



JAPAN

MAJOR FORCES



CONCERNS ABOUT THE ECONOMY, COST OF LIVING AND LEVELS OF TAXATION



DISILLUSIONMENT AND LOW TRUST IN GOVERNMENT



GROWING CONCERNS AROUND INEQUALITY

WHICH ARE CONTRIBUTING TO:



A BREAKDOWN IN SOCIAL COHESION



A TENDENCY TO PRIORITISE DOMESTIC ISSUES OVER INTERNATIONAL ONES



WHAT THIS MEANS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

Despite high levels of support for development and widespread recognition of the domestic benefits to this spending, support falls apart once presented as a trade off with domestic priorities. This is true even for more sympathetic groups.



PATHWAYS TO BUILDING SUPPORT:

Framing international development as a tool for poverty reduction or disaster relief were more effective than framing as building sustainable economic growth. Emphasising the role of multilateralism and working together with other countries was also effective.

This chapter is based on polling only

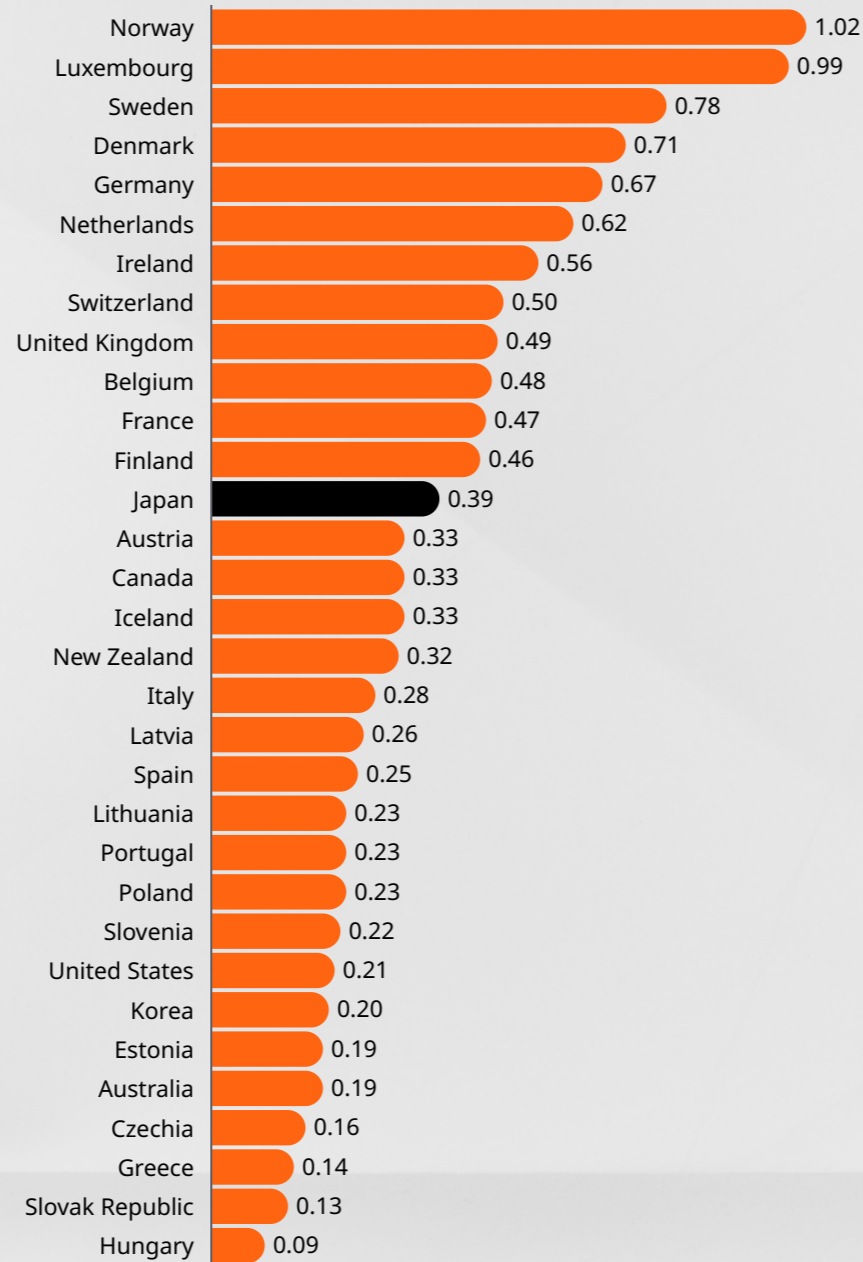
SUMMARY

Worries about the state of the economy dominate public concerns in Japan, with cost of living and levels of taxation following. A majority of people across the political spectrum feel disillusioned by the government, though there is some optimism about the role that individuals can play in enacting change in government. Even so, concerns about the economy and low trust in government, coupled with a rising sense of inequality, are contributing to a breakdown in social cohesion.

