

Though Obama Viewed Positively, Still Much Criticism of US Foreign Policy: Global Poll

July 7, 2009

[Country-by-Country Summaries \(PDF\)](#)
[Questionnaire/Methodology \(PDF\)](#)
[Full PDF Version](#)



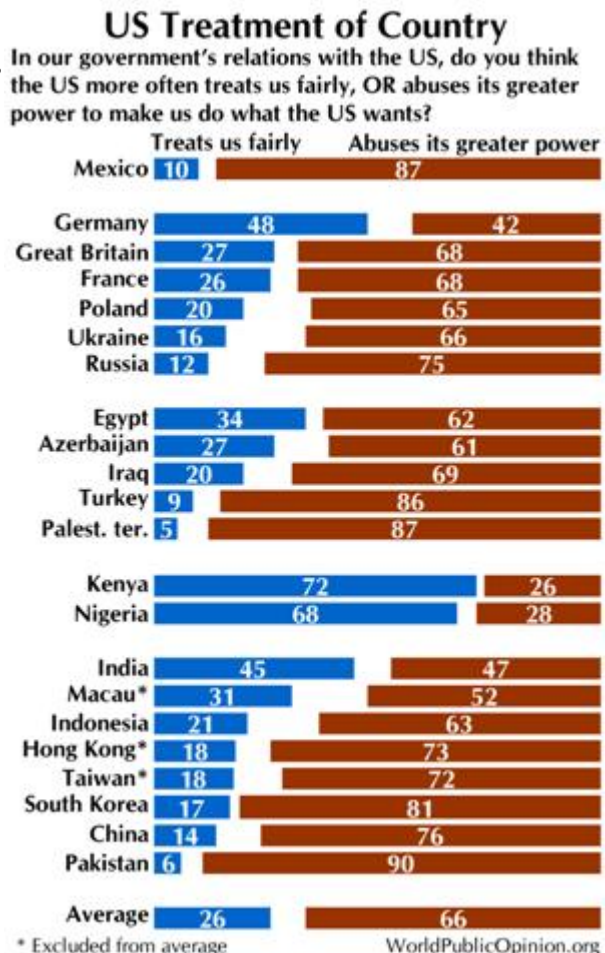
A new WorldPublicOpinion.org poll finds that around the world US foreign policy continues to receive heavy criticism on a variety of fronts, even though in 13 of 19 nations most people say they have confidence in President Obama to do the right thing in international affairs.

(Official White House Photo)

The US is criticized for coercing other nations with its superior power (15 of 19 nations), failing to abide by international law (17 of 19 nations), and for how it is dealing with climate change (11 of 18 nations). Overall, views are mixed on whether the US is playing a mainly positive or mainly negative role in the world.

Asked whether they have confidence in Barack Obama to "do the right thing regarding world affairs," for all nations (excluding the US) an average of 61 percent say they have some or a lot of confidence.

But asked how the US treats their government, few--on average just one in four--say it "treats us fairly," while two-thirds say that it "abuses its greater power to make us do what the US wants." Overall, these views are no better than they were in 2008. Only three countries



diverged from this view (Kenya, Nigeria, and Germany).

In all nations polled, majorities say that the US "use(s) the threat of military force to gain advantages." Majorities range from 61 percent in India and Poland to 92 percent in South Korea and include America's close ally Great Britain (83%). On average, across all nations polled, 77 percent perceive the US as threatening. Even 71 percent of Americans agree.

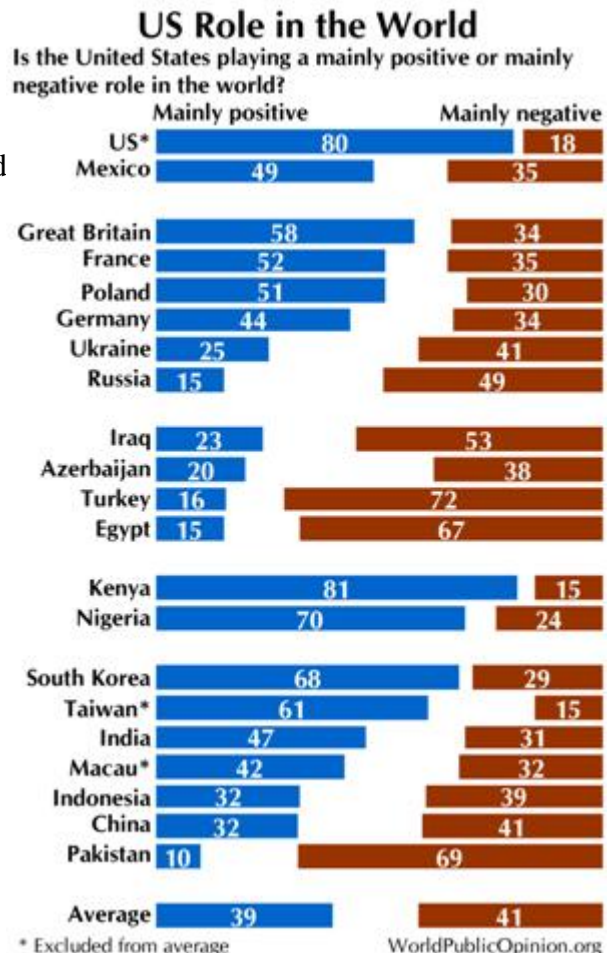
Steven Kull, director of WorldPublicOpinion.org comments, "Most people around the world seem to have a positive view of the young new captain at the helm of the American ship of state, though many people see this huge ship as still carrying forward domineering policies."

