

# NATIONAL OPINION BALLOT REPORT

*RESULTS OF THE FOREIGN  
POLICY ASSOCIATION'S 2012  
NATIONAL OPINION SURVEY*



**F O R E I G N P O L I C Y A S S O C I A T I O N**  
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**OPINION BALLOTS** have been included with the Foreign Policy Association's *Great Decisions* since 1955 to enable participants to make their views known. Each year FPA sends the NATIONAL OPINION BALLOT REPORT to the White House, the departments of State and Defense, members of Congress, the media and concerned citizens.

## about GREAT DECISIONS balloters...

### A. How long have you participated in the GREAT DECISIONS program (i.e., attended one or more discussion sessions)?

This is the first year I have participated.	25%
I participated in one previous year.	14%
I participated in more than one previous year.	61%

### B. How did you learn about the GREAT DECISIONS program?

Word of mouth	42%
Local library	7%
FPA Web site	4%
Promotional brochure	5%
Other organization	42%

### C. Where does your GREAT DECISIONS group meet?

Private home	16%
Library	12%
Community center	23%
Learning in retirement	16%
Other	33%

### D. What is your sex?

Female	62%
Male	38%

### E. Have you been abroad during the last two years?

Yes	50%
No	50%

### F. Do you know, or are you learning, a foreign language?

Yes	49%
No	51%

### G. What is the highest level of formal education you have completed?

Some high school	0.2%
High school degree	2%
Some college	11%
College graduate	36%
Advanced degree	50%

### H. How often are you asked for your opinion on foreign policy?

Often	15%
Sometimes	50%
Hardly ever	35%

### I. How many hours, on average, do you spend reading one GREAT DECISIONS chapter?

Less than 1 hr.	19%
1–2 hrs.	61%
3–4 hrs.	18%
More than 4 hrs.	3%

### J. Would you say you have or have not changed your opinion in a fairly significant way as a result of taking part in the GREAT DECISIONS program?

Have	51%
Have not	27%
Uncertain	23%

FOREIGN POLICY ASSOCIATION  
*Karen M. Rohan, Editor in Chief*  
*Leslie Huang, Assistant Editor*  
*Tyler Benedict and Catherine Ingram, editorial interns*

*Additional copies of this report may be obtained free of charge from the Foreign Policy Association, 470 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016-6819.*

*Ballots received by June 30 were tabulated by Peter Abrams Research Services, NYC.*

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# Ballot Report Highlights

**OPINION BALLOTS** are included in each GREAT DECISIONS, a briefing book prepared annually by the nonpartisan, not-for-profit Foreign Policy Association. This year, 20,623 ballots were returned by Great Decisions program participants who took part in the study and discussion of eight major foreign policy topics. The five states whose residents submitted the largest number of ballots are, in decreasing order, Florida, California, New York, Colorado and Arizona. The largest number of ballots were returned for the “Middle East realignment” and “Mexico” topics.

The ballots cast by participants demonstrate:

## Support for:

- ✓ re-evaluating relations with semidemocratic allies such as Saudi Arabia and Bahrain
- ✓ using diplomacy and aid (funding, training, etc.) to promote democracy
- ✓ restoring the ban on semi-automatic weapons to curb drug violence
- ✓ promoting open networks in countries where cyberspace is filtered
- ✓ ratifying the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea
- ✓ developing alternative energy
- ✓ ratifying the Kyoto Protocol

## Opposition to:

- ✓ individual nations’ handling fisheries management
- ✓ using sanctions or military force to promote democracy
- ✓ undertaking anti-drug operations in Mexico without Mexican permission
- ✓ sole U.S. leadership of anti-drug cartel initiatives in North and Central America

## GREAT DECISIONS 2012 TOPICS

Middle East realignment

Promoting democracy

Mexico

Cybersecurity

Exit from Afghanistan & Iraq

Oceans

Indonesia

Energy geopolitics

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*The popular revolts and upheaval of the Arab Spring have radically changed the face of the Middle East. What lies ahead for the Middle East’s transition to democracy? What are the prospects for the governments that have held out in this new order? With many longtime U.S. allies ousted, how will the U.S. recalibrate its relations with the new regimes?*

*\*In this REPORT, totals may not equal 100% because percentages are rounded.*

**ISSUE A.** The U.S. is on the “right side” of the new governments and movements that have been borne from the upheaval in the Middle East.

