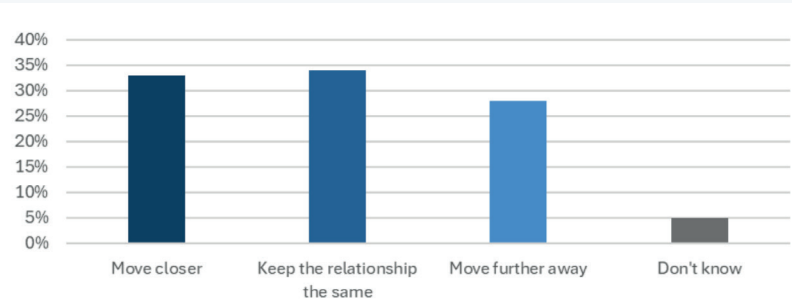


Proximity to the United States

While Britons are largely united in their belief that the actions of United States President Donald Trump necessitate that the UK move closer to the EU, they are divided over how best to approach relations with the United States itself moving forwards. While the highest proportion of Britons believe the UK should maintain its current level of relationship with the United States (34%), this is followed closely by moving closer to the United States (33%) and not far behind by moving further away from the United States (28%). This divide is reflective of variations in Britons' opinions of President Trump, their relative risk appetite for potentially falling out with President Trump and the United States more broadly, as well as variations in Britons' assessment of how critical a partner the United States is for the UK.

Proportion of Britons who believe that, in response to the actions of President Trump, the UK should move closer to, or further away from, the United States in its foreign and security policy

BFPG



Politically, 2024 Reform UK voters (54%) are the most often inclined to believe the UK should move closer to the United States as a result of President Trump's actions, followed by 2024 Conservative (37%) and Labour (33%) voters. Meanwhile, just 24% of 2024 Liberal Democrat voters and 16% of 2024 Green voters believe that the UK should move closer to the United States. Indeed, a majority (53%) of 2024 Green voters believe that the UK should move further away from the United States, reflecting their wider feelings of discomfort and distrust towards the United States and particularly President Trump.

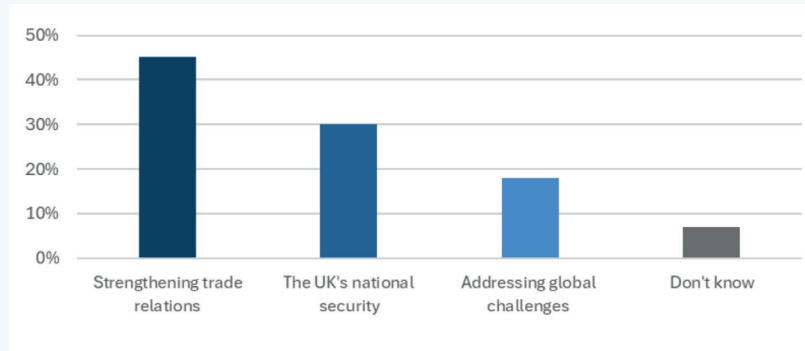
Younger Britons are more inclined than older Britons to believe the UK should move closer to the United States, with 47% of 26-35-year-olds and 43% of 18-25-year-olds believing this, compared to 26% of 56-65-year-olds and 25% of over-66s. Men (39%) are also more inclined than women (28%) to believe that the UK should move closer to the United States as a result of President Trump's actions.

Priorities in the UK-US Relationship

While Britons are divided over how close they believe the UK should be with the United States, they are clearer on what they believe the UK should prioritise in the relationship, with a plurality of Britons believing that the UK should prioritise strengthening its trading relationship with the United States (45%). A further 30% believe the UK should prioritise protecting the UK's national security, while just 18% of Britons believe the UK's top priority in its relationship with the United States should be addressing global challenges such as climate change. A further 7% of Britons don't know.

This focus on the economy in the UK-US relationship likely reflects Britons' wider prioritisation of the economy in foreign policy more generally, as well as concern about the tariffs being imposed by President Trump and a desire to minimise the consequences of this on the UK economy.

Britons' perceptions of what the UK's top priority should be in its relationship with the United States



The largest plurality across all demographic breakdowns believe the UK's top priority in its relationship with the United States should be prioritising its trading relationship, although the extent to which they believe this varies. The one exception to this is 2024 Green voters, the largest proportion (30%) of which believe addressing global challenges should be the top priority, while 29% believe it should be national security and 25% believe it should be trade agreements.

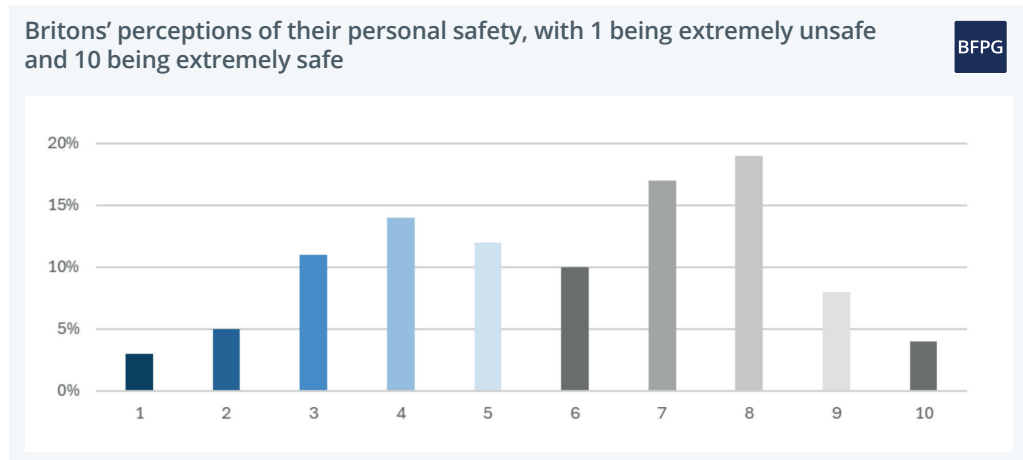
National Security

The UK Government is ramping up its defence spending commitments and has declared that the UK must prepare for a “wartime scenario” on the “UK homeland”, as the threats to the UK escalate.¹⁰ However, while Britons recognise many of the security challenges facing the UK, their assessment of their severity, and of the urgency of addressing them, does not align with the Government’s. Indeed, despite the proliferation of global challenges and threats, Britons feel increasingly safe in the world, and, while at a top-level Britons support higher defence spending, they are unwilling to shoulder the trade-offs that might be required to fund an increase in defence spending.

As such, if the UK is committed to this significant drive to strengthen the UK’s defence and national security then it must also have an upfront conversation with the British public about the threats the UK faces and the difficult choices that might be required to meet them.¹¹ Without it, the UK risks failing to bring the public with it in its efforts to shore up UK national security and defence, leading to a crisis in public consent.

Perceptions of Safety

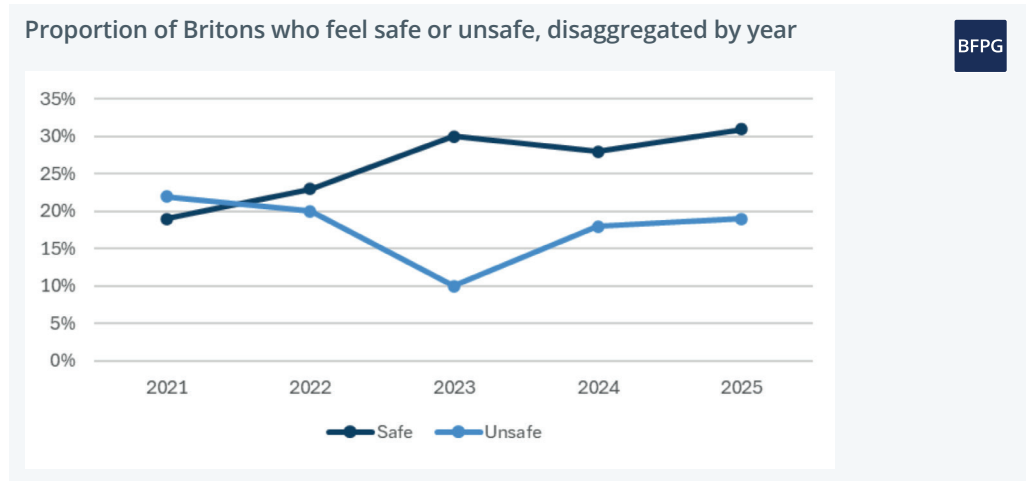
When asked to score on a scale of 1-10 how safe they feel in the world, given the direction of travel of world events, with 1 being extremely unsafe and 10 being extremely safe, the average (mean) score given by Britons is 5.86, with Britons leaning closer to feelings of safety. Furthermore, a higher proportion of Britons report feeling safe (scores 8-10) (31%) than unsafe (scores 1-3) (19%).



