

Norway

[Untroubled and vigilant]

Norway, because of its geographical location, plays an important role in European security today as NATO’s northernmost flank, with a land and maritime border shared with Russia. Although Norway rejected EU membership in the 1994 referendum, it is associated with the Union through its membership of the European Economic Area (EEA), which constitutes the cornerstone of EU-Norwegian relations today. In 1949, Norway joined NATO as one of its founding members, but committed to not allowing foreign bases to be established on Norwegian territory in peacetime. In addition, Norway is a member of various frameworks for regional and subregional cooperation in the Arctic – most notably the Arctic Council – and has concluded bilateral and trilateral defence cooperation agreements with other Nordic countries within the framework of the Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFECO).

Self-perception

Norway stands out as the most satisfied and trusting country in the survey. Only 24% of respondents believe that Norway does not have the status it deserves – the lowest figure in the poll by far. Relatedly, trust in both civilian and military institutions is strikingly high in Norway, in marked contrast to all other polled nations. The only institutions not trusted by a majority are the media and political parties – trust in both stands at some 43% in Norway, which is still two to five times more than elsewhere. As regards trust in the health care system and satisfaction with the government’s management of the coronavirus pandemic, Norway again ranks highest among all the countries polled.

Status in the world



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

Norwegians identify with the European cultural sphere (62%), albeit to a lesser extent than other surveyed European countries. Only the United Kingdom scores lower. The impression of Norwegian self-reliance is reinforced by the fact that only a minority (45%) believe that Norway’s prosperity depends on the well-being and positive developments of other countries. Only two other resource-extracting countries – Russia and the United States – scored similarly.

Correspondingly, support for increased collaboration with the EU is weaker in Norway than in other surveyed countries (only 54%). At the same time, fewer people than in most polled

EU members think that EU policies are in conflict with Norway’s interests (37%).

Remarkably, Norwegian respondents give higher credit to the OSCE than any other polled country and consider its influence close to that of the EU or the UN. The expert group underlined the importance of the Arctic Council as a forum for regional cooperation, including with Russia. Experts believe that the High North and Russian-Norwegian cross-border relations continue to remain stable because of the many overlapping institutions that govern Arctic affairs.

Perception of European security

Compared with the other 13 countries, the Norwegian respondents feel safest in their immediate surroundings (96%). They also appear to be least concerned about their personal future and about the possibility that their financial circumstances might worsen as a result of the various developments the country faces today.

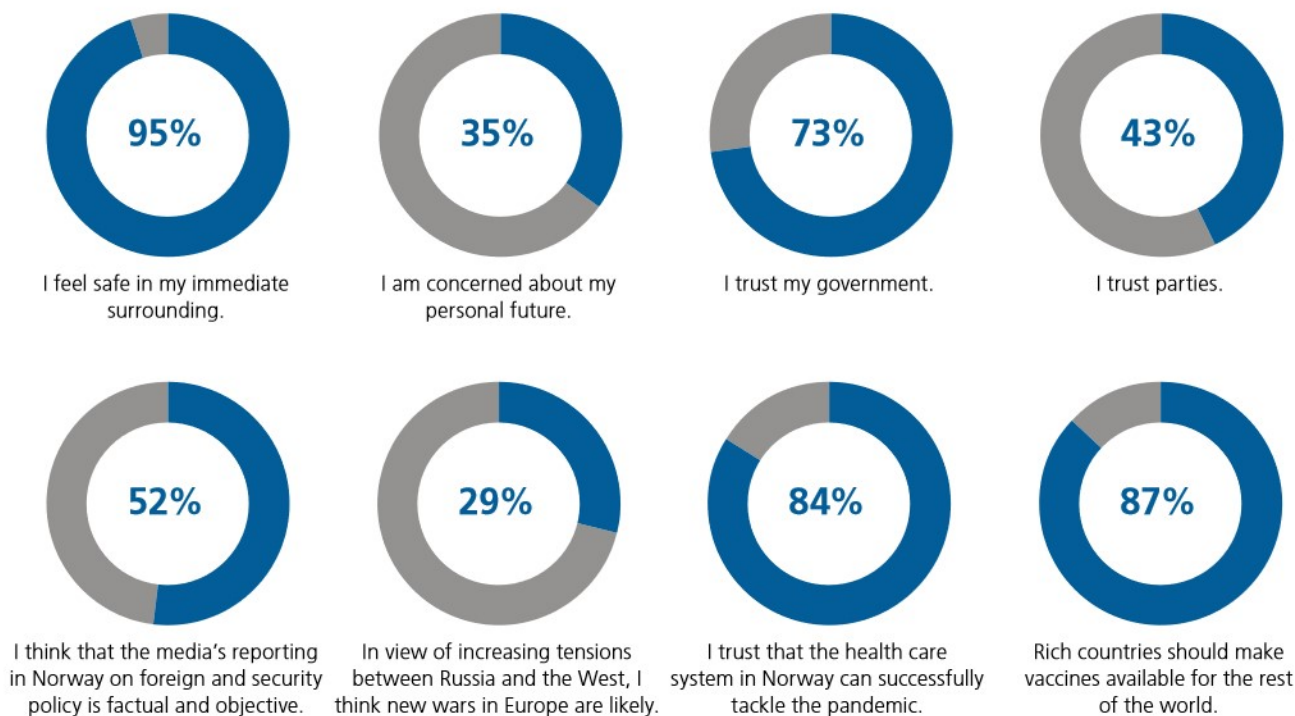
Slightly more than half of the respondents are worried that wars and conflicts might affect Norway in the future. However, only 29% consider increasing tensions between Russia and the West to have the potential to trigger new wars in Europe.

