

Majority of Americans Say Congress' Approval Needed for US Strikes in Iran

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Following US-Israeli attacks on Iran, members of Congress are calling for a vote on bipartisan resolutions to rein in presidential war powers. While previous [efforts to enact such legislation have failed](#), the ongoing war in Iran—and the recent [deaths of US service members in Kuwait](#)—make the question of congressional oversight all the more salient. A Chicago Council-Ipsos survey conducted February 27-March 1, 2026—before, during, and after the initial strikes—shows a majority of Americans considered prior approval from Congress necessary and half expressed support for airstrikes that were explicitly targeted against nuclear facilities.

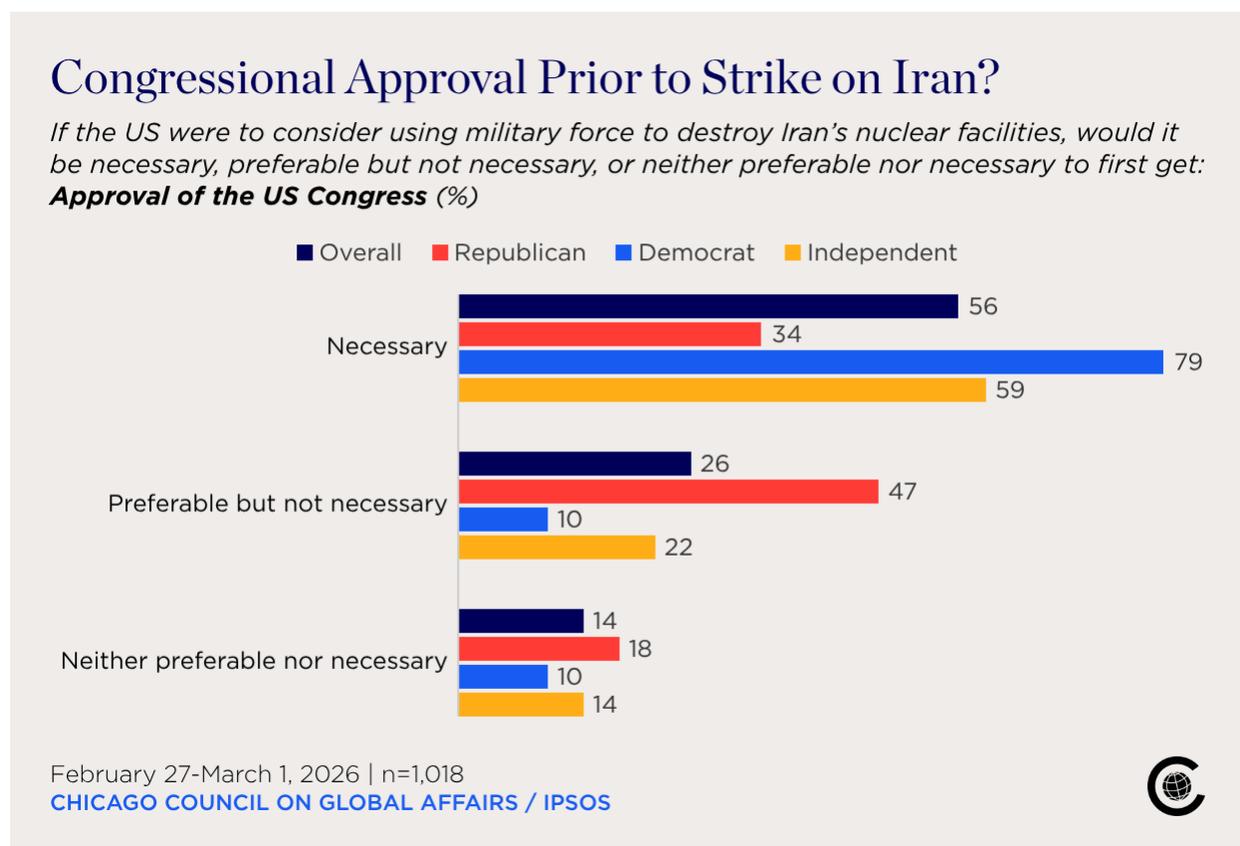
Key Findings

- About six in 10 Americans thought it necessary for the president to obtain approval from Congress before using military force to destroy Iran's nuclear facilities (56%).
- Half expressed support for US airstrikes against Iran's nuclear facilities (49%), and four in 10 said they would support using US troops to destroy Iran's nuclear facilities (39%).
- Americans are more concerned about Iran's funding of terrorist organizations (79%), suppression of popular protests (76%), and the possibility of Iran developing nuclear weapons (75%) than Iran's political regime (69%) or a potential Iran-Israel conflict (66%).
- Seven in 10 Americans (71%) said it was likely that US military action against Iran would lead to a broader regional conflict (25% very likely, 46% somewhat likely).

Majority Say Congressional Approval Necessary for Military Action

When asked whether it would be necessary or preferable to get congressional approval to use US military force to destroy Iran’s nuclear facilities, 56 percent of Americans deemed it a necessary step, while 26 percent said it would be preferable but not necessary. Fourteen percent found such approval neither necessary nor preferable. Notably, there are no significant differences between responses collected ahead of the strikes with those collected after.

