

America Divided: Political Partisanship and US Foreign Policy

Results of the 2015 Chicago Council
Survey of American Public Opinion and
US Foreign Policy



THE CHICAGO COUNCIL
ON GLOBAL AFFAIRS

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Executive Summary

The results of the 2015 Chicago Council Survey demonstrate that the American public remains committed to engagement in the world—as it has been for the more than 40 years the Council has conducted its surveys. But on specific policies, public opinion often divides along party lines. At a fundamental level, these divergent views reflect differing interpretations of how the United States can most effectively advance its interests—whether through military or other means—in an increasingly volatile world.

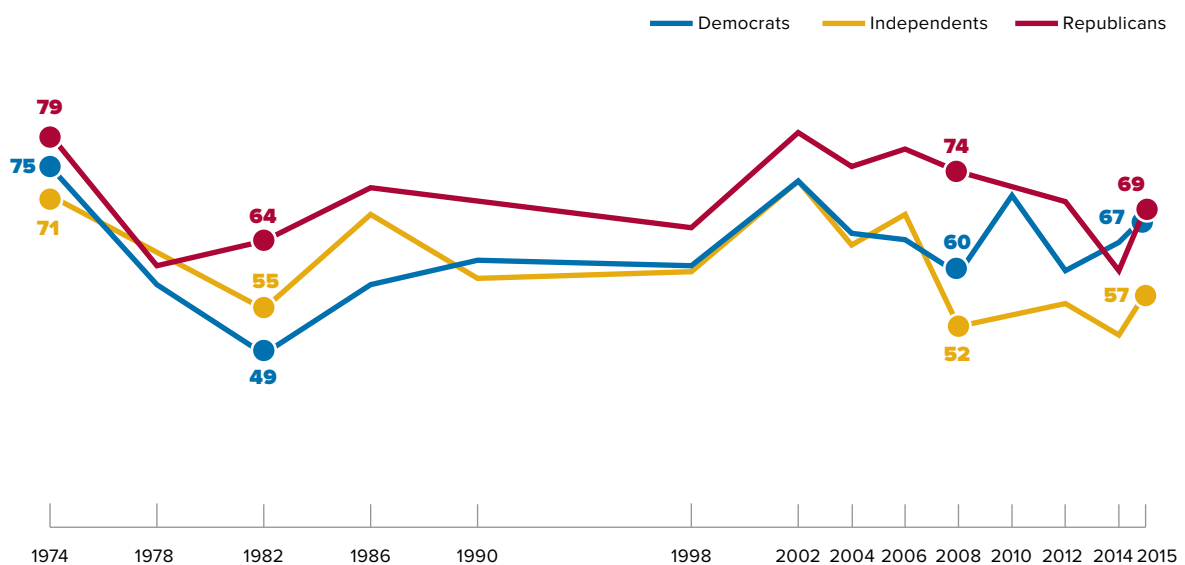
Shared Concerns about US National Security

Americans again widely agree that the United States should be actively engaged abroad, with 64 percent of Americans saying the United States should play an active role in world affairs, an increase of six percentage points from last year. On this fundamental issue, Democrats and Republicans in the US public express similar views (Figure A). A majority of Independents agree, though a sizable minority (42%) thinks the United States should stay out of world affairs.

Figure A: **Across Parties, Majorities Favor an Active US Role in World Affairs**

Do you think it will be best for the future of the country if we take an active part in world affairs or if we stay out of world affairs? (% active part)

Full sample (n = 2,034)



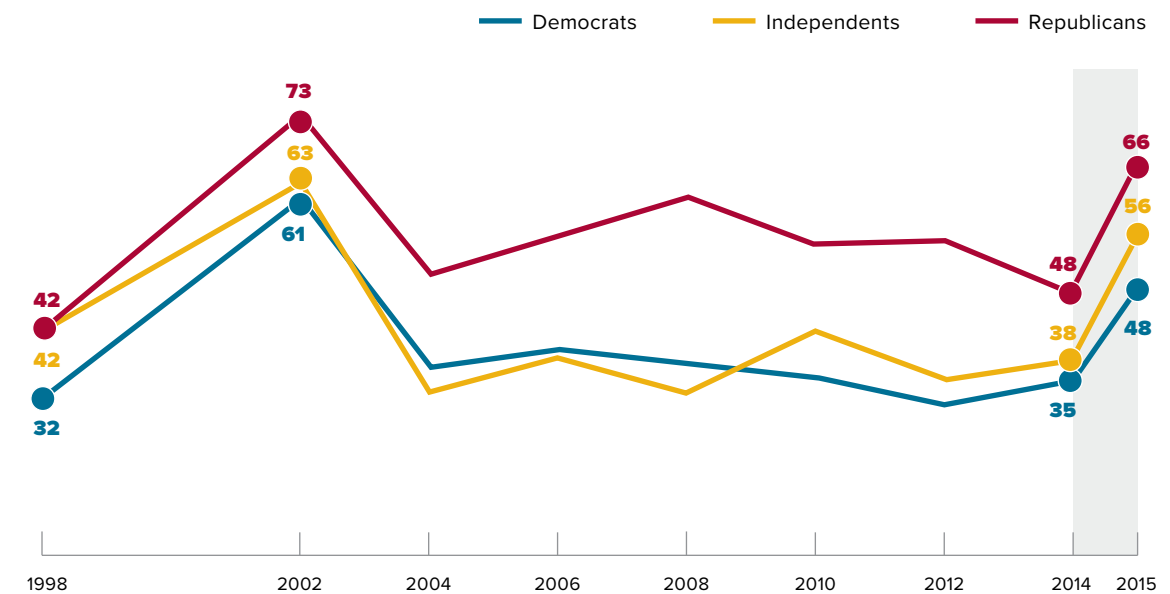
2015 Chicago Council Survey

The 2015 survey results also reveal that the rise of the Islamic State (ISIS) has had a marked impact on US public perceptions of the major threats to US security. American concern about Islamic fundamentalism has jumped 15 percentage points since the 2014 survey and is currently at the highest level since the 2002 survey—the first conducted after the attacks of September 11, 2001 (Figure B).

Figure B: **Concern about Islamic Fundamentalism Has Risen**

Please select whether you think Islamic fundamentalism is a critical threat, an important but not critical threat, or not an important threat at all. (% critical threat)

Full sample (n = 2,034)



2015 Chicago Council Survey

Reflecting these heightened fears, Americans rate two related threats—a major terrorist attack in the United States by violent Islamic extremist groups and, more broadly, international terrorism—among the most critical threats facing the country. Furthermore, more than 60 percent of Americans agree that two other threats are also critical: cyberattacks on US computer networks and the rise of violent extremist groups in Iraq and Syria.

Partisan Divisions Deepest on Immigration and Climate Change

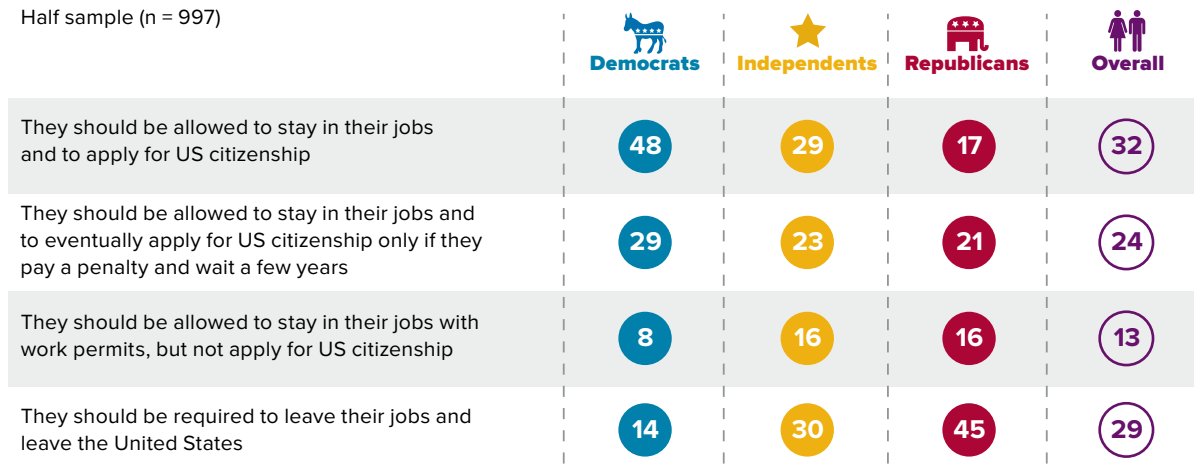
Beyond these common perceptions of critical security threats, however, Republicans and Democrats disagree on a range of issues, with extremely stark differences on immigration and climate change.

Republicans are more than twice as likely as Democrats to say that “large numbers of immigrants and refugees coming into the United States” represents a critical threat. Moreover, nearly half of Republicans believe that illegal immigrants should be required to leave their jobs and depart the country. By contrast, nearly 8 in 10 Democrats support a path to citizenship, one of the main components of immigration reform (Figure C).

Figure C: **Partisan Divisions on Illegal Immigrants**

When it comes to immigration, which comes closest to your view about illegal immigrants who are currently working in the United States? (%)

Half sample (n = 997)



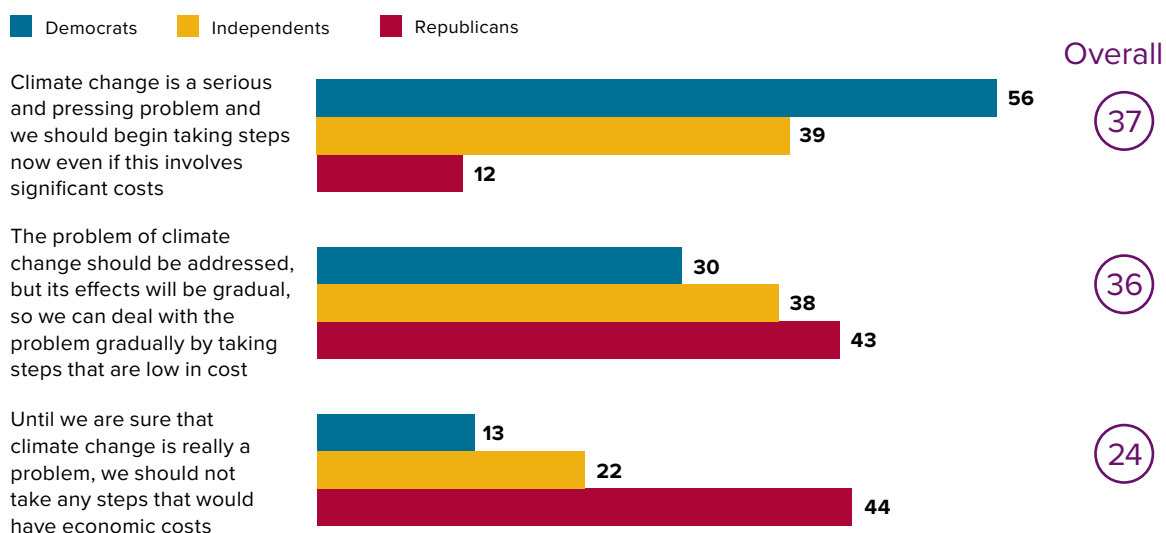
2015 Chicago Council Survey

Climate change remains the most polarizing issue in American public opinion. Democrats see climate change as one of the top five critical threats facing the United States—with 56 percent believing it deserves immediate action. This issue is a much lower priority for Republicans, who do not see a need for immediate action and remain divided between those who believe climate change should be dealt with gradually and those who question whether it even exists (Figure D).

Figure D: **Americans Divided on How to Address Climate Change**

There is a controversy over what the countries of the world, including the United States, should do about the problem of climate change. Here are three statements. Please tell me which statement comes closest to your own point of view. (%)

Half sample (n = 1,053)



Figures may not add to 100 due to rounding.

2015 Chicago Council Survey

Partisan Divisions on Politics Abroad: Iran Nuclear Deal, Creation of an Independent Palestinian State, and Regional Role of Israel

For much of the past year, the negotiations over a nuclear deal with Iran have been the top foreign policy story. While a majority of Americans consider Iran's nuclear program a critical threat, opinions diverge on whether the nuclear deal negotiated by the Obama administration in July is the best way to address this threat. In polls conducted both before and after the agreement was signed, Democrats have consistently registered greater support than Republicans for the deal. And while majorities of Democrats and Republicans doubt the agreement will prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, Republicans are more likely than Democrats to favor using cyberattacks and air strikes against Iranian nuclear facilities if Iran violates the agreement. Only among Republicans does a majority support sending US troops to destroy Iran's nuclear facilities under such circumstances (Figure E).

Figure E: **Republicans Support Sending Troops into Iran if Iran Violates Deal**

If Iran commits a major violation of this agreement, would you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose the United States taking each of the following actions: **Send US troops to destroy Iran's nuclear facilities.** (% strongly or somewhat support)

Half sample (n = 1,050)



2015 Chicago Council Survey

Republicans and Democrats also differ on support for establishing "an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip." While supporters of both parties were once divided internally on this issue, now a majority of Democrats (61%) support an independent Palestinian state while 60 percent of Republicans are opposed. And though both Democrats and Republicans continue to express favorable views of Israel, Republicans' feelings toward Israel have grown much warmer in recent years. Perhaps partly as a consequence of the lack of movement toward a two-state solution, only 4 in 10 Democrats see Israel's role in the region as positive, compared to 6 in 10 Republicans (Figure F).

Figure F: **Americans Disagree on Israel's Impact on the Middle East**

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

Half sample (n = 1,037)



2015 Chicago Council Survey

Despite Broad Consensus, Republicans Favor Force

What explains these partisan differences? Though disagreement on the issues themselves is certainly a factor, the results of the 2015 Chicago Council Survey reveal a more fundamental difference is also at play: divergent views on how to address threats to US national security and achieve US foreign policy goals.

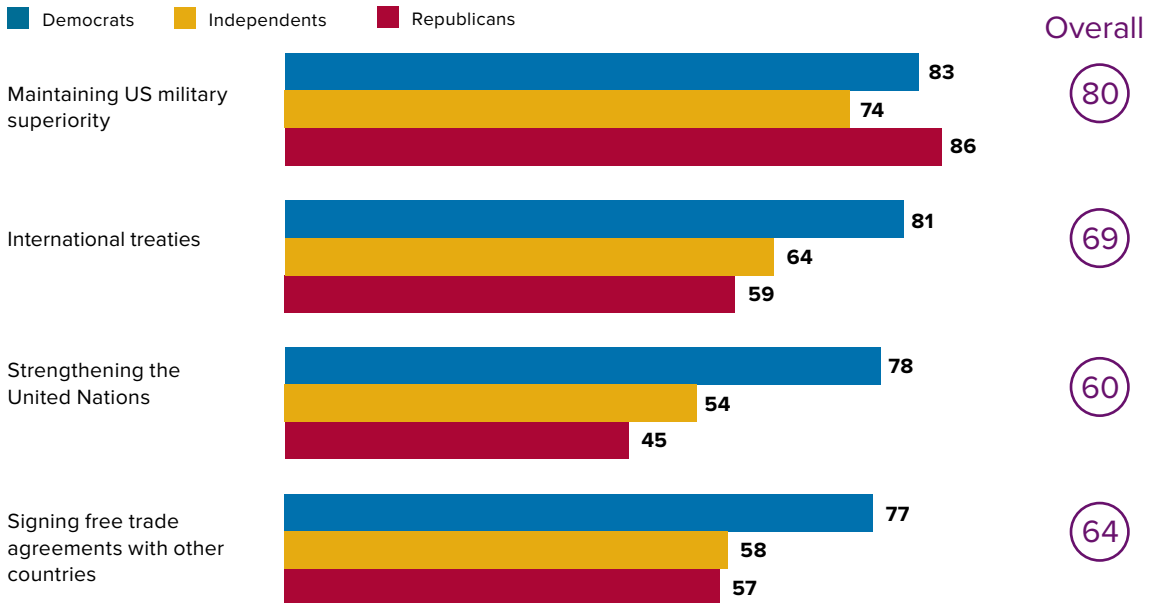
While both Democrats and Republicans value maintaining a military edge in the world, Republicans place relatively greater importance on forceful approaches to achieve US aims and protect US interests. Republicans are more likely than Democrats to prioritize maintaining US military superiority and to say this is an effective way of achieving US foreign policy goals (Figure G). In turn, Republicans are more likely to support the use of US troops abroad to stop Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, to fight Islamic extremist groups, and to defend Israel if it comes under attack from its neighbors. They are also more likely than Democrats to favor keeping some US troops in Afghanistan beyond 2016 for training and counterterrorism and to favor the United States training Ukrainian military troops. And at home, Republicans' emphasis on forceful methods translates into an immigration policy focused on law enforcement, border security, and deportation.

Democrats, though supportive of the use of force in cases of a direct threat such as terrorism, are more likely than Republicans to favor diplomatic approaches such as working through the United Nations, signing free-trade agreements, and participating in international treaties. Reflecting this outlook, Democrats are more likely than Republicans to favor negotiated diplomatic solutions to

Figure G: **Democrats More Likely to Favor Diplomacy**

How effective do you think each of the following approaches are to achieving the foreign policy goals of the United States—very effective, somewhat effective, not very effective, or not effective at all?
(% very or somewhat effective)

Full sample (n = 2,034)



2015 Chicago Council Survey

address Iran's nuclear program, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and climate change. As a prelude to these negotiations, Democrats favor meeting with leaders of hostile nations and groups, including Cuba, Iran, and North Korea, and to a lesser extent Hamas and the Taliban—steps Republicans are much more likely to oppose. Democrats are also more likely than Republicans to favor the use of economic engagement, including lifting the trade embargo against Cuba and providing economic aid abroad.