WorldPublicOpinion.org conducted the poll of 19,923 respondents in 20 nations that comprise 62 percent of the world's population. This includes most of the largest nations-- China, India, the United States, Indonesia, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Russia--as well as Mexico, Germany, Great Britain, France, Poland, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Kenya, Egypt, Turkey, Iraq, the Palestinian territories, and South Korea. Polling was also conducted in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau.

WorldPublicOpinion.org, a collaborative project involving research centers from around the world, is managed by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland. The margins of error range from +/-3 to 4 percentage points. Not all questions were asked in all nations. The survey was conducted between April 4 and June 12, 2009, prior to Obama's speech in Cairo but subsequent to his Ankara speech. Funding for this research was provided by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and the Calvert Foundation.

Views of Obama are especially positive among Europeans including 92 percent of the British, 89 percent of the Germans, and 88 percent of the French. Even a majority of the Chinese concur (55%). The exceptions are majority-Muslim nations and Russia. Those saying they have not too much confidence or no confidence at all include majorities in the Palestinian territories (67%), Pakistan (62%), Egypt (60%), and Iraq (57%) as well as Russia (55%).

But on average, only one in four agrees that the US is "an important leader in promoting international laws and sets a good example by following them," while two-thirds say "the US tries to promote



international laws for other countries, but is hypocritical because it does not follow these rules itself." Here too, overall, there has been no significant change from 2008. The most negative are France (79%) and Egypt (78%). Even in America's close ally Britain three-quarters say the US is hypocritical. Kenya and Nigeria are the only nations that give the US good grades (55% and 52% respectively) on complying with international law.

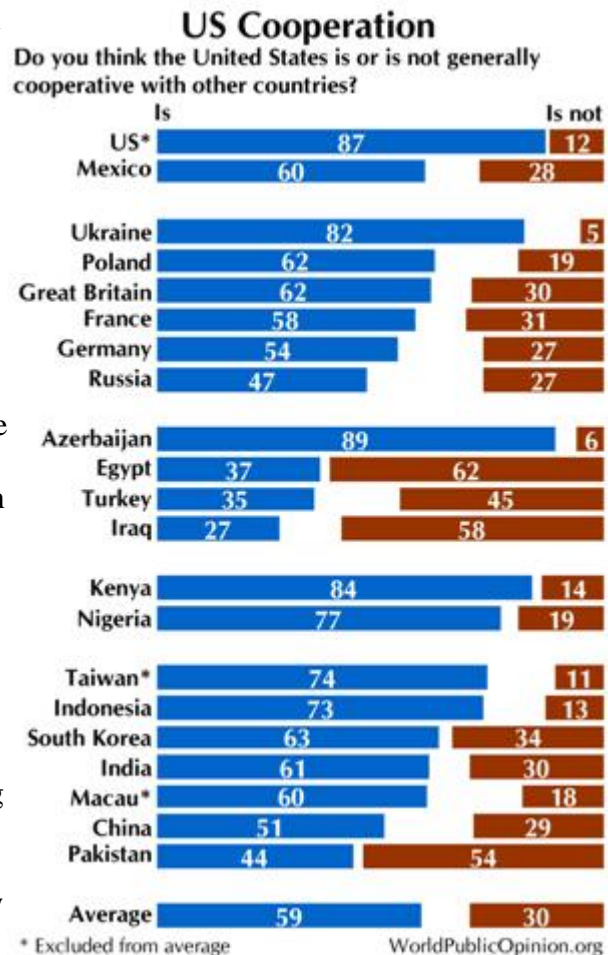
Americans, though, think the US has changed on this front. While in 2008 a majority of Americans (54%) agreed that the US was hypocritical, now 56 percent say the US sets a good example by following international law.

Climate change is another area where US policy comes in for criticism. Eleven out of 18 nations say that they disapprove of how the US is dealing with the issue. Europeans are especially critical including majorities in Britain (65%), France (62%), and Germany (56%). Majority-Muslim nations are critical as well, especially Egypt (68%), Pakistan (62%), and Turkey (56%). However, Asians take a more positive view, led by South Korea (67%), Indonesia (56%), and India (53%)--though the Chinese lean to the negative (21% approve, 41% disapprove). Views again are most positive in Nigeria (79%) and Kenya (74%). On average 41% disapprove and 39% approve.

On two fronts the US scores fairly well. In all but four nations a majority or plurality says that the US is "generally cooperative with other countries." On average 59 percent have this view, including 51 percent of Chinese and a plurality of Russians (47%). Those tending to say the US is not cooperative are all majority-Muslim nations: Egypt (62%), Iraq (58%), Pakistan (54%), and Turkey (45%).

In 12 out of 18 nations most people say the US is "generally respectful of human rights," led by roughly eight in 10 in South Korea, Nigeria, Azerbaijan, and Kenya. On average 51 percent say the US is respectful while 38 percent say it is not. The exceptions are several majority-Muslim nations and Mexico. Germans are divided on this question.

Asked, overall, whether the US is "playing a mainly positive or mainly negative role in the world" views are mixed. Nine nations say that the US is playing a mainly positive role. This includes European allies that were quite critical of the US



during the Bush years. Now a majority in France (52%) and Britain (58%), as well as a plurality in Germany (44% to 34%) say that the US is playing a mainly positive role in the world. Nearly half in Mexico (49%) also see the US playing a positive role. Large majorities of Kenyans (81%), Nigerian (70%) and South Koreans (68%) agree, as do Taiwanese (61%).

But nine nations say the US is playing a mainly negative role. Despite Obama's speech in Ankara in early April, 72 percent of Turks say the US is playing a mainly negative role, as well as majorities in Pakistan (69%), Egypt (67%), Iraq (53%), and pluralities in Russia (49%), China (41%), Ukraine (41%), Indonesia (39%), and Azerbaijan (38%).