FACTUM

The Technology War Is Already Here, And Everyone Is on the Battlefield

New Ipsos survey for Halifax International Security Forum finds widespread concern about cyberattacks and disinformation, while fears about artificial intelligence and the future of democratic freedoms are growing.

Toronto, Canada, November 21, 2026 — The next war may not begin with an attack on a military base. For ordinary citizens, the threats are already present on the phones and computers they use every day. A new Ipsos survey conducted for the Halifax International Security Forum finds that 77% of respondents across 20 countries tracked consistently in the annual research regard deliberate disinformation as a real threat. Almost as many, 76%, say the same about hacking for fraudulent or espionage purposes. Concern about artificial intelligence is also increasing. Two-thirds now regard an AI defence system escaping human control as a real threat, an increase of seven percentage points over the past year.

The findings point to a change in the nature of national security. People no longer have to live near a battlefield to be exposed to activities intended to compromise their security or influence what they believe. The survey of more than 22,500 people in 30 countries was conducted ahead of the November 20 to 22 Halifax International Security Forum, which meets this year under the theme *Agenda: Ideals.*

The Battlefield Is in Your Pocket

For much of history, the battlefield was the place where armies confronted one another. The development of digital technology has made it possible to attack a country's institutions or interfere with its public debate without crossing its borders. The devices people use to communicate and obtain information also provide opportunities for those seeking to steal information or influence public opinion. Citizens can be exposed to these activities without knowing where they originated or who is responsible.

The survey shows how seriously people regard these threats. In the United States, 85% believe deliberate disinformation is a real threat, while 83% say the same about hacking. In Canada, 78% regard disinformation as a real threat and 77% are concerned about hacking. These findings are consistent with the high levels of concern recorded across the countries surveyed. The distinction from conventional warfare is important. A person does not have to serve in the military or live in a conflict zone to become a target of hostile activity. The technology people depend on in their daily lives can also be used against them.

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Artificial Intelligence Is Raising the Stakes

Concern about artificial intelligence is increasing more rapidly than concern about any other security threat measured in the comparable annual series. Across the 20 countries tracked consistently, 66% now regard an AI defence system escaping human control as a real threat to humanity. That represents an increase of seven percentage points since 2025 and nine points since 2023. The increase is particularly pronounced in North America. In the United States, 75% now regard such a system as a real threat, up 11 points in a single year. In Canada, concern has increased eight points to 68%.

These findings are significant because the question concerns a technology whose future military applications remain uncertain. The public is already worried about the possibility that systems designed to improve national defence could eventually become threats themselves. The rapid increase in concern suggests that artificial intelligence is becoming an established part of how people think about national security.

The Threat to Democratic Freedom

The survey also finds growing concern about what digital technology could mean for democracy. Across the 30 countries surveyed, 58% agree that the revolution in digital technology will undermine and destroy the democratic freedoms that exist in the world today. That is an increase of seven percentage points since 2025. Concern is particularly high in Colombia, where 67% agree, followed by Mexico at 66% and India at 65%. In Canada, 57% believe digital technology will undermine democratic freedoms. In the United States, 53% agree. These findings stand in contrast to the expectations that accompanied the early development of the internet. Digital technology was widely seen as a means of expanding access to information and making it easier for people to participate in public affairs.

Today, a majority of respondents believe the digital revolution threatens the democratic freedoms it was once expected to strengthen. The concern extends beyond the possibility of personal financial loss or stolen information. It involves the potential consequences of technological change for the political systems in which people live.

A Different Kind of Security Threat

The findings have important implications for the political and military leaders gathering in Halifax. Governments have traditionally organized national defence around threats that could be identified geographically and confronted with military force. Digital threats operate differently because they can originate outside a country's borders and reach directly into the lives of its citizens. The survey suggests that the public understands this change. Large majorities regard hacking and disinformation as real threats, while concern about artificial intelligence is increasing rapidly.

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The implications for democratic countries are considerable. Protecting citizens now involves more than defending territory, and maintaining national security requires attention to the digital systems on which modern societies depend. The technology war does not require everyone to carry a weapon. It has made the devices people carry potential points of attack.

About the Study

The Ipsos World Affairs and Security Report 2026 was conducted online among 22,526 adults under the age of 75 across 30 countries between September 25 and October 9, 2026.

The study examines perceptions of international security threats and government preparedness, as well as public attitudes toward democracy and global affairs. Historical comparisons are based on the 20 countries included consistently in the annual research.

International figures represent averages across the countries surveyed rather than population-weighted estimates of the world's population.

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