



The World's Most Important Problem: Gallup Study Finds Economy, Work, Governance and Safety Top Public Priorities

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Feb. 4, 2026 — As governments confront economic uncertainty, technological disruption and geopolitical instability, a new global study from **Gallup**, launched at the **World Governments Summit (WGS)**, shows that people's day-to-day experiences and perceptions shape national concerns more powerfully than external indicators alone. *The World's Most Important Problem: What People Need Leaders to Hear in 2026* report draws on responses from adults in 107 countries and areas, offering the first globally comprehensive view of what people identify as their country's most pressing problem, and what they most want to see improved. While concerns fall into 12 broad categories, four themes dominate worldwide: economic issues (global median 23%), work and employment (10%), politics and government (8%), and safety and security (7%).

"People don't feel progress through GDP charts. They feel it through safety, dignity and opportunity in their daily lives," said Jon Clifton, CEO of Gallup. "Leaders who ignore that risk solving the wrong problems."

Economic Pressure Dominates, but Perception Matters More Than Performance

Across 71 of 107 countries analyzed, the economy emerges as the most frequently cited national concern. Economic anxiety is most pronounced among young adults aged 15 to 34. Women are more likely than men to cite economic issues as their country's top problem (35% vs. 31%). This gender pattern persists across income levels and widens in poorer countries, where women face sharper economic insecurity.

While secondary priorities vary by region, the report finds that headline indicators such as recent GDP growth do not reliably predict how people perceive the economy. Instead, views are shaped by household finances, whether people feel financially secure, can afford housing and basic necessities, find dignified work, and experience economic progress in their daily lives.

National concerns also vary by income level. People in lower-income countries are more likely to identify economic issues as their nation's top problem. At the same time, in several high-income countries — including Ireland, Australia and Canada — affording basic necessities also ranks among the leading public concerns, underscoring how economic anxiety can persist even in otherwise prosperous societies.

Work Concerns Go Beyond Unemployment

Work-related issues rank as the second most common national concern globally. While higher unemployment rates correspond with greater concern about work, the study shows dissatisfaction is not driven by joblessness alone. What matters more is people's connection to the workforce itself.

Across regions and income levels, people express concern about the quality, stability and dignity of work, even where jobs are available. These findings point to a growing expectation that leadership success depends not just on job creation, but on providing dignified and engaging work that allows people to use their strengths.

Security and Stability Reshape National Priorities

In wealthier and more stable societies, public concern often centers on politics and governance, particularly where trust in institutions is weak. People with low confidence in institutions — including government, the judicial system, electoral integrity, the military and financial institutions — are more likely to identify politics as their country's biggest problem.

In contrast, in countries experiencing war, violence or severe instability, concerns about physical safety and security eclipse all other priorities, including the economy and governance. Among the countries most likely to cite physical safety and security as their most pressing national concern, nearly all have experienced major conflict or post-conflict instability. In these contexts, peace and stability dominate public consciousness, pushing other challenges into the background. In more peaceful nations, security rarely tops the list, allowing space for other national concerns to surface.

Together, these findings point to a shared leadership reality across contexts: People measure national progress by their daily experience, whether they can live well, work well, trust governance and feel safe. Understanding public priorities remains a critical foundation for effective leadership, as today's attitudes help shape tomorrow's decisions.

About Gallup

Gallup delivers analytics and advice to help leaders and organizations solve their most pressing problems. Combining more than 90 years of experience with its global reach, Gallup knows more about the attitudes and behaviors of the world's constituents than any other organization.