



EXECUTIVE MEMORANDUM

To: Whom It May Concern
From: Chris Anderson, Daron Shaw, & Terry Classen
Date: June 19, 2025
Subject: Results from the Reagan Institute Summer Survey

Overview

From May 27-June 2, 2025, the Ronald Reagan Institute sponsored a national poll to assess the priorities and opinions of Americans across a wide array of foreign policy issues. The poll builds on the Summer 2023 and 2024 surveys, which focused on broad foreign policy attitudes, as well as surveys conducted in support of the Reagan National Defense Forum since 2018, which explored defense policy issues in greater depth. The purpose of these surveys is to provide politicians, policymakers, and experts with timely and scientifically valid information about what Americans believe about key foreign policy issues.

Over those seven days, the bi-partisan team of Beacon Research (D) and Shaw & Company Research (R) interviewed 1,257 adults from across the United States. The poll gauged opinions on a variety of issues, including America's global leadership, concerns and priorities, DOGE cuts, tariffs, territorial expansion, and views on NATO, Ukraine, China, and the Middle East. Below we identify and discuss key findings.

U.S. Foreign Policy Philosophy & Goals

As we move further away from the Cold War and as party coalitions continue to shift, it is often unclear what the American public thinks about how our country should engage with the rest of the world. In the Summer 2025 survey, we asked a simple philosophical question about American foreign policy: "When it comes to international events, do you think it is better for the United States to be more engaged and take the lead, or to be less engaged and react to events?" Almost two-thirds (64%) of respondents said it is better for the U.S. to be more engaged and take the lead, while fewer than one quarter (23%) said it is better to be less engaged and react to events. The 64% opting for engagement and leadership represents a 10-point jump from last year, when 54% held that opinion. Support for the less engaged option decreased by 10 points, from 33% to 23%.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, Republicans and Democrats are equally likely to support a more engaged foreign policy. Sixty-nine percent of Republicans tilt toward greater engagement, compared to 65% of Democrats. Perhaps surprisingly, 73% of MAGA supporters say they prefer a more engaged foreign policy. Conversely, half of independents support greater engagement, whereas 24% support less engagement.

The survey explores support for the various particular forms of what greater U.S. foreign policy engagement could mean in practice. The statement garnering the highest level of agreement is that “a strong U.S. military is essential for maintaining peace and prosperity at home and abroad,” with 85% agreeing (59% strongly). Statements focusing on promoting trade and economic prosperity (85% agree, 49% strongly) and standing up for democracy and human rights (83% agree, 50% strongly) also receive high levels of agreement. There are some notable partisan differences within these broadly held beliefs, as Republicans are more likely to agree that a strong military is necessary for peace and prosperity (93% to 80% for Democrats) while Democrats are more likely to agree that America has a moral obligation to stand up for human rights and democracy (87% to 81% for Republicans).

Curiously perhaps, a 57% majority (29% strongly) also agrees with a central isolationist principle—that the U.S. is better off staying out of foreign conflicts and should focus more on problems at home. However, the fact that Americans can hold contrary views at the same time should not obscure the fact that there is more support (and more intense support) for engagement rather than isolationist principles.

Compared to 2023, strong agreement with specific engagement principles is up between 1 point (the need for a strong military) and 16 points (the need to promote trade and economic prosperity) whereas agreement with the isolationist principle has decreased by 5 points.

By a more than two-to-one margin, the influence of American engagement is seen as mostly positive by respondents. When asked about the impact of U.S. engagement on the world, 67% say it has been positive compared to 19% negative. This +48-point spread has increased from +34 points in 2024 (61% beneficial to 27% harmful). When asked about its impact on the U.S., 66% say it has been positive compared to 23% negative. This +43-point spread has increased from +24 points in 2024 (57% beneficial to 33% harmful). As might be expected, the percentage saying the impact of greater U.S. engagement has been positive is exceedingly high with older voters (80% positive among seniors) and more educated voters (81% among post-graduates). In partisan terms, Republicans are more likely to say the impact has been positive (75%) than are Democrats (65%) or independents (51%). This is a change from 2024, when only 53% of Republicans were positive compared to 68% of Democrats.

