



# BATTLEGROUND:

How Trump and Harris Voters See America's  
Role in the World

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September 2024



**institute  
for global  
affairs**  
eurasia group



# Contents

Executive Summary	3
Introduction	5
Who Took Our Survey?	7
Specific Findings	8
Perceptions of the Biden Legacy	8
Critical Issues on the Ballot	11
Highlights from Key Swing States	19
How Americans See America's Role	24
Issues for the Next President	33
Methodology and Acknowledgements	39
About IGA	41
Endnotes	42

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# Executive Summary

This year the Institute for Global Affairs (IGA) asked 1,835 Americans their perspectives on key foreign policy issues.

Our findings reveal important differences across parties, candidate preferences, and between the national population and residents of hotly contested battleground states. In addition to a nationally representative sample, we included focused samples of three Rust Belt states (Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Michigan) and three Sun Belt states (Georgia, Arizona, and Nevada), with potential consequences for this year's presidential election.

## **Harris leads on critical foreign policy issues nationally, but Trump leads in key swing states.**

- Nationally, Kamala Harris is seen as the candidate more likely to pursue a foreign policy which “benefits people like you,” improve America’s international reputation, be a strong leader who advances America’s interests internationally, and less likely to send US troops to an unnecessary war. In swing states, however, Donald Trump has the edge on each of these.
- Where Trump is perceived more favorably than Harris nationally — more likely to reform immigration, end the Gaza and Ukraine wars, and respond effectively to a Chinese attack on Taiwan — he has an even greater margin of favorability in swing states.
- People in Rust Belt states care more about the rise of China and less about climate change than Americans nationwide. Those in Sun Belt states care more than that nationwide population about immigration. These views could bode well for Trump’s candidacy.

## **Supporters of Kamala Harris and Donald Trump differ on key foreign policy issues.**

- Trump supporters appear less hawkish on China than the average Republican, and Harris supporters appear more hawkish on China than the average Democrat.

For example, more Republicans than Democrats think the West should prepare for a new Cold War between the US and China (68% vs. 52%), but the margin shrinks when comparing Trump supporters to Harris supporters (66% vs. 54%).

- Harris supporters are 18% more likely than Trump supporters (and 7% more likely than Democrats) to think the US should militarily defend Taiwan. People who intend to vote for a different candidate are least likely to think it should.
- A majority (58%) of Harris supporters think the US should maintain or increase the number of overseas troops while a majority (58%) of Trump supporters think the US should decrease the number. People who intend to vote for a different candidate are aligned with Trump supporters — 56% prefer a troop decrease.
- A majority of Harris supporters are “Wilsonian,” advocating for a rules-based order focused on democracy, liberal economics, and human rights (59%). A plurality of Trump supporters are “Jacksonian,” averse to international institutions and deep global engagement but supporting a strong military to deter enemies (41%). A plurality of people who plan to vote for candidate besides these two are “Jeffersonian,” wanting to strengthen democracy at home and promote it abroad not by force but by example (48%).

## **Republicans and Independents are less hawkish on European security than Democrats. Democrats and Independents are less hawkish on the Gaza war and China than Republicans.**

- US goals in Ukraine which would de-escalate the war are prioritized more than twice as often as those which would perpetuate or intensify it. Republicans and Independents are about 20% more likely than Democrats to prioritize avoiding a wider war.



- If Finland, a new NATO ally, were invaded by Russia, after being reminded of NATO's obligation for collective defense, 76% of Democrats — but only 55% of Republicans and 59% of Independents — would support a US military operation to expel Russian forces.
- Majorities of Democrats (67%) and Independents (55%) believe the US should either end support for Israel's war effort or make that support conditional on a ceasefire. Only 8% of Democrats but 42% of Republicans think the US must support Israel unconditionally.
- Twice as many Democrats as Republicans think the West's need to cooperate with China should dissuade the US from preparing for a new Cold War. Twice as many Republicans as Democrats think China presents a threat to US security, and so the US should prepare for one.
- Twice as many Democrats think the US should normalize relations with Cuba as should continue to pressure and isolate Cuba (66% vs. 34%), and Republicans are more evenly divided on the issue (45% vs. 55%).
- Thirty percent of respondents cite the withdrawal from Afghanistan as one of Biden's biggest foreign policy failures. However, 62% of Americans believe the Afghanistan war was primarily a failed mission from the start or should have ended when Osama bin Laden was killed.
- President Biden's framing of foreign policy as a global struggle between democracy and autocracy may not resonate with most Americans. Though four times as many Democrats as Republicans cite threats to democracy in foreign countries as a top concern, among a list of 12 foreign policy issues, it is the issue Americans care about the least.

**Younger and older generations disagree about how US policy should approach Israel's war in Gaza, a new Cold War with China, and normalizing relations with Cuba.**

**Americans have mixed views of the Biden administration's foreign policy record.**

- The release of American prisoners from Russia and NATO expansion are seen as among President Biden's most significant foreign policy successes (though addressing climate change is the top choice among Democrats).
- Republicans and Independents most often point to immigration as one of Biden's top foreign policy failures. Democrats most often select the US response to the war in Gaza.
- Twice as many adults under 30 as those 65 and older think the US must stop supporting Israel's war in Gaza (23% vs. 11%).
- Twice as many adults 65 and older as those under 30 think the US must support Israel's war unconditionally (26% vs. 13%).
- Americans 45 and older are much more likely than Americans under 45 to think the US must prepare for a new Cold War with China (68% vs 47%).
- Two-thirds of adults under 30 think the US should normalize relations with Cuba rather than continue isolating the island nation. A slight majority of Americans 65 and older agree (66% vs. 53%).



## Introduction

In our seventh year of polling Americans about their foreign policy views, we have a confession to make: foreign policy does not frequently register as a priority for American voters. Concerns closer to home loom larger than overseas wars and geopolitical competition. But as Americans get ready to vote for a new president in November, debates about America's international obligations and actions have taken on new urgency.

In short, foreign policy is having a moment. In 2024, the world reckons with the aftermath of a pandemic, a new war in the Middle East, a protracted war in Ukraine, and intensifying geopolitical competition. Early this year, one influential poll revealed an uptick in foreign policy interest. Though the economy remains a top voter issue, about twice as many Americans cited foreign policy as a top priority — and four times as many expressed concern about US involvement overseas — this year as last year.<sup>1</sup>

This prioritization of foreign policy has held firm. In September, a Pew survey showed foreign policy as the fourth most important issue for voters.<sup>2</sup> A Washington Post poll from earlier in the summer ranked the Gaza and Ukraine wars in the top ten important issues.<sup>3</sup>

The rise of voter interest in foreign policy offers us some hope here at the Institute for Global Affairs, an organization committed to helping people make sense of geopolitics. Conventional wisdom suggests Americans both know and care little about foreign policy. As a result, foreign policy leaders don't face much political pressure, and so the popular will isn't always reflected in Washington's policy prescriptions. This year's election, however, could be different.

Foreign policy positions could shape the stakes of this November's election. If Harris wins, foreign policy analysts argue she could take a more restrained approach, one which reflects a "humbler" view of US influence in the world.<sup>4</sup> Yet Harris hasn't articulated a concrete plan for ending or de-escalating the war in Ukraine. Donald Trump promised to immediately end the Ukraine war and avoid "World War III." Yet his less qualified support for Israel's war and his significant increase of the US defense budget in his first term obscure his commitment to military restraint.<sup>5</sup>

It remains to be seen how voters' preferences will be reflected in these policies — and in the outcome of the election. But in a year when foreign policy matters more than usual, our survey offers a glimpse into Americans' foreign policy preferences. For the first time, our survey (fielded August 15-19) includes focused sampling of voting-age adults in critical battleground states alongside a nationally representative sample. We compare the views of voting age adults in the national population with voting age adults in swing states in the Rust Belt (Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Michigan) and Sun Belt (Georgia, Nevada and Arizona). These two groups of swing states offer both candidates the most likely pathways to victory.<sup>6</sup>



In our survey, Rust Belt voters — midwestern populations living in America's industrial heartland — expressed foreign policy preferences which diverged in important ways from those of Americans as a whole. Rust Belt voters were, for example, more concerned about competition with China and trade, but less supportive of US interventionism. Voters in the Sun Belt — an area which has seen rapid business growth and a marked rise in immigration — reported significantly more interest in immigration than the national average

This election will shape a new era in American foreign policy in important ways. In a healthy democracy, international relations conducted on behalf of the public must be subject to public scrutiny and debate. We have seen how global public health crises, international economic collapse, regional war and insecurity, and mass migrations can affect Americans' daily lives from the Rust Belt to the Sun Belt, and from coastal cities to rural towns.

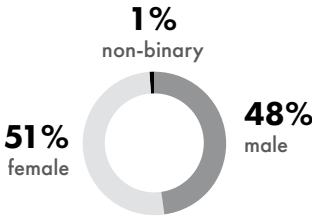
We hope this report helps shed light on the preferences of the American voters who deserve attention from leaders who seek to represent them. We also hope it supports meaningful public discussion of, and education about, the critical foreign policy topics which confront the United States during this election year, and in the years to come.





# Who Took Our Survey?

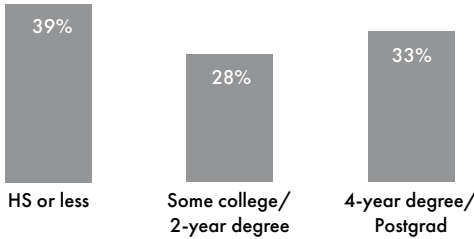
## Gender



## Age



## Education



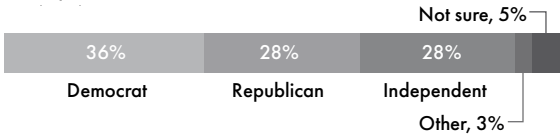
## Race



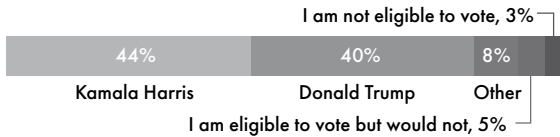
## Income



## Political Party



## 2024 Candidate Preference





## Specific Findings

### Perceptions of the Biden Legacy

**Across the aisle, the release of American prisoners from Russia and NATO expansion are seen as among President Biden's most significant foreign policy successes (though addressing climate change is the top choice among Democrats). Immigration and the Afghanistan withdrawal are seen as among the most significant failures (though the US response to the Gaza war is the top choice among Democrats).**

The finding that the release of American prisoners from Russia is a significant foreign policy success may be a result of the recent prisoner swap, which included the release of Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich, when our survey was fielded.<sup>7</sup> Gershkovich was arrested in March 2023 on charges of espionage and sentenced to 16 years in prison, and his case attracted substantial media attention.<sup>8</sup>

More than one third of Democrats identified Biden's top foreign policy success to be investments in green energy. Provisions for renewable energy and climate change measures were included in the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022, a key piece of legislation for the Biden administration.<sup>9</sup> Strengthening European alliances was another core piece of President Biden's foreign policy agenda, which he highlighted in July's NATO Summit. An IGA survey released in June found most Americans think Europe should be primarily responsible for its own defense.<sup>10</sup> Yet though it expands America's defense obligations in Europe, more than one in four consider the expansion of NATO as one of the president's most significant successes.

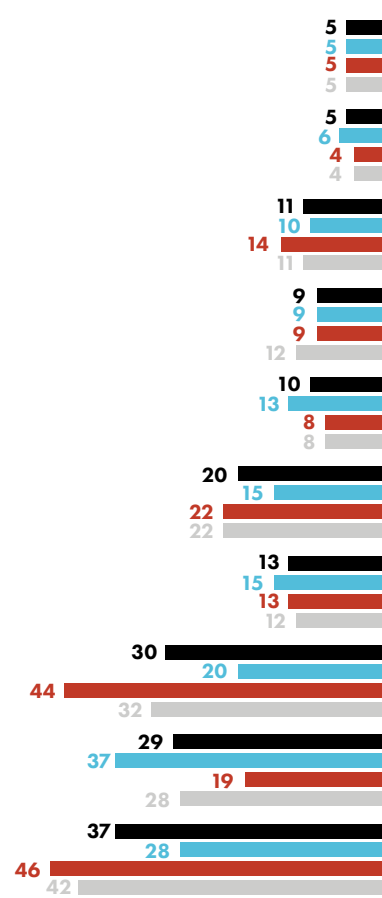
Perceptions of foreign policy failures are divided along partisan lines. Biden's response to immigration is considered the biggest foreign policy failure among Republicans and Independents, closely followed by ending the war in Afghanistan. A plurality of Democrats consider the handling of the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza to be a top foreign policy failure. Republicans and Independents appear more likely to prioritize immigration and security over other issues, while Democrats are more likely to prioritize humanitarian issues and climate change over other issues. In the run-up to the election, Republicans will likely seek to implicate Kamala Harris in President Biden's perceived foreign policy failures, especially immigration. Harris has drawn on her past as a prosecutor to signal she will be tough on border security (and crime), but she will need to strike a delicate balance — this could appeal to moderate Republicans and Independents, but alienate some progressive Democrats.



