

RONALD  REAGAN
INSTITUTE

Reagan Institute Summer Survey

Conducted June 2023

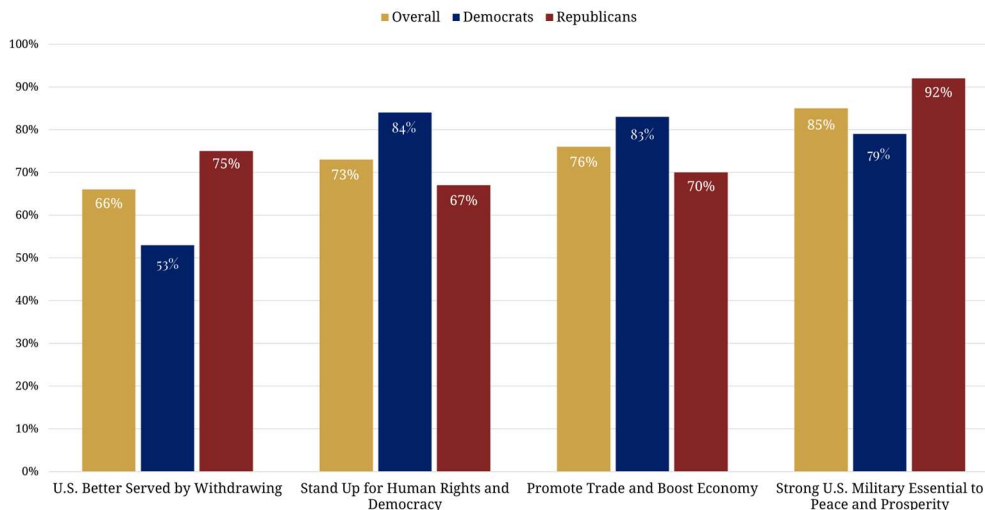
American public opinion on foreign policy and national security reflects an increasingly complex and, often, confusing world. Still, our latest poll reveals that the American people have some core principles that have remained consistent over time. They express enduring support for aiding Ukraine and deterring China, with extensive new questions revealing more details about the depth of and reasons for that commitment. They overwhelmingly support a strong U.S. military and investment in defense spending—opposing cuts to the military budget amid Washington’s politicking over the debt and deficit. And they want the United States to demonstrate leadership in the world, engaging on economic and trade issues as well as standing up for freedom and democracy abroad.

Support for U.S. Global Leadership

Despite political polarization in recent years, there is bipartisan agreement on which broad principles should guide U.S. foreign policy. Americans across the political spectrum, including large majorities of both Republicans and Democrats, support U.S. global leadership and international engagement.

In the abstract, respondents believe that the United States is better served by withdrawing from international affairs and focusing more attention on problems at home, which garners agreement from 65% of Americans, including 53% of Democrats, 70% of Independents, and 75% of Republicans. But when asked more concretely about particular dimensions of American global leadership and international engagement, even higher percentages agree that the United States should stand up for human rights (74%), promote trade (76%), and maintain a strong military (85%).

Support for Foreign Policy Principles

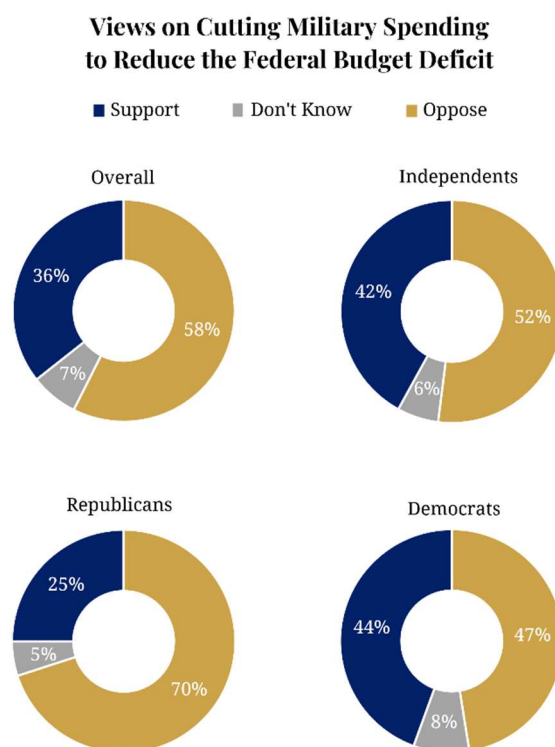


Prioritizing Peace Through Strength

This endorsement of President Reagan’s “peace through strength” philosophy that a strong American military is essential to maintaining peace and prosperity, both at home and abroad, runs particularly deep in the American electorate. It garners support from 92% of Republicans, 81% of Independents, and 79% of Democrats. Supporting international trade and defending human rights abroad also each drew strong bipartisan support: more than two-thirds of both Republicans and Democrats agreed with these statements.

