



A Mandate for Renewal

Global Public Opinion on the United
Nations and the Selection of the
10th Secretary-General

KEY FINDINGS

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This research captures the views of 5,000 respondents as the United Nations selects a new Secretary-General. Findings are drawn from a 20-country global survey commissioned by the UN Foundation and conducted by GeoPoll. The study, which was fielded between Sept. 1 and Sept. 16, 2026, provides a snapshot of global public opinion, supplemented by insights into major variations between countries and demographic groups.

1. Worldview and Outlook

- **Citizens fear for their future in a turbulent world.** Nearly 6 in 10 respondents (57%) are worried about the future. Older generations are the most pessimistic (64% worried), while young adults (18–34) are the most optimistic (37% hopeful).
- **These fears strengthen the mandate for international cooperation.** Nearly 90% of respondents agree that even the most powerful nations need international partnerships to protect their people.
- **Support for global cooperation falls when national interests are at stake.** While 69% favor joint problem-solving, 28% believe their country should prioritize its own interests even if that means cooperating less with other countries.
- **Peace and security are the top priority.** Preventing and ending armed conflicts rank first for all demographic groups, followed by reducing poverty, climate action, and human rights.

2. Trust in the International System

- **The system is trusted, but not by all.** Trust in international institutions to make progress on global challenges stands at 58% and is higher in the Global South (65%) than the Global North (44%). Globally, nearly two in five respondents (39%) distrust the system's ability to deliver, including 11% who do not trust the system at all.
- **Impunity and bias erode credibility.** Trust is driven by principle (upholding international law, 57%), performance (delivering results, 41%), and pragmatism (being the only realistic option, 41%). Critics distrust the UN more because it lacks enforcement power (56%) and is dominated by powerful countries (51%) than due to impatience with its bureaucracy (35%).

3. The Future of the UN

- **The UN is relevant, but is perceived as underperforming on delivery.** While 84% believe the UN is necessary, they are divided on its performance: 32% say it is more necessary than ever, while 52% believe it is struggling to deliver results. When asked about reform, only 10% say that the UN is working well as it is.
- **Demand for an outward-looking leader.** Over half (52%) want structural reform, yet only 17% want the next Secretary-General primarily to play the role of an inward-looking reformer. Instead, citizens want an outward-facing leader: a diplomat (28%), crisis manager (26%), or moral voice (25%).

4. The Race to Be Secretary-General

- **The selection race has failed to break through.** Eighty-five percent of respondents have heard little to nothing about the selection process. Candidates are far from unknown (averaging 19%, against 11% for decoys), but are yet to achieve wider visibility. With expectations for a new leader high, the 10th Secretary-General will have an opportunity to build a global profile during the first 100 days in office.
- **Strong support for a historic first.** Six in ten respondents (61%) believe it is important that the 10th Secretary-General be a woman, with the greatest support coming from women (68%), young adults (68%), and the Global South (70%).



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