

Poll of 27 Countries on Most Significant Events of 2005

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Iraq War, Tsunami, US Hurricanes Mentioned Most

[Methodology/Questionnaire](#)

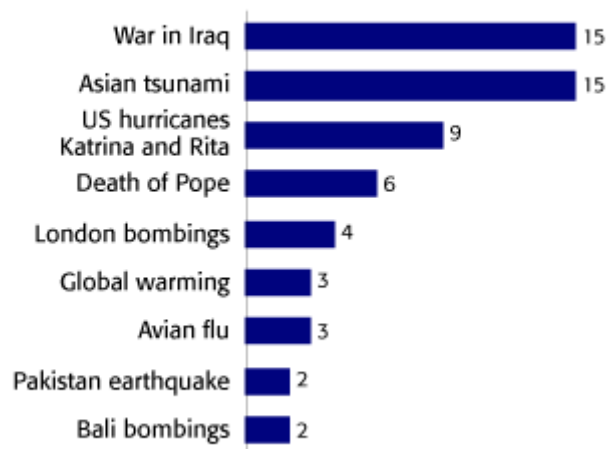
A BBC World Service poll asked citizens of 27 countries (see below for list of countries) from around the world, “In the future, when historians think about the year 2005, what event of global significance do you think will be seen as most important?” Without prompting, the most common answers were the war in Iraq, the Asian tsunami, and the hurricanes (Katrina and Rita) in the US.

The poll of 32,439 people was conducted for the BBC World Service by the international polling firm GlobeScan together with the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland. The 27-nation fieldwork was coordinated by GlobeScan and completed during November and December 2005 in most countries.

The war in Iraq was volunteered as the most significant event by 15 percent worldwide. Not surprisingly, this was especially prominent among Iraqis with 43 percent citing it. It was also relatively high in South Korea (31%), Spain (28%), the US (27%), and Turkey (26%). Given that the UK has troops on the ground in Iraq, it is surprising that only 9 percent of Britons mentioned the war there as the most important event.

The Most Significant Events of 2005

Average of 27 Countries



The other most widely mentioned event of 2005 was the Asian tsunami, volunteered by 15 percent worldwide. Not surprisingly, Asia-Pacific countries were most apt to cite it—Sri Lanka (57%), Indonesia (31%), Australia (27%), South Korea (24%), and the Philippines (21%). But 28 percent of South Africans mentioned it as well.

The US hurricanes—Katrina and Rita—were mentioned by 9 percent worldwide. Curiously, Americans were not the highest. While 15 percent of Americans cited it as the most significant event, larger percentages were found in Afghanistan (18%) and Argentina (18%).

The death of Pope John Paul II and the inauguration of Pope Benedict XVI was the fourth most widely cited event. Worldwide, 6 percent volunteered this as the most important event of the year. Much of this came from several Catholic countries, where very large percentages cited it, especially Poland (48%), but also Italy (17%). Large percentages also cited it in the Congo (29%) and Kenya (10%).

The London bombings were seen as the most significant event by 4 percent overall. Interestingly, among Britons, only 7 percent mentioned the London bombings, while in Indonesia, 48 percent mentioned the Bali bombings. The London bombings also figured more prominently among Ghanaians (11%) and Australians, South Koreans, and the Spanish (8% each) than among the British.

Global warming figured prominently in the thinking of 3 percent who cited the earth getting warmer or the international negotiations related to climate change as the most significant event of the year. Concerns about global warming were especially high in Mexico (13%), Finland (11%), Great Britain (10%), Canada (8%), and India (8%).

A striking finding is how similar assessments were across countries. The top three events cited worldwide were also among the three most frequently cited in a large number of countries. Steven Kull, director of PIPA comments, “The extent to which people in different countries perceive the same events as significant is a sign of how much the world has become globalized.”

Number of Countries Mentioning Top Three Events

Countries for which the Following Were among the
Top Three Mentions



The largest groupings of responses were various natural disasters. Weather-related disasters including the US hurricanes, the Mumbai flooding, and other extreme weather or weather-related natural disasters totaled 19 percent. This prominent focus on weather-related events may also be related to concerns that they reflect not just idiosyncratic events but a larger trend related to global warming. Earthquake-related disasters

including the Asian tsunami and the Pakistan earthquake totaled 17 percent. In Afghanistan, the Pakistan earthquake was mentioned by 42 percent.

Mentions related to various aspects of terrorism were less prominent. Worldwide, 9 percent mentioned them, including the bombings in London (4%), Bali (2%), and Egypt (less than 1%), as well as 3 percent who mentioned terrorism in general.

The emergence of the Avian flu has a substantial number concerned. Worldwide, 3 percent mentioned it as the most significant event of the year. This was especially prominent among Saudi Arabians (21%), Russians (12%), Turks (10%), and Iraqis (9%).

Doug Miller, President of GlobeScan says, “Global citizens see 2005 mainly as a year of natural and manmade disasters. It seems likely that most people are happy for the year to be over.”

The remainder of the results were highly diffuse. Overall, 16 percent were unable to answer the question. In some countries, people mentioned events that were close to home. In Germany, 16 percent mentioned the German election. In France, 9 percent mentioned the riots in the French suburbs. Increasing HIV/AIDS was cited more frequently in Africa, including 16 percent in South Africa, 9 percent in Congo, and 7 percent in Ghana. Twelve percent of Brazilians cited corruption.

The United Kingdom

The United Kingdom was unique in a number of ways. Perhaps most striking, only 7 percent mentioned the London bombings—only modestly higher than the worldwide average of 4 percent. The London bombings also figured more prominently among Ghanaians (11%) and Australians, South Koreans, and the Spanish (8% each) than among the British. In contrast, Indonesians were more influenced by the bombings in Bali, with 48 percent mentioning them as the most significant event. The French, though, were similar in that only 9 percent mentioned the riots in the French suburbs.

Given that the British have troops in Iraq, it is surprising that only 9 percent mentioned the war as the most significant event—lower than the worldwide average of 15 percent.

So what did Britons focus on? The highest was the Asian tsunami, with 16 percent citing it. Interestingly, global warming was the second highest at 10 percent, making Britain the third highest country citing this issue. The war in Iraq was in third place at 9 percent.

The United States

Not surprisingly, the US was one of the highest in rating the war in Iraq as most important with 27 percent citing it. However, there were others that were higher, including South Korea (31%) and Spain (28%) in addition to Iraq (43%).

The US hurricanes figured prominently at 15 percent, but, interestingly, this was on par with several other countries. The tsunami was the third most mentioned event at 8 percent.

Contrary to the image of the US as unconcerned about global warming, 4 percent of Americans mentioned it—slightly higher than the worldwide average of 3 percent.

Countries surveyed: Afghanistan, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Congo (DRC), Finland, France, Germany, Ghana, Great Britain, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Italy, Kenya, Mexico, Philippines, Poland, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sri Lanka, Turkey, USA.

Polling was conducted during October, November, and December 2005 with a total sample of 32,439 people. In four of the countries the sample was limited to major metropolitan areas. The margin of error per country ranged from +/-2.5 to 4%. For more details, please see the Methodology/Questionnaire.