



The Chicago Council on Foreign Relations



Program on International
Policy Attitudes (PIPA)

The Hall of Mirrors
Perceptions and Misperceptions
in the
Congressional Foreign Policy Process

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INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2002 the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations released its regular surveys, exploring attitudes about foreign policy issues among the general public and American leaders. In that survey something rather striking was found. On a significant number of foreign policy questions, there were large majorities of the public and leaders who agreed. The striking part was that many of these consensus positions were quite at odds with the way the US Congress had voted on these issues. This led to a decision by the Chicago Council (CCFR) and the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) of the University of Maryland to undertake a joint research effort try to find out more about why this might be the case.

In 2004 CCFR undertook another set of surveys of the public and of US leaders. The public sample included 1,195 Americans. The sample size of the leaders was expanded overall to include 450 leaders and the number of congressional staffers included was increased to 100. This survey was conducted in July 2004. These included 100 Congressional members or their senior staff, 31 from the Senate and 69 from the House; 41 administration officials such as assistant secretaries and other senior staff in various agencies and offices dealing with foreign policy; 75 university administrators and academics who teach in the area of international relations; 59 journalists and editorial staff who handle international news; 50 religious leaders; 38 senior business executives from Fortune 1000 corporations; 32 labor presidents of the largest labor unions; 29 presidents of major private foreign policy organizations; and 25 presidents of major special interest groups relevant to foreign policy. The individuals interviewed, or their immediate superiors, hold key leadership positions. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the inner circle of foreign policy decision makers in the White House or the Department of Defense. However, many of the interviewees exercise direct authority over US foreign policy, while others may affect policy indirectly in a variety of ways.

As we shall see below, in this survey once again CCFR found a significant number of cases in which the majority of the public and leaders, including senior Congressional staffers and executive branch officials, agreed on positions that were at odds with Congressional voting. In some cases, though, a majority of Republican staffers diverged from the consensus.

Naturally the question arises: how is it possible that Congress is so out of step with the preferences of public and the elite on such a range of foreign policy positions? This study set out to explore several factors that may be contributing to this dynamic.

One possible factor may be that Americans in all types of leadership positions, including Congress and high level members of the executive branch, misread the attitudes of the general American public. They may not feel that the public supports such positions, so that it is politically risky to pursue them. This may be especially true for new multilateral initiatives. To find out, CCFR, in its July 2004 survey, asked all 450 of the foreign policy leaders surveyed what they assumed about the attitudes of the general public on these key issues.

Key findings

1. Public-Elite Consensus and Congressional Votes

On a wide variety of foreign policy questions there is broad consensus among both the American public and American leaders. However, in many cases Congress has voted in ways that are inconsistent with these consensus positions.....3

2. Leaders’ Perceptions of General Public

Americans in all types of leadership positions, including Congressional staffers and high level members of the executive branch, misread the attitudes of the general American public on numerous foreign policy issues, especially in regard to participating in multilateral efforts. Leaders generally underestimate the consistency between their views and the general public.11

3. Public Perceptions of Congress Overall

Americans’ assumptions about how Congress overall votes on foreign policy issues are often incorrect. Americans tend to assume, often incorrectly, that Congress is voting in ways that are consistent with how they would like Congress to vote.19

4. Congressional Staffers’ Perceptions of Constituents

Congressional staffers widely misread the attitudes of their constituents on foreign policy issues. While staffers’ perceptions of the attitudes in their districts or states were highly varied, actual constituent attitudes were remarkably homogeneous. Curiously, staffers whose views were at odds with the majority of their constituents showed a strong bias toward assuming, incorrectly, that their constituents agreed with them, while staffers whose views were actually in accord with their constituents more often than not assumed this was not the case.21

5. Public Perceptions of Their Member of Congress

Americans’ assumptions about how their own member votes appear to be frequently incorrect. The assumptions of Americans who lived in districts of members who voted in favor of various pieces of foreign policy legislation were only slightly different from Americans who lived in districts of members who voted against them. In other words, the way that their member actually voted had very little influence on their assumptions. Rather, in the absence of information, it appears that Americans tend to assume, often incorrectly, that their member is voting in ways that are consistent with how they would like their member to vote.24

FINDINGS

1. Public-Elite Consensus and Congressional Votes

On a wide variety of foreign policy questions there is broad consensus among both the American public and American leaders. However, in many cases Congress has voted in ways that are inconsistent with these consensus positions.

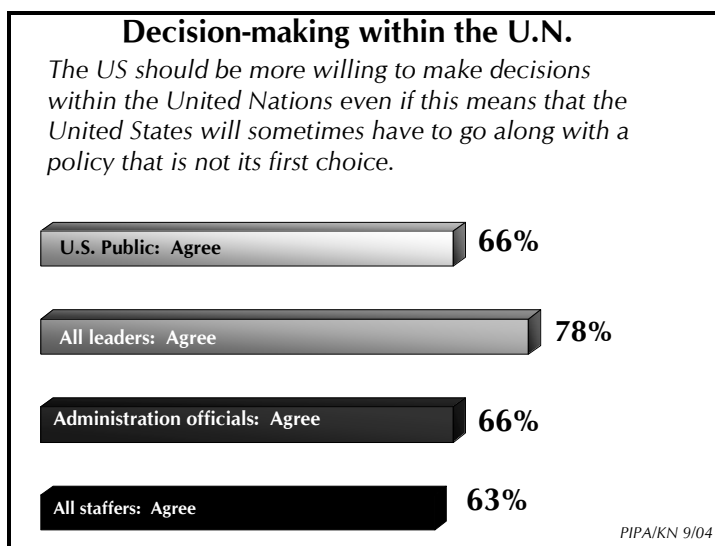
In comparing public and elite attitudes on a variety of issues in the 2002 and 2004 CCFR surveys a remarkable number of cases were found in which there was a consensus between the public and the elite. In many cases these were not reflected in Congressional actions. A recurring theme is that the public and leaders show more support for multilateral action than Congress supports. Majorities of the public and foreign policy leaders favor a variety of forms of multilateralism, including US participation in the International Criminal Court, the Kyoto treaty on climate change, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the treaty banning anti-personnel land mines, and in 2002 requiring UN approval to go to war with Iraq. Nevertheless, Congressional legislative activity has been at odds with these preferences. An exception is that Congress has acted consistent with public and elite support for complying with adverse WTO decisions adverse to the US. Congress has also acted contrary to shared public and elite preferences on the Israel-Palestinian conflict, defense spending and missile defense. Congress has, however, shown a readiness to consider taking military action against genocide, consistent with public and elite views.

This consensus exists among all categories of leaders, including administration officials. It includes Democratic staffers, but on a number of issues Republican staffers are the one group that is out of step.

There were also two cases in which public-elite consensus were reflected in Congressional action. The public-elite consensus that the US should abide by adverse WTO decisions was reflected in at least one case of legislation complying with a WTO ruling, and support for taking action against genocide was reflected in a Congressional resolution calling for the administration to investigate options for acting on the genocide identified in Darfur.

Multilateral Action

The public and leaders show strong support for a greater emphasis on multilateral action in US foreign policy, and even a readiness to accept multilateral decisions that are unfavorable to the US. Asked whether they agreed or disagreed that “When dealing with international problems, the U.S. should be more willing to make decisions within the United Nations even if this means that the United States will sometimes have to go along with a policy that is not its first choice,” 66% of the public and 78% of the leaders agreed that the US should. Within the sub-sample of administration officials, 66% agreed with this position. Among Congressional staffers, 63% agreed. In virtually all the leader categories, very large majorities agreed with this position—ranging from 73-87%. The one exception was Republican staffers: only 38% agreed while 62% disagreed.

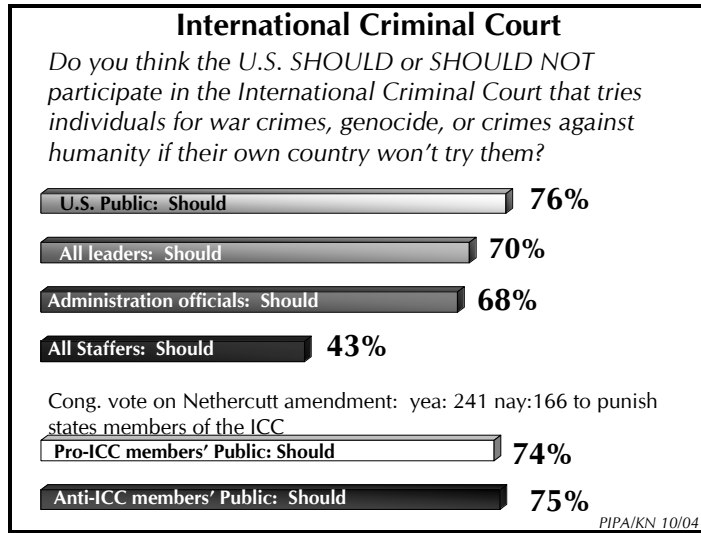


International Criminal Court

Asked whether the US should participate in the International Criminal Court, 76% of the public and 70% of the leaders said that it should. (In 2002, a similar majority of 66% of leaders had supported participation in the ICC.) Perhaps most striking, 68% of administration officials also thought the US should participate in the ICC. Congressional staffers differed, however, with only 43% supporting participation in the ICC (52% opposed). Preferences varied by party with 74% of Democratic staffers favoring participation, while among Republican staffers just 15% said the US should participate in the ICC. For all other leader categories support ranged from 60% among business leaders to 87% among educators.

