

CAVENDISH



# Nationality exposure.

A new dimension  
of corporate risk





# Executive summary.

For much of the *last three decades*, organisations competed on familiar considerations: price, quality, innovation and execution.

*That is beginning to change.*

Governments are increasingly viewing trade, technology, investment and critical infrastructure through the lens of national interest and economic security. As resilience and strategic dependence become more important, organisations are beginning to inherit perceptions associated not only with what they do, but where they are perceived to come from.

**We call this Nationality Exposure:** the extent to which an organisation's country of origin or geopolitical association influences stakeholder perceptions, creating commercial, political or regulatory risk.

This report examines whether recent geopolitical developments are beginning to influence how the British public thinks about organisations based in different countries and geopolitical blocs, and whether those perceptions are beginning to shape commercial behaviour, expectations around government contracts and the wider political environment.

*Why now?*

A series of strategic shocks - including the Covid pandemic, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, disruption to global supply chains, the race for AI and growing geopolitical competition - have accelerated a shift towards economic security, resilience and strategic autonomy.

As governments have adapted their approach, the question becomes whether public and broader stakeholder expectations are beginning to evolve in the same direction.



*What it means*

Nationality Exposure does not affect every organisation equally, nor does it affect every sector in the same way.

However, the direction of travel is clear. As governments increasingly frame economic policy through national interest and resilience, stakeholder expectations appear to be evolving alongside them.

For organisations operating internationally, country of origin and geopolitical association are becoming additional factors shaping trust, commercial opportunity, government relationships and long-term licence to operate.

Importantly, Nationality Exposure is not fixed. The research suggests stakeholder perceptions can be influenced by visible long-term commitment to the UK, including investment, local leadership, partnerships, tax contribution and support for national priorities.

Understanding Nationality Exposure is therefore not simply about identifying risk - it is about recognising where exposure exists, taking practical steps to strengthen trust and communicating this to key audiences.

## What *we* found.

### Signal 1

**Geopolitical Trust Is Becoming More Fragmented.**

Traditional assumptions about geopolitical partners are becoming more nuanced. Perceptions increasingly differ by generation, political outlook and context, suggesting businesses can no longer assume a single public view of geopolitical trust.

### Signal 2

**Geopolitical Identity Is Beginning to Shape Commercial Behaviour.**

Country of origin is becoming another factor shaping purchasing decisions, creating commercial opportunities for some businesses while increasing exposure for others.

### Signal 3

**America's Political Brand Is Becoming a Corporate Risk.**

The research suggests companies can increasingly inherit perceptions associated with their home country. For some US-based businesses, political and geopolitical associations are becoming as significant as traditional commercial considerations.

### Signal 4

**Nationality Is Beginning to Shape Expectations of Government Procurement.**

Stakeholders are increasingly applying questions of national interest, resilience and strategic autonomy to public procurement, particularly in strategically important sectors.

### Signal 5

**Political Scrutiny of Foreign Companies Is Increasing.**

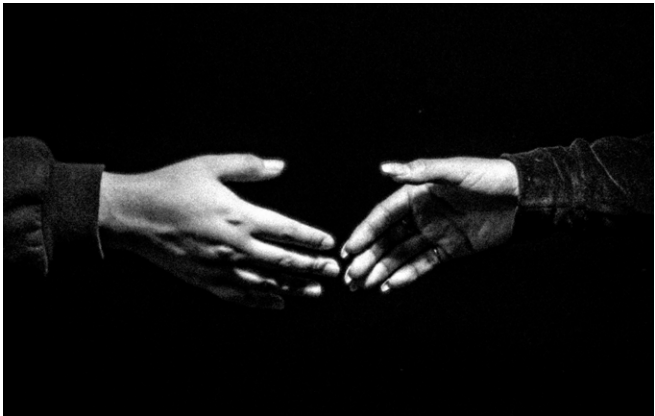
Members of Parliament show strong support for greater scrutiny of foreign companies competing for public contracts, suggesting nationality is becoming a more significant consideration within the political and regulatory environment.

# Key findings.



4  
*out of*  
5

US companies remain the second most preferred government supplier, after the EU, in four of the five sectors tested. Trust in the US remains, but stakeholders are becoming more selective about where that trust extends.



36%

of the public thinks the UK government should reduce contracts with US-based organisations. Nationality is beginning to shape expectations of government decision-making, not just consumer choice.

+6%

Just six percentage points separate China (37%) and the United States (31%) as perceived threats to the UK's national interest. Traditional assumptions about nations and trust are becoming more nuanced.

38%  
*versus*  
26%

Gen Z are significantly more likely than Baby Boomers to identify the United States as a threat to the UK's national interest. At the same time, Baby Boomers are far more likely than Gen Z to identify China as a threat. Trust in nations is becoming increasingly fragmented by generation.



85%

of MPs support greater scrutiny of foreign companies bidding for UK public contracts. Political support for considering nationality in strategic procurement is already strong.

31%

of the British public say they are less likely to buy from organisations based in the United States, while 41% say they are more likely to buy from the European Union. Geopolitical association is beginning to influence consumer behaviour, creating both risks and opportunities.

75%

of MPs say paying UK taxes would make them more favourable towards foreign involvement in UK industries. Nationality Exposure is not fixed. Organisations can strengthen trust through visible, long-term commitment to the UK.





*A new* dimension  
of **corporate risk.**



# Introduction.

Today, another factor is beginning to influence commercial outcomes: **nationality**.

Governments are increasingly viewing trade, technology, investment and critical infrastructure through the lens of national interest and economic security. As resilience and strategic dependence become more important, organisations are beginning to inherit perceptions associated not only with what they do, but where they are perceived to come from.

**We call this Nationality Exposure: the extent to which a company's country of origin or geopolitical association influences stakeholder perceptions, shaping commercial, political and regulatory outcomes.**



This report examines whether recent geopolitical developments are beginning to influence how the British public thinks about organisations based in different countries and geopolitical blocs, and whether those perceptions are beginning to shape commercial behaviour and expectations around government contracts.

The chapters that follow explore why this shift has occurred, what the evidence tells us, and what it means for organisations operating internationally.