Promoting Freedom and Funding

Respondents were asked for their attitudes about cuts—both real and prospective—in funding for several federal programs designed to promote freedom and democracy abroad. At the most general level, 57% said that these programs are beneficial whereas 32% said they are not worth the expense (+25 points). Although all partisan groups say they are beneficial, Democrats are more supportive of these programs (68% beneficial to 23% not worth it) than independents (44% beneficial, 34% not worth it) or Republicans (52% supportive, 34% not worth it).

When asked about two specific programs—the *National Endowment for Democracy* and the *U.S. Agency for Global Media*—respondents are net-supportive by +9 and +7 points, respectively.

The most effective messaging in defense of these programs emphasizes that these efforts help combat extremism abroad and mitigate threats before they end up in the U.S.: 73% cite this as a good reason for funding these programs, while 21% say it’s not a good reason. A similarly positive

reaction occurs when respondents were told these programs strengthen freedom worldwide by supporting democratic institutions, protecting religious freedoms, fighting corruption, and aiding dissidents of authoritarian regimes (72% good reason, 20% not a good reason). Messages emphasizing that these programs are a low-cost, high-impact way to counteract adversaries through communication rather than military confrontation (+46 net-good reason), that they communicate banned information that undercuts authoritarian regimes (+45), or that adversaries would like to see us end these programs (+26) test well but are slightly less compelling.

All told, Americans are split—48% concerned, 48% not concerned—on the possibility that DOGE's cost cutting on defense spending will undermine national security. As might be expected, this item produces a notable partisan divide. Democrats are concerned (65% concerned, 32% not concerned) while Republicans are unconcerned (33% concerned, 64% not concerned). Independents are split: 45% concerned, 47% not concerned.

Security Concerns and Tariffs

We asked respondents how much a series of issues or concerns matter for U.S. security and prosperity. The top concern, with 84% saying it matters a great deal or somewhat, is preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. This is followed by a potential war between China and Taiwan (75%), illegal immigration across the southern border (74%), the war between Russia and Ukraine (73%), the security of Israel (71%), and tariffs to promote trade deals (69%).

While all issues elicited appreciable levels of concern, there were substantial partisan differences. For example, 81% of Republicans believe the security of Israel matters to the U.S., compared to 66% of Democrats and 53% of independents. On illegal immigration, 91% of Republicans say this issue matters, whereas 62% of independents and 59% of Democrats are concerned. On tariffs, 85% of Republicans say this matters, compared to 62% of independents and 53% of Democrats.

Americans are split on using tariffs as a tool of U.S. foreign policy: 48% support and 48% oppose. However, two-thirds prefer a free trade approach to a protectionist, pro-tariff approach (66% free trade, 20% protectionist). Just under half (49%) say tariffs hurt the U.S. economy rather than help it (35%).

The target country of protectionist tariffs influences attitudes towards the policy. Respondents oppose tariffs towards Canada (42% support, 49% oppose, for a net rating of -7), South Korea (-6), the United Kingdom (-5), Israel (-5), and Japan (-3). They split on tariffs towards the European Union (-1) and Mexico (0).

By 13 points (52% to 39%), respondents think tariffs on U.S. allies hurt our credibility and leadership rather than being necessary to protect American industries.

Conversely, citizens support tariffs towards China by 16 points (53% support, 37% oppose). This support, however, is upended if respondents believe these tariffs mean higher prices for American consumer goods, 53% oppose them while 41% support.

Expansion?

Americans are intrigued by the Administration's proposals regarding the territorial expansion of the U.S. A majority (55%) support exploring the re-acquisition of the Panama Canal, to protect a strategic transit route and to counter Chinese influence over the Canal. A majority (57%) opposes the U.S. taking control over Gaza, to transform the region into a hub for tourism and economic growth. With respect to acquiring Greenland to provide the U.S. with critical minerals and increased access to the Arctic, 47% support and 47% oppose.

