

The Myth of a Bipartisan Golden Age for U.S. Foreign Policy

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The Truman-Eisenhower Consensus Remains

Scholars and practitioners of U.S. foreign policy commonly describe the “early Cold War” presidencies of Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower as a golden age for bipartisan cooperation.¹ During those years, Democrats and Republicans structured U.S. foreign policy around four principles that this article calls the “Truman-Eisenhower consensus”: maintaining preponderant military power, defending allies against interstate aggression, establishing trade networks, and working with multilateral institutions. Republican senator Arthur Vandenberg exemplified the bipartisan ethos of this era, declaring that “politics stops at the water’s edge” and shepherding Democratic President Truman’s foreign policy agenda through Congress.²

That spirit of bipartisanship seems long gone. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Iran nuclear deal, and the Paris climate agreement are just a few examples of foreign policy controversies that have exposed deep cleavages between Democrats and Republicans. Meanwhile, congressional voting on foreign policy issues has become increasingly polarized across party lines.³

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1. See, for example, Richard A. Melanson, *American Foreign Policy since the Vietnam War: The Search for Consensus from Richard Nixon to George W. Bush*, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 3–42; Charles A. Kupchan and Peter L. Trubowitz, “Dead Center: The Demise of Liberal Internationalism in the United States,” *International Security*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Fall 2007), pp. 10–15, <https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.2007.32.2.7>; Daniel W. Drezner, “Grand Strategy in a Fractured Marketplace of Ideas,” in Thierry Balzacq and Ronald R. Krebs, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Grand Strategy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 658–660.

2. Hendrik Meijer, *Arthur Vandenberg: The Man in the Middle of the American Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), p. x.

3. See, for example, Peter Trubowitz and Nicole Mellow, “Foreign Policy, Bipartisanship, and the Paradox of Post-September 11 America,” *International Politics*, Vol. 48, No. 2/3 (2011), pp. 164–187, <https://doi.org/10.1057/ip.2011.12>; Gyung-Ho Jeong and Paul J. Quirk, “Division at the Water’s

These patterns have generated widespread pessimism about the future of the United States' global role. In the words of Kenneth Schultz, "It is hard to see how a country so at odds with itself can lead a fractious world."⁴ Charles Kupchan and Peter Trubowitz warn that "the political foundations of American internationalism have collapsed."⁵ When a 2018 survey conducted by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs asked 588 foreign policy experts to identify the greatest threats to U.S. national security, it found that political polarization was, by far, the most common answer.⁶

This article, by contrast, shows that most Democrats and Republicans continue to support the core internationalist principles that defined bipartisan cooperation during the early Cold War. I back this claim with evidence from public opinion surveys, congressional voting records, and party platform statements—the same data other scholars use to argue that bipartisan consensus in U.S. foreign policy has deteriorated since the Truman and Eisenhower administrations.

Why, then, has U.S. foreign policy become increasingly divisive? The answer is that the United States' international agenda was much narrower during the early Cold War than it is now. The Truman and Eisenhower administrations directed their major foreign policy investments toward defending the United States and its core allies. Since the 1960s, however, Democrats and Republicans have increasingly used U.S. power to promote global political change and shape the affairs of the Global South. The United States has thus, over time, directed more of its resources toward advancing goals that lie outside the Truman-Eisenhower consensus. Controversies surrounding this expanded agenda do not indicate either party has turned its back on long-standing commitments that previously enjoyed bipartisan support.

In fact, the Truman and Eisenhower administrations recognized that early Cold War bipartisanship could not sustain the kinds of international commitments that have generated political divisions in recent decades. In 1953, for ex-

Edge: The Polarization of Foreign Policy," *American Politics Research*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (2019), pp. 58–87, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X17719721>.

4. Kenneth A. Schultz, "Perils of Polarization for U.S. Foreign Policy," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Winter 2018), p. 24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2017.1406705>.

5. Charles A. Kupchan and Peter L. Trubowitz, "The Home Front: Why an Internationalist Foreign Policy Needs a Stronger Domestic Foundation," *Foreign Affairs*, April 20, 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-04-20/foreign-policy-home-front>.

6. Dina Smeltz, Joshua Busby, and Jordan Tama, "Political Polarization Is the Critical Threat to U.S., Foreign Policy Experts Say," *The Hill*, November 9, 2018, <https://thehill.com/opinion/national-security/415881-political-polarization-is-the-critical-threat-to-us-foreign-policy/>.

ample, sixty-four senators who believed that the United Nations (UN) was promoting “socialism by treaty” cosponsored a constitutional amendment that would have rendered all international agreements invalid without congressional approval. Eisenhower responded to that pressure by declaring that he would not support any new UN-sponsored conventions on economic and social matters.⁷ Most contemporary issues that drive political friction between the United States and multilateral institutions, such as the actions of the UN Human Rights Council or the International Criminal Court, would thus likely have been at least as controversial during the early Cold War as they are today. Truman and Eisenhower similarly understood that most citizens disapproved of sending U.S. military forces to topple foreign governments, as was the case with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The only comparable conflict from the early Cold War was Truman’s invasion of North Korea, which, as this article will demonstrate, also generated intense political discord.

This article offers a new lens for understanding the sources and consequences of political divisions over U.S. foreign policy. The conventional wisdom on this subject—which I term the “erosion thesis”—holds that Democrats and Republicans have steadily lost common ground on foreign policy issues in a manner that depletes Washington’s global influence.⁸ This idea is reflected in works describing how the United States has experienced a “slow erosion of the domestic sources of usable power,”⁹ how “the political foundations of American internationalism have collapsed,”¹⁰ how the bipartisan compact behind U.S. foreign policy “has been effectively dismantled,”¹¹ or how the liberal international order is being “hollowed out from within.”¹² By contrast, this article argues that both parties have stoked controversy by broadening their international agendas beyond the Truman-Eisenhower consensus. In this view, which I call the “enlargement thesis,” rising political divisions are

7. Duane Tananbaum, *The Bricker Amendment Controversy: A Test of Eisenhower’s Political Leadership* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988).

8. Prominent examples of the erosion thesis include Kupchan and Trubowitz, “Dead Center”; Drezner, “Grand Strategy in a Fractured Marketplace of Ideas”; Jeong and Quirk, “Division at the Water’s Edge”; Schultz, “Perils of Polarization for U.S. Foreign Policy.”

9. Peter Trubowitz and Peter Harris, “The End of the American Century? Slow Erosion of the Domestic Sources of Usable Power,” *International Affairs*, Vol. 95, No. 3 (May 2019), pp. 619–639, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiz055>.

10. Kupchan and Trubowitz, “The Home Front,” p. 92.

11. Kupchan and Trubowitz, “Dead Center,” p. 10.

12. Rebecca Adler-Nissen and Ayşe Zarakol, “Struggles for Recognition: The Liberal International Order and the Merger of Its Discontents,” *International Organization*, Vol. 75, No. 2 (2021), p. 611, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818320000454>.

largely a reaction to Democrats and Republicans deploying U.S. power in new ways rather than a force that undermines traditional conceptions of U.S. global leadership.

The politics of combating climate change exemplify the contrast between the erosion and the enlargement theses. Democrats' recent efforts to reduce carbon emissions have provoked intense partisan combat. But there has never been a time when both parties have agreed to back major investments in reversing climate change. That policy objective did not become salient in U.S. politics until the 1990s, and neither party prioritized that issue before the presidencies of Barack Obama and Joe Biden. A world in which the Obama and Biden administrations had devoted fewer resources to fighting climate change would have featured less political controversy. But avoiding that controversy would also have involved making less progress in fighting climate change. These dynamics reveal how partisan conflict often emerges when parties expand the United States' global role rather than when they abandon commitments that previously enjoyed bipartisan support.

Showing that the scope of bipartisan cooperation in U.S. foreign policy has not eroded since the early Cold War does not imply the United States will uphold its traditional commitments indefinitely. For example, if Donald Trump were to win reelection in November 2024, he might renounce the United States' commitment to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or significantly raise tariffs. Yet Trump's views on these subjects do not represent widespread divisions between Democrats and Republicans. For example, the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives each passed unanimous resolutions rebuking Trump's hostility toward NATO,¹³ and polling data show that both parties' voters generally favor free trade.¹⁴ Trump's stances on these issues thus largely reflect his idiosyncratic beliefs rather than systematic disagreements between Democrats and Republicans that threaten the Truman-Eisenhower consensus.

13. "The Latest: Senate Jabs Trump in Unanimous Vote on NATO," Associated Press, June 15, 2017, <https://apnews.com/united-states-congress-general-news-70da262f7b574273b4683dbde6fdc655>; Brett Samuels, "House Passes Resolution in Support of NATO by Unanimous Voice Vote," *The Hill*, July 11, 2018, <https://thehill.com/homenews/house/396536-house-passes-resolution-in-support-of-nato-by-unanimous-voice-vote/>.

14. Karl Friedhoff and Lama El Baz, *Most Americans See Value in International Trade* (Chicago: Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2023), p. 2, <https://globalaffairs.org/research/public-opinion-survey/most-americans-see-value-international-trade>. See also Lydia Saad, "Americans' Vanishing Fear of Foreign Trade," Gallup, February 26, 2020, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/286730/americans-vanishing-fear-foreign-trade.aspx>.

This distinction matters for policymaking. If the erosion thesis is correct—that is, if Democrats and Republicans increasingly lack common ground on foreign policy issues—then it is likely the United States will struggle to maintain a coherent vision for global leadership. Some scholars believe that domestic divisions have already grown so great that “grand strategy is dead.”¹⁵ Other proponents of the erosion thesis argue that Washington’s traditional foreign policy commitments can only endure if the country undertakes major course corrections, such as finding new ways to make foreign policy “work for the middle class,”¹⁶ reinvigorating the welfare state,¹⁷ or reducing the federal deficit.¹⁸ Either way, proponents of the erosion thesis argue that domestic political divisions increasingly threaten the viability of the international system that the United States helped build during the early Cold War.¹⁹ By contrast, this article’s analysis indicates that a foreign policy agenda consistent with the Truman-Eisenhower consensus is as viable today as it was during the 1940s and 1950s. Political divisions influence U.S. foreign policy primarily by constraining new uses of power rather than forcing the United States to abandon the principles that have shaped its global role for the last seventy-five years.

Assessing the Stability of the Truman-Eisenhower Consensus

This article uses the term “bipartisan consensus” to indicate the set of international commitments a majority of both parties’ voters and elites jointly support. It uses the terms “political controversy” and “political divisions” to reflect any foreign policy presidents attempt to implement without bipartisan backing.²⁰ My central argument is that bipartisan consensus in U.S. for-

15. Dan W. Drezner, Ronald R. Krebs, and Randall Schweller, “The End of Grand Strategy: America Must Think Small,” *Foreign Affairs*, April 13, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2020-04-13/end-grand-strategy>.

16. Salman Ahmed et al., *Making U.S. Foreign Policy Work Better for the Middle Class* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2020).

17. Kupchan and Trubowitz, “The Home Front.”

18. Richard Haass, *A World in Disarray: American Foreign Policy and the Crisis of the Old Order* (New York: Penguin, 2017), pp. 292–298.

