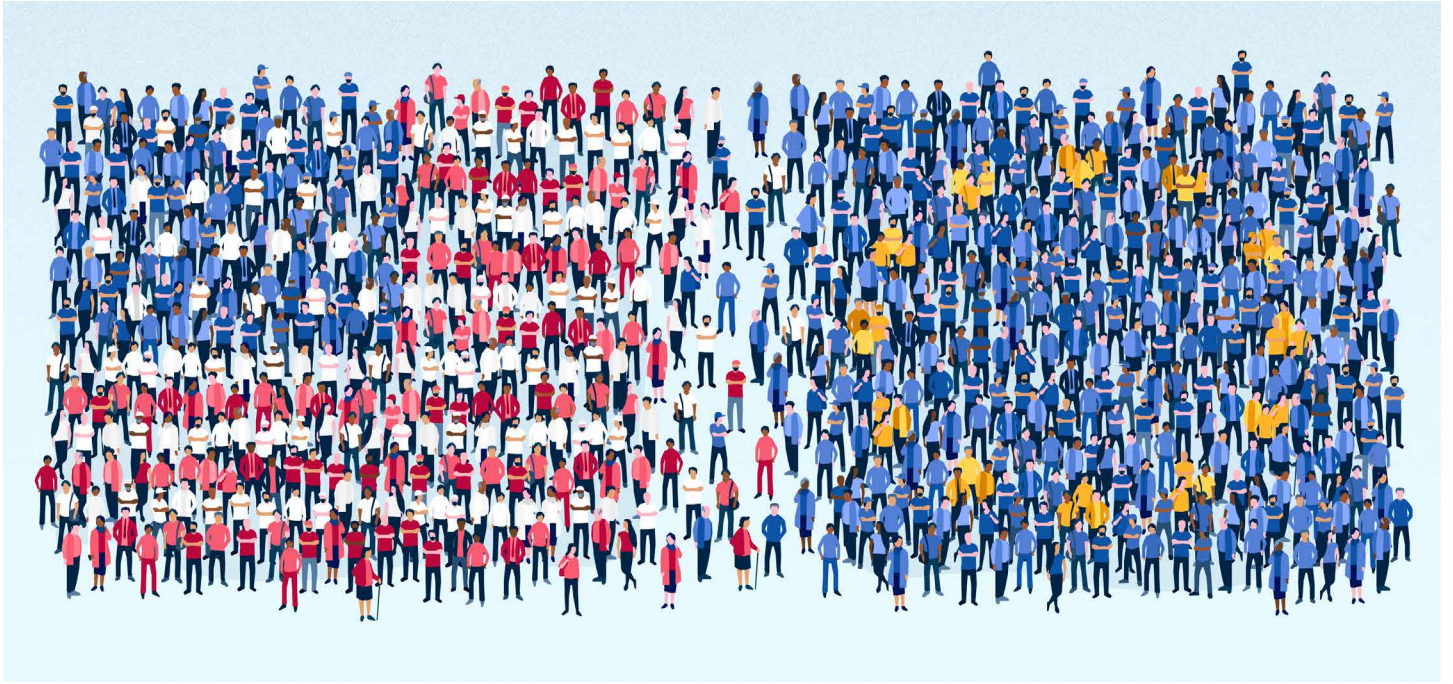




Brandon Bohrn, Courtney Flynn Martino and Daniela Schmidt | October 2026

Unequal Trust, Shared Interests

European and American Views on the Future of Transatlantic Relations

Executive Summary

Europeans and Americans remain committed to transatlantic cooperation, but approach the partnership with markedly different levels of trust. Americans are twice as likely to consider Europe trustworthy as Europeans are to say the same of the United States. A large majority of Europeans believe Europe should go its own way, a position shared by a narrow majority of Americans. Both publics consider greater European independence achievable. Meanwhile, the United States remains the EU's most valued ally, but its standing has declined sharply since 2024, while the UK and Canada have gained ground.

Despite this erosion of trust, support for closer EU-U.S. ties remains strong, regardless of which U.S. administration is in office. Security and defense top both publics' priorities for cooperation, followed by trade. Majorities also favor maintaining or increasing the U.S. military presence in Europe as European countries increase their defense spending. Relations with China provide further common ground, with majorities on both sides supporting efforts to reduce economic dependence on China and strengthen transatlantic coordination.

Taken together, these findings suggest that, despite political turbulence, broad public support remains on both sides of the Atlantic for a rebalanced partnership combining greater European independence with pragmatic cooperation on shared interests. This support could provide political leaders with room to act, particularly in the context of global competition with China, where both publics see the EU and the U.S. as natural partners.

