

***Campaign 2000***

**Political Rhetoric and Public Concerns :**

*A poll analyzing issues the public really cares about  
and wants the candidates to discuss.*

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# New Poll Shows Public at Odds with Gore and Bush on Major Issues

A new poll has found that very strong majorities of Americans have high levels of interest and concern about a range of issues that are rarely being discussed in the current political campaign. And on several key issues where candidates George W. Bush and Al Gore basically agree—the benefits of international trade and increased military spending relative to other priorities, for instance—the public does not.

The poll, commissioned by *The Nation* magazine and the Institute for Policy Studies, a Washington-based think tank, found that:

- **Despite the booming economy many Americans worry about the disenfranchised: they show concern for the many Americans without health insurance (91%) and the gaps between rich and poor (74%). An overwhelming majority (81%) supports an increase in the minimum wage.**

- **While both candidates express enthusiasm for the growth of international trade, a huge majority of voters (83%) wants to see this growth moderated by other goals—protecting workers, the environment and human rights—even if this means slowing the growth of the economy.**

- **While both candidates are speaking in favor of increases in defense spending, a strong majority (63%) is interested in the possibility of redirecting some defense funds to education and other priorities.**

- **A clear majority considers it "very important" or "somewhat important" for the candidates to debate some of the foreign policy issues that are rarely being discussed, such as the comprehensive test ban treaty (80%) and contributing to international peacekeeping operations (86%). An equally strong majority (81%) wants the United States to work with other countries through the United Nations.**

"These results suggest a disconnect between the rhetoric of the political campaign and the reality of public concerns," says Katrina vanden Heuvel, editor of *The Nation*.

The poll was conducted in late September by the Center on Policy Attitudes (COPA), an independent social science research center closely associated with the University of Maryland. It asked questions that had been asked in previous polls over the last several years by the Pew Research Center; ABC News; the Center's own Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA, a joint program with the Center on Strategic and International Studies at the University of Maryland); *Newsweek*; and CBS News/*New York Times*.

These questions were asked again to see if the current political campaign has made much difference in public attitudes. Surprisingly, *The Nation*/IPS poll found that voter views and levels of interest on these issues are generally about as strong as they were in mid-1999—even though many of the issues tested received scant attention during the last 12 months of intensive campaigning.

"Despite the assurances of politicians that times have never been better at home and that globally we're in a new era of *Pax Americana*, we see that a majority of voters are, in poll after poll, worried by unfettered free trade, growing inequality at home and abroad, and U.S. unilateralism. They are out ahead of one or both of candidates Bush and Gore in believing fair trade is more important than free trade, supporting cuts in military spending and reinvesting in other programs, and wanting the U.S. to play by the rules through the United Nations," says John Cavanagh, Director of the Institute for Policy Studies.

## ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS

### Expanding Health Coverage to the Uninsured

Respondents were offered a series of topics and asked, "How important is it for you personally to hear what positions presidential candidates take on this issue?" Both Bush and Gore have proposed health care reforms. The poll question that received the strongest rating was "how to provide health insurance to children and adults who can't afford it," with 91% calling it very (69%) or somewhat (22%) important. When Pew asked the same question in October 1999, an identical 91% called it very (62%) or somewhat (29%) important. An October 1999 survey by Lake Snell Perry & Associates found that Americans would pay as much as \$50 more per year to assure that all in the U.S. have health coverage. Concern for the issue of the uninsured as a whole appears remarkably stable, though growing in intensity.

Americans are right to worry about the uninsured. Forty-three million Americans are uninsured today; every year, one million more people lose their health insurance; and every month alone, more than 100,000 children and their parents lose health coverage, according to *Straight Talk 2000*, a new report by Campaign for America's Future. The study estimates that with corporate downsizing and cuts in benefits, an estimated 12.5 million more people will lose employment-based health insurance by 2002.

### Education: The Gap Between Rich and Poor School Districts

Both Bush and Gore have made education a central plank of their domestic platform, focusing on fixing

"failing" schools. The broader problem of the gap between richer and poorer school districts has not been addressed on its own terms.

