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FOR GLOBAL
CHANGE

Covid-19 and Changing Attitudes: The US, China and Global Cooperation

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Summary

The pandemic has had large-scale impacts on the majority of the world's population. It also came at a time of geopolitical turmoil with Brexit negotiations underway, unpredictable US foreign policy, foreign interference in elections and, importantly, China increasingly asserting its might across the world.

In early June, we conducted representative surveys in Britain, France, Germany and the US to help understand the changing views of geopolitics in the West in light of the coronavirus pandemic. What do people think of relationships between China and the West, how do people perceive the role of global institutions in the world, and whom do people blame for the severity of the crisis?

We also looked at technology companies in the same context, because the scale and reach of some of the biggest companies now eclipses many traditional international institutions. You can read more about what our research found on [attitudes to tech companies](#), as well as our findings on [how social attitudes have changed as a result of Covid-19](#).

The headlines from our findings on geopolitics are as follows:

1. People in Germany have the most positive perception of their own country overall, with a majority of Germans saying they feel their country is the best or better than most other countries in the world. Only 35% of British people and 27% of French people would say the same thing. In the US and Britain, more positive perceptions of one's own country were associated with greater preference for less coordination and cooperation with other countries. In France and Germany there was no such association.
2. Both the Chinese and the US governments are seen as forces for bad in the world by a majority of people in Britain and France, with Germany having a worse view of the US government than it does of the Chinese government.
3. In Britain, the US, Germany and France, a plurality of people hold the Chinese government most responsible for the severity of the pandemic, over their own governments.
4. A majority of people surveyed in the US, France and Britain say their opinion of the Chinese government has worsened during the pandemic; around two in five of those in the US think this about their own government. The highest reported change is in Britain, where 69% and 60% of people say their opinion of the US and the Chinese governments has worsened respectively.
5. There is no consistent view on the importance of coordination with other countries on the pandemic though it is notable that less than a quarter of people surveyed in each country want more integration with the global economy and only 6% in France want more integration.
6. In all the countries we surveyed, people have a much higher expectation of the role the World Health Organisation (WHO) should be playing in finding solutions to the pandemic compared to the role they think it has played in tackling it.
7. There are high expectations of global pharmaceutical companies to find solutions to the problems

created by the pandemic, but few people have a lot of confidence in those companies (and in France, a quarter of people have no confidence at all).

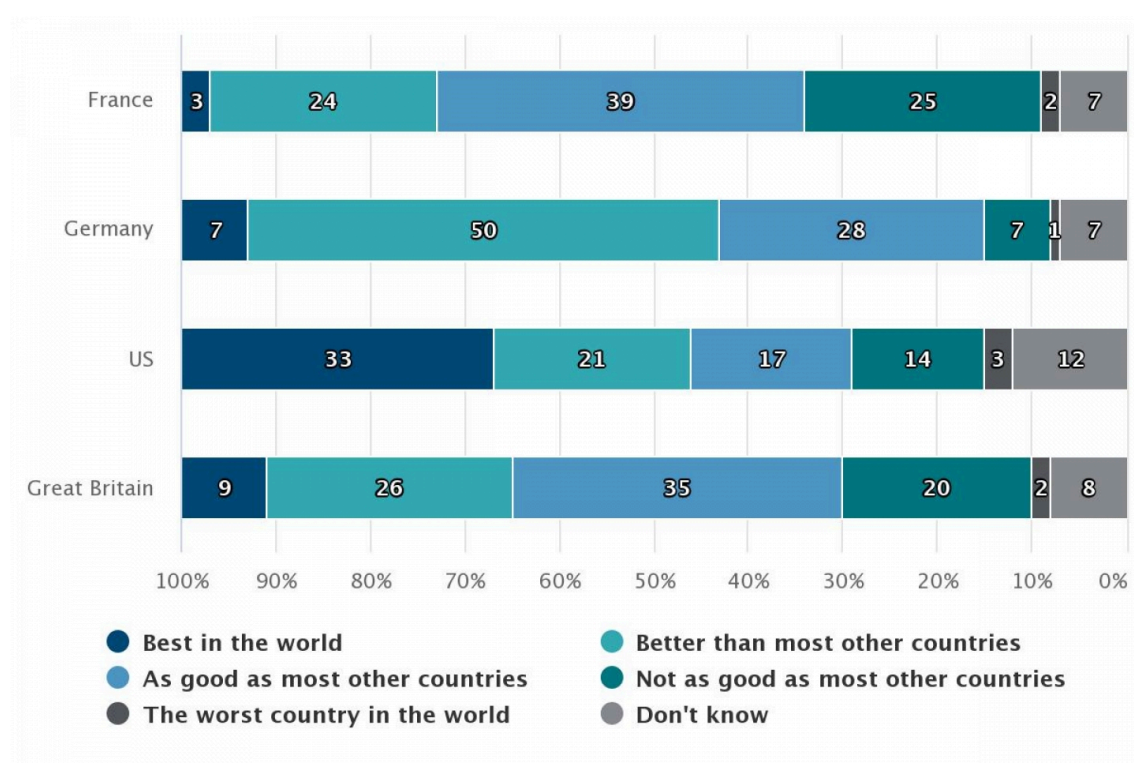
8. In Britain a majority (60%) of people view the United Nations as a force for good in the world, but the pandemic has changed few opinions on the UN in the countries we surveyed. It's also clear the pandemic has changed few views on the perceptions of the European Union in the countries we surveyed.

Nationalism and Cooperation

We asked how people feel about their own countries. A large majority of the people we surveyed in each country had a positive sentiment of their own countries, rating their country as “as good as most other countries” or more positively. People in the US are most likely to say their country is the best in the world, but this is highly polarised, with 73% of 2016 Trump voters saying the US is the best versus 17% of 2016 Clinton voters.

In Britain, the US and Germany, generally speaking, the older you are the more likely you are to say that your country is the best in the world, or better than most other countries. In France it is the 35-44s who are least likely to hold this positive sentiment (19% would say their country is better than most other countries or the best, compared with 33% of 18-24s and 32% of over-65).

Figure 1 – How respondents feel about their own country



Q Which of the following statements best describes the way you feel about (specific country)? Options: x is the best country in the world; x is better than most other countries; x is as good as most other countries; x is not as good as most other countries; x is the worst country in the world; don't know

There is no consistent view when it comes to coordination on the pandemic, though less than a quarter of people in each country want more integration with the global economy. France has particularly

isolationist views with regard to integration with the global economy and a majority of people (52%) believe their country should become more independent from the global economy.

