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Foreign Policy and the Rational Public

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American public opinion about foreign policy is neither volatile nor capricious. Contrary to much conventional wisdom, collective opinion has tended to be rather stable. When it has changed, it has done so by responding in rational ways to international and domestic events that have been reported and interpreted by the mass media and by policymakers and other elites. The public has not always successfully judged the best interests of the United States or that of people elsewhere, nor have elites and the media always reported truthfully and interpreted correctly. Nevertheless, we maintain that Americans, as a *collective* body, have done well with whatever information has been provided, and that they have formed and changed their policy preferences in a reasonable manner. This conclusion is based upon analysis, both quantitative and historical, of a comprehensive set of data on foreign policy opinion changes in the United States from the 1930s to the 1980s.

Public opinion, especially with respect to foreign policy, has a poor reputation among theorists and observers of politics. James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and other founders of the American political system, for example, referred to public opinion in terms of unreasoned “passions,” involving “violent movements,” “fluctuations,” and “temp-

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orary errors or delusions"; they feared the potential tyranny of the majority (Hamilton et al., 1961; e.g., Numbers 49, 63, 68, 71). To them, public opinion as an aggregate or collective phenomenon was unworthy of responsiveness by unrestrained democracy.

Many subsequent observers have agreed. Walter Lippmann (1922, 1956), for one, strongly and persistently criticized policymakers who paid too much attention to public opinion: He asserted that objective reality differs sharply from "stereotypes" or "pictures in our heads," and he was deeply skeptical about the wisdom of the public.

A similar conception of public opinion is widespread among policy analysts and policymakers. For example, Bernard Cohen's (1973) description of the views of government officials and staff members at the State Department's Bureau of Public Affairs indicates that the mass public was thought to have little capacity to contribute anything substantial to a dialogue about foreign policy. Many commentaries concur (e.g., Rosenberg, 1981: 9).

To be sure, it is frequently acknowledged—although perhaps with ambivalence or reluctance—that public support is a political resource that policymakers can or should use (e.g., Neustadt, 1960; Brzezinski, 1983: 524–525). A few authors go further and say public opinion about foreign policy tends to be sensible and ought to be taken into account (e.g., Levering, 1978, including foreword by George Gallup; Foster, 1983). But this remains a minority view.

Gabriel Almond's "mood theory," a particularly important negative assessment of mass opinion that encouraged wariness about public input to foreign policy during the early Cold War, lingers with us still. According to Almond's thesis, public opinion is normally indifferent to foreign policy and responds only to immediate threats. When the pressure is removed, opinion tends to snap back and then continues to shift rapidly back and forth, thus constituting "a mood, a superficial and fluctuating response." If public opinion behaves in this way, it clearly cannot contribute very constructively to policy deliberations. Almond illustrated his argument with trend data consisting of responses to the Gallup poll's "most important problem" question (Almond, 1950: 53, 73, 76; note that Klingberg, 1983, and Holmes, 1985, use the term *mood* in a different way).

The difficulty with this appraisal is that it no longer fully fits the evidence—if it ever did. Almond himself later observed that there appeared to have been a stabilization in the American public's awareness and attentiveness to the gravity and salience of international

and security problems (Almond, 1960: xxii). Moreover, William Caspary (1970) strongly challenged the “mood theory” by presenting some additional data. Other scholars have ignored or rejected Almond’s view or have assumed that the issue is subject to further debate (e.g., Key, 1961; Mueller, 1973; Erikson et al., 1980; Levering, 1978). Still, the “mood theory” is very much alive; for example, it underlies the “realist” school’s argument that public opinion is “a barrier to coherent efforts to promote national interests that transcend the *moods and passions of the moment*” (Holsti, 1987: 23; emphasis added).

Our own answer to any question concerning the volatility of public preferences about foreign policy is unequivocal: The notion of a capricious public is a myth. Our data will make this clear. More difficult is the broader and somewhat ambiguous question of whether the public is collectively “rational” or “sensible,” but we will offer considerable evidence in support of that as well.

The theoretical underpinning of our argument is a model of how rational individuals form, hold, and express their political opinions, which, across the national population, aggregate into collective public opinion. We have maintained that examination of this collective public opinion, at the aggregate or macro level, is the key to understanding relationships between public opinion and policymaking in the context of democratic theory (Page and Shapiro, 1983; see also Russett, 1989).¹ We have also argued that many of the familiar deficiencies of individuals’ opinions—weak informational bases, lack of structure, instability over time, and the like (Converse, 1964)—are overcome in the aggregation process, so that collective opinion is highly stable, well structured, and responsive to the best available information. Hence we speak of a “rational public” (Page and Shapiro, 1987). Some elements of the underlying model are tentatively formalized in McCubbins and Page (1984).

Here we deal with matters specifically pertinent to foreign policy and international relations. We will first present our overall findings concerning stability and changes in Americans’ collective preferences about foreign policy based on extensive survey data that we have

1. Several prepublication readers have lamented our failure to deal here with individual- or group-level data. But our concern is with *collective* national opinion. As we will see, much individual-level instability cancels out across the population. And the role of demographic subgroups is of only limited interest since their opinions (even those of people with different levels of formal education, whose distinctive foreign policy views have attracted much scholarly attention) tend to move in parallel with each other (Shapiro and Page, 1984).

assembled and analyzed. We will then describe some of the historically important patterns of opinion change during the past 50 years. We will see that foreign policy preferences have in fact had considerable stability and, when they have changed, have done so in ways that can be judged as reasonable, given the unfolding of events and changes in objective conditions as reported and interpreted by the media and political leaders. Americans have generally responded rationally to changing circumstances. That is, they have responded in ways they perceive to be in their own interest or in the interest of the nation, based upon common sense, shared values, and common standards of judgment obtained from the media, policymakers, and other elites. (See Cantril, 1947: 213. For an analysis quite similar to ours, though based upon less systematic evidence, see Davies, 1952.)

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Generalizations about stability and change in public opinion have been hampered in the past by reliance upon fragmentary or unsatisfactory data and by failure to distinguish policy preferences from other kinds of attitudes. For example, many observers have drawn inferences about the instability of public opinion from fluctuations in presidential popularity, or in prenomination candidates' poll standings, or, as with Almond, in what the public sees as the "most important problem" at the moment. The objects of these attitudes are not policy alternatives; they are political figures, whose words and deeds can change markedly and rapidly, or political "problems," which can quickly rise and fall in objective importance or in media salience. When the public's choices among *policy alternatives* are examined, opinion changes are much less frequent. Alleged fluctuations often amount to nothing more than artifacts of random sampling error, different question wordings, or variations in response categories or interviewing procedures.

The comparison of responses to differently worded questions is hazardous; even asking about joining *a* league of nations versus *the* League of Nations, for example, can mean a very different thing. And the procedures of different survey organizations vary in significant ways. Yet some journalists and pollsters have been surprisingly careless about such matters. Scholars have seldom had access to comprehensive collections of responses to identically worded policy preference questions asked repeatedly over time by the same survey organizations. (See

Lipset, 1976; Glenn, 1975; Schuman and Presser, 1981. Roshco, 1978, gives a striking example of mistaken claims about changes in opinion concerning the Panama Canal treaties.)

In connection with our broader study of relationships between public opinion and policy in the United States, we have assembled a large archive of survey data, consisting of the marginal frequencies of responses to all available policy questions (foreign and domestic) that have been asked of national samples since 1935 by reputable survey organizations.²

In the first part of this article we report aggregate findings from more than 6,000 survey questions fielded during the period 1935-1982 by five organizations: NORC (formerly the National Opinion Research Center), the American Institute of Public Opinion (Gallup), the Survey Research Center/Center for Political Studies (SRC/CPS) at the University of Michigan, Louis Harris and Associates, and the old Office of Public Opinion Research (OPOR).

In the second part of the article we supplement these data with evidence from an additional several thousand questions fielded through 1985 by NORC; Gallup; Harris; SRC/CPS; OPOR; the Roper Organization; *New York Times*/CBS News; NBC News; ABC News/*Washington Post*; *Los Angeles Times*; TRENDX, Inc. (for General Electric); Yankelovich, Skelly, and White; Penn + Schoen Associates; Cambridge Reports, Inc.; and the Opinion Research Corporation. With these even more comprehensive data, we examine trends in public opinion over the last 50 years of foreign policy, chronologically and by substantive topic.

The 6,000-plus survey items used in the aggregate analysis include 1,128 questions that were asked with identical wording by the same survey organization at two or more time points. To our knowledge, these repeated items constitute the most extensive set of survey trends ever assembled. They address all types of policy activity by all levels and branches of government covering a wide variety of foreign and domestic policy issues. A total of 425 of them (38%) deal with foreign affairs or national defense: military actions, spending and force levels, weapons systems, foreign aid, trade, investment, diplomatic initiatives, treaties, and other matters touching virtually all areas of the world. These

2. The archive includes many breakdowns of opinion by population subgroups as well, but these play little part in the present analysis. The data are described further in Page and Shapiro (1982, 1983, 1987).

