

# The Socio-Political Instability Observer

## Results from the Socio-Political Instability Survey

### September 2023



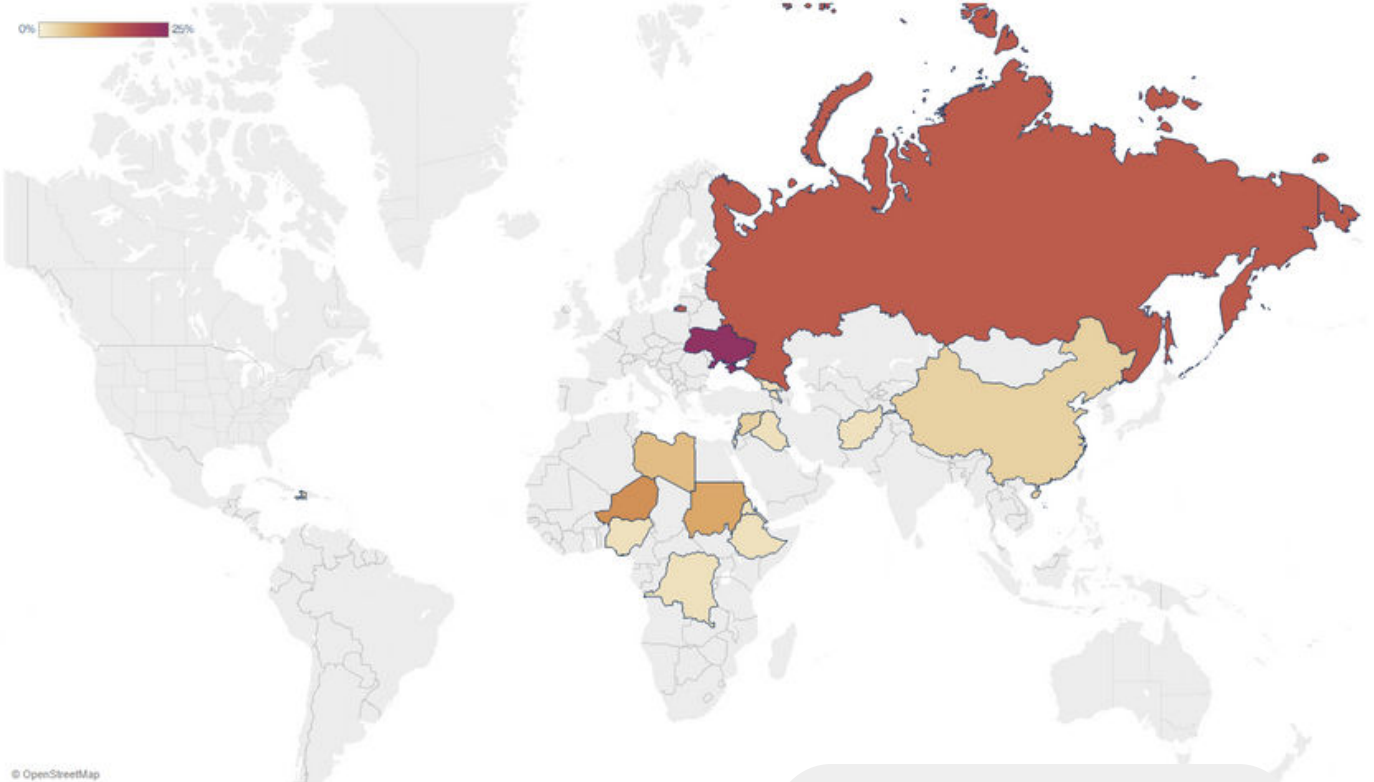
Source (from left to right): U.S Secretary of State Blinken participates in a UN Security Council Ministerial on the Middle East. President Mohamed Bazoum on a official visit to Bénin, [Présidence de la République du Bénin](#). Ukrainian Bohdana SPG battery in the Northern operative zone, [Mil.gov.ua](#). Kim Jong-un and Vladimir Putin, [Kremlin.ru](#).

This 'Observer' factsheet outlines the results of the second Socio-Political Instability Survey. In this survey, socio-political instability encompasses various drivers of volatility, such as economic, diplomatic, environmental, and demographic factors. In extreme socio-political instability, this includes the probability of conflict fatalities, specifically, the incidence of armed conflict that results in fatalities. To learn more about the Survey, please visit the [HCSS website](#).

