

THE PIPA/KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS POLL

THE AMERICAN PUBLIC ON INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

Public Perceptions of the Foreign Policy Positions of the Presidential Candidates

September 29, 2004

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**PROGRAM ON INTERNATIONAL
POLICY ATTITUDES (PIPA)**

A joint program of the Center on Policy
Attitudes and the Center for International and
Security Studies at the University of Maryland



**Knowledge
NETWORKS**

A polling, social science, and
market research firm based in
Menlo Park, California

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The Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) is a joint program of the Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland and the Center on Policy Attitudes. PIPA undertakes research on American attitudes in both the public and in the policymaking community toward a variety of international and foreign policy issues. It seeks to disseminate its findings to members of government, the press, and the public as well as academia.

Knowledge Networks is a polling, social science, and market research firm based in Menlo Park, California. Knowledge Networks uses a large-scale nationwide research panel which is randomly selected from the national population of households having telephones and is subsequently provided internet access for the completion of surveys (and thus is not limited to those who already have internet access).

The Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland (CISSM), at the University of Maryland's School for Public Affairs, pursues policy-oriented scholarship on major issues facing the United States in the global arena. Using its research, forums, and publications, CISSM links the University and the policy community to improve communication between scholars and practitioners.

The Center on Policy Attitudes (COPA) is an independent non-profit organization of social science researchers devoted to increasing understanding of public and elite attitudes shaping contemporary public policy. Using innovative research methods, COPA seeks not only to examine overt policy opinions or positions, but to reveal the underlying values, assumptions, and feelings that sustain opinions.

Steven Kull, Clay Ramsay, Evan Lewis, and Stephen Weber designed the questionnaires and wrote the analysis.

Knowledge Network's Stefan Subias adapted the questionnaires and managed the fielding of the polls.

Thanks to Gina Coplon-Newfield, Don Kraus, and Heather Hamilton for advising on the research regarding the candidates' positions.

Meredith Perry, Roman Gershkovich, Jeff Tinley, Daniel Maloney, and Batsuuri Haltar contributed to the production of the report.

The search of existing poll data was done with the aid of the Roper iPOLL database.

This study was made possible by grants from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund.

INTRODUCTION

Numerous polls have shown that foreign policy will play an unusually large role in the upcoming presidential election. But how well do Americans know the positions of the candidates on foreign policy issues?

While the subjects of Iraq and terrorism have been prominent, underlying these issues are more fundamental questions, such as how much the US should pursue multilateral approaches for dealing with its security issues. The candidates have debated about how much the UN should take a leading role in Iraq.

But also related to the question of how much the US should pursue a multilateral approach to security are questions about whether the US should be part of the International Criminal Court, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and the Land Mines treaty—all issues on which the candidates have taken conflicting positions.

Implicit in much of the debate about foreign policy is the question of how much the US should emphasize military force in US foreign policy. The presidential candidates have taken conflicting positions on whether the US should increase defense spending and whether the US should move forward at this point with deploying a missile defense system.

A major point of contention between the US and its allies is the fact that the US has declined to be part of the Kyoto treaty on climate change. Here again, the candidates have taken conflicting positions.

Senator Kerry has highlighted concerns about US jobs going overseas and has come out in favor of including in trade agreements requirements for maintaining minimum labor and environmental standards. The president has opposed this idea.

In the post-Cold War era, a major form of international engagement for the US has involved contributing troops to a number of UN peacekeeping operations. President Bush has not taken a position for or against contributing to such operations. However, he has expressed skepticism about the UN and has never contributed US troops to such an operation during his term in office. Kerry on the other hand has in the past voted in favor of the US contributing to such operations.

Another key question in US foreign policy is whether the US should take Israel's side or take neither side in the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Both candidates have made strong statements of solidarity with Israel and have not done so with the Palestinians. However, there is still some ambiguity on this point, as neither has rejected the goal of being an honest broker.

To find out more about how the public perceives the candidates on these issues PIPA in conjunction with Knowledge Networks conducted a poll of 959 Americans on September 8-12. The margin of error was plus or minus 3.2-4.0%, depending on whether the question was administered to two-thirds or all of the sample. Funding for this research was provided by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund.