TABLE 1
Significant Changes in Repeated Policy Questions

	No Change		Change		Total Questions	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
Foreign and defense policy	51	215	49	210	38	425
Domestic policy	63	440	37	263	62	703
Total items	58	655	42	473	100	1128

NOTE: gamma = Yule's Q = $-.24$; $p < .05$.

provide a substantial base for analyzing collective opinion changes concerning foreign policy.

AGGREGATE FINDINGS: OPINION STABILITY

The first question of interest is how much change and how much stability is found in Americans' opinions about foreign policy and national defense. The striking finding is one of general stability.

We used the modest standard of a 6 percentage point shift in responses (excluding "don't know" or "no opinion" replies)³ to constitute a significant change. (In our surveys a 6% change is statistically significant at a little better than the .05 confidence level; see Shapiro and Page, 1982: 26, footnote 4.) Table 1 shows that even by this rather generous measure, fully half of our repeated foreign policy items—215 of the 425, or 51%—showed no significant change at all. There was a somewhat higher proportion of stability for domestic issues, 63%, which suggests that foreign policy changes are a bit more frequent, but only a bit.⁴

3. "Don't know" responses are excluded in order to track the balance of opinion among those people with opinions—the portion of the public to which government policy might respond. Changes in proportions of "don't knows" only occasionally play an important part in altering the balance of opinion.

4. This 63% finding differs from our earlier report of a nearly identical proportion (50%) of significant changes for both foreign and domestic issues (Page and Shapiro, 1982). The apparent discrepancy results from the fact that foreign policy opinions tend to change more quickly than domestic, when they change at all; our initial data set was enlarged here by adding Harris and OPOR surveys that repeated questions at shorter intervals than other surveys and thus picked up additional cases of rapid foreign policy changes.

TABLE 2
Magnitudes of Significant Changes in Policy Preferences

	6-7%		8-9%		10-14%		15-19%		20-29%		30%+		Total	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Foreign/ defense policy	21	54	22	55	28	71	15	38	12	30	3	7	46	255
Domestic policy	24	71	21	62	30	91	14	41	8	23	4	13	54	301
Total	22	125	21	117	29	162	14	79	10	53	4	20	100	556

NOTE: gamma = $-.05$ (n.s.).

Not only was there general stability, but most of the 556 changes in foreign and domestic preferences that did occur (in response to the 473 questions that showed one or more opinion changes) were relatively small. Nearly half of them—242, or 44%—were less than 10 percentage points. Most of those involved preference changes of 6 to 8%—hardly startling. Contrary to what one might expect, foreign and defense items did not differ much overall from domestic issues in the magnitudes of changes, as can be seen in Table 2. There were, however, some variations among different types of foreign and domestic issues, as shown in the first column of Table 3.

The second column of Table 3 contains evidence about *rates* of opinion change. Clearly, foreign and domestic opinion changes differ in this respect: The former tend to occur much more rapidly than the latter. We defined “abrupt” changes as those that occurred at a rate of 10 percentage points or more per year. This is a somewhat lenient cut-off point; it includes any significant changes (6% or more) that occurred within approximately seven months along with bigger shifts that occurred more slowly.

Taking foreign and domestic issues together, we found quite a few cases of abrupt changes in policy preferences. Of the total 556 instances of significant change, 229 (41%) involved movement at a rate of more than 10 percentage points per year. This is not an enormous number out of the 1,128 repeated questions we examined, and especially not out of the much larger number of pairs of time points that we compared. (Many questions were repeated three or more times.) Still, the rapidity of change in some cases was quite striking, particularly for foreign policy issues.

TABLE 3
Magnitudes and Rates of Opinion Change for Different
Types of Foreign/Defense and Domestic Policies

	<i>Average Magnitudes of Significant Opinion Changes (percentage points)</i>	<i>Percentage of Opinion Changes 10 Percentage Points or More Per Year</i>	<i>N</i>
Foreign/defense policies ^a	12.6	58	255
International organizations	10.4	41	22
Soviet Union	12.2	44	27
World War II	12.0	100	24
Korean War	11.5	88	8
Vietnam War	10.0	79	28
Draft	10.2	40	5
China	17.2	37	19
Foreign aid	11.3	65	26
Fight communism	15.5	32	22
National defense	14.0	61	23
Middle East	13.6	68	18
Other foreign	12.1	48	23
Other foreign-domestic, mixed ^a	9.9	33	21
Domestic policies ^a	12.4	27	301
Civil liberties	18.0	0	24
Civil rights	12.5	28	25
Social-style issues	12.6	4	27
Abortion	18.2	8	13
Crime	15.1	6	16
Gun control	9.8	0	9
Education	10.5	0	6
Social welfare	9.6	20	15
Labor	11.9	44	18
Big government	10.8	15	20
Political reform	12.3	13	23
Nixon/Watergate	16.6	100	10
Economic issues	11.8	65	43
Other domestic	10.0	32	41

a. The other foreign/domestic, mixed items were reclassified as foreign or domestic, depending upon their substantive content, in calculating the total foreign versus domestic magnitudes of opinion change and rates of change.

The mean rate of change for all our foreign policy instances of change was 31 percentage points per year, compared to 12 percentage points for domestic cases. (The medians were 12 and 4 percentage points, respectively.) That is, foreign policy changes were nearly three times as rapid, presumably because circumstances tend to change more quickly in international affairs. As Table 3 shows, 58% of changes in foreign policy matters and only 27% for domestic met our 10 percentage point criterion for abrupt change.

Among the foreign policy issues, war-related opinions changed more abruptly than others. Opinions on issues related to World War II and the Korean and Vietnam wars altered rapidly with wartime events. With the exceptions of Nixon-Watergate issues and certain economic matters, such as attitudes toward inflation and taxes, domestic opinion changes for the most part have been gradual.

Still, one should not overstate the extent or the importance of abrupt changes in foreign policy opinions. To summarize the aggregate findings so far: Half the foreign policy preferences we examined showed no significant change at all, and of those opinions that changed, close to half shifted at a rate of less than 10 percentage points per year. Even the abrupt changes mostly involved small but very quick opinion shifts. This does not look like "violent movement" of public opinion.

To complete an appraisal of the alleged volatility of foreign policy opinions, however, we must also examine the question of opinion *fluctuation*, which bears upon assertions that opinion changes are temporary, transitory, or "moody."

We operationally defined a *fluctuation* in terms of the number of significant reversals in direction of opinion change within a given time interval, taking two or more significant changes in opposite directions within two years, or three or more within four years, as constituting a fluctuation. Fluctuations occurred infrequently—in only 31 (18%) of the 173 survey questions that were asked frequently enough to detect fluctuations. There was no significant difference between foreign versus domestic issues in this respect: 21% (19 of 89) foreign questions versus 14% (12 of 84) domestic questions involved fluctuations. This would not seem to support the notion that the public has fickle and vacillating moods toward either foreign or domestic affairs.

In fact, even the few fluctuations we found did not necessarily represent unpredictable or irrational shifts in policy preferences, or indeed any real preference changes at all. Some resulted from question wordings that embodied "shifting referents" and therefore changed

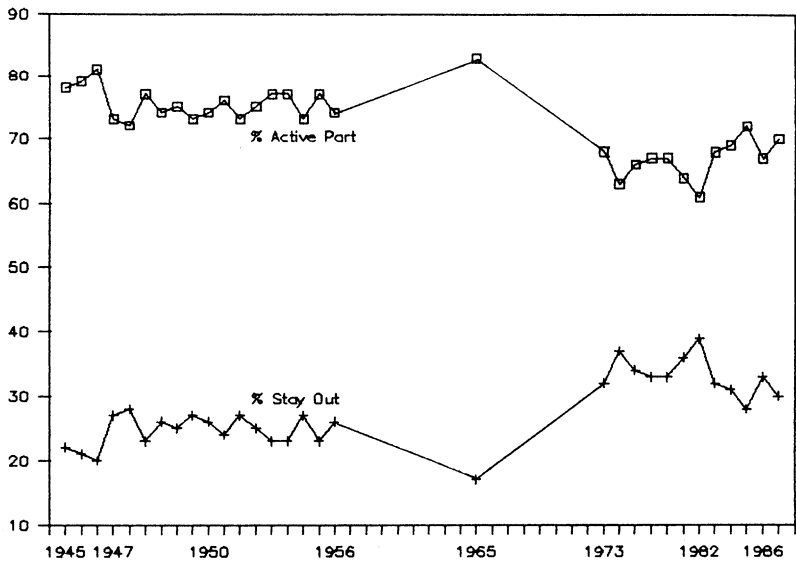
meaning (despite identical wording) because of changing real-world conditions. Some questions, for example, referred to current government activity at the moment of the interview, which could be quite different at different interviewing dates: Had the United States “gone too far” concerning world affairs? Were people “making too many sacrifices” for national defense? Should the United States “be firmer” with Russia? Was troop withdrawal from Vietnam going “too slow(ly)” or “too fast?” Changes in responses to such questions are somewhat like the public’s relatively volatile impressions of public figures, in which evaluations of people or performance change as those figures behave differently or as new information is received. Responses may vary when the stimuli—the referents—themselves change, even if underlying policy preferences remain constant.

