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Les relations des États-Unis avec les pays étrangers inquiètent sa population.U.S. Foreign Policy Index : Anxious Public Sees Growing Dangers, Few Solutions.

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Par William Mann

[Associated Press](#). Washington, Le mercredi 18 octobre 2006

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Inquiétude et insatisfaction : tels sont les deux sentiments que l'état des relations de Washington avec les pays étrangers inspirent aux étasuniens. Si l'on en croit une étude rendue publique mercredi, nombre appréhendent que la politique étrangère suivie par l'administration Bush rende le monde plus dangereux pour les États-Unis et leurs ressortissants.

L'enquête de l'institut [Public Agenda](#) comprend un nouvel « indicateur d'anxiété » qui calcule le niveau d'inquiétude aux Etats-Unis sur la base des réponses à cinq questions. Cet indicateur est établi suivant une échelle allant de zéro (sans inquiétude) à 200 (le plus anxieux). Et la situation semble loin d'être rose : pour cette première estimation, l'indicateur pointe à 130.

Ce niveau indique que « l'appréhension et le malaise au sujet de la position internationale du pays sont à des niveaux élevés et que l'état d'esprit du public pourrait approcher un « point de bascule », souligne Daniel Yankelovich, président de *Public Agenda*. « Ce degré d'anxiété publique, combiné à la désapprobation des Américains, n'est pas une chose que les dirigeants peuvent ignorer. »

« Ce n'est pas simplement un événement ou une politique particulière qui inquiètent les gens. C'est l'Irak, mais aussi le danger d'une attaque terroriste, la dépendance énergétique, notre réputation affaiblie à travers le monde, la montée d'un extrémisme musulman violent », observe M. Yankelovich.

D'après l'étude, la troisième du genre diffusée par *Public Agenda*, après celles de juin 2005 et de janvier dernier, un peu plus de huit étasuniens sur dix s'inquiètent du cours des choses pour les États-Unis ; et un peu moins de huit sur dix ont le sentiment que le monde est devenu plus dangereux pour leur pays.

Plusieurs résultats reflètent ainsi une déconnexion entre la population et la politique menée par l'administration Bush : 87 % croient que la menace qui pèse sur la sécurité nationale s'est exacerbée parce que le pays est vu d'un mauvais oeil par d'autres pays. Pour 78 % des personnes interrogées, les États-Unis sont considérés comme arrogants.

Par ailleurs, si 52 % estiment que la démocratie réduit le conflit et la violence, 64 % jugent que cette même démocratie ne peut pas être imposée et que les pays doivent y être prêts. Au sujet de l'Irak, 20 % pensent que les États-Unis peuvent faire « beaucoup » pour nourrir un système démocratique dans ce pays, et 24 % considèrent que la création de démocraties devrait représenter un objectif très important pour les États-Unis.

Suivant un système de gradation, moins d'une personne interrogée sur trois donne un "A" ou un "B" au gouvernement des Etats-Unis à propos de la réalisation de ses objectifs en Irak ou en Afghanistan ; et un peu moins d'une sur quatre accorde un "A" ou un "B" à Washington s'agissant de sa dépendance à l'égard d'autres pays dans le domaine de l'énergie ou de ses relations avec les pays musulmans.

Pour 87 % des sondés, Washington pourrait faire « quelque chose » ou « beaucoup » pour s'arracher à la dépendance en matière d'énergie. Un nombre croissant de personnes, 41 % (contre 35 % lors de la précédente étude) jugent réaliste d'attendre du gouvernement des fournitures de pétrole stables à un prix raisonnable.

L'enquête, réalisée en collaboration avec le magazine [« Foreign Policy »](#), a été menée auprès d'un échantillon national représentatif de 1.001 personnes âgées de 18 ans et plus entre le 5 et le 18 septembre. Sa marge d'erreur tourne autour de 3,5 points.

[Confidence in U.S. Foreign Policy Index](#)

Anxious Public Sees Growing Dangers, Few Solutions

Americans are looking out on a world where they see growing dangers, few solutions and little in U.S. foreign policy that seems to be working. In this third edition of the Public Agenda Confidence in U.S. Foreign Policy Index, produced in association with [Foreign Affairs](#), we're introducing our new "Anxiety Indicator," which will track the public's overall outlook on world affairs much as the Consumer Confidence Index follows its view of the economy. Our first indicator shows that public anxiety on international affairs is at high levels (a score of 130 on a 200-point scale), enough to show a deep dissatisfaction with current policies. Read Public Agenda Chairman [Daniel Yankelovich's explanation of the Anxiety Indicator](#).

Majorities believe the world is becoming a more dangerous place for Americans and that international relations are on the wrong track. Yet the best-known policy strategies, such as actively creating democracies or economic development in Islamic countries, face skepticism from the public. Majorities do believe reducing dependence on foreign energy sources would enhance national security, and even stronger majorities think the government can do something to achieve itâ€”yet nearly half give the United States failing grades in this area.