Norwegian respondents are most worried about terrorism (68%), climate change (66%), cyber-attacks (62%) and economic crises (62%). In addition, as many as 68% identify the dissemination of disinformation and cyber-attacks against public institutions as threatening. This is in line with the expert group discussion, which stressed the need to build societal resilience and raise awareness of increasing hybrid threats.

The expert group identified great power competition, climate change and migration as the most pressing challenges faced by Norway today. In terms of threatening actors, survey

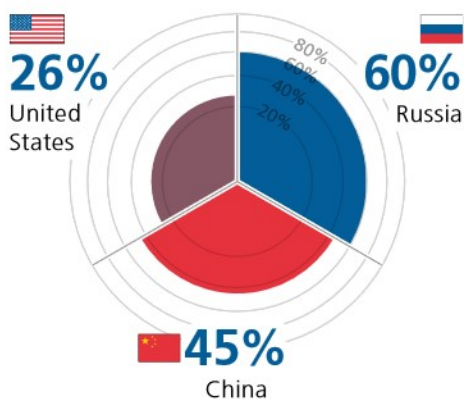
Selected perceptions in Norway

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



respondents identify Russia as most threatening to peace and security in Europe (60%), followed by China (45%). The experts consider Norway to be caught in the middle of great power rivalry between the United States and Russia, which has spilled over into the Arctic.

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



Both sets of results suggest that the military build-up in the High North does not pose a threat to Norway's foreign and security interests. But the expert group felt that in the absence of effective military-to-military dialogue, the growing military activity on the part of both Russia and NATO might lead to misinterpretation of intentions and unintended escalation. Military cooperation with Russia has been suspended since 2014.

The way forward

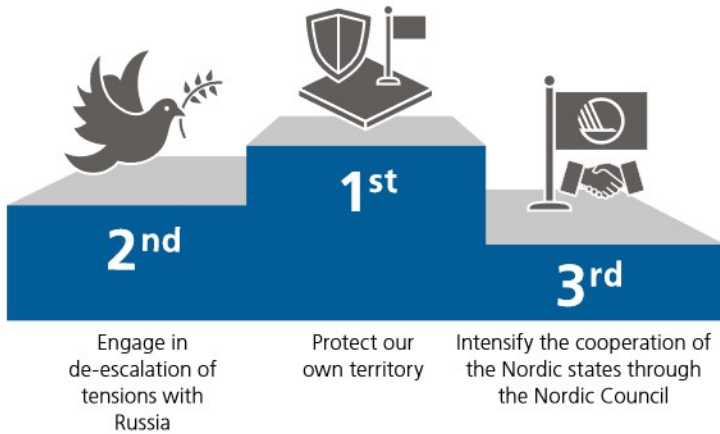
Among global foreign and security problems, Norwegian respondents would like the government to prioritise, first, international terrorism and extremism (62%), followed by climate change (52%), human rights violations (48%) and pandemics (40%). In terms of effectiveness of foreign policy tools, Norwegians are among the strongest proponents of economic sanctions

Trust in institutions in Norway is the highest among the polled countries

"Overlapping institutions in the Arctic provide for stable security"

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

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



(59%), but they prefer to solve foreign policy crises diplomatically (67%). Military interventions are considered both ineffective (45%) and illegitimate (48%) and are rejected by most respondents (45%) – a stance not shared by their polled NATO peers.

When asked about their top three priorities for Norwegian foreign policy, respondents name protection of their own territory, de-escalation of tensions with Russia and intensification of cooperation between the Nordic states through the Nordic Council.

In line with Norway’s commitment to meet the 2% defence spending target by 2024, both the expert group and the polling results reveal public support for an increase in military spending (46%). Among polled NATO member states, only Turkey and Poland exhibit greater public support for increased defence spending.

De-escalation of tensions with Russia is a foreign policy priority for Norwegian respondents

Public opinion is split on the contentious issue of the presence of NATO troops on Norwegian soil. About equal shares (around a quarter of respondents) believe a prolonged presence would not be a problem; would jeopardise relations with Russia; or do not have an opinion on the topic. Another quarter believe that alongside cooperation with NATO, Norway’s defence policy should focus on strengthening cooperation with the other Nordic states.

As regards Ukraine, Norwegian respondents regard Russia (56%) and Russian-backed separatists (29%) as responsible for the ongoing conflict in the country. Some 56% of respondents agree that Russia annexed Crimea illegally. These results are largely consistent across all polled NATO member states. Respondents were almost equally divided on Ukraine’s eventual membership of NATO and the EU, with as many as 38–41% of respondents not having any opinion on this issue. Most respondents consider European-Russian relations to be influenced primarily by the ongoing conflict in Ukraine (61%), incompatible values and mindsets (55%) and domestic developments in Russia (54%).

Recognising the growing security dilemma in the Arctic, the expert group underlined the need to improve mechanisms for de-escalation in the event of an unintended incident or a minor crisis. It was suggested that mechanisms that are already in place, such as the Incidents at Sea Agreement or a hotline from the military Headquarters near Bodø to the Northern Fleet Headquarters in Severomorsk, should be implemented by other members of the Alliance to help reduce the risk of misunderstanding and escalation.

Here are some statements about Norway’s relationship with NATO. Choose one statement that you agree with most.

All figures in %

