

Trans-Atlantic public opinion on China

Great power competition amidst Russian invasion of Ukraine

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1 Introduction

This report presents the results of a series of public opinion surveys conducted online in **15 countries across North America, Europe, and the Middle East in August-October 2022**. The research sample (n=22,900) was representative of gender, age, education level, urban-rural divide, and region within each country.¹ This survey is part of a broader research project, 'Sinophone Borderlands – Interaction at the Edges,' funded by the European Regional Development Fund and run by Palacky University Olomouc in collaboration with the Central European Institute of Asian Studies (CEIAS).

This report summarizes some of the main findings from the 15 countries included in the survey: Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Greece, Israel, Latvia, Portugal, Romania, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Overall, China is seen predominantly negatively, with the exceptions of Greece, Romania, and Latvia. **Russia is perceived even more negatively than China**, although public sentiments are less negative in Greece and Turkey. On the other hand, **the US and the EU are seen predominantly positively** in all 15 surveyed countries.

As a result, although the Russian invasion of Ukraine has sent shockwaves across the Trans-Atlantic space, **there are important differences between the individual countries**. Most importantly, Eastern countries (especially Turkey and Greece) tend to be split regarding their views of the great powers and their foreign policy alignment preferences. These deviations could have foreign policy implications, such as their membership in NATO, potentially impacting its ability to act.

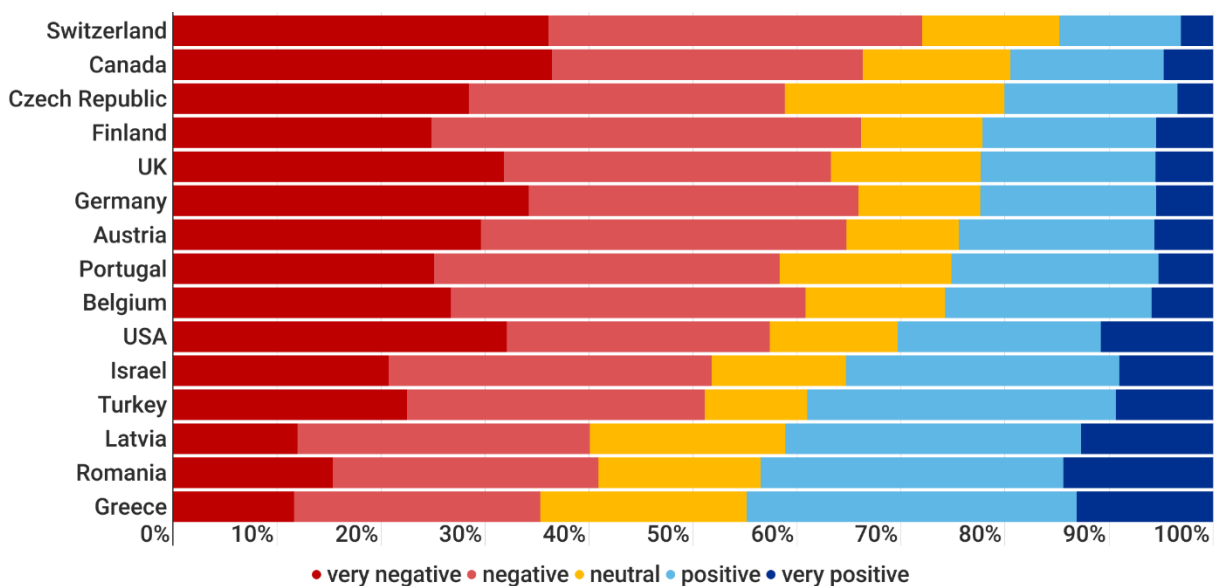
Another issue may be related to what appears to be a **gap between US foreign policy and American public opinion**. The US public sentiment towards China and Russia does not appear very negative compared to other surveyed countries – even though the US has taken some of the most assertive positions toward these two nations. Lack of public support may hinder the US international leadership in the future.

2 Feelings towards China, the US, and other countries

Respondents in the surveyed countries view China quite negatively. In every country aside from Latvia, Romania, and Greece, over 50% of respondents indicated either negative or very negative feelings toward China. Greece showed the most favorable attitudes, with 45% of respondents having positive or very positive perceptions of China. Romania and Latvia displayed similar results, with 44% and 41% of respondents indicating either positive or very positive feelings, respectively. Such results are not surprising for Latvia, as they align with our survey findings from two years ago.²

On the other end of the spectrum, the Swiss public had the most negative perception of China, with 72% of respondents indicating negative or very negative feelings toward the country. Canadian, Finnish, German, and Austrian respondents were also among the most likely to perceive China negatively, with more than 60% of respondents indicating negative or very negative sentiments in each country. It is noteworthy that the US public was not among the most negative populations, even though American foreign policy has taken quite a strong position towards China in recent years.

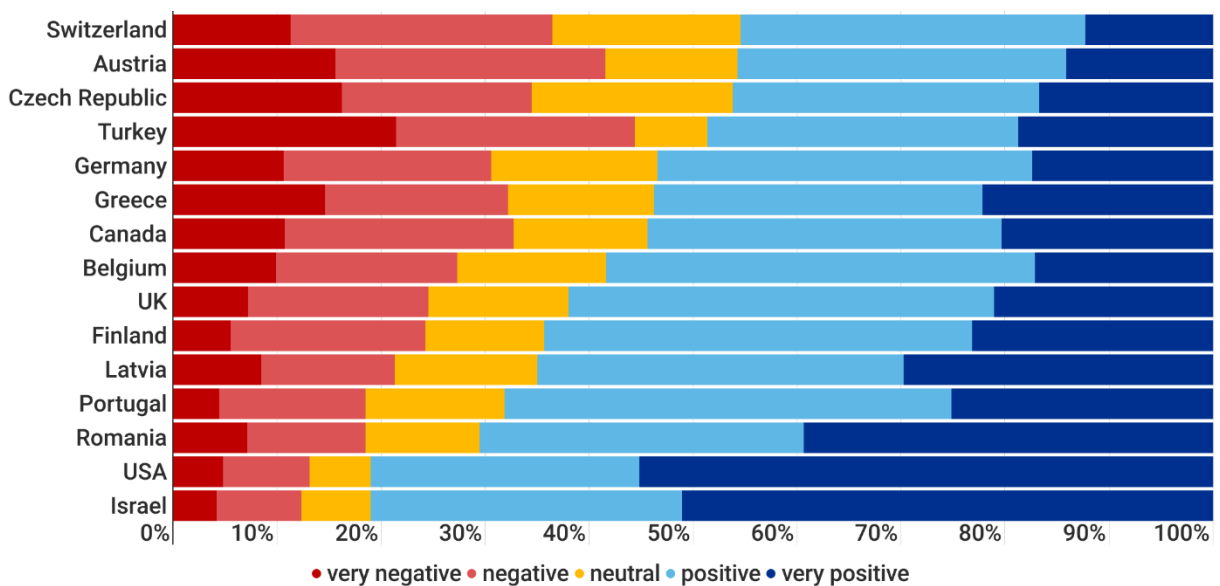
Figure 1: Feelings towards China (% of respondents)⁴



Regarding perceptions of the US, *Figure 2* indicates positive views among respondents in all 15 countries surveyed. Switzerland, Austria, and the Czech Republic have the smallest shares of respondents with positive views of the US – 36% of the Swiss display a negative attitude towards the US, making their country first in terms of negative attitudes towards the US. Among the surveyed countries, the Swiss were the most negative towards both the US and China.

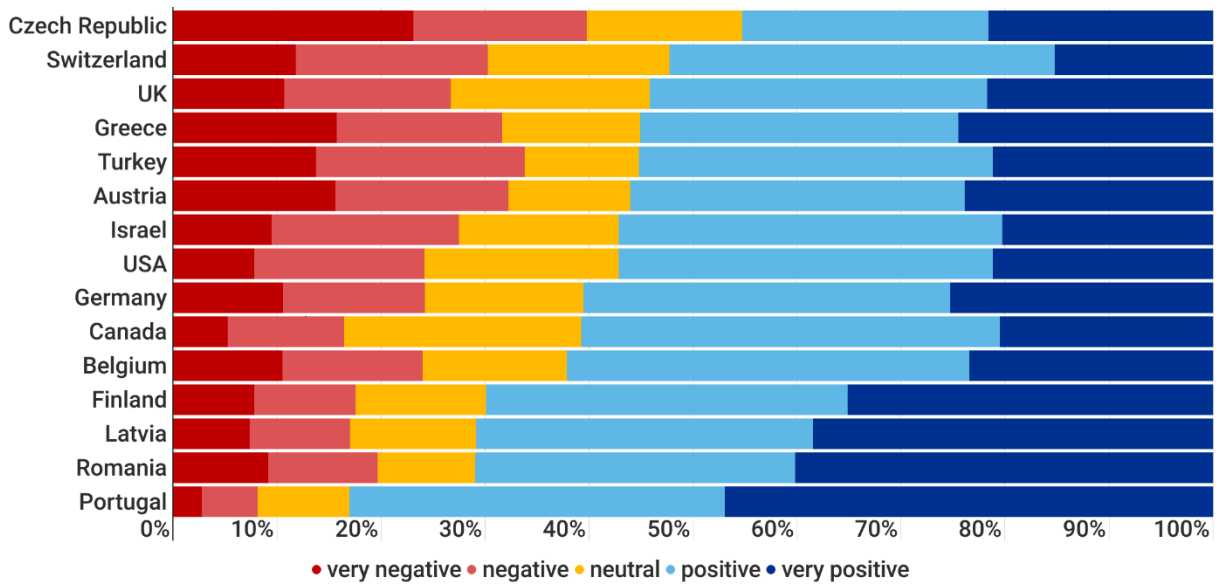
Sizeable contingents of respondents from Turkey (44%), Austria (42%), Czech Republic (34%), and Canada (33%) also reported negative feelings towards the US. On the other hand, larger majorities of respondents in Israel (81%), Romania (71%), Portugal (68%), and Latvia (65%) held favorable views of the US. Unsurprisingly, a vast majority of American respondents (81%) also indicated positive feelings toward the US.

