



## PUBLIC OPINION STRATEGIES



**TO: INTERESTED PARTIES**

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**DT: OCTOBER 10, 2012**

**RE: BETTER WORLD CAMPAIGN – INDEX OF PUBLIC OPINION ON INTERNATIONAL  
ISSUES AND U.S. FOREIGN POLICY**

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

National research conducted from October 4-7, 2012 by Public Opinion Strategies and Hart Research Associates, on behalf of the Better World Campaign, shows:

- In addition to the economy and jobs, foreign policy is also an important vote issue this election cycle.
  - Majorities of Republicans, Independents, and Democrats rate a candidate's position on international issues and foreign policy as important to determining their vote.
- Voters do not believe the presidential candidates are talking enough about foreign policy in the campaign.
- If voters were able to pose questions to the candidates during the foreign policy debate, they would want to know more about the candidates' policies on ending the war in Afghanistan, the impact and support of our relationship with Israel, addressing the development of nuclear weapons in Iran, what they would do to improve the situation in the Middle East (please see the detailed findings section for the full list of topics mentioned).

- An important frame of reference for voters is that they want the United States' to achieve its foreign policy goals by working with major allies and through international organizations rather than acting on our own. This is true among Republicans, Independents, and Democrats.
- In talking about international issues and the U.S. approach to foreign policy, language makes a difference to voters. Talking about internal cooperation works better than talking about isolationism and America going it alone.

**DETAILED FINDINGS:**

<b><u>Question:</u></b>	<b><u>Answer:</u></b>
<p><b>What do voters believe is important about foreign policy this election cycle?</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1) For a majority of voters, it is an important issue this cycle.</b></li> <li><b>2) Voters do not think candidates are talking enough about foreign policy so far in the campaign.</b></li> <li><b>3) Voters want to know what a candidate is going to do about ending the war in Afghanistan and bringing the troops home, understanding how our support of Israel impacts their foreign policy agenda, how to address the nuclear weapons issue with Iran, and what their policies will be in the Middle East moving forward.</b></li> <li><b>4) It is about working with our major allies and international organizations not acting on our own.</b></li> <li><b>5) It is about internal cooperation, not isolationism.</b></li> </ol>

1. Three out of four voters (74%) rate a candidate’s position on international issues and foreign policy as being important in determining how they will vote (rating of 7-10). As a comparison point, nearly all voters (96%) rate a candidate’s position on the economy and jobs as being important in determining how they will vote (rating of 7-10).
  - We asked respondents to rate the issue on a scale of one to ten, where one is not important at all and ten is very important.
  - Majorities of Republicans, Independents, and Democrats rate a candidate’s position on international issues and foreign policy as important to their vote.

*Importance of a candidate’s position on international issues and foreign policy*

	<u>% Rating 7-10</u>	<u>Mean Score</u>
<b>All Voters</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>7.6</b>
Republicans	73%	7.7
Independents	79%	7.7
Democrats	73%	7.6

- When asked why foreign policy is an important vote issue, respondents say it matters to them this year because:
    - It is important for the United States to have allies around the world and a candidate needs to be able to bring allies together.
    - It is important a candidate be seen as a strong leader around the world and the United States be a leader in the world.
    - Foreign policy is essential to the security and safety of the United States.
2. Nearly half of voters (47%) think the candidates running for president are not talking enough about international issues and foreign policy.
    - We asked respondents the following question: *“Do you think the candidates running for president are talking... too much...or...not enough...about international issues and foreign policy, or do you think they have been talking the right amount about international issues and foreign policy?”*

<u><b>All Voters:</b></u>	
Too Much	8%
Not Enough	47%
About The Right Amount	39%

- Republicans and Independents are more likely than Democrats to say the candidates are not talking enough about foreign policy.

	<u>GOP</u>	<u>IND</u>	<u>DEM</u>
Too Much	7%	7%	8%
Not Enough	53%	49%	40%
About The Right Amount	34%	39%	44%

3. We asked an interesting open-ended question to better understand what voters want to hear from the presidential candidates heading into the foreign policy debate next week.

