



May 2018

IPSOS VIEWS

What Worries the World

Michael Clemence



What Worries the World?

Every month across the year, our *What Worries the World* survey series has asked an online sample of over 18,000 citizens in 26 core countries¹ about the biggest worries for their nation, presenting them with a list of 17 concerns ranging from crime and violence to childhood obesity.

Which three of the following topics do you find the most worrying in your country?

- Immigration control
- Healthcare
- Poverty & social inequality
- Terrorism
- Rise of extremism
- Unemployment
- Maintaining social programmes
- Crime & violence
- Moral decline
- Financial/political corruption
- Education
- Taxes
- Inflation
- Climate change
- Threats against the environment
- Childhood obesity
- Access to credit

The headline figures from the seventh year of our polling series are:

1. The world has become marginally more optimistic: **40%** believe their country is headed in the right direction, up from **37%** in 2016.
2. Unemployment remains the biggest worry for 2017 overall, but its lead over poverty/inequality and corruption diminished over the year.
3. This fall in concern about unemployment has been driven by big drops in worry about job security in established nations including Canada and the US.

This year's report also investigates who is most worried about each of the biggest three concerns in the poll – unemployment, corruption and political scandal, and poverty/inequality.

It finds that worry about unemployment is the most evenly spread across different countries. By contrast, concern about poverty/inequality is more of a concern for citizens in established economies, while corruption and political scandal is a bigger issue for those in emerging economies.

¹ Malaysia and Chile will be added to the core countries for 2018

What worries the World – core country coverage

Country	Sample size (per month)	Audience
Argentina	500	Full
Australia	1,000	Full
Belgium	500	Full
Brazil	1,000	Partial/middle class
Canada	1,000	Full
China	1,000	Partial/middle class
France	1,000	Full
Germany	1,000	Full
Great Britain	1,000	Full
Hungary	500	Full
India	1,000	Partial/middle class
Israel	500	Full
Italy	1,000	Full
Japan	1,000	Full
Mexico	500	Partial/middle class
Peru	500	Partial/middle class
Poland	500	Full
Russia	500	Partial/middle class
Saudi Arabia	500	Partial/middle class
Serbia	500	Full
South Africa	500	Partial/middle class
South Korea	500	Full
Spain	1,000	Full
Sweden	500	Full
Turkey	500	Partial/middle class
US	1,000	Full

Are we on the right track?

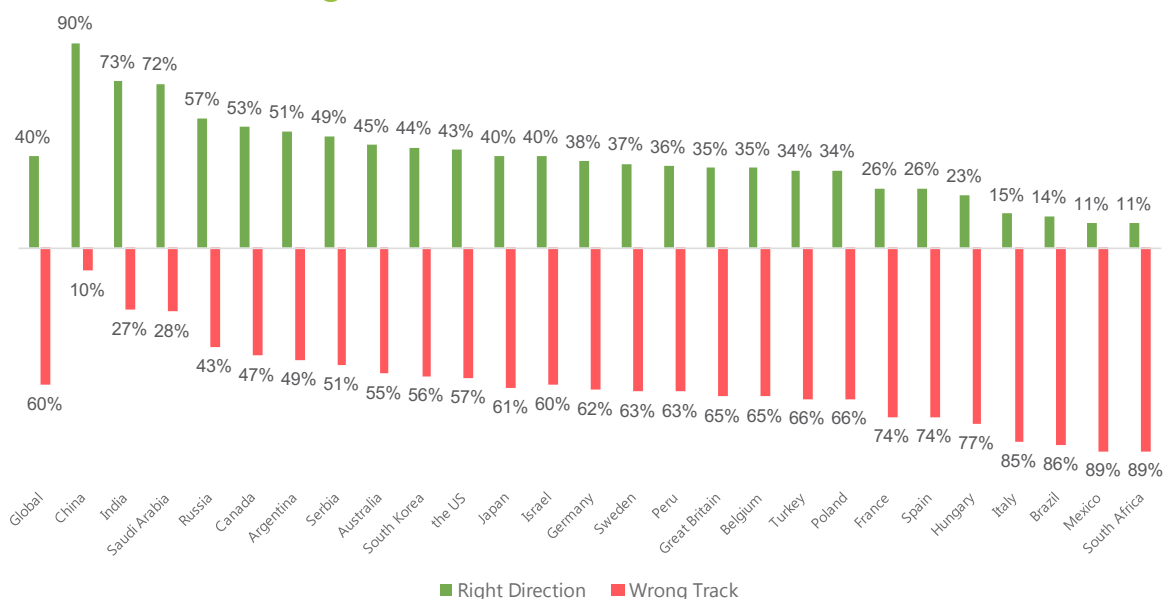
In addition to asking about citizens' concerns, we also ask for their assessment of the direction of travel of their country – whether they feel things are heading in the right direction, or if they are off on the wrong track.

