



POLICY BRIEF

UNITED WEST, DIVIDED FROM THE REST: GLOBAL PUBLIC OPINION ONE YEAR INTO RUSSIA'S WAR ON UKRAINE

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SUMMARY

- A new poll suggests that Russia's war on Ukraine has consolidated 'the West'; European and American citizens hold many views in common about major global questions.
- Europeans and Americans agree they should help Ukraine to win, that Russia is their avowed adversary, and that the coming global order will most likely be defined by two blocs led respectively by the US and China.
- In contrast, citizens in China, India, and Turkiye prefer a quick end to the war even if Ukraine has to concede territory.
- People in these non-Western countries, and in Russia, also consider the emergence of a multipolar world order to be more probable than a bipolar arrangement.
- Western decision-makers should take into account that the consolidation of the West is taking place in an increasingly divided post-Western world; and that emerging powers such as India and Turkiye will act on their own terms and resist being caught in a battle between America and China.

Introduction

A year after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, there is little doubt the war is a turning point in world history. The conflict has challenged Europeans' most basic assumptions about their security, brought the spectre of nuclear confrontation back to their continent, and disrupted the global economy, leaving energy and food crises in its wake.

Yet while Russia's aggression is an event of global significance, people in different parts of the world have experienced and interpreted it in diverse ways. According to a former national security adviser to the prime minister of India, "for many parts of the globe, a year of war in Ukraine has done less to redefine the world order than to set it further adrift, raising new questions about how urgent transnational challenges can be met." In contrast to opinion in the West, people in many non-Western countries appear to believe that the post-cold war era is finished. They do not expect the next international order to be characterised by polarisation between two blocs led by the US and China; instead, they see as more likely a fragmentation into a multipolar world.

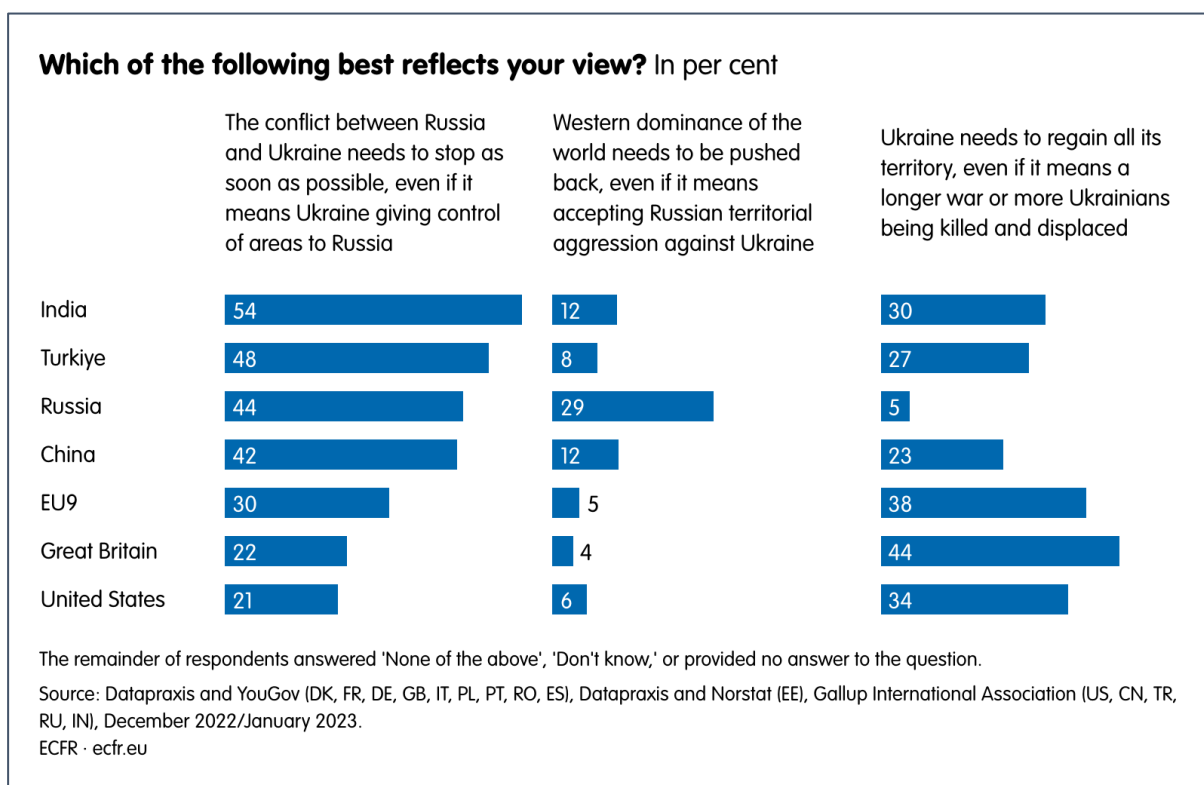
The key findings of a new multi-country global poll indicate that, a year since Russia's war on Ukraine began, the United States and its European allies have regained their unity and sense of purpose. But the study also reveals a wide gap between the West and the 'rest' when it comes to their desired outcomes for the war and differing understandings of why the US and Europe support Ukraine. The poll took place in early 2023 across ten European countries and China, India, Turkiye, Russia, and the US (the CITRUS countries, to use the shorthand of the University of Oxford's Europe in a Changing World project). Its results suggest that Russia's aggression in Ukraine marks both the consolidation of the West and the emergence of the long-heralded post-Western international order.

