



TRACKING AMERICAN PUBLIC ATTITUDES

WAR PRESIDENT

THE IRAN TRAP

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**institute
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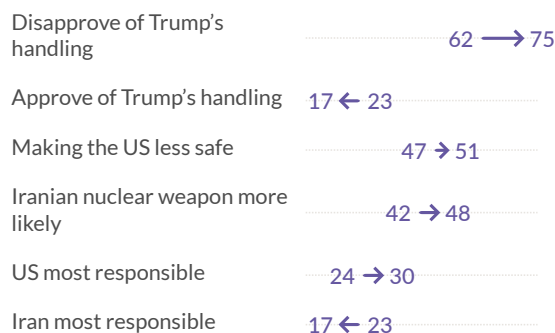
Introduction

The war the president said would take four to five weeks, and has repeatedly declared won, now stretches on for a half-year. It has claimed the lives of at least 18 US service members, killed thousands of civilians across the Middle East, and its core objectives have gone unmet. The Iranian regime remains in power, the status of its nuclear program is uncertain, and Tehran has weaponized its hold on the Strait of Hormuz. Though a memorandum of understanding struck earlier this summer was meant to provide a framework for negotiating a final deal, it was tenuously held and formally expired on August 17.

Fighting resumed after a month-long lull, and US economic pressure has only intensified — all of which could be taken as signs that Donald Trump has found himself trapped at home and abroad by a war that no one is winning and that has no clear off-ramp. Trump's approval ratings have hit record lows, and in our polling, most Americans say it was a mistake to attack Iran, only a third of the country approves of his handling of the war, and three in four Independents now disapprove.¹ Republicans still back him, but with less conviction than in the spring. The war's effect on affordability has been immediate and broadly felt. Traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, which before the war carried a fifth of the world's oil, has slowed to a trickle and oil prices have stayed high. Three months before the midterms, eight in ten Americans — majorities across every political party — say the war has raised the cost of living.

Independents' changing views of the Iran War

% of Independents, April vs. August 2026



Source: Institute for Global Affairs at Eurasia Group / YouGov, April 24–27 and August 11–14, 2026

The war may also leave a geopolitical legacy far different from the one the administration intended. More Americans say the likelihood of an Iranian bomb has increased over the past year, than say it has decreased. America's stock of missile interceptors, needed for contingencies in Asia and elsewhere, has run low. And the war has opened questions about the future of warfare and America's conduct abroad that the public is only beginning to reckon with. Artificial intelligence has been used to identify and prioritize military targets — something fewer than one in ten Americans have heard much about. Strikes on schools and civilian infrastructure, whether intentional, accidental, or merely threatened, implicate America's moral standing — a majority call deliberate strikes on civilian power, fuel, and water systems unacceptable.

The Trump administration and the American public will be stuck with this war for months and years to come, regardless of when it ends.



Executive Summary

The Institute for Global Affairs (IGA) at Eurasia Group surveyed 1,000 voting-age Americans between August 11 and 14, 2026. The survey, the second in a series of IGA polls tracking public opinion ahead of the 2026 midterm elections, finds a public wary of a war that many believe the United States is not winning, unlikely to achieve its stated objectives, and not worth the costs. Dig beneath the topline, however, and the war divides Democrats and Republicans — each counted here with the Independents who lean their way — even as President Trump’s political base hedges.²

Republicans still back the war and largely approve of President Trump’s handling of it, but with less intensity than in the spring.

- Republican strong approval collapsed 15 points since April, and Independents’ disapproval jumped 13 points, though the Republicans’ overall approval has held steady at 74% — virtually unchanged from the spring (73%).
- Roughly a sixth of Republicans think the United States made a mistake in attacking Iran (17%), while two-thirds think the United States didn’t make a mistake (65%).
- Half of Republicans think the war is making the United States safer (49%), a quarter say it’s making the country neither more nor less safe (26%), and 16% say less safe — fewer than one in ten aren’t sure (8%).
- Most Republicans trust the Trump administration to provide accurate information about the war (69%), but about a quarter have doubts (26%) — 17% say they don’t trust the administration much and 9% say not at all.

Nationally, few Americans think that the war has been a quick victory for the United States.

- Approval for Trump’s handling of the Iran war hovers around one in three (34%). Disapproval for the president’s handling of the conflict is intense — more than three times as many “strongly disapprove” (46%) as only “somewhat disapprove” (14%).
- Roughly as many say the war has made the United States safer (23%) as say it has made no difference at all (22%) — and a plurality think the war is making the United States less safe (46%).
- A plurality of Americans — 43% — say Iran is more likely to develop a nuclear weapon today than it was a year ago.
- Americans are split on which country currently has the advantage. Slightly more than one-third (37%) say the United States, one-quarter says Iran (25%), and few say neither (14%).
- Despite widespread disapproval of the war and low trust in the Trump administration, Americans think the United States is more likely than Iran to honor the terms of a



ceasefire. More than twice as many report a great deal or a fair amount of confidence in the United States (53%) than Iran (22%).

Beneath the surface, Democrats and Republicans register very different opinions.

- Only 5% of Democrats approve of the administration's handling of the war, a nearly 70-point gap with Republicans.
- Majorities of Democrats (81%) and Independents (59%) think the United States made a mistake in attacking Iran. Seventeen percent of Republicans agree.
- When presented with six goals that could justify military action against Iran, half of Democrats say none of them do (51%) — seven times more than the share of Republicans who think the same (7%).
- More than seven times as many Democrats blame the United States for the war (53%) as blame Iran (7%). Meanwhile, more than three times as many Republicans hold Iran more responsible (55%) than the United States (15%).

Americans have few shared sources of information about the war, and this shapes their understanding of the US military operation in Iran — its toll on US troops, its use of artificial intelligence, and the harm done to civilians.

- A plurality (39%) of Democrats reported hearing “a lot” about a missile strike on a girls’ elementary school in Iran on February 28, 2026. Only 11% of Republicans reported hearing “a lot,” and a plurality (40%) had heard “nothing at all.”

- Awareness of US troops killed in the war did not vary as much by party. Roughly two-thirds of Democrats (64%) and Republicans (65%), and six in ten Independents (59%), reported at least some awareness of it.
- Independents were the least aware of the impact of US military strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities: more than twice as many heard “nothing at all” (24%) as “a lot” (10%).
- On the military's use of AI in the war, only 8% of Americans have heard “a lot” and 42% have heard nothing at all — by far the least familiar of the topics we asked about. That holds across party: only 11% of Democrats, 5% of Independents, and 6% of Republicans have heard “a lot.”
- Paying attention to public affairs doesn't close the AI gap. Among Americans who follow government and public affairs most of the time, just 11% have heard a lot about the military's use of AI — the only topic we asked about on which even the most attentive are more likely to have heard nothing at all (39%) than a lot (11%).



CHAPTER 1

War Fatigue

This nationally representative survey of 1,000 voting-age Americans, IGA's second since the start of the war with Iran, was fielded between August 11 and 14, 2026, before renewed hostilities ended a month-long lull in the conflict. The memorandum of understanding signed in June was frayed from the start — each side read the agreement's terms very differently and accused the other of violating it — and it was days away from formally expiring. With diplomacy stalled and uncertainty over the Strait of Hormuz keeping oil prices high, this survey finds a president trapped by a war with no clear exit, rising economic costs, and a Republican base whose patience is beginning to wane.

- Just 34% of Americans approve of President Trump's handling of the war with Iran. Most Republicans back him (74%), but less emphatically than in the spring: the share who "strongly approve" fell from 49% to 34%, while the share who "somewhat approve" rose from 24% to 40%.
- Democrats and Republicans are divided on the goals that justify continuing military action (for 51% of Democrats, none are worth it, compared with 7% of Republicans), whether the war is making the United States more (49% of Republicans) or less safe (70% of Democrats), and who bears most responsibility (53% of Democrats blame the US while 55% of Republicans blame Iran).
- Democrats (91%), Independents (79%), and Republicans (73%) agree the war has increased the cost of living "some" or a "great deal."

