

UK and US attitudes: Two sides of the same coin?

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Introduction

The publication of this report coincides with the first anniversary of Donald Trump's election to the US Presidency. In that year, the tides of British politics have shifted markedly, with Reform UK now consistently topping polls for voting intention^[1] ^[2] and presenting a significant threat to the two-party system. The similarities between the rise of Reform in the UK and Trump in the US are numerous. On policy, they both combine a tough approach on immigration with a preference for smaller government and protectionism. They also represent an insurgency from the right against an established political order. These similarities are reflected by the close personal affinity between Trump and Reform UK's leader, Nigel Farage.

Given Reform is currently the most popular party in the UK, it is reasonable to ask whether attitudes in the UK are now aligning with those that that helped to deliver Trump his second term in office. In other words, could Farage's UK look like Trump's America?

To answer this question, we replicated questions on the NatCen Opinion Panel in the UK that had previously been asked as part of a study by the Pew Research Center^[3] and the American National Election Study^[4] in the United States. These topics include immigration, racial equality, the appropriate size and role of government, protectionism and free trade, crime, gender and the family.

In its first section, the report focuses on how attitudes in the two countries compare at the national level. We then address how these attitudes differ across the party divide within the two countries, first by focusing on Reform voters and Trump supporters and then by looking across political party support more widely to analyse political polarisation in the two countries. Given the increasing level of support for Reform UK in the polls, how do attitudes associated with voting for the party in the UK compare with the attitudes that were associated with supporting Trump in 2024? Is the close association between Trump and Farage matched by a similarity in outlook among their supporters? Or are the issues motivating people to back Reform distinct? The 2024 UK General Election made a significant dent in the

traditional two-party system, with 'challenger parties' such as Reform UK and the Green Party gaining a foothold. Given this changing political landscape, we discuss where the political dividing lines now lie, which issues are polarising and which are not, and how this compares with attitudes on the other side of the Atlantic.

UK and US: The Atlantic Divide

To answer the question of where UK attitudes are now, in comparison with those we find in the US, it is necessary to examine how these views compare across a range of policy issues. This section considers the following: immigration, gender and the family, crime and justice, the economy and role of government.

For each of these topics, the differing histories and current policy contexts of the two countries are likely to have an impact on whether views diverge or align. For example, a greater level of racial diversity in the US compared with the UK may lead to Americans holding more liberal opinions on this issue. In contrast, we may expect the greater role of religion in the US to result in less liberal attitudes than in the UK on issues to do with gender and the family. On the other hand, the popularity of Reform in the polls may indicate that attitudes in both countries are now aligned more closely. But which of these expectations are realised? Is the UK more socially liberal on some topics and less so on others, or is the UK now more or less in the same place as the US in its public attitudes? This section aims to answer these questions by taking each topic in turn, starting with immigration, race, and national history.

Immigration, race and national history

Immigration and race

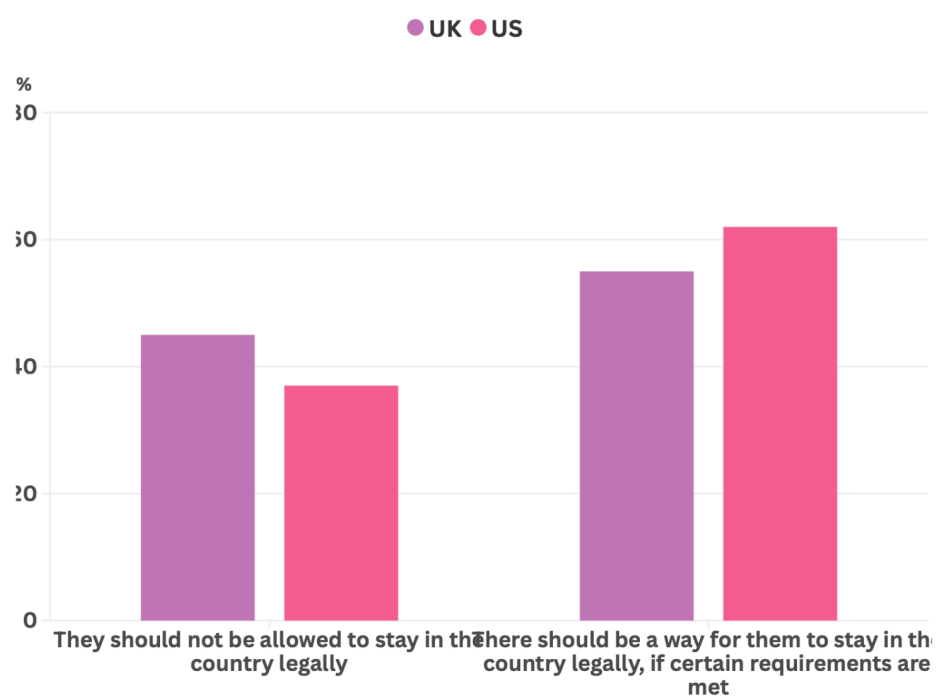
The US and UK are countries with different histories when it comes to immigration and diversity. Sometimes referred to as a ‘Nation of Immigrants’^[5], the US has a long history of immigrants from across the world making it their home. In contrast, significant levels of inward migration into the UK have only occurred since the 1960s, and it is more recently, from the start of the 21st century, that levels of net immigration have accelerated markedly.^[6] Increases in both legal and illegal immigration into the UK have had a great impact on UK politics in the last decade, not least with respect to Brexit and, more recently, increased support for Reform. Despite this, the US

remains significantly more ethnically diverse than the UK, with those from a non-Hispanic White background making up just 57% of the population^[7]. This compares with nearly three-quarters (74%) of those living in England and Wales who identify as being from a White English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British background^[8].

Given these differing historical contexts, with America’s national story being tied to immigration and the US having a greater level of ethnic diversity, we may expect to find slightly more liberal attitudes on these issues in the US compared with the UK. Indeed, this expectation is largely borne out by the data. People in the UK generally take a tougher line on how the government should deal with immigrants living in the country without permission. They are also less likely than Americans to say that openness to people from other countries is an essential part of the country’s identity.

Taking immigration first, as shown in Figure 1, people in the UK (45%) are more likely than those in the US (37%) to believe that immigrants living in the country without permission ‘should not be allowed to stay in the country legally’, rather than that ‘there should be a way for them to stay legally, if certain requirements are met’.

Figure 1 – Attitudes towards immigrants living in the country without permission (UK and US)



Source - UK data: NatCen Opinion Panel, fieldwork dates 26th June – 27th July 2025; US data: Pew American Trends Panel, fieldwork dates 8th – 14th April 2024.

Table 1 provides a further breakdown by how views differ between the UK and US on what should happen to illegal or undocumented migrants – whether there should be a legal effort to deport them or if they should be given a path to citizenship.

Table 1 - Attitudes towards the handling of immigrants living in the UK/US without permission

	UK	US
Should not be allowed to stay in country legally and should be a national law enforcement effort to deport	42%	33%
Should not be allowed to stay in country legally but should not be a national law enforcement effort to deport	3%	4%
Should be way for them to stay in the country legally and be eligible to apply for [UK/US] citizenship	22%	37%
Should be way for them to stay in the country legally and be eligible to apply for permanent residency, but not [UK/US] citizenship	32%	24%
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>2083</i>	<i>8709</i>

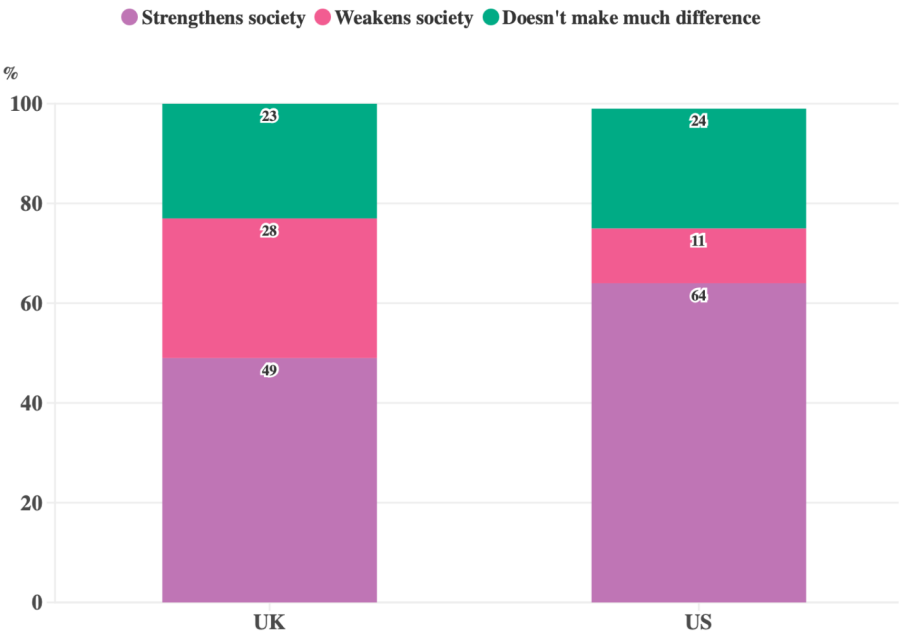
Source - UK data: NatCen Opinion Panel, fieldwork dates 26th June – 27th July 2025; US data: Pew American Trends Panel, fieldwork dates 8th – 14th April 2024.

In the UK the most popular response is that illegal immigrants should not be allowed to stay and there should be a national legal effort to deport them (42%). In contrast, Americans were more likely to have said that undocumented migrants should be allowed to stay and should be eligible for citizenship (37%), a stance which has little support in the UK (22%). In attitudes towards illegal immigration, there is evidence that people in the UK are currently more hardline than Americans were prior to the election of Trump last year.

Attitudes in the UK are not only slightly more hardline on the issue of illegal immigration, but there is also a smaller appetite to tie the UK’s national story to migration than there is in the US. A majority of those in the US (63%) felt that ‘America’s openness to people from all over the world is essential to who we are as a nation’, compared with just 49% people in the UK.

