

**The Foreign Policy Disconnect:
Multilateralist Public, Unilateralist Officials**

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Abstract

Data from the 2006 CCGA national survey once again indicate that the American public is much more multilateralist than U.S. foreign policy officials. Large majorities of Americans favor several specific steps to strengthen the UN, support Security Council intervention for peacekeeping and human rights, and favor working more within the UN even if it constrains U.S. actions. Large majorities also favor the Kyoto agreement on global warming, the International Criminal Court, the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, and the new inspection agreement on biological weapons. Large majorities favor multilateral uses of U.S. troops for peacekeeping and humanitarian purposes, but majorities oppose most major unilateral engagements.

Analysis of more than one thousand survey questions asked of both the public and foreign policy officials over a thirty year period by the CCGA (formerly CCFR) indicates that significant disagreements between officials and the public have been very frequent, occurring 73% of the time. Disagreements between majorities of officials and majorities of citizens have occurred 26% of the time. On Diplomatic issues, gaps have reached a peak in the George W. Bush years. Over the years, however, there have also been many disagreements over Defense issues (the public is more reluctant to use troops and more opposed to military aid and arms sales), and even more disagreement on international Economic issues: citizens are more worried about immigration and drugs, and much more concerned about the effects of trade on Americans' jobs and wages.

Most gaps between citizens and officials appear to have more to do with differing values and interests than with differing levels of information and expertise. To the extent that this is true and that Americans' collective policy preferences are coherent and reflective of the best available information, there would seem to be a strong argument, based on democratic theory, that policy makers should pay more heed to the public's wishes.

Over the last two or three decades an accumulation of survey evidence has indicated that ordinary Americans' preferences concerning foreign policy are worth paying attention to. Contrary to the fears of James Madison, Walter Lippmann, "realist" theorists of international relations, and many others, the collective foreign policy preferences of the American public turn out to have a number of attractive characteristics. Collective preferences are mostly stable over time, except that major international events tend to cause opinion changes – generally in predictable and reasonable directions. Americans' opinions on different foreign policy issues are nearly always mutually consistent. They involve sharp distinctions, concerning such matters as circumstances for using or not using force, forming alliances, granting foreign aid, or carrying out international trade. Collective policy preferences generally form coherent patterns that reflect the underlying values and beliefs of the public (see Page and Shapiro, 1992.)

Collective opinion has these properties of stability, differentiation, consistency and coherence despite the instability and low information levels of most individuals' opinions. Two main processes appear to be responsible for this. 1) Statistical aggregation eliminates a great deal of the random noise that characterizes the expression and measurement of individuals' opinions; and 2) Collective (often mediated) deliberation permits even ill-informed individuals to make indirect use of the best available information, by accepting the conclusions of well-informed people they trust.

More recent evidence also indicates that – contrary to some conventional wisdom about mass belief systems – individual Americans tend to organize their foreign policy attitudes into "purposive belief systems," in which policy preferences flow from a number of logically relevant factors: the goals that individuals seek from foreign policy;

the international threats they perceive; their feelings and beliefs about specific foreign countries, and their general political values and orientations. This coherent structure of opinions at the individual level probably contributes to the coherence of collective public opinion. That is, the collective policy preferences of majorities of Americans tend to follow from the foreign policy goals, threat perceptions, and beliefs that most Americans hold. Over a wide range of policy areas – from defense capabilities and military action to diplomacy and international trade policy – Americans’ policy preferences rather consistently fit into a coherent world view that can be characterized as multilateralist and neo-liberal¹ (Page with Bouton 2006.)

Yet it is not clear that U.S. foreign policy decision makers pay much attention to the collective policy preferences of American citizens. To be sure, many scholars have come to believe that public opinion has substantial effects upon foreign policy decision making. This belief largely rests on bivariate evidence, such as the finding that – for a large number of cases in which opinion changed significantly and subsequent policy shifted measurably in one direction or the other – foreign policy moved in the same direction as opinion 62% of the time (Page and Shapiro 1983, p.182. Holsti, 2004, pp.56-69, reviews this and other evidence.) But recent multivariate analyses suggest that when other factors (such as the foreign policy preferences of business leaders, labor leaders, and foreign affairs experts) are taken into account, the public’s preferences may actually have little or no independent effect on the making of foreign policy (Jacobs and Page 2005.)

Even the bivariate relationships that have been found between public opinion and foreign policy are not very large. The 62% figure for congruence between opinion

change and policy change, for example, does not look very impressive when one remembers that congruence would be expected to occur by chance about 50% of the time.

This paper documents the multilateralism of the American public and then explores the extent to which (on these and other issues, and during different time periods) foreign policy officials and U.S. foreign policy itself have tended to agree or disagree with the public. We will see that there has regularly been a wide divergence – perhaps a “disconnect” – between the two, and that disagreements over issues of diplomacy, multilateralism, and international organizations have reached a record high point during the administration of George W. Bush.

The Multilateralism of the American Public

For many decades since World War II, survey after survey has shown that most Americans favor multilateralism and diplomacy in world affairs. Most Americans hold the United Nations and other international organizations in high esteem, want to strengthen them in various specific ways, and are willing to accept constraints on U.S. policy in order to gain the legitimacy and burden-sharing that such organizations can provide. Most Americans favor U.S. participation in a wide variety of international treaties and agreements. Most favor diplomatic contacts and agreements with other countries, including adversaries. Most oppose major uses of U.S. military force without support from allies and the United Nations. (See Rielly, 1975, 1979, 1983, 1987, 1991, 1995, 1999; Bouton, 2002, 2004, 2006; Page and Shapiro, 1992; Page with Bouton, 2006; Kull and Destler, 1999; and numerous surveys by the Program on International Policy Attitudes.)

These patterns are evident once again in the results of the U.S. national survey carried out in the summer of 2006 by Knowledge Networks for the Chicago Council on Global Affairs (CCGA; formerly the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations) together with the Asia Society. Only a brief summary will be given here; for a full report, see Bouton (2006.)

In the most recent CCGA survey, for example, only 10% of respondents endorsed the attractive-sounding proposition that “as the sole remaining superpower, the U.S. should continue to be the preeminent world leader in solving international problems.” Instead, 75% said that the U.S. “should do its share to solve international problems together with other countries.” (12% said the U.S. “should withdraw from most efforts to solve international problems.”) This general sentiment is reflected in the public’s views on many concrete policy issues.

Most Americans have long held favorable attitudes toward the United Nations. On a 100-degree “feeling thermometer” (where 0 means a very cold unfavorable feeling, 100 means a very warm, favorable feeling, and 50 means not particularly warm or cold), respondents in 2006 gave the UN an average (mean) rating of a fairly warm 55 degrees. This was well above the World Bank (46 degrees), the IMF (44 degrees), and most other of the eight international groups or organizations mentioned: below only “international human rights groups” (56 degrees) and the World Health Organization (59 degrees), itself a specialized agency of the UN. (See Figure 1.) Moreover, the thermometer rating of the UN was higher than those of eleven out of the fifteen countries asked about (Bouton 2006, p.19.)