*The Nation*/IPS poll, however, found high public interest in this more basic issue. When asked "how to reduce the gap between rich and poor school districts in a fair way," 88% called this very (56%) or somewhat (32%) important. This shows some increase in intensity from October 1999, when 80% called it very (41%) or somewhat (39%) important in Pew's poll.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, the wealthiest school districts spend 56% more per student than the poorest school districts, and more than seven of ten teachers in low-income schools report lacking necessary materials for their classes.

## Closing the Income Gap Between the Rich and Poor

A domestic issue that the public seems to rate far more highly in importance than might be assumed during a period of economic prosperity is "how to reduce the gap between rich people and poor people in this country." Seventy-four percent said that it is very (44%) or somewhat (30%) important to them to hear candidates' positions on this issue, while just 24% said it is unimportant. This is down only slightly from the 81% who called the issue important (44% very important) in October 1999.

Consistent with this concern, a startlingly high number (68%) said they agreed with the statement, "Today it's really true that the rich just get richer while the poor get poorer" (completely agree, 33%; mostly agree, 35%). Only 28% disagreed. This, again, is only slightly down from the 72% (33% completely) who agreed in Pew's October 1999 poll—despite this year of extraordinary economic growth.

According to *State of Working America*, a new study by the Washington, D.C.-based Economic Policy Institute, the gap between rich and poor in the United States has widened in recent decades. Between 1979 and 1998, the study found, income for the lowest fifth of Americans fell by 5%, while it rose 38% for the top fifth of the population. (In sharp contrast, between 1947 and 1979, income for the lowest one-fifth grew by 120% and for the wealthiest one-fifth grew by 94%.) As candidate Gore frequently notes, the income gap has recently begun to narrow modestly for the first time in 20 years.

## Closing the Income Gap Between Black and White Americans

When asked, "Do you think that black Americans will ever be able to close the income gap and earn as much money as whites Americans," 67% of those polled said yes. However, the poll shows white Americans are much more optimistic about the prospects for African Americans to eventually close the gap. A strong majority of white Americans (71%) thought that the income gap would eventually be overcome, compared to 40% of African Americans and 50% of minorities as a whole.

An April 1999 *Newsweek* poll found almost identical results.

Consistent with the point of view that the wage gap was likely to persist, almost all African Americans (97%) considered a candidate's ideas on how to reduce the gap between rich people and poor people in this country to be important (very important 76%; somewhat important 21%). A strong majority of white Americans (72%) also considered this an important issue, but felt less strongly about it (very important 39%; somewhat 32%). Similarly, while support for raising the minimum wage was strong among white Americans (80% favored), it was overwhelming among African Americans, with 97% favoring raising the minimum wage.

EPI's *State of Working America* found that with the booming economy, the income gap between blacks and whites has narrowed slightly. In 1989, the median black family made 56.2% of what the median white family made, while in 1998, the median black family was making 60% of white families.

## Support for Increasing the Minimum Wage

While Gore has called for increasing the minimum wage by \$1.00, Bush has conditioned any rise on "not pricing entry-level workers out of the market."

In *The Nation*/IPS poll, an overwhelming 81% support "raising the minimum wage, which is now \$5.15 an hour"—nearly identical with the 83% who supported it in October 1999 (ABC) and 82% in September 1999 (Pew). In the current poll, only 17% were opposed.

Without another increase, the real value of the minimum wage will fall to \$4.67 (1999 dollars) by the year 2003, according to inflation projections by the Congressional Budget Office. Even with a dollar increase—to \$6.15 per hour—a full-time worker (working 2080 hours a year) would earn only \$12,792 a year, still below the 1998 federal poverty line of \$13,000 for a family of three according to IPS calculations.

## Shifting Money From Defense to Other Priorities

Both the Republican and Democratic presidential candidates have made increases in defense spending a cornerstone of their proposals for America's foreign and security policy. However, in the current poll, a majority approved of redirecting defense spending. Respondents were asked, "Imagine that the President and Congress decided to cut defense spending by 10% and directed this money to improving education, strengthening Social Security, and paying down the national debt instead. Would you support this move or not support this move?" A strong majority of 63% said they would support it, while 31% were opposed.

All respondents were then asked, "If the U.S. government cut defense spending by 10%, do you think that you would feel less secure, about as secure as you feel now, or more secure?" Fifty percent said they would

feel as secure as now and 12% said they would feel more secure, for a total of 62%; only 34% said that a 10% defense cut would make them feel less secure.