Congressional legislative action has been contrary to this public consensus. In the most recent instance (July 2004) the House of Representatives voted on the “Nethercutt amendment,” which actively sought to weaken the ICC by ensuring that all US nationals would be exempt from its jurisdiction. Specifically, the amendment prohibited foreign aid to any ICC member country that has not signed a bilateral agreement with the US to exempt US nationals. The Nethercutt amendment passed the House of Representatives by a vote of 241 to 166.

While the nationwide poll numbers indicate that supporters of the Nethercutt amendment were acting at odds with the public as a whole, it is, of course, possible that in the districts of those members who supported the Nethercutt amendment, relatively more constituents opposed the ICC. To determine if this was the case, respondents were divided according to whether their member had voted for or against the amendment. In fact there was no significant difference. In districts where the member voted for the Nethercutt amendment (against the ICC), 76% supported the US participating in the ICC and 21% were opposed. In districts where the member voted against the Nethercutt amendment, 73% of constituents supported the US participating in the ICC and 21% were opposed.



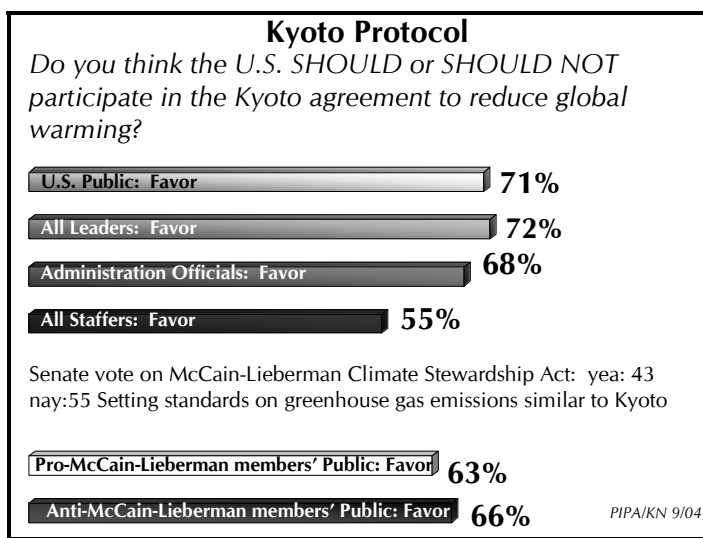
Kyoto Treaty

The Kyoto Treaty on climate change was another area in which the public and leaders converged. Seventy-one percent of the public and 72% (64% in 2002) of leaders favored US participation. Strikingly, 68% of administration officials did as well. A slight 55% majority of Congressional staffers also favored participation, with only 21% of Republicans in favor. For all other leader categories, Kyoto was favored by majorities ranging from 59% to 80%.

Congress has never acted in support of Kyoto and in 1997 the Senate passed a resolution by 95-0 saying that “the United States should not be a signatory to any... agreement...which would mandate new commitments to limit or reduce greenhouse gas emissions” unless the agreement also required specific, scheduled commitments from developing countries. This was clearly targeted at the Kyoto treaty, which did not have such scheduled commitments from developing countries.

In October 2003 the Senate also defeated (55 to 43) the McCain-Lieberman Climate Stewardship Act, which would set up regulations on greenhouse gas emissions by large companies. While this legislation pursued the same goals as Kyoto, it was significantly less demanding. Presumably no opponent of McCain-Lieberman would vote in favor of the Kyoto Protocol, while supporters of McCain-Lieberman might consider doing so.

While by voting against McCain-Lieberman, the Senate as a whole was going against national public support for the goals of the Kyoto treaty, again it is not clear if the senators who voted against it represent states that are particularly prone to oppose Kyoto. Once again, respondents from those states in which *both* senators voted either for or against McCain-Lieberman were differentiated. Once again, there was no significant difference between the size of the majority that favored Kyoto in states where both senators voted in favor of McCain-Lieberman (63% of public favored Kyoto) than in states in which both senators voted against it (66% of public favored).



Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty

CCFR also asked whether the US should participate in “the treaty that would prohibit nuclear weapon tests worldwide,” i.e., the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Eighty-seven percent of the public and 85% of the foreign policy leaders said the US should participate. (A similar 83% of leaders favored CTBT in 2002.) Support among administration officials interviewed was 80%. Among Congressional staffers, a 61% majority also supported participating though only 26% of Republican staffers supported CTBT. Support among all other categories was high, ranging from 79% to 97%.

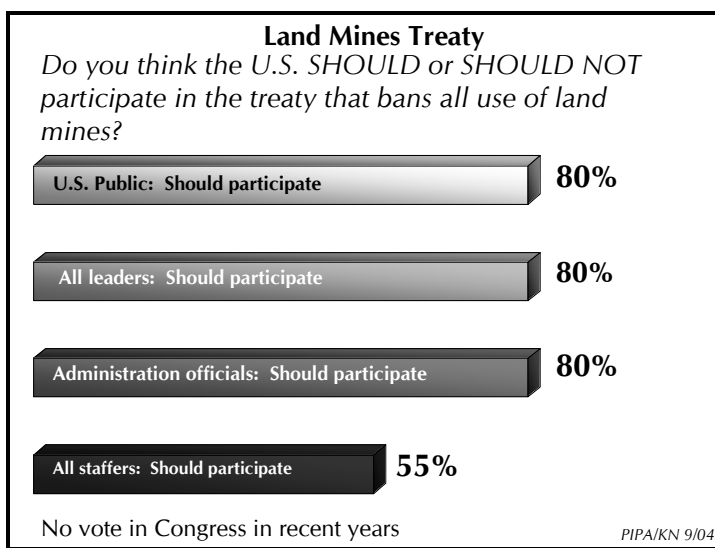
Congress’ has not taken any action in support of the CTBT and the Senate rejected ratification in October 1999, when 51 voted against it and 48 voted in favor.

In November 2002 PIPA found that there was no significant difference between the attitudes in states in which both senators voted for ratification (83% favored) than in states in which both senators voted against it (80% favored).

Land Mines Treaty

CCFR asked public and foreign policy leaders whether they thought “the US should or should not participate...in the treaty that bans all use of land mines” [the Ottawa Convention on land mines]. Eighty percent of the public said the US should participate, with 16% opposed. Among the leaders, 80% thought the US should participate and 17% thought it should not. (In 2002, a similar majority of leaders, 75%, favored a land mines treaty.) Among administration officials, support was at 80%. Support was much lower among Congressional staffers, at 55%, due mostly to Republican staffers’ opposition to the land mine treaty (only 35% were in favor, with 59% opposed). Among all other categories of the leader sample, support was in the 69-88% range.

Congress has never taken any action in support of the land mines treaty. A bill introduced in 2001 by Senator Leahy, the “Land Mine Elimination and Victim Assistance Act”—which, if enacted, would express the sense of Congress that the US should join the Ottawa Convention—has languished in committee and never come up for a vote.



Going to War With Iraq Without UN Approval

In the 2002 CCFR poll, the public and leaders were asked about the potential for taking military action against Iraq. Among the public, 65% said the US should invade only with UN approval; 20% said the US should invade, even if it has to go it alone; and only 13% said the US should simply not invade Iraq. At that time, 49% of leaders said “the US should only invade Iraq with UN approval and the support of its allies,” while 22% said “the US should invade Iraq even if we have to go it alone” and 26% simply said “the US should not invade Iraq.”

In the House, the Spratt amendment—which said that if the UN Security Council did not pass a resolution to use force, the president should return to Congress for such authorization—was voted down, 270 to 155.

To see how this vote accorded with the public, PIPA asked in November 2002: “Would you want your Congressional representative to vote for or against a resolution that says that the U.S. should only invade Iraq with UN approval and the support of its allies?” Sixty-five percent preferred that their representative vote for such a resolution, while 31% wanted their member to vote against it. In those districts where the representative *did* vote for the Spratt amendment, 68% of the public in those districts favored such a resolution. In those districts where the representative voted *against* the Spratt amendment, 63% favored such a resolution. (Though this five-point difference is in the expected direction, it does not achieve statistical significance.)

