

**THE IMPACT OF FOREIGN POLICY ON PUBLIC OPINION:
The Malvinas Case (1984-1997)(*)**

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Resumen:

This paper studies the relationship between public opinion and one specific Argentine foreign policy, namely, the one concerning the Malvinas during the last two democratic governments. In particular, since the instauration of the democratic regime, there have been two different policies followed by the two elected presidents, Raúl Alfonsín, and Carlos Menem.

What was the impact of these policies on Argentine public opinion? By using survey data the paper suggests that in the Malvinas case, public support will probably depend on the general evaluation on government performance in other areas considered more critical by most of the population.

The relationship between public opinion and foreign policy in the United States has been the focus of large research programs and long debates. By contrast, there are very few works on this topic in Argentina.¹ The most important is, perhaps, the work published by Mora y Araujo, Di Rado and Montoya in which they characterize foreign policy in Argentina as a dimension of public affairs in which most of the public is not actively engaged.²

This paper aims to study the relationship between public opinion and one specific foreign policy, namely, the one concerning the Malvinas during the last two democratic governments. What was the impact of the policies regarding Malvinas on Argentine public opinion? In particular, since the instauration of the democratic regime, there have been two different policies followed by the two elected presidents, Raúl Alfonsín, and Carlos Menem. Has public opinion in Argentina reflected or followed the changes in the policies? Conversely, has public opinion affected the policies? This paper is a first attempt to look at the interaction between foreign policy and public opinion on one issue in particular, the Malvinas dispute.

This research is based on survey data done by SOCMERC, a leading Argentine consulting company, and consists of four surveys done in the years 1986, 1990, 1996, and 1997.³ Consequently, this research does not present a time series analysis. Another problem that hampers generalizations across time is changes in wording and response categories in the questionnaires.⁴ Some specialists contend that it is impossible to infer changes in public opinion across time based on questions phrased differently even if the questions are about the same topic.⁵ It is evident that with the number of surveys available it is possible only to look at snapshots the public opinion at different points in time and comment on what each survey meant for that moment. Even if questions are phrased differently, there is still the room to describe the state of the opinion at that particular time and, in this way, to suggest broad comparisons.

In the next section, the paper will present the discussion on public opinion and foreign policy in the United States. This paper will explore three dimensions of specific attitudes: First, attitudes toward improving relations with England, attitudes with respect to government policy toward the Malvinas, and attitudes regarding joint administration and exploitation of natural resources in the waters surrounding the Malvinas. This paper will also analyze how Argentines have assessed the consequences of the war fifteen years later and how they think about the future resolution of the dispute.

Public opinion and foreign policy debate in the United States

According to Bruce Russett there are four possible interpretations of the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy specific to national security in the United States. The first is that the public is *controlling*. Second, is the opposite of the first namely, that public opinion is itself *controlled*. The third considers that the two groups (leaders and public opinion) are mutually *irrelevant*. Finally, there is the view that opinion and policies interact: each influences the other depending on the political and social context.⁶ According to Russett, this last interpretation is the one that most accurately describes the relationship. Scholars refer to the public opinion/policy nexus as reciprocal. Therefore, leaders try to educate or manipulate public opinion, but such decision-makers also are sensitive to the preferences of the public.⁷

James Rosenau characterizes the public as being able to react only in emotional terms.⁸ According to Rosenau, the sole function of public opinion is to set "the outer limits within which decision makers and opinion makers feel constrained to operate and interact." In general, studies conducted during the 1950s to 1970s tended to confirm the assumptions concerning foreign policy,

that the public had little understanding about the topic, that it was volatile and emotional. Americans' opinions toward foreign policy were characterized as "moods" that "undergo frequent alteration in response to changes in events."⁹

Much of the time public opinion is not activated and has no direct influence over foreign policy. For this reason, policymakers pursue policies within the limits of "anticipated future opinion." Leaders weigh carefully the degree to which public opinion may be persuaded to approve new policies. Particularly, presidents make foreign policy choices based on their reading of public capacity to be persuaded and then try to legitimize their decisions. All this has to be made within the limits of what they perceive polity to want.

In Argentina researchers have concluded that public opinion and foreign policy in general follow a similar pattern to that of the United States. As Mora y Araujo, Di Nardo and Montoya state,

The people's opinion on foreign policy is to a great extent determined by the general opinion mood regarding to public policy in each moment.¹⁰

A recent work concludes that the dominant patterns in the evolution of Argentine public opinion during last decade are stability and gradual change. It also suggests that public opinion is rational.¹¹ Has Argentine opinion also been stable and rational regarding the Malvinas? A look at the opinions expressed in the surveys suggests that the same pattern does hold towards Malvinas.