Similarly, on the merits or otherwise of diversity, we find the same relationship between a more progressive or liberal US compared with a more conservative UK. As shown in Figure 2, Americans are notably more likely (64%) than people in the UK (49%) to have said that diversity strengthens society. Those in the UK (49%) are also more likely (40%) to believe that ‘White people declining as a share of the population’ would be ‘somewhat’ or ‘very’ bad, compared with 22% of people in the US.

Figure 2 - In general, do you think the fact that [Britain's/the US] population is made up of people of many different races, ethnicities and religions strengthens [British/American] society, weakens it, or doesn't make much difference?



Source - UK data: NatCen Opinion Panel, fieldwork dates 26th June – 27th July 2025; US data: Pew American Trends Panel, fieldwork dates 8th – 14th April 2024.

Ahead of Trump’s election, Americans were, then, generally more favourable towards diversity in their society than those in the UK are now. However, it could be that these views are merely a consequence of the demographic differences between two countries. If people from ethnic minority groups hold more favourable attitudes on these questions than others, and there is a greater proportion of people from ethnic minority groups in the US than in the UK, it may be that more liberal views in the US are a consequence of this greater diversity.

To help determine whether this is the case, in Table 2 we provide a breakdown by ethnic background of responses to two of the questions on diversity and openness in both countries. As shown, the views of non-white British and non-white American people are broadly aligned and are more liberal than their compatriots. To that extent, the composition or demography of the country does play a role. However, White British people are less liberal on these questions than White Americans. White Americans (63%) are more likely than White British people (46%) to say that diversity strengthens society, and are more likely to say that openness to others is essential to national identity.

Table 2 - Attitudes towards societal openness and diversity by ethnic background

	White British	Non-White British	White Americans	Non-white Americans
The fact the [UK/US] population is made up of people of many different races, ethnicities and religions strengthens [British/American] society	46%	73%	63%	69%
The [UK/America]’s openness to people from all over the world is essential to who we are as a nation	46%	71%	60%	72%
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1893</i>	<i>144</i>	<i>5744</i>	<i>2528</i>
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>1810</i>	<i>217</i>	<i>6117</i>	<i>2008</i>

Source - UK data: NatGen Opinion Panel, fieldwork dates 26th June – 27th July 2025; US data: Pew American Trends Panel, fieldwork dates 8th – 14th April 2024.

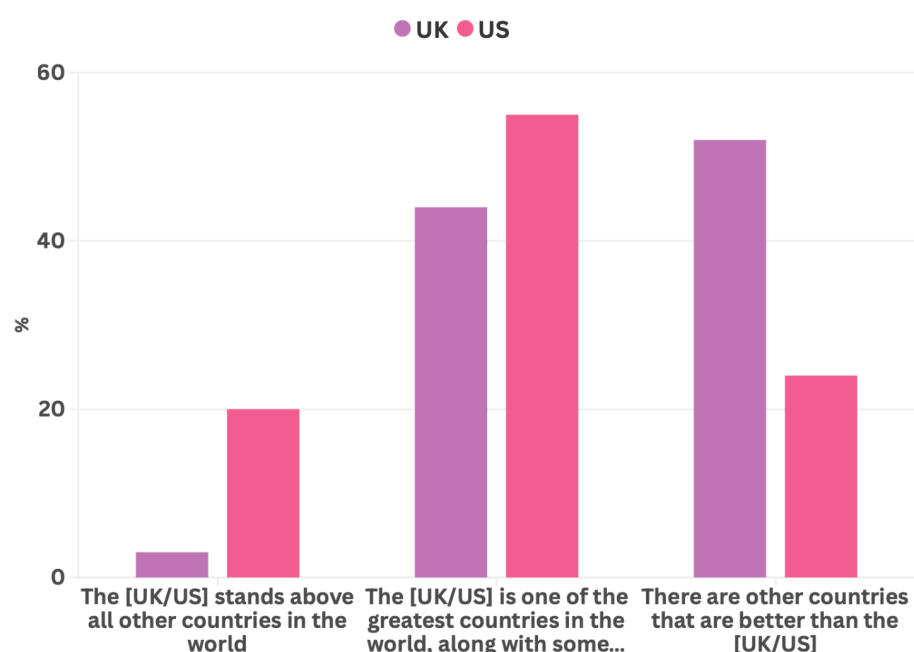
The more liberal attitudes on these questions of White Americans could reflect a higher likelihood of interacting with non-Whites in the US, resulting in positive intergroup contact^[9], but either way the differences in attitudes between the two countries cannot be explained by the composition of the countries alone.

Overall, then, attitudes diverge between the UK and US on this issue in the way that was initially expected. Attitudes in the UK are more hardline on immigration and are less sympathetic towards diversity than in the US. Given the difference in attitudes between White people in the UK and White Americans, these differences are perhaps less to do with the differing ethnic compositions of the two countries, and more to do with the roles immigration and multiculturalism play in their respective national stories. Either way, it would not be fair to say the UK reflects Trump's America on these issues, as UK views on these issues are less progressive than those found in the US.

National history / place in the world

Attitudes may be more liberal in the US on immigration and race, but is this relationship mirrored in views on national history and nationalist sentiment? Given the greater size of the US and influence on the world stage, we may expect Americans to be slightly more confident than those in the UK of their country's place in the world and to be more likely to think public discussions on past successes are important. These are expectations that are borne out by the data.

Figure 3 – Views on country compared with the rest of the world (UK and US)



Source - UK data: NatCen Opinion Panel, fieldwork dates 26th June – 27th July 2025; US data: Pew American Trends Panel, fieldwork dates 8th – 14th April 2024.

Figure 3 shows responses both in the UK and US to a question on how their countries compare with the rest of the world. In the UK, only three per cent of people think their country “stands above all others,” compared with 20% in the US. Meanwhile, over 2 in 5 (44%) of those from the UK think the country is “one of the greatest, along with some others,” whilst more than half (55%) of those in the US hold this view.

Meanwhile, a majority of people in both countries feel that it is “extremely” or “very” important to have public discussions about their country’s historical successes and failures. Views in the UK are the same for both successes and failures, with 60% of UK adults saying it is “extremely” or “very” important to have public discussions on them. Similarly in the US, around the same proportion feel it is as important to have discussions about their country’s successes (67%) as it is to have discussions about its failures (65%).

There is a larger difference, therefore, between how people in the UK and US view their country today compared with the importance they put on examining their respective countries’ pasts. Despite the difficulties both countries face, Americans were much more positive about their country’s

place in the world prior to Trump's election than UK adults are now. This may be down to the greater size and economic power of the US leading its citizens to have a different perspective on its place in the world. Whatever the cause, there is no doubt that levels of patriotic or jingoistic feeling is notably lower in the UK than across the Atlantic.

Gender and the family

People in the UK are, therefore, less confident of their country's place in the world than Americans and less progressive in their attitudes towards immigration and race. The UK is so far not looking too similar to Trump's America, and we would not expect questions to do with the family and gender to buck this trend. These issues, such as marriage, contraception and abortion, are ones that both divide 'small-c' conservatives from social liberals, and are strongly correlated with religious beliefs. A greater proportion of Americans than British people are religious believers and, in particular of the Christian faith^[10], around 6 in 10 (62%) US adults are Christian believers compared to 46% of those living in England and Wales^[11]. Given this greater level of religious belief in the US, we may expect a contrast on these questions between a more socially conservative US and a more socially liberal UK.

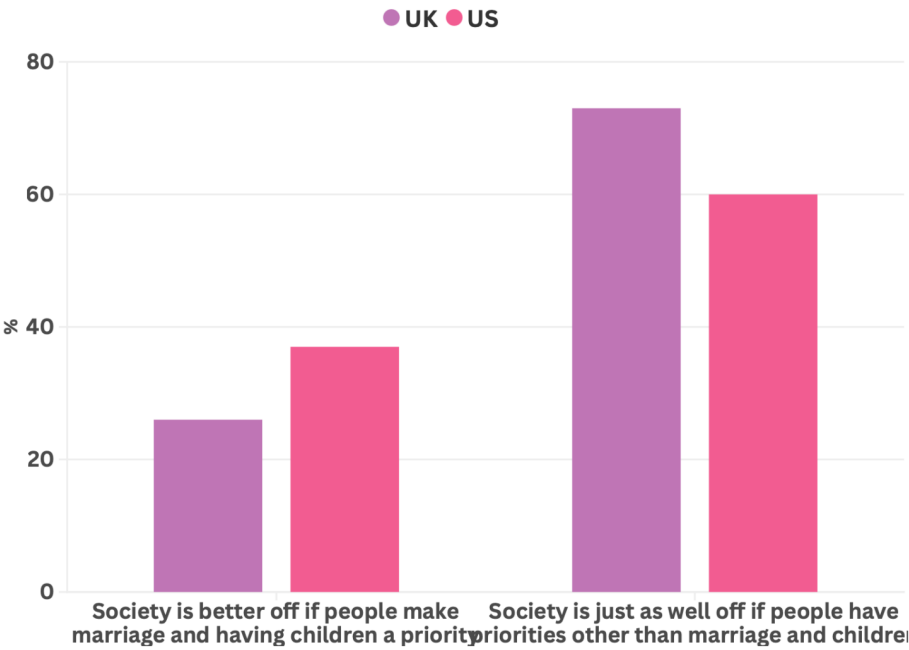
That being said, the question of transgender rights, however, may be something of an outlier. In the UK, debates on issues such as abortion, contraception or gay marriage are more 'settled' in the UK than transgender rights, which are a more live political issue. The debate generates a significant amount of polarisation, and people's views do not sit neatly across the right-left divide. There have also been significant developments in recent years in the form of both the Cass Review^[12] (which concluded there was insufficient evidence for the prescription of puberty blockers for young people) and a recent Supreme Court ruling on the status of gender recognition certificates and the Equality Act (ruling that a gender recognition certificate does not change a person's legal sex under the Act)^[13], which may have had an impact on public attitudes.

