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Public Perceptions of UK Intelligence

Still in the Dark?

Daniel W B Lomas and Stephen Ward

Opinion polling of public attitudes on the UK's intelligence agencies reveals that Britons are often still ambivalent around issues of agency activity and powers despite increasing engagement and outreach activity. Drawing parallels with similar polling in North America and Europe, this article suggests that while public support for national agencies remains relatively strong, with high levels of 'trust', views on what intelligence agencies do – and who 'does intelligence' – remain deeply wedded to James Bond-like clichés. Daniel W B Lomas and Stephen Ward argue that, while popular perceptions of intelligence have traditionally offered cover and even increased awareness of agencies such as the Secret Intelligence Service, the lack of public awareness is dangerous as agencies build a 'licence to operate' in the 21st century.

Over the past three decades, the UK intelligence agencies have moved from the shadows to a more public-facing role. In doing so, there has been increasing acknowledgement of the need for agencies in democracies to explain what they do directly to the public, especially in an era of increasing global security threats. Since Edward Snowden's damaging revelations a decade ago, there has been renewed concern about rebuilding public trust. Today, the agencies themselves have become more proactive in developing a media presence and communicating more directly to the public. Social media, public statements, websites and wider media engagement have all become the norm, with more information now available on UK intelligence than any time before. A major theme of agency engagement so far has been the attempt to move beyond traditional James Bond-like clichés or male-dominated workforces, and become more representative of the public through their recruitment practices. Nonetheless, the more information we have on intelligence does not necessarily translate into greater understanding; the impact of wider engagement on public knowledge and trust of the agencies remains an open question.

The question of how far media engagement has changed attitudes to UK intelligence is an important one. Bond, more than any other fictional depiction, remains a go-to reference point for journalists in writing about intelligence in the UK, even if the fictional officer (often confused as an 'agent') says little about the real world of intelligence collection and analysis, or the experiences of officials across the UK's agencies. True, Bond-like clichés have not historically held back parts of the UK intelligence community, particularly the foreign intelligence agency, the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6). Indeed, as former MI6 Chief ('C') Colin McColl once said, Bond is the 'best recruiting sergeant in the world',[1] while Jeremy Black has pointed out that Bond contributed to the reputation of British intelligence.[2] Yet, in recent years, successive heads of UK agencies have gone on record to question the popular depictions of intelligence. In October 2016, MI6 Chief Alex Younger said that for 'too long – often because of the fictional stereotypes I have mentioned – people have felt that there is a

1. Trevor McCrisken and Christopher Moran, 'James Bond, Ian Fleming and Intelligence: Breaking Down the Boundary Between the "Real" and the "Imagined"', *Intelligence and National Security* (Vol. 33, No. 6, 2018), p. 807.
2. Jeremy Black, *The World of James Bond: The Lives and Times of 007* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), p. xiii.

The public struggles to understand how intelligence agencies operate. The MI6 building in London, 2021. *Courtesy of Cultura Creative Ltd / Alamy Stock Photo*

single quality that defines an MI6 officer'.[3] Younger's successor, Richard Moore, recently took to Twitter urging followers to '#ForgetJamesBond'.[4]

The cultural hold that Bond – and, to a lesser extent, other cultural depictions of intelligence – has on the real world is important, if not dangerous. The authors of a 2015 report on privacy and security noted that, as 'traditional notions of national security and public safety compete with the realities of a digital society, it is necessary to periodically renew the licence of the police, security and intelligence agencies to operate'. The authors added, 'This report aims to enable the public at large to engage in a more informed way in the debate, so that a broad consensus can be achieved and a new, democratic licence to operate can be agreed'.[5] It can be argued that the UK intelligence community more generally has a 'democratic licence to operate' where trust is needed. As Security Service (MI5) Director General Ken McCallum said in his July 2021 threat update, 'they [MI5] couldn't do their jobs without the trust and support of the British public'.[6] At the heart of this trust lies greater understanding of what agencies do. Depressingly, however, contemporary debates about important legislation are often wrapped up in references to Bond. Political and public discussions, for example, on the UK's Covert Human Intelligence Sources (Criminal Conduct) Act 2021 – permitting intelligence agencies and other authorities to break the law when running a so-called covert human intelligence source – quickly descended into whether the bill was a 'licence to kill'. Security Minister James Brokenshire told MPs there were 'upper limits to the activity that can be authorised under the Bill, and those are contained in the Human Rights Act'.[7] Here, the real world of intelligence was

3. *The Guardian*, 'James Bond Would Not Get Job with Real MI6, Says Spy Chief', 8 December 2016.
4. Daniel W B Lomas, '#ForgetJamesBond: Diversity, Inclusion and the UK's Intelligence Agencies', *Intelligence and National Security* (Vol. 36, No. 7, 2021), p. 995.
5. Panel of the Independent Surveillance Review, 'A Democratic Licence to Operate: Report of the Independent Surveillance Review', *Whitehall Report*, 2-15 (July 2015), p. x.
6. Security Service, MI5, 'Director General Ken McCallum Gives Annual Threat Update 2021', 14 July 2021, <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/news/director-general-ken-mccallum-gives-annual-threat-update-2021>, accessed 24 May 2022.
7. *Hansard*, House of Commons, 'Covert Human Intelligence Sources (Criminal Conduct) Bill', Commons Chamber Debate, 5 October 2020, Vol. 681, Col. 659.

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seen through a prism of fiction, something Amy B Zegart observes in relation to the US where 'fiction too often substitutes for fact'.[8]

This article both assesses the agencies' moves towards a greater public presence and, particularly, reviews public attitudes towards and knowledge of intelligence in the UK through the available opinion polling data. The article suggests a rather fragmented picture. While headline public support remains superficially high, knowledge of the agencies' work and responsibilities is still limited, and myths generated by Bond, but also shows such as *Spooks*, dominate public perceptions.[9] Moreover, there is a significant degree of suspicion about surveillance activities and data usage in relation to UK citizens. As noted, however, public opinion data remains relatively limited especially in terms of exploring demographic and comparative differences in attitudes.

