

People in 17 of 21 Nations Say Governments Should Put International Law Ahead of National Interest

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Most Trust World Court to Be Fair

[Questionnaire with Findings, Methodology \(PDF\)](#)



A poll by WorldPublicOpinion.org finds that most people in 17 of 21 nations surveyed say their government should abide by international law and reject the view that governments are not obliged to follow such laws when they conflict with the national interest.

(Photo: Jeroen Bouman/International Court of Justice)

Most respondents in two out of three nations polled are also confident that the International Court of Justice, also known as the World Court, would treat their country fairly and impartially, the WPO poll shows.

The poll, conducted in 21 nations from around the world asked respondents which of two statements is closest to their own view. The first statement said, "Our nation should consistently follow international laws. It is wrong to violate international laws, just as it is wrong to violate laws within a country": the second said, "If our government thinks it is not in our nation's interest, it should not feel obliged to abide by international laws."

On average, across all nations polled, 57% said that their country should put a higher priority on international law than national interest.

WorldPublicOpinion.org conducted the poll of 20,202 respondents in 21 nations that comprise 64 percent of the world's population. This includes most of the largest nations--China, India, the United States, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Russia--as well as Mexico, Chile, Germany, Great Britain, France, Poland, Ukraine, Kenya, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Turkey, Iraq, Pakistan, the Palestinian territories, and South Korea. Polling was also conducted in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau. Not all questions were asked to all nations. The margins of error range from +/-3 to 4 percentage points. The surveys were conducted across the different nations between April 4 and July 9, 2009.

WorldPublicOpinion.org, a collaborative project involving research centers from around the world, is managed by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland.

Support for abiding by international law is strongest in China, where 74% of those polled on the mainland say their government should abide by international law, while just 18% say the national interest should take precedence.

Belief in the primacy of international law was also strong in the United States Europe, Africa and the rest of the Far East. Seventy percent of Germans, 69% of Americans, 68% of Taiwanese, and 65% of Kenyans and Nigerians put international law ahead of their national interest.

The only nations where a majority says the national interest justifies violating international law were Pakistan, where 56% give priority to their national interest and 38% favor compliance with international law, and Mexico, 53% to 44%. Each has a longstanding alliance with the United States that has been marked over the years by significant concessions to Washington, which may suggest that the people of the two nations are wary of international commitments that are not to their benefit.

Also, views are divided in Turkey and the Palestinian Territories on this question.

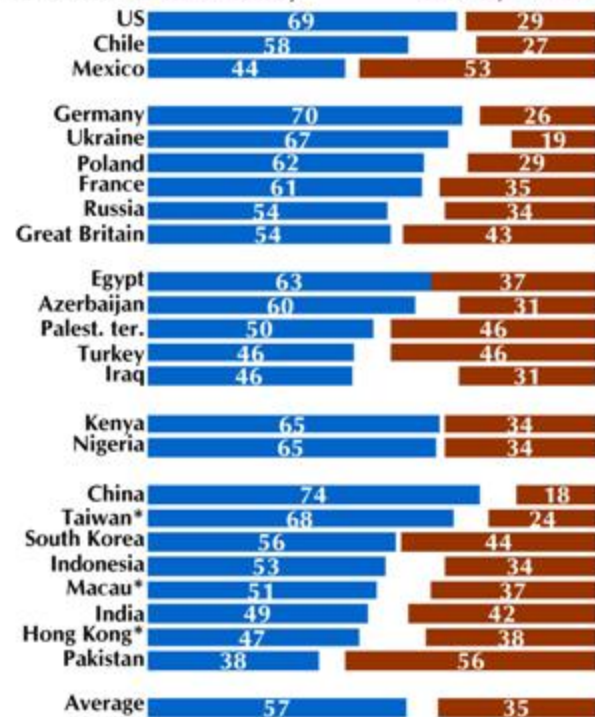
Confidence in the World Court, which adjudicates cases involving international law, is also widespread. The court, which is based in The

International Law

Which of these two views is closer to yours?

Our nation should consistently follow int'l laws. It is wrong to violate int'l laws, just as it is wrong to violate laws within a country.

If our government thinks it is not in our nation's interest, it should not feel obliged to abide by int'l laws.

