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Type: Roundtable

Public discourse, public opinion and national security

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Recent British national security policy documents recognise an important role for the public. Both the Strategic Defence Review and the National Security Strategy argue that building resilience at home, and ensuring the public are engaged and supportive of UK approaches to producing security, are crucial. As Sir Keir Starmer's introduction to the National Security Strategy stresses, 'nations are strongest when they are bound together by a shared purpose', demanding 'nothing less than national unity' in response to the challenges ahead (HM Government, 2025: 6). To achieve the UK's national security goals, it is recognised that this requires a 'whole-of-society' approach (HM Government, 2025:12). As the foreword to the Strategic Defence Review states, 'everyone has a role to play and a national conversation on how we do it is required' (Ministry of Defence, 2025: 9).

Yet, what an inclusive, thoughtful and realistic national conversation on the UK's defence and national security might look like is not clear. Bringing together cross-disciplinary expertise and research, this roundtable will discuss the relationship between the public and policymaking on topics of national security, asking:

How do diverse UK publics understand and experience 'security'?

How do these understandings and experiences translate into policy preferences for producing national security for the UK?

What is the basis upon which different policy approaches are preferred and prioritised?

To what extent is there consensus or dissensus on national security policy among key stakeholders (i.e., the public, policymakers, the third sector)?

Track Classification: Security Policy and Practice