(FIGURE 1 HERE)

A solid 60% of Americans agree that, when dealing with international problems, “the U.S. should be more willing to make decisions within the UN even if this means the U.S. will sometimes have to go along with a policy that is not its first choice.” Only 36% disagree.

(FIGURE 2 HERE)

Large majorities of Americans favor each of four concrete steps to strengthen the UN: “creating an international marshals service that could arrest leaders responsible for genocide” (75 in favor, just 21% opposed); “giving the UN authority to go into countries in order to investigate violations of human rights” (75% to 22%); “having a standing UN peacekeeping force, trained and commanded by the United Nations” (72% to 24%); and “giving the UN the power to regulate the international arms trade (60% to 34%).) Even the rather radical step of “giving the UN the power to fund its activities by imposing a small tax on such things as the international sale of arms or oil” wins support from a substantial minority of Americans: 45% favor this measure, with 50% opposed.

(FIGURE 3 HERE)

Large majorities also favor giving the UN Security Council “the right to authorize military force to prevent severe human rights violations like genocide” (83% in favor). Human rights are a serious concern for most Americans: 71% favor “using U.S. troops to stop a government from committing genocide” (other evidence indicates that this refers to multilateral use of U.S. troops), and 65% favor “using U.S. troops to be part of an international peacekeeping force in Darfur.”

(FIGURE 4 HERE)

Americans' high regard for the value of international organizations is not limited to the UN. Fully 73%, for example, say that the U.S. should in general "comply if another country files a complaint with the WTO and it rules against the U.S."

(FIGURE 5 HERE)

By large margins, the American public also favors U.S. participation in several international treaties and agreements that the Bush administration has rejected. An overwhelming 89% favor U.S. participation in "an agreement on inspections under the treaty banning biological weapons (only 8% oppose.) Participation in "the treaty that would prohibit nuclear weapon test explosions worldwide" (the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty) is favored by 86% to 10%; in "the agreement on the International Criminal Court" by 71% to 25%; and in "the Kyoto agreement to reduce global warming" by 70% to 23%. It is notable that majorities of Republicans as well as Democrats favor U.S. participation in each of these treaties. As a general matter, partisan differences in opinion have grown somewhat in recent years, but they remain rather small on most matters of concrete policy. Statements about the preferences of "the American public" generally apply to nearly all social, demographic, and partisan groups.

(FIGURE 6 HERE)

Majorities of Americans express support for "using U.S. troops" (that is, modest numbers of troops, under multilateral auspices) for a variety of humanitarian purposes: stopping genocide, dealing with humanitarian crises, stopping the killing in Darfur, and enforcing a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. (Not "to install democratic governments in states where dictators rule," however, which – with Iraq presumably in mind – is supported by only 29%.) Support for troop use is much lower –

particularly if no multilateral context is specified – when it comes to major engagements likely to be costly in lives and money. A small majority (53% to 42%) favors U.S. troop use in the hypothetical event that “Iran attacked Israel,” but only 45% favor troop use “if North Korea invaded South Korea”; 49% oppose. Only 32% of Americans favor U.S. troop use “if China invaded Taiwan.”

(FIGURE 7 HERE)

The crucial role of multilateralism in these matters is evident in the quite different response to explicitly multilateral questions. Fully 65% favor (45% oppose) “the U.S. contributing military forces, together with other countries, to a UN effort to reverse the aggression” if North Korea invaded South Korea. A similar jump of 20 percentage points or more in support for troop use when the context was made explicitly multilateral was found in 2002 for hypothetical invasions of Saudi Arabia by Iraq and of South Korea by North Korea. Moreover, in pre-war 2002 a large (65%) majority favored the U.S. invading Saddam Hussein’s Iraq “only...with U.N. approval and the support of our allies” (Bouton 2006, pp.27-28. See also Bouton 2004, p.30 on South Korea and pp. 21-27 on multilateral vs. unilateral uses of force generally.)

(FIGURE 8 HERE)

Most Americans are quite concerned about Iran, giving it in 2006 an icy 21-degree average feeling thermometer score – lower than that of any other country. Most accept U.S. officials’ charges that Iran is pursuing a nuclear weapons program, and most want to do something about it: even use U.S. troops if necessary. But the preferred policies are multilateral and diplomatic. A solid majority of Americans, 58%, would “undertake a military strike [against Iran’s nuclear energy facilities], but only if the UN

authorizes the strike and other allies participate.” Only 18% think the U.S. should “undertake a military strike even if the U.S. has to act on its own”; 20% oppose a military strike altogether. And in answer to a different question, only a similar 18% think that, “if Iran continues to enrich uranium,” the UN Security Council should “authorize a military strike against Iran’s nuclear energy facilities.” A large majority prefers that the Security Council either “continue diplomatic efforts to get Iran to stop enriching uranium” (35%) or “impose economic sanctions” (41%).

(FIGURES 9 AND 10 HERE)

Throughout the post-World War II period, Americans have worried a great deal about nuclear weapons. Large majorities have regularly favored arms control agreements, a nuclear “freeze” with the Soviet Union, and mutual nuclear disarmament (Page and Shapiro 1992, p.274.) Anti-nuclear sentiment extends to unilateral U.S. uses of nuclear weapons as well. In 2006 – contrary to official U.S. strategic doctrine – a very large majority of Americans opposed any first use of nuclear weapons. Only 20% said that “in certain circumstances the U.S. should use nuclear weapons even if it has not suffered a nuclear attack.” A 58% majority said that “the U.S. should only use nuclear weapons in response to a nuclear attack,” and 20% said “the U.S. should never use nuclear weapons under any circumstances.”

(FIGURE 11 HERE)

Further evidence on the strongly multilateral and diplomatic, rather than unilateral or militaristic, inclinations of Americans can be found in the CCGA’s report on its 2006 survey (Bouton 2006; see also Page with Bouton 2006, and extensive data at pipa.org.)

Measuring Disagreements between Citizens and Officials

A number of instances in which official U.S. policy has contrasted with the wishes of majorities of Americans are evident from simple perusal of the survey results described above. For example, the Bush administration has actively opposed all four of the majority-supported treaties we discussed: the Kyoto agreement, the International Criminal Court, the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, and the inspection protocol to the Biological Weapons Convention. In the case of the ICC the administration has been exceptionally hostile to the treaty; it used threats and aid cutoffs to deter countries from ratifying the treaty and then pushed hard for a series of bilateral agreements exempting U.S. nationals from referral to the Court.

Far from taking steps to strengthen the powers of the United Nations or making decisions within the UN, U.S. policy makers have resisted paying U.S. dues in full, opposed a standing peacekeeping force or a marshals service, and insisted on decisional autonomy, taking a number of actions (including the invasion of Iraq) in defiance of the will of most members of the UN Security Council.

