

Americans Say the Iran War is Bad for the United States

Dina Smeltz, Managing Director and Chair, Public Opinion and US Foreign Policy, Chicago Council on Global Affairs

Lama El Baz, Research Assistant, Public Opinion and US Foreign Policy, Chicago Council on Global Affairs

May 2026

The US-Israeli war against Iran remains at a stalemate after US President Donald Trump apparently [rejected](#) an Iranian counteroffer to the US proposal to end the war over the weekend. While the current ceasefire set over a month ago remains in place, there have been [skirmishes in the region](#) over the past week, including US strikes against two Iranian tankers and Iranian fire against US warships in the Strait of Hormuz.

For their part, most Americans see little upside to continuing the war. According to a Chicago Council on Global Affairs-Ipsos survey conducted May 1-3, 2026, the US public thinks the US action has been successful at degrading Iranian military assets. But at the same time, Americans tend to think the military action has been detrimental to the US economy, national security, and standing abroad. What's more, except for Republican Party supporters, many Americans are skeptical that the United States or Iran will comply with a future agreement that links sanctions relief to limiting Iran's nuclear program.

Key Findings

- Americans broadly view the US-Iran war as bad for the United States' cost of living (86%), international relations (72%), reputation abroad (72%), and national security (65%).
- While 55 percent think the Trump administration has done enough to destroy Iranian military assets and facilities, majorities of Americans do not think the Trump administration has done enough to pursue a negotiated resolution to the conflict (63%), consult with key allies and partners in the region (63%), limit Iranian civilian casualties (57%), or

protect American civilians and military personnel in the Middle East (54%).

- Just two in 10 Americans (18%) are confident Iran would comply with a deal to lift economic sanctions against it in exchange for limiting its nuclear program. Only half are confident in the United States' compliance with the same deal (48%).
- A plurality views the US-Iran war as a stalemate, as 45 percent of Americans think neither side in the conflict has an advantage. But among those who do sense a winning side, more think the United States has the advantage (36%) than think Iran does (16%).
- Most Americans see the key actors in the Middle East playing a negative role in resolving the key challenges facing the region, including Iran, Israel, and the United States.

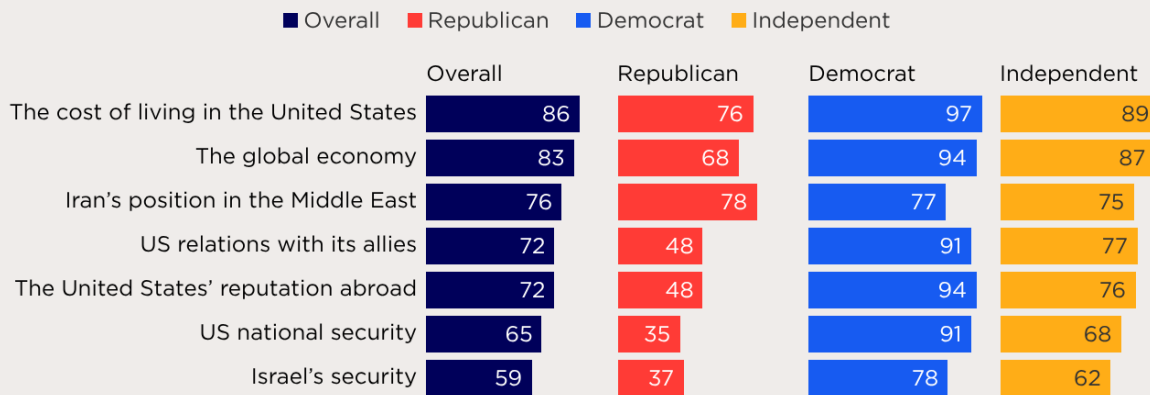
Americans Perceive Negative Impacts to US Security, Economy, Reputation

The US-Israeli military action in Iran has had [negative global and regional security and economic consequences](#), especially given Tehran's closure of the Strait of Hormuz, which caused a spike in gas and oil prices and the cost of critical items like fertilizer. Most Americans (83%)—including majorities of self-described Republicans (68%), Democrats (94%), and Independents (87%)—say the conflict has been bad for the global economy.

