

# UK Public Opinion on Foreign Policy and Global Affairs

## Annual Survey – 2020

Sophia Gaston

## Table of Contents

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Introduction.....	3
1. The Social Dimensions of Mobility and Outlook.....	4
2. International Identities.....	9
3. Interest and Knowledge about Global Affairs .....	15
4. Global Issues of Importance .....	20
5. Expenditure and Priorities.....	28
6. Allies, Foes and Multilateralism .....	36
7. Immigration.....	43
8. Perceptions of Global Threats .....	49
9. Global Britain, Trade and Military Interventionism .....	53
Key Lessons.....	65
Conclusions .....	69
End Notes and References .....	70

# UK Public Opinion on Foreign Policy and Global Affairs

As Britain embarks upon its new life after the European Union, we are compelled to define our role and image in the world. It is a challenging time to do so: four years of polarising, fractious debate has left British society deeply divided, and the world order we are seeking to re-enter anew is itself undergoing dramatic structural shifts. The Global Britain project presents a defining opportunity for the nation to renew itself, consolidate its values, and take on a more prominent and meaningful leadership role in many of the world's most pressing challenges. To realise these ambitions, however, the Government and all those with a vested interest in our role in the world must build consensus amongst the British people. Therefore, there has never been an important time to understand their preferences, their values and their ambitions for Britain and its international footprint.

## This Survey

This report presents the findings of a nationally representative survey of British adults led by the British Foreign Policy Group (BFPG), with the fieldwork undertaken by Opinium Research. This survey builds on the previous surveys conducted by the BFPG in 2017 and 2019, and it is our ambition for this to continue as an annual exercise. This year, we have expanded the social and

political dimensions of the survey, exploring how these factors influence public opinion regarding international issues, our global presence, allies and enemies. We have also been able to incorporate some comparative data from the Lowy Institute and the Chicago Council on Global Affairs – two leading international research organisations in Australia and the United States. We hope that in time we can develop a truly comparable data-set between our three nations.

Fieldwork was conducted by Opinium Research over two sessions, incorporating the full questionnaire, to minimise the influence of topicality: 21-24 Jan and 7-11 Feb 2020. Sample size was 2,000 UK adults per session. Results were weighted to be nationally representative.

Comparative data has been drawn from the Lowy Institute's '2019 Poll' (available at <https://www.lowyinstitute.org>) and the Chicago Council's 'Survey of American Public Opinion and US Foreign Policy' (available at: <https://www.thechicagocouncil.org>).

With special thanks to Flora Holmes, Katarina Kosmala-Dahlbeck and Matt Gillow at the BFPG for their assistance in the preparation of this report, and to James Endersby, James Crouch and Priya Minhas of Opinium Research – as ever, wonderful partners.

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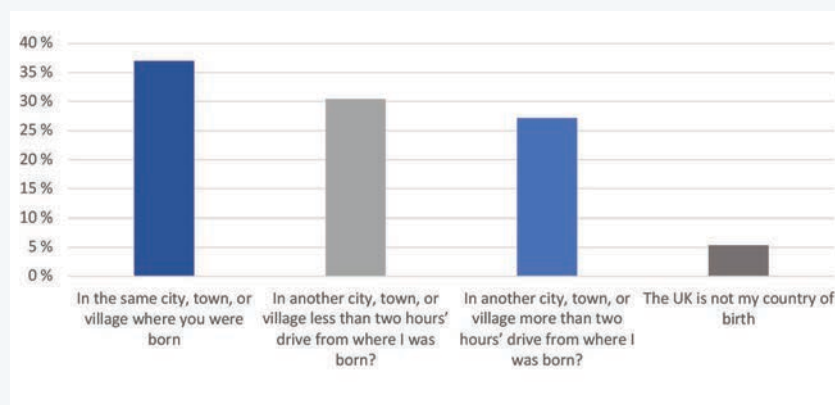
# The Social Dimensions of Mobility and Outlook

## Place of Residence and Lifetime Mobility

In 2019, we introduced questions regarding lived experiences of mobility into the BFPG annual survey for the first time. These enabled us to better understand the full spectrum of influences shaping citizens' understanding of the world around them, and observe the interaction between lived experience, place and the formation of public opinion. This year, we have repeated two of the questions that we found to be most illuminating in understanding the role of rootedness and mobility in guiding citizens' attitudes.

Our first question asked Britons about the distance between their current place of residence and their place of birth. Overall, in 2020, we find that 37% of Britons continue to live in the same town, city or village where they were born, with 30% living within two hours' drive, and a further 27% living more than two hours' drive away from their place of birth. Despite the mythology of the mobile youth, we find the comparatively constrained life experiences of the younger generations means they are significantly (47%) more likely to live where they were born, compared to 37% of 35-54-year-olds, and 29% of those aged 55 years and over.

If you were born in the UK. do you live...



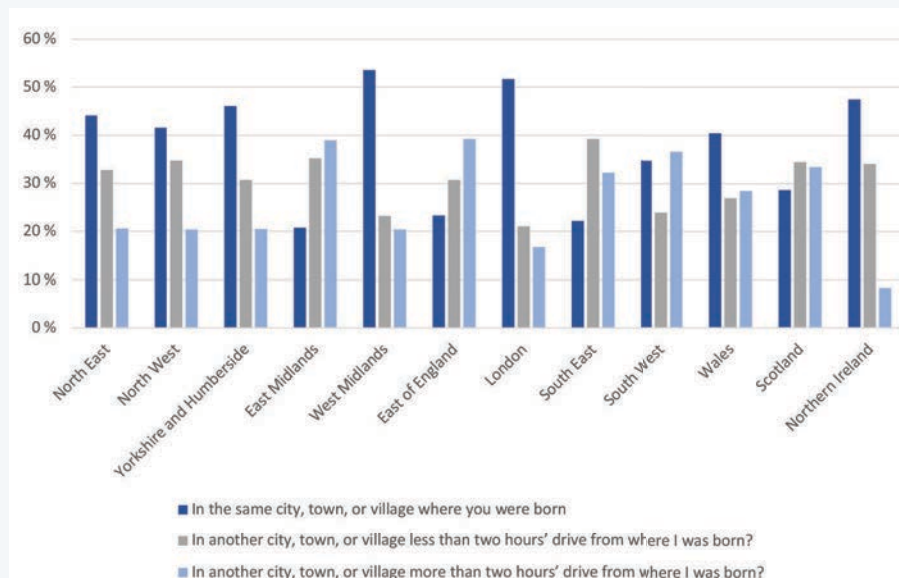
Britons from the C2DE social grade (39%) and without further qualifications (also 39%) are somewhat more likely to continue to live rooted in their place of birth than those in the ABC1 grouping (33%) and with a university education (32%). This suggests that mobility is entwined to some degree with education, and the career opportunities it provides. We can also observe an effect pertaining to ethnicity: while BAME Britons are understandably more likely to have been born abroad (18% to 3% of White British), those born in the UK are also 10 percentage points more likely to continue to live in the same community (43% to 33% of White British).

Emigration is lowest in the West Midlands, where 54% of the resident population can claim it as their place of birth, followed by London on 52%. We can anticipate that the driving factors behind these low rates of attrition are likely to be significantly different, given the divergence in the economic profile of both places. These statistics contrast dramatically with the East of England (23%), the South East (22%), and the East Midlands (21%), where less than half as many residents are native to the area, having pursued economic opportunities or followed family needs elsewhere.

## 1. The Social Dimensions of Mobility and Outlook

If you were born in the UK, do you live...

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Conservative voters in the 2019 election were more likely than Labour voters to have been mobile throughout their lives, with 42% of Labour voters living where they were born, compared to 37% of Conservatives. Liberal Democrat voters were the most likely to live furthest from their place of birth, at 31%, compared to 29% of Conservatives, 24% of Labour voters and just 17% of UKIP voters. Those who live in the same town or city where they were born are most likely to be readers of the London Evening Standard (44%), The Sun (41%), or the Daily Mirror (40%), with readers of the Guardian (29%) and the Times and Sunday Times (25%) the least likely to do so.

Examining the EU referendum vote, we can see that Leave voters were four percentage points more likely than Remain voters (40% to 36%) to continue to live where they were born. And breaking these down by their ensuing vote in the 2019 General Election, we can see that Conservative-voting Leave voters are six percentage points more likely than Conservative-voting Remain voters to live where they were born, and Labour-voting Leave voters are eight percentage points more likely than Labour-voting Remain voters to do so.

### International Travel

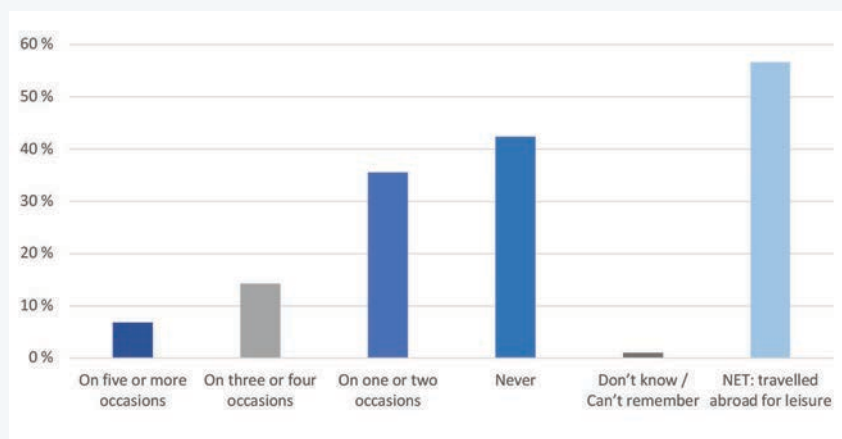
While on a residential level, mobility appears to have become a less significant factor in shaping public opinion, the more day-to-day nature of lived experiences of mobility – namely, travel – continues to be correlated with certain types of outlooks and preferences around international issues. Overall, we can see that in 2019, 42% of the British public did not travel abroad at all for leisure, with 57% travelling on one or more occasion. Of those who travelled, most Britons travelled on one or two occasions (36%), with a further 14% travelling on three or four occasions, and just 7% travelling frequently, on five or more occasions. These figures have not changed considerably since the previous survey, assessing citizens' mobility in 2018.

The most frequent travellers are the young, with 10% of 18-34-year-olds travelling on five or more occasions, compared to just 4% of those aged 55 years and over. The percentage of Britons aged 55 years and above who did not travel at all is also considerably higher, at 48%, than the proportion of under-35s, at 32%. This suggests that while the young are not moving as

## 1. The Social Dimensions of Mobility and Outlook

Throughout 2019, how often, if at all, have you travelled abroad for leisure?

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extensively within the UK, as above, they continue to be more inclined to explore the world and take advantage of their youthful lifestyles to travel for leisure.

Education and social grade play an important role in shaping travel behaviour. School leavers (46%) were considerably more likely than graduates (29%) to not have travelled at all in 2019, as were those in the C2DE social grade (50%), compared to those in the ABC1 social grade (30%). White Britons are also substantially less mobile than Britons from BAME backgrounds, with 43% not having travelled in 2019, compared to just 16% of BAME Britons. There is an important point to consider here, in light of the role that socio-economic factors play in shaping attitudes to a wide range of international issues, about the asymmetrical nature of access to international engagement opportunities on an individual level.

This inequality of international opportunity extends to the UK's regions. Our survey finds that residents in the East Midlands are the least mobile. Here, 56% of the population did not travel at all in 2019 (rising to 63% in Nottingham particularly), compared to just 29% of those living in London. Those living in the South West (51%) and Wales (51%) were also less inclined to travel. In part due to geography, readers of the London Evening Standard and the Telegraph (11%) are the most likely to have travelled frequently in 2019. Overall, those who read The Sun (44%) and the Daily Mirror (43%) are the most likely to have not travelled at all in 2019, and those who read the Financial Times (20%) are the least likely to not have travelled at least once during the year.

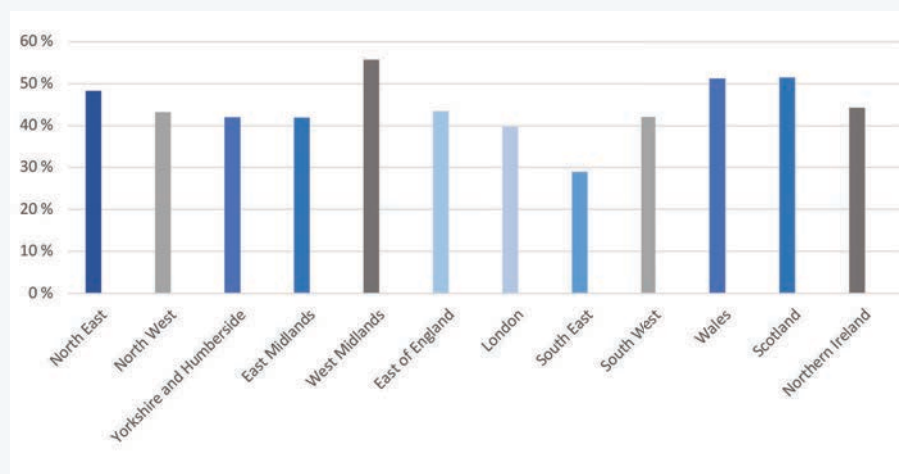
Citizens' vote in the European Union Referendum appears to be more important in shaping travel mobility behaviour than party affiliation. Overall, 63% of Remain voters travelled for leisure in 2019, compared to 52% of Leave voters. These distinctions are profoundly clear when Referendum and 2019 General Election votes are compared together, identifying that 71% of Conservative-Remain voters travelled in 2019, compared to just 43% of Conservative-Leave voters. And 61% of Labour-Remain voters travelled in 2019, compared to just 44% of Labour-Leave voters. These findings reinforce the close relationship between the identities and outlooks captured in the polarisation of the 2016 EU Referendum campaign and its aftermath, and citizens' lived experiences of engaging with the world. They compel us to consider the need for the Government's two agendas – Global Britain and Levelling Up – to work hand-in-hand, or risk falling into competition, or failing to achieve the full depth and breadth of their ambitions.

In our 2019 survey, we found that this lived experience of day-to-day mobility was one of the most profound variables correlating with distinct opinions on perceptions of issues of importance, and individually held identities. In our 2020 survey, we have again been able to

## 1. The Social Dimensions of Mobility and Outlook

Residence of Britons who Did Not Travel Abroad for Leisure in 2019

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cross-analyse the way in which frequency of travel, and indeed, abstinence from travel, correlates with views on the full range of survey questions.

### Looking specifically at the divergence in public opinion between those who travelled frequently in 2019, compared to those who did not travel at all, we find:

- Britons who travelled frequently are 36 percentage points more likely to see themselves as 'global citizens' (66% to 30%) and 27 percentage points more likely to see themselves as 'European' (63% to 36%). No significant differences are observed on the identity of being a 'patriot', which appears to be less shaped by lived experience.
- Britons who travelled frequently are 27 percentage points more likely to feel informed about foreign affairs (78% to 51%)
- Britons who travelled frequently are 23 percentage points more likely to advocate for increased expenditure on international engagement and programmes (39% to 16%), and 14 percentage points more likely to advocate for conditional military interventionism (70% to 56%) and less likely to advocate for isolationism (10% to 20%)
- Britons who travelled frequently are 14 percentage points more likely to favour a foreign policy driven by economic and strategic defence interests (48% to 34%). No differences are observed in the level of support for a values-led foreign policy.
- Britons who travelled frequently are 9 percentage points more likely to trust the government to act in the public's interests on foreign policy (50% to 41%), and Britons who did not travel are 8 percentage points more likely to be distrustful (46% to 38%)
- Britons who did not travel are also consistently more likely to be distrustful of all other nations to act responsibly in the world, and to see the Commonwealth as 'Britain's best friend' (27% to 17%)
- Britons who did not travel are 15 percentage points more likely to identify immigration as an issue of importance (37% to 25%) – the issue most singularly shaped by lived experience. They are also more likely to advocate for declines in the intake of all source countries, and less likely to favour increases, and to agree with all negative statements about immigration's impact on British society and the economy.
- Britons who did not travel are more likely to be fearful of international terrorism (52% to 42%), but less likely to regard a wide spectrum of both 'hard' and 'softer' threats as 'critical' – perhaps emphasising their lower degree of interest in these subjects
- Britons who did not travel are also considerably more likely to be unsure of their responses to a range of issues – including retaining our membership of NATO (26% vs 9%).

## 1. The Social Dimensions of Mobility and Outlook

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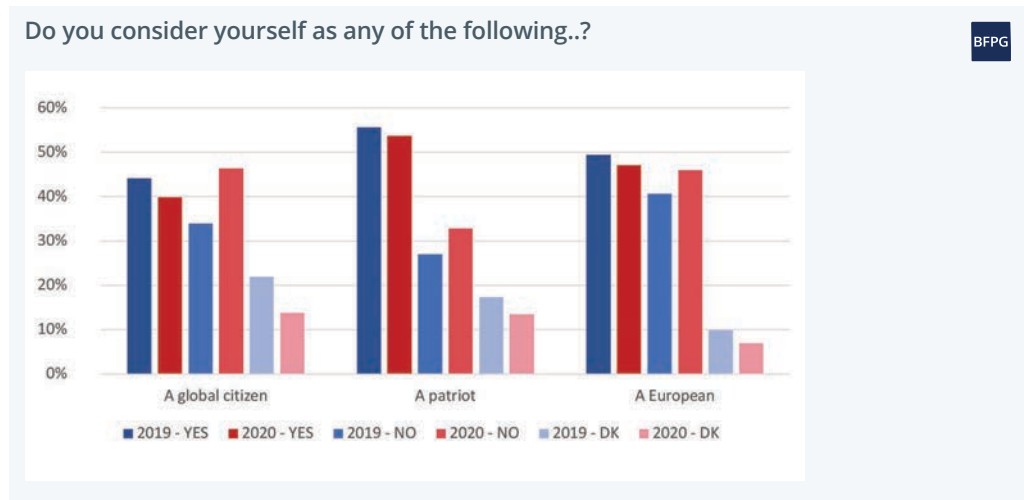
These findings are interesting, because the combination of the UK's departure from the European Union, the dramatic new coalitions that have developed around the political parties, and the politicisation of many issues associated with the Conservatives' post-Brexit agenda, have injected an unprecedented level of dynamism into public opinion. Questions have been raised as to whether these new phenomena could wield a degree of influence sufficiently powerful to mute or diminish some of the more profound existing relationships between place and public opinion on international affairs. It is clear that the axes of polarisation that have formed around the Leave-Remain divide and the parties that champion each side – appear to be hugely instrumental at this very particular moment in time in influencing citizens' consciousness of their individual role in the UK's international engagement.

Nonetheless, we can see that these more fundamental aspects of citizens' own lived experiences of interacting with the world at large appear to continue to play a critical role in engendering a worldview that tends to either instinctively embrace, or question – or even fear – connectivity, diversity and international collaboration. Perhaps at a more fundamental level, whether the scope of an individual's life is able, or compelled, to extend beyond the confines of the nation – or perhaps beyond their community and the daily touch-points of their lives. This worldview cannot be artificially manufactured, although it could perhaps be remotely maintained, meaning a government wishing to consider how to extend its reach across the nation will have to recognise the importance of enabling equality of opportunity to travel abroad.



## International Identities

One of the most striking findings of this year's survey is the extent to which international identities in Britain have become more concretely fused into the broader trends in Britain towards 'affective' social and political polarisation'. Overall, the proportion of Britons who are unsure about their international identities has fallen across the board since our survey in 2019: from 22% to 14% on the question of being a global citizen, 17% to 13% on patriotism, and 10% to 7% of European identity. This demonstrates that Britons are more confidently declaring their affinity with a particular camp, with the majority of the 'now-certain' responses coming from those rejecting international identities.



This sharpening of Britons' engagement with international identities has also coincided with a slight fall in the proportion of Britons identifying with any of the three international identities we surveyed, and a rise in the percentage who actively reject them. In 2019, 44% of Britons identified as global citizens, falling to 40% in 2020, with 46% actively rejecting this identity. Similarly, last year 56% of Britons identified as patriots, falling to 54% in favour this year, and 33% actively rejecting this identity. And 49% of Britons identified as Europeans in 2019, falling to 47% this year, with 46% actively not assuming a European identity. This hardening of international identities is primarily being driven by men, with women more likely across all identities to say they are unsure about their identity positions.

Do you consider yourself as any of the following...?			
2020	A global citizen	A patriot	European
Yes	40 % (-4%)	54 % (-2%)	47 % (-2%)
No	46 % (+12%)	33 % (+6%)	46 % (+5%)
Don't know	14 % (-8%)	13 % (-4%)	7 % (-3%)
2019	A global citizen	A patriot	European
Yes	44 %	56 %	49 %
No	34 %	27 %	41 %
Don't know	22 %	17 %	10 %

## 2. International Identities

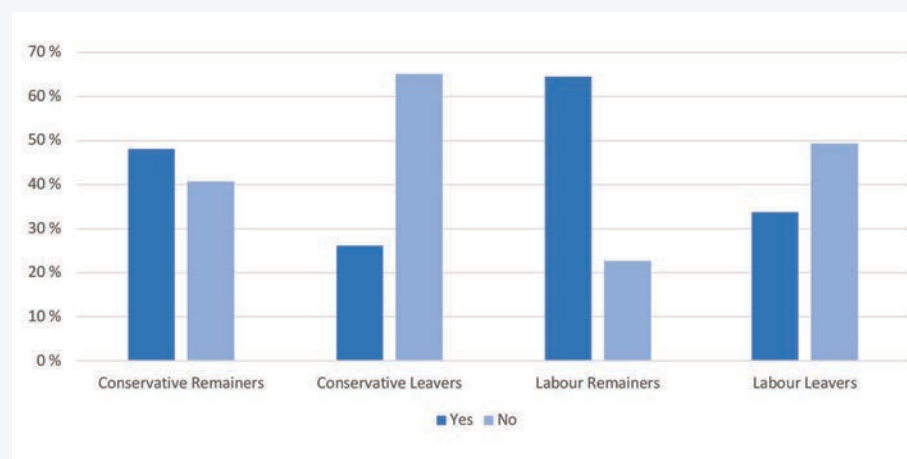
### Global Citizenship

Young Britons are the most likely to consider themselves to be global citizens, with 46% of under-35s assuming this identity, compared to 34% of those aged 55 years and over. Turning to the regions, Londoners again come out on top as the most inclined to see themselves as global citizens, at 58%, reflecting both their disproportionately frequent rates of travel, and the high degree of cultural and ethnic diversity within its truly international population. The strength of the global citizen identity in London contrasts sharply with other regions, resonating with just 32% of those in Yorkshire and the Humber, and 27% of those in the East of England – falls of around 10 percentage points over the past year. Somewhat curiously, 52% of residents in the North East now describe themselves as ‘global citizens’ – up 16 percentage points since 2019.

Perhaps linked to their contrasting lived experiences of mobility, it is clear that the identity of global citizenship is heavily tied to social status and education levels. Those who identify as global citizens are much more likely to be of the ABC1 social grade (49%) than those in the C2DE grade (33%), and, even more distinctly, to have a university education (57%) than those who finished their education at school (30%). BAME Britons are also more likely (49%) to see themselves as global citizens than White Britons (40%). The ‘internationalising’ effect of education, and the opportunities it provides to connect psychologically, and physically, with the world at large, is plain to see in its influence over Britons’ perceptions of their own individual place in a global community.

We can also observe both political and Referendum-related partisanship in play in shaping responses to this question, with the Labour Party and the Remain campaign having attracted a much greater portion of the citizens who see themselves as part of the world at large. 57% of Labour voters see themselves as global citizens, compared to 30% of Conservative voters, and just 7% of UKIP voters. The distinctions between Referendum voters are also dramatic: while 58% of Remain voters see themselves as global citizens, just 26% of Leave voters feel the same. Britons who consume *The Times* or the *Sunday Times* (58%) and the *Financial Times* (57%) are the most likely to describe themselves as global citizens, and those who read *The Sun* (32%) are the least likely to do so.

Do you consider yourself a 'Global Citizen'?



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## 2. International Identities

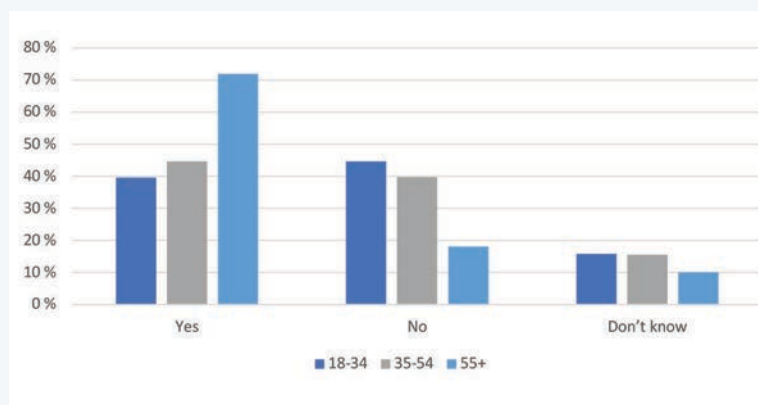
It is important to note that these positions are hardening over time. In 2019, 64% of Remain voters saw themselves as 'global citizens', with 21% rejecting the identity. Today, this figure is at 58%, with 29% actively rejecting to be described as such. Meanwhile, Leave voters are also becoming less enamoured with the concept of global citizenship, moving from 27% to 26% regarding themselves as global citizens, and the proportion actively rejecting this identity strengthening from 52% to 63%. This suggests that the notion of global citizenship has either been sullied due to national or international political events, or depressed somewhat by the fact of the UK's departure from the European Union.