Americans Oppose Cutting Defense Spending to Address Federal Deficit

The broad, bipartisan support for “peace through strength” goes beyond the belief that a strong U.S. military guarantees peace and prosperity. Even amid recent debates on the debt and deficit, there is hardly any support for sacrificing defense spending. Nearly 60% of Americans would oppose cutting spending on the military to reduce the federal budget deficit—most notably, 70% of Republicans. Increasing the defense budget has the support of 71% of Americans, including 85% of Republicans, 74% of Independents, and 57% of Democrats. Reagan Institute polling dating back to 2018 shows support for boosting military spending consistently above 70%.



Are Americans Becoming Isolationist?

How can we square the circle that majorities of Americans support strong U.S. global leadership and international engagement but also think the United States would be better served by prioritizing attention on problems at home instead of world affairs? Americans do not seem to view these ideas in a zero-sum way. When asked if we should focus on problems at home, people are inclined to say yes—even if it means withdrawing from international affairs in abstract terms (a bit of a false dichotomy, to be sure). But when those same people are asked in practical terms about U.S. global leadership and engagement, they are even more supportive—in the greater numbers noted above. While many, understandably, believe that domestic problems deserve attention and resolution, they simultaneously believe that the United States should maintain a strong military in addition to promoting international trade and defending human rights abroad. The American people do not share the pessimism about our country that many isolationist commentators voice; instead, respondents believe that America can and should do all of the above.

The survey yielded further evidence of broad support for America’s international leadership when we asked respondents to rate how globally engaged the United States

should be, on a ten-point scale. (Zero meant the United States should not engage with most issues and let other countries take the lead and ten meant the United States should engage with most issues and take a leadership role.) The average response was 7.5, with Americans across the political spectrum leaning toward engagement: Democrats averaged 8.0; Republicans averaged 7.2; and Independents lag slightly behind both brands of partisans at 6.8.

Republicans and Democrats Views Themselves As Pro International Engagement

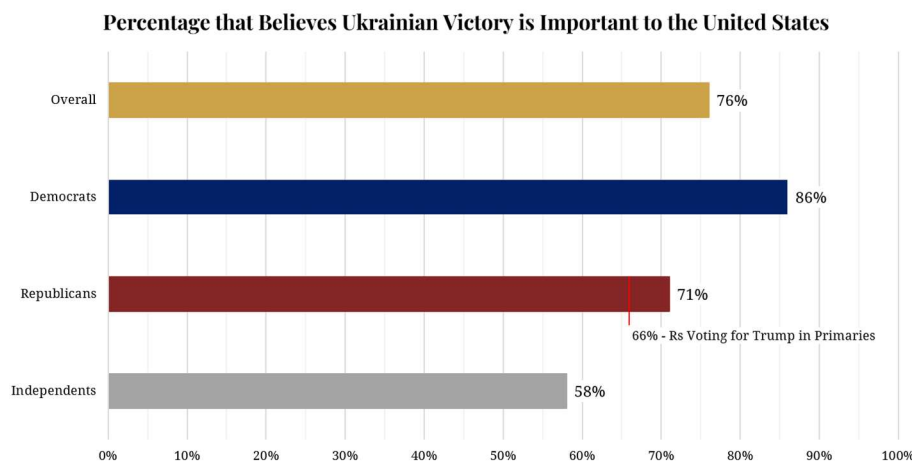
Using that same ten-point scale, survey respondents were asked to rate how they think various political groups view America’s role in the world. Both Republicans and Democrats rate their own parties as even more supportive of international engagement than they are individually, demonstrating a broad political preference for U.S. global leadership beyond one’s individual views. Democrats’ view of their own party jumps to 8.6, and Republicans’ view of the GOP jumps to 8.2. Even views of the wings of both parties are that they lean toward international engagement, with Democrats rating “Progressive Democrats” at 7.9 and Republicans rating of “MAGA Republicans” at 7.2. Interestingly, Republicans who report planning to vote for Trump in the 2024 presidential primaries describe MAGA Republicans’ views as 8.2 on this scale—indicating that these voters definitively categorize their own views as internationalist, despite the narrative from some media and elites about isolationist views among MAGA voters.

