

Obama Rockets to Top of Poll on Global Leaders

June 29, 2009

Putin and Ahmadinejad Receive Lowest Marks

[Country-by-Country Summaries \(PDF\)](#)

[Questionnaire/Methodology \(PDF\)](#)



US President Barack Obama has the confidence of many publics around the world - inspiring far more confidence than any other world political leader according to a new poll of 20 nations by WorldPublicOpinion.org. A year ago, President Bush was one of the least trusted leaders in the world.

(Official White House Photo)

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin now have the most negative confidence ratings around the world. On average across all nations about half have little or no confidence that they will "do the right thing regarding world affairs" while just a third or less do have confidence.

WorldPublicOpinion.org conducted the poll of 19,224 respondents in nations that comprise 62 percent of the world's population. This includes most of the largest nations-- China, India, the United States, Indonesia, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Russia--as well as Mexico, Germany, Great Britain, France, Poland, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Kenya, Egypt, Turkey, Iraq, the Palestinian territories, and South Korea. Publics were also polled in Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. The margins of error range from +/-3 to 4 percentage points.

WorldPublicOpinion.org, a collaborative research project involving research centers from around the world, is managed by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland. The survey was conducted between April 4 and June 12, 2009, prior to Obama's speech in Cairo but subsequent to his Ankara speech.

An average of 61 percent express a lot or some confidence in Obama to do the right thing in world affairs, across the nineteen nations polled (excluding the US). Thirty-one percent say they have not too much or no confidence at all. In 13 nations, a majority or plurality

has confidence in Obama; in five nations they do not; one nation is divided. A majority of the American public (70%) also expresses confidence in Obama in world affairs.

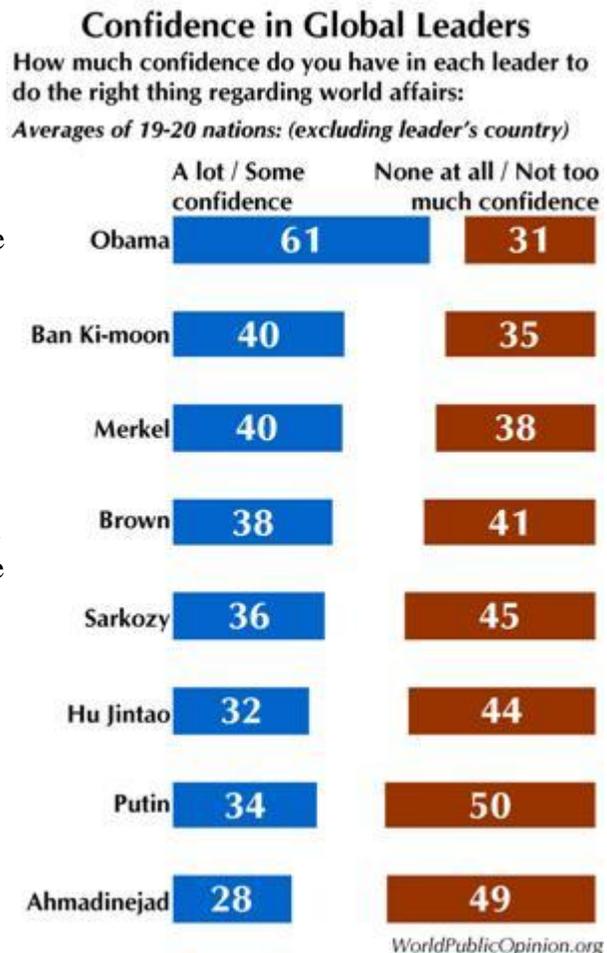
No other leader has the confidence of more than an average of 40 percent across the publics polled. For most leaders, more express a lack of confidence than express confidence.

"At this moment Obama occupies a unique position in the eyes of the world" observes Stephen J. Weber of WorldPublicOpinion.org. "His communication skills and the change he represents create an open door for him to engage people around the world."

President Ahmadinejad has the confidence of an average of only 28 percent across the 20 nations, while 49 percent do not have confidence in the Iranian leader. Fourteen nations have a negative view, lead by the US (84%) Germany (81%), France (79%), and South Korea (67%). The public in six nations express confidence in Ahmadinejad led by two majority-Muslim nations; Pakistan (75%) and the Palestinian territories (57%). However, other majority-Muslim nations express a lack of confidence, including Iraq (56%), Azerbaijan (59%), Egypt (57%), and Turkey (48%). Indians also lean positive (42 to 30%) about Ahmadinejad.

