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Common

# Attitudes toward the UK-EU Relationship

*August  
2025*

# Key takeaways

**Across all groups, participants supported a closer UK-EU relationship- particularly on trade and mobility- if it delivered clear economic or practical benefits. However, there is no appetite for full re-entry, and people want any closer alignment to be incremental and visibly beneficial to the UK.**

**People were generally sceptical about the government's ability to secure a good deal with the EU. For some, this is because the UK does not have the 'clout' on the world stage to do so post-Brexit, while others feel the government lacks the competence, willpower or urgency to negotiate a better deal for the UK.**

**Sovereignty remains a live issue, especially when it comes to the UK being a 'rule taker' and following the remit of the European Court of Justice. Concerns soften if the remit of the ECJ is limited to specific areas (e.g. agriculture) or if British judges are involved.**

**People were wary of matching European food standards, often assuming EU rules were more lax than British ones. When told EU alignment could raise standards or benefit UK farmers and manufacturers, support for alignment increased. There was strong opposition to matching US regulations.**

**Few voters were aware of the details of the new UK-EU agreement, and said it was unlikely to shape their vote. However, a successful delivery of a closer relationship could help to rebuild voters' trust in Labour if tied to domestic concerns, like the economy and cost of living.**

**One area of the agreement that cut through was the agreement on fisheries. Among 2016 Leave voters and current Conservative/Reform voters, this was seen as a betrayal not just of UK fishers but of British sovereignty, regardless of the benefits to UK-EU cooperation.**

The slide features a light blue background. On the left side, there are three vertical blue rectangles of varying heights. At the top, there is a horizontal row of five blue rectangles of equal width, with a small portion of a sixth rectangle visible on the far right edge.

# **The impacts and opportunities of being outside the EU**

# Room for improvement on the economy

**For many, Britain's relationship with the European Union isn't working. This sense of dissatisfaction applies regardless of participants' current or past voting intention, or how they voted in 2016.**

**The economic impacts of being outside the EU are particularly salient. People are apprehensive not just about the impact Brexit is having on the UK economy as a whole, but on their day-to-day lives, be it the availability of goods in shops or the cost of buying goods from abroad.**

**In focus groups, people were aware that the UK faced more 'red tape' and barriers to trade with European countries- those in Cardiff discussed the effect of being outside the EU on the Welsh steel industry at length. Several respondents suggested that being outside the EU may have dissuaded investors and businesses from coming to the UK since 2020.**

"I ordered a pair of trainers from, I think it was a place in Italy, and I thought I'd got a really good price on it, but now we have to pay customs excise on them (...) I ended up having to pay 80 pounds to get them to the country. So I lost out on my saving completely. And that's happening with lots of different goods from lots of different countries"

**-Mick, 57, Train Driver, Doncaster East. 2024 Labour voter, would now vote Reform**

"We were reading some statistics a few weeks ago and it said that, come 2035, that we're going to have 3 million less jobs and like 32% less investments in exports than it would've been if we stayed. So, I just think that leaving was bad choice and that we're probably going to be worse off in years to come than what we have been."

**-Abby, 37, Carer, Doncaster North. 2024 Labour voter, would vote Labour again**

"Brexit had an impact on food, the price (...) but actually we spend a lot of our money on food. So actually, in normal day-to-day living, our food's gone up because of this trade. All things that we buy from European countries, you know, everything's got gone up"

**-Steve, 53, Bus Driver, Swindon South. 2024 Labour voter, would now vote Conservative**

# Weakened influence on the world stage

A commonly cited consequence of being outside of the EU- and a concern for many participants- was the **weakening of Britain's influence on the world stage.**

Many respondents said that, outside of the EU, **Britain was weaker and lacked 'clout'.** Sometimes this was simply a result of not being part of the 'team' with other European countries at a time when the Trump presidency is taking a more confrontational approach toward Europe and there is conflict on the continent.

At other times, participants felt that the **UK was being punished by the EU for leaving,** though this sentiment was mainly found among 2016 Leave voters.