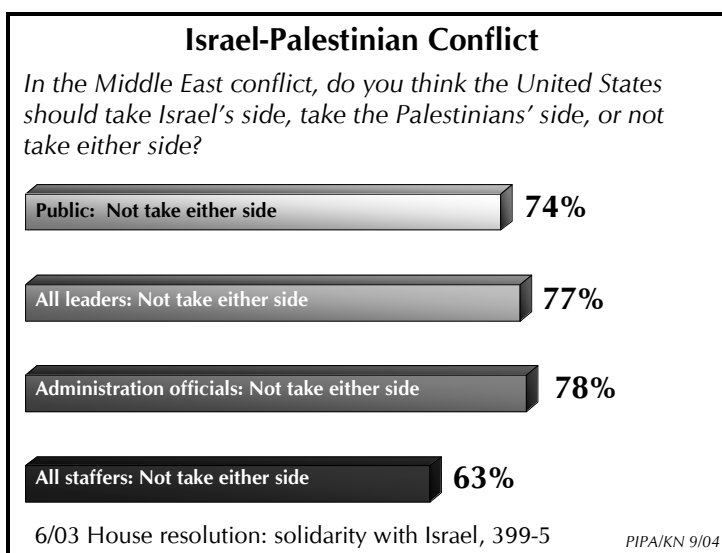
Israel-Palestinian Conflict

Both the public and foreign policy leaders were asked: “In the Middle East conflict, do you think the United States should take Israel’s side, take the Palestinians’ side, or not take either side?” Among the public, 74% said the US should not take either side, 17% said the US should take Israel’s side, and 3% said the US should take the Palestinians’ side. Similarly, most foreign policy leaders favored the US not taking a side (77%, and 72% in 2002), with 15% favoring the US taking Israel’s side and 4% wanting the US to take the Palestinians’ side. Within the foreign policy leaders, 78% of administration officials favored taking neither side. Among Congressional staffers 63% favored taking neither side, in which a 50% plurality of Republican staffers favored taking neither side while

44% favored taking Israel’s side. Among other categories of leaders, 63% to 86% favored taking neither side; those wanting to take Israel’s side ranged from 5% to 28%.

In this case, there was a consensus among leaders that even included a plurality of Republican staffers, as well as the public, in favor of not taking either side in the Israel-Palestinian conflict. However, several Congressional votes on resolutions expressing solidarity with Israel have produced a strong appearance of taking Israel’s side. To take one of several recent examples, after the formal June 2003 rollout of the “roadmap” plan the House passed a resolution expressing solidarity with Israel, and viewing “Israel’s fight against terrorism as part of the global war against terrorism,” by a vote of 399 to 5. No such solidarity was expressed toward the Palestinians. Indeed the resolution explained that “the concept of ‘cycle of violence,’ which implies moral equivalence between terrorists and their victims, should be rejected as a description of Israeli-Palestinian dynamics, since Palestinian terrorism justifies Israeli counterterrorist operations.”

Given the lopsided nature of this vote, it was impossible to do a meaningful analysis that would include how constituents of those who voted against the resolution viewed the Middle East conflict.

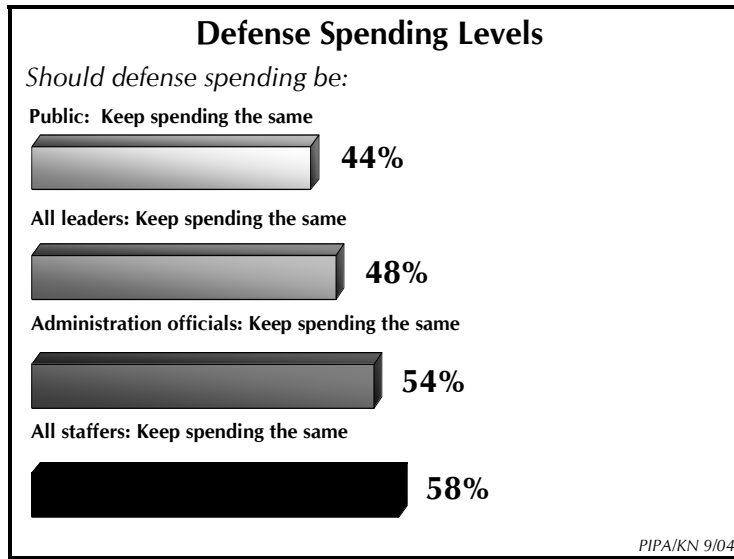


Defense Spending Levels

Only 29% of the public favors increases in defense spending. More striking, only 15% of leaders overall favor increases, including a mere 10% of Administration officials and 25% of Congressional staffers. (In 2002, a 30% minority of foreign policy leaders had favored increasing defense spending; support for further increases in defense spending has declined among leaders since 2003.) The only group to show significant support is Republican staffers, with a large minority of 47% favoring increases. The dominant view in every group is to keep spending the same—for the public, 44%; for leaders, 48%; for administration officials, 54%; and for Congressional staffers 58%. Among other categories, keeping spending the same was the strongest view in all groups but one, ranging from 38% to 60%. (The exception was presidents of foreign affairs interest groups; 68% of this group wanted to cut defense spending.)

Congress, however, has repeatedly increased defense budgets. Defense spending has increased a total of 35% since 2001 (see <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/fy2005/defense.html>.) Since defense spending is embedded in larger spending bills no single vote can be interpreted as a vote on

increasing defense spending per se. Thus it was not possible to compare constituents' views with their members' positions.

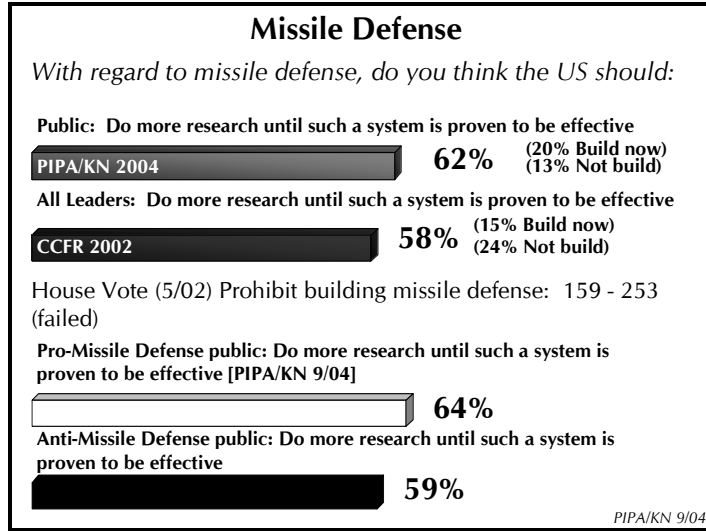


Missile Defense

While the current CCFR study did not include a question on missile defense, CCFR's 2002 study did. Given three options, 52% of the public wanted to "do more research until such a system is proven to be effective," while 31% wanted to "build a missile defense system right away," and 14% wanted to "not build a missile defense system at all." The foreign policy leaders in 2002 were even less supportive of deployment. Fifty-eight percent wanted to do more research, only 15% wanted to build a system right away, and 24% wanting to not build a missile defense system at all.

In fact, Congress has allocated funds to proceed with deployment of a missile defense system, though the cycle of testing for its components is unfinished. An example of a clear roll-call vote limited to this issue took place in May 2002, when a House amendment that would prohibit funding to build a space-based missile defense program was defeated, 253-159.

PIPA/KN asked CCFR's question again in September 2004 in order to compare constituents with members' votes. Districts with new members since the November 2002 election were excluded from the analysis. There was no significant difference between attitudes in districts in which members voted in favor of building the system (61% wanted to do more research) and districts where members voted against building (64% wanted to do more research).



Use of Troops to Stop Genocide

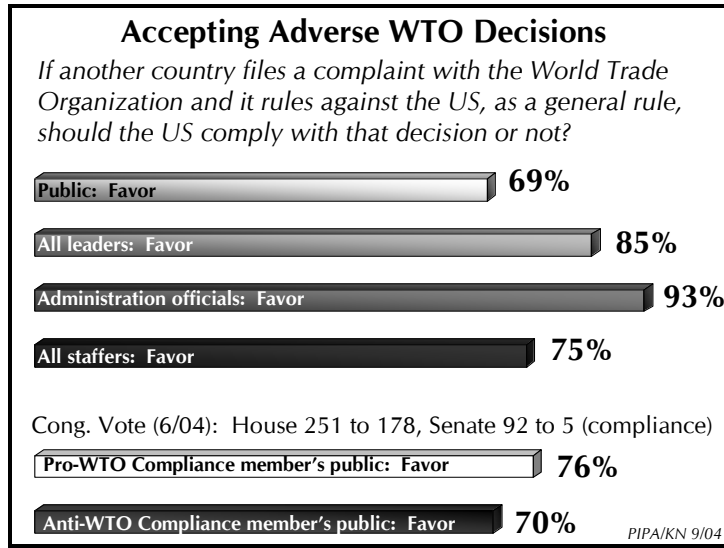
One case in which Congress did act in a way that was consistent with public-elite consensus was in regard to acting against genocide. Seventy-five percent of the public sample said they would favor using US troops “to stop a government from committing genocide and killing large numbers of its own people.” The leadership sample held the same views even more strongly, with 86% (85% in 2002) in favor. The sub-sample from government was similar, with 78% of administration respondents and 91% of Congressional staffers in favor. In all other categories, support was very high—in the 81-93% range.

The nature of genocidal situations requires assessments on a case-by-case basis; consequently nothing in the legislative record can be construed as a full test of how the majority of Congress would answer this question. However, it is very noteworthy that in the current case of Darfur, the House of Representatives has unanimously passed a resolution (H. Res. 467), declaring Darfur to be a situation of genocide in progress and urging the administration to consider multilateral or unilateral actions to prevent it.