### Patriotism

As a subject, and as an identity, patriotism has been heavily debated during the four years since the European Referendum campaign – assuming a deeply politicised overtone that appears to be responsive to contemporary media discourses. However, much longer-standing trends around the resonance of this identity are also evident.

Overall, a majority (54%) of Britons in 2020 describe themselves as patriots, and 33% actively do not see themselves as such. However, it is clear that this identity is heavily mediated by a range of demographic factors. Men are more likely to hold a patriotic identity than women (60% to 47%), as are older Britons, with 72% of 55-and-overs identifying as patriots, compared to 40% of under-35s. Interestingly, only 45% of 35-54-year-olds identify as patriots, indicating a sharp jump in subscription to this identity amongst the Baby Boomer generation.

Do you consider yourself to be a patriot?



Patriotism does not appear to be shaped by social class, with no discernible differences in the level of patriotic feeling between the ABC1 and C2DE social grades. Education does, however, play a small role, with university graduates moderately less inclined to describe themselves as patriots compared to school leavers (48% to 55%). Given the influence of education in the uptake of the identity of global citizenship, we can deduce that education has a strong proactive shaping role in international identities, and a somewhat flattening role in the diminishing of national identities.

One of the most dramatic chasms can be observed between White and non-White Britons, with White Britons (57%) almost 30 percentage points more likely than BAME Britons (28%) to see themselves as patriots. Due to the age and ethnicity profile of church-goers in the UK, Britons who describe themselves as 'Christians' are considerably more likely than other

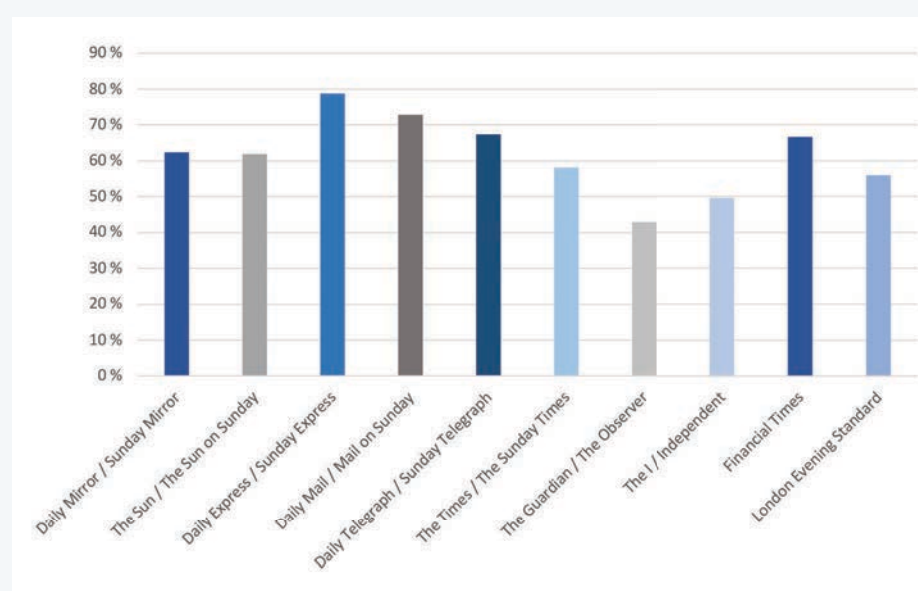
## 2. International Identities

religious Britons to describe themselves as patriots (70% to 50%), with non-religious Britons the least likely to be patriotic (44%).

Patriotic feeling is strongest in Scotland (61%) – although this is likely to be mediated by Scottish nationalism, and therefore at least in part reflecting the power of Scottish identity rather than British identity. The most patriotic area in England is the South West, close behind Scotland at 60%, and the least is the East Midlands, at just 41%. Looking specifically at cities, we can see that patriotism spikes in Glasgow (68%), followed by Leeds at 60%, and is weakest in Liverpool (46%), Brighton (44%) and Nottingham (just 37%).

At 88%, patriotism is most acutely felt amongst UKIP voters, followed by Conservative voters (72%) and Liberal Democrats (60%). Just 38% of Labour voters describe themselves as patriots – a startling reflection of how the party's new internationalism has come to stand at odds with patriotism. There is also a clear correlation to be observed between patriotism and European Referendum voting behaviour, with Leave voters considerably more likely (68%) than Remain voters (49%) to describe themselves as patriots. The difference in the likelihood to identify as a patriot between Conservative Remain and Leave voters (66% vs 74%) is slightly smaller than the difference between Labour Remain and Leave voters (37% to 48%).

Britons who describe as 'patriots', by newspaper readership



Readers of the Daily Express (79%) and the Daily Mail (73%) are the most likely to describe themselves as patriots. Despite common media narratives of the mutual exclusion between 'globalist' and patriotic identities, readers of The Telegraph and the Financial Times both equally likely (67%) to describe themselves as patriots. At just 48%, readers of The Guardian are distinctly disinclined to hold a patriotic identity – likely reflecting the erosion of a patriotic advocacy within the leadership of the Labour Party, and the growing discomfort on the Left of British politics with the nation's imperial legacy<sup>ii</sup>.

## 2. International Identities

### European Identity

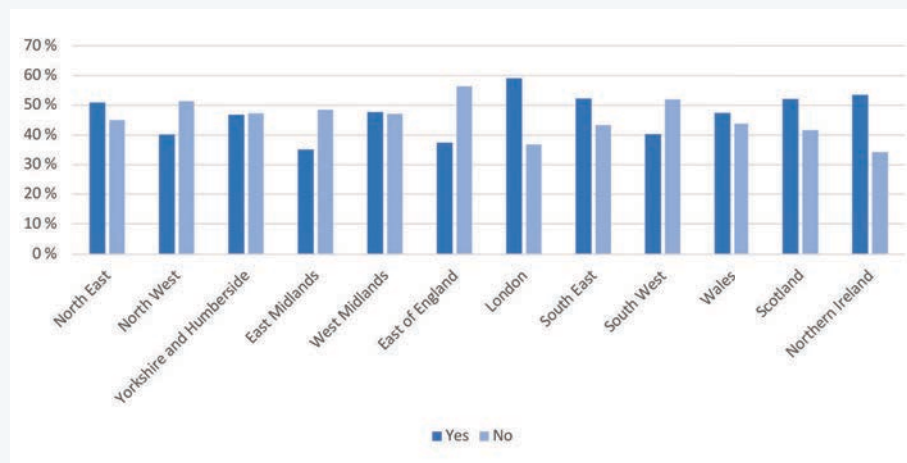
The deep level of social polarisation in Britain around the question of European identity is clearly captured in our survey, with 47% of Britons describing themselves as European, and 46% rejecting this identity. Despite the media narratives, and survey evidence<sup>iii</sup> regarding the youthful nature of support for the European Union itself, we can see a distinction between attitudes towards EU membership and a European identity in the evenly spread degree of identity adoption across the age groups. While 49% of under-35s subscribe to a European identity, so do 48% of 35-54-year-olds and 45% of those aged 55 years and over.

There appears to be a strong socio-economic element to the adoption of European identity. At 56%, Britons in the ABC1 social grade are almost 20 percentage points more likely than Britons in the C2DE social grade (37%) to identify as European. An even larger gulf can be observed between university graduates, of whom 63% identify as European, and school leavers, of whom just 36% identify as such. Interestingly, no discernible distinctions can be seen between the likelihood of White British or BAME Britons to regard themselves as European.

The regional divides on European identity are also significant, stretching from 59% of Londoners, to just 35% of residents in the East Midlands. Other strong areas for holding a European identity are Scotland and the wider South East (both at 52%); more surprisingly, perhaps, we see a high degree of support for a European identity in the North East of England, at 51%, compared to 45% of residents actively rejecting this identity. Other areas with extremely weak support for a European identity are the East of England (just 37%), the North West and the South West (both 40%). At just 31% and 32% respectively, Norwich and Nottingham are the two cities least connected to a European identity.

Do you consider yourself to be 'European'?

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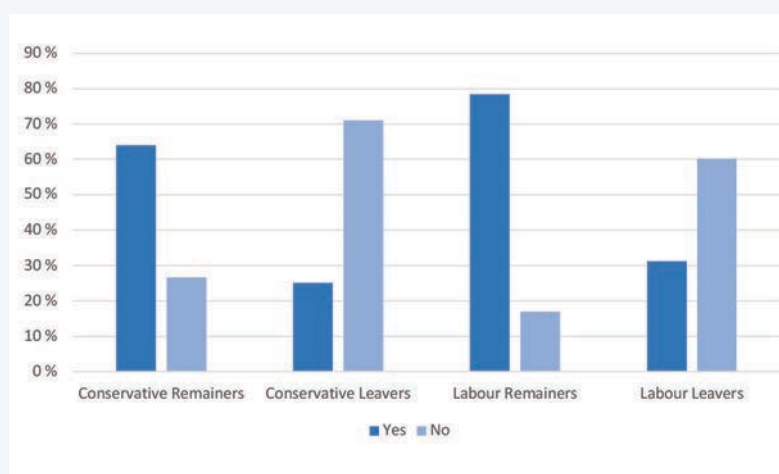
With the exception of the North East, these regional distinctions around identity appear to graft quite closely towards the voting patterns of the European Referendum itself in 2016<sup>iv</sup>. And indeed, we can see that just 28% of Leave voters from 2016 describe themselves as European, compared to 73% of Remain voters. The fact that 21% of Remain voters actively reject a European identity for themselves demonstrates the 'hard-nosed' and less emotional elements of the Referendum vote.

## 2. International Identities

Turning to the political dimensions of European identity, a not-insubstantial third (33%) of Conservative voters consider themselves to be European. However, this compares to 59% of SNP voters, 65% of Labour voters and 70% of Liberal Democrat voters from the 2019 election. In turn, 62% of Conservative voters, 34% of SNP voters, 30% of Labour voters, and a sizeable 27% of Liberal Democrat voters actively do not see themselves as holding a European identity. Despite the high degree of voter volatility at the 2019 election, and the 'sorting' that took place around the Brexit vote<sup>4</sup>, these figures emphasise the complex dynamics that continue to remain within the political parties, with voters' personal identities not always aligning with the policy and values positions as framed by party leadership.

Do you consider yourself to be 'European'?

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Readers of The Guardian and The Independent are uniquely inclined to hold a European identity, at 78% and 77% respectively. They are followed by readers of The London Evening Standard (69%), The Times (66%) and the Financial Times (65%). At just 35%, readers of The Sun are distinctly less inclined than other Britons to hold a European identity.

European Identity – By Newspaper Readership

	Yes	No
The Sun/Sun on Sunday	35%	61%
Daily Mirror/Sunday Mirror	49%	47%
Daily Express/Sunday Express	42%	57%
Daily Mail/Mail on Sunday	40%	57%
Daily Telegraph/Sunday Telegraph	55%	42%
The Times/Sunday Times	66%	33%
The Guardian/Observer	78%	21%
Financial Times	65%	35%
The Independent	77%	21%
London Evening Standard	69%	27%

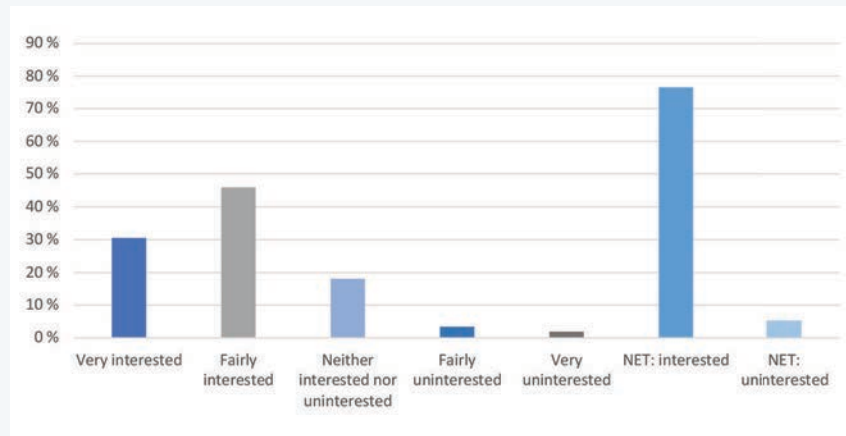
# Interest and Knowledge about Global Affairs

## Interest in the UK's Global Affairs

Overall, 77% of Britons say that they are interested in the UK's international activities, with only 5% of the population actively uninterested. It is important to note that more Britons are 'fairly' interested (46%) in the nation's global affairs than are 'very' interested (31%).

How interested are you in what the UK does internationally?

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Gender and age dimensions are important in shaping responses to this question. Women are less likely than men to be 'very' interested in the UK's international activities (27% to 34% of men), and also more likely to be ambivalent overall (21% to 15% of men). Britons aged 55 years and over are also more likely than the younger generations (82% to 72% of under-35s) to declare themselves interested in the UK's global activities, and are considerably more likely to express a high degree of interest (37% to 20% of under-35s).

Socio-economic factors also clearly play a role in shaping interest in global affairs. At 83%, Britons in the ABC1 social grade are more likely to describe themselves as 'interested', compared to 69% of those in the C2DE social grade. At 87%, university graduates are also much more inclined to be interested in international affairs than school leavers, at 68%. It is interesting to note that White Britons claim to be more interested in the UK's international activities than BAME Britons (79% to 63%).

Profound regional differences can also be observed in the degree to which citizens are actively engaged in the UK's international activities. In London, 40% of residents are very interested in the UK's international affairs, followed closely by residents in Northern Ireland, at 39%. These figures contrast sharply with those in the North East (26%), East of England (26%), Yorkshire and Humberside (26%), Wales (24%), and the North West (23%), where active engagement with our global affairs is significantly more muted. In these regions, residents tend to be more relaxed in their concern with our international presence, with majorities or pluralities describing themselves as 'fairly' interested. Active disengagement is relatively low, although it peaks highest in the East of England (9%), Wales (8%) and the East Midlands (8%), compared to just 1% of London residents.

### 3. Interest and Knowledge about Global Affairs

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Looking at the political dimensions of engagement, there is actually very little difference to be observed between Conservative and Labour voters from the 2019 election, with 82% and 83% of their voters respectively expressing a degree of interest in our global affairs. Similarly, 34% of Conservative voters and 35% of Labour voters possess a strong degree of interest. The most significant differences are rather seen amongst SNP voters (76% interested) and UKIP voters (just 59% of whom are interested). There is also an 11-percentage point difference in the interest levels between Remain and Leave voters, with 86% of Remain voters interested in the UK's international activities, compared to 75% of Leave voters.

When we explore both the 2016 Referendum and 2019 General Election voting behaviour in tandem, we can see that the more isolationist impulses amongst Leave voters have mainly been channelled into the Labour vote in 2019. In both major parties, their Remain-backing voters are the most engaged in international affairs, at 89% amongst Conservative-Remain voters and 88% amongst Labour-Remain voters. However, while Conservative-Leave voters are less likely than their Remain-voting counterparts to be engaged, at 81%, they are considerably more engaged than Labour-Leave voters – of whom only 70% are interested in the UK's international activities, and 10% are actively uninterested.

A number of British newspapers command readerships almost universally interested in the UK's role in the world. At 96%, The Telegraph leads the way, followed closely by readers of The Independent (94%), the Financial Times (93%) and The Guardian (93%). At 72%, the readers of The Sun are distinctly less interested in the UK's international activities.

Interest in the UK's Global Activities			
	2020	2019	2017
Very interested	31 %	20%	20%
Fairly interested	46 %	44%	38%
Neither interested nor uninterested	18 %	22%	24%
Fairly uninterested	3 %	9%	12%
Very uninterested	2 %	5%	6%
<b>NET: interested</b>	<b>77 %</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>58%</b>
<b>NET: uninterested</b>	<b>5 %</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>18%</b>

Interest in the UK's global activities has been growing steadily over the past three years. Our first survey, undertaken in the first year following the EU Referendum in 2017, found that 58% of Britons described themselves as 'interested' in the UK's global activities. This rose to 65% in 2019, and an impressive 77% this year. The proportion of Britons actively uninterested has also plunged from 18% to just 5%. This dramatic shift reflects the prominence of the Brexit debate in national affairs, and the focus it has compelled on Britain's role in the world.

#### Knowledge about the UK's Global Affairs

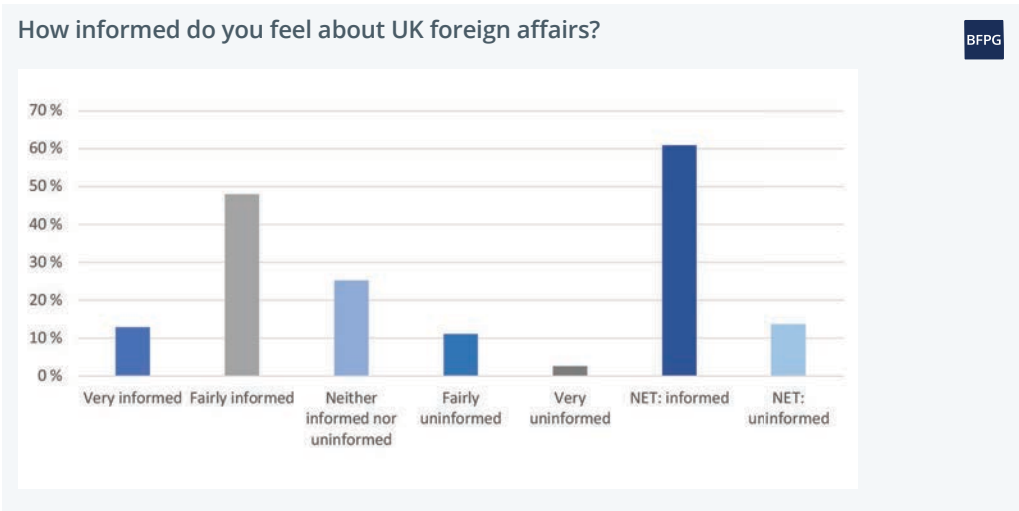
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There is a significant gap between the degree to which Britons consider themselves to be interested in the UK's international activities, and the extent to which they feel informed about them. While, as previously discussed, 77% of Britons self-describe as interested, only 61% feel knowledgeable.

The gap between knowledge and interest is widest amongst women, at 20 percentage points (72% to 52%), compared to 10 percentage points (81% to 71%) amongst men. Men are also

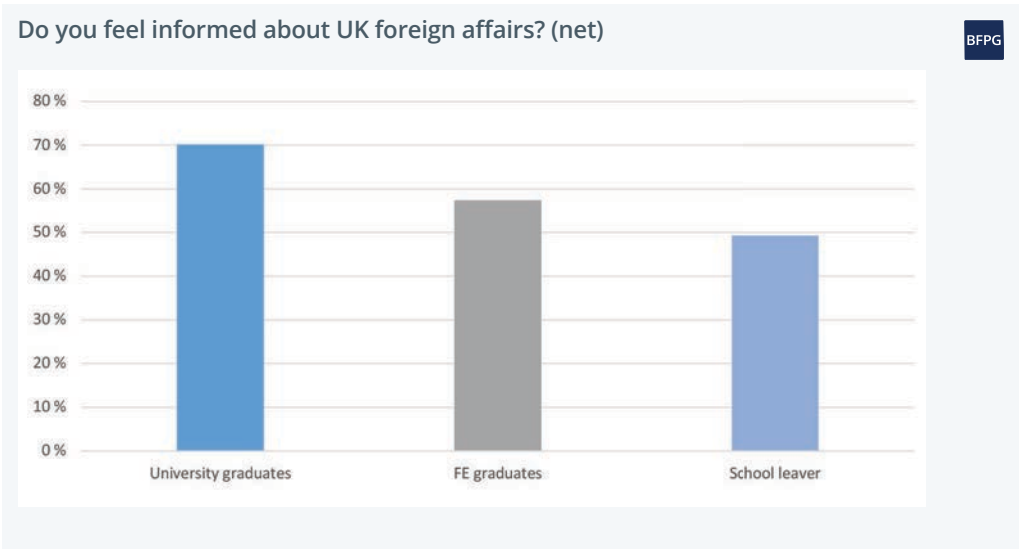


3. Interest and Knowledge about Global Affairs



more likely to describe themselves as ‘very informed’, at 18%, compared to just 8% of women. Reinforcing their lack of certainty on this subject, women are in turn much more likely to describe themselves as ‘neither informed nor uninformed’, perhaps unclear as to what standards of knowledge these responses would refer to. Age appears to be less significant as a factor in knowledge, with the generational gap between those describing themselves as informed shrinking somewhat to 8 percentage points (66% of those 55-and-over vs. 58% of under-35s). Overall, however, 17% of under-35s describe themselves as ‘uninformed’, compared to 10% of those aged 55 years and above.

Socio-economic status not only influences an individual’s engagement and interest in foreign affairs, but also their self-reported knowledge. 66% of those in the ABC1 social grade describe themselves as informed, compared to 49% of those in the C2DE category. Once again, the gap around education is even more substantial: 70% of university graduates describe themselves as ‘informed’, compared to 49% of school leavers.



### 3. Interest and Knowledge about Global Affairs

Regional variations are also dramatic. Overall, 75% of Londoners describe themselves as informed about the UK's global affairs, followed by 69% of residents in Scotland, and 67% of those in the West Midlands. In the North West, the East Midlands, and Northern Ireland, however, just 49% of residents describe themselves as knowledgeable.

Interest and Knowledge of Foreign Affairs – By Region		
	Net: Interested	Net: Informed
North East	80 %	64 % (-16%)
North West	85 %	49 % (-36%)
Yorkshire and Humberside	88 %	55 % (-33%)
East Midlands	64 %	49 % (-15%)
West Midlands	87 %	67 % (-20%)
East of England	85 %	63 % (-22%)
London	85 %	75 % (-10%)
South East	92 %	63 % (-29%)
South West	93 %	59 % (-34%)
Wales	85 %	51 % (-34%)
Scotland	83 %	69 % (-14%)
Northern Ireland	70 %	49 % (-21%)

UK's foreign affairs, followed by Liberal Democrats (68%), SNP voters (68%) and, curiously, UKIP voters (68%) – whose self-described knowledge apparently exceeds their interest. At 66%, Labour voters are somewhat less likely than others to feel informed. The gap between self-reported knowledge in global affairs is also relatively marginal between Remain and Leave voters in the 2016 Referendum (70% to 64%), potentially as a result of the politicisation of the narrative around education in its aftermath. These findings suggest that the social and political polarisation in Britain is more clearly expressed in citizens' reported level of engagement in global affairs, than in their perceptions of their personal knowledge about them.

That said, the combination of the age and regional profile of parties' voter bases also influences the extent to which the 2016 Referendum and 2019 General Election intersection becomes meaningful. At 79%, Conservative Remain-voters are the most likely of any voters to consider themselves informed about global affairs, contrasting with 69% of Conservative Leave-voters. In Labour, even Remain voters are less likely to feel confident in their knowledge about the UK's international activities, at 71%, and Labour-Leave voters are distinctly less informed about these, at 57%. In short, Leave voters are less engaged with the world beyond Britain, but it is Leave voters who supported Labour in the 2019 General election who are the most disconnected.

Turning to newspaper readership, we can see that at 91% and 90% respectively, readers of the London Evening Standard and the Financial Times are the most inclined to describe themselves as informed about global affairs. They are followed by readers of The Independent (84%) and the Daily Telegraph (84%), The Guardian (76%) and The Times (71%). Readers of The Sun are the most likely to describe themselves as uninterested in the UK's global affairs, and we can see they are also the most inclined to describe themselves as uninformed (53%).

### 3. Interest and Knowledge about Global Affairs

Knowledge about UK Foreign Affairs			
	2020	2019	2017
Very informed	13 % (+7%)	6 %	5 %
Fairly informed	48 % (+11%)	37 %	33 %
Neither informed nor uninformed	25 % (+9%)	34 %	36 %
Fairly uninformed	11 % (-5%)	16 %	19 %
Very uninformed	3 % (-5%)	7 %	7 %
<b>NET: informed</b>	<b>61 % (+18%)</b>	<b>43 %</b>	<b>38 %</b>
<b>NET: uninformed</b>	<b>14 % (-9%)</b>	<b>23 %</b>	<b>26 %</b>

While interest in the UK's international activities has been growing, so too has self-reported knowledge about our global affairs. In 2017, just 38% of Britons described themselves as 'informed' about foreign affairs, rising to 43% in 2019, and then undertaking a dramatic jump to 61% in our 2020 survey. The proportion of Britons who declare themselves to be 'uninformed' has also fallen significantly, from 26% in 2017, to just 14% in 2020. These findings suggest that, while the Brexit debate has driven engagement in international issues, it has also encouraged Britons to educate themselves about the issues at stake. It should be noted that these scales are self-reported, and we have not tested citizens' knowledge, so we are simply able to measure their personal assessments, not their actual capacities and understanding.

## Global Issues of Importance

The first of our 2020 surveys was undertaken in the weeks before the 31st of January, when Britain formally left the European Union. As such, we found that Brexit stood as the most important global issue for Britons, with a majority (53%) identifying it as an issue of importance. However, this was closely followed by climate change, with 51% of the population concerned, immigration (34%) and international terrorism (29%). Just under a quarter of Britons regarded the actions of the United States under President Trump as a priority global issue of importance.

Women are more likely than men to be concerned about climate change (55% to 46%), terrorism (30% to 28%), international crime (17% to 14%), and humanitarian crises (17% to 13%). Men are more likely to be concerned about Brexit (55% to 51%), immigration (36% to 33%), and international trade (24% to 12%).

