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Most People Think Their Country's Foreign Policy Is Morally No Better Than Average: Global Poll

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Contact: Steven Kull, Director, WorldPublicOpinion.org, (202) 232-7500

College Park, MD—The world is full of nationalistic people certain that their country is morally superior to others, right? Actually, a new WorldPublicOpinion.org poll of 21 nations around the world finds that people can be remarkably modest.

Asked to assess the morality of their country's foreign policy, in 19 out of 21 countries the most common answer is that their country is about average or below average.

In the United States, about half (49%) say the morality of US foreign policy is average with another 16 percent saying it is below average. Just 24 percent say it is above average.

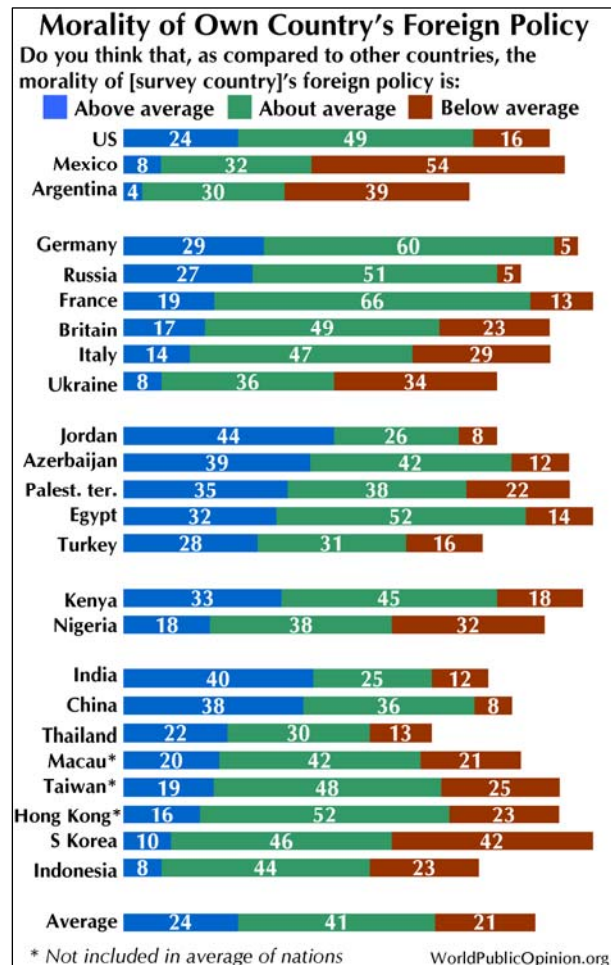
Among Russians, 51 percent say the morality of their foreign policy is average, while 5 percent say it is inferior. Twenty-seven percent say it is superior.

In China, a relatively large 38 percent say their foreign policy is morally superior, but more say that it is either average (36%) or below average (8%).

The British are the most skeptical among the major powers, with more saying their country is below average (23%), than above average (17%), though most say it is average (49%).

France has the largest percentage of all nations polled saying that France is average (66%), while slightly more say it is above average (19%) than below average (13%).

Across all countries, the most common answer is that their country's foreign policy is about average, with 41 percent giving this response. The view that their country is above average is only slightly higher than the view that it is below average—24 percent said it is above



average while 21 percent said it is below average.

“People around the world may actually be more realistic than is often assumed,” comments Steven Kull, director of WorldPublicOpinion.org, a collaborative project of research centers around the world.

The poll of 21618 respondents was conducted between July 15 and September 26, 2008 in 21 nations. Most of the world's largest nations were included—China, India, the United States, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Russia—as well as Argentina, Mexico, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinian Territories, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Kenya, Thailand, South Korea, and Ukraine. The nations polled represent 61 percent of the world population. Publics in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau were also polled. Margins of error range from approximately +/-2 to 4 percent. Not all questions were asked in all nations.

In just two countries do more people say that their country is above average than say it is average or below average—but even here less than half are so self-confident. The highest number is found in Jordan, where 44 percent say that their country is above average, while 26 percent say it is average and 8 percent below average. In India 40 percent give their country above average ratings, while 25 percent give it average ratings and 12 percent below average.

