



General Election 2019: 5 things to ask your local candidates and canvassers



Calling all global citizens - we need to move beyond polarised soundbites on Brexit to and bring a range of international issues to the fore of this election!

As polling day draws closer interacting with party representatives is valuable. The points and questions you raise are likely to be fed back to party headquarters and can have real influence on candidates' approaches and parties' campaign priorities.

By highlighting the links between national and global interests, you can send the message that constituents care about global issues, and that policies should reflect this. You could also trigger candidates to swot up and go on the record with their approach to the UN different foreign policies. As well as helping raise these issues further up the agenda, it also makes it possible to hold the elected candidate to account once they are in office.

Do your bit to support internationalism by asking candidates and canvassers the following questions and publicise their answers to your networks (our answers are included!)

1. What will you do to support the United Nations?

2020 is [a make or break year for our international system](#). Governments have decided to mark the UN's 75th anniversary with a leaders' summit in September 2020, and a declaration on "The Future We Want, the United Nations We Need". Alongside a number of other major international events next year, including make—or-break talks on nuclear disarmament, and the crucial UN

climate summit in Glasgow mean that this is a crucial and rare opportunity to take stock of our current global system – and demand action to improve it.

75 years ago the UK, then a very different kind of power, made a strong case for the creation of the United Nations. Similar bold leadership to reform our global system, and truly make it deliver for all, is called for once again. The UK should use its influence at the UN, particularly on the Security Council to support proposals to transform the UN into an inclusive institution that works in partnership with civil society to deliver for all. UNA-UK's Together First Campaign will incubate and promote those proposals.

2. What is your approach to nuclear disarmament? Do you support the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)?

World leaders will meet next year to discuss the system for regulating nuclear weapons – the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The lack of progress on disarmament from nuclear armed states means that trust is at an all time low, and there is a very real chance that this process will disintegrate. States and experts are increasingly questioning whether multilateral disarmament might have had its day.

In this context there is an urgent need for the UK to rebuild trust with non-nuclear states by taking a [completely fresh attitude](#) to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) – also known as the nuclear ban treaty, which is supported by a majority of states and is an understandable response to nuclear armed states' failure to live up to their legal obligation to work for a world free of nuclear weapons.

The UK should acknowledge the TPNW's value and legitimacy in building a world free from nuclear weapons. It should signal an intention to attend future meetings of states parties to the Treaty as an observer. And it should follow the [guidance](#) of UN officials such as the UN High Representative on Disarmament Affairs: "don't ignore it, don't attack it". To be taken seriously these actions must be pursued in tandem with unmistakable UK actions to make progress on its international obligation to disarm. This would place the UK in the vital position of bridgebuilder between nuclear and non-nuclear states.

3. How can the UK take a leading role in the safeguarding of human rights globally?

[Human rights are under siege](#) at a time when they are more needed than ever. And yet the funding that human rights receives is pitiful, particularly with respect to overall aid funding – a dynamic that contributes to human rights becoming the ["forgotten pillar"](#) of our global system.

The UK should commit to earmarking 1% of its Official Development Assistance budget, 0.007% of GNI, to human rights. This amount is readily affordable, and indeed might seem inconsequential, but would represent a tripling of current budgets. In addition to the important work that these funds would do in protecting the most vulnerable, making this commitment would send a powerful signal as to the importance of the agenda.

Much as the UK's commitment to spending 0.7% of GNI to Official Development Assistance makes the UK a world leader on development issues and forms a significant part of British soft

power, this commitment would propel the UK into a leadership position in defence of the human rights agenda.

4. Would you increase UK contributions to UN peacekeeping?

UN peacekeeping is one of the international community's most important tools to help end conflicts and foster reconciliation. Over the past 70 years, UN missions have succeeded in dozens of countries, from Liberia to Tajikistan. [Studies have found it to be more effective and substantially cheaper than comparable operations](#). They also significantly benefit the troops involved, providing unmatched training, coalition building, and career enrichment opportunities.

The UK has a commendable record on UN peacekeeping and has increased its troop contributions of late: [doubling the number of troops deployed in 2016](#) and recently [committing](#) to a higher-risk and very valuable deployment in Mali. However, given the size and capacity of the UK's armed forces, the lack of other significant deployments, and the obligations placed upon the UK by its permanent membership of the UN Security Council, there is a capacity to make yet greater contributions.

The contribution of an additional battalion-size contingent would make the UK the biggest Troop Contributing Country in Europe. This would significantly increase the UK's prestige and clout in the UN, answering many of the questions raised regarding the legitimacy of UK's leadership role at the Security Council. It would also go a significant way to bridging the divide at the heart of peacekeeping between ["those that lead and those that bleed"](#).

UN peacekeeping is incredibly cost effective, and many of the costs are covered by the UN itself. However, it is not a revenue neutral endeavour for a state such as the UK, and so such a commitment would need to be supported by the earmarking of funds and identification of suitable funding streams. The exact amount such a deployment would cost would vary significantly according to its location and nature, but the sums involved are relatively speaking not large – of the same order of magnitude as the cost of purchasing a single fighter aircraft.

5. Would you support a review of the UK's national security strategy? Would you champion an inclusive process?

The security context has changed dramatically since the previous National Security Strategy (NSS) and Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR), held in 2015. A new review is therefore long overdue. The insubstantial National Security Capability Review (NSCR) in 2017 and the even more superficial Modernising Defence Programme in 2018 do not compensate for this strategic void at the heart of the UK's approach to peacebuilding and security.

While there was an opportunity for civil society to contribute evidence back in 2015, the consultation was not transparent and was widely seen as ignored by the defence establishment. We live in a democracy and the UK Government should be accountable to the public. The lack of an inclusive process to determine the UK's security strategy means that assumptions on, for example, the efficacy of the doctrine of nuclear deterrence, or the adoption of militaristic approaches to foreign policy go unchallenged.

The UK Government should start a national programme of public engagement on the issue of Britain's security and seek advice from all parts of UK society around priorities and approaches when it comes to security. Much greater emphasis on international cooperation, diplomacy and global solidarity should be explored as some of the most effective means to combat the major threats facing our country.

Image: The famous black door of Number 10 Downing Street, London (c) UK Government, used under Creative Commons Licence 2.0.

Created in November 2019.