Figure 2: Feeling towards the USA (% of respondents)



Like the US, the EU is seen positively across the surveyed regions (*Figure 3*). More than half of respondents in all countries except the Czech Republic indicated positive feelings towards the European Union. The Czech Republic (40%), Turkey (34%), Greece (32%), and Switzerland (30%) have the largest proportion of respondents who indicated negative feelings toward the EU. In contrast, more than two-thirds of respondents from Portugal (83%), Romania (71%), Latvia (71%), and Finland (70%) reported favorable views of the EU.

Figure 3: Feelings towards the EU (% of respondents)



Russia is viewed predominantly negatively in all surveyed countries (*Figure 4*). Greece was the only country where fewer than half of the respondents indicated negative sentiments toward Russia, and about 40% of respondents showed positive views. A similar proportion of Turkish respondents also showed positive attitudes toward Russia. Respondents in all other surveyed countries were decisively negative towards Russia, with the most negative sentiments detected in Finland (87%), Portugal (87%), the UK (84%), and Canada (79%). These results suggest that geographical proximity to Russia does not play a key role in determining the overall sentiment toward it.

Comparing the results, the EU was viewed positively by the largest proportion of respondents overall (*Figure 5*). In fact, the only countries in which the EU did not rank first in terms of the proportion size of respondents with positive views were the Czech Republic, the UK, the US, and Israel, where it lagged behind the US. The democratic great powers were perceived positively by a larger proportion of respondents in all 15 countries. Moreover, China outranked Russia in each surveyed country when it came to the share of respondents with positive opinions.

Figure 4: Feelings towards Russia (% of respondents)

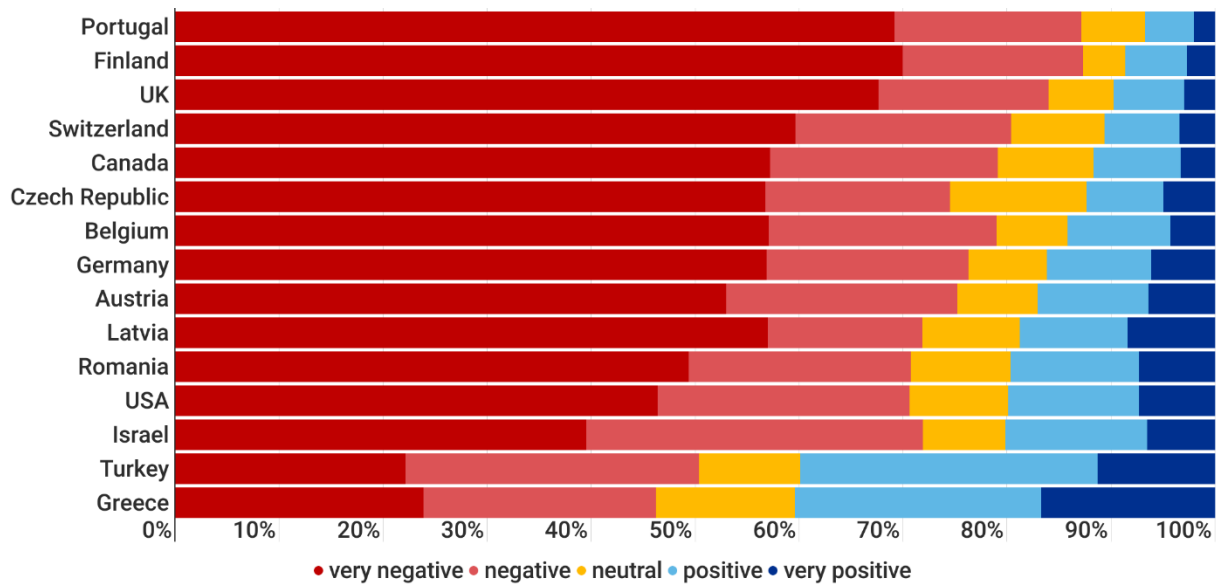
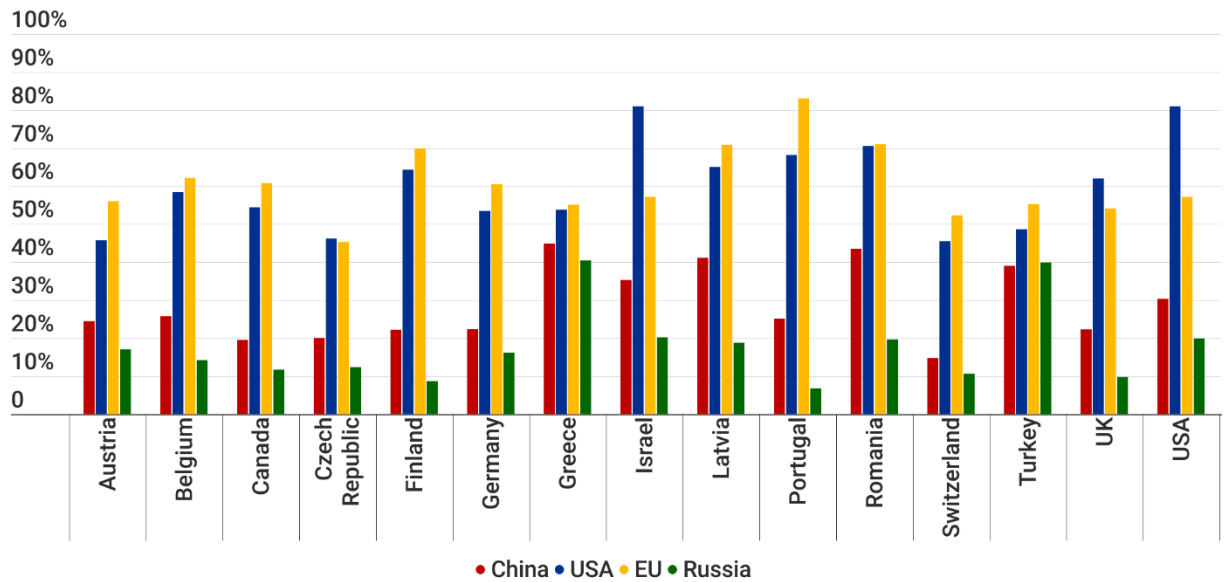


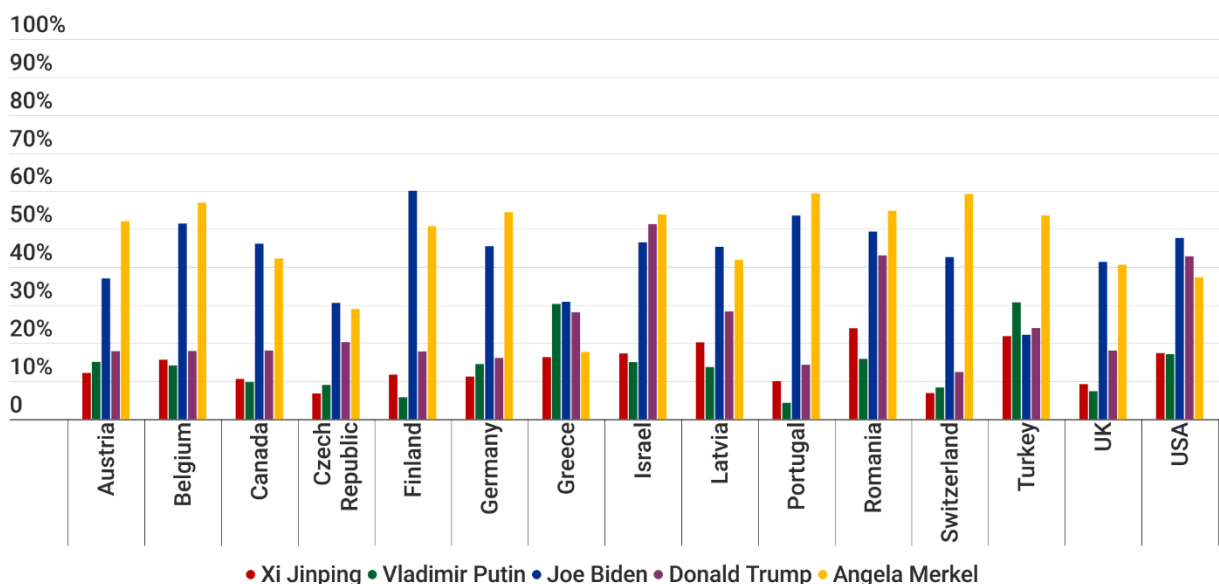
Figure 5: Feelings towards China, the USA, Russia, and the EU (% of respondents with positive views)



Nonetheless, the attitudes of Greek and Turkish respondents appeared somewhat less clear-cut compared to other states. In both countries, a similar proportion of respondents (about 40%) indicated favorable views on both China and Russia. Besides, the ratio of respondents with a positive attitude towards the US (45% in Greece, 39% in Turkey) and the EU (55% in Greece, 55% in Turkey) appears to be higher by only several percentage points, making the difference much less stark.