Key findings

- **Trust in the transatlantic partnership is markedly unequal.**
72% of Americans consider Europe trustworthy, compared with 36% of Europeans¹ who say the same of the United States.
- **European independence has stronger support in Europe than in the U.S., but both publics consider it achievable.**
73% of Europeans and 52% of Americans say Europe should go its own way, while 59% on both sides consider greater European independence realistic.
- **The United States remains the EU's most valued ally, but its standing has declined sharply.**
The share of Europeans naming the U.S. as the EU's most valuable ally has fallen from 51% in 2024 to 29% in 2026. Over the same period, the UK has risen from 13% to 20% and Canada from 7% to 14%. Among Americans, the UK ranks first at 21%, followed by the EU and Canada at 18% each.
- **Canada leads European and American preferences for stronger future partnerships.**
Canada is selected by 36% of Europeans and 44% of Americans, followed by the UK at 34% and 37%, respectively. Among Americans, the EU also receives 37%, placing it alongside the UK, behind Canada.
- **Majorities on both sides favor closer transatlantic cooperation, regardless of which U.S. administration is in office.**
62% of Europeans and 73% of Americans support deepening the EU-U.S. partnership, regardless of which U.S. administration is in office.
- **Security and defense top the priorities for transatlantic cooperation, followed by trade.**
Security and defense are identified as priorities by 52% of Europeans and 51% of Americans, followed by trade at 44% and 48%, respectively.
- **Greater European defense spending does not diminish support for a continued U.S. military presence.**
As European countries increase their defense spending, 61% of Europeans and 66% of Americans favor maintaining or increasing the U.S. military presence in Europe. Reducing it is preferred by 23% of Europeans and 24% of Americans, while 16% and 10%, respectively, favor ending it altogether.
- **Majorities on both sides view China's global influence negatively, particularly Americans.**
61% of Europeans and 71% of Americans hold a negative view of China's influence in global affairs.
- **Reducing economic dependence on China provides substantial common ground.**
65% of Europeans and 72% of Americans support reducing economic dependence on China, even at the cost of short-term economic disadvantages. Closer EU-U.S. coordination on China is favored by 60% of Europeans and 72% of Americans.

¹ The terms 'Europeans' and 'European respondents' refer to the aggregate results for the EU-27.

Unequal trust coexists with shared support for greater European independence

Europeans and Americans differ markedly in how they assess each other's trustworthiness (Figure 1).

Nearly three in four Americans (72%) consider Europe a trustworthy partner, compared with just over one in three Europeans (36%) who say the same of the United States. A clear majority of Europeans (64%) regard the U.S. as untrustworthy, an increase of ten percentage points since September 2025.

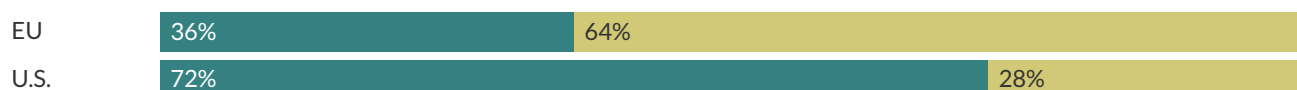
European views vary considerably across countries. Only 25% of respondents in Germany and 30% in France consider the United States trustworthy, compared with majorities in Romania (60%), Poland (58%) and Lithuania (57%). In Poland and Lithuania, these findings coincide with particularly strong support for maintaining or increasing the U.S. military presence in Europe, as discussed later in the study. The importance of U.S. military engagement and differences in perceived security threats may help explain the comparatively positive assessments in these countries, despite the wider EU trust deficit.

Figure 1 | How trustworthy of a partner is the United States / Europe for Europe / the United States?

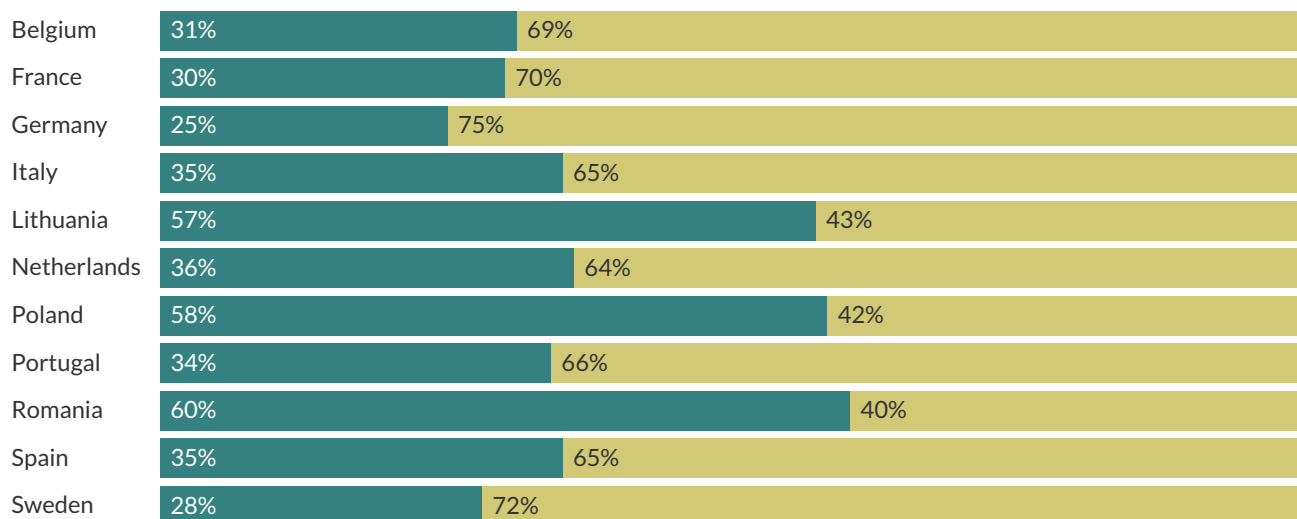
Results for the EU, the U.S., and selected EU member states

Trustworthy Untrustworthy

EU and U.S.



Selected EU member states



August 2026

To reduce complexity, the figures for "Trustworthy" and "Untrustworthy" combine "very" and "somewhat" responses.

eupinions | what do you think?

Figure 2 | In the last half century, Europe and the United States have often cooperated closely. Do you think that it is time for the EU to go its own way?

