



A Mandate for Renewal

Global Public Opinion on the United
Nations and the Selection of the
10th Secretary-General



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Disclaimer: This document has been prepared by the United Nations Foundation, based on fieldwork conducted by GeoPoll (Mobile Accord Inc.). The opinions and findings expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position of the UN Foundation. This document includes information, insights, and data based on current research and analysis. Readers are encouraged to consider multiple perspectives and sources when evaluating the content.

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Preface

World leaders will soon gather in New York for the 81st session of the UN General Assembly, as citizens demand action to secure their futures in a world facing profound and multiple crises.

Record levels of conflict, escalating geopolitical rivalry, and a worsening planetary crisis will dominate the agenda. Every day, we hear new warnings of artificial intelligence running amok, while energy and food markets are destabilized by ongoing wars.

For citizens, the impact of these crises is immediate and personal. They fear for their futures and for those of their communities. The scale of these threats is now so great that few believe their governments can successfully confront them by acting alone.

This raises the stakes for a multilateral system battered by repeated shocks, financial strain, and geopolitical division. Tempted to look inward, international institutions face a test that will define their futures. Can they adapt and deliver when the world needs them most?

Whether the United Nations is at the forefront of meeting this challenge depends on the quality of its leadership, and whether it has the vision, credibility, and courage to mobilize action in a divided world.

That makes the ongoing selection of a new Secretary-General perhaps the most consequential leadership transition in its history. The choice of a new leader offers an opportunity to define why the institution exists in today's world, whom it serves, and how.

This poll was commissioned by the UN Foundation to help meet this moment. It offers a snapshot of public attitudes to the United Nations, drawing on a 20-country survey that includes all members of the UN Security Council.

The findings offer grounds for hope. Across every region, people overwhelmingly favor international cooperation and expect the UN to help solve the global challenges that matter most to them.

But public patience is finite, and rightly so. While the selection process has yet to capture their imagination, the world will be watching when a new Secretary-General is announced and takes office on Jan. 1, 2027.

That first year cannot be wasted. It is the new leader's window to secure the early wins and visibility that prove the international system can still deliver when the world needs it most.

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Key Findings

This research captures the views of 5,000 respondents as the United Nations selects a new Secretary-General. Findings are drawn from a 20-country global survey commissioned by the UN Foundation and conducted by GeoPoll. The study, which was fielded between Sept. 1 and Sept. 16, 2026, provides a snapshot of global public opinion, supplemented by insights into major variations between countries and demographic groups.

1. Worldview and Outlook

- **Citizens fear for their future in a turbulent world.** Nearly 6 in 10 respondents (57%) are worried about the future. Older generations are the most pessimistic (64% worried), while young adults (18–34) are the most optimistic (37% hopeful).
- **These fears strengthen the mandate for international cooperation.** Nearly 90% of respondents agree that even the most powerful nations need international partnerships to protect their people.
- **Support for global cooperation falls when national interests are at stake.** While 69% favor joint problem-solving, 28% believe their country should prioritize its own interests even if that means cooperating less with other countries.
- **Peace and security are the top priority.** Preventing and ending armed conflicts rank first for all demographic groups, followed by reducing poverty, climate action, and human rights.

2. Trust in the International System

- **The system is trusted, but not by all.** Trust in international institutions to make progress on global challenges stands at 58% and is higher in the Global South (65%) than the Global North (44%). Globally, nearly two in five respondents (39%) distrust the system's ability to deliver, including 11% who do not trust the system at all.
- **Impunity and bias erode credibility.** Trust is driven by principle (upholding international law, 57%), performance (delivering results, 41%), and pragmatism (being the only realistic option, 41%). Critics distrust the UN more because it lacks enforcement power (56%) and is dominated by powerful countries (51%) than due to impatience with its bureaucracy (35%).

3. The Future of the UN

- **The UN is relevant, but is perceived as underperforming on delivery.** While 84% believe the UN is necessary, they are divided on its performance: 32% say it is more necessary than ever, while 52% believe it is struggling to deliver results. When asked about reform, only 10% say that the UN is working well as it is.
- **Demand for an outward-looking leader.** Over half (52%) want structural reform, yet only 17% want the next Secretary-General primarily to play the role of an inward-looking reformer. Instead, citizens want an outward-facing leader: a diplomat (28%), crisis manager (26%), or moral voice (25%).

4. The Race to Be Secretary-General

- **The selection race has failed to break through.** Eighty-five percent of respondents have heard little to nothing about the selection process. Candidates are far from unknown (averaging 19%, against 11% for decoys), but are yet to achieve wider visibility. With expectations for a new leader high, the 10th Secretary-General will have an opportunity to build a global profile during the first 100 days in office.
- **Strong support for a historic first.** Six in ten respondents (61%) believe it is important that the 10th Secretary-General be a woman, with the greatest support coming from women (68%), young adults (68%), and the Global South (70%).

Introduction

On Jan. 1, 2027, the 10th Secretary-General of the United Nations will take office. Under Article 97 of the UN Charter, the selection requires a formal recommendation from the 15-member Security Council to the 193-member General Assembly, which then appoints the new leader.

The selection process is underway. As the 81st session of the General Assembly opens in New York, the Security Council is conducting rounds of straw polls to narrow the field of active candidates. A decision is expected at some point after the conclusion of High-Level Week on Sept. 29, allowing for confirmation in the General Assembly and a leadership transition before the new term begins.

As the UN's membership moves toward a decision, this research offers fresh insights into what the global public wants from international cooperation, the United Nations, and the next Secretary-General.

Scope of the Research

While the choice of a new Secretary-General is taken by Member States, this research grounds that decision in the voices of the global citizens the United Nations serves.

The research was undertaken by the UN Foundation and GeoPoll. It draws on data from all 15 members of the UN Security Council, including countries that are rarely polled, alongside five major powers that do not hold Security Council seats. These countries are home to more than 4.5 billion people, or 56% of the world's population.

GeoPoll's fieldwork concluded in mid-September, providing a real-time snapshot of public sentiment just as the Security Council prepares for final, and decisive, rounds of voting.

Because this survey used mobile web and telephone polling, the resulting sample leans slightly toward a more connected demographic. Results reflect the views of citizens who may be more actively engaged with global issues. The sampling approach is designed primarily to deliver insights at a global level, while also highlighting major variations between countries and demographic groups.

To place results from this study into context, the report draws on findings from other global polling organizations and qualitative research into the views of young adults.

Inside the Report

The report has four sections:

1. **Worldview and Outlook.** Examines public hopes and fears for the future, support for international cooperation, and priorities for global action.
2. **Trust in the International System.** Evaluates public confidence in the United Nations and other international institutions, as well as the underlying drivers of the system's credibility.
3. **The Future of the UN.** Assesses views on UN performance, demand for institutional renewal, and the preferred leadership style of the next Secretary-General.
4. **The Race to Be Secretary-General.** Investigates awareness of the selection process and candidate field, alongside views on electing the first woman Secretary-General.

A special feature — **The 2050 Mandate** — provides a preview of results from an ongoing qualitative survey of young people.

Methodology

This survey covers the following countries:

- **Five permanent members (P5) of the UN Security Council:** China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, and the U.S.
- **Ten elected Council members (E10), serving in 2026:** Bahrain, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Denmark, Greece, Latvia, Liberia, Pakistan, Panama, and Somalia.
- **Five nations that are not Council members:** Brazil, India, Mexico, Nigeria, and South Africa.

Fieldwork used a mix of mobile web and computer-assisted telephone interviewing. The sample size was 250 respondents per country (5,000 overall), using nonprobability sampling structured around age, gender, and regional demographic quotas. Pooled results are unweighted, treating each country equally rather than in proportion to population size. Candidate awareness was evaluated using a randomized split-sample experiment pairing declared candidates against control decoys.

At a global level, findings are robust (carrying an implied margin of error of $\pm 1.4\%$), as are findings from subgroups for gender, age, or region. Individual country samples are relatively small (indicative within roughly 6 percentage-points). **Country-level reporting therefore focuses not on narrow differences but major variations (more than 10 points).** Data for within-country subgroups are not reported.

A detailed description of survey methodology and sample limitations can be found in the annex.

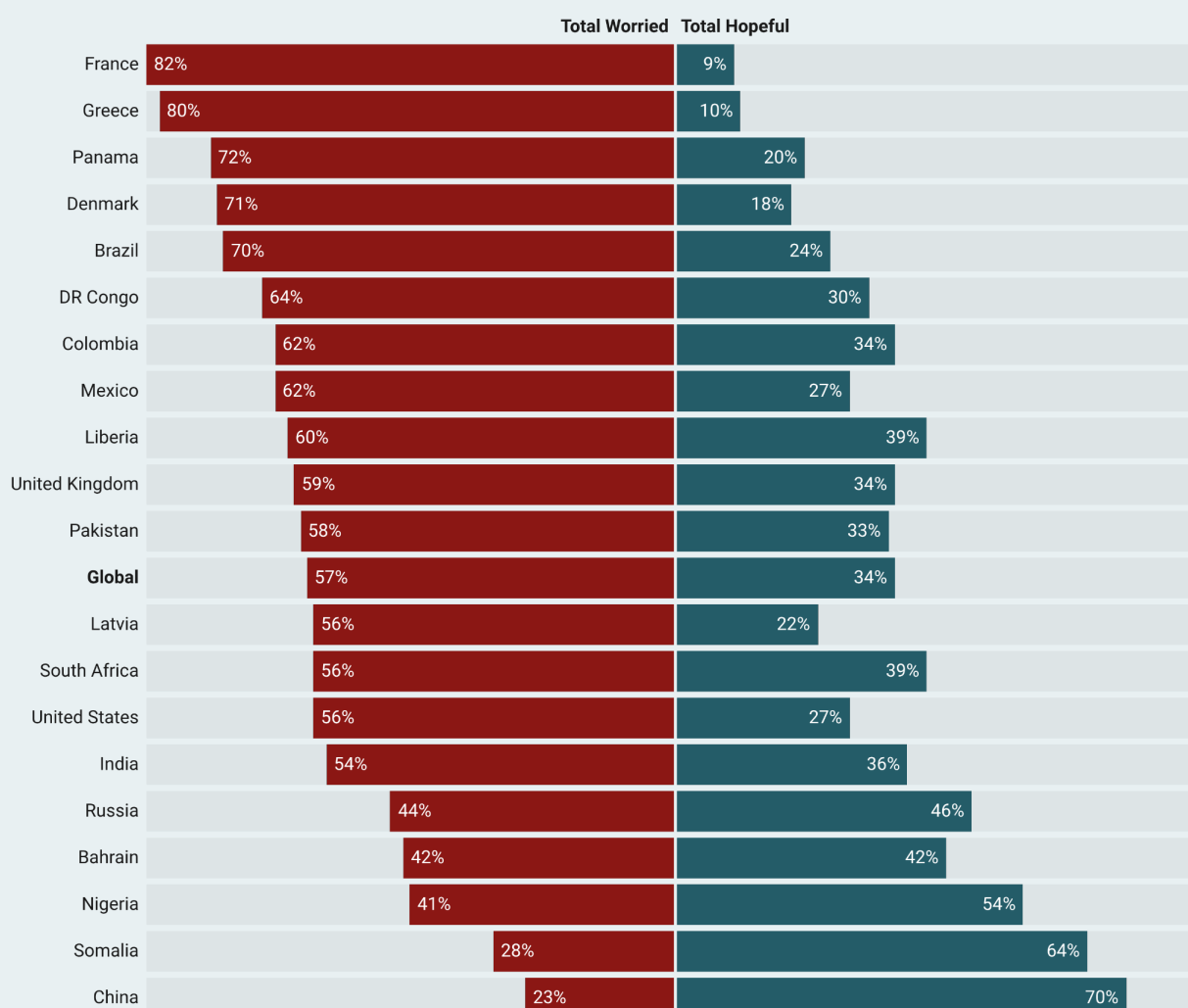
Part 1

Worldview and Outlook

A new Secretary-General will take charge of the United Nations as citizens fear for their future in a turbulent world.

We asked respondents to reflect on the state of the world today and about their hopes and fears for the future.

“When you think about the state of the world today, do you feel more hopeful or more worried?”



Note: Country results are indicative within roughly 6 points. Narrower variations between countries are not meaningful.

Across the surveyed countries, **nearly 6 in 10 respondents (57%) are worried about the future**, including 24% who report feeling very worried. Only one-third express hope, with

just 15% feeling *very* hopeful. While women are marginally more pessimistic than men (a 3 percentage point difference), a clearer divide can be seen across generations:

- **Young Adults (18–34) are the most optimistic cohort.** A narrow majority are worried about the future, yet 37% remain hopeful. This group is polarized: 2 in 10 (21%) are *very* worried about the world, while 18% are *very* hopeful.
- **Older Generations (55+) are the most pessimistic.** Just over a quarter of older respondents (27%) express hope for the future, compared with 64% who are worried.

The following countries are notably more pessimistic than the global average of 57%: France (82%), Greece (80%), Panama (72%), Denmark (71%), and Brazil (70%). In China, Somalia, and Nigeria, hope prevails, with more than half of respondents feeling optimistic about the future.