However, many acknowledged that the **UK has developed stronger working relationships with both individual EU countries and the EU as a whole** following the outbreak of the Ukraine war. For many, this is proof that the UK and the EU can work together in a collaborative way post-Brexit.

"I voted to leave for several reasons. I'm not a MAGA hat wearer, but I wanted to make Britain great again and I wanted all that, but I didn't want it at the cost of international relations. If we were still in Europe and we weren't paying these tariffs, we'd have a stronger voice against America. (...) We're not in a club, we're out of Europe now. We've lost a lot of that power from that."

-Stuart, 49, Building maintenance manager, Doncaster North. 2024 Labour voter, would now vote Reform

"I think that a lot of the other countries are, in my opinion, they're making us outcasts in certain respects. We are like the poor relations of Europe now, in my opinion. And I don't think that can be repaired anytime soon."

-John, 71, Furnace Manager, Doncaster North. 2024 Labour voter, would now vote Reform

# Global instability

The anxiety that President Trump provokes among Britons plays a particular role in shaping Britons' attitudes towards the UK-EU agreement and our broader relationship with the EU. Among our more right leaning participants in Watford, Fareham and Waterlooville, the actions of Trump and the damage this had done to Britons' confidence in the 'special relationship' have created more openness to the idea of closer cooperation with Europe.

Though there was an underlying sense among many that Keir Starmer and Labour 'deep down' had always wanted a closer relationship with the EU, there was a recognition that Trump's actions had created a genuine need for Britain to reconsider and improve its relationship with Europe.

Meanwhile in Bristol, it was clear that dislike for President Trump was motivating people's desire for Britain to rebuild its relationship with the EU - and reigniting Europe as a political issue close to their hearts.

"I think for me, one of the major issues I have I suppose politically in the world today is around Trump and what's happening there and how that's affecting us or how it could affect us. And I think that the UK and the EU united together along with other parties will have to work closer together to be able to deal with some of the situations that Trump is bringing forth."

**-Kinny, 39, Business Development Manager, Bristol. 2024 Labour voter, would still vote Labour**

"Well, the divorce didn't exactly go well, did it, but I think, like that lady just said, with Donald Trump doing what he's doing with the tariffs and things, it has kind of pushed Europe and Britain closer together"

**-Ross, 44, Nurse, Cardiff & Penarth. 2024 Labour voter, would vote Labour again**

# Tariffs and manufacturing

As much as Donald Trump is viewed by voters as a destabilising global influence, voters across the groups expressed admiration for his efforts to ‘stick up’ for the US- and believed that, post-Brexit, the UK could follow in the USA’s footsteps.

Many spoke positively about the US President’s attempts to make sure that the country’s trading relationships and cooperation agreements with other countries came with some material benefit to the US. An example that was cited more than once in groups in Swindon and Doncaster was Trump’s leveraging of US military aid in negotiations for access to Ukrainian mineral resources.

Trump’s attempts to reinvigorate the American manufacturing industry were particularly well received. The people we spoke to lamented the collapse of the UK’s manufacturing industry and its ability to ‘make things’, with jobs and industry often based abroad. In Cardiff, many once again made reference to the difficulties faced by the Welsh steel industry and the closure of the Port Talbot steelworks.

While some recognised that the UK services industry is doing well, and makes up a significant portion of its trade with the EU, these ‘invisible goods’ were often not considered to be as symbolically important as physical ones.

“I’m not a particular fan of Trump, but at least he’s getting something done. At least he’s actually getting to the fact that his country is his country and we need somebody here that will fight for our country as well. And we don’t have that, we haven’t had that for such a long time”

- Tracy, 54, Student and carer, Cardiff & Penarth. 2024 Labour voter, would vote Labour again

“We could use that to our advantage a bit like what Trump’s doing (...) like that he’s done with Ukraine. He says, you know, we’ve given you all this money. Give us some of your minerals”

-Colin, 60, General Manager, Swindon South. 2024 Labour voter, would vote Labour again

“Years ago, my mum and dad used to buy things and it was stamped ‘Made in Great Britain’. I haven’t seen a stamp on anything in donkeys. We don’t make anything. So if we don’t make anything, what are we trading? Like Britain’s biggest export is finance, you know, London, New York, the two capital stock exchanges of the world. Yes, we do billions and trillions of pounds in financial transactions. But what do we make?”

