

Americans, Taiwanese Favor the Status Quo

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Results from the Chicago Council Survey in the United States and the Taiwan National Defense Surveys find that everyday Taiwanese and Americans both favor continuing the political status quo for Taiwan. But if Beijing decides to invade Taiwan, the Taiwanese public's expectations for the United States helping to defend their country far exceed American public support for committing US troops for this purpose. Recent headlines seem to imply that the Taiwanese government is well aware of this disconnect: It is [considering a major US arms purchase](#) as a signal to the incoming Trump administration that it is taking serious preparations for its own defense.

Key Findings

- Americans and Taiwanese (62% each) say their bilateral relationship strengthens their country's national security.
- Majorities of Taiwanese expect—and majorities of Americans support the idea—that the United States would provide food, medical, and military aid to Taiwan should China invade.
- While a majority of Taiwanese (53%) think the United States would send US troops to help defend Taiwan in the event of a Chinese invasion, only 36 percent of Americans support doing so.

- A combined majority of Taiwanese (60%) say Taiwan should maintain the status quo either permanently (34%) or temporarily, deciding on independence or unification depending on future circumstances (26%).
- Half of Americans (51%) say the United States should encourage Taiwan to maintain the status quo.

Majorities of Taiwanese and Americans Support the Status Quo

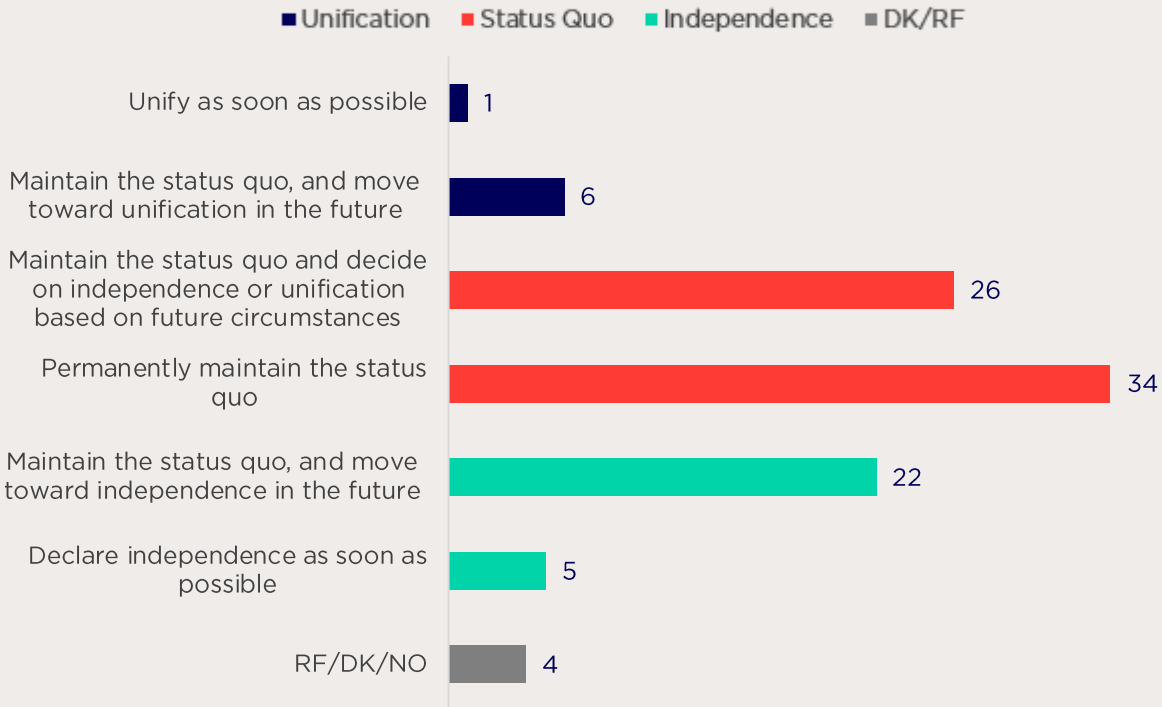
When it comes to cross-strait relations between Taipei and Beijing, Americans and Taiwanese are on the same page: both favor maintaining the status quo.

