



StrategyOne

PUBLIC OPINION REPORT

AMERICANS ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
AND INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP



**A CITY ON A HILL,
THE ARSENAL OF DEMOCRACY,
AN ECONOMIC POWERHOUSE
OR THE NEW ATHENS?**

NOTES

A CITY ON A HILL, THE ARSENAL OF DEMOCRACY, AN ECONOMIC POWERHOUSE OR THE NEW ATHENS? AMERICANS ARE SEGMENTED ON THEIR APPROACHES TO GLOBAL STABILITY.

By Robert Moran

Although much has been made of America's military and economic power, from Paul Kennedy's theory of "imperial overstretch" to America's designation as a "hyperpower," a majority of Americans believe that America's most effective international tools are the so-called "soft power" of idealistic-ethical and intellectual-creative leadership.

In this groundbreaking study of **13,560 American adults** conducted via national telephone surveys between May, 2007 and August, 2008, Americans were segmented into four approaches to global leadership –

- an idealistic and ethically strong America
- a militarily strong America
- an economically strong America
- an intellectually and creatively strong America

The study, composed of 14 national surveys with a combined margin of error of +/- 1%, tells us as much about Americans' views of the world as it does about their approach to foreign policy. The segmentation question was balanced so as to fairly represent each school of thought.

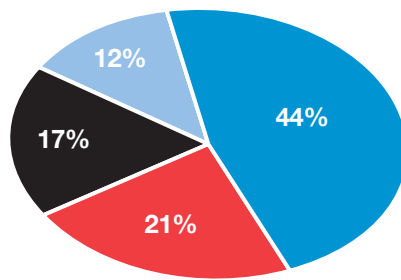
Americans were asked "which one of the following do you think is most likely to ensure that America leads a peaceful and less threatening world?"

Survey participants were given four randomized response options:

- (a) "an ethically strong America that leads the world by example and stands for values like honesty, integrity, fair play, equality, democracy and the rule of law" (44%),
- (b) "a militarily strong America that is dedicated to defending its allies and keeps the peace by standing up to violent nations and terrorist groups" (21%),
- (c) "a strong and innovative American economy that helps America and the world grow wealthier and more connected to each other through international trade and investment" (17%), or
- (d) "an intellectually strong America that leads and influences the world by being the center for new and innovative ideas, art, literature and entertainment" (12%).



First, it might surprise foreign peoples and governments that a plurality (44%) of Americans say the path “most likely to ensure that America leads a peaceful and less threatening world” is an emphasis on idealistic-ethical leadership via adherence to Western, democratic principles. And while it is true that Democrats were more likely than Republicans (51% to 38%) to select the idealistic leadership option, this option was still the first selection of Republicans and Independent voters. In fact, given some of the polarization we might expect from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as issues surrounding the Guantanamo detainees, it is significant that both parties and Independents choose the idealistic leadership option over the others.



■ “ETHICALLY STRONG” TOP GROUPS:

- College Graduates, Democrats (56%)
- Female Democrats (55%)
- Democrats/Blue States (54%)
- Some College Education, Democrats (52%)

■ “MILITARILY STRONG” TOP GROUPS:

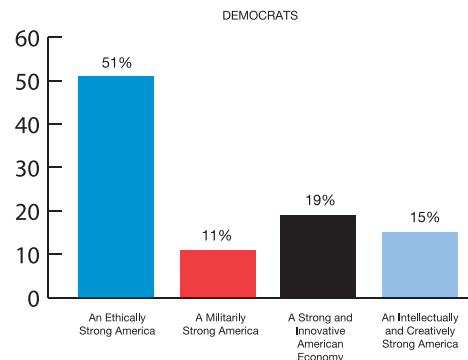
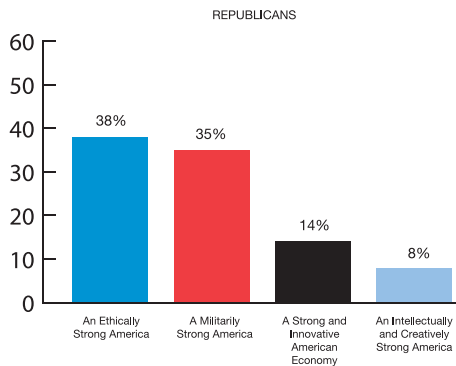
- Male Republicans (41%)
- Republicans (35%)
- Males (25%)
- Age 55+ (25%)
- South (24%)