Perhaps [most importantly](#) for everyday Americans are the negative impacts on their standard of living. Nearly nine in 10 (86%) overall believe the war has been bad for the cost of living in the United States, including majorities of Republicans (76%), Democrats (97%), and Independents (89%). These critical views are no doubt linked to gas prices, which have [increased more than 30 percent](#) since the start of the war.

Impact of US-Iran War

Overall, do you think the US-Iran war has been good or bad for: (% bad)



May 1-3, 2026 | n=1,018

CHICAGO COUNCIL ON GLOBAL AFFAIRS-IPSOS



Two-thirds say the conflict has been bad for US national security (65%), and an even larger majority say the conflict has been detrimental to the United States' reputation in the world (72%). Moreover, only 42 percent of Americans believe the United States is playing a positive role in the Middle East, consistent with findings from June 2025 but down from 50 percent in April 2025 (see figure on page 9). On each of these aspects, Republicans are evenly divided while Democrats and Independents are sharply negative.

Americans also sense the war has hurt the United States' relationship with its allies (72%), perhaps as a result of Iran's regional retaliation against initial US airstrikes. In response to US and Israeli attacks, Iran launched [drone and missile attacks against US military bases](#) and [energy infrastructure across the Middle East](#), inflicting significant damage to the economies and energy infrastructure of the United States' closest regional partners. Experts warn they will need at [least 12 to 18 months to recover](#). In addition, [Trump has also heavily criticized European allies](#) for refusing to support US efforts to secure the Strait of Hormuz. Majorities of Democrats and Independents think the war has been bad for US relations with its allies (91% and 77%, respectively), while Republicans are equally divided (48% bad, 49% good).

Americans do not only think there has been reputational fallout for the United States. Most also think the US-Iran war has been bad for Iran's position in the Middle East (76%, with partisan consensus) and that Tehran has played a

negative role in the Middle East (82%, with no change since June 2025 but down from 87% in April 2025).

While Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has stated that the war with Iran is not over, Americans do not think Israel's security has been improved at this point in the war. In fact, 59 percent say that the war has been bad for Israeli national security, though Republicans are much less likely to say so (37%) than Democrats (78%) and Independents (62%). Moreover, two-thirds say Israel is playing a negative role in the Middle East (64%, up marginally from 61% in June 2025).

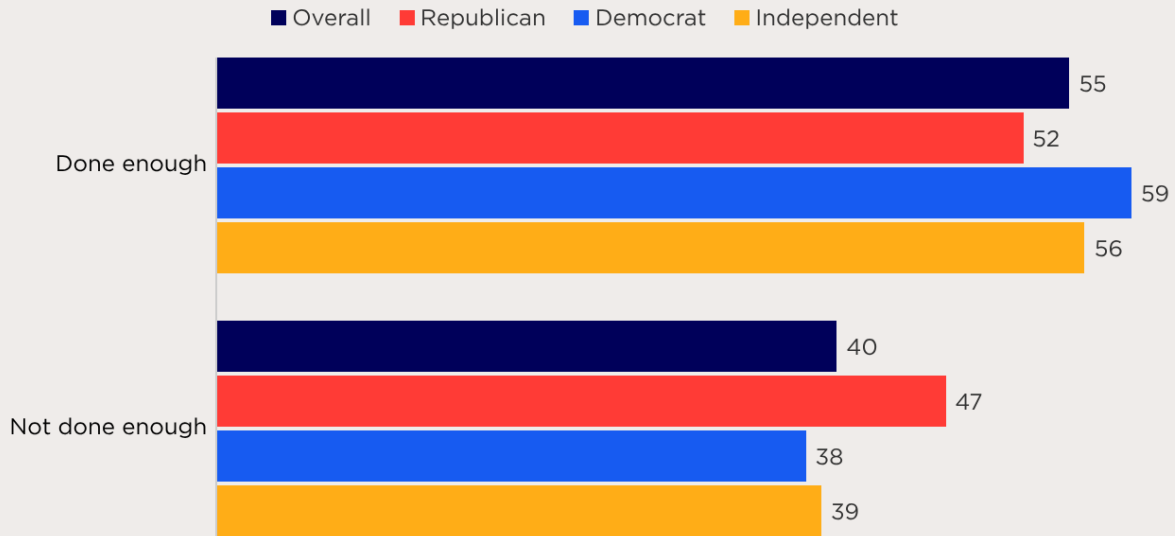
Americans Say US Efforts to Destroy Iranian Military Have Been Sufficient

At a [White House news conference](#) last Tuesday, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio asserted that the administration had achieved its goals in the military action in Iran. But some analysts and Americans might beg to differ. In [a video released on February 28](#), Trump outlined five major goals for Operation Epic Fury: ensure that Iran never obtains a nuclear weapon, destroy Tehran's ballistic missiles, "annihilate" its naval capabilities, cut its support of militant groups like Hamas and Lebanese Hezbollah, and create the conditions for the Iranian population to change its political regime.