Stop the war v Win the war

The new consensus among European governments is that only a Ukrainian victory will stop Putin's war. Although significant numbers of European citizens still wish the war to cease as soon as possible, the poll appears to show a clear trend over the last

year towards preferring Ukraine to win even if the conflict endures some time longer. Americans similarly believe that Ukraine must regain its territory if lasting peace is to be secured.

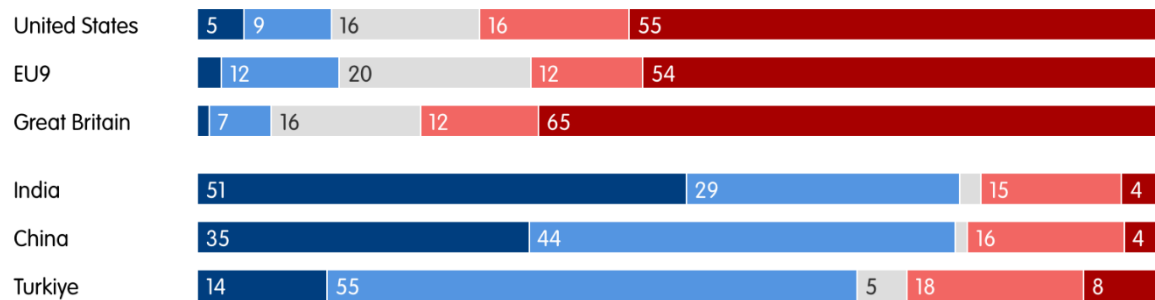
In contrast, people in non-Western countries possess a clear preference for the war ending now – even if it means Ukraine having to give up territory. In China, a plurality of those asked (42 per cent) agree that the conflict between Russia and Ukraine needs to stop as soon as possible, even if it means Ukraine giving control of areas to Russia. This desire to end the war soon is even stronger in Turkiye (48 per cent) and India (54 per cent). It is worth noting, however, that almost a third of people in both these countries would prefer Ukraine to regain all of its territory, even if it means a longer war or more Ukrainians being killed and displaced.



Reflecting on the war, Americans and Europeans are united in believing that Russia is an “adversary” or a “rival.” Seventy-one per cent of respondents in the US, 77 per cent in Great Britain, and 65 per cent in the EU countries polled alight on one of these two terms; they regard the future of relations with Russia as one of confrontation.

Which best reflects your view on what Russia is to your country? In per cent

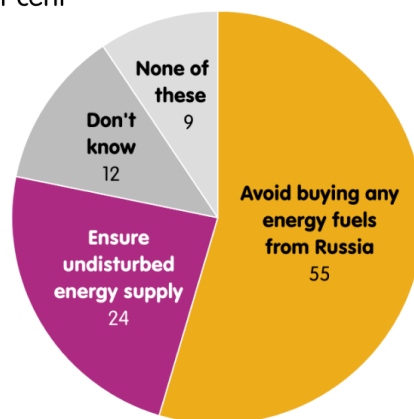
- An ally – that shares our interests and values
- A necessary partner – with which we must strategically cooperate
- A rival – with which we need to compete
- An adversary – with which we are in conflict
- Don't know



Source: Datapraxis and YouGov (DK, FR, DE, GB, IT, PL, PT, RO, ES), Datapraxis and Norstat (EE), Gallup International Association (US, CN, TR, RU, IN), December 2022/January 2023.
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The growing hostility of Europeans towards Russia is reflected in their preference not to buy Russian fossil fuels even if it results in energy supply problems. This is the prevailing view in every one of the nine EU countries polled, with an average of 55 per cent of these EU citizens supporting it. By contrast, just 24 per cent favour securing unobstructed energy supplies by continuing to buy from Russia.

What approach should your country take to buying energy from Russia? Average across nine EU countries polled, in per cent



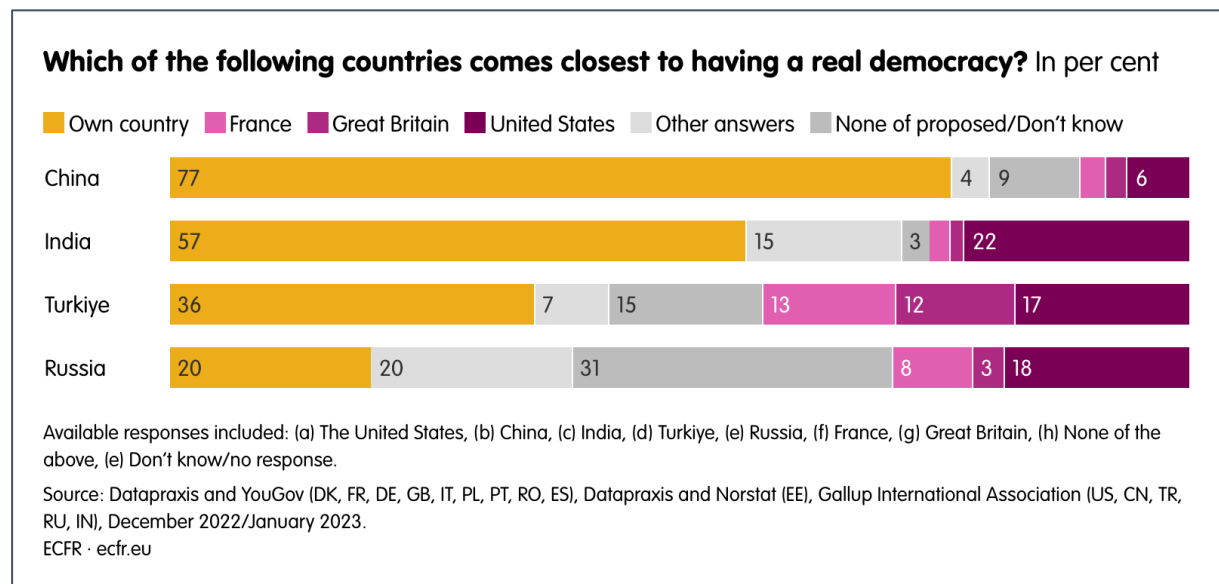
The options were: (a) Given the war in Ukraine European countries should avoid buying any energy fuels from Russia, even if that causes temporary energy supply problems in Europe; (b) The priority for European countries should be to ensure undisturbed energy supply, even if that requires continuing to buy some energy fuels from Russia; (c) None of these; (d) Don't know.