Looking at the respondents' attitudes towards certain political leaders (Figure 6), representatives of democratic nations (Angela Merkel, Joe Biden, Donald Trump) were generally perceived positively by a substantially larger proportion of respondents than leaders of Russia (Vladimir Putin) and China (Xi Jinping). Merkel was seen favorably by a larger proportion of respondents in eight of the 15 countries, while Biden was favored by a larger proportion of respondents in the remaining seven countries. In most instances, the gap between the two was small, as is evident when calculating the overall average percentage of respondents who viewed a given political leader favorably across all 15 countries, which shows that Merkel was ahead by only three and a half percentage points.⁵

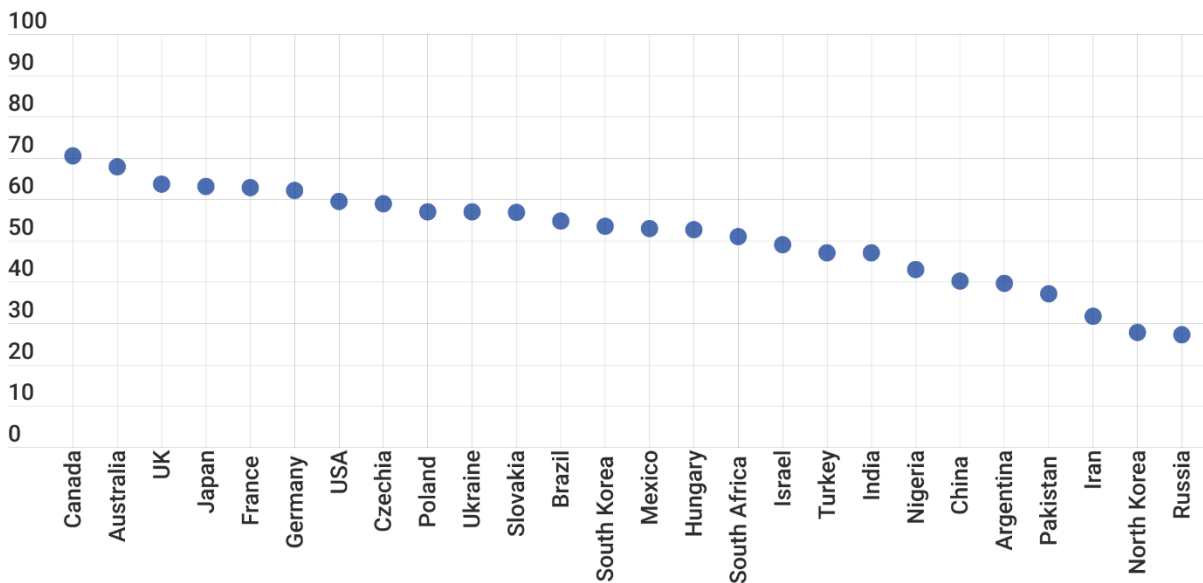
Figure 6: Perceptions of political leaders (% of respondents with positive views)



Both Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping had the lowest share of positive perceptions in every country aside from Turkey, where Putin was perceived favorably by a larger share of respondents (31%) than Donald Trump (24%) and Joe Biden (22%). In most countries, Trump appeared to be viewed positively by a smaller share of respondents. However, similarly to Xi and Putin, he had a far more positive image in Israel (51%), Romania (43%), and the US (43%), where the proportion of respondents who perceived him favorably was closer to that of Biden and Merkel.

Across all 15 countries (Figure 7), respondents' average perception score was 40 out of 100 for China, compared to 59 for the United States. Canada was the most positively perceived country, with an average score of 70. On the other end of the spectrum, Russia was seen least favorably with a score of 27, ranking below North Korea (28) and Iran (32). European and North American countries were generally perceived more favorably, followed by countries in South America, Asia, and Africa.

Figure 7: Feelings toward selected countries in Europe and North America (15 countries combined, mean values)

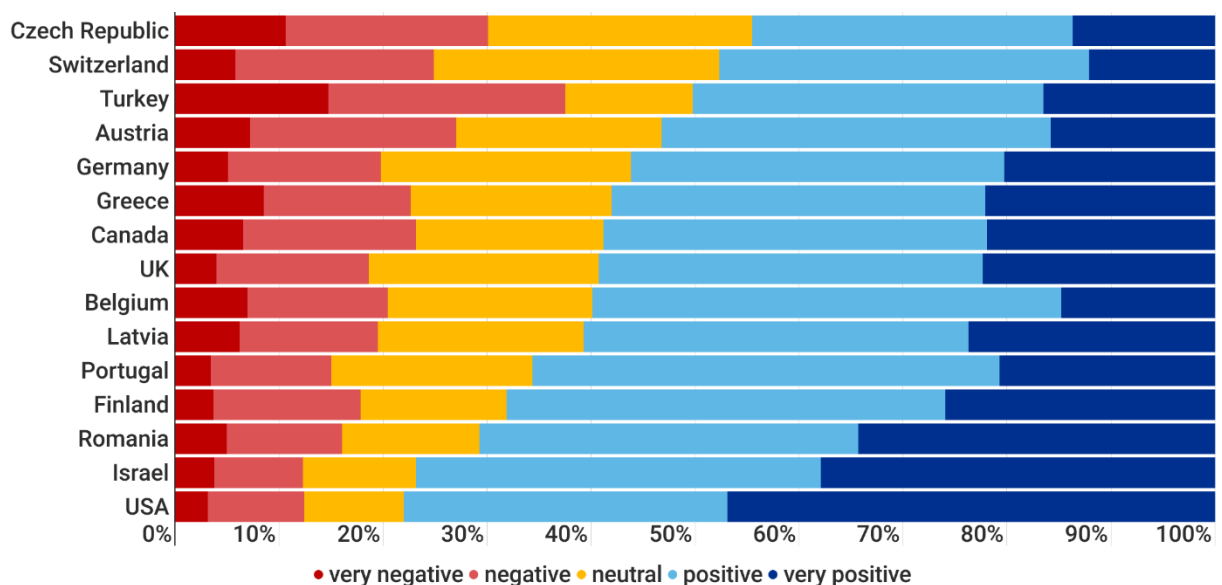


3 Feelings toward Chinese, Americans, Europeans, and Russians

Chinese people are viewed more positively than their country as a whole (Figure 8), as less than 50% of respondents in all 15 countries indicated negative or very negative feelings toward them. The Czech Republic had the smallest share of respondents with positive feelings toward the Chinese (from the PRC), with 45%. However, Turkey had the largest percentage of negative views, with 38%. Over three-fourths of respondents from the United States and Israel expressed positive sentiments towards the Chinese people, at 78% and 77%, respectively.

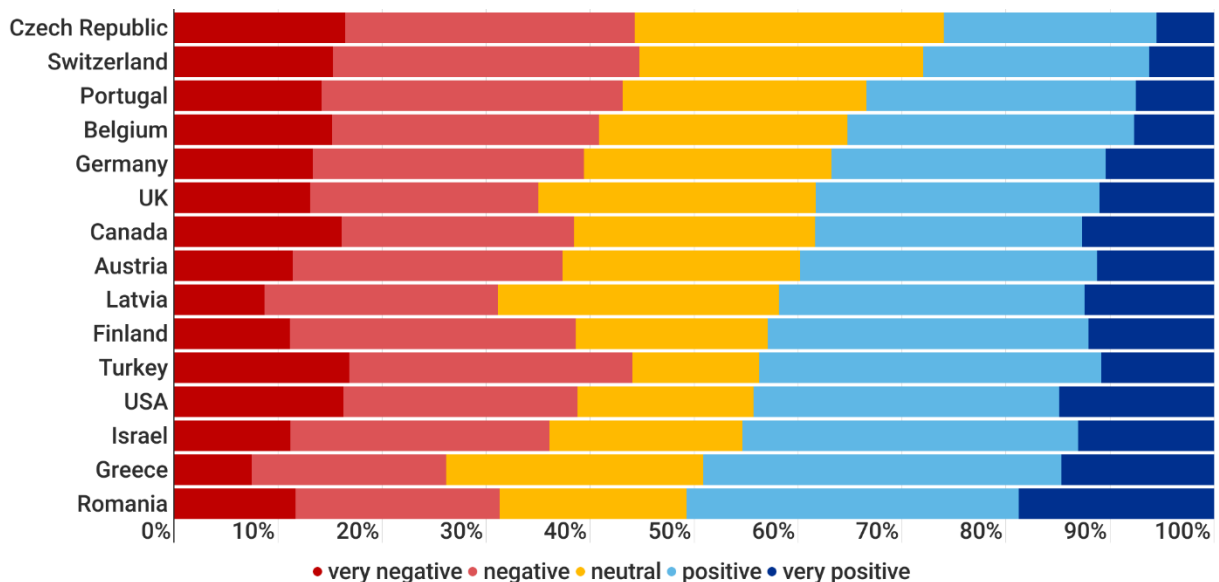
This proves that respondents differentiate quite substantially between their attitude towards China as a country and the Chinese as a people. Notable, the US respondents clearly distinguish between China as a country (represented today by the PRC) and its citizens, with the latter much more positively viewed.