Generationally, we can see that Britons aged 55 years and over are more concerned than their younger counterparts about Brexit (55% to 48% of under-35s), immigration (37% to 28% of under-35s), international terrorism (39% to 18% of under-35s), the actions of the United States under Donald Trump (36% to 18% of under-35s) and international crime (23% vs 10% of under-35s). In turn, the youngest generations are more concerned about current wars, such as Syria (24%, to 13% of 55-and-overs), and humanitarian crises (20% to 12% of 55-and-overs).

Considering socio-economic factors, we can see that education appears to play a somewhat stronger role than social grade in cultivating issues of concern – although the issue of immigration presents one of the most dramatic gulfs – prioritised by those from C2DE social grade by more than 13 percentage points, compared to those in the ABC1 social grade (40% to 27%). The gap between school leavers and university graduates on immigration is even more substantial, at 44% to 19%. The two other areas where both university graduates and ABC1 citizens are most distinct in their opinions are in their concern about the actions of the United States under President Trump, and global humanitarian crises. BAME Britons are less likely to be concerned about immigration than White Britons (10% to 36%), and also less threatened by international terrorism (16% to 35%).

Profound geographical differences in global issues of importance can be observed across the country, reinforcing that the lived experience of place on a domestic level also shapes attitudes towards the world outside. Brexit appears to be an issue of greatest concern in Wales (62%), the East of England (57%), the South East (56%) and Northern Ireland (55%), and of less importance to residents in the West Midlands (47%) and East Midlands (43%).

Climate change is of greatest interest as a global issue to those living in Wales and Northern Ireland (both 56%), the South East, South West and Yorkshire and Humberside (all 55%). It is of less concern to those in the North West (46%), the West Midlands (43%) and the East Midlands (41%). Citizens' interest in Brexit and climate change appears to be inversely held, with socially liberal citizens less focused on Brexit, and especially focused on climate change, and more conservative Britons continuing to regard Brexit as a significant issue, and less persuaded on the issue of climate change.

On the issue of immigration, we can observe one of the clearest indications of the intersection between social values, geography and global affairs. 50% of residents in the East Midlands are concerned about immigration as a global issue, compared to just 24% of those living in London. Other areas of particular interest in immigration are the West Midlands (41%) and the North West (40%).

#### 4. Global Issues of Importance

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##### **Other notable regional distinctions, compared to national averages:**

- Residents in London are especially concerned about the Israel-Palestinian dispute (14% vs. 7%)
- Residents in the North East are especially concerned about humanitarian crises (28% vs 15%)
- Residents in Northern Ireland and London are especially concerned about current wars, such as Syria (24% and 22%, compared to 15%)
- Residents in the East Midlands (29%), the North East, Wales (both 25%) and London (24%), are the most concerned about international trade
- Residents in Scotland are the most concerned about the United States' actions under President Trump's leadership.

Considering the correlations between voting behaviour and issues of importance, we can observe that at 66%, UKIP voters are the most concerned about Brexit, followed by Conservative voters 64%, SNP voters (66%) and Liberal Democrats on 54%. By comparison, only 45% of Labour voters regard Brexit as an international issue of importance. Turning to climate change, we can see that Green voters hold an outsized level of concern about this issue, at 78%, followed by Liberal Democrats (66%) and Labour voters (60%). Conservatives are considerably less interested in climate change, at 45%. UKIP voters are also disproportionately likely to be concerned about immigration (93%), followed by Conservative voters (45%). Just 20% of Labour voters are concerned about immigration as a global issue.

##### **Other notable political party distinctions, compared to national averages:**

- UKIP (50%) and Conservative voters (37% vs 29%) are most likely to be concerned about international terrorism
- SNP, Green (both 39% to 23%) and Labour voters (32%) are most likely to be concerned about the actions of the United States under President Trump
- Conservative voters (22% to 18%) are the most concerned about international trade
- Labour and Liberal Democrat voters (20%) are the most concerned about global wars, such as Syria, and twice as concerned as Conservative voters (10%)
- Labour voters are the most concerned about humanitarian crises (25% to 15%), and more than three times as concerned as Conservative voters (8%).

##### **Turning to newspaper readership, we can see that:**

- Readers of The Guardian (65%) and The Independent (62%) are the most concerned about climate change, and Daily Express (35%) and Daily Telegraph (32%) readers are the least
- Readers of The Sun (56%) are the most concerned about Brexit, and readers of the Financial Times (40%) are the least
- Readers of the Daily Express are the most concerned about international terrorism (43%), and readers of The Guardian (23%) are the least
- Readers of The Sun (44%) and the Daily Mail (41%) are the most concerned about immigration, and readers of The Times (18%), The Guardian (14%) and The Independent (9%) are the least
- Readers of the Daily Telegraph (41%) are the most concerned about international trade, and readers of The Sun (16%) and the Daily Mirror (15%) are the least.

Referendum voting behaviour appears to be even more significant than party alignment on shaping issues of importance. Overall, we can see that Leave voters are disproportionately focused on Brexit, immigration and terrorism, and Remain voters are disproportionately focused on climate change, President Trump, global wars, disputes and humanitarian crises.

##### **Specifically, compared to Remain voters, Leave voters are:**

- 10 percentage points more likely to be concerned about Brexit (60% to 50%)
- Nearly 40 percentage points more likely to be concerned about immigration (50% to 13%)
- 13 percentage points more likely to be concerned about international terrorism (36% to 23%)

#### 4. Global Issues of Importance

- Nearly 20 percentage points less likely to be concerned about climate change (44% to 63%)
- Half as likely to be concerned about the actions of the United States under Trump (16% to 32%)
- 7 percentage points less likely to be concerned about current wars such as Syria (12% to 19%)
- Only around a third as likely to be concerned about humanitarian crises (9% to 23%)
- Less than half as likely to be concerned about the Israel-Palestine dispute (4% to 10%).

These findings extend the previous research into fundamental distinctions in ‘world views’ underpinning the Referendum, and highlight the challenge the emphasis on these distinctions poses to governance<sup>vi</sup>.

The gaps of opinion we can observe between Conservative Remainers and Leavers and Labour Remainers and Leavers are, as ever, significant, and generally conform to the standard of the distinctions within the Labour Party being more profound than those within the Conservative Party. For example, Labour-Remain voters are 16 percentage points more likely than Labour-Leave voters to be concerned about climate change (66% to 50%), are 15 percentage points more likely to be concerned about the actions of President Trump (36% to 21%), and are 16 percentage points more likely to be concerned about humanitarian crises (30% to 14%). They are also 31 percentage points less likely to be concerned about immigration, and 10 percentage points less likely to be concerned about terrorism.

The exception to these is the issue of Brexit, where Conservative-Leave voters are 15 percentage points more likely than Conservative-Remain voters to be concerned (67% to 52%), while both Labour-Leave and Remain voters sit at 46%. Distinctions within the Conservative Party are otherwise significant, but somewhat less so than within the Labour Party, with the gaps most profound between Conservative-Leave and Remain voters on the issues of immigration (30 percentage points), climate change (12 percentage points), President Trump (12 percentage points) and international crime (9 percentage points).

Global Issues of Importance		
	2019	2020
Brexit	56%	53 % (-3%)
Climate change	38%	51 % (+13%)
Immigration	42%	34 % (-8%)
International Terrorism	39%	29 % (-10%)
The actions of the US under Trump (e.g. Iran strike)	N/A	23 %
International trade	21%	18 % (-3%)
International crime (e.g. hacking/cybercrime/organised crime)	20%	16 % (-4%)
Current wars (e.g. Syria)	16%	15 % (-1%)
Humanitarian Crises	18%	15 % (-3%)
Israeli-Palestine dispute	N/A	7 %
Territorial disputes (e.g. Gibraltar)	4%	3 % (-1%)
Other (please specify)	N/A	1 %

Our previous survey in 2019 also explored attitudes to a number of these issues and how they have evolved in importance and priority for citizens over time. The single most dramatic shift can be observed in the tremendously sharp rise of climate change on the national agenda in just the past year alone – up 13 percentage points – and the concurrent waning of anxieties around immigration (down 8%) and terrorism (down 10%).

#### 4. Global Issues of Importance

Given the importance of news currency to perceptions of global issues of importance, we conducted a second survey under the same conditions some two weeks after our primary survey, which asked the same questions of respondents. In that time, we saw a significant shift on this specific question – captured in the table below. What is most noticeable, is that the issue of Brexit decreased in salience by 7 percentage points in two weeks, following the UK's official departure from the European Union. Climate change has also fallen down the list of concerns, with international terrorism and the Israel-Palestine dispute both growing in importance. These findings emphasise the volatile nature of public opinion on these issues, and underscore the need to view these month-on-month, and year-on-year, figures as evolving trends rather than fixed results.

Global Issues of Importance		
	21-24 Jan	7-11 Feb
Brexit	53 %	49 % (-4%)
Climate change	51 %	44 % (-7%)
International terrorism	29 %	34 % (+5%)
Immigration	34 %	33 % (-1%)
International trade	18 %	20 % (+2%)
The actions of the US under Trump	23 %	19 % (-4%)
Humanitarian crises	16 %	17 % (+1%)
International crime	15 %	16 % (+1%)
Current wars	15 %	14 % (-1%)
Territorial disputes	7 %	8 % (+1%)
Israel-Palestine dispute	3 %	8 % (+5%)

#### Global Warming and Climate Change

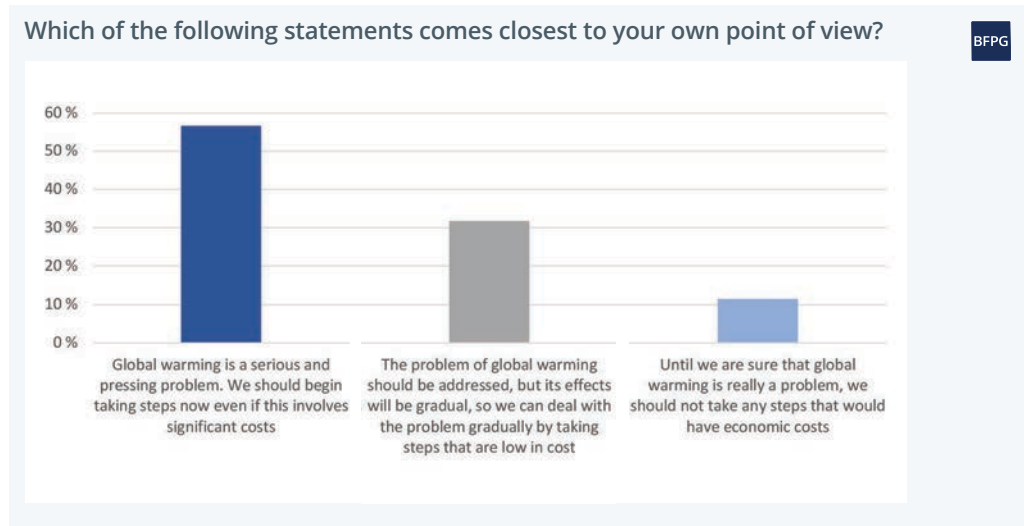
It is received wisdom that the UK's climate change conversation in politics and the media is significantly more progressive than that of Australia or the United States, where a debate regarding the science continues, and political action is more constrained. In this survey, we replicated the exact wording of a question that has featured in the national annual survey of the Lowy Institute in Sydney since 2006. While the organisation acknowledges that the public debate, scientific knowledge and indeed the environmental impact of climate change has evolved significantly in the past 14 years, it has retained this specific wording in order to aid comparability over time.

In particular, the wording of this question, which employs the phrase 'global warming' instead of 'climate change', can feel outdated. Moreover, the discussion of individual versus collective responsibility reflects the nature of the debate in Australia and the United States, rather than that of the United Kingdom – which accepts both individual and collective action as a settled point. Nonetheless, the injection of this framing into the United Kingdom context does provide some fascinating results, which emphasise the importance of political and media narratives in cultivating public support for responses to climate change.

Overall, we find that 57% of Britons agree that 'Global warming is a serious and pressing problem. We should begin taking steps now even if this involves significant costs'. This figure correlates with the percentage who identified global warming as a 'critical threat' elsewhere in the survey. Interestingly, we find that a third of Britons (32%), rather agree that, 'The problem of global

#### 4. Global Issues of Importance

warming should be addressed, but its effects will be gradual, so we can deal with the problem gradually by taking steps that are low in cost' – a plea for a moderate and gradual response rather than radical action. A further 12% of Britons believe that 'Until we are sure that global warming is really a problem, we should not take any steps that would have economic costs' – effectively expressing disbelief in the consensus in the scientific community and urging restraint.



These findings are fascinating, because they in fact demonstrate a somewhat higher degree of scepticism about action on global warming compared to Australia. In the 2019 Lowy Institute survey, 61% of Australians agreed with the first statement calling for urgent action, 28% urged a degree of restraint, and 10% disagreed with the science and questioned the need for any action at all. The results emphasise that the scope and nature of the discussion in the United Kingdom has reduced the space for contention and helped facilitate meaningful political responses more so than that of the discussion in Australia.

The Britons who are most likely to support radical and urgent action on climate change tend to be: younger, university-educated, from higher social grades, of White British ethnicity, live in the North West, East Midlands and Scotland, support Labour, the Liberal Democrats, the SNP or the Greens, read The Guardian and The Independent, and to have voted Remain in the 2016 Referendum.

The gap between Conservative and Labour voters on this question is 18 percentage points (49% of Conservatives to 67% of Labour voters) and the gap between Leave and Remain voters is 20 percentage points (49% of Leave voters to 69% of Remain voters). On this question, however, the Leave-Remain axis appears to be a more powerful determinant in shaping opinions, with Conservative-Remain voters more closely aligned with their Remain-voting counterparts in Labour than in their own political party. This suggests that climate change is fused to the 'open vs. closed' framework underpinning attitudes towards the European Union.

There are no distinctive age traits amongst those who urge restraint and champion a more incremental kind of action on climate change, however they are more likely to be found in the North East (40%) or East of England (36%), to have FE qualifications (43%) or be a school leaver (40%), to be of BAME background (52%), to read The Sun (5%), to have voted Conservative in 2019 (37%), and to have voted Leave in the 2016 referendum (36%).



## 4. Global Issues of Importance

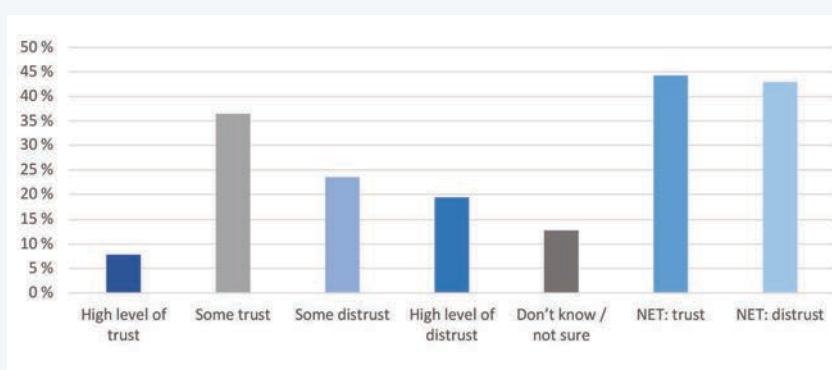
Those who question the science of climate change and the need for any action whatsoever are more likely to vote for UKIP (21%) or the Conservatives (14%), to have voted Leave in 2016 (15%), to have no further qualifications (15%), to be in the C2DE social grade (15%), to be White British (11%), to live in Northern Ireland (26%) or Wales (15%), and to read the Daily Express (17%).

### Trust in the Government on Foreign Policy

When asked to consider the extent to which the British people trust their government to take decisions in the public's interest on strategic foreign policy choices, overall, we see the country is deeply divided – with 44% leaning towards trust, and 43% leaning towards distrust. Of these, 8% of Britons claim to possess high levels of trust, and more than twice as many (19%) possess high levels of distrust.

How much do you trust the UK Government to take decisions in the UK public's interest when it comes to making strategic foreign policy decisions?

BFPG



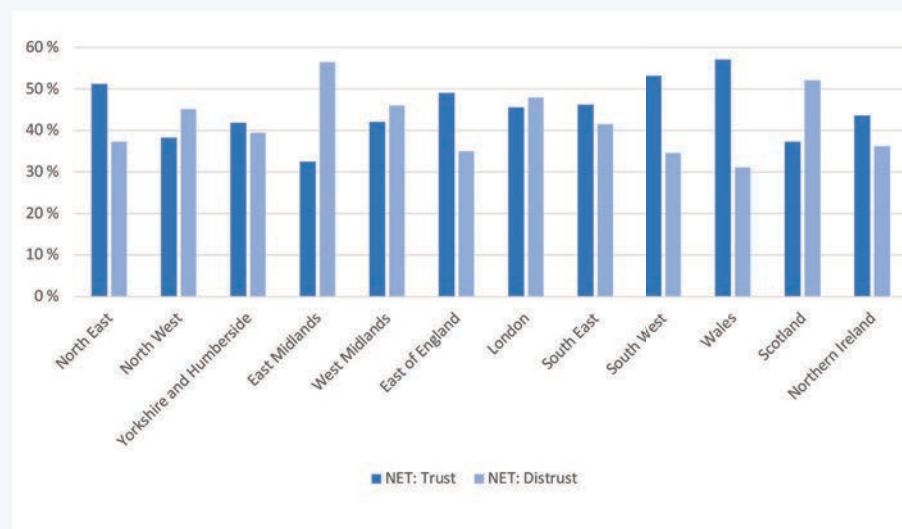
Men are more likely than women to trust politicians, at 49% to 40%, although women are more likely to be unsure about their levels of trust, at 16% to 9%. The levels of high trust and high distrust, however, are broadly similar, which suggests gender does not play a significant role in shaping perspectives on this issue. By contrast, age does seem to be more important in forging opinions – with 52% of Britons aged 55 years and over reporting trust in the government on foreign policy, compared to just 40% of all other Britons. The most actively distrustful of government are those aged 35-54 years, at 46%, compared to 44% of under-35s and 39% of those aged 55 years and over.

Fascinatingly, trust in the government on foreign policy appears to be distinct from other more generalised measures of trust. When asked about their levels of trust in government generally, we know that socio-economic factors, including education and income, play a strong role in perceptions of trust – with those in lower social grades and without higher education generally more likely to be distrustful of government and state institutions<sup>vii</sup>. Regarding foreign policy, however, there are no discernible differences in levels of trust in the government's stewardship between education levels, nor social grades. This perhaps reflects the influence of political partisanship, discussed below, and its intersection with socio-economic demographics that would have otherwise been more significant in shaping outcomes.

#### 4. Global Issues of Importance

How much do you trust the UK Government to take decisions in the public's interest when it comes to making strategic foreign policy decisions?

BFPG



Profound variations in citizens' levels of trust in government on foreign policy can be observed across the UK's nations and England's regions. The most trusting of government on foreign policy are those living in Wales, at 57% trusting, followed by those in the South West (53%) and the North East (51%). The weakest levels of positive trust are to be found in the East Midlands, at 32% and the North West, at 38%. The highest levels of active distrust in government are found amongst residents in the East Midlands (56%) and Scotland (52%), where a majority of citizens claim not to trust the government to act in the public's interests. Again, the city of Nottingham reveals itself to be a specific outlier, with an astonishing 63% of residents not trusting the government. Londoners are the most polarised on this question of all citizens, with 46% trusting government, and 48% distrustful.

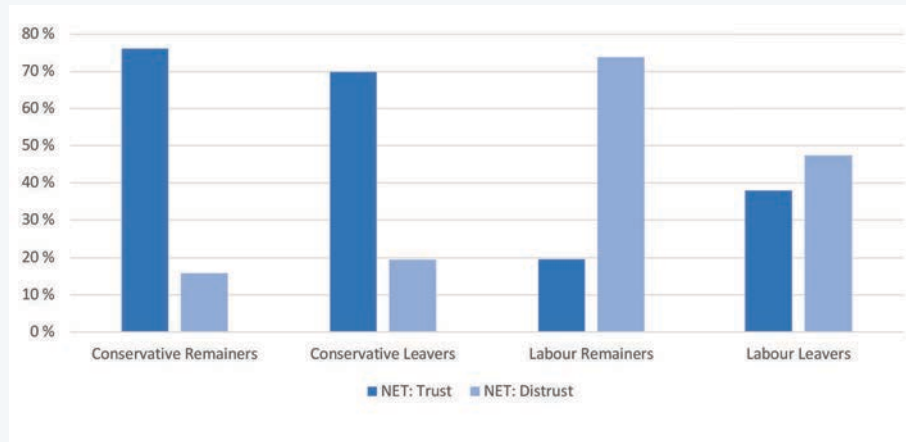
Not surprisingly given its focus on 'the government', this question plays directly into political partisanship. We therefore find 71% of Conservatives trusting of their own party leading government on foreign policy, compared to just 37% of Liberal Democrats, 26% of Labour voters and 19% of SNP voters. The levels of mistrust of the government are highest amongst Green (70% not trusting), Labour and SNP voters (both 65% not trusting). Despite these predictable results, some more interesting stories linger beneath the surface. It should be noted, for example, that almost a fifth (19%) of Conservative voters are not trusting of their government on foreign policy, and more than a quarter (26%) of Labour voters are in fact trusting of the government – speaking simultaneously to both the diversity of the constituencies within the parties, and also the degree of bipartisan support foreign policy can attract.

Remain voters are considerably less inclined to be trusting of the government on foreign policy, emphasising the important degree to which Brexit and the 'Global Britain' project in its wake have become fused to citizens' conceptions of Britain's international role. Just 33% of them trust the government to act in the national interest, and 57% of actively distrust the government. This contrasts almost perfectly with Leave voters, of whom 59% trust the government to act in their interests, compared to 29% who don't. This finding is noteworthy because, at the time of the Referendum, Leave voters were substantially more likely than Remain voters to be distrustful of government in general<sup>viii</sup>.

#### 4. Global Issues of Importance

How much do you trust the UK Government to take decisions in the public's interest when it comes to making strategic foreign policy decisions?

BFGP



This merging of political and referendum partisanship is distinctly captured in the consistency of opinion amongst Conservative voters, with Leave and Remain voters only marginally apart in their degrees of trust – to note, however, it is the Conservative-Leave voters who are somewhat less trusting (70% to 76% of Conservative-Remain voters). In the Labour Party, just 20% of Labour-Remain voters are trusting in the government on foreign policy, compared to 74% actively distrusting, while a more substantial 38% of Leave voters are trusting, and a less dramatic 47% of distrustful. This suggests that even Labour-Leave voters are more likely to see foreign policy in the age of Global Britain as a Brexit-driven exercise, and importantly, almost 4 in 10 of them are securitised by this beyond their political partisanship.

Given the intense influence of political partisanship on responses to this question, we can also observe that papers with the highest incidence of voters for the Conservative Party and for Leave in the 2016 EU Referendum – the Daily Express (66%) and the Daily Telegraph (61%) – are the most likely to be trusting of the government on foreign policy. Interestingly, readers of the Remain-supporting Financial Times are also very trusting of the government (61%); however, this may reflect their readership's outsized level of support for national institutions. At 31%, readers of The Guardian are the most distrusting of government acting in the national interest on foreign policy.

# Expenditure and Priorities

## Expenditure on International Activities

Our survey outlined that the UK currently spends 2.75% of GDP on the totality of its foreign policy, including defence, aid, diplomacy and trade, and asked citizens when they felt that the government should be spending more, less or the same amount on these activities. Overall, 22% of Britons said 'more', 16% said 'less', and a large plurality (44%) felt that we should be spending the same. Of these net figures, just 6% of Britons felt we should be spending 'substantially more', and the same amount (6%) felt that we should be spending 'substantially less'.

Comparing these findings to our 2019 survey, we can see that there has been quite a significant shift in perspectives on international spending over the past year. In 2019, a considerably larger proportion of Britons – 24% – wanted to see the UK reducing its international expenditure, now down 8%. However, 27% of Britons in 2019 also wanted to see the UK increasing its international spending, and this too has fallen to 22%. What appears to have transpired is that a greater proportion of Britons now wish our spending to remain 'about the same' – up 8 percentage points from 36% – and also a larger number of Britons are unsure about their feelings on the subject – up 5 percentage points from 13%.

In our 2020 survey, women are considerably more likely than men to say that they are unsure (26% to 10%), which depresses their support for greater spending (18%, to 27% of men) and also for a reduction in spending (12%, to 19% of men). Britons under the age of 55 years are also more likely to be unsure of their position on funding than their older counterparts, at 21% of under-55s, to 13% of 55-and-overs. In terms of the fundamental question of increasing or reducing foreign policy budgets, however, the differences between the generations were relatively insignificant.

We know from the survey questions gauging the degree of citizens' knowledge and interest in foreign affairs, that those from lower socio-economic backgrounds are considerably less engaged with Britain's role in the world. This trend is also reflected in their lack of enthusiasm for increasing expenditure on our global activities. While 27% of Britons in the ABC1 social grade support increasing international spending, just 19% of those in the C2DE social grade agree. As ever, the gap between education levels is larger again, with 27% of university graduates supporting an increase in government spending, and 17% of school leaders in agreement. Turning to ethnicity, we can see that support for increasing the UK's foreign budgets is larger amongst BAME Britons (34%) than White Britons (23%).

Looking at the regions, the greatest support for increasing foreign budgets can be found in the West Midlands, at 33%, followed by Northern Ireland (27%), and Yorkshire and Humberside (26%). In turn, support for a reduction in our international funding is strongest in the East Midlands – at 33%, a direct inverse of their neighbours in the West Midlands – and followed by residents in Wales (21%) and the East of England (20%). At 49%, residents in London and Wales were the most likely to support the status quo. Citizens in Northern Ireland (25%), the North East (23%) and the North West (22%) were most likely to be unsure.

