

A special relationship?

Exploring the future of UK–US
cultural ties

To receive publications in alternative formats
or to request a hard copy, please contact
externalrelations@britishcouncil.org

Author: Alasdair Donaldson

About the British Council

The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. We create friendly knowledge and understanding between the people of the UK and other countries. We do this by making a positive contribution to the UK and the countries we work with – changing lives by creating opportunities, building connections and engendering trust.

We work with over 100 countries across the world in the fields of arts and culture, English language, education and civil society. Last year we reached over 65 million people directly and 731 million people overall including online, broadcasts and publications. Founded in 1934, we are a UK charity governed by Royal Charter and a UK public body.

www.britishcouncil.org

www.britishcouncil.org/organisation/policy-insight-research

 [@InsightBritish](https://twitter.com/InsightBritish)

Contents

Foreword	02
Executive summary	03
Introduction	04
Two countries with a shared past and future	05
The relationship analysed	08
Shared concerns	08
Shared values	09
Mutual attraction	10
Culture	13
Education	15
People	18
Economy and society	20
A 'special' relationship?	23
Conclusion	26
Appendix: methodology	28

Foreword

Oscar Wilde once famously said of the US that ‘we have everything in common nowadays – except, of course, language’. Yet it is striking how much we speak the same language when it comes to the things that matter to us.

This report shows how young people in both countries identified the same global issues as their leading concerns, with poverty, extremism, and climate change as the top factors chosen by both. Similarly, the research shows the degree to which they shared the same values, whether it is equality, openness, or freedom.

At a time of significant demographic, political, social, and economic change on both sides of the Atlantic, this solid foundation of shared values and common concerns offers a unique opportunity to build and share experience and expertise – and to develop collaborative approaches for the benefit of our two nations and the wider global community.

The research also demonstrates how underlying cultural connections between the UK and the US are stronger than ever. Whether it is Adele or the Premier League, Hogwarts or the Royal wedding, the continuing popular impact of British culture in the US is clear. For most people, such subjects appear to be of much more interest, day to day, than politics. And they make a more enduring difference than political events to the strong attraction each country feels towards the other.

This attraction is strengthened further by a long history of widespread personal and educational connections; and by deep underlying links between the two nations’ societies in terms of the way they are structured and what is important to them.

Whether it is offering new perspectives on social issues through theatre, helping young Americans make potentially life-changing decisions about studying overseas, or providing young people from under-represented communities with the opportunity to become part of an international network of future policymakers, the British Council’s work in the US aims to make these links even stronger in the future.

The US–UK relationship is often called ‘special’, but there is ongoing debate amongst UK commentators about just how special it is – and exactly what that means is in the 21st century. This research should dispel some of that anxiety. It suggests that, when it is looked at as a cultural concept at the level of what really matters to people on both sides of the Atlantic – the relationship between the UK and the US is special and thriving. Given its importance, it is up to all of us to make sure that it continues to thrive in the future.



Leigh Gibson,
Director USA,
British Council

Executive summary

Against the background of political change in the UK and the US, a strong relationship between them is vital for both nations. Its importance extends far beyond them: the two countries play a crucial role in maintaining the rules-based international order and as leading members of the UN Security Council and other multinational institutions.

This report presents the findings of a 2018 survey by GfK Social and Strategic Research of 1,000 young people in each country, along with extensive web search and social media analysis by Ipsos Public Affairs of popular trends online.

The research demonstrates that the underlying cultural closeness between the two countries – based on shared concerns, values, and mutual attraction – is strong, and shows no signs of weakening. This closeness can be seen across a range of factors.

Culture: Analysis of US internet activity between 2016 and 2018 reveals that 64 per cent of US social media mentions relevant to the UK were concerned with culture, compared with 18 per cent for politics. In the US, online discussions of pop star Adele surpassed those of Brexit on average over the periods analysed, which included the month immediately following the UK's EU referendum vote.

- the top factors contributing to the UK's attractiveness among US respondents were 'cultural and historic attractions' (43 per cent), and 'history' (42 per cent)
- the top factors contributing to the US's attractiveness among UK respondents were 'cities' (62 per cent) and 'brands' (47 per cent)
- the current and past actions of governments were only the 16th most important factor in determining how attractive young people in each country found the other
- the UK was rated top amongst major world countries in the eyes of young Americans for having world-leading culture and sport.

Education: The UK was also rated top in the G20 for having world-leading universities. Forty-three per cent of young Americans thought it was the most attractive place to study overseas (above any other G20 country). This attraction was mutual: among young British people, 55 per cent thought the US was the most attractive place in the G20 to study overseas. Respondents also ranked each other's countries as the most attractive in the G20 for making personal contacts and friendships.

Trade: Among young people surveyed about their views for this report:

- 34 per cent of young Americans thought the UK was the number one partner for trade and business in the G20
- 54 per cent of young British people thought the US was the number one partner for trade and business in the G20.

Society: The UK enjoyed a striking vote of confidence among young Americans for its social institutions. Sixty-nine per cent thought it was a global power (placing it above all other G20 countries except China). It was ranked number one against seven other major countries for:

- being a force for good in the world
- having a free press, fair justice system, and strong non-governmental institutions
- valuing individual liberty
- being a strong example of a democratic society.

Web analysis shows that the phrase 'special relationship', often used to describe the bilateral relationship, has almost four times more popular traction in the UK than in the US, and not much in either. Yet the research also demonstrates strong underlying cultural affinity between the two countries. This affinity is based on deep ties of history, language, and cultural values, which are largely outside politics. And those ties are in turn supported by close links in the areas of popular culture, education, and personal connections.

With power shifting across the world, and with both countries undergoing significant demographic and political changes, there can be no complacency about the need to support bilateral connections. Efforts must be made to strengthen such links. Doing so will strengthen the mutual trade and influence of both nations. The relationship between them is a fundamental plank of the economic wellbeing of both. It is also vital to their enduring influence and the maintenance of the rules-based order in an increasingly uncertain world.

Introduction

As the US and the UK undergo political and cultural change, this report explores the current relationship and its future prospects. It looks at the health of cultural, educational, and personal links between the two, and their contribution to that relationship. It looks in particular at the views of young people – the generation who will shape the future of transatlantic ties in years to come. It examines:

- the economic and strategic importance of the relationship for both nations
- views among young people in the US and UK of each others' countries
- the specific factors young people find attractive about each others' nations, including culture, education, people, economy, and society
- the extent of the popular use of the term 'special relationship' and its validity to describe Anglo-American ties.

The British Council has worked for decades to strengthen the bilateral relationship between the UK and the US, and cultural and educational exchange between the people of the two countries. It has undertaken this study to gain a deeper understanding of popular views of the relationship, how cultural and educational links are changing, and how they can enhance the two countries' economic and diplomatic ties in the future.

The report is based upon:

- desk research on the existing relationship between the two nations
- analysis of new research data from large-scale quantitative surveys of the views of 1,000 young people in the UK and the US, undertaken for the British Council in 2018 by GfK Social and Strategic Research
- social media and web search analysis undertaken by the Risk Analytics Division of Ipsos Public Affairs in the US, focused on three specific moments: one month immediately following the UK's EU referendum vote (23 June 2016), Donald Trump's inauguration as American President (20 January 2017) and early 2018 (17 February 2018).¹

The report presents key findings from these studies, together with an analysis of the implications for the future of the overall relationship between the US and UK.

This report explores the current relationship and its future prospects.

1. A total of nine million social media mentions were collected from across the United States (approximately three million per time period). The analysis included major social media and network platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Google, Reddit, YouTube, and Twitter, among others. While this analysis did not directly target young people, social media users are disproportionately likely to be young. For example, around 40 per cent of American Twitter users are aged 18–35. See Appendix for further details.

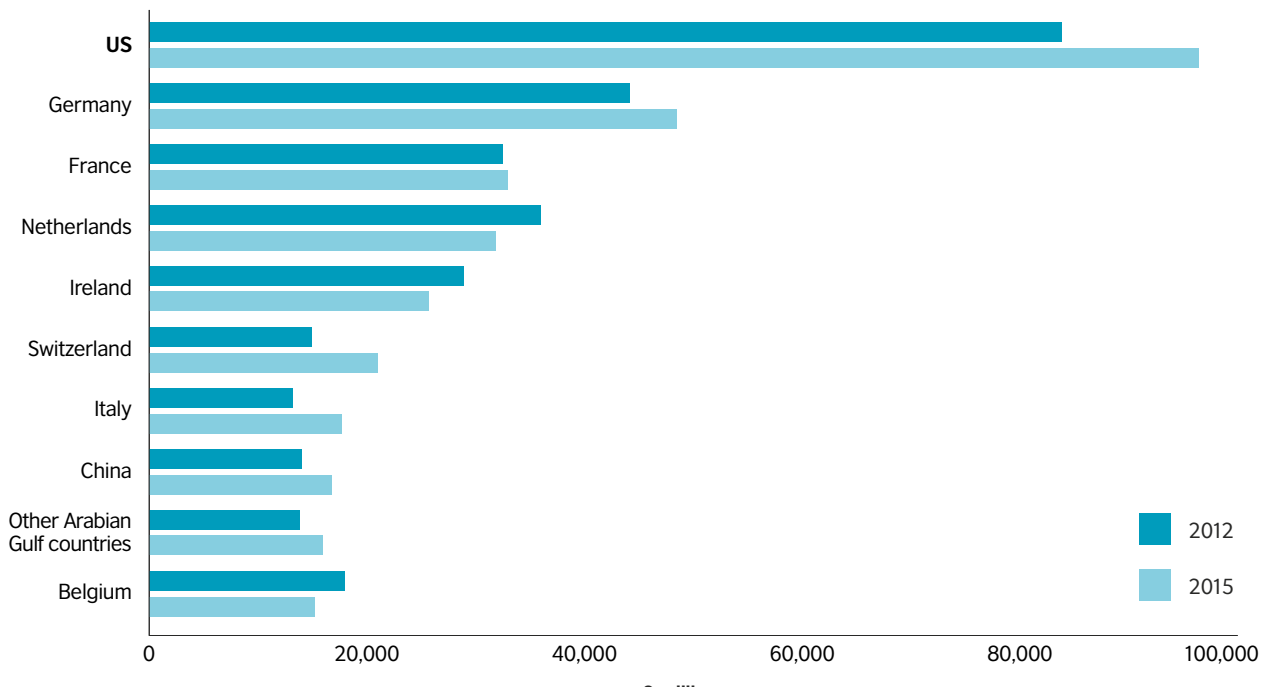
Two countries with a shared past and future

We now live in a world that is less stable and where power relations are in greater flux than they have been for many decades. There are mounting challenges to the liberal world order which the US and the UK had significant roles in establishing at the end of the Second World War. The shift of the global centre of gravity to Asia raises questions about the future of the world order – and of the place of the UK–US relationship within it. Meanwhile, Brexit poses both opportunities and challenges for the UK. It suggests that, while it attempts to position itself as a global Britain, it may seek to further strengthen ties, economically and diplomatically, with the US. Lastly, the election of Donald Trump has shaken up America's foreign policy in ways that have yet to play out in terms of its global influence. His election and policy priorities, and the UK's future role outside the EU, have put more focus on the question of the degree to which the two countries' political priorities and agendas will continue to align in the future. These developments give the health and stability of the UK–US relationship greater significance today than it has had for some time.