How do Americans judge the administration's actions thus far? An overall majority believe that Trump officials have succeeded in degrading Iranian military capabilities, with 55 percent assessing that the United States has "done enough" to destroy Iranian military assets and facilities (55%, 40% not enough). By about a 6-to-4 margin, majorities of both self-described Democrats (59%) and Independents (56%) think this action has been sufficient, but Republicans are more divided (52% enough, 47% not enough).

US Efforts to Destroy Iranian Military

When thinking about the US-Iran war, do you think the Trump administration has done enough or not done enough to...? **Destroy Iranian military assets and facilities** (%)



May 1-3, 2026 | n=1,018
CHICAGO COUNCIL ON GLOBAL AFFAIRS-IPSOS



In fact, most Americans would rather the administration walk away from the conflict. Two-thirds in a [March Ipsos poll](#) say the United States should work to end its involvement in the conflict quickly, even if it means it does not achieve all of its goals in Iran (66%)—a view shared by majorities of Democrats (91%) and Independents (74%). By contrast, Republicans think the United States should work to achieve its goals in Iran, even if it means US involvement in the conflict continues for an extended period of time (57%).

Majorities Criticize US Efforts to Avoid Casualties

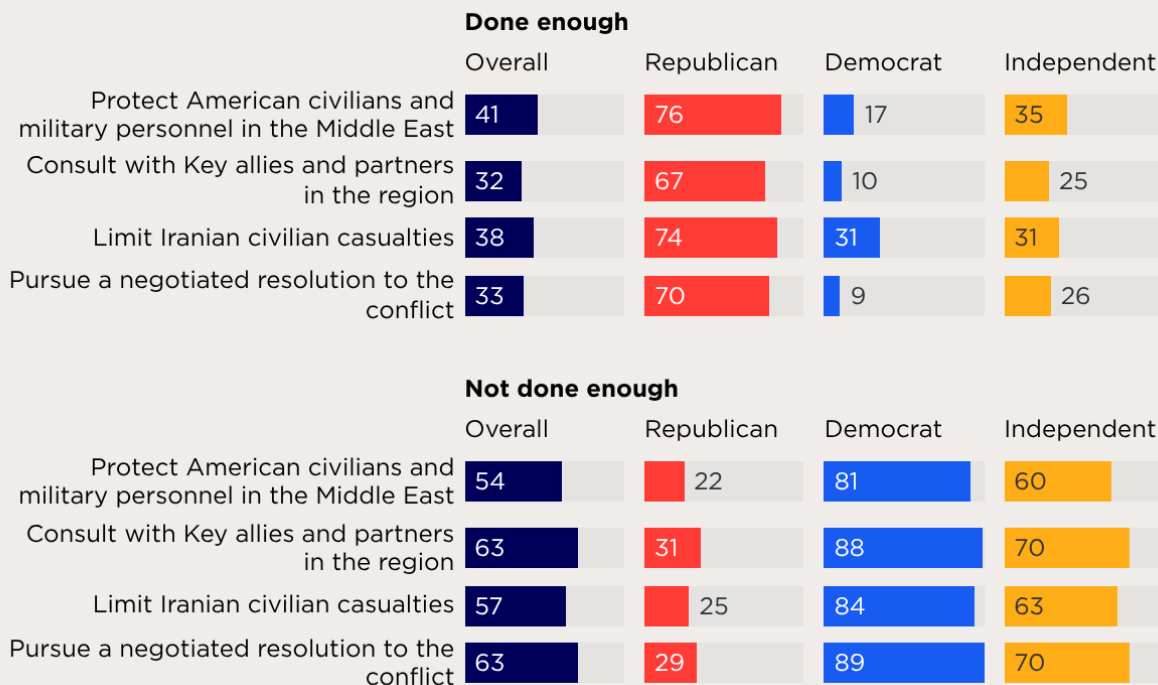
Americans are less inclined to praise the administration's efforts to protect civilians and US military personnel. Majorities think US leaders have not done enough to limit Iranian civilian casualties (57% vs. 38% done enough) or protect American civilians and military personnel in the Middle East (54% vs. 41%). On each of these, about eight in 10 Democrats and six in 10 Independents are critical, while three-quarters of Republicans give positive reviews.