Protecting the Economy Listed as Top Foreign Policy Priority

When asked which particular priorities should be a major focus of U.S. foreign policy, protecting American jobs and companies ranks at the top of the list, followed by fighting terrorist networks. These are the top two priorities for Republicans, Democrats, and Independents alike. Next on the list for Democrats is working to limit climate change, while Republicans prioritize negotiating favorable trade deals and Independents prioritize nuclear non-proliferation. Across all political groups, Americans rank countering China and Russia rank as second-tier priorities, despite the bipartisan consensus among national security leaders in Washington about prioritizing strategic competition.

Enduring Support for Aid to Ukraine

Three-quarters of Americans say that it is important to the United States that Ukraine wins



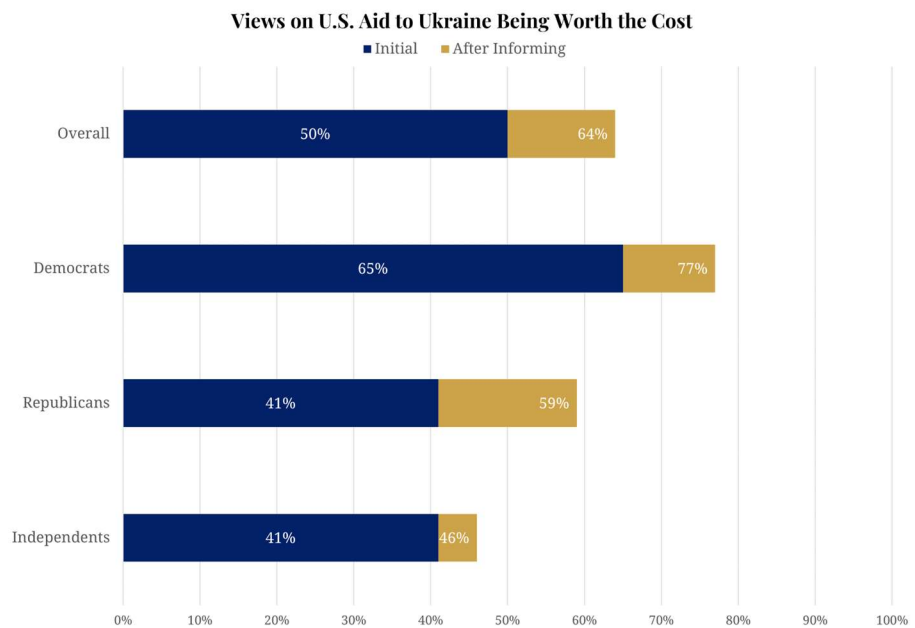
the war against Russian aggression, including bipartisan supermajorities of Democrats (86%) and Republicans (71%). Independents lag significantly behind partisans at 58%. Americans are less sure of who is currently winning the war between Russia and Ukraine, with

31% saying Ukraine, 27% saying Russia, 25% saying neither, and 17% saying that they do not know.

Overall, a strong majority (59%) of Americans support sending U.S. military aid to Ukraine, including 75% of Democrats and 50% of Republicans (with 41% opposed). Again, Independents are significantly less likely than partisans to support Ukraine aid, with 39% in favor and 39% opposed. Among Ukraine aid supporters, the most compelling reason is that standing up to Russian aggression in Ukraine will discourage Russia from invading other neighboring countries (37%). Nearly as many (30%) said the best reason for continued aid was that it is important to help protect freedom of people and sovereignty of countries wherever we can. **Support for Ukraine aid has not wavered since the November 2022 Reagan National Defense Survey, which found that 57% of Americans supported aid.**

Minority Opposition to Aid: Less than a third (30%) of Americans oppose sending U.S. military aid to Ukraine, including 41% of Republicans, 39% of Independents, and 17% of Democrats. This is consistent with our November 2022 data, which found 33% of Americans opposed to Ukraine aid. The most compelling reason to oppose aid is that we have too many unmet needs here at home to be sending billions of dollars to Ukraine, with 57% of those opposed citing this reason. The prospect of comprehensive auditing and accounting measures to ensure that the Ukrainians are using U.S. aid appropriately did not build much support among those opposed to aid. Over half (56%) said it would make no difference, while only about a quarter (27%) said it would make them more supportive of sending aid.

