World Public Favors Globalization and Trade but Wants to Protect Environment and Jobs

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Full Report (PDF)
Questionnaire (PDF)
Methodology/Research Partners (PDF)

Majorities around the world believe economic globalization and international trade benefit national economies, companies, and consumers. But many think trade harms the environment and threatens jobs and want to mitigate these effects with environmental and labor standards.

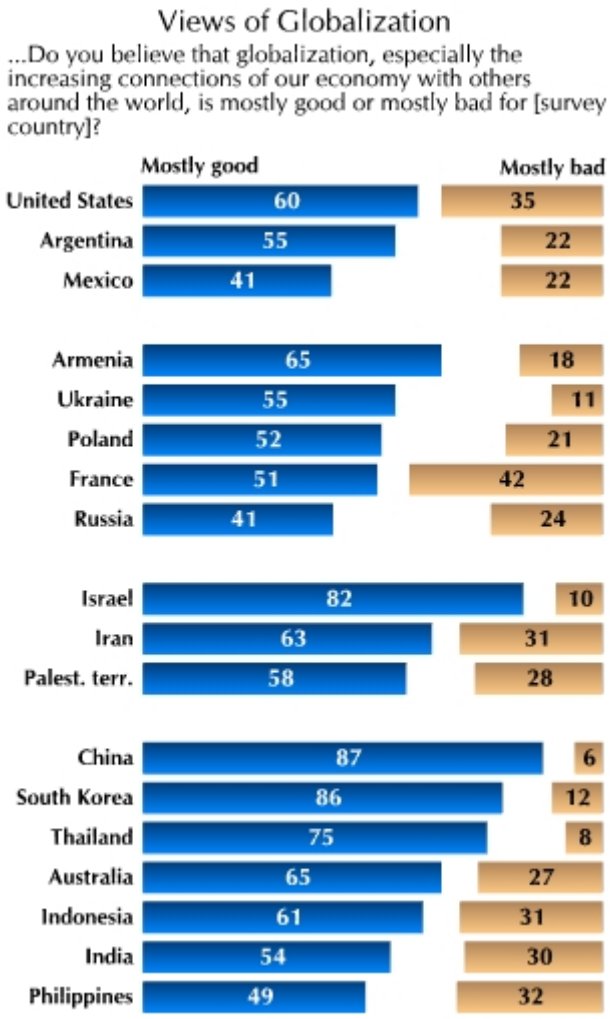
(USDA Photo)

The Chicago Council on Global Affairs and WorldPublicOpinion.org, in cooperation with polling organizations around the world, conducted the survey in countries representing 56 percent of the world's population: China, India, the United States, Indonesia, France, Russia, Thailand, Ukraine, Poland, Iran, Mexico, South Korea, the Philippines, Australia, Argentina, Peru, Israel, Armenia-- and the Palestinian territories.

This is the fifth in a series of reports based on the global poll's findings that analyze international attitudes on key issues. Not all questions were asked in all countries.

Support for globalization is remarkably strong throughout the world. Seventeen countries plus the Palestinian territories were asked if "globalization, especially increasing connections of our economy with others around the world, is mostly good or mostly bad" for their country. In every case positive answers outweigh negative ones.

The highest levels of support are found in countries with export-oriented economies: China (87%), South Korea (86%) and Israel (82%). Positive answers fall below 50 percent in only three countries, though such responses outweigh negative replies by wide margins. The greatest skepticism about globalization is found in Mexico (41% good, 22% bad), Russia (41% good, 24% bad) and the Philippines (49% good, 32% bad). In the United States, 60 percent think globalization is mostly good and 35 percent call it mostly bad.

