

By Elaina Loveland

## The First Globals Generation

An interview with pollster and commentator John Zogby

**J**OHN ZOGBY DEVELOPED THE CONCEPT OF TODAY'S YOUNG PEOPLE as "First Globals," a term he coined for the generation born between 1979 and 1991. The First Globals concept, developed based on his extensive polling research, attempts to examine this generation's new worldview both to understand where they currently stand on various key issues, and to help look down the road to where these leaders of tomorrow may take us.

Zogby is chairman of the board of Zogby International, a worldwide research and marketing firm. He founded the company in 1984, and now conducts business in more than 75 countries. His clients include local and national newspapers, television stations, international news services, and cable news networks.

His prolific writing currently includes a weekly column for Forbes.com, a weekly report card on President Obama's performance for *U.S. News & World Report's* Washington Whispers blog, and a monthly column for *Politics* magazine. Zogby's analytical expertise has also been published on the opinion pages of numerous leading newspapers, publications, and Web sites.

Zogby served for nine years as a member of the Board of Trustees of his alma mater, Le Moyne College. He is also a senior advisor at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and serves as the first-ever senior fellow of The Catholic University of America's Life Cycle Institute in Washington, D.C. He also served on the Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy and is a commissioner on The Center for Strategic and International Studies' Commission on Smart Power.

He is the author of *The Way We'll Be: The Zogby Report on the Transformation of the American Dream*, which was published by in August 2008.

**IE:** You have defined today's young people as "First Globals." What traits do First Globals have that other generations did not?

**ZOGBY:** It is the name I give to those Americans born between 1979 and 1991. Over half have traveled abroad, are the age cohort most likely of any to consider

themselves "citizens of the planet Earth," are least likely to feel that American culture is inherently superior to the cultures of other peoples, tell us that America will most likely "look like Barack Obama 20 years from now because he looks like us," are most likely to favor the United States cooperating with international agencies and protocols in responding to crises, and are most open-minded to immigration and immigrants. They have been introduced to open borders throughout their lives via MTV, fashion, the Internet, and social networking. Thus, the whole world is their playing field. Two in five "expect" (not "hope" or "wish") to live and work in a foreign capital at some point in their lives.

**IE:** What factors are responsible for the transformation of this generation of young adults, including college students?

**ZOGBY:** This is the result of history and technology aligning. Historically, the Berlin Wall came down at the same time that music went global, United Colors of Benetton, and Tommy Hilfiger became the uniforms of youth worldwide (with a message of harmony), Eastern Europe and China became open, the Internet introduced us to the planet, and soccer became a truly worldwide game once this generation of Americans played it. Money traveled at the speed of light, faraway crises became global and countries had real names—instead of "us" vs. "them" during the Cold War. The world and its peoples were brought closer by cheaper air travel and the internet. MTV featured the work of groups like Greenpeace and Amnesty International. This is the world in which First Globals were born and came of age.



John Zogby

**IE: How did you come up with the term “First Globals”?**

**ZOGBY:** I was commissioned to do two polls in 2004 and 2005 for the New York-based Foreign Policy Association. The polls went into great detail about the role of the United States in the world—war and peace, relationships with allies and NGOs, global issues like the environment, immigration, nuclear weapons, and so on. Since I had already been examining the response differences among age cohorts to my surveys over the years, I paid especially close attention to the cross-tabulations by age for these long surveys (approximately 50–60 questions). The differences between young people and all other age groupings was particularly striking. There was no question that they see their world differently. We (my colleagues here at Zogby International, and I) started to pay even closer attention to these young people and found these substantial differences on a lot of matters—but notably on global issues. I began to incorporate the unique views of 18–29-year-olds in my speeches and in June 2006 I spoke to executives at the Technology CEO Council and presented them with “America’s First Global Citizens.” In late 2006, I was preparing a paper for IBM on these “First Global Citizens” and produced stunning findings about their identification as “citizens of the planet Earth,” their acceptance of diversity, their strong desire to travel and see the world, and their sense that they would. I would have the opportunity to work closely with IBM in 2007 on planning two Global Leadership Conferences where our role was to find these “First Globals,” build profiles on them, and invite a number to these meetings.

**IE: What is a First Global?**

**ZOGBY:** I use the name interchangeably with 18–30-year-olds not because everyone in this age group fits the description but because those with passports, global social networks, and a planetary sensibility dominate the whole cohort. It is vital to note that the children of the elite (by wealth, influence, or educational attainment) always had an opportunity to travel and expand their worldview. But today’s First Global citizens include a substantial number who were not born into special privilege. Nor have they necessarily traveled outside the country at all or very much. I define them by their sense that the world is their playing field. In 2004 I was asked to respond to a scholarly paper presented at a conference on “The New Global History” at Yale. The paper detailed how little then-current college students knew factually about the larger world. It was the first time I ever used the phrase that suggested that this group is not defined by facts they know but by their awareness: “They may not be able to immediately find Darfur on the map, but what sets them apart among earlier cohorts of twentysomethings is that they know there is a Darfur on the map.” And that is what is critical here. I just remind my fellow Boomers that we knew so much less about these things. When we were in our twenties, the United States was at war in Vietnam, but we barely knew a whit about that country let alone China, India, or Africa. Nor did we much care.

