

22 Nation Poll on the Global Economy

January 25, 2005

Most Are Pessimistic

[Questionnaire](#)

[Methodology/Survey Partners](#)

A BBC World Service Poll of 22 countries from around the world found that in 13 countries a majority or a plurality believe the world economy is getting worse. Citizens in only 6 countries see the world economy improving.

When asked about their country's economy, citizens of only 9 countries saw it getting better, with people in another 10 countries expecting worsening conditions. Only when asked about their own family's finances did a majority in 14 countries take a positive view.

The poll--completed mostly before the Asian tsunami disaster--found, on average, 44 percent saying the world economy is getting worse compared to only 34 percent saying it is improving. Similarly, 48 percent say their national economy is getting worse with another 41 percent saying it is getting better. Fully 47 percent see their family's economic conditions as getting better (vs. 36% saying it is getting worse).

The poll of 22,953 people was conducted by the international polling firm GlobeScan together with the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland.

Steven Kull, director of PIPA comments, "While the world economy has clearly picked up from difficult times just a few years ago, people do not seem to have fully absorbed this development, though they are personally experiencing its effects. There seems to be a paradoxical tendency for people around the world to say 'I'm OK; but the world isn't.' Policymakers should take note of this tendency to underestimate the world economy as it may lead people to not recognize the benefits of politically controversial policies such as more open trade or aid programs to help poor countries develop their economies."

Doug Miller, President of GlobeScan, comments, "The poll shows that even before the Asian tsunami disaster few citizens were confident in the global economy, or even in their own country's economy. While they may feel confident about their own finances, they see a world in conflict and are concerned how this will affect the global economy."

Views of Economic Conditions for Family, Country, and World

Number of Countries with Majorities or Pluralities Saying Economic Conditions are Getting "Better" or "Worse"



When asked whether they thought economic conditions in the world as a whole were getting better or worse, the most pessimistic country was South Korea, with 82% expressing negative expectations. Italy was also quite negative at 67 percent, followed by the Philippines (65%), Mexico (62%) and Canada (53%). The most optimistic country was China (68% saying better), followed by India (55%) and Indonesia (52%).

Pessimism about their national economy was quite strong in a small number of developing nations-- Lebanon (77%), the Philippines (82%), and Mexico (66%)-- and in several advanced economies, most of which have been experiencing disappointing economic growth -- South Korea 88%, Italy 81%, France 74%, Japan 53 %, and Germany 52%. The US public leaned negative (51% to 45%) in assessing their nation's economic condition. Optimism about national economic performance was more often found among developing economies like China (88%), South Africa (62%), Chile (57%), and India (55%); but also included a few established economies (Australia 61%, Canada 61%, and Great Britain 57%).

The countries whose people showed the most optimism about their family's economic conditions were again China (86%), India (77%) and Indonesia (before the tsunami) (71%). After these came the Philippines (68%), South Africa (65%), and Britain (64%). On the other side of the ledger, South Korea was most pessimistic, with 71 percent saying their family's economic conditions were getting worse, followed by Mexico (69%), Italy (58%), Lebanon (54%), and Poland (48%).

Worldwide, those with a low educational level (relative to their country) were much less likely to say their family's economic situation was getting better than those with medium or high levels-- 36% for low education as compared to 50% for medium and 51% for high. As might be expected, income made a strong difference: 64% of those with very high income seeing improvement compared to 37% of those with very low income. Men are slightly more likely to be optimistic than women (49% to 46%), while the young are significantly more optimistic than the old (61% of 18-24 year olds vs. only 28% for those over 65). As is discussed in more depth in the Demographic Differences analysis below, these patterns carried over to perceptions of country and world trends though not as sharply.

[Graph: World Economic Conditions](#)

[Graph: Economic Conditions in Country](#)

[Graph: Family's Economic Condition](#)

REGIONAL ANALYSIS

Asia

The countries where people are most optimistic are developing nations in Asia (though this survey was fielded before the tsunami). Optimistic about their family's economic circumstances are China (86%), India (77%), Indonesia (71%), and the Philippines (68%). China, India, and Indonesia also have positive expectations for national and world economic growth. Eighty-eight percent, 55 percent, and 52 percent respectively are optimistic about their nations and equally large numbers about the world: China (68%) India (55%), Indonesia (52%). The stark exception was the Philippines: only 18 percent see their country's economic condition getting better and 31 percent the world.

The advanced Asian economies in this study, Japan and South Korea, are far less optimistic than the developing economies in the region on all questions and are among the lowest of all countries surveyed. In Japan low percentages see improvements in their family economic conditions (18%), their nation (19%) and the world (12%). Similarly in South Korea only 26 percent are optimistic about their family, 11 percent their nation and 15 percent the world.

Europe

Western European countries are also fairly pessimistic. This is especially true of France and Italy which have fallen behind other advanced countries. Relatively low numbers of the French were optimistic about their family conditions (33%), their country (16%) and the world (20%). Optimism was even lower among the Italians: family (15%), country (12%) and the world (17%). In Germany, despite stagnated economic growth between 1996 and 2004, views of family conditions were slightly positive (41% getting better, 35% getting worse), somewhat negative about the national economy (41% better, 52% worse), and neutral on the world economy (45% better and 45% worse).

