

# WORLD PUBLIC OPINION AND THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The UN and Human Rights  
Religious Freedom  
Freedom of Expression  
Media Freedom  
Torture  
Women's Rights  
Racial and Ethnic Equality  
Social and Economic Rights  
Governance and the Will of the People

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

WorldPublicOpinion.org would like to thank the Oak Foundation and the Calvert Foundation for their support that made it possible to conduct this study.

The study would not have been possible without the participation of the partner research organizations from around the world which are part of the WorldPublicOpinion.org network.

The questionnaire was developed by the Program on International Policy Attitudes with contributions by international partners in the WorldPublicOpinion.org network. The analysis of the data for this report was carried out by the WorldPublicOpinion.org team: Steven Kull, Clay Ramsay, Melanie Ciolek, Stephen Weber, Evan Lewis, Melinda Brouwer, and Ebrahim Mohseni.

Melanie Ciolek and Abe Medoff managed production of the report with the assistance of Emily Majka, Mamiko Saikawa, Elizabeth Zehe, Jennifer Chen, Abdul Rahim, Tiffany Gordon, Florina Belorusets, and Elise Boyson.

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Program on International Policy Attitudes/Knowledge Networks *United States*

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**WorldPublicOpinion.org (WPO)** is an international collaborative project, managed by the Program on International Policy Attitudes at the University of Maryland, with the aim of giving voice to public opinion around the world on international issues. As the world becomes increasingly integrated, problems have become increasingly global, pointing to a greater need for understanding between nations and for elucidating global norms. With the growth of democracy in the world, public opinion has come to play a greater role in the foreign policy process. WorldPublicOpinion.org seeks to reveal the values and views of publics in specific nations around the world as well as global patterns of world public opinion.

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*An electronic copy of the questionnaire and a summary of country-by-country findings for this study can be found with the report at [www.WorldPublicOpinion.org](http://www.WorldPublicOpinion.org) under the topic "Justice / Human Rights."*



# Introduction

December 10, 2008 is the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. Although the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is not a legally binding instrument, its potency as a statement of norms and its use as a means of moral suasion are significant worldwide. In the last four decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century its language has been included in many new national constitutions. Civil society groups, both national and international, have regularly invoked it as a source of legitimacy.

Later treaties that do have the force of international law embody in detail the grand lines of the Declaration. Out of 192 UN state members, 158 countries are parties to the Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, while 162 countries are parties to the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

At the same time the UDHR has been subject to a number of challenges that call into question whether it has long term viability.

At times over its history, the Declaration has been criticized as an essentially Western document that tries to universalize values that are actually culturally grounded in Europe and North America. According to this view, human rights is only the most recent spearhead of Western interference in the mores of other cultures—notably the Islamic world and East Asia.

Many have asked whether there is a conflict between the value structure of Islam and the rights-based assertions of the Declaration. In 1948 Saudi Arabia abstained

from voting for the Declaration, claiming cultural and religious grounds—particularly on the individual's freedom to change religion, or to marry or not marry without family sanction. In 1990, 45 member nations of the Organization of the Islamic Conference adopted the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam to serve as their guidance on human rights questions. The constitutions of some Muslim countries include human rights language drawn from the Declaration, along with a clause to the effect where conflicts exist, shari'a has overriding value. Do most individuals in Muslim countries experience such an ethical conflict?

A comparable argument exists about East Asian societies and human rights as described in the Declaration. One of the four main drafters of the Declaration was Peng-chun Chang, a Chinese educator and diplomat who frequently argued from Confucian thought in the group's debates. However more recently some have argued that East Asian culture is at odds with a West-centric notion of human rights expressed in the Declaration. East Asian societies, it is argued, put greater emphasis than the West does on community welfare, consensus and harmony. Individual rights are embedded in wider rights and duties that concern the well-being of the family and wider concentric circles of community. In this account, the Declaration is a one-sided Western formulation that exalts the isolated individual, stripping the person of his or her social duties and context. But does this argument against the universality of the rights described in the Declaration resonate with ordinary citizens of East Asian countries?

Another challenge to one of the principles of the

UDHR—the prohibition on the use of torture—has surfaced in the context of the struggle with terrorism. An argument now made in some countries says that if a detained person is thought to be withholding information about an impending terrorist attack that would take innocent lives, it would be morally justified to use torture to gain information. How do ordinary people view the prohibition against torture when they are asked about this “ticking bomb” scenario?

Another controversy in regard to human rights is whether the government should play an active role in promoting human rights in society. The classic role of human rights is to impose constraints on the ability of the state to limit the freedoms of its citizens. But what about the state actively intervening in the private sphere to prevent discrimination—such as in the workplace—based on gender, race or ethnic identity? Government efforts to prevent such discrimination have at times provoked tremendous resistance.

A corresponding controversy applies to the role of the United Nations in promoting human rights. In addition to establishing the UDHR by a vote of the General Assembly, in various ways the UN has played an active role in monitoring human rights in member states. This has often engendered substantial resistance, not least by the governments of those states subjected to scrutiny. An argument sometimes made is that this is undue interference in the internal affairs of a state and a violation of national sovereignty. What do people around the world believe, including in states that have been subject to pressure from the UN?

The attitudes of Americans toward the economic and social rights laid out in the Declaration has also been a point of contention. In World War II, Franklin Roosevelt put forward the “Four Freedoms” to define the cause for which the allies—already calling themselves the United Nations—were fighting, and these included “freedom from want.” But the Cold War with the Soviet Union was in progress once the

Declaration was being drafted, and Eleanor Roosevelt had to expend her considerable influence to convince the US State Department to support language that described people’s basic material requirements as human rights. Ultimately, though, she reported to the drafting commission that the United States

...favored the inclusion of economic and social rights in the Declaration, for no personal liberty could exist without economic security and independence. Men in need were not free men... [Methods of implementation] would necessarily vary from one country to another, and such variations should be considered not only inevitable but salutary.<sup>1</sup>

Still, American political culture has often seemed far from willing to endorse the idea of economic and social rights. But what about the American people themselves—how do they respond?

Finally, there is debate as to whether support for the norms in the Declaration have faded or will fade with time. If young people are less ardent in their support for these principles, then the long term prognosis is poor. Also, since levels of education across the world are rising generation by generation, the effect of education on the support for the principles of the Declaration is key.

To answer these various questions, WorldPublicOpinion.org has undertaken an in-depth study of the status of the norms of the UDHR in 25 nations plus Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau. WorldPublicOpinion.org is a network of research centers from around the world managed by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland. Across the world tens of thousands of ordinary people answered questions—some apparently simple, others probing and difficult—that made them ponder situations where key values may come into conflict.

<sup>1</sup> Information on the drafting of the Declaration is drawn from Mary Ann Glendon, *A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, New York: Random House, 2001. Quotations are on pp. 239-40 and 115-16.

This study endeavors to understand the role of human rights as it plays out at the deepest level—the convictions of individuals living in various countries across the world. The authors who drafted the Declaration’s text felt strongly that its language should speak directly to individuals as well as to states. The Preamble calls the Declaration a “common standard of achievement...to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights.”

Charles Malik, a Lebanese diplomat who worked on the Declaration, thought that “Men, culture and nations must first mature inwardly before there can be effective international machinery to adjudicate complaints about the violation of human rights.” And Eleanor Roosevelt said in one of her last speeches at the UN:

Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home—so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighborhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm or office where he works.

In addition to assessing the status of the norms of the UDHR in the minds of individuals, this study also gives individuals the opportunity to assess how well their government and their society are fulfilling these norms. Even if governments have certain rights written into their constitution or their laws, the rights may or may not be realized in practice. Furthermore, to the extent that people believe their government is responsible not only for showing restraint, but also for actively countering discrimination, how well do citizens perceive that their government is performing this function?

The study also provides citizens’ assessments of human rights conditions that have received little direct study. Recently a number of studies in specific societies have indicated discrimination against widows and divorced women. However, there are no systematic efforts yet to quantify the scope of the problem on a world scale.

This study has sought to break new ground by using the perceptions of citizens as an initial reconnaissance of the scope of the problem.

The study was conducted in 25 nations, plus three additional Chinese publics (Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan), that include over 60 percent of the world’s population. Due to the extensive number of questions the study was conducted in two waves of interviews: the first from December 2007 through April 2008, and the second from July through September 2008. Most nations were polled in both waves; however, Iran, Peru and Spain participated only in the first wave, and Germany, Italy, Kenya and the additional Chinese publics participated only in the second. Also, in each wave a few questions were not asked in all countries. Sample sizes within a wave ranged from 600 respondents to as high as 3,200. Thus the margins of error per public ranged from 1.9 to 4.1 percent. Overall, 20,824 respondents were interviewed in the first wave and 26,417 in the second; a total of 47,241 respondents participated in the study. See the appendix on Methodology for more extensive detail. An electronic copy of the questionnaire and a summary of country-by-country findings for this study can be found with the report at [www.WorldPublicOpinion.org](http://www.WorldPublicOpinion.org) under the topic “Justice / Human Rights.”

The basic finding of the study is that the norms of the UDHR receive robust support throughout the world. Stated in general terms, they are endorsed by majorities in every country. However in a minority of nations, when it comes to situations where there are risks of political instability or where civilians may be at risk, publics sometimes back away from the broadest application of the principles.

The relativistic assumption that cultures live in highly different moral universes gets very little support. Publics in majority-Muslim countries do show a bit more acceptance of governments having the right to control various forms of expression that could be politically destabilizing, but it is not clear whether this is due to Muslim culture or whether these nations face more political instability. There is no consistent

evidence that East Asian cultures vary significantly from the rest of the world.

The prognosis for the principles of the UDHR is good. Though the UDHR is now 60 years old, the youngest generation shows just as much if not more support for its principles. Also more educated people are more supportive of the principles—a positive sign in a world that is becoming increasingly educated with each generation.

More specifically the key findings are as follows:

#### *The United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*

- All publics polled favor the United Nations actively promoting the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in member states and reject the view that this would be improper interference.
- Nearly all publics want to see the United Nations do more than it does now to promote human rights principles and favor giving it new powers to go into countries to investigate human rights abuses.

#### *Religious Freedom*

- Majorities in all nations agree that it is important for people of different religions to be treated equally.
- Majorities in most, but not all, nations believe that followers of any religion should be able to assemble and practice in their country.
- Views are mixed on the whether people should have the right to try to convert others to their religion, with more than half of the publics polled saying that people should not have such a right.

#### *Freedom of Expression*

- Large majorities in all nations endorse the importance of freedom of expression, including the right to criticize the government.
- Most publics say governments do not have the right to prohibit the discussion of any political and religious views, but there are exceptions.

- All publics endorse the right to demonstrate peacefully against the government.

#### *Media Freedom*

- All publics polled support the principle that the media should be free of government control.
- Nearly all publics say the government should not limit internet access.
- But many Muslims and Russians say the government should have the right to prohibit publishing material it thinks will be politically destabilizing.
- Many publics want greater media freedom.

#### *The Prohibition Against Torture*

- As a general principle, large majorities in all nations reject the government using torture.
- However, in a few nations there is support for making an exception in the case of terrorists who may have information that could save innocent lives.

#### *Women's Rights*

- Large majorities in all nations favor equal rights for women and most perceive that women have been gaining greater equality.
- Majorities in all nations say that the government should actively work to prevent discrimination against women, and in many nations there is a broad desire for their government to make greater efforts.
- There is robust support for the UN playing an active role in promoting women's rights.
- Many see discrimination against widows and divorced women in their country.

#### *Racial and Ethnic Equality*

- Publics around the world overwhelmingly endorse the principle that people of different races and ethnicities should be treated equally.
- In nearly all nations majorities say that employers should not have the right to discriminate based on race or ethnicity.
- Most publics say that governments should take

action to prevent racial discrimination and many say that their government should do so more than it is.

- In most, but not all nations people see racial discrimination diminishing.

#### *Social and Economic Rights*

- All publics overwhelmingly endorse the view that governments should be responsible for ensuring that their citizens can meet their basic needs for food, healthcare, and education.
- Publics vary widely on how well they perceive their government fulfilling these responsibilities.

#### *Governance and the Will of the People*

- Publics in all nations agree that the will of the people should be the basis of the authority of government and that government leaders should

be selected through elections.

- World publics express broad dissatisfaction with how responsive their government is to the will of the people and this is highly related to low levels of trust in government.
- There is broad support for the government being more attentive to public opinion including paying attention to polls and having a government agency to study public preferences on policy.
- Majorities in most countries think their government should also be more responsive to world public opinion.

# The United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

*“Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world...*

*The General Assembly proclaims this Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a common standard of achievement...to the end that every individual and organ of society...shall strive...by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance.”*

—Preamble, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

- All publics polled favor the United Nations actively promoting the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in member states and reject the view that this would be improper interference.
- Nearly all publics want to see the United Nations do more than it does now to promote human rights principles and favor giving it new powers to go into countries to investigate human rights abuses.

Publics worldwide say the United Nations should actively promote the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in member states, even when presented the counter-argument that this would be improper interference in a country’s internal affairs and that human rights should be left to each country. In most nations publics want to see the United Nations do more than it does now to promote human rights principles and in no nations do majorities want to see it do less.

## Active UN Promotion of Human Rights

Respondents in 21 nations were told that “the members of the UN General Assembly have agreed on a set of principles called the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” They were then presented the debate about whether the UN should actively promote such rights: “Some people say the United Nations should actively promote such human rights principles in member states. Others say this is improper interference in a country’s

internal affairs and human rights should be left to each country.” They were then asked, “Do you think the UN should or should not actively promote human rights in member states?”

The dominant view in all 21 nations—majorities in 19, pluralities in two—was to favor the UN actively promoting human rights principles in member states. On average 70 percent favored such efforts while 19 percent were opposed.

Countries with the highest levels of support were Kenya (94%), Germany and Argentina (both 91%), Nigeria (87%) and Mexico (85%). Support was strong among the permanent members of the UN Security

Council member states with large majorities being supportive in France (76%), the United States (70%), Britain (68%), and China (62%), though the Russian majority was relatively modest (55%).

Support for the UN actively promoting human rights was lowest in Thailand, where it was nonetheless a clear plurality (44% to 25%). Comparatively modest support was also found in Jordan (50% to 33%), in the Palestinian Territories (54%) and India (55%)

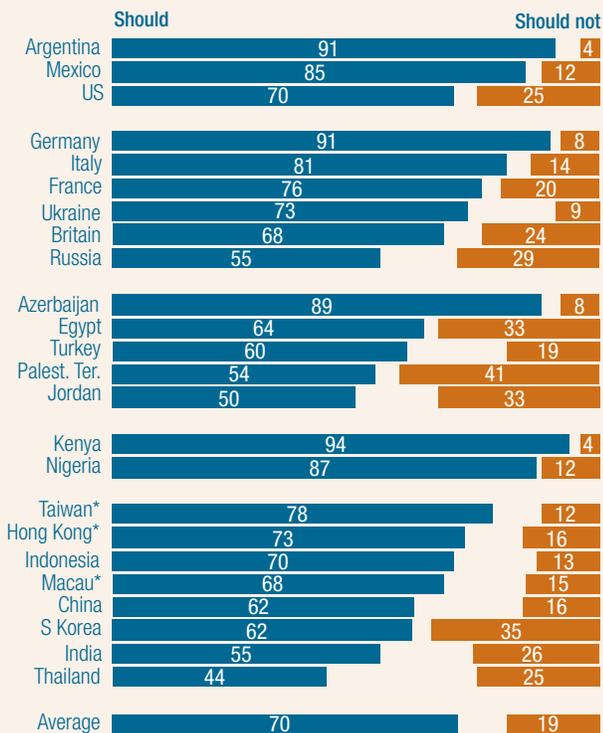
Muslim nations included three of the four nations with the highest levels of opposition: Palestinian Territories (41%), Jordan (33%), and Egypt (33%), but these were minorities in every case. South Korea was the one other country with significant minority opposition (35%).

Support for the UN playing an intrusive role was strikingly high in China (62%) given that the Chinese government has invoked the principle of national sovereignty in opposition to the UN playing an active role in regard to human rights. However support was even higher in Taiwan (78%), Hong Kong (73%), and Macau (68%).

While majorities at every level of education thought the UN should actively promote human rights, those with high levels of education were 11 points more likely to think so than those with low levels (75% and 64%, respectively). There were no significant differences related to age.

**THE UDHR AND THE UN**

As you may know, the members of the UN General Assembly have agreed on a set of principles called the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Some people say the United Nations should actively promote such human rights principles in member states. Others say this is improper interference in a country’s internal affairs and human rights should be left to each country. Do you think the UN SHOULD or SHOULD NOT actively promote human rights in member states?



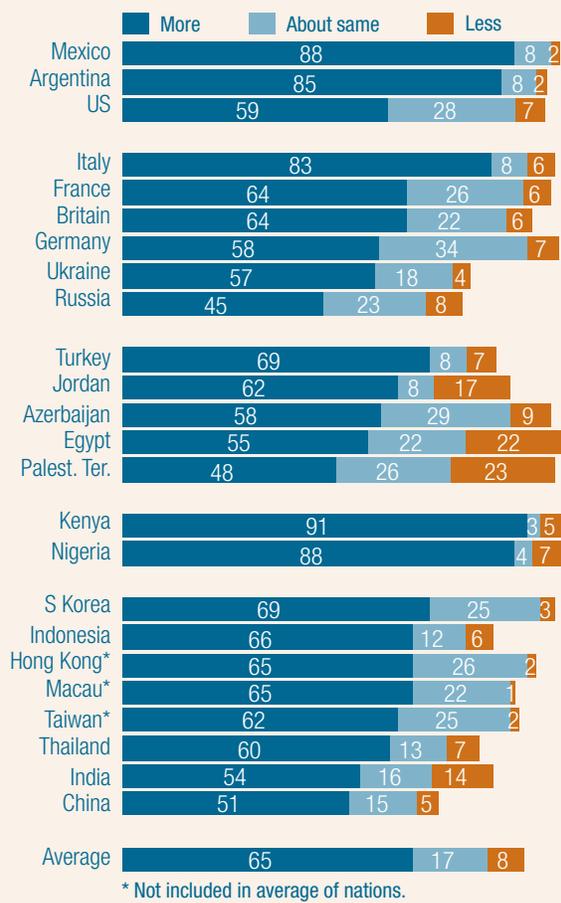
\* Not included in average of nations.

**Greater UN Role on Human Rights**

Respondents were asked: “Would you like to see the UN do more, do less, or do about the same as it has been doing to promote human rights principles?” In 19 of 21 nations majorities wanted the United Nations to do more; in one public (Russia) a plurality was in favor, and in one (the Palestinian Territories) views were mixed. On average across 21 nations, 65 percent said the UN should do more, 17 percent said it should do the same as it has been doing, and 8 percent said it should do less.

**SHOULD UN PROMOTE HUMAN RIGHTS MORE?**

Would you like to see the UN do more, do less, or do about the same as it has been doing to promote human rights principles?



The largest majorities wanting the UN to do more to promote human rights were in Africa and Latin America. Ninety-one percent of Kenyans and 88 percent of Nigerians said the UN should do more, as did 88 percent of Mexicans and 85 percent of Argentines. Italians were also highly supportive (83%).

Palestinians, who were divided, were the least supportive among the 21 publics of a greater UN role on human rights: 48 percent wanted the UN to do more while 49 percent wanted it to do the same amount (26%) or less (23%). In Russia a plurality of 45

percent wanted the UN to do more, while 31 percent wanted it to do the same (23%) or less (8%).

In China, a 51 percent majority wanted the UN to do more, much smaller numbers wanted it to do the same (15%) or less (5%), and 29 percent did not answer. (In both Hong Kong and Macau, a higher 65% wanted the UN to do more, as did 62% in Taiwan.)

While the Palestinians had the lowest level of support and majority Muslim countries, tended to be lower than average, majorities were supportive of a greater UN role in Turkey (69%), Indonesia (66%), Jordan (62%) and Egypt (55%).

Interestingly some of the more modest majorities were found in Western countries long associated with promoting human rights: Germany (58%), the United States (59%), France (64%), and Great Britain (64%).

Those with greater education were only slightly more likely than those with less education to want the UN to take a stronger human rights role. Sixty-two percent of those at low levels of education wanted to see the UN do more in this regard, while 66-68 percent of those with medium and higher levels of education wanted this as well. Again, the young and old were not significantly different on this issue.

**Giving the UN New Investigative Powers**

Majorities also support giving the UN new powers in the effort to promote human rights. Active UN investigations on human rights are supported by very broad majorities. Asked about possible steps for strengthening the UN, the possibility of “giving the UN the authority to go into countries in order to investigate violations of human rights” was supported in 20 nations (18 majorities, 2 pluralities); 2 countries were divided, but none were opposed.\* On average, about two thirds (65%) were in favor, with just 22 percent opposed.

\*Some of the data for this question was derived from polling done as part of a WorldPublicOpinion.org study conducted in conjunction with the Chicago Council on Global Affairs.

The largest majorities were in Europe and Africa: France had 92 percent in favor, Britain 86 percent, Nigeria 83 percent, and Kenya 81 percent. Clear majorities were also supportive in the United States (75%), Russia (64%) and China (57%).

A plurality of Turks was supportive (47% to 25%) as was a plurality of Argentines (46% to 29%). Two countries were divided: Egypt (51% to 49%) and the Philippines (46% to 46%).

