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Views of China and Russia Decline in Global Poll

Public views of China and Russia have slipped considerably in the past year, according to a new BBC World Service poll across 21 countries.

Views of the US have improved modestly over the past year but remain predominantly negative, even though the poll was taken after President Obama's election.

In last year's BBC Poll across the same countries, people leaned toward saying China and Russia were having positive influences in the world. But views of China are now divided, with positive ratings having slipped six points to 39 per cent, while 40 per cent are now negative. Negative views of Russia have jumped eight points so that now, substantially more have a negative (42%) than a positive view (30%) of Russia's influence.

Views of the US showed improvements in Canada, Egypt, Ghana, India, Italy and Japan. But far more countries have predominantly negative views of America (12), than predominantly positive views (6). Most Europeans show little change and views of the US in Russia and China have grown more negative. On average, positive views have risen from 35 per cent to 40 per cent, but they are still outweighed by negative views (43%, down from 47%).

As was the case last year, Iran, Israel and Pakistan are the three countries rated most negatively. Iran had the poorest average ratings of the countries people were asked to rate, with 55 per cent feeling it has a negative influence in the world. Fourteen of the twenty one countries see it as having a negative influence.

Pakistan also gets very low ratings with 53 per cent giving negative ratings and 17 percent positive ones. Eighteen countries see Pakistan as having a negative influence.

The largest number of countries - 19 out of 21 - give negative ratings to Israel. The two exceptions are Americans (where slightly more are positive) and Russians (who are divided). On average, 51 per cent in countries polled say it is having a negative influence and 21 per cent say it is having a positive influence.

It should be noted that most polling occurred before Israel undertook its military operation in Gaza, and before the recent interruption in Russian gas supplies to Europe.

As last year, the most positive views are of Germany, with positive ratings rising even higher from 55 per cent to 61 per cent on average. Every country polled has a favourable view of Germany.

The UK has also moved up seven points, with an average of 58 per cent today saying it is having a positive influence.

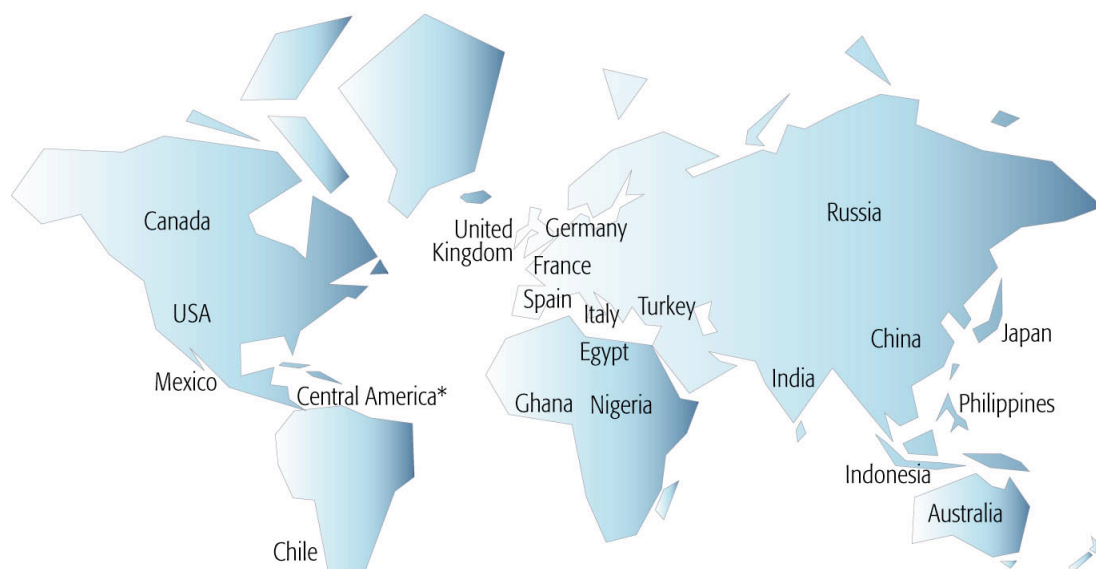
The BBC World Service Poll has been tracking opinions about country influence in the world since 2005. The latest results are based on 13,575 in-home or telephone interviews conducted across a total of 21 countries by the international polling firm GlobeScan, together with the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland. GlobeScan coordinated fieldwork between 21 November 2008 and 1 February 2009.

GlobeScan Chairman Doug Miller comments: "Our poll results suggest that China has much to learn about winning hearts and minds in the world. It seems that a successful Olympic Games has not been enough to offset other concerns that people have.

"As for Russia, the more it acts like the old Soviet Union, the less people outside its borders seem to like it."

Steven Kull, director of PIPA, comments, "Though BBC polls have shown that most people around the world are hopeful that Barack Obama will improve US relations with the world, it is clear that his election alone is not enough to turn the tide. People are still looking to see if there are significant changes in US policies."

Participating Countries



*Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama
Note: In Chile, China, Egypt, Mexico, the Philippines, Turkey, and the countries of Central America urban samples were used. Please see methodology for details.

Detailed Findings

Public opinion in Russia relative to public opinion in Europe and the US seems to be polarizing. Americans and Europeans have both grown more negative toward Russia, and Russians have become more negative toward the US, the EU, and less positive toward Germany and the UK (but not France). Russia's military action against Georgia and increasing limitations on civil rights may be affecting American and European attitudes, and US and European criticism of Russia may be affecting Russian attitudes. [Note that the polling was done before Russia's cut-off of natural gas supplies to Ukraine and parts of Europe.]