Indeed, a majority of Taiwanese (60%) say Taiwan should maintain the status quo either permanently (34%) or for the time being while deciding on independence or unification based on future circumstances (26%). Twenty-seven percent prefer independence, either as soon as possible (5%) or in the future while maintaining the status quo for now (22%). Finally, seven percent of Taiwanese prefer to seek unification, either as soon as possible (1%) or in the future while maintaining the status quo for now (6%).

While most Taiwanese favor maintaining the status quo in cross-strait relations, political parties in Taiwan hold divergent views on what this means. The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which governs Taiwan, officially supports “upholding democratic principles, maintaining dignity, and preserving the status quo” but is often seen as leaning toward eventual independence. The Kuomintang (KMT), the main opposition party, also supports the status quo but emphasizes engaging with Beijing and reducing tensions. The Taiwan People’s Party (TPP), an emerging third party, has taken a more pragmatic and ambiguous stance to appeal to centrist voters. Despite these differences, public opinion consistently shows broad public support for the status quo in Taiwan, reflecting a cautious approach to managing cross-strait tensions.

Future Relationship of Taiwan and Mainland China

Regarding the relationship between Taiwan and mainland China, there are several different views. Which of these do you lean toward? (%)



September 11-16, 2024 | n=1,214

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For their part, Americans also favor maintaining the status quo. Half (51%) say the United States should encourage Taiwan to maintain the status quo, not moving toward independence or unification. About a third (36%) favor encouraging Taiwan to move closer to independence from China, even if this risks provoking a war with the mainland. And few Americans (4%) say Washington should encourage Taipei to move closer to unification with China.

Both Publics More Concerned about Domestic Challenges than Threat from China

Both Taiwan and the United States have tensions with China, but in Taiwan, the threat is an existential one. China has [repeatedly threatened](#) to invade the island. In fact, a recent television show, [Zero Day](#), funded in part by Taiwan's Ministry of Culture to counter Chinese "opinion warfare," [imagines just that scenario](#) and illustrates how top of mind this possibility is for everyday Taiwanese: two-thirds of Taiwanese (64%) and half of Americans (48%) say China's territorial ambitions represent a critical threat to their nation's vital interests. However, this isn't the foremost concern for either public. Instead, Americans and Taiwanese are more focused on domestic problems. For

Taiwanese, those problems include the low birthrate crisis (77% critical threat) and energy shortages (74%). [For Americans, weakening US democracy](#) (67% critical threat) is top of mind.

Despite most Taiwanese viewing China's territorial ambitions as a critical threat, six in 10 (62%) do not believe these ambitions will manifest in the form of a military invasion in the next five years. Only a quarter of Taiwanese (24%) say it is very possible (7%) or somewhat possible (17%) the Chinese military will attack Taiwan in the next five years. Instead, the Taiwanese public seems more concerned about Beijing's use of military exercises and grey-zone tactics, which are perceived as encroaching on Taiwan's territorial integrity, sovereignty, and overall security.

