

II. CANADA-U.S. FREE TRADE: SALIENCE, AWARENESS AND SUPPORT

A. Top Problem Facing Canada

The proportion of Canadians identifying "free trade/Canada-U.S. relations" as the "most important problem facing Canada today" rose from 6% in June to 11% in August (Table 1). Nevertheless, the issue continues to trail unemployment/youth unemployment (34%) and economic issues (14%) as the most frequently mentioned "top-of-mind" concerns of Canadians. Notable as well is the emergence of immigration as the top problem identified, by 8% of Canadians, reflecting the attention of the public, media and Parliament to this issue over the summer.

Table 1

MOST IMPORTANT PROBLEM FACING CANADA TODAY

<u>ISSUE</u>	JUNE	AUGUST
	<u>1987</u> %	<u>1987</u> %
Unemployment/youth unemployment	37	34
Economic issues	13	14
Social/moral issues	9	9
Government general/spending	6	7
Free trade/Canada-U.S. relations	6	11
Pollution/conservation	5	3
Constitution/national unity	4	1
Nuclear war/world peace	2	4
Other	8	11
Don't know/no problem/no response	8	6

The fact that the free trade issue has passed the "5% barrier" in terms of the public's chief issue concerns can be interpreted as evidence that it is increasingly "top-of-mind" for many Canadians and that the issue is "heating up" in public opinion terms. This is particularly true of Ontario residents, among whom the percentage indicating free trade/Canada-U.S. relations as their top issue concern doubled (from 8% to 16%) between June and September. The affluent and medium-level production workers are also more likely to mention free trade as the top problem facing the country today.