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## Confidence in Obama Lifts U.S. Image Around the World Most Muslim Publics Not So Easily Moved

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### Overview

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The image of the United States has improved markedly in most parts of the world, reflecting global confidence in Barack Obama. In many countries opinions of the United States are now about as positive as they were at the beginning of the decade before George W. Bush took office. Improvements in the U.S. image have been most pronounced in Western Europe, where favorable ratings for both the nation and the American people have soared. But opinions of America have also become more positive in key countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia, as well.

Signs of improvement in views of America are seen even in some predominantly Muslim countries that held overwhelmingly negative views of the United States in the Bush years. The most notable increase occurred in Indonesia, where people are well aware of Obama's family ties to the country and where favorable ratings of the U.S. nearly doubled this year. However for the most part, opinions of the U.S. among Muslims in the Middle East remain largely unfavorable, despite some positive movement in the numbers in Jordan and Egypt. Animosity toward the U.S., however, continues to run deep and unabated in Turkey, the Palestinian territories and

## Pakistan.

Israel stands out in the poll as the only public among the 25 surveyed where the current U.S. rating is lower than in past surveys.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast, in Germany favorable opinion of the U.S. jumped from 31% in 2008 to 64% in the current survey. Large boosts in U.S. favorability ratings since last year are also recorded in Britain, Spain and France. In its own hemisphere, America's image rose markedly in Canada, Mexico, Argentina and Brazil. Improvements in U.S. ratings are less evident in countries where the country's image had not declined consistently during the Bush years, including Poland, Japan and South Korea. Opinions of the U.S. remain very positive in the African nations of Kenya and Nigeria, while increasing significantly in India and China.

The new survey by the Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project, conducted May 18 to June 16, finds that confidence in Barack Obama's foreign policy judgments stands behind a resurgent U.S. image in many countries. Belief that Obama will "do the right thing in world affairs" is now nearly universal in Western countries, where lack of confidence in President Bush had been almost as prevalent for much of his time in office. In France and Germany, no fewer than nine-in-ten express confidence in the new American president, exceeding the ratings achieved by Nicolas Sarkozy and Angela Merkel in their own countries.

In Asia, optimism about Obama is almost as extensive with 85% of Japanese and 81% of South Koreans expressing confidence in the American president, and only somewhat lower percentages expressing that view in India (77%) and China (64%). In Brazil, 76% have confidence in Obama, as do most Argentines (61%), despite their generally skeptical view of the U.S. as expressed in this and earlier surveys.

Even in some countries where the U.S. remains unpopular, significant percentages nonetheless say that they think Obama will do the right thing in international affairs. In Egypt and Jordan, sizable numbers have confidence in him - 42% and 31% respectively. This represents a three-fold increase compared with opinions about President Bush in 2008. But in Pakistan and the Palestinian territories, ratings of Obama are only marginally better than the abysmal ratings accorded Bush. Again, Israel stands alone as the only country where Obama does not engender more confidence than did President Bush. And only about one-in-three Russians (37%) voice confidence in the new president, although this is still a considerably better rating than Bush received in 2008 (22%).

In most countries where opinions of the U.S. have improved, many say that Obama's election led them to have a more favorable view of the U.S. This admission is most apparent in Western Europe, Canada and Japan. In Indonesia, where opinion of America improved dramatically, no fewer than 73% say that his election bettered their opinion of the U.S. However even in countries where there was little or no upswing in the U.S.'s ratings, many people say that Obama's election has led them to think more favorably of the U.S. For example in Egypt and Turkey, where America's favorable ratings remain very low, as many as 38% in both countries say they have better opinions of the U.S. because of Obama. However, fewer than one-in-ten (9%) in Pakistan express that view.

More generally, analysis of the survey finds that views of the U.S. are being driven much more by

personal confidence in Obama than by opinions about his specific policies. That is, opinions about Obama personally are more associated with views of the U.S. than are judgments of his policies that were tested in the poll.

### Obama's Cairo Speech

The polling in the Muslim world took place around the time of President Obama's Cairo speech. In some countries, interviews took place both before and after the speech, providing some gauge of the effect of Obama's remarks on his image and opinions of the U.S. more broadly. In Turkey a sufficient number of interviews were conducted before and after the speech to allow for an analysis of how much impact it had on public opinion. This analysis suggests that the speech had little measurable impact on views of the U.S. or Obama himself. However, the pre-post comparisons were rudimentary ones that could only have detected a major swing in public opinion.

In Israel and the Palestinian territories full surveys were conducted both before and after the Cairo speech. A pre-post analysis among both publics suggests that Obama's June 4 speech had a more negative impact on attitudes toward America among Israelis than it had a positive one among Palestinians. Before the speech, 76% of Israelis questioned had a favorable view of the U.S., but after the speech that rating fell to 63%. Similarly, confidence in Obama to do the right thing in world affairs slipped from 60% pre-speech to 49% post-speech.

