DEMOCRACIES' DISCONTENTS

When former Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney visited Washington in June, he remarked with more than a tinge of irony that he envied President Clinton's “high” approval ratings—then hovering around 38 percent. In fact, all across the world's major industrial democracies, leaders and governments are getting low marks. Relatedly, the performance of national economies is viewed very unfavorably almost everywhere. Beyond this, many citizens of the planet's most fortunate countries are often recorded expressing general pessimism—about the future, about prevailing moral standards, and the like. The question is: What are we to make of such expressions? In particular, how unusual is today's discontent? As we will see, the story is in fact quite complex.

In the first five pages of this section we document the striking display of discontent in eight leading industrial nations: the United States, Canada, Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and Japan.

Question: In general are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going in the United States at this time?

United States

4% Don’t know

25% Satisfied with the way things are going in the United States at this time

71% Dissatisfied

Source: Survey by the Gallup Organization, latest that of February 12-14, 1993.

Question: I'd like you to tell me, in the most general way, how satisfied you are with the direction the country is going in today? Would you say you are very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied?

Canada

3% Don’t know

27% Satisfied with the with the direction the country is going today

70% Dissatisfied

Source: Survey by Decca Research, March 13-17, 1993.

Question: Thinking of Britain as a whole, do you think the country is going forward along broadly the right lines or not?

Great Britain

17% Don’t know

29% Is going forward along broadly the right lines

63% Is not


Question: When you look at the way the evolution for France and the French has been going, do you have the impression that things are going to get better or that things have a tendency of getting worse?

France

2% No opinion

14% Things are getting better

23% No change

61% Have a tendency to get worse

Source: Survey by SOFRES for Le Figaro, April 24-28, 1993.

Question: As a whole, do you think Japan is heading in the right or wrong direction?

Japan

24% Don’t know

31% Wrong direction

44% Is heading in the right direction

Note: The above result marks the first time since 1983 that “wrong direction” has exceeded “right direction.”

Approval Ratings

Among government leaders, with the exception of those extremely new to office, no one gets good ratings. Political discontent in general is widespread.

**Question:** Do you approve or disapprove of the way Bill Clinton is handling his job as president?

**United States**

- Don't know/no opinion: 15%
- Approve of the way Clinton is handling his job as president: 39%
- Disapprove: 46%

**Note:** In a CBS News/New York Times survey conducted just before the November 1992 election, 37% of respondents said they approved of the way Bush was handling his job as president; 56% disapproved.

**Source:** Survey by CBS News/New York Times, June 21-24, 1993

**Question:** Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with Mr. Major as prime minister?

**Great Britain**

- 6% Don't know
- Satisfied with Major as prime minister: 21%
- Dissatisfied: 73%

**Note:** The percentage saying they are satisfied is the lowest ever for any British prime minister for which polling data is available.

**Source:** Survey by Social Surveys (Gallup Poll) Ltd., May 26-31, 1993

**Question:** Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with Mr. François Mitterrand as president of the Republic?

**France**

- No opinion: 11%
- Satisfied with Mitterrand as president of the Republic: 39%
- Dissatisfied: 50%

**Source:** Survey by the Institut Français d'Opinion Publique et d'Étude des Marchés (IFOP) for Le Journal du Dimanche, May 6-13, 1993

**Question:** Do you approve or disapprove of the way Brian Mulroney is handling his job as prime minister?

**Canada**

- 7% Don't know
- Approve of the way Mulroney is handling his job as prime minister: 17%
- Disapprove: 76%

**Note:** Brian Mulroney was succeeded as Prime Minister by Kim Campbell June 25, 1993.

**Source:** Survey by Gallup Canada, January 13-19, 1993

**Question:** Do you support the Miyazawa cabinet?

**Japan**

- No answer/other: 14%
- Yes, support the Miyazawa cabinet: 26%
- Do not: 59%

**Source:** Survey by the Yomiuri Shimbun, May 1993

**Question:** Are you happy or unhappy with the job done, in the last month, by Giuliano Amato as president of the cabinet?