In addition—as will be discussed in the chapter on women’s rights—very large majorities in nearly every nation said that the United Nations should try to further women’s rights, even when presented the argument that this would conflict with national sovereignty.

# Religious Freedom

*“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”*

—Article 18

- Majorities in all nations agree that it is important for people of different religions to be treated equally.
- Majorities in most, but not all, nations believe that followers of any religion should be able to assemble and practice in their country.
- Views are mixed on the whether people should have the right to try to convert others to their religion, with more than half of the publics polled saying that people should not have such a right.

Publics around the world believe it is important for people of different religions to be treated equally. Majorities in every country polled called equal treatment across religions important, and in most nations a majority said it is very important. Majorities in most, but not all, nations affirm that followers of any religion should be allowed to assemble and practice in their country. At the same time, discomfort with proselytizing—trying actively to convert others to one’s own religion—is quite widespread. Majorities in more than half of the countries polled do not extend the status of a right to proselytizing.

## Equal Treatment

Support for the norm of equal treatment of adherents of different religions is quite robust. Respondents in 21 nations were asked “How important do you think it is for people of different religions to be treated equally?” Majorities in every country said that it was somewhat or very important. This ranged from 74 percent in Egypt to 99 percent in Kenya. In 17 out of 21 nations majorities

called it “very important.” On average 89 percent said that it is important, 64 percent very important.

The countries with the highest levels of support included Kenya (99%), Argentina (97% important, 90% very), Indonesia (95%, 82% very), the United States (95%, 77% very), Mexico (94%, 83% very), and France (94%, 66% very).

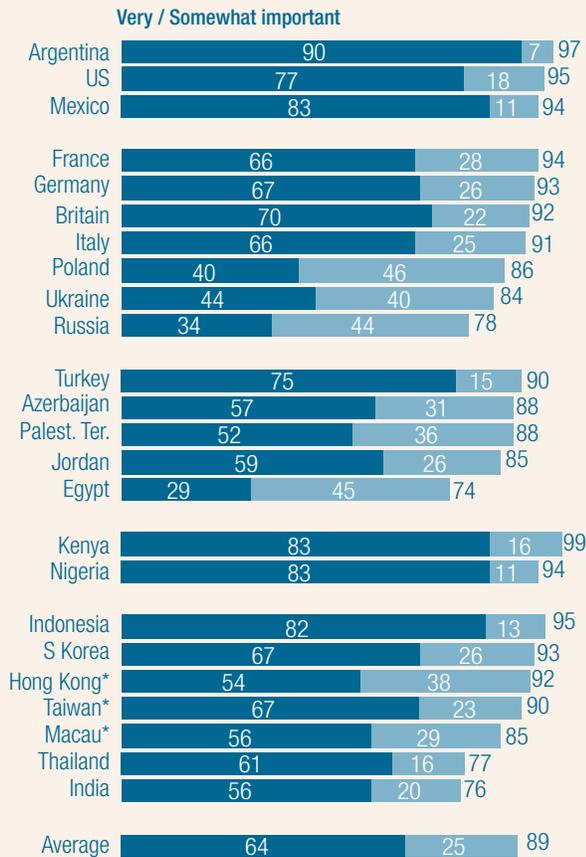
In no country did a large number say that equal treatment was not very important or not important at all. Egypt was the highest with 24 percent. This was followed by India (15%), Jordan, the Palestinian Territories, Poland and Russia (all 11%).

The belief that it is very important to treat equally members of different religions rises with greater education. The highly educated are 9 points more likely to call this “very important” than are those with little education.

Respondents 60 years and older were 6 points less likely to say that it is very important for people of different

**EQUAL TREATMENT OF RELIGIONS**

How important do you think it is for people of different religions to be treated equally?



\* Not included in average of nations.

religions to be treated equally. There were no age-based differences, however, among respondents younger than 60.

**Freedom to Practice Any Religion**

When respondents were asked to consider the right of *any* religion to be practiced, support was still high, but there were some countries where a majority backed away from endorsing such a right.

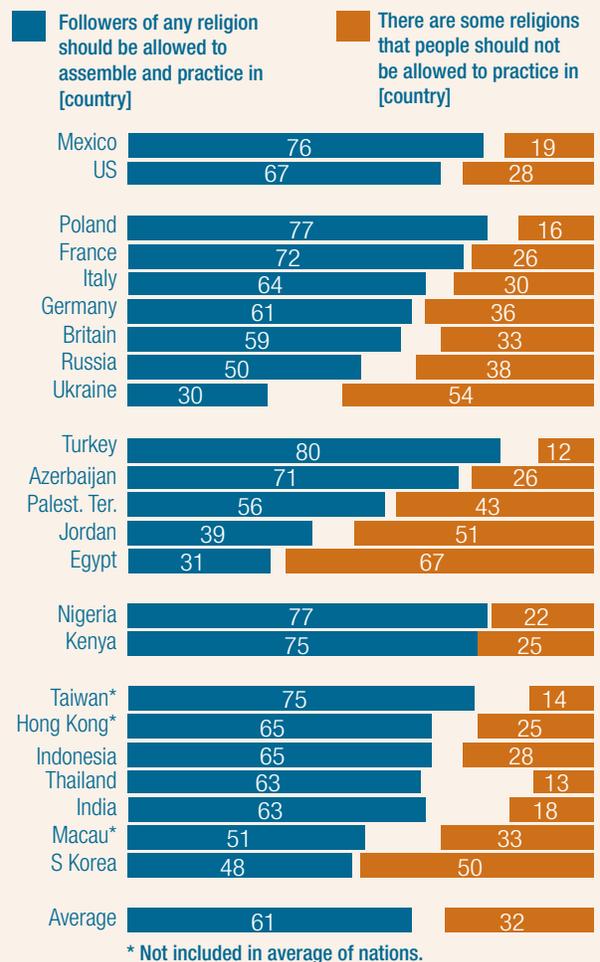
Respondents were asked to choose between two statements: “Followers of any religion should be allowed to assemble and practice in [our country],” or “there are some religions that people should not be

allowed to practice in [our country].” The question wording intentionally offered a test, by evoking in respondents’ minds “some religion” that they might find specifically objectionable.

In 16 out of 20 countries, majorities (15) or pluralities (1) said that in their country followers of any religion should be able to assemble and practice. In three countries, majorities said there were some religions that people should not be permitted to practice there. One country was divided on the question. On average across all publics, 61 percent endorsed the right to assemble and practice any religion, while 32 percent said some religions should be excluded.

**RIGHT TO PRACTICE ANY RELIGION**

Do you think:



\* Not included in average of nations.

The highest majority supporting freedom to practice without exceptions was found in Turkey—a majority Muslim country—at 80 percent; just 12 percent were opposed. Other countries with high majorities were Poland and Nigeria (both 77%); Mexico (76%); Kenya (75%); France (72%) and Azerbaijan (71%). The United States was somewhat lower at 67 percent. Russia had a substantial plurality in support, 50 percent to 38 percent.

Three countries had majorities wanting to exclude some religions from the freedom to assemble and practice. The highest was Egypt at 67 percent, followed by the Ukraine at 54 percent and Jordan at 51 percent. South Koreans were divided, with 50 percent wanting to disallow some religions and 48 percent saying there should be no exceptions.

### Trying to Convert Others

The most controversial issue centered around the right to try to convert others to one’s religion. Indeed, more publics opposed such a right than favored it. It should be noted that the Declaration does not explicitly establish such a right, though it does provide for the right to change one’s religion.

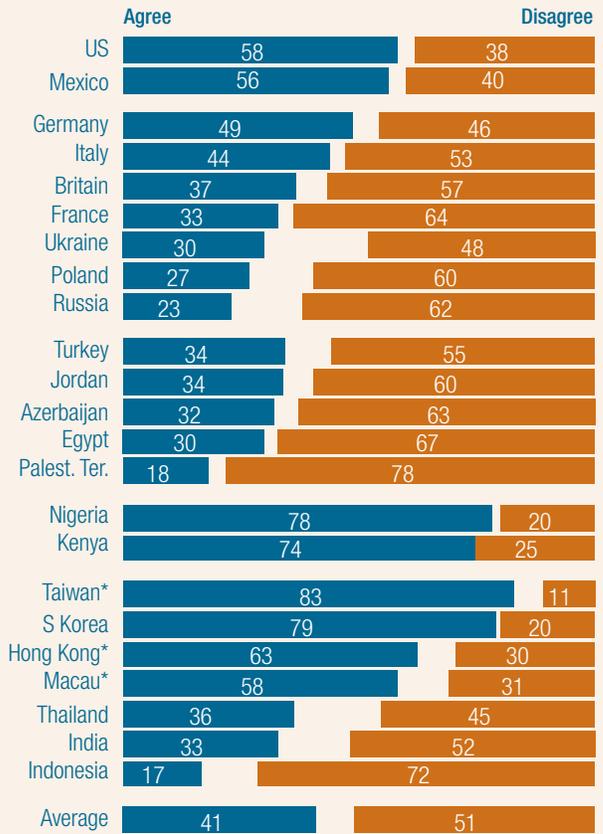
Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement: “In [our country], people of any religion should be free to try to convert members of other religions to join theirs.”

Fourteen nations had majorities or pluralities that disagreed, i.e. they were unwilling to give activities to convert others the status of a right. In six countries majorities did agree and one country was divided. On average across all publics a majority disagreed, 51 to 41 percent.

Publics in European countries and in Muslim countries express the highest levels of discomfort about proselytizing activities. Indonesia had the largest majority disagreeing with the statement, at 72 percent, followed by Egypt (67%), France (64%), Russia (62%), Poland and Jordan (both 60%).

### RIGHT TO SEEK TO CONVERT OTHERS

“In [country], people of any religion should be free to try to convert members of other religions to join theirs.”



\* Not included in average of nations.

The highest support for the freedom to seek to convert others came from two East Asian publics, Taiwan (83%) and South Korea (79%). In Africa there were also very large majorities in Nigeria (78%) and Kenya (74%). In the Americas supportive majorities were more modest at 58 percent in the United States and 56 percent in Mexico.

Germany was the one country where the public was divided: 49 percent agreed and 46 percent disagreed that people of any religion should be free to try to convert others.

Support for the right to try to convert was higher among those with more education. While 49 percent of the college-educated supported this as a freedom, only 37 percent of those with less than a high school education did.

# Freedom of Expression

*“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression...[which] includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas.”*

—Article 19

*“Everyone has the right to peaceful assembly and association.”*

—Article 20

- Large majorities in all nations endorse the importance of freedom of expression, including the right to criticize the government.
- Most publics say governments do not have the right to prohibit the discussion of any political and religious views, but there are exceptions.
- All publics endorse the right to demonstrate peacefully against the government.

The principle that individuals have a right to freedom of expression, including criticism of government and religious leaders, appears to be nearly universally supported by people throughout the world. However when asked whether government should have the right to limit expression of certain political and religious views, the consensus is not as strong; while majorities in most countries say the government should not have such a right, in several countries a majority and in another few a large minority say that it should have such a right. At the same time there is widespread consensus that individuals should have the right to demonstrate peacefully against the government.

## Right to Expression

Majorities in all nations polled say that it is important that people have the right “to express any opinion, including criticisms of the government or religious leaders.” In 16 of the 20 nations a majority said that it is “very important.”

On average, across all nations polled, 66 percent judged this right to be “very important” and an additional 22 percent saw it as somewhat important; only 7 percent saw it as either not very important (5%) or not important at all (2%).

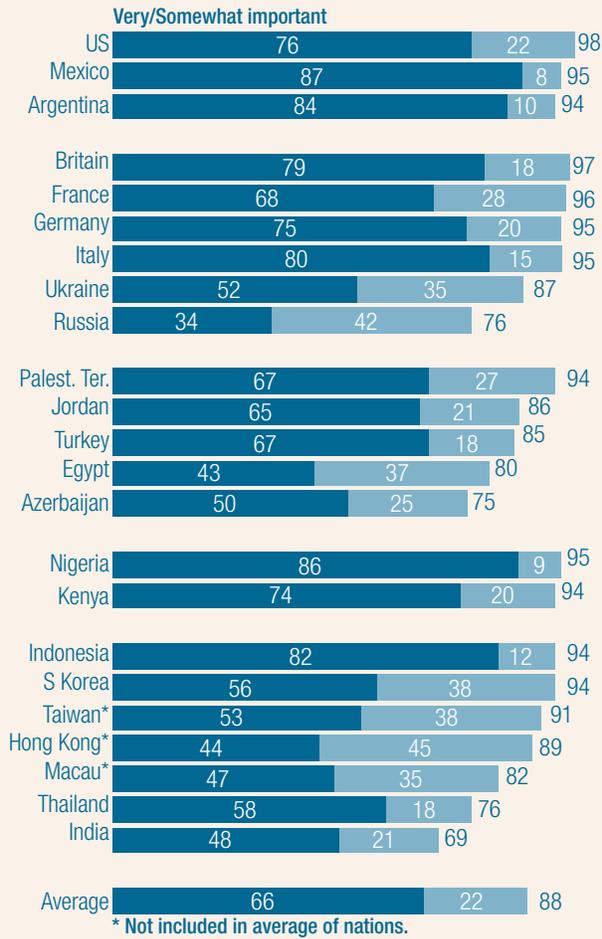
Five countries showed exceptionally high levels of support, with 8 in 10 or more saying that this right is very important—Mexico (87%), Nigeria (86%), Argentina (84%), Indonesia (82%), and Italy (80%).

In a few countries, support for this right of free expression was present but weaker than elsewhere, with less than half saying that the right to expression is very important. These included Russia (34%), Egypt (43%) and India (48%). But in all these countries a majority did say it is at least “somewhat important.”

In addition to the 20 nations polled, three publics within the Greater China region were studied: Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau. Large majorities of these publics also said that free expression is important (Taiwan 91%, Hong Kong 89%, and Macau 82%), but the number

**RIGHT TO EXPRESS ANY OPINION**

How important is it for people to have the right to express any opinion, including criticisms of the government or religious leaders?



saying it was “very important” (Taiwan 53%, Hong Kong 44%, and Macau 47%) was below the global average (66%).

**Right of Governments to Prohibit Expression**

The right to free expression can also be examined from the perspective of whether the government has the right to prohibit the discussion of certain views. Interestingly, while the dominant view is that governments should not have such a right, several countries had significant numbers, in some cases even majorities, saying that the government should have such a right.

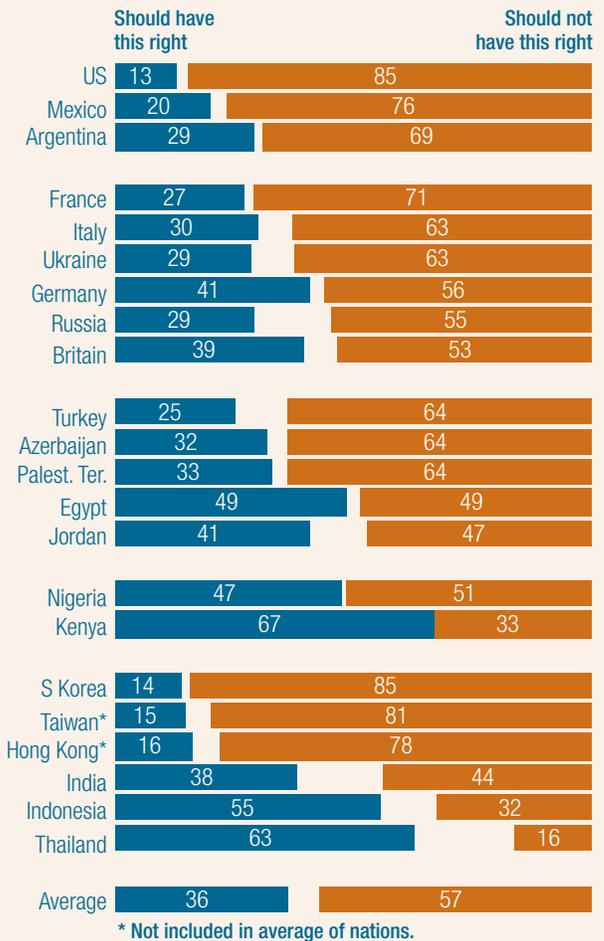
Asked whether the government should “have the right to prohibit certain political or religious views from being discussed” majorities in 13 nations and pluralities in three said that the government should not have such a right.

On average only 36 percent said the government should have such a right, while 57 percent said that the government should not.

The strongest opposition to the government having such a right was found in the US (85%), South Korea (85%), Taiwan (81%), Hong Kong (78%), Mexico (76%), France (71%) and Argentina (69%).

**GOVERNMENT RIGHT TO LIMIT EXPRESSION**

Do you think the government should or should not have the right to prohibit certain political or religious views from being discussed?



In three countries a majority supported the government's right to prohibit expression of certain views: Kenya (67%), Thailand (63%), and Indonesia (55%). Curiously all three of these countries also have large majorities saying that it is very important for people to have the right to express any opinion. A common feature of these countries is that they have all recently had major political instability with near-civil war in Kenya, a coup in Thailand with continuing instability, and ethnic conflict in Indonesia. It may be that in these countries people aspire to full freedom of expression, but also feel that in the current context the government needs to have the right to regulate expression that could be destabilizing.

While all European countries polled had majorities saying that the government should not have the right, in two these majorities were relatively small. In Great Britain only 53 percent, said that government should not have the right to prohibit the expression of certain political and religious views, and 39 percent said the government should have such a right. In Germany as well, a relatively small majority (56%) opposed the right of government to prohibit the discussion of certain views, while a substantial minority (41%) felt that government should be able to prohibit the expression of some views. Both of these countries have fairly substantial Islamic extremist groups operating in their midst that have generated controversy about whether some of their language should be regarded as incitement. Also Germany has a tradition of regulating neo-Nazi activities.

Two countries—Egypt and India—had nearly half saying that the government should not have the right to prohibit expression and are also two of the three countries that place relatively low importance on freedom of expression, suggesting that the norm in favor of freedom of expression, while clearly extant, is relatively weak. In Egypt views were divided on whether the government should have the right to limit expression (49% to 49%), while just 43 percent said freedom of expression is very important. In India a modest plurality said that the government should

not have the right to limit expression (44% to 38%), while 48 percent said freedom of expression is very important.

Two other countries—Jordan and Nigeria—also had relatively large minorities saying that the government should have the right to limit expression (Nigeria 47%, Jordan 41%). However in these two cases large majorities also said freedom of expression is very important (Nigeria 86%, Jordan 65%). This suggests that some of the readiness to accept government control may be more of a response to current conditions as aspirations to have full freedom of expression appear to be quite strong.

### Right to Demonstrate Peacefully

The right to demonstrate peacefully to protest against the government was a right supported by clear majorities of the public in all 19 countries studied around the world. In none of the countries polled did a majority think that “the government should have the right to ban peaceful demonstrations that it thinks would be politically destabilizing”.

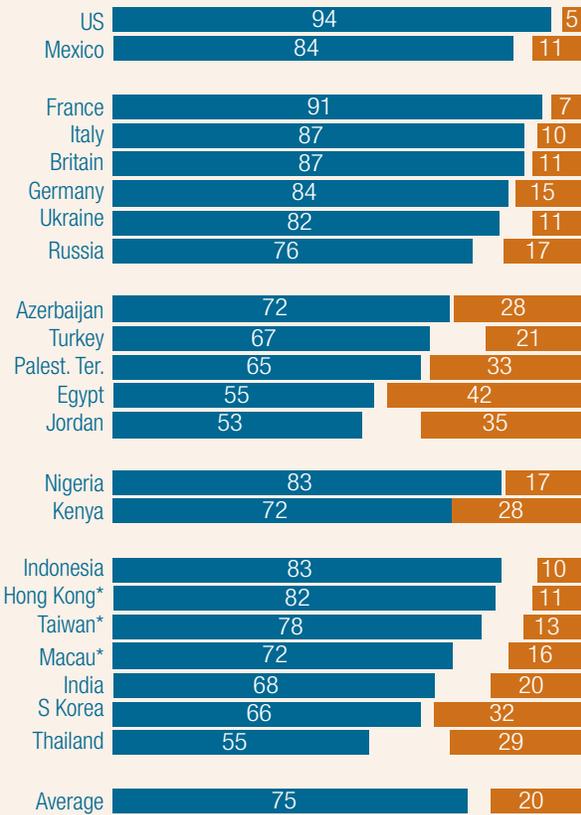
Demonstrations to protest political issues are sensitive matters for the governments of many nations; demonstrations that start peacefully can sometimes lead to violence by the demonstrators, by opponents, or by the authorities. However it seems clear that publics around the world widely support the right for citizens to demonstrate peacefully against their government. Across the 20 countries surveyed, an average of 75 percent of respondents said that people should have the right to demonstrate peacefully, and only 19 percent felt the government should have the right to ban peaceful demonstrations when “it thinks (they) would be politically destabilizing.”

In most countries, the number who felt that people should have the right to demonstrate peacefully widely outnumber those who did not subscribe to this right, for example 94 percent in the United States (vs. 5% who said the government should have the right to ban peaceful demonstrations), 91 percent in France (vs.

**RIGHT TO PEACEFULLY DEMONSTRATE**

Do you think that:

- People should have the right to demonstrate peacefully to protest against the government
- The government should have the right to ban peaceful demonstrations that it thinks would be politically destabilizing



\* Not included in average of nations.

7%), 84 percent in Mexico (vs. 11%), and 83 percent in Indonesia (vs. 10%).