In 2017 we witnessed a three percentage-point rise in optimism – 40% of global participants felt that their country was headed in the right direction, compared to 37% the previous year. Chinese citizens remain the most upbeat with 90% optimistic about the direction of their country, improving on their 2016 score of 88%.

Still, a majority – 60% – of the global public are pessimistic. At the foot of the league table of optimism we see some familiar names from 2016; less than 15% of citizens in Brazil, Mexico and South Africa are happy with the direction of their country, close to their scores for the previous year. Italy is a new joiner, with their level of optimism slipping from 20% to 15%, while the French have doubled their optimism over the same period, from 13% to 26%.

The pattern of national optimism we observe echoes the “Optimism Divide” found in our Global Trends Survey report² – optimism abounds among those living in the emerging markets of Asia, while the inhabitants of established economies – especially those in Europe – are more pessimistic.

Right direction or wrong track?



Base: 250,309 adults aged 16-64 (18-64 in US, CA) in 26 countries, interviewed Jan – Dec 2017

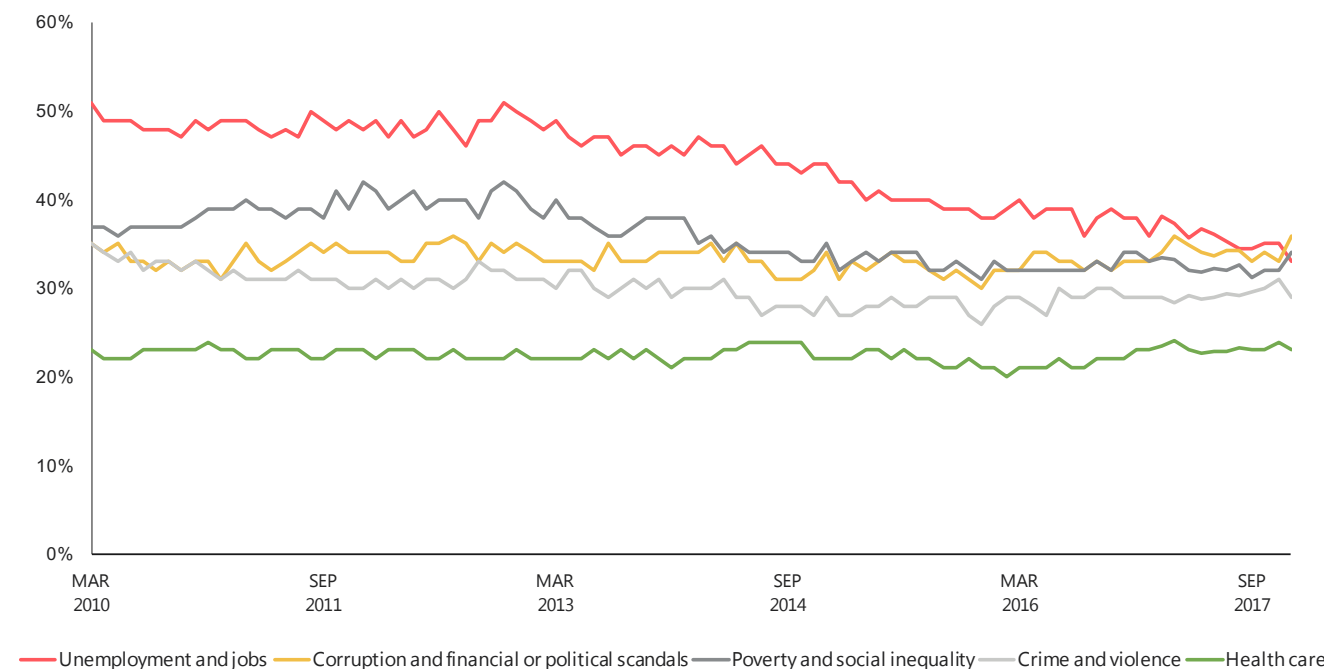
² <https://www.ipsosglobaltrends.com/category/article/the-optimism-divide/>

