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Poll: Muslims Positive About Globalization, Trade

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College Park, MD—Contrary to the common assumption that Muslims view globalization as a threat to their society, a new poll of Muslim countries finds that globalization is generally viewed positively. The poll was conducted by WorldPublicOpinion.org in six nations with predominantly Muslim populations in different regions of the world, including Egypt, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Iran, Indonesia, and the Palestinian Territories, plus the Muslim population of Nigeria.

Asked about “globalization, especially the increasing connections of our economy with others around the world,” majorities in six of the seven publics polled say that it is “mostly good” for their country. Approval is highest among Egyptians and Nigerian Muslims (79% and 78% saying mostly good, respectively). Sixty-three percent of Azerbaijanis, 61 percent of both Iranians and Indonesians, and 58 percent of Palestinians see globalization as mostly good. Turkey is the only country whose support does not reach a majority, but a plurality still calls globalization mostly good (39% to 28%). On average across all seven publics, 63 percent say that globalization is good for their own countries. Only 25 percent think it is mostly bad.

Steven Kull, director of WorldPublicOpinion.org comments, “These findings run counter to the widespread assumption that people in the Muslim world are anxious and hostile about the prospect of integration into the global economy.”

The poll of 5,216 respondents was conducted 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. Not all questions were asked in every country. Margins of error range from +/- 3.2 to 4.1 percent.

Most people in these predominantly Muslim countries also have positive attitudes about international trade. Majorities or pluralities in five of six nations see international trade as good for their countries’ companies—Nigerian Muslims being the only exception (37% good, 59% bad). Overall, on average 59 percent see trade as beneficial to their respective countries’ companies.

Majorities in every population polled think trade is good for consumers (on average 63%) and for their own standard of living (on average 56%).

Views of the effect of international trade on workers is more mixed. While trade is widely seen as positive for creating jobs, its effect on job security for workers produces

more divided responses. On average, a 61-percent majority thinks international trade is good for creating jobs in their own countries (29% bad), while a 48-percent plurality thinks international trade is good for job security (37% bad).

The most negative views of the effect of trade on workers is found among Egyptians: 64 percent think that trade is bad for job creation and 65 percent think it is bad for job security. Nigerian Muslims have divergent responses to the two questions: 64 percent think it is bad for job security but, 72 percent think trade is good for job creation.

The effect of international trade on the environment elicited the most negative views from respondents. On average across the six populations opinion is divided, with 44 percent saying it has a bad effect and 42 percent saying it has a good effect on the environment. Majorities in three nations see trade's environmental effects as negative: Egyptians (63%), Nigerian Muslims (58%), and Indonesians (56%).

However most respondents express interest in addressing the negative effects of trade on the environment and workers—not through protectionism but through an international, cooperative effort integrating labor and environmental standards into agreements on international trade.

When asked: “Do you think that countries that are part of international trade agreements should or should not be required to maintain minimum standards for protection of the environment,” on average, across all five countries polled, a robust 84-percent majority says they should be required to do so, with no country having less than three in four in support.

Support among these populations is equally strong for requiring minimum standards for working conditions in international trade agreements. On average 8 in 10 support them, as do at least three in four within each nation.

These findings are notable, considering that most of the six nations polled are considered to be developing countries and leaders of many developing countries oppose including environmental and labor standards in trade agreements in fear that it would undermine their competitive edge by raising costs and discouraging investment. Advocates of labor and environmental standards, however, argue that without such standards companies would seek out countries with lower standards and that developing countries would compete amongst each other by lowering their standards. Publics in the countries polled clearly favor maintaining such standards despite the competitive potential of lowering them.

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