Independents: Secret Partisans and the Politically Disconnected

Independents offer the weakest enthusiasm for the United States playing an active role internationally. Often assumed to be a swing vote in elections, research has shown that Independents who “lean” toward one of the parties often vote along partisan lines, while the remaining Independents who do not identify as leaning to one party or another (“pure” Independents) are far less likely than others to register to vote, turn out to vote, or show significant interest in the news.

The Chicago Council Survey shows that Independent “leaners” resemble partisans in their foreign policy views as well. They align more closely with Republicans in doubting the effectiveness of new alliances, economic aid, and free-trade agreements. Yet they more closely resemble Democrats when it comes to limiting the use of hard power—again, reflecting their disinclination to involve the United States in overseas conflicts. In fact, Independents are the least likely to say that a range of forceful and diplomatic options are effective to achieving US foreign policy goals.

Public Opinion on Foreign Policy and the 2016 Elections

Foreign policy issues are already playing a significant role in the campaigns for the presidential primaries. In the first Republican debate on August 6, foreign policy was the most-discussed topic, with immigration (treated as a subtopic of foreign policy in this report) tied for second.¹ Yet few candidates have proposed specific policies to respond to these challenges. This ambiguity is probably not an oversight. At this early stage, candidates are focusing on broad appeals and widely shared concerns to maximize their appeal. Thus, the candidates are largely delivering similar messages on the issues most important to the American voter writ large: combating terrorism, fighting ISIS, and protecting the American economy.

Meanwhile, candidates are also seeking to articulate a vision that resonates with their base. This tradeoff is especially clear on issues that are distinct priorities for one party over another, such as immigration and climate change. For Republicans, the question of how to manage undocumented immigration has become one of the leading wedge issues in the campaign so far. Among Democratic leaders, there is a heated discussion of how quickly to transition from using fossil fuels to ramping up renewable sources of energy—and the Democratic electorate is similarly divided on whether action taken to limit climate change should be immediate or gradual.

The challenge for all presidential candidates—Republican and Democratic alike—is to balance an appeal to the base with an appeal to the median voter. That challenge is all the greater in 2015 given the deep divisions within the electorate on many of the top foreign policy issues facing America today. ●

Introduction

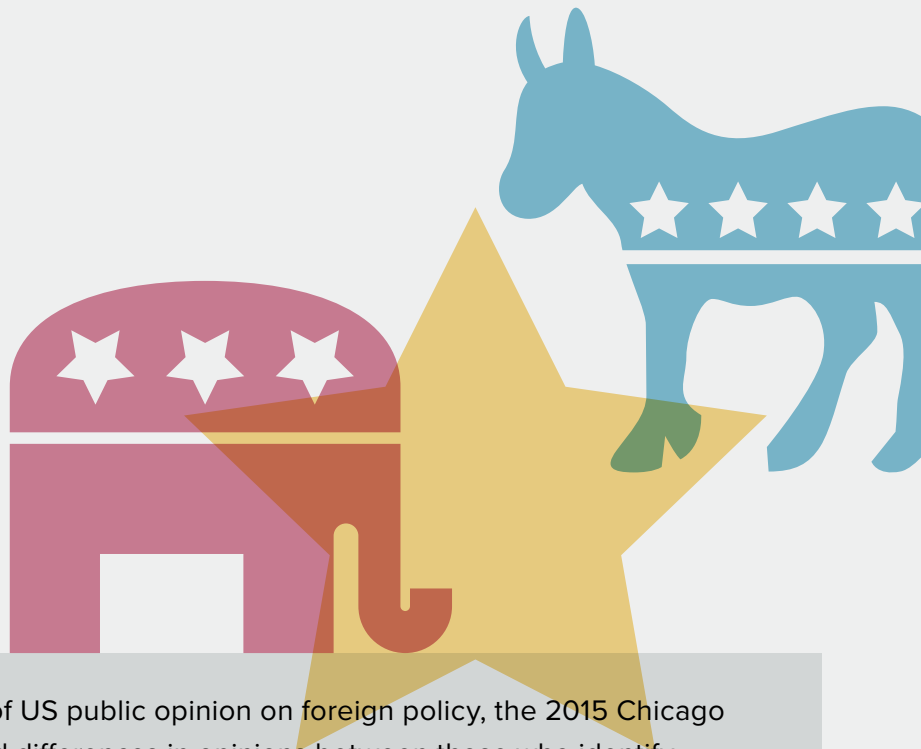
With the world seemingly lurching from one crisis to the next, foreign policy is bound to be a major issue in the 2016 presidential campaign. Over the past year, a number of existing threats have become more pressing. In particular, the Middle East presents a vexing puzzle for the United States. The Islamic State (ISIS), which rose to prominence after the Iraq War and amidst the continuing chaos of the Syrian civil war, now occupies vast swathes of Iraq and Syria. ISIS gained international notoriety with its videotaped brutalities, and now its actions and influence threaten to spill into neighboring countries. Consequently, after several years of pulling troops out of the region, the Obama administration has ramped up military operations with sustained air strikes against ISIS.

Tensions are also rising outside the Middle East. In the Asia–Pacific, China is asserting itself in defense of territorial claims in the South China Sea, and Japan is moving to reinterpret its constitution after 70 years in order to contribute more to regional and global security and shed some of its pacifist constraints. North Korea’s intention to expand its nuclear weapons program continues to present a volatile threat to South Korea and the entire region. In Europe, Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its continuing efforts to destabilize Ukraine have led to a growing divide with the West and a renewed focus on the military dimension of Western relations with Moscow.

In the United States, President Obama has reestablished diplomatic ties with Cuba after 54 years, a move hailed as long overdue by many observers (and vehemently opposed by others). Administration officials are also trying to convince an increasingly skeptical American

public of the benefits of negotiating a historic nuclear agreement with Iran. In addition, the president's executive actions on immigration and his efforts to curb the effects of climate change have set the terms of debate on these issues for the candidates running to replace him.

The 2015 Chicago Council Survey reveals how Americans view foreign policy, as well as the differing views of Republicans, Democrats, and Independents on the top global issues. With the current administration's term winding down, nearly two dozen candidates have already announced their intention to run for president of the United States in 2016. To win, each will have to appeal to both his or her party base and the American public at large. In some cases, the survey shows that reconciling between these two may be a difficult task.



In addition to offering an overall snapshot of US public opinion on foreign policy, the 2015 Chicago Council Survey highlights the similarities and differences in opinions between those who identify as Republicans, those who identify as Democrats, and those who identify as Independents. For more information, see methodology, [“About the Survey Sample,”](#) on page 42.

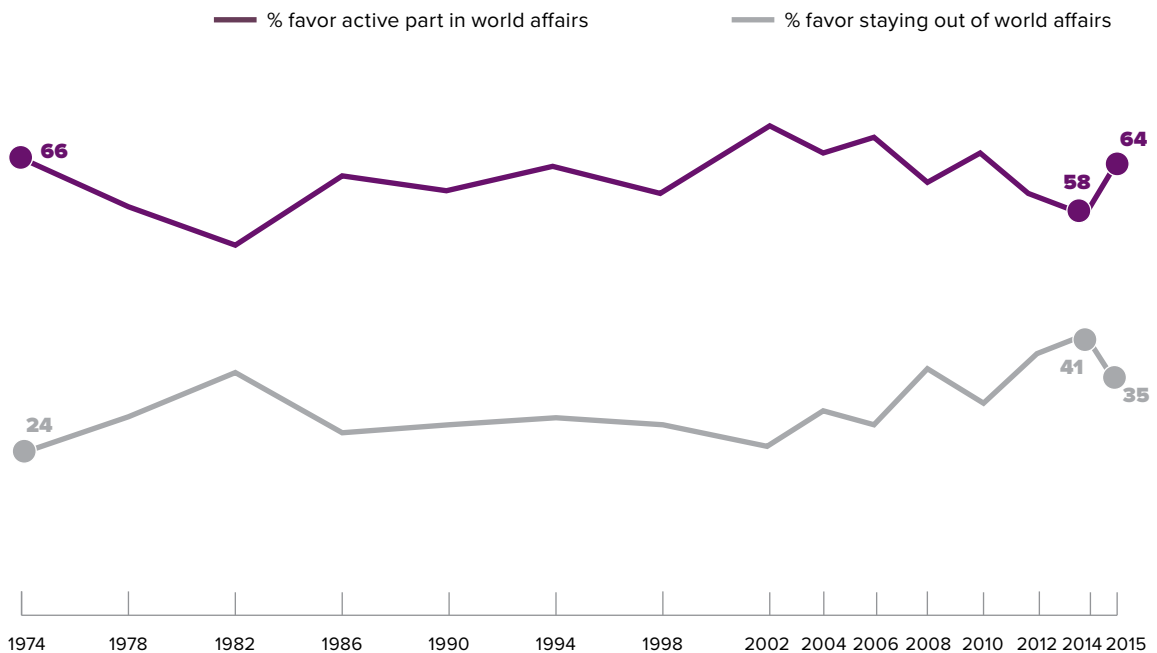
A Majority of Americans Support an Active US Role in World Affairs

Since the first Chicago Council Survey in 1974, a clear majority of Americans have said that the United States should play an active role in world affairs. Today, 64 percent support an active US role, up from 58 percent in 2014 (Figure 1). This boost is likely related to greater concern about terrorism and the rise of violent Islamic extremist groups such as ISIS ([see page 13](#)). Furthermore, the public's increased interest in foreign policy concerns may be partly attributable to reduced concern about the health of the US economy.

Figure 1: **Americans Prefer Active US Role in World Affairs**

Do you think it will be best for the future of the country if we take an active part in world affairs or if we stay out of world affairs?

Full sample (n = 2,034)



Figures may not add to 100 due to rounding.

2015 Chicago Council Survey

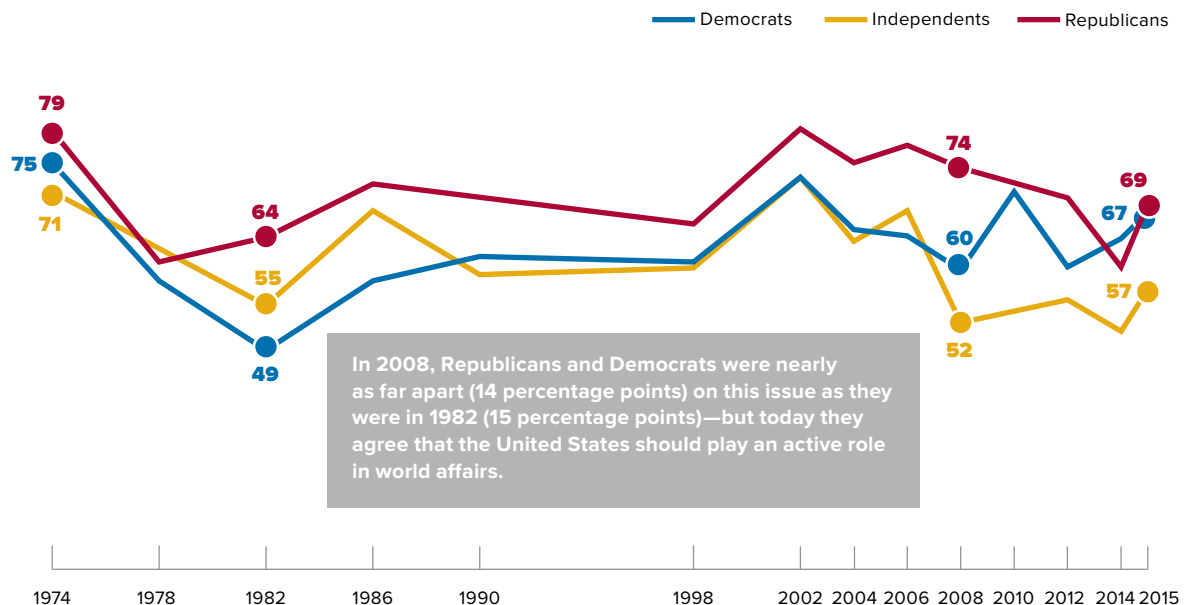
Americans' current endorsement of US participation in world affairs crosses political lines. Since 1980, Republicans have been more likely than Democrats to favor engagement regardless of which party held the White House. In 2008, Republicans and Democrats were nearly as far apart as they were in 1982. This gap narrowed after President Obama assumed office, and today Democrats and Republicans equally believe that the United States should play an active part (Figure 2).

In contrast to Republicans and Democrats, since 2002 Independents have become increasingly less likely to favor an active US role in world affairs (despite an increase in 2015). This downward trend has been driven by Independents who do not lean toward one of the two parties—the so-called “pure” Independents.²

Figure 2: **Across Parties, Majorities Favor an Active US Role in World Affairs**

Do you think it will be best for the future of the country if we take an active part in world affairs or if we stay out of world affairs? (% active part)

Full sample (n = 2,034)



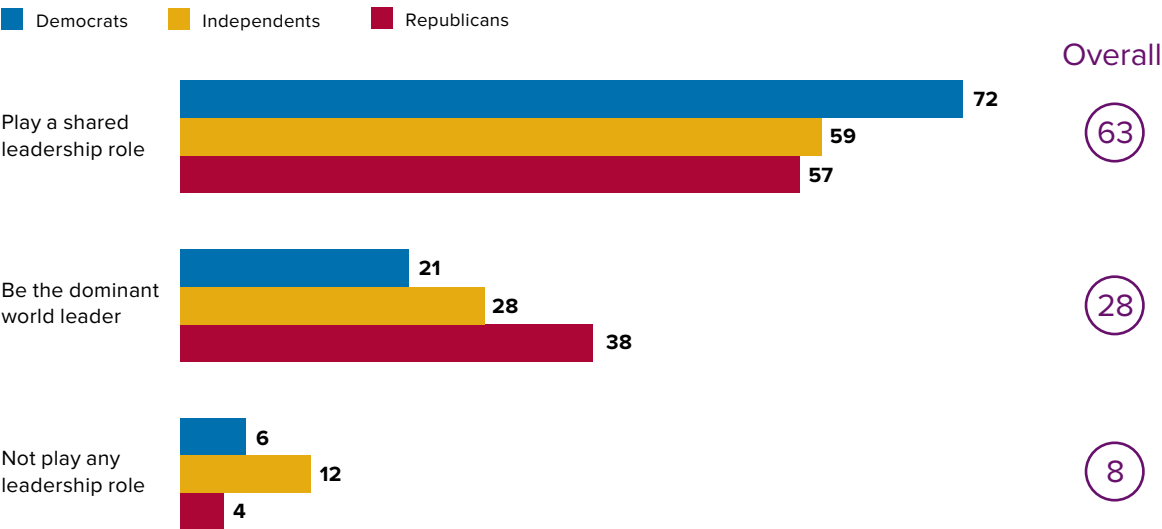
2015 Chicago Council Survey

US Dominance or a Shared Leadership Role?

Overall, 9 in 10 Americans say that strong US leadership in the world is desirable, with a clear majority—63 percent—preferring a shared rather than a dominant leadership role. While support for shared leadership extends across party lines, Democrats are significantly more likely than Republicans or Independents to express this view. Republicans are comparatively more likely to say that the United States should be the dominant world leader by a nearly two-to-one margin over Democrats (Figure 3).

Figure 3: **Americans Prefer a Shared Leadership Role**

What kind of leadership role should the United States play in the world? Should it be the dominant world leader, or should it play a shared leadership role, or should it not play any leadership role? (%)
Full sample (n = 2,034)



Figures may not add to 100 due to rounding.
2015 Chicago Council Survey

Even respondents who prefer dominant US leadership would like traditional or familiar allies to exert strong international leadership (see [Appendix Figure 5](#)). Large majorities of Americans say it is desirable for the European Union (80%) and Japan (73%) to exert strong leadership in the world; smaller majorities say the same about India (63%) and South Korea (62%).