The Malvinas as a foreign policy issue

On March 1990, only a minority of Argentines considered the Malvinas dispute as an important international problem.¹² Nevertheless, the Malvinas had traditionally occupied a salient position in the Argentine international agenda.¹³ In the attempt to recover the islands the country had embarked on a costly war in April 1982. Initially, this action in "defense of the sovereignty"-as it was presented at the time- was very popular among the Argentines. As soon as news of the Argentine landing was announced in Buenos Aires, a massive crowd gathered in front of the presidential house to cheer the military.¹⁴ The cause of the Malvinas evoked emotion and intense sentiment.¹⁵ The image of the crowds filling the *Plaza de Mayo* voicing their support to a government that two days before had been repudiated by another crowd left an imprint that few politicians of that generation could forget.¹⁶ Whoever regains the sovereignty over the islands would become a national hero and earn the eternal gratitude of the Argentines. From a more practical point of view, a victory would enable the party, either UCR or Justicialista, and the president to stay in power as well.

Consequently, the next two democratic governments paid much attention to the issue. Successive Argentine presidents emphasized the recovery, by pacific means, of the islands as high priority for their foreign policy. Both presidents Raúl Alfonsín and later Carlos Menem, mentioned the issue in their inaugural addresses. In his first speech to the Congress on December 10, 1983, the new president Raúl Alfonsín declared:

In the case of the Islands Malvinas, Georgia of the South and Sandwich of the South, our undeniable objective is and it will always be their recovery and the definitive assertion of our Nation's right to its sovereign territorial integrity. *In this point we are inflexible and the sovereignty is a previous fact to the negotiation.* We will impel the recovery of those insular territories and their definitive integration to the sovereignty of the Nation by claiming with energy and decision the fulfillment of the effective resolutions of the General Assembly of the United Nations, which exhort the parts to conduct direct negotiation on all the issues.¹⁷

Six years later, the next democratically elected president, Carlos Menem, stated in his inaugural speech regarding the Malvinas that: "as President ...I am going to dedicate the largest and

the most important effort, in a cause I will fight with the law and the right in the hand. It will be a great Argentine cause: the recovery of our Malvinas, South Georgias, and South Sandwich Islands.”¹⁸

Despite the similarities in their addresses, however, the policies concerning the Malvinas implemented by each president were actually different. At the outset, Alfonsín’s administration wanted to return to an *ante bellum* situation.¹⁹ The government, in this case, wanted to pursue negotiation with Great Britain with the condition of including sovereignty as part of the discussion. At the same time, the Argentine government pursued a multilateral approach denouncing the British occupation in international forums such as the United Nations, Organization of American States, and the Non-Aligned Movement.

Subsequently, Menem’s administration agreed to reestablish diplomatic relations with Britain under the cover of a diplomatic artifice known as “umbrella formula.”²⁰ This formula allowed the parties to safeguard their sovereignty claims and rights while the parties engaged in the discussion of solutions to other topics. In this case, the objective was to negotiate other issues of bilateral relations such as trade, air flights, Argentine and British property rights within each country, fisheries, and visits to the soldiers’ tombs. The expectation was that these talks would serve as confidence building measures in which the issue of sovereignty would eventually spill over from agreement on other issues.

Given the importance successive democratic governments gave to the issue and the ample media attention it received, how did the public react to the different policy approaches. In both cases, did public opinion act as a constraint to or has it followed government policies?

Attitudes to improve relations

After the war, both the governments of Argentina and Britain, and especially the latter, declared that they wanted to reestablish diplomatic relations and to work on the resolution of common problems. There persisted, however, certain unsolved tensions, which made the achievement of this goal difficult. While to the British government the war had succeeded in retaining the islands under British sovereignty, the Argentine government wanted to keep the subject of sovereignty on the table. The British expert Walter Little summarized the situation in this way:

[Then] the British were willing to discuss everything except the only thing that the Argentina wanted. On the other hand, the Argentina was mainly interested in discussing the only topic that the Britons had declared not to be willing to try.²¹

The resolution of this dilemma occupied most of Alfonsín presidency and was eventually a stepping stone to the renewal of diplomatic relations. Given the adamant Argentine government position, what was the attitude of the population regarding the improvement of relations with Britain?

A survey conducted in April 1986, exactly four years after the disastrous South Atlantic War, showed that a majority of the Argentines (59 per cent) agreed that it was convenient to reestablish diplomatic relations with Great Britain. Only one third disagreed with the idea (see Appendix table A-1).

The presidency of Carlos Menem introduced changes in the bilateral relationship by effectively reestablishing full diplomatic relations with Great Britain. Consequently, on February 1990, the governments of Argentina and Great Britain signed in Madrid an agreement that normalized relations between both governments. Two months later, a survey showed that “all the measures to improve relations received majority support” (see Appendix table A-2).²² Overall, the attitudes towards improvement in bilateral relations ranged between high levels and overwhelming levels of approval.²³

These results were corroborated shortly afterwards, when on August 1990, another survey explicitly asked about support for the government's decision to resume diplomatic relations with Great Britain. The result showed that seventy per cent of the Argentines considered it "a good decision." On the other hand, less than one-fifth thought that the country should have continued without formal contacts (see Appendix table A-3). Consequently, the public was supportive of the decision to renew relations. Noguera and Willetts concluded, "the Argentine government has [nothing] to fear from any sector of their electorates."²⁴ In this case, what was seemed a bold decision by the recently installed government of president Menem was actually one that had wide support among the Argentines.²⁵

Attitudes to government policy toward the Malvinas

With the accession of Raúl Alfonsín as president of Argentina on December 10, 1983, Primer Minister Margaret Thatcher reiterated her offer to reestablish diplomatic relations. The new Argentine democratic government agreed in general terms with the wishes of the British officials, but Alfonsín set as a condition to normalize relations the discussion of the subject of sovereignty in concordance with the United Nations resolutions.²⁶ The British government thereupon rejected Argentina's aspirations. Consequently, during Alfonsín's presidency the core of the negotiations with Britain reflected a quandary for Argentina as to how to normalize relations and discuss sovereignty at the same time. In sum, President Alfonsín's negotiation position can be summarized as *negotiating only if the subject of sovereignty was included*.