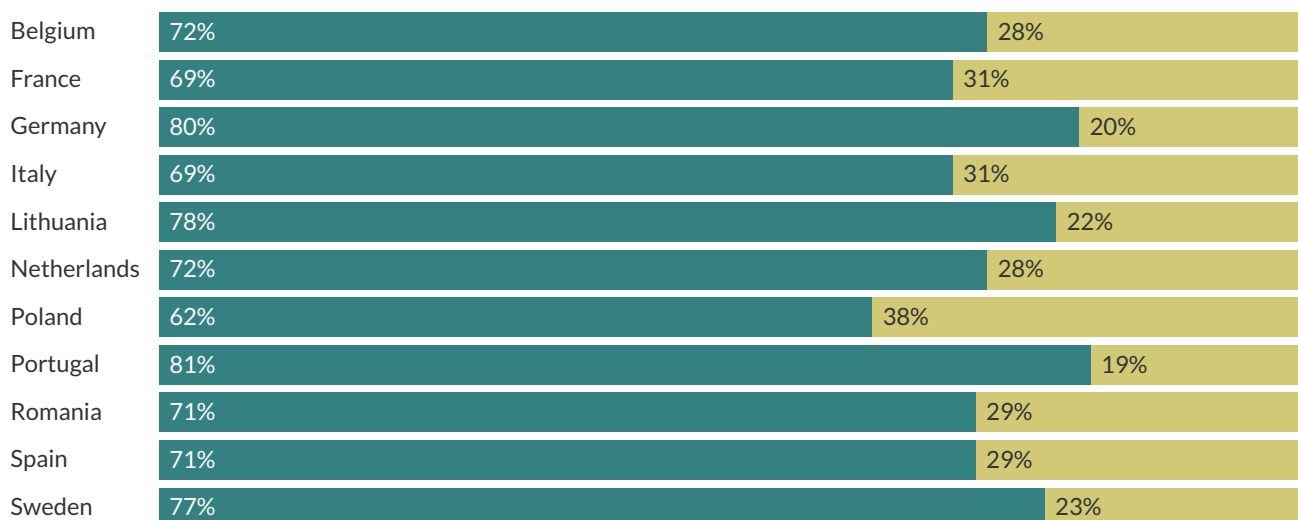
Results for the EU, the U.S., and selected EU member states

■ Agree ■ Disagree

EU and U.S.



Selected EU member states



August 2026

To reduce complexity, the figures for "Agree" and "Disagree" combine "strongly" and "somewhat" responses.

eupinions | what do you think?

Alongside this imbalance in trust, majorities on both sides of the Atlantic believe it is time for Europe to 'go its own way' after decades of close cooperation with the United States (Figure 2).

Support remains consistently high in Europe at 73%, unchanged from March 2026. Among the EU countries surveyed, support ranges from 62% in Poland to 81% in Portugal. Americans are more divided, with a narrow majority of 52% agreeing and 48% disagreeing. Although support is lower among Americans, the findings are noteworthy: greater European independence is not an exclusively European aspiration.

Generational patterns also differ across the Atlantic. Support for European independence is broadly shared among younger and older Europeans, at 72% among those aged 18–35 and 76% among those aged 56–69. In the United States, younger respondents are considerably more supportive than their older counterparts: 65% of those aged 18–35 favor Europe going its own way, compared with 42% of those aged 56–69.

For European policymakers, these findings underscore broad public support for ongoing efforts to build a more capable and self-reliant Europe.

Views converge more closely on whether greater European independence is achievable. On both sides of the Atlantic, 59% believe Europe can realistically become more independent of the United States. In Europe, confidence in its feasibility is lower than support for independence, although a majority still considers it achievable. The distinction is particularly pronounced in Germany, where 80% support Europe going its own way, while just 61% consider greater independence realistic. In the U.S., the share who consider it achievable exceeds the share who favor it.

American respondents also support the EU maintaining its own regulatory standards, even when concessions are presented as a means of improving transatlantic relations. A majority of Americans (57%), alongside 64% of Europeans, oppose relaxing EU rules on climate, technology or product standards for this purpose. However, the American majority masks a substantial political divide: 68% of respondents on the left oppose relaxing EU rules, compared with 43% on the right². Among Europeans, opposition to relaxing standards remains the majority position across the political spectrum.

² 'Left' and 'right' refer to the combined results for respondents identifying as far left, left or center left, and far right, right or center right, respectively.

These findings are particularly relevant to transatlantic trade tensions over European regulation, especially rules affecting American technology companies. The American majority opposing concessions points to a gap between the U.S. administration's pressure for regulatory changes and public support for relaxing EU standards to improve relations. For European policymakers, opposition across the political spectrum provides broad public backing for maintaining these standards in negotiations with Washington.

The trust gap and support for greater European independence are accompanied by a sharp decline in the United States' standing as the EU's most valuable ally, while both publics express interest in closer ties with other international partners.

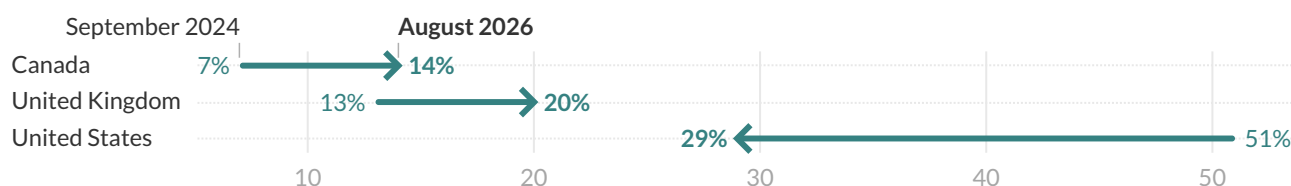
U.S. standing in Europe has declined sharply, while Canada and the UK lead preferences for stronger ties

The United States remains the EU's most valuable ally for a plurality of European respondents, but its standing has weakened substantially (Figure 3).

