
In United States and Largest European Economies Public Opinion Is Split on Issues of Economic Nationalism, Protectionism and Internationalism

ROCHESTER, N.Y. – March 19, 2009 – A new **Financial Times/Harris Poll** finds a lack of consensus in the United States and the largest European countries as to whether their governments should adopt protectionist and nationalistic economic policies or continue more internationalist and liberal economic policies. For example, 30% of adult Americans feel that “national protectionism” can contribute to their economic recovery, 24% think this would not help and fully 46% are either not sure or “neither agree nor disagree.” In Europe equally large numbers of people do not come down on either side of this argument. Of those who do, somewhat more people oppose than support national protectionism – by 30% to 16% in Germany, 30% to 22% in Spain, 36% to 23% in France, 23% to 21% in Britain and by 34% to 28% in Italy.

These are some of the results of a **Financial Times/Harris Poll** conducted online by Harris Interactive® among a total of 6,538 adults (aged 16-64) in France, Germany, Great Britain, Spain, and the United States and adults (aged 18-64) in Italy between February 25 and March 3, 2009.

A question asked in Europe, but not in the United States, found that the public was equally split as to whether the free movement of people, capital, goods and services in the European Union helps or harms a European recovery. Here again large numbers are not sure, or think this movement neither helps nor hurts the EU economy. Of the remainder, more think cross-border movement within Europe helps than hurts but this varies by country. In Spain fully 54% think it helps and only 9% think it hurts. In Britain, only 27% think it helps; slightly more than the 24% who think it hurts.

Immigration

In Europe, majorities in Italy (59%) and Spain (53%) and pluralities in France (45%) and Germany (43%) favor the ability of citizens of other EU countries being able to work in their countries. In Britain (almost always the least “pro-European” of these countries) a 54% to 33% oppose foreign EU workers being able to work there.

However, most people in the United States, and in the European countries, support the idea of their governments “asking” immigrants who have no jobs to leave the country. Only between 35% (in France) and 14% (in Britain) oppose this idea.

Free Trade

While many people do not have an opinion one way or the other, large pluralities in the United States (by 48% to 17%), Germany (49% to 11%) and Britain (36% to 10%) believe that free trade can contribute significantly to their countries’ recovery. Smaller pluralities in France, Italy, and Spain also feel this way.

Unemployment a Bigger Threat than Inflation

Some politicians and economists are warning of the dangers of rapid inflation triggered by very large deficits and increased government spending. However, by large majorities (from 81% in Spain to 55% in Germany and 64% in the United States) most people see unemployment as a bigger threat than inflation.

Not Yet Time to Buy Stock or Start a Business

Majorities in two countries (61% in Italy, 57% in Spain) are less likely to buy shares because of the economic downturn. Pluralities in the other countries (41% in Britain, 41% in France, 48% in Germany and 45% in the United States) agree. Only very small minorities (from 4% in Italy to 11% in France) feel that they are now more likely to buy shares.

Replies to a similar question about starting one's own business also finds majorities or large pluralities saying the downturn makes this less likely.

Public Sector Workers More Likely to Survive the Recession

Majorities in four countries (France, Italy, Spain and Germany) and clear pluralities in the other two (the United States and Britain) believe that public sector workers have a better chance than private sector workers of "surviving the recession."

So What?

Public opinion in all of these countries is divided on what policies their governments should implement in relation to protectionism, free trade or immigration.

History suggests, however, that at times of crisis, public opinion often responds to leadership and rhetoric (on both sides of the debate) and can be quite volatile. Depending on the language used, people may support or oppose free trade and liberal economic policies or economic nationalism, tough anti-immigrant policies and protectionism. This debate has probably only just begun.

TABLE 1

WOULD NATIONAL PROTECTIONISM HELP END THE ECONOMIC RECESSION

“And, do you agree or disagree that national protectionism can significantly contribute to [the UK, France, Italy, Spain, German, the US] coming out of the economic recession?”

Base: All EU adults in five countries and U.S. adults

	United States	Great Britain	France	Italy	Spain	Germany
	%	%	%	%	%	%
AGREE (NET)	30	21	23	28	22	16
Agree strongly	9	4	3	6	4	2
Agree somewhat	21	17	21	23	18	14
Neither agree nor disagree	23	26	26	26	26	32
DISAGREE (NET)	24	23	36	34	30	30
Disagree somewhat	14	14	24	22	21	19
Disagree strongly	10	9	12	11	9	11
Not sure	23	29	15	12	21	22

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

TABLE 2

FREE MOVEMENT IN EU AND THE RECESSION

“And thinking about the European Union, do you agree or disagree that its rules on free movement of people, capital, goods and services will help or hurt the European Union coming out of the economic recession?”

Base: All EU adults in five countries

	Great Britain	France	Italy	Spain	Germany
	%	%	%	%	%
HELP (NET)	27	40	44	54	33
Definitely help	6	4	10	13	7
Probably help	21	36	35	41	26
Neither help nor hurt	22	27	27	19	28
HURT (NET)	24	18	14	9	20
Probably hurt	19	13	13	7	16
Definitely hurt	6	5	1	2	4
Not sure	26	14	15	18	19

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

TABLE 3

CITIZENS OF EU COUNTRIES GETTING JOBS IN OTHER EU COUNTRIES

“How much do you support or oppose citizens of other European Union countries getting in [the UK’s, France’s, Italy’s, Spain’s, Germany’s] job market?”

Base: All EU adults in five countries

	Great Britain	France	Italy	Spain	Germany
	%	%	%	%	%
SUPPORT (NET)	33	45	59	53	43
Strongly support	8	6	14	20	7
Somewhat support	25	39	45	33	36
OPPOSE (NET)	54	37	33	41	49
Somewhat oppose	31	24	25	33	35
Strongly oppose	23	13	8	7	15
Not sure	13	18	8	6	8

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

TABLE 4

ASKING IMMIGRANTS TO LEAVE COUNTRY IF THEY DO NOT HAVE A JOB

“How much do you support or oppose [the UK’s, France’s, Italy’s, Spain’s, Germany’s, the US] government asking immigrants to leave the country if they do not have a job?”

Base: All EU adults in five countries and U.S. adults

	United States	Great Britain	France	Italy	Spain	Germany
	%	%	%	%	%	%
SUPPORT (NET)	64	78	51	79	71	67
Strongly support	40	51	20	51	30	30
Somewhat support	24	27	31	28	41	37
OPPOSE (NET)	24	14	35	15	23	26
Somewhat oppose	13	10	22	11	18	19
Strongly oppose	11	4	13	5	5	7
Not sure	12	8	13	5	5	7

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

TABLE 5
FREE TRADE HELPING TO END THE ECONOMIC RECESSION

“Do you agree or disagree that free trade can significantly contribute to [the UK, France, Italy, Spain, German, the US] coming out of the economic recession?”

Base: All EU adults in five countries and U.S. adults

	United States	Great Britain	France	Italy	Spain	Germany
	%	%	%	%	%	%
AGREE (NET)	48	36	29	35	29	49
Agree strongly	18	11	6	8	9	13
Agree somewhat	30	25	23	27	20	36
Neither agree nor disagree	22	32	36	32	30	30
DISAGREE (NET)	17	10	22	24	22	11
Disagree somewhat	11	8	16	18	14	8
Disagree strongly	6	2	6	6	9	2
Not sure	13	23	13	9	18	10

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

TABLE 6
LARGER THREAT TO ECONOMY

“Which one of the following is the larger threat to [the UK’s, France’s, Italy’s, Spain’s, Germany’s, the US] economy?”

Base: All EU adults in five countries and U.S. adults

	United States	Great Britain	France	Italy	Spain	Germany
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Unemployment	64	63	62	70	81	55
Inflation	27	27	30	26	14	38
Not sure	9	11	8	4	5	7

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

TABLE 7
BUYING SHARES IN COMPANIES

“Has the current economic downturn made you any more or less likely to buy shares in companies?”

Base: All EU adults in five countries and U.S. adults

	United States	Great Britain	France	Italy	Spain	Germany
	%	%	%	%	%	%
More likely	9	6	11	4	6	7
Less likely	45	41	41	61	57	48
Has not made any difference	39	46	39	28	30	39
Not sure	6	6	9	6	6	6

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

TABLE 8
STARTING A BUSINESS

“Has the recent economic downturn made you any more or less likely to start up your own business?”

Base: All EU adults in five countries and U.S. adults

	United States	Great Britain	France	Italy	Spain	Germany
	%	%	%	%	%	%
More likely	7	6	8	3	4	3
Less likely	36	34	32	55	60	43
Has not made any difference	39	46	43	30	24	39
Already have my own business	7	6	3	4	5	6
Not sure	11	9	15	8	8	9

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

TABLE 9
GROUPS WITH BEST CHANCE TO SURVIVE RECESSION

“Which of the following groups of people do you feel has the best chance of surviving the recession?”

Base: All EU adults in five countries and U.S. adults

	United States	Great Britain	France	Italy	Spain	Germany
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Public sector workers	34	46	54	68	69	60
Individuals on pensions or state benefits	13	15	10	6	7	14
Private sector workers	23	12	15	11	8	7
Not sure	30	27	21	16	16	19

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

Methodology

This **FT/Harris Poll** was conducted online by Harris Interactive among a total of 6,538 adults (aged 16-64) within France (1,067), Germany (1,060), Great Britain (1,226), Spain (1,098) and the United States (1,057), and adults (aged 18-64) in Italy (1,030) between 25 February and 3 March 2009. Figures for age, sex, education, region and Internet usage were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words “margin of error” as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult populations of the respective countries. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the Harris Interactive panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls and the British Polling Council.

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