

Growing Optimism That Obama Will Improve US Relations: Global Poll

January 16, 2009

[Full report \(PDF\)](#)



As Barack Obama prepares to be sworn in as the 44th president of the United States, a new 17-nation poll conducted for the BBC World Service finds widespread and growing optimism that his presidency will lead to improved relations between the United States and the rest of the world.

The poll also shows people around the world are looking to President Obama to put highest priority on dealing with the current global financial crisis.

In 15 of the 17 countries polled, majorities think that the election of Barack Obama will lead to improved relations with the rest of the world. On average 67 per cent express this upbeat view, while 19 per cent think relations will stay the same and just 5 per cent that relations will worsen.

This is up sharply - by 21 points among tracking countries - from polling done for the BBC World Service six months ago, before Obama was elected. At that time just 47 per cent expressed optimism that an Obama presidency would lead to improved relations with the rest of the world. The number of people giving no answer to the question is also down sharply.

This optimism does not necessarily mean, however that views of the United States itself have changed. BBC World Service is currently completing its annual poll assessing views of major countries' influence in the world, which will be released within the next few weeks and will show whether views of US influence are improving.

Asked to rate six possible priorities for the Obama Administration, the top priority in all countries polled was the global financial crisis. On average 72 per cent said that it should be a top priority.

This was followed by withdrawing US troops from Iraq - with 50 per cent saying this should be a top priority - then addressing climate change (46%), improving America's relationship with the respondent's country (46%), brokering peace between Israel and the

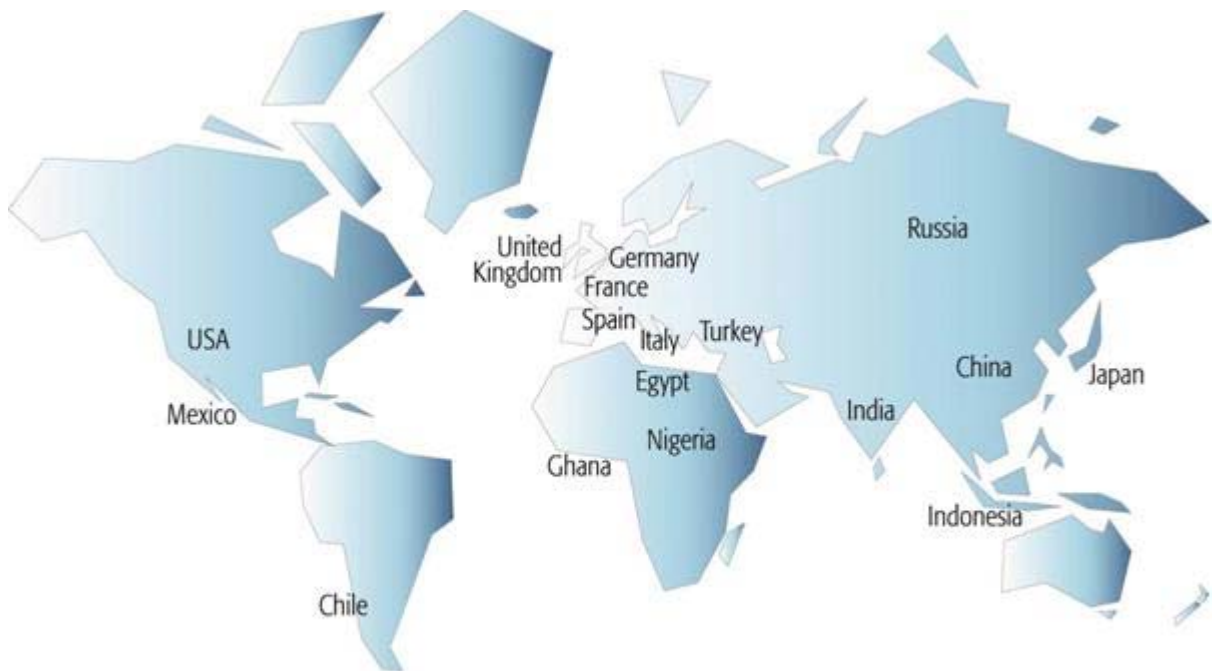
Palestinians (43%), and supporting the government of Afghanistan against the Taliban (29%).

Polling was completed prior to the current Gaza conflict in all countries except Egypt and India. In Egypt, 75 per cent said brokering peace between Israel and the Palestinians should be a top priority.

The results are drawn from a survey of 17,356 adult citizens across 17 countries conducted for the BBC World Service by the international polling firm GlobeScan together with the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland. GlobeScan coordinated fieldwork between 24 November 2008 and 5 January 2009.