**Italy**

- 5% Not sure/other
- Happy with the job done by Amato as president of the cabinet: 27%
- Unhappy: 45%
- Neither happy nor unhappy: 23%

**Source:** Survey by DIXIA, January 19, 1993
Economic Doldrums

In nearly all of these affluent nations, large majorities say the economic situation is worse now than a year ago.

**Question:** Would you say that at the present time business conditions are better or worse off than they were a year ago?

**United States**
- 43% Worse
- 22% Same
- 33% Better

2% Don't know/no answer

**Source:** Survey by the Survey Research Center, University of Michigan, dated May 1-27, 1993.

**Question:** How do you think the general economic situation in this country has changed over the last 12 months?

**Canada**
- 17% Worse
- 19% Better
- 62% Same

2% Don't know

**Source:** Survey by Gallup Canada, November 19-26, 1992

**Japan**
- 50% Not in a depression
- 41% Depression, but not a severe one
- 9% Other/not sure

**Note:** In Japan, "depression" refers to an economic slump which is comparable to a serious recession as we understand it here.

**Source:** Survey by the Asahi Shimbun, March 1993

**Question:** How do you evaluate the condition of our economy right now?

**United States**
- 43% Worse
- 22% Same
- 33% Better

2% Don't know/no answer

**Source:** Survey by the Survey Research Center, University of Michigan, dated May 1-27, 1993.

**Question:** Compared to 12 months ago, do you think that the general economic situation in this country is better, unchanged, or worse?

**United Kingdom**
- 85% Worse
- 9% Unchanged
- 3% Better

3% No answer

**Germany**
- 62% Worse
- 31% Unchanged
- 1% Better

6% No answer

**France**
- 62% Worse
- 29% Unchanged
- 2% Better

7% No answer

**Spain**
- 74% Worse
- 15% Unchanged
- 8% Better

3% No answer

**Italy**
- 73% Worse
- 13% Unchanged
- 7% Better

2% No answer

**Source:** EUROBAROMETER surveys conducted for the Commission of the European Communities, Fall 1992.
Government Malperformance

Big government, once seen as the essential solution to myriad problems in many countries shown, is now thought to be a big part of the problem. Governmental performance is criticized across the board.

Question: Do you think that, in general, the federal government creates more problems than it solves, or do you think it solves more problems than it creates?

United States

- Federal government creates more problems than it solves: 69%
- Solves more than it creates: 22%
- Don’t know/no answer: 9%


Question: Speaking of our future, which do you think will be the biggest threat to Canada in years to come—big business, big labor, or big government?

Canada

- Big government is the biggest threat to Canada in years to come: 56%
- Big labor: 16%
- Big business: 16%
- Don’t know: 18%


Question: Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way France is governed?

France

- Satisfied with the way France is governed: 45%
- Dissatisfied: 57%
- No opinion: 3%

Source: Survey by Brucet Ville Associates (BVA). April 15-20, 1993

Question: If we compare the current situation with the situation 5–10 years ago, is the situation in Italy better or worse with regard to the functioning of the state?

Italy

- Better: 10%
- Neither: 11%
- Situation with regard to the functioning of the state is worse than 5–10 years ago: 76%
- Don’t know: 3%

Source: Survey by CDAX. January 1993

Question: How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Tokyo to do what is right—just about always, most of the time, only some of the time, or never?

Japan

- Can trust the government to do what is right: 15%
- Only some of the time/never: 84%
- 1% Don’t know/no answer


Question: Do you think corruption in government is part of the way things work in Japan, or do you think the government can run without corruption?

Japan

- Government can run without corruption: 75%
- Corruption in government is part of the way things work in Japan: 22%
- 3% Don’t know/no answer

Prospects

The belief that moral standards have deteriorated is also widespread. And, all of the dissatisfactions noted in these pages have fueled doubts about the future as well—about, for example, what the next generation can expect.

**Question:** Do you think the future generation of Americans will be better off, or worse off, or about the same as people today?