Figure 2 – Britain and the US are more interested in greater coordination with other countries on pandemic response

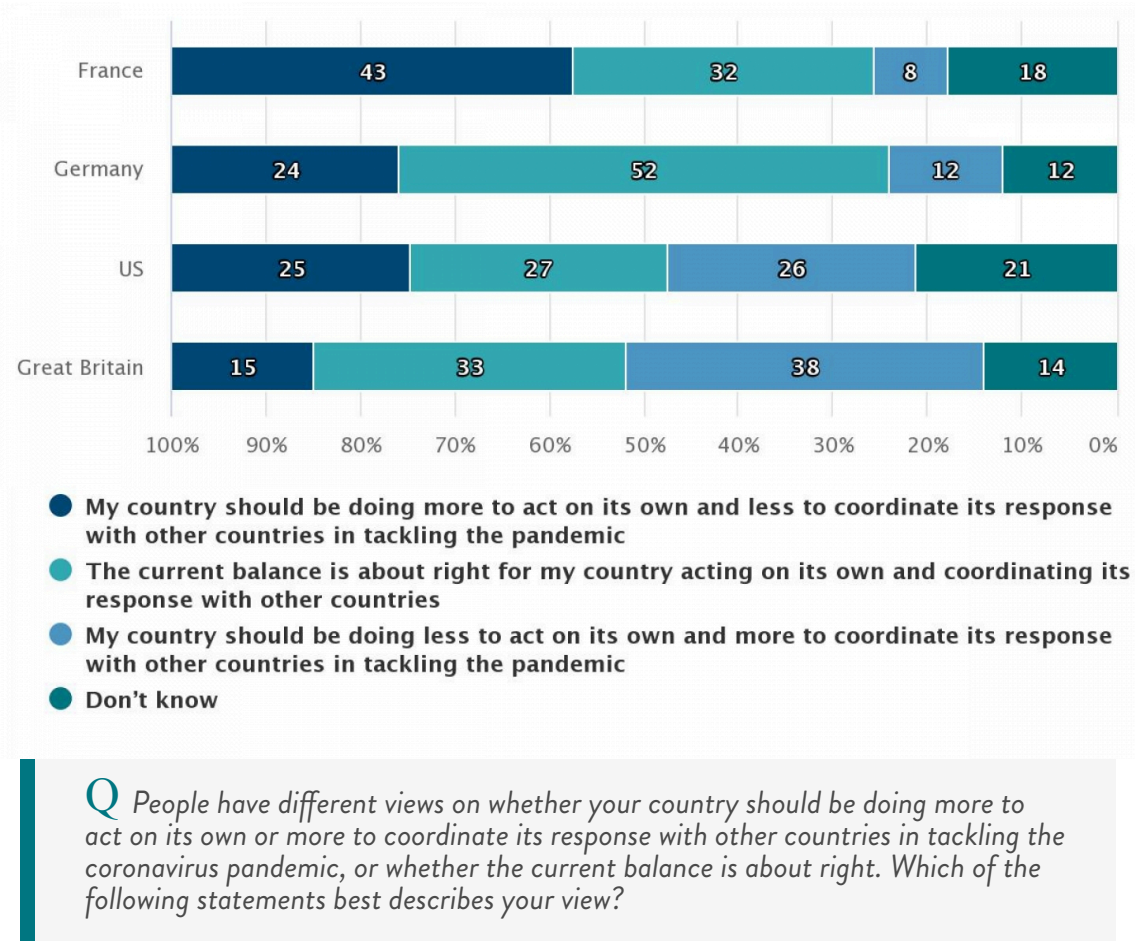
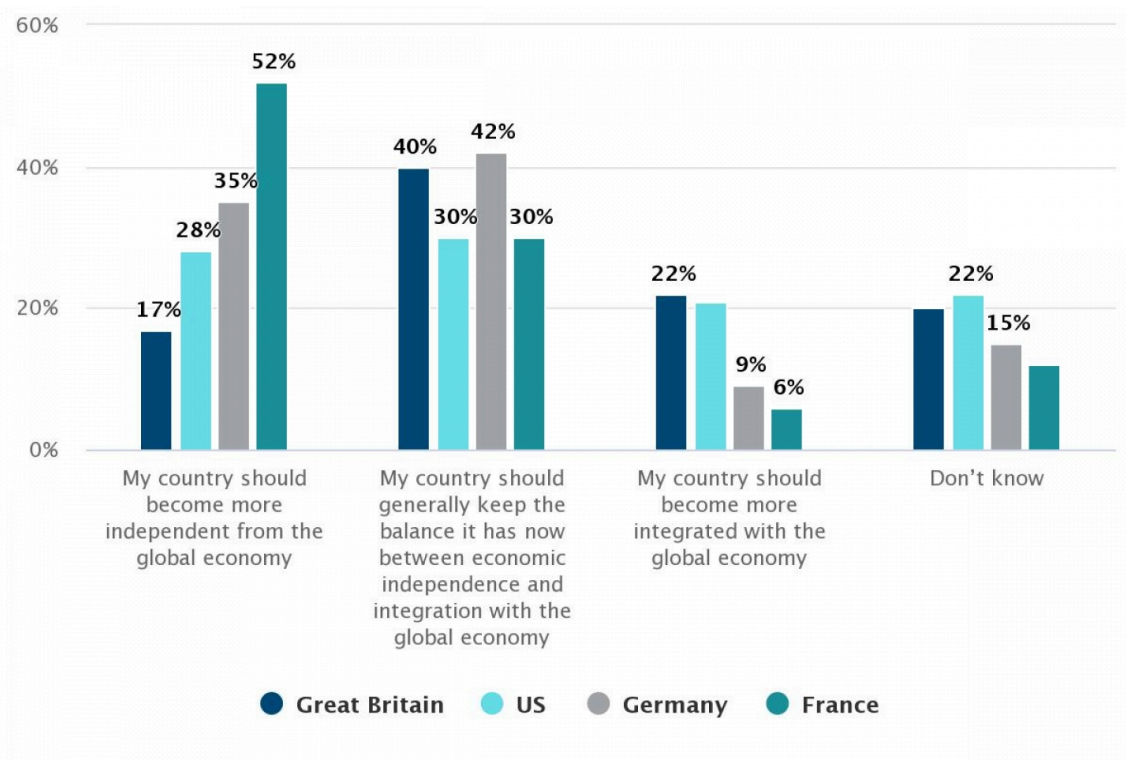


Figure 3 – France has more isolationist views when it comes to the global economy



Q In response to the coronavirus pandemic, people have different views on whether your country should become more independent from the global economy or more integrated with the global economy, or should generally keep the balance it has now between economic independence and integration with the global economy. Which of the following statements best describes your view?

