

World Publics See Government as Responsible For Ensuring Basic Healthcare, Food, and Education Needs

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But Big Variations on How Well Their Government is Performing

[Questionnaire/Methodology \(PDF\)](#)

[Full report \(PDF\)](#)

[Press Release \(PDF\)](#)



A new WorldPublicOpinion.org poll of 21 nations around the world finds that large majorities in every country say their government should be responsible for ensuring that citizens can meet their basic needs for food, healthcare, and education.

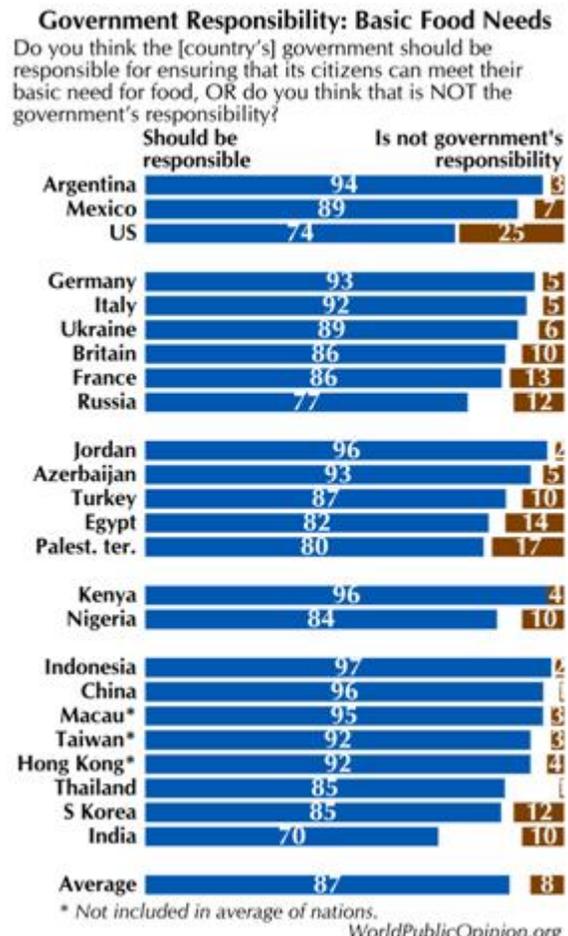
(USAID photo/Richard Nyberg)

On average, across all countries polled, nine in 10 say that their government has the responsibility to ensure access to food, healthcare, and education.

"Clearly there is universal consensus that governments have a responsibility to address the social and economic needs of their citizens," comments Steven Kull, director of WorldPublicOpinion.org.

However, the poll found major variations in how well people perceive their governments to be fulfilling these responsibilities. Overall, respondents expressing the highest levels of satisfaction with their government's performance in meeting such needs are found in China, Great Britain, Jordan, and the Palestinian Territories. The lowest levels are found in Russia, Ukraine, Argentina, and Nigeria.

These results show overwhelming public support for the principles presented in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which is celebrating its 60th anniversary this year. It states that: "Everyone has the right to...food, medical



care...[and] education." Signatories to the declaration commit "by progressive measures, national and international, to secure" these rights.

The poll of 21,321 respondents was conducted between July 15 and September 26, 2008 by WorldPublicOpinion.org, a collaborative research project involving research centers from around the world and managed by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland. Margins of error range from +/-2 to 4 percent.

Interviews were conducted in 21 nations, including most of the largest nations--China, India, the United States, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Russia--as well as Argentina, Azerbaijan, Egypt, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Mexico, the Palestinian Territories, South Korea, Thailand, Turkey, and Ukraine. Interviews were also conducted in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau. The publics included represent 61 percent of the world population.

