

**U.S. Public and Leader Attitudes Towards the United Nations**

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**Abstract**

The United Nations (UN) is arguably the most important organization for international cooperation. Many policymakers, academics, and the media presently question the purpose, structure, and effectiveness of UN, and the place of multilateralism in contemporary international relations. Public and leader support for UN is therefore a timely issue to explore. The general public has historically been quite supportive of the UN, while political policy elites have not (Page & Shapiro 1992; Holsti 2004; Page 2006). This paper examined similarities and differences in aggregate opinion between leaders and the public on topics such as the legitimacy of unilateral and multilateral use of force, international economic and justice issues involving the UN, and participation in UN peacekeeping and treaties. The public was generally supportive of multilateralism through the UN. However, a larger group of political elites was even more supportive, and smaller group of politicians less supportive, in comparison to the general public. The policies of the Bush administration were much closer to the policy preferences of politicians, but quite divergent from those of the general public and a wider group of political elites.

## **U.S. Public and Leader Attitudes Towards the United Nations**

### **A. Introduction**

The U.S. public has shown a great deal of support for the UN since its inception. Despite disappointment with UN performance in response to international events the U.S. public has not pushed for abandonment of the UN project. Citizens have criticized the effectiveness of the UN but view it as a viable and important international institution. Opinion dropped when a UN/U.S. peacekeeping mission such as Somalia failed or the U.S. failed to secure UN participation in a large military campaign such as Iraq. But this is not simply because the UN did not go along with U.S. foreign policy. The polls demonstrate instead that the majority of the U.S. public nearly always preferred working with the UN and was frustrated that its own government did not do so.

It is instructive to compare any similarities and differences between leaders and the public in their overall attitudes. I compare aggregate attitudes on several issues areas that relate to the UN and multilateralism (a list of the exact question wordings is available from the author). These are broken up into issues areas such as U.S. participation in treaties, economic multilateralism, international justice and terrorism, the use of U.S. troops and peacekeeping, the use of force by the UN, and the use of force by a country. The questions in these issue areas all measure policy preferences for specific policies related to multilateralism and the UN. Lastly, there is also a section at the end that compares differences between leaders and the general public in terms of general support for the UN and multilateralism, which are measures of more general orientations rather than specific policy preferences.

### **B. Policy Leaders and Opinion of the UN**

Luck (1999: 254) claims that in order to understand U.S. attitudes toward the UN we must first look at the difference between elites and the public. Historically, many elites have demonstrated a great disdain for the UN, while most of the public has shown broad support for the organization. However, Luck (1999) also points out that this seemingly large difference in support of the UN between elites and the public may not be as great as it appears. Leaders and the public are not as uniform in their support or disdain for the UN once each group is broken down to a finer level. In addition, he claims that “Public perceptions no doubt have been influenced by the stances taken by members of Congress; prominent commentators, including the U.S. representative to the UN; and, particularly, the president” (Luck 1999: 266). No doubt, the public is affected by elite discourse of foreign policy topics, but it remains to be seen whether the negativity of political elites regarding the UN results in a convergence of attitudes among elites and the public. As Luck points out, it is also the case that the more heterogeneous larger group of leaders sampled by the 2004 CCGA survey could differ significantly from political elites. Newspaper editors, labor leaders, university deans, and interest group leaders have a different set of motivations than political leaders, and many of these professions would be considered the vanguard of the group of liberal elites that tend to be internationalist.

Despite early support from presidents Roosevelt and Truman, many political elites despised the UN from the beginning as a threat to U.S. sovereignty. Accordingly, over the history of the UN the U.S. has avoided any agreements that would constrain its national action without totally abandoning multilateral institutions (Desai 2005: 58). We often hear that the American public and elites do not value the UN or know as much about it as others in the world; “...what else could explain Congress’ penchant for withholding assessed dues and the recurrent

and seemingly insatiable chorus of criticism concerning UN performance voiced by U.S. opinion leaders?” (Luck 1999: 10). However, it is likely not a lack of perceived value of the UN for both the public and elites. The public clearly believes the UN has value despite a lack of knowledge about the organization. Elites are quite knowledgeable regarding the UN but often view international multilateralism as an impediment to the pursuit of U.S. interests rather than a valuable international institution.

There is no end to the horrible names hurled at the UN by U.S. political elites. These include: “bureaucratic”, “ineffective”, “undemocratic”, “useless”, “irrelevant”, “bloated”, and “dangerous”. According to J. B. Matthews, chief investigator for the House Un-American Activities Committee, the UN “could not be less of a cruel hoax if it had been organized in Hell for the sole purpose of aiding and abetting the destruction of the United States.” (Albright 2004: 166). Just as current public opinion of UN performance suffered in the wake of the conflict over Iraq, it seems that political leaders are in a decidedly negative mood concerning the organization. Specifically relating to Iraq, a senior White House official commented that “The Iraq-war snub raises questions ‘about the organization, specifically the Security Council’s ability to deal substantively with the threats of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and [their] availability to outlaw regimes” (Katz 2004: 128).

