



British Foreign Policy Group

# UK Public Opinion on Foreign Policy and Global Affairs

## Annual Survey – 2023

Evie Aspinall and Eliza Keogh



## Table of Contents

---

Foreword .....	4
The 2023 Survey and Methodology .....	5
Executive Summary .....	6
International Engagement .....	9
The UK's Role in the World .....	14
The UK's Alliances and Partnerships .....	20
Strategic Rivals .....	28
National Security .....	31
Ukraine .....	35
Migration .....	42
Foreign Aid and International Development .....	47
Climate Change .....	52

---

# About this Report



BFGP

## The British Foreign Policy Group

The British Foreign Policy Group (BFGP) is an independent, non-partisan think tank dedicated to advancing the UK's global influence, at a crucial time in the nation's modern history. Our core objective is to bridge the link between the domestic and international spheres – recognising that Britain's foreign policy choices are shaped by our social, economic and democratic landscape at home. Our mission supports Britain as a strong, engaged and influential global actor. We promote democratic values, liberal societies, and the power of multilateralism – and we recognise Britain's critical international responsibility to uphold and extend these throughout the world. The BFGP believes that a strong and united nation at home is the essential foundation of an effective and cohesive UK foreign policy.



INTEGRITY

## Integrity

Integrity is an international consultancy that provides informed, ethical, and expert services to governments, international organisations, and the private sector. Based on sound evidence, we help our clients design and deliver effective policy and programming in complex contexts around the globe. Our thematic expertise covers a wide range of challenges, including state fragility, violent conflict, climate security, aid effectiveness, governance and justice, refugees and migration, gender equality, and social inclusion.

We are pleased to support BFGP to conduct this year's survey and report on domestic public perceptions of British foreign policy and global affairs. This initiative highlights useful and relevant insights on UK foreign policy. It directly contributes to building an all-important evidence base to inform decisions, policy and programming affecting Britons today at home and abroad.



JLP

## J.L. Partners

J.L. Partners is a global market and public opinion research company with offices in London and Washington D.C. J.L. Partners is an accredited member of the British Polling Council and Market Research Society.

---

## The Authors

**Evie Aspinall** is the Director of the British Foreign Policy Group. She is a social and political researcher specialising in UK foreign policy. Her primary research interests centre around building domestic consent for the UK's international activities and she has worked on BFGP's public opinion work, including its annual survey, since 2020. Other research focuses include future trends in foreign policy, international development and climate change. She holds a BA from the University of Cambridge and an MSc from King's College London.

[evie.aspinall@bfpg.co.uk](mailto:evie.aspinall@bfpg.co.uk)

**Eliza Keogh** is a Researcher and Programmes Manager at the British Foreign Policy Group, supporting BFGP's research output and external relationships, and managing its programme of events and activities. Her primary research interests are energy security and Indo-Pacific relations. She studied Political Science at the University of Exeter and the University of Sydney.

[eliza.keogh@bfpg.co.uk](mailto:eliza.keogh@bfpg.co.uk)

---

# Foreword

I am delighted that BFPG is able to present once again our landmark annual survey of British public opinion on foreign policy. We are particularly pleased that this year Evie Aspinall, who has been directing the research on this project for several years, has continued her work now in the position of Director of BFPG, where, along with our expanded team of leading experts and researchers, she will continue to expand our engagement at the interface of foreign and domestic policy, trade and the regions. As a not-for-profit think tank, we are extremely grateful for the support of Integrity which has made it possible for us to continue in these inflationary times. They are a most valued partner.

We look forward to a programme of discussions around this report, but also to expand our activities, not just in London but across the country. We would be delighted to hear from anyone who would be interested in working with us in the coming year.

**Peter O'Kane**

Chairman of Strategy International

## Acknowledgements

With thanks to Integrity for their support in making this year's survey possible. Thanks also to our polling partners J.L. Partners and to our designer Nadia Nelson for bringing this paper to life. All mistakes are the authors' own.

---

# The 2023 Survey and Methodology

This report presents the findings of the 2023 Survey of UK Public Opinion on Foreign Policy and Global Affairs, authored by The British Foreign Policy Group. This is the fifth edition of this survey of public opinion on foreign policy, which was first conducted in 2019. The fieldwork for this report was conducted with J.L. Partners between 26th May and 1st June 2023. In previous iterations of the survey, fieldwork was conducted by BMG Research (2019) and Opinium (2020 - 2022). In all editions of the survey we have conducted a nationally representative online survey but panel effects may vary between partners.

The report presents findings based on descriptive analysis of a nationally representative sample of 2,158 people, using quotas with the data weighted to be nationally representative. Subsamples such as age groups, regions or voter groups have not been individually quota'd and weighted to be representative of that group beyond the national quotas and weights.

To maintain readability and reasonable length, we have not reported complete findings for each question by each subgroup. For each research question, we have reported the most frequently selected response, and noted whether it was selected by a majority of respondents (over 50%) or only a plurality (i.e. selected by under 50% of respondents, but still the most frequently selected response). In addition, we have reported findings by certain subgroups where the frequency of responses across groups differed by more than 5 percentage points, or where we understand there to be a specific interest in findings for particular subgroups. In some cases, in addition to the majority or plurality response, we have further reported, for each response option, which subgroup selected it with the highest frequency. We have not conducted hypothesis testing, reported confidence intervals for estimated proportions, nor assessed the statistical significance of reported differences across groups. As such, the findings should be treated as indicative only.

All conclusions drawn are the authors' own and full editorial control and responsibility belongs to the British Foreign Policy Group.

---

# Executive Summary

## International Engagement

- Against the backdrop of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and growing instability in the US-China relationship, Britons' interest and engagement in UK foreign policy has risen sharply over the last year.
- However, substantial disparities remain between levels of interest (77%) and self-reported knowledge (55%) on foreign policy. These disparities are particularly substantial among younger Britons and women, and targeted engagement with these groups would therefore help strengthen the UK Government's democratic mandate on foreign policy.
- Britons' sense of international identity remain in flux but the proportion of Britons who associate with each of the following identities - European (53%), patriot (48%) and global citizen (47%) - has increased over the last year.
- While a majority of Britons identify as European, 41% of Britons do not, highlighting how many of the divides in how Britons view themselves, which became particularly prominent during the EU Referendum, continue to hold salience.

## The UK's Role in the World

- Distrust in the UK Government on foreign policy continues to grow, with a majority of Britons (54%) distrusting the UK Government to take decisions in the public's interest when it comes to foreign policy. However, trust in the UK Government on foreign policy has also risen from 35% in 2022 to 41% in 2023, as Britons become more confident in their views on the UK Government's foreign policy agenda.
- The UK's global reputation is widely seen to have been boosted by the UK's role in supporting Ukraine since Russia's invasion of the country (62%). To a lesser extent, the coronation of King Charles III (45%) and the hosting of the 2023 Eurovision Song Contest (44%) are also seen to have had a positive effect on the UK's reputation overseas.
- However, the UK's decision to leave the European Union is widely regarded as having had a negative impact on the UK's reputation overseas (58%). While the decision to reduce aid spending from 0.7% to 0.5% of the UK's GNI is not understood to have had particularly substantive effects, the effects are more often seen to be negative (29%) than positive (24%).
- Despite a large proportion of Britons believing that some of the UK's major policy decisions have had negative effects on the UK's reputation overseas, levels of pride in the UK's role in the world have risen substantially since 2022 (43%), with a majority (52%) of Britons now feeling proud of the UK's role in the world. This is likely a reflection of distance from both the Covid-19 pandemic and the withdrawal from Afghanistan - which previous surveys have shown many Britons view with a degree of shame - and the very positive reception to the UK's response to the Ukraine crisis.

## The UK's Allies and Partnerships

- Of the nations polled, the European Union (53%) is the most widely trusted nation in terms of its capacity and willingness to act responsibly in the world - above Ukraine (50%), the United States (48%) and France (46%). Strikingly, trust in France has fallen 9 percentage points over the last year, likely the result of ongoing debates about irregular Channel migration.
- China and Russia are overwhelmingly viewed as strategic rivals, with 86% of Britons distrusting Russia to act responsibly in the world, and 74% distrusting China. The United Arab Emirates, which hosts this year's COP28, is also distrusted by 57% of Britons.

## Executive Summary

---

- Britons' perceptions of the UK's relationship with the United States remains complex. While just 48% of Britons trust the US to act responsibly in the world, it is, by far, the nation most widely regarded as the UK's closest ally (46%). This is testament to how the 'special relationship' is seen by Britons to endure, even when the relationship, and indeed levels of trust, in the United States, are in flux.
- Britons are increasingly warming to cooperation with the EU and only a small fraction (5%) of Britons oppose all UK-EU cooperation. Support is particularly high for reducing barriers to trade in goods and services with the EU (61%), which is even supported by a majority of Leave voters (58%).
- More broadly, the UK's international partnerships are widely understood to make the UK more safe, particularly NATO, the G7 and AUKUS. Indeed, 75% of Britons believe NATO makes the UK more safe.

## Strategic Rivals

- The largest proportion (43%) of Britons believe that Russia and China pose the same level of threat to the UK's national interest. However, three times as many Britons view Russia as a greater threat than China (35%) than vice versa (13%).
- Britons are more willing to cooperate with China on a range of fronts than they were in 2022. Nonetheless, the most popular form of engagement is still challenging China on its human rights abuses (42%), and there is little appetite for cooperation with China around technology (15%) or infrastructure (15%).

## National Security

- Even with war raging in Europe, Britons feel safer now than they did in early 2022. Indeed, only 10% of Britons currently feel unsafe. This is likely the result of the subsiding of the Covid-19 pandemic and Ukraine's success in staving off Russia more effectively than many expected, providing reassurance about the strength of the Western alliance and the limitations of the threat posed by Russia.
- Nonetheless, the majority of Britons view continued Russian aggression (53%) as one of the three biggest threats to UK national security. The rise of China as a world power (39%) and terrorism (34%) are the next most widely cited threats.
- Furthermore, despite growing feelings of safety, Britons are still highly supportive of maintaining and even strengthening the UK's defensive capabilities. Support for the UK's membership of NATO is remarkably strong (78%), particularly among older Britons and those from higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades, and has risen 11 percentage points over the last two years.
- A majority (59%) of Britons support increasing defence spending to 2.5% of GDP at some stage, with 34% of Britons believing we should slowly increase defence spending to reach 2.5% of GDP over the next few years, while 25% of Britons believe we should immediately increase defence spending to 2.5% of GDP.

## Ukraine

- The Ukraine crisis is seen to have had substantial repercussions for the UK's economy, security and energy supply, as well as the wider geopolitical environment, including the UK's relationship with the EU and the likelihood of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan.
- Nonetheless, the groundswell of public support for Ukraine in the immediate aftermath of the invasion has been maintained, with a majority of Britons supporting all forms of aid the UK has offered Ukraine. Indeed, 85% of Britons support providing humanitarian assistance to Ukraine. Furthermore, the majority (53%) of Britons believe the UK should provide assistance to Ukraine for as long as it takes, and there is little desire for the UK to withdraw support from Ukraine.

### Migration

- The majority of Britons (54%) support the UK's Illegal Migration Bill, compared to 23% of Britons who oppose it.
- There are also high levels of support for the UK's visa and migration schemes for selected Ukrainians, Afghans and BN(O) passport-holders, however there is little appetite to develop similar schemes for other nations currently producing substantial numbers of refugees and migrants.

### International Development

- International aid and development spending remains a source of contention, and a majority (61%) of Britons believe it takes away money that should be spent on domestic needs. In turn, Britons are divided over whether the UK should return to the 0.7% GNI aid and development spending commitment.
- Despite these concerns, the majority of Britons believe that the UK has a moral duty to use aid and development to contribute to a more secure and prosperous world (55%), and, to a lesser extent, perceive there to be strategic economic and security benefits that the UK can derive from aid and development.
- Alleviating poverty, fighting climate change and supporting green investment, providing infrastructure for essential public services, and implementing basic health programmes are the areas most widely regarded by Britons as areas the UK should prioritise in its aid and development work.

### Climate Change

- Despite, or perhaps even because of, the ongoing energy crisis, support for UK leadership on climate change continues to grow, with 70% of Britons supporting the UK taking a leading international role in tackling climate change.
- Support for the UK's climate leadership is particularly high among 18-25-year-olds (74%) and those in higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades (74%).



# International Engagement

The last year has seen a period of significant global turbulence, with war brought once more to the European continent and growing instability in the US-China relationship challenging the geopolitical status quo. In an increasingly globalised world, these shifts are having significant domestic repercussions. Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the fallout from it - including the acceleration of already rising energy prices, the compounding of the cost of living crisis, and the influx of Ukrainian refugees to the UK - have brought the impact of the invasion to the door of the domestic British population. Within this context, it is interesting to consider the extent to which Britons' interest in and understanding of foreign policy have evolved over the last year, as well as how they self-identify within this increasingly globalised world.

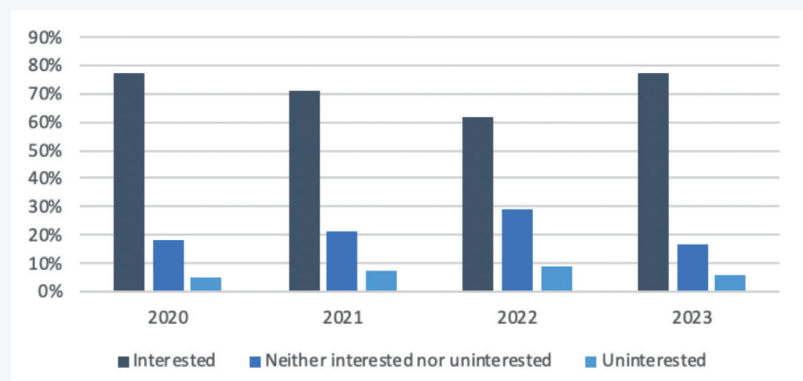
## Interest in the UK's International Activities

In recent years we have seen substantial fluctuations in levels of interest in UK foreign policy - rising from 65% in 2019 to 77% in 2020 as the Covid-19 pandemic hit. Levels of interest have been on a steady decline since then, with 62% of Britons expressing an interest in UK foreign policy in 2022.

Over the last year, however, there has been a sharp increase in interest in UK foreign policy, with the vast majority of Britons (77%) now reporting being (very or fairly) interested in what the UK does internationally. A further 17% of Britons are neither interested nor uninterested in the UK's foreign policy activities, while just 6% of Britons report being (very or fairly) uninterested in the UK's international activities. Given its significant coverage in the mainstream media and its impact on ordinary Britons, not least through its compounding of the energy crisis, this growth in interest is likely driven, in large part, by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Ongoing debates around Channel migration, which tend to attract significant public attention, the signing of the Windsor Framework and concerns over escalating tensions between the United States and China may also have contributed to this uptick in interest.

While overall levels of interest have fluctuated, the broad demographic trends in interest in foreign policy have remained much the same over the last few years. Men (82%) continue to be more interested in the UK's international activities than women (72%), as do those from higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades (84%) relative to those from lower (C2DE) socio-economic grades (69%). Meanwhile, Britons who voted for the Liberal Democrats (86%) or Conservatives (84%) in 2019 show higher levels of interest than those who voted Labour (79%), as do those who voted Remain (84%) relative to those who voted Leave (78%).

Proportion of Britons interested in UK foreign policy, disaggregated by year



Surveys conducted by Opinium Research, J.L. Partners and the British Foreign Policy Group, 2020 – 2023

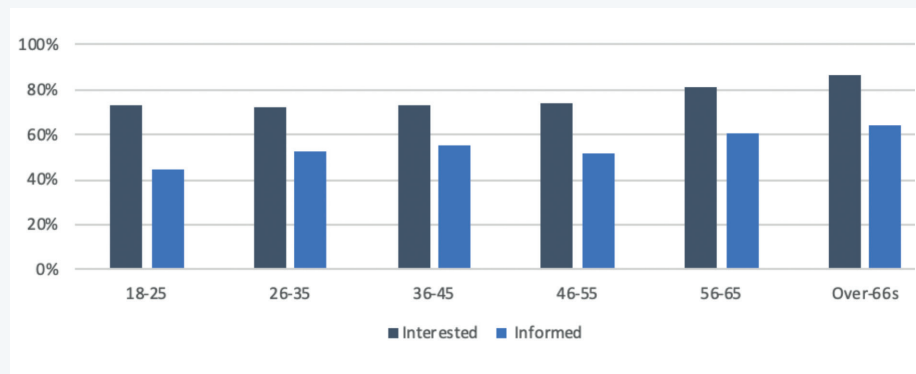
## Self-Reported Foreign Policy Knowledge

Previous surveys have shown that trends in self-reported foreign policy knowledge tend to closely track trends in levels of interest in the UK's international activities, albeit with a sizable gap between overall levels of interest and levels of self-reported knowledge. This trend has continued this year, with the proportion of Britons who feel (very or fairly) informed about the UK's international activities, like the proportion of Britons interested in the UK's international activities, rising substantially, from 43% in 2022 to 55% in 2023. Meanwhile, 26% of Britons feel neither informed nor uninformed about the UK's international activities, while 19% of Britons feel (very or fairly) uninformed.

Self-reported knowledge of foreign policy is highest among those from higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades (65%), men (64%), over-66s (64%), residents in Eastern England (62%) and residents in London (61%). It is lowest among women (46%), Britons aged 18-25 (44%) and Britons from lower (C2DE) socio-economic grades (43%). Meanwhile, self-reported knowledge of foreign policy is higher among Britons intending to vote Conservative at the next election (73%) than those intending to vote Liberal Democrat (61%) or Labour (56%).

While levels of interest and self-reported understanding of UK foreign policy closely track each other, there remains a gulf, of 22 percentage points, in the extent to which Britons feel interested (77%) and informed (55%) about UK foreign policy. Disparities between interest and self-reported knowledge are particularly sharp among young people, with 18-25-year-olds experiencing a 29 percentage point gap between levels of interest (73%) and self-reported knowledge (44%). Among women, there is also a particularly notable 26 percentage point gap. Disparities between interest and actual knowledge among these groups are not necessarily higher, and these disparities might be driven by lower levels of confidence among these groups. Nonetheless, targeted engagement with these demographics would likely increase self-reported knowledge of foreign policy, which is important for the UK government's democratic mandate for its international activities.