Nearly identical questions were asked by PIPA in November 1995, with the goals of "improving education, fighting crime and cutting the deficit" as the use for the redirected defense funds. At that time, a higher number—78%—supported redirecting funds, while 69% said they would feel about as secure as now, 5% said more secure, and 24% said less secure. It may be that the greatly improved fiscal picture, as well as the much-publicized assertions of a weakened military, have led about 15% to modify their support for redirecting defense funds.

Another newly-released poll conducted by COPA and Knowledge Networks, a for-profit company, focused on how Americans would allocate the federal discretionary budget—that portion of the budget that is not dictated by existing law—and how, faced with trade-offs, they would set priorities. By far, the largest reallocation of the discretionary budget change, in dollar terms, was a dramatic reduction in defense spending—on average 24%. Sixty-eight percent of respondents cut defense, while just 23% increased it.

What is striking is that when the public is asked simply if it favors cutting defense spending—rather than redirecting military funds to other priorities—more say no. For example, in May 2000, Gallup found that 31% believed the U.S. spends "too little" for "national defense and military purposes." Forty-four percent said current spending was "about right," while 22% thought it was "too much." What this suggests is that most Americans are not aware of the size of the defense budget. It is only when they are given the information about the size of the defense budget relative to other items in the budget that they express a willingness to cut.

Currently, the Pentagon receives about 50% of the discretionary budget and 98% of the total international budget. After falling in the early to mid-1990s, military spending is again increasing. More than a decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union, U.S. military spending remains at 90% of the cold war average. And despite the U.S.' unchallenged military dominance, Pentagon spending (more than \$300 billion for 2001) is over twice as much as the combined military budgets of the top ten nations defined as possible threats to U.S. security, according to a recent study by Foreign Policy In Focus.

## Balancing International Trade

While both candidates have expressed enthusiasm for the growth of international trade, an overwhelming majority of Americans favor balancing the growth of trade with other considerations—even if this may slow its growth. Eighty-three percent agreed with the statement: "International trade is an important goal for the United States, but it should be balanced with other goals, such as protecting workers, the environment, and human rights—even if this may mean slowing the growth of trade and the economy." Only 13% disagreed. A nearly identical question asked by PIPA in October 1999 (using the expression "free trade" instead

of "international trade") found a similar 88% in agreement.

According to United Nations statistics, trade and investment liberalizations have been accompanied by growing inequality over the past 15 years. For instance, between 1987 and 1998, a period of enormous global liberalization, the number of people living in extreme poverty—less than \$1 per day—increased from 1,183 million to 1,199 million, according to the World Bank's *World Development Report*. The *Report* also found that the gap in average incomes between the richest and poorest countries has widened greatly over the last several decades. In 1960, per capita GDP in the richest 20 countries was 18 times that in the poorest 20 countries. By 1995, this gap had widened to 37 times.

## High Interest in U.S. Foreign Policy Issues

Perhaps more surprising are the levels of interest in foreign policy subjects that have gone virtually untreated in the campaign, and were much more prominent in the news in 1999 than they are today. Eighty percent said it was very (49%) or somewhat (31%) important to hear candidates' views on "whether the U.S. should participate in a treaty to ban all underground nuclear tests." This is virtually the same as the 83% who said so in the fall of 1999, when the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty was under active debate in the U.S. Senate.

The current poll also tested support for a more unilateral U.S. approach to foreign affairs, of the kind implied by the Senate's rejection of the test ban treaty. The poll posed, "Since the U.S. is the most powerful nation in the world, we should go our own way in international matters, not worrying too much about whether other countries agree with us or not." Only 31% agreed, while a strong majority of 66% disagreed. This is nearly identical to Pew's March 1999 result with the same question, when 26% agreed and 69% disagreed.

Similarly, another rarely discussed issue in the campaign is "the debate about whether U.S. troops should go into another country to stop the killing of innocent civilians in a civil war." Eighty-six percent called this issue very (50%) or somewhat (36%) important, slightly down from 91% (56% very important) in fall 1999. General interest in this foreign policy problem apparently remains high despite the absence of substantive political debate about the role of the U.S. in current international humanitarian and peacekeeping missions.