Despite growing competition, the US remains the most powerful country in the world. The American economy represents about a quarter of entire world GDP. The US is home to many of the world's top corporations, foundations, non-governmental organisations, and technology companies. It is the UK's biggest trading partner,² and one of the fastest growing (see Figure 1), accounting for a fifth of all British exports.³ Nor is this economic relevance only one way. UK–US trade is worth over £160 billion per year. Trade in services between London and New York exceeds that between any other cities in the world.⁴ The stock of investment held by the US and the UK in each other's economies currently stands at \$1 trillion.⁵ The two countries are each other's largest source of foreign direct investment, directly supporting over two million jobs.⁶

The shift of the global centre of gravity to Asia raises questions about the future of the world order – and of the place of the UK–US relationship within it.

2. HM Revenue and Customs Monthly UK Trade Statistics, April 2018. Available online at: <https://www.uktradeinfo.com/Statistics/Pages/Monthly-Tables.aspx>
3. Department for International Trade (2018) Joint release by the UK International Trade Secretary and US. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer. Available online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-release-by-the-uk-international-trade-secretary-and-us-trade-representative-robert-lighthizer>
4. Peter Taylor (2015) 'Global City Network'. The City Reader (6th edition) Legates, R and Stout, F (eds). Routledge, page 97.
5. Department for International Trade (2018) *op. cit.*
6. UK foreign direct investment, trends and analysis, 2018. Available online at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/balanceofpayments/articles/ukforeigndirectinvestmenttrendsandanalysis/january2018>

Figure 1: UK exports of goods and services, main markets

Source: ONS Balance of Payments and annual geographical tables. Note other Gulf Arabian countries means Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, UAE and Yemen.⁷

In diplomacy, security, and international relations, the US and UK are among each other's closest international allies, with a long history of standing together on major issues in international relations. Both are members of the UN Security Council. Both are core members of NATO, and have the biggest military spending within the alliance. They are also members of the Five Eyes intelligence alliance along with Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The UK has long relied on its relationship with the US as a core plank of its national security, whilst contributing its military and in particular its intelligence expertise to the security of the US.

However, the relationship between the two countries is not simply based on economic, political, or military ties. It also springs from deeper cultural currents. The history and language shared by the two countries in itself forms a very strong cultural link and enables ongoing mutual ease of communicating, doing business, and access to cultural outputs.

Of course the cultural relationship has not been unproblematic. The US has in the past been viewed as if it were a sort of adolescent offspring, sometimes copying and sometimes defining itself against its perceptions of its British 'parent'.⁸ And the UK has in turn been caricatured as either the old-fashioned place described by those perceptions, or alternatively as no more than an American cultural and political 'poodle'. Some in the UK have been critical of perceived 'Americanisation' of British society, preferring to see the UK's culture as more closely aligned with that of Europe. Yet if – very crudely – current British high culture is as much European as transatlantic, both its popular and its political culture arguably have at least as much in common with that of America. And this cuts both ways, as the culture of the US is likewise closely linked to that of the UK.

7. Office for National Statistics (2017) Balance of Payments and annual geographical tables. Available online at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/balanceofpayments/adhocs/006656balanceofpaymentsannualgeographicaldatatables>

8. Hugh Brogan (1999) *The Longman History of the United States of America*. 2nd edition, Penguin Books.

In particular, there has been an enduring mutual enthusiasm for each country's popular culture. From Hollywood films dominating cinematic consumption in the UK, to the 'British Invasion' of British popular culture – from Bond and the Beatles to Harry Potter and Adele – into the US. Meanwhile educational links have resulted in many people in both countries having strong personal connections with the other. At the individual level, many of the strongest ties between the countries have come from a wide variety of Anglo-American people-to-people links. Tourism and leisure constitutes an important transatlantic current in the mix of factors contributing to the relationship today. Tourist flows between the two countries are very large and growing, with 3.8 million British tourist visits to the US and 3.5 million American tourist visits to the UK in 2016.⁹

Commonality can also be seen in social and political institutions. At present the US and the UK have very different domestic politics, but they continue to share an underlying constitutional and legal culture. This is true for the very simple reason that the constitutional arrangements and legal systems of both countries arose from the ideas of the Anglo-Scottish Enlightenment and the English Common Law. Whilst other aspects of the countries' shared culture may have long, deep roots in Europe, the history of home-grown constitutional democracy is much longer in the US and the UK than it is in many other parts of the world. These differences matter, as they have resulted in similarities between the US and the UK in terms of their long-term cultural, political, economic, and legal outlook. As such, the UK's relationship with the US has perhaps been closer and more important than that of any other European country.

Both the US and the UK have been undergoing substantial demographic change. The population of the UK is growing, with the vast majority of that growth coming from immigration and the higher fertility of previous migrants. Migration into the UK has been around half a million or more every year since 2001, accompanied by significant annual emigration of British citizens (including to the US), leading to significant changes in the make-up and cultural background of the overall population of around 65 million.¹⁰

At the same time the American population is also becoming more diverse. According to the Census Bureau, by 2060, the (non-Hispanic) white population of the US will be a minority of around 43 per cent.¹¹ Some have suggested that, if the UK is a less central part of the cultural frame of reference of the majority of the American population, and vice versa, the relationship between the two countries may be diminished, and this is certainly a challenge for the future.¹²

This changing landscape suggests that it is a timely moment to explore the current health and future prospects of the transatlantic relationship. The research set out in this report looks in detail at the views of young people in each country towards the other today – and what that means for the future.

There has been an enduring mutual enthusiasm for each country's popular culture.

9. www.visitbritain.org/markets/usa

10. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/articles/overviewoftheukpopulation/mar2017>

11. Projections of the Size and Composition of the US Population: 2014 to 2060 (2015). Available online at: <https://census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2015/demo/p25-1143.pdf>

12. Xenia Wickett (2018) *Transatlantic Relations: Converging or Diverging?* Chatham House Report. Available online at:

The relationship analysed

Shared concerns

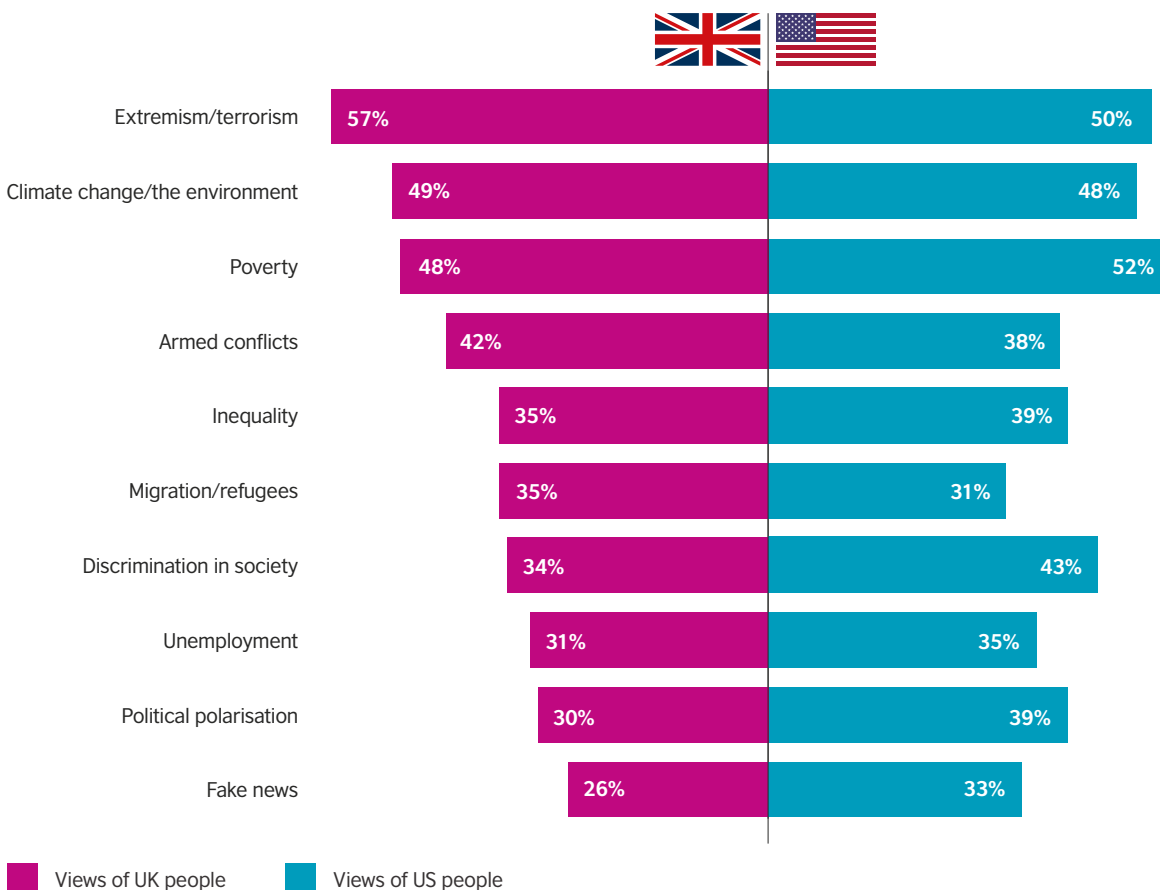
The 2018 survey of UK and US 18–34 year olds with secondary education and higher provides a rich picture of the views and outlook of young people in the US and the UK – and the specific factors that connect or divide them.

Survey respondents in the UK and US were asked about global issues and values. The results show that young people in the US identified 'poverty' (52 per cent),

'extremism/terrorism' (50 per cent), and 'climate change' (48 per cent) as their top concerns when it came to the issues facing the world. Young British people also chose these as their top three concerns, though in a different order, with 'extremism/terrorism' top (57 per cent), followed by 'climate change' (49 per cent) and then 'poverty' (48 per cent) (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: The most important issues the world is facing

What are the three most important issues facing the world today?



Base: UK respondents (1,636) and US respondents (1,000). Fieldwork dates: March to April 2018. What do you think are the most important issues facing the world today? Data presented here is weighted to relevant national populations.

Source: Fieldwork by GfK.

Shared values

Turning to values, equality and diversity was deemed by respondents in both the US and the UK to be the most important value that countries should support in the 21st century. For UK respondents this was followed by 'Peace', then 'Openness' and 'Care for the environment'. US respondents had 'Empathy and mutual supportiveness' ranked second, but then they also ranked 'Openness' and 'Care for the environment' third and fourth. There was a striking similarity in the values chosen by both sets of

respondents (see Figure 3). It is worth noting that the UK is considered by young Americans to support important values better than their own country, with 56 per cent of American respondents in 2018 considering that the UK supports their values very or fairly well, as opposed to only 45 per cent saying the same thing about the US itself. In this respect, they rated the UK more highly than other leading countries.

Figure 3: Young people's most important values

What are the most important values the world should support and encourage in the 21st century?



Base: UK respondents (1,636) and US respondents (1,000). Fieldwork dates: March to April 2018. What are the most important values that countries around the world should support and encourage in the 21st century? Data presented here is weighted to relevant national populations.

Source: Fieldwork by GfK.