Source: Datapraxis and YouGov (DK, FR, DE, GB, IT, PL, PT, RO, ES), Datapraxis and Norstat (EE), Gallup International Association (US, CN, TR, RU, IN), December 2022/January 2023.
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Don't make it all about democracy

The non-Western publics studied differ from the Western publics not only in the outcomes they desire for the war but in what they think about why the US and Europe are helping Ukraine. President Joe Biden has framed the war as a struggle between democracy and authoritarianism, and he has sought to use the defence of democracy as a rallying cry at home and abroad. In the US, the language of leadership of “the free world” has returned.

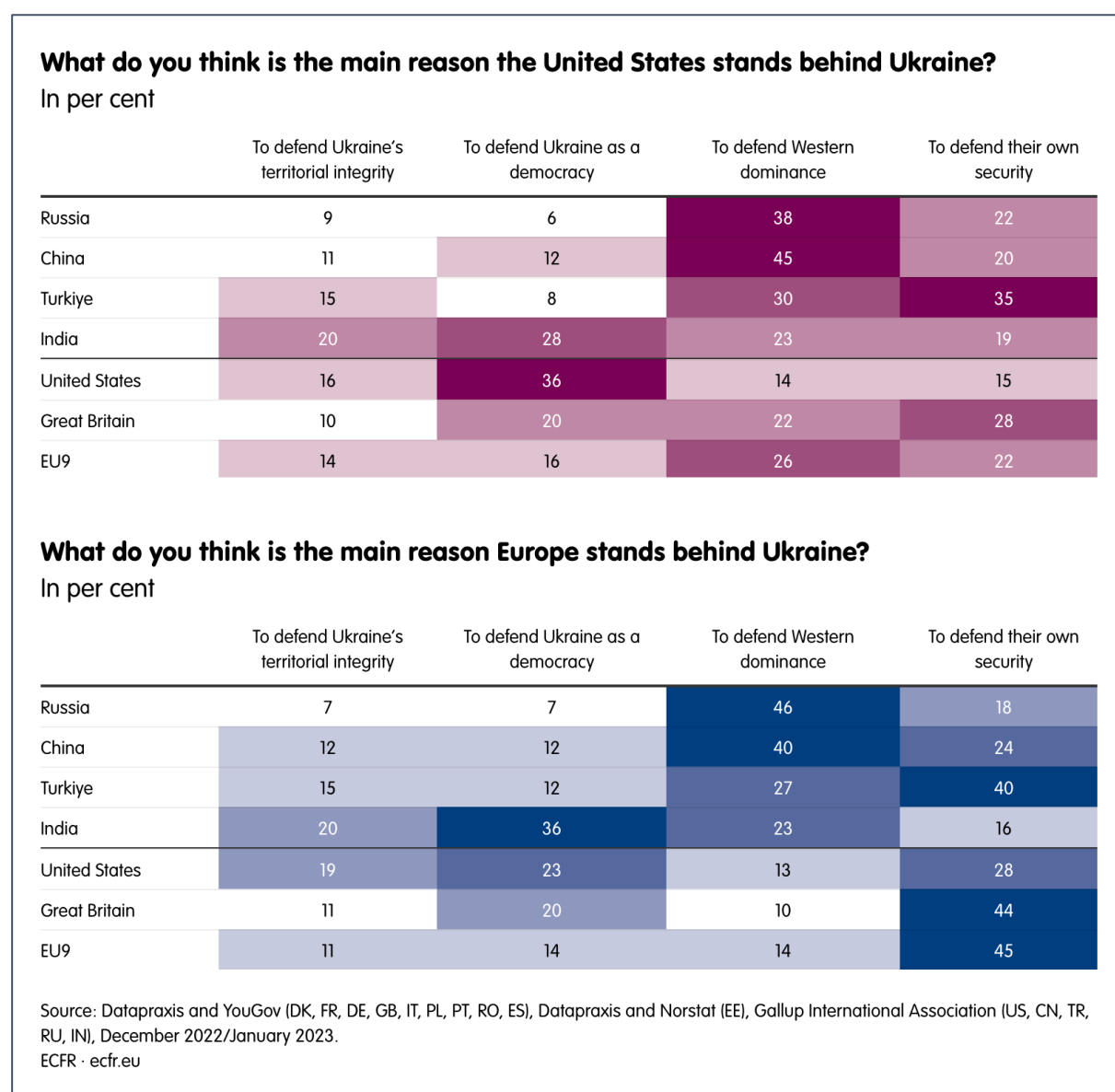
While Western figures may depict the conflict in these ways to unify the West, it offers no surefire way to appeal to citizens in non-Western countries. On the contrary: in the view of many people outside the West, their own countries are also democracies – and are perhaps even the best democracies. When asked which country comes closest to having a “real democracy”, 77 per cent in China respond “China”; 57 per cent of Indians respond “India.” The responses are less clear cut in Russia and Turkiye, but, still, Turks’ most frequent response is their own country (36 per cent). The poll finds that 20 per cent of Russians award the accolade to Russia, which is also the top substantive answer there. (However, almost a third of respondents in Russia did not select any country as having a real democracy).