To some extent this polarizing trend seems to be appearing in relations between China and the West as well. Europeans have become more negative toward China, while the Chinese have become more negative toward the US (negative views have risen from 46% to 58%), the EU (16% to 28%), and France (positive views dropped from 64% to 44%--perhaps in reaction to French demonstrations regarding the Tibet issue).

However, Chinese views of the UK have grown more positive (rising from 56% to 67%), as have views of Germany (58% to 65%). And Americans have not grown more negative toward China, with negative views essentially unchanged at 52 per cent.

The US for the first time since 2005 has surpassed Russia in positive ratings (an average of 42% for the US as compared to 30% for Russia), but their negative ratings are similar as are the number of countries giving them predominantly positive or negative ratings.

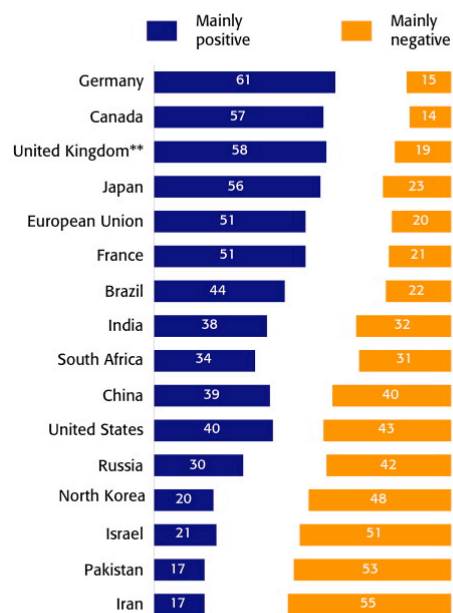
Sixteen of the countries polled say Japan is having a mostly positive influence in the world. But for the first time, Japan's average ratings have slipped behind those of the UK, due to an increase in the UK's positive rating. Japan suffered from declining views in Germany, Russia, Turkey and the UK.

France's positive ratings have edged upward from 49 per cent to 51 per cent and 18 of the countries polled give it a positive rating. American public opinion towards France continues to gradually improve; for the first time since the BBC started tracking in 2005, a majority of Americans give France a positive rating. While in 2005, 52 per cent of Americans had a negative view of France (37% positive), now 52 per cent have a positive view (28% negative).

Views of India continue to lean toward the positive, but there has been some erosion. Positive views have slipped from 41 per cent to 38 per cent and negative views have risen from 30 per cent to 32 per cent. This is largely driven by sharp increases in negative views in European countries - France (35% to 50%), Germany (34% to 54%), Italy (30% to 43%), and Spain (35% to 47%) - as well as China (30% to 44%).

North Korea continues to garner quite negative views with an average of 48 per cent (up 2 points) saying it is having a negative influence, and 20 per cent a positive influence. Fourteen countries give it poor ratings, but views are divided in China, Egypt, Nigeria and Russia, and lean positive in Ghana.

Views of Countries' Influence
"Mainly Positive" vs "Mainly Negative,"
Average of Tracking Countries, * January 2009



*Averages do not include views of subject country/countries (in the case of the EU); views of China, Russia, and US are based on all survey countries.

**Prior to 2009 the question was asked regarding Great Britain. The white space in this chart represents "Depends," "Neither," "Neutral," and "DK/NA."

Canada has the second-most positive ratings with fifty-seven per cent seeing it as having a positive influence in the world. In only one country – Turkey - are views predominantly negative. Positive views are up on average 4 points from two years ago.

The EU has all but one country (Turkey) giving it positive ratings. On average 51 per cent see it as having a positive influence. Its ratings have remained essentially unchanged since last year. The biggest changes have been downward movements in Russia (positive views dropping from 51% to 31%), Turkey (44% to 34%), and China (negative views rising from 16% to 28%). German positive views of the EU have risen (72% to 81%).

All but two countries have a positive view of Brazil. However, their ratings are more modest, with an average of 44 per cent giving them a positive rating and 22 per cent a negative rating. Positive views have risen three points over last year.

South Africa, assessed for the first time this year, elicits evenly-divided views. Average ratings are balanced (34% positive, 31% negative). The most positive ratings come from its African neighbours, Ghana (60%) and Nigeria (62%). The most critical country is Germany (53% negative).

In total 13,575 citizens in Australia, Canada, Chile, China, Central America (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama), Egypt, France, Germany, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Nigeria, Philippines, Russia, Spain, Turkey, UK and USA were interviewed face-to-face or by telephone between 21 November 2008 and 1 February 2009. Polling was conducted for the BBC World Service by the international polling firm GlobeScan and its research partners in each country. In 7 of the 21 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. Average figures quoted for the US, Russia and China include all 21 countries. For other countries, average scores exclude Mexico and Indonesia.

Questionnaire

I would now like to ask your impressions of some specific countries.

Q1A Please tell me if you think each of the following countries are having a mainly positive or mainly negative influence in the world:

ROTATE

at) China

- 01 Mainly positive
- 02 Mainly negative

VOLUNTEERED (DO NOT READ)

- 03 Depends
- 04 Neither, neutral
- 99 DK/NA

bt) France

ct) The United States

dt) The European Union

et) Japan

ft) Israel

gt) North Korea

ht) Canada

Q1B Please tell me if you think each of the following countries are having a mainly positive or mainly negative influence in the world:

ROTATE

at) The United Kingdom

- 01 Mainly positive
- 02 Mainly negative

VOLUNTEERED (DO NOT READ)

- 03 Depends
- 04 Neither, neutral
- 99 DK/NA

bt) Russia

ct) India

dt) Iran

et) Brazil

ft) Pakistan

gt) Germany

h) South Africa