Mutual attraction

Turning from shared concerns and values to mutual attractiveness, the social media analysis examined the interests of American people when it came to the UK. It revealed that approximately 64 per cent of all the analysed conversations on American social media relating to the UK referenced British culture (broadly defined), compared to 18 per cent referring to politics (see Figure 4).

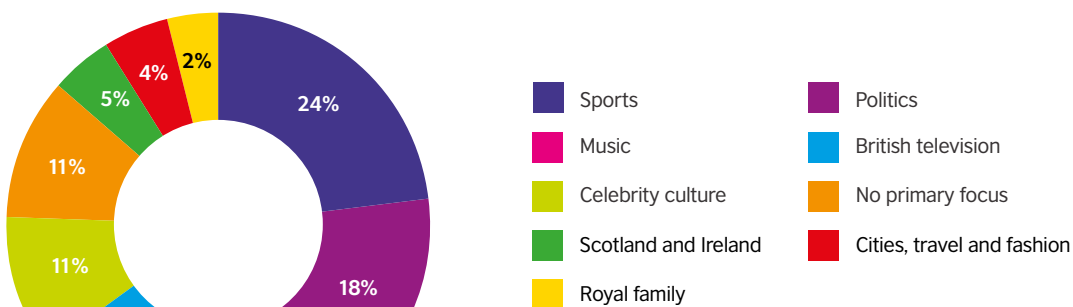
Similarly, social media analysis revealed a large continuing interest in the US in British cultural exports. Prominent among these were popular musicians like Adele and David Bowie, television shows like the *Great British Bake Off* and *Downton Abbey*, and British sports (largely soccer).

There is clear evidence of continued high mutual appreciation of each other’s cultures among the rising generation from the research. Yet a distinction might be made between cultural attraction and cultural proximity, and it might be argued that the latter is a more important foundation for nurturing strong ties between countries. In order to identify cultural similarity between countries, Ipsos Public Affairs accordingly examined web search patterns for names of popular celebrities, politicians, and important historical figures for both the US and the UK. Ipsos then calculated search interest in these names for a number of countries around the world and ranked them accordingly.¹³

The results showed that Americans are interested in both popular and historical British figures. British people were not quite as enamoured of American celebrities. Yet they rank highly when it comes to interest in American historical figures. These high rankings suggest overall similar interests both in terms of popular and historical culture. This suggests that Americans and Britons are very much interested in each other’s popular culture and history, and share an interest in similar topics and people.

The research also examined which factors are most important in making the UK attractive to the US and vice versa (see Figure 5). The UK’s ‘cultural and historic attractions’ (chosen by 43 per cent of respondents), were the top factor when it came to making the country attractive to the American respondents, followed by its history (42 per cent), country and landscape (40 per cent), cities (39 per cent) and arts (38 per cent). The most important factors for the British respondents were American cities (62 per cent), as well as brands (47 per cent), weather (45 per cent) and people (40 per cent). Interestingly, the current and past actions of government were considered much less important for both the UK and US respondents in their assessment of relative attractiveness, coming in as joint 16th most important factor for both countries (for 17 per cent of young people in the US and nine per cent of young people in the UK).

Figure 4: US Social media mentions referring to UK, grouped by category



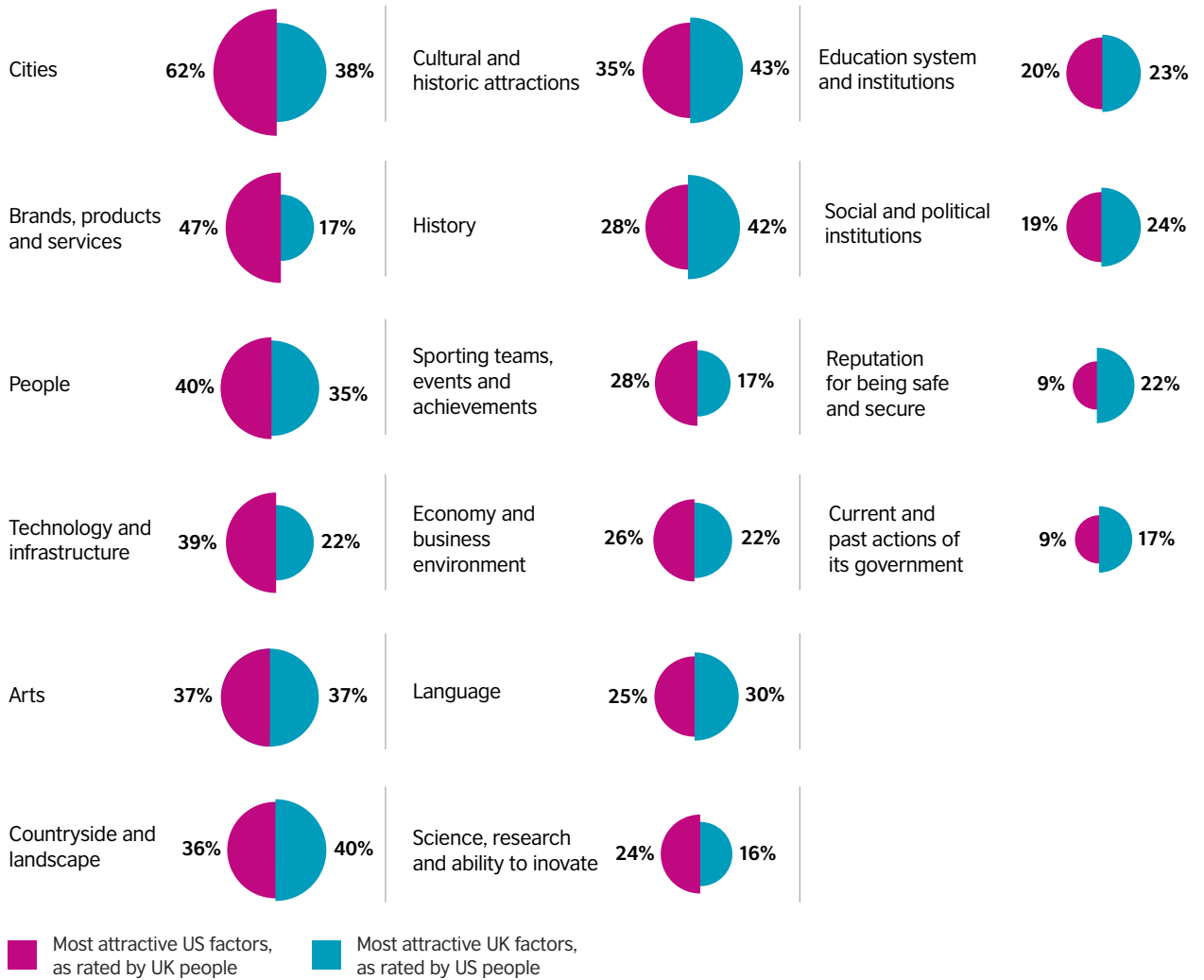
Base: 9,000,000 social media mentions from time periods between June 2016 and March 2018. The most popular topic groups demonstrating popularity of British cultural exports prominent in media and pop culture.

Source: Ipsos Public Affairs.

13. To do this Ipsos created several dictionaries, including sets of names denoting popular celebrities, politicians, and important historical figures for both the US and the UK. For the list of popular modern names, it used the 37 most searched people in the US in 2017 (politicians, actors, musicians, and athletes), and the top ten most-searched people in the UK. The list of top historical figures in US history was sourced from an article in Smithsonian Magazine, and included such individuals as Abraham Lincoln and Louis Armstrong. A 2002 BBC poll provided an equivalent list of British historical figures and contained politicians like Winston Churchill, musicians like Paul McCartney, and many others.

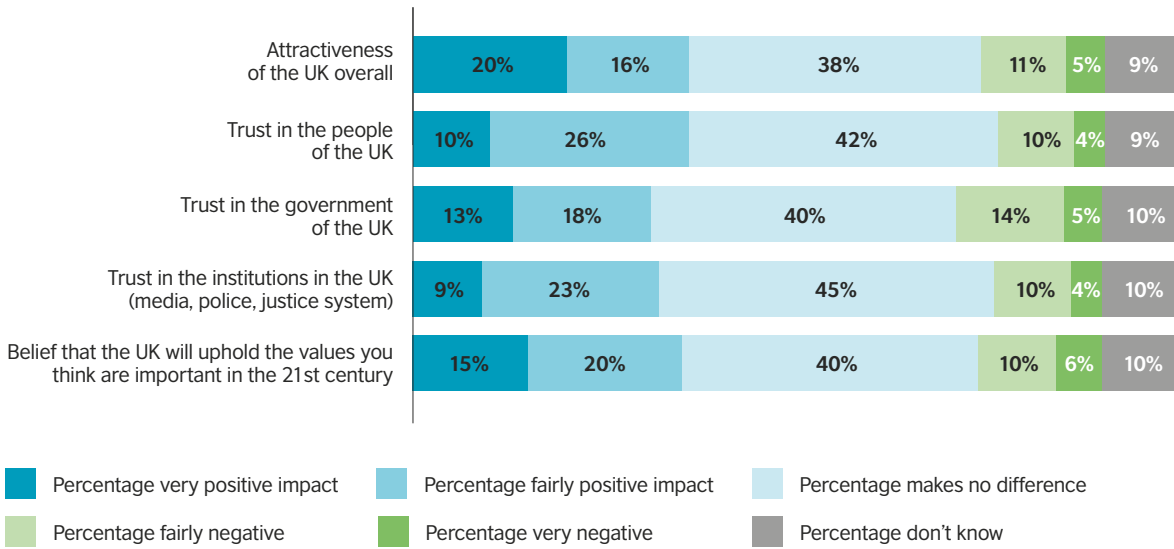
Figure 5: Factors which make each country attractive to the other

Which three factors make the US/UK attractive to you?



Base: UK respondents (1,636) and US respondents (1,000). Fieldwork dates: March to April 2018. Which, if any, of the characteristics below particularly contribute to making the US/UK attractive to you? Data presented here is weighted to relevant national populations.
 Source: Fieldwork by GfK.

Figure 6: Impact of EU referendum on US attitudes to UK



Base: US respondents (1,000). Fieldwork dates: September 2016. Overall, does the UK's vote to leave the EU (Brexit) have a positive impact, negative impact or no impact on... Data presented here is weighted to relevant national populations. Where results do not sum to 100, this may be due to rounding.
 Source: Fieldwork by Ipsos MORI.

Have recent political developments, such as the EU referendum and US Presidential election results of 2016, had an impact upon levels of attraction between the two countries?

Results from previous research conducted by Ipsos Mori for the British Council in autumn 2016 suggested that the EU referendum had more of a positive than negative impact on American views of the UK. Two thirds of young Americans asked in the research knew about the referendum and the result. Over one in four said that they were more likely to visit the UK. Overall, respondents said they were also more likely to study in the UK, consume British art or culture, and cultivate friendships with British people. Thirty-six per cent said that the vote had a 'very' or 'fairly' positive impact on their view of the attractiveness of the UK overall (as against 16 per cent saying the impact was very or fairly negative) (see Figure 6).

The social media analysis also showed rising positive sentiments over the period in question. There were surges of interest in political events and figures in the other country, with terms such as 'Brexit', 'Trump', 'Theresa May', and 'Boris Johnson' showing spikes in the immediate aftermath of key political events, followed by returns to lower levels of interest.