The only countries where 30 percent or more of the public felt that the government has the right to ban peaceful demonstrations were Egypt (42%), Jordan (35%), the Palestinian Territories (33%) and South Korea (32%). However the majority in each of these countries still endorsed the right of the people to demonstrate peacefully.

Among the three publics of Greater China polled in this study, support for the people’s right to demonstrate peacefully is also very high: in Taiwan 78 percent, in Hong Kong 82 percent, and in Macau 72 percent.

**Regional and Demographic Effects**

The majority Muslim nations polled on these freedom of expression issues – Azerbaijan, Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinian Territories, Turkey, and Indonesia – have diverse views on these rights. There does not appear to be single “Muslim view” about individual and government rights. The national political culture and history of the majority Muslim nations studied seems more important than their shared religion in views of freedom of expression.

Majorities in all six nations said that freedom of expression is important, but fewer Egyptians (43%) and Azerbaijanis (50%) said it is “very important” than the other majority Muslim countries or the global average.

In Indonesia, a majority of the public (55%) said that the government should have the right to prohibit the discussion of certain political or religious views, and the public in Egypt was divided on the issue (49% agreed that government had such a right, 49% disagreed). Jordan and the Palestinian Territories fell around the global average. In Turkey, where religious expression is a salient topic because of its secular constitution and recent conflicts between secularists and the Islamist party, 64 percent of the public said the government should not have the right to prohibit such expression. In Azerbaijan, a similar 64 percent said that the government should not have such a right.

The publics in all of the majority Muslim nations polled supported the right of peaceful demonstrations. Publics in Egypt (55%) and Jordan (53%) were somewhat below the global average (75%); and in Indonesia 83 percent did so, a notably large majority.

Whether Asian values about democracy and political rights are distinct from Western values, or those of other countries generally, has been a point of contention among both politicians and scholars. The issue has arisen primarily in terms of East Asia and parts of South Asia such as Singapore and Malaysia. Our three questions about free expression can add to

the empirical base of this discussion. Overall, there seems to be little evidence of a coherently distinct political culture in East and South Asia with respect to these facets of democracy.

Large majorities in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, Indonesia, South Korea, and Thailand all said that it is important for people to have the right to express criticisms of government and religious leaders. However, in all but one of these publics the proportion saying the right is “very important” was below the global average of 66 percent; the exception was Indonesia where 82 percent said it was very important.

The picture is more mixed in terms of whether the government has the right to prohibit certain political or religious views from being discussed. In Taiwan (81%), Hong Kong (78%), and South Korea (85%), very large majorities of the public said the government did not have such a right. These figures are higher than the global average. However, only minorities in Indonesia (32%) and Thailand (16%) felt that the government did **not** have such a right. This question was not asked in China.

Majorities of all of the publics polled in Asia affirmed the people’s right to demonstrate peaceably against the government. The average of the six publics (73%) was similar to the global average (75%). Thailand (55%) and South Korea (66%) were below the global average, while Indonesia (83%) and Hong Kong (82%) were above the global average.

Overall there is a modest tendency for people with greater education to show stronger support for freedom of expression. The strongest example was in regard to the government’s right to prohibit the discussion of political or religious views. Those with college educations more often (65%) feel that government should not have the right to prohibit such discussion than do people who have not completed secondary education (50%). This pattern is evident in the global data overall and within most individual nations. Similar, but more modest effects were found on the importance of free expression and about the right to demonstrate peacefully; but a majority of those without secondary educations still support free expression and peaceful demonstrations.

# Media Freedom

*“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to...seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”*

—Article 19

- All publics polled support the principle that the media should be free of government control.
- Nearly all publics say the government should not limit internet access.
- But many Muslims and Russians say the government should have the right to prohibit publishing material it thinks will be politically destabilizing.
- Many publics want greater media freedom.

In all nations polled there is robust support for the principle that the media should be free of government control and that citizens should even have access to material from hostile countries. With just a few exceptions majorities say that the government should not have the right to limit access to the internet. But while most publics say the government should not have the right to prohibit publishing material it thinks will be politically destabilizing, a majority in several predominantly Muslim countries and nearly half of Russians say that governments should have such a right. In many countries, majorities want more media freedom.

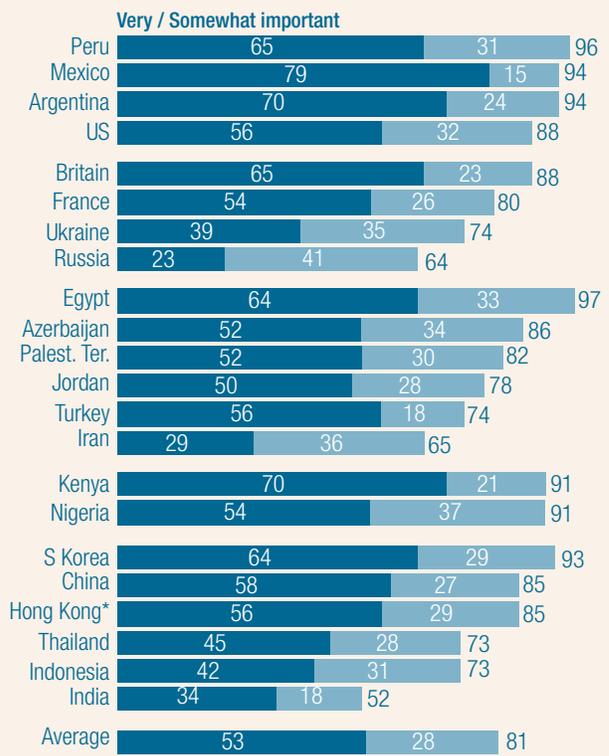
## Worldwide Support for Principle of Media Freedom

The broad principle of media freedom gets very robust support. Majorities in all nations asked say that it is important “for the media to be free to publish news and ideas without government control.”

On average, 81 percent said it is “important,” with 53 percent saying it is “very important.” In no country did more than 29 percent say that media freedom is “not very important” or “not important at all.”

### MEDIA FREEDOM

How important is it for the media to be free to publish news and ideas without government control?



\* Not included in average of nations.

Citizens are also seen as having the right to read publications from hostile countries. Respondents were asked whether people in their country should “have the right to read publications from all other countries including those that might be considered enemies.” Once again, majorities in all countries affirmed this right; on average 80 percent.

The only country with fewer than seven in 10 agreeing was India, where 56 percent agreed. India also had the highest percentage (33%) saying that access to such publications should be limited.

**Internet Censorship**

The Internet is a significant new medium for news, information, and ideas. As some governments have sought to regulate access to the Internet, it has also become a new arena for conflict about media freedom.

Presented the issue of Internet censorship, a majority in all but two of the countries that were asked this question said that “people should have the right to read whatever is on the Internet.” On average 62 percent endorsed full access, while 30 percent said that the government should have the right to “prevent people from having access to some things on the Internet.”

In China, a country whose Internet censorship policies have received a great deal of international attention, 71 percent of the public said that “people should have the right to read whatever is on the Internet;” only 21 percent of Chinese endorsed their government’s right to limit access.

The only two publics to not endorse full access were Jordan and Iran. In Jordan 63 percent supported government regulation of the Internet, as did 44 percent in Iran (32% favor unlimited access).

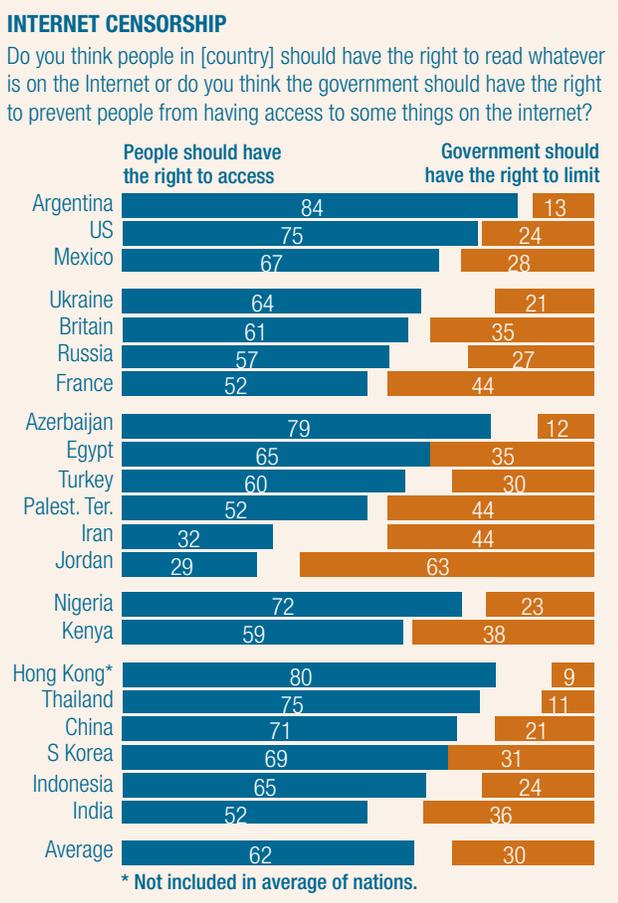
However majorities in other Middle Eastern nations favored the right to full Internet access, including Egypt (65%), Turkey (60%), and the Palestinian Territories (52%). Two other majority-Muslim countries polled also endorsed this right: Indonesia (65%) and Azerbaijan (79%).

Though majorities in all countries except Jordan and Iran favored the right, there is also significant minority support for some government control of access to information on the Internet in France (44%), the Palestinian Territories (44%), Kenya (38%), India (36%), and Great Britain (35%).

**Controlling Potentially Destabilizing Information**

Presented with a choice between an argument in favor of media freedom without government control and the argument that “government should have the right to prevent the media from publishing things it thinks will be politically destabilizing,” majorities or pluralities in 15 publics polled felt that that the risk of political instability does not justify government control.

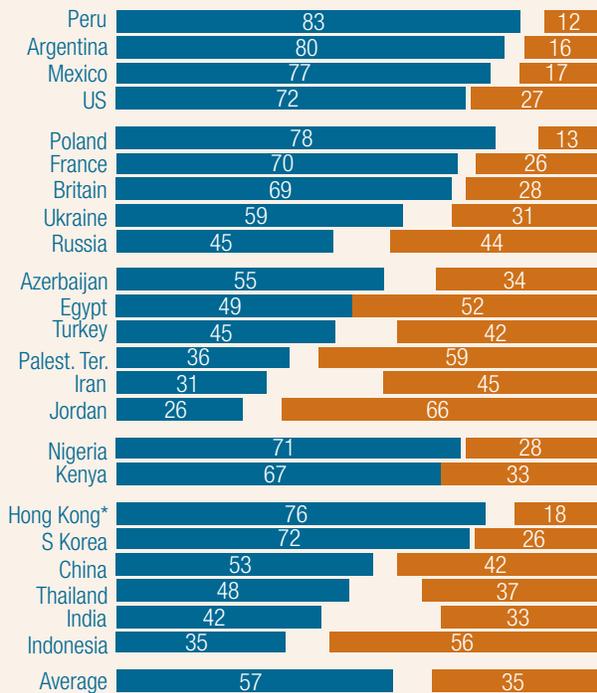
However, in six predominantly Muslim nations and



**GOVERNMENT LIMITS ON MEDIA**

Do you think:

- The media should have the right to publish news and ideas without government control
- The government should have the right to prevent the media from publishing things that it thinks will be politically destabilizing



\* Not included in average of nations.

in Russia this scenario prompted considerable support for government control. Majorities in Jordan (66%), the Palestinian Territories (59%), and Indonesia (56%) supported government control of the media when the government thinks that publishing some things might be politically destabilizing. In Iran, a plurality (45%) supported government control under such circumstances (31% felt the media should be able to publish freely). Views were divided in Russia (45% to 44%), Egypt (49% to 52%), and Turkey (45% to 42%).

This does not, however, mean that any of these publics favor greater government regulation in general. Rather, in four of these cases majorities favored greater media freedom—Egypt (64%), the Palestinian Territories (62%), Jordan (56%), and Indonesia (53%). Only small minorities favored less freedom in Iran (9%), Turkey (30%), and Russia (17%).

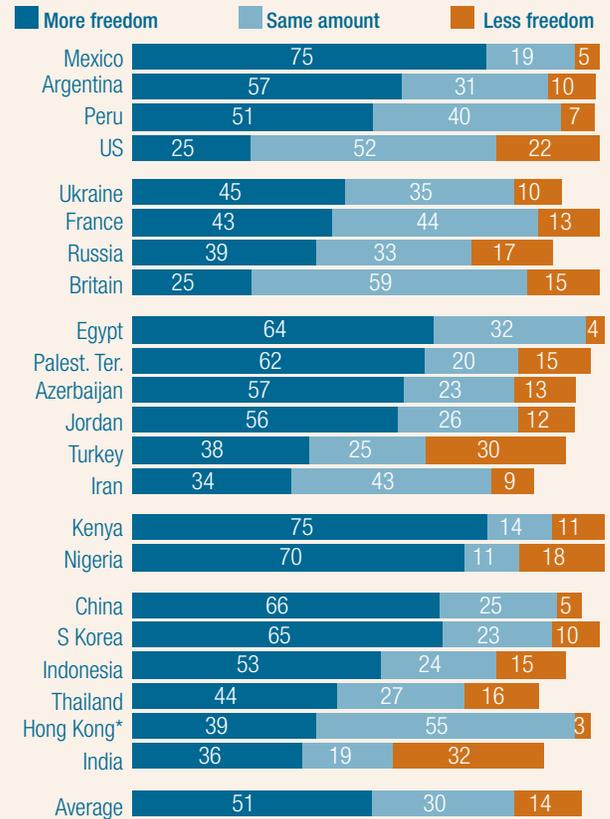
Those countries with strong majorities continuing to favor media freedom even when it may be destabilizing include Peru (83%), Argentina (80%), Poland (78%), Mexico (77%), the US (72%), South Korea (72%), Nigeria (71%), France (70%), Great Britain (69%), and Kenya (67%). Smaller majorities or pluralities in three other countries also preferred media freedom over government control: Ukraine (59%), Azerbaijan (55%), China (53%), Thailand (48%), and India (42%).

**Widespread Desire for More Freedom**

In 12 nations a majority favored more media freedom and in another six their publics leaned in that direction. Just three countries are largely content and in no country did more than one in three favor less freedom.

**DESIRE FOR MORE MEDIA FREEDOM**

Do you think that in [country] the media should have more freedom, less freedom, or the same amount of freedom?



\* Not included in average of nations.

The 12 nations with a majority calling for more freedom included Mexico (75%), Kenya (75%), Nigeria (70%), China (66%), South Korea (65%), Egypt (64%), the Palestinian Territories (62%), Azerbaijan (57%), Argentina (75%), Jordan (56%), Indonesia (53%), and Peru (51%).

An additional five countries had substantial numbers favoring greater freedom. These included Ukraine (45%), Thailand (44%), France (43%), Russia (39%), Turkey (38%), and India (36%). It should be noted, though, that in Turkey and India there was an unusually large number calling for less freedom (30 and 32%, respectively).

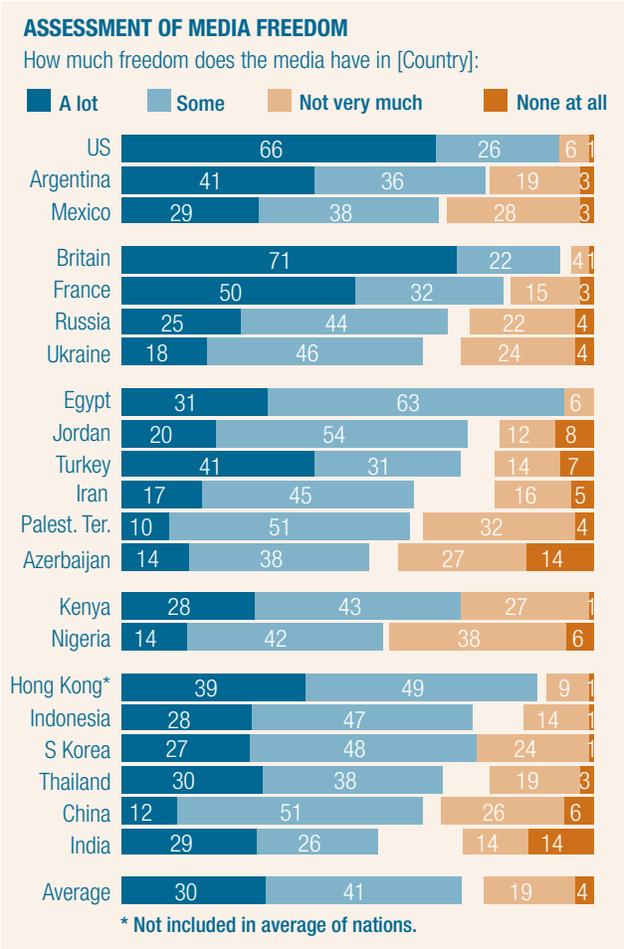
Three countries expressed relative contentment. Only small minorities called for more freedom in the United States (25%), Great Britain (25%) and Iran (34%). Majorities in Britain (59%) and the United States (52%) said that they have the right amount of freedom, as did 43 percent in Iran. In the United States an unusually large 22 percent called for less freedom—approximately the same number of those calling for more (25%). This is in contrast to Britain and Iran where those calling for more freedom were significantly more numerous than those calling for less (Britain: 25 to 15%; Iran: 34 to 9%).

On average, across all nations polled, 51 percent said that they would like their media to have more freedom, 14 percent favored less freedom, and 30 percent favored the same amount of freedom.

**Perceived Status of Media Freedom in Country**

This poll also assessed public views of how free the media are in their own country. In all nations polled, a majority said that media in their country have either “a lot” of freedom (30% across countries) or “some” freedom (41%). In no country polled did a majority say “not very much” or “none at all.”

This may not be surprising. Even when governments, or other forces, do exercise control over the media, they usually create an environment where control is not complete, where “some freedom” is present.



In only three countries polled did 50 percent or more say that the media in their country have a “lot of” freedom: Great Britain (71%), the United States (66%), and France (50%).

The largest percentages saying the media have either not very much or no freedom were found in Nigeria (44%), Azerbaijan (41%), the Palestinian Territories (36%), and China (32%).

There is a clear correspondence between how people perceive media freedom in their country and outside evaluations. For example, the organization *Reporters Sans Frontières* (RSF, or Reporters without Borders) ranked 169 countries in terms of their media freedom (see [www.rsf.org](http://www.rsf.org) for details of their measures).

There is a correlation of 0.64 between the 2007 RSF rankings of countries in terms of media freedom and

the proportion of the public in those countries saying in the poll that there was a lot of freedom.

In the poll, the three countries rated by at least half of their citizens as having “a lot” of media freedom also had three of the four highest ranks in the RSF 2007 Index: Great Britain (24<sup>th</sup>), France (31<sup>st</sup>), and the United States (48<sup>th</sup>). South Korea had a ranking of 39 among the 169 RSF-ranked countries, but only 27 percent of Koreans said there was a lot of media freedom in their country.

Those nations where very few citizens polled said that there was “a lot” of media freedom also got low rankings among the 169 countries in the RSF index: the Palestinian Territories 158<sup>th</sup>, China 163<sup>rd</sup>, Azerbaijan 139<sup>th</sup>, Nigeria 131<sup>st</sup>, Iran 166<sup>th</sup>, and Ukraine 92<sup>nd</sup>.

There also appears to be a relationship between the actual level of freedom—perceived by respondents or outside evaluators—and expressed dissatisfaction. In the three countries where half or more of the public said that there is “a lot” of media freedom, and who scored relatively high on the RSF Index, the public tended to indicate that they want the media to have the “same amount of freedom.” This was the case in Britain (59%), the United States (52%), and France (44%), though in France another 43 percent said they want more freedom.

In the 14 nations where the publics characterized their country as having “some” rather than “a lot” of media freedom, majorities in nine said that there should be *more* media freedom: Mexico (75%), Nigeria (70%), China (66%), South Korea (65%), Egypt (64%), the Palestinian Territories (62%), Azerbaijan (57%), Jordan (56%), and Indonesia (53%).

Argentina displayed a similar pattern: a slim plurality (41%) said their country had “a lot” of media freedom and 36 percent said it had “some” freedom. A majority of Argentines (57%) did think the country should have more freedom than it currently has.

In six other countries that said they had “some” media

freedom, the view was more mixed: Russia, Ukraine, Turkey, Thailand, India, and Iran. In none of the six did a majority say there was a lot of media freedom, and each of the six countries received low RSF Index rankings on media freedom. However, in none of the six did majorities say that there should be more media freedom.

In five of the countries, support for more media freedom is the most common response, but not a majority: Russia (39%), Ukraine (45%), Turkey (38%), Thailand (44%), and India (36%). Here, the publics seem to recognize that media freedom is at least somewhat limited; they also said that media freedom was important, but a majority of the people were not demanding more.

Among Iranians, only 17 percent of the public said there is a lot of media freedom, but only 34 percent said there should be more freedom in their country, and the most common response (43%) was that there should be the same amount of freedom as there is currently.

People with greater education tend to support media freedom more than those with less education. This pattern is evident in response to questions on the importance of media freedom, whether the media should be free to publish without government control, whether people should be able to read publications from other countries even those considered enemies, and whether people should have the right to read whatever is on the Internet. Those with a college degree supported media freedom across each of these issues more so than those with less than high school educations by magnitudes ranging between 7-14 points. However, even those with the lowest level of education supported media freedom on all these questions.