At 27%, Conservative voters are the most supportive of increasing foreign budgets, followed by Labour voters, at 23%. By contrast, 25% of SNP supporters actively support a reduction in international spending, compared to 18% of Conservatives and 13% of Labour voters. Green

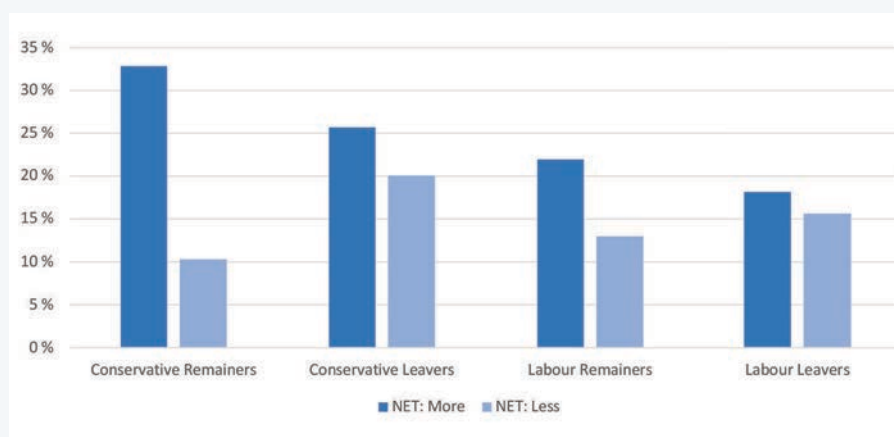
## 5. Expenditure and Priorities

voters are the most inclined to keep budgets as they are (63%), followed by UKIP voters (61%) and Liberal Democrats (57%), with Labour and Conservative voters similarly placed on 45% and 44% respectively. The relatively muted Labour support for international expenditure, which should challenge the notion of the party's internationalist persona, likely reflects the conditioning effects of Jeremy Corbyn's leadership, which promoted a smaller footprint for Britain and encouraged active criticism of the nation's imperial and military legacy<sup>ix</sup>.

The difference of opinion between Leave and Remain voters on support for increasing international budgets is marginal (24% of Remain voters, to 22% of Leave voters), however Leave voters are much more likely to actively favour a reduction in international spending (20% to 10%). This same gap is evident in the distinction between Conservative-Leave and Conservative-Remain voters (also 20% to 10%) – a rare example of the Referendum voting patterns expressing themselves more substantially within the Conservative Party than the Labour Party, in which the gap on reducing global budgets is considerably smaller (16% of Labour-Leave voters to 13% of Labour-Remain voters).

Do you think the UK should spend more or less on its foreign policy?

BFPG



This question provides a telling example of how the strong relationship between the 'Global Britain' slogan and the Brexit project has encouraged shifts in behaviour amongst Leave voters, who previously would have – by virtue of their demographics and their world views – been more likely to promote isolationist, protectionist and anti-globalist policies. We can observe the complexity now in studying views about foreign affairs in the post-Brexit era, in the attitudes of newspaper readers to this question of expenditure. Hence, while Financial Times readers are the most likely to support an increase in foreign budgets (48%), they are followed closely behind by Daily Telegraph and Daily Express readers (both 45%). The readers of these Brexit-backing papers, however, are twice as inclined to also support reductions in our international budgets than those of the Financial Times. The weakest level of support for increasing budgets comes from The Sun readers (27%), and readers of The Daily Mail (29%).

## 5. Expenditure and Priorities

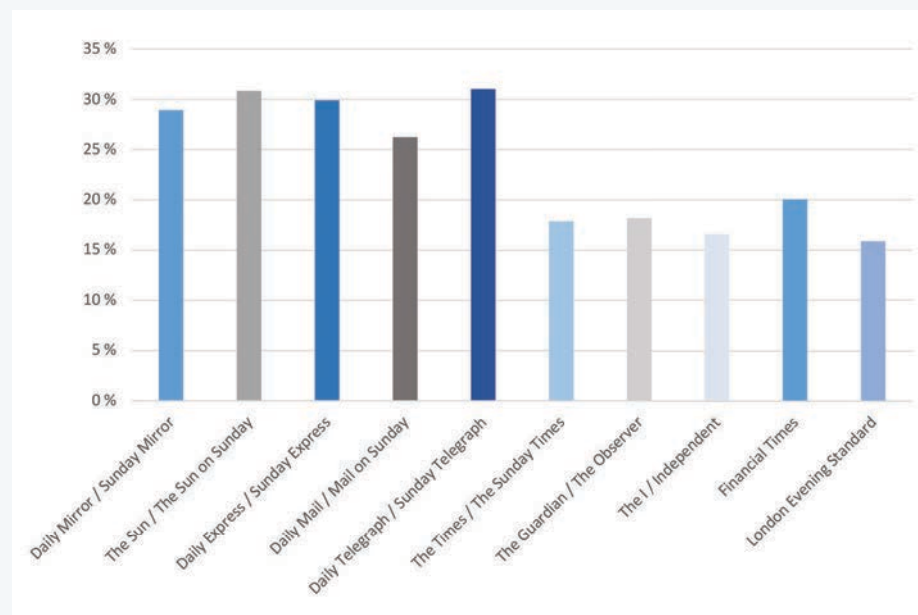
### Aid and Development Spending

When asked to consider how the UK should focus its aid and development spending, 31% of Britons choose combatting poverty as a priority, followed closely by 30% who choose providing infrastructure to provide essential public services, such as sewers and clean water, and 29% who choose basic health programmes, such as vaccinations. These three humanitarian-focused objectives all form significant parts of the UK's development activities, and are clearly seen as facilitating the provision of basic human rights.

The fourth-most popular choice, however, and the highest-ranking option of strategic self-interest, is to 'create new investment opportunities for the UK' – which a quarter of Britons (24%) believe should be a focus of our aid and development spending. We can also see that 16% of the population would like to see our aid spending directed to programmes discouraging immigration from poorer countries to wealthier nations, such as Britain.

**% of Britons who want the UK to prioritise aid spending on 'creating new investment opportunities for the UK', by newspaper readership**

BFGP



While the UK Government has made much of its leading global role in challenging violence against women<sup>x</sup> and expanding the provision of girls' education, only a fraction of the population believes these should be priority areas in the UK's aid and development budgets – with just 15% of the population supporting programmes protecting women from violence, and only 8% wanting budgets to prioritise improving girls' education.

Turning to demographic distinctions in public opinion on these issues, we can see that women are somewhat more likely than men to support humanitarian-focused priorities for spending, as well as programmes on protecting women from violence and improving girls' education. Men are, in turn, more likely to advocate directing our development spending on matters of economic self-interest for the UK, and combatting migration flows, as well as fostering economic growth in developing nations themselves.

## 5. Expenditure and Priorities

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To some extent, these same dynamics can be observed in the distinctions of opinion between the younger generations and the older generations, with under-35s considerably more likely to support humanitarian and environmental programmes, and programmes focused on women's safety and education, and 55-and-overs more likely to support 'hard-nosed' objectives such as economic self-interest and combatting migration. That said, older Britons are also more likely to support spending on the nuts-and-bolts spending of basic infrastructure (ie. sanitation and vaccinations) than younger Britons, who tend to spread their spending interests more widely.

The socio-economic dimensions of aid spending appear to be less significant than may have been presumed. Gaps in public preferences between social grades and educational attainment are relatively muted – almost negligible – with only two exceptions: university graduates and those in the ABC1 group are much more likely to support aid and development spending on combatting environmental degradation, and also on fostering economic growth in developing nations. This aligns with the generally higher levels of concern about climate change amongst Britons from higher socio-economic backgrounds, and also the understandable narrative resonance of the 'British money to support British growth', amongst those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

### **Notable trends across the UK's constituent nations and regions include:**

- Residents in Northern Ireland (38%) and the North East (37%) are most likely to want aid directed to combatting poverty, with those in the East Midlands and East of England (both 27%) the least supportive of poverty-reduction aid
- Support for infrastructure spending is relatively consistent across the regions, although notably lower in the West Midlands (at just 23%), the East Midlands and the North West (both 25%)
- Residents in Northern Ireland (34%), London and the South West (both 33%) are the most likely to prioritise spending on health programmes and vaccinations
- The North East is the most active hub of support for aid being used to create new investment opportunities for the UK (at 31%)
- Residents in the East Midlands (36%) and the North East (33%) are outliers in their support for aid being used to reduce corruption in developing countries
- A fifth (20%) of Britons in the North West, and the West and East Midlands, would like development spending to be used to discourage migration to the UK
- A curious streak of support for programmes aimed at protecting women from violence can be seen in the East Midlands, an outlier at 31%, compared to just 10% of residents in Yorkshire and Humberside
- At 24%, London stands alone in its support for aid investment to be directed towards improving economic growth in developing countries, compared to just 8% of those in Scotland and 9% in the East Midlands
- Support for improving girls' education is notably weakest in the North West (3%) and Northern Ireland (just 2%).

### **Turning to the political dimensions of aid spending preferences:**

- Conservative voters are the most likely to support development aid being used for economic self-interest, in the form of facilitating investment opportunities for the UK (34%, vs 14% of Labour voters)
- Conservative voters are also the most likely to support development spending as a means of discouraging outward migration to wealthier countries like the UK (23%, vs 10% of Labour voters)
- SNP voters (42%) and Labour voters (40%) are the most likely to support aid spending to reduce poverty, compared to 25% of Conservatives

## 5. Expenditure and Priorities

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- Labour and Liberal Democrat voters (both 30%) are the most likely to support development spending being used to fight environmental degradation, compared to 16% of Conservatives
- Liberal Democrats are the most likely to support spending on improving girls' education (14%), compared to just 5% of Conservative voters
- Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat voters all share similar degrees of concern about the issue of corruption, providing emergency support during natural disasters, and the need for development spending to focus on basic health programmes.

### **Comparing Leave and Remain voters overall, we can see that:**

- Leave voters are almost twice as likely as Remain voters to believe aid spending should prioritise creating investment opportunities for the UK (32% to 17%) and more than three times as likely to want development spending to prioritise discouraging migration to wealthier countries, such as the UK (25% to 8%)
- Remain voters are twice as likely as Leave voters to support development programmes focused on fighting environmental degradation (30% to 16%), and twice as likely to support improving girls' education (11% to just 5%)
- Remain voters are also more likely to support spending on poverty, infrastructure, and health, protecting women from violence, and supporting economic growth in developing countries.

### **Examining the Leave and Remain splits within the two major parties, we can observe:**

- Labour-Remain voters are unique in their lack of support for development spending being directed to creating investment opportunities for the UK (11%) or discouraging migration to countries like the UK (4%)
- Labour-Leave voters are unique in their lack of support for aid spending to respond to natural disasters and other crises (17%), or to stop the spread of diseases such as Ebola (10%). They are also the least likely to preference aid spending being used to help support economic growth in developing countries (6%).
- Conservative-Leave voters are unique in their lack of support for development spending to fight environmental degradation (14%)
- Conservative-Remain voters are the least likely to support development spending being used to protect women from violence (9%), or on improving girls' education (4%).

### **Britain's newspapers have taken an extensive interest in the nation's aid and development spending, and it is therefore important to consider the ways in which certain narratives are promoted within their pages. Considering the preferences of newspaper readers, we can observe that there is a high degree of diversity in public opinion as to how aid budgets should be directed – broadly coalescing around political lines. As such:**

- Daily Mirror readers are the most supportive of development spending on combatting poverty (40%), and the Guardian's readers are most likely to support aid spending towards preventing environmental degradation (41%)
- Readers of The Sun (28%) and the Financial Times (24%) are most supportive of aid spending to prevent the spread of diseases
- Readers of the Daily Express (26%) and the Daily Mail (20%) are most inclined to want aid spending directed to preventing migration to wealthier nations, and Daily Telegraph readers are the most likely to support aid spending being directed to promote economic growth in developing nations (21%)
- Readers of the Financial Times are the most supportive of development spending being used to protect women from violence (23%), and readers of The Guardian (15%), The Independent (11%), the Financial Times (10%) and the Daily Telegraph (10%) are the most likely to support investment in girls' education.



## 5. Expenditure and Priorities

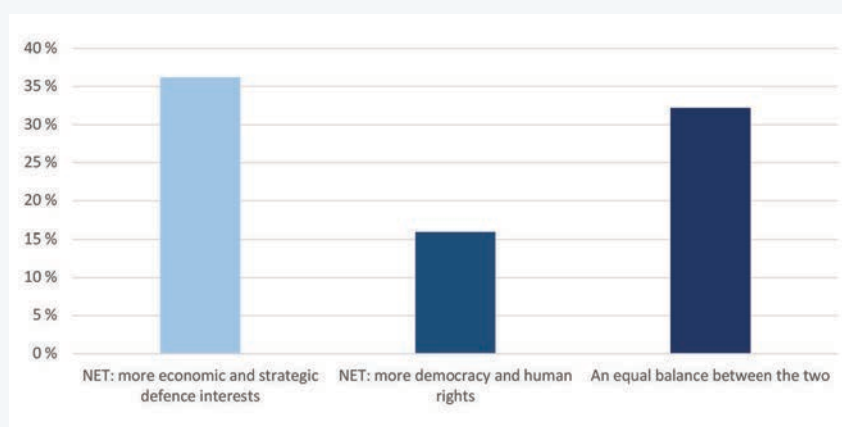
### Balancing the UK's Values and Strategic Interests

Foreign policy is increasingly depicted as a struggle between a hard-nosed 'economic and strategic' emphasis and a softer, values-led approach – and certainly, this framing was emphasised by the Labour Party during the 2019 General Election, and has formed the backdrop of debates around the potential integration of the Department for International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In reality, our foreign activities already straddle both of these objectives, often simultaneously, and it is highly likely that further integration – not just of departments but of purpose and mission – will take place over this government term. Nonetheless, it is useful to understand how Britons prioritise and distinguish between these objectives.

Overall, we find that 36% of Britons would prefer that Britain's international activities emphasise economic and strategic defence interests, 16% would like them to emphasise democracy and human rights, and 32% would like them to equally balance the two. The salience of the support for strategic interests as the predominant guiding force is considerably stronger than for values, with 18% of Britons wanting our activities to be 'much more' driven by economic and strategic interests, compared to just 8% who want them to be 'much more' driven by values. Around 16% of Britons are unsure about their views on this question.

#### Should Britain's interests be driven more by economic or strategic interests, or more by values such as democracy and human rights?

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When we compare these findings with our 2019 survey, we can see that opinions haven't shifted dramatically in the past year. However, it is clear that Britons have become more opinionated – with support for our foreign policy being driven more by economic and strategic defence interests (up 3 percentage points), and also for it being more driven by democracy and human rights (up 2 percentage points), both increasing, at the expense of support for a balanced approach between the two (down 7 percentage points).

Consistent with the previous questions, women in our 2020 survey are more likely to be unsure on this issue, and also somewhat more likely to prefer a balanced approach, meaning they are considerably less likely to come out strongly in favour of either position. For example, while 22% of men are emphatic that Britain's foreign policy should be 'much more' driven by strategic interests, just 13% of women also take this position.

## 5. Expenditure and Priorities

Older Britons also once again reveal themselves to be the most hard-nosed and decisive about these issues of foreign policy. Those aged 55 years and over are only half as likely to be unsure of their positions than younger Britons (10% to 20% of under-55s). They are also more inclined to strongly favour strategic interests (23% to 12% of under-35s), and less likely to feel that democracy and human rights should be the driving force behind our international activities (14% to 21% of under-35s).

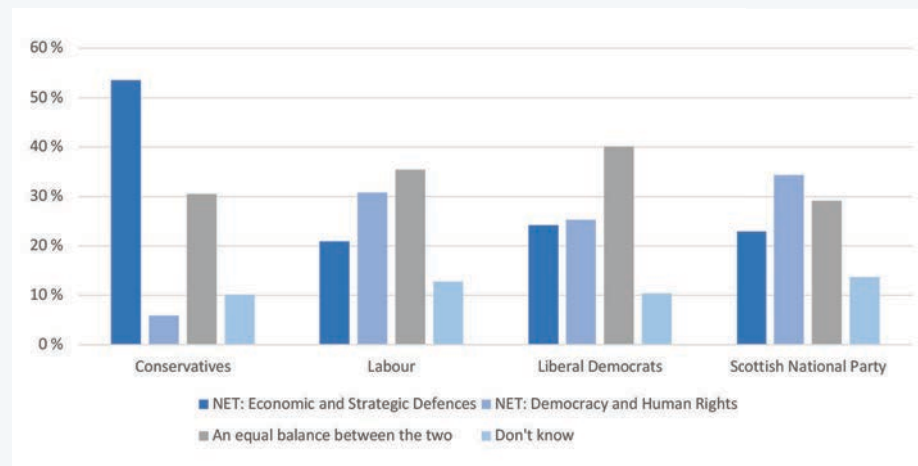
There are no discernible differences in preferences to be observed between education levels – one of the few questions for which this is the case. Britons from higher social grades are, however, somewhat more likely to favour both a strategic or values-based approach, than those from lower social grades, who tend to be more unsure about their stance on the issue. Interestingly, we can observe that Britons who describe themselves as Christians, are in fact less inclined than other citizens to support a values-based approach.

Britons living in Wales (46%), the East Midlands (45%) and the North East (44%) are the most inclined to support a foreign policy that prioritises economic and strategic defence interests. At 28%, London is a clear outlier in its support for a foreign policy prioritising human rights and democracy, in stark contrast compared to the weak support for this emphasis amongst residents in Wales (10%), the East of England and the East Midlands (both 11%).

This question appears to play directly into British political polarisation, with dramatic distinctions observed between the parties. At 54%, a majority of Conservative voters believe that Britain's foreign policy should be primarily driven by economic and strategic interests, followed by 51% of UKIP voters. This compares sharply with 24% of Liberal Democrats, 23% of SNP voters, and just 21% of Labour voters. By contrast, while 34% of SNP voters and 31% of Labour voters would like our foreign policy to be primarily driven by values like human rights and democracy, just 6% of Conservative voters and 0% of UKIP voters agree with this.

**Should Britain's interests be driven by what is in the UK's economic and strategic defence interests, or should they be driven more by values such as democracy and human rights?**

BFPG



The sharp divide in preferences on this issue is also captured in the Leave-Remain split. While 49% of Leave voters want economic and strategic defence interests to guide our foreign policy, just 23% of Remain voters agree. A larger share of Remain voters (27%) would like democracy and human rights to be prioritised, compared to just 7% of Leave voters.

## 5. Expenditure and Priorities

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Strikingly, we see a high degree of agreement amongst both Leave and Remain-voting Conservatives on this question (50% of Conservative-Leave voters vs. 54% of Conservative-Remain voters agree economic and strategic defence interests should guide our foreign policy), but a clear distinction within the Labour Party, with Labour-Leave and Labour-Remain voters holding polar opposite opinions: 37% of Labour-Leave voters prioritise strategic interests and 14% prioritise values, while 38% of Labour-Remain voters prioritise values and 14% prioritise strategic interests. This suggests that the established and new voters within the Conservative Party hold a greater degree of conceptual clarity around their foreign policy visions than the Labour Party, where their coalitions remain in competition.

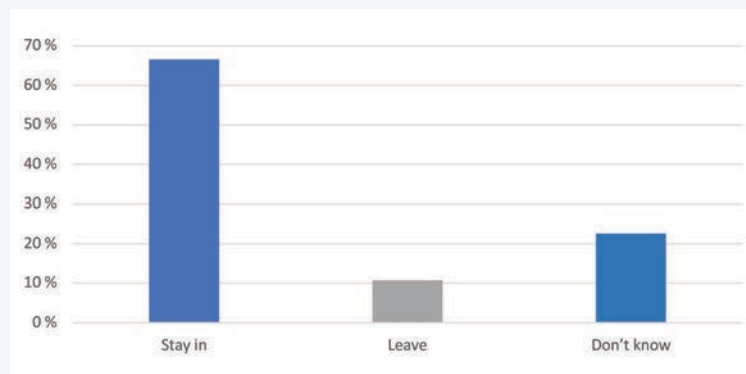
Considering newspaper readership, Britons who are most likely to support a predominantly strategic approach to our foreign policy tend to consume the Daily Express (61%), the Daily Telegraph (56%), the Financial Times (53%) or the Daily Mail (53%). Of these, the Financial Times is the only newspaper that backed 'Remain' in the 2016 EU Referendum. Readers of The Independent (40%), The Guardian (39%) and The Times (24%) are the most likely to back a values-led approach – compared to just 6% of readers of The Sun.

# Allies, Foes and Multilateralism

## NATO Membership

A majority of Britons (67%) support the UK maintaining its membership of NATO, with just 11% of the population actively against our membership. Significantly, nearly a quarter of Britons (23%) are unsure, indicating a weak level of knowledge about NATO's purpose and relevance to Britain's security interests.

If you could choose, would you stay in or leave NATO?



Comparing these results with our 2019 and 2017 surveys, we can see a slight downward movement in terms of the overall level of support for NATO membership – moving from 70% in 2017 to 67% today, coinciding with both a slight increase in the percentage of citizens who are actively opposed to NATO membership (from 8% to 11%) and a quite significant increase in the proportion of Britons unsure of their views – from 15% in 2017, to 17% in 2019 and 23% in 2020. This suggests that the strength of the case for our NATO membership has been somewhat diminished over recent years, and there is an active role for the government to play in addressing the degree of wavering public commitment.

Comparing our findings against the Chicago Council's annual survey, we can see that Americans remain somewhat more supportive of NATO than Britons, with 78% of Americans favourable to remaining their nation's membership of the Alliance.

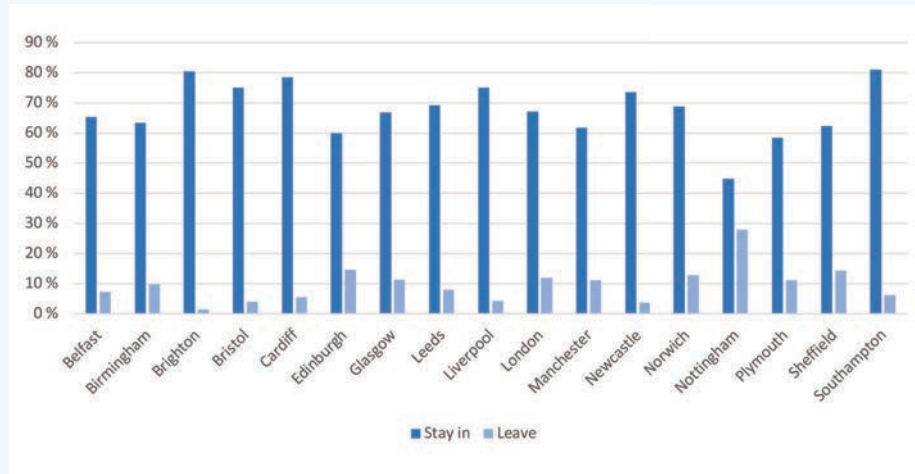
In our 2020 survey, men are more likely than women to support the UK both remaining a member (73% to 61%) and leaving (13% to 8%) – largely because women are considerably more inclined to be unsure about their position on this subject, at 31% to 13% of men. Younger Britons' support is also less enthusiastic than their older counterparts (57% of under-35s to 79% of 55-and-overs), and while they are also more inclined to be unsure (27% to 17%), they are also one of the driving forces behind the active desire to rescind our membership (16% to 5%).

The strongest support for our NATO membership can be found in Wales (78%), the North East of England (77%) and the South East (75%). At just 49%, the East Midlands is an outlier in both its tepid degree of enthusiasm, and its concentrated support for the UK abandoning its membership, at 23%. The next highest levels of support for leaving NATO can be found in London (16%), but in many other regions, the desire to leave is extremely marginal, standing at under 5%. Looking at the city level, we can see that the erroneous results from the East

## 6. Allies, Foes and Multilateralism

Should the UK retain or rescind its NATO membership?

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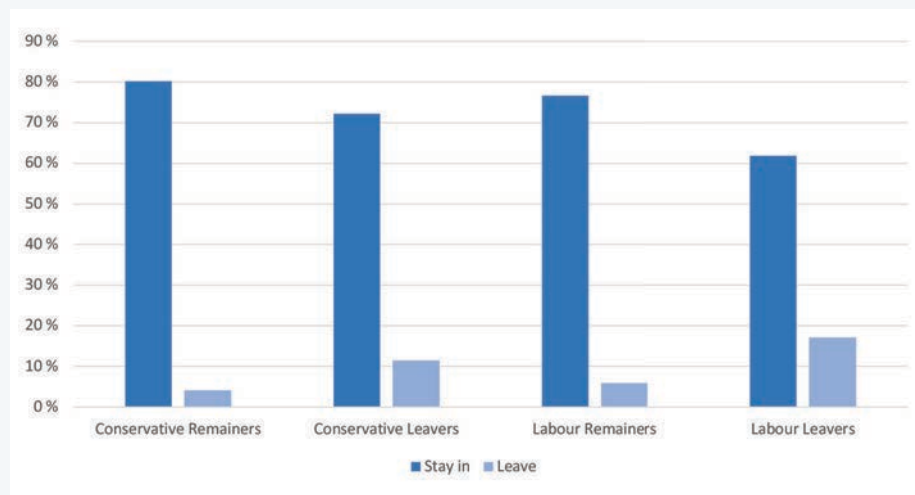


Midlands are being driven by residents specifically in Nottingham, where just 45% want the UK to remain members, and an extraordinary 28% of residents would actively like the UK to rescind its membership. In Brighton, by contrast, just 1% of residents support leaving NATO.