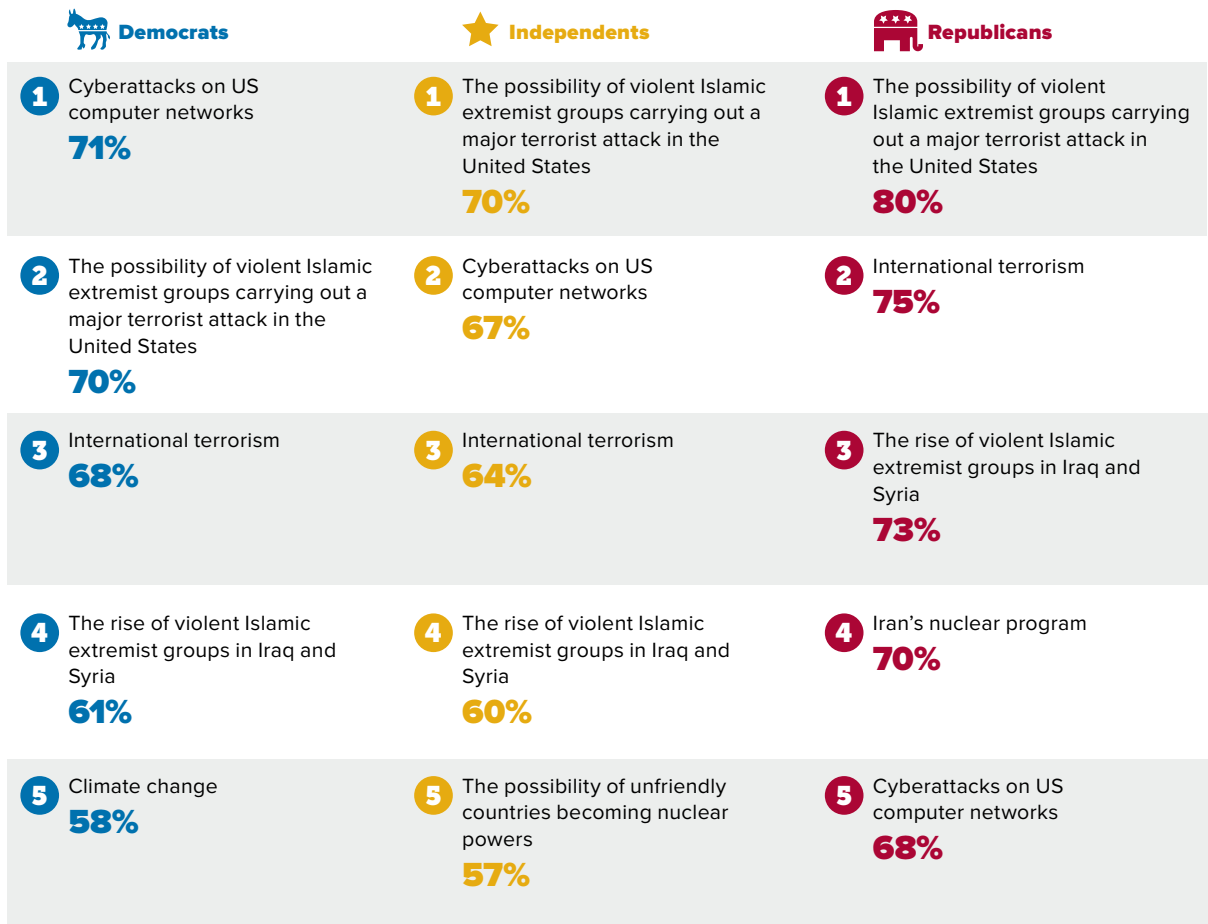
Partisans Broadly Agree on Critical Threats Facing the United States—Except for Climate Change and Immigration

The US public's views on the most critical international threats parallel the major news headlines over the past year. A majority of respondents consider the following threats to be critical: the possibility of violent Islamic extremist groups carrying out a major terrorist attack in the United States (72%), international terrorism (69%), cyberattacks on US computer networks (69%), the rise of violent Islamic extremist groups in Iraq and Syria (64%), the possibility of unfriendly countries becoming nuclear powers (59%), Iran's nuclear program (57%), North Korea's nuclear program (55%), and Islamic fundamentalism (55%). (See Appendix Figure 1.) For the most part, majorities of Republicans, Democrats, and Independents view all of these threats as critical, though the relative order differs for each group (Figure 4).

Figure 4: **Americans' Top Five Critical Threats**

Below is a list of possible threats to the vital interest of the United States in the next 10 years. For each one, please select whether you see this as a critical threat, an important but not critical threat, or not an important threat at all. (% critical threat)

Half sample (n varies)



In addition to variation in ordering, there are some differences in the extent to which partisans sense each of these items as a threat. For example, across a list of 20 potential threats, a majority of Republicans consider 10 of them to be critical, compared with 8 among Democrats and 7 among Independents. This finding reflects Republicans' tendency to sense a more dangerous world: nearly half of Republicans say that the United States today is less safe today than before the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (compared with only one-quarter of Democrats and one-third of Independents).³

Largest Partisan Divides on Threats of Immigration and Climate Change

The sharpest contrasts between Democrats and Republicans emerge on the potential threats posed by an increase in immigration and climate change. While 63 percent of Republicans consider large numbers of immigrants and refugees coming into the United States a critical threat, just 29 percent of Democrats say the same, a gap of 34 percentage points. Conversely, while 6 in 10 Democrats label climate change a critical threat, no more than 2 in 10 Republicans say the same, a gap of 41 percentage points. There are smaller gaps on the perceived threat of Islamic fundamentalism—a difference of 18 percentage points—and Iran's nuclear program—a gap of 16 percentage points (see Appendix Figure 1).

Independents split the difference between Republicans and Democrats on climate change and immigration. In addition, of all partisan groups, Independents are the only group within which a majority does not perceive a critical threat in the form of either an international financial crisis (44% compared with 51% among both Democrats and Republicans) or Iran's nuclear program (49% compared with 70% of Republicans and 54% of Democrats).

Partisans Disagree on Top Goals of US Foreign Policy

As past surveys have shown, these threat perceptions influence the public's top foreign policy goals. Overall, 6 in 10 or more say that four goals in particular are very important: protecting American jobs (73%),⁴ preventing the spread of nuclear weapons (72%), combating international terrorism (65%), and securing adequate supplies of energy (61%). Smaller majorities mention maintaining superior military power around the world (55%), improving global access to clean water (53%), improving America's standing in the world (53%), and controlling and reducing illegal immigration (52%). (See Appendix Figure 2.)



While **6 in 10** Democrats label climate change a critical threat, no more than **2 in 10** Republicans say the same, a gap of **41 percentage points**.

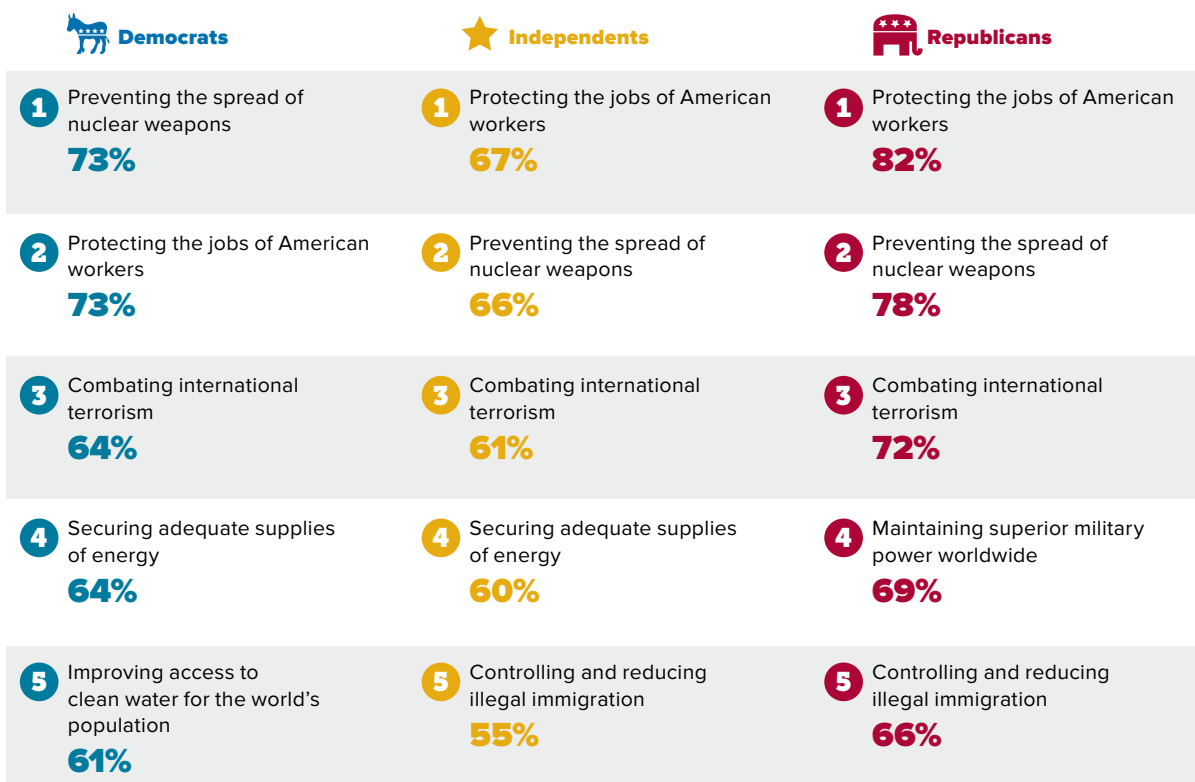
Partisans agree on the top three goals, reflecting the public's broadly shared priorities of jobs and security at home (Figure 5). Beyond those common concerns, though, Republicans place relatively greater emphasis on maintaining superior military power worldwide and controlling and reducing illegal immigration, while Democrats stress the importance of securing adequate supplies of energy and improving access to clean water. Democrats are also much more likely than Republicans to say that combating world hunger (55% Democrats, 27% Republicans, 41% Independents) and reducing economic inequality in the world (38% Democrats, 13% Republicans, 28% Independents) are very important goals—though neither is in their top five.

Independents have something in common with both Republicans and Democrats. Like Democrats, they view securing adequate supplies of energy as an important goal—followed by controlling and reducing illegal immigration, a priority they share with Republicans.

Figure 5: **Americans' Top Five Foreign Policy Goals**

Below is a list of possible foreign policy goals that the United States might have. For each one, please select whether you think that it should be a very important foreign policy goal of the United States, a somewhat important foreign policy goal, or not an important goal at all. (% very important goal)

Half sample (n varies)



2015 Chicago Council Survey

Despite Shared Perception of Many Threats and Goals, Immigration and Climate Change Could Be Wedge Issues for US Public

In sum, Democrats and Republicans share a desire to remain engaged in the world and have common fears about national security. Both consider international terrorism, cyberattacks, and the rise of violent Islamic extremist groups to be critical threats. Both also focus on similar foreign policy goals, which include protecting American jobs, preventing the spread of nuclear weapons, and combating international terrorism.

Beyond these similarities, Republicans and Democrats have particularly serious differences on two key issues: immigration and climate change. In addition, Republicans are significantly more likely than Democrats to prioritize maintaining superior US military power, and they are also more likely to view Iran's nuclear program and Islamic fundamentalism as critical threats. For their part, Democrats are substantially more likely than Republicans to view combating world hunger and fighting economic inequality as very important goals for US foreign policy, though these are second-tier goals for Democrats as well.

Even when Republicans and Democrats see eye to eye on foreign policy threats and goals, they often prefer different approaches to address them. The next section outlines those means of international engagement seen as most effective, with key differences emerging on whether forceful or diplomatic approaches work best. ●

Perspectives Differ on Force Versus Diplomacy as the Most Effective Foreign Policy Tool

Overall, Americans endorse a wide range of methods to achieve US foreign policy goals, with majorities judging that both hard and soft approaches are at least somewhat effective. But just as Republicans and Democrats differ on the preferred type of leadership role for the United States ([see page 12](#)), they also differ on the most effective means of engaging internationally: Republicans are significantly more likely than Democrats to support hard-power approaches to US foreign policy. Democrats also see the value in military strength, though they are more likely than Republicans to view soft-power methods as effective (Figure 6).

While large majorities across political affiliations believe that maintaining US military superiority is an effective way to achieve US foreign policy goals, Republicans are more likely than Democrats to say that this is a “very” effective approach (50% compared with 37% of Democrats and 34% of Independents). The next closest approach deemed “very effective” by Republicans is maintaining existing alliances (substantially lower, at 31%). ([See Appendix Figure 3.](#))

Republicans’ focus on hard power carries over to their preferences for how the United States should respond to specific international situations. Republicans are more likely than Democrats or Independents to support the use of US troops in three particular situations: to stop Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, to defend Israel if it were attacked by its neighbors, and to fight violent Islamic extremist groups. Republicans, especially strong Republicans, are also more likely than other partisans to support the use of force against terrorism, though majorities across all partisan groups are supportive of doing so ([see pages 24–26](#)).

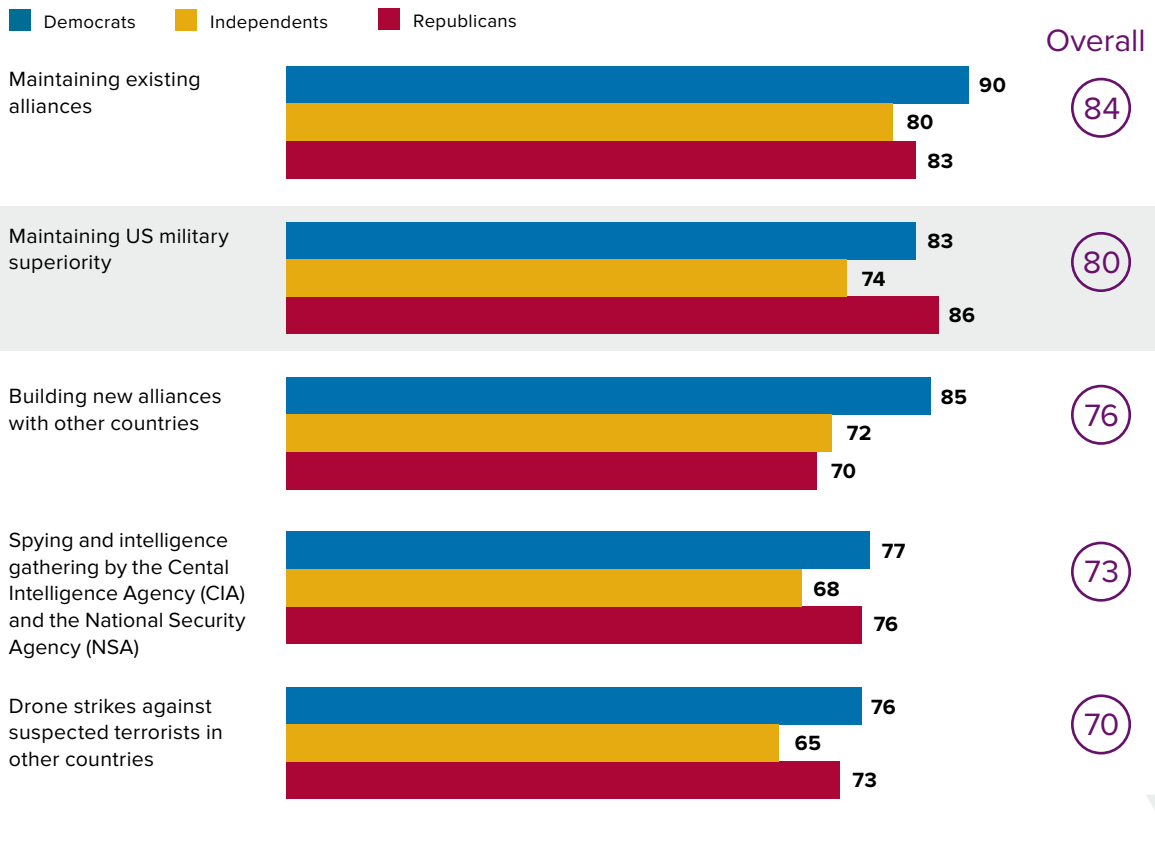
Compared with Republicans, Democrats are significantly more likely—by 20 to 33 percentage points—to say that several diplomatic actions, including strengthening the United Nations, engaging in high-level diplomatic visits, signing free-trade agreements, and providing economic aid to other countries, are “somewhat” or “very” effective. Democrats are also more likely to view signing international treaties, building new alliances, and placing sanctions on other countries as effective, though these gaps are narrower. This pattern corresponds to a greater inclination among Democrats to favor multilateral approaches and working through the UN—even at the expense of US interests.⁵

Reflecting their support of soft-power approaches, Democrats are also more likely than Republicans to favor diplomatic engagement in sensitive international situations. [As detailed on page 19](#), Democrats tend to support continued diplomatic efforts with Iran to prevent it from obtaining a nuclear weapon and favor ending the trade embargo with Cuba. These positions are not new: since 2008, Chicago Council Surveys have shown that Democrats are more likely to say that US government leaders should be ready to meet and talk with the leaders of hostile nations and groups, including Cuba, Hamas, Hezbollah, Iran, and the Taliban ([see Appendix Figure 7](#)). Democrats are also far more likely to support US participation in a variety of international treaties, including a treaty to address climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions.⁶

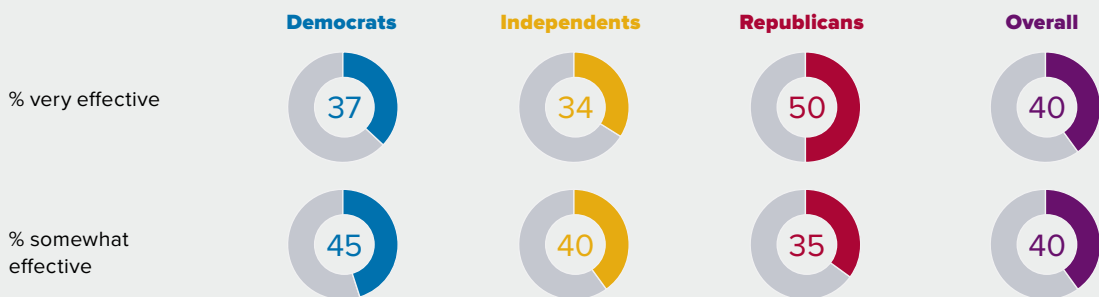
Figure 6: **Americans' Top Five Approaches to US Foreign Policy**

How effective do you think each of the following approaches are to achieving the foreign policy goals of the United States—very effective, somewhat effective, not very effective, or not effective at all? (% very or somewhat effective)

Full sample (n = 2,034)



Maintaining US military superiority



Figures may not add to 100 due to rounding.

2015 Chicago Council Survey

Independents are least likely to say that most of these approaches are effective, reflecting their relatively weaker enthusiasm for the United States playing an active role on the international stage. They align more closely with Republicans in doubting the effectiveness of building new alliances, economic aid, and free-trade agreements. Their opinions lie in between Republicans and Democrats on international treaties and strengthening the United Nations, and they more closely resemble Democrats on the value of superior military power (34% deem it very effective).

