



# Britain's foreign policy tribes

The British Foreign Policy Group and Opinium

---

April 2021



# Leading Public Opinion Research on Foreign Policy

---

The British Foreign Policy Group and Opinium jointly lead an annual survey into UK Public Opinion on Foreign Policy and Global Britain – a vital piece of social research to understanding the complex, evolving nature of public attitudes towards international affairs.

The 2021 survey produced the most comprehensive dataset of British public opinion on foreign policy. To bring the results to life, Opinium and the BFPG have worked together to segment the UK adult population into four foreign policy ‘tribes’ across the full spectrum of public opinion.

The segmentation demonstrates both the important areas of convergence and divergence in public opinion on international affairs, as well as helping to quantify the electoral power of each of the tribes. The findings reveal a deeply polarised nation, but with important pathways to unity and consensus, which must be harnessed as the UK seeks to become ‘a truly Global Britain’.

# The Opinium and BFPG partnership



## Opinium

Opinium an award-winning strategic insight agency, built on the belief that in a world of uncertainty and complexity, success depends on the ability to stay on the pulse of what people think, feel and do.

Reliable public opinion data and its interpretation is crucial to helping policy makers make better decisions that respond to and take account of the views of citizens.



## British Foreign Policy Group

The British Foreign Policy Group (BFPG) is an independent, non-partisan think tank dedicated to advancing the UK's global influence, at a crucial time in the nation's modern history.

Our core objective is to bridge the link between the domestic and international spheres – recognising that Britain's foreign policy choices are shaped by our social landscape at home, and the social, economic and political constraints of both our allies and strategic rivals

# Meet the four foreign policy tribes

# The four foreign policy tribes that make up Britain

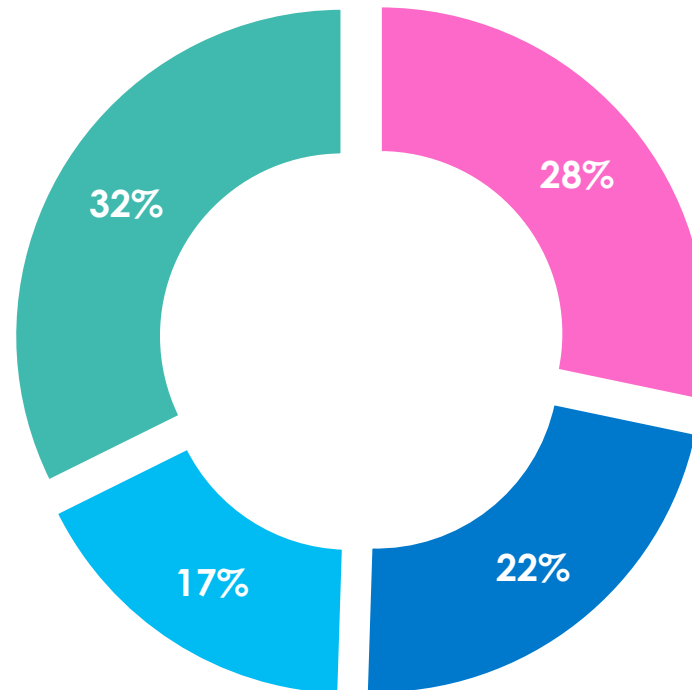
Britain's foreign policy tribes

## Humanitarians

- Strong humanitarian focus
- Values-driven
- Believes UK's priority should be advancing democracy, human rights, international aid

## Globalists

- Pro-globalisation internationalists
- Balance ethical and self-interested foreign policy preferences
- Support multilateralism



## Isolationists

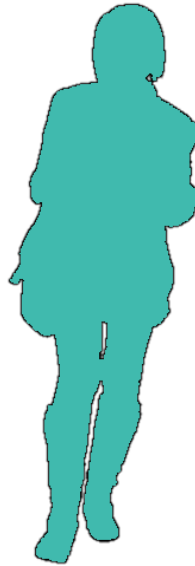
- Disengaged from foreign policy
- Lack both patriotic and international identities
- Isolationist and protectionist instincts

## Patriots

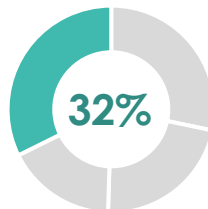
- Balance defensive and internationalist instincts
- Proud of a strong, respected Britain on the world stage
- Lean towards the Anglosphere and the Commonwealth

Liberal cosmopolitans, highly supportive of immigration, who want Britain to lead on advancing human rights across the world