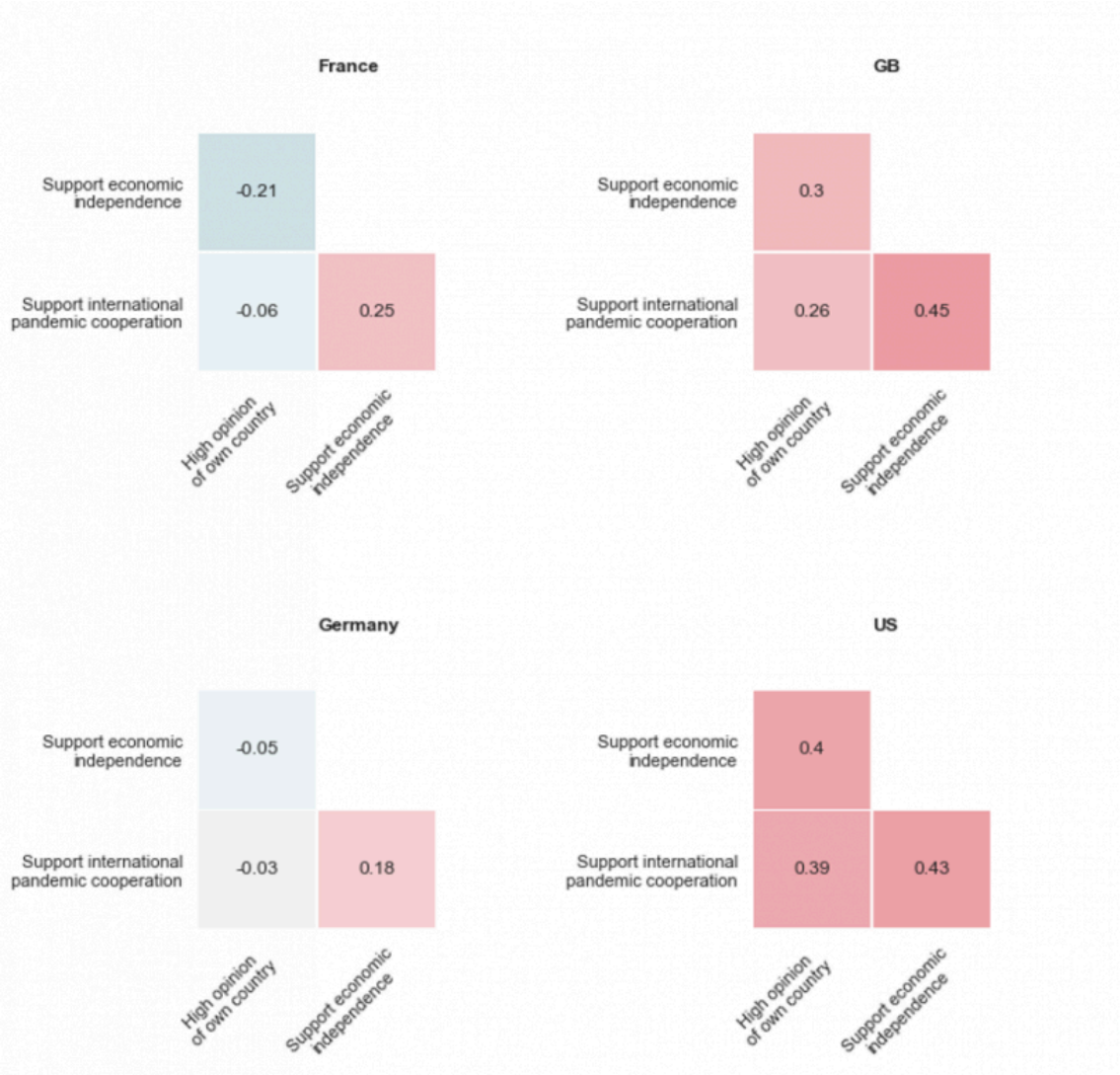
The Correlation Between Opinions of One's Own Country and Views on Cooperation

The research also reveals some of the drivers behind views on global coordination and cooperation. We looked at the correlation between three survey questions: on how respondents feel about their own country, on views on whether their country should be coordinating more internationally on the pandemic response and on whether their country should be integrating more with the global economy.

For all countries, individuals who thought that their country should coordinate more to respond to the coronavirus pandemic were likely to also think that their country should be more integrated in the global economy.

For the US and Britain, the people who had more favourable views of their country (i.e. they thought their country was better than most others or the best) also tended to favour less internationally coordinated approaches to the coronavirus pandemic and the economy. However, for people in France and Germany, this association is not apparent – thinking very highly of one's own country is not associated with a desire for less coordination in either coronavirus or economic integration.

Figure 4 – Correlation between opinions of one’s own country and views on global cooperation

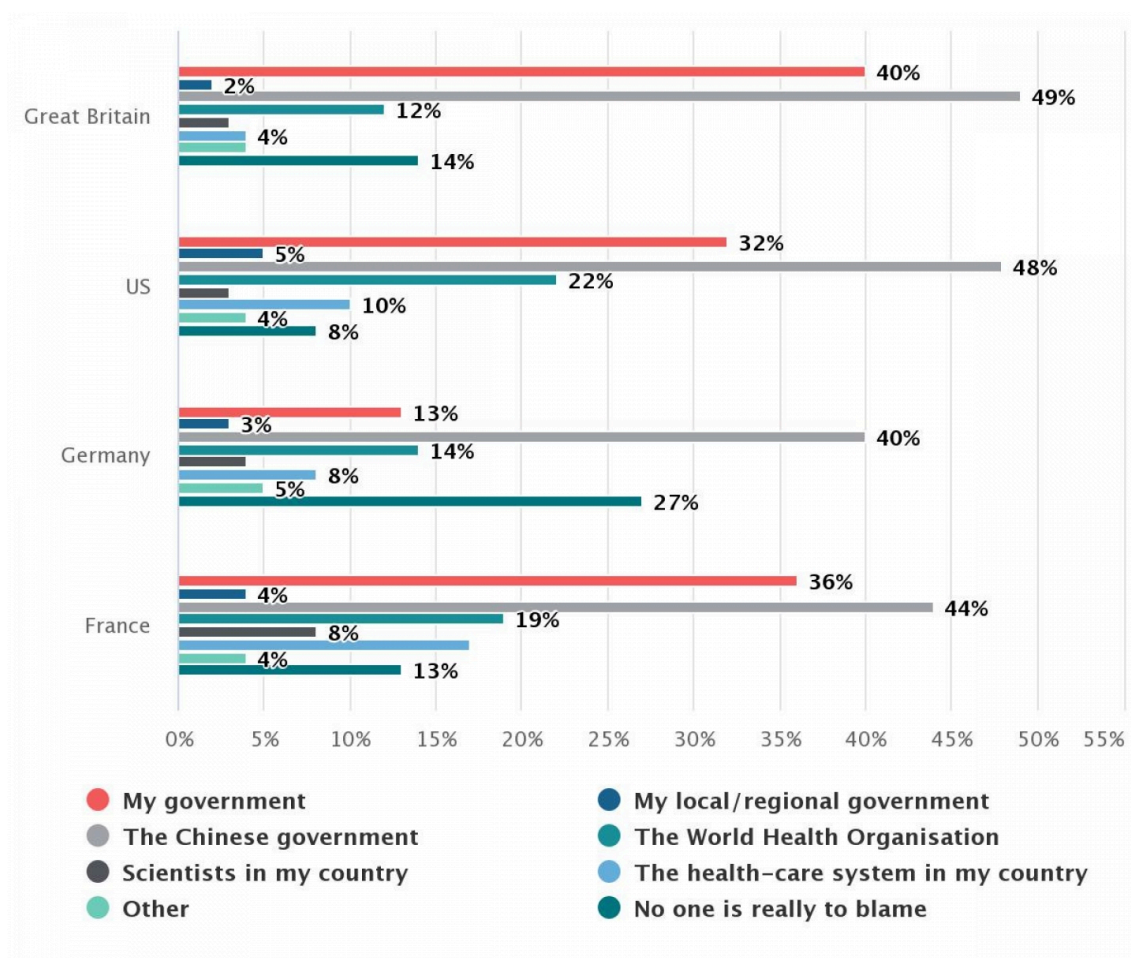


Note Respondent answers were converted to a numerical scale where higher numbers indicate higher views of one’s own country/views on cooperation on the global economy. Correlation is calculated using Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient. Responses of “Don’t know” were excluded.