Figure 8: Feelings towards Chinese people (from the PRC) (% of respondents)



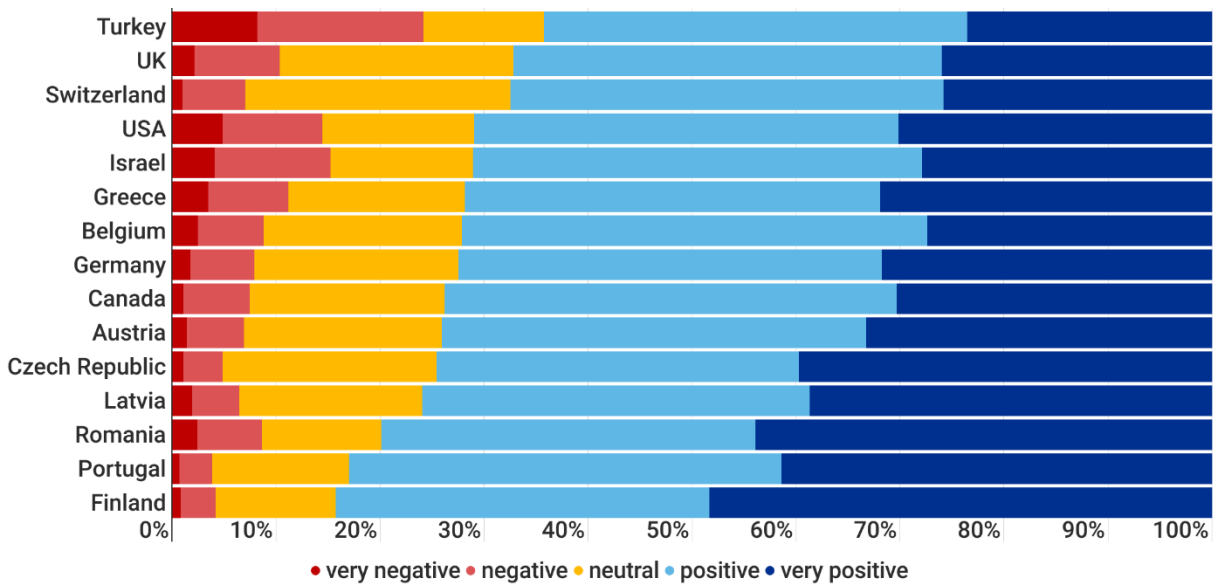
Americans were consistently viewed more negatively in the surveyed countries than the Chinese were (Figure 9), again indicating different attitudes toward countries and their people. The Czech Republic had the smallest proportion of positive feelings toward Americans, with just 26%. Only Romania had a majority with positive feelings toward Americans, with 51%, but Greece had the lowest proportion of negative responses, with 26%. Interestingly, Americans viewed themselves less favorably than respondents from Israel, Greece, and Romania, with 39% of American respondents indicating negative or very negative sentiments toward themselves.

Figure 9: Feeling towards Americans (% of respondents)



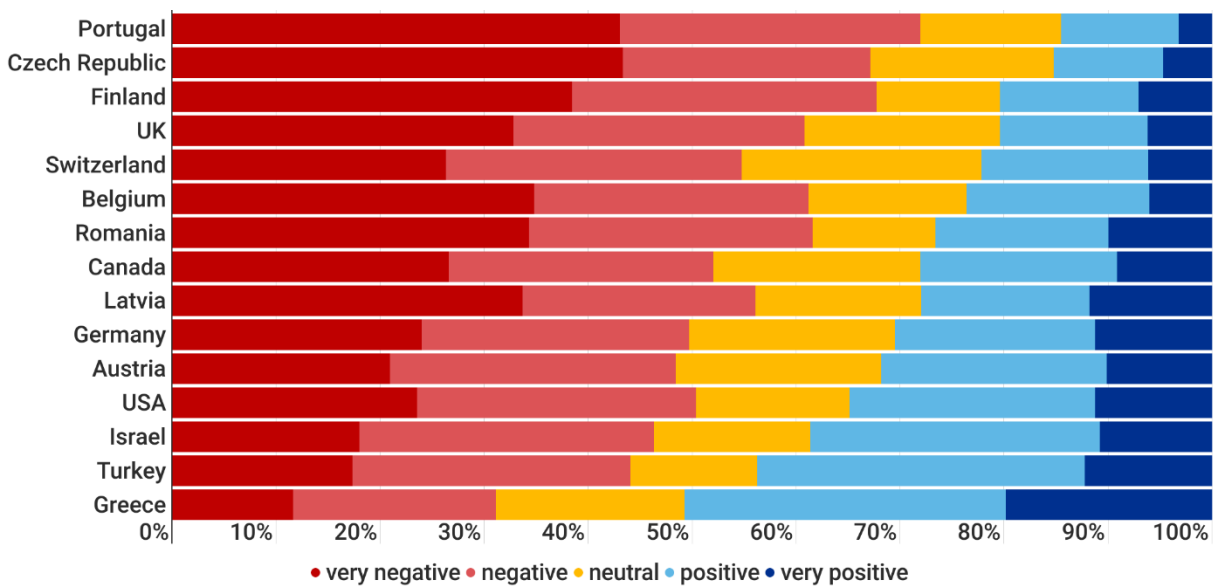
Europeans were by far the most favorably viewed people among those we asked about, with between 60% and 85% of respondents in all 15 countries indicating positive feelings (Figure 10). Turkey displayed both the largest percentage of negative views (24%) and the smallest percentage of positive views (64%) toward Europeans. The UK showed the second smallest percentage of positive responses with 67%, which corresponds to eurosceptic and antimigration attitudes relating to Brexit. The highest proportions of positive feelings towards Europeans were in Romania (80%), Portugal (83%), and Finland (84%).

Figure 10: Feeling towards Europeans (% of respondents)



Russians were the least favorably viewed of all four groups of people (Figure 11), with over 50% of respondents indicating negative feelings in all but four countries. Portugal (72%), Finland (68%), and the Czech Republic (67%) had the largest proportion of negative responses, while Greece (31%), Turkey (44%), Israel (46%), and Austria (48%) had the smallest proportion of negative feelings.

Figure 11: Feeling towards Russians (% of respondents)



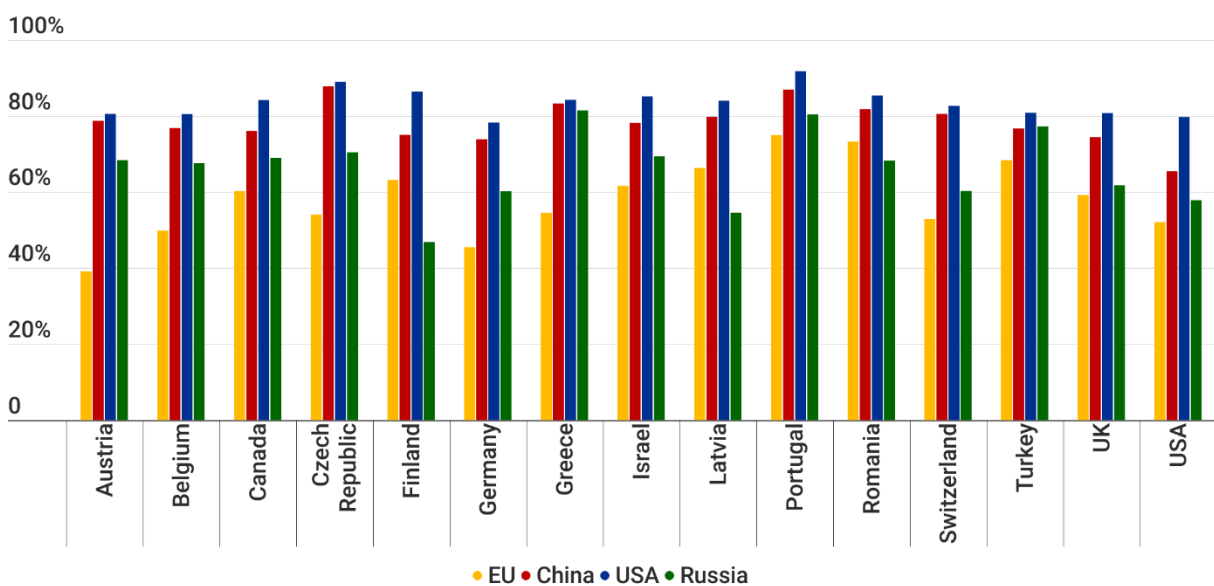
4 Comparing great powers

Most surveyed respondents consider China and the US to be the most militarily powerful of the four great powers (*Figure 12*). The US was perceived as militarily strong by the largest proportion of respondents in all 15 countries. However, the two countries were perceived as similarly strong in nearly every country aside from the US, which rated its own military power 14 percentage points higher than that of China.