While eight in 10 Democrats (79%) and six in 10 Independents (59%) said congressional approval would be a necessary step before launching an attack on Iran’s nuclear facilities, just a third of Republicans (34%) agreed. A plurality of Republicans instead saw congressional approval as preferable but not necessary (47%).



Even before the recent attack, Americans said they wanted Congress to play a greater role in foreign policy decisions. The 2025 Chicago Council Survey, conducted in July, [found](#) that Americans viewed Congress as playing too weak a role (52%) in determining US foreign policy compared to the president. While majorities of Democrats (72%) and Independents (56%) saw Congress as playing too weak of a role, Republicans thought the division of

power was about right (52%). The recent strikes are anticipated to drive additional debate over the role of Congress in US foreign policymaking.

Half of Americans Support Strikes against Iran's Nuclear Program

Few Americans want to see Iran develop a nuclear weapon: just 19 percent said the United States should accept a nuclear Iran. As in past surveys, Americans prefer a non-military solution, with large majorities supporting continued diplomatic efforts (79%) and the tightening of economic sanctions (75%) to get Iran to stop enriching uranium. While Chicago Council Surveys have found that, [in principle](#), Americans support using US troops to stop another country from obtaining nuclear weapons (72%)¹, at the time of this survey, about half supported US airstrikes against Iran's nuclear facilities (49%, 45% oppose).

News of the US military strikes did not seem to change Americans' preferences about strikes on Iran's nuclear program. There are no statistically significant differences in support for strikes between respondents who participated in the survey before (49%) or after (50%) the March 2 US military action. This is likely because Americans had already [formed attitudes about the best way to deal with Iran](#).