-Ross, 44, Nurse, Cardiff & Penarth. 2024 Labour voter, would vote Labour again

A decorative graphic in the top-left corner of the slide, consisting of a grid of blue squares of various sizes. The squares are arranged in a way that they appear to be floating or overlapping, creating a modern, geometric look. The colors are different shades of blue, ranging from a very light, almost white blue to a medium-dark blue.

# The benefits of a closer relationship and the public's red lines



# Desire to improve the trading relationship

For some, the perceived economic impact of Brexit has fostered a 'pragmatic' attitude towards having a closer relationship with the EU, particularly on trade- they are happy to be closer to, and cooperate with, Europe if it comes with some tangible benefit to their everyday lives, particularly regarding the cost of living.

To several people we spoke to, it simply 'made sense' that we would have a good trading relationship with our closest partners.

Those who voted Leave, however, do still tend to be more wary of what a 'closer relationship' means in practice. People are clear that the benefits of any trade deal with the EU should outweigh the costs.

People feel that, while a member state, the UK was exploited and paid far more in than it received (being 'taken for mugs' was a common refrain), and that this should not happen again. In other words, the UK should not agree to a closer trading relationship with Europe for the sake of it- if the terms do not suit, Britain should take its business elsewhere.

"We should have those negotiations with the EU and say, look, we are your best, best neighbours. You know what I mean? You know, we want to support you. We want to work with you both defensively and economically, so, you know, let's, let's smooth everything out and let's have a really good trade deal (...) that is beneficial to both parties"

-Colin, 60, General Manager, Swindon South. 2024 Labour voter, would vote Labour again

"You need to get on with your neighbours. Like, if you look at it in terms of a street, like you all work together, with the people next to you. If you're short of something, you're going to knock next door because it's closer. You're not going to go around the corner and get it. You're going to go to whoever's closer (...) if we're getting stuff from the closer countries to us it's going be a bit cheaper because there's less transporting and less logistics"

-Paul, 46, Bookmaker, Cardiff & Penarth. 2024 Labour voter, would vote Labour again

# Regulatory alignment

Participants demonstrated a strong intuitive grasp of how the regulatory divergence between the UK and EU had increased costs by creating regulatory duplication - pointing to examples like 'Not for EU' labelling and their own experiences in shopping online for products from Europe.

Among these voters, support for regulatory alignment is salient and seems 'common sense' - so long as it does not lead to lower regulatory standards in the UK. This applies particularly to food. The assumption of most people is that UK food standards were some of, if not the highest, in Europe, and that aligning with EU regulations on food and agricultural products in the name of a closer relationship could potentially lead to lower quality.

However, when a moderator pointed out that, in some cases, aligning with the EU on regulatory standards might actually lead to higher standards for British produce, the prospect of alignment was generally viewed more positively.

Many are particularly sympathetic toward farmers, and the impact that being outside the EU has had on their ability to export to Europe. There was a sense that, if farmers see the value of regulatory alignment to their business and think this would be beneficial to the industry, then it is something the UK should pursue. If they do not, we should not.

"I think it costs a lot as well in the aspect if they have to have certain different packaging and different stuff to send it out to sell it in the EU, they're obviously going to then have to make two different types of packaging and potentially two different products and things to send it out. So it's not going to be cost effective."

- Becky, 45, Classroom Assistant, Fareham and Waterlooville. 2024 Conservative voter, now undecided

"I think we've got a reputation worldwide for supplying high quality products in Great Britain anyway. So I think our standards are really high anyway. It might be a question just of maybe lowering them a little bit to European standards"

-Mick, 57, Train Driver, Doncaster East. 2024 Labour voter, would now vote Reform

"A lot of their [European] fields have added preservatives and e-numbers that are dangerous and proved and linked to cancers and stuff. So if we let our standards slip, then that means that it's going to have a knock on effect later on for everybody else."