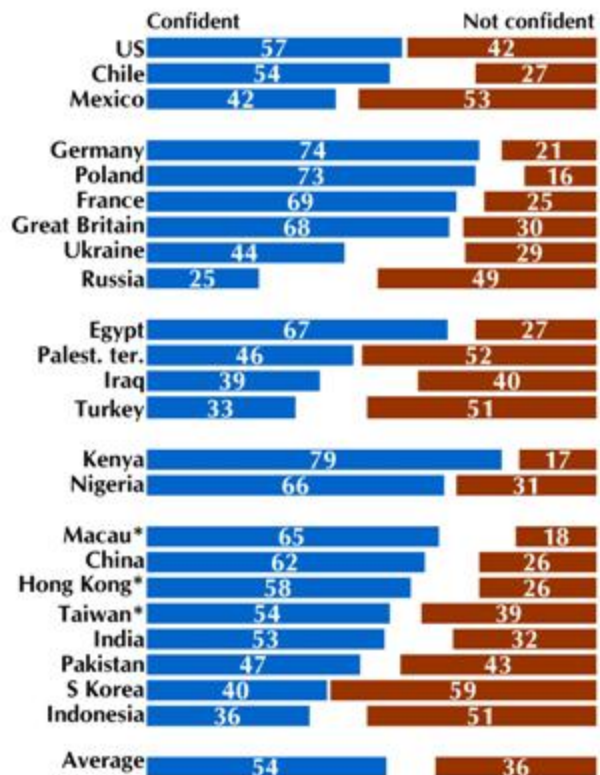


* Excluded from average

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Fairness of World Court

If there were a case involving [country], how confident are you the [World] Court's decision would be fair and impartial? Would you say that you are:



* Excluded from average

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Hague and began operations in 1946, is the principal judicial body of the United Nations and consists of 15 justices from around the world.

Respondents in 20 nations were asked if there were a case involving their country, "how confident are you that the Court's decision would be fair and impartial?" Most respondents in 13 nations say they would be somewhat or very confident, while five countries say they are not very confident or not confident at all.

On average 54% say that they would be at least somewhat confident that the Court would be fair, while 36% express a lack of confidence. Majorities also express confidence in Taiwan (54%), Hong Kong (58%), and Macau (65%).

Steven Kull, director of WorldPublicOpinion.org, comments: "It appears that publics around the world show a fairly strong internationalist orientation. Most favor subordinating national interest to international law and are ready to trust the World Court to be impartial."

Confidence in the world court is strongest among Kenyans, where 79% say they are confident a case involving their country would be decided freely and fairly. Seventy-four percent of Germans are confident, 73% of Poles, 67% of Egyptians, and 66% of Nigerians.

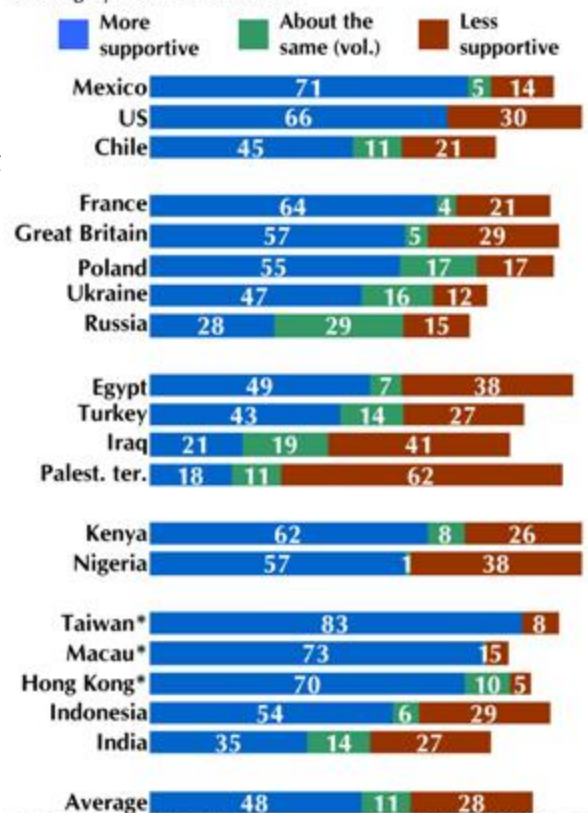
Majorities express a lack of confidence in the court in five nations, in most cases by modest majorities--South Korea (59%), Mexico (53%), the Palestinian territories (52%), Turkey (51%), and Indonesia (51%).

It appears that people in nearly all nations have a tendency to underestimate the support for international law among their fellow citizens. Respondents were asked whether they think their own support for consistently abiding by international laws is greater or less than that of the average citizen in their country. If people as a whole were estimating their fellow citizens correctly, those saying that others are more supportive would be equal to those saying others are less supportive.

However, in 14 of the 16 nations asked this question, plus Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau, many more

Support for International Law Relative to Others

As compared to the average [Country citizen] would you say you are more supportive or less supportive of consistently abiding by international laws?



* Excluded from average

said that they were more supportive of abiding by international law than said they were less supportive. On average, 48% said they were more supportive, while just 28% said they were less supportive.

Kull comments, "Clearly people are underestimating how ready others are to consistently abide by international law. People tend to think they are above average."

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