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CAFTA

## Survey: U.S. citizens split on trade pact

Supporters of CAFTA-DR outnumber its opponents by a narrow margin according to a study released on Monday.

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**WASHINGTON** - A new poll out Monday showed Americans support a free-trade deal with six Latin American nations by a narrow margin, but have misgivings over the negative effects of free trade.

Fifty percent of those polled supported the agreement with Central American nations and the Dominican Republic, known as CAFTA-DR and 39 percent opposed it, according to the Program on International Policy Attitudes, a joint effort by the Center on Policy Attitudes and the University of Maryland's Center for International and Security Studies.

The survey comes just weeks before the House of Representatives is expected to vote on CAFTA-DR, bitterly opposed by labor groups and sugar farmers as harmful to the U.S. economy. President Bush said the pact is needed to boost U.S. competitiveness as well as shore up democracies in the region.

### QUALIFIED SUPPORT

Most respondents offered only qualified support for CAFTA-DR and free trade, the data showed. Most respondents said they wanted more free trade, but also supported more protection for workers who may lose their jobs when barriers are lowered. "There's an equity dimension to it," said Steven Kull, the principal investigator of the survey.

Support for Central American pact, which was signed a year ago but is still awaiting Congressional ratification, surged to 65 percent if the U.S. government were to spend more on workers who lost jobs, or ensure that Central American nations enforced their labor laws, Kull said.

A January 2004 survey also reached similar conclusions, revealing that public views on trade haven't changed much despite the debate that swarms around CAFTA-DR.

Democratic lawmakers say CAFTA-DR does too little to ensure labor standards in Central America and have presented a solid front in opposition to the agreement.

### NOT A PARTISAN ISSUE

However, public support for CAFTA-DR does not divide along partisan lines, with 51 percent of Democrats and 50 percent of Republicans saying they back CAFTA-DR.

Most House Democrats oppose the deal and only ten Democrats joined 44 Republicans to ratify CAFTA-DR in a June 30 ratification vote.

U.S. officials hope the House of Representatives will pass the agreement with Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Guatemala and the Dominican Republic before Congress goes into a month-long summer recess on July 31.

The poll of 812 respondents had a margin of error of 3.5 percent to 4 percent. It was carried out by Knowledge Networks, an Internet-based polling firm, on June 22-26.