In general, the data bear out these expectations, and we find more socially liberal attitudes towards each of these issues in the UK, with the exception of transgender rights. People in the UK are more likely than those in the US to

think abortion should be legal, to have more favourable views on contraception, and to put less stress on the importance on getting married and having children. Religion clearly plays a role in influencing attitudes on each of these issues, and can help to explain the divergence in views. On transgender rights, however, views in the UK and US are more or less the same. We turn to each of these topics now in more detail.

Taking the subject of marriage and having children first, Americans are more likely than people in the UK to think it is important for society that people make this a priority. As shown in Figure 4, 73% of people in the UK think society ‘is just as well off if people have priorities other than marriage and children’, compared with 60% of people in the US.

Figure 4 – Attitudes on the importance of marriage and having children to society (UK and US)



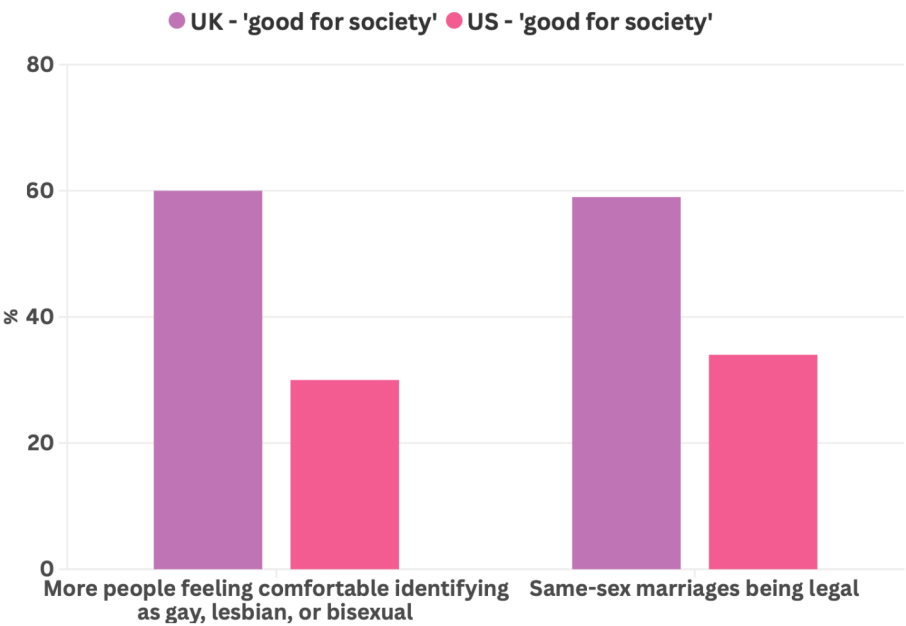
Source - UK data: NatCen Opinion Panel, fieldwork dates 26th June – 27th July 2025; US data: Pew American Trends Panel, fieldwork dates 8th – 14th April 2024.

On contraception and abortion, attitudes in the UK form a broad, liberal consensus. Around 9 in 10 (92%) think contraception being widely available is either ‘very’ or ‘somewhat’ good for society, compared with 78% who think so in America. Americans are also less likely than those living in the UK to think

abortion should be legal. A greater proportion of people in the UK (86%) than in the US (63%) feel that abortion should either be legal in ‘all’ or ‘most’ cases.

A greater degree of social liberalism in the UK is also evident in attitudes towards lesbian, gay and bisexual people. A majority of people in the UK (60%) feel that ‘more people feeling comfortable identifying as gay, lesbian or bisexual than in the past’ is good for society, compared with just 30% of Americans. As shown in Figure 5, there is a similar difference on the question of whether same sex marriages being legal is good or bad for society.

Figure 5 – Attitudes towards same-sex marriage and LGB identification (UK and US)



Source - UK data: NatCen Opinion Panel, fieldwork dates 26th June – 27th July 2025; US data: Pew American Trends Panel, fieldwork dates 8th – 14th April 2024.

On attitudes towards transgender and non-binary people, views in the two countries are much more aligned. Approximately two-thirds of Americans (66%) and those in the UK (65%) believe that ‘whether someone is a man or a woman is determined by the sex they were assigned at birth’, rather than that ‘someone can be a man or a woman even if that is different from the sex they were assigned at birth (34% US; 35% UK). Meanwhile, the same proportion of Americans and Britons (55%) say they would feel ‘uncomfortable’ with

‘someone using they/them pronouns instead of he or she to describe themselves’.

As would be expected, religious belief is associated with more conservative views on many of these issues. Table 3 shows attitudes towards marriage and having children, contraception, and abortion by whether someone is a religious believer or not. On each of these questions, the views of UK and US non-believers are not so far apart, and the gap between the two groups is less than 10 points for each question asked. However, the gap between UK and US religious believers is notably wider on the questions concerning contraception and abortion.

Table 3 - Attitudes towards marriage, contraception and abortion by religious belief

	UK religious believers	UK non- believers	US religious believers	US non-believers
Society is better off if people make marriage and having children a priority	37%	15%	43%	21%
Birth control pills, condoms and other forms of contraception being widely available is very good for society	70%	86%	52%	77%
Abortion should be legal in ‘all’ or ‘most’ cases	78%	92%	53%	86%
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1007</i>	<i>1011</i>	<i>3032 (marriage), 3073 (contraception), 6105 (abortion)</i>	<i>1300 (marriage), 1245 (contraception), 2545 (abortion)</i>
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>956</i>	<i>1057</i>	<i>3053 (marriage), 3051 (contraception), 6103 (abortion)</i>	<i>1260 (marriage), 1256 (contraception), 2516 (abortion)</i>

The divergence in UK and US attitudes on issues like these can, therefore, not only be explained by the higher proportion of religious believers in the US. It is also caused by the fact religious believers in the US typically hold more conservative views than their counterparts in the UK.

Therefore, a division between a more socially liberal UK and a more conservative US generally holds true for questions to do with the family and sexuality, with attitudes towards transgender rights a notable exception. As mentioned in the introduction to this section, the status of transgender rights as a 'live' political issue compared with the other questions may help to explain why UK and US attitudes are more aligned. Although noting this exception, there is little sign of the UK more generally matching the more conservative views found in the US on matters such as abortion, the family or lesbian, gay and bisexual rights. In general, therefore, the UK remains quite distinct from Trump's America on these issues.

Crime and justice

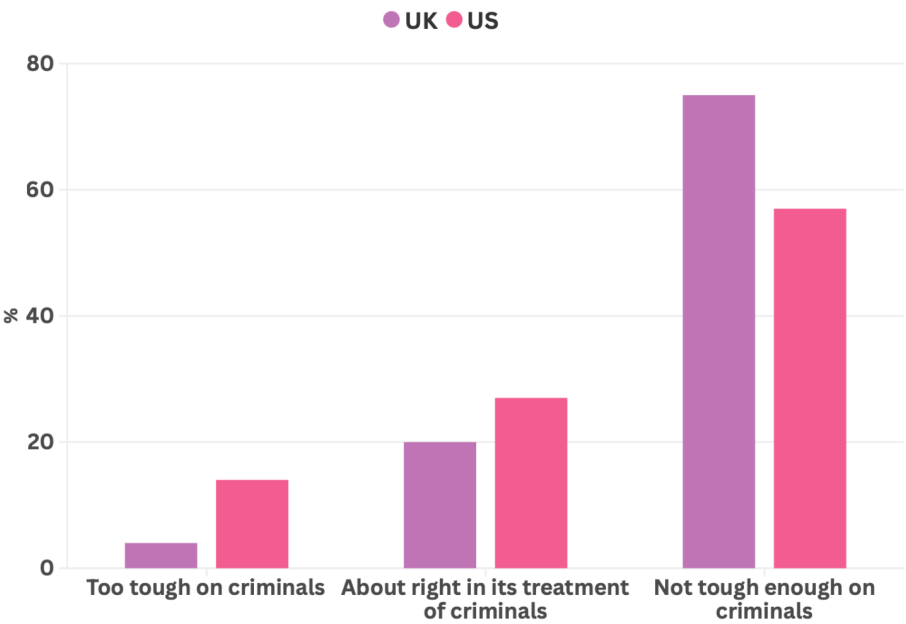
The UK may not be in the same place as the US in its attitudes towards immigration or the family, but what about attitudes towards crime and justice? The two countries certainly have different approaches when it comes to this issue. In the UK, there is strict gun control and capital punishment is illegal^[14], while in the US, in many states, the death penalty is legal along with the right to carry a gun^[15]. In recent years, both the UK and US have also seen discontent about policing, with the Black Lives Matter protests and unrest in the US following instances of perceived police brutality^[16]. Violent crime however remains much higher in the US^[17], including homicides^[18], and rates of imprisonment^[19]. Given this context, we might expect the criminal justice system in the US to reflect more hardline views on law and order within the population.

However, this expectation is not borne out by the data. Americans are less likely to think the criminal justice system is too tough than those in the UK, although this may be reflective of the respective strictness of the two systems. Meanwhile, on priorities for the criminal justice system, views do not

differ greatly between the two countries, with Americans slightly more likely to think protecting the rights of minorities is key.

Figure 6 compares attitudes in both countries to the criminal justice system. In the UK, 75% think their criminal justice system is currently not tough enough on criminals, compared with 57% in the US. Conversely, Americans are more likely than people in the UK to think their system is too tough on criminals, with 14% of Americans holding this opinion, compared with just 4% of Brits.

Figure 6 – Attitudes towards the criminal justice system (UK and US)



Source - UK data: NatCen Opinion Panel, fieldwork dates 26th June – 27th July 2025; US data: Pew American Trends Panel, fieldwork dates 8th – 14th April 2024.

Dealing with crime can often involve a complex balance of competing groups and outcomes. When asked about the priority of different groups, the UK and US populations are broadly aligned. A majority on both sides of the Atlantic think that keeping communities safe is critical, with 72% in the UK and 69% in US stating this is extremely important. Treating people of all racial and ethnic groups equally is also viewed as key, albeit to a lesser extent, with 64% of Americans holding this view compared with 57% in the UK. When it comes to protecting the rights of people suspected of crimes, there is a smaller level of

support in both countries – only 21% of those in the UK and 30% of Americans think this is extremely important.

