



Research Article

Indian Perceptions of the US: A Study of Indian Surveys and Public Opinion

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ABSTRACT

The Indian public has traditionally had very little say in the making of foreign policy. However, they do have views on foreign policy and the media and elites play an important role in influencing them. What do Indians think about the US, the most important power in the world and about the bilateral relations between New Delhi and Washington? Have the views of Indians on the US evolved over the years and what do Indians think about India's future ties with the US? This article examines these questions and traces historically Indian views of the US and how they have evolved over the years. The article uses available data from opinion polls and studies based on opinion polls. A descriptive analytical approach is used for the study.

Keywords: Perception; Public opinion; USA; India; Survey

INTRODUCTION

The Indian public has traditionally had very little say in the making of foreign policy. However, they do have views on foreign policy and the media and elites play an important role in influencing them. What do Indians think about the US, the most important power in the world and about the bilateral relations between New Delhi and Washington? Have the views of Indians on the US evolved over the years and what do Indians think about India's future ties with the US? This article examines these questions and traces historically Indian views of the US and how they have evolved over the years. The article uses available data from opinion polls and studies based on opinion polls.

This article is divided into four sections. The first section examines the debate on the influence of the public on foreign

policy. Section two traces Indian perceptions of the US over the years. The third section deals with opinion polls conducted in India on foreign policy and studies based on these polls, focusing on Indian views of the US. The concluding section analyses factors which have influenced Indian views of the US, the demographic divide in the opinion polls and portends the future of Indian perceptions about the US.

PUBLIC OPINION AND FOREIGN POLICY

International Relations scholarship has witnessed much debate on the influence of public opinion on foreign policy. Gabriel Almond (1960) through his mood theory laid a foundation for doubts on whether the public had the ability to give inputs for foreign policy. His theory suggests that



attention to or interest in foreign policy is usually low and can fluctuate in times of crises. He argued that the public is usually indifferent to foreign policy. But, he warned that this indifference could quickly change to apprehension to fatalism or even anger in times of crisis. Other scholars in the realist tradition like Hans Morgenthau were dismissive of public opinion, considering the public to be utterly unaware of the nuances of foreign policy decision-making. They believed foreign policy making to be the exclusive domain of elite opinion leaders and argued that a greater role for public opinion could potentially the international system. As Morgenthau said, "the rational requirements of good foreign policy cannot from the outset count upon the support of a public opinion whose preferences are emotional rather than rational" (1978:558 quoted in Holsti 1992: 440)¹.

Liberals, on the other hand, find "public opinion to be relatively stable, sensibly structured, consistent, and consequently impactful on foreign policy", as leaders take into consideration public opinion while making foreign policy decisions (Dorani 2018).² In fact, Page and Shapiro (1992)³ in their study found that public opinion was remarkably stable and rational. This should be read in conjunction with the liberal democratic peace theory which posits that democracies do not go to war with each other as leaders are answerable to the public. Liberal theories, argue that leaders have to take public preferences because of two reasons (Dorani 2018).² The first is that public support is essential for legitimising democratic governments. Second, reasonable politicians keep aside their own beliefs and follow public preferences because they are responsible to the public's will and opinions. So, they try to get advantage at the elections by following which would have public support.

Finally, analysts focusing on decision-making assume that public opinion is a crucial source of analysis and therefore plays a part in shaping foreign policy decisions (Ibid).

In modern history, one has witnessed the influence of public opinion in the US during the Vietnam War, with public opinion forcing the US to withdraw from Vietnam. The same scenario played out in Afghanistan in 2021 when the US withdrew because the long-drawn war had little support domestically.

In the case of India, while foreign policy has generally been immune from public opinion, there have been instances when the Indian state has had to take cognisance of public sentiments. India's intervention in 1971 in East Pakistan was driven partly by the angst in West Bengal of Bengalis being killed in East Pakistan. As Bass contends, though India was hesitant initially to intervene because of concerns over Pakistan's sovereignty, its "deference toward sovereignty was undone by its own public opinion, expressed through its democratic system. Almost the entire political spectrum clamored(sic) to stop the killing, with scant concern about criticizing what Pakistan did inside its own borders" (Bass 2015: 238).⁴ Bass points out how from the

very beginning, India's public opinion and press condemned Pakistan for genocide and how the Congress Party decried "the crime of genocide." Both houses of India's Parliament also unanimously urged all governments to press Pakistan to stop "the systematic decimation of people which amounts to genocide." (Ibid: 253)

Similarly, India's policy towards the Sri Lankan civil war was held hostage for a long time by Tamil sentiments in Tamil Nadu. More recently, in 2014, the Prime Minister refused to attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) summit held in Sri Lanka because sustained protests in Tamil Nadu against this. By and large, barring a few issues – like relations with Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the United States, and China – the Indian public does not have strong views on many international issues. So, most surveys on foreign policy in India show high proportions of 'no opinion' or 'don't know' responses.