With respect to the Bush administration, John Ruggie, former UN Assistant Secretary-General, believes some in the administration secretly “like the idea that the [legitimacy of] the UN may have been damaged in this process. I don’t think it was unintended collateral damage for some people in this administration” (Katz 2004: 129). Many members of Congress are equally hostile towards the UN. In the 1990s the U.S. blocked payments to the UN and some were convinced that the UN was “the nemesis of millions of Americans” (Jesse Helms, R-NC) (Albright 2004: 167). Rep. Eliot Engel, D-N.Y. claimed “There is a feeling amongst many members [of Congress] that the United Nations is useless and a waste of time and a waste of money”. Similarly, libertarian politician Ron Paul (R-TX) opined that the UN is “actively hostile to American interests” (Katz 2004: 130).

Even though Katz himself is somewhat sympathetic to the intention behind the UN there is an incredible amount of skepticism; “You know intellectually that it’s important to have the United Nations...where countries can have dialogue and try to settle disputes. On the other hand, the United Nations has been so one-sided in so many things in terms of anti-American rhetoric, in terms of anti-Israel resolutions...you begin to question whether it can really ever be an effective vehicle for peace” (Katz 2004: 130).

Obviously, not all political elites are anti-UN. Former U.S. ambassador to the UN, Madeleine Albright clarified that “Questions about the efficiency of the United Nations and many of its specific actions are legitimate, but worries about U.S. sovereignty are misplaced and appear to come primarily from people aggrieved to find the United Nations so full of foreigners” (Albright 2004: 171). Albright appears to be in complete agreement with the finding of the previous chapter that the majority of the U.S. public is critical of UN performance but not concerned with encroachments on U.S. sovereignty. Former UN ambassador John Negroponte also defended against attacks on the relevance of the UN; “I’m struck by the relevance of the UN to United States foreign policy and national security interests. If you look at the agenda that we’ve had since I’ve been here, it very much tracks with the agenda of our foreign policy and of our national security policy. To those who would question the relevance of the UN, my answer would be: absolutely the UN is relevant, no question about it, all you have to do is look at our agenda. The degree of UN involvement in any specific issue will vary from case to case, but

there will always be a UN role. The debate is going to over the precise definition of that role, and it seems to vary from situation to situation.” John Negroponte (in Fasulo 2004: 204).

This sample of elite opinions leaves one with the impression that there is much less support for the UN among leaders in comparison to the general public, especially when recent administration policies are taken into account. The policies of the Bush administration are clearly out of line with the desires of the American public for greater multilateralism and a stronger relationship with the UN (as Page 2006 found). However, it is essential that administration policies are not viewed as representative of the opinions of all policy leaders. It could certainly be the case that the opinions of a wider group of policy leaders that includes other politicians, and business, religious, academic, media, labor, and interest group leaders may also be out of sync with administration policy and closer to the opinions of the public.

### C. Hypotheses

#### *Hypothesis 1*

I expect to find that the U.S. public in the aggregate will show continued strong support for the UN in the 2004 and 2006 CCGA surveys.

#### *Hypothesis 2*

Although government policy is not an exact indicator of overall elite sentiments, especially given the fact that the CCGA sample of leaders includes non-political elites, it is one of the indicators upon which to make a prediction regarding any differences between leaders and the general public in support for the UN. U.S. government policies have historically not been supportive of the UN. Elites are mistrustful of an overarching global organization that could possibly reduce the sovereignty and independent actions of the U.S. The George W. Bush administration has continued to take a combative stance towards the UN and has even escalated this behavior to some extent. In contrast, although the public has been critical of UN performance, there has been strong support for the UN over its entire lifespan. Thus, I expect to find that leaders are not as supportive of the UN and multilateralism in comparison to the public.

#### *Hypothesis 3*

Political leaders will be less supportive of the UN in comparison to the larger group of diverse elites and the general public. This lower level of support for multilateralism is due to the policymaking positions of political leaders, which makes them more likely to observe foreign policy from a U.S. interest standpoint.

### D. Method

This study employs the Chicago Council on Global Affairs (CCGA) 2004 American Opinion and Foreign Policy dataset (Bouton, 2005). The CCGA conducted a study of both public and leader opinion of American foreign policy every four years from 1974 to 2004. The 2004 dataset was chosen for several reasons. First, the survey has both leader and public samples, which allows the advantage of a direct comparison of leader and public opinion using exactly the same questions, a luxury not generally afforded with most opinion datasets. Second, it is the most recent set of CCGA survey questions with both leader and public samples (the 2006 survey and upcoming 2008 survey do not have leader samples), which as of yet has not been analyzed extensively. Lastly, this survey is the most useful for studying opinion regarding the UN. In comparison to the previous surveys in the 70s, 80s, and 90s, the 2004 CCGA survey has an abundance of questions relating to U.S. foreign policy and the UN.