Turning to the political parties, we can see that Liberal Democrats and Greens voters are the most supportive of retaining the UK's NATO membership, at 80% each. Interestingly, only a marginal difference can be observed between Conservative and Labour voters on this issue (73% to 71%), which is considerably smaller than in other surveys<sup>xi</sup>. Moreover, we can see that Conservative voters in 2019 were slightly more inclined to support the revocation of our NATO membership, at 10% to 8% of Labour voters. Both of these shifts could suggest an effect attributable to the formerly Labour-voting Leave-voters – largely based in the 'Red Wall' and less enthusiastic about multilateralism – who migrated across to the Conservatives in 2019. Support amongst SNP voters stands at 63%, with UKIP voters outliers at just 47% of support, and 37% of their voters actively preferring that the UK rescinds its membership.

Should the UK retain or rescind its NATO membership?

BFGP



## 6. Allies, Foes and Multilateralism

Remain voters are more supportive of the UK's membership of NATO than Leave voters, at 77% to 68%, and less likely to actively prefer a departure from NATO, at just 5% to 13% of Leave voters. Once again, we can observe that Labour-Leave voters are the most distinct in their opinions, and that the gap between their preferences and that of Labour-Remain voters is considerably larger than those within the Conservative Party. Hence, while 77% of Labour-Remain voters support the UK's membership of NATO, just 62% of Labour-Leave voters agree. The divide between Conservative-Remain and Conservative-Leave voters, while significant at 8 percentage points (80% to 72%), is only half the size of the divide between Labour's Leave-Remain camps.

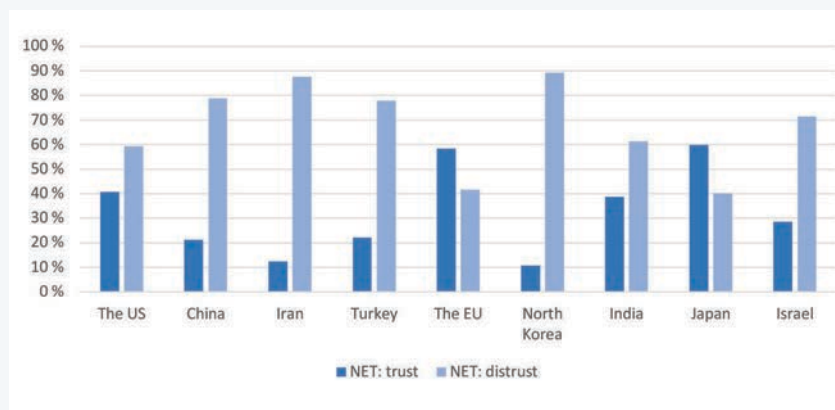
### Trust in Other Nations to Act Responsibly in the World

Our survey asked Britons to consider the level of trust they hold in a variety of different nations to act responsibly in the world – ranging from key allies to authoritarian regimes. Overall, we see that Britons possess the highest level of trust in Japan (60%), followed by the European Union (58%) and the United States of America (41%). Nonetheless, each of these three actors is also mistrusted by a significant portion of the population: 40% of Britons do not trust Japan to act responsibly, 42% of Britons do not trust the European Union to act responsibly, and a substantial 59% of Britons do not trust the United States in its international activities. The greatest degree of distrust, however, is to be found directed towards North Korea (89%), Iran (88%) and China (79%). At 71%, Israel is the British ally carrying the deepest level of distrust, with just 29% of Britons believing it acts responsibly in the world.

These figures tell a clear and striking story: that outside of their own nation, Britons perceive a world of profound threats and unconvincing allies.

How much do you trust the following countries and union of nations to act responsibly in the world?

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#### Focusing on the United States, we can see that:

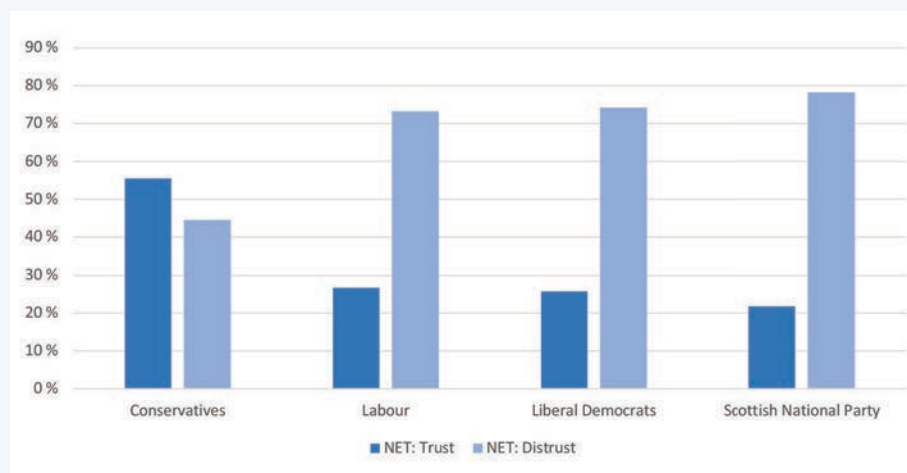
- 41% of Britons trust the United States to act responsibly in the world and 49% do not. 8% of Britons possess 'very high' levels of trust, and 20% possess 'very high' levels of distrust.
- Men are more trusting than women (46% to 36%) and less actively distrustful than women (54% to 64%)
- No particular distinctions can be observed between the generations
- Britons from lower socio-economic grades and with lower levels of education are more trusting of the United States – 37% of university graduates, vs. 48% of school leavers

## 6. Allies, Foes and Multilateralism

- The most trusting Britons reside in the North East (47% trust to 53% distrust), and the least trusting Britons reside in Wales (27% trust to 73% distrust)
- Active distrust is also high in Scotland (65%), Northern Ireland (64%), Yorkshire (62%) and the East of England (62%)
- UKIP supporters (81%) and Conservative voters (55%) are the most trusting, although 45% of Conservatives are also distrustful
- Just 27% of Labour voters, 26% of Lib Dems and 22% of SNP voters trust the United States to act responsibly in the world
- Leave voters are divided on their attitudes towards the United States (51% trusting to 49% distrustful), but Remain voters are clearly distrustful (29% trusting to 71% distrustful)
- Daily Express readers are the most trusting (70%) and Guardian readers are the least trusting (27%) in the United States
- Britain is less trusting of the United States than Australia. The 2019 Lowy Institute survey found 52% of Australians (+11%) trust the United States to act responsibly in the world, and 48% (-11%) are distrustful.

### Do you trust the United States to act responsibly in the world?

BFGP



### Focusing on China, we can see that:

- 21% of Britons trust China to act responsibly in the world and 79% do not. Just 2% of Britons possess 'very high' levels of trust, and 32% possess 'very high' levels of distrust
- Gender is not significant in shaping opinions on China, nor is an individual's socio-economic status or education levels
- Age, however, is: 87% of Britons aged 55 years and over are distrustful, compared to 71% of under-35s
- The most trusting Britons reside in London (28%), and the most actively distrustful are in Wales (89%) and the East of England (84%)
- Green supporters (88%) are the most distrustful, followed by Conservatives (83%) and Liberal Democrats (83%). Labour voters are somewhat less distrustful (74% to 24% trusting).
- Leave voters are more distrustful than Remain voters (84% to 77%) – and this phenomenon is replicated evenly within the two major parties
- Readers of the Financial Times and the Daily Express (both 28%) are the most trusting, and readers of the Daily Mail (16%) and The Independent (15%) are the least trusting
- Britain is less trusting of China than Australia. The 2019 Lowy Institute survey found 32% of Australians (+11%) trust China to act responsibly in the world, and 68% (-11%) are distrustful. Interestingly, these are the same gaps (+ or - 11%) as can be observed in the differences of opinion regarding the United States.

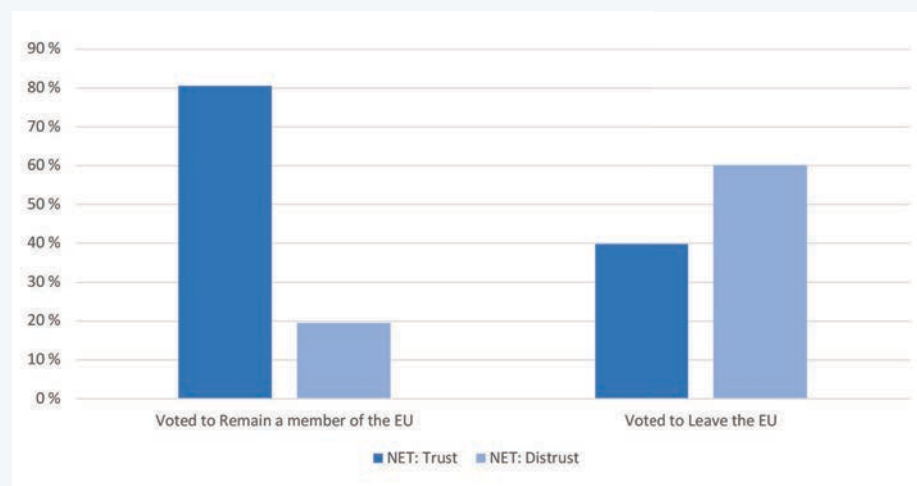
## 6. Allies, Foes and Multilateralism

### Focusing on the European Union, we can see that:

- 58% of Britons trust the European Union to act responsibly in the world, and 42% do not. 15% of Britons possess 'very high' levels of trust, and 12% possess 'very high' levels of distrust
- Women are somewhat more trusting than men (61% to 55%)
- The young are somewhat more trusting than older Britons (62% of under-35s vs 56% of 55 years and over)
- University graduates (70%) and those in the ABC1 social grade (66%) are considerably more trusting than school leavers (51%) and those in the C2DE social grade (53%)
- The highest levels of trust are in London (68%), the South East (64%) and Scotland (63%)
- The highest levels of active distrust are in the West Midlands (52%), the East Midlands (49%), and Northern Ireland (49%)
- Amongst political parties, trust in the EU is highest amongst Liberal Democrats (82%), Labour (74%) and Green voters (72%), compared to 46% of Conservatives
- The highest level of active distrust is held by UKIP voters (65%) and Conservatives (54%)
- 81% of Remain voters trust the EU, and 19% do not. Yet, 40% of Leave voters do trust the EU to act responsibly in the world, while 60% do not
- Readers of The Guardian (85%), The Independent (84%) and the Financial Times (76%) are the most likely to trust the EU to act responsibly in the world. Readers of the Daily Mail (51%) are the least likely to do so – but a majority still continue to trust the EU as an international actor.

### Do you trust the European Union to act responsibly in the world?

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### Focusing on Israel, we can see that:

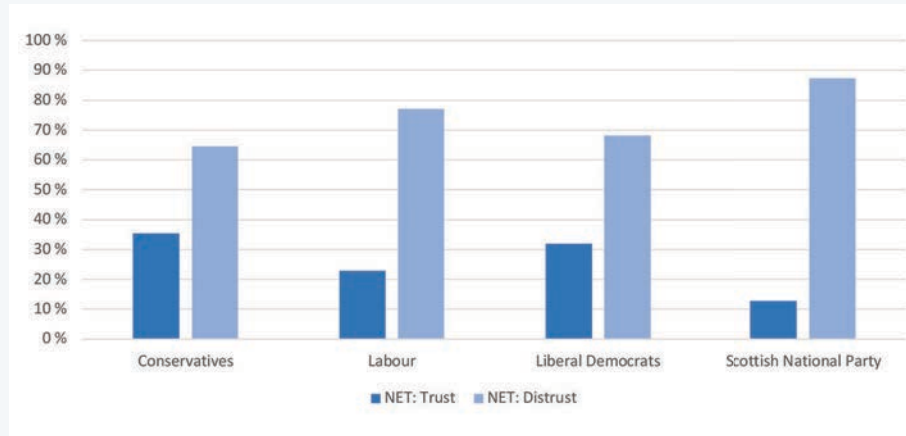
- 29% of Britons trust Israel to act responsibly in the world and 71% do not. 6% of Britons possess 'very high' levels of trust, and 25% possess 'very high' levels of distrust
- Men are somewhat more trusting than women (32% to 25%)
- Age does not appear to be a significant factor in shaping trust, and nor does socio-economic status or educational attainment
- London (36%) and the South East (34%) are distinct in their higher levels of trust. These are also areas home to the majority of the UK's Jewish population<sup>xii</sup>.
- Active distrust is highest in Wales (80%) and Yorkshire and Humberside (77%)
- Conservative (35%) and Liberal Democrat (32%) voters are the most trusting of Israel
- SNP (88%), Green (80%), and Labour (77%) voters are the most distrustful – although 65% of Conservative voters are also distrustful
- No tremendous differences can be observed between Leave and Remain voters as a whole, although Labour-Remain voters are the most distrustful as a group (81%)



## 6. Allies, Foes and Multilateralism

### Do you trust Israel to act responsibly in the world?

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- Readers of the Daily Express (52%), the Daily Telegraph (51%) and the Financial Times (50%) are the most trusting of Israel, and readers of The Guardian (25%) and The Independent (22%) are the least trusting.

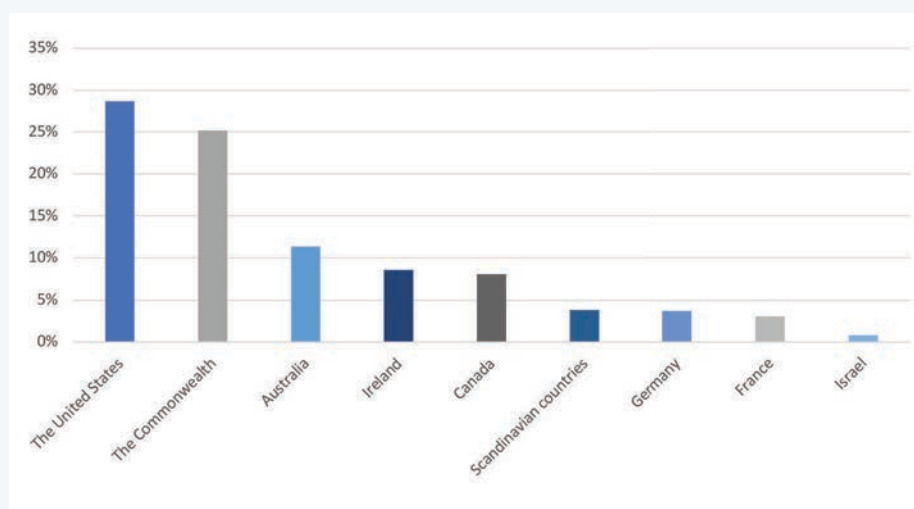
### Britain's Allies and 'Best Friends'

When asked to consider which country or union of nation could be described as Britain's 'best friend in the world', 29% choose the United States, 25% the Commonwealth, 11% Australia, 9% Ireland and 8% choose Canada. Only a fraction of Britons select the Scandinavian countries, Germany or France, and just 1% choose Israel.

When the Lowy Institute asked the same question of Australians in 2019, they found that a majority of Australians regard New Zealand as the nation's best friend (59%), followed by the United States (20%), and the United Kingdom (15%). This indicates that Australians feel

### In your opinion, which one of the following countries, or groups of countries, is the UK's best friend?

BFGP



## 6. Allies, Foes and Multilateralism

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somewhat closer to the United Kingdom than Britons do towards Australians, and that Britons are rather more connected to the United States than their Anglosphere counterparts. Moreover, Australia's unique relationship with its neighbour New Zealand is certainly not replicated with the United Kingdom's geographical neighbours in Europe.

In our 2020 survey, younger Britons are the most likely to choose the United States, at 34% of under-35s, to 22% of those aged 55 years and above. Older Britons are more likely to select the Commonwealth, at 36%, compared to just 17% of under-35s. Smaller differences can also be observed between the generations on a number of the less popular choices, with older Britons more likely to favour Australia and younger Britons more likely to favour Ireland or Germany. The primary distinction on a socio-economic level is that Britons from lower education and socio-economic backgrounds are most likely to favour the United States as Britain's 'best friend' – 36% of school leavers select the United States, compared to 22% of university graduates.

Regionally, residents in the North East are the most likely to favour the United States (39%), compared to just 21% of residents in London. Those in the South West are the most likely to preference the Commonwealth (36%), compared to just 16% of those in the East Midlands. Residents in the East Midlands are utter outliers in their preference for Australia, at 32%, compared to just 7% of residents in London and 6% in the South West.

At 88%, UKIP voters are the most ardent supporters of the United States being Britain's closest ally, followed by Conservative voters at 37%. This compares to 23% of Labour voters and just 16% of Liberal Democrats. The Commonwealth is in turn chosen by a third of Liberal Democrats, 30% of Conservatives, and 23% of Labour voters. Green voters are the most aligned with Australia (22%), followed by SNP voters (18%).

The only major distinctions in preferences that can be observed within the Leave-Remain divide are on the United States, with Leave voters much more likely to preference the special relationship than Remain voters (39% to 19%) and Ireland, with Remain voters more likely to see our neighbours as our 'best friend' than Leave voters (14% to 4%). Both Leave and Remain voters are equally likely to regard the Commonwealth favourably.

Turning to newspaper readership, once again, it is attitudes towards the United States which are most polarising. Readers of the Daily Express (50%) and The Sun (40%) are uniquely favourable to the United States, with readers of The Guardian (20%) the least enthusiastic. Readers of the Daily Telegraph (32%) and the Daily Mail (30%) are the most likely to have selected The Commonwealth as the UK's 'best friend' and closest ally.

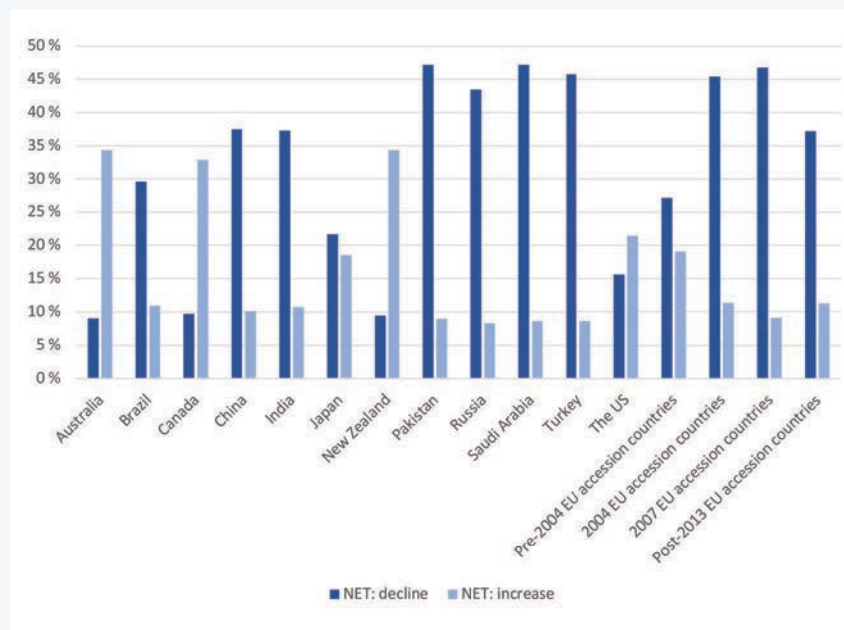
# Immigration

## Preferences for Immigration Source Countries

Our survey asked Britons to identify their preferences in immigration levels from a diverse range of source countries. Examining the data as a whole, we cannot see any indication that a majority of Britons would support an increase in immigration from any nation whatsoever – reinforcing the emphasis on a reduction in overall figures.

**From which nations would you be willing to accept increased numbers of immigrants coming to live/work in the UK?**

BFGP



That said, it is clear that there are nations from which immigration would be received more favourably than others. Around a third of Britons – and we can imagine that these are a consistent group of respondents – support increases in immigration from three Anglosphere nations: Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. These nations also have the smallest percentages of citizens advocating for a decline in figures – at around 10% each – and large pluralities of Britons, at around 40%, supporting the intakes from these nations remaining as they are.

The other nations with the largest support for increases in immigration are the United States (21%) and Japan (19%) – our two further allies from the 5 Eyes security-sharing agreement. It is interesting to note that the United States does not meet the approval of a portion of those in favour of increased immigration from Australia, Canada and New Zealand, suggesting that there is a political element also in play to shaping immigration favourability.

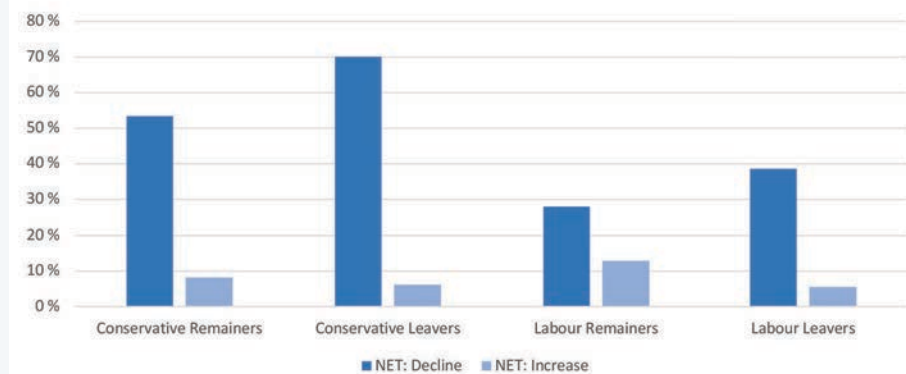
A number of nations stand out as especially problematic to Britons within the immigration context. Our survey captures the depth of desire for a reduction in immigration from Pakistan (47%), Saudi Arabia (47%), Turkey (46%), Russia (43%), and China (37%). These choices suggest

## 7. Immigration

that concerns about immigration from specific source countries are generally evoking both cultural concerns (ie. integration from Muslim-majority nations) and also geopolitical anxieties (ie. Russia and China). Interestingly, however, 36% of Britons would also like to see a reduction in Indian migration.

### Would you be willing to accept increased numbers of immigrants from Pakistan coming to live or work in the UK?

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Turning specifically to EU migration, our survey enabled Britons to differentiate between waves of freedom of movement migration, to capture the diversity of source country attitudes. In doing so, we find that Britons are considerably more favourable to migration from the pre-2004 accession nations – otherwise known as the ‘old EU’, such as France, Germany, Spain and Italy – and hold very specific concerns and hostilities towards migration from Eastern and Central Europe.

While 27% of Britons support a decline in migration from old EU nations, this rises to 45% of post-2004 Central and Eastern European nations (ie. Poland and Hungary), and 47% for Romania and Bulgaria – matching the highest levels of immigration concerns of any source country overall. Moreover, a fifth of Britons support an increase in immigration from old EU nations, similar to the levels of support received by the United States. These distinctions emphasise the importance of differentiation between member states in the public and political discussion around EU immigration.

Overall, we see that citizens’ concerns about immigration coalesce most acutely around Muslim-majority nations, and Central and Eastern European member states. These findings suggest that immigration attitudes are shaped first and foremost by both a preference for higher-skilled migration, and a strong degree of social integration into the ‘British way of life’<sup>xiii</sup>.

### Turning to the demographic distinctions behind these preferences, a number of interesting findings include:

- Conservative voters are the most likely to support an active increase in immigration from Australia, at 44%, compared to 29% of Labour voters. This is partly driven by Conservative-Leave voters, as those who voted to leave the European Union are more amenable to increasing Australian migration than those who voted to Remain.
- Older Britons are more than twice as likely as younger Britons to support a decline in immigration from China, at 53% to 24% of under-35s. Similar distinctions are observed between Conservative and Labour voters (51% decline to 23%). Londoners are also

## 7. Immigration

distinctly relaxed about Chinese immigration, with only 23% seeking a reduction, compared to 44% of those in Yorkshire or the North West.

- Socio-economic status appears to be more important in shaping the degree of hostility towards source countries that top the list of preferences for a decline in immigration levels – for example, 54% of school leavers advocate a reduction in immigration from Pakistan, compared to 38% of university graduates
- White Britons are more likely to support increased immigration from Australia than BAME Britons (32% to 22%) – with similar preferences exhibited towards two of the other Anglosphere nations, Canada and New Zealand. They are also much more likely to seek a decline in immigration from Muslim-majority nations, such as Pakistan (52% of White Britons to 14% of BAME Britons).
- Similar age, geographical and party-political distinctions can be observed in the attitudes towards Indian immigration – despite many of these Britons also being the most supportive of the Commonwealth as an institution and an ally. It appears that these demographics consistently support the reduction of all immigration.
- One exception can be found in attitudes towards American immigration, for which it is Labour voters who are somewhat more likely to support a decline in immigration (18% to 15% of Conservatives)
- Support for a decline in migration from Pakistan, and the other nations with the most widespread support for a lower intake (ie. Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Romania), is highest amongst older Britons (66%), those in the North East, North West and East of England (all 53%), amongst Conservative voters (67%), and Leave voters (63%) – rising to 70% of Conservative-Leave voters. They are also more likely to read the Daily Telegraph (66%) or the Daily Express (65%).
- Daily Telegraph (46%), Daily Mail and Daily Express (both 41%) and readers are the most likely to support immigration from Australia – with similar patterns observed for Canada and New Zealand.