-Abby, 37, Carer, Doncaster North. 2024 Labour voter, would vote Labour again

# Youth mobility

In groups held before the announcement of the new UK-EU deal, many expressed regret that a generation of young people is finding it increasingly difficult to travel and work in Europe. These participants were particularly positive about the prospect of a youth mobility scheme, touting the benefits of such a scheme not just for young people, but for all ages.

However, several participants expressed scepticism about whether British young people would engage with the scheme as actively as their European counterparts. This reflects a broader sentiment among respondents that the UK should only enter into agreements that clearly serve its own interests—if the EU stands to gain more, the value of the scheme in their eyes is reduced.

In Cardiff, some said that they worried that an increase in the number of young people coming to live and work in the UK on such a scheme could have a negative impact on the employment prospects of British young people, often invoking the idea that people from outside the UK are willing to work for cheaper wages and fill vacancies Britons are unwilling to. An additional concern was that some may overstay their visas, and end up settling in the UK illegally, or abusing the welfare system.

“I've got a teenage, well just 20-year-old son, and if he wanted to travel more or work in Europe, that's going to be harder for him, which at my age, we could do that. And so that's a benefit [of a closer relationship]”

**-Sarah, 54, Management Accountant, Swindon South. 2024 Labour voter, would vote Labour again**

“I don't think it's a bad idea. I think that some of the people that can't find work over here can go over there and work for four years, I don't know, maybe in tourist trade or whatever. But it gives work experience, which is better than being on the dole or whatever you call it over here now and doing nothing at least. And it gives them maybe a chance of learning different languages and the type of thing that is beneficial from abroad. (...) Students or whoever it is, 18 to 30s, coming over here can learn different cultures, get trade or jobs in that country and take their knowledge that they learn back to the former country and maybe better their country, better our country”

**-John, 71, Furnace Manager, Doncaster North. 2024 Labour voter, would now vote Reform**

# An incrementalist approach

Despite their desire for a closer relationship, many are still averse to the idea of ‘full fat’ membership of the EU. This remains an unpopular and unrealistic prospect for many of those we spoke with, including **2016 Remainers** and those who are in favour of a closer relationship with Europe overall.

Support for a closer relationship exists, but with an ‘case by case’ approach- small steps toward cooperation where it is mutually beneficial for both the UK and the EU.

“I think rejoining is a step backwards really. I think it's about time Britain set up on its own two feet, if you want my opinion. (..) a closer relationship, but not, being back in Europe and stuff like that, but working with Europe”

**-Paul, 46, Bookmaker, Cardiff & Penarth. 2024 Labour voter, would vote Labour again**

“I got to agree with what somebody said just earlier on. I mean, if we, if we go too big too soon, we might as well just go, go back in, you know what I mean? Small, small steps. Small steps. Definitely.”

**-Alan, 66, CCTV Operator, Swindon South. 2024 Labour voter, would vote Labour again**

# Sovereignty and the ECJ

The idea that, in the event of a closer relationship, the UK would have to follow rules made outside of its borders is not just concerning those who voted Leave, but to those who voted Remain in 2016.

Being able to legislate independently is a benefit of Brexit few are willing to compromise on, particularly if the UK were placed in a position where it is bound by rules beyond its control, with no tangible economic benefit. Even when it was posed that there might be some benefit to regulatory alignment, resistance to the idea persisted.

While specific knowledge of the ECJ is limited, the idea of being outside of its remit post-Brexit is seen positively, and there is opposition to any remit for a European court over the UK-EU relationship.

In groups, that opposition did soften when the prospect of British judges having some kind of influence was floated, and when the court's remit would only apply to specific rules (e.g. agricultural regulation). Yet there is still some caution among people that any remit of the ECJ could start relatively narrow, but grow over time.