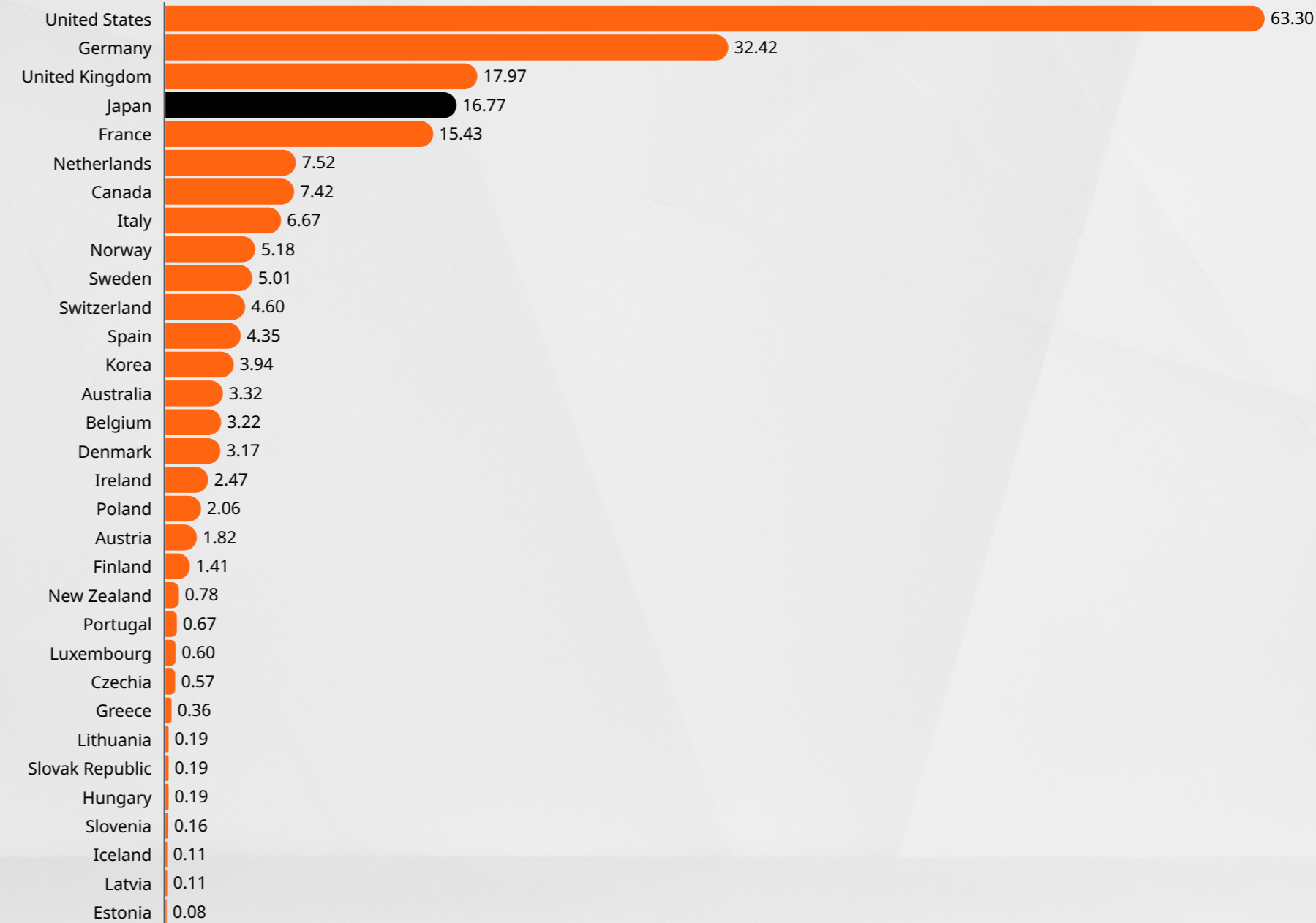
Across all age groups, the Japanese public feel strongly about their international reputation and support multilateralism on the whole. CDP voters in particular placed investment into global cooperation above other domestic priorities, suggesting there is still widespread support for international development amongst this voter group, even when traded-off against competing national issues. This is driven in part by the perception that international development could result in a stronger global economy and could create new markets for Japanese goods.

Despite blanket support for international development across voter groups, there was little support for hypothetical funding models, with the public highly sceptical about increased taxes unless they're targeting Japan's wealthiest. The most resistant to development spending in all of the framings tested were non-voters, a group that also felt disempowered from politics and isolated from society.

International development framing around the disaster relief/humanitarian approach resonated best with the Japanese public. However, messaging related to global cooperation was more successful than disaster relief and international aid when traded against domestic policies, suggesting a combination of disaster relief whilst emphasising a multilateral approach to international development delivery may resonate in Japan.