The majority of Indians have little interest in foreign policy as Devesh Kapur established in 2009 in his paper on public opinion and Indian foreign policy based on a survey of two hundred thousand households. Kapur argued that there are enough people who do have an interest and this demographic group is growing rapidly (2009:304).⁵ He suggests that public opinion is likely to play a greater role in shaping the future of India's foreign policies due to two reasons (290). First, India's political landscape has become more fragmented leading to a weakening of executive power compared to the legislative and judicial branches. Second, more electoral competition has meant that marginal voters matter more for electoral success and if India's current economic trajectory continues, the marginal voter is likely to be urban and more educated. If foreign policy issues have greater salience with this demographic, then public opinion on foreign policy will have greater weight. Third, one could also add that the increase in access to social media and indeed the information overload on the internet is increasing interest in foreign policy everywhere in India like it is across the world as it has been established that people are influenced by elite opinions and media. Wittkopf and Maggiotto(1983) and Wittkopf 1987^{6,7} argued that masses and elites in the United States tend to possess similar foreign policy belief systems, thus proving that elites have some influence in shaping the expression of public opinion. The reason I point to the influence of elites on public opinion is because many of the surveys examined in this study are based on surveys of the elites in India. Finally, the proliferation of social media and the rise of Narendra Modi as a global leader—aided by his social media presence shows the priority laid by the government in using social media to uphold positive public opinion (Iyer 2020).⁸ The "Mann Ki Baat" radio show where the Prime Minister talks about issues, including foreign policy, underlines the rising relevance of public opinion and the relations between public opinion and foreign policy in India (Ibid).



The next section traces out historically, Indian perceptions of the US.

INDIAN PERCEPTIONS OF THE US

As one of the most powerful countries in the world, even before India's independence, Indians, at the least the educated ones, had views about the US. In the 1930s, even as India was fighting for independence, resolutions introduced in the US Senate condemned 'British repression in India', supporting the Indian freedom movement. In 1941 President Franklin Roosevelt argued for Indian independence. In a meeting with Prime Minister Winston Churchill, he argued that the "I cannot believe that we can fight Fascist slavery and at the same time not work to free people all over the world from a backward colonial policy. The peace cannot include despotism. The structure of the peace demands and will get the equality of peoples" (Banerjee 1968: 316).⁹

The US was therefore seen by Indian freedom fighters as a beacon of democracy and anti-colonialism. Shortly after independence, President Harry S. Truman invited Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to Washington. So, there was certainly some amount of goodwill for the US in India initially. US aid, its assistance to India in agriculture, science and technology, irrigation, education, and most importantly, US food aid enhanced this goodwill for India.

In July 1964, when the Civil Rights Bill was enacted as law in the US, the President of India sent a message to President Johnson expressing sincere congratulations on this historic measure and great achievement which would ensure the enjoyment of equal rights by all citizens of the U.S.A. irrespective of race, colour, or creed.

Other than foreign policy related issues, some other factors have had a deep impact on Indian perceptions of the US. The first is the idea of the US as a home or a land of opportunities. Small numbers of Indians, often sailors, began to immigrate from the British empire from Punjab and sometimes Bengal. But this was stopped after race based immigration restriction acts in the US. In 1907, the Oregon state legislature enacted a law prohibiting Indians from getting permanent residency in Oregon (Chakravorty, Kapur, and Singh 2017:8).¹⁰ There were even riots against Indians in Bellingham, Washington, possibly over fears that they were stealing jobs. It was also feared that they carried diseases like hookworms (ibid: 10). The House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization held "Hindu immigration hearings" in 1914 over fears of Indians overrunning the West Coast (Ibid: 9). As a result, during the first two decades of 20th century, there were only 300 migrants every decade from India (Ibid: 56). The 1924 US immigration act also prevented Indians from immigrating. However, despite all these anti-Indian sentiments, the US refused to deport the Gadariites to British India because of its own anti-colonial sentiments. In 1952, an act was passed which increased immigration. But till then, Indians

encountered hostility in the US. However, the number of Indian immigrants remained small till 1965. Till 1965, as per the US census, there were only 12,296 people of Indian origin in the US. The period after this witnessed the emigration of skilled professionals and students.

