

## **Governance and Democracy – the People’s View.**

### **A global opinion poll**

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#### **Abstract:**

The **Gallup International Millennium Survey** interviewed 57,000 adults in 60 different countries of the world between August and October 1999, representing 1.25 billion of the planet’s inhabitants.<sup>1</sup> The survey covered a wide range of topics of an ethical, political and religious nature, focusing specifically on issues close to people’s basic values, particularly those which will have an impact on the new Millennium. Issues such as Democracy, the United Nations, Human Rights, Women’s Rights, the Environment, Religion, Crime, and “What Matters Most in Life” were included.

The results of such a global opinion poll – the world’s largest ever such undertaking – are bound to be revealing and thought provoking. Some of the findings are perhaps shocking in exposing many similarities in people’s dissatisfaction with the structure and operation of democracy, both in their own country and globally. Initial results show:

- Less than half find the results achieved to date by the United Nations satisfactory
- A united call from Mankind for a global improvement in respect of Human Rights.
- The protection of Human Rights is seen as the most important role for the United Nations in the New Millennium
- A universal lack of faith in governments: They are believed to be corrupt and bureaucratic.
- Democracies are frail in many parts of the world. Only in Western Europe and North America do a majority of citizens feel elections *in their country* are free and fair.
- Globally, two thirds say: *my country is not governed by the will of the people*

It is for the relevant experts to find ways of addressing these issues and global concerns about governance but such findings warrant more attention and further study. As Professor Ramesh Thakur, Vice Rector said when Gallup International shared these findings with the United Nations University: “When a high proportion of the world’s population at this point in time says ‘*My country is not governed by the will of the people*’ it can only make you reflect on how much work lies ahead of the international political leadership.”

This paper seeks to clarify some of the findings further but does not try to explain all the figures. We have avoided burdening the reader with too many percentages and so have not quoted these in detail. Rather, we have tried to look beyond the numbers to highlight the key patterns in the data. Further analysis we have undertaken may help an understanding of why so many of the world’s citizens feel dissatisfied with the structures and performance of governance

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<sup>1</sup> See the note at the end of this paper.

There is also much cause for optimism in many of the survey results. Around the globe, people demonstrate through their answers a high degree of consensus about many topics such as What Matters Most in Life, the Importance of Human Rights and the Protection of the Environment.

The intention of the Gallup International Millennium Survey is to provide a start point for future thought and work that aims at improving the global citizen's views and experience of governance and democracy.

### **Consensus on What Matters Most in Life**

One of the aims of the **Gallup International Millennium Survey** was to see to what extent a "global human conscience" exists. The degree to which we share the same values independent of our nationality and under what circumstances we live is revealed by our survey. If we cannot agree to strive for a common range of values, we will have difficulties in agreeing where we want to take the World in the New Millennium.

In fact as human beings we do share some very basic values, no matter whether we live a sophisticated urban life in one of the World's metropolises or in a rural area in a developing country. When the survey asked *what matters most in life?* the response that most consistently came back from almost every corner of the globe was: *to have a happy family life and good health*. Health came top in 37 out of the 60 countries, whereas a happy family came first in a further 16 countries.

So although there are differences, the relatively modest aspirations of having *good health* and *a happy family life* are the most sought after values almost everywhere in the world.

Apart from the unison around these two basic values, the rank order of other values in terms of what matters most does differ significantly from country to country and from region to region depending on the local economic, religious and political situation.

But although priorities vary, it is evident that globally human beings want a job to provide for themselves and those they love. *To have a job* ranks as number one in 5 countries and as number two or three in another 23 countries, mostly those where having a job does not necessarily come all that automatically. Amongst these countries were almost all of the former Soviet dominated economies. A job was also equally high on the list in Latin America, in some of the troubled Asian economies and in West Africa. In Beijing, which was the only part of China interviewed, having a job came only second to having good health.

Such aspirations may appear to be very basic and modest, but we should remember how difficult even these basics are for some people to achieve. Poverty, lack of education and unemployment are still the reality in too many parts of the world. In many countries having good health and a job that can provide the basis for a happy family life is not yet as easy to come by as it is in the developed nations.

