

Methods for Strengthening the UN

Giving the UN the authority to go into countries in order to investigate human rights violations

75%

Creating an international marshals service that could arrest leaders responsible for genocide

75%

Having a standing UN peacekeeping force selected, trained, and commanded by the United Nations

72%

Giving the UN power to regulate the international arms trade

60%

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

45%

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Americans Strongly Support UN in Principle, Despite Reservations about Performance

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Most Americans believe the United Nations should be stronger and that it plays a necessary role in the world. Americans are dissatisfied, however, with how well the United Nations is carrying out its mission.

A [comprehensive analysis](#) of polls of the American public over the past decade, conducted by WorldPublicOpinion.org shows that the American public remains committed to a strong United Nations. Not only do Americans, like most other publics around the world, want their leaders to work

within the United Nations to solve international problems, they also want the world body to take on additional powers, including regulation of the international arms trade and creation of a standing UN peacekeeping force.

Americans have reservations about UN performance, however. Recent polls show that three out of five Americans think the United Nations is doing a “poor job” in trying to solve international problems. Perhaps because of this, American sentiments toward the UN are slightly cooler than those of other nations.

Expansion of UN Powers

Multinational polls conducted by The Chicago Council on Global Affairs and WPO in 2006 and 2007 find that Americans, like much of the rest of the world, favor some dramatic measures to increase UN power. Seventy-five percent of Americans think the United Nations should be able to go into countries to investigate human rights abuses, 72 percent favor a standing UN peacekeeping force, and 60 percent endorse UN regulation of international arms sales.

The only proposal included in the poll that did not engender much enthusiasm in the United States or abroad was to give the UN “the power to fund its activities by imposing a small tax on the international sale of arms or oil.” A plurality of Americans oppose this idea by a margin of 50 percent to 45 percent.

Moreover, Americans are comfortable with giving the UN Security Council the right to authorize the use of force to address a variety of international crises. More than four out of five believe that the Security Council should be able to authorize the use of force to “defend a country that has been attacked” (83%) and equal numbers believe it should be allowed to do so to “prevent severe human rights violations such as genocide” (83%). About three out of four say the Security Council should also have this right to “stop a country from supporting terrorist groups” (76%).

Americans show slightly less support for Security Council authority to use force on nuclear issues: 62 percent believe it should have the right to prevent new countries from acquiring nuclear weapons (33% should not), while 57 percent believe it should have the right to use force to prevent countries from producing nuclear fuel that could be used to produce nuclear weapons (39% should not). Fifty-seven percent also believe that the Security Council should be able to authorize force to restore “a democratic government that has been overthrown,” although 38 percent oppose this.

Support for International Cooperation

The analysis of US polling data by WorldPublicOpinion.org shows that Americans remain convinced six decades after its founding that the United Nations should be a key international player. This conviction holds even when respondents are told that US leaders may have to accept less than ideal compromises in the interests of international cooperation.

Most Americans (60%) agree that the United States should be “more willing to make decisions within the United Nations” even if it means agreeing to a policy that is not their country’s first choice, Chicago Council results show. Only 37 percent disagree. Such strong American support for multilateral decisions—even if it means sacrificing some US preferences—is especially striking today, given the highly publicized criticism of the United Nations by some Bush Administration officials.

Findings from other polls bolster this result. An October 2006 poll by the WorldPublicOpinion.org found that Americans rejected the idea that US leaders would be better off avoiding international institutions. Less than one quarter of those polled (23%) accepted the idea that the United States should avoid working through international institutions because they “are slow and bureaucratic and often used as places for other countries to criticize and block the US.” Instead seven out of ten (69%) preferred the alternative argument that “as the world becomes more interconnected, and problems such as terrorism and the environment are of a more international nature, it will be increasingly necessary for the US to work through international institutions.”

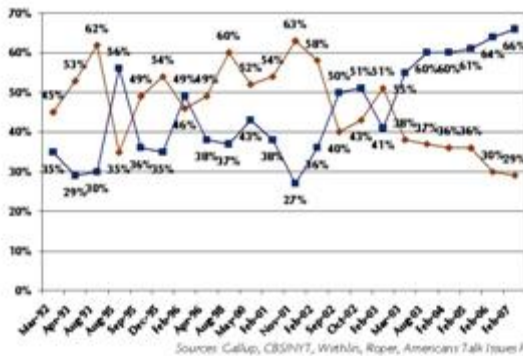
This conviction has strengthened since 1999 when 56 percent of Americans thought it was “increasingly necessary” to work through international institutions and 39 percent rejected them as “slow and bureaucratic.”

Other polls confirm Americans’ belief that the United States needs to work with the United Nations. A February 2005 Gallup poll found that nearly two-thirds of Americans (64%) thought the United Nations “plays a necessary role in the world.” A German Marshall Fund poll taken in May of the same year showed that 56 percent of Americans agreed that the UN could “manage many of the world’s most pressing problems better than any single country” and 66 percent agreed that the UN allowed different countries to share “the costs of international actions.”

Evaluation of UN Job Performance

Do you think the United Nations is doing a good job or a poor job in trying to solve the problems it has had to face?

— Good job — Poor job



Sources: Gallup, CBS/NYT, Withler, Roper, American Talk Issues Foundation

US continued participation in the United Nations gets overwhelming support: 85 percent of Americans said in the 2005 Gallup poll that they were against the United States giving up its UN membership. Only 13 percent said they would favor such a decision.

Doubts about UN Performance

US views about whether the United Nations is doing a good job or a poor one have fluctuated dramatically since 1990, however. Positive views reached highs of more than 60 percent when the international community rallied around the United States during the Gulf War and following the September 11, 2001, attacks, major polls show. Negative evaluations of the world body's job performance began rising when the UN Security Council failed to back the United States' invasion of Iraq. Dissatisfaction has remained at above 60 percent for the past two years.

This may explain why American sentiments toward the United Nations are less enthusiastic than those of other countries. The Chicago Council asked Americans to gauge their feelings toward the UN on a 100-degree thermometer, where 100 is the warmest or most favorable and 0 the least. American feelings on average register a somewhat lukewarm 55 degrees. This is the lowest temperature reading among the eight countries polled.

[Other key findings](#) of WPO's analysis of US opinion about the UN include:

- Majorities of Americans have said consistently in polls taken over the past decade that their government should pay its UN dues.
- Americans support adding new permanent members to the UN Security Council. Seven out of ten Americans (70%) told a BBC/GlobeScan/PIPA poll in 2004 that additional countries should be allowed to join the council while only 23 percent disagreed.
- Americans believe the UN should take the lead in dealing with Iran's nuclear program. In September 2006, the Pew Research Center found that Americans favor UN rather than US leadership on this issue by a margin of 70 percent to 21 percent.