Indian immigration continued through three phases. In the first phase between 1965 and 1979, professionals, especially doctors, skilled professionals and students, began immigrating. In the next phase between 1980 and 1994, families began immigrating. The final phase started in 1995 with the IT revolution in India, which led to the immigration of large numbers of IT professionals and students. 3/4th of Indians in the US arrived after the mid 1990s. This can be attributed to the IT revolution, changed higher education policies in both countries which facilitated movement of people, the mushrooming private engineering colleges, especially in South India. Soon, the US adapted the H1B visa programmes. Today, the Indians immigrating to the US are mostly youth. As the US became more welcoming and more accessible, Indian perceptions of the US also changed. All this was happening in the backdrop of globalization and the LPG reforms in India which led to more interactions between Indians and Americans at both personal and official levels.

The second factor is the role of some American personalities, particularly the popularity of some American Presidents in India. Starting with President John F Kennedy¹¹ Indian media and elites have not been immune to his charm as is evident from the newspapers of the time. His aid and support to India during the 1962 war with China helped increase his popularity in India. In more recent times, President Bill Clinton arrived to adoring crowds in India and was mobbed by legislators after his speech to the Parliament. President George W. Bush was also popular in India. Similarly, President Barack Obama remained immensely popular in India during both his terms. Even President Donald Trump was popular in India.

Third, American soft power mediated through Hollywood movies, brands like Pepsi, Coca Cola, KFC, Levis, etc have also influenced Indians' views of the US as have depictions of the US in Indian media, which remains largely Western oriented.

The role of US public diplomacy also cannot be discounted in changing Indians' perceptions about the US. US government scholarships, exchange programmes, conferences, and media junkets played a big role in introducing the US to Indians and in projecting a positive image of the US. The next section looks at some studies and surveys which look at Indian perceptions of the US and on issues related to US-India bilateral ties over the years. But most of these surveys have limitations: mostly the respondents are urban youth; educated people; and elites. It is also not clear how much percentage of the respondents were women. But usually these surveys have overwhelmingly



male respondents.

RE-READING SURVEYS ON INDIAN VIEWS OF THE US

There have been very few surveys on Indian views of the world, particularly during the Cold War years. But a paper by Aidan Milliff, Paul Staniland and Vipin Narang in 2019 titled ‘Uneven Accountability? Public Attitudes on Indian Foreign Policy since the 1960s’ explores public opinion about India’s foreign policy using both historical survey data from the 1960s and 1970s, and modern, scientific surveys from the 2000s onwards.¹² However, this survey was confined to the urban public and to literate people. But the urban, University-educated public is also the constituency most likely to have influence on foreign policy issues and shape media treatment of them. The paper finds that the urban public was fairly pro-US in the 1960s and 1980s, making the 1990s rapprochement perhaps less of a surprise than people would think (Milliff, Staniland, and Narang (2019: 8).¹²

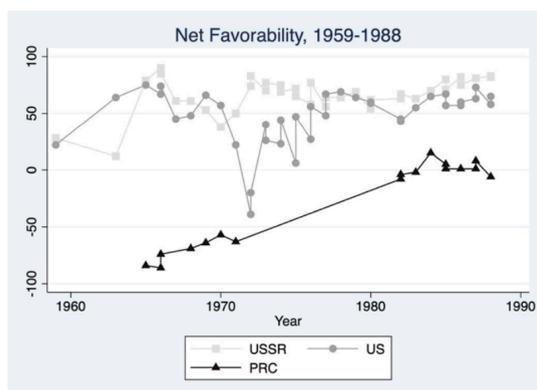


Fig. 1: Net Favourability of the US, USSR, and PRC from 1959-1988 in IIOPO Urban Surveys. *Source: Milliff, Staniland, and Narang (2019: 6)*¹²

