



FRANCE

MAJOR FORCES



CONCERNS ABOUT THE ECONOMY AND IMMIGRATION



LOW TRUST IN GOVERNMENT



WIDESPREAD FEELINGS OF DISEMPOWERMENT

WHICH ARE CONTRIBUTING TO:



A BREAKDOWN IN SOCIAL COHESION



A BREAKDOWN IN THE SOCIAL CONTRACT BETWEEN THE PUBLIC AND THE GOVERNMENT



A TENDENCY TO PRIORITISE DOMESTIC ISSUES OVER INTERNATIONAL ONES



WHAT THIS MEANS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

Despite high levels of support for development in principle, support crumbles once presented as a trade off with domestic priorities.



PATHWAYS TO BUILDING SUPPORT:

There are limited pathways to building support for development by tweaking messaging though focusing on humanitarianism and national benefits are more effective.

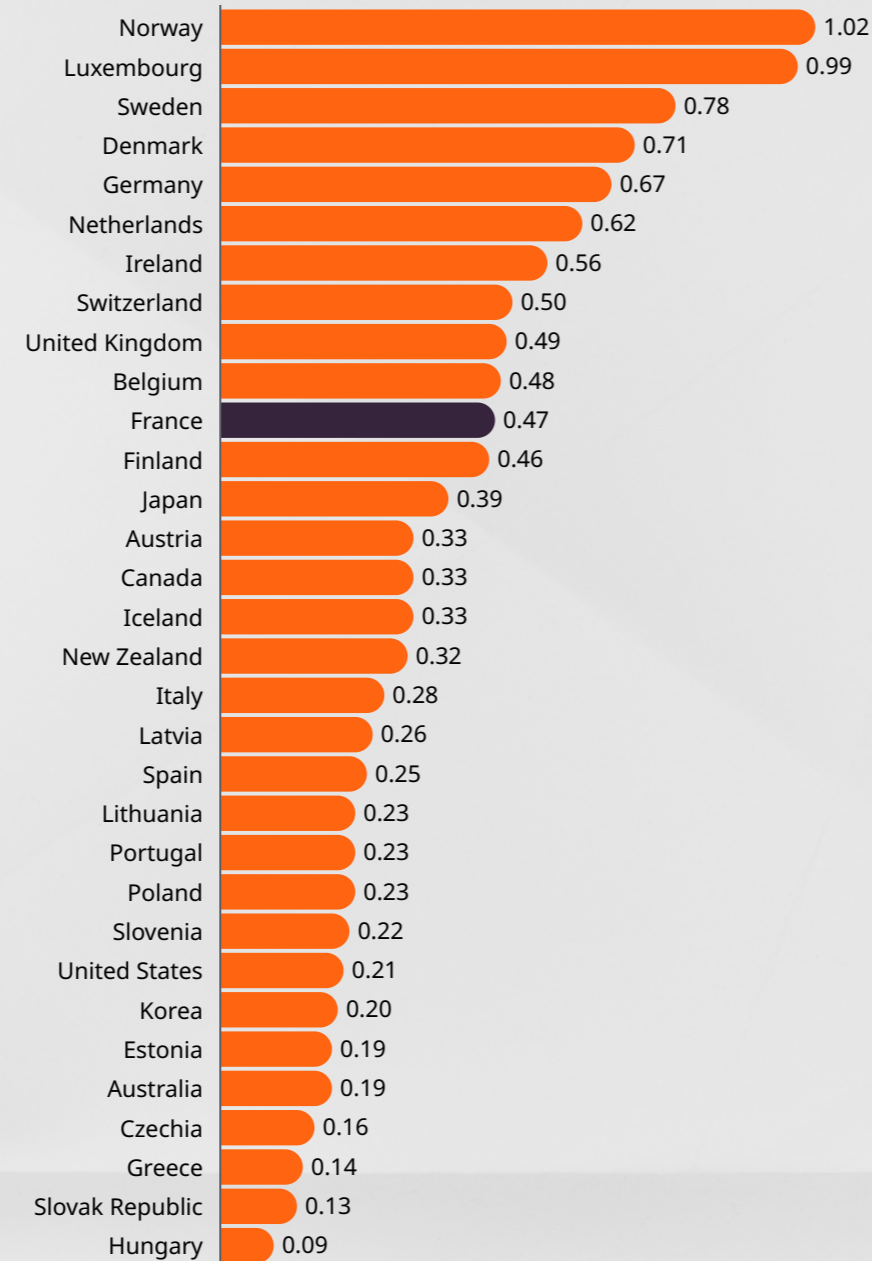
SUMMARY

Concerns about the economy and immigration, low trust in government, and widespread feelings of disempowerment are driving the public and political discourse in France. These forces are contributing to a breakdown in social cohesion across the country, a breakdown in the social contract between the public and the government, and a tendency to prioritise domestic issues over international ones.

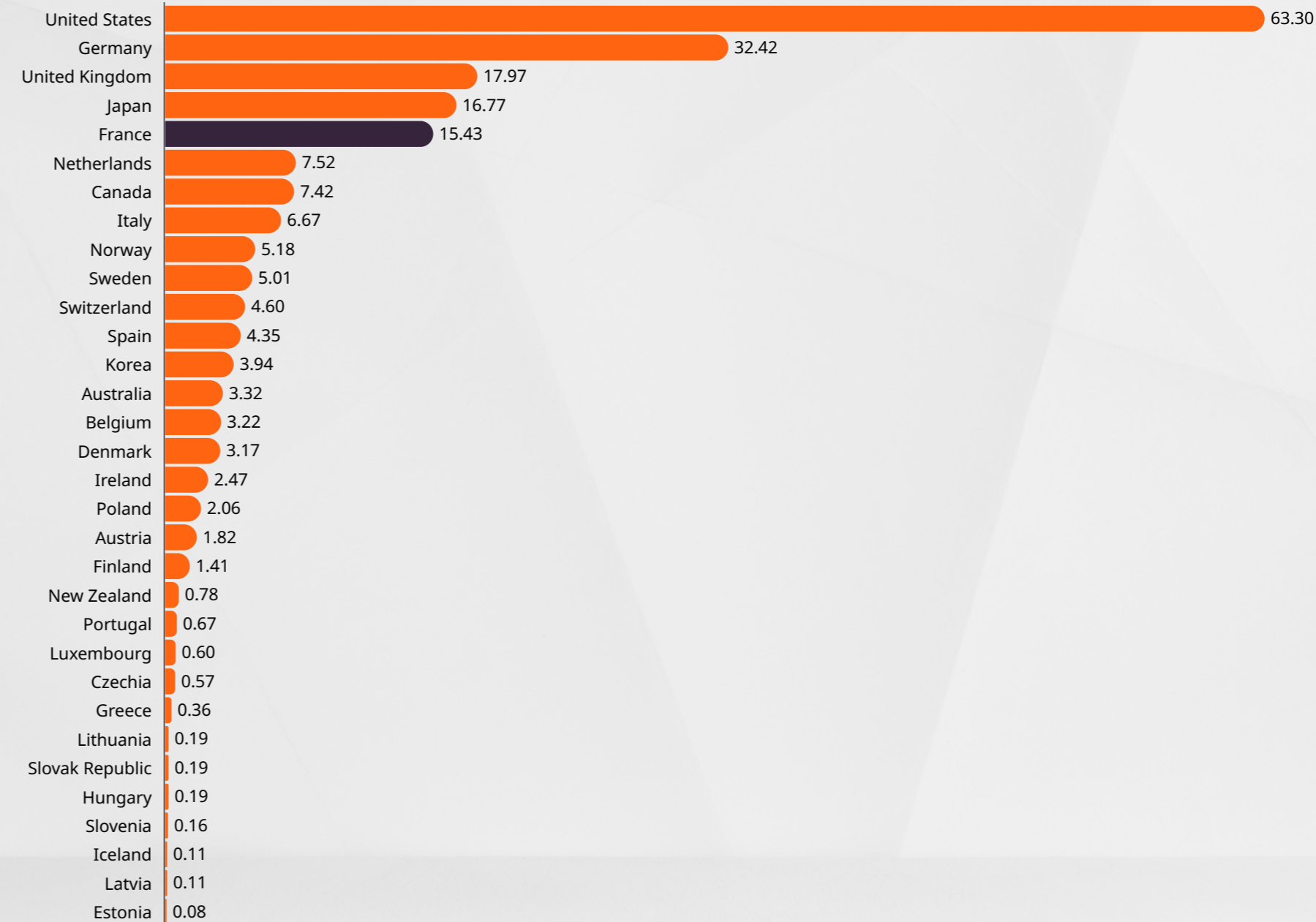
As a result - despite relatively high levels of support for multilateralism and international development in-principle - support crumbles once it is presented as a trade-off with domestic priorities. This is true for all groups, including those who are more supportive of development in general, including younger people and left-leaning voters.

