

Americans See South Korea's Influence at All-Time High

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As the United States and South Korea mark the 70th anniversary of their alliance, they celebrate a relationship that now encompasses a broad range of issues. The 2023 Chicago Council Survey—conducted September 7-18, 2023—finds Americans see South Korea as more influential than at any time in the past and view the relationship with Seoul as strengthening US security.

Key Findings

- American perceptions of South Korea's influence in world affairs is at an all-time high. On a zero-10 scale, where zero is not influential at all and 10 is highly influential, South Korea receives a mean score of 5.1, up from 4.5 in 2021.
- Seven in 10 (71%) say the relationship with South Korea does more to strengthen US national security and two-thirds (64%) support having long-term military bases in South Korea.
- A slim majority (52%) say North Korea's nuclear program is a critical threat facing the United States, unchanged from 2022.
- Eight in 10 (79%) say the United States should focus on other pressing problems facing the United States besides North Korea and just 28 percent support taking military action to force North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons.
- Half of Americans (50%) favor using US forces to defend South Korea if invaded by North Korea, down from 55 percent in 2022.
- Sixty-six percent of Americans think US leaders should be ready to meet and talk to North Korean leaders.
- Three-quarters of Americans (75%) say the United States should cooperate with North Korea on the return of remains of US soldiers killed during the Korean War. A bare majority (51%) support sending congressional delegations to North Korea.

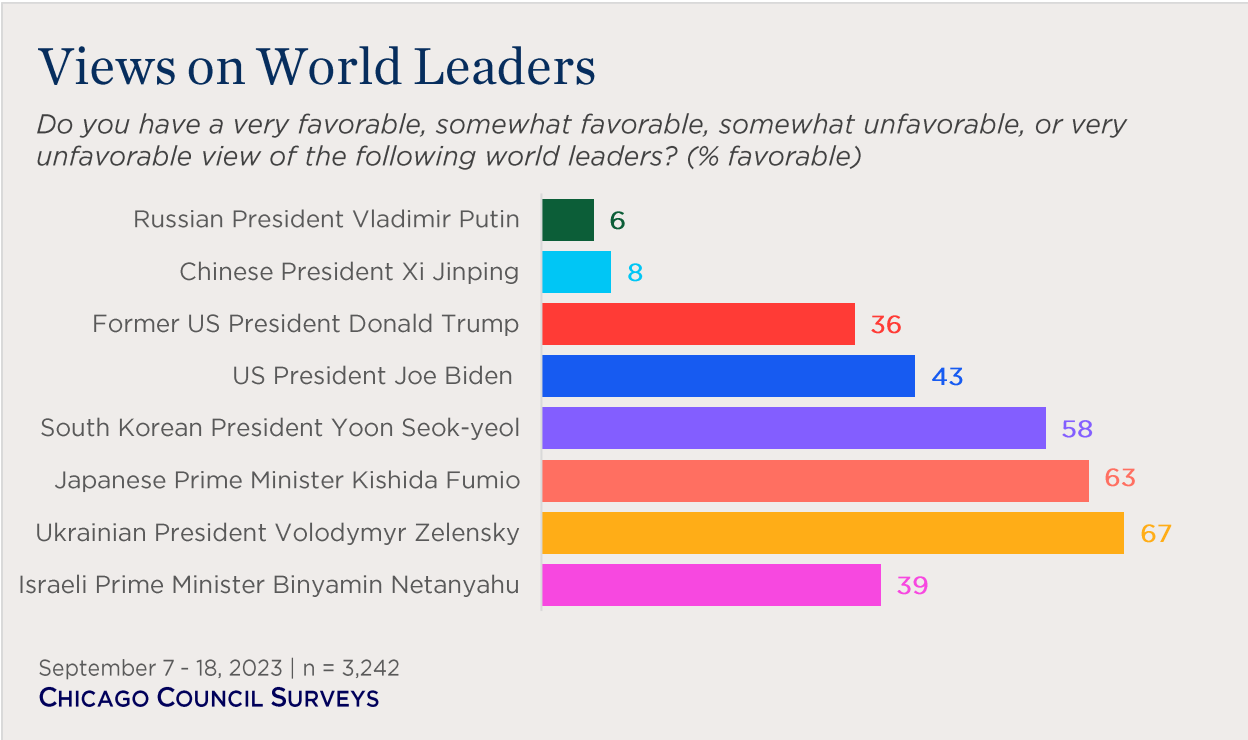
South Korea’s Perceived Influence Hits Record High among Americans

Over the past five years, South Korea’s cultural influence has risen dramatically as its movies, music, and television series penetrate the American market. At the same time, the American public’s perceptions of South Korea’s global influence have also shifted.

