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The Public's View of Foreign Trade: Pragmatic Internationalism

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The Public's View of Foreign Trade: Pragmatic Internationalism

*By Gus Koehler
Ph.D.*

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*Prepared at the Request of
Assemblymember Sally Havice*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Cold War has ended. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), World Trade Organization (WTO), the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and the European Union have changed the global political and economic landscape in only a few short years. This review draws together responses from national and California public opinion surveys over the past ten years to paint a broad picture of the public's views on foreign trade.

Neither trade isolationism nor international activism have become dominant directions in American public opinion. What has emerged is adoption by the public of a position best characterized by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations as "pragmatic internationalism."¹ "Pragmatic internationalism" means that Americans are generally committed to an active trade and foreign relations role for the U.S. in the world.² Despite polling limitations, the accumulated findings over a ten-year period support the view that the public is generally aware of both the positive and negative impacts of foreign trade on their home life.³ The public has also become more concerned about economic vulnerability, which, in turn, affects opinions about broader international issues (U.S. policy toward Japan and China, for example).

The various limitations of public opinion polls and the fluid nature of public opinion, make it difficult to precisely describe the public's views on foreign trade policy. Only national or state polls conducted by established and well-known pollsters are cited in this review. Nonetheless, different polls, even completed at the same time, may record significant differences in opinion about specific issues depending on how the question is worded, the size of the sample, the surveyed geographic region, and other factors. A poll may cause the respondent to develop an opinion in response to poll questions, an opinion that they may not have held prior to being asked. In nearly all cases, the pollster did not ask the same question from year to year, nor did different pollsters use the same questions. Coverage of significant foreign trade issues is quite spotty and varies over the ten-year period covered in this review. In some cases, different polls have been pulled together in a single graph in an attempt to show historical trends.

In general, public opinion polls suggest that Americans tend to view economic rather than military power as the most significant measure of global strength. But the public and its leaders disagree on the level of support they give this viewpoint. In 1998, 63 percent of the public and 89 percent of the nation's leaders* agreed that economic power is the most significant measure of global strength, a 26 percentage point difference.⁴

* Unless noted otherwise, this term follows the Chicago Council of Foreign Relations (CCFR) usage which defines "leaders" as: "Americans in senior positions with knowledge of international affairs. Roughly, equal proportions were included from the House of Representatives, the Senate, and the administration. Leaders were also drawn from the business community, the media, academia and private foreign policy institutes. A smaller number of leaders was drawn from national labor unions, churches and special interest groups relevant to foreign policy." John E. Rielly, *American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy 1999* (Chicago: the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 1999) at <http://www.ccf.org>.

A similar and long-standing difference has existed between the U.S. public and U.S. leaders across several foreign trade and policy dimensions (Table 1). Concerns about

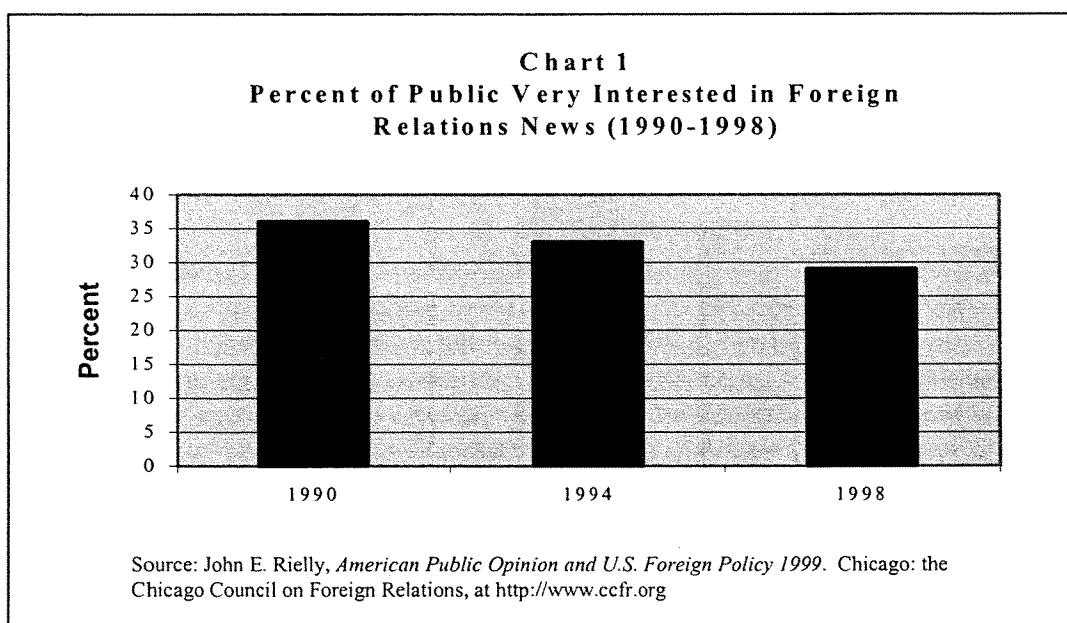
Table 1 Differences in opinion between U.S. public and leaders agreeing with the following statements (excluding "no opinion") (1998)			
	Public	Leaders	Gap
Economic competition from low-wage countries is a critical threat.	69%	31%	38%
Protecting the jobs of American workers is a very important goal.	83%	45%	38%
Tariffs are necessary to protect certain manufacturing jobs.	60%	36%	24%
The U.S. does not have a vital interest in Brazil.	58%	24%	34%
The U.S. does not have a vital interest in Mexico.	29%	6%	23%
The U.S. should not contribute to the IMF to meet world financial crisis.	67%	16%	51%
Economic competition from Japan is a critical threat.	47%	14%	32%
Source: John E. Rielly, <i>American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy 1999</i> (Chicago: the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 1999), p. 38. (Available at http://www.ccfir.org .)			