When the United States attacked Iran earlier this year, the Trump administration expected the war to end quickly. In the weeks after the start of the US-Israeli offensive, Donald Trump repeatedly asserted that military operations were running ahead of schedule and that an American victory was just weeks away. Sustaining the war "won't be difficult," he assured *The New York Times* a day after the initial strikes killed Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and other senior officials.³

It didn't take long for intelligence assessments and accounts from officials close to the president to emerge that cast doubt on the effectiveness of airpower to topple the battered — but not defeated — Iranian regime, and America's capacity to foment local resistance inside of Iran.

Six months later, the war has fallen into stalemate. Many of the issues that the Trump administration had hoped to put to rest — Iran's nuclear program and ballistic missiles, and the regime's threat to Israel and US forces in the Middle East — remain unresolved, while new issues have come to the fore — namely, Iran's control over the Strait of Hormuz.



This is the Iran trap. It's sharpest when it comes to Iran's nuclear program, an issue that has defined US-Iran relations for two decades and that Americans cite as often as any other justification for the war. Yet more Americans say the war has made an Iranian bomb more, not less, likely.

For a president who fashions himself a peacemaker, Trump may also have a political problem at home.⁴ While polling finds the war has been unpopular from the start, it has since revealed major fault lines among his base, where strong Republican approval has fallen, and among Independents, whose disapproval has climbed. Unlike during previous administrations that have gone through the process of galvanizing support for major military operations, this administration has made little effort to sell voters on the war, except to downplay the financial burdens it has placed on everyday Americans.⁵

Most Americans, except for Republicans, disapprove of Trump's handling of the war – but Republican support has cooled.

Do you approve or disapprove of how President Trump has handled the US military campaign against Iran?

% of US adults, April vs. August 2026

Strongly disapprove Somewhat disapprove Somewhat approve Strongly approve Not sure

All

April 45 13 14 19 9

August 46 14 20 14 6

Democrats

April 79 11 4 1 5

August 82 7 3 2 5

Independents

April 45 17 16 7 16

August 51 24 13 4 8

Republicans

April 8 13 24 49 6

August 8 15 40 34 4

Source: Institute for Global Affairs at Eurasia Group / YouGov, April 24–27 and August 11–14, 2026



Overall, approval of Trump's handling of the war with Iran hovers at 34%, roughly the same share as when we fielded this question in April. Opposition, however, is widespread — 60% disapprove — and deeply held: more than three times as many people strongly disapprove (46%) as only somewhat disapprove (14%). Only 6% say they are unsure.

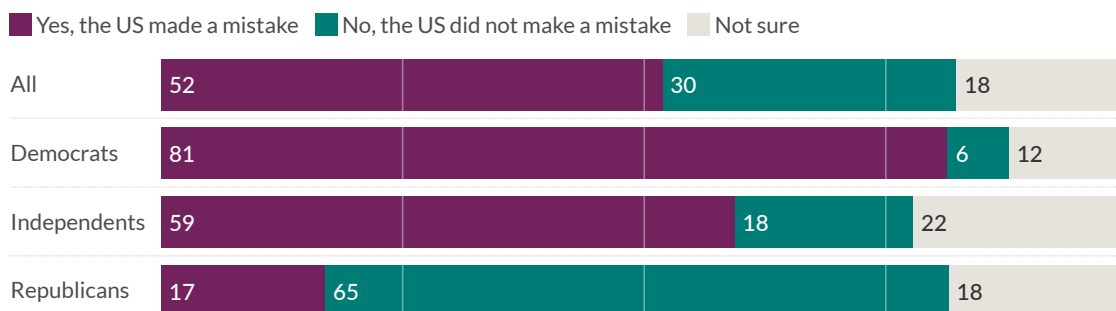
With opposition to the war holding steady, cracks are beginning to show among its supporters. The share of Americans who strongly approve of Trump's handling has fallen (-5 points), while the share who only somewhat approve has risen (+6 points) — both statistically significant shifts. Controversy over the war in conservative and right-wing circles — seen in the defections of former representative Marjorie Taylor Greene and broadcaster Tucker Carlson over the administration's Middle East policies — may help explain the hedging. Although most Republicans still approve of Trump's handling of the war (74%, compared to 73% in spring), the share who strongly approve has fallen by nearly a third (-15 points), while the share who only somewhat approve rose (+16 points).

Republicans have not abandoned Trump, but their approval has become more qualified. The question is whether this is a temporary blip or a trend that deepens the longer the war drags on and prices stay high. For an administration that has appeared out of touch with its populist instincts and nonchalant about the effect of its sagging approval ratings on this year's midterms — an election in which observers take seriously the possibility of Democrats winning both the House and Senate — the shift among Independents may be the most consequential.

Support for the war has faltered among Independents. Fewer today are undecided — the share answering “not sure” has fallen by half (-8 points) — and approval has slipped (-6 points), from 23% to 17%. Consequently, their disapproval has shot up 13 percentage points, from 62% to 75%. Three in four Independents now disapprove, either strongly (51%) or somewhat (24%) — an outlook far more aligned with Democrats, nine in ten of whom disapprove (89%), than with Republicans, among whom only about a quarter disapprove (23%).

Do you think the United States made a mistake in taking military action against Iran, or not?

% of US adults, August 2026



Source: Institute for Global Affairs at Eurasia Group / YouGov, August 11–14, 2026



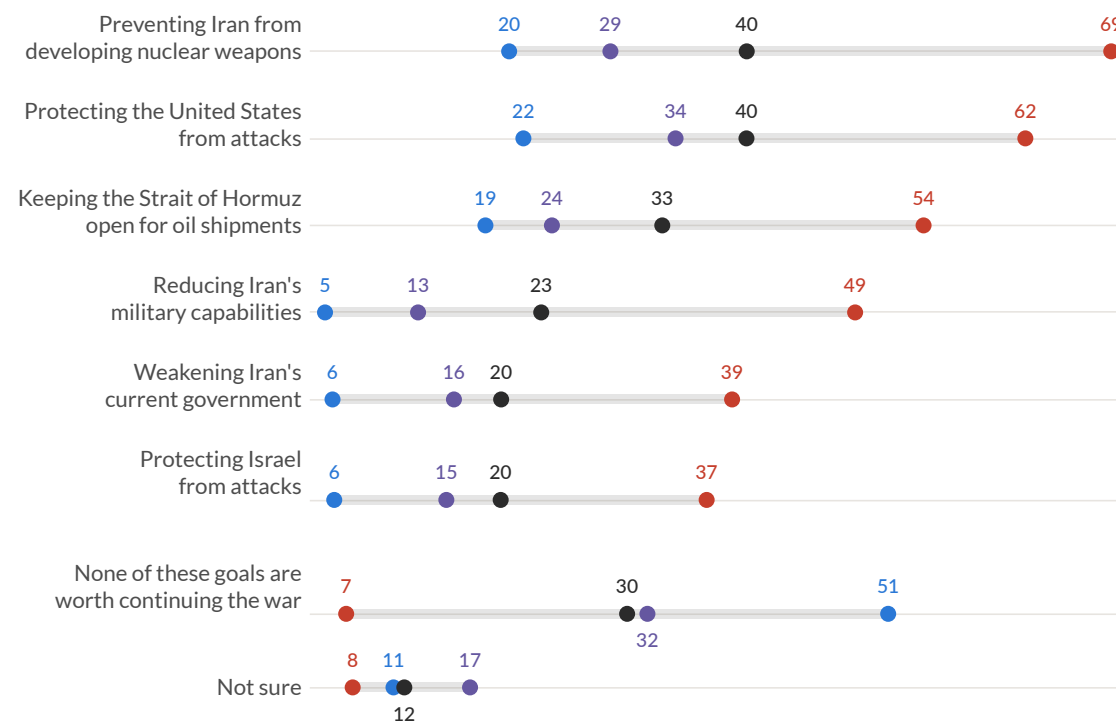
Majorities of Democrats and Independents think attacking Iran was a mistake.