If one examines the Net Favourability of the US, USSR, and PRC from 1959-1988 in Indian Institute of Public Opinion (IIOPO) Urban Surveys, there are no surprises. There are favourable perceptions of the US in India after the 1962 war, thanks to the help extended by the US. Part of this could also be attributed to President Kennedy’s charmas mentioned earlier. Then we see a cooling of relations after the 1965 war, and then US backing for Yahya Khan’s regime in 1970-71 leads to the decline in positive views. The lowest point in Indo-US relations was in the 1970s, particularly during and after the Bangladesh War and that is reflected in this survey quite well. Thus, the favourability of the US which is quite high in this survey in the early/mid-1960s (see Figure 1), starts to decline in the late 1960s, and then declines further during and after the 1971 war, when the US supported Pakistan and sent the USS Enterprise aircraft carrier into the Bay of Bengal. Conversely, the favourability

of the USSR climbs substantially in response to Soviet backing for India in the same period (Milliff, Staniland, and Narang 2019: 8).¹² After the 1971 war, the pro-US sentiments bounced back, and by the end of the Cold War, was not very far behind the USSR. So, as this survey makes clear, pro-US sentiment was actually quite high, other than in the early/mid-1970s. This makes the speed of the US-India rapprochement after the end of the Cold War less unexpected as this was also a time when a growing number of Indians started moving to the United States. In fact, in 1985 Rajiv Gandhi had already reached out to Washington, and the evidence in this survey shows that an influential section of Indian public opinion wanted closer ties with the US (Ibid:8).

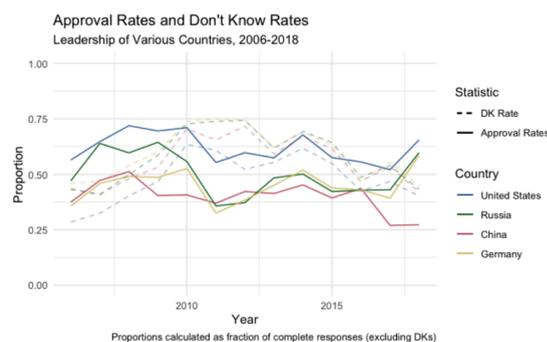


Fig. 2: Approval rates for the leadership of Russia, China, and Germany, and the United States. *Source: Milliff, Staniland, and Narang (2019: 25)*¹²

Similarly, if one studies the approval rates for the leaderships of various countries, the approval rates for US have remained consistently high (See Figure 1).

Region	China Approval	US Approval	Approval Gap
North	0.46	0.72	0.26
Central	0.35	0.61	0.26
East	0.26	0.44	0.18
South	0.54	0.64	0.10
West	0.35	0.59	0.24

Fig. 3: 2008-2018 World Gallup Poll Approval Rates of US and China. *Source: Milliff, Staniland, and Narang (2019: 32)*¹²

Figure 3 also shows the consistently higher approval rates for the US as opposed to China across the different geographic regions in India. Northern respondents are warmer towards the United States (see Figure 3). Milliff, Staniland, and Narang point out some other interesting facts from the World Gallup Polls in their study (2019:28):¹² Muslim respondents have almost 14 points lower warmth of feelings toward the United States than Christian respondents. It also seems that higher education translated to higher approval of the US.

In 2006, Outlook and AC Nielsen conducted surveys on India’s public attitudes toward India-US bilateral relations.



Among other items, it asked respondents whether India could trust the United States for support in times of need. The results showed that 55 percent of Indians had positive feelings towards the US. In fact, a plurality of Indian respondents (66 percent) considered President George W. Bush as India's friend.

INDIAN PUBLIC OPINION ON FOREIGN POLICY: SUMMARY OF RECENT SURVEYS

Survey	India sample size	Coverage	Results - attitudes towards:	
			US	China
Pew, 2006	2, 029	Urban	56% viewed the US favorably, down 15% from 2005. 4 th highest rating given out of 15 countries polled	Not available, but 56% viewed China favorably in 2005
Pew, 2007	2, 043	Urban	59% viewed the US favorably, up 3% from 2006 15 th highest rating out of 47 countries polled	46% viewed China favorably, down 10% from 2005 26 th highest rating of 47 countries polled.
Chicago Council of Global Affairs, 2006	2, 458	National, Formally Educated	66% believed US had significant influence on the world ²¹ 54% wanted US to have that much say in the world	46% believed China had significant influence on the world. 48% wanted China to have that much say in the world

Fig. 4: Indian Public Opinion on Foreign Policy: Summary of Recent Surveys. Source: Kapur (2009: 291)⁵

Kapur's study seems to reinforce this view about approval for the US (see Figures 4, 5 and 6). This cuts across different states and age groups in the country (See Figures 7 and 8).

	yes
SEC A1 ("elites")	USA (5948) 66.72
	China 53.58
	Pakistan 29.85
Urban	USA (50546) 62.44
	China 50.92
	Pakistan 31.93
Young (less than 30 years old)	USA (6918) 61.65
	China 49.69
	Pakistan 32.72