international economic competition and job loss are of greater concern to the general public than to the leaders, as the first three questions in Table 1 indicate. Other polls have found that the public is more likely to say that the U.S. has a vital interest in a foreign nation when an economic and political crisis occurs there.⁵ As Table 1 shows, the general public is also much more inclined than leaders to agree that the U.S. does not have a vital interest in Brazil. In the case of Mexico, a large majority of the public and leaders agree the U.S. has a vital interest in Mexico, but the magnitude of agreement varies. The general public is also less positively inclined than leaders toward the U.S. contributing to the International Monetary Fund. A little less than half of the public, compared to only 14 percent of leaders, sees economic competition with Japan as a threat.

The differences between opinions of the U.S public and leaders may reflect the leaders' more detailed knowledge of economic policy, and perhaps their relatively more secure economic position. In some cases, leaders may have failed to educate and persuade the public to their view. There also may be substantial differences in the ways in which economic foreign policy outcomes affect the two groups, leading to differences in perceived personal risk or benefit. Blue-collar workers, for example, have a direct stake in the movement of manufacturing jobs overseas.

PUBLIC INTEREST IN FOREIGN TRADE NEWS

In 1999, 39 percent of Americans felt that they were very knowledgeable or knowledgeable about foreign trade, compared to 44 percent reporting little or no knowledge.⁶ Nonetheless, public interest in national news, U.S. foreign relations, and news about other countries declined from 1994 through 1998. Interest in news about foreign countries, defined as "very interested," declined from a high of 36 percent in 1990 to 33 percent in 1994, to 29 percent in 1998.⁷ Even so, this interest in foreign countries was higher than the period between 1974 and 1986.⁸ Outright lack of interest in foreign news has diminished somewhat over the long run. Individuals with higher levels of education or international travel experience are more apt to follow news of foreign countries (as much as 7 percentage points higher).⁹