Consistent with this, an overwhelming 81% said that "now that the cold war has ended," it is extremely (41%) or somewhat (40%) important, "for the United States to cooperate with other countries by working through the United Nations." This question has not been asked since March 1994, when it was posed by CBS/New York Times and found a similar 89% endorsing the importance of cooperation with other countries through the UN.

*This report was prepared by Martha Honey and Erik Leaver of Foreign Policy In Focus (a joint project of the Institute for Policy Studies and the Interhemispheric Resource Center) and Clay Ramsey and Stephen Kull of the Center on Policy Attitudes.*

# The Nation/IPS Questionnaire and Results

September 21-25, 2000

600 Respondents

Margin of error: +/-4%

To prepare this study, a nationwide poll was conducted, along with a comprehensive review of previous polls done by other organizations.

The poll was conducted September 21-25, 2000 with a sample of 600 American adults. Communications Center, Inc. interviewed respondents by telephone on a CATI system, using a questionnaire designed by the Center on Policy Attitudes for *The Nation* and the Institute for Policy Studies. Respondents were chosen from all households in the continental United States by a random digit dialing sample generated by Scientific Telephone Samples.

The margin of error was +/-4%.

The order and placement of some questions were varied to reduce any biases that might derive from question order.

I'd like to ask you about the importance of some issues to this year's presidential campaign. The (first/next) one is: [ITEM]

**How important is it for you personally to hear what positions presidential candidates take on this issue—very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not at all important?**

**1. How to reduce the gap between rich and poor school districts in a fair way.**

	<i>The Nation/IPS</i> September 2000	Pew October 1999
Very important	56.1	41
Somewhat important	31.6	39
Not too important	6.9	12
Not at all important	3.7	7
Don't know/Refused	1.8	1
<b>Total Important</b>	<b>87.7</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Total Not Important</b>	<b>10.6</b>	<b>19</b>

**2. The debate about whether U.S. troops should go into another country to stop the killing of innocent civilians in a civil war.**

	<i>The Nation/IPS</i> September 2000	Pew October 1999
Very important	49.8	56
Somewhat important	35.9	35
Not too important	7.9	6
Not at all important	4.7	2
Don't know/Refused	1.6	1
<b>Total Important</b>	<b>85.7</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>Total Not Important</b>	<b>12.6</b>	<b>8</b>

**3. How to provide health insurance to children and adults who can't afford it.**

	<i>The Nation/IPS</i> September 2000	Pew October 1999
Very important	69.2	62
Somewhat important	21.9	29
Not too important	4.3	6
Not at all important	4.1	2
Don't know/Refused	.5	1
<b>Total Important</b>	<b>91.1</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>Total Not Important</b>	<b>8.4</b>	<b>8</b>

**4. How to reduce the gap between rich people and poor people in this country.**

	<i>The Nation/IPS</i> September 2000	Pew October 1999
Very important	43.7	44
Somewhat important	30.3	37
Not too important	14.9	10
Not at all important	9.2	9
Don't know/Refused	1.8	-
<b>Total Important</b>	<b>74.0</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Total Not Important</b>	<b>24.1</b>	<b>19</b>

**5. Whether the U.S. should participate in a treaty to ban all underground nuclear tests.**

	<i>The Nation/IPS</i> September 2000	Pew October 1999
Very important	49.2	56
Somewhat important	30.8	27
Not too important	12.0	7
Not at all important	5.7	8
Don't know/Refused	2.3	2
<b>Total Important</b>	<b>80.0</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Total Not Important</b>	<b>17.7</b>	<b>15</b>

**6. Would you support or oppose raising the minimum wage, which is now five dollars and fifteen cents an hour?**

	<i>The Nation/IPS</i> September 2000	ABC October 1999
Support	80.7	83
Oppose	16.9	15
Don't know/Refused	4	2

**7. International trade is an important goal for the United States, but it should be balanced with other goals, such as protecting workers, the environment, and human rights—even if this may mean slowing the growth of trade and the economy.**

	<i>The Nation/IPS</i> September 2000	PIPA October 1999
Agree	83.4	88
Disagree	12.6	9
Don't know/Refused	4	3

