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New World Order: The Balance of Soft Power and the Rise of Herbivorous Powers

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SUMMARY

The largest survey of public opinion in the world shows support for a more multipolar world and a greater role for 'herbivorous powers' - countries not widely perceived as military superpowers.

There is mistrust of the Cold War powers as well as Islamist-inspired Iranian autocracy. More people want to see a decline rather than an increase in the power of Russia (29% decline, 23% increase), of China (32% decline, 24% increase), of the United States (37% decline, 26% increase), and of Iran (39% decline, 14% increase). On the other hand, there is strong support for an increase in the power of fast-developing powers such as South Africa, India and Brazil.

The European Union is the most popular great power. Uniquely among great powers, more people across all continents want to see its power increase than decrease. This demand for more European power extends to many former European colonies.

Whilst American soft power has declined, the rise of China has led to the resurgence in support for American power in Asia. Increasing Russian influence in Eastern Europe is paralleled by a demand for a greater American role.

Outside Europe, 'the West' is still seen to some extent as a single actor: countries suspicious of American power tend also to be against EU power.

In the run-up to the Iraq war, Mary Robinson called global public opinion the "second superpower". She may have exaggerated its ability to sway the decision to invade Iraq, but she was right to point to its importance as a source of legitimacy in world politics. Even in the many places where citizens cannot vote in free and fair elections, governments constantly poll the public to understand their aspirations and pre-empt them. Their findings can have an impact on decisions about war and peace and can even affect the positions they defend in institutions such as the UN and WTO.

The Findings

Who will gain and who will lose from the emergence of global public opinion as a super power? Which of the current great powers will succeed in capturing the global imagination?

The results of the 2007 edition of Voice of the People © - the world's largest survey of public opinion this year, based on interviews with 57,000 people from 52 countries - show that more world citizens want to see an increase in the power of the European Union than any other great power. In the survey, which asked people if the global influence of various major international powers should increase or decrease to make the world a better place, the EU received the highest number of positive

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answers.¹ More than a third of respondents (35%) said they wanted to see an increase in EU power while only 20% want it to decline.²

Just over one in four respondents believe that India and South Africa should have greater influence (27% and 26%, respectively), whereas two in ten declare the opposite (20% and 18%). Almost a quarter (23%) think Brazil should be more influential while 17% believe the contrary. Russia and China provoke more negative than positive reactions. While 23% and 24% of respondents respectively want to see the power of these countries increase, 29% and 32% believe the world would benefit from a decline in their power. Respondents are most hostile to the influence of Iran and the US. Although 26% of respondents believe an increase in US power would make the world a better place, 37% think the opposite. In the case of Iran, 39% would like to see its power decline, while only 14% want it to have more influence in the world. Approval ratings for each of the eight powers have been inferred on the basis of the balance of respondents who wish to see a power's influence increase or decrease. These are set out in the Love/Hate maps that accompany this paper.

Overall, the results suggest little enthusiasm for a unipolar world but the multipolar world sought by world citizens appears more complex and unpredictable than some may have thought.

The Balance of Soft Power and the Rise of Herbivorous Powers

The negative perceptions of Russia, China and Iran seem to be linked to the fact that they are perceived not so much as rising economic or political powers, but as military powers with potentially global reach. This suggests that the new world order will be determined not simply by the balance of 'hard power' (the ability to use economic or military power to coerce or bribe countries to support you), but by the balance of what the American academic Joseph Nye has called 'soft power' - the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion and payment, arising from the appeal of your culture, political ideals, and policies. The survey backs the view that the ability to project military power around the globe can substantially damage soft power.

This theory seems to be borne out by the relatively positive view of the 'herbivorous powers' - South Africa, India and Brazil - whose rise is not connected in the global imagination with military might on a global scale. The public does not yearn for a world order where America's hegemony is simply replaced by the rivalry of other military powers such as Russia and China.

