

USAID in court of public opinion. *Devex* 25 Mar 2025

Foreign assistance has always been a convenient political punching bag in the U.S. because of the many misconceptions surrounding it. Once those misconceptions are debunked, [however, public opinion shifts dramatically](#), my colleague Ayenat Mersie writes.

Perhaps the most stubborn myth is that the U.S. expends a ton of total federal spending on foreign assistance — to the tune of 25% in some cases — fueling perceptions that the money would be better spent addressing problems at home. But as aid advocates continually try to hammer home: **Aid accounts for less than 1% of federal spending.**

When that's dispelled, most **Americans say the U.S. is spending about the right amount on foreign aid** — and that shift occurs across party lines, according to a recent survey from KFF.

But once political narratives take hold, they are hard to break. Many conservatives claim USAID is riddled with corruption and waste. Despite their debatable nature, these claims have sunk in: A recent poll for the Financial Times found that almost 60% of respondents agreed that funds set aside for humanitarian causes were “wasted on corruption or administration fees.”

So do Americans really want USAID dismantled? It's complicated. About half of those surveyed by KFF said eliminating USAID would make the country less safe, but there was a major partisan divide: with over 3 in 4 Democrats believing this to be the case, compared to 1 in 4 Republicans.

Read: [Foreign aid is an easy political target. But do Americans want it gone?](#)