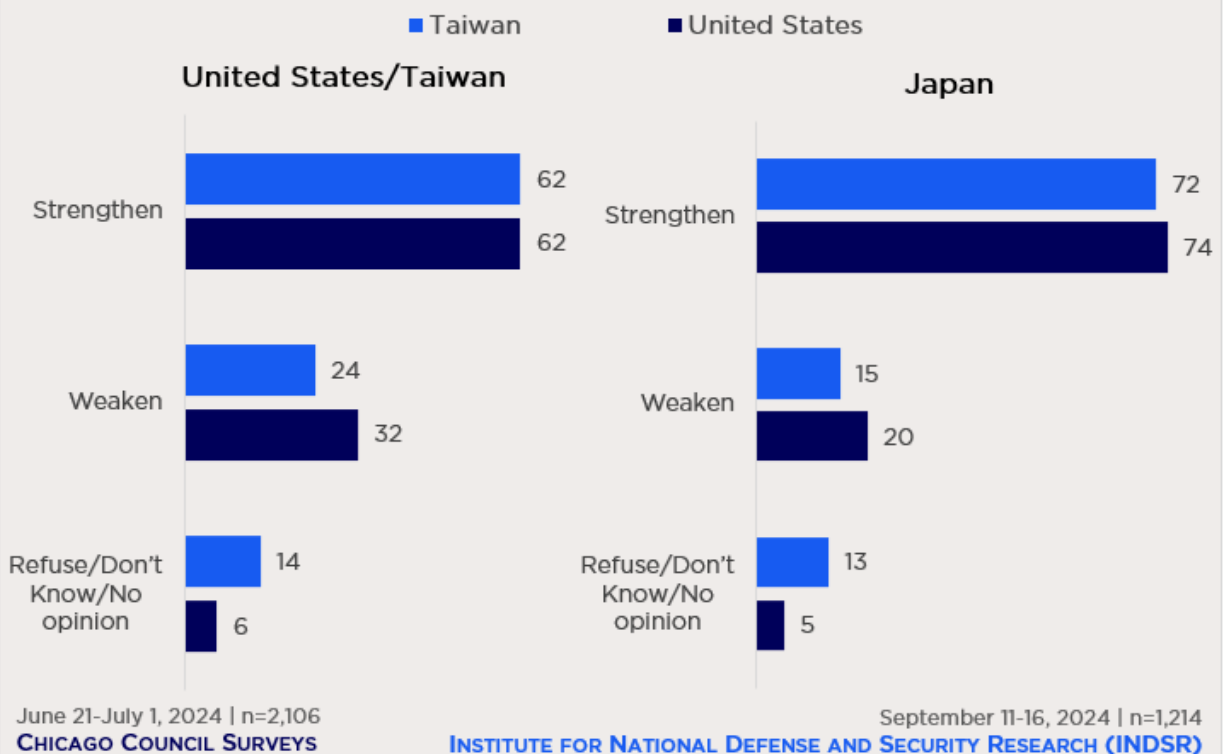
Majorities Say Bilateral Relationship Strengthens Their Security

Though American and Taiwanese publics are concerned about China to differing degrees, they have similar views about their security relationship. Six in 10 Americans and Taiwanese (62% each) say the bilateral relationship strengthens their nations' national security. Similar majorities of Americans (74%) and Taiwanese (72%) also view their nations' relationship with Japan as strengthening their national security.

US-Taiwan Security Relationship

Taiwan: Do you think that Taiwan's relationship with _____ strengthens or weakens Taiwan's national security? (%)