Proportion of Britons interested in and informed about UK foreign policy, disaggregated by age



Survey conducted by J.L. Partners and the British Foreign Policy Group, May - June 2023

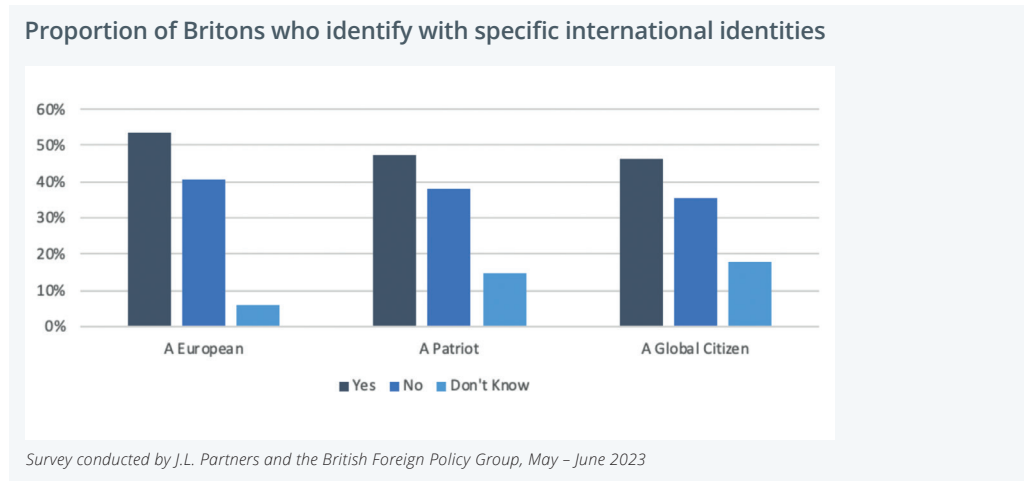
## International Engagement

### International Identities

The UK's position in the world has been in flux in recent years as it has sought to carve out a new position for itself following its departure from the EU. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has further compounded these fluctuations, as the UK seeks to position itself as a global leader and staunch defender of Ukraine, while also having to focus more sharply both on the European security environment and the UK's own domestic security and prosperity.<sup>1</sup>

Against this backdrop, there have been substantial fluctuations in Britons' sense of international identity in recent years. This year we see continued instability in Britons' sense of international identity, with a higher proportion of Britons identifying with all three of the international identities polled than did in 2022. It is also the case that a majority of Britons now identify as European (53%), while close to a majority identify as a patriot (48%) or a global citizen (47%).

However, while Britons identify with each of these terms more often than not, it is still the case that a substantial proportion of Britons do not identify with each term. This includes 41% of Britons who do not identify as European, 38% who do not identify as a patriot and 36% who do not identify as a global citizen. These sharp variations in association with these terms speak to rather strong divergences in how Britons view their position in the world and, in turn, how they seek to engage with it.



#### European Identity

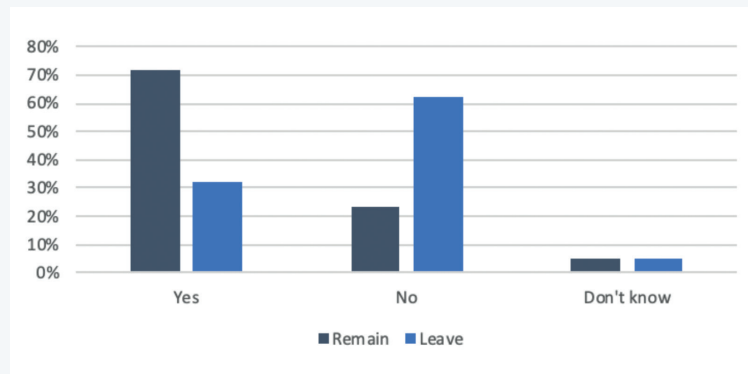
Of the three identities polled, the European identity is the only one which a majority (53%) of Britons identify with. However, the European identity also produces the sharpest divides of the three identities polled, with 41% of Britons not identifying as European. While the rather visceral debate over Britain's departure from the EU may have largely calmed down (except among the most ardent supporters and opponents of Brexit), the fissures in how Britons view themselves, which underlined these debates, evidently remain. These divides may also have been strengthened by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the UK's subsequent reorientation to the European security sphere.

<sup>1</sup> Cabinet Office (2023). *Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a More Contested and Volatile World*. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/integrated-review-refresh-2023-responding-to-a-more-contested-and-volatile-world>

## International Engagement

Relative to the other identities polled, the European identity is also the identity which Britons most often have a clear perspective on. While 18% of Britons don't know whether they identify as a global citizen and 15% don't know whether they identify as a patriot, just 6% of Britons don't know if they identify as European. This likely reflects the dominance of the EU referendum in public discourse in recent years, which has forced Britons to think extensively about their European identity, a focus which has only been reinforced by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

**Proportion of Britons who identify as European, disaggregated by EU Referendum vote**



Survey conducted by J.L. Partners and the British Foreign Policy Group, May – June 2023

Unsurprisingly, EU Referendum voting preferences deliver the sharpest differences in association with European identity, with twice as many Britons who voted Remain (72%) than those who voted Leave (32%) identifying as European. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that despite voting to leave the European Union, almost a third of Leave voters identify as European. The motivations of these Leave voters are worthy of attention, particularly as the UK government increasingly looks to re-engage with Europe and the European Union.

Meanwhile, Britons intending to vote Liberal Democrat (70%) or Labour (63%) at the next election much more frequently identify as European than those planning to vote Conservative (41%). Regionally, identification as European is particularly strong in Northern Ireland (62%) and Scotland (62%), compared to Wales (55%) and many of the regions of England, e.g. the North East (46%). These divides could pose a challenge to developing a UK-wide 'Europe policy' that secures support across all of the devolved nations.

Identification as European is also particularly high among 18-25-year-olds (68%), many of whom were too young to vote in the 2016 Brexit referendum. By comparison, just 49% of 46-55-year-olds and 48% of over-66s identify as European.

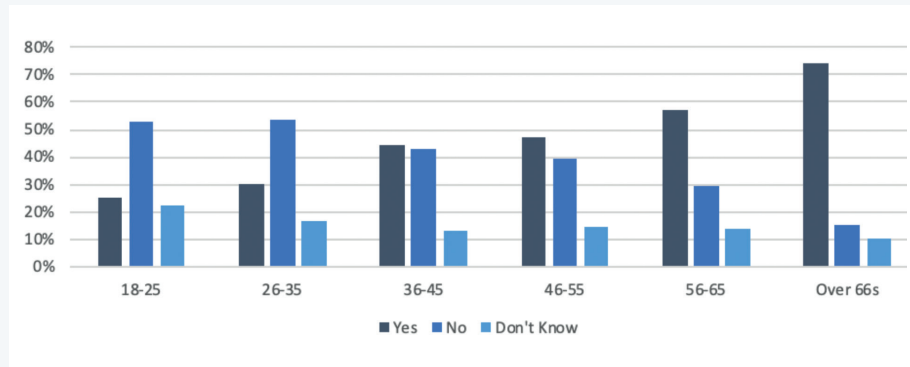
### Patriotism

The topic of patriotism was highly embroiled in debates around the EU Referendum, and in our surveys since then, we have sought to understand how association with the term has evolved since the UK voted to leave the EU. This year, we find that while the proportion of Britons who identify as patriots has rebounded slightly, after dropping eight percentage points in 2022, Britons remain sharply divided over whether they identify as such, with 48% of Britons identifying as patriots and 38% of Britons not. A further 15% of Britons don't know whether they identify as patriots.

Of the three global identities polled, patriotism generates the largest demographic disparities. The clearest of these emerges in regard to age - three times more over-66s (75%) than 18-25-year-olds (25%) identify as patriots. In fact, a majority of 26-35-year-olds (54%) and 18-25-year-olds (53%) do not identify as patriots.

## International Engagement

Proportion of Britons who identify as patriots, disaggregated by age



Survey conducted by J.L. Partners and the British Foreign Policy Group, May – June 2023

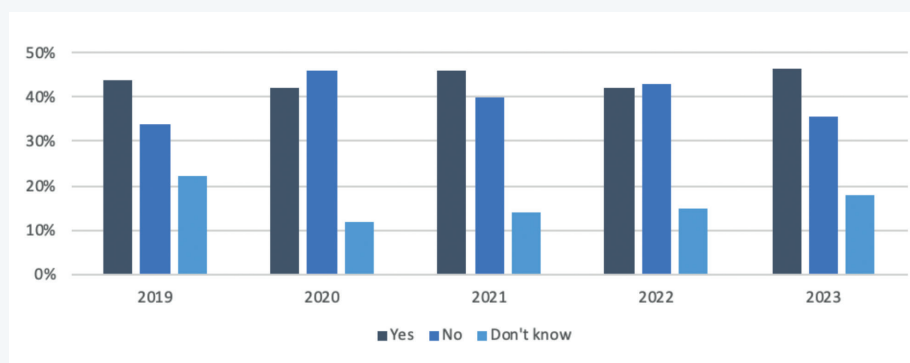
Men (55%) also more frequently than women (40%) identify as patriots, while Britons in higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades (54%) more often identify as such than those in lower (C2DE) socio-economic grades (40%). Britons who are planning to vote Conservative in the next general election (71%) also more often identify as patriots than those planning to vote Liberal Democrat (47%) or Labour (38%), as do Leave voters (59%) relative to Remain voters (47%).

### Global Citizenship

Of the three identities polled, association with the term 'global citizen' has been the most in flux in recent years. After falling in 2022, Britons have developed a renewed sense of global citizenship over the last year, with 47% of Britons identifying as such. Nonetheless, this association is still far from universal, with 36% of Britons not identifying as global citizens. A further 18% of Britons don't know whether they identify as a global citizen.

However, while identification with the term has fluctuated, the broad demographic trends in association with the term have remained much the same. Younger Britons more widely associate with the term global citizen than older Britons, with a majority of 18-25-year-olds (58%) and 26-35-year-olds (53%) identifying as global citizens, compared to 37% of over-66s. Similarly, Britons from higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades (53%) more frequently identify as global citizens than those from lower (C2DE) socio-economic grades (40%). The concept of global citizenship also resonates more strongly with Britons who voted for the Liberal Democrats (65%) or Labour (55%) in 2019 than among those who voted Conservative (38%).

Proportion of Britons who identify as global citizens, disaggregated by year



Surveys conducted by BMG Research, Opinium Research, J.L. Partners and the British Foreign Policy Group, 2019 – 2023

# The UK's Role in the World

In the years immediately following the EU Referendum, the UK has embraced the concept of 'Global Britain', attempting to forge a path for itself as a global leader across a broad spectrum of foreign policy priorities. However, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as evidenced in the UK's 2023 Integrated Review Refresh, the UK's ambitions are shifting. In an increasingly contested world, the UK is placing a renewed emphasis on shoring up domestic security and resilience and strengthening the UK's partnerships and alliances to meet these growing challenges.

As the UK continues to reconfigure and reassess its role in the world, this section of the report strives to understand how the current approach to UK foreign policy is perceived by Britons and how Britons believe the UK is perceived in the world as a result. It finds that while trust in the UK Government on foreign policy remains low (41%), and a number of the UK's key international policies in recent years are seen to have had negative impacts on the way the UK is perceived internationally, the majority of Britons are nonetheless proud (52%) of the UK's current role in the world.

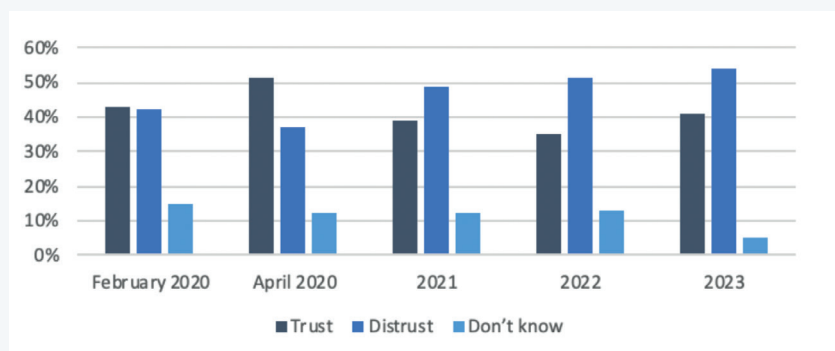
## Trust in UK Government on Foreign Policy

After falling during the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic, distrust in the UK Government to make decisions in the public's interest when it comes to foreign policy has risen in the past three years. Distrust is now substantially higher than it was prior to the pandemic. This year we see some continuation of this trend, with 54% of Britons expressing (high or some) distrust in the government in this regard, the highest levels recorded since we began asking this question in February 2020. However, levels of trust have also risen, up from 35% in 2022 to 41% in 2023.

These simultaneous trends of rising trust and distrust in the UK Government on foreign policy are driven by a sharp drop, from 13% to 5%, in Britons who don't know whether they trust the UK government on foreign policy. This likely reflects the higher salience of foreign policy in the mainstream media over the last year, primarily due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Trust in the UK government on foreign policy tends to mirror wider political divides. Trust in the UK Government on foreign policy is higher among Britons who voted Conservative in 2019 (58%) than among those who voted Liberal Democrat (42%) or Labour (32%). In fact, twice as many Britons who voted Labour in 2019 distrust (65%) the UK Government to act in the UK's best interests when it comes to foreign policy than trust (32%) it. These divides sharpen when looking at voting intention, with twice as many Britons intending to vote Conservative at the next election

Proportion of Britons who trust the UK Government to take foreign policy decisions in the public's interest, disaggregated by year



Surveys conducted by Opinium Research, J.L. Partners and the British Foreign Policy Group, 2020 - 2023

## The UK's Role in the World

(78%) trusting the UK government on foreign policy than those intending to vote for the Liberal Democrats (38%) or Labour (31%).

Meanwhile, a higher proportion of men (47%) than women (36%) trust the UK Government on foreign policy, as do a higher proportion of those from higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades (47%) relative to those from lower (C2DE) socio-economic grades (35%). At 55%, over-66s stand out for their trust in the UK government on foreign policy, while all other age groups have trust levels between 37% and 40%. Regionally, distrust in the UK government on foreign policy is particularly high across the devolved regions, with 71% of residents in Northern Ireland, 62% of residents in Scotland, and 61% in residents in Wales, distrusting the UK government. Meanwhile, London is the only region in which a majority of Britons trust the UK government on foreign policy (53%).

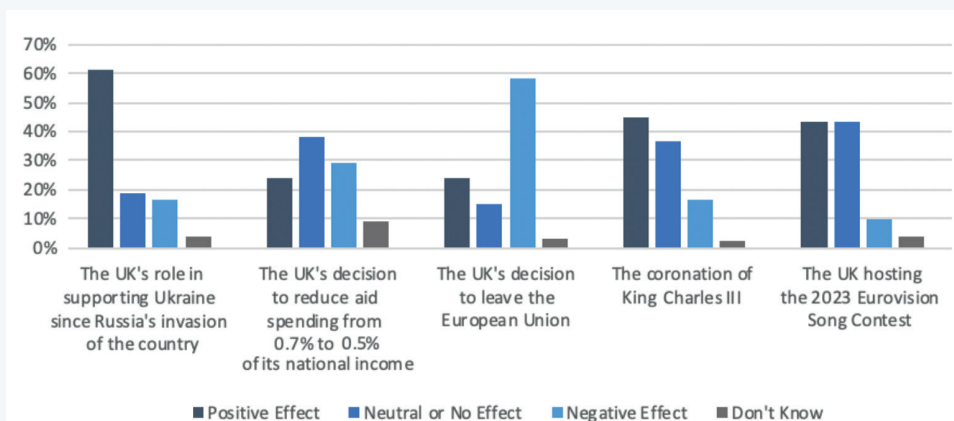
## The UK's International Reputation

The last few years have been particularly eventful in UK foreign policy, and in this year's survey, we therefore sought to assess how the British people believe some of these major events and policies have shaped the UK's international reputation. We find that a majority of Britons (62%) believe that the UK's role in supporting Ukraine since Russia's invasion of the country has had a (strongly or slightly) positive effect on the UK's reputation overseas. Just under half of Britons also believe that the coronation of King Charles III (45%) and hosting the 2023 Eurovision Song Contest (44%) have had a positive effect on the UK's reputation overseas.

However, some of the UK's major policy decisions are seen to have had more negative than positive effects on the UK's reputation overseas. This includes the UK's decision to leave the European Union, which 58% of Britons believe has had a (strongly or slightly) negative effect on the UK's reputation overseas. Additionally, while the largest proportion of Britons (38%) believe that the UK's decision to reduce aid spending from 0.7% to 0.5% of its gross national income (GNI) has had a neutral or no effect, a higher proportion of Britons believe it has had a negative effect (29%) than a positive effect (24%).

It is also notable that a sizable proportion of Britons believe a number of these decisions have not impacted the UK's reputation at all. This includes 43% of Britons who believe that hosting Eurovision has had a neutral or no effect on the UK's reputation, 38% of Britons who believe this in regard to reducing aid spending from 0.7% to 0.5% GNI, and 36% of Britons who believe the coronation of King Charles III has had a neutral or no effect. This suggests some perceived

### Britons' perceptions of the effects of specific events/policy decisions on the UK's international reputation



Survey conducted by J.L. Partners and the British Foreign Policy Group, May – June 2023

## The UK's Role in the World

rigidity in how the UK is viewed in the world, with only the biggest geopolitical events seen to have a particularly notable bearing on how the UK is viewed in the world.

### The UK's Role in Ukraine

Of the policies and events polled, the UK's role in supporting Ukraine since Russia's invasion of the country is the most widely regarded as having a (strongly or slightly) positive effect on the UK's reputation overseas (62%). Meanwhile, 18% of Britons believe it has had a neutral or no effect, and just 16% of Britons believe it has had a (strongly or slightly) negative effect.

Over-66s (87%) stand out for their belief that support for Ukraine has had a positive effect on the UK's reputation overseas, while only half of 26-35-year-olds (50%) believe it has had a positive effect. Belief that it has had a positive effect on the UK's reputation overseas is also particularly high among residents in the North East (73%) and, while still a majority, it is lowest in the South West (54%).

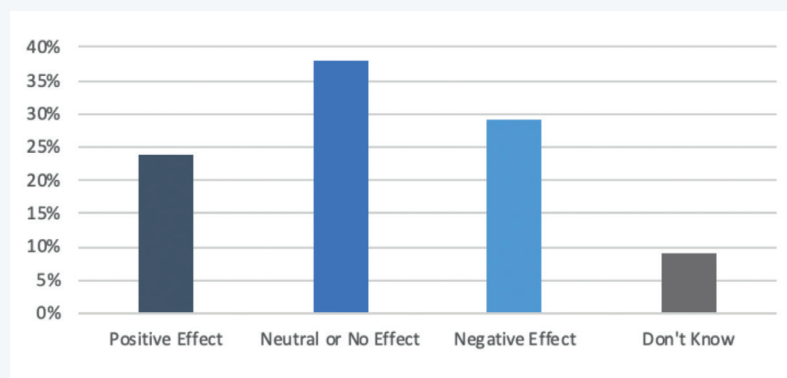
Britons intending to vote Conservative (76%) or Liberal Democrat (71%) at the next general election more frequently perceive positive reputational consequences from the UK's role in Ukraine than those intending to vote Labour (57%). In turn, twice as many of those intending to vote Labour (20%) than those intending to vote Conservative (10%) believe it has had negative reputational impacts for the UK.

### The Reduction in Aid Spending

Britons are divided over the perceived impact of the UK's decision to reduce aid spending from 0.7% to 0.5% of its gross national income (GNI). A plurality of Britons (38%) believe the move has had a neutral or no effect on the UK's reputation overseas, while 29% of Britons believe it has had a (strongly or slightly) negative effect, and 24% of Britons believe it has had a (strongly or slightly) positive effect. A further 9% of Britons don't know what their view is.