The survey results show that human beings also universally cherish less tangible values. Very importantly, we want to live our lives in freedom, in a country where there is no war and without violence and corruption. Importantly, the individual cannot impact on these factors but must rely on the man-made system and structures of government and democracy to furnish the appropriate conditions. In view of this, it is perhaps little wonder that there is a global level of dissatisfaction with the performance of the system, as the survey shows elsewhere.

## **And What Matters Least**

The most popular answers to what matters least (in a forced choice question) are almost as consensual globally as we saw in the high ranking of family and health. If we do have to choose something that matters less, we choose to give up on *being faithful to my religion* and *to have a good standard of living*. The population in 48 of the 60 countries mention *being faithful to my religion* as one of the two least important things in life.

Whereas *being faithful to a religion* might have been expected to be among the less important things in life to many people. It maybe more of a surprise to find that in this day and age *a good standard of living* is sacrificed so readily by so many around the world. Certainly critics of the modern, industrialised lifestyle maintain that it is too materialistic. It is also a popular conception that in less developed parts of the world, this lifestyle is the aspiration of many. However, the survey results show that when asked, many people in many countries both in the developed and developing world respond that if they have to choose, their *standard of living* would be much less important than *health, family, freedom* and *to live in peace*.

## **Consensus – Global anxieties**

Given that our core values are similar, irrespective of such factors as national or demographic group, perhaps it is not surprising that human beings across the world show similar anxieties about what are universally perceived as actual or potential threats to the harmony of life.

Thus, we all share a concern about the current state of the environment in our countries and there is a consensus that governments have done too little.

In all regions, a majority of the population say they are personally concerned *a great deal* about levels of crime in their country, and that this concern has increased *a lot* or *a little* over the last 5 years. Again, there is universal criticism of government for not handling the crime situation effectively.

There is also consensus about the importance of fundamental Human Rights and an acknowledgement by citizens in many countries that these are not fully respected where they live. The citizens of the world demand that the United Nations protect Human Rights as a global priority in the coming Millennium. This should be recognised as a powerful call for action on the issue.

Indeed, there is more evidence of consensus even in the varying levels of dissatisfaction with the way democracy works in our societies. Significant proportions across all regions find the government of their country corrupt and bureaucratic. The individual's sense of impotence in the face of such inefficient, unjust and unresponsive governance resounds collectively across the world through this survey's results.

## **Consensus on Specific Issues**

### **The Importance of the Environment**

There is a high degree of consensus and universal frustration over government's attention to environmental issues. The population of the world is united in their criticism of their governments

in relation to protecting the environment. Two-thirds of the 1.25 billion people represented in World's largest opinion poll, say their government *has done too little to address the environmental issues* in their country. Only in very few countries - namely five - out of the 60 participating did a majority agree that *their government had done the right amount to address the environmental issues*.

Another finding that illustrates the global concern for the environment among the electorate, was that only in 3 countries did a majority feel that *economic growth is more important than protection of the environment*. These countries are Armenia, Cameroon and Hong Kong. In all other countries *the protection of the environment* came in as ultimately *more important than economic growth*.

Certainly it is not news that the environment is more under threat in developing nations than in Europe or North America. What is news is that the populations in the emerging economies are fully aware of the threat to their environment and are now among the nations who are most critical towards their government's actions. But the survey shows that in many, but not all of these lesser-developed economies there is now strong public support for the environment and a call for environmental action by their governments.

However local the focus of some environmental issues may be, the protection of the environment is a global issue. Pollution, global warming, holes in the ozone layer and the loss of the rainforest are not under the control of any single government and only international co-operation can ensure sustainable solutions for the planet.

## **Human Rights**

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948, embodies the moral code, political consensus and legal synthesis of human rights. It enshrines the rights due to every single human being on the planet, irrespective of differences in culture, religion, sex, ethnicity or political belief. A model for humanity.

Yet the Gallup International Millennium Survey demonstrates that everywhere people feel that Human Rights are not respected to the degree that they should be. Worse, in many countries people report abuses and discrimination of the most intolerable kind as all too commonplace. Perhaps one of the survey's greatest revelations is that the so-called sophisticated countries of Western Europe and North America are not exempt, their citizens also feel human rights are not fully respected in several key areas, notably with regard to discrimination against women which is mentioned by a high proportion of US citizens and with regard to discrimination by race, mentioned most frequently by British citizens.

