

Sept. 19, 2013

Environmental Concerns on the Rise in China

Many Also Worried about Inflation, Inequality, Corruption

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About Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project

Pew Research Center is a nonpartisan fact tank that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world. It does not take policy positions. Its Global Attitudes Project conducts public opinion surveys around the world on a broad array of subjects ranging from people's assessments of their own lives to their views about the current state of the world and important issues of the day. Since 2001, the project has conducted more than 330,000 interviews in 60 nations.

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Research Center for the People & the Press

Environmental Concerns on the Rise in China

Many Also Worried about Inflation, Inequality, Corruption

The Chinese public is increasingly concerned about the quality of the country's air and water after a year in which China experienced numerous high-profile environmental problems.

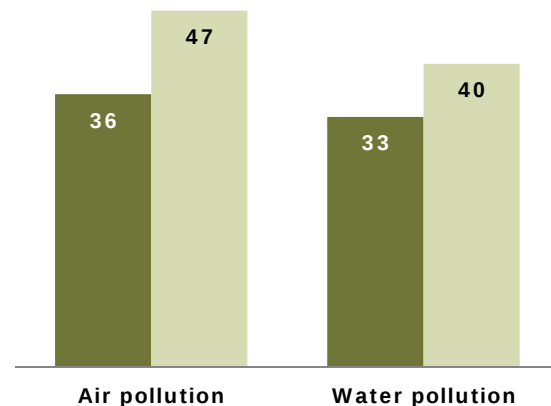
Meanwhile, even though most Chinese have rated their national economic situation positively in recent years, there are also widespread concerns about the side effects of economic growth, such as rising prices and the gap between rich and poor.

And, more than half (53%) describe political corruption as a very big problem – an issue highlighted most recently by the trial of former Chongqing Communist Party boss Bo Xilai.

Pollution Fears Grow in China

% Very big problem

■ 2012 ■ 2013



PEW RESEARCH CENTER Q17a & f.

As their disposable income grows, many Chinese are worried about the safety and quality of the goods they are consuming. The percentage of Chinese identifying the quality of manufactured goods and the safety of food and medicine as major challenges has risen sharply over the last five years.

Concerns about consumer issues are common across all segments of Chinese society, but they are especially widespread among those who have in many ways benefited the most from the country's long run of economic expansion – wealthier Chinese, urban residents, and people under age 30.

These are among the key findings from a survey of China conducted by the Pew Research Center between March 4 and April 6, 2013. Face-to-face interviews were conducted among 3,226 respondents.¹ Overall, the survey highlights an evolving set of priorities for the Chinese public. As the country's wealth grows and millions move into the middle class, issues such as

¹ For more on how the survey was conducted, see the Survey Methods section of this report.

the environment and consumer safety are moving to the forefront. At the same time, many believe the country's economic growth is benefiting some more than others, with the rich and the politically connected reaping more than their share of the rewards.

Widespread Optimism, but Also Growing Worries

The Chinese public has high expectations for the country's economy. In the short term, 80% said they expect the national economic situation to improve in next 12 months, the highest percentage among 39 countries polled by Pew Research in spring 2013. And in the long run, 82% believe that when Chinese children grow up, they will be better off than their parents – again, the highest percentage registered in the survey.²

However, this optimism coexists with a growing set of concerns. Among the 17 issues included in the survey, eleven are considered either a very big or moderately big problem by at least 70% of respondents. Three issues are rated as a *very big problem* by more than half of those polled.

Inflation tops the list of public concerns. Roughly six-in-ten Chinese (59%) say rising prices are a *very big problem*, although this is actually down from 72% in 2008.

Meanwhile, inequality is also a major concern, with 52% rating the gap between rich and poor a *very big problem*. Such unease is little changed from 48% in 2012, but up significantly from 41% in 2008. About seven-in-ten (69%) say the gap between rich and poor has increased in recent years.

Increasing Public Concerns in China

	% <i>Very big problem</i>			
	2008	2012	2013	08-13 Change
	%	%	%	
Safety of food	12	41	38	+26
Quality of manufactured goods	13	33	31	+18
Safety of medicine	9	28	27	+18
Old age insurance	13	28	30	+17
Air pollution	31	36	47	+16
Corrupt officials	39	50	53	+14
Education	11	23	24	+13
Water pollution	28	33	40	+12
Rich-poor gap	41	48	52	+11
Health care	12	26	23	+11
Worker conditions	13	23	23	+10
Traffic	9	18	19	+10
Crime	17	25	24	+7
Corrupt business people	21	32	27	+6
Unemployment	22	24	27	+5
Electricity shortages	4	8	8	+4
Rising prices	72	60	59	-13

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Similarly, concerns about political corruption have grown over time – 53% say corrupt officials are a *very big problem*, up from 39% in 2008.

