

PRESS RELEASE

HISF-Ipsos Threat Index Finds Disinformation, Hacking Seen as Top Threats

Ipsos survey for the Halifax International Security Forum also finds natural disasters seen as fastest-growing threat over past decade

Toronto, ON, November 22, 2024 – Perception is reality — but who, or what, is influencing reality these days?

In the age of deepfakes and fake news it can be hard to know what's fact and what's fiction. And our new question on disinformation finds the vast majority are rightfully worried about this.

A new Ipsos poll of more than 22,000 people across 30 countries – the HISF-Ipsos Threat Index – conducted by Ipsos for the [Halifax International Security Forum](#) finds just over two in three think some person, organization, or country deliberately spreading disinformation to influence public opinion (new to the poll at 76%) in the next twelve months is a real threat.

Worry about disinformation looms large

This is an historic election year, with more than 60 countries set to hold national elections by the end of 2024, and the possible impact of disinformation on the democratic process has been a hot topic.

The issue dominated headlines in the U.S. amid the run-up to the presidential election on November 5, with both sides accusing the other of deliberately spreading falsehoods. This year's polling was conducted on Ipsos' [Global Advisor](#) online platform between Sept. 20 and Oct. 4, 2024, and found that in the lead-up to Election Day in the U.S. Americans were the most concerned (88%) of all 30 countries about disinformation.

Disinformation, often spread via social media online, is a global problem and that's reflected in our polling, which finds it's seen as a real threat by a majority in all 30 countries where Ipsos conducted the survey this year. Just over three-quarters (77%) of people in Canada, which must hold a national election before October 20, 2025, consider disinformation to be a real threat while those in Mexico (67%), which elected a new president in June, are the least concerned.

Threat of hacking ties for top spot

Cyberhacking has consistently been a leading concern over the past decade in our survey and ties disinformation as the No. 1 threat this year, with 76% on average globally saying that the threat of some person, organization or country hacking into either their public, private or personal information system for fraudulent or espionage purposes in the next twelve months is a real threat.

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Across all 30 countries, a nuclear/biological or chemical attack taking place somewhere in the world is currently perceived as a real threat by 72% (+one pt year-over-year), followed by natural disasters (70%, no change), a terrorist attack (66%, +three pts), a major health epidemic (62%, -one pt), the personal safety/security of individuals/their family members being violated (61%, -two pts), a violent conflict breaking out between ethnic/minority groups in their country (60%, no change), an artificial intelligence (AI)-based defense system becoming a threat to humanity by breaking free of human control (60%, no change) and armed conflict with another country (50%, +one pt).

Since 2015, on average across 20 countries*, hacking for fraudulent or espionage purposes has been seen as the threat most widely found to be real except for in 2020 (the year a global pandemic was declared and a major health epidemic topped the list), 2022 (the year Russia invaded Ukraine when hacking tied with fears about a nuclear/chemical attack) and 2024 (when hacking tied with the newly added issue of disinformation amid a big global election year).

The proportion of citizens listing cyberattacks as a real threat only significantly declined in one country, Peru (-10 pts to 67%) in 2024. Hacking is considered a real threat for most respondents in all of the countries Ipsos conducted polling this year and there are significant increases in eleven countries — the U.S. (+five pts to 84%), Poland (+16 pts to 81%), Indonesia (+five pts to 80%), Singapore (+four pts to 80%), Belgium (+six pts to 80%), Spain (+five pts to 80%), the Netherlands (+eight pts to 78%), South Korea (+eight pts to 77%), Mexico (+six pts to 75%), Japan (+seven pts to 73%) and India (+10 pts to 73%). Meanwhile, concern remains just above the global average in Canada at 78% (+one pt).

Concern about natural disasters up in last decade

After yet another year filled with record-breaking heat, forest fires and floods people around the world people are clearly concerned. The proportion who feel a major natural disaster taking place in their country is a somewhat/very real threat is up 11 points from 2015 when 58%, on average across 20 countries*, said a natural disaster was a threat.

In 2024, a majority in 27 of 30 countries say a natural disaster is a threat with concern among Canadians dropping six points since 2023 to 68% while worry remains well above the global average in the U.S. at 85% (+one pt).

Nuclear/biological/chemical attack concern remains high

Concern about a nuclear, biological, or chemical attack happening somewhere in the world surged nine points, on average across 20 countries*, in the wake of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and despite easing a bit as the conflict nears the three-year mark, worry is still higher than it was in 2021 when 65% considered it a real threat.

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Concern about a possible attack remains widespread and is seen as a real threat by majorities in every country surveyed in 2024, ranging from 58% (no change since 2023) in France to 86% (+one pt) in Thailand.

