

America

Homicides are up

US image abroad has rebounded, says poll

WASHINGTON, June 10, (AP) — The United States' image around the world has improved sharply since President Joe Biden took office, according to new surveys conducted in 16 countries, including many long-standing allies of the US.

The Pew Research Center surveys show majorities of the citizens across the countries — more than 6 in 10 in each — express confidence in Biden to “do the right thing” in world affairs.

Biden arrived in Britain on Wednesday on the first leg of his first overseas trip, hoping to reestablish the United States' global standing and reinforce partnerships with key European allies.

Favorable ratings of the US have started to rebound after declining considerably during Donald Trump's four years as president, growing as much as 30 percentage points since last year in partner nations like France and Germany. In 2020, positive views of the US reached or neared low points in these two countries, as well as the United Kingdom, Canada and Japan.

In France, for example, 65% now have a favorable view of the US, up from 31% last year. No more than half in France rated the US positively during Trump's presidency, but at least 6 in 10 had during each of Barack Obama's eight years as president.

And 74% of the public in France say they have confidence in Biden, a Democrat, to do the right thing regarding world affairs, compared with just 11% saying that for Trump, a Republican, last year. Across 12 countries surveyed in both 2020 and 2021, the gap in confidence in the two presidents is at least 40 percentage points — in Biden's favor in all 12.

Biden seeks to reaffirm to allies his commitment to the US role abroad, which stands in contrast to Trump's “America First” approach. Biden will initially meet with Group of Seven leaders before continuing on to Brussels for a NATO summit, a meeting with heads of the European Union and several face-to-face meetings with other world leaders, including Russian President Vladimir Putin in Geneva.

Even as the US global standing is rosier among the citizens of these nations around the world, Biden faces challenges as he looks to transition the US out of the Trump era. The surveys find many nations skeptical of the US, both as a global partner and as a functioning democracy.

No more than 2 in 10 across the 16 countries say the US is a “very” reliable partner, with majorities in most calling the US “somewhat” reliable. In Canada, France, Spain and Greece, roughly a third say the US is not reliable as a global partner.

Germany is the only nation surveyed where a majority say relations with the US will improve in the next few years. Across most other countries, more think the relationship will stay the same rather than get better.

The state of US democracy also earns mixed reviews around the world. In Canada, for example, 6 in 10 say the political system in the US does not work well, as do about two-thirds of Australians and New Zealanders. About 4 in 10 in France and Spain say the US democracy is working poorly, compared with slim majorities who say it does work at least somewhat well. In Germany and the U.K., people are closely divided. And majorities across most of the 16 countries say the US democracy “used to be a good example, but has not been in recent years.”

Meanwhile, on social media and in political speeches, some Republicans and pro-police groups say last year's calls to slash spending on law enforcement have led to a dramatic rise in killings in cities overseen by Democrats. The increases they cite are real, and several big cities did make cuts to police spending. But the reductions were mostly modest, and the same big increases in homicides are being seen nationwide — even in cities that increased police spending. At the same time, the rates for burglaries, drug offenses and many other types of crime are down in many cities across the country.

The effort to blame Democrats for crime may offer a preview of Republicans' strategy for upcoming elections: a new twist on an old “law and order” argument from the party's past, harkening back to President Richard Nixon.

Just as it did half a century ago, the argument ignores the complicated reasons for fluctuations in crime rates — a list that today includes the upheaval wrought by the coronavirus pandemic and protests that erupted after the killing of George Floyd by police. “2020 was just a crazy complicated year where lots of things happened, and there are lots of potential explanations for why we saw these big changes,” said David Abrams, a University of Pennsylvania Law School professor, who tracks crime rates and is studying the impact of the pandemic. The bottom line? “It's complicated.”

Showing

Late last month, the National Fraternal Order of Police posted a graphic on social media showing big increases in the homicide rate in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Minneapolis, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and Portland, Oregon — all cities currently led by Democrats. “The leadership in all of these cities turned the keys over to the ‘Defund the Police’ mob,” the post read.

