

France

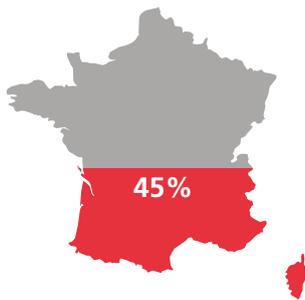
[Confident and active]

France, a nuclear power with a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, has a long history as a military and colonial power. Together with Germany, France is considered to be the main driver of the European Union. Under President Emmanuel Macron, France has been actively advancing the EU as a geopolitical actor, with aspirations to establish it on the same footing with the United States, China or Russia.

Self-perception

Among the Western nations in the survey, French respondents stand out as being dissatisfied with its status (45%). A substantial proportion of 40% even thinks that other countries strive to prevent France from achieving true greatness.

Status in the world



"In my opinion my country does not have the status in the world it deserves in comparison with other countries."

Recalling the number of terrorist attacks France has experienced in recent years, it is not surprising that French respondents are most concerned about international terrorism (82%), much more than their EU peers. However, they are equally worried by climate change. Terrorism and extremism is identified as the prime global security problem by 70% of respondents – by far the highest number in the poll. When asked about the top three priorities for French foreign policy, French respondents point to the protection of French territory (51%), the regulation of migration (47%) and the assertion of French economic interests (44%).

Although most French people (63%) view pandemics as a challenge to global peace and security, they do not identify them as a crucial global problem (only 31% think so, the lowest along with Poland). The French are also most pessimistic in terms of future cooperation in the aftermath of the pandemic (only 27% think it will increase, again similar to Poland).

French respondents distrust civilian institutions and put most confidence in the military (80%). Only 23% trust the media – as few as in Russia – and only 24% consider media reporting factual and objective, compared with 47% in neighbouring Germany. At the same time, compared with their EU peers,

French respondents are most concerned about dissemination of misinformation and cyber-attacks against public institutions (78%).

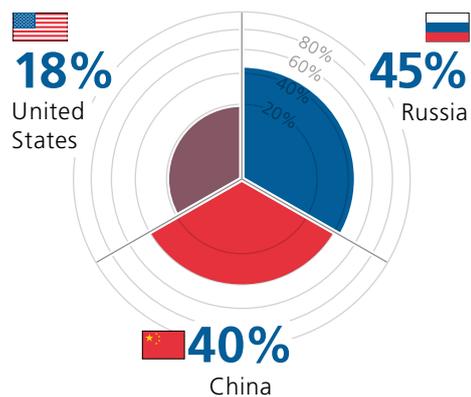
Perception of European security

France has a long history as a military power and is still a large-scale provider of troops for UN-mandated missions in Mali, Central Africa and Lebanon. Perhaps because of that, French respondents have a markedly positive attitude towards the military and military intervention.

French respondents stand out in their belief that military actions in other countries are an accepted means of warding off dangers to their country (60%), compared with a survey average of only 40%. In general, nearly half of French respondents (45%) are open to pursuing military intervention in conflicts, in contrast to only 19% in Serbia, the most sceptical country surveyed.

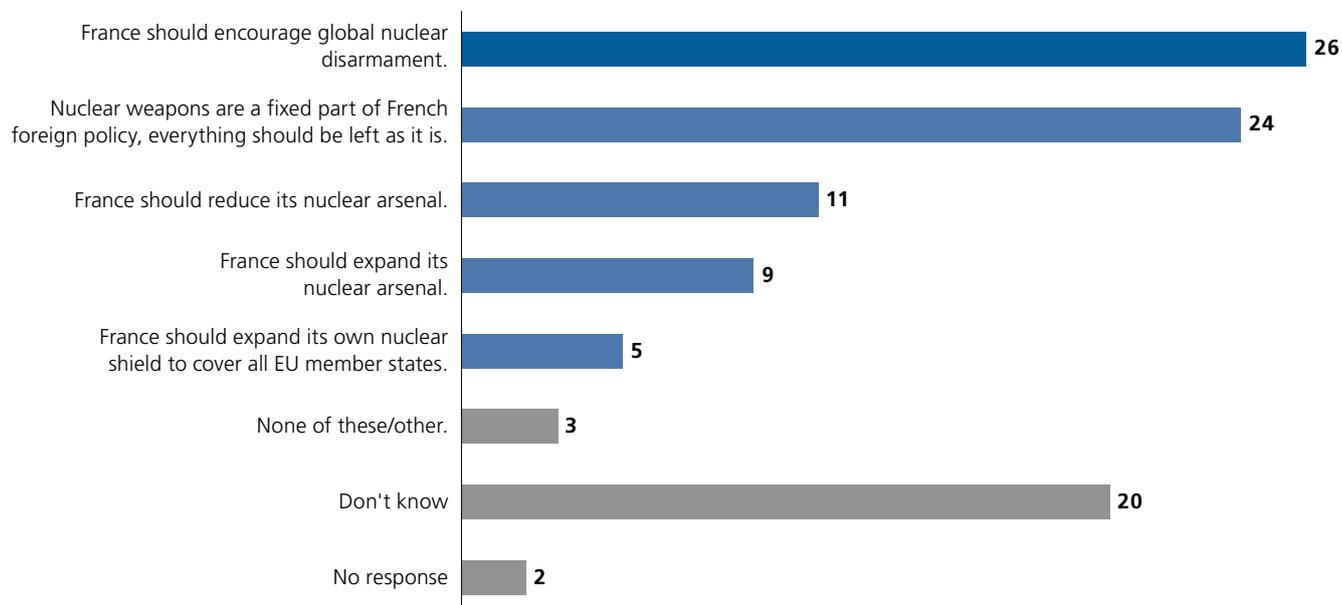
Half of French respondents consider military intervention to be effective – compared with an average of 40% – and slightly more (56%) have faith in diplomatic negotiations as a conflict resolution instrument, compared with 72% in Italy, who are the