Education has no effect, however, on people’s view of how much media freedom their country has or how much it should have.

The effect of age showed a different pattern. Older

and younger people showed little difference in the importance of media freedom, whether the media should be free of government control, or on whether people should have the right to read publications from other countries. But people 60 years and older (though still a majority of 52%) were less likely than younger respondents (66%) to feel that people should have the right to read whatever is on the Internet.

The oldest respondents (40%) also were more likely to say that their country has “a lot” of media freedom than the youngest (26%); and the oldest (42%) were less likely to feel that their country should have “more” media freedom than the youngest (53%).

# The Prohibition Against Torture

*“No one shall be subjected to torture.”*

—Article 5

- As a general principle, large majorities in all nations reject the government using torture.
- However, in a few nations there is support for making an exception in the case of terrorists who may have information that could save innocent lives.

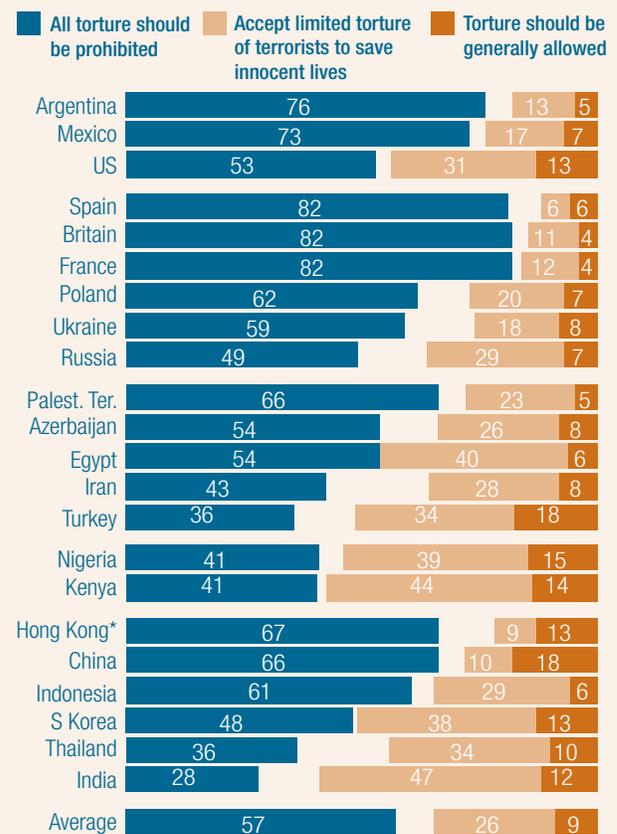
Large majorities in all nations polled favor a general prohibition against torture. However a majority or plurality in a few nations favor making an exception in a case where terrorists have information that could save innocent lives.

## Unequivocal Prohibition vs. Making Exception for Terrorists

Since the 9/11 attacks there has been substantial discussion of the possibility of using torture when terrorists have key information, representing a challenge to the norm against the use of torture established in the UDHR and in other international treaties. The poll first sought to find out how much this argument in favor of an exception has gained credence with publics around the world.

Respondents were presented with an argument in favor of allowing the torture of potential terrorists who threaten civilians: “Terrorists pose such an extreme threat that governments should now be allowed to use some degree of torture if it may gain information that would save innocent lives”—as well as the argument that “Clear rules against torture should be maintained because any use of torture is immoral and will weaken international human rights standards against torture.”

### VIEWS ON TORTURE



\* Not included in average of nations.

In fifteen nations, a majority or plurality opted for the unequivocal view in favor of fully maintaining the norm. On average across all nations polled, 57 percent opted for unequivocal rules against torture. Thirty-four percent favored an exception when innocent lives are at risk.

Support for the unequivocal position was highest in Spain (82%), Great Britain (82%), and France (82%), followed by Argentina (76%), Mexico (73%), China (66%; Hong Kong, 67%), the Palestinian Territories (66%), Poland (62%), Indonesia (61%), and the Ukraine (59%). In five countries either modest majorities or pluralities supported a ban on all torture: Azerbaijan (54%), Egypt (54%), the United States (53%), Russia (49%), and Iran (43%). South Koreans were divided.

The five publics favoring an exception for terrorists when innocent lives are at risk included majorities in India (59%), Kenya (58%), Nigeria (54%), and Turkey (51%), and a plurality in Thailand (44%).

Older people were more likely to support an unequivocal prohibition on torture. People 60 years and older were eight points more likely to reject the argument for making an exception in the case of terrorists than those 18 to 29 years old. Differences in education level among respondents did not seem to influence whether respondents favor unequivocal rules against torture or making exceptions in cases of terrorism.

Interestingly, those who said they have no religious preference were more likely to support an unequivocal prohibition on torture (66%) than were the members of major religions in the 19 nations sampled.

All of the nations polled on this topic are signatories to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and parties to the Geneva Conventions forbidding torture and other forms of abuse. All but three have also ratified the 1987 UN Convention against Torture. India has signed but not ratified the convention, while Iran has not signed it. The Palestinian Territories are not eligible to be a party to the agreement.

## General Use of Torture

The next issue to be addressed was the state of the general norm against torture, over and above the specific circumstance of a scenario involving terrorists and at-risk civilians. Those who favored an exception for terrorists were then also asked whether the government should generally be allowed to use torture.

Across all nations polled, in no case did more than one in five favor generally allowing governments to use torture. On average just 9 percent said there should be no rules against torture.

China and Turkey had the largest percentages (18% in both) saying governments should generally be allowed to torture, followed by Nigeria (15%). France and Great Britain had the lowest (4% in both).

## Trends

A June–July 2006 poll conducted for the BBC World Service by GlobeScan and PIPA asked 16 of the 21 nations polled in the present study the same question about making an exception to rules against torture in the case of terrorists. While there has been little change overall, there have been some dramatic shifts within specific countries.

Only India had even a modest plurality favoring an exception for terrorists in 2006. In the current survey four countries (India, Kenya, Nigeria, and Turkey) had a majority supporting such exceptions, Thailand had a plurality, and South Korea was divided.

Five countries included in both surveys showed dramatic increases in support for allowing the torture of terrorists: India (from 32% to 59%), Kenya (38% to 58%), Nigeria (39% to 54%), Turkey (24% to 51%), and South Korea (31% to 51%). Substantial increases also occurred in Egypt (25% to 46%) and the United States (36% to 44%).

At the same time, there were equally dramatic increases among those favoring a complete ban on torture. Support grew substantially in Mexico (rising

from 50% to 73%), Spain (65% to 82%), China (49% to 66%), Indonesia (51% to 61%), Britain (72% to 82%), and Russia (43% to 49%).

On average, support for an exception went up six points, while support for an unequivocal rule went up one point. Thus the net increase in favor of an exception was just five points.

Why has support for allowing the torture of potential terrorists increased in certain countries since 2006? Civilians from three of the seven nations polled have suffered terrorist attacks over the past year and a half: India has endured attacks attributed to Kashmiri separatists and Turkey has been plagued by Kurdish

rebels. South Koreans underwent a six-week hostage drama in July and August, 2007 after Taliban rebels in Afghanistan kidnapped 23 Christian volunteers and then executed two of them. And the US public receives a steady stream of news reports about terrorist attacks in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Of the six countries with the largest increases in support for an unequivocal rule against torture, four (Spain, Britain, Indonesia, and Russia) suffered major terrorist attacks before the 2006 poll, but have not suffered major attacks since then. Thus it may be that after a terrorist attack the prohibition against using torture weakens, but then over time gradually reasserts itself.

# Women's Rights

*“Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedom set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex...”*

—Article 2

*“Men and women of full age... have the right to marry and found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.”*

—Article 16

- Large majorities in all nations favor equal rights for women and most perceive that women have been gaining greater equality.
- Majorities in all nations say that the government should actively work to prevent discrimination against women, and in many nations there is a broad desire for their government to make greater efforts.
- There is robust support for the UN playing an active role in promoting women's rights.
- Many see discrimination against widows and divorced women in their country.

Given that the idea that women should have equal rights is fairly new in the context of human history, there is remarkable global consensus on the issue. Large majorities in all nations support the principle that women should have “full equality of rights” and most say it is very important. This is true in Muslim countries as well as Western countries. In nearly all countries most people perceive that in their lifetime women have gained greater equality. Large majorities believe their government has the responsibility to seek to prevent discrimination against women and in many nations majorities want their government to make greater efforts. Large majorities in nearly every country polled favor the UN playing an active role. The study found widespread perceptions that widows and divorced women are treated worse than other women.

## Importance of Equality for Women

An overwhelming majority of people around the world say that it is important for “women to have full equality of rights compared to men.” Large majorities in all nations polled took this position, ranging from 60 percent in India to 98 percent in Mexico and Britain. On average, across the 20 nations polled, 86 percent said women's equality is important, with 59 percent saying it is very important.

Attitudes vary about whether such equality is very important or somewhat important. Large majorities said it is very important in Mexico (89%), Britain (89%), Turkey (80%), US (77%), China (76%), France (75%), Indonesia (71%), and Argentina (71%). Smaller percentages said it is very important in Egypt (31%), Russia (35%), India (41%), South Korea (43%), Ukraine (44%), and Iran (44%).

Support for equal rights is also robust in all Muslim countries. Large majorities said it is important in Iran (78%), Jordan (83%), Azerbaijan (85%), Egypt (90%), Indonesia (91%), Turkey (91%), and the Palestinian Territories (93%).

Men and women differ strikingly little on this question. On average, across all nations, 84 percent of men as well as 89 percent of women said equality is important. However a substantially larger percentage of women said that equality is very important (women 65%, men 53%). This pattern—women slightly more likely to say that equality is important, but substantially more likely to say it is very important—appears in nearly every country.

### Perceived Changes in Women’s Rights

Very large majorities in nearly all nations polled perceive that over the course of their own lifetime women have gained more equality of rights as compared to men. On average 72 percent perceived that women have gained greater equality of rights with 31 percent saying that they have gained much more equality and 41 percent saying they have a little more equality.

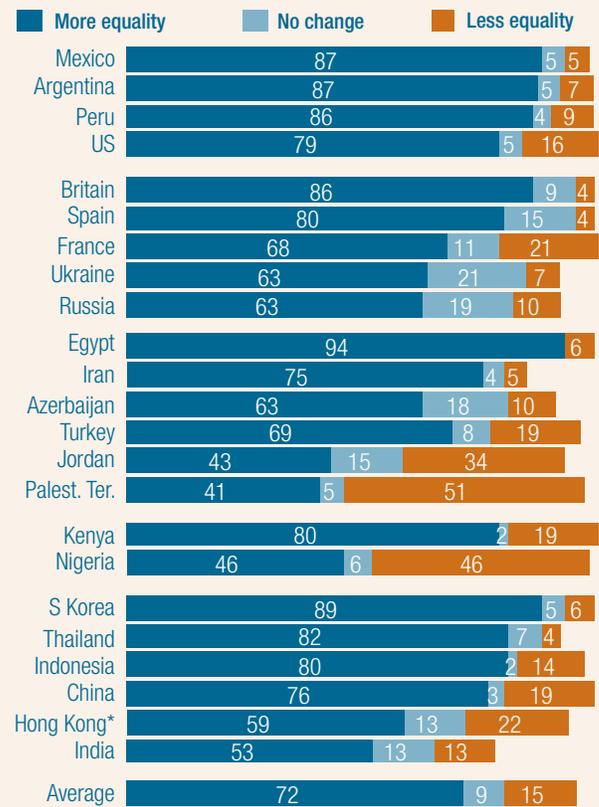
The two exceptions were the Palestinian Territories and Nigeria. Among Palestinians a slight majority (51%) said that women’s rights have become less equal, while 41 percent said they have grown more equal. Nigeria was divided, with 46 percent perceiving greater equality and 46 percent perceiving less equality.

While the countries of the former Soviet Union had majorities saying that women’s rights had improved, relatively large numbers said that there has been no real change or that women now have less equality, including 29 percent of Russians, and 28 percent of Ukrainians and Azerbaijanis. This may be due to the declining influence of Marxist-Leninist ideology that called for women’s rights.

India is unique in that only 53 percent said that women have gained greater equality, but an additional

### INCREASING EQUALITY FOR WOMEN

Thinking about the course of your lifetime, would you say, compared to the rights men have in this society, that women now have:



\* Not included in average of nations.

14 percent volunteered the response that women now have more rights than men, implying that a significant change has occurred.

There is also considerable variation among countries in the belief that women have gained “much more” equality. Majorities in Egypt (57%), Britain (52%), and Thailand (52%) said women have gained much more equality. In contrast, only 9 percent of Nigerians, 11 percent of Palestinians, and 15 percent of Jordanians had this perception.

Men and women overall differ little on the question of whether women have gained greater equality—74 percent of men and 70 percent of women agreed that this has occurred.

Considering the advances in women’s rights in recent

history, one might expect older respondents to more widely perceive women having much greater equality. Indeed among those over 60, 39 percent said women have much more equality, while only 28 percent said this among respondents from 18 – 29 years old.

### Government Intervention

There is very strong support for the government taking an active role to further women's rights. Majorities in all nations—with very large majorities in nearly all cases—said that “the government should make an effort to prevent discrimination against women.” Only small minorities endorsed the view that “the government should not be involved in this kind of thing.”

On average, 81 percent said the government should try to prevent discrimination against women, while 15

percent said the government should not be involved in this kind of thing.

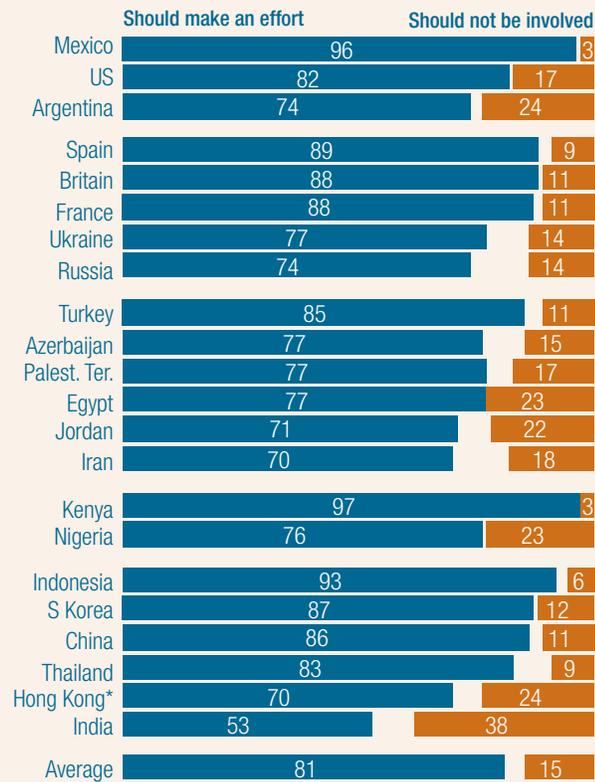
Kenya and Mexico had the largest majorities (97% and 96%, respectively) endorsing such intervention. India was the only country without a large majority favoring government action (53%) and the one with the largest minority saying the government should not be involved (38%).

Respondents who said their government should try to prevent discrimination were then asked whether it was doing enough in this regard. On average, 53 percent (of the full sample) felt that the government should do more, while 24 percent that the government is doing enough.

However there is substantial variation between nations. In 14 nations the most common view was

#### SHOULD GOVERNMENT PLAY A ROLE?

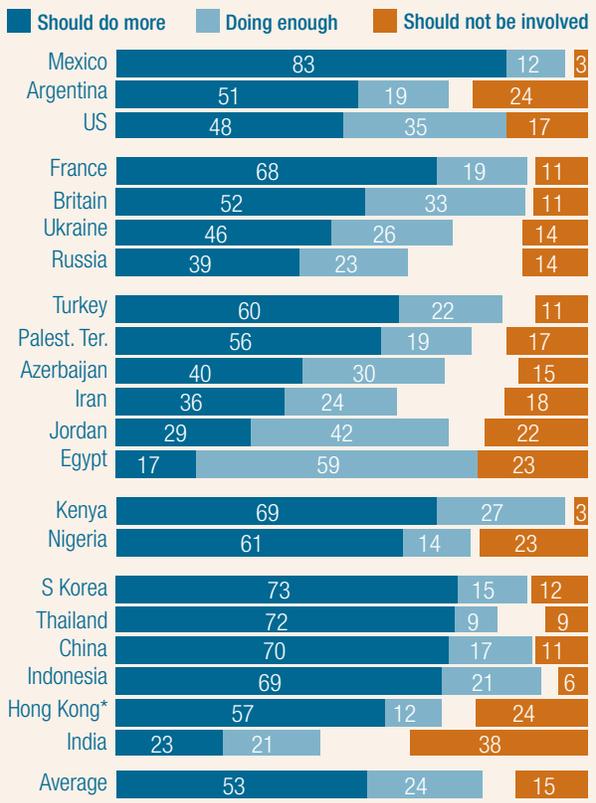
Do you think the government should make an effort to prevent discrimination against women, or do you think the government should not be involved in this kind of thing?



\* Not included in average of nations.

#### SHOULD GOVERNMENT DO MORE?

Do you think the government is doing enough to prevent discrimination against women or do you think it should do more?



\* Not included in average of nations.

that the government should do more. Majorities in 12 nations believed this: Mexico (83%), South Korea (73%), Thailand (72%), China (70%; Hong Kong, 57%), Indonesia (69%), Kenya (69%), France (68%), Turkey (60%), Nigeria (61%), Palestinian Territories (56%), Britain (52%), and Argentina (51%). Pluralities believed it in two countries: Ukraine (46%) and Russia (39%).

In six countries the most common view was that governments are either already doing enough to prevent discrimination or that they should not get involved; four of these were predominantly Muslim. More than four out of five Egyptians (82%) said that their government is either doing enough (59%) or that it should not do anything (23%). Sixty-four percent of Jordanians said that the government is doing enough (42%) or that it should not make an effort (22%). Pluralities were also opposed to greater intervention in Azerbaijan (30% doing enough, 15% should not be involved), and Iran (doing enough 24%, should not be involved 18%).

Interestingly two of the largest democracies also showed low support for greater efforts. Sixty-three percent of Indians said that the government should not be involved (38%), is doing enough (21%), or volunteered that the government is doing too much (4%). A more modest majority of Americans (52%) also thought that government efforts are already sufficient (35%) or should stop (17%).

Overall, women were only slightly more likely than men to say that the government should make an effort to prevent discrimination (83% to 78%). However, they were substantially more likely to say that the government should do more than it is to prevent discrimination against women (58% to 48%).

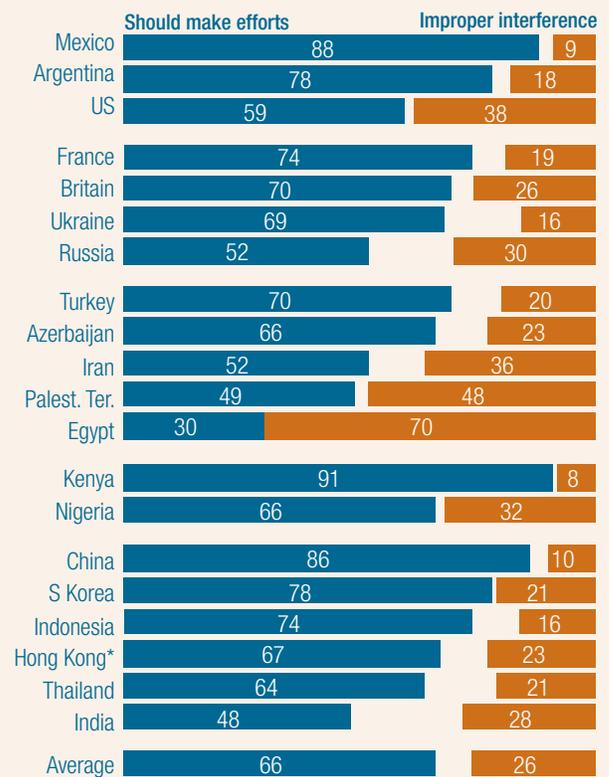
### The Role of the United Nations

Very large majorities in nearly every nation said that the United Nations should try to further women’s rights even when presented the argument that this would conflict with national sovereignty. Respondents

were asked, “Do you think the UN should make efforts to further the rights of women or do you think this is improper interference in a country’s internal affairs?”

#### SHOULD UN PLAY A ROLE?

Do you think the UN should make efforts to further the rights of women or do you think this is improper interference in a country’s internal affairs?



\* Not included in average of nations.

In 17 out of the 19 publics polled most favored UN efforts, including large majorities in Kenya (91%), Mexico (88%), China (86%; Hong Kong, 67%), Argentina (78%), South Korea (78%), France (74%), and Great Britain (70%) as did substantial majorities in the Ukraine (69%), Nigeria (66%), Thailand (64%) and the United States (59%). Support was more modest in Russia (52%) and India (48% favor, 28% opposed and 24% uncertain).

The two exceptions were Egypt, where most of those polled (70%) thought the United Nations should not

get involved in efforts to improve women's rights, and the Palestinian Territories where views were evenly divided.

In the other predominantly Muslim countries most supported UN efforts on women's rights, including Indonesia (74%), Turkey (70%), Azerbaijan (66%), and Iran (52%).

Overall on average, 66 percent approved of UN efforts to further the rights of women, while 26 percent said this would be improper interference.