Russian Prime Minister Putin has the confidence of publics in five nations (the lowest of any leader tested), but in 14 the public has little confidence. On average across 19 nations other than Russia, 34 percent of the public expresses confidence and 50 percent do not. Critics of Putin include France (78% little confidence), Poland (76%), Germany (72%), and the US (69%) as well as all of the nations of the Middle East that were polled.

However, Mr. Putin does elicit confidence in the world's two largest nations, China (64%) and India (65%). The public in Ukraine, where the current West-leaning President Yushchenko has had tense relations with the Kremlin, also has confidence in Putin (57%); notably, more Ukrainians express confidence Putin than in President Obama (35%). Russians themselves have confidence in their Prime Minister by a very large majority (82%).



Public confidence in President Hu Jintao of China presents a mixed picture around the globe. In most nations in the West--including Europe, the US and Mexico--President Hu receives low confidence scores. Low scores are also common in the Middle East including in Turkey, the Palestinian territories, and Iraq. However, in Asia, the publics in most nations express confidence in the Chinese leader such as in Pakistan (80%), India (50%) and in South Korea (by a narrow margin, 51% to 47%). Overall, seven nations express confidence in President Hu, 10 lack confidence, and two divided. On average across the nations polled, excluding China, 32 percent have confidence in him and 44 percent do not.

There are also large majorities reporting confidence in President Hu in separate surveys that were conducted in Taiwan (60%), Hong Kong (94%), and Macau (92%). "In his own backyard, President Hu seems to be using soft power very effectively," notes Stephen Weber.

Among the national leaders studied in this poll, Chancellor Merkel has the second-highest rating - on average 40 percent express confidence in her, while 38 percent do not. Nine nations have positive views, but eight show little confidence, and two are divided. Most nations in Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and Europe report confidence in Merkel, but most majority-Muslim nations do not.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon receives the second-highest rating behind Obama. On average his ratings lean positive (40% to 35%) and 11 nations express confidence, seven do not, and two are divided. Views are especially positive in Asia and Africa. Only in the US and in some nations in the Middle East (Egypt, the Palestinian territories, and Turkey) does a majority express low confidence.

President Sarkozy of France has somewhat lower confidence ratings than his European compatriots, but has shown the most improvement- from 30 percent confidence in 2008 to 34 percent in 2009 across 14 trended nations. During the second half of 2008, France occupied the Presidency of the European Union. This platform may have helped his confidence ratings increase in the US, Great Britain, Ukraine, Nigeria, and India. There is, nonetheless, a robust 45 percent of the public polled that does not have confidence in him.

The Chinese public, however, expresses sharply lower confidence in Sarkozy in 2009 (23%) than in 2008 (42%). This fall in confidence was not evident for other Western leaders. The protests in France in April 2008 related to the Olympic torch and Tibet policy, and Mr. Sarkozy's threat to boycott the Beijing Olympics seems to have soured the Chinese public.

Prime Minister Brown has a profile similar to Chancellor Merkel, though with slightly lower scores overall. His global confidence average is 36 percent positive and 45 percent negative, and eight nations express confidence in him. Ten nations do not express confidence, notably all majority-Muslim nations polled except Azerbaijan, as well as France, Poland, Russia and Mexico.

Examining trends in nations that were surveyed in both 2008 and 2009 reveals that most leaders changed very little in their global average scores. The new American president receives dramatically different ratings than his predecessor. President Sarkozy received confidence ratings that on average were four points higher in 2009 than 2008, but at the same time saw his ratings by the Chinese public crash. No other leader changed by more than one point in their global average.

Funding for this research was provided by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and the Calvert Foundation.