Many other cases can be found in which U.S. foreign policy appears to have deviated from what a majority of Americans favor. A partial list is given in the Appendix, based on data from around 2002 (when the CCGA survey was unusually comprehensive, so that a particularly broad set of issues could be considered.) Such lists inevitably depend on somewhat subjective judgments, however; only occasionally are survey questions so specific that we can tell with certainty whether or not policy has fit the wishes of the public. More precision can be attained concerning the extent to which the expressed preferences of officials coincide with or deviate from those of the public,

using identical survey items to measure both. The preferences that officials express generally have some relation to the policies that they put into place; a gap in preferences between officials and citizens strongly suggests – though it does not prove – that there is also a gap in actual policy.²

Fortunately, every four years from 1974 through 2002 the Chicago Council on Global Affairs produced exactly the sort of data needed for this purpose. Eight times during that period the CCGA (then CCFR) conducted parallel surveys of “foreign policy leaders” (including a subset of official decision makers, on whom we will focus) and the general public, asking many identical questions of both groups.³ Each year’s surveys included an average of 145 policy-relevant questions, covering a wide range of foreign policies – from the use of military force to treaties, trade, and diplomatic relations – that were asked both of the general public and of an average of 78 policy makers from the executive branch, the House of Representatives, and the U.S. Senate. (For more details, see Page with Bouton 2006, ch. 7.)

These data enable us not only to assess the general extent of agreement or disagreement between U.S. citizens and foreign policy officials over a thirty year period, but also to compare levels of disagreement at different times, concerning different types of policy (diplomatic, defense, and economic), in different institutions (House, Senate and executive branch), and in different contexts (e.g., unified vs. divided party control.)

We used two different measures to compare citizens’ and officials’ preferences. First – over-all, and for each type of policy and each institution in a given year – we calculated the frequency of disagreements between citizens and officials as a proportion of the total number of relevant survey questions that were asked of both. For each survey

question, the percentage of policy makers taking a particular stand was subtracted from the percentage of the public taking that same stand (“don’t know” or “no opinion” responses were excluded.) That yielded a percentage-point “gap” between the two. We took any difference of 10 percentage points or more as constituting a statistically and substantively significant “disagreement.”⁴

Second, we calculated the proportion of relevant survey questions on which a disagreement of 10 percentage points or more existed and majorities of policy makers took positions opposite to those of majorities of the public. From the perspective of democratic theory, the frequency of these opposing majorities may be of particular interest. We believe, however, that the frequency of disagreements between the preferences of policy makers and citizens is also important, especially because – as we will see shortly – they are often quite large.

The Frequency of Disagreements between Citizens and Officials

The data indicate that, over a thirty-year period, foreign policy decision makers in the executive branch, the U.S. Senate, and the House of Representatives have frequently and persistently disagreed with the views of the U.S. public. In short, there appear to be many gaps: a substantial “democratic deficit,” if not a “disconnect,” between leaders and public.

Table 1 shows that during the whole 1974-2002 period, policy makers disagreed with the public by 10 percentage points or more on fully 73% -- nearly three quarters – of the 1,153 survey questions that both officials and citizens were asked. Comparison of data from each of the eight pairs of surveys indicates that the frequency of citizen-official

divergence has been fairly constant over time, ranging from 67% (in 2002) to 78% (in 1990).

(TABLE 1 HERE)

Moreover, the magnitudes of differences between citizens and officials (as measured by percentage point differences in support levels) have been sizable. As Table 2 indicates, in 80% of the disagreements over the three-decade period, the level of support among decision makers has differed from that among the public by 15 percentage points or more. In more than half (58%) of disagreements the levels have differed by 20 points or more. The magnitudes of disagreements have been fairly constant across all eight pairs of surveys. Every time, more than half the disagreements between decision makers and public have involved 20 percentage points or more. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that there has been a rather wide gulf, on many issues, between the foreign policy preferences of government officials and those of the American citizenry.

(TABLE 2 HERE)

Of course one might argue that gaps of 20 or even 30 or 40 percentage points might not matter, so long as both the public and the leaders ended up on the same side of each issue. If 90 percent of policy makers but “only” 60% of the general public favored some particular policy, why should anyone worry about the difference?

I do not agree with this perspective, because I believe that a high or low percentage of support for some policy on a survey question with limited choices (often only two choices) usually reveals something about what specific policy the average person would favor. If, for example, 90% of policy makers but only 60% of citizens favor “increasing” foreign aid to a particular country, it seems likely that the average

policy maker favors a significantly larger dollar increase than the average citizen does (see Page with Bouton 2006, n17 p. 309.) Even if majorities agree, therefore, I consider percentage point gaps to signal meaningful disagreements about what sorts of foreign policies the United States should pursue.

Still, the idea of majority preferences occupies a special place in democratic theory. It seems important to check how often majorities of foreign policy decision makers disagree with majorities of citizens on these survey questions.

When we do so, we see that the answer is, rather often. Table 3 shows that over the 1974-2002 period as a whole, majorities of policy makers took stands opposed by majorities of the general public on 26% -- about one quarter -- of the 1,153 in-common questions. This has been true year in and year out. There has not been a great deal of variation, in the different Chicago Council surveys, between the lowest proportion of opposing majorities (20%, in 1986) and the highest (31%, in 1998.)

(TABLE 3 HERE)

To be sure, one could emphasize that the glass is three-quarters full rather than one-quarter empty. But I consider the fact that most public officials say they want to go in the opposite direction from what most members of the public want, on so many important foreign policy issues -- including issues of war and peace and economic relationships -- to be rather sobering. Neither democratic responsiveness nor "education" of the public by leaders seems to be functioning with anything close to perfection.

There have been some differences in the extent of citizen-official disagreement according to different types of policy. Table 4 indicates that policy makers' sharpest disconnect from public opinion tends to occur on economic issues. (Perhaps this is partly

because business corporations care a lot about economic policies, differ markedly from the public about many of them, and have substantial influence over what government does; see Jacobs and Page 2005.) The frequency of disagreement on economic issues averaged 81% across the eight surveys, reaching a remarkable peak of 95% in 1994.

(TABLE 4 HERE)

Likewise, Table 5 indicates that majorities of policy makers and of the general public took opposite sides on fully one third (33%) of all economic policy questions, with a peak of 50% disagreement in 1994 – a year in which the Democrats controlled both Congress and the presidency and Robert Rubin was Secretary of the Treasury. Ordinary citizens, regularly more concerned than officials about Americans' jobs, were considerably less enthusiastic than the officials about NAFTA and other free trade agreements that paid little attention to environmental or workplace protections. Although the economic policy gaps were especially sharp in 1994, similar patterns on economic matters pervade all the surveys, encompassing issues of drug inflows, immigration, and economic foreign aid as well as international trade. In no year did the level of disagreement fall below 68% or did the frequency of opposing majorities drop below 21%.

(TABLE 5 HERE)

Defense policies. On average over the years, policy makers have not differed quite as often from the public on defense or diplomatic foreign policies as on economic ones, though average proportions of disagreement stand at a very high 70% in both areas. Opposing majorities have also been less common, and only a little more frequent on defense issues (28%) than on diplomatic issues (22%.)