There are some promising routes to shifting attitudes for some segments of the public by changing the way you speak about international development, the way that you spend it, or finding new tax resources to fund it. However, the reforms we tested only led to marginal changes in support, mostly with centrist or left-leaning groups who were already more sympathetic to international development - none sufficiently shifted the dial with sceptical groups.

Ultimately, our research suggests that advocacy aimed at building public support for international development in France will fail unless it fundamentally grapples with: 1. Low trust and feelings of disempowerment that the government can make positive change and 2. Domestic economic and migration challenges that are dominating the public discourse.



ODA as percent of GNI (grant equivalent) in 2024



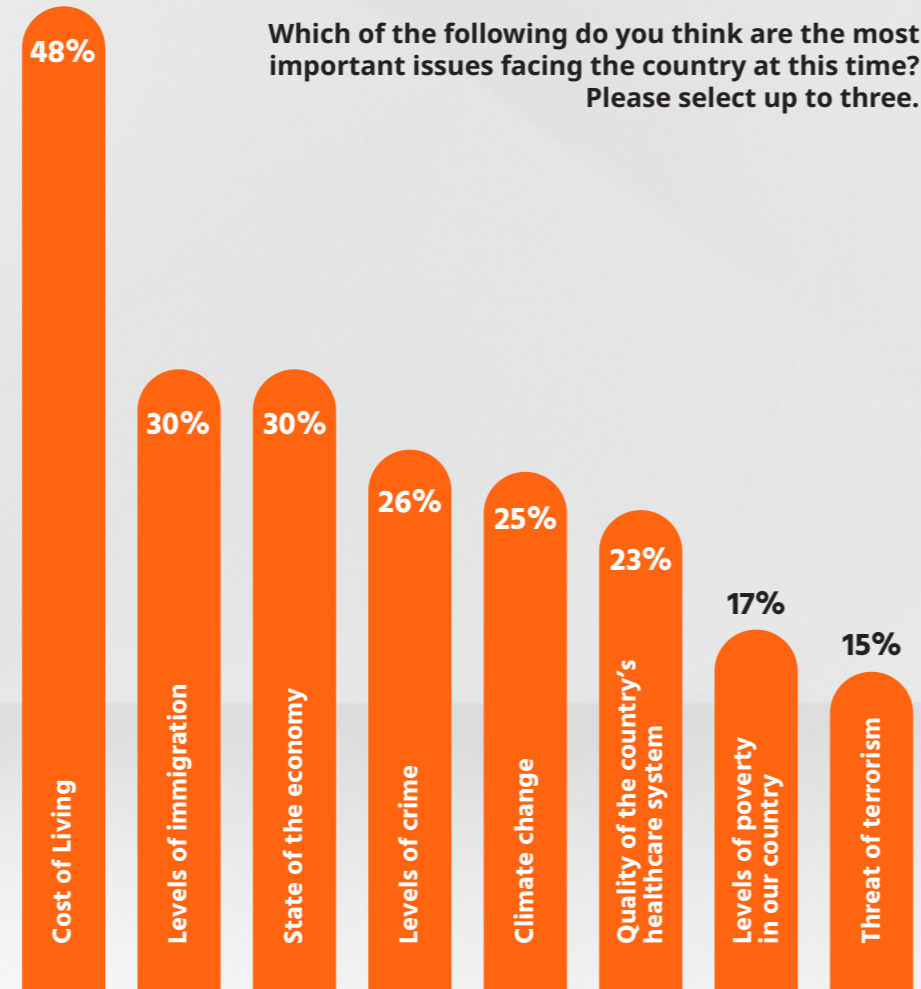
ODA - grant equivalent in 2024, USD billions

THE MAJOR FORCES DRIVING THE POLITICAL AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE

We identified three major forces that are shaping the political and public debate in France:

Widespread concerns about the economy and immigration.

The cost of living (48%), levels of immigration (30%), and the state of the economy (30%) are the top three most important issues facing the country according to the French public. This was reflected in our focus groups with right-leaning and centrist voters, where cost of living and immigration dominated much of the conversation. In the right-leaning group, participants unanimously agreed that these domestic concerns meant France should take care of its own before sending money abroad.

