

Opinium Political Polling

UK perceptions of the United States



Key findings

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Project details

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Introduction

This briefing document presents the latest findings from the Opinium / Observer polling series, examining UK public attitudes towards the United States amid heightened political and geopolitical uncertainty. It covers:

- Whether the United States is viewed as an ally or a threat, and how this compares with perceptions of other countries
- Differences in attitudes by 2024 past vote, highlighting partisan divides in views of the US
- How perceptions of the US have shifted over time, particularly across the Trump I, Biden, and Trump II presidencies
- UK views of Donald Trump, including perceptions of leadership, trust, and alignment with UK interests
- Public reaction to US military action in Venezuela, including views on legitimacy, motives, and how the UK government should respond

The findings provide insight into how UK public opinion towards the United States is evolving, and the extent to which recent events have reshaped perceptions of the US as a strategic partner.

Methodology

This study was conducted online by Opinium as part of the long-running Opinium/Observer polling series, amongst a nationally representative sample of 2,050 UK adults, between 7th and 9th January 2026.

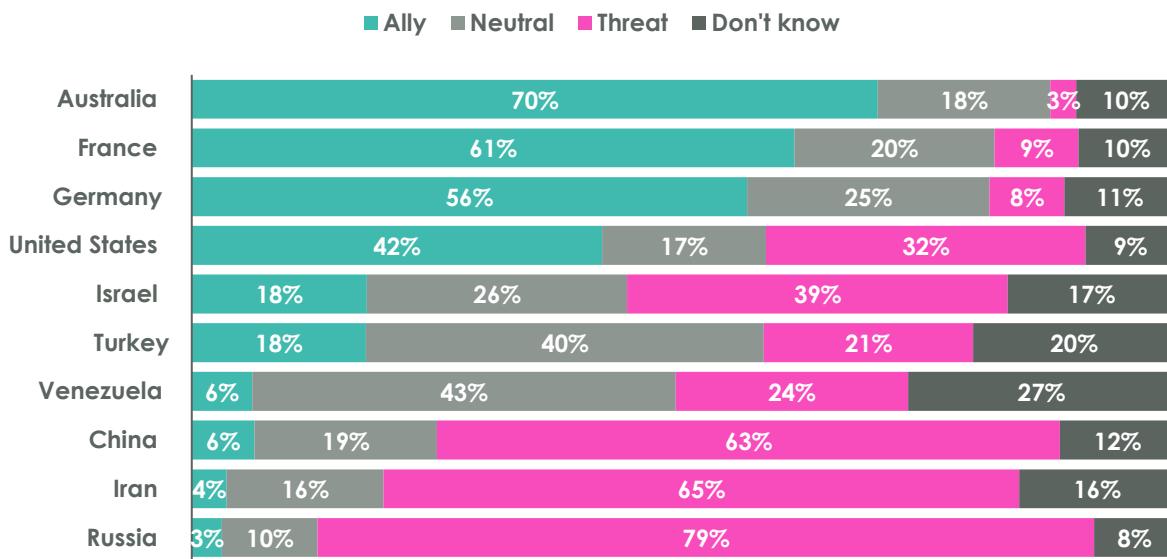
Is the USA an ally or threat?

Fewer than half think the US is an ally to Britain

The United States occupies a distinct middle position in UK perceptions: less positively viewed than close allies such as Australia, France and Germany, but far less negatively regarded than strategic adversaries such as China, Iran and Russia.

At 42% ally and 32% threat, the US stands out as the only major Western partner for which a substantial minority of the public view it as a threat.

Are these countries an ally or threat to the UK?



Venezuela is not widely perceived as a major threat to the UK, with the public most commonly viewing it as neutral. Threat perceptions are far lower than for states such as China, Iran and Russia.