Strongly agree	5%
Agree	63%
Disagree	29%
Strongly disagree	3%

**ISSUE B.** The NATO mission in Libya was championed and led by Britain and France rather than the U.S. In future international interventions, the U.S. should take a backseat role with limited participation.

Yes	64%
No, the U.S. should take a leading role	11%
No, the U.S. should not participate in such efforts at all	5%
Other	20%

*“The response we take should always depend on careful consideration of many factors including the nature of the mission, the type of intervention, the timing of the conflict and other important factors.”*

— balloter from Tucson, AZ

*“Now is the time for the U.S. to conduct itself with restraint [and] win back some credibility among Middle Eastern countries.”*

— balloter from Guaynabo, Puerto Rico

**ISSUE C.** The U.S. should reassess its relationships with semidemocratic allies such as Saudi Arabia and Bahrain.

Strongly agree	20%
Agree	63%
Disagree	14%
Strongly disagree	1%

**ISSUE D.** The regime changes in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya have left al-Qaeda on the sidelines and demonstrate that the organization has fallen in public opinion in the Arab world.

Yes	35%
No	21%
Not sure	45%

*“Al-Qaeda may or may not be a relic of the past, but it has plenty of successors and copycats who are no less dangerous and far more prevalent globally.”*

— balloter from Tampa, FL

*The U.S. has a legacy of advancing and supporting democracy around the world. What place does democracy promotion have in U.S. foreign policy today? With a choice of tools ranging from economic aid to military force, what are the appropriate yet effective methods that the U.S. should use to promote democracy?*

**ISSUE A.** Any U.S. efforts at democracy promotion should be channeled through organizations like NATO and the UN, rather than undertaken unilaterally.

Strongly agree	28%
Agree	46%
Disagree	23%
Strongly disagree	4%

**ISSUE B.** The United States should actively promote democracy around the globe.

Strongly agree	13%
Agree	59%
Disagree	25%
Strongly disagree	4%

*“Democracy cannot and should not be the work of unilateralism, but multilateralism instead.”*

— balloter from Lake Charles, LA

*“The best way to promote democracy is by example.”*

— balloter from Marietta, OH

**ISSUE C.** In your opinion, which method of promoting democracy is the most appropriate unilateral U.S. strategy?

Diplomacy	41%
Sanctions (includes conditional aid)	8%
Democracy assistance in the form of funding, training, organizing, etc.	51%
Military force	1%

**ISSUE D.** The U.S. should be more accountable to domestic constituents about the disbursement of democracy assistance.

Yes	70%
No	10%
Not sure	21%

*“People are highly misinformed about foreign aid. Non-military foreign aid is an invaluable asset... that brings back great dividends in the forms of increased good will and economic cooperation. It’s a tool that can subtly change countries for the better.”*

— balloter from Santa Rosa, CA

*Mexico’s border with Central America, as well as the border it shares with the U.S., has been a pathway for people, goods, crime and contraband in both directions. How can Mexico address these transborder challenges? What is the future of Mexico’s relations with its northern and southern neighbors? How will Mexico’s foreign relations affect its domestic politics?*

**ISSUE A.** Should the U.S. pursue anti-drug initiatives in Mexican territory without explicit permission from the Mexican government?

Strongly agree	5%
Agree	15%
Disagree	51%
Strongly disagree	29%

**ISSUE B.** Who should lead efforts to combat drug cartels and criminality in North and Central America?

U.S. alone	1%
Mexico alone	1%
U.S. and Mexico	58%
Central American nations	6%
Mexico and Central American nations	34%

*“The war on drugs is a lost cause. As long as we create a market, there will always be drugs. Legalize them, tax them, and take away the drug dealers’ market.”*

— balloter from Huntington, WV

**ISSUE C.** The Obama Administration should restore the ban on semi-automatic weapons that lapsed in 2004.

Yes	85%
No	9%
Not sure	6%

**ISSUE D.** In your opinion, how should the U.S. government prioritize the “Four Pillars” of the Mérida Initiative? (Rank 1=Most important and 4=Least important)