### Attitudes Towards Immigration

	Net: Agree	Net: Disagree
The UK's population is already too high	62%	13%
Overall, immigration has a positive impact on the UK's economy	44%	25%
Immigrants strengthen the country because of their hard work and talents	47%	22%
Accepting immigration from many different countries makes the UK stronger	41%	29%
Immigrants are a burden on our social welfare system	44%	29%
Immigrants take jobs away from other Britons	37%	35%

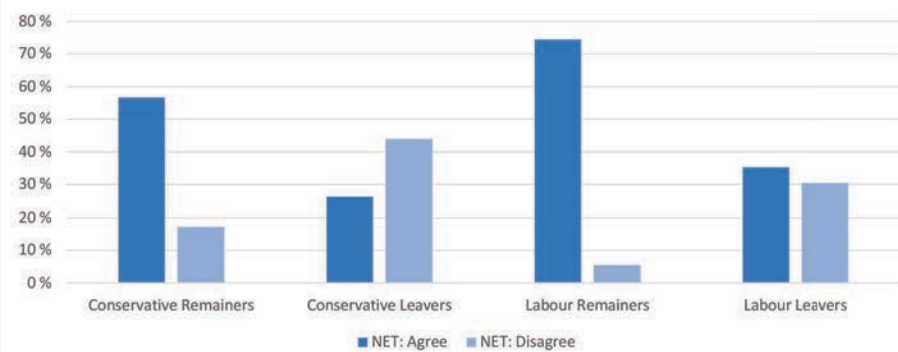
Our survey presented Britons with a series of statements about immigration, some positive and some negative, to capture the nuances in public opinion to this complex issue. Overall, we found that Britons were more likely to agree with all the statements – whether positive or negative – than disagree, and despite the sense of acute polarisation around immigration, relatively large portions of the population, around a quarter to a third of Britons, were ambivalent.

The only majority position we found is for the statement, 'The UK's population is already too high', which 62% of Britons agreed with, and 13% disagreed. Nonetheless, large pluralities also agreed with each of the other statements – both challenging and supportive to immigration.

## 7. Immigration

Do you agree with the following statement: 'Overall, immigration has a positive impact on the UK economy'

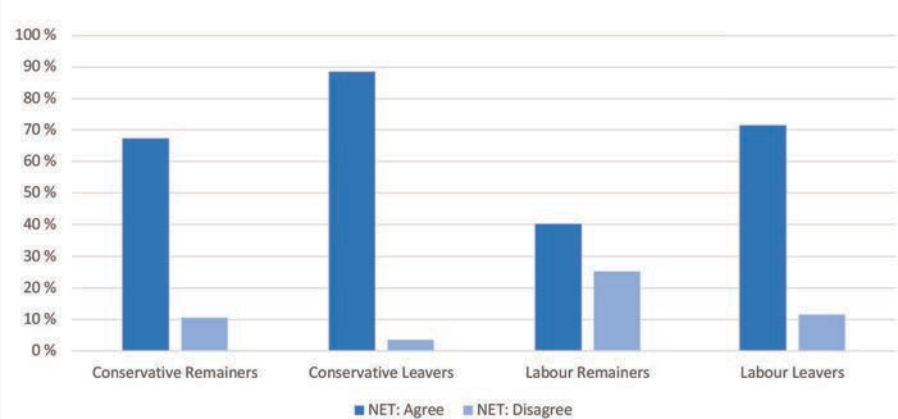
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The most contested statement, and the one inciting the greatest degree of polarisation, was the suggestion that immigrants 'take away jobs from other Britons', which garnered 37% of Britons in agreement, to 35% actively in disagreement. These findings indicate that the issue of border control itself is the most potent force underpinning attitudes towards immigration, with views on the economic and social impacts of immigration much more disputed and less salient.

Do you agree with the following statement: 'The UK's population is already too high'

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**Looking individually at the statements, we can observe that:**

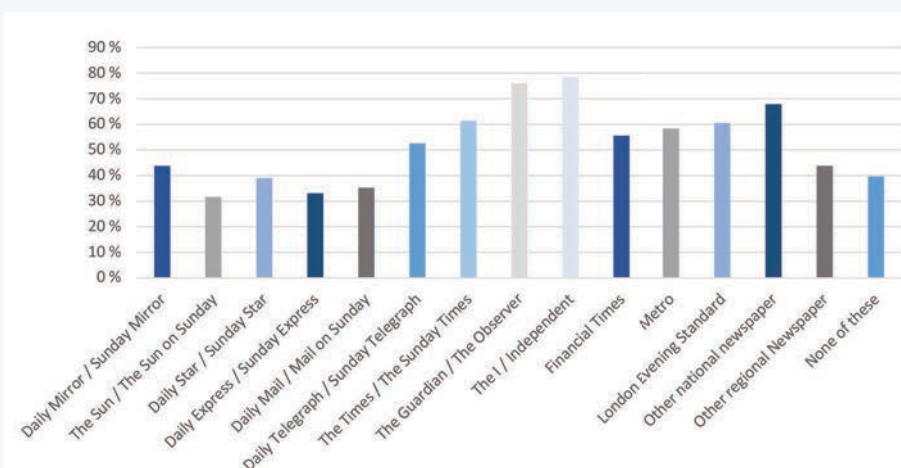
- Older Britons are consistently the most negative towards immigration. 72% of Britons aged 55 years and over believe the UK's population is too high, compared to 48% of under-35s.
- Britons from lower socio-economic grades (65%) and without qualifications (69%) are the most likely to believe that the UK's population is too high, compared to those from higher social grades (55%) and with university degrees (48%)
- White Britons are also much more likely to be sensitive towards immigration than BAME Britons (65% to 29%)
- Residents in the East of England, the North East and the South West are the most hostile to immigration, and residents in Scotland and London are the most positive

## 7. Immigration

- Londoners are most likely to recognise a positive economic contribution from immigration (59%), and those in the North West and Yorkshire (both 38%) are the least likely to. Just 27% of Londoners believe migrants are a burden on the welfare system, compared to 51% in the East of England.
- The gap in perspectives between Labour and Conservative voters is substantial. 84% of Conservative voters in 2019 believe the UK's population is too high, compared to 47% of Labour voters. A similar gap can be seen between Leave and Remain voters.
- For this reason, Labour-Leave voters are much more aligned on the issue of immigration to Conservative voters, than Labour-Remain voters
- Conservative-Remain voters are convinced by the economic arguments for immigration, and also recognise migrants' hard work and talent. On both of these points, they diverge from their Leave-voting counterparts in the Party, with 57% recognising immigration's positive contribution to the economy, and 62% believing migrants' hard work and talent strengthens the nation, compared to just 26% and 31% of Conservative-Leave voters respectively.
- The question as to whether migrants are a burden on the welfare system presents one of the starkest gaps between Conservative (65%) and Labour (22%) voters. Just 14% of Labour-Remain voters agree with this statement.
- Conservative-Leave voters in 2019 are the most likely to believe that migrants take jobs away from other Britons, at 61%. This narrative has often been thought to be more strongly associated with Labour-Leave voters, who tended to be most exposed to wage competition at the lower end of the jobs market. The higher degree of salience for this question may reflect the deeper penetration of negative opinion towards immigration across all dimensions, held by Conservative-Leave voters, and also the movement of former Labour-Leave voters to the Conservative Party in 2019.
- Readers of the Daily Mail (77%) are the most likely to believe the UK's population is too high, followed by the Daily Express (73%) and the Daily Mirror (70%). Readers of the Guardian (40%), the Financial Times (40%) and The Independent (37%) are considerably less likely to believe this. These trends, and the scale of the chasm between readerships, remain consistent or in the exact inverse throughout the positive and negative statements.
- It should be noted, however, that despite the polarisation on immigration attitudes around newspaper consumption, relatively substantial groups of readers across all papers do recognise the positive influence of immigration on Britain – most convincingly on the question as to whether migrants' hard work and talents strengthen the nation. Questions regarding migrants' economic contribution, and the value of diversity, are less able to incite a degree of baseline consensus.

**Those that agree that immigration has a positive impact on the UK economy, by newspapers read within the last month**

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## 7. Immigration

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Comparing these findings to the Lowy Institute's 2019 survey presents a mixed picture. Britons are considerably less positive about the benefits of immigration than Australians, although they are less likely to also actively agree with negative statements, and are less alarmed about population growth. Overall, it appears that the strength of feeling in Britain about immigration, while substantial, is less intense than in Australia, with weaker coalitions of support and opposition and a higher degree of ambivalence.

	United Kingdom		Australia	
	Net: Agree	Net: Disagree	Net: Agree	Net: Disagree
Our population is already too high*	62%	13%	71%	29%
Overall, immigration has a positive impact on our economy	44%	25%	67%	32%
Immigrants strengthen the country because of their hard work and talents	47%	22%	65%	34%
Accepting immigration from many different countries makes our country stronger	41%	29%	62%	37%
Immigrants are a burden on our social welfare system	44%	29%	48%	50%
Immigrants take jobs away from other citizens	37%	35%	40%	59%

*\*Note that Lowy's 2019 survey stated, 'Australian cities are already too crowded'.*



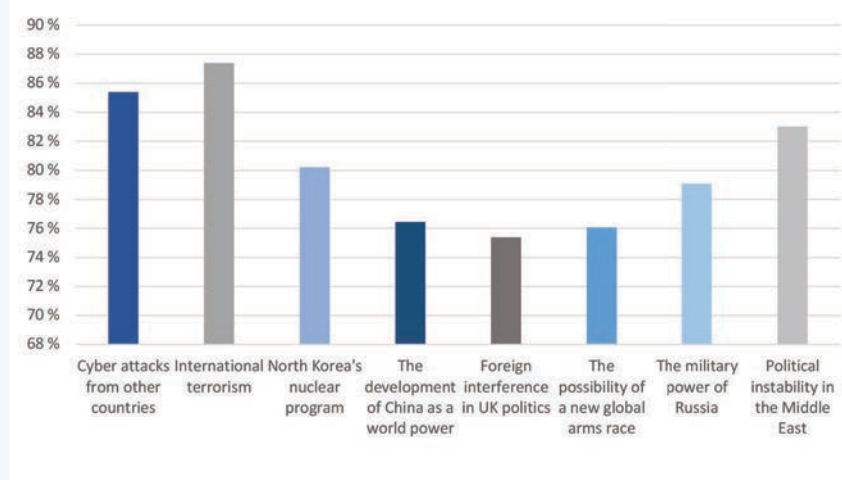
# Perceptions of Global Threats

## Geopolitical and Security Threats

Our survey presented Britons with a range of potential and active threats across two areas, and asked them to assess how 'critical' these threats are to the UK. The first collection of potential threats pertain to geopolitical and security issues.

**Do you see the following possible security/defence threats to the vital interests of the UK as a critical threat, an important but not critical threat, or not a threat at all? (Net: threat)**

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The findings show that a majority of Britons believe that international terrorism is a critical threat, and also a large plurality classify cyber-attacks from other countries (47%), political instability in the Middle East (42%) and North Korea's nuclear programme (42%) as critical threats. Significant segments of the population also see these three threats as 'important', if not critical, and hence it is only a very small fraction of Britons – around 10-15% overall – who do not regard these issues as worthy of concern.

A considerably smaller, but still significant, proportion of Britons also regard Russia's military power (33%), the possibility of a new global arms race (33%), the rise of China as a world power (28%) and foreign interference in British politics (28%) as critical threats to Britain. While near-majorities or large pluralities of Britons also regard these as 'important', overall, around 20-25% of the population do not see these developments as worthy of any concern.

These findings suggest that cyber-attacks and terrorism – both with the potential to bear direct consequences for Britain – as well as the long-standing conflict in the Middle East, and North Korea's unpredictable nuclear activities, are prioritised as more present concerns for Britons than other changing dynamics in the world order. Nonetheless, when the responses identifying all of these potential threats as either 'critical' or 'important' are taken together, it is also clear that Britons are carrying a high degree of anxiety about global issues with them on a day-to-day basis. Through this lens, the world is clearly a complex and potentially dangerous place, fraught with risks and danger.

## 8. Perceptions of Global Threats

### Examining the demographic distinctions on these issues, we can see that:

- Older Britons are more likely to regard every threat as more 'critical' than younger Britons, with the exception of foreign interference in UK politics, which is of shared concern across the generations
- The gap in threat perception is larger between school leavers and university graduates than between ABC1 and C2DE social grades. School leavers are more likely to see almost every security and defence issue – whether international terrorism, North Korea's nuclear programme, or the rise as China – as a 'critical' threat than university graduates. This raises questions about the relationship between socio-economic status and personal security, and perceptions of national security. The distinct exception to this trend is foreign interference in UK politics, which university graduates are more concerned about.
- Large perception gulfs also exist between White Britons and BAME Britons. For example, on the issue of international terrorism, 55% of White Britons believe this is a 'critical threat', compared to just 23% of BAME Britons. This trend carries forth across all security and defence-related threats.
- The East Midlands and London are distinctly less concerned than other areas of the UK with various geopolitical threats. The very different profiles of these regions and their broader attitudes towards foreign policy suggests that their mutual disinterest is motivated by very different forces. In the East Midlands, it appears to be driven by their broader degree of disengagement with politics and foreign affairs, while in London, it is more likely to reflect the youthful population and the more relaxed attitudes towards globalisation and international engagement.
- Conservative voters are broadly much more concerned about these geopolitical threats than Labour voters – perhaps also reflecting their heightened levels of knowledge and interest in global affairs. The one exception is foreign interference in UK politics, which appears to have become a partisan issue, seen as a critical threat by a larger share of Labour voters.
- While Leave voters tend to be less interested and engaged in foreign affairs, they are consistently more likely to identify global developments and dynamics as 'critical threats', suggesting they regard the world at large as a more threatening and fearful place
- Examining the perceptions of threats amongst newspaper readers, we can see a degree of variation across each of the security threats; however, the most pronounced are evident on the issue of international terrorism. 67% of Daily Express readers describe this as a critical threat, compared to 37% of Guardian readers and 32% of Financial Times readers.

Comparing Britons' perceptions of security and defence threats with Australia and the United States, as captured by the Lowy Institute and the Chicago Council's annual surveys, we can see that Britons are almost universally less concerned about all types of risks. This may reflect the nature of broadcast media and/or political environments in Australia and the United States, perhaps geared towards a more oppositional, aggressive voice conducive to exacerbating anxieties and amplifying the perceptions of threats. The relative ambivalence of Britons on these issues may also reflect the reduced prominence they have been afforded in national discourse over recent years.

	United Kingdom	Australia	United States
Cyber-attacks from other countries	47%	62%	77%
International terrorism	53%	61%	69%
North Korea's nuclear programme	42%	60%	61%
The rise of China as a world power	28%		42%
Foreign interference in national politics and elections	28%	49%	53%
The possibility of a new global arms race	33%		48%
The military power of Russia	33%		43%
Political instability in the Middle East	42%		38%

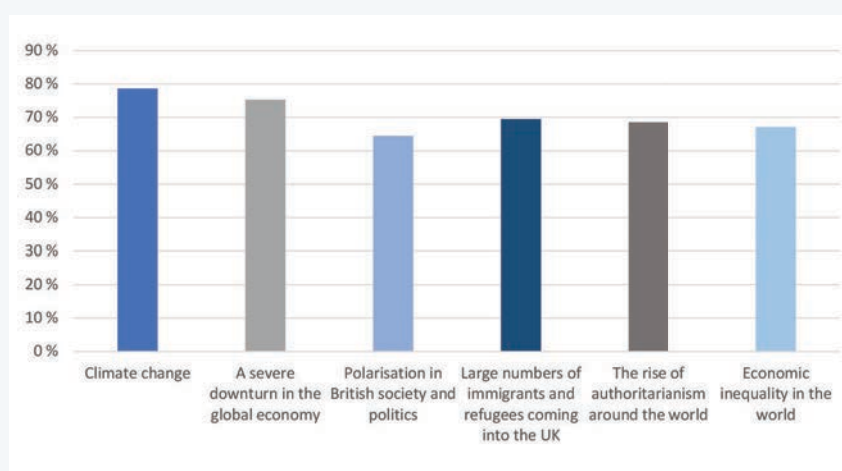
## 8. Perceptions of Global Threats

### Democratic, Social and Economic Threats

It is striking to compare the findings of citizens' assessments of the democratic, social and economic threats alongside the geopolitical threats presented above. What is clear is that climate change is the only issue that conjures a clear consensus of its nature as a critical threat, and that other issues are regarded as less severe, dangerous and/or pressing than the more security-based or geopolitical threats. These findings are helpful in understanding how citizens prioritise and perceive of risks in a democratic context – with those outside, and particularly the 'nuts and bolts' of defence risks – assessed to be more concerning than those pertaining to 'softer' issues of the economic and political spheres.

**Do you see the following possible threats to the vital interests of the UK as a critical threat, an important but not critical threat, or not a threat at all? (Net: threat)**

BFPG



**Nonetheless, we can see that some of these more domestically focused issues are still ranked as important, if not critical, concerns for a majority of Britons.**

- 69% of Britons regard the risk of 'large numbers of refugees and migrants coming to Britain' as a critical (36%) or important (33%) threat
- 75% of Britons regard a severe downturn in the economy as a critical (26%) or important (49%) threat
- 69% see the rise of authoritarianism as a critical (27%) or important (42%) threat
- 65% regard polarisation in politics as a critical (20%) or important (45%) threat
- 68% regard economic inequality in the world as a critical (24%) or important (44%) threat.

The only two issues which a significant group of citizens do not regard as an important threat are 'large numbers of refugees and migrants coming to Britain', dismissed by 22% of Britons, and global economic inequality, dismissed by 20% of Britons.

#### Examining the demographics underpinning these attitudes:

- Women are more likely than men (57% to 49%) to regard climate change as a critical risk. Perhaps unexpectedly, older Britons are also more likely to see climate change as critical (58% of 55-and-overs to 49% of under-35s).
- Men are more concerned than women (40% to 33%) about large numbers of refugees and migrants coming to Britain. Older Britons are also more concerned about this than their younger counterparts (47% of 55-and-overs to 28% of under-35s).

## 8. Perceptions of Global Threats

- Once again, educational attainment is more important than social grade in shaping perceptions of risk – however, on these democratic, social and political risks, we can see that the situation is in stark inverse from the trend pertaining to defence and security risks. As such, university graduates are more likely to see every issue within this section as a greater threat than school leavers – for example, on climate change, which is seen as a critical risk by 57% of graduates and 45% of those without further qualifications.
- The one exception is the ‘threat’ posed by the potential for large numbers of migrants and refugees arriving in the UK, which school leavers (41%) are almost twice as likely to perceive as a critical risk than university graduates (22%)
- White Britons are more likely to see mass migration and climate change as critical risks than BAME Britons, who in turn are more concerned about political polarisation in the UK
- Labour and Remain voters are the most concerned about climate change, rising economic inequality, polarisation in British society, and the rise of authoritarianism around the world
- Conservative-Remain voters are distinctly unconcerned about the rise of authoritarianism, with only 15% regarding this as a critical threat, compared to 25% of Conservative-Leave voters, 30% of Labour-Leave voters and 43% of Labour-Remain voters
- 55% of Leave voters see the possibility of large numbers of refugees and migrants coming to Britain as a critical threat, compared to 18% of Remain voters
- Residents in the North East are the most likely to describe a severe downturn in the global economy as a critical risk (35%). They are also much more concerned about polarisation in British society (32%, compared to just 12% in the East Midlands), and influxes of migrants and refugees (47%, compared to 27% in London). It appears that residents in this region hold a higher degree of agitation about social, political and economic issues overall.
- The greatest degree of polarisation between the readers of national newspapers can be observed on the issues of climate change and mass migration. Three-quarters of The Guardian readers and 71% of Independent readers regard climate change as a critical threat, compared to 45% of the Daily Mail readers, 44% of The Sun readers, and 44% of Financial Times readers. On mass migration, 50% of Daily Express readers, 43% of Daily Mail and 42% of Daily Telegraph readers all consider this to be a critical threat. Just 21% of Financial Times readers, 17% of The Guardian's readers and 13% of The Independent's readers agree.

Once again, when the UK findings of our survey are compared with the results of the Lowy Institute and the Chicago Council, we can see that Britons are less actively concerned about social and political risks than their Australian and American counterparts. Many of these issues have been prominent in the political environments of all three nations over recent years, so the relative lack of salience suggests that there is a kind of alchemy in the lifestyle and information environment in the United Kingdom that provides a ‘securitising’ effect for citizens.

	United Kingdom	Australia	United States
Climate change	53%	64%	54%
A severe downturn in the global economy	26%	51%	
Polarisation in our society and politics	20%		49%
Large numbers of immigrants and refugees coming into the country	36%	36%	43%
The rise of authoritarianism around the world	27%		42%
Global economic inequality	24%		29%

# Global Britain, Trade and Military Interventionism

## Meaning of Global Britain

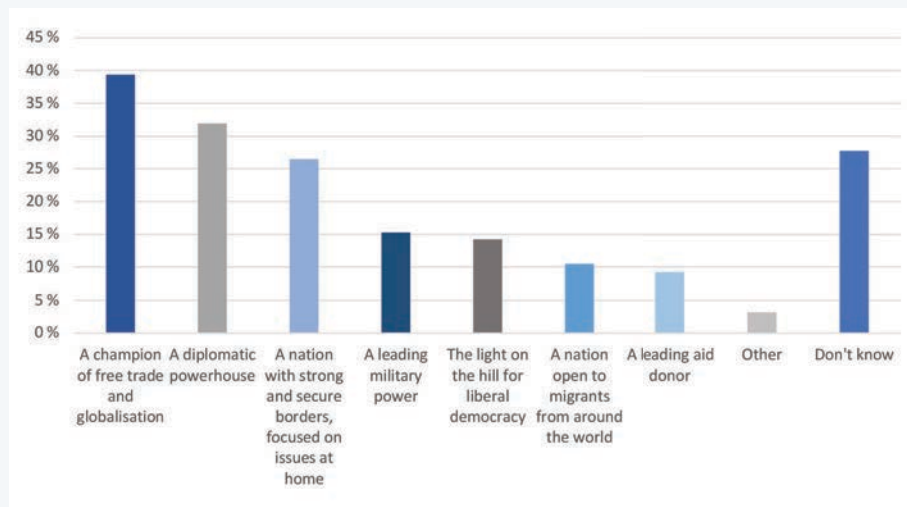
The slogan of 'Global Britain' has persisted since the European Referendum campaign in 2016 – a unique legacy from the Vote Leave campaign, which translated into the Theresa May premiership, and has been retained and bolstered by Prime Minister Johnson. The UK Government has defined 'Global Britain' as "about reinvesting in our relationships, championing the rules-based international order and demonstrating that the UK is open, outward-looking and confident on the world stage"<sup>xiv</sup>; however, almost four years since the Referendum, and with the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy further delaying the articulation of its priorities, it remains unclear as to how these ambitions will be achieved in practice. Moreover, the task of building consensus for its foreign policy vision still awaits the Government – emphasising the importance of understanding the preferences of the British public, and the potential obstacles to securing their buy-in and support.

Our survey asked citizens to set out their own understanding of the meaning of Global Britain, and what they hope the government will achieve from the strategy. Overall, the most popular understanding of 'Global Britain' was for the UK to become 'a champion of free trade and globalisation', selected by 39% of Britons. This was followed by the notion of Britain as 'a diplomatic powerhouse, brokering negotiations in Britain's interests and helping to facilitate international cooperation on shared challenges', selected by 32% of Britons. The relative popularity of these responses indicates that the most active support can be found for the notion of Britain maintaining a position of being both economically open and diplomatically present.

The third most popular response, however, may be regarded as more controversial. More than a quarter of Britons indicated that their understanding of Global Britain is 'A nation with strong and secure borders, focused on issues at home'. While enforcing tougher and more restrictive border control and immigration policies is by no means incompatible with other areas of global engagement, it is difficult to reconcile the preference for being 'focused on issues at home' with Britain also maintaining its status as an active global participant.

In your opinion, what does it mean for the UK to be 'a truly Global Britain'?

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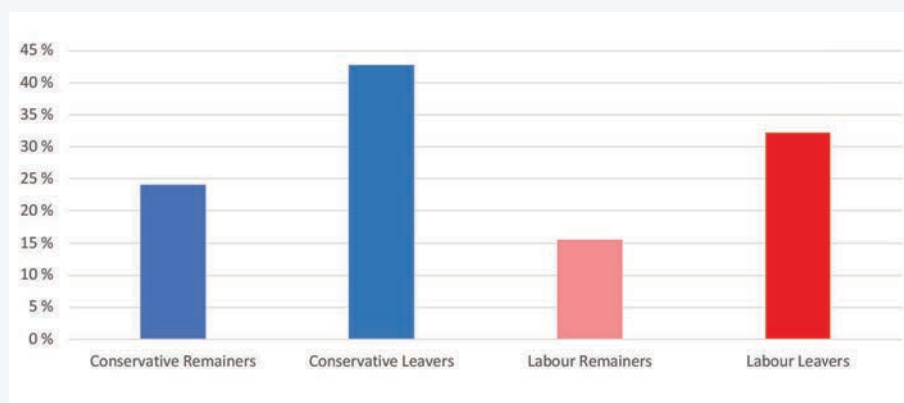
## 9. Global Britain, Trade and Military Interventionism

Only 15% of Britons indicated they would like Global Britain to facilitate the UK become 'A leading military power, able to defend Britain's security and also intervene in conflicts abroad', and – despite its centrality to the 'values-based' approach emphasised by the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary – just 14% of Britons see the Global Britain project as positioning Britain as 'The light on the hill for liberal democracy, promoting our liberal values across the world'. Less popular still (10%) is the notion of Global Britain signalling that Britain is 'A nation open to migrants from around the world', and the least popular suggestion for Global Britain is that it would mean Britain maintaining its status as 'A leading aid donor, helping to alleviate global poverty'.

It is important to note that 28% of Britons were unsure about what Global Britain really means – and, significantly, no substantial gender divide could be observed on this question, unlike other issues. In fact, the only marginal differences we observe between the genders is that women were four percentage points more likely than men to want to see Global Britain as a project to secure the nation's borders and focus attention inward.