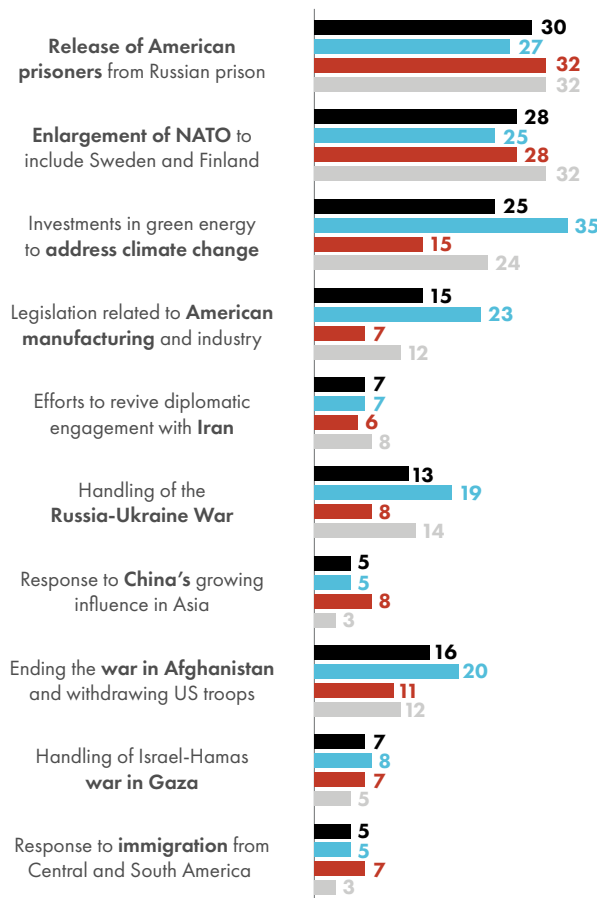


● Democrat ● Republican ● Independent ● Total

### Perceived as a Top Failure



### Perceived as a Top Success



Questions: "Of the following, which do you think are the most significant foreign policy successes of Joe Biden's presidency? (Pick up to two answers); Of the following, which do you think are the most significant foreign policy failures of Joe Biden's presidency? (Pick up to two answers.)"

Note: The sum of percentages is greater than 100 because respondents selected multiple answer options.

Numbers shown as percentages

Source: Institute for Global Affairs

## Yet a majority of Americans believe the Afghanistan war was primarily a failed mission from the start or should have ended when Osama bin Laden was killed.

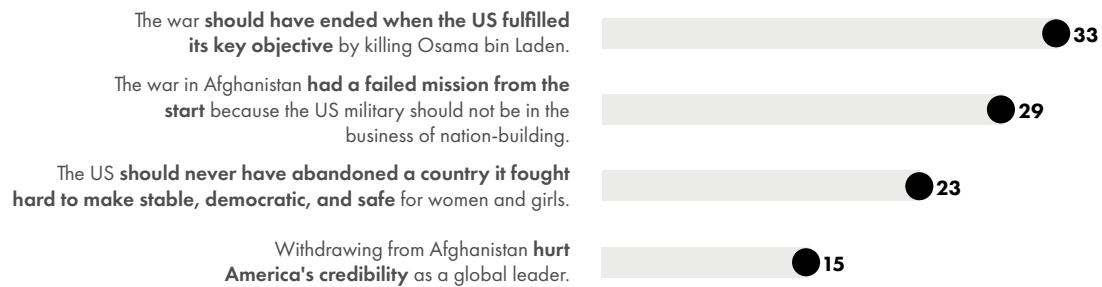
Sixty-three percent more Americans think this as are primarily concerned about credibility as a global leader or having abandoned the war's humanitarian gains, suggesting most supported the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan even as they deem the execution a failure. Republicans roundly criticized the withdrawal for compromising the safety of American personnel and Afghans working for the US government. A recent report by congressional Republicans underscores the deaths of 13 American service members in the final days of troop withdrawals, and assigns partial blame to Vice President Kamala Harris. President Trump laid the groundwork for the withdrawal in a negotiated deal with the



Taliban as part of the 2020 Doha Agreement.<sup>11</sup> Twice as many Republicans as Independents think the withdrawal primarily hurt America's credibility as a global leader. Independents (34%) are more likely than Democrats (29%) and Republicans (23%) to think the war was primarily a failed mission from the start because the US military should not be in the business of nation-building. It's likely they would be most reluctant to attempt nation-building elsewhere.

## What do you think the most important lesson from America's war in Afghanistan is? \*

Select the statement you most identify with.



\*Question was preceded by this prompt: "In August 2021, the United States withdrew all US troops from Afghanistan, marking an end to the war in Afghanistan. The legacy of the war continues to be debated."

Numbers shown as percentages

Source: Institute for Global Affairs



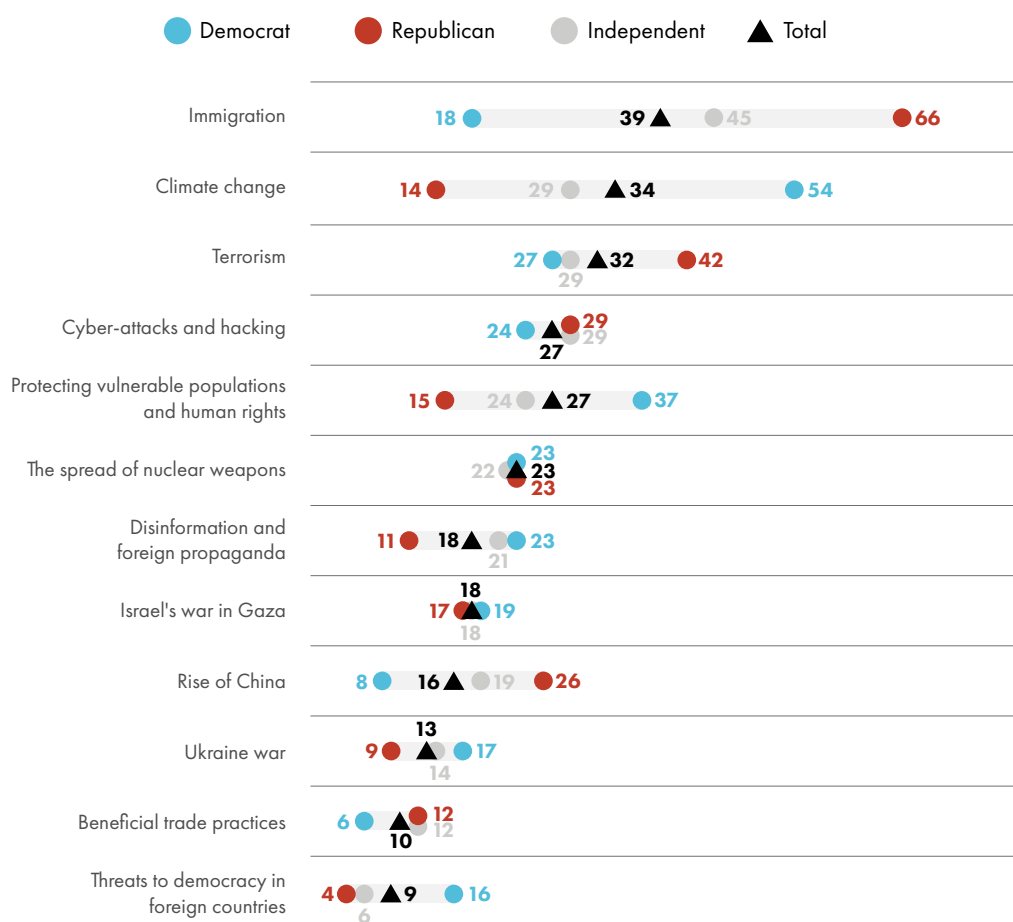
# Critical Issues on the Ballot

**The number one foreign policy issues for Democrats (climate change) and Republicans (immigration) are both among the top concerns for Independents.**

Americans identified immigration as their top foreign policy concern. It has received more advertising spending than any other campaign issue, and both candidates seek to be perceived as tough on the border.<sup>12</sup> A majority of Republicans and a plurality of Independents care most about immigration, while fewer than one in five Democrats selected it as a top issue, signaling a high degree of partisan disagreement. In the wake of Republican attacks on immigration, Kamala Harris highlighted her background as a prosecutor to argue she will be tough on gangs, drug cartels, and human traffickers at the border.<sup>13</sup> Though she may appeal to Independents with this argument, she also risks alienating Democrats.

## Which foreign policy issues do you care most about?

Select up to three answers.



Note: The sum of percentages is greater than 100 because respondents selected multiple answer options.

Numbers shown as percentages

Source: Institute for Global Affairs



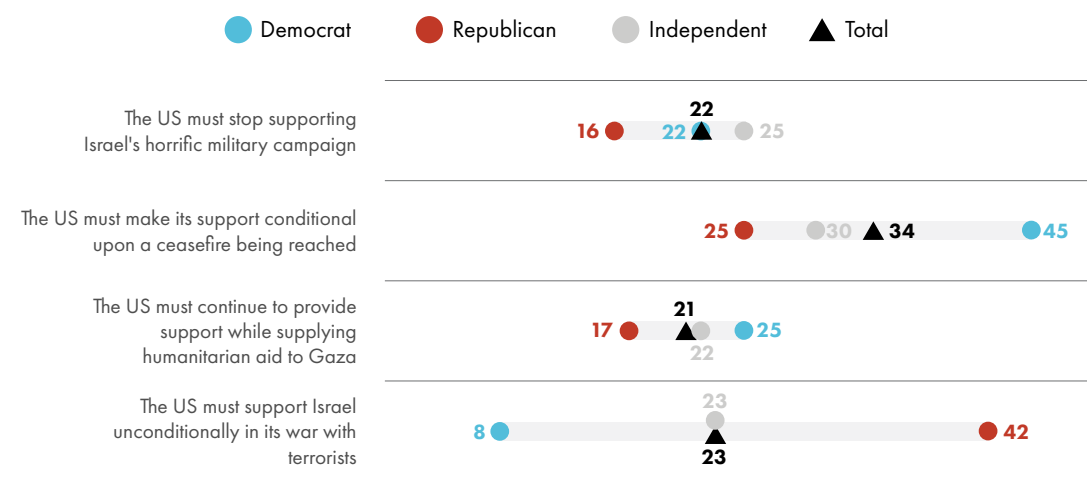
The three foreign policy issues about which Americans say they care most — immigration, climate change, terrorism — are also domestic issues to some extent. Perhaps because the campaigns know they are top concerns, they are often sensationalized in the run-up to elections. Climate change, cyber-attacks and hacking, and terrorism were all equally important foreign policy issues for Independents. Terrorism ranked second in foreign policy issues Republicans care most about. Although concerns about international terrorism have largely dissipated since 9/11, the fear associated directly with the safety of American citizens continues to make terrorism a greater concern than other topics.<sup>14</sup> More than one in four Americans selected cyber-attacks and hacking, which is fairly consistent across party lines.

**Though the rise of China and the wars in Ukraine and Gaza receive significant attention from foreign policy analysts, they are among the public's least cited concerns. Twice as many Democrats as Republicans list the Ukraine war and three times as many Republicans as Democrats list the rise of China as a top issue.**

The Ukraine war, Israel's war in Gaza, and the rise of China all placed in the bottom five foreign policy issues for Americans. While they are the subject of ample discussion among foreign policy experts, neither issue is cited by more than one in five Americans. More than four times as many Democrats as Republicans and (and twice as many Democrats as Independents) cite threats to democracy in foreign countries as a top issue. Still, fewer than one in five Democrats do so. This suggests President Biden's sweeping rhetoric about safeguarding democracy abroad might not resonate with most Americans, who appear more concerned with issues typically viewed as relevant to their day-to-day lives or which directly threaten their security.

**Majorities of Democrats and Independents think the US must either end support for Israel's war effort or make that support conditional on a ceasefire. A plurality of Republicans think the US must support Israel's war effort unconditionally.**

What is the right approach to the provision of military aid in support of Israel's war?



Numbers shown as percentages

Source: Institute for Global Affairs

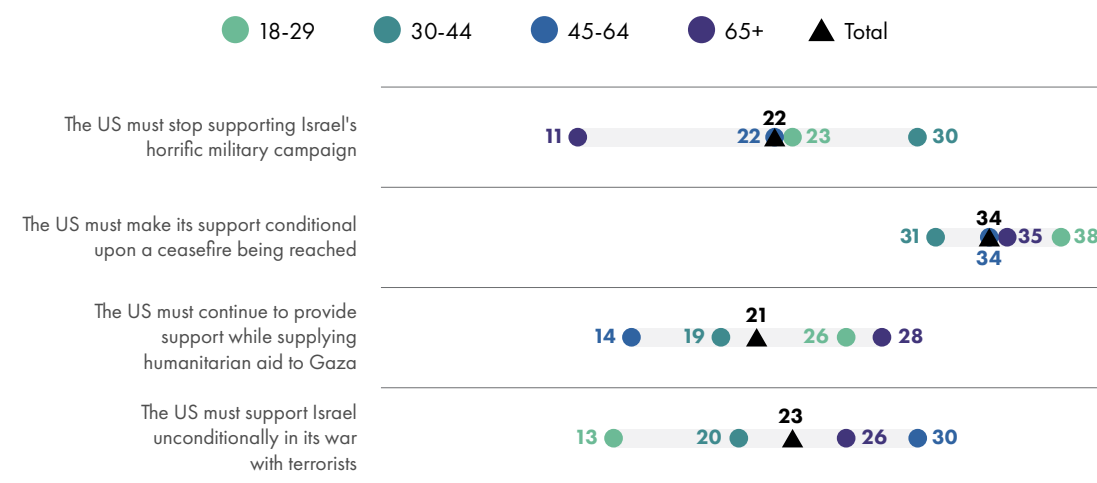


A plurality of Americans think the United States must make its support for Israel's war effort conditional on a ceasefire, indicating general support for Israel may be slipping as that country persists in the prosecution of its war. Democrats are more than twice as likely to think US support must be conditional than the United States must end its support of Israel's military campaign altogether. But fewer than one in ten Democrats think the United States must support Israel unconditionally. Independents are split more or less evenly. "The US must continue to provide support while supplying humanitarian aid to Gaza" is the least selected response among Republicans and Independents, perhaps because they perceive this position as trying to play both sides without a commitment to end the conflict.