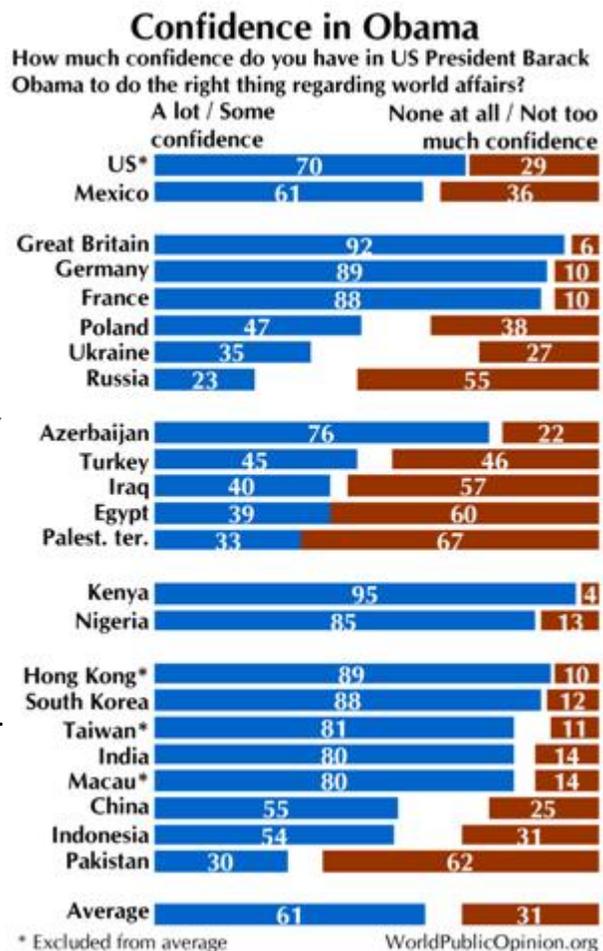
DETAILED ANALYSIS OF LEADERS WITH A GLOBAL PROFILE

US President Barack Obama

US President Barack Obama is the leader who inspires the most confidence in publics around the world by a very large margin. Across nations polled, an average of 61 percent of the public expresses confidence in Obama to do the right thing regarding world affairs, while 31 percent indicate little confidence. No other leader assessed in 2009 or 2008 approaches this level of public confidence.

Barack Obama was inaugurated in January 2009, approximately four months prior to this polling. His election campaign, covered widely by global media, was seen as a rejection of many unpopular policies of his predecessor George W. Bush. In the early months of his presidency he traveled to Europe and Turkey, making appearances and speeches to wide acclaim.

Majorities or pluralities in 13 nations polled, plus the US, have confidence in Obama. These include all European nations, the two African nations, and most Asian nations. Seventy percent of Americans express confidence in Obama as well.



People in most majority-Muslim nations do not express confidence in Obama including majorities in the Palestinian territories (67%), Pakistan (62%), Egypt (60%), and Iraq

(57%). Turkey is divided. It is clear that Obama has challenges remaining in reaching the publics in majority-Muslim nations. A majority of Russians (55%) also express a lack of confidence.

Obama's ratings are far higher than the 2008 ratings of President Bush: France (+77 percentage points), Britain (+ 75 points), South Korea (+ 58 points), Mexico (+45 points), Turkey (+38 points), India (+35 points), Egypt (+31 points), and the Palestinian territories (+30 points). The publics in every nation polled in both 2008 and 2009 showed an increase in confidence in Obama compared to Bush--on average 37 points.

The dramatic increase in confidence occurs both among the publics of traditional allies who had been alienated by the policies and manner of the Bush administration such as Britain, France, and South Korea as well as nations where the standing of the US remains quite low such as those in the Middle East. Even in nations where a majority of the public does not express confidence in Obama, there has nonetheless been an increase in confidence with the new President, such as Turkey (rising from 7% to 45%) and Russia (rising from 14% to 23%).

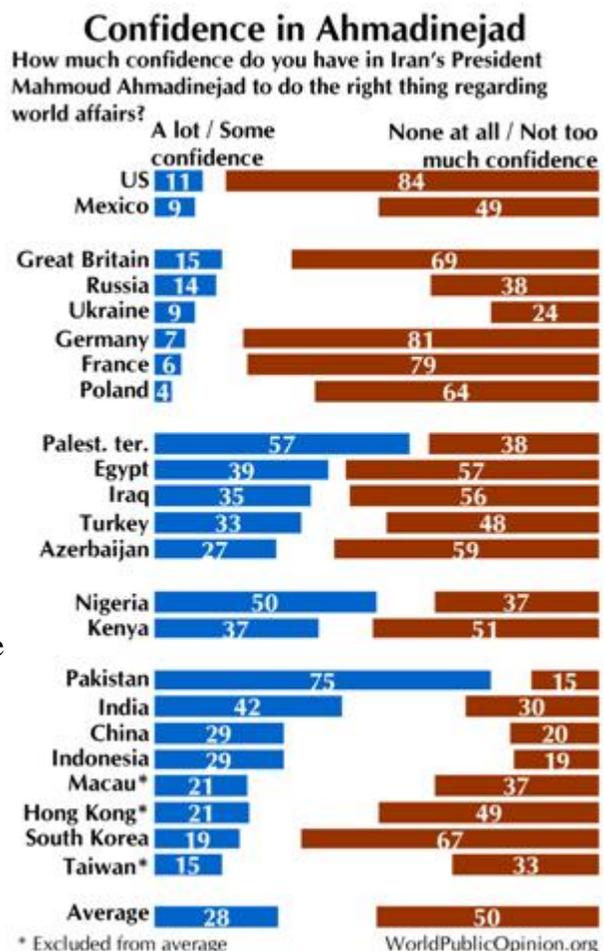
A majority of the public now express confidence in President Obama in the two Asian nations that are the world's most populous: China (55%) and India (80%). President Bush enjoyed confidence among a plurality of public in these nations in 2008, but not a majority.