It is perhaps worth pointing out, however, that social media discussions of pop star Adele still surpassed those of Brexit, suggesting that British popular culture is of more interest to ordinary people in the US than British politics, and that analysts of the relationship should remain aware that cultural factors often tend to have a greater impact on global views of countries than political issues.

Culture

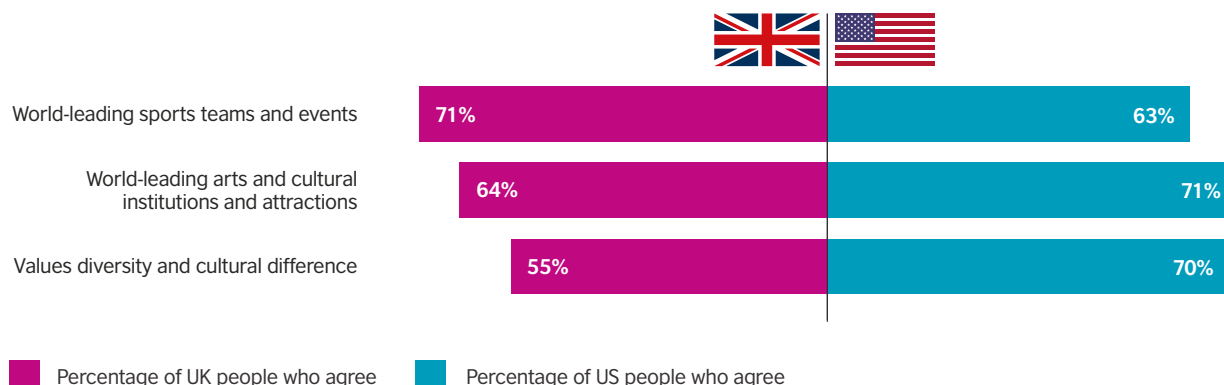
The 2018 survey also asked UK and US respondents to rate a series of cultural characteristics of the other country. The results show that young Americans valued the UK highly for a range of cultural factors, from having ‘world-leading arts and cultural institutions and attractions’ (71 per cent), and ‘world-leading sports teams and events’ (63 per cent), to ‘valuing diversity and cultural difference’ (70 per cent). Young British people, meanwhile, similarly valued the US for its ‘world-leading arts and cultural institutions and attractions’ (64 per cent) and ‘world-leading sports teams and events’ (71 per cent) – although they scored the US somewhat lower when it came to ‘valuing diversity and cultural difference’ (55 per cent) (see Figure 7).

When young Americans were asked which G20 countries they found most attractive as a source of arts and culture, the UK came fourth (26 per cent), behind Italy (44 per cent), France (39 per cent), and Japan (31 per cent). Similarly, the US ranked fourth most attractive (28 per cent) when young British people were asked to identify the most attractive sources of arts and culture, again after Italy (42 per cent), Japan (35 per cent), and France (31 per cent) (see Figure 8). This also reveals that UK and US young people have similar tastes in terms of how they view the attractiveness of third countries.

Across a range of cultural factors, then, the data suggests strong cultural attraction and cultural proximity between the UK and the US.

Figure 7: Views of cultural characteristics

Percentage of respondents who agree that the following statements are true of the other country

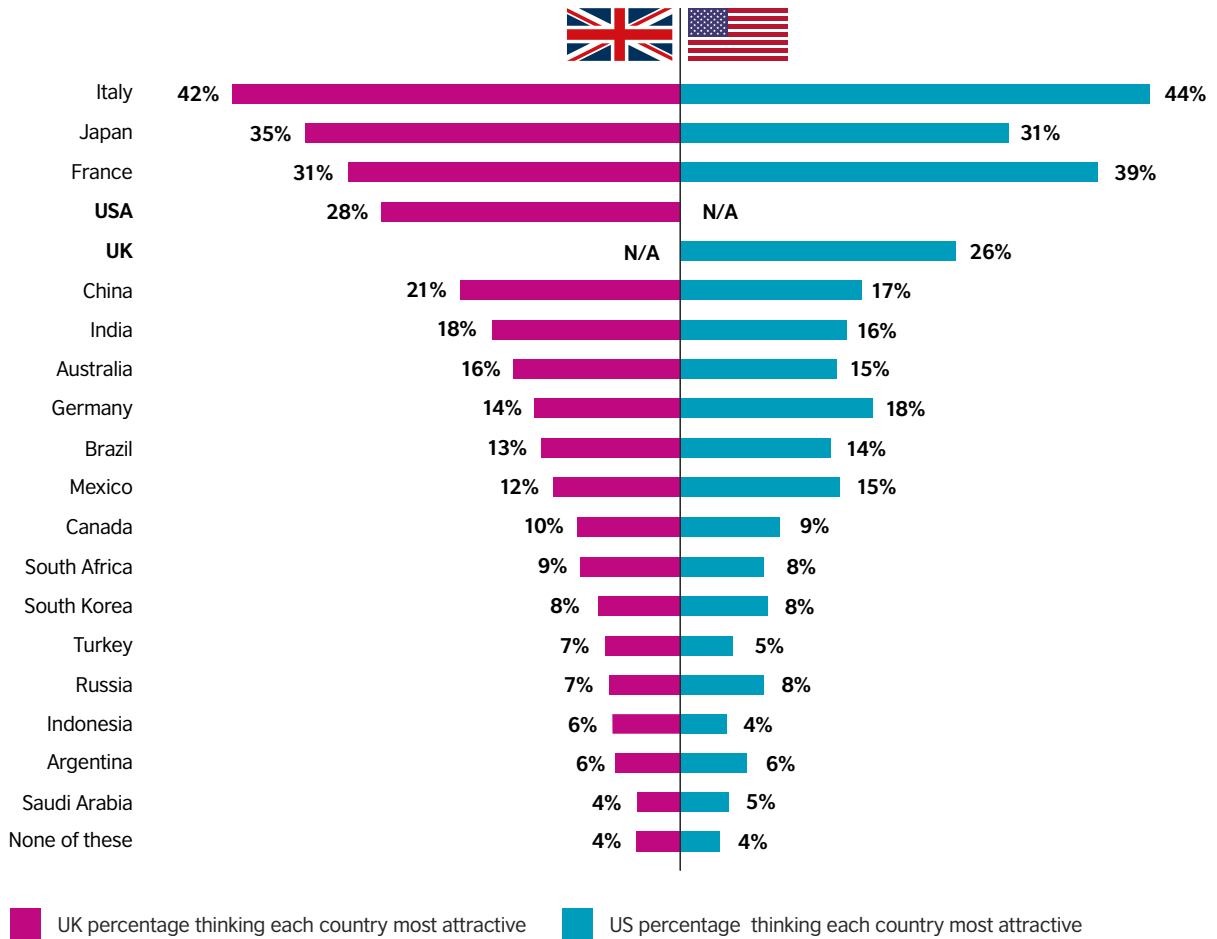


Base: UK respondents (1,636) and US respondents (1,000). Fieldwork dates: March to April 2018. Thinking specifically about the UK/US, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Data presented here is weighted to relevant national populations.

Source: Fieldwork by GfK.

Figure 8: Most attractive G20 country as a source of arts and culture

Which three countries do you find the most attractive as a source of arts and culture?



Base: UK respondents (1,636) and US respondents (1,000). Fieldwork dates: March to April 2018. Which three of the following countries do you find most attractive as a source of arts and culture? Data presented here is weighted to relevant national populations.

Source: Fieldwork by GfK.

Education

The US and the UK, in that order, are the world's top two education markets, and attract hundreds of thousands of students every year from around the world, including from each other. Both countries are at the top of many world rankings for higher education.

Around a third (29 per cent) of young Americans are interested in studying abroad, and almost eight per cent of the cohort of overseas students studying in the UK are from the US, which is worth at least a quarter of a billion pounds to the British economy every year. Similarly, we know that the US – with the largest number of universities of any country in the world (3,263) – has at least 10,000 students from the UK.¹⁴

Sixty per cent of young Americans responding to the survey considered that the British education system fostered creativity and innovation and 68 per cent thought that the UK had world-leading universities and academic research. Fifty-four and 76 per cent, respectively, of young British respondents thought the same of the American education system and its universities (see Figure 9).

As Figure 10 shows, the US was by some way the most attractive overseas study destination for young British people, with 55 per cent of respondents identifying it as

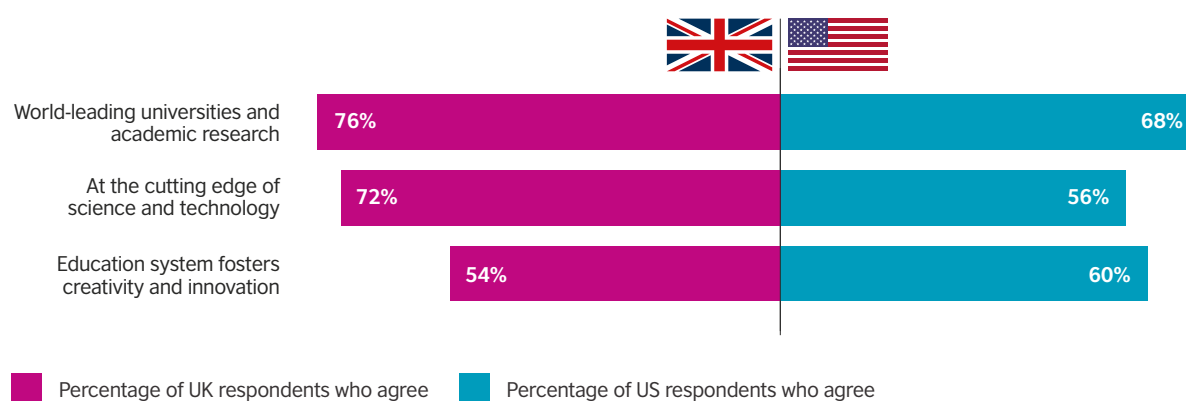
one of their top three most attractive G20 countries in which to study (with Australia and Canada in second and third place on 37 per cent and 36 per cent respectively). In 2016–17 there were 11,489 British students in American higher education.¹⁵

Similarly, the UK was by far the most attractive study destination for young Americans, identified by 43 per cent of those asked the same question (with Italy and France in second and third places on 35 per cent and 33 per cent respectively) (see Figure 10). More young people in the US and the UK had studied or intended to study in the other than in any other G20 country. Around 18,000 American students are taking their degrees in the UK, along with some 39,000 'study abroad' students visiting on shorter academic exchanges, making the UK the most popular study abroad market for the US.

The two countries have strong research links across a wide range of disciplines. For example, one third of the UK's internationally co-authored academic papers are with American partners, making the US by far the largest research collaborator with the UK, with almost double the number of co-authored papers than the second largest collaborator (Germany) in the period 2013–18.¹⁶ In turn, the UK is the second largest research collaborator with the USA (after China), and the most impactful in terms of citations.¹⁷

Figure 9: Views of educational characteristics

Percentage of respondents who agree that the following statements are true of the other country



Base: UK respondents (1,636) and US respondents (1,000). Fieldwork dates: March to April 2018. Thinking specifically about the UK/US, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Data presented here is weighted to relevant national populations.