ODA as percent of GNI (grant equivalent) in 2024

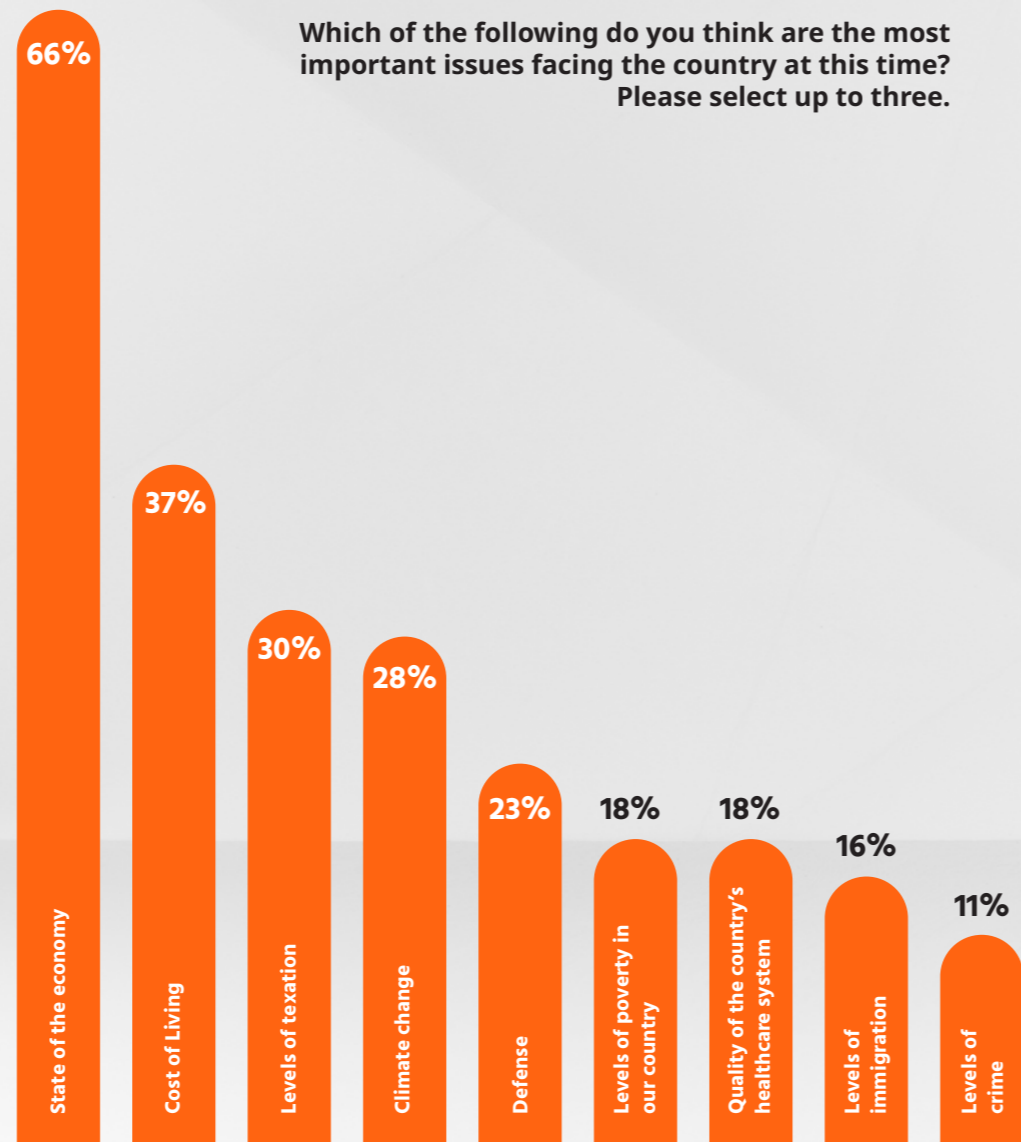


ODA - grant equivalent in 2024, USD billions

THE MAJOR FORCES DRIVING THE POLITICAL AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE

Japan's economy is dominating public concern.

The state of the economy is by far the biggest issue for Japanese voters, followed by cost of living and levels of taxation.



Relatedly, the Japanese public is concerned about rising levels of inequality in the country.

Most people (59%) disagree that ordinary people get their fair share of the country's wealth, compared with just 10% who agree. A majority of Japanese people also think that the gap between the rich and the poor in their country is growing (75% agree vs. just 8% who think the gap is shrinking). Further, a majority agree that the standard of living of the average person in Japan is decreasing (69% vs. 10% who think it is increasing). These concerns are shared widely across age groups and across the political spectrum.