2017 in review

December 2017 was a significant month for the *What Worries The World* series – for the first time since the survey began in March 2010, unemployment was not the number one issue worldwide. Thirty-three per cent cited unemployment as a worry, putting it in third position behind both corruption and financial/political scandals (the new leader on 36%) and poverty and social inequality (34%).

One of the factors driving the end of the dominance of unemployment is a sharp reduction in concern in established markets. Between January and December 2017, concern about unemployment fell by 17 percentage points in Canada, 11 points in the US, ten in Poland and nine in Russia and Sweden. By contrast, the biggest increases in concern occurred in emerging markets – with rises of six percentage points in China, and four points in Turkey and Peru (although unemployment is not the biggest worry in any of these countries).

After 93 months, unemployment leaves the top spot



Base: 250,309 adults aged 16-64 (18-64 in US, CA) in 26 countries, interviewed Jan – Dec 2017

The impact of this shift in global concern is masked when we look at the scores across 2017 as a whole; here unemployment retains a slim lead on 36%. Corruption and financial/political scandal scores 34% over the year, and poverty/social inequality stands at 33%.

Elsewhere in the ranking there has been limited movement since last year. Crime and violence remains the fourth-biggest worry on the same score as 2016, and healthcare has risen by two percentage points to 23% but remains fifth. Childhood obesity and access to credit remain the least pressing worries, on three and two per cent respectively.

What Worries the World – ranking 2016-2017

Worry	% mentioning in 2017	% mentioning in 2016
1 Unemployment/jobs	36%	38%
2 Corruption and financial/political scandals	34%	33%
3 Poverty/social inequality	33%	33%
4 Crime and violence	29%	29%
5 Healthcare	23%	21%
6 Terrorism	20%	20%
7 Education	19%	19%
8 Taxes	17%	16%
9 Moral decline	15%	14%
10 Immigration control	13%	13%
11 Inflation	10%	11%
12 Rise of extremism	10%	10%
13 Threats to the environment	10%	9%
14 Maintaining social programmes/Welfare state	9%	10%
15 Climate change	9%	8%
16 Childhood obesity	3%	3%
17 Access to credit	2%	2%



เอเธนส์ (เอเธนส์)