Interestingly, Russia’s military might was seen as lower when comparing its perception to that of the US and China, perhaps as a result of its largely unsuccessful handling of the Ukraine invasion. The exceptions were Greece and Turkey, where Russian military power was seen as more or less equal to that of the US and China.

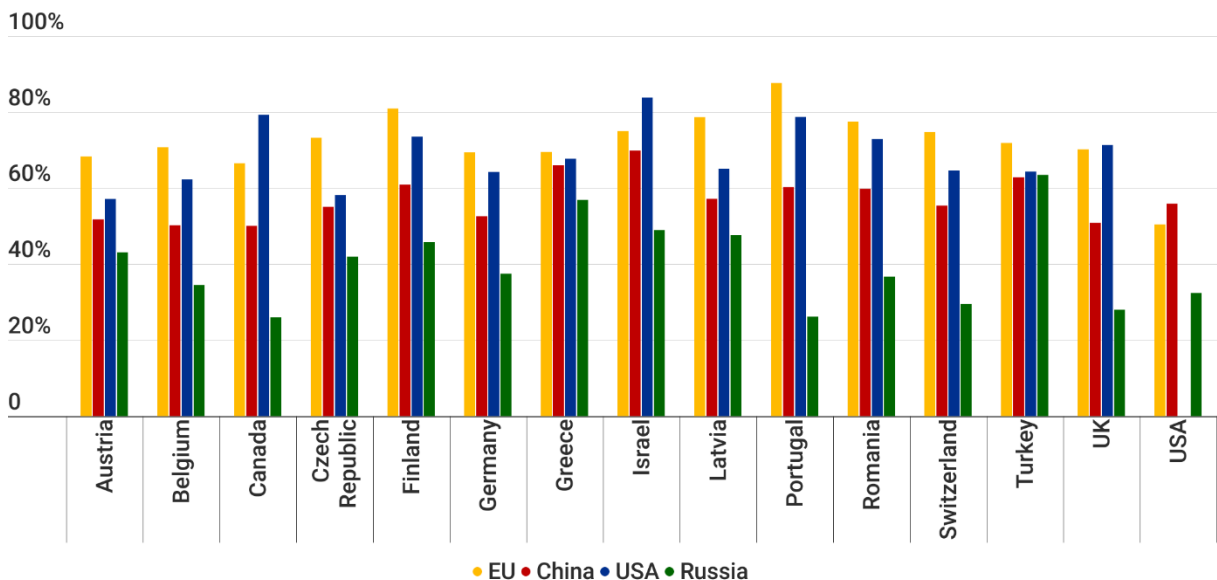
The EU was perceived as the weakest military power among the four entities in every country except Finland, Latvia, Romania, and the US. Given that the EU lacks a substantial unified military, it is perhaps unsurprising that respondents consider the EU as less militarily powerful when compared to scores for the US, China, and Russia.

Figure 12: Perception of the military power of the US, China, the EU, and Russia (% of respondents finding them strong)⁶



The EU was viewed as economically important by the largest proportion of respondents in every country except Canada, Israel, the UK, and the US (Figure 13). Its importance was valued highest in Portugal (88%), Finland (81%), and Latvia (79%), while it was valued lowest in the US (50%), Canada (67%), and Austria (68%). The US was perceived as economically important by a larger proportion of respondents in all 15 states compared to the proportion size of respondents who viewed China as economically important. However, the gap in respondents was small in Turkey, Greece, the Czech Republic, and Austria. Even still, China was perceived as economically important by over 50% of respondents in every country, with an overall average perception only 12 points lower than that of the US. Russia was perceived as economically less important by every country, with only Greece and Turkey having over 50% of respondents believing it to be important.

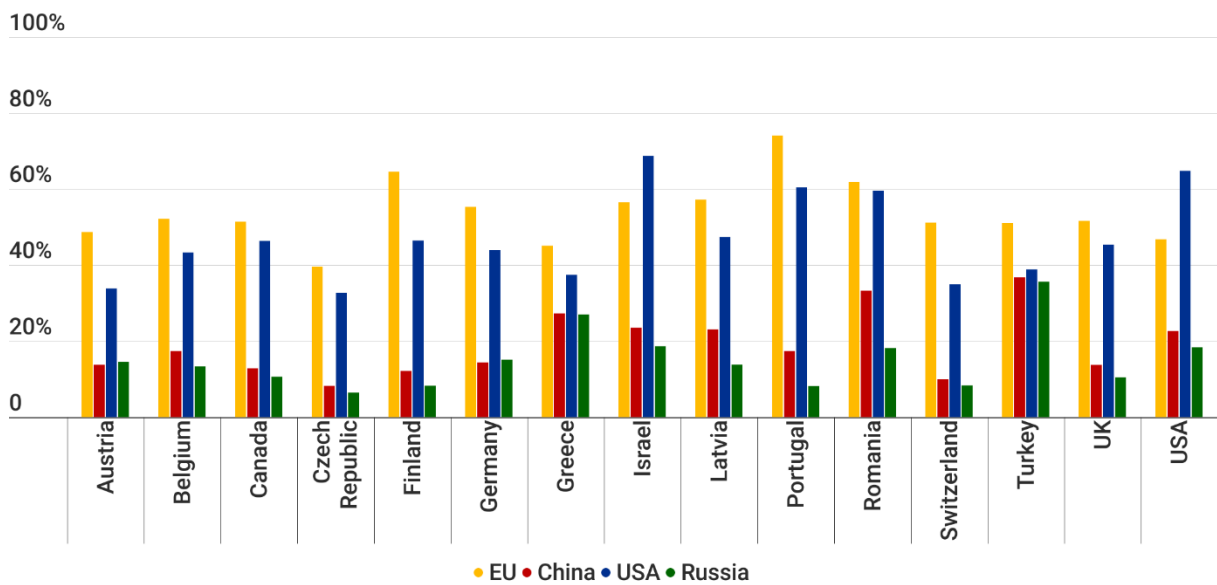
Figure 13: Perception of the economic importance of the USA, China, the EU, and Russia (% of respondents finding them important)⁷



When asked about their perception of great powers' political values, respondents were most favorable toward the EU, with 13 of the 15 countries ranking it above the United States (Figure 14). The US was more positively perceived only in Israel and the United States, though it was a close second in most countries. The EU received the most positive perception from Portugal, with 74%, while the Czech Republic had the lowest, with 40%. China was also more positively perceived than Russia in 13 countries, with

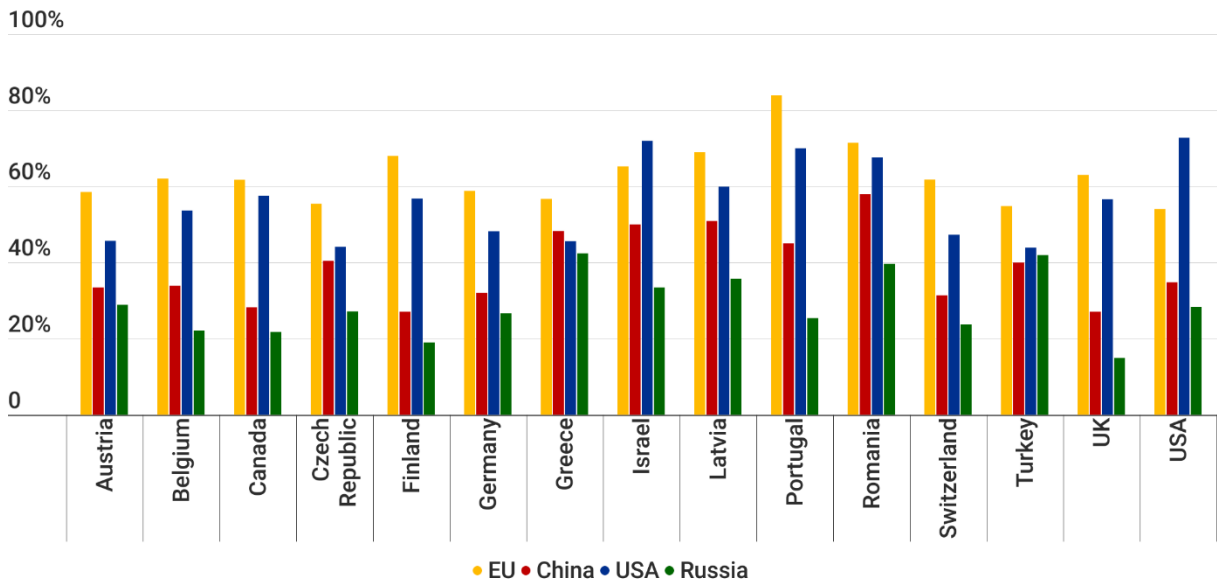
Germany and Austria as the only two exceptions. China was most positively perceived in Turkey, with 37%, while the Czech Republic had the smallest proportion of positive sentiments, with 8%. Turkey also had an unusually high percentage of respondents with favorable views toward Russia, with 36% compared to the overall average of the remaining 14 countries (14%). However, despite being more positively perceived than Russia, China lagged behind both the EU and the US in all 15 countries surveyed.

Figure 14: Perceptions of great powers’ political values in Europe and North America (% of respondents with positive views)



The EU’s cultural attractiveness is generally strong across Europe and North America (*Figure 15*). Europe ranks first in all but two countries, as a higher percentage of Israeli and American respondents perceive the US to be culturally attractive. Only three countries had over 50% of respondents who perceived China as culturally attractive: Israel (50%), Latvia (51%), and Romania (58%). However, China’s cultural attractiveness scored higher than Russia’s in all 15 countries, as under one-third of respondents in 10 countries viewed Russia as culturally attractive. Those with a more favorable view toward Russia included Greece (42%), Israel (33%), Latvia (35%), Romania (40%), and Turkey (42%).

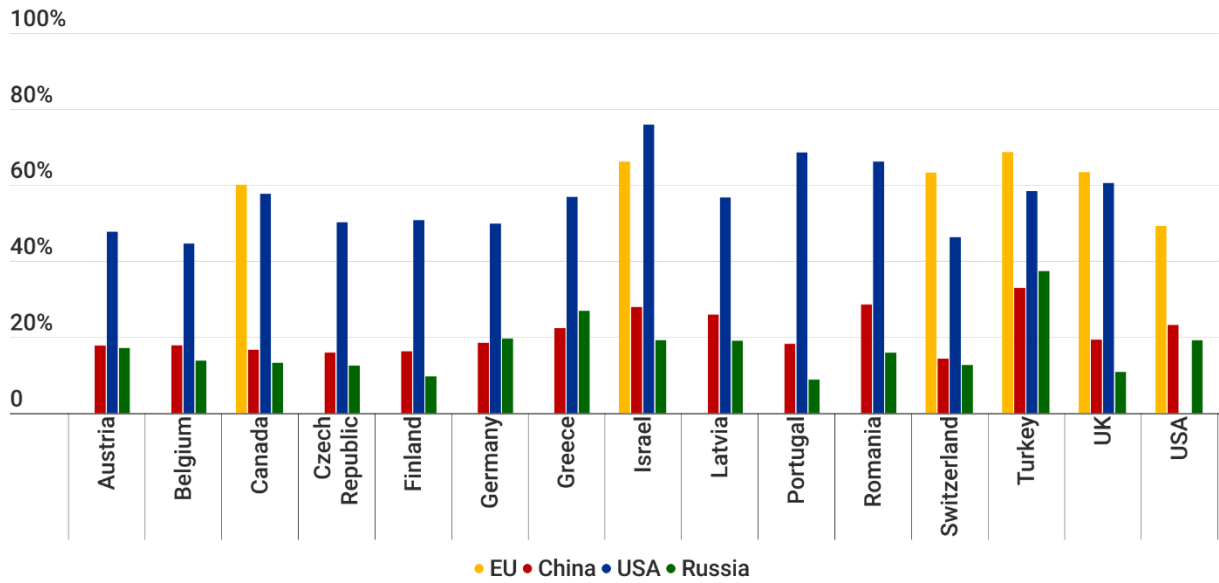
Figure 15: Perception of cultural attractiveness of the USA, China, the EU, and Russia (% of respondents finding them attractive)⁸



Regarding respondents' perception of the quality of life in the four great powers (*Figure 16*), the US ranks higher than China in all 15 countries. As many of the surveyed countries are part of the EU, their respondents were not asked about the quality of life in the EU. However, in non-EU countries (Canada, Israel, Switzerland, Turkey, and the UK), respondents viewed the EU as having the highest quality of life. Israelis were the exception, favoring the US over the EU. This could be a function of greater Israeli perceptions of antisemitism in Europe.

Regarding countries' quality of life, China trails behind by a wide margin (*Figure 16*), even losing out to Russia in Germany, Greece, and Turkey. In fact, only one country had one-third of its respondents who believed their quality of life would be high in China, and that was Turkey (33%). Russia is believed to have a good quality of life by less than 20% of respondents in all countries aside from Greece (27%) and Turkey (37%).

Figure 16: Perceptions of the quality of life in the USA, China, the EU, and Russia (% of respondents finding it good)⁹

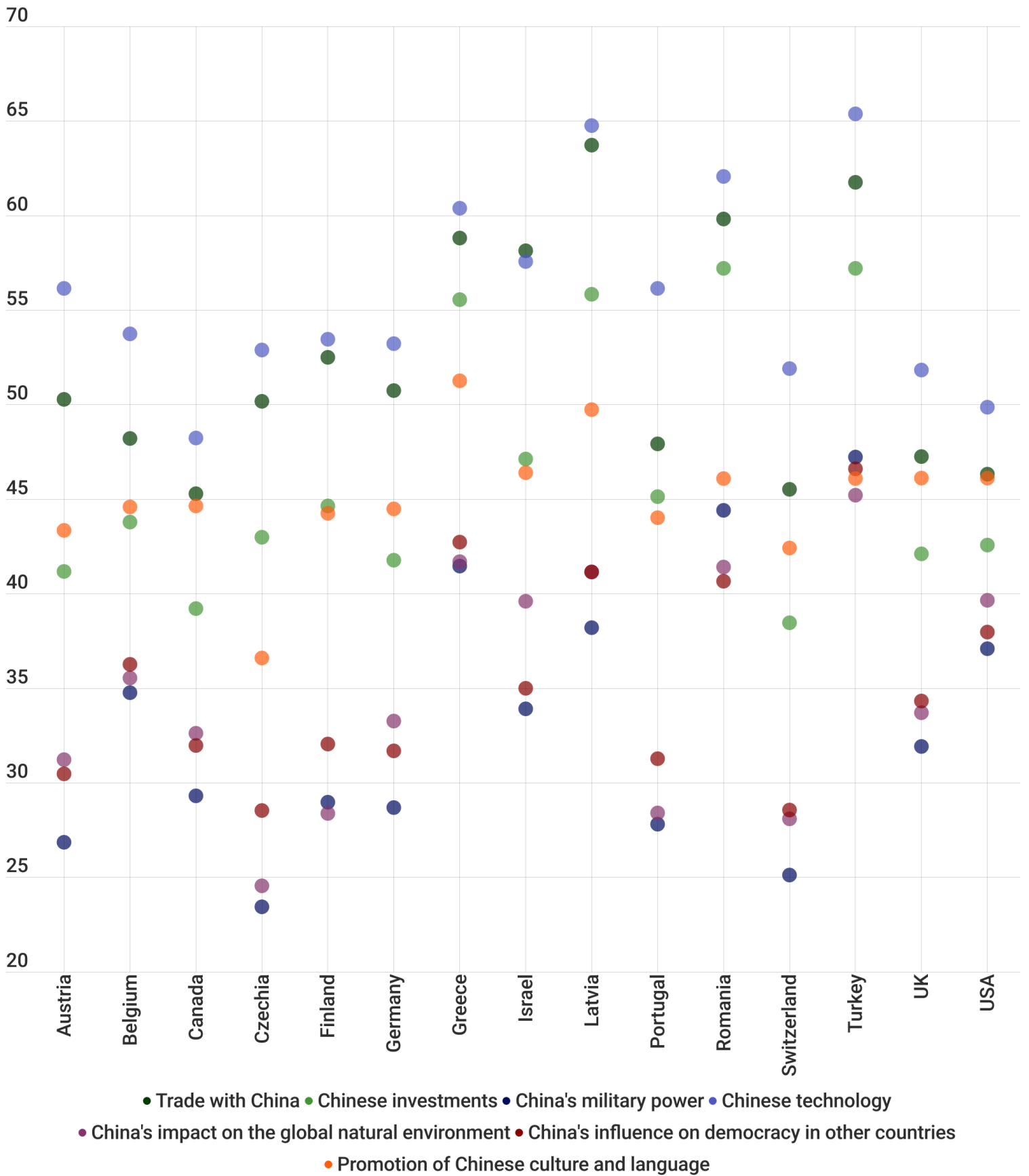


5 China's global footprint

Respondents were asked to indicate their feelings towards nine aspects of China's international presence on a 100-degree feeling thermometer. Over one-third of respondents in all countries surveyed had positive perceptions of Chinese technology and trade ties. Chinese investments were also perceived somewhat positively by over one-third of respondents in every country, with only two countries having an average score below 40: Canada (39) and Switzerland (38). (*Figure 17*). Nonetheless, the level of positive feelings differs significantly across individual states.