This marks an increase in feelings of safety relative to 2024, in which 28% of Britons reported feeling safe, and a significant improvement from 2021 during the Covid-19 pandemic, when just 19% of Britons felt safe. This likely reflects the fact that Britons’ assessment of threats often centres around domestic challenges, hence feelings of safety were lowest during the Covid-19 pandemic, when global challenges were having the most immediate impact on their day-to-day lives.

¹⁰ Cabinet Office. (2025, June). National Security Strategy 2025: Security for the British People in a Dangerous World. UK Government. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-security-strategy-2025-security-for-the-british-people-in-a-dangerous-world>

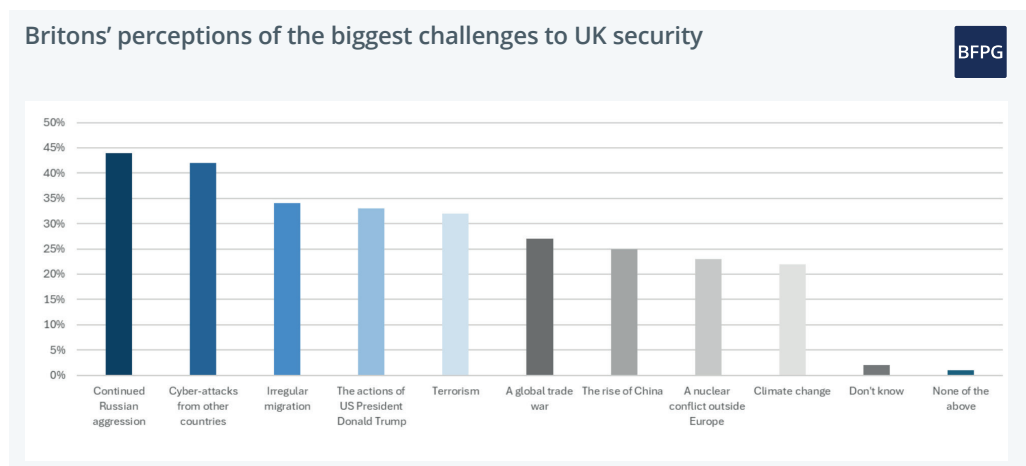
¹¹ Aspinall, E., & Keogh, E. (2024, September). *Ibid.*



Older Britons continue to feel more unsafe than younger Britons, with 27% of 56-65-year olds and 24% of over-66s feeling unsafe, compared to 11% of 18-25-year-olds. Politically, 31% of those who voted Reform UK in the 2024 General Election feel unsafe, compared to just 11% of those who voted Labour. Meanwhile, 23% of those who voted Liberal Democrat, 20% of those who voted Green and 18% of those who voted Conservative feel unsafe. The very low feelings of insecurity among 2024 Labour voters can largely be explained by the fact there is a Labour Government, which is likely to make Labour voters feel more secure in the world. Meanwhile, the high feelings of insecurity among 2024 Reform UK voters likely reflects disillusionment and distrust in the current Government but also reflects wider research which shows that feelings of insecurity often lead to more populist perceptions.¹²

Challenges to National Security

Every year, we ask Britons what, out of a range of potential challenges, they believe to be the three biggest challenges to the UK's national security. Of the nine potential challenges polled this year, continued Russian aggression (44%) is the most frequently seen as a top three challenge to the UK's national security. We have asked this question in a number of different ways and with a number of different options over the years to reflect the different potential risks at the time of polling, and since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Russian aggression has consistently been one of the top two concerns, regardless of question form or other threats polled.



¹² Zhirnov, A., Antonucci, L., Thomeczek, J. P., Horvath, et al. Precarity and populism: explaining populist outlook and populist voting in Europe through subjective financial and work-related insecurity. *European Sociological Review*, 10(4), 704-720. Retrieved from: <https://academic.oup.com/esr/article/40/4/704/7271479>

National Security

This is followed closely by cyber-attacks from other countries (42%), which are consistently seen as a top concern among the British public, reflecting Britons' particularly high levels of concern about foreign policy issues which have very direct domestic impacts. The next most widely perceived challenges to national security are irregular migration (34%), the actions of United States President Donald Trump (33%) and terrorism (32%).

Meanwhile, the least widely cited challenges are a global trade war (27%), the rise of China as a world power (25%), a nuclear conflict outside Europe (23%) and climate change (22%). The fact climate change comes so low in perceived potential challenges is striking, given in previous years and previous iterations of the question it has been seen as one of the biggest threats, and likely reflects the fact that the current global environment is so volatile that Britons are concentrating on short-term issues, with limited bandwidth for addressing long-term challenges.

There is relatively little overlap across age groups in their perceptions of what the biggest challenges to UK national security are. Among over-66s, who show a remarkable degree of consensus among themselves around the two biggest challenges, continued Russian aggression (60%), cyber-attacks from other countries (55%), and the rise of China as a world power (35%) are the most commonly seen as top challenges to UK national security. However, none of these are among the most widely cited top challenges among 18-25-year-olds, who instead most often view climate change (36%), a global trade war (34%) and the actions of US President Donald Trump (33%) as a top challenge. Indeed, despite being the challenge most commonly seen as a top challenge among over-66s (60%), continued Russian aggression is the second least commonly cited as a top challenge among 18-25-year-olds (25%). Similarly, while climate change is the challenge most widely regarded as a top challenge among 18-25-year-olds (36%), among over-66s (12%) it is the least often regarded as a top challenge, of the challenges polled.

Britons' perceptions of the top three biggest challenges to UK security, disaggregated by age

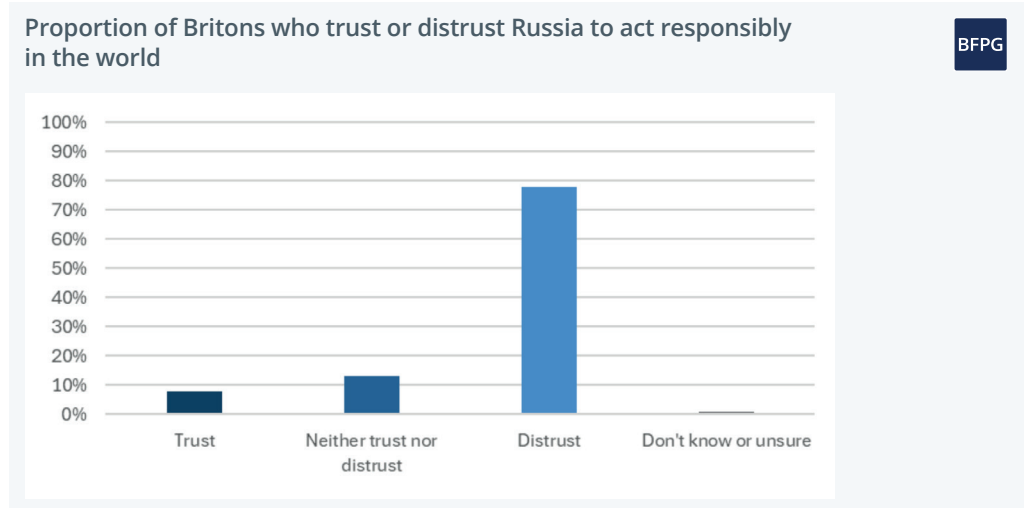
BFPG

18-25-year-olds	1. Climate change (36%) 2. A global trade war (34%) 3. The actions of US President Donald Trump (33%)
26-35-year-olds	1. A global trade war (39%) 2. Cyber-attacks from other countries (38%) 3. Terrorism (37%)
36-45-year-olds	1. Cyber-attacks from other countries (40%) 2. Continued Russian aggression (37%) 3. Irregular migration (35%)
46-55-year-olds	1. Continued Russian aggression (46%) =2. Cyber-attacks from other countries (40%) =2. The actions of US President Donald Trump (40%)
56-65-year-olds	1. Continued Russian aggression (55%) 2. Cyber-attacks from other countries (46%) 3. Irregular migration (38%)
Over-66s	1. Continued Russian aggression (60%) 2. Cyber-attacks from other countries (55%) 3. The rise of China as a world power (35%)