แอลลิสซาบว
ลิสบอน

เคนยา

นครนิต
มหานคร
ทูลูนา
แทนซาเนีย

อินโดนีเซีย

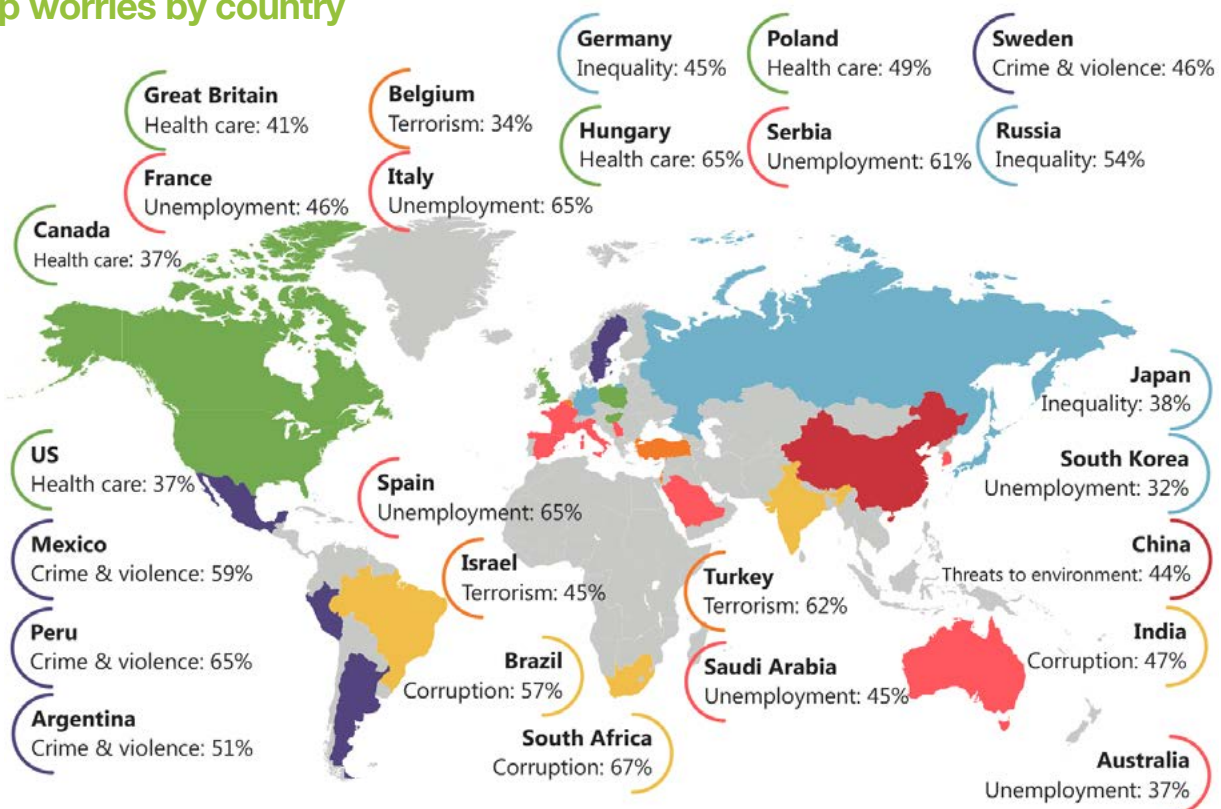
อินโดนีเซีย

Who worries about what?

The principal trend in world worries over 2017 has been the shift from a global focus on unemployment and jobs to the emergence of three key issues for the world – unemployment and jobs, poverty and inequality, and corruption and political scandals.

This trend can be seen across the 26 countries in the poll: unemployment remains the most common top issue, however this is the case in only eight countries. Healthcare is the second most common as the biggest worry for five countries, followed by crime and violence in four. Despite being the second and third biggest worries worldwide, corruption and poverty/inequality are the biggest concern in just three countries each. Finally, China stands out this year as the only country that rates threats against the environment as the biggest worry.

Top worries by country



Base: 250,309 adults aged 16-64 (18-64 in US, CA) in 26 countries, interviewed Jan – Dec 2017

As demonstrated above, the fall in concern about unemployment has been driven by diverging priorities for citizens in different parts of the world. Each of the three key issues – unemployment, poverty/inequality and corruption and political scandal – has a different base of support, reflecting how national priorities are changing. Using the 2017 *What Worries the World* data, here we provide some background to the different constituencies driving concern with each of the world's three biggest worries.

Unemployment

In addition to being the most frequently mentioned worry of 2017, unemployment and jobs is also the most evenly distributed worry across different demographic groups. The difference in worry between those living in emerging and established markets³ was just five percentage points, meaning those living in emerging markets such as China and India were slightly more worried overall than residents of countries such as the US and France. However, the most – and least – concerned countries came from established markets (Italy and Spain on 65%; Germany on 12%).

Pessimists were – perhaps unsurprisingly – more worried than optimists, however the difference between these two groups is smaller than for other issues. Thirty-eight per cent of those who think their country is headed in the wrong direction named unemployment as a worry, compared with 33% of those who feel things are on the right track. The difference between those who are satisfied and dissatisfied about the present situation of their country is similar (31% compared with 40%).

The difference in worry between men and women on this topic is smaller still, at just two percentage points. There is a notable age gradient however, with four in ten of those aged 16-24 concerned, declining to 31% of 55-64 year olds.

Who is more worried about unemployment?