Americans question whether this war should have been started in the first place — 52% say it was a mistake for the United States to take military action. That view is held by eight in ten Democrats (81%) and 59% of Independents. And while Republicans have cooled on Trump's handling, nearly two-thirds (65%) say it was not a mistake.

Which, if any, of the following goals justify continuing US military action against Iran?

% of US adults, August 2026

● All ● Democrats ● Independents ● Republicans



Notes: Respondents could select more than one goal.

Source: Institute for Global Affairs at Eurasia Group / YouGov, August 11–14, 2026

Most Democrats see no goal justifying continuing the war.

The Trump administration's rationale for the war has shifted since it began. More recently, its objectives have centered on reopening the Strait of Hormuz, where Iran has restricted the passage of commercial vessels. The memorandum of understanding between the United States and Iran was meant to provide a framework for resolving their dispute over the Strait, but the two sides are still sparring over the important waterway.



When presented with a list of potential reasons for continuing the war, about half of Democrats said none justified continued operations (51%) — more than twice the share who chose their next most common response, protecting the United States from attacks (22%).

Most Republicans, by contrast, identified grounds for continuing the fight. Majorities said the United States should keep fighting to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons (69%), protect America from attack (62%), and reopen the Strait (54%).

No single rationale garnered majority support among Americans. The most commonly cited goals were preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons (40%), protecting the United States from attacks (40%), and keeping the Strait of Hormuz open for oil shipments (33%). Roughly three in ten said none of the goals was worth continuing the fight (30%).

Republicans vary in views of US safety during the war.

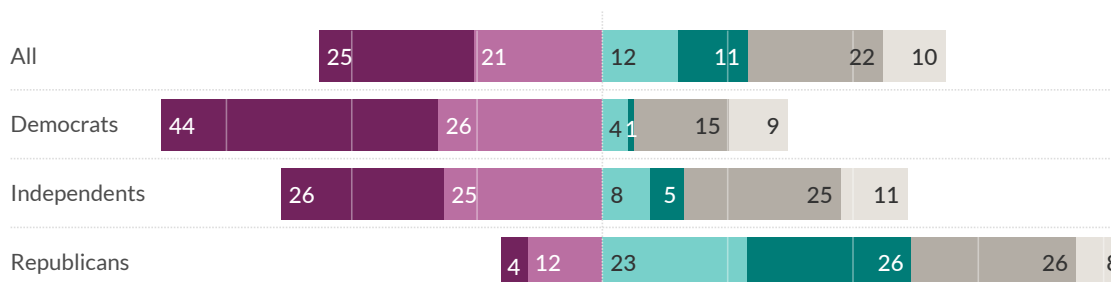
Whatever the war's aims, just under half of Americans (46%) say US military operations are making the United States less safe — and the partisan divide is stark. Half of Republicans say operations are making the country safer (49%), compared with 16% who say less safe. Among Democrats, 70% say the war is making the country less safe, while only 5% say it's making the country safer. Almost no Democrat — a statistically insignificant 1% — thinks the war is making the country “much more safe.”

Overall, one in five Americans think the war has made the United States neither more nor less safe (22%). A quarter of Republicans (26%) and Independents (25%) share this view, compared with less than a fifth of Democrats (15%).

Do you think US military operations against Iran are making the United States more or less safe?

% of US adults, August 2026

■ Much less safe
 ■ Somewhat less safe
 ■ Somewhat more safe
 ■ Much more safe
 ■ Neither more nor less safe
 ■ Not sure



Source: Institute for Global Affairs at Eurasia Group / YouGov, August 11–14, 2026



A plurality of Americans think Iran is more likely to develop a nuclear weapon today than a year ago.

The possibility that Iran might one day weaponize its civil nuclear energy program was one of the stated pretexts for this war. The Trump administration vowed that Iran would never possess a nuclear weapon, and the military campaign has sought to degrade Tehran's technical capacity to build one. Yet the war itself — the destruction of much of Iran's military, and attacks both real and threatened on the country's leadership and civilian infrastructure — creates precisely the incentives that drive countries toward the bomb.

Do you think Iran is more or less likely to develop a nuclear weapon today than it was a year ago?

% of US adults, April vs. August 2026

■ Much more likely ■ Somewhat more likely ■ Somewhat less likely ■ Much less likely ■ Not sure

All



Democrats



Independents



Republicans



Source: Institute for Global Affairs at Eurasia Group / YouGov, April 24–27 and August 11–14, 2026

Although preventing an Iranian bomb is among the most-cited justifications for continuing military operations, Americans on balance doubt the United States will achieve that objective. Forty-three percent think Iran is more likely to develop a nuclear weapon today than a year ago, compared with 35% who think it's less likely — shares essentially unchanged from the spring.



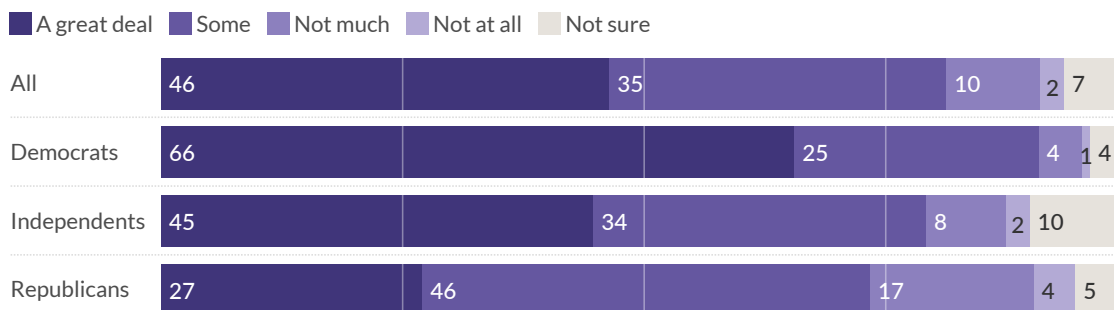
Republicans are the exception, however. Democrats say more likely by a wide margin, 56% to 23%, and Independents closely follow: 48% say more likely and 19% less likely — though a third of Independents say they are not sure (33%). Republicans — seven in ten of whom cite preventing an Iranian bomb as a reason to continue the war — see that prospect receding. A majority (58%) say Iran is less likely to develop a nuclear weapon today than a year ago, compared with 28% who say more likely.

Most Americans, across party lines, say the war has raised the cost of living.

The war's impact on Americans' pocketbooks was felt almost immediately, as oil and gas prices spiked at the start of hostilities and costs have mounted in the months since. An overwhelming majority of Americans say the war has raised the cost of living at least some (81%) — and Democrats are the most convinced: 91% say the war has increased costs either a great deal or some, including two-thirds (66%) who say a great deal.⁶ These shares remain steady from the spring, when we first asked the question just two months into the war. Independents are close behind, with 79% saying the war has increased costs some (34%) or a great deal (45%), followed by Republicans, with 73% saying the war has raised costs some (46%) or a great deal (27%).

Regardless of your personal situation, how much do you think the war in Iran has increased the cost of living in general?

% of US adults, August 2026



Source: Institute for Global Affairs at Eurasia Group / YouGov, August 11–14, 2026

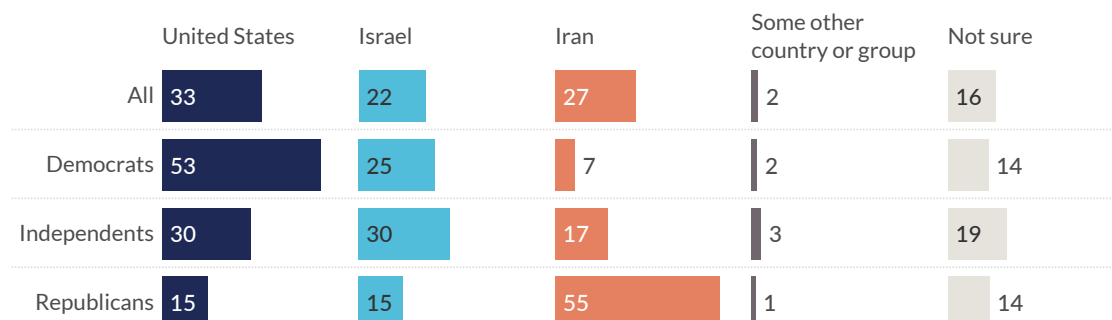
More Americans blame the United States or Israel for the war than Iran.