Source: Fieldwork by GfK.

14. Universities UK (2017) *International Facts and Figures*. Available online at: https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/International/International_Facts_and_Figures_2017.pdf

15. British Council in-house figures (2018, unpublished).

16. Prime Minister's Office (2011) *UK-US higher education, science, and innovation collaboration*. Available online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-us-higher-education-science-and-innovation-collaboration>

17. According to Field Weighted Citation Impact, or number of times a paper is cited, evened out by the average for each research subject.

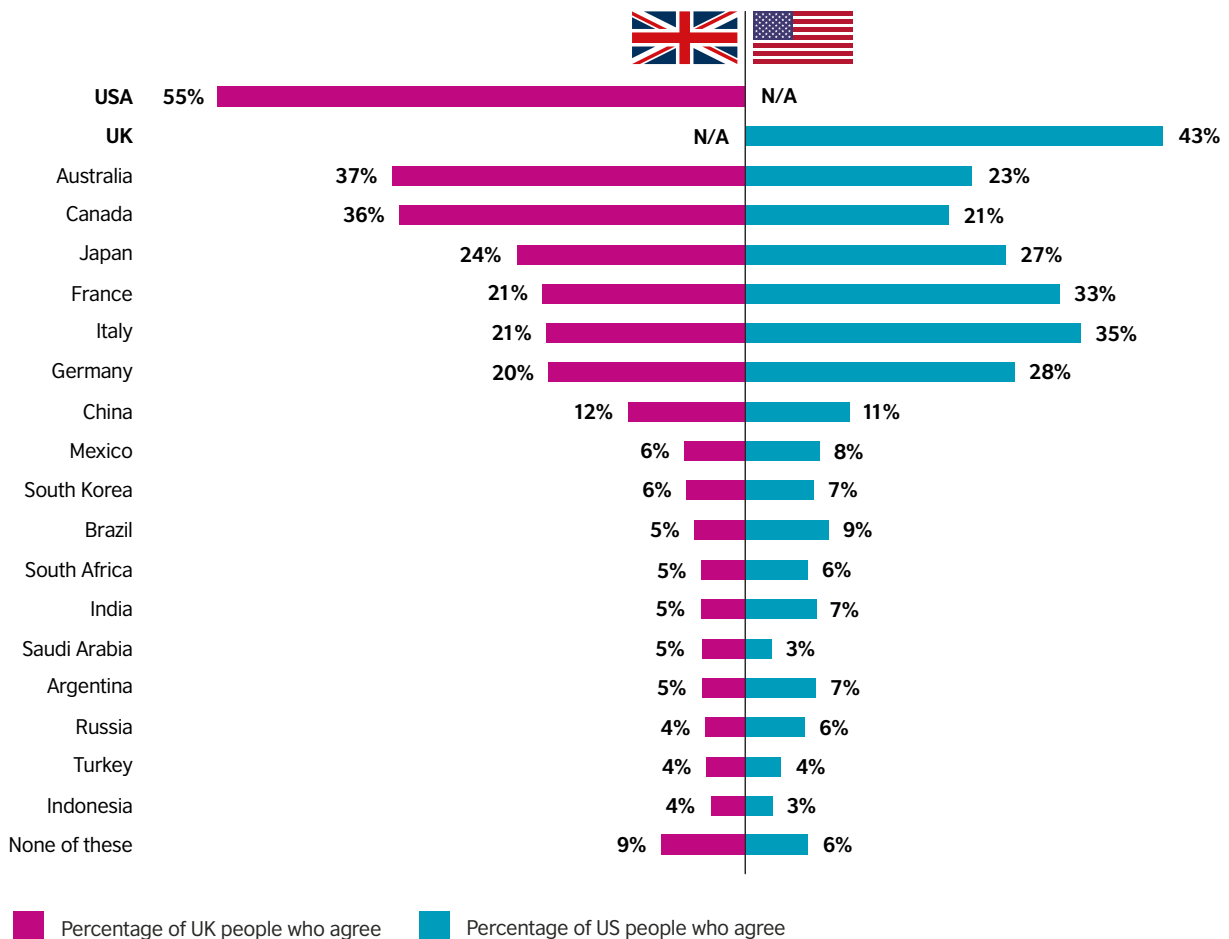
In the area of education it is worth pointing out that some exchange programmes were set up with an explicit intention to strength the bilateral relationship. As Professor Nicholas Cull has argued: ‘*The Anglo-American Special Relationship... has benefited from innumerable gentle interventions to help the course of cultural relations. Before government-sponsored agencies like the British Council played a role, private foundations worked to build links through civic projects like those of the English Speaking Union or educational exchanges like those founded by Cecil Rhodes in the UK or Edward Harkness*

in the US. It is striking how the alumni of these exchanges became a cadre of transatlantic interpreters across the twentieth century.’¹⁸

Rhodes scholarships for students from the US and other English-speaking countries to study at Oxford University were established in 1902. The scheme’s alumni have included ex US President Bill Clinton. Similar programmes include the Marshall, Fulbright and Gates Cambridge scholarship schemes. Beyond these there is significant traffic between the universities of the US and the UK at all levels.

Figure 10: Most attractive G20 country to study in overseas

Which three of the following countries do you find most attractive as a place to study overseas?



Base: UK respondents (1,636) and US respondents (1,000). Fieldwork dates: March to April 2018. Which three of the following countries do you find most attractive as a place to study overseas? Data presented here is weighted to relevant national populations.

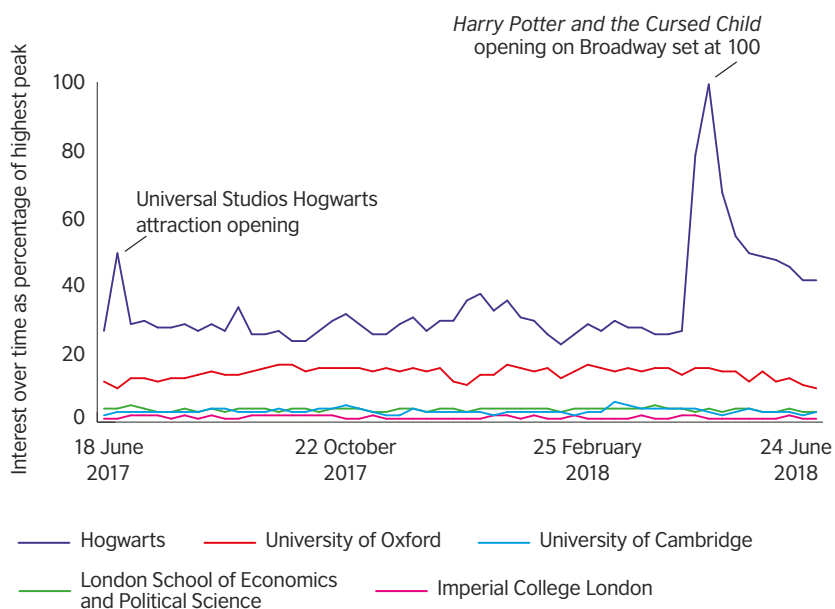
Source: Fieldwork by GfK.

18. Professor Nicholas Cull in Culture, in Policy and the UK–US Special Relationship at 70, British Council, Insight (October, 2016). Available online at: <https://www.britishcouncil.org/organisation/policy-insight-research/insight/culture-policy-and-us-uk-special-relationship-70>

The most-mentioned British educational establishment throughout the period analysed was Hogwarts.

Despite the strong educational links between the US and the UK, the social media analysis found that, unsurprisingly British education was not a particularly popular topic of discussion on American social media, although leading British universities (Oxford, Cambridge, LSE, Imperial, and Edinburgh) featured relatively highly in American web search trends. Indeed, it is a striking example of the reach of British popular culture that the most-mentioned British educational establishment throughout the period analysed was Hogwarts (see Figure 11). However, the combination of strong existing links and positive perceptions of the UK and US young people of each other’s education systems and opportunities suggests that education and research are important ongoing sources of prosperity and professional and personal connections between the two countries.

Figure 11: Leading British educational institutions according to US social media mentions



Base: Google searches conducted in the United States between June 2017 and June 2018. Select educational institutions in the UK plus Hogwarts.

Source: Ipsos Public Affairs.

People

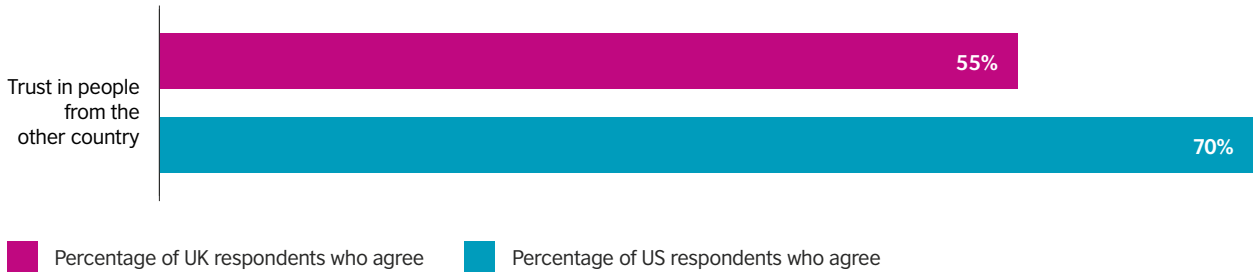
Personal connections have been central in the US–UK relationship for decades. We know from other research that trust in people is associated with increased willingness to engage in trade.¹⁹ The 2018 survey showed that 70 per cent of young Americans trusted people from the UK. This compared favourably to the other G20 countries, placing the UK behind only Canada (on 83 per cent), and France and Italy (both on 71 per cent) (see Figure 12). Meanwhile 55 per cent of young British people trusted American people. This figure was

therefore lower, possibly because British people are in general less trusting, but still made people from the US the seventh most trusted in the G20.

Turning to analysis of personal relationships, the UK ranked first, at 45 per cent, for young Americans asked which G20 countries they thought were the most attractive for making personal contacts and friendships. Among young British people, the US ranked top (at 56 per cent) for making personal contacts and friendships (see Figure 13).

Figure 12: Trust in people

Do you trust people from the other country?



