

**The Holocaust on the Anniversary of the
Liberation of Auschwitz:**

Few Lessons May Have Been Learned



**COMPAS Inc.
Public Opinion and Customer Research
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“Who after all is today speaking about the destruction of the Armenians?”

Adolf Hitler - The Obersalzberg Speech - 22 August 1939
<http://www.adolfhitler.ws/lib/speeches/text/390822.html>



1.0. Overview

On the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz death camp, the *National Post* commissioned COMPAS to delve into how Canadians perceive the Holocaust and what lessons they draw from it.

The portrait of Canadians to emerge is one of empathetic people who largely do not blame the victims of Hitler's killing machine but know little history and do not volunteer a commitment to action to prevent genocides in the future.

The most sanguine finding is that only 9% blame the Jews of mid-20th century Europe for their own fate—marginally down from 15% in 2002 and 16% in 1986.

Many Canadians nonetheless know little about this period in history and many have a passive attitude about preventing genocides in the future:

- ❑ Asked if Jews during the Holocaust were partly, mostly, or not at all to blame for their "persecution," 23% say that they do not know;
- ❑ Asked how many European Jews were murdered during the Holocaust, 34% volunteer that they do not know or are unfamiliar with that period of human history and 12% volunteer numbers in the thousands rather than millions;
- ❑ Asked what lessons should be drawn from the Holocaust, more than a fifth say that they either do not know or are too unfamiliar with World War II to have an opinion—only 3% volunteer a clear and explicit view that Canada should take an active role in preventing future genocides;
- ❑ Asked how democratic countries should respond in situations like the recent Iranian threats to nuclearize Israel, 24% volunteered that they did not know while 6% say that democratic countries should not get involved.

A minority of respondents perceive their country as passive in the face of evil and worry about it. As one respondent put it, "Genocide is still happening today in Africa and [we] are unaffected about this because of ignorance and indifference." "Millions of people died in Africa in 1994," observed another, "and Canada didn't do anything to help."



2.0 What Do Canadians Know and Whom Do They Blame

Canadians do not know a lot about the Holocaust but are largely uninclined to blame Jews for their own persecution. Roughly one-fourth of the public has a sense that six million Jews were liquidated. Meanwhile, 34% honestly do not know how many perished, sometimes volunteering an unfamiliarity with this period of human history. Twelve percent believe that the number of victims was in the many thousands rather than millions, as shown in table 1.

Table 1: (Q2) Approximately how many Jews were murdered by the Nazis during the Holocaust of World War II? [UNPROMPTED]

	%
Under 100,000	4
100,000-500,000	5
500,000-999,999	3
1-5 million	18
6 million	23
More than 6 million	10
Other non-numeral answer	3
[UNPROMPTED] Don't know/ Refused	34

Despite limited historical knowledge, Canadians are not inclined to blame the victims. Only 9% blame Jews themselves for their own victimization, as shown in table 2. This ranges from a low of 6% among university educated English-speaking women to a high of 27% among French-speaking males with high school education or less. In the former group, 81% hold Jews entirely blameless compared to 47% with that opinion in the latter group.



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Table 2: (Q1) Thinking back a half century ago to the treatment of the Jews in Europe, before and during World War II, do you think the persecution of the Jews was... [NO ROTATION]

	2005					2002	1986
	All	Male	Female	Eng./ Fem./ Univ. ¹	Fr./ Male/ HS ²	All	All
Partly or Mostly the fault of the Jews	9	11	7	6	27	15	16
Not at all the fault of the Jews	68	66	70	81	47	75	60
[UNPROMPTED] Don't know/ Refused	23	23	24	13	27	11	23

3.0. Lessons Learned and the Iranian Threat to Nuclearize Israel

Table 3 displays the distribution of open-ended responses to a question about lessons learned. More than two-fifths of responses (42%) imply no lessons learned: 20% saying that no lessons were learned, 19% having no opinion on the matter, and 3% saying that they know too little to have an opinion. The proportion having no opinion on the matter is larger among Francophones than Anglophones—32% vs. 15%.

The following verbatims illustrate the view that people have not learned anything from the Holocaust:

¹ English-speaking women with a University education.