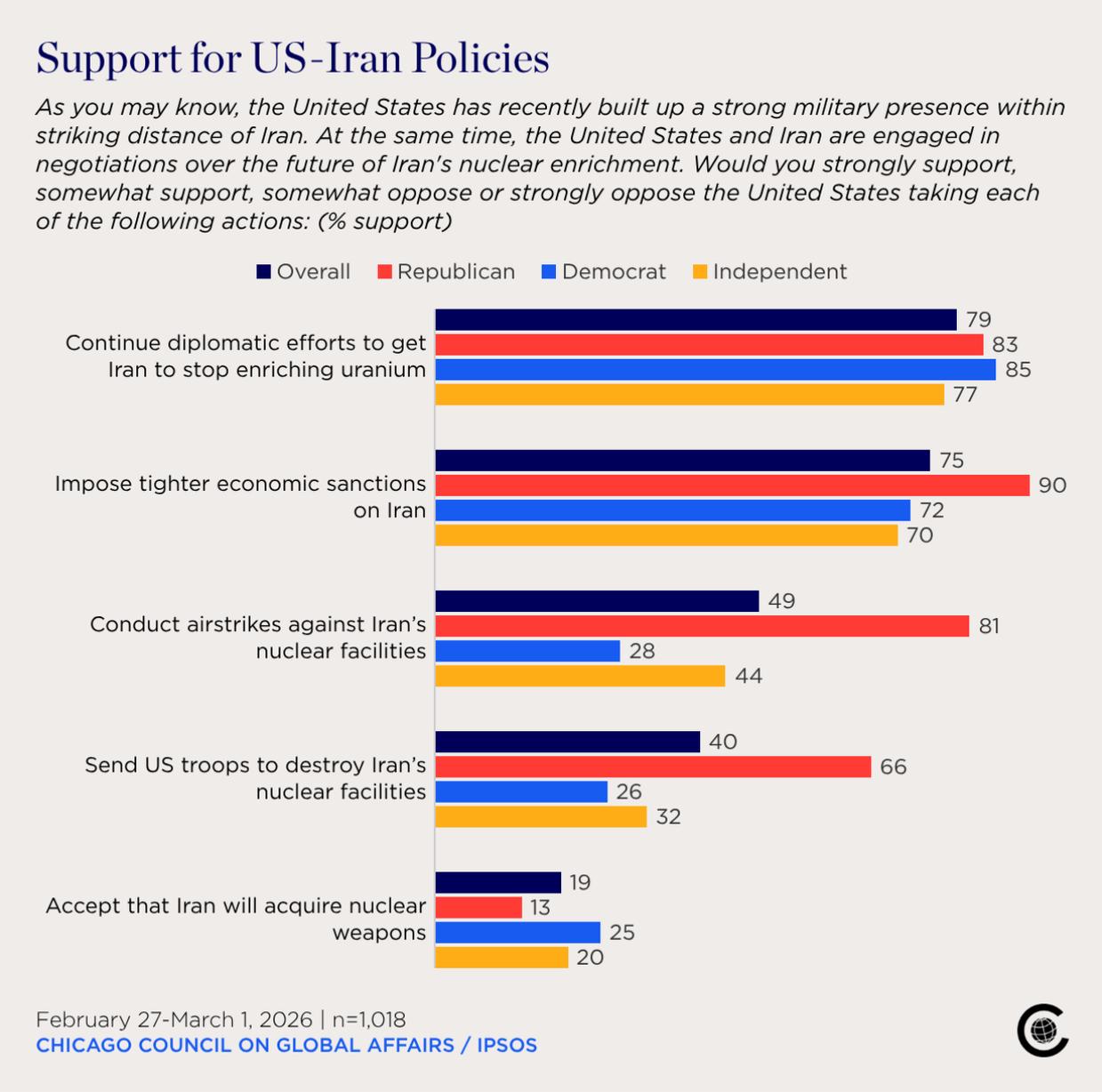
[Past Council polling](#) has consistently shown that Americans view nuclear proliferation as one of the most critical threats to US national security. The Council survey asked about support or opposition to military action specifically to degrade Iranian nuclear facilities. By comparison, a February 28-March 1 [CNN survey](#) found that just 41 percent of Americans approved of a less specific "US decision to take military action in Iran," with 59 percent disapproving. Further, a [Washington Post survey](#) conducted on Sunday, March 1, found that more Americans opposed (52%) than supported (39%) "airstrikes against Iran." By then, respondents may have heard reports of several US service members being killed or injured in the conflict.

While both US President Donald Trump and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth have [kept open](#) the possibility of sending US ground troops into Iran to advance the military operation, Council polling reports just four in 10 Americans who said they would support sending US troops to destroy Iran's nuclear facilities (40%, 55% oppose—with no change before and after the actual strikes occurred).

¹ Seven in 10 also said they would support using US troops to stop a country from supporting a terrorist group (71%) in the [2025 Chicago Council Survey](#).

