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The World Wants Strong Defences, But Can Governments Deliver?

New Ipsos survey for Halifax International Security Forum finds strong public support for national defence and increased military spending, but weaker confidence in governments' ability to acquire the equipment they need.

Toronto, Canada, November 22, 2026 — People around the world believe their countries need strong military forces, and many want their governments to spend more on defence. But they are less certain that governments can deliver the equipment needed to protect them. A major new Ipsos survey conducted for the Halifax International Security Forum finds that 78% of respondents across 30 countries believe it is important to maintain a strong national defence force, even in times of peace. Six in ten, 60%, agree that given the dangers in the world, their governments need to spend more on the military. However, just 63% express confidence that their countries will be able to buy what they need to defend themselves.

The findings reveal an important challenge for governments confronting a more dangerous international environment. Public support for military capability remains strong. But agreeing that national defence matters is not the same as believing governments can turn that commitment into the equipment and capabilities their armed forces require. The survey of more than 22,500 people across 30 countries was conducted ahead of the November 20 to 22 Halifax International Security Forum, which brings together political, military and security leaders from democratic nations.

Strong National Defence Remains a Public Priority

Despite the considerable differences in the security challenges facing countries around the world, the importance of maintaining strong national defence forces commands widespread public support. Across the 30 countries surveyed, 78% agree that their country should maintain a strong national defence force, even in times of peace.This is an important finding at a time when governments are confronting difficult choices about public spending. Defence competes with health care, education, infrastructure and other priorities for limited public resources. But the survey suggests that the public continues to recognize the importance of military preparedness, even when their countries are not directly involved in armed conflict.

The lesson for governments is that maintaining military capability is not simply a priority for defence officials and security experts. It is something the public considers an important responsibility of the state.

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The Public Wants Governments to Spend More

Support for strong national defence also translates into substantial support for increased military spending. Across the 30 countries surveyed, 60% agree that given the dangers in the world, their governments need to spend more on the military. That finding comes as many countries are reconsidering their defence commitments in response to the war in Ukraine, growing tensions in Asia and uncertainty about the future of international security arrangements.

The demand for additional spending is not uniform across countries. Different assessments of national security threats, economic circumstances and existing military capabilities all influence public attitudes. Nevertheless, the overall finding is clear. A majority believes the international security environment justifies greater military investment.

For political leaders who have argued that their countries need to strengthen their armed forces, the survey suggests there is a substantial base of public support. But that support comes with an important qualification.

Spending Money Is Not the Same as Building Capability

One of the most revealing findings concerns public confidence in defence procurement. Across the countries surveyed, 63% express confidence that their country will be able to buy what it needs to defend itself. While that represents a majority, it is considerably weaker than the 78% who believe maintaining a strong national defence force is important. The distinction matters. Modern military forces depend on increasingly sophisticated and expensive equipment. Aircraft, ships, weapons systems, communications networks and emerging technologies can take years to develop, acquire and deploy. Governments can announce additional spending relatively quickly. Turning that money into operational military capability is a much more difficult undertaking.

The survey does not establish why some citizens lack confidence in procurement. But it does demonstrate that public support for defence cannot automatically be interpreted as confidence in governments' ability to deliver it. For countries seeking to rebuild or modernize their armed forces, that represents a significant challenge.

A Test of Government Delivery

The findings raise important questions for the political and military leaders gathering in Halifax. For much of the period following the Cold War, many democratic countries reduced their military spending or allowed important capabilities to decline. Governments now face pressure to reverse those decisions in a much less predictable international environment. The public appears willing to support stronger national defence and, in many countries, additional spending. What remains less certain is whether governments can translate those commitments into results.

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The challenge involves more than allocating money. It requires effective procurement systems, industrial capacity, skilled personnel and the ability to adapt to rapidly changing military technology. The growing importance of artificial intelligence, autonomous systems and other emerging technologies makes that task even more demanding. Governments are being asked to prepare for a security environment that is changing faster than many traditional military acquisition systems were designed to accommodate.

The Public Is Ready. Governments Must Deliver.

The findings from this year's Halifax International Security Forum survey suggest that political leaders have an opportunity to strengthen their countries' military capabilities with substantial public support. Most citizens continue to believe that strong national defence is necessary, even in peacetime. A majority also believes governments should be spending more on their armed forces. But public confidence in the ability to acquire the necessary equipment is less convincing. That is where the challenge now lies.

The debate about national defence cannot end with commitments to spend more money. Governments must demonstrate that those commitments will produce the military capabilities their countries need. The public understands the importance of national defence. The question is whether governments can deliver it.

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 survey examines public perceptions of national security, military preparedness, defence spending and international affairs. The international figures represent averages across the countries surveyed rather than population-weighted estimates of the world's population.

The defence procurement question was asked of 13,227 respondents across the 30 countries.

For more information on this Factum, please contact:

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