



As Acts of Terror Proliferate, Americans See No End in Sight

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Both presidential candidates have spent a good portion of time on the campaign trail explaining how they plan to combat terrorism. Hillary Clinton has said she would expand airstrikes against violent Islamic extremist groups in Iraq and Syria. At this point last week Donald Trump said he would partner with any country ready to fight Islamic terrorism—including Russia. The June 10-27 Chicago Council Survey finds that the American public considers international terrorism to be the most critical threat facing the nation. In combatting terrorism Americans say that almost all options should be on the table, yet a large majority expect that occasional acts of terror will be a part of life in the future.

International Terrorism America's Most Critical Threat

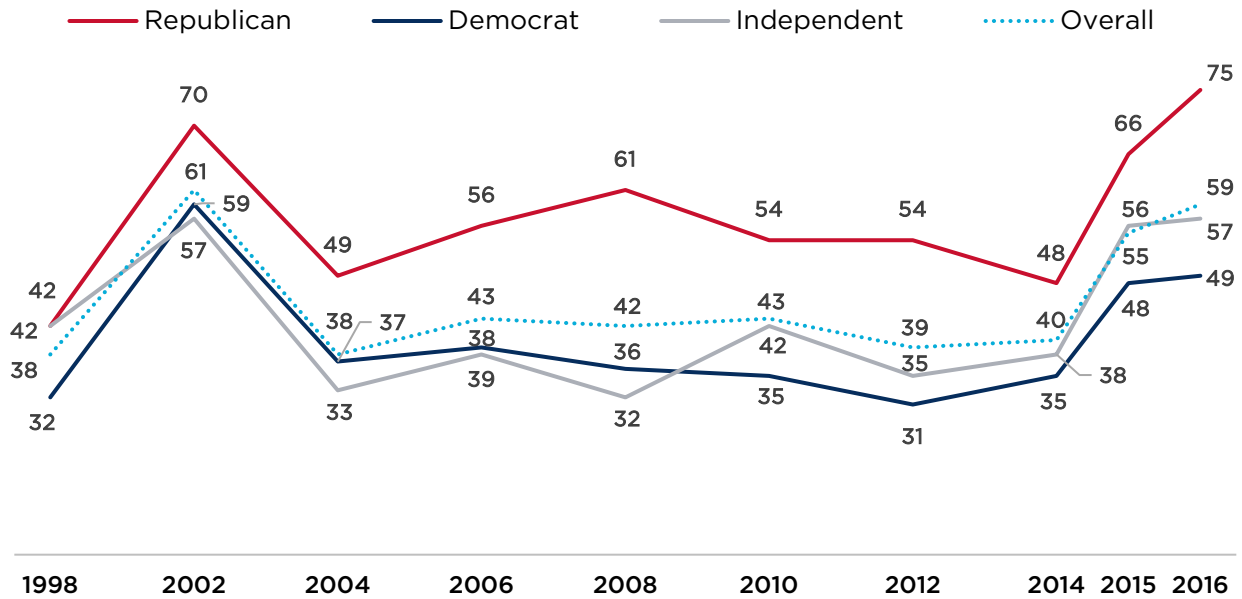
While Americans remain politically divided on a number of core issues as the presidential election looms, terrorism is not one of them. Among a range of potential threats facing the United States, Americans continue to cite international terrorism as the most critical threat facing the United States (75%) followed by unfriendly countries becoming nuclear powers (61%) and Islamic fundamentalism (59%).

Both self-identified Republicans (83%) and self-identified Democrats (74%) say that terrorism is the most important threat facing the country. However, supporters of these parties differ in their perceptions of critical threat posed by Islamic fundamentalism, with a majority of Republicans (75%, up from 66% in 2015) and half of Democrats (49%, 48% in 2015) identifying it as a critical threat. For Republicans, the perceived critical threat posed by Islamic fundamentalism is at its highest point since the question was first asked in 1998, even higher than after the September 11 attacks (70% in 2002).

Three-quarters (72%) of Americans also say that combatting international terrorism is a very important foreign policy goal of the United States. Again, there is much common ground between Democrats (70%) and Republicans (81%).