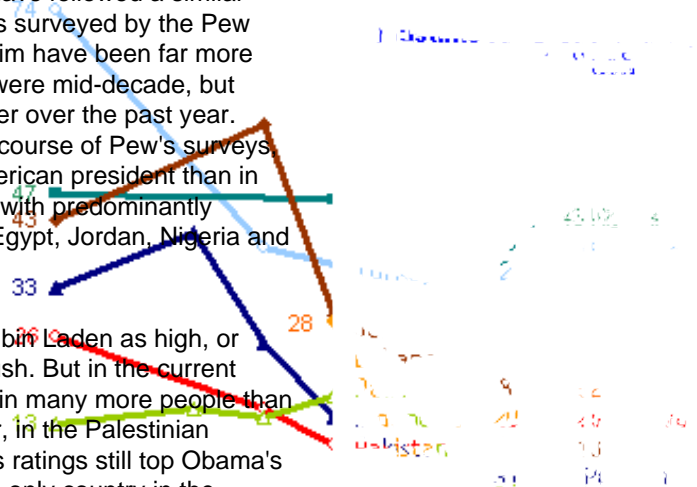
Among Palestinians, in contrast, overall ratings of the U.S. and Obama improved but only marginally (+5 percentage points), a difference that is not statistically significant. However, one apparently positive consequence of the speech on Palestinian public opinion was observed in the survey. The number of Palestinians thinking that Obama would consider their country's interests when making international policy rose from 27% to 39%, following the Cairo speech.

### Obama vs. bin Laden

More generally, there is little evidence that a more positively regarded U.S. president has spurred further declines in support for terrorism in Muslim countries. Pew Global Attitudes surveys over the last few years have found many fewer Muslims than earlier in the decade saying that suicide bombing and other forms of violence against civilians are justified to defend Islam from its enemies. However, support for suicide bombing has not fallen further over the past year.

Opinions about Osama bin Laden have followed a similar trend line among the Muslim publics surveyed by the Pew Global Attitudes Project. Views of him have been far more negative in recent years than they were mid-decade, but overall they have not declined further over the past year. However, for the first time over the course of Pew's surveys there is more confidence in the American president than in bin Laden in a number of countries with predominantly Muslim publics; including: Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, Nigeria and Indonesia.

In 2008, most Muslim publics rated bin Laden as high, or higher than they rated President Bush. But in the current survey Obama inspires confidence in many more people than does the al Qaeda leader. However, in the Palestinian territories and Pakistan, bin Laden's ratings still top Obama's by sizable margins. (Lebanon is the only country in the survey where Bush's ratings had been higher than bin Laden's among Muslims in recent years).



### Obama Runs the Table on Guantanamo and Iraq

Obama's overall approval rating for some of his current international policies is high in most countries. This is especially so in Western Europe, where markedly more people than in the U.S. itself give a thumbs up to the new president's foreign policy. Closing the military prison at Guantanamo and withdrawing troops from Iraq are the specific policies that engender the most public international support. Supra majorities in almost all countries favor both measures - including nearly all of the publics of predominantly Muslim countries surveyed. The one notable exception is the U.S., where the public is now divided about closing the military prison at Guantanamo.

Sending more troops to Afghanistan is the only Obama policy tested that does not engender broad global support. In fact, majorities in most countries oppose the added deployments. This includes the publics of several NATO countries - such as Britain, Germany, Spain and Canada - most of which in recent years have called for removing troops from Afghanistan. A majority of Pakistanis also oppose the call for more troops in Afghanistan, reflecting longstanding opposition to NATO operations in that country. Opinions in the U.S. and Israel are exceptional - majorities in both countries favor Obama's request for more troops.

Afghanistan not withstanding, people around the world for the

most part have high expectations for Barack Obama. Majorities of the publics of America's traditional allies, who

have thought the U.S. favors Israel too much think that Obama will be fair in his dealing with the Palestinians and Israelis. In the Mideast, however, large majorities are dubious. More than six-in-ten Jordanians (69%), Egyptians (66%) and Lebanese (63%) do not expect Obama to be even handed. In Israel, the number thinking Obama will be fair was 57% prior to the Cairo speech, but just 47% after Obama's address. Among Palestinians, the view that the new American president will be fair rose marginally after the speech (25% to 31%).

The nearly 27,000 people questioned in the new Pew Global Attitudes survey are also generally optimistic that Obama will seek international approval before using military force and will take into account the interests of their country when making U.S. policy. Western Europeans and Canadians are especially positive in these regards. Publics around the world are also optimistic on another issue that has been a source of contention with regard to the U.S.: climate change. Majorities or pluralities of people in almost every country surveyed believe that Obama will get the U.S. to take significant measures to control climate change.

While the image of the U.S. is much improved and expectations about Obama are high, there has been only modest change in opinion of the U.S. on two key issues: multilateralism and the impact of the American global footprint. Expectations about Obama's multilateralism notwithstanding, most still say the U.S. is not considering their country when making foreign policy. Only in Germany, India, Israel, Kenya, Nigeria, China and Brazil do majorities think the U.S. is taking their country's interest into account when making foreign policy. And overwhelming numbers of people around the world continue to see the U.S. as having a big influence on their country, with the publics of most nations surveyed describing that influence as bad, rather than good. Exceptions are India and Kenya, where majorities say that the U.S. impact is positive.