It is perhaps less surprising that Obama now does exceptionally well in Kenya (95% confidence) and Nigeria (85%), as well as having a 26 point increase in Indonesia relative to President Bush. His life story, no doubt, has special attractions in these nations.

Publics around the world seem to feel familiar with Obama, even though he was in office only four months at the time of the polling. Far fewer people across nations were unable or unwilling to express an opinion on Obama (8% don't know/depends) than on other global leaders whose non-answer scores ranged between 16-24 percent.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

President Ahmadinejad has a predominantly negative image. Around the world, on average only 28 percent of publics expresses confidence in him - the



lowest of any leader assessed on a global level. Forty-nine percent indicate that they have low confidence in the Iranian President. Fourteen out of 20 nations have a predominantly negative view. All of the polling was done prior to the June 12 Iranian presidential election.

Across Europe, both West and East, the public gives Mr. Ahmadinejad low confidence ratings, including large majorities in Germany (81%), France (79%), Britain (69%), Poland (64%). More moderately negative views are found in Russia (38% vs. 14% confidence), and Ukraine (24% vs. 9% confidence). These evaluations in Europe differ little from those in 2008. A very large majority of the US public (84%) indicate that they do not have confidence in Mr. Ahmadinejad as does a large plurality in Mexico (49%, with 9% expressing confidence).

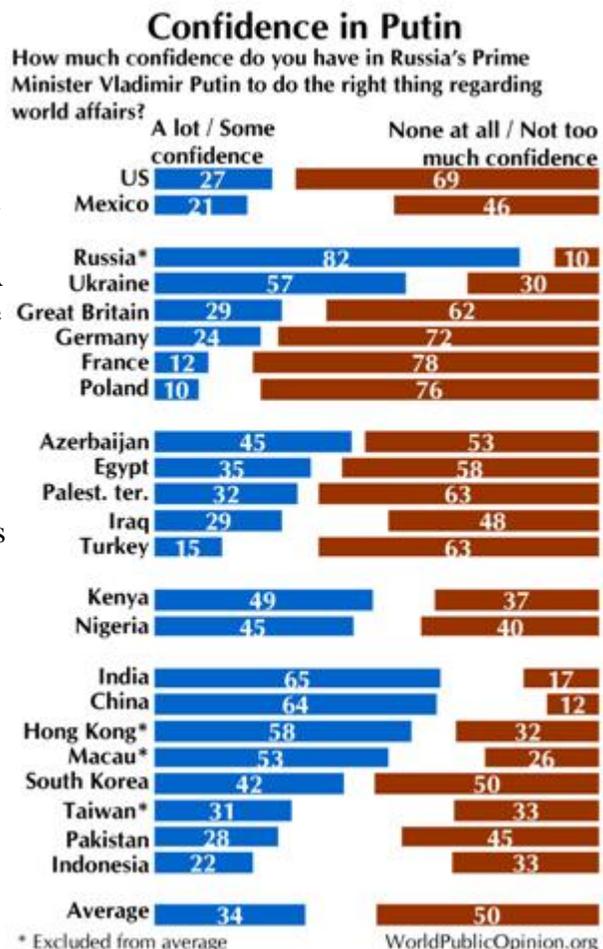
Ahmadinejad's positive grades appear largely in Islamic nations - including Pakistan (75%), the Palestinian territories (57%), Indonesia (29% vs. 19% with little confidence), and Nigeria (50%, where approximately half of the population is Muslim). However in some his approval is low, including Turkey (33%), Egypt (39%), and Azerbaijan (27%).

