

ABC NEWS NIGHTLINE POLL: ELIAN, THE U.S. AND CUBA – 4/6/00
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In the Midst of Elian's Saga, More Support for U.S.-Cuba Ties

Can a six-year-old change the course of international relations?

It's not impossible. In the midst of the Elian Gonzalez affair, a new ABC News Nightline poll finds that more Americans are inclined to rethink U.S. policy toward Cuba: Most now support open travel between the countries, and nearly half favor full trade and diplomatic ties.

While not a sea change, these views do mark a shift from two years ago, when majorities opposed ending the trade embargo or establishing diplomatic relations with Cuba, and the public divided on the question of travel.

	4/00		1/98	
	Favor	Oppose	Favor	Oppose
Diplomatic relations with Cuba	47%	49	38%	56
End the trade embargo	47	47	35	58
End travel restrictions	58	38	49	46

It's possible the Gonzalez case may have encouraged this shift by putting a human face on the two countries' estrangement. The change also could represent a broader, gradual reassessment of the relationship since the breakup of the Soviet Union, of which Cuba was a client state.

EMPATHY – On the Gonzalez case itself, this poll finds somewhat greater empathy for the boy's Florida kin than for his father, Juan Miguel Gonzalez, who came to the United States on Thursday to claim his son. Seventy percent think the Miami relatives have the boy's best interests at heart; fewer but still most, 57 percent, say that of the father.

One apparent point of concern is the father's charge that politicians, journalists and Miami's Cuban-American community have been exploiting the boy. Americans by 2-1 think those comments were scripted by the Cuban government.

Nonetheless, most Americans – 58 percent in this poll – say Elian Gonzalez should be returned to his father, rather than remain with his Miami relatives. This level of support for the boy's return appears to have stabilized after gradually advancing in earlier polls.

Elian's future:
Return Remain
4/6/00 58% 36

4/1/00	59	33
2/6/00	55	33
1/9/00	52	36
12/12/99	46	33

There's also very broad agreement that the dispute should be handled solely as a child custody case, not as a political matter: Eighty-eight percent feel that way.

INTERESTS – Indeed, while majorities think the family members have the boy's best interests at heart, other players fare less well. Just over half think the Cuban-American community in Miami is "mainly out for its own interests," rather than the boy's. And the judgments on others – the Clinton administration, the presidential candidates and especially the Cuban government – get considerably harsher from there.

	Interested in what's best for the boy	Out for its own interests
The Miami relatives	70%	28
The father	57	37
The Cuban-American community	43	53
The Clinton administration	31	63
George W. Bush	23	60
Al Gore	17	68
The Cuban government	9	85

GROUPS - Republicans are somewhat less apt to want the boy returned to his father, and they're also more sympathetic toward the family in Miami. But these views don't extend to policy issues: Perhaps surprisingly, Republicans are more apt than others to support lifting travel restrictions to Cuba, and about as likely to favor trade and diplomatic ties.

There's also a difference on policy matters between the sexes, with men 14 or 15 points more likely than women to support opening diplomatic relations with Cuba, and ending the 38-year trade embargo.

METHODOLOGY - This ABC News poll was conducted by telephone April 6, 2000, among a random national sample of 509 adults. The results have a 4.5-point error margin. Field work by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet at:
<http://www.abcnews.com/sections/us/PollVault/PollVault.html>

Here are the full results:

*= less than 0.5 percent

- I have a question about Elian Gonzalez, the six-year-old Cuban boy whose mother drowned when their boat sank off Florida and whose father lives in Cuba. Do you think the boy should be returned to his father, or remain with his relatives who want to keep him in the United States?

	Return	Remain	No opinion
4/6/00	58	36	6
4/2/00	60	32	8
4/1/00	59	33	9
2/6/00	55	33	13
1/9/00	52	36	12
12/12/99	46	33	20

Slight wording differences 12/12-4/2; call for text.

2. Do you think this should be handled as a political issue involving the interests of the United States and Cuba; or as a child custody case only involving the interests of the family members involved?

	Political	Child custody	No opinion
4/6/00	10	88	2

3. For each group or person I name, please tell me whether you think it's mainly interested in doing what's best for Elian Gonzalez or mainly out for its own interests? (Scrambled order)

	Interested in what's best for Elian	Out for own interests	No opin.
A. The Clinton administration	31	63	6
B. The Cuban government	9	85	6
C. The boy's relatives in Florida	70	28	3
D. The boy's father	57	37	6
E. The Cuban-American community in Miami	43	53	4
F. Al Gore	17	68	15
G. George W. Bush	23	60	16

4. As you may know, the father has come to the United States to claim his son, and has said he believes politicians, journalists and Miami's Cuban community have been exploiting the boy. Just your best guess, do you think the father is expressing his own views, or saying what he's been told to say by the government of Cuba?

	Expressing his own views	Saying what he's been told to say	No opinion
4/6/00	31	63	5

5. As you may know, the United States broke off diplomatic relations with Cuba after it became a communist country under Fidel Castro in 1959. The U.S. also imposed travel restrictions and a trade embargo, which means U.S. companies cannot do business in Cuba and Cuban companies cannot do business here. Do you think the United States government should or should not establish diplomatic relations with Cuba?

	Should	Should not	No opinion
4/6/00	47	49	4
1/13/98	38	56	6

6. Do you think the United States should or should not end the trade embargo, and allow U.S. companies to do business in Cuba and Cuban companies to do business here?

	Should	Should not	No opinion
4/6/00	47	47	6
1/13/98	35	58	7

7. Do you think the U.S. government should or should not end its travel restrictions, and allow U.S. citizens to visit Cuba and Cubans to visit the United States?

	Should	Should not	No opinion
4/6/00	58	38	4
1/13/98	49	46	5

END