² French-speaking men with a High School or lower level of education.



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I don't think we have learned anything regarding the Holocaust. There is still much killing and suffering going on in the world.

It's just a recurring thing. We continue to get persecutions such as Rwanda...and what went on in Serbia.

I don't think that the persecution ever stops because there is just too much war happening all over the world and it seems that it'll never stop.

I don't think that was anything that we learned.

I don't think we will ever learn.

While 42% of respondents point to a possibility that no lessons have been learned, a slightly larger share of respondents (47%) responds to the question about lessons learned by calling for goodness. Such respondents call on people to love and understand each other or treat each other as equals (23%), express regret that evil should never have been allowed to happen (18%), or convey a belief that people should be wary of propaganda (6%).

The following verbatims illustrate the view, expressed by 47% of respondents, that people should love and understand each other, that all people are equal, and genocide should never happen again:

All people are equal.

Be tolerant to every race, colour, and creed.

Bigotry is simply disgusting.

I've learned that we should all be kind to each other.

That people have their beliefs and that you can't go around knocking people because they have different beliefs from your own.

It should not happen again.

War doesn't accomplish anything.

It was very sad. People have to learn lessons.

No reason to kill so many innocent people.

At most 8% call for action. This consists of 3% who explicitly call for Canadian action against bad people or governments plus 5% who articulate a George W. Bush-like commitment to democracy and opposition to dictatorships. A call for action appears to emerge a little more strongly among Anglophones



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than Francophones—9% vs. 4%. The following illustrate a small number of calls for action:

Act first. You don't run around and make peace with guys like Hitler. [Today] we should be pulling our weight.

If things are going wrong, then other countries should step in to fix the problems before it gets out of hand.

To keep an eye on dictators, like the United States is doing. If someone is too much of a threat, they take action.

The lesson that we have learned from this period of history is that you need democracy.

A smattering of respondents, especially among Francophones, reply to the general question about lessons from the Holocaust with anti-Bush, anti-American, anti-Israeli, or anti-Jewish comments. As one respondent put it, “We didn't learn anything, we never learn. You kill people, you find a reason to stop it, and then Bush starts the war in Iraq.” “Many innocent people, especially children,” said another respondent, “were massacred by the Americans in Iraq.”

Respondents were asked how democratic countries should respond to situations such as the recent Iranian threat to nuclearize Israel. A total of 30% implied that they favour inaction—24% saying that they did not know what should be done and 6% explicitly favouring non-involvement.

Table 3: (Q3) What lesson, if any, have we learned from this period of history? [OPEN-END]

	ALL	ENG.	FR.
	%	%	%
COMBINED No lessons learned	42	40	44
We haven't learned anything...but we should have	20	23	6
Don't know/have no opinion/ Refused	19	15	32
I don't know anything/ enough about the Holocaust or World War II	3	2	6
COMBINED People should be good	47	47	44



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	ALL	ENG.	FR.
	%	%	%
People should love and understand each other/ we are all equal	23	23	23
It should never have happened/ it should never be allowed to happen again	18	17	20
People should be weary of propaganda and group think	6	7	1
COMBINED Call for democracy or action	8	9	4
Dictatorships are bad/ absolute power corrupts absolutely/ democracy the solution	5	6	3
That we should stand up and take action quickly against bad people or governments	3	3	1
Unsympathetic response	1	1	4
Anti-Bush, Anti-American, or Anti-Israeli response	1	*	5
Other	2	3	0

Table 4: (Q4) As you may know, some leaders of Iran have threatened Israel with nuclear destruction. Which of the following opinions is closest to you own? [RANDOMIZE]

	%
Democratic countries should express the same concern about the right of Israel to live in peace as for any other country	55
In light of the Holocaust, democratic countries should show special concern when Israel is threatened by other countries with total destruction	15
Democratic countries should not involve themselves when threats are made against Israel	6
Don't know/ Refused	24



4.0. Methods

A representative sample of n=454 Canadians were interviewed by CATI January 21-22, 2005. Samples of this size are deemed accurate to within 4.8 percentage points 19 times out of 20. The principal investigators on this study were Dr. Conrad Winn and Tamara Gottlieb.