Ahmadinejad also does relatively well in India and China. In India, a plurality (42%) of the public has confidence in him while 30 percent do not. In China, a somewhat larger percentage (29%) of the public expresses confidence in Ahmadinejad than expresses a lack of confidence (20%). Both India and China have better relations and stronger commercial ties with Iran than most of Western Europe and the US.

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin

Vladimir Putin, now Prime Minister of Russia, is an extremely popular leader at home (82% of Russians have confidence in him), but most often receives negative evaluations abroad. On average, across the 19 nations polled other than Russia, 34 percent express confidence in Mr. Putin. A full 50 percent do not have confidence, the highest negative score of any global leader. Fourteen nations do not have confidence in him, while five do.

Across most of Europe, publics report little confidence, including large majorities in Britain (62%), Germany (72%), France (78%), and Poland (76%). Similarly, a majority in the US (69%) expresses a lack of confidence in the Russian leader. In



Mexico, a sizable plurality (46% to 21%) says it has little confidence in Putin.

Ukraine is an interesting case. Its Western-oriented leader, President Yushchenko, has had tense relations with the Kremlin and Mr. Putin, but a majority of the Ukrainian public (57%) has confidence in Putin. This means that considerably more Ukrainians have confidence in the Russian leader than they do in Obama (35%) or in any European leaders studied here.

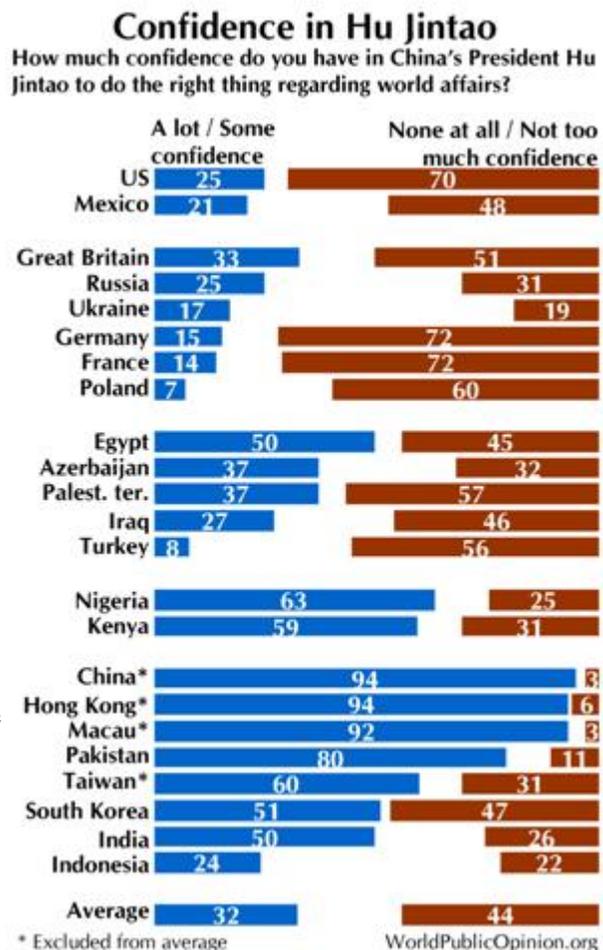
Prime Minister Putin also does well among the public in the world's two largest nations. Clear majorities in India (65%) and in China (64%) have confidence in Mr. Putin. In China he outscores Obama in public confidence (64% vs. 55%), though India places more confidence in the American President (80% vs. 65%).

In the Middle East, a large proportion of the public in all nations polled has little confidence in Putin: in Azerbaijan 53 percent express low confidence, in Egypt 58 percent, in the Palestinian territories 63 percent, in Iraq 48 percent, and in Turkey 63 percent.

Chinese President Hu Jintao

Among the eight global leaders examined in this poll, President Hu Jintao stands sixth, with an average of 32 percent having confidence in him and 44 percent not having confidence. Seven nations give the Chinese president predominantly positive confidence ratings, 10 give him predominantly negative ratings, and two are divided. Clear patterns are apparent among global publics in their views of President Hu.

No nation in Europe gives the Chinese president predominantly positive confidence scores; most are clearly negative: Germany (72%), France (72%), Poland (60%), Britain (51% negative), while the public in Russia is slightly negative (31 % little confidence, 25 % confidence), and Ukraine is divided. In the US a large majority (70%) of the public lacks confidence in the Chinese leader, and in Mexico a clear plurality (48%) lacks confidence.



