

Just Half of Americans Support Airstrikes Against Houthis

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On May 6, US President Donald Trump announced the United States will [halt all airstrikes against the Houthis](#), an Iranian-backed military group, in exchange for the safe passage of American ships across the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea. This deal comes just two months after the United States dramatically [intensified its aerial campaign in Yemen](#) in retaliation for the Houthis' attacks on vessels sailing toward the Suez Canal and disruption of global maritime trade.

A just-completed Chicago Council on Global Affairs-Ipsos survey, fielded May 2-4, 2025, finds that an agreement to end the airstrikes may be welcomed by the American public, just half of whom support the United States using force to address the Houthis' Red Sea attacks.

Key Findings

- While nearly half of Americans support the United States launching airstrikes against Houthi targets in Yemen to address maritime attacks and disruptions to global trade (46%), nearly the same share opposes doing so (44%; 10% are unsure).
- The majority of Americans support the United States pressuring Israel to accept and maintain a ceasefire in Gaza (55%) so that the Houthis halt their attacks, while a third opposes putting any pressure on it (35%; 10% are unsure).
- About two in three Americans support the United States imposing additional economic sanctions against Iran so it cannot fund Houthi

activities (65%) and economically sanctioning the Houthis and their financial institutions (62%). A smaller majority favor deploying more warships and personnel to defend passing ships (56%).

- Presented with the news that US military strikes against Houthi targets in Yemen have resulted in the deaths of several civilians, six in 10 Americans say it is rarely or never justified for the US government to kill civilians in military operations (62%), while a third believe it is sometimes or often justified (34%) in doing so.
- There are stark partisan divisions on many of these questions. Republicans are most likely to support US military actions against the Houthis and say civilian deaths in this case are justified. In contrast, Democrats tend to oppose strikes against Houthi targets and prefer that the United States pressure Israel to accept a ceasefire in Gaza.

Americans Divided on Use of Airstrikes to Deter Red Sea Attacks

In a [show of support](#) for Palestinians, Hamas, and Iran's broader axis of resistance amid the Israel-Gaza war, the Iranian-backed Houthis began indiscriminately attacking military and commercial ships sailing toward the Suez Canal through the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea in October 2023. This waterway represents one of the most important maritime trade routes that more than \$1 trillion worth of goods—or about [12–15 percent of global trade](#)—pass through annually. As a result of the attacks, global shipping companies have [suspended their use of the canal or diverted](#) their ships around the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa. The Red Sea crisis has greatly affected global supply chains and is estimated to have dropped [Suez Canal revenues by up to 60 percent](#) in 2024.