Democrats Favor Iran Deal; Republicans Most Likely to Want Military Option on the Table

Recent negotiations with Iran over its nuclear program have been the top foreign policy story of 2015 and provide an excellent illustration of the tensions between pursuing diplomacy compared with military options. Since the agreement was reached in July 2015, Republican presidential contenders have come out strongly against the deal. Scott Walker, in his candidacy announcement speech, promised to “terminate the bad deal with Iran” on his first day in office; Jeb Bush called it “dangerous, deeply flawed, and shortsighted,” and Ted Cruz has said the deal “poses the gravest national security threat to this country of anything we are facing.”² In contrast, Democratic candidates are backing President Obama: Hillary Clinton described the deal as “an important step in putting a lid on Iran’s nuclear program,” and Bernie Sanders praised the deal as “a victory for diplomacy.”³

Results from the 2015 Chicago Council Survey, conducted in the weeks before the official agreement was finalized, found that public opinion runs along the same political fault lines. Democrats and Independents supported the framework for the agreement, while just less than half of Republicans favored it. Several surveys conducted after the agreement was signed have found that overall public support has since substantially declined, though Democrats and Independents are still more likely than Republicans to favor the deal. At best, the most recent polls find opinion divided, and many respondents say they don’t know how they feel.⁴ Respondents’ views also vary based on the wording of and the amount of information provided in the question.¹⁰

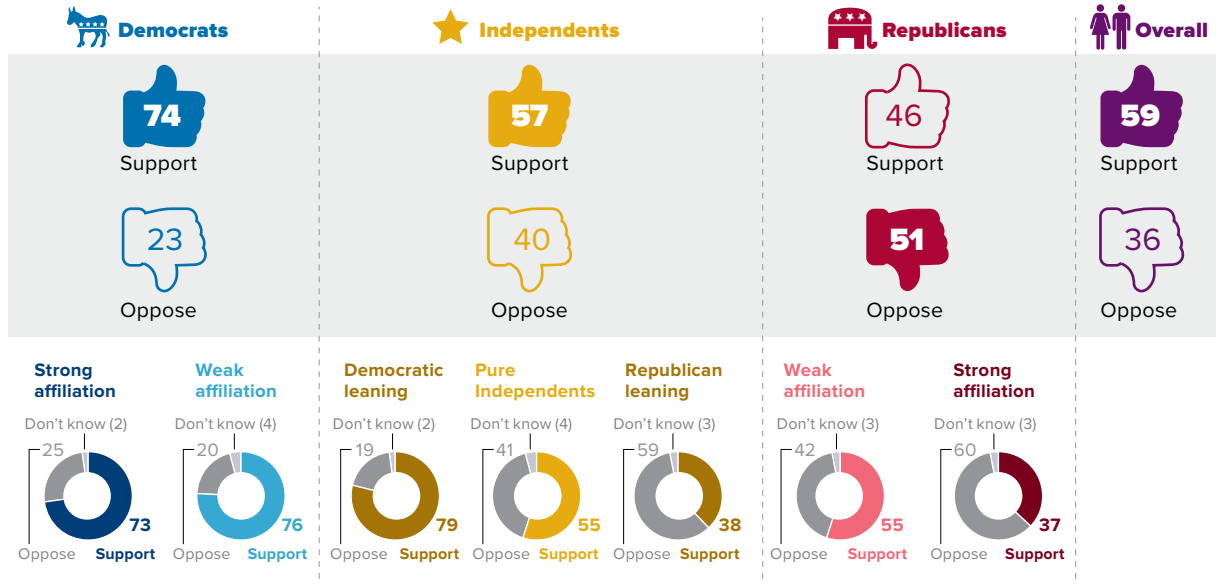
A closer look at the 2015 Chicago Council Survey results shows that strong Republicans were less likely to support the deal than weak Republicans, who actually favor the deal. Furthermore, pure Independents and Independents who lean Democrat were much more in favor of the deal than Independents who lean Republican (Figure 7). These differences ensure that the Iran deal will figure prominently in the debates and campaigns, especially as differing poll results reveal the fluidity of US public opinion on the issue.

Should Iran commit a major violation of an agreement, large majorities of Americans across parties favor continuing diplomatic efforts and tightening sanctions. More aggressive actions also find favor across partisan lines: two in three Republicans and slightly smaller majorities of Democrats and Independents support cyberattacks and air strikes against Iran’s nuclear facilities in this case. But only among Republicans does a majority favor sending US troops to destroy Iran’s nuclear facilities if the country violates an agreement. This preference is more prevalent among strong Republicans. Similarly, Independents who lean Republican are more likely to support sending US troops to destroy Iran’s nuclear facilities; pure and Democratic-leaning Independents more closely resemble Democrats on this question (Figure 8).

Figure 7: **Partisans Divide on Iran Nuclear Deal**

As you may know, the United States and other countries recently reached the outlines of an agreement with Iran that will ease some of the economic sanctions against Iran. In exchange, Iran will limit its nuclear enrichment capacity and research and development for 10 years, give international inspectors greater access to nuclear facilities, and increase the time it would take for Iran to develop a nuclear weapon from 2–3 months to at least a year. Do you support or oppose the outlines of this agreement? (%)

Full sample (n = 2,034)



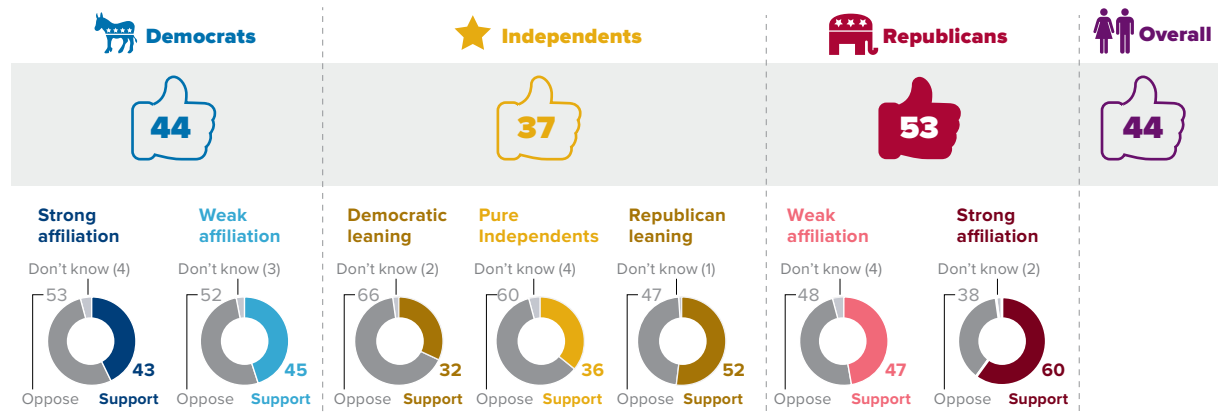
Figures may not add to 100 due to rounding.

2015 Chicago Council Survey

Figure 8: **Republicans Support Sending Troops into Iran if Iran Violates Deal**

If Iran commits a major violation of this agreement, would you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose the United States taking each of the following actions: **Send US troops to destroy Iran's nuclear facilities.** (% strongly or somewhat support)

Half sample (n = 1,050)



Figures may not add to 100 due to rounding.

2015 Chicago Council Survey

Partisans Disagree in Opinions about Israel and a Two-State Solution

Over the past year, differences over Iran policy between President Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu spilled into the headlines, exacerbated by Mr. Netanyahu's March 2015 speech before Congress, made at the request of GOP leaders. These events seem to have had some impact on public attitudes toward Israel's role in the Middle East, though as in past surveys, there is generally bipartisan goodwill toward Israel.

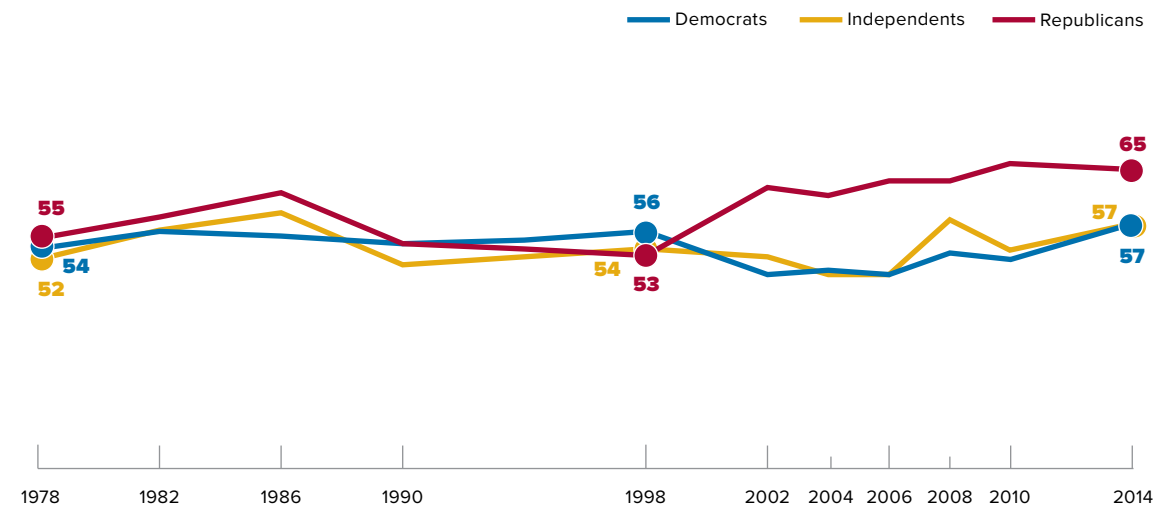
Results from the 2014 Chicago Council Survey found that favorable feelings toward Israel have increased among supporters from both parties in recent years.⁴¹ Republicans' favorable views of Israel have surged since 1998, while Democrats continue to feel warmly toward Israel, slightly more today than in 1978 (Figure 9).

Overall, the US public is evenly divided on whether Israel plays a positive or negative role in resolving the key problems facing the Middle East. A majority of Democrats say Israel plays a negative role in the Middle East, with strong Democrats (60% negative) more critical than weak Democrats (47% negative). By contrast, a majority of Republicans say that Israel plays a positive role in the Middle East, with little difference between strong and weak Republicans. Like the public overall, Independents are divided on Israel's role, with those leaning Republican more positive than those who lean Democrat. Pure Independents most closely resemble Democrats on this question (Figure 10).

Figure 9: **Americans' Favorable Feelings toward Israel Have Increased**

Please rate your feelings toward some countries and peoples, with 100 meaning a very warm, favorable feeling; 0 meaning a very cold, unfavorable feeling; and 50 meaning not particularly warm or cold. You can use any number from 0 to 100; the higher the number, the more favorable your feelings are toward that country or those people: **Israel**. (rating from 1 to 100)

Half sample, 2014 survey (n = 938)

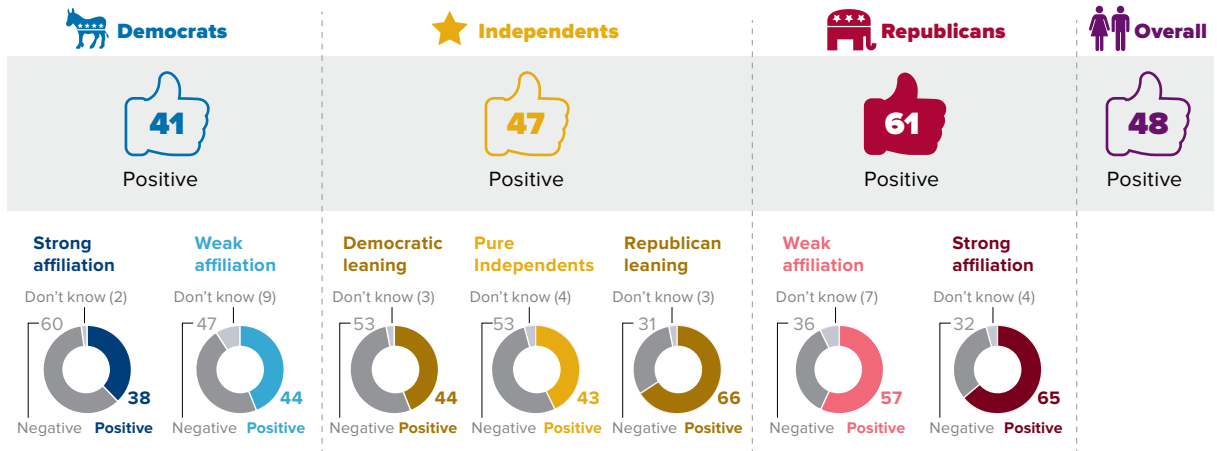


2015 Chicago Council Survey

Figure 10: **Americans Disagree on Israel's Impact on the Middle East**

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

Half sample (n = 1,037)



Figures may not add to 100 due to rounding.

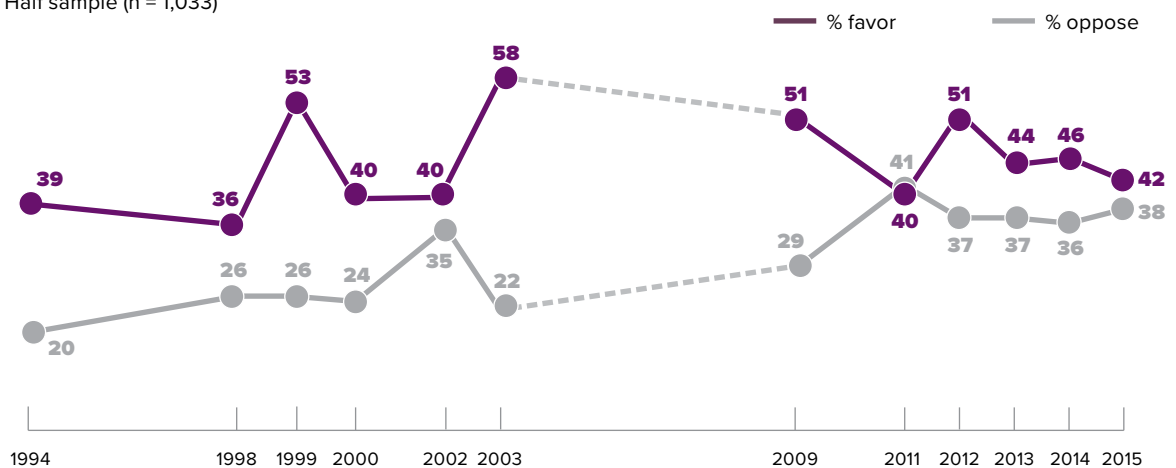
2015 Chicago Council Survey

More critical views among Democrats of Israel's role in resolving the problems in the Middle East may also reflect Democrats' desire for a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Overall public opinion is now closely divided, though a majority supported the creation of "an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip" in 1999, 2002, and 2012 (Figure 11). Looking more closely at differences among party sympathizers, 6 in 10 Democrats support a Palestinian

Figure 11: **Americans Divided on Forming a Palestinian State**

Do you favor or oppose the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip?

Half sample (n = 1,033)



Data between 2003 and 2009 are unavailable.

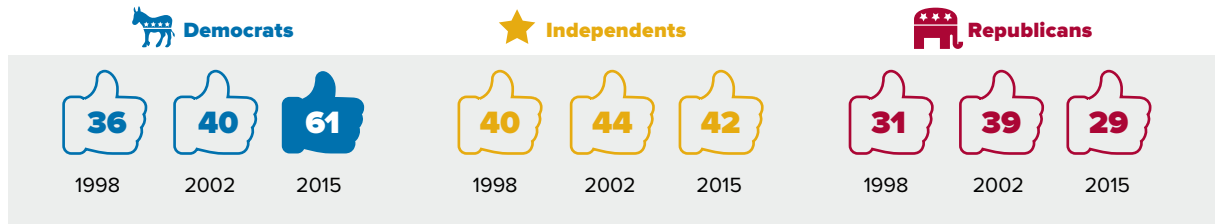
Sources: Surveys by The Chicago Council on Global Affairs (1994, 1998, 2002, 2015), CNN/ORC (2011), and Gallup (1999, 2000, 2003, 2009, 2012, 2013, 2014).

2015 Chicago Council Survey

state, compared with only 3 in 10 Republicans and 4 in 10 Independents. But opinions on this issue were not always so partisan: in 1998 and 2002, Republicans, Democrats, and Independents were narrowly divided (Figure 12).

Figure 12: **Democrats Now Support the Formation of a Palestinian State**

Do you favor or oppose the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip? (% favor)
Half sample (n = 1,033)



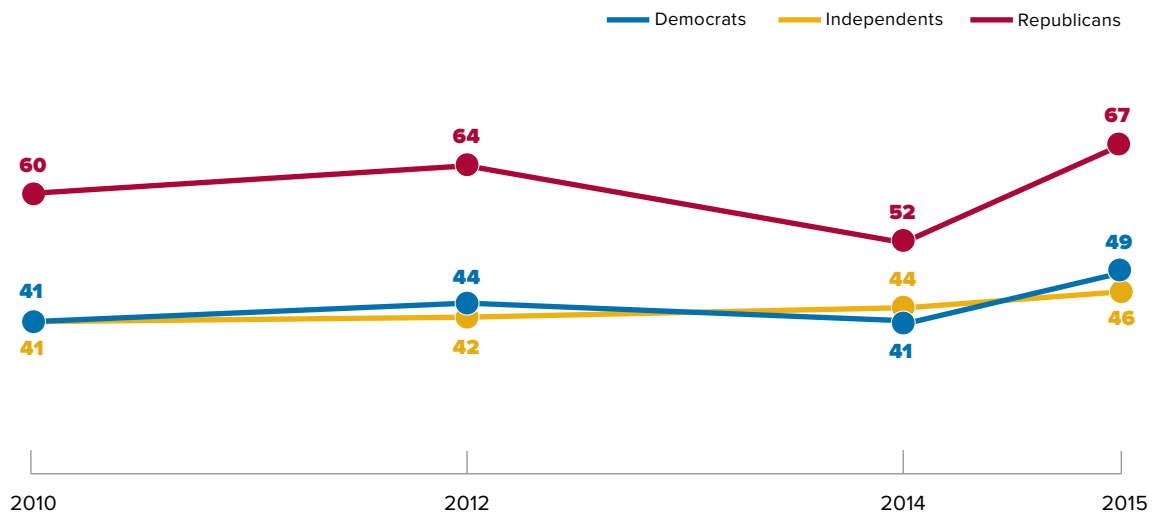
2015 Chicago Council Survey

Despite dissenting views on Israel's role in the Middle East, support for coming to Israel's defense has been stable over time. If Israel were attacked by its neighbors, a majority of Americans (53%) would support using US troops to defend Israel. In fact, support for using US troops for this purpose is currently at the highest level recorded among Republicans, Democrats, and Independents. Reflecting both their more favorable views of Israel's role in the region and relatively greater willingness to use force, Republicans are most likely to support using US troops to defend Israel, while half of Democrats and nearly as many Independents concur (Figure 13).