Respondents with a bachelor's degree equivalent or higher tended to more widely support UN efforts in this area (70%) compared to those with less than a high school education (64%).

### Discrimination Against Widows and Divorced Women

In 12 of the 18 nations polled, about 4 in 10 perceived that there is some or a great deal of discrimination against widows. The same was true for discrimination against divorced women.

On average across all 18 nations, just 29 percent said there is no discrimination against widows at all, while 20 percent said there is a little, 27 percent some, and 16 percent a great deal. Similarly, for divorced women, an average of 27 percent said there is no discrimination, 21 percent said a little, 27 percent some, and 17 percent a great deal.

Given that people in most countries—including developed ones—recognize there is at least some discrimination against widows and divorced women, it appears that this may be a phenomenon of many countries, not just some traditional cultures.

Poorer treatment may take a variety of forms. In less developed countries, women's rights and development experts have long noted that wherever the wife has trouble securing her property rights after her husband's death, the widow and her children can become

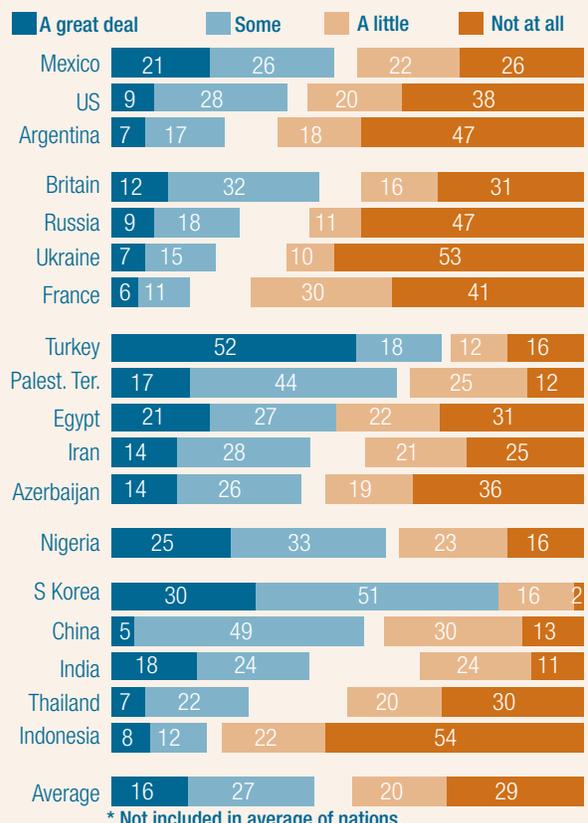
impoverished—in extreme cases by being stripped of her land or goods and expelled from the household. Divorce laws that do not recognize the wife's labor as constituting an economic stake in the household can have the same result. In developed countries, since women live longer, gaps in a country's social safety net are more likely to affect women. In the United States, for example, poverty rates for widows and divorced or separated women are far above the average.

While there have been no large-scale studies quantifying the scope of discrimination against widows and divorced women, the thousands of respondents in the poll report that the problem is quite widespread.

In six nations the dominant view was that there is "some" or a "great deal" of discrimination against

#### TREATMENT OF WIDOWED WOMEN

To what degree are women in [country] who are widowed treated worse than other women:



widows. This included majorities in South Korea (81%), Turkey (70%), the Palestinian Territories (61%), Nigeria (58%) and China (54%). In India, a substantial plurality agreed (42 to 35%), though India is a country that has received substantial international attention over the mistreatment of widows.

In Mexico and Great Britain views were divided, with nearly half of those who answered saying that widows are often treated unfairly in their country.

Only two countries had a majority saying that there is no discrimination against widows—Ukraine (53%) and Indonesia (54%).

Six more countries had a majority saying there is little or no discrimination. French (71%), Argentines (65%), Russians (58%), Americans (58%), Azerbaijanis (55%), and Egyptians (53%) were relatively sanguine about the treatment of widows in their societies. In Thailand half said there is little or no discrimination.

Interestingly, in China more thought widows are mistreated (54%) than thought divorced women are mistreated (46%). This pattern was also present in Nigeria and the Palestinian Territories.

Majorities said divorced women are treated worse than others in six nations: South Korea (82%), and in most of the largely Muslim nations polled—Egypt (80%), Turkey (72%), the Palestinian Territories (53%), Iran (51%), and Azerbaijan (54%). Pluralities agreed in India (46%).

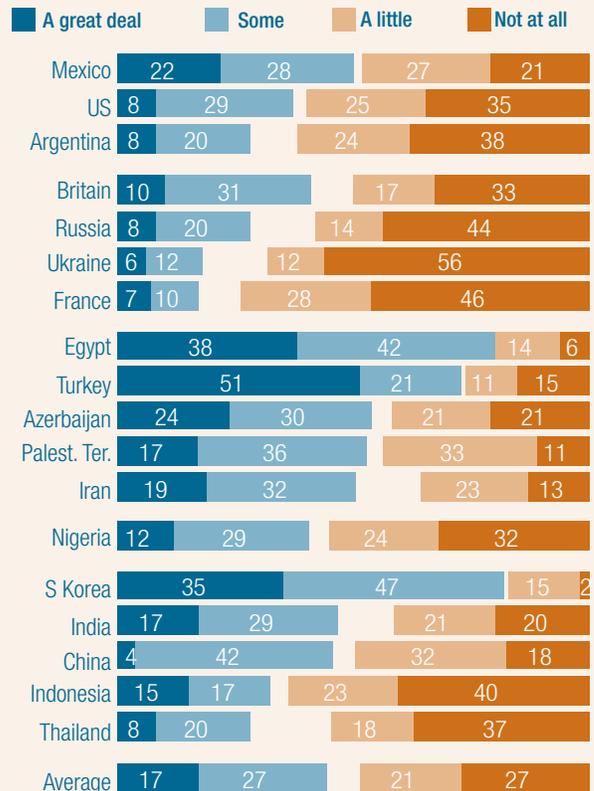
Out of 18 nations, only one—Ukraine—had a majority (56%) saying that divorced women are not discriminated against at all.

Another seven had majorities who thought there is no more than a little discrimination against divorced women in their country. These include the French (74%), Russians (58%), Indonesians (63%), Argentines (62%), Americans (60%), Nigerians (56%), and Thais (55%).

Perceptions of the extent of discrimination vary widely between countries. The breadth or intensity

### TREATMENT OF DIVORCED WOMEN

How about women who are divorced? To what degree are they treated worse than other women:



\* Not included in average of nations.

of the perception does not necessarily correlate with the actual magnitude of discrimination. In countries where discrimination is customary and unchallenged people may find it so lacking in salience that they do not readily note it. On the other hand, in countries where there have recently been efforts to mitigate such discrimination people may be more aware of it, even though it is improving.

For example, South Korea had the largest majorities believing that widows (81%) and divorcees (82%) are mistreated in their country. Recently South Korea enacted legal reforms advancing women’s status, and in 2005 its high court granted women for the first time the right to claim an equal share in jointly owned family property. Up until this year, South Korea employed a family registry system under which

the status of “widow or divorcee” could cause some complications. Such changes may well have raised the salience of the issue in the minds of Koreans.

Similarly, a large majority in Turkey (70%) perceived discrimination against widows with the largest number (52%) of any of the nations polled saying that they are mistreated a great deal. The same pattern applies to divorced women—72 percent of the Turkish public thought divorced women are mistreated, with 51 percent saying a great deal. This issue may have gained a greater profile in Turkish society as part of the process of Turkey seeking accession into the European Union. The European Parliament said that while women have officially had full political rights in Turkey since the 1930s, customary treatment of women in the country’s southeast has varied from the legal ideal.

In Egypt, an overwhelming majority (80%) thought that divorced women are mistreated (a great deal, 38%; some, 42%), though a substantially lower number (48%) perceived this level of discrimination of widows. Egyptian law has been criticized by Human Rights Watch for its differing forms of initiating divorce for men and women, for denying the woman property rights in the marital home unless she has a specific legal title, and for the “obedience law” which conditions alimony on obedience to the ex-husband.

In the Palestinian Territories, majorities thought that both widows and divorced women are discriminated against (61% and 53%, respectively). Of the two, widows were more widely viewed as being mistreated. The perception that widows are discriminated against was stronger among the young (18-29 years, 60%; 60 years and older, 38%), among low-income people, and interestingly, among men (men 65%, women 56%). Family relations in the Territories are still governed by Egyptian legal codes (in Gaza) or Jordanian ones (in the West Bank), because no unified Palestinian law has been finalized. The Territories have been criticized for having differing forms of initiating divorce for women and men, and for having inheritance laws that discriminate against women.

In Nigeria, a clear majority (58%) thought widows experience at least some mistreatment in their country, while a lesser 41 percent thought that divorced women are mistreated. Those living in rural areas, having lower income, or advanced in years were more likely to think widows are mistreated. Majorities of both Christians (62%) and Muslims (54%) held this view. Recently, a new law banning traditional practices harmful to widows was passed in one of Nigeria’s eastern states, gaining attention for the issue across Nigeria.

In China, a 54-percent majority saw widows as discriminated against, while a lesser 46 percent saw this as being the case for divorced women. This view of widows’ situation is stronger among women (60%) than among men (48%), and slightly stronger among the young (18-29 years, 60%). The Chinese government has engaged in significant legal reforms to protect women’s rights since the 1990s. Inheritance laws today guarantee the inheritance rights of widows, but a traditional stigma on widows’ remarrying has not entirely faded away.

Variations may also be affected by personal experience of widowhood. The Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s greatly increased the number of widows in Iran in the population at that time. Their children are now adults, and the age gap on this issue is extraordinary. Among those aged 60 and over only 18 percent thought widows are mistreated in Iran, while 67 percent do not. But among those aged 18 to 29, 53 percent did think widows are mistreated, and only 37 percent did not.

India seems to follow a different pattern. The national government has enacted numerous laws to protect women’s rights, including complete prohibitions against traditional practices for which India is famous, such as the burning of widows (Sati) and the giving or receiving of dowries of any size. However, enforcement has been challenging, and there are many regional, religious and caste variants of family law which tend to escape government jurisdiction.

Despite the prominence of the issue, perceptions of discrimination were relatively modest, with a plurality of 42 percent saying that widows are discriminated against (though those with more education were more likely to see widows as mistreated). This may be related to a relatively low level of consensus about the importance of women's rights, or the need for action against discrimination: lower than in any of the other countries polled.

As noted above in this chapter, WorldPublicOpinion.org has found that while the majority (60%) of the public in India felt that women's rights are important, this is less than in any of the other 15 countries surveyed (global average 86% important). Furthermore, fewer Indians felt the government should have a role in preventing discrimination against women (53%) than the global average (80%) or that the government should do more to prevent discrimination against women (India 44%, global average 77%).

# Racial and Ethnic Equality

*“Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race...”*

—Article 2

- **Publics around the world overwhelmingly endorse the principle that people of different races and ethnicities should be treated equally.**
- **In nearly all nations majorities say that employers should not have the right to discriminate based on race or ethnicity.**
- **Most publics say that governments should take action to prevent racial discrimination and many say that their government should do so more than it is.**
- **In most, but not all nations people see racial discrimination diminishing.**

**V**ery large majorities in all countries say people of different races and ethnicities should be treated equally. In nearly every country large majorities say that employers should not be allowed to discriminate based on race or ethnicity and that it is the government’s responsibility to stop this from happening. In general, large majorities agree that governments should take action to prevent racial discrimination, and in most of them majorities think they need to do more. In most countries most believe treatment of different races has grown more equal over the course of their lifetime, but in six countries this is not the case.

## Racial and Ethnic Equality

Majorities in all 21 nations considered it important for “people of different races and ethnicities to be treated equally.” In 17 countries, majorities said this is “very important.” On average, 91 percent said that treating people of different races and ethnicities equally is important, with 69 percent saying it is very important. No more than 13 percent in any country said it is not important.

Overwhelming majorities said racial equality is very important in Mexico (94%), China (90%; Hong Kong, 47%), and Britain (87%), along with large majorities in Kenya (80%), the United States (79%), Indonesia (75%), Jordan (73%), Turkey (73%), Argentina (72%), Egypt (71%), South Korea (71%), Nigeria (71%), Peru (70%), the Palestinian Territories (70%), France (69%), Azerbaijan (68%), and Iran (62%). Smaller numbers agreed in Russia (37%), Thailand (39%), India (44%), and Ukraine (50%).

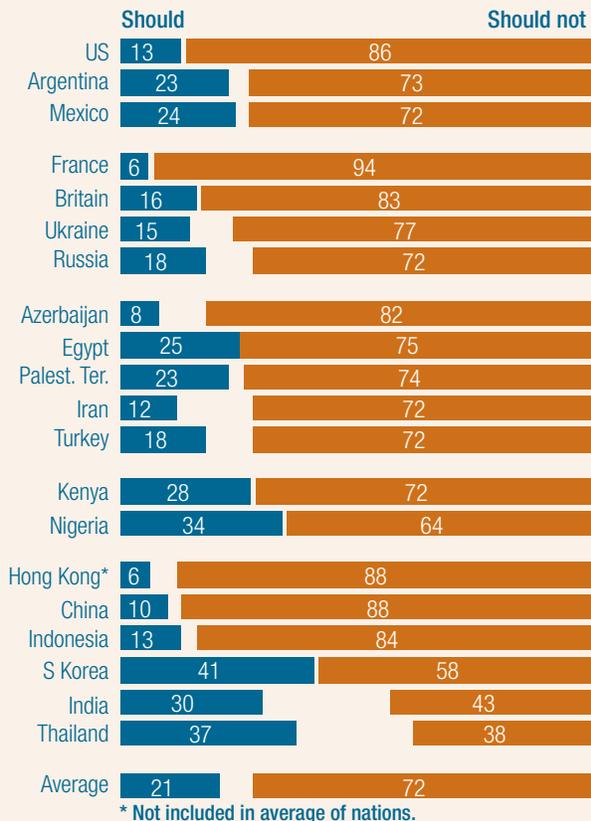
## Workplace Discrimination

Majorities in 17 out of 19 nations agreed that employers should not have the right to discriminate. Asked whether employers should be allowed to “refuse to hire a qualified person because of the person’s race or ethnicity,” on average 72 percent said employers should not be able to base hiring decisions on race, while just 21 percent believed they should.

Majorities against workplace discrimination were largest in France (94%), China (88%--the same in Hong Kong), the United States (86%), Indonesia (84%), Britain (83%), and Azerbaijan (82%).

**SHOULD EMPLOYERS BE ALLOWED TO DISCRIMINATE?**

Do you think that employers should be allowed to refuse to hire a qualified person because of the person's race or ethnicity?



Thailand and India stand apart from the other countries polled. Thais were divided on whether employers should be allowed to discriminate based on race or ethnicity (37%) or whether they should not (38%). In India, although a plurality opposed such discrimination, an unusually high 30 percent said that employers should be allowed to reject jobseekers because of race or ethnicity. Relatively large minorities also agreed that employers should be free to hire whom they choose in Nigeria (34%) and South Korea (41%), though in both cases, majorities were opposed (64% and 58%, respectively).

Majorities in 16 out of 19 nations believed that the government has the responsibility to stop employers from discriminating. On average, 58 percent believed that the government has the responsibility to take

action against such practices, while just 14 percent believed it does not.

Indonesians (80%) and the Chinese (77%; Hong Kong, 66%) believed overwhelmingly that the government should try to prevent discriminatory hiring practices, followed by Azerbaijanis (72%), the French (69%), Americans (69%), Britons (69%), Ukrainians (65%), Mexicans (64%), Kenyans (63%), Iranians (61%), and Argentines (60%). More modest majorities agreed in Russia (58%), Egypt (56%), Nigeria (56%), the Palestinian Territories (53%), and South Korea (53%). Among Thais, 36 percent said the government has this responsibility, while nine percent disagree.

Two countries differ: Turkey and India. Only 23 percent of Turks said that the government has the responsibility to take measures against workplace discrimination and 43 percent said it does not. Among Indians, just 27 percent said that government has this responsibility, while 20 percent said it does not.

The belief that employers should not be allowed to refuse to hire a qualified person because of race or ethnicity increased slightly with education (69% with high school education, 75% with more than a bachelor's degree). Those respondents with higher education levels were also more likely to think that the government has a responsibility to prevent employers from refusing to hire someone because of race or ethnicity (53% with a high school education, 65% with more than a bachelor's degree).

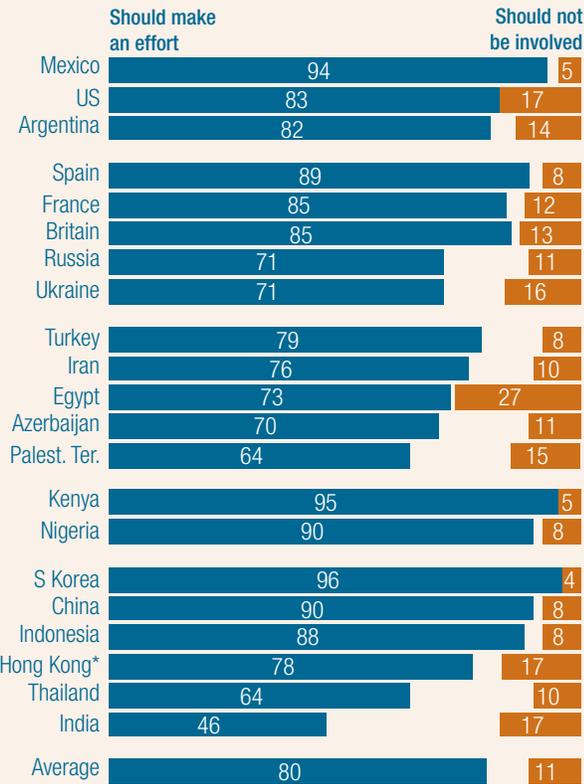
**Wide Support for Government Action**

Majorities around the world agree that governments should act to ensure that minorities are treated equally. On average, 80 percent agreed that the government "should make an effort to prevent discrimination based on a person's race or ethnicity," while just 11 percent felt that the government should not be involved.

Support for government action was greatest in South Korea (96%), Kenya (95%), Mexico (94%), China

**SHOULD GOVERNMENT PLAY A ROLE?**

Do you think the government should make an effort to prevent discrimination based on a person's race or ethnicity, or do you think the government should not be involved in this kind of thing?



\* Not included in average of nations.

(90%; Hong Kong, 78%), Nigeria (90%), Spain (89%), and Indonesia (88%). Very large majorities also favored such efforts in Britain (85%), France (85%), the United States (83%), Argentina (82%), Turkey (79%), and Iran (76%).

Only in India did less than half of the public (46%) favor government action. Seventeen percent opposed such action while large numbers were uncertain.

A respondent's age or education level did not affect their belief about whether the government should be involved in ensuring that minorities are treated equally.

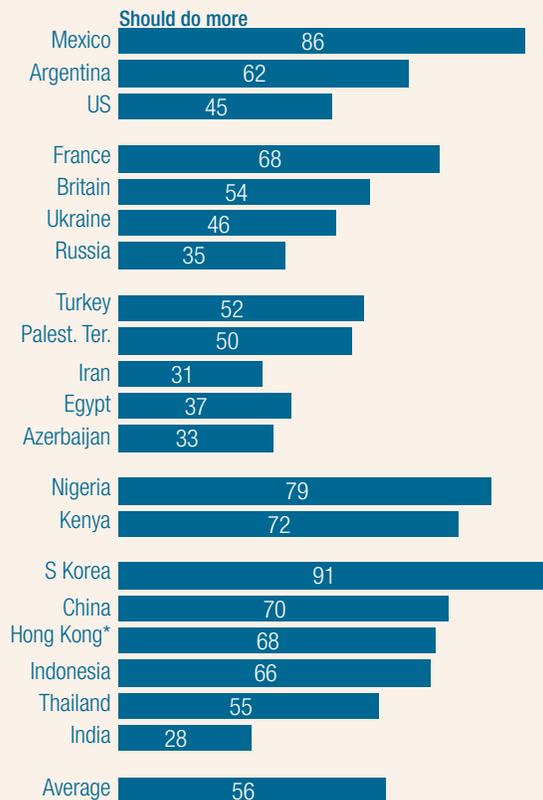
In 13 of the 19 nations polled, the most common view was that governments should go further to prevent racial and ethnic discrimination. On average across

all nations polled, 56 percent said the government should do more, while 21 percent felt it is already doing enough. Just 5 percent volunteered that their government already does too much.

Overwhelming numbers of South Koreans (91%) and Mexicans (86%) supported greater government efforts along with 79 percent of Nigerians. Large majorities also supported further government action in Kenya, (72%), China (70%; Hong Kong, 68%), France (68%), Indonesia (66%), and Argentina (62%), while more modest majorities held this view in Thailand (55%), Britain (54%), and Turkey (52%). Pluralities agreed in the Palestinian Territories (50%) and Ukraine (46%). Indians, Americans, Russians, and several Muslim publics expressed more mixed views.

**SHOULD GOVERNMENT DO MORE?**

Do you think the government is doing enough to prevent racial discrimination or do you think it should do more?



\* Not included in average of nations.

The largest percentage opposed to government action against discrimination was found in India, where 38 percent say that the government should not be involved (17%) or that it is doing too much (21%). However, this lower number may be due in part to the robust affirmative action programs in favor of the lower castes implemented by the Indian government. The question of race or ethnicity can be seen as more relevant to the Indian caste system.