When asked who bears most responsibility for the war, more Americans point to the United States or Israel (55% combined) than Iran (27%). A plurality names the United States as most responsible (33%), with smaller shares naming Iran (27%) and Israel (22%) — 16% are not sure.



Which country or group do you think is most responsible for the current war with Iran?

% of US adults, August 2026



Source: Institute for Global Affairs at Eurasia Group / YouGov, August 11–14, 2026

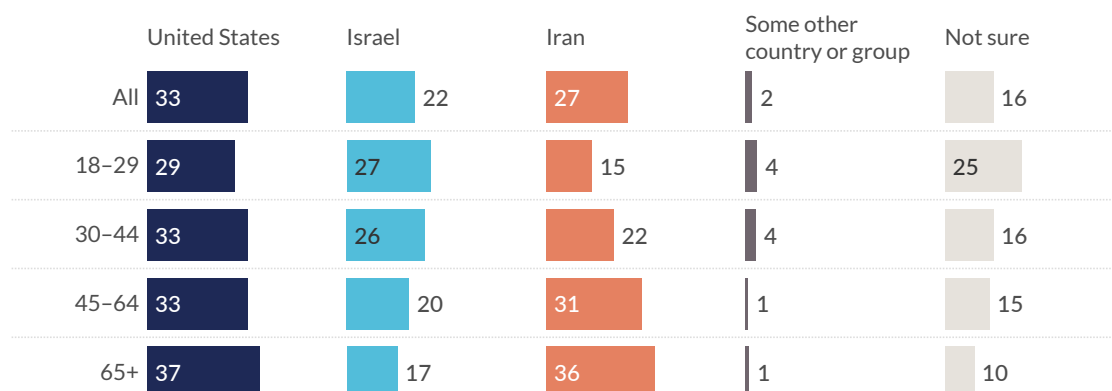
Views on responsibility vary widely by party. Half of Democrats blame the United States (53%), a quarter blame Israel (25%), and 7% blame Iran. Most Republicans, by contrast, blame Iran (55%), with equal shares holding the United States and Israel most responsible (15% each). Independents are evenly split between the United States and Israel (30% each) as most responsible, while 17% say it's Iran. In each of these partisan groups, more than one in ten are not sure — 14% of Democrats, 14% of Republicans, and 19% of Independents.

Older Americans are more likely to blame Iran for the war.

Age plays a large factor as well. Blame shifts toward Iran as respondents get older. Under-30s are more likely to find Israel responsible (27%) than Iran (15%), while those 65+ place responsibility on Iran (36%) well ahead of Israel (17%). Views of US responsibility, by contrast, stay fairly equal across age groups, all clustered around a third of responses.

Which country or group do you think is most responsible for the current war with Iran?

% of US adults, by age, August 2026



Source: Institute for Global Affairs at Eurasia Group / YouGov, August 11–14, 2026



CHAPTER 2

Information War

Americans are deeply divided along party lines, and this could partly stem from being exposed to different information environments, as well as their level of trust in the Trump administration. The president himself has claimed several goals for the war with Iran, including destroying Iran's nuclear program, reopening the Strait of Hormuz, and regime change. He also declared victory or suggested the war's end was imminent at least 32 times since its start in February 2026.⁷

- Six months into the war, Democrats and Republicans don't agree on which country has the advantage. Sixty-eight percent of Republicans say the United States and 43% of Democrats say Iran. Independents are split: 28% say the US and 23% say Iran.
- Americans don't trust the current administration to provide accurate information about the war. Only 15% of Americans say they trust the Trump administration "a great deal" (4% of Democrats, 32% of Republicans, and 5% of Independents).
- We asked Americans their level of awareness of certain elements of the war so far, to see which stories break through the noise. Thirty-nine percent of Democrats reported hearing "a lot" about a strike on a girls' elementary school in Iran, while only 11% of Republicans had. When it came to the military use of AI in the war, most Americans (63%) reported hearing "only a little" or "nothing at all," regardless of party.

President Donald Trump has proclaimed Iran was on the verge of collapse at various points throughout the conflict. As early as April, he announced "total and complete victory" over Iran after announcing a two-week provisional ceasefire.⁸ Iran has similarly declared victory over the United States, touting its continued control of the Strait of Hormuz.⁹ We asked Americans which country, if any, has the advantage in the current conflict.

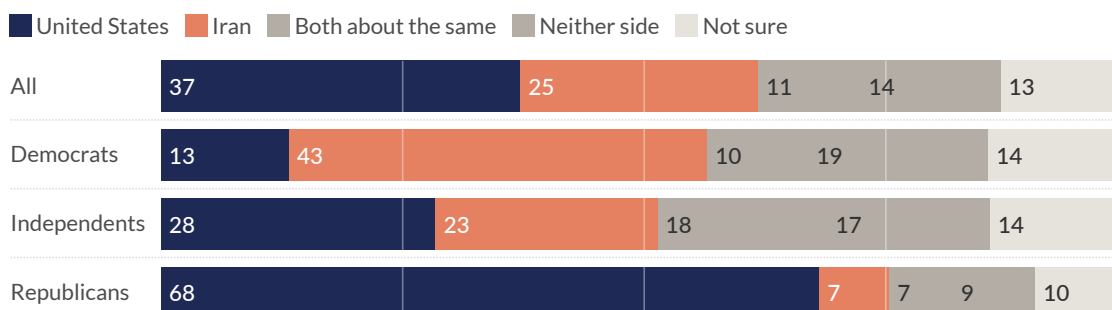
Six months into the war, Americans see no clear advantage for either the United States or Iran.

A plurality of Americans (37%) say the United States has the advantage in the war against Iran, while a quarter say Iran holds the advantage (25%). That there is no majority favoring either side seems to mirror the deadlock of the conflict itself. After six months of multiple rounds of strikes, fruitless talks, and an expired memorandum of understanding, Americans are divided as to which side has the advantage.



Given what you know from news and public debate about the war between the United States and Iran, which side do you think currently has the advantage, if any?

% of US adults, August 2026

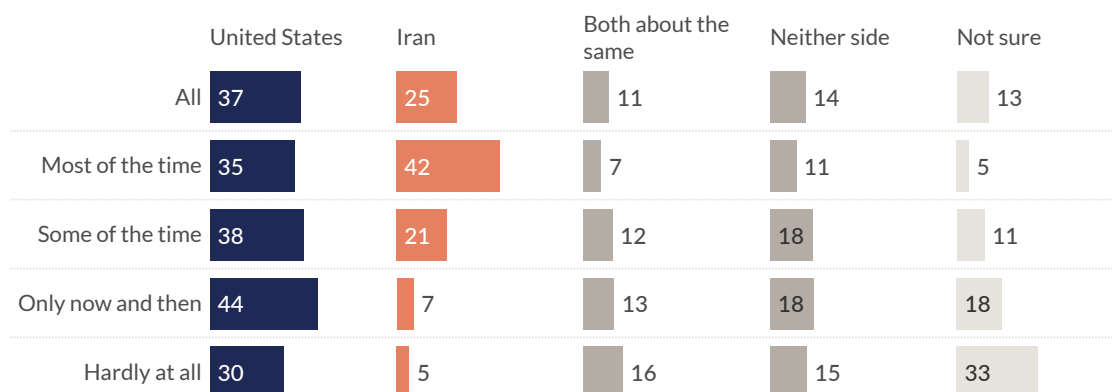


Source: Institute for Global Affairs at Eurasia Group / YouGov, August 11–14, 2026

The partisan breakdown reveals stark disagreements between Republicans and Democrats. Most Republicans (68%) think the United States holds the advantage, while only 13% of Democrats agree. Democrats are more split among themselves than Republicans, with no outright majority. Still, more than four in ten Democrats (43%) say Iran is better positioned in the conflict. Independents are the least likely to see a clear winner. Just 28% give the advantage to the United States and 23% give it to Iran, while 35% say either that both sides are about the same (18%) or that neither side has the advantage (17%). Nearly one in five Democrats (19%) also think neither side has the advantage.