On crime, therefore, there are slight differences between the two countries regarding priorities for the justice system, but there is a notable difference between Americans and people in the UK as to whether the system is getting the balance right in its treatment of criminals or not. The differences between the criminal justice systems in both countries will clearly play a role in these assessments, not least the higher rate of incarceration in the US. Given around three quarters (76%) of those in the UK feel the system is not tough enough, it may be that a more American approach to the justice system would generate a good deal of support in the UK.

Economic issues and the role of Government

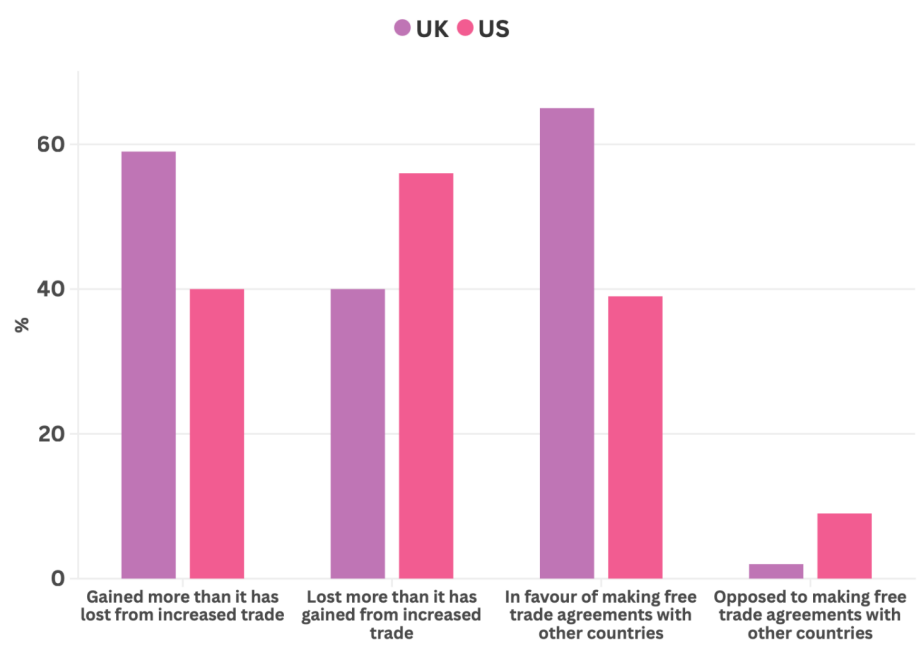
As well as having distinct approaches to crime and the justice system, both countries have also forged distinct economic paths. On international trade, the UK has long been a proponent of free trade^[20], whilst the US relied heavily on protectionism in the years before its shift to multilateralism after the Second World War^[21]. Similarly, on the role of government, the US has championed the idea of a smaller state^[22]. Since the election, the Trump administration has pursued protectionist policies and introduced wide-ranging tariffs on foreign imports^[23], and sought to cut the size of the state through the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE)^[24]. The UK, in contrast, has traditionally favoured a more active government, adopting elements seen among its European neighbours such as a welfare state and publicly funded healthcare^[25]. Given these differences in both history and economic context, one may expect to find attitudes in the US that are, compared with the UK, more protectionist, keener on a smaller role for government, and anti-welfare.

With the exception of welfare spending, where views are similar in the two countries, attitudes towards the economy diverge in a way that is perhaps unsurprising. People in the UK are indeed more likely than Americans to be in favour of free trade and against protectionism, and are also more likely to be in favour of a larger role for the state. On economic issues and the role of

government in general, therefore, there is little sign of the UK reflecting a more American outlook.

Taking the issue of free trade first, Figure 7 provides a breakdown of attitudes towards this issue in both countries. As shown, a majority of the UK population (59%) think that their country has gained more than it has lost from increased trade with other countries in recent decades whilst, on the other hand, a majority of Americans (56%) said their country has lost more than it had gained. Similarly, around two-thirds of people in the UK (65%) are in favour of the UK making free trade agreements with other countries, compared with just 39% of those in the US.

Figure 7 - Attitudes towards free trade (UK and US)

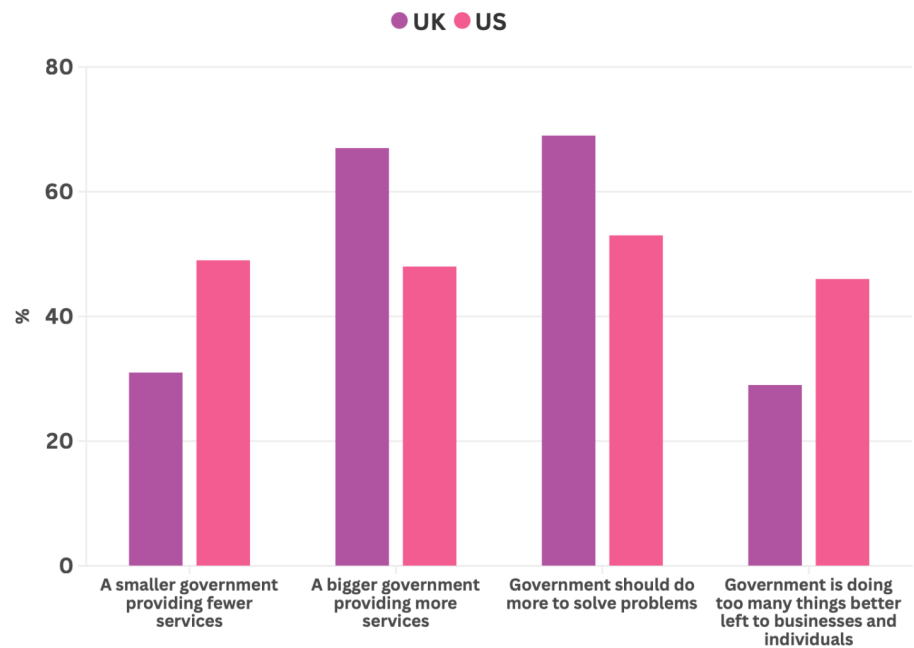


Source - UK data: NatCen Opinion Panel, fieldwork dates 26th June – 27th July 2025; US data: Gained/lost from increased trade - Pew American Trends Panel, fieldwork dates 8th – 14th April 2024, Favour/oppose making free trade agreements – ANES 2024 Time Series Study (post-election), fieldwork dates 7th November – 17th February 2025.

When it comes to the size and role of the state, UK citizens are more supportive than Americans of a larger and more active government. As shown in Figure 8, a majority of those in the UK (67%) say they would prefer a bigger government providing more services over a smaller one providing fewer

services. While Americans are more divided, with around a half (49%) preferring a smaller sized state. A large proportion of the UK population (69%) also think that government should be doing more to solve problems, with those in the US broadly split between that opinion (53%) and the more ‘laissez-faire’ view that government is doing ‘too many things which are better left to businesses and individuals’ (46%).

Figure 8 – Attitudes towards the size of the government (UK and US)



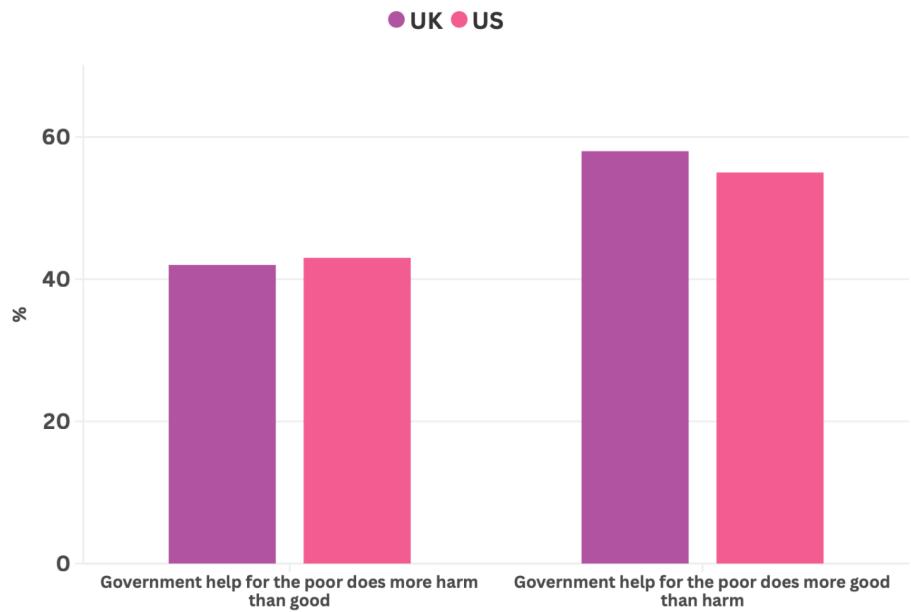
Source - UK data: NatCen Opinion Panel, fieldwork dates 26th June – 27th July 2025; US data: Pew American Trends Panel, fieldwork dates 8th – 14th April 2024.

Somewhat counterintuitively, given their greater support for a larger government, UK citizens are slightly more likely to think that the state is poorly managed – around two-thirds of Brits (65%) feel that government is almost always wasteful and inefficient, compared with 57% of Americans who share the same view.

Although views differ on free trade and the size of government, there is a smaller difference when it comes to welfare. Firstly, looking at attitudes on state support for the poor, UK and US citizens hold similarly positive views. As shown in Figure 9, a similar proportion of those in the UK (58%) and US (55%)

think that government aid to the poor does ‘more good than harm, because people cannot get out of poverty until their basic needs are met’.

Figure 9 – Attitudes towards welfare (UK and US)



Source - UK data: NatGen Opinion Panel, fieldwork dates 26th June – 27th July 2025; US data: Pew American Trends Panel, fieldwork dates 8th – 14th April 2024.

