

For Greenland's voters, foreign politics are local



Greenlandic attitudes toward foreign policy show support for more involvement internationally, but, the closer to home Nuuk looks to make its mark, the better, according to the second Nasiffik study of voters' opinions about foreign policy.

By Kevin McGwin

A second study of Greenlandic attitudes towards foreign policy published on December 12th suggests slight changes over the past three years, but otherwise cements Nato, the EU and an "Arctic axis" made up of neighbouring countries and the Arctic Council as the country's preferred partners.

Presented in Nuuk at Ilisimatusarfik (the University of Greenland) by its co-authors, Rasmus Leander Nielsen and Maria Ackrén, and commented on by Mininnguaq Kleist, the permanent secretary of Greenland's foreign ministry, the findings of the 2024 edition of the Foreign and Security Policy Opinion Poll in Greenland offer insight into people's opinions and how they have shifted since publication of the results of the initial survey three years ago.

Domestic issues that still top the list

While the results indicate that international affairs, including relations with the US and China, continue to loom large among lawmakers and in the media, it is domestic issues that still top the list of people's concerns.

The importance of day-to-day issues like the cost of living comes as no surprise, according to Rasmus Leander Nielsen, who also co-authored the first study, but what was uncertain was how depictions of rivalry in the Arctic region and a general focus on foreign conflicts would sway their thinking.



Rasmus Leander Nielsen and Maria Ackrén are co-authors on the survey 'The Second Foreign and Security Policy Opinion Poll in Greenland', which provides insight into the population's position on a number of foreign and security policy issues.

Photo: Ilisimatusarfik

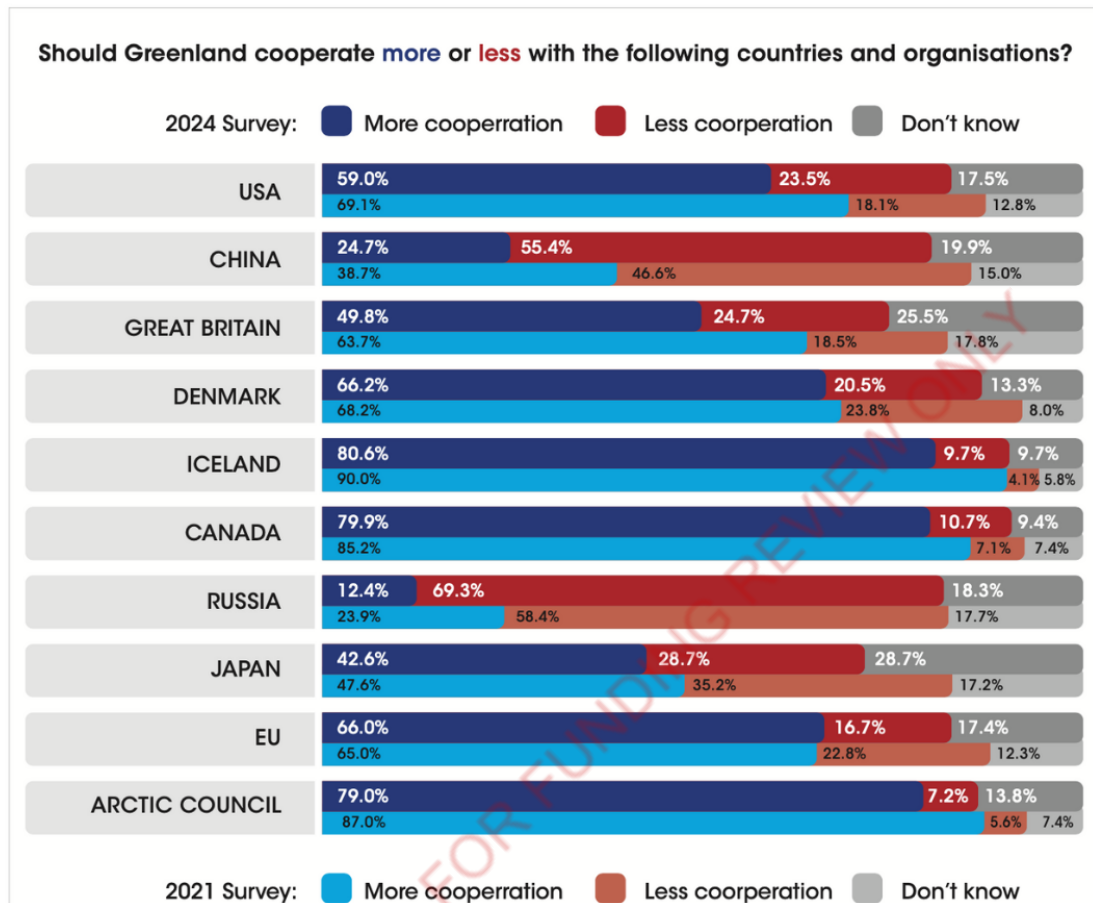
"No-one really knew what people were thinking about the Arctic Council, the US, China, the EU," he says. "We can see people pay attention to foreign affairs, but, when they do, their focus is still on what is closest to home."

Still, he reckons the most recent findings, as well as how attitudes towards foreign policy have changed, will play an important role in informing decision makers and voters as Greenland continues to formalise its foreign-policy role. This could be a general discussion about Greenland's expanding network of representative offices; its newest representative office is in Beijing, yet half of the survey respondents would like to see relations with China cooled.

"People pay attention to foreign affairs, but, when they do, their focus is still on what is closest to home"

– Rasmus Leander Nielsen

Figure 3: Cooperation with Other Countries and Organizations



The survey shows the Greenlandic public's opinion on which countries Greenland should cooperate more – or less – with in 2021 and 2024.

Graphics from the report: 'The Second Foreign and Security Policy Opinion Poll in Greenland'

Local involvement is crucial

Take attitudes towards the military. In both 2021 and in the current findings people roundly reject the notion of a Greenlandic military, but, after some initial scepticism, there has been growing interest in emergency-preparedness training for civilians offered jointly by the Danish military and local Greenlandic authorities.

“The training programme went from being divisive to a success once people understood it was civilian oriented,” Rasmus Leander Nielsen says. “That’s a good indication that people are interested in these types of issues, but they want to be involved with them at their own level.”

The survey, conducted by Epinion, a Danish polling firm, on behalf of [Nasiffik – Centre for Foreign & Security Policy](#) at Ilisimatusarfik, reflects the perspectives of 702 respondents in Greenland.

Topphoto: Cover of the survey report *The Second Foreign and Security Policy Opinion Poll in Greenland*

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