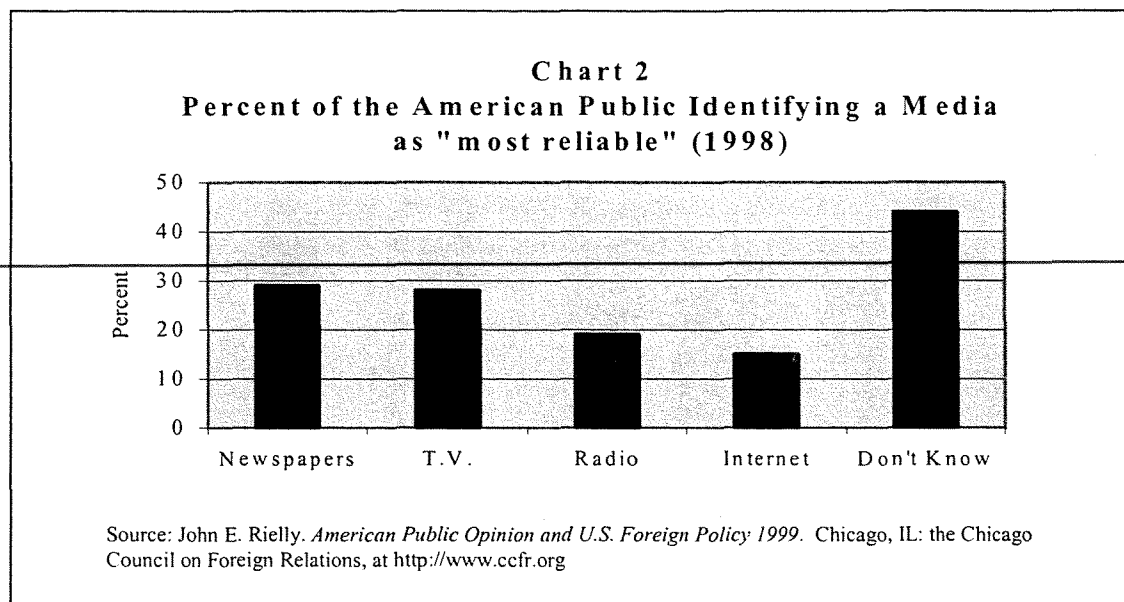


A characteristic pattern of episodic public attention to foreign trade issues is well illustrated by the recent debate over U.S. Congressional approval of the WTO treaty with China. In the first months of 2000, only 29 percent of Americans claimed to be following news about the issue either "very" or "somewhat closely." According to Gallup, "the current level of attention paid to China and the WTO is among the lowest registered when compared to more than 60 other news events that Gallup has measured since 1991."¹⁰ Yet, a few weeks later, when the issue was closer to a vote by Congress, 41 percent of the public said that they had been following the issue.* A similar pattern was seen during the NAFTA debates. In both cases, public interest increased as a significant political action became imminent and attracted more media coverage.

In 1998, newspapers and television were perceived by the public to be the most reliable source of foreign policy information (Chart 2). Radio was next and the Internet last.

* The public attention given to China's admission to the WTO was similar to that given to the "Who Wants to be a Millionaire" broadcast three months earlier. Gallup Poll, May 23, 2000.

Interestingly, an equal percentage (27 percent) of those surveyed felt that either the Internet was "not reliable" or is a "very reliable" source of foreign policy information.¹¹



Foreign Trade and Personal Economic Security

"Pragmatic internationalism," as defined in this analysis, means that the U.S. public tends to see U.S. foreign policy largely as an instrument to achieve personal economic security. In 1998, competition from low wage countries was considered a critical threat by 42 percent of the American public, but only 16 percent of the leaders held this view.¹² International terrorism, chemical and biological weapons, and other issues were also perceived as "critical threats" by the public. In each case, the public expressed significantly more concern than the leaders, showing an eight percent to 31 percent difference.¹³ The greatest difference centered on "protecting American jobs," with 80 percent of the public giving this a high priority as a U.S. foreign policy goal, compared to 45 percent of the leaders. These public opinion polls findings suggest that the general public and leaders do not rank foreign policy concerns the same way. In another example of this dichotomy, a 1994 poll found that, the public ranked international trade (free trade with other countries and trade relationships) sixth among the top ten issues. The leaders ranked it first, followed by concerns about the world economy (seventh).¹⁴

Most of the time the foreign policy issues have relatively limited visibility, but specific events can place them on the public's agenda. In a 1994 poll, respondents were asked to name a law or bill that Congress had recently passed. Only 5 percent identified NAFTA (enacted the previous year), compared to 44 percent who identified a crime bill, and 20 percent who mentioned the Brady handgun bill (37 percent could not name any bill).¹⁵ However in a second 1994 poll, the public gave top ranking to economic competition and immigration as significant threats. The public more widely believed that economic competition with Japan and risks to American workers were greater domestic threats than

did leaders (43 percent compared to 33 percent).¹⁶ Economic concerns continued to increase during the decade, with the public identifying U.S. world trade and the trade balance as significant issues in 1998. Leaders were even more concerned, placing the world economy and concerns about the Asian economic crises at the top of their list.¹⁷ A 2000 national poll of registered voters found that 48 percent agreed with the statement that “foreign trade has been bad for the U.S. economy,” compared to 34 percent who agreed that it had been good for the U.S. economy.¹⁸

The U.S. public is pragmatic about foreign trade, identifying the larger selection of goods and products imported from other countries as a positive. This view was expressed by 58 percent of the respondents in a 1999 poll. Imports were also perceived as helping poorer families to reduce their cost of living (69 percent agreed). The public also agreed that imports keep American manufacturers on their toes and make them work harder to improve the quality of their products (73 percent).¹⁹ In a second 1999 national poll, 56 percent of the respondents agreed that foreign trade provides an opportunity for economic growth through exports, compared to 36 percent who agreed that foreign trade is a threat because of imports.²⁰ In general, these polls report themes of economic security and pragmatism. Respondents support international competition and reaping the benefits of cheap foreign products at the lowest possible cost to U.S. jobs.

Prior to 1994, many Americans felt that foreign policy had a substantial impact on the nation's overall economy. This view changed in 1994 for a brief period. The *nation* was perceived as less vulnerable to foreign influences, even if *personal* vulnerability and job insecurity remained serious concerns.²¹ In the mid-1990s, when asked if trade pulls down wages, two-thirds of American respondents said yes.²² A 1995 poll found the public sharply divided by type of employment as to whether jobs being exported to other countries were a threat to “people like themselves”; 55 percent of blue-collar and union members saw a threat compared to 38 percent of executives and professionals.²³ One commentator held that this split could reflect the level of blue-collar unemployment at the time and fears about job retention. A general restructuring of the market place, resulting in the loss of many blue-collar jobs, had occurred between the late 1980s and mid-1990s.²⁴ As a result of plant closures and layoffs, some workers had to accept jobs at significantly lower wages.²⁵ In a poll published in 1996, about the same number of respondents who agreed that corporate downsizing was bad also agreed that foreign trade agreements had cost American jobs (59 percent and 54 percent respectively).²⁶