According to polls reported by SOCMERC, in the late 1982, when the Argentines were asked, "what do you think Argentina should do concerning the Malvinas?" nearly one third of the respondents said that it should somehow continue to "pursue the conflict." Notably, by June 1984 this position was expressed only by 7 per cent of the respondents.²⁷

By late 1984, SOCMERC introduced some changes in the response categories for "negotiation." The new standardized categories offered the following choices: "negotiate," "demand the islands' return," and "pursue the conflict." In this way, the pollsters introduced a new category between the hard line position of "pursuing the conflict" and the more amicable "negotiate." Starting on April 1986, the "negotiate" option was further reconfigured into "negotiate without prior conditions" and "negotiate only if the subject of sovereignty is included." The first category reflected the idea that talks could be conducted without a fixed agenda but without dealing explicitly with sovereignty. The later category reflected the negotiating approach of the Argentine government, that is, to talk only if sovereignty was included.

The results of the surveys conducted through 1990 indicated stability, but with a trend across time: more people supporting negotiations and a steady decline in the relatively hard-line position of "demand the return of the islands."²⁸ Throughout this period, the group advocating "pursue the conflict" position nearly vanished.²⁹ Table 1 shows the trend between December 1984 to March 1990.

Table 1. *Argentine policy towards the dispute*

What do you think Argentina should do concerning the Malvinas?

	Dec-84 Percent	Aug-85 Percent	Apr-86 Percent	Mar-90 Percent
Negotiate	37	47	56	58
Demand the Island's return	46	41	31	30
Pursue the conflict	5	5	4	1
DK/ NR	12	7	10	10
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Adapted from Noguera and Willetts (1992), 258.

The March 1990 survey was carried out only a short time after Argentina and Great Britain had concluded its successful talks on bilateral negotiations leading to the Madrid Accords. It is interesting to note that this success did not affected negatively the poll's results which continued to show a general support for negotiations on the Malvinas. Note that the difference between the data from 1986 to 1990 is only about 2 per cent. It is also significant that on March 1990 the negotiation option still preferred by the Argentines was "to negotiate only if it includes the issue of sovereignty" (39 per cent to 19 per cent to negotiate without conditions). Yet 30 per cent said they supported a policy demanding the islands return. A mere 1 per cent of the respondents preferred to pursue the conflict (see Appendix table A-4).³⁰ A clear majority of the population supported the idea of negotiation and there were virtually no belligerent attitudes, as the declining support for the "pursue the conflict" option clearly shows. Evidently, for whatever reason, the Argentines had learned a lesson, *don't mess with a great power*.³¹

If Menem's government intended further concessions over the Malvinas, the August 1990 survey signaled a limit to governmental negotiation action. The public was asked:

Do you think that it would be a good idea to make concessions concerning the Malvinas in exchange for convenient agreements with other countries, or do you consider that the absolute claim of Argentine sovereignty over the Islands must not be negotiate?

Two thirds of the respondents supported the option that "the claim of sovereignty ought not to be negotiated." Only 22 per cent said, "it is proper to make concessions in exchange of agreements" (see Appendix table A-5). That is, a majority of the population would not support any negotiation that jeopardized Argentina's sovereignty claims over the islands in exchange for any advantage with other countries or parties.³²

Nonetheless, six years after President Menem reestablished relations with Britain, Argentine public support for "negotiations" over the Malvinas declined from 58 to 40 per cent. At the same time, the more hard line position of "demand the island's return" increased eleven percentage points (from 30 to 41 per cent, see Appendix table A-6). How can we explain this reversal in support of negotiations? One possible explanation is that by 1996 there had emerged a certain degree of public disenchantment with the outcome of the new policy, which have consisted in negotiations over any issue except for sovereignty. The claims from both parts were put "under an umbrella" which protected their rights. The expectation from the Argentine side was that once the umbrella was in place, negotiations would advance swiftly. Indeed, from the first days of his mandate Menem had

vowed that “the Malvinas will be Argentines before the year 2000.” Yet, there was no sign that the situation would change, and in the eyes of the public the administration was running out of time.

As if the government was responding to the October survey, two months later president Menem proposed to Great Britain to share the sovereignty over the islands (see next section). A survey in December 1997 repeated the question about what the Argentine should do concerning the Malvinas; however, in response to the new Argentine initiative, the pollsters again changed the response categories.³³ This time one of the options offered was consistent with the new government negotiating strategy. It proposed to start sharing the islands’ administration with Great Britain, in this way, making progressive steps forward until once again Argentina recovered the islands. A large minority of 42 per cent supported this option. However, the harder option, “the government should continue claiming all the necessary time until getting complete sovereignty, and only then, should it move into the islands,” still received support by nearly half of the respondents (see Appendix table A-7).

