

## HOW CANADIANS SEE THE WORLD TODAY

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### Major issues facing the world today

*Global warming and the environment has emerged in the minds of Canadians as the world's most pressing issue, but there is also considerable concern about such issues as war and conflict, famine in the developing world, human rights abuse, and the gap between rich and poor.*

### Top world issue

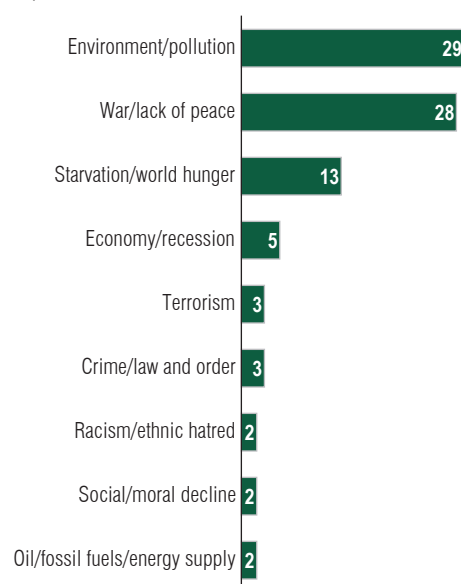
Canadians see the environment as the most important issue facing the world today, followed closely by war and conflict. When asked to name what they see as the most important issue or problem in the world (unprompted, without being offered response options), three in ten (29%) Canadians name the environment or pollution as the most serious, while 28 percent cite war or a lack of peace, and another 13 percent name world hunger. By comparison, no more than five percent identify any other global issue, including economic problems (5%), terrorism (3%) and crime/law and order (3%).

That economic concerns are not more salient is surprising, given media coverage in recent weeks of the growing turmoil in global equity markets and a possible recession in the U.S. that could sideswipe Canada.

These current results reflect a definitive shift in just the past two years, based on ongoing tracking through Environics' FOCUS CANADA research. In 2006, it was war/lack of peace at the top of the list (20%), followed by terrorism (17%), the environment (17%) and starvation/world hunger (16%).

### Most important world issue

Top mentions



### Q.1

*What do you think is the most important issue or problem facing the world today?*

## Major world concerns

Similarly, when Canadians are then presented with a slate of issues and asked about their level of concern with each, again the environment emerges at the top of the list. Six in ten (61%) Canadians say they are very concerned about global warming and other environmental problems.

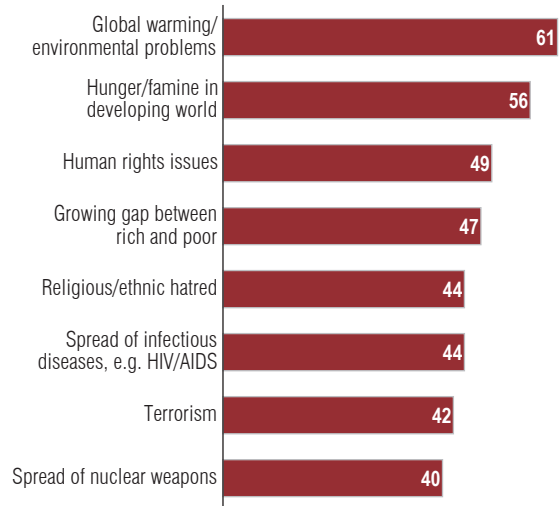
Large proportions of Canadians also say they are very concerned about hunger and famine in the developing world (56%), human rights abuses (49%), and the growing gap between rich and poor (47%), with equal numbers saying they are at least somewhat concerned about each issue. At least four in ten state they are very concerned about the spread of infectious diseases like AIDS (44%), religious and ethnic hatred (44%), terrorism (42%) and the spread of nuclear weapons (40%). On none of these issues do fewer than three in four Canadians say they are at least somewhat concerned.

**Age cohort.** Young Canadians, aged 15 to 24, stand out as most concerned about the planet they will inherit, with one-third (32%) identifying the environment as the most important global issue, along with 32 percent of 25- to 39-year-olds, with this focus declining among older cohorts. Youth are comparatively less apt to name war and conflict (24%) (the number one issue among Canadians aged 60 plus). Compared with older cohorts, youth are also more likely to express concern about the spread of infectious diseases, while less apt to be very concerned about the spread of nuclear weapons, religious and ethnic hatred, terrorism, and the gap between rich and poor.