In particular the objective were to determine how well respondents who planned to vote one of the other candidate understood the positions of their preferred candidates and to determine how well the uncommitted knew the positions of both of the candidates. The uncommitted were defined as those

Americans that did not choose a preference for President or were not “very sure” they would vote for either Bush or Kerry and constituted 28% of the sample.

The list of questions is admittedly limited. They were selected from questions asked in the 2004 survey of the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations and on which the candidates have taken a clear or implied position.

FINDINGS

As the nation prepares to watch the presidential candidates debate foreign policy issues, a new PIPA-Knowledge Networks poll finds that Americans who plan to vote for President Bush have many incorrect assumptions about his foreign policy positions. Kerry supporters, on the other hand, are largely accurate in their assessments. Swing voters also tend to misperceive Bush’s positions, though to a smaller extent than Bush supporters, and to perceive Kerry’s positions correctly.

PIPA selected these questions from those asked in polls by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations and dealt with issues on which the presidential candidates have taken clear and documented positions.¹

Bush Supporters

Majorities of Bush supporters incorrectly assumed that Bush favors including labor and environmental standards in trade agreements (84%), and the US being part of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (69%), the International Criminal Court (66%), the treaty banning land mines (72%), and the Kyoto Treaty on global warming (51%). They were divided between those who knew that Bush favors building a new missile defense system now (44%) and those who incorrectly believe he wishes to do more research until its capabilities are proven (41%). However, majorities were correct that Bush favors increased defense spending (57%) and wants the US, not the UN, to take the stronger role in developing Iraq’s new government (70%).

Bush supporters also, themselves, favored some of the positions that they attributed to Bush. Majorities of Bush supporters favored including labor and environmental standards in trade agreements (93%), and the US being part of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (68%), the International Criminal Court (75%), the treaty banning land mines (66%), and the Kyoto treaty on climate change (54%). Only 33% of Bush supporters wanted to build a new missile defense system now, while more wanted to do more research until its capabilities are proven (56%). Forty percent of Bush supporters favored increased defense spending, while 47% wanted it kept about the same (9% wanted to cut). A majority of Bush supporters (55%) were at odds with Bush in wanting the US, not the UN, to take the stronger role in developing Iraq’s new government; 44% wanted the US to take the stronger role.

¹ The positions of President Bush and Senator Kerry were documented from six sources:

- Council on Foreign Relations “Campaign 2004” website on the candidates’ positions (<http://www.cfr.org/campaign2004/>)
- Answers given by Bush and Kerry’s campaigns to a questionnaire submitted by Time magazine and AOL News, available at www.presidentmatch.com.
- Official public documents of the State Department, available at www.state.gov
- The White House’s Office of Management and Budget website (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/fy2005/defense.html>)
- Kerry’s answers to questionnaires submitted to him by the Stop the Arms Race Political Action Committee (see www.starpac.org) and Peace Action (see www.peace-action.org).

Kerry Supporters

Kerry supporters were much more accurate in assessing their candidate's positions on all these issues. Majorities knew that Kerry favors including labor and environmental standards in trade agreements (90%); the US being part of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (77%); the International Criminal Court (59%); the land mines treaty (79%); and the Kyoto Treaty on climate change (74%). They also knew that he favors continuing research on missile defense without deploying a system now (68%), and wants the UN, not the US, to take the stronger role in developing Iraq's new government (80%). A plurality of 43% was correct that Kerry favors keeping defense spending the same, with 35% assuming he wants to cut it and 18% to expand it.

Kerry supporters were generally in harmony with their preferred candidate's positions. Majorities of Kerry supporters favored including labor and environmental standards in trade agreements (94%), and the US being part of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (88%), the International Criminal Court (74%), the treaty banning land mines (81%), and the Kyoto treaty on global warming (79%). On missile defense, 68% wanted to do more research until its capabilities are proven, while 17% wanted to not build such a system at all and 10% wanted to build one right away. However, 52% of Kerry supporters wanted to keep defense spending about the same, while 36% wanted to cut back and only 11% wanted to expand it. Almost all Kerry supporters wanted the UN, not the US, to take the stronger role in developing Iraq's new government (85%).