The numbers in it were alarming: Homicides in Chicago, up by 22% through late May compared with the same period last year. In Minneapolis, homicides were up by 56%; in Portland, 800%.

Top Republicans have taken up the claim, too. “Look at what's happening where they're defunding the police,” former President Donald Trump said Saturday at the North Carolina GOP convention, echoing an argument he made on the campaign trail last year. “The crime rate is going up by 50, 60, 100%, 131% in one city.” Killings have been on the rise since 2020, but the numbers don't tell the whole story about reductions in police spending or a troubling increase in homicides being seen throughout the country.

Meanwhile, ‘SKYROCKETING MURDER RATES,’ claimed the National Fraternal Order of Police. “An explosion of violent crime,” said Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell. “Democrat-run cities across the country who cut funding for police have seen increases in crime,” tweeted U.S. Rep. Patrick McHenry, R-N.C., other types of crime are down, according to preliminary statistics and researchers who say crime initially dropped around the world after the pandemic began. While cities are reporting jumps in their homicide rate, there's been no similar increase in other crimes, like burglaries, robberies or drug offenses.

That's not what you'd expect if calls to defund the police were leading to a rash of crime, Abrams said.

“Any theory explaining the rise in homicides would also have to explain why we haven't seen a spike in other kinds of crimes,” he said. So why are killings up? Economic losses and personal stress brought on by the pandemic are one suggestion. COVID-19 also disrupted in-person education and many community programs designed to quell violence.

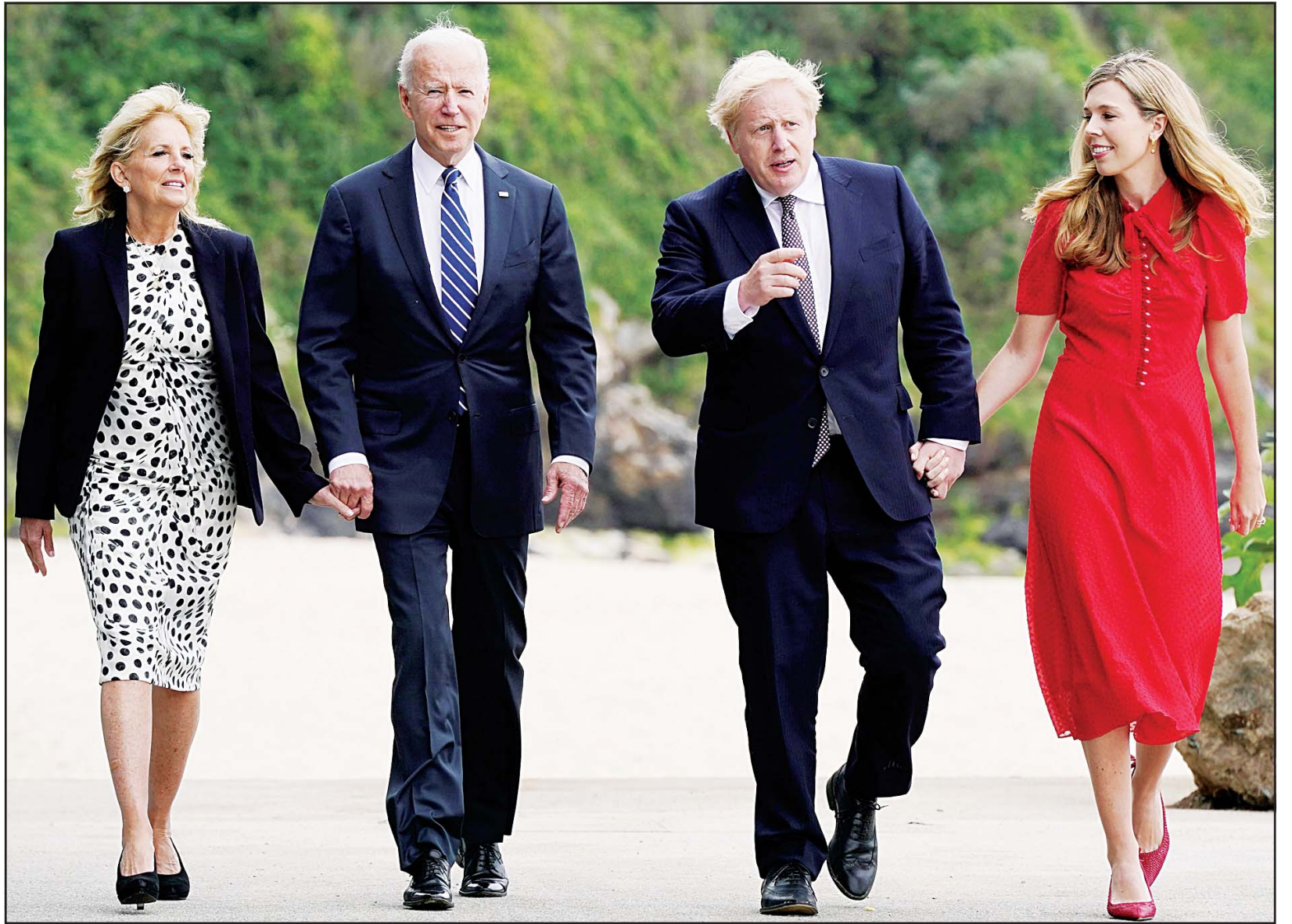
It put a strain on police departments, hospitals, courts and other institutions tasked with dealing with the impact of crime. Other possibilities include rising gun ownership and the protests over police killings that could have emboldened criminals. Then there are the host of factors that contribute to localized violence, including gangs, drugs and poverty.