Throughout the period survey results showed that public opinion was stable and consistent. Argentines expected their government to negotiate only if the subject of sovereignty were included.

The idea of a joint administration and exploitation of natural resources

Eventhough the surveys regularly asked Argentines if they would accept a joint administration of the Islands with Great Britain. The government never discussed it publicly or was presented as a negotiating alternative during Alfonsin’s government. The most his government would propose to Great Britain was a formal declaration ending hostilities in exchange for the retirement of the British garrison and the occupation of the islands by a United Nations peacekeeping force (Blue Helmets). Then President Menem publicly offered the new alternative on December 1996. He proposed to be prepared to share the sovereignty of the islands.³⁴

When this issue is analyzed, some problems arise. In effect, there are no equal questions or response categories over time. Consequently, it is only possible to gauge the degree of public acceptance of a plausible sharing in the administration of the islands.

On April 1986, Argentines were asked if they found acceptable, in order to solve the dispute, a “share” of the islands with Great Britain. Two thirds of the respondents rejected the idea. Only 25 per cent said they would accept it (see Appendix table A-8).

On August 1990, still under the process of negotiating with Great Britain the reestablishment of diplomatic relations, the issue was asked again in a survey. This time the question introduced the concept of “joint administration.” The results were approximately similar to those of four years earlier. The majority said that the idea was unacceptable (58 per cent) while a mere 28 per cent thought it acceptable (see Appendix table A-9).

Notably, the responses from the October 1996 survey show a very thin support (13 per cent) for a policy of pursuing “a shared sovereignty” over the islands (see Appendix table A-6). Yet, regardless of these results, President Menem announced his proposal for a joint administration of the islands. Perhaps he decided to promote this initiative because of his earlier promises and the meager results from the negotiation policy (see above). Now he declared to the press,

I do not give up the hope that for the year 2000 we could see perhaps the Argentine flag flying, alone or in company of others, over the Islands.³⁵

A year later, a survey asked the Argentines what they thought about the idea of joint administration. In terms of generating domestic support, Menem’s strategy proved successful. After the issue had been discussed publicly, the results improved over the earlier surveys. This time, a majority (53 per cent) thought that it “a good idea.” This suggests a measure of Menem’s political

leadership in managing public opinion. Nonetheless, those who thought that it a “bad idea” remained a large minority, 42 per cent (see Appendix table 10).

The public was also asked about the joint exploitation of natural resources in the waters surrounding the Malvinas. As part of the policies of cooperation, on September 1995, Menem’s government signed a joint declaration for cooperation on activities related to exploration and exploitation of oil and gas in the South West Atlantic waters.³⁶ Initially, the public reacted negatively to the government’s policy. Table 2 reports that in October 1996, 56 per cent of the respondents disagreed with the joint exploitation of the maritime resources surrounding the Malvinas. A year later, public opinion had changed in the direction of supporting the government when a similar majority said they agree with the idea of joint exploitation. Survey data shows that the government once again was able to persuade the population to support its policies.

Table 2. *Joint Exploitation of oil and fishing resources*

What do you think of joint exploitation by Argentina and Great Britain of the oil and fishing resources in the waters surrounding the Malvinas?

	Oct-96	Dec-97
	Percent	Percent
Strongly agree	2.9	9.3
Agree	34.8	44.8
Disagree	40.6	21.8
Strongly disagree	15.6	14.5
Indifferent	-	3.8
DK/ NR	6.1	6.1
Total	100	100
	n= 799	n= 1200

The consequences of the war fifteen years later: a retrospective view and a look to the future

An exploration of Argentine public attitudes concerning the Malvinas could not be complete without further analysis on how the war is viewed in hindsight and prospects for the future. That is, how do the Argentines retrospectively judge the conflict and how do they assess the future of negotiations about the Islands?

Fifteen years after the conflict ended and after having witnessed two different administration’s policies towards the islands, Argentine answers to surveys present a blend of moderate hope and pessimism about any possibility of gaining future total control over the territory.³⁷

In terms of a retrospective look at the conflict, an overwhelming majority of nearly 90 per cent of the respondents showed a great deal of realism. They believed that the war of 1982 damaged in great measure the possibilities of Argentina recovering the islands (see Appendix table A-11).

Another question asked respondents if they considered that an improvement in the general relations with Great Britain increased the likelihood of a solution for the Malvinas (see Appendix table A-12). Half of the respondents thought that this was the case. In particular 36 per cent chose “some” and 14 per cent said that the possibilities increased “a lot.” At the same time, 40 per cent of those interviewed concluded that the possibilities for solution are small or nil.

Likewise, Argentines accepted the idea of a joint administration. When asked about a more emotive concept such as the idea of the Argentine flag flying at the same time with the British flag over the islands, they showed a moderately positive mood (see Appendix table A-13). In this case,

half of the respondents thought that a step would improve the negotiation process. Conversely, 40 per cent said that it would be a step backwards. Probably this same group also said that the joint administration was not a good idea (see above).