## Methodology

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from surveys by YouGov Plc. Commissioned by Cavendish:

- **Public:** Total sample size was 2,122 GB adults (aged 18+). Fieldwork was undertaken between 15-16 June 2026.
- **MPs:** Total sample size was 102 Members of the House of Commons. Fieldwork was undertaken between 3-24 June 2026.

Both surveys were carried out online and the figures have been weighted and are representative of their relevant populations (British population; make-up of the House of Commons.)



# Five strategic shocks.

## The Pandemic shock



COVID-19 exposed the fragility of globally integrated supply chains and challenged assumptions that critical goods would always move freely across borders. Competition for personal protective equipment, pharmaceuticals and vaccines was accompanied by export restrictions, domestic prioritisation and intense international competition for access.

## The Conflict shock



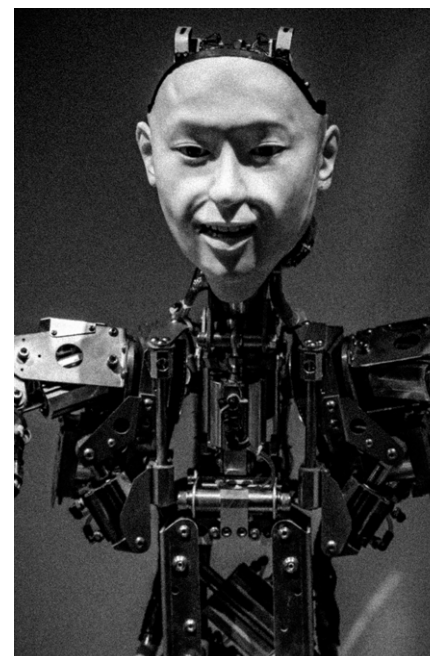
Russia's invasion of Ukraine exposed Europe's dependence on Russian energy, transforming what had been viewed as a commercial relationship into a strategic vulnerability. Governments accelerated efforts to diversify supply yet were then caught up in the Iran/US conflict and subsequent closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

## The Supply Chain shock



Disruption to shipping through the Red Sea and Suez Canal demonstrated how quickly instability in one part of the world could reverberate across global supply chains. Delays, higher freight costs and disrupted trade flows exposed the vulnerability of business models built around just-in-time delivery and highly optimised logistics.

## The Technology shock



Artificial intelligence has transformed technology from a commercial advantage into a strategic capability. Access to frontier AI models, advanced semiconductors, cloud infrastructure and compute capacity is increasingly viewed through the lens of sovereignty, competitiveness and national capability.

## The Alliance shock



Recent shifts in US policy on trade, tariffs, defence commitments and international engagement have accelerated a broader reassessment of long-standing assumptions across Europe and other allies. Relationships that had long been treated as stable foundations of the international economy have become subject to greater uncertainty.

## Findings.

The shocks described so far changed how governments think about trade, technology and investment. What this research set out to test is whether they have also begun to change how the wider public, and those who represent them, think about the companies caught up in them.

To find out, we looked at four things in turn: how the British public perceives different countries and geopolitical blocs, whether those perceptions are starting to influence what people buy, why, and how far they extend into expectations of government. We then turned from the public to Parliament, surveying MPs directly.

What emerged is five signals. On its own, each is suggestive rather than conclusive. Read together, they point consistently in one direction: nationality is becoming a more significant factor in how organisations are judged, and its effects are already visible in perceptions, in purchasing intentions, and in the political environment surrounding public contracts.

One theme runs through all five. There is no longer a single public view to manage. Attitudes differ sharply by generation and political outlook, which means Nationality Exposure is felt differently depending on who an organisation is trying to reach.

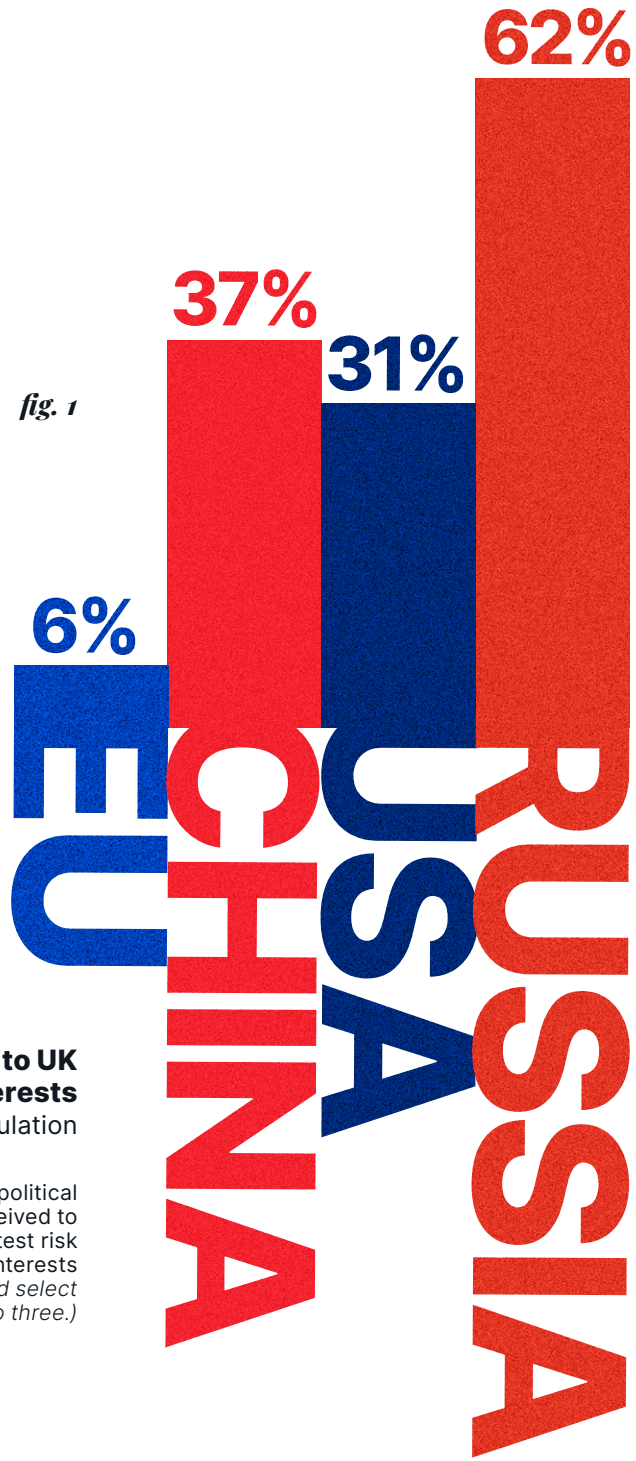


# Geopolitical *trust* is becoming more *fragmented*.

**The geopolitical assumptions that shaped the post-Cold War economy are beginning to shift within public opinion.**

When asked which countries or geopolitical blocs present the greatest risk to the UK's national interests, respondents were able to select up to three options.