19. See, for example, Peter Trubowitz and Brian Burgoon, *Geopolitics and Democracy: The Western Liberal Order from Foundation to Fracture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), pp. 120–137; G. John Ikenberry, *A World Safe for Democracy: Liberal Internationalism and the Crisis of Global Order* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020), pp. 1–6; Jessica Chen Weiss and Jeremy L. Wallace, “Domestic Politics, China’s Rise, and the Future of the Liberal International Order,” *International Organization*, Vol. 75, No. 2 (2021), pp. 4–5, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S002081832000048X>.

20. The absence of bipartisan consensus includes when both parties reject some element of a presi-

eign policy is at least as broad today as it was during the early Cold War, and rising political divisions in this domain are primarily attributable to presidents devoting more resources toward goals that have not historically enjoyed bipartisan agreement.

U.S. foreign policy during the early Cold War revolved around four core principles I call the “Truman-Eisenhower consensus.”²¹ First, Truman and Eisenhower committed the United States to maintaining military preponderance, defined as the ability to prevent other countries from dominating the world’s economically vital regions. Those regions have traditionally been specified as the industrialized cores of East Asia, North America, and Western Europe, as well as the energy-producing areas of the Middle East.²²

The second component of the Truman-Eisenhower consensus involved defending allies against interstate aggression. These commitments were intended to deter attacks from hostile powers and reduce allies’ incentives to conduct escalatory arms races. To support those objectives, the Truman and Eisenhower administrations created NATO in Western Europe and a network of bilateral defense treaties in East Asia. Once again, those alliances were primarily designed to protect the stability of the world’s vital economic centers.²³

The third component of the Truman-Eisenhower consensus involved establishing trade networks to stave off a resurgence of global protectionism, which was widely seen as contributing to the collapse of global order in the 1930s. To do that, the Truman and Eisenhower administrations created the Bretton

dent’s foreign policy agenda, as such cases reveal an absence of bipartisan support for a given commitment. On the importance of incorporating “antipresidential bipartisanship” into studies of political divisions in U.S. foreign policy, see Jordan Tama, *Bipartisanship in U.S. Foreign Policy: Cooperation in a Polarized Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023).

21. These four principles are consistent with the grand strategy of deep engagement as articulated by Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, *America Abroad: The United States’ Global Role in the 21st Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). Yet the term “deep engagement” is commonly used to describe the U.S. contemporary grand strategy, which includes many commitments the Truman and Eisenhower administrations opposed. Brooks and Wohlforth’s research on deep engagement is also primarily intended to serve a normative function in guiding contemporary policy, whereas this article’s analysis of the Truman-Eisenhower consensus primarily serves a descriptive purpose in defining the basic set of international commitments that enjoyed bipartisan support during the early Cold War.

22. Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), pp. 17, 97, 450, 515–517; Robert R. Bowie and Richard H. Immerman, *Waging Peace: How Eisenhower Shaped an Enduring Cold War Strategy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 48–49, 179, 200–201.

23. Timothy Andrews Sayle, *Enduring Alliance: A History of NATO and the Postwar Global Order* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019), pp. 11–27; Michael J. Green, *By More Than Providence: Grand Strategy and American Power in the Asia Pacific since 1783* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), pp. 245–296.

Woods institutions of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, while coordinating multilateral tariff reductions through the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).²⁴

Finally, the Truman and Eisenhower administrations worked with inter-governmental organizations (IGOs) such as the UN. These institutions were designed to coordinate efforts to preserve international stability, help Washington demonstrate “strategic restraint” in ways that legitimize U.S. power, and grant the United States outsized influence in shaping global affairs.²⁵

By adopting foreign policies consistent with the Truman-Eisenhower consensus, the United States committed itself to an unprecedented program of global leadership. Yet that leadership was still limited in scope. As Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth describe it, these commitments were primarily designed for defensive purposes: “To prevent a much more dangerous, unstable world from emerging and to forestall the breakdown of cooperation regarding the global economy and other issues of great importance to the United States.”²⁶ For example, the Truman and Eisenhower administrations articulated their main foreign policy objective as containing the Soviet Union rather than rolling back Soviet influence or spreading liberal values.²⁷ Truman and Eisenhower thus generally confined efforts to promote regime change to the realm of covert actions that did not require large-scale resource commitments.²⁸ And, since Truman and Eisenhower did not trust Moscow to keep its word on matters pertaining to national security, they made little effort to cooperate with the Soviet Union. As a result, neither president produced (or even tried particularly hard to negotiate) significant arms control agreements.²⁹

24. Francine McKenzie, *GATT and Global Order in the Postwar Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 26–33, 62; Thomas W. Zeiler, *Capitalist Peace: A History of American Free Trade Internationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), pp. 57–108.

25. G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Carla Norrlof, *America's Global Advantage: U.S. Hegemony and International Cooperation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

26. Brooks and Wohlforth, *America Abroad*, pp. 9–10.

27. John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 24–196; Brendan Rittenhouse Green, “Two Concepts of Liberty: U.S. Cold War Grand Strategies and the Liberal Tradition,” *International Security*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Fall 2012), pp. 9–43, https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00097.

28. Gregory Mitrovich, *Undermining the Kremlin: America's Strategy to Subvert the Soviet Bloc, 1947–1956* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000).

29. Michael Krepon, *Winning and Losing the Nuclear Peace: The Rise, Demise, and Revival of Arms Control* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2021), pp. 15–58.

Another key scope condition on U.S. foreign policy during the early Cold War is that Truman and Eisenhower prioritized defending core allies—particularly industrialized democracies such as France, Germany, and Japan—rather than projecting power globally. Thus, even though the Truman Doctrine nominally promised to protect all “free peoples” from armed subjugation, Truman provided only limited assistance, and chose not to send U.S. military forces, to defend China against Mao Zedong’s communist insurgency.³⁰ Similarly, even though Eisenhower popularized the idea that South Vietnam’s collapse would embolden communist movements throughout Southeast Asia, he limited U.S. cooperation with Saigon to relatively small amounts of noncombat aid.³¹ Truman and Eisenhower both provided economic assistance to developing countries, but they devoted far greater resources toward rebuilding the industrial core of Western Europe through the Marshall Plan.³²

Starting in the 1960s, presidents from both parties steadily relaxed those constraints, deploying U.S. power to pursue a growing range of strategic objectives. John F. Kennedy significantly expanded U.S. foreign aid to compete for political influence in the developing world. Lyndon Johnson sent half a million U.S. soldiers to fight insurgents in Vietnam. Richard Nixon attempted to foster a new era of cooperative relations with the Soviet Union through the policy of *détente*. Jimmy Carter elevated global human rights to the center of his foreign policy agenda. Ronald Reagan rejected traditional conceptions of containment in favor of rolling back Soviet influence. When the Cold War ended, presidents expanded U.S. foreign policy in myriad directions, including conducting humanitarian interventions, spreading democracy, trading with China, combating climate change, invading other countries to replace their governments, and attempting decades-long projects in armed nation-building. All the choices described in this paragraph generated sharp political divisions, and none of them fell within the scope of the Truman-Eisenhower consensus. These initiatives all involved promoting political change or projecting U.S. power into the Global South on a scale that early Cold War presidents deliberately avoided.³³

30. Daniel Kurtz-Phelan, *The China Mission: George Marshall's Unfinished War, 1945–1947* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2018).

31. Steven Wagner, *Eisenhower for Our Time* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2024), pp. 103–136.

32. Burton I. Kaufman, *Trade and Aid: Eisenhower's Foreign Economic Policy, 1953–1961* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982); Benn Steil, *The Marshall Plan: Dawn of the Cold War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2018).

33. For descriptions of how Cold War presidents expanded the boundaries of U.S. foreign policy

There are many reasons why Democrats and Republicans expanded their international agendas in such ways. The most obvious explanation is leaders have often genuinely believed that the United States would benefit from tackling a broader range of global problems.³⁴ Other accounts stress the influence of ideology,³⁵ the habits and personal ambitions of foreign policy elites,³⁶ political incentives for presidents to accomplish more in international affairs than their predecessors,³⁷ diminished geopolitical constraints following the collapse of the Soviet Union,³⁸ and a decline of congressional oversight that had previously limited presidents' freedom of action.³⁹ Given these factors, some expansion of the United States' foreign policy agenda was probably inevitable in the long run. The rest of this section explains why it is crucial to account for that shift when analyzing the sources and consequences of political divisions in U.S. foreign policy.

DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN THE EROSION AND THE ENLARGEMENT THESES

The fact that the United States' foreign policy agenda has grown over time suggests there are at least two distinct ways to understand the sources and consequences of political divisions in U.S. foreign policy. According to the erosion thesis, the scope of bipartisan consensus in U.S. foreign policy has deteriorated

in controversial ways, see Jessica M. Chapman, *Remaking the World: Decolonization and the Cold War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2023); Jussi M. Hanhimäki, *The Rise and Fall of Détente: American Foreign Policy and the Transformation of the Cold War* (Sterling, VA: Potomac Books, 2013); Barbara J. Keys, *Reclaiming American Virtue: The Human Rights Revolution of the 1970s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); William Michael Schmidli, *Freedom on the Offensive: Human Rights, Democracy Promotion, and U.S. Interventionism in the Late Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2022). For similar trends in the post-Cold War era, see Michael Mandelbaum, *Mission Failure: America and the World in the Post Cold War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); John J. Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018); Aaron L. Friedberg, *Getting China Wrong* (Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2022).

34. Jake Sullivan, "More, Less, or Different? Where U.S. Foreign Policy Should—and Shouldn't—Go from Here," *Foreign Affairs*, December 11, 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/review-essay/2018-12-11/more-less-or-different>.

35. Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); Colin Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders: Power, Culture, and Change in American Grand Strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

36. Patrick Porter, "Why America's Grand Strategy Has Not Changed: Power, Habit, and the U.S. Foreign Policy Establishment," *International Security*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (Spring 2018), pp. 9–46, https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00311; Stephen M. Walt, *The Hell of Good Intentions: America's Foreign Policy Elite and the Decline of U.S. Primacy* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2018).

37. Jeffrey A. Friedman, *The Commander-in-Chief Test: Public Opinion and the Politics of Image-Making in U.S. Foreign Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2023).

38. Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion*.

39. Linda L. Fowler, *Watchdogs on the Hill: The Decline of Congressional Oversight of U.S. Foreign Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

rated since the early Cold War. As noted in this article's introduction, the erosion thesis implies the United States' usable power and its chances of implementing a coherent vision of global leadership have diminished over time. A different perspective, which I call the enlargement thesis, is that Democrats and Republicans still largely support the Truman-Eisenhower consensus; presidents have courted controversy by devoting more resources to goals that have not historically generated bipartisan agreement. In this view, political divisions constrain new uses of U.S. power without directly undermining Washington's traditional international commitments.

To assess the plausibility of the erosion and the enlargement theses, I examine each component of the Truman-Eisenhower consensus. These analyses establish four principal claims. First, U.S. commitments to the Truman-Eisenhower consensus are at least as extensive today as they were during the early Cold War. For example, the U.S. military budget is now higher in real terms than it was during the 1940s and 1950s, barriers to global trade have substantially declined since the Truman and Eisenhower presidencies, and U.S. obligations to alliances and multilateral institutions have grown over the last seventy-five years. This analysis refutes the most worrisome variant of the erosion thesis, which claims that "grand strategy is dead."⁴⁰ By contrast, I argue that the United States still generally upholds the basic internationalist principles the Truman and Eisenhower administrations developed.