Sampling for the leader and general public subsamples was necessarily different. The public survey had a sample size of 1,195 respondents. Knowledge Networks (KN) conducted the surveys for the public through their Internet database. The sampling frame was a nationally representative, stratified, systematic, random sample of American men and women over the age of 18 selected from KN's respondent panel. KN utilized list-assisted Random Digit Dialing (RDD) sampling techniques on the sample frame consisting of the entire United States telephone population. Telephone numbers were selected with equal probability for each number. The sample generation system excluded confirmed disconnected and nonresidential telephone numbers. Telephone numbers for which a valid postal address was recovered were sent an advance mailing informing them that they had been selected to participate in the KN Panel. To conduct the survey, a sample was drawn at random from active panel members using an implicitly stratified systematic sample design. The KN Internet sample is not self-selected and is independent of computer ownership.<sup>1</sup>

The leader sample had a sample size of 450 respondents. Unfortunately, given the nature of the target population, sampling of leaders was not random. The fact that the leader sample is not representative of the total population of leaders is somewhat problematic for aggregate comparisons of the prevalence of attitudes and policy preferences with a representative sample of the public. The aggregate attitudes of the leader sample are not generalizable to the whole population of policy leaders. Therefore, the results of these comparisons should be taken as indicative of possible differences and similarities between leaders and the general public. However, as described in the next section, the CCGA did a good job of selecting leaders in different areas from comprehensive lists of membership in each type of position (i.e., selecting Congressional leaders from the Congressional Yellowbook). These lists are good approximations of the population of leaders in each leader category included in the sample. This lends greater confidence in their generalizability to the population of leaders at least as far as the population parameters are defined simply as active membership in each leader category.

The CCGA poll employed a wide-ranging definition of what constitutes a "leader". Leaders included Congressional members and senior staff, university administrators and professors specializing in international relations, journalists and editors of international news, administration officials involved in foreign policy, religious leaders, labor leaders, business leaders, presidents of major private foreign policy organizations, and presidents of major interest groups in foreign policy. The motivation for including all of these groups under the category of "policy leaders" was that all of these groups have some vested interest or knowledge of foreign policy, and are in a position to influence the general public in this regard.

Members of the House of Representatives and Senate were selected from the Congressional Yellow Book. If the House or Senate member was not available, the interview was conducted with a senior staffer responsible for foreign affairs. The Federal Yellow Book was used to interview assistant secretaries and other senior level administrative staff. The Fortune 1000 list was used to select names of vice presidents in charge of international affairs in top corporations. News Media Yellow Book was used to select names of television and radio news directors, network newscasters, and newspaper editors and columnists. The Capital Source was used to select names of presidents of the largest labor unions, presidents of large special interest groups relevant to foreign policy, and presidents of major private foreign policy organizations. United States News and World Report 2003 list of the top 50 doctoral research institutions in the United States was used to select names of university presidents and faculty

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<sup>1</sup> KN participants are given free hardware and Internet access in return for participation in the KN panel.

who teach in the field of foreign affairs at universities. Names of religious leaders representing faiths proportionate to the number of Americans who worship each faith were selected from the Yearbook of Canadian and American Churches 2004.

Comparisons in this study were conducted between the general public and two groups of leaders – an “all leaders” group that contains all categories of leaders and a “political leaders” group that contains only members of Congress and the administration. The political leaders were selected out from the larger group of leaders in order to compare how the policy-making positions of political leaders might influence their foreign policy preferences and attitudes. Other leaders may have different motivations from political leaders due their different positions within the political process. The same applies to an even greater extent to comparisons with the general public. It is quite possible that various political elites have different considerations and motivations in foreign policy and this separation from the wider group of leaders was meant to test this possibility.

## E. Results

### 1. Treaty Participation

The American public quite strongly supported participation in all the multilateral international treaties covered in this survey – the Kyoto treaty to combat global warming, the treaty to ban land mines, the nuclear weapon test ban treaty, and the International Criminal Court (ICC) (see Table 1). The public wanted to see the U.S. deal with international problems involving the environment, nuclear and conventional weapons, and human rights violations by actively supporting these multilateral agreements with other nations. Political leaders were much less supportive of these multilateral treaties and, obviously, the behavior of the U.S. administration was at odds with the public over the desirability of these international treaties.

**TABLE 1**  
PUBLIC AND LEADER SUPPORT FOR U.S. PARTICIPATION IN TREATIES AND AGREEMENTS

Treaty	Public	Leader		Difference	
		All	Political	All	Political
Kyoto accord	79	74	68	+5	+11
Nuclear test ban	90	89	75	+1	+15
ICC	80	74	58	+6	+22
Land mines treaty	84	82	69	+2	+15

*Note:* 2004 CCGA Public and Leader surveys.