"Familiarity with Obama seems to be breeding hope," commented Steven Kull, director of the Program on International Policy Attitudes. "But then again," he added, "he is starting from a low baseline, following eight years of an unpopular US president. Maintaining this enthusiasm will be a challenge given the complexities he now faces."

Participating Countries



Note: In Chile, China, Egypt, Mexico, and Turkey urban samples were used. Please see methodology for details.

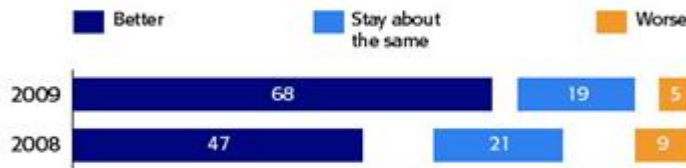
Additional Highlights

Even nations that last summer had few people expressing optimism have come to have hope in an Obama presidency. Those predicting better US relations with the rest of the

world have jumped from 11 to 51 per cent in Turkey, 11 to 47 per cent in Russia, 29 to 58 per cent in Egypt, and 39 to 68 per cent in China.

Predicted Changes in US Relations with World Due to Election of Barack Obama

Average of 14 Tracking Countries,* September 2008 – January 2009



*The tracking countries include China, Egypt, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Mexico, Nigeria, Russia, Spain, Turkey, United Kingdom, and the United States.

The white space in this chart represents "DK/NA."

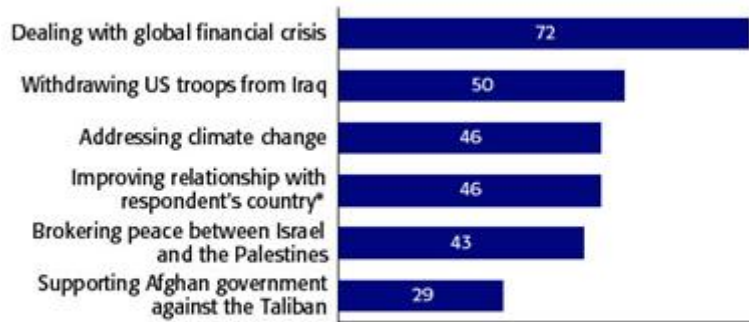
Interestingly, two of these countries showing the largest improvement are majority Muslim countries (Egypt and Turkey). Indonesians are also optimistic (64%) and have shown an 18-point increase in optimism from last summer.

The most optimistic views are expressed in Ghana (87%) and in Europe--in Italy (79%), Germany (78%), Spain (78%) and France (76%)--followed by Mexico (74%) and Nigeria (74%). Americans are also quite optimistic, with 65 per cent expressing hope that America's international relations will improve.

The only two countries where less than a majority express optimism are Japan and Russia. In Japan 48 per cent express optimism, while 37 per cent think relations will stay the same and 8 per cent think they will get worse. In Russia, 47 per cent expect improvement, 26 per cent no change and 5 per cent a worsening.

Priorities for the New US Administration

"Top Priority," Average of 17 Countries, January 2009



*In the United States, question was asked regarding the US' relationship with the rest of the world

Base: Representative sample of 17,000 adults in 17 countries

Europeans, in particular, are looking to the new US president to prioritise tackling climate change, with 58 per cent of French, 63 per cent of British, 65 per cent of Spanish and 68 per cent of Italians seeing it as a top priority.

There are marked differences of opinion on the priority of brokering peace in the Middle East, with 75 per cent of Egyptians but only 17 per cent of Russians seeing it as a top priority for the Obama administration. However, polling was completed in all countries except Egypt and India prior to the current Gaza conflict began.

Americans' priorities are somewhat different from the world as a whole. While they agree with the highest priority being the global financial crisis (75% say top priority), they are higher than any other country in placing a top priority (46%) on supporting the government of Afghanistan against the Taliban. They also show substantial concern for improving America's relations with the world - 60 per cent say it should be a top priority; this is substantially higher than the global average (46%) saying that it should be top priority for the US to improve its relations with their region.

In total 17,356 citizens in Chile, China, Egypt, France, Germany, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Nigeria, Russia, Spain, Turkey, the UK and the USA were interviewed face-to-face or by telephone mainly in November and December 2008. Polling was conducted for the BBC World Service by the international polling firm GlobeScan and its research partners in each country. In 5 of the 17 countries, the sample was limited to major urban areas. The margin of error per country ranges from +/-2.4 to 4.4 per cent, 19 times out of 20.

Polling from last summer was conducted in the same countries from 8 July to 15 September 2008.

For more details, please see the [full report \(PDF\)](#)