Across the world the survey shows that equal status for women and an end to discriminatory attitudes and behaviour still have a long way to go. Young women are increasingly impatient for change in a world where many inhabitants still believe men are more suited to education, employment and politics than women.

The most severe problems with regard to Human Rights are found in Latin America. Here, less than one in ten citizens believe that Human Rights are being fully observed. Shockingly, as many as one

third claim that as a rule Human Rights are not being observed at all, whilst only a small majority concede that human rights are even partially respected in their country.

Of all the countries included in the survey, the country given the poorest testimonial by its citizens is Colombia, where as many as two thirds believe that overall human rights are not being respected at all in their country.

In the Latin American region as a whole over a third believe torture takes place in their country; a majority in 5 out of the 10 countries the survey included in the region believe this is the case, whilst in Peru and Ecuador, the proportion is a staggering three quarters of all those interviewed, who believe torture to take place in their country.

Universally cherished by Mankind, the protection of these very Human Rights is seen as the most important role for the United Nations in the new Millennium.

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**The United Nations**  
**Satisfaction with UN performance to date**

The United Nations is the pre-eminent forum for mediating national interests and for harmonising these within the international interest. Established in the wake of the devastation of World War 2, it represents post war optimism and belief in a New World Order where unbridled nationalism and the raw interplay of power could be moderated within a wider, internationally consensual framework.

Since its inception, the United Nation has been called upon repeatedly to intervene in global political, diplomatic and humanitarian events. The survey asked: *How satisfactory do you find the results achieved by the UN up until now? Very satisfactory, somewhat satisfactory, somewhat unsatisfactory or very unsatisfactory?*

At first sight, that less than half of those interviewed globally claim the UN’s performance, judged on results to date, to be either very or somewhat satisfactory may make depressing reading. Yet a deeper look at the survey results shows that differing views lie behind this apparent global condemnation of the United Nations activities and there is significant variation between views in different regions of the world.

| <i>How satisfactory do you find the results achieved by the UN up until now?</i> | <i>Very + somewhat satisfactory</i><br>% |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Globally                                                                         | 48                                       |
| Western Europe                                                                   | 49                                       |
| Eastern Europe                                                                   | 32                                       |
| North America                                                                    | 65                                       |
| South East Asia                                                                  | 44                                       |
| Beijing                                                                          | 43                                       |
| Latin America                                                                    | 42                                       |
| West Africa                                                                      | 71                                       |

It is interesting to note that despite the governmental level criticism the US has raised against United Nations causing them to withhold their dues, citizens in North America are amongst the most positive in their assessment of UN performance to date. Only the populations of the three West African states included in the survey are more enthusiastic about United Nations achievements.

Looking even more deeply reveals that even within regions there is not always a homogeneous picture from one country to the next. Closer analysis of these patterns on a regional and even a local level may help understand these different assessments of United Nations activities.

**Those with experience of UN intervention**

Within the last 10 years, the world map has changed significantly, not least in Europe where the collapse of the Soviet Union and subsequent rapid democratisation of Eastern Europe had unforeseen consequences. Nationalism appeared to rear its bloody head again and through the global media, world attention was drawn to the suffering of those caught up in the now well-known evil of ethnic cleansing.

Pictures of troops with blue berets are fresh in connection with Bosnia, Croatia and Kosovo; several of the countries included in the survey have recently had United Nations troops within their borders, so would these countries have more positive or negative views of such intervention?

Here there is some genuine cheer for the United Nations. People in countries where the UN actually have intervened recently - Bosnia, Croatia - or those close to them such as the FYR of Macedonia are more satisfied with UN performance than others in either East or West Europe or indeed other parts of the world.

### **Ex-CIS countries**

In other parts of Eastern and Central Europe, the picture is gloomier. United Nations performance to date is only deemed to be very or quite satisfactory overall by less than one in three citizens in the recently democratised countries and perhaps most important of all – Russia itself. The apparent disenchantment of Eastern Europe is not reserved uniquely for the United Nations. The survey findings show that overall citizens of this region are generally dissatisfied with the operation of their newfound democracies, believing themselves to be powerless and their governments to be corrupt.