**United States**

- 25% Same
- 31% Worse off
- 40% Better off
- 4% Don't know/no answer


**Question:** And how do you think the generation younger than you will fare financially compared to your generation? Do you think the next generation will be better off, worse off, or in about the same financial shape as your generation?

**Canada**

- 16% Same
- 54% Worse off
- 25% Better off
- 5% Unsure

**Source:** Survey by Angus Reid Group. October 1992.

**Question:** Do you think the future generation of Japanese will be better off, worse off, or about the same as people today?

**Japan**

- 46% Same
- 41% Worse off
- 13% Better off


**Question:** On the whole, would you say you are satisfied or dissatisfied with the honesty and standards of behavior of people in the country today?

**United States**

- 20% Satisfied with the honesty and standards of behavior of people in the country
- 78% Dissatisfied
- 2% Don't know

**Source:** Survey by the Gallup Organization for USA Today and CNN. January 6–9, 1992

**Question:** Do you believe that morals are improving or deteriorating?

**Canada**

- 59% Deteriorating
- 17% No change
- 22% Morals are improving
- 3% Don't know

**Source:** Survey by Gallup Canada. December 1992.
As we said in the outset, all this professed dissatisfaction and gloom in the world's most fortunate—politically and economically—nations is quite striking. But just how should it strike us? That is, what are we to conclude from these findings? The industrial countries have all been going through recessions, which is presumably enough to dampen spirits and produce complaints about the powers that be. Just how deep does the pessimism run in these countries, and how far across the various areas of life does it extend?

We see below that the discontent chronicled in the first five pages does not extend to people's assessments of their own lives.

**Question:** On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the life you lead?

**Source:** EUROBAROMETER surveys conducted for the Commission of the European Communities, Fall 1992

**Question:** In general, how satisfied are you with the way things are going in your own life these days? Would you say you are completely satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, or would you say you are completely dissatisfied with the way things are going these days?

**Source:** Surveys by CBS News/New York Times and the Tokyo Broadcasting System, December 3–9, 1992 (Japan) and December 7–9, 1992 (U.S.)
Even Governments Can Get Good Marks

While many leaders are getting bad marks, this condition isn't an inevitable part of modern times. New prime ministers who seem to stand for something other than politics-as-usual get high marks. And, shifting our focus to Mexico, a short, balding Harvard graduate has been getting exceptionally high public ratings.

**Question:** How about your personal future? Would you say you are very optimistic, optimistic, pessimistic, or very pessimistic about your own future?

- **Canada**
  - Optimistic: 81%
  - Pessimistic: 14%
  - Don't know: 5%

**Source:** Survey by Decima Research, March 13-17, 1993

**Question:** If you were free to do so, would you like to go and settle in another country?

- **United States**
  - Would not like to go: 90%
  - Would: 9%

**Source:** Survey by the Gallup Organization, May 23-26, 1991

**Question:** Are you happy or unhappy to live in Italy?

- **Italy**
  - Happy to live in Italy: 87%
  - Unhappy to live in Italy: 13%

**Source:** Survey by DOXA, December 1992

**Question:** If you were free to do so, would you like to go and settle in another country?

- **Great Britain**
  - Would not like to go: 51%
  - Would like to: 49%

**Source:** Survey by Social Surveys (Gallup Poll) Ltd., February 2-8, 1993

**Question:** I'd like to know more specifically what you are optimistic about and what you are pessimistic about. The opportunities for you to get ahead—as far as the future is concerned, do you feel...?

