

Americans on Africa

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Poll Shows American Public Supports Stronger Engagement With Africa

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Despite the fact that America's conflicts with Iraq, North Korea and al-Qaeda have dominated headlines, the American public believes that the US should increase its engagement with Africa in a variety of ways. An overwhelming 74% rejected the argument that "The US has no vital interests in Africa. Therefore the US should make Africa a lower priority when deciding where to distribute its aid," while only 23% found it convincing. A 44% plurality said that the US is not concerned enough with Africa, while just 12% said that it was too concerned.

A key area where Americans want to see increased engagement with Africa is in the war on terrorism. Seventy-one percent of respondents said the US should increase military and police training and exchange intelligence with African countries.

A solid majority supports the kind of increased US-Africa trade that was the focus of the recent US-Africa Economic Forum in Mauritius. A robust 60% of respondents expressed support for African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), which was described as legislation that "eliminated import restrictions on nearly all goods produced in African countries that agreed to embrace market-oriented economic policies and move to open up their markets to US trade and investment." As a general principle, 57% said that "if countries in Africa say they will lower their barriers to products from the US if we will lower our barriers to their products," the US should agree to this.

There is also sentiment in favor of increasing the portion of US foreign aid that goes to Africa. Asked to estimate what portion of US foreign aid goes to Africa, the median estimate was 15%. Asked how much

it should be, the median proposed amount was 20%—one-third more than the presumed portion, and nearly twice the actual portion of US foreign aid that goes to Africa, which is 11%.

Perhaps the most striking finding is that Americans also show a readiness to spend a greater total amount on aid for Africa than is presently the case. Asked, “How many of your tax dollars would you be willing to have go to economic and humanitarian aid for African countries?” the median response was \$20, when in fact for the median taxpayer about \$3 goes to aid for Africa. However, because Americans are not aware of the actual amount of aid that goes to Africa, there is not a majority calling for increased aid.

Steven Kull, director of PIPA commented, “Given all of the international concerns that are competing for Americans’ attention—including terrorism, Iraq and North Korea—it would be easy to assume that Americans have lost interest in Africa. This poll, however, shows that this is not the case. Americans do see important links between developments in Africa and their own interests and values.”

Other key poll findings were:

- An overwhelming 86% said that that the US should not try to stop African countries from developing generic AIDS drugs.
- Most Americans are not aware that democracy in Africa has grown over the last 10 years. Less than one in five—18%—knew that the number of African democracies has increased in this period.
- Support for aid to Africa is greatly dampened by the belief that a majority of aid money ends up in the pockets of corrupt officials: an overwhelming majority (80%) would favor an increase in aid if they had more confidence that the aid would really help the people who need it.
- Support for President Bush’s proposed Millennium Challenge Account—which would result in increased aid to Africa as well as other regions—varies from about half to three quarters depending on how the question is framed, with support being higher in response to more information.
- A majority (55%) said the US has a moral responsibility to participate in military interventions in Africa to stop genocide, and a strong majority (66%) said the US should have intervened in Rwanda in 1994. Fifty-nine percent favored providing training for a multinational African force that would be prepared to intervene in cases of large-scale ethnic killings.

The poll was conducted with a nationwide sample of 1,146 American adults over December 19, 2002-January 1, 2003. The margin of error was plus or minus 3%. The poll was fielded by Knowledge Networks using its nationwide research panel, which is randomly selected from the national population of households having telephones and

subsequently provided Internet access. For more information about this methodology, go to: www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp.

In addition, a supplementary poll of 504 American adults was fielded through Communications Center, Inc. over January 2-10, 2003. Its margin of error was plus or minus 4.5%.