However, when all leaders were considered, the gap between leaders and public was no longer evident on all four treaties. The gap in support was never more than 6% between the public and the larger group of leaders, but support from political leaders was considerably lower, especially in the case of the ICC.

Government policy during this time period mirrored this overall weaker support for treaties among political leaders (although in an absolute sense, majorities of political leaders also

supported participation in these treaties). The U.S. government, after initially signing the Kyoto treaty, refused to participate due to concerns that it would harm the U.S. economy and continued to block new efforts at combating climate change at the Bali conference in 2008. The American government also strongly opposed participation in the treaty to ban land mines, citing safety concerns for American troops around the world, especially on the border between North and South Korea. The Bush administration also rejected the nuclear weapon test ban treaty because it is in the process developing and testing new nuclear weapons. The U.S. government staunchly opposed participation in the ICC over worries that the court would be easily abused by nations for political reasons and refused to recognize its jurisdiction over American leaders and soldiers.

## 2. **International Economic Policies**

The public face of the UN is inevitably tied to peacekeeping and conflict issues. News coverage of UN activities usually takes place in the context of UN involvement in conflict resolution or peacekeeping. Most of the public does not realize that UN involvement is primarily in the areas of social, economic, and development concerns. Not only is UN involvement in non-security related issues higher than it is in security matters, but the UN has been arguably more effective in resolving international problems in these areas in comparison to conflict resolution.

A strong majority of the public supported compliance with World Trade Organization (WTO) rulings, even when they ruled against the U.S. (74%), and even stronger majorities of leaders (91%) and political leaders (88%) did as well (see Table 2). Thus, on international economic issues, Americans supported an overarching multilateral institution even though the U.S. could gain more from acting unilaterally and using its unparalleled economic and military power. Leaders were more willing than the public to adhere to the international economic system at the expense of personal gain. The American government has on many occasions refused to accept the rulings of the WTO if it sided against the U.S. government. This behavior is at odds with the wishes of the majority of the public and a wider array of leaders, who would rather maintain economic multilateralism, even if it means the U.S. would lose out in the short term on a particular issue.

**TABLE 2**  
PUBLIC AND LEADER SUPPORT FOR COMPLIANCE WITH WTO RULINGS AGAINST THE U.S.

Compliance	Public	Leader		Difference	
		All	Political	All	Political
Yes	74	91	88	-17	-14

*Note:* 2004 CCGA Public and Leader surveys.

Seventy-two percent of the American public also thought that the U.S. should not have a special ability to veto decisions made by international economic organizations and decisions should always be made by a majority. The public believes that the U.S. may not always be in the right on world economic issues, and prefers that nations work together on an equal basis. The majority opinion of American political leaders was exactly opposite to the public; only 54% of leaders thought the U.S. *should* give up its veto in international economic organizations. Perhaps leaders were more willing to accept the decisions of international economic organizations



because they were sensitive to the advantages for the government to be able to veto any unfavorable decision.

### 3. **International Justice and Terrorism**

A majority of the public believed the U.S. should make a commitment to the World Court, and comply with its decisions (62%). The whole group of leaders did not vary much from the opinions of the public (53% support), but political leaders showed nearly no support for the World Court (35%) (see Table 3). Political leaders do not want U.S. citizens, including themselves, subject to the jurisdiction of any courts but their own and see these international courts as a direct threat to U.S. sovereignty. U.S. politicians and military commanders fear that biased judges or prosecutors may launch “politically motivated prosecutions” against U.S. leaders or military personnel (Goldstone 2007: 475). To this end the U.S. government has signed more than 100 bilateral immunity agreements.

**TABLE 3**  
PUBLIC AND LEADER SUPPORT FOR U.S. COMPLIANCE WITH WORLD COURT DECISIONS

Compliance	Public	Leader		Difference	
		All	Political	All	Political
Should	62	54	35	+8	+27

*Note:* 2004 CCGA Public and Leader surveys.

Strong majorities of the public (86%) and all leaders (82%) favored the trial of suspected terrorists in the ICC (see Table 4). Political leaders were not nearly as supportive in opinion (70%) and deed. Again, this position was at odds with government policy in the “war on terror”, which has been to hold suspected terrorists in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba without trial. Strong majorities of the public, all leaders, and political leaders wanted to see the U.S. work through the UN to strengthen international laws against terrorism as a way to combat terrorism (91%, 95%, and 95%, respectively).

**TABLE 4**  
PUBLIC AND LEADER SUPPORT FOR MEASURES TO COMBAT TERRORISM

Measure	Public	Leader		Difference	
		All	Political	All	Political
Trial of suspected terrorists in the ICC	86	82	70	+4	+16
Working through the UN to strengthen international laws against terrorism	91	95	95	-4	-4

*Note:* 2004 CCGA Public and Leader surveys.