Government Responsibility for Basic Needs

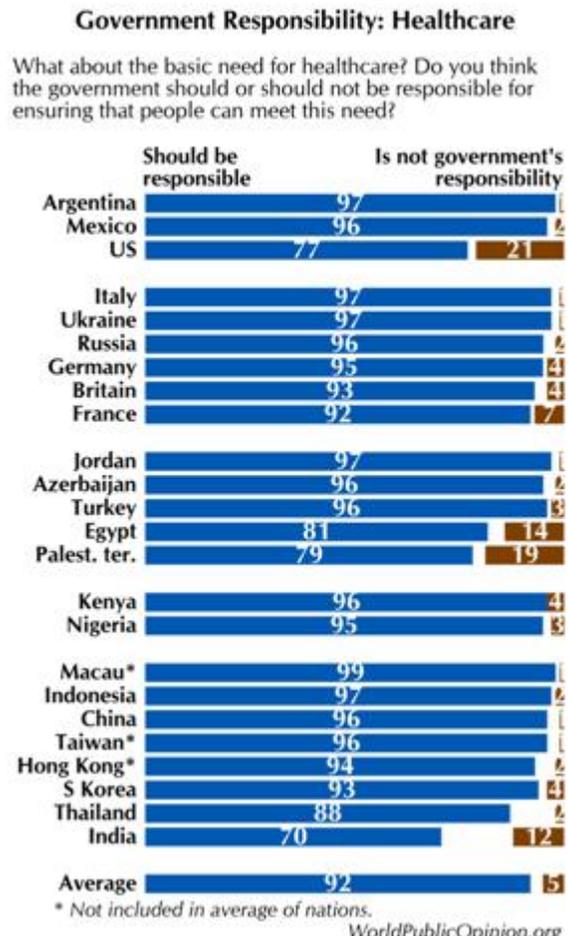
When asked whether their "government should be responsible for ensuring that its citizens can meet their basic need for food," or whether "you think that is not the government's responsibility," majorities of 70 to 97 percent in all 21 countries say government should be responsible for this. The average is 87 percent.

The most universal support is found in eight publics where more than nine in 10 believe the government should be responsible for citizen's need for food: Indonesia (97%), China (96%), Jordan (96%), Kenya (96%), Argentina (94%), Azerbaijan (93%), Germany (93%), and Italy (92%). Even the lowest majorities saying the government is responsible in this case are well above half, including Indians (70%), Americans (74%), and Russians (77%).

The publics with significant numbers saying the government does not have the responsibility to ensure access to food include the United States (25%), the Palestinian Territories (17%), Egypt (14%), and France (13%).

When asked the same question about "the basic need for healthcare," majorities of the same magnitude (70-97%) in all countries polled see ensuring that people can meet their need for healthcare as one of government's responsibilities. The average majority is 92 percent and in all but five countries support is greater than 90 percent.

Ninety-seven percent say the government should have this responsibility in Argentina, Italy, Ukraine, Jordan, and Indonesia, and 96 percent agree in Azerbaijan, Mexico, Russia, Turkey,



Kenya, and China. Ninety-five percent take this view in Germany and Nigeria, 93 percent in Britain and South Korea, and 92 percent in France. Only India (70%), the United States (77%), the Palestinian Territories (79%), Egypt (81%), and Thailand (88%) have less than 90 percent saying the government has the responsibility to provide healthcare.

In only a few publics do significant numbers reject the government having the responsibility to ensure access for healthcare; 21 percent of Americans say the government is not responsible, followed, again, by Palestinians (19%), and Egyptians (14%).

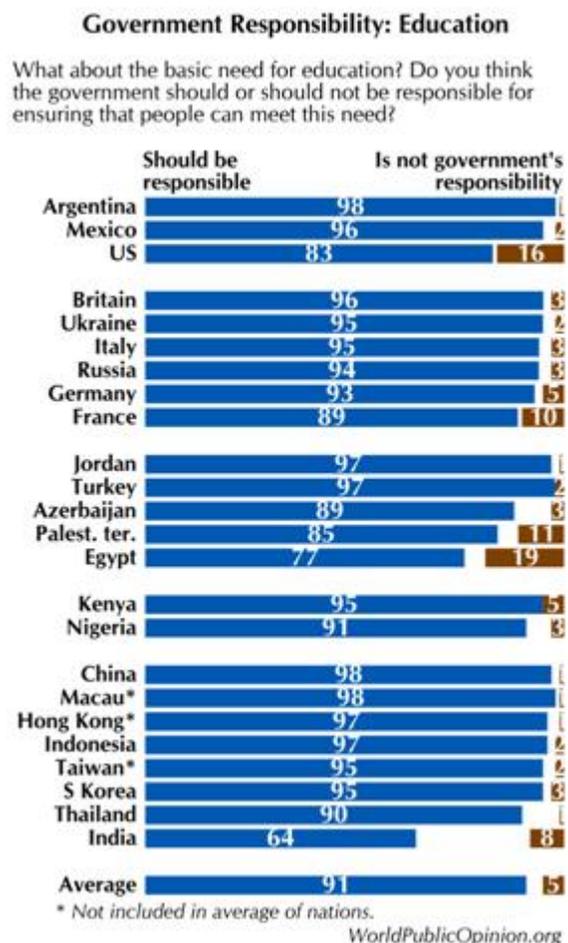
On education, majorities ranging from 64 to 98 percent also see the government as responsible for ensuring that people can meet their basic needs. The average majority is 91 percent and in only six nations do majorities of less than 90 percent take this position.