Other results in our poll further suggest that people in China, India, and Turkiye are sceptical of claims about defending democracy.

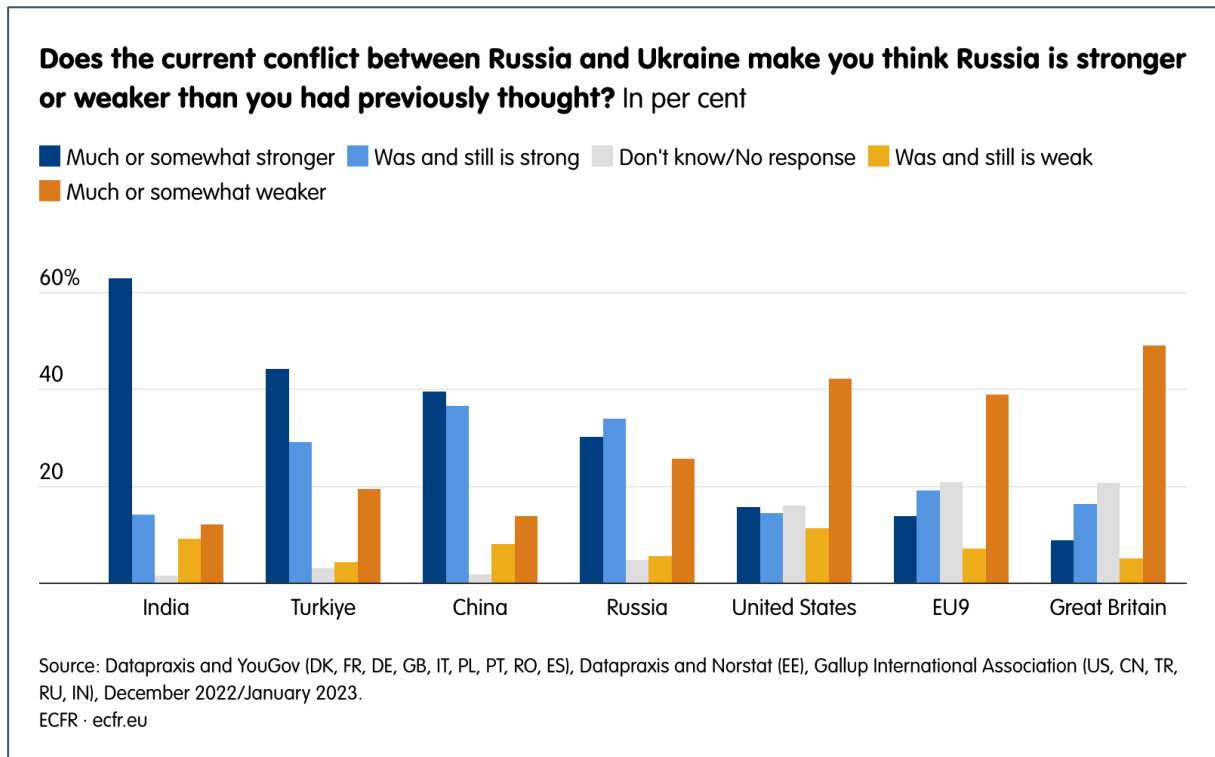
Many in China state that American and European support for Ukraine is driven by the desire to protect Western dominance. And for the vast majority of Chinese and Turks, this support is motivated by reasons other than a defence of Ukraine’s territorial integrity or of its democracy.

Among the rising powers, India is an exception, where (similarly to the US) more than half of respondents point to one of these two reasons to explain Western solidarity. Still, the lack of democracy in Russia does not prevent Indians from holding a generally positive view of that country: 51 per cent describe it as an “ally” and a further 29 per cent see it as a “partner”



The survey reveals that Vladimir Putin’s war of outright aggression, and his military failures during the conflict, do not appear to have caused people in non-Western

countries to downgrade their opinion of Russia or to question its relative strength. Russia is either an “ally” or a “partner” for 79 per cent of people in China and 69 per cent in Turkiye. Moreover, around three-quarters in each of these two countries and in India believe that Russia is either stronger, or at least equally strong, compared to how they say they perceived it before the war.



Fragmentation versus polarisation: What will define the next world order?

One of the most striking findings of the survey relates to differing ideas about the future world order. Most people both within and beyond the West believe the US-led liberal order is passing away.

Paradoxically, the West’s new-found unity in response to Russia’s aggression does not signal a resurrection of an America-led international order. Just 9 per cent of people in the US, 7 per cent in the EU countries polled, and 4 per cent in Great Britain see American global supremacy as the most likely state of affairs in a decade from now.

Instead, in Europe and America, the prevailing view is that bipolarity is coming back. A significant number of people expect a world dominated by two blocs led by the US

and China. Memories of the cold war likely shape the way that Americans and Europeans view the future.