Overall, the Czech Republic, Switzerland, Canada, and Austria seem to be the most cynical about China's global impact, with averages under 40 out of 100. The remaining 11 countries also had overall average scores of 50 or below, aside from Turkey, with a score of 53.¹⁰ This, and the fact that only one country and one category (Turkey's perception of Chinese technology) scored above 65, seems to indicate that the surveyed countries remain skeptical about most China-related policy issues.

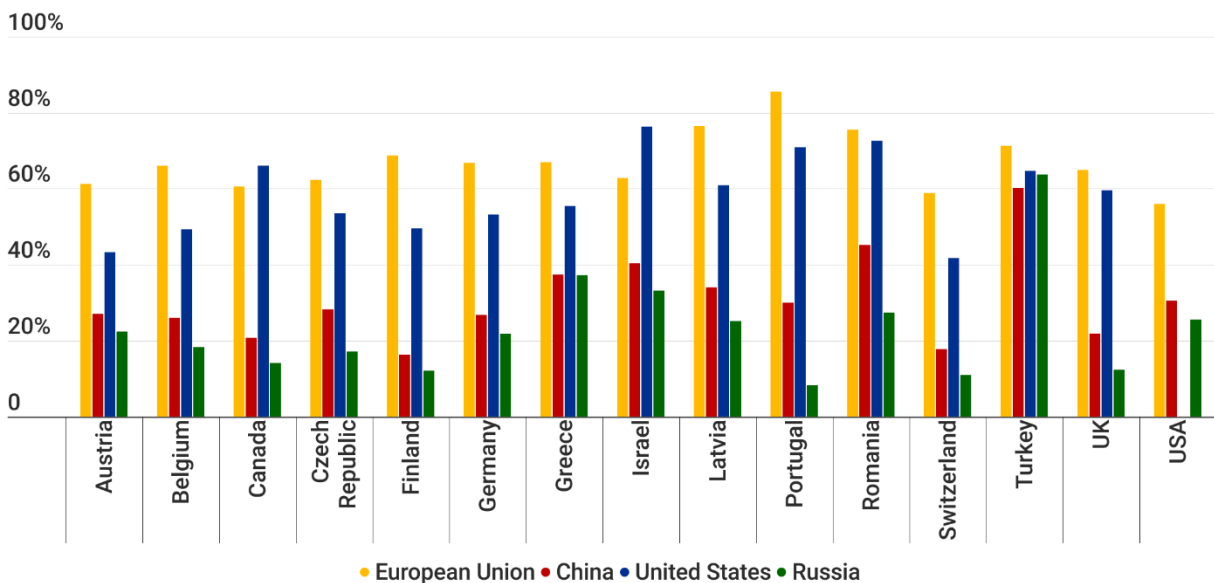
Figure 17: Feelings towards the issues related to China
(mean values on the 100-point thermometer)¹¹



6 Foreign policy preferences

Regarding the respondents' preferences on foreign policy alignment, the US and the EU were the most favored option in every country aside from Turkey (*Figure 18*). Nearly 60% or more of respondents in every country agreed with the idea of aligning closely with the EU, with only Canada and Israel indicating a higher preference for the US. Only five countries had over one-third of respondents indicating that they would like to closely align with China, and only Turkey had a majority, with 60% in favor of a foreign policy alignment with China. Alignment with Russia was viewed least favorably in all but Turkey. Interestingly, Turkish respondents had comparably high shares of respondents who favored foreign policy alignment with the EU (71%), China (60%), the US (65%), and Russia (64%).

Figure 18: How closely should your country's foreign policy align with the following actors? (% of respondents who wish to align closely)¹²

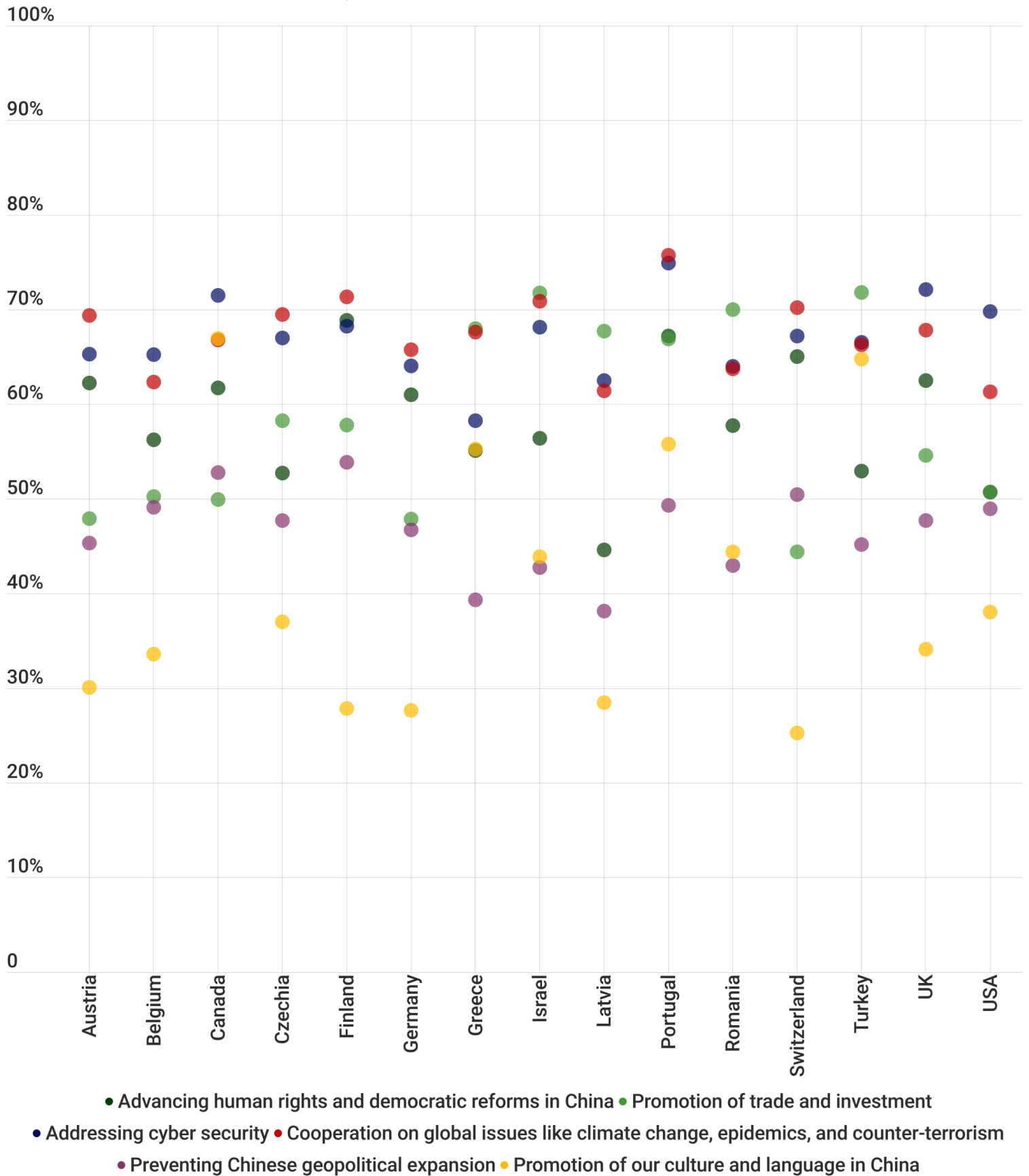


7 Priorities of China-policy

Respondents were presented with a menu of eight policy areas – advancing human rights, expanding trade, intellectual property protection, cyber security, cooperation on global challenges, preventing China’s geopolitical expansion, military cooperation, and cultural promotion – and asked to indicate to what extent they agreed or disagreed with each as a policy priority in their country’s approach towards China.

Cooperation on global issues, addressing cyber security, promoting trade and investment, and advancing human rights and democratic reforms in China were the top agenda items, with overall average percentages of 67%, 67%, 59%, and 58%, respectively. Preventing Chinese global expansion and promotion of one’s own language and culture in China were viewed as less important, with 47% and 41% of respondents believing them to be policy priorities, respectively. Only Canada, Greece, Portugal, and Turkey had over 50% of respondents who believed the promotion of their language and culture was a priority, while all 15 countries had over 60% of respondents who believed cooperation on global issues was a priority. Similarly, all but Greece had over 60% of respondents who believed addressing cyber security was a top priority.