The aggregate evidence we have presented should dispose of any contention that Americans’ collective opinions about foreign policy are volatile—that they change frequently, or by large amounts, or in vacillating directions. But this takes us only part way in the argument for a “rational” public. Stability need have little or nothing to do with rationality; totally random individual responses, for example, would aggregate to highly stable collective public opinion. (Of course, this theoretical possibility does not in fact characterize U.S. public opinion; the result of coin-flip survey responses would be equally frequent choices among all available response options, not the varied and meaningfully patterned response frequencies that are actually observed.) In order to pursue the broader and more difficult question of collective opinion rationality, we must consider the substance of opinion changes, influences upon them, and their relations to events and information.

In the remainder of the article, we examine specific examples of foreign policy opinion trends during the last 50 years and put them in historical context. We will see that they are seldom inexplicable, whimsical, or capricious.

TRENDS IN PUBLIC OPINION ABOUT FOREIGN POLICY

Americans’ collective opinions about various aspects of foreign policy have changed over the past half century—sometimes gradually, sometimes abruptly, and occasionally in a fluctuating manner. These changes have seldom, if ever, occurred, however, without reasonable causes, such as the actions of foreign friends or enemies or changes in the



NOTE: Percent "take active part" versus "stay out" ("don't know"/"no opinion" excluded). Question (Gallup, NORC, and NORC GSS): Do you think it will be best for the future of this country if we take an active part in world affairs or if we stay out of world affairs? Survey dates: Gallup, 10/45, 2/46, 11/46, 8/47, 11/50, 11/78, 11/82, 11/86; NORC and NORC GSS, 3/47, 6/47, 3/48, 6/48, 9/49, 1/50, 12/50, 10/52, 2/53, 9/53, 4/54, 3/55, 11/56, 6/65, 3/73, 3/75, 3/76, 3/78, 3/82, 3/83, 3/84, 3/85, 3/86.

Figure 1: U.S. Role in World Affairs

United States' position in the world. It is our judgment that the American public has generally responded in a sensible fashion to international and domestic events, as reported and interpreted by the U.S. mass media and by American leaders.

The following examples of important opinion changes, which include most of the large changes that have occurred, are based on questions that were repeated (with identical wording, unless otherwise noted) by the same survey organizations. Further information and documentation is available from the authors.

INTERNATIONALISM

The most fundamental issue of foreign policy arguably concerns how much foreign policy there will be, that is, how actively a nation will attempt to influence events in international affairs. It may have taken a

quarter century before the majority of Americans affirmed Woodrow Wilson's position that the United States would have to take an active role in world affairs (see Levering, 1978; Foster, 1983; Klingberg, 1983; Holmes, 1985), but they clearly did so in the 1940s. Figure 1 shows the changing proportions of the public, from the 1940s to the 1980s, that supported this position.

Americans rejected isolationism to embrace the challenges of World War II and, after a brief postwar pause, the Cold War. There was fairly steady support for an active U.S. role, by more than 70% of those with opinions, through the 1950s. Support rose to a peak of 83% at the beginning of the Vietnam war in 1965; it fell as the war dragged on with heavy casualties with no positive result. The trend later showed signs of an upswing, and the level of internationalism remains high.

The "active part" survey question was used by Caspary (1970), with telling effect, to challenge Almond's mood theory. Of course, this question is too general to reveal precisely how Americans reacted to specific events or to the flow of new information. It is hardly surprising, however, that many Americans responded to Hitler's actions and Pearl Harbor, and subsequently to the Cold War, by endorsing an active foreign policy; or that the painful experience of the Vietnam war led to a desire for retrenchment. None of these moderate changes supports the implication that the public is fickle or undependable.

Here and in the remainder of this article, to support our argument that public opinion is rational and reasonable (given the information that citizens have available to them), we rely upon connections between particular opinion changes and the historical circumstances we briefly describe, not always spelling out the precise workings of Americans' beliefs and values. A fuller analysis is provided in Page and Shapiro (1987).⁵

WORLD WAR II

As Hitler began Germany's aggressive expansion in the middle and late 1930s, the U.S. government and American public opinion responded. Between September and November 1938, after the Munich

5. We can comment only in passing about relationships between public opinion and policymaking, a complicated topic that we continue to pursue. On the basis of our research so far, we believe that the relationship is reciprocal, but that public opinion probably more often affects policy than policy affects opinion (Page and Shapiro, 1983). In many cases in which the enactment of policies might be thought to have influenced public opinion, leaders or elites have in fact first "prepared" or influenced opinion, which then played a part in the making of policy.

agreement and the takeover of Czechoslovakia, there was a 15 percentage point increase in public support for building a larger navy. From February to March 1939, support rose 14% for selling war material to England and France, and sentiment for selling food to the Allies, already upheld by a substantial (76%) majority, increased another 6%.

None of this represented war fever. Between October 1939 and February 1940, 6% fewer Americans (only 23% of them!) actually favored declaring war on Germany, falling off after the immediate reaction to the German invasion of Poland in September. Between December 1940 and April 1941, support for declaring war (according to a differently worded repeated question) increased only by 6 percentage points, to a very modest level of 9%. Throughout this period, however, substantial and growing majorities of 60% or more said that it was "more important" to defeat Germany than to stay out of war.

As the war went badly for France and Britain during 1940 and 1941, Americans became more willing to provide help in ways other than involvement in combat. Between January and March 1941, 7% more favored helping England win, and from April to May there was an 11% increase in support for using the U.S. navy to guard ships going to Britain. From September to October 1941, there was a 13% increase in the proportion of the public saying the United States should permit shipments of war materials to Britain.

Given Americans' cultural and economic ties with Britain and France and the successful alliance against Germany in the First World War, the logic of events themselves played a major part in these opinion shifts. Bad war news such as Dunkirk and the fall of Paris in the spring of 1940 made it increasingly apparent that U.S. action would be required to save Britain. Roosevelt's leadership in nudging the United States toward involvement—his public statements, as well as policies like Lend Lease (March 1941) and the Atlantic convoying that provoked incidents with German submarines—was also important, as was support from pro-British groups and leaders like the Republican Wendell Wilkie. Only the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 drove the public to accept the necessity of direct involvement in war against Japan, Germany, and Italy.

This account suggests that the public was moved both by objective circumstances and by opinion leadership. With respect to the latter, we should note at once that it is difficult to distinguish leadership or education of the public from manipulation or deception through misleading, incomplete, or inaccurate information. In the case of

America's entry into the war, for example, Roosevelt's efforts at leadership may have been marred by his crafty maneuvering against Japan, his misrepresentation of incidents in the Atlantic, and his denial that American troops would be needed when he knew that they would be (see Beard, 1948). Issues concerning education and manipulation of the public and the quality of the information it receives must be considered in any full assessment of democratic theory or practice. We deal with such issues elsewhere (Page and Shapiro, 1987, 1988) but allude to them only briefly below, because our chief concern here is with how the public reacts to the information (of whatever quality) that is made available to it.

Once the United States was at war, opinions about certain policies shifted with events at home and on the battlefield. Willingness to talk peace, as opposed to insistence on total and harsh victory, tended to vary with the extent of U.S. sacrifices and with military success or failure. Support for a hypothetical peace offer from the German army (after Hitler was out of the way), for example, dropped 13% between June 1942 and August 1943, when the tide seemed to turn the Allies' way after victories at Midway and Guadalcanal and in North Africa and Russia. By 1945, after years of sacrifices, many Americans had escalated their war aims and wanted a "severe" peace. Between early 1943 and August 1945, there was a large increase (by more than 20 percentage points), to 60%, in the proportion favoring the United States obtaining new bases at the end of the war. Between November 1943 and October 1944, there was a 21% drop in public support for the relatively mild postwar solutions to "strictly supervise," "rehabilitate," or "do nothing" to Germany; 44% wanted to "destroy Germany completely." By April 1945, 88% favored using German men to rebuild Russian cities, up 17% from July 1944.