'In from the Cold'

The UK's intelligence agencies have moved far beyond what was once described as a 'culture of secrecy'.[10] Today, the UK's agencies – MI5, acknowledged under the 1989 Security Service Act, MI6 and GCHQ, recognised in law in 1994 – have public-facing roles. While operating in the shadows for much of their existence, the UK's intelligence agencies have come under ever-increasing public and media spotlight. While agencies had begun to move beyond the traditional 'no comment' response in the early 1990s, and following renewed efforts after September 2001, the publication of leaks by US contractor Edward Snowden in June 2013 underlined the need for public engagement.[11] Post-Snowden, it was clear that modern-day agency heads, and the intelligence community more widely, needed to engage and 'get their message across to protect their corporate image'.[12] As Chris Moran added, modern-day intelligence leaders have 'to be public, [have] to be visible' if only to 'sell the intelligence mission' to parliament and public. Now, agency heads play a role 'in trying to shape and influence ... public misunderstandings'.[13] Moreover, as former GCHQ Director David Omand noted, it is a necessary precondition of the modern-day state for government to 'provide sufficient background information about its intelligence and security organizations ... to engender the needed trust in operational security decisions'.[14] Post-Snowden agencies now needed, as a *Telegraph* editorial suggested, 'to be better at explaining what they do to keep us safe and why it is important that they continue to do it. They have a good story to tell'.[15]

In a sign of the new era of engagement, GCHQ took to Twitter with the simple message 'Hello, world' in May 2016, also joining Instagram in October 2018.[16] 'We want', GCHQ's director of communications told followers, for the agency 'to be more accessible and to help the public understand more about our work'.[17] MI5 went on to join Instagram in spring 2021, and now has over 119,000 followers. Although MI6 has not followed suit, Chief Richard Moore has avidly used Twitter, speaking on themes related to diversity, inclusion and recruitment. Moore also made history by

8. Amy B Zegart, *Spies, Lies, and Algorithms: The History and Future of American Intelligence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021), p. 43.
9. In 2002, it was noted that the flashy, action-packed world of BBC drama *Spooks* led to a surge in applications for MI5. One intelligence official told journalists: 'I think they are just glad that they are being shown in a positive light for a change, instead of total bastards playing dirty tricks'. See Martin Bright, 'Spooks Pulls in Recruits for MI5', *The Guardian*, 26 May 2002.
10. David Vincent, *The Culture of Secrecy: Britain, 1832–1998* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
11. See Nigel West, 'The UK's Not Quite So Secret Services', *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* (Vol. 18, No. 1, 2005); Paul Lashmar, 'From Silence to Primary Definer: The Emergence of an Intelligence Lobby in the Public Sphere', *Critical Sociology* (Vol. 45, No. 3, 2019), pp. 411–30.
12. Christopher Moran, Ioanna Iordanou and Mark Stout, 'Conclusion: Intelligence Leadership in the Twenty-First Century', in Christopher Moran et al. (eds), *Spy Chiefs, Vol. 1: Intelligence Leaders in the United States and United Kingdom* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2018), p. 302.
13. Remarks made by Chris Moran in *Spycast*, 'Spy Chiefs: A Conversation with Mark Stout and Chris Moran', 5 June 2018, <https://play.acast.com/s/spycast/spy-chiefs-a-conversation-with-mark-stout-and-chri>, accessed 23 May 2022.
14. David Omand, *Securing the State* (London: Hurst, 2010), p. 18.
15. *The Telegraph*, 'GCHQ Must Open Up', 16 April 2014.
16. Liam McLoughlin, Stephen Ward and Daniel W B Lomas, '"Hello, World": GCHQ, Twitter and Social Media Engagement', *Intelligence and National Security* (Vol. 35, No. 2, 2020), pp. 233–51.
17. GCHQ, '"Hello, World" – GCHQ Has Officially Joined Twitter', 16 May 2016, <https://www.gchq.gov.uk/news/hello-world-gchq-has-officially-joined-twitter>, accessed 21 May 2022.

becoming the first 'C' in MI6's history to be interviewed, speaking to *Times Radio* in April 2021,[18] and subsequently making a well-publicised speech to the International Institute for Strategic Studies in November.[19] More recently, Director of GCHQ Jeremy Fleming gave a widely reported speech addressing the situation in the Russia–Ukraine War, mirroring the UK's Defence Intelligence's regular reporting of its key judgements.[20] While it is not within the scope of the article to fully explore agency engagement, the UK's agencies now use social media, public speeches, newspaper interviews, television and radio to speak to new and diverse audiences, with the aim of explaining what they do. Today, we have more information than ever before. A key question that largely remains unanswered, however, is the extent of the impact that this new information has on public trust and understanding of what the agencies do. In theory at least, the growth of information on the agencies, from official and unofficial sources, should have an impact on general understanding of the subject.

The Nature of Polling on Intelligence and Intelligence Agencies

Claudia Hillebrand and R Gerald Hughes observed that there 'are rarely any studies or opinion polls which provide quantifiable data' setting out what the public really thinks about intelligence.[21] The history of assessing public attitudes towards UK intelligence – and agencies generally – is not a long one. It is difficult to locate much focused research before the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. In academic terms, Graeme A M Davies and Robert Johns claim their 2012 paper to be the first that analyses public opinion towards the agencies in any depth.[22] While there is now an increasing range of public opinion data available reflecting demands for greater transparency, it is still somewhat fragmented and often not specifically focused on the agencies themselves. The YouGov Cambridge series has provided useful regular data over the past decade, while ESRC-sponsored research by academics at Cardiff University produced several useful consolidated reviews of public opinion data in the wake of the Snowden revelations.[23] However, much of the public opinion material dealing with the agencies is found in wider discussion of data privacy issues and discussion of security and terrorism. Here, questions tend to talk more broadly about government, the state, or police and security forces in general, rather than specific agencies. Hence, while there are regular annual surveys of perceptions of the police,[24] as well as contextual studies such as attitudes towards UK foreign policy,[25] this is not the case with intelligence. There is still a dearth of in-depth material. For example, there is little qualitative work to explore