Islamic Fundamentalism

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)



2016 CHICAGO COUNCIL SURVEY
THE CHICAGO COUNCIL ON GLOBAL AFFAIRS

Orlando Attack Increased Worry about Islamic Fundamentalism among Democrats

The Orlando attack which killed 49 people, the most deadly terror attack on American soil since 9/11, took place while the survey was being conducted (with 804 respondents having completed the survey before the attack and 1,257 after the attack). While there was a minimal increase of four percentage points in the portion who said that international terrorism is a critical threat after the Orlando attacks hit the news, the survey registers a 12 percentage point increase in the perceived critical threat of Islamic fundamentalism—from 52 percent critical before the attack to 64 percent after.

The Orlando shooting seems to have increased Democrats' concerns over Islamic fundamentalism, but did not have a meaningful effect on Republican's already heightened concern. Among Republicans, only a two percentage point increase was registered for those who identified Islamic fundamentalism as a critical threat; 74 percent before and 76 after the attack. Among Democrats, that number jumped from 40 percent before to 55 percent post-Orlando.

It is also important to note that the Orlando attack had no impact on a respondent's presidential candidate preference in the general election. While 52 percent said that they would vote for Hillary Clinton before the attack in Orlando, 51 percent said the same in the wake of the attack. The same was true on the Republican side; 40 percent preferred Donald Trump both before and after the attack.

Americans Think Acts of Terror Are Here to Stay

With terror attacks generating headlines on a weekly basis, 89 percent of Americans now say it is at least somewhat likely that occasional acts of terrorism will be a part of life in the future (48% very likely; 41% somewhat). While this is the first time this question was asked as part of the Council Survey, a similar question in a [2013 Pew survey](#) found similar results with 75 percent concurring.

At the same time, the Council Survey shows Americans increasingly think the United States is less safe than before the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. When this question was originally asked in 2014, 27 percent of Americans said they were less safe than before September 11. In 2016, that number is now 42 percent. However, Republicans and Democrats diverge on this belief. While a majority (53%) of Republicans say the country is less safe, just one-third (34%) of Democrats agree.

(Almost) All Options Are on the Table in Combatting Terrorism

Majorities of both parties, and 78 percent overall, think blocking terrorist financing is the most effective method of combatting terrorism. Bipartisan majorities say that both manned and unmanned and sending US trainers and Special Forces are effective. Although an overall majority say that sending US combat troops is effective, there is a 15 percentage point gap which separates Democrats (57%) and Republicans (72%).

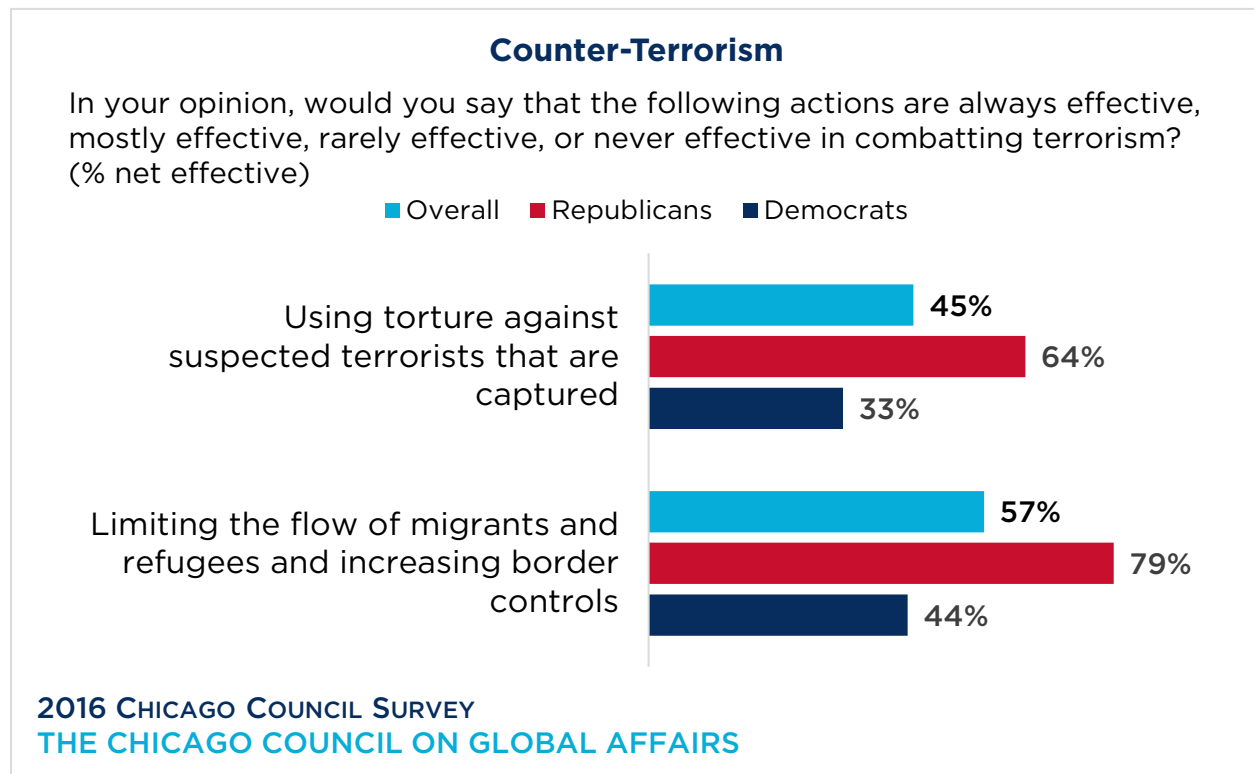
Table 1. In your opinion, would you say that the following actions are always effective, mostly effective, rarely effective, or never effective in combatting terrorism? (% net effective)

