

Capitol Forum on America's Future

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2006 Ballot Report—Tomorrow's electorate voices concerns today

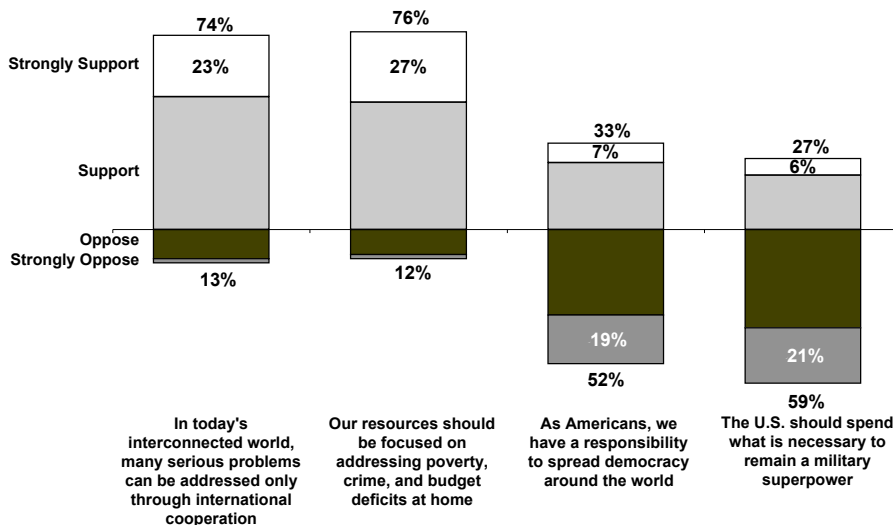
In programs taking place in spring 2006, three out of four high school students in eight states support international cooperation as a guiding principle of U.S. foreign policy but also demonstrate concern about problems here at home. Only one in three believe that it is our responsibility to spread democracy around the world.

When considering a wide range of international issues in the context of discussion on America's role in the world, high school students participating in the 2006 Capitol Forum on America's Future expressed significant support for international cooperation while also recognizing a responsibility to address pressing issues here at home. In keeping with this view, they also reject the idea that the United States should be working to spread democracy around the world. Nearly three out of four students (74%) express support for a statement that "In today's interconnected world, many serious problems can be addressed only through international cooperation." A similar number (76%) support a statement that "Our resources should be focused on addressing poverty, crime, and budget deficits at home." On the other hand, only one in three (33%) support a statement that "As Americans, we have a responsibility to spread democracy around the world." By a margin of more than 2 to 1 (27 percent support, 59 percent oppose), students oppose a statement that "The United States should spend what is necessary to remain a military superpower."

Students expressed these views at the conclusion of their participation in the Capitol Forum, a program that engages high school social studies students—in the classroom and at their state capitols—in discussion of our nation's role in a changing international environment. Students from almost 80 high school classes in eight states completed a series of lessons exploring key issues in interna-

Capitol Forum gives students the opportunity to develop, share and reevaluate their opinions on substantial global issues. Each year I am impressed with the students' presentations, and I enjoy learning what Rhode Island's young adults have to say about the important issues of the day.

— Senator Jack Reed, Rhode Island



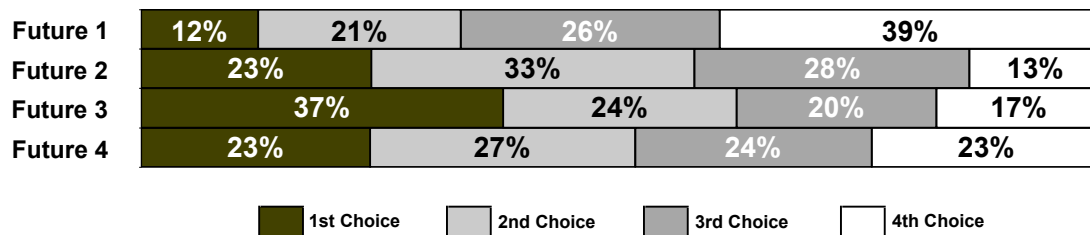
tional relations. Between March 10 and May 16, 2006, 550 student representatives and their teachers met at their respective state capitols to deliberate on these issues with their peers and to present their concerns to state and Congressional officials. Following the forum, student representatives returned to their schools to lead their fellow classmates in further discussion. As a culminating activity, more than 1600 students submitted online ballots expressing their concerns, priorities, and vision for our nation's future. The Capitol Forum program has taken place annually since 1997. Students in Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Maryland, Nebraska, Rhode Island, Washington, and West Virginia took part in the program in 2006.