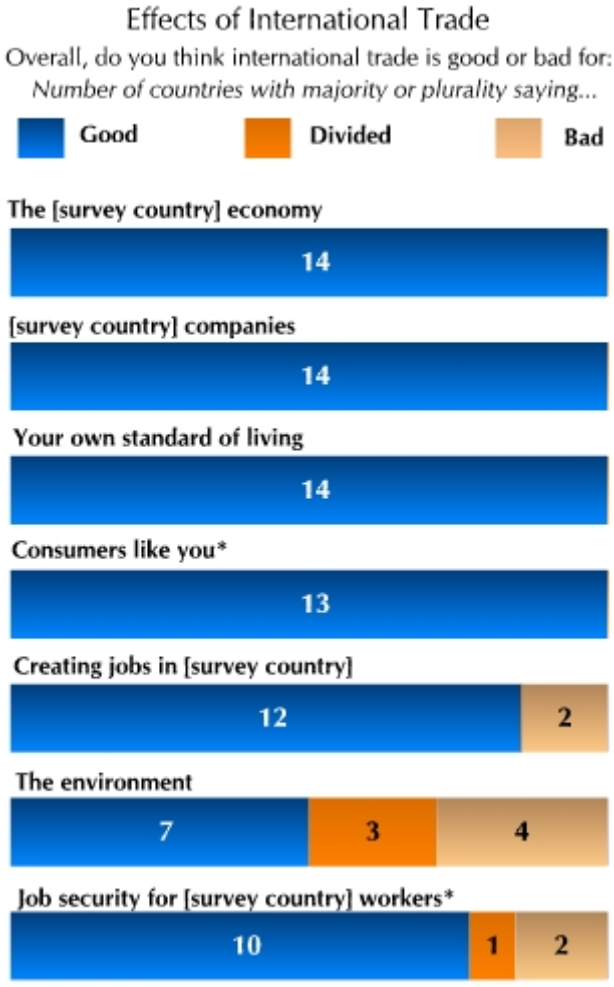


Those with more education are more likely to feel that globalization is mostly good in 13 of the 18 countries. Younger respondents, ages 16-29, are more positive than those 50 years and older in eight countries (France, Indonesia, Iran, Mexico, Poland, Russia, Ukraine and the US). This difference is most extreme in France, where only 40 percent of older respondents have a favorable view of globalization while 71 percent of younger respondents do.

There is an even stronger consensus around trade's positive impact on national economies. Respondents in 14 countries were asked whether trade was good or bad for their economy. In all of them, majorities reply that it is good. The highest levels of approval are in China (88%), Israel (88%), South Korea (79%), and Thailand (79%). The highest negative views, though still held by minorities, are found in the United States (42%), France (34%), Mexico (27%) and India (27%).

Majorities say trade benefits their country's companies in all the countries asked. Israelis (86%), Chinese (78%) and South Koreans (78%) again top the list of those saying trade is "good" for their country's companies. The highest percentages of negative replies are found in the United States (45%), France (43%) and Russia (34%).

Most of those polled also believe trade benefits consumers. Majorities (ranging from 56 percent to 77 percent) express positive views in all but one country, Argentina, where 46 percent think trade is good for consumers (31% bad). A majority of the French are also positive (61%), though France has the largest percentage expressing negative views (38%). A strong majority of Americans also believes trade is good for consumers (70%).