**Adults under the age of 30 are least likely to think the US must support Israel's war unconditionally. Most under 45 think the US must either stop support for Israel's war effort or make that support conditional on a ceasefire.**

Pluralities across all age groups think the United States must make its support for Israel's war effort conditional on reaching a ceasefire, with adults under 30 the most likely to think so. Adults under 30 are also more than twice as likely as those 65 and older to think the United States must stop supporting Israel's military campaign in Gaza. Although fewer than one in four adults under 30 selected Israel's war in Gaza as a foreign policy issue they most care about, one third did select "protecting vulnerable populations and human rights." It is not surprising that students on college campuses protest against what some human rights experts have deemed war crimes and genocide in Gaza.<sup>15</sup> While the conduct and rhetoric of protesters might not represent younger adults in general, the concentration of Americans who hold this position is greatest in this age cohort. Generational differences found in a 2024 Pew Survey show older adults have a more favorable view of Israel, and may be more likely to interpret criticism of Israeli policy as antisemitic.<sup>16</sup>

**What is the right approach to the provision of military aid in support of Israel's war?**



Numbers shown as percentages

Source: Institute for Global Affairs

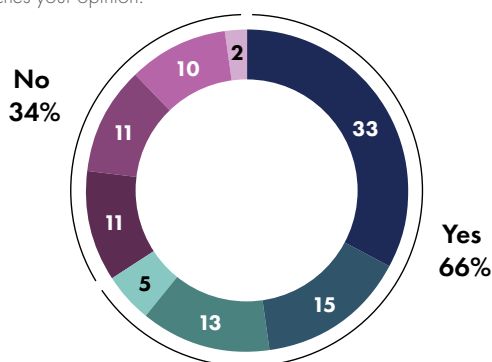


## Twice as many Americans think the US should push for a negotiated settlement to end the war in Ukraine as think it should not.

A majority of Americans want the United States and other NATO countries to push Ukraine toward a negotiated settlement with Russia. The war's human toll is the most frequently cited reason, with a plurality selecting "the war has killed or injured hundreds of thousands of people, and it needs to stop." After more than two years of fighting and Ukraine's counteroffensive failing to substantially alter the trajectory of the war, Americans do not appear confident Ukraine can achieve outright victory. Roughly a quarter of those in favor of a negotiated settlement think "the West can't afford to keep supporting this war indefinitely."

### Should the NATO member countries, including the US, push for a negotiated settlement for the war in Ukraine?

Pick the response option that best matches your opinion.



- No, Russia must be further weakened militarily before Ukraine can get as much leverage as it can in a negotiation.
- No, this is Ukraine's fight so the West should not seek to influence how it seeks to win or end the war.
- No, Ukraine should never negotiate with Russia, and focus instead on a complete military victory.
- No, Russia's claims to Ukrainian territory are legitimate and it must not concede its gains.
- Yes, the war has killed or injured hundreds of thousands of people, and it needs to stop.
- Yes, the West can't afford to keep supporting this war indefinitely, so Ukraine should keep what it can now.
- Yes, while Ukraine still has leverage, the West should urge it to settle for an imperfect victory.
- Yes, the West does not have the industrial capacity to protect itself while also supplying the Ukrainian war effort.

Numbers shown as percentages

Source: Institute for Global Affairs

## Most Americans, regardless of party, prefer the US pursue goals for the Ukraine war which would de-escalate the conflict over goals which perpetuate or intensify it.

The desire to end the war in Ukraine and avoid a wider conflict transcends party lines. "Weakening Russia to punish it for its aggression" was the least cited goal for the United States in Ukraine among

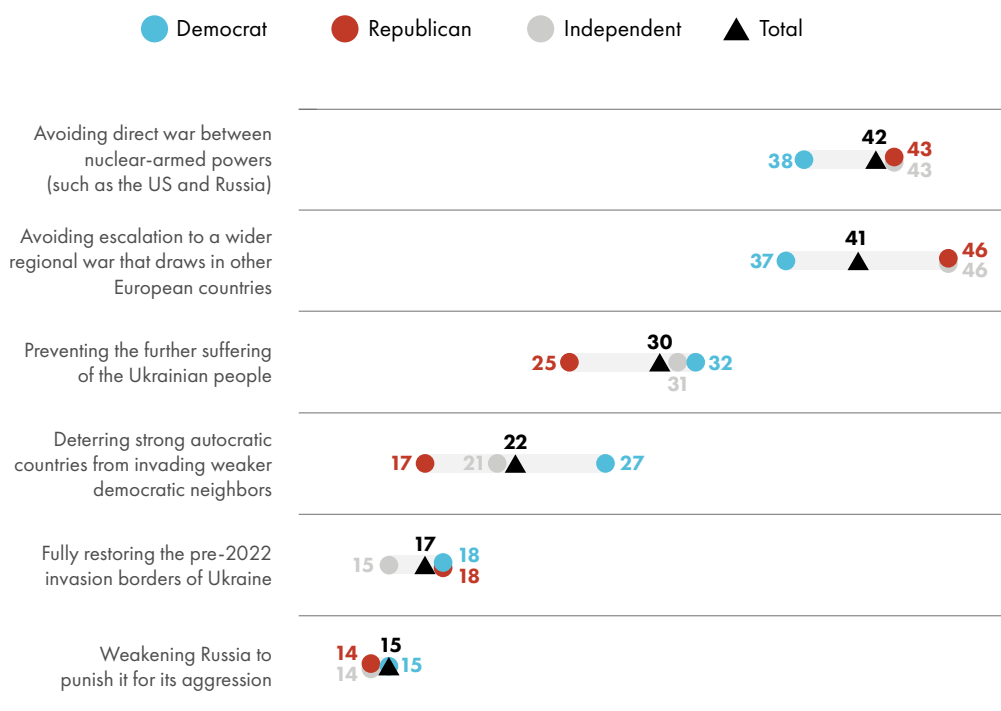


Democrats, Republicans, and Independents alike. This indicates the majority of Americans do not necessarily view this conflict through a Cold War lens, but think about it primarily in terms of the human and financial costs. Democrats are most likely to cite “deterring strong autocratic countries from invading weaker democratic neighbors” as a primary US goal, suggesting they do care about protecting democracy abroad. But it is not among their top priorities.

Adults who intend to vote for Donald Trump are about 30% more likely than those intending to vote for Kamala Harris to cite “avoiding direct war between nuclear-armed powers” as a primary US goal in Ukraine. Of the adults who intend to vote for a candidate other than Trump or Harris, 54% cite this same goal. Trump claims his relationship with Putin will help him negotiate a swift end to the war and this may appeal to these voters.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, Harris supporters are about 50% more likely than Trump supporters to select “preventing the further suffering of Ukrainians” as a primary US goal. Protecting vulnerable populations and human rights matters to Harris supporters but leaning into the security risks associated with a prolonged proxy war with Russia could appeal more to undecided voters.

## Considering the West's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which goals do you think the US should prioritize?

Select two.



Note: The sum of percentages is greater than 100 because respondents selected multiple answer options.

Numbers shown as percentages

Source: Institute for Global Affairs

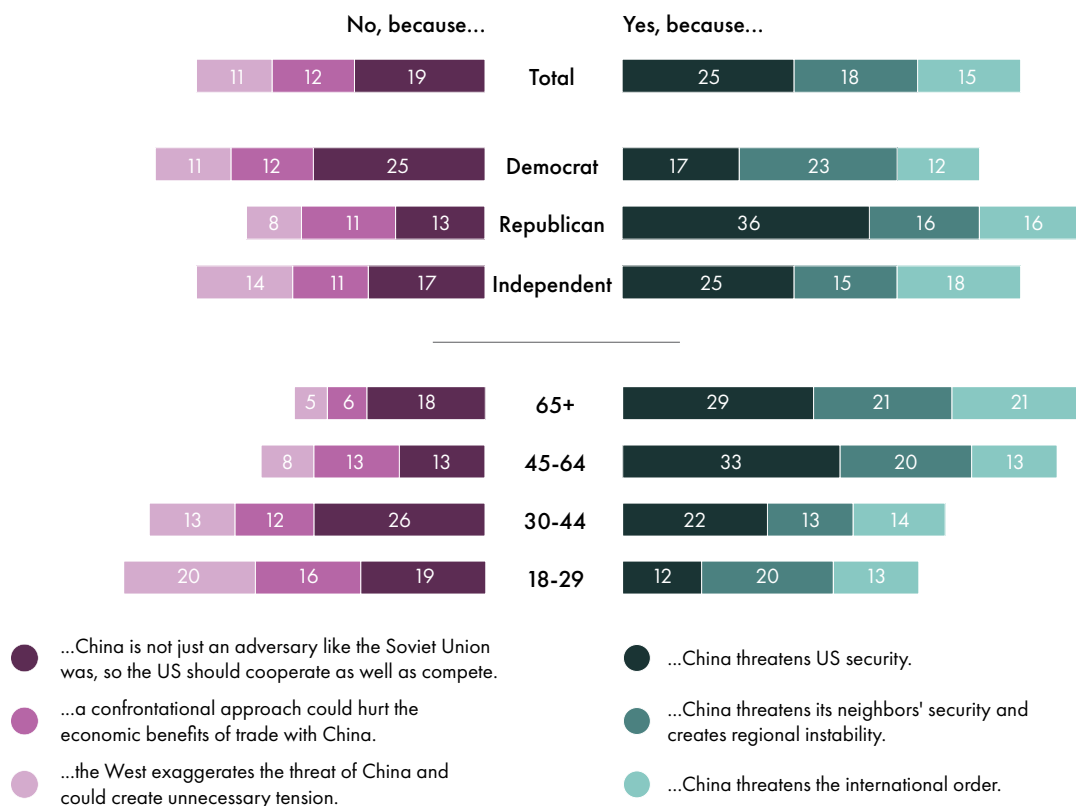


## Republicans are significantly more likely than Democrats and Independents to think the West should prepare for a new Cold War with China.

The majority of Americans think the West should prepare for a new Cold War between the United States and China. Sixty-eight percent of Republicans think so. Democrats more frequently cite the threat China poses to its neighbors' security and regional stability. Disputed claims in the South China Sea have led several neighboring countries — including Japan, Vietnam, and the Philippines — to conduct joint military exercises with the United States and allies.<sup>18</sup> Republicans and Independents, however, are more likely to perceive the threat as primarily to US security. While a slim majority (52%) of Democrats favor preparing for a new Cold War, they are more likely than Republicans and Independents to think the West should cooperate as well as compete with China.

### Should the West prepare for a "new Cold War" between the US and China?

Pick the response option that best matches your opinion.



Numbers shown as percentages

Source: Institute for Global Affairs





The gap between Democrats and Republicans on whether the West should prepare for a new Cold War with China narrows when looking at 2024 presidential candidate preference. While Republicans are about 30% more likely than Democrats to respond “yes” to the question, those who intend to vote for Trump are 22% more likely than Harris supporters to respond “yes.” Therefore, Trump supporters tend to be slightly less hawkish on China than the average Republican and Harris supporters tend to be slightly more hawkish on China than the average Democrat. A slight majority (51%) of adults who intend to vote for a candidate other than Trump or Harris think the West should not prepare for a new Cold War with China, suggesting they are less hawkish on China than supporters of either candidate.

Republican vice presidential nominee J.D. Vance has emphasized competition with China as a key issue of the 2024 presidential campaign. Particularly in the Rust Belt, where deindustrialization has seen the disappearance of manufacturing jobs, Vance has applied the same playbook often used with immigration, arguing that China’s economic rise threatens US jobs and the possibility of the American dream.<sup>19</sup> Harris’s comparatively less hawkish position on China could appeal to Independents and more moderate Trump supporters.

**Most Americans 45 and older think the West should prepare for a new Cold War between the US and China, most often expressing a perceived threat to US security. Conversely, a slim majority of Americans under 45 oppose preparations for a new Cold War, most often expressing a perceived need to cooperate.**

Older adults who remember the Cold War may view China like the former Soviet Union, perceiving a greater threat to US security than younger adults who came of age after the United States began to normalize diplomatic and trade relations with China in the late 1970s. Many younger adults think the West should not prepare for a new Cold War because the West exaggerates the threat of China and could create unnecessary tension. They have grown up seeing “Made in China” on consumer goods, and increasingly turn to Chinese retail giants like Shein and Temu for affordable products.<sup>20</sup> Many are active on the Chinese-owned social media platform TikTok and, according to a survey by Pew, are the least likely age group to support proposals to ban TikTok in the United States.<sup>21</sup>

**Though twice as many think the US should militarily defend Taiwan as not, about as many Americans express no opinion.**

Should the United States defend Taiwan militarily if it is attacked by China? \*



\* Question was preceded by this prompt: “Some American policymakers argue that the US should defend Taiwan from Chinese attack. They argue Taiwan is strategically important because it is located between China and other US partners in Asia (Japan, Philippines, South Korea), and is a democracy and trading partner. Other policymakers note the US policy of ‘strategic ambiguity’ does not commit the US to defend Taiwan, and the prospect of doing so has become increasingly costly and dangerous, even putting the US homeland at risk of a Chinese counter-attack.”