Nonetheless, one concrete, positive sign for the new administration in the survey is a surge in support for U.S.-led efforts to combat terrorism. The percentage favoring the U.S. effort among the nation's allies had steadily declined from 2002 to 2007. The new survey once again finds majorities of Western Europeans and Canadians approving of the U.S. anti-terrorism effort. But increased support for U.S. anti-terrorism efforts is also apparent in Poland, Russia, Brazil and Mexico. Among majority-

Muslim publics, Indonesians are alone in supporting American anti-terrorism efforts. In that regard, while the image of the U.S. has improved somewhat in many predominantly Muslim countries, majorities in most continue to fear that the U.S. could pose a military threat to their country someday.

### It's Still the Economy

As in 2008, most people surveyed by the Pew Global Attitudes Project say they are dissatisfied with conditions in their country. However, discontent increased sharply over the

past year in Spain, Poland, Russia, Pakistan and Mexico. As in previous polls, an overwhelming number of Chinese (87%) say they are satisfied with conditions in their country. Majorities in Canada and India also express satisfaction with the way things were going in their countries. For India, the current recorded level of national contentment represents a major increase over 2008.

Overwhelmingly negative views of national economies underlie national discontent in most countries. Overall, ratings of national economic conditions have grown more negative in the last year. Among the 21 countries surveyed in 2008 and 2009, the median percentage rating their economy as bad is 74% this year, compared with 62% last year. Evaluations of economic conditions soured the most over the past year in Europe - specifically in Britain, Germany, Spain, Poland and Russia. But in China, India and Indonesia, where GDP has continued to grow, opinions of economic conditions have improved since 2008, especially in India.

Even though America's image has improved markedly over the past year, majorities or pluralities in 20 of 25 publics believe that the U.S. economy is hurting their own economies. This was the prevailing view in most countries in the 2008 survey, as well. It is slightly more prevalent in the new poll - especially in Russia and Nigeria. In India most (55%) see the U.S. as having a positive effect on the economy, while the Chinese are divided about evenly on the American impact.

There is little consensus as to which of the major powers has the best plan to fix the economy. In Europe, only the French and Germans express strong confidence in the European Union. In Britain and Spain, where many favor the U.S. approach, confidence in the EU is lower. Most Americans (60%) believe the U.S. has the best approach to dealing with the global recession, though the poll does find that Obama's economic stimulus plan is less popular in the United States than in Western Europe. As in the United States, most Chinese (60%) say their country's approach to the global recession is best.

The 25-nation poll finds a mixed message in responses to the global recession. As in the past, majorities in most nations continue to endorse a free market economy and most people polled continue to endorse growing international trade ties. However, still more people say their governments should take steps to protect their countries economically, even if other friendly nations object. And as in previous surveys in this series, large percentages of people believe that their country needs to be protected against foreign influence and most favor greater restrictions and control on immigration.

While global recession concerns are clearly evident, huge majorities of the 25 publics questioned in the poll continue to see global warming as a serious problem. As has been the case in past years, the intensity of

concern about this issue is somewhat less among the Chinese and the Americans compared with people in other major nations. But the current poll found the intensity of worry also slipping in Canada, Mexico, Britain, Spain, Poland, Russia and Turkey compared with levels in 2008. Stronger concern for global warming was recorded in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Nigeria and China. However, the Chinese continue to report far less intense worry about global warming than any of the other publics polled.

Notably, however, willingness to pay increased prices to combat climate change was much higher in China, and also India, than in other countries. Close to nine-in-ten among these two publics, both of which have seen GDP growth in the past year, agree that people should be willing to pay higher prices to address this problem. And support for higher prices to deal with climate change was also a good deal higher than average among the publics of two other major Asian economies - South Korea and Japan.

The poll found near universal awareness of swine flu among the 25 publics surveyed in late May and early June. Pakistan is the only country polled where people were largely unaware of the disease. Concern about swine flu was considerable: Majorities of those who have heard about the disease in most countries polled were very or somewhat worried about being exposed to it. Concerns were especially strong in parts of Asia, but surprisingly modest in Mexico, despite the number of deaths from swine flu that have occurred there.

### Also of Note:

- Lebanese Sunnis are more confident in Obama than are either Christians or Shia. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of Sunni Muslims in Lebanon say they have at least some confidence in Obama, compared with 46% of Christians and just 26% of Shia Muslims.
- Brazilians increasingly view China, a fellow member of the BRIC group (Brazil, Russia, India and China), as a partner. Nearly half of Brazilians (49%) now see China as a partner, up from 34% in 2008.
- Opinions of the European Union remain fairly tepid in Britain. In fact, more Canadians (71%) and Americans (56%) than the British (50%) express favorable opinions of the EU.
- Views of the United Nations have improved in the United States, as well as in Britain and France. Currently, 61% of Americans say they have a favorable view of the U.N., compared with 48% in 2007
- There is as much support for the free market in the Middle East as there is in Western Europe. And a higher percentage of Palestinians (82%) than any Western European public agrees that people are better off in a free market economy, even though some are rich and some are poor.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Polls were taken in 24 nations, as well as in the Palestinian territories.

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