Table 4 shows that policy makers were out of harmony with the public on defense issues to an unusual extent in 1990, disagreeing on fully 90% of the in-common questions. A large part of that divergence stemmed from policy makers' having concluded more quickly than the public that the Cold War was over and the Soviet Union no longer a threat, but that continued support for long-standing defense alliances remained important. The 2002 low point in disagreements (49%) reflects the fact that both the public and officials largely agreed in favoring strong defense in reaction to terrorist attacks.

Over the years, however, the American public has often been substantially more resistant than decision makers to the idea of using U.S. troops abroad – for example, in reaction to various hypothetical invasion scenarios. Some of this reluctance undoubtedly reflects the public's concern about risking the lives of U.S. troops, who are more often the sons, daughters, and friends of ordinary Americans than of public officials. In addition, however, the public appears more sensitive than officials to harm that armed conflict causes to non-Americans. The public has also regularly been more opposed than officials to giving military aid and even to selling weapons abroad.

Diplomatic policies. Disagreements between decision makers and the public have generally been least frequent (at least in terms of opposed majorities) in the diplomatic realm, the main focus of this paper. Substantial gaps have often occurred, however, especially reflecting greater support among the public than among officials for the United Nations, for negotiating with adversaries, and for treaties and agreements on arms control and other matters.

Table 4 confirms more systematically the impression we earlier had from examining the 2006 survey data: on diplomatic issues, the George W. Bush administration has been at odds with the public to an unusually great extent. In 2002, early in Bush's first term, the frequency of opposing majorities between citizens and officials on diplomatic issues reached 32%, a higher level than ever before. That is, majorities of officials disagreed with majorities of the public on nearly one third of the survey questions that concerned diplomatic policy.

A majority of officials (58%), for example, but only a small minority of citizens (33%) said that in international crises the U.S. should "take action alone" if it did not have the support of its allies. Most citizens, but only minorities of officials, thought it was very important to strengthen the United Nations (58% of citizens, 16% of officials), favored participating in the Kyoto agreement (75%, vs. 49%), and favored the International Criminal Court (76% vs. 45%). There were also very large percentage point gaps on the Land Mines Convention and on various dovish measures to combat terrorism, including trying terrorists in an International Criminal Court, improving relations with adversaries, helping poor countries develop their economies, and being evenhanded in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

These variations in citizen-official disagreements across policy areas and over time are interesting, but the most important finding remains the high overall extent and persistence of disagreements. It is striking to see in table 4 that, looking at each of the three clusters of diplomatic, economic and defense issues, across each of the eight pairs of surveys between 1974 and 2002, the frequency of disagreements between policy makers and the public dropped below 66% (roughly two thirds) only five out of twenty-

four possible times. Not once did the proportion of disagreements fall below 49% -- that is, about half. Table 5 indicates that the proportion of opposing majorities fell below 20% only three out of 24 possible times.

Further analyses not reported here indicate that levels of disagreement between citizens and policy makers have not varied much by institution (House, Senate, executive branch) or by partisan control of government. The main point is that these gaps have been pervasive and persistent.

Why the Gaps?

A popular explanation for gaps between the foreign policy opinions of officials and ordinary citizens has been that the officials are far-seeing experts, with clear conceptions of the long-term national interest, whereas the public is ignorant, short-sighted, and subject to capricious “moods.” Before and during the early years of the Cold War, this was the position taken by Walter Lippman (1925, 1955), Gabriel Almond (1960), Hans Morgenthau (1973), and a good many scholars of international relations.

As we have noted, however, the “mood theory” has fallen on hard times. It is contradicted by a great deal of survey evidence indicating that the collective policy preferences of Americans are generally stable, coherent, sensible, and reflective of the best available information. Only very occasionally does the U.S. public show signs of fitting the old stereotype – for example, in its sluggishness at coming to terms with the end of the Cold War around 1990. Usually gaps between officials and citizens reflect something quite different from mass ignorance contrasted with elite enlightenment.

Instead, most gaps appear to be founded upon differences between the values and the interests (both subjective and objective) of citizens and officials. This is evident, for example, in the American public's wariness about using U.S. troops in major engagements abroad, which tend to be much more painful and costly to ordinary citizens than to decision makers. By contrast, the U.S. public has generally been quite supportive of well defined peacekeeping missions, high levels of defense spending, the maintenance of military bases abroad, and the use of airpower and other capital- rather than labor-intensive military capabilities. The public's views on using military force have been characterized as "pretty prudent" (Jentleson 1992, Jentleson and Britton 1998.)

Similarly, the American public generally approves of globalization and international trade, recognizing their great benefits to consumers and to the U.S. economy as a whole. But ordinary citizens are much more sensitive than decision makers to the costs of trade in terms of some Americans' wages and job security. They insist that losers should be compensated through job retraining and other measures, and that trade agreements should include environmental and workers' rights provisions. Again, ordinary citizens have more reason than officials to worry about negative economic and social impacts of immigration and about the inflow of illegal drugs from abroad.

The gaps we have highlighted on diplomatic issues – the contrasts between the strong multilateralism of the public and tendencies toward unilateralism among officials – arguably stem not from differing levels of expertise but from differing values and beliefs about the costs and benefits of multilateral and unilateral policies, including the advantages of burden sharing and legitimacy that can come from multilateralism, versus the autonomy and freedom of action inherent in unilateralism. Some decision makers

may prefer to avoid multilateral constraints simply because they enjoy holding sole control over the levers of power themselves. At this moment in history, when the United States seems to be suffering disastrous consequences as a result of excessive unilateralism, it seems particularly hard to argue that the public's view of these matters is ignorant or wrong.

My interpretations of these gaps rest heavily on the fact (well established by CCGA data) that ordinary citizens tend to disagree with officials about what sorts of goals U.S. foreign policy should pursue. Differences concerning goals clearly involve differences in values and interests, not just information. Moreover, multivariate analyses of individuals' attitudes indicate that varying levels of information and knowledge do not have much independent effect on citizens' policy preferences, a finding that suggests (though it does not prove) that the distinctiveness of elite experts' and policy makers' preferences, too, reflects something other than informational differences (see Page with Bouton, 2006, esp. ch. 2.)

The likelihood that differences in policy preferences between officials and citizens generally reflect differing values and interests does not, however, fully explain why gaps appear in actual policy making. In a democratic society, aren't officials (whatever their personal preferences) forced by electoral concerns to carry out the policies that most citizens favor? Whatever happened to the famous median voter theorem, which asserts that vote-seeking politicians end up doing exactly what the public wants?

I will not attempt a full answer here (see Page with Bouton 2006, pp.170-73, 219-23), but the essential points are clear enough. On most foreign policy issues, electoral

pressures from the public are quite limited. Thus officials have some leeway to pursue unpopular policies that they prefer. Decisive electoral pressures often come from organized interest groups and party activists, rather than the general public.

Some foreign policy issues are technical and/or obscure to ordinary citizens, distant from their daily lives. Other issues (concerning wars and international crises, for example) tend to be surrounded by a high degree of uncertainty; it is very hard for a citizen to judge exactly what the consequences of a given policy action will be. For both these reasons, citizens often discount stands concerning future foreign policy when they vote, enforcing accountability chiefly in a retrospective fashion, through “electoral punishment” for results that turn out to be major disasters. (Foreign policy voting is by no means rare, however; see Aldrich, Sullivan and Borgida, 1989.) Officials who can win votes on other grounds therefore have some leeway to pursue unpopular policies, either because they believe the results will later win voters’ approval or because they think voters will not notice.