Public concern about competition with Japan dropped from 62 percent in 1994 to 45 percent in 1998, a period during which the U.S. economy improved but the Japanese economy floundered.²⁷ In 1998, the public again agreed that foreign policy affected the nation's overall economy (63 percent), but only 38 percent agreed that it had a major impact on their personal standard of living, reversing the opinions in 1994. Still, like the 1994 poll, those individuals most likely to believe that foreign policy had an impact on their personal style of life were those with less than a college education and yearly incomes under \$25,000.²⁸ A 1999 poll of Americans who reported a household job loss found that only 6 percent agreed that the loss resulted from a company moving to Mexico or another country, or that foreign competition was the reason for the job loss.²⁹

Californians were divided in 1996 in their opinions as to whether U.S. trade with other countries creates more or fewer jobs in the state. About one third agreed that foreign trade creates more jobs, with more men (41 percent) holding this position than women (26 percent). In contrast, 40 percent of the respondents felt that foreign trade leads to a reduction in jobs, with slightly more women (43 percent) than men (38 percent) agreeing.³⁰ A different question, asked in 1997, sought to determine Californians' perceptions about whether foreign trade helps or hurts the economy. Nearly a third of the respondents felt that trade either helps a lot or somewhat, in contrast to a quarter who felt that trade hurts the economy. Men were more likely to be positive (38 percent compared to 27 percent for women), while women were slightly more inclined to believe that trade hurts the economy (28 percent compared to 23 percent for men).³¹

Globalization

The International Monetary Fund defines globalization as "the growing economic interdependence of countries worldwide through the increasing volume and variety of cross-border transactions in goods and services and of international capital flows, and also through the more rapid and widespread diffusion of technology."³² A 1998 poll found that the public agreed that U.S. overall economic strength is more important than military strength (63 percent); 89 percent of leaders agreed. In addition, 54 percent of the public and 87 percent of the leaders felt that increasing connections between the U.S. economy and the economies of other nations are positive.³³ This level of confidence does not translate into personal economic security. A recent poll (2000) found that only 43 percent of the public agrees that the global economy will help the average U.S. citizen, compared to 52 percent who are of the opinion that it will hurt.³⁴

An individual's level of education and foreign travel experience are positively related to a supportive view of globalization. For example, in 1998, 58 percent of college graduates and 68 percent of individuals with post-graduate education favored globalization, compared to 46 percent of high school graduates. People with international travel experience were more supportive, 58 percent to 46 percent. Age was not a significant indicator, as about half the respondents in each age group supported globalization.³⁵

In a 1998 survey, the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations concluded:

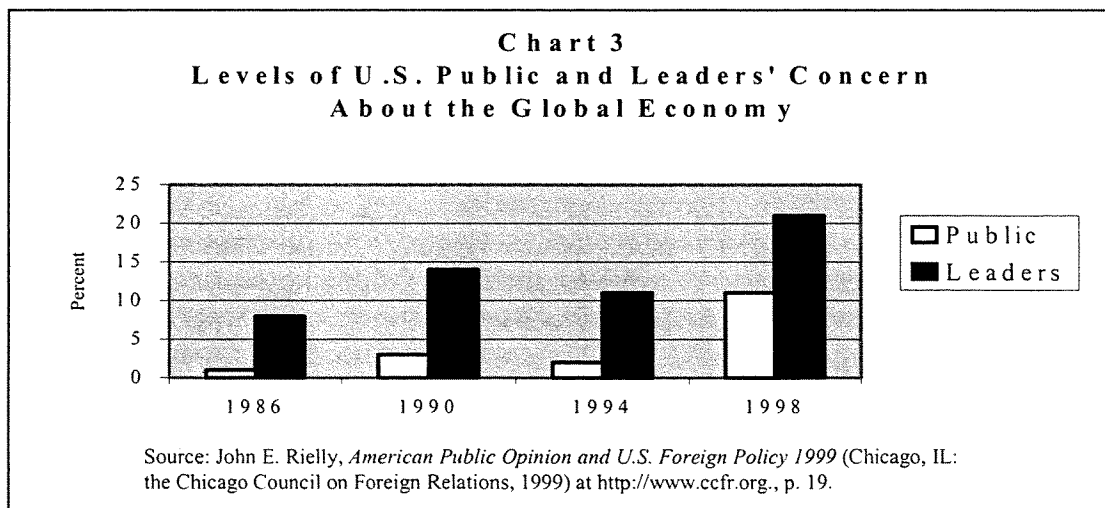
Findings that Americans are positive about economic interdependence are congruent with other established evidence that Americans are relatively sophisticated about the importance of overseas developments for the U.S. domestic economy. Among the public, U.S. foreign policy is viewed as having a major impact on our overall economy (cited by 66%) and on domestic unemployment (54%), though a relatively small 36% feel the same way about its influence on their own personal standard of living.³⁶