The Cold War, however, transformed American attitudes toward West Germany. With the advent of the Korean war there was an increase in sentiment for building up the German army (up 18% from June to July 1950) and for integrating troops into the defense of Europe (up 7% from October 1951 to February 1952). There was a similar rise in opinion favoring trade with Japan, and strong support (at the 80% level) for building up the Japanese army.

THE EARLY COLD WAR

After Hitler invaded Russia in 1941, and especially after the United States entered the war, many Americans put aside their dislike and

distrust of the Soviets for the sake of wartime cooperation (see Levering, 1976, 1978). Many became aware of the huge extent of Russian losses during the war and of Russia's efforts on the eastern front. Increasing proportions of the public expressed the opinion that Russia should not have to pay for Lend Lease aid. But the American public never fully trusted the Soviet Union or communism.

At the peak of wartime cooperation, much of the underlying antagonism toward the Russians was suspended. As many as 64% of Americans said that we could expect Russia "to cooperate" in working out problems together. As the end of the war neared, however, Americans' underlying fears and hostilities reemerged; the public's wartime optimism vanished, with the 64% dropping to 38% by late 1946 and presumably further by late 1947, when less than 20% thought we could count on Russia "to meet us halfway." Although the account of these trends in Caspary (1968; see also Gillroy, 1980) glosses over some variations in question wording, it does establish that opinion changes were strongly related to incidents of "refractory" Soviet behavior, as reported in the U.S. media, such as the Czech coup and tensions in Berlin that culminated in the Berlin Blockade.

The same events that affected these general perceptions of Soviet cooperativeness also influenced Americans' policy choices. Between October 1947 and March 1948, the proportion of Americans saying the United States was "too soft" toward Russia increased by 17 percentage points, reaching 84%. Increasing numbers (58% in April 1947, 7% more than in October 1946) thought we should "stop any attempt by Russia to control countries in Europe and Asia." Support for military training rose by 10% between the end of 1947 and March 1948. Big majorities (although not as near unanimity as in 1939) favored increasing the sizes of the armed services, and by April 1950, 89% of Americans (up 6% from three months earlier) considered "stopping the spread of communism" to be "very important."

The efforts of President Truman and Secretary of State Marshall and others, through the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and the evolution of the containment policy, no doubt helped lead public opinion (see Kernell, 1976; Larson, 1985; Leigh, 1976; Page and Shapiro, 1984). (To touch on the manipulation issue once again, the warnings against Soviet expansionism were often strident and exaggerated, neglecting power realities and Russian security concerns based on the history of attacks from the west.)

The Cold War also affected attitudes about policies toward foreign aid and relations with Europe, such as European recovery spending and

military aid; it was the reason for the rapid changes in opinion toward foreign aid shown in Table 3. But by 1950, prior to the Korean war, the U.S. public was showing some signs of fatigue with the effort of rearming and providing foreign aid to stop communism.

KOREA

The Korean war, which for the first time brought American soldiers into combat against communist opponents, drew attention to Asia and solidified anticommunist opinion. Rises and falls in U.S. fortunes on the battlefield, like those of World War II, produced corresponding changes in public support for various policies.

Reports of North Korea's attack on the South in June 1950, and its rapid push south to the Pusan perimeter, together with the Truman administration's strong rhetoric and its decision to send U.S. troops, led the public to focus increased attention on Asia, supporting military aid to Asia and agreeing that it was as important to "stop Russia" in Asia as it was in Europe. However, this did not imply that Europe should be neglected, since one immediate result of the war was an increase in support for building up the German army and using German troops to defend Europe. Support for military aid to Europe rose a very large 33 percentage points (to 80%) between prewar March 1950 and March 1951. But the proportion of Americans that favored sending large numbers of U.S. troops to Europe dropped a striking 23% between September and December 1950, as the victorious Inchon landing and the United States drive north to the Yalu River provoked a Chinese intervention that forced U.S. troops back again to the thirty-eighth parallel, and the Korean war demanded high priority.

The impact of the Korean war also extended over foreign policy issues beyond the defense of Korea and Europe. The high costs of fighting, for example, no doubt reduced Americans' interest in providing aid to help improve the standard of living in what a survey question indelicately called "backward" countries; there was a 12% drop in support for such aid between November 1949 and November 1950. But more Americans wanted to spend money on propaganda, and more expressed contentment with the amount of foreign policy information being released.

As the war proceeded, opinions on certain matters fluctuated. For example, support for the proposition that we were making "too many sacrifices" (versus "not enough" or the "right amount") for defense dropped 11% between March and April 1951, rose 9% by August, and

dropped 9% between November 1951 and April 1952. Responses of "not enough" dropped 14% between May and June 1952, and rose 15% again by August. This unusual fluctuation of opinions reflected the shifting referent inherent in the question wording (i.e., different "sacrifices" were being made at different times) and the changing tides of the war and the peace talks.

After the dramatic events of 1950 and early 1951, the Korean war settled into stalemate, with frustrating, mostly fruitless, truce talks. Public opinion became less and less enthusiastic about the war. The segment of the public calling U.S. involvement a "mistake" grew steadily in proportion to the magnitude of U.S. casualties (Mueller, 1971, 1973). Opinion favoring a pull-out of U.S. troops rose by 13 percentage points to a level of 30% between December 1951 and February 1952. The favorite policy option of much of the public was one that foreshadowed the popularity of "Vietnamization" 15 years later: A sizable majority came to agree with presidential candidate Dwight Eisenhower that the South Korean (ROK) army should be trained and equipped to take American soldiers' places. Support for this policy increased a solid 20 percentage points during 1952—from 67% in February to 87% in November. Between April 1951 and December 1952, 15% fewer Americans favored spending more on U.S. rearmament.

When, after Eisenhower's accession to the presidency and Stalin's death, a Korean truce was signed in July 1953 and prisoners were exchanged and most American troops came home, the public relaxed some of its concern. More of the population (10%) put higher priority on stopping communism in Europe, rather than in Asia, in May 1953 compared with April 1951. Support for a firmer position toward the Soviets ("be firmer") dropped from 74% in March 1950 to 65% in November 1953.

In general, the end of the Korean war helped pave the way for a relatively quiet decade of American foreign policy, in which relations with the Soviet Union warmed up a bit and the United States paid particular attention to questions involving the United Nations and relations with emerging countries of the Third World, many of them neutral in the East-West struggle.

THE UNITED NATIONS

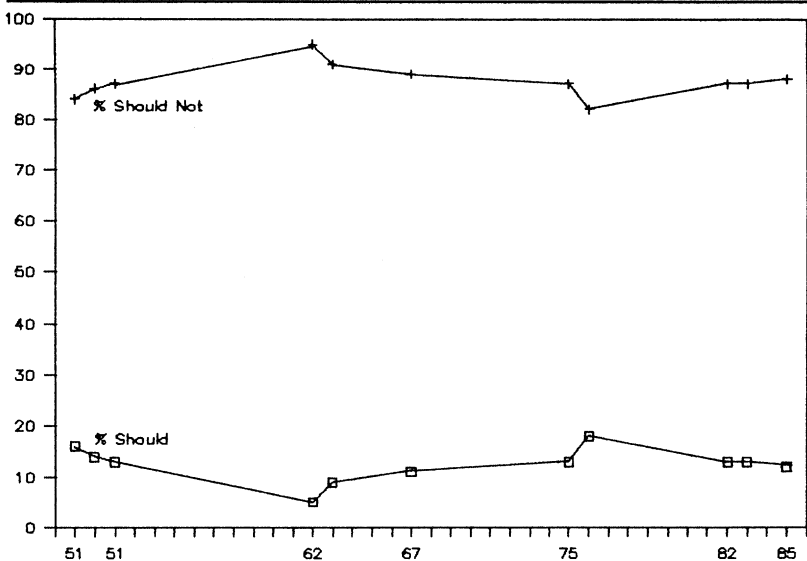
In the middle and late 1930s, as the League of Nations proved impotent against aggression by Hitler and Mussolini, the American

public expressed little enthusiasm for Woodrow Wilson's dream of peacekeeping through world organization. When World War II began—even before the United States entered it—support for world organization began to increase. In May 1941, Americans divided evenly over whether they would like to see the United States join “a league of nations” after the war was over, and in July they split about evenly over whether the United States should have joined the League after the last war. Once the United States itself entered the war, support for joining a league after the war jumped 22 percentage points between May 1941 and June 1942 (26 nations, including the United States, signed the United Nations Declaration in January 1942), and reached a high of 84% in favor of joining in April 1944, as FDR campaigned in favor of a world organizations (see Hero, 1966; Foster, 1983; Leigh, 1976; Scott and Withey, 1958).

Wartime cooperation with the Soviets and others encouraged hopes for a new world order. By the time the United Nations was chartered in 1945, an overwhelming majority of Americans favored U.S. membership. In the early postwar years majorities also favored U.N. inspection of nuclear plants (78% in February 1947, up another 7 percentage points by October) and international control of atomic energy (72% in October 1947).