Fig. 5: Favourable Feelings towards US, China, Pakistan. Source: Kapur (2009): 294⁵

Devesh Kapur's study on 'Public opinion and Indian Foreign Policy' further found that Indian elites may like the US more in absolute terms as they benefit more from better relations with the US and are better informed about the US. He finds that weaker segments of society also appear to harbour warmer feelings towards the US compared to other



Fig. 6: Overall Feelings of Warmth towards Foreign Countries. Source: Kapur (2009: 297)⁵

RATINGS ON FEELINGS OF WARMTH TOWARDS FOREIGN COUNTRIES ACROSS STATES

States	US	Pakistan	China
Andhra Pradesh	68.4	32.1	51.9
Assam	63.6	33.7	63.4
Bihar	53.6	33.3	53.3
Chandigarh	65.5	35.1	55.6
Chattisgarh	56.8	34.8	53.2
Delhi	67.3	34.8	53.5
Goa	64.6	25.7	45.8
Gujarat	51.4	25.8	39.1
Haryana	71.3	29.5	55.5
Himachal Pradesh	59.9	28.7	52.3
Jammu	61.1	28.5	46.8
Jharkhand	63.0	34.8	54.1
Karnataka	68.2	37.8	54.4
Kerala	52.9	36.1	48.9
Madhya Pradesh	57.5	31.7	49.4
Maharashtra	58.2	29.5	45.2
Orissa	64.7	29.5	53.2
Punjab	68.1	41.6	54.3
Rajasthan	56.9	27.8	48.5
Tamil Nadu	71.9	33.5	63.4
Uttar Pradesh	58.6	31.3	50.2
Uttaranchal	59.3	30.3	50.1
West Bengal	61.6	35.3	55.8

Fig. 7: Warmth towards Foreign Countries across States. Source : Kapur (2009: 299)⁵

RATINGS OF FEELINGS OF WARMTH TOWARDS FOREIGN COUNTRIES ACROSS AGE GROUPS

AGE	US	Pakistan	China
15-19 years	64.1	35.2	52.2
20-29 years	62.1	32.7	50.9
30-39 years	60.1	31.3	50.6
40-49 years	59.7	31.1	51.1
50+ years	59.9	31.9	50.0

Fig. 8: Warmth towards Foreign Countries across Age Groups. Source : Kapur, 2009: 298⁵

countries and younger people seem to have warmer feelings towards the US than older people.

The Lowy Poll conducted in 2013 based on 1233 respondents found that among all the countries in the world Indians like the United States most and Pakistan least (Medcalf 2013).¹³ The study also found that 75% of Indians want US-India ties to strengthen further over the next 10 years. Yet, a substantial minority (31%) of Indians think the United States poses a threat to India, though only 9% see it as a major threat. A large majority of Indians (83%) consider India-US relations to be strong, with 38% describing this relationship as very strong. Three quarters of Indians would like the US-India relationship to become stronger still over the next 10 years, with 50% wanting it to become a lot



stronger.

In his Survey of India’s Strategic Community” for Brookings India, Jaishankar (2019)¹⁴ surveyed 290 members of India’s strategic community, with 18% of respondents being female. He found that 75% perceive the United States to be India’s most important partner on global issues (see Figure 9). Additionally, a large minority of respondents (43%) are in favour of closer collaboration with the United States in the event of greater U.S.-China competition (see Figure 10). The respondents see trade disputes and U.S.-Pakistan relations to be constraining the India-U.S. partnership. Jaishankar also found that those born between 1960 and 1979 generally place a greater priority on the partnership with the United States, a point emphasized by the other surveys mentioned above.

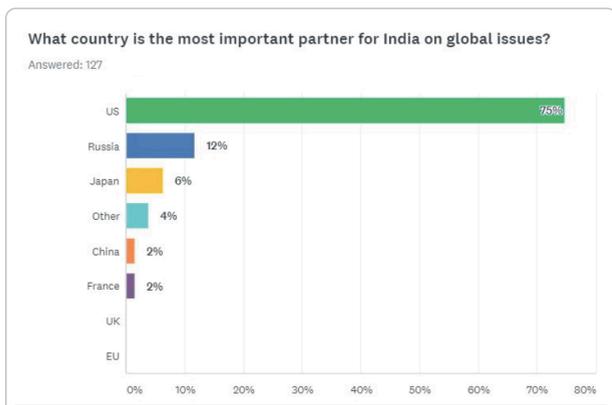


Fig. 9: Most Important Partners for India on Global Issues. Source: Jaishankar (2019:13)¹⁴