Accepting Adverse WTO Decisions

Another case in which Congress took action consistent with a public-elite consensus was in regard to accepting adverse WTO decisions. A 69% majority of the public sample said that “If another country files a complaint with the World Trade Organization and it rules against the US, as a general rule,” the US should comply with that decision (24% said the US should not). Among the foreign policy leaders, 85% said the US should comply and 9% said it should not. Among administration officials, 93% said the US should comply as did 75% of Congressional staffers. This was one case in which a majority of Republican staffers (59%) as well as Democratic staffers (92%) were both supportive. All other categories showed majority support, varying from 63% among labor leaders to 92% among educators and media professionals.

While there has been no congressional legislation calling for compliance with the WTO per se, in June 2004 legislation was passed by both houses to amend the tax code to comply with a WTO ruling on foreign sales corporations. The vote in the House was 251 to 178, and the vote in the Senate was 92 to 5.



2. Leaders' Perceptions of General Public

Americans in all types of leadership positions, including Congressional staffers and high level members of the executive branch, misread the attitudes of the general American public on numerous foreign policy issues, especially in regard to participating in multilateral efforts. Leaders generally underestimate the consistency between their views and the general public.

In the 2004 CCFR survey of leaders, leaders were asked about their perceptions of US public opinion on a variety of issues. In nine cases, the actual public position was quite clear in the CCFR public survey, providing an excellent opportunity to assess the correspondence of elite perceptions and actual public opinion. In seven of the nine cases leaders' perceptions of the public were very much at odds with the actual attitudes of the general public.

What is quite striking is that in seven of the nine cases where leaders clearly misperceived the public, the attitudes of the public and the leaders were very consonant, but leaders did not know this was the case.

Three of these cases referred to actual government policies at odds with the majority preferences of both public and leaders (including government officials). Large majorities of the public and leaders favored US participation in the International Criminal Court and the Kyoto Treaty on global warming, but majorities of leaders in all categories assumed that there was not majority support in the general public or among staffers' constituents. Large majorities of the public and leaders favored the US taking neither side in the Israel-Palestinian conflict, but leaders did not assume that this was a majority view in the public.

This same pattern obtained on several issues related to multilateral decision-making. Large majorities of the public and leaders agreed that the US should make more decisions in the UN and be willing to accept untoward decisions, and should accept adverse rulings by the World Trade Organization. However, the majority of leaders in all categories did not assume that this was the majority view in the public.

Other issues related to the United Nations followed this pattern. Large majorities of the public and the leaders favored the US participating in UN peacekeeping operations, but leaders were not aware

of this support. Perhaps most interesting, when asked about the possibility of the UN imposing a small tax to support its activities, the public was divided but leaned in a positive direction, while leaders were also divided but leaned in a negative direction. But asked how the public would feel about such an idea, leaders roundly assumed that the public would be opposed.

Two areas in which the policymakers correctly perceive the public deserve special note. A clear majority of the public and an even larger majority of leaders (in all categories) oppose increased defense spending, and leaders are largely accurate in their perception of the public on this point. What is curious is that over the last few years, defense spending has increased strongly.

One other area where the leaders' perceptions were at least roughly correct was questions related to the use of US troops. Large majorities of both the public and leaders favored using US troops to stop genocide, and leaders generally perceived this correctly, though they somewhat underestimated the magnitude of support.

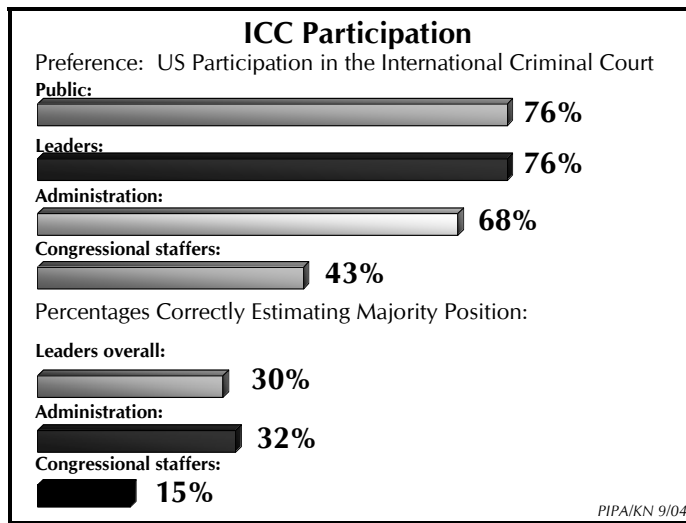
International Criminal Court

Asked if the US should participate in “the International Criminal Court that can try individuals for war crimes, genocide, or crimes against humanity if their own country won’t try them,” 76% of the public and 70% percent of the leaders said that the US should.

Only 30% of leaders estimated that the public favored this position, and only 20% estimated that this to be a large majority. Curiously, the one subcategory of leaders that came close to correctly estimating public attitudes was the heads of special-interest organizations, with 56% assuming that the majority of the public was in favor.

Among administration officials, only 32% estimated that a majority favored the ICC and only 17% estimated that this is a large majority.

Fifteen percent of Congressional staffers correctly estimated majority support, with 7% saying it would be a large majority. Among Republican staffers, only 9% estimated the direction of the general public correctly, with 3% estimating that it would be a large majority. Among Democratic staffers 18% thought there would be majority support (6% large majority).



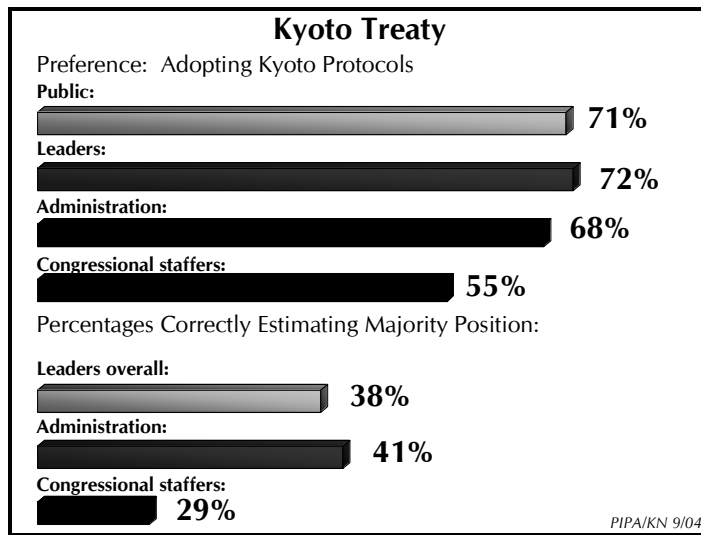
Kyoto Treaty

The Kyoto Treaty on global warming was another area in which the public and leaders converged in strong support, but leaders sharply underestimated the public’s support. Seventy-one percent of the public and 72% of leaders favored US participation. Strikingly, 68% of administration officials did as well. Staffers, though, were very divided along party lines with only 21% of Republicans in favor and an overwhelming 94% of Democrats in favor.

Leaders underestimated public support. Overall, only 38% estimated that a majority of the public would be in favor, and only 28% correctly estimated that this majority would be a large majority. However, a few subgroups did estimate that a majority would favor Kyoto: labor (66%), special interests (56%) females (54%), and liberals (54%).

Forty-one percent of administration officials were correct on the direction of the majority, and 29% estimated that it would be a large majority.

Twenty-nine percent of Congressional staffers thought Kyoto would have majority support (large majority, 9%). Among Republican staffers 15% estimated the right direction; 9% the magnitude. Among Democratic staffers 43% estimated the right direction of the majority and 35% that this would be a large majority.



Making Decisions Within the UN

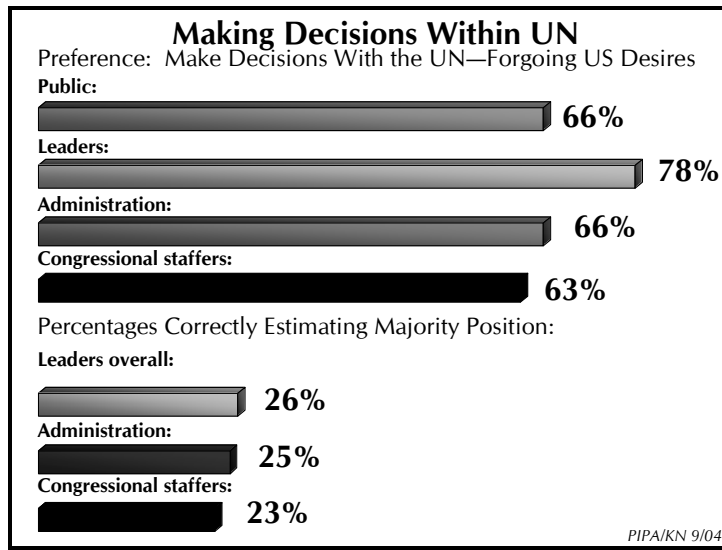
When asked for their own opinion, strong majorities of the public and the leaders showed a readiness to participate in multilateral decision-making and even accept unfavorable outcomes. However, the leaders as a whole dramatically underestimated the public’s willingness to do so.

Asked whether they agree or disagree that “When dealing with international problems, the U.S. should be more willing to make decisions within the United Nations even if this means that the United States will sometimes have to go along with a policy that is not its first choice,” 66% of the public and 78% of the leaders agree that the US should.

