

NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND DISARMAMENT

Nuclear weapons and global security

Canadians believe that nuclear weapons have made the world a more dangerous place, with the greatest threat coming from terrorist attacks. There is overwhelming public support among Canadians for the complete elimination of the world's nuclear weapons.

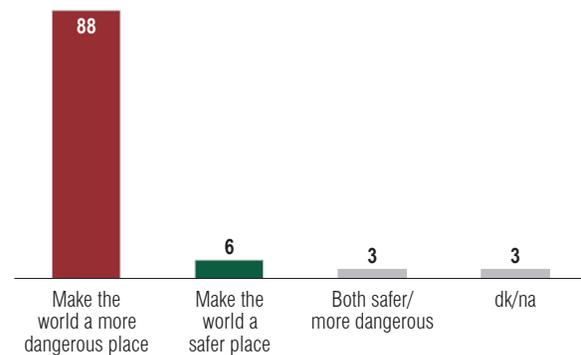
Impact of nuclear weapons on world safety

One of the major challenges facing today's world is the presence—and potential use—of nuclear weapons, which are currently in the arsenal of seven countries (officially) and likely several more. The devastating destructive power of such weapons is unquestioned, and this very power has made them highly effective as a deterrent to potential aggression against these countries and their allies. How do Canadians view the role of nuclear weapons in today's world—does it make the world a safer or more dangerous place?

Canadian public opinion is close to consensus on this question—nine in ten (88%) Canadians believe that nuclear weapons make the world a more dangerous place, with few saying it creates a safer world (6%). The remainder are more equivocal in their response to this question (3%) or are unable to offer one (3%). This sentiment is held equally strongly across the population, but youth aged 15 to 24 are especially likely to express the view that nuclear weapons make for a more dangerous world (93%).

Comparison with a 2007 international survey sponsored by The Simons Foundation reveals that Canadian opinion on this question is similar to sentiments expressed in six other nations (which either have nuclear

Impact of nuclear weapons



Q.42

Do you think nuclear weapons make the world a safer place or a more dangerous place?

capability domestically or through NATO).² Strong majorities also believe nuclear weapons have made the world a more dangerous place by residents of Germany (92%), Italy (90%), Israel (87%), the United States (79%), France (77%) and Great Britain (73%).

2 The Simons Foundation, "Global Public Opinion on Nuclear Weapons," Vancouver Canada, September 2007.

Greatest nuclear threat

In the Cold War era, the only danger from nuclear weapons came from potential war between major powers (as the Cuban Missile Crisis nearly demonstrated). In the early years of the 21st century, a new threat emerged in the form of non-state terrorists using nuclear weapons to strike out at their enemies. And it is this latter threat that Canadians now take more seriously. Canadians are more likely to say the greatest threat to world peace and security comes from the use of nuclear weapons by terrorists (51%) than their use by those countries who possess such weapons (31%). One in six (15%) maintain that both represent an equally significant threat, while only a handful (4%) cannot offer a response.

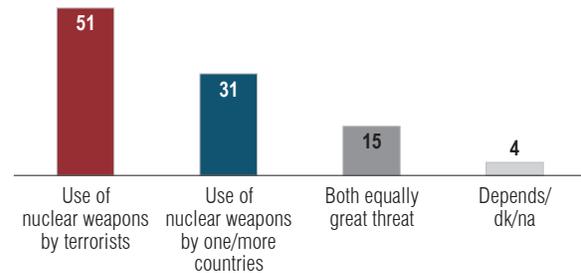
This view is evident across most of the population, but concern about terrorist use of nuclear weapons is strongest among Canadians 40 and older, while youth aged 15 to 24 are more evenly divided: 42 percent say the greater threat comes from terrorists, but almost as many point to major powers (40%). Quebecers stand out in being almost twice as likely as other Canadians to insist that both threats are equally serious.

Elimination of nuclear weapons

Canadians' uneasiness with nuclear weapons leads to a clear desire to rid them from the world. Close to nine in ten say they would strongly (73%) or moderately (15%) support the elimination of all nuclear weapons in the world through an enforceable agreement. Just one in ten moderately (4%) or strongly (5%) oppose such a move, while only three percent do not offer a clear opinion either way. This support for elimination is strong across the country, but most widespread in Quebec (84%), while somewhat less so in the Prairies and Atlantic Canada, and in the North.

Strong support for elimination is significantly more widespread than it is in four of the six countries polled on this question in 2007, including France (51%), Great Britain (50%), the U.S. (44%) and Israel (43%). Only in Italy (84%) and Germany (78%) do more citizens voice stronger support for eliminating such weapons.

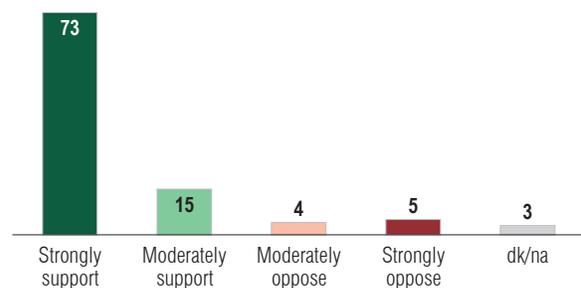
Which is the greater threat?