Despite views being broadly aligned on whether government helps the poor or not, Americans are in fact slightly more willing to say the government should do more to help those in need. Around a half (52%) of Americans said ‘the government should do more to help needy Americans, even if it means going deeper into debt’, compared with 40% of people in the UK who share this view. It may be that responses to this question were influenced by views on the relatively smaller amount of welfare provision available in the US and its ability to borrow more easily. This caveat notwithstanding, there is little sign of more progressive or favourable attitudes towards welfare in the UK compared with the US.

Summary

How far views in the UK and US either align or differ depends very much on the issue at hand. On immigration and multiculturalism, people in the UK are

generally less progressive in their attitudes than Americans were prior to Trump's election. They are less likely to tie national identity to an openness to others, and are less likely to view diversity as a strength. Interestingly these differences hold even when we control for ethnicity, implying that the demographic differences between the two countries cannot solely explain this divergence alone.

In contrast, and as may be expected, in the UK there is a more socially liberal consensus on issues like abortion, contraception and same-sex marriage. American attitudes are, in comparison, more socially conservative. Religion plays a prominent role in explaining these differences. America has both a greater proportion of religious believers and those who are believers hold more conservative views on these issues than believers in the UK. Interestingly, though, questions on transgender people generate a closer similarity in views across the two countries. The status of this as a 'live' political issue in the UK, which does not sit neatly across the 'left-right' divide, may help to explain why attitudes within the UK on this issue are something of an outlier.

On crime and justice, people in the UK and US both feel their criminal justice system is not tough enough, though this sentiment is stronger in the UK. This may perhaps be to do with the relative stringency of the two systems. Meanwhile, UK respondents are much more supportive of a larger role for government and free trade, compared with Americans. In both countries, however, there is broad support for welfare spending, and a belief that government support for the poor does more good than harm.

The UK is not, therefore, in the same place as the US when it comes to public attitudes on important policy issues. The UK is notably more liberal than the US on issues such as same-sex marriage, abortion and contraception, though more conservative in its attitudes towards immigration. Attitudes in the UK towards the role of government and the merits of free trade are also markedly different. Despite these differences, there is a concern shared in both countries that our societies in the UK and US are increasingly polarised. The degree of division these issues create, and how they map on to the party political divide, are questions we turn to in the next section.

The politics of it all

We have thus far examined how attitudes in the UK and the US compare at a population level. But is the divide between left and right on these issues any different in the two nations? Both countries are facing an increased level of political polarisation. In the US, Joe Biden's election in 2021 was followed by riots in the State Capitol^[26], and both former President Biden^[27] and President Trump have spoken of the necessity of imprisonment for political opponents.^[28] In the UK, meanwhile, the 2024 General Election demonstrated a record-level of support for parties such as Reform UK and the Greens, and away from the more centrist Labour and Conservative Parties. Reform UK has built on this election result and are currently consistently top of the polls for voting intention.^[29] ^[30] Meanwhile, our own data show that the proportion of people who say they 'strongly dislike' the Conservative and Labour parties has increased in the past decade, from 16% to 27% in the case of the former and from 9% to 22% for the latter. In addition, Reform UK's rise has drawn comparisons with the success of Trump in the US, not least because of the close affinity between the President and Reform UK's leader, Nigel Farage.

This section is split into two parts. Firstly, we focus specifically on comparing the views of Trump supporters in the US with Reform voters in the UK across the range of political and social issues outlined in the section regarding UK and US attitudes. Similarities may be drawn between the two leaders and their political movements, but does a Trump supporter agree with each other on these issues? We then widen the scope of the cross-country comparison to examine the difference between voters for the main parties of the right in the UK (Reform, Conservatives) and the left (Labour, Lib Dems, Greens) and Trump vs Harris supporters in the US. Although both countries may be dealing with political polarisation, is the scale of the political divide similar or different in the two countries?

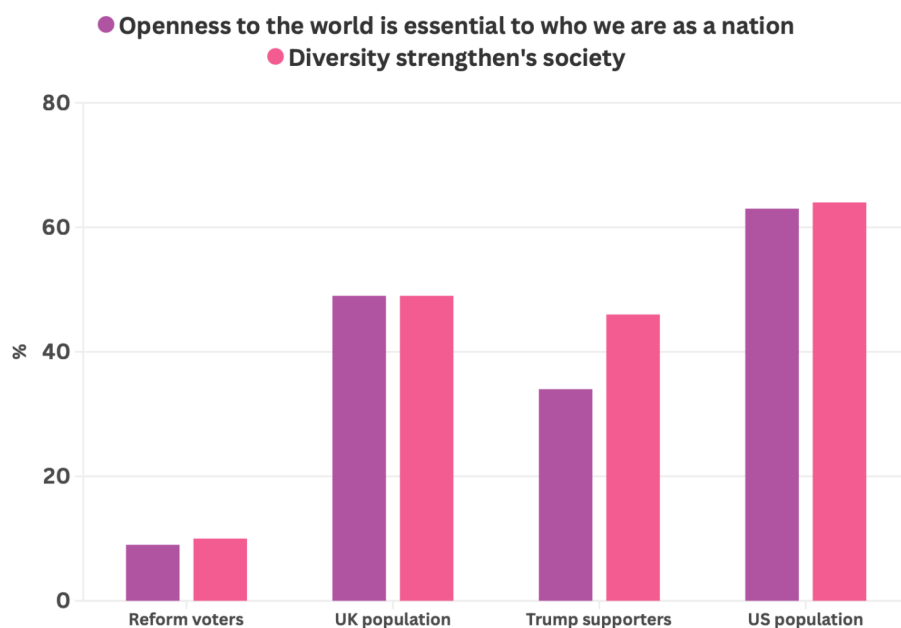
The nature of Reform and Trump support

There are two ways one could answer the question of whether Reform voters and Trump supporters are aligned. One way would be to examine whether they are similar in absolute terms, i.e. whether the same proportion of both groups agree or disagree with the proposition put before them. An alternative way of approaching the question is to look at both groups' views relative to their national population. In other words, the proportion of Trump supporters and Reform voters who agree on a question may be different, but the gap between their responses and their respective national compatriots may be the same. In general, we will primarily focus on their relative positions relative to their national populations, so as to show whether their views are similarly distinctive compared with the general climate of public opinion in their country.

It would be expected that both Reform voters in the UK and Trump supporters in the US would be to the right and more socially conservative of their respective populations on a range of issues. And indeed this is what the data show. However, what we also find is that, where UK national attitudes are more liberal on an issue, Reform voters tend to be more liberal on that issue than Trump supporters, and vice versa. For example, a Reform voter is more likely than a Trump supporter to be conservative on immigration and race, but liberal in their attitudes towards contraception and abortion. We can see this by examining each topic in turn.

For example, on the section covering immigration and race, we have shown that there is a somewhat more liberal outlook in the US than there is in the UK. In absolute terms, Reform voters are more likely (79%) than Trump supporters were (70%) to think illegal immigrants should not be allowed to stay in the country, and they are almost equally to the right of their respective compatriots. The differences become more evident on questions to do with race and ethnicity. As shown in Figure 10, Reform voters are less likely (9%) than Trump supporters (34%) to think that their country's openness to others from around the world is essential to our national identity. And while only one in 10 Reform voters (10%) think Britain's population being made up of different races, ethnicities and religions strengthens Britain's society, 46% of Trump supporters think this strengthens American society.

Figure 10 – Attitudes towards openness and diversity (UK/Reform/US/Trump)

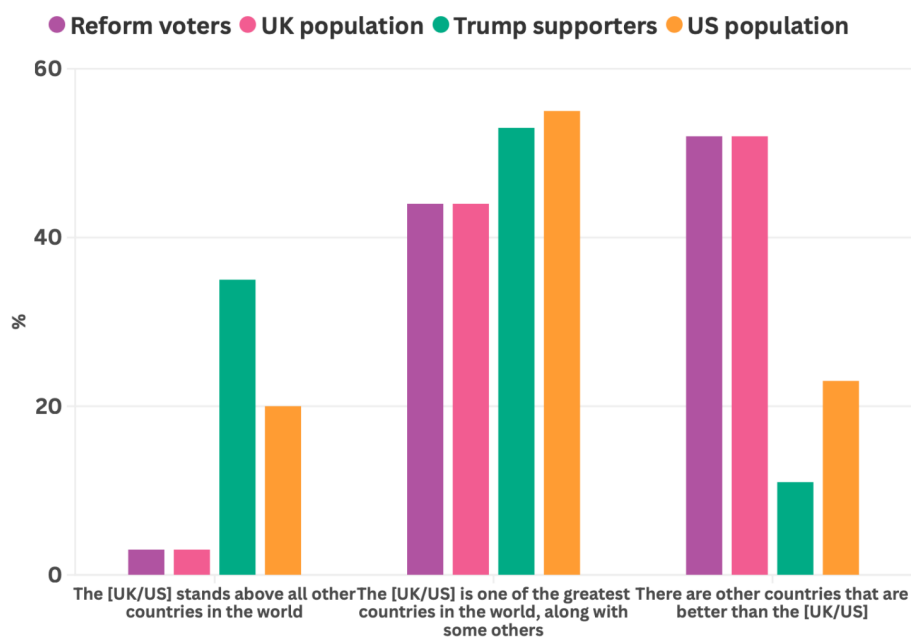


Source - UK data: NatCen Opinion Panel, fieldwork dates 26th June – 27th July 2025; US data: Pew American Trends Panel, fieldwork dates 8th – 14th April 2024.

Both Reform and Trump voters are to the right of their compatriots on these questions, but the former are further to the right when compared to their compatriots than the latter are.

Reform voters and Trump supporters may stand out among their compatriots in their views on immigration, but what about on patriotic feeling? Both the 'Make America Great Again' (MAGA) movement in the US and Brexit in the UK emphasise national sovereignty and independence. Are both sets of supporters therefore outliers in their levels of national pride? The answer is no. Indeed, the greater level of national pride we see in America is reflected in a much greater level of pride among Trump supporters, who stand out amongst their compatriots. As shown in Figure 11, 35% of Trump supporters feel the US stands above all others, higher than in the 20% for the population as a whole. In contrast, only 3% of Reform UK voters feel this way about the UK, the same proportion as the wider population.