However, when leaders were asked to estimate attitudes in the general public, only 26% estimated that this would even be a majority position, and only 16% made the correct estimate that a large majority would agree with this position.

Among administration officials, only 25% perceived that the majority would agree with this position, with 22% assuming that it would be a large majority. The mean estimate was that views are evenly divided, leaning in the direction that more would disagree.

Among all Congressional staffers only 23% correctly estimated the direction of the majority and only 9% assumed that this would be a large majority. Among Republican staffers, only 24% correctly estimated the direction of the majority, as did 18% of Democratic staffers.

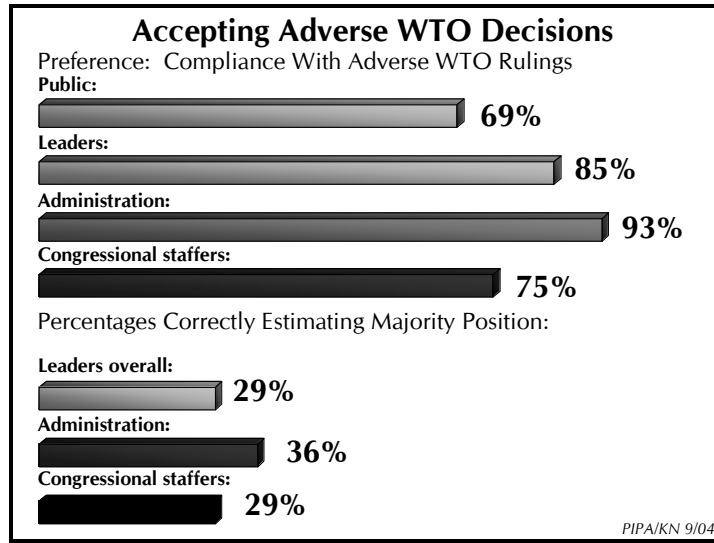


Accepting Adverse WTO Decisions

A similar dynamic occurred in response to the question: “If another country files a complaint with the World Trade Organization and it rules against the US, a general rule, should the US comply with the decision or not?” Sixty-nine percent of the public and 85% of the leaders said that it should.

When asked to estimate what the public would say, only 29% estimated that a majority would say the US should accept adverse decisions, with 19% assuming that this would be large majority. Among administration officials, 36% correctly estimated the direction of the majority, with 29% estimating that this would be a large majority.

Among Congressional staffers 29% thought there would be majority support (18% a large majority). Among Republican staffers, only 35% correctly estimated the majority, with 23% estimating that it would be a large majority. Among Democratic staffers, only 24% estimated that the public would accept adverse WTO decisions, with 16% estimating that this would be a large majority.



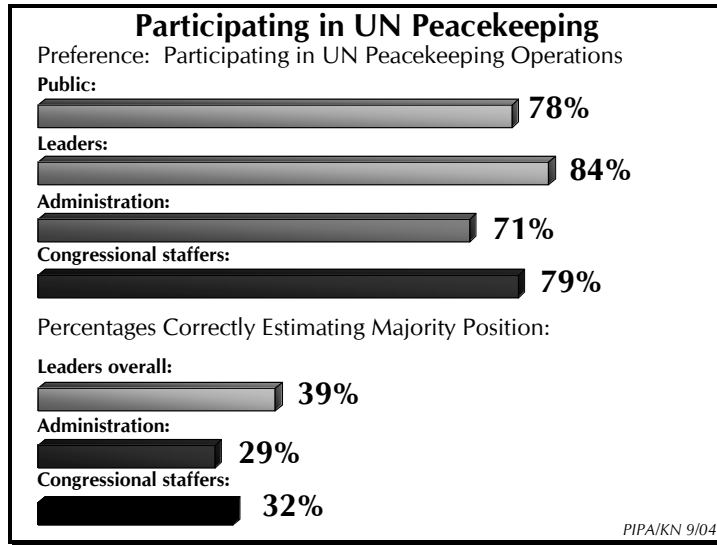
Participating in UN Peacekeeping

Asked whether “in general, when the United States is asked to be part of a United Nations international peacekeeping force in a troubled part of the world, the U.S. should take part, or that we should leave this job to other countries,” a resounding 78% of the public and 84% of leaders said that it should, including 71% of administration officials, 68% of Republican staffers, and 94% of Democratic staffers.

When asked to estimate public attitudes, 39% correctly estimated that a majority would favor taking part, with 24% correctly estimating that a large majority would take this position. Overall, the mean estimate was that views would be evenly divided. There were, however, some significant variations among subgroups of leaders. Fifty-six percent of the members of special interest groups and 52% of foreign policy specialists correctly estimated that a majority would be favorable, as did 47% of business leaders and 46% of liberals and 44% of Democrats.

Among administration officials, 29% estimated correctly that a majority would support participation in peacekeeping, with 24% estimating a large majority. The mean estimate was that the public is evenly divided.

A third (32%) of Congressional staffers thought there would be majority support, with 18% thinking the majority would be large. Among Republican staffers, only 21% thought a majority would be favorable (12% a large majority). Democratic staffers did better, with 45% guessing the correct direction of the majority (24% that it would be a large majority).



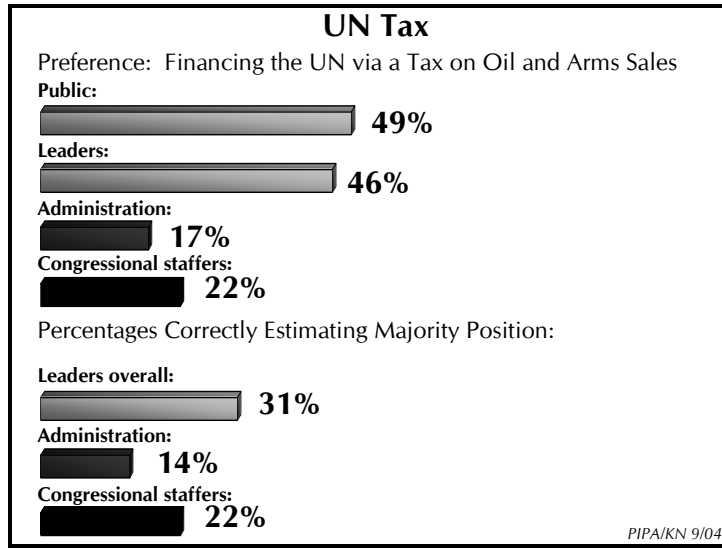
UN Tax

One of the most dramatic misestimations was in response to the idea of “giving the UN the power to fund its activities by imposing a small tax on such things as the international sale of arms or oil.” A slight plurality of the public favored the idea—49% to 45%--while a slight plurality of leaders was opposed—46% in favor, 49% opposed. However, among government leaders there was clear opposition: 73% of administration officials and 72% of Congressional staffers were opposed, with 91% of Republicans and 59% of Democrats opposed.

Asked to estimate the public’s view, among leaders overall, 31% gave a roughly correct estimation: views being evenly divided or a majority in favor. Fifty-seven percent said that a majority would be opposed, with 46% saying that a large majority would be opposed. The mean estimate was that a majority would be opposed. Among conservatives, Republicans, and foreign policy specialists, a majority said that a large majority would be opposed.

Among administration officials, only 14% were roughly correct. A resounding 76% assumed that a majority would be opposed, with 61% assuming this would be a large majority.

Among Congressional staffers, 28% estimated correctly (i.e., said either that the public is divided or that a majority is in favor). Among Republican staffers, a mere 18% estimated correctly, while 62% estimated that a large majority would be opposed. Twenty-seven percent of Democratic staffers estimated correctly.



Defense Spending

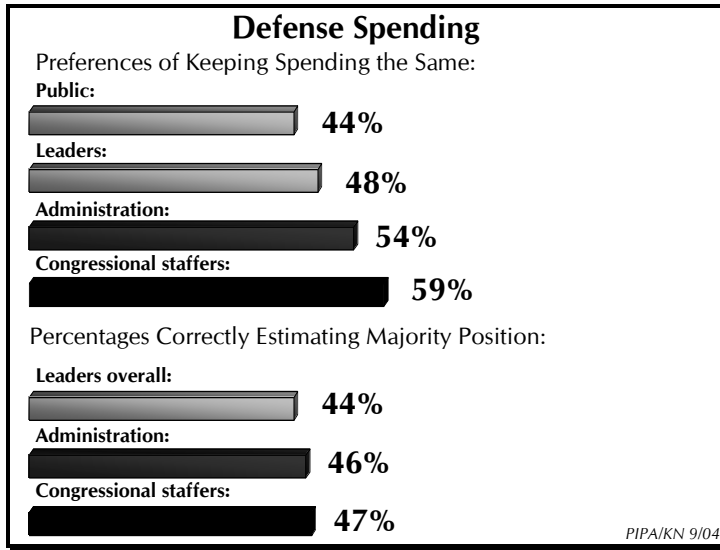
Leaders' attitudes and perceptions about defense spending are one of the more perplexing set of findings, given that over the last few years the US has consistently and dramatically increased defense spending. Only 29% of the public favors increases. More striking, only 15% of leaders overall favor increases, as do a mere 10% of Administration officials and 4% of Democratic staffers. The only group to show significant support is Republican staffers, with 47% favoring increases. The dominant view in every group is to keep spending the same—general public 44%, leaders overall 48%, administration officials 54%, Democratic staffers 65% and Republicans staffers 53%.