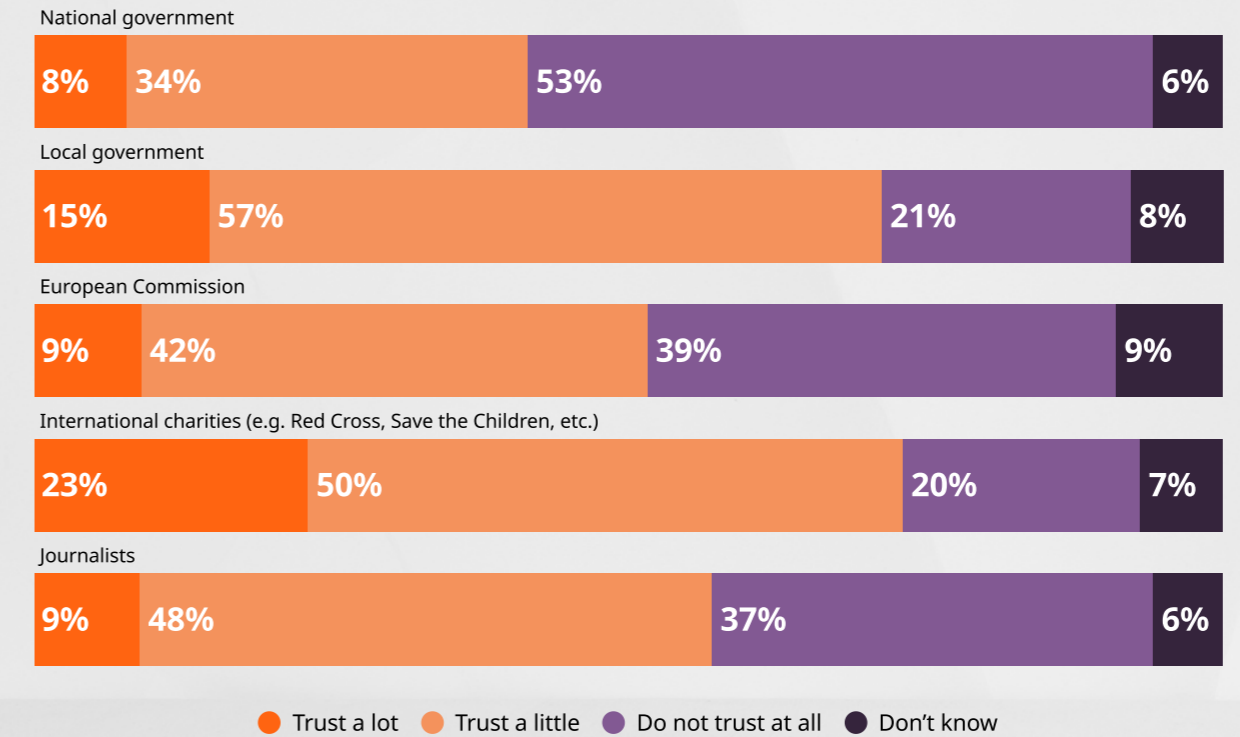


Low trust in the government.⁴

53% of the French public do not trust the national government at all - trust is lowest amongst older people and those who voted for the National Rally or didn't vote at all in the last election. Further, only around 1 in 5 French people trust the government to spend the national budget in a way that is in their best interest. This sentiment was borne out in both focus groups, where both centrist and right-leaning voters routinely expressed scepticism and general mistrust in the government. For example, when presented with national spending figures one male participant in his 50s replied:

"Where does this number come from? What does it mean? You can make numbers mean anything."

ODA as percent of GNI (grant equivalent) in 2024



⁴ This research took place after the December 4th 2024 no confidence vote that toppled Prime Minister Michel Barnier's government, but before the September 8th 2025 no confidence vote that toppled Prime Minister Francois Bayrou's government.

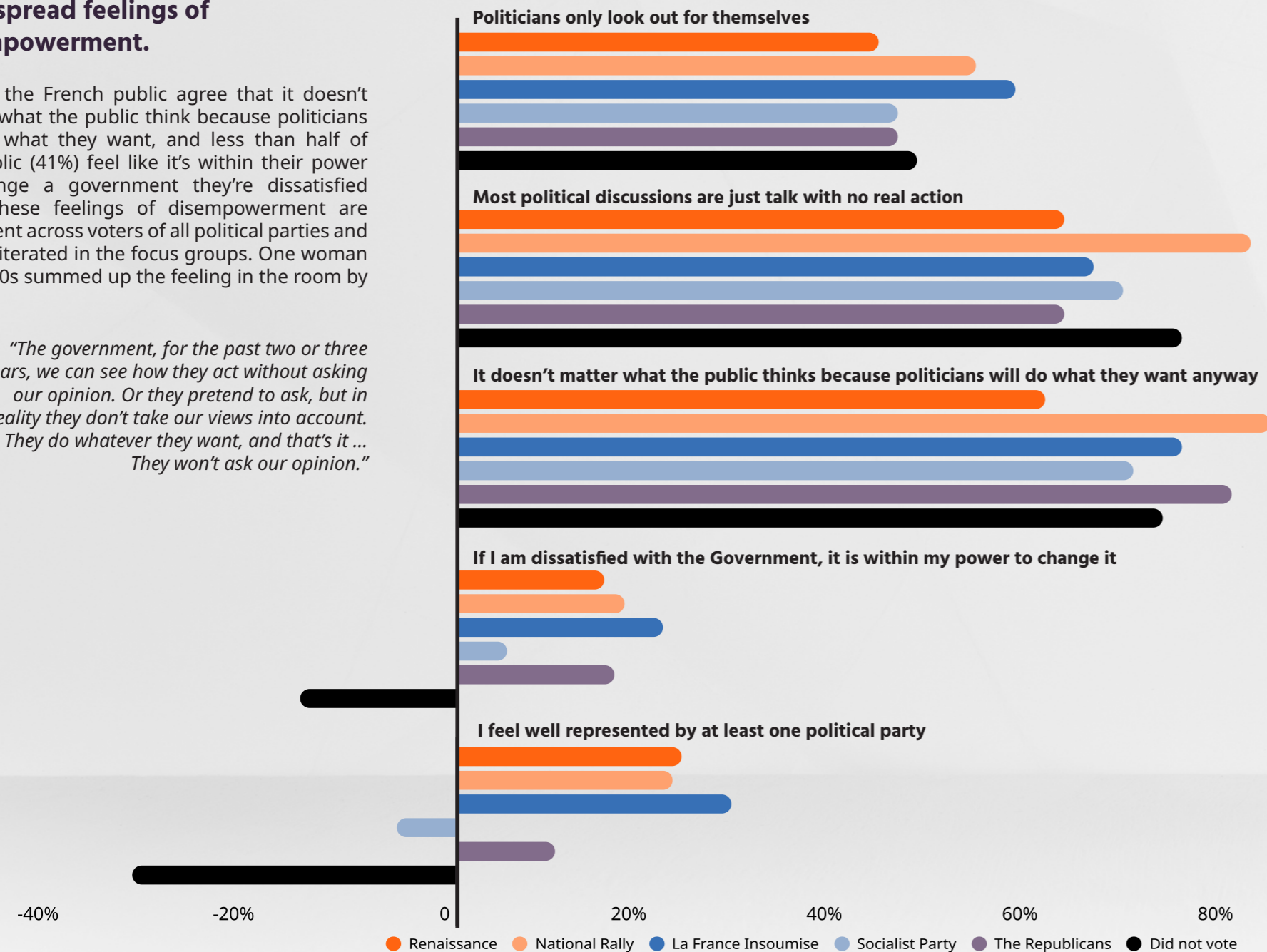


Widespread feelings of disempowerment.

81% of the French public agree that it doesn't matter what the public think because politicians will do what they want, and less than half of the public (41%) feel like it's within their power to change a government they're dissatisfied with. These feelings of disempowerment are consistent across voters of all political parties and were reiterated in the focus groups. One woman in her 60s summed up the feeling in the room by saying:

"The government, for the past two or three years, we can see how they act without asking our opinion. Or they pretend to ask, but in reality they don't take our views into account. They do whatever they want, and that's it ... They won't ask our opinion."