Virtually unanimous majorities in Argentina (98% and China (98%) say the government has the responsibility to ensure its citizens' educational needs are met. In three countries, 97 percent agree (Indonesia, Turkey, and Jordan), 96 percent in two countries (Mexico and Great Britain), 95 percent in four countries (Italy, Ukraine, South Korea, and Kenya), 94 percent in Russia, 93 percent in Germany, and 91 percent in Nigeria.

Very large majorities slightly below the global average say the government has this responsibility in Thailand, (90%), Azerbaijan (89%), France (89%), the Palestinian Territories (85%), and the United States (83%). Egypt (77%) and India (64%) have the smallest majorities in support, although 19 percent in India volunteer "depends" as their answer.

Egyptians have the largest minority saying the government is not responsible for education (19%), followed by Americans (16%).

These results show overwhelming public support for the standards offered by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 25 states that: "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care." Article 26 adds that: "Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary stages." (The Declaration does not imply that state education should be the only means to achieve universal education; in fact, the article also states that "parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.")



Assessments of Government Efforts

Respondents were asked how well they feel the government is ensuring that people can meet their basic needs for food, education, and healthcare. They were not asked to assess how well their government was fulfilling these responsibilities in absolute terms, but rather in the context of "the limits of the[ir] ...government's resources." Broadly, publics answered in ways that clearly distinguished between different responsibilities and took into account constraints on the government's means. Improvements over recent decades, as measured by bodies such as the World Health Organization, seem to have been registered by publics.

The UN Development Programme rates 177 countries by their level of human development (the Human Development Index). In reporting this poll, countries that receive a ranking of 1-35 were classified as "developed," 36-80 as "middle tier" and 81-177 as "developing."

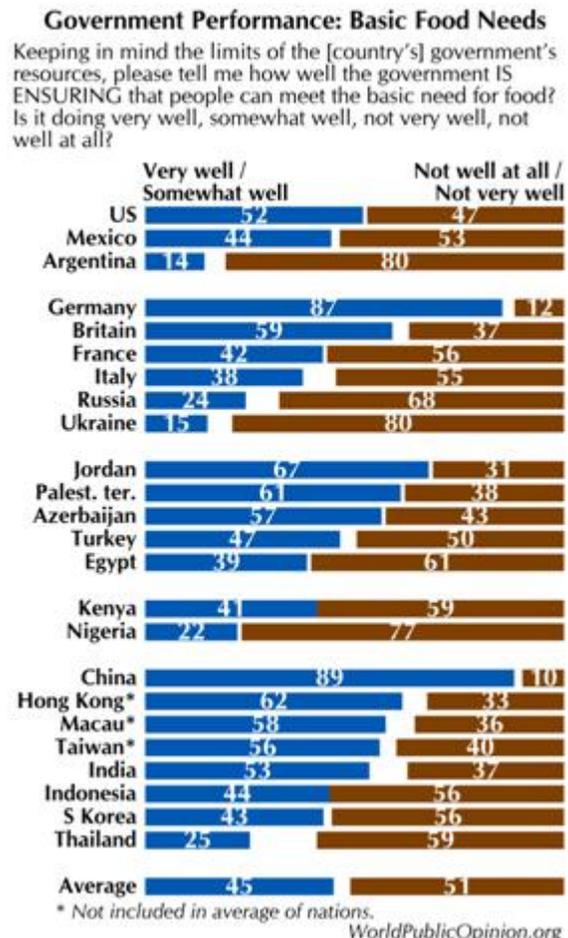
Among the six developed countries in the poll, the one public that gives their government positive ratings in all categories is Great Britain. The United States gets positive ratings in regard to food and education, but not healthcare. Germans give positive ratings for food and healthcare, but not for education. The French give positive ratings for education and healthcare, but not for food. South Koreans give a positive rating for education, but not for food or healthcare. Italians give poor rating for food and healthcare, and divided ratings for education.

Among the five middle tier countries, views are consistently negative. Argentines, Russians, and Ukrainians give their countries negative ratings in all areas. Mexicans are negative in regard to education and food, though positive about healthcare. Thais give negative ratings on food and healthcare, though lean positively on education.

Interestingly, views tend to be the most positive in the 10 developing nations--underscoring how governments are assessed relative to their efforts and progress rather than in absolute terms. In China, India, Jordan, and the Palestinian Territories, majorities give positive ratings for all categories. In Turkey, Indonesia, and Kenya majorities are satisfied in all areas except food. Azerbaijanis are satisfied in all areas except healthcare. Egyptians are only satisfied in the area of education, while Nigerians are dissatisfied in all areas.