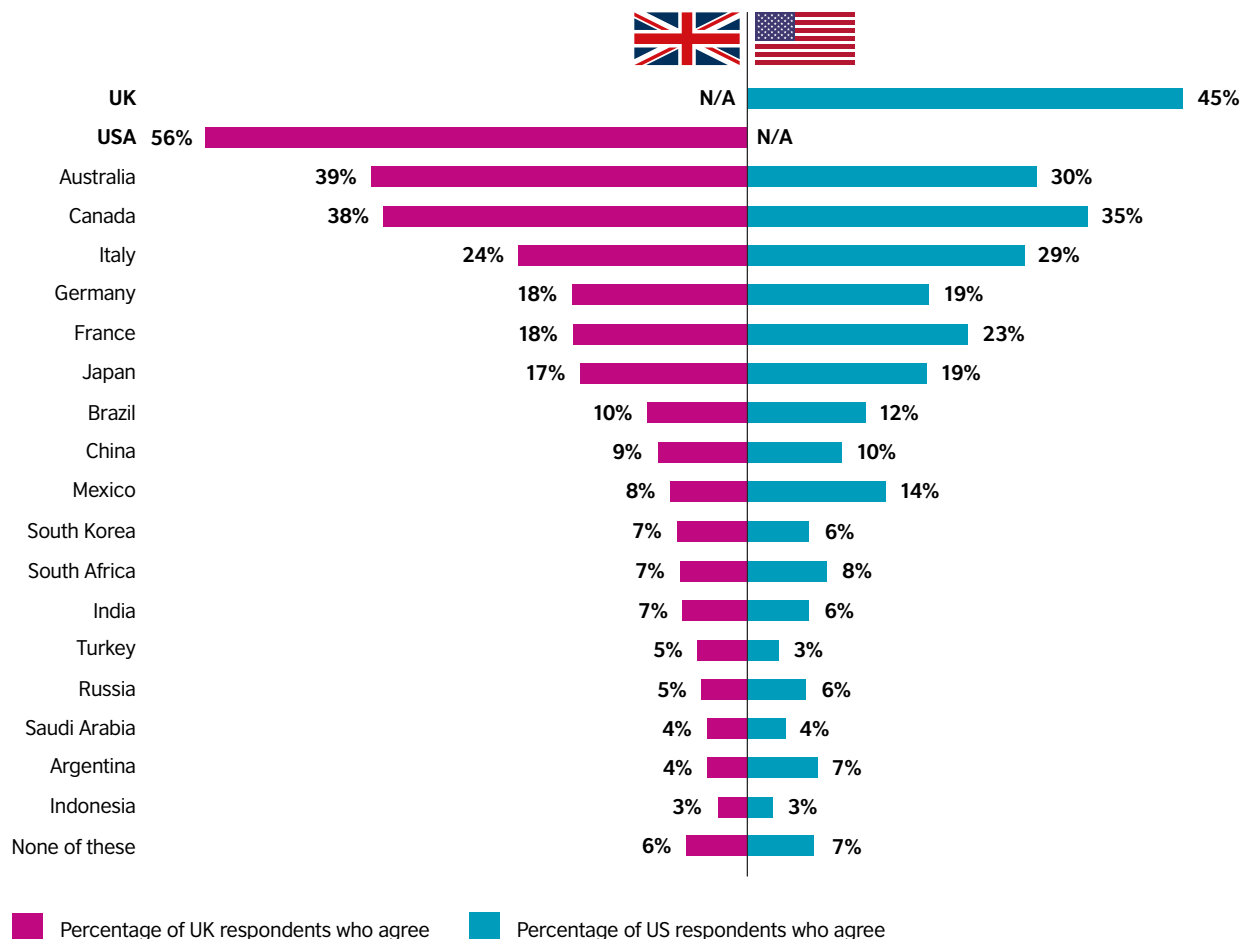
Base: UK respondents (1,636) and US respondents (1,000). Fieldwork dates: March to April 2018. Thinking generally about people to what extent do you distrust or trust people from each of these countries? Data presented here is weighted to relevant national populations.

Source: Fieldwork by GfK.

19. British Council (2018) The Value of Trust. Available online at: <https://www.britishcouncil.org/organisation/policy-insight-research/the-value-of-trust>

Figure 13: Most attractive G20 country for its people

Which three of the following countries do you find most attractive for making personal contacts and friendships?



Base: UK respondents (1,636) and US respondents (1,000). Fieldwork dates: March to April 2018. Which three of the following countries do you find most attractive for making personal contacts and friendships? Data presented here is weighted to relevant national populations.
 Source: Fieldwork by GfK.

The research also found that 46 per cent of young Americans said they have friends or family from the UK or living in the UK – and according to the BBC there are over two thirds of a million British people living in the US.²⁰ Direct personal contact is a significant pillar of Anglo-American sympathy at the individual level. These connections have been important going back decades. Events such as the American aid during the World Wars and the Marshall Plan in the late 1940s did, of course, have an impact on the connections between the nations. As important were the direct personal bonds created by serving on the same side during the liberation of Western Europe, and strengthened by the presence of some two million American service personnel in the UK for long periods of the Second World War – along with tens of thousands of marriages and hundreds of thousands of children.

It is also worth pointing out that soft power side-effects from common military endeavour appear to continue to this day. For example, the social media analysis found steady social media discussion of joint military ties and shared international security concerns partly by the large numbers of American soldiers who served alongside British service personnel before returning to live in the US, often in the non-coastal ‘fly-over’ states where British cultural penetration is otherwise perhaps less obvious.

Economy and society

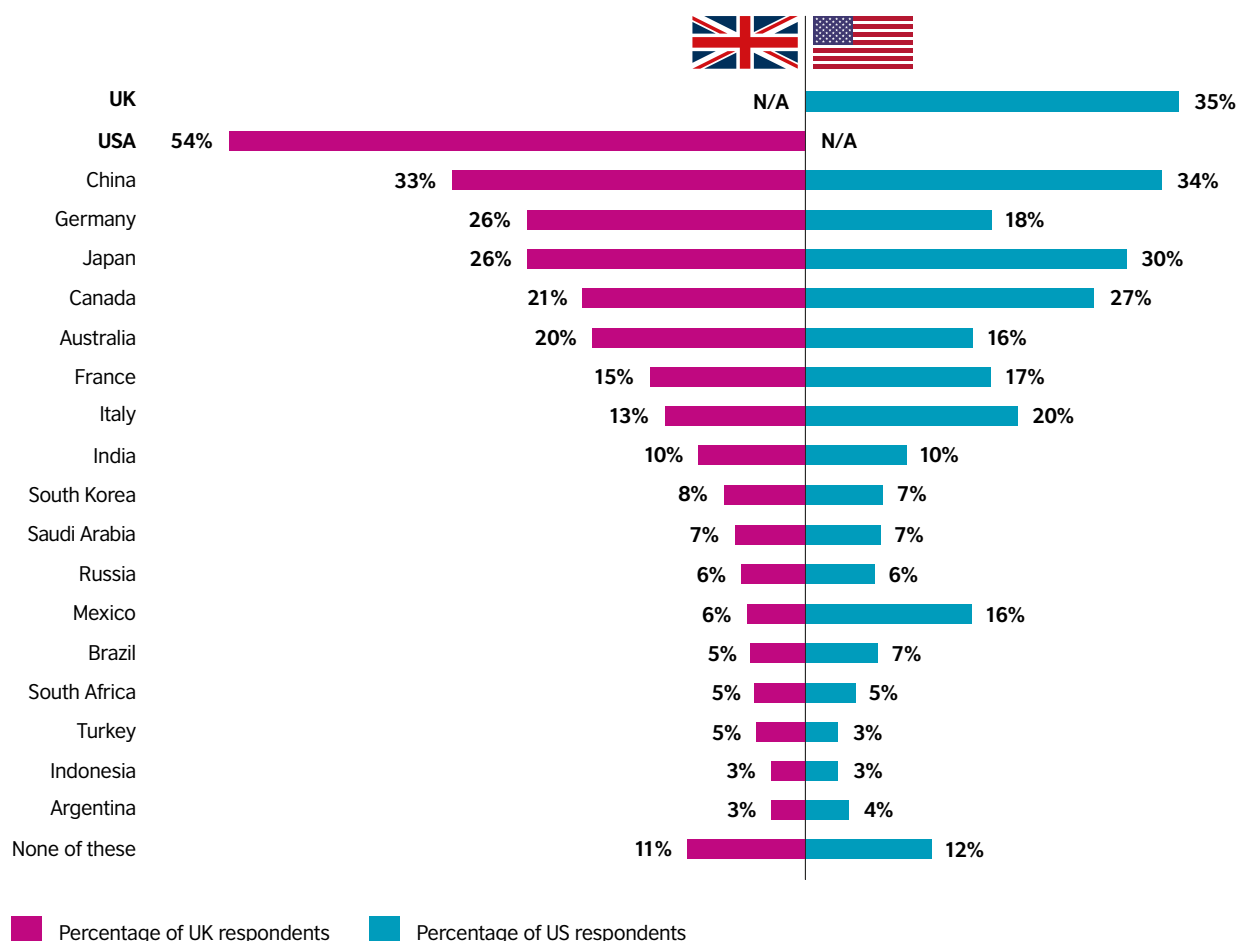
While the British Council’s interests and remit bring a natural focus on the personal, educational, and cultural relationship elements of the bilateral relationships, the research also sought to understand how this linked to the views of young people in the US and UK across a wider set of economic and societal characteristics and relations.

For trade and business, the UK was identified by young Americans as the most attractive country with which to conduct trade or business (at 35 per cent), and the US as top by young British people (at 54 per cent, with China second at 33 per cent) (see Figure 14). This should be particularly important for the UK as it aims to become a more global Britain, post-Brexit.

46 per cent of young Americans said they have friends or family from the UK or living in the UK.

Figure 14: Most attractive G20 country for business and trade

Which three of the following countries do you find the most attractive to do business/trade with?



Base: UK respondents (1,636) and US respondents (1,000). Fieldwork dates: March to April 2018. Which three of the following countries do you find most attractive to do business/ trade with? Data presented here is weighted to relevant national populations.

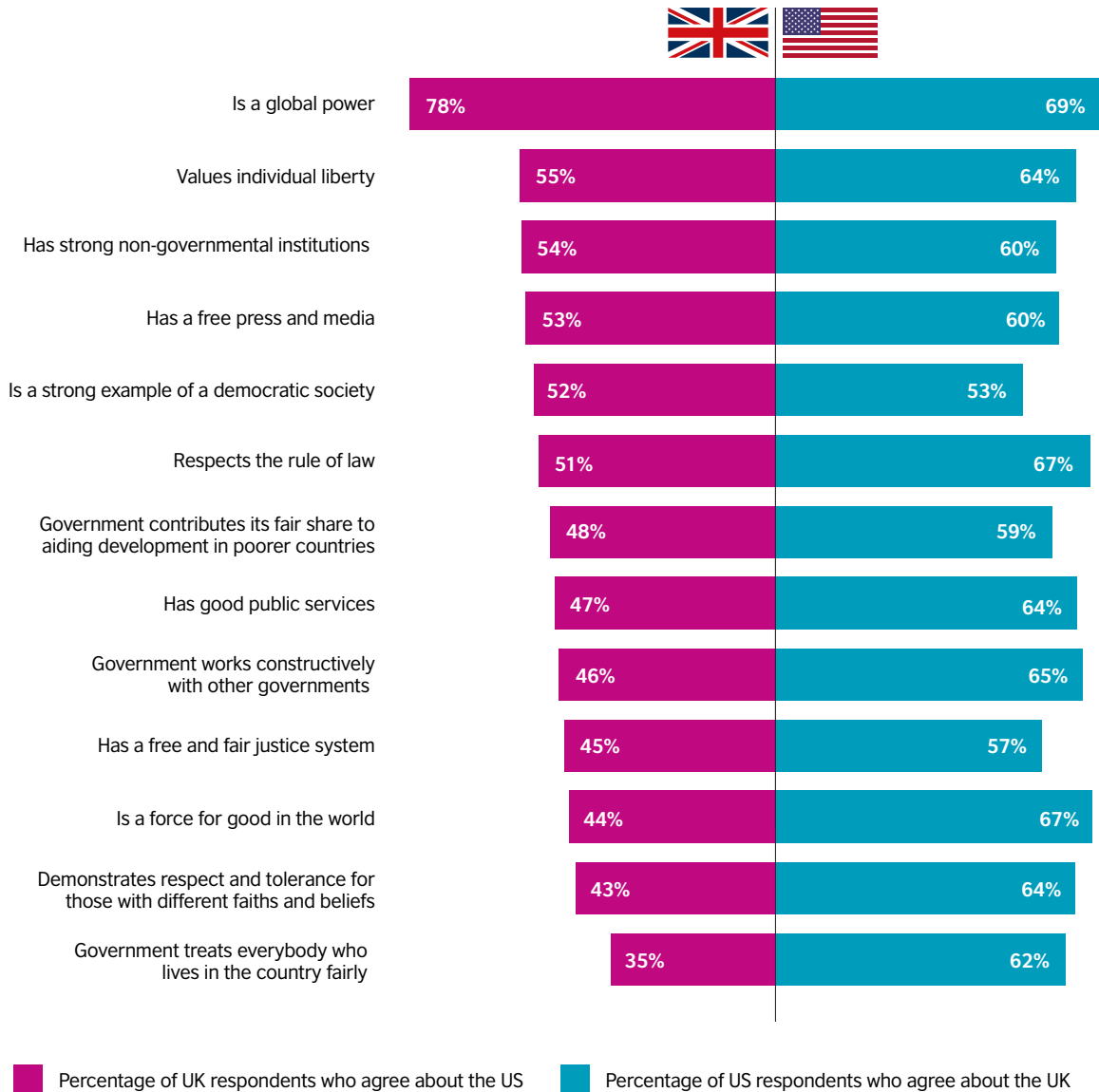
Source: Fieldwork by GfK.