Do you believe that China, the USA or Russia represent a threat to peace and security in Europe?



When you think of the French nuclear arsenal, what would you like to see happen here in the future?

All figures in %



most positive in the EU about diplomatic negotiations. At the same time, a value-based foreign policy is important for the French: 68% favour enforcing values, even if this may cause disadvantages, by far the highest share among the polled EU and NATO countries.

Fewer French respondents than in most polled EU and NATO members perceive Russia as a threat (45% agree, 37% disagree). On China, opinion is somewhat split (40% perceive it as a threat, 43% disagree). However, 53% (the highest in the EU) think that the interests of the EU and China are at odds. French experts identified Russia as "more than ever" a threat and referred to the London NATO summit in December 2019, at which Emmanuel Macron mentioned Russia as a security threat in that framework.

The French are known to be sceptical about the USA, but their relations improved with the change of US presidents: in 2019, 44% of French respondents identified the USA as a threat to the security in Europe, whereas only 18% think so in 2021.

The way forward

France is by far the most pessimistic country in the poll concerning the future of peace and security at home: 49% think the situation will deteriorate in the next five years. A substantial figure of 60% of French respondents think that wars and other conflicts will affect their country in the future, in contrast to 47% in Germany and only 36% in Austria, the most optimistic country in this respect.

French experts underlined that possible security threats come not only from the East, as in the case of most European countries, but also, because of French history and geographical position, from the South. Even though France has an active role in Ukraine through the Normandy Format, the French public does not seem to be following the conflict very closely: more than most other respondents, the French do not have an opinion on many questions related to Ukraine.

France's uneasy relationship with NATO is reflected in the public's stance: 29% are in favour of sticking to the status quo of EU-NATO relations, 23% don't know how to proceed and

French respondents have a markedly positive attitude towards the military

The French are the most supportive within the EU of the development of an EU army

19% are in favour of the EU pursuing a security policy completely independent of NATO.

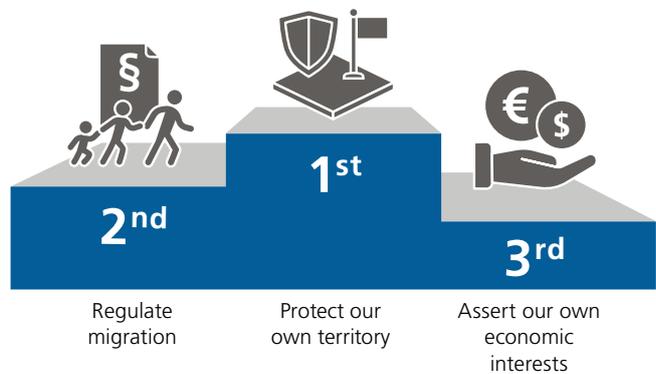
A similar division is evident when respondents are asked about the future of the French nuclear arsenal: 26% are in favour of France encouraging global nuclear disarmament, 24% consider nuclear weapons to be a fixed part of French foreign policy that should not be changed, and 20% are indifferent. Some 9% are in favour of expanding the nuclear arsenal, whereas 11% speak in favour of reducing it. Only 5% favour sharing French nuclear capabilities with the EU.

Concerning an EU approach to defence policy, the French respondents are the most supportive within the EU of the development of an EU army (53%, compared with 45% on average among the surveyed EU countries). However, only 27% of French respondents share the policy aim of strengthening the EU as a foreign policy power and only 59% favour stronger collaboration with the EU, compared with 67% of their EU peers.

The central policy aim identified by French experts was the development of a strategically autonomous EU acting on the world stage. Experts linked the concept of strategic autonomy closely to geoeconomics, technological development and

Please give the three most important objectives that your country should pursue with its foreign policy*

**Respondents were asked to select from 12 items.*



artificial intelligence. These can be – but are not necessarily – connected to security matters, but the EU must keep up with the other geopolitical actors. In general, French respondents stand out as steady supporters of a bigger role for the EU ahead of other international organisations (63%).

Differences in perceptions in France and Germany*

Combined responses "strongly agree" and "somewhat agree". All figures in %

**for commonalities, see graph in Germany chapter, p. 63.*