James Alan Fox, a criminologist and professor at Boston's Northeastern University, said small changes to a police budget, or the party affiliation of a particular mayor, aren't likely to play a big role. Some violence fluctuations are part of long-standing problems. “It's not related to which party is ruling,” Fox said. “But you can win a lot of votes by pushing fear.”

Nixon used a similar argument in his successful 1968 presidential campaign, arguing that protests over civil rights “have torn 300 cities apart.” The strategy helped galvanize support among white voters concerned about racial integration, according to Elizabeth Hinton, a Yale Law School professor who studies the history of criminalization in America.



Trump



President Joe Biden and First Lady Jill Biden are greeted and walk with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his wife Carrie Johnson, ahead of the G-7 summit, June 10, in Carbis Bay, England. (AP)

Diplomacy

Bid to manage political, personal differences

Biden, Johnson strike convivial tone

CARBIS BAY, England, June 10, (AP) — President Joe Biden and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson met for the first time Thursday, looking to highlight their nations' famed “special relationship” but doing so against a backdrop of differences both political and personal.

Biden hopes to use his first overseas trip as president to reassure European allies that the United States had shed the transactional tendencies of Donald Trump's term and is a reliable partner again. Tensions could simmer beneath the surface, but the leaders immediately struck a tone of conviviality.

“I told the prime minister we have something in common. We both married way above our station,” Biden joked after a highly choreographed walk with their spouses.

Johnson laughed and said he was “not going to dissent from that one” but then seemed to hint that he would be looking to only improve relations with his American counterpart.

“I'm not going to disagree with you on that,” said Johnson, “or indeed on anything else.”

But there are areas of disagreement. The president staunchly opposed the Brexit movement, the British exodus from the European Union that Johnson championed, and has expressed great concern with the future of Northern Ireland. And Biden once called the British leader a “physical and emotional clone” of Trump.

The British government has worked hard to overcome that impression, stressing Johnson's common ground with Biden on issues such as climate change and his support for international institutions. But Johnson, the host for the Group of Seven summit that will follow his sit-down with Biden, has been frustrated by the lack of a new trade deal with the United States.