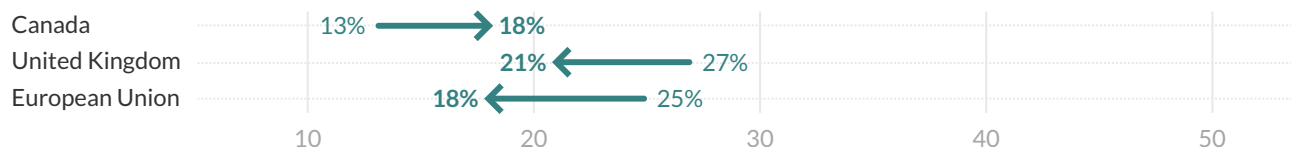
Figure 3 | **Who's the European Union's / the United States' most valuable ally?**

Results for the EU and the U.S.

EU



U.S.



eupinions | what do you think?

The share naming the U.S. has fallen from 51% in 2024 to 29% in 2026, a decline of 22 percentage points. Among the EU countries with nationally representative samples, respondents in Poland (48%) and Romania (42%) are the most likely to name the U.S. as the EU’s most valuable ally in 2026.

Over the same period, the UK’s share has risen from 13% to 20%, while Canada’s has doubled from 7% to 14%. The U.S. therefore retains its leading position, but European preferences are more widely distributed among other partners than in 2024.

Americans’ views on their most valuable ally are more evenly distributed, with the UK (21%) narrowly ahead of the EU and Canada (both 18%). Since 2024, both the EU and the UK have lost ground, while Canada’s standing has risen from 13% to 18%.

These results reveal a paradox: while a majority of Europeans do not trust the United States, they continue to identify it as the EU’s most valuable ally. Conversely, Americans largely view Europe positively but do not consider it to be its most vital relationship. For European policymakers, this contrast suggests that recognition of the practical importance of cooperation with the United States persists even as trust, a key indicator of soft power, declines.

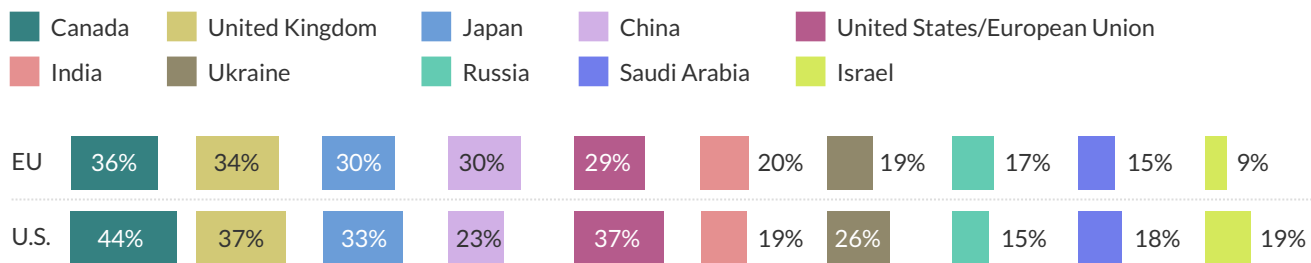
Although Canada is not currently the leading choice for most valuable ally among either public, it ranks first among both Europeans and Americans as a partner with which to strengthen ties in the future. A plurality of Americans (44%) and Europeans (36%) favor building stronger partnerships with Canada. Support for closer ties with the UK is also high among both publics, second only to Canada. Among Americans, the EU and the UK are tied at 37%.

The growing prominence of Canada and the UK as both valuable allies in the present and closer partners in the future suggests a potentially broader conception of transatlanticism in the years to come. While the United States and the European Union continue to rank highly in each other’s assessments, the sharp decline in the U.S.’s standing as the EU’s most valuable ally, alongside the increased prominence of Canada and the UK, points to support for a transatlantic partnership less centered on Washington and Brussels.

Beyond the transatlantic sphere, Europeans are more likely than Americans to favor stronger partnerships with China (30% versus 23%), while both publics show considerable interest in closer ties with Japan (Figure 4). Americans place greater priority on future engagement with Ukraine and Israel than Europeans do, while interest in India is broadly similar on both sides.

Figure 4 | **With which of the following countries should the EU / the U.S. build stronger partnerships in the coming years?**

Results for the EU and the U.S.
Multiple answers possible



August 2026

Alongside their preference for wider partnerships, both publics continue to support deeper EU-U.S. ties, with close alignment on key priority areas.

Both publics continue to favor deeper transatlantic cooperation, with security and defense topping the agenda

Support for European independence and interest in broader partnerships coexist with a clear preference for deeper EU-U.S. cooperation (Figure 5).

Across the EU, 62% favor strengthening the partnership regardless of which U.S. administration is in office. Support is higher still among Americans, at 73%. This preference extends across the political spectrum, although support among Americans is stronger on the left than on the right, at 80% and 64%, respectively.