The second edition of the Observer highlights the continued importance of Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a significant factor in shaping expert perceptions of global socio-political instability in the short term. Russia and Ukraine are seen as major sources of instability, through the worsening of the war in Ukraine and the conflict's role as a catalyst for geopolitical bloc forming. However, experts do not perceive that the war in Ukraine is likely to escalate into a wider Russia-NATO confrontation any time soon. Africa, particularly Middle Africa, continues to be seen as a major source of future socio-political instability, with a number of coups in September highlighting how volatile situations can escalate and inspire other armed events. This potential for volatility around the world is heightened by perceptions of a retreat from multilateralism and a lack of 'international community', also highlighted in the previous May Observer. Please note, this Observer highlights the findings of a survey conducted throughout September 2023, before the October 7th Hamas attack on Israel and subsequent events.

# 1. Socio-political instability: Russia-Ukraine Conflict Persists and Mid-West Africa Battles 'Coup Contagion'

**Country likely to experience the most socio-political instability in the next six months**  
 Experts surveyed predict that Ukraine will face the most socio-political instability in the short-term



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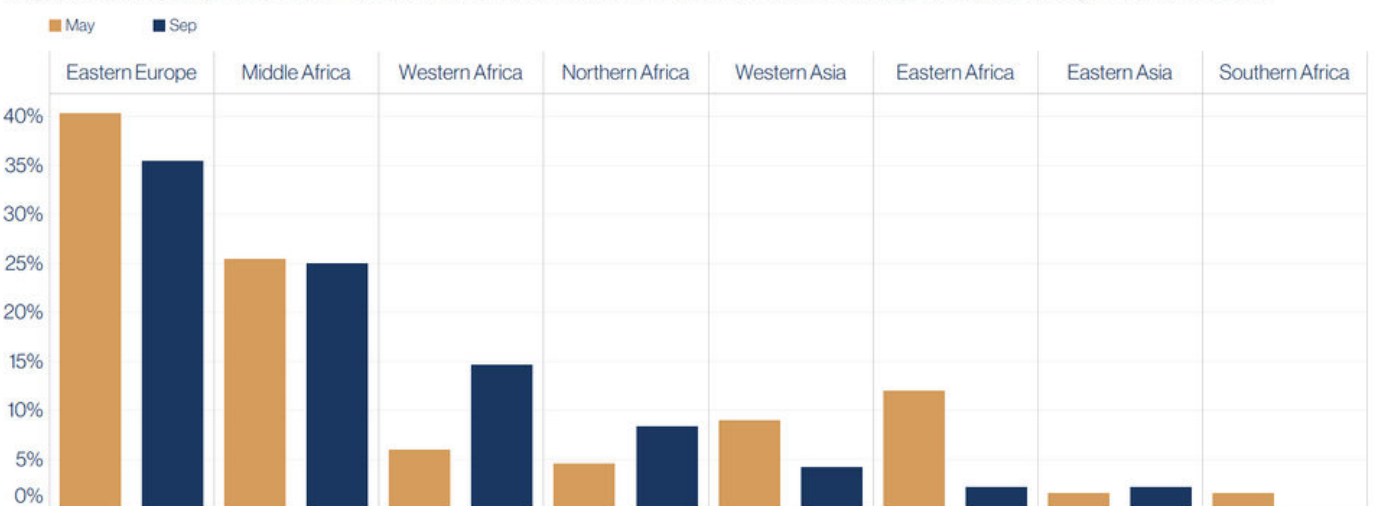
Top 3 Sept 2023:	Top 3 May 2023:
1.  Ukraine 24%	1.  Sudan 42%
2.  Russia 15%	2.  Ukraine 33%
3.  Niger 11%	3.  Russia 9%

### Drivers of socio-political instability

Experts surveyed ranked five drivers of socio-political instability in terms of impact globally, with 1 being the most impactful driver