18. *Times Radio*, 'MI6 Chief Richard Moore Speaks to Tom Newton Dunn', 25 April 2021, available at *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pKpA7YyBf10>, accessed 1 April 2022. MI5 Director General Andrew Parker had given the first interview by a sitting director general to *BBC Radio 4* in September 2015.
19. Richard Moore, 'Speech by SIS Chief Richard Moore: Human Intelligence in the Digital Age', speech given at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, 30 November 2021, available at *Youtube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GDGV7LScLp0>, accessed 23 May 2022.
20. Jeremy Fleming, 'Director GCHQ's Speech on Global Security Amid War in Ukraine', speech given at the Australian National University, 31 March 2022, <https://www.gchq.gov.uk/speech/director-gchq-global-security-amid-russia-invasion-of-ukraine>, accessed 21 May 2022. See also Dan Lomas, '"Weaponising the Truth": UK Intelligence, Public Information and Ukraine', In-Depth Briefing No. 28, 26 April 2022, <https://chacr.org.uk/2022/04/26/in-depth-briefing-28-weaponising-the-truth-uk-intelligence-public-information-and-ukraine/>, accessed 26 April 2022.
21. Claudia Hillebrand and R Gerald Hughes, 'The Quest for a Theory of Intelligence', in Robert Dover, Huw Dylan and Michael S Goodman (eds), *The Palgrave Handbook of Security, Risk and Intelligence* (London: Palgrave, 2017), p. 14.
22. Graeme A M Davies and Robert Johns, 'British Public Confidence in MI6 and Government Use of Intelligence: The Effect of Support for Preventive Military Action', *Intelligence and National Security* (Vol. 27, No. 5, 2012), pp. 678–79.
23. YouGov, 'YouGov-Cambridge Centre for Public Opinion Research', <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/yougov-cambridge/home>, accessed 2 February 2022; Digital Citizenship and Surveillance Society: UK State-Media-Citizen Relations after the Snowden Leaks, <https://dcssproject.net/index-2.html>, accessed 2 February 2022.
24. See the Office for National Statistics statistical bulletins, 'Crime in England and Wales', at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice>; and annual surveys from HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services, 'State of Policing', at <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/state-of-policing-the-annual-assessment-of-policing-in-england-and-wales-2021/>.
25. See the British Foreign Policy Group's Annual Surveys of UK Public Opinion on Foreign Policy and Global Britain.

the area, even if the influence of popular culture, especially Bond, has gained traction.[26]

An overview of public opinion studies from the past decade suggests that there are four main themes of interest in relation to the agencies. First, there are questions about trust. Second, consideration is given to the privacy–security balance, perhaps the most common area examining what the public thinks agencies do in relation to information-gathering: whether they have confidence in this, and also whether agencies need extended powers to meet security threats. Third, knowledge-type questions focus on what people actually know about the different agencies and what they do. Finally, there are questions about representativeness and the image of the agencies, touching on the impact of 'spytainment'.[27]

Knowledge: The 'Don't Know' Factor

There are significant question marks about the depth of public feelings and the actual level of public knowledge about intelligence. What is noticeable in many of the surveys is the relatively high levels of 'don't know' ('DK') responses, especially as questions become more specific. This indicates that many respondents have limited knowledge of what the agencies do in reality, or the legal powers and responsibilities they have, despite the growth of official information from the agencies, oversight bodies such as the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, or media reporting on the subject. Surveys regularly record 'DK' answers of 10%+ and this increases to over 30% in relation to more specific intelligence questions.[28] YouGov's 2021 survey on intelligence showed almost one-in-five (19%) UK adults could not say whether they trusted the UK intelligence community, just behind the 23% who said they had not much or no trust at all.[29] Similar trust questions often generate lower 'DK' responses; a YouGov/Cabinet Office survey carried out in November 2021 found significantly lower 'DK' responses for the NHS (4%), government (5%), the police (5%), media organisations (5%) and the UK armed forces (8%), with only the 'Church or organised religion' going into double figures (10%).[30] Beyond the trust factor, there is also considerable confusion or misunderstanding when pollsters have asked about what agencies are allowed to do. A significant minority of the public appears to accept the mythology around Bond's 'licence to kill'. 27% of respondents to an autumn 2013 YouGov survey believed that UK intelligence agencies killed people in foreign countries, while 20% thought they could kill in the UK. Even though a larger number (41% and 53%, respectively) believed the UK's agencies could kill, the polling suggested a sizeable number of UK citizens believed the agencies had the ability to kill with no questions asked,[31] a finding borne out elsewhere.[32] Although Britons overwhelmingly believed that the 2018 poisoning of former Russian intelligence officer Sergei Skripal and his daughter, Yulia, in Salisbury was carried out by the Russian state, 28% of those asked believed the UK's agencies carried out similar attacks themselves abroad. A further 6% thought that while UK intelligence did not run similar activity, it should.[33] Again, the assumption underlying such a finding is that the public partly bases its knowledge on fictional characters.

26. Milan Dinic, 'The YouGov Spying Study Part Two: Spying and Personality', YouGov, 30 September 2021, <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/lifestyle/articles-reports/2021/09/30/yougov-spying-study-part-two-spying-and-personalit>, accessed 1 February 2022.
27. Amy B Zegart, '"Spytainment": The Real Influence of Fake Spies', *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* (Vol. 23, No. 4, 2010), pp. 599–622.
28. See Milan Dinic, 'The YouGov Spying Survey Part 5: Should the UK Be Spying on Other Countries', YouGov, 30 September 2021, <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2021/09/30/part-five-should-uk-be-spying-other-countries-and->, accessed 1 February 2022.
29. Milan Dinic, 'The YouGov Spying Study Part Four: Trust in UK Intelligence and Security Agencies', YouGov, 30 September 2021, <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2021/09/30/part-four-trust-uk-intelligence-and-security-agenc>, accessed 20 May 2022.
30. YouGov, survey results, fieldwork conducted 9–10 November 2021, <https://docs.cdn.yougov.com/2wm4slxt15/Internal_PoliceandJustice_211110_GB_W.pdf>, accessed 24 May 2022.
31. Joel Rogers de Waal, 'Public Opinion and the Intelligence Services', YouGov, 11 October 2013, <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2013/10/11/british-attitudes-intelligence-services>, accessed 22 May 2022.
32. *Ibid.*
33. YouGov, 'Do you think that the UK does or does not carry out similar attacks in other parts of the world?', 13 March 2018, <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/travel/survey-results/daily/2018/03/13/d167e/2>, accessed 20 May 2022.