Republicans Favor Range of Actions Against Iranian Nuclear Program; Democrats and Independents Oppose Military Action

Reflecting a greater level of perceived [concern about Iran’s nuclear program](#), Republicans favor a wide range of US policy options to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons—including economic sanctions (90%), diplomatic efforts (83%), airstrikes (81%), and the use of US troops to destroy Iran’s nuclear facilities (66%).



Democrats and Independents are more circumspect in their policy approach, with majorities favoring diplomacy (85% Democrats, 77% Independents) and

tighter sanctions (72% Democrats, 70% Independents). Relatively few in either group favor using military force to deal with Iran. On airstrikes, a majority of Democrats (70%) oppose, while Independents are split (49% oppose, 44% favor). Majorities of both groups, however, oppose sending US troops to destroy Iranian nuclear facilities (73% Democrats, 62% Independents).

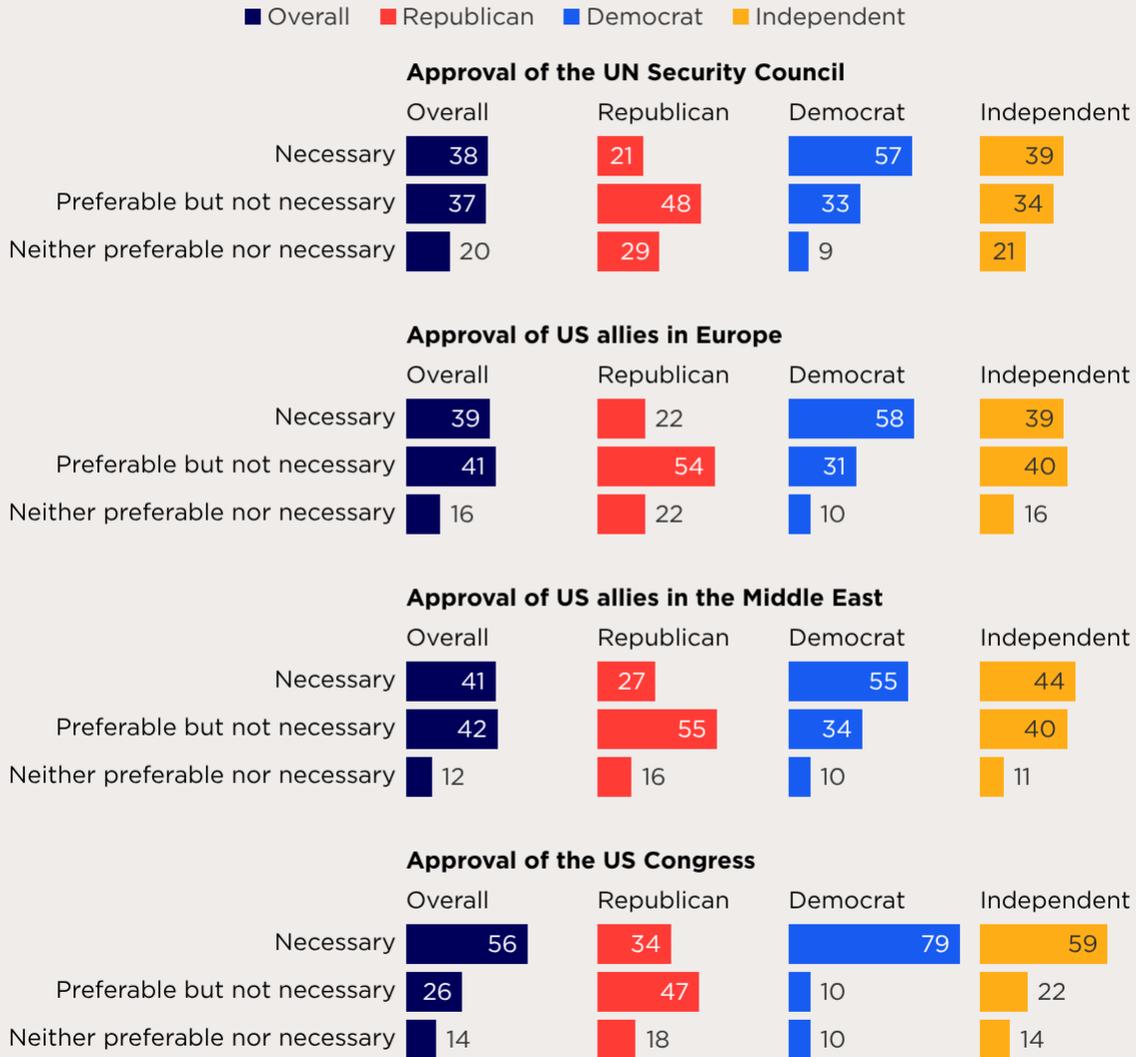
Majorities Believe Approval of Allies and UN Security Council Preferable, If Not Necessary