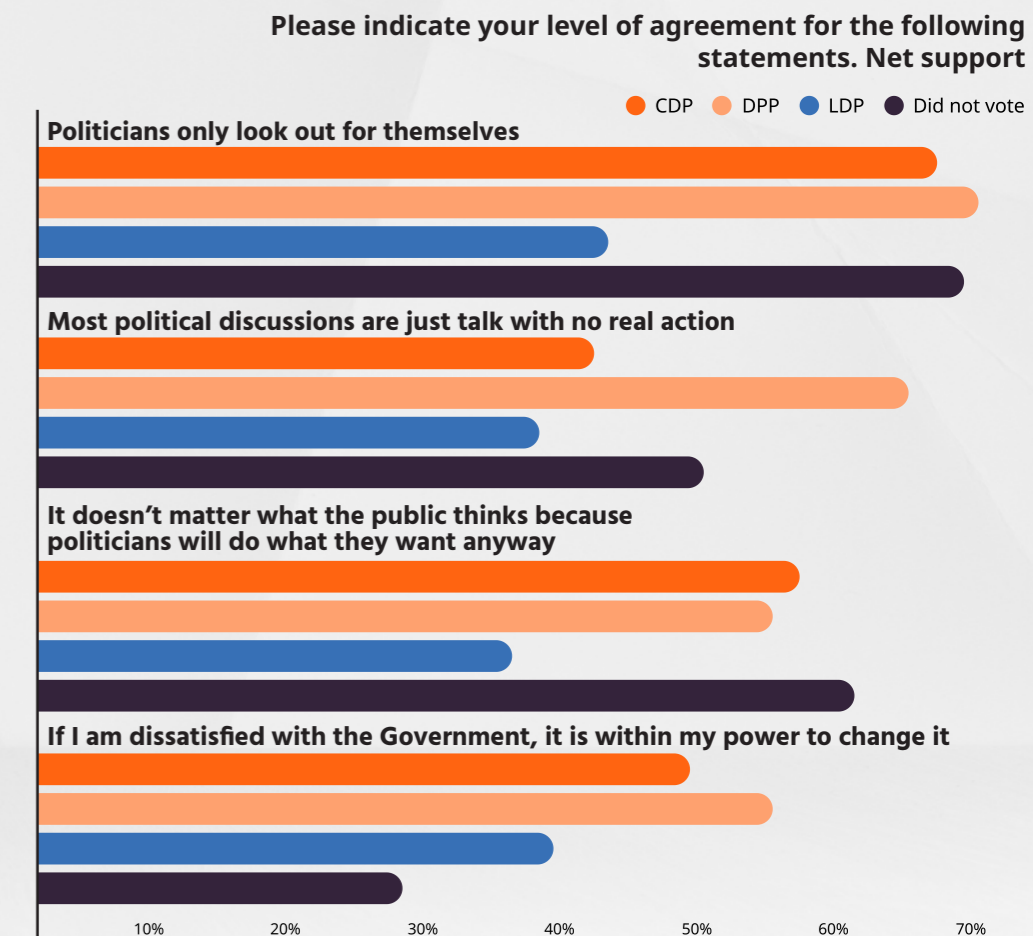
Less than half (46%) of the public in Japan say they trust the national government with significant splits across party lines.

Trust is highest amongst LDP voters (69%), followed by CDP (53%), DPP (42%), then those who did not vote in the most recent election (26%). The public also tend to not trust that the government will spend the national budget in a way that is in their best interest (16% agree vs. 55% disagree) or the best interest of the country (17% agree vs. 53% disagree).

Combined, these forces are contributing to a breakdown in social cohesion - with 70% of Japanese people saying they are feeling increasingly less connected to the people around them compared to just 9% who say they are feeling increasingly more connected.

Though there are high levels of disillusionment in politics in Japan, most voters still feel empowered to make change.

This is particularly true for DPP voters - this group are the most likely to think that most political discussions are just talk with no action and that politicians only look out for themselves. However, they are also the most likely to think that it is within their power to change a government they are dissatisfied with. This suggests that this disillusionment with politics and politicians has not yet translated into political apathy.



LOOKING OUTWARD: FEELINGS TOWARDS INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY & MULTILATERALISM

The Japanese public care about their international reputation.

80% of the public think it is important that other countries have a positive view of Japan. This is highest amongst older populations:

88%

of over 65s agreeing it is important vs. just 8% who think it is not important. They see humanitarian aid, development programmes and climate action as the main ways to build respect from other countries.

Helping other countries when they suffer from a disaster was by far the most popular choice for ways to drive international respect for Japan.

LDP voters were notably more likely to think that respect was driven by a strong military approach - including supporting Japan's allies and helping to defend other countries from invasion.

The Japanese public also think it is important for countries to work together to solve global problems, but these cannot get in the way of fixing problems at home.