Figure 13: **Republicans Most Likely to Support Using Troops to Defend Israel**

There has been some discussion about the circumstances that might justify using US troops in other parts of the world. Please give your opinion about some situations. Would you favor or oppose the use of US troops: If Israel were attacked by its neighbors. (% favor)

One-third sample (n = 675)



2015 Chicago Council Survey

Independents and Democrats also hold similar positions on sending ground troops to Iran to destroy their nuclear facilities if Iran violates an agreement and using ground forces to combat ISIS. Republican-leaning Independents exhibit enthusiasm akin to strong Republicans on these matters, while pure and Democratic-leaning Independents more closely resemble strong Democrats.


Broad Public Support for Using Force to Combat ISIS and Terrorism

The rise of ISIS has had a marked impact on public fears since the 2014 Chicago Council Survey. The footage of brutal beheadings and ISIS's rapid territorial gains in both Iraq and Syria have alarmed both political leaders and the US public.

No doubt related to these developments, American public concern about Islamic fundamentalism has risen dramatically. Fifty-five percent now view Islamic fundamentalism as a critical threat—an increase of 15 percentage points from 2014 and the highest level since the 2002 Chicago Council Survey following the attacks of September 11, 2001. Reflecting these heightened fears, Americans rate two related threats—a major terrorist attack in the United States by violent Islamic extremist groups and international terrorism—as the most critical facing the country ([see page 13](#)).

The American public backs a range of military and nonmilitary options to address these threats, and primary candidates from both parties seem to favor continued military action against ISIS and its affiliates in Iraq and Syria. Republican candidate Jeb Bush has said that the United States needs “to reengage with a strong military and a strong presence,”¹² and Marco Rubio suggests that the country “put together a coalition of armed forces from regional governments” to confront ISIS, “with US special operations support.”¹³ On the Democratic side, Hillary Clinton believes that military action against ISIS is justified but “not sufficient alone.”¹⁴ Martin O'Malley agrees, advocating “an approach focused not only on military power, but on political solutions.”¹⁵

The 2015 Chicago Council Survey reveals that the American public vigorously supports forceful action to combat terrorism when necessary. These tactics include air strikes against terrorist training camps and other facilities, assassinations of individual terrorist leaders, and attacks by US ground troops against training camps and facilities (Figure 14).

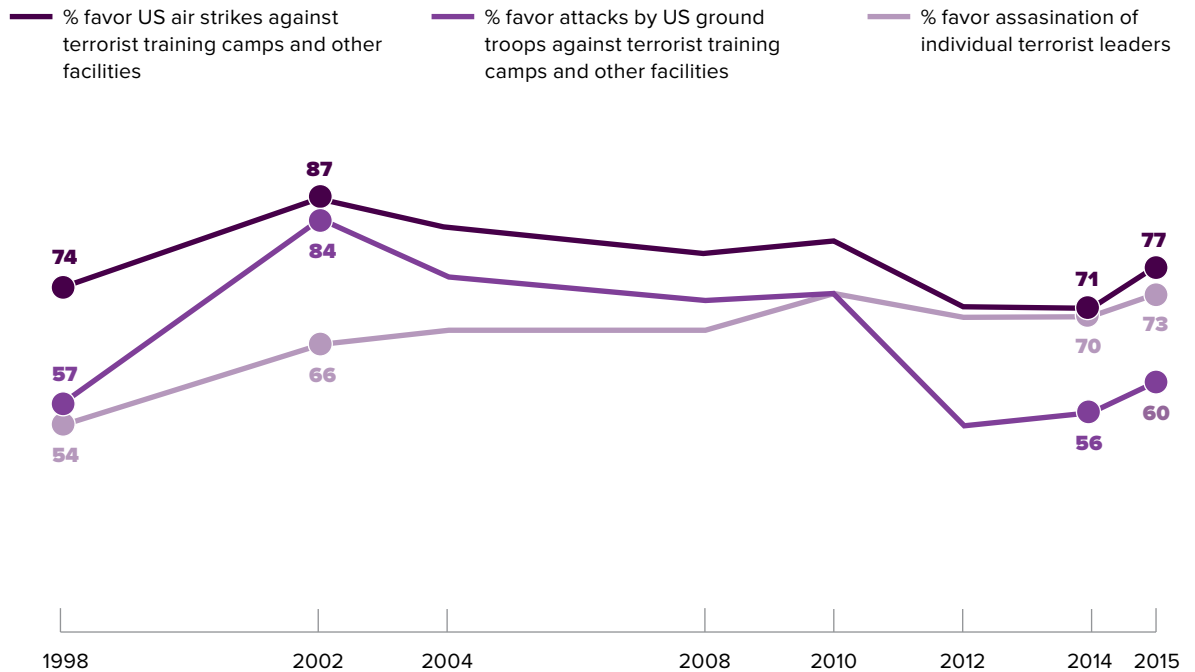


While support for ground troops has increased since **2012**, it remains lower than in previous years, especially compared with the high point of **84 percent** in **2002**.

Figure 14: **Americans Support Forceful Action When Necessary**

In order to combat international terrorism, please say whether you favor or oppose each of the following measures.

Full sample (n = 2,034)



2015 Chicago Council Survey

Since 2010, Americans have favored using assassinations over ground troops in fighting terrorism, a shift from previous patterns. This finding reinforces the idea that Americans have grown more supportive of lower-risk tactics, such as air strikes and assassinations, and less supportive of high-risk tactics—namely the use of ground troops. While support for ground troops has increased since 2012, it remains lower than in previous years, especially compared with the high point of 84 percent in 2002.

Unlike other issues, such as Iran and Israel, the survey finds relatively few partisan differences when it comes to taking action against international terrorism. Instead, majorities of all party supporters—Republicans, Democrats, and Independents alike—support a wide spectrum of responses to terrorism, including but not limited to the use of force (Figure 15). This cross-partisan support reflects the public's widely shared concerns about the threat of international terrorism, the rise of violent Islamic extremist groups in Iraq and Syria, and the possibility of those groups carrying out a major terrorist attack in the United States.

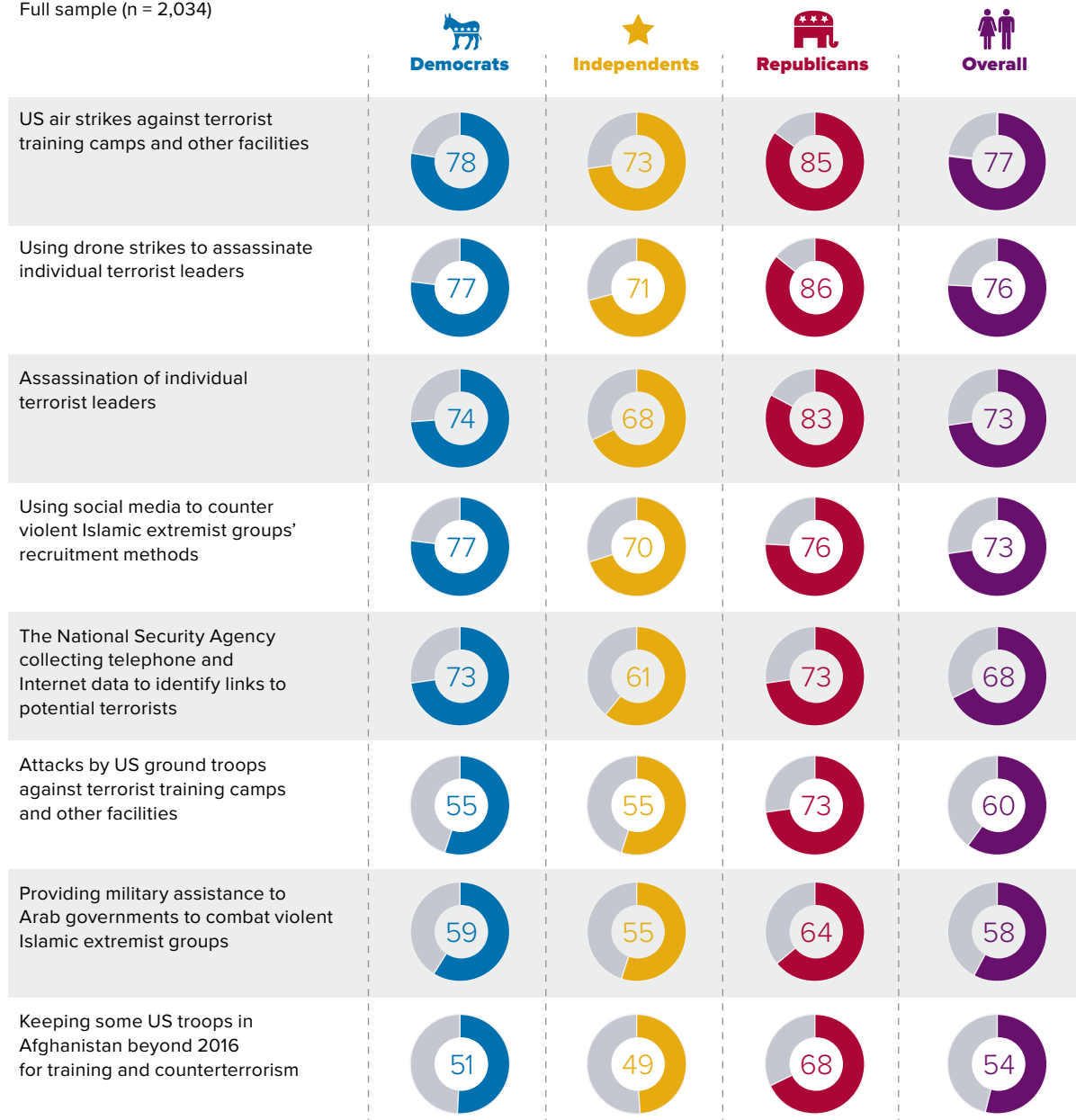
The differences that do exist are smaller than on other issues in the survey. In general, Republicans are the strongest supporters of most measures to combat international terrorism. Although a majority of Independents back nearly all of the policies included in the 2015 Chicago Council

Survey, their level of support is generally lower than other partisan groups. In addition, Republicans are much more likely than Democrats or Independents to favor attacks by US ground troops against terrorist training camps and other facilities as well as leaving some troops behind in Afghanistan beyond 2016 to help train the Afghan army and counterterrorism operations. •

Figure 15: How Americans Prefer the United States Fight Terrorism

In order to combat international terrorism, please say whether you favor or oppose each of the following measures. (% favor)

Full sample (n = 2,034)



2015 Chicago Council Survey

Similar Views Across Party Affiliations on Russia, Ukraine, and China—But Starkly Divided on Immigration and Climate Change

While the previous sections highlighted issues that elicit wide differences in partisan views, not all foreign policy issues divide the public. The 2015 Chicago Council Survey demonstrates widespread public support for diplomatic responses to improve relations with Cuba and to address the situation in Ukraine. In addition, Chicago Council Surveys from 2006 to 2014 found that two-thirds of Americans have consistently favored engagement and cooperation with China rather than working to limit its power.¹⁶

Strong Republicans Least, and Democrats Most, Supportive of Ending Trade Embargo with Cuba

When the Obama administration announced the restoration of diplomatic relations with Cuba, several Republicans, including Jeb Bush, Ted Cruz, and Marco Rubio, criticized the move. In a recent *New York Times* op-ed, Marco Rubio described the opening as a “Faustian bargain” and argued that any changes in US-Cuba policy must be tied to changes first in Cuba.¹⁷ Ted Cruz said that Obama’s Cuba policy “will be remembered as a tragic mistake.”¹⁸

However, the issue of normalizing diplomatic relations with Cuba seems to be more of a problem for a handful of politicians and a vocal minority of the public than it is for the American public at large. In Chicago Council Surveys from 2008 to 2014, two-thirds of Americans have consistently said that US leaders should be ready to meet and talk with leaders from Cuba.

Democratic candidates have gone even further than supporting a diplomatic defrost and have come out in favor of lifting the trade embargo. For example, Hillary Clinton has called the embargo an “outdated” policy,¹⁹ and Martin O’Malley has commented that, “Diplomacy creates opportunities. Embargoes don’t.”²⁰ The 2015 Chicago Council Survey finds that a majority (67%) of the US public supports the United States ending the trade embargo with Cuba, with 8 in 10 Democrats and 6 in 10 Independents in support. Even 6 in 10 Republicans support lifting the embargo, though support is stronger among weak Republicans (67%) than strong Republicans (51%).

Partisans Express a Shared Desire to Avoid Conflict with Russia and China

Whatever their partisan sympathies, Americans have consistently expressed a desire to avoid conflicts with Russia and China, perhaps because of their formidable military power. This reluctance could also be linked to American perceptions that the territorial ambitions of Russia and China are lesser direct threats to the United States, especially when compared with terrorism, Iran’s nuclear program, and Islamic fundamentalism (see Appendix Figure 1).

Russia and Ukraine

Both Democratic and Republican presidential candidates support the United States taking a stronger stance against Russia in response to Putin's ongoing "frozen war" in eastern Ukraine. While Republican candidate Jeb Bush has advocated for stronger US leadership,²¹ candidates from both parties would like to see more direct US involvement, such as providing financial assistance and military training (Hillary Clinton)²² as well as lethal aid to the government of Ukraine (Scott Walker).²³

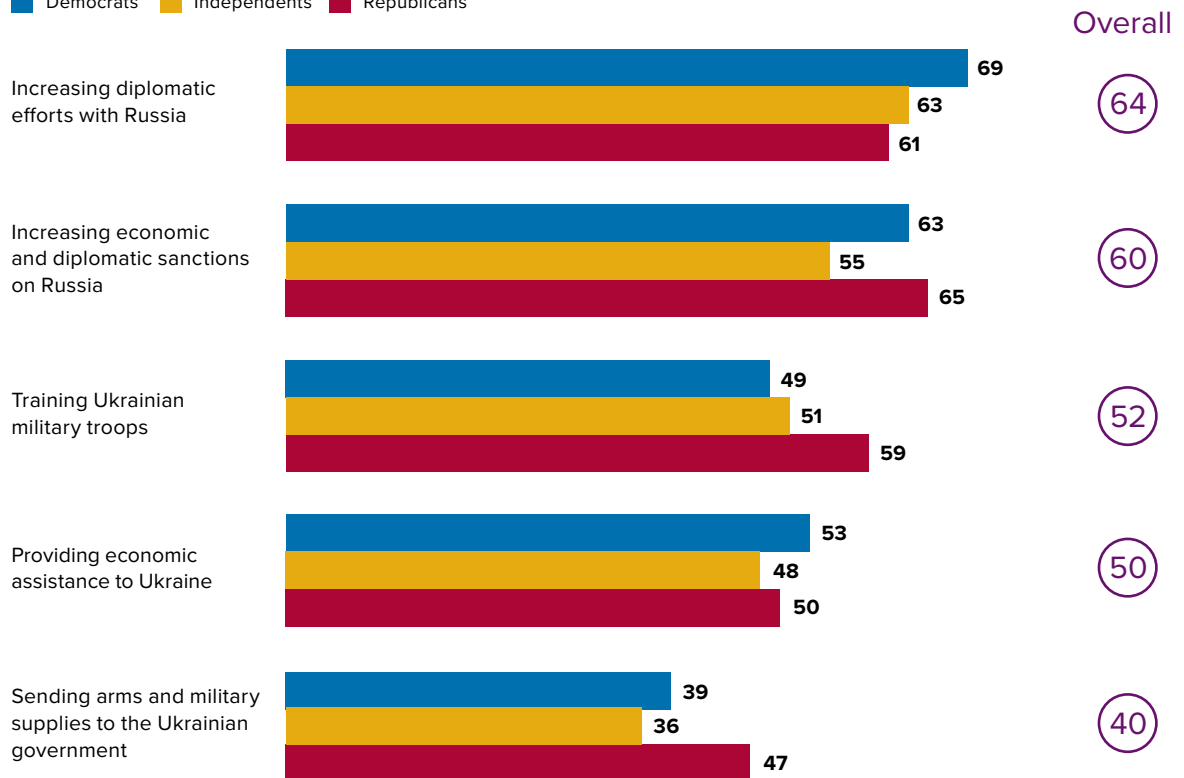
According to the 2015 Chicago Council Survey, Republicans are more comfortable than others in expanding US military support, in line with some of the candidates' recommendations. A majority of Republicans, compared with half of Independents and Democrats, would support the United States training Ukrainian troops. Republicans are also more likely to favor sending arms and military supplies to the Ukrainian government, though no more than half of any partisan group favors doing so (Figure 16).

Figure 16: **Americans' Views on the Conflict in Ukraine**

In response to the situation involving Russia and Ukraine, would you support or oppose the United States: (% support)

Full sample (n = 2,034)

■ Democrats ■ Independents ■ Republicans



Figures may not add to 100 due to rounding.

2015 Chicago Council Survey

But Americans, regardless of political affiliation, oppose direct US military involvement in this conflict: no more than one-third favor using US troops if Russia invades the rest of Ukraine. In contrast, nearly half of Democrats and Republicans and 4 in 10 Independents would support using US troops if Russia invaded a NATO ally such as Estonia, Latvia, or Lithuania.