Beyond Bond-like mythology, it could also be inferred that many Britons believe in conspiracy theories. A September 2013 poll revealed that a quarter of adults living in Great Britain believed that MI6 was in some way involved in the death of Princess Diana. 16% thought that UK special forces were involved, while, overall, 38% believed Diana's death was not an accident (as opposed to 41% who said it was).[34] A quarter of those polled by YouGov in August 2013 thought that UK officials could break into private property without authorisation and, in light of the Snowden leaks, a majority (60%) said that UK agencies could 'hack into calls/emails/text messages' of Britons no questions asked.[35] Asked if the UK's agencies should be allowed to kill, break into property or intercept communications without authorisation, a smaller – although still sizeable – number of respondents agreed.[36] Responses also suggest that Britons simply do not have an answer. Asked if the agencies should spy on allies, almost a third said they did not know.[37]

Trust: Contradictory Views?

Trust is a key measure in terms of UK intelligence's ability to take the public with it, and in relation to the wider support for foreign policy goals, military intervention or counterterrorism activities. Despite the Iraq War and the Snowden revelations, the levels of trust in the institutions remain fairly high. Indeed, the UK's agencies are often regarded more favourably than many other government/state institutions. Most of the surveys show around a 60% institutional trust level in the UK's agencies, compared with around 25–30% claiming to not trust them.[38] In its latest polling on the intelligence services, released in September 2021, YouGov found that 58% of Britons trusted the UK's agencies, as opposed to just 16% who had 'not much' trust and 7% who had no trust at all.[39] The latest YouGov polling also conforms to some of the earliest findings by Davies and Johns, published in October 2012, that 62% of Britons were highly confident of the intelligence that MI6 produced. The same study found that while just 4% of the public had the lowest level of trust in the UK's foreign human intelligence agency, a significantly larger number, 36%, did not trust the government to use this information correctly.[40] Similarly, in data from 2015, 63% of Britons said they were more likely to trust the intelligence agencies with new surveillance powers, as opposed to only 50% for police and 45% for civil servants and politicians.[41]

However, beyond abstract trust questions, the picture becomes more complex. Around a fifth of Britons, in the most recent YouGov survey, believed that the security services were spying on them, and a further third were unsure. There were also differences by party political allegiance. Conservative voters were more likely than their Labour counterparts to 'greatly trust' the agencies (25% to just 11%), while 31% of Labour voters were inclined to have not much (21%) or no confidence

34. William Jordan, '38% of Brits Think Princess Diana's Death "NOT an Accident"', YouGov, 17 September 2013, <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2013/09/17/38-brits-princess-dianas-death-was-not-accident>, accessed 23 May 2022.
35. de Waal, 'Public Opinion and the Intelligence Services'.
36. *Ibid.*
37. Milan Dinic, 'The YouGov Spying Study Part 5: Should the UK Be Spying on Other Countries and if so – Which?', YouGov, 30 September 2021, <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2021/09/30/part-five-should-uk-be-spying-other-countries-and->, accessed 23 May 2022.
38. Will Dahlgreen, 'Broad Support for Increased Surveillance Powers', 18 January 2015, <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2015/01/18/more-surveillance-please-were-british>, accessed 20 May 2022; Jonathan Cable, 'An Overview of Public Opinion Polls Since the Edward Snowden Revelations in June 2013', Working Paper, UK Public Opinion Review, 18 June 2015, pp. 25–26.
39. Dinic, 'The YouGov Spying Study Part Four'.
40. Davies and Johns, 'British Public Confidence in MI6 and Government Use of Intelligence', pp. 678–79.
41. Cable, 'An Overview of Public Opinion Polls Since the Edward Snowden Revelations in June 2013', p. 25. As a comparison, in a 2014 poll, 60% of those polled said they had 'total' trust in the UK armed forces on overseas operations, significantly behind then Prime Minister David Cameron (37%). See Joel Rogers de Waal, 'Report on British Attitudes to Defence, Security and the Armed Forces', YouGov, 25 October 2014, <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/international/articles-reports/2014/10/25/report-british-attitudes-defence-security-and-arme>, accessed 21 May 2022.

(10%) in the agencies, compared with just 12% of Conservatives.[42] Given Labour's historical hang-ups about intelligence, this comes as little surprise.[43] The history of the Labour Party has been laced with tales of plots, from the Zinoviev Letter in 1924 to the Wilson Plot of the 1970s. While out of office, or often under a left-wing leadership, the party has also tended to see the intelligence agencies as a rogue elephant, working against the interests of democracy. It was the claims made by former Prime Minister Harold Wilson that a 'disaffected faction' within MI5 had undermined his government – claims given new life by former MI5 officer Peter Wright's memoir *Spycatcher* – that led many within the party to view intelligence with suspicion, even if the claims of an MI5 conspiracy against Wilson and his government were not true.[44] In addition, existing fears of widespread bugging, the monitoring of 'subversives' and the lack of intelligence accountability all combined in the early 1980s to result in the party pushing for new oversight mechanisms that would finally end with the 1989 Security Service Act. It is a picture that, while often accepted as Labour's traditional attitudes to intelligence, is hard to sustain given the close working relationship between officials and Labour governments from Clement Attlee to Tony Blair.[45] The findings question, however, earlier polling on intelligence and the Iraq War, which suggested that Labour voters were 'less cynical' about the use of intelligence, in part, it seems, because of their need at the time to defend the record of the Blair government and Iraq, with the use of intelligence before Iraq becoming a political issue.

The findings of YouGov's survey fit with what is already known about internal party attitudes to the agencies. Among Labour supporters, attitudes are often split along internal factional lines, the left historically having a negative view, while the right and leadership have often had a close relationship. A poll in August 2016 found that 55% of Jeremy Corbyn supporters believed that MI5 was working to undermine him.[46] Polling for the *Sunday Mirror*/*The Independent* by Savanta ComRes suggested that 12% of British adults and 19% of then current Labour voters believed negative attacks on Corbyn's leadership came from MI5.[47]

In relation to building public trust, it is often argued that one of the cornerstones of intelligence in liberal democracies is oversight. While the public is strongly supportive of the concept, there is less faith in current procedures. Notably, the public seems to blame politicians for any failings of the oversight system. Hence, there is some degree of scepticism about parliamentary oversight compared with the role of the judiciary.[48] An Ipsos MORI survey from 2014 indicated that 55% of the public had confidence in the current system (42% did not).[49] This again reflects long-term high levels of public mistrust of both politicians and political institutions but also suggests a lack of public awareness of the current parliamentary system of oversight, especially the role of the Intelligence and Security Committee.