Before their formal discussions, the two men looked back on illustrious wartime predecessor, inspecting documents related to the Atlantic Charter, a declaration signed by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt in August 1941 setting out common goals for the world after World War II, including freer trade, disarmament

and the right to self-determination of all people.

Johnson noted that the charter laid the foundation for the United Nations and NATO.

“Yeah, I know,” said Biden, who later pumped his fist when he - incorrectly - suggested that Neville Chamberlain slipped a reference to labor unions into the document, an unlikely salute for the disgraced appeaser on the eve of the war.

The leaders had planned to visit the spectacular island of St. Michael's Mount but the trip was scrapped because of bad weather. Instead, they met above the beach at the G-7 site in Carbis Bay, staring out at the ocean while trading pleasantries.

Both couples - Johnson is newly married - held hands as they walked. First lady Jill Biden's black jacket had “LOVE” embroidered on the upper back - a fashion move that recalled her predecessor Melania Trump's decision to wear a jacket with “I really don't care, do u?” on the back during a 2018 trip to a Texas border town.

Reporters

The first lady told reporters that the president was “over prepared” for his meetings during his week in Europe, including a trip-ending summit with Russia's Vladimir Putin.

“He's been studying for weeks, working up to today,” she said. “Joe loves foreign policy.”

The leaders were expected to announce a new U.S.-U.K. task force to work on resuming travel between the two nations, according to a White House official. Most travel has been banned between the two nations since March 2020.

Both sides have stressed publicly that the meeting would be about reaffirming ties between longtime allies in a week in which Biden will look to rally the West to rebuff Russian meddling and publicly demonstrate it can compete economically with China.

National security adviser Jake Sullivan described Biden's initial calls with Johnson as “warm” and “constructive” and played down any differences between the two nations' goals.

“They've been very much down to

business,” Sullivan said earlier this week. “And I expect that their meeting together will just cover the waterfront. I mean, really, a wide range of issues where the two of them and the U.S. and United Kingdom do see eye to eye.”

Biden, who is fiercely proud of his Irish roots, has warned that nothing should undermine Northern Ireland's 1998 Good Friday peace accord. Some on the British side have viewed Biden warily because of his heritage. White House officials have said the United States does not plan to be involved in the negotiations and that Biden would not lecture Johnson but would urge that a resolution be reached expeditiously.

After Brexit, a new arrangement was needed for the border between Northern Ireland, which is part of the United Kingdom, and Ireland, because the European Union requires certain goods to be inspected and others not to be admitted at all. Ahead of a June 30 deadline, ongoing negotiations over goods - including sausages - have been contentious and have attracted the attention of the White House.

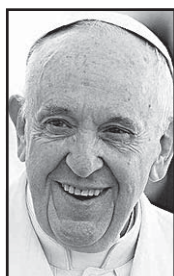
The two leaders also were expected to discuss climate change, the coronavirus pandemic, creating an infrastructure financing program for developing countries, Afghanistan and a refresher of the 80-year-old charter between the two nations, Sullivan said. There were also plans to launch a bilateral commission to research and defeat cancer. White House officials suggested that it not be read as another Cold War-era document but a pathway for an increasingly complex, interconnected globe.

But Trump's presence was still likely to be felt on Thursday. Johnson and Trump, for a time, appeared to be kindred spirits, both riding a wave of populism that in 2016 delivered Brexit and upended the American political landscape.

Biden, for his part, has expressed a mistrust of Johnson, who once unspooled a Trump-like insult of President Barack Obama, saying that Biden's former boss was “half-Kenyan” and had an ancestral dislike of Britain.



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau walks to a government plane at the airport in Ottawa, June 10. Trudeau will participate in the G7 Summit in the United Kingdom and NATO meeting in Belgium. (AP)



Pope Francis



Malala

News in Brief

Pope rejects resignation: Pope Francis refused Thursday to accept the resignation offered by German Cardinal Reinhard Marx over the sex abuse scandal in the church, but said a process of reform was necessary and that every bishop must take responsibility for the “catastrophe” of the crisis.