**Place of birth.** Those born in Canada are somewhat more likely (30%) than those born elsewhere (25%) to see the environment as the top issue facing the planet, while foreign-born Canadians name war (28%) only slightly more often than do native-born Canadians (27%). Another issue on which native- and foreign-born Canadians diverge is the threat of terrorism: New Canadians are more likely (6%) to see terror as the top global issue, compared with just three percent of the Canadian-born.

**Region.** Global warming and the environment is most apt to be seen as the top global issue in B.C. (41%) and the Territories (32%), while in Quebec war and conflict is the number one global issue (37% – nine

## Very concerned about specific world issues



### Q.4

*Please tell me whether you are very, somewhat, not very or not at all concerned about each of the following global issues ...?*

points above the national average). When prompted, however, Quebecers are somewhat more likely than other Canadians to say they are very concerned about global warming and the environment (66%), as well as the spread of nuclear weapons (44%).

## Is the world heading in the right or wrong direction?

*Canadians are evenly split on whether they are optimistic or pessimistic about the world's future over the coming decade. Positive trends tend to be seen in terms of technological advances, while environmental degradation and world conflict are the most prominent negative trends.*

### Optimistic or pessimistic?

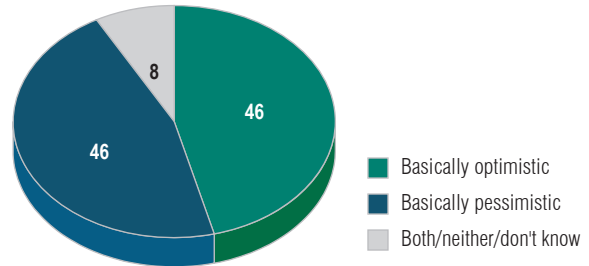
Canadians are evenly split on whether the world's future will be better or worse than today: Just under half (46%) say they are basically optimistic about the direction they think the world is heading over the next 10 years, while the same proportion (46%) are basically pessimistic. The remainder have a mixed view (5%) or could not offer a response (3%).

**Age cohort.** Middle-aged Canadians (40 to 59 years of age) are the most likely to express optimism about the direction of world events (48%), while youth aged 15 to 24 are least apt to share this view (43% optimistic versus 48% pessimistic).

**Place of birth.** New Canadians, like youth, are more apt to be pessimistic (48%) than optimistic (43%) about the direction they see the world heading over the next decade.

**Region.** Across Canada, it is residents of Manitoba and Saskatchewan who are most upbeat about the world direction (52% optimistic versus 39% pessimistic), followed by Quebecers (47% versus 44%). By contrast, the least hopeful opinions are found in B.C. (38% optimistic versus 55% pessimistic).

### General view of world's direction over next decade



#### Q.2

*Would you say you are basically optimistic or basically pessimistic about the direction you think the world is heading over the next 10 years?*

## Positive and negative trends

In what ways do Canadians believe the world is a better place than it was 20 years ago? When asked (unprompted), the most significant trends are of a technological nature: technology advancements (21%), medical advancements (14%) and communications/information technology (10%). Less widely cited are increased environmental awareness (7%), economic improvements/more jobs (5%), higher incomes/less poverty (4%), better education (4%) and global awareness (4%). Very few identify positive trends in areas of social justice and human rights, peace and conflict, tolerance or improved quality of life. Perhaps most telling is that four in ten (39%) Canadians could not think of any way in which they felt the world is now a better place compared with 20 years ago (i.e., 1987, just before the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe).

When asked how the world has gotten worse over the past 20 years, Canadians are most apt to name environmental degradation and global warming (25%)

or world conflict (22%), followed by increased crime (13%) and declining moral values (10%). One in ten (12%) could not think of any way in which the world is now a worse place than 20 years ago.

**Age cohort.** On positive trends, youth are most likely to emphasize technology advances (28%), while Canadians aged 60 and over are the ones least able to identify any positive trends (47%). On negative trends, it is the 60 plus cohort most likely to mention world conflict, crime and world hunger in the developing world.

**Place of birth.** New Canadians are most likely to mention positive trends around technology advances.

**Region.** There are few regional differences on positive trends. On negative trends, environment/climate change is most prominently mentioned in the territories (38%) and least so in Manitoba/Saskatchewan (19%).