Next, each section asks whether core principles of the Truman-Eisenhower consensus have become increasingly divisive since the early Cold War. This pattern would be consistent with widespread concerns about how the bipartisan foundations of the United States' traditional global role have weakened over time. To test this claim, I use congressional voting patterns and public opinion surveys to analyze party elites' preferences and voter attitudes, respectively. When analyzing congressional voting patterns, I focus on legislation that deals with similar issues across periods. For example, I compare votes on annual military budgets during both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations (1945–1960) and the last fifteen years (2009–2024). When analyzing polling data, I use the iPoll database, a resource maintained by Cornell University's Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, to identify relevant survey questions that were posed in similar ways across different eras.⁴¹ These com-

40. Drezner, Krebs, and Schweller, "The End of Grand Strategy."

41. iPoll database, Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, version 3, Cornell University, <https://www.ropercenter.cornell.edu>. Online supplementary materials (section 1) describe how these survey questions were selected and grouped for the article's analysis.

parisons provide the clearest lens for analyzing the extent to which the scope of bipartisan agreement in U.S. foreign policy has shifted over time.⁴² This analysis contradicts the erosion thesis by showing that U.S. citizens and their elected representatives tend to be at least as supportive of the Truman-Eisenhower consensus today as they were during the early Cold War.

The third part of each section examines the extent to which contemporary controversies over the United States' global role involve issues that fall outside the scope of the Truman-Eisenhower consensus. I identify the universe of contemporary controversies in U.S. foreign policy using data from the Berlin Social Science Center's Manifesto Project, which has categorized every policy-related statement in Democratic and Republican platforms since 2004.⁴³ These data provide systematic foundations for understanding political parties' foreign policy disagreements.⁴⁴ This article refines the Manifesto Project's data by separating statements that criticize core components of the Truman-Eisenhower consensus (e.g., maintaining U.S. military preponderance) from concerns about foreign policies that fell outside the Truman-Eisenhower consensus (e.g., invading Iraq). This analysis supports the enlargement thesis by showing that contemporary political controversies over U.S. foreign policy overwhelmingly center on efforts to expand the United States' international agenda beyond its scope from the early Cold War.

Finally, each section considers the counterfactual question: Would the Truman and Eisenhower administrations have been able to build bipartisan consensus for the kinds of international commitments that currently create political divisions in U.S. foreign policy? That assumption is crucial to the erosion thesis: If Democrats and Republicans during the early Cold War could not agree on policies such as armed nation-building in Afghanistan or the Paris climate agreement, then those episodes cannot serve as evidence that bipartisan consensus in U.S. foreign policy has narrowed in recent decades. Yet Truman

42. Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro, *The Rational Voter: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

43. The Manifesto Project provides data on U.S. party platforms dating back to 1948. But 2004 is the earliest year for which the Manifesto Project provides annotated platforms specifying exactly which statements correspond to different content codes. The Manifesto Project had not yet coded the parties' 2024 platforms when this article went to press, but none of the statements in those documents appear to contradict the Truman-Eisenhower consensus. I discuss Democrats' and Republicans' contemporary positions on key issues throughout this article. See: Pola Lehmann et al., *The Manifesto Data Collection: Manifesto Project (MRG/CMP/MARPOR)*, version 2023a (Berlin: Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung [WZB]; Göttingen: Institut für Demokratieforschung [IfDem], 2023), <https://doi.org/10.25522/manifesto.mpps.2023a>.

44. Trubowitz and Burgoon, *Geopolitics and Democracy*, pp. 46–53.

and Eisenhower generally avoided expanding their foreign policy agendas because they expected those initiatives to generate political discord. This analysis supports the article's argument that political divisions in contemporary U.S. foreign policy do not generally reflect either party abandoning international commitments that it supported during the early Cold War.

By comparing contemporary U.S. foreign policy with that of the early Cold War, the article's research design cannot exclude the possibility that bipartisan consensus on the United States' global role peaked sometime in between those eras. The most plausible peak would be the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the 9/11 terrorist attacks, when both parties endorsed ambitious programs to broaden alliances, expand trade, combat terrorism, and conduct military interventions.⁴⁵ My empirical analysis shows that Democrats and Republicans no longer possess such enthusiasm for remaking global politics. There are nevertheless three reasons why I compare the politics of contemporary U.S. foreign policy with those from the early Cold War instead of analyzing a broader sweep of history.

First, as noted in the introduction, proponents of the erosion thesis generally argue that the early Cold War represented the zenith of bipartisan agreement in U.S. foreign policy. Thus, if there is any time since World War II when we should expect the scope of bipartisan consensus to be broader than it is today, it would be the early Cold War. Second, the fact that Democrats and Republicans could not sustain ambitious visions for transforming world politics after the collapse of the Soviet Union is consistent with my thesis that efforts to expand the United States' international agenda reliably generate political backlash. Finally, descriptions of the early Cold War as a golden age for liberal internationalism indicate widespread beliefs about how the Truman and Eisenhower administrations played significant, constructive roles in shaping global order. By demonstrating that the Truman-Eisenhower consensus remains at least as strong today as it was in the 1940s and 1950s, this article shows that Democrats and Republicans still agree on a coherent set of internationalist principles.

Military Preponderance

One of the principles underpinning the Truman administration's foreign policy was that the United States needed sufficient military capacity to prevent

45. Mandelbaum, *Mission Failure*; Trubowitz and Mellow, "Foreign Policy, Bipartisanship, and the Paradox of Post-September 11 America."

hostile powers from dominating East Asia, North America, or Western Europe. During his second term as president, Truman thus raised annual military spending from \$14 billion to \$52 billion.⁴⁶ President Eisenhower preserved that investment, leaving office in 1961 with an annual defense budget of \$50 billion, which is equivalent to roughly \$525 billion in 2024 dollars.⁴⁷ This level of military spending received overwhelming bipartisan support. From 1946 to 1961, the average vote to pass annual military budgets was 367–2 in the House of Representatives. The Senate recorded just two “no” votes for all military budgets in that period.⁴⁸

If either political party opposed maintaining such high levels of defense spending, then this would indicate that the scope of bipartisan consensus in U.S. foreign policy has eroded since the early Cold War. Yet over the last fifteen years, the House and Senate have passed annual defense budgets by average margins of 339–80 and 85–15, respectively.⁴⁹ The proportion of votes opposing these bills is higher today than it was during the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, but it still falls far short of threatening the bills’ passage. Moreover, the most recent U.S. military budget of \$886 billion is roughly 70 percent higher in real terms than it was when President Eisenhower left office.⁵⁰ These figures indicate that substantially expanding the United States’ investment in global military preponderance since the early Cold War has triggered only marginal political opposition.⁵¹

46. Unless otherwise noted, all defense spending data in this section are from the SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), <https://doi.org/10.55163/CQGC9685>.

47. Real (i.e., inflation-adjusted) dollar values throughout this article are estimated using the Bureau of Labor Statistics’s Consumer Price Index Inflation Calculator and are current as of June 10, 2024. See “CPI Inflation Calculator,” Bureau of Labor Statistics, <https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl?cost1=886&year1=202312&year2=202404>.

48. These data are from *CQ Almanac*’s annual appropriations summaries. See, for example, the record of HR 7391 described in “Defense” in *CQ Almanac 1952*, 8th ed. (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1953), pp. 97–101. These figures exclude voice votes as well as the 1950 “omnibus” spending bill, which merged funding for foreign and domestic programs.

49. These data were gathered from records provided by Congress.gov. See, for example, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2025, S.4638, 118th Cong. (2024), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/4638>. These data exclude the U.S. Senate’s passage of the 2011 National Defense Authorization Act by unanimous consent and the U.S. House’s passage of the 2014 National Defense Authorization Act by voice vote.

50. Patricia Zengerle, “Congress Passes \$886 Billion Defense Policy Bill,” Reuters, December 14, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/congress-passes-886-billion-defense-policy-bill-biden-sign-into-law-2023-12-14/>.

51. When progressive members of Congress attempted to “defund the Pentagon” in 2020, their proposed allocation of \$667 billion was still 50 percent larger in real terms than President Eisenhower’s last defense budget for 1961. Even the fiercest critics of U.S. military expenditures thus endorse spending levels that exceed the boundaries of bipartisan consensus from the early Cold War.

The proportion of gross domestic product (GDP) the United States devotes to national defense declined from roughly 9 percent in 1961 to 3 percent in 2023.⁵² Some scholars argue that this trend represents a waning commitment to maintaining U.S. military power.⁵³ But defense spending as a proportion of GDP measures the burden military expenditures place on a state's overall economy instead of the capabilities states possess for defending their national interests. For example, the countries that currently devote the largest proportions of their GDP to military expenditures are Ukraine, Lebanon, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, and South Sudan. None of these countries can remotely challenge U.S. power, which shows why the proportion of GDP that a state spends on defense provides limited information about that country's overall military capacity.

If anything, the United States' claim to military preponderance is stronger today than it was during the early Cold War.⁵⁴ By the end of the Eisenhower administration, the United States accounted for about 40 percent of global military expenditures, which was roughly equivalent to what the Soviet Union spent on its own national defense.⁵⁵ In 2024, the United States still accounts for about 40 percent of global military expenditures, and it spends twice as much on defense as its closest geopolitical rival, China.⁵⁶ These spending ratios likely understate the degree to which the United States' ability to prevent hostile

Joe Gould, "Defund Pentagon Effort Holds Message for Biden," *DefenseNews*, July 20, 2020, <https://www.defensenews.com/congress/2020/07/20/defund-pentagon-effort-holds-message-for-biden/>.

52. "The Cost of the Global Arms Race," *Economist*, May 23, 2023, <https://www.economist.com/international/2023/05/23/the-cost-of-the-global-arms-race>.

53. See, for example, Martin Feldstein, "The Underfunded Pentagon," *Foreign Affairs*, March 1, 2007, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2007-03-01/underfunded-pentagon>; Trubowitz and Burgoon, *Geopolitics and Democracy*, pp. 45, 49.

54. See, for example, Michael Beckley, *Unrivaled: Why America Will Remain the World's Sole Superpower* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018); Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, "The Myth of Multipolarity: American Power's Staying Power," *Foreign Affairs*, April 18, 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/china-multipolarity-myth>.

55. Since SIPRI's military expenditure database lacks information on the Soviet Union, these figures are from National Military Capabilities, Correlates of War, v6.0, <https://correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/national-material-capabilities/>.

56. An American Enterprise Institute (AEI) report argues that after adjusting for purchasing-power parity and off-the-books expenditures, China's defense budget is roughly equivalent to that of the United States. Thus, the ratio of U.S.-to-Chinese military expenditures today is similar to the U.S.-Soviet balance from the early Cold War. Since adjusting for purchasing-power parity would also likely increase estimates of Soviet defense expenditures, AEI's analysis reinforces this article's claim that U.S. military preponderance is not obviously lower today than it was during the Truman and Eisenhower administrations. See Mackenzie Eaglen, *Keeping Up with the Pacing Threat: Unveiling the True Size of Beijing's Military Spending* (Washington, DC: AEI, 2024).

powers from dominating the world's key economic centers has improved since the early Cold War. During the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, the Soviet Union possessed conventional military superiority in Europe. Stopping a Soviet invasion thus relied on nuclear deterrence—a precarious situation given how rapidly the Soviets built up their own nuclear arsenal.⁵⁷ By contrast, the United States in 2024 has a credible ability to defend East Asian allies against Chinese aggression without resorting to nuclear war, particularly given that the region's maritime geography impedes offensive operations.⁵⁸

Even if the United States' claim to global military preponderance is stronger today than it was during the early Cold War, it would still be a concern if public support for high levels of defense spending have substantially declined. In that case, it would be reasonable to worry that Washington's traditional military commitments might not be sustainable for the long term. But public opinion polls show few signs of eroding support for military expenditures. The Roper Center's iPoll database contains twenty-eight surveys from the Truman and Eisenhower administrations that ask voters about increasing military spending, decreasing it, or keeping it about the same. On average, 25 percent of these surveys' respondents supported raising military expenditures, whereas 19 percent supported defense budget cuts.⁵⁹ The iPoll database contains fifty-six surveys asking similar questions over the last fifteen years. On average, 31 percent of those surveys' respondents indicated the defense budget was too low, whereas 29 percent indicated the defense budget was too high.⁶⁰ Once again, the data provide little evidence that large-scale expansions to U.S. military spending since the early Cold War have provoked significant political opposition.

