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Hacking, Natural Disasters Seen as Biggest Threats Facing World Next Year as Fear of Health Epidemic Subsides

Ipsos poll for Halifax International Security Forum finds wide gap between citizens' level of concern about cyberattacks and epidemics and their confidence in governments' ability to address them

Toronto, ON, November 19, 2021 – With the increasing availability of COVID-19 vaccines and the relaxation of measures to control the spread of the coronavirus, global citizens' assessment of threats has shifted. A new Ipsos poll of citizens from 28 countries on behalf of the Halifax International Security Forum finds that more see being hacked in the next 12 months is a real threat (a global country average of 75%) than do about a major health epidemic outbreak in their country (70%, down 8 percentage points from last year). And almost as many (69%, up 4 points) view a major natural disaster as a real threat.

Once again, this year's survey respondents were presented with eight possible threat scenarios. They were asked how real they feel the threat of each occurring in the next 12 months is and how much confidence they have in their government's preparedness to respond to them.

A cyberattack, a health epidemic, and a nuclear or chemical attack are three threats showing the widest gap between the high level of public concern about them and the notably lower perception that governments can provide the appropriate levels of security and protection to respond to them effectively.

While the survey finds a near consensus across the world in the belief it has become more dangerous, opinions differ widely from one country to the next as to whether things are getting better than are getting worse.

These are some of the findings of a survey of more than 22,000 adults conducted on Ipsos' Global Advisor online platform between September 24 and October 8, 2021.

Hacking is (once again) the number one perceived threat

On average globally, 75% say they feel that being hacked for fraudulent or espionage purposes in the next 12 months is a real threat, almost unchanged from last year (+1 percentage point). Being hacked ranks once as again as the threat most widely found to be real as it has in each of the last nine years except for last year.

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Cyberattacks are perceived as a real threat by large majorities of adults in every country surveyed, most of all in Sweden (85%), Turkey (85%), South Africa (85%), and the United States (83%). Countries showing the largest increases from last year in concern about hacking are Sweden (up 10 points), Italy (up 9 to 70%), and Hungary (up 8 to 59%), while South Korea (-6 to 71%), shows the largest decrease.

Threat of epidemic is receding

At the time of last year's survey, COVID-19 cases were surging to an unprecedented level globally. Understandably, "a major health epidemic" ranked as the top risk then, as it was viewed as a real threat by an average of 78% globally (up 27 points from 51% in 2019).

When this year's survey was conducted, more than six billion COVID-19 vaccine doses had been administered, according to Oxford University's [Our World in Data](#). This may explain why a health epidemic fell to second place this year with 70% on average viewing it as a real threat, down 8 points from last year. The proportion of citizens listing an epidemic as a real threat significantly decreased in 22 of the 27 countries surveyed, with declines of 10 points or more in 12 of them. Countries showing the largest decreases from last year are South Korea (-16 points to 59%), Chile (-15 to 66%) the Netherlands (-15 to 63%), and Germany (-15 to 55%). The sole country showing an increase is Malaysia (+4 to 80%).

Nevertheless, a major health epidemic remains a real threat for majorities of those surveyed in all but one of the 27 countries, most of all in Turkey (86%), South Africa (85%), and the U.S. (82%).

Greater concern about natural disasters

This year, 69% on average globally report feeling that a major natural disaster in their country is a real threat, up 4 points from last year and 15 points from 10 years ago. It is the view of more than four in five residents in each of Peru, Turkey, Mexico, Spain, Chile, Colombia, the U.S., and Japan. It ranks as the top concern in the U.S., cited as a real threat by 85%.

Threats of violence

A nuclear or chemical attack somewhere in the world is viewed as a real threat that could occur over the next 12 months by an average of 66% globally – from 85% in Turkey to 44% in France.

About six in 10 adults see as real threats each of:

- A terrorist attack within their country (an average of 62%, from 87% in Turkey and 84% in France to 39% in South Korea and 36% in Brazil);
- A violent conflict breaking out between ethnic or minority groups in their country (an average of 60%, from 82% in South Africa to 40% in Japan); and

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- The personal safety and security for themselves and their family being violated (an average of 60%, from 82% in South Africa to 47% in Hungary).