About the Capitol Forum on America's Future

The Capitol Forum engages high school students in consideration of our nation's future at a demanding moment in history. To lay the foundation for student deliberation on the U.S. role in international affairs, the 2006 Capitol Forum highlighted five distinct themes—immigration, trade, environment, nuclear weapons, and terrorism. Participating teachers introduced these themes within the context of their courses prior to the Forum. At the heart of the Capitol Forum is an exploration of four distinct visions for the United States in the coming years.

FOUR FUTURES: CONSIDERING ALTERNATIVE POLICY DIRECTIONS

After deliberating on a range of international issues including immigration, trade, environmental policy, nuclear weapons, and terrorism, the Capitol Forum on America’s Future asks students to grapple with one central question: “What role should the United States play in the changing international environment of the 21st century?” A framework of four divergent policy directions—or Futures—form the core of student deliberations. Among the four Futures, “Future 3: Build a More Cooperative World” received significantly more support as a first choice than any other Future. Of almost 1,650 students who participated in the online ballot, more than a third (37%) identified Future 3 as their first choice. When considering first and second choices as positive responses, three out of five students (61%) registered positive responses to this Future. Almost as many (56%) rated “Future 2: Protect U.S. Global Interests” as a first or second choice, though only 23 percent of these rated this Future first. “Future 4: Protect the U.S. Homeland” is viewed favorably by half of the students participating. The least supported Future was “Future 1: Lead the World to Democracy” which was ranked first by only 12 percent and received unfavorable ratings by 65 percent. This is a significant change from one year ago when, though rated as the least favorite, Future 1 was ranked first by 20 percent of students.



THE FUTURES IN BRIEF

Future 1: Lead the World to Democracy The United States is the most powerful nation in the world. The world depends on us to maintain peace and order and to support liberal democratic principles. Today’s international system was built around American ideals and power. Neither collective security nor the United Nations can be counted on to deal with the threats to this system. We must devote the necessary resources to build an international moral order and a vigorous international economy grounded in American political and economic principles and we must protect this international system from any threats, even if pressuring other governments to adopt American democratic principles may spark international criticism that the United States is ushering in a “Pax Americana.”

Future 2: Protect U.S. Global Interests We live in a dangerously unstable world. U.S. foreign policy must strive for order and security. International terrorism, chaos in the Middle East, rising poverty in the developing world, and global economic competition have created an international minefield for U.S. leaders. We need to focus our energies on protecting our own security, cultivating our key trade relationships, ensuring our access to crucial raw materials, and stopping the spread of nuclear weapons to unfriendly nations or to terrorist networks. We must be selective in our involvement in international affairs, but we must be prepared to protect ourselves—at home and abroad—against any threats to our security and prosperity, even if this policy may breed resentment and lead to an angry backlash against us.

Future 3: Build a More Cooperative World We live today in an interdependent and interconnected world. We cannot stand alone. National boundaries can no longer halt the spread of AIDS, international drug trafficking, terrorism, and other global scourges. We must take the initiative to bring the nations of the world together and play a leadership role in strengthening the UN’s role in maintaining international security and responding to other global problems such as environmental pollution, financial crises, refugees, and AIDS. We must be willing to give up a portion of our independent authority, or sovereignty, to the UN and offer our military, intelligence, and economic support to UN-led initiatives, even if this may limit our ability to use military force unilaterally outside of North America.

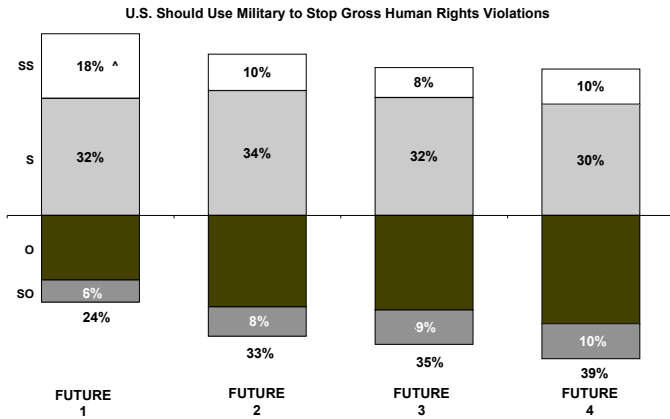
Future 4: Protect the U.S. Homeland The attacks of September 11, 2001 have made us feel a vulnerability not felt in more than fifty years. We have spent hundreds of billions of dollars a year defending our allies in Western Europe and East Asia and distributed tens of billions more in foreign aid to countries throughout the developing world. These high-profile foreign policy programs have only bred resentment against us and made us enemies. It is time to sharply scale back our foreign involvement and turn our attention to the real threats facing Americans: a sagging economy, decaying schools, a shaky health care system, and inadequate resources to protect against terrorism, even if this may upset the worldwide balance of power and cause insecure countries to seek nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons.