Francis wrote a letter to Marx in response to the German's bombshell announcement last week that he had offered to resign as archbishop of Munich and Freising over the church's mishandling of abuse cases.

Francis refused to accept the resignation and told Marx in the letter he must continue as archbishop.

Francis said what was necessary instead was a process of reform “that doesn't consist in words but attitudes that have the courage of putting oneself in crisis, of assuming reality regardless of the consequences.”

Francis' letter, written originally in Spanish and using an informal, brotherly tone, appeared to give Marx papal backing to proceed with the German Church's controversial reform process that was launched as a response to the abuse crisis and reports into the German hierarchy's mishandling of abuse cases over decades. (AP)

California officer charged: A Southern California police officer has been charged with threatening and striking homeless people while on duty in two separate incidents last year, prosecutors said.

Kevin Dinh, a 12-year-veteran of the Garden Grove Police Department, has not been arrested and is on administrative leave, the Los Angeles Times reported Wednesday.

The 37-year-old officer faces multiple charges including attempted criminal threats, battery and assault, the Orange County District Attorney's Office said.

Prosecutors said Dinh struck a homeless man on the head and threatened to knock out his teeth outside a restaurant last September. (AP)

7-foot gator found in post office: They say neither rain nor snow nor gloom of night will stop the US Postal Service, but an alligator could get in the way.

That's what happened at the Spring Hill Post Office in Florida's Hernando County, according to a sheriff's office Facebook post.

Sheriff's officials say someone stopped by the post office about 3:30 a.m. Wednesday to drop off a package and saw the 7-foot (2-meter) gator roaming

around the lobby. The building has automatic double doors that allows off-hours entry, officials said. (AP)

German ex-minister stripped: A Berlin university on Thursday stripped a prominent former German minister of her doctorate following a long-running saga over plagiarism allegations that led to her resignation last month.

Franziska Giffey quit as Germany's

minister for women and families in mid-May, but the center-left Social Democrat is still a leading candidate to become Berlin's mayor in an election in September.

Berlin's Free University said it had concluded that Giffey's doctorate was obtained with “deception over the independence of her academic achievement.” It said her thesis used texts and references from other authors without sufficiently labeling them as such. (AP)



In this Monday, June 7, 2021 photo, Rep Abigail Spanberger, D-Va., (right), listens to distiller Sherry Brockenbrough, during a tour of the Hilltop distillery in Maidens, Va. Spanberger held a roundtable discussion with distillers to discuss COVID-19 reopening challenges experienced by small businesses & regulatory issues facing central Virginia distilleries. (AP)

Pakistani police arrests cleric: Pakistani police have arrested a cleric after a video of him went viral on social media, in which he threatens Nobel Laureate Malala Yousafzai over her recent comments about marriage, officials said Thursday.

The cleric, Mufti Sardar Ali Haqqani, was arrested in Lakki Marwat, a district in the northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, on Wednesday, said Waseem Sajjad, a local police chief.

In the video, the cleric threatens to target Malala with a suicide attack when she returns to Pakistan, allegedly because of her comments earlier this month to British Vogue magazine about marriage that he claims insulted Islam. (AP)

Car bomb attack kills six: At least six Afghan security forces were killed and 10 others were injured in a car bomb attack that was detonated close to a military base in Afghanistan's northern Baghlan province, said officials Thursday.

A senior official and the commander of 3rd Brigade of 217 Pamir Army Corps, Abbas Tawakoli confirming the attack said that it was targeted by the security forces before reaching its target.

“After the attack, the Taliban started a gunfight, but their attack was pushed back by security forces,” he said. The attack took place in Bagh-e-Shamal area in Pul-e-Khumri city, the center of Baghlan province. (KUNA)