Russia remains the most frequently identified risk. More striking, however, is the position of the United States. Nearly one-third of respondents identify the US as one of the principal risks to the UK's national interests, placing it just six percentage points behind China. By contrast, only 6% identify the European Union, underlining the very different perceptions attached to the UK's principal geopolitical relationships.



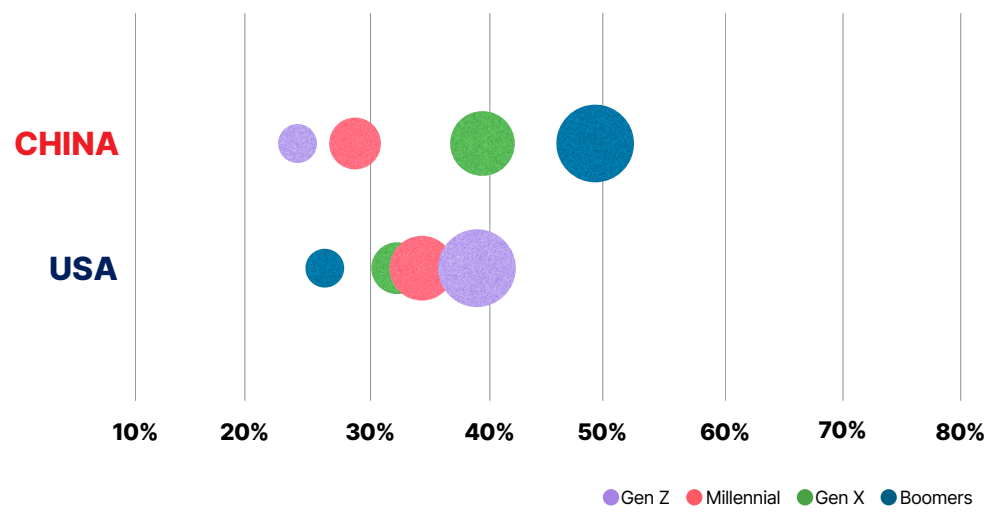
**Threat to UK National Interests**  
By UK population

Countries and geopolitical blocs perceived to present the greatest risk to UK national interests (Respondents could select up to three.)

**fig. 2**

**Threat to UK National Interests**  
By generation

Generally speaking, which of the following countries / regions, if any, do you think present the greatest risk to the UK's national interests? (Respondents could select up to three.)



**The national picture, however, masks profound political differences.**

Among Green, Labour and Liberal Democrat supporters, the United States is more frequently identified as a risk to the UK's national interests than China. Conservative and Reform UK supporters take the opposite view, identifying China by a considerable margin as the greater concern. Similar differences emerge between Remain and Leave voters, suggesting attitudes towards geopolitical partners increasingly reflect broader political worldviews rather than a single national consensus.

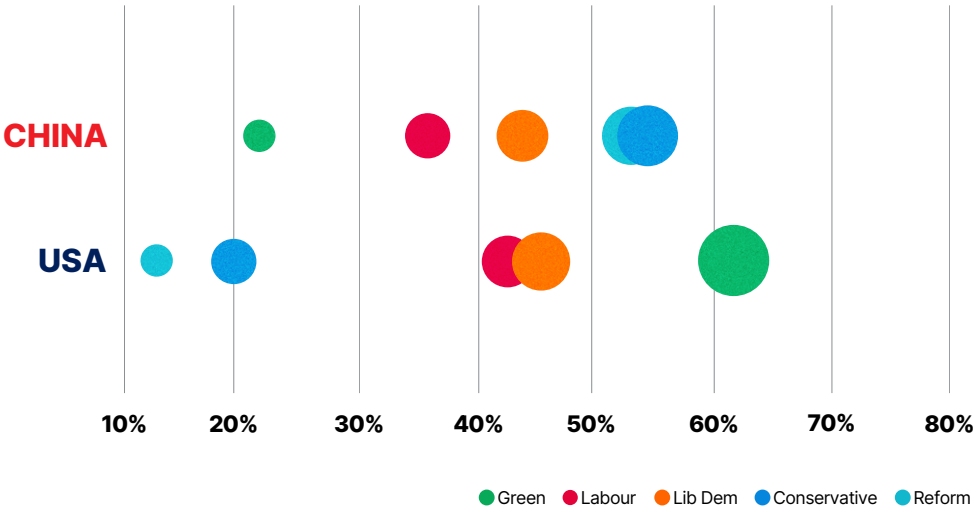
Generational differences are equally striking. Among Gen Z, 38% identify the United States as a threat to the UK's national interest, compared with 24% for China. By contrast, 49% of Baby Boomers identify China as a threat, compared with 26% for the United States.

By comparison, differences across gender, income and socio-economic background are relatively modest throughout the research.

This is an important finding. It suggests organisations should think less about “the British public” and more about the specific stakeholder groups

that shape their operating environment. Political identity and generation emerge as far stronger drivers of geopolitical perceptions than many traditional demographic characteristics, meaning Nationality Exposure is unlikely to be experienced uniformly.

The same organisation may be viewed very differently depending on the political outlook, age profile and wider perspectives of the stakeholders it is seeking to influence.