Assessments of Government Efforts on Food

Perhaps in response to concerns about rising food costs, access to food is the need with the largest number of countries (12 out of 21) saying their government is doing a poor job. On average, 51



percent say their government is not ensuring citizens can meet this need well, while 45 percent say it is.

The most negative perceptions of government performance on meeting citizens' need for food come from the middle tier of countries, with very large majorities in Argentina (80% not well), Ukraine (80%), and Russia (68%) having this view. It is notable that two post-Soviet states give their national governments very low marks on food security--particularly Russia, whose government leadership receives high marks in general in other polls. Modest majorities of Thais (59%) and Mexicans (53%) also agree their government is doing a poor job.

Among the 10 developing countries, perceptions range from quite negative to very positive on the issue of food. Most in five developing countries rate their governments poorly on ensuring access to food, including Nigeria (77%), Egypt (61%), Kenya (59%), Indonesia (56%), and Turkey (50%).

However, an overwhelming 89 percent in China say their government is doing a good job ensuring citizens' access to food. China's overall increase in standard of living has been widely reported; its GNP per capita has grown fivefold since 1990.

Publics polled in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau give more tepid, but still positive evaluations. In Taiwan, a 56-percent majority says their government is doing a good job ensuring citizens' access to food, though 40 percent say "not well." In Hong Kong a 62-percent majority agrees (33% not well), and in Macau a 58-percent majority agrees (36% not well).

Also giving their governments a positive rating on ensuring its citizens' access to food are 67 percent of Jordanians, 61 percent of Palestinians, 57 percent of Azerbaijanis, and a modest majority of Indians (53%). Jordan had less than 2 percent of its people living below the world poverty line (less than \$1 a day) in 2003, and has been successful in reducing the percentage of small children who are underweight.

Opinions also range widely among the six developed countries in the poll, with three publics criticizing their governments for performing poorly in meeting this need: France (56% not well), South Korea (56%) and Italy (55%). In contrast, a very large majority in Germany (87%) says its government is meeting this need well, as do smaller majorities in Great Britain (59%) and the United States (52%).

Assessments of Government Efforts on Education

On the topic of education, global publics are somewhat more positive. Fourteen out of 21 publics polled have majorities or pluralities saying the government is doing a good job ensuring citizens can meet this need. Publics in six others have majorities or pluralities saying it is not doing this very well, while one public is divided. On average, a slight majority (52%) says their government is doing a good job ensuring citizens can meet their need for education, while 44 percent say it is not doing this well.

Nine of the 10 developing countries polled say the government is doing a good job ensuring its citizens can meet their educational needs. Kenyans are the most positive (86% well), followed by Jordanians (77%), Chinese (71%), the Palestinians (69%), and Azerbaijanis (64%).

This overwhelming majority in Kenya may be responding still to the 2003 introduction of free, universal primary education, when, in one day, 1.3 million new students were brought into Kenya's classrooms. By 2005 enrollment reached almost 80 percent of children, despite the great challenges faced by the country's educational resources. High approval in Jordan and the Palestinian Territories may be associated with the expansion of education since the 1990s.

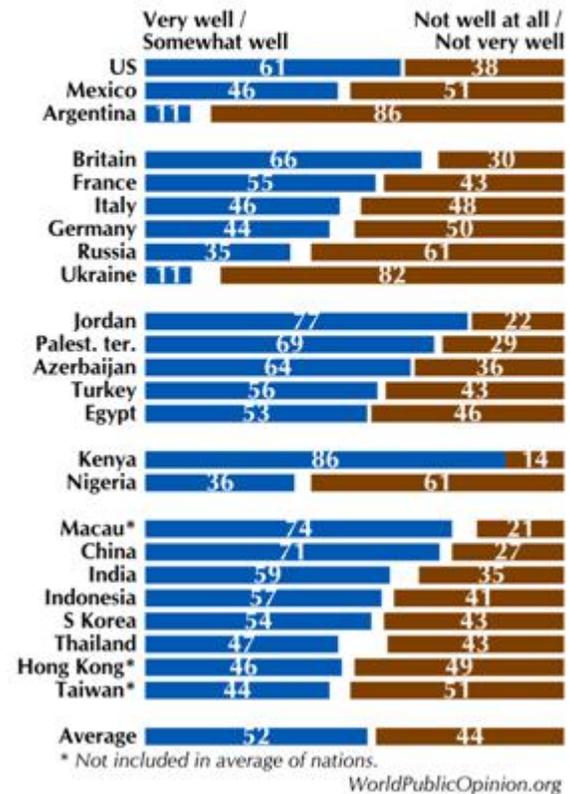
Majorities in India (59%), Indonesia (57%), Turkey (56%), and Egypt (53%) also say the government is doing this at least somewhat well. Only Nigerians have a majority (61%) saying the government is doing a poor job ensuring educational needs among this group of countries.