² For more on views about economic issues in China and the other nations included in the spring 2013 Pew Research Center survey, see [Economies of Emerging Markets Better Rated During Difficult Times](#), released May 23, 2013.

Just since last year, there have been significant changes in views about the environment. In January, air quality in Beijing and several other major cities reached record lows, and the public is increasingly taking note of this issue. Nearly half (47%) rate air pollution a very big problem, an increase of 11 percentage points from 2012.

And following a year that included headlines about thousands of dead pigs floating down a river through the center of Shanghai, concerns about water pollution have also increased. Four-in-ten say it is a very big problem, compared with 33% last year.

Food safety is another issue that has made headlines in recent years, with scandals involving issues such as infant formula and other products. About four-in-ten (38%) consider the safety of food a very big problem, a 26 percentage point increase since 2008. Other consumer issues are also seen by many as major challenges, including the quality of manufactured goods. Roughly three-in-ten (31%) describe this as a very big problem, up from just 13% five years ago. Similarly, 27% hold this view about the safety of medicine, compared with 9% in 2008.

Food safety, the quality of manufactured goods, and the safety of medicine tend to be especially high concerns among 18-29 year-olds, people with higher incomes, and those who live in urban areas.

Consumer Issues Important to Young, Higher Income, Urban Residents

	<i>% Very big problem</i>		
	Food safety	Quality of manufactured goods	Safety of medicine
	%	%	%
Total	38	31	27
18-29	41	35	32
30-49	37	31	27
50+	36	25	21
Low income	32	24	18
Middle income	41	31	27
High income	42	38	35
Urban	43	35	33
Rural	32	26	20

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Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project
Spring 2013 Survey
China Survey Methods

The survey in China is part of the larger cross-national Spring 2013 Pew Global Attitudes survey conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International.

Results for the survey in China are based on 3,226 face-to-face interviews conducted March 4 to April 6, 2013. It uses a multi-stage cluster sample design stratified by China's three regional-economic zones and urbanity (which include all provinces except Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong and Macau), representing roughly 98% of the adult population. The sample is disproportionately urban, but the data were weighted to reflect the actual urbanity distribution in China. All interviews were conducted in Chinese (Mandarin, Hebei, Shandong, Yunnan, Chongqing, Guangdong, Hubei, Henan, Hunan, Jiangsu, Gansu, Sichuan, Shaanxi, Anhui, Shanghai, Jilin, Jiangxi, Zhejiang, and Beijing dialects). The results cited are from Horizonkey's self-sponsored survey.

The margin of sampling error is ± 3.5 percentage points. For the results based on the full sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus the margin of error. In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

**Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project
2013 Spring Survey Topline Results
September 19, 2013 Release**

Methodological notes:

- Survey results are based on national samples. For further details on sample designs, see Survey Methods section.
- Due to rounding, percentages may not total 100%. The topline “total” columns show 100%, because they are based on unrounded numbers.
- Not all questions included in the Spring 2013 survey are presented in this topline. Omitted questions have either been previously released or will be released in future reports.

		Q5 And over the next 12 months do you expect the economic situation in our country to improve a lot, improve a little, remain the same, worsen a little or worsen a lot?						
		Improve a lot	Improve a little	Remain the same	Worsen a little	Worsen a lot	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2013	25	55	13	2	0	4	100
	Spring, 2012	24	59	9	2	0	6	100
	Spring, 2011	22	62	10	2	0	4	100
	Spring, 2010	22	65	10	1	0	1	100
	Spring, 2009	24	58	11	4	0	2	100
	Spring, 2008	32	53	9	2	0	3	100
	Summer, 2002	4	32	53	6	1	3	100

		Q8 When children today in (survey country) grow up, do you think they will be better off or worse off financially than their parents?				
		Better off	Worse off	Same (Volunteered)	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2013	82	7	3	7	100

		Q17a Now I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems in our country. Tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem or not a problem at all: a. Air pollution					
		Very big problem	Moderately big problem	Small problem	Not a problem at all	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2013	47	36	12	4	2	100
	Spring, 2012	36	39	18	4	3	100
	Spring, 2008	31	43	21	3	1	100

		Q17b Now I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems in our country. Tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem or not a problem at all: b. Corrupt business people					
		Very big problem	Moderately big problem	Small problem	Not a problem at all	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2013	27	44	16	6	7	100
	Spring, 2012	32	41	19	3	6	100
	Spring, 2008	21	40	22	3	14	100