Americans are closely divided between those who think it is necessary and those who think it is preferable (but not necessary) to seek the approval of US allies before using military force to destroy Iran's nuclear facilities. Four in 10 Americans believe it is necessary to seek approval from Mideast allies (41%), with an equal proportion saying it is preferable but not necessary (42%). Just as many believe it necessary to seek approval from allies in Europe (39%) as believe it preferable but not necessary (41%). Views are similar about seeking approval from the United Nations Security Council. (38% necessary, 37% preferable but not necessary).

Across the board, Democrats are far more likely than Independents or Republicans to say that it is necessary to seek the approval of the UN Security Council and US allies in Europe and the Middle East before using force against Iranian nuclear targets.

Necessary to Get Approval Prior to Strike on Iran?

If the US were to consider using military force to destroy Iran's nuclear facilities, would it be necessary, preferable but not necessary, or neither preferable nor necessary to first get: (%)



February 27-March 1, 2026 | n=1,018
 CHICAGO COUNCIL ON GLOBAL AFFAIRS / IPSOS



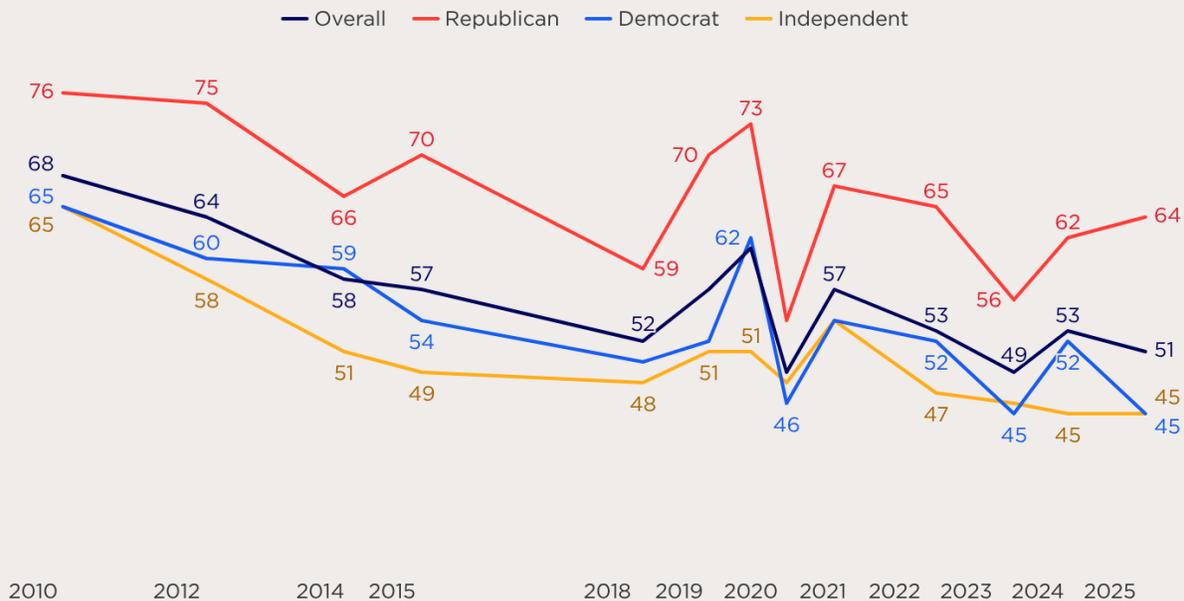
Americans Are More Concerned about Iran's Nuclear Program, Funding Militant Groups, and Suppression of Protesters than Its Political Regime

Over time, Americans have become less concerned about Iran's nuclear program—especially after the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

(JCPOA) agreement. In July 2025, 51 percent of the US public considered Iran’s nuclear program a critical threat, down from 68 percent in 2010.