With the exception of 18-25-year-olds, all age groups most frequently believe that reducing aid spending has had a neutral or no effect. However, of the age groups, belief that it has had a negative effect on the UK's reputation is highest among 56-65-year-olds (35%), and belief that it has had a positive effect is highest among 36-45-year-olds (32%) and 26-35-year-olds (32%). Turning to voting preferences, the majority of 2019 Liberal Democrat voters (58%) believe the reduction in aid spending has had a negative effect on the UK's reputation overseas, compared to 34% of 2019 Labour voters and 22% of Conservative voters. This is still the largest proportion of 2019 Labour voters, while the largest proportion of 2019 Conservative voters believe it has had a neutral or no effect (45%).

Britons' perceptions of the effect that the UK reducing aid spend from 0.7% to 0.5% of GNI has had on the UK's international reputation



Survey conducted by J.L. Partners and the British Foreign Policy Group, May – June 2023



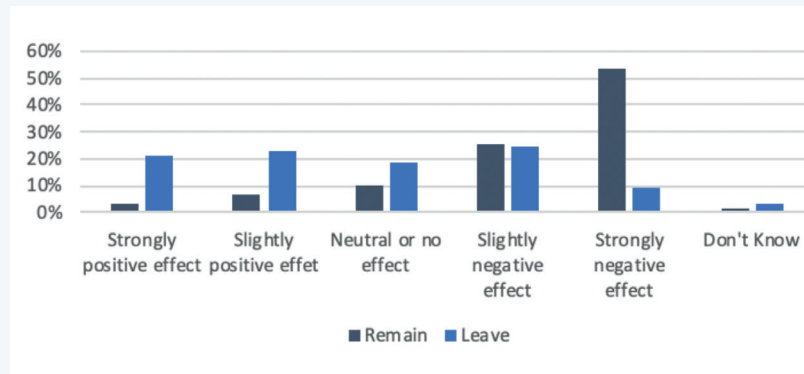
### The UK's Departure from the European Union

The majority of Britons (58%) believe that the UK's decision to leave the EU has had a (strongly or slightly) negative effect on its reputation overseas. Meanwhile, 24% of Britons believe the UK's departure from the European Union has had a (strongly or slightly) positive effect on its reputation overseas. A further 15% of Britons believe it has had a neutral or no effect, and 3% of Britons don't know their views.

Unsurprisingly, there is a sharp disparity in perceptions of the reputational impact of the UK's departure from the EU between Remain and Leave voters. Twice as many Remain voters (79%) as Leave voters (34%) believe the UK's departure from the EU has negatively affected the UK's reputation overseas. In turn, four times more Leave voters (44%) than Remain voters (10%) believe it has had a positive effect on the UK's reputation overseas. Meanwhile, Britons intending to vote Liberal Democrat (71%) or Labour (69%) at the next election much more frequently believe the UK's departure from the EU has had a negative effect on its reputation overseas than those intending to vote Conservative (41%).

Despite being one of the demographics most likely to have voted for the UK to leave the EU, belief that leaving the EU has had a negative effect on the UK's reputation is highest among Britons aged 56-65 (68%).<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, belief that it has had a negative effect is highest among residents in Northern Ireland (71%), while the West Midlands (49%) is the only region where there is not a majority of Britons who believe it has had a negative effect.

Britons' perceptions of the effect that the UK's decision to leave the EU has had on the UK's reputation, disaggregated by EU Referendum vote



Survey conducted by J.L. Partners and the British Foreign Policy Group, May – June 2023

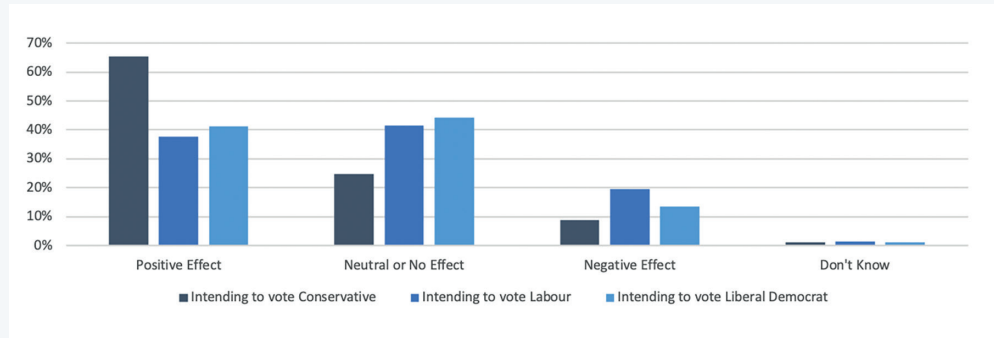
### The Coronation of King Charles III

The coronation of King Charles III is seen by 45% of Britons to have had a (strongly or slightly) positive effect on the UK's reputation internationally. A further 36% of Britons believe it has had a neutral or no effect, while 17% of Britons believe the King's coronation has had a (strongly or slightly) negative effect on the UK's reputation overseas. A further 3% of Britons don't know what effect they believe the coronation has had on the UK's reputation overseas.

The largest variation in perceptions emerges along partisan voting lines, with 65% of those intending to vote Conservative at the next election believing the coronation of King Charles III has had a positive effect on the UK's reputation overseas, compared to 41% of those intending to vote Liberal Democrat and 38% of those intending to vote Labour. In turn, twice as many of those intending to vote Labour at the next election (20%) believe it has had a negative effect on the UK's reputation overseas than those intending to vote Conservative (9%).

<sup>2</sup> BBC (2021). *EU referendum: The result in maps and charts*. Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-36616028>

**Britons' perceptions of the effect that the coronation of King Charles III has had on the UK's reputation, disaggregated by voting intention**



Survey conducted by J.L. Partners and the British Foreign Policy Group, May – June 2023

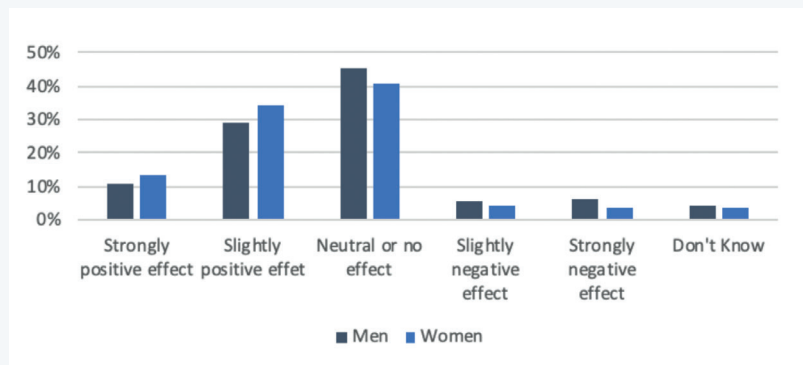
Belief that the coronation of King Charles III has had a positive effect on the UK's reputation overseas is highest among residents in Eastern England (50%) and lowest among residents in Scotland (33%). A majority of over-66s (57%) and Britons aged 56-65 (53%) believe it has had a positive effect on the UK's international reputation, while just 30% of Britons aged 18-25 believe this. In fact, the same proportion of Britons aged 18-25 believe the coronation has had a negative effect on the UK's reputation overseas (30%) as believe that it has had a positive effect (30%).

**The UK Hosting the Eurovision Song Contest**

In May 2023, the UK hosted the Eurovision song contest for the first time in 25 years. Overall, 44% of Britons believe that hosting the competition has had a (strongly or slightly) positive effect on the UK's reputation overseas, while 43% of Britons believe it has had a neutral or no effect. However, just 10% of Britons believe it has had a (strongly or slightly) negative effect.

Belief that hosting this year's Eurovision Song Contest has had a positive effect on the UK's reputation overseas is higher among women (48%) than men (39%). Regionally, belief that hosting the contest has had a positive effect on the UK's reputation overseas is particularly high in Yorkshire and Humberside (49%), London (49%), and the North West (48%), the last of which includes residents of the host city Liverpool. By comparison, just 37% of residents in Scotland believe it has positively affected the UK's reputation internationally, while a majority of residents in Scotland (52%) believe it has had a neutral or no effect.

**Britons' perceptions of the effect that the UK hosting the 2023 Eurovision Song Contest has had on the UK's reputation, disaggregated by gender**



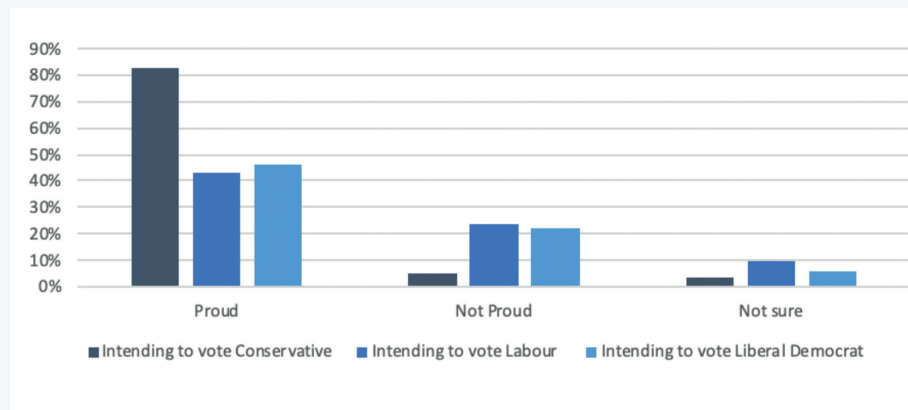
Survey conducted by J.L. Partners and the British Foreign Policy Group, May – June 2023

## Pride in the UK's Role in the World

Despite a substantial number of Britons believing that some of the UK's major policy decisions have had negative effects on the UK's reputation overseas, a majority of Britons (52%) now report feeling (very or quite) proud of the role that the UK currently plays in the world, up from 43% in 2022. Meanwhile, the proportion of Britons who feel not very or not at all proud of the UK's role in the world has almost halved from 40% in 2022 to 21% in 2023. A further 9% of Britons are unsure how they feel about the UK's role in the world.

There are likely to be several drivers of this heightened sense of pride. The UK's withdrawal from Afghanistan, which was widely criticised by Britons at the time, and the UK's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, which Britons believed negatively impacted international perceptions of the UK, likely contributed to the lower levels of pride displayed last year.<sup>3</sup> Distance from these events, and the very positive reception the UK's response to Ukraine has received both domestically and internationally, both of which are explored later in this report, are likely to be among the primary drivers of this heightened sense of pride.

Proportion of Britons who feel proud of the role the UK currently plays in the world, disaggregated by voting intention



Survey conducted by J.L. Partners and the British Foreign Policy Group, May-June 2023

Demographically, levels of pride in the UK's role in the world map closely on to levels of trust in the UK government on foreign policy - with men (55%) and older Britons, especially over-66s (65%), most frequently reporting feeling proud of the UK's role in the world. However, pride in the UK's current role in the world is particularly low in the devolved nations, with 47% of residents in Wales, 43% of residents in Northern Ireland, and just 39% of residents in Scotland feeling proud of the UK's role in the world. Given the UK's devolved regions also have very high levels of distrust in the UK government to make foreign policy decisions in the UK public's interest (see p15), these findings reflect an uphill battle that policymakers face in galvanising public consent for the UK's international activities across the devolved nations.

As with levels of trust in the UK government on foreign policy, there are also substantial political divides in levels of pride in the UK's role in the world. Among those intending to vote Conservative at the next election, 83% feel proud of the UK's role in the world, compared to just 47% of those intending to vote Liberal Democrat and 43% of those intending to vote Labour.

<sup>3</sup> Ibbetson, C. (2021). *Britons react to the collapse of Afghanistan*. Retrieved from: <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2021/08/16/britons-react-collapse-afghanistan>; British Foreign Policy Group (2022). *UK Public Opinion on Foreign Policy and Global Affairs Annual Survey - 2022*. Retrieved from: <https://bfp.org.uk/2022/06/2022-annual-survey/>

# The UK's Alliances and Partnerships

At the centre of the 2023 Integrated Review Refresh is a renewed focus on the UK's alliances and partnerships. The acceleration of global cooperation is seen to have enabled 'renewed purpose and cooperation among the UK's core network of allies and partners' and strengthened the impetus for the UK to widen its networks of partners.<sup>4</sup>

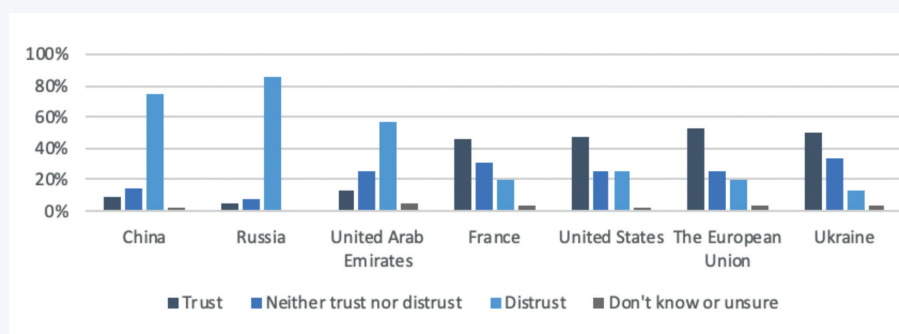
However, our research finds that while many of the UK's international partnerships, not least NATO and the G7, are seen to improve the UK's national security, Britons' perceptions of the UK's key partners and allies remain complex. In particular, while Britons overwhelmingly view the United States as the UK's closest ally, less than half of Britons trust the nation to act responsibly in the world. Meanwhile, while there is growing support for cooperation with the European Union, particularly around trade, a number of deep-seated demographic divides - along partisan, age, and regional lines - still surround the UK's relationship.

## Trust in Other Nations

Every year we explore Britons' levels of trust in a variety of nations. This year we polled on France, the United States, and the European Union - three of the UK's main international partners - and Russia and China - the UK's main strategic rivals. We also polled on Ukraine and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), two nations playing a major role on the world stage this year: Ukraine, due to the ongoing invasion of the country, and the UAE, as the host of COP28.

Of the seven nations polled, the European Union (53%) is the most frequently trusted (strongly or somewhat) to act 'responsibly' on the world stage, while half of Britons trust Ukraine (50%) to act responsibly. However, it is no longer the case that the majority of Britons trust the United States (48%) or France (46%) to act responsibly on the world stage. Meanwhile, an overwhelming number of Britons distrust Russia (strongly or somewhat) to act responsibly in the world (86%). The same is true to a lesser, but still large, extent, for China (74%). A majority of Britons are also distrustful of the United Arab Emirates' (57%) capacity and willingness to act responsibly in the world.

Proportion of Britons who trust or distrust specific countries/blocs to act responsibly in the world



Survey conducted by J.L. Partners and the British Foreign Policy Group, May - June 2023

<sup>4</sup> Cabinet Office (2023). *Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a More Contested and Volatile World*. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/integrated-review-refresh-2023-responding-to-a-more-contested-and-volatile-world>

### The European Union

A majority of Britons (strongly or somewhat) trust the European Union (53%) to act responsibly in the world, while 25% of Britons neither trust nor distrust the European Union in this regard, and 20% of Britons (strongly or somewhat) distrust it. A further 3% of Britons don't know or are unsure whether they trust the European Union to act responsibly in the world.

While other nations may have been more highly trusted than the EU, had they been polled (Australia, Canada and Germany have historically been very highly trusted, for example), it is striking that, post-Brexit, the EU is more widely trusted than France, a bilateral partner in the EU, as well as the United States, which Britons regard as the UK's closest ally.<sup>5</sup> This high level of trust, in relative terms, suggests that after a tense few years in the UK-EU relationship, there may increasingly be room and appetite for, at the very least, more cordial relations with the EU, built on mutual trust and respect.

Nonetheless, the legacy of Brexit fissures remain, with twice as many Britons who voted Remain (71%) compared to those who voted Leave (32%) trusting the EU to act responsibly in the world. In fact, a larger proportion of Britons who voted to leave the EU distrust (37%) the EU than trust (32%) it. Trust in the EU to act responsibly in the world is also particularly low among 46-55-year-olds (43%) and residents in the East Midlands (43%). It is highest among 18-25-year-olds (64%) and residents in Scotland (61%).

### Ukraine

With the UK's international activities focusing heavily on support for Ukraine, half of Britons (50%) (strongly or somewhat) trust Ukraine to act responsibly in the world. At 13%, Ukraine is the nation which the fewest Britons distrust. Meanwhile, 34% of Britons neither trust nor distrust Ukraine to act responsibly in the world, and 4% of Britons don't know or are unsure of their view. Of all the nations polled, perspectives of Ukraine are the least divided along demographic and political lines. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that 2019 Liberal Democrat voters (60%) show particularly high levels of trust in Ukraine's ability to act responsibly in the world, as do over-66s (60%). Meanwhile, Britons from lower (C2DE) socio-economic grades (45%), Britons aged 26-35 (44%), and residents in Northern Ireland (44%) show the lowest levels of trust in Ukraine.

### United States

Trust in the United States to act responsibly in the world sits just short of a majority, with 48% of Britons strongly or somewhat trusting the nation. Meanwhile, 26% of Britons neither trust nor distrust the United States to act responsibly in the world, and 25% of Britons (strongly or somewhat) distrust it. A further 2% of Britons don't know or are unsure of their view. Over-66s (54%) are particularly trusting of the United States, while Britons aged 56-65 (41%) are the age group who display the lowest levels of trust. Trust in the United States is also particularly high among residents in Wales (53%) and the South West (52%) and men (51%). Notably, given the United States' high levels of interest in Northern Ireland, just 35% of residents in Northern Ireland trust the United States to act responsibly in the world.

### France

The UK-France summit held in March 2023, the first such summit in five years, was pitched as a "moment of reunion and reconnection" between the two nations.<sup>6</sup> However, levels of trust in France to behave responsibly in the world have fallen nine percentage points over the last year, from 55% of Britons strongly or somewhat trusting the nation in 2022 to 46% in 2023.

---

<sup>5</sup> British Foreign Policy Group (2022). *UK Public Opinion on Foreign Policy and Global Affairs Annual Survey - 2022*. Retrieved from: <https://bfpgrp.co.uk/2022/06/2022-annual-survey/>

<sup>6</sup> Gallardo, C., & Caulcutt, C. (2023). *Sunak and Macron hail 'new chapter' in UK-France ties*. Retrieved from: <https://www.politico.eu/article/rishi-sunak-emmanuel-macron-hail-new-chapter-uk-france-ties-channel-migration/>

## The UK's Alliances and Partnerships

---

Meanwhile, 32% of Britons neither trust nor distrust France, and 20% (strongly or somewhat) distrust the nation. A further 3% of Britons don't know or are unsure of their position.

This is also the first year in which Britons have viewed France as less trustworthy than the United States. This suggests that agreements made at the UK-France summit have not disseminated into public consciousness enough to alleviate ongoing concerns among Britons around key challenges in the relationship - not least Channel migration, a topic which Britons feel particularly passionate about.

Demographic trends in perceptions of France mirror those of perceptions of the European Union, with residents in Scotland (54%) and Wales (53%), 18-25-year-olds (53%), 26-35-year-olds (50%), and Britons from higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades (49%) displaying the highest levels of trust in France to act responsibly in the world. The largest variations in levels of trust in France emerge along Brexit fault lines, with 18 percentage points more Remain (55%) than Leave (37%) voters trusting France to act responsibly in the world.