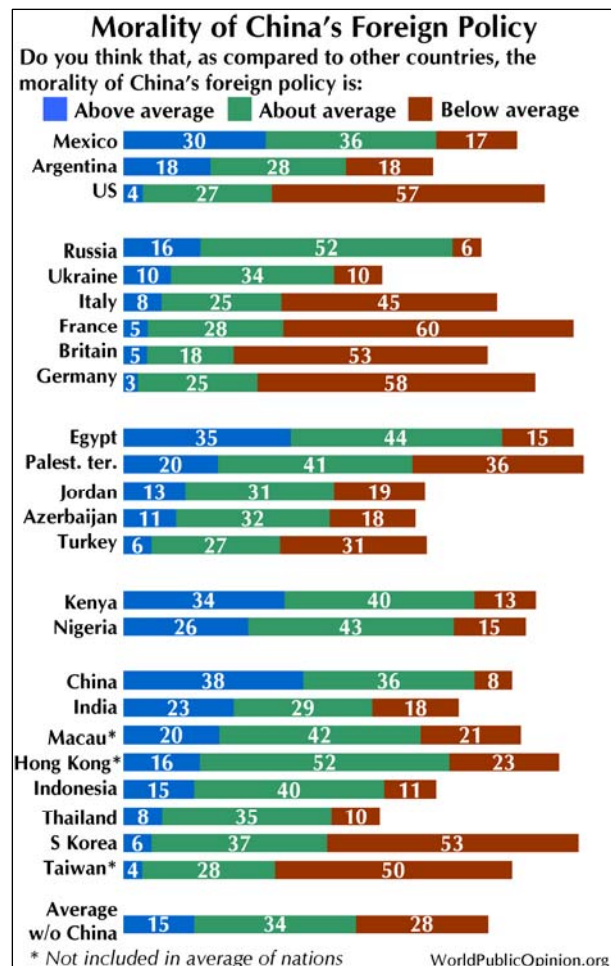
On the other hand, two countries give their country predominantly poor ratings. In Mexico 54 percent say the morality of their foreign policy is below average, as does a plurality of Argentines (39%).

Assessing Other Countries

Asked to assess the morality of other major nations, people around the world tend to feel that all of the major nations are about average.

The country to get the most negative ratings is China, with six nations saying that its foreign policy is below average (France 60%, Germany 58%, US 57%, Great Britain 53%, South Korea 53% and Italy 45%). Overall 28 percent say China is below average, 15 percent above average, and 34 percent average.

Russia gets similar ratings. Five nations predominantly say Russia is below average (France 57%, US 51%, Britain



47%, Azerbaijan 45% and Germany 43%). Overall, Russia has the biggest spread between those who say it is below average (29%) and those who say it is above average (12%), while 32 percent say it is average.

Views of America’s foreign policy are the most mixed. While five nations predominantly say it is below average (Palestinians 61%, Germans 55%, Russians 52%, Turks 45%, and Argentines 40%), two nations predominantly say it is above average (Kenya 56%, and Nigeria 48%). Overall, the US has the largest number worldwide saying it is below average (32%), but it also has one of the highest numbers saying it is above average (20%). Overall, 29 percent say it is about average.

The best ratings go to Britain. It is the only nation that overall has appreciably more people saying that it is above average (21%), than below average (17%), while 38 percent say it is average. Nearly all nations give it a predominantly average rating. The only exceptions are the Palestinians, where 57 percent say it is below average and Kenyans where 53% say it is above average. Taiwanese also give Britain a predominantly positive rating (44%).

Views of France are the most balanced. Overall, the number worldwide saying France’s foreign policy is above average (17%) is almost exactly the same as those saying that it is below average (16%), while 40 percent call it average. No nation predominantly says France is above average or below average.

Outside mainland China, views of the morality of China’s foreign policy vary among Chinese populations. Taiwan is quite critical with 50 percent saying it is below average. Hong Kong gives China fairly balanced ratings (23% below average, 16% above average, 52% average), as do the residents of Macau (21% below, 20% above, 42% average).