Which side do you think has the advantage, if any?

% of US adults, by how closely they follow government and public affairs, August 2026



Notes: Respondents who answered “Don’t know” about how closely they follow government and public affairs are not shown.

Source: Institute for Global Affairs at Eurasia Group / YouGov, August 11–14, 2026



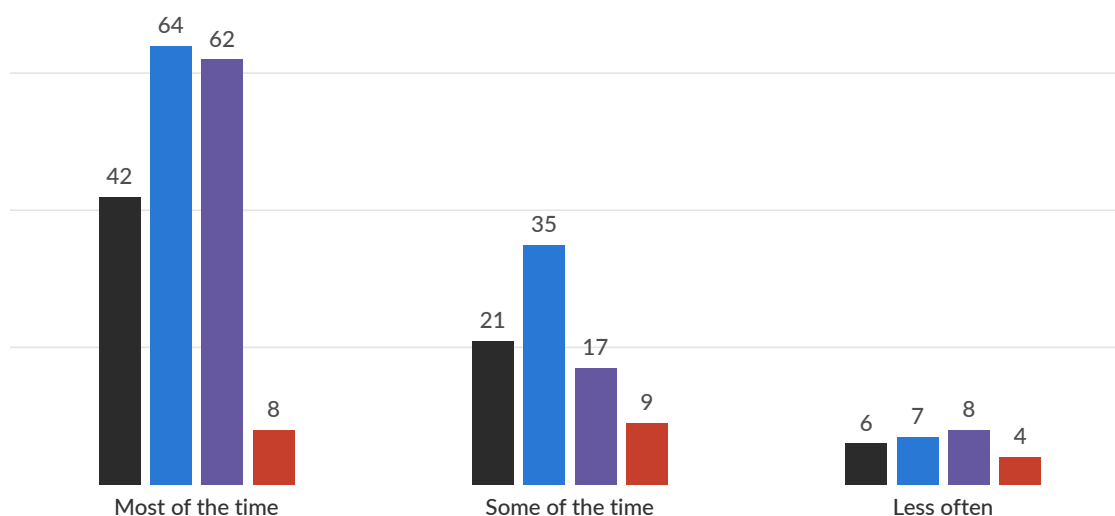
The most politically engaged Americans are more likely to think Iran currently has an advantage over the United States.

How closely people follow politics and current events also influences their views on the conflict. The most attentive Americans are the most likely to think Iran holds the advantage. Among Americans who follow government and public affairs “most of the time,” a plurality (42%) say Iran currently has the advantage and 35% say the United States. The share who see Iran ahead falls as attention decreases — 21% among those who follow “some of the time,” 7% among those who follow “only now and then,” and 5% among those who follow “hardly at all.” Conversely, the share giving the United States the edge rises, from 35% to 38% and then 44%. Only among the least attentive does it dip (30%), and that’s because a third of Americans who hardly follow government and public affairs are not sure.

Which side do you think has the advantage, if any?

% of US adults who say Iran currently has the advantage, by party and by how closely they follow government and public affairs, August 2026

■ All ■ Democrats ■ Independents ■ Republicans



Notes: “Less often” combines respondents who follow government and public affairs “only now and then” and “hardly at all”; those who answered “Don’t know” are not shown.

Source: Institute for Global Affairs at Eurasia Group / YouGov, August 11–14, 2026

The most politically engaged Democrats more often say Iran is winning; the most politically engaged Republicans most often say the United States.

Even within political parties, the degree people pay attention to politics shapes their views on the conflict. Among Democrats who follow government and public affairs “most of the time,” 64%



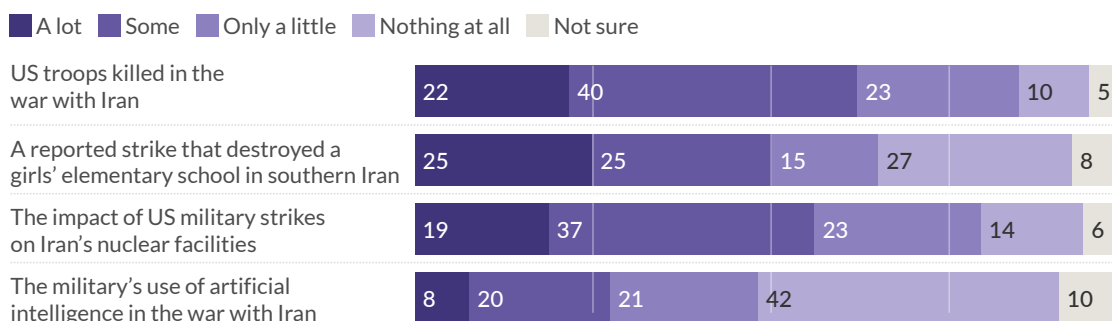
say Iran has the advantage, compared to 35% of those who follow “some of the time” and 9% who follow “only now and then.” Republicans skew in the opposite direction: the most attentive among them more often think the United States is winning (79%) — though no more than 9% of any Republican group gives the edge to Iran.

One of the deadliest incidents of the US-Iran war was when a missile struck a girls’ school in Minab, Iran, killing at least 156 people, most of them students.¹⁰ Though the US and Israel initially denied responsibility, later evidence suggested a US missile was likely responsible; the school had appeared on a US target list and may have been mistaken for a military site, raising questions about the role of AI-enabled targeting in the strike.¹¹ American casualties have also climbed over the course of the campaign.¹² As of late August, at least 18 US service members have been confirmed killed and more than 750 wounded since the war began.¹³ However, an investigative report found the Pentagon has changed its casualty-counting methodology in ways that may understate the true toll.¹⁴ Despite the scale and duration of the conflict, public attention to these specific episodes, and the ethics of the tactics involved, has varied widely.

We asked Americans about their awareness of various components and casualties associated with the US military campaign against Iran: the Minab strike; US troops killed; the military’s use of AI; and the impact of US military strikes on Iran’s nuclear facilities.

How much, if anything, have you heard about each of the following?

% of US adults, August 2026



Source: Institute for Global Affairs at Eurasia Group / YouGov, August 11–14, 2026

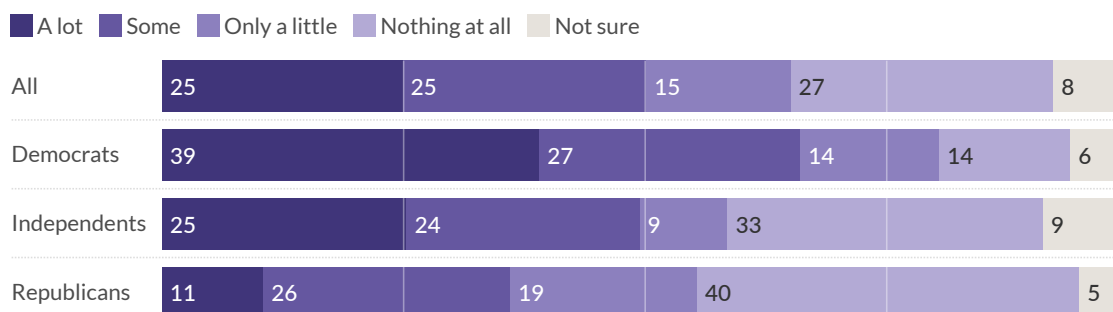
A plurality of Democrats report hearing “a lot” about the girls’ elementary school strike in Iran, while a plurality of Republicans have heard “nothing at all.”

More than half of Democrats have heard “a lot” (39%) or “some” (27%) about the strike on the girls’ elementary school in Iran. Among Republicans, only 11% reported hearing “a lot” about the strike, whereas 40% report having heard “nothing at all,” implying a significant partisan information gap with regard to this particular incident. One-third of Independents also reported hearing “nothing at all.” Overall, half of Americans reported having heard “some” or “a lot” about the incident.