A geographical divide is also evident within Europe, with stronger support for closer ties in eastern EU member states. Support reaches 84% in Lithuania, 77% in Poland and 72% in Romania, compared with 57% in Belgium and 50% in France, where opinion is evenly divided. The French result masks substantial differences across political affiliations, with 74% of

Figure 5 | **The EU and the United States should deepen their partnership, regardless of the U.S. administration currently in office.**

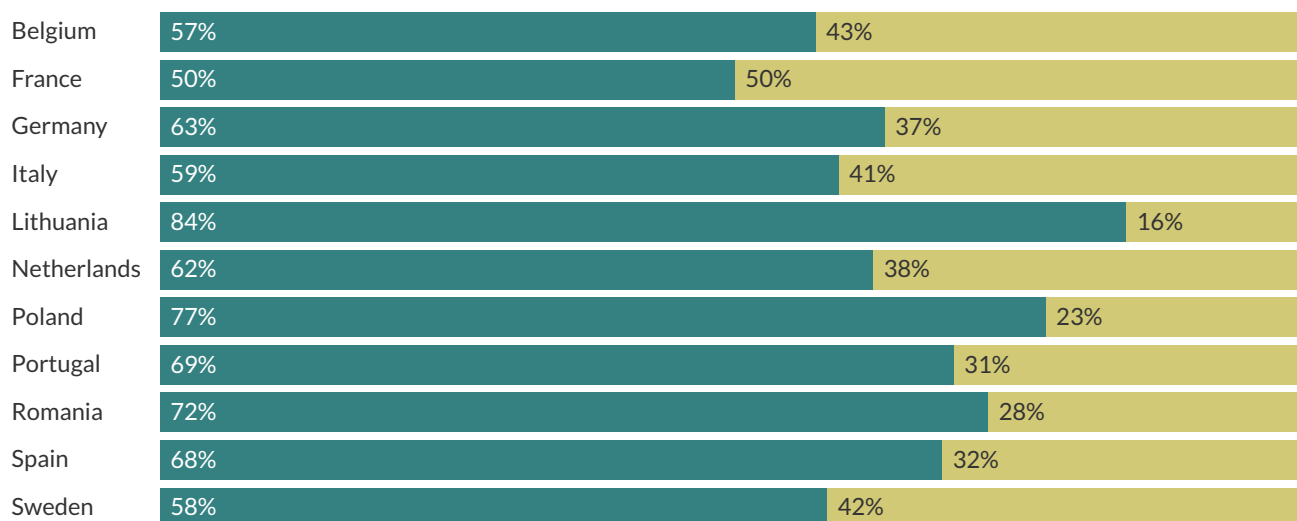
Results for the EU, the U.S., and selected EU member states

■ Agree ■ Disagree

EU and U.S.



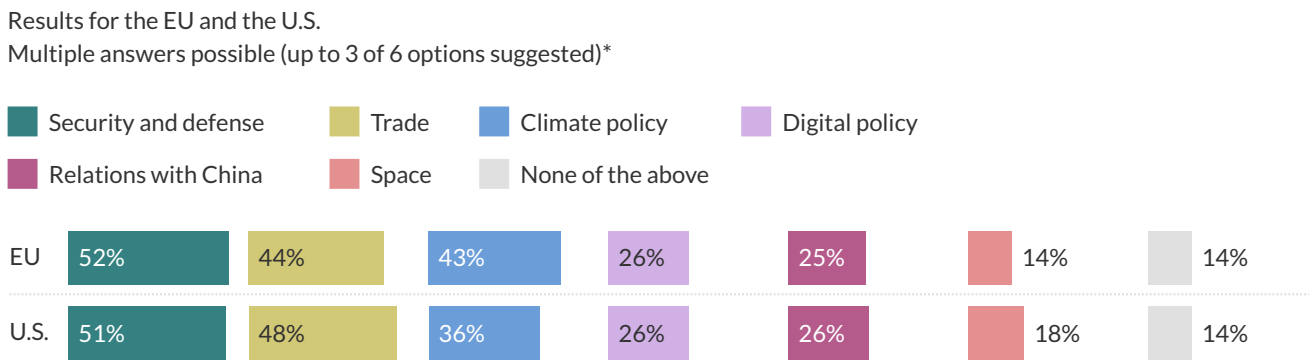
Selected EU member states



August 2026

To reduce complexity, the figures for "Agree" and "Disagree" combine "strongly" and "somewhat" responses.

Figure 6 | What areas of cooperation should the U.S. and EU prioritize in the coming years?



August 2026
Chart: *Including around 10% of respondents who selected more than 3 answers

eupinions | what do you think?

supporters of the centrist Renaissance party favoring deeper cooperation, compared with 50% of supporters of the far-right Rassemblement National and 36% of those supporting the change to far-left La France Insoumise.

Germany illustrates how low levels of trust and support for cooperation can coexist at the national level: just 25% regard the United States as trustworthy, yet 63% favor deepening the partnership.

When asked which areas the EU and U.S. should prioritize, Europeans and Americans give similar answers (Figure 6).

Security and defense rank first, selected by 52% and 51%, respectively. Trade follows at 44% among Europeans and 48% among Americans. Climate policy also features prominently, although it receives more support in Europe (43%) than in the United States (36%).

These findings suggest that European policymakers retain public backing for engagement with Washington even where confidence in U.S. reliability is low. Broad support across the American political spectrum also suggests that cooperation has a wider public constituency than tensions between governments might imply.

Greater European defense spending is accompanied by continued public support for a U.S. military role in Europe. Asked how the U.S. military presence should change as European countries increase their defense spending, the largest group on both sides favors maintaining it at its current level (Figure 7):

43% of Europeans and 49% of Americans. A further 18% and 17%, respectively, favor increasing it. Around a quarter prefer a reduced presence, at 23% in Europe and 24% in the United States. Ending the U.S. military presence altogether attracts the least support, at 16% and 10%, respectively.