Turning to matters of governance and society the research sought to assess the views of young British and US respondents of a range of characteristics about American and British democracy, government and institutions. Sixty-two per cent of young people in the US thought the UK government 'treats everybody who lives in the country fairly', 59 per cent thought it 'contributes its fair share to aiding development in poorer countries', and 67 per cent of young Americans thought that the UK was 'a force for good in the world'. Young people from the US also scored the UK highly for 'respects the rule of law' (67 per cent), 'values individual liberty' (64 per cent), 'shows tolerance for those of other faiths' (64 per cent), and having 'strong non-governmental institutions' (60 per cent) and 'a free press' (60 per cent) (see Figure 15). In all these categories, the UK compared favourably to other leading nations.

Young British people were relatively more sceptical of the US government, with 35 per cent considering that it 'treats everybody who lives in the country fairly', 48 per cent that it 'contributes its fair share to aiding development in poorer countries', and 44 per cent that the US was 'a force for good in the world'. Young people in the UK also scored the US somewhat less highly for 'respects the rule of law' (51 per cent), 'values individual liberty' (55 per cent), 'shows tolerance for those of other faiths' (43 per cent), and having 'strong non-governmental institutions' (54 per cent), and 'a free press' (53 per cent).

Figure 15: Views of societal characteristics

Percentage of respondents who agree that the following is true of the other country



Base: UK respondents (1,636) and US respondents (1,000). Fieldwork dates: March to April 2018. Thinking specifically about the UK/US, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Data presented here is weighted to relevant national populations.

Source: Fieldwork by GfK.

A ‘special’ relationship?

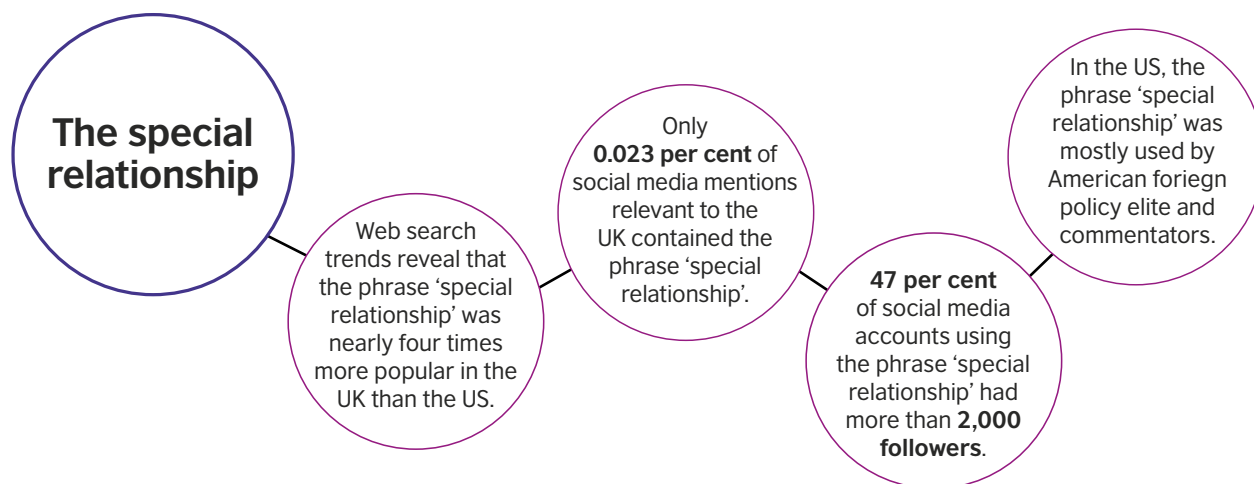
The UK–US relationship has been strengthened by ties of shared history, language, and values, as well as economic, political, and strategic interest. There is a history of British anxiety about the country’s connections with the US and a common perception that the term ‘special relationship’ may be more resonant in the UK than the US – and that there might be a danger of either complacency or unrequited and perhaps even subservient affection from the British end. This research examined whether the phrase itself has much popular traction – particularly in the US – but also whether the ties that underpin it remain strong and important. It can help shed light on whether the special relationship is an aspirational theory with little underpinning in current reality – or whether it is in fact quite the reverse: a flourishing reality disguised by lack of awareness or cynicism about its theoretical label.

When the term ‘special relationship’ related to the UK was examined through social media and search trend analytics, it was found to be largely absent from mainstream American social media. It was nearly four times less popular, per capita, as a phrase in American as opposed to British social media posts. In as much as it is used in the US, it is a term mostly deployed by American political and foreign policy commentators: 47 per cent of

social media accounts using the phrase had more than 2,000 followers, and it had a low level of grass roots interest (see Figure 17). There was an increase in web searches for, and conversations about, the special relationship at the time of the EU Referendum and Donald Trump’s inauguration, but in both cases they quickly subsided.

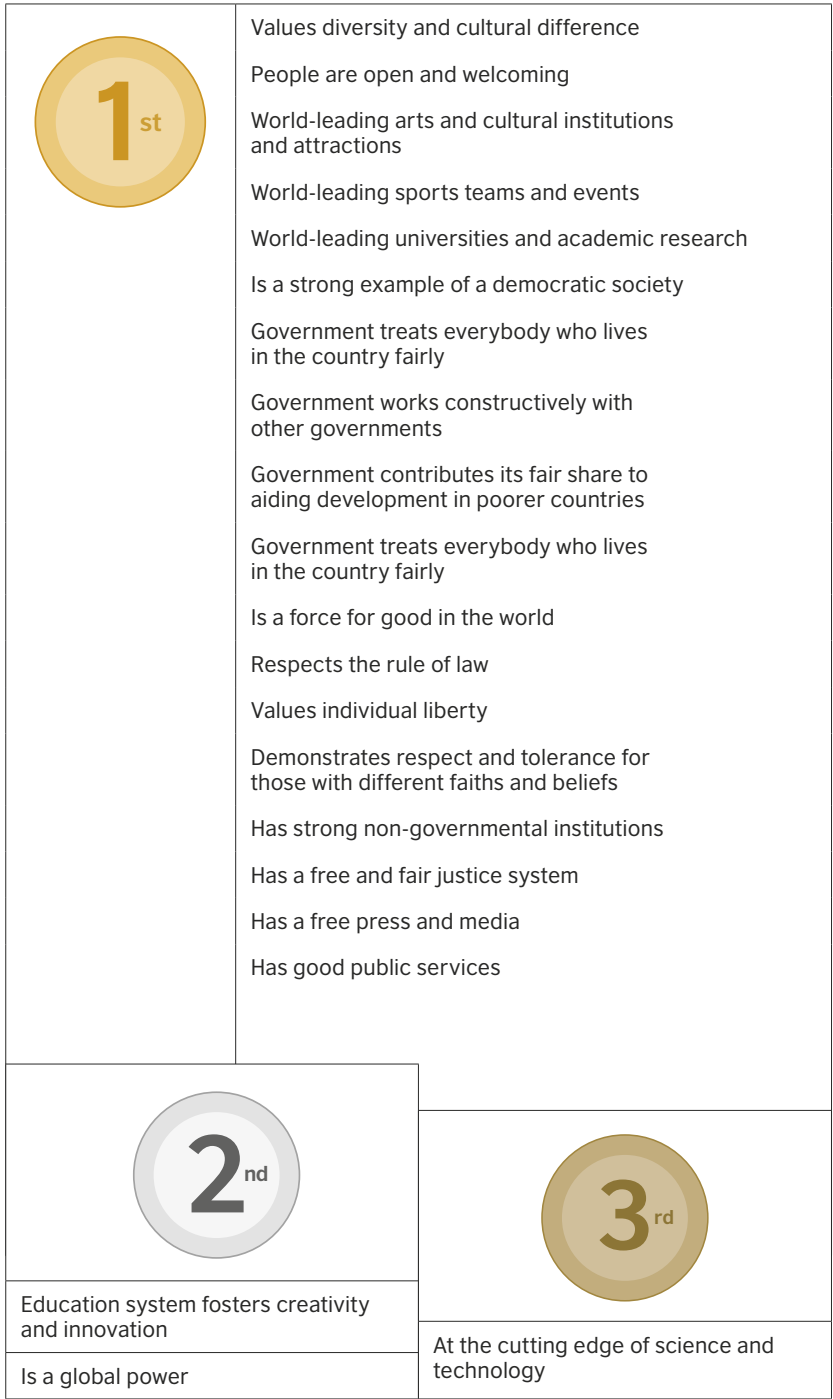
Whether they call the relationship ‘special’ or not, American respondents do, however, consistently place the UK ahead of other major countries across a broad series of cultural, educational, personal, and societal characteristics. These factors range from having world-class arts, universities, and sports, to having strong non-governmental institutions, a free justice system, and a free press, and from ‘having a government that works constructively with other governments’ and ‘is a force for good in the world’ to ‘values individual liberty’ (see Figure 18). This supports existing data which suggests that, apart from neighbouring Canada, the UK is seen as being an ally or a friendly nation by more American adults than any other country.²¹ Sixty-nine per cent of young Americans also rated the UK as ‘a global power’ It is views like these which constitute the true state of the relationship, and which arguably mark it out as ‘special’.

Figure 17: Popularity of the phrase ‘special relationship’ in social media and web searches’



21. Economist YouGov Poll, August 2017.

Figure 18: US rankings of UK relative to other major countries across a range of categories



American respondents... consistently place the UK ahead of other major countries across a broad series of cultural, educational, personal and societal characteristics.