In ten years from now, which of the following do you think is more likely?
In per cent

	United States	Great Britain	EU9	Russia	China	Turkiye	India
A more even distribution of global power among multiple countries	17	16	19	33	30	23	21
A division of global power between two rival blocs, each led by the United States and China	26	29	28	12	23	21	14
Global dominance by the United States	9	4	6	7	6	18	31
Global dominance by China	13	10	9	12	27	17	15
Global dominance by another country (not the United States or China)	7	2	4	16	4	11	12
None of these/Don't know/No response	28	39	34	20	10	10	7

Source: Dataprix and YouGov (DK, FR, DE, GB, IT, PL, PT, RO, ES), Dataprix and Norstat (EE), Gallup International Association (US, CN, TR, RU, IN), December 2022/January 2023.
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Meanwhile, outside the West, citizens believe that fragmentation rather than polarisation will mark the next international order. Most people in major non-Western powers such as China, India, Turkiye, and Russia predict the West will soon be just one global pole among several. The West may still be the strongest party but it will not be hegemonic.

The most popular view in Russia and China is to expect a more even distribution of global power among multiple countries – namely, for multipolarity to emerge. More than 20 per cent of Turks and Indians also expect this. This is even though more Indians foresee US dominance, while responses in Turkiye are almost equally divided between anticipating American hegemony, Chinese hegemony, a bipolar world, and multipolarity.

All in all, for 61 per cent of people in Russia, 61 per cent in China, 51 per cent in Turkiye, and 48 per cent in India the future world order will be defined either by multipolarity or Chinese (or other non-Western) dominance. Corresponding

numbers in the US, Great Britain, and the EU states polled are, respectively, just 37 per cent, 29 per cent, and 31 per cent.

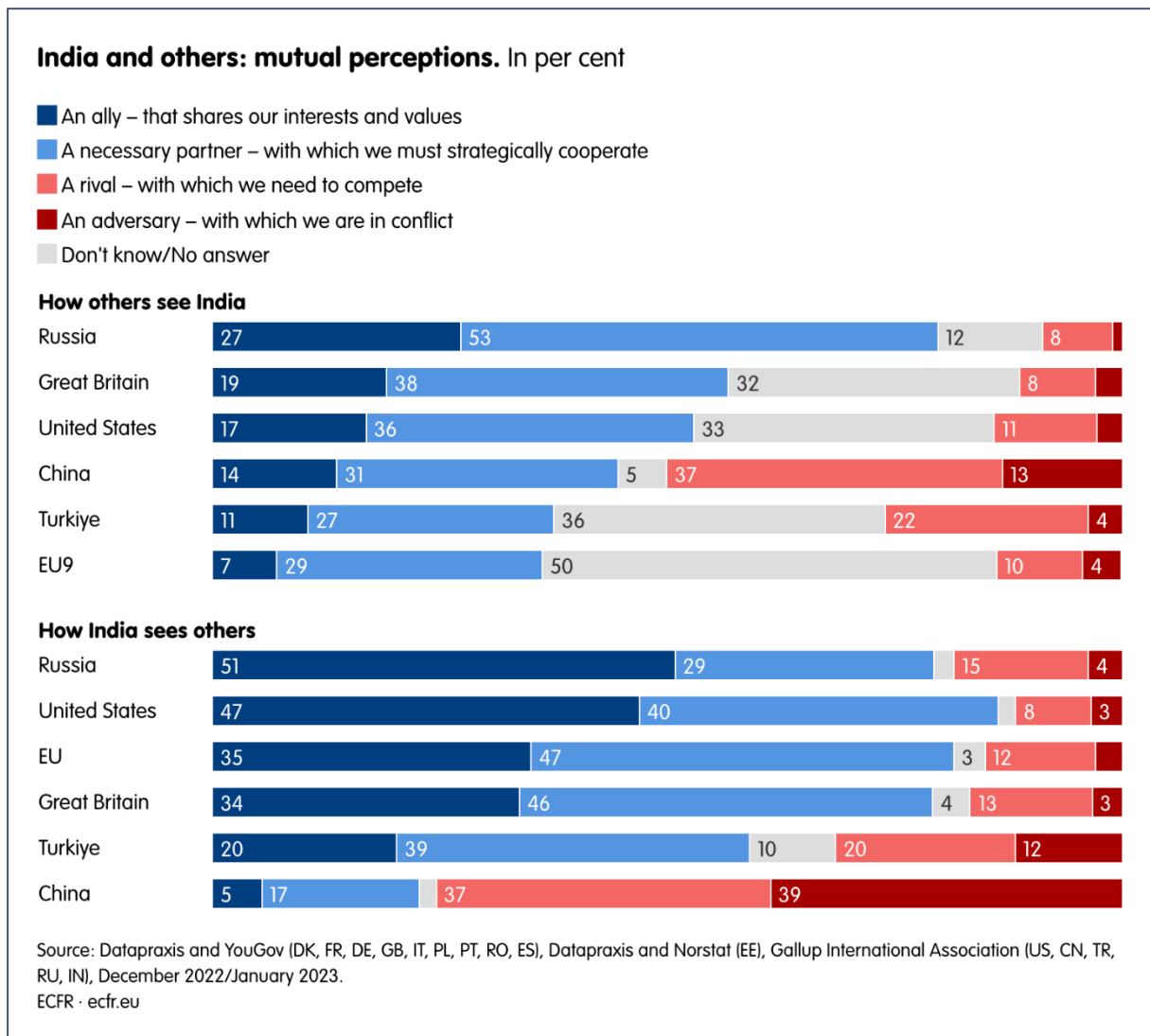
India and Turkiye as (re)emerging great powers

In the sort of bipolar world scenario expected by Americans and Europeans, the role of countries such as India and Turkiye may be as swing states that – however reluctantly – will be forced to define their loyalties and take sides.