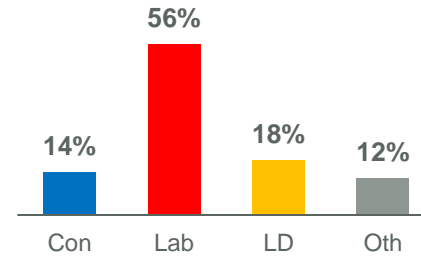
## TRIBE 1



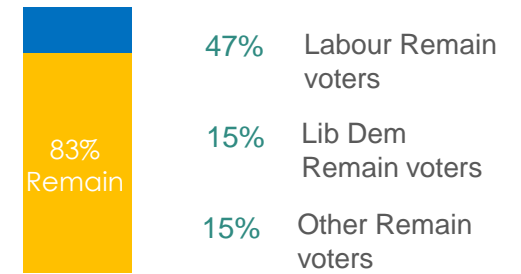
## Humanitarians



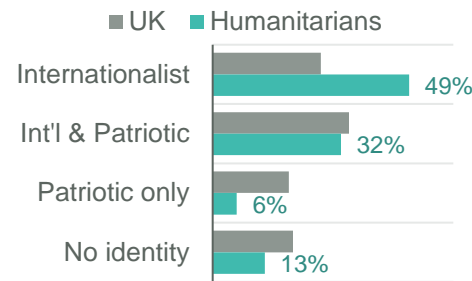
### 2019 PAST VOTE



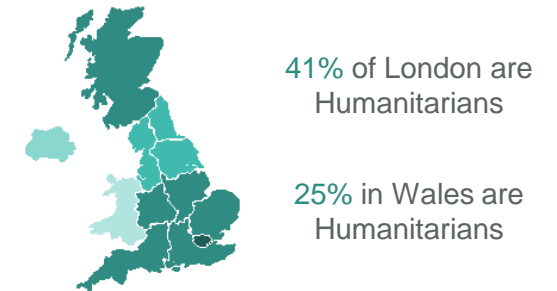
### EU REFERENDUM



### IDENTITY



### REGIONAL



### CORE DEMOGRAPHICS

- 53% Female
- 38% Aged 18 to 34
- 62% White collar

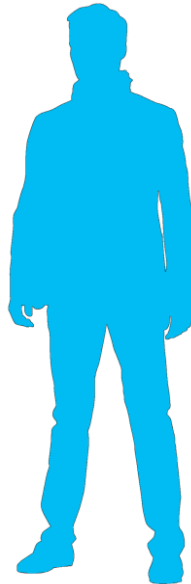
### MEDIA CONSUMPTION

40% read the Guardian

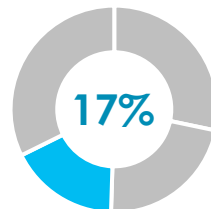


Urban internationalist professionals who balance values and self-interested foreign policy instincts

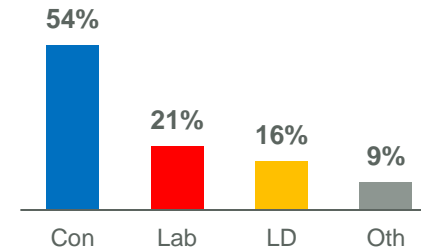
## TRIBE 2



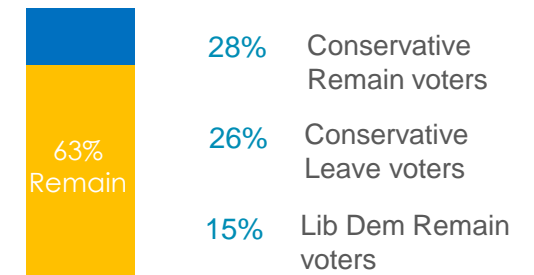
## Globalists



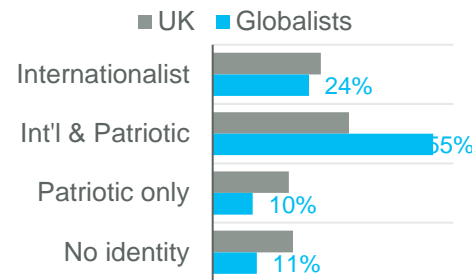
### 2019 PAST VOTE



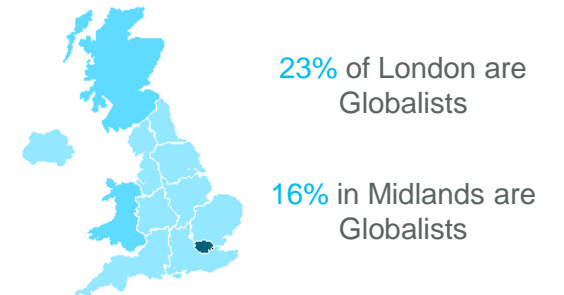
### EU REFERENDUM



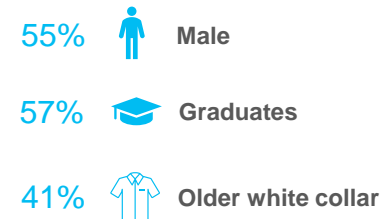
### IDENTITY



### REGIONAL



### CORE DEMOGRAPHICS



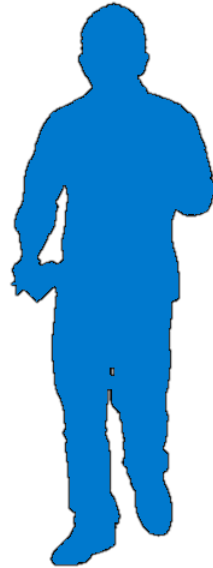
### MEDIA CONSUMPTION

19% read the Times

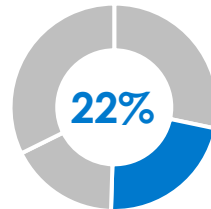


Older Britons in the South and Midlands with a more traditional and 'patriotic' view of Britain and its role on the world stage

