

Confidence in NATO sharply declined in France, Germany, US, says study



Participants sit in front of the NATO logo during a NATO summit.
[EPA/MAURIZIO GAMBARINI]

NATO's public image in France, Germany and the US worsened sharply after US President Donald Trump and French President Emmanuel Macron questioned the value of the Western alliance, according to a new Pew Research Center study published on Monday (10 February).

In Europe, NATO is seen favourably across member states but there are reservations about the fulfilment of obligations linked to collective defence.

Overall, the study said 53% of people in 16 NATO members had a positive opinion of the Alliance, while less than a third expressed a negative view.

According to the report, NATO is seen most favourably in Poland and is least liked in Turkey. In France and Germany, decline of trust is particularly noteworthy.

57% of Germans hold a favorable view of NATO, down almost 20% compared to the late 2000s, the study shows.

Over the same period, approval declined from 71% in 2009 to 49% in France. President Emmanuel Macron infamously said last year the alliance was experiencing “brain death” because of a perceived failure to help resolve world conflicts,

Despite the organisation’s largely favourable ratings among member states, there is widespread reluctance to fulfill the collective defence commitment outlined in Article 5 of the NATO Treaty.

While most NATO countries trust the US to come to their defence if attacked by Russia, few would be willing to return the favour.

When asked if their country should defend a fellow NATO ally against a potential attack from Russia, a median of 50% across 16 NATO member states say their country *should not* defend an ally, compared with 38% who say their country *should* defend an ally against a Russian attack.

Only in five of the countries polled — US, Netherlands, Canada, UK and Lithuania – did majorities say their country should use force to defend an ally, the survey said.

In the two European countries with the sharpest confidence decline, only 34% of Germans and 41% of French would want their country to intervene militarily if another NATO member was attacked by Russia.

By contrast, 63% of Germans and 57% of the French would rather want to see US troops intervene in an Article 5 scenario.

“The belief that their country should respond to a hypothetical Russian attack on a NATO ally has become less common over time in a handful of countries,” the research centre said.

Among NATO members, Germany showed particularly low approval for “military force to maintain order in the world” in general. Forty-seven percent said it is sometimes necessary, much less than in France (64%), the UK (71%) and the US (78%).

The study comes after the dispute between Macron and US counterpart Donald Trump exposed major rifts in the Cold War-era military alliance.

Macron has defended his “brain death” remarks as a useful wake-up call for allies, who he said were too focused on defence spending and other internal issues, rather than relations with Russia, NATO-member Turkey in Syria and the Middle East.

NATO diplomats have long feared that Trump’s portrayal of NATO as an alliance in crisis might erode US public support.

Trump has harangued allies since taking office in 2017 over perceived under-spending on defence, effectively threatening to pull America out of the alliance in 2018.

Positive views of NATO, which relies on the commitment of its allies to collective defence, fell to 52% in the US last year, from 64% in 2018, the study said.

In post-Brexit Britain, where NATO is taking on greater symbolic importance following the country’s decision to leave the European Union, favourable views of NATO increased to 65% compared with 62% in 2017.

Source:

<https://www.euractiv.com/section/defence-and-security/news/confidence-in-nato-sharply-declined-in-france-germany-us-says-study/>

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