Figure 11 - National pride – (UK/Reform/US/Trump)



Source - UK data: NatCen Opinion Panel, fieldwork dates 26th June – 27th July 2025; US data: Pew American Trends Panel, fieldwork dates 8th – 14th April 2024.

Turning to questions on gender and family, we find that the more liberal attitudes in the UK on these questions are reflected in a more liberal outlook among Reform voters on these issues compared with Trump supporters. Reform UK voters are not ‘small-c’ social conservatives in the same way Trump supporters are. Reform UK voters are also closer than Trump supporters were to their compatriots in their views on this issue. A couple of examples illustrate the point. A majority of Trump supporters (60%), think ‘society is better off if people make marriage and having children a priority’, compared with 37% of Americans as a whole, a 23 point gap. Meanwhile only a minority of Reform UK voters (37%) share this view, and the gap between them and UK adults as a whole (26%) is only 11 points. Similarly, on abortion, 82% of Reform voters believe this should be legal, which is around the same as the UK population as a whole (85%). In contrast, only a minority of Trump supporters felt the same way (35%), putting them significantly to the right of the US population as a whole (62%) on this question.

An exception, as might be expected given the alignment of UK and US attitudes on this issue, is attitudes towards transgender rights. A clear majority (95%) of Reform UK voters think ‘whether someone is a man or

woman is determined by the sex they were assigned at birth', a similar proportion to Trump supporters in the US (92%). These are much higher majorities than the roughly two-thirds of the UK (64%) and US (66%) populations that took this view, but unlike the other questions on family and sexuality, Reform and Trump voters are equally to the right of their respective populations.

Turning to economic issues, Reform and Trump voters hold different views on the merits of free trade and the size of the state, but are aligned in their views on welfare. Taking free trade first, this is an issue on which Trump and Reform potentially diverge on policy. The Trump administration has pursued a generally protectionist policy, implementing wide-ranging tariffs. In contrast, a key argument used by Brexit supporters was that the UK would be able to sign free-trade agreements with countries outside of the European Union, although more recently Reform UK leader Nigel Farage has advocated for more protectionist policies on steel.^[31]

In general, Reform voters are more in favour of free trade than Trump supporters. Roughly the same proportion of Reform voters (64%) are in favour of the UK making free trade agreements with other countries, little different from the UK population as a whole (65%). In contrast, only 31% of Trump supporters share the same view of the US making these agreements, compared with 39% in the wider population.

On the size of the state, Trump voters are much further to the right than Reform voters in both absolute terms and when compared with their compatriots. A clear majority of Trump supporters (84%) would prefer a smaller government, compared with 54% of Reform voters. The gap between Reform voters and UK adults (31%) in general is narrower (23 points) than it is for Trump supporters and US adults (50%) on this question (34 points). On welfare, however, Trump and Reform voters are more aligned. A similar proportion think 'government help for the poor does more harm than good, by making people too dependent on government assistance' (Reform: 69%; Trump: 72%). They are both about equally to the right of their respective populations on this issue, as 42% of UK adults and 43% of US adults selected this option.

Finally on criminal justice, unsurprisingly both Reform and Trump supporters would like the system to be tougher on criminals. A clear majority of Reform

voters (92%) and Trump supporters (83%) take this view, though it should be noted Trump supporters are a little further away from the US public (58%) on this issue than Reform voters are from the UK public (75%).

In summary, it will come as little surprise that Reform voters and Trump supporters tend to have a more conservative outlook than their compatriots. However, across most issues, where attitudes are less liberal in one of the countries, such as immigration in the UK, attitudes of Reform voters are in fact more hardline than those Trump supporters. And in the other direction, where attitudes are more liberal in the UK, such as on ‘small-c’ conservative questions on gender and family, Reform voters are in turn more liberal than Trump supporters. To understand the extent of polarisation within the two countries, however, it is important to bring into the analysis the political attitudes of supporters of other parties within the two countries. This is what we address in the next section.

Greater divides – greater polarisation

As outlined in the introduction to this section, there is concern in both countries about political polarisation, with groups of the right and left so far apart from each other that it is difficult to arrive at a political consensus. But do we find deep divisions between right and left on these issues? And are the UK and the US polarised on the same issues, or are there in fact many subjects on which both people on the right and left agree? This section seeks to answer these questions by examining attitudes to immigration and race, family, gender and sexuality and the role of the state and how they vary across the political spectrum within each country.

Immigration, multiculturalism, race

Starting with the issue of immigration, multiculturalism and race, Table 4 presents responses to questions on immigration and race by party political support in the two countries. Taking immigration first, there is generally a greater level of consensus in the US than there is in the UK. For example, in the UK, there is a relatively even split between those who feel illegal immigrants should not be able to stay in the country legally (45%) and those who feel they

should be able to if certain requirements are met (55%), whereas in the US there is a greater deal of consensus that they should be able to stay (61%). As shown in Table 4, there is not a great deal of cross-party consensus on this issue in either country. There is a 55 point gap between Trump and Harris supporters on this issue, compared with a 64 point gap between Greens and Reform, and a 49 point gap between Labour and Reform.

Table 4 - Attitudes towards illegal immigrants, openness and diversity by UK party vote and US presidential support

	UK					US	
	Green	Labour	Liberal Democrat	Conservative	Reform	Harris	Trump
Illegal immigration							
Immigrants living in the [UK/US] without permission should not be allowed to stay in the country legally	15%	30%	41%	63%	79%	15%	70%
Openness							
The [UK/America]'s openness to people from all over the world is essential to who we are as a nation	75%	67%	57%	25%	9%	88%	34%
Diversity							
The fact the [UK/US] population is made up of people of many different races, ethnicities and religions strengthens [British/American] society	78%	64%	60%	32%	10%	83%	46%
White share of population							
White people declining as a share of [Britain's/the US] population is 'somewhat' or 'very' bad for society	19%	23%	30%	61%	85%	9%	43%
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>117</i>	<i>628</i>	<i>211</i>	<i>359</i>	<i>192</i>	<i>2273, 1135 (White)</i>	

						<i>decline)</i>	<i>1930, 960 (White decline)</i>
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>114</i>	<i>602</i>	<i>187</i>	<i>290</i>	<i>183</i>	<i>1831, 947 (White decline)</i>	<i>784, 897 (White decline)</i>

Source - UK data: NatCen Opinion Panel, fieldwork dates 26th June – 27th July 2025; US data: Pew American Trends Panel, fieldwork dates 8th – 14th April 2024.

There is similar polarisation on the question of whether openness to people from all over the world is essential to national identity. A majority of voters for parties on the left (Greens, Labour and Liberal Democrats) in the UK believe that ‘openness is essential to who we are as a nation’, whereas only a quarter (25%) of Conservative voters and 9% of Reform voters do so. There is a 54 point gap between Harris and Trump supporters on this issue, smaller than the gap between Reform and the Greens (66 points) but closer to the gap between Reform and Labour (58 points).

On the question of diversity, there is a gap of 37 percentage points between the proportion of Trump (46%) and Harris (83%) supporters who think it strengthens American society, which is similar to the 32 percentage point gap between Conservative (32%) and Labour (64%) on this issue. On the further ends of the spectrum, though, there is a much wider gap of 68 points on this issue between Reform (10%) and Green (78%) voters. It is a similar story when we examine responses to whether White people declining as a proportion of the population is a good or bad thing by party political support. The gap between Trump and Harris (34 points) supporters is not so different to that between Conservative and Labour (38 points), but there is a marked gap of 62 percentage points between Greens and Reform on this issue.

These relative differences in the size of the gap raise the question as to how best to compare party support in the two countries. As shown, if we focus on those on the parties at both ends of the political spectrum in the UK, namely Reform UK and the Greens, we see a wider degree of polarisation than we do between Trump and Harris supporters in the US. However, this might merely be a consequence of the more divergent party system in the UK. Comparing Reform with the Greens involves comparing polarisation between two parties at the opposite ends of a five party spectrum, which is a different scenario to the US where party support effectively cleaves the population in two, and support for each party is therefore liable to include more of those in the

‘centre ground’. To address this question, we can combine Labour, Lib Dems and Greens voters and Reform and Conservatives voters into two distinct blocs, to arrive at a more potentially more comparable picture.

Table 5 provides a breakdown of the questions presented in Table 4, but with the parties in the UK combined into these two groups. The gap between parties of the left and right in the UK on whether illegal immigrants should be able to stay in the country legally is actually narrower in the UK (39 points) than in the US (55 points), and the gap between those who feel that openness is essential to national identity is broadly similar (UK: 47 points, US: 54 points). Using the combined two categories, the UK then appears slightly less polarised than the US for these two questions on immigration. Not only is there a more hardline stance on illegal immigration and a smaller willingness to associate national identity with openness to others, but there is less disagreement on these views between left and right.

Table 5 - Attitudes towards illegal immigrants, openness and diversity by UK combined party vote and US presidential support

	UK left	UK right	Harris	Trump	UK gap (left – right)	US gap (Harris – Trump)
Immigrants living in the [UK/US] without permission should not be allowed to stay in the country legally	31%	70%	15%	70%	-39	-55
The [UK/America]'s openness to people from all over the world is essential to who we are as a nation	66%	19%	88%	34%	+47	+54
The fact the [UK/US] population is made up of people of many different races, ethnicities and religions strengthens [British/American] society	65%	24%	83%	46%	+41	+37
White people declining as a share of [Britain's/the US] population is 'somewhat' or 'very' bad for society	24%	70%	9%	43%	-46	-34
<i>Unweighted base</i>	956	551	2273, 1135 (White decline)	1930, 960 (White decline)		
<i>Weighted base</i>	903	474	1831, 947 (White decline)	1784, 897 (White decline)		

Source - UK data: NatCen Opinion Panel, fieldwork dates 26th June – 27th July 2025; US data: Pew American Trends Panel, fieldwork dates 8th – 14th April 2024.