The most optimistic European country is Great Britain which since 1996 has grown faster than all other western European countries surveyed. Sixty-four percent here say their family economic conditions are getting better and 57% their nation; but only 40% see the world getting better (49% worse).

The people of Poland and Russia are negative about the economic conditions of their families (Poland 29% getting better, 48% worse, and Russia 29% better, 42% worse) and negative or neutral about their national economies (Poland: 33% better, 50% worse, and Russia: 35% better, 36% worse). Their views of the world economy tend to be mixed: in Poland (31% better, 32% worse) and Russia (31% better, 21% worse) with many not taking a position. These countries' recent and extensive economic transitions likely contribute to its citizens' cautious economic expectations.

North America

Americans are quite optimistic about their family situation (58%), lean remarkably negative on their country's prospects (45% better, 51% worse) and also lean negative about the global economy (39% better, 46% worse).

Their northern neighbors in Canada, are more upbeat. They are positive about their family prospects (62%) and their national economy (61%). However they hold a grim view of world trends (35% better, 53% worse)

In stark contrast is Mexico--one of the most negative countries surveyed. Sixty-nine percent are pessimistic about their family's economic circumstances, 66% about their country's economy, and 62% the world economy. Though Mexico had reasonable economic growth in 2004 (4%) it is slowly rebounding out of several years of stagnated growth.

South America

On average, South Americans exhibit balanced opinions on economic expectations. Most upbeat are Chileans with 45% optimistic about their family, 57% about their country, and 39% about the world (32% pessimistic). Brazilians are more optimistic about their family (49%) but are divided about their country (43%-43%) and lean pessimistic about the world (31% optimistic, 50% pessimistic). Argentineans are modestly optimistic about their family (44%-26%) and their country (49%-30%) but only 21% are optimistic about the world while 37% are pessimistic.

Other Countries

South Africans and Australians are among some of the most optimistic people surveyed. South Africans are remarkably optimistic about their family (65%) and their country (62%) and lean positive about the world (44% - 33%). Australians are nearly as optimistic about their family (54%) and as optimistic about their country (61%), however they swing more negative about the world (31% getting better, 45% getting worse) compared to South Africans.

There are significant differences between two Muslim countries, Turkey and Lebanon. Turks are upbeat about their families (54%) and divided about their nation and the world. Lebanese are quite pessimistic: a majority (54%) are negative about their family's prospects, are profoundly pessimistic about their national economy (77%) and lean negative on the world (25% better-42% worse). In both countries, negativity about their national economy is surprising as both had healthy growth rates in 2004 (Turkey 7%, Lebanon 5%).

DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES

Overall, within each country, those with relatively high incomes showed optimism about their families' economic prospects while those with relatively low incomes were more pessimistic. On average among those with very high incomes, 64% were optimistic, while among those with very low incomes only 37% were optimistic and 47% were pessimistic.

In some countries these income-based differences were extreme. In India, 91% of those with very high income were optimistic compared to only 15% with very low income. In Lebanon the spread between optimism among those with very high and very low income was 47 points, in Russia and Turkey 42 points, in the USA 43 points, and in Canada, 45 points.

When asked to think about their country's economy, a similar but less extreme pattern emerged: 55% with very high income were optimistic about their country, while this was true of only 40% with very low income while 47% felt worse. When asked to think about the economic condition of the world, the pattern became even milder: 44% with very high incomes felt optimistic, while 40% felt pessimistic, while 33% with very low income felt optimistic and 43% felt pessimistic.

The effect of education was similar to income. Among those with low education, on average, only 36% saw their family's economic conditions getting better (42% worse), while those with medium and high levels were considerably higher, with 50% and 51%, respectively, saying it was getting better. The influence of education on optimism was notable in most countries. The exceptions were India and South Africa where there was no significant difference between those with varying levels of education and Mexico where those with high education were less optimistic for their families than those with low education. When asked to think about the world's economy, those with high education were as pessimistic (46%) as those with low education (44%).

The young are far more inclined to perceive economic conditions as improving than are the old--especially in regard to their own conditions. Worldwide, a striking 59 percent of those 18 to 29 years old see their family's economic conditions as getting better, but only 49 percent of those 30 to 44 see this; 41 percent of those 45 to 59; and just 31 percent of those above 60. Where their country is concerned, 45 percent of the youngest group are optimistic, but only 37 percent of the oldest group; and for the world, 41 percent of those from 18 to 29 are positive, but just 28 percent of people sixty years and older.

Overall, women tend to be slightly more pessimistic than men about economic prospects. Gender differences are minimal regarding their family's economic conditions--49% of men were optimistic as compared to 46% of women. In regard to their country's economic conditions 51% of women thought things were getting worse (38% better) while this was true of 46% of men (better 44%). Similarly 47% of women saw the world economy getting worse (31% better) as compared to 42% of men (38% better).

The BBC World Service Poll was conducted from November 15, 2004 to January 3, 2005 with a representative sample of 22,953 people across the 22 countries. In eight of the countries the sample was limited to major metropolitan areas. The margin of error per country ranged from +/- 2.5-4%. For more details, please see the Methodology section.