[Polling conducted by other organizations](#) also finds that many Americans are doubtful the military campaign will improve the lives of the Iranian people. For example, [a March Economist/YouGov survey](#) found twice as many Americans think US military intervention in Iran will worsen the situation for the people of Iran (45%) as those who think it will improve it (21%). In this poll, Republicans stood apart from other partisans in their view that US military action will improve the situation and quality of life for Iranians (48%); Democrats and Independents tend to think Iranians will fare worse as a result of the war (70% and 47%, respectively).

Assessment of US Actions in Iran

When thinking about the US-Iran war, do you think the Trump administration has done enough or not done enough to...? (%)

■ Overall ■ Republican ■ Democrat ■ Independent



May 1-3, 2026 | n=1,018

CHICAGO COUNCIL ON GLOBAL AFFAIRS-IPSOS

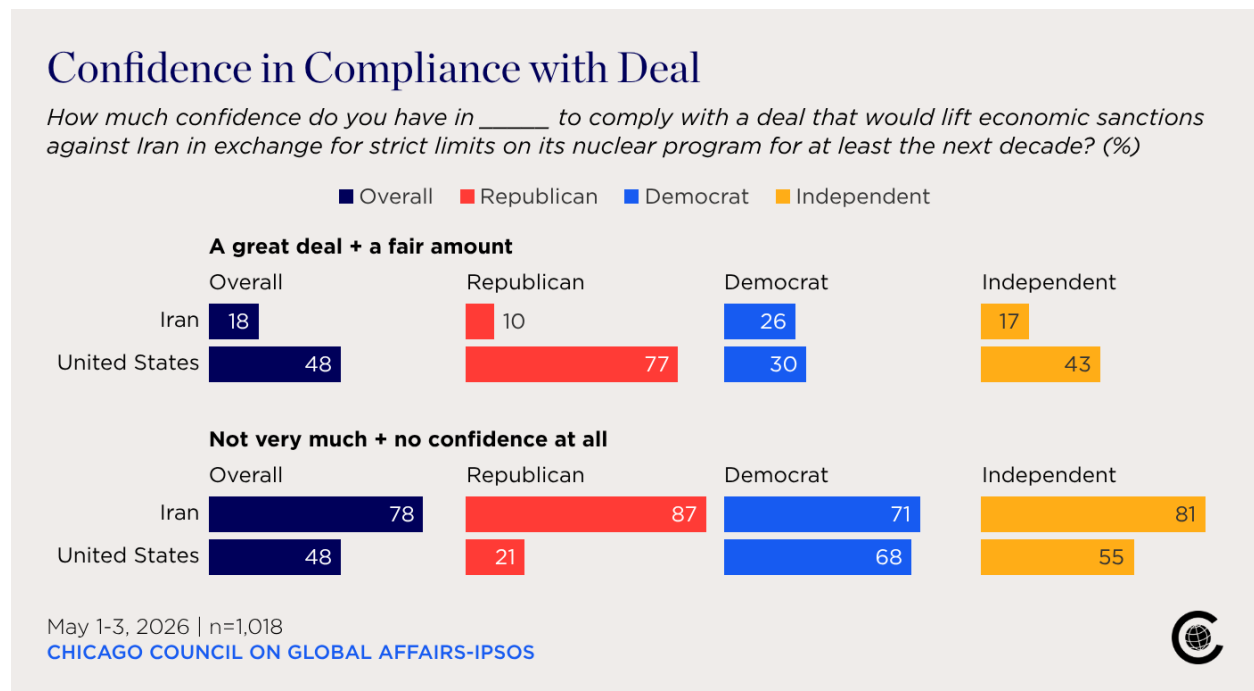


Overall majorities also give the administration poor marks on the diplomatic front. Majorities of Americans do not think the Trump administration has done

enough to consult with key allies and partners in the region or to pursue a negotiated resolution to the conflict (63% each). In a familiar pattern, at least eight in 10 Democrats and seven in 10 Independents believe efforts in this regard have been insufficient, while two-thirds or more Republicans say the administration has done enough.