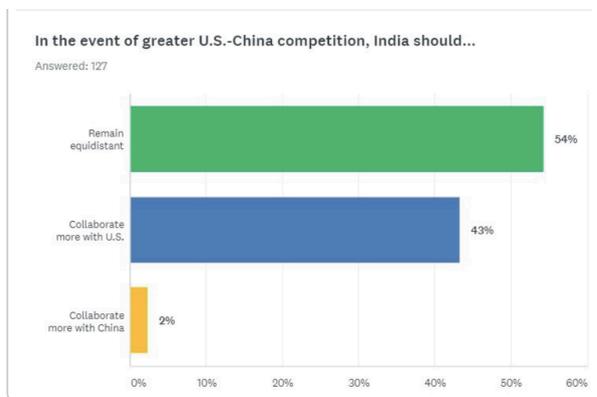


Fig. 10: India’s Posture in the case of greater US-China Competition. Source: Jaishankar (2019:14)¹⁴

Jaishankar’s survey shows that the Indian elites see the Indo-Pacific as India’s extended regions, much above the Asia Pacific or Asia or Eurasia. This construct would therefore suggests closer collaboration with maritime powers,

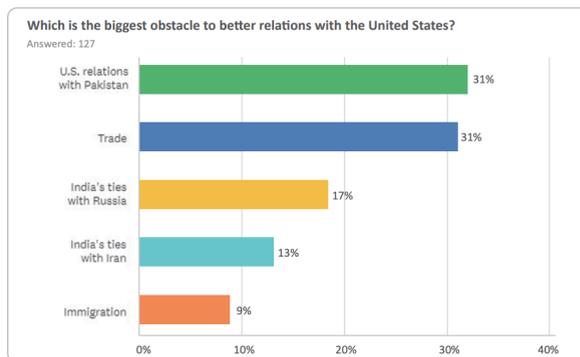


Fig. 11: Biggest Obstacles to better Relations with the US. Source: Jaishankar (2019:14)¹⁴

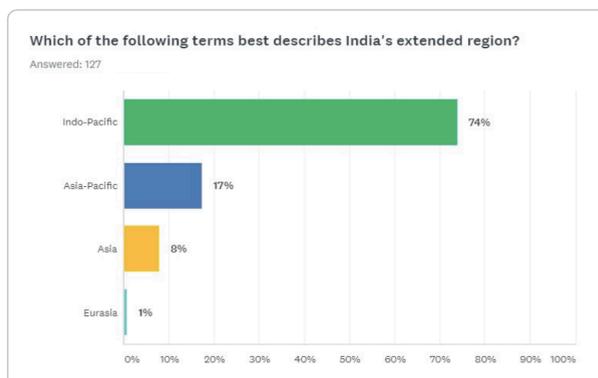


Fig. 12: India’s Extended Region. Source: Jaishankar (2019:15)¹⁴

including the United States, Japan, Australia, and Southeast Asia. As the idea of the Indo-Pacific is closely associated with the US and its treaty allies, one could extrapolate that the Indian elites favour closer ties with the US. The survey finds that those born between 1960 and 1979 are more likely to identify the United States as India’s most important partner and are more likely to believe that India should collaborate with the United States in the event of greater U.S.-China competition

The Pew Research of 2017 found that Indians remain relatively positive on America and President Trump. Roughly half (49%) have a favourable view of the U.S., while just 9% have an unfavourable view. Four-in-ten had confidence in President Donald Trump to do the right thing regarding world affairs. It also found that roughly half of BJP supporters (52%) are positive on the U.S., but only 36% of Congress party supporters are positive towards it. There is a similar pattern on confidence in Trump, with BJP supporters slightly more likely to say they trust the U.S. president on the world stage (44% vs. 33%) and Congress supporters more likely to offer no opinion. These assessments stand in stark contrast to the negative ratings Trump received in much of the world.



Across 37 countries, people were most likely to say they think of Trump as “arrogant” (a global median of 75%), “intolerant” (65%) and “dangerous” (62%). Similarly, even before, in 2016, during the Obama administration, solid majorities held a favorable opinion of the U.S. (56%) and trusted Obama’s approach to international affairs (58%). The Pew Research of 2019 found that 58% of Indians see US as the leading economic power; 45% see US economic influence as positive; 74% believe that US-India economic ties are good; and 72% want better economic ties with the US.