China

Over the past year, territorial disputes have also emerged as a serious point of contention between China and its neighbors. These disputes created disagreements with the United States, especially over freedom of navigation in the South China Sea. Both Democratic and Republican candidates have voiced reservations about China's increasing influence. While stating that she wants to see China rise peacefully, Hillary Clinton has expressed concerns over China's growing military power and cyberespionage.²⁴ Many Republican candidates have been critical of China's human rights violations (Cruz)²⁵ and cyberattacks on the United States (Walker).²⁶

While the American public has concerns about China that align with those articulated by the candidates, its critique is generally more cautious. Only 34 percent of the public expresses confidence in China's ability to deal responsibly with world problems, putting China on par with India (34%) and South Korea (36%) but far below Japan (58%) or the European Union (66%). Democrats are only slightly more likely than Republicans and Independents to express confidence in China ([see Appendix Figure 4](#)). Nevertheless, the 2014 Chicago Council Survey found that about two-thirds of Republicans, Democrats, and Independents think the United States should undertake friendly cooperation and engagement with China rather than actively working to limit the growth of its power.²⁷

Although relatively low on the list of perceived threats facing the United States, the overall public is more inclined to consider China's military power rather than its economic power to be a critical threat, with no differences across party lines. Even fewer consider territorial disputes between China and its neighbors and a confrontation between China and Japan to be critical threats (Figure 17).²⁸

If China invades Taiwan or initiates a military conflict with Japan over disputed islands, no more than one-third of Americans across the political spectrum favor using US troops to defend Taiwan or Japan. In each of these cases, Independents are the least likely to support the use of US troops, with very little difference between Republicans and Democrats.

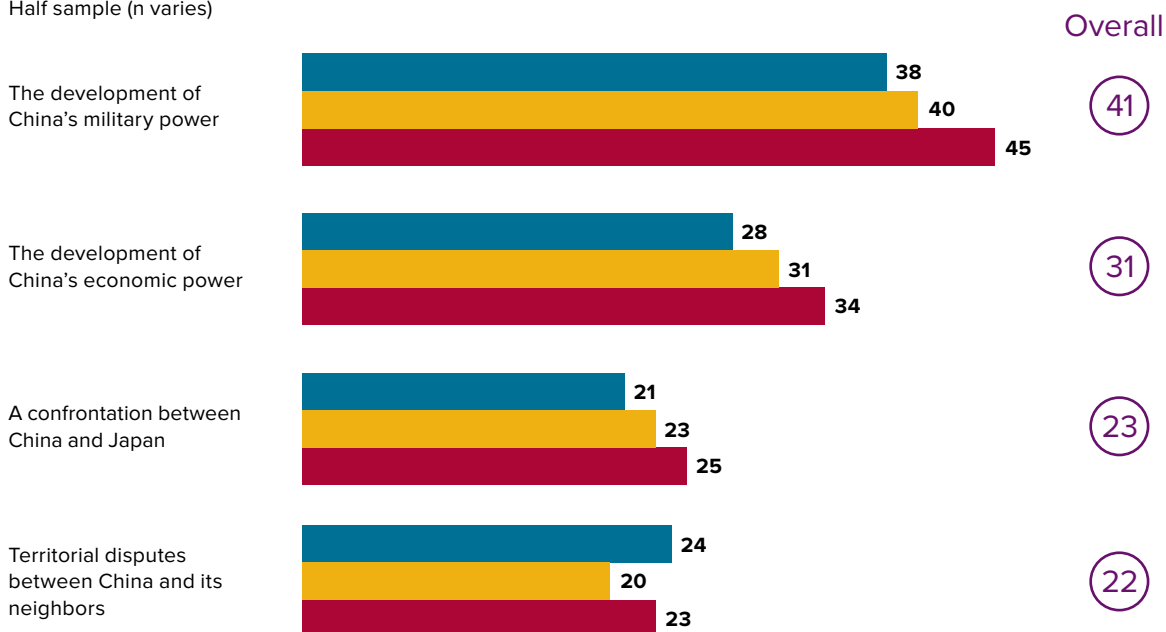
While Chinese military expansion is not seen as a direct threat to the United States, it is most often named as a likely source of potential conflict in the Asia-Pacific region (35% very likely and 44% somewhat likely). Americans view the relationship between North Korea and South Korea as the second most likely source of potential conflict in the region (34% very likely and 44% somewhat likely). ([For full results, see Appendix Figure 6.](#))

Figure 17: **Americans' Views on China**

■ Democrats ■ Independents ■ Republicans

Below is a list of possible threats to the vital interest of the United States in the next 10 years. For each one, please select whether you see this as a critical threat, an important but not critical threat, or not an important threat at all. (% critical threat)

Half sample (n varies)



There has been some discussion about the circumstances that might justify using US troops in other parts of the world. Please give your opinion about some situations. Would you favor or oppose the use of US troops: (% favor)

One-third sample (n = 675)



2015 Chicago Council Survey

Perhaps as part of a continued hedge against China as well as North Korea, a solid majority of Americans (64%) continue to support maintaining the US military presence in Asia at its current levels. But in a hypothetical situation where North Korea attacks South Korea, less than half (47%) of Americans support using troops to come to the aid of South Korea, though this share has increased over time. The same is true should North Korea attack Japan, a scenario in which 48 percent of the US public would support the use of US troops.

Immigration: Implications for Both Foreign and Domestic Policy

The Chicago Council Survey shows that over the past 20 years, immigration has become an increasingly partisan issue for the public. From 1998 to 2002, similar majorities of Democrats, Republicans, and Independents viewed large numbers of immigrants and refugees as a critical threat, and controlling and reducing illegal immigration as a very important goal. But since 2002, partisan views have widened greatly. In particular, Democrats have become far less likely to view immigration as a threat (Figure 18).²⁹

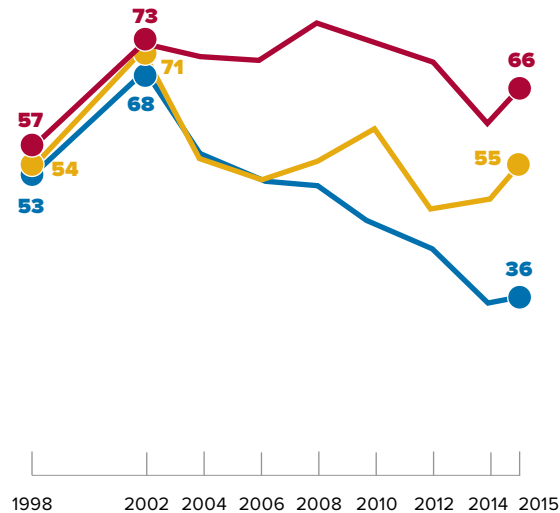
Figure 18: **Americans' Views on Immigration ...**

— Democrats — Independents — Republicans

... as a Very Important Foreign Policy Goal

Below is a list of possible foreign policy goals that the United States might have. For each one, please select whether you think that it should be a very important foreign policy goal of the United States, a somewhat important foreign policy goal, or not an important goal at all: **Controlling and reducing illegal immigration.** (% very important goal)

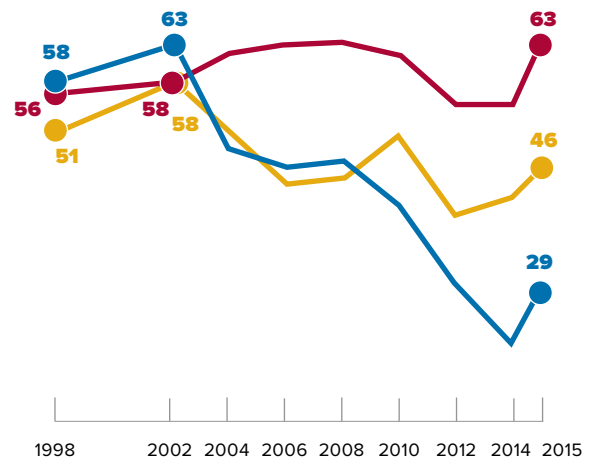
Half sample (n = 1,040)



... as a Critical Threat


Below is a list of possible threats to the vital interest of the United States in the next 10 years. For each one, please select whether you see this as a critical threat, an important but not critical threat, or not an important threat at all: **Large numbers of immigrants and refugees coming into the United States.** (% critical threat)

Half sample (n = 1,027)



Figures may not add to 100 due to rounding.

2015 Chicago Council Survey



Two-thirds of Republicans, but only **one-third** of Democrats, say that controlling and reducing illegal immigration is a very important goal of US foreign policy.

Today, the partisan gaps between Republicans and Democrats on illegal immigration are at record levels.³⁰ Two-thirds of Republicans, but only one-third of Democrats, say that controlling and reducing illegal immigration is a very important goal of US foreign policy. Similarly, Republicans are more than twice as likely as Democrats to view large numbers of immigrants and refugees coming into the United States as a critical threat. In fact, out of the 20 threats and goals polled in the 2015 Chicago Council Survey, questions about immigration produced the second-largest partisan divide after climate change (see [Appendix Figure 1](#)).

Republican candidates have laid out a variety of approaches on the immigration issue, from deportation to allowing illegal immigrants to stay as long as certain conditions are met. Given the importance that Republicans place on controlling and reducing illegal immigration, it is little surprise that 45 percent of Republicans believe that illegal immigrants should be required to leave their jobs and the United States, while 38 percent support allowing them to stay in their jobs and apply for US citizenship, either now or after paying a penalty and waiting a number of years. Among strong Republicans, an outright majority back deportation (Figure 19). These views among the GOP base presents challenges for Republican candidates, who must also appeal to Latino voters if they hope to win the general election.³¹

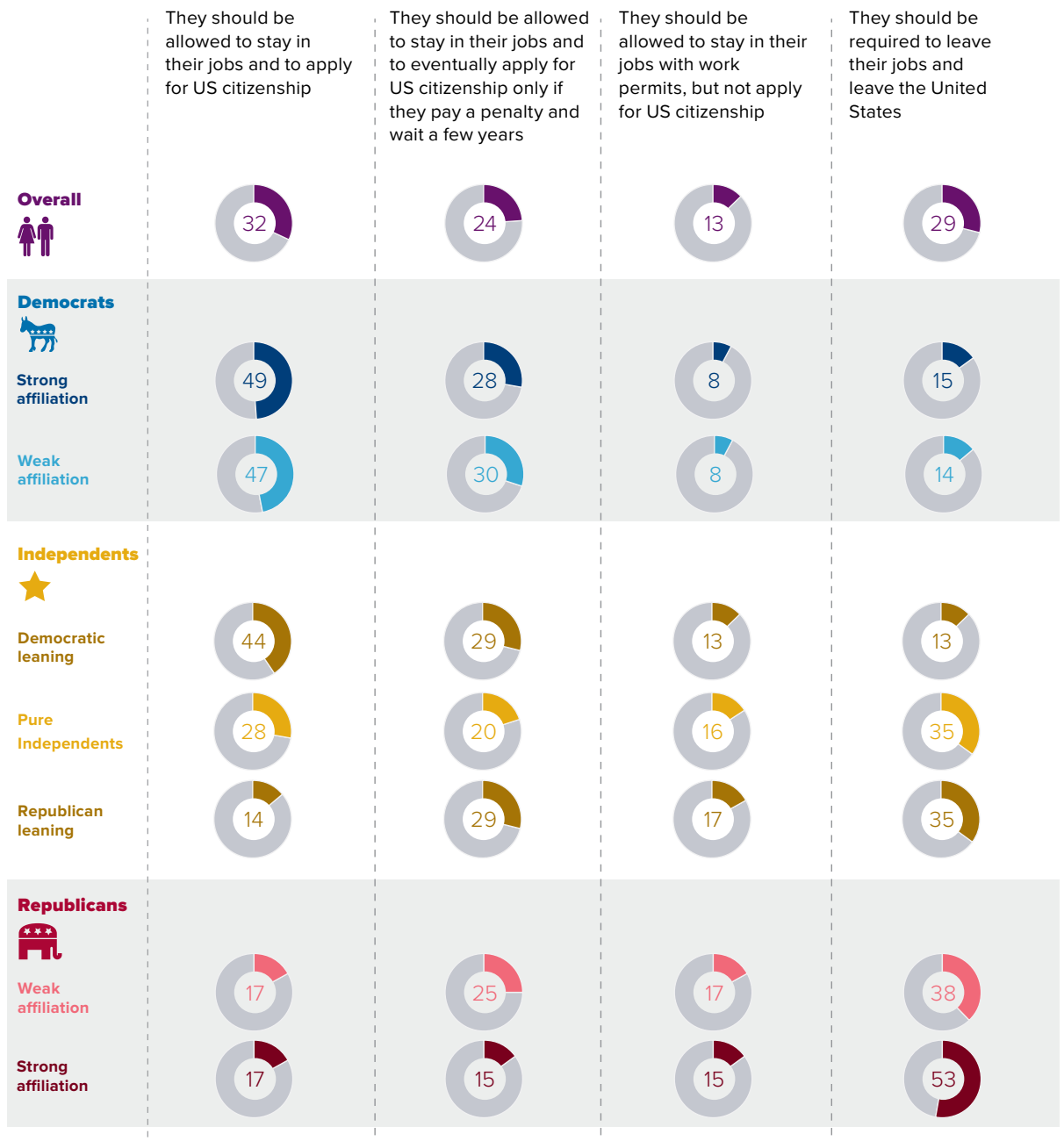
In contrast, one of Hillary Clinton's first official pronouncements as a candidate was to clearly embrace President Obama's executive action on immigration.³² Among the US public, Democrats back the components of immigration reform, with a majority of nearly 8 in 10 in favor of allowing illegal immigrants to stay in their jobs and apply for US citizenship, either now or after paying a penalty and waiting a number of years. Those views are shared across Democratic Party supporters, with little difference between strong and weak Democrats.

Like Republicans, a majority of Independents say that controlling and reducing illegal immigration is a very important goal—in fact, they see it as one of the country's top five goals (see [page 15](#))—and nearly half say that increasing immigration is a critical threat. But Independents' views on deportation versus a path to citizenship lie midway between the two partisan groups. The opinions of Independents who lean toward one of the parties resemble those partisans, while pure Independents are slightly more likely to favor citizenship (now or eventually) than deportation.

Figure 19: **Partisan Divisions on Illegal Immigrants**

When it comes to immigration, which comes closest to your view about illegal immigrants who are currently working in the United States? (%)

Half sample (n = 997)



2015 Chicago Council Survey

Climate Change: The Most Divisive Issue

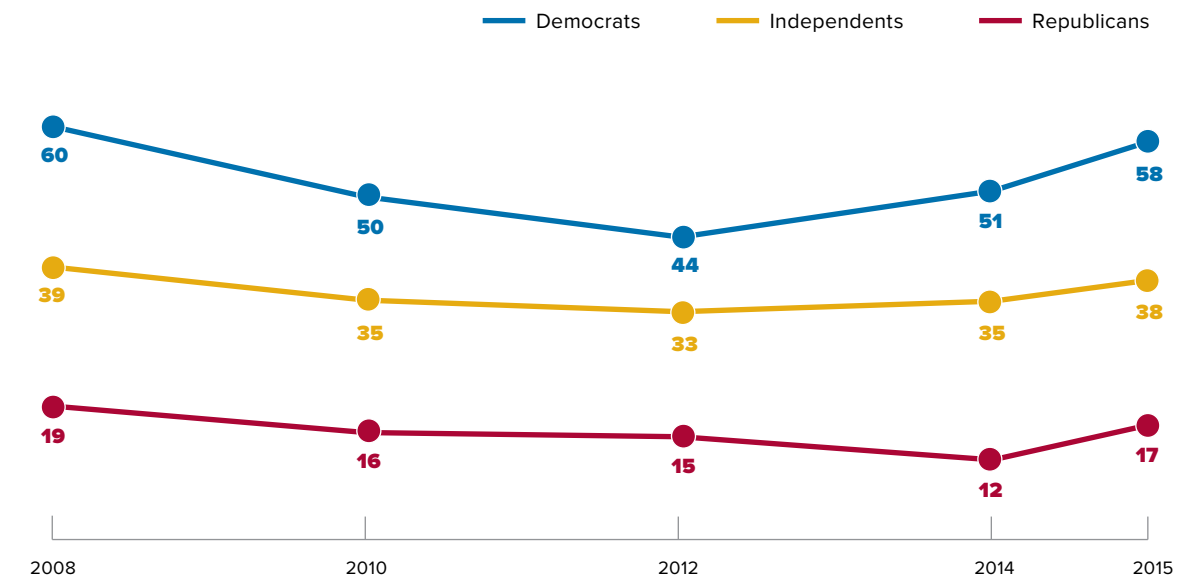
While it has not yet proved to be a high-profile issue in the upcoming primaries, climate change is the most polarizing issue for American public opinion out of all the threats and goals presented in the 2015 Chicago Council Survey. Overall, 4 in 10 Americans now say that climate change is a critical threat, returning to levels reported in 2008. Chicago Council Surveys from 2008 to 2012 detected a drop on this issue, most likely reflecting the lingering effects of the 2008 economic collapse (Figure 20). Gallup polls from 1998 to 2014 found that when economic growth and environmental protection are pitted against each other, Americans tend to emphasize economic growth during periods of perceived economic decline.³³

While nearly 6 in 10 Democrats see climate change as a critical threat, only 4 in 10 Independents and fewer than 2 in 10 Republicans agree. Similarly, a majority of Democrats say that limiting climate change is a very important goal, while fewer than 4 in 10 Independents and 2 in 10 Republicans say the same (see Appendix Figure 2). Over the past six years, all partisans have followed the same trajectory, albeit at varying levels of support.