But the poll suggest that this is not how these countries view themselves or their role in the coming international order. In an increasingly fragmented and polarised world, countries such as India and Turkiye appear attracted to free-floating sovereigntism – where every conflict between superpowers becomes an opportunity to assert one’s relevance and capacity to take sovereign decisions.

India

India is the most important global country of this persuasion – and its citizens seem to have a clear notion of their country’s place in the world. Respondents to the poll in India stand out in describing both the US (47 per cent) and Russia (51 per cent) as an “ally” – which is likely partly because, for them, China is either an “adversary” (39 per cent) or a “rival” (37 per cent). Perceptions of the EU and Great Britain are also predominantly positive: Indians see these as either an “ally” or “partner.”



The majority of the Indian public perceives almost every other power – including the US (70 per cent), Russia (63 per cent), China (53 per cent), the EU (67 per cent), Great Britain (63 per cent), and India itself (68 per cent) – as “stronger” than they say they thought before Russia’s all-out war on Ukraine. They are the only ones to hold such a view of all of the US, Russia, the EU, Great Britain, and their own country.

Indians appear to feel positive about the future. Their main responses when asked to describe their country are that it is “rising” (35 per cent), “strong” (28 per cent), and “peaceful” (18 per cent). Only a small proportion believe it is “declining” (8 per cent) or “weak” (7 per cent). By way of comparison, 31 per cent of Americans and Britons characterise their own country as “declining”.

India is also, as noted, the only CITRUS country where prevailing opinion is that the US (28 per cent) and Europe (36 per cent) are mostly supporting Ukraine to defend it

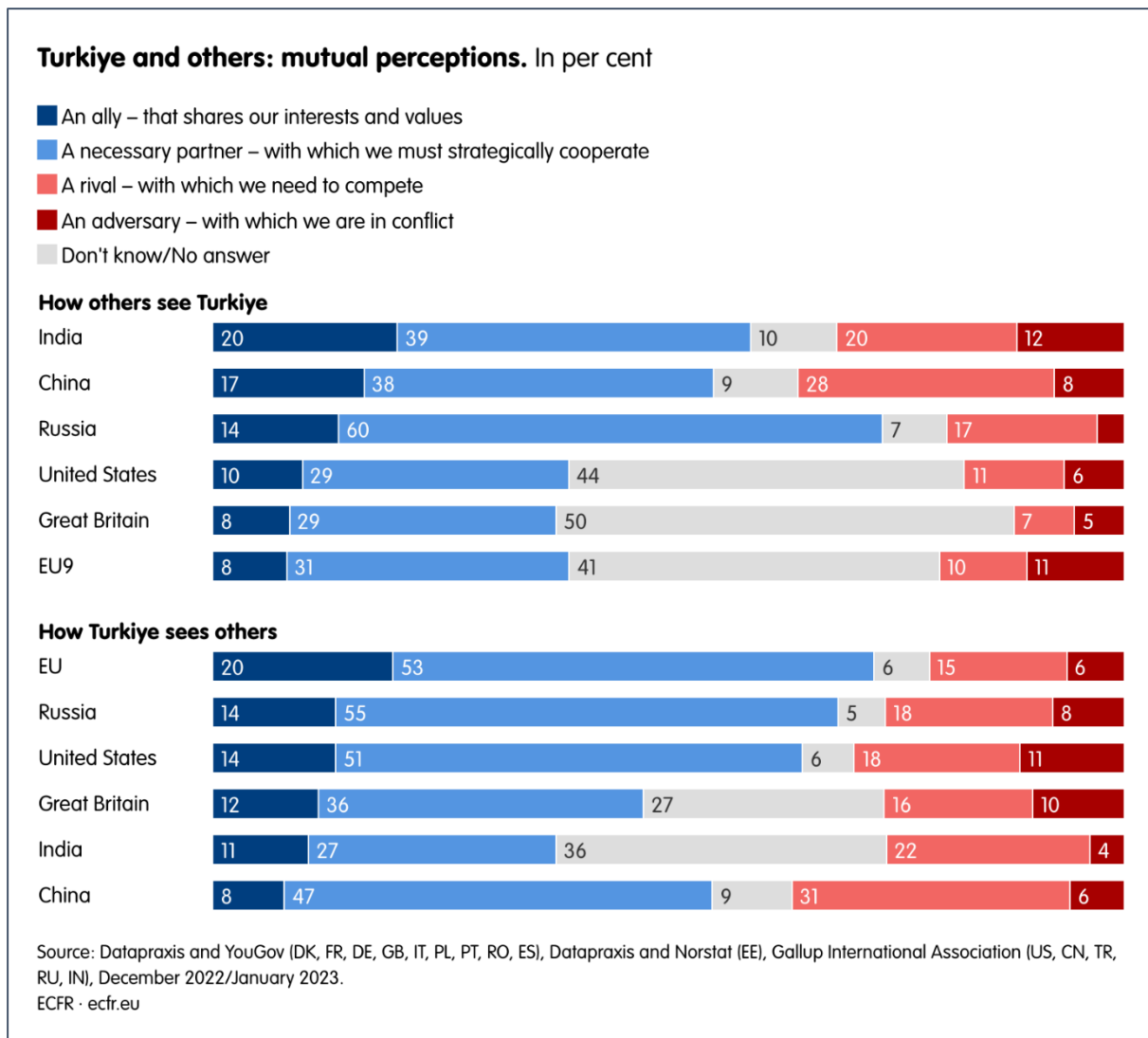
as a democracy – this may reflect India’s sense of itself as the world’s largest democracy.