Elsewhere, the picture changes. In Africa, Nigeria and Kenya both express confidence in President Hu (63% and 59%, respectively). In the Middle East, views are mixed. Pluralities of the publics in Egypt (50%) and Azerbaijan (37%) express confidence in the Chinese leader, but in the Palestinian territories (57% negative), Iraq (46% negative) and Turkey (56% negative) the public predominantly expresses little confidence in him.

In Asia, President Hu scores very well among the public. His own public is immensely confident (94%) in his doing the right thing regarding world affairs. No other public studied in this survey is so confident in their leader. Confidence in President Hu is the predominant view in Pakistan (80%), India (50%) and South Korea (by a narrow 51% confident, 47% not confident margin). Most people in Indonesia were unable to give him a confidence rating; among those who did, they were divided with 24 percent confident and 22 percent not confident.

Separate surveys were also conducted in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau. In each, large majorities express confidence in President Hu, in Taiwan 60 percent, in Hong Kong 94 percent, and in Macau 92 percent. President Hu appears to be a very reassuring figure among these publics.

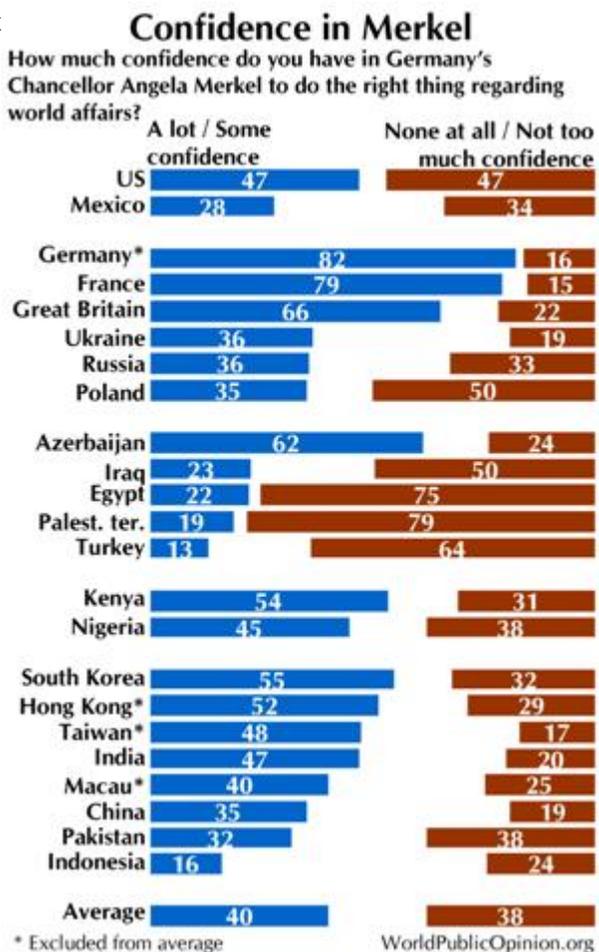
German Chancellor Angela Merkel

Chancellor Merkel was studied for the first time in 2009, and she proves to be a leader who inspires relatively high confidence in other nations: among national leaders she has the most favorable views after Obama. Nine nations have positive views of Merkel; eight have negative views; and two are divided. An average of 40 percent of the publics, not including Germany, express confidence in her, and 38 percent do not.

In Europe, large majorities express a positive view in France (79%) and Britain (66%) as does a plurality in Ukraine (36% to 19%). Russians are divided with many not expressing a view, while Poles lean to the negative (35% to 50%).

Interestingly Americans are divided, while Mexicans lean to the negative (28% to 34%).

In Asia, most nations have more positive than negative views, including in South



Korea (55%), India (47%) and China (35 to 19%). Indonesia (16% to 24%) and Pakistan (32% to 38%) lean negative .

Publics in the Middle East nations have the least confidence in Merkel, with large numbers expressing low confidence among the Palestinians (79%), Egyptians (75%), Turks (64%) and Iraqis (50%). Only in Azerbaijan does a majority (62%) express a positive view.