Moreover, the most important electoral pressures do not always proceed from ordinary voters. The vast sums of money needed for advertising, polling, consultants and the like, and the essential role of turnout-mobilizing party activists in nominations and elections – especially in gerrymandered House districts – mean that candidates can sometimes win elections by taking policy stands that please money-givers and activists, even if those stands are quite unpopular with the general public. Bush administration opposition to the United Nations and international treaties, for example, may well reflect the key role of a small group of strongly unilateralist activists in the Republican Party “base,” even though most Republican identifiers and voters hold quite different views.

Likewise, both parties' support for unrestrained free trade may reflect the crucial financial role – for both parties – of multinational corporations that vigorously promote international trade. (For trenchant analyses of the role of “major investors,” especially multinational corporations, in affecting both parties' stands on international economic issues, see Ferguson and Rogers 1986 and Ferguson 1995.)

In short: preference and policy gaps between officials and ordinary citizens often occur because the two groups tend to hold different values and to have different interests; because citizens usually cannot or do not enforce their views electorally; and because organized interests and party activists often push officials away from the policies that most citizens favor.

Conclusion

Quite often the expressed preferences of U.S. foreign policy decision makers – and actual U.S. foreign policies – contrast markedly with the foreign policy preferences of the American public. Analysis of more than one thousand survey questions asked of both officials and the general public over a thirty year period reveals significant disagreements between officials and the public nearly three quarters of the time: in 73% of the cases. Indeed majorities of officials have disagreed with majorities of the public about one quarter (26%) of the time.

Disagreements over diplomatic issues reached a peak during the administration of George W. Bush, when the multilateralism of the American public (very supportive of international agreements and institutions, including the United Nations, the Kyoto

Agreement on global warming, and the International Criminal Court) has contrasted sharply with the unilateralist tendencies of decision makers.

But gaps between officials and the public have persisted at high levels on many types of issues for many years, under both Democratic and Republican administrations. The gaps over diplomatic issues have been matched in size and frequency by disagreements about defense policy, with the American public much more wary than officials of going it alone in major military engagements and much more skeptical of military aid or arms sales. Even wider have been the gaps on international economic issues, with the public more concerned than officials about immigration and drugs, more skeptical of strategic foreign aid, and much more worried about the effects of trade upon Americans' jobs and wages.

The reasons for most of these gaps appear to have more to do with contrasting values and interests than with differing levels of information. That is, officials appear to disagree with ordinary citizens less because they are far-seeing experts than because they hold distinctive positions in society and have distinctive interests. Officials are less economically vulnerable to the downside of international trade, less exposed to social stresses from drugs or immigration, and less in danger of losing loved ones in combat abroad. Officials may also be more enamored of freedom of action – their own action – in foreign affairs, hence more resistant to multilateral constraints. Only occasionally do policy disagreements seem to fit the old stereotypes of wise officialdom resisting the impulses of an ignorant, moody, even dangerous public.

If this interpretation of the gaps between officials and public is correct, and if the “rational public” view is accepted – that collective public opinion on foreign policy is

generally stable, differentiated, consistent, coherent, and responsive to the best available information – then there would seem to be a strong argument that policy makers should more often heed the public’s preferences. Greater responsiveness to the public would not only be more democratic and more sustainable, but it might well produce a better and more effective foreign policy.

No doubt there are moments when the public is slow to adjust to new realities (e.g., briefly at the very end of the Cold War), or when issues are highly technical and collective deliberation has not yet conveyed the conclusions of experts to the citizenry. But such moments appear to be relatively few. Thus the problem is not a failure to “educate” the populace or a need for statesmen to rise above the passions of the mob. Sometimes, as in the case of multilateralism vs. unilateralism, citizens and officials have broad disagreements about policy means. Are we sure that the officials are always right about means? Are they even usually right? History – including some very recent history – seems to cast doubt on both propositions. More often, officials and citizens disagree about the goals of U.S. foreign policy. In a democracy, who should set policy goals? Should it not be the citizenry? Any other answer would seem to sanction dictatorship or oligarchy.

Those who are disturbed by the size and frequency of gaps between foreign policy officials and the public might want to scrutinize features of the U.S. political system that permit or encourage policy makers to defy the wishes of ordinary citizens. I have suggested that likely culprits include arrangements that lead to unequal influence by money givers, organized interests, and party activists. Any serious effort to achieve a more democratic foreign policy would have to grapple with difficult questions about how

to give more equal political influence to all citizens.

Table 1. Frequencies of Disagreements between Policy Makers and the Public

years	1974	1978	1982	1986	1990	1994	1998	2002	All
Disagreements as percentages of all opinion items	75%	74	73	68	78	72	70	67	73
	(184 /246)	(117 /158)	(105 /143)	(63 /93)	(106 /136)	(83 /116)	(78 /112)	(100 /149)	(836 /1153)

A “disagreement” is defined as an instance in which the response frequencies of policy makers differed by 10 percentage points or more from those of the general public when asked identically worded questions. Entries are numbers of disagreements expressed as percentages of all opinion items asked of both groups. Numbers of disagreements and of common opinion items are given in parentheses.

Table 2. Magnitudes of Disagreements between Policy Makers and the Public

	1974	1978	1982	1986	1990	1994	1998	2002	All
years									
Size of Disagreement									
10-14 points	21%	15	16	21	26	17	28	20	20
15-19 points	24	21	28	16	18	19	19	23	22
20-24 points	21	20	14	17	15	20	13	11	17
25-29 points	15	12	10	16	15	17	10	15	14
30-34 points	5	14	5	13	8	5	13	9	8
35-39 points	5	9	13	6	5	5	10	6	7
40-44 points	3	4	3	3	2	10	3	7	4
45-49 points	3	2	3	2	8	4	3	3	3
50 points or more	2	4	8	6	2	4	1	6	4
Total	100 (184)	100 (117)	100 (105)	100 (63)	100 (106)	100 (83)	100 (78)	100 (100)	100 (836)
15 points or more	79%	85	84	79	74	83	72	80	80
20 points or more	54%	64	56	63	56	64	53	57	58

Entries are percentages of all disagreements between policy makers and the public that had a given size in terms of percentage point differences in response frequencies by the two groups.

Table 3. Frequencies of Opposing Majorities between Policy Makers and Public

	1974	1978	1982	1986	1990	1994	1998	2002	All years
Opposing majorities as percentages of all common items	28%	22	27	20	27	28	31	26	26
	(68 /246)	(34 /158)	(38 /143)	(19 /93)	(37 /136)	(33 /116)	(35 /112)	(39 /149)	(303 /1153)

An “opposing majority” is an instance in which the response frequencies of policy makers and the public differed by 10 percentage points or more on identically worded questions and majorities of the two groups took opposite sides of the issue. Entries are numbers of opposing majorities expressed as percentages of all opinion items asked of both groups. Numbers of opposing majorities and of common items are given in parentheses.