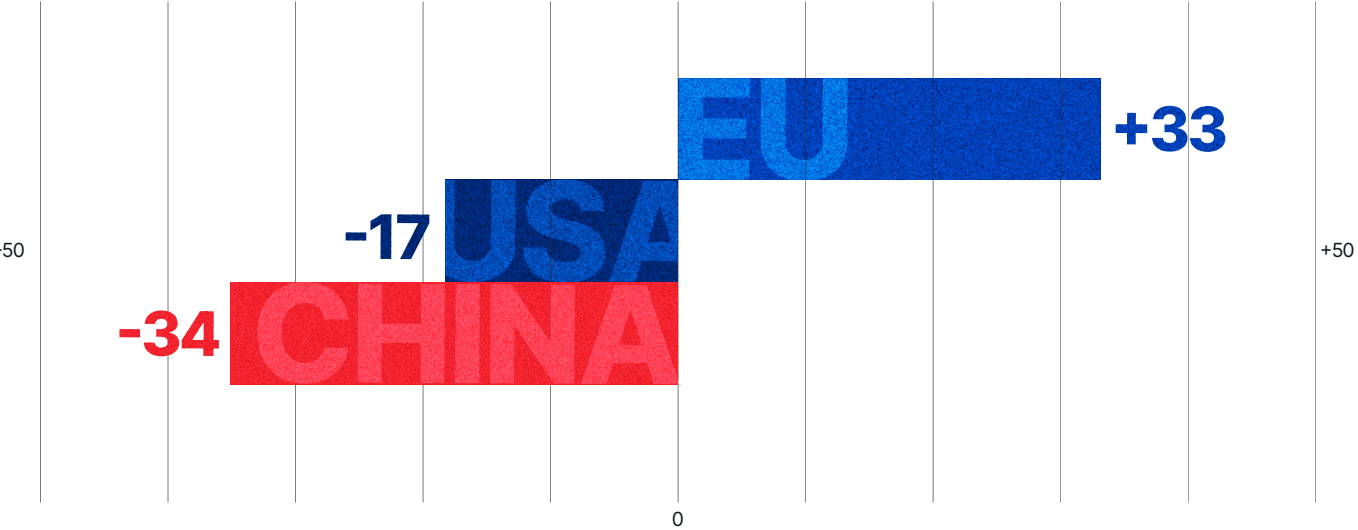


Generally speaking, which of the following countries / regions, if any, do you think present the greatest risk to the UK's national interests? (Respondents could select up to three.)



# Geopolitical identity is *beginning to shape* commercial behaviour.

The research suggests these geopolitical perceptions do not remain confined to foreign policy. They are beginning to influence commercial behaviour.

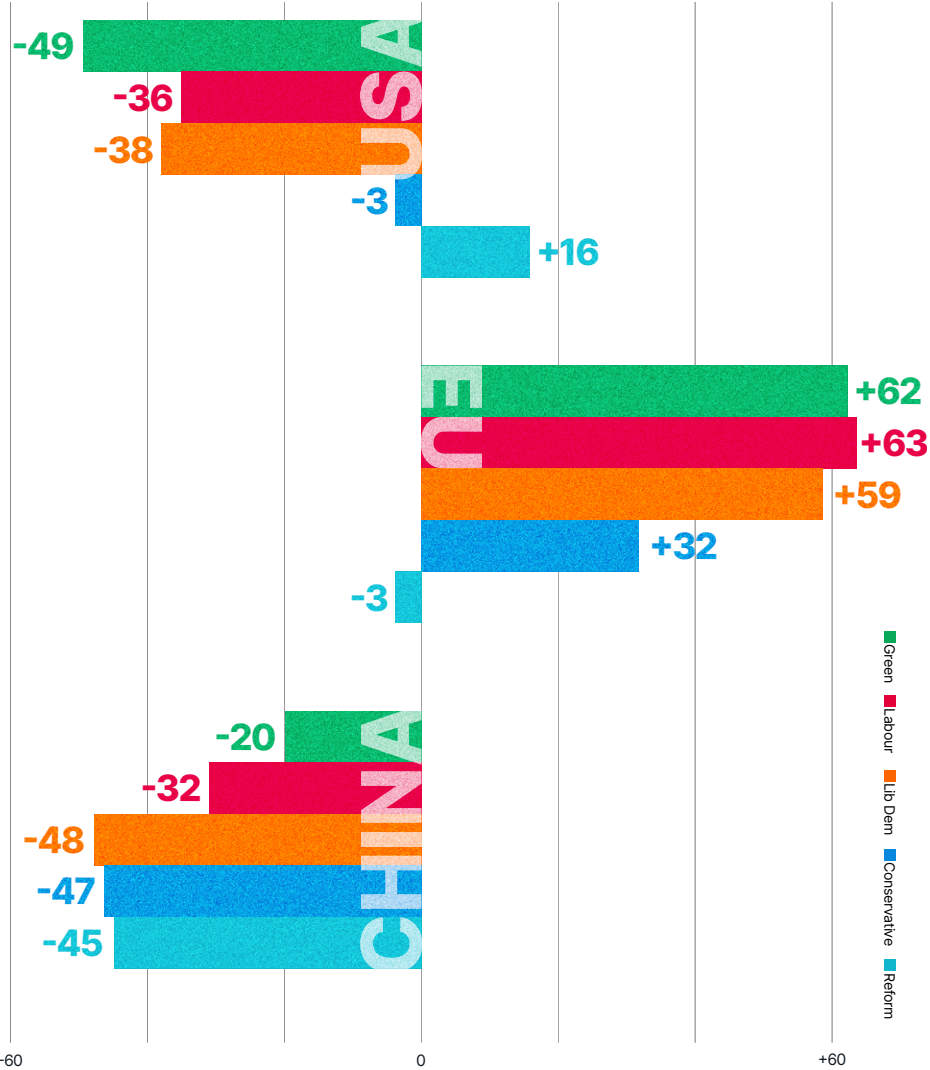


**fig. 4** Net impact of geopolitical origin on purchasing intentions.  
UK Population

In general, if you were aware that a company was based in the following country / region, would it make you more or less likely to purchase their products / services, or would it make no real difference?

**fig. 5** Net impact of geopolitical origin on purchasing intentions.  
By voting intention.

In general, if you were aware that a company was based in the following country / region, would it make you more or less likely to purchase their products / services, or would it make no real difference?



Respondents were asked whether knowing a company was based in a particular country or geopolitical bloc would make them more or less likely to purchase its products or services.

The contrast between the three principal geopolitical blocs examined is striking.

Companies based in the European Union benefit from a clear commercial premium. 41% of respondents say EU origin would make them more likely to purchase, compared with just 8% who say it would make them less likely.

Companies based in the United States occupy a much more contested position. 14% of British adults say US origin would make them more likely to purchase, while 31% say it would make them

less likely. Almost half (49%) say it would make no difference.

Companies based in China face the greatest commercial headwind. Only 5% say Chinese origin would make them more likely to purchase, compared with 39% who say it would make them less likely.

The overall picture, however, masks important political differences. Supporters of Green, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties are substantially more likely to say a company being based in the United States would make them less likely to purchase from it, while Conservative and Reform UK supporters are considerably more favourable.

By contrast, attitudes towards Chinese companies are negative across the political spectrum,

with much smaller differences between parties.

**This distinction matters.**

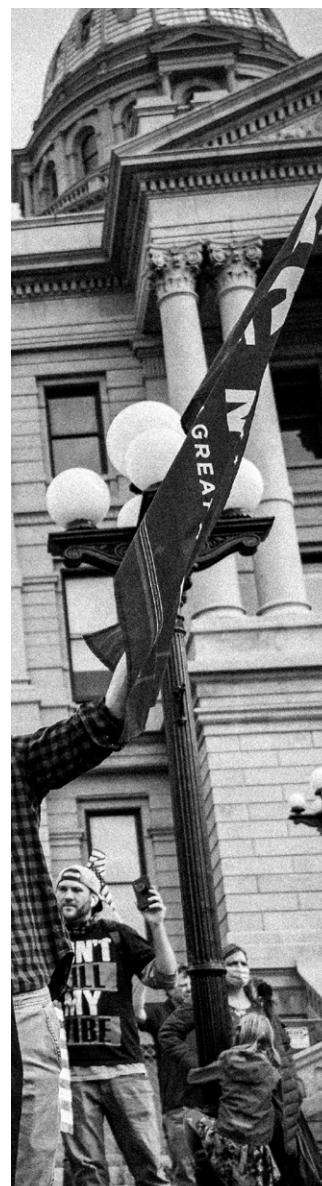
Chinese companies appear to face a relatively consistent commercial penalty across different political constituencies. The United States presents a different challenge. Perceptions are considerably more polarised, meaning organisations associated with the US may encounter very different stakeholder environments depending on the audiences they are engaging.

Nationality Exposure is therefore unlikely to be experienced uniformly. The commercial consequences depend not only on where a company is based, but on which stakeholders it is seeking to influence.



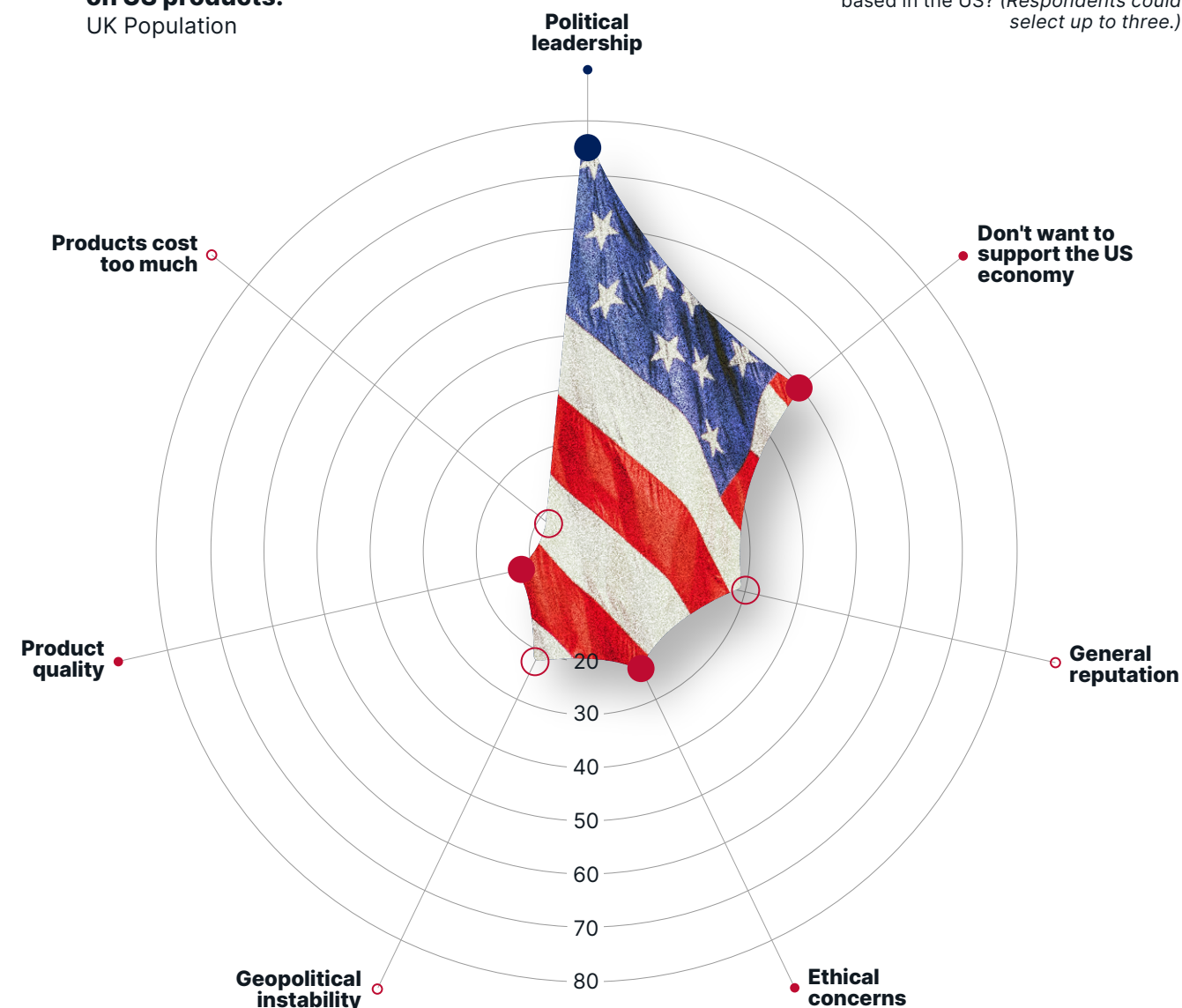
# America's political brand is becoming a corporate **risk**.

The previous section demonstrated that companies based in the United States face a measurable commercial headwind compared with companies based in the European Union.



**fig. 6** Reasons to reduce spending on US products.  
UK Population

Which of the following reasons best describe why you would feel less likely to buy products / services from companies based in the US? (Respondents could select up to three.)



## The next question is why.

Respondents who said they would be less likely to purchase from companies based in the United States were asked to identify the reasons for that view, selecting up to three responses. The findings point overwhelmingly towards politics rather than commerce.

Around three quarters (76%) selected the political leadership of the United States as one of the principal reasons they would be less likely to buy from US-based companies. Around half (51%) said they did not want to support the US economy, while 30% cited the general reputation of the country.

By contrast, traditional commercial considerations ranked much lower. Just 13% cited concerns about product or service quality and only 9% pointed to price. This is one of the clearest signals in the research.

The commercial challenge facing some US-based organisations is not primarily about the products they sell. It is increasingly shaped by perceptions of the country in which they are based.

## This is Nationality Exposure *in practice*.

The United States is currently the clearest example identified by this research, but the principle extends beyond a single country. As geopolitics becomes a more prominent feature of commercial life, organisations may increasingly find themselves judged not only by what they do, but by where they come from.

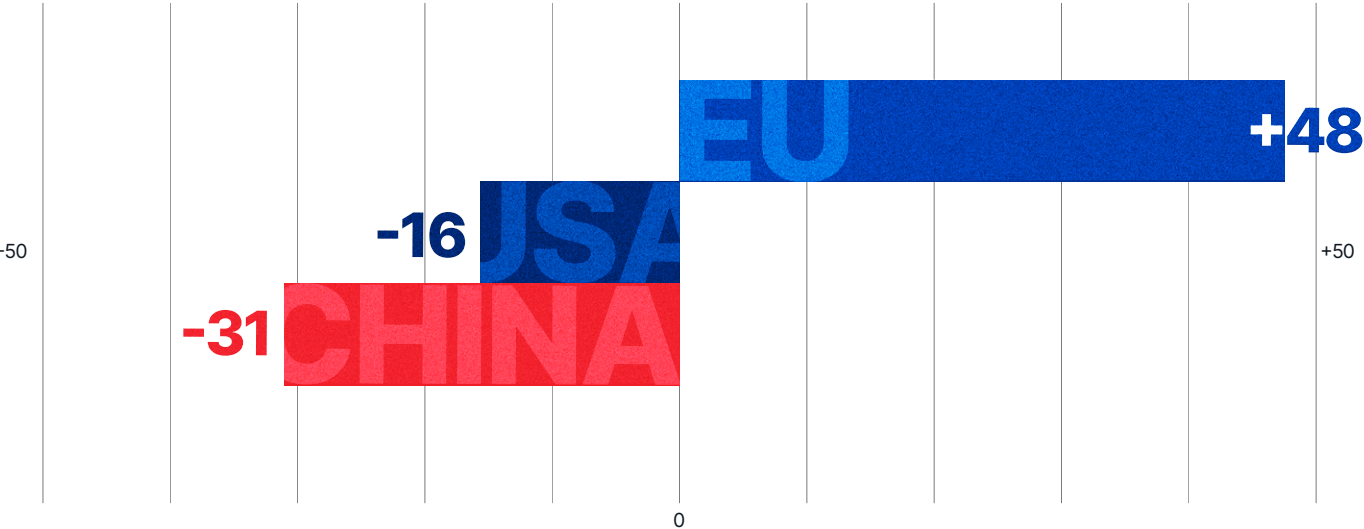
For multinational organisations, managing reputation may increasingly require managing geopolitical association alongside corporate behaviour.



# Nationality is beginning to *shape* expectations of government procurement.



fig. 7



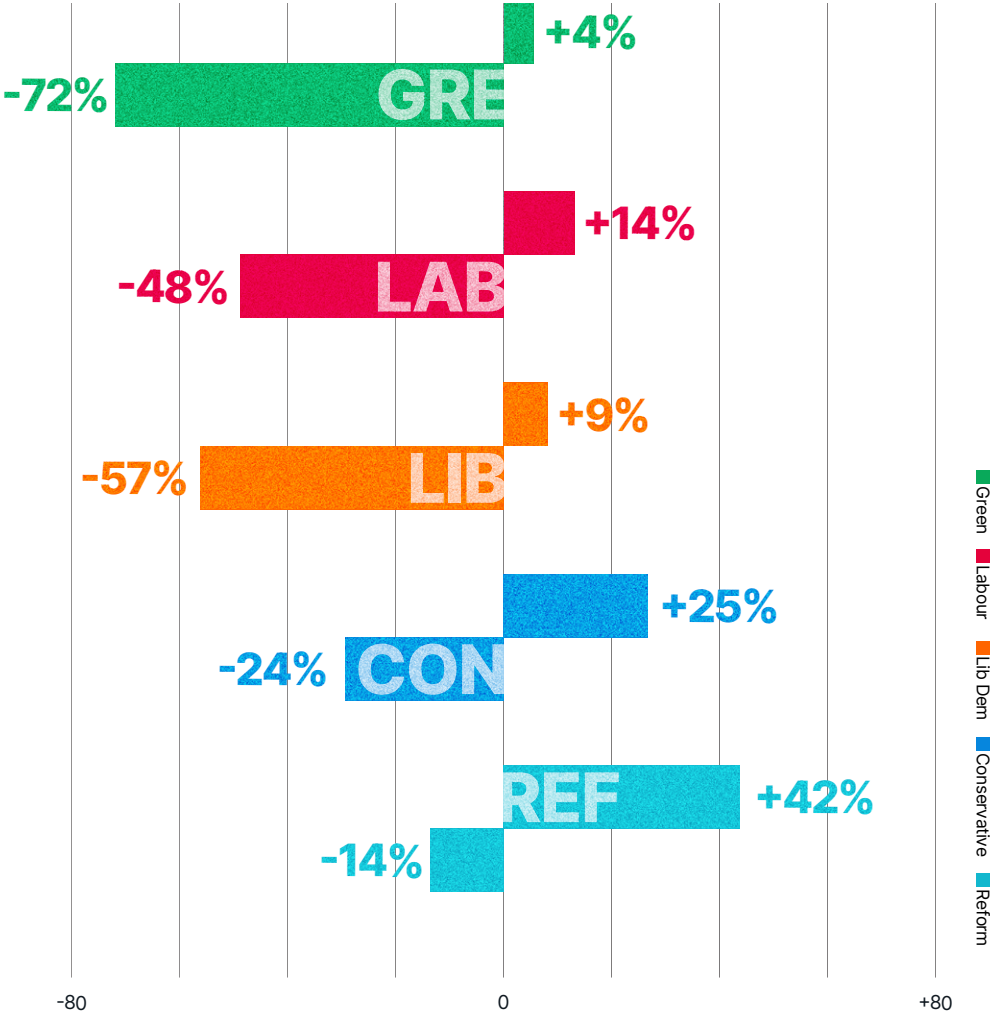
**Net public preference for government contracts.**  
UK Population

In general, do you think the government should increase or decrease contracts with companies that are from the following countries / regions?

fig. 8

**Net public preference for contracts with US-based companies.**  
By voting intention.

In general, do you think the government should increase or decrease contracts with companies that are from the following countries / regions?