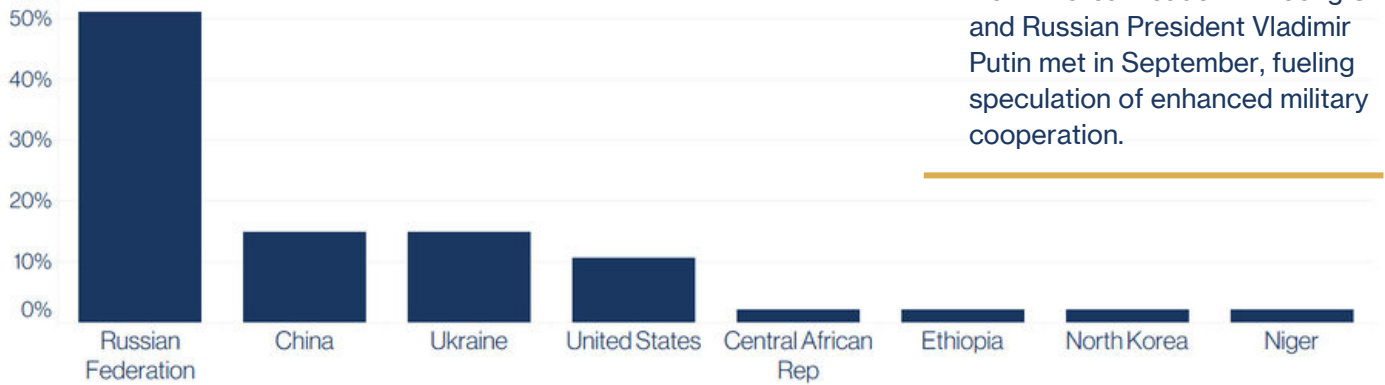
- 1 Economic
- 2 Military
- 3 Environmental
- 4 Demographic
- 5 Diplomatic

**Region likely to experience the most socio-political instability in the next six months**  
 Experts surveyed predict that Eastern Europe will continue to face the most socio-political instability in the short term



### Country likely to exert the most influence on global socio-political instability in the short term

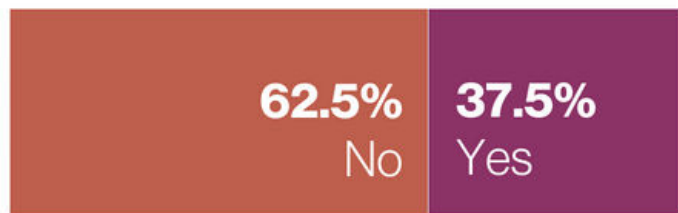
Experts surveyed predict that the Russian Federation will continue to exert the greatest influence on global socio-political instability in the next six months



- Our May survey coincided with a series of Chinese military exercises encircling Taiwan. Tensions are expected to stabilise through the end of this year.
- North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and Russian President Vladimir Putin met in September, fueling speculation of enhanced military cooperation.

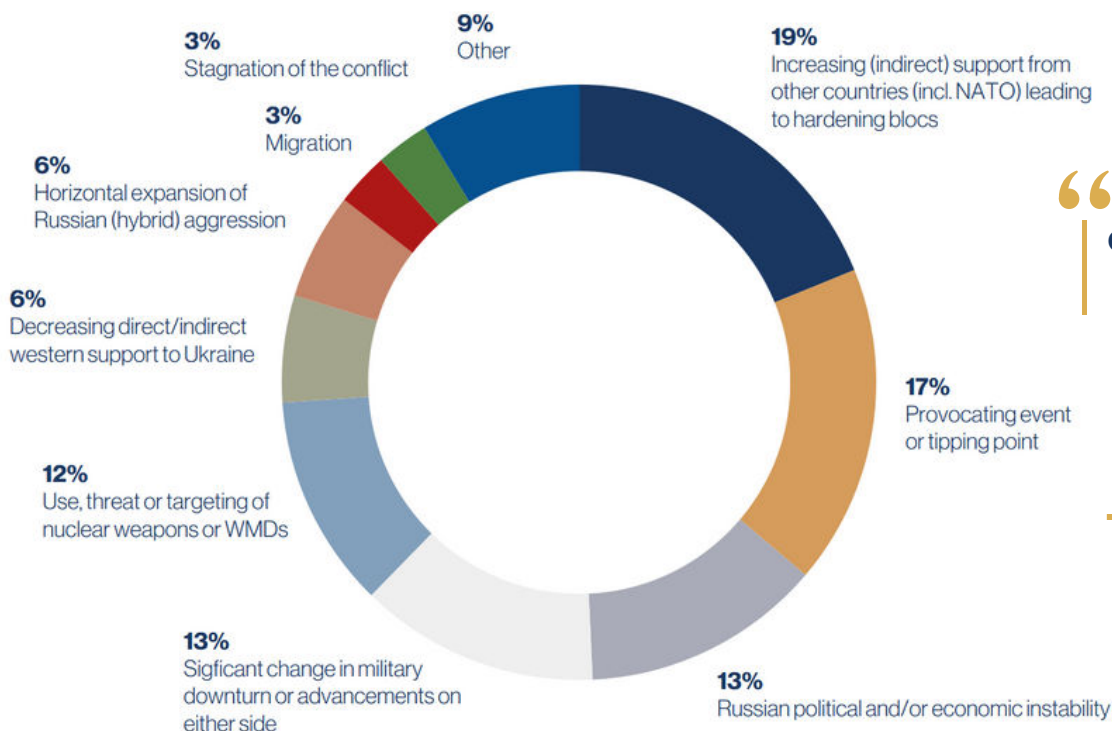
## 2. Beyond Ukraine: The Risk of Escalation into a Russia-NATO war