What, then, drives contemporary political divisions over U.S. military

57. Susan Colbourn, *Euromissiles: The Nuclear Weapons That Nearly Destroyed NATO* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2022).

58. Stephen Biddle and Ivan Oelrich, "Future Warfare in the Western Pacific: Chinese Antiaccess/Area Denial, U.S. AirSea Battle, and Command of the Commons in East Asia," *International Security*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Summer 2016), pp. 7–48, https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00249; Eric Heginbotham et al., *The U.S.-China Military Scorecard: Forces, Geography, and the Evolving Balance of Power, 1996–2017* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2015); Mark F. Cancian, Matthew Cancian, and Eric Heginbotham, *The First Battle of the Next War: Wargaming a Chinese Invasion of Taiwan* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2023); Elbridge A. Colby, *The Strategy of Denial: American Defense in an Age of Great Power Conflict* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021), pp. 153–160.

59. Supplementary information (SI) in the online appendix details procedures for gathering all iPoll data that the article describes. The data in this sentence are documented in SI section 2, statement 1 (28 surveys).

60. See SI section 2, statement 2 (56 surveys) in the online appendix.

power? The Manifesto Project's database provides a useful tool for answering that question. As noted previously, that database catalogs every policy-related statement in Democratic and Republican platforms according to "content codes" that indicate when those statements reflect positive or negative sentiments toward specific policy issues. One of the content codes the Manifesto Project assigns to those statements reflects negative attitudes toward military power, defined as "negative references to the military or [to the] use of military power to solve conflicts."⁶¹ The Manifesto Project has documented these coding decisions for every Democratic and Republican party platform released from 2004 to 2020. During that span, the Manifesto Project has coded 113 platform statements as expressing negative attitudes toward military power.⁶²

Table 1 shows that none of these statements directly challenges the long-standing U.S. commitment to military preponderance. A plurality of these statements ($n = 45$) criticizes the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. This is a clear case of how recent presidents have stoked political controversy by using military power in ways that fall outside the Truman-Eisenhower consensus. Another twenty-nine statements address miscellaneous issues that have no direct connection to debates about whether the United States should preserve global military preponderance, such as closing the Guantanamo Bay detention camp, opposing the reinstatement of a military draft, exempting female soldiers from combat, or the Trump administration politicizing the armed forces.⁶³

Just thirteen statements in the Manifesto Project's dataset—12 percent of all statements coded as reflecting negative attitudes toward military power—plausibly indicate support for reducing U.S. military capabilities. All these statements entail vague calls for "rebalancing investments" or "making tough budgetary decisions." None of them endorses large-scale cuts to U.S. military resources. In fact, every Democratic and Republican platform since 1992 has explicitly advocated maintaining unrivaled military power.⁶⁴

61. Pola Lehmann et al., *The Manifesto Project Dataset—Codebook* (Berlin: Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung; Göttingen: Institut für Demokratieforschung, 2023), p. 12, <https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu/datasets/MPDS2023a>.

62. See SI section 1 in the online appendix for details. In total, Manifesto Project data classify 17,379 policy positions across these platforms.

63. For the three tables in this study, all statements in each category are in section 1 of the online appendix.

64. For example, the 2020 Democratic Party platform states: "We will ensure that our military has no peer." 2020 Platform Committee, "2020 Democratic Party Platform," Democratic National Committee, July 27, 2020, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/sites/default/files/books/presidential-documents-archive-collections/national-political-party-platforms/136019.pdf>.

Table 1. Party Platform Statements Reflecting Negative Attitudes toward Military Power

Subject	Examples	Number of statements
Criticisms of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan	<p>“We need to bring our forever wars to a responsible end.”</p> <p>“Our war in Afghanistan is the longest war in American history, with the youngest troops now fighting a war that was launched before they were even born.”</p>	45 statements
Reducing the United States’ military budget or footprint	<p>“We can maintain a strong defense and protect our safety and security for less.”</p> <p>“In our current fiscal environment, we must also make tough budgetary decisions across the board—and that includes within the defense budget.”</p>	13 statements
Emphasizing the importance of diplomacy	<p>“We believe that war must always be the last resort, never the first choice.”</p> <p>“Rather than militarize our foreign policy, treat our diplomats with contempt, and call for reckless budget cuts, Democrats will put diplomacy back in the hands of professionals.”</p>	26 statements
Miscellaneous issues unrelated to the Truman-Eisenhower consensus	Closing Guantanamo Bay; opposing a military draft	29 statements

SOURCE: Manifesto Project, 2004–2020.

The last set of statements the Manifesto Project codes as indicating negative attitudes toward military power ($n = 26$) expresses a party’s commitment to diplomacy. The Manifesto Project codes these statements as reflecting negative attitudes toward military power because they imply that a party seeks to lessen the role that military force plays in international politics. That inclination would threaten the Truman-Eisenhower consensus if it indicated that parties were no longer willing to use U.S. military power to prevent the rise of regional hegemons. But none of the statements in the Manifesto Project’s data suggests that. Instead, these statements all indicate a desire to resolve conflicts peacefully when possible—and, in many cases, to increase State Department resources for pursuing diplomacy—in ways that do not directly challenge the Truman-Eisenhower consensus.

Altogether, this section’s analysis shows that neither political party cur-

rently challenges the United States' long-standing commitment to maintaining global military preponderance. Instead—and consistent with the enlargement thesis—controversies surrounding U.S. military power predominantly stem from issues that fall outside the boundaries of the Truman-Eisenhower consensus, particularly the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. If it were true that Democrats and Republicans would have supported those kinds of conflicts during the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, then that would suggest the scope of bipartisan consensus in U.S. foreign policy has eroded in recent decades. Yet the only comparable case from that period—U.S. military intervention in Korea—also stoked deep political divisions.⁶⁵

President Truman deployed U.S. troops to South Korea in 1950 to defend that country against communist invasion. Truman's choice to defend South Korea was consistent with the goal of deterring regional hegemony, particularly given that North Korea's attack was widely seen as a Soviet-sponsored attempt to promote communist influence in East Asia. U.S. citizens overwhelmingly supported this effort: According to a 1950 Gallup poll, 78 percent approved of intervening in the war.⁶⁶ Within two months, the United States and its allies had ejected foreign forces from South Korea.

Truman then expanded U.S. war aims by invading North Korea, attempting to destroy Pyongyang's army and potentially unify the Korean peninsula under noncommunist rule. This choice shifted the United States' role in the conflict from stopping interstate aggression to promoting political change. Invading North Korea also triggered Chinese military intervention, thereby transforming the conflict into a prolonged war of attrition. As fighting dragged on, the war became increasingly unpopular: During Truman's last full year in office (1952), just 35 percent of voters agreed the war had been worth fighting compared with 55 percent of voters who disagreed with that statement.⁶⁷ Those figures resemble polling data from the last full year of George W. Bush's presidency (2008), when 33 percent of voters on average agreed the Iraq War

65. The only other overt U.S. military intervention during the Truman and Eisenhower administrations was the 1958 peacekeeping mission in Lebanon. That operation had relatively limited objectives (to secure Beirut's port and airport) and a relatively limited duration (three months), so it is a poor analogy to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

66. Fifteen percent of U.S. citizens opposed intervening in the war. Gallup Organization, Gallup Poll #1950-0458: Communism/Size of Military/Foreign Relations, Question 28, USGALLUP. 50-458.QK09A (Ithaca, NY: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, Cornell University, 1950), <https://doi.org/10.25940/ROPER-31087441>.

67. SI section 2, statement 3 (4 surveys) in the online appendix.

had been worth fighting compared with 63 percent of voters disagreeing with that statement.⁶⁸ Similarly, by the end of the U.S. occupation in Afghanistan in 2021, just 35 percent of voters agreed the war had been worth fighting compared with 62 percent who disagreed.⁶⁹ Such comparable levels of public disapproval for these wars show that the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan do not reflect an erosion of cross-party consensus on foreign policy issues. Instead, these cases show that ever since the early years of the Cold War, leaders have struggled to maintain bipartisan support for military interventions that fall outside the boundaries of the Truman-Eisenhower consensus, especially when those efforts do not achieve their goals at acceptable cost.⁷⁰

Defending Allies from Interstate Aggression

Following World War II, the Truman and Eisenhower administrations determined that Western Europe lacked the resources to defend itself against Soviet encroachment. Several U.S. wartime allies also feared that a reconstructed Germany would again destabilize Europe. Truman addressed those concerns by creating NATO, which committed members to mutual defense. Though Republican nationalists who were skeptical of entangling the United States in European politics opposed joining NATO, the Senate ultimately ratified NATO's Charter by a vote of 83–13.⁷¹ The Eisenhower administration then constructed a “hub-and-spokes” network of bilateral alliances in East Asia that the Senate also ratified with overwhelmingly bipartisan support.⁷²

If either political party renounced its support for NATO, then it would indicate the United States no longer retained bipartisan agreement for the foreign policy commitments it devised during the early Cold War. Yet congressional support for NATO is, if anything, stronger in 2024 than it was during the

68. SI section 2, statement 4 (14 surveys) in the online appendix.

69. “Most Americans Say the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq Were Not Worth Fighting,” AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, August 19, 2021, <https://apnorc.org/projects/most-americans-say-the-wars-in-afghanistan-and-iraq-were-not-worth-fighting/>.

70. On how U.S. voters consistently show higher levels of support for military interventions designed to preserve international stability rather than to coerce political change, see Bruce W. Jentleson, “The Pretty Prudent Public: Post Post-Vietnam American Opinion on the Use of Military Force,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (March 1992), pp. 49–74, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2600916>.

71. Robert David Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 27–28.

72. Victor D. Cha, *Powerplay: The Origins of the American Alliance System in East Asia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016).