Table 4. Frequencies of Policy Maker/ Public Disagreements by Policy Type

		1974	1978	1982	1986	1990	1994	1998	2002	All years
Policy type										
Economic policy	89%	73	86	79	75	95	68	77		81
Defense policy	65	80	83	66	90	74	52	49		70
Diplomatic policy	75	71	66	60	75	60	74	75		70

Entries are percentages of common items within a given policy domain on which policy makers and the public differed by 10 percentage points or more.

Table 5. Frequencies of Opposing Majorities by Policy Type

	1974	1978	1982	1986	1990	1994	1998	2002	All years
Policy type									
Economic policy	36%	21	43	21	29	50	32	31	33
Defense policy	29	40	36	21	29	22	33	13	28
Diplomatic policy	23	13	19	20	21	21	29	32	22

Entries are percentages of common items within a given policy domain on which majorities of policy makers took the opposite sides from majorities of the public.

Endnotes

**Appendix: Cases of Divergence between Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy
(c. 2002-2004)**

Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, p.162
arms sales, p.121
birth control aid for poor countries, pp.194, 195
budget for foreign aid, p.192
Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, p.161
decision making within the United Nations, p.120, 158
democratization by force, p.170
diplomatic relations with Cuba, Iran, Iraq, and North Korea, pp.144-45
economic aid level, p.191, 192
economic aid to Egypt, Israel, p.192
economic sanctions against China, p.182
environmental protections in trade agreements, p.180
even-handedness between Israel and Palestinians, p.150, 151
farm subsidies, p.180, 301n17
International Criminal Court, pp.167-68
immigration level, p.185
Israeli use of U.S. weapons, p.150
job retraining after trade displacement, p.179
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UN direct tax, p.156, 157
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UN regulation of arms trade, p.157
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Veto power in Security Council, p.158
Working condition standards in trade agreements, p.179
World Court jurisdiction, p.158

Note: page numbers refer to Page with Bouton, The Foreign Policy Disconnect (2006.)

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Endnotes

Many thanks to Larry Jacobs, with whom I collaborated on the analyses of citizen/ official gaps that are reported here and in Page with Bouton (2006, ch. 7), and to Martin Kifer and Dukhong Kim for research assistance. Thanks also to Marshall Bouton, Steven Kull, Christopher Whitney, Silvia Veltscheva, David Tully, and other members of the 2006 CCGA research team.

¹ Of course few Americans are familiar with such abstract terms as “neo-liberalism.” The point is not that most people identify themselves as neo-liberals, but rather that their collective policy preferences form coherent patterns that generally fit the neo-liberal label

² Careful scrutiny of foreign policy officials’ expressed preferences in the CCGA data indicates that they are in fact quite similar to the policies actually pursued. To the extent that there are differences, the expressed preferences tend to be closer to the public’s wishes (on treaties, for example) than policy is. That is, “gaps” measured in terms of expressed preferences tend to understate the extent of disagreement between citizens and official policy.

³ The CCGA also conducted parallel surveys of foreign policy leaders and the general public in 2004, but those data are not used here. The 2006 study did not include a leader survey.

⁴ The exact size that a gap must reach to attain statistical significance varies with sample sizes and the distributions of responses, but our 10-percentage-point threshold matches or exceeds a $p < .05$ significance level in most cases. More important, we consider gaps of 10 points or more to be substantively significant.

The Foreign Policy Disconnect: Multilateralist Public, Unilateralist Officials

Benjamin I. Page
Northwestern University
for ISA 2007

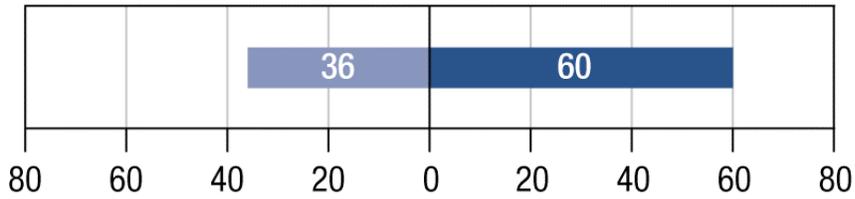
Positive attitudes towards WHO and UN



Strong commitment to working through the UN

“When dealing with international problems, the United States should be more willing to make decisions within the United Nations even if this means that the United States will sometimes have to go along with a policy that is not its first choice.”

Disagree Agree

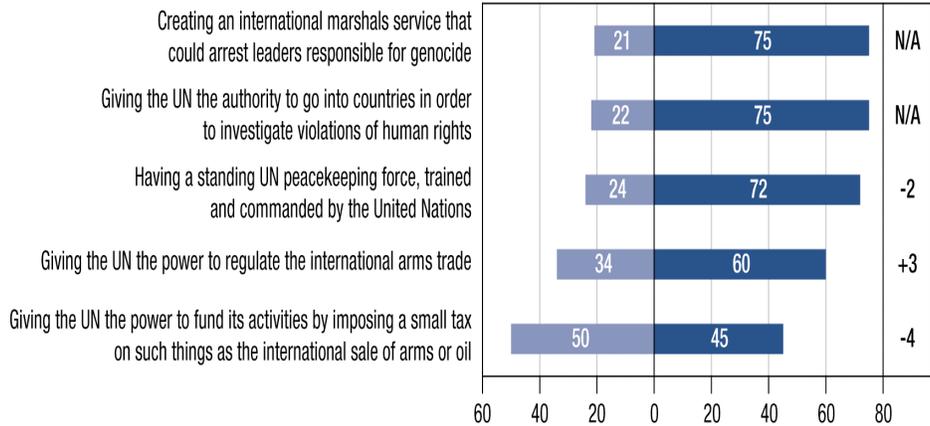


....and for steps to strengthen the UN

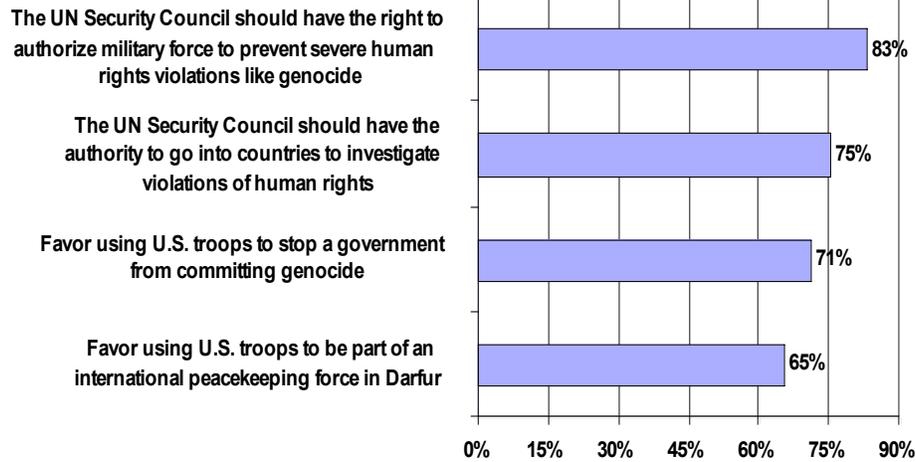
Percent who favor or oppose the following steps that could be taken to strengthen the UN