**8. Do you think that black Americans will ever be able to close the income gap and earn as much money as white Americans, or not?**

	<i>The Nation/IPS</i> September 2000		
	All	Whites	Blacks
Will be able	67.2	71	40
Will not be able	22.2	18	52
Don't know/Refused	10.6	11	8

Princeton Survey Research  
April 1999

	All	Whites	Blacks
Will be able	67	71	42
Will not be able	23	19	49
Don't know/Refused	10	10	9

**9. Imagine that the President and Congress decided to cut defense spending by 10% and directed this money to improving education, strengthening Social Security and paying down the national debt instead. Would you support this move or not support this move?**

	<i>The Nation/IPS</i> September 2000	PIPA November 1995
Support	63.4	78
Not support	30.9	19
Don't know/Refused	5.7	3

[Nov. 1995: "...improving education, fighting crime, and cutting the deficit"]

**10. If the U.S. government cut defense spending by 10%, do you think that you would feel less secure, about as secure as you feel now, or more secure?**

	<i>The Nation/IPS</i> September 2000	PIPA November 1995
Less secure	34.2	24
About as secure as now	49.6	69
More secure	11.9	5
Don't know/Refused	4.3	2

**11. Now that the cold war has ended, how important do you think it is for the United States to cooperate with other countries by working through the United Nations—extremely important, somewhat important, not so important or not important at all?**

	<i>The Nation/IPS</i> September 2000	CBS/NY Times March 1994
Extremely important	41.2	50
Somewhat important	39.7	39
Not so important	7.0	6
Not important at all	10	3
Don't know/Refused	2.1	2
<b>Total Important</b>	<b>80.9</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>Total Not Important</b>	<b>17.0</b>	<b>9</b>

**12. I'm going to read you a statement. Please tell me whether you agree or disagree. Since the U.S. is the most powerful nation in the world, we should go our own way in international matters, not worrying too much about whether other countries agree with us or not.**

	<i>The Nation/IPS</i> September 2000	Pew March 1999
Agree	30.7	26
Disagree	65.8	69
Don't know/Refused	3.6	5

**13. Now I'm going to read you a statement. Please tell me if you completely agree with it, mostly agree with it, mostly disagree with it, or completely disagree with it: Today it's really true that the rich just get richer while the poor get poorer.**

	<i>The Nation/IPS</i> September 2000	Pew October 1999
Completely agree	33.1	33
Mostly agree	35.1	39
Mostly disagree	18.4	20
Completely disagree	10.0	6
Don't know/Refused	3.5	2

<b>Total Important</b>	<b>68.2</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>Total Not Important</b>	<b>28.4</b>	<b>26</b>

**14. Now, just a few questions for statistical purposes. In politics today, do you think of yourself as:**

Strongly Republican	16.0
Leaning toward Republican	12.0
Leaning toward Democrat	11.3
Strongly Democrat	21.5
Independent	31.0
Other	5.1
Don't know/Refused	3.1

<b>Total Republican</b>	<b>28.0</b>
<b>Total Democrat</b>	<b>32.8</b>
<b>Total Independent</b>	<b>31.0</b>

**15. In what year were you born?** (age calculated)

18-29	22.0
30-39	21.1
40-49	20.4
50-59	14.2
60-69	9.9
70 and over	12.4
Refused	-

**16. What ethnic group do you consider yourself to be part of? [IF UNCLEAR:] Would that be White, African American, Hispanic, or another group?**

White/Caucasian	78.2
Black/ African American	10.2
Hispanic/Latino	3.6
Other	5.7
Don't know/Refused	2.2

**17. What is the highest level of education that you have had:**

Less than high school	17.2
High school graduate	32.6
Some college	26.3
4 year college degree	15.4
Advanced degree	7.1
Don't know/Refused	1.4

**18. Here is a range of household incomes. Just stop me when I read an amount that is more than the correct category for your household income for last year.**

\$15,000	18.4
\$30,000	18.0
\$50,000	23.5
\$75,000	16.8
\$100,000	4.8
More than \$100,000	6.2
Don't know/Refused	12.3

**Gender (recorded by observation)**

Male	48.0
Female	52.0