#### 4. U.S. Troops and Peacekeeping

Both the public and leaders strongly supported participation in UN peacekeeping missions, so neither could be said to be even close to a lack of support, but there were relative differences. Out of a series of questions in the 2004 survey that measured support for strengthening the UN in various ways, the largest majority of the public supported strengthening the UN through the creation of a standing UN peacekeeping force and general support for U.S. participation in UN peacekeeping missions (80% for both) (see Table 5). Leaders, especially political leaders, showed less support for strengthening the UN with a standing UN peacekeeping force (69% and 59%, respectively). However, American leaders were even more eager than the public to participate in UN peacekeeping missions. The public believed it was more important to strengthen the UN, while political leaders showed higher support for specific policies and aspects of the UN. Conversely, leaders showed much higher support than the public for the use of U.S. troops in specific peacekeeping missions in Afghanistan, India/Pakistan, and Israel/Palestine (see Table 6). This higher level of support was perhaps due to the fact that U.S. troops were specifically mentioned in the other questions concerning specific missions, which lowered support out of concern for the lives of U.S. troops.

**TABLE 5**  
PUBLIC AND LEADER SUPPORT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACEKEEPING

Position	Public	Leader		Difference	
		All	Political	All	Political
Should take part	80	92	89	-12	-9
Should strengthen UN with a standing peacekeeping force	80	69	59	+11	+21

*Note:* 2004 CCGA Public and Leader surveys.

**TABLE 6**  
PUBLIC AND LEADER SUPPORT FOR CIRCUMSTANCES THAT MIGHT JUSTIFY USING U.S. TROOPS IN OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD

Situation	Public	Leader		Difference	
		All	Political	All	Political
Part of international peacekeeping force in Afghanistan	63	96	96	-33	-33
Part of international force to keep peace between India and Pakistan	54	69	69	-15	-15
Part of international peacekeeping force to enforce peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians	54	79	79	-25	-25

*Note:* 2004 CCGA Public and Leader surveys.

Even though the UN did not support the invasion of Iraq, the American public still strongly favored the UN taking the lead role in rebuilding Iraq (74%) (see Table 7). This was possibly partially due to reluctance on the part of the American public to bear the brunt of the considerable costs of rebuilding Iraq after an already costly war, but the support for the UN was there nonetheless. Interestingly, an even stronger majority of the larger group of leaders favored giving the UN the lead role in rebuilding Iraq (81%). American leaders were willing to invade Iraq without UN support but thought that the UN was in a better position to help Iraqis in the rebuilding phase, and in the process give up some direct control over the future of Iraq. However, it is also possible that just as public support for peacekeeping is likely based partially on cost-sharing concerns, U.S. leaders are interested in sharing the astronomical costs of rebuilding Iraq despite the loss of control over the future of Iraq. At the time of writing (2008), the Bush administration was more interested in maintaining control over Iraq and instead opted for partially sharing the burden of security and reconstruction with preferred allies (i.e., Britain).

**TABLE 7**  
PUBLIC AND LEADER ATTITUDES TOWARDS WHO SHOULD HAVE A STRONGER  
ROLE IN REBUILDING IRAQ

Position	Public	Leader		Difference	
		All	Political	All	Political
United Nations	74	81	73	-7	+1

*Note:* 2004 CCGA Public and Leader surveys.

### 5. The Use of Force

Strong majorities of the public and leaders supported the use of force by the UN to prevent a country from acquiring nuclear weapons (public: 75%; all leaders: 65%; political leaders: 63%), prevent severe human rights violations such as genocide (public: 90%; all leaders: 96%; political leaders: 94%), stop a country from supporting terrorist groups (public: 86%; all leaders: 78%; political leaders: 80%), and defend a country that has been attacked (public: 82%; all leaders: 92%; political leaders: 89%), while weaker majorities supported the use of force by the UN to restore a democratic government that has been overthrown (public: 65%; all leaders: 63%; political leaders: 70%) (see Table 8). Although, support reached majorities for leaders and the public in all scenarios, leaders were more supportive of the use of UN force to defend a country, while the public was more supportive of the use of UN force to prevent the acquisition of nuclear weapons. Support dropped for the use of force in these situations if it was carried out by a country without UN approval (see Table 9). Leaders also wanted the U.S. to work through the UN in all of these situations where the use of force is involved.

**TABLE 8**  
PUBLIC AND LEADER SUPPORT FOR THE RIGHT OF THE UN TO AUTHORIZE  
MILITARY FORCE

Purpose	Public	Leader		Difference	
		All	Political	All	Political
To prevent severe human rights violations such as genocide	90	96	94	-6	-4
To stop a country from supporting terrorist groups	86	78	80	+12	+6
To defend a country that has been attacked	82	92	89	-10	-7
To prevent a country that does not have nuclear weapons from acquiring them	75	65	63	+10	+12
To restore by force a democratic government that has been overthrown	65	63	70	+2	-5

*Note:* 2004 CCGA Public and Leader surveys.