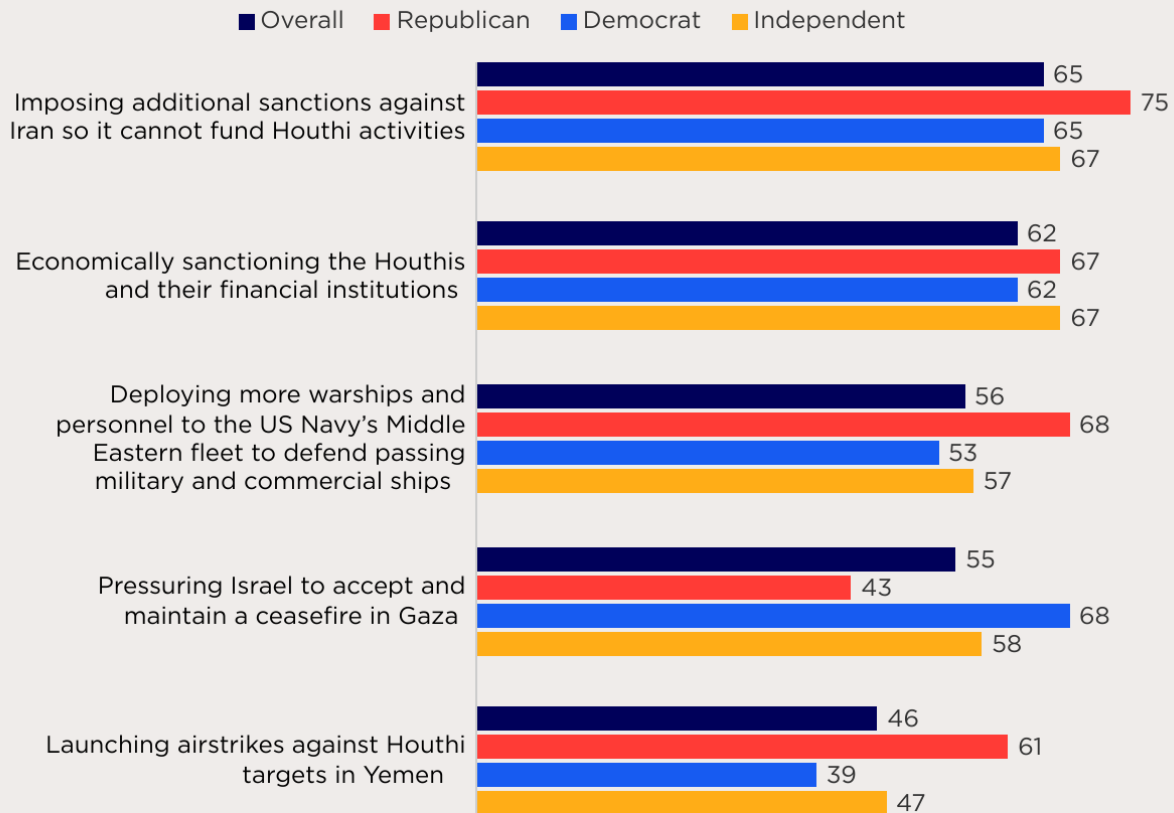
Inheriting the Biden administration's [multinational naval task force](#) and [aerial campaign](#) against the Houthis, Trump [dramatically increased the scale and scope of airstrikes](#) over the last two months to restore freedom of navigation and reestablish deterrence, as Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth said in a [leaked Signal message](#). US airstrikes across Yemen's capital, Sana'a, and other Houthi-controlled governorates are reported to have struck over [1,000 targets and killed hundreds of fighters](#) since March. However, they are also reported to have resulted in the deaths of several dozen civilians, including [at least 68 migrants held](#) in a detention center.

For the US public, the use of airstrikes against Houthi targets is the least favorable policy option (46%) to address the Red Sea attacks and disruptions

to global trade. Americans are instead most supportive of imposing additional sanctions against Iran—the [Houthis' key benefactor](#)—so that it cannot fund the group's activities in the region (65%) and of sanctioning the Houthis themselves along with their financial institutions (62%). Majorities also favor deploying additional warships and personnel to the US Navy's Middle Eastern fleet to defend passing ships (56%) and pressuring Israel to accept and maintain a ceasefire in Gaza (55%), but to a lesser degree. Since the outbreak of war between Israel and Hamas in October 2023, the Houthis have made the safe passage of ships across the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea [contingent](#) upon an end to the Israeli invasion and blockade of Gaza.

US Response to Houthi Red Sea Attacks

In response to Israel's war in Gaza, the Iranian-backed Houthis in Yemen have indiscriminately attacked military and commercial vessels heading toward the Suez Canal, one of the most important waterways in the world. To address the attacks and their disruptions to global trade and commerce, do you support or oppose the United States: (%)