The Cold War, however, ended all such hopes. As early as August 1946, 55% of the public said we should rely on our own defenses, not the United Nations—an increase of 8 percentage points from February. By June 1948, support for international control of atomic energy had dropped 14 percentage points from its 1947 level. While a solid 75%, as late as October 1949, still said that the United Nations had done a good job rather than a poor job in trying to settle world problems, large majorities (66% in April 1947 and 72% in May 1948, up from only 46% at the beginning of 1947) began to express dissatisfaction with the progress the United Nations had made to date. Between April 1948 and June 1949, 8% more of the public (a total of 60%) said that making the United Nations into a world government was not a good idea.

A U.N. “uniting for peace” resolution and a multinational force under the U.N. flag served as the rubric for American troops to fight in Korea. This may have increased the public's regard for the organization: Between November 1949 and October 1950, approval of the idea of setting up a world government rose 13%. But it also made the United Nations vulnerable to frustrations with the war. Opinion that the United Nations had done a “good job” in trying to solve world problems stood



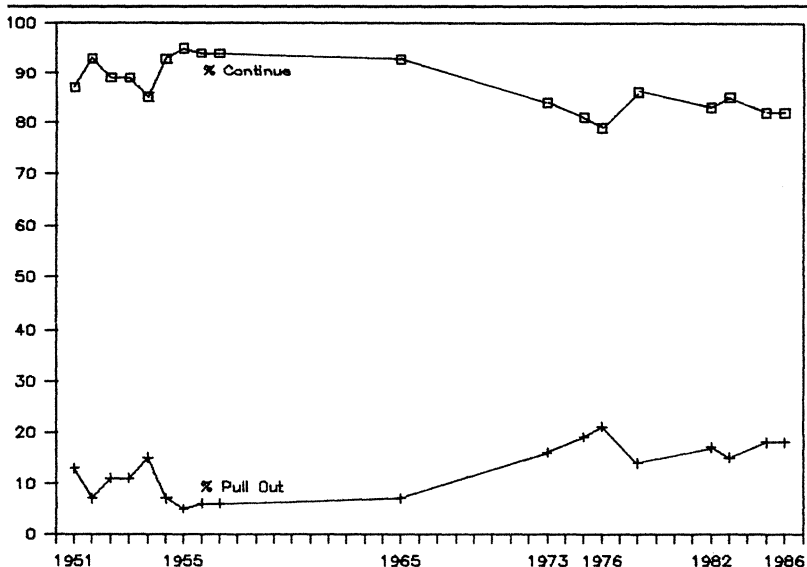
NOTE: Percent "should" versus "should not" ("no opinion" excluded). Question (Gallup): Do you think the United States should give up its membership in the United Nations? Survey dates: 1/51, 9/51, 11/51, 1/62, 11/63, 7/67, 2/75, 11/75, 1982, 1983, 1985.

Figure 2A: United States Give Up Membership in United Nations

at only 61% in January 1951, after the Chinese had routed U.S. and U.N. forces in North Korea. Still, approval increased to 85% in September 1953, after peace was achieved, and it continued to rise to a peak of 89% in October 1955, holding at about that high level through the early 1960s (see Hero, 1959, 1966; Scott and Withey, 1958).

Support for continuing U.S. membership in the United Nations rose and fell somewhat during the war, although not very much or very rapidly, as shown in Figure 2. It is noteworthy that during this period public support for continued U.S. membership never fell below 85%. In fact, in the decade between November 1951 and January 1962, advocacy of giving up U.N. membership changed (dropped) by only 8 net percentage points.

During the 1950s, there was also increasing support for the idea that the Soviet Union should remain in the United Nations, up 14 percentage points between December 1952 and November 1956, and there was substantial sentiment for building up the U.N. emergency force by adding U.S. and Soviet troops (68% favoring this in February 1958), but it dropped in the early 1960s for reasons noted below.



NOTE: Percent "continue to belong" versus "pull out now" ("don't know" excluded). Question (NORC and NORC GSS): Do you think our government should continue to belong to the United Nations (organization), or should we pull out of it now? Survey dates: 1/51, 5/52, 5/53, 6/53, 11/53, 10/54, 8/55, 4/56, 11/56, 6/65, 3/73, 3/75, 3/76, 3/78, 3/82, 3/83, 3/85, 3/86.

Figure 2B: Should United States Belong to the United Nations?

As many newly independent countries (especially from Africa) joined the United Nations and the power of the Third and Fourth World coalition in the United Nations grew, Americans found the organization adopting resolutions contrary to what they perceived as U.S. national interests. Support for the United Nations and for U.S. membership in it dropped. This was accentuated in the late 1960s and the 1970s as the nonaligned majority condemned U.S. actions in Vietnam, and as Arab and other Third World countries pursued a campaign against Israel and Zionism. U.S. ambassadors to the United Nations (especially Moynihan and later Kirkpatrick) sharply criticized the organization. Twenty years after an April 1956 survey, 14% fewer Americans wanted the United States to stay in the United Nations.

A RELATIVELY QUIET DECADE

From the end of the Korean war in 1953 to the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, American foreign policy enjoyed 9 or 10 years of relative peace, at

least in the sense that no regular U.S. troops were fighting abroad. Public opinion displayed relatively few rapid changes during this time, though some serious international crises affecting opinion did occur, which included Indochina, Quemoy and Matsu, the British-French-Israeli invasion of Egypt, Soviet repression of Hungary, and Berlin, which culminated in the building of the wall between East and West.

Once Stalin had died and the Korean war ended, U.S. relations with the Soviets improved considerably. The proportion of the public wanting "war now" with the Soviets dropped 10 percentage points between November 1951 and September 1954, to a very low level of 7%. There was a drop of 13% from May 1952 to April 1954 in the proportion of the public saying the United States should use the A-bomb right away if there was war, and a drop of 8% between April 1954 and January 1955 in the proportion wanting to use the H-bomb right away if Russia attacked a European ally. During this period the Soviets' own development of thermonuclear weapons (the hydrogen bomb in 1953) very likely contributed to Americans' increased reluctance to use such weapons.

Americans favored various kinds of peaceful relations with the Soviet Union. Between August 1953 and June 1955, there was a strikingly large (19 percentage point) increase, to 65%, in public support for "working out a business arrangement to buy and sell goods" with the USSR. Between October 1952 and April 1957, the proportion of Americans wanting to continue diplomatic relations with the Soviets rose by 15 percentage points, to an overwhelming 80%. After the suppression of the Hungarian revolt in autumn 1956, however, support for exchanging musicians and athletes and for extending invitations to top Soviet leaders to visit the United States dropped by 12% and 6%, respectively.

There can be little doubt that President Eisenhower's leadership played an important part in these changes. After some initial talk of "rolling back" the Iron Curtain, he called for summit meetings, exchanges, and peaceful relations. The wing of the Republican party that had been isolationist during the pre-World War II period, and then extremely hostile toward the Soviets, became more internationalist and more receptive to peaceful coexistence; Republican party identifiers provided much of the change in public opinion.

The thaw in relations did not mean abandoning anticommunist policies, but it did entail an easing off. Public support for military aid to Europe dropped by 7% from June 1952 to November 1956, and there was a 9% decline between May 1953 and April 1956 in backing for military aid to "countries that are friendly to us." The public shifted

support from military to economic assistance. From November 1950 to March 1955, there was a solid 15% rise in support for economic aid to improve the living standards of “backward” countries. More to the point, from August 1952 to June 1956 there was a 26 percentage point upsurge in the proportion favoring economic as opposed to military aid to U.S. allies. However, there were some indications of sagging support for economic aid in the middle and late 1950s.

The struggle in Indochina threatened the peacefulness of the 1950s. As the French position worsened, there was increasing talk of sending in U.S. troops. Although public support for sending U.S. soldiers remained very low, it rose by 16 percentage points between August 1953 and May 1954, reaching a level of 24%. President Eisenhower decided against the use of U.S. air power, and the fall of Dien Bien Phu, followed by the Geneva peace agreements, foreclosed the possibility of immediate American military involvement.

Although the United States engaged in a number of covert military operations during this period, in such places as Iran, Guatemala, Indonesia, and Indochina, these events were not widely known, even among elites, until the 1960s (see Wise and Ross, 1964). For the most part, as best the American public could tell, the highly regarded Eisenhower presided over a comparatively peaceful period of foreign policy.

VIETNAM

By the end of the 1950s, many Americans were becoming uneasy about the military and technological gains of the Soviet Union—most notably the Sputnik space satellite—and about an apparent communist or leftist tide in world affairs, and in Cuba, Southeast Asia, and elsewhere. This was accentuated by alarmist rhetoric, from John F. Kennedy and others, about Soviet threats and an illusory “missile gap” (see Bottome, 1971; Ball, 1980; Kaplan, 1983). As unhappy memories of Korea faded, a steadily increasing proportion of Americans strongly favored “keep[ing] U.S. soldiers in anti-communist nations”: 49% in autumn 1956, 55% in 1958, and 63% in the autumn of 1960.