US: Does the US security relationship with the following countries do more to strengthen US national security or weaken US national security? (%)



Taiwanese Expect Direct US Aid in Case of Invasion; Americans Opposed

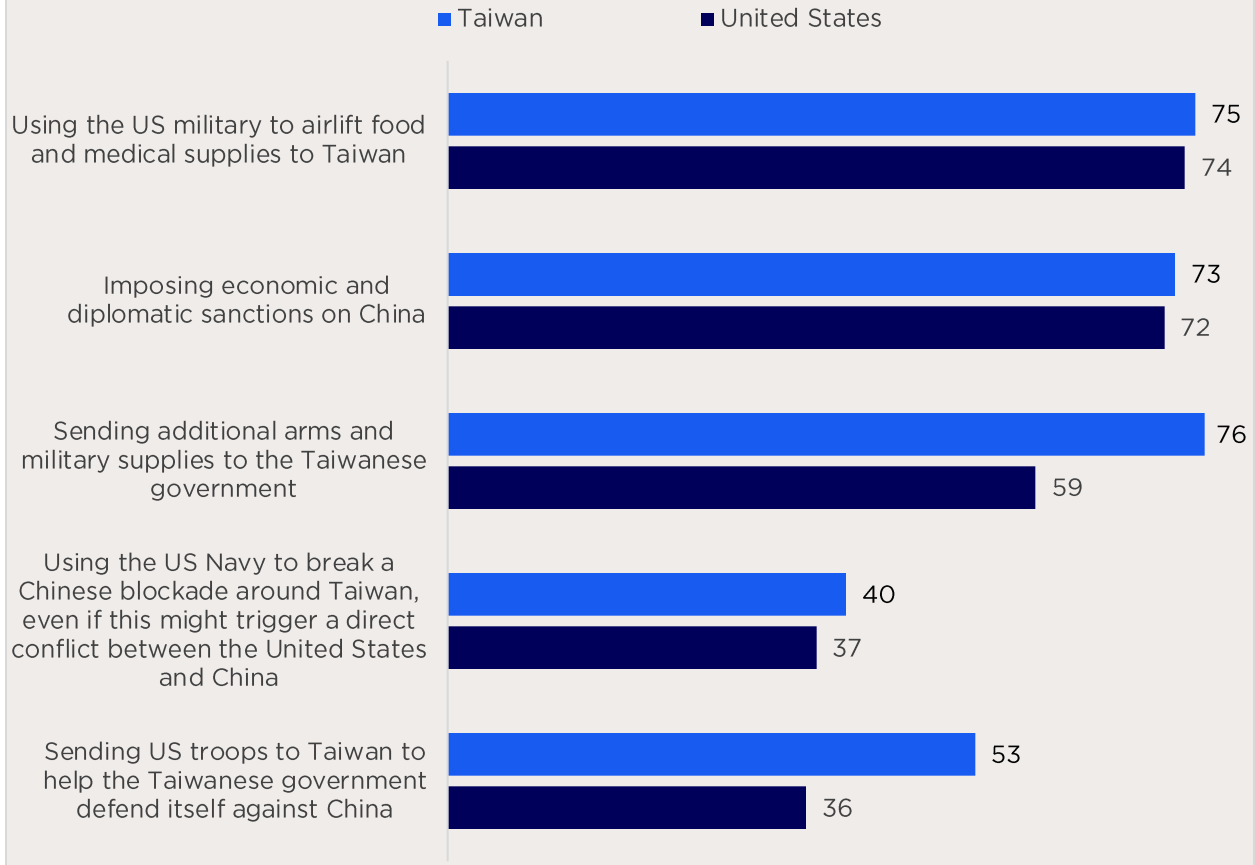
While both Americans and Taiwanese view their bilateral relationship as improving their national security, the question of how the United States would respond to an invasion of Taiwan remains open. Despite President Joe Biden's repeated comments that the United States would come to Taiwan's aid, the official US government position remains one of "strategic ambiguity."