Oppose Favor

Change from 2004

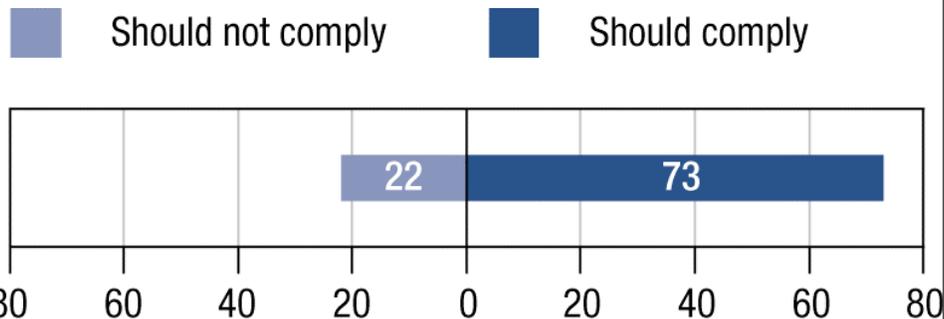


High support for UNSC having the right to intervene to stop human rights abuses



Strong support for accepting WTO decisions

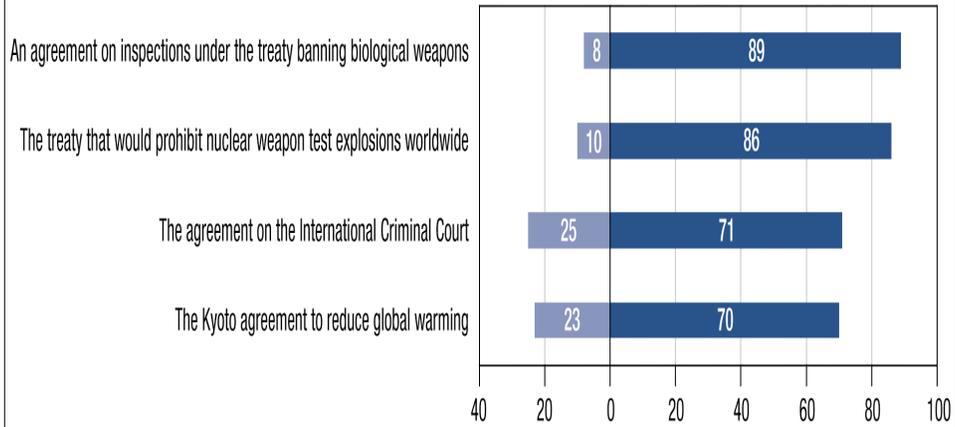
Percent who agree or disagree that the U.S. in general should or should not comply if another country files a complaint with the WTO and it rules against the U.S.



Strong support for participation in international treaties

Percent who think the U.S. should or should not participate in the following treaties or agreements

Should not participate Should participate

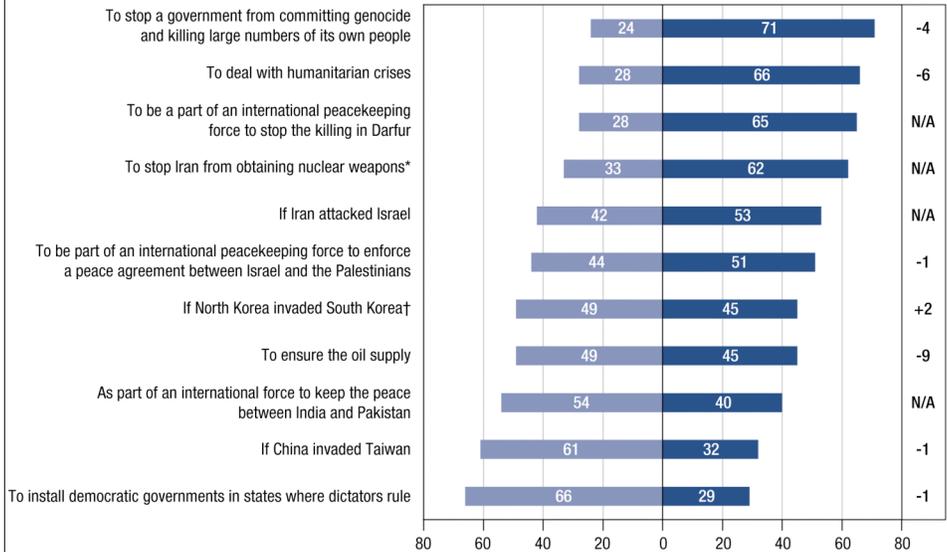


High support of troop use for humanitarian purposes

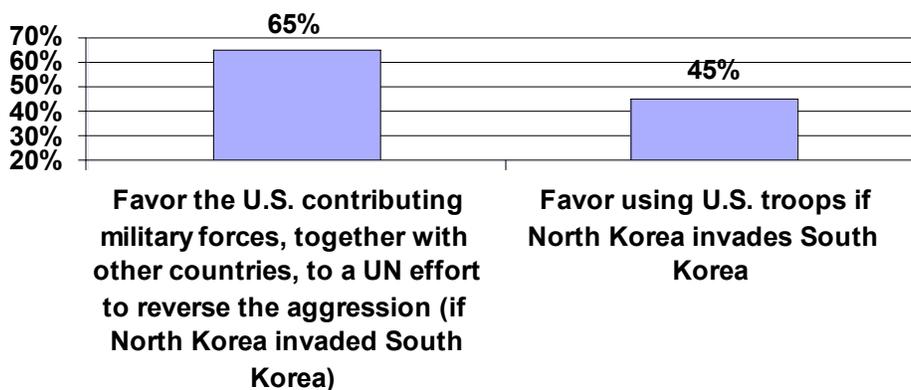
Percent who favor or oppose the use of U.S. troops in the following situations

Oppose Favor

Change from 2004

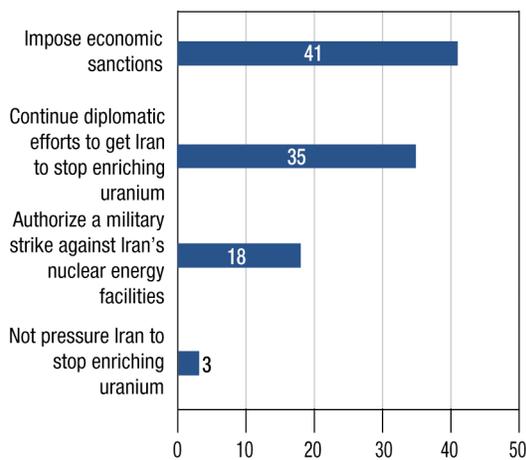


Support for using U.S. troops increases when multilateral context is stated



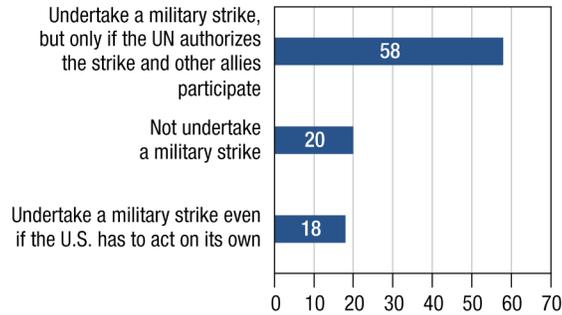
Americans favor sanctions and diplomacy to resolve Iran situation