### United Arab Emirates

As host of this year's COP28 summit, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is at the centre of a number of key international conversations this year. However, 57% of Britons (strongly or somewhat) distrust the UAE to act responsibly in the world. A further 25% of Britons neither trust nor distrust the UAE, while just 13% of Britons (strongly or somewhat) trust the nation to act responsibly in the world.

Older Britons are the most distrustful of the UAE - with 72% of over-66s and 71% of 56-65-year-olds distrusting the nation to act responsibly in the world, compared to 35% of 18-25-year-olds. Distrust is also particularly high among residents in Northern Ireland (71%) and Eastern England (68%) and those intending to vote Liberal Democrat at the next election (65%).

### China

The majority of Britons (74%) are (strongly or somewhat) distrustful of China's ability to act responsibly in the world, including 46% of Britons who strongly distrust the nation. A further 14% of Britons neither trust nor distrust the nation, while just 9% of Britons (strongly or somewhat) trust China. However, distrust in China has fallen seven percentage points since 2022. This may reflect the fact that the heightened focus on Russia since its invasion of Ukraine may have diverted some attention away from China. It may also reflect distance from the Covid-19 pandemic, given Britons were highly critical of China's handling of the pandemic.<sup>7</sup>

Older Britons tend to be substantially more distrustful of China than younger Britons, with 91% of over-66s distrusting China, compared to 61% of 26-35-year-olds and 54% of 18-25-year-olds. Distrust is also higher among 2019 Conservative voters (85%) than 2019 Liberal Democrat (76%) or Labour (68%) voters.

### Russia

Of the nations polled, Britons are most distrustful of Russia, with 86% of Britons (strongly or somewhat) distrusting the nation to act responsibly in the world, including a large majority (73%) of Britons who strongly distrust the nation. Meanwhile, 8% of Britons neither trust nor distrust Russia to act responsibly in the world, while just 5% of Britons (strongly or somewhat) trust Russia. Interestingly, levels of distrust in Russia have fallen five percentage points since 2022. This may be driven by the reality of Russia's invasion of Ukraine being less severe than some Britons might have expected prior to the invasion, not least among those who feared Putin may use nuclear weapons.

---

<sup>7</sup> British Foreign Policy Group (2021). *UK Public Opinion on Foreign Policy and Global Affairs Annual Survey - 2021*. Retrieved from: <https://bfpgrp.co.uk/2021/02/2021-annual-survey/>

## The UK's Alliances and Partnerships

Demographically, levels of distrust mirror those seen in relation to China. Distrust of Russia to act responsibly in the world is highest among older Britons, with a striking 98% of over-66s and 95% of those aged 56-65 distrusting Russia, compared to 73% of Britons aged 18-25. Residents in Northern Ireland (94%) and Scotland (92%) also display particularly high levels of distrust, as do Britons who voted Conservative in 2019 (92%).

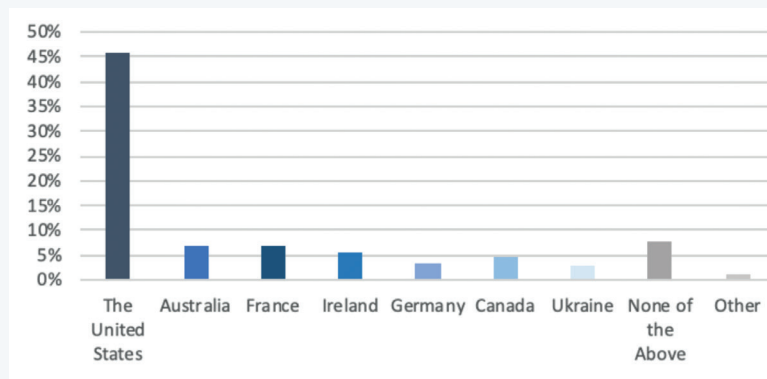
## The UK's Closest Ally

Every year we ask Britons which nations they view as the UK's closest ally. This year we asked about seven of the UK's key allies - Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Ireland, Ukraine and the United States. The list provided is not comprehensive but it does cover many of the nations that have, in previous polling by BFPG and others, been widely perceived as close UK allies. Furthermore, only 8% of Britons do not believe any of the nations are the UK's closest ally, and just 1% believe that another nation is the UK's closest ally.

Strikingly, given that less than half (48%) of Britons trust the United States to act responsibly in the world, six times more Britons view the United States (46%) to be the UK's closest ally than any other nation polled. Australia (7%) and France (7%) are distant runners-up, followed by Ireland (6%) and Canada (5%). Germany (3%) and Ukraine (3%) are the least frequently regarded as the UK's closest ally.

Belief that the United States is the UK's closest ally is particularly high in the North East (56%), among men (53%) and 36-45-year-olds (51%). It is also higher among Britons intending to vote Conservative at the next election (55%) than among those intending to vote Labour (48%) or Liberal Democrat (38%).

### Britons' perceptions of which nation is the UK's closest ally



Survey conducted by J.L. Partners and the British Foreign Policy Group, May - June 2023

## The UK's Relationship with the United States and the EU

When asked which relationship, out of the United States and the European Union, they view as the most important to the UK, Britons are more inclined to view the UK's relationship with the European Union as most important (48%) than its relationship with the United States (35%). Meanwhile, 17% of Britons don't know or are unsure which relationship they view to be the most important. Belief that the UK's relationship with the EU is the more important relationship has risen six percentage points in the last year, up from 42% in 2022. This likely reflects both the UK's renewed focus on Europe, particularly European security, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and the improvement of UK-EU relations since the agreement of the Windsor Framework.

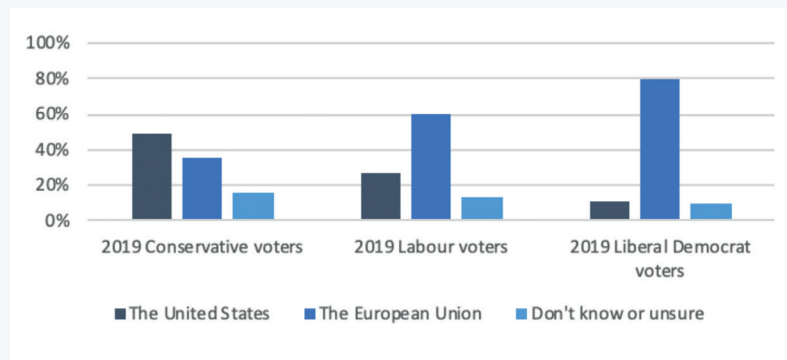


## The UK's Alliances and Partnerships

Younger Britons place a higher emphasis on the importance of the relationship with the EU than older Britons, with 61% of 18-25-year-olds viewing the UK's relationship with the European Union as more important, compared to 40% of over-66s. In fact, a higher proportion of over-66s believe the UK's relationship with the United States is more important (41%) than believe the UK's relationship with the EU is (40%). Meanwhile, belief that the UK's relationship with the EU is more important is particularly high among residents in Scotland (58%) and Northern Ireland (54%).

The sharpest differences though appear along political lines, with the vast majority of 2019 Liberal Democrat voters (79%), and to a lesser extent 2019 Labour voters (60%), viewing the UK's relationship with the EU as the most important, compared to just 35% of 2019 Conservative voters. Indeed, a higher proportion of 2019 Conservative voters view the relationship with the United States as the more important of the two relationships (49%) than view the EU relationship as such (35%). Similar trends emerge based on EU referendum voting, with twice as many of those who voted to leave the EU (51%) prioritising the relationship with the United States than those who voted to remain in the EU (23%).

**Britons' perceptions of whether the UK-EU or the UK-US relationship is more important, disaggregated by 2019 vote**



Survey conducted by J.L. Partners and the British Foreign Policy Group, May – June 2023t

## The Future of the UK-EU Relationship

Over the last year, and particularly since the signing of the Windsor Framework in February 2023, which brought at least a temporary resolution to many of the challenges surrounding the implementation of the Northern Ireland Protocol, relations between the UK and the EU have begun to improve. Indeed, the warmth in tone in relations between Prime Minister Sunak and the President of the European Commission, Ursula Von der Leyen, seem to signal a renewed governmental willingness to cooperate and engage with the EU.

This is also reflected in public perceptions of the UK's relationship with the EU. Support for every form of engagement polled has risen over the last year, and 83% of Britons now support the UK having at least one form of engagement with the EU. Just 5% of Britons would not support the UK having any engagement with the EU. The proportion of Britons that don't know which forms of engagement with the EU they would support has also fallen from 21% in 2022 to 12% in 2023, likely reflective of the agreement of the Windsor Framework and the passing of time more broadly, providing greater clarity of the practical opportunities and limitations to cooperation with the EU.

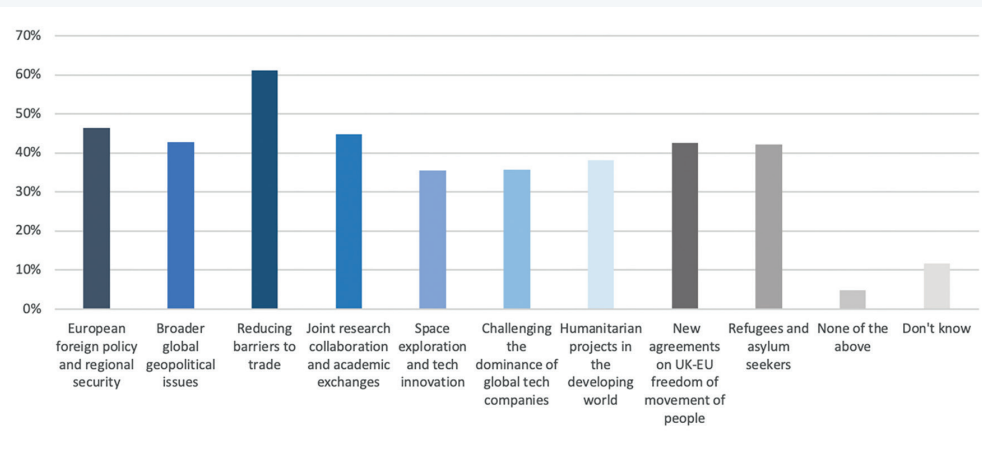
By far the most popular form of engagement is the trading relationship, with a majority of Britons supporting reducing barriers to trade in goods and services with the EU (61%). However, cooperation on European foreign policy and regional security (46%), joint research collaboration and academic exchanges (45%), cooperation on broader global geopolitical issues such as the rise of China (43%), new agreements to facilitate UK-EU freedom of movement of



## The UK's Alliances and Partnerships

people (43%) and cooperation on refugees and asylum seekers (42%) are all well supported as well. There are lower levels of support for collaborating on humanitarian projects and investments in the developing world (38%), cooperation on space exploration and technological innovation (36%), and cooperation to challenge the dominance of global technology companies (36%). This is likely because these less supported areas of cooperation are drawn from areas of foreign policy that tend to be less highly prioritised by Britons and, at least to a layperson, appear to present less immediate or direct concerns to the UK's security and prosperity.<sup>8</sup>

Proportion of Britons who support cooperation with the EU on...



*N.B Respondents could select more than one option.*

*Survey conducted by J.L. Partners and the British Foreign Policy Group, May – June 2023*

Men are more supportive than women of all forms of engagement polled, though this is driven primarily by the fact that over three times as many women (18%) than men (6%) don't know what forms of engagement they believe the UK should have with the EU. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that the size of the divergence in support varies substantially - there is a 15 percentage point difference between the proportion of men (43%) versus women (28%) who believe the UK should cooperate with the EU on space exploration and technological innovation, yet there are only four percentage points between the proportion of men (44%) and women (40%) who support cooperation on refugees and asylum seekers.

Support for each form of engagement is between 10 and 31 percentage points higher among Britons aged 55-65 than among 18-25-year-olds. The sharpest of these disparities is in support for cooperation with the EU on refugees and asylum seekers, which is supported by 61% of over-66s and 59% of 56-65-year-olds, compared to 32% of 36-45-year-olds, 28% of 18-25-year-olds and 27% of 26-35-year-olds. These age disparities are particularly striking given younger Britons generally take a more pro-EU stance - they more frequently identify as European, more often trust the EU to act responsibly in the world, and more widely believe the UK's relationship with the EU is more important than its relationship with the United States.

Britons intending to vote Liberal Democrat at the next election more frequently support each type of engagement polled, compared to those intending to vote Labour or Conservative. For example, 53% of Britons intending to vote Liberal Democrat at the next election support cooperating with the EU to challenge the dominance of global technology companies, compared to 39% of those intending to vote Labour and 36% of those intending to vote Conservative. What is most striking, though, is the difference in the relative prioritisation Britons intending to vote Labour and those intending to vote Conservative give to different forms of engagement. For example, those intending to vote Conservative are particularly supportive of engagement

<sup>8</sup> British Foreign Policy Group (2020). *UK Public Opinion on Foreign Policy and Global Affairs Annual Survey – 2020*. Retrieved from: <https://bfgp.co.uk/2020/06/public-opinion-foreign-policy/>

## The UK's Alliances and Partnerships

---

with the EU on trade (70%) relative to those intending to vote Labour (63%), while those intending to vote Labour (50%) are more supportive of new agreements to facilitate UK-EU freedom of movement of people than those intending to vote Conservative (40%).

Meanwhile, for each type of engagement polled, Remain voters are between 10 and 27 percentage points more supportive than Leave voters. The most visible divide emerges around new agreements to facilitate UK-EU freedom of movement of people, which are supported by 58% of Remain voters but just 31% of Leave voters. However, only 7% of Leave voters don't believe that the UK should have any engagement with the EU, and a majority of Leave voters (58%) are supportive of reducing trade barriers to the EU. This is likely reflective of the intensity of the debate around the EU referendum softening as time has passed, as clarity on the practicalities, opportunities and limitations of a post-Brexit Britain have entered public discourse. Such a softening has likely opened the door for Britons to observe and assess salient issues around the UK's relationship with the EU in a less emotional and more pragmatic and constructive manner.

### Partnerships

Looking beyond the UK's bilateral relationships, this year we took the opportunity to understand how Britons perceive the UK's key partnerships and, in a particularly geopolitically contested environment, to understand whether these partnerships are seen to matter to and improve the UK's security. We found, very clearly, that Britons believe that many of the UK's international partnerships make the UK safer. This is most emphatically felt in regard to NATO, with 75% of Britons believing that NATO makes the UK (much or slightly) safer. Meanwhile, the majority of Britons believe that the G7 (64%) and AUKUS (58%) make the UK safer. While Britons are less convinced of the security benefits of the Commonwealth - with 49% believing it makes the UK safer - just 5% of Britons believe that it makes us (much or slightly) less safe.

#### NATO

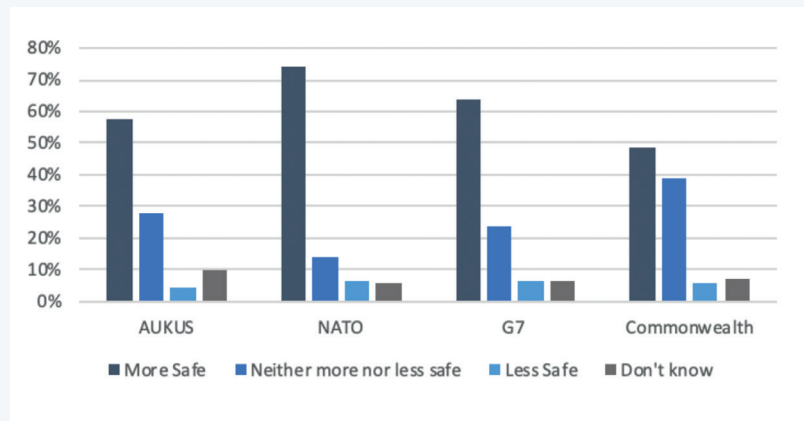
Of the four partnerships polled, NATO is the partnership that the largest proportion of Britons believe makes the UK more safe, with 75% of Britons believing it makes the UK much or slightly more safe. This includes 39% of Britons who believe the UK's relationship with NATO makes the UK much more safe. A further 14% of Britons believe NATO makes us neither more nor less safe, 6% of Britons believe it makes the UK much or slightly less safe, and 5% don't know their views. The large proportion of Britons who believe the partnership makes the UK more safe likely reflects both the high-profile nature of NATO, particularly since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and the very direct security focus of the organisation.

However, NATO is the partnership that creates the sharpest generational divides in perceptions. 90% of over-66s and 86% of those aged 56-65 believe NATO makes the UK safer, compared to just 62% of 26-35-year-olds - likely reflective of older Britons' greater familiarity with NATO, as a result of growing up under the spectre of the Cold War. NATO also creates the sharpest socio-economic divides in perceptions, with 81% of those in higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades believing the partnership makes them safer, compared to 67% of those in lower (C2DE) socio-economic grades. Meanwhile, 84% of 2019 Liberal Democrat voters and 82% of 2019 Conservative voters believe NATO makes the UK safer, compared to 73% of 2019 Labour voters (73%).

#### G7

Turning to the G7, the majority of Britons (64%) believe that the grouping makes the UK (much or slightly) safer. Meanwhile, 24% of Britons believe it makes us neither more nor less safe, while 6% believe it makes us (much or slightly) less safe. A further 7% of Britons don't know their views.

Britons' perceptions on the impact of specific partnerships on the UK's safety



Survey conducted by J.L. Partners and the British Foreign Policy Group, May – June 2023

Belief that the G7 makes the UK safer is particularly high among over-66s (73%), and while still a majority, it is lowest among Britons aged 46-55 (57%). Belief that the G7 makes the UK safer is also particularly high among Britons intending to vote Conservative (74%) or Liberal Democrat (73%) at the next election and residents in Northern Ireland (68%).

**AUKUS**

The majority of Britons (58%) believe AUKUS - the UK's defence partnership with Australia and the United States - makes the UK safer. This includes 40% of Britons who believe it makes the UK slightly more safe and 18% of Britons who believe it makes the UK much more safe. Meanwhile, 28% of Britons believe that AUKUS neither makes it more nor less safe, while 4% believe it makes the UK less safe. Of the partnerships polled, AUKUS is the partnership for which the largest proportion of Britons (10%) are uncertain of its implications for UK security, likely reflective of the relatively new nature of the partnership.

Men (62%), more frequently than women (53%), believe AUKUS makes the UK safer, as do those from higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades (63%) compared to those from lower (C2DE) socio-economic grades (52%). Britons in Northern Ireland (65%) and the South East (64%) display particularly high levels of belief that AUKUS makes the UK safer, while regionally those in the South West display the least (51%).

Perceptions around the security implications of AUKUS create the sharpest partisan divides of the partnerships polled, with 73% of Britons who intend to vote Conservative at the next election believing the partnership will make them safer, compared to 57% of those intending to vote Liberal Democrat and 55% of those intending to vote Labour.

**Commonwealth**

At just under half (49%) of Britons believing the Commonwealth makes the UK (much or slightly) more safe, of the partnerships polled, the Commonwealth is the least widely seen to make the UK safe. However, with just 5% of Britons believing the partnership makes us (much or slightly) less safe, this is not primarily driven by concern that the partnership makes the UK less safe, but rather by a view, held by 39% of Britons, that the partnership makes us neither more nor less safe. A further 7% of Britons are unsure of their view.

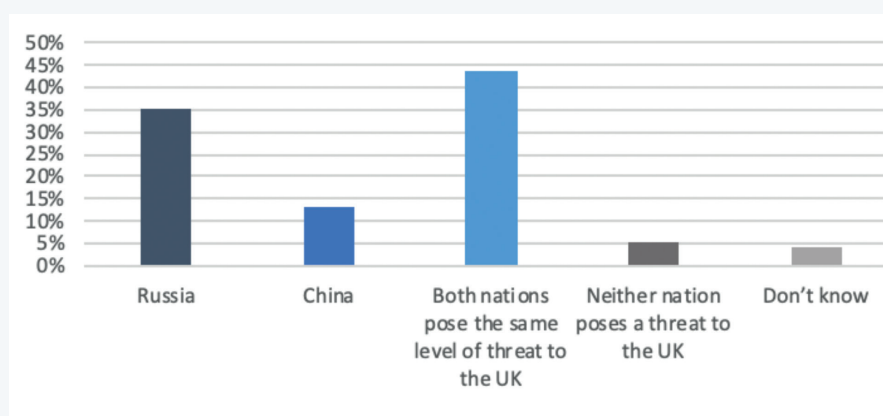
The Commonwealth produces the least clear demographic divisions in perceptions of its security implications for the UK. The one exception to this is voting intention. Belief that the Commonwealth makes the UK safer is noticeably higher among Britons intending to vote Conservative at the next election (64%) than those intending to vote Labour (48%) or Liberal Democrat (43%).

# Strategic Rivals

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the 2023 Integrated Review Refresh unequivocally condemned Russia as 'the most acute threat to the UK's security'. To much public debate, the UK has, so far, veered away from designating China as a 'threat', instead describing it as an 'epoch-defining challenge', as it attempts to balance engagement with China on economic and global issues, with concerns over China's aggression in the Indo-Pacific and growing influence in world affairs.<sup>9</sup> While the two nations are therefore both regarded as providing clear challenges for the UK Government, the UK's approach and responses to them are very distinct.

This year we asked respondents which of the two nations they perceived to be the greatest threat to the UK's national interest to see whether there was broad support for the distinct categorisation and approaches the UK currently takes to the two nations. We find that 43% of Britons believe that Russia and China pose the same level of threat to the UK's national interest at present. However, Russia (35%) is much more widely regarded as a greater threat to the UK's national interest than China (13%). A further 5% of Britons believe neither nation poses a threat to the UK, while 4% of Britons don't know their view.

**Britons' perceptions of the relative threats posed by Russia and China to the UK's national interest at present**



Survey conducted by J.L. Partners and the British Foreign Policy Group, May – June 2023

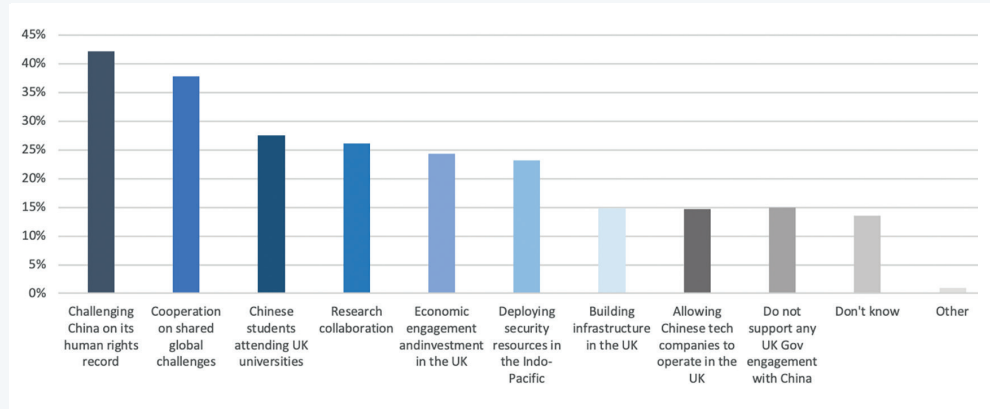
Respondents who voted Conservative in 2019 most frequently believe that the two nations pose the same level of threat to the UK (47%). Responses are split amongst 2019 Liberal Democrat voters, 42% of whom believe the two nations pose the same level of threat to the UK, while a further 42% believe Russia is the bigger threat. Meanwhile, 40% of 2019 Labour voters view Russia as the bigger threat, while 38% of 2019 Labour voters believe both nations pose the same level of threat to the UK.

## UK-China Relations

As the UK continues to navigate the complexities of how to engage with China, our research finds that Britons tend to prioritise a values-driven approach to engagement with China and remain cautious of economic and academic cooperation. Of the eight forms of engagement polled, challenging China on its human rights record is the most frequently supported form of engagement (42%), followed by cooperation on shared global challenges, such as climate

<sup>9</sup> Cabinet Office (2023). *Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a More Contested and Volatile World*. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/integrated-review-refresh-2023-responding-to-a-more-contested-and-volatile-world>

Proportion of Britons who support the UK having specific forms of engagement with China



N.B Respondents could select more than one option. Survey conducted by J.L. Partners and the British Foreign Policy Group, May – June 2023

change (38%). There is substantially less support for all other forms of cooperation. Academic cooperation is the next most favoured form of engagement, albeit markedly less popular, with 28% of Britons supporting Chinese students attending UK universities and higher education, and 26% of Britons supporting research collaboration between the UK and China. Meanwhile, less than a quarter of Britons support Chinese economic engagement and financial investment in the UK (24%), or the UK deploying security resources to contain China's aggression in the Indo-Pacific (23%). Britons are least supportive of China building infrastructure in the UK, such as nuclear plants and 5G technology (15%), and it is also the case that 15% of Britons do not support the UK Government having any engagement with China whatsoever. This year, we expanded this question to also assess support for allowing Chinese technology companies to operate in the UK (e.g. TikTok). Britons' limited support for this engagement (15%) aligns with the broader trend of Britons supporting a cautious relationship with China in recent years, in which support for engagement centres around values-based activity, while more constructive forms of collaboration and partnership are viewed more sceptically.

These findings align broadly with the results from both 2021 and 2022, with relative levels of support for each form of engagement remaining much the same, highlighting consistency in the broad types of engagement Britons want the UK to have with China. However, across the board, Britons are more supportive of engagement with China this year than they were in 2022, with an increase in support reflected across all engagement methods. For example, support for cooperation on shared global challenges such as climate change has risen from 33% in 2022 to 38% in 2023. Meanwhile, support for research collaboration between the two nations has increased from 21% in 2022 to 26% in 2023. It is striking that the trend that we were able to observe last year - of an overall hardening of public opinion in regard to China - looks to have reversed in 2023, despite the increasingly tough stance and rhetoric being taken in Westminster. Given a higher proportion of Britons view Russia as a bigger threat than China, it appears that Britons' security concerns may have, at least temporarily, been diverted away from China towards Russia, strengthening opportunities for collaboration. The challenges posed by the invasion may also have made cooperation with China appear more strategically necessary to Britons, to offset the challenges presented by decoupling from Russia.

Older Britons are the most supportive of values-led engagement with China, with 48% of over-66s supporting cooperation on shared challenges such as climate change, compared to 31% of 18-25-year-olds. Meanwhile, younger Britons are, in relative terms, more supportive of academic and technological cooperation than older Britons. For example, five times as many 18-25-year-olds (24%) than over-66s (5%) believe that we should allow Chinese technology companies to operate in the UK.

## Strategic Rivals

---

Regionally, residents in Northern Ireland exhibit some of the highest levels of support for the various methods of engagement - they are, for example, the most supportive of Chinese economic engagement and financial investment in the UK (36%) and of Chinese students attending UK universities and higher education (34%). However, the sharpest disparity can be seen in support for challenging China on its human rights record, with 56% of residents in Northern Ireland supporting this, compared to just 37% of those in the South West.

Britons intending to vote Liberal Democrat also display particularly high levels of support for engagement with China across every form of engagement polled, relative to those intending to vote Conservative or Labour. For example, 46% of those intending to vote Liberal Democrat at the next election support Chinese students attending UK universities and higher education, compared to just 30% of those intending to vote Labour and 25% of those intending to vote Conservative.

# National Security

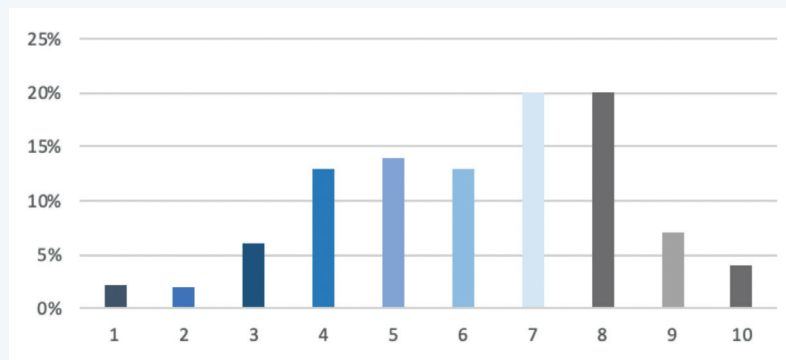
The central premise of the 2023 Integrated Review Refresh was to respond to a 'more contested and volatile world'.<sup>10</sup> This year, we therefore sought to understand public perceptions of the UK's national security challenges and how Britons believe the UK should respond to them. We found that, despite ongoing geopolitical volatility, Britons now feel more safe in the world than they did in 2022 or 2021. Nonetheless, Britons are still supportive of a number of measures designed to strengthen national security, in particular, the UK's membership of NATO and increasing defence spending to 2.5% of GDP. This suggests that while Britons may, broadly, feel safe, there is still an appetite for the UK to maintain and strengthen its defensive capabilities.

## Perceptions of Safety

When asked to score their current feelings of safety on a scale of 1-10, with 1 being extremely unsafe and 10 being extremely safe, 30% of Britons reported feeling 'safe' (scores of 8-10) and 10% reported feeling 'unsafe' (scores of 1-3). The strongest gravitational pull is towards the middle, with Britons' self-reported safety levels averaging at 6.17 out of 10. These results show an increase in Britons' self-reported overall safety levels, with the number of Britons reporting feeling 'safe' increasing from 23% in 2022 and 18% in 2021. This trend in feelings of security is also reflected in the Australian population, with the 2023 Lowy Institute Poll finding that feelings of safety among Australians have increased 10 percentage points over the past year.<sup>11</sup>

This may seem counterintuitive given the volatility of the current geopolitical environment, but there are a number of potential causes. The most likely seems to be distance from the Covid-19 pandemic, which BFPG research undertaken during that time found to lead to significant feelings of uncertainty and anxiety among Britons. It may also be driven by the fact Ukraine has not fallen to Russia as quickly as some expected prior to the invasion, potentially reassuring Britons about the strength of the Western alliance and the limitations of the threat posed by Russia. Another factor to note could be the signing of the Windsor Framework, which has, so far, brought more stability to the UK-EU relationship.

### Britons' perceptions of their personal safety, with 1 being extremely unsafe and 10 being extremely safe



Survey conducted by J.L. Partners and the British Foreign Policy Group, May – June 2023

<sup>10</sup> Cabinet Office (2023). *Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a More Contested and Volatile World*. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/integrated-review-refresh-2023-responding-to-a-more-contested-and-volatile-world>

<sup>11</sup> Lowy Institute (2023). *Lowy Institute Poll 2023: Understanding Australian Attitudes to the World*. Retrieved from: <https://poll.lowyinstitute.org/files/lowyinstitutepoll-2023.pdf>

## National Security

---

Britons intending to vote Conservative at the next election (41%), as well as residents in the West Midlands (36%) and Wales (35%), report particularly high feelings of safety. Men (33%) also report higher feelings of safety than women (27%). Age is also an interesting determinant of perceived levels of safety, with 38% of 36-45-year-olds and 35% of 26-35-year-olds reporting feeling safe. Meanwhile, younger Britons - those aged 18-25 (27%) - and 46-55-year-olds (26%) and over-66s (26%) are the age groups which least frequently report feeling safe.

## Perceptions of Security Threats

To understand what drives Britons' feelings of security (or lack thereof), we asked respondents to select, out of 11 potential threats, the three threats that they regard as posing the biggest threat to the UK and to rank them in order of priority. Terrorism is most frequently seen as the top threat, with just over a fifth of respondents (21%) identifying it as the number one threat to the UK's national security. Other threats seen by over 10% of respondents as the top threat include climate change (19%), continued Russian aggression (18%), and the rise of China as a world power (14%). Fewer than 10% of respondents feel other options pose the top threat, including cyber-attacks from other countries (8%), a global economic crisis (5%), a nuclear arms race (3%), the emergence of a new global health pandemic (3%), the break-up of the union of the United Kingdom (2%), foreign interference in UK politics and democracy (2%), and the development of advanced artificial intelligence (1%). A further 4% of Britons are unsure what they perceive to be the biggest threat, 1% view something else as the biggest threat and another 1% believe none of the above are the biggest threat.

Looking more broadly at Britons' selection of the top three threats to UK national security, Britons most frequently view continued Russian aggression as a top three threat (53%), followed by the rise of China as a world power (39%) and then terrorism (34%). The next most widely selected threats are cyber-attacks from other countries (30%), climate change (29%), and a global economic crisis (22%). The emergence of a new global health pandemic (15%), a nuclear arms race (15%), foreign interference in UK politics and democracy (13%), the break-up of the union of the United Kingdom (12%), and the development of advanced artificial intelligence (12%) are least frequently selected as one of the top three biggest threats to the UK.

The lack of alignment between which threats Britons most frequently consider the biggest, and which threats they consider to be one of the three biggest, provides some interesting insights into the salience of some of these threats. There is, for example, a sizable minority of respondents for whom climate change is seen as the biggest threat (19%). However, for most respondents, it doesn't feature among their top three threats, with only 29% of Britons viewing it as a top three threat. The same is true for terrorism, which a sizable minority of participants (21%) see as the biggest threat, but is only regarded as a top three threat by a third of Britons (34%). The reverse is true for threat perceptions around Russia. While a majority (53%) of Britons view continued Russian aggression as a top three threat to the UK, only 18% view it as the biggest threat.

Continued Russian aggression is most frequently selected as a top three threat by all age groups, although over-66s (64%) show particularly high levels of concerns about continued Russian aggression compared to other age groups, particularly 26-35-year-olds (42%). Meanwhile, it is striking that while, at 41%, climate change is the second most selected top three threat among 18-25-year-olds, just 23% of 46-55-year-olds view it as one of the three biggest threats. The extent to which climate change is viewed as one of the biggest threats also produces particularly sharp distinctions along political lines. Among those intending to vote Liberal Democrat at the next election, 37% view climate change as one of the biggest threats to the UK, as do 34% of those intending to vote Labour. However, just 24% of those intending to vote Conservative view it as a top three threat.

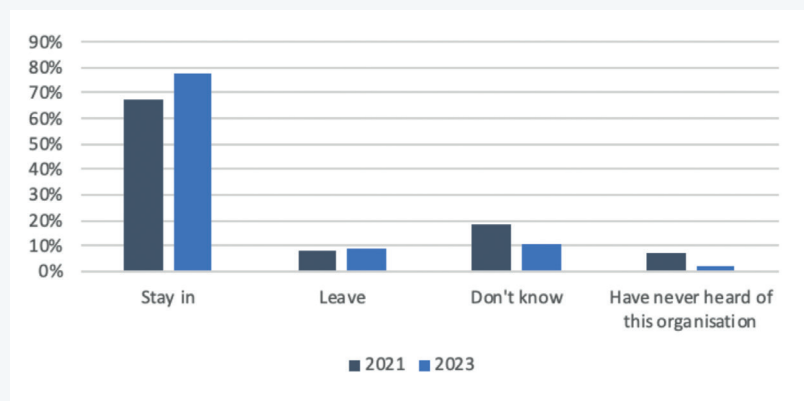


## NATO Membership

Looking at measures designed to strengthen the UK's national security, Britons are strongly supportive of the UK's membership of NATO, with 78% of Britons believing the UK should stay in NATO, while just 9% of Britons believe the UK should leave NATO. This marks a substantial 11 percentage point uplift in support for membership of the organisation in two years, from 67% in 2021. This is driven in large part by the fact the proportion of Britons who 'don't know' their view of NATO membership has fallen from 18% in 2021 to 11% in 2023, while the proportion who have never heard of NATO has fallen five percentage points from 7% to 2%. It is striking that this increased awareness of NATO has primarily been funnelled into an uplift in support for NATO membership, suggesting that the prominent role NATO has played in Ukraine, which likely drives much of this growth in awareness, has made the strategic value of membership more evident.

Support for NATO membership is highest among older Britons, with 92% of over-66s and 90% of those aged 56-65 supporting membership, while 26-35-year-olds are the least supportive (64%). Britons in higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades (84%) are also more supportive than those in lower (C2DE) socio-economic grades (70%). 2019 Liberal Democrat (88%) and Conservative (84%) voters also display higher levels of support for staying in NATO than 2019 Labour voters (76%), as do Remain voters (85%) relative to Leave voters (76%).

**Proportion of Britons who believe the UK should stay or leave NATO, disaggregated by year**



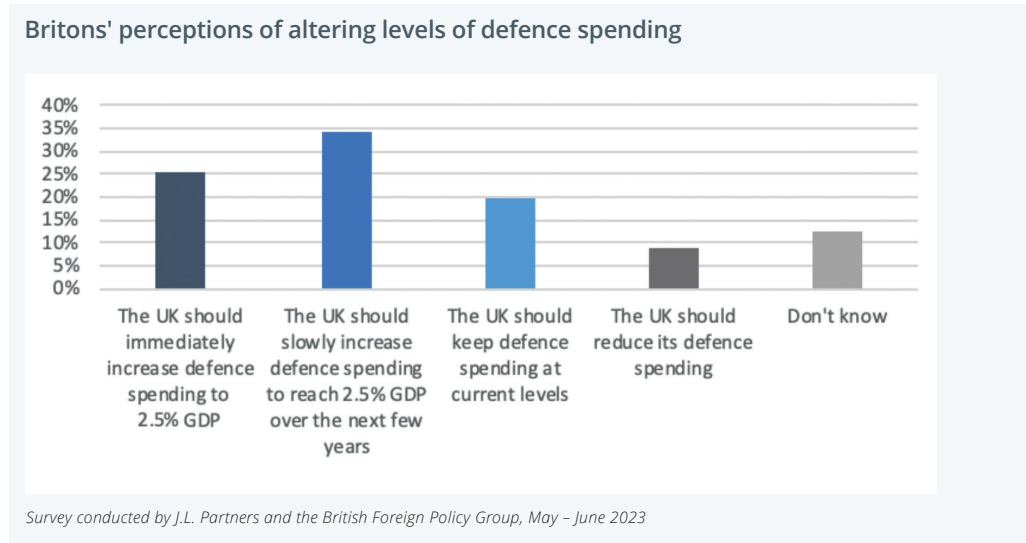
Surveys conducted by Opinium Research, J.L. Partners and the British Foreign Policy Group, 2021 – 2023

## Defence Spending

Earlier this year, the UK set out an ambition to, in the long-term, increase defence spending to 2.5% of GDP, to maintain the UK's position in NATO and support the ongoing modernisation of the UK's armed forces.<sup>12</sup> The principle of increasing defence spending is widely endorsed, with 59% of Britons believing we should (immediately or slowly) increase defence spending to 2.5% of GDP. This includes 34% of Britons who believe we should slowly increase defence spending to reach 2.5% of GDP over the next few years and 25% of Britons who believe we should immediately increase defence spending to 2.5% of GDP. Meanwhile, 20% of Britons believe that the UK should keep defence spending at current levels, while 9% of Britons believe the UK should reduce its defence spending. A further 12% of Britons don't know their view. This high level of support for increasing defence spending is particularly striking given previous BFIG surveys have highlighted Britons' apprehension about any increases to foreign policy spending.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Cabinet Office (2023). *Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a More Contested and Volatile World*. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/integrated-review-refresh-2023-responding-to-a-more-contested-and-volatile-world>

<sup>13</sup> British Foreign Policy Group (2022). *UK Public Opinion on Foreign Policy and Global Affairs Annual Survey – 2022*. Retrieved from: <https://bfigp.co.uk/2022/06/2022-annual-survey/>



While women tend to feel less safe than men (see p32), they are also less supportive of increasing defence spending - for example, 30% of men believe the UK should immediately increase defence spending to 2.5% of GDP, compared to 20% of women. This might reflect the fact that the drivers of women's lower feelings of safety may be less likely to be solved by increasing defence spending, or they may hold lower levels of confidence in the potential benefits of increasing defence spending. Meanwhile, three times as many over-66s (40%) than 18-25-year-olds (12%) believe the UK should immediately increase defence spending.

# Ukraine

Since Russia invaded Ukraine, the premise that ‘Ukraine’s security is all of our security’ has lain at the heart of the UK’s foreign policy agenda, with the UK seeking to take on a leading role in support for Ukraine.<sup>14</sup> We, therefore, sought to understand how Britons interpreted Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, what the implications for the UK are seen to be, and, over a year since the invasion, where public support for assistance to Ukraine lies.

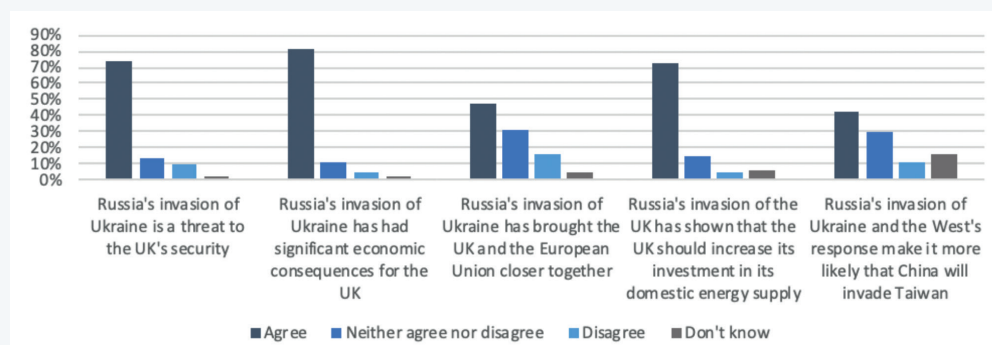
We found that despite Britons feeling safer now than they have in previous years, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is seen to have had profound economic, energy and security implications for the UK and, to a lesser extent, the wider geopolitical environment. Despite these perceived consequences, public support for assistance to Ukraine remains very high, with a majority of Britons supporting all forms of aid provided to Ukraine and believing the UK should support Ukraine for ‘as long as it takes’.

## Implications of the Crisis

In the 2023 Integrated Review Refresh, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is deemed to have had ‘far-reaching’ consequences for the UK.<sup>15</sup> Our research found that Britons broadly endorse this idea and a large majority of Britons believe Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has had substantial repercussions for the UK across a number of key areas. The vast majority of Britons polled (strongly or somewhat) agree that the invasion has had significant economic consequences for the UK (81%), but a large majority also agree that the invasion is a threat to the UK’s security (74%) and that the invasion has shown the UK should increase its own domestic energy supply (73%). The public has, historically, struggled to draw linkages between domestic and international activity, and it is therefore striking how well domestic consequences of the Ukraine crisis are understood by Britons.

Britons are less convinced of the potential wider geopolitical ramifications of the invasion, with 48% of Britons agreeing that the invasion has brought the UK and the EU closer together, while 42% agree that the invasion has made it more likely that China will invade Taiwan. This is likely because these effects are less directly and immediately felt by Britons. Nonetheless, substantially more Britons agree than disagree with each of these statements.

**Proportion of Britons who agree or disagree with specific statements on Russia's invasion of Ukraine**



Survey conducted by J.L. Partners and the British Foreign Policy Group, May – June 2023

<sup>14</sup> Cabinet Office (2023). *Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a More Contested and Volatile World*. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/integrated-review-refresh-2023-responding-to-a-more-contested-and-volatile-world>

<sup>15</sup> Cabinet Office (2023). *Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a More Contested and Volatile World*. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/integrated-review-refresh-2023-responding-to-a-more-contested-and-volatile-world>

### **Economic Consequences**

Britons are acutely aware of the economic consequences for the UK of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, with 81% of Britons agreeing it has had significant economic consequences for the UK. This includes 47% of Britons who strongly agree this is the case, while 34% of Britons somewhat agree. A further 11% of Britons neither agree nor disagree that it has had significant economic consequences, while 5% of Britons (strongly or somewhat) disagree.

Belief that the invasion has had significant economic consequences for the UK is particularly strong among older Britons, including both over-66s (94%) and those aged 56-65 (92%), residents in the North East (90%), and Britons intending to vote Conservative at the next election (87%). Meanwhile, a smaller majority of Britons aged 18-25 (65%) believe the invasion has had significant economic consequences for the UK.

### **UK Security**

A large majority of Britons (74%) agree that Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a threat to the UK's security. This includes 46% of Britons who somewhat agree and 29% of Britons who strongly agree. Meanwhile, 14% neither agree nor disagree. Just 9% of Britons (strongly or somewhat) disagree that the invasion is a threat to the UK's security, while 3% of Britons are uncertain of their view.

Belief that the Russian invasion of Ukraine poses a threat to the UK's security is highest amongst Britons who voted Liberal Democrat in the last election (82%), over-66s (81%), and 56-65-year-olds (79%).

Meanwhile, this belief is least widely held by Britons who voted Labour in 2019 (72%), residents in the East Midlands (71%), and 26-35-year-olds (68%). However, over two-thirds of respondents in all groups feel it is a threat, demonstrating widespread agreement across demographic groups.

### **Domestic Energy Supply**

A large majority of Britons (73%) also agree that Russia's invasion of Ukraine has shown the UK should increase its investment in its domestic energy supply, with 44% of Britons strongly agreeing that this is the case and 29% of Britons somewhat agreeing. A further 15% of Britons neither agree nor disagree, while 5% of Britons (strongly or somewhat) disagree.

Belief that the invasion has shown that the UK should increase investment in its domestic energy supply is higher among older Britons - including over-66s (87%) and those aged 56-65 (82%) - than younger Britons, particularly 18-25-year-olds (56%). While agreement remains high across the demographics, men (78%) also more frequently believe this than women (68%), as do Britons from higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades (78%) relative to those from lower (C2DE) socio-economic grades (68%). Agreement is also higher among Britons intending to vote Conservative at the next election (83%) than among those intending to vote Liberal Democrat (75%) or Labour (71%).

### **Closeness with the European Union**

At 48%, a plurality of Britons agree that Russia's invasion of Ukraine has brought the UK and the European Union closer together, with 34% of Britons somewhat agreeing and 13% strongly agreeing. A further 31% of Britons neither agree nor disagree, while 16% of Britons (strongly or somewhat) disagree that the invasion has brought the UK and the EU closer together, and 5% of Britons are unsure of their views.

Agreement that the invasion has brought the UK and the EU closer together is higher among men (52%) than women (43%), as it is among Britons from higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades (52%), relative to those from lower (C2DE) socio-economic grades (42%).

### Potential Invasion of Taiwan

We also asked Britons the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that 'Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the West's response to it make it more likely that China will invade Taiwan'. Of the statements polled, this statement is the least widely endorsed by Britons, with 42% of Britons (strongly or somewhat) agreeing. These lower (in relative terms) levels of agreement are driven primarily by neutrality and uncertainty rather than active disagreement with the statement, as 30% of Britons neither agree nor disagree, 17% of Britons don't know their views, while just 11% (strongly or somewhat) disagree.

Regionally, residents in Eastern England (46%), the East Midlands (46%), and the North East (46%) more frequently agree that it will make it more likely China will invade Taiwan, particularly relative to residents in Yorkshire and Humberside (32%).

### Support for Ukraine

When Russia invaded Ukraine, the UK collectively sprung into action. The UK Government quickly began supplying both humanitarian and military aid and, alongside allies, the UK unveiled unprecedented sanctions against Russia. Aid organisations, businesses, and ordinary civilians alike also scrambled to provide emergency support, while 130,000 Britons registered to house Ukrainian refugees within days of the 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme launching. Meanwhile, polling found a groundswell of support for Ukraine among the general public.<sup>16</sup>

Fast forward a year, and the UK has continued to lead the way in support for Ukraine. The UK is now the second largest military donor to Ukraine behind the United States, and it has consistently led from the front in pushing allies to provide more and wider support for Ukraine. For example, in January 2023 the UK became the first nation to pledge main battle tanks to Ukraine, and in June 2023 the UK hosted the Ukraine Recovery Conference, helping facilitate international investment to support Ukraine's reconstruction.<sup>17</sup>

Our research finds that public support for assisting Ukraine also remains very high. There is substantial support for all the primary forms of aid given to Ukraine, particularly humanitarian aid (85%), and the majority of Britons (53%) want to support Ukraine for as long as it takes.

### Types of Support

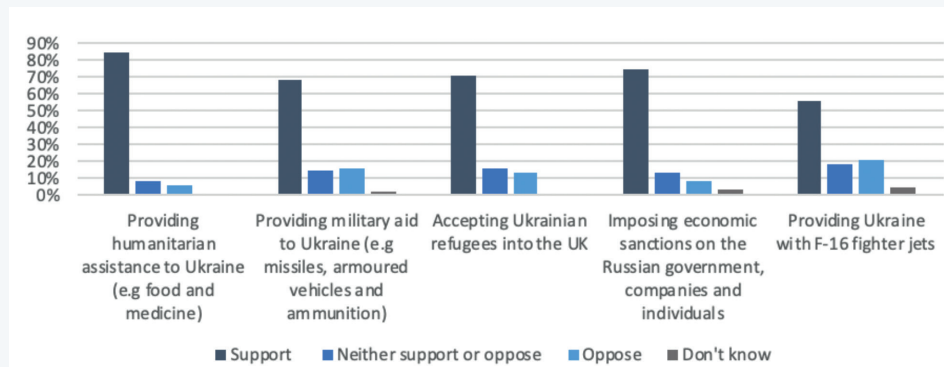
In understanding public support for Ukraine, we sought to understand what kinds of assistance Britons want the UK to provide to Ukraine. We found that providing humanitarian assistance such as food and medicines is by far the most widely supported, with 85% of Britons (strongly or somewhat) supporting this. Nonetheless, a substantial majority of Britons still support imposing economic sanctions on the Russian Government, companies and individuals (75%), accepting Ukrainian refugees into the UK (70%), and providing military aid to Ukraine such as missiles, armoured vehicles and ammunition (68%). A smaller proportion, though still over half, of respondents (56%) support providing Ukraine with F-16 fighter jets. The lower levels of support for this type of support, in relative terms, likely reflect Britons' wider apprehension about more overtly 'military' activity and the ongoing lack of consensus about the provision of F-16 fighter jets among the UK's allies.

---

<sup>16</sup> Culbertson, A. (2022). *Ukraine war: More than 130,000 Britons register interest in housing Ukrainian refugees*. Retrieved from: <https://news.sky.com/story/ukraine-war-more-than-100-000-britons-register-interest-to-house-ukrainian-refugees-12566826>; YouGov. (2022). *Support for Ukraine is strong in Europe, but nations are not as united as it looks*. YouGov. Retrieved from: <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/international/articles-reports/2022/05/05/support-ukraine-strong-europe-nations-are-not-unit>

<sup>17</sup> Mills, C. (2023). *Military assistance to Ukraine since the Russian invasion*. Retrieved from: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9477/CBP-9477.pdf>

**Proportion of Britons who support or oppose the UK taking specified actions in support of Ukraine**



Survey conducted by J.L. Partners and the British Foreign Policy Group, May – June 2023

**Humanitarian Assistance**

Overall, 85% of Britons support the UK providing humanitarian assistance to Ukraine (e.g. food and medicine). This includes a majority (52%) of Britons who strongly support this and 33% of Britons somewhat support this. Meanwhile, 9% of Britons neither support nor oppose this. Just 6% of Britons (strongly or somewhat) oppose the provision of humanitarian aid to Ukraine, while 1% of Britons don't know or are uncertain of their views.

Of the types of support polled, providing humanitarian assistance to Ukraine produces the least substantive variations in perspectives across demographics. However, it is notable that for a number of demographic characteristics, support for humanitarian assistance for Ukraine is over 90%. This includes over-66s (96%), those who voted Liberal Democrat in 2019 (93%), those aged 56-65 (91%), and residents in Northern Ireland (90%) and the North East (90%).

**Economic Sanctions**

With 75% of Britons in support, imposing economic sanctions on the Russian government, companies and individuals is the second most widely supported response. This includes a majority (51%) of Britons who strongly support these sanctions and 24% of Britons who somewhat support the move. Meanwhile, 14% of Britons neither support nor oppose, 9% (strongly or somewhat) oppose, while 3% of Britons don't know or are uncertain of their views.

However, support for sanctions differs substantially across age groups. While over-66s overwhelmingly support imposing economic sanctions (93%), only just over half of 18-25-year-olds are supportive (56%). Moreover, residents in London exhibit the lowest levels of support (67%), perhaps reflective of the city's financial sector's reliance on Russia and in turn, how much more sharply economic sanctions are likely to be felt in London than elsewhere in the UK.

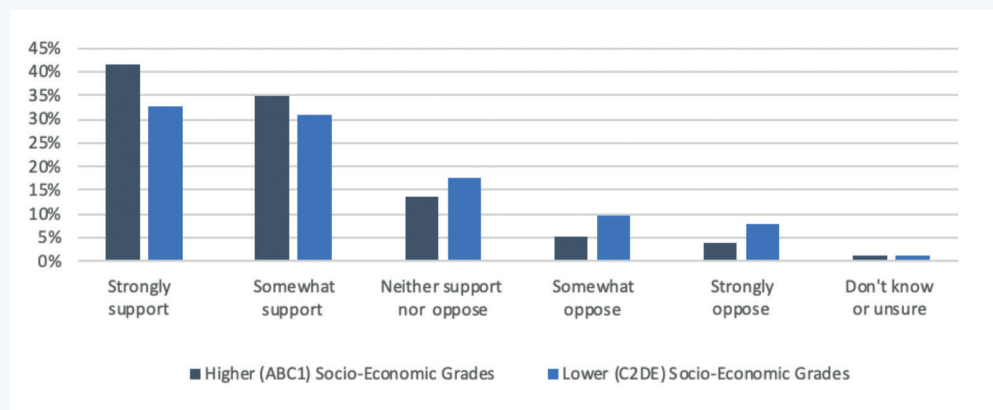
**Ukrainian refugees**

At 70%, the vast majority of Britons support the UK accepting Ukrainian refugees into the country. This includes 38% of Britons who strongly support accepting Ukrainian refugees and 33% who somewhat support this. Meanwhile, 16% of Britons neither support nor oppose it, 13% oppose it, and 1% of Britons don't know or are uncertain of their view.

## Ukraine

Of the forms of assistance polled, acceptance of Ukrainian refugees produces the largest socio-economic divides - over three-quarters (76%) of Britons in higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades support the UK accepting Ukrainian refugees, while two-thirds (64%) of those in lower (C2DE) socio-economic grades do. In turn, twice as many of those in lower (C2DE) socio-economic grades (18%) as those in higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades (9%) oppose accepting Ukrainian refugees into the UK. Meanwhile, across the board, there is relatively little divergence in views on support for Ukraine between EU Referendum voter cohorts, with the exception of views on accepting Ukrainian refugees. This is supported by 79% of Remain voters, compared to 67% of Leave voters. This reflects wider views on migration, explored later in this paper (see p42), with socio-economic status and referendum voting proving to be clear dividing lines in levels of support for migration more generally.

### Proportion of Britons who support or oppose the UK accepting Ukrainian refugees into the UK, disaggregated by socio-economic grade



Survey conducted by J.L. Partners and the British Foreign Policy Group, May – June 2023

### Military Aid

The majority of Britons (68%) support the UK providing military aid to Ukraine, including 35% of Britons who strongly support this and 33% who somewhat support this. Meanwhile, 16% of Britons oppose the provision of this aid, and 14% neither support nor oppose it. A further 2% of Britons don't know or are unsure of their views.

Military aid generates the sharpest variations along partisan voting lines, with support higher among 2019 Liberal Democrat voters (82%) than 2019 Conservative voters (76%) and 2019 Labour voters (63%). There are similarly sharp divergences in regard to voting intention, with 80% of those intending to vote Conservative at the next election supporting sending military aid to Ukraine, compared to 75% of those intending to vote Liberal Democrat and 66% of those intending to vote Labour. Military aid also produces particularly sharp age divides. While 88% of over-66s and 75% of those aged 56-65 support providing military aid to Ukraine, just 60% of 46-55-year-olds and 56% of 26-35-year-olds feel the same.

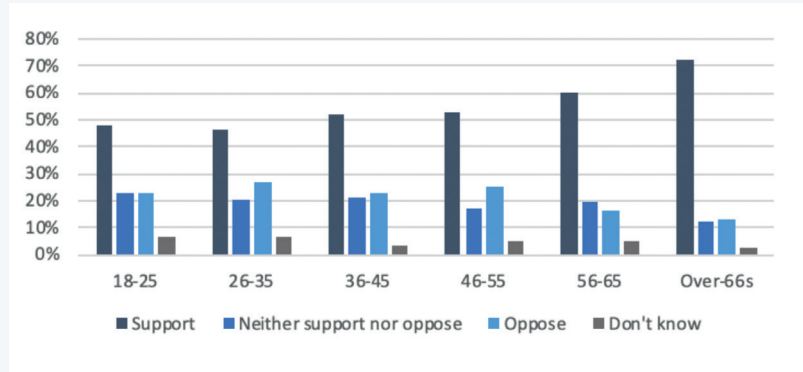
### F-16 Fighter Jets

While providing Ukraine with fighter jets is the least widely supported response to the Ukraine crisis, it is still the case that a majority of Britons (56%) support this. This includes 28% of Britons who strongly support the provision of fighter jets and 28% who somewhat support this. However, 21% of Britons oppose the provision of F-16 fighter jets, with 11% of Britons strongly opposing it and 10% somewhat opposing it. A further 19% of Britons neither support nor oppose providing F-16 fighter jets, and 5% of Britons don't know or are unsure of their view.