**TABLE 9**  
PUBLIC AND LEADER SUPPORT FOR THE RIGHT OF A COUNTRY, WITHOUT UN  
APPROVAL TO USE MILITARY FORCE

Purpose	Public	Leader		Difference	
		All	Political	All	Political
To prevent severe human rights violations such as genocide	74	77	81	-3	-7
To stop a country from supporting terrorist groups	64	50	57	+14	+7
To defend a country that has been attacked	64	80	87	-16	-23
To prevent a country that does not have nuclear weapons from acquiring them	53	37	48	+16	+5
To restore by force a democratic government that has been overthrown	43	35	48	+8	-5

*Note:* 2004 CCGA Public and Leader surveys.

#### 6. **General Support for the UN and Multilateralism**

A majority of the public (69%) supported the U.S. taking an “active part” in world affairs, and answers to other questions indicate that this action should be multilateral whenever possible. However, the public was substantially more isolationist than leaders; nearly all leaders believed the U.S. should take an “active part” in world affairs (All: 98%; Political: 99%). Leaders unquestionably rejected the idea of isolationism and believed strongly that the U.S. should participate fully in international relations.

There was also majority public support for making joint decisions with the UN even when the decision is not the first choice of the U.S. (69%). This is a high level of support

considering the wording of the question, which specifically points out that these decisions may not necessarily reflect the interests of the U.S. This support also extended to political leaders (69%) and to an even greater degree, all leaders (79%).

Strong support for multilateral approaches to fighting terrorism was also evident. A majority of the public thought the most important lesson of September 11<sup>th</sup> was that the U.S. needed to work more closely with other countries (76%) rather than act more on its own. All leaders and political leaders believed to a greater degree than the public that the important lesson of September 11<sup>th</sup> was that the U.S. needed to work more closely with other nations (91% and 88%, respectively) rather than go it alone. Once again political leaders showed a greater desire than the public to engage with other countries and work with them to solve international problems, especially on the most important issue of the moment in American foreign policy – terrorism.

## F. Discussion and Conclusions

### 1. Summary of Findings

Do leaders and the general public display large differences in overall support for multilateralism? Do they stress different foreign policy goals and priorities? Do they show differences in support for various policies related to multilateralism? There was certainly a large gap between the foreign policy wishes of the general public, and the opinions of political elites and actual policies enacted by the Bush administration post-9/11. However, it seems that these differences are not so great when one compares the foreign policy preferences of a larger group of political leaders and the general public on multilateralism and related opinions.

There were no discernable differences between all leaders and the public in terms of support for U.S. participation in various treaties (see Table 10 for a summary of differences in support for policies). Both groups showed strong majority support for participation in the Kyoto accord, the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban treaty, the ICC, and the land mines treaty. But political leaders showed significantly less support for all treaties, especially participation in the ICC. Support remained a majority for political leaders but there were clearly many more politicians who saw these agreements as restrictions on U.S. sovereignty. The Bush administration's rejection of all these treaties is clearly out of step with the strong desire on the part of both a larger group of political elites and the general public to participate in these multilateral agreements.

Although both leaders and the general public showed strong majority support for U.S. compliance with WTO rulings leaders were almost unanimous in their support. However, the public supported abolishing the veto in international economic organizations to a significantly greater degree and also displayed strong majority support for compliance with the decisions of international economic organizations.

On topics concerning international justice and terrorism there were no differences between all leaders and the public, but once again differences were evident when compared to political leaders. Slight majorities of all leaders and the public agreed the U.S. should accept the decisions of the World Court, but there was little support for international judicial jurisdiction among political leaders. Strong majorities of all leaders and the public supported the trial of suspected terrorists in the ICC and strengthening laws against terrorism though the UN, while fewer political leaders supported involving the ICC in fighting terrorism. Lastly, a significantly greater percentage of the public supported a greater emphasis on military methods to fight

terrorism while both groups of leaders wanted to put more emphasis on diplomacy. The public was also less supportive of maintaining a ban on the use of torture in order to fight terrorism than both groups of leaders. Thus, this trend points towards a generally greater “hawkish” foreign policy stance on the part of the public in terms of methods to fight terrorism and a great dislike for international institutions of justice among political leaders.