Indeed, a plurality of Japanese agree "we should take care of our own people before we take care of people from other countries" (46% agree), rather than "at the same time" (31% agree). There is an age divide - with over 65s much more likely to think Japan can help its own people and fix its own issues at the same time as helping people from other countries and fixing global issues compared to 25-34-year-olds. However, this doesn't mean the Japanese are apathetic to providing help to others internationally:

49%

of the public think their country has a responsibility to help people in other countries when they are in need, compared to just 20% who disagree.



CURRENT ATTITUDES TO INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

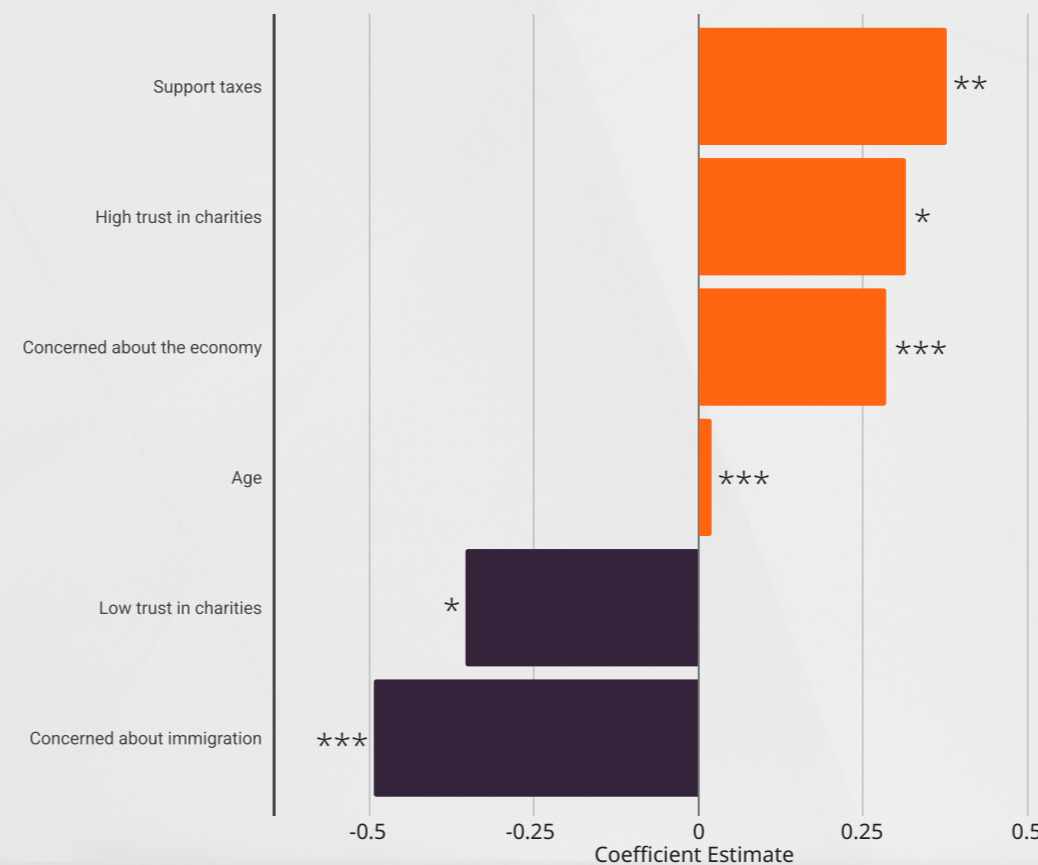
A majority of the public support international development spending.

With 59% saying they supported Japan spending money to reduce poverty in developing countries compared to just 13% who said they opposed it. Support varied across political parties, with CDP and LDP voters demonstrating higher levels of support, and DPP voters showing much lower levels of support. Non-voters were the most critical of development spending overall, with just 38% saying they supported the government spending money to reduce poverty in developing countries.

Support for international development was largely driven by those who were willing to pay higher taxes to address domestic issues, those with higher trust in international charities, and those who were concerned about the state of the Japanese economy.

Significant Predictors of Support for International Aid in Japan⁸

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001



⁸ 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. 'Concerned about Immigration: 1' represents respondents who selected immigration as one the top three issues facing Japan today.

