

Globalisation splits rich and poor

There is considerable unease about the pace of globalisation around the world, according to a new BBC global poll.

Half of all people polled across 34 countries say that the pace of globalisation is too fast, while 35% say globalisation is going too slowly.

But concern about globalisation is strongest among the world's richest countries, where it is closely correlated with a belief that the fruits of economic growth have been unfairly shared.

In many of the world's poorest countries, however, where large majorities say that the benefits and burdens of economic development have not been shared fairly, people are more likely to say that globalisation is proceeding too slowly.

"People in some developing countries want to accelerate globalisation and appear to believe that this will help break down some of the inequities in their country," said Steven Kull of the University of Maryland's Program on International Policy Attitudes, a co-sponsor of the poll.

Among the countries where this correlation is strongest are the Philippines, Indonesia, Brazil, Kenya and Mexico.

Overall, 64% of the global public believes that the economic benefits of growth have been shared unfairly, with majorities favouring this view in 27 out of 34 countries.

China exception

One exception to the pattern is China, which has experienced extraordinary economic growth of over 10% annually during the last decade.

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In surveys conducted only in urban areas, most Chinese say that economic growth has been fairly distributed even though economists say the gap between rural and urban areas has widened sharply.

But the Chinese public is strongly concerned about the pace of globalisation, which is dramatically transforming the physical and social landscape of cities like Shanghai.

So it appears that for some emerging market countries, concern about globalisation centres around social dislocation rather than its economic costs.

The same pattern may apply in India in cities like Bangalore, although polling was not completed there in time to be included in this survey.

Western unease

The survey, which was conducted before the recent sharp falls in world share markets, also shows considerable unease about deteriorating economic conditions, especially in rich countries.

Only 22% of US citizens said economic conditions were getting better in their country, with 78% saying they were getting worse.

Citizens in France, Italy and Japan are equally pessimistic, with only 22% of French people and 33% of Japanese saying conditions were getting better.

In contrast, there was economic optimism in China, Russia, Canada, Australia, and the UAE, all countries which are benefitting from increased economic growth, partly as the result of rising commodity prices for oil and minerals.

Protectionist pressures

It is also striking that among rich countries, concern about globalisation is strongest among Western European countries such as France, Spain, and Italy who favour a social model of development.

It is slightly weaker in "Anglo-Saxon" economies such as the US and the UK, where growth is actually slowing faster and inequality has been rising more sharply.

"There is real public concern about the direction of the economy, but it's not only about a downturn. It also has to do with how fairly the benefits and burdens are shared, and the pace of globalisation," said Doug Miller, director of Globescan, the polling company that conducted the survey on behalf of the BBC.

With growing protectionist rhetoric among Democrats ahead of a presidential election in the US, the poll suggests that restarting the stalled world trade talks - and overcoming the growing scepticism about the benefits of free trade in industrial countries - could be an uphill task.

Globescan interviewed 34,528 people in Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Egypt, El Salvador, France, Ghana, Germany, Great

Britain, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Lebanon, Mexico, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Panama, the Philippines, Portugal, Russia, South Korea, Spain, Turkey, UAE, and the United States.