In the event of an invasion, Taiwan's public expects—and the American public supports—a range of US policies designed to aid Taiwan in a crisis. This includes using the US military to airlift food and medical supplies to Taiwan, imposing American sanctions on China, and sending additional US arms and military supplies to Taipei.

Responses to a Chinese Invasion of Taiwan

Taiwan: Next, we'd like to ask you how you think the United States would assist Taiwan if China were to invade Taiwan. Would the United States: (% definitely + probably would)

US: If China were to invade Taiwan, would you support or oppose the United States: (% support)



June 21-July 1, 2024 | n=2,106
CHICAGO COUNCIL SURVEYS

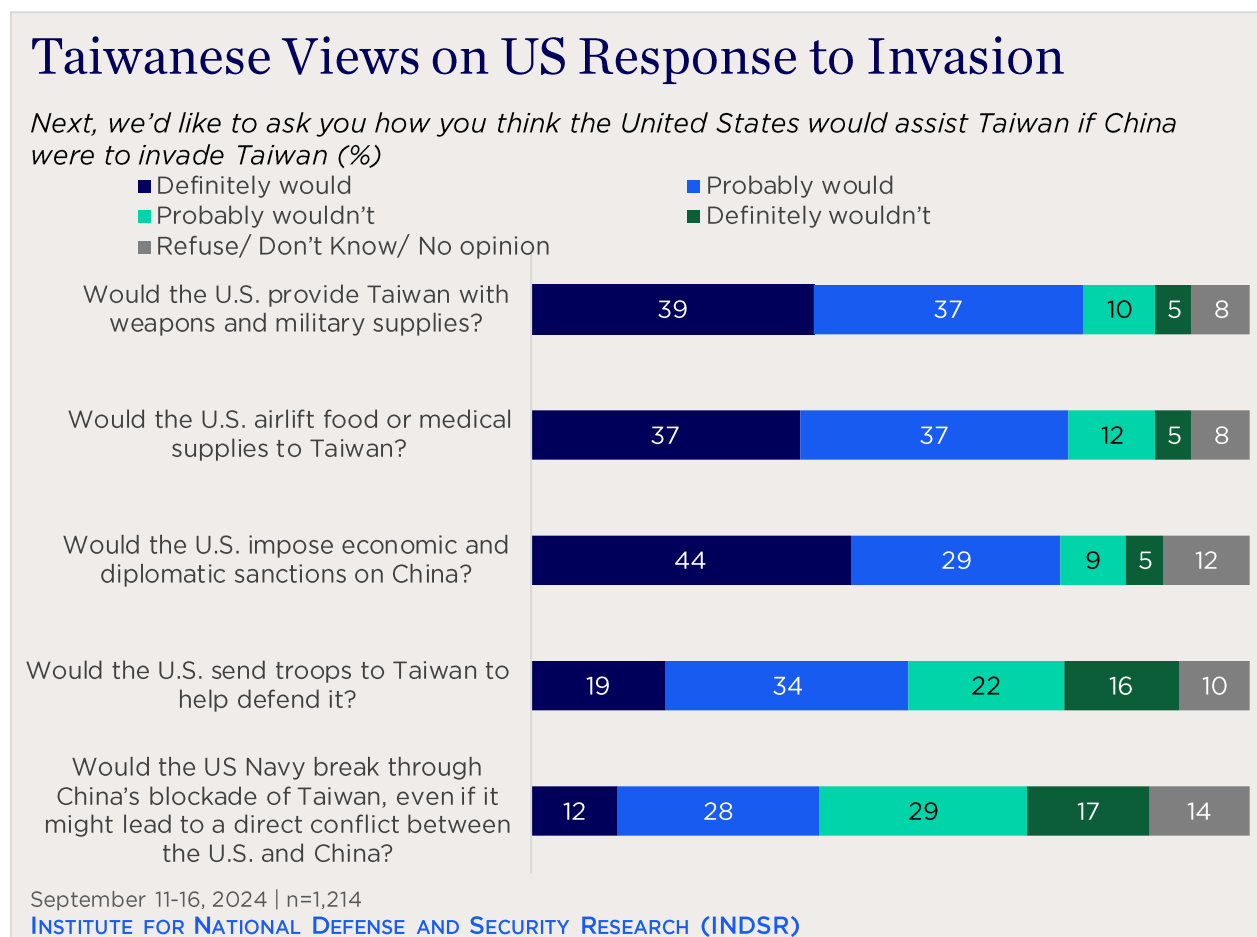
September 11-16, 2024 | n=1,214
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A slim majority of Taiwanese (53%) say the United States definitely or probably would send US troops to Taiwan to aid the island in its defense against a Chinese invasion—an action only a third of Americans (36%) support the United States undertaking.

Interestingly, while they tend to think the United States will send troops, in this scenario, Taiwanese do not expect the United States to use the US Navy to break a blockade of Taiwan “if doing so could trigger a direct conflict between the United States and China.” Only four in 10 Taiwanese (40%) expect the United States to do this, and here they are more closely aligned with American public opinion: only 37 percent of Americans would support

using the Navy to break a blockade if it risked triggering a direct conflict with Beijing.

The difference in Taiwanese public opinion regarding the use of US naval power to break a blockade may largely stem from the specific wording of the questions posed in the survey. The phrase “direct conflict with China” is a strong and vivid cue in public opinion surveys. It triggers a sense of danger and potential escalation that respondents are generally reluctant to support. In this context, the question about breaking a blockade may seem more confrontational, and the inclusion of the term “direct conflict” makes it a much more significant and alarming action than sending troops, which might be seen as more defensive or measured.

