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Majority (83%) of Australians support the closing of their international borders as few (21%) believe COVID-19 is contained – Ipsos poll

- New Zealand gets top marks for how it has dealt with COVID-19
- Health epidemic eclipses hacking as the top potential threat
- Majority of Australians do not believe China will be a positive influence on world affairs

December 4, 2020

More than eight in 10 Australians (83%) believe that **our international borders should be closed**, not allowing anyone in or out, as relatively few believe the coronavirus is contained, according to new Ipsos polling conducted on behalf of the Halifax International Security Forum.

A majority of global citizens also support international border closures in an effort to combat COVID-19. The poll of more than 21,000 people in 28 countries reveals that most global citizens are supportive of becoming more insular in order to fight the virus at home.

COVID response

In terms of attitudes to responding to COVID-19, the key Australian findings are:

- At 83% agreement **our international borders should be closed**, not allowing anyone in or out, we are second only to Malaysia 92% in support for this measure;
- Eight in ten (strongly disagree 32.9%/ somewhat disagree 45.8%) do not believe **COVID-19 is contained**;
- Eight in ten (33.6% strongly/47.8% somewhat) agree that our **country needs to focus less on the world and more at home**;
- When asked to assess whether or not certain countries or organisations have shown good leadership in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, nine in ten Australians surveyed said New Zealand had. However, 14% of Australians think the US has shown good leadership in dealing with the COVID 19 pandemic. Another 22% of us believe China has done a good job, and 43.8% believe the UK has done a good job;
- A majority of Australians (56.9%) believe the World Health Organisation has done a good job.

Globally the findings regarding the response to COVID-19 include:

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- Australia is just behind Malaysia 92% in **countries most supportive of international border closures**, followed by Canada (82%), Chile (82%), Peru (81%) and South Africa (78%). Two in three (67%) Americans support the closure of their borders. Some countries' residents (mostly in Europe) are much less likely to agree with the closure of their borders, including those in the Netherlands (44%), Sweden (47%), Germany (50%), Belgium (52%) and Hungary (56%) and Poland (57%).
- Strong support for border closures is likely a function of the fact that **relatively few believe that COVID-19 is contained**. Just one in three (33%) global citizens agrees (7% strongly/26% somewhat) that the coronavirus outbreak has been contained and will soon be over. Those in Malaysia (71%), Saudi Arabia (69%), India (68%), China (58%) and Russia (52%) are most likely to believe that the virus is largely contained, while those in Great Britain (17%), Spain (18%), Japan (19%), Belgium (20%), Canada (21%), France (21%), Chile (21%) and Australia (21%) are much less likely to believe it has been contained. One quarter (27%) of Americans believe COVID-19 has been contained and will soon be over.
- Given the difficult economic issues in their country today, eight in ten (78%) global citizens agree (33% strongly/45% somewhat) that their **country needs to focus less on the world and more at home**, up 5 points since last year.
- Global citizens were asked to assess whether or not certain countries or organisations have shown good leadership in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. New Zealand earns top marks from global citizens, with 74% believing that New Zealand has demonstrated good leadership.
- The United States is clearly lagging the field, and even only 39% of Americans believe that the US has shown leadership through its COVID-19 response. The only country that Americans judge harsher is China (32%), and Americans believe that Canada's response (84%) has shown the most leadership.

Concern over health epidemic overtakes hacking (74%) as top perceived threat

This study also looked at threat scenarios, which included: threat of a major health epidemic, major natural disaster, a terrorist attack, violent conflict between ethnic or minority groups, the country being involved in armed conflict abroad, nuclear or biological attack, personal and family safety and cyber-attacks or hacking.

More global citizens now perceive a **health epidemic** (78%, +27 points since last year) as the top threat over the next 12 months, surpassing the threat of **being hacked for fraudulent or espionage** purposes (74%, -1), which has been at the top of list for a number of years.