Numbers shown as percentages

Source: Institute for Global Affairs

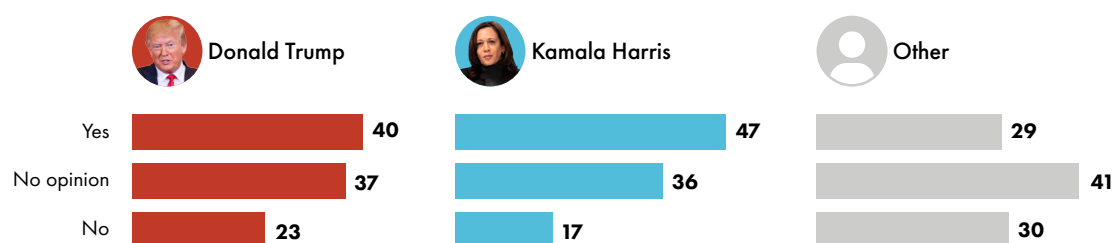


China has long aimed for reunification with Taiwan, whether peacefully or by force. The democratically elected ruling party of Taiwan, the Democratic Progressive Party, favors national independence. The United States holds a “One China” policy which maintains strategic ambiguity on the matter of defending Taiwan in the event of an attack from China.<sup>22</sup> With mounting Chinese aggression in the South China Sea and increased hawkishness on China from the foreign policy establishment, the American public seems more receptive to the idea of militarily defending Taiwan. For the first time, the Chicago Council on Global Affairs found a slim majority (52%) of Americans support committing US troops should China invade Taiwan.<sup>23</sup> Our data confirm there is more support for defending Taiwan than not, but more than a third of Americans still have no opinion. This could mean they either do not feel they have enough information to form an informed opinion, or they simply do not care enough about the issue.

### Adults who intend to vote for Kamala Harris are more hawkish on defending Taiwan than those who intend to vote for Donald Trump.

Democrats and Republicans are almost perfectly aligned on the defense of Taiwan, with 44% of Democrats and 45% of Republicans in favor. However, adults who intend to vote for Kamala Harris are 18% more likely than those intending to vote for Donald Trump to think the United States should militarily defend Taiwan. Trump voters appear to be less hawkish than the average Republican, and in the case of Taiwan, less hawkish than Harris voters. Independents are divided with 37% in favor, 27% against, and 41% reporting no opinion. Nearly a third of adults who intend to vote for a candidate other than Trump or Harris are against the United States defending Taiwan, departing from the broader trend, and the opposition among Independents exceeds the percentage of those in favor by one point. The large number of respondents without an opinion suggests the defense of Taiwan is not a particularly strong issue for candidates to focus on, as the public appears less engaged — unless they can effectively connect Taiwan to a broader message about China and America’s role in the world.

### Should the United States defend Taiwan militarily if it is attacked by China?\*



\*Question was preceded by this prompt: “Some American policymakers argue that the US should defend Taiwan from Chinese attack. They argue Taiwan is strategically important because it is located between China and other US partners in Asia (Japan, Philippines, South Korea), and is a democracy and trading partner. Other policymakers note the US policy of ‘strategic ambiguity’ does not commit the US to defend Taiwan, and the prospect of doing so has become increasingly costly and dangerous, even putting the US homeland at risk of a Chinese counter-attack.”

Numbers shown as percentages

Source: Institute for Global Affairs



# Highlights from Key Swing States

Nationally, Harris is viewed more than Trump as a strong leader, more likely to improve America's reputation, and less likely to send troops to an unnecessary war. In key swing states, Trump is viewed more than Harris in these ways.

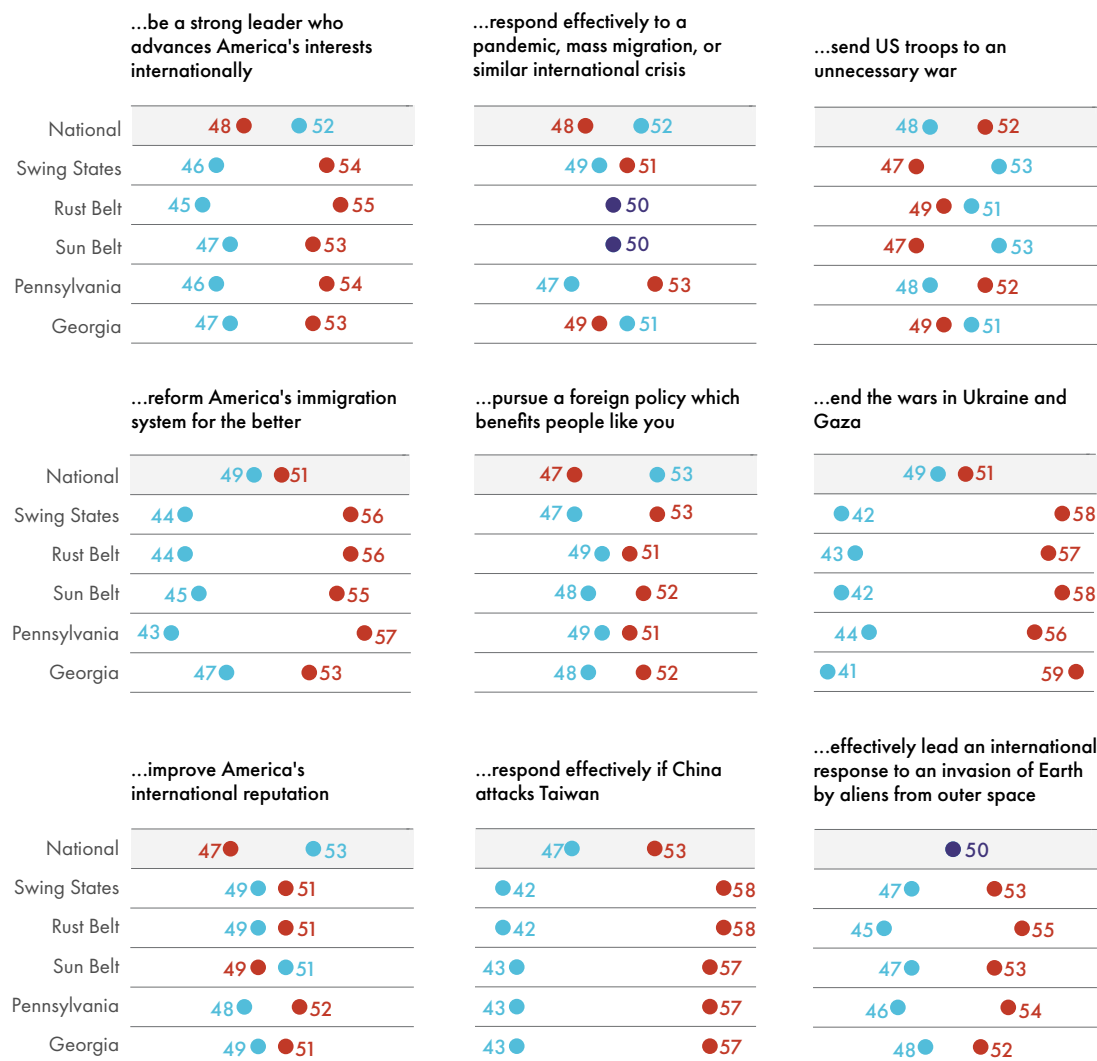
Pick which of the two major party presidential candidates you think is most likely to...



Donald Trump



Kamala Harris



Numbers shown as percentages

Source: Institute for Global Affairs



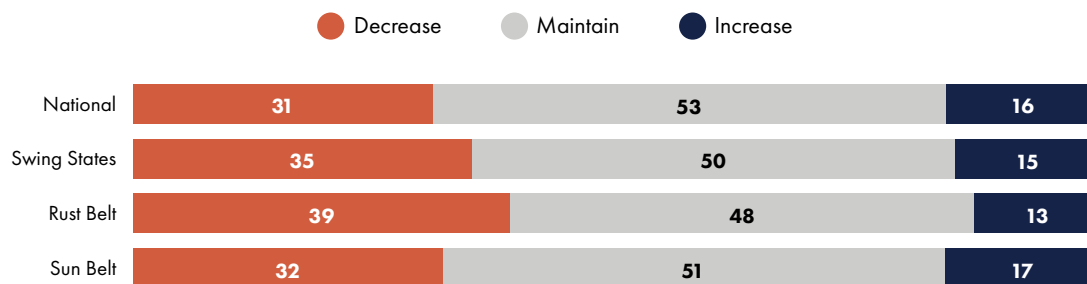
Recent polls show a tight race between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris. In swing states, foreign policy could play an outsized role in deciding the outcome. Some young voters who consider the handling of Israel's war in Gaza as a foreign policy failure of the Biden administration may not vote for Harris. It is unclear to what degree voters associate Harris with Biden's policies.

Americans in swing states think Trump is most likely to pursue a foreign policy that benefits Americans (53%) compared to Americans nationally who trust Harris more (53%). They also think Trump is more likely to end the wars in Ukraine and Gaza (58%), reform America's immigration system for the better (56%), and respond effectively if China attacks Taiwan (58%) compared to the national population.

**Twice as many Americans think the US should decrease its current level of military spending as increase it. In Rust Belt states, three times as many want to decrease as increase spending.**

Nearly twice as many Americans, nationally and in swing states, want to see military spending decrease rather than increase. Americans in the Rust Belt — a name used to describe states known for their manufacturing, steel, and automotive industries — are the least supportive of increasing military spending and also tend to be less supportive of other forms of international engagement. Rust Belt states have been particularly hard hit by the flight of US manufacturing overseas, which could lead to a regional sentiment against government spending on issues overseas.

In 2023, the United States spent around \$916 billion on its national defense, more than any other country. Do you think American lawmakers should increase, maintain, or decrease the level of military spending?



Numbers shown as percentages

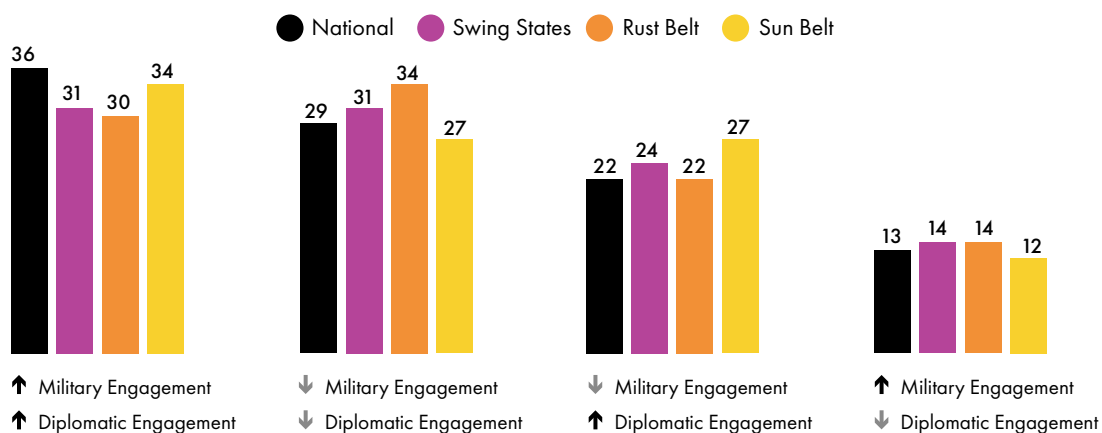
Source: Institute for Global Affairs

**Twenty percent more Rust Belt state respondents than Americans nationwide prefer both decreased military and diplomatic engagement.**

Rust Belt Americans are less supportive of international organizations than the national population (51% vs. 58%). They are also less likely to favor an increase in US troop presence in the Middle East in response to Israel's war in Gaza compared to Americans more broadly (18% vs. 23%). In short, Americans in the Rust Belt tend to think the United States should be less involved internationally, perhaps reflecting a greater desire to prioritize domestic issues.



## What type of global engagement do swing states Americans support?



Questions: "The US has agreed by treaty to defend many countries around the world. It currently stations around 200,000 active duty troops overseas. Which of the following statements comes closer to your view?"; "Since 1945, the US has created or participated in many international organizations like the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization. Which of the following statements comes closer to your view?"

Numbers shown as percentages

Source: Institute for Global Affairs

### People in Rust Belt states are more likely to care about the rise of China and less likely to care about climate change than Americans nationally. Those in Sun Belt states are more likely to care about immigration.

