

# AGENDA

OPINION

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## Incoming Leaders Must Act as Citizens' Concerns Reveal Confidence Crisis

Implementing sustainable and inclusive global growth can improve citizen satisfaction

By **Richard Attias** | January 27, 2025

Each year, I am joined by global leaders from business, finance, politics and civil society in hubs of industry around the world. These conferences are shaped by the topics and trends that are front of mind for attendees and their nations' citizens, which means no two conferences are ever the same. But despite the unique nature of every FII event, I am left with the two pervasive takeaways that should shape and encourage action.

**Richard Attias**

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First, it's amazing how much the world can change in just 12 months. For example, a few years ago, almost every conversation I had was related to the war in Ukraine; this year, AI and emerging markets shaped conversations. This is not to say topics that previously dominated no longer matter — they do. But it underlines how fast our 24/7 world changes and evolves.

Second, these gatherings serve as a reminder of how much we have in common. Even though the leaders who attend FII events come from far and wide — countries big and small, rich and emerging — what matters most to their citizens and, by extension, the leaders themselves is almost indistinguishable: goals and aspirations, but also fears and challenges.

My evidence for this isn't just anecdotal. During the most recent FII flagship event in Riyadh in October, our nonprofit think tank, the FII Institute, published our latest **Priority Compass**, a major global study based on the responses of thousands of citizens from around

the globe. These studies — which are published every year — are always fascinating and, of course, identify many reasons to be cheerful. However, this year's survey worried me: The study showed a stark decline in citizen satisfaction, mainly due to the global backdrop.

For example, 52% of respondents, representing over 60% of the world population, reported they were dissatisfied with the world situation — an 11% drop from 2023 levels. Global satisfaction levels drop even more when specific countries are isolated. In the U.S., only 35% of citizens are satisfied with the state of the country itself. Respondents cite the cost of living, political corruption, environmental concerns and health care access as issues contributing to the pessimism.

Global leaders must act, and newly sworn-in President Donald Trump will have a crucial role to play both at home and globally, especially as the landscape of global leadership continues to shift and evolve, with leaders like Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announcing their resignations.

On the one hand, it's understandable that some citizens feel so pessimistic; in the last decade alone, we've had the fallout from the global financial crisis, a global pandemic, economic disruption and the outbreak of two major global conflicts. On the other hand, statistically, we are **wealthier** than ever; in most countries, life expectancy is **increasing**, and living standards have generally been **rising** for most of the last 50 years. We also have more information at our fingertips than ever through advanced technologies, creating huge opportunities.

Clearly, there is a disconnect. But I am in the business of tangible solutions, so what steps should global leaders, including the new U.S. president, take to improve citizen satisfaction?

The key is implementing sustainable and inclusive global growth — no easy feat, but achievable when leaders focus on narrowing the gap between the global north and south. For example, expanding public-private partnerships can drive global investment, with inward capital from the global north and multinational investors who see the potential of these new and emerging markets.

As part of this, we must focus on the areas where we can make the biggest impact, like addressing "health care deserts" — areas suffering from accurate shortages of medical care providers. For example, investing 5% of GDP in the health care systems of developing countries could lead to almost a decade of additional healthy life expectancy. This is huge, given that we know a healthy workforce and population are critical to economic growth.

As mentioned, I have seen an uptick and concentrated focus across industries on the integration of AI and advanced technologies. Despite this, many global citizens are skeptical of these tools — and they are right to be in some cases. However, if we can implement a regulatory framework that drives and prioritizes equitable outcomes, such as a minimum

level of access and data rights while mitigating biases, my hope is we can take full advantage of these amazing new tools, ensuring they work for the many.

Crucially, this approach to AI and new tech must be combined with a refreshed educational curriculum that not only uses these tools to drive outcomes but equips students with the skills to effectively use new technologies themselves — ensuring they are ready to respond to growing skills gaps and needs in their countries and globally.

Of course, these are just a handful of examples and potential solutions. But if, as our data shows, global citizens share many of the same problems, we should pursue global solutions.

This year's Priority Compass certainly made for worrying reading, and leaders must take note. But through the combination of the tools and ideas mentioned above, and our natural human ingenuity, we do have solutions at our disposal. And we must take full advantage.