Who Is to Blame for the Severity of the Pandemic?

The Chinese government is consistently seen as responsible for the severity of the pandemic

Figure 5 – In Britain, the US, Germany and France, people hold their own governments less responsible than the Chinese government



Q

Which one or two, if any, of the following would you say is MOST responsible for the severity of the coronavirus pandemic?

There are some differences in opinion by age. Younger people in Britain are more likely to blame the British government than they are the Chinese government for the severity of the pandemic. (52% of 18-24s think Britain's government is most to blame, compared to 31% of 55-64s).

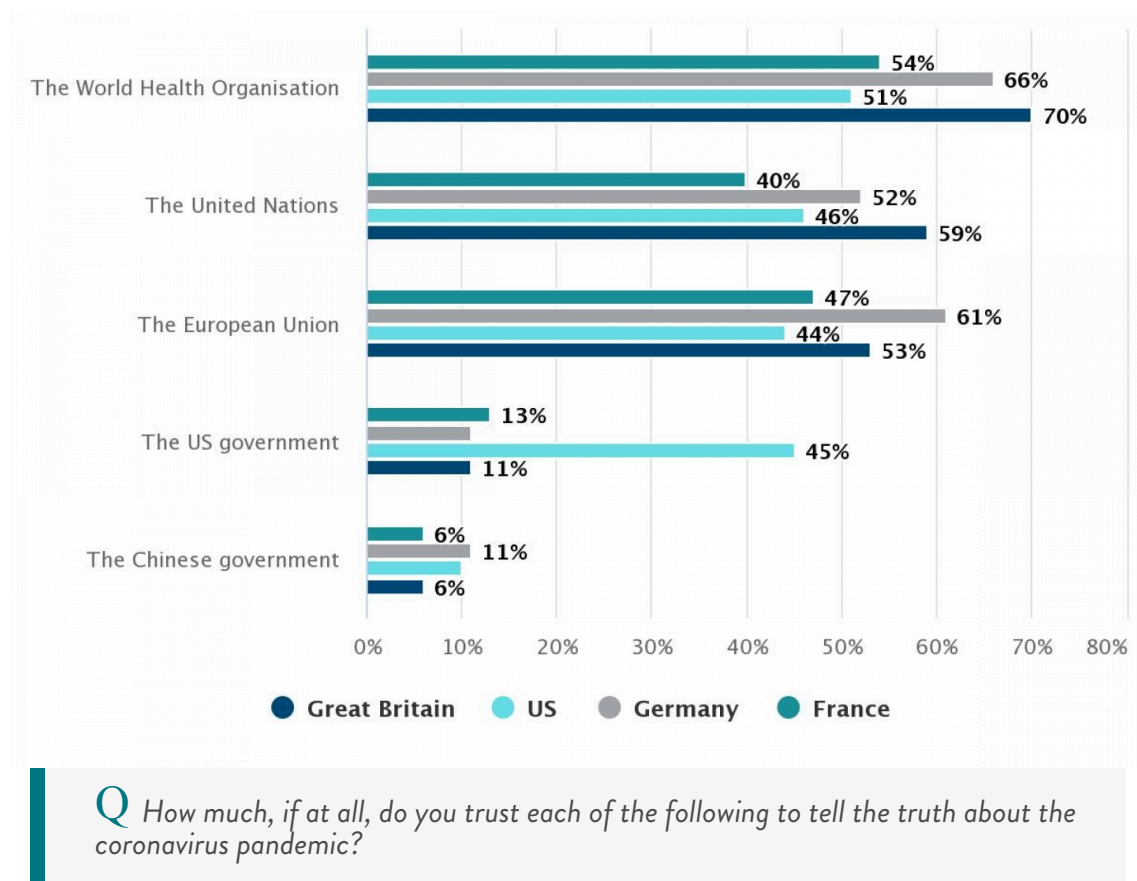
In the US older people are more definitive about blame resting with the Chinese government, with 63% of over-65s saying it is most responsible. US 25-34s are the only generation to place more responsibility with their own national government than with the Chinese government.

In Germany the Chinese government is held most responsible overall. Older people are more likely by 14 percentage points to say no one is to blame (21% for 18-24s compared to 35% of 65+)

In France 18-24s place roughly equal responsibility with the Chinese government and their own national government (~32-34%) whereas older people are more likely to hold the Chinese government responsible.

The WHO is the most trusted out of the international institutions we asked about and especially in contrast to extremely low trust in the Chinese and US Governments

Figure 6 – Trust in international institutions and the superpowers



While opinions on geopolitical questions are highly polarised on political lines, there is widespread non-partisan distrust of China.

In all demographics and regions in the four countries we polled, there was majority, and often overwhelming, distrust in the Chinese government (for example, 95% of British Conservative voters do not trust the Chinese government).

In the US, 2016 Clinton and Trump voters have very different views on all of the international institutions and superpowers we asked about. There is little difference, however, in sentiment towards China, with only around 4% of 2016 Trump or Clinton voters polled believing that China is a force for good in the world.

Perceptions of the US, China and the EU

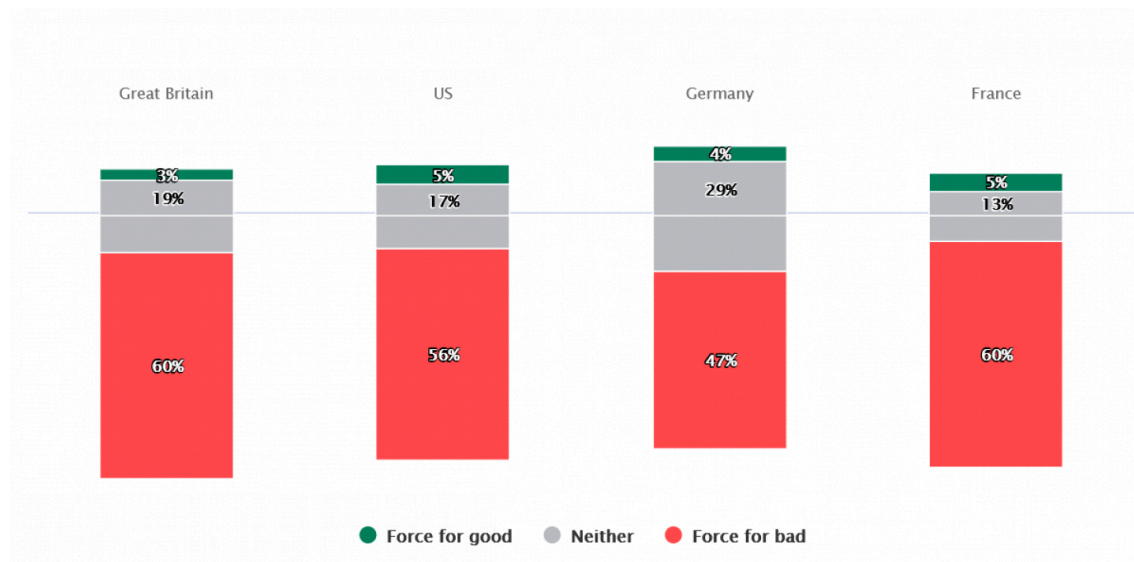
The Chinese and the US governments are seen as forces for bad in the world by a majority of people in Britain and France, with Germany having a worse view of the US government than the Chinese government.