Attitudes towards NATO

Logically, support for greater U.S. engagement with foreign affairs would seem to suggest support for a military alliance like NATO. The data indicate that this is indeed the case, as almost two-thirds of Americans (62%) have a favorable view of the alliance whereas slightly under a quarter have an unfavorable view (24%). These numbers are largely unchanged since 2021 (60% favorable, 22% unfavorable).

Furthermore, there is substantial opposition to the possibility that the U.S. would withdraw from NATO: 55% would oppose such a move, compared to 33% who would support it. Indeed, 38% say they strongly oppose such a move, with only 15% strongly supporting it.

But what about the core premise of the alliance itself: are Americans in favor of honoring our commitment to respond if any country in the alliance is attacked? Currently, 71% support honoring this commitment, while 17% oppose. These numbers are virtually unchanged from 2024. This support extends across all demographic and partisan sub-groups. Even groups that have historically been skeptical of internationalism display solid support for honoring our Article V commitments, including 58% of those under the age of 30, 67% of non-college respondents and 59% of independents.

Conversely, it does seem that support for "collective defense" can be weakened. When asked if the U.S. should honor its commitment to come to the aid of a NATO member who has been attacked *if that country has not spent the required percentage of its GDP on defense*, support drops by 17 points (from 71% to 54%), while opposition rises (from 17% to 30%). Put another way, the +54 support of a member country decreases to +24—there is still majority support, but it is dramatically weaker. The decrease in support comes from voters across the political spectrum (-12 points among Democrats, -19 among independents, -22 among Republicans) and holds regardless of a voters' age, education, view on NATO, or preferred level of U.S. engagement with world affairs.

Russia-Ukraine

Americans clearly want Ukraine to win its war with Russia. U.S. citizens either prefer Ukraine (58%) or have no opinion either way (34%). The common trope that Republicans want Putin to win is completely unsupported by the data: only 12% of Republicans prefer that Russia win, compared to 3% of Democrats and 5% of independents. However, 28% of Republicans say they don't want either side to win, and another 13% say they aren't sure who they want to win. Fifteen percent of MAGA supporters say they want Russia to win.

Furthermore, most Americans (59%) say they would support increasing U.S. military presence in Eastern Europe to counter Russian aggression. Support for increasing the U.S. military presence in Eastern Europe is strongest among seniors (+43 points more support than oppose), those with a college degree (+40 points), men (+38 points), and Democrats (+48 points). Republicans (+24 points) and independents (+19) support this policy by a smaller margin.

In total, respondents appear somewhat confused by the Trump Administration's preferences when it comes to negotiating an end to the war. Most (37%) say Trump is favoring Russia, but almost as many say he is neutral (36%) and 14% say he is favoring Ukraine. The party divide on this is less opaque—68% of Democrats think Trump favors Russia, compared to 22% of independents and 16% of Republicans who hold this opinion.

China-Taiwan

Americans are quite concerned about an array of threats coming from the Chinese Communist Party. The top five concerns about China, in order, are (1) China developing AI technology more advanced than that of the U.S. (48% extremely concerned), (2) technology theft by the Chinese (47%), (3) the Chinese military build-up and overtaking the U.S. as the world's number one super-power (47%), (4) China holding \$760 billion in U.S. government debt (47%), and (5) Chinese human rights violations, including its treatment of Hong Kong and the Uyghurs (44%).

U.S. citizens show high levels of concern about China's potential threats to the U.S. homeland. When asked how worried they are about specific potential threats, the top concern is that Chinese telecom companies are integrating into U.S. networks and collecting Americans' data (56% extremely concerned). Just behind is China purchasing farmland near U.S. military bases (56% extremely concerned), China spying on the U.S. with satellites and air reconnaissance (54%), China surveilling Americans through apps like TikTok (49%), and Chinese military-age men infiltrating the U.S. through the southern border (46%).