Will the war between Russia and Ukraine escalate into a wider conflict between Russia-NATO in the next 2 to 5 years?



### Factors which may escalate the Russia-Ukraine war into a wider Russia-NATO conflict within the next 2 to 5 years

Experts surveyed think that increased tension and bloc forming through the supply of arms and indirect support from allies will be the most important factor in a potential escalation of the conflict



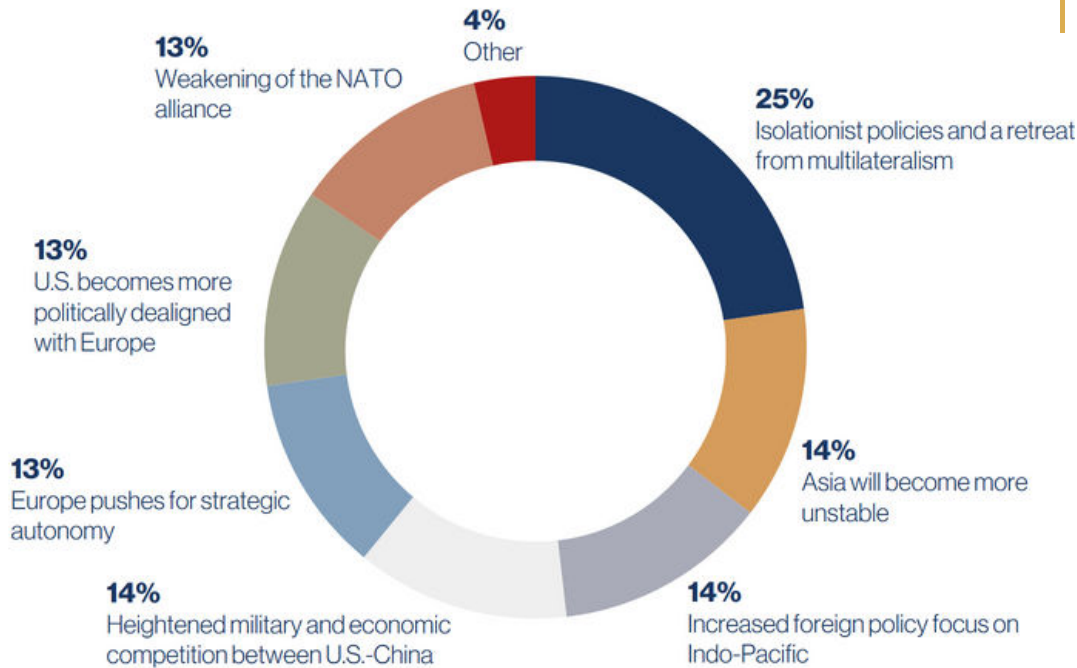
Quote:  
The 'wider' conflict will mainly exist in the form of a new East-West divide...