■ “A STRONG & INNOVATIVE AMERICAN ECONOMY” TOP GROUPS:

- African Americans (22%)
- Democrats/Red States (20%)
- \$100k+ HH Income (20%)
- Democrats (19%)
- Males (18%)

■ “AN INTELLECTUALLY & CREATIVELY STRONG AMERICA” TOP GROUPS:

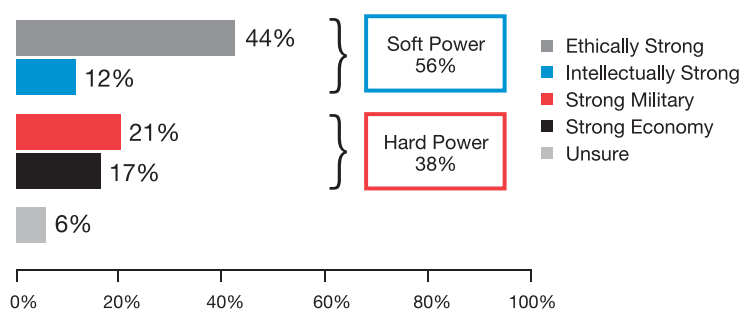
- 18-24 year olds (20%)
- Male Democrats (16%)
- Democrats/Blue States (15%)
- Democrats (15%)



When idealistic-ethical leadership is combined with leadership in the intellectual-creative realm, a majority of Americans (56%) are primary advocates of leading through what Professor Joseph Nye has called the “**soft power**” of culture, values and ideas. And in a time where ideas flow rapidly across the globe with minimal friction, there is clearly support for Victor Hugo’s contention that “**one can resist the invasion of armies; one cannot resist the invasion of ideas.**”

At the other end of the spectrum are advocates of realpolitik “hard power” – economic and military might. Thirty eight percent (38%) of American adults believe “a militarily strong America” (21%) or “a strong and innovative American economy” (17%) are “most likely to ensure that America leads a peaceful and less threatening world.”

“SOFT POWER” vs. “HARD POWER”



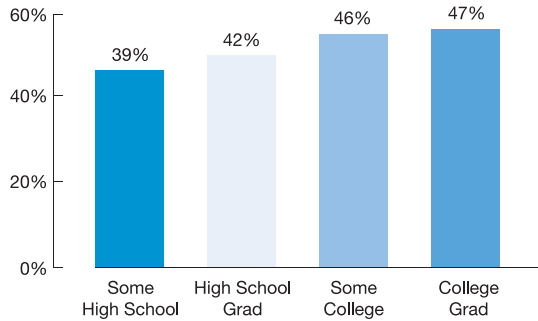
Of course, nations use both “hard” and “soft” power as tools. In the Cold War, America used moral leadership, an intellectual critique of totalitarianism, strong alliances backed with military power, international trade and development, and popular culture to contain and ultimately defeat communism. This question was created as a trackable segmenting tool, not a false choice, an opinion tracking tool and a measure of the American zeitgeist, not a polemic.

And strength in one of these four areas generally leads to strength in others. With the notable exception of North Korea, economic power is a necessary condition for military power. And in the same way, human liberty and freedom of expression are necessary for the arts and literature to thrive.

SOFT POWER:

Idealistic-Ethical Leadership: Forty four percent (44%) of Americans say that America’s strongest global leadership tool is “an ethically strong America that leads the world by example and stands for values like honesty, integrity, fair play, equality, democracy and the rule of law.” America has often been described as an idea and its people idealists. Because of this, it is not surprising that a plurality of Americans would gravitate toward the idealistic approach to foreign policy. John Winthrop’s notion of America as a “city upon a hill” echoes through the American conscience to this day.

IDEALISTIC-ETHICAL LEADERSHIP, BY EDUCATION



This option is chosen most by Democrats with a college degree (56%), Democratic women (55%), and Democrats in blue (Kerry 2004) states (54%). Interestingly, the greater a person's educational attainment, the more likely they are to choose this more idealistic leadership tool. So, for example, 39% of

those with less than a high school diploma choose this option, but this choice increases with the high school educated (42%), those with some college education (46%), and those with a college degree or greater (47%). In the 21st century the city upon a hill has a tall ivory tower.