Please indicate your level of agreement for the following statements. Net support



Combined, we find these forces are contributing to:

- 1. A breakdown of social cohesion.** Only a third of the French public agree that they are feeling increasingly more connected to the people around them. Feeling less connected to the people around them was a consistent finding for voters across the political spectrum and across age groups.
- 2. A breakdown in the social contract between the public and the government.** Both the poll and focus groups found widespread mistrust of the government and scepticism that they can deliver for the public. This suggests that the social contract - i.e. that the public pay taxes to the government who spend it efficiently to provide a social safety net and enable people to thrive - is breaking down. This was at the very core of people's opposition to international development (i.e. the government could not be trusted to spend it efficiently or effectively) but went far beyond international development to all elements of government spending - only 19% of the public trust the government to spend the national budget in a way that is in their best interest vs. 61% disagree.
- 3. A focus on domestic over international priorities.** There are high levels of support for tackling international issues, like climate change or global poverty, when viewed in isolation (77% of the public agree countries should work together to solve global problems like climate change or global poverty - this is consistently high across all voter groups). However, when presented in the context of other domestic priorities, support for international policies crumbles. When asked how they would like the government to spend a new hypothetical pot of €10 billion, international aid is the last (or one of the last) choices for voters across right-wing, centrist and left-wing parties alike.



LOOKING OUTWARD: FEELINGS TOWARDS INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY & MULTILATERALISM

Despite widespread domestic concerns, the French do not want to turn their back to the world.

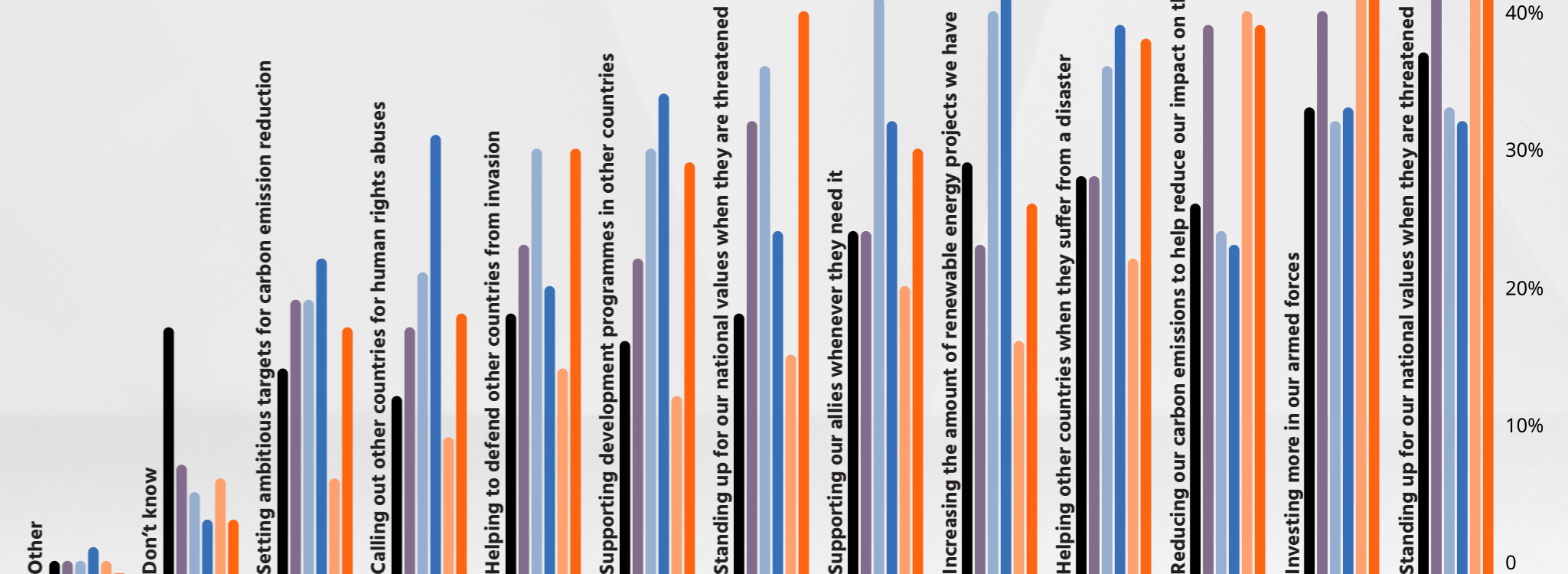
The French public agree that countries should be working together to solve global problems, such as climate change or global poverty (77% agree vs. only 7% disagree) and a plurality agree that France has a responsibility to help people in other countries when they are in need (45% agree vs. 23% disagree). Support for multilateralism is higher for voters of left-leaning parties like La France Insoumise (88% agree countries should work together) and the Socialist Party (86% agree) but there is also strong agreement across voters for right-wing parties like the National Rally (71% agree). However, National Rally voters differ from others in that they generally disagree that France has a responsibility to help people in other countries when they are in need (46% disagree vs. 26% agree); voters across all other parties believe France does have this responsibility. Further, the public have higher trust in multilateral institutions like the European Commission (51% trust) and United Nations (58% trust) than they do in their own national government (41% trust) - this is true for all voter groups.

The French think it's important that other countries have a positive view of their country but have different opinions on what builds international respect.

76% of the French public - including a majority across voters of all political parties - agree that it is important that other countries have a positive view of France. However, there is a significant difference in what builds those positive views across different voter groups. Voters across more centrist and right-leaning parties believe respect is earned by 'standing up for our national values when they are threatened' and 'standing up for our economic interests more loudly'. These activities were also popular amongst voters of left leaning parties, like La France Insoumise and the Socialist Party, however they came secondary to activities related to climate and development, including "reducing our carbon emissions to help reduce our impact on the climate" and "helping other countries when they suffer from a disaster".

This dimension of public attitudes will be particularly important for the upcoming French Presidency of the G7 in 2026 when issues of global cooperation and development will be part of the agenda.

In your view, which, if any, of the following would increase the respect other countries have for France on the world stage? Select any which apply