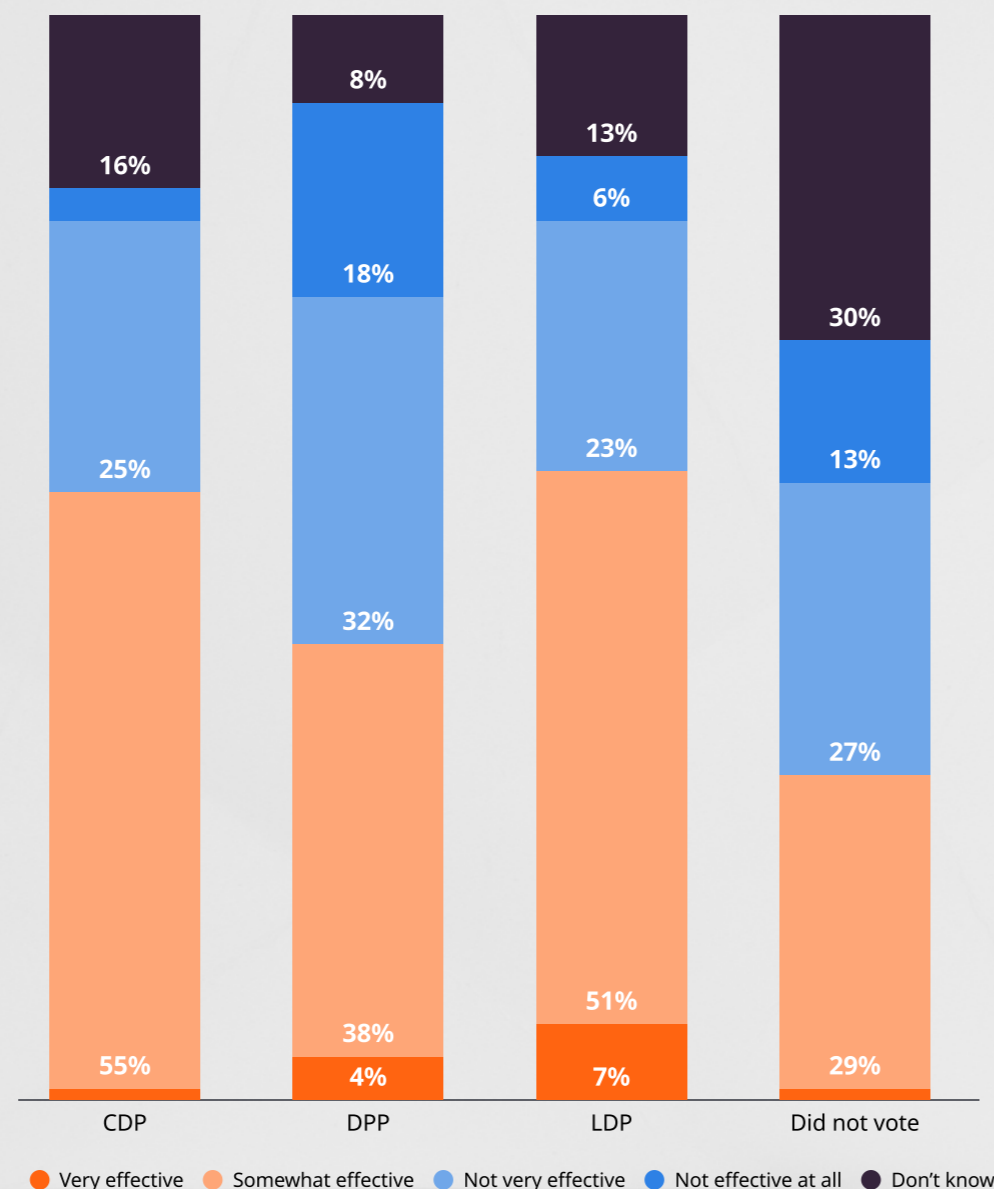
Part of this support can be explained by the sense that development reduces global poverty.

Which was viewed as a big problem in other countries (61%) and an important issue for the Japanese government to try to reduce globally (54%). The public sees the mutual benefits of development in creating new markets and supporting Japan's economic growth.

Despite support for international development spending, a large portion of the public think Japan is currently spending too much to reduce poverty in other countries.

38% hold this view, and the sentiment was higher among the right (54%). Public perception is that Japan spends more on international development than similar wealthy countries, but again this was driven by those on the right (37% compared to 57%). The public is relatively mixed on whether this spending is effective or not, with views splitting down party lines: CDP and LDP voters are more likely to think it's effective while DPP and non-voters are more likely to think it's ineffective.

Do you think the money your country sends to developing countries is effective or ineffective in its goals of reducing poverty around the world?