		Q17c Now I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems in our country. Tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem or not a problem at all: c. Conditions for workers					
		Very big problem	Moderately big problem	Small problem	Not a problem at all	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2013	23	38	23	8	7	100
	Spring, 2012	23	40	27	5	5	100
	Spring, 2008	13	43	31	4	9	100

		Q17d Now I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems in our country. Tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem or not a problem at all: d. Unemployment					
		Very big problem	Moderately big problem	Small problem	Not a problem at all	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2013	27	38	23	8	4	100
	Spring, 2012	24	40	27	6	3	100
	Spring, 2008	22	46	24	3	5	100

		Q17e Now I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems in our country. Tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem or not a problem at all: e. Safety of food					
		Very big problem	Moderately big problem	Small problem	Not a problem at all	DK / Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2013	38	38	15	6	3	100
	Spring, 2012	41	39	15	2	3	100
	Spring, 2008	12	37	42	7	2	100

		Q17f Now I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems in our country. Tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem or not a problem at all: f. Water pollution					
		Very big problem	Moderately big problem	Small problem	Not a problem at all	DK / Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2013	40	36	17	6	2	100
	Spring, 2012	33	37	20	7	3	100
	Spring, 2008	28	38	26	7	1	100

		Q17g Now I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems in our country. Tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem or not a problem at all: g. Quality of manufactured goods					
		Very big problem	Moderately big problem	Small problem	Not a problem at all	DK / Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2013	31	40	20	6	3	100
	Spring, 2012	33	45	17	2	2	100
	Spring, 2008	13	42	38	5	2	100

		Q17h Now I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems in our country. Tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem or not a problem at all: h. Health care					
		Very big problem	Moderately big problem	Small problem	Not a problem at all	DK / Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2013	23	40	25	9	3	100
	Spring, 2012	26	38	27	7	3	100
	Spring, 2008	12	39	40	6	2	100

		Q17i Now I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems in our country. Tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem or not a problem at all: i. Education					
		Very big problem	Moderately big problem	Small problem	Not a problem at all	DK / Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2013	24	34	30	10	2	100
	Spring, 2012	23	36	29	9	3	100
	Spring, 2008	11	31	42	13	4	100

		Q17j Now I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems in our country. Tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem or not a problem at all: j. Crime					
		Very big problem	Moderately big problem	Small problem	Not a problem at all	DK / Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2013	24	38	26	9	4	100
	Spring, 2012	25	40	26	6	4	100
	Spring, 2008	17	44	30	5	4	100
	Spring, 2007	22	58	18	1	1	100
	Summer, 2002	40	49	8	2	1	100

		Q17k Now I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems in our country. Tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem or not a problem at all: k. Corrupt officials					
		Very big problem	Moderately big problem	Small problem	Not a problem at all	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2013	53	31	10	2	4	100
	Spring, 2012	50	35	9	1	4	100
	Spring, 2008	39	39	14	1	6	100

		Q17l Now I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems in our country. Tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem or not a problem at all: l. Old age insurance					
		Very big problem	Moderately big problem	Small problem	Not a problem at all	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2013	30	40	20	8	2	100
	Spring, 2012	28	40	22	6	3	100
	Spring, 2008	13	40	35	8	3	100

		Q17m Now I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems in our country. Tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem or not a problem at all: m. Safety of medicine					
		Very big problem	Moderately big problem	Small problem	Not a problem at all	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2013	27	43	20	7	3	100
	Spring, 2012	28	43	22	3	4	100
	Spring, 2008	9	37	42	9	3	100

		Q17n Now I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems in our country. Tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem or not a problem at all: n. Traffic					
		Very big problem	Moderately big problem	Small problem	Not a problem at all	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2013	19	34	30	16	2	100
	Spring, 2012	18	37	28	13	3	100
	Spring, 2008	9	30	40	21	1	100

		Q17o Now I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems in our country. Tell me if you think it is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem or not a problem at all: o. Electricity shortages					
		Very big problem	Moderately big problem	Small problem	Not a problem at all	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2013	8	29	33	27	3	100
	Spring, 2012	8	30	33	25	4	100
	Spring, 2008	4	23	43	29	1	100

		Q21a Do you think a. Rising prices is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem or not a problem at all in our country?					
		Very big problem	Moderately big problem	Small problem	Not a problem at all	DK/Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2013	59	35	5	1	1	100
	Spring, 2012	60	32	6	1	1	100
	Spring, 2008	72	24	4	1	0	100

		Q21c Do you think c. The gap between the rich and the poor is a very big problem, a moderately big problem, a small problem or not a problem at all in our country?					
		Very big problem	Moderately big problem	Small problem	Not a problem at all	DK / Refused	Total
China	Spring, 2013	52	35	9	2	2	100
	Spring, 2012	48	39	10	1	2	100
	Spring, 2008	41	48	9	0	1	100