Turkiye

Closer to Europe, Turkiye sees itself as playing a role similar to the one that India aspires to globally. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has used the conflict to assert his country’s role as an inescapable player in European politics. He has managed to be both a crucial supplier of weapons to Ukraine and one of Russia’s most trusted economic partners.

The Turkish public has a comparable world view, seeing almost everyone predominantly as a “partner,” whether it is the US (51 per cent), China (47 per cent), Russia (55 per cent), or the EU (53 per cent). When it comes to other populations’ perceptions of Turkiye, these views are reciprocated. Turkiye is considered mostly as a “partner” in Russia (60 per cent), China (38 per cent), and India (39 per cent) – although a third of Chinese and Indians describe the country as a “rival” or an “adversary.”

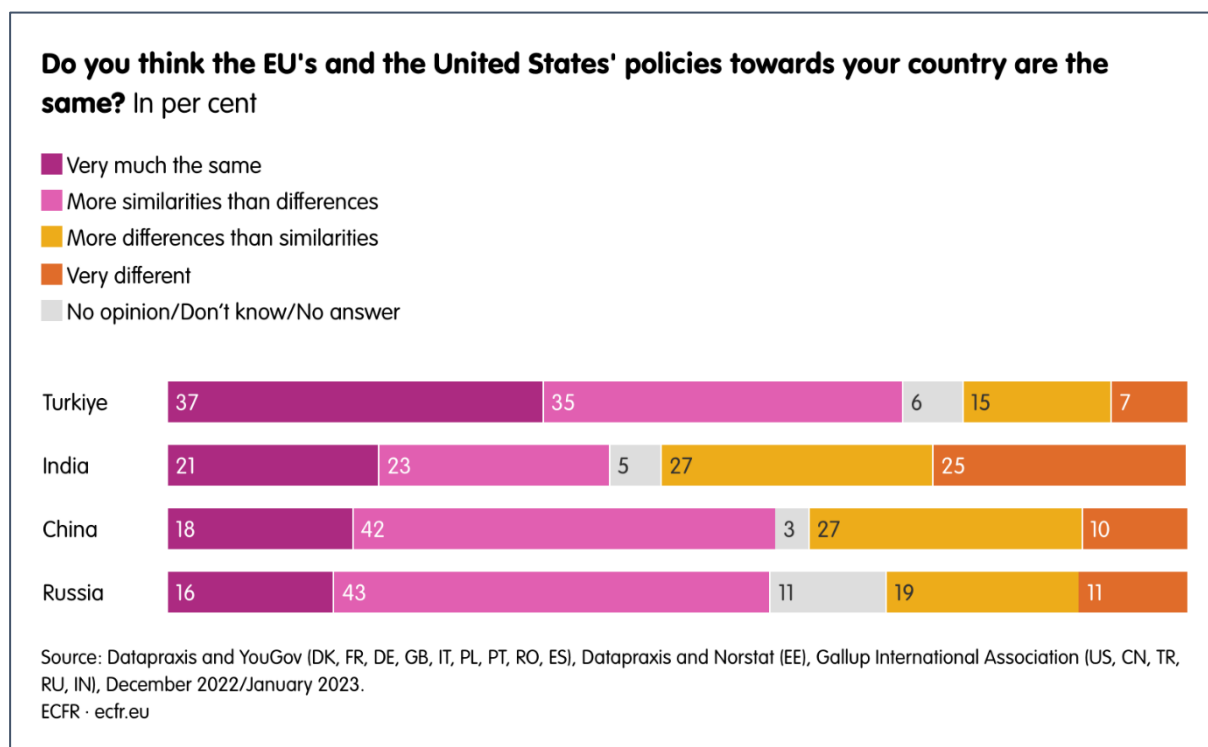
In the West, people also mostly see Turkiye as a “partner”. However, a strikingly high proportion of respondents in the US, Great Britain, and the EU – between 40 and 50 per cent – say they simply do not know how to define Turkiye. The reason for this Western uncertainty probably comes from Turkiye’s flaunting of its new sovereign foreign policy while remaining, at least on paper, a member of NATO.



Conclusion: The paradox of Western unity and global disunity

During the Iraq war of 2003, leading European intellectuals such as Jacques Derrida and Jürgen Habermas tried to define the EU’s political identity in contrast to that of the US. They celebrated Europe’s civilian power as the ultimate counterpoint to America’s military might. In the last decade, and particularly following the Trump years in the US, notions of European sovereignty and strategic autonomy have once again moved to the heart of European debates. But the reality is that Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine confirmed the renewed centrality of American power to Europe – with billions of dollars spent maintaining the war effort, which has sustained unity across the Atlantic on sanctions and diplomatic positions towards Russia and given a new lease on life for Western-led institutions such as NATO and the G7.