Poland and Lithuania stand out for their support for an increased U.S. military presence, at 34% and 32%, respectively. Even in these countries, however, maintaining the current presence remains the most common response, at 54% and 50%. Overall, the findings suggest that both publics regard greater European defense spending as compatible with continued U.S. military engagement.

Majorities of Europeans (63%) and Americans (66%) also believe their country’s NATO membership provides protection against threats to peace, while 56% of Europeans and 63% of Americans consider NATO’s 5% defense spending target reasonable. In Germany,

Figure 7 | **As European countries spend more on defense, should the United States increase, maintain, reduce, or end its military presence in Europe?**

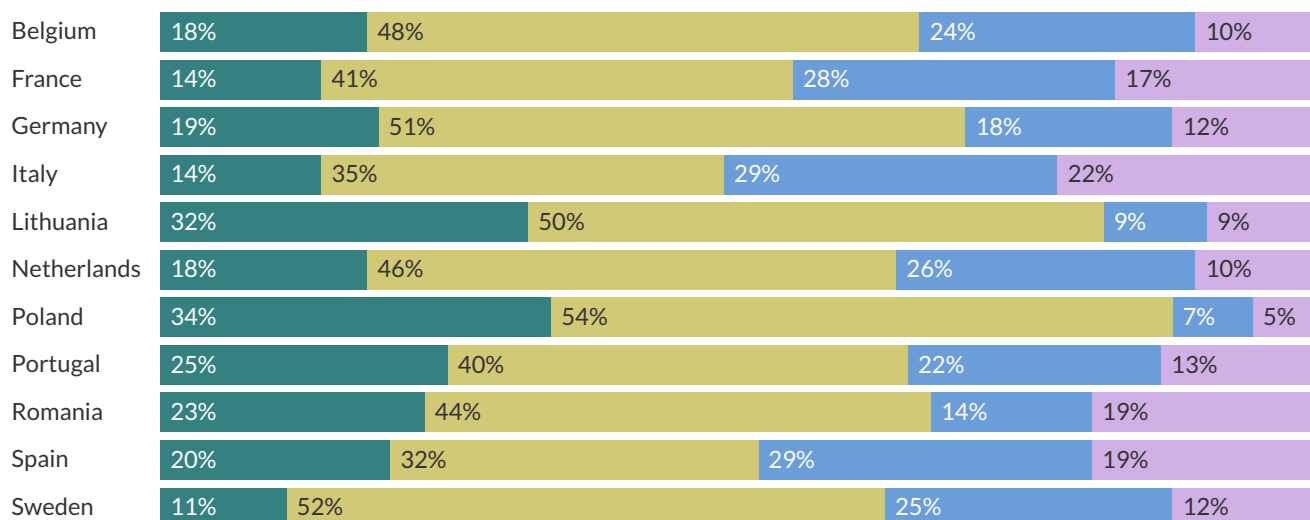
Results for the EU, the U.S., and selected EU member states

■ Increase ■ Maintain ■ Reduce ■ End

EU and U.S.



Selected EU member states



August 2026

eupinions | what do you think?

views of NATO differ sharply across political affiliations, despite widespread distrust of the United States: 79% of supporters of both the center-right CDU/CSU and the Greens believe NATO membership protects against threats to peace, compared with 44% of supporters of the far-right AfD.

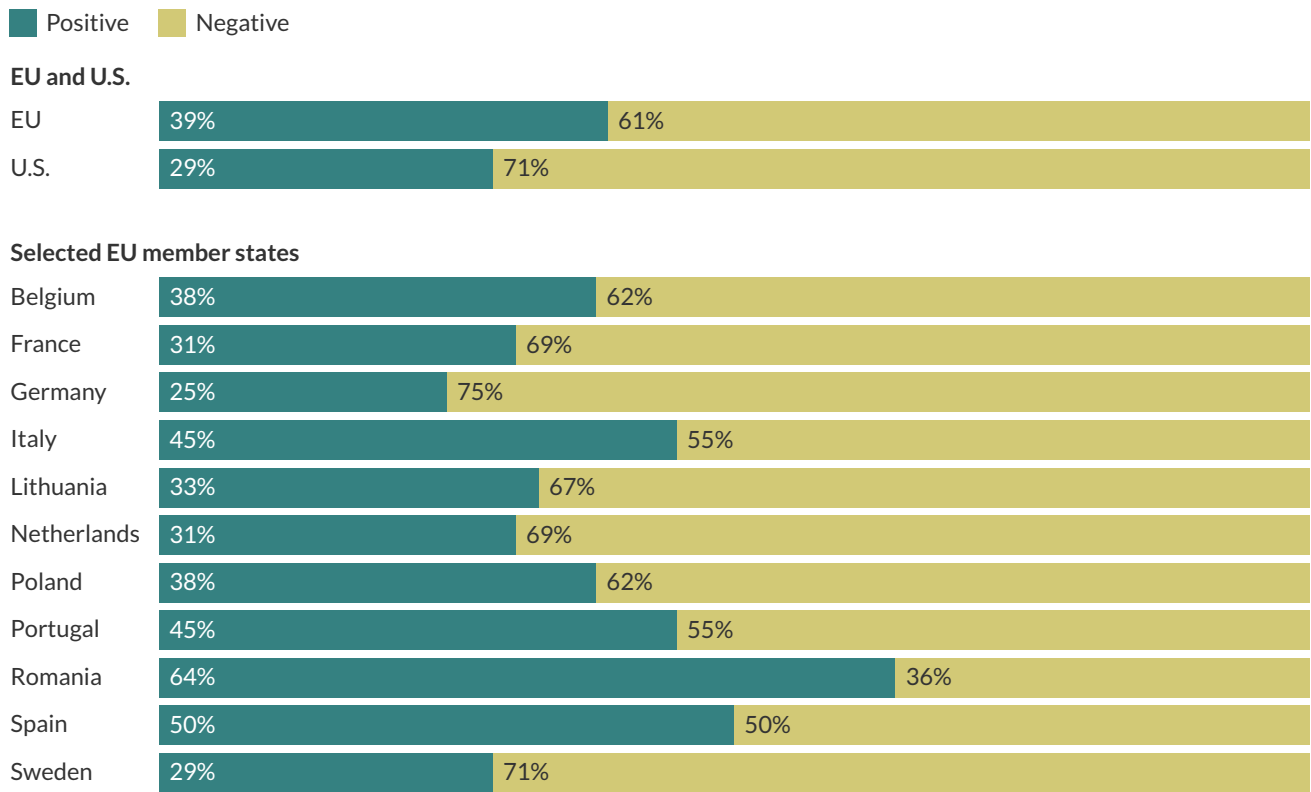
Taken together, support for NATO, its spending target and continued U.S. military engagement suggests that both publics remain committed to collective defense as Europe's role within the alliance grows. NATO thus retains a substantial foundation of public support despite uneven trust and political divisions. The American findings also point to a gap between public support for sustained engagement and White House