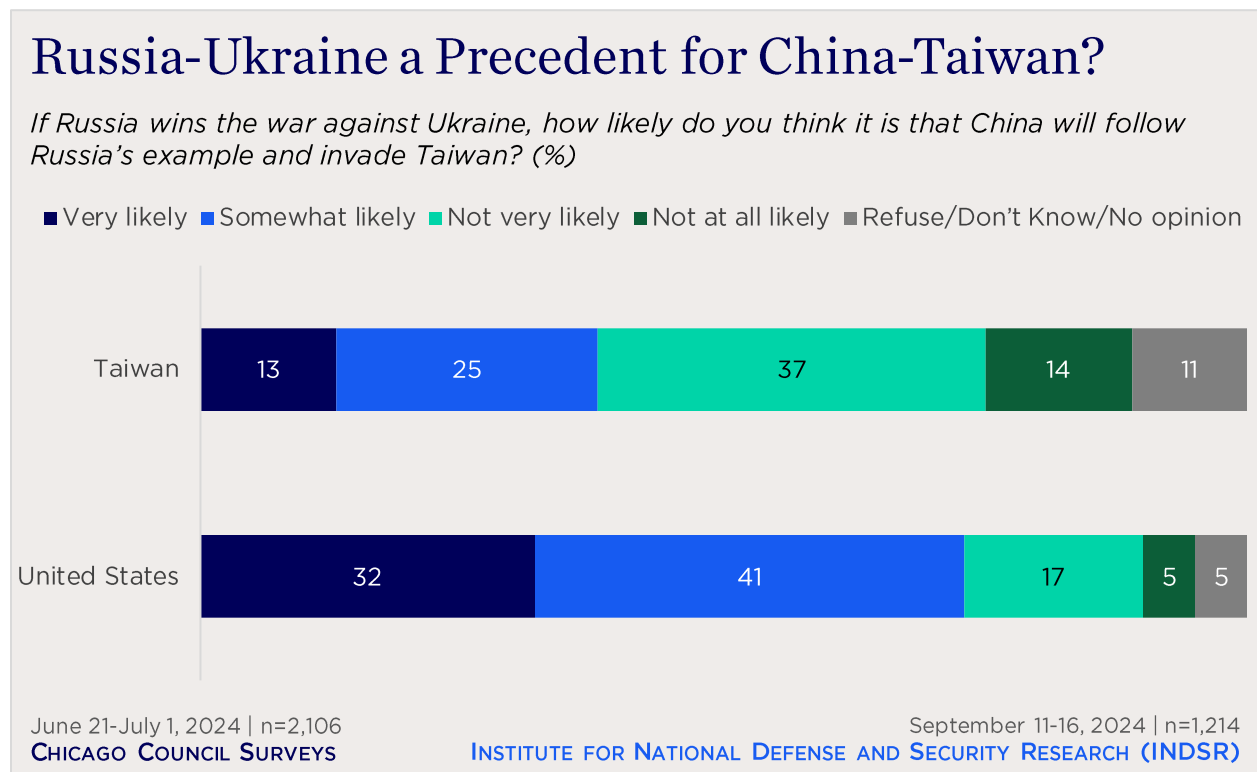


Since launching in 2021, the Taiwan National Defense Surveys have consistently found that between two-thirds and three-quarters of Taiwanese citizens are at least somewhat willing to fight to defend Taiwan should China invade. This holds true for the most recent survey: 68 percent of Taiwanese are either very willing (42%) or somewhat willing (26%) to defend Taiwan in

case of invasion. And notably, whether or not Taiwanese expect China to invade Taiwan in the next five years is unrelated to their willingness to fight.

Instead, [analysis by researchers](#) from the Institute for National Defense and Security Research has found that the public’s willingness to fight is influenced in part by the perceived likelihood of foreign support, particularly from the United States. This suggests that US involvement plays a critical role in boosting Taiwanese morale and public belief in the effectiveness of Taiwan’s armed forces. This dynamic highlights the significant influence US commitment has on Taiwanese attitudes toward defense and resistance to Chinese aggression.

Another point of departure between Americans and Taiwanese: the relevance of Russia’s war in Ukraine as a precedent setter for Taiwan. While a majority of Americans (73%) think it is likely a Russian victory in Ukraine would lead China to invade Taiwan, only a minority of Taiwanese agree (38%, 51% unlikely).



Conclusion

Since the majority of Taiwanese and Americans support maintaining the status quo in cross-strait relations, this shared position provides a strong foundation for further cooperation between the two nations. For the American public, this alignment signals an opportunity to engage in deeper

collaboration with Taiwan to promote stability in the region while also reinforcing the US commitment to Taiwan's security. For the Taiwanese public, continued support for the status quo offers a pragmatic approach to preserving peace and security without provoking Beijing. This mutual understanding should serve as a basis for expanding diplomatic, economic, and military cooperation between the United States and Taiwan, ensuring that both publics remain invested in safeguarding the status quo.