*The Futures are available in full from the Choices Program web site at <www.choices.edu/USrole.cfm> and in the Choices curriculum unit, *The U.S. Role in a Changing World*. The Futures are designed to help students think about a range of possible policy directions. Each Future includes a set of policies on specific issues, an overview of the beliefs that underlie it, some arguments in support of the position, and some criticisms of it. After analysis of the four Futures and deliberation with their peers, students are expected to frame their own “Future Five” reflecting their views on the topic.*

HOW DO SUPPORTERS OF ALTERNATIVE FUTURES DIFFER ON BELIEFS AND POLICIES?

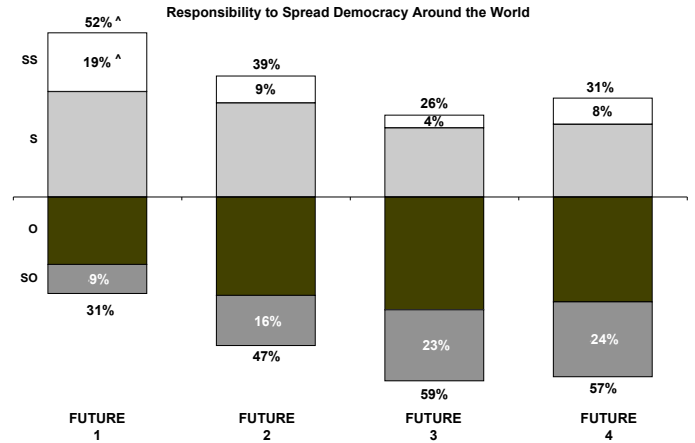
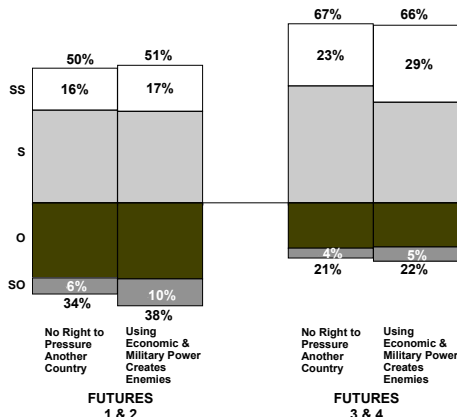
It is encouraging to note that, after dedicating significant time to study and deliberation on international issues, these high school students demonstrate that they understand the issues and can make difficult decisions involving real trade-offs. Their ability to align their beliefs and concerns with policy direction demonstrates a substantive understanding of the issues.

Fully half (52%) of supporters of Future 1 believe that the United States has a responsibility to “spread democracy around the world.” Fewer than one in three (32%) supporters of other Futures believe in spreading democracy. Although not a popular position overall, twice as many Future 1 supporters as those of other Futures (18% compared to 9%) strongly



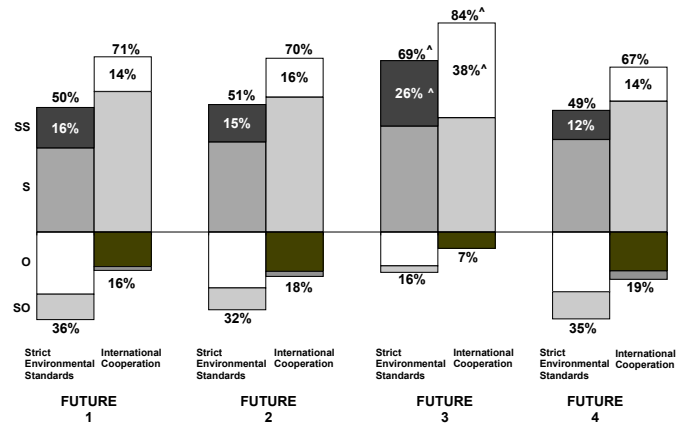
support this view with 26 percent expressing “strong support.” While there is significant support for this policy from other Futures it is less (50%) with only 14 percent strongly supporting this. Future 3 supporters also believe significantly more strongly than others that “many serious problems can be addressed only through international cooperation.” More than four out of five (84%) support this view with 38 percent strongly supporting it. Only 15 percent of the supporters of other Futures “strongly support” this view.