Americans held divided views: 55 percent said the government is already doing enough (38%) or should not be involved (17%), but a robust 45 percent said the government should do more. Results were similar in Russia, where 39 percent said the government is doing enough (24%), too much (4%), or should not be involved (11%), but 35 percent thought it should do more.

Three Muslim countries have mixed views. In Iran two out of five (40%) said the government already does enough to prevent racial and ethnic discrimination and another 10 percent said it should not do anything. But nearly a third (31%) thought it should do more. Egyptians were almost evenly divided between those who said the government should take further action (37%) and those who said it does enough (36%). In Azerbaijan, 34 percent said the government does enough and 33 percent wanted it to do more.

Respondents aged 18 to 29 were more likely to think that the government should do more, compared to respondents 60 years and over by a margin of roughly 6 points.

### Majorities See Improvement

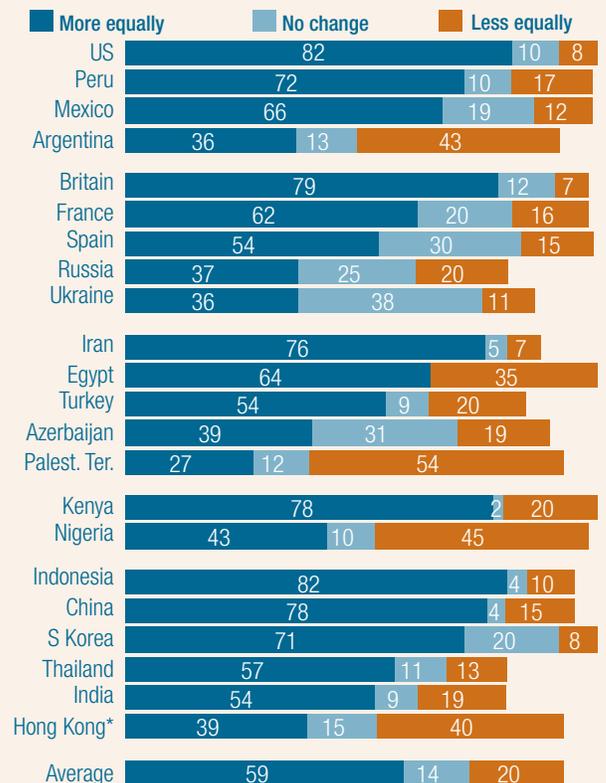
In 15 of the 21 nations polled, majorities said that over the course of their lifetime people of different races and ethnicities have come to be treated more equally. On average, 59 percent said people of different races and ethnicities are treated more equally than in the past, including 21 percent who said much more equally. Only 20 percent believed people are treated less equally than before and 14 percent said there has been no real change.

The United States and Indonesia had the largest majorities (82% in both) saying that racial and ethnic minorities enjoy greater equality than in the past, followed by Britain (79%), China (78%), Kenya (78%), and Iran (76%). The United States (42%), Britain (39%), and China (34%) had the largest percentages saying such minorities are treated “much more equally.” Hong Kong was markedly different from mainland China; there just 39 percent said minorities are treated more equally (much more, 15%).

Palestinians are the one public that perceived a retrogressive movement. A majority of Palestinians (54%) said people of different races and ethnicities are now treated less equally than in the past while only 27 percent said they get better treatment. However this may be a reference to Israeli government action toward

### PERCEIVED INCREASE IN RACIAL EQUALITY

Thinking about the course of your lifetime, would you say, compared to the past, people of different races and ethnicities are now treated:



\* Not included in average of nations.

Palestinians rather than treatment of other ethnic groups.

Views were mixed about whether minorities are treated more equally in five countries: Nigeria (43% more equal, 45% less equal, 10% no change), Argentina (36% more, 43% less, 13% no change) and three former Soviet states, Ukraine (36% more equal,

11% less, 38% no real change), Azerbaijan (39% more, 19% less, 31% no change) and Russia (more 37%, less 20%, no change 25%).

Respondents 60 years of age or older were more likely to say that racial minorities in their country are treated “much more equally” than younger respondents by a margin of 6 points (27% to 21%).

# Social and Economic Rights

*“Everyone has the right to...food...medical care... [and] education.”*

—Articles 25-26

- All publics overwhelmingly endorse the view that governments should be responsible for ensuring that their citizens can meet their basic needs for food, healthcare, and education.
- Publics vary widely on how well they perceive their government fulfilling these responsibilities.

Very large majorities in every country say their government should be responsible for ensuring that citizens can meet their basic needs for food, healthcare, and education. However, there are wide variations in how people perceive their governments to be fulfilling these responsibilities.

## Government Responsibility for Basic Needs

### Food

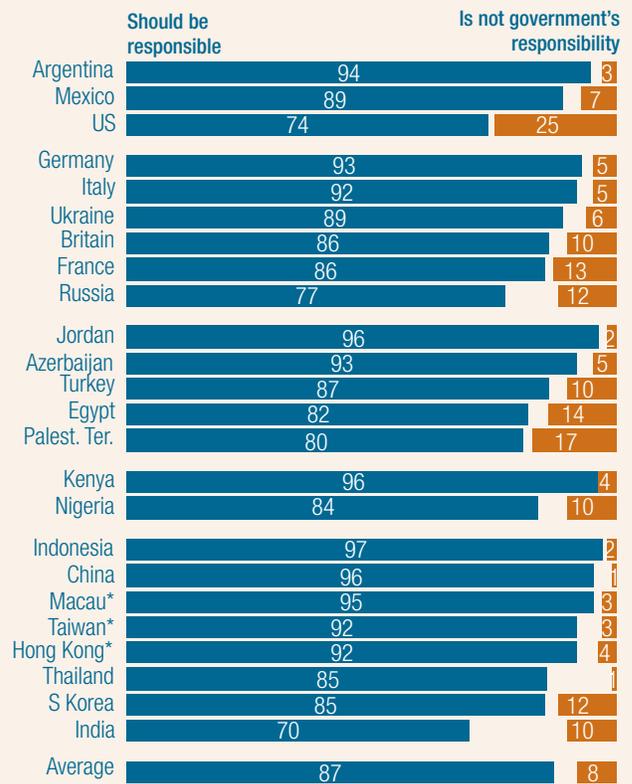
When asked whether their “government should be responsible for ensuring that its citizens can meet their basic need for food,” or whether “you think that is not the government’s responsibility,” majorities of 70 to 97 percent in all 21 countries said government should be responsible for this. The average was 87 percent.

The most universal support was found in eight publics where more than nine in 10 believed the government should be responsible for citizens’ needs for food: Indonesia (97%), China (96%), Jordan (96%), Kenya (96%), Argentina (94%), Azerbaijan (93%), Germany (93%), and Italy (92%).

Even the lowest majorities saying the government is

### GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITY: FOOD NEEDS

Do you think the [country's] government should be responsible for ensuring that its citizens can meet their basic need for food, OR do you think that is NOT the government's responsibility?



\* Not included in average of nations.

responsible in this case were well above half, including Indians (70%), Americans (74%), and Russians (77%).

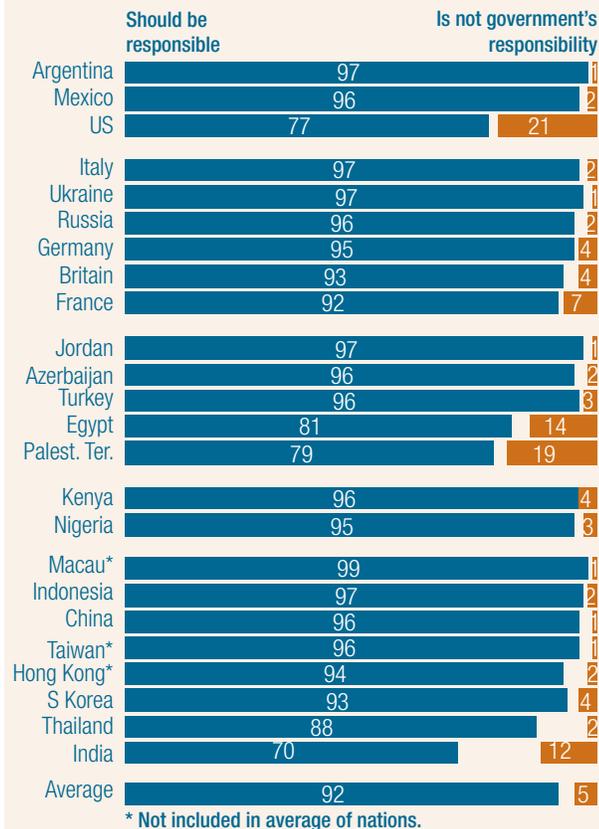
The publics with significant numbers saying the government does *not* have the responsibility to ensure access to food included the United States (25%), the Palestinian Territories (17%), and France (13%).

*Healthcare*

When asked about government responsibility in regard to “the basic need for healthcare,” majorities of the same magnitude (70–97%) in all countries polled saw ensuring that people can meet this need as one of government’s responsibilities. The average majority was 92 percent and in all but five countries support is greater than 90 percent.

**GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITY: HEALTHCARE**

What about the basic need for healthcare? Do you think the government should or should not be responsible for ensuring that people can meet this need?



Ninety-seven percent said the government should have this responsibility in Argentina, Italy, Ukraine, Jordan, and Indonesia, and 96 percent agreed in Azerbaijan, Mexico, Russia, Turkey, Kenya, and China. Ninety-five percent took this view in Germany and Nigeria, 93 percent in Britain and South Korea, and 92 percent in France.

The only nations to have less than 90 percent saying the government has the responsibility to provide healthcare include India (70%), the United States (77%), the Palestinian Territories (79%), Egypt (81%), and Thailand (88%). The publics with the highest numbers saying that the government does not have such a responsibility were the Americans (21%), the Palestinians (19%), and Egyptians (14%).

*Education*

On education, majorities ranging from 64 to 98 percent also saw the government as responsible for ensuring that people can meet their basic needs. The average majority was 91 percent and in only six nations did majorities of less than 90 percent take this position.

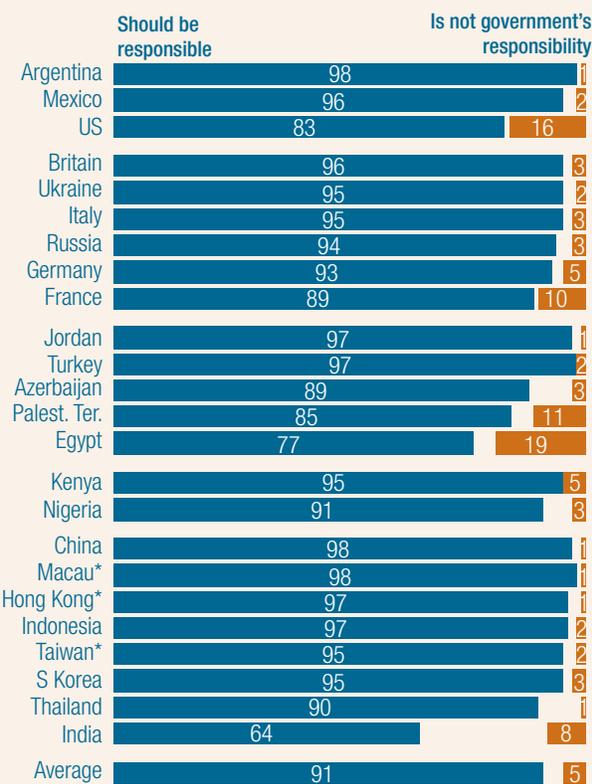
Virtually unanimous majorities in Argentina (98%) and China (98%) said the government has the responsibility to ensure its citizens’ educational needs are met. In three countries, 97 percent agreed (Indonesia, Turkey, and Jordan), 96 percent in two countries (Mexico and Great Britain), 95 percent in four countries (Italy, Ukraine, South Korea, and Kenya), 94 percent in Russia, 93 percent in Germany, and 91 percent in Nigeria.

Very large majorities slightly below the global average said the government has this responsibility in Thailand (90%), Azerbaijan (89%), France (89%), the Palestinian Territories (85%), and the United States (83%). Egypt (77%) and India (64%) had the smallest majorities in support, although 19 percent in India volunteered “depends” as their answer.

Egyptians had the largest minority saying the government is not responsible for education (19%), followed by Americans (16%).

**GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITY: EDUCATION**

What about the basic need for education? Do you think the government should or should not be responsible for ensuring that people can meet this need?



\* Not included in average of nations.

**Assessments of Government Efforts**

Respondents were asked how well they feel the government is ensuring that people can meet their basic needs for food, education, and healthcare. They were not asked to assess how well their government was fulfilling these responsibilities in absolute terms, but rather in the context of “the limits of the[ir] ... government’s resources.” Broadly, publics answered in ways that clearly distinguished between different responsibilities and took into account constraints on the government’s means. Improvements over recent decades, as measured by bodies such as the World Health Organization, seem to have been registered by publics.

The UN Development Programme rates 177 countries by their level of human development (the Human

Development Index). In reporting this poll, countries that receive a ranking of 1-35 were classified as “developed,” 36-80 as “middle tier” and 81-177 as “developing.”

Among the six developed countries in the poll, the one public that gives their government positive ratings in all categories is Great Britain. The United States gets positive ratings in regard to food and education, but not healthcare. Germans give positive ratings for food and healthcare, but not for education. The French give positive ratings for education and healthcare, but not for food. South Koreans give a positive rating for education, but not for food or healthcare. Italians give poor ratings for food and healthcare, and divided ratings for education.

Among the five middle tier countries, views are consistently negative. Argentines, Russians, and Ukrainians give their countries negative ratings in all areas. Mexicans are negative in regard to education and food, though positive about healthcare. Thais give negative ratings on food and healthcare, though lean positively on education.

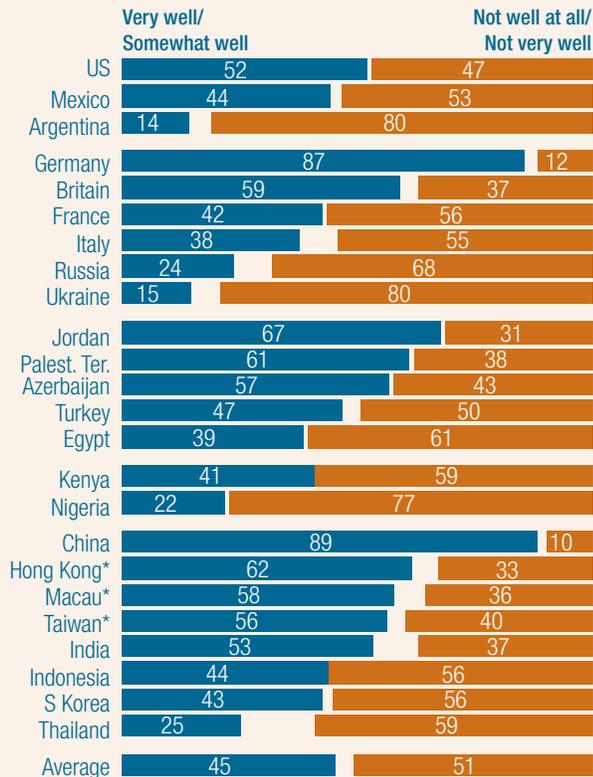
Interestingly, views tend to be the most positive in the 10 developing nations—underscoring how governments are assessed relative to their efforts and progress rather than in absolute terms. In China, India, Jordan, and the Palestinian Territories, majorities give positive ratings for all categories. In Turkey, Indonesia, and Kenya majorities are satisfied in all areas except food. Azerbaijanis are satisfied in all areas except healthcare. Egyptians are only satisfied in the area of education, while Nigerians are dissatisfied in all areas.

*Government Efforts on Food*

Perhaps in response to concerns about rising food costs, access to food is the need with the largest number of countries (12 out of 21) saying their government is doing a poor job. On average, 51 percent said their government is not ensuring citizens can meet this need well, while 45 percent said it is.

**GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE: FOOD NEEDS**

Keeping in mind the limits of the [country's] government's resources, please tell me how well the government is ensuring that people can meet the basic need for food?



\* Not included in average of nations.

The most negative perceptions of government performance on meeting citizens' need for food came from the middle tier of countries, with very large majorities in Argentina (80% not well), Ukraine (80%), and Russia (68%) having this view. It is notable that two post-Soviet states give their national governments very low marks on food security—particularly Russia, whose government leadership receives high marks in general in other polls. Modest majorities of Thais (59%) and Mexicans (53%) also agreed their government is doing a poor job.

Among the 10 developing countries, perceptions range from quite negative to very positive on the issue of food. Most in five developing countries rated their governments poorly on ensuring access to food, including Nigeria (77%), Egypt (61%), Kenya (59%), Indonesia (56%), and Turkey (50%).

However, an overwhelming 89 percent in China said their government is doing a good job ensuring citizens' access to food. China's overall increase in standard of living has been widely reported; its GNP per capita has grown fivefold since 1990.

Publics polled in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau give more tepid, but still positive evaluations. In Taiwan, a 56-percent majority said their government is doing a good job ensuring citizens' access to food, though 40 percent said "not well." In Hong Kong a 62-percent majority agreed (33% not well), so did a 58-percent majority in Macau (36% not well).

Also giving their governments a positive rating on ensuring its citizens' access to food were 67 percent of Jordanians, 61 percent of Palestinians, 57 percent of Azerbaijanis, and a modest majority of Indians (53%). Jordan had less than 2 percent of its people living below the world poverty line (less than \$1 a day) in 2003, and has been successful in reducing the percentage of small children who are underweight.

Opinions also range widely among the six developed countries in the poll, with three publics criticizing their governments for performing poorly in meeting this need: France (56% not well), South Korea (56%) and Italy (55%). In contrast, a very large majority in Germany (87%) said its government is meeting this need well, as did smaller majorities in Great Britain (59%) and the United States (52%).

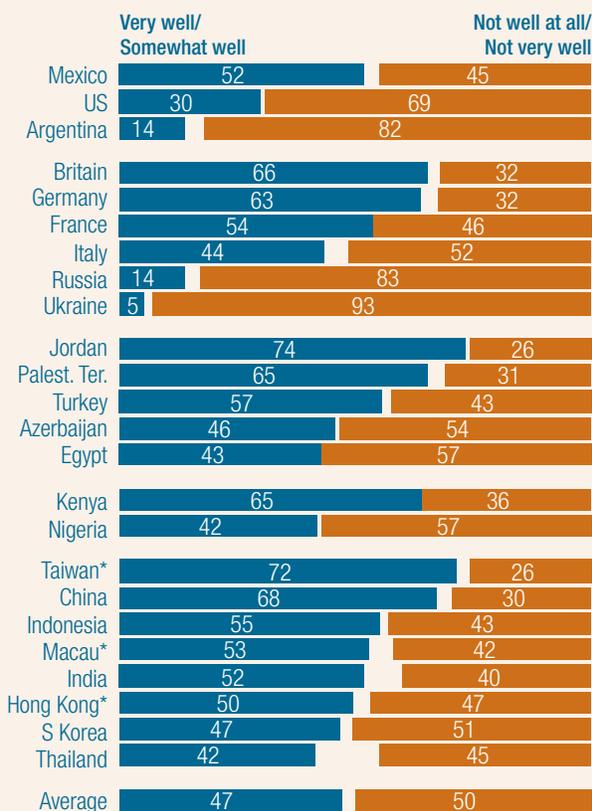
*Government Efforts on Healthcare*

Global perceptions on government performance in ensuring healthcare are generally divided, although 11 publics had majorities saying the government is doing a good job, compared to nine that said it is doing poorly, with one country divided. On average, 50 percent said their government is not ensuring citizens can meet their healthcare needs well, while 47 percent said it is doing well.

Americans satisfaction with their government's performance on this right (30% well) is far below the world average (47% well).

**GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE: HEALTHCARE**

How well is the government ensuring that people can meet the need for healthcare?



\* Not included in average of nations.

Most developing countries said that their government is ensuring that its citizens can meet their healthcare needs at least somewhat well; seven out of 10 had majorities with this view. Jordanians rated their government’s performance most positively (74% well), followed by the Chinese (68%), the Palestinians (65%), Kenyans (65%), Turks (57%), Indonesians (55%), and Indians (52%). Jordan’s per capita expenditure on health grew 50 percent between 2000 and 2005, and its infant mortality rate was one-third lower in 2006 than it had been 15 years earlier. Its public appears to see and applaud these efforts.

Egyptians and Nigerians were the most negative among this group, with 57 percent of each public saying the government is not doing its job well on healthcare. Azerbaijanis were close behind with 54 percent holding this view.

Four out of the five middle tier countries said their government is doing a poor job ensuring its citizens can meet their healthcare needs, including an overwhelming 93 percent in Ukraine, 83 percent in Russia, and 82 percent in Argentina. This leaned slightly negative: 45 percent said their government is doing a poor job, while 42 percent said it is performing well. Of this group, only Mexico had a modest majority (52%) saying the government is doing a good job meeting this need.

Developed countries are somewhat divided on how well their governments are doing on this issue, with three countries rating their governments positively and three negatively. Majorities in Great Britain (66%), Germany (63%), and France (54%) said their government is doing a good job. Conversely, nearly seven in 10 Americans (69%) said their government is not doing this well. Slight majorities in Italy (52%) and South Korea (51%) also rated their government negatively.