Truman and Eisenhower administrations. Even though NATO's original objectives have become less urgent—the collapse of the Soviet Union greatly improved Western Europe's security and warfare among Western European states is now all but unthinkable—Congress has not sought to reduce U.S. obligations to NATO. Instead, the Senate has voted on an overwhelmingly bipartisan basis to approve six rounds of NATO expansion since 1998. Doing so has committed the United States to defend sixteen additional European countries.⁷³

Bipartisan support for NATO in Congress was particularly noticeable during the Trump administration, after Trump publicly questioned the value of upholding the U.S. commitment to defending allies from attack. The U.S. Senate rebuked Trump's comments by affirming its commitment to NATO through a rare 100–0 vote.⁷⁴ The House of Representatives then passed a resolution “solemnly reaffirming” its commitment to defend NATO allies by a vote of 423–4.⁷⁵ The Senate later passed a second motion of support for NATO by a vote of 97–2, and the House passed a similar measure by unanimous consent.⁷⁶

Bipartisan support for NATO remains strong among voters, too. According to Chicago Council on Global Affairs (hereafter Chicago Council) data from October 2023, 92 percent of Democrats and 68 percent of Republicans think that the United States should either maintain or increase its commitment to NATO.⁷⁷ Even among voters who identify as “Trump Republicans,” 61 percent oppose reducing Washington's commitment to NATO.⁷⁸ These data further

73. The Senate approved these rounds of NATO enlargement by votes of 80–19, 96–0, a “division vote” (occurring when the Senate does not take roll call but for which no objections are recorded), 97–2, 91–2, and 95–1. *NATO Enlargement: Senate Advice and Consent*, Congressional Research Service Report RL31915 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, January 15, 2010), <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/RL31915.html>; Alexander Bolton, “Senate Votes 95–1 to Add Sweden, Finland to NATO,” *The Hill*, August 3, 2022, <https://thehill.com/policy/defense/3586658-senate-ratifies-accession-of-sweden-and-finland-to-nato/>.

74. “The Latest: Senate Jabs Trump in Unanimous Vote on NATO.”

75. “House Overwhelmingly Backs NATO Mutual Defense,” Reuters, June 27, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-nato-congress/house-overwhelmingly-backs-nato-mutual-defense-idUSKBN19I30Y/>.

76. Ted Barrett, “Senate Takes Swipe at Trump with Pro-NATO Vote,” CNN, July 11, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/07/10/politics/senate-nato-vote-trump/index.html>; Samuels, “House Passes Resolution in Support of NATO by Unanimous Voice Vote.”

77. Dina Smeltz, *Americans Continue to See Benefits from U.S. Alliances* (Chicago: Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2023), p. 4, <https://globalaffairs.org/research/public-opinion-survey/americans-continue-see-benefits-us-alliances>.

78. Dina Smeltz and Craig Kafura, *Majority of Trump Republicans Prefer the United States Stay Out of World Affairs* (Chicago: Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2023), <https://globalaffairs.org/research/public-opinion-survey/majority-trump-republicans-prefer-united-states-stay-out-world>.

demonstrate that Trump's abrasive stance toward NATO reflects his idiosyncratic views rather than either political party's systematic opposition to the United States' traditional foreign policy commitments.

The iPoll database further reveals that public support for NATO has been remarkably constant since the alliance's founding, when 74 percent of voters supported joining NATO.⁷⁹ For comparison, iPoll data over the last fifteen years show that an average of 70 percent of voters have indicated that NATO is good for the United States.⁸⁰ During the same period, an average of 79 percent of voters indicated that the United States should maintain its commitments to NATO,⁸¹ and 76 percent of voters agreed that President Trump should "defend all of America's NATO allies, if necessary."⁸² In each of these instances, voters' support for participating in NATO remains almost identical to baseline levels from the early Cold War.

The continuity of bipartisan support for U.S. security commitments in Asia is harder to evaluate because these alliances involve a series of bilateral agreements rather than a single, multilateral compact. Moreover, polling data on these relationships during the early Cold War are sparse. A reasonable barometer for gauging the strength of these commitments is the U.S. public's willingness to defend Taiwan against an attack from mainland China. That issue was salient in the early Cold War—particularly during the 1955 and 1958 Taiwan

As this report's title indicates, self-identified "Trump Republicans" say that the United States should generally "stay out of world affairs," but the report's authors note that these general attitudes do not indicate that Trump Republicans necessarily oppose traditional foreign policy commitments such as NATO. On how voters' responses to "active part" questions have limited predictive power regarding their preferences on specific foreign policy issues, see Dina Smeltz and Craig Kafura, *Americans Grow Less Enthusiastic about Active U.S. Engagement Abroad* (Chicago: Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2023), <https://globalaffairs.org/research/public-opinion-survey/americans-grow-less-enthusiastic-about-active-us-engagement-abroad>.

79. Eleven percent of voters opposed joining NATO. SI section 2, statement 5 (11 surveys) in the online appendix.

80. Twelve percent of voters responded that NATO is bad for the United States. SI section 2, statement 6 (3 surveys) in the online appendix.

81. In contrast, 18 percent agree that NATO is "not necessary anymore." SI section 2, statement 7 (2 surveys) in the online appendix.

82. In comparison, 17 percent disagreed that the United States should defend its NATO allies. See SI section 2, statement 8 (3 surveys) in the online appendix. A February 2024 Quinnipiac poll similarly found that 83 percent of voters view NATO as important to the security of the United States, whereas 71 percent view Trump's public statements encouraging Russia to attack NATO allies that did not meet their defense spending obligations as a bad idea. See "2024 Election: Biden Holds on to Slight Lead over Trump, Quinnipiac University National Poll Finds; Trump Gets Higher Marks on Age, Mental and Physical Fitness; Biden Does Better on Ethics, Empathy and Temperament," Quinnipiac Poll, Quinnipiac University, February 21, 2024, <https://poll.qu.edu/poll-release?releaseid=3890>.

Strait Crises—and it remains the most plausible flashpoint for military conflict in East Asia today. The iPoll database shows that an average of 52 percent of voters supported sending military forces to defend Taiwan during the early Cold War, with 36 percent opposed.⁸³ By contrast, iPoll data from the last fifteen years reveal that an average of just 30 percent of voters have supported sending troops to defend Taiwan, with 66 percent opposed.⁸⁴

These numbers suggest that U.S. voters' willingness to defend allies in Asia has declined since the Eisenhower administration. Yet surveys conducted during the Taiwan Strait Crises of the 1950s probably reflect a period of heightened concern over Chinese aggression that may have elevated U.S. citizens' resolve to use military force. That interpretation is consistent with the fact that domestic support for defending Taiwan has trended upward in recent years, as U.S.-China competition has become increasingly salient.⁸⁵ For example, the percentage of voters who said that they would approve sending U.S. forces to defend Taiwan in 2022 (62 percent) was similar to the average proportion who said that they would do so during the early Cold War (52 percent).⁸⁶ Chicago Council data also reveal that voters' willingness to use troops to defend South Korea or Japan has grown in recent decades.⁸⁷

Official policy has reflected this rise of bipartisan concern for containing China. Despite disagreeing on many other foreign policy issues, the Trump and Biden administrations have both implemented measures to shore up U.S. alliances in East Asia, such as expanding the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the Quad),⁸⁸ signing new security pacts with Australia and Japan,⁸⁹ negotiating new defense arrangements with Pacific Island nations,⁹⁰ building new

83. SI section 2, statement 9 (3 surveys) in the online appendix.

84. SI section 2, statement 10 (7 surveys) in the online appendix.

85. Craig Kafura, *Americans Feel More Threat from China Now Than in Past Three Decades* (Chicago: Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2023), p. 2, <https://globalaffairs.org/research/public-opinion-survey/americans-feel-more-threat-china-now-past-three-decades>.

86. Dina Smeltz et al., *Pivot to Europe: U.S. Public Opinion in a Time of War* (Chicago: Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2022), p. 4, <https://globalaffairs.org/research/public-opinion-survey/2022-chicago-council-survey>.

87. Smeltz, *Americans Continue to See Benefits*, p. 7. Unfortunately, the iPoll database lacks data from the early Cold War against which to compare these attitudes.

88. Stephen Collinson and Caitlin Hu, "Quad Summit Is a Rare Mark of Continuity between Trump and Biden," *CNN.com*, September 24, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/09/24/world/meanwhile-in-america-sept-24-intl/index.html>.

89. Bo Erickson and Kathryn Watson, "Biden Announces New Steps to Deepen Military Ties between the U.S. and Japan," *CBSNews.com*, April 10, 2024, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/biden-kishida-to-announce-ramped-up-military-partnership/>.

90. Steve Holland, David Brunnstrom, and Kirsty Needham, "Biden Makes New Pledges to

bases in the Philippines,⁹¹ and establishing a new nuclear sharing arrangement with Seoul.⁹² In April 2024, the House of Representatives overwhelmingly approved (385–34) sending military aid to Taiwan.⁹³

The Manifesto Project's data confirm that U.S. alliances face little systematic opposition from either the Democratic or the Republican parties. Among all platform statements the Manifesto Project categorizes as reflecting "negative references to international cooperation," just one entry directly criticizes U.S. alliances. That statement comes from the 2016 Republican Party platform, which proposed that Washington's allies should shoulder more of the burden for their own defense.⁹⁴ That sentiment has been widely shared among U.S. policymakers since the early Cold War, when the Eisenhower administration repeatedly threatened to withdraw U.S. forces from Europe if NATO allies did not help offset the cost of those deployments.⁹⁵ Even President Obama, who is widely portrayed as a committed liberal internationalist, publicly derided U.S. allies as "free riders."⁹⁶ The Manifesto Project's data thus provide no basis for believing that bipartisan support for upholding long-standing alliances has waned over time.

Democrats and Republicans are more divided on providing military assistance to Ukraine. Defending other countries from interstate aggression is ar-

Pacific Island Leaders as China's Influence Grows," Reuters, September 25, 2023: <https://www.reuters.com/world/us-recognize-independence-two-small-pacific-nations-biden-2023-09-25/>.

91. Geoff Ziezulewicz, "Increased US Partnership with the Philippines Coming in 2024," *DefenseNews*, December 26, 2023, <https://www.defensenews.com/news/your-navy/2023/12/26/new-in-2024-increased-us-partnership-with-the-philippines/>.

92. Hyung-Jin Kim, "US and South Korea Sign Joint Nuclear Deterrence Guidelines in Face of North Korean Threats," Associated Press, July 12, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/south-korea-us-nuclear-guidelines-a0446c1ad624442e49061d02db92d165>.

93. The U.S. Senate then approved this aid, in a package containing support for Israel and Ukraine, by a vote of 79–18. See Catie Edmondson, "House Approves \$95 Billion Aid Bill for Ukraine, Israel, and Taiwan," *New York Times*, April 20, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/20/us/politics/house-foreign-aid-bill.html>; Catie Edmondson, Martín González Gómez, and Molly Cook Escobar, "How the U.S. Senate Voted on Foreign Aid to Ukraine, Israel, and Taiwan," *New York Times*, April 23, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/04/23/us/politics/senate-vote-aid-israel-tiktok.html>.

94. "With the American people spending on defense, per capita, four times the amount spent by Europeans, we demand, as we have in the past, that our fellow members of NATO fulfill their commitments and meet their need for greater investment in their armed forces." Republican National Committee, "2016 Republican Party Platform," July 18, 2016, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/2016-republican-party-platform>.

95. Francis J. Gavin, *Gold, Dollars, and Power: The Politics of International Monetary Relations, 1958–1971* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), pp. 33–45.

96. Jeffrey Goldberg, "The Obama Doctrine," *Atlantic*, April 15, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525/>.

guably the topic the two parties disagree on the most. A slim majority of House Republicans (112 out of 218, or 51 percent) voted against continuing to provide aid to Ukraine in April 2024.⁹⁷ A February 2024 Chicago Council survey similarly showed that 53 percent of Republican voters opposed further military assistance to Ukraine.⁹⁸ Yet Ukraine is not a treaty ally of the United States, and neither the Truman nor the Eisenhower administrations took responsibility for protecting Eastern Europe against Soviet encroachment.⁹⁹ Republicans' opposition to sending aid to Ukraine is thus consistent with this article's thesis that political divisions in U.S. foreign policy generally occur when leaders make large-scale resource commitments to goals that fall outside the boundaries of the Truman-Eisenhower consensus rather than when either party abandons Washington's traditional foreign policy commitments.