42. Dinic, 'The YouGov Spying Study Part Four'.
43. Daniel W B Lomas, 'Party Politics and Intelligence: The Labour Party, British Intelligence and Oversight, 1979-1994', *Intelligence and National Security* (Vol. 36, No. 3, 2021), pp. 410–30.
44. For context, see Dan Lomas, 'The Idea That the UK's Intelligence Agencies Have an Anti-Labour Bias Runs Deep – But It Is False', LSE British Politics and Policy, 3 February 2021, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/labour-intelligence-services/>, accessed 24 May 2022. On the Wilson Plot, see Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), pp. 62–63.
45. For a summary, see Lomas, 'The Idea that the UK's Intelligence Agencies Have an Anti-Labour Bias Runs Deep – But It Is False'.
46. Matthew Smith, 'Eight More Things We've Learned from Our Labour Leadership Election Survey', YouGov, 2 September 2016, <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2016/09/02/8-more-things-weve-learned-our-labour-leadership-e>, accessed 20 May 2022. A poll of UKIP party members in October 2016 found that almost half of members (46%) believed that MI5 and other agencies were 'working to undermine' the party. See Matthew Smith, 'Profiled for the First Time: The UKIP Party Membership', YouGov, 22 October 2016, <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2016/10/22/introduction-ukip-party-membership>, accessed 21 May 2022.
47. Savanta ComRes, 'Sunday Mirror Independent Political Poll', August 2016, <https://comresglobal.com/polls/sunday-mirror-independent-political-poll-august-2016/>, accessed 20 May 2022.
48. Ipsos MORI, 'Privacy and Personal Data', May 2014, <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/privacy-and-personal-data>, accessed 21 May 2022; Panel of the Independent Surveillance Review, 'A Democratic Licence to Operate'.
49. *Ibid.*

Privacy/Security: False Dichotomies?

There has been regular polling about public attitudes towards privacy and security stimulated by concerns about terrorism and digital data/communication protections. Notions of privacy and security are often set against each other, where one is traded off against the other – the truth is perhaps more complex.[50] Indeed, the public regularly demands both high levels of privacy but also wants high levels of security, and does not necessarily accept any tradeoffs between the two.[51]

Naturally, the issue of new technology and the rather prosaic nature of ethics and privacy also results in contradictory responses. In 2013, polling for the *Sunday Times* showed that 56% of respondents believed that Edward Snowden was right to reveal details of secret US–UK surveillance programmes. Just 27% said Snowden was wrong,[52] although the percentage of those who thought the leaks were necessary declined slightly over time.[53] YouGov polling, shortly after the Snowden revelations, found that there was 'all to play for in the battle of public opinion' with regard to intelligence powers and surveillance.[54] 42% of Britons believed that surveillance powers were about right, with a further 22% believing that the agencies needed more powers to protect the UK, despite the public discourse on surveillance.[55] Just 19% of UK adults said the intelligence agencies had too many powers.[56] As YouGov's Joel Rogers de Waal explained: 'The Snowden story doubtless helped to galvanise a new privacy lobby in the UK ... But this lobby has seemingly struggled to make wider headway in the public debate'.[57]

> The public regularly demands both high levels of privacy but also wants high levels of security, and does not necessarily accept any tradeoffs between the two

The lack of knowledge of intelligence matters generally, and the complexity of the issue is perhaps one reason for the lobby failing to take off. Polling in 2016, for example, found that 72% of adults were unaware of the Investigatory Powers Act.[58] When asked about the balance between privacy and surveillance in 2017, the public split three ways – 32% said that more needed to be done to protect national security, even if it meant undermining privacy, as opposed to 26% who said that privacy should be an overriding priority. 24% believed the balance was about right.[59]

The agencies again generally perform quite well, at least in abstract terms, on privacy. Citizens appear to be more sympathetic to agencies' use and need to gather data than they are of commercial interests.[60] A 2017 YouGov survey on surveillance indicated that 54% trusted GCHQ and 58% trusted MI5 with online data gathered under the Investigatory Powers Act, considerably more than Home Office

50. Julian Richards, 'Intelligence Dilemma? Contemporary Counter-Terrorism in a Liberal Democracy', *Intelligence and National Security* (Vol. 27, No. 5, 2012), pp. 761–80.
51. DATA-PSST and DCSS, 'Public Feeling on Privacy, Security and Surveillance', ESRC, Bangor University and Cardiff University, November 2015.
52. William Jordan, 'Edward Snowden: Hero?', YouGov, 16 June 2013, <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2013/06/16/edward-snowden-hero>, accessed 20 May 2022.
53. See Cable, 'An Overview of Public Opinion Polls Since the Edward Snowden Revelations in June 2013', pp. 2–4.
54. de Waal, 'Public Opinion and the Intelligence Services', <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2013/10/11/british-attitudes-intelligence-services>, accessed 22 May 2022.
55. Dahlgreen, 'Little Appetite for Scaling Back Surveillance', <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2013/10/13/little-appetite-scaling-back-surveillance>, accessed 20 May 2022.
56. *Ibid.*
57. Joel Rogers de Waal, 'Security Trumps Privacy in British Attitudes to Cyber-Surveillance', *RUSI Commentary*, 5 June 2017.
58. Mark Townsend, 'Snooper's Charter: Most Britons Unaware of Tory Plans, Survey Finds', *The Guardian*, 5 June 2016.
59. de Waal, 'Security Trumps Privacy in British Attitudes to Cyber-Surveillance'.
60. 79% of users said they had not very much / no trust in social media companies use of data, while 63% said the same about national companies. YouGov, 'YouGov/Cabinet Office Survey Results', 3–4 November 2021, <https://docs.cdn.yougov.com/ny9gmp5rjm/CabinetOffice_GeoSpatial_211104_w.pdf>, accessed 20 May 2022.

officials and civil servants at just 34% trust. In line with wider scepticism of politicians, just 27% said they trusted ministers with data collected under the act.[61] Interestingly, this is one of the few studies that distinguishes between GCHQ and MI5. However, the responses are nearly identical indicating that the public either does not make the distinction or, more likely, does not know what the different agencies are responsible for. Nevertheless, the public appears to differentiate between targeted information-gathering by agencies as opposed to bulk data harvesting – the latter being seen much more sceptically.[62] Moreover, the public is generally sympathetic to the UK's agencies having more powers in the context of security threats from terrorism and organised crime, yet still makes distinctions about the specific circumstances.[63] For example, the public seems more relaxed in terms of gathering intelligence on foreign citizens and countries or in circumstances when the data/information gathered is not its own.[64]

Intriguingly, attitudes may vary between generations. The Cardiff University studies, including both survey and focus group work, indicate that older citizens (60+) are more willing to trade off privacy and are more supportive of agencies having additional powers. In contrast, younger citizens, and those from minority ethnic groups in the UK, express more concerns about agency activities and powers in relation to privacy particularly. This could reflect the fact that older age groups are less confident and knowledgeable per se with online technologies, but it may also be reflective of a more nationalistic and patriotic disposition among older populations.[65] This raises questions for the agencies as to whether younger age groups will become supportive over time, or whether this is reflective of more fundamental generational shifts.