	Overall	Democrats	Republicans
Blocking terrorist financing	78%	77%	82%
US air strikes against suspected terrorists by drones/unmanned aircraft	76%	77%	82%
US air strikes against suspected terrorists by manned aircraft	73%	71%	81%
Sending US trainers and Special Operations Forces to countries where terrorists operate	65%	67%	69%
Sending US combat troops to fight terrorists abroad	60%	57%	72%

There are two notable partisan differences, both in areas where the presidential candidates diverge. First, there is disagreement on the effectiveness of limiting the flow of migrants and refugees and increasing border controls. A majority of Americans (57%) cite this as an effective approach, and particularly Republicans (79%), coinciding with Donald Trump's position on limiting the number of refugees and immigrants entering the United States. By comparison, only 44 percent of Democrats agree that limiting the flow of migrants and refugees is effective, aligning with Hillary Clinton's position of supporting immigration and accepting [an even greater number of refugees](#) than the Obama Administration has pledged.

The only option which a majority of Americans do not think is effective is the use of torture against suspected terrorists. But again there is a wide gap between partisans just as there is among the candidates. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of Republicans believe torture to be effective in combatting terrorism, in synch with Donald Trump's statements that he would [seek to broaden](#)

[laws that allow torture in the fight against terrorism](#). Only one-third (33%) of Democrats concur, aligning with Hillary Clinton's [opposition to the use of torture](#).



Few Americans See Common Ground with Russia in Ending Syrian Conflict

Just last week in Youngstown, Ohio, [Mr. Trump said](#) that the United States could find “common ground” with Russia in the fight against the Islamic State in Syria stating, “They have too much at stake in the outcome in Syria, and have had their own battles with Islamic terrorism.” This may prove to be a difficult sell to the American public. Two-thirds (64%) of Americans think that the United States and Russia are working in different directions when it comes to ending the conflict in Syria (29% same direction).

Methodology

The analysis in this report is based on data from the 2016 Chicago Council Survey of the American public on foreign policy. The 2016 Chicago Council Survey was conducted by GfK Custom Research using their large-scale, nationwide online research panel between June 10 and June 27, 2016 among a national sample of 2,061 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. The margin of error ranges ± 2.2 to ± 3.5 percentage points, depending on the specific question, with higher margins of error for partisan subgroups (Democrats: ± 3.6 to ± 5.2 ; Republicans; ± 4.1 to ± 5.7 ; Independents; ± 3.7 to ± 5.3). Partisan identification is based on respondents’ answer to a standard partisan self-identification question: “Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an independent, or what?”

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