Only one country, Chile (-six pts to 72%), shows a significant decrease from last year in concern about a nuclear, biological, or chemical attack. Concern rose significantly in Singapore (+five pts to 80%), Indonesia (+six pts to 75%), Canada (+five points to 74%) and Italy (+six pts to 64%). Worry in the U.S. remained slightly higher than the global average at 78% (no change).

Concern about an epidemic also remains elevated

The coronavirus crisis is now firmly in the rearview mirror, but scars remain.

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared a global pandemic on March 11, 2020, with many believing it would be over relatively quickly. Instead, years of anxiety and uncertainty followed until the WHO finally declared an end to the COVID-19 global public health emergency on May 5, 2023.

The proportion of people worried about a major health epidemic breaking out in their country has now levelled out around the 60% mark. While that's well below the 79%, on average across 20 countries*, who considered an epidemic a real threat in 2020 during year one of the pandemic it's still above the 51% who thought the same in 2019 pre-pandemic.

Lack of confidence in government and its agencies to deal with threats

Throughout the world, many citizens continue to be skeptical that "the appropriate levels of security and protection could be provided by [their] government or its agencies could respond effectively" to perceived real threats.

In 2024, 72% on average across 30 countries view a nuclear/biological/chemical attack taking place somewhere in the world as a real threat, yet only 44% express confidence in their government's ability to respond if a nuclear attack took place — a difference of 28 percentage points.

There are similarly wide gaps on a few other issues. Just over three in four (76%) say some person, organization or country hacking into their information system for fraudulent/espionage purposes is a real threat, yet only 48% express confidence in their government's ability to respond to cyberhacking in their country — a difference of 28 percentage points. And while the majority (a 30-country average of 76%) feel some person, organization, or country deliberately spreading disinformation to influence public opinion is a real threat, half (50%) are somewhat/very confident their government could respond to the threat effectively — a gap of 26 percentage points.

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About the Study

These are the results of a 30-country survey conducted by Ipsos on its Global Advisor online platform and, in India, on its IndiaBus platform, between Friday, September 20 and Friday, October 4, 2024. For this survey, Ipsos interviewed a total of 22,989 adults aged 18 years and older in India, 18-74 in Canada, Malaysia, South Africa, Türkiye, and the United States, 20-74 in Thailand, 21-74 in Indonesia and Singapore, and 16-74 in all other countries.

The sample consists of approximately 1,000 individuals each in Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, Spain, and the U.S., and 500 individuals each in Argentina, Belgium, Chile, Colombia, Hungary, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Malaysia, Mexico, the Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden, Thailand, and Türkiye. The sample in India consists of approximately 2,000 individuals, of whom approximately 1,800 were interviewed face-to-face and 200 were interviewed online.

Samples in Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Poland, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, and the U.S. can be considered representative of their general adult populations under the age of 75. Samples in Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Indonesia, Israel, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, Singapore, South Africa, Thailand, and Türkiye are more urban, more educated, and/or more affluent than the general population. The survey results for these countries should be viewed as reflecting the views of the more “connected” segment of their population.

India’s sample represents a large subset of its urban population — social economic classes A, B and C in metros and tier 1-3 town classes across all four zones.

The data is weighted so that the composition of each country’s sample best reflects the demographic profile of the adult population according to the most recent census data. “The Global Country Average” reflects the average result for all the countries and markets in which the survey was conducted. It has not been adjusted to the population size of each country or market and is not intended to suggest a total result.

When percentages do not sum up to 100 or the ‘difference’ appears to be +/-1 percentage point more/less than the actual result, this may be due to rounding, multiple responses, or the exclusion of “don’t know” or not stated responses.

The precision of Ipsos online polls is calculated using a credibility interval with a poll where N=1,000 being accurate to +/- 3.5 percentage points and of where N=500 being accurate to +/- 5.0 percentage points. For more information on Ipsos’ use of credibility intervals, please visit the Ipsos website.

The publication of these findings abides by local rules and regulations.

*Change for 20-country average is based on the countries which were in all editions of the Ipsos for the Halifax Security Forum report.

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About Ipsos

Ipsos is one of the largest market research and polling companies globally, operating in 90 markets and employing nearly 20,000 people.

Our passionately curious research professionals, analysts and scientists have built unique multi-specialist capabilities that provide true understanding and powerful insights into the actions, opinions and motivations of citizens, consumers, patients, customers or employees. Our 75 business solutions are based on primary data from our surveys, social media monitoring, and qualitative or observational techniques.

“Game Changers” – our tagline – summarizes our ambition to help our 5,000 clients navigate with confidence our rapidly changing world.

Founded in France in 1975, Ipsos has been listed on the Euronext Paris since July 1, 1999. The company is part of the SBF 120, Mid-60 indices, STOXX Europe 600 and is eligible for the Deferred Settlement Service (SRD).

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