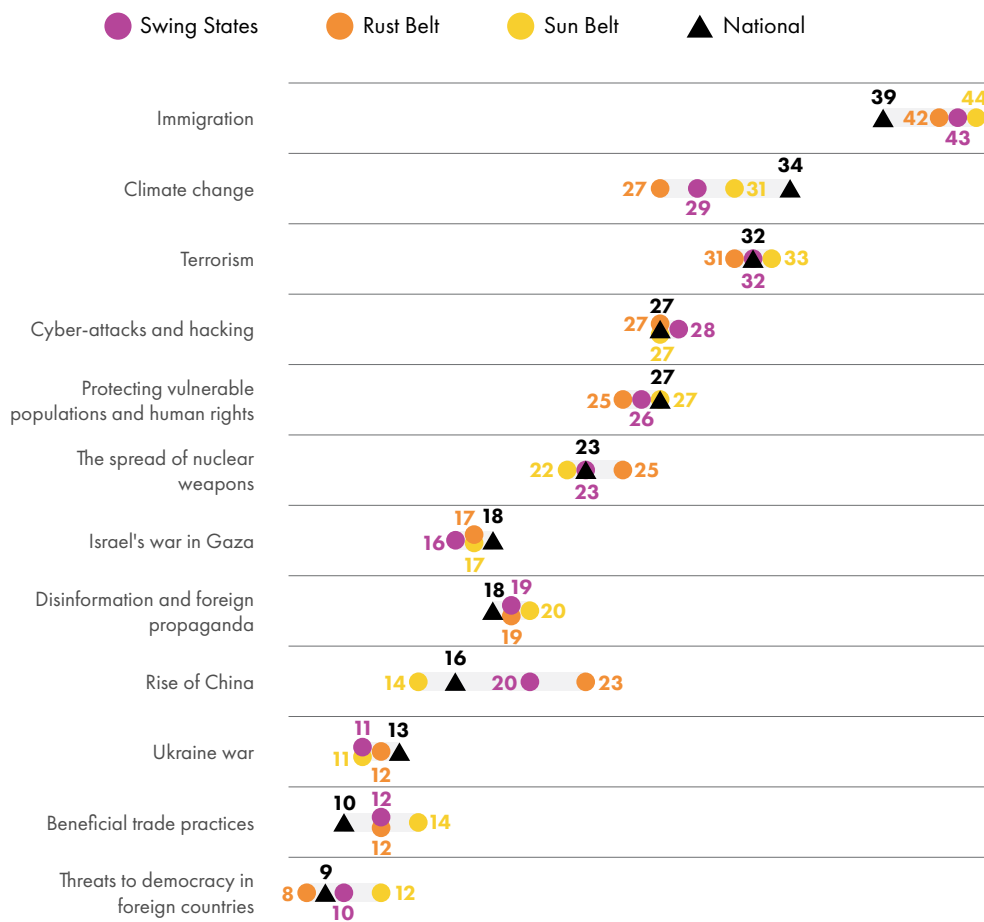
Immigration, climate change, and terrorism top the list of issues Americans care most about, regardless of party or geography. However, the degree to which they care about these issues varies. Immigration is a more significant concern across swing states than elsewhere. Sun Belt Americans care about it most. Arizona, Nevada, and Georgia — the three Sun Belt states featured in this survey — have each grappled with record levels of immigration. Phoenix, Las Vegas, and Atlanta are among the twenty cities with the largest foreign-born populations.<sup>24</sup>

More Americans in Rust Belt and Sun Belt states selected terrorism than climate change. People in the Rust Belt, whose industries have been impacted by outsourcing, more frequently than most Americans cite the rise of China among the issues they care most about.



## Which foreign policy issues do you care most about?

Select up to three answers.



Numbers shown as percentages

Source: Institute for Global Affairs

### Three in four Americans — and significantly more in the Rust Belt — think the president should be required to gain congressional approval before ordering military action overseas.

Since the beginning of the Cold War, the United States has engaged in a number of armed conflicts abroad without congressional approval. There were periods with greater congressional oversight after the Vietnam War, but a marked decline in congressional influence over military force began with the Gulf War and intensified after 9/11. Many of the mechanisms that enable the executive branch to wield military power remain in place, including three different Authorizations for Use of Military Force (AUMF). The 2001 AUMF has since been used against a wide range of actors, most recently the Houthi movement and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard.<sup>25</sup> The Senate rejected an attempt to repeal that law in 2023.<sup>26</sup> Americans 65 and older strongly support requiring congressional approval (79%). Democrats are least



likely to support requirements (70%), with more support from Republicans (77%) and Independents (79%) – though this could be skewed by the current Democratic administration.

The president of the United States should be able to order military action overseas **without approval from Congress.**

Unless the country is under attack, the president of the United States should be **required to seek approval from Congress** before ordering military action overseas.



Question: “The US Constitution gives Congress the sole authority to declare war. Yet, recent resolutions allow the president to commit troops overseas without such a declaration in certain circumstances. Which of the following statements comes closer to your view, even if neither is exactly right?”

Numbers shown as percentages

Source: Institute for Global Affairs

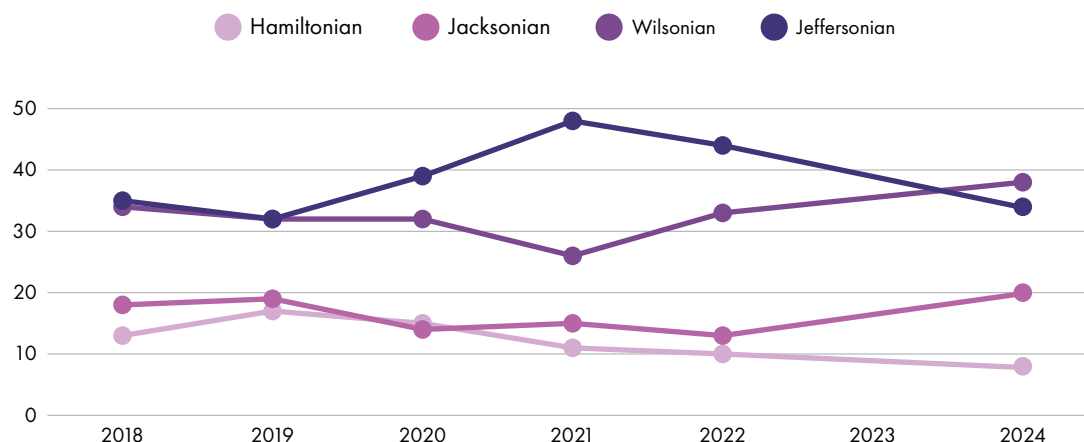


# How Americans See America's Role

**A plurality of Americans hold a Wilsonian view of US foreign relations — more than anytime in the past seven years.**

Professor Walter Russell Mead identifies four US foreign policy traditions: Hamiltonian, Jeffersonian, Jacksonian, and Wilsonian. These ideal types have dominated public sentiment and competed with one another for influence throughout the United States' history.<sup>27</sup> In order to determine Americans' alignment with these traditions, we asked respondents three questions about their views on the priorities and purpose of US foreign policy. Survey takers were assigned a category if two of their responses corresponded to one of the four schools of thought.<sup>28</sup>

## Trends in American Worldviews



Note: No data pertaining to the Mead typology was collected in 2023.

Numbers shown as percentages

Source: Institute for Global Affairs

*Hamiltonianism* derives from the philosophy espoused by the founding father and first US Treasury Secretary. It emphasizes commerce as the engine of American prosperity, civic nationalism as the glue that holds America together, and pragmatism to temper ambitions to remake the world. A leading worldview during the Cold War, Hamiltonianism fell out of fashion in the 1990s. While Mead makes a case for the revival of this tradition, few Americans, according to our survey, hold Hamiltonian sentiments.<sup>29</sup>

*Jeffersonianism* is a more prevalent view today in the United States. More than a third of Americans hold views consistent with the tradition — a proportion which has held steady since we first fielded this survey in 2018. An ideological challenger to Hamiltonian points of view, Jeffersonians believe America is secure when it husbands its resources and focuses the bulk of its attention on issues close to home. The United States is limited in its ability to shape the world, and interventionism leads to blowback. Modern Jeffersonians, Mead argues, came into prominence as a reaction to the military misadventures in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya.<sup>30</sup>

*Wilsonianism*, named after US President Woodrow Wilson, emerged during the First World War, found its footing in the Second, and hit its stride when America emerged as the world's sole superpower at





the end of the Cold War. Wilsonianism seeks to promote a rules-based order premised on democracy, liberal economics, and respect for human rights.

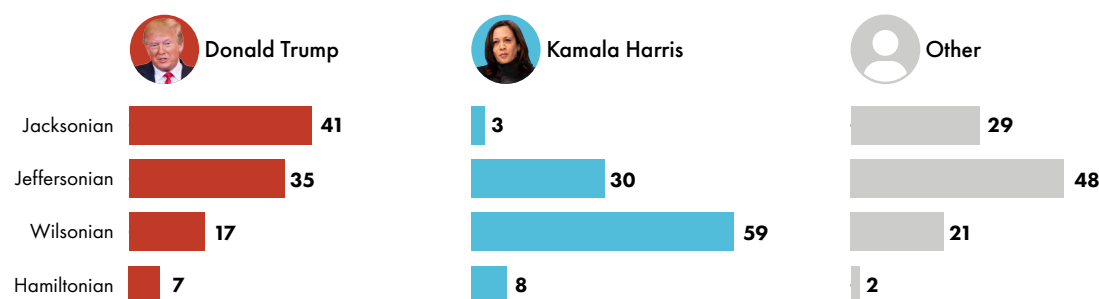
While some of the more ambitious Wilsonian assumptions of the post-Cold War era have since been undermined – e.g., that liberal trade policies would constrain authoritarianism in China or that US-led nation-building efforts could build stable democracies – our survey nevertheless reveals an uptick in the number of Wilsonians. The Wilsonian tradition hit its lowest mark in 2021 amid America’s withdrawal from Afghanistan.<sup>31</sup> Today, as the United States supports Ukraine’s and Israel’s wars, nearly two in five Americans fit this mold.

*Jacksonianism* is the fourth tradition in Mead’s taxonomy. Derived from the politics of President Andrew Jackson, this worldview tends to distrust international institutions specifically and deep engagement with the world generally. Yet it supports the development of a strong military that can respond to threats with overwhelming force. Contemporary Jacksonian sentiment has become more prevalent with the rise of right-wing populism. “America has suddenly become a more Jacksonian nation,” Mead declared following the assassination attempt of former President Trump. Indeed, Jacksonianism is on the rise after it began to decline at the tail end of Trump’s presidency – though less than one in four Americans can currently be described as such.<sup>32</sup>

**Trump and Harris supporters have very different views of America’s role in the world. Nearly half of Harris supporters are Wilsonian in outlook, while a third of Trump supporters fit a Jacksonian worldview.**

The Jacksonian resurgence, if there is one, is primarily a Republican phenomenon. A plurality of Republicans (33%) are Jacksonians, while only 15% of Independents and 4% of Democrats hold this worldview. The percentage is even higher among Trump supporters. In many ways, Trump descends from this tradition. His unilateralism is well documented. As president, he scorned global institutions like the United Nations and withdrew the United States from the Iran nuclear deal, Paris Climate Accords, and the Trans-Pacific Partnership. His campaign promises to achieve “peace through strength,” and, should he win in November, is expected to greatly increase military spending – even if fewer than a third of his supporters (30%) think maintaining overwhelming military strength is the best way to keep the United States safe.<sup>33</sup> At the same time, he pitches himself as a peacemaker, critical of wars peripheral to American interests. His campaign also promises to enact sweeping tariffs on goods imported into the United States.

American Worldviews



Numbers shown as percentages

Source: Institute for Global Affairs



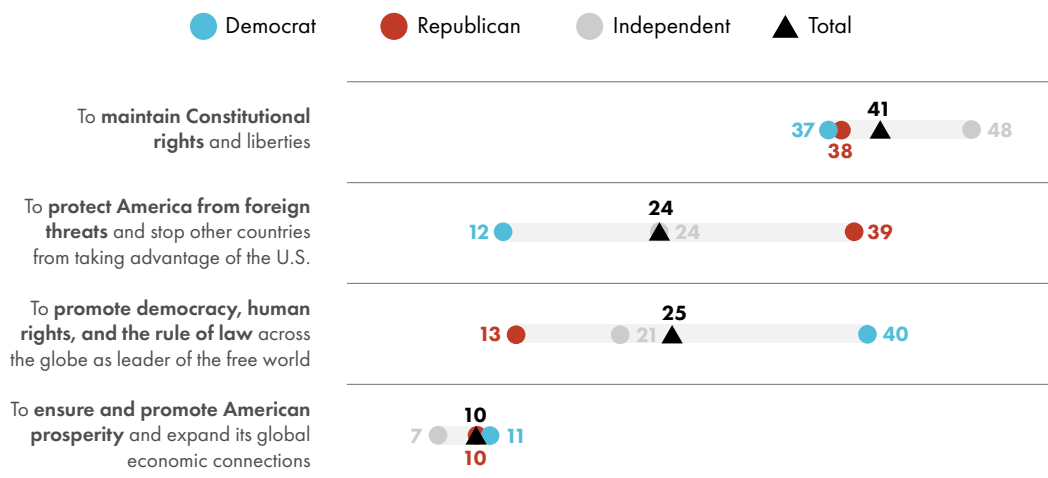
Nearly half (46%) of Democrats – and an even greater number of Harris supporters – are, by contrast, Wilsonian. The Biden administration distanced itself from certain policies associated with this tradition, notably the promotion of democracy and human rights through military intervention in places such as Afghanistan. But Biden has embraced other aspects. His rhetoric paints a world caught in a struggle between democracy and authoritarianism in which America is the “arsenal of democracy.”<sup>34</sup> America, he contends, has a moral and strategic obligation to support Ukraine and Israel in their wars against Russia and Hamas.

Harris is expected to pick up where Biden left off on foreign policy, but many speculate she could take a more modest approach to foreign engagement, in which diplomacy is prioritized over the military, and issues at home are prioritized over those abroad. Though Harris has embraced some of Biden’s understanding of American indispensability, her ticket’s anti-war credentials and comments distancing herself from Biden’s Israel policy could resonate with other Americans – 32% of Independents, 24% of Republicans, and 26% of Americans are Jeffersonian in their outlook.<sup>35</sup>

**Three times as many Republicans as Democrats think the government’s primary obligation should be to protect America from foreign threats and stop other countries from taking advantage of the US. Three times as many Democrats as Republicans think its primary obligation should be to promote democracy, human rights, and the rule of law across the globe.**

The traditions in Mead’s typology hold different assumptions about the purpose of America’s power in the world. A plurality (41%) of Americans hold the Jeffersonian view that the primary obligation of the US government is maintaining constitutional rights and liberties. More than a quarter think it is the Wilsonian view: to promote democracy abroad (26%). Just shy of a quarter selected the Jacksonian view: to protect the United States from foreign threats and stop other countries from taking advantage of it (24%). Fewer still think the primary obligation is the Hamiltonian expansion of trade connections and promotion of American prosperity (10%).