However, there is far more consensus across voter groups, and while the extent to which they view each as a top challenge varies, 2024 Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat and Green voters, all have continued Russian aggression and cyber-attacks from other countries as two of their three most widely cited top challenges. Among 2024 Labour, Liberal Democrat and Green voters, the other challenge in their top three is the actions of United States President Donald Trump, while for 2024 Conservative voters it is irregular migration. It is only 2024 Reform UK voters who particularly stand out from the others, with irregular migration (61%) the most widely viewed as a top challenge, followed by cyber-attacks from other countries (42%) and terrorism (40%).

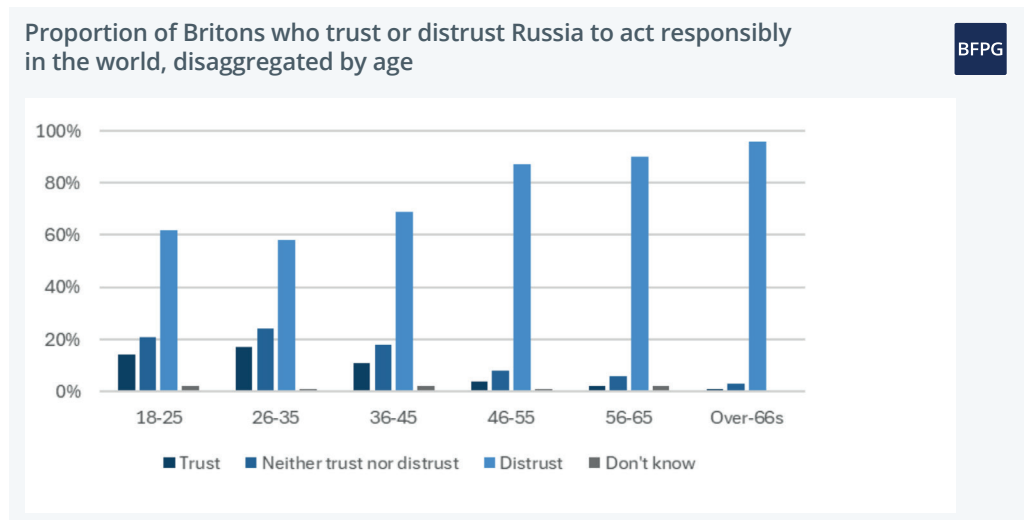
Russia and the Invasion of Ukraine

Britons remain concerned about the threat posed by Russia, with continued Russian aggression widely seen by Britons as the top threat facing the UK. Despite these concerns, Britons' attention towards, and bandwidth for addressing, Russia's invasion of Ukraine is starting to wane, with supporting Ukraine not widely seen as a top priority for the Government, and Britons increasingly disenchanted with the Government's support for Ukraine.



As attention and bandwidth on Ukraine dwindles, distrust in Russia is also falling, albeit from a very high base. The proportion of Britons who distrust Russia has fallen from 91% in 2022 to 86% in 2023, then to 83% in 2024 and now sits at 78%. Meanwhile, 13% of Britons neither trust nor distrust it, 8% trust it and 1% of Britons 'don't know'.

When it comes to Russia and Ukraine, there are sharp generational divides in perspectives, with interest in, and concern about, Ukraine significantly higher among older than younger Britons. Older Britons are more often distrustful of Russia than younger Britons, with 96% of over-66s and 90% of 56-65-year-olds distrusting Russia, compared to just 62% of 18-25-year-olds and 58% of 26-35-year-olds. In turn, younger Britons show lower levels of concern about Russia, and while 60% of over-66s view continued Russian aggression as a top threat to the UK, just 25% of 18-25-year-olds view it as such. This then leads to lower levels of concern and attention for Ukraine, and, while 46% of over-66s believe supporting Ukraine should be a top priority for the UK, only 17% of 18-25-year-olds and 14% of 26-35-year-olds (14%) believe this.



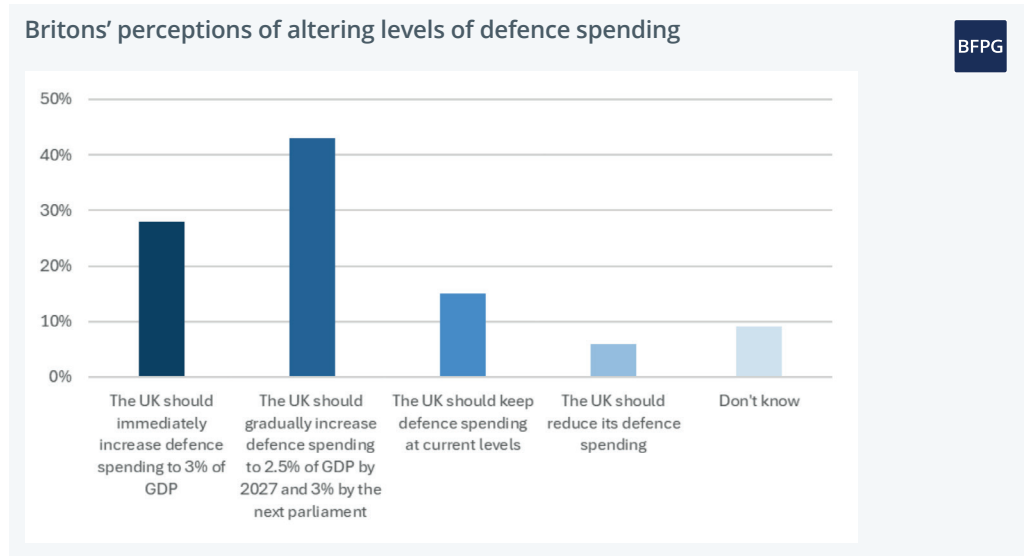
National Security

These generational disparities seem to be driven in part by older Britons' first-hand experiences of the Cold War, which influence their baseline views of Russia, as well as a frustration among younger Britons that the Ukraine war is seen as having received disproportionate attention relative to other conflicts around the world. As the war in Ukraine rages on, it will be critical for the Government to engage with and speak to younger Britons to help bridge the divide between elite and youth opinion on the threats posed by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Defence Spending

With war still raging in Ukraine, the United States retrenching, and the rise of grey-zone warfare, the UK is facing renewed pressure to increase defence spending, from both domestic military leaders and from international allies, not least the United States. In 2024, the UK spent 2.3% of GDP on defence spending and it has now committed to spending 2.5% of GDP on defence by 2027, with an "ambition" to spend 3% of GDP on defence in the next parliament. These commitments were supplemented by a pledge at the NATO Summit to spend 5% of GDP on defence by 2035, with 3.5% of GDP going on core defence spending and 1.5% of GDP being spent on defence related industries.¹³

At a top-line level, Britons broadly accept the need to increase defence spending, with the majority (71%) of Britons believing defence spending should be increased to 3% of GDP either now or over the next few years. However, Britons believe this should be a gradual process, with 43% of Britons believing that the UK should gradually increase defence spending to 2.5% of GDP by 2027 and to 3% of GDP by the next parliament, while 28% of Britons believe defence spending should be increased to 3% of GDP immediately. Only 15% of Britons believe defence spending should remain at current levels, while 6% believe it should be reduced. A further 9% of Britons 'don't know'.