Looking to the future, two questions asked about Argentina's odds for recovering the Islands totally and partially. In the case of total recovery, a large number of the Argentines were pessimistic. Nearly 73 per cent, divided in equal parts, said that the possibilities were "few" or "null." Only less than a quarter foresaw some possibility (see Appendix table A-14).

If the chances for a total recovery of the islands are nearly nonexistent for a large majority of the respondents, what do they think about a partial recovery of sovereignty over the territory? In this case, although the response categories were different, it is possible to find the same pattern of answers. While the negative response categories remained the same, the positive categories asked if a partial recovery of the islands might offer "a definitive situation" or it was a previous step towards "total recovery." Nevertheless, 57 per cent thought that the chances for this kind of solution were "few" or "null" (see Appendix table 15). Only five per cent said that this would be the final solution. While 6 per cent thought that it would be a step towards the total recovery of the sovereignty, one third of the respondents had no answer to this question. Furthermore, Argentines still remain pessimistic even if asked to assume hypothetically that Britain did agree to joint administration. In this case, the negative position prevails. Forty seven per cent said that Argentina could not ever gain total control over the islands. The more optimistic position that joint administration would be a first step toward gaining full control over the territory was supported by 43 per cent of the people (see Appendix table A-16).

Public opinion, foreign policy, and the Malvinas

In the years after the war is it possible to discern a pattern of public opinion regarding the Malvinas? How did it related to the government's foreign policy? The analysis of the attitudes toward improving relations, government policy, joint administration, and the future enable us to see a pattern and make some connections.

At least since the restoration of the democratic regime Argentines, in principle, have favored reestablishment of relations with Great Britain. There was little animosity in the population against Britain. Thus the governments of presidents Alfonsín, in the first place, and Menem later, framed the public discussion of policy with respect to the terms and conditions under which relations with Britain would be reestablished.

Regarding foreign policy, Argentine public opinion shared the disposition of their governments not to use force and to pursue negotiations in order to solve the dispute over the sovereignty. In this case, both the Government and the public expressed a rational attitude. The limit to the negotiations accepted by the public was that the government does not abandon the sovereignty claims. Furthermore, besides the strong support for not abandoning the sovereignty, the prevailing position of the public was also that the government should not make concession on the Malvinas in order to solve other issues with third parties.

These results seem to support the conclusion that public opinion was in general more in tune with Alfonsín's policy towards the Islands. That is, during all these years the public expressed their support for a policy of no negotiations unless the subject of sovereignty was included. Yet, Menem had little trouble in proceeding with a policy that in practical terms froze the discussion about sovereignty under an "umbrella" formula. How was it possible? A plausible explanation is based on the hypothesis stated by Noguera and Willetts in which the public does not perceive the dispute as "a single coherent issue, with everything constrained by sovereignty." Furthermore, they agree that the public distinguished between the symbolic dimension of the conflict and the concrete disputes related to questions of day-to-day policy. Consequently they distinguished between their wishes and reality.³⁸ Notwithstanding, after six years of Menem's policy, the public began to show signs of discontent by supporting a more hard line approach such as "demanding the return of the Islands." Expressions of

this discontent suggest a reason why Menem introduced to the public the proposal of shared sovereignty with Britain. A year later, the public had accepted it. How could Menem produce such change? First, it is possible to credit the change as a triumph of presidential leadership. Second, with the new initiative, the public began to realize (or became resigned) that it is better to have a part of something than nothing of the whole. Lastly, another possible explanation is based on the tendency in Argentine public opinion observed by Mora y Araujo and corroborated by others which assert that beginning in the late 1980s early 1990s the Argentines began to show a more universalistic and pragmatic attitude which affected their political views.³⁹ Consequently, the issue of the Malvinas was also seen as part of this new vision which implies a more pragmatic approach, in opposition to more ideological approach, to policies in general and foreign policy in particular. In the last decade, Argentines become convinced in increasing numbers that it was convenient for them to improve their ties with the Western world, including Great Britain. In this case, they believed that the Islands should not constitute an obstacle to the reestablishment of Argentina as part of the Western world. Table 3 reports with what groups of countries Argentines thought their country would have priority in increasing ties for political convenience. While in 1986, the priority on increasing the ties was placed on Latin America, in 1997 the priority clearly was the Western World, which includes the United States, Western Europe, and Japan (see table 3).

Table 3. *Group of countries Argentina should develop close ties*

With which group of countries do you think Argentina should primarily develop close ties with for reasons of political convenience? (First choice)

	Apr-86	Aug-90	Dec-97
	Percent	Percent	Percent
United States, Western Europe, Japan	29.3	54.5(*)	62.3(*)
Soviet Union and other communist countries	4.8	2.5	1.6
Latin America	40.1	23	18.1
Other Third World countries	4.1	1.4	1.7
DK/ NR	21.8	18.6	13.3
Total	100	100	100
	n= 800	n= 800	n= 1200

(*)The number shows the total. United States, Western Europe, and Japan were asked separated.

Conclusion

So far, the research shows that public opinion has reacted in a favorable way to government's changes in the policy towards the Islands. In general, public opinion has followed governmental policies. Particularly, President Menem proved to be successful in presenting and convincing the Argentines about the new policies towards the Islands.

The government of Alfonsín did not slavishly follow public opinion surveys. The former Foreign Minister during Alfonsín's government, Dante Caputo, acknowledged in an interview that they did not pay much attention. The reality was there were surveys circulating as the 1986 survey indicates. The problem was that they were not systematic and officials did not trust them.⁴⁰ In this case the government acted according to the expectations of the future opinion or "anticipated future opinion." As seen we have seen, the public supported the policies.

Menem's approach was different, and one of his first foreign policy initiatives was to reestablish diplomatic relations with Great Britain. He accepted to put aside the claims over

sovereignty under an umbrella and proceeded to the normalization of the relationship. The public reacted favorably to this first step and to others as well, such as the initiative to joint administration and exploitation of natural resources. The limit the public imposed was not to abandon the claim over the sovereignty. Public opinion conformed to the policy concerning the Malvinas. In this case public opinion was subtly controlled by the government.

Because the Malvinas dispute is no longer salient to the Argentines, public opinion acts as Rosenau described by setting “the outer limits” of the policy. As Noguera and Willet conclude, “the emotions of national identity that the symbolic question of sovereignty invokes will not guide policy; they set constraints on what is possible, boundaries for political debate.”⁴¹ Even when only an specific foreign policy, as in this case the Malvinas, public support will probably depend on the general evaluation on government performance in other areas considered more critical by most of the population.⁴² And regarding foreign policy issues, the more optimistic analysts on the role of public opinion on guiding policy would have to wait until the issue became more intense and the government could not convince the public to accept its policies.⁴³

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¹ Gerardo Adrogué complains that there are a very small number of systematic studies of public opinion in general on Argentina. (1998, 391) Perhaps the most important work of this new democratic era is the book by Edgardo Catterberg, *Argentines Confront Politics* (1991).

² Mora y Araujo, Di Rado and Montoya (1992) 222. Other important work that compares the opinion of both British and Argentines is Noguera and Willetts (1992). This works covered the period 1984 to 1990. Particularly, their research is based on the March 1990 survey that was simultaneous on both countries and specifically designs to study the issue of Malvinas.

³ The author would like to acknowledge and thank SOCMERC for generously sharing the data with him.

⁴ The problem of how wording can influence the responses has been extensively studied. See for example, Schuman and Presser (1996). For instance the use of the word “sovereignty” in the questions about the policy concerning the Malvinas. We do not know for sure if the use of the word “sovereignty” in some of the response categories and not in another could affect the respondents. Another group of questions was the one concerning joint administration, the 1997 question had different response categories.

⁵ Adrogué (1998) 391.

⁶ (1990)

⁷ Powlick and Katz ,1998.

⁸Rosenau (1961).

⁹Almond (1960).

¹⁰ Mora y Araujo, Di Rado and Montoya (1992) 222-223.

¹¹ Adrogué (1998)

¹²Noguera and Willetts (1992), 254. When asked about what was the most important international problem facing Argentina, 22 per cent of the respondents mentioned the Malvinas as their first response.

¹³On January 1833 a British warship appeared in front of the coast of the Malvinas Islands and proceeded to expel a group of Argentine settlers. The islands became a British colony in the South Atlantic. Since then Argentina had claim to Great Britain for its rights over the sovereignty of the Islands. However, after the Second World War, Argentina began to make stronger claims and presented the issue a national cause. Argentina took the issue to the United Nations. So far, Great Britain had systematically denied that there was a dispute and stated it had legitimate rights over the islands were clear and, consequently, refused to talk about the issue with Argentina. However, in 1965 a resolution from the United Nations General Assembly recognized that the Malvinas were a case of decolonization and urged the part to discuss the issue of sovereignty in order to solve by peaceful means the dispute. In 1966 the bilateral talks started and in 1972, both governments signed a communications agreement that connected the islands to the continent by means of Argentine airplanes. Argentina provided also the fuel, gas and heating oil to the islanders. The agreement also allowed Argentine citizens to visit the islands without passport. Negotiations continued until April 2, 1982, when the Argentine military government, then in power, decided to take more decisive action and invade the islands. Great Britain sent an armada to recover the islands. After 74 days and thousand dead from both parts, the British regained the control over the islands. One consequence of the Argentine defeat was the collapse of the military regime and the installation of a democratic regime in December 1983.

¹⁴ In this regard, the American specialist Lowell Gustafson observes that “the Junta was not cynically manipulating the public; the public was driving the Junta forward to battle.” (Gustafson 175)

¹⁵ As one key official on foreign affairs during the Alfonsín’s administration characterized the Malvinas as “an atypical foreign policy issue.” According to him, “it is an emotive and sentimental topic, like the national soccer team or Carlos Gardel.” (Raúl Alconada Sempé, interview with the author, Buenos Aires, 8-4-1999)

¹⁶ Plaza de Mayo is the square in front of the presidential palace in Buenos Aires. On March 30,1982, the same square was the center of a massive antigovernment demonstration which was repressed by the police.

¹⁷ Clarín, 12-11-1983. Emphasis added.

¹⁸ Cited in Romero (1999), 59.

¹⁹ Before the Argentine invasion, representatives from both countries had been negotiating a leaseback agreement. According to Ambassador Carlos Ortiz de Rozas, main negotiator in London, the agreement was nearly finished (interview with the author, Buenos Aires, 7-22-1999).

²⁰ The “umbrella formula” had been originally proposed and agreed during Alfonsín’s government in secret negotiations mediated by State Department of the United States. However, it was implemented by Menem’s administration.

²¹ Little (1989), 61.

²² Survey SOCMERC, March 1990 (Noguera & Willetts, 1992, 243)

²³ According to the analysts Noguera and Willetts the favorable result is surprising, “the result is particularly striking when one considers the points that might have evoked a more emotional response.” (Noguera and Willetts, 1992, 244)

However, the 1986 survey had already shown a favorable attitude towards renewing the relations with Britain.

²⁴ Noguera and Willetts (1992), 244.

²⁵ Menem took that decision despite the fact that during the electoral campaign he had presented himself as an extreme hawk concerning the Malvinas. For example, during the campaign he declared: “lets the pirates of the world know that Argentina does not surrender and we will continue to insist in the international organizations in order to recover the territory. I don’t know how long it will take. I don’t know how many generations will pass. I don’t know how much blood will be spill, but our territory will be return to the Argentine people.” (cited by Romero, 1999, 58) After these words, that worried many observers including the British, Menem surprised the world when, as one of his first acts of government, he opened bilateral talks with Great Britain.

²⁶ The most important resolution is the 2065 (XX) (1965) which recognized the Malvinas case as an international problem to be solved by the parties, other resolutions followed latter. After the war, United Nations resolutions continued to urge the parts to solved the dispute. See resolutions 37/9 (1982), 38/12 (1983), and 39/6 (1984)

²⁷ Noguera and Willetts (1992), 258-9.

²⁸ These results are corroborated by a poll taken in urban centers by Edgardo Catterberg and Associates in April 1988. It reported that 80 per cent of those polled thought that the best way to resolve the Malvinas problem was “fundamentally negotiating with the British.” Contrary, only 8 per cent supported the idea of using military means if necessary. (cited in Floria, 1991, 104)

²⁹ Noguera and Willetts (1992), 259.

³⁰ A poll conducted in urban centers taken in June 1990 by Edgardo Catterberg and Associates reported that 62 per cent of the respondents agreed with Menem’s policy toward Great Britain, and 57 percent agreed with his handling of the Malvinas problem (cited in Floria, 1991, 104).

³¹ Another poll taken by Edgardo Catterberg and Associates in April 1988 reported that 74 per cent of the respondents thought that the Argentine invasion to the Islands had been totally incorrect. From this group, nearly one quarter said that war never solves anything. At the same time, 37 per cent disagreed with the war because of the inferiority of the Argentine military forces and 22 per cent said that the military made tactical errors (cited in Floria, 1991, 104).

³² Menem became to power in July 1989 when the socioeconomic situation of the country was very difficult. Under the circumstances, it could not be wrong to speculate that the government could have resort to any proposal in order to alleviate the situation. Remember that during the 1840, the Argentine dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas had proposed London to exchange the Malvinas for the condonation of the foreign debt owed to the Baring Bros. At that time, the British government rejected the proposal.

³³ The questions from the surveys of 1996 and 1997 also were worded in a slightly different way. The first survey asked “¿qué cree Ud. que debe hacer la Argentina *frente a* las Islas Malvinas?” The second survey asked “¿qué piensa Ud. que debería hacer Argentina *en el caso de* Malvinas?” (emphasis added). The phrase “en el caso” has a more neutral content than “frente a.”

³⁴ Oliva (1991); Romero (1999) 84-85. The idea was not new. It has been propose by the Secretary of State Alexander Haig during his intent to mediate during the conflict of 1982. The proposal was rejected by the Argentine government

³⁵ Romero (1999), 84-85.

³⁶ Joint Declaration for Cooperation on Off-Shore Activities in the South West Atlantic, signed in New York, September 27, 1995 (Romero, 1999, 74-75).

³⁷ Data from survey by SOCMERC, December 1997.

³⁸ Noguera and Willetts (1992).

³⁹ Fabian Echegaray explains that there is a debate regarding which factors influenced Argentine’s attitude changes. One group emphasizes the impact of the hyperinflation trauma of 1989. Others point to the presence of individualistic and achievement-oriented values, and to a well-educated, upper middle-class profile. Finally,

others, among which is Mora y Araujo, assert that the attitude changes started back in 1982, and the transition from the military rule, and the external debt crisis. In turn the acute economic crisis and the fiscal breakdown of the state reinforced the new emerging values in the late 1980s. (1993, 369-370)

⁴⁰ Dante Caputo, interview with the author, Buenos Aires, 8-19-1999. See also Adrogué (1998) 402-403.

⁴¹ Noguera and Willetts (1992) 257.

⁴² Other more critical indicators that the public use to assess foreign policy are presidential image, economic policy, and government performance (Mora y Araujo, Di Rado, and Montoya, 1992, 223).