Of those listed below, which is the most important obligation of the United States government?



Numbers shown as percentages

Source: Institute for Global Affairs



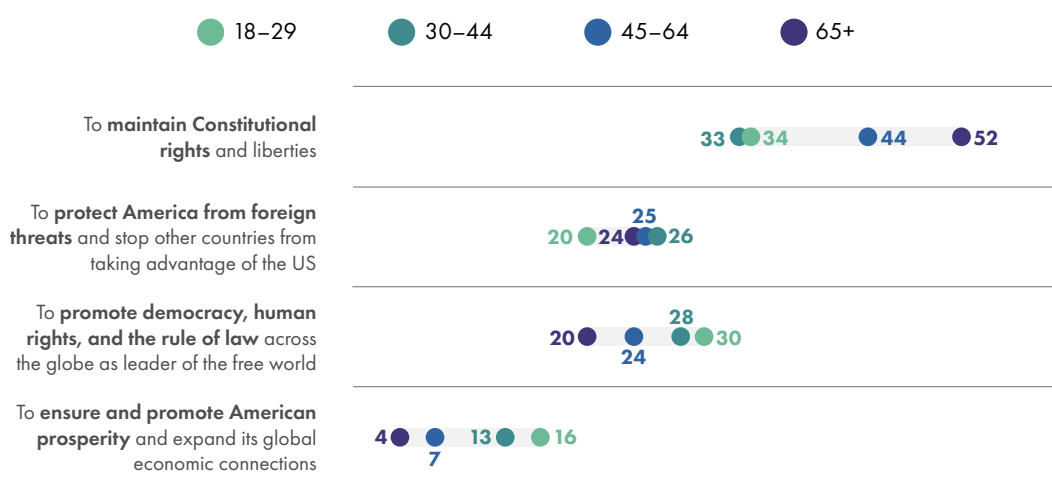
More than a third of Republicans and Democrats and nearly half of Independents think the US government's primary obligation is to maintain American rights and liberties. Democrats and Republicans differ in other ways. A plurality of Republicans hold the Jacksonian view that the government has an obligation to stop other countries from taking advantage of the United States. Nearly half of Democrats, by contrast, think the United States government is obligated to promote democracy, human rights, and the rule of law around the world.

**Americans under 45 are more likely than their older counterparts to prioritize the promotion of economic prosperity domestically and democracy internationally. Americans 45 and older focus most on the maintenance of constitutional rights and liberties.**

Although few Americans think trade and economics should be the government's primary foreign policy objective, young people – those between the ages of 18 and 29 – are the most likely to think it should be. Whether informed by early memories of the 2008 financial crisis, COVID-19 lockdowns, or the rising cost of living, young Americans are more financially insecure than previous generations.<sup>36</sup> Even still, economics as the goal of foreign policy is their least frequently selected response.<sup>37</sup> Among Americans 65 and older, only 4% think expanding prosperity is the US government's primary obligation.

Pluralities across all age groups think the US government's main focus should be on protecting constitutional rights and liberties. The proportion of Americans who hold this view increases with age. More than half of Americans 65 and older – and to a greater extent than any other cohort – think this is the most important obligation.

Of those listed below, which is the most important obligation of the United States government?



Numbers shown as percentages

Source: Institute for Global Affairs

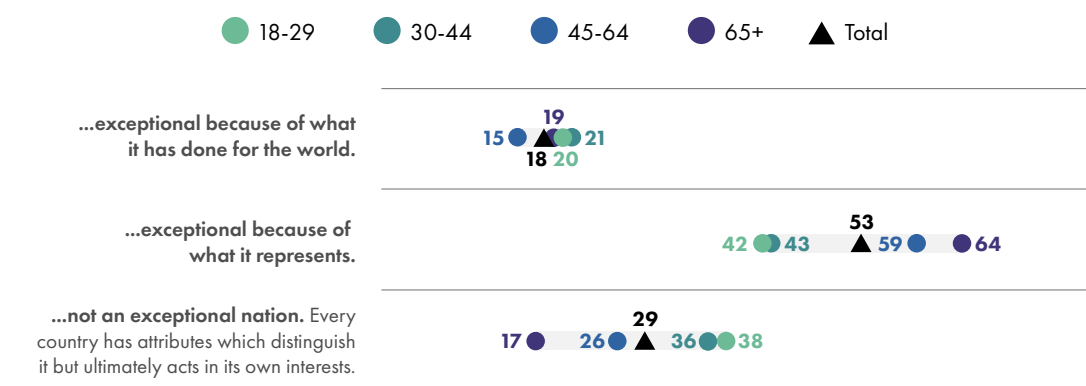


**A plurality of Americans in every age group think the United States is exceptional because of what it represents. Americans under 30 are the group most likely to think America is not an exceptional nation.**

The belief in American exceptionalism – the idea that the United States is endowed with unique qualities that set it apart from the world's other nations – increases with age.

Americans' views today may be shaped by perceptions of financial insecurity, the legacies of inconclusive wars, gridlock and polarization in government, the emergence of other geopolitical powers, as well as a panoply of competing narratives propagated in an increasingly fragmented media environment.

America is...



Numbers shown as percentages

Source: Institute for Global Affairs

Interpretations of the traits, values, and principles which distinguish America vary. Biden's oft-repeated phrase that America must lead by the power of its example is one variation. Trump tells a different story in which the United States must look to the past to restore its greatness. Harris espouses a more inclusive vision in which America continues to be an indispensable nation.

While Harris asserts America is obligated to uphold democracy around the world, more of her supporters than Trump supporters think the United States is not exceptional. Among those who intend to vote for Harris, 48% think the United States is exceptional because of what it represents, 18% think it is because of what it has done for the world, and 34% believe the United States isn't exceptional. Among Trump supporters, 62% think America is exceptional for what it represents, 21% think it is for what it has done, and only 16% think it isn't exceptional.

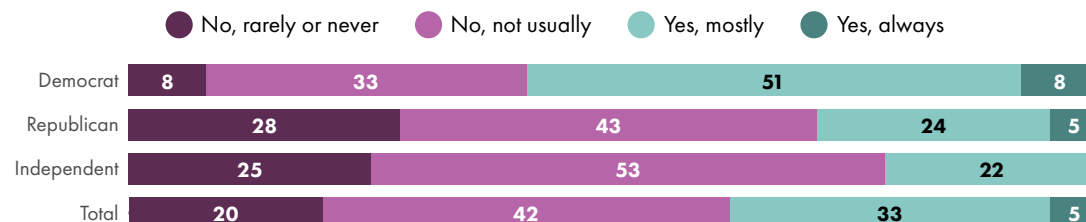
**Republicans and Independents trust foreign policy elites significantly less to have their best interests in mind than Democrats do.**

Mead highlights the mistrust of elites as another aspect of the Jacksonian tradition. Donald Trump exemplifies this tradition as he disparages government officials, high and low.<sup>38</sup> He accuses a "deep state" of undermining his presidency and presidential campaigns. In the realm of foreign policy, his administration oversaw the hollowing out of career officers from the State Department and questioned



orthodoxies within the foreign policy establishment, such as the sanctity of alliances.<sup>39</sup> Critics of Trump’s foreign policy praised the so-called “adults in the room” – those military leaders, appointed officials, and career bureaucrats, who, for better or worse pushed back against Trump’s foreign policy agenda – and these establishmentarians drew opprobrium from the former president.

## Do you believe that people in Washington who set the direction of US foreign policy have in mind the best interests of Americans like you?



Numbers shown as percentages

Source: Institute for Global Affairs

Americans are generally skeptical that foreign policy leaders in Washington have their best interests in mind. More than half believe foreign policymakers rarely or never pursue the interests of people like them. Yet, Democrats have much more faith than the public as a whole. More than half say policymakers often or constantly try to make decisions reflecting their interests. Republicans and Independents are much less trusting. Roughly three in four lack trust in foreign policy elites.

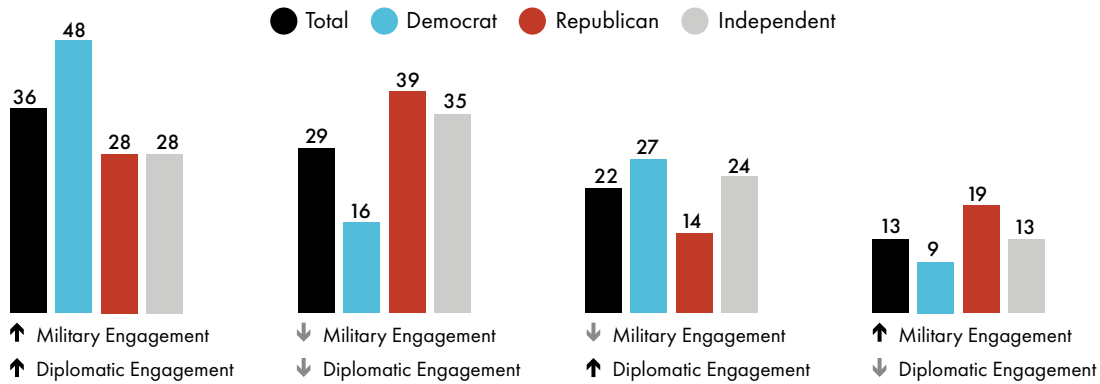
### Nearly half of Democrats — but only 28% of Republicans — want to increase both diplomatic and military engagement. A plurality of Trump supporters want to decrease both diplomatic and military engagement.

More than a third of Americans remain deeply invested in America’s presence abroad and want to increase both diplomatic and military engagement. A slim majority of Harris supporters favor this type of global engagement (51%). More than a quarter of Americans want to decrease both diplomatic and military engagement overseas, signaling a desire to be less involved in international affairs and to focus more on domestic issues. A plurality of Republicans and a larger plurality of Trump supporters favor this level of global engagement, as well as a plurality of Independents.

Less than a quarter of Americans want to increase diplomatic engagement but decrease military engagement, which may entail withdrawing troops stationed overseas while playing a key role in international organizations. This is the second most common view among Democrats and the least common among Republicans. Relatively few want to increase military engagement but decrease diplomatic engagement, a view least commonly held among Democrats and Independents.



## What type of global engagement do Americans support?



Questions: "The US has agreed by treaty to defend many countries around the world. It currently stations around 200,000 active duty troops overseas. Which of the following statements comes closer to your view?"; "Since 1945, the US has created or participated in many international organizations like the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization. Which of the following statements comes closer to your view?"

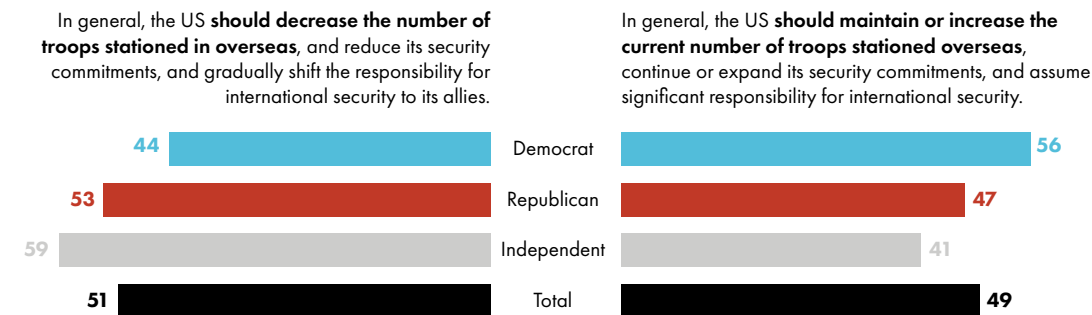
Numbers shown as percentages

Source: Institute for Global Affairs

### Majorities of Republicans and Independents think the US should decrease the number of overseas troops, reduce its security commitments, and shift the responsibility for international security to allies.

Americans hold mixed views of America's military posture — about half think the United States should decrease or withdraw the troops it stations abroad and shift responsibility for international security to its allies. A slim majority of Republicans and even more independents support a reduced military footprint.

A slight majority of Democrats, by contrast, support an equal or greater role for the US military abroad.. The gulf between those who intend to vote for Harris and those who intend to vote for Trump is even greater. While 58% of Harris supporters think the United States should maintain or increase its troops abroad, the same percentage of Trump supporters think the United States should decrease its military footprint. Voters who intend to vote for another candidate align with Trump supporters — 56% prefer a decrease.



Question: "The US has agreed by treaty to defend many countries around the world. It currently stations around 200,000 active duty troops overseas. Which of the following statements comes closer to your view?"

Numbers shown as percentages

Source: Institute for Global Affairs



## Nearly half of Americans think the US should bring more troops home from the Middle East. Yet a third of Republicans think it should increase its troop presence there.

President Biden came into office determined to shift America's national security focus to Asia. The Biden administration withdrew US troops from Afghanistan, etched a security pact with Australia and the United Kingdom, and expanded troop access to the Philippines. This initiative may guide US policy for decades. Yet foreign policy during the Biden administration largely focused on the Middle East and Europe.