Even though polls find that the U.S. public is generally positive about globalization, and understands the interdependence between the domestic economy, employment and

overseas developments, poll findings (Chart 3) suggest a rising level of concern. In a 1998 poll about NAFTA and keeping jobs within the U.S., four-fifths of the citizen respondents ranked protecting American workers as "very important."³⁷ Leaders, in contrast, were much more focused on issues involving the world economy in 1998. Leaders most concerned were concentrated in the business community (25 percent), compared to 11 percent of labor leaders, and 16 percent of leaders in government or academia.³⁸

A 2001 review of recent public opinion polls indicates that U.S. citizens recognize both the costs and benefits of integration of the nation's economy with the world economy, but tend to weigh the costs as being higher than the benefits.³⁹ Second, the survey data supports earlier findings that less-skilled workers are much more likely to oppose free trade than more skilled workers.⁴⁰ Finally, this skills-preferences gap may reflect different wage-growth patterns since the early 1970s. Less skilled workers experienced close to zero or even negative wage growth relative to higher skilled workers.⁴¹

The Seattle World Trade Organization meeting in 1999 focused public attention on corporate foreign trade practices relating to labor and environmental issues. Frost summarizes labor and environmental concerns as follows: "As they see it, these corporations are abandoning workers and communities to pursue profits around the world. In so doing they are destroying U.S. jobs, undermining health and safety standards, exploiting foreign workers, and polluting the global environment."⁴² Ricardo Melendez-Ortiz, at the International Center for Trade and Sustainable Development,



Geneva, suggests that developing countries, who now make up a majority of the members of the WTO, are also concerned about the impact of these same issues in their own countries.⁴³ There may be some convergence of opinion between the American public's concerns about jobs and other globalization issues, and various non-government organizations and developing nations relative to the WTO and other global bodies and policies.

International Trade Barriers

Historically, support of trade barriers is tied to protecting American jobs, fairer prices and other factors. Although a plurality of voters supported trade barriers in 1994 (48 percent), this was the lowest percentage ever recorded in the Chicago Council of Foreign Relations national survey.⁴⁴ Higher income individuals were more inclined than the general public to support retaining tariffs.

Polls find a trend of general public support for reducing tariffs.⁴⁵ In 1997, the public either strongly or somewhat agreed (79 percent) that reducing trade barriers was an important way to increase U.S. trade with other countries.⁴⁶ Support for tariffs among leaders increased from 20 percent in 1994 to 34 percent in 1998.⁴⁷ Just six months before the WTO meeting in Seattle, a majority of Americans (59 percent) agreed that the U.S. should take the lead in reducing trade barriers.⁴⁸

INTERNATIONAL TRADE AGREEMENTS AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

In a 1997 survey, the U.S. public was divided about the job-creating potential of international trade agreements. A significant portion (42 percent) agreed that such agreements cost jobs. Nearly as many (41 percent) agreed that trade agreements both create and cost jobs. Only 7 percent agreed that trade only creates jobs.⁴⁹ A similar opinion pattern emerged in an October 2000 poll. About a third (35 percent) of the Americans surveyed felt that free trade agreements between the U.S. and foreign countries have helped the U.S. economy, about a third (32 percent) felt they have hurt it, and 24 percent were of the opinion that trade agreements do not make much difference.⁵⁰

In 1999, three quarters of Americans surveyed felt that human rights abuses, illegal transfers of technology, and allegations of illegal contributions in U.S. political races should be addressed during the WTO agreement negotiations. Still, less than a majority agreed about the effectiveness of such efforts. About 48 percent of the respondents felt that this approach is effective while 40 percent agreed that it does not work.

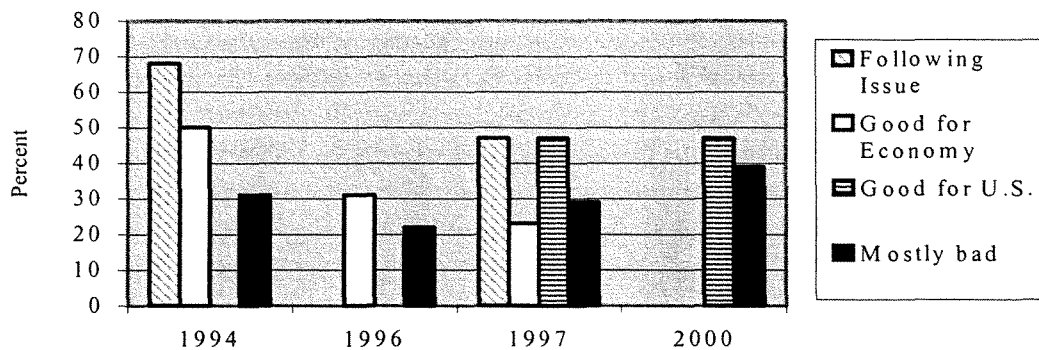
North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)

NAFTA was approved by the Senate and signed by the President in 1993. In December 1994, 68 percent of the public surveyed were following the issue.⁵¹ Three years later, far fewer were actively interested, with 43 percent saying they had "heard a lot" or "quite a bit" about the issue, and 57 percent reported "not much" or "little."⁵² This 25 percent drop in public attention could reflect either a decline in news coverage about NAFTA or a decrease in people's interest.