In contrast, combining parties in the UK on the two other questions to do with multiculturalism and race does not have the same effect. As also shown in

Table 5, the gap between those who think diversity strengthens British society on the left and right (41 points) remains broadly similar to the gap in the US (37 points), though the gap between left and right on whether ‘White people declining as a proportion of the population’ is a bad thing is wider in the UK (46 points) than in the US (34 points). This provides us with somewhat of a mixed picture. The gap between right and left is smaller on the question of illegal immigration in the UK than it is in the US, but wider on certain questions to do with diversity. It may be easier, therefore in the UK than in the US, to form a political coalition on what should be done regarding illegal immigration than it would be to find consensus on the merits or otherwise of a multicultural society.

Family, gender and sexuality

Turning to the questions on family, gender and sexuality, as shown in the previous section, there is in general a liberal consensus on these questions in the UK that we do not find in the US. It is also worth noting that much of the social legislation in the UK to do with these questions, such as on abortion^[32] or LGBT rights^[33] has historically been passed by MPs in a free vote where they were not directed to take a party line. Given this different context, and the fact these issues are less likely in the UK to form major components of political campaigns, we may expect to find a smaller degree of polarisation on these issues in the UK than in the US.

And, indeed, this expectation is largely met in the data. Table 6 presents attitudes on marriage, abortion and contraception by party political support. On whether society is better off if people make marriage and children a priority, in the US there is a stark difference by party support. Six in ten (60%) Trump supporters think society is better off, compared with just 17% of Harris supporters. In contrast, in the UK, the divisions are less stark, and the widest gap is 25 points between Green (13%) and Conservative Party voters (38%).

Table 6 - Attitudes towards marriage, contraception and abortion by UK party vote and US presidential support

	UK					US	
	Green	Labour	Liberal Democrat	Conservative	Reform	Harris	Trump
Society is better off if people make marriage and having children a priority	13%	21%	21%	38%	37%	17%	60%
Abortion should be legal in ‘all’ or ‘most’ cases	93%	90%	90%	82%	82%	87%	35%
Birth control pills, condoms and other forms of contraception being widely available is very or somewhat good for society	96%	95%	94%	94%	95%	92%	67%
Same-sex marriages being legal in the [UK/US] is very or somewhat good for society	78%	71%	72%	47%	39%	57%	10%
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>1171</i>	<i>628</i>	<i>211</i>	<i>359</i>	<i>192</i>	<i>1135</i> <i>(marriage),</i> <i>2273</i> <i>(abortion),</i> <i>1138</i> <i>(contraception,</i> <i>same-sex)</i>	<i>960</i> <i>(marriage),</i> <i>1930</i> <i>(abortion), 970</i> <i>(contraception,</i> <i>same-sex)</i>
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>114</i>	<i>602</i>	<i>187</i>	<i>290</i>	<i>183</i>	<i>947</i> <i>(marriage),</i> <i>1831 (abortion),</i>	

Source - UK data: NatCen Opinion Panel, fieldwork dates 26th June – 27th July 2025; US data: Pew

American Trends Panel, fieldwork dates 8th – 14th April 2024.

Views on abortion, contraception and LGBT rights are all more politically polarised in the US compared with the UK. A majority of voters for all political parties in the UK think abortion should be either legal in ‘all’ or most’ cases, ranging from 82% of Conservative and Reform voters to 93% of Green voters. In contrast, there is a gap of 52 points between Trump and Harris supporters on this question. The situation is the same on contraception and LGBT rights. In the UK, over 9 in 10 voters of each of the five major political parties believe contraception has been either ‘very’ or ‘somewhat’ good for society. In the US, around 9 in 10 Harris supporters (92%) said contraception was either ‘very’ or ‘somewhat’ good, compared with around two-thirds of Trump supporters (67%) who felt this way. Meanwhile, the gap between Trump (10%) and Harris (57%) supporters on whether same-sex marriages are good for society stands at 47 points, wider than even the gap between Reform and Greens in the UK (39 points).

As shown in Table 7, given the alignment of views between left and right, combining categories in the UK makes little difference to the overall result. The gap between left and right remains larger in the US than in the UK for each of the questions asked. There is a socially liberal consensus on these issues in the UK, therefore, that is reflected in a greater deal of cross-party consensus than we find in the US. Americans are polarised on these issues in a way that those in the UK are simply not.

Table 7 - Attitudes towards marriage, contraception and abortion by UK combined party vote and US presidential support

	UK left	UK right	Harris	Trump	UK gap (left – right)	US gap (Harris – Trump)
Society is better off if people make marriage and having children a priority	20%	37%	17%	60%	-17	-43
Abortion should be legal in ‘all’ or ‘most’ cases	90%	82%	87%	35%	+8	+52
Birth control pills, condoms and other forms of contraception being widely available is very or somewhat good for society	95%	94%	92%	67%	+1	+25
Same-sex marriages being legal in the [UK/US] is very or somewhat good for society	72%	44%	57%	10%	+28	+47
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>956</i>	<i>551</i>	<i>1135</i> <i>(marriage),</i> <i>2273</i> <i>(abortion),</i> <i>1138</i> <i>(contraception,</i> <i>same-sex)</i>	<i>960</i> <i>(marriage),</i> <i>1930</i> <i>(abortion), 970</i> <i>(contraception,</i> <i>same-sex)</i>		

<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>903</i>	<i>474</i>	<i>947 (marriage), 1831 (abortion), 884 (contraception, same-sex)</i>	<i>897 (marriage), 1784 (abortion), 886 (contraception, same-sex)</i>
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Source - UK data: NatGen Opinion Panel, fieldwork dates 26th June – 27th July 2025; US data: Pew American Trends Panel, fieldwork dates 8th – 14th April 2024.

The one exception to the above however, is attitudes towards transgender people. The relative degree of polarisation in the two countries is dependent on whether we look at five parties or two groups combined in the UK. If we compare the two parties at the opposite ends of the spectrum: the UK is actually more polarised on this issue than the US. At 63 points, the gap between the proportion of Reform UK (94%) and Green voters (31%) who believe whether someone is a man or a woman is determined by their sex assigned at birth is wider than the 54 point gap between Trump (92%) and Harris supporters (39%). However, the gap between parties of the right (88%) and left (48%) on this issue in the UK is actually narrower. Either way, this question stands out among the others asked in this section as being one that causes political polarisation in both countries, rather than just in the US. As discussed earlier in the report, this may be related to the issue being ‘live’ in UK political discourse, in contrast to the more ‘settled’ issues of gay marriage or abortion rights.

Role of the state and economic issues

Turning to economic issues, the appropriate size of the state is an issue that politically polarises those in the US in a way it does not in the UK, as shown in Table 8. As would be expected, voters on the right in both countries are more supportive of a smaller state than those on the left. There is a wider gap between left and right in America than in the UK, however, with a 62 point difference between the proportion of Trump (84%) and Harris (22%) supporters who would prefer a smaller government. In contrast, the widest gap in the UK is between Conservative or Reform voters (54%) and Labour voters (15%) at 39 points, while combining the parties into left and right groups makes little difference to this result.

Table 8 - Attitudes towards size and scope of government by UK party vote and US presidential support

	UK					US	
	Green	Labour	Liberal Democrat	Conservative	Reform	Harris	Trump
Would rather have a smaller government providing fewer services	16%	15%	27%	54%	54%	22%	84%
Government should do more to solve problems	87%	82%	64%	48%	49%	76%	21%
Government regulation of business is necessary to protect the public interest	85%	80%	79%	58%	34%	88%	26%
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>117</i>	<i>628</i>	<i>211</i>	<i>359</i>	<i>192</i>	<i>1135</i> <i>(smaller gov), 1138</i> <i>(do more, regulation necessary)</i>	<i>960</i> <i>(smaller gov), 970</i> <i>(do more, regulation necessary)</i>
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>114</i>	<i>602</i>	<i>187</i>	<i>290</i>	<i>183</i>	<i>947</i> <i>(smaller gov), 884</i> <i>(do more, regulation necessary)</i>	<i>897</i> <i>(smaller gov), 886</i> <i>(do more, regulation necessary)</i>

Source - UK data: NatCen Opinion Panel, fieldwork dates 26th June – 27th July 2025; US data: Pew American Trends Panel, fieldwork dates 8th – 14th April 2024.

The results are similar when people are asked whether the government should ‘do more to solve problems’ or whether the government is doing ‘too many

things better left to businesses and individuals'. There is a 56 point gap between the proportion of Trump (21%) and Harris (76%) supporters who selected the former, whereas the widest gap between parties in the UK stands at 40 points. Those on the right, therefore, certainly would prefer a smaller government to a bigger one in the UK, but this debate divides left and right to a greater extent in the US.

Reform are the only party in the UK for which a minority of its voters (34%) think that government regulation is necessary, but the level of polarisation on this question remains higher in the US. The gap between Trump and Harris supporters stands at 62 points, whereas the widest gap in the UK is 51 points between Reform (34%) and Green voters (85%). As shown in Table 9, when the parties are combined, the gap narrows to just 32 points between left and right, given the more favourable attitudes of Conservative voters towards government regulation.

Table 9 - Attitudes towards size and scope of government by UK combined party vote and US presidential support

	UK left	UK right	Harris	Trump	UK gap (left – right)	US gap (Harris – Trump)
Would rather have a smaller government providing fewer services	17%	54%	22%	84%	-37	-61
Government should do more to solve problems	79%	48%	76%	21%	+31	+56
Government regulation of business is necessary to protect the public interest	81%	49%	88%	26%	+32	+62
<i>Unweighted base</i>	<i>956</i>	<i>551</i>	<i>1135</i> <i>(smaller gov), 1138</i> <i>(do more, regulation necessary)</i>	<i>960</i> <i>(smaller gov), 970</i> <i>(do more, regulation necessary)</i>		
<i>Weighted base</i>	<i>903</i>	<i>474</i>	<i>947</i> <i>(smaller gov), 884</i> <i>(do more, regulation necessary)</i>	<i>897</i> <i>(smaller gov), 886</i> <i>(do more, regulation necessary)</i>		

Source - UK data: NatCen Opinion Panel, fieldwork dates 26th June – 27th July 2025; US data: Pew American Trends Panel, fieldwork dates 8th – 14th April 2024.

