

Poll of 9 Major Nations Finds All, including U.S., Reject World System Dominated by Single Power in Favor of Multipolarity

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Uncertainty about whether US, China will be World Powers in Future



Majorities in nine major nations, including the United States, say that a world system dominated by a single world power is not the best framework for ensuring peace and stability in the world. Instead most favor multipolar systems, either led by the United Nations or by a balance of regional leaders. Respondents also dismissed a system where power was divided between two world powers.

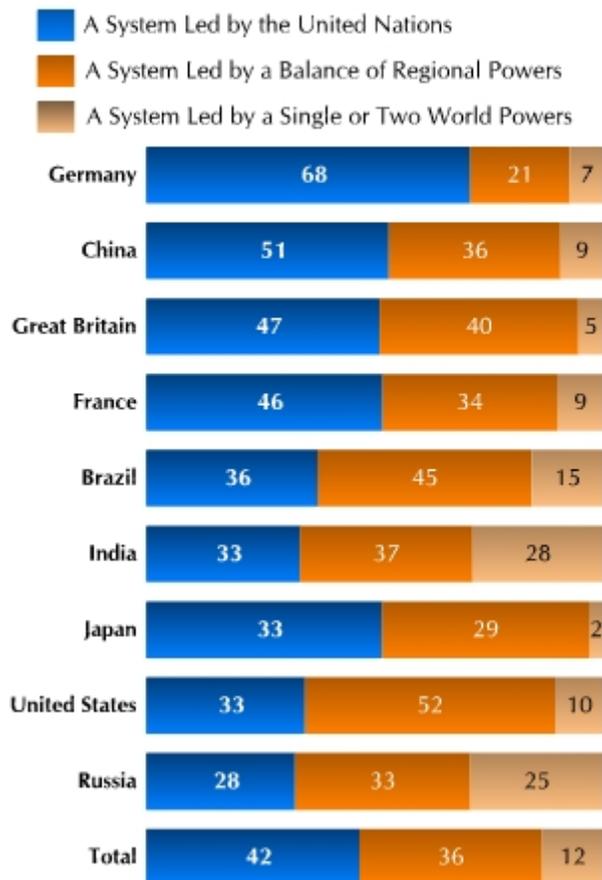
United Nations Security Council on May 31st, 2006 (UN Photo/Ryan Brown)

The survey, released this month by the [Bertelsmann Foundation](#) of Germany, included nine global or regional powers: Brazil, China, France, Germany, Great Britain, India, Japan, Russia and the United States. TNS Emnid conducted the polls, carrying out more than 10,000 interviews between Oct. 29 and Dec. 17, 2005.

Respondents were also asked which among the nine nations is a world power today and which would be one in 2020. Majorities in all nine countries agreed that the United States is currently an international power but there was less agreement about whether it would continue to wield such clout in fifteen years. There was also no consensus on whether China would achieve world power status in the near future.

Ensuring Peace and Stability in the World

What is the best framework for ensuring peace and stability?



Bertelsmann Foundation, 12/2005

On the question of what would be the “best framework for ensuring peace and stability,” respondents were given four choices: a system led by the United Nations, by a balance of regional powers, by a single world power or by two world powers. The multipolar options were by far the most popular. In five nations, the most common answer was a system led by the United Nations while four preferred a balance of regional powers. On average these options were preferred by 42% and 36% respectively. The least popular choices were a bipolar system, favored on average by only five percent of respondents in the nine countries surveyed, and a system led by a single power, supported by seven percent.

Despite their status as the world’s sole super power today, Americans also rejected the model of a world order based on a single world power. Nor did they want to return to a world dominated by two great powers. Instead, they indicated that they would prefer an international system where power was shared among nations. A majority (52%) thought a balance of regional powers was the best framework but a third (33%) said they would like the United Nations to lead the world. Only ten percent favored either a system led by a single power (6%) or two powers (4%).

These results are consistent with other polls showing that Americans are uncomfortable with their country’s role as the world’s supreme power. A 2004 poll commissioned by the [Chicago Council on Foreign Relations](#) and conducted by Knowledge Networks found that 80 percent of

Americans agreed the United States was “playing the role of world policeman more than it should be.” Asked to choose the statement closest to their own position, only eight percent said that the United States should “continue to be the preeminent world leader in solving international problems;” 78 percent said instead that the United States should “do its share in efforts to solve international problems together with other countries.”

Among the other eight nations, most also favored some system where power was shared among several nations. The Germans (68%) and the Chinese (51%) were the most enthusiastic about U.N. leadership. Pluralities also favored the UN in Great Britain (47%) and France (46%) while they supported a balance of regional powers in Brazil (45%) and India (37%). The Russians and the Japanese were more closely divided, with about a third in each country choosing the UN and a third picking a balance of regional powers. But a quarter of the Russians said they preferred a world system dominated by one or two superpowers. And more than a third of the Japanese either did not know which system to pick or choose not to answer the question.

World Powers in the Future

Though majorities in all nine countries agreed that the United States is a world power today (on average 81%), there is a striking lack of consensus about whether it will be a world power in the year 2020. While majorities in five countries thought the United States would retain its status fifteen years from now, in four countries only a minority did. Among Americans polled, 66 percent said the United States would still be dominant in 2020 compared to 81 percent who said it was today. Germans are more confident about the United States’ future leadership than Americans are: 82 percent said the United States would be a superpower in the future as did 78 percent of the British, 60 percent of the French and 51 percent of the Indians. But less than half of those interviewed in Brazil (39%), Japan (40%) and China (42%) thought the United States would be a world power in 15 years. On average, 57 percent of those interviewed believed the United States would be a dominant international force in 2020.

China’s superpower potential may excite debate in the press and among policymakers but there is no clear consensus in the public over whether China is or will become a world power. Majorities in four of the nine countries –Germany (68%), Great Britain (66%), France (61%) and the United States (51%)—see China as a world power today. But relatively fewer outside of Western Europe and North America—India (34%), Japan (31%), Brazil (26%), and Russia (26%)—put China among today’s world powers, including those polled in China itself (44%). On average, less than half (45%) of those polled in all nine countries see China a world power now but more than half (55%) believe it is an emerging world power. Majorities in five countries saw China rising to world power status by 2020: Germany (79%), France (73%), Great Britain (72%), China (71%), and the United States (54%). The skeptics were, again, outside of North America and Western Europe. Only 32 percent of Brazilians saw China as a future power, 34 percent of Russians, 40 percent of Japanese and 43 percent of Indians.