⁴³ For the optimistic view on the capacity of public opinion to set limits on public policy in general see Adrogué (1998) 403-404.

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Appendix

Table A-1. *There are people who think it is convenient that Argentina renew diplomatic and economic relations with England. Do you agree?*

	Percent
Strongly agree	4.9
Agree	53.6
Disagree	26.4
Strongly disagree	4.4
DK/ NR	10.8
Total	100

n= 800

Table A-2. *Support for improving relations, March 1990*

	Percent that "Agree strongly" or "Agree" with each point
Ending trade restrictions	75
Direct airflights	78
Fishing agreement	71
Diplomatic relations	81
Visit to war graves	97

Source: Adapted from Noguera and Willetts (1992), 243.

Table A-3. *At the beginning of this year the present government agreed to renew diplomatic relations with Great Britain, relations that had been severed because of the Malvinas conflict. Do you think that this was a good decision on part of the government or should we have continued to maintain no diplomatic relations with the English?*

	Percent
It was a good decision	71.1
We should continue without diplomatic relations	17.5
DK	9.4
NR	1.9
Total	100

n= 800

Table A-4. *What do you think Argentina should do concerning the Malvinas?(*)*

	Percent
Negotiate without conditions	15.6
Negotiate about sovereignty	24.9
Demand the Islands return	41.3
Pursue the conflict	13.3
DK/ NR	4.9
Total	100

Source: Adapted from Noguera and Willetts (1992), 258.

(*) Survey March 1990.

Table A-5. *Do you think it would be a good idea to make concessions concerning the Malvinas in exchange for convenient agreements with other countries, or do you consider that the absolute claim of Argentine sovereignty over the Islands must not be negotiated?*

	Percent
It is OK to make concessions in exchange for reaching an agreement	21.8
Sovereignty should not be negotiated	62.6
DK	12
NR	3.5
Total	100

n= 800

Table A-6. *What do you think Argentina should do concerning the Malvinas Islands?*

	Percent
Negotiate without prior condition	15.6
Negotiate only if sovereignty is included	24.9
Demand return of the Islands	41.3
Have a shared sovereignty	13.3
DK/ NR	4.9
Total	100

n= 799

Table A-7. *What do you think Argentina should do concerning the Malvinas Islands?*

	Percent
To start sharing the Islands administration with Great Britain by making progressive steps forward until Argentina recovers the Islands	41.8
The Government should continue claiming all the necessary time until getting complete sovereignty, and only then, should it move into the Islands	49.8
DK/ NR	8.4
Total	100

n= 1200

Table A-8. *Would it be acceptable in your opinion if, in order to solve the problem of the Malvinas, Argentina shared the Islands with Great Britain?*

	Percent
Very acceptable	0.8
Acceptable	23.3
Unacceptable	56.6
Very unacceptable	11.4
DK/ NR	8
Total	100

n= 800

Table A-9. *If the British and Argentine governments reach an agreement in which both countries maintain joint administration over the Islands, is it acceptable or unacceptable to you?*

	Percent
Acceptable	27.6
Unacceptable	57.5
DK	11.9
NR	3
Total	100

n= 800

Table A-10. *What do you think of the idea of joint administration of the Malvinas Islands between Argentina and Great Britain?*

	Percent
It is a good idea and it should be tried	38.4
It is a good idea but an impractical one	14.2
It is a bad idea	41.7
DK/ NR	5.8
Total	100

n= 1200

Table A-11. *In your opinion, did the Malvinas War harm a lot, some, a little or not at all, the chances that Argentina has of recovering the Malvinas?*

	Percent
The war harmed them a lot	67.3
The war harmed them some	18.8
The war harmed them a little	5.2
The war did not harm them at all	6.7
DK/ NR	2.1
Total	100

n= 1200

Table A-12. *Do you think that the improvement of general diplomatic relations with Great Britain increases the chances of a solution for the Malvinas?*

	Percent
A lot	14.1
Some	36
A little	24.8
Not at all	15.2
DK/ NR	9.9
Total	100

n= 1200

Table A-13. *What do you think about the idea of the Argentine flag flying at the same time with the British flag over the Malvinas?*

	Percent
It would be a step forward	50.1
It would be a step backward	39.3
DK/ NR	10.7
Total	100

n= 1200

Table A-14. *What chances do you think Argentina has of total recovery of the Malvinas at some time?*

	Percent
Many	7.3
Some	15.9
A few	36.3
None	36.9
DK/ NR	3.6
Total	100

n= 1200

Table A-15. *What chances do you think Argentina has of partially recovering the Malvinas at some time?*

	Percent
It has a chance eventhough this partial recovery might be definitive	4.9
It has a chance and it will be a first step toward total recovery	5.7
It has a few chances	31.9
It has no chance at all	26.8
DK/ NR	30.7
Total	100

n= 1200

Table A-16. *If Argentina convinces Great Britain to accept gradual joint administration of the Islands. What do you think?*

	Percent
It would be Argentina's first step towards obtaining full control of the Islands	43.3
We would not advance any further and joint administration would be maintained	46.8
DK/ NR	9.9
Total	100

n= 1200