"I mean, we don't want to be governed by somebody outside of our flipping coastline, do we? You know what I mean? Which is what you are saying. If they're, if they're telling us how they behave, we might as well just go back and be blooming in Europe in the first place"

-Alan, 66, CCTV Operator, Swindon South. 2024 Labour voter, would vote Labour again

"I think that's better because if it was an equal 50-50 British-European split, then you'd have more say and you can see both sides and make a decision from that. Obviously they're going to vote with a judge from both sides and points raised either side. So I think that'd be a positive. If it was a 70-30, it'd be completely different"

-Owen, 30, Water Treatment Engineer, Doncaster North. 2024 Labour voter, would now vote, Reform

"I think Britain still needs to stay autonomous and even if we do do some deals with the EU, I still think that we should still be very independent from the EU and therefore the Court of Justice should not get involved"

-Caroline, 50, Housekeeper, Swindon South. 2024 Labour voter, would vote Labour again



# The UK-EU 'reset'

# The UK-EU agreement

In the groups held after the UK-EU summit, few participants had heard anything about either the meeting nor the agreement reached. Only a small handful had a detailed grasp of any of the core components of the agreement.

Ambivalence, across both the more progressive-leaning group in Bristol and the more right-leaning group in Fareham and Waterlooville, was the underlying response toward the summit when informed about it, rather than the frustration and anger that characterise Britons' political attitudes on other key issues. This suggests that much of the 'heat' has gone out of the Brexit debate compared to the period 2016-2019.

"I think that they are our closest neighbour and at the end of the day we're a tiny little island, a very politically powerful island, but there are certain things that we have relied on European countries for over the years that overnight that doesn't just stop. So it has to be some sort of give and take with things."

- Jack, 37, Art Dealer Watford. 2024 Labour, would now vote Liberal Democrat

"I suppose we had to give something though, didn't we? In a negotiation you always have to give and take. So I guess that's why something had to go."

-Karen, 60, Administrator, Fareham and Waterlooville. 2024 Conservative, now undecided

# Little faith in government

A theme shared across all focus group conversations was a lack of confidence in the UK Government to get a good deal from its negotiations with the European Union.

Participants displayed a highly transactional and zero-sum approach to our relationship with Europe. They understood that in the negotiations, if the government were to secure something good for Britain it would have to give something up in return. Whether the value of those benefits exceeded the value of what the EU had secured from the UK in return was the frame through which they evaluated the agreement - rather than seeing cooperation or divergence as an inherently good or bad thing.

Although few participants came with specific, deeply held views about the recent UK-EU agreement, this broader loss of confidence fed into their assessment of it during our discussion - as underpinning much of it was concern that the EU would always find a way of 'getting the better of Britain'.

For example, participants in all of our groups thought that oversight of the trade agreement by the European Court of Justice would lead to Britain following judgements grounded in and motivated by the interests of the EU - rather than being something the UK government could effectively manage. In Bristol, however, participants suggested that a further layer of oversight would be a positive rather than negative thing.

"I think we definitely lost, it's becoming more and more evident that we're certainly not in the position of power that we were once in and I think as the years seem to be rolling on, I think that just becomes more and more evident for a number of different reasons really. But yeah, it's flaky times to put it in the nicest possible way as things currently stand in my personal opinion anyway."

-David, 40, Recruitment Consultant, Bristol . 2024  
Labour voter, would now vote Green

"I don't think they've given up as much as we have. I think they're trying to take the little bits at the moment and then it's going to come to a point where they're going to go, right, well we've taken all your little stuff, now we want the big stuff and they're going to try and go more and more and more."

-Becky, 45, Classroom Assistant, Fareham and  
Waterlooville. 2024 Conservative voter, now  
undecided



# Fisheries

When reflecting on the new UK-EU agreement, the only element that provoked more passionate responses from focus group participants was the fisheries accord. The agreement caused deep frustration and even anger among participants who brought the issue up unprompted- this was particularly common among those with existing concerns around sovereignty.

The 'transactional' approach that many had demonstrated toward Britain's relationship with the EU - where many wanted Britain to be willing to lose a few small things to gain some bigger things- didn't apply here. Many were aware of the relatively small economic contribution fishing makes to Britain but remained unconvinced that any concession on fishing would be outweighed and worth a larger and more economically valuable concession from the EU in return.

Participants suggested that allowing Europe to maintain its presence and quotas in British waters was unfair, as it would hit a group (fishers) who they saw as being hard done by and struggling to get by, particularly in an era of deindustrialisation when small coastal towns had already been hit hard. Britain's fishing industry was also seen as something to be proud of and something that they considered had an important role in Britain's heritage as a coastal nation.