Figure 20: **Democrats Lead Americans in Viewing Climate Change as a Critical Threat**

Below is a list of possible threats to the vital interest of the United States in the next 10 years. For each one, please select whether you see this as a critical threat, an important but not critical threat, or not an important threat at all: **Climate change** (% critical threat)

Half sample (n = 980)



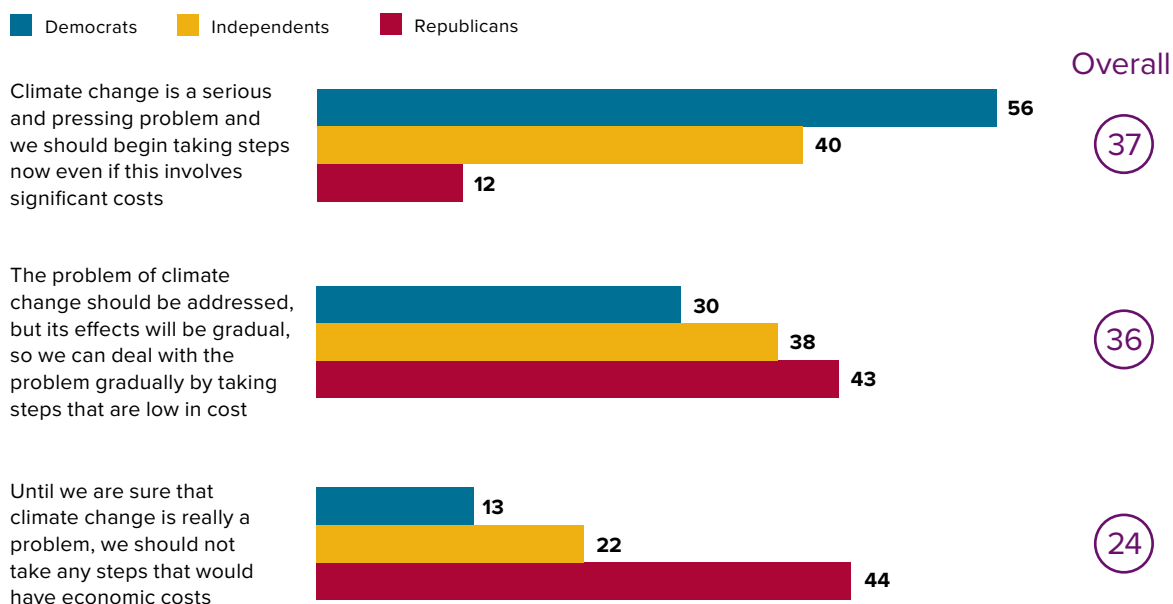
2015 Chicago Council Survey

Differences among the Democratic and Republican primary candidates mirror the sharp divide in public opinion. Martin O'Malley and Hillary Clinton both point to climate change as serious threats. In fact, Hillary Clinton has stated that climate change is "the most consequential, urgent, sweeping collection of challenges we face as a nation and a world,"³⁴ while O'Malley has argued we have a "moral obligation" to act "immediately and aggressively" to stop climate change.³⁵ Among the public, an increasing percentage of Democrats believe that climate change is a serious and pressing problem. For the first time, a majority of Democrats agree that countries, including the United States, should take steps now to address climate change, even if it incurs significant costs (Figure 21). This total represents an increase of seven percentage points from 2010.

Republican presidential candidates, by contrast, share a wider spectrum of beliefs. Some, such as Jeb Bush, accept that the climate is changing but remain skeptical that human activities are to blame.³⁶ Others, such as Ted Cruz, completely deny that climate change exists.³⁷ These two perspectives coincide with divisions among their Republican supporters, who remain split over whether the problem of climate change should be dealt with gradually by taking steps that are low in cost and if climate change is even a problem. Only a small minority of Republicans support taking steps now.

Figure 21: **Americans Divided on How to Address Climate Change**

There is a controversy over what the countries of the world, including the United States, should do about the problem of climate change. Here are three statements. Please tell me which statement comes closest to your own point of view. (%)
Half sample (n = 1,053)



Figures may not add to 100 due to rounding.

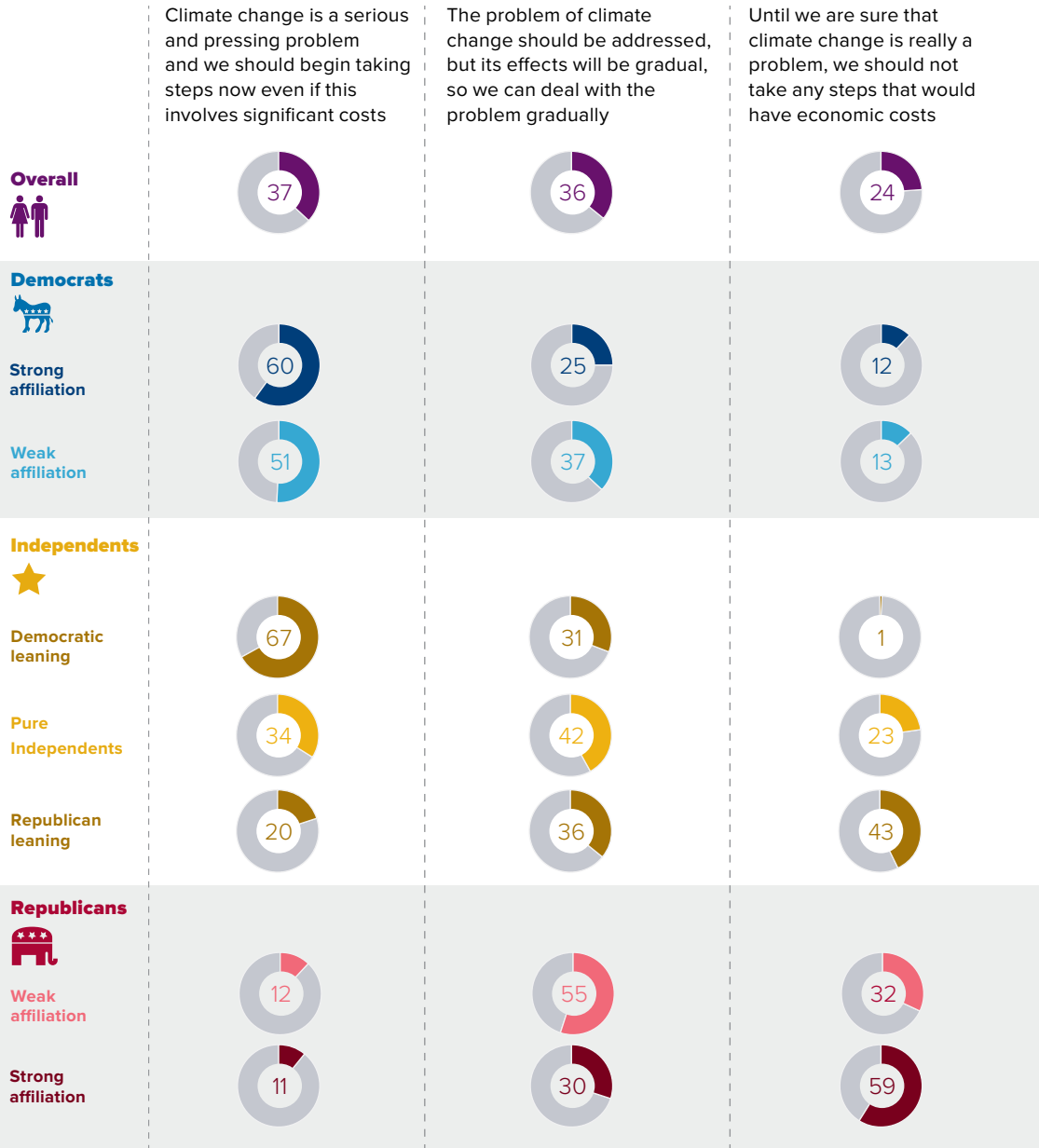
2015 Chicago Council Survey

There are also internal divisions among Republicans in the general public. While a majority of strong Republicans question whether climate change is actually a problem, a majority of weak Republicans think climate change is a problem and should be addressed through gradual action. Independents fall between the two parties; while leaners resemble supporters of the parties they tilt toward, pure Independents are closer to Democrats on this issue (Figure 22).

Figure 22: **Within Parties, Disagreement on Addressing Climate Change**

There is a controversy over what the countries of the world, including the United States, should do about the problem of climate change. Here are three statements. Please tell me which statement comes closest to your own point of view. (%)

Half sample (n = 1,053)



2015 Chicago Council Survey

Climate and Immigration Key to US Competitiveness

In parallel to their respective concerns about immigration and climate change, Republicans and Democrats assign differing priorities to each of these issues in terms of the United States remaining competitive in the global economy.³⁸

Among Republicans, controlling and reducing undocumented immigration is the second most important policy cited for US competitiveness: two-thirds of Republicans label this issue very important for US competitiveness, behind only reducing federal budget deficits. Meanwhile, minorities of Democrats (39%) and Independents (43%) hold a similar view.

Democrats, in turn, link concerns about climate change to investments in renewable energy and say that investing in renewable energy is one of the most important policies for US competitiveness, second only to improving public education. This priority is shared by a majority of Independents (51%) and a minority of Republicans (38%).

In addition to these factors, majorities of Democrats, Republicans, and Independents agree that improving public education, investing in science and technology research, and reducing federal budget deficits are very important factors for the United States to remain competitive in the world economy. ●

Conclusion

The 2015 Chicago Council Survey offers a detailed picture of the American public's attitudes on foreign policy. The results show that Americans express a significant sense of purpose to stay engaged in world affairs and take forceful action against direct threats to US national security, while also avoiding entanglements overseas. In particular, the results demonstrate that partisan differences have widened considerably on a number of issues, such as a two-state solution for Israel and Palestinians and the threat posed by increased immigration. Earlier surveys showed that opinions of Democrats and Republicans were remarkably similar on both of these matters in the past but now are no longer in sync.

The survey's longitudinal data illustrate how the American public's perception on certain issues has been influenced by key inflection points tied to real-world events. The rise of ISIS over the past year, for example, has helped to elevate the threat of terrorism across all partisan groups.

Other factors can also shape prevailing views on issues. The Republican and Democratic primaries put the positions of candidates under the spotlight and shape the dialogue through blanket media coverage. Already, the debate on immigration among GOP primary candidates has intensified, driven in part by the degree to which certain positions resonate with the party's base. The ongoing global debate about the Iran nuclear agreement all but guarantees it will remain a hot-button issue.

Despite the degree of volatility in the world, it is worth emphasizing that Americans tend to share the same basic goals for US foreign policy. Top priorities include protecting American jobs, preventing the spread of nuclear weapons, and combating international terrorism. These common goals and the public's foreign policy ideals are bound to be obscured in the emotions of a presidential campaign, but they underpin America's role in the world and the country's standing abroad. ●

Methodology

This report is based on the results of a survey commissioned by The Chicago Council on Global Affairs. The 2015 edition of the survey is the latest effort in a series of wide-ranging surveys on American attitudes toward US foreign policy. The 2015 Chicago Council Survey was made possible by the generous support of The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Robert R. McCormick Foundation, the Korea Foundation, the United States–Japan Foundation, and the personal support of Lester Crown and the Crown Family.

The survey was conducted from May 28 to June 17, 2015, among a representative national sample of 2,034 adults. The margin of sampling error for the full sample is ± 2.4 , including a design effect of 1.193. Please see the below table for the margin of error for partisan results and split-sampled questions.

Sample sizes

	Full sample n = 2,034	Half sample n = 1,017	One-third sample n = 677
Overall	± 2.4	± 3.4	± 4.1
Democrats	± 3.9	± 5.6	± 6.8
Strong affiliation	± 5.5	± 7.8	± 9.5
Weak affiliation	± 5.6	± 8.0	± 9.8
Independents	± 4.1	± 5.8	± 7.1
Democratic leaning	± 8.7	± 12.4	± 15.1
Pure Independents	± 5.4	± 7.6	± 9.3
Republican leaning	± 9.1	± 12.9	± 15.8
Republicans	± 4.6	± 6.5	± 7.9
Weak affiliation	± 6.3	± 8.9	± 10.8
Strong affiliation	± 6.7	± 9.5	± 11.7

A full listing of questions asked in the 2015 Chicago Council Survey, including details on which questions were administered to split samples, is available online at thechicagocouncil.org.

The survey was conducted by GfK Custom Research, a polling, social science, and market research firm in Palo Alto, California, using a randomly selected sample of GfK's large-scale nationwide research panel, KnowledgePanel®. The survey was fielded to a total of 3,905 panel members yielding a total of 2,182 completed surveys (a completion rate of 61%). The median survey length was 23 minutes. Of the 2,182 total completed surveys, 148 cases were excluded for quality control reasons, leaving a final sample size of 2,034 respondents.

Respondents were excluded if they failed at least one of three key checks:

- **Respondents who completed the survey in 10 minutes or less.**
- **Respondents who refused to answer half or more of the items in the survey.**
- **Respondents who failed two or three of the following checks:**
 - Did not accurately input "4," or refused or skipped the question that was specifically designed to make sure respondents were paying attention. ("In order to make sure that your browser is working correctly, please select number 4 from the list below.")
 - Refused 1 or more full lists that included five items or more (there were 26 such lists).
 - Gave exactly the same answer ("straight-lined") to every item on one of the four longest lists in the survey (Q5, Q6, Q8, or Q85).

The GfK KnowledgePanel was recruited using address-based sampling (ABS) to cover the growing number of cell phone-only households (approximately 97% of households are covered this way). Currently, 40 percent of panel members were recruited through random digit dialing (RDD) and 60 percent with ABS. Prior to April 2009, the panel was recruited using stratified RDD telephone sampling.

For both ABS and RDD recruitment, households (i.e., all eligible adults in the household) that agree to participate in the panel are provided with free Internet hardware and access (if necessary), which uses a telephone line to connect to the Internet and the television as a monitor. Thus, the sample is not limited to those in the population who already have Internet access.

The distribution of the sample in the Web-enabled panel closely tracks the distribution of United States Census counts for the US population 18 years of age or older on age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, geographical region, employment status, income, and education. To reduce the effects of any nonresponse and noncoverage bias in panel estimates, a poststratification raking adjustment is applied using demographic distributions from the most recent data from the Current Population Survey (CPS).

The poststratification weighting variables include age, gender, race, Hispanic ethnicity, and education. This weighting adjustment is applied prior to the selection of any sample from the KnowledgePanel and represents the starting weights for any sample. The following benchmark distributions were utilized for the poststratification weighting adjustment:

- Gender (male, female)
- Age (18–29, 30–44, 45–59, 60-plus)
- Race (white non-Hispanic, black non-Hispanic, other non-Hispanic, two-plus races non-Hispanic, Hispanic)
- Education (less than high school, high school, some college, college degree or more)
- Household income (less than \$10K, \$10–25K, \$25–50K, \$50–75K, \$75–100K, \$100K-plus)
- Home ownership status (own, rent/other)
- Census region (Northeast, Midwest, South, West)
- Metropolitan area (yes, no)
- Internet access (yes, no)

Comparable distributions are calculated using all valid completed cases from the field data. Since study sample sizes are typically too small to accommodate a complete cross-tabulation of all the survey variables with the benchmark variables, an iterative proportional fitting is used for the poststratification weighting adjustment. This procedure adjusts the sample back to the selected benchmark proportions. Through an iterative convergence process, the weighted sample data are optimally fitted to the marginal distributions. After this final poststratification adjustment, the distribution of calculated weights is examined to identify and, if necessary, trim outliers at the extreme upper and lower tails of the weight distribution. The poststratified trimmed weights are then scaled to the sum of the total sample size of all eligible respondents.

Demographic profiles of the respondents to the 2015 Chicago Council Survey are detailed below. The survey respondents self-identified as Democrats, Independents, or Republicans; whether they are registered to vote as such was not confirmed.

About the Survey Sample

	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
% of 2015 sample (n = 2,036)	36%	34%	27%
Average age	47	46	49
Racial composition			
White	51%	67%	84%
Black	22%	8%	2%
Hispanic	20%	16%	8%
Other	8%	9%	5%
Gender*	55% female/45% male	47% female/53% male	52% female/49% male
Christian	62%	62%	86%
Registered to vote	89%	77%	92%
Likely to vote in 2016	91%	75%	93%
Summary	Democrats are fairly cohesive in their views of the role of the United States in the world and are more likely than others to favor multilateral approaches overall, although they also see a time and place for the use of force.	In general, Independents are least enthusiastic for the United States to play an active role on the international stage. They are much less likely to support the use of military force in response to a range of possible inciting actions, though Independents who lean toward one party or another tend to share views with the party they tilt toward.	Republicans strongly support an active role for the United States in world affairs and are more likely than others to favor the use of military force. They are more likely than others to see the world as a less safe place since the attacks of September 11, 2001.

*Figures may not add to 100 due to rounding.

For more information about the sample and survey methodology, please visit the GfK website at <http://www.gfk.com/us/Solutions/consumer-panels/Pages/GfK-KnowledgePanel.aspx>.

For more information about the Chicago Council Survey, please contact Craig Kafura, research associate, at ckafura@thechicagocouncil.org.

