



US Public Not Convinced that Trump's Policies Will Make America Safer

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Introduction

In his inaugural speech, President Trump promised to "unite the civilized world against radical Islamic terrorism, which we will eradicate completely from the face of the Earth." But his administration has yet to release a comprehensive counter-terrorism strategy. The president has tinkered around the edges, with unsuccessful attempts to implement a travel ban from six countries in the Middle East and has continued the Obama administration's blend of airstrikes, Special Forces raids, and military training of the Iraqi army.

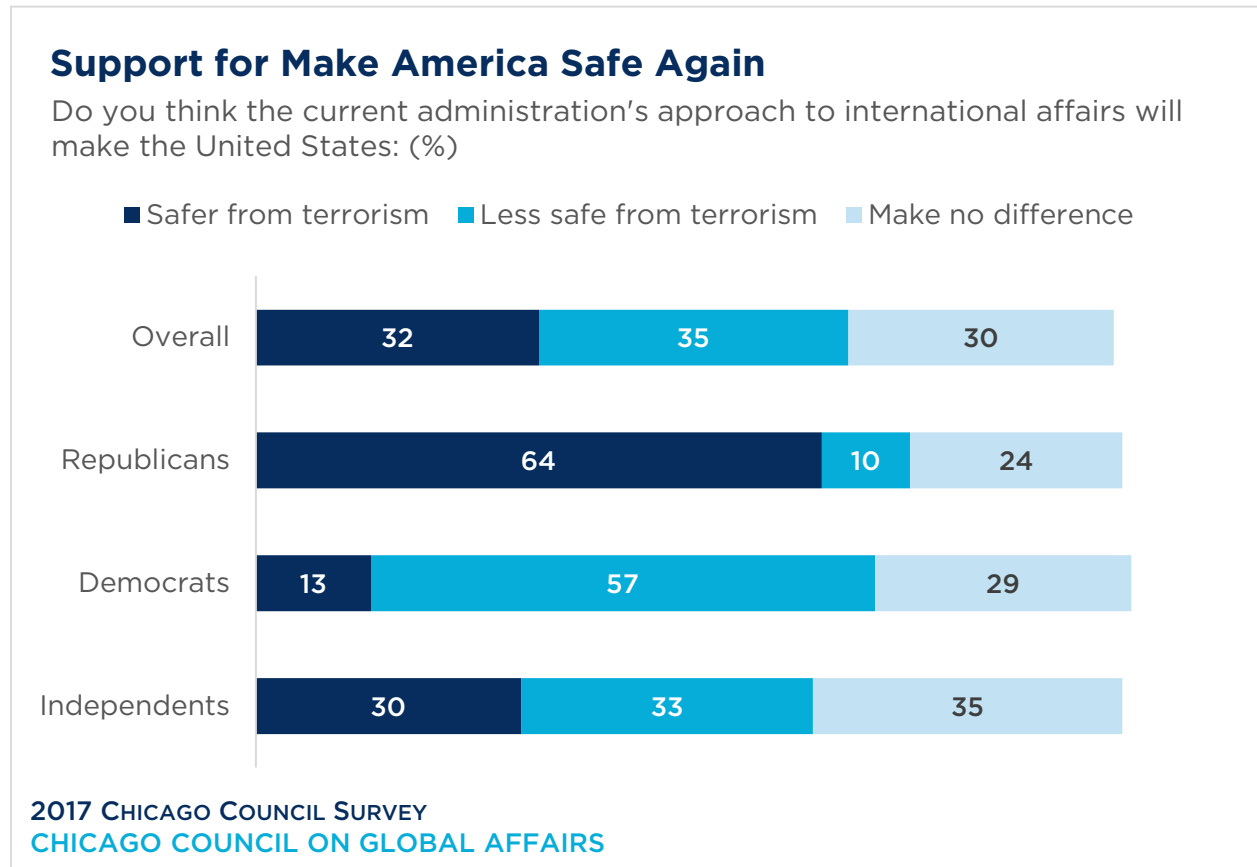
The 2017 Chicago Council Survey finds that majorities of Americans continue to think that international terrorism is the most critical threat to the United States (along with North Korea), and majorities continue to support US airstrikes, though not ground troops, to combat violent Islamic extremists. But the overall public is not convinced that the Trump administration's policies will make the United States safer from terrorism. Other polls show that majorities oppose the travel ban and more Americans think home-grown terrorism is a greater danger than terrorists from abroad infiltrating the United States.

Public Opinion Divides Three Ways on Impact of Trump Policies

Thus far, public assessments of the new administration's approach to foreign policy are mixed. About a third each say that the current administration's approach to international affairs will make the United States safer from terrorism (32%), less safe from terrorism (35%), or make no difference (30%).