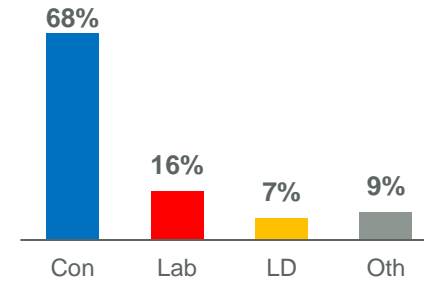
### TRIBE 3



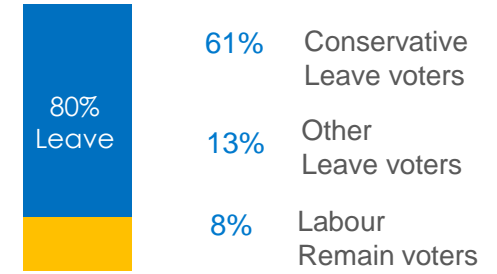
### Patriots



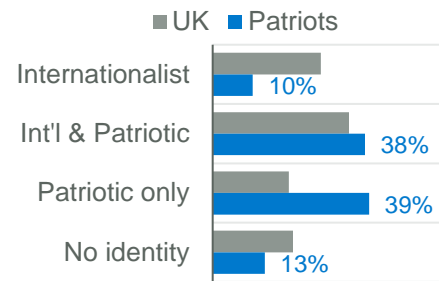
#### 2019 PAST VOTE



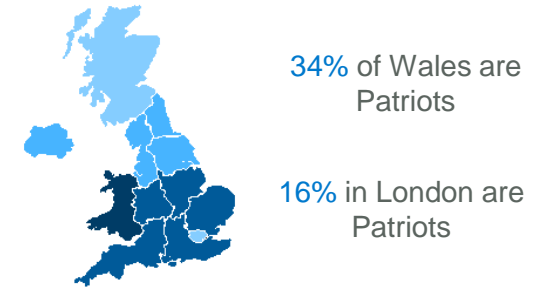
#### EU REFERENDUM



#### IDENTITY



#### REGIONAL



#### CORE DEMOGRAPHICS

- 55% Male
- 33% Aged 65+
- 93% White British

#### MEDIA CONSUMPTION

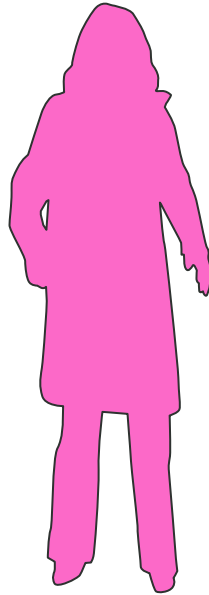
34% read the Daily Mail



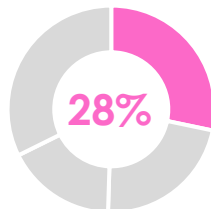


Disengaged working-class voters who lack a clear identity but whose instincts are generally isolationist or protectionist in nature