Top five most concerned

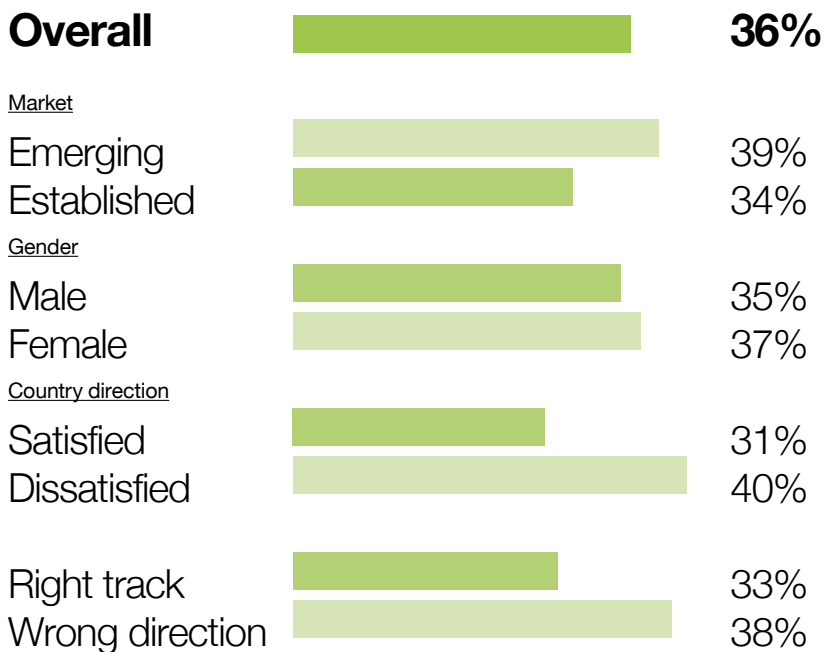
Italy	65%
Spain	65%
South Korea	62%
Serbia	61%
South Africa	57%

Top five least concerned

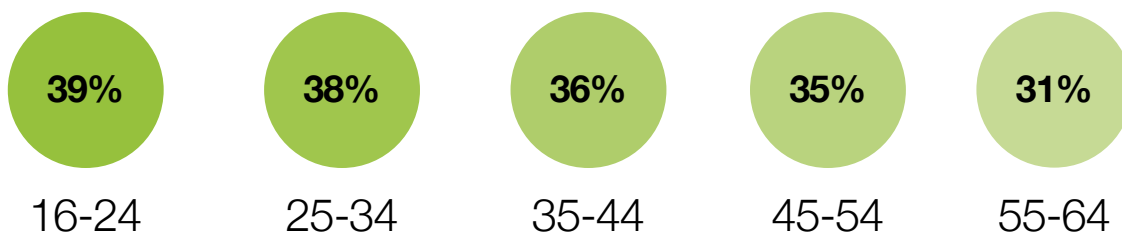
Sweden	21%
USA	18%
Great Britain	18%
Israel	17%
Germany	12%

³ Emerging Markets here are: Argentina, Brazil, China, India, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey and Peru. Established Markets are: Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Poland, Russia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Great Britain, the United States, Israel and Serbia

Worry about unemployment by key demographic groups



Worry by age group



Base: 250,309 adults aged 16-64 (18-64 in US, CA) in 26 countries, interviewed Jan – Dec 2017

Poverty and inequality

There is greater variation in attitudes towards poverty and inequality. It is a bigger concern for those living in established economies than for emerging market citizens, with an eight percentage point gap between these two groups. In fact, concern with poverty and inequality was greater than concern about unemployment in established economies (36% versus 34%). The United States is a notable exception here; just 17% consider inequality a worry for their country, six percentage points lower than for any other country.

Poverty and inequality is also a lesser concern for those who feel their country is headed in the right direction; a quarter of optimists think this is a concern, compared to over a third of pessimists. These figures are similar for both those who are currently optimistic about their country (satisfied with the way things are going) as well as those who are optimistic with the way things are developing for the future (think their country is headed on the right track).