Worth the Cost: When asked if U.S. aid to Ukraine has been worth the cost, initially, half (50%) said yes, while 35% said no. But with a little more information, those numbers moved significantly. Respondents were told that the United States has spent roughly \$24 billion on military aid to Ukraine (3% of the U.S. military's own budget), that Ukraine remains in control of roughly 83% of its territory, and that the war has severely degraded Russia's military power and its ability to threaten NATO allies. After learning this, the number who said U.S. aid has been worth the cost jumped to 64%, including 77% of Democrats (+12), 59% of Republicans (+18), and 46% of Independents (+5). Only 28% maintained that US aid has not been worth the cost. This demonstrates that there exists a reservoir of support among the American people across party lines for assisting the Ukrainians in their fight



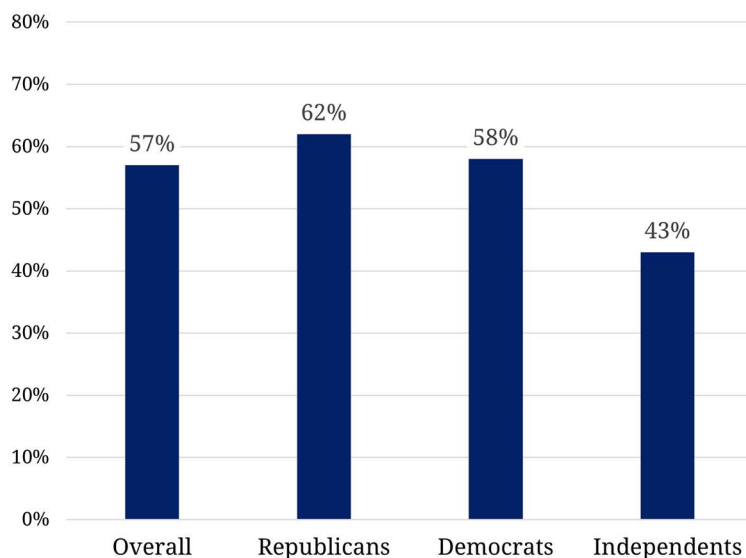
for freedom. Leaders can tap into that reservoir by educating their fellow Americans and providing them with the context and details of U.S. support for the Ukrainians' defense—and its effects.

Multifaceted Approach to Deterring China

Taiwan: Americans are increasingly prioritizing the security threat from China, with a majority (54%) saying that countering Chinese military power should be a major focus of U.S. foreign policy. While there has been a slight decline in support for deterrence with regard to Taiwan, majorities remain in favor of these measures. Increasing U.S. military presence near Taiwan has the support of 56% overall including 62% of Republicans and 54% of Democrats. Independents again lag partisans, at 42%. A majority (52%) also support increasing U.S. arms sales to Taiwan including 60% of Republicans, 49% of Democrats, and 41% of Independents. These numbers are down slightly since the 2022 Reagan National Defense Survey, a trend driven by Democrats, whose support dropped 8 and 10 points for deterrence measures, respectively.

In the political realm, Americans are broadly supportive of recent meetings between U.S. leaders and Taiwanese officials, even knowing China opposed the meetings and sanctioned some Americans as a result. Overall, 61% (including more than 60% of both Republicans and Democrats) think these meetings were the right thing to do because they showed support for a threatened democracy. Only 21% think these meetings were the wrong thing to do because they risked provoking China.

Support for Trade Agreement with Asian Countries Designed to Counter China



Trade: Fewer Americans (44%) believe that countering Chinese economic power should be a major focus of U.S. foreign policy. But a majority (57%) would support a foreign trade agreement with countries in Asia if they knew that the agreement was designed to counter Chinese economic power, including 62% of Republicans, 58% of Democrats, and 43% of Independents. Only two in ten (21%) would oppose such an agreement, with little partisan disparity.

TikTok: Opinion is split on banning the social media app TikTok in the United States, with

40% in favor of a ban and 44% opposed. The greatest disparity, not surprisingly, is across age cohorts. Among those aged 18 to 29, only 19% support a TikTok ban, while about three-quarters (73%) are opposed. Among those aged 65 and older, 54% support banning TikTok, while only a quarter (24%) oppose. There is also a preference for banning the app among Republicans (52% support, 34% opposed), while Democrats oppose a ban (50% opposed, 31% support).

Conclusion

On the 40th anniversary of D-Day, 39 years ago this month, President Reagan stood above the cliffs of Pointe Du Hoc in Normandy, France, and explained, **“It is better to be here ready to protect the peace, than to take blind shelter across the sea, rushing to respond only after freedom is lost. We’ve learned that isolationism never was and never will be an acceptable response to tyrannical governments with an expansionist intent.”** In the face of tyranny and expansionism from Putin’s Russia and the Chinese Communist Party, the United States must continue to protect the peace rather than taking “blind shelter” at home while “freedom is lost” abroad. While Americans are inclined to agree with this approach, leaders today must heed President Reagan’s example and explain to the American people what is at stake and why American leadership matters.

Polling Conducted By