	1	2	3	4
Provide equipment, technology and training to disrupt the capacity of organized crime.	24%	35%	29%	12%
Professionalize the military and police and improve the judicial system.	23%	29%	33%	16%
Enhance border security to curtail illicit trans-border movement.	22%	14%	20%	44%
Create jobs and pursue social initiatives, such as youth programs, to create drug-resistant communities.	39%	22%	15%	25%

*“Some form or level of legalization seems the only rational long-term solution (or, more accurately, better solution). Prohibition didn’t work with alcohol and seems not to work with other drugs.”*

— balloter from Deerfield, IL

*The securitization of cyberspace has caused a sea change for both governments and the private sector, which are confronting new threats, new battlegrounds and new opportunities. Faced with challenges such as international cybercrime and authoritarian control of networks, how will the U.S. and its democratic allies approach the cyber frontier? How does this new domain figure in U.S. strategic interests?*

**ISSUE A.** In cases like the London riots of 2011, governments have a “law and order” interest in controlling cyberspace.

Strongly agree	21%
Agree	56%
Disagree	19%
Strongly disagree	4%

**ISSUE B.** What party or parties is best equipped to lead in the global governance of cyberspace?

A multilateral body, like the UN, where all countries have a say.	28%
Liberal democracies, such as the U.S., that have a commitment to open networks.	14%
A collaboration between the public and private sectors.	55%
The private sector alone.	3%

*“Certainly the U.S. should work on a global and regional basis to promote Internet privacy and freedom. It is more likely, however, that international educational exchanges and trade will do more to promote the openness of networks.”*

— balloter from Breckenridge, CO

*“Anyone making laws about cyberspace should have a complete understanding of the cyber world. Private sector representatives should be consulted.”*

— balloter from Massapequa, NY

**ISSUE C.** The U.S. government should actively promote the openness of networks in authoritarian countries where content is filtered.

Yes	65%
No	12%
Not sure	23%

**ISSUE D.** Which of the following is the most compelling argument for cyberspace governance?

The proliferation of internationalized cybercrime.	40%
The incidence of “political” cyber attacks (e.g. pro-nationalist hackers).	8%
The impact of cyber activity on foreign and military policy.	23%
The possibility of a cyber “arms race” in the near future.	22%
Other	7%

*Ten years after September 11, 2001, the U.S. is winding down its military commitment in Iraq and slowly pulling out of Afghanistan. What exit strategy will help Afghanistan and Iraq build stable democratic nations? How can the U.S. continue to achieve its counterterrorism goals? What is the role of the U.S. in the future of the Middle East?*

**ISSUE A.** With the killing of Osama bin Laden and other key terrorist leaders, al-Qaeda has lost momentum and is on the wane.

Strongly agree	4%
Agree	47%
Disagree	43%
Strongly disagree	6%

**ISSUE B.** In your opinion, what is the most compelling reason for a continued U.S. presence in Afghanistan?

It is critical to thwart the Taliban and terrorist groups seeking sanctuary in Afghanistan.	24%
Considering the strained nature of U.S.-Pakistan relations, Afghanistan is essential to curbing Pakistani extremists.	27%
The U.S. has an obligation to assist the Afghan government in stabilizing the country.	31%
Other	19%

*“We should work to disengage militarily from the Middle East and instead relate to the countries over there by way of trade, investment, cultural exchange and technical assistance.”*

— balloter from Alexandria, VA

**ISSUE C.** The U.S. should increase its efforts to stem the flow of insurgents, their matériel and support from Pakistan into Afghanistan.

Strongly agree	23%
Agree	49%
Disagree	23%
Strongly disagree	5%

*“Pakistan is our bigger problem.”*

— balloter from Trinity, FL

**ISSUE D.** Following the Obama Administration’s 2011 deadline for the exit of U.S. troops from Iraq, how should the U.S. best view Iraq?

As a strategic partner in the war on terrorism.	9%
As a regional counterweight to the threat of a nuclear Iran.	22%
As a potential area for economic investment and development.	17%
As a fledgling democracy that requires assistance.	45%
Other	7%

*“It’s time to end nation-building, stop trying to be the world police, and focus on internal issues.”*

— balloter from Twin Falls, ID



*The world’s oceans are essential to life on earth, and are tremendously sensitive to global climate change. What are the consequences of climate change on oceanic factors like biodiversity, sea levels and extreme weather systems? How can the U.S. and its international partners address the emerging challenges to this shared resource?*

**ISSUE A.** The U.S. should ratify the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Yes	79%
No, the U.S.’s current status as a non-ratifying signatory is sufficient	8%
No, and the U.S. should not be a signatory to the treaty	3%
Not sure	10%

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**79% of balloters support ratification of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea**

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**ISSUE B.** In your opinion, which of the following is the most pressing ocean policy issue?