Representativeness

More recent survey data from YouGov has begun to gather information on citizens' views about who works for intelligence agencies and, also, whether they would see themselves as pursuing careers in intelligence. Knowing this helps the agencies recruit more broadly and inclusively. It also sheds light on how far the Bond myth continues to dominate public perspectives, despite the 'opening-up' of UK intelligence.

In part, YouGov's polling is comforting; attributes typical of the Bond-like cliché – good looks, physical strength, military training and being 'well-spoken' – all scored low. Younger Britons were more likely to view spying as 'cool', a pattern replicated when respondents were asked if they would make a 'good' spy. Britons singled-out high intelligence (59%), analytical skills (57%), strong people skills (45%) and knowledge (41%) as ideal attributes of an intelligence officer;[66] yet, as the polling shows, there are clear divides between men and women on who would typically join the agencies. In 2019, a YouGov survey showed that just 39% of women said they would like a career in intelligence. More women, 43%, said they would not, compared with 28% of men asked the same question. Over half of men polled, 52%, said they would like a career in intelligence.[67] The latest figures still show that a majority of women, 45%, did not want an intelligence career (as opposed to 41% who said they would) while 53% of men still said they would like to work for the UK intelligence and security services.[68] Popular depictions of intelligence may play a role; in 2010, MI5 began a recruitment campaign to attract female recruits after fears that over-the-top violence in the BBC series *Spooks* was deterring this group. Though visits to MI5's website dramatically increased during the series, a Whitehall source

61. YouGov, survey data, 26–27 February 2017, p. 4, <http://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/guozfocn1q/YGC,%20GB%20Surveillance%202017.pdf#page=4>, accessed 20 May 2022.
62. *Ibid.*
63. Ipsos MORI, 'Privacy and Personal Data'.
64. Panel of the Independent Surveillance Review, 'A Democratic Licence to Operate'.
65. Sophia Gaston and Evie Aspinall, 'UK Public Opinion on Foreign Policy and Global Affairs', Annual Survey – 2021, British Foreign Policy Group, February 2021, p. 12.
66. Milan Dinic, 'The YouGov Spying Study Part Two: Spying and Personality', 30 September 2021, <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/lifestyle/articles-reports/2021/09/30/yougov-spying-study-part-two-spying-and-personalit>, accessed 20 May 2022.
67. Milan Dinic, 'The YouGov Spying Study Part One: What Britons Think About Becoming a Spy', 30 September 2021, <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/lifestyle/articles-reports/2021/09/30/yougov-spying-study-part-one-what-britons-think-ab>, accessed 20 May 2022.
68. YouGov, 'Would you rather be in MI5 (the secret services focused on Britain) or MI6 (the secret services focused on British interests around the world)?', 19 June 2019, <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/survey-results/daily/2019/06/19/cb25d/3>, accessed 20 May 2022.

expressed concern that 'Spooks is a great TV show, but the violence can put women off applying for jobs at MI5. A career in the Service is about brain not brawn, carefully piecing together vital intelligence to protect the UK and its people'.[69] There might also be differences in agency perception. Although the latest polling did not probe the question further, a survey asking whether respondents would work for MI6 or MI5, published in June 2019, revealed that an equal number of men and women would work for the UK's domestic security service, while just 24% of women (as opposed to 30% of men) wanted to work for MI6.[70] GCHQ did not feature, and polling on the agency remains absent. On the wider issue of diversity, much more needs to be done. The polling evidence lacks detail on attitudes of minority ethnic groups, a subject of increasing importance for the agencies following a highly critical 2018 Intelligence and Security Committee report.[71]

Beyond the UK

It is still difficult to place UK public attitudes on agencies into a comparative context. For example, while the EU-supported Eurobarometer ask questions periodically regarding security and terrorism, it does not specifically ask about agencies or intelligence-gathering. There have been two in-depth studies in the past decade on internal security in the EU, but questions ask about police and law enforcement agencies rather than specifically mentioning intelligence agencies.[72] Vian Bakir and colleagues refer to one in-depth, nine-country European study conducted in 2015 which focused on surveillance, privacy and security technologies.[73] However, the authors of this present article could not find evidence of any further studies of this type. Despite this comparative gap, however, there is growing national survey data elsewhere, notably in the Five Eyes countries and across European states.

In the US, Amy Zegart found that Americans broadly held favourable views of the CIA (50%) and FBI, but that confidence in the *accuracy* of the intelligence provided to government fell away rapidly.[74] In some of the most extensive polling to date, the University of Texas Intelligence Studies Project similarly showed, in 2018, that a majority of Americans saw the US intelligence community as 'effective', with 83% replying that the US's agencies successfully prevented terrorist attacks, and 77% seeing the agencies as effective in learning the plans of hostile governments. 59% of Americans still saw the agencies as vital, with just 12% judging them to be an anachronism. Even after the Donald Trump administration's stormy relationship with the intelligence community, which saw a very public, and divisive, deep rift between US intelligence officials and the White House on Russia's interference in the 2016 Presidential election, a fourth and final poll (taken in 2020) showed that confidence was stable and resilient: 64% of Americans said the agencies were vital, and 85% classed them as effective in thwarting terror plots. An increased number of Americans also saw the agencies as effective in countering hostile states (83%), results that were echoed across other countries.[75]

Polling commissioned by Canada's domestic security agency, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), revealed that a sizeable majority of Canadians either had a 'great deal of confidence' (20%) or 'some confidence' (64%) in CSIS's work, compared with just 12% with little or no confidence at all. The remaining 4% surveyed did not know or were unsure. Equally, Canadians were more likely to see CSIS as important and trusted its ability to