The New Delhi-based Thank tank Observer Research Foundation’s (ORF) Survey of 2021 identified the top priorities in foreign policy among its respondents. It found that 82% see better relations with US as a priority. However, this survey was focused on the youth in India, that too urban youth.

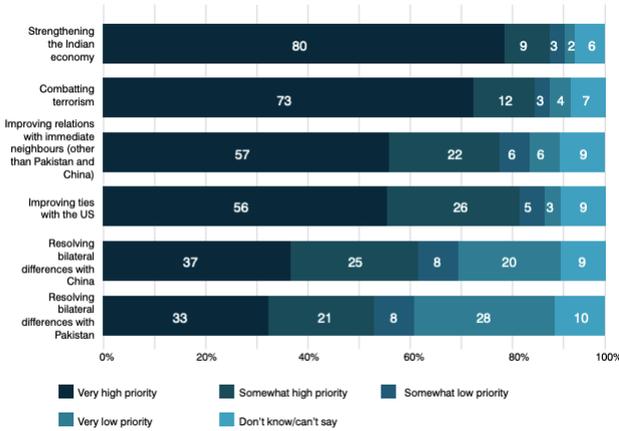


Fig. 13: Top Priorities in Foreign Policy. Source: Pant et al. (2021: 17)¹⁵

On the questions of countries which its respondents trust the most, the US with 77 percent favorability rating leads when it comes to trust (32 percent trust completely, and 45 percent trust somewhat) [See Figure 14]. The highest number i.e. 78 percent of respondents believe that the US is likely to be India’s leading partner in the coming decade (See Figure 15). The positive sentiment for the US is reflected in the fact that it is the only country in whom trust for the present is matched by the projections for the future as the report points out.

Similarly, as per the ORF survey, 44 percent of those surveyed saw the US as India’s most likely future partner, followed by Australia, Japan, and Russia respectively (see Figure 15).

On the question of India’s position if US-China tensions rise, the majority of the respondents (62%) suggested cooperating with the US, with only 32 % preferring to remain neutral (See Figure 16).

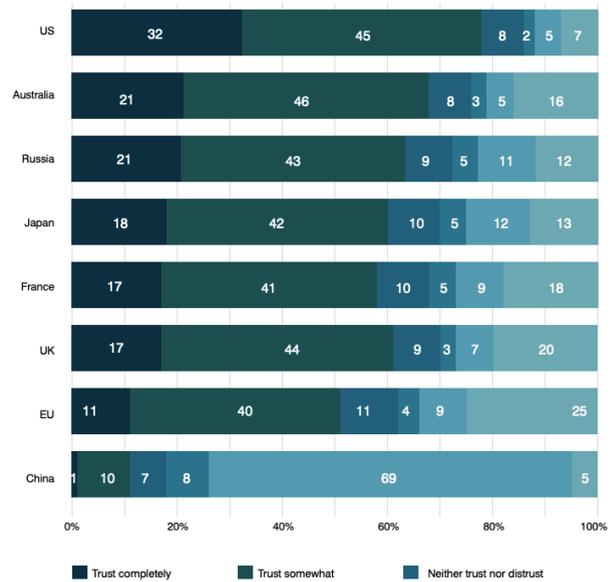


Fig. 14: How would you rate these powers on the basis of how much you trust them?. Source: Pant et al (2021:25)¹⁵

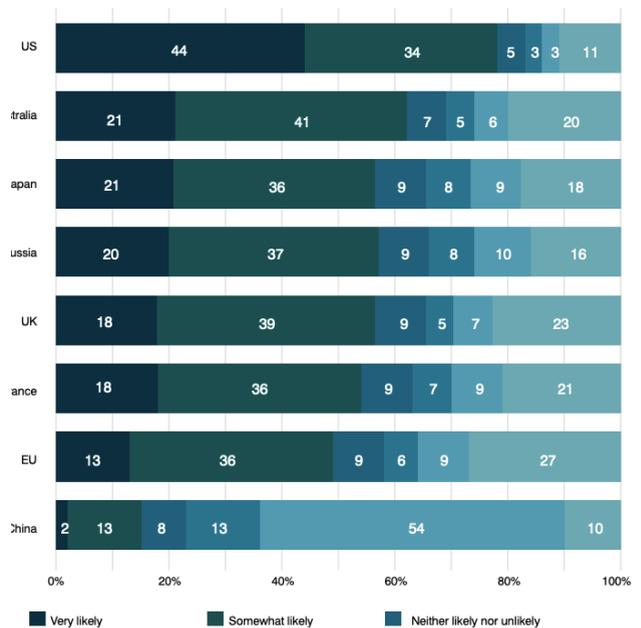


Fig. 15: In the next 10 years, how likely are each of the following powers, to become India’s leading partners?. Source: Pant et al (2021: 27)¹⁵



What should be India's position if US-China tensions continue to rise?