Undersea minerals and other natural resources	11%
Transit and shipping access	6%
Sustainability of fish stocks	41%
Rising sea levels	14%
Loss of biodiversity	17%
Claims on the Arctic	5%
Other	6%

*“Banning all exploration for resources in the Arctic would be nice environmentally but would hardly be agreed to by a resource-greedy world.”*

— balloter from Hastings, MI

**ISSUE C.** Issues of fisheries management are best handled through:

International organizations like the UN	57%
Local/regional governance	32%
Individual nations	11%

**ISSUE D.** The U.S. and other countries with sovereignty in the Arctic region should negotiate an agreement similar to the Antarctic Treaty.

Strongly agree	49%
Agree	46%
Disagree	5%
Strongly disagree	1%

*“Coming to an agreement alone will be insufficient. There will need to be some kind of monitoring and enforcement mechanism.”*

— balloter from Cedar Rapids, IA

*Having emerged from authoritarianism in the last 15 years, Indonesia has made remarkable strides politically, economically and socially. Yet the new, democratic Indonesia is still a developing country facing considerable challenges. How can Indonesia continue its path of growth, reform and prosperity? What is Indonesia’s role in the global community?*

**ISSUE A.** Indonesia has completed the process of democratization and no longer needs assistance from the U.S. or the international community.

Strongly agree	3%
Agree	33%
Disagree	57%
Strongly disagree	7%

**ISSUE B.** Relative to other allies in Southeast Asia (Japan, South Korea and Taiwan), the U.S. should prioritize relations with Indonesia.

Strongly agree	9%
Agree	58%
Disagree	31%
Strongly disagree	2%

**ISSUE C.** Expansion of U.S.-Indonesia relations should focus on which issue?

Trade and economic development	39%
Global terrorism	5%
Regional stability in Southeast Asia	46%
Combating China’s influence	9%
Other	2%



*“The situation in Indonesia... provided some hope for progress in other countries. Through diplomacy we should encourage Indonesia to respect all minorities and work toward more equitable distribution of wealth, opportunity, etc.”*

— balloter from Coatesville, PA

**67% of balloters support prioritizing U.S.-Indonesia relations**

*“[Indonesia is] one of the real success stories because our involvement has been limited and non-military. Let’s keep it that way.”*

— balloter from Tampa, FL

*The energy markets have been shaken by the instability of Middle East oil and the vulnerability of nuclear power. Moreover, developing countries like China are becoming bigger energy consumers, while energy producers like Russia see the opportunity to widen their influence. In this changed landscape, how will the U.S.'s energy needs affect its relations with other nations?*

**ISSUE A.** Constructing the Keystone XL pipeline is in the U.S. national interest.

Strongly agree	20%
Agree	37%
Disagree	30%
Strongly disagree	13%

**ISSUE D.** The U.S. should ratify the Kyoto Protocol.

Strongly agree	37%
Agree	42%
Disagree	16%
Strongly disagree	6%

**ISSUE B.** The most appropriate way for the U.S. to ensure its energy security is:

Supply-side: Secure imported energy supplies	4%
Supply-side: Develop alternative, more efficient energy supplies	57%
Demand-side: Reduce domestic consumption of energy	27%
Other	12%

*“The focus should be on clean renewable energy, not fossil fuels, regardless of how much there may be available.”*

— balloter from Aurora, OH

*“The U.S. uses and imports so much more oil than other countries that we’re not going to be able to shift our energy profile away from oil any time soon.”*

— balloter from Salem, OR

**57% believe the Keystone XL pipeline is in the national interest**

**ISSUE C.** Russian exploration in the Arctic is a threat to U.S. interests.

Yes	48%
No	18%
Not sure	34%

*“Government laboratories should be given adequate multi-year budgets for developing energy related projects.”*

— balloter from Deerfield, IL

# GREAT DECISIONS

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