*Government Efforts on Education*

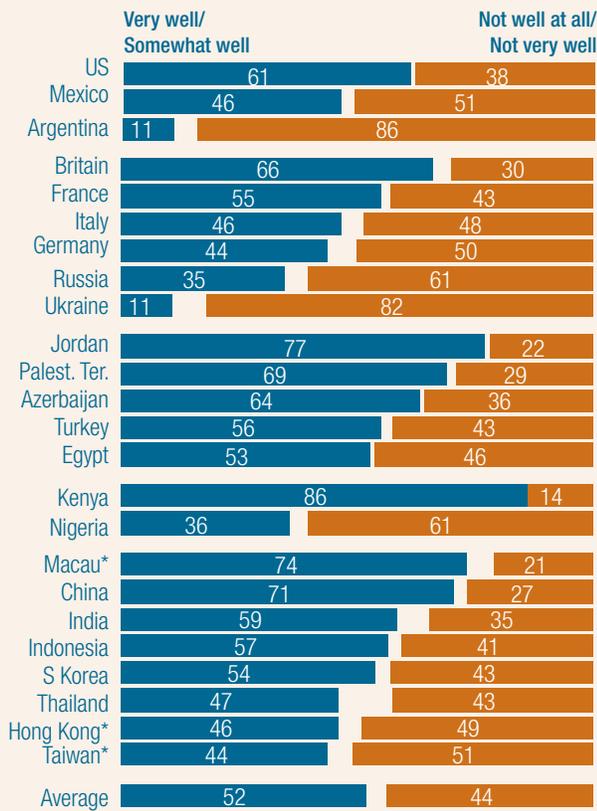
On the topic of education, global publics are somewhat more positive. Fourteen out of 21 publics polled had majorities or pluralities saying the government is doing a good job ensuring citizens can meet this need. Publics in six others had majorities or pluralities saying it is not doing this very well, while one public was divided. On average, a slight majority (52%) said their government is doing a good job ensuring citizens can meet their need for education, while 44 percent said it is not doing this well.

Nine of the 10 developing countries polled said the government is doing a good job ensuring its citizens can meet their educational needs. Kenyans were the most positive (86% well), followed by Jordanians (77%), Chinese (71%), the Palestinians (69%), and Azerbaijanis (64%).

This overwhelming majority in Kenya may have been responding still to the 2003 introduction of free, universal primary education, when, in one day,

**GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE: EDUCATION**

How well is the government ensuring that people can meet the need for education?



\* Not included in average of nations.

1.3 million new students were brought into Kenya’s classrooms. By 2005 enrollment reached almost 80 percent of children, despite the great challenges faced by the country’s educational resources. High approval in Jordan and the Palestinian Territories may be associated with the expansion of education since the 1990s.

Majorities in India (59%), Indonesia (57%), Turkey (56%), and Egypt (53%) also said the government is doing this at least somewhat well. Only Nigerians had a majority (61%) saying the government is doing a poor job ensuring educational needs among this group of countries.

Developed countries have mixed views on their government’s performance on ensuring its citizens’ educational needs. In four countries, majorities said

their government is meeting this need well: Great Britain (66%), the United States (61%), France (55%), and South Korea (54%). However, half in Germany (50%) believed their government is not doing a good job ensuring its citizens can meet their basic needs for education. Opinion in Italy was divided (46% well, 48% not well), where school dropout rates are higher than the European Union as a whole and national reform of its system is underway.

Again, the most negative perceptions of government performance came from the middle tier countries, where the worst ratings were given by Argentines (86%) and Ukrainians (82%). Majorities of Russians (61%) and Mexicans (51%) also said their governments are doing a poor job. A plurality of Thais (47%) tended to think that their government is performing well, although a high 43-percent said that is not performing well.

Interestingly, respondents with greater education were more likely to feel the government was meeting educational needs poorly than were those with less education. A similar effect was seen among older respondents, who viewed the government as meeting the educational needs of its citizens more poorly than did younger respondents.

# Governance and the Will of the People

*“The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage...”*

—Article 21

- **Publics in all nations agree that the will of the people should be the basis of the authority of government and that government leaders should be selected through elections.**
- **World publics express broad dissatisfaction with how responsive their government is to the will of the people and this is highly related to low levels of trust in government.**
- **There is broad support for the government being more attentive to public opinion, including paying attention to polls and having a government agency to study public preferences on policy.**
- **Majorities in most countries think their government should also be more responsive to world public opinion.**

In every nation polled, publics show strong support for the principles of democracy. Majorities in all nations agree with the democratic principle that “the will of the people should be the basis for the authority of government.” Majorities in all countries also endorse the view that government leaders should be selected through elections.

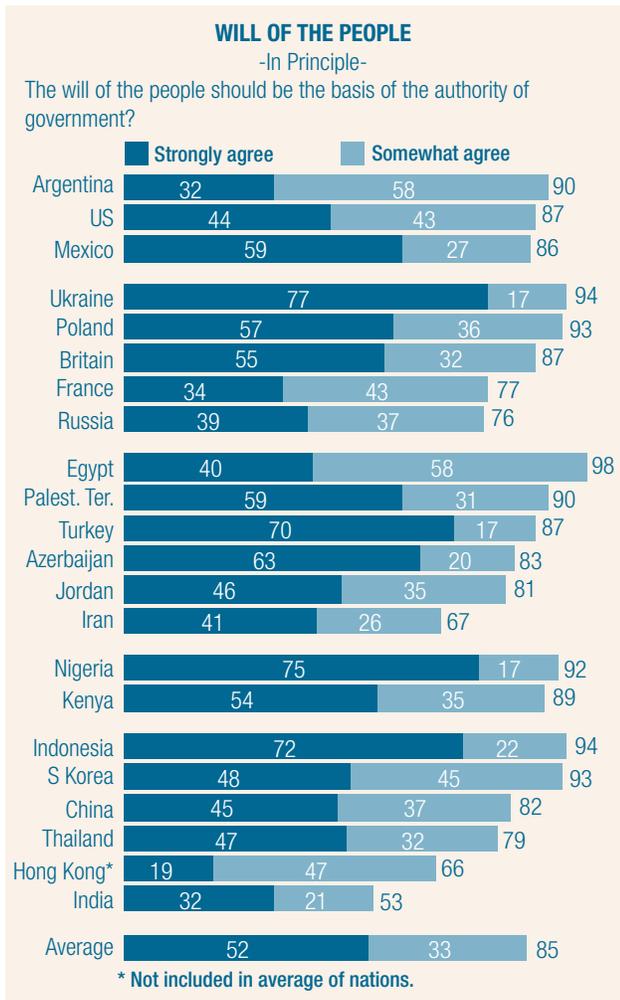
At the same time, in nearly every nation, majorities express dissatisfaction with how responsive their government is to the will of the people. Most people polled see their governments as primarily serving big interests rather than the people as a whole. The perception that governments are not responsive to the popular will appears to contribute to low levels of confidence in government.

## Strong Support for Democratic Principles

In all 21 nations polled majorities agreed with the democratic principle that “the will of the people should be the basis for the authority of government.” On average 85 percent agreed—52 percent “strongly.”

Interestingly, the most robust support for this principle does not come from the western democracies. The largest percentages saying that they *strongly* agree with this principle were found in Ukraine (77%), Nigeria (75%), Turkey (70%), and Indonesia (72%)

Among western democracies the numbers in strong agreement were more modest: France (34%), the United States (44%), and Great Britain (55%). However, only very small numbers in these nations disagreed with the principle (12-21%).



Asked how much their nation “should be governed according to the will of the people” (on a scale with 0 meaning “not at all” and 10 meaning “completely”), the mean response for all nations was well above 5, and in only two did the mean dip below 7: India (6.2), and Jordan (6.6). On average, the mean across all nations was 8.0.

At the same time, relatively few said that the people should have complete control over the government’s decisions. On average only 31 percent gave the answer of 10. However, majorities in two nations gave an answer of 10: Ukraine (52%) and Indonesia (51%). Russia also had a large percentage (49%) endorsing complete control by the people.

Majorities in all nations also endorse the democratic principle that “government leaders should be selected through elections in which all citizens can vote,” another principle enunciated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. On average 85 percent agreed with this view, while 12 percent said that government leaders should be selected “some other way.” In only one nation was support for democratic elections below 7 in 10: India (54%). Thirty-three percent in India said leaders should be selected in some other way.

The publics polled in East Asia show very similar support for these democratic principles as do publics around the world. On average, 83 percent of the publics across China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, South Korea, and Thailand agreed that the will of the people should be the basis of government authority and 85 percent said that government leaders should be selected through elections based on universal suffrage. It is perhaps interesting that only Hong Kong among these East Asian publics was significantly below the global average on these democratic principles, but still a majority in Hong Kong endorsed the will of the people as the basis of government authority (66%) and the use of elections to select leaders (72%). China itself evidenced more support for these principles than Hong Kong with ratings almost identical to the global average.

### Dissatisfaction with Government

All publics polled showed substantial dissatisfaction with how responsive their government is to the will of the people. The perceived level of democratic responsiveness was also highly correlated with trust in government and the belief that the government serves the interests of the people.

In addition to asking how much their government should be governed according to the will of the people respondents were asked how much it is so governed (using the same 0-10 scale). The mean perceived level was well below the preferred level in every nation polled. On average the mean perceived level of

**WILL OF THE PEOPLE**

-Perceived/Preferred Level of Influence-  
-Global averages (0 meaning "not at all" and 10 "completely")-

How much is this country governed according to the will of the people?



How much do you think this country should be governed according to the will of the people?



government responsiveness was 4.6 (on a 0-10 scale)—much lower than the mean preferred level of 8.0.

Looking at individual responses to these two questions, overwhelming majorities in most nations gave a preferred level of government responsiveness that was higher than the perceived level. On average 73 percent of responses showed such a gap and in all but three nations the ratio was about 6 in 10 or higher. The three exceptions were India (46%), Jordan (44%), and Thailand (41%), where a plurality expressed a desire for more responsiveness.

The highest levels of dissatisfaction in government responsiveness were found in Egypt (97%), Kenya (94%) and Nigeria (89%). However, high levels of dissatisfaction were also found in long-established western liberal democracies, including the United States (83%), Great Britain (77%), and France (73%).

Overall dissatisfaction with government democratic responsiveness tends to rise with greater education. For the sample as a whole, among those with less than a high school education, 70 percent favored more government responsiveness to the will of the people, while among those with a bachelor's degree or higher, 80 percent favored more responsiveness.

In East Asia, the publics as a group were somewhat less dissatisfied with their governments' responsiveness, but there was also considerable variation among them. A larger than average majority

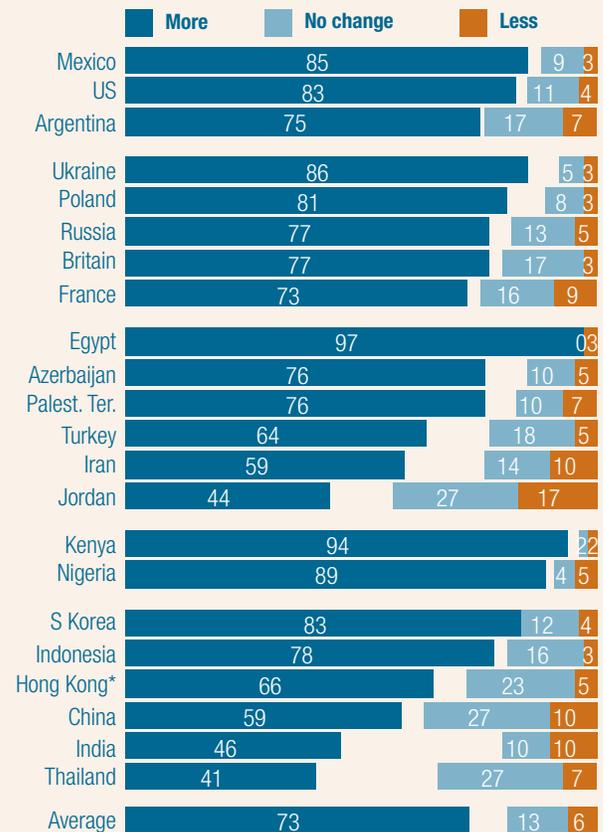
in South Korea (83%) said that the government should be more responsive than it is. In China (59%), Hong Kong (66%), and Thailand (41%), the proportion of the publics saying the government should be more responsive was below the global average, though in each case a majority or plurality sought greater governmental responsiveness.

Most publics express low levels of trust in their government to do what is right and this low trust appears to be related to the perception that governments are not being responsive to the will of the people.

When asked how much of the time they "trust" their national government to "do the right thing," in 12 of the 19 countries clear majorities said "only some of the

**WILL OF THE PEOPLE**

-Preferred Change in Level of Influence-  
Percent saying country should be governed according to the will of the people...



\* Not included in average of nations.

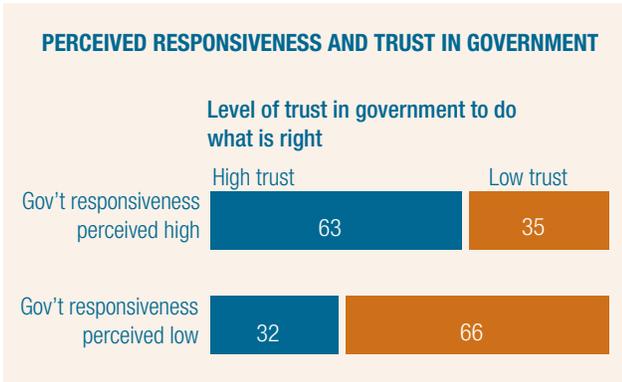
time” or “never.” On average 47 percent said they trust their government to do the right thing only some of the time and seven percent volunteered “never.” Thirty-one percent said they trust their government “most of the time” and 12 percent said “just about always.”

Only five publics had a majority expressing confidence that they can trust their government most of the time: Egypt (84%), China (83%), Russia (64%), the Palestinian Territories (55%), and Jordan (54%).

It is noteworthy that publics gave their governments poor ratings in all of the western democracies. Majorities said they trust their government only some of the time or never in Britain (67%), France (64%), and the United States (60%).

Trust in government appears to be highly related to how much people perceive the government as being responsive to the will of the people. For the entire sample, among those who gave high ratings of their governments’ responsiveness to the will of the people (a rating of 6 to 10 on a 10 point scale), 63 percent said they trust their government to do the right thing most of the time or just about always. However, among those who gave their government low ratings (0-4), less than half as many (32%) expressed substantial levels of trust in their government.

Trust in government is negatively related to education. Overall, among those without a high school diploma, 47 percent said they can trust the government only some of the time or never. This rises to 58 percent among those with some college education.



Similar to the low levels of trust in governments to do the right thing, majorities in most nations perceived their government as serving powerful special interests rather than the interests of the people as a whole. This view is also highly related to the perception that governments are not responsive to the will of the people.

Respondents were asked whether their nation is “run by a few big interests looking out for themselves” or whether it is run “for the benefit of all people.” In 17 of the 20 nations asked, respondents said that it is run by big interests. On average 63 percent said it is run by big interests and only 30 percent said it is run for the benefit of all people.

The three exceptions include two nations where a majority said the government is run for the benefit of the people—China (65%) and Egypt (57%). Views in Jordan were divided.

Once again, established western democracies give their governments poor ratings. Majorities said that their government is run by and for big interests in the United States (80%), Britain (60%), and France (59%).

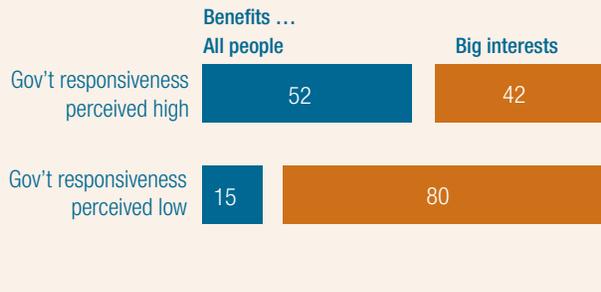
The highest percentages saying their nation is run by big interests were found in Mexico (83%), the United States (80%), Nigeria (78%), and South Korea (78%).

The perception that the government is run for the benefit of all people is positively related to the perception that it is responsive to the will of the people. For the entire sample, among those who gave their government a high rating for democratic responsiveness (6-10), a majority (52%) said that their government is run for the benefit of all the people. Among those who gave their government low ratings (0-4) for democratic responsiveness, the numbers saying the government is run for the benefit of the people was 37 points lower—a mere 15 percent.

Conversely, those who perceived low levels of government responsiveness to the will of the people were twice as likely to say that their government is run by a few big interests looking out for themselves as

**PERCEIVED RESPONSIVENESS AND WHO GOVERNMENT BENEFITS**

Generally speaking, would you say that this country is run by a few big interests looking out for themselves, or that it is run for the benefit of all the people?



were those who perceived high levels of responsiveness (80% to 42%).

**Paying Ongoing Attention to Public Opinion**

As discussed, majorities in all nations polled endorse the democratic principle that “government leaders should be selected through elections in which all citizens can vote.” However, most do not think that input from the public should be limited to elections. In other words, few subscribe to the view associated with the British philosopher and legislator Edmund Burke, that the influence of the public should be limited to occasional elections.

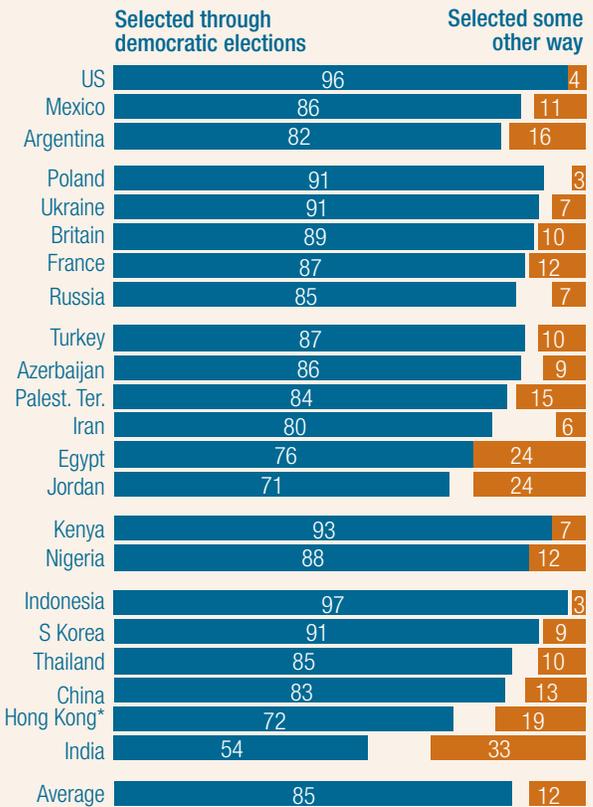
Respondents were asked whether they thought that “elections are the only time when the views of the people should have influence, or that also between elections leaders should consider the views of the people as they make decisions.” Majorities in 16 out of 19 nations asked this question said that leaders should pay attention to the views of the people between elections.

On average 73 percent endorsed the view that the public should have ongoing influence and 22 percent chose the “Burkean” view that elections are the only time the public should have a say in the government’s decisions.

In just one nation did a majority favor the view that elections are the only time the public should have

**ELECTIONS**

As a general rule, do you think government leaders should be selected through elections in which all citizens can vote, or do you think they should be selected some other way?



\* Not included in average of nations.

influence: 53 percent of Turks. In the Palestinian Territories views were divided.

In India, a plurality (45%) favored this view. A modest majority (55%) was supportive of ongoing public influence in Indonesia. In all other nations support ranged from 64 to 94 percent.

Overall, support for leaders giving ongoing attention to the views of the public rises with education. Among those who have not graduated from high school, 64 percent approved of paying attention to the public’s views, rising to 80 percent among those with a bachelor’s degree or more education.

On average, opinion in the six Asian nations did not differ significantly from the global average on this

question. But if South Korea is removed from the six-country Asian average, and the remaining five Asian nations' average falls 19 points below the global average—only a 52-percent majority supports ongoing public influence, compared to the 71-percent global majority. In South Korea an extraordinary 93-percent majority said that leaders should pay attention to the views of the people as they make decisions.

Consistent with their support for the government giving ongoing attention to the views of the public, even larger majorities say that leaders should pay attention to public opinion polls.

Respondents were presented a common argument that “when government leaders are thinking about an important decision” they “should not pay attention to public opinion polls because this will distract them from deciding what they think is right.” They also heard the argument that government leaders “should pay attention to public opinion polls because this will help them get a sense of the public’s views.”

The public response was remarkably unequivocal—in all 20 nations polled a majority said that government leaders should pay attention to polls. On average, eight in 10 opted for this view while just 15 percent endorsed the view that lawmakers should not heed the polls.

Even in the United States—where some elected leaders have asserted proudly that they do not pay attention to polls—81 percent said that they should (including 70% of Republicans and 88% of Democrats).