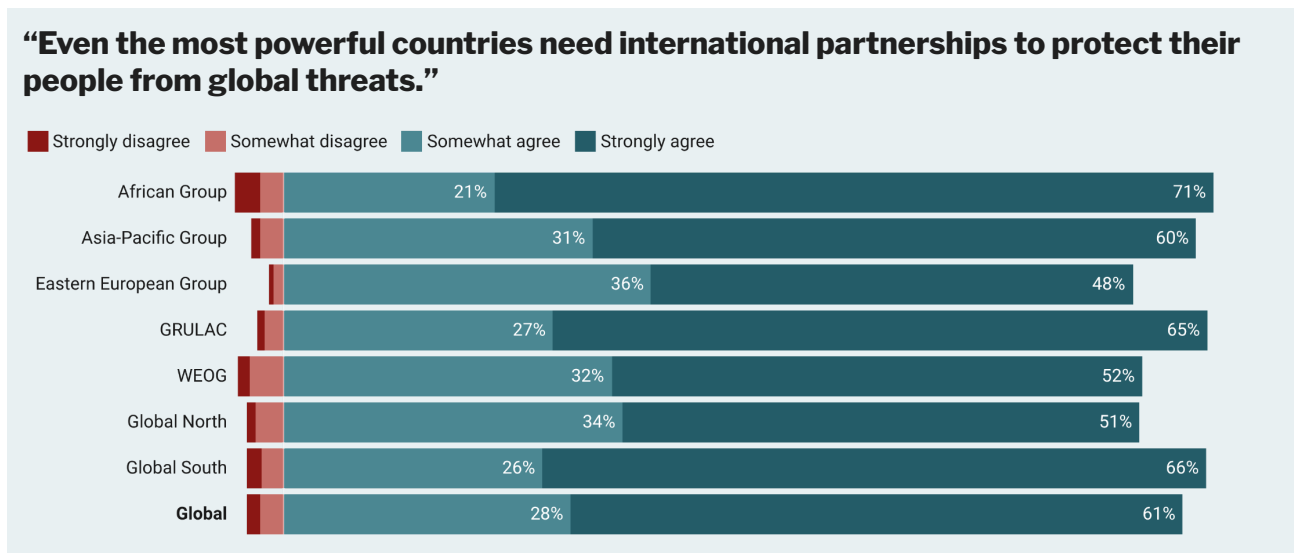
This anxiety strengthens the mandate for international cooperation.

We wanted to understand whether people believe countries should go it alone in an unstable world or whether they think governments have no choice but to work together to confront shared challenges.

We asked respondents whether they agree that “even the most powerful countries need international partnerships to protect their people from global threats.”

The consensus is clear: **Nearly 90% agree that partnership is necessary, even for the powerful.** Respondents from all 20 countries share this sentiment and, in 16 countries, more than half of respondents *strongly* agree. Only 4% of all respondents actively disagree with this statement.

Respondents in the Global South are noticeably more likely to *strongly* agree (66%) than those in the Global North (51%) that even powerful nations cannot go it alone.

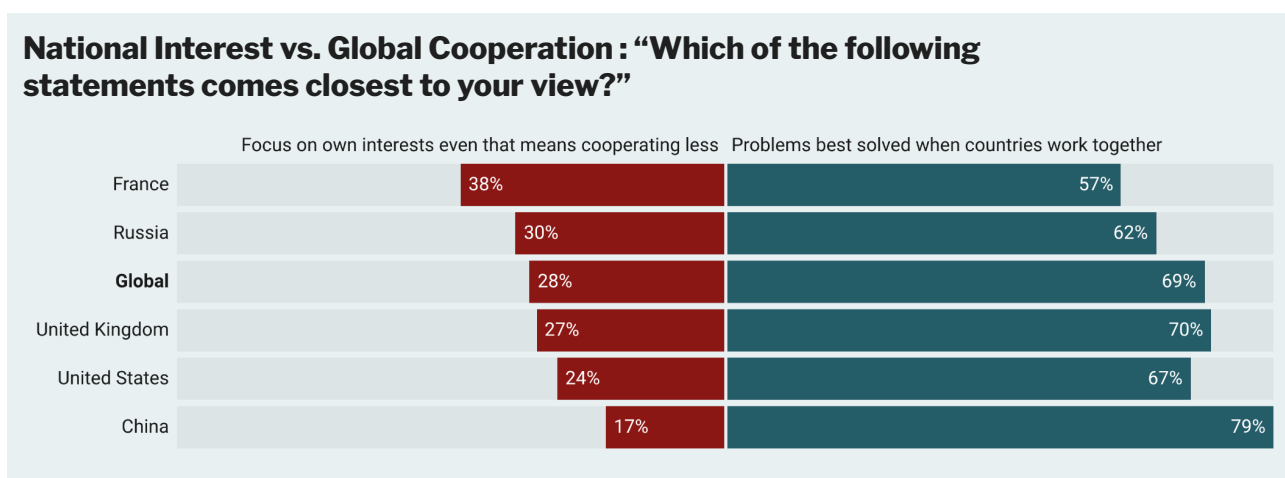


Support for global cooperation falls when national interests are at stake.

When asked to confront a trade-off between national and shared interests, a clear majority (69%) believe that pandemics, climate change, armed conflict, and other crises are best solved when countries work together.

However, **28% believe their country should prioritize its own interests, even if it means cooperating less with others.**

Support for prioritizing the national interest is higher than the average (28%) in some smaller or developing nations: Liberia (50%), Somalia (46%), and the DRC (44%)



Among the P5 nations, respondents in France (38%) are the most likely to say their country should prioritize its own interests, even at the expense of cooperation. Russia (30%), the United Kingdom (27%), and the U.S. (24%) cluster near the global average. In China, only 17% hold this view.

Preventing conflict is the top priority for international cooperation, followed by reducing poverty and inequality.

When asked to identify top priorities among major global challenges, the public wants international cooperation to focus on security and human welfare.

- **Peace and security rank first.** Preventing and ending wars and armed conflicts is the top priority globally (58%), ranked first by all age groups, both genders, and the Global South and North.
- **Poverty, climate, and human rights are leading priorities.** Reducing poverty and inequality ranks as the second priority globally, followed by addressing climate change and protecting the environment (third) and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms (fourth).

- **Economic and systemic risks are a lower priority.** Managing inflation, debt, or the global economy (fifth) and preparing for pandemics and other health emergencies (sixth) are in the middle tier.
- **Emerging threats are not yet top of mind.** Protecting critical infrastructure (energy supplies, shipping routes, and internet cables) and setting international rules for artificial intelligence and other new technologies finished in a virtual dead heat in seventh and eighth places.

“Which of the following global challenges should be the highest priority for countries to work together to address over the next 5 to 10 years?”