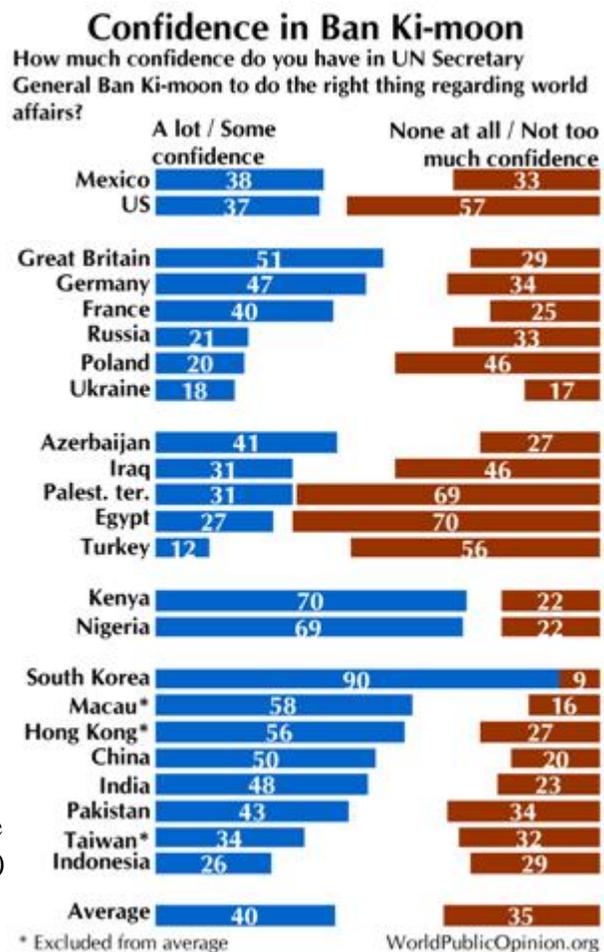
In Africa both Kenya (54%) and Nigeria (45%) have confidence in Chancellor Merkel.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon

The UN Secretary General generally receives better ratings than most other world leaders who are heads of nations. On average his evaluations across the 20 nations are positive (40% to 35%) and 11 nations express confidence, seven do not, and two are divided. This places him second among the leaders studied, below Obama, but slightly above Merkel.

Views of Ban Ki-moon are particularly positive in Africa and in Asia - nearly all Asian nations give him positive confidence scores led by South Korea (90%). Indonesia is an exception: views are divided. Large majorities in both Kenya (70%) and Nigeria (69%) express confidence in him.

Countries polled in Western Europe have confidence in the Secretary General, including Britain, Germany, and France, but Poland and Russia do not, and Ukraine is divided. A majority of Americans (57%) report little confidence in him, while Mexico leans toward having confidence (38% to 33%).



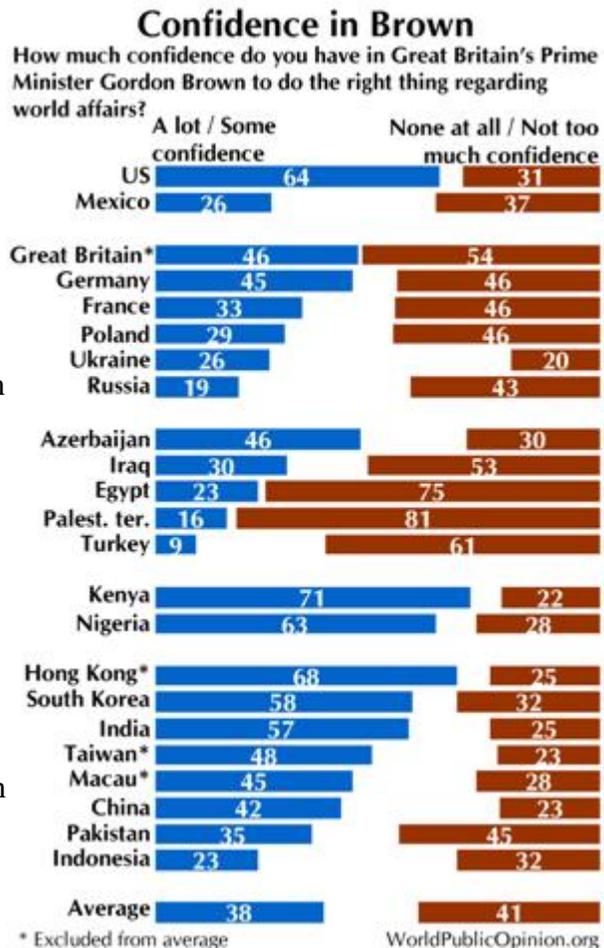
British Prime Minister Gordon Brown

Gordon Brown has a profile similar to Chancellor Merkel, though his ratings across nations are slightly below hers. On average, 38 percent of the public express confidence in him, and 41 percent do not; eight nations are positive, 10 are not, and one is divided.