Desire for increased global influence for different powers – by region

*Question: For the world to become a better place, do you believe that the global influence of the following major powers should increase, should decrease, or should remain about the same as now?
Percentages responding 'increase'*

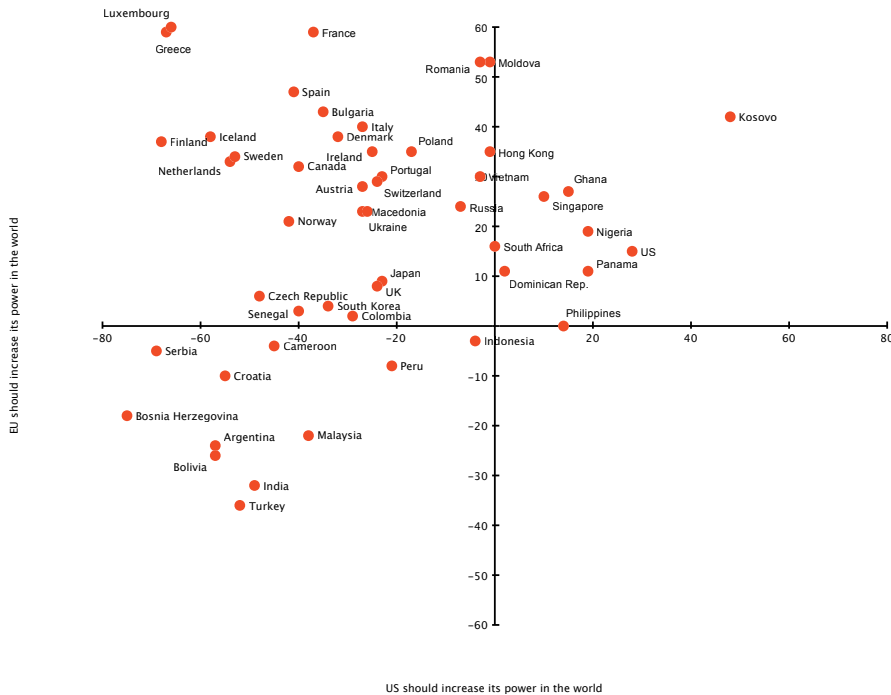
	Total Sample	Africa	Asia Pacific	E&C Europe	Latin America	North America	Western Europe
European Union	35%*	37%	23%	36%*	24%	34%	51%*
India	27%	27%	33%*	16%	24%	25%	35%
South Africa	26%	43%*	20%	11%	25%	28%	37%
United States	26%	37%	20%	19%	16%	42%*	16%
China	24%	33%	21%	25%	20%	20%	23%
Brazil	23%	32%	17%	11%	29%*	24%	35%
Russia	23%	25%	16%	36%*	15%	19%	20%
Iran	14%	23%	10%	11%	13%	14%	15%

* highest value per column

Source: Gallup International Association – Voice of the People ©

¹ The powers are Brazil, China, the European Union, India, Iran, Russia, South Africa and the United States.

² Between them, the countries surveyed account for 1.2 billion people. Governments refused permission for the Voice of the People © poll to be carried out in several Arab states and in China.



It is equally remarkable that the Union's increase in power is supported by many former European colonies, demonstrating that the colonial legacy of EU member states is declining in importance. What is more, unlike the United States, the EU is highly appreciated in its own neighbourhood. However, a closer look at the figures and a comparison with previous surveys, reveals some worrying trends for the EU.

First, it suggests that the EU's soft power is closely related to the prospects of enlargement in the European neighbourhood. It is safe to assume that the stark rise in the attractiveness of Russia in some parts of the former Eastern Bloc and the

ex-USSR - particularly in Ukraine - is linked to European foot-dragging on enlargement, which is having a negative impact on its reputation in the European neighbourhood. The poll also shows a growing resistance to EU influence in places where the Union acts as a quasi-colonial power such as Bosnia. This makes clear that EU faces a choice in the Balkans either to press ahead with enlargement so as to normalize relations with these countries, or to face further hostility if it continues behaving like an imperial power.

The Hopeful and the Hopeless

Each continent has a different approach to power. Africa and Latin America mark two extreme positions. On the one hand, a majority of Africans would welcome increased influence among all the rival centres of power - there is support for a more powerful US, EU and China. Public opinion in Latin America, on the other hand, is at best skeptical, and often hostile, to increases in the global influence of powers outside the region.