rhetoric and steps towards a reduced U.S. defense role in Europe.

Beyond European security, relations with China provide another area in which both publics favor closer transatlantic coordination.

Figure 8 | How do you feel about China’s influence in global affairs?

Results for the EU, the U.S., and selected EU member states



August 2026
To reduce complexity, the figures for “Positive” and “Negative” combine “very” and “somewhat” responses.

eupinions | what do you think?

Reducing dependence on China offers common ground for transatlantic cooperation

Both publics view China’s influence on global affairs predominantly negatively (Figure 8), with 71% of Americans and 61% of Europeans holding this view. Negative assessments prevail in all surveyed countries except Romania, where 64% hold a positive view, and Spain, where opinion is evenly divided.

The gap between the two publics has also widened since 2025, when 67% of Americans and 64% of Europeans viewed China’s global influence negatively.

Nevertheless, negative assessments remain the majority position on both sides.

Economic dependence on China is also widely recognized: 65% of Europeans and 66% of Americans describe their country as economically dependent on China. Furthermore, majorities in every surveyed country support reducing economic dependence on China, even if doing so entails short-term economic costs (Figure 9).

Support is stronger among Americans on the right (78%) than on the left (68%). In Europe, differences are smaller and run in the opposite direction, with

Figure 9 | **How do you feel about reducing your country's dependency on China even if it hurt your economy in the short term?**

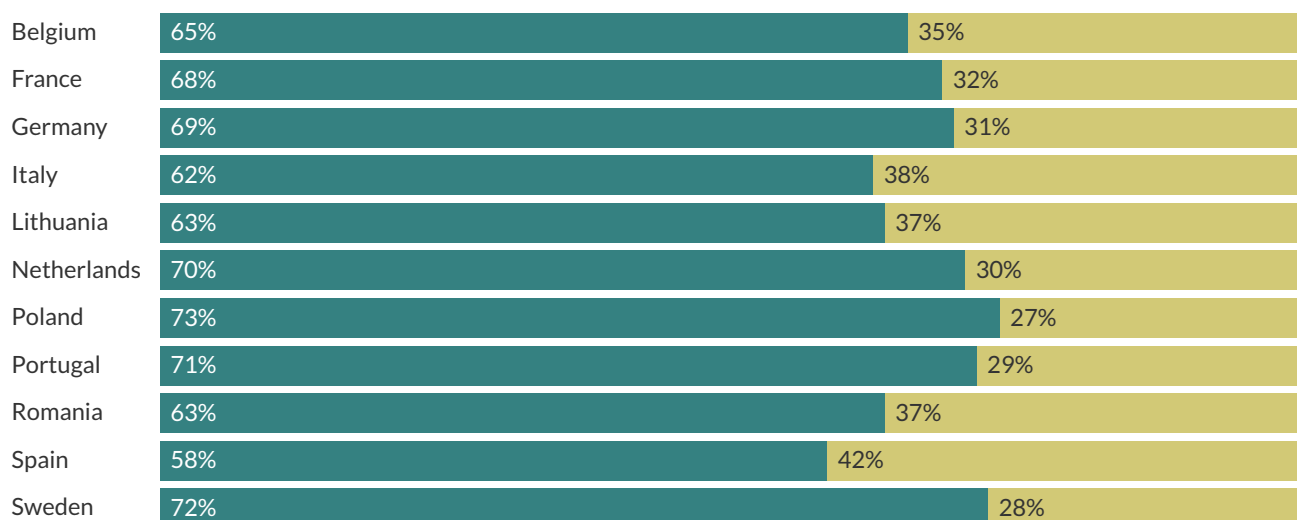
Results for the EU, the U.S., and selected EU member states

■ Positive ■ Negative

EU and U.S.



Selected EU member states



August 2026

To reduce complexity, the figures for "Positive" and "Negative" combine "very" and "somewhat" responses.

eupinions | what do you think?

around 67% of left-leaning respondents and 62% of those on the political right supporting reduced dependence despite short-term economic costs. Nonetheless, the relatively small differences indicate broad support across the political spectrum.