All majority-Muslim nations except Azerbaijan do not have confidence in Mr. Brown. In addition, a lack of confidence in Brown was the most frequent position in France (46%), Poland (46%), Russia (43%) and Mexico (37%).

Mr. Brown does inspire considerable confidence in Africa, both in Kenya and Nigeria, and a number of nations of Asia are predominantly positive, including South Korea (58%), India (57%), and China (42%). However, pluralities do not have confidence in Brown in both Pakistan (45%) and Indonesia (32%).

The US public by a clear majority (64%) has confidence in Prime Minister Brown.



French President Nicolas Sarkozy

President Sarkozy shows the most increase in confidence ratings of any leader studied in 2008 and 2009, from 30 to 34 percent across 14 trended nations. The Presidency of the European Union during the second half of 2008 and his activist manner may have increased the confidence that some people feel for him. His confidence ratings increased in India (35% to 58%), in Ukraine (18% to 34%), in Great Britain (35% to 44%) and in the US (38% to 46%).

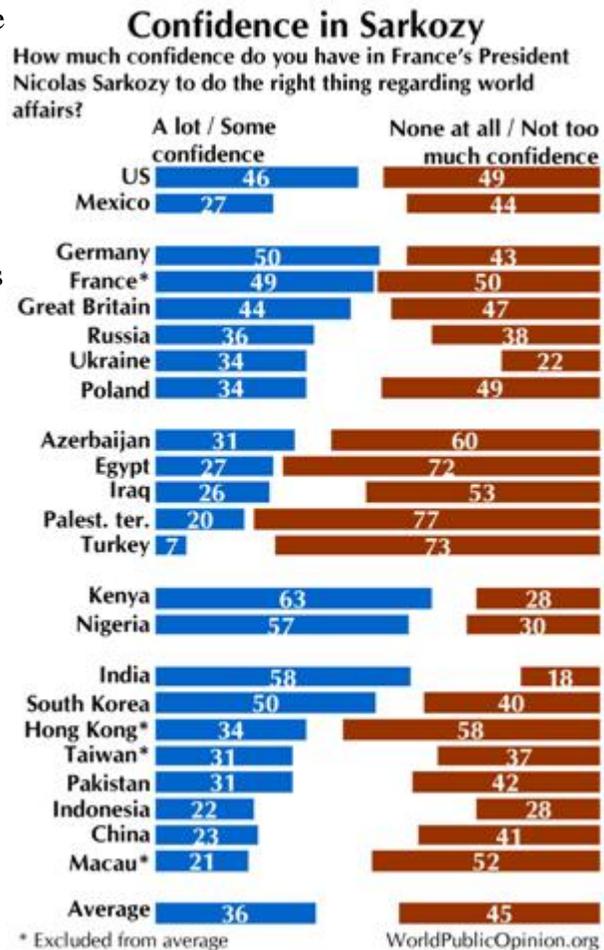
Even with these increases, however, Mr. Sarkozy still ranks somewhat below other European leaders. On average, across the 19 nations polled in 2009 (other than France), 36 percent have confidence in him and 45 percent do not. Six nations lean positive, ten lean negative and three are divided.

Sarkozy receives low confidence scores from a majority of the public in all of the nations polled in the Middle East. He and Prime Minister Putin are the only world leaders for which this is true.

In Europe, Germans express confidence in him (50% to 43%), but Great Britain and Russia are divided. Poland is negative (49% to 34%) and Ukraine is positive (34% to 22%). Overall, Mr. Sarkozy's performance in his own region seems rather weak. Americans, are divided, though their views of the French President have improved.

Kenya and Nigeria both express majority confidence in Sarkozy. Indians (58%) and South Koreans (50%), too, indicate their confidence in him. However, Pakistanis (42%) and Indonesians (28%) are predominantly negative.

The views of the Chinese public are telling, however. In 2009, only 23 percent express confidence in Sarkozy (41% little confidence); confidence in the French president is down 19 points from 42 percent in 2008. No other Western leader experienced a similar decline in confidence in China. Several events may have contributed to this change:



French protests related to the Olympic torch and Tibet policy, Sarkozy's threat to boycott the Beijing Olympics, and his meeting with the Dalai Lama in December 2008.