Our own research shows that the coronavirus pandemic is likely to have had a strong impact on views of the US government and the Chinese government, but a much smaller effect (positive or negative) on views of the European Union.

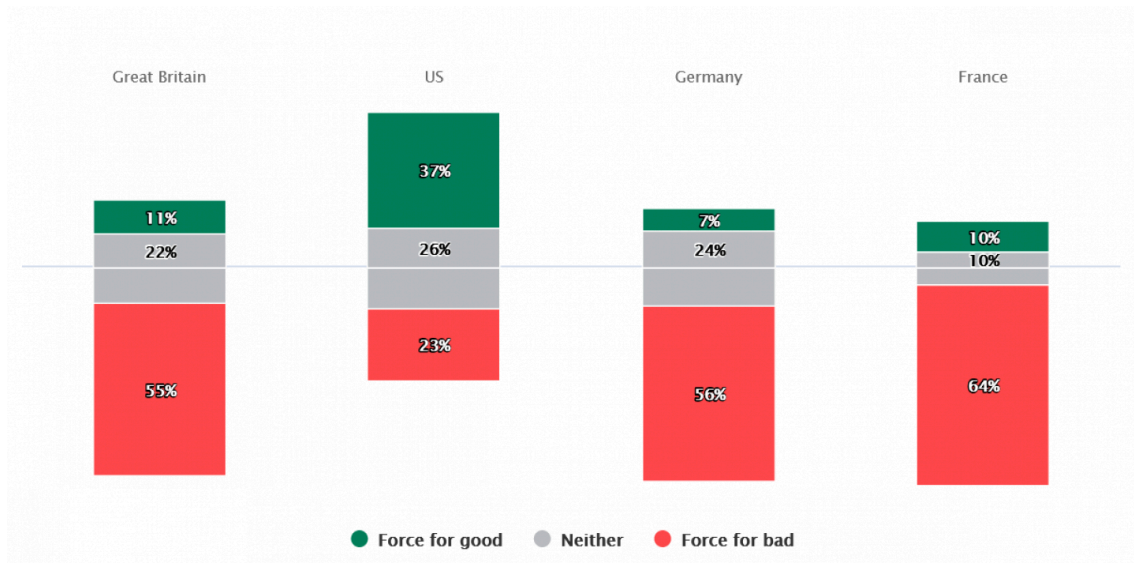
Trust in the US and China is particularly low in the countries we surveyed, and this is mirrored in views of the role international companies should have in national infrastructure projects, where large proportions of the populations we surveyed opposed major roles by US and Chinese companies.

Figure 7 – % of people who say the US government, Chinese government or European Union is a force for bad in the world