However, it does not appear that actual increases in defense spending have been prompted by assumptions about the public, as in no case did leaders perceive the majority of the public as favoring increases. Only 13% of leaders assumed that the majority favored increases, as did 10% of administration officials, and 18% of Republican staffers and 8% of Democratic staffers.

On balance, leaders' perceptions were fairly consonant with public views--if we regard the assumptions that the public favors keeping defense spending the same, or that views are evenly divided, as both roughly correct. Among leaders overall, 44% assumed that the public wanted to keep defense spending the same and 27% that views were evenly divided. Similarly, among administration officials the assumptions were: keep the same 46%, evenly divided 22%. For Republican staffers they were: keep the same 50%, evenly divided 32%. Democratic staffers were little different: keep the same 49%, evenly divided 24%.

What is striking is that in no category of leaders did a majority estimate that a majority of the public *avored* increased defense spending. For all categories of leaders, estimates of the general public majority favoring increases ranged from 8-18%.

Among Congressional staffers only 10% thought a majority wanted to expand defense spending, while 47% thought a majority wanted to keep it the same. For Republican staffers, 18% thought a majority wanted to expand, 50% to keep it the same; for Democratic staffers, 8% thought a majority wanted to expand, 49% to keep it the same.



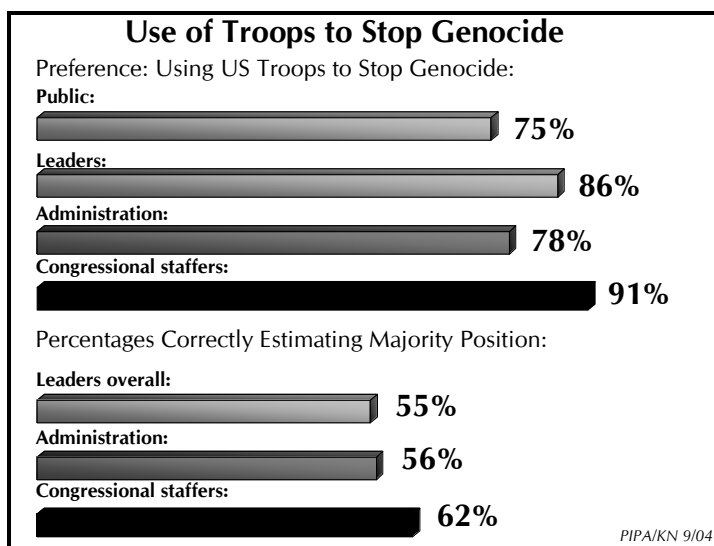
Use of Troops To Stop Genocide

In this subject area, both leaders in general and government respondents had a better understanding of the public than evinced elsewhere.

Seventy-five percent of the public sample said they would favor using US troops “to stop a government from committing genocide and killing large numbers of its own people.” The leadership sample held the same views even more strongly, with 86% in favor. The sub-sample from government was similar, with 78% of administration respondents and 92% of Congressional staffers in favor.

When the leaders were asked to think about the public’s views, 55% were broadly right—thinking a public majority would be in favor—though only 40% thought that more than 60% of Americans would be in favor. Fifty-six percent of administration officials estimated a majority would be supportive (44% said a large majority).

Sixty-two percent of Congressional staffers thought there was majority support. Democratic staffers were especially good at estimating on this subject, with 73% estimating a majority among the general public and 55% estimating large majorities. Republican staffers were reasonably accurate, with 53% estimating majorities of the public and 38% large majorities.



3. Public Perceptions of Congress Overall

Americans' assumptions about how Congress overall votes on foreign policy issues are often incorrect. Americans tend to assume, often incorrectly, that Congress is voting in ways that are consistent with how they would like Congress to vote.

Not only do leaders tend to misperceive the public; the public also tends to misperceive Congress. The PIPA poll asked respondents how they assumed Congress would vote on a variety of issues. These included a set of issues where we were able to compare public perceptions of Congress with actual votes: a resolution on Iraq, the International Criminal Court, missile defense, the Kyoto treaty on climate change, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the Israel–Palestinian conflict, and defense spending. There were also a set of issues where we could only compare respondents' perceptions to the absence of action, as in the case of the Land Mines Treaty.

In each case there was a tendency to assume that Congress would vote the way they wanted it to vote. Respondents' assumptions about how Congress voted were highly correlated with respondents' own policy preferences. When the public was asked about how the majority of Congress felt about participating in the International Criminal Court, 64% of people in favor of participating in the ICC felt that the majority of Congress also favored ICC; 65% of individuals *opposed* to the ICC believed that Congress was opposed as well. In the case of the Kyoto agreement, for example, 69% the public who favored participating in Kyoto felt that the majority of Congress took the same position, while 74% of those who opposed Kyoto also felt that Congress took their position. For compliance with WTO, 58% favoring also felt that most of Congress favored WTO, while 65% opposed believed that Congress was opposed. This pattern of projecting one's own preferences onto Congress as a whole was quite strong across nearly every issue.

Going to War With Iraq Without UN Approval

In November 2002 PIPA asked respondents how they thought Congress would vote on a resolution saying that the US could only go to war with Iraq with the approval of the UN and allies. Fifty-six percent of the public expected that Congress as a whole would favor doing so. This was consistent with the preference of 65%.

However, in October 2002 the House of Representatives voted against the Spratt Amendment, which said that if the UN Security Council did not pass a resolution to use force in Iraq, the President should

return to Congress for such authorization. Congress voted down the Spratt amendment by a 64% majority.

International Criminal Court

The International Criminal Court is another issue in which the public has a strong majority position; a 76% majority favored US participation and a 54% majority of the public expected that most of the Congress favored the ICC. However as discussed above, the House rejected the ICC.

Missile Defense

Space-based missile defense was strongly advocated by President Bush and the debate in Congress revolved principally around whether to begin funding the system and initiate construction immediately, or to conduct additional research and testing to ensure effectiveness before funding actual construction. Asked to think about Congress overall, 52% thought Congress would want to continue research; 22% that Congress would favor building immediately; and 11% that Congress would not want to build at all. However in May 2002, Congress rejected an amendment which would have prohibited funding the start of a space-based missile defense system 159 to 253, a 61% majority.

The Kyoto Agreement

A majority of the public (55%) in the September 2004 PIPA/KN survey assumed that most of Congress favored participating in the Kyoto agreement. McCain-Lieberman incorporates some of the less burdensome requirements of Kyoto into legislation which starts America down the road to reducing pollutants implicated in climate change. Nonetheless, the Senate had voted against McCain-Lieberman.

Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty

A substantial majority of the public (64%) assumed that most senators would favor a nuclear test ban. (PIPA/KN, 2002). However, in October 1999 the Senate voted on the CTBT and narrowly rejected the treaty by 52 to 48.

Expanding Defense Spending

Sixty-five percent of respondents assumed that the majority in Congress would favor keeping defense spending the same rather than increasing or decreasing it. However, between 2001 and 2004, defense spending has risen 35%.

Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Forty-nine of respondents assumed that the majority of Congress would favor taking neither side in the Israel-Palestinian conflict. However, as discussed above, Congress passed a strongly stated resolution favoring Israel in June 2003, which passed by a vote of 399 to 5.

Land Mines Treaty

A 61% assumed that that Congress overall favors the Ottawa Convention to ban land mines. However, Congress has failed to act on HR 948, introduced in March 2001, which encourages the US to join the treaty.

Position	Percent of Public Favoring	Percent of actual vote in Congress consistent with majority public	Percent of Public Who Think Majority in Congress Would Vote With Public
Use force in Iraq only with UN approval	65%	36%	56%
Participate in International Criminal Court	76%	41%	54%
Don't build missile defense system without further testing	62%	38%	52%
Participate in Kyoto Treaty	71%	44%	55%
Participate in Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty	87%	48%	64%
Don't expand defense spending	69%	Defense spending increased sharply	65%
Take neither side in Israel-Palestinian conflict	74%	1%	49%

4. Congressional Staffers' Perceptions of Constituents

Congressional staffers widely misread the attitudes of their constituents on foreign policy issues. While staffers' perceptions of the attitudes in their districts or states were highly varied, actual constituent attitudes were remarkably homogeneous. Curiously, staffers whose views were at odds with the majority of their constituents showed a strong bias toward assuming, incorrectly, that their constituents agreed with them, while staffers whose views were actually in accord with their constituents more often than not assumed this was not the case.