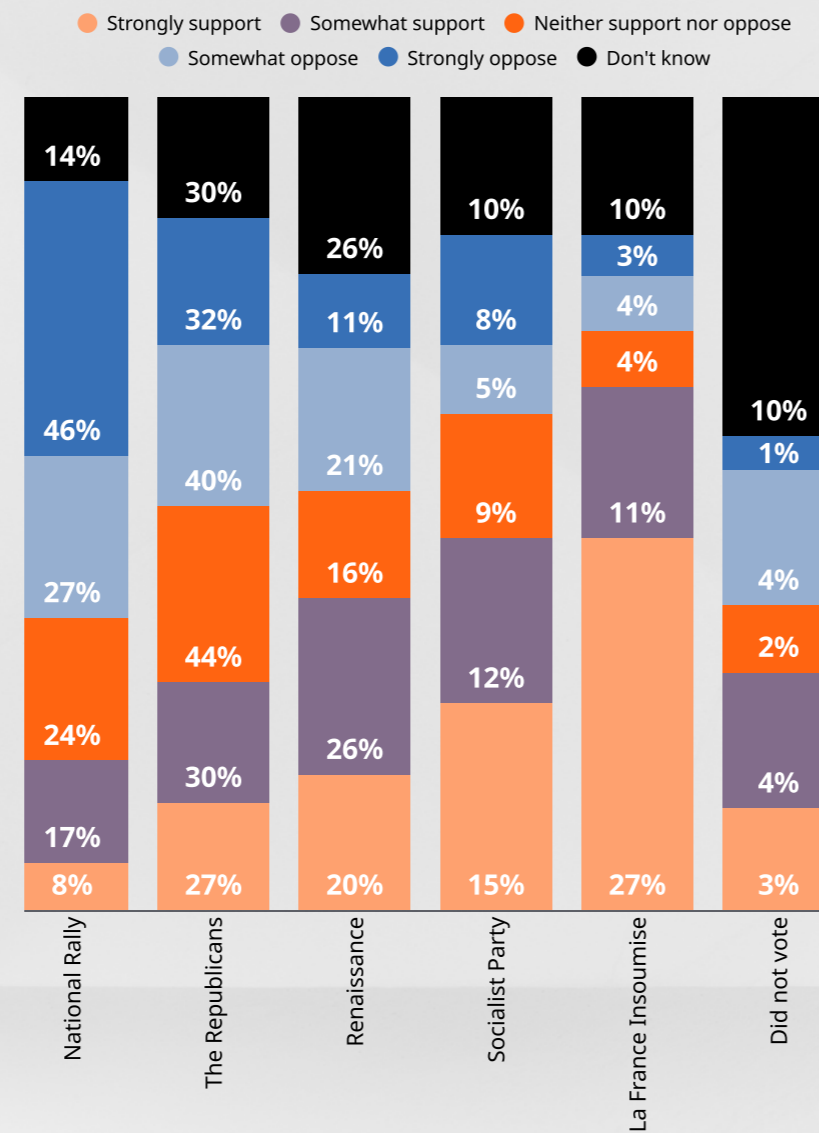


CURRENT ATTITUDES TO INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

When it comes to international development more specifically, support in principle is high.

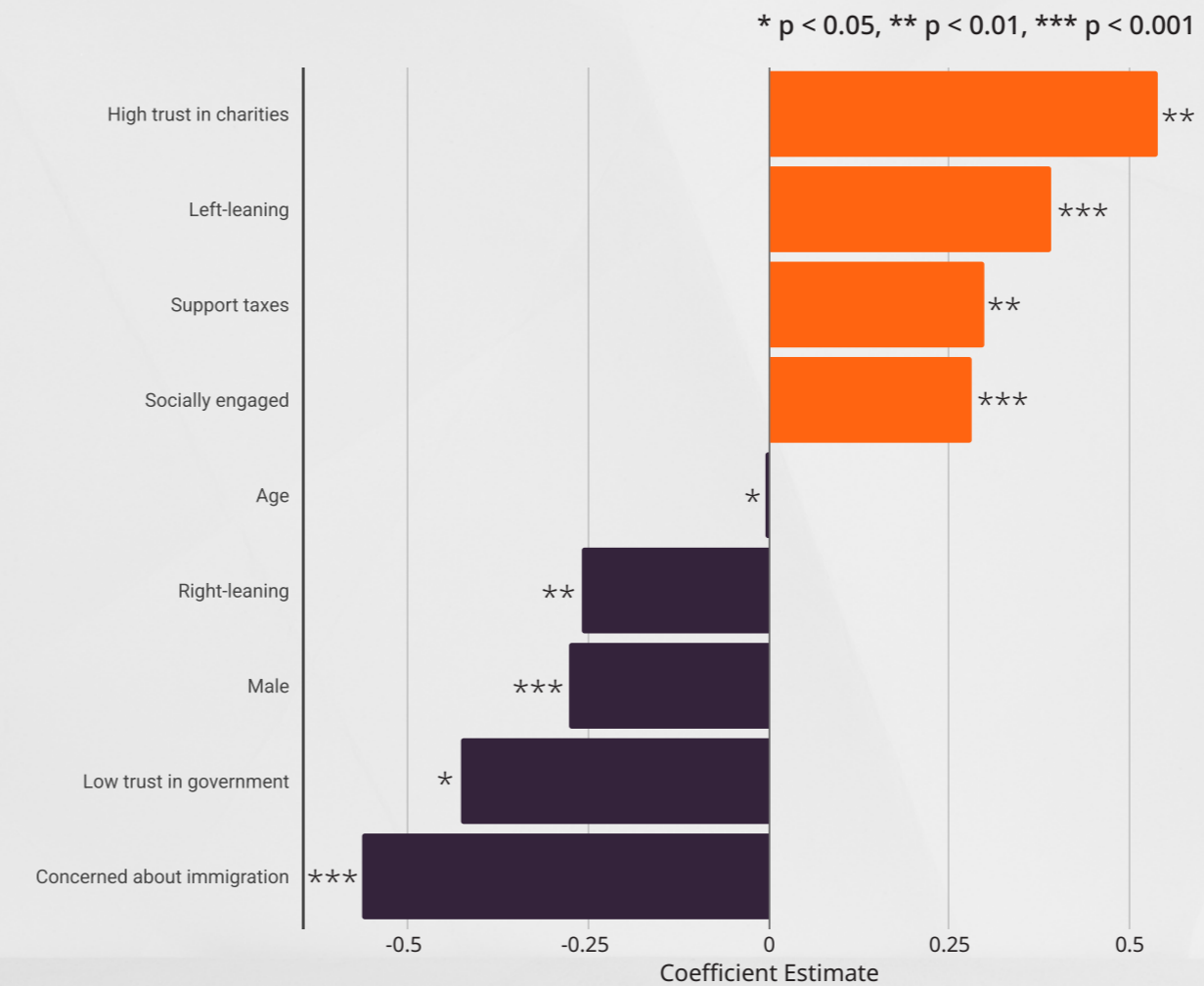
51% of the public support their government spending money to reduce poverty in developing countries vs. just 21% who oppose. Further, 52% agree it is important for the French government to reduce poverty in other countries vs. 38% who disagree. Support for international development in-principle is relatively high across the political spectrum.

To what extent do you support or oppose France spending money to reduce poverty in developing countries, such as by providing food assistance, or helping to construct vital infrastructure like schools or wells?



The most significant predictors of support for international development are being politically left-wing and having high trust in charities, whereas opposition to international development is driven by low trust in government and concerns about immigration.

Significant Predictors of Support for International Aid in France⁵



⁵ Social engagement is defined as those who have taken part in signing a petition, donating or volunteering, sharing political content on social media, or attending a protest. Supports taxes represents those who would support increasing taxes in order to improve public services. 'Concerned about Immigration: 1' represent those who selected immigration as one of the top three issues facing France today.



However, the French do generally think they are spending too much on international development

46% agree France spends too much vs. 37% believe the country spends either the right amount or too little. There is a left/right political divide to these attitudes, with voters of right-leaning parties more likely to think France is paying too much. This may be related to the fact the French think other countries are not pulling their weight - 46% believe France is spending more on international development than other wealthy countries, 24% think France spends about the same as others and only 9% think France spends less than others.

Further, the public are very sceptical about how the international development budget is spent, with significant concerns around transparency, waste and corruption found in both the poll and focus groups.