How much, if anything, have you heard about a reported strike that destroyed a girls' elementary school in southern Iran?

% of US adults, by party, August 2026



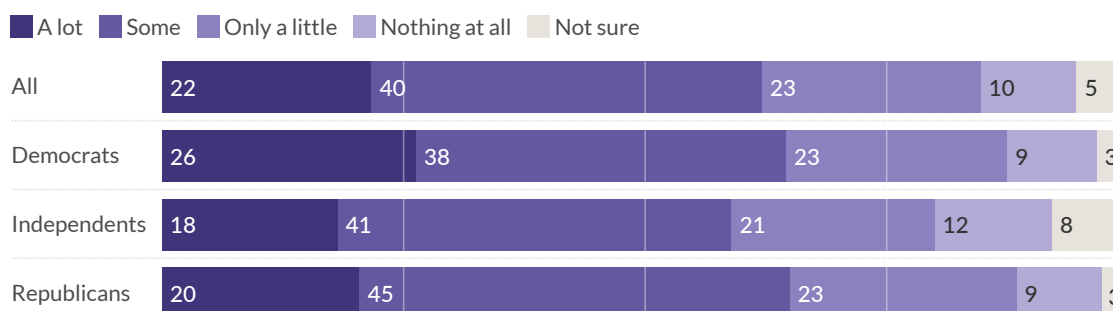
Source: Institute for Global Affairs at Eurasia Group / YouGov, August 11–14, 2026

Most Americans have heard some or only a little about US troops killed in the war with Iran.

Roughly six in ten Americans (62%) have heard “a lot” or “some” about US troops killed in the war with Iran. Across the political spectrum, the percentage of Americans who report hearing “a lot” does not surpass 26%.

How much, if anything, have you heard about US troops killed in the war with Iran?

% of US adults, by party, August 2026



Source: Institute for Global Affairs at Eurasia Group / YouGov, August 11–14, 2026

Most Americans have heard “only a little” or “nothing at all” about the military’s use of AI in the war with Iran.

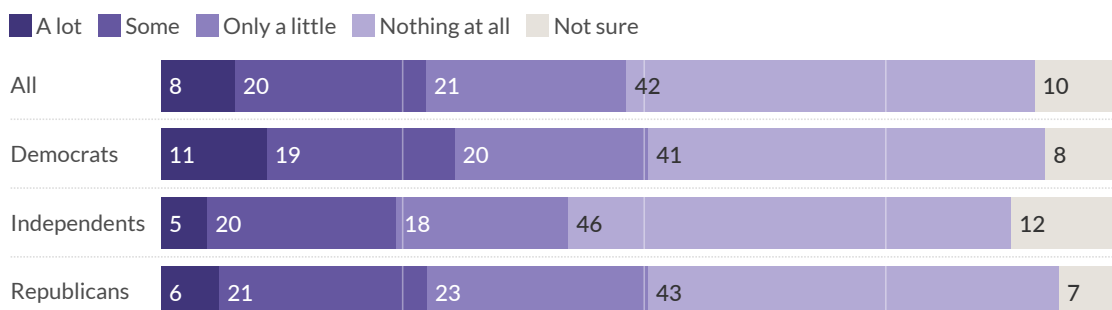
The US military has used artificial intelligence in the war with Iran at a scale no previous American war has seen. The Pentagon’s Maven Smart System sifts intelligence collected from satellites, drones, and intercepted communications to detect and prioritize targets. It has run on advanced



versions of commercial AI models, among them Anthropic's Claude. According to The Washington Post, Maven helped the military strike more than 1,000 targets in the first day of the war.¹⁵ Other frontier AI companies whose software is used by millions of Americans, like OpenAI, Google, and xAI, hold government contracts of their own. Our survey findings, however, suggest a disconnect between the actual involvement of artificial intelligence tools in the war and the general awareness of the American public.

How much, if anything, have you heard about the military's use of artificial intelligence in the war with Iran?

% of US adults, by party, August 2026



Source: Institute for Global Affairs at Eurasia Group / YouGov, August 11–14, 2026

Only 8% of Americans overall have heard “a lot” about the military’s use of AI in the war with Iran, including 11% of Democrats and 6% of Republicans. The majority of Americans (63%) have heard “only a little” or “nothing at all” about the military’s use of AI in the war with Iran, and more than four in ten (42%) have heard “nothing at all.”

Even among Americans who pay close attention to government and public affairs, the military’s use of AI has not registered. Only 11% of those who follow public affairs “most of the time” have heard a lot about it. By contrast, a third of these avid observers have heard a lot about US troops killed (34%) and about strikes on Iran’s nuclear facilities (32%), and four in ten about the school strike (43%). AI is the only topic we asked about on which the most attentive Americans are more likely to have heard nothing at all (39%) than a lot (11%).

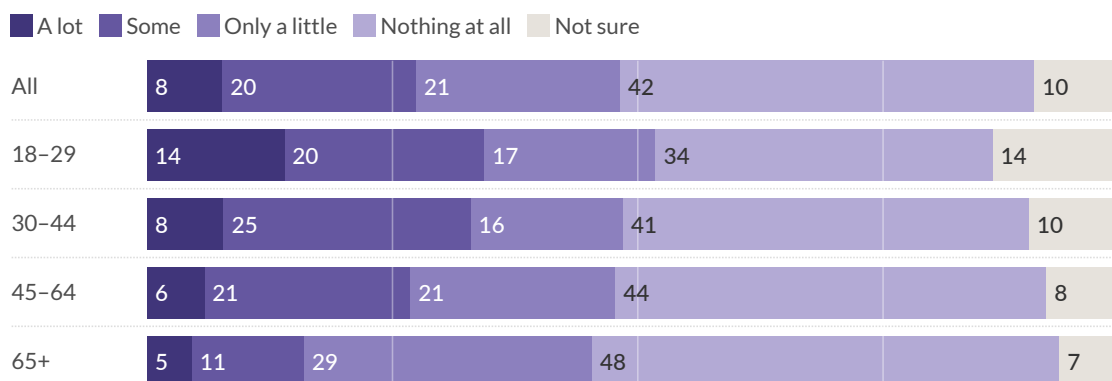
Young Americans are more aware of how the military is using AI than older Americans.

Awareness of the military’s use of AI skews young. Fourteen percent of 18-to-29-year-olds have heard a lot, compared with 5% of those 65 and older, who most often reported having heard nothing at all (48%). It is the only topic we asked about on which the youngest Americans are ahead of the oldest — on every other topic, older cohorts are at least as likely as younger ones to have heard a lot.



How much, if anything, have you heard about the military's use of artificial intelligence in the war with Iran?

% of US adults, by age, August 2026



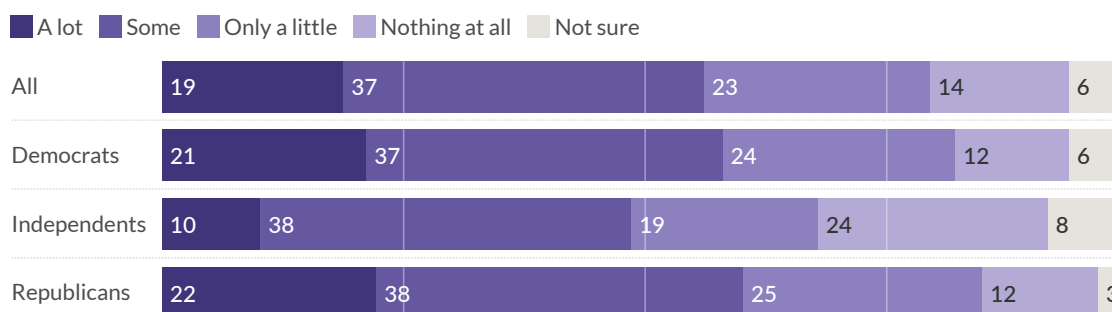
Source: Institute for Global Affairs at Eurasia Group / YouGov, August 11-14, 2026

About twice as many Americans age 65+ report hearing “a lot” about the impact of US military strikes on Iran’s nuclear facilities than do Americans age 18-29.