May 2-4, 2025 | n=1,026

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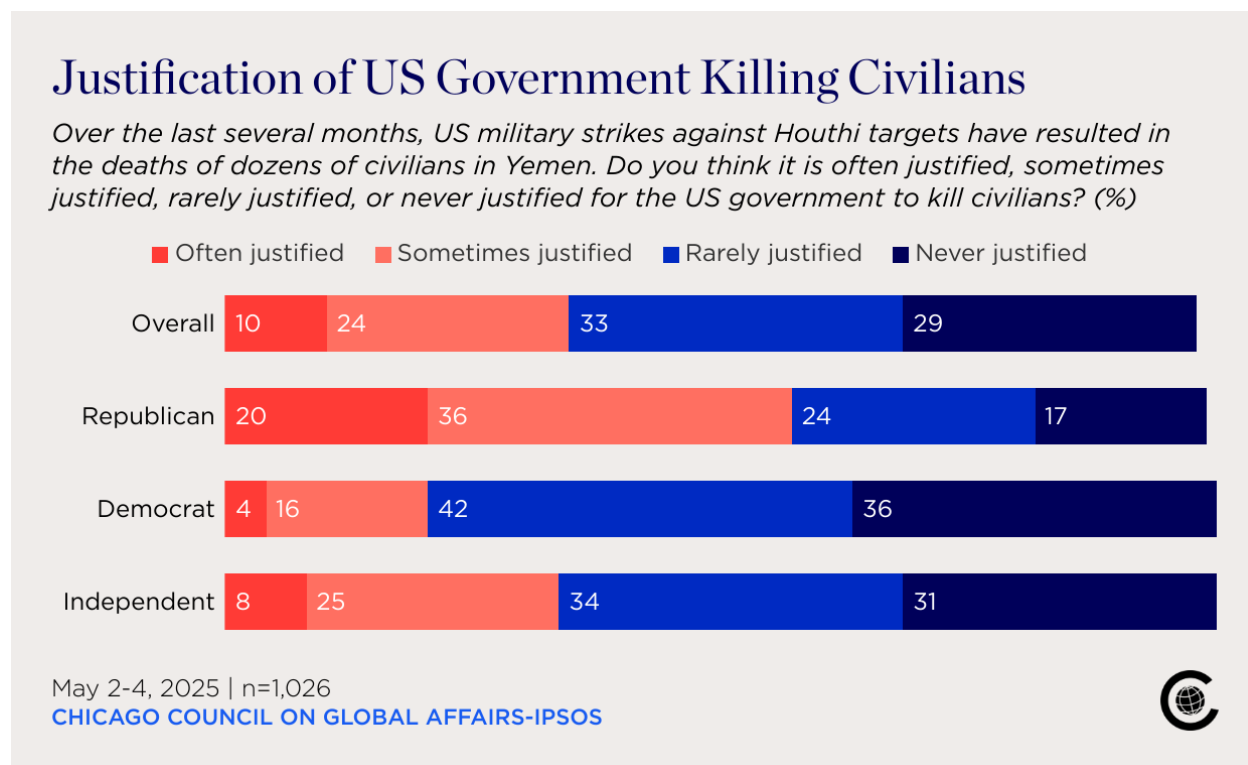


Among the partisans, Republicans express more support for the use of military action in this context, like launching airstrikes against the Houthis (61%) and deploying additional warships and personnel to the Middle East (68%) than Democrats and Independents. They are also more in favor of sanctioning Iran (75%) and the Houthis (67%). These findings echo those from an [April 2025 Chicago Council-Ipsos survey](#), in which Republicans favored a more hardline and assertive approach to Iran and its nuclear-development program than other partisans. The most recent data suggest that their hawkishness extends to parties in Iran's axis of resistance as well.

On the other hand, Democrats are most likely to support pressuring Israel to accept and maintain a ceasefire (68%) so the Houthis stop their attacks. While this policy preference reflects Democrats’ broader proclivity for diplomacy and reluctance to escalate the conflict with direct military action, it also suggests they want to secure a ceasefire in Gaza and see the Houthis’ attacks as a means of deterring further Israeli aggression in the enclave. This is also consistent with their milder approach to Iran [in previous surveys](#).

Majority of Republicans Justify Deaths of Civilians Caught in the Crosshairs

Since the Trump administration intensified its campaign against the Houthis in March, airstrikes across Yemen have killed more than 250 people and resulted in the [deaths of several civilians](#). When provided this information, the majority of Americans say it is rarely or never justified for the US government to kill civilians (62%), but about a third believe it is sometimes or often justified (34%).



While the majority of Democrats (76%) and Independents (65%) believe killing civilians is rarely or never justified, most Republicans believe there are some instances in which the US government would be justified in doing so (56%). Perhaps for this reason, Republicans are more willing to use military

force to [achieve US foreign policy goals](#) and, in this case, address the Houthis' Red Sea attacks, regardless of the risks posed to civilians.

Conclusion

After a thousand airstrikes and at least 70 civilian casualties, the Trump administration's gamble against the Houthis appears to have paid off. Americans are divided on the use of airstrikes to deter Red Sea attacks, but the recent agreement between the White House and the Houthis demonstrates that US military might can bring belligerents to the negotiating table. However, senior Houthi officials have asserted that while American ships will no longer be targeted, [attacks against Israeli vessels will continue](#) until it lifts its blockade against Gaza and agrees to a ceasefire with Hamas.

Methodology

The study was conducted May 2-4, 2025, by Ipsos using its large-scale, nationwide, online research panel, KnowledgePanel, among a weighted national sample of 1,026 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 1.09.

The data for the total sample were weighted to adjust for gender by age, race/ethnicity, education, Census region, metropolitan status, and household income using demographic benchmarks from the 2024 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 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+)

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