Men (78%) much more frequently than women (65%) believe that the UK should increase defence spending to 3% of GDP either now or by the end of the next parliament, as do those in higher (ABC1) socioeconomic grades (76%) relative to those in lower (C2DE) socioeconomic grades (65%). Across voter groups, 2024 Conservative voters (80%) most frequently believe the UK should increase defence spending to 3% of GDP either now or in the next few years, while 2024 Green voters (59%) least frequently believe this.

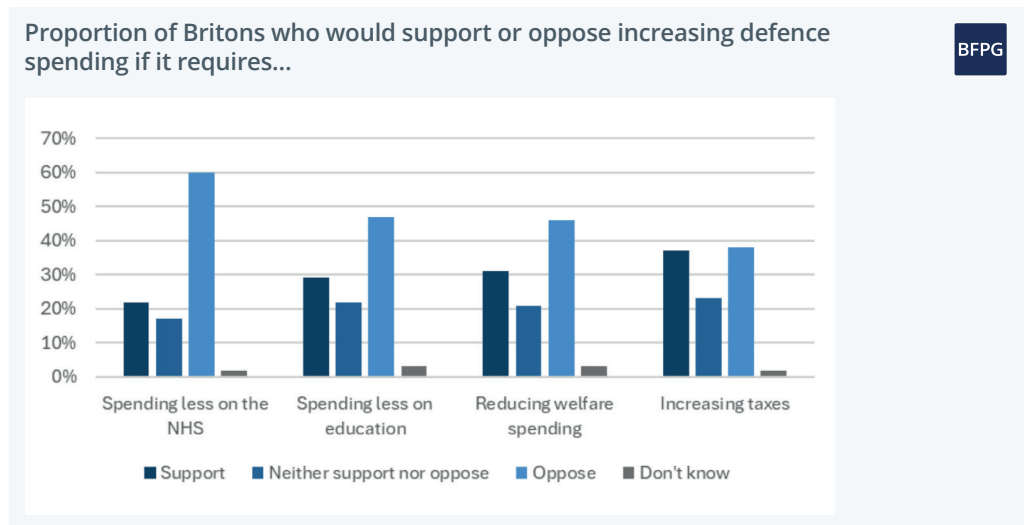
¹³ NATO. (2024, June). Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014-2024). Retrieved from: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_226465.htm
Whannel, K., & Francis, S. (2025, June). UK vows to spend 5% of GDP on national security by 2035. *BBC News*. Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c07dk90d94vo>

Defence Spending Trade-Offs

However, while at a top-line level Britons support increasing UK defence spending, they are unwilling to accept any of the potential trade-offs polled that might be required in order to fund an increase in defence spending. Britons are most opposed to increasing defence spending if it requires reducing spending on the NHS, with 60% of Britons opposed to this, and just 22% of Britons supporting increasing defence spending in this scenario.

Britons also more often oppose (47%) than support (29%) increasing defence spending if it requires reducing spending on education. The same is true when it comes to reducing welfare spending, with Britons more often opposing (46%) than supporting (31%) increasing defence spending in this scenario.

The trade-off that Britons are most willing to accept is increasing taxes to fund an increase in defence spending, but it is still the case that a higher proportion of Britons oppose (38%) than support (37%) this.



This leaves the Government in a very difficult position when it comes to funding this increase in defence spending and highlights the need for a ‘national conversation’ around defence and national security spending to build public consent, if the Government is to fulfil its new defence spending commitments.

This challenge is further compounded by variations in willingness to shoulder the costs of defence spending. Women, for example, are consistently more often opposed to increasing defence spending in the scenarios posed than men, in line with their higher sense of uncertainty about defence spending. Indeed, 65% of women would oppose increasing defence spending if it required spending less on the NHS, compared to 54% of men. A majority of women would also oppose increasing defence spending if it required reducing spending on welfare (51%) or education (51%).

Politically, 2024 Conservative and Reform UK voters are the voter groups who most frequently support increasing defence spending in the scenarios polled, while 2024 Liberal Democrat and Green voters do so the least. 2024 Labour voters sit somewhere in the middle. For example, 39% of 2024 Reform UK and 37% of 2024 Conservative voters would support increasing defence spending if it required reducing spending on education, compared to 30% of 2024 Labour voters, 24% of 2024 Liberal Democrat voters and 20% of 2024 Green voters. Indeed, the level of opposition to increasing defence spending among 2024 Green voters in the scenarios posed is particularly striking - 78% would oppose increasing defence spending if it required reducing spending on the NHS and 56% would oppose it if it meant reducing spending on welfare.

National Security

The exception to this trend is when it comes to increasing taxes to fund an increase in defence spending, in which 2024 Reform UK voters go from consistently among the most supportive to among the least supportive, with 2024 Conservative (42%), Labour (41%) and Liberal Democrat (41%) voters more often supporting increasing defence spending in this scenario than 2024 Reform UK voters (35%). This is no doubt driven by Reform UK voters' wider opposition to high levels of taxation.

The kinds of trade-offs Britons are willing to make to increase defence spending are also heavily contingent on their personal interests. Across age groups, Britons aged 36-45 and 46-55 are consistently the least willing to accept trade-offs to fund an increase in defence spending, reflective of their lower levels of belief that defence spending needs to be increased in the first place. However, whether it is younger or older Britons who are most supportive of increased spending in a given trade-off, depends on their relative self interest. As such, 26-35-year-olds (31%) and 18-25-year-olds (29%) more often than over-66s (19%) support increasing defence spending even if it requires spending less on the NHS. Meanwhile, 49% of over-66s support increasing defence spending if it requires increasing taxes, compared to 39% of 26-35-year-olds and 30% of 18-25-year-olds. This disparity is driven by the relative impact each trade-off would have on each group - as a general rule, older Britons tend to be more reliant on the NHS and younger Britons are more likely to be impacted by tax increases.

The UK-China Relationship

Over the last year, the UK has sought to develop a more constructive relationship with China, with high-level visits from Ministers designed to create opportunities for closer collaboration. However, while Britons are less distrustful of China than they once were, they remain very cautious about collaboration with the nation and about the potential security risks it may pose. As a result, Britons believe the UK should prioritise its own national security when it comes to engaging with China and are very cautious of any engagement that might undermine that.

Levels of (Dis)Trust

Britons remain distrustful of China, with 62% of Britons distrusting China to act responsibly in the world, while just 15% of Britons trust it. A further 22% of Britons neither trust nor distrust it and 2% don't know.

However, while levels of distrust in China are high, they have fallen nine percentage points over the last year, from 71% in 2024 to 62% in 2025. This improvement in perceptions of China likely reflects distance from the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as high-profile Government efforts to improve relations with China in recent months, which may have helped convince Britons of the potential for more constructive relations.

Older Britons remain very distrustful of China, with 81% of over-66s distrusting China to act responsibly in the world, and only 2% trusting China. However, China's reputation among younger Britons is substantially better, with only 44% of 26-35-year-olds and 41% of 18-25-year-olds distrusting China. There are therefore sharp generational divides in views on China, likely reflecting both older Britons' higher sense of insecurity in the world, and younger Britons' greater levels of exposure to China.

Distrust in China is also particularly high among Leave voters (72%), 2024 Conservative voters (71%) and residents in Yorkshire and Humberside (71%).

Proximity to China

Since the election of President Trump, US-China relations have become increasingly turbulent, with the on-and-off again prospect of a major trade war looming between these two nations. In light of this, and Britons' wider concerns about President Trump, this year we asked Britons whether they thought the UK should move closer to, or further away from, China in response to recent actions by President Trump.

