

# Publics Want More Government Action on Climate Change: Global Poll

July 29, 2009

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



A new WorldPublicOpinion.org poll of 19 nations from around the world finds that majorities in 15 think their government should put a higher priority on addressing climate change than it does now. This includes the largest greenhouse gas emitters: China (62% want more action), the US (52%), and Russia (56%).

(Photo: [publik19](#))

In all but three nations most people think their government should give climate change a relatively high priority (6-10 on a 0-10 scale: on average 7.33). However in only four nations do most people think that is what their government is doing.

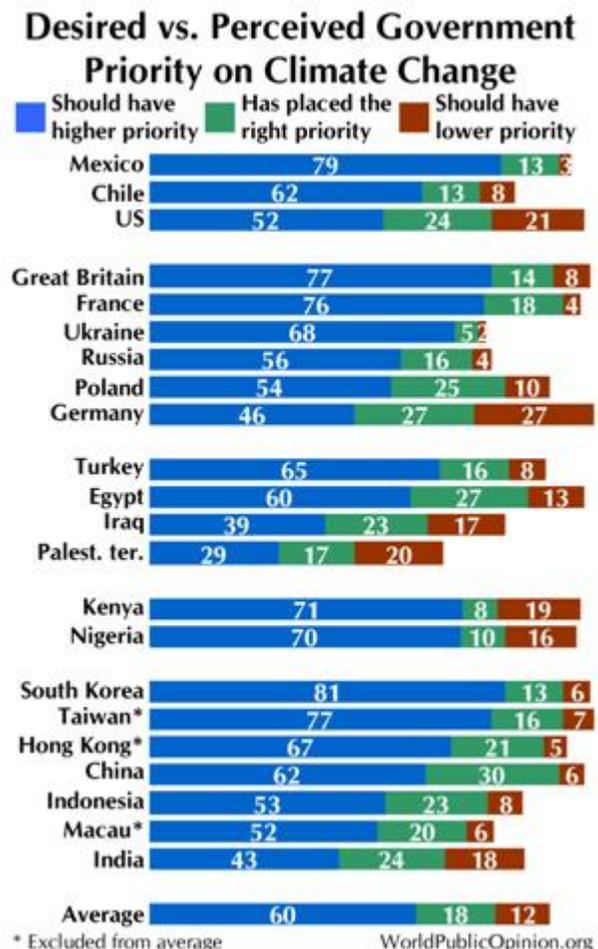
The poll also found that people tend to underestimate how high a priority their fellow citizens place on addressing climate change, with twice as many people saying they are above average than saying they are below average.

WorldPublicOpinion.org conducted the poll of 18,578 respondents in 19 nations that comprise 60 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, Egypt, Turkey, Iraq, the Palestinian territories, and South Korea. Polling was also conducted in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau.

WorldPublicOpinion.org, a collaborative project involving research centers from around the world, is managed by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland. The margins of error range from +/-3 to 4 percentage points. The surveys were conducted across the different nations between April 4 and July 9, 2009.

## Desire for Governments to Do More on Climate Change

Respondents were asked how high a priority their government places on addressing climate change on a 0-10 scale, with 0 meaning "not a priority at all" and 10 meaning "a very high priority." Respondents



were then asked to say, on the same 0-10 scale, how high a priority their government should place on addressing climate change.

Comparing the two measures, in 15 out of 19 nations majorities think their government should give higher priority to climate change than it does now and in no nation do more than one in three want their nation to give it a lower priority.

On average across all nations polled, 60 percent want climate change to get a higher priority, 12 percent want a lower priority, and 18 percent think the current priority is about right.

"Many government leaders express worry that their publics are not really ready to absorb the hardships that would come with addressing climate change," comments Steven Kull, director of WorldPublicOpinion.org, "but most people around the world appear to be impatient that their government is not doing enough to address the problem of climate change."

The largest majorities wanting a higher priority are in South Korea (81%), Mexico (79%), Britain (77%), France (76%), and Nigeria (70%). Taiwan is also quite high (77%). In no nation does more than one in five want their government to give climate change a lower priority except Germany where 27 percent want a lower priority. Most Germans (83%) believe that their country already puts a high priority on addressing climate change.