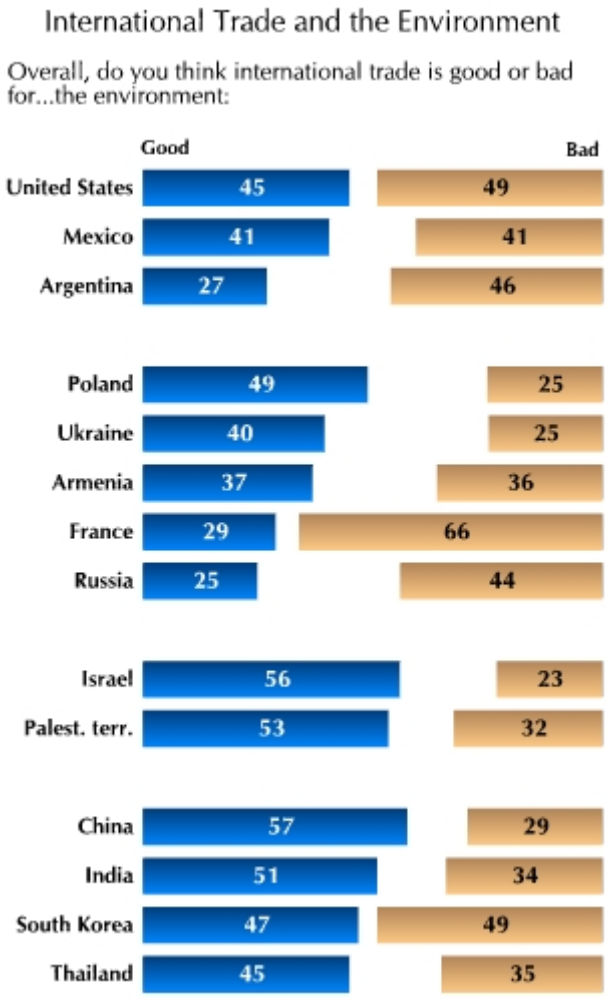
Attitudes about whether trade is good or bad for "your own standard of living" follow a similar pattern. Majorities in all but three countries express positive views. Once again, the most enthusiastic are the Israelis (74%) and the Chinese (73%). Americans are also positive (64%). The three exceptions are: Argentina (good 42%, bad 30%), Russia (good 45%, bad 19%), and France (good 50%, bad 44%).

Higher education is associated with the belief that trade is good for one's standard of living in seven of 14 countries asked (China, France, Poland, Russia, South Korea, Ukraine and the United States). In Poland, Russia, Thailand, Ukraine, and the United States, those younger than 30 are more likely than those older than 50 to believe this (by 5 - 10 percentage points). In France, the younger age group is far more likely (69%) to see trade as good for their standard of living than the older one (39%).

Trade and the Environment

Respondents around the world express concern about the effect of trade on the environment. In four countries, the idea that trade is bad for the environment is the most common view: France (66% bad, 29% good), the United States (49% bad, 45% good), Argentina (46% bad, 27% good), and Russia (44% bad, 25% good). Opinion is divided in Armenia (36% bad, 37% good,), Mexico (41% bad, 41% good), and South Korea (49% bad, 47% good).

In none of the countries polled do large majorities believe trade helps the environment. Those most optimistic about trade's environmental impact are the Chinese (57%), Israelis (56%) and Palestinians (53%).



There are several reasons why people may think that trade harms the environment. Some may believe that it stimulates growth and consumption, resulting in more factories and cars and ultimately more pollution. Others may assume that by opening domestic markets to foreign goods, trade allows companies to evade environmental laws by moving to countries with more lax regulations.

One way to mitigate the potentially negative impact of trade on the environment is to require minimum environmental standards as part of trade agreements. Critics say, however, that including environmental standards in trade agreements hurts the developing world by raising costs and discouraging investment.

Nonetheless, the publics in developing as well as developed nations show strong support for such standards. Large majorities in all 10 countries asked--ranging between 60 percent and 93 percent--say that trade agreements should include "minimum standards for protection of the environment." Those in favor include two of the world's largest developing economies: China and India. The Chinese favor environmental protections by 85 percent to 8 percent and the Indians endorse them by 60 percent to 28 percent.

Trade and Labor

There is significant concern about the effect of trade on employment, especially in more developed countries. Eighty percent of French respondents believe trade has a negative impact on job security in their country and 73 percent think it is also bad for the creation of jobs there. In the United States, 67 percent consider trade harmful for U.S. workers' job security and 60 percent call it detrimental for job creation. In Argentina and South Korea, respondents are divided about whether trade helps preserve jobs, though they tend to say trade is good for creating jobs.