Establishing Trade Networks

In 1947, the United States joined twenty-two other countries in founding GATT. This agreement required participants to offer one another most-favored-nation status—that is, the lowest tariff rate that each state offered any GATT member automatically applied to the others. This arrangement facilitated several rounds of multilateral tariff reductions that significantly expanded global commerce.

If either party rejected maintaining trade at the levels that Truman and Eisenhower established, then that would indicate the scope of bipartisan consensus in U.S. foreign policy has eroded over time. But Washington's trade commitments are vastly greater today than they were during the early Cold War. Since Eisenhower left office in 1961, the United States has lowered its average total tariff rate from 7.2 to 3.0 percent.¹⁰⁰ The United States has also sup-

97. Edmondson, "House Approves \$95 Billion Aid."

98. Craig Kafura and Dina Smeltz, *Americans Continue to Support Military, Economic Aid to Ukraine* (Chicago: Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2024), p. 3, <https://globalaffairs.org/research/public-opinion-survey/americans-continue-support-military-and-economic-aid-ukraine>.

99. Two examples of the United States not protecting Eastern Europe during the early Cold War include when it did little to stop a 1948 Soviet-sponsored coup d'état in Czechoslovakia or Moscow's 1956 invasion of Hungary. Voters were not eager to defend those countries from Soviet aggression. For example, a December 1956 poll found that just 12 percent of voters thought that the Eisenhower administration should have done more to aid Hungary: National Opinion Research Center (NORC), Survey #1956-0401: Foreign Affairs, Question 3, USNORC.560401.R03 (Ithaca, NY: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, Cornell University, 1956), <https://doi.org/10.25940/ROPER-31095107>.

100. Office of Analysis and Research Services, "U.S. Imports for Consumption, Duties Collected,

plemented multilateral tariff agreements with a series of regional and bilateral free trade deals, such as the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the 2007 U.S.-Korea Free Trade Agreement (KORUS).¹⁰¹ Given that global tariffs are now so low, trade negotiations increasingly focus on reducing nontariff barriers to trade, such as intellectual property theft, production subsidies, and unequal labor standards.¹⁰² To manage those issues, the international community in 1995 replaced GATT with the World Trade Organization (WTO), an institution whose mandate significantly exceeds that of its predecessor. For example, the WTO has the authority to issue binding rulings on trade disputes, whereas GATT operated by consensus.¹⁰³ The WTO's membership is also widespread, spanning 164 members.¹⁰⁴ By contrast, the Truman administration designed GATT to advance the interests of a "nuclear group" of the United States and its core allies; the organization contained just thirty-six states when Eisenhower left office.¹⁰⁵

Why, then, do so many observers worry that the U.S. commitment to free trade has eroded? One concern is that neither party currently supports signing new trade deals. For example, both parties' 2016 presidential nominees, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, opposed joining the Trans-Pacific Partnership. Bipartisan opposition to the Trans-Pacific Partnership was widely viewed as a "retreat" from efforts to expand the global trade regime.¹⁰⁶ But pulling back from efforts to grow global trade does not mean either party aims to uproot the trade order's foundations. The fact that the Trans-Pacific Partnership faced strong domestic opposition is thus consistent with my thesis about how salient political controversies in U.S. foreign policy generally stem from attempts to expand rather than contract U.S. international commitments.

Other concerns about a collapse of the U.S. commitment to free trade involve policies that marginally restrict international commerce but do not

and Ratio of Duties to Value, 1891–2021 (Table 1)," dataset, U.S. International Trade Commission, May 2022, https://www.usitc.gov/documents/dataweb/ave_table_1891_2021.pdf.

101. Jagdish Bhagwati, *Termites in the Trading System: How Preferential Agreements Undermine Free Trade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

102. Douglas A. Irwin, *Free Trade Under Fire*, 5th ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), pp. 257–314.

103. Craig VanGrasstek, *The History and Future of the World Trade Organization* (Geneva: World Trade Organization, 2013).

104. "Members and Observers," World Trade Organization, accessed July 17, 2024, https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/tif_e/org6_e.htm.

105. McKenzie, *GATT and Global Order*, pp. 62–78.

106. See, for example, Dan Roberts and Ryan Felton, "Trump and Clinton's Free Trade Retreat: A Pivotal Moment for the World's Economic Future," *Guardian*, August 20, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/aug/20/trump-clinton-free-trade-policies-tpp>.

fundamentally challenge the basic trade regime Truman and Eisenhower established during the early Cold War. For example, both the Trump and Biden administrations imposed tariffs on China, but the United States did not trade with China at all during the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, which deliberately excluded communist countries from the GATT system.¹⁰⁷ The Obama, Trump, and Biden administrations all blocked appointments to the WTO's arbitration court; this is a clear example of a controversy that has resulted from expanding the scope of the international trade regime beyond GATT's initial contours.¹⁰⁸ Trump forced renegotiations to NAFTA and KORUS, but those changes were relatively minor and may actually have expanded trade flows.¹⁰⁹ Biden implemented industrial policies that give special preferences to U.S. manufacturers, but the Truman administration undertook larger-scale efforts to stimulate domestic production in industries related to national defense.¹¹⁰ In each of these areas, Democrats and Republicans have backed away from the ideals of global free trade liberalism that dominated the U.S. foreign policy establishment in the post-Cold War period. But, once again, the fact that recent efforts to expand free trade have sparked political backlash is consistent with this article's thesis that enlarging the scope of the U.S. foreign policy agenda consistently generates political divisions.

It is particularly important to note that U.S. trade flows have increased, in the aggregate, since the start of the Trump administration.¹¹¹ The primary impact of recent political divisions over trade policy has thus entailed restraining the growth of international commerce rather than reducing it, let alone return-

107. McKenzie, *GATT and Global Order*, pp. 62–78.

108. Gary Clyde Hufbauer, "WTO Judicial Appointments: Bad Omen for the Trading System," Peterson Institute for International Economics, June 13, 2011, <https://www.piie.com/blogs/realtime-economic-issues-watch/wto-judicial-appointments-bad-omen-trading-system>; Philip Blenkinsop, "At WTO, Growing Disregard for Trade Rules Shows World Is Fragmenting," Reuters, October 2, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/business/wto-growing-disregard-trade-rules-shows-world-is-fragmenting-2023-10-02/>.

109. Joshua P. Meltzer, Earl Anthony Wayne, and Diego Marroquín Bitar, *USMCA at 3: Reflecting on Impact and Charting the Future* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2023), <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/usmca-at-3-reflecting-on-impact-and-charting-the-future/>; Simon Lester, Inu Manak, and Kyoungwha Kim, *Trump's First Trade Deal: The Slightly Revised Korea-U.S. Trade Agreement*, Free Trade Bulletin 73 (Washington, DC: CATO Institute, 2019), <https://www.cato.org/free-trade-bulletin/trumps-first-trade-deal-slightly-revised-korea-us-free-trade-agreement>.

110. Aaron L. Friedberg, "Why Didn't the United States Become a Garrison State?," *International Security*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Spring 1992), pp. 109–142, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2539189>.

111. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the real value of U.S. trade in goods and services increased from \$6.4 trillion in 2016 to \$6.8 trillion in 2023. See "U.S. International Trade in Goods and Services," U.S. Census Bureau Historical Releases, accessed July 18, 2024, https://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/Press-Release/ft900_index.html.

ing trade barriers to early Cold War levels. The most plausible threat of such retrenchment might occur if Trump were to win reelection in 2024, given his campaign promise to impose 10 percent tariffs on all imports. Doing so would significantly damage U.S. trade relationships and would raise U.S. tariffs to levels higher than at the end of the Eisenhower administration.¹¹²

This is another area in which it is important to recognize that Trump has idiosyncratic preferences that do not reflect the U.S. public's general foreign policy attitudes. Polling data show that the proportion of voters who view free trade as good for the economy (as opposed to bad for the economy) has actually grown in recent decades: A 2023 Chicago Council survey found that 74 percent of voters agreed with that statement, including 83 percent of Democrats and 64 percent of Republicans.¹¹³ Polling data also indicate that voters are at least as supportive of free trade today as they were during the Truman and Eisenhower administrations. The most direct comparison in public attitudes across these periods involves asking whether voters want tariffs raised or lowered. According to iPoll data spanning 1946–1960, on average, 36 percent of voters preferred lowering tariffs and 22 percent of voters supported raising tariffs.¹¹⁴ Over the last fifteen years, support for lowering restrictions on trade has nearly doubled (to 63 percent), whereas support for raising trade restrictions has grown only slightly (to 29 percent).¹¹⁵

Manifesto Project data confirm that most recent controversies over U.S. trade policy involve topics that fall outside the Truman-Eisenhower consensus. Since 2004, the Manifesto Project has coded fifty-nine statements in Democratic and Republican Party platforms as reflecting support for protectionism, defined as “favorable mentions of extending or maintaining the protection of internal markets.”¹¹⁶ In principle, these statements could reflect challenges to the global trading system that the United States helped establish during the early Cold War. Yet none of these statements actually recommends significantly reducing trade. Instead, these statements generally support enforcing the terms of existing free trade arrangements ($n = 21$), supporting domestic manufacturers ($n = 10$), or preventing U.S. companies from outsourcing

112. Kimberly A. Clausing and Mary E. Lovely, *Why Trump's Tariff Proposals Would Harm Working Americans*, Policy Brief 24-1 (Washington, DC: Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2024), <https://www.piie.com/sites/default/files/2024-05/pb24-1.pdf>.

113. Friedhoff and El Baz, *Most Americans See Value in International Trade*, p. 2; Saad, “Americans’ Vanishing Fear of Foreign Trade.”

114. SI section 2, statement 11 (8 surveys) in the online appendix.

115. SI section 2, statement 12 (4 surveys) in the online appendix.

116. Lehmann et al., *Manifesto Project Dataset—Codebook*, p. 16.

Table 2. Party Platform Statements That the Manifesto Project Codes as Supporting Protectionism

Subject	Examples	Number of statements
Directly criticizing existing trade deals	<p>"We need better negotiated trade agreements that put America first."</p> <p>"We need an international order that maintains a fair and open global market for America's goods and services."</p> <p>"Nor should an agreement give greater rights to foreign investors than to U.S. investors, require the privatization of our vital public services, or limit our government's ability to create good jobs in our communities."</p>	3 statements
Enforcing terms of existing trade agreements	<p>"China manipulates its currency to the disadvantage of American exporters."</p> <p>"We will apply a carbon adjustment fee at the border to products from countries that fail to live up to their commitments under the Paris Climate Agreement."</p>	21 statements
Support for domestic manufacturing	<p>"We will expand effective tax credits that support domestic manufacturing."</p> <p>"We will not negotiate any new trade deals before first investing in American competitiveness at home."</p>	10 statements
Anti-offshoring	<p>"We will end policies that incentivize offshoring."</p> <p>"America's high tax rate encourages corporations to move overseas."</p>	10 statements
Statements with no direct connection to protectionism	Restoring the gold standard; imposing sanctions on Cuba to promote human rights	15 statements

SOURCE: Manifesto Project, 2004–2020.

production ($n = 10$). Fourteen statements have little obvious connection to protectionism at all, such as using economic sanctions to promote human rights in Cuba or reintroducing the gold standard (which would, ironically, restore elements of the early Cold War economic system that the United States abrogated in 1971). As shown in table 2, just three of the fifty-nine statements the Manifesto Project codes as supporting protectionism explicitly suggest the United States should abandon existing trade arrangements. None of those statements implies that either party supports reducing global exchange to anywhere near early Cold War levels.