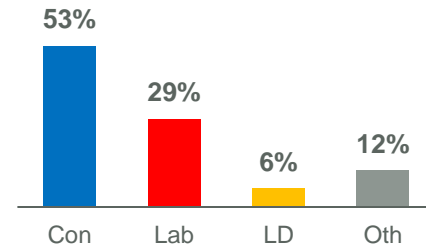
## TRIBE 4



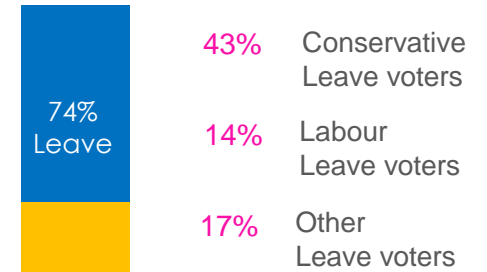
### Isolationists



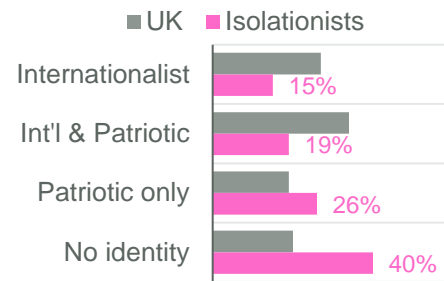
#### 2019 PAST VOTE



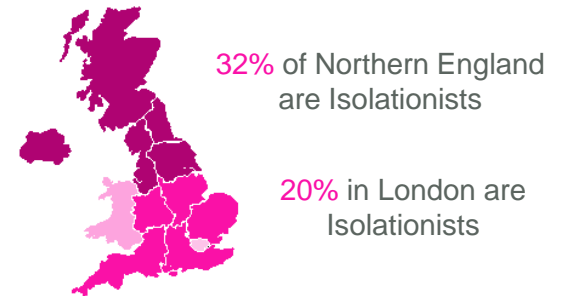
#### EU REFERENDUM



#### IDENTITY



#### REGIONAL



#### CORE DEMOGRAPHICS

- 58% Female
- 60% Blue collar
- 58% School leavers

#### MEDIA CONSUMPTION

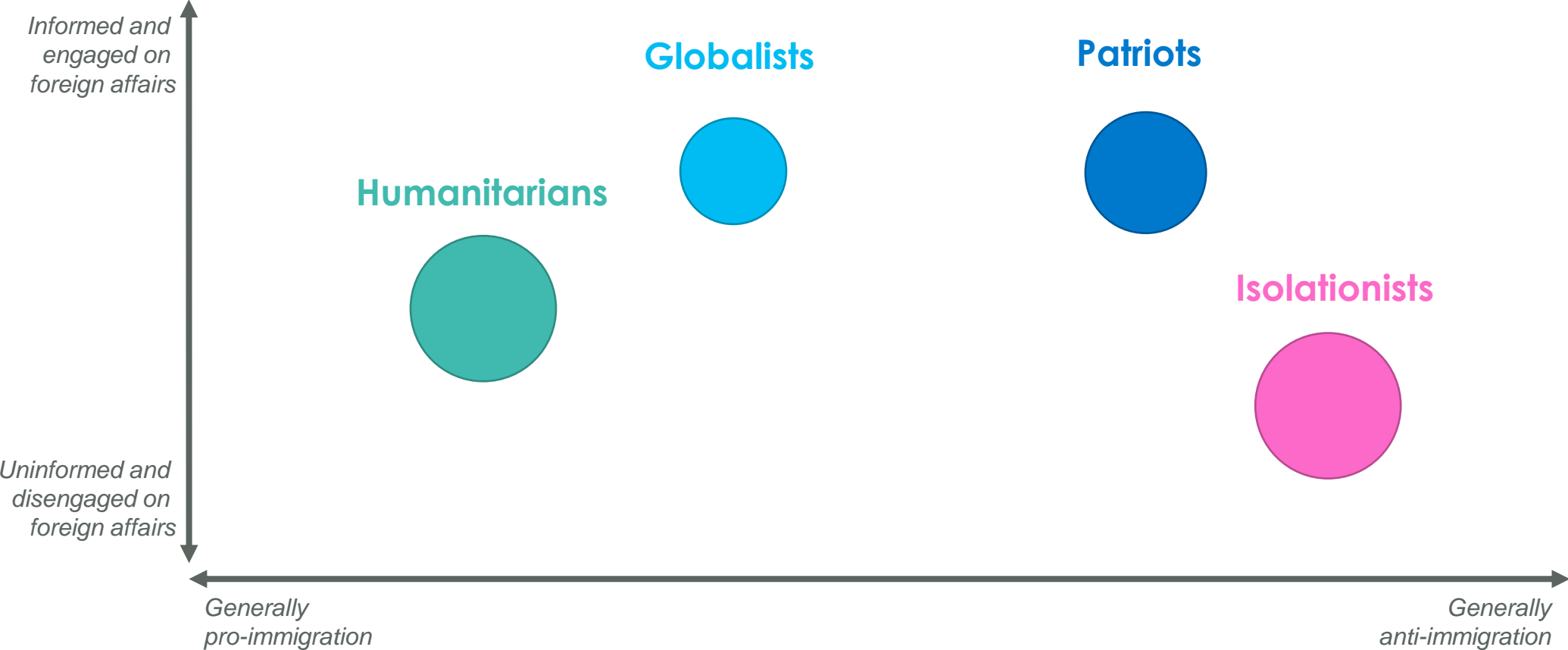
43% never read a newspaper



# Navigating the UK's foreign policy tribes

---

# The tribes on either side of the immigration divide differ in self-reported levels of knowledge and engagement



# Which aspects of the UK's foreign policy are the greatest sources of pride to you?

- Our armed forces and defence capabilities
- Our national security and intelligence services
- Promoting democracy and human rights around the world
- Our leadership on global challenges (e.g. climate change)
- Our close alliances with other liberal nations
- UK as a leading global donor for aid and development
- Our membership of the Commonwealth
- Our membership of multilateral organisations (e.g. NATO)

Humanitarians	Globalists	Patriots	Isolationists
✗	✗	✓	✓
✗		✓	
	✓		✗
✓		✗	✗
	✓		✗
✓		✗	✗
✗		✓	
	✓	✗	✗

✓ Above average positive answers

✗ Below average positive answers

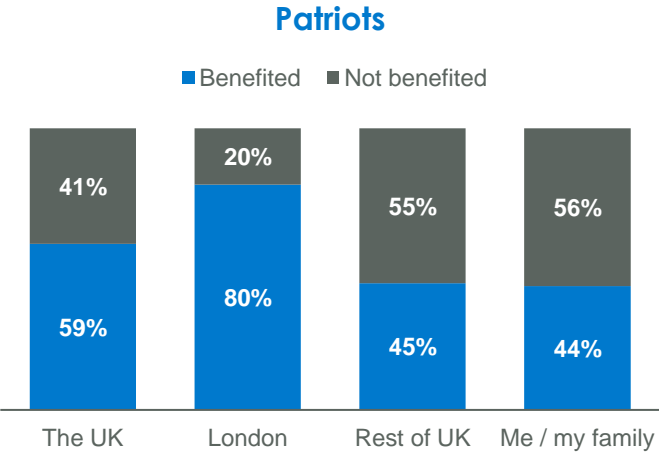
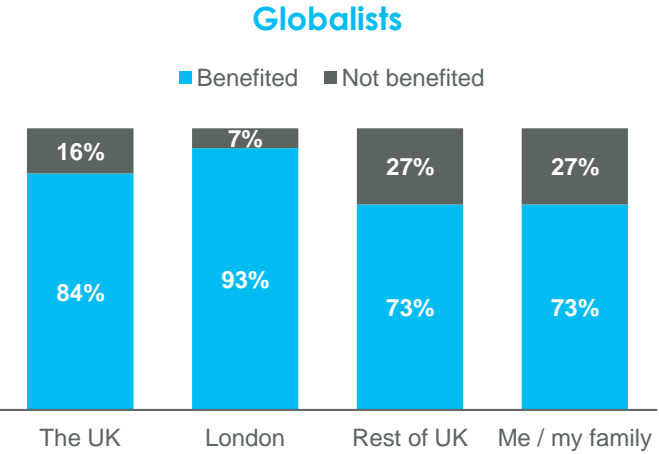
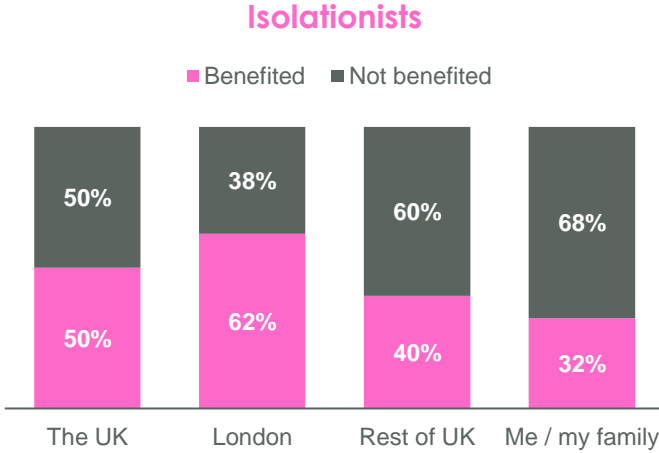
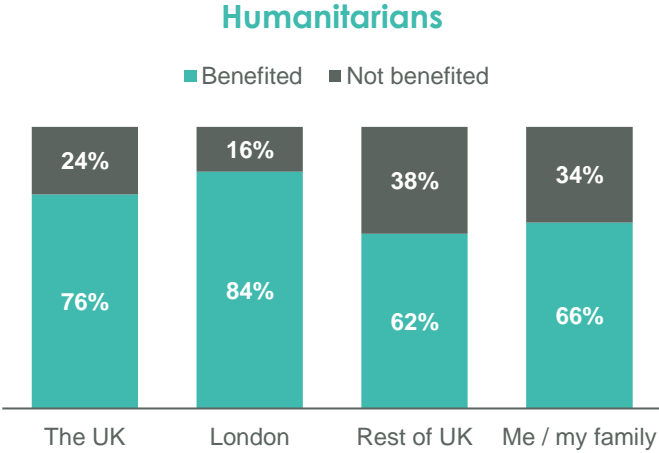