The Uncommitted

Many of the uncommitted (those who say they are not certain for which candidate they will vote) also misread Bush's position on most issues, though in most cases this was a plurality, not a majority. The uncommitted incorrectly believed that Bush favors including labor and environmental standards in trade agreements (69%), the US being part of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (51%), the International Criminal Court (47% to 31%), the Land mines treaty (50%), and the Kyoto treaty on climate change (45% to 37%). Only 35% knew that Bush favors building a new missile defense system now, while 36% incorrectly believed he wishes to do more research until its capabilities are proven, and 22% did not give an answer. Only 41% knew that Bush favors increased defense spending, while 49% incorrectly assumed he wants to keep it the same (29%) or cut it (20%). A plurality of 46% was correct that Bush wants the US rather than the UN to take the stronger role in developing Iraq's new government (37% assumed the UN).

The uncommitted were much more accurate in assessing Kerry's positions. Majorities knew that Kerry favors including labor and environmental standards in trade agreements (75%), and the US being part of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (60%), the land mines treaty (57%), and the Kyoto Treaty on global warming (54%), and wants the US, not the UN, to take the lead in developing Iraq's new government (71%). Pluralities correctly assumed that Kerry favors US participation in the International Criminal Court (49 to 30%) and that he favors doing more research until its effectiveness is proven (46%), with 26% assuming he does not want to build a system at all). Thirty-nine percent correctly assumed that he wants to keep defense spending the same, but 36% assumed that he wants to cut it.

Other Issues Without Clear Candidate Positions

Two other issues, on which neither candidate's position can be definitively established, were also explored. One was in regard to how the US should deal with the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Bush supporters were divided about whether Bush favored taking Israel's side (41%) or taking neither side (45%), while the uncommitted leaned toward the view that Bush favored taking neither side (47%) more than taking Israel's side (30%). Kerry voters mostly assumed that Kerry favored taking neither side (68%), as did swing voters (58%).

On the question of whether, as a general rule, the US should contribute troops to UN peacekeeping operations, Bush supporters assumed that Bush would favor doing so (78%) as did Kerry supporters (58%) and a majority of the uncommitted (60%). Kerry supporters (73%) also assume that he would favor contributing to peacekeeping as do a bare majority of the uncommitted (51%). However, a plurality of Bush supporters (48%) assumes that Kerry would prefer to leave the job to other countries.

Issue	Bush's position	Bush supporters that correctly perceive Bush (%)	Un-committed that correctly perceive Bush (%)	Kerry's position	Kerry supporters that correctly perceive Kerry (%)	Un-committed that correctly perceive Kerry (%)
Who should take the lead in Iraq on writing a new Constitution and building a democratic government	US	70	46	UN	80	71
Participation in the international criminal court	Opposes	24	31	Supports*	59	49
Participation in a treaty that bans the testing of nuclear weapons	Opposes	24	31	Supports	77	60
Participation in land mine treaty	Opposes	20	31	Supports	79	57
Defense spending	Expand	57	41	Keep same	43	39
Building a missile defense system	Build now	44	35	Research only	68	46
Participation in Kyoto agreement on global warming	Opposes	39	37	Supports*	74	54
Labor and environmental standards in trade agreements	Opposes	11	19	Supports	90	75
* Wants the US to be involved in negotiating details and implementation of the treaty						

METHODOLOGY

The poll was fielded by Knowledge Networks, a polling, social science, and market research firm in Menlo Park, California, with a randomly selected sample of its large-scale nationwide research panel. This panel is itself randomly selected from the national population of households having telephones and subsequently provided internet access for the completion of surveys (and thus is not limited to those who already have internet access). The distribution of the sample in the web-enabled panel

closely tracks the distribution of United States Census counts for the US population on age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, geographical region, employment status, income, education, etc.

The panel is recruited using stratified random-digit-dial (RDD) telephone sampling. RDD provides a non-zero probability of selection for every US household having a telephone. Households that agree to participate in the panel are provided with free Web access and an Internet appliance, which uses a telephone line to connect to the Internet and uses the television as a monitor. In return, panel members participate in surveys three to four times a month. Survey responses are confidential, with identifying information never revealed without respondent approval. When a survey is fielded to a panel member, he or she receives an e-mail indicating that the survey is available for completion. Surveys are self-administered.

For more information about the methodology, please go to:
www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp.