

Dēmos

WORLD
POLICY
INSTITUTE



TALKING ABOUT TRADE AND ECONOMIC GLOBALIZATION

**A Message Builder from
the U.S. in the World
Initiative**

ABOUT DĚMOS

Dēmos is a non-partisan public policy research and advocacy organization. Headquartered in New York City, Dēmos works with advocates and policymakers around the country in pursuit of four overarching goals: a more equitable economy; a vibrant and inclusive democracy; an empowered public sector that works for the common good; and responsible U.S. engagement in an interdependent world.

The International Program at Dēmos promotes responsible U.S. engagement in an interdependent world. It advances policies and ideas in support of a more democratic system of global governance, a more inclusive and sustainable global economy, and the more active involvement of the American public in U.S. international policy.

Dēmos was founded in 2000.

Miles S. Rapoport, President

David Callahan, Director, International Program

ABOUT THE WORLD POLICY INSTITUTE

The World Policy Institute, a non-partisan source of progressive policy analysis and thought leadership for more than four decades, focuses on complex challenges that demand cooperative policy approaches in an increasingly interdependent world: an inclusive and sustainable global market economy, engaged global civic participation and effective governance, and collaborative approaches to national and global security. WPI's Fellows program, regular public and private events, collaborative policy development, media activities, and flagship *World Policy Journal* provide a forum for solution-focused policy analysis and public debate. Its programs seek to introduce fresh ideas and new voices from around the world on critical shared global issues including migration, climate change, technology, economic development, human rights, and counter-terrorism.

Michele Wucker, Executive Director

David A. Andelman, Editor, *World Policy Journal*

THE PROJECT ON SHARED GLOBAL PROSPERITY

The Project on Shared Global Prosperity is a joint initiative between Dēmos and the World Policy Institute to advance policies on trade, development, and sustainability that elevate living standards and strengthen economic security in both developed and developing countries.

ABOUT THE U.S. IN THE WORLD INITIATIVE

The U.S. in the World Initiative, a project of Dēmos, is a state-of-the-art resource for communicators, advocates, educators, experts, and anyone else who wants to talk with Americans about a cooperative, constructive and effective role for the U.S. in the world. Working with a range of partners and drawing on the latest public opinion and communications research, U.S. in the World develops messaging advice that helps communicators build mainstream public support for this vision of responsible global engagement and for policy approaches that reflect it.

Priscilla Lewis, Director

Sue Veres Royal, Deputy Director

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Public Thinking About Globalization: Opportunities and Obstacles	1
The Broader Foreign Policy Context	2
Building Your Message: Themes to Convey, Pitfalls to Avoid	3
Themes to Convey (and Tips on How to Convey Them)	3
Messaging Pitfalls to Avoid	5

Introduction

This Message Builder is a resource for advocates of a bold new U.S. leadership role in creating an open global economy that works for everyone—including American workers. It is designed to facilitate the preparation of communications aimed at the mainstream American public. Drawing on existing opinion research and on other messaging resources developed by or in partnership with U.S. in the World, this document suggests **big themes and ideas to convey** and identifies **messaging pitfalls to avoid**. These broadly applicable recommendations are meant to be tailored to advocates' own voice and needs. At the same time, the common framework provided here should help diverse advocates communicate in mutually reinforcing ways, even if they disagree on policy details.

This is a working draft, not a focus-group-tested messaging platform. It is subject to further discussion and revision on the basis of new public opinion research and feedback from communications practitioners. We hope users of this resource will share their experiences and suggestions with us, so we can continue to refine our recommendations.

Public Thinking About Globalization: Opportunities and Obstacles

At the heart of this Message Builder is the question of how to “talk so you can be heard” by a mainstream public that is **profoundly anxious about the impacts of economic globalization, skeptical about the ability of government to get results, and still groping toward a new understanding of America’s role in a rapidly changing world**. You want your messages to resonate with the public—but at the same time, you want to avoid reinforcing familiar themes that might send your audience’s thinking in the wrong direction (toward protectionism, isolationism, or “us vs. them” calculations). So it’s important to have a sense of what people already understand or think they understand about these issues; not necessarily so you can confirm what they believe, but so you can make strategic messaging choices that encourage new ways of understanding.

Polls and focus group findings* suggest that public thinking presents both opportunities and challenges for advocates of U.S. leadership in creating shared global prosperity.

Americans are extremely negative about how the process of globalization is working and want to see significant changes. For advocates and opinion leaders, the challenge is to ensure that dissatisfaction with today’s global economic engagement doesn’t turn into a preference for disengagement, rather than pressure for a different kind of engagement.

- **The public is still supportive of globalization in principle, but alarmed and angry about how it seems to be affecting American livelihoods.** Large majorities believe that international trade has made things worse for American workers (people are divided as to whether it’s been good or bad for consumers) and that the U.S. is losing while our trading partners are gaining. U.S. trade policy is widely seen as not attentive to the needs of American workers.
- **There is overwhelming public support for including labor and environmental standards in trade agreements.** Americans say they feel a moral obligation to ensure that products we use aren’t produced in harsh or unsafe conditions, and want other countries to allow wages to rise by permitting unions and ending child labor. Public support for the lowering of trade barriers is contingent both on the inclusion of such standards and on whether steps to **mitigate negative effects on U.S. workers** would be put into place.

* See page 7 for sources and additional resources.

- Americans continue to believe that the free market economy is the best model for the world, though support for that notion is softening. There's some suggestion that proponents of the free market system are now **more inclined to believe the system works best with government regulation** – and that when people have doubts about the government's ability to regulate the free market, their confidence in the market diminishes.

Americans are frightened by the domestic economic downturn and furious about inadequate government responses to it. Zero-sum arguments about “taking care of our own first” are gaining traction, making it more difficult to advance development-friendly policies and investments. And public skepticism about government effectiveness complicates advocacy for investment in new domestic social and economic programs.

- **Americans want the government to take significant measures to address their economic needs, but many believe that Washington is unwilling (because it is beholden to special interests) or unable (because of incompetence) to act effectively.** So people often say they want government to “cut waste” first, before spending on new programs. The public shows considerable enthusiasm, though, for government investment in businesses to create new jobs—especially in the alternative energy sector.
- There is profound anxiety and a loss of confidence about the future of the middle class. International trade and other economic trends are seen as enriching an elite and squeezing everyone else. The public's **anger about the “forgotten” American middle class can spill over into anger about seemingly unchecked government spending to solve people's problems overseas.**
- Focus groups suggest that **urgency is a critical consideration** for the American public; immediate action must be part of any policy agenda. How to balance this with long-range considerations remains a challenge for advocates and leaders.

The Broader Foreign Policy Context

Here, too, there are opportunities and challenges for advocates.

The American public is looking for a new approach to foreign policy. At the same time, people's lens on the world has been narrowed to Iraq and terrorism—potentially narrowing people's understanding of what can be achieved (and why it should be achieved) through the responsible use of U.S. power and influence abroad.

- Americans are deeply **concerned about the deterioration of our global image**, hungry to believe we can be a force for good in the world, and committed to the idea that our foreign policy should reflect core values. But by far the most frequently cited reasons for our loss of moral authority are the war in Iraq, America's wealth and power, and the U.S.-led “war” on terrorism; **the electoral debate has not yet produced a broadly conceived or well-developed framework for public thinking about this challenge.**
- **Support is higher than ever for working with other nations and international institutions.** In fact, the public seems to be enthusiastic about cooperative action to address certain problems—environmental and human rights challenges, for example—that they would not identify as top U.S. priorities. It's at least plausible that global development falls into this category. But because people may not know that effective multilateral strategies exist for making progress toward a better, safer world, they may **assume the U.S. is being expected to fix the world's problems.**

- **Americans embrace the general notion that a more stable and peaceful world is safer and better for everyone, including the U.S.—but they are less certain about what it takes to create such a world.** “Development assistance” is an abstraction for many. And while Americans believe alleviating poverty and promoting democracy make life better for people within a country, the public is not persuaded that such measures make for less violence and conflict in the world.
- **The public believes we’ve relied too heavily on military force in recent years, and is listening with interest to ideas about more balanced approaches to foreign policy.** But meanwhile, “global engagement” has come to mean *military* engagement for many people. As a result, some Americans (especially progressives) who used to be most supportive of active U.S. engagement in creating a better, safer world have concluded that **the best thing we can do for the world is to stay home and mind our own business.**

Building Your Message: Themes to Convey, Pitfalls to Avoid

Cognitive scientists tell us that people rely on familiar, culturally shared stories and ideas to make sense of new information. So your listeners are not blank slates. Your communications interact with their preexisting ideas about how the world works. That’s why **successful advocacy requires understanding and sometimes changing the constructs that guide people’s thinking about an issue; presenting more facts is not enough.** If you evoke the right big themes and ideas, you create a context that enables people to make sense of your specific arguments, facts, and policy prescriptions. If your communications trigger the wrong conceptual framework, it could send your audience down a path of reasoning that is detrimental to your cause.

What big themes and ideas are likely to help Americans see the need for and value of bold U.S. leadership in creating an open global economy that works for everyone? Unfortunately, while a considerable amount of opinion research and some messaging research has been done on foreign aid and on trade and the U.S. economy, there is very little opinion or messaging research that draws together multiple strands of an alternative response to globalization. In particular, **much remains to be learned about how to make the highly charged issue of American economic security part of a public discourse that also includes development-friendly trade policies and investments in poverty alleviation.**

But we can offer some meaningful advice in the meantime. Below are a set of recommended **themes to convey, with tips on how to convey them**, followed by a list of **pitfalls to avoid**. While these themes are not tested messages, our analysis to date suggests that communications framed in such terms are likely to create a favorable context for the conversation you want to have with the American public about trade and globalization.

Themes to Convey (and Tips on How to Convey Them)

INTERCONNECTED WORLD: *Even as you respect Americans’ economic concerns, try to reinforce a sense of being “in it together” with other countries and people.* Remember that fear narrows people’s horizons, and that public support for progressive trade and economic policies (as well as other progressive foreign policies) depends on Americans’ maintaining an open worldview. Consider talking about “finding a secure place for American workers in a global economy that works for everyone,” rather than just about protecting Americans’ economic security (which might invigorate an “us vs. them” mindset). Remind people that in an interconnected world, everyone benefits when more people and countries become self-sufficient members of a peaceful, prosperous global community; and everyone shares the risk when conditions of poverty and despair are allowed to fester and worsen.

- Don't frame the global dimension of your agenda as charity for people in poor countries; tell a story about common fates. Don't make your domestic agenda about being pro- or anti-globalization; it's about constructive responses to the reality of globalization. Don't tell a story that reinforces distinctions between domestic problems and international problems; tell a story about getting U.S. policy back on course, at home and abroad.

A NEW APPROACH TO GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT: Make your proposals part of a new vision for U.S. global leadership that includes working in partnership with other nations and international institutions; rebuilding America's image abroad and mending fences so we can inspire the kind of teamwork that's needed to address shared global problems; leading with the power of our example and through American ingenuity and innovation—especially on alternative energy technologies; putting our principles into practice in ways that work for us and for the world; doing what's right and smart.

- Don't tell a story about the U.S. fixing the world; tell a story about using our power and influence (and the power of our example) to mobilize other countries and international institutions, a story about being part of a change that we can't bring about alone—but that won't happen without us.

A POSITIVE VISION: Build confidence, emphasize efficacy and accountability. Advocacy that's empowering generally gets better results than advocacy that relies on guilt or negativity. Americans' can-do spirit has been shaken, so communicate that solutions are available (including by offering examples of success). Inspire without being grandiose; give people reasons to believe that your bold proposals are also achievable and feasible. Offer yardsticks people can use to judge the effectiveness of what you propose and to hold leaders accountable for results. Don't overplay how uniquely threatening today's situation is; the U.S. has a history of evolving to meet changing economic circumstances, but if people think we've never faced comparable challenges, it may prevent them from being encouraged by past successes. Make the point that we already have some of the policy tools and best-practice models we need to make progress on both the domestic and global economic fronts; it's a question of using them. Acknowledge that no one has all the answers—but if we work together and use all the tools at our disposal, we'll find solutions.

- Don't tell the familiar story about how globalization isn't working and Americans have lost control of their economic destinies; tell a story that acknowledges the scale of the challenge but conveys realistic confidence in our ability both to advance human values and to find a secure place in the global marketplace.

A VITAL ROLE FOR GOVERNMENT: Tell a positive story about government and about the new public structures we need to create – in the U.S. and internationally – if we're to prosper in a new global economy. If you only criticize past policy failures, you may reinforce a cynicism about government that actually undermines support for the multifaceted, sustained, and inevitably costly measures we have to undertake. Remind people that the global marketplace is blind to the fates of individual countries and people; it's the job of governments and international institutions to ensure that the benefits of the global economy are shared more fairly, within and among nations. And since globalization is such a powerful force, we need strong, effective public structures here at home (retraining programs, health-care, etc.) to help us respond together, as a society, to challenges that none of us can handle alone. Our government isn't perfect; but as citizens, we have a shared responsibility to maintain and help build the public structures that ensure our quality of life.

- Don't make government the problem; tell a story about the need for a big, sustained, transformative effort of the sort only government can spearhead.[†]

[†] The concept of "public structures" is borrowed from research conducted by the FrameWorks Institute for another Dēmos program, Public Works: The Dēmos Center for the Public Sector.

RESPONSIBLE ECONOMIC PROBLEM SOLVING: *Put your arguments in the context of what people already know about smart, farsighted, creative problem solving.* This frame has the advantage of linking the domestic and global economic arenas, and of enabling you to talk about the broader economic challenges we face in a globalizing world—including but not limited to fixing the global trading system. In this issue area, as in other complex issue areas, Americans probably aren't looking for particular new policies; rather, they're looking for a new approach that is solutions-oriented, that takes urgent problems seriously and tackles them honestly and accountably. People want boldness and prompt action, to be sure, but if the frame that guides their thinking is something like “responsible, effective problem solving,” they are more likely to remember that complex problems require comprehensive solutions—and that short-sighted decision making will just make things worse in the long run. Explain how the solutions you propose will have an impact on people's lives now while also enabling us to move toward long-term objectives that are appropriate to an interconnected world. Be prepared to explain how you'll overcome structural and systemic obstacles to progress—including resource limitations.

- *Don't just tell a story about fixing trade rules or creating jobs for American workers; talk about a responsible, comprehensive new approach to economic planning that's designed to get results in a rapidly changing global economy.*

Messaging Pitfalls to Avoid

Based on our analysis to date, we suggest avoiding the following pitfalls and potential pitfalls. These are approaches to messaging which could trigger a worldview that leads people to tune out or reject your arguments.

- *Don't narrow the lens to “trade.”* You can't avoid the issue—but try to avoid letting your message be about the debate over whether free trade is a good or a bad thing, or whether or not trade rules are really responsible for significant American job losses and wage stagnation. In many parts of the country, patience with this debate seems to be wearing thin. By emphasizing the benefits of trade, you may inadvertently signal to these audiences that you are indifferent to their distress. Offer a broader lens, as suggested above, that addresses the public's underlying anxieties about the disappearance of the middle class and the threat of economic dislocation.
- *Avoid making globalization itself the villain...or a hero.* Globalization is opening up new opportunities and causing wrenching dislocations in every corner of the world. It's neither inherently good nor inherently bad; the work of policy is to push the balance toward the good side of the scale—locally, nationally, and globally.
- *Don't treat people as if they're selfish for wanting to redirect resources to the home front.* Remember that Americans are now skeptical about our ability to achieve any of our objectives abroad; they don't want to throw good money after bad. And we naturally want to help others in our own communities—especially when we see ordinary people hurting while a small number of wealthy individuals thrive. Americans are generous and think of themselves as generous people. Build on that quality instead of calling it into question or trying to play on people's guilt.
- *Avoid “guns vs. butter” arguments* for taking resources from national defense and dedicating them to social and economic needs. You risk needlessly alienating your audience at a time when security concerns (and the strains on our military) are front-of-mind for many people. If you grapple with this issue, consider talking about allocating our resources more wisely; making smarter choices within the defense budget; organizing ourselves and our resources better to meet today's global security, economic, and environmental challenges.

- *Keep in mind that relying exclusively on a “justice” frame to promote global poverty alleviation could backfire with some listeners.* While some audiences may be reminded of their moral obligation to help the world’s poor, other audiences may be reminded of how unfair economic conditions are here at home and how we need to take care of our own instead of trying to fix the world. Appealing to values does not replace creating a conceptual context that changes people’s understanding of an issue and enables them to see the logic of alternative policy solutions.
- *And keep in mind that the public is likely to be skeptical of sweeping claims about how economic development in poor countries will enhance national security (or contribute directly to the U.S. economy).* Such claims may lead people to think very literally about pay-offs and calculations of benefit: “Is this strategy directly related to my family’s safety, are there other strategies that will get more immediate results?” or “How many American-made products are these impoverished countries really going to consume, even if incomes there go up slightly?”

SOURCES AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

This Message Builder is meant to complement, not substitute for, the detailed guidance provided in *U.S. in the World: Talking Global Issues with Americans* (2004), a multi-issue communicators' guide developed through consultations with hundreds of experts and advocates over a two-year period (see <http://www.gii-exchange.org/guide>).

Two recent messaging resources from U.S. in the World were also consulted in preparing this Message Builder: *Talking About Security: Public Opinion Highlights and Implications for Communicators*, and *Talking Moral Imperatives in 2008—The Role of Values in U.S. Foreign Policy: Public Opinion Highlights and Implications for Communicators* (draft). In addition, our analysis relies on a series of meta-analyses of public opinion that were based on research undertaken for the U.S. in the World Initiative in 2007 by Meg Bostrom of Public Knowledge LLC:

- *How Are Americans Making Sense of Security?*, commissioned by U.S. in the World
- *Team Player, Not Lone Ranger*, commissioned by the Stanley *Foundation* (www.stanleyfoundation.org)
- *Facets of American Leadership*, commissioned by the Stanley Foundation (www.stanleyfoundation.org)
- *Principle Versus Practice*, commissioned by the Human Rights Center of the University of California Berkeley (www.hrcberkeley.org)

The four meta-analyses and all U.S. in the World messaging resources are available from sue@usintheworld.org.

This Message Builder also draws from recent, publicly available opinion research conducted by Public Agenda (www.publicagenda.org), Democracy Corps (www.democracycorps.com), and WorldPublicOpinion (www.worldpublicopinion.org).

Dēmos
220 Fifth Ave., 5th Floor
New York, NY 10001
212.633.1405 | www.demos.org

World Policy Institute
220 Fifth Ave., 9th Floor
New York, NY 10001
212.481.5005 | www.worldpolicy.org