# What does a 'truly Global Britain' mean to the tribes?

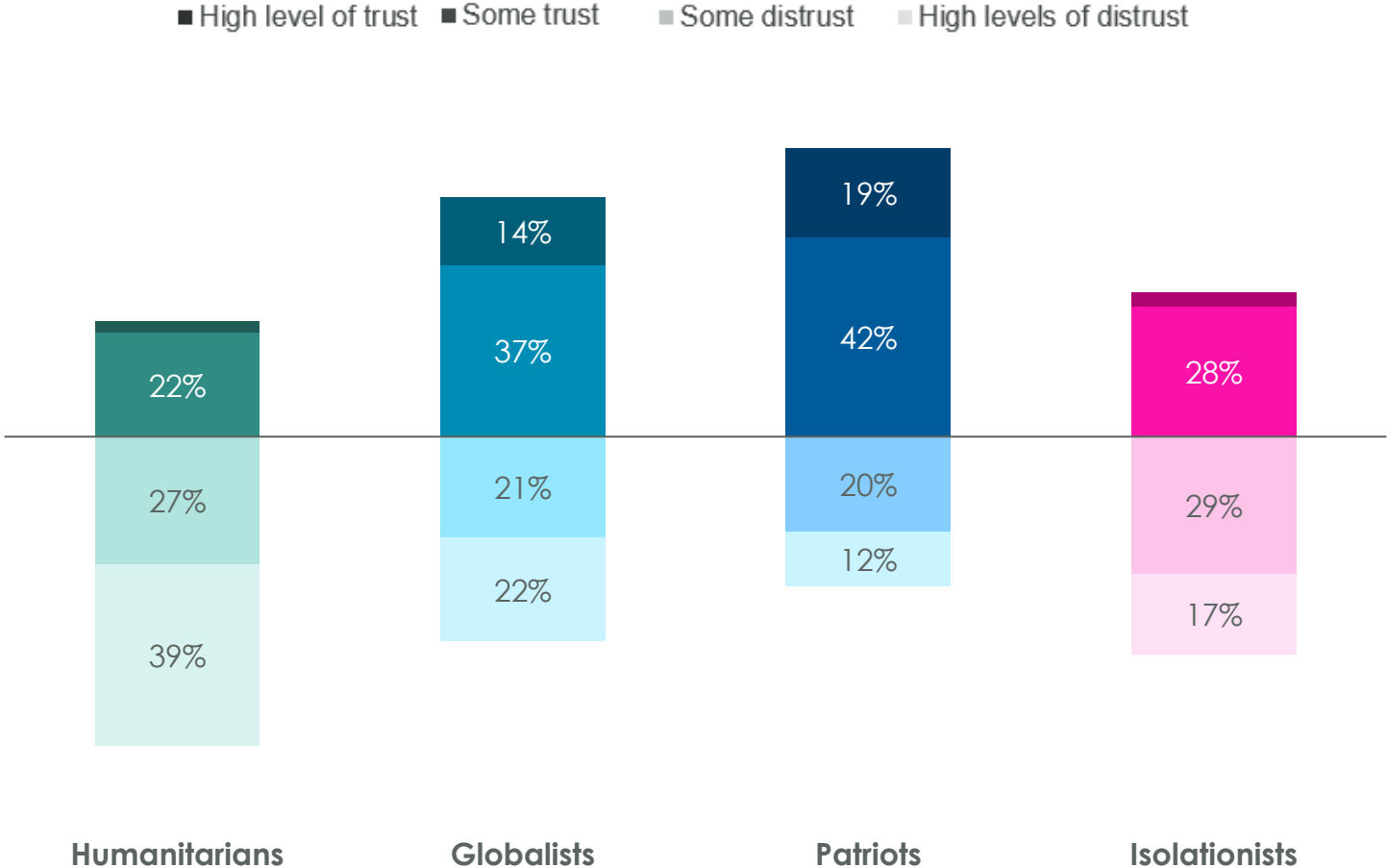


	Humanitarians	Globalists	Patriots	Isolationists
A champion of free trade and globalisation		✓	✓	✗
A diplomatic powerhouse		✓	✓	✗
A nation with strong and secure borders	✗		✓	✓
A light on the hill for liberal democracy	✓	✓		✗
A nation open to migrants	✓	✓	✗	✗