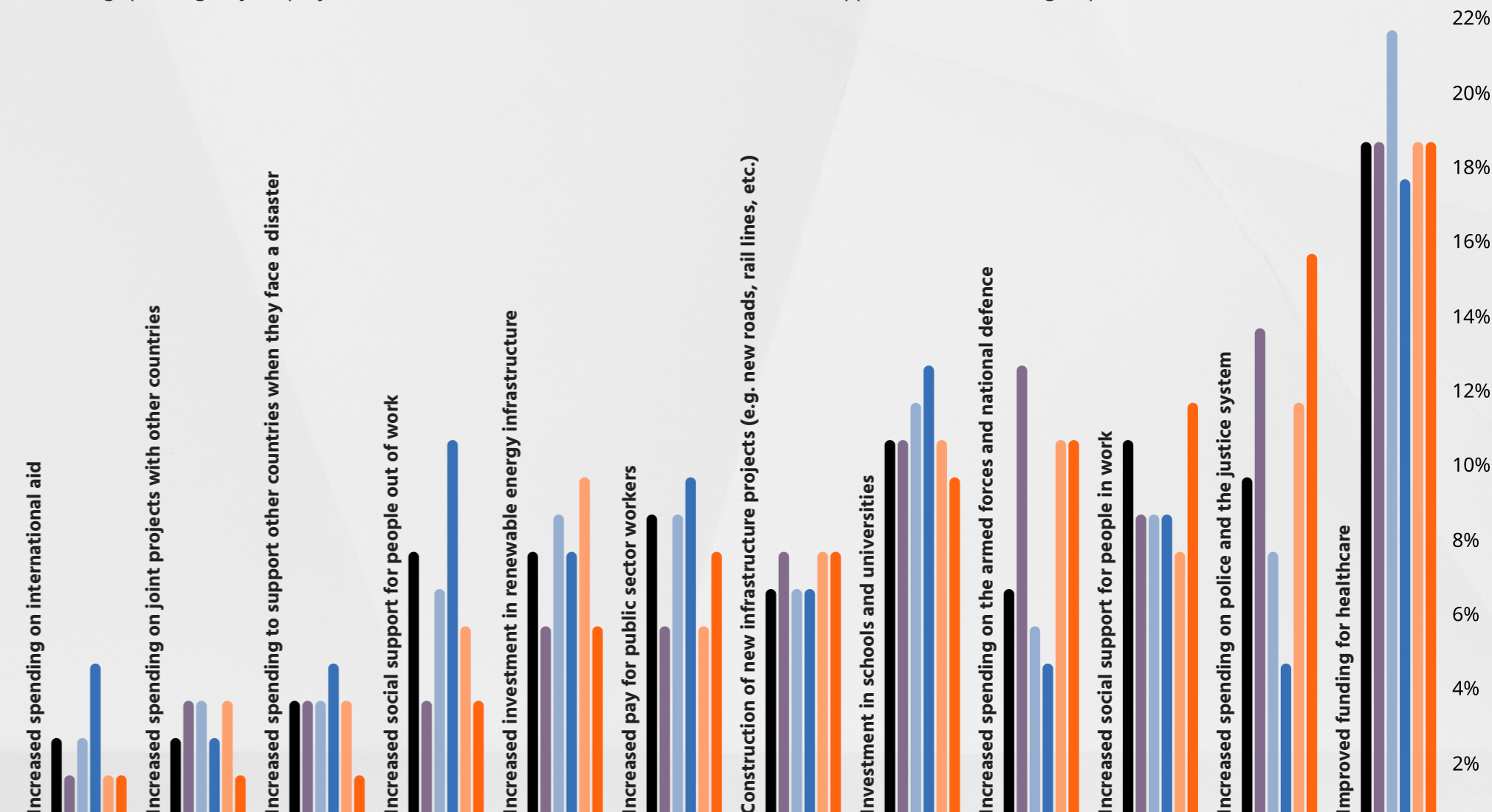
In a focus group with right-leaning voters, for example, the most powerful driver of opposition to international development spending was corruption and participants were highly sceptical that money ever reached the people it was intended for. This was due to obstacles like corrupt intermediaries, but also a general lack of trust in their government to make good use of the funds.

“AND ALSO, WITH THIS AID, WE NEVER SEE THE DETAILS, AND I GET THE IMPRESSION THERE IS LITTLE OR NO CONTROL. IF I TAKE THE EXAMPLE OF AID TO UKRAINE, YOU SOMETIMES HEAR ABOUT CORRUPTION, MONEY DISAPPEARING. INSTEAD OF ACTUALLY BEING AID, THAT MONEY ENDS UP IN THE POCKETS OF THOSE AT THE TOP. I MENTION UKRAINE, BUT IT COULD BE IN AFRICA OR ANYWHERE ELSE - CORRUPTION HAS ALWAYS BEEN THERE. I FEEL THERE IS LITTLE OR NO OVERSIGHT. IF IT WERE REALLY CONTROLLED, DOWN TO THE EURO, THEN IT WOULD BE DIFFERENT.”

Male, 40s

While there does appear to be a left/right political divide in high-level support for international development, support crumbles when compared to domestic priorities for voters across the political spectrum.

When we asked the public how they would like to see the government spend a new hypothetical pot of €10 billion, increasing spending on international aid, increased spending to support other countries when they face disaster, and increasing spending on joint projects with other countries received the lowest levels of support across all voter groups.



PATHWAYS FOR BUILDING PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

We tested three pathways for building support for international development:

1. Changing the way it's framed
2. Changing how it's spent
3. Raising new tax resources to fund it

We found that each reform pathway offered limited routes to building support with specific groups (who tended to be more supportive or sympathetic of international development to begin with), but none of them were sufficient for building widespread public support for international development.

Changing the way it's framed.

We tested a few different framings for international development, including:

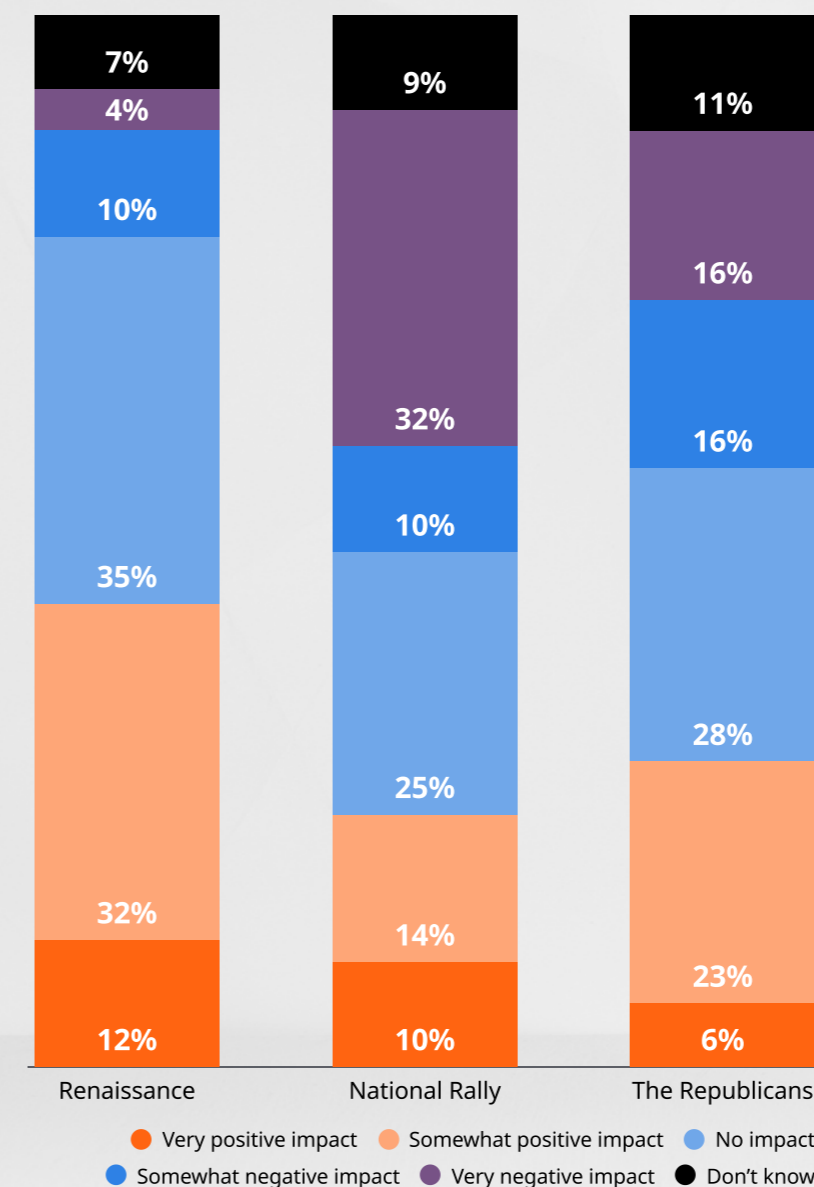
1. As a tool for poverty reduction (e.g. focused on 'traditional' development programmes in education, health and nutrition)
2. As a tool for disaster relief (e.g. focused on humanitarian relief)
3. As a tool for sustainable economic growth (e.g. focused on job creation)

We found no meaningful difference between the 'traditional' framing of international development around poverty reduction and investment in social sectors vs. the more 'modern' framing of international development around building sustainable economies - there was a relatively even split in attitudes across left-leaning, centrist and right-leaning voters.

However, framing international development as 'helping other countries respond to a disaster, such as an earthquake, a flood, or the outbreak of a disease' did receive more support with voters across the political spectrum than the 'traditional' poverty reduction framing. This framing was particularly impactful with National Rally voters - who reported net support for international development when framed as disaster relief (46% support vs. 27% oppose) compared to net opposition to the traditional framing (34% support vs. 42% oppose).

We also tested various 'mutual benefit' arguments to see if these framings could drive support - i.e. that investment in developing countries has tangible benefits to the donor country, including by supporting the growth of new trading partners, reducing the flow of migration, or reducing the price of food or energy in the donor country. Whilst these framings do speak to concerns that different groups have - e.g. reducing migration pressures to France would be a top 3 benefit of international spending for voters across Renaissance, the National Rally and the Republicans - this framing didn't resonate with voters because they are not sold that these relationships exist.

To what extent do you believe that your country providing financial support to developing countries has a positive or negative impact on the following?: Reducing levels of international migration



This finding was reiterated in the focus groups, where most participants - in both the centrist and right-wing groups - were either sceptical or outright rejected the idea that international development spending could deliver mutual benefits for France. Both groups acknowledged that this made sense in principle and that France probably does not give money purely "out of the goodness of its heart", and that international development is likely tied to diplomatic relationships or strategic interests. However, many of them felt these interests were hidden from the general public and that the benefits were removed from most ordinary people's lives.

"There might be a benefit, but it's not us little people that will ever see it."

Female, Right-leaning Voter, 60s

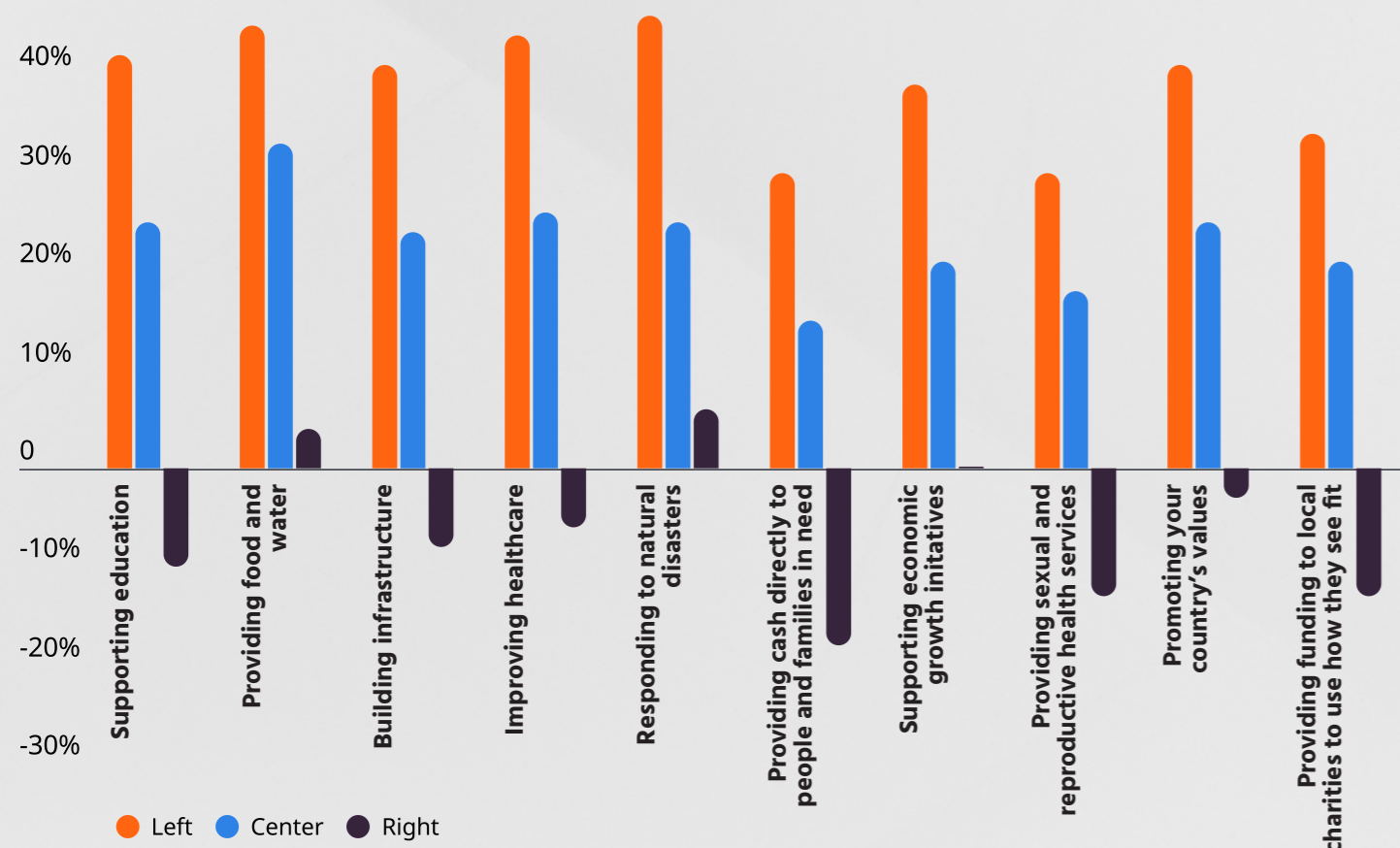
Participants in the centrist group also questioned whether international development spending may actually hurt France people and businesses rather than leading to mutual benefit after one participant shared an example of aid to Ukrainian poultry farmers ultimately undercutting French farmers.