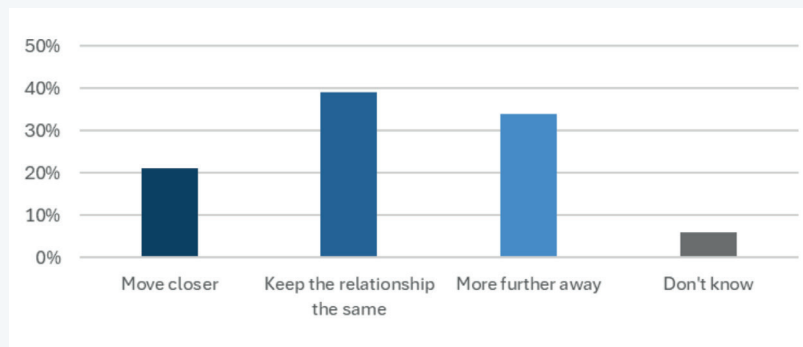
We found that a plurality of Britons (39%) believe that in response to the actions of United States President Donald Trump, the UK should maintain the same level of relationship with China that it currently has. However, despite concern about President Trump's actions, a higher proportion of Britons believe the UK should move further away from China (34%) than move closer to it (21%) in response to President Trump's actions, making clear where Britons' views would likely lie if US-China relations were to deteriorate.

Women (36%) more often than men (32%) believe that the UK should move further away from China as a result of President Trump's actions, and in turn, men (25%) more often than women (18%) believe the UK should move closer to China. This likely reflects women's higher levels of concern about President Trump's actions and the potential consequences therefore of antagonising President Trump by moving closer to China, as well as higher levels of scepticism towards China among women.

The UK-China Relationship

Proportion of Britons who believe that, in response to the actions of President Trump, the UK should move closer to, or further away from, China in its foreign and security policy

BFPG



Meanwhile, while the largest proportion of over-66s (49%), 56-65-year-olds (38%), 46-55-year-olds (33%) and 36-45-year-olds (33%) believe that the UK should move further away from China, younger Britons more often believe the UK should move closer rather than further away from China in response to President Trump's actions. Among 26-35-year-olds, 39% believe the UK should move closer to China, compared to 21% who believe the UK should move further away. Similarly, 35% of 18-25-year-olds believe the UK should move closer to China, compared to 27% who believe the UK should move further away. Notably, younger Britons are also more inclined than older Britons to believe the UK should move closer to the United States and the EU and this difference in views across generations therefore likely reflects a variety of factors, including older Britons' feelings of insecurity and nervousness in the world and hesitancy about international partnerships, as well as younger Britons' higher levels of trust in China and support for cooperation with China.

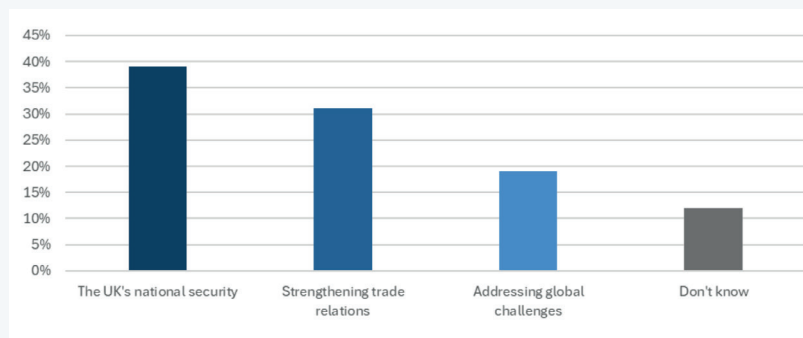
Regionally, support for moving further away from China is highest in Yorkshire and Humberside (41%), while support for moving closer is highest in Wales (28%) and London (28%). Support for moving further away from China is also particularly high among 2024 Reform UK (49%) and Conservative (46%) voters and lowest among 2024 Labour voters (25%).

The UK-China Relationship

When the UK does engage with China, a plurality of Britons believe the UK's top priority should be protecting the UK's national security (39%). This is followed by strengthening trade relations (31%) and then by addressing global challenges such as climate change (19%). A further 12% of Britons are unsure what the UK's approach should be.

Britons' perceptions of what the UK's top priority should be in its relationship with China

BFPG



The UK-China Relationship

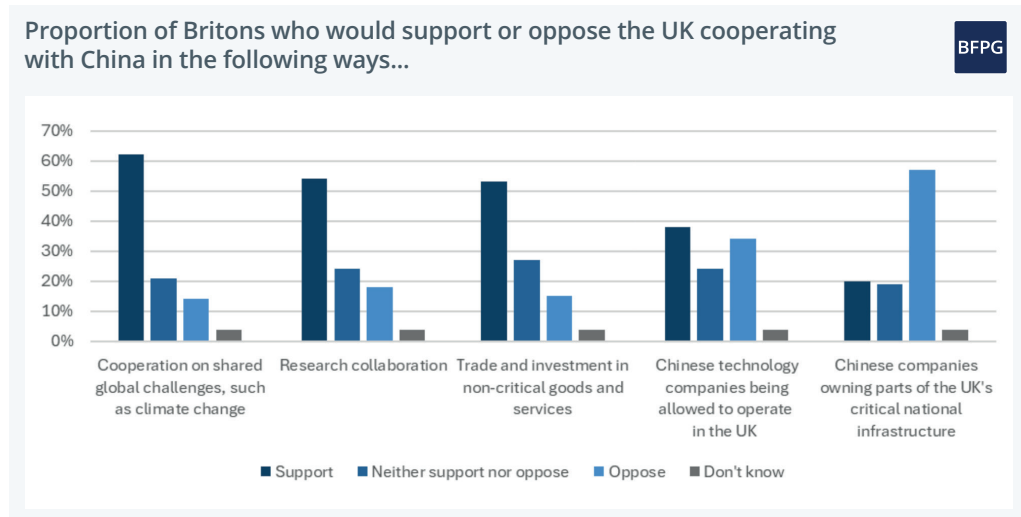
When asked what the UK's top priority should be when engaging with the United States and the EU, Britons are clear that strengthening trade relations should be the top priority. More broadly too, Britons tend to take an economics-first approach to UK foreign policy. The focus on national security when it comes to China is therefore striking and reflects the fact that while Britons are less distrustful of China than they were a few years ago, they remain cautious of the risks that China could pose.

The higher degree of distrust and scepticism towards China held by older Britons shines through here, with the majority of over-66s (61%) and 56-65-year-olds (52%) believing the UK should prioritise national security when it comes to engaging with China. Meanwhile, just 22% of 26-35-year-olds and 17% of 18-25-year-olds believe it should be the priority. Instead, both 18-25-year-olds (49%) and 26-35-year-olds (45%) most often believe that the top priority should be strengthening trade relations. Indeed, 18-25-year-olds more often believe the priority should be addressing global challenges such as climate change (26%) than believe that the priority should be UK national security (17%).

The largest proportion of 2024 Conservative (51%), Reform UK (43%) and Liberal Democrat (41%) voters all believe UK national security should be the top priority, while the largest proportion of 2024 Labour voters believe trade agreements should be the top priority (37%) and the largest proportion of 2024 Green voters believe the UK should prioritise addressing global challenges (39%).

Cooperation with China

Despite Britons viewing security and trade agreements with China as more important than addressing global issues, when asked about five different forms of potential cooperation with China, Britons are most comfortable with cooperation on shared global challenges such as climate change, which is endorsed by 62% of Britons. A further 21% of Britons neither support nor oppose it, while only 14% of Britons oppose it. This likely reflects the fact that engagement around global issues is seen as less controversial or divisive than other potential forms of cooperation but is also seen as less of a priority.



A majority of Britons also support research collaboration (54%) and trade and investment with China in non-critical goods and services (e.g. furniture or office supplies) (53%). Just 18% and 15% of Britons oppose each of these forms of cooperation respectively.