Older people tended to be more aware of US military strikes on Iran’s nuclear facilities. Only 13% of Americans age 18-29 reported hearing “a lot” about the topic; 18% of 30-44-year-olds reported hearing “a lot”; 20% of 45-64-year-olds reported hearing “a lot”; with 24% of Americans 65 or older reporting as such.

How much, if anything, have you heard about the impact of US military strikes on Iran’s nuclear facilities?

% of US adults, by party, August 2026

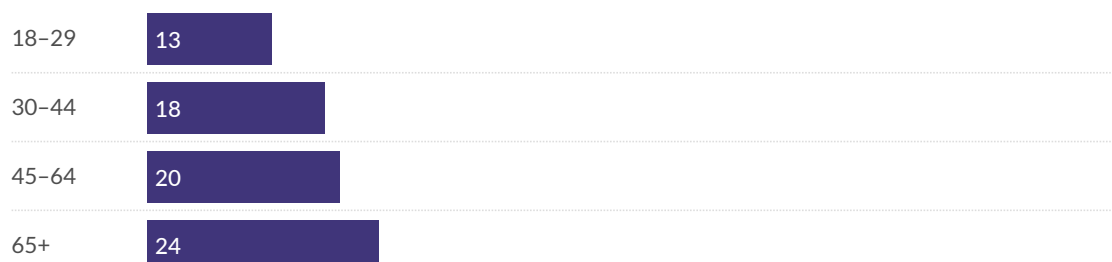


Source: Institute for Global Affairs at Eurasia Group / YouGov, August 11-14, 2026



How much, if anything, have you heard about the impact of US military strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities?

% of US adults who have heard "a lot," by age, August 2026



Source: Institute for Global Affairs at Eurasia Group / YouGov, August 11–14, 2026

Beyond awareness of specific incidents, the war has reignited debate over the legality and morality of how the United States fights its wars. Under both US and international law, the military may not deliberately strike civilians and must take feasible precautions to avoid harming them.

Harder cases arise when the target is not people but places: power plants, bridges, fuel depots, and other so-called dual-use infrastructure that serves civilians and militaries alike. Such sites can be lawful targets if they contribute to military operations and the expected harm to civilians is not out of proportion to the military gain. Whether such strikes can be morally justified is a separate and highly contested question.

Iran has struck desalination plants and data centers in the Gulf during the conflict, and the United States has threatened Iran's power plants and desalination plants — actions Amnesty International and other human rights groups say amount to war crimes.¹⁶ Both sides describe such targets as legitimate, and President Trump has made the threat repeatedly. In April, he posted that "a whole civilization will die tonight" if Iran did not meet his deadline for a deal, and in July he vowed to destroy a bridge or a power plant for every Iranian attack on shipping in the Strait of Hormuz.¹⁷ To gauge how Americans feel about such threats, we asked how morally acceptable they would find it for the United States to deliberately strike electricity, fuel, or water systems used mostly by civilians.

One in ten Americans find it "very acceptable" for the US to deliberately strike electricity, fuel, or water systems used mostly by civilians.

A majority of Americans (56%) say it would be unacceptable for the United States to deliberately strike critical civilian infrastructure, including 37% who say "very unacceptable." Fewer than a third (29%) find it acceptable, and just 11% say "very acceptable." Fifteen percent are not sure.

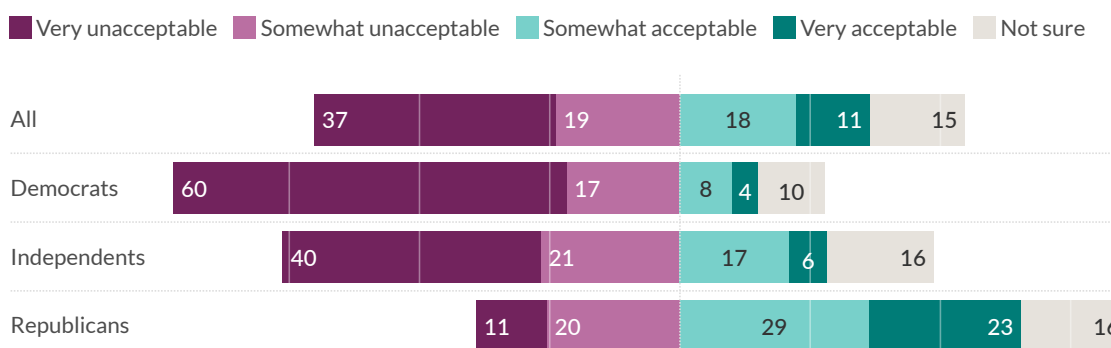
Few questions in the survey reveal as stark a partisan split. Three-quarters of Democrats (77%) say it is morally unacceptable to strike electricity, fuel, or water systems used mostly by civilians,



and a majority (60%) say “very unacceptable.” Independents lean the same way: 61% find such strikes unacceptable, including 40% who say “very unacceptable.” Republicans are the only partisan group in which a majority (52%) finds striking civilian infrastructure morally acceptable — 23% “very acceptable” and 29% “somewhat acceptable” — while 31% say it is unacceptable and 16% are not sure.

In wartime, would you find it morally acceptable or unacceptable for the US to deliberately strike electricity, fuel, or water systems used mostly by civilians?

% of US adults, August 2026



Notes: Half the sample saw the question with an added rationale about protecting shipping routes; results were similar and are combined.

Source: Institute for Global Affairs at Eurasia Group / YouGov, August 11–14, 2026

Nevertheless, there are splits among Republicans. More Republicans call such strikes “somewhat” than “very” acceptable, nearly a third call them unacceptable, and one in six are unsure — among the largest shares of undecided Republicans on any question in the survey. The results suggest another tension within the president’s Republican base: between a Jacksonian tradition that demands decisive action, unshackled by international law, and another that regards rules as necessary constraints on the destructive impulses of states.¹⁸

The United States and Iran reached a provisional ceasefire in April and, in June, signed a 14-point memorandum of understanding that set a 60-day window to negotiate a final deal. It unraveled within weeks: the two sides resumed trading strikes, Trump walked back his earlier enthusiasm for the agreement and declared it “over” in July, and it formally expired on August 17 without a diplomatic resolution to permanently end hostilities. We asked Americans how confident they are that either the United States or Iran would honor the terms of a ceasefire, if one were reached.



Americans think the United States is more likely than Iran to honor the terms of a ceasefire.

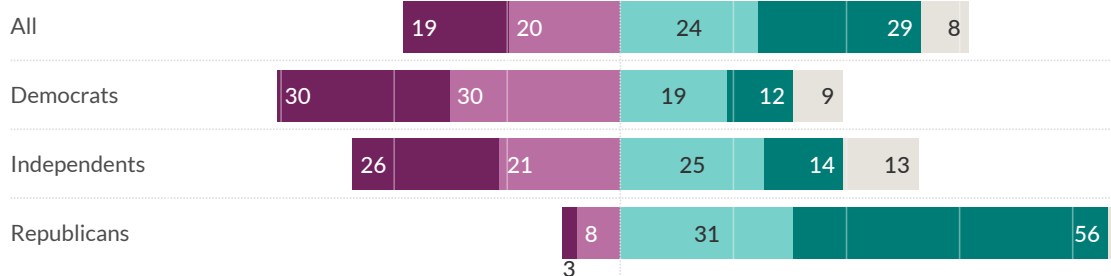
Nearly a third (29%) of respondents have “a great deal” of confidence that the United States would honor the terms of a ceasefire with Iran, but only 4% say the same about Iran. About a fifth (19%) of Americans have no confidence at all that the United States would honor ceasefire terms and about a third (34%) say the same about Iran.

If the United States and Iran were to reach a ceasefire, how much confidence do you have that each side would honor its terms?