Attitudes to the US by voter group

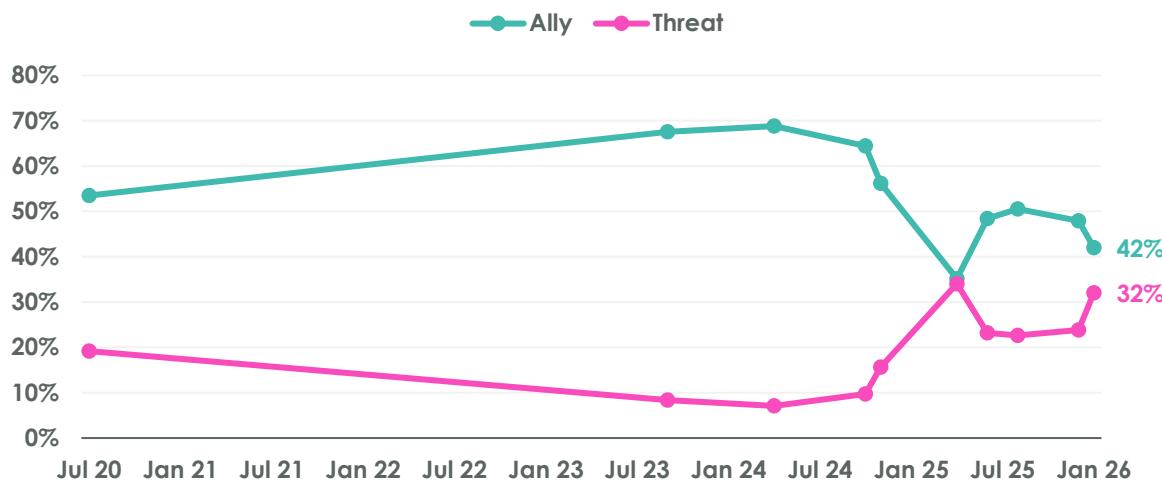
Perceptions of the US vary sharply by 2024 past vote. Conservative voters (55% ally vs 23% threat) and Reform UK voters (63% vs 17%) are most likely to see the US as an ally, while Labour (38% vs 41%) and Liberal Democrats (39% vs 35%) voters are more evenly split.

Green voters stand out as the most hostile to the US, with nearly two thirds viewing the US as a threat (25% ally vs 62% threat), indicating a strong ideological divide in attitudes towards the United States.

The UK's perception of the United States over time

UK views of the United States have shifted markedly in recent years, closely tracking changes in the US presidency. While the US has generally been seen more as an ally than a threat, this balance has shifted significantly since the start of Trump II.

Is the USA an ally or threat?



Trump I

During the first Trump presidency, the US was still regarded as an ally, but with some reservations.

- **Fieldwork 23-25 July 2020: 54% ally vs 19% threat**

The US retained its status as an ally, though perceptions were relatively muted compared to other Western allies. While perceptions were more positive than today, there were nonetheless strains in transatlantic relations during this period.

Biden

Joe Biden's presidency marked the recent high-water mark of pro-US sentiment in the UK, driven by close cooperation with NATO allies following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

- **Fieldwork 17-19 April 2024: 69% ally vs 7% threat (peak)**

At this point, the US was seen as a more significant ally than major European partners such as France, and second only to close Commonwealth allies such as Australia. This reflected perceptions of the US as a reliable and predictable partner on NATO, Ukraine, and climate change.

Trump II

Donald Trump's second presidency marks a significant shift in UK public attitudes towards the US.

- **Fieldwork 9-11 April 2025: 35% ally vs 34% threat (during the tariff dispute)**

The US is no longer seen as a default ally. While perceptions of the US as an ally partially recovered after the tariff dispute as tensions eased, they remain far below Biden-era levels and markedly below those seen during Trump I. A further dip followed the US military action in Venezuela and the capture of President Nicolás Maduro.

Perceptions of Donald Trump

A strong president, but not trusted

Effectiveness over empathy: While Donald Trump is widely seen as able to get things done (49%) and a strong leader (44%), far fewer believe he is trustworthy (17%) or that he represents what most Americans think (28%).

Divided views on intent: Opinion is closely split on whether Trump has the USA's best interests at heart (38% agree vs 39% disagree), suggesting uncertainty about his motivations rather than a settled negative judgment.

Weak affinity with the UK: Only 30% of the UK public see Trump as a friend of Britain's, compared with 42% who disagree, reinforcing the view that concerns are driven less by competence and more by trust and alignment with UK interests.

Reaction to US action in Venezuela

UK public react negatively to US actions

More opposition than support: The UK public is more likely to oppose than support the US military action in Venezuela (36% oppose vs 22% support), with a further 24% neither supporting nor opposing, indicating limited public enthusiasm.

US motives widely questioned: Just 17% believe the US under Donald Trump acted mainly for the right reasons, while 37% say it acted mainly for the wrong reasons. A further 26% see a mix of motives, suggesting widespread scepticism.

Strong doubts over legality: Only 9% believe the action would be legal under international law, compared with 41% who say it would be illegal. Nearly half either see the legality as disputed (21%) or are unsure (29%), pointing to widespread uncertainty around the legal position.

Preference for restraint from the UK government: The most common response favoured is for the UK government to avoid taking sides and call for restraint and a peaceful transition (32%). Only 7% support publicly backing the US and asserting the action was legal.

Clear partisan divides:

- Conservative and Reform UK voters are more open to supporting the removal of Nicolás Maduro, although without endorsing the legality of US action.
- Labour and Liberal Democrats voters are more likely to favour condemnation of the US's actions or calling for restraint.
- Green voters stand out as the most critical, with a majority favouring outright condemnation of the US's actions.