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The third most concerning threat globally is a **nuclear, biological and chemical attack** taking place somewhere in the world, where two-thirds (67%) of people believe it is a real threat in the next 12 months. Next is the threat of a **major natural disaster** (65%), followed by a tie between **violent conflict breaking out between ethnic or minority groups in their country** and **personal safety and security for themselves and their family** (61%, respectively). Comparatively, close to six in ten (58%) people consider a **terrorist attack taking place in their country** a real threat while four in ten (43%) people consider their country going into **armed conflict with another nation** a real threat.

Perceived threats among Australians surveyed were:

- 87% for health epidemic;
- 82.9% for a person, organisation or country hacking into their public, private or personal information for fraudulent or espionage purposes;
- 77% a natural disaster;
- 69.3% a nuclear, biological or chemical attack taking place somewhere in the world;
- 63.3% a terrorist attack;
- 58% a violent conflict between ethnic or minority groups;
- 52.5% the personal safety and security of family members being violated; and
- 47.4% Australia being involved in an armed conflict with another nation.

While most global citizens believe the threat of an epidemic or hacking is real, they are not convinced that the appropriate levels of security and protection could be provided by their own governments or agencies in response to such a threat. In fact, just 53% are confident that their government could respond effectively to a major health epidemic breaking out in their country. Confidence is among the highest in Australia at 66%.

China's influence on world affairs in the coming decade

The year 2020 has seen a precipitous drop in the proportion of global citizens who believe that China will have a positive influence on global affairs in the next decade, with just 42% saying that China will have an overall positive influence, down 11 points since last year.

Australia is among those least likely to believe China's influence in the next decade will be positive at 24%, however Canada is our top choice for positive influence at 90%.

China is not the only country whose scores have dropped considerably in the last number of years. Back in 2016, under an Obama administration, 64% believed that the United States would have a positive influence in world affairs, which dropped to 55% in 2017 after the election of Donald Trump as President and has deteriorated further to 50% in 2020.



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We have more faith in Great Britain, with 78.8% of us believing that the UK will have a positive influence. A majority of us (88.2%) do believe that Australia will have a positive influence on world affairs and most of us (71.8%) believe the United Nations will as well.

Ipsos Australia Director, David Elliott, said: "This year's research, conducted exclusively for the Halifax International Security Forum, was more wide ranging than usual. It wasn't surprising to see the threat of a health epidemic increase so dramatically and hit top spot this year, or to see further decline in perceptions of the United States as a positive influence in world affairs given what we have seen and heard from President Trump over the last 12 months. However, what was interesting was the 11 point slide for China, with only 42% globally believing it will have a positive influence globally. Given the seemingly daily escalation in the 'trade war' with China, this negative global perception of China no doubt resonates with many Australians at the moment."

About the Study

These are the findings of an Ipsos Global Advisor survey conducted between August 21st and September 4th, 2020. The survey instrument is conducted monthly in 28 countries around the world via the Ipsos Online Panel system. The countries reporting herein are Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, France, Great Britain, Germany, Hungary, India, Israel, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, Poland, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and the United States of America. For the results of the survey presented herein, an international sample of 21,104 adults aged 18-74 in the US and Canada, and age 16-74 in all other countries, were interviewed. Approximately 1000+ individuals participated on a country by country basis via the Ipsos Online Panel with the exception of Argentina, Belgium, Chile, Colombia, Hungary, India, Israel, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, Poland, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden and Turkey, where each have a sample approximately 500+. Weighting was then employed to balance demographics and ensure that the sample's composition reflects that of the adult population according to the most recent country Census data, and to provide results intended to approximate the sample universe. A survey with an unweighted probability sample of this size and a 100% response rate would have an estimated margin of error of +/-3.1 percentage points for a sample of 1,000 and an estimated margin of error of +/- 4.5 percentage points 19 times out of 20 per country of what the results would have been had the entire population of adults in that country had been polled. All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error, and measurement error.

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