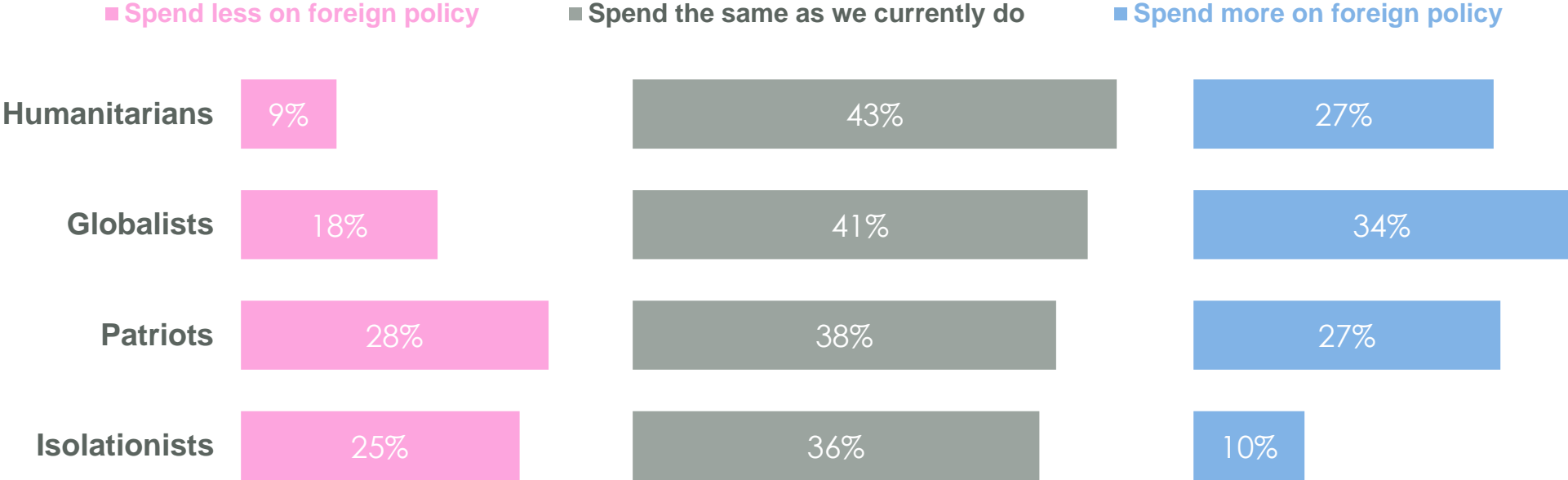
# The tribes are divided on whether globalisation has benefited the UK, and whether those benefits have been shared across society



# Globalists and Patriots have far higher levels of trust in government on foreign policy decisions than Humanitarians and Isolationists



# Humanitarians and Globalists generally support maintaining or increasing foreign policy spending, while Patriots and Isolationists are more sceptical

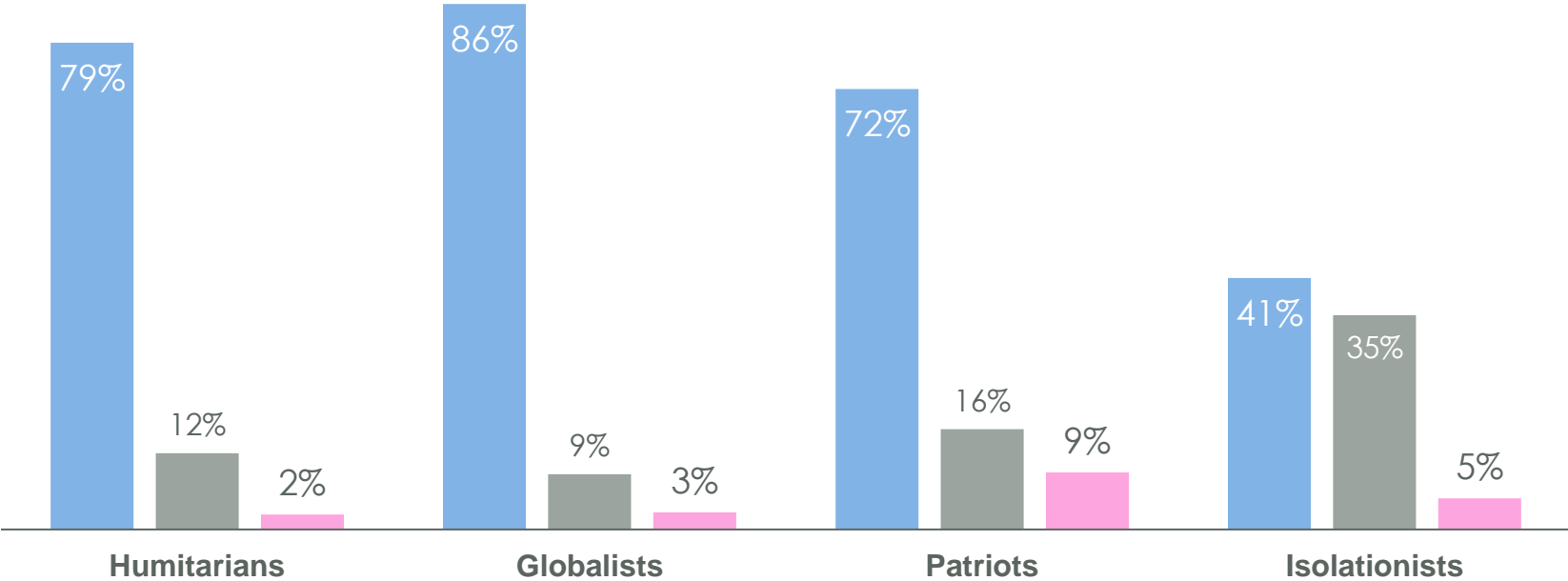




Despite the fragmentation of attitudes between tribes, some issues do appear to unite the majority of British people, such as climate change

Do you support or oppose the UK taking a leading international role in tackling climate change?