### 3. From Red States to Red Lines: U.S. foreign policy and the future of multilateralism

#### The impact that two successive Republican presidencies would have on U.S. foreign policy

Those surveyed predict that isolationist policies and a retreat from multilateralism will be the most significant impacts



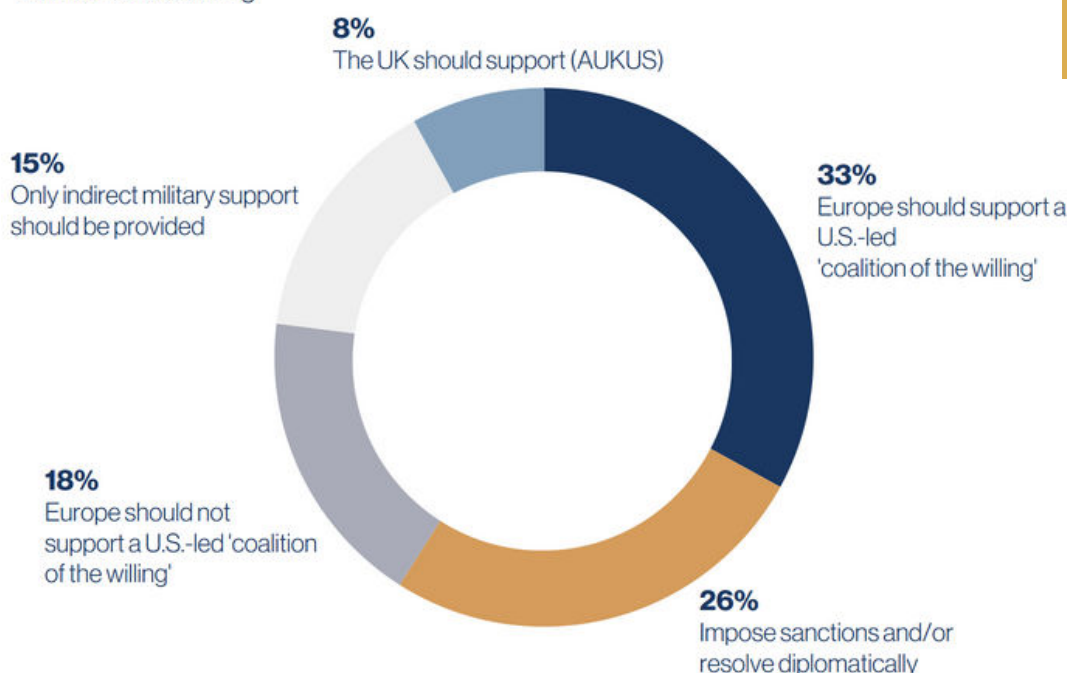
Quote:

“America first” will impact European security at a time when Europe is not yet ready to stand on its own two feet.

### 4. Europe's 'Coalition of the Willing': Strategies for Navigating a China-Taiwan Conflict

#### European responses to a possible invasion of Taiwan by the People's Republic of China

Those surveyed recommend that European powers should support a U.S.-led 'coalition of the willing'



Quote:

China is too big and a serious player globally for countries to join the U.S. in its excursions as was the case in Iraq and Afghanistan.

## Survey respondents

### Experts' place of residence by country

Most experts surveyed reside in the Netherlands



- 48 experts from universities, think tanks and research institutes completed this version of the survey.
- Our expert respondents reside in 19 different countries across 8 different regions.
- Half of the experts live in Western Europe, with 35% of experts based in the Netherlands. This may account for the importance placed on the war in Ukraine and the influence of the Russian Federation.
- 15% of respondents reside in the United States.
- International Relations, Security Studies and Military Studies were the domains of expertise most represented amongst those surveyed, 20% each.
- We endeavour to expand participation in future surveys.

### Experts' domain of expertise

Indicated fields of expertise or professional domain by experts surveyed



In May this year, HCSS launched The Socio-Political Instability Survey, inviting over 500 think tankers from around the world to give their views on the short term likelihood and geography of volatility globally using both multiple-choice and open questions. The results of the open-ended questions were gained through a process of quantitative and qualitative discourse analysis. With specified themes or coding categories determined by the authors. The most popular categories are those included in the most responses, but each response usually includes multiple categories. The survey was completed throughout the month of September 2023 and is the second of a series of surveys, to be completed throughout the year. The survey results will contribute to the HCSS Socio-Political Instability Monitor dashboard. Each survey will produce an 'Observer', like this document, highlighting key findings which will be available on the HCSS website.

### Take part in the next Socio-Political Instability Survey!

**Are you a geopolitics, economics, security, climate, area or international affairs expert affiliated with a think tank, university or research institute? Interested in taking part in the next Socio-Political Instability Survey? Sign up via the [Socio-Political Instability Survey page](#)**

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