### The Priority Levels Publics Want

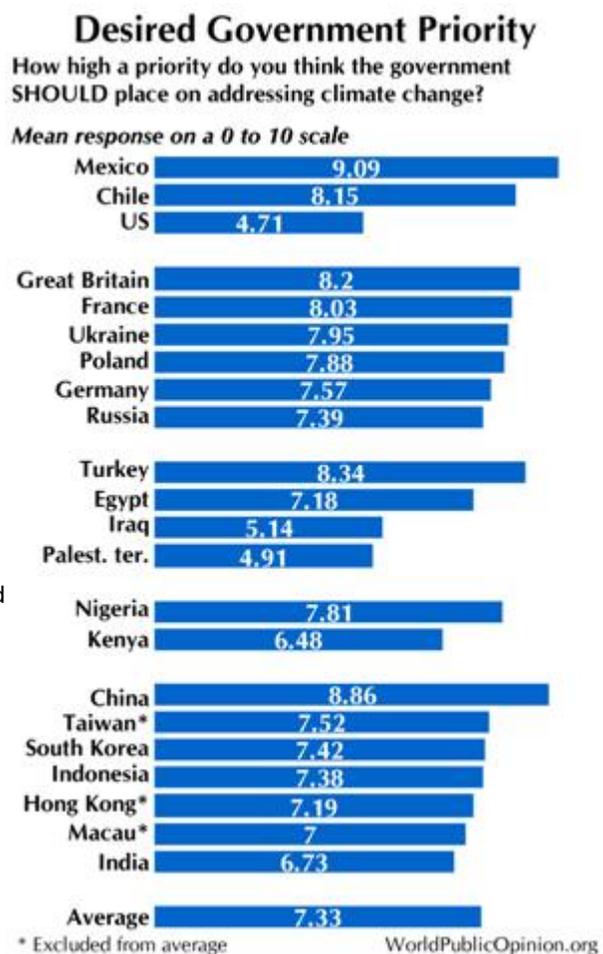
Asked how high a priority their government should place on addressing climate change, most want a high priority--on average 7.33 on a 0-10 scale. The highest mean levels are found in Mexico (9.09), China (8.86), Turkey (8.34), and France (8.03).

Only three nations had means below 6. The lowest was the United States (4.71) followed by the Palestinian territories (4.91) and Iraq (5.14).

On average across all nations polled, 73 percent think their government should give climate change a priority between 6 and 10; 12 percent think this priority should be between 0 and 4; and 9 percent say it should be a 5.

### Assessing Governments

In assessing their government on how high a priority they do give to climate change, two nations stand out. China gets a mean rating of 7.31 on a 0-10 scale, while Germany gets a mean of 7.02. Despite China's high score, 62 percent of Chinese want an even higher priority, though only 46 percent of Germans have such aspirations. Other nations which give their government high scores are Britain (5.92), Poland (5.89), and Indonesia (5.85).



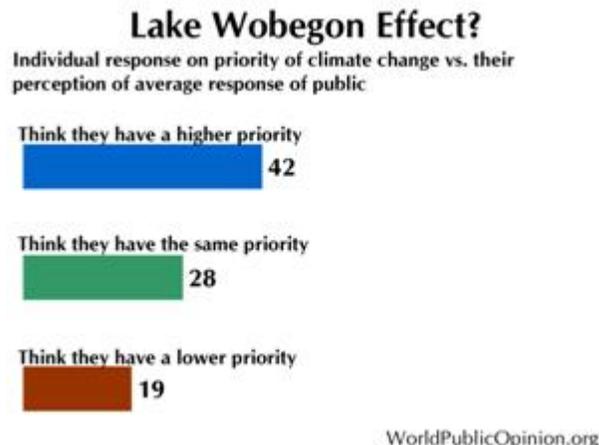
The nations which give their government the lowest scores are Ukraine (2.18), Iraq (3.65), United States (3.84), and the Palestinian territories (4.18). While majorities favor their government giving a higher priority in Ukraine (68%), and the US (52%), smaller numbers feel that way in Iraq (39%) and the Palestinian territories (29%).

Across all nations, the mean assessment of all governments was 5.06, with an average of 39 percent saying their government gives climate change a relatively high priority (6-10), 35 percent a relatively low priority (0-4), and 17 percent in between (responding with a 5).

### Tendency to Underestimate Others

In most nations people have a tendency to underestimate how much other people in their country want to prioritize climate change. Respondents were asked, "What is your guess on how high a priority the average person in [our country] thinks the government should place on addressing climate change?"

Across all nations, the average person is perceived as wanting a priority of 6.42 for climate change--though the priority actually desired on average across all nations is a higher 7.33.



Their answers about the average person were then compared to respondents' own desired priority for climate change to see how many people attributed to the average person a score that was higher, lower or the same as their own score. If each public, overall, was estimating itself correctly, the numbers saying more and less would be equal.

In fact, in all but three nations those rating themselves as above average outweighed those who said they were below average. For all nations as a whole, the percentage saying that they were above average outweighed those saying that they were below average by a two to one ratio--42 percent to 19 percent.

"Clearly we have a skew in how people perceive each other, a kind of Lake Wobegon effect. People tend to think they are above average," comments Steven Kull.

The nations with the largest percentages rating themselves above average are China (77%), South Korea (75%), Britain (66%), the US (52%), and Germany (52%).

In just one nation, the Palestinian territories, do a majority (52%) perceive the average person as more concerned than they are.

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