As was the case in last year’s survey, respondents are least likely to view an armed conflict with their country and another nation as a real threat (46% on average, from 78% in Turkey and 74% in the U.S. to 16% in Sweden).

(Lack of) Confidence in government and its agencies to deal with threats

Throughout the world, many citizens express skepticism that “the appropriate levels of security and protection could be provided by [their] government or its agencies could respond effectively” to various threats. While a global country average of 75% feel hacking is a real threat over the next year, just 45% are confident their government could respond to the threat effectively – a difference of 30 percentage points. Confidence in the government’s preparedness is highest in India (71%) and lowest in Belgium (30%). Fewer than half of adults in Russia (49%), Canada (49%), Great Britain (47%), and the U.S. (46%) express confidence in their government’s ability to respond to a cyberattack.

While 70% view a health epidemic as a real threat, only 51% express confidence in their government’s ability to respond to a major health epidemic – a difference of 19 percentage points. Confidence that their government and its agencies could respond to a health epidemic is highest in Malaysia (73%) and lowest in Poland (37%). It has decreased since last year in 11 of the 28 countries surveyed, with Germany (-14 to 46%), the Netherlands (-10 to 57%), and South Korea (-10 to 52%) showing the largest declines. On the other hand, confidence has grown significantly in Chile (+12 to 56%), France (+8 to 41%), and Belgium (+8 to 42%).

	% saying it’s a real threat in the next 12 months (change from 2020)	% confident in their government’s preparedness (change from 2020)	Difference (% feeling it’s a threat minus % confident in gov’t preparedness)
Being hacked for fraudulent or espionage purposes	75% (1)	45% (n/c)	-30
Major health epidemic in your country	70% (-8)	51% (-2)	-19
Major natural disaster in your country	69% (4)	53% (-2)	-16
Nuclear/chemical attack in the world	66% (-1)	44% (-1)	-22
Terrorist attack in your country	62% (4)	47% (-1)	-15
The personal safety and security for you or your family members being violated	60% (-1)	46% (-1)	-14
A violent conflict breaking out between ethnic or minority groups in your country	60% (-1)	46% (-1)	-14
Your country entering armed conflict with another country	46% (3)	46% (n/c)	=

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The world continues to be viewed as a dangerous place

A global country average of 82% agree that, over the last year, the world has become more dangerous, unchanged from last year's survey. This view is held by most adults in each of the 28 countries surveyed. Agreement is highest in Colombia (91%), Peru (90%), and South Korea (88%). The U.S. (86%) and Canada (83%) rank among the top half of countries with adults holding this view.

Split views on current direction of the world

Although most citizens of every country agree the world is a dangerous place, there is less consensus about the direction it is taking. A global country average of 49% say that more things are getting better in the world these days than are getting worse, but there is considerable variation among countries. This view is held by large majorities in China (86%), India (79%) and Saudi Arabia (73%), and Malaysia (72%), but by fewer than one in three in Japan (25%), Turkey (26%), France (31%), and Belgium (31%). The U.S. (34%) and Canada (40%) rank among the most pessimistic countries on the topic.

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About the Study

These are the results of a 28-market survey conducted by Ipsos on its Global Advisor online platform. Ipsos interviewed a total of 22,016 adults aged 18-74 in the United States, Canada, Malaysia, South Africa, and Turkey, and adults aged 16-74 in 23 other markets between Friday, September 24 and Friday, October 8, 2021.

The sample consists of approximately 1,000 individuals in each of Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, mainland China, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, Spain, and the U.S., and 500 individuals in each of Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Hungary, India, Malaysia, Mexico, the Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden, and Turkey.

The 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 taken as representative of their general adult population under the age of 75.

The samples in Brazil, Chile, mainland China, Colombia, India, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, and Turkey 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.

The data is weighted so that each country’s sample composition 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 where 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.

Where results do not sum to 100 or the ‘difference’ appears to be +/-1 more/less than the actual, 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 of 1,000 accurate to +/- 3.5 percentage points and of 500 accurate to +/- 5.0 percentage points. For more information on Ipsos’ use of credibility intervals, please visit the Ipsos website.

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About Ipsos

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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. We serve more than 5000 clients across the world with 75 business solutions.

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