Priority	Global	Female	Male	18–34	35–54	55+
Preventing and ending wars	1	1	1	1	1	1
Reducing poverty and inequality	2	2	2	2	2	2
Climate and environment	3	3	3	4	3	3
Human rights	4	4	4	3	4	4
Global economy	5	5	5	5	6	5
Pandemics and health emergencies	6	6	6	6	5	6
Critical infrastructure	8	7	8	7	8	8
AI and new technologies	7	8	7	8	7	7

Note: Ranks reflect how often each issue was selected among respondents’ top three choices, not an ordered ranking by respondents.

IN CONTEXT

Conditional support for global cooperation

Evidence from other surveys also demonstrates declining optimism, as economic insecurity fuels broader anxiety about the world. Only 36% of respondents globally believe the next generation will be better off than today (Edelman, 2025), while citizens in only three of 15 countries surveyed believe global events have a more positive than negative impact on their daily lives (FES, 2023).

While a majority favor multilateral action even if it requires national compromise, that support drops sharply if citizens fail to see direct benefits at home (Rockefeller & Focalldata, 2025). Economic pessimists are 18 percentage points less likely to support cooperation than economic optimists, demonstrating how economic insecurity at home could erode the public support on which the international system depends.

Sources: Edelman Trust Institute, 2025 Edelman Trust Barometer; Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, FES Global Census 2023; Rockefeller Foundation & Focalldata, Demanding Results: Global Views on International Cooperation (2025).

Part 2

Trust in the International System

The 10th Secretary-General will be at the heart of an international system that is trusted, but not by all.

We asked respondents whether they trust international institutions, such as the United Nations, to make progress on the challenges they believe are priorities for global action.

Nearly 6 in 10 (58%) express confidence in the capacity of international institutions to deliver, including 19% who trust them a great deal. However, more than a third (39%) do not trust the system to deliver, and 11% do not trust it at all.

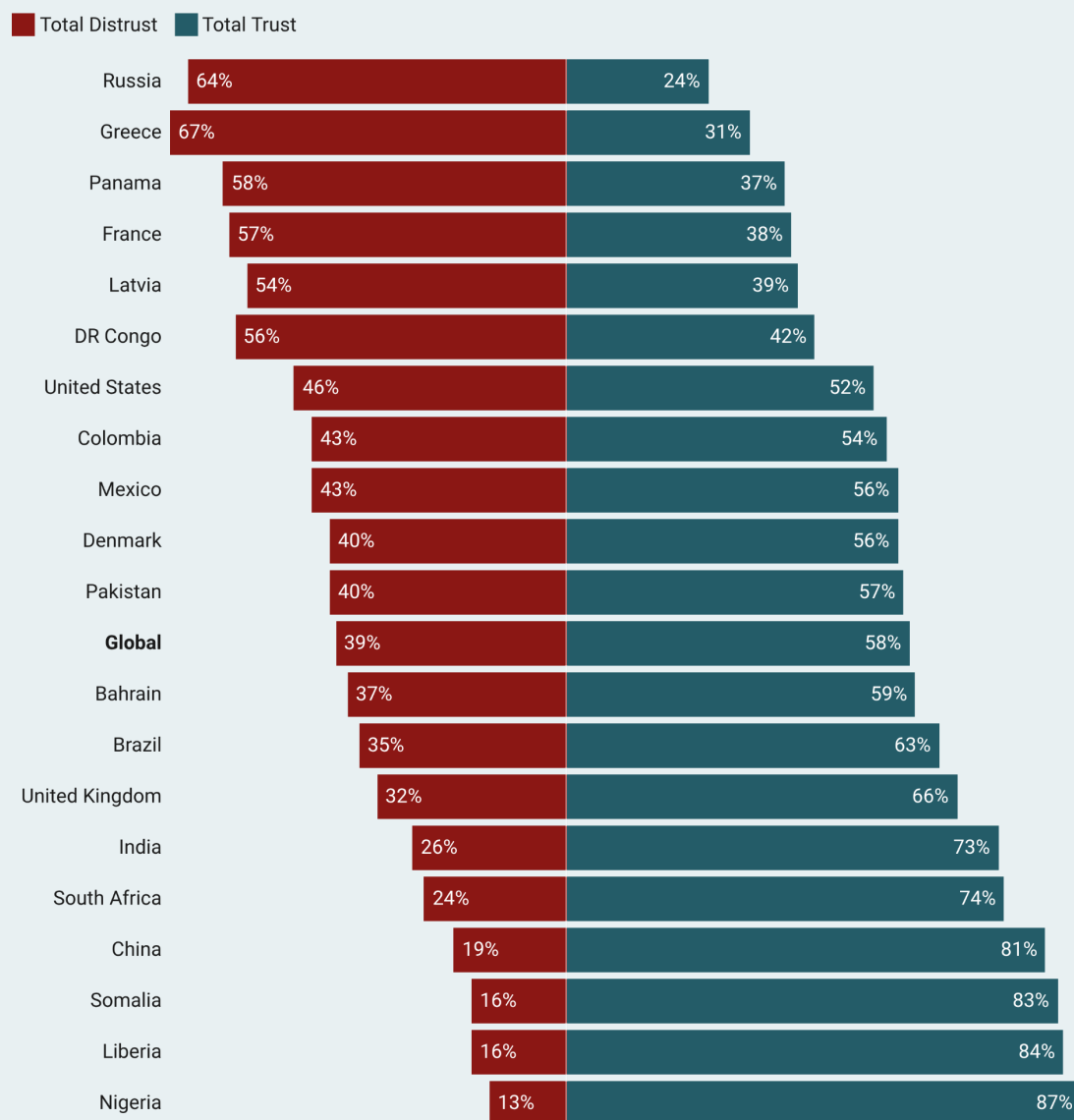
Levels of trust are higher in the Global South (65%) than in the Global North (44%), driven by regional differences. Trust is highest in the surveyed countries from the African Group (74%), while respondents in two Eastern European countries express the lowest levels of trust (32%).

Among the UN Security Council members, levels of trust vary. The P5 (52%) sits just below global baseline, though this masks a divide between permanent members with high trust in international delivery (China, the UK) and those with low trust (Russia, France, and to a lesser extent, the United States).

While the E10 (54%) also sits near the global average, skeptics with an elected seat on the Council include respondents in Greece (31% trust), Panama (37%), Latvia (39%), and the DRC (42%).

Finally, a generational divide emerges. **Young adults (18–34) have greater faith in international institutions (64%) than respondents aged 55 and older (52%).**

“How much do you trust international institutions, such as the United Nations, to make progress on global challenges?”



Note: Country results are indicative within roughly 6 points. Narrower variations between countries are not meaningful.

The UN and other international institutions win trust when they deliver on principles and performance, but many believe the system is skewed toward the rich and powerful.

Among the majority who trust the UN, respondents offer three main motivations: principle (which ranks first by a substantial margin), performance, and pragmatism.