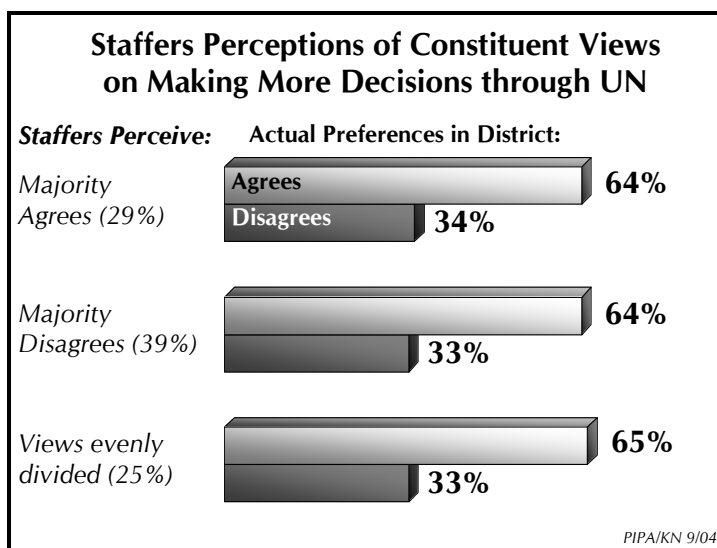
Another possible factor that may contribute to the gap between public-elite consensus and Congressional voting is that members of Congress may misperceive the attitudes of their constituents. To find out if this might be the case, in the 2004 CCFR survey of leaders 100 Congressional staffers—a plausible indicator of members' views—were asked about their perceptions of their constituents attitudes on a number of foreign policy positions. This analysis focuses on nine such questions for which the general public took a relatively unambiguous position.

In seven of the nine cases only a minority correctly perceived majority public opinion. These included:

Congressional Staffers' Perceptions of Constituents' Attitudes	
Public's Position	Correctly Perceived Public position
Making more decisions through the UN	29%
Participating in the Kyoto treaty	35%
Participating in the International Criminal Court	24%
Accepting adverse WTO decisions	31%
Contributing troops to UN peacekeeping	34%
Taking neither side in the Israel-Palestinian conflict	39%
Not expanding defense spending	63%
Using force to prevent genocide	57%
Having a UN tax (favor or views evenly divided regarded as correct)	26%

It should be noted that the sample was not large enough to provide a full sample for every district. However, further analysis suggests that it is very unlikely that for any specific district the direction of the majority would deviate from the direction of the general norm. Public respondents were divided according to the varying assumptions about the distribution of public opinion on their districts. Actual distributions were then compared for each subgroup. To a remarkable extent there was virtually no difference between the subgroups.

For example, on the question of whether the US should make more decisions through the UN, views of constituents were very divided. Only 32% of staffers believed that their constituents agree that the US should be willing to go along with majority UN decisions even if they are contrary to the US position; 41% perceived their constituents as disagreeing and 27% thought views would be evenly balanced. However, when the sample was split according to the assumptions of the staffer of the district or state they lived in, there was virtually no difference between them. In districts or states in which staffers perceived the majority of their constituents as agreeing, 64% in fact agreed, while in districts or states where the staffer assumed that the majority would disagree 63% agreed, and in districts or states in which staffers assumed that views would be evenly divided 68% agreed.



This general pattern was repeated in all instances. In not a single instance was the majority position different among respondents in districts perceived as diametrically opposed by their staffers. In six of the eight issues there was no significant difference at all between the percentages endorsing the dominant position. In the case of defense spending, there was some effect consistent with the assumptions of staffers--in districts or states where staffers assumed that the majority wanted to expand, support for doing so was a bit higher (28%) than in districts in which staffers assumed that the majority wanted to cut (16%)--but in every case the dominant position was to keep spending the same. In the case of the International Criminal Court there was an unusual 16 percentage point difference between districts in which staffers assumed that the majority would favor US participation from those who assumed the opposite, but in the opposite direction of the staffers' assumptions--in districts or states in which staffers assumed the majority would favor ICC participation 62% were in favor, while in districts or states in which staffers assumed the majority would be opposed 74% were in favor.

In short, staffers' perceptions of the views of their constituents proved to be very poor predictors of their actual constituent's views. While staffers' assumptions about their constituents were very divided--on only a few issues did a majority of staffers have common perceptions--the districts or states themselves were remarkably homogeneous.

Staffers' Attitudes and Perceptions of Constituents

Given that staffers' perceptions of their constituents varied widely independent of the actual homogeneity of districts and states, this raises the question of whether staffers may be showing bias according to their own views. Indeed, there is evidence that staffers show some tendency to assume that their constituents agree with them. In most cases, among the response options offered for characterizing the public, staffers chose the option that characterized the public as agreeing with them more often than any other option.

However, curiously, this was primarily true about staffers whose views were in fact at odds with their constituents' views. Staffers whose views were at odds with the majority of their constituents were considerably more likely to assume that their constituents agreed with them than were staffers whose views were *actually in accord* with their constituents.

Among staffers whose views were at odds with most of their constituents, on average for the eight issues explored, 56% incorrectly assumed that most agreed with them. However among staffers whose views were in accord with their constituents, only a minority (39%) assumed that the majority agreed with them, while a majority of 61% did not assume this was the case. Assuming that staffers are getting some actual input from constituents, staffers whose views are in accord with their constituents appear to have some kind of counter-bias such that they discount evidence that their constituents agree with them, while highlighting evidence to the contrary.

Congressional Staffers: Personal Views and Perceptions of Constituents		
Position on Issue	% of staffers whose view is contrary to majority of constituents but who incorrectly assume majority agrees	% of staffers whose view is consistent with majority of constituents and who correctly assume majority agrees
Making more decisions through UN	62	43
Participating In Kyoto Treaty	62	50
Complying with Adverse WTO decisions	67	34
Participating in UN Peacekeeping	57	39
Participate in ICC	47	36
Tax on international sale of arms and oil to fund UN	76	n/a
Participate in ICC	47	36
Not taking sides in Israeli - Palestinian conflict	42	22
Us troops to prevent genocide in another country	n/a	62
Keep defense spending the same	35	29
Average	56	39

5. Public Perceptions of Their Member of Congress

Americans' assumptions about how their own member votes appears to be frequently incorrect. The assumptions of Americans who lived in districts of members who voted in favor of various pieces of foreign policy legislation were only slightly different from Americans who lived in districts of members who voted against them. In other words, the way that their member actually voted had very little influence on their assumptions. Rather, in the absence of information, it appears that Americans tend to assume, often incorrectly, that their member is voting in ways that are consistent with how they would like their member to vote.

As we have seen above, when asked to assess how Congress overall is voting in numerous cases, a majority of the public is mistaken. Americans also appear to be getting little information about how their *own member* is voting. Respondents were asked for their impression of the position of their member of Congress on a number of issues. For each issue, respondents were then divided according to whether a member voted for or against a piece of legislation.

Of course, if the public was getting information about how their members were voting, there would be major differences between these two groups and, ideally, majorities in each group would have

opposite perceptions of how their member would vote. However, this was never the case. Even more disconcerting, there was only a modest difference between the perceptions of respondents whose member voted for the legislation in question and respondents whose members voted against it. Fortunately, this variation did tend to be in the correct direction, suggesting that at least a little information about members' positions is getting through to the public. But overall, it appears that assumptions about how one's own member votes appears to be influenced very little by how members do in fact vote.

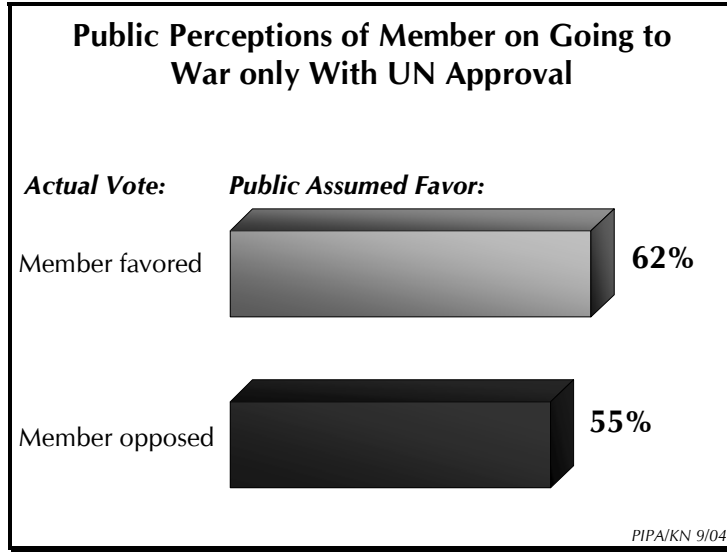
It appears that, in the absence of information to the contrary, Americans tend to assume that their own member votes in ways that are consistent with how they would like him or her to vote. Respondents' assumptions about how their member voted were highly correlated with respondents' own policy preferences. Examples abound. When an individual supported US participation in UN peacekeeping, 70% also believed their own member of Congress supported it; when an individual opposed it, 71% assumed that their member was opposed to it. In the case of complying with WTO rulings, 66% of the public who favored compliance believed that their member also favored it, and 59% of those who opposed compliance believed their member was opposed. For all of the foreign policy issues there was a strong tendency for people to assume, irrespective of their own position, that their member of Congress took the same position.