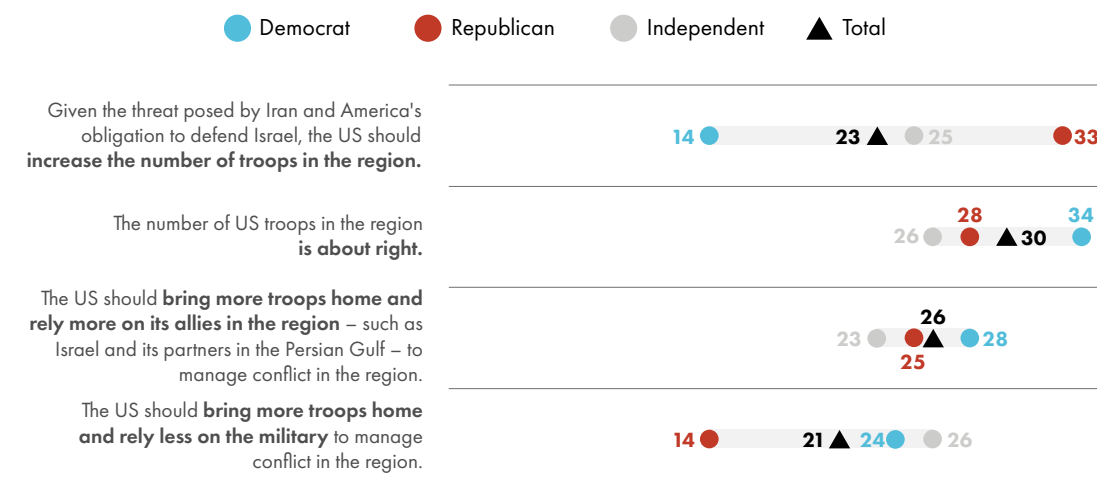
In the Middle East, Washington has spent time and energy supporting Israel in its war in Gaza, brokering a ceasefire, and negotiating a security pact with Saudi Arabia — all while managing the war's escalatory risks.

President Biden justifies the deployment of US assets to the Middle East, notably in the Red Sea, as a geopolitical necessity, but this is the region where the deployment of the US military appears most controversial for Democrats. Fewer than a fifth of Democrats support increasing troops to the region, while roughly half support a decrease either because they think the United States should rely on allies more or because the US military should be relied on less.

Among Republicans, there is a strong desire to maintain or increase America's military presence in the Middle East. Despite the Biden administration's robust support for Israel, Republican lawmakers have criticized the delay in the transfer of certain weapons and accused the administration of appeasing Iran. Republicans are twice as likely as Democrats to think more troops should be deployed to the region, and more than a quarter of Republicans think the number of troops stationed there is "about right." Fewer than half think more service members should be brought home.

Independents, meanwhile, are nearly split across all four answer options: About half support bringing troops home for one reason or another.

### Which of the following comes closest to your view?



Question was preceded by this prompt: "The United States has more than 30,000 troops stationed in the Middle East. Since the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas War, additional military capabilities have been sent to bolster force protection for these troops and to help defend Israel."

Numbers shown as percentages

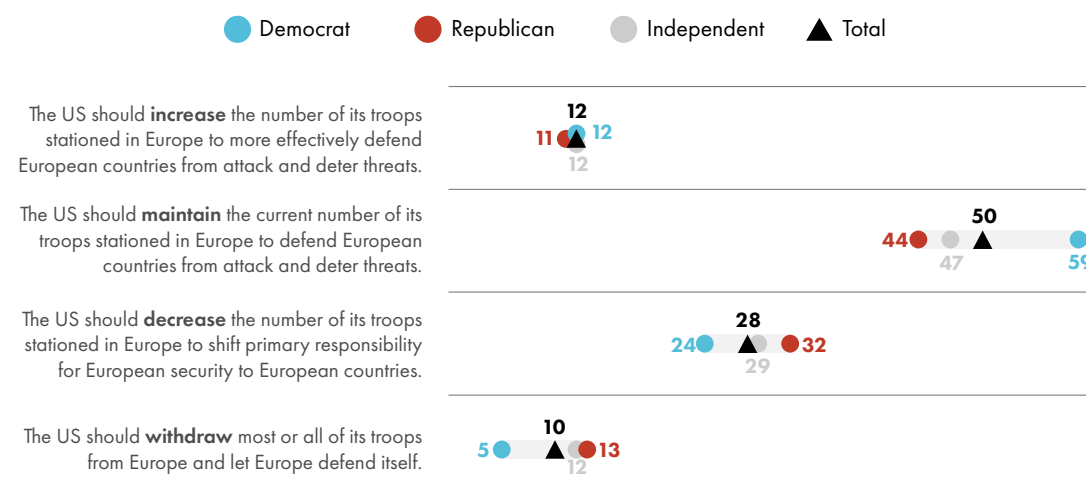
Source: Institute for Global Affairs



## Few Americans want to increase troop levels in Europe. Among Republicans, just as many would prefer to decrease or withdraw US forces altogether as maintain current levels.

If the future of America's military presence in the Middle East is a cleavage issue among Democrats, then it's Europe that stokes divisions among Republicans. Donald Trump frequently denigrates the transatlantic alliance, and his candidacy has raised concerns that the United States could reduce its role in NATO, if not withdraw from the pact entirely. Some on the shortlist to join the Trump administration see Europe as a distraction from Asia.<sup>40</sup>

Among Republicans, about as many support either decreasing or removing most US forces from the continent as support the status quo. But it's not only Republicans who are wary of overcommitting US troops, weapons, and material to Europe. Few Independents and Democrats think it's necessary for the United States to deploy more troops to the continent to defend and deter attacks on European countries. However, most Democrats support maintaining the current number of troops stationed in Europe, while Independents and Republicans are both divided on whether troop levels should be maintained, or if they should be decreased or withdrawn entirely from Europe.



Question: Which of the following statements comes closest to your view?

Numbers shown as percentages

Source: Institute for Global Affairs

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 sparked a rich debate on the future of America's role in Europe. For some, it demonstrates the importance of America in the alliance.<sup>41</sup> Biden, who calls the alliance "sacrosanct," permanently increased the number of American troops on NATO's eastern flank and reassured Europe of America's commitment to the continent.<sup>42</sup> But for others, it shows the alliance to be a liability for the United States.<sup>43</sup> Yet, few officials, analysts, or Americans generally would contest the notion that countries in Europe could invest more in its security.<sup>44</sup>

Few Americans think the United States should increase its military presence in Europe. Half say it should stay the same, and just over a quarter think the United States should shift more responsibility to the Europeans.





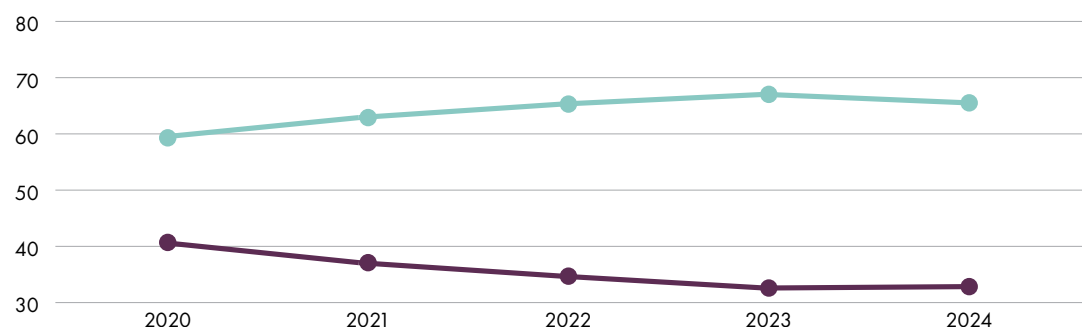
## Issues for the Next President

### Two-thirds of Americans believe the United States should negotiate directly with any and all adversaries to avoid military confrontation.

Prison exchanges negotiated by the Biden administration with the Russian government have been noted as a major foreign policy success by Americans, regardless of partisan affiliation.<sup>45</sup> This preference for negotiation holds across partisan lines. Americans 65 and older support negotiation more than their younger peers, including adults under age 30 (71% vs. 63%).<sup>46</sup> People who believe the United States should continue to work to rekindle the 2015 Iran nuclear deal are slightly more likely to believe in negotiation more broadly than people who do not support restarting the nuclear deal (68% vs. 55%).<sup>47</sup> There are similar trends between those who believe that the United States should pursue a settlement in the Russia-Ukraine War and those who do not (69% vs. 59%).<sup>48</sup> This indicates that robust attempts at negotiation are a general preference of Americans, regardless of the geopolitical context.

Which of the following statements comes closer to your view, even if neither is exactly right?

- The US **should negotiate** directly with adversaries to try to avoid military confrontation, even if those adversaries are human rights abusers, dictators, or home to terrorist organizations.
- The US **should not negotiate** directly with adversaries, even if negotiating could avoid military confrontation, if those adversaries are known human rights abusers, dictators, or home to terrorist organizations.

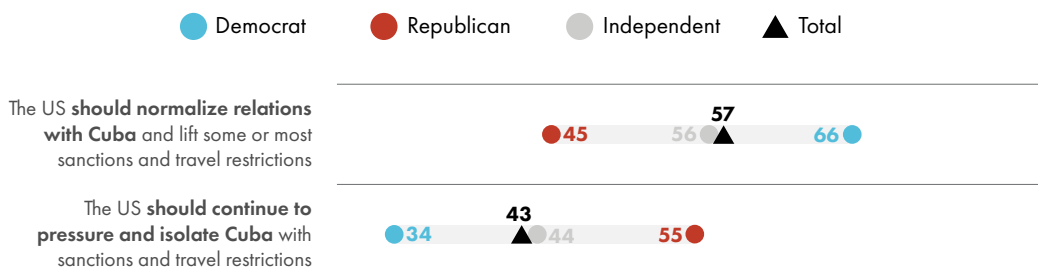


Numbers shown as percentages

Source: Institute for Global Affairs

### Twice as many Democrats think the US should normalize relations with Cuba as should continue to pressure and isolate Cuba. Republicans and Independents are more evenly divided.

The United States has maintained a general embargo on Cuban exports since 1962. Relations thawed briefly during the Obama administration, but the Trump administration resumed all sanctions in 2017. The United Nation General Assembly has criticized the embargo since it restricts Cubans' access to essential goods like food and medicine. Americans support normalizing relations with Cuba by a slim majority (56%). A majority of Independents support normalization (55%) while Republicans oppose it by the same margin (55%). Americans in Rust Belt states support normalization by a slightly wider margin than the general population (61%).<sup>49</sup>



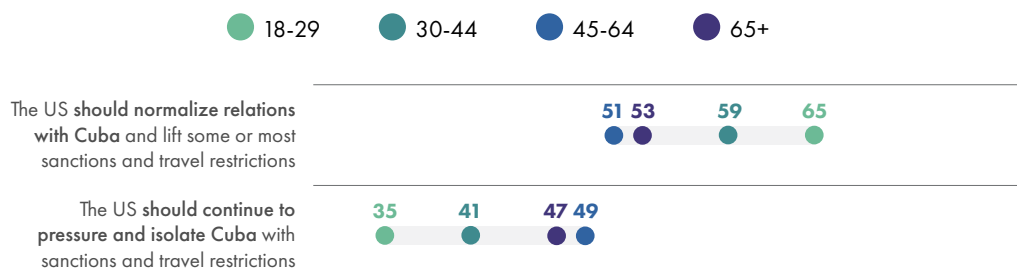
Question: "Cuba is an island nation ruled by a repressive single-party government located 90 miles from Florida. Since the early 1960s, the US has had an embargo on Cuba, limiting travel to and trade with the country. Some say Cuba policy is a relic of the Cold War and that the US should lift sanctions because they harm ordinary Cubans and haven't worked to influence positive changes. Others say US policy shouldn't change because the country is still an authoritarian regime that maintains close ties to US adversaries. What do YOU think?"

Numbers shown as percentages

Source: Institute for Global Affairs

### Majorities across every age group think the US should normalize relations with Cuba. Nearly twice as many younger Americans think it should do so as think it should continue to pressure and isolate Cuba.

Relations with Cuba have historically been a campaign issue during presidential elections. Florida, with the largest Cuban-American population, has become more solidly Republican and is no longer a swing state. This year, the Biden administration quietly lifted some financial restrictions on Cuban businesses.<sup>50</sup>



Question: Cuba is an island nation ruled by a repressive single-party government located 90 miles from Florida. Since the early 1960s, the U.S. has had an embargo on Cuba, limiting travel to and trade with the country. Some say Cuba policy is a relic of the Cold War and that the U. should lift sanctions because they harm ordinary Cubans and haven't worked to influence positive changes. Others say U.S. policy shouldn't change because the country is still an authoritarian regime that maintains close ties to US adversaries. What do YOU think?

Numbers shown as percentages

Source: Institute for Global Affairs

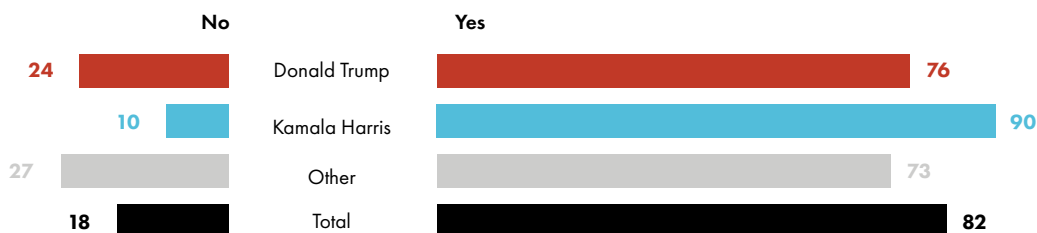
### Four in five Americans, including substantial majorities of both Harris and Trump supporters, think the US should continue pursuing negotiations to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon.