All the evidence presented in this section is consistent with the enlargement thesis. Both parties appear comfortable maintaining trade at levels that are far more extensive than they were during the early Cold War. Contemporary trade-related controversies largely stem from agreements signed after Truman and Eisenhower left office, particularly as the focus of trade negotiations shifts from lowering tariffs to addressing “behind the border” regulatory issues such as currency manipulation and environmental standards.¹¹⁷

The Truman and Eisenhower administrations both recognized they lacked bipartisan consensus for tackling the trade policy issues that drive political divisions today. This lack of consensus was most apparent in Truman’s attempt to replace GATT with a new intergovernmental body, the International Trade Organization (ITO).¹¹⁸ The ITO would have functioned much like today’s WTO: negotiating nontariff barriers, arbitrating trade disputes, and better serving the interests of developing countries. The Truman administration considered the ITO as a core component of its foreign policy agenda, and it spearheaded negotiations on the institution’s charter in 1948. Truman’s secretary of state, Dean Acheson, called the ITO “the capstone of the economic structure we are seeking to erect.”¹¹⁹

Yet Congress refused to ratify the ITO. In addition to encountering predictable backlash from industries fearing global competition, the ITO alienated many proponents of free trade, who claimed that developing countries had forced U.S. negotiators to make too many concessions on nontariff issues such as import quotas and production subsidies.¹²⁰ According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the ITO charter had the “very grave defect of placing this country in a position where it must accept discrimination against itself while extending the Most-Favored-Nation treatment to all members of the Organization.”¹²¹ In November 1950, Acheson sent Truman a memorandum declaring that “the ITO is no longer a practical possibility.”¹²² Truman then announced he would not resubmit the ITO for consideration by the incoming Congress.¹²³

117. Irwin, *Free Trade Under Fire*, p. 313.

118. Martin Daunton, *The Economic Government of the World, 1933–2023* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2023), pp. 255–273.

119. C. Donald Johnson, *The Wealth of a Nation: A History of Trade Politics in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 377–402, 413.

120. William Diebold Jr., *The End of the ITO*, *Essays in International Finance* 16 (Princeton, NJ: International Finance Section, Princeton University, 1952).

121. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

122. Quoted in Johnson, *Wealth of a Nation*, p. 437.

123. *Ibid.*, pp. 437–438.

Eisenhower attempted to revive these negotiations by proposing to create an institution called the Organization of Trade Cooperation. He intended this organization to serve the same basic function as Truman's ITO. Eisenhower's secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, warned that the United States would suffer "grave consequences" if it declined to participate in the Organization of Trade Cooperation.¹²⁴ But both parties' congressional caucuses remained skeptical of enhancing the limited authorities they had already invested in GATT. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee refused even to hold a vote on the matter. Eisenhower, like Truman, ultimately withdrew the proposal from congressional consideration.¹²⁵

Congress took additional measures to constrain Eisenhower's ability to negotiate tariff reductions through GATT. During prior administrations, Congress had typically granted presidents authority to negotiate tariffs during three-to-five-year periods. Starting in 1953, Congress required Eisenhower to renew his trade authority annually. Congress further attenuated Eisenhower's ability to negotiate trade deals by expanding the use of peril point and escape clause provisions that reduced the credibility of U.S. promises to reduce trade barriers.¹²⁶ Thus, even though Eisenhower saw trade networks as a critical arena for Cold War competition, and even though Republicans enjoyed unified control of Congress for part of his administration, average U.S. tariff rates actually rose during Eisenhower's presidency.¹²⁷ These controversies reveal that bipartisan consensus during the early Cold War could not support anything resembling the scope of global exchange the United States participates in today. Recent controversies surrounding global trade are generally consistent with this article's thesis that political divisions in U.S. foreign policy generally stem from presidents expanding the country's foreign policy commitments in contested ways rather than parties turning their backs on the Truman-Eisenhower consensus.

Working with Multilateral Institutions

The U.S. Senate approved the UN Charter in 1945 by a vote of 89–2. This bipartisan effort to coordinate global governance through multilateral institutions is

124. *Ibid.*, p. 450.

125. Kaufman, *Trade and Aid*, pp. 43–44, 74–76, 115; Zeiler, *Capitalist Peace*, pp. 117–119.

126. Kaufman, *Trade and Aid*, pp. 41–43; Douglas A. Irwin, *Clashing over Commerce: A History of U.S. Trade Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), pp. 509–519. The "peril point" provision empowered an independent Tariff Commission to set floors for tariff reductions that might harm domestic producers; the "escape clause" allowed producers harmed by imports to seek relief.

127. Office of Analysis and Research Services, "U.S. Imports for Consumption."

widely cited as one of the defining features of U.S. foreign policy during the early Cold War.¹²⁸

As of October 2024, the United States participates in more international institutions than it did at the end of the Eisenhower administration (89 versus 61).¹²⁹ Many of these institutions' agendas have also expanded over time. For instance, sixty-three of the 108 organizations in the UN system were founded after 1961, reflecting the UN's attempts to tackle a growing range of global issues.¹³⁰ In this sense, U.S. commitments to IGOs are broader today than they were during the early Cold War. Yet there are two main reasons to worry that bipartisan support for these relationships has eroded.

First, U.S. presidents since the 1970s have become increasingly assertive in confronting IGOs that appear to be acting contrary to U.S. interests. President Carter withdrew the United States from the International Labour Organization to protest what he considered to be selective enforcement of labor regulations against the United States and its allies.¹³¹ President Reagan withdrew the United States from the International Atomic Energy Agency and the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).¹³² President Bill Clinton declared that the United States would no longer pay more than 25 percent of the UN's budget.¹³³ President Trump withdrew U.S. support from several international institutions, such as the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the World Health Organization.¹³⁴

Public opinion data also suggest that the U.S. public has developed increasingly negative views of international institutions. For example, the iPoll data-

128. See, for example, Austin Carson and Matthew J. Conklin, "Co-Optation at the Creation: Leaders, Elite Consensus, and Postwar International Order," *Security Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (2022), pp. 634–666, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2022.2133628>.

129. Jon C. W. Pevehouse et al., "Tracking Organizations in the World: The Correlates of War IGO Version 3.0 Datasets," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 57, No. 3 (2020), pp. 492–503, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343319881175>.

130. "The United Nations System," United Nations Department of Global Communications, July 2023, https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2021/09/un_system_chart.pdf. The mandates of many individual UN organizations have also grown over time. For example, the World Meteorological Association was originally conceived to promote technical cooperation in weather forecasting, but it shifted in the 1970s to become the primary organ for the UN to combat climate change. See Amy L. Sayward, *The United Nations in International History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), pp. 65–67.

131. Stanley Meisler, *United Nations: A History*, rev. ed. (New York: Grove Press, 2011), pp. 225–226.

132. Bob Reinalda, *Routledge History of International Organizations: From 1815 to the Present Day* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 545.

133. Edward C. Luck, *Mixed Messages: American Politics and International Organization, 1919–1999* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1999), p. 244.

134. Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay, *The Empty Throne: America's Abdication of Global Leadership* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2018), pp. 91–137.

base shows that the proportion of voters who think the UN is doing a good job dropped from an average of 57 percent during the early Cold War to an average of 36 percent today. Similarly, the proportion of voters who think the UN is doing a poor job has grown from 28 percent to 58 percent.¹³⁵ These attitudes show clear signs of political polarization—Republicans are roughly twice as likely as Democrats to express negative views toward the UN.¹³⁶

These trends would provide evidence for the erosion thesis if they indicated a declining willingness to support elements of IGOs' agendas that the United States backed during the early Cold War. Yet most recent friction between the United States and international institutions has instead surrounded IGOs' attempts to expand their mandates, particularly on economic and social issues. Scholars generally trace the origins of this controversy to the 1960s and 1970s, when more developing countries joined IGOs after decolonization.¹³⁷ Those countries consolidated their power over IGOs' agendas by adopting bloc voting procedures to promote a "New International Economic Order" that called for redistributing global wealth.¹³⁸ U.S. officials perceived this movement as advocating radical socialism and consistently opposed developing countries' efforts to advance the New International Economic Order at the UN and other international institutions.¹³⁹

The Manifesto Project's data support the idea that friction between the United States and international institutions largely stems from the ways IGOs' agendas have expanded over time. Since 2004, the Manifesto Project has coded forty-nine party platform statements as criticizing the UN or other IGOs.¹⁴⁰ Table 3 shows that almost all of these statements criticized policy commitments that the Truman and Eisenhower administrations did not support either. For example, eleven statements opposed IGO efforts to protect the envi-

135. SI section 2, statements 12 (2 surveys) and 13 (12 surveys) in the online appendix. A similar degradation of U.S. attitudes toward the UN over time is shown in: United Nations, poll charts, Gallup, accessed July 18, 2024, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/116347/united-nations.aspx>.

136. Jeffrey A. Friedman, "Is U.S. Grand Strategy Dead? The Political Foundations of Deep Engagement after Donald Trump," *International Affairs*, Vol. 98, No. 4 (July 2022), pp. 1301–1303, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iia112>.

137. See, for example, Luck, *Mixed Messages*, pp. 105–132; Meisler, *United Nations*, pp. 204–238.

138. Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), pp. 142–175.

139. Michael Franczak, *Global Inequality and American Foreign Policy in the 1970s* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2022).

140. This subset is drawn from the Manifesto Project's broader category of negative attitudes toward international cooperation. Lehmann et al., *The Manifesto Data Collection*.

Table 3. Party Platform Statements Reflecting Criticisms of the United Nations and Other IGOs

Subject	Examples	Number of statements
Opposition to programs for protecting the global environment	<p>"The United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is a political mechanism, not an unbiased scientific institution."</p> <p>"We strongly reject UN Agenda 21 as erosive of U.S. sovereignty."</p>	11 statements
Opposition to joining new IGO-facilitated conventions	<p>"We have deep reservations about the regulatory, legal, and tax regimes inherent in the Law of the Sea Treaty."</p> <p>"We oppose U.S. participation in the International Criminal Court."</p>	16 statements
Demands for institutional reform	<p>"The United Nations remains in dire need of reform."</p> <p>"The UN must reform its scandal-ridden and corrupt management and become more accountable and transparent in its operations and expenses."</p>	7 statements
Miscellaneous issues unrelated to the Truman-Eisenhower consensus	<p>"We oppose any form of UN Global Tax."</p> <p>"International regulatory control over the open and free internet would have disastrous consequences for the United States and the world."</p>	15 statements

SOURCE: Manifesto Project, 2004–2020.

ronment, such as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, which did not play a major role in global politics until the 1970s.¹⁴¹ In sixteen of these statements, parties promised not to sign UN-facilitated conventions to which the United States had never been a party (e.g., the International Criminal Court or the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea) because doing so would have extended Washington's international commitments. Fifteen statements criticized miscellaneous issues that are unrelated to the Truman-Eisenhower consensus, such as the UN imposing taxes on U.S. citizens (which it has never done) or the UN Population Fund (which was created in 1969).