Developed countries have mixed views on their government's performance on ensuring its citizens' educational needs. In four countries, majorities say their government is meeting this need well: Great Britain (66%), the United States (61%), France (55%), and South Korea (54%). However, half in Germany (50%) believes their government is not doing a good job ensuring its citizens can meet their basic needs for education. Opinion in Italy is divided (46% well, 48% not well), where school dropout rates are higher than the European Union as a whole and national reform of its system is underway.

Again, the most negative perceptions of government performance come from the middle tier countries, where the worst ratings are given by Argentines (86%) and Ukrainians (82%). Majorities of Russians (61%) and Mexicans (51%) also say their governments are doing a poor job. A plurality of Thais (47%) tend to think that their government is performing well, although a high 43-percent say that is not performing well.

Government Performance: Education

What about the need for education? Please tell me if you think the government is ensuring that people can meet this need very well, somewhat well, not very well, not well at all.



Assessments of Government Efforts on Healthcare

Global perceptions on government performance in ensuring healthcare are generally divided, although 11 publics have majorities saying the government is doing a good job, compared to nine that say it is doing poorly, with one country divided. On average, 50 percent say their government is not ensuring citizens can meet their healthcare needs well, while 47 percent say it is doing well.

Most developing countries say that their government is ensuring that its citizens can meet their healthcare needs at least somewhat well, with seven out of 10 having majorities with this view. Jordanians rate their government's performance most positively (74% well), followed by the Chinese (68%), the Palestinians (65%), Kenyans (65%), Turks (57%), Indonesians (55%), and Indians (52%). Jordan's per capita expenditure on health grew 50 percent between 2000 and 2005, and its infant mortality rate was one-third lower in 2006 than it had been 15 years earlier. Its public appears to see and applaud these efforts.

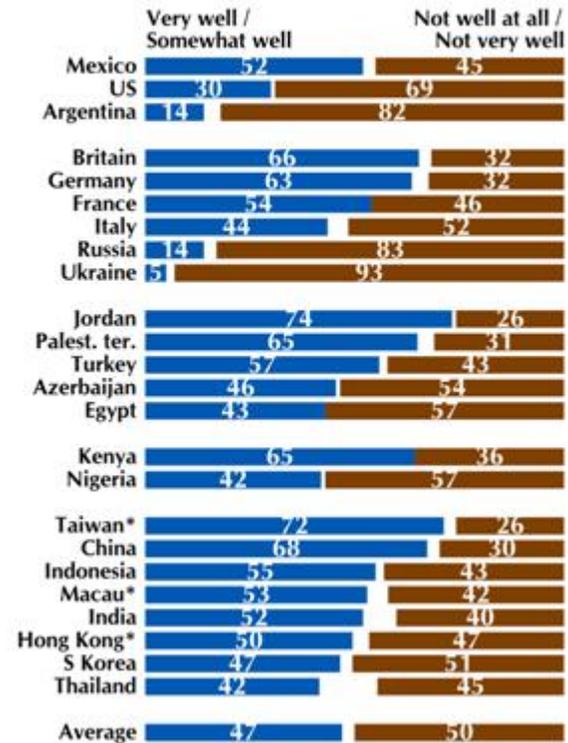
Egyptians and Nigerians are the most negative among this group, with 57 percent of each public saying the government is not doing its job well on healthcare. Azerbaijanis are close behind with 54 percent holding this view.

Four out of the five middle tier countries say their government is doing a poor job ensuring its citizens can meet their healthcare needs, including an overwhelming 93 percent in Ukraine, 83 percent in Russia, and 82 percent in Argentina. Thais lean slightly negative: 45 percent say their government is doing a poor job, while 42 percent say it is performing well. Of this group, only Mexico has a modest majority (52%) saying the government is doing a good job meeting this need.

Developed countries are somewhat divided on how well their governments are doing on this issue, with three countries rating their governments positively and three negatively. Majorities in Great Britain (66%), Germany (63%), and France (54%) say their government is doing a good job. Conversely, nearly seven in 10 Americans (69%) say their government is not doing this well. Slight majorities in Italy (52%) and South Korea (51%) also rate their government negatively.

Government Performance: Healthcare

What about the need for healthcare? Please tell me if you think the government is ensuring that people can meet this need very well, somewhat well, not very well, not well at all.



* Not included in average of nations.

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