Critical Threat of Iran’s Nuclear Program

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: **Iran’s nuclear program** (% critical threat)



July 18-30, 2025 | n=2,148
CHICAGO COUNCIL SURVEYS



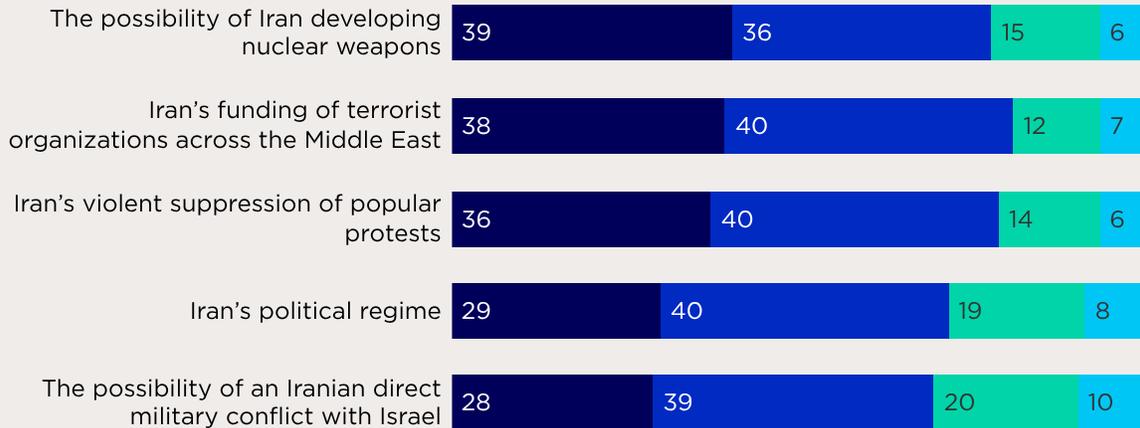
When asked whether they are very or somewhat concerned about the Iranian regime’s various activities, Americans view the possibility of Tehran developing a nuclear weapon (75%), Iran’s funding of terrorist organizations (79%), and the regime’s suppression of popular protests (76%) as equally worrying. A smaller majority express concern about the Iranian political regime (69%).² Two-thirds are also concerned about the potential for a conflict between Israel and Iran (66%).

² While this survey did not ask about the possibility of using US troops to force a regime change in Iran, a previous Chicago Council-Ipsos survey and other Council surveys find that generally Americans do not support using US troops to force a leadership transition in other countries. For example, see “Americans Oppose Using Military Force to Take Greenland,” <https://globalaffairs.org/research/public-opinion-survey/americans-oppose-using-military-force-take-greenland>.

American Concerns about Iran

When it comes to Iran, how concerned are you by the following? (%)

■ Very concerned
 ■ Somewhat concerned
 ■ Not very concerned
 ■ Not concerned at all