It is the forms of cooperation that have a clear potential security component which Britons are more uncomfortable with. As such, only a slightly higher proportion of Britons support

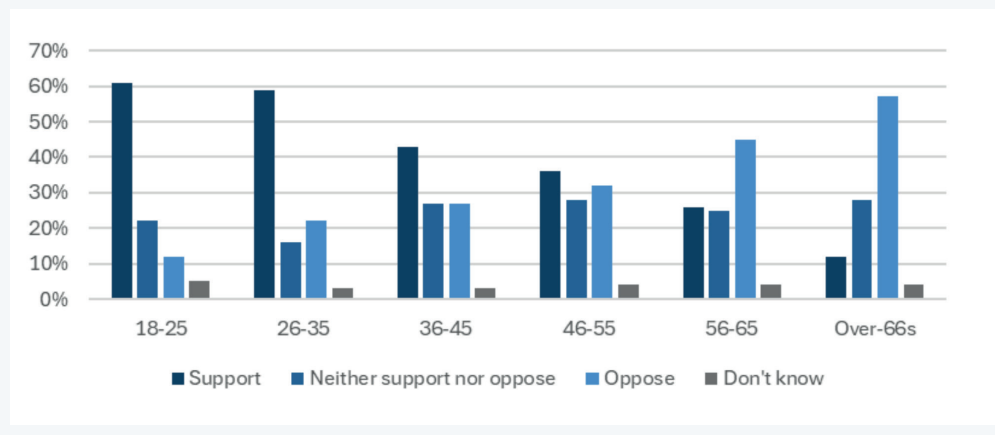
The UK-China Relationship

(38%) rather than oppose (34%) Chinese technology companies being allowed to operate in the UK. Meanwhile, Britons are very averse to Chinese companies owning part of the UK's critical national infrastructure (e.g. nuclear plants or steel works), and this is opposed (57%) by a substantially larger proportion of Britons than those who support it (20%).

In line with their higher levels of trust in China, younger Britons are consistently more supportive of all forms of cooperation proposed than older Britons. The sharpest of these disparities emerges when it comes to Chinese technology companies operating in the UK, which is supported by 61% of 18-25-year-olds and 59% of 26-35-year-olds but just 12% of over-66s. This is in large part driven by the different generations' views on China, but the sharpness in divide across generations in relation to technology companies specifically also likely reflects young people's greater exposure, and reliance upon, Chinese technology, not least TikTok.

Proportion of Britons who would support or oppose Chinese technology companies being allowed to cooperate in the UK, disaggregated by age

BFPG



Britons in higher (ABC1) socioeconomic grades are consistently more supportive of cooperation with China than those from lower (C2DE) socioeconomic grades. The sharpest of these disparities is in support for cooperation over shared global challenges, which is endorsed by 68% of those in higher (ABC1) socioeconomic grades and 56% of those in lower (C2DE) socioeconomic grades. Residents in London are also consistently particularly supportive of cooperation with China, including 67% who support cooperation on shared global challenges and 62% who support research collaboration.

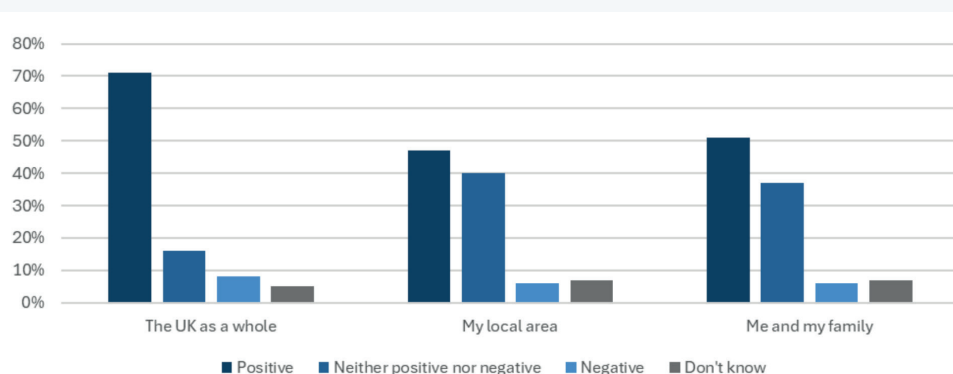
Politically, 2024 Labour and Green voters are consistently the most supportive of cooperation with China, while 2024 Conservative and Reform UK voters are the least. For example, while 66% of 2024 Green voters and 64% of 2024 Labour voters support research collaboration with China, just 46% of 2024 Conservative voters and 42% of 2024 Reform UK voters support this. Collaboration with China also produces sharp divides along EU referendum voting lines. For example, 42% of Remain voters support Chinese technology companies operating in the UK, compared to 28% of Leave voters.

Free Trade

With President Trump imposing sweeping tariffs on a broad array of nations, the free trade system has found itself increasingly under threat over the last few months. But Britons remain convinced of the benefits of free trade, with 71% of Britons believing that free trade has a positive effect on the UK as a whole. Indeed, just 8% of Britons believe that free trade agreements have a negative impact on the UK. A further 16% believe they have neither a positive nor negative effect and 5% don't know.

Proportion of Britons who believe free trade agreements have a positive or negative impact on the following...

BFPG



A majority of Britons also believe that free trade agreements have a positive impact on them and their families (51%), with only 6% of Britons believing they have a negative impact. Meanwhile, a plurality (47%) of Britons believe trade agreements have a positive impact on their local area, with only 6% of Britons believing they have a negative impact.

There are three demographics who consistently more often perceive benefits to free trade than their counterparts - men, those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds and Remain voters. However, the areas where these demographic divides are sharpest vary. For men and women, the sharpest divide emerges in perceptions of the impact of free trade agreements on the UK as a whole, with 75% of men believing this to be positive, compared to 67% of women. Meanwhile, across socioeconomic groups and 2016 Referendum vote it emerges around the impact on their local area, with 52% of those in higher (ABC1) socioeconomic grades and 51% of Remain voters believing that free trade agreements have a positive impact on the local area, compared to 41% of those in lower (C2DE) socioeconomic grades and 39% of those who voted Leave.

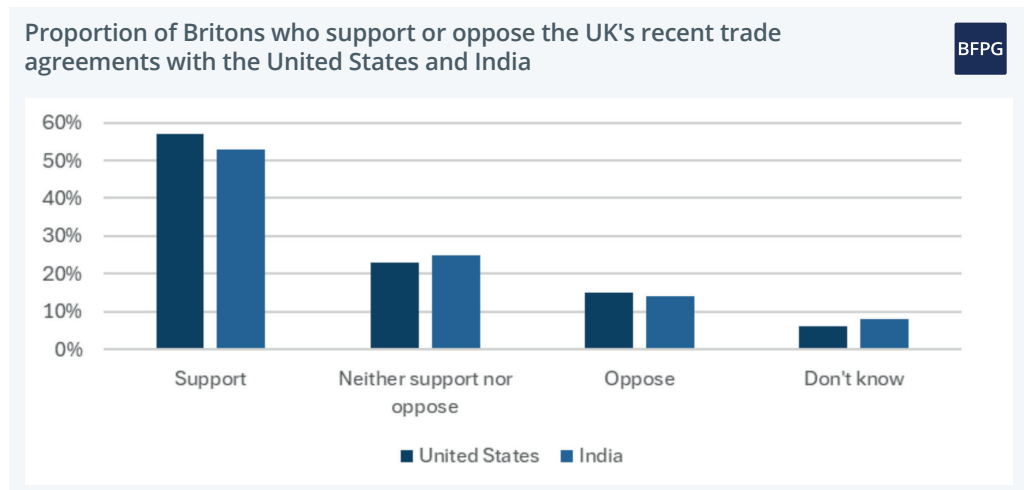
There are also very sharp divisions in perceptions of free trade across age groups. 26-35-year-olds are the most often convinced of the benefits of free trade, while 56-65-year-olds are consistently the least. However, the sharpness of the divide varies extensively across areas polled. For example, while there is a 12 percentage point difference between the proportion of 26-35-year-olds (77%) and the proportion of 56-65-year-olds (65%) who believe free trade agreements have a positive impact on the UK as a whole, there is a 30 percentage point gap between the proportion of 26-35-year-olds (65%) and the proportion of 56-65-year-olds (35%) who believe that it has had a positive impact on them and their families. Furthermore, while, at 75%, over-66s are some of the most frequent believers in the positive impact of free trade on the UK as a whole, at 40% and 35% respectively they are some of the least frequent believers in the benefits of free trade when it comes to them and their families or their local area.