Americans Doubt United States' Compliance in a Deal with Iran

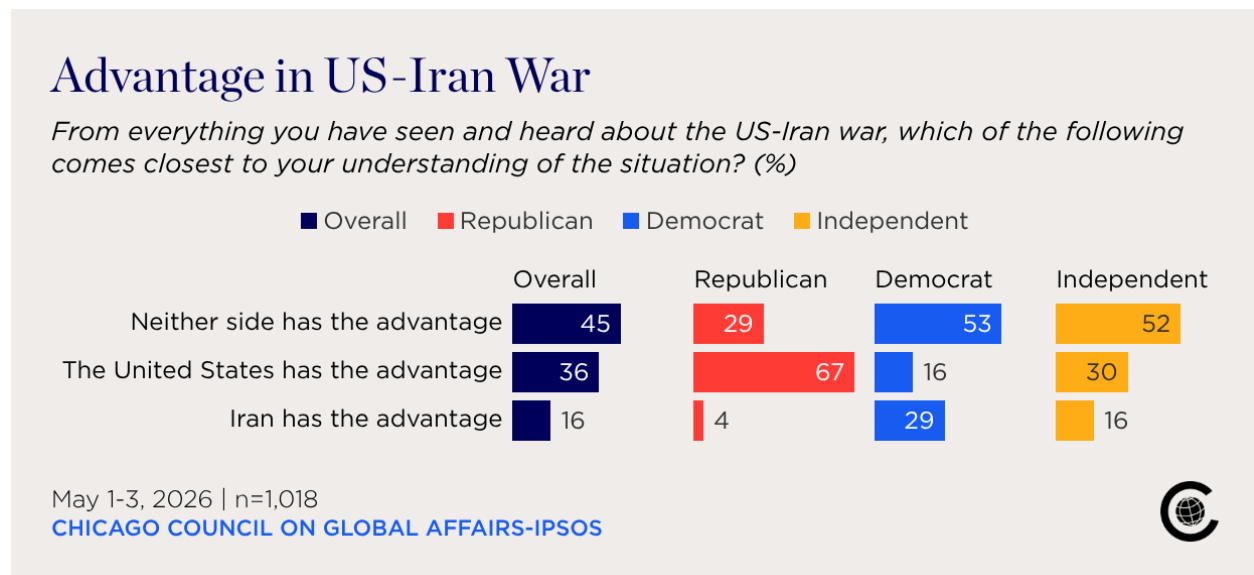
If a deal is reached between the United States and Iran, just two in 10 Americans are confident Iran would comply with an agreement similar to the 2015 nuclear deal that would lift economic sanctions in exchange for limits on its nuclear program (18%, 78% unconfident). Democrats tend to express somewhat more confidence in Iran's compliance than other partisans (26% Democrat, 17% Independent, 10% Republican) but majorities across the board are not convinced Iran would comply with such a deal (87% Republican, 81% Independent, 71% Democrat).



When it comes to the United States' compliance in this deal, the public is equally divided (48% confident, 48% unconfident) due to partisan differences. More than three-quarters of Republicans are confident the United States would comply in a deal that lifts sanctions in exchange for strict limits on Tehran's nuclear program (77%), compared to just minorities of Democrats (30%) and Independents (43%). This skepticism is likely because Trump

already pulled out of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal in his previous term and, more recently, issued orders to attack Iran while nuclear negotiations were ongoing last February.

Although more Americans say the United States has the advantage (36%) in the war than Iran (16%), the plurality does not see either side as having the advantage (45%). Republicans are confident the United States has the advantage in the war (67%), while bare majorities of Democrats (53%) and Independent (52%) see the conflict at a stalemate.