Although it is true that Democrats are more likely to choose this option, it is important to reiterate that 38% of Republicans and 46% of female Republicans choose idealistic-ethical leadership as their primary option.

Cultural Leadership: An idealistic America that stands for democratic values and the rule of law represents one type of “soft power,” but the creative output and intellectual leadership of a nation is another type of “soft power.” “Hard power” aficionados may scoff at this, but consider two examples of America's creative superpower status.

It was 1914 and the Great War had engulfed Europe. But 1914 can also be known for something quite different. The first feature length movie made in Hollywood, *The Squaw Man*, produced by Cecil B. DeMille and Oscar Apfel and starring Dustin Farnum, was released. Hollywood was born. Fast forward almost 100 years and the American motion picture industry employs 193,000 people in production related activities and creates roughly 600 films per year with worldwide box office receipts of nearly \$27 billion.

If Hollywood and the enormous entertainment industry that has sprouted around it are not a sufficient measure of creative leadership, consider book publishing. Based on preliminary data, the exclusive ISBN agency Bowker projects that US publishers churned out 276,649 titles in 2007, up slightly from the 274,416 published in 2006. And in another measure of creativity, there were 50,071 new fiction titles printed in the US last year, up 17% from 2006 and nearly double the number introduced in 2002.



“Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall.”



With this in mind, twelve percent (12%) of American adults say that “an intellectually and creatively strong” America is the most likely to ensure that America leads a peaceful and less threatening world. They may have a point. Militarily strong and materially successful western nations stood down communism. This is true. But writers like Solzhenitsyn and Vaclav Havel in *the Warsaw Pact* and Friedrich Hayek in *the West* provided a devastating intellectual critique of communism. They were invaluable soldiers in the 20th century’s great war of ideas.

Interestingly, America’s young (18-24 years old) are the most likely to believe that an America that is the “center for new and innovative ideas, art, literature and entertainment” is an America that can lead a peaceful world. While only 12% of Americans think intellectual and creative leadership is America’s strongest tool for peace, fully one in five (20%) young adults think so. Although many older Americans may be tempted to write off the propensity of younger Americans to believe in the power of creative, cultural leadership, there are some compelling arguments for the role of creativity and artistic design in a post-industrial economy where a “creative class” commands premium compensation for crafting systems, living spaces, appealing products and experiences for a wealthier world willing to pay a premium for quality, innovative design.



HARD POWER:

Military Leadership: Those Americans gravitating toward “soft power” focus on an approach to foreign policy that emphasizes America as a beacon for liberty or aspirationally as a “city on a hill,” but one in five Americans takes the

“realist” approach and views military might as the greatest tool at Washington’s disposal.

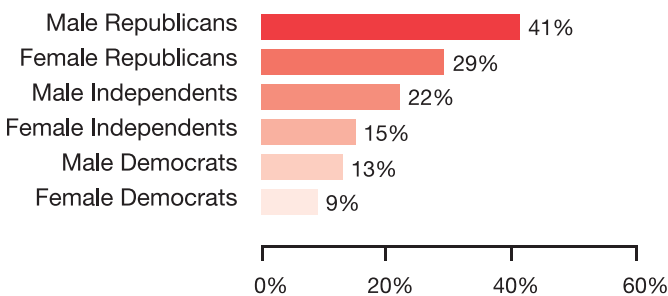
This school of thought is best represented by the “peace through strength” strategy promulgated by the American Security Council in 1978 and forcefully represented by President Reagan, or Senator Phil Gramm’s 1995 announcement speech in College Station, Texas where he stated that

“For our children’s sake, and for the sake of humanity, we must be the leader of the world. And to be the leader of the world we must be strong. And that’s why I am committed to the principle that even in a world where the lion and the lamb are about to lie down together, I want America to always be the lion.”

While 21% of Americans say America’s strongest leadership tool is “a militarily strong America that is dedicated to defending its allies and keeps the peace by standing up to violent nations and terrorist groups,” there are significant differences by party and gender. 35% of Republicans, but only 11% of Democrats believe that American military strength will lead to a peaceful and less threatening world. This gives yet more support to the notion of the “Daddy party” (Republican) and the “Mommy party” (Democratic) in American politics.