Partisan differences on this question are stark. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of Republicans think that the Trump administration's approach will make the United States safer versus just 13 percent of Democrats. Just one in ten (10%) Republicans

believe Trump’s approach will make the US less safe while 57 percent of Democrats think so. Like the overall public, Independents are evenly divided.



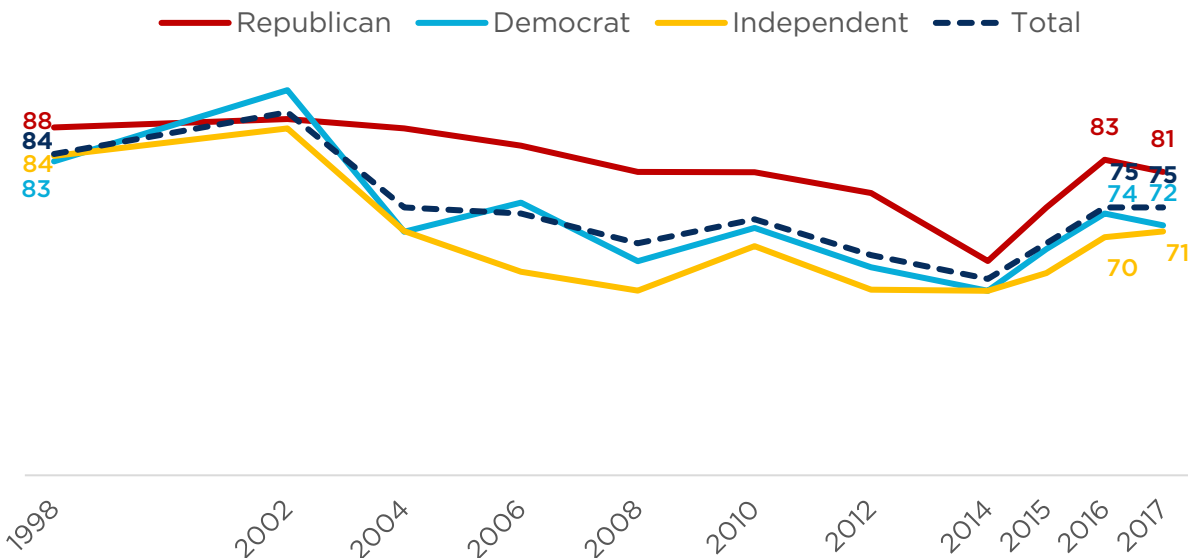
International Terrorism A Top Threat Facing the Country

In the past year, there have been highly visible terrorist attacks in Barcelona, London, Manchester, Paris, Brussels, Stockholm, Istanbul, and many other cities around the globe. While Americans divide on the security impacts of the Trump administration’s policies, they are united in their sense of threat from terrorism. Three in four Americans (75%)—and majorities across all political affiliations—continue see terrorism as a critical threat to the United States, unchanged from 2016. This places it among the top threats facing the country, along with North Korea’s nuclear program (75%).

Terrorism as a Critical Threat

Below is a list of possible threats to the vital interest of the United States in the next 10 years. For each one, please select whether you see this as a critical threat, an important but not critical threat, or not an important threat at all:

International terrorism (% critical threat)



2017 Chicago Council Survey
THE CHICAGO COUNCIL ON GLOBAL AFFAIRS

Perhaps the most iconic symbol of terrorism right now is the Islamic State, also known as ISIS, and Americans express similar threat levels toward ISIS as to international terrorism. An [April 2017 Marist poll](#) found that 70 percent of Americans described ISIS as a major threat to the security of the United States (70%). And a [January 2017 CNN survey](#) found that three in four Americans think there are terrorists associated with the Islamic State who currently have the resources to launch a major terrorist attack against the United States at any time (73%). In the [2015 Chicago Council Survey](#), 72 percent said that the possibility of violent Islamic extremist groups carrying out a major terrorist attack in the United States was a critical threat.

Support for Using US Forces in Fight against Islamic Extremists

Islamic State militants have lost control of Mosul, Fallujah and Ramadi in Iraq, and are currently in a battle for Raqqa, Syria. The 2017 Chicago Council Survey finds that a clear majority of the American public (63%) favors the use of US forces to fight violent Islamic extremist groups in Iraq and Syria, up slightly from 2015 (57%).

Asked about other potential actions the United States could take in Syria,¹ a majority of Americans say they would favor US airstrikes against violent Islamic extremist groups there (68%). Four in ten would support sending US combat troops to fight Islamic extremists in Syria (41%).

Of course, the situation in Syria is more complex than just a terrorism issue, and the US public is more hesitant about getting involved in the internal Syrian political struggle. Only 45 percent would support US airstrikes against the Assad regime, and just 28 percent would support sending US troops to remove Assad from power. Only one quarter of Americans would favor helping to negotiate a peace agreement that would keep Assad in power (25%). But a clear majority would support helping to negotiate an agreement with a Syrian leader other than Assad (70%).