**The final stage of the research explored whether these geopolitical perceptions extend beyond purchasing decisions and into expectations of government.**

Respondents were asked whether the government should increase or decrease contracts with companies based in different countries and geopolitical blocs. The findings suggest that the same geopolitical distinctions seen in consumer behaviour are also beginning to shape public expectations of government. Companies based in the European Union attract the strongest public support. More than half of respondents (56%) believe government should increase contracts with EU-based companies, while only 8% believe they should be reduced.

By contrast, attitudes towards companies based in the United States are considerably more divided. One in five respondents (20%) support increasing government contracts with US-based companies, while over a third (36%) favour reducing them.

Views towards companies based in China are more consistently negative. Just 10% support increasing government contracts, compared with 41% who believe they should be reduced.

The overall picture, however, masks significant political differences.

Green, Labour and Liberal Democrat supporters are considerably more likely to favour reducing government contracts with US-based companies. Conservative supporters are broadly evenly divided, while Reform UK supporters are the only major political group more likely to support (either strongly or somewhat) increasing rather than reducing government contracts with US-based organisations.

This should not be interpreted as evidence that government procurement policy is being driven by public opinion. It does suggest, however, that the political environment in which decisions about government contracts are made may be changing. As governments increasingly consider resilience, trusted partners and strategic autonomy, different political constituencies appear to hold markedly different expectations about which countries and geopolitical blocs government should do business with.

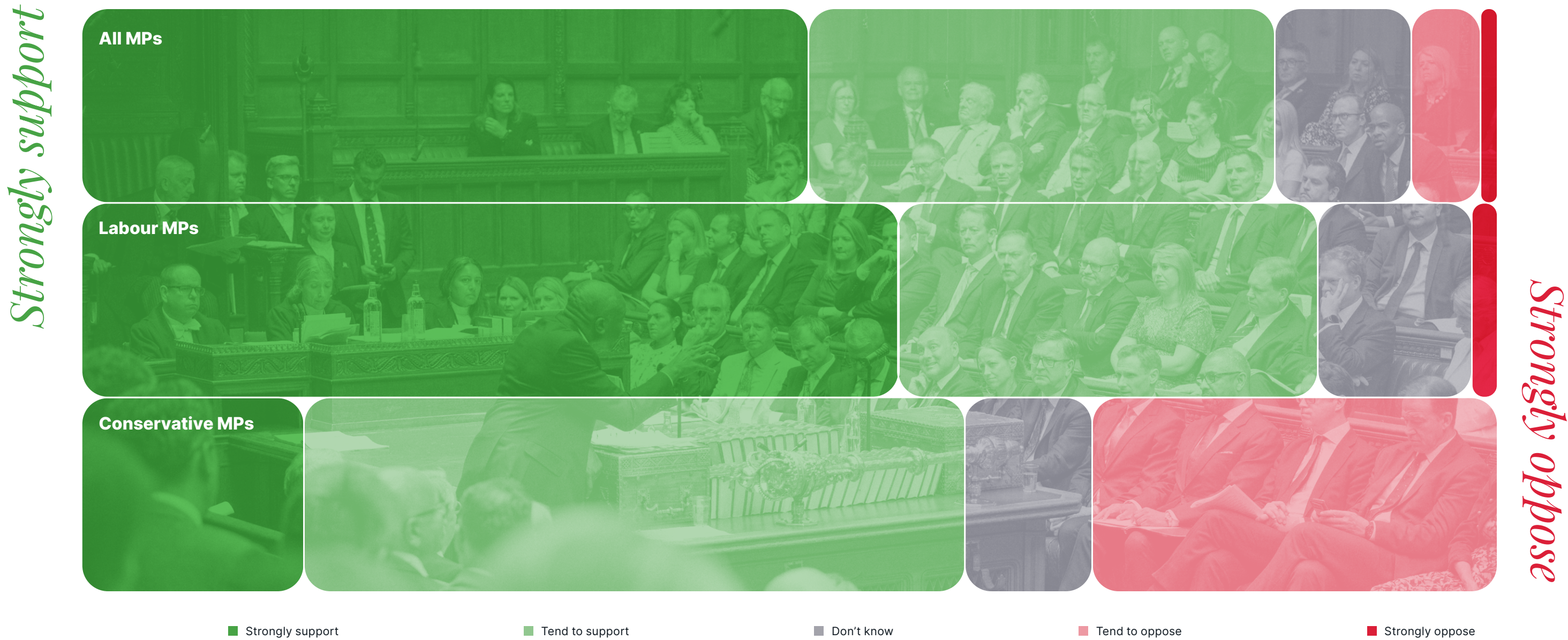
For organisations operating in sectors where government is a major customer, nationality exposure may increasingly shape not only stakeholder perceptions, but the wider political debate surrounding public contracts.



fig. 9

**MP support for increased scrutiny on foreign companies bidding for UK public sector contracts.** By voting intention.

To what extent would you support or oppose the UK government increasing restrictions or applying greater scrutiny to foreign companies bidding for UK public sector contracts?



# Political scrutiny of foreign companies is *increasing*.

Throughout this report we have examined whether public attitudes are beginning to shift.

Our parallel survey of Members of Parliament suggests these questions are not confined to public opinion.

85% of MPs support increasing scrutiny of foreign companies bidding for UK public sector contracts, with just 6% opposed. For the governing Labour Party representatives this rises to 88%.