**Global Britain means: 'A nation with strong and secure borders, focused on issues at home'**

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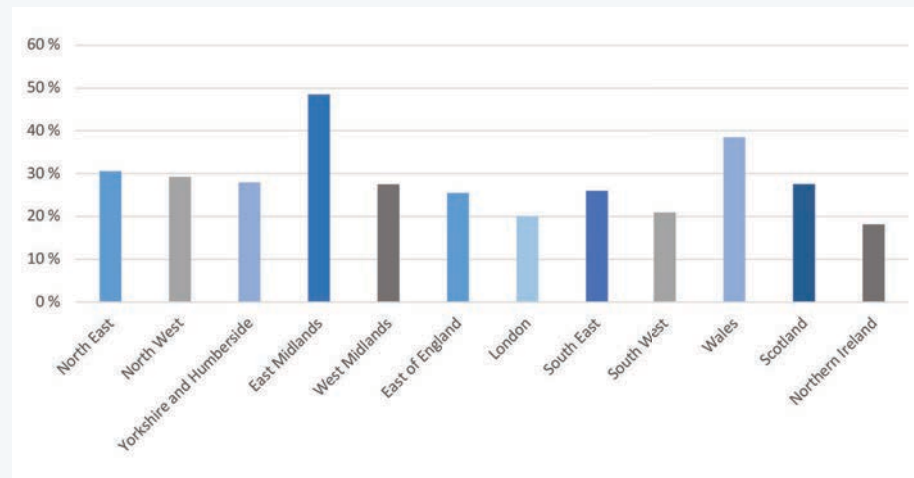
Nonetheless, important distinctions are evident amongst age groups. Younger Britons are much more likely to be unsure of their positions (37% of under-35s vs. 21% of 55-and-overs). Older Britons are also more likely to support Britain being a champion of free trade and globalisation (54% to 23% of under-35s), a diplomatic powerhouse (41% to 20% of under-35s), a nation with strong and secure borders (34% to 17% of under-35s), and a leading military power (19% to 12% of under-35s). No generational differences are observed on the question as to whether Britain should be a 'light on the hill' for liberal democracy, although this garners relatively weak support across the board. Younger Britons are more favourable to the idea of Britain being open to migrants (14%) and a leading aid donor (13%) than older Britons (8 and 6% respectively).

Considering the socio-economic dynamics at play, we can see that educational attainment plays the strongest role in shaping perceptions on this question. School leavers are the most enthusiastically behind the government's championing of free trade (42%, to 35% of graduates), but they are dramatically more likely to also support the idea of a Britain focused at home (33%, to 18% of graduates), and are only a third as likely to support a strong defence role for the UK (9%, to 22% of graduates). Britons without further qualifications are also half as inclined to support values-based leadership roles for the United Kingdom in the world.

## 9. Global Britain, Trade and Military Interventionism

What does 'Global Britain' mean? % Don't Know/Unsure

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Support for Britain as a 'champion of free trade' is strongest in the South West (49%), Northern Ireland (45%), Wales (43%) and the South East (42%), and weakest in the East Midlands (26%) and Scotland (34%). Residents in the South West (40%), Northern Ireland (40%), London (36%) and Yorkshire and Humberside (35%), are the most likely to want to see Britain as a 'diplomatic powerhouse', with those in the North East (23%) and the East Midlands (19%) the least likely to support this. Significant regional disparities can also be observed around preferences for Britain to have 'strong and secure borders' and be 'focused at home', with support for this idea most robust in the South West (34%), Yorkshire and the Humberside (31%), Northern Ireland (34%), and the West Midlands (30%), and weakest in London (18%), the East Midlands (17%) and the North East (15%).

To help understand the regional distinctions in preferences for Global Britain, it is important to note the tremendous disparities in the proportion of citizens in each region who are unsure about their views on Global Britain, or what this project could mean. While, for example, in London, just a fifth (20%) of residents are unsure, this figure rises to 31% of residents in the North East, 39% in Wales, and a staggering 49% of residents in the East Midlands. These findings indicate the enormous task ahead of communicating and build consensus around the Global Britain strategy, and ensuring it is truly inclusive across the UK's constituent nations and regions.

Turning to the political dimensions of the 'Global Britain' vision, Conservative voters are the most likely to favour the UK becoming a champion of free trade (54%), compared to 37% of Liberal Democrats, 33% of Labour voters and 31% of SNP voters. Conservative and Green voters are tied in their support for Britain as a diplomatic powerhouse, at 44%, compared to 28% of Liberal Democrats and 25% of Labour voters. While 22% of Conservative voters support the notion of the UK being a leading military power, just 14% of Liberal Democrat and SNP voters, and 10% of Labour voters, share this preference.

Overall, the story is of Labour voters being considerably more inclined to support values-based and development roles for Global Britain than their Conservative counterparts, and Conservative voters supporting both 'traditional' core roles and responsibilities (ie. defence, diplomacy) and also being more isolationist in their preferences. For example, 38% of Conservative voters believe that Global Britain means the UK having 'strong and secure



## 9. Global Britain, Trade and Military Interventionism

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borders, focused on issues at home', while only 19% of Labour voters and 16% of Liberal Democrats share this vision. Labour voters are also considerably more likely, possibly because of their youthful age profile, and also because it is a 'Conservative-led project', to be unsure about the Global Britain project, at 29%, to 15% of Conservative voters.

Examining the intersection between party-political and referendum-based affiliations and identities, we can see that Leave voters who supported both the Conservative Party and the Labour Party in 2019 were more likely to champion free trade, despite the fact that historically these groups were some of the least likely to do so<sup>xv</sup>. This suggests that, when framed as part of the 'Global Britain' project, positioned as a dividend for Brexit voters, opposition to free trade is considerably diminished amongst traditional opponents, and considerably increased amongst traditional supporters.

These trends are also captured in newspaper readership. We can see that readers of the Daily Express (61%), the Daily Telegraph (54%) and the Daily Mail (53%) are the most supportive of Britain as a free-trade champion, with readers of The Guardian (38%) and The Independent (30%) ascribing the weakest degree of support – suggesting that, in the context of 'Global Britain', trade is now seen entirely in political terms. Similar trends are observed regarding the notion of Britain as a diplomatic powerhouse, although in somewhat more muted terms. Support for Britain being focused at home is strongest amongst Daily Mail and Daily Express readers (both 36%), and weakest amongst readers of the Financial Times (19%), The Guardian (12%), and The Independent (9%). Readers of these three newspapers are in turn twice or three-times as likely to advocate for a values-based role for the UK in the world.

A number of other interesting observations can be made. Firstly, we can see that, on the question as to whether Global Britain should mean the UK acting as a leading military power, Labour-Remain voters are distinct outliers to the rest of the population in their almost complete rejection of this prospect – with Labour-Leave voters joining Conservative Leave and Remain voters in a relatively weak (~20%) but nonetheless significant degree of support.

Secondly, on the question as to whether Global Britain should be a project of strong borders and a domestic focus, we can see that Leave voters in the Labour Party are more closely aligned in their views with those in the Conservative Party, than in the Labour Party – and the same is true of Remain voters in the Conservative Party, who share more in common on this issue with Labour-Remain voters. The same phenomenon can be observed in the question of whether Britain should become 'a light on the hill for liberal democracy', and on the more values-based questions around being open to migrants and being a leading aid donor, which appear to pull on the Leave-Remain axis more heavily than party affiliation.

These findings indicate that the Global Britain project has both the potential to unite the Conservative Party, and other Leave voters, but also to emphasise the polarisation that has emerged within the social fabric of the nation since the Referendum. In particular, considering the Conservative voters who endorsed the Prime Minister's mandate to deliver the Global Britain agenda, we can see that, beyond trade, stark divides exist in preferences as to the nature and scope of our role in the world, and the priorities we should emphasise in our international activities.



### Britain's Engagement in World Affairs

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To better understand the degree to which Britons' instincts lean towards active engagement in the world, or towards isolationism, and the circumstances in which citizens might be persuaded towards either position, our survey asked whether 'It would be best for the future of the country if the UK...' always, sometimes, or never, took an active part in world affairs. Overall, we find that 26% of Britons would like the UK to always take an active role, 66% would like the UK to sometimes take an active role, and 8% would like the UK to never take an active role in world affairs.

In its 2019 survey, the Chicago Council found that 69% of Americans believed it would be best for America to always take part in world affairs, with a substantial 30% of the population believing America should 'stay out of world affairs'. While the opportunity for a more nuanced response regarding conditional support for engagement was not explicitly given to American respondents, if we take these findings on face value, it appears the isolationist sentiment in the United States is considerably stronger (+22%) than in the United Kingdom.

In our 2020 survey in Britain, men are more likely than women to favour the UK always taking an active role in world affairs (30% to 22%), while women's support is more conditional (70% to 62%). The same proportion (8%) amongst both genders supports a consistently isolationist approach. Turning to the generational differences on this issue, we can see that the support for a consistently active role is relatively even across the generations, however older Britons are somewhat more likely to favour a conditional approach (68% to 63% of under-35s) and younger Britons are more likely to favour isolationism (10% of under 55s, to 5% of over-55s).

The distinctions across the UK's regions are considerably more profound. The greatest degree of support for the UK being consistently active in the world is found in the North East, where 35% of residents support this, followed by London at 31%. The weakest support for an active and engaged UK on the world stage is in Northern Ireland (21%), the North West (22%), Yorkshire and Humberside (22%). Conditional support for the UK's active presence is highest in Wales (71%), the South East (70%) and the East of England (69%), and lowest in the East Midlands (51%). The East Midlands is exceptional in its support for an isolationist approach – a full quarter (25%) of residents here favour the UK never taking an active role in world affairs, compared to just 2% of residents in London. Other relative spikes in support for isolationism are found in Northern Ireland (13%), Yorkshire and Humberside (13%), and the North West (12%).

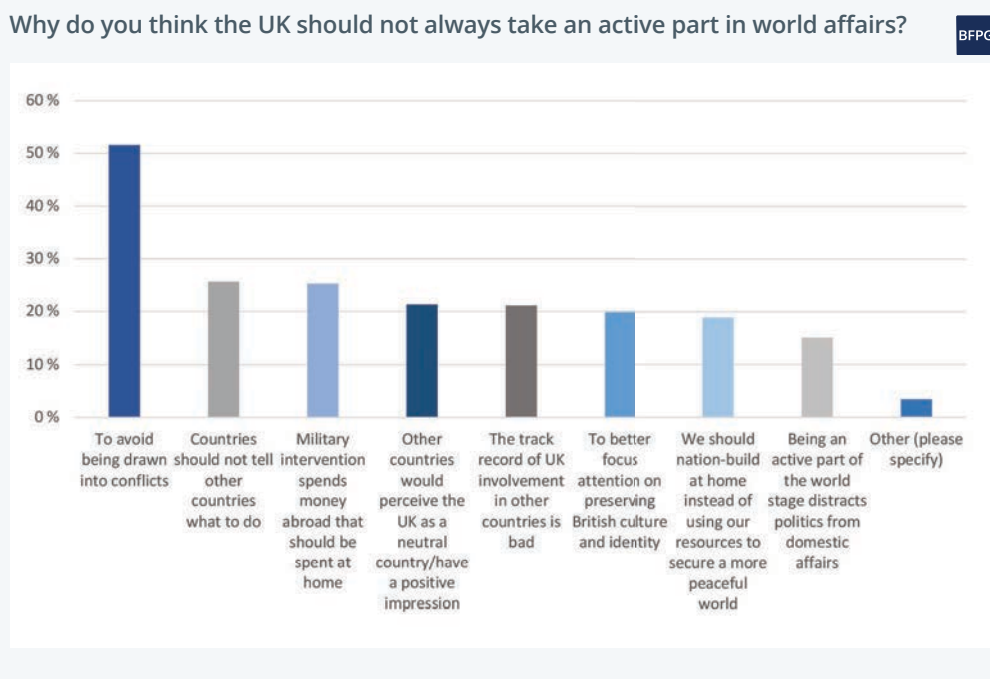
Within the political parties, the support for a consistently active and engaged UK in world affairs is highest amongst Liberal Democrat voters (38%), followed by Green voters (33%), Labour voters (28%) and Conservatives (27%). Support for isolationism is highest amongst UKIP voters (11%), with SNP voters (7%), Labour voters (6%) and Conservatives (4%) all similarly unenthusiastic. Considering the distinctions between Leave and Remain voters, we can see that neither are especially isolationist, however Remain voters are more inclined to want a consistently engaged UK (33% to 23%), while Leave voters' support is more conditional (71% to 63%). Between the two major parties, it is Labour-Leave voters in particular who are more likely to be isolationist (10% vs. 3%) of Conservative-Leave voters.

These findings capture the multifarious nature of interventionist-isolationist instincts, with the motivations behind voters' desires to withdraw or engage considerably more complex than typical narratives allow. For example, some Labour-Remain voters may wish to see Britain take a less active role in world affairs because they equate being 'active' with military interventionism, while some Conservative-Leave voters may equate being 'active' with investing large sums in aid and development programmes.

To better understand the conditionality of support for the UK's role in the world, we included a second survey question directly only at those who had not indicated their preference for

## 9. Global Britain, Trade and Military Interventionism

consistently engaged approach – so around three-quarters of the population. We asked them to explain the motivations driving their reluctance for the UK to always take an active role in world affairs. The most frequently selected response, chosen by a majority of respondents (52%) was ‘to avoid being drawn into conflicts’. The clarity in the disproportionate support for this option suggests that the legacy of the Iraq War, and unease about the fluidly evolving nature of contemporary wars and disputes, has played the largest single role in shaping isolationist instincts in the UK.



Not unrelated to this theme, we see that the second most frequently chosen option was that ‘countries should not tell other countries what to do’ (26%), followed by the argument that ‘military intervention spends money abroad that should be spent at home’ (25%). It is interesting to note that, aside from the desire to avoid being drawn into conflicts, most other options presented to respondents are received with a relatively similar degree of salience. Hence, around a fifth of respondents also raise concerns about ensuring the UK is perceived as neutral (21%), the UK’s track record of involvement in other nations (21%), the desire to better focus attention on preserving British culture (20%) and to focus on nation-building at home (19%).

The equivalence given to these positions indicates that concerns about interventionism are widespread and difficult to eradicate. It also appears that there are two fundamental strains of thinking shaping the generalised disinclination towards interventionism: an isolationist instinct compelling spending and attentions to the domestic front, and an unease and discomfort about Britain playing a leadership role in the world, given its imperial legacy.

The isolationist driver appears strongest amongst older Britons, school leavers, those in the C2DE social grade, residents in the North East, Conservative and UKIP voters, Leave voters in the 2016 EU Referendum and readers of Right-leaning newspapers. In turn, younger voters, with university degrees and/or in the ABC1 social grade, living in London, who vote for Labour or the Liberal Democrats, voted Remain in the 2016 EU Referendum, and read Left-leaning newspapers, tend to be more sensitive to the UK’s ‘track record’ of involvement in global affairs.

### Support for Military Interventionism

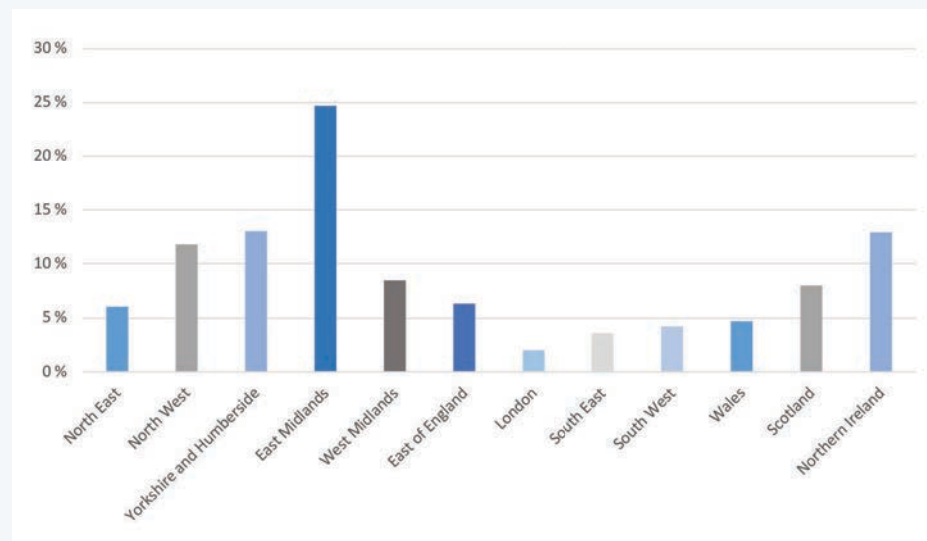
Our survey asked Britons to consider whether they support UK military interventionism, and the deployment of British troops, under any circumstances. As our previous research has shown, support for military involvement in conflicts overseas has been experiencing a steady trend of decline since the Iraq War<sup>xvi</sup>. We find that, in 2020, 62% of Britons support conditional interventionism, with 18% hardened against any circumstances, and a further 19% unsure as to their position.

Men are much more likely to favour interventionism than women, at 69% to 56%, although women are considerably more likely to be unsure – at 27% to 12% of men. Britons aged 55 years and above are also more likely to support troop deployment than younger Britons (69%, to 57% of 18-34-year-olds), somewhat less likely to actively oppose interventionism (15%, to 20% of under-55s) and also more likely to be certain of their position (17% ‘don’t know’, compared to 23% of under-35s).

Socio-economic status and educational attainment do not appear to influence views on this issue. However, White Britons are substantially more inclined to support interventionism than BAME Britons (68% to 39%), and BAME Britons are much more likely than White Britons to oppose interventionism in all scenarios (41% to 15%).

Significant regional disparities can also be observed. Residents in the South East are the most likely to support interventionism, at 71%, a dramatic gap with those in the East Midlands, at just 49%. In the East Midlands, there is also the largest degree of active opposition to interventionism, with 28% of the population saying they would not support the deployment of troops under any circumstances, followed by Scotland at 23%. Northern Ireland has the largest proportion of residents unsure as to their position, at 34%.

% who want the UK to never take an active part in world affairs



UKIP supporters are the most favourable to military intervention, at 85%, followed by Conservative voters on 78% and Liberal Democrats on 68%. A majority of Labour voters do support conditional interventionism, at 57%, although a quarter of their voters (25%) actively oppose it under all circumstances. At 48%, SNP voters are the least amenable to interventionism, with 34% of their voters in active opposition.

## 9. Global Britain, Trade and Military Interventionism

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Interestingly, Leave voters overall are more likely than Remain voters (72% to 61%) to support military interventionism, demonstrating that this form of global engagement is seen as distinct, patriotic and nationalistic compared to other areas, such as multilateralism. The interaction between the party-political and referendum axis on this question, however, provokes some curious results within the parties – with Conservative-Remain voters somewhat more likely to support interventionism than Conservative-Leave voters, and Labour-Leave voters more likely to support it than Labour-Remain voters.

Considering the relationship to newspaper readership, we see that readers of the London Evening Standard (85%), the Daily Express (84%), the Financial Times (83%), and the Daily Telegraph (83%), are the most supportive of interventionism – compared to 66% of readers of The Sun. Active opposition to interventionism in all scenarios is strongest amongst readers of The Sun (23%), the Daily Mirror (21%) and the Guardian (20%).

### Scenarios of Interventionism

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Recognising the complexities in citizens' views regarding interventionism, and the high degree of conditionality, we presented Britons who indicated that they would support interventionism in some circumstances with a range of different scenarios, to better understand the nature of their concerns about military deployment.

**Overall, we find that the greatest degree of support for interventionism relates to the scenarios of:**

- Retaliation for a direct attack on British soil (68% favour, 10% against)
- British ships and crews being seized by another state (66% favour, 12% against)
- To prevent a government from committing genocide (58% favour, 16% against); and
- If the sovereignty of British Overseas Territories, such as Gibraltar, is threatened (56% favour, 14% against).

These findings suggest that Britons are most supportive of military interventionism in circumstances where British interests and assets are directly threatened, and in scenarios where humanitarian crises have reached an untenable scale and pernicious nature.

**Weaker, but still substantial, support is also found for:**

- Conducting freedom of navigation naval operations (49% favour, 14% against)
- To support a NATO military alliance if a NATO country goes to war (49% favour, 16% against)
- To be part of an international peacekeeping mission in the Middle East (47% favour, 25% against)
- To stop Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons (47% favour, 22% against).

**The scenarios that garnered the greatest degree of contested responses are:**

- Fighting against violent extremist groups in places like Syria and Iraq (39% favour, 29% against)
- If Russia invades a NATO ally, such as Latvia or Estonia (38% favour, 26% against)
- If China invaded Taiwan and the US decided to intervene (17% favour, 46% against).

These results suggest that Britons retain a degree of interest in our military upholding its defensive, strategic and peacekeeping capacities – although the prospect of involvement in the Middle East appears to incite particular discomfort. Moreover, battles that do not feel 'our own', are unable to incite the same degree of support, suggesting that Britons would rather our military serve the nation's direct interests, rather than those of the broader Western alliance.

It is also fascinating to note that, despite the overall support for our ongoing membership of NATO, the willingness to uphold its principles – such as the Article 5 covenant on collective

## 9. Global Britain, Trade and Military Interventionism

defence, which stipulates that ‘an attack against one Ally is considered as an attack against all Allies’ – is in fact deeply contested. As such, significant work would need to be undertaken by the British Government to convince the public of the responsibility the nation holds, should such a scenario arise.

### Examining the demographic distinctions on the issue of interventionism, we can observe:

- Women are consistently more likely than men to be ‘unsure’ of their responses, with men Britons more likely to choose to both favour or reject scenarios for interventionism
- Young Britons and Labour voters are also more likely to be ‘unsure’ of their responses than older Britons, although they are also more consistently inclined to reject scenarios for interventionism
- University graduates consistently reveal themselves to be around 10 percentage points more supportive of interventionism than school leavers, with the inexplicable exception of the scenario of needing to conduct freedom of navigation operations. Similar trends are observed between ABC1 and C2DE social grades, although as ever in this survey, the gap between educational attainment exceeds that of the traditional class-based groupings.
- White Britons are consistently more likely than BAME Britons to support interventionism across all scenarios, with the gaps largest on the scenarios of defending British Overseas Territories, and fighting terrorism in the Middle East, and smallest on questions of genocide and humanitarian intervention. On the question of intervening in the Israel-Palestinian dispute, however, we see that BAME Britons are uniquely more inclined than White Britons to support interventionism.
- Residents in the East Midlands and London are frequently the most disinclined to support military interventionism, although as previously discussed, it is reasonable to assume that their motivating factors are distinct
- Conservative voters tend to support defence-based scenarios, and Labour voters tend to support humanitarian-based scenarios. The exception is around Russian military aggression, for which Labour voters are slightly more inclined to intervene.
- There is a high degree of correlation between Conservative and Leave voters on questions of interventionism, but the party-political affiliation appears to be more significant, with Conservative-Remain and Conservative-Leave voters aligning more closely than Conservative-Leave and Labour-Leave voters
- The preferences of newspaper readerships generally follow the Right-Left political axis, with readers of Left-leaning papers dramatically more supportive of humanitarian-based interventionism, and readers of Right-leading papers dramatically more supportive of defence and security-based interventionism.

	United Kingdom	Australia	United States
To stop a government from committing genocide and killing large numbers of its own people	58%	80%	
To conduct freedom of navigation naval operations	49%	60%	
To fight against violent extremist groups in Iraq and Syria	39%	50%	59%
If Russia invades a NATO ally like Latvia, Lithuania, or Estonia	38%		54%
To stop Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons	47%		70%
To be part of an international peacekeeping force to enforce a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians	47%		59%
If China invaded Taiwan and the US decided to intervene	17%	43%	38%

## 9. Global Britain, Trade and Military Interventionism

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Comparing the preferences of UK citizens to those of Americans and Australians from the Chicago Council and Lowy Institute surveys, we can see that Britons remain considerably less enthusiastic regarding interventionism across a wide variety of circumstances. While citizens' conceptions of 'worthy' scenarios are of course influenced by geography and the perception of threats likely to directly impact the national interest, we can see that similar trends are in play comparatively between the types of threats that are likely to be prioritised by citizens, but that Britons are much less inclined to muster enthusiasm and therefore their baseline level of support is always significantly lower than amongst their Australian and American counterparts. Looking specifically at the percentages in favour of intervention:

### Trade Negotiations

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The UK's decision to leave the European Union provides the opportunity, and the necessity, to strike trade deals with nations around the world. While the UK's trade policy was effectively devolved to the European Union, many Britons had not previously taken an active interest in the issue of trade, as public debates on the subject had not held a prominent role in national politics. As a consequence of the centrality of such discussions to the Brexit conversation, however, trade has become an issue of increasing concern and political salience, featuring heavily in the 2019 General Election<sup>xvii</sup>.

Much of the media reporting and political debate around trade has emphasised the potential risks that Free Trade Agreements can hold for the maintenance of standards in food, animal welfare, the environment and employment rights. Our survey gave Britons the opportunity to emphasise the issues of greatest concern for them as the UK embarks upon its first wave of free trade negotiations.

Citizens were given the opportunity to select up to three concerns, and the results indicate that there is no clear consensus around the single most troubling aspect of free trade negotiations, with concerns rather spread widely and thin across a vast array of issues. Just 12% of Britons said they had 'no concerns', and 15% were unsure, indicating that a clear majority of the population do hold some degree of anxiety, but the presentation of a relatively broad set of issues enabled respondents to split their focus and therefore dilute the power of any single issue.

