

Media Release

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Poll Findings Suggest Trouble Ahead for the Globalization Agenda

Survey of 20,000 Citizens across 20 Key Countries

A major new public opinion poll across 20 countries representing 65 percent of the world's population shows that while a majority of citizens today believes economic globalization will be positive for them and their families, only one in ten is very convinced this will be so. A majority of citizens also believes that:

- globalization will harm their country's culture,
- human rights and environmental protection are the major priorities for stronger international controls, well ahead of trade and investment,
- groups generally found outside the Seattle and Quebec City barricades (i.e., NGOs and faith-based groups) can be trusted much more than those inside (i.e., national governments and global companies) to operate in the best interests of society.

The survey findings reveal a startling rejection of traditional authority across many of the countries surveyed, and suggest that fundamental changes in both process and content will be necessary to retain popular support for the globalization agenda.

The research, involving 20,000 in-person or telephone interviews across mainly G20 countries, was conducted during December 2000 and January 2001 by respected public opinion research institutes in each participating country, under the leadership of Environics International of Toronto, Canada. (Please see page 4 for a list of participating countries and research institutes.) The research forms part of Environics' annual Global Issues Monitor report, available on a subscription basis.

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Current Support for Globalization

Today, twice as many citizens around the world see economic globalization as something positive for them and their families, than see it as negative. However, support is very soft, with only one in ten seeing globalization as strongly in their interests.

A majority of 55 percent of citizens across twenty countries see globalization as at least somewhat in their interest, while 26 percent see it as negative and another one in five (19%) are unable to say. However, only one in ten (10%) citizens worldwide sees globalization as strongly in their interests – a finding that should give pause to strong advocates of further liberalization of trade and investment prior to making progress on other aspects of global governance.

Doug Miller, President of Environics International, cautions that “While currently supportive of globalization, the global public has not yet made up its mind, and more riot police and tear gas associated with further trade liberalization initiatives (such as in Quebec City a week ago) are unlikely to be positive factors.

“Interestingly, our analysis shows that cultural concerns are the strongest factors driving negative public opinion on globalization. One in four citizens across the 20 countries strongly believes that globalization threatens their country’s unique culture, and another third are somewhat convinced of this.”

Protecting Human Rights and the Environment Take Priority

One of the contributing reasons for weak support for economic globalization appears to be a broadly perceived imbalance in global governance. Asked to choose areas needing stronger international safeguards and controls, most survey respondents point to human rights and environmental protection, followed by workers’ rights ahead of international trade and investment.

Fully four in ten (39%) citizens across G20 countries choose human rights as the area needing stronger international control. Almost three in ten (27%) select environmental protection as the highest priority, and another one in ten (10%) point to workers’ rights. Only 7 percent choose international trade and investment and just one percent volunteer that stronger controls are not needed in any area.

“The guarded support for globalization, combined with the strong belief that controls against human rights abuses and environmental degradation are insufficient, suggest that another round of global trade negotiations would be ill-advised until major initiatives are taken in the human rights and environmental protection areas,” advises Miller.

Low Trust in National Governments

Another reason for caution on the globalization agenda is the survey’s finding that people have far more trust in value- and faith-based institutions than in traditional institutions, including national governments.

When asked how much they trust a number of institutions to operate in the best interests of society, a strong majority of people across G20 countries say they have trust in non-governmental organizations (NGOs); and only slightly fewer favor religions and churches. Other institutions rank considerably lower, especially global companies and national governments.

Two-thirds of global citizens (65%) say they have trust in NGOs to work in the best interests of society. In fact, they are regarded as the most trustworthy societal institutions by people in four of the six geographic regions surveyed. Religious groups and churches enjoy the confidence of six in ten people polled (58%). Significantly, 81% of Americans say that they trust churches. Ranking second in the US are NGOs. In Europe, NGOs are ranked first for trustworthiness.

Disturbingly, fewer than half of G20 citizens (45%) say that they trust their national governments to operate in the best interests of society. Europeans and Latin Americans have the least faith in their governments whereas North Americans express the most faith. But even in North America, fewer than six in ten trust their national government.

Among all institutions rated, global companies fare the worst. Only four in ten people (42%) say that they trust them to operate in the best interests of society. One bright spot for global companies, unfortunately not shared by governments, is that young people and those with better education and higher incomes tend more than others to trust them.

The survey findings indicate a rejection of traditional authority in favor of a growing allegiance to organizations based on values. This development helps explain public concerns about an economic globalization agenda perceived as being developed in secret and graphically excluding some of the most trusted players.

Commenting on the implications of the poll's findings, Environics International's President Doug Miller says, "It's a new world. Citizens are rejecting the traditional authority of national governments and beginning to push back against the growing power of large corporations. They are also acknowledging the moral leadership of values-based organizations.

"Unless meaningful ways are found to involve NGOs and faith-based organizations in developing international agreements in the trade, human rights and environmental areas, global initiatives will lack moral authority and the progression towards greater globalization will likely suffer significant set-backs. Police lines and tear gas should not be necessary tools for building a new world order."

* Each national survey was based on a representative sample of 1,000 adults, and was conducted in home or by telephone during December 2000 and January 2001 as part of Environics' annual 20-nation Global Issues Monitor survey. National findings are accurate to within + or - 3 percent, 19 times out of 20.

