

Resistance to Globalization

The whole of the global economy is based on supplying the cravings of two percent of the world's population.

—Bill Bryson, nonfiction writer (born 1951)

Essential Question: What were the various responses to globalization from 1900 to the present?

While globalization of culture has in many ways raised awareness and appreciation of cultural diversity, the economics of globalization have led to serious concerns. Resistance to globalization has come from non-governmental and governmental sources. A network of opponents to economic globalization promotes equal distribution of economic resources, challenging the lopsided economy described above by author Bill Bryson. Participants contend that corporations and global financial institutions, such as the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** and the World Trade Organization (WTO) work to maximize profit and sacrifice safety and labor conditions, environmental conservation needs, and national independence.

Some countries, such as North Korea, have resisted economic and cultural globalization. Others, such as Saudi Arabia and China, have resisted cultural globalization, particularly through controlling the internet. These countries want goods and money to flow freely among nations, but they are more restrictive of how people and ideas cross borders.

The Roots of Globalization and Anti-Globalization

Globalization affected the relationships among and within nations. After World War II, several organizations contributed to the growth of a global economy. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the European Economic Union, Mercosur (in South America), and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) all formed between 1947 and the early 1990s. These organizations were meant to help economies and expand prosperity. Falling tariff rates eased the movement of goods across national borders.

In 1995, the World Trade Organization (WTO) took over GATT's operations. The WTO makes rules for more than 90 percent of international trade. The rules and its closed board meetings led people to believe that the WTO did not care for their welfare. (Connect: Compare the economic practices of the 17th century to globalization in the 20th and 21st centuries. See Topic 4.5.)

The “Battle of Seattle” In 1999, protests erupted at a WTO conference in Seattle. The WTO had planned a round of trade negotiations for the new millennium. Then more than 40,000 protesters arrived. Special interest groups, including labor unions, family farmers, student groups, and environmentalists shut down the WTO’s meeting and drew global attention to the issues of the new global economy. Anti-WTO demonstrations took place in dozens of other countries as well.

Many people consider the Seattle protests to be the beginning of the anti-globalization movement. They were also one of the first social movements to be coordinated through the internet. However, the WTO itself remained powerful. China joined in 2001, increasing the group’s territorial and economic reach.



Source: WTO protestors (1999)

The “Sea Turtle” protesters outside the 1999 World Trade Organization Conference in Seattle, Washington.

Why Resist Globalization?

Why did people protest globalization when it made goods and services more freely available? Opponents had different reasons. Many of them centered on the idea that consumers who buy products and services with a few clicks often have no idea who creates those products and services and what the short-term and long-term costs really are. A series of scandals in different parts of the world showed some of the hazards of globalization. Working conditions are especially problematic

- Much of the chocolate that consumers bought in the early 21st century had its origins in **child labor** in West Africa. The largest chocolate companies missed deadlines in 2005, 2008, and 2010 to make sure their suppliers did not use child laborers. In 2015, the U.S. Department of Labor estimated that more than 2 million children took part in dangerous labor in the cocoa-growing regions of the world.

- Working conditions in Western nations could also be harsh. In 2019, employees of **Amazon**'s warehouses described such intense pressure to fulfill orders that workers risked being fired if they took a bathroom break. At the time, Amazon employed more than 600,000 people and another 100,000 at holiday time, though not all of them worked in warehouses.
- In 2013, the collapse of the **Rana Plaza factory**, an eight-story building in Dhaka, Bangladesh, shocked the world. More than 1,000 people died and another 2,500 suffered injuries. Most of the dead and injured were female garment workers who made clothing for Western companies. **Muhammad Yunus**, a Bangladeshi who won the Nobel Prize for Peace, called the disaster "a symbol of our failure as a nation." He suggested that companies worldwide set an international minimum wage.



Source: Wikimedia Commons

The Rana Plaza collapse is considered the deadliest structural failure accident in modern human history, and therefore also the deadliest garment-factory disaster in history.

Environmental Damage Critics of globalization pointed out that the fuel involved in shipping products vast distances increased the amount of greenhouse gases in the environment, thus worsening the climate emergency. Also, in the early 21st century, Brazil cut down thousands of square miles of rainforest each year to make way for cattle farms. The meat was one of the country's most valuable exports.

Proponents of globalization argue that it can help the environment. They point out that Costa Rica and other nations have developed **ecotourism** industries that make profits while showing off the country's natural wonders.

Threats to National Sovereignty Many liberal groups believe that globalization often harms children, workers, and the environment. However, many conservative groups also distrust globalization.

In 2016, 52 percent of British voters agreed to leave the European Union, an international political and economic organization of 28 countries. This British exit was nicknamed **Brexit**. Britain was a founding member of the EU in 1993, but conservative British politicians argued that the EU interfered with Britain's right to govern itself. Many Brexit proponents contended that the EU required Britain to accept too many immigrants.

Negotiations to leave the EU broke down when British prime minister **Theresa May** was unable to craft a deal that was acceptable to her own political party, let alone to the other 27 nations in the EU. May resigned in 2019. Brexit critics believed that leaving the EU would be economically disastrous for Britain, an island nation that depended on imports.

Economic Resistance

Critics of globalization believe that international agreements and institutions can destroy small local businesses. Large corporations could use the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the WTO to achieve their goals, but local individuals and businesses could not. For example, many small businesses and individuals could not cross state lines or national borders. They could not extract the natural resources they needed or use the wide variety of labor sources that big corporations and transnational businesses used. In an attempt to combat globalization, some businesses, especially restaurants, have insisted on providing their customers locally grown or made products.

Globalization critics also distrusted the World Bank, an international organization affiliated with the United Nations. The bank's mission is to improve the economic development of member states. In 1988, about 20,000 people protested meetings of the IMF and the World Bank in West Berlin. Protesters insisted that these agencies favored richer nations over poorer ones. In 2001 and 2002, anti-IMF and anti-World Bank protests took place in 23 countries, including many of the world's poorest nations. In 2014, the World Bank made reforms to its structure and governance, but critics maintained that the world's richest nations controlled the bank.

What Measures Do Anti-Globalists Favor? The anti-globalization movement has grown into a social movement as well. Its followers tend to focus on these issues:

- **Human rights**, which are basic freedoms that every person has, such as freedom from slavery and freedom to express opinions



- **Fair trade**, which is a system that ensures the person who provided the good or service receives a reasonable payment for it
- **Sustainable development**, which means business ventures that allow people and companies to make a profit without preventing future generations from meeting their own needs
- **Debt relief** or **debt restructuring** so that countries that owe huge sums to the IMF do not have to risk economic breakdown

Anti-Globalization and Social Media

Anti-globalization activists have used the internet to perpetuate and spread their ideas in nearly every country on Earth. However, access to global communication through social media outlets has met resistance in some countries. In 2009, more than 1,000 rioters clashed with police in the city of Urumqi, China. The unrest resulted from tensions between members of the Han ethnicity and members of the **Uighur** ethnicity, most of whom are Muslim. Chinese authorities blamed the riots on the growth of social unrest based on Twitter and Facebook and banned both platforms. The government introduced a new platform called **Weibo** as a substitute. It could stream incoming posts while tracking and blocking “sensitive” content. Weibo has become a vehicle of negotiation between the Chinese government and its citizens.

In some other countries, governments allow social media platforms but influence or control their content. For example, critics contend that Saudi Arabian officials use Twitter and Facebook to harass and intimidate citizens. “If the same tools we joined for our liberation are being used to oppress us and undermine us, and used to spread fake news and hate, I’m out of these platforms,” explained **Manal al-Sharif**, a women’s rights activist.

In some parts of the world, resistance to participating in an interconnected society persists. The coming together of economies and cultures threatens some people’s and governments’ sense of autonomy and identity.

KEY TERMS BY THEME		
<p>SOCIETY: Leaders and Thinkers Muhammad Yunus Theresa May Manal al-Sharif</p> <p>SOCIETY: Issues and Problems child labor Rana Plaza factory</p>	<p>ecotourism human rights fair trade sustainable development debt relief debt restructuring</p>	<p>GOVERNMENT: Politics Brexit Uighur</p> <p>TECHNOLOGY: E-Commerce and Social Media Amazon Weibo</p>