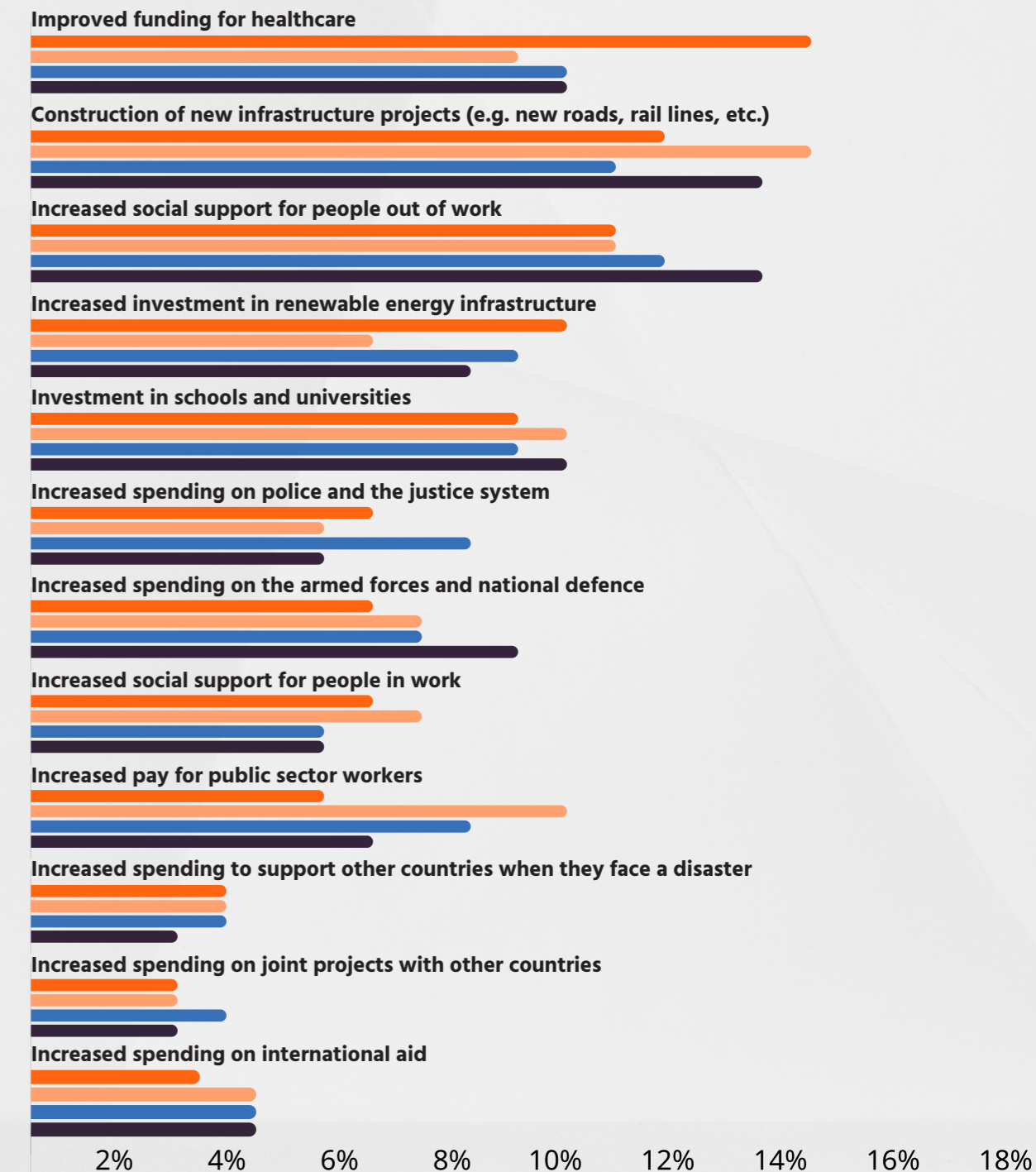
In addition to concerns about how effective international development is among parties on the right, support falls apart when traded off against domestic priorities.

Across all parties, voters were least likely to prioritise greater spending on police and international aid, though changes to how international development is framed dramatically shifted responses. When framed through the lens of multilateralism - i.e. 'joint projects with other countries to tackle global challenges' - this policy was the most supported option amongst CDP voters - above all of the domestic policies that were tested. The framing of 'disaster relief' was more effective than 'international aid' but less effective than the multilateral framing.

Imagine that your country had an additional €10 billion to spend on a policy issue. Look at the policy issues below. Which of these would you MOST LIKE the government to spend this money on, and which would you LEAST LIKE the government to spend this additional money on?

% who would MOST LIKE this policy

- CDP
- DPP
- LDP
- Did not vote



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

Changing the way it's framed.