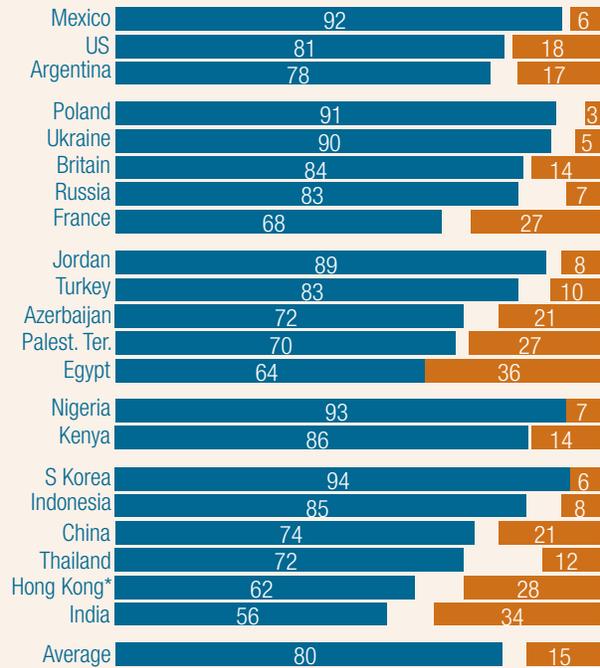
There were only two nations where less than 7 in 10 respondents endorsed polls: India (56%) and Egypt (64%). In these two nations more than 3 in 10 rejected polls (34% and 36% respectively).

Majorities in all but one nation favored the idea of having a government agency that would monitor public opinion. Respondents were told that “Some people think the government should have an agency where social scientists study public opinion on issues the government is dealing with and release all their

**PAYING ATTENTION TO POLLS**

When government leaders are thinking about an important decision, do you think:

- They should pay attention to public opinion polls because this will help them get a sense of the public's views
- They should not pay attention to public opinion polls because this will distract them from deciding what they think is right



\* Not included in average of nations.

findings to the public.” They were also told that “Others think the government should not be involved in this kind of thing.” In 20 nations majorities favored the idea of such an agency. Support was especially strong in Kenya (94%), China (91%), Azerbaijan (90%), Nigeria (89%) and South Korea (87%). Poland was the one country that only had a plurality in favor (41% to 31%). On average 74 percent favored such an agency while just 16 percent said that they thought it was a bad idea.

**Paying Attention to World Public Opinion**

When developing foreign policy, how much should government leaders pay attention to public opinion outside the country? On one hand it may be argued that world public opinion is irrelevant to the interests

of the nation. On the other hand there may be pragmatic concerns about a nation’s public diplomacy. There may also be a normative response: the belief that the will of the people is a proper source of legitimacy for domestic policies can flow logically into the belief that foreign policies that are supported by the will of the people globally also have greater legitimacy.

Asked, how much “the government *should* take into account world public opinion” when “developing its foreign policy,” on a 0-10 scale (with 0 meaning “not at all” and 10 meaning “a great deal,”) the mean response was above 5 in every nation polled. The average across all 18 nations was 7.1—only slightly lower than the average preferred level for government responsiveness to public opinion at home (8.0).

The lowest levels of support for world public opinion were found in India (5.8), the Palestinian Territories (5.9), Thailand (6.5), the United States (6.6), and Russia (6.6). The highest were found in Indonesia (8.4), Mexico (8.2), and Nigeria (8.1).

When asked how much attention their government *does* pay attention to world public opinion, using the same 0-10 scale, the mean assessments were lower than the preferred level in every nation polled. Across the 18 nations asked, the mean assessment was 5.0.

The lowest mean estimates of government responsiveness to world public opinion were found in the United States (3.8), Kenya (3.9), Egypt (4.1), and Ukraine (4.5). The highest were found in China (6.6), Indonesia (6.6), and South Korea (5.9).

Interestingly, estimates of government responsiveness to world public opinion tend to be higher than the estimates of responsiveness to public opinion at home—5.0 as compared to 4.6.

Looking at individual responses on the two questions, majorities or pluralities in all nations give a preferred level of government responsiveness to world public opinion that is higher than the perceived level. On average 57 percent favored greater responsiveness.

WORLD PUBLIC OPINION

Percent saying government should take world public opinion into account more than it does



\* Not included in average of nations.

The highest majorities were in Kenya (86%), Nigeria (78%), Mexico (77%), and Egypt (72%). In the United States—which has received substantial criticism by world public opinion in recent years—65 percent said that the government should be more responsive.

Pluralities favored greater responsiveness in China (49%) and India (34%), and it was the most commonly held belief in the Palestinian Territories (47%), Turkey (42%), and Russia (36%). Thailand was divided (28% greater responsiveness; 27% same amount).

Overall, support for greater government responsiveness to world public opinion rises with education. Among those with less than a high school education, 54 percent favored greater responsiveness, as compared to 59 percent among those with a bachelor’s degree or more education.

# Conclusion

On the basis of this study, we can propose answers—probably for the first time—to a number of basic questions. Is there a widespread consensus in support of the kinds of principles enunciated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or are views of human rights highly variable between cultures? How well does support for specific human rights stand up to challenges? Are there countries or cultures where support for human rights is fundamentally different—such as the predominantly Muslim countries, or East Asia, or the United States in the case of social and economic rights? Is support for the principles of the UDHR likely to wane or grow as the generations pass, and as education is available to more and more people? How much do people see their government as responsible for actively furthering human rights and how well do they see their government as performing this function? What do they see as the normative basis for governing?

Perhaps the most powerful finding of the study is that most of the general principles of the UDHR receive universal support in all of the nations polled. Majorities in *all* the nations polled, including some with authoritarian governments, endorse the principles that:

- people should be free to express their opinions including criticism of the government;
- people should have the right to demonstrate peacefully;
- the media should be free of government control;
- people should be treated equally irrespective of religion, gender, race or ethnicity;
- governments should be responsible for ensuring that their citizens can meet their basic needs for food, healthcare and education;
- the will of the people should be the basis for the authority of government and government leaders should be selected through free elections with universal suffrage.

Finally, all publics endorsed the United Nations' affirming of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its active promotion of these rights in member states.

It is quite remarkable to find this high degree of consensus on so many different aspects of a broad subject and one that has historically engendered tremendous conflict.

Divergences did appear, however, when these principles are applied in some more specific circumstances. In most cases a competing value was invoked such as political stability or the protection of innocent civilians.

In the study the largest deviations from these principles arose when people were asked about the right of the government to “prevent the media from publishing things it thinks will be politically destabilizing.” Majorities in Jordan, the Palestinian Territories, and Indonesia and a plurality in Iran supported government control of the media under such circumstances, while views were divided in Russia, Egypt, and Turkey.

This does not mean that these publics do not endorse the principle of media freedom. Majorities in all cases said that they did support the principle the media should be free of government control. However, in the specific circumstances of potential political instability many

appear to be ready to make an exception. It is worth noting that all five of these nations either have or have recently had governments that have been assessed as limiting freedoms. It may be that when citizens have had less experience living in free societies, they have greater anxiety about ideas expressed in the press generating instability and greater readiness to allow the state to exert control over the media in certain circumstances.

Furthermore the readiness to allow the government to restrict potentially destabilizing media content does not mean that any of these publics favor greater government regulation of the media than is presently occurring in their country. In all cases only small minorities favored less media freedom and majorities favored *greater* media freedom in Egypt, the Palestinian Territories, Jordan, and Indonesia.

Similarly in three countries—Kenya, Thailand and Indonesia—majorities supported the government’s right to prohibit expression of certain views. As discussed above, a common feature of these countries is that they have all recently had major political instability with near-civil war in Kenya, a coup in Thailand with continuing instability, and sectarian and ethnic conflict in Indonesia. While these countries’ people may aspire to full freedom of expression—in every case majorities expressed support for the principle of freedom of expression—they may also feel that in the context they are living now the government needs to be able to limit some forms of expression.

Another example of people making an exception to a general rule was in regard to the use of torture. In all countries majorities rejected the idea that the government should generally be able to use torture. But presented a case in which a terrorist has information that could save innocent lives—i.e. a competing value was invoked—majorities in India, Kenya, Nigeria and Turkey and a plurality in Thailand said that the government should be allowed to use a “some degree of torture.” Views were also divided in South Korea and only a plurality was opposed in Russia and Iran.

Two questions related to religion also elicited in some countries majority responses that deviated from the absolute principle of religious freedom. Asked whether followers of “any religion should be allowed to assemble and practice” in their country or if “there are some religions that people should not be allowed to practice.” Three countries had majorities wanting to exclude some religions from the freedom to assemble and practice—a large majority in Egypt and modest majorities in Ukraine and Jordan. South Koreans were also divided. The question wording intentionally offered a test, by evoking in respondents’ minds “some religion” that they might find specifically objectionable. Further research on what kinds of religions people had in mind would be valuable.

The one case of the study in which a majority of nations did not support a certain right was in regard to proselytizing. This is not explicitly a right in the Declaration though one could argue that it is an aspect of freedom of expression in a religious context. Fourteen nations had majorities or pluralities that disagreed with the statement that in their country “people of any religion should be free to try to convert members of other religions to join theirs.” Publics in European countries and in Muslim countries expressed the highest levels of discomfort about proselytizing activities. The Palestinian Territories had the largest majority disagreeing with the statement, followed by Indonesia, Egypt, France, Azerbaijan, Russia, Poland and Jordan. Opposition to a right to seek to convert may be prompted by other perceived rights such as the right to privacy or to not be accosted in public.

Turning to the question of the whether views of human rights differ in majority Muslim nations, the Islamic world proves to be complex and diverse in regard to views on human rights. On freedom of expression in general, support in Egypt and Jordan is somewhat lower, but in Turkey and Indonesia somewhat higher than the world average. When asked whether the government should have the right to stop media from publishing things that could be politically destabilizing, four Muslim nations said it

should and another two were divided. However, none of these seven nations said that in general, the media should have less freedom in their country, and five of them said there should be no internet restrictions. While only three out of seven nations thought their governments should be more active in promoting women's rights, four thought the UN should take on this role in member states. On religion, there is majority resistance among all Muslims polled to giving efforts to convert the status of a right, but in this they are similar to French and Polish respondents. On the broad question of equal treatment of people without distinction of religion, Muslims' responses are no different than those of the sample as a whole.

It appears that national differences between predominantly Muslim countries are more illuminating than the overall criterion of Islam as compared to the rest of the world. Turks and Indonesians often give responses supportive of human rights that are above world averages. In summary, in response to some questions majority Muslim nations appear disproportionately among those who deviate from the dominant norm on human rights, but in every case there are other majority Muslim nations that strongly align with the norm. Thus there is no consistent basis for concluding from these public opinion findings that Islam itself is at odds with the principles of the Declaration.

Another part of the world sometimes designated as having different values regarding human rights, particularly democracy and political rights, is East Asia. Yet for the region as a whole, there is no pattern that distinguishes people's views clearly from those of the world as a whole. Indonesia and Thailand, with less recent history of full civilian control, have majorities who say the government has a right to prohibit the discussion of some political and religious views. On the other hand, China—surely a plausible candidate for the homeland of a uniquely East Asian outlook—has majorities higher than the world average saying it is very important that the media be free to publish without government control; that people

should be free to read anything on the internet; and that the Chinese media should have more freedom than they do now. Thus the case for an East Asian cultural consensus that differs from the Declaration gains no real support from this study.

A last suggested area of resistance is the United States, which is often assumed to have highly individualistic values that are resistant to the concept of social and economic rights. In fact, belief in a government responsibility to ensure that citizens can meet their basic needs for food, healthcare and education is somewhat below the world average in the United States—but in no case is it below three in four Americans.

This study also sought to address the question of whether people think that human rights principles should go beyond imposing constraints on the power of the state and actually impose responsibilities on the state. This question was answered with a resounding yes. Large majorities around the world favor governments assuming the responsibility to actively work to prevent discrimination based on gender, race or ethnicity, including in private workplaces, and to ensure that citizens have access to food, health care and education.

Support is no less widespread for having the United Nations play a robust role in promoting human rights, including in nations whose government has historically resisted the UN playing such a role. Indeed majorities around the world favor even giving the UN the power to enter countries to investigate potential human rights abuses.

Naturally, there is the question of whether the norms in the Declaration have faded or are likely to fade with time. A document written 60 years ago could conceivably come to be seen as dated. Unfortunately we do not have trend line data. However we do have the ability to make comparisons between younger people and older people to see if there is a generational effect in the direction of decreasing saliency of the norms of the UDHR.

In fact differences between younger and older people are quite slight, and in more instances than not younger people are more supportive of the principles of the UDHR than are older people. Persons under 60 are slightly more likely to see the equal treatment of individuals of any religion as very important; to think their government should do more about racial discrimination than it is doing now; or to say there should be no restrictions on the Internet. On the other hand, those 60 and older are slightly more resistant to making any exceptions to the prohibition against torture.

As education becomes accessible to more and more people across the world, is it enhancing support for human rights? This seems probable. The best educated respondents were more likely to think that the UN should promote human rights. They were not only more likely to say that people of different religions should be treated equally, but also to support a right to try to convert others. A larger proportion of them said government is responsible to try to stop employer discrimination on the basis of race. They were also more likely to support media freedom and to say governments should pay attention to public opinion. In all the cases where the best educated differed from other respondents, it was because they were more supportive of some aspect or application of human rights.

Of course, we must address the challenge that the universality of support for the broad principles of the Declaration is not really meaningful because it is so apparent that these answers are the “right” answers. It is possible that people do have contrary thoughts and feelings that operate at the conscious or unconscious level. What is key is that, even if people do some self-censoring, there is a remarkable consensus about what they “should” say.

What is especially remarkable is that, as this study reveals, this consensus is now worldwide, spanning highly diverse cultures and religions. Why this is the case is not entirely clear. It may be that with the increasing communication that comes with

globalization there is a convergence of thinking around the world. Unfortunately we do not have trend line data to determine if this is the case.

On the other hand, it may in fact be the case that this convergence arises from a natural and spontaneous human response that is independent of culture. The political theorist John Rawls in his famous theory of justice posited that justice is derived from the rules for society that people favor when they imagine that they are behind a ‘veil of ignorance’ such that they do not know what position (rich or poor, racial majority or minority) they would have in society. It does appear that in this study people went through a similar process when they considered what the rules of society should be. What is striking is how similar their responses were.

Finally, there is the question of why it is important to establish agreement about broad principles. Social science research has revealed that people have a tendency to perceive others as less socially developed than oneself. For example, there is a tendency to perceive others as more racist or sexist, and less altruistic and fair-minded than oneself. Naturally this bias in perceptions leads to suspicion and makes it more difficult to resolve conflict and to develop social structures that reflect the values that people in fact prefer. Studies such as these create the opportunity for people to communicate and counter such biases.

The purpose of the Declaration was to pre-establish some basic principles to guide the development of societies, including the relations between subgroups within nations as well as the relations between nations. It set out to establish a common ground upon which to build. This study indicates that the ground that the Declaration has laid out is indeed common and that it is a viable and vital framework that can perform this guiding function in the development of humanity.

# Research Partners and Methodology

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### Questionnaire and Country Highlights

An electronic copy of the questionnaire and a summary of country-by-country findings for this study can be found with the report at [www.WorldPublicOpinion.org](http://www.WorldPublicOpinion.org) under the topic “Justice/Human Rights.”

### Methodology

	Sample Size (unweighted)	MoE (%)	Field dates	Survey methodology	Type of sample
Argentina	800 679	3.5 3.8	March 14-20, 2008 August 20-29, 2008	Face-to-face	Urban <sup>1</sup>
Azerbaijan	602 600	4.1	Jan 13 – Feb 5, 2008 August 10-31, 2008	Face-to-face	National
China	1000 1011	3.2	Jan 10-25, 2008 Jul 26 – Aug 2, 2008	Telephone	Urban/ National <sup>2</sup>
<i>Hong Kong</i>	<i>1022</i> <i>1018</i>	<i>3.1</i>	<i>September 10-26, 2008</i> <i>October 22-24, 2008</i>	<i>Telephone</i>	<i>Representative of Hong Kong</i>
<i>Macau</i>	<i>1089</i>	<i>3.0</i>	<i>August 11-20, 2008</i>	<i>Telephone</i>	<i>Representative of Macau</i>
<i>Taiwan</i>	<i>823</i>	<i>3.5</i>	<i>August 22-31, 2008</i>	<i>Telephone</i>	<i>Representative of Taiwan</i>
Egypt	600 600	4.1	Jan 17-27, 2008 Jul 21 – Aug 1, 2008	Face-to-face	Urban <sup>3</sup>
France	600 600	4.1	Feb 5-11, 2008 August 5 - 12, 2008	Telephone	National
Germany	1008	3.1	Jul 15 – Aug 12, 2008	Telephone	National
Great Britain	800 803	3.5	Jan 29 – Feb 19, 2008 Jul 31 – Aug 8, 2008	Telephone	National
India	1023 1118	3.2 3.0	February 25-29, 2008 Aug 30 – Sep 2, 2008	Face-to-face	National <sup>4</sup>
Indonesia	811 716	3.5 3.7	Jan 19-29, 2008 Jul 26 – Aug 18, 2008	Face-to-face	National <sup>5</sup>
Iran	710	3.8	Jan 13 – Feb 9, 2008	Face-to-face	National
Italy	600	4.1	July 16-30 and Sep 4-10, 2008	Telephone	National
Jordan	959 583	3.2 4.1	March 4-10, 2008 August 12-15, 2008	Face-to-face	National
Kenya	1000	3.2	July 17-30, 2008	Face-to-face	National

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	Sample Size (unweighted)	MoE (%)	Field dates	Survey methodology	Type of sample
Mexico	850 850	3.4	Jan 25-27, 2008 August 9-10, 2008	Telephone	National <sup>6</sup>
Nigeria	1000 1000	3.2	February 7-18, 2008 August 9-18, 2008	Face-to-face	National <sup>7</sup>
Palestinian Territories	626 638	4.0	February 10-23, 2008 August 1-7, 2008	Face-to-face	National <sup>8</sup>
Peru	597	4.1	March 15-16, 2008	Face-to-face	Urban <sup>9</sup>
Poland	870 1094	3.4 3.0	Nov 29 – Dec 4, 2007 Jun 30 – Jul 8, 2008	Face-to-face	National
Russia	800 803	3.5	Jan 18-22, 2008 Jul 18-22, 2008	Face-to-Face	National
South Korea	600 600	4.1	Feb 11-12, 2008 August 28-29, 2008	Telephone	National
Spain	600	4.1	Mar 26 – Apr 9, 2008	Telephone	National
Thailand	2699 2223	1.9 2.1	Apr 21 – May 6, 2008 September 1-25, 2008	Face-to-face	National <sup>10</sup>
Turkey	719 1023	3.7 3.1	Jan 12-24, 2008 Jul 28 – Aug 18, 2008	Face-to-face	National
Ukraine	1020 1043	3.1	Feb 8-18, 2008 Aug 30 – Sep 9, 2008	Face-to-face	National
United States	940 879	3.3 3.4	Jan 18-27, 2008 August 9-20, 2008	Internet <sup>11</sup>	National

- 1 In March 2008, the survey was executed in the urban areas of Capital Federal, Gran Buenos Aires, Cordoba, Mendoza, and Rosario, representing 39 percent of Argentina's population. In August 2008, the survey was executed in the urban areas of Capital Federal and Gran Buenos Aires, representing 35 percent of Argentina's population.
- 2 In January 2008, the survey was a national probability sample of urban telephone households across China. A stratified PPS sample design was developed to sample 20 cities; urban households represent approximately 45 percent of the Chinese population. In August 2008, the survey was a probability sample of urban and rural households with land-line telephones in the provinces of Anhui, Hebei, Heilongjiang, Hubei, Jiangsu, Shanxi, Shanghai, Sichuan, and Yunnan—representing approximately 60 percent of the mainland Chinese population. The August sample was 40 percent rural, 60 percent urban (rural households make up approximately 55 percent of the population).
- 3 In Egypt, the survey was executed in the urban areas of Cairo, Alexandria, Giza, and Subra. These four urbanized areas represent 75 percent of Egypt's urban population, which is 42 percent of the national population.
- 4 In India, a face-to-face survey was conducted in urban and rural areas in 14 of the largest Indian states; these states comprise 77 percent of India's population. The sample is 60 percent urban, India's population is approximately 30 percent urban.
- 5 In Indonesia, a national probability sample was conducted in both urban and rural areas and covering approximately 87 percent of Indonesia's population.
- 6 In Mexico, a random telephone sample of adults who had landline telephones was conducted in all 31 states and the Federal District. Telephone penetration in Mexico is 55 percent.
- 7 In Nigeria, the sample was developed by selecting six states, one per geographic region, based upon their size and representativeness. Within each state, sampling points were selected by means of a multi-stage random sample which disproportionately sampled urban areas. The final sample is 75 percent urban; Nigeria is approximately 50 percent urban.
- 8 In the Palestinian Territories, a face-to-face national probability survey was conducted among the population of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip.
- 9 In Peru, the survey was executed in the metropolitan areas of Lima and Callao, representing 31 percent of the population.
- 10 In May 2008, the survey was conducted in 10 provinces of the country including Bangkok, Samutprakarn, Chantaburi, Ratchaburi, Chiang Mai, Kampanget, Kornkean, Sakonnakorn, Chumporn, and Songkla. In September 2008, the survey was conducted in 9 provinces of the country including Bangkok, Samutprakarn, Chanthaburi, Khonkaen, Chiang Mai, Kamphaengphet, Sakonnakhon, Chumphon, and Songkhla.
- 11 In the United States, the poll was an online survey drawn from a nationally representative sample of the Knowledge Networks online panel. This panel is randomly selected through telephone interviews from the population of telephone households in the US, and subsequently provided with Internet access if needed.



## WorldPublicOpinion.org Network

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Chatham House (Royal Institute of International Affairs) *Great Britain*

Hong Kong University Public Opinion Programme *Hong Kong*

Centre for Voting Opinion & Trends in Election Research (CVoter) *India*

Synovate *Indonesia*

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