In 1994, half the public agreed that NAFTA was "mostly good" for the U.S. economy, compared to about a third who saw it as "mostly bad" (Chart 4). Union households tended to be more opposed (48 percent) than all working people (40 percent).⁵³ Leaders were the most supportive (86 percent). By 1996, the public had become less certain

about NAFTA, with about half moving into the "do not know" category (47 percent).⁵⁴ California public support for NAFTA was also evenly divided in a 1996 poll.⁵⁵ Two 1997 national polls provided different assessments of the public's view of NAFTA's economic impact. In response to a broad, more generalized question, the public agreed that NAFTA was good for the nation.⁵⁶ But, when asked more directly about the economy, they were less certain about how good it was.⁵⁷ This same ambivalence showed up in a 2000 poll, where the public responded that NAFTA did not have a strong negative impact.⁵⁸

Chart 4
U.S. Public Opinion About NAFTA (1994-2000)



Sources: Gallup Poll, December 1, 1994; General Social Surveys Poll, 1996; *Los Angeles Times* Poll, September 9, 1997; NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* Poll, September 15, 1997; Pew Research Center Poll, September 11, 1997; and Gallup Poll, May 23, 2000.

In 1994, 21 percent of business executives surveyed agreed that NAFTA would help to reduce costs and to increase demand.⁵⁹ A bare majority (52 percent) agreed NAFTA would help their businesses, compared to 48 percent who thought NAFTA would not make much of a difference.⁶⁰ A large majority (79 percent) of business executives agreed that non-U.S. companies would establish operations in Mexico to take advantage of NAFTA. In their view, the largest percentage of such companies would be Japanese (82 percent), followed by Korean (57 percent), Western European (55 percent), and South American (31 percent).⁶¹

The public was asked in 1994 to compare how well business and unions had handled the implementation of NAFTA. Business received a much higher rating (43 percent positive) than labor (27 percent positive).⁶²

The public grew more negative over time about the impact of NAFTA on jobs and wages. A majority (52 percent) of the public surveyed in a 1994 poll thought that NAFTA would help the overall job situation. In contrast, 32 percent agreed that it would hurt a lot.⁶³ In

1997, a plurality (45 percent) thought that the effect of NAFTA was to keep wages down⁶⁴ and that it would take jobs away (46 percent).⁶⁵ About a third agreed that NAFTA had already cost jobs in their area, and only 9 percent were of the opinion that the treaty had created jobs.⁶⁶

When asked in 1999 what the U.S. should do in regards to the NAFTA treaty, 24 percent of Americans polled agreed that the U.S. should continue with the treaty, 18 percent agreed the U.S. should pull out, and 40 percent were of the opinion that NAFTA should be amended.⁶⁷

World Trade Organization (WTO) and General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)

In 1994, when asked how much they had heard about GATT's new Uruguay Round to reduce trade barriers among its members (it had just been signed), about 64 percent of the public had heard about the agreement, while 36 percent knew little or nothing about it.⁶⁸ This level of awareness parallels that for NAFTA suggesting that about a third of the American public doesn't follow international treaty issues even when an important decision is made. More people do become interested as political decisions draw closer and media coverage increases.

In 1995, when Congress was preparing to consider the WTO's proposed role of administering the GATT treaty, the public was generally unaware of the new trade organization and its proposed trade rules.⁶⁹ Californians had about the same level of awareness as the national public. When asked how closely they followed the issue in the news, only about one-third of both national and California respondents were aware of the issue. In both cases, public interest and awareness increased as the issue moved toward a political decision. When asked if they favored or opposed the treaty, Californians tended to be more supportive than the public nationally.

In 2000, a national poll found that 62 percent of surveyed Americans agreed that U.S. participation in the WTO is good for the U.S., compared to 20 percent who believe it is bad.⁷⁰

International Monetary Fund (IMF)