■ Support ■ Neither ■ Oppose





# Electoral distribution and influence of the four tribes

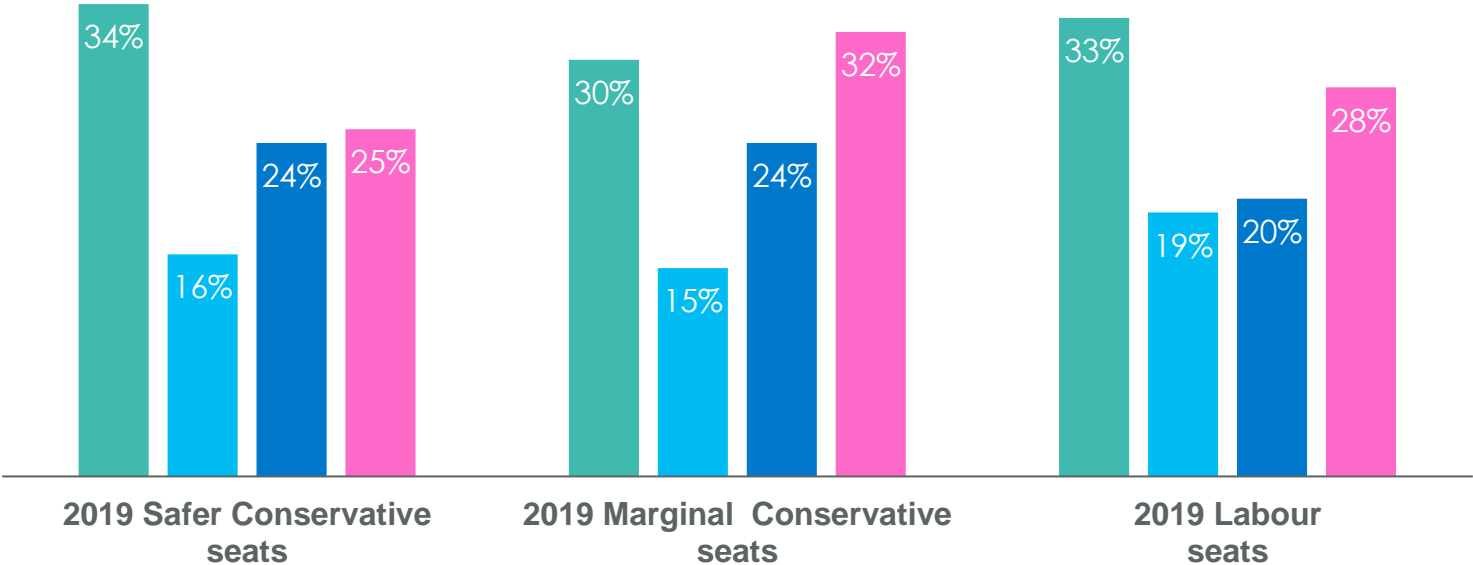
---

# How the tribes are distributed across the electoral map

■ Humanitarians ■ Globalists ■ Patriots ■ Isolationists

**Humanitarians** are more common in safer seats on either side of the political divide.

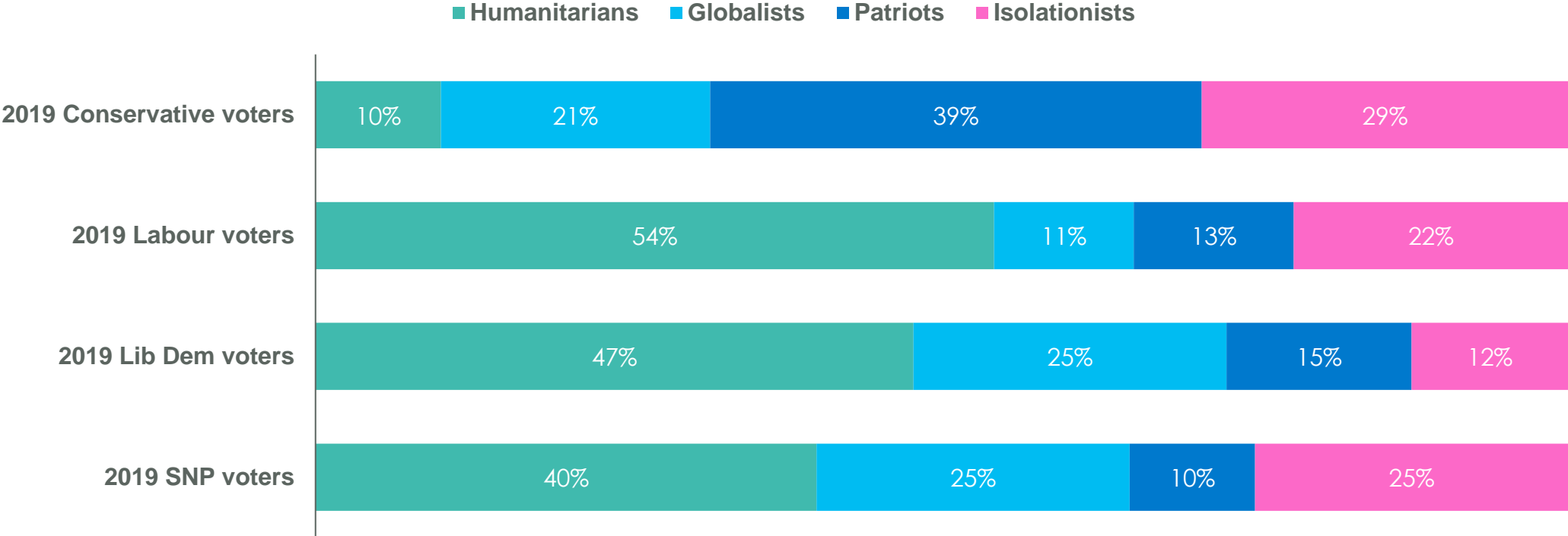
**Globalists** are a key segment of Conservative voters in Labour-held seats.