The 2015 Iran nuclear deal, also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), ended in 2018 when the Trump administration pulled the United States out of the plan. Despite efforts by the Biden administration to revive the deal, negotiations have stalled. Support for negotiating with Iran



varies by age. Americans 65 and older are vastly more supportive of continued negotiations (90%), whereas younger people are less supportive and those who are 18 to 29 are the least supportive (77%). Although Democrats are 10% more likely than Republicans to support negotiations with Iran, Harris voters are 17% more likely to think so than Trump voters.<sup>51</sup>

Do you think the US should continue pursuing negotiations to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon in the near future? \*

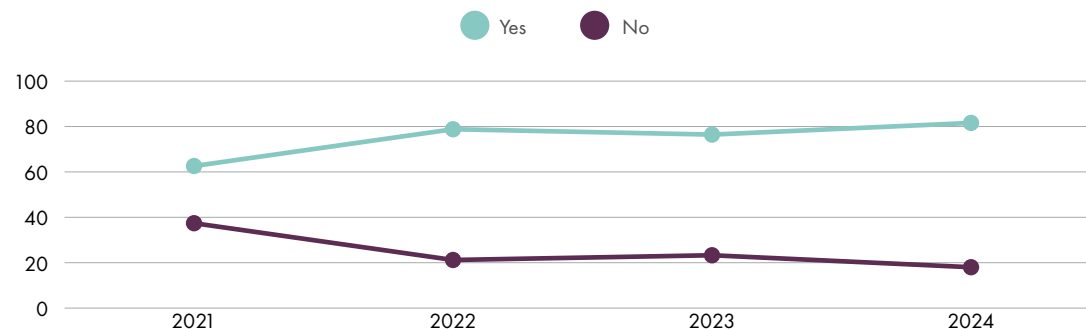


\* Question was preceded by this prompt: "In 2018, the United States withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal, which sought to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon in exchange for decreasing economic sanctions on Iran."

Numbers shown as percentages

Source: Institute for Global Affairs

Do you think the US should continue pursuing negotiations to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon in the near future? \*



\* Question was preceded by this prompt: "In 2018, the United States withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal, which sought to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon in exchange for decreasing economic sanctions on Iran."

Question text and format have changed since 2021 to reflect current events. Numbers shown as percentages

Source: Institute for Global Affairs

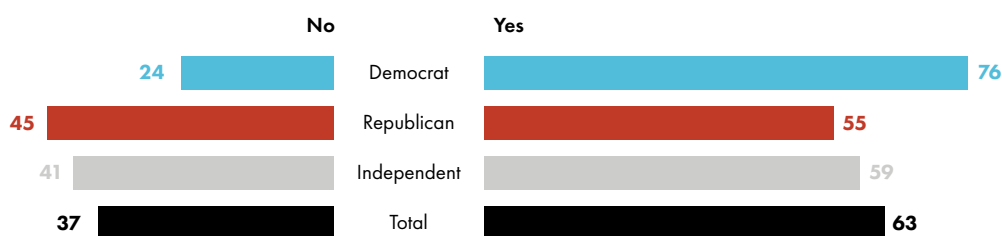
**Nearly two-thirds of Americans say they would support a hypothetical US military operation to defend Finland from Russia. Democrats are more pronounced in their support than either Republicans or Independents.**

NATO admitted Finland as a member in 2023. Under Article 5 of NATO's Charter, countries "agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all." The Trump administration often criticized other member countries for not contributing a fair share to allied security costs. This skepticism raised concerns among NATO partners that the



United States might not defend them in the event of a war. Although Trump voters are less unified on this issue than other Americans, a majority still support a hypothetical military operation in Finland (51%). Republicans are more supportive than Trump voters (56%), and Harris voters are more supportive than Democrats (78% vs. 75%).<sup>52</sup>

Imagine that Russia has invaded Finland, and Finland invokes Article V of the NATO treaty, which requires allies to treat an invasion of a member country like an invasion of its own territory. Assume expelling Russian forces requires ground forces from allied countries, which would lead to US casualties. Should the US send troops to Finland to fight Russia? \*



\*Question was preceded by this prompt: "The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is a security alliance of 32 countries in Europe and North America formed at the beginning of the Cold War. Finland is one of the newest members of the NATO alliance."

Numbers shown as percentages

Source: Institute for Global Affairs

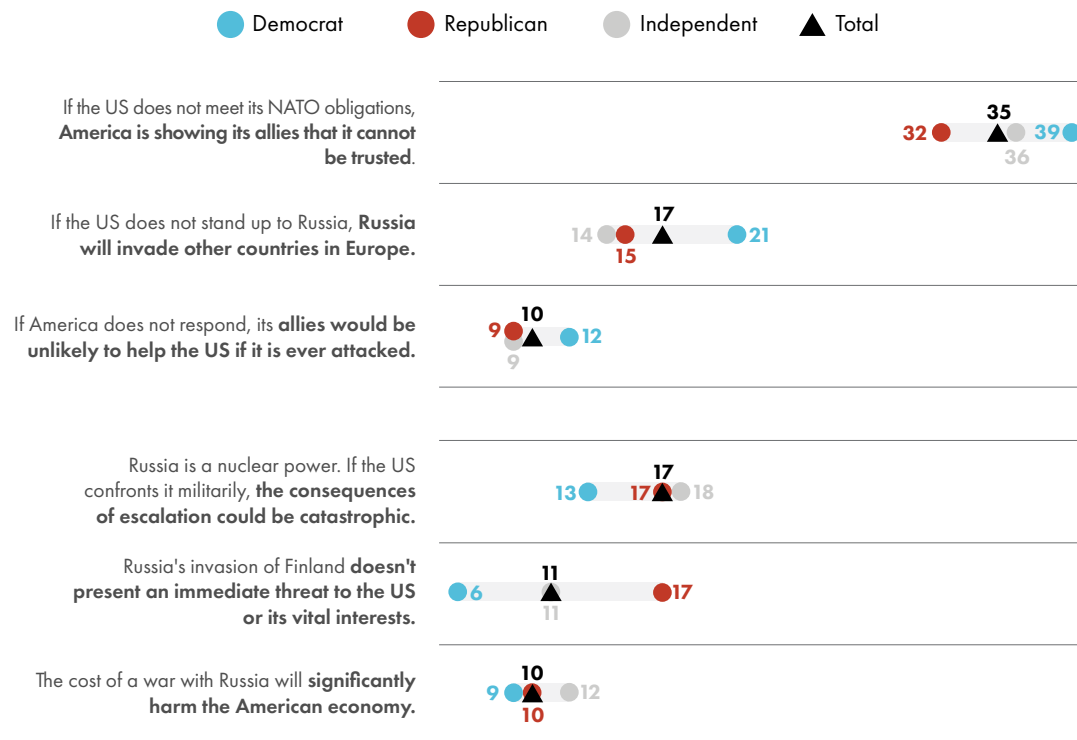
### When considering a hypothetical Russian invasion of Finland, a plurality think the future of US credibility among allies should guide decision-making.

In this question, respondents were presented with six different decision-making guidelines and asked to select which one they think should guide policymakers in a hypothetical Russian invasion of Finland. This question was asked after respondents had already chosen whether or not the United States should intervene. Out of the six response options, three suggest policymakers would intervene and three suggest that they would not. Respondents were free to select any of the six guidelines, regardless of their answer to the prior question.

Harris voters are most likely (43%) to think that maintaining US credibility among allies should guide decision-making. Among respondents who think that the United States should intervene to protect Finland, almost half (48%) express concern about maintaining US credibility among allies, while one in five worry that Russia would invade more countries unless stopped (22%). Among respondents who think the United States should not intervene to protect Finland, almost a third fear potential nuclear escalation (32%), while around a fifth cite lack of US interests in Finland (22%) and another fifth cite harm to the US economy (18%).<sup>53</sup>



## Which of the following reasons for the US military operation in Finland should guide US decision-making?



Numbers shown as percentages

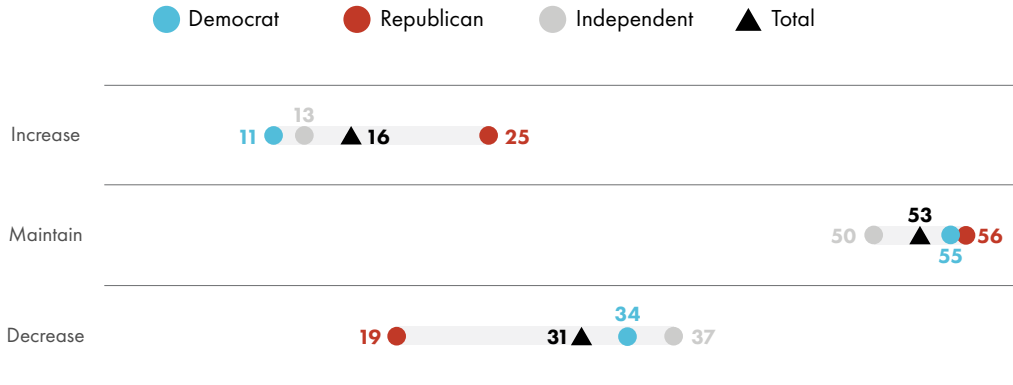
Source: Institute for Global Affairs

## Republicans are most likely to think the US should increase the military budget. Independents are most likely to think the US should decrease it.

The US military budget is the largest in the world, with 37% of global defense spending in 2023, three times as much as China.<sup>54</sup> Some policymakers argue that given the global posture of the United States, this budget is not enough to maintain the armed forces. Others argue this money could be spent elsewhere. Over half of Americans support maintaining the military budget (53%) and almost a third support decreasing the budget (31%). Less than one in five support increasing the budget (16%). Half of those who intend to vote for Trump want to maintain the budget and the other half are equally divided between increasing (24%) and decreasing (24%) the military budget. Only 11% of Democrats support increasing the budget.



In 2023, the United States spent around \$916 billion on its national defense, more than any other country. Do you think American lawmakers should increase, maintain, or decrease the level of military spending?



Numbers shown as percentages

Source: Institute for Global Affairs



## Methodology and Acknowledgements

This survey was developed and commissioned by the Institute for Global Affairs. The survey instrument was written by Mark Hannah and Lucas Robinson. They were joined by Eloise Cassier and Ransom Miller for analysis and interpretation. It was distributed online by YouGov to a sample of 1,835 voting age adults in the United States between August 15 and August 22, 2024. This included over-samples of voting age adults in Pennsylvania (N=350), Georgia (N=350), pooled Rust Belt states (N=500 from Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin) and Sun Belt states (N=500 from Arizona, Nevada, and Georgia).

A nationally representative sample was surveyed and statistically significant findings are reported with a margin of error of +/-3.9% for national and pooled swing state samples. The margin of error for the pooled Rust Belt is +/-5.6% and Sun Belt samples is +/-5.7% and for the Pennsylvania and Georgia state-specific samples, +/-6% and +/-6.6% respectively.

To achieve these representative samples, YouGov fielded general population and state level surveys and utilized a sample matching approach. YouGov sent targeted email invitations to panelists based on their pre-profiled demographic characteristics. To match survey participants to the YouGov population frame, more interviews than needed are collected. The final sample of respondents to this survey were matched to a more complete population frame, selecting the closest matches to the population on the interlocking targets on gender, race, age, and education. Matched interviews were weighted to the population frame using propensity scores. The weighting equation included gender, race, age, education, region, and 2020 presidential vote choice. Population weights were normalized to equal sample size.

YouGov sources respondents from its opt-in survey panel, composed of approximately 1 million US residents who agreed to participate in YouGov's Web surveys. Panel members are recruited using multiple methods to help ensure diversity in the panel population. Recruiting methods include Web advertising campaigns (public surveys), permission-based email campaigns, partner-sponsored solicitations, SMS-to-Web recruitment (voter registration-based sampling). Whenever reference is made in this report to a "significant" or "statistically significant" relationship, significance is established beyond the 0.05 level. Graphics included in the report are summary statistics or cross-tabulations.

The general population survey was distributed online by YouGov to a sample of 1,000 voting age adults in the United States between August 15 and August 19, 2024. YouGov collected over-samples of voting age adults in Pennsylvania (N=350), Georgia (N=350), pooled Rust Belt states (N=500 from Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin) and Sun Belt states (N=500 from Arizona, Nevada, and Georgia). 90% of the swing state oversample was collected between August 15 and 19, with a small number of additional cases collected between August 20 and 22, 2024. This time frame overlapped with the Democratic National Convention (August 19-22, 2024), and was about one month after the first assassination attempt on President Trump. As with any public opinion survey, news consumption of current events might have a short-term effect on respondents' views, but the attitudes and opinions expressed in our survey are likely as durable as those in any survey. During this time, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. was a presidential candidate, and response options for candidate preferences included Harris, Trump,



Kennedy, and Other. Because Kennedy exited the race, our analysis combines voters who intended to vote for Kennedy with those who intended to vote for Other.

IGA thanks its nonresident fellows, Andrew Payne from the City, University of London and Rachel George from the Council on Foreign Relations, for their collaboration on and contributions to the survey draft. IGA alone takes responsibility for the validity of the survey and this analysis. We welcome any questions about the methodology and data from other researchers: [info@instituteforglobalaffairs.org](mailto:info@instituteforglobalaffairs.org)





## About IGA

IGA pursues industry-leading research on geopolitics and global affairs, creates relevant, objective, fact-based content, tools, and programming, and partners around the world to drive awareness, increase understanding, and support action.

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- 47 See above. The answer to the question "Do you think the US should continue pursuing negotiations to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon in the near future?" was used as the Independent variable.
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