The most obvious difference between leaders and the public was in internationalism/isolationism. Majorities of both leaders and the public support the U.S. taking an active role in world affairs but this is only a slight majority for the public and reaches virtual unanimity among leaders. The public has traditionally taken a more isolationist posture in world affairs, preferring to concentrate on domestic affairs (Holsti 1992) and it seems there has been no change in this regard. Leaders do not argue over whether or not the U.S. should take an active

**TABLE 10**  
SUMMARY OF DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LEADERS AND THE PUBLIC IN  
AGGREGATE SUPPORT FOR POLICY PREFERENCES

Support	Public	Leader		Difference	
		All	Political	All	Political
Kyoto accord	79	74	68	+5	<b>+11</b>
Nuclear test ban	90	89	75	+1	<b>+15</b>
ICC	80	74	58	+6	<b>+22</b>
Land mines treaty	84	82	69	+2	<b>+15</b>
WTO compliance	74	91	88	<b>-17</b>	<b>-14</b>
World Court compliance	62	54	35	+8	<b>+27</b>
Trial of suspected terrorists in the ICC	86	82	70	+4	<b>+16</b>
Terrorism_strengthen intl laws at UN	91	95	95	-4	-4
U.S. participation in UN peacekeeping	80	92	89	<b>-12</b>	-9
Strengthen UN_standing peacekeeping force	80	69	59	<b>+11</b>	<b>+21</b>
U.S. Troops_Afghanistan	63	96	96	<b>-33</b>	<b>-33</b>
U.S. Troops_India and Pakistan	54	69	69	<b>-15</b>	<b>-15</b>
U.S. Troops_Israel and the Palestinians	54	79	79	<b>-25</b>	<b>-25</b>
UN should take lead in rebuilding Iraq	74	81	73	-7	+1
UN Force_prevent human rights violations	90	96	94	-6	-4
UN Force_prevent support for terrorism	86	78	80	<b>+12</b>	+6
UN Force_defend a country	82	92	89	<b>-10</b>	-7
UN Force_prevent nuclear proliferation	75	65	63	<b>+10</b>	<b>+12</b>
UN Force_restore democratic government	65	63	70	+2	-5
Country Force_human rights violations	74	77	81	-3	-7
Country Force_prevent support for terrorism	64	50	57	<b>+14</b>	+7
Country Force_defend a country	64	80	87	<b>-16</b>	<b>-23</b>
Country Force_prevent nuclear proliferation	53	37	48	<b>+16</b>	+5
Country Force_restore democratic government	43	35	48	+8	-5
U.S. should take an active part in world affairs	69	98	99	<b>-29</b>	<b>-30</b>
U.S.-UN joint decision-making	69	79	69	<b>-10</b>	0
Sept 11 <sup>th</sup> _work more closely with others	76	91	88	<b>-15</b>	<b>-12</b>

*Note:* 2004 CCGA Public and Leader surveys with refused dropped. Differences of 10% or greater in bold.

role in world affairs. They are under no illusions that the U.S. can just bury its head in the sand and hope that the international structure turns out to benefit the U.S. Instead, there is a debate among leaders as to what form this interaction should take – hardline and assertive, or more cooperative and multilateral.

What about support for the UN and multilateralism in general? Majorities of leaders and the public supported U.S.-UN joint decision-making but support was significantly higher among all leaders in comparison to the public and political leaders. The same pattern was evident in regard to the importance of Sept. 11<sup>th</sup>. Strong majorities of both groups thought the lesson was that the U.S. should work more closely with other countries but support was nearly unanimous among leaders.

Support for peacekeeping was dependent on the particular context of the question. Strong majorities of leaders and the public supported strengthening the UN with a standing peacekeeping force and U.S. participation in peacekeeping in general, but leaders showed significantly greater support for general participation while the public showed greater support for a standing peacekeeping force. When it comes to specific peacekeeping missions that mention the use of U.S. troops (India/Pakistan, Israel/Palestine, Afghanistan) leaders were much more supportive of U.S. participation than the public. These findings lend support to the idea that the public is more risk averse to soldier casualties than leaders and that leaders are more accepting of the necessity of sacrifice in order to achieve foreign policy goals.

Overall support was very high among both the public and leaders for the use of force by the UN to prevent human rights violations and stop government support of terrorism, and low for both in the case of restoring a democratic government. Leaders demonstrated significantly greater support for the use of force by the UN to defend a country that has been attacked (although support is still very high for both) and the public showed significantly greater support for the use of force where it is used to prevent a country from acquiring nuclear weapons.

In the case of unilateral force, the general public favored the use of force to a greater extent than leaders to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and stop a government from supporting terrorists. There was little difference between leaders and the public in support for unilateral force to prevent human rights violations (support was high for both) and to restore a democratic government (support was low for both). Leaders supported unilateral force to defend a country that has been attacked to a greater degree.

It is important to note that when one compares levels of support within the groups, both leaders and the general public overwhelmingly supported the use of force by the UN over unilateral force in every case. However, in reference to differences *between* leaders and the public in overall support for the use of force, it did not matter so much whether the force was unilateral or multilateral, but rather what the reason was for the use of force. The public was more concerned with the spread of nuclear weapons and terrorism, and therefore supported both unilateral and multilateral force to deal with these problems to a greater extent than leaders. On the other hand, leaders were more concerned with maintaining order in the international system, and thus supported both unilateral and multilateral force to defend a country when it is attacked. It is only when support for the use of force was similar among leaders and the public where the nature of the intervention became significant. Support for the use of force was greater when undertaken by the UN among both the public and leaders to prevent human rights violations and restore a democratic government.