**Isolationists** are the single most common tribe in Conservative marginal seats.

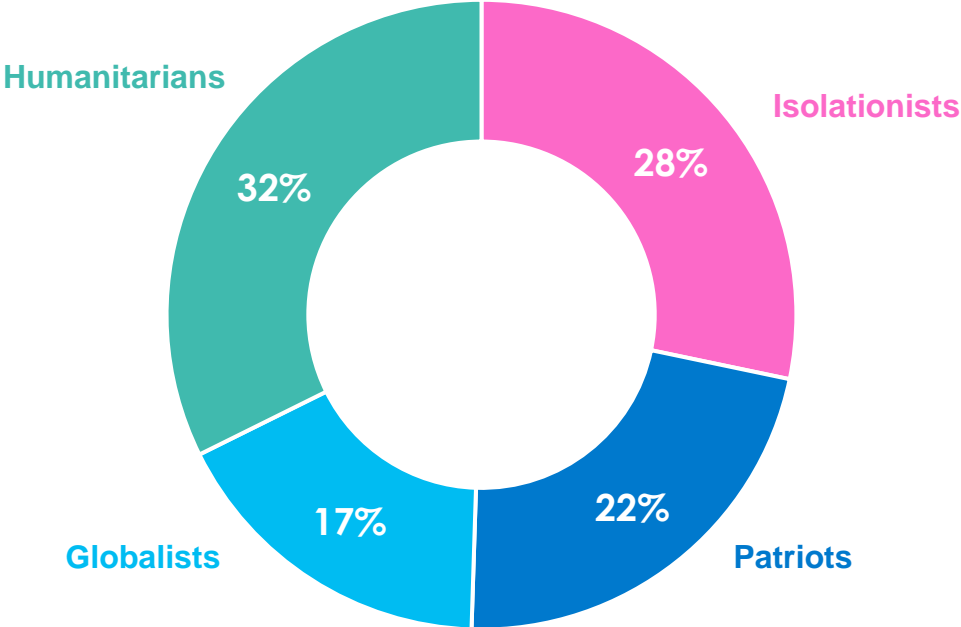
**Patriots** are both more common in marginal and safer Conservative seats.

# Patriots are the largest tribe among Conservative voters, while the Humanitarians are the largest tribe amongst voters of the three other largest parties

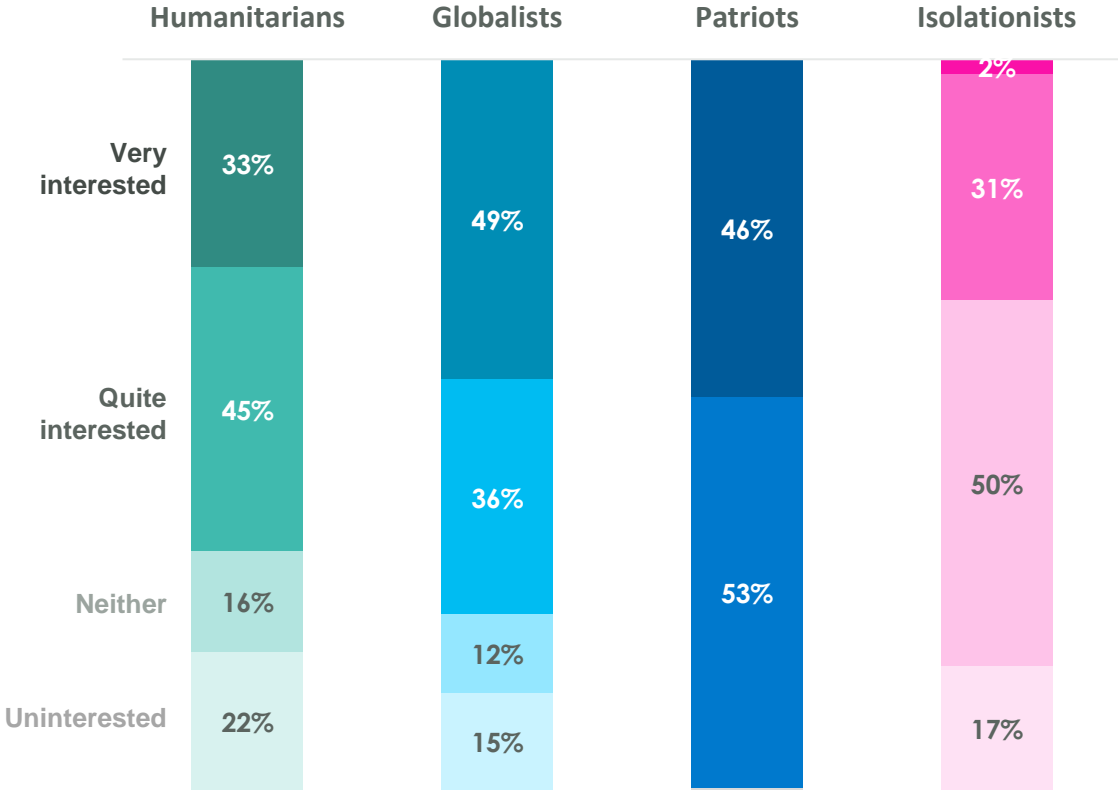


# Levels of interest in UK foreign policy differ significantly between the tribes, which means the electoral significance of their views also varies

Share of each tribe among UK adults



Interest in foreign policy by tribe



## What does this research tell us?

The distinctions in the attitudes and preferences of the British people about foreign policy are more complex than a narrative of polarisation can capture. Rather than being 'split down the middle', the UK electorate falls into four main tribes.

**Building public consent for foreign policy is therefore a process of coalition-building.**

**These four tribes are not evenly distributed**, and differences in their political engagement and likelihood of voting means they hold differing levels of influence in shaping UK foreign policy. The voices that are most vocal on Twitter and in Westminster are not necessarily the most electorally meaningful.

Every tribe has areas of overlap in values, issues and priorities with at least one other tribe, and these often extend across multiple tribes depending on the issue. **Understanding these pathways to consensus support for different types of foreign policy initiatives will be crucial to both political and policy outcomes.**