## Ukraine

The largest demographic variation in views on the provision of F-16 fighter jets emerges based on age, with 72% of over-66s supporting this, compared to just 46% of 26-35-year-olds.

### Proportion of Britons who support or oppose the UK providing Ukraine with F16 fighter jets, disaggregated by age

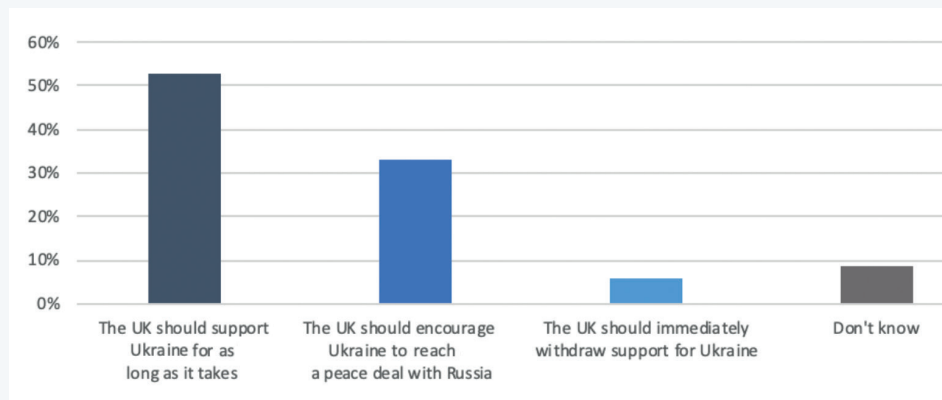


Survey conducted by J.L. Partners and the British Foreign Policy Group, May – June 2023

## Longevity of Support

In understanding current support for Ukraine, we also sought to understand how this support might be expected to endure as the war continues. We found that the majority of Britons (53%) believe the UK should support Ukraine for as long as it takes, while a third (33%) of Britons believe the UK should encourage Ukraine to reach a peace deal. However, just 6% of Britons believe the UK should immediately withdraw from Ukraine. A further 9% of Britons don't know their view.

### Proportion of Britons who support the following potential outcomes of the war in Ukraine and the UK's involvement



Survey conducted by J.L. Partners and the British Foreign Policy Group, May – June 2023

The starkest demographic variations in views are generational, with more consensus among older generations compared to younger ones, where there is more variation in opinion. A majority of respondents in each age group above the age of 46 believe the UK should support Ukraine for as long as it takes, with the highest levels of support found among over-66s (74%). However, younger respondents are roughly evenly split between those who believe we should support Ukraine for as long as it takes (40% of 18-25-year-olds), versus those who believe the UK should encourage Ukraine to reach a peace deal with Russia (42% of 18-25-year-olds).



## Ukraine

---

Residents in Scotland (59%) are the most supportive of the UK supporting Ukraine for as long as it takes. However, while half of residents in Northern Ireland (50%) believe the UK should support Ukraine for as long as it takes, at 41%, residents in Northern Ireland also display the highest levels of regional support for the UK encouraging Ukraine to reach a peace deal. Meanwhile, endorsement for supporting Ukraine for as long as it takes is 11 percentage points higher among Britons in higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades (58%) than Britons in lower (C2DE) socio-economic grades (47%).

# Migration

Britain's departure from the EU has heralded a significant reformation of UK migration policy. In 2021, upon leaving the EU, the UK introduced a new immigration system, ending the free movement of people between the UK and both the European Union and the European Economic Area. Within this new immigration system, targeted migration schemes have increasingly been used as routes by which to provide support and assistance in a crisis, with schemes introduced to support the migration of Ukrainian refugees, the resettlement of those who supported the UK's military operations in Afghanistan, and to provide visas and pathways to citizenship for British National Overseas (BNO) passport holders in Hong Kong.

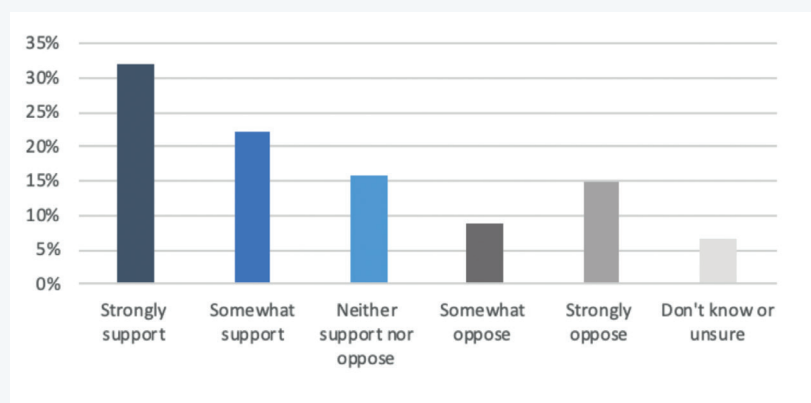
Our research finds high overall levels of support for the UK's current approach to migration - including the Illegal Migration Bill and migration schemes for certain individuals from Ukraine, Afghanistan and Hong Kong. However, there is little appetite to develop similar migration schemes for other nations currently experiencing significant domestic turmoil. There are also sharp demographic differences in perceptions of migration, and while support for the UK's current approach is high among older and more Conservative Britons, other demographics, particularly younger Britons, are less supportive.

## Illegal Migration Bill

At the centre of debates around migration has been a focus on irregular migration, particularly via the Channel, with Prime Minister Sunak committing to 'stop the boats' as one of his five main policy pledges for 2023. The UK Government's Illegal Migration Bill seeks to prevent and deter unlawful migration, and in particular migration by unsafe routes, by requiring the removal of anyone arriving illegally in the UK to their home country or to a safe third country to have their asylum claim processed.<sup>18</sup>

Our research finds that the bill is fairly widely endorsed, with the majority of Britons (54%) (strongly or somewhat) supporting the policy, while 23% of Britons (strongly or somewhat) oppose it. A further 16% of Britons neither support nor oppose the bill, while 7% of Britons are unsure of their view. The bill elicits particularly strong views, with Britons more frequently strongly supporting the bill (32%) than somewhat supporting the bill (22%) and similarly more

Proportion of Britons who support or oppose the UK's Illegal Migration Bill



Survey conducted by J.L. Partners and the British Foreign Policy Group, May – June 2023

<sup>18</sup> UK Parliament (2023). *Illegal Migration Bill*. Retrieved from: <https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/51629/documents/3583>

## Migration

frequently strongly opposing (15%) than somewhat opposing (9%). The strength of these opinions in both support and opposition is unusual in public opinion on foreign policy and likely reflects the intensity with which public and political debates around illegal migration tend to unfold.

Support for the bill varies substantially across age groups, with 69% of over-66s and 57% of 56-65-year-olds supporting the bill, compared to 37% of 18-25-year-olds. Indeed, half of over-66s (50%) strongly support the policy compared to just 12% of those aged 18-25. Support for the bill is also particularly high in the North East (61%) and the East Midlands (60%).

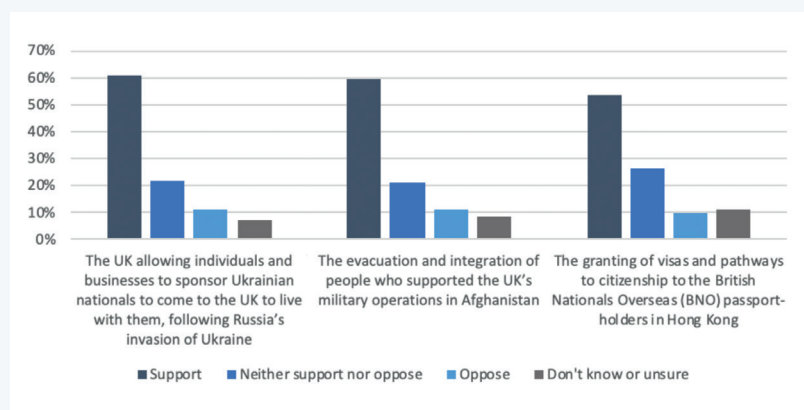
The sharpest divides in perceptions of the bill emerge along partisan voting lines - Britons intending to vote Conservative at the next election (78%) overwhelmingly support the bill, compared to 41% of Britons intending to vote Labour and 39% of Britons intending to vote Liberal Democrat. Nonetheless, Britons intending to vote Labour are still more likely to support (41%) than oppose (35%) the bill.

## Migration Schemes

A key component of the UK's post-Brexit migration policy has been the development and proliferation of new migration schemes. These migration schemes are increasingly used as a tool within the UK's foreign policy arsenal to support nations in times of crisis. The three main migration schemes created in the last few years have entailed: enabling the sponsorship of Ukrainian nationals to live in the UK, the granting of visas and pathways to citizenship for BN(O) passport-holders in Hong Kong, and the evacuation programme for Afghanistan allied partners and their families.

There is strong public support for these new migration schemes, with all three schemes being supported by a majority of Britons. Support is highest for the scheme for Ukrainian nationals, with 61% of Britons (strongly or somewhat) supporting this, followed by the scheme for Afghan allied partners and their families, with 59% of Britons strongly or somewhat supporting this. Support is slightly lower for the scheme to support BN(O) passport holders from Hong Kong, with 53% of Britons supporting this - likely reflective of the more recent and high-profile nature of the former two policies. Support for the schemes has endured well over the last year - in 2022, 59% of Britons supported migration schemes for Afghan allied partners and their families, and 51% supported the BN(O) settlement scheme. This is a positive sign for the ability of these schemes to maintain public support, years after they are introduced.

### Proportion of Britons who support specific routes to visas and citizenship in the UK



Survey conducted by J.L. Partners and the British Foreign Policy Group, May - June 2023

### **Sponsoring Ukrainian Nationals**

Looking in more detail at support for each of the schemes in turn, the UK's scheme to allow individuals and businesses to sponsor Ukrainian nationals to come to the UK to live with them is the most widely supported scheme. It is (strongly or somewhat) supported by 61% of Britons, while just 11% of Britons (strongly or somewhat) oppose the scheme. A further 21% of Britons neither support nor oppose the policy, and 7% of Britons don't know or are unsure of their views.

It is notable though, that when, as we reported earlier (see p38), we asked Britons whether they supported 'accepting Ukrainian nationals' as a route by which the UK could assist Ukraine, 70% of Britons supported this, compared to 61% who, when talking about migration policy, support 'the UK allowing individuals and businesses to sponsor Ukrainian nationals to come to the UK to live with them, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.' This may be the result of lower levels of support for the specifics of the Ukrainian sponsorship scheme than for the broad concept of accepting Ukrainian refugees, and/or the result of the framing of the questions, with the more direct links to strategic support for Ukraine in the first iteration driving up support.

The Ukrainian sponsorship scheme produces the sharpest division along EU Referendum voting lines of the three schemes polled, with support ten percentage points higher among Remain voters (69%) than Leave voters (59%). There are also substantial variations in support for the Ukrainian sponsorship scheme based on 2019 voting patterns - support is 16 percentage points higher among 2019 Liberal Democrat voters (77%) than 2019 Labour voters (61%). However, this narrows when looking at voting intention, and support for the scheme is only five percentage points higher among those intending to vote Liberal Democrat at the next election (68%) than those intending to vote Labour (63%).

### **Evacuation of Afghan Partners**

A majority (59%) of Britons support the evacuation and integration of people who supported the UK's military operations in Afghanistan, including 26% of Britons who strongly support this and 34% of Britons who somewhat support this. A further 21% of Britons neither support nor oppose the scheme, and just 11% of Britons (strongly or somewhat) oppose the scheme. Meanwhile, 9% of Britons don't know or are unsure of their view.

The Afghan resettlement scheme is the scheme that produces the sharpest divisions based on age, with 77% of over-66s and 71% of those aged 56-65 supporting the scheme, compared to just 50% of 36-45-year-olds and 49% of both 26-35-year-olds and 18-25-year-olds. There are also sharp divisions based on socio-economic status, with 66% of Britons from higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades supporting the scheme compared to 52% of those from lower (C2DE) socio-economic grades.

### **British Nationals (Overseas) in Hong Kong**

With 53% of Britons (strongly or somewhat) supporting the granting of visas and pathways to citizenship for BN(O) passport holders in Hong Kong, it is the least well-supported of the three schemes polled. However, only 10% of Britons (strongly or somewhat) oppose the scheme. A further 26% of Britons neither support nor oppose the scheme and 11% of Britons don't know or are unsure of their view.

Of the three schemes polled, the BN(O) scheme produces the sharpest gender divides in levels of support, with support for the scheme 13 percentage points higher among men (60%) than women (47%). It also produces the sharpest regional divides, with 62% of those living in Northern Ireland supporting the scheme compared to 44% of those in the East Midlands.

## Development of New Migration Schemes

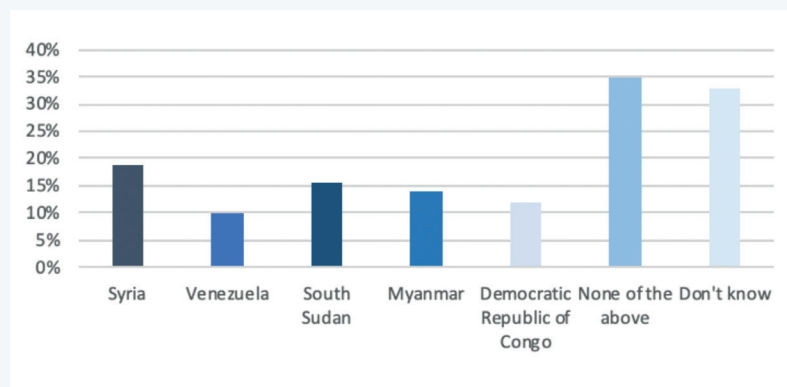
While there is strong support for the migration schemes introduced over the last few years, there is little appetite for the proliferation of such schemes. We gave respondents the opportunity to select which nations, from a list of five, they would support the UK developing new migration schemes for. The nations suggested were Syria, Venezuela, South Sudan, Myanmar, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, the five nations, aside from Ukraine and Afghanistan, which produced the most refugees and asylum seekers in 2022.<sup>19</sup>

However, a plurality of Britons (35%) do not support expanding migration schemes to any of these nations, while a third (33%) of Britons are unsure of their opinion. As such, support for development of new migration schemes is very low for all the nations polled. Introduction of a new migration scheme for Syria is supported by 19% of Britons, South Sudan by 16%, Myanmar by 14%, the Democratic Republic of Congo by 12% and Venezuela by 10% of Britons.

There are likely to be multiple drivers of these low levels of support. BFPG focus groups have shown that Britons identify profoundly, and consequently empathise strongly, with Ukrainians as fellow Europeans. This likely drives the particularly high levels of support Britons display for Ukrainian refugees. The ‘stake’ Britons have in Afghanistan and Hong Kong is also well understood. BFPG focus groups have shown that Britons feel a clear sense of duty to both sets of migrants and asylum seekers - one because of our involvement in the war in the country and the other because of its status as a former British colony under threat from one of the UK’s strategic rivals, China. As such, it may be that Britons view each of these instances as special cases, negating the need to introduce similar migration schemes for other nations where the UK’s relationship and duty to the nation is seen to be less direct. It may well also be the case that if such schemes were announced by the government, they may well elicit more public support than they do as abstract ideas, not least because Britons would have more time to consider the concept.

The most striking demographic trend is based on age - five times more Britons aged 56-65 (46%) or over-66 (45%) than 18-25-year-olds (13%) do not support the introduction of new schemes for any of the nations polled. This produces large disparities in support for each of the proposed nations. For example, three times as many Britons aged 18-25 (34%) support the introduction of a scheme for Syria compared to over-66s (11%). This is particularly notable because, for the migration schemes already in place, older Britons show consistently higher levels of support than younger Britons.

### Proportion of Britons who support the introduction of new migration schemes for specific nations



*N.B Respondents could select more than one option.  
Survey conducted by J.L. Partners and the British Foreign Policy Group, May – June 2023*

<sup>19</sup> UNHCR (2022). *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2022*. Retrieved from: <https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends-report-2022>

## Migration

---

This trend is mirrored in partisan perceptions. While 2019 Labour voters are the least supportive of all the migration schemes the UK government has created in recent years, they are generally the most supportive of the creation of new ones. For example, 28% of 2019 Labour voters support the creation of new migration schemes for refugees from Syria, compared to just 11% of 2019 Conservative voters. Indeed, 51% of 2019 Conservative voters believe we should not open new migration schemes to any of the nations suggested, compared to 24% of 2019 Labour voters and 21% of 2019 Liberal Democrat voters. There could be multiple reasons for this trend, but it suggests that lower levels of support for existing migration schemes among young people and 2019 Labour voters may be, in part, the result of their aversion to any actions by the current government rather than just a more critical view of immigration.

---

# Foreign Aid and International Development

In recent years, aid and development spending has been at the centre of a number of highly contentious debates around UK foreign policy, not least during periods of economic challenge, where there is often a strong impetus for governments to justify all expenditure, but particularly international spending. Seeking to address these challenges, in April 2023, while setting out his vision for the UK's international development agenda, Andrew Mitchell, the UK's Minister for International Development, pledged to increase public support for international aid and development from 50/50 to 70/30 over the next 10 years.<sup>20</sup>

This year we therefore sought to delve deeper than we have in previous years into understanding public support for aid and international development. In particular, we sought to understand where Britons' support for aid and development currently sits, and what the key drivers and rationale for aid and development support and opposition are.

## Implications of UK Aid

We began by testing a series of statements on UK aid and international development to see how widely different narratives around aid and development are endorsed. These statements reflect sentiments often expressed in BFPG focus groups or narratives regularly used by the UK government and the aid sector. We found that the majority (61%) of Britons (strongly or somewhat) agree that UK aid and development spending takes away money that should be spent on domestic needs. Nonetheless, a majority of Britons still agree that the UK has a moral duty to use aid to contribute to a safer and more prosperous world (55%) and that UK aid and development spending improves perceptions of the UK internationally, creating new trading opportunities (52%). A plurality of Britons (44%) also agree that UK aid and development improves global security and makes the UK safer. As such, while there are clearly concerns about the economic cost of international aid and development, Britons recognise the moral and, to a lesser extent, the strategic arguments for international development, although more could be done to strengthen these further.