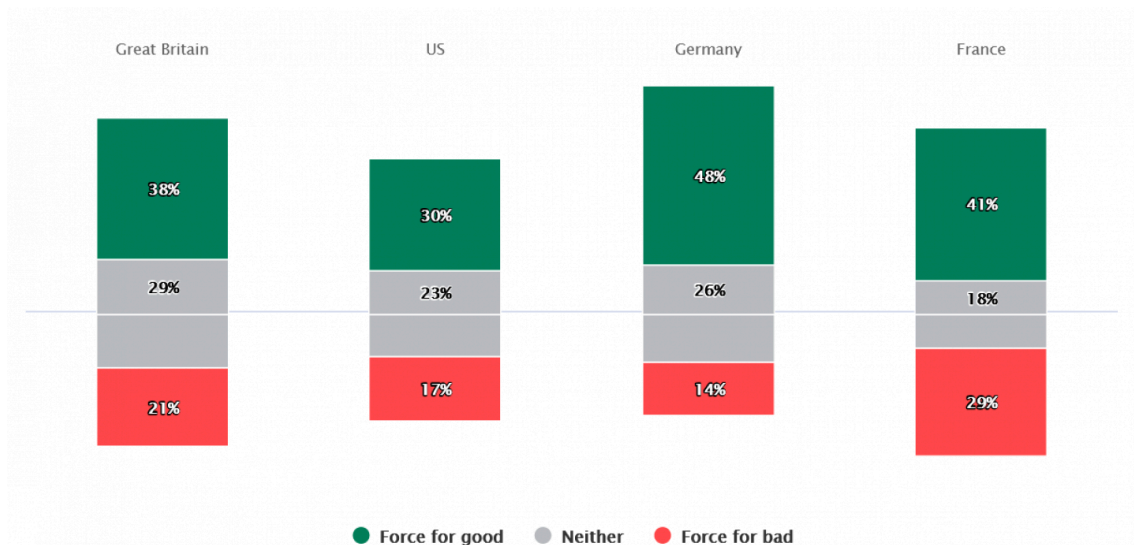
The Chinese government



The US government



The European Union

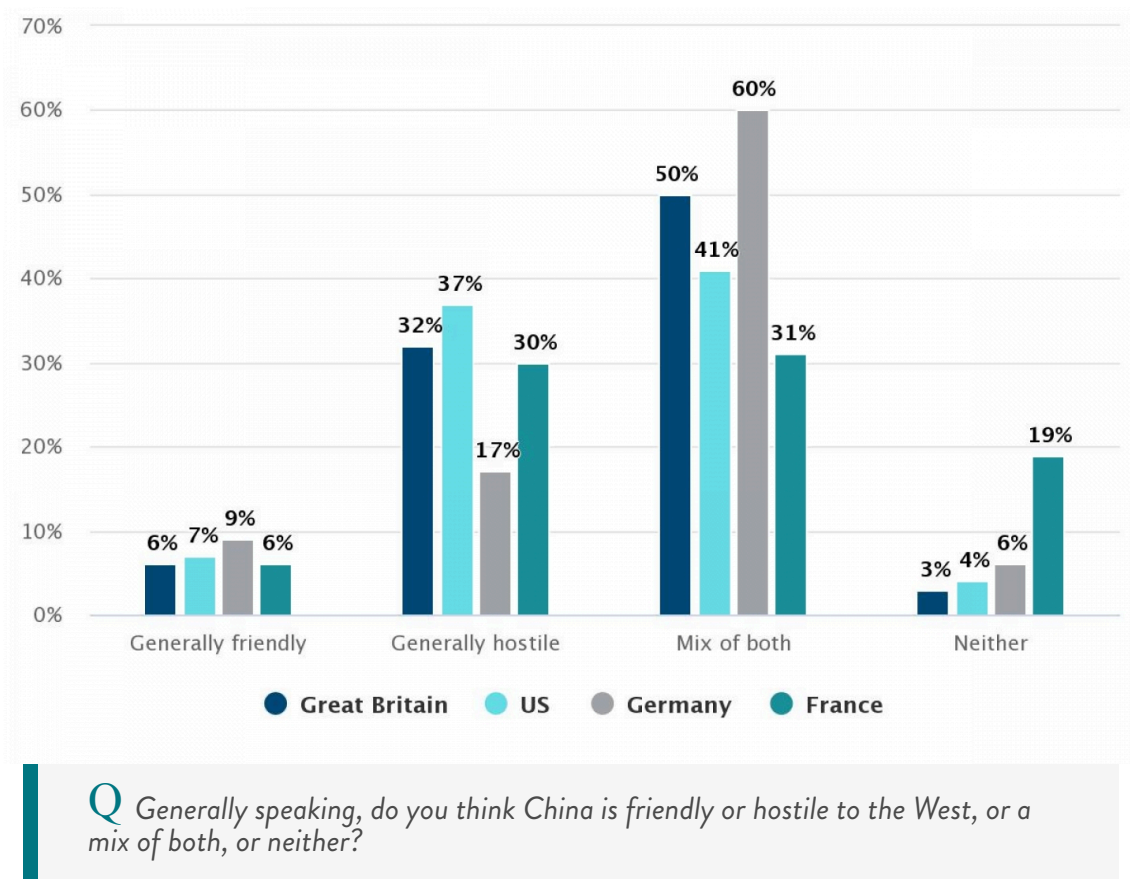


Q Please say whether you think each of the following is generally a force for good or a force for bad in the world, or neither?

The Chinese government

Many people have mixed feelings about whether China is friendly or hostile to the West, but few think it is generally friendly. People in the US are slightly more likely to view China as hostile.

Figure 8 – Perceptions of China as generally friendly or hostile to the West, by country



The US government

Trust in the US government is very low in three of the countries we surveyed. A very large majority of people in Britain do not trust the US government to tell the truth about the pandemic (GB: 82%, DE: 80%, FR: 79%). In the US, perceptions of trust around the pandemic vary significantly by political affiliation with just 34% of 2016 Clinton voters but 68% of 2016 Trump voters saying they trust the US government to tell the truth.

It's also clear that opinions of the US government have worsened in the European countries since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic (GB: 69%, DE: 62%, and FR: 62% said their opinion had worsened).

The EU

The EU has a more positive image in the countries we surveyed, though in none of the countries we surveyed did a majority of the population think it was a force for good. 38% of people in Britain said the EU is generally a force for good, as did 30% of people in the US, 48% in Germany and 41% in France.

Perceptions of the EU in Europe naturally divide along political lines and also by age. 67% of 2019 British Labour voters saw it as a force for good compared to 14% of British Conservative voters. 56% of 18-24s said it was a force for good compared to 25% of over-65s in Britain.

People in Britain and Germany are more likely to trust the EU to tell the truth about the coronavirus pandemic than not to trust it. People in Germany are twice as likely to trust than not trust the EU (61% vs 30%). In France equal amounts of people trust as do not trust the EU to tell the truth about the pandemic (47% vs 45%).

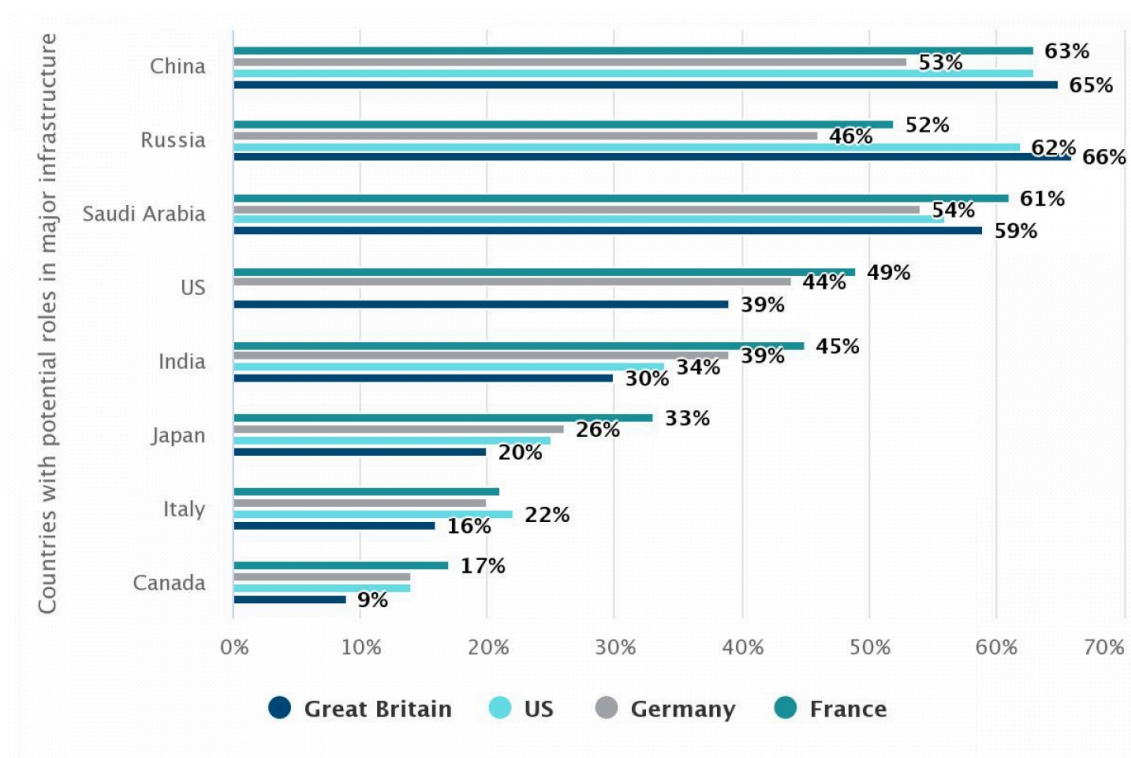
Overall, the coronavirus pandemic does not seem to have made much of a difference in views on the EU. When asked whether their opinion of the EU had improved or worsened during the pandemic, the most popular answer in Britain, France and Germany was that it had made no difference (GB: 61%, DE: 50%, FR: 42%).

A majority of people say their opinion of the Chinese government has worsened during the pandemic and around two in five of those in the US think this about their own government. The highest reported change in the perception of the US government is in Britain, where 69% of people say their opinion of the US government has worsened.

Opposition to International Companies

When asked about international companies having a major role in national infrastructure projects, there is high opposition towards international companies from China. A majority of respondents from all four countries surveyed opposed this.

Figure 9 – Opposition to international companies from the following countries playing a major role in national infrastructure projects



Q Generally speaking, to what extent would you support or oppose allowing international companies from each of the following countries to have a major role in infrastructure projects in your country?

Younger people in the countries we surveyed are likely to be more supportive of companies from foreign nations having a major role in national infrastructure projects.

People we surveyed are more certain about whether they support Chinese companies having a major role than they are about whether the Chinese government is a force for good or bad in the world (for example, 10% of people in Britain didn't know what they thought about China's role in infrastructure, compared to 19% who didn't know whether they thought China was a force for good or bad).