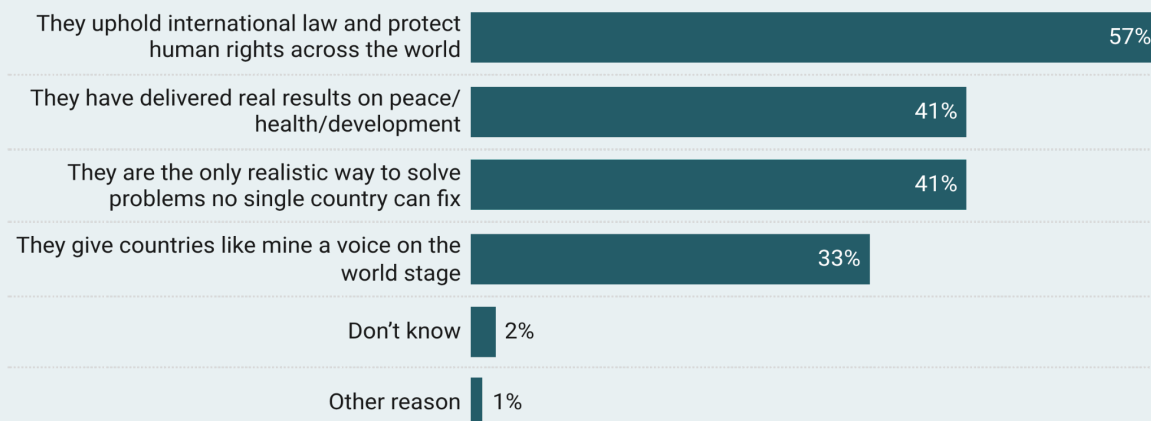
- **Principle (57%):** A belief that international institutions uphold international law and protect human rights.

- **Performance (41%):** A view that these institutions have delivered real results on peace, health, or development.
- **Pragmatism (41%):** Recognition that they are the only realistic way to solve problems no single country can fix.

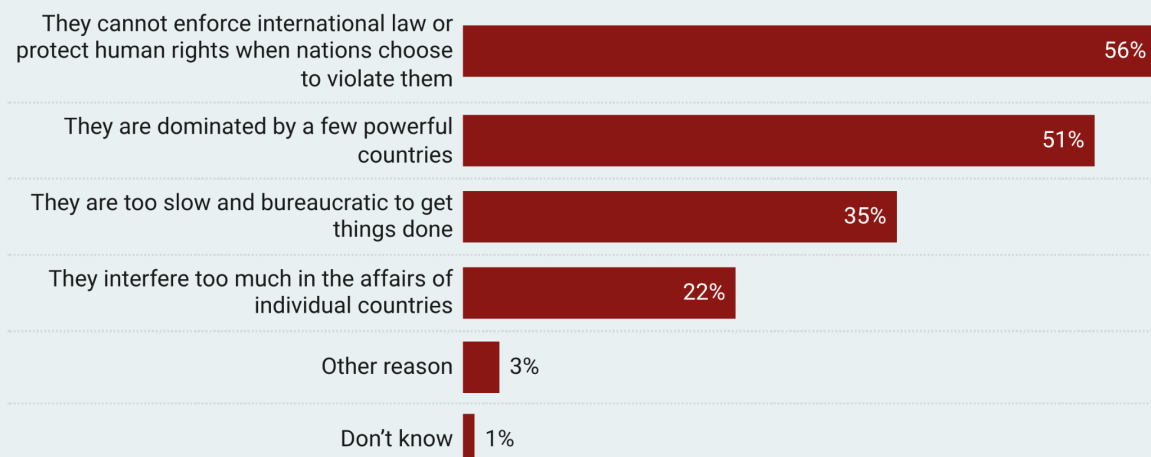
For critics, failures of principle outweigh practical concerns. Those who distrust the system cite a lack of enforcement power when international law or human rights are violated (56%) and the dominance of a few powerful countries (51%).

The drivers of trust and distrust

“Which of the following best explains why you trust international institutions like the United Nations?”



“Which of the following best explains why you do not trust international institutions like the United Nations?”



Note: Respondents were asked to select up to two reasons based on whether they previously indicated trust or distrust in international institutions.



IN CONTEXT

Systemic bias erodes institutional trust

At a national level, trust in institutions is undermined by perceptions of favoritism, unfairness, and inequality, and by the belief that actions taken by government and business are “hurting my quality of life” (Edelman, 2025). More than 6 in 10 (62%) of the global public view the “rich and powerful” as a dividing force pulling society apart (Edelman, 2023).

Trust in global governance is shaped in similar ways. Polling shows that public backing for international cooperation is high when it benefits ordinary households, low-paid workers, or vulnerable communities but drops by 12 to 14 percentage points when the primary beneficiaries are perceived to be wealthy business owners or richer nations (Rockefeller & Focalddata, 2025).

These findings align with the UN Foundation/GeoPoll data in this report, confirming that perceptions of bias toward powerful countries are a leading driver of distrust in the international system.

Sources: Edelman Trust Institute, 2025 Edelman Trust Barometer; Edelman Trust Institute, 2023 Edelman Trust Barometer; Rockefeller Foundation & Focalddata, Demanding Results: Global Views on International Cooperation (2025).



SPECIAL FEATURE

The 2050 Mandate: What Young People Want from the 10th Secretary-General

“I would trust a Secretary-General who would be able to speak up against those countries that dominate global politics, standing on a neutral ground without being influenced by pressure and power.”

Remesh Respondent

While the new Secretary-General will be under pressure to tackle immediate crises, young people want a leader who also looks decades ahead.

The quantitative data presented in this report reveals a generational divide. While a narrow majority of young people (ages 18–34) remain worried about the future, they are more hopeful (37%) than respondents aged 55 and older (27%). Younger generations are also highly invested in the UN and in the leadership race.

[Our Future Agenda](#) places young people at the heart of global decision-making. Launched in response to the current Secretary-General’s call for the next generation to be “designers of their own future,” it is now conducting a global consultation into the expectations, priorities, and vision of young people for the leader who will succeed António Guterres.

Through the deliberative platform Remesh, nearly 3,000 people under the age of 35 (adults and some under the age of 18) have participated in a digital global focus group that concludes later in 2026. These qualitative findings align with the polling but reflect the views of a globally connected cohort with strong opinions on what it wants the international system to deliver.

A Vision for Tomorrow, Delivered Today

“The next Secretary-General would matter in my life if their vision quietly reshaped the conditions in which we build, create, and lead ... tilting the global atmosphere toward courage, dignity, and long-term thinking.”

Remesh Respondent

Young participants view preventing global breakdown as a necessity. Preventing major conflicts and keeping crises from escalating rank first among priorities for the next Secretary-General’s term. When forced to consider trade-offs during a crisis, they

expect the Secretary-General to prioritize protecting the people facing the most immediate risks.

But when asked to explore the core purpose of the office, attention switches from crisis management to **protecting future generations from long-term risks**. Nearly 6 in 10 want the next Secretary-General to embed long-term thinking — on climate, new technologies, and other emerging threats — into international decision-making.

The long term is not seen as an alternative to delivery in the present day. Participants reject feel-good rhetoric, ranking **“turning global agreements into real-world outcomes”** as the most important day-to-day responsibility for the UN Secretary-General.

Writing the Job Description

“Open it up. Make it global, and give us the power to influence the decisions impacting us and those following.”

Remesh Respondent

Many young respondents believe the Secretary-General’s role is “not currently designed for the 21st century.” They also point to a paradox in how the UN operates: Member States place high expectations on the Secretary-General but fail to give the office the authority and tools needed to meet those expectations.

Young respondents, however, still demand results, seeking a leader who adapts when obvious paths to delivering them are blocked. To them, standing up for what is right — even when doing so upsets powerful countries — ranks above pragmatism, neutrality, or consistency as a test of effective leadership.

Building on these deliberations, a coalition of young leaders published a job description that highlights five expectations for the 10th Secretary-General:

- Turn international commitments into outcomes people can feel in their lives.
- Act before crises deepen.
- Build trust across global and local divides.
- Use public pressure and quiet diplomacy to defend international law.
- Shift young people to the heart of decision-making so the UN acts for both current and future generations.

(Full [Remesh survey](#) results will be published later in the year. The Job Description for the 10th Secretary-General is [available online](#).)

Part 3

The Future of the UN

The UN is seen as relevant but struggling to deliver.

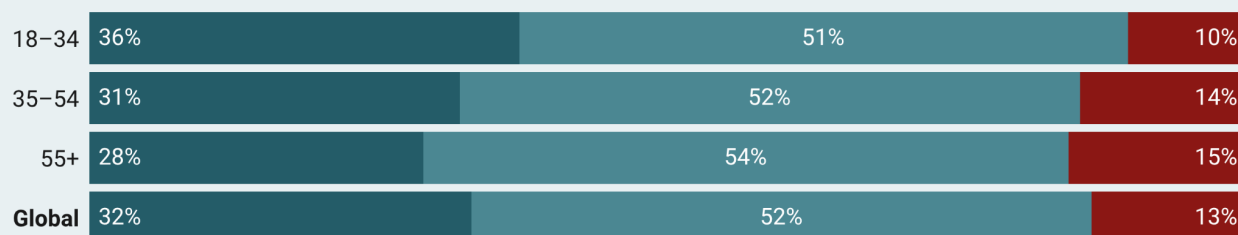
A clear majority of respondents (84%) believe **the UN remains necessary today**, although more than half (52%) add a caveat that the institution is **struggling to deliver results**. Only 13% believe the UN is outdated and no longer necessary in the modern world.

While about half of every age group agree that the UN is necessary but struggling, young people are the most likely to offer unequivocal backing for its role in the modern world:

- **Young Adults (18–34):** 36% say the UN is more necessary than ever, and only 10% say it is no longer needed.
- **Older Generations (55+):** Just 28% say the UN is more necessary than ever, while 15% say it is no longer needed.

“Some people argue the United Nations is becoming outdated, while others believe it is more necessary than ever. Which of the following best describes your view?”

- The UN is more necessary than ever to solve today's global problems
- The UN is still somewhat necessary but it is struggling to deliver results
- The UN is outdated and is no longer necessary in the modern world



The new Secretary-General will take office with a mandate for renewal.

While the public agrees the UN is necessary, they are divided on its future. Over half of respondents (52%) believe **the UN needs structural reform**, while a third (35%) want it to improve its performance while keeping its structure mostly the same.

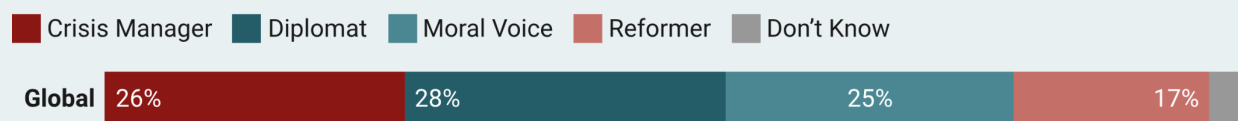
Support for the status quo is low. Only 1 in 10 (10%) believe the UN is “working well as it is and should continue operating in the way it does now.”

Despite strong support for renewal, few respondents (17%) want the Secretary-General to act primarily as a reformer, focused on modernizing the UN bureaucracy and reducing waste from the inside.

Instead, **citizens want an outward-facing leader**. They are roughly equally divided in wanting the UN's top official to act as a:

- **Diplomat (28%)**: A peacemaker focused on bridging divides and negotiating compromises between rival global powers through quiet diplomacy.
- **Crisis Manager (26%)**: A practical problem-solver focused on tackling emergencies and delivering humanitarian relief.
- **Moral Voice (25%)**: A leader who speaks out publicly for human rights, climate action and justice.

“Which type of leadership style is most needed in the next United Nations Secretary-General?”





IN CONTEXT

Trust in the UN may be fragile

While perceptions of the UN remain positive, median favorability ratings fell from 61% in 2025 (25 countries) to 55% in 2026 (37 countries), marked by steep drops in Nigeria, South Korea, and other key regional powers (Pew, 2026).

Other surveys support the UN Foundation/GeoPoll finding that young adults hold more positive views toward the UN than older generations (Pew, 2026).

Studies also reveal ideological polarization, particularly in North America (Pew, 2026; Chicago Council, 2025) and Western Europe (Pew, 2026; Rockefeller & Focalddata, 2025), where right-leaning citizens are less likely to trust or support the UN than those on the left.

Three-quarters of the global public would support international cooperation if it delivered effective solutions to global or national problems, but only 58% currently trust the UN to lead these efforts (Rockefeller & Focalddata, 2025).

Sources: Pew Research Center, United Nations Seen Favorably by Many Across 25 Countries (2025); Pew Research Center, Many Across 37 Countries View the UN Favorably, but Opinions Have Become More Negative in Some Places (2026); Chicago Council on Global Affairs, Americans Support Working Through the United Nations (2025); Rockefeller Foundation & Focalddata, Demanding Results: Global Views on International Cooperation (2025).

Part 4

The Race to Be Secretary-General

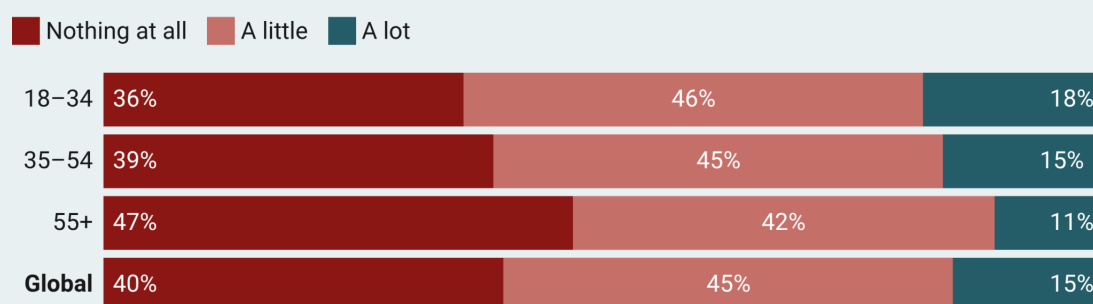
While citizens are invested in the UN's future, the race to be the next Secretary-General has failed to break through to the global public.

The search for a new Secretary-General has been underway for months, but it has largely flown under the radar.

When asked how much they had heard about the selection process, **a clear majority of respondents (85%) report hearing “nothing at all” or only “a little” about the race.** This finding is striking given that the UN Foundation/GeoPoll sample skews slightly toward more connected and engaged respondents.

- Levels of awareness are lowest in Greece, Latvia, Liberia, Denmark, and Russia, where roughly 95% of respondents say they have heard little or nothing about the race.
- Awareness is higher in Somalia, India, and China, where around 3 in 10 respondents say they have followed the race.
- While awareness is low across all demographics, few older people (55+) have followed the race, with 47% having heard “nothing at all” and 42% only “a little.”

“The United Nations is currently selecting its next Secretary-General, who will take office in January 2027. Before taking this survey, how much had you heard or read about this selection process?”



The new Secretary-General will need to introduce themselves to the global public, as awareness of the candidates remains low.

To test awareness of the race, we presented respondents with real Secretary-General candidates mixed with three categories of “decoy”: a figure from their region whose profile

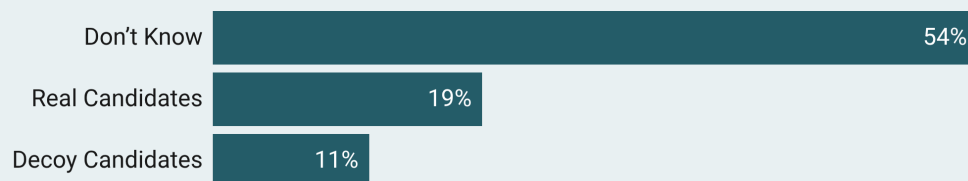
is similar to that of the candidates; a fictitious name (Elena Morales Vega); and a well-known leader of another international body (FIFA President Gianni Infantino).

Official candidates enjoy some recognition, but **the race has yet to break through to the wider public:**

- **The public “recognize” all three types of decoys at the same rate**, establishing an 11% floor for respondents who may have been guessing which were candidates and which were not.
- **The real candidates perform better than the decoys**, averaging a 19% recognition rate globally, with the most recognized candidate reaching 24%.
- When presented with the names, **more than half of all respondents (54%) choose “don’t know,”** confirming that candidates are yet to become household names.

Low visibility is unsurprising at this stage, but three windows offer opportunities to raise the profile of the leadership transition: the final Security Council votes (especially if a deadlock creates headlines), the announcement of the winner, and the new leader’s first 100 days in office.

“Which of the following individuals are currently official candidates for the role of UN Secretary-General?”

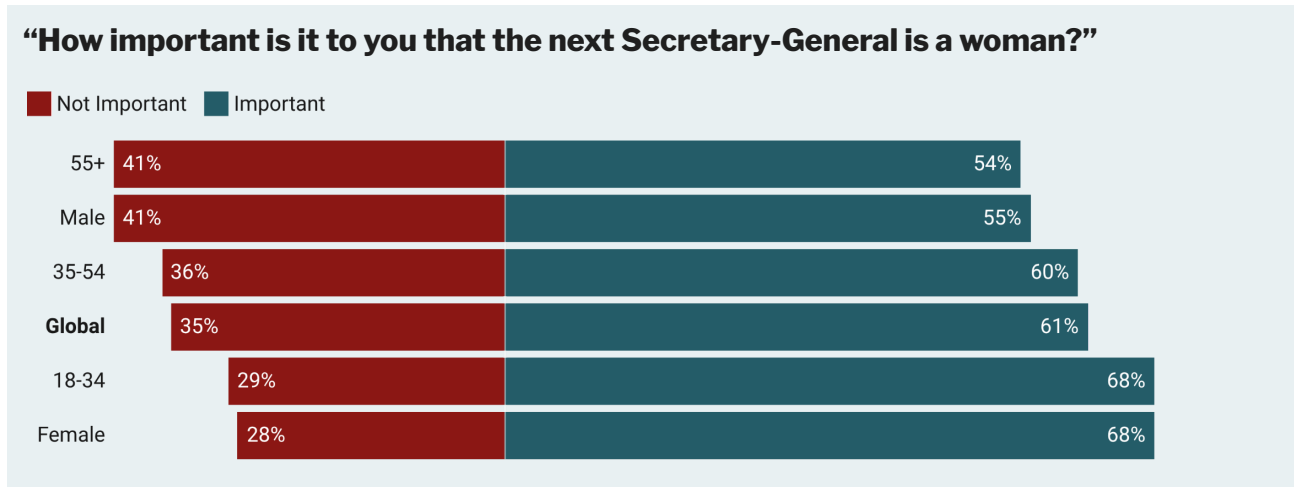


The mandate for a historic first is clear: The public wants a woman to be Secretary-General.

The UN has had nine Secretaries-General in its 80-year history. All have been men. As the selection process gets underway, the public wants that to change. Six in ten (61%) of respondents believe **it is important that the 10th Secretary-General is a woman**, compared with 34% who say it is not.

- **Women feel strongly about the need for a breakthrough.** Almost seven in ten (68%) say it is important (with 37% calling it *very important*), compared with 55% of men.
- **Younger adults are the strongest champions of a woman Secretary-General.** Support reaches 68% among those ages 18–34 and 60% among those ages 35–54, before stepping down to 54% among respondents 55 and older.

- **Demand is highest across the Global South.** Across the 13 surveyed nations from this bloc, 70% of respondents believe it is important, compared with 45% in the Global North.



IN CONTEXT

The prestige of the office is not enough

Although this study provides the first dedicated polling of the Secretary-General race, insights can be drawn from other surveys on what will be expected of a new leader.

When respondents across 34 countries are asked about international cooperation to tackle concrete challenges, their priorities center on survival, economic well-being, and personal security (Rockefeller & Focalddata, 2025). The more an issue affects daily life, the more citizens demand a global solution.

Two-thirds of the public believe leaders build legitimate influence by “understanding what people like me need and want” (Edelman, 2025). But among those with the greatest grievances, respect for formal titles falls. Less than half (48%) believe a leader is legitimate simply for “occupying a formal position of power.”

For the 10th Secretary-General, the implications are clear. The prestige of the office will not be enough, especially for those most skeptical of the UN. The next leader will build trust with a global constituency only when they are *seen* solving the problems that matter most to citizens and their communities.

Sources: Rockefeller Foundation & Focalddata, *Demanding Results: Global Views on International Cooperation* (2025); Edelman Trust Institute, 2025 Edelman Trust Barometer.

Annex

Methodological Notes

Sample and country coverage

The survey was conducted across 20 countries, with a target sample of $n=250$ respondents per country ($N=5,000$ overall). Equal sample sizes were used across countries irrespective of population size. Accordingly, pooled results reflect the surveyed countries equally rather than in proportion to their population.

Because the survey relies on nonprobability sampling, a formal margin of error does not apply. However, as a benchmark, a probability sample of this size would carry an estimated margin of error of $\pm 1.4\%$ globally and $\pm 6.2\%$ for each country (at the 95% confidence level). Subgroups at a global level, which aggregate responses across countries, have an implied margin of error $\leq \pm 2.6\%$.

UN regional group subgroups range from $\pm 2.8\%$ (WEOG, African Group) to $\pm 4.4\%$ (Eastern European Group, comprising only Latvia and Russia).

Survey implementation

Fieldwork was conducted by GeoPoll (Mobile Accord Inc.), a global research organization specializing in quantitative and qualitative data collection, including in low- and middle-income countries. GeoPoll administered the survey using its proprietary survey platform and managed respondent recruitment, questionnaire delivery, quota monitoring, quality control, translation, and data processing across participating markets.

Country selection

The sample consists of all 15 members of the United Nations Security Council serving during 2026:

- Five permanent members (P5): China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, and the U.S.
- Denmark, Greece, Pakistan, Panama, and Somalia, whose elected terms run 2025–2026.
- Bahrain, Colombia, the DRC, Latvia, and Liberia, whose terms run 2026–2027.

Five additional countries, Brazil, India, Mexico, Nigeria, and South Africa, were included to broaden geographic and population coverage beyond the Council and allow for comparisons between Council and non-Council countries.

Geographic and population coverage

The survey covers 20 countries that together are home to approximately 4.5 billion people, or 56% of the world's population, based on [2026 population projections](#) from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division.¹

This figure describes the population living in the countries included in the study rather than the representativeness of the survey sample itself.

Sampling and demographic quotas

Soft demographic quotas were applied during data collection to help maintain sample balance, targeting at least 40% male and 40% female respondents in each country. This target was met in 16 of the 20 countries; in the remaining four, fieldwork concluded with a modest gender imbalance skewed toward male respondents. Age quotas were informed by each country's adult population distribution, while geographic quotas grouped subnational administrative units into broader regions and applied minimum sample shares alongside a soft ceiling for the capital or principal urban area.

Mode of data collection

GeoPoll conducted the survey primarily through mobile web, or computer-assisted web interviewing (CAWI), in 17 of the 20 countries. In the DRC, Liberia, and Somalia, fieldwork was conducted using computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) because lower levels of internet access made an online-only approach less appropriate.

In these three markets, respondents were reached by telephone. Telephone numbers were drawn from a combination of random digit dialing across active mobile number ranges and GeoPoll's existing database of mobile numbers in each country. Numbers were allocated automatically to interviewers through GeoPoll's sample management system. Calls were placed in-country and conducted by trained interviewers using the GeoPoll enumerator application. Interviews were administered in French and Lingala (DRC), English (Liberia) and Somali (Somalia). Participation was voluntary, and all call outcomes were recorded using standard disposition codes from the World Association for Public Opinion Research (WAPOR).

Sample limitations

The survey uses nonprobability sampling and should not be interpreted as a probability-based nationally representative survey in each market. GeoPoll applies demographic quotas based on age, gender, and region to approximate the population

¹ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, World Population Prospects 2024, medium-variant projections for 2026. <https://population.un.org/wpp/>

structure within its online samples. Nevertheless, the degree to which online samples approximate national populations varies according to internet access in each country. In markets with lower connectivity, online recruitment can overrepresent younger, urban, more educated, and male populations. The use of computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) in the DRC, Liberia, and Somalia was intended to mitigate this limitation in those markets. Differences in recruitment and survey mode should therefore be considered when interpreting cross-country comparisons, making clustering of countries more reliable than direct comparisons.

Questionnaire and language

The questionnaire consisted of 13 closed-ended substantive questions and three respondent identification questions covering age, gender, and location. An English master questionnaire was translated into 14 additional languages: Arabic, Danish, French, Greek, Hindi, Latvian, Lingala, Mandarin, Pidgin, Portuguese, Russian, Somali, Spanish, and Urdu. Although translations were intended to preserve the meaning of the master questionnaire, differences in language and local interpretation may affect cross-country comparability.

Analytical classifications

For subgroup analysis, countries were classified in several ways. Security Council status distinguishes the P5, E10, and non-Council countries. Countries were also grouped according to the UN's five regional groups or Global North and South.² For the latter, the analysis follows [UNCTAD's classification](#) of countries as developed or developing economies. Developed economies are grouped as the Global North, and developing economies as the Global South.

Respondents are grouped by gender and by age groups between 18–34, 35–54, and 55+.

Candidate-awareness question

The candidate-awareness question used a randomized design and included all eight candidates who had been officially nominated for UN Secretary-General by the survey fielding date of Sept. 1, 2026.

Respondents were shown a subset of names rather than the full list. Each respondent saw three rotating declared candidates, two constant decoy names, one rotating regional candidate and an “I don’t know / I am not sure” option.

² For analytical purposes, the U.S. is included with the [Western European and Others Group](#). Formally, the U.S. is not a member of a regional group, but it participates in WEOG as an observer and is treated as a member for electoral purposes.

Subgroup analysis and interpretation

Country-level samples of 250 respondents should be interpreted cautiously. In the reporting, they are used only to identify broad trends and major differences in opinion, rather than narrower distinctions between countries. Subgroups divided by age, gender, Security Council status, region, or other characteristics are used only at a global level. Differences between small subgroups, particularly country-by-demographic intersections within countries, are not significant and are not presented in the reporting.

Results are unweighted. Each country contributes the same number of respondents to pooled results irrespective of population size. Percentages are calculated using valid responses to each question unless otherwise specified. Because of rounding, displayed percentages may not always sum to exactly 100%. Questions permitting multiple selections, if any, may sum to more than 100%.



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