This reality has not gone unnoticed by global publics. The rising powers considered in this study often view Europe and America as forming part of a single West. Seventy-two per cent of people in Turkiye, 60 per cent in China, and 59 per cent in Russia see little difference between EU and US policies towards their countries (no doubt to the disappointment of President Emmanuel Macron and other champions of European strategic autonomy). That being said, as noted some important nuances still remain, particularly when it comes to the standing of the US and Europe in India and China.



It is now clear that, contrary to the Kremlin's expectations, the war has consolidated the West, rather than weakened it. If the risk of a transatlantic split still exists, it comes from within: a possible victory by Donald Trump in the American presidential election in 2024 could be more threatening to Western unity than anything that Russia has so far been able to muster.

The West may be more consolidated now, but it is not necessarily more influential in global politics. The paradox is that this newfound unity is coinciding with the emergence of a post-Western world. The West has not disintegrated, but its consolidation has come at a moment when other powers will not simply do as it wishes.

Are Western leaders and Western societies ready for this new world? Our polling shows that many people in the West see the coming international order as the return of a cold war-type bipolarity between West and East, between democracy and authoritarianism. In this context, decision-makers in the US and the EU may feel inclined to view countries such as India and Turkiye as swing states that can be cajoled into siding with the West.

But people in those countries see themselves very differently: as emerging great powers that may side with the West on some issues but not on others. In contrast to the days of the cold war, today one's major trade partners are not usually one's security partners. Even when the emerging powers agree with the West, they will often maintain good relations with Russia and China. This is also what Brazil is currently doing: President Lula speaks in favour of preserving his country's neutrality vis-à-vis Ukraine and Russia, to avoid "any participation, even indirect," even as he accepts that Russia "was wrong" to invade its neighbour.

It might disappoint Europeans that governments and publics in places such as India and Turkiye tend to view Russia's aggression through the prism of their national interest rather than universal principles. But they should not be overly surprised. Many non-Western nations had their own moments of disappointment in the way that Western countries have neglected crises that were existentially important to these players. Talk of Western hypocrisy is most acutely visible in the differential treatment extended to refugees from Ukraine and Syria – but that is just the tip of the iceberg as far as many emerging powers are concerned.

In our view, the West would be well advised to treat India, Turkiye, Brazil, and other comparable powers as new sovereign subjects of world history rather than as objects to be dragooned onto the right side of history. These countries do not represent some new third bloc or pole in international politics. They do not share a common ideology among themselves. Indeed, they often have divergent or competing interests. They know they do not have the global influence of the US or China. But they are certainly not content to adjust to the whims and plans of the superpowers. And their publics support such an approach, as demonstrated, for example, by their reluctance to consider problems relating to Ukraine to be any of their business. Rather than

expecting them to support Western efforts to defend the fading post-cold war order, we need to be ready to partner with them in building a new one.

Ukraine's victory in the war will be critical for the shape of the next European order. But it is highly unlikely to restore a US-led global liberal order. Instead, the West will have to live, as one pole of a multipolar world, with hostile dictatorships such as China and Russia, but also with independent major powers such as India and Turkiye. This may end up being the biggest geopolitical turning point revealed by the war: that the consolidation of the West is taking place in an increasingly divided post-Western world.

Methodology

The polling and analysis contained in this policy brief is the result of a collaboration between the European Council on Foreign Relations and the Europe in a Changing World project of the Dahrendorf Programme at St Antony's College, University of Oxford.

This report is based on a public opinion poll of adult populations (aged 18 and over) conducted in late December 2022 and early January 2023 in ten European countries (Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, and Spain), and in five countries outside Europe (China, India, Turkiye, Russia, and the United States). The total number of respondents was 19,765 respondents.

In Europe, the polls were carried out for ECFR as an online survey through Datapraxis and YouGov in Denmark (1,064 respondents; 3-11 January), France (2,051; 3-12 January), Germany (2,017; 4-11 January), Great Britain (2,200; 4-10 January), Italy (1,599; 4-12 January), Poland (1,413; 3-20 January), Portugal (1,057; 4-12 January), Romania (1,003; 4-11 January), and Spain (1,013; 4-11 January); and through Datapraxis and Norstat in Estonia (1,022; 18-24 January). In all European countries the sample was nationally representative of basic demographics and past vote. In the United Kingdom, the poll did not cover Northern Ireland, which is why the paper refers to Great Britain.

Outside Europe, the polls were conducted by Gallup International Association (GIA) through independent local partners as an online survey in the US (1,074; on 17 January; through Distance/SurveyMonkey), China (1,024; 3-17 January; Distance/Dynata), and Turkiye (1,085; 3-19 January; Distance/Dynata); and through face-to-face surveys in Russia (800; 26 December to 17 January: BeMedia Consultant) and India (1,343; 27 December-18 January; Convergent). The choice of face-to-face surveys in the latter two countries was directed by the tense internal political and social situation in Russia and poor quality of internet in India's smaller cities. In Turkiye and the US, the sample was nationally representative of basic demographics. In China, the poll included panellists from Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen agglomerations only. In Russia, only cities of more than 100,000 inhabitants were covered. And in India, rural areas and tier-3 cities were not covered. Therefore, data from China, Russia, and India should be considered as representative only for the population covered by the poll. Last but not least, considering the poll scope and questionnaire, the results from Russia and China need to be interpreted with caution, bearing in mind possibility that some respondents might have felt constrained in expressing their opinions freely.

About

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