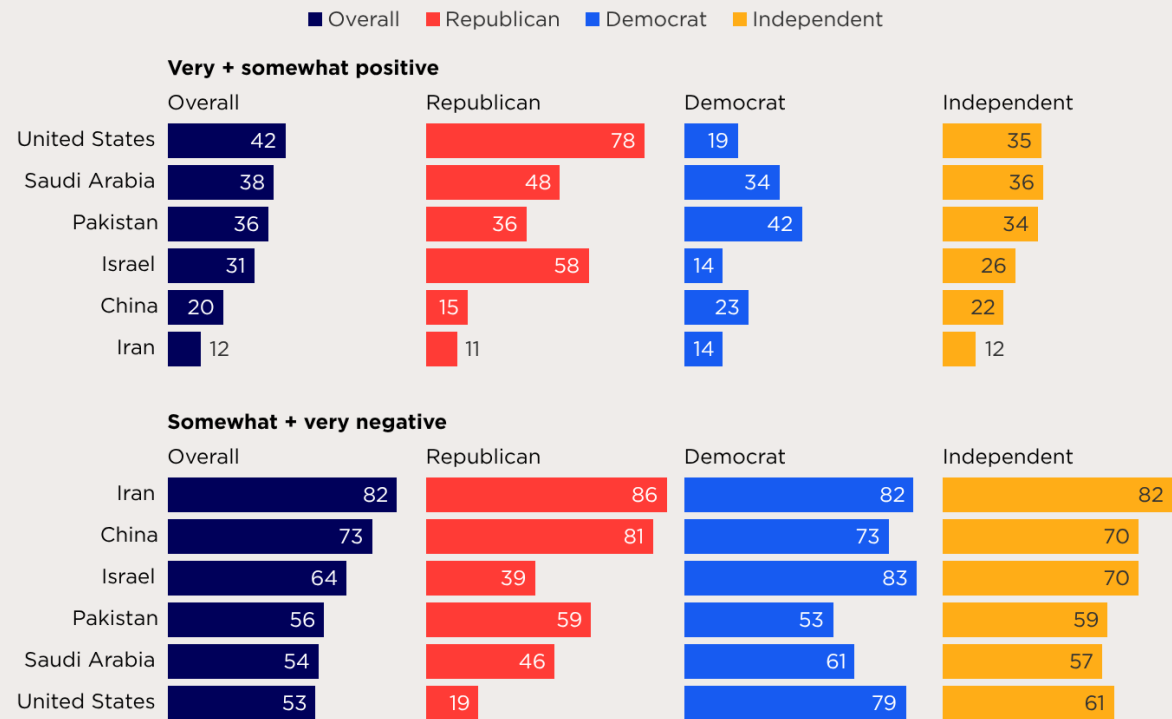


Americans Do Not See Any Country Playing a Positive Role in the Middle East

The American public thinks the key actors in the current conflict play a negative role in solving regional challenges, but they tend to view Iran (82%) and China (73%) as playing the worst role—with consensus across partisan groups. In addition to thinking the US-Iran war has been bad for Iran’s position in the Middle East, Americans also see the war as worsening China’s position in the world (58%), but Republicans (73%) are far more likely than other partisans (53% both Democrat and Independent) to believe China’s position has declined.

Role of Countries in the Middle East

In your opinion, are the following countries playing a very positive, somewhat positive, somewhat negative, or very negative role in resolving the key problems facing the Middle East? (%)



May 1-3, 2026 | n=1,018
CHICAGO COUNCIL ON GLOBAL AFFAIRS-IPSOS



Despite helping to secure the fragile ceasefire between the United States and Iran, Americans also see Pakistan playing a negative role in the region (56%), but to a lesser degree than other actors. Democrats (42%) are more likely than other partisans (36% Republican, 34% Independent) to view Pakistan’s role positively. The opposite is true when it comes to Saudi Arabia, which more than half of Americans consider to be playing a negative regional role (54%). In this case, Republicans are more likely to view Saudi Arabia’s role more positively (48%) than Democrats (34%) or Independents (36%).

Conclusion

With tensions escalating in the Strait of Hormuz and a peace proposal up in the air, the future of the US-Iran war remains uncertain. For their part, Americans are feeling the economic impact of a war they do not believe the United States is winning nor has a promising resolution. Narrowing down on a peace agreement, the public perception that US military objectives have been

met may provide the Trump administration with an off-ramp to end its current involvement in the Middle East.

Methodology

This analysis is based on a poll conducted for the Chicago Council on Global Affairs by Ipsos from May 1-3, 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)

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.