The public apparently favored the pacific side of Kennedy administration policy, such as the proposed nuclear test ban treaty (see Rosi, 1965, and the case study in Childs, 1965). There are no systematic public opinion data concerning attitudes toward Kennedy’s new policies of

"flexible response," counterinsurgency forces, and the like, and there are no indications that the American public was urging a U.S. commitment in Vietnam. But the open deployment of U.S. military "advisors" in Vietnam beginning in 1961, and U.S. responses to the crises during that year in Laos and Berlin, along with U.S. sponsorship of the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba and the confrontation over the Soviet missiles there in 1962, appeared to win public acceptance and foreshadowed a climate of acquiescence as major involvement in Vietnam began in 1964 and 1965.

Now that the facts are publicly known, the Tonkin Gulf incident of August 1964, the critical event used to justify U.S. military action in Vietnam, seems to have been a rather clear case of opinion manipulation. The information that the Johnson administration provided the press and the public misrepresented the alleged North Vietnamese attacks on the U.S. destroyers USS *Maddox* and *Turner Joy*; the United States and South Vietnam provoked the first attack, and the second may never have occurred (Windchy, 1971; Goulden, 1969; Gravel, 1971, Vol. 3; Wise, 1973, gives a popular account). The administration also exaggerated "domino" arguments and released a White Paper early in 1965 claiming that the NLF (Viet Cong) movement in South Vietnam (the independent statehood of which was very much in question) represented an "invasion" by the North. Johnson seized upon attacks at Pleiku and Quinhon early in 1965 as pretexts to begin the massive strategic bombing of North Vietnam and then the sending of U.S. combat troops. Again, however, our point is that the public reacted reasonably to the information it was given.

Between August and November 1965, there was a 13 percentage point increase (to 60%) in public support for sending more men to Vietnam, and from December 1965 to April 1966, support for blockading North Vietnamese ports increased by 15 percentage points. Later, between 1966 and 1967, there were increases in the proportion of the public that wanted to "win" in Vietnam, and even in the proportion willing to reduce programs at home in order to pay for the war.

It soon became apparent that victory would not be easy. American casualties mounted, and the public became aware (largely through television) of the war's destruction and of the political corruption and turmoil in South Vietnam. The NLF and the North Vietnamese continued to hold substantial territory despite announcements about the "light at the end of the tunnel."

More Americans began to see the war as a "mistake" that the United States should have avoided. As had been the case with Korea, the

number of "mistake" responses rose with the cumulative magnitude of U.S. casualties (Mueller, 1971, 1973), as well as with increasing dollar costs and disruptive demonstrations. Most members of the public disliked the demonstrators, but the demonstrators drew attention to the war, which the public also increasingly began to disfavor (see Burstein and Freudenberg, 1978). President Johnson's popularity dropped calamitously, responding to the flow of bad news from Vietnam (Brody and Page, 1975).

Not all opposition to the war took the form of favoring withdrawal; part of the public wanted to "win or get out" and was willing to use maximum force to gain victory. But the Tet offensive of early 1968 shocked the American public. While the military outcome was not the disaster that was portrayed in some news reports (see Braestrup, 1977, and his critics), the political impact of Tet was enormous, because the offensive so directly contradicted the official U.S. line of continual progress.

The initial public reaction to Tet was belligerent: The proportion of Americans labeling themselves "hawks" rose 12% between December 1967 and early February 1968. As the news was interpreted further, however, the proportion of "hawks" dropped more than 20 percentage points (from 72% to 50%) by April 1968 and continued to decline. The proportion of the public wanting the United States to "get out as quickly as possible" rose 17 percentage points between May 1967 and March 1968 (from 26% to 43%), and between February and June 1968 there were substantial decreases in support for American bombing or American troops in Vietnam.

Predominant opinion still opposed immediate withdrawal. Americans tended to favor policies along the lines of the Johnson administration's partial deescalation of bombing North Vietnam later in 1968 and the gradual troop withdrawals of the new Nixon administration in mid-1969. Already by early 1968 there was strong sentiment for "Vietnamization." In February, 77% favored "training ARVN troops and withdrawing American soldiers," up 6 percentage points from November.

As the war dragged on over the next several years, more and more Americans favored rapid troop withdrawals. Between September 1968 and January 1971, for example, there was a 15 percentage point increase (to 37%) in the proportion wanting to pull out entirely from Vietnam, and from November 1969 to February 1970, there was a dramatic 17% rise in the proportion of the public agreeing with the positions of Senators who supported immediate withdrawal.

The proportion favoring U.S. withdrawal, even if the South Vietnamese government collapsed, rose 13% between October 1969 and April 1970. At the same time, however, the idea of a "coalition government" including the communists never gained much popularity, and most people still wanted to "stop communism." Sentiment that we should get out on grounds that the war was "wrong" was not very high (though subsequent polls have shown substantial majorities saying it was "fundamentally wrong and immoral"). More typical was the feeling that troop withdrawals should continue, which 71% favored in July 1970 (up 12 percentage points since October 1969). The public preferred that the war eventually be fought without United States ground forces, if it were to continue at all.

The public's opinion shift against the war did not occur in a social vacuum. The indirect and long-term effects of domestic protests were important, as were the early efforts of a few political figures, such as Senator William Fulbright. Many businesspeople and elite publications like the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* eventually turned against the war as too costly (especially after Tet), and a number of political figures followed suit. But the crucial and sometimes unmediated role of objective factors like casualties and costs should not be discounted. A time series analysis relating public preferences to the actual pace of U.S. troop withdrawals in the 1969-1971 period indicates that each affected the other: Variations in the speed of withdrawal appear to have responded rather strongly to public opinion, and, to a substantial extent, public opinion also responded to the objective levels of troop withdrawals (Page and Shapiro, 1987).

The agonizing Vietnam experience left its mark on a wide range of public attitudes about foreign policy. It affected attitudes toward defense spending, described further below. And, between January 1969 and February 1973, the proportions of Americans willing to use U.S. troops to defend various places such as Berlin, Brazil, Thailand, or Japan dropped by 20 to 30 percentage points. The impact of Vietnam is evident in that the sharpest drops occurred with respect to Asia; the biggest of all was a 37% decline in willingness to defend South Korea. From 1971 to 1973, support also declined for spending more on foreign aid.

This "neoisolationism" may or may not have represented a realistic sense of long-term U.S. interests or the limits of power, but it certainly is an understandable response to a disastrous policy. The trend is well summarized by the solid 20% increase between June 1965 and April

1975 in the proportion of Americans saying we should stay out of, rather than take an active part in, world affairs. This trend was reversed only later as a consequence of well-publicized strains in United States-Soviet relations. We will examine that change after summarizing opinion trends concerning China and the Middle East.

CHINA

Shortly after World War II, when Mao-Zedong's Communists pursued their revolution against Chiang Kai-Shek and the Nationalists, the American public opposed them, fed by characterizations of the communists as tools of the Soviet Union (see Kusnitz, 1984). Public support for giving military supplies to the Nationalists increased as the Nationalists' resistance crumbled in 1948, and only when their cause became hopeless did support for sending military supplies drop (by 18 percentage points, from 63% to 45%, between April 1948 and June 1949).

The combat in Korea between U.S. and Chinese troops had a predictable effect on public opinion: During the war, substantial and rising numbers of Americans (urged on by General MacArthur, Senator Knowland, and others) favored bombing China: 64% in August 1951, up another 9% in October (but dropping 11% by August 1952 as the war cooled down and stalemated near the prewar thirty-eighth parallel boundary). In the early 1950s, with the Korean war, the Cold War in general, and the activities of the Committee of One Million (see Bachrack, 1976), strong and persistent majorities of the American public opposed U.S. recognition of the People's Republic of China or the admission of China to the United Nations (e.g., 92% opposed admission in July 1954).

From the mid-1950s through more than two subsequent decades, however, the story of public preferences about U.S.-Chinese relations is one of slow, gradual increases in desires for rapprochement. There were temporary ups and downs: improvements with the Geneva conference of 1954 and Bandung nonalignment conference of 1955; setbacks with the Vietnam war and the Cultural Revolution; and acceleration with China's emergence as a nuclear power in October 1964. But long before Richard Nixon's "opening to China," the U.S. public had moved quite a way toward friendliness. Kusnitz (1984) thoroughly discusses these trends, which are included in the "China" entries in Table 3, showing some of the largest and least abrupt changes among the foreign policy

issues in our data. By May 1971, amid the early publicity about Nixon's opening to China, more Americans favored United Nations admission than opposed it—a remarkable turnaround from 1954.