69. James Slack, 'MI5 Launches Recruitment Drive for Women Because Violence of TV Show Spooks is Putting Them Off', *Daily Mail*, 8 November 2010.
70. YouGov, 'Would you ever like to work for GCHQ, MI5 or MI6 (Britain's security services)?', 8 April 2019, <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/survey-results/daily/2019/04/08/684cd/1>, accessed 20 May 2022.
71. Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, *Diversity and Inclusion in the UK Intelligence Community*, HC 1297 (London: The Stationery Office, 2018).
72. Eurobarometer, 'Europeans' Attitudes Towards Security', March 2015, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2085>, accessed 24 May 2022; Eurobarometer, 'Public Attitudes Towards Internal Security', December 2017, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/1569>, accessed 24 May 2022.
73. DATA-PSST and DCSS, 'Public Feeling on Privacy, Security and Surveillance'.
74. Amy Zegart, 'Real Spies, Fake Spies, NSA, and More: What My 2012 and 2013 National Polls Reveal', *Lawfare*, 7 November 2013.
75. Joshua Busby, Archit Oswal and Steve Slick, 'Public Attitudes on U.S. Intelligence in 2020', *Lawfare*, 7 June 2021. The final report and data can be found at Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 'Public Attitudes on US Intelligence 2020: Final Trump-Era Survey Confirms Broad Popular Support, Reveals Opportunities for Greater Transparency', May 2021, <https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/research/public-opinion-survey/public-attitudes-us-intelligence-2020>, accessed 20 May 2022.

protect the rights of citizens.[76] Polling, therefore, suggests that citizens of the above-mentioned countries (as in the UK) looked favourably at their intelligence agencies, even if, further polling revealed, they were often ambivalent about what the agencies did and who they protected.

Nevertheless, worryingly, polling shows that, despite the growing public-facing activities of the agencies, these seem to have had little impact on general attitudes. Zegart found that spytainment heavily shaped public views; in the case of rendition and torture, TV watchers were more willing to support such methods, as opposed to those who infrequently watched spy-themed entertainment. Regular spytainment viewers were also more likely to support mass surveillance and support the National Security Agency (NSA), even if Americans knew little of what the NSA actually did. Despite coverage resulting from Snowden, 32% believed that America's signals intelligence agency killed people overseas, while another 39% were unsure if it did. Just over a third of Americans also thought the NSA interrogated people, with 42% saying they were not sure. The study concluded that the more Americans got to know about the NSA, the less likely they were to support it.[77] In Canada, although public support and understanding of the importance of CSIS was relatively high, awareness of what Canada's primary national intelligence service did was low. Just 30% of Canadians were able to identify CSIS unaided, with 63% polled saying they did not know. One third had never heard of the service, despite levels of confidence being high.[78]

National surveys regarding intelligence tend to focus on the same questions outlined above, and the results produce fairly similar results, but there is often a lack of depth. One recent study of Spanish students, however, does delve further.[79] It revealed considerable knowledge gaps even among highly educated students. However, perhaps more significantly, it offered potential explanatory factors for attitudinal beliefs based on socio-demographic background and political variables. Political ideology played a particularly strong role in knowledge of the powers and mission of the Spanish Centro Nacional de Inteligencia (National Intelligence Centre, CNI). For instance, those from 'extreme ideological positions' – both right and left – showed greater knowledge and awareness of CNI.[80]

Finally, one recent feature in public opinion–intelligence agency work is agencies/government departments now publicly sponsoring such research. Although it is assumed that agencies have previously undertaken this privately, this potentially represents a further opening-up of the intelligence community. Since 2016, the Suojelupoliisi (or Supo), the Finnish security and intelligence agency, has published annual studies of public perceptions of its work via an annual yearbook.[81] The latest survey, published in March 2022, found that 89% of Finns had high or fairly high confidence in Supo, and more than 90% of respondents were able to identify the core aims of gathering intelligence on threats to national security, combating terrorism and preventing espionage.[82] Similarly, the Canadian Communications Security Establishment (CSE) recently published survey findings which sought to inform the agency's communication strategies (2020) and build trust in the CSE. This focused on public awareness (which was low – just 68% of adults polled saying they had never heard of it), trust, mission knowledge, security and civil liberties, as well as cybersecurity and attacks.[83]

Discussion and Conclusions: What Is Missing?

While it may be a cliché for academic studies to finish by calling for more research, this short overview has revealed significant gaps in polling on

76. Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), 'Attitudes to the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) – Baseline Study: Final Report', June 2018, pp. 18–19.
77. Zegart, 'Real Spies, Fake Spies, NSA, and More'.
78. CSIS, 'Attitudes to the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) – Baseline Study: Final Report', pp. 15–16.
79. Cristina Del-Real and Antonio M Díaz-Fernández, 'Public Knowledge of Intelligence Agencies among University Students in Spain', *Intelligence and National Security* (Vol. 37, No. 3, 2021), pp. 19–37.
80. *Ibid.*, p. 27. The authors of the article used a questionnaire to establish attitudes to intelligence. For ideology, respondents were asked to self identify using a 10-point scale from left-wing (1) to right-wing (2) (see *ibid.*, p. 24).
81. See Supo, <https://supo.fi/en/year-book>, accessed 24 May 2022.
82. Supo, 'Yearbook 2021', March 2022, pp. 26–27.
83. Government of Canada, 'Attitudes Towards the Communications Security Establishment – Tracking Study: Final Report', April 2020, <https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2020/cstc-csec/D96-16-2020-eng.pdf>, accessed 24 May 2022.

societal attitudes on intelligence. The discipline of intelligence studies, as Peter Gill and Mark Phythian have noted, has tended to focus on history, process, activities and organisation, rather than examining the relationship between agencies and the public.[84] Given the need for secrecy and confidentiality, it is perhaps not surprising that there is a limited amount of such work. This article argues that there is a need for more extensive research in three areas in particular: understanding the differences in, and dynamics of, attitudinal-shaping factors and public knowledge; comparative research to understand wider systemic influences on national public attitudes; and, finally, the representation of agencies and intelligence to the public via media and popular culture.

