

WHO CAN HELP DEAL WITH THREATS TO OUR SECURITY? An 8-nation European survey of support for alliances or acting alone

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Every European country faces risks to its national security from the global economy, climate change and the war in Ukraine. Since these are trans-national problems, a government has the choice of seeking help from multi-national institutions such as the European Union, the United Nations or NATO or going it alone in a world of interdependence. In making and implementing choices, democratic governments require the sustained support of their citizens.

A new survey² of public opinion in Britain, Germany, Sweden, Italy, Poland, Hungary, Romania and Croatia reveals the extent to which people see the global economy, climate change, immigration, military action and terrorism as big risks to their security. It also shows whether people think their country should work with the EU, the UN, NATO or the USA to deal with each threat or alternatively, the country must deal with the threat on its own.

Among Europeans five-sixths see the global economy as posing a big or fair amount of risk to their country's security and four-fifths say the same about climate change. Immigration is seen as a risk by two-thirds, terrorism by just over half, and military threats appear as a risk to 49 percent of survey respondents.

A majority of 55 percent see military threats as best handled by an alliance with NATO and 9 percent name the United States as best for dealing with military threats. Germany is below average in endorsing NATO as best for military security. Only 22 percent of Europeans endorse their country acting on its own if facing a military threat.

As regards climate change there is a three-way division of opinion: 38% give priority to going it alone, 31% place the European Union first as an ally and 24 percent put the United Nations first. In seven countries there is no majority for any one alternative. Hungarians are exceptional in a majority endorsing going it alone on climate change (Table 3a).

An average of 46% think their national government should deal with the global economy on its own and a majority of British and Germans take this view. On the other hand, an average of 39% give priority to the EU for help in dealing with the global economy. This group includes only a quarter of Britons, while a majority of Hungarians look to the EU to protect their national economy from global risks.

There is more difference among Europeans about which global activities present the biggest threat to security than there are differences in the choice of allies. Britons and Germans for example have similar concerns about risks to their security and how to deal with them.

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² The survey of 12,685 respondents is part of the PAYOFF project with an online-Access-Panel by Bilendi, quota sample, 29. November to 18 December 2022. The PAYOFF project and data collection was funded by the German Science Foundation (DFG) as part of Cluster of Excellence "Contestations of the Liberal Script" (EXC 2055, Project-ID: 390715649). H. Giebler, S. Hellmeier, E. Keremoglu, J. Gerschewski & M. Zürn (2023).

Table 1: HOW MUCH DO YOU THINK OUR COUNTRY IS AT RISK FROM:

Country	Problems of the global economy in %	Climate change in %	Immigra- tion in %	Terrorism in %	Military threats in %	n = 100 %
Great Britain	92	83	70	80	51	1449
Germany	84	74	64	67	48	1673
Poland	85	76	63	50	71	1495
Italy	93	92	79	64	48	1876
Sweden	80	72	73	64	40	1616
Hungary	94	83	59	28	35	1281
Romania	93	86	70	46	69	1556
Croatia	87	75	62	26	30	1749
Total	88	80	68	54	49	12695

Table 2: WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING CAN BEST HELP OUR COUNTRY DEAL WITH

	United Nations %	European Union %	USA %	NATO %	On our own %	n = 100%
Problems global economy	4	39	4	7	46	8953
Climate change	24	31	2	4	38	4893
Immigration	7	39	2	4	47	6971
Terrorism	8	21	7	24	40	5298
Military threats	4	10	9	55	22	8078

Table 3a: HOW COUNTRIES DIFFER IN GOING IT ALONE

Country	Global Economy	Climate Change	Immigration	Terrorism	Military Threat
Great Britain	54	37	63	45	23
Germany	55	35	63	55	33
Poland	35	41	42	30	14
Italy	47	34	32	38	32
Sweden	38	37	51	32	12
Hungary	40	56	53	42	20
Romania	51	41	41	37	21
Croatia	53	25	39	40	24
Total	46	38	47	40	22

Table 3b: HOW COUNTRIES DIFFER IN GIVING PRIORITY TO EU

Country	Global Economy	Climate Change	Immigration	Terrorism	Military Threat
Great Britain	24	14	23	12	6
Germany	27	26	25	17	9
Poland	42	36	38	14	8
Italy	40	35	57	30	19
Sweden	46	43	39	33	10
Hungary	52	34	31	19	9
Romania	37	27	43	16	8
Croatia	41	33	48	22	9
Total	39	31	39	21	10

Table 3c: HOW COUNTRIES DIFFER IN GIVING PRIORITY TO NATO

Country	Global Economy	Climate Change	Immigration	Terrorism	Military Threat
Great Britain	8	6	3	24	52
Germany	9	5	3	14	47
Poland	8	4	8	33	56
Italy	6	5	3	17	33
Sweden	10	3	6	24	71
Hungary	4	3	5	27	64
Romania	8	4	7	36	63
Croatia	4	2	3	30	59
Total	7	4	4	24	55

Table 3d: HOW COUNTRIES DIFFER IN GIVING PRIORITY TO USA

Country	Global Economy	Climate Change	Immigration	Terrorism	Military Threat
Great Britain	5	2	1	8	14
Germany	2	1	1	4	5
Poland	12	4	4	18	20
Italy	3	2	2	5	8
Sweden	4	3	1	6	5
Hungary	2	2	1	6	4
Romania	3	3	3	6	5
Croatia	1	3	2	4	4
Total	4	2	2	7	9

Table 3e: HOW COUNTRIES DIFFER IN GIVING PRIORITY TO UNITED NATIONS

Country	Global Economy	Climate Change	Immigration	Terrorism	Military Threat
United Kingdom	10	41	10	11	6
Germany	7	34	7	10	6
Poland	2	15	8	5	2
Italy	4	24	5	10	7
Sweden	3	26	3	5	2
Hungary	2	24	9	5	2
Romania	1	10	6	5	3
Croatia	1	21	8	4	4
Total	4	24	7	8	4