**IE: What does it mean for this generation of students to be “global citizens”?**

**ZOGBY:** They literally have a world full of choices. They are not limited by space or geography. Sometimes the choices can be overwhelming and stifling but being a First Global means redefining how they will respond to their world. They are already changing the workplace. They need time to surf the net, check out e-Bay for good deals, and maintain their social networks. I used to think my younger employees were wasting time. Now I know that these things are part of their DNA and that they are helping to brand my business. Employers will have to get accustomed to new definitions of tenure and longevity. First Globals want to move. Today’s twentysomethings will have had four jobs by the age of 30 and ten by the age of 40. So now our focus as employers is not to ensure their loyalty for long-term employment but instead keep them loyal because we need to ensure they will leave happy. Blogging and tweeting about a bad experience travels now at the speed of light. How do banks finance and builders build for a generation who are here today and gone tomorrow? Perhaps we are talking about 15-year mortgages that be assumed by each new “buyer” in shorter increments? Homes will be redesigned not to emphasize living and dining spaces, but for workspace comfort. Will relationships become more and more virtual and occasionally live? Will children be “Army brats” because they are moving constantly? Today’s students have a whole new set of expectations and things they need to do. Has the Great Recession changed this? To some degree we see more modesty in terms of expectations. Young people applying for jobs are a bit needier, less focused on becoming CEO in three years. They need a job—and frankly, best to have life’s humbling experiences in their twenties than in their forties. But now job-seeking means even more trying to find something anywhere on earth.

**IE: Have First Globals raced ahead of educators in coming to grips with globalization?**

**ZOGBY:** Overall, I believe educators in higher education are doing well in keeping up. I hear and see signs that community colleges, which are exploding in enrollments, are identifying this group and starting to work with them. Where the United States really needs to work harder is on the K–12 level. We do foreign languages all wrong here. We have benefited from strategic isolation historically and from the fact that English is lingua franca in the world of business and diplomacy. But the fast-growing economies, the next world giants, are peoples that are less inclined toward mastering English. China, Russia, Brazil, Turkey—these are all countries filled with extreme pride and even ultra-nationalist tendencies that make doing business in native tongue a global statement. India of course has as many English-speakers as the United States, but in the Arab world the language is viewed as an art form. Learning Arabic is a major sign of respect. Learning Russian, Chinese, Portuguese, Spanish—are a must. And these have to begin as a priority in elementary school.

**IE: What different needs do First Globals have for their higher education?**

**ZOGBY:** This is an age cohort that is moving, constantly moving. Not only from place to place, but exchanging information in the palm of their hands, and social networking. Higher education must be mobile, fluid, flexible. Online education is becoming more

of the “new normal” and my polling for Excelsior College shows that it is gaining respect not only among course-takers, but also by employers and academics. This now has to be taken to the next step—the cafeteria model. I believe we are heading toward a world where education is constant, permanent, speedy, and undefined by space or geography. A cafeteria model suggests that students can attend multiple institutions and select from courses and programs that make the most sense for their degrees or certificates. Thus one institution might have the courses I need in business technology, while another has a better set of communications skills development courses that fit my program. Institutions can see that their role will be as much brokering courses and working with students to put together optimum courses on a worldwide basis. Giant strides have already been made in building world-class campuses overseas and creating strategic partnerships between and among universities. This is the next step for people on the move. We already see the model in the news media. We put together our own “newspapers” and “magazines” from a number of sources that make the most sense to us. This will be the next global means of higher learning.

**IE: In recent years, education abroad has become more popular among college students. Do you think the outlook that First Globals have about the world has increased interest in studying abroad? Do you think First Globals do or will have more interest in studying abroad differently than students in generations past?**

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**ZOGBY:** One thing that is notable already about First Globals is how much they are changing philanthropy. Crises are less remote to this group and their ability to act by spreading the word (and pictures) virally is as impressive as their contributions by texting. They also show an impressive willingness to spend spring breaks, summers, and even whole semesters in the “field” doing NGO work. Along those lines, they are on a quest to learn as much about people and cultures abroad as they can. What is important to understand is how schools can fill this gap by placement in schools abroad as well as distance learning and conversations with their counterparts overseas. Remember, they can also be globally experienced without even leaving home.

**IE: What impact will First Globals have on the global economy? How can institutions work with employers to help First Globals be prepared for the global workforce?**

**ZOGBY:** First of all, they are consumers and, as a group, they are almost as large as Baby Boomers with 70+ million strong. They care the least among age groups where an item is made, thus they are not as wedded to “Made in America” campaigns nor protectionism. However, they care very deeply about the human rights and child labor policies, as well as the level of environmental-friendliness of the countries where their products are made. In this sense alone, they will have a major impact on the global economy. Secondly, they are the focal point, the employee base for what Sam Palmisano of IBM refers to as the “globally integrated enterprise”—the new multinational corporation that is based in many areas and is populated by mobile workers of the future. There will be a revolution in housing, headhunting, workplace and living amenities, and transportation services to meet their needs. As independent contractors, they will be entrepreneurial to survive, opening the door to many new products, services, and “apps” for the next economy.

**IE: Is there a general opinion that First Globals have regarding foreign policy, and how could this potentially impact public diplomacy in the future?**

**ZOGBY:** They are watching America’s status as the unipolar superpower on the wane. They are the most likely to be multilateral in their support for foreign policy initiatives, more supportive of the United Nations and NGOs as global problem-solvers, more favorable toward U.S. participation in global warming initiatives like the Kyoto Protocols, very favorable toward U.S. participation in the World Court, less wedded to Israeli policies toward Gaza and the West Bank, and most willing among any other age cohort to learn more about China, Russia, Arabs, and Muslims. And they voted in 2008. Generally, the 18–29 year old cohort produced about 17–18 percent of the total votes cast in presidential elections from 1992–2004. In 2008, they were 19.5 percent of the record 133 million voters on election day. Will they continue to be engaged or are they jaded by the political process is a key question?

They are least likely to feel that U.S. culture is inherently superior to the cultures of Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America. This is their playing field and they are curious—though not always knowledgeable—about their fellow citizens of the world.

**ELAINE LOVELAND** is managing editor of *IE*.