Importantly, this question was about greater scrutiny, not blanket restrictions. The findings suggest there is broad parliamentary support for considering nationality and geopolitical association more carefully where public contracts are concerned. This does not mean procurement policy will change overnight. Nor does it imply that foreign companies will be excluded from competing for government work.

It does suggest that nationality and geopolitical association are becoming increasingly legitimate considerations within political debate, particularly where public money and strategically important sectors are involved.



# Managing Nationality exposure.

**The findings in this report should not be interpreted as suggesting that Nationality Exposure is fixed or inevitable.**

While organisations cannot control geopolitical events or the relationships between states, they can influence how they are perceived within the markets in which they operate.

Alongside this research, Cavendish surveyed Members of Parliament to understand what factors would make them more favourable towards foreign organisations operating in strategically important sectors of the UK economy.

The findings suggest that stakeholders distinguish between

foreign organisations that simply operate in the UK and those that demonstrate a clear, long-term commitment to it.

**The strongest signals all point in the same direction:** Economic contribution matters. Long-term investment matters. Demonstrable commitment to the UK matters.

This suggests that Nationality Exposure is shaped by more than simply where an organisation is based. It is also influenced by the extent to which stakeholders believe that organisation contributes to the UK's economy, resilience and long-term national interests.

For organisations, this represents an important shift.

Managing Nationality Exposure is unlikely to be achieved through communications alone. It increasingly requires organisations to demonstrate commitment through investment, employment, operational presence, partnerships and responsible corporate behaviour.

Understanding which actions matter most, and to which stakeholders, will become an increasingly important source of competitive advantage as geopolitical considerations become more prominent in commercial and political decision-making.



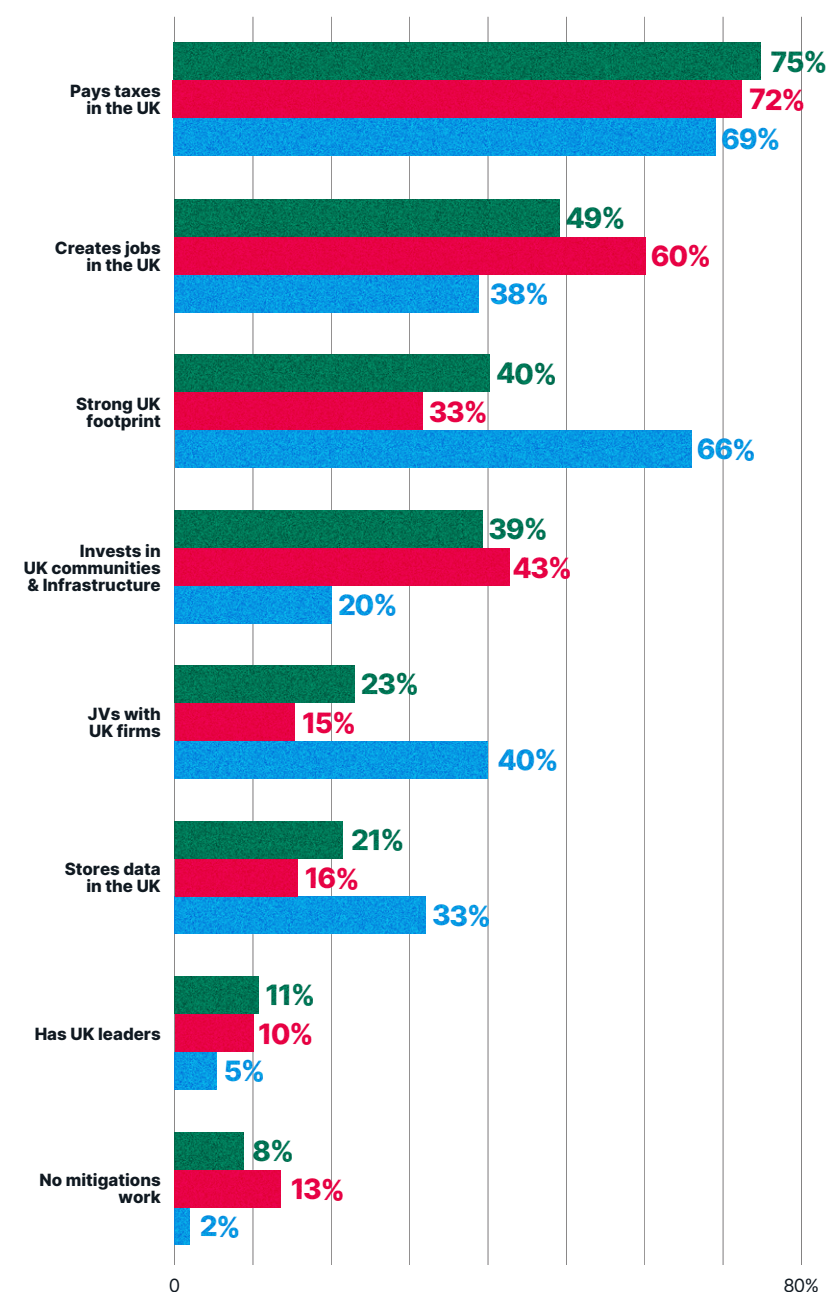
fig. 10

**Actions which would make MPs view foreign ownership or involvement in UK industries favourably.**

By MPs.

Which of the following actions, if any, would make you more likely to view foreign ownership or involvement in UK industries favourably? (Respondents could select up to three.)

■ All MPs  
■ Labour MPs  
■ Conservative MPs





*How Cavendish can help.*

## Understanding where exposure exists is only the **starting point.**

The greater challenge is understanding how that exposure varies across different stakeholder groups, where it creates commercial or political risk, and what practical actions can strengthen trust and long-term resilience.

**Cavendish helps businesses translate these insights into strategy. Our work includes:**

- Assessing where Nationality Exposure exists across key stakeholder groups
- Identifying the commercial, political and regulatory risks and opportunities it creates

- Developing strategies to strengthen trust, reduce exposure and build resilience
- Positioning businesses to navigate complex political, regulatory and reputational environments

As geopolitical relationships, public attitudes and government priorities continue to evolve, so too will Nationality Exposure.

Businesses that understand those shifts - and respond to them - will be better placed not only to manage emerging risks, but to build trust, unlock new opportunities and strengthen long-term competitive advantage.