In the Bristol group, there was also concern that maintaining European access to Britain's waters could lead to overfishing, and some worried about potential environmental costs.

"I've listened to all of this on the news and I know that they were not happy about what the gentleman's just said about the fishing aspect. I actually know a small company that's pretty much just closed its doors after that being announced, which was quite a shame really."

-Sally, 58, Care Assistant, Fareham and Waterlooville. 2024 Conservative, would still vote Conservative

"But as well, I mean just because it's only 10,000 people to the small coastal areas that still do that sort of fishing, it's their lifeline, isn't it? And it's our heritage as well. So just because it's only 10,000 people doesn't mean it's any less important than anything else really. It's part of what it's to be British, isn't it?"

-Mark, 42, Software Engineer, Fareham and Waterlooville. 2024 Conservative, would now vote Green.

# Electoral implications

In the groups held before the announcement of a new UK-EU agreement, **few explicitly said that they would have a more positive view of Labour if it achieved a closer relationship with Europe and a better deal for the UK with the EU than currently exists.**

**This is not because a 'reset' of the UK-EU relationship is an unpopular prospect, but because many of the people we spoke to had little faith in the government to successfully deliver one.**

**Others said, though they would welcome a closer relationship with Europe, foreign policy simply is not a priority- often citing the cost-of-living crisis, concerns about defence and security, or the NHS. For many, anyone making noise on Europe was distracting from these core issues, regardless of whether they were supportive or opposed to a closer relationship with Europe.**

**Instead, the consistent theme across all three groups was the despair many feel toward the state of the country. This seems to be a bigger driver of people's political opinions than any action or policy proposed by a political party. Some participants also compared quality of life and the economic situation of the UK unfavourably to that of other European countries.**

**"I think it's pretty much on the back burner. I can't remember anything that Labor have said, any pledges they have made towards Europe. And I mean I'm not glued to politics and what have you, but I do watch and read the news every day, and I can't remember reading or hearing anything in the last few weeks. No mention of it."**

**-Mick, 57, Train Driver, Doncaster East. 2024 Labour voter, would now vote Reform**

**"Yeah, I mean, if they could do a good trade deal that's beneficial to us, then yeah, I'd feel more positive towards the Labour party and it is certainly doable. It all depends on what that deal looks like. If they obviously mess it right up, then obviously I don't think they'd be too popular with a lot of people."**

**-Colin, 60, General Manager, Swindon South. 2024 Labour voter, would vote Labour again**

**"I think we've got bigger things that they should be sorting and doing than putting the time and effort into doing that [negotiating with Europe] because then if they say that they're going to do it and then not do it, it just makes them look like liars again. I just think that they'll lose more people who would vote for him"**

**-Abby, 37, Carer, Doncaster North. 2024 Labour voter, would vote Labour again**

# Methodology

The insights in this report are based on a series of focus groups held across April and May 2025 by More in Common for Best for Britain.

16 and 17 April 2025

Doncaster North and Doncaster East

- All SEG C1/C2/DE
- 2024 Labour voters now considering voting for Reform UK
- All voted Leave in 2016
- Voted a mixture of Labour/Conservative in 2019

Swindon South

- All B/C1/C2
- 2024 Labour voters now considering Labour, Conservative or are undecided
- Voted a mixture of Leave/Remain in 2016
- All voted Conservative in 2019

Cardiff and Penarth

- 2024 Labour voters now considering voting for Labour again
- All voted to Remain in 2016
- Mixed 2019 vote

28 and 29 May 2025

Bristol South and Bristol East

- All SEG B/C1/C2
- 2024 Labour voters now considering voting for Green or Labour
- All voted Remain in 2016
- All voted Labour in 2019

Watford

- All B/C1/C2
- Voted for a mixture of parties in 2024/mixed current VI
- Voted a mixture of Leave/Remain in 2016
- Mixed 2019 vote

Fareham and Waterlooville

- All 2024 Conservative voters/mixed current VI
- Voted a mixture of Leave/Remain in 2016
- All voted Conservative in 2019