Overall, the most frequently cited concern was the protections of standards of health services (29%), reflecting the extensive public debate around whether the NHS would be 'on the table' in trade negotiations. This was followed closely by concerns around upholding workers' rights (26%), protecting standards of food and beverages (26%), environmental protections (22%) and animal welfare (19%). Concerns about job security, loss of revenue for small firms, and wage competition, were relatively weak, only attracting the interest of around 10% of the population.

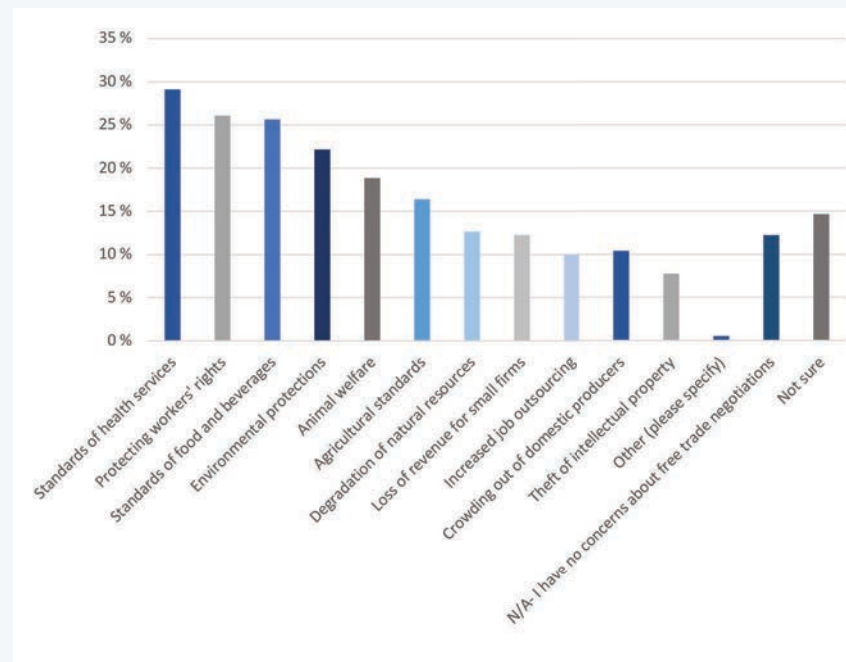
At 19%, Britons under 35 years were almost twice as likely to be unsure of their positions on these issues of trade compared to older Britons. In general, older Britons expressed a higher degree of concern around health services (37% to 22%), food and beverage standards (32% to 18%), agricultural standards (22% to 10%), animal welfare (21% to 15%), as well as impacts on wage competition and small firms. In turn, younger Britons appear more concerned about environmental protections (26% to 20%), and the degradation of natural resources (15% to 10%). Both younger and older Britons share similar levels of concern around protecting workers' rights, and theft of intellectual property.

Examining the socio-economic dimensions of concerns about trade, we can see that university graduates are in fact more inclined to say they are concerned about workers' rights than school leavers (33%, to 22%), as are those in the ABC1 social grade compared to those in the C2DE grouping (28%, to 24%) – who would be more likely to be employed in insecure work vulnerable to any lowering of such standards. Graduates are also more concerned about environmental

## 9. Global Britain, Trade and Military Interventionism

Which, if any, of the following aspects of free trade negotiations are you most concerned about?

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protections than school leavers (29% to 17%), although school leavers are somewhat more concerned about animal welfare (21% to 16%).

The vast majority of issues do not elicit any considerable distinctions between ethnicities, with two exceptions: White Britons are twice as concerned about upholding health standards and services than BAME Britons (31% to 17%), and BAME Britons are in turn twice as concerned about the degradation of natural resources (25% to 13%).

### Looking across the regions, we can observe:

- Concern about health services and the NHS is relatively evenly distributed across UK nations and regions
- Scotland (36%) and the West Midlands (30%) are the most concerned about protecting workers' rights
- Residents in the North East (35%) and Wales (33%) are the most concerned about standards of food and beverages
- The South East (26%) and Scotland (26%) are the most concerned about environmental protections
- The East of England (25%) and Scotland (24%) are the most concerned about animal welfare
- The South West (25%), Northern Ireland (24%) and the East Midlands (23%) are most concerned about agricultural standards
- Londoners are uniquely concerned with the degradation of natural resources (21%)
- Residents in the North East (17%) and Northern Ireland (17%) are uniquely concerned with job outsources
- Residents in Wales are the most likely to say they have no concerns whatsoever regarding trade negotiations (22%), compared to just 9% of those in Yorkshire and Humberside, and around 10% of other Britons
- Residents in Yorkshire and Humberside (19%), and the North West (18%) are the most likely to be unsure about their concerns.



## 9. Global Britain, Trade and Military Interventionism

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The degree and nature of concerns about free trade negotiations differ significantly between the parties, reflecting the politicisation of the trade conversation in the broader 'post-Brexit' environment. Almost a fifth of Conservative voters (19%) claim they have no concerns whatsoever about the negotiations, while just 5% of Labour, Liberal Democrat and Green voters share the same view.

Overall, Labour voters are more concerned about every aspect of trade negotiations than Conservative voters. The disparity in the level of anxieties is most prominent on the areas of health services (39% to 27%), protecting workers' rights (39% to 18%), standards of food and beverages (33% to 24%) and environmental protections (33% to 15%). That said, it is clear that around a fifth-to-a-quarter of Conservative voters do possess a level of concern about these issues. We cannot presume to know whether Conservative voters' relatively muted concerns about these issues more reflects their de-prioritisation of these issues compared to Labour voters, or whether the stewardship of the negotiations in the hand of their political party imbues a degree of trust that neutralises their concerns.

There are, however, a few notable exceptions in the party divide on trade negotiation anxieties. Conservative voters are more likely to be worried about free trade negotiations threatening agricultural standards (19% to 13%), the crowding out of domestic producers (12% to 7%), the loss of revenue for small firms (13% to 10%), and theft of intellectual property (9% to 5%). They share relatively equal concerns with their Labour counterparts regarding animal welfare.

The higher degree of concern towards almost every major aspect of trade negotiations amongst Labour voters is also replicated amongst Remain voters, meaning that Labour-Remain voters often possess an outsized level of concern about these issues, utterly distinct both from their Leave-voting counterparts in Labour, and all Conservative voters. One exception is agricultural standards, which Labour-Leave voters are uniquely disinterested in, and the degradation of natural resources, which unites both Conservative and Labour-Remain voters in concern.

Finally, examining the concerns of newspaper readers, we can once again observe a strong correlation with the political leanings of the newspaper themselves. The Britons most concerned about a decline in health standards and services read the Daily Mirror (46%), The Independent (44%) and The Guardian (41%). Readers of The Guardian are also the most concerned about protecting workers' rights (42%), and the pattern of Guardian and Independent readers being the most concerned about all potential aspects of trade negotiations continues on the subjects of food and beverage standards, and environmental protections. Readers of the Financial Times are also very concerned about environmental and agricultural standards, job outsourcing and intellectual property theft. Spikes of concern amongst the readership of more conservative newspapers, such as the Daily Express and the Daily Mail, coalesce around animal welfare, and the crowding out of domestic producers.



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# Key Lessons

Considering the data-set as a whole, as well as the comparative data points we have been able to draw upon from previous years, and those of other nations, we can draw a number of conclusions regarding the current state of public opinion regarding international issues and the UK's place in the world.

## **1. Public opinion on foreign policy is becoming polarised, and dynamically responsive to political narratives.**

The first clear finding from this survey is the extent to which political dynamics have dramatically influenced public opinion on foreign policy. In particular, the deepening of social and political polarisation around both the Leave-Remain axis, and between the major political parties, has translated into preferences on a wide range of international issues and Britain's role in the world. It is no longer possible to distinguish public opinion on foreign policy from the forces shaping attitudes on domestic issues – these questions about whether the nation should be open, engaged and connected in the world, and many of the most emotive and urgent subjects of the day, such as climate change, cut to the heart of our social and political identities.

Two processes are simultaneously in force. We can observe that Britons are sorting into more clearly formed, polarised groups, which reflect their lived experiences of mobility, as well as their socio-economic backgrounds, their social values, and their political ideologies. At the same time, the positions these groups adopt on international issues, and the UK's international activities, are being dynamically shaped in real time by the identities and political narratives leading these groups. This results in some 'artificial' responses, where public opinion appears to be heavily responsive to political leadership, but it is likely that the salience and/or sustainability of such beliefs is incredibly weak.

For example, we can see that many of the Britons who would have previously instinctively been sceptical of free trade, are now supportive, due to the success of the embedding of the narrative of Britain as a buccaneering free-trading nation in the Global Britain vision. Simultaneously, we observe a deep scepticism towards the benefits of free trade emerging amongst Remain and Labour voters, many of whom would have once championed openness and connectivity. These types of findings present some challenges to the task of analysing and interpreting public opinion data, because we must dig more deeply to truly understand the nature of citizens' attitudes, the degree to which they could stand up to testing, and their susceptibility to future influence by external or internal forces.

It is unclear as to whether those for whom political identities are competing with socialised preferences will ultimately side with their more established instincts or the tribal calling of their contemporaneous political grouping. This nebulous quality will somewhat exacerbate the challenge for policy-makers to assess the social and political risks they face in seeking to persuade and build consensus around a vision for Global Britain.

## **2. International identities are hardening.**

When we compare and contrast citizens' identification with international identities since the European Referendum in 2016, we can observe a clear process of 'hardening' amongst these identities. What is striking is that, while Brexit saw Britons more actively adopting international identities – particularly those that had become politically associated with certain 'tribes', such

as being European or being a global citizen – in 2020, at the tail end of the peak of the public debate around Brexit, we can see that the real growth has been in the number of citizens actively rejecting these identities. It is not so much that Britons have been actively switching between adoption and rejection, but that the proportion of those who were unsure about their identities has dramatically fallen.

This solidification of identities, and the strength of feeling that is required for an individual to actively reject an identity, is troubling for social cohesion and for governance. It reminds us of the multifaceted layers that construct polarisation, with issues- and values-based attitudes being simply two parts of a complex picture. The fact that a considerably larger share of the population has moved from, for example, being unsure or ambivalent about their opinion as to whether they are 'global citizens', to now being actively opposed to the label, increases the propensity for social conflict and heightens the pressure on political language when communicating about our collective international identity as a nation.

### **3. Educational attainment and lived experiences with mobility remain significant predictive factors in public attitudes.**

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Two of the most powerful predictive factors in shaping citizens' attitudes to a range of international issues, as well as their generalised favourability to openness and connectivity, remain educational attainment, and their lived experiences with mobility. Educational attainment is consistently revealed to be a more powerful influence on public opinion than an individual's placement in the traditional socio-economic grades (ABC1 and C2DE), with university graduates consistently more inclined to be internationalist, to embrace diversity and to advocate for values-based approaches to our global activities. In turn, it is concerning to see those without further education consistently revealed to be less confident and engaged on foreign affairs, and more sceptical, fearful, and perhaps even resentful, of the notion of an active and engaged Britain.

The process of experiencing higher education, or choosing not to or not being able to access these opportunities, appears to be a crucial junction in the formation of an individual's worldview. Two clear questions present themselves: what does it mean to have a society so clearly divided by the pathways of the first major independent decision citizens will take for themselves after a life governed by state and parental interventions? Secondly, is it possible, or desirable, for those unwilling or unable to undertake further education to become more engaged and knowledgeable about foreign affairs in adulthood, let alone to be exposed to the kinds of conditioning effects that facilitate the degree of security needed to support openness?

Beyond education, it is also interesting to note the role that citizens' lived experiences with mobility play in shaping their perspectives. In particular, whether they have personally travelled or not for leisure in the past year, and their frequency of travel, appears to be significantly correlated with polarised attitudes towards foreign affairs. This will of course be influenced by a range of demographic and socio-economic factors, as we know, for example, that the young are the most likely to travel frequently. However, it is evident that, for the 40% of Britons who did not travel at all for leisure in 2019, the likelihood of holding an internationalist mind-set is significantly reduced.

### **4. Britons aren't as fearful, or passionate, as our allies about global risks.**

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In comparing our survey to the findings of the Chicago Council and the Lowy Institute's most recent surveys, we can see that Britons are consistently revealed to be less inclined to view a wide variety of global security, democratic and governance risks as 'critical threats' than Americans or Australians. This suggests that either these subjects are less politically contested or visible, and/or that the narratives around them are less salient.

Between our two data-sets in January and February 2020 in the UK, we can see that the primary shifts in public opinion have been around the issues of Brexit, climate change and immigration – all international issues that are also deeply rooted in domestic politics. We can hypothesise that the average Briton is less insecure about wider geopolitical dynamics than their closest allies, possibly because these domestically linked, globally facing issues are so prominent in the national political environment at the moment – crowding out space for anxiety about less ‘direct’ threats. It may also, however, speak to more ingrained elements of the nation’s psychological profile, often found to be more ‘moderate’ or balanced on even the most sensitive social issues achieving a fever-pitch degree of salience elsewhere<sup>xviii</sup>, and also more confident of its collective capacity for national resilience<sup>xix</sup>.

### **5. Perceptions of our global allies and foes are becoming polarised and contested.**

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A conspicuous finding in this research is the degree to which public opinion regarding our allies and foes is increasingly contested. Unlike Australia, the United Kingdom does not have a singular ‘best friend’ to command a clear majority or plurality of public support. Rather, our perception of who our closest friends are is divided across a vast number of possible nations. While the United States remains the most popular preference, barely a third of Britons make this choice. Moreover, the question asking Britons as to their assessment of trust in other nations to ‘act responsibly in the world’, reveals that even such a close ‘friend’ as the United States is subject to a deep level of cynicism and disdain.

We can observe two important, associated trends: firstly, that Britons are both tepid and divided in their perceptions of whether our global allies genuinely share our interests and values. And secondly, that no other nation can inspire any degree of consensus in the levels of trust that is held in the intentions behind their international activities. These findings suggest that Britons tend to lean towards seeing their own nation as isolated to some extent, perhaps the only truly ‘responsible’ nation in the world, and that their instincts to support multilateralism and see the United Kingdom as part of a community of nations have been fundamentally eroded.

### **6. Voter volatility has brought new challenges to the Conservative Party.**

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A significant portion of Labour’s Leave voters moved across to the Conservative Party in the 2019 General Election, as did former UKIP and Brexit Party voters<sup>xx</sup>. These voters have brought distinct views on international issues and foreign policy, with many either coming from socio-economic groups more inclined towards certain preferences, or simply holding values and priorities that diverge from traditional Conservative instincts. In broad terms, these voters tend to be more isolationist, protectionist and nationalistic than Conservative voters, who have traditionally supported global institutions, multilateralism, free trade, and an active and engaged United Kingdom.

BFPG’s research during the General Election identified this possibility, and set out the challenges this could pose to the Party’s approach to foreign policy<sup>xxi</sup>. This data-set, capturing public opinion in the wake of the election, highlights the degree to which these voter movements are actively influencing the direction of travel in results by party affiliation.

When we compare the findings with the survey we conducted at the same time in 2019, we can see, for example, that the percentage of Conservative voters identifying as ‘global citizens’ has fallen (34%-30%) and the percentage identifying as ‘European’ has also fallen (40%-33%). Other important variations are evident – such as the decline in the support for NATO membership, down from 83% before the 2019 General Election, to 73% in its wake, with a concurrent rise in the percentage of Conservative voters unsure of their opinion (16% vs 10%) – a characteristic

we know is more prevalent amongst these new voters. The consequence of this diversity of opinion on foreign policy is that the Party's leaders will need to focus energies never previously required on building a robust coalition of support for their positions.

Nonetheless, as previously discussed, the influence of political polarisation and partisanship is also playing a dramatic role in challenging long-held views and identities, and therefore – at least while the Brexit narratives continue to resonate on both sides – it also remains possible that truly persuasive (and/or tribal) leadership could bring these new voters to a consensus position with the more established voters.

### **7. The Labour Party's coalitions are more challenging to bring together and reconcile.**

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Our ability to consider the preferences and attitudes of voters for the two major parties against their voting behaviour in the 2016 EU Referendum, provides valuable insights about the way in which public opinion on international issues plays into both of these forms of dynamic social polarisation. While the aforementioned politicisation of international affairs in the wake of the Brexit vote has given a resurgence to the importance of political parties as defined groups housing distinct preferences, it is clear that the Leave-Remain divide is also a profound indicator of attitudes on a range of issues – particularly those pertaining to generalised feelings of openness, assessments of risk, and attitudes towards immigration.

The strength of the Leave-Remain divide, and its resilience throughout the four years since the Referendum – and in some cases, its growing degree of influence – is evident, and relevant, within the parties. Despite the 'sorting' that took place in the 2019 General Election, both the Labour and Conservative parties remain coalitions of interests, attitudes and identities. Although the reality of the Conservative Party being in power understandably helps its coalitions to feel more united around common narratives and priorities, both the identity and issues-level polarisation – while significant – appears to be less substantial than the gulf between Leave and Remain voters within the Labour Party.

Labour voters frequently achieve astonishing degrees of separation in their perspectives on a wide range of issues and identities, with younger, more affluent and educated Labour voters, who largely voted Remain, passionate about humanitarian issues, and keen to see a values-led foreign policy that challenges the traditional multilateralism in the West. Meanwhile, the Leave voters who remained faithful to the Party in the recent election, unable to overcome their mistrust of the Conservative Party, are revealed to be some of the most intensely isolationist, disengaged and disinterested in global human rights and values-based foreign policy of all voters.

Strikingly, many of the issues traditionally associated with the Labour Party, for example, employment rights and workers' protections, now appear to be championed most ardently as values, rather than personal interests, and by voters who are more economically and educationally secure than those who would have traditionally campaigned for them.

This evolution of the Labour Party's voting base, and the acute degree of polarisation amongst those who align themselves with its cause, presents profound challenges. The Party's decision to prioritise a values-led foreign policy at the 2019 General Election appears to have contributed to the loss of a large swathe of one part of their coalition – compounded by the perception that its leader, Jeremy Corbyn, was unable or unwilling to champion the nation on the world stage, defend its traditional identity, and provide a degree of fundamental national security to its people. While many of the voters who left the Party to vote for the Conservatives are not instinctively passionate about an open and engaged United Kingdom, they nonetheless wish to feel safe, protected and proud. As the Labour Party embarks on a new era under a new leader, its strategic and thematic approach to foreign policy is revealed to be one of the most fragile aspects of its coalition.

# Conclusions

Our 2020 survey captures Britain at a remarkable moment in its history – across both the final days of our membership of the European Union, and the early days of its independence after ‘Brexit Day’ on the 31st of January. We find a nation increasingly divided at home and in its outlook towards the world. These conflicts reflect socio-economic, party-political and Referendum-related influences on public opinion – often coalescing together in powerful, reinforcing ways. As the UK Government seeks to conceive, articulate and persuade of its vision for our role in the world, the scale of the challenge appears immense.

Our ambitions for the extent of our global influence, the composition of our international cooperation and the degree to which we pursue multilateralism, as well as the nature and values of our activities abroad, are all deeply contested – and they reflect fundamentally distinct worldviews, issues frameworks and identities. Perhaps most concerning is the extent to which Britons’ international identities appear to be hardening, with the most acute rise visible amongst those actively rejecting certain identities. As our ambivalence gives way to ardent passion and hostile opposition, the capacity to compromise, and to see ourselves as one community, becomes more difficult.

With the UK Government’s Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy well underway, this lengthy period of confusion and opacity around the meaning and intent of ‘Global Britain’ will, in practice, soon be coming to an end. Indeed, by the time we undertake our next annual survey, we should theoretically have completed the transition period following our departure of the European Union, and therefore be on our journey to a new global role, and a new period of ambition. The confidence to succeed in the world, and to act with clarity and strength, is deeply entwined with the degree of support and trust that leaders can command at home. The tremendous task of bringing this fractious, and fractured, nation along with this vision will prove one of the defining tests of the Johnson Government – and a trial our allies and foes will be watching with bated breath.

- <sup>i</sup> For a more in-depth literature review of the distinct nature of affective and issues-based polarisation in the UK, and how these have developed in the wake of the 2016 EU Referendum, see: Duffy, B. et al. (2019). 'Divided Britain – Polarisation and Fragmentation Trends in the UK', The Policy Institute at King's College London. Available at: <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/policy-institute/assets/divided-britain.pdf>
- <sup>ii</sup> YouGov survey: 1,684 adults between 10 and 11 June 2019. Findings presented in The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/11/uk-more-nostalgic-for-empire-than-other-ex-colonial-powers>
- <sup>iii</sup> See, for example, this summary prepared for BBC News by Professor John Curtice (2018), 'How young and old would vote on Brexit now'. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-45098550>
- <sup>iv</sup> Very good maps regarding the regional distribution of the Leave and Remain votes, and the percentage of the Leave vote in each constituency, are available from the BBC, at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36622039>
- <sup>v</sup> For a succinct summary of the high degree of voter volatility in recent UK General Elections, I recommend turning to the British Election Study, available at: <https://www.britishelectionstudy.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Explaining-Voter-Volatility.pdf>. For a specific analysis of the volatility in the 2019 General Election, the Electoral Reform Society has a useful explainer, available at: <https://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/latest-news-and-research/parliamentary-briefings/ers-general-election-2019-briefing/>
- <sup>vi</sup> Prof. Paula Surridge's work on values divides has been especially important, as presented in this piece (2019) for the UK in a Changing Europe, available at: <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/The-European-elections-and-Brexit.pdf>
- <sup>vii</sup> For example, see the OECD's Trust Lab, which captures the distinct interaction between trust and social grades, available at: <https://www.oecd.org/sdd/statistical-insights-trust-in-the-united-kingdom.htm>
- <sup>viii</sup> Much has been written about the role that trust played in the 2016 EU Referendum, but the British Social Attitudes Study's analysis in its wake provides a pithy distillation of the key divides: [https://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/39149/bsa34\\_brexit\\_final.pdf](https://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/39149/bsa34_brexit_final.pdf)
- <sup>ix</sup> 'A New Internationalism', the foreign policy section of the Labour Party's 2019 General Election manifesto, is available at: <https://labour.org.uk/manifesto/a-new-internationalism/>
- <sup>x</sup> See, for example, the promotion of the Department for International Development's 'What Works to Prevent Violence: Impact at Scale' project in November 2019. Available at: <https://dfidnews.blog.gov.uk/2019/11/05/uk-aid-to-help-stop-violence-against-a-million-women-and-girls/>
- <sup>xi</sup> See, for example, our previous BFGP survey on public opinion regarding critical threats, which also assessed perceptions of NATO's importance to UK peace and security. Available at: <https://bfgp.co.uk/2019/12/public-opinion-on-global-threats-future-of-nato/>
- <sup>xii</sup> The Institute for Jewish Population Research undertakes analysis of the Jewish population in censuses. Their 2011 Census summary is available at: [https://www.jpr.org.uk/documents/2011%20Census%20results%20\(England%20and%20Wales\)%20-%20Initial%20insights%20about%20the%20UK%20Jewish%20population.pdf](https://www.jpr.org.uk/documents/2011%20Census%20results%20(England%20and%20Wales)%20-%20Initial%20insights%20about%20the%20UK%20Jewish%20population.pdf)
- <sup>xiii</sup> A useful summary of the latest data (January 2020) on immigration attitudes is brought together by the Migration Observatory at Oxford University – including further discussion of source country and skill-level preferences. Available at: <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/uk-public-opinion-toward-immigration-overall-attitudes-and-level-of-concern/>
- <sup>xiv</sup> The UK Government has brought together a range of speeches and public documents articulating its current vision for the Global Britain agenda, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/global-britain-delivering-on-our-international-ambition>
- <sup>xv</sup> A useful summary of public attitudes on trade can be found in Singh, M. (2018). 'Is Britain a nation of protectionists?', CapX. Available at: <https://capx.co/is-britain-a-nation-of-protectionists/>
- <sup>xvi</sup> BFGP's paper on Public Attitudes towards British Military Interventionism (2019) is available at: <https://bfgp.co.uk/2020/01/public-attitudes-to-uk-military-interventionism/>
- <sup>xvii</sup> A leak of provisional UK-US trade negotiation dossiers provided a key moment in the 2019 General Election, and compelled the Government to set out its 'red lines' of negotiations: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-50572454>
- <sup>xviii</sup> Britons partly demonstrate their 'moderate' approach to social issues through their relatively liberal tendencies – with opinions growing exponentially more liberal over recent decades. A summary of the shift in social attitudes can be found in recent research undertaken by Ipsos MORI and King's College London, available at: <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/british-attitudes-moral-and-social-issues-have-become-significantly-more-liberal-last-30-years>. It is always also worth exploring the British Social Attitudes Survey, which captures these trends, and its latest iteration from 2019 is available at: [https://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/39363/bsa\\_36.pdf](https://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/39363/bsa_36.pdf).
- <sup>xix</sup> This is often referred to as 'British exceptionalism', but it could equally be framed as 'Britain's exceptional optimism'. It has recently often been discussed in pejorative terms with regards to Brexit, and certainly, a perturbing degree of complacency has often appeared to cloud the national consciousness at moments of genuine crisis in the negotiations. However, it also speaks to the windfalls of strong institutions, competent governance, a robust welfare state, a resilient degree of patriotism and a strong community spirit – which has afforded the British people a degree of security that is not easily replicated elsewhere.
- <sup>xx</sup> A comprehensive summary of the demographics behind the 2019 General Election outcome, and in particular, the movement of voters between parties, has been prepared by YouGov. It is available at: <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2019/12/17/how-britain-voted-2019-general-election>
- <sup>xxi</sup> The study can be accessed on the BFGP's website, here: <https://bfgp.co.uk/2019/11/ukip-homecoming-foreign-policy/>

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