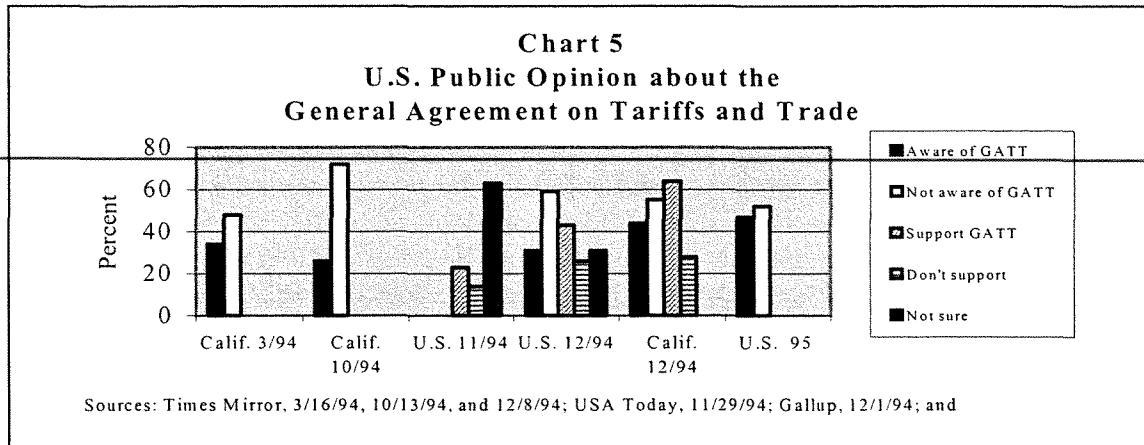
In 1998, only 25 percent of the public felt that the U.S. should contribute more money to the IMF to address global finance crises, and 51 percent were opposed. In contrast, 82 percent of the leaders polled supported IMF contributions.⁷¹

REGIONAL AND NATIONAL ISSUES

Europe

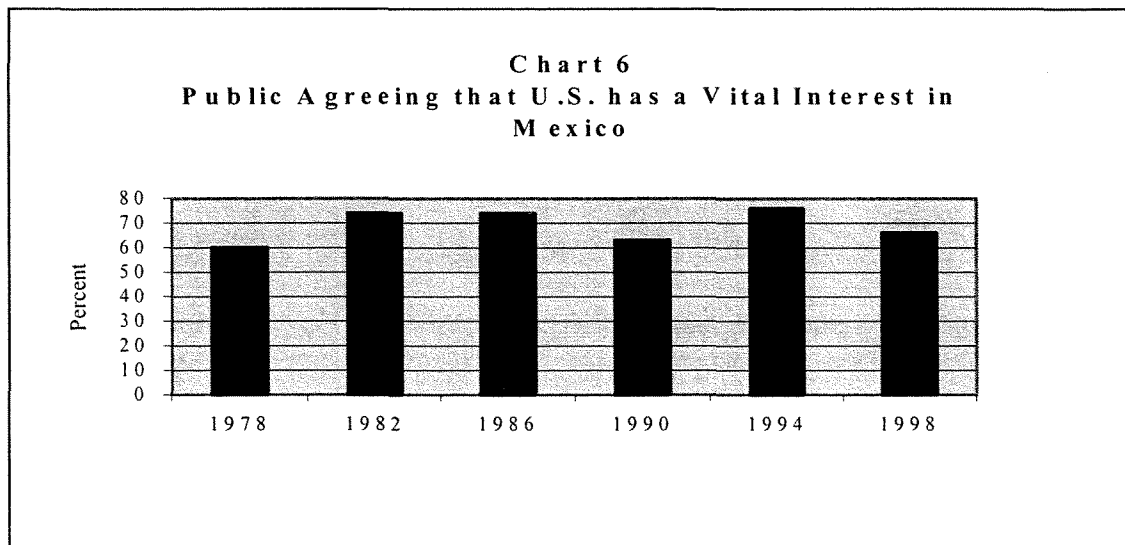
Public concern about economic competition between the U.S., Japan, and Europe was high in the late 1980s and early 1990s.⁷² In 1994, Americans saw Europe as more important than Asia to U.S. interests and viewed the European Economic Union

positively. About one third of the U.S. public believed that European Union trade practices were unfair, compared to 27 percent of the leaders polled.⁷³ In 1999, the public was concerned about how well the government was managing trade disputes with Europe, with 40 percent giving it a top priority.⁷⁴