- **United States**
  - Optimistic about the opportunities for you to get ahead: 60%
  - Pessimistic: 33%
  - Don't know: 7%

**Source:** Survey by the Roper Organization (Roper Reports 93-25), January 9-23, 1993

**Question:** Do you like or dislike the way President Salinas is governing Mexico?

- **Mexico**
  - Like the way Salinas is governing Mexico: 80%
  - Dislike: 12%
  - Neither: 5%

**Source:** Survey by MORI de Mexico for Este Paez and Excelsior, February 1993

**Question:** Do you have confidence in Carlo A. Ciampi as president of the cabinet?

- **Italy**
  - Confident/pretty confident in Ciampi as president of the cabinet: 59%
  - A little confident/not confident at all: 15%
  - Don't know: 26%

**Source:** Survey by DOXA, April 27-28, 1993

**Question:** Do you approve or disapprove of the way Edouard Balladur is handling his job as prime minister?

- **France**
  - Approve of Balladur as prime minister: 61%
  - Disapprove: 26%
  - No opinion: 13%

**Source:** Survey by IFOP for Express, May 14-15, 1993
I'm Okay, But the Country Isn't

In general, the data show that in every country, people are more sanguine about things close to home that they can know about from personal experience than about things remote and abstract that they can know about only by reading or watching television.

Question: Would you describe the state of the nation's economy these days as excellent, good, not so good, or poor?

Question: Would you describe the state of your own personal finances these days as excellent, good, not so good, or poor?

**United States**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excellent/good</th>
<th>Not so good/poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nation's economy</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal finances</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey by ABC News/Money, latest of four-week rolling averages ending June 6, 1993.

**United Kingdom**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country's economy</th>
<th>Financial condition of your household</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uneasy</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disgusted</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angry</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopeful</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afraid</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Financial condition of your household: 35%, 8%, 22%, 8%, 12%, 15%. Source: Survey by Social Surveys (Gallup Poll) Ltd., April 15-21, 1993.

**France**

Question: Did you find 1992 to be a good or bad year concerning the following topics?

- 6% No opinion
- 8% Found 1992 to be a good year for the situation in France
- 86% Bad year


**ITALY**

Question: Considering the economic situation in Italy, do you think that during the next 12 months things will be good, so so, or bad?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic situation during the next 12 months will be good</th>
<th>Will be bad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: "Unchanged" responses not shown. Source: Survey by Gallup Group, 1993.

**Question:** In a year, do you think that you or your family will be financially better or worse?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family financial situation will be better in a year</th>
<th>Will be worse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27%</td>
<td>19%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Things Have Always Gone Up and Down

Part of the story of current discontent is that we are on a down-side of an inevitable cycle. Across Europe and the United States, economic pessimism in 1992 looked similar to that of 1982—the last recession. Governments' standings wax and wane in response to business cycles, time in office, and innumerable local conditions. In the early 1990s, many of the western democracies had been controlled by the same party or coalition for an unusually long span.

**Question:** Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with François Mitterrand as president of the republic?

**France**

**Satisfied with Mitterrand as president of the republic**

- Jun. 1981: 54%
- Nov. 1984: 26%
- Nov. 1986: 61%
- Dec. 1991: 22%
- May 1993: 39%


**Question:** Do you support the Miyazawa cabinet?

**Japan**

**Support the Miyazawa cabinet**

- Nov. 1991: 56%
- Jan. 1992: 40%
- Nov. 1992: 20%
- Jan. 1993: 29%
- May 1993: 26%

*Source:* Surveys by the Yomiuri Shimbun, latest that of May 1993.

**Question:** Do you approve or disapprove of the way George Bush is handling his job as president?

**United States**

**Approve of the way Bush is handling job as president**

- Feb. 1989: 61%
- Mar. 1991: 87%
- Jul. 1992: 32%
- Jan. 1993: 56%


**Question:** In general terms, would you say that the political situation in Spain is very good, good, bad, very bad, or neither good nor bad?

**Spain**

**Political situation...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Bad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apr. 1989</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 1990</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr. 1992</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar. 1993</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* Surveys by Demoscope for El País.

**Question:** Compared to 12 months ago, do you think that the general economic situation in this country is better, unchanged, or worse?

**Economic situation in this country is worse than 12 months ago**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>France</th>
<th>Italy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>50%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* EUROBAROMETER surveys conducted for the Commission of the European Communities, latest that of Fall, 1992.