Free Trade

This trend of some demographics being very convinced of the benefits to the UK as a whole but not the local or personal benefits can also be seen across different geographies and political persuasions. For example, while 69% of residents in Scotland believe it has a positive effect on the UK as a whole, only 39% believe it has a positive impact on their local area (39%) or on them and their families (37%). Similarly, 2024 Conservative voters are among the most frequent believers in the positive impacts of free trade agreements for the UK as a whole (74%) but much less convinced than other voter groups on the positive effects for them and their families (49%) or for their local area (46%). This speaks to both the realities of the unequal manner in which the effects of free trade are distributed and Britons' perceptions of this.

The UK's New Trade Agreements

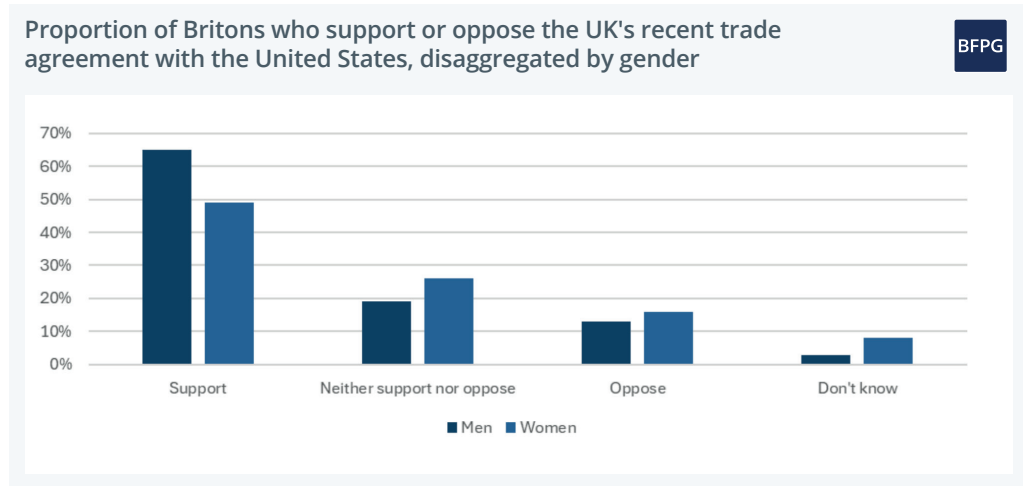
As well as the UK-EU Summit, which is widely endorsed, the UK has also signed two major new trade agreements in recent months, one with India and one with the United States. Britons widely endorse both new trade agreements, with the majority of Britons supporting both the UK-US trade deal (57%) and the UK-India trade deal (53%). In both cases only a minority of Britons oppose the deals, at 15% and 14% respectively.



While support for the UK-US trade deal is marginally higher than support for the UK-India trade deal, it is striking how similar levels of support are, given that BFPG's survey last year found that Britons more often distrusted (37%) than trusted (21%) India to act responsibly in the world, and that only 37% of Britons believed the UK should trade more with India - only slightly more than the 31% who believed the UK should trade less with India.¹⁴ This likely reflects how the idea of closer trade relations with certain nations may seem worse to Britons than the practicalities of it, as well as widespread endorsement of this particular agreement, which managed to avoid some of the more politically complicated concerns around a potential UK-India trade agreement.

The gender disparity in perceptions of these free trade agreements is striking, especially given gender differences tend to be less sharp than disparities across other demographic groups. There is a 16 percentage point disparity between the proportion of men (65%) and the proportion of women (49%) who support the UK-US trade agreement and a 12 percentage point difference between the proportion of men (59%) and women (47%) who support the UK-India trade agreement. This is likely, in part, the result of women's higher levels of scepticism about the benefits of trade agreements more broadly - for example, 75% of men believe free trade agreements benefit the UK as a whole, compared to 67% of women. The sharpness of the disparity in support for the UK-US trade agreement also likely reflects women's higher levels of discomfort with the United States, demonstrated throughout this research.

¹⁴ Aspinall, E., & Keogh, E. (2024, September). *Ibid.*



Across other demographics there is less consistency in views across the two trade agreements. For example, while Remain voters (61%) far more frequently than Leave voters (48%) support the UK-India trade deal, Leave voters (61%) more often than Remain voters (56%) support the UK-US trade deal. This likely reflects the politicisation of the UK-US trade deal during the 2016 Brexit referendum, in which a UK-US trade agreement was presented as a potential 'Brexit dividend'. The prominence of the debate at the time has left conversations about trade between the UK and the United States deeply politicised and widely associated with views about Brexit.

Meanwhile, when it comes to the UK-India trade deal, 2024 Labour voters (63%) are the most supportive, followed by 2024 Conservative (56%), Liberal Democrat (50%) and Green (46%) voters, with 2024 Reform UK voters (42%), the least supportive. In contrast, when it comes to the UK-US trade deal, 2024 Conservative (67%) and Reform UK (66%) voters are the most supportive, followed by 2024 Labour (59%) and Liberal Democrat (47%) voters, and with 2024 Green voters (35%) notably less supportive than other voter groups. This very low level of support among 2024 Green voters reflects their wider scepticism of both free trade and of the United States, while for 2024 Reform UK voters, their wider scepticism of free trade seems to be offset when it comes to a UK-US trade deal by their desire to move closer to the United States.

Geographically, the relatively low levels of support for both the UK-US (48%) and the UK-India (47%) trade deals among residents in Scotland is striking, likely reflective of the fact they less often believe there are personal or local benefits of free trade than residents in other regions do. Meanwhile, support for the UK-India trade deal is highest in the North East (69%) and support for a UK-US deal is particularly high in Northern Ireland (68%).

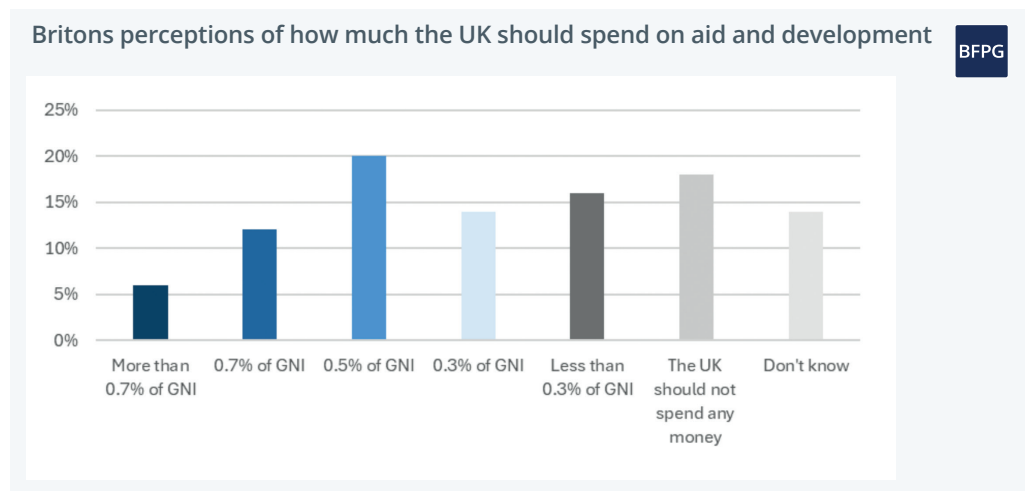
International Development

In February 2025, the UK Government announced plans to gradually reduce spending on international aid and development from 0.5% of Gross National Income (GNI) to 0.3% of GNI in 2027, in order to fund an increase in defence spending to 2.5% of GDP by 2027 and to meet the challenges posed by a more volatile geopolitical environment. This follows cuts made during the Covid-19 pandemic which saw the UK aid and development budget fall from 0.7% of GNI to 0.5% of GNI, and came despite the Government's manifesto commitment to restore spending to 0.7% of GNI "as soon as fiscal circumstances allow".