Support for recognition of China rose a dramatic total of 31 percentage points between the Vietnam war low (in 1968) and 1977, the year before President Carter extended U.S. recognition. Support for retaining recognition of the Nationalists on Taiwan dropped 7% from October 1977 to June 1978, and support for keeping the U.S. alliance with the Nationalists dropped 14% between 1976 and 1978.

For public opinion toward China, presidential and other opinion leadership was undoubtedly important, but its impact should not be exaggerated. Once the Korean hostilities had ended, it appears that many Americans, particularly new and better educated cohorts, concluded that a major power like China—which clearly was no satellite of the USSR—had to be dealt with and brought into the international system. (See Kusnitz, 1984, for a discussion of the complexities of opinion leadership and followership in the China case.)

THE MIDDLE EAST

Since Israel's emergence as a state in 1948, most Americans and most of the U.S. media have felt a strong cultural and political affinity with that largely European, democratic, and capitalist outpost of Western values, and have felt sympathy for Jewish victims of Nazism. In disputes between Israel and Arab countries or Arab nationalist movements, most Americans have favored the Israelis.

There was early public support for the new Israeli state at its founding, and expressions of general American support or "sympathy" for Israeli versus Arab positions have remained high. This did not, however, mean that the public favored U.S. involvement such as sending troops or even necessarily supplying arms to Israel during the 1950s. (Only 32% favored arms aid in November 1955.) In the mid-1950s, the new U.S. receptiveness toward neutral Third World countries such as Nasser's Egypt led to a moderate decline in support for shipping arms to Israel (down 9% between November 1955 and April 1956). The seizure of the Suez Canal late in 1956 further detracted from U.S. support for Israel. The Six Day War of 1967 maintained and strengthened Americans' support for Israel but also led to a rise in sentiment (up 18% from June 1967 to January 1969) that the United States should stay out of the Middle East conflict.

The 1973 Egyptian attack and Yom Kippur War, and the OPEC oil boycott in protest of U.S. support of Israel—with the ensuing sharp oil price rises—apparently impressed upon Americans that the Arab countries would have to be confronted. Public support for Israel dipped: “Sympathy” for Israel declined a bit from 1973 to 1974 as the U.S. economic recession deepened, and this apparently continued through 1978, judging by a different “sympathy”-related survey question. Between October 1973 and March 1978, there was also an 18 percentage point increase in support for supplying arms to (some) Arab countries (from a very low 2% to 20% in favor) and a 9 percentage point decrease in the proportion favoring arms for the Israelis (from 43% to 34%).

The Camp David peace brokered by Jimmy Carter altered Americans’ attitudes toward both Egypt and Israel; between March 1978 and August 1980, support for arms sales to Israel rose from 44% to 58%, and support for sales to Egypt soared from 30% to a striking 56%. Oil remained a crucial considerations: By 1979, after the second sharp OPEC price increase and long lines at gasoline stations, there was a substantial (18%) increase in the proportion saying that we would have to get along with the Arabs, even if that meant less support for Israel.

After the overthrow of the Shah of Iran by Islamic fundamentalists, the seizure of hostages in the U.S. embassy in Teheran, which was heavily covered and criticized on television, provoked an angry public reaction. Between December 1979 and January 1980, support for using military force if the hostages were put on trial rose from 48% to 56%. Over the same period there was a precipitous drop, from 57% to 38%, in support for continuing to sell grain to Iran (even) if the hostages were released. The public’s reaction extended beyond Iran; from 1978 to February 1980, there was a 10% increase in approval of “using” U.S. troops if the Arabs cut off oil supplies. As we will see, the hostage crisis and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan also strongly affected opinions about U.S. defense spending.

The June 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon and bombardment of Beirut, as depicted on television, were unpopular among Americans. Sympathy for Arabs rose, especially after Palestinian refugees were massacred in Israeli-controlled territory at the Sabra and Shatilla camps. At the end of September 1982, 61% of informed Americans favored a “Palestinian homeland” on the West Bank, up 7 percentage points from a previous survey.

From September to October 1983, public support for sending U.S. peacekeeping troops to Lebanon rose from 40% to 53%, as President

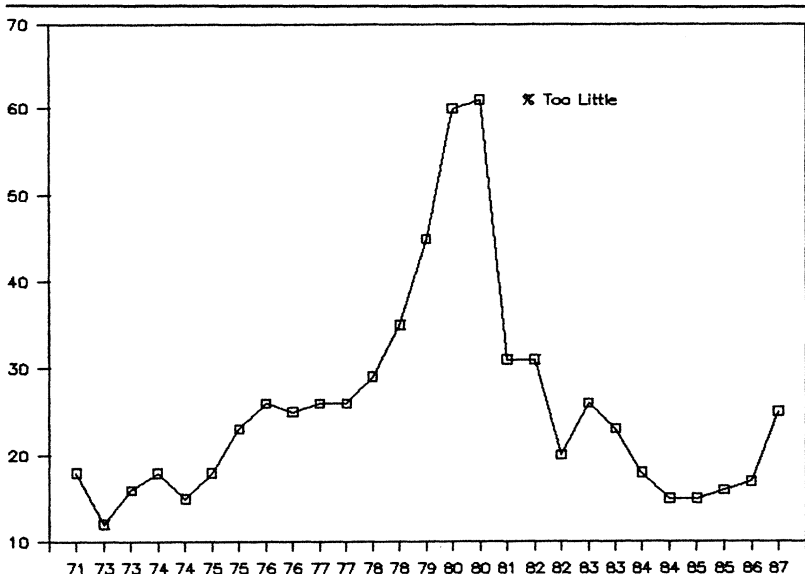
Reagan sent in the troops as part of an international force. Between October and December 1983, however, support for U.S. and Israeli troops "push[ing] the Syrians out of Lebanon" dropped from 53% to 42%. The truck bombing and killing of 243 marines at their airport compound turned the public against continued deployment: Opposition rose from 34% in November 1983 to 63% in February 1984. The marines were withdrawn. The Israeli pullout from most of Lebanon subsequently defused this issue still further. Most Americans remained more sympathetic to Israel than to the Arabs, but this was tempered by sympathy for the Palestinians and a more critical view of Israeli foreign policy, later accentuated somewhat by revelations of the Israeli role in the Iran-contra affair.

DÉTENTE AND THE NEW COLD WAR

As the Vietnam war ended, the Nixon administration promoted détente with the Soviet Union. Arms control negotiations went forward with the 1971 multinational treaty banning seabed installation of nuclear weapons and the 1972 SALT I treaty limiting the deployment of antiballistic missiles (ABMs). Nixon also visited Moscow in 1972, and in June 1973 Brezhnev traveled to the United States, where he signed a series of agreements on exchanges and trade.

The American public increasingly favored such moves. Between September 1968 and November 1972, there was a big drop (19%) in opposition to trade with communist countries, and the SALT agreements won substantial and increasing majority support. Even opinion toward Cuba warmed: A majority supported recognition of Cuba in 1975, and from 1971 to 1974 approval increased by 27% of allowing the importation of Cuban cigars.

By the mid-1970s, however, there was some disappointment with the economic fruits of détente, and concern was stirring about increased Soviet military power and Soviet influence in the Third World. Already in 1972 Eugene Rostow and other members of the Coalition for a Democratic Majority were objecting to détente. In 1974 Paul Nitze angrily resigned from the SALT negotiating team and testified in the Senate that détente was a myth; in 1976 the Committee on the Present Danger was formed. Concern grew over Soviet and Cuban influence in Angola and northern Africa, and some CIA estimates indicated that Soviet military spending was increasing faster than U.S. spending. Continuing into the 1980s, the CPD and various politicians and experts



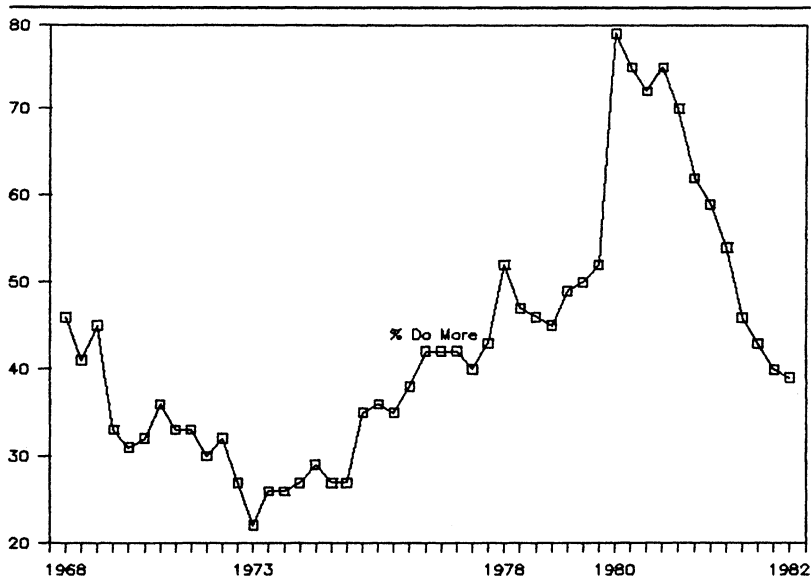
NOTE: Percent "too little" ("don't know" excluded). Question (Roper and NORC GSS surveys): We are faced with many problems in this country, none of which can be solved easily or inexpensively. I'm going to name some of these problems, and for each one I'd like you to tell me whether you think we're spending too much money on it, too little money, or about the right amount . . . Are we spending too much, too little, or about the right amount on . . . the military, armaments and defense? Survey dates: Roper, 10/71, 12/73, 12/74, 12/75, 12/76, 12/77, 12/78, 12/79, 12/80, 12/81, 12/82, 12/83, 12/84, 12/85; NORC GSS, 3/73, 3/74, 3/75, 3/76, 3/77, 3/78, 3/80, 3/82, 3/83, 3/84, 3/85, 3/86, 3/87.