On the question of whether the U.S. should take military actions to defend Taiwan if China invades, an overwhelming majority supports this approach (70%, with 19% opposing). Thirty-six percent strongly support this action.

Interestingly, demographic and partisan differences on U.S.-China policy are less stark than they are on other foreign policy questions: wide majorities of Democrats (75%) and Republicans (70%) support the U.S. defending Taiwan militarily, while 55% of independents say the same.

Additional information on the strategic importance of Taiwan to the U.S. can further increase support for American military support in the event of an invasion. The most effective piece of information is that Taiwan is one of the world's largest producers of semiconductors—71% say this makes them more likely to support U.S. military aid to Taiwan, with 41% saying it makes them "much more likely." The second-best message is that abandoning Taiwan sends a message to China and other adversaries that the U.S. is not willing to stand up for its friends, with 70% saying this makes them more likely to support U.S. military aid to Taiwan, and 41% saying it makes them "much more likely." In order, the next most effective messages for increasing support for U.S. military defense of Taiwan are (1) Taiwan is a key strategic partner in the region (38% much more likely to support), (2) defending Taiwan is critical for the defense of other allies (36%), (3) abandoning Taiwan sends the message that the U.S. is no longer the world's foremost superpower (35%), and (4) Taiwan has a democratically elected government (32%).

After being presented with this information, support for U.S. military aid to Taiwan in the event of a Chinese invasion increases to 78% and opposition decreases to 15%.

Israel-Palestine

Americans' support for Israel has declined slightly over the last year. When asked whether the U.S. should offer more support for Israel's military actions against Hamas in Gaza, the West Bank, and Lebanon, offer less support, or are we striking a good balance, 28% said we should do more, while 26% said we should do less, and 36% said we are striking a good balance.

Similarly, 36% say it is a good idea to relocate Palestinians in Gaza to other countries in the region to improve Israel's security and to allow for reconstruction in Gaza, whereas 41% say it's a bad idea and 22% offer that they don't know.

When asked specifically about whether the U.S. should be sending weapons to Israel, respondents are still supportive, but only by a 49%-41% margin. This is down from a 56%-35% margin in last year's summer poll.

Iran, India, and Pakistan

There is broad support for negotiating a deal with Iran to prevent them from developing a nuclear weapon in exchange for easing economic sanctions on the regime. Two-thirds support this notion, while 20% oppose it.

This is an indication of the seriousness of the issue, rather than the desire of Americans to avoid confronting the situation. By a 45% to 37% margin, citizens say they would support Israeli airstrikes against Iranian nuclear facilities should diplomatic efforts fail.

Concerns about South Asia are not necessarily as intense as they are with respect to China and Europe, but they are substantial. When asked about the recent four-day military conflict between India and Pakistan, 52% said they were concerned about a regional conflict where China gets involved (27% are extremely worried about this); 50% said they were concerned about a nuclear conflict (31% extremely worried); and 42% said they were concerned about a broader war between India and Pakistan (23% extremely worried).

Methodology

This survey was conducted from May 27-June 2, 2025. It features a mixed-mode design, with 478 responses collected by live telephone interviewers and another 779 responses gathered online. The telephone portion of the survey is a probability sample, relying on a multi-stage cluster design. Fifty percent of the calls were completed via landline and 50 percent were completed via cell phone. On average, the interviews lasted approximately 20 minutes. To ensure that results accurately reflect the demographics of the country, they were weighted by age/gender, race/region, and education targets drawn from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2023 American Community Survey. The probability sample was then used to calibrate the non-probability online sample (conducted over the same

dates) by key demographic and attitudinal variables. For the full sample of 1,257 respondents, the estimated margin of error is +/- 2.5 percentage points. Some questions were asked of half the respondents, with an associated margin of error of +/- 4 points. The margin of error for sub-groups is larger.