### **Most positive ratings in West Africa**

This region is still emerging from its recent history of military coups, repressive regimes human rights abuses and ethnic conflict. Yet the countries of the region that are included in the survey are particularly positive in their assessment of United Nations activity with Ghana and Nigeria reporting the largest majorities seen in the survey rating the achievements of the UN as very or somewhat satisfactory.

The interviews for the survey were conducted in Nigeria only months after pressure from the international community finally contributed to the first democratic elections for 30 years in May 1999. Perhaps a new spirit of optimism after such a long and chaotic period of history is being expressed in this assessment of the United Nations as the guardian and model of international justice and democracy, not only in Nigeria, but also in the other countries of West Africa that are included in the survey and which have themselves also recently emerged from long periods of instability.

### **Latin America – A specific Human Rights Issue**

Overall in the region, only 42% say the UN performance to date has been very or somewhat satisfactory. Human Rights is a particularly sensitive issue in this part of the world as the results of the Gallup International Millennium Survey demonstrate. In many countries of the region, people have often been denied these rights and made victims of oppression by their own governments and leaders. The populations of these countries have too many recent experiences where the structures of governance, both local, regional and global remain unable to prevent large scale abuses of Human Rights, especially by very forces that should protect the individual i.e. the Army, the Police and the Government. Through their answers to the survey, the people of Latin America deliver criticism to the United Nations and to the structures of governance that have not prevented undemocratic regimes in their countries from abusing the Human Rights of their own citizens.

## **The Role of the United Nations in the Future**

One of the first acts of the newly formed United Nations in 1948 was to adopt the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the survey shows that most people around the globe consider the most important task for the United Nations in the future will be *to protect Human Rights*. One third believes the most important objective in the future for the United Nations is the *prevention of war by intervention* and a similar proportion stress giving *humanitarian aid in times of natural disasters*.

Those questioned were also offered the option that a potential aim for the United Nations could be *to develop into a world government* but this was only popular with a very small proportion of people. Given United Nations involvement in the Gulf War and more recently in the former Yugoslavia, it is something of a surprise to find that only a relatively small proportion of the survey population felt that *to maintain peace by armed forces* should be one of the United Nations most important aims in the future.

*To protect Human Rights* is considered particularly important in West Africa, but is also given high priority in Western Europe and of course in Latin America, where Human Rights abuses have had a great influence on several of the survey's questions as we have already demonstrated. This role for the United Nations receives relatively less support in South East Asia and Eastern Europe, although neither of these regions has an unblemished Human Rights record.

It seems that the United Nations must take serious note of this objective, not least as the call *to protect Human Rights* is directly related to age; the younger you are the more important it seems to be. Among those under 25 - almost half put this as the most important aim. The young who will be the global citizens of the next Millennium are also supporters of the United Nations and a majority of this group is satisfied with the United Nations performance to date.

*To give humanitarian aid in times of natural disasters* is perhaps not surprisingly highest where such natural disasters occur - in West Africa and South East Asia. Bearing in mind that events like the recent earthquakes in Turkey are rare, where such events are less likely to occur i.e. in Western Europe and even in Eastern Europe, such an role for the UN in the future is less important as a priority. Even though there have been several such natural disasters in Latin America recently, including devastating hurricanes in Central America, humanitarian aid in times of disaster is not seen as a key future UN objective for citizens of this region.

## Democracy

As stated earlier, the survey results on the topic of Democracy at first seemed inconsistent and enigmatic, certainly warranting further investigation and analysis.

Normally you would expect that if the people of a given country agree that *elections in my country are free and fair*, they would also agree that *my country is ruled by the will of the people*. After all the whole idea of a democracy is to secure that through free and fair elections of representatives, it is will of the people which rules the country. One of the most surprising findings in the Gallup International Millennium Survey has therefore been to find that this is by no means always the case.

Most of the participating countries consider themselves to be democratic, and it is therefore less surprising to find that actually in many countries a majority willingly agrees that *elections in my country are free and fair*. The big surprise comes when the respondent also says, but *my country is not ruled by the will of the people*.