Turkey presents a very special case. It demonstrates the instincts of an unrecognized world power. Turkish public opinion resists the influence of any of the rising powers and demonstrates a distinct lack of enthusiasm for the US as a global power, perhaps surprising given its status as a long-term US ally. Turkish respondents expressed a strong rejection of both EU and US leadership of world affairs.

The Stealthy Superpower

The EU is unique among the big four powers (the other three being the US, China and Russia) in that no one wants to balance its rise. It is striking that a continent with a military budget second only to the United States, and the biggest number of peace-keeping forces serving, is perceived as a force for good. This suggests that EU policy-makers' attempts to achieve greater visibility for EU power may well be misguided. The fact that European peace-keepers tend to operate under a NATO or a national flag rather than a European one probably helps to make the EU seem less threatening. The fragmentation of European power among 27 member states endows the EU with a stealthy quality on the world stage.

Does the West Still Exist?

Has the EU benefited from the collapse in American soft power following the Iraq war? Has the EU gone from being a US ally to constituting an alternative world power?

The findings of the survey demonstrate that, at least in both Western and Eastern Europe, the EU is perceived as an alternative to American unilateralism thanks to its stress on multilateralism, the rule of law, and its distaste of power politics. But in other parts of the world, the EU and US are perceived as twins rather than alternatives.

The dynamics differ from region to region, but there seems to be a hardening anti-Western block in global public opinion that is particularly strong in Latin America.

Summary Results

Row percents	Total:	Orientation:					
		Pro EU	Pro USA	Pro Western	Anti Western	Not sure	(DK/NA)
Total world:	1234732	27	10	17	14	16	16
Africa All	169913	11	9	29	12	12	27
Latin America All	65241	20	5	12	32	12	20
Asia Pasific All	263387	23	8	13	18	15	23
North America All	243931	20	24	21	7	27	2
USA	218254	16	26	22	7	29	0
Total Europe	492404	39	5	14	14	14	15
Total EU	266720	49	4	13	10	10	14
EU Core All	229504	50	4	13	11	9	13
EU Newly accepted All	37217	41	3	14	8	13	20
Total Non EU	216049	26	6	14	19	19	16
Western Balkans All	20621	32	3	17	26	8	14
Russia	114800	28	10	18	10	27	6
Turkey	43332	10	2	2	43	5	38

Key	% of total sample
Pro-EU includes:	
EU should increase, USA - decrease	12%
EU should increase, USA-remain the same	6%
EU should remain the same, USA-decrease	9%
Pro USA includes :	
USA should increase, EU - decrease	3%
USA should increase, EU-remain the same	2%
USA should remain the same, EU - decrease	5%
Pro-Western includes :	
Both USA&EU should increase	17%
Anti-Western includes :	
Both USA&EU should decrease	14%
Not sure	
Both USA&EU should remain the same	15%

Conclusions

The findings of the Voice of the People © poll make encouraging reading for European decision-makers. They reveal a world that is neither unipolar nor keen to return to traditional power politics. Furthermore, it is a world that seems to be crying out for greater European leadership. However, there are some warning signs among the good news.

The paradox of the EU's power is that its strength may be rooted to some extent in the perception of its weakness. The fact that nobody is interested in balancing the EU may stem – at least in part – from a perception that the EU is unlikely to get its act together. Moreover, the decline of the EU's soft power in the ex-USSR, Turkey and the Balkans shows that “softness” in the long run may generate sympathy, but not necessarily respect. Whilst legitimacy is an increasingly important element in global politics, the EU must not make the mistake of confusing popularity with power.

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The Balancing Superpower

Foreign policy debates in recent years have centered on the question of how to deal with the ‘unipolar moment’ - of how to balance US power. But strikingly, this survey reveals that in many parts of the world, a new question is being asked: how can the US balance the rise of aggressive new emerging global powers? It is no coincidence that there is a great appetite for increased American power in Asia - the site of the contest between the new global powers.

It is also intriguing to see that while the American public is hostile to increased Russian power, the Russian public is much more positive in its view of American power. This poll shows that the multipolar world might lead to a resurgence of American soft power – not necessarily as a model for the world, but as a way of buttressing the power of new regional superpowers.

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