Figure 19: Foreign policy preferences towards China (% of respondents agreeing)

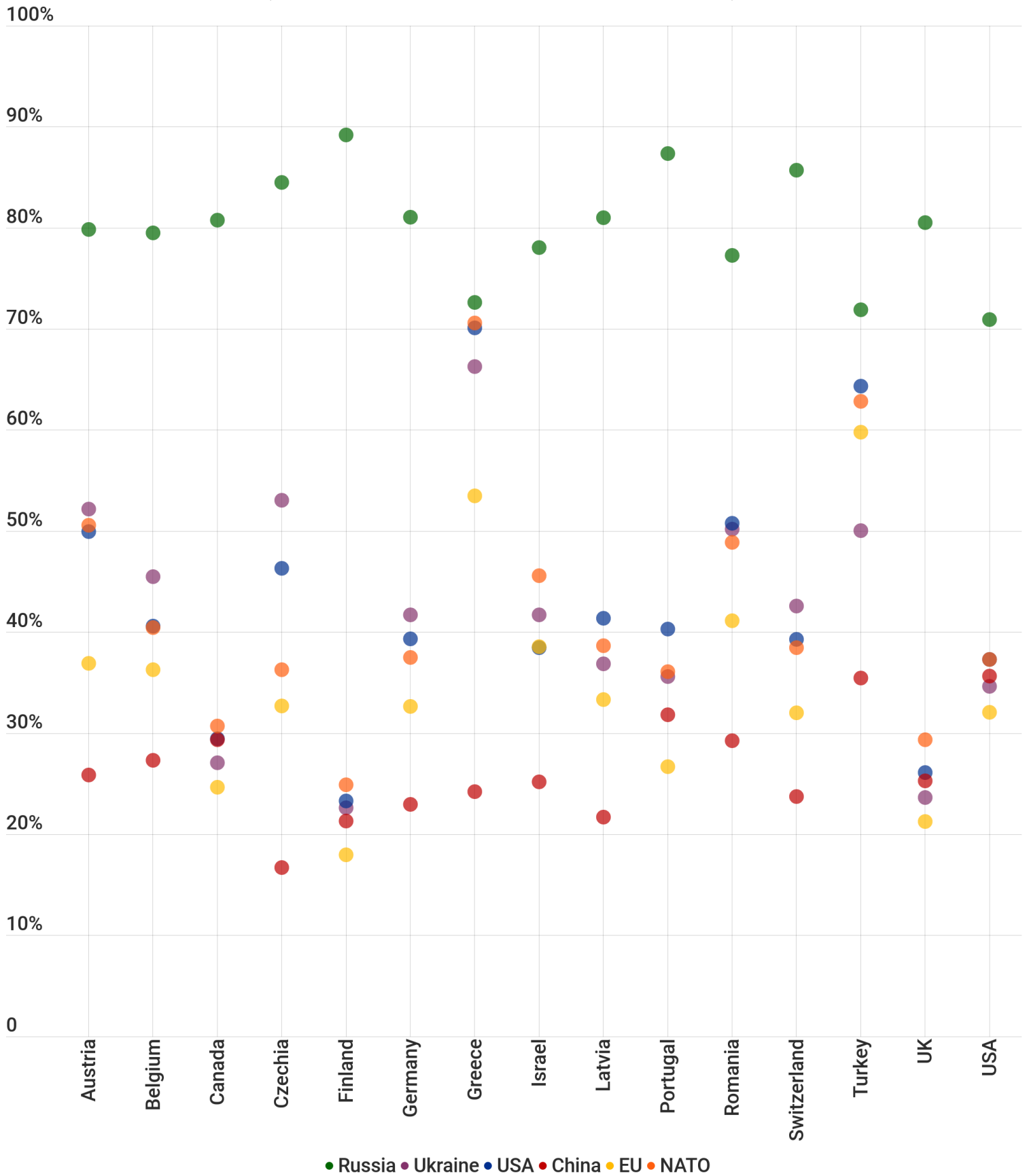


8 Perceptions of the Russia-Ukraine War

Respondents were asked who is to be blamed for the Russia-Ukraine war with answers on a 7-point scale ranging from 'definitely no' to 'definitely yes' (Figure 20). Russia is blamed in all 15 countries by an overwhelming majority, aside from Greece, where the US, EU, and NATO are seen as nearly equally responsible. The highest percentage of respondents who blame Russia is in Finland (89%), Portugal (87%), and Switzerland (86%), but all 15 countries had at least 70% of respondents put the blame on Russia.

The US, NATO, and Ukraine have a similar proportion of respondents placing the blame upon them, with overall averages of 43%, 41%, and 42%, respectively.¹³ The EU received a smaller proportion of blame than the US, Ukraine, and NATO in every country aside from Turkey, and China was blamed least of all in 10 of the surveyed countries. Only Canada, Finland, Portugal, the UK, and the United States blamed China more than any of the other four actors, and only by a small margin. Overall, the combined average percentage of respondents who blamed the EU was 35%, while only 26% blamed China.

Figure 20: Perceptions of the Russia-Ukraine War
 (% of respondents who believe they are to blame)



Endnotes

- 1 In the US and Latvia, the research sample also considered ethnicity as the quota, while in Israel and Switzerland, the research sample also considered religion as the quota. The data collection was coordinated by NMS Market Research, using their own online panel of respondents in the Czech Republic, through NG Research and Marketagent in Turkey and Switzerland, and through Cint in the remaining countries. The data collection was conducted in line with the guidelines of ICC/ESOMAR International Code on Market and Social Research. We have also received approval from the ethical board of the Faculty of Arts, Palacky University Olomouc, Czech Republic.
- 2 Turcsányi, R. Q., Šimalčík, M., Kironská, K., Sedláková, R. et al. European public opinion on China in the age of COVID-19: Differences and common ground across the continent. CEIAS, 2020. https://ceias.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/COMP-poll-report_3.pdf; Bērziņa-Čerenkova, U. A., Turcsányi, R. Q., Šimalčík, M., Kironská, K., & Sedláková, R. Latvian public opinion on China in the age of COVID-19. CEIAS, 2020. <https://ceias.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/LV-poll-report.pdf>
- 3 Respondents were asked to give each country a numerical ranking between 0 and 100, representing their feeling towards them, where 0 represents cold, negative feelings, 50 represents neutral, and 100 represents warm, positive feelings. Responses were then grouped into five categories: very negative (0-20), negative (21-45), neutral (46-54), positive (55-79), and very positive (80-100).
- 4 This average is calculated from a combination of the percentage of respondents in each country who viewed a given political leader favorably.
- 5 The respondents were asked: "How militarily powerful or militarily weak do you consider the following countries/entities?" and offered a 7-point scale indicating the following options: (1) very weak, (2) weak, (3) somewhat weak, (4) neither, (5) somewhat strong, (6) strong, and (7) very strong. The figure shows the proportion of respondents who selected options 5 to 7 in each state.
- 6 The respondents were asked: "How important or unimportant do you consider the following countries/entities for the development of your country's economy?" and offered a 7-point scale indicating the following options: (1) very unimportant, (2) unimportant, (3) somewhat unimportant, (4) neither, (5) somewhat important, (6) important, and (7) very important. The figure shows the proportion of respondents who selected options 5 to 7 in each state.
- 7 The respondents were asked: "How attractive or unattractive do you consider the cultures of the following countries/entities?" and offered a 7-point scale indicating the following options: (1) very unattractive, (2) unattractive, (3) somewhat unattractive, (4) neither, (5) somewhat attractive, (6) attractive, and (7) very attractive. The figure shows the proportion of respondents who selected options 5 to 7 in each state.

- 8 The respondents were asked: "How good or bad would life be for a person like you if you were to live in these places?" and offered a 7-point scale indicating the following options: (1) very bad life, (2) bad life, (3) somewhat bad life, (4) neither good nor bad life, (5) somewhat good life, (6) good life, and (7) very good life. The figure shows the proportion of respondents who selected options 5 to 7 in each state.
- 9 Overall scores were determined by averaging each country's score for each individual China policy.
- 10 The respondents were asked: "How positively or negatively do you feel about the following issues on a scale of 0 to 100, where 0 represents cold, negative feelings, 50 represents neutral, and 100 represents warm, positive feelings?" The figure shows the weighted mean values of all responses in each country.
- 11 Respondents were asked how closely their country's foreign policy should align with certain countries and entities based on a 10-point scale ranging from 'Not at all' to 'Completely.'
- 12 In order to calculate overall scores, each country's percentage of respondents who blamed a given country or entity for the war was averaged together so that one average score could be made from all 15 surveyed nations' responses to a given country.

About CEIAS

The Central European Institute of Asian Studies (CEIAS) is an independent think tank based in Bratislava (Slovakia), and with branches in Olomouc (Czech Republic), and Vienna (Austria).

The main goal of CEIAS is to spread knowledge about Asia among scholars and experts in Central Europe and beyond, while also informing the public about Central European activities in Asia.

To this end, CEIAS conducts and publishes its research, organizes public seminars and conferences, supports education on Asian topics, and communicates with the local, regional, and international media.

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About Sinophone Borderlands

The Sinophone Borderlands – Interaction at the Edges is an excellent research project based at the Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic. The project is funded by the European Regional Development Fund, project no. CZ.02.1.01/0.0/0.0/16_019/0000791.

The main idea of the project is to explore how the Chinese-speaking world interacts with other worlds, including those at its border (Slavophone, Tibetophone, Turco-Persophone, or Austroasiatophone worlds), as well as those who may be more distant (such as Anglophone, Hispanophone, Francophone, and others).

The Sinophone Borderlands research team consists of researchers from various disciplines under three main Research Groups - Political Science, Anthropology, and Linguistics. This allows for a cross-disciplinary dialogue and cross-cultural comparisons which pushes the academic studies of China and Asia beyond the limits of current disciplinary and national frameworks.

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Trans-Atlantic public opinion on China

Great power competition amidst Russian invasion of Ukraine

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