These results seem even more puzzling when you discover that it is particularly in the old well established democracies in Western Europe and Northern America, where majorities feel that their country is not ruled *by the will of the people* even though generally they do endorse the election process as being *free and fair*. When at the same time large proportions of the population are saying their government is *corrupt*, it is time to wonder what has happened to democracy if free elections in fact, do not result in *government by the will of the people*, but in governments perceived to be corrupt.

### Four key groups

The key to understand this apparent contradiction proved to be to divide respondents into four sub-groups based the answers to the two key questions that had initially shown such high levels of dissatisfaction. We thus established the relative size of each segment in each region and in each country and in order to try to understand the situation better we looked at each of the four segment's responses to all the other questions in the survey.

| % of total survey population               | <b><i>My country ruled by the will of the people:</i></b> |                                             |
|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| <b><i>Elections are free and fair:</i></b> | <b><i>Yes</i></b>                                         | <b><i>No</i></b>                            |
| <b><i>Yes</i></b>                          | Segment A : 32%<br><b>The Pillars of Democracy</b>        | Segment C : 24%<br><b>The Disillusioned</b> |
| <b><i>No</i></b>                           | Segment B : 5 %<br><b>The Outsiders</b>                   | Segment D : 38 %<br><b>The Malcontents</b>  |

Segment A representing only 1 in 3 of the electorate are the only group responding as you would have hoped in a democracy: *Yes, elections in my country are free and fair* and *yes, my country is ruled by the people*.

The other two thirds of the electorate either disagreed that the elections are free and fair or that their country is ruled by the people. Or even worse they disagreed with both statements.

The sizes of the four segments are very different from country to country. On the extreme, in Russia, not less than nine out of ten of the population are found in segment D, saying Russian elections are *not free and fair* and Russia is *not ruled by the will of the people*. But this group is also present in long established democracies like Sweden where close to half the population agree that Swedish elections are *free and fair*, but that Sweden still is *not ruled by the will of the people*.

To understand why many democracies apparently seem to be less healthy than expected and what implications this may have for such democracies and the world as a whole, we have looked at each of the four segments in detail.

### **A deeper look at each Segment**

**Segment A** are the most easiest group to understand. They are satisfied with the elections and agree the people's will rules. We have chosen to label this group **The Pillars of Democracy** as they are the strongest supporters of their society. Their satisfaction is widespread and appears again and again when asked about how well their government is coping with different issues. When describing the government itself, they use words as *efficient, just* and *responds to the will of the people*.

If in a country they constitute a majority, that country or that government has little to worry about. This is, however, only the case in 8 out of the 60 countries. In 19 countries i.e. one democracy in three, **The Pillars of Democracy** constitute a quarter or less of the electorate.

**Segment B** do not agree that elections in their country are free and fair, but contrarily say that their country is nevertheless run by the will of the people. This is a very small group. They represent only 5 percent or less and only in 3 countries would they be a significant political factor, namely in Philippines, Taiwan and Thailand where they around a quarter of each country's population. They would tend to be more involved with a religious life than the other three segments and there are some suggestions in the data that they are more aware of local discrimination based on religion, language and political beliefs.

One possible interpretation is that this group consists of different minorities, who feel themselves unable to elect enough representatives to their parliament to alter the balance of power, but on the other hand do agree that all in all their country is run by the will of the people (but maybe not their kind of people). We label this group **The Outsiders** as they seem to have little illusions as to their own impact on the system they live in. From a stability point of view, due to their limited numbers they are not a potential major force behind political protest. However, in the three countries above, they would be a factor to be considered.

**Segment C** is the real puzzle in the data. These are voters who agree that elections in their country are free and fair, but also say that their country is not run by the will of the people. How can this be? Does something happen to the politicians after they are elected?

We have chosen to label this group as **The Disillusioned**. Somewhere down the line, they have lost their illusions that fair elections lead to government by the will of people.

Countries where **The Disillusioned** constitute a large part of the population are very often well established Western European democracies e.g. the UK, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, France and the Netherlands, but representatives are also in some of the Eastern and Central European countries, who have a more recently established Western style democracy : Hungary, the Czech Republic and Lithuania.

When asked to describe their government, they are the group most frequently using the label: *bureaucratic* and are in general quite dissatisfied with the way their government handles different issues. They more frequently have a higher education and more strongly oppose any suggestion that men should be superior to women. Also they are in general also more concerned about Human Rights than the average.