"I'm a poultry farmer. Twenty years ago, we went to teach Ukrainians how to raise chickens. Now, there's MHP (a large poultry producer and exporter in Ukraine), which accounts for 79% of the European volume, and 77% of the poultry arriving in France. There's no mutual benefit... I mean, everyone has certainly advanced, but that aid has created other issues."

- Male, 30s

Changing how it's spent.

We tested various reform options for international development spending to understand whether how you spend the development budget can fundamentally shift support. We found slight variations in support, but that reform to spending priorities did not fundamentally shift any voter groups. For left-wing groups with the highest support for international development already, all options were similarly well received. For centrist groups, all options received similar lukewarm support. For right wing groups with the lowest support for international development already, humanitarian relief was the only option that received net support. For National Rally voters specifically, none of the options meaningfully shifted support levels.



In the focus groups, participants across both groups said they might support international development spending more if the money were clearly directed towards issues they felt were urgent - which included climate and conflict reduction. However, across both groups, a lack of transparency around how the development budget is spent fuelled mistrust that these changes could be made.

"We don't have any information; we know that we don't know. As citizens, maybe we need to go out and seek the information ourselves. But from everything I read and hear about international aid, I'd say we still don't have more information, we lack visibility."

- Female, 50s

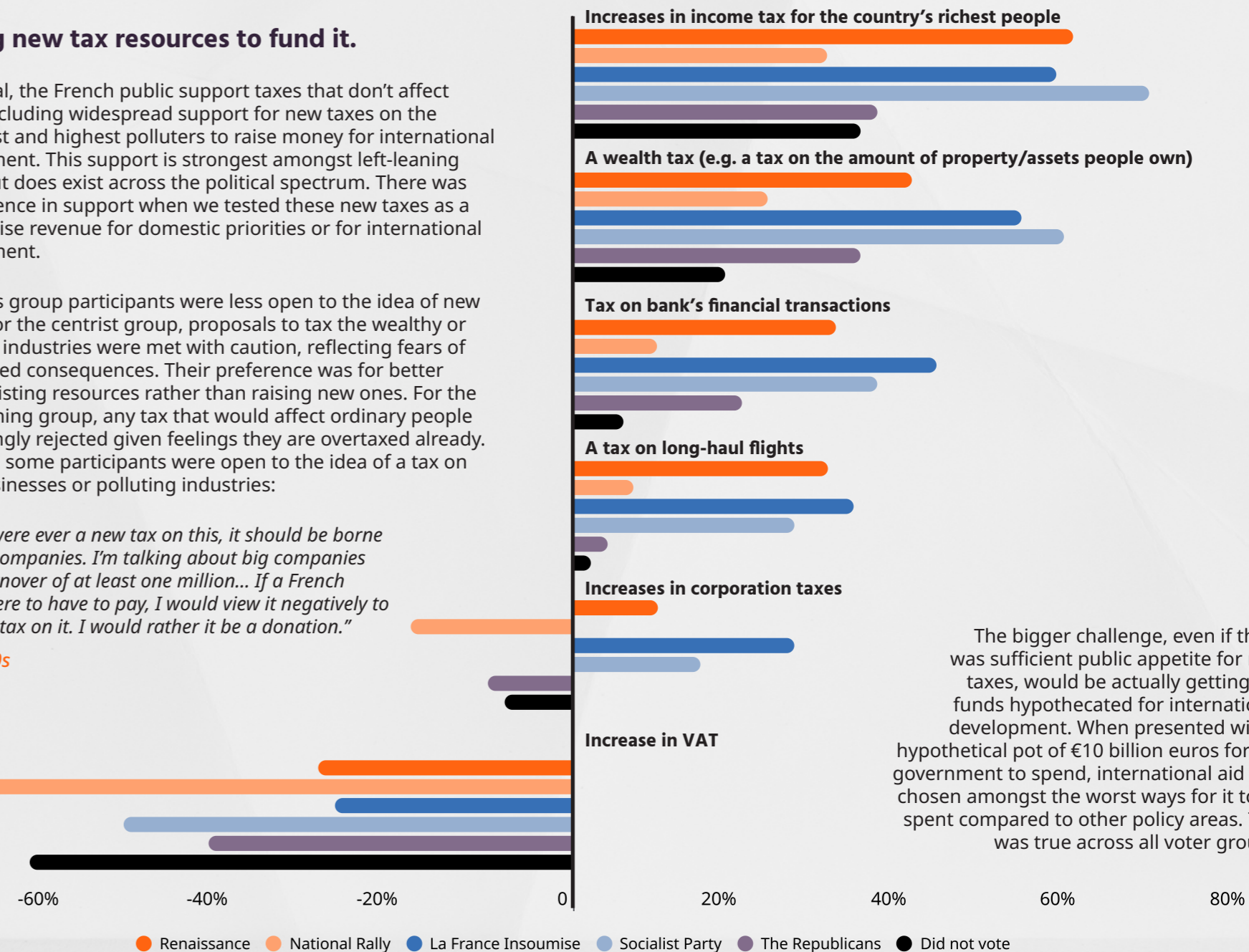
Raising new tax resources to fund it.

In general, the French public support taxes that don't affect them - including widespread support for new taxes on the wealthiest and highest polluters to raise money for international development. This support is strongest amongst left-leaning voters but does exist across the political spectrum. There was no difference in support when we tested these new taxes as a way to raise revenue for domestic priorities or for international development.

The focus group participants were less open to the idea of new taxes - for the centrist group, proposals to tax the wealthy or polluting industries were met with caution, reflecting fears of unintended consequences. Their preference was for better use of existing resources rather than raising new ones. For the right-leaning group, any tax that would affect ordinary people was strongly rejected given feelings they are overtaxed already. However, some participants were open to the idea of a tax on large businesses or polluting industries:

"If there were ever a new tax on this, it should be borne by large companies. I'm talking about big companies with a turnover of at least one million... If a French person were to have to pay, I would view it negatively to impose a tax on it. I would rather it be a donation."

- Male, 40s



The bigger challenge, even if there was sufficient public appetite for new taxes, would be actually getting the funds hypothecated for international development. When presented with a hypothetical pot of €10 billion euros for the government to spend, international aid was chosen amongst the worst ways for it to be spent compared to other policy areas. This was true across all voter groups.