Seven statements that the Manifesto Project codes as expressing negative at-

141. Maria Ivanova, "Climate Change," in Thomas G. Weiss and Sam Daws, eds., *The Oxford Handbook on the United Nations*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 717–719.

titudes toward IGOs (14 percent of the total) criticize the UN for management problems and scandals. These statements cast the UN in a negative light, but they are not particularly controversial because the UN has faced well-documented challenges in designing an efficient bureaucracy.¹⁴² Even Vandenberg—the Republican senator who helped to negotiate the UN Charter and who is generally seen as a driving force in forging the Truman-Eisenhower consensus—argued that the UN was incapable of effectively administering economic programs.¹⁴³ Consequently, Vandenberg and other members of the U.S. delegation to the UN Charter negotiations worked to keep that institution’s mandate and its organizational structure focused primarily on maintaining international security.¹⁴⁴

A final question is whether the economic and social issues that drive political controversy over U.S. relations with IGOs today would have been similarly divisive during the early Cold War. The answer is “yes”; in fact, the Truman and Eisenhower administrations both deliberately constrained the United Nations’ economic and social agenda because they understood that Congress was unwilling to support substantial multilateral commitments in those areas.

Despite their near-unanimous ratification of the UN Charter, many legislators feared that UN agreements would become a Trojan horse for socialism and desegregation. Thus, shortly after the UN came into being, Congress began criticizing it for promoting a radical ideology. These criticisms became particularly intense as the United States worked to draft a Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which established principles that the UN planned to implement by negotiating additional covenants on economic and social issues. Congress forced the declaration’s drafters to accept a “domestic jurisdiction” clause declaring that no human rights compact could supersede domestic laws, and it refused to support the proposed implementing covenants.¹⁴⁵ When the UN General Assembly unanimously approved a convention prohibiting genocide—which was broadly seen as a minimal standard for protecting human rights following the Holocaust—segregationists worried

142. Linda Fasulo, *An Insider’s Guide to the UN*, 3rd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), pp. 236–253; James O. C. Jonah and Amy Scott Hill, “The Secretariat: Independence and Reform,” in Weiss and Daws, *The Oxford Handbook*, pp. 212–230.

143. Luck, *Mixed Messages*, pp. 201–203.

144. Thomas G. Weiss et al., *The United Nations and Changing World Politics*, 8th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2017), p. 249.

145. Carol Anderson, *Eyes off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944–1955* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 44–45, 78–112, 135–136, 218.

that this measure could be used to justify anti-lynching measures.¹⁴⁶ The Senate Foreign Relations Committee refused even to hold hearings on the Genocide Convention, which the United States did not ratify until 1988.¹⁴⁷

Congressional resistance to the UN's economic and social agenda coalesced during the early Cold War around Ohio senator John Bricker, who described the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights as a "blueprint for slavery."¹⁴⁸ In an effort to stymie U.S. participation in such covenants, Bricker proposed a constitutional amendment that would render international treaties and executive agreements invalid without congressional implementing legislation. This amendment would have hamstrung the president's ability to negotiate with other countries. The Bricker amendment nevertheless garnered sixty-four Senate cosponsors, along with backing from a broad range of influential interest groups such as the American Bar Association, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars. To dissuade Congress from passing the Bricker amendment, Eisenhower declared he would not join any subsequent UN treaties on economic and social issues. Ultimately, sixty senators voted for the amendment—just one vote shy of ratification. The Bricker amendment controversy demonstrates how efforts to expand the UN's economic and social agendas were at least as divisive during the early Cold War as they are today.¹⁴⁹

Conclusion

This article's analysis has shown that rising political divisions in U.S. foreign policy have primarily resulted from Democrats and Republicans expanding their foreign policy agendas rather than from either party renouncing traditional international commitments. These findings contradict widespread claims about how political polarization has undermined long-standing conceptions of U.S. global leadership or depleted Washington's ability to shape world politics.

Of course, showing that the Truman-Eisenhower consensus remains robust does not imply it provides an optimal blueprint for U.S. foreign policy. Much

146. Rowland Brucken, *A Most Uncertain Crusade: The United States, the United Nations, and Human Rights, 1941–1953* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), pp. 171–209.

147. Anderson, *Eyes off the Prize*, pp. 180, 221.

148. Tananbaum, *The Bricker Amendment Controversy*, p. 25.

149. Tananbaum, *The Bricker Amendment Controversy*, pp. 24–25, 60–63, 113–121, 180, 219.

has changed since the early Cold War. The Soviet Union no longer exists, and China has taken its place as the United States' most powerful geopolitical rival. Meanwhile, the world must grapple with evolving challenges such as cyberweapons and climate change. Scholars and practitioners hold diverse views about how to respond to these changes: Some believe that the United States should substantially reduce its international commitments,¹⁵⁰ whereas others believe that U.S. foreign policy does not currently do enough to meet global challenges.¹⁵¹ Though this article takes no position on those normative debates, its argument lends insight for predicting the areas in which U.S. foreign policy should be most (and least) able to adapt to a changing world.

For example, efforts to contain China's rise align closely with the Truman and Eisenhower administrations' emphasis on maintaining U.S. military preponderance and defending core allies from interstate aggression. Beijing plausibly aims to establish regional hegemony, it has a history of coercing U.S. allies, and many analysts fear that it will use force to conquer Taiwan. Policies designed to forestall these outcomes—such as enhancing U.S. security cooperation with East Asian allies—are consistent with core principles that have shaped Washington's global role since the early Cold War. The fact that these efforts resonate with long-established principles of U.S. foreign policy may help to explain why, despite their other disagreements, the Trump and Biden administrations implemented a relatively consistent set of policies designed to counter China's rise.¹⁵² Both the Trump and the Biden administrations have also significantly expanded U.S. military capabilities in the space and cyber realms. Those efforts are also compatible with this article's description of how both parties remain committed to maintaining the United States' unrivaled military power.

The prospects for bipartisan cooperation are likely to be the lowest in areas that involve promoting political change outside the United States (e.g., combating climate change or regulating artificial intelligence), creating new structures for providing global public goods, or cooperating with states that are not

150. See, for example, Barry R. Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014); Miranda Priebe et al., *Implementing Restraint: Changes in U.S. Regional Security Policies to Operationalize a Realist Grand Strategy of Restraint* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2021).

151. See, for example, G. John Ikenberry and Anne-Marie Slaughter, eds., *Forging a World of Liberty under Law: U.S. National Security in the 21st Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Project on National Security, 2006); Rebecca Lissner and Mira Rapp-Hooper, *An Open World: How America Can Win the Contest for Twenty-First Century Order* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020).

152. David E. Sanger and Mary K. Brooks, *New Cold Wars: China's Rise, Russia's Invasion, and America's Struggle to Defend the West* (New York: Crown, 2024).

core U.S. allies. This article's analysis has shown that such efforts reliably generate partisan divisions. Yet those divisions do not necessarily prevent leaders from making headway in tackling important problems. For example, the Biden administration estimates that its investments and tax credits will contribute \$1 trillion to combating climate change.¹⁵³ The 2022 Inflation Reduction Act alone invested more than \$350 billion toward that goal.¹⁵⁴ No presidential administration has ever allocated so many resources to tackling global problems that are not directly related to national defense. For comparison, the Marshall Plan would cost roughly \$150 billion today.¹⁵⁵ Biden's climate agenda has been politically divisive, but it also significantly expanded the United States' foreign policy agenda, which illustrates why it is a mistake to equate rising political divisions with eroding usable power.

The enduring Truman-Eisenhower consensus is consistent with broader research showing that most voters possess stable and coherent attitudes about the United States' global role, even if they pay relatively little attention to foreign policy details.¹⁵⁶ In particular, my analysis indicates that U.S. citizens generally prefer their country acts as a status quo power rather than as a revisionist state. They also generally prefer deploying U.S. influence to defend core allies rather than to intervene in the politics of the Global South. Although elites have often succeeded in convincing voters to experiment with more expansive policies, efforts to expand the U.S. international agenda have consistently generated political divisions in the long run.¹⁵⁷

This article's analysis raises at least two questions for future research. First, why did Democrats and Republicans rapidly adopt a new international agenda during the early Cold War, whereas the boundaries of bipartisan agree-

153. Timothy Cama, "White House Slaps \$1 Trillion Price Tag on Climate Record," *E&E News*, January 22, 2024, <https://www.eenews.net/articles/white-house-puts-1-trillion-price-tag-on-climate-efforts/>.

154. *Ibid.*

155. Act of April 3, 1948, European Recovery Act [Marshall Plan], Enrolled Acts and Resolutions of Congress, 1789–1996, General Records of the United States Government, Record Group 11, National Archives, accessed July 18, 2024, <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/marshall-plan>.

156. See, for example, Page and Shapiro, *The Rational Voter*; Eugene Wittkopf, *Faces of Internationalism: Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990); Joshua D. Kertzer et al., "Moral Support: How Moral Values Shape Foreign Policy Attitudes," *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 76, No. 3 (July 2014), pp. 825–840, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381614000073>.

157. On the role that elites play in shaping public opinion, see Elizabeth N. Saunders, *The Insiders' Game: How Elites Make War and Peace* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2024). On the temporary nature of elites' ability to shape public opinion on high-salience issues, see Matthew A. Baum and Tim Groeling, "Reality Asserts Itself: Public Opinion on Iraq and the Elasticity of Reality," *International Organization*, Vol. 64, No. 3 (2010), pp. 443–479, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818310000172>.

ment in U.S. foreign policy have remained relatively static ever since? The answer likely involves the harrowing experiences of the world wars and the Great Depression. Those crises affected nearly every U.S. family and made clear that the United States had a significant stake in preventing another collapse of the world order, which is what the Truman-Eisenhower consensus prioritized. It is, of course, a good thing that the United States has not faced another Great Depression or world war.¹⁵⁸ But the absence of such large-scale crises also helps explain why the early Cold War represented a unique reordering moment in shaping foreign policy attitudes.

Finally, this article's analysis raises the question of why voters from both political parties consistently find the Truman-Eisenhower consensus appealing. Why, for example, do voters seem to prefer that the United States orient its foreign policies around the defensive goals of preserving international equilibrium rather than pursuing more ambitious ways to transform global politics? This pattern may partly be a function of political psychology. Scholarship on prospect theory shows that most people are willing to take greater risks to avoid losses than achieve gains. Prospect theory predicts that voters will pay substantial costs to protect the United States' status as the world's preponderant military power, deter the rise of regional hegemons, and prevent a resurgence of global protectionism. By contrast, foreign policy objectives such as advancing human rights or spreading democracy all operate in the "domain of gains," whereas prospect theory suggests voters tend to be risk averse.¹⁵⁹

Empirically explaining the political appeal of the Truman-Eisenhower consensus requires analysis that falls outside this article's scope. But simply posing that question for future research demonstrates the degree to which this article offers a new vantage point for analyzing the politics of U.S. foreign policy. Whereas existing literature generally seeks to explain why bipartisan consensus in U.S. foreign policy has eroded since the early Cold War, this article has demonstrated it is worth studying how a set of international commitments designed seventy-five years ago retains widespread political support from Democrats and Republicans today.

158. The most plausible example of a global crisis that has directly affected most U.S. families since World War II is the COVID-19 pandemic. But managing that crisis primarily involved crafting domestic policies rather than changing the United States' international commitments.

159. Rose McDermott, *Risk-Taking in International Politics: Prospect Theory in American Foreign Policy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998).