Gender also appears to play a key role here as well. And as it turns out, men (especially Republican men) really are from Mars. While 25% of men say a strong military is the most important, 17% of women think so. This pattern applies to both Democrats and Independents as well. Within the Republican party itself, Republican men are much more likely than Republican women to choose this global leadership option (41% compared to 29%). In fact, a plurality of Republican men (41%), choose this as their primary foreign leadership option.

MILITARILY STRONG AMERICA, BY GENDER & POLITICAL PARTY



There also appears to be a red state pro-military bias of 3-4%, even when controlling for party. For example, Republicans in red states were 4% more likely to choose military strength than their fellow Republicans in blue states (37% compared to 33%). The same trend was true for Independent voters, where Independents in red states showed a 4% military bias over their peers in blue states (20% compared to 16%). And this pattern was evident in

Democrats as well, where the red state military bias was 3% (12% for Democrats in red states and 9% for Democrats in blue states). There are several potential explanations for this. One is that military retirees may cluster in Republican-leaning southern and western states. Another is that the greater prevalence of major military bases in the south and west boosts support for this leadership tool across the spectrum.

From Teddy Roosevelt's Great White Fleet and the "Big Stick" to NATO and America's "nuclear umbrella" to today's missile defense initiative, the military leadership tool has well-established historical credentials. With just over 20% of Americans and 41% of Republican men viewing military leadership as the most effective international engagement strategy, there is still significant support for this global leadership tool.



Economic Leadership: The other component of "hard power" is economic strength.

Supporters of this global leadership tool are likely to note that no nation can maintain a technologically advanced military, forge strong trade treaties or hold international respect without a vibrant economy. This school of thought is best represented in the American memory by President Calvin Coolidge's famous January 17, 1925 speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors where he stated that "the business of America is business" and General Motors CEO and Secretary of Defense Charlie Wilson's famous statement in 1953 that "...what was good for the country was good for General Motors and vice versa."

17% of Americans choose economic strength as their top global leadership tool. Interestingly, African Americans (22%), Americans in households making over \$100,000 (20%), and Democrats in 2004 Red states (20%) are more likely than the average to trust in the driving force of a vibrant economy.



With the financial crisis and federal bailout package of Autumn, 2008, economic leadership may become more salient to Americans. But only time will tell.

APPLICATION

What can be made of this public opinion segmentation?

First, at the meta level, 56% of Americans cite “soft power” as America’s greatest tool, while 38% cite the “hard power” of military and economic might. When it comes to how America should interact with the world, Americans are currently more idealist than realist/materialist. Upon reflection, this is not surprising. In the same oft-quoted 1925 speech that touched on the “business of America” President Coolidge also noted that:

“We make no concealment of the fact that we want wealth, but there are many other things that we want very much more. We want peace and honor, and that charity which is so strong an element of all civilization. The chief ideal of the American people is idealism. I cannot repeat too often that America is a nation of idealists. That is the only motive to which they ever give any strong and lasting reaction.”

Secondly, this data suggests that American leaders must constantly work to connect their foreign policy activities with domestic American idealism and western Democratic values. It also means that military alliances and international trade need to be tightly linked to American ideals in order to gain lasting support from American idealists. For example, this data puts in stark relief the domestic challenges American leaders are likely to experience when engaging emerging nations with tight controls on the media and problematic human rights records.

Finally, it is important to guard against isolationism. The “soft power” of an idealistic beacon and a cultural pioneer can easily devolve into a self-satisfied disengagement. Idealism without action is dead.

Robert Moran leads StrategyOne’s primary research division in Washington. He can be reached at robert.moran@strategyone.net or 202.326.1772.

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Although this data has been collected over a turbulent 15 months, the segmentation tool appears to be very stable. Greater time series data will tell us just how transcendent this segmentation tool is, but thus far it appears to be measuring deeper opinions about America and American interaction with the world. It is our hope that other researchers and organizations will also use this segmentation tool to track American opinion over time and add their own insights.

NOTES



StrategyOne

Washington, DC

1875 Eye Street, NW
Fourth Floor
Washington, DC 20006
Tel +202 326 1772
Fax +202 312 1099