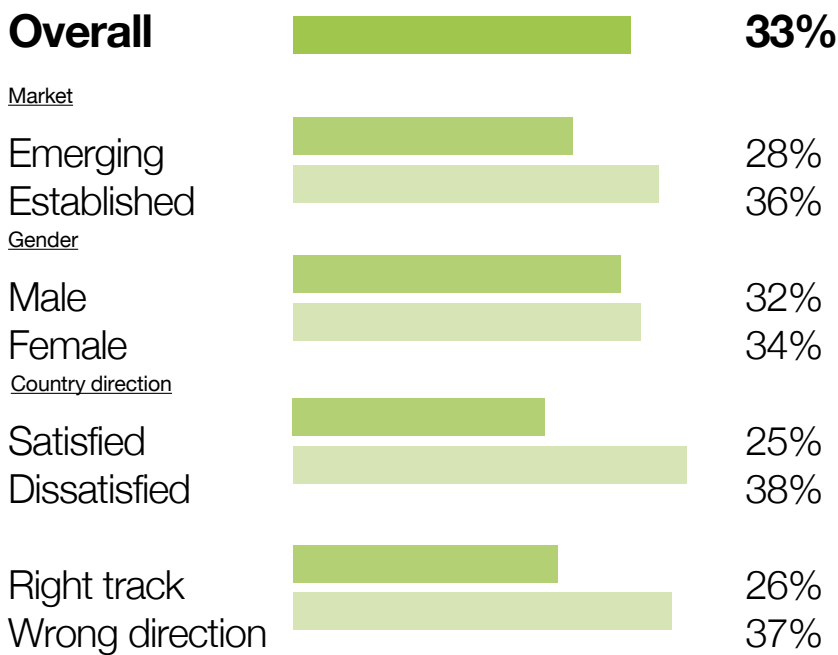
Looking at key demographic factors, however, concern is much less varied here. Men and women show a similar level of concern (32% for the former and 34% for the latter), while there is a small five percentage point gap between the youngest participants, who are least concerned about poverty (16-24: 31%), and the oldest group, who are the most worried (55-64: 36%).

Who is more worried about inequality?

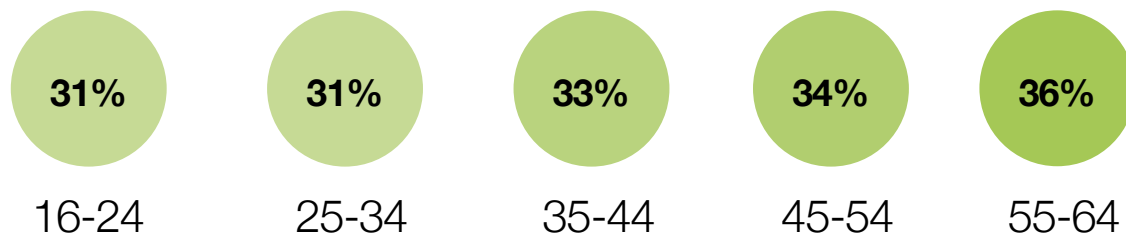
Top five most concerned	
Hungary	57%
Russia	54%
Serbia	53%
Germany	45%
Israel	41%

Top five least concerned	
Saudi Arabia	25%
Australia	24%
Brazil	23%
Sweden	23%
USA	17%

Worry about poverty/inequality by key demographic groups



Worry by age group



Base: 250,309 adults aged 16-64 (18-64 in US, CA) in 26 countries, interviewed Jan – Dec 2017

Corruption and financial/ political scandals

As befits a concern that can be strongly affected by individual political events, there is the greatest level of variation in concern about corruption and political scandal.

There is a clear difference in worry between emerging and established markets, with four in ten citizens of the former citing this as a worry – this is the same proportion as those concerned about unemployment in emerging markets (39%). By contrast, three in ten members of the public in established markets are worried about corruption, making it the smallest of their three key issues. This is reflected in the country rankings; all five of the least-concerned countries are established economies.

Optimism about the direction of the country was also correlated with concern about corruption – both those who are satisfied with the way things are going currently, as well as those who feel their country is headed in the right direction, were substantially less worried about corruption than average. Four in ten pessimists felt that corruption and political scandal is a big worry.