Politics is a likely driver for opposition to Chinese and other countries' investment in the US but is less of a driver for other countries.

Perceptions of the WHO and the UN

The UN

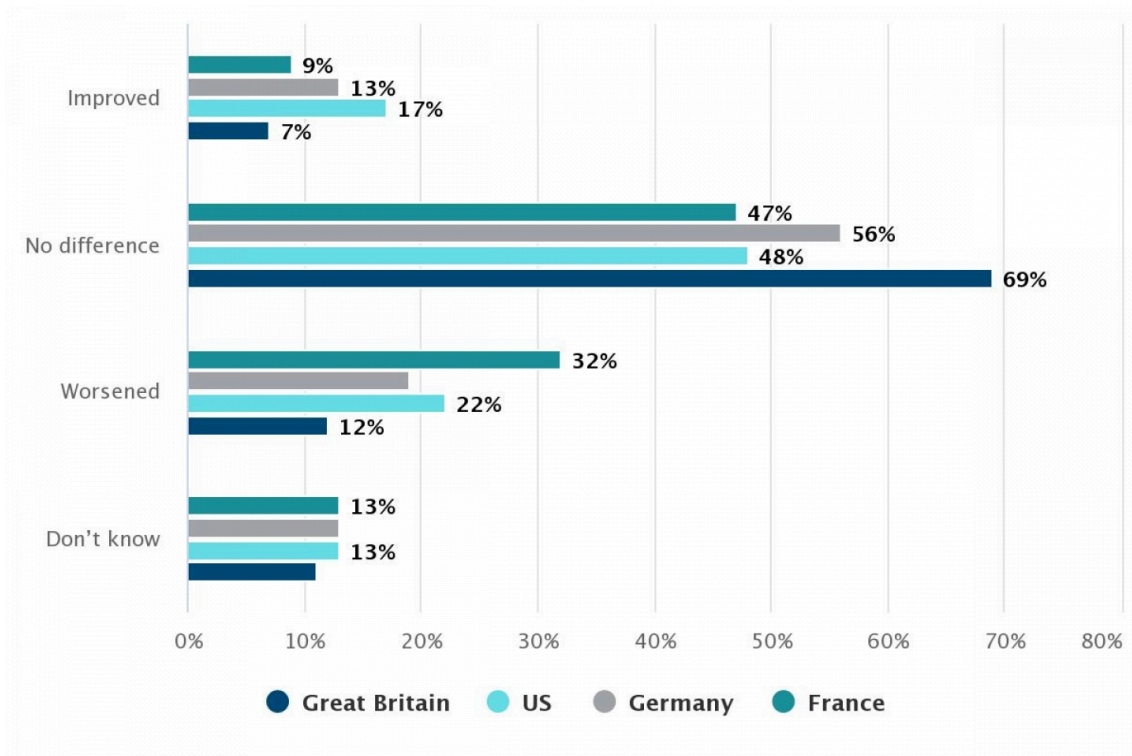
A majority of people in Britain see the UN as a force for good in the world, and the pandemic has changed few opinions.

Figure 10 – Perceptions of the UN as a force for good or bad in the world



Q Please say whether you think each of the following is generally a force for good or a force for bad in the world, or neither?

Figure 11 – How opinions of the UN have changed since the beginning of the pandemic

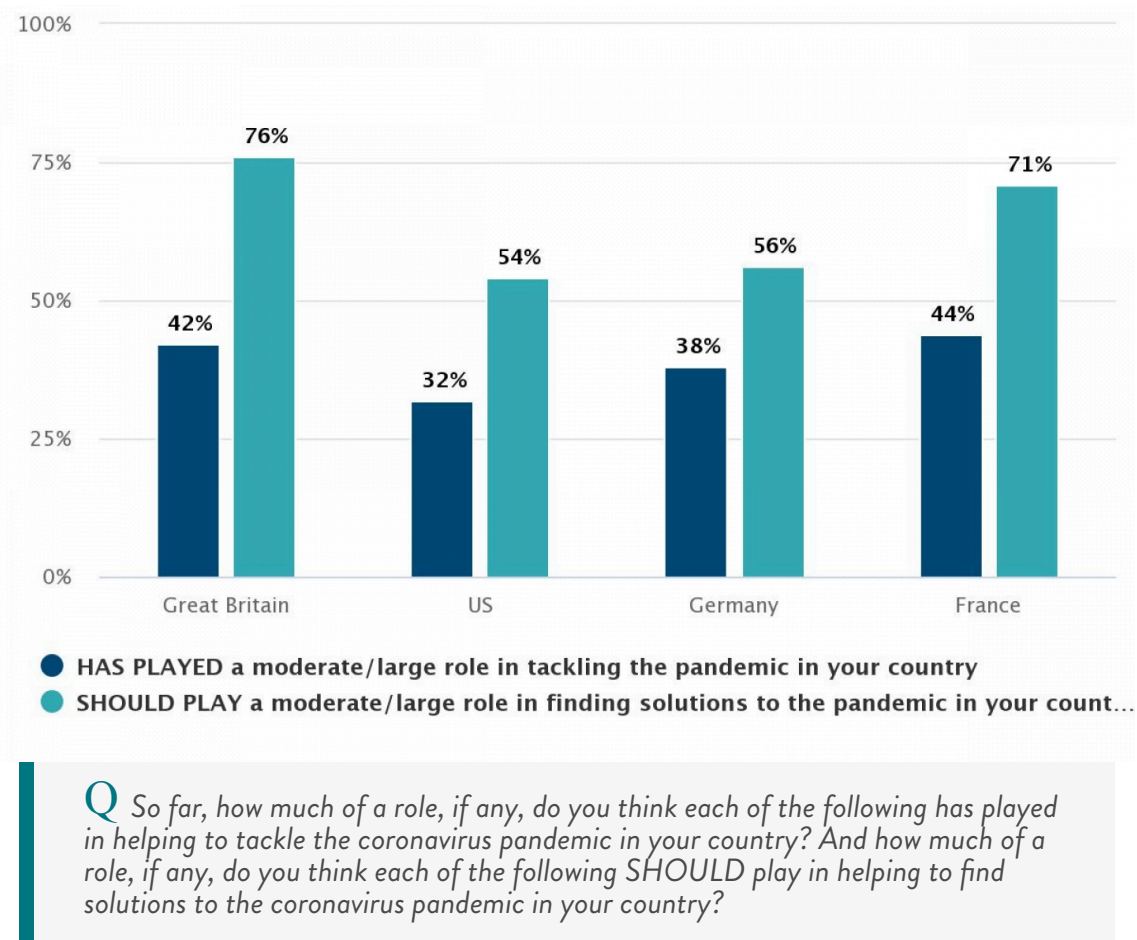


Q Has your opinion of each of the following improved or worsened since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, or has it made no difference?

The World Health Organisation

A large proportion of people in all of the countries we surveyed thought that the WHO has had a large role in tackling the pandemic in their countries, but our polling shows that people have much higher expectations of the role it should play in the future. A majority of people in all of the countries we surveyed believe it should play a large role in finding solutions, with particularly strong views in Britain and France.