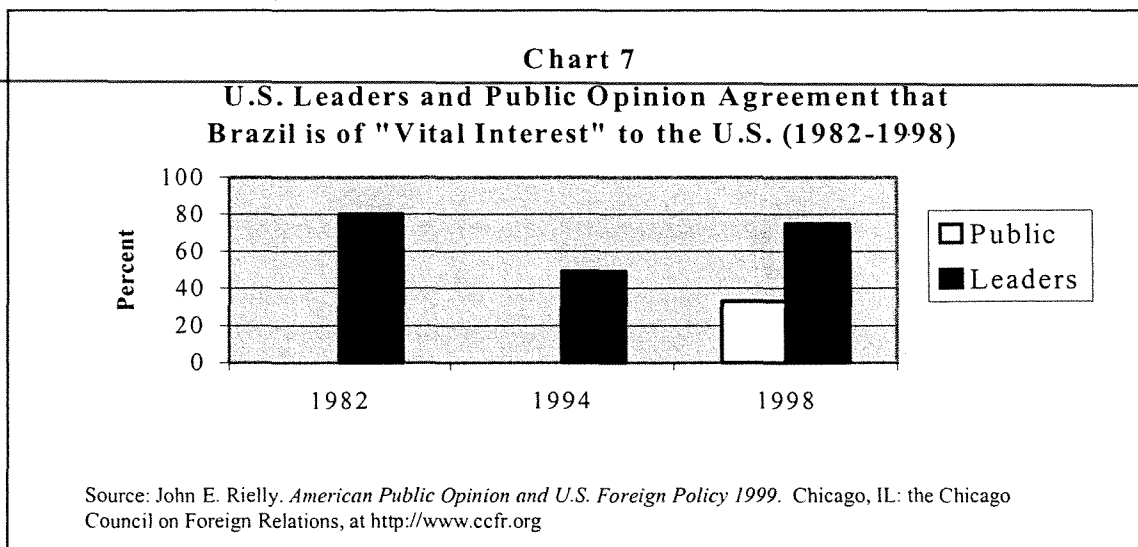
Mexico

The American public has varied in its perceptions about the importance of Mexico to U.S. economic interests (Chart 6). The variations seem to follow Mexico's internal economic and political cycles. Throughout the 1994-1998 period, U.S. leaders appeared to be less volatile than the public, in that they strongly felt (94-98 percent) that Mexico is of vital interest to the U.S.⁷⁵



Brazil

As with Mexico, American public interest seems to track the internal economic and domestic fortunes of Brazil.⁷⁶ Following the recent Asian economic crisis (1998), which also affected Brazil, U.S. leaders, and the public to a much lesser degree, agreed that Brazil is of vital interest to the U.S. (Chart 7). The leaders interest peaked sharply from 49 percent in 1994 to 75 percent in 1998, after a period of declining interest.



China

During the Cold War, Americans' attitudes toward China were generally unfavorable.⁷⁷ However, they became more positive over time, reaching a favorable 72 percent rating in a 1989 poll. Following the Tiananmen Square tragedy, there was a large decline to a favorable rating of only 34 percent in August 1989. Ten years later, a Gallup poll found this unfavorable attitude continued (38 percent favorable).⁷⁸ Another 1999 poll found Americans to be about evenly divided over which policy should be given higher priority with China: advancing economic interests (43 percent) or improving human rights (42 percent).⁷⁹ The public did not support the loss of American jobs in exchange for improving human rights in China.⁸⁰

In 1999, over half (54 percent) of Americans surveyed favored the just-completed agreement between China and the U.S. enabling China to join the WTO. This was about the same proportion of Americans who favored the NAFTA agreement in 1993. In contrast, around a third of those polled felt the treaty was a bad idea. Many Americans (60 percent) thought that the treaty would have a major impact on the U.S. economy.⁸¹ Less than half (43 percent) of American conservatives favored the agreement, compared to 62 percent of liberals and 60 percent of moderates. While 56 percent of the survey respondents agreed that the WTO agreement with China would help American companies, 59 percent felt that it would hurt American workers (compared to 35 percent who said it would help workers). Given the choice, respondents

(61 percent) were more inclined to wait for the Chinese government to make improvements in political and religious freedoms before entering into the trade agreement.⁸²

A 2000 poll found that 57 percent of Americans agreed that trade between the U.S. and China would mostly hurt American workers, while 28 percent said it would mostly help.⁸³ Slightly more of the respondents were inclined to believe that increased trade with China would benefit our economy than would hurt (48 percent to 37 percent). Younger Americans were more optimistic, with 59 percent of those surveyed between the ages of 18 and 29 believing that the U.S. economy would benefit. A third of this younger group felt that trade would also help U.S. workers. Americans with higher incomes or levels of education were most likely to agree (87 percent) that increased trade would mostly help the Chinese economy. Almost half of Americans agreed that increased trade would help human rights in China, while 18 percent had no opinion.⁸⁴

National Foreign Trade Goals

Most Americans favor an active role for the U.S. in world affairs (65 percent). This is particularly true for leaders (almost 100 percent). Both figures, reported for 1994, have remained relatively unchanged since World War II.⁸⁵ Nonetheless, the importance of foreign policy on the national agenda has declined. Not a single foreign policy issue appeared on the public's top ten list of national issues. This was even true of leaders. Domestic issues, particularly the recession and crime led both lists.⁸⁶

In 1996, 57 percent of Californians felt that it was important for presidential candidates to have the "right position" on foreign trade. This was particularly important to Republicans.⁸⁷ A hint as to what that position might be is revealed in a 1997 poll. In 1997, the American public was asked what role government should take to ensure that workers and businesses benefit from international trade. Forty percent of survey respondents agreed that government should not protect businesses or workers but should help both to compete; 37 percent felt that the government should protect workers; and 17 percent agreed that government should not be involved in the issue at all.⁸⁸

Notes

¹ John E. Rielly, *American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy 1999* (Chicago: the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations (CCFR), 1999). Posted at <http://www.ccfrr.org>.

² Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, *American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy 1995*, *American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy 1995*. Summary posted at <http://www.ccfrr.org/publications/opinion/findings.html>.

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