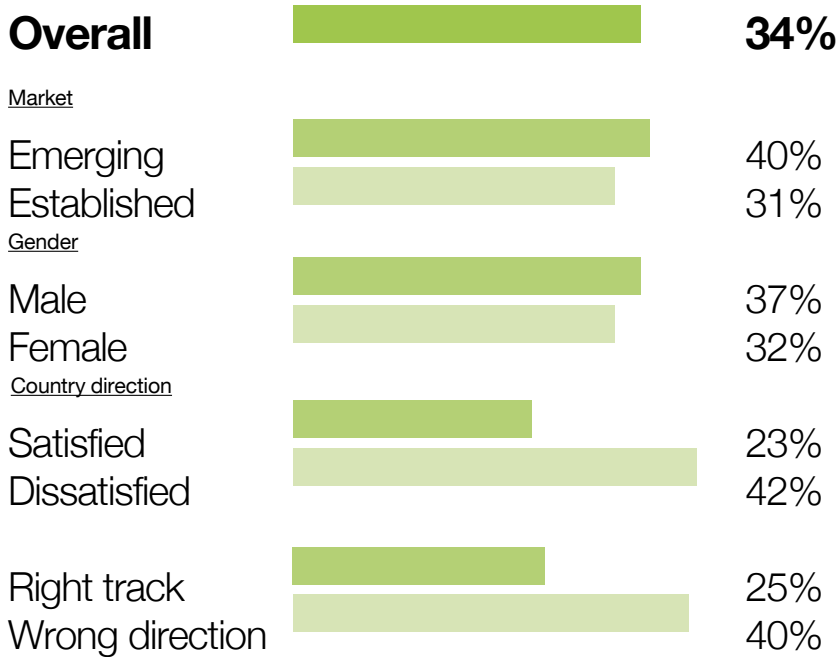
Corruption concerns were also the only one of the three main worries where men and women have differing views, with men more likely to feel this is a worry than women, albeit by a small (5ppt) margin. The same distance separates the least worried youngest participants (16-24: 33%) from the most concerned older participants (55-64: 38%).

Who is worried more about corruption?

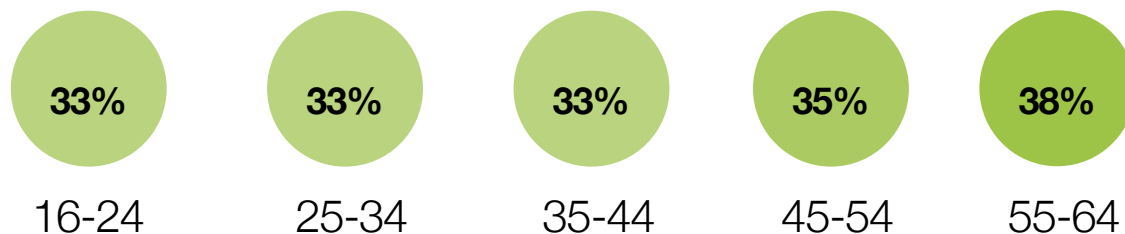
Top five most concerned	
South Africa	67%
Hungary	59%
Peru	57%
Brazil	57%
Spain	56%

Top five least concerned	
France	17%
Australia	14%
Great Britain	11%
Germany	9%
Sweden	9%

Worry about corruption by key demographic groups



Worry by age group



Base: 250,309 adults aged 16-64 (18-64 in US, CA) in 26 countries, interviewed Jan – Dec 2017

Looking to 2018

What are we worrying about in 2018? The findings of the initial few months suggest we have entered a new phase, where global concern is no longer dominated by the single issue of unemployment, but instead different countries prioritise one of three key concerns depending on national and regional factors. As we have set out the three biggest worries – unemployment, corruption and inequality – all have different bases of support, and this is unlikely to change in the near term.

It also seems unlikely that any other worries will rise to challenge the supremacy of the top three. Crime and violence, and healthcare, respectively the fourth- and fifth-biggest issues, have polled at about the same level since the *What Worries the World* poll began in 2010, and can be expected to continue along those lines.

There appears to be slightly more movement when it comes to optimism that things are headed in the right direction. Although small, the two-percentage point shift in favour of optimism observed since 2016 is likely to continue, especially against a background of ebbing concern about unemployment and a more positive global economic environment. The fact that our basket of countries contains several established Eurozone economies, that have previously been pessimistic but are now experiencing growth, will also help drive the rise in optimism – although it remains unlikely that the global balance will fully tip in favour of optimism any time soon.



Michael Clemence is Research Manager in the UK Ipsos Public Affairs team.

The Ipsos Views white papers are produced by the **Ipsos Knowledge Centre**.

GAME CHANGERS

<< Game Changers >> is the **Ipsos** signature.

At **Ipsos** we are passionately curious about people, markets, brands and society. We make our changing world easier and faster to navigate and inspire clients to make smarter decisions. We deliver with security, simplicity, speed and substance. We are Game Changers.

www.ipsos.com

@_Ipsos

GAME CHANGERS