If Iran continues to enrich uranium do you think the UN Security Council should

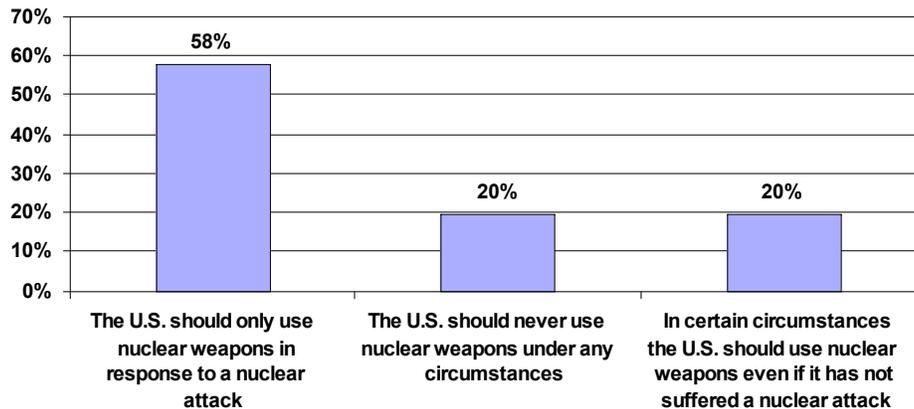


...and are willing to undertake a military strike only with UN approval and the participation of allies

In regard to the possibility of the U.S. undertaking a military strike against Iran's nuclear facilities, do you think the U.S. should:



Americans reject using nukes except in response to a nuclear attack



Americans reject use of torture

Rules against torture should be maintained because torture is morally wrong and weakening these rules may lead to the torture of American soldiers who are held prisoner abroad

Terrorists pose such an extreme threat that governments should be allowed to use torture if they may gain information that saves lives

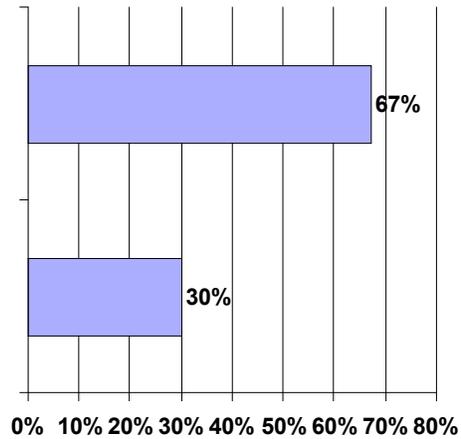


Table 1. Frequencies of Disagreements between Policy Makers and the Public

1974	1978	1982	1986	1990	1994	1998	2002	All years
75%	74	73	68	78	72	70	67	73
(184 /246)	(117 /158)	(105 /143)	(63 /93)	(106 /136)	(83 /116)	(78 /112)	(100 /149)	(836 /1153)

A “disagreement” is defined as an instance in which the response frequencies of policy makers differed by 10 percentage points or more from those of the general public when asked identically worded questions. Entries are numbers of disagreements expressed as percentages of all opinion items asked of both groups. Numbers of disagreements and of common opinion items are given in parentheses.

Table 2. Magnitudes of Disagreements, Policy Makers and the Public

Size	1974	1978	1982	1986	1990	1994	1998	2002	All years
10-14 pts.	21%	15	16	21	26	17	28	20	20
15-19 pts.	24	21	28	16	18	19	19	23	22
20-24 pts.	21	20	14	17	15	20	13	11	17
25-29 pts.	15	12	10	16	15	17	10	15	14
30-34 pts.	5	14	5	13	8	5	13	9	8
35-39 pts.	5	9	13	6	5	5	10	6	7
40 or more pts.	8	10	14	11	12	18	7	16	11
Total	$\frac{100}{(184)}$	$\frac{100}{(117)}$	$\frac{100}{(105)}$	$\frac{100}{(63)}$	$\frac{100}{(106)}$	$\frac{100}{(83)}$	$\frac{100}{(78)}$	$\frac{100}{(100)}$	$\frac{100}{(836)}$

Entries are percentages of all disagreements between policy makers and the public that had a given size in terms of percentage point differences in response frequencies by the two groups.

**Table 3.
Frequencies of Opposing Majorities between Policy Makers and Public**

1974	1978	1982	1986	1990	1994	1998	2002	All years
28%	22	27	20	27	28	31	26	26
(68 /246)	(34 /158)	(38 /143)	(19 /93)	(37 /136)	(33 /116)	(35 /112)	(39 /149)	(303 /1153)

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Table 4.
Frequencies of Policy Maker/ Public Disagreements by Policy Type

	1974	1978	1982	1986	1990	1994	1998	2002	All years
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Defense policy	65	80	83	66	90	74	52	49	70
Diplomatic policy	75	71	66	60	75	60	74	75	70

Entries are percentages of common items within a given policy domain on which policy makers and the public differed by 10 percentage points or more.

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	1974	1978	1982	1986	1990	1994	1998	2002	All years
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Defense policy	29	40	36	21	29	22	33	13	28
Diplomatic policy	23	13	19	20	21	21	29	32	22

Entries are percentages of common items within a given policy domain on which majorities of policy makers took the opposite sides from majorities of the public.

**Table 6. Cases of Divergence between Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy
(2002-2004)**

Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, p.162	missile defense, p.116
arms sales, p.121	nuclear weapons use, p.113
birth control aid for poor countries, pp.194, 195	tariffs, p.178
budget for foreign aid, p.192	terrorists trials in ICC, p.147, 148
Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, p.161	trade with Cuba, p.184
decision making within UN, p.120, 158	UN and Iraq invasion, p.109
democratization by force, p.170	UN direct tax, p.156, 157
diplomatic relations with Cuba, Iran, Iraq, North Korea, pp.144-45	UN dues payment, pp.155-56
economic aid level, p.191, 192	UN regulation of arms trade, p.157
economic aid to Egypt, Israel, p.192	UN role in Iraq, p.156, 170
economic sanctions against China, p.182	UN standby peacekeeping force, p.120, 157
environmental protn. in trade agts., p.180	Veto power in Security Council, p.158
even-handedness, Israel and Palestinians, p.150, 151	Working stds. in trade agreements, p.179
farm subsidies, p.180, 301n17	World Court jurisdiction, p.158
International Criminal Court, pp.167-68	
immigration level, p.185	Page numbers from Page with Bouton (2006.)
Israeli use of U.S. weapons, p.150	
job retraining after trade displacement, p.179	
joint decision making with Europe, p.141	
Kyoto Protocol, pp.164-65	
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military aid to Egypt, Israel, p.120	