## Domestic Expenditure

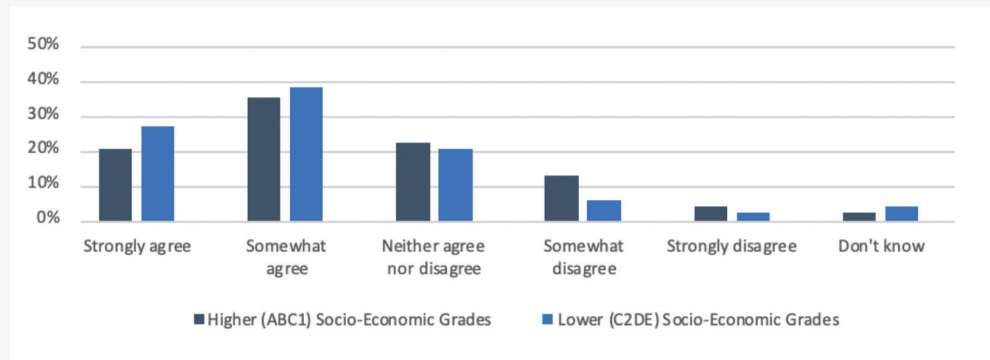
The most widely endorsed statement is that UK aid and development spending takes away money that should be spent on domestic needs. This is (strongly or somewhat) supported by 61% of Britons, compared to just 14% of Britons who disagree (strongly or somewhat) that aid and development spending takes money away from domestic needs. A further 22% of Britons neither agree nor disagree that it takes money away from domestic needs, and 3% don't know their views. For policymakers, this is likely to make it very hard to gain public support for aid and development spending during a period of domestic economic challenge, without first making a more emphatic case for the moral and strategic importance of aid and development.

Belief that aid and development spending takes money away from domestic needs is higher among Britons from lower (C2DE) socio-economic grades (66%), who are more likely to rely on government support, than among those from higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades (57%) who are less likely to rely on this.

---

<sup>20</sup> Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (2023). *Future of International Development: Minister Andrew Mitchell's Speech*. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/minister-andrew-mitchell-speech-on-the-future-of-international-development>

**Proportion of Britons who believe UK aid and development spending takes away money that should be spent on domestic needs, disaggregated by socio-economic grade**



Survey conducted by J.L. Partners and the British Foreign Policy Group, May – June 2023

More broadly, belief that such spending takes money away from domestic needs is particularly high among Leave voters (76%), those intending to vote Conservative at the next election (72%), residents in the East Midlands (66%), and Britons aged 36-45 (66%). Belief in this statement is lowest among residents in the North West (56%), those intending to vote Labour (55%), 18-25-year-olds (53%), and Remain voters (49%).

**Moral Duty**

Nonetheless, while the majority of Britons believe that UK aid and development spending takes away money from domestic needs, it is still the case that the majority of Britons (55%) believe that the UK has a moral duty to use aid to contribute to a safer and a more prosperous world. This includes 40% of Britons who somewhat agree that we have a moral duty to do so, while 16% of Britons strongly agree. Meanwhile, 25% of Britons neither agree nor disagree that the UK has a moral duty to provide this support, and 16% of Britons disagree (strongly or somewhat) that we have a moral duty to use aid to contribute to a safer and more prosperous world.

Belief that the UK has a moral duty to use aid to contribute to a safer and more prosperous world is highest among 18-25-year-olds (63%) and lowest among Britons aged 46-55 (52%) or 56-65 (52%).

It is also more widely believed by Britons intending to vote Liberal Democrat at the next election (73%) than those intending to vote Labour (63%) or Conservative (53%). Belief in this moral duty is also 25 percentage points higher among Remain voters (68%) than Leave voters (43%).

**Trading Opportunities**

A slim majority (52%) of Britons believe that UK aid and development spending improves perceptions of the UK internationally, creating new trading opportunities, with 40% somewhat agreeing this is the case and 12% of Britons strongly agreeing. A further 29% of Britons neither agree nor disagree, 12% (strongly or somewhat) disagree, and 6% of Britons are unsure of their view.

Belief that aid improves perceptions of the UK internationally, creating new trading opportunities, is higher among Britons in higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades (56%) than among those in lower (C2DE) socio-economic grades (48%). 18-25-year-olds (59%) are the age group who more frequently perceive these benefits, while 46-55-year-olds (47%) least frequently do. Belief that it generates positive perceptions and, in turn, trading opportunities for the UK is also higher among Remain voters (61%) than Leave voters (45%).



## Foreign Aid and International Development

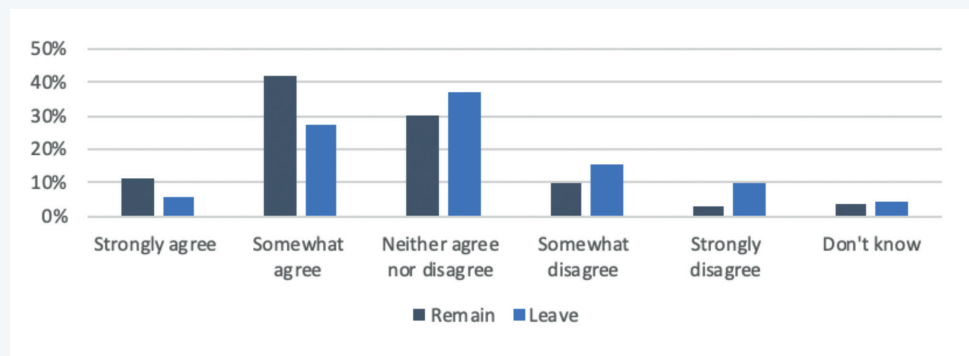
### Global Security

Of the statements polled, Britons are least convinced of the security benefits of UK aid and development spending. While a plurality of Britons (44%) (strongly or somewhat) agree that UK aid and development spending improves global security and makes the UK safer, a third of Britons (33%) neither agree nor disagree, and 18% (strongly or somewhat) disagree.

Belief that UK aid and development spending improves global security and makes the UK safer is highest among younger Britons, with 57% of Britons aged 18-25 believing this, compared to 36% of over-66s. Belief that UK aid and development spending provides security benefits is also highest, regionally, among residents in London (51%) and Northern Ireland (51%), and socio-economically, among those in higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades (48%).

A majority of those intending to vote Liberal Democrat (53%) or Labour (52%) at the next election believe UK aid and development spending improves global security and makes the UK safer, while 42% of those intending to vote Conservative believe this. EU referendum voting produces even larger variations in views, with 53% of those who voted Remain believing UK aid and development spending improves global security and makes the UK safer, compared to 33% of those who voted Leave.

#### Proportion of Britons who agree or disagree that UK aid and development spending improves global security and makes the UK safer, disaggregated by EU Referendum vote



Survey conducted by J.L. Partners and the British Foreign Policy Group, May – June 2023

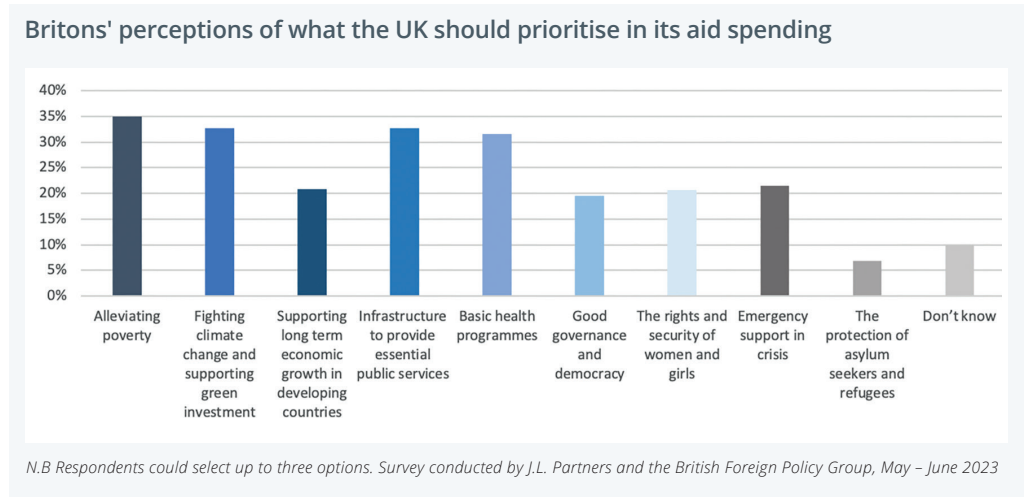
### International Aid and Development Priorities

To understand Britons' priorities for international aid and development, we drew from the broad themes and priorities outlined in the UK's International Development Strategy and asked respondents to select, from a list of 9, their top three priorities for aid spending.<sup>21</sup>

There are four areas that are selected by roughly a third of respondents as among their top three priorities: alleviating poverty (35%), fighting climate change and supporting green investment (33%), providing infrastructure to provide essential public services (e.g. sewers and clean water) (33%) and implementing basic health programmes (32%). There are a further four areas that are chosen by roughly a fifth of respondents as a top three priority: emergency support in a crisis, e.g. an earthquake or tsunami (22%), supporting the rights of women and girls (21%), supporting long-term economic growth in developing countries (21%) and promoting good governance and democracy (20%). The area least often selected as a top three priority amongst our list is supporting the protection of refugees and asylum seekers, which only 7% of respondents view as a top three priority.

<sup>21</sup> Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (2022). *The UK Government's Strategy for International Development*. Retrieved from: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1075328/uk-governments-strategy-international-development.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1075328/uk-governments-strategy-international-development.pdf)

## Foreign Aid and International Development



Age is a substantial variable in preferences around aid and development priorities. Among over-66s (43%) and those aged 56-65 (40%), implementing basic health programmes is widely regarded as a top priority, likely reflective of older Britons' higher exposure to health challenges. By comparison, just 24% of 26-35-year-olds and 23% of 18-25-year-olds view implementing basic health programmes as a top priority. Meanwhile, the sharpest regional variation in preferences emerges around alleviating poverty, with 43% of residents in Scotland viewing this as a top priority, compared to 28% of those in the South East.

Looking at voting intention, a higher proportion of those intending to vote Conservative consider implementing basic health programmes (40%), providing infrastructure to provide essential public services (39%), and providing emergency support for a crisis (28%) to be top priorities, than their Labour and Liberal Democrat voting counterparts. Meanwhile, a higher proportion of those intending to vote Liberal Democrat at the next election consider fighting climate change and promoting green investment (43%), supporting long-term economic growth of developing countries (31%), supporting the rights and security of women and girls (25%) and promoting good governance and democracy (24%) to be top priorities, compared to Labour and Liberal Democrat voters. Those intending to vote Labour at the next election have less distinctive aid priority preferences. However, alongside those intending to vote Liberal Democrat (41%), those intending to vote Labour (41%) more frequently view alleviating poverty as a top priority, than those intending to vote Conservative (26%).

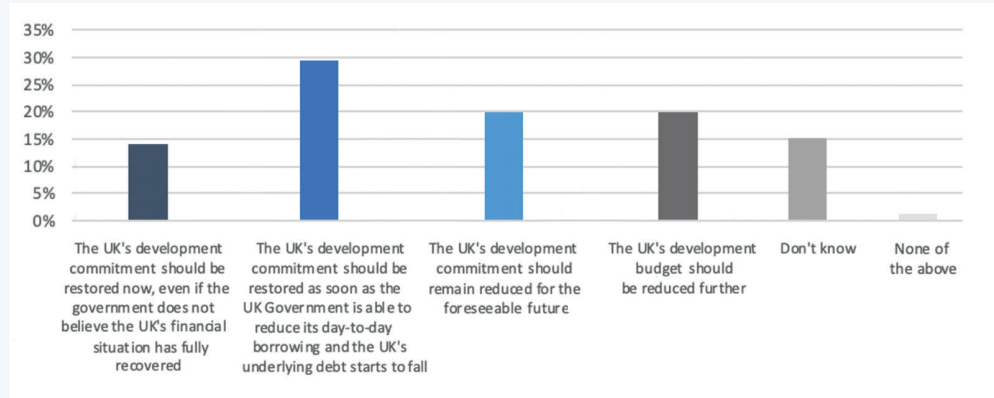
## Foreign Aid and Development Spending

In 2021 the UK reduced aid spending from 0.7% to 0.5% of Gross National Income (GNI) as a “temporary measure” in response to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the UK economy. The UK pledged to restore its commitment to 0.7% “when the fiscal situation permits” but has not yet done so.<sup>22</sup>

Meanwhile, the British public is divided over whether the UK should restore this commitment. A plurality (30%) of Britons believe the UK's development commitment should be restored as soon as the UK Government is able to reduce its day-to-day borrowing and the UK's underlying debt starts to fall. However, the next most frequently reported perspectives are a tie between those who feel the UK's development commitment should remain reduced for the foreseeable future and those who believe the development budget should be reduced further, each of which are supported by 20% of respondents. Only 14% of Britons believe the UK should restore its 0.7% GNI spending commitment now. A further 15% of Britons don't know their views, while 1% of Britons do not agree with any of the statements.

<sup>22</sup> UK Parliament. (2020). *Ibid.*

**Britons' perceptions on the UK's decision to reduce its development spending commitment**

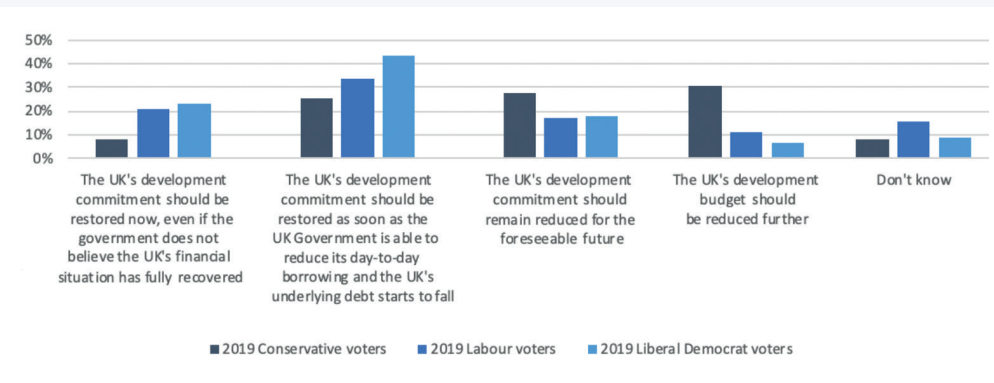


Survey conducted by J.L. Partners and the British Foreign Policy Group, May – June 2023

Younger Britons are more supportive of restoring the aid budget than older Britons, with 61% of 18-25-year-olds believing it should be restored now or when the fiscal situation allows, compared to 33% of over-66s. In turn, belief that the aid budget should be reduced further is higher among over-66s (29%) and 55-65-year-olds (24%) than among 26-35-year-olds (14%) and 18-25-year-olds (7%). Support for restoring the aid budget at some point is also higher among Britons in higher (ABC1) socio-economic grades (49%) than Britons from lower (C2DE) socio-economic grades (37%), although this is driven in part by high levels of uncertainty by Britons from lower (C2DE) socio-economic grades (21%).

Residents in Northern Ireland are the most sharply divided over aid spending - they simultaneously have the highest levels of regional support for the aid budget being restored immediately (21%), and the second-highest levels of regional support, after residents in North East England (25%), for the UK reducing the aid budget further (24%). However, the starkest disparities emerge on political lines. Belief that the aid budget should be reduced further is three times higher among Leave voters (33%) than Remain voters (11%). Similarly, belief that the aid budget should be restored further is much higher among 2019 Conservative voters (31%), than among 2019 Labour (11%) or Liberal Democrat (7%) voters.

**Britons' perceptions on the UK's decision to reduce its development spending commitment, disaggregated by 2019 vote**



Survey conducted by J.L. Partners and the British Foreign Policy Group, May – June 2023

# Climate Change

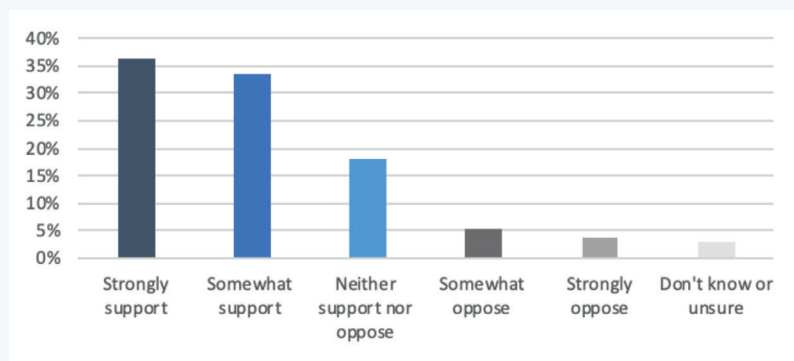
In the UK's Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, tackling climate change and biodiversity loss is identified as the UK's 'number one international priority', while the 2023 Integrated Review Refresh commits to tackling climate change as the UK's 'first thematic priority'.<sup>23</sup> This focus on tackling climate change within the UK's international agenda is widely endorsed, with 70% of Britons (strongly or somewhat) supporting the UK taking a leading international role in tackling climate change. A further 18% of Britons neither support nor oppose the UK taking on this role, while just 9% of Britons (strongly or somewhat) oppose the UK leading on climate change. A further 3% of Britons are unsure of their perspective.

This marks a slight uptick in support for the UK assuming a leading role in tackling climate change, up from 66% in 2022. Contrary to widely-held beliefs, this suggests that the energy and wider cost of living crisis have not especially displaced concerns about climate change. Indeed, support for climate leadership may, in fact, have been strengthened by the energy crisis, which has highlighted the challenges posed by overreliance on gas and the potential security benefits of a move towards renewables. Support is also likely to have been driven by the ongoing prominence of climate change in the media and wider public discourse and the findings of recent IPCC reports on climate change.

Britons aged 18-25 (74%) exhibit the highest levels of support for UK leadership on climate change, followed by 36-45-year-olds (73%), while 46-55-year-olds (66%) exhibit the lowest. However, active opposition to UK climate leadership is highest among the oldest Britons - those aged over-66 (11%) and those aged 56-65 (11%). Regionally, residents in Eastern England (74%) are the most supportive of the UK taking a leading role in tackling climate change, followed by residents in London (72%) and Northern Ireland (72%). Support is also higher among those from higher (ABC1) socio-economic backgrounds (74%) than those from lower (C2DE) economic backgrounds (65%).

Meanwhile, Britons who voted Liberal Democrat (81%) or Labour (77%) in the last general election show higher levels of support than those who voted Conservative (67%) for the UK taking on this leadership role. Remain voters are also more supportive than Leave voters, with 79% of Remain voters supporting the UK taking a leading role in tackling climate change, including 46% who strongly support it, compared to just 63% of Leave voters who support the UK leading on climate action, with just 28% of Leave voters strongly supporting this.

## Proportion of Britons who support or oppose the UK taking a leading role in tackling climate change



Survey conducted by J.L. Partners and the British Foreign Policy Group, May - June 2023

<sup>23</sup> Cabinet Office (2023). *Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a More Contested and Volatile World*. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/integrated-review-refresh-2023-responding-to-a-more-contested-and-volatile-world>

The British Foreign Policy Group is an independent, non-partisan think tank dedicated to advancing the UK's global influence, at a crucial time in the nation's modern history. To achieve this, we produce dynamic events and high-quality research, and facilitate networks amongst stakeholders with a vested interest in Britain's international engagement.

Our core objective is to bridge the link between the domestic and international spheres – recognising that Britain's foreign policy choices and obstacles are shaped by our social landscape at home. Through pioneering research into the UK's social fabric, we seek to build understanding of the nuances of public opinion, and how our foreign policy can become more inclusive, responsive and relevant to citizens' lives.



British Foreign Policy Group