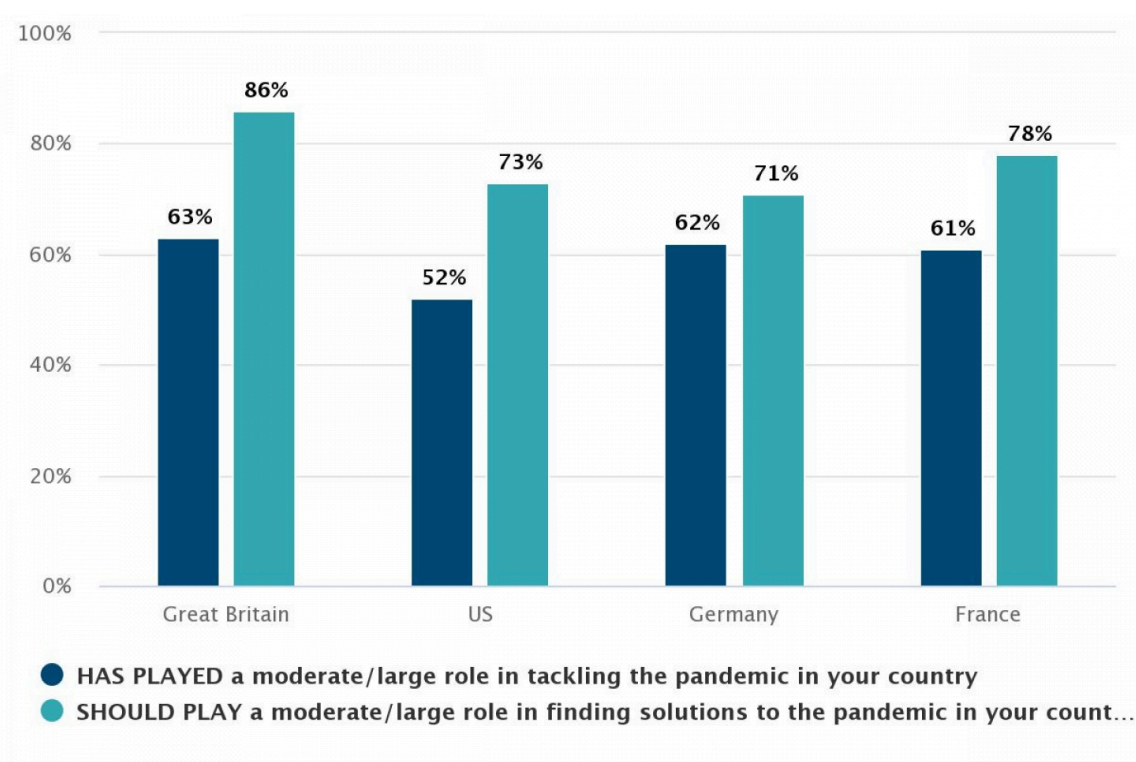
Figure 12 – Perceptions of the role the WHO has played and should play in tackling the pandemic



Perceptions of Global Pharmaceutical Companies

A significant majority in Britain, the US, Germany and France believe that global pharmaceutical companies should have a large role in tackling the pandemic. British people in particular have high expectations of the role of global pharmaceutical companies in tackling the pandemic.

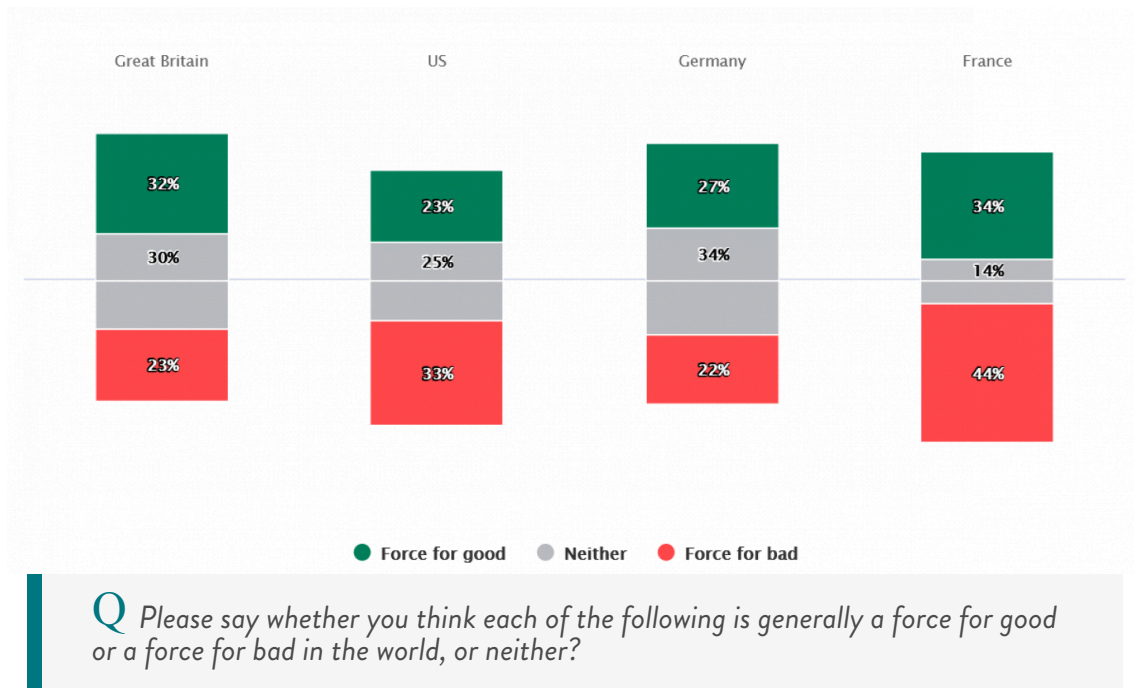
Figure 13 – Perceptions of the role global pharmaceutical companies have played and should play in tackling the pandemic



Q So far, how much of a role, if any, do you think each of the following has played in helping to tackle the coronavirus pandemic in your country?; And how much of a role, if any, do you think each of the following **SHOULD** play in helping to find solutions to the coronavirus pandemic in your country?

Despite the significant role people believe global pharmaceutical companies should play in finding solutions, only a small percentage of people have a lot of confidence in those companies to solve the problems created by the pandemic (GB: 8%, US: 8%, DE: 5%, FR: 5%). A plurality of people in Britain, the US and Germany are neither confident nor not confident in those companies to solve the problems created. France has particularly low confidence, with 26% of people reporting they have no confidence at all.

Figure 14 – Perceptions on whether the global pharmaceutical companies are a force for good or bad in the world



EDITOR'S NOTE: The source of this data is polling conducted by YouGov of a sample of 8,494 adults in Great Britain, the United States, Germany and France. The sample was made up of 2,033 adults in GB between 4 and 15 June 2020; 2,418 adults in the US between 8 and 11 June 2020; 2,020 adults in Germany between 9 and 12 June 2020; and 2,023 adults in France between 9 and 11 June 2020.

Full Survey Results

The data is available here in XLSX format

- [Great Britain](#)
- [United States](#)
- [Germany](#)
- [France](#)

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