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International Poll: No Consensus On Who Was Behind 9/11

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College Park, MD—A new WorldPublicOpinion.org poll of 17 nations finds that majorities in only nine of them believe that al Qaeda was behind the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States.

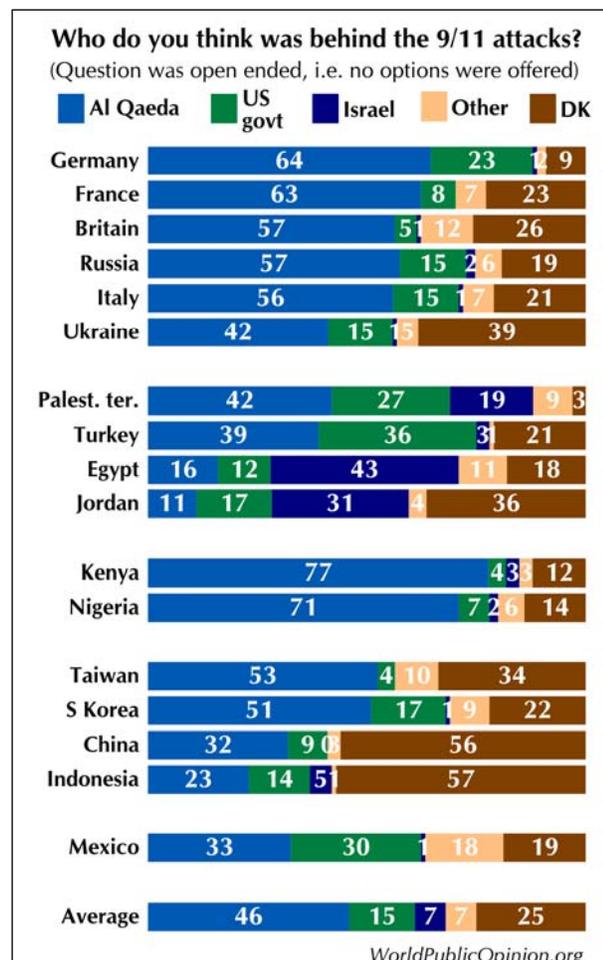
In no country does a majority agree on another possible perpetrator, but in most countries significant minorities cite the US government itself and, in a few countries, Israel. These responses were given spontaneously to an open-ended question that did not offer response options.

On average, 46 percent say that al Qaeda was behind the attacks while 15 percent say the US government, seven percent Israel, and seven percent some other perpetrator. One in four say they do not know.

“Given the extraordinary impact the 9/11 attacks have had on world affairs, it is remarkable that seven years later there is no international consensus about who was behind them,” comments Steven Kull, director of WorldPublicOpinion.org.

Even in European countries, the majorities that say al Qaeda was behind 9/11 are not overwhelming. Fifty-seven percent of Britons, 56 percent of Italians, 63 percent of French and 64 percent of Germans cite al Qaeda. However, significant portions of Britons (26%), French (23%), and Italians (21%) say they do not know who was behind 9/11. Remarkably, 23 percent of Germans cite the US government, as do 15 percent of Italians.

Publics in the Middle East are especially likely to name a perpetrator other than al Qaeda. In Egypt 43 percent say that Israel was behind the attacks, as do 31



percent in Jordan and 19 percent in the Palestinian Territories. The US government is named by 36 percent of Turks and 27 percent of Palestinians. The numbers who say al Qaeda was behind the attacks range from 11 percent in Jordan to 42 percent in the Palestinian Territories.

The only countries with overwhelming majorities citing al Qaeda are the African countries: Kenya (77%) and Nigeria (71%). In Nigeria, a large majority of Muslims (64%) also say that al Qaeda was behind the attacks (compared to 79% of Nigerian Christians).

The poll of 16,063 respondents was conducted between July 15 and August 31, 2008 by WorldPublicOpinion.org, a collaborative research project involving research centers from around the world and managed by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland. Margins of error range from +/-3 to 4 percent.

Interviews were conducted in 17 nations, including most of the largest nations—China, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Russia—as well as Egypt, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Mexico, the Palestinian Territories, South Korea, Taiwan, Turkey, and the Ukraine.

Respondents were asked “Who do you think was behind the 9/11 attacks?” and their answers were categorized into four response groups: “Al Qaeda,” “the US government,” “Israel,” or “Other.” Any answers that approximated al Qaeda, such as “bin Laden” or “Islamic extremists,” were categorized along with those who said al Qaeda. Those who simply characterized the perpetrators as “Arabs,” “Saudis,” or “Egyptians” (3% on average) were included in the “Other” category.

Respondents in Asia have mixed responses. Bare majorities in Taiwan (53%) and South Korea (51%) name al Qaeda, but 17 percent of South Koreans point to the US government and large numbers in both countries say they do not know (Taiwan 34%, South Korea 22%).

Majorities of Chinese (56%) and Indonesians (57%) say they do not know, with significant minorities citing the US government (Indonesia 14%, China 9%).

A clear majority of Russians (57%) and a plurality of Ukrainians (42%) say al Qaeda was behind the attacks. But significant minorities identify the US government (15% in both cases) and large numbers do not provide an answer (Ukrainians 39%, Russians 19%).

Out of all countries polled, Mexico has the second-largest number citing the US government as the perpetrator of 9/11 (30%, after Turkey at 36%). Only 33 percent name al Qaeda.

Though people with greater education generally have greater exposure to news, those with greater education are only slightly more likely to attribute 9/11 to al Qaeda. Steven

Kull comments, "It does not appear that these beliefs can simply be attributed to a lack of exposure to information."

A stronger correlate of beliefs about 9/11 are respondents' attitudes about the United States. Those with a positive view of America's influence in the world are more likely to cite al Qaeda (on average 59%) than those with a negative view (40%). Those with a positive view of the United States are also less likely to blame the US government (7%) than those with a negative view (22%).

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