## Good guys and bad guys on the world stage

*Most Canadians see their own country as one that stands out as a positive force in today's world, followed distantly by the U.S. and Great Britain. The U.S. stands out as being seen as a negative force in the world, well ahead of such countries as Iran, North Korea and Pakistan.*

### Good countries

When asked to name countries that stand out as being a positive force in the world today, six in ten (59%) Canadians name their own country. No other country is identified by more than one in six, with the next most common mentions being Great Britain/UK (16%) and the United States (15%). Other Western European countries are mentioned by fewer than one in ten (ranging from 8% for Sweden and France, down to 1% for Iceland). Other countries mentioned include Australia (7%), China (3%) and Japan (2%). No other country is identified by more than one percent of Canadians. One in five (21%) do not identify any country as standing out as a positive force in the world today.

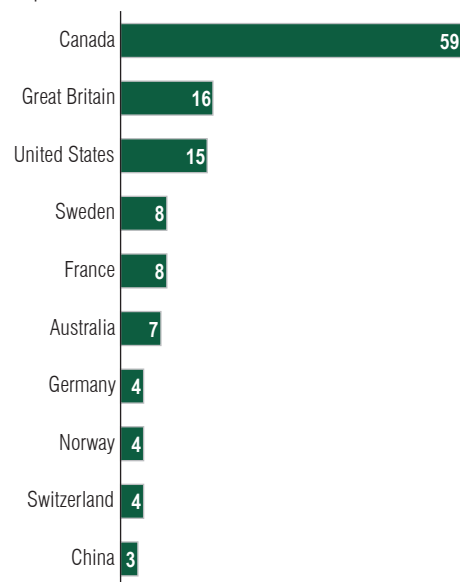
**Age cohort.** Canadians in the 60-plus age cohort stand out from the other three age groups in being less likely (52%) to see Canada as a positive force in the world, and more likely to name the U.S. (21%).

**Place of birth.** Although, foreign-born Canadians are somewhat less likely to name Canada as a positive force in the world (54%), they still name it far more often than any other country. This group is less apt to identify the UK (11%).

**Region.** Quebecers are the least likely to name Canada as a positive force in the world (49%), while residents of Atlantic Canada (67%) are the most likely to do so.

## Countries standing out as a positive force in today's world

Top mentions



Q.5a

*What countries, if any, stand out as being a positive force in the world today? Any others?*

## Bad countries

When it comes to naming countries that stand out as a negative force in the world today, half (52%) of Canadians point to their nearest neighbour, the U.S. Other countries making the list are Iran (21%), Iraq (19%), China (13%), Afghanistan (11%), Pakistan (9%), North Korea (8%) and Russia (6%). Others name regions such as Africa (7%) and the Middle East (5%), while another four percent specifically identify Israel or the Palestinian territories. Four percent name Canada as a negative force in the world, while 13 percent could not name any country fitting this role.

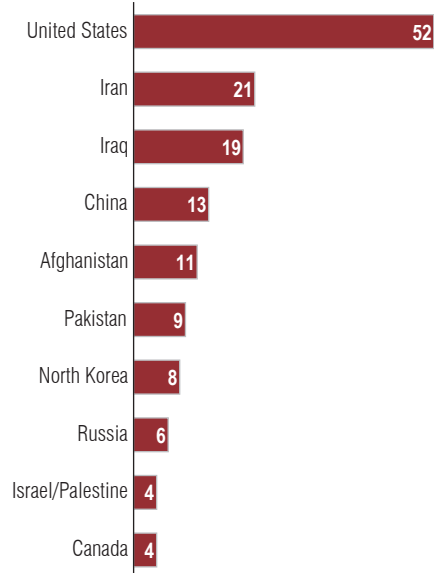
**Age cohort.** Young people stand out in their belief that the U.S. is a negative force in today's world (63%, versus only 36% of Canadians aged 60 plus), while less apt to name Iran (11%) or Pakistan (4%).

**Place of birth.** New Canadians are marginally less apt to identify the U.S. as a negative force (49% versus 53%), and to mention Middle Eastern countries.

**Region.** Perception of the U.S. as a negative force in the world today is most widespread in B.C. (58%) and Quebec (56%), but close to the 50 percent level in every region except the North (36%). Middle Eastern countries are most prominently identified in Alberta and least so in Quebec. In no region do more than five percent name Canada as a negative force in today's world.

## Countries standing out as a negative force in today's world

Top mentions



Q.5b

*What countries, if any, stand out as being a negative force in the world today? Any others?*