While there is some consistent work on top-line trust and privacy, there is a need to go beyond this and engage in more focused studies to understand attitudinal differences. Initial research has hinted at several avenues for exploration in terms of demographics. More concerted quantitative data needs to be gathered focusing on younger citizens and, also, ethnic and religious minorities who tend to be more sceptical of intelligence-gathering and institutions. In the case of young people, we need to understand whether we are witnessing a real generational shift in attitudes or a lifecycle effect, where trust might grow as people age. Similarly, the role of ethnicity, race and religion in shaping attitudes on intelligence agencies are also important here, especially given the contested nature of government policy around radicalisation and deradicalisation in Muslim communities, for example. There is considerable longstanding research on attitudes towards the police among ethnic minority groups which indicates considerably lower levels of trust, especially in communities who feel targeted by state authorities – how far do the same factors apply in terms of intelligence and security agencies?

Potential demographic differences also tie into other important discussions about value shifts around nationhood, patriotism and the changing role of the UK in global affairs, all of which potentially shape the way the public views intelligence and security questions. For example, how far is Brexit impacting on such values? As noted earlier, there are also indications that ideology and political partisanship play a role in shaping attitudes towards intelligence agencies. Suspicion of intelligence services on the left has been a long-running theme in the research. However, the populist right, over the past decade, often now seems to share such scepticism. Hence, research focused on political partisans (such as party members) would help understand how far partisan political values interact with, and potentially override, levels of knowledge, in shaping attitudes towards intelligence issues.

While quantitative research is valuable in gauging baseline knowledge, there is considerable space to add to the richness of attitudinal and knowledge data through qualitative approaches. A mixed-methods approach of survey data followed by focus group work to explore key themes from the data would provide more depth to understanding how citizens come to understand the intelligence agencies. There are also opportunities to conduct more experimental-type research providing participants with imaginary scenarios about agencies and their roles to help understand how people make their assessments. Such qualitative approaches could also partially help to overcome some of the research issues with the high 'DK' counts in relation to survey questions in this field.

While there is a growing body of national research, there is still a relative dearth of cross-national material which could uncover specifics of national cultural attitudes towards intelligence. This is perhaps reflective of the difficulties of comparing the different national agencies and their roles. Comparative study, however, would help to understand more about the differential impact of systemic context, notably how far national foreign policy, specific national security and terrorist threats influence attitudes and awareness of intelligence bodies. More broadly, comparative research could also help to understand how systemic political and media environments have an impact on public attitudes. For instance, do adversarial political systems produce more divides around intelligence/security issues than consensus-seeking systems? Similarly, how far do different media systems shape the public outlook, and are some attitudes and knowledge explained by differences in the hyper-partisan content of some media environments and the more public-service oriented output in other states?

While not directly concerned with assessing public knowledge or attitudes towards intelligence, national media and popular culture are clearly primary sources of information for most citizens. One area which has attracted recent attention, but is worthy of more examination, is how far popular culture has an impact on people's outlook on who the agencies are, what they do and whether they

84. Peter Gill and Mark Phythian, 'What is Intelligence Studies?', *International Journal of Intelligence, Security, and Public Affairs* (Vol. 18, No. 1, 2016), pp. 5–19.

are representative of the public.[85] Given the media's continuing obsession with the Bond-myth, but also, in contrast, the agencies' attempts to broaden their recruitment appeal and move away from this image, there might be some interesting paradoxes for agencies. Although the world of Bond and other fictional depictions have served to share identity and 'brand', the reality is that, at least in the UK, intelligence agencies have had less of a 'licence to kill' and more of a necessary 'licence to operate'. In modern-day liberal democracies, while operational secrecy is necessary, agencies have now realised that greater public engagement is equally necessary if the public is to 'support in principle what the agencies do'.[86]

Longitudinal legacy and social media content analysis is also an area which could add value. Such content analysis, since the supposed opening-up of intelligence, would allow an assessment of changes in coverage both in terms of quantity, but also in the ways that intelligence and intelligence services are portrayed. Has openness produced more coverage and, if so, in what ways? Does it simply replicate fictional tropes about spies and agents? Moreover, given the relatively recent move of agencies on to social media platforms, analysis here would allow us to look at the ways that agencies are engaged in impression management, and how the public responds to this. Again, content and theme analysis can be used on social media output while social media metrics and analysis of public responses allow a window on who is engaging with the agencies. For example, early indications suggest that sometimes social media output becomes a magnet for conspiracy theory networks or critics of the intelligence community.[87]

Finally, overall, it is clear that citizens in the UK, and elsewhere, are often in the dark about the activities of national intelligence organisations. In essence, Zegart is correct that there is something of an 'education crisis' going on.[88] Even if many citizens are trusting of agencies, believing that they are both effective and ensure national security, polling shows that a sizeable number are ambivalent about their powers and activities, either inflating their powers, or viewing them as a 'deep state', or drawing on fictional spies for real-life situations. Ironically, the growth of information on intelligence and security does not necessarily lead to better public knowledge or necessarily increase trust. Indeed, as mentioned previously, US research indicates the opposite may be true. If past examples are anything to go by, Bond-like images of what the agencies do stick, and it is, as this article argues, unhelpful that fictional depictions still shape public discourse on issues that matter to national security. Sadly, while the amount of information available on the UK's agencies for the public has increased, the polling evidence that is available highlights that in the UK, knowledge of what the agencies do is limited. If intelligence agencies in liberal democracies need a 'licence to operate', they, the media and academia have a long way to go if they are to fill the existing knowledge gap. ■

Daniel W B Lomas is Lecturer in Intelligence and Security Studies at Brunel University London. He is author of *Intelligence, Security and the Attlee Governments, 1945 – 1951: An Uneasy Relationship?* (Manchester University Press, 2016). He is currently writing a forthcoming book for Bloomsbury on the history of security vetting, and a documentary reader on reviews of the UK intelligence community for Edinburgh University Press.

Stephen Ward is a Reader in Politics at the University of Salford. His research interests centre on the use of the internet and social media by political organisations, notably around political campaigning, participation and mobilisation. He has over 60 publications focused on parties, MPs and public participation online.

85. Zegart, '"Spytainment"', pp. 599–622; Trevor McCrisken and Christopher Moran, 'James Bond, Ian Fleming and Intelligence: Breaking Down the Boundary Between the "Real" and the "Imagined"', *Intelligence and National Security* (Vol. 33, No. 6, 2018), pp. 804–21.
86. Panel of the Independent Surveillance Review, 'A Democratic Licence to Operate'.
87. McLoughlin, Ward and Lomas, '"Hello, World"'.
88. Zegart, *Spies, Lies, and Algorithms*, Chap. 2.