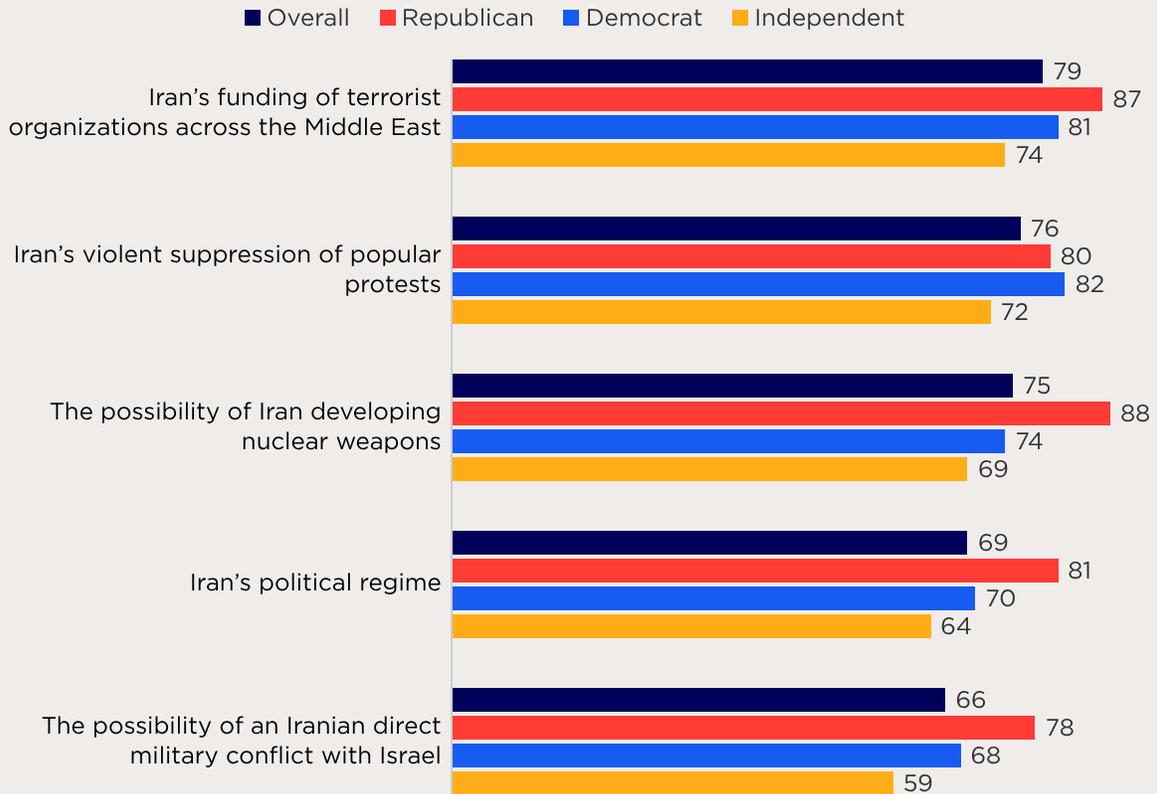
February 27-March 1, 2026 | n=1,018
 CHICAGO COUNCIL ON GLOBAL AFFAIRS / IPSOS



While majorities of partisans across party affiliations are at least somewhat concerned about these actions, Republicans express a heightened level of concern. Majorities of GOP supporters said they are “very” concerned about Iran’s funding of terrorist groups (54%) and nuclear program (55%), while minorities of Democrats and Republicans said the same.

Partisan Concerns about Iran

When it comes to Iran, how concerned are you by the following? (% very or somewhat concerned)