Majorities Oppose Travel Ban but Also Oppose Accepting Refugees

Similar to previous Chicago Council Surveys, four in ten Americans (43%) say they would support accepting Syrian refugees into the United States, with large differences between Democrats (64%) and Republicans (17%). But this does not mean the public overall supports President Trump's attempts to impose travel restrictions on immigrants from the Middle East. A [September 2016 Monmouth University survey](#) found that 74 percent of Americans opposed "banning all Muslims from entering the United States". A smaller majority opposed a "blanket ban on the immigration of any person who lives in a country with a history of terrorism against the west" (60% vs. 32% support).

A former senior counterterrorism official told the *New Yorker* magazine that President Trump's immediate call for the travel ban could arguably do more to "inspire further acts of homegrown terrorism than it is to prevent terrorists from entering the country and perpetrating terrorist acts."² In fact, homegrown terrorism or lone wolf attacks seem to be more of a concern to everyday Americans. The Monmouth survey found that by a five to three margin, more Americans believe that US citizens who become radicalized (53%) are a bigger threat of future attacks than terrorists from overseas who infiltrate the United States (32%; 12% both are equally threatening).

¹ These options were only asked about potential actions that could be taken in Syria. The preceding question was in a separate battery and identified the violent Islamic extremist groups being located in both Iraq and Syria.

² David Rhode, "What Donald Trump Can Do To Help Stop Terrorism: Talk Less," *New Yorker*, June 4, 2017.

Methodology

The analysis in this report is based on data from the 2017 Chicago Council Survey of the American public on foreign policy. The 2017 Chicago Council Survey was conducted by GfK Custom Research using their large-scale, nationwide online research panel between June 27 and July 19, 2017 among a weighted national probability sample of 2,020 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. The margin of error is ± 2.4 percentage points.

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Appendix

Q275b. Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2011, has US foreign policy made the US:

	More safe (%)	Less safe (%)	Make no difference (%)	Not sure/Decline (%)
2017				
<u>Overall</u>	42	22	35	1
Republican	50	21	28	1
Democrat	42	22	35	1
Independent	36	24	39	1

Q277. Do you think the current administration's approach to international affairs will make the United States:

	Safer from terrorism (%)	Less safe from terrorism (%)	Make no difference (%)	Not sure/Decline (%)
2017				
<u>Overall</u>	32	35	30	2
Republican	64	10	24	1
Democrat	13	57	29	1
Independent	30	33	35	1

Q5: Below is a list of possible threats to the vital interest of the United States in the next 10 years. For each one, please select whether you see this as a critical threat, an important but not critical threat, or not an important threat at all:

5/10. International terrorism

	Critical (%)	Important but not critical (%)	Not important (%)	Not Sure/Decline (%)
2017				
<u>Overall</u>	75	23	2	0
Republican	81	17	1	0
Democrat	72	25	3	0
Independent	71	25	3	0

Q267a. Do you support or oppose the United States taking each of the following actions with respect to Syria?

267a/1. Accepting Syrian refugees into the United States

2017	Support (%)	Oppose (%)	Refused (%)
<u>Overall</u>	43	54	3
Republican	17	79	3
Democrat	64	33	3
Independent	41	57	3

267a/7_1. Helping to negotiate a peace agreement that allows President Assad of Syria to remain in power

2017	Support (%)	Oppose (%)	Refused (%)
<u>Overall</u>	25	69	6
Republican	20	72	8
Democrat	30	64	6
Independent	23	74	3

267a/7_2. Helping to negotiate a peace agreement that would put a new President in place other than President Bashar al-Assad

2017	Support (%)	Oppose (%)	Refused (%)
<u>Overall</u>	70	25	6
Republican	71	23	6
Democrat	75	22	4
Independent	65	29	6

267a/8_1. Conducting airstrikes against violent Islamic extremist groups

2017	Support (%)	Oppose (%)	Refused (%)
<u>Overall</u>	68	28	3
Republican	82	15	2
Democrat	61	37	2
Independent	66	31	3

267a/8_2. Conducting airstrikes against President Bashar al-Assad's regime

2017	Support (%)	Oppose (%)	Refused (%)
<u>Overall</u>	45	49	6
Republican	55	39	6
Democrat	44	50	6
Independent	41	55	4

267a/5_1. Sending combat troops into Syria to fight violent Islamic extremist groups

2017	Support (%)	Oppose (%)	Refused (%)
<u>Overall</u>	41	55	5
Republican	57	39	4
Democrat	36	60	5
Independent	34	62	5

267a/5_2. Sending combat troops into Syria to forcibly remove Syrian President Bashar al-Assad from power

2017	Support (%)	Oppose (%)	Refused (%)
<u>Overall</u>	28	65	6
Republican	34	59	7
Democrat	26	70	4
Independent	28	67	5