However, given the differences in what Taiwanese expect and what Americans support doing in a crisis, both sides need to work to better understand one another's strategic desires and limitations. To further strengthen US-Taiwan cooperation, enhancing strategic communication through Track 1.5 or 2 dialogues would be a solid first step. These informal or semiofficial channels of communication can help ensure that Taiwanese society has a clear understanding of the types of assistance the United States can realistically provide, and conversely, Americans can better understand Taiwanese thinking and planning around potential contingencies. By doing so, Washington and Taipei can avoid potential gaps in expectations—whether overly optimistic or overly pessimistic—that could lead to strategic misjudgments. This proactive communication strategy would not only foster mutual understanding but also contribute to more-effective collaboration in the event of a crisis, ensuring both sides are aligned in their responses and commitments.

Methodology

This analysis is based on data from the 2024 Chicago Council Survey of the American public on foreign policy, an annual project of the Lester Crown Center on US Foreign Policy, and the Taiwan National Defense Surveys, a project of the Institute for National Defense and Security Research (INDSR).

US Methodology

The 2024 Chicago Council Survey was conducted June 21–July 1, 2024, by Ipsos using its large-scale nationwide online research panel, KnowledgePanel, in English and Spanish among a weighted national sample of 2,106 adults 18 or older living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. The margin of sampling error for the full sample is ± 2.3 percentage points, including a design effect of 1.1229.

Additional US data comes from a joint Chicago Council-Ipsos survey conducted using the KnowledgePanel August 16–18, 2024, among a weighted national sample of 1,019 adults 18 or older living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. The margin of sampling error for the full sample is ± 3.2 percentage points, including a design effect of 1.10.

Results were weighted to adjust for gender by age, race/ethnicity, education, Census region, metropolitan status, and household income using demographic benchmarks from the 2023 March Supplement of the Current Population Survey (CPS). Specific categories used were:

- Gender (Male, Female) by Age (18–29, 30–44, 45–59 and 60+)
- Race/Hispanic Ethnicity (White, Non-Hispanic; Black, Non-Hispanic; Other, Non-Hispanic; Hispanic; 2+ Races, Non-Hispanic)
- Education (Less than High School, High School, Some College, Bachelor’s Degree or Higher)
- Census Region (Northeast, Midwest, South, West)
- Metropolitan Status (Metro, Non-Metro)
- Household Income (Under \$25,000; \$25,000–\$49,999; \$50,000–\$74,999; \$75,000–\$99,999; \$100,000–\$149,999; \$150,000+)

The 2024 Chicago Council Survey is made possible by the generous support of the Crown family, the Korea Foundation, and the United States-Japan Foundation.

Taiwan Methodology

The 2024 Taiwan National Defense Survey was commissioned by the Institute for National Defense and Security Research (INDSR) and conducted by the

Election Study Center at National Chengchi University. The target population consisted of residents of Taiwan 18 and older, with the survey carried out through random sampling via telephone interviews. The data was collected September 11-16, 2024. A total of 1,214 valid responses were obtained, comprising 851 landline samples and 363 mobile phone samples. At a 95 percent confidence level, the maximum margin of sampling error is estimated to be ± 2.81 percentage points.

About the Institute for National Defense and Security Research

The Institute for National Defense and Security Research (INDSR) is dedicated to fueling knowledge-based policy analyses and strategic assessments on Taiwan's security. The INDSR is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization based in Taipei, Taiwan which aims to shape innovative ideas and lead constructive debates on issues pertaining to international security and national defense, Chinese politics and military affairs, nontraditional security, hybrid and cognitive warfare, and cybersecurity, among other security areas.

About the Chicago Council on Global Affairs

The Chicago Council on Global Affairs is an independent, nonpartisan membership organization that provides insight—and influences the public discourse—on critical global issues. We convene leading global voices, conduct independent research, and engage the public to explore ideas that will shape our global future. The Council is committed to bringing clarity and offering solutions to issues that transcend borders and transform how people, business, and governments engage the world. Learn more at globalaffairs.org and follow [@ChicagoCouncil](https://twitter.com/ChicagoCouncil).

About the Lester Crown Center on US Foreign Policy

Established in 2018 with a transformative gift from the Crown Family, the Lester Crown Center on US Foreign Policy is driven by the belief that the public plays a critical role in determining the direction of US foreign policy and that an informed and engaged public is critical for effective policymaking. The centerpiece of the Lester Crown Center is its annual survey of American public opinion and US foreign policy, the Chicago Council Survey, which has been conducted since 1974.