February 27-March 1, 2026 | n=1,018
 CHICAGO COUNCIL ON GLOBAL AFFAIRS / IPSOS

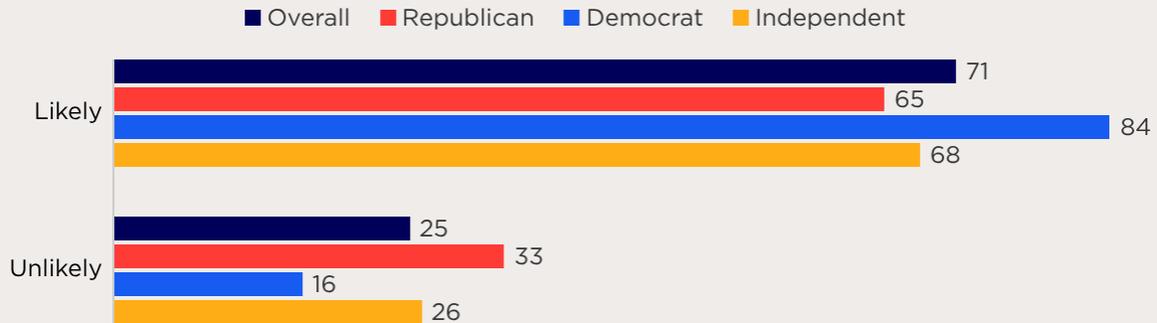


Most Americans Feared Strikes on Iran Would Spark a Broader Regional War

Americans are united in their concerns that US military action would spark a greater regional war. Three-quarters thought it was at least somewhat likely the conflict would expand beyond Iran (25% very, 46% somewhat likely). Democrats (84%) were the most likely to see a broader war as likely, but majorities of Independents (68%) and Republicans (65%) also believed a US military action against Iran would incite a wider war in the region.

Will US Military Action Spark a Broader War?

Based on what you know, how likely is it that US military action against Iran will spark a broader regional war? (%)



February 27-March 1, 2026 | n=1,018
CHICAGO COUNCIL ON GLOBAL AFFAIRS / IPSOS



Conclusion

While the US public has been wary of Iran for many years, these results indicate Americans did not think there was an imminently critical threat from Tehran before the recent US decision to attack Iran. At best, this survey shows that half supported the strikes, suggesting relatively limited support. This modest level of support—rather than a “rally around the flag” effect—could be due to early news of some US military and Iranian civilian casualties or inconsistent messaging from Trump administration officials on why the United States chose to attack Iran.

It is also very possible that Americans are tiring of the Trump administration’s decision to focus on foreign policy over cost-of-living issues at home. Currently, seven in 10 Americans criticize US leaders for not giving enough attention to rising inflation, which is a dramatically greater proportion than those who criticize US leaders for not paying enough attention to Iran’s nuclear program (31%), immigration (25%), or other foreign policy concerns (see appendix).

Now, Americans appear to be watching their fears of a broader conflict come to pass.

Appendix

Q352. When it comes to Iran, how concerned are you by the following?

Q352. Concerns about Iran (% very concerned)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
Q352/1. The possibility of Iran developing nuclear weapons	39	55	32	33	23
Q352/2. Iran's funding of terrorist organizations across the Middle East	38	54	32	32	22
Q352/3. The possibility of an Iranian direct military conflict with Israel	28	35	26	24	9
Q352/4. Iran's violent suppression of popular protests	36	40	37	35	3
Q352/5. Iran's political regime	29	41	24	26	17

Q131. Do you think US leaders are giving each of the following issues too much attention, not enough attention, or about the right amount of attention?

Q131. US Leader Attention (% not enough attention)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
Q131/1. The Ukraine-Russia conflict	44	22	68	45	-46
Q131/2. US competition with China	35	31	39	37	-8
Q131/7. Immigration	25	32	22	21	10
Q131/9. Inflation	72	58	87	75	-29
Q131/10. Iran's nuclear program	31	32	32	29	0

Methodology

This analysis is based on a poll conducted for the Chicago Council on Global Affairs by Ipsos from February 27 to March 1, 2026, using its large-scale, nationwide, probability-based online research panel, KnowledgePanel. The study was fielded in English among a weighted national sample of 1,018 adults age 18 or older. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 3.0 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, for results based on the entire sample of adults. The margin of sampling error takes into account the design effect, which was 1.06.

The data for the total sample were weighted to adjust for gender by age, race/ethnicity, education, Census region, metropolitan status, and household income. The demographic benchmarks came from the 2025 March Supplement of the Current Population Survey (CPS). Party ID benchmarks are from the adjusted 2025 National Public Opinion Reference Survey (NPORS).

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+)
- Party ID (Republican, Leans Republican, Independent/Other, Democrat, Leans Democrat)

Comparisons of pre- and post-strike views are based on a split in the sample between those who began the poll before February 28 at 9 a.m. EST, and those who began after that date and time. The data is additionally weighted to account for compositional differences between pre- and post-strike respondents, though these compositional produce only minor differences in response patterns regardless of weighting scheme.

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.

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.