Q.43

Which do you consider the greater threat: The use of nuclear weapons by one or more countries, or the use of nuclear weapons by terrorists?

Elimination of all nuclear weapons



Q.46

Would you support or oppose eliminating all nuclear weapons in the world through an enforceable agreement? Is that strongly or moderately {support/oppose}?

NATO's nuclear capability

Canadians are more likely than not to feel that Canada is safer under the protection of NATO's nuclear arsenal. At the same time, a majority believe the use of NATO's nuclear weapons would never be justified under any circumstances.

Impact on Canada

Canada does not have any nuclear weapons but is a member of NATO, for which its nuclear arsenal is a cornerstone of its military capability. Despite Canadians' misgivings about the threat that nuclear weapons pose to world security, a majority (54%) believe that Canada is a safer country because of NATO's nuclear capability. Three in ten (30%) say that Canada is less safe because of its tie to NATO's nuclear arsenal, while another one in six are equivocal (6%) or unable to say either way (10%).

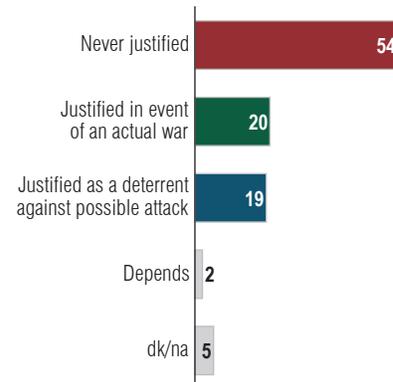
Residents of Atlantic Canada (63%) and Ontario (60%) are most apt to believe Canada is safer under NATO protection, while opinion is more divided among Quebecers (41% say safer, versus 35% who say less safe) and Canadian youth aged 15 to 24 (50% versus 38%).

Use of NATO's nuclear capability

While Canadians are more likely than not to feel safer because of NATO's nuclear deterrence, there is considerable discomfort about the prospect of these weapons ever being used. Only one in five (20%) believe the use of nuclear weapons by NATO would be justified in the event of an actual war, and a similar proportion (19%) say such use would be justifiable as a deterrent against a possible attack. A majority (54%) express the view that the use of NATO nuclear weapons would never be justified.

Opinions on this question are largely similar across the population, with some variation in proportions. The view that NATO nuclear strikes would be justified in the event of war is somewhat more evident among Albertans (26%) and youth (27%). Belief that use of such weapons is never justified is strongest in Quebec (61%) and among new Canadians (58%).

Use of NATO nuclear capability



Q.45

Do you think the use of nuclear weapons by NATO would be ... Justified in the event of an actual war ... Justified as a deterrent against a possible attack ... Never be justified?

Canadians are less categorical in their belief that use of NATO nuclear weapons would never be justified, in comparison with Germans (77%) and Italians (70%). But they are much more likely to express this view, when compared with the citizens of Great Britain (49%), France (43%), the U.S. (40%) and Israel (22%) in terms of whether the use of nuclear weapons by their own country would ever be justified.

Canadian policy on nuclear exports

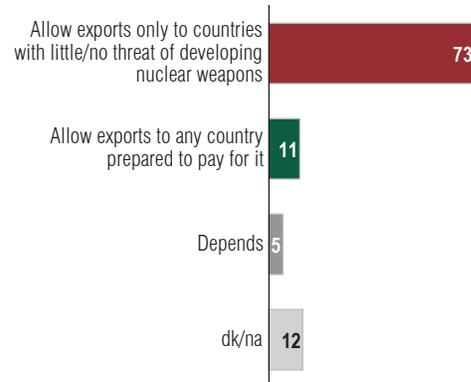
Most Canadians believe Canada should not be exporting its nuclear technology to countries that may end up using it to develop nuclear weapons.

While Canada does not manufacture or have nuclear weapons, it has a nuclear technology industry that exports nuclear energy products and services to other countries around the world. These exports are not directed to supporting nuclear arms, but some concerns have been expressed about whether or not this might be happening in some indirect ways.

With Canadians concerned about the hazards of nuclear weapons and their potential use, there is a clear preference for the country's nuclear technology industry to err on the side of safety over profits. Three-quarters (73%) say that Canada's nuclear exports should only be allowed to countries with little or no threat of developing nuclear weapons, compared with one in ten (11%) who maintain the industry should be able to export its products to any country prepared to pay for them. Another one in six say it would depend (e.g., on the countries in question) (5%) or cannot offer an opinion either way (12%).

Support for restricted exports is the majority view across the country, but most evident in Alberta (78%), B.C. (77%) and Atlantic Canada (77%). Youth aged 15 to 24 are among those most apt to feel that industry should be able to export to any country prepared to pay for the technology (18%).

Preferred policy on Canadian nuclear technology exports



Q.47

Canada has a nuclear technology industry which exports nuclear energy products and services to other countries. Should Canada's industry be allowed to export its technology ... To any country prepared to pay for it ... Only to countries with little or no threat of developing nuclear weapons?