A dangerous world is not as frightening if you have confidence in what the government is doing to cope with it. But increasing numbers of the public give the United States a "D" or "F" grade on accomplishing key foreign policy goals.

Traditionally, the American public focuses more on domestic concerns and gives leaders a lot more leeway in crafting foreign policy. But the threat of terrorism, the Iraq war and the seemingly endless series of crises in the Middle East have put foreign affairs front and center for the public. That's reflected in the relatively high rating of our first Anxiety Indicator.

[Measuring Anxiety : Summing Up the Public's Mood With a New Indicator](#)

by Daniel Yankelovich
Chairman, Public Agenda

In the fall 2006 edition of the Confidence in U.S. Foreign Policy Index, we introduce a new element called the Anxiety Indicator. The indicator sums up Americans' overall comfort level with the country's foreign policy using a simple numerical score. It offers a clear, unadorned benchmark of how well Americans think the country is doing in the international arenaâ€”much the way the Consumer Confidence Index captures the public's views of the economy or the way a student's grade point average sums up overall scholastic ability.

The U.S. Foreign Policy Index will continue to offer detailed results from its comprehensive survey containing more than 100 questions about America's role in the world. And it will continue to provide performance ratings from the public on issues ranging from terrorism to trade to energy independence to global development. But as informative as the specifics are, we believe a more succinct and overarching reading of Americans' state of mind is needed.

Apart from the war in Iraq (America's most urgent foreign policy concern), how secure and confident are most Americans about the nation's course ? Is the country divided ? Are most people feeling confident and positive about our role in the world ? Or is the bulk of country feeling anxious and ill-at-ease ? We've introduced the Anxiety Indicator to gauge this overall sense of well-being.

We cannot expect unanimity in any society where robust debate flourishes, especially in troubled times. There will always be disagreements among Americans on whether the United States is succeeding or failing in its foreign policy goals. Still, it is important to know whether the country's leaders are pursuing foreign policy goals that are widely shared and initiatives that have broad public support. It's also important to know when public dissatisfaction with government policy may be reaching a "tipping point" that leaders have to address. The Anxiety Indicator is designed to highlight the degree to which a broad swath of Americans have confidence in or concern about the country's direction. The indicator will also offer a way to understand how the public's mind-set at any one time stacks up against other recognized benchmarks in public opinion.

There is a thorough discussion of how Public Agenda computes the Anxiety Indicator in the methodology section of this report, and we encourage those who want to delve into the nitty-gritty of the calculations behind it to contact us for details. Fundamentally, however, the indicator is the result of a few key steps.

Public Agenda has created five questions that we believe capture the public's fundamental comfort level with the country's position in the world :

- ▶ Whether U.S. relations with the rest of the world are on the right or wrong track
- ▶ Whether the world is becoming safer or more dangerous for Americans
- ▶ Whether the public believes the rest of the world sees the United States in a positive or negative light
- ▶ How successful the United States is as a leader working toward a more peaceful and prosperous world
- ▶ The degree to which Americans say they worry about the way things are going for the United States in world affairs

The five questions are dispersed and rotated throughout the questionnaire to avoid biased or patterned responses.

To create the indicator, Public Agenda collects from more than 1,000 randomly selected Americans the responses to these five questions and plots them on a scale of 0 to 200, where 0 is the most secure and 200 the most anxious. A rating of 100 is "neutral," a midpoint neither anxious nor confident. In fall 2006, the Anxiety Indicator stands at 130—a number suggesting that apprehension and unease about the country's international position are at high levels and that the public mood may be nearing a tipping point.

Public Agenda will ask these five questions in all future editions of the Confidence in U.S. Foreign Policy Index and report the Anxiety Indicator whenever we release our results. The plan invites the natural question of how much we expect the Indicator to rise and fall over time. We certainly don't expect that the Indicator will ever reach the extreme points on the scale, either the 0 for confidence or the 200 for anxiety. World events and how the country responds to them will obviously play a role. Even so, the relationship between events and the public's state of mind may not be as simple as might be expected. There may often be a time lag between events and changes in public opinion or momentary surges or falls that quickly dissipate. Overall, however, we expect the Indicator to give us an ongoing reading of the shifts in the state of public opinion on foreign policy.

Another reasonable question is whether Americans' sense of confidence or anxiety is based on an accurate picture of reality. Or put another way, given the public's comparatively low interest and knowledge about foreign affairs, do the views of typical Americans really matter ? Some are likely to argue that the public's current anxiety is being

stoked by the media's focus on bad news from Iraq and Afghanistan"or that some politicians are fanning public fears of terrorism for political gain. It's only public opinion, they may argue, not actual developments on the ground.

But in the world of policy making and international relations, public perceptions and beliefs have their own reality. Even in countries far less open and democratic than the United States, what the population wants and fears matters a great deal ; leaders' actions are influenced and constrained by it. And history suggests that high levels of public anxiety and fear can be especially troublesome.