

- 1972 was a US Presidential election year but the incumbent administration and likely election winner had taken a constructive leadership role on environmental problems both nationally and internationally. 1992 is again a US Presidential election year but the incumbent administration and also likely election winner has increasingly blocked progress on many international environmental issues in and outside the UNCED preparatory negotiations. After being in the vanguard in 1972, the USA remains in 1992 a major force but from an increasingly isolated position in the rearguard.
- In 1972 Japan was a reluctant participant in Stockholm. Today, it is a major player in UNCED, with the opportunity to play a principal role in shaping its financial outcomes.
- In 1972 there were few environmental pollution problems which were considered urgent by most developing countries. In 1992 the developing countries environmental concerns are much less abstract. Most are faced with urgent domestic problems of both natural resource depletion and environmental degradation.
- To a surprising degree, the developing countries positions in 1972 and 1992 are very similar. Developing countries then and now are concerned about Northern imposed constraints on their development, and about the need for additional resources. India, and Mrs Gandhi in particular, played a role analogous to the one played by Malaysia and Prime Minister Mahathir today.
- One Southern country that has sharply shifted its stance is Brazil. In 1972 its delegates argued that "environment is a conspiracy of the rich to keep us in a state of happy savagery", and declared their interest in receiving more polluting investment from the North. Today, Brazil is the host of the conference, and consistently registers its concerns about both halves of the environment and development agenda.
- In 1972 the developing countries persisted and succeeded in making the linkage between environment and international trade one of the key preoccupations at the Stockholm Conference. In 1992 developed countries have persisted and so far succeeded in minimizing its prominence on the agenda for the Rio Conference.
- The Founex meeting in June 1971, involving top economists and other experts from developed and developing countries, had a major impact in expanding the international environment agenda beyond concerns about conservation and pollution to wider issues including flows of development assistance, trade and development. The Founex report helped reassure many developing countries that the Stockholm Conference would not lead to additional constraints on their development prospects.