Base: US respondents (1,000). Fieldwork dates: March to April 2018. Thinking specifically about the UK, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Data presented here is weighted to relevant national populations. Countries ranked were US, UK, China, Russia, India, Japan, Germany.

Source: Fieldwork by GfK.

The history of the ‘special relationship’

The term ‘special relationship’ was first coined by Winston Churchill in his famous 1946 ‘Iron Curtain’ speech. This is often cited as marking the effective start of the Cold War. After being close allies in two world wars, the UK and the US were instrumental in establishing NATO as well as many of the institutions and norms which underpin the modern international rules-based system. They continue to share many values and have both been consistent champions of liberal democracy and free-market capitalism. As such, the ‘special relationship’ has been called ‘the cornerstone of the modern, democratic world order’,²² and viewed as instrumental in the successful prosecution of the Cold War. And, although the UK was the junior partner, it did play a significant role.²³

During the 1960s the then Prime Minister Harold Macmillan – like Churchill, half American – famously described Britain’s role as being like that of ‘Athens to America’s Rome’. It is interesting to note that this conception envisaged not a partnership of equals, but a relationship of influence and mutual benefit between an older, cultural superpower and a younger, military and economic one. Since Churchill coined the expression, the special relationship has seen fluctuating fortunes, from moments of closeness between Macmillan and JFK, Reagan and Thatcher, Blair and Bush, to low points such as the recent suggestion by Barack Obama that the UK would go ‘to the back of the queue’ when it came to post-Brexit trade deals. The election of President Trump opened a new chapter in the relationship which is yet to conclude.

The ‘special relationship’ has been described as ‘the cornerstone of the modern, democratic world order’.

22. Paul Johnson (1991) *The Birth of the Modern: World Society 1815–1830*. Harper-Collins.

23. See entry by Dino Buenviaje on The Special Relationship in Britain and the Americas, Culture, Politics, History, Ed. Will Kaufman and Heidi Slettedahl Macpherson, ABC CLIO (2005).

Conclusion

The research shows that there is a close proximity and strong mutual attraction between the US and the UK when analysed through the prism of the views of their young people. Moreover, the factors driving that proximity and attraction might best be described as precisely 'cultural' (broadly defined) rather than political.

These cultural underpinnings to the relationship are important. They support bilateral relations focused on diplomatic, strategic, and economic affairs. They provide a basis which allows countries like the US and the UK to maintain an enduring closeness through times of political change. According to the research, those deeper cultural currents are strong, continue to endure, and have the potential to be strengthened in the future.

Specific areas which are contributing to the relationship – from shared concerns and values, to tourism and other personal links, to popular culture, arts, sport, education, government and society, and the perceived personal trustworthiness of ordinary people in each country – all show a positive picture of transatlantic mutual regard and cultural affinity. This underlying cultural closeness is associated with a healthy mutual appreciation.

Americans surveyed highly appreciated the UK for its history and culture. They also thought the UK is the most attractive country as a place to study and trade. Similarly, the UK young people surveyed found the US the most attractive country for study and trade.

Despite the changing demographics in both countries, which might be considered to represent a challenge to the cultural proximity between the US and the UK, this research shows this cultural proximity to be strong among the *young*. Given that the evidence also points to the importance of current popular culture as much as historical ties, there is every reason to be optimistic about the future of the relationship. There is little sign of the more diverse younger generations in either country showing lower levels of mutual cultural proximity or appreciation today.

Brexit arguably represents a long-term shift in the UK's international status and position. The data suggests that when it comes to the US, Brexit presents a positive opportunity to reach out to more Americans, albeit greater efforts may need to be made to reassure Americans of all backgrounds that the UK is welcoming and tolerant of diversity.

The special relationship is a cultural as much as a political phenomenon.

In the light of this research, it could be said that the relationship between the nations in terms of the attitudes and views of young people does indeed have some 'special' characteristics. The underlying cultural affinity between the two countries continues to be so strong regardless of the vicissitudes of short-term politics and international relations. In that sense, the special relationship is a cultural as much as a political phenomenon.

Furthermore, the challenges to the rules-based international system largely established by the US and the UK, and the development of a more multi-polar world, suggest a renewed interest in the relationship. It also suggests a new relevance for a political and cultural alliance that has evolved over the past century. The mutual benefits of close co-operation between two of the world's leading English speaking nations – from diplomacy, military and intelligence links to trade and influence and shared culture and values – will continue to be important for both countries, as they have been throughout recent history. Post-Brexit, it will be even more important to the UK, which cannot afford to be complacent or to ignore the scale of the opportunities potentially on offer.

This report's findings paint a vivid picture of the views held by young people from the UK of the US, and vice versa, which points to a positive future for the relationship between the two. The evidence implies that the term 'special relationship' does not itself enjoy wide popular use, particularly in the US. However, it also suggests that the concept underlying it and the historical and current cultural and personal ties which lead the populations of the US and the UK to share cultural values and deep mutual appreciation are alive and flourishing.

The UK–US relationship remains underpinned by popular cultural cross-over, mutual attraction, and shared values and concerns. These have in the past been strengthened by the creation of bilateral cultural and educational exchange programmes. The ties which form the foundations of the relationship can and should be further strengthened. They could benefit, for example, from policies designed to encourage more travel between the two countries for cross-cultural exposure, for education, and for tourism – including for those from regions and communities perhaps traditionally less exposed to transatlantic connections. Doing so is in the clear interest of both nations.

Appendix: methodology

Survey analyses

Data in this report is based on surveys of young people in the UK and the US, conducted by GfK Social and Strategic Research in 2018. The objective of this research is to understand what contributes to educated millennials' appraisal of a country's attractiveness, and in particular the attractiveness of the UK compared to the rest of the G20 countries – its closest economic and cultural competitors.

The research aimed to understand how the UK was seen by educated young people in the G20 countries and build trend data in order to measure changes in attitudes towards the UK.

GfK Social and Strategic Research conducted online surveys across the 19 country members of the G20 group (the EU being the 20th member) with 18–34 year olds with a minimum of secondary education.

In each country, data is weighted on age and gender to be representative of the national population aged 18–34 with secondary education or higher. Only data from the US and the UK appear here.

Fieldwork in the US took place between 12 and 25 April 2018. Fieldwork in the UK took place between 11 and 26 April, 2018. The final sample size is 1,000 per country.

Where results do not sum to 100, this may be due to rounding, multiple responses or the exclusion of 'don't know' categories.

0 per cent represents values lower than 0.5 per cent, including 0.

Social media and web trends analysis

To conduct the research, Ipsos Public Affairs targeted three specific moments in time, consisting of a one-month period immediately following the Brexit vote (23 June 2016), Donald Trump's inauguration (20 January 2017), and early 2018 (17 February 2018).

A total of nine million social media mentions were collected from across the United States (approximately three million per time period), including four million unique content mentions (i.e. not retweets or other types of content shares).

The analysis was conducted utilising Ipsos Amethyst – Ipsos's social intelligence suite, including proprietary machine learning algorithms applied to social media and search trends data. The analysis relied on analysis of major social media and network platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Google, Reddit, YouTube, and Twitter among others.

Methodologies applied for this study include:

- text analytics – author/pattern clustering
- text analytics – word associations
- Google search trends
- search similarity by country
- topic modelling

TFIDF (Term Frequency-inverse Document Frequency) was utilised to vectorise social media mentions in text analytics and topic modelling. It is a numerical statistic, which reflects the weight (importance) of words to a document.

In order to identify groups of users with similar interests, Ipsos Public Affairs utilised the clustering algorithm non-negative matrix factorisation (NMF). When applied to text, this technique identifies terms and phrases that pattern together across texts. As an example, the algorithm identified one cluster of users primarily concerned with the television show *Sherlock* and some of the most relevant terms to that group of users are listed below:

Sherlock, season, Holmes, Watson, SDCC, trailer, Cumberbatch, sdcc2016, Benedict, series, John, episode, Benedictcumberbatch...

Another subset of users was primarily concerned with Brexit and its economic effects. Some of the key terms are as follows:

Brexit, UK, vote, EU, post, May, bank, mortgage, news, Britain, says, Trump, rates, IMF, economy, global, growth...

Text analytics – word associations

To identify terms that were associated with a topic of interest, Ipsos Public Affairs separated data into groups of posts, which contained words denoting our topics, such as ‘history’, ‘politics’, or ‘diplomacy’. A technique called support vector machine (SVM) classifier was then utilised to identify vocabulary closely associated with each group of posts. For every topic Ipsos Public Affairs ranked the terms by the SVM association score multiplied by the overall frequency of the term, to identify terms that were both common and associated with the topic of interest. As a supplement to this technique Ipsos Public Affairs also identified the most common words and phrases in the subset of posts containing topic terms.

As an example, in period 2 the top five phrases most associated with the terms ‘sports’ or ‘soccer’ were:

Champions league, premier league, Manchester united, Rio2016 Olympics, Manchester city

In period 1, the top five phrases most associated with the term ‘politics’ were:

Boris Johnson, David Cameron, Jeremy Corbyn, Prime Minister, Nigel Farage

Google search trends

Google’s search interest score is relative and per search, meaning that the values are represented on a scale of 0 to 100. Each search interest value represents the raw number of searches for a word or phrase divided by the total number of all searches. After retrieving a set of search interest scores, each score is normalized relative to the maximum in the set, meaning that the maximum will always be 100, with other values displayed as a percentage of that maximum. This score can be restricted to a given geographic area or time period, to either rank areas or show change over time.

Search similarity by country

In order to identify cultural similarity between countries, Ipsos Public Affairs examined search patterns for important names. It created several dictionaries, including sets of names denoting currently popular celebrities, politicians, and important historical figures for both the US and UK. For the list of popular modern names, the 37 most searched people in the US in 2017 (politicians, actors, musicians, and athletes), and the top ten most-searched people in the UK, were used.

The list of top historical figures in US history was sourced from an article in the Smithsonian Magazine, and includes such individuals as Abraham Lincoln and Louis Armstrong.²⁴ A 2002 BBC poll provided an equivalent list of British historical figures and contained politicians like Winston Churchill, musicians like Paul McCartney, and many others.²⁵ Ipsos calculated average search interest in these names for each country and ranked them accordingly.

Topic modelling

Ipsos Public Affairs used the NMF algorithm to identify clusters of words that patterned together across posts and shares containing the phrase ‘special relationship’. These clusters represent topics of discussion. One group of posts was centred around discussions of Theresa May. Here are some of the words most associated with that cluster:

May, Theresa, Prime, Minister, British...

Another cluster referred to Brexit:

union, european, leave, vote, historic...

The frequency of each of these topics were examined to determine the most common themes in discussions of the ‘special relationship’.

24. TA Frail (2014) *Meet the 100 Most Significant Americans of All Time*. Smithsonian Magazine. Available online at: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonianmag/meet-100-most-significant-americans-all-time-180953341/>

25. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/2208671.stm>

Acknowledgements

Editor: Alice Campbell-Cree

Series Editor: Mona Lotten

We would like to thank the following people for their contributions to this report:

Roy Bacon, John Dubber, Leigh Gibson, Justine Gamez, Megan Oliver

ISBN 978-0-86355-916-7

© **British Council 2018 / J062**

The British Council is the United Kingdom's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities.

