

Global survey finds growing opposition to US foreign policy

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The Pew Institute's 2007 Global Attitudes poll reveals a world in which the mass of the population is highly distrustful of all global leaders and opposed to the current direction of events, particularly of US foreign policy. The institute polled over 45,000 people in 47 countries in North and Latin America, Western and Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa and released data on roughly 100 questions, withholding the rest for "future release." Significantly, no data was collected in countries occupied or threatened by the US (Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, North Korea).

Co-chaired by former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and former Senator John Danforth, the Global Attitudes project is a thoroughly establishment body. It has functioned since 2001—when its list of directors included former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, US Council on Foreign Relations chair Leslie Gelb, AFL-CIO President John Sweeney, and Capetown Bishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu—issuing reports on topics of interest to the US foreign policy establishment.

The Pew poll is not set up to sensitively record the opinions of its interviewees. Many of its questions are impossibly sweeping (e.g., "Do you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable opinion of Russia?"), as its directors do not take into consideration the class divisions within each country. Nor does the poll record the backgrounds and opinions of its interviewees, which often seem rather moderate. Even though US President George W. Bush's approval ratings have never been above 40 percent in 2007 and have typically been near or under 30 percent, 45 percent of US respondents to the Pew poll express high or moderate confidence in Bush.

This makes the poll's bleak results for attitudes to US foreign policy all the more striking.

The poll began by asking respondents to select the top two global threats from a list of five: the spread of nuclear

weapons, religious and ethnic hatred, AIDS and other diseases, pollution and environmental problems, and the gap between rich and poor. Responses varied widely by country and the five options often received comparable numbers of votes—though one suspects that if "war" had been included on the list, especially in the Middle East, it might have won a clear majority.

Sometimes, however, some choices predominated. Respondents in Africa and the poorer South Asian countries overwhelmingly named disease and social inequality. In China, which is seeing an explosive development of industrial capitalism, pollution and social inequality were by far the top concerns. Respondents in Japan—the location of the US atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and of the 1997 Kyoto environmental treaty torpedoed by the Bush administration—chose nuclear weapons and pollution.

Globally, compared to the results of a 2002 poll, concern grew most about issues highly threatening to the US capitalist elite—environmental concerns and the growth of social inequality.

The poll then asked respondents who should take responsibility for dealing with these problems. In no country was the US the majority choice. Pluralities named the US in the US and Japan, and small pluralities named the US in Peru, Venezuela, Spain, the Ivory Coast and Mali. The United Nations was a popular choice, though respondents often chose "all countries acting together" instead. The European Union was perhaps surprisingly unpopular, even in Western Europe.

The poll continued by asking for opinions of various countries and world leaders. Significantly, the US was viewed unfavorably by majorities or pluralities in several Latin American countries (Argentina, Bolivia, and Brazil), most Western European countries (France, Germany, Spain, Sweden), all Muslim Middle Eastern countries except for the oil sheikhdom of Kuwait, and in

several Asian countries (China, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Pakistan). In some countries (e.g., Japan and South Korea), majorities viewed the US favorably even though US military bases in those countries are highly controversial. However, Americans uniformly rated more favorably than America—particularly in Western Europe, where solid majorities in all countries except Spain viewed Americans favorably.

Bush is widely hated, with only Israel and a few sub-Saharan African countries giving him a more than 50 percent approval rating. In Latin America and Europe his approval rating is always below 30 percent and occasionally in the single digits. In the Middle East, besides Israel and Lebanon, his approval rating is never more than 15 percent and usually in the single digits.

These findings were confirmed by a recent Harris Research poll carried out in Europe for the *Financial Times*. It found that a plurality (32 percent) of respondents in Germany, France, Great Britain, Italy and Spain viewed the US as the single greatest threat to global peace. In Spain, 46 percent named the US the greatest single threat. This mirrors the opinions of younger Americans, 35 percent of whom name the US as the top threat to global stability.

US journalists reviewing the poll often tried to put the best gloss on the Pew poll findings by noting that the leaders of China, Russia, Iran and Venezuela are also globally unpopular. This is, however, a rather cold comfort. A country by country comparison shows that Russian president and former KGB agent Vladimir Putin is more popular than Bush in 25 of 47 countries, including nearly all of Western Europe and the Middle East, and most Eastern European and Asian countries.

More detailed questions on US foreign policy revealed massive global distrust. In all the European countries, all Middle Eastern countries except Israel, all Asian countries except India, and all the Latin American countries except Peru and Venezuela, majorities of respondents said the US took the interests of their home country into account very little or not at all. If they are to be believed, more positive responses in Venezuela (an oil-rich country where the Bush administration has repeatedly tried to mount coups) and sub-Saharan Africa (whose societies are bled white by the US-dominated International Monetary Fund's debt policies) indicate illusions with a very fragile base in reality.

In almost all countries of Asia and the Middle East, in most Eastern European countries, in Canada, and in all Western European countries, majorities saw US policies

as “increasing the gap between rich and poor countries.”

Bush administration claims that it altruistically spreads democracy are globally discredited. In 43 of 47 countries majorities said that the US “promotes democracy mostly where it serves its interests.” This included 63 percent of US respondents. Nigeria was the only country where a plurality (of only 2 percent) said that the US promotes democracy “wherever it can.”

While US television programs are still globally fairly popular, “US ideas and customs” are not. Solid majorities in every Latin American, European and Middle Eastern country (except Israel) describe their effect on local societies as negative. African countries divide evenly over the issue. In Asia, Japan is the only country where a plurality views their effect as positive.

The US occupation of Afghanistan is also globally discredited. It was only supported by a bare 50 percent of respondents in the US and Ghana, 59 percent in Israel, and a 3 percent plurality in Great Britain. The heritage of anti-imperialist struggle is very strong: all Latin American and Muslim Middle Eastern countries show large majorities calling for withdrawal. In sub-Saharan Africa, typically less critical of US foreign policy, aside from Ghana majorities and a few solid pluralities oppose US rule in Afghanistan. Results in Asia are similar.

In a highly significant move, the Pew poll did not release any results concerning, or indicate if any questions were asked, about the US occupation of Iraq. Such a decision amounts to self-censorship by the Pew Institute.

The poll also indicated serious concern over global warming and growing awareness of the US role in causing it. Majorities of at least 65 percent and usually more described global warming as very or somewhat serious in all 37 countries where the question was asked (the question was not asked in sub-Saharan Africa). Moreover, in all but two countries (Israel and South Korea), pluralities named the US as the world's most polluting country.



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