Figure 3A: Defense Spending

portrayed the USSR as engaged in a massive buildup of strategic nuclear weapons that threatened to open a U.S. "window of vulnerability" to a first-strike attack (Sanders, 1983).

Publicity about these matters began to move public opinion. Between 1969 and 1977, according to one survey question, there was a sweeping drop of 29 percentage points in the proportion saying that too much was being spent on the military. A substantial part of this seems to have occurred in the mid- to late 1970s, during the Carter administration, as shown in Figure 3 (see also Russett and DeLuca, 1981; Smith, 1983).

Apprehension about the Soviet Union carried over to other policy areas as well. The enthusiasm for trade and for exchanges of scientists and for a joint space project dropped (about 10% each) by December 1975, and from 1976 to 1978 there was a 10% increase in support for



NOTE: Percent "do more" ("don't know" excluded). Question (Trendex surveys, samples from telephone directory, not random-digit dialing): I would like to get your opinion on several views of important government activities. As I read each one, please tell me if you would like the government to do more, do less, or do about the amount as they have been on . . . defense? Survey dates: 1/68, 5/68, 10/68, 2/69, 7/69, 4/70, 8/70, 5/71, 11/71, 5/72, 8/72, 11/72, 1/73, 5/73, 8/73, 1/74, 7/74, 10/74, 2/75, 4/75, 7/75, 11/75, 11/76, 2/77, 5/77, 8/77, 11/77, 2/78, 5/78, 8/78, 11/78, 2/79, 5/79, 8/79, 11/79, 2/80, 5/80, 8/80, 11/80, 2/81, 5/81, 8/81, 11/81, 2/82, 5/82, 8/82, 11/82.

Figure 3B: Defense

spending more on civil defense and an 8% drop in objections that the U.S. was spending too much on foreign aid.

An especially important facet of the emerging new Cold War was the erosion of support for arms control agreements with the Soviet Union. Already by January 1976, 68% of Americans said it was "dangerous" to cooperate too closely with the USSR and China, up 10% in seven months. After first rising 10% from December 1975 to May 1977, support for the new SALT treaty dropped 11% by May 1979, as charges were made that such agreements advantaged the Soviets.

Jimmy Carter signed SALT II in June 1979, but before and after the signing a parade of arms experts and retired generals testified that verification would be difficult and that the balance of forces favored the USSR. The survey data reveal clear declines in support (with the exact

timing varying by survey question and survey organization) for SALT II and nuclear limitation agreements. Between June and November 1979, for example, there was a 19 percentage point drop, to only 49% favoring ratification of SALT II, and the Senate did not vote approval. This shift against SALT II, like the movement in favor of defense spending, was a triumph for the advocates of a U.S. military buildup, whose arguments seem in retrospect to have been considerably exaggerated. (CIA analysts, for example, soon revised their estimates of increases in Soviet arms expenditures downward to only about 2% per year. The Reagan administration ignored its own anti-SALT rhetoric and for several years quietly agreed with the Soviets to observe the terms of the unratified treaty, with all its alleged defects.)

The events of late 1979, as interpreted by U.S. leaders and the media, greatly worsened U.S.-Soviet tensions and moved public opinion much further in a hawkish direction on national defense and related issues. The Iranian hostage crisis and the occupation of Afghanistan became symbols of U.S. impotence and Soviet aggressiveness; they dramatically accelerated the public shift away from détente. In the spring of 1980 the proportion of Americans favoring an increase in defense spending jumped an additional 30 percentage points over the previous year, to an astounding 60% in favor of spending more money (rather than less or the same amount) on the military, up nearly 50 percentage points since the 1973 post-Vietnam low of 12% (see Figure 3).

The years 1980 and 1981 were in many respects the peak of the new Cold War. Carter's policies had already responded to the emerging sentiments with a substantial military buildup. The new Reagan administration added to the buildup, aimed hostile rhetoric at the Soviet "evil empire," and continued to stress the U.S.'s vulnerability, even after the lower estimates of Soviet military growth were widely known (Gervasi, 1986; Halloran and Gelb, 1983). As the military budget grew, however, while the Federal Reserve kept money tight and the United States slid into recession, public enthusiasm for further armament began to fade. By spring 1982 public opinion had completely reversed its earlier movement, with only 31% favoring increased defense spending while 32% favored a decrease, and prospecting opinion continued on a downward trend.

The rapid rise and fall of desires for defense spending was quite unusual, and meets our definition of an opinion fluctuation. But it did not much resemble the sort of capricious movement that Almond postulated; public opinion shifted in a predictable and reasonable way

given international events and domestic circumstances and the information that citizens received. In part, the drop in preferences for defense spending reflected concern over domestic policy priorities, especially from 1982 to 1985; and in part it simply meant that people perceived the arms buildup as successful and sufficient. But the Reagan administration also appears to have produced a counterreaction among the public: alarm over the possibility of nuclear war. Large majorities—79% in April 1982, rising to 86% in November 1983—endorsed a “freeze” on the building, testing, and installation of nuclear weapons. Sentiment that the United States should “get tough” toward the Soviets dropped sharply, from 74% in January 1980 to 40% in May 1982. When the Reagan administration subsequently cooled its rhetoric, this was noted and welcomed by the public. The feeling that Reagan administration was “going too far” about plans to build more nuclear weapons in its reaction against the Soviets stood at 68% in July 1983, but dropped 21 percentage points, to 47%, in November.

CONCLUSION

It would be desirable to add to our account a description of recent trends in public opinion toward such important issues as strategic nuclear arms, international terrorism, Central America, and South Africa. Although we have not yet fully pieced together and analyzed all the survey data on these matters, we have so far found that they, too, tend to fit the pattern of public opinion responding reasonably to foreign and domestic events as political leaders, other elites, and the mass media report and interpret them.

We believe that the data in the first part of this article conclusively refute the notion that Americans’ foreign policy preferences are volatile or fluctuate wildly. Collective opinion tends to be rather stable; it sometimes changes abruptly, but usually only by small amounts; and it rarely fluctuates.

Moreover, our historical examination of opinion changes in the second part of the article should go a long way toward refuting any assertion that collective opinion moves in capricious or inexplicable ways. Virtually all changes in Americans’ foreign policy preferences over the last half century are understandable in terms of changing circumstances or changing information. Moreover, we have found most of them to be reasonable, or sensible, in that they reflect in a logical

fashion the impact of new information. We have left for elsewhere a more precise statement of this claim, but we feel justified in speaking of a "rational" public.

For present purposes we have been somewhat agnostic about questions of opinion manipulation or deception. Our other work (e.g., Page et al., 1987) has indicated that objective events do not often affect opinion in a direct or unmediated way; Americans get nearly all their information and interpretation about foreign affairs through the mass media, and the contents of the media—especially reports from experts and commentators—account for a high proportion of opinion changes. Any systematic misinformation or biases in the news, therefore, can have profound effects on public opinion, and we have suggested certain biases (e.g., nationalistic and anticommunist) that may in fact exist (Page and Shapiro, 1988). For now, however, we focus on the more limited point that the public, *given the information that is made available*, does a good job of forming and changing its collective policy preferences.

Our conclusion, then, is very much in harmony with the views of V. O. Key, Jr. (1961): The quality of public opinion tends to reflect the quality of the information and the choices with which the public is presented. If the public seems foolish or confused on some issue, the fault may very well lie with the providers of information—or misinformation. When leaders explain international realities clearly and correctly, the public generally responds sensibly, based on its underlying values. When information is unbiased, public opinion is very much worth taking into account in policymaking. There is no need to fear democracy.

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