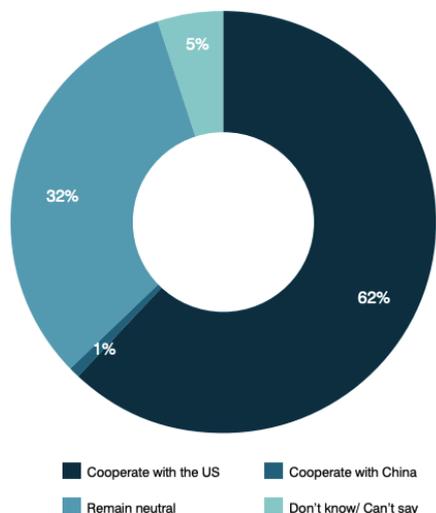


Fig. 16: India's Position in case of US-China Tensions. Source: Pant et al (2021: 28)¹⁵

INDIAN PUBLIC OPINION AND INDIA-US TIES

Indian public opinion has not been a decisive factor in shaping India's relations with the United States. However, there have been several instances where public opinion has had an impact on issues affecting Indo-US ties.

The first instance is that of the nuclear deal with the United States. In 2008, an Outlook India poll found that 56 percent approved of the government's decision to press ahead with it. That probably gave the then Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, the courage and support to go ahead with the deal despite opposition from within his coalition parties. The Congress Party won the next general elections, proving that the public was not against the deal. Another instance of public opinion having an impact on Indo US ties can be found in 2003. Again, a survey by Outlook published in July 2003 found that 69% of urban Indians, albeit in a small sample size, were not in favour of sending Indian troops to Iraq (Outlook 2003). Blareland Pardesi (2012)¹⁶ concluded that, despite clear preference of the ruling elites in favour of participating in the US-led Iraq War, India's public opinion constrained the final policy outcome when India decided against sending troops to Iraq. Similarly, during the 1991 Gulf war, a large majority of respondents (71 percent) expressed the opinion that India should adopt a neutral stance on the issue (Malik 1991: 852).¹⁷

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, a quick survey of Pew Research over the years shows that there has been consistent support for the US. Even President Donald Trump, mocked and reviled in most other countries, was popular in India, with even a

temple being built for him and people praying for him to win the Presidency a second time. There is no doubt that since Independence, India has looked up to the United States as a leading democracy. The help extended by the US during the 1962 war with China helped to improve perceptions about the US among the Indians. US AID, particularly US food aid, which made a difference on the ground for ordinary people also helped improve perceptions of the US. However, later, President Johnson's short tether policy on food aid to India might have affected these perceptions as did President Nixon's tilt towards Pakistan and the US rapprochement with China. This added to the perception among any people in India, particularly those on the Left, saw the US as an Imperialist power, which was bent on not allowing India to emerge as a leading power. In fact, several times during the Cold War, often the US came in handy for the ruling class as the "foreign hand" interfering in India's domestic politics. It was perhaps during the Bangladesh war that the US became most unpopular.

But despite all this, the US was seen as a place to migrate to, a land of opportunity where Indians could do well. The US is the second most preferred choice to migrate to for Indians, after the UAE. Post LPG reforms, perceptions of the US became even more pro-US because of the IT revolution which led to more interactions among Indians and Americans. Notwithstanding this, Indian perceptions of the US have always been coloured by the perceived strength of US-Pakistan relations; and to a lesser degree by US-China relations as is evident from the different surveys. However, there appears to always have been a groundswell of pro-US sentiments in India, possibly because of shared democratic values. Today, as all the surveys have shown, Indians have very favourable views of the US. This positive perception about the US is seen across age groups and states. Moreover, with India's population becoming more youthful because of its demographic dividend, this positive image will only increase. Moreover, more and more of the youth are now studying in the US as it is the most favoured destination for higher education and are therefore getting more exposed to the US. This is true of the elites as well who are more invested culturally and economically in the US than in any other foreign country. In fact, this graph is likely to rise as more interactions take place between the peoples of the two countries and as US-China tensions rise along with India-China tensions. The US is seen as a partner who can be trusted against China. So, if public opinion has a say in the formulation of future Indian foreign policy, all indications are that India will grow closer to the US in the future.

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