Future 4 supporters hold the strongest views on attention to domestic issues with more than four out of five (82%) supporting the statement that “Our resources should be focused on addressing poverty, crime, and budget deficits at home.” Almost half of these (38%) strongly support this view.



support the view that “The United States should use its military—alone if necessary—to stop gross human rights violations.”

Supporters of Future 3 distinguish themselves for their strong support of a policy calling for “negotiat[ion of] strict international standards to address global warming and other environmental threats.” More than two out of three (69%)



Futures 3 and 4 supporters distinguish themselves from those of Futures 1 and 2 by their more multilateralist perspectives. Two out of three Future 3 and 4 supporters (67%) believe that “We have no right to decide on our own to pressure another country to behave in a certain way,” while only half of Futures 1 and 2 supporters (50%) hold this view. Although a common belief across all Futures, “Using our economic and military power around the world creates more enemies than friends” is more strongly held by supporters of Futures 3 and 4 than by those supporting Futures 1 and 2. Two out of three supporters of Futures 3 and 4 (66%) hold this view compared with only 51 percent of those of Futures 1 and 2.

A report on the data collected from students during the 2006 Capitol Forum program is available online at www.choices.edu/capitol_forum/capf_ballot_repts.cfm.

KEY

SS = Strongly Support
 S = Support
 O = Oppose
 SO = Strongly Oppose

^ = Sig. .95 vs. avg (not shown)

Don't Know not shown

PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS IN 2005-06

Illinois

Bureau Valley High School (Manlius)
Cairo Jr/Sr High School
Carl Schurz High School (Chicago)
Clemente Community Academy (Chicago)
Eureka High School
Greenville High School
Homewood-Flossmoor HS (Flossmoor)
Judah Christian School (Champaign)
Lockport Township High School
Maine South High School (Park Ridge)
Newark High School
Normal Community High School
Normal Community West High School
Pontiac Township High School
SIUE-East St. Lois Charter School
Streamwood High School
University High School (Normal)

Indiana

Arsenal Technical High School
Cathedral High School (Indianapolis)
Columbus East High School
Covenant Christian HS (Indianapolis)
Hauser Jr/Sr High School (Hope)
Jefferson High School (Lafayette)
North Daviess High School (Elnora)
Signature School (Evansville)
Silver Creek High School (Sellersburg)
Wabash High School

Maine

Camden Hills Regional HS (Rockport)
Cape Elizabeth High School
Hampden Academy
Mt. Desert Island High School

Maryland

Broadneck High School (Annapolis)
Largo High School
Paint Branch High School (Burtonsville)
Patterson High School
Saints Peter & Paul High School (Easton)

Nebraska

Ashland-Greenwood High School
Bellevue West High School
Cambridge Public Schools
Crofton High School
Chadron High School
Holdrege High School
Howells High School
Lincoln High School
Lynch High School
Millard West High School (Omaha)
Omaha Benson High School
Omaha North High School
Plainview High School
Platteview High School
Sterling High School
Sumner-Eddyville-Miller High School
Valentine Rural High School
Wausa Public School
Wilcox-Hildreth Public School (Wilcox)

Rhode Island

Burrillville High School
Cranston East High School
East Greenwich High School
Moses Brown School (Providence)
Narragansett High School
North Kingstown High School
North Smithfield High School
Portsmouth High School
Providence Academy for International Studies
South Kingstown High School
Westerly High School

Washington

Clover Park High School (Lakewood)
Clover Park High School-Powerhouse
Clover Park High School-Achiever
Clover Park High School-Crossroads
Mercer Island High School
Nathan Hale High School (Seattle)
Shorewood High School (Shoreline)

West Virginia

Moorefield High School
Hart High School
Parkersburg High School
Scott High School
Sissonville High School
Webster County High School



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Commission on International Education
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The Capitol Forum on America's Future is a program of the Choices for the 21st Century Education Program at the Watson Institute for International Studies at Brown University. The Choices Program incorporates cutting-edge scholarship into curriculum resources on a range of current and historical international topics, provides professional development for teachers, and organizes educational programs for students. The Capitol Forum is endorsed by the National Council for the Social Studies (CSS) and the National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS), and approved by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). Information on all programs and resources of the Choices Program is available online at www.choices.edu.

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