This alignment is also reflected in support for closer transatlantic coordination on China, favored by 60% of Europeans and 72% of Americans. Although these figures have declined from 64% and 76%, respectively, in 2025, the findings suggest that China remains an area in which the EU and U.S. could engage constructively and pursue shared objectives.

Policymakers seeking to capitalize on this broad support across political and geographical divides should nevertheless be mindful of the growing divergence between American and European perceptions of China. Against a backdrop of transatlantic tariff tensions, competition over rare earths and Europe's economic ties with China, opportunities for a coordinated approach to managing China's global influence may become more difficult to sustain.

Conclusion

The findings of this study point to changing expectations of the transatlantic relationship, whose value nevertheless remains widely recognized on both sides. Declining European trust, support for greater independence and interest in broader international partnerships coexist with a continued willingness to cooperate. Understanding how these sometimes divergent preferences fit together provides a clearer picture of the relationship's potential future. Four broader conclusions emerge:

Declining European trust has not displaced support for transatlantic cooperation.

Europeans increasingly question U.S. reliability while continuing to favor closer ties, regardless of which administration is in office. This suggests that the relationship's perceived value extends beyond confidence in current political leadership. Cooperation may remain desirable – or necessary – even as Europeans seek to reduce their exposure to decisions made in Washington.

American public opinion should not be equated with the positions of the U.S. administration.

High levels of American trust in Europe, positive assessments of NATO and support for continued U.S. military engagement point to substantial public backing for cooperation. Political tensions between governments should therefore not be interpreted as a general rejection of Europe or the alliance by the American public. This distinction matters when assessing the extent of support for the transatlantic relationship beyond the White House.

Greater European independence and broader international partnerships enjoy support on both sides of the Atlantic.

Europeans' desire for greater independence is shared by a narrow majority of Americans, while both publics favor stronger ties with other partners, particularly Canada. Diversification is therefore more than a European response to declining trust in Washington. The prominence of Canada and the UK suggests considerable interest in strengthening existing networks of allies, with Americans also identifying the EU as a priority for closer ties.

Shared interests provide a basis for pragmatic cooperation, although its terms remain contested.

Alignment on security, trade and reducing economic dependence on China creates opportunities for cooperation despite strained political relations. Yet agreement on these priorities does not resolve questions about military responsibilities, regulatory concessions or economic competition. The findings point towards a pragmatic transatlantic partnership whose continued relevance depends not on complete alignment, but on the ability to address shared challenges while accommodating differing interests.

About eupinions

eupinions is an independent platform dedicated to gathering and analyzing data on European public opinion. We provide insights into what Europeans think about current political issues and emerging megatrends.

Every quarter, we conduct surveys across all EU member states in 22 languages. Our data is representative of the population in terms of age, gender, and country/region.

eupinions is a Bertelsmann Stiftung project. The data is collected by Nira Data.

For more information, visit www.eupinions.eu!

Methodology note

The samples analyzed in this report were drawn by Nira Data (formerly Latana and Dalia Research) in August 2026 across all 27 EU member states and the United States (EU: $n = 18,514$, U.S.: $n = 5,294$).

Sampling targets reflect current population distributions with respect to age (18–69 years), gender, education, and urbanization (city, town/suburb, or rural area). For the EU, these targets are based on the most recent Eurostat statistics; for the United States, based on data from the Wittgenstein Centre for Demography and Global Human Capital.

To ensure census-representative results, responses were weighted to each country's demographic structure. Samples in Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, as well as the United States are nationally representative by age, gender, education, and urbanization. In Lithuania, results are also nationally representative, with weighting limited to age, gender, and education.

After country-level weighting, a second weighting stage aligned each member state's contribution to its share of the total EU population, making the combined results representative at the EU level.

The estimated overall design effect of the final European weights is 2.06. Accounting for this, the effective margin of error for EU-wide estimates is $\pm 1.0\%$ at a 95% confidence level. For the United States, the design effect is 1.46 and the margin of error is $\pm 1.6\%$ at a 95% confidence level.

Responsible according to the press law

© Bertelsmann Stiftung, Gütersloh

October 2026

Bertelsmann Stiftung
Carl-Bertelsmann-Straße 256
33311 Gütersloh
Germany
Telephone +49 5241 81-0
www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de

Authors

Brandon Bohrn
Senior Expert, Transatlantic Relations
Bertelsmann Stiftung
Telephone +49 30 275788-174
brandon.bohrn@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

Courtney Flynn Martino
Assistant Director, Transatlantic Relations
Bertelsmann Foundation North America
Telephone +1 202 340 2735
courtney.flynn.martino@bfna.org

Daniela Schmidt
Project Manager eupinions
Bertelsmann Stiftung
Telephone +49 5241 81-81124
daniela.schmidt@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

Grafic design

Nicole Meyerholz, Bielefeld

Editing

Barbara Serfozo, Berlin

Cover image

© Paul Feldkamp

DOI: 10.11586/2026137

Address | Contact

Bertelsmann Stiftung
Carl-Bertelsmann-Straße 256
33311 Gütersloh
Germany
Telephone +49 5241 81-0
www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de

Brandon Bohrn
Senior Expert, Transatlantic Relations
Bertelsmann Stiftung
Telephone +49 30 275788-174
brandon.bohrn@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

Courtney Flynn Martino
Assistant Director, Transatlantic Relations
Bertelsmann Foundation North America
Telephone +1 202 340 2735
courtney.flynn.martino@bfna.org