In the other countries polled, majorities view trade as positive for job creation while majorities or pluralities think it is good for job security. Israelis, Mexicans and Thais are those most positive that trade helps create jobs (74% each). The largest majority saying trade is good for job security is in China (65%) while Indians (49% good, 37% bad) and Russians (43% good, 32% bad) are among the more skeptical.

In five countries, younger respondents are more likely than older respondents to see trade as good for creating jobs, but the differences related to age are not large (10 percentage points or fewer).

Anxiety about trade's impact on labor is also expressed in a question about foreign policy goals. Respondents in seven countries were asked to judge the importance of possible foreign policy goals, including "protecting the jobs" of their country's workers. In all seven countries, majorities gave this goal the top rating of "very important:" Armenia (84%), Australia (83%), the United States (76%), China (71%), South Korea (68%), Thailand (66%), and India (54%).

Those with less education in Australia, South Korea, and the United States are more likely to feel that job protection is a very important foreign policy goal. Those older than 50 are more likely than those younger than 30 to say that protecting job security is an important foreign policy goal in most of the countries polled on this issue, including China, India, South Korea, Thailand, and the United States.

Concerns about the effect of trade on jobs has prompted labor leaders in developed countries to insist that trade agreements include labor standards that would require signatory governments to

comply with international labor standards, such as prohibiting child labor and allowing workers to form labor unions. They argue that such standards would prevent a "race to the bottom" by companies that move to countries without minimal worker protections in search of lower costs.

As in the case of environmental standards, those opposed say that adding labor protections to trade agreements would hurt developed countries by raising costs and discouraging investment.

Respondents in developed countries, not surprisingly, overwhelmingly support including labor standards in international trade agreements, including nine out of ten respondents in the United States (93%), Israel (91%), Argentina (89%), and Poland (88%).

But adding labor protections to trade agreements also receives strong support in many less developed countries that are known for low-cost labor markets. In China, 84 percent favor them as do majorities in Mexico (67%), India (56%) and the Philippines (55%).

This is contrary to the widespread assumption that laborers in developing countries would oppose the imposition of higher standards because they desire the competitive advantages derived from lower labor costs. It is possible that the requirement of higher standards is attractive because it generates outside pressure to improve working conditions in their countries.

Complying With WTO Rulings

While respondents around the world tend to support international trade as an engine of economic growth, they are less enthusiastic about the World Trade Organization (WTO), which was founded in 1995 to enforce trade rules and resolve international trade disputes among member states. Most countries lean toward compliance with adverse rulings by the WTO, but there is substantial variation.

After being told that the WTO was "established to rule on disputes over trade treaties," respondents in eight countries were asked: "If another country files a complaint with the World Trade Organization and it rules against [survey country], as a general rule, should [survey country] comply with that decision or not?"

The US public, despite its reservations about international trade, shows the highest support for obeying WTO decisions. Seventy-three percent of Americans endorse compliance. This is a slight increase from 2004, when 69 percent favored compliance. American views about compliance with WTO decisions are consistent with the support they have shown in this and other polls for strengthening multilateral institutions.

Majorities in two other countries also endorse compliance with WTO rulings: China (58%) and Mexico (53%). Mexican support is up 5 points since 2004.

Modest pluralities favor obeying WTO decisions in three countries. These include India (37% yes, 29% no), Thailand (34% yes, 17% no) and Ukraine (40% yes, 12% no). In all three countries, substantial minorities say "it depends" or "not sure."

South Korea is the only country where a majority opposes complying with adverse WTO decisions (52% no, 37% yes). But while opposition to compliance has remained unchanged since 2004 (52%), support has dropped 11 points from 48 percent. South Koreans have suffered adverse WTO rulings regarding their ship building and computer chip industries in recent years. The WTO has also forced South Korea to open up its market to rice imports.

Armenians tend to oppose compliance (35% no, 26% yes), though many Armenians (38%) are uncertain, saying it depends or don't know. Filipinos are divided (48% yes, 49% no).

To read more about opinion in the individual countries surveyed, click here to view the full report (PDF).