This approach is widely endorsed, and while there are a sizable proportion of Britons who believe the UK should spend more than its new commitment of 0.3% of GNI on aid and international development, there is very little appetite for returning to spending 0.7% of GNI. And ultimately, with Britons keen to increase defence spending but opposed to domestic spending cuts to fund it, and with low levels of support for international development, it is not hard to see why aid and international development spending has become an easy target for Government.

International Development and Aid Spending

There is a wide spectrum of views on what the UK should spend on aid and international development - 6% of Britons believe the UK should spend 0.7% GNI, 12% that it should be 0.5% of GNI, 20% that it should be 0.3% of GNI, 14% that it should be less than 0.3%, and 18% that the UK should not spend any money on aid and international development. A further 14% of Britons don't know.



There are a wide range of ways to read this. If looking at whether Britons want to restore the UK's commitment to spending 0.7% of GNI on aid and international development, the answer is clearly no - only 18% of Britons believe the UK should be spending 0.7% of GNI or more on aid and international development.

However, it also shows that 38% of Britons believe that the UK should spend more than the 0.3% of GNI it is now targeting, compared to 14% who believe it should spend 0.3% of GNI and 34% who believe it should spend less than 0.3% of GNI. The proportion of Britons who believe the UK should spend more than 0.3% of GNI is therefore higher than the proportion of Britons who believe that the UK should spend less than 0.3% of GNI.

International Development

However, and with the firm caveat that last year's iteration of this question was framed differently in line with differences in government pledges at that time, so direct comparisons are not possible, but last year our research found that only 22% of Britons believed that the UK aid budget should be reduced further from the then commitment of 0.5%, substantially below the 34% of Britons who now believe the aid budget should be cut further from the already reduced target of 0.3% GNI. The challenge seems to be that by cutting the aid budget multiple times over the last few years, aid cuts have now been normalised and the value of the limited remaining budget is therefore increasingly questioned.

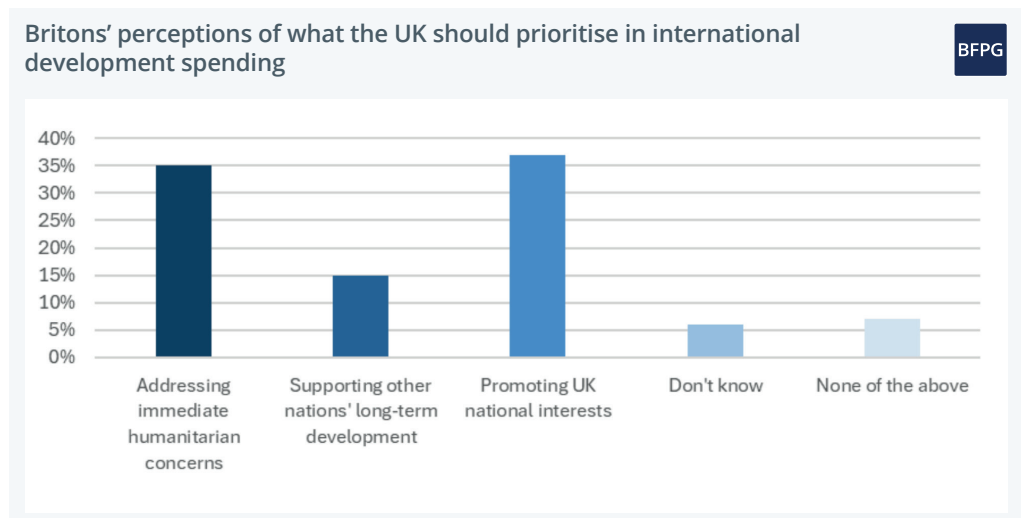
There are also very sharp demographic disparities in attitudes towards the aid budget. Younger Britons are far more supportive of higher levels of aid and international development spending than older Britons, with 56% of 18-25-year-olds and 52% of 26-35-year-olds believing the UK should spend more than 0.3% of GNI on aid and international development, compared to 37% of 36-45-year-olds, 31% of 46-55-year-olds, 29% of over-66s and 26% of 56-65-year-olds. Indeed, while only 12% of 18-25-year-olds believe that the UK should spend less than 0.3% of GNI on aid and international development, 49% of 56-65-year-olds and 46% of over-66s believe this.

The political divides are similarly sharp, with 2024 Green (55%), Labour (48%) and Liberal Democrat (46%) voters much more often believing that the UK should spend more than 0.3% of GNI on aid and international development than 2024 Conservative (30%) or Reform UK (23%) voters. Indeed, 61% of 2024 Reform UK voters believe that the UK should spend less than 0.3% of GNI on aid and international development, including 38% of 2024 Reform UK voters who believe that the UK should not spend any money on aid and international development.

Britons in higher (ABC1) socioeconomic grades (46%) more often believe the UK should spend more than 0.3% of GNI on aid and international development, than those in lower (C2DE) socioeconomic grades (29%). Meanwhile, residents in London (47%) are the most frequent believers that aid and international development spending should be increased to more than 0.3% of GNI, while residents in Yorkshire and Humberside (47%) most often believe the aid budget should be reduced to less than 0.3% of GNI.

International Development Priorities

Given the limited budget now available for international development, it is critical that the Government spends it as strategically and effectively as possible. However, Britons are divided over what they believe the UK should prioritise when it comes to spending money on aid and international development. At 37%, the largest proportion of Britons believe that the UK should prioritise promoting the UK's national interests such as trade and security, but this is followed



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closely by addressing immediate humanitarian concerns (e.g. disaster relief) which is supported by 35% of Britons. Just 15% of Britons believe the top priority should be supporting other nations' long-term development. A further 6% of Britons don't know and 7% believe it is none of the options provided.

The high proportion of Britons who prioritise promoting the UK's national interests is striking, especially given previous BFPG research has not seen such a significant focus on this, reflecting how difficult geopolitical and economic times are impacting how Britons think about aid and international development and what they believe the UK should derive from these kinds of investments. Meanwhile, the low level of prioritisation of long-term development is a challenge for the Government, which is firmly focused on building long-term sustainable and equitable partnerships.

While the overall proportion of Britons prioritising UK national interest and immediate humanitarian need are relatively similar, there is variation across demographics in which they believe should be prioritised. Among 2024 Reform UK voters, for example, 52% believe that the UK should prioritise promoting the UK's national interests, compared to 21% who believe the UK should prioritise addressing immediate humanitarian concerns. 2024 Conservative voters are similarly focused on UK national interest, with 42% believing this should be the top priority compared to 32% who believe addressing humanitarian concerns should be.

In contrast, 48% of 2024 Green voters believe that addressing immediate humanitarian concerns should be the top priority, while 20% believe it should be promoting the UK's national interests, the same proportion who believe it should be supporting long-term development. 2024 Labour voters find themselves torn primarily between UK national interests (38%) and immediate humanitarian concerns (38%). Meanwhile, 2024 Liberal Democrat voters are the voter group most divided across all three - addressing immediate humanitarian concerns (31%), promoting the UK's national interests (30%) and supporting other nations' long-term development (29%).

Men (41%) more often than women (34%) believe that national interest should be prioritised, and women in turn place greater emphasis on addressing immediate humanitarian concerns (39%) than men (30%). The largest proportion of over-66s (41%) prioritise addressing immediate humanitarian concerns, while the largest proportion of 18-25-year-olds (41%), 46-55-year-olds (41%), 26-35-year-olds (39%) and 36-45-year-olds (38%) prioritise UK national interest. Meanwhile, 56-65-year-olds are equally divided between prioritising humanitarian concerns (34%) and UK national interest (34%).

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.

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