- We asked respondents the following question: *“As you may be aware, the presidential debate on foreign policy will be happening in about two weeks. Thinking specifically about foreign policy and international issues that deal with things happening outside of the United States and deal with things around the world, what one or two foreign policy questions would you want to ask the presidential candidates? What specifically would you want to hear them talk about on foreign policy in the debate?”*
- The topics most important to voters is to make sure the candidates address questions about:
  - Ending the war in Afghanistan/bring troops home;
  - The impact of our relationship and support of Israel;
  - How to address the development of nuclear weapons in Iran;
  - What to do in the Middle East;
  - Our continuous involvement in wars;
  - About our aid to other countries;
  - Dealing with terrorism;
  - Our economic involvement and dependence on China/Asia; and,
  - National security/border security.

Listed below are a selection of some of the types of questions voters wanted to ask the presidential candidates:

- *“How do we maintain American strength without being an international bully?”*
- *“How to deal with a nuclear Iran and what their vision is for the draw-down of troops in Afghanistan?”*
- *“I would like to know what the candidates’ response would be to the possibility of nuclear arms in Iran and what their response would be to the withdrawal of troops in Afghanistan and what are the ramifications of withdrawal?”*
- *“Iran’s nuclear program and the war in Afghanistan - I want to know what each of the candidates would do to remedy these issues.”*
- *“What is their Middle East strategy?”*

- *“What happened at the Libyan Consulate? What are we going to do about Iran – are we going to take any military action on Iran?”*
- *“I would like to know their position on the serious Syria conflict, if they plan to enter it and go to war.”*
- *“How are we going to continue our support of Israel and keep peace with the Muslim countries in the Middle East?”*

4. Voters overwhelmingly want the United States’ to achieve its foreign policy goals by working with major allies and through international organizations (78%) rather than acting on our own (18%).

- Respondents were asked the following question: *“To achieve our foreign policy goals, do you think it is better for the Unites States to work with major allies and through international organizations or act mainly on our own?”*
- Republicans, Independents, and Democrats agree with this more cooperative approach to foreign policy.

	<u><b>GOP</b></u>	<u><b>IND</b></u>	<u><b>DEM</b></u>
Major Allies/International Orgs	71%	81%	85%
Act on own	25%	14%	12%

5. We tested a number of short phrases and terms that could be used to describe different approaches to U.S. foreign policy over the next five years. International cooperation scores the highest (rating of 70).

- Respondents rated a number of short phrases/terms on a scale of zero to one hundred, where zero meant they had a very unfavorable impression of the term and one hundred means they have a very favorable impression of the term.

The table below shows the terms we tested and the overall mean rating score each received.

<b>Summary of International Policy Terminology - Ranked by % Mean Score</b>	<b>Mean Score</b>
International cooperation	70
Restoring American leadership abroad	69
An American century, which means America leads the free world and the free world leads the entire world	62
America doing its fair share around the world	61
America leading with greater force in the world	57
America working with global partners around the world and letting our partners take more of the lead	53
International burden-sharing	52
Multilateralism	51
Isolationism	34
America going it alone	33

6. We tested three statements on foreign policy. The approach focusing on international cooperation was the most compelling for voters in having an impact on their likelihood of voting for a candidate.

Listed below is the actual text of the statement on foreign policy we tested that scored the highest. A majority of voters (61%) said they would be more likely to vote for a presidential candidate in 2012 if they heard a candidate say this:

*“Candidate Miller says America cannot face all of its enemies or solve the world’s problems alone. Candidate Miller says we need to share the burden and not be the sole supplier of resources, finances, military forces, and diplomacy for peace in the world. Today, solutions to the world’s problems require international cooperation – we cannot do it alone. International cooperation is a better way of solving some of the world’s key problems. He says we need to work through international organizations like the United Nations to make sure America’s values and interests are respected around the world.”*

#### **METHODOLOGY:**

Public Opinion Strategies and Hart Research Associates conducted a national telephone survey of 800 registered voters (560 landline; 240 cell phone), from October 4-7, 2012, on behalf of the Better World Campaign. The purpose of the survey was to measure American attitudes toward international issues heading into the 2012 election. The margin of error on a sample of 800 interviews is  $\pm 3.5\%$ .