Reasons for Public Opinion on Foreign Policy

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Introduction to Research

This research focuses on the U.S. foreign policy for three key countries: China, Mexico, and Russia. Throughout the entirety of the presidential campaigns for 2020 presidential election (Bevan and Krewel), public opinion can have a major impact on policy decisions and election outcomes (Knecht and Weatherford).

What does the literature say?

China

• Trump claimed to make drastic changes and enforce stricter policy, but has maintained a similar relationship as his predecessors (MacDonald).
• protectionist stance has changed U.S. economic policy with China (Nordin and Weissmann)
• Withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership

Russia

• Media plays an important role in shaping public opinion and foreign policy and is especially true of U.S. foreign policy toward Russia under the Trump administration (Hoffman).
• The power of media was displayed first during the Vietnam War and again through the Trump campaign and presidency with the collusion question about Russia (Aldrich).

Mexico

• Trump has made foreign policy toward Mexico much stricter on his claims that illegal immigration is a danger to the United States (Dominguez).
• Trump has been very vocal about the supposed effects that immigration has on the crime rate, and has dedicated more resources than his predecessors to preventing immigration across the southern border – a move that is mainly supported by Trump’s base (Klingner).

Hypotheses:

H 1: Liberal Democrats vs. Opinion of Foreign Policy (China)
Cross Tabulation Results:
- Closer to Liberals: 34.3%
- About Right: 44.0%
- Too Tough: 21.8%
- Somewhat Liberal:
  - Not Tough Enough: 39.5%
  - About Right: 39.1%
  - Too Tough: 21.3%
- Very Liberal:
  - Not Tough Enough: 53.5%
  - About Right: 37.4%
  - Too Tough: 9.1%

H 2: Trust in Media vs. Opinion of Foreign Policy (Russia)

• The results of this research showed that those who distrust the media are more likely to either say that U.S. foreign policy towards Russia under the Trump administration is about right, which proves the second hypothesis. In addition, those who have more trust in media are more likely to say that the foreign policy is not tough enough.

H 3: Illegal Immigration vs. Opinion of Foreign Policy (Mexico)

• The results of this research showed that those who believe illegal immigration increases the U.S. crime rate are more likely to say that the U.S. foreign policy towards Mexico is not tough enough, despite the stricter policies enforced under the Trump administration.

Findings

H 1: Liberal Democrats vs. Opinion of Foreign Policy (China)
The results of this research showed that the more liberal a Democrat is, the more likely they are to say that U.S. foreign policy towards China under the Trump administration is not tough enough. This conclusion disproves my first hypothesis and demonstrates the relationship between ideology and public opinion.

H 2: Trust in Media vs. Opinion of Foreign Policy (Russia)
The results of this research showed that those who distrust the media are more likely to say that U.S. foreign policy towards Russia under the Trump administration is about right, which proves the second hypothesis. In addition, those who have more trust in media are more likely to say that the foreign policy is not tough enough.

H 3: Illegal Immigration vs. Opinion of Foreign Policy (Mexico)
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Conclusions

• While liberal Democrats do not have a unified opinion of Trump’s foreign policy towards China, this research shows that there may be a relationship between ideology and public opinion of foreign policy.
• Trust in the media shapes public opinion of foreign policy, and those with less trust in media have more confidence that Trump is doing the right thing when it comes to foreign policy towards Russia, possibly because they may trust the president’s word over the media’s criticisms.
• The belief that illegal immigration causes crime has an effect on public opinion of U.S. policy towards Mexico, especially following Trump’s stricter policies regarding the southern border.

References