A pattern of misperceiving one's member of Congress was evident on a set of issues where we were able to compare public perceptions of members with actual votes: a resolution on Iraq, the International Criminal Court, and missile defense. In some cases, we were limited to analyzing the relationship between respondents' perceptions and votes which took place only in the Senate: the Kyoto treaty on climate change and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. There was a single case in which the majority did perceive their member correctly: compliance with rulings of the World Trade Organization. However, this correct perception appears to have been driven more by the fact that Congress happened to be voting in a way that was consistent with the public's preferences, rather than by the public having more information about the voting behavior of the members who represented them.

Making Decisions within the UN: the Iraq Resolution

In October 2002, the House voted on the Spratt Amendment, which said that if the UN Security Council did not pass a resolution to use force in Iraq, the President should return to Congress for such authorization. In November 2002, PIPA asked a question that addressed how the public wanted their member of Congress to vote on such an issue. Congress voted down the Spratt amendment by a 64% majority; the public favored such a multilateral approach by a 65% majority.

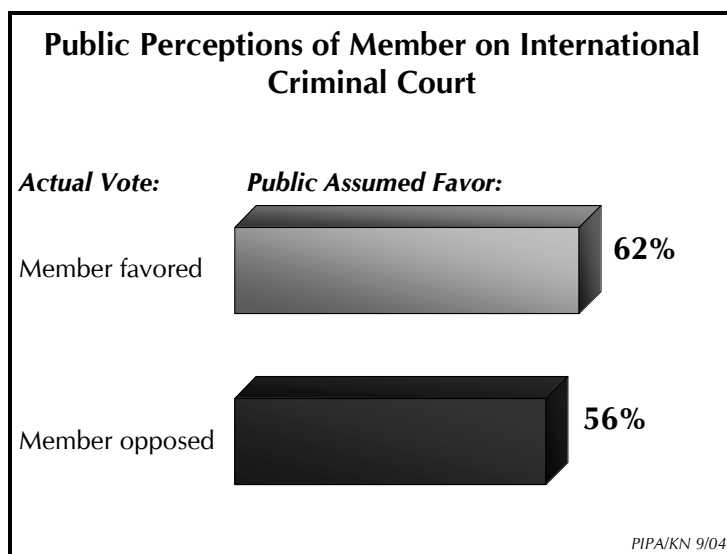
Fifty-seven percent of the public expected that their member would favor using force in Iraq only with the approval of the UN and allies. In districts where the member voted in favor of the Spratt amendment, 62% of constituents expected their member to do so; for members who voted against the Spratt amendment, 55% of people from those districts still expected that their member would vote in favor of it. Thus only a small percentage were actually influenced by the reality of how their member voted.



International Criminal Court

The International Criminal Court is another issue in which the public has a strong majority position; a 76% majority favored US participation. Using the “Nethercutt amendment” (discussed above) as the criterion vote, the House rejected the ICC by 241 to 166, or 59%. This was a largely partisan vote in the House, with 201 Republicans voting in favor of the amendment (against the ICC) and 154 Democrats voting against it.

Does the public understand the differences between their own views and the actions of their representatives on this issue? A 57% majority believed that their own member would vote in the pro-ICC direction. In examining individual districts where the member effectively voted for the ICC, 62% of constituents assumed that was how the member voted. In districts where the member effectively voted against the ICC, 56% still assumed their member would vote for it. Thus, again, the actual vote had only a slight effect on perceptions.



Missile Defense

Space-based missile defense was strongly advocated by President Bush and the debate in Congress revolved principally around whether to begin funding the system and initiate construction immediately or to conduct additional research and testing to ensure effectiveness before funding actual construction. The public favored more research by a solid majority (62%) and only 20% of the public in our survey favored building a missile defense system right away; 13% felt that a missile defense system should not be built at all.

When asked in September 2004 about their own member of Congress, 51% thought their member would want to continue research but not build a system; only 19% felt that their member favored building the system immediately; and 15% felt their member would not want to build at all. However, in May 2002, Congress rejected an amendment which would have prohibited funding the start of a space-based missile defense system by 159 to 253, a 61% majority.

Among members who voted against building a missile defense system (i.e. for the amendment), 64% of the public in their districts expected the member to oppose construction but favor research, whereas 61% of the public expected members to vote against construction but favor research in districts where the member voted to build. In the case of space-based missile defense, therefore, Congress as a whole voted against the preferences and expectations of their constituents by a wide margin. Linking individual members to their constituents' expectations for their vote, most members voted against their constituents' expectations, but a very small positive relationship (3 percentage points) was evident between citizen expectations and members' voting.

Compliance with Decisions of the World Trade Organization

A large majority of the American public (69%) felt that the US should comply with rulings of the World Trade Organization even when they go against the US. Fifty-six percent of the public thought that the member of Congress which represents them held this view. This is a pattern that we have commonly observed: people generally feel that Congress and particularly their own member share their opinions.

In June, 2004, the House passed H.R. 4520 supporting compliance with WTO rulings by 251 to 178, a 59% majority. Two hundred and three Republicans were joined by 48 Democrats in passing the bill.

An analysis of whether individual members were aligned with people in their districts produced an anomalous inverse relationship – in districts where the House member voted in favor of WTO, 52% of constituents surveyed thought their member favored WTO compliance, whereas in districts where the member voted against, 62% thought their member favored WTO compliance.

WTO compliance was alone among the issues evaluated where there was an inverse relationship: people from districts where their legislator voted in favor of WTO were 10 percentage points less likely to expect such a vote than those from districts where the legislators voted against it. This curious finding may be due to the cross pressures built into this issue. The vote was carried by a Republican majority, and WTO has an important constituency among the business community. However, yielding some US prerogatives to this international organization may not be popular with many grassroots Republicans. The Democrats, similarly, have a labor constituency, some of whom ardently oppose trade agreements. However, many other Democrats may look positively towards international agreements. The public's expectations about how Congress votes on such an issue may be particularly prone to error.

The Kyoto Agreement

To explore these issues in the context of another vote, we are able to compare the McCain-Lieberman climate change legislation voted down by the Senate in 2003 with survey data from PIPA and CCFR. Across many polls, a majority of the public has favored participation in the Kyoto agreement on climate change (in CCFR studies, 64% in 2002 and 71% in 2004). McCain-Lieberman incorporates some of the less burdensome requirements of Kyoto into domestic legislation.

A majority of the public (55%) in the September 2004 PIPA/KN survey assumed that most of Congress favored participating in the Kyoto agreement, despite the fact that a year earlier the Senate had voted against McCain-Lieberman. In states where both Senators voted for the legislation, 60% of the public assumed that the majority of Congress favored McCain-Lieberman; in states where both Senators voted against it, 53% assumed that the majority of Congress favored Kyoto. While overall, the public does not recognize that on Kyoto the Senate has been voting against their preferences, some of this message gets through in districts where both Senators have voted either for or against it.¹

Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty

A Senate vote on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty also offers an opportunity to examine the relationship between public expectations of legislators and actual votes. In October 1999 the Senate voted on the CTBT and narrowly rejected the treaty by 52 to 48. CCFR polled on a treaty prohibiting nuclear testing in 2002 and 2004; PIPA/KN also did polls of the public on the issue in 2002 and 2004. Across all polls in both years, the public strongly favored a nuclear test ban treaty.

A substantial majority of the public (67%) assumed that their own senators would support a nuclear test ban (PIPA/KN, 2002). In states where both senators had supported the treaty, 69% of the public had expected this position; and in states where both *opposed* it, 65% of citizens expected that both senators *favored* a treaty, a difference of only 4 percentage points.

The above topics represent the set of foreign policy issues where we have public opinion data, public perceptions of Congress' positions, and specific votes. (There are also a set of foreign policy issues where less complete data are available, usually because of the lack of an analytically usable vote in Congress; these issues have been discussed in earlier sections.)

A Summary of Voter Preference, Perceptions of Legislator Positions, and Actual Votes

What can we conclude from examining voter preferences, impressions of legislators' positions, and votes in Congress? Clearly, citizen preferences and expectations for their legislators *translate poorly* into Congressional votes on foreign policy matters.

The public's *perceptions* of where their lawmakers stood on the six foreign policy issues covered in this section rarely corresponded with actual votes in Congress. They did so only in the case of the WTO vote. Public perceptions of their member's positions on these foreign policy issues were determined far more by the public's own views than by an appreciation of how their member was likely to vote. It is clear that the public tends to project their preferences onto their legislators and that there is little information how their representative votes on foreign policy that disrupt these projections.

¹ The study does not include data on this topic for respondents' perceptions of their own member.

There was an identifiable but small relationship between public perceptions of their own legislators and how legislators voted on issues. Usually, constituents from a district or state where legislators voted one way on an issue differed in their perceptions from constituents where the legislator voted the other way. This difference ranged from 4 to 9 points across five issues. Clearly there is some detectable effect from a legislator's actual positions among some members of the public, but the relationship is so weak that it seems unlikely to affect the policy process in Congress.

METHODOLOGY

The poll was fielded by Knowledge Networks, a polling, social science, and market research firm in Menlo Park, California, with a randomly selected sample of its large-scale nationwide research panel. This panel is itself randomly selected from the national population of households having telephones and subsequently provided internet access for the completion of surveys (and thus is not limited to those who already have internet access). The distribution of the sample in the web-enabled panel closely tracks the distribution of United States Census counts for the US population on age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, geographical region, employment status, income, education, etc.

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

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