## 2. Conclusions

With respect to Hypothesis 1, which stated that the U.S. public would continue to show strong support for the UN and multilateralism, it is safe to say that this hypothesis was confirmed. Majorities of the public supported various forms of economic multilateralism, various UN treaties, strengthening the UN in various ways, working more with other nations and the UN, U.S. participation in peacekeeping, fighting terrorism through multilateral efforts, and a generally active role for the U.S. in world affairs.

Hypothesis 2 was not confirmed in any way whatsoever with respect to differences between the public and the large group of elites encompassed by the CCGA sample. There were many cases where leaders and the public did not differ significantly in support for the UN and multilateralism. These attitudes included support for treaties, economic multilateralism, fighting terrorism through the UN, and World Court compliance. There were also many more attitudes and policies where leaders demonstrated greater support for the UN and multilateralism than the public. Leaders supported WTO compliance, U.S.-UN joint decisions, working more closely with other nations, U.S. participation in peacekeeping, and active participation in world affairs to a significantly greater extent than the general public. There were only two policies where the public supported multilateralism to a greater extent than leaders<sup>2</sup> and most of the differences between the general public and leaders were not complete reversals of majorities or pluralities. In most cases majorities of the public also supported multilateralism and the UN. However, there was a strong pattern in degree of unanimity of support. Leaders were much more homogeneous in their support of the UN and multilateralism.

One possible explanation for this result, which contrasts with most previous research, is that this was due to the unique leader sample of the CCGA data. The leader sample in the CCGA data contained a wide-ranging definition of political “elites” or “leaders” that included University administrators, union and business leaders, interest group leaders, and other leaders in addition to political leaders. Most other studies of leader opinion of foreign policy used only political leaders. This hypothesis, in the form of Hypothesis 3, received a great deal of support because political leaders differed significantly from the larger group of leaders and the public on many issues. Political leaders were less supportive of economic multilateralism, international institutions of justice, multilateral treaties, and overall less supportive of strengthening the UN in comparison to the larger group of elites and the general public. Political leaders were much more sensitive to any multilateral policies that would infringe on U.S. sovereignty or conflict with U.S. interests. Political elites were much more concerned with protecting the ability of the U.S. to act independently and pursue its foreign policy goals. In fact, political elites often supported more altruistic foreign policy goals to a greater extent than the general public, but not within a multilateral context where U.S. sovereignty and interests may be compromised. This outlook means that giving up U.S. power to the UN, WTO, World Court, ICC, and various treaties was not an option for elites.

There is undoubtedly an imperfect relationship between enacted public policies and the policy preferences of political leaders. First, the political process places many constraints on the ability to translate policy preferences and attitudes into actual policies because politics is inevitably an exercise in compromise. Second, foreign policy is an area that is heavily dominated by the executive branch of the government. This fact further restricts the probability that there will be a high degree of convergence between administration foreign policies and the policy

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<sup>2</sup> There were two other policies where the public demonstrated more support than leaders but these involved the use of force by a country rather than multilaterally.



preferences of politicians. Lastly, politicians are, in the end, dependent on the electorate for reelection. Therefore, the official policy actions of politicians will not always converge with their own personal opinions due to a motivation to reflect the wishes of their constituents. For all these reasons the correlation between opinion and policy is far from perfect. However, it remains the case that the actual policies and policy preferences of politicians should correlate to a significant degree. The sum total of the policy preferences in Congress should guide the enactment of actual policies to a significant degree. In addition, although the executive branch maintains significant control over foreign policy it cannot act with total disregard for the policy wishes of Congress without consequences in other policy areas and in the public. For these reasons there is surely not a perfect correspondence between policy preferences and policies, but there theoretically should be a significant relationship.

### 3. **Implications**

What implications arise from these results? These findings do not challenge the general pattern that the general public is supportive of the UN and multilateralism. Although opinion of UN *performance* was at an all time low at the time of writing, there still remained strong support for UN institutions, policies, and U.S. participation in multilateralism. The more interesting finding, however, is that the large group of elites was even more homogeneous in their positive attitudes and support for these same policies than the public, while political leaders were much less supportive on specific aspects of multilateralism. It seems that not only was the Bush administration out of line with public desires relating to foreign policy, but was to an even greater extent in conflict with the foreign policy wishes of a wide variety of political elites. However, the Bush administration's rejection of multilateralism likely met with little resistance from political leaders whose views were closer to administration policy. Rather than displaying great hostility towards multilateralism, which is implied based on elite policy and elite debate, a diverse group of leaders overwhelmingly supported U.S. participation in multilateralism. The public face of elites regarding their support for the UN and related policies is dominated by political elites, who are the major source of news information on foreign policy, and it is likely that this impression has led the public to the totally wrong impression of overall elite attitudes on this subject.

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