Our interpretation of the data would suggest that one major reason as to why they do not agree their country is run by the will of the people (although the elections are fair) is that they have repeatedly observed that good political intentions get buried in bureaucratic red tape. This leads to some degree of frustration with the political establishment. In the real world, when elected all politicians must seek to balance different opinions within a general political consensus in these West European democracies. Inevitably this means treading a path full of compromises rather than the swift, more idealistic political actions they promised. Also living in very prosperous, well functioning societies, **The Disillusioned** expect their governments do be able to do better.

That this group is large in a given country should not be seen as a sign of political instability as they are fully satisfied with the electoral process. What it may likely lead to are “single issue” actions, where groups within the populations are formed when the political frustration over a particular issue just becomes too unbearable and provokes a protest. **The Disillusioned** will not overthrow the government, but they will react strongly every now and then, when the bureaucracy becomes just too much.

The last **Segment D** represent much more of a potential threat to the present political system and its stability. They do not believe elections in their country are free and fair, nor do they believe their country is run by the will of the people. When asked to describe their government, 2 out of 3 in this group say it is *corrupt*. In general they are the most concerned with issues such as crime and consistently display more traditional, conservative views. It would be here that the many new ultra-rightwing parties could recruit their supporters.

We have chosen to label this group **The Malcontents**. They do not believe in or agree with their present political system. If they constitute a large proportion of the population, the country could very well be in for a major change.

An interesting example is Pakistan, where events give a reality to the survey results. The survey was carried out just before the recent dramatic change of government. At that point in time 65 percent of all Pakistanis were **Malcontents** and only 13 percent belonged to **The Pillars of Democracy**. Apparently the pillars were not strong enough.

Other countries with a very large proportion of **The Malcontents** are mainly to be found in certain Latin American countries and in many of the former Soviet block e.g. Armenia, Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan. In all these countries **The Pillars of Democracy** constitute less than one in 12 of the electorate.

The data on the proportions of the four segment should not be seen as a prognostic tool for identifying where the next revolution or other overthrow of government is to be expected. However it does seem that the answers to these questions give an understanding of the level of confidence a society expresses in its democracy. The findings in some countries particularly those with a high proportion of **Malcontents** provide a warning, and it might have significant consequences in these countries if the political leadership do not find a way to reinstate beliefs in the fairness of the elections.

## **The Gallup International Millennium Survey The Project Background**

Gallup International was formally founded in May 1947 with 11 original members and Dr George Gallup as its first President. Now the World's largest network of opinion and social research institutes with members in 55+ countries, Gallup International is completely independent economically and financially from any political orientation.

The founding members believed that surveys were an integral part of democracy, bringing the voice of the people direct to those who govern the world in our name and our interests. This has remained a major benefit for both the public we interview and the societies we serve, when we conduct our everyday polls. The Gallup International Millennium Survey seeks to bring attention to the common voice of the people of the World on some of the very basic values of Mankind at the start of the Millennium.

Designed to poll world opinion on a variety of ethical, political, religious and other fundamental subjects at the doorstep of the new Millennium, more than 50,000 people in 60 countries were interviewed between August and October 1999. This represents a total global population of 1.25 billion.

We wish to stress that in any survey of public opinion, the respondents answer is based on their own local experience. A survey is a measurement of people's views and perceptions rather than an accurate assessment of reality. As such, no survey of public opinion can be more than an imperfect view of world opinion - a snapshot.

Many external factors affect the results of any survey and even the timing of such a survey can have an effect upon its results. Thus, findings should always be interpreted with an understanding of the relevant cultural, historical, political and economic background. When a survey such as this is conducted in so many countries at one time, it is not surprising that specific events may impact on the findings significantly and should be borne in mind. Similarly, practicalities such as cost and geography impact on the methodology used to survey public opinion and so on the populations represented in the poll. We recognise that a survey of the size and scope of the Gallup International Millennium Survey is subject to such limitations.

Funded entirely by the members themselves, the data from the survey is available *pro bono* to universities and other relevant institutions for further investigation and study. For further technical information about the Gallup International Millennium Survey or to request access to the data, please contact:

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