Appendix

Appendix Figure 1

Below is a list of possible threats to the vital interest of the United States in the next 10 years. For each one, please select whether you see this as a critical threat, an important but not critical threat, or not an important threat at all. (% critical threat)

Half sample (n varies)

	Democrats	Independents	Republicans	Democrat-Republican gap	Overall
The possibility of violent Islamic extremist groups carrying out a major terrorist attack in the United States	70 Rank: #2	70 Rank: #1	80 Rank: #1	10	72
International terrorism	68 Rank: #3	64 Rank: #3	75 Rank: #2	7	69
Cyberattacks on US computer networks	71 Rank: #1	67 Rank: #2	68 Rank: #5	3	69
The rise of violent Islamic extremist groups in Iraq and Syria	61 Rank: #4	60 Rank: #4	73 Rank: #3	12	64
The possibility of unfriendly countries becoming nuclear powers	56 Rank: #6	57 Rank: #6	67 Rank: #6	11	59
Iran's nuclear program	54 Rank: #7	49 Rank: #8	70 Rank: #4	16	57
North Korea's nuclear program	53 Rank: #8	56 Rank: #6	58 Rank: #9	5	55
Islamic fundamentalism	48 Rank: #10	56 Rank: #6	66 Rank: #7	18	55
An international financial crisis	51 Rank: #9	44 Rank: #10	51 Rank: #10	0	49
Large numbers of immigrants and refugees coming into the United States	29 Rank: #15	46 Rank: #9	63 Rank: #8	34	44
The development of China's military power	38 Rank: #11	40 Rank: #11	45 Rank: #11	7	41

Continued on next page

Appendix Figure 1 (continued)

Climate change	58 Rank: #5	38 Rank: #12	17 Rank: #20	41	40
The continuing conflict in Syria	34 Rank: #13	33 Rank: #13	40 Rank: #12	6	35
Ebola and other potential epidemics	38 Rank: #11	32 Rank: #14	28 Rank: #16	10	33
Russia's territorial ambitions	28 Rank: #16	30 Rank: #16	39 Rank: #13	11	32
The development of China's economic power	28 Rank: #16	31 Rank: #15	34 Rank: #14	6	31
A confrontation between North Korea and South Korea	32 Rank: #14	25 Rank: #17	29 Rank: #15	3	29
A confrontation between North Korea and Japan	28 Rank: #16	24 Rank: #18	25 Rank: #17	3	25
A confrontation between China and Japan	21 Rank: #20	23 Rank: #19	25 Rank: #17	4	23
Territorial disputes between China and its neighbors	24 Rank: #19	20 Rank: #20	23 Rank: #19	1	22

2015 Chicago Council Survey

Appendix Figure 2

Below is a list of possible foreign policy goals that the United States might have. For each one, please select whether you think that it should be a very important foreign policy goal of the United States, a somewhat important foreign policy goal, or not an important goal at all. (% very important goal)

Half sample (n varies)

	Democrats	Independents	Republicans	Democrat-Republican gap	Overall
Protecting the jobs of American workers	73 Rank: #1	67 Rank: #1	82 Rank: #1	9	73
Preventing the spread of nuclear weapons	73 Rank: #1	66 Rank: #2	78 Rank: #2	5	72
Combating international terrorism	64 Rank: #3	61 Rank: #3	72 Rank: #3	8	65
Securing adequate supplies of energy	64 Rank: #3	60 Rank: #4	59 Rank: #6	5	61
Maintaining superior military power worldwide	48 Rank: #10	51 Rank: #6	69 Rank: #4	21	55
Improving access to clean water for the world's population	61 Rank: #5	51 Rank: #6	42 Rank: #10	19	53
Improving America's standing in the world	55 Rank: #8	50 Rank: #8	56 Rank: #7	1	53
Controlling and reducing illegal immigration	36 Rank: #13	55 Rank: #5	66 Rank: #5	30	52
Safeguarding against global financial instability	56 Rank: #7	43 Rank: #9	47 Rank: #8	9	49
Combating world hunger	55 Rank: #8	41 Rank: #10	27 Rank: #11	28	42
Limiting climate change	58 Rank: #6	36 Rank: #11	17 Rank: #13	41	38
Defending our allies' security	38 Rank: #11	34 Rank: #12	43 Rank: #9	5	38
Promoting and defending human rights in other countries	35 Rank: #14	28 Rank: #13	24 Rank: #12	11	30
Reducing economic inequality in the world	38 Rank: #11	28 Rank: #13	13 Rank: #14	25	28

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Appendix Figure 3

How effective do you think each of the following approaches are to achieving the foreign policy goals of the United States—very effective, somewhat effective, not very effective, or not effective at all?
 (% very effective)

Full sample (n = 2,034)

	Democrats	Independents	Republicans	Democrat-Republican gap	Overall
Maintaining US military superiority	37	34	50	13	40
Maintaining existing alliances	37	26	31	6	32
Building new alliances with other countries	31	21	20	11	24
Drone strikes against suspected terrorists in other countries	25	16	26	1	22
Strengthening the United Nations	32	16	13	19	21
Spying and intelligence gathering by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the National Security Agency (NSA)	23	16	27	4	21
International treaties	24	11	11	13	16
Visits by the president, secretary of state, or other senior officials to other countries	23	9	9	14	14
Placing sanctions on other countries	17	10	12	5	13
Signing free-trade agreements with other countries	19	10	11	8	13
Military aid to other countries	15	8	12	3	12
Economic aid to other countries	17	9	7	10	11

2015 Chicago Council Survey

Appendix Figure 4

How much confidence would you say you have in the following countries to deal responsibly with world problems—a great deal, a fair amount, not very much, no confidence at all? (% great deal or fair amount of confidence)

Full sample (n = 2,034)

	Democrats	Independents	Republicans	Democrat- Republican gap	Overall
The United States	91	73	82	9	82
The European Union	77	59	62	15	66
Japan	63	57	56	7	58
South Korea	41	34	34	7	36
India	41	34	27	14	34
China	41	32	28	13	34
Russia	31	27	22	9	27

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Appendix Figure 5

From your point of view, how desirable is it that the following countries exert strong leadership in world affairs—very desirable, somewhat desirable, somewhat undesirable, very undesirable? (% very or somewhat desirable)

Full sample (n = 2,034)

	Democrats	Independents	Republicans	Democrat-Republican gap	Overall
The United States	95	86	95	0	91
The European Union	84	76	82	2	80
Japan	75	73	75	0	73
India	67	61	62	5	63
South Korea	64	61	64	0	62
China	57	50	45	12	51
Russia	44	44	41	3	43

2015 Chicago Council Survey

Appendix Figure 6

Thinking about the future, how likely do you think it is that each of the following will be a potential source of conflict between major powers in Asia?

Full sample (n = 2,034)

	Very likely	Somewhat likely	Not very likely	Not likely at all
The growth of Chinese military power	35	44	11	3
Tensions between North Korea and South Korea	34	44	12	4
Competition over vital energy resources like oil and gas	29	46	14	3
The spread of nuclear weapons to new countries in Asia	25	46	18	4
Economic competition among Asian countries	20	51	18	3
Relations between mainland China and Taiwan	16	50	23	3
Relations between India and Pakistan	16	49	23	5
The US military presence in Asia and the Pacific	15	48	25	5

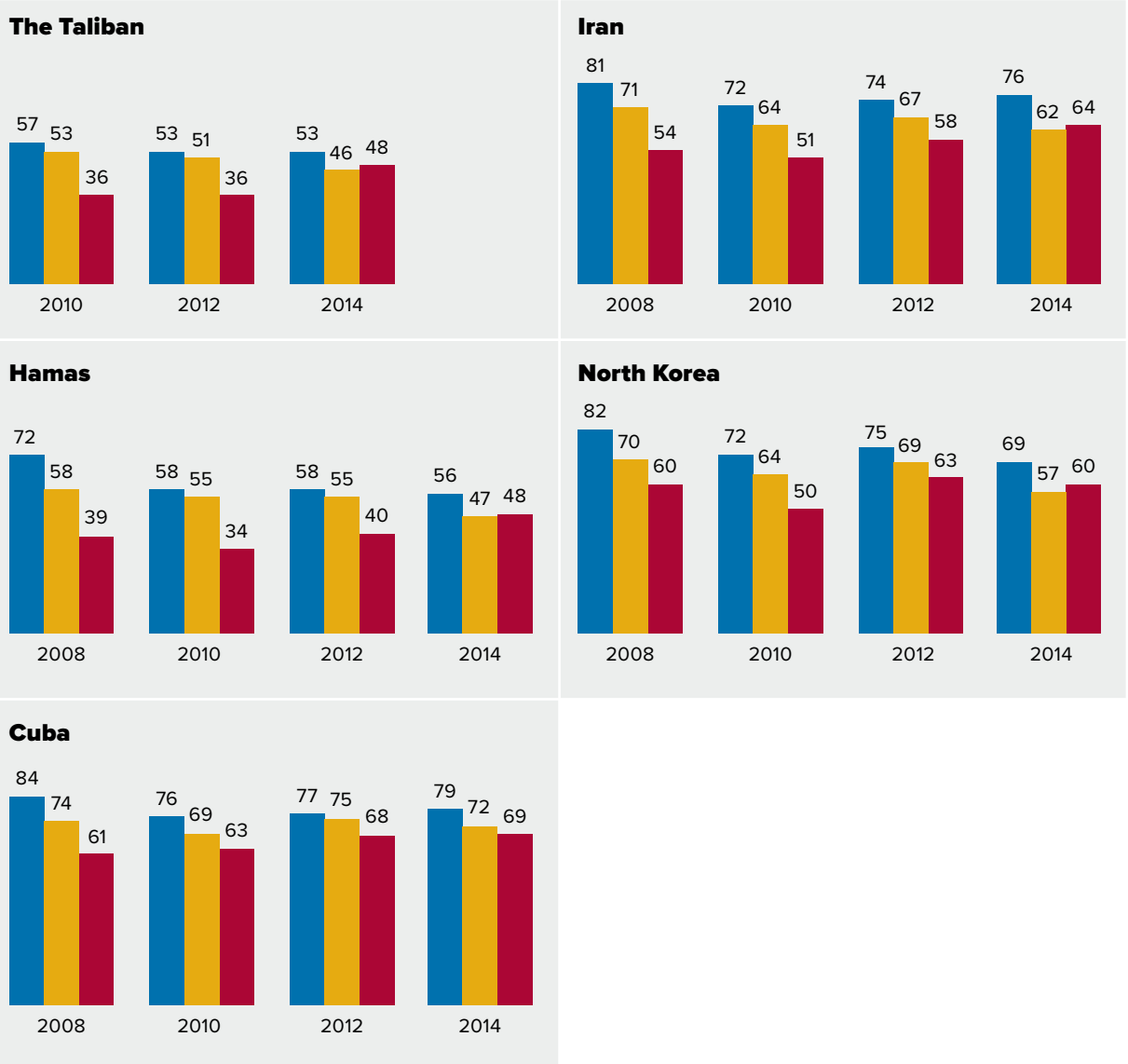
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Appendix Figure 7

As you may know there is currently a debate about whether US government leaders should be ready to meet and talk with leaders of countries and groups with whom the United States has hostile or unfriendly relations. Do you think US leaders should or should not be ready to meet and talk with leaders of: (% should be ready)

Full sample (n = 2,034)

■ Democrats ■ Independents ■ Republicans



2015 Chicago Council Survey

Endnotes

Executive Summary

¹ Leah Libresco, "Live Coverage of the First Republican Debate," *FiveThirtyEight*, <http://fivethirtyeight.com/liveblogs/2016-election-first-republican-presidential-debate/?#livepress-update-23449408>.

A Majority of Americans Support an Active US Role in World Affairs

² Throughout this report, reference is made to several basic categories and subcategories of political party supporters. First, respondents were asked to identify their party affiliation. Those who identified as Republican or Democrat were asked in a follow-up question whether they considered themselves strong (referred to in this report as *strong*) or not very strong (*weak*) Republicans or Democrats. For those who initially identified as Independents, a follow-up question asked whether they thought of themselves as closer to the Republican Party, the Democratic Party, or neither. Those who identified a party are referred to as *leaning* partisans. Those who did not lean toward a party are called *pure* Independents.

³ Democrats (50%) and Independents (49%) tend to say that the United States today is "as safe" as it was before September 11, 2001 (compared with 39% of Republicans). No more than a quarter from any partisan group says the United States is safer today.

⁴ This percentage, while still a leading concern, is down 10 percentage points since 2012—likely reflecting the American public's increasing confidence in the recovery of the US economy following the end of the 2008 financial crisis.

Perspectives Differ on Force Versus Diplomacy as the Most Effective Foreign Policy Tool

⁵ When last asked in 2014, 74 percent of Democrats, 54 percent of Independents, and 45 percent of Republicans agreed that "When dealing with international problems, the United States should be more willing to make decisions within the United Nations even if this means that the United States will sometimes have to go along with a policy that is not its first choice." See Dina Smeltz, Joshua Busby, Gregory Holyk, Craig Kafura, Jonathan Montan, and Jordan Tama, "United in Goals, Divided on Means," *Chicago Council Survey*, The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2015.

⁶ When last asked in 2014, 86 percent of Democrats, 70 percent of Independents, and 54 percent of Republicans said that the United States should participate in a new international treaty to address climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. See Dina Smeltz, Joshua Busby, Gregory Holyk, Craig Kafura, Jonathan Montan, and Jordan Tama, "United in Goals, Divided on Means," *Chicago Council Survey*, The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2015.

⁷ Ryan Teague Beckwith, "Transcript: Read Full Text of Gov. Scott Walker's Campaign Launch," *Time*, July 13, 2015, <http://time.com/3956422/transcript-read-full-text-of-gov-scott-walkers-campaign-launch/>; Ron Brackett, "Jeb Bush, Marco Rubio Blast Iran Nuclear Deal," *Tampa Bay Times*, July 14, 2015, <http://www.tampabay.com/blogs/the-buzz-florida-politics/jeb-bush-marco-rubio-blast-iran-nuclear-deal/2237264>; Matthew Boyle, "Cruz Slams Romney, Bush over Iran: GOP Too 'Scared' to Speak Truth," *Breitbart*, July 30, 2015, <http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2015/07/30/cruz-slams-romney-bush-over-iran-gop-too-scared-to-speak-truth/>.

⁸ Carrie Dann, "Clinton: Deal 'An Important Step in Putting a Lid On' Iran Nuke Program," *NBC News*, July 14, 2015, <http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/iran-nuclear-talks/clinton-deal-important-step-putting-lid-iran-nuke-program-n391786>; David Sherfinski, "Bernie Sanders Praises Iran Deal as 'Victory for Diplomacy over Saber-Rattling,'" *The Washington Times*, July 14, 2015, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/jul/14/bernie-sanders-praises-iran-deal-victory-diplomacy/>.

⁹ For example, a July 29–August 2, 2015, CBS News poll reported 20 percent of Americans approve of the deal, 33 percent oppose it, and 47 percent do not know enough yet. In an August 13–16, 2015, poll by CNN/ORC, 41 percent said Congress should approve the deal, and 56 percent said Congress should reject it. Public opinion is deeply divided along partisan lines: 70 percent of Democrats, but only 15 percent of Republicans, said Congress should approve the deal ("CNN/ORC Poll: Iran Full Results," *CNN*, August 20, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/08/20/politics/iran-cnn-orc-poll-full-results/index.html>). Also see Scott Clement, "The Iran Deal Is Hemorrhaging Support," *The Washington Post*, August 3, 2015, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/07/28/is-support-for-the-iran-deal-dropping-it-appears-so/>.

¹⁰ For the 2015 Chicago Council Survey, the exact wording of this question was as follows: As you may know, the United States and other countries recently reached the outlines of an agreement with Iran that will ease some of the economic sanctions against Iran. In exchange, Iran will limit its nuclear enrichment capacity and research and development for 10 years, give international inspectors greater access to nuclear facilities, and increase the time it would take for Iran to develop a nuclear weapon from 2–3 months to at least a year. Do you support or oppose the outlines of this agreement?

¹¹ Dina Smeltz, Joshua Busby, Gregory Holyk, Craig Kafura, Jonathan Montan, and Jordan Tama, "United in Goals, Divided on Means," *Chicago Council Survey*, The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2015.

¹² Steve Peoples, "GOP Contenders Push for Military Action Against Islamic State Group," *Military Times*, February 27, 2015, <http://www.militarytimes.com/story/military/2015/02/27/gop-contenders-push-for-military-action-against-islamic-state-group/24142969/>.

¹³ Michael Brendan Dougherty, "Marco Rubio is Criminally Overrated on Foreign Policy," *The Week*, April 21, 2015, <http://theweek.com/articles/550722/marco-rubio-criminally-overrated-foreign-policy>.

¹⁴ Dan Merica, "ISIS is Neither Islamic nor a State, Says Hillary Clinton," *CNN*, October 7, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/10/06/politics/hillary-clinton-isis/>.

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Similar Views Across Party Affiliations on Russia, Ukraine, and China—But Starkly Divided on Immigration and Climate Change

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- ²⁴ Hillary Clinton Accuses China of 'Stealing US Secrets,'" *BBC News*, July 5, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-33399711>.
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- ²⁷ In 2014, 72 percent of Democrats, 66 percent of Independents, and 63 percent of Republicans agreed. See Dina Smeltz, Joshua Busby, Gregory Holyk, Craig Kafura, Jonathan Monten, and Jordan Tama, "United in Goals, Divided on Means," *Chicago Council Survey*, The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2015.
- ²⁸ Cyberattacks against US computer systems is high on the list of top threats, though the survey question does not directly link these attacks to China (see Appendix Figure 1).
- ²⁹ This decline in concern parallels the decrease in Mexican migration to the United States. See Jeffrey S. Passel, D'Vera Cohn, and Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, "Net Migration from Mexico Falls to Zero—and Perhaps Less," Pew Research Center, April 23, 2012, <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2012/04/23/net-migration-from-mexico-falls-to-zero-and-perhaps-less/>. See also Damien Cave, "Better Lives for Mexicans Cut Allure of Going North," *The New York Times*, July 6, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2011/07/06/world/americas/immigration.html>.
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- ³⁸ Those who say that controlling and reducing illegal immigration is a very important goal, or that large numbers of immigrants and refugees coming into the United States is a critical threat, are more likely to say that controlling undocumented immigration is very important for US competitiveness. Similarly, those who say that limiting climate change is a very important goal, or that climate change is a critical threat, or who favor immediate action on climate change, are also more likely to say that investing in renewable energy is a top factor in the United States remaining competitive.

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