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

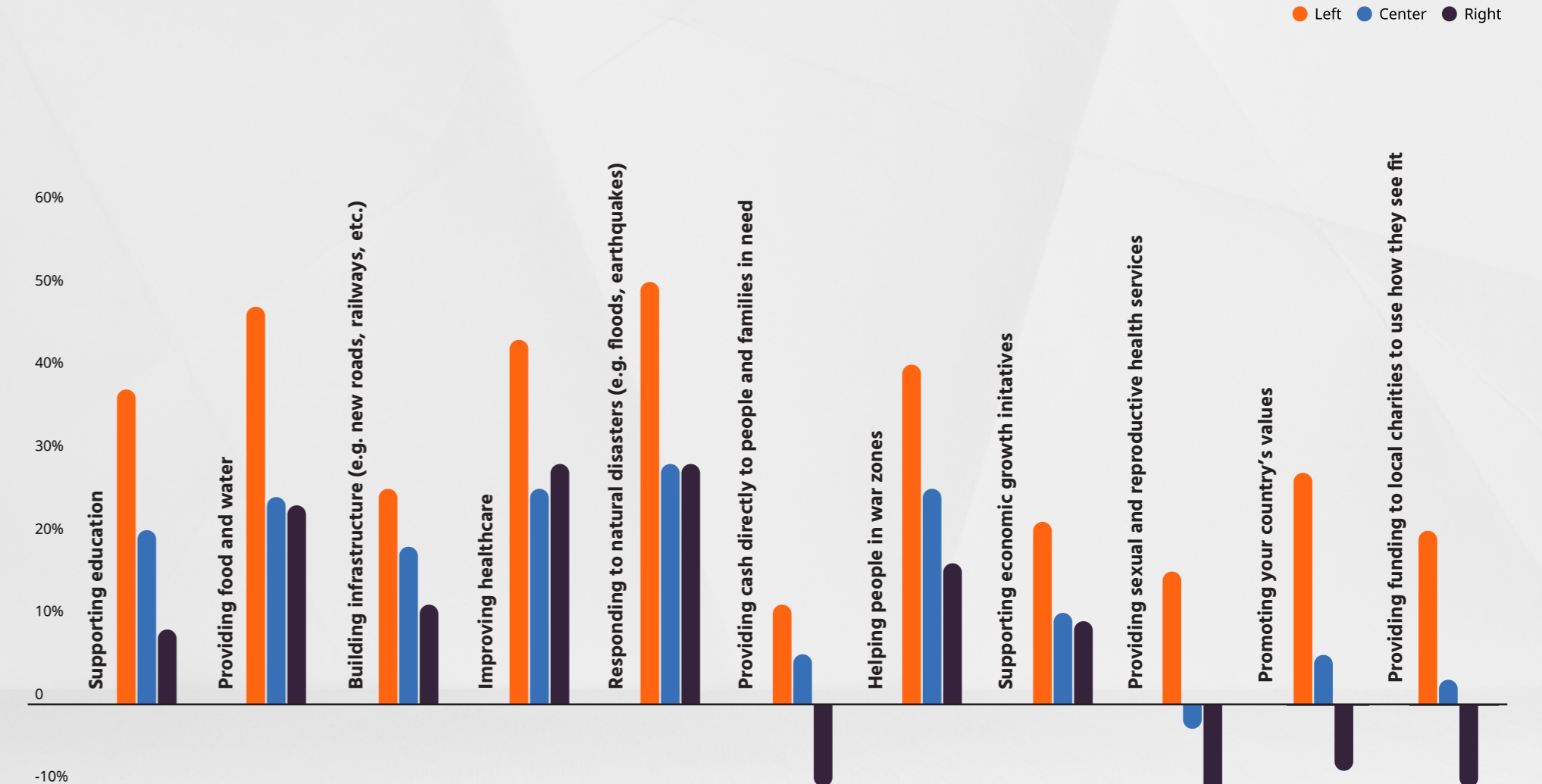
1. As a tool for poverty reduction (e.g. focused on 'traditional' development programmes in education, health and nutrition)
2. As a tool for disaster relief (e.g. focused on humanitarian relief)
3. As a tool for sustainable economic growth (e.g. focused on job creation)

Support for the 'traditional' model of international development as a tool for poverty reduction was highest among the left and CDP and LDP voters, but received the lowest levels of support from the right. Support was consistently high across all parties for development when framed as a tool for disaster relief, earning much higher support from the right but still demonstrating lower support amongst non-voters. The 'modern' model of international development as a tool for sustainable economic growth resonated the least with the Japanese public, though notably, left-leaning members of the public were still highly in support of this model.

Changing the way it's spent.

Support for development spending was varied depending on political leaning, with right-wing voters in opposition to funding for sexual health services, promoting democracy, providing funding to charities, and providing cash directly to families in need. On the left, support was highest for disaster relief and providing necessities.

Imagine that aid spending in your country was focused on X. To what extent would you support or oppose your country spending more money to reduce poverty in developing countries in this scenario? Net support



Raising new tax resources to fund it.

The Japanese public was against nearly every fund raising measure we tested, apart from a slim majority that supported a wealth tax (2% net support) and an increase in income tax on the country's richest (12% net support). Views varied dramatically across political parties, with DPP voters and non-voters critical of all proposed funding measures. Opposition was least pronounced among the DPP and non-voters for an income tax on the country's richest (-4% and -2% net support respectively).

To what extent would you support or oppose the following measures to raise money specifically to fund support for developing countries?
Net support