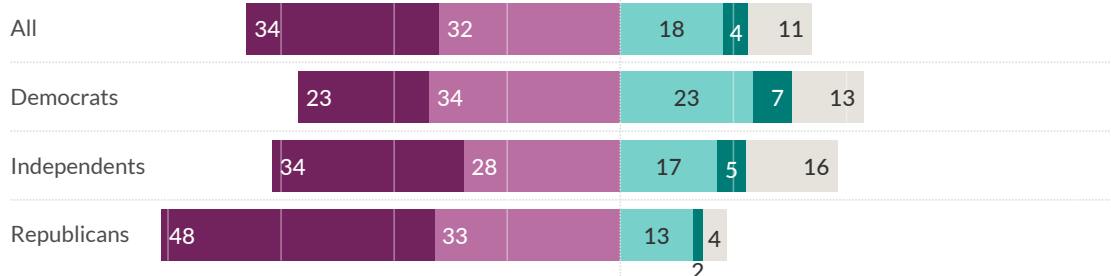
% of US adults, August 2026

None at all Not too much A fair amount A great deal Not sure

United States



Iran



Source: Institute for Global Affairs at Eurasia Group / YouGov, August 11–14, 2026

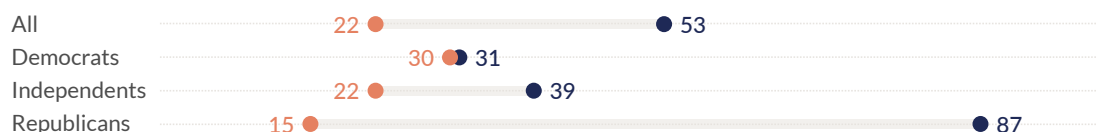
Republicans are much more confident than Democrats that the United States would honor the terms of a ceasefire. A majority of Republicans (56%) have “a great deal” of confidence compared with just 12% of Democrats and 14% of Independents. Roughly half of Republicans (48%) report no confidence at all that Iran would do the same. Meanwhile, Democrats have about as much confidence in Iran as the United States to honor a ceasefire.



How much confidence do you have that each side would honor a ceasefire?

% of US adults confident that each side would honor a ceasefire, August 2026

● United States ● Iran



Notes: "Confident" combines "a great deal" and "a fair amount."

Source: Institute for Global Affairs at Eurasia Group / YouGov, August 11–14, 2026

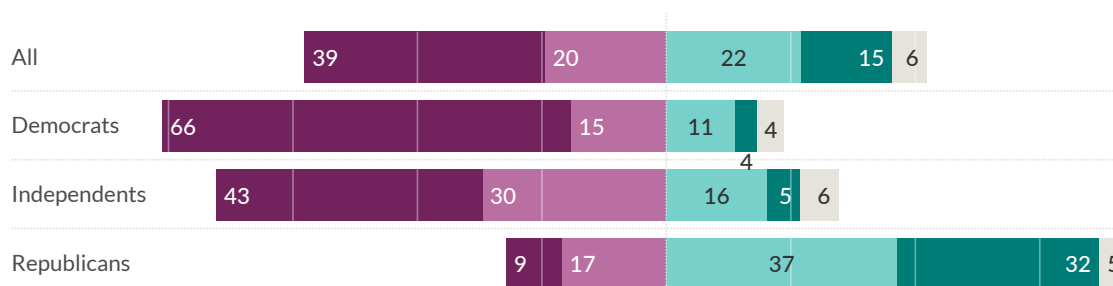
Most Americans do not trust the Trump administration to provide accurate information about the war with Iran.

Amid the ongoing conflict with Iran, President Trump has declared victory at various points and insisted that the Strait of Hormuz was fully open and operational, even as ship traffic remained a tiny fraction of its pre-war volume. The Pentagon's reporting on the number of American service members injured in the war has also been called into question.¹⁹ We tried to get a sense of how much respondents trust the Trump administration to provide them accurate information about the conflict.

How much do you trust the current administration to provide accurate information about the war with Iran?

% of US adults, August 2026

■ Not at all ■ Not much ■ Somewhat ■ A great deal ■ Not sure



Source: Institute for Global Affairs at Eurasia Group / YouGov, August 11–14, 2026

Only about a third of Americans (37%) trust the current administration "a great deal" or "some-what" to provide accurate information about the war with Iran. Twenty percent say "not much" and a plurality (39%) say "not at all." Democrats and Independents have much less trust in the



administration than Republicans. A majority of Democrats (66%) and a plurality of Independents (43%) don't trust the Trump administration at all.

Fewer Republicans are as confident in their trust than Democrats are in their distrust. About a third of Republicans (32%) trust the administration "a great deal," while 37% trust it "somewhat," 17% "not much," and 9% "not at all." Even though most Republicans continue to approve of the military campaign against Iran, about a quarter are not sold on the war or the Trump administration's handling of it.



Methodology

The Institute for Global Affairs at Eurasia Group developed and commissioned this survey as part of its Independent America program, which explores how US foreign policy could better be tailored to new global realities and to the preferences of American voters. Jonathan Guyer, Lucas Robinson, Eloise Cassier, and Ransom Miller wrote the survey instrument and analyzed and interpreted the findings, with the support of Ammara Elsevier and Ria Mueller. YouGov distributed the survey online to a sample of 1,000 voting-age adults in the United States between August 11 and August 14, 2026.

A nationally representative sample in the United States was surveyed, and statistically significant findings are reported with a margin of error ± 3.64 percentage points. The report uses “America” and “American” to describe survey takers in the United States.

Results in this survey are presented as percentages of the sample, rounded to the nearest whole number.

Whenever reference is made in this report to a “significant” or “statistically significant” relationship, significance is established beyond the 95% confidence level. Graphics included in the report are summary statistics or cross-tabulations.

Party identification is measured on a seven-point scale. Democrats and Republicans combine respondents who identified as “strong” or “not very strong” partisans with Independents who said they lean toward

that party. Independents are those who lean toward neither. Respondents who answered “not sure” are included in the overall figures but not in the party breakdowns. This “partisans plus leaners” definition is the same one used in our April 2026 report, so the two surveys can be compared directly.

To achieve these representative samples, YouGov fielded surveys that used a sample matching approach. YouGov sent targeted email invitations to panelists based on their pre-profiled demographic characteristics. To match survey participants to the population frame, more than 1,000 interviews were collected in order to achieve the targeted sample. For matching and weighting, YouGov used a population frame with demographic benchmarks derived from the US Census Bureau’s American Community Survey. The final sample respondents were the closest matches to the population frame based on gender, age, education, and race. Matched interviews were then weighted using propensity and were further post-stratified using the joint stratification of those same variables as well as vote choice for the most recent national elections.

YouGov sources respondents from its opt-in survey panel, composed of over 1 million US residents who agreed to participate in YouGov’s online 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, and SMS-to-web recruitment (voter registration-based sampling).

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. For context, the survey was in the field during a period of time (August 11–14, 2026) in which the Iran war was in its sixth month; news broke that President Donald Trump had been secretly flown out of July's NATO summit in Turkey on a military jet because of an Iranian assassination threat; an earthquake in Colombia killed hundreds of people; and the June memorandum of understanding between the United States and Iran was days from its August 17 expiration.

Acknowledgements

Institute for Global Affairs is grateful to the several journalists and think-tank experts who advised on the survey instrument. Thank you to IGA CEO Mark Hannah and development and operations associate Sasha Benke. Thank you to IGA interns Ria Mueller and Ammara Elsevier.



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About IGA

Institute for Global Affairs 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.

Jonathan Guyer is a program director at the Institute for Global Affairs at Eurasia Group, where he leads research and public opinion polling on US foreign policy. He hosts IGA's podcast, *None of the Above*, and is a contributing editor at *The American Prospect*, where he was managing editor from 2019 to 2021. His writing appears in the *New York Times*, the *Financial Times*, *The New Republic*, *Foreign Policy*, and *New York Magazine*, and has been recognized by the Society of Professional Journalists and the Military Reporters and Editors Association. He lived in Cairo from 2012 to 2017, editing the *Cairo Review of Global Affairs*. He studied Arab comics and political cartoons as a 2017–18 Harvard Radcliffe fellow. He speaks Arabic and Hebrew and is a graduate of Brown University.

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