If we turn to questions on the relative merits of free trade versus protectionism, again we see a greater level of consensus and less polarisation on this issue in the UK than we do in the US. As shown in Table 10, in the UK a broadly positive view towards increased trade is held across the political

spectrum – with Labour (63%), Lib Dem (61%) and Green (58%) voters as likely as Conservative (65%) and Reform (61%) voters to say the UK has gained more than it has lost from increased trade. In comparison, only around 1 in 5 (21%) Trump supporters feel the US has gained more than it has lost from increased trade, compared with 55% of Harris supporters. The story is similar when respondents are asked whether they are in favour or opposed to the UK / US making free trade agreements with other countries. Reform and Green Party voters are actually closer on this issue than Reform voters are with Conservatives or Greens are with Labour. In contrast, 51% of Harris supporters in the US were in favour of the US making free trade agreements, compared with 31% of Trump supporters – a 20 point gap. Where parties are combined in the UK, the same proportion of those on the left and right (70%) are in favour of the UK making free trade agreements with other countries.

Table 10 - Attitudes to free trade by UK party vote and US presidential support

	UK					US	
	Green	Labour	Liberal Democrat	Conservative	Reform	Harris	Trump
In favour of [UK/US] making free trade agreements with other countries	62%	69%	77%	74%	64%	51%	31%
[UK/US] has gained more than it has lost from increased trade	58%	62%	61%	65%	60%	55%	21%
Unweighted base	117	628	211	359	192	777 (free trade agreements), 1135 (increased trade)	569 (free trade agreements), 960 (increased trade)
Weighted base	114	602	187	290	183	748 (free trade agreements), 947 (increased trade)	580 (free trade agreements), 897 (increased trade)

Source - UK data: NatGen Opinion Panel, fieldwork dates 26th June – 27th July 2025; US data: Gained/lost from increased trade - Pew American Trends Panel, fieldwork dates 8th – 14th April 2024, Favour/oppose making free trade agreements – ANES 2024 Time Series Study (post-election), fieldwork dates 7th November – 17th February 2025.

In summary, where there is a greater deal of consensus on an issue, we see a smaller divide by party political support. Questions to do with race and diversity currently divide people in the UK in a way that they do not do in the US, where there is a greater deal of consensus on how to handle illegal immigration and on the perceived benefits of a multicultural society.

Meanwhile, in the UK there is a much greater degree of consensus on ‘small-l’ and ‘small-c’ liberal and conservative issues such as abortion, marriage and children, and contraception, and we do not see the kind of stark party divides we see in the US in response to questions on these matters. The UK is also more united in its view on the merits of free trade and the appropriate size of the state than Americans are, and again there is a greater deal of cross-party consensus on these issues. Looking to the future, these differences between the two countries are likely to impact which issues dominate party political agendas. Free trade, the role of government and abortion may be ‘live’ political issues in the US in a way they are not in the UK, where the issues of immigration and a multicultural society may become more prominent.

Conclusion

Despite the similarities of Reform UK to the Trump movement in the US, there is little sign that the current popularity of Farage's party in the UK is a reflection of an underlying similarity in attitudes in the two countries. The direction of attitudes very much depends on the topic at hand. On issues such as immigration and diversity, people in the UK take a tougher stance than people in the US do. In contrast, attitudes in the UK are more liberal than in the US on issues such as abortion, contraception and gay marriage. The two countries are divided on important issues like these, but a generalised conception of one of the countries being more liberal than the other would not tell the whole story.

There is concern in both countries about increased polarisation, and the gap between left and right becoming unbridgeable. Certainly – there are issues that cause strong divisions in both countries, but these are not the same issues. The level of consensus among voters for each of the main parties in the UK is high on debates around the merits of free trade, or on questions to do with marriage, gender and the family. Meanwhile questions to do with immigration and race are politically polarising – and voters for parties on the left and right have distinct views on these questions. In contrast, in the US, topics such as free trade, abortion and LGBT rights divide people across party lines in a way they simply do not in the UK. To answer the question of how polarised each society is between left and right depends on the topic we are concerned with, and issues that divide voters in the US are certainly not the same as those which do so in the UK. These dividing lines will help to influence political debate in both countries in the coming years: immigration will no doubt be an important issue in the UK that politicians seek to address, questions on free trade and gender and family less so.

Finally – commentary has focused on the rise of Reform and whether this is echoes the support seen for Trump in the US. At the recent Liberal Democrat Party conference (September 2025), their leader Ed Davey made a direct comparison between what would be 'Farage's Britain' and 'Trump's America'. [34] There are no doubt parallels between the two groups. Both hold similar views when compared to their compatriots on issues of race and immigration,

for example. However, Reform voters do not merely reflect the views of Trump supporters on the other side of the Atlantic. Overall, where the UK is more liberal on an issue, Reform voters are more liberal on that issue than Trump supporters, and vice versa. Therefore, Reform voters hold more hardline views on immigration and multiculturalism than Trump supporters did, whereas the latter hold much more ‘small-c’ Conservative views than Reform voters on issues to do with marriage, contraception and abortion.

The implications of these findings for the UK, at least, over the course of the next Parliament are clear. Across the topics asked, immigration and race stand out as key dividing lines between left and right, and rising support for Reform in no small part reflects this division. Any government, of whatever political persuasion, will face the difficult task of finding policy solutions that can please a public that may be united on many issues, but has deeply divergent views on this one.

Methodology

US survey data

Data for the US population were taken from two sources. The main source was the Wave 146 survey conducted in April last year by Pew Research Center, via their probability-based American Trends Panel, a nationally representative panel of randomly selected US adults. The data were collected between 8th and 14th April 2024, with self-administered web participation – panelists without internet access at home were provided with a tablet and wireless internet connection. A total of 8,709 panelists responded out of 9,527 who were sampled, for a 91% survey response rate^[35]. The data were weighted to be representative of the US adult (18+) population.

Some data was also taken from the ANES (American National Election Studies) 2024 Time Series Study (pre- and post- election), a probability-based cross-sectional survey of public opinion and voting behaviour in the US. The fresh web sample, which consisted of randomly selected US residential addresses, was used – respondents could take part online or by paper. The data was collected between 3rd August and 5th November 2024 for the pre-election survey and between 7th November 2024 and 17th February 2025 for the post-election survey. Among the fresh web sample, 2,308 respondents completed the pre-election survey, for a response rate of 36% and 1,969 respondents completed the post-election survey, giving a re-interview rate of 85%. The data was weighted to be representative of the US adult (18+) population.

UK survey data

Fieldwork for this study was conducted using the NatCen Opinion Panel – a random-probability panel of people recruited from high-quality, random probability studies such as the British Social Attitudes survey. The data was collected between 26th June and 27th July 2025 using a sequential mixed mode design (web and telephone). A total of 2,083 of the 3,636 panel

members invited to take part did so, either online or over the phone, giving a 57% survey response rate^[36]. The data was weighted to be representative of the UK adult (16+) population.

Data comparability

Whilst efforts have been made to ensure comparability between the fresh UK survey data and the existing US survey data, it is worth taking note that there are several differences that could, at least partly, account for any variation in attitudes seen between the UK and US populations.

The survey data was collected at different points in time, with the UK data collected in mid-2025, whilst the majority of the US data was collected in early 2024, with several major events in the intervening period, most significantly, the re-election of Donald Trump as US President in November 2024.

The three source surveys, while all nationally representative and based on probability-sampling, do have slight methodological variations, including in target population, sampling, survey mode, language, question wording and weighting.

Different variables are used to analyse attitudes by political support. For the UK survey data, we have used a variable highlighting how people voted in the 2024 General Election, asked to those who stated they had voted in the election. For the Pew survey data, we have used a derived variable, HORSE_W151, which highlights whether someone supports (or leans towards) Donald Trump or Kamala Harris. It is based on two questions, asked only to US citizens and registered voters, on how they would vote (or lean towards) if the presidential election were held today. This vote preference data was collected in a later survey, conducted in August 2024, after Joe Biden had been replaced by Kamala Harris as the Democratic candidate – a special weight was produced and has been used to align with the data collected in April 2024. For the ANES survey data, we have used a variable highlighting how people voted in the 2024 Presidential election, asked to those who stated that they voted for a Presidential candidate.

Footnotes

1. <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/uk-opinion-polls> ↑
2. <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/trackers/voting-intention> ↑
3. <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2024/08/26/the-political-values-of-harris-and-trump-supporters/> ↑
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5. Kennedy, John F. (John Fitzgerald), 1917-1963. A Nation of Immigrants. New York :Harper and Row, 1964. ↑
6. <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn06077/> ↑
7. <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/08/12/politics/us-census-2020-data/index.html> ↑
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 21. <https://www.annualreviews.org/content/journals/10.1146/annurev-economics-070119-024409> ↑
 22. https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/69765/1/Wade_American_paradox_2017.pdf ↑
 23. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cn93e12rypg0> ↑
 24. <https://doge.gov/savings> ↑
 25. <https://academic.oup.com/oxrep/article/41/1/2/8157935> ↑
 26. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-56004916> ↑
 27. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/oct/23/biden-trump-lock-up-prison-election-backlash> ↑
 28. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/apr/30/trump-second-term-abortion-immigration> ↑
 29. <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/uk-opinion-polls> ↑
 30. <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/trackers/voting-intention> ↑
 31. https://x.com/Nigel_Farage/status/1909635595598491832?lang=en ↑
 32. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1967-07-13/debates/147b02e7-28d5-4ba0-93ce-b0003c127e2a/MedicalTerminationOfPregnancyBill> ↑
 33. <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/lln-2017-0045/> ↑
 34. <https://www.libdems.org.uk/news/article/ed-davey-speech-autumn-2025> ↑
 35. The cumulative response rate accounting for nonresponse to the recruitment surveys and attrition is 3%. ↑

36. This response rate does not account for non-response as a result of people not taking part in the recruitment survey, not joining the panel, or attrition from the panel. [↑](#)

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