When Americans are asked to rate South Korea’s influence on world affairs on a zero to 10 scale, where zero means not at all influential and 10 means they are extremely influential, South Korea receives a mean score of 5.1. This is the first time South Korea has exceeded 5.0 since the question was first asked in 2010 and is up from 4.5 when the question was last asked in 2021.

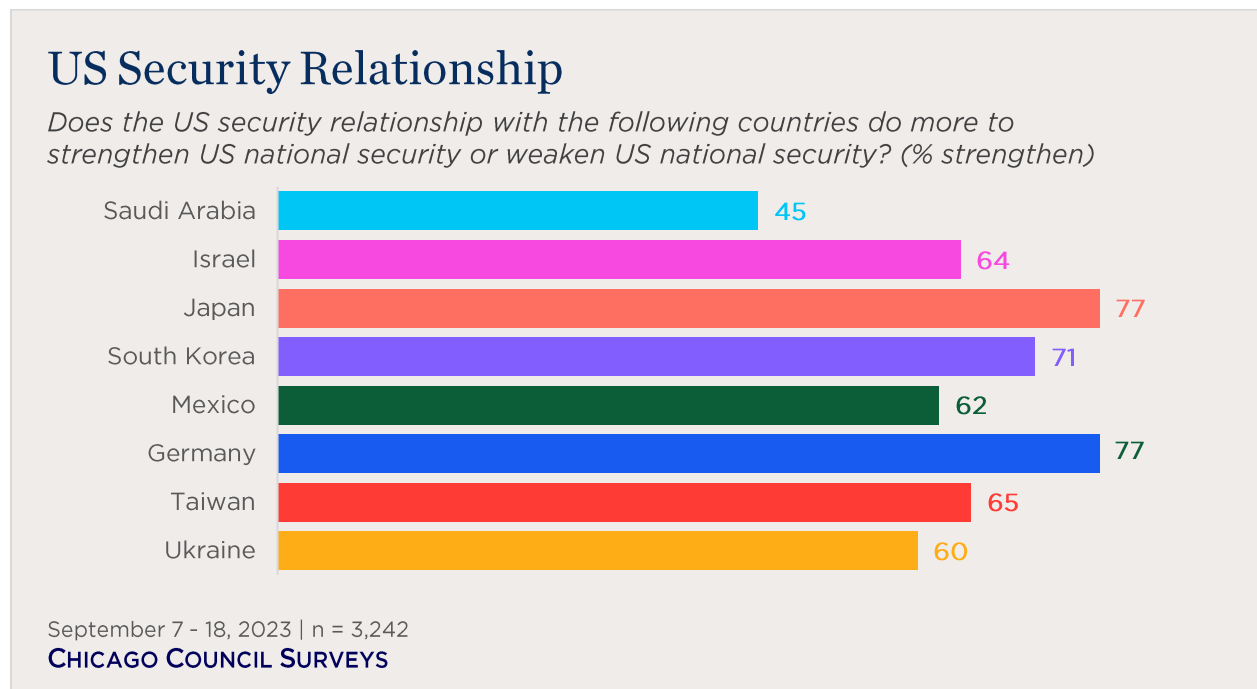
But it is worth noting that South Korea is also perceived as the least influential of any country included in the survey. The United States (8.4) is viewed as the most influential. China received a 7.5 mean score and Japan 6.0. Other countries included are Russia (6.3), the United Kingdom (5.9), Germany (5.7), Saudi Arabia (5.7), and Israel (5.4).

Americans also tend to take favorable views of South Korean leaders. Nearly six in 10 (58%) of Americans view hold favorable views of President Yoon Seok-yeol, including 57 percent of Republicans and 63 percent of Democrats. This is similar to the favorable ratings in 2021 for then-president Moon Jae-in (64%). Yoon’s 2023 favorability was slightly lower than favorable views of Japan’s Kishida Fumio (63%), but far ahead of China’s Xi Jinping (8%).



Relationship with South Korea Does More to Strengthen US National Security

The security relationship between the United States and South Korea—formed in the aftermath of the Korean War—remains one that is highly supported by the American public. And it is not seen as a one-sided commitment by the United States. Seven in 10 Americans (71%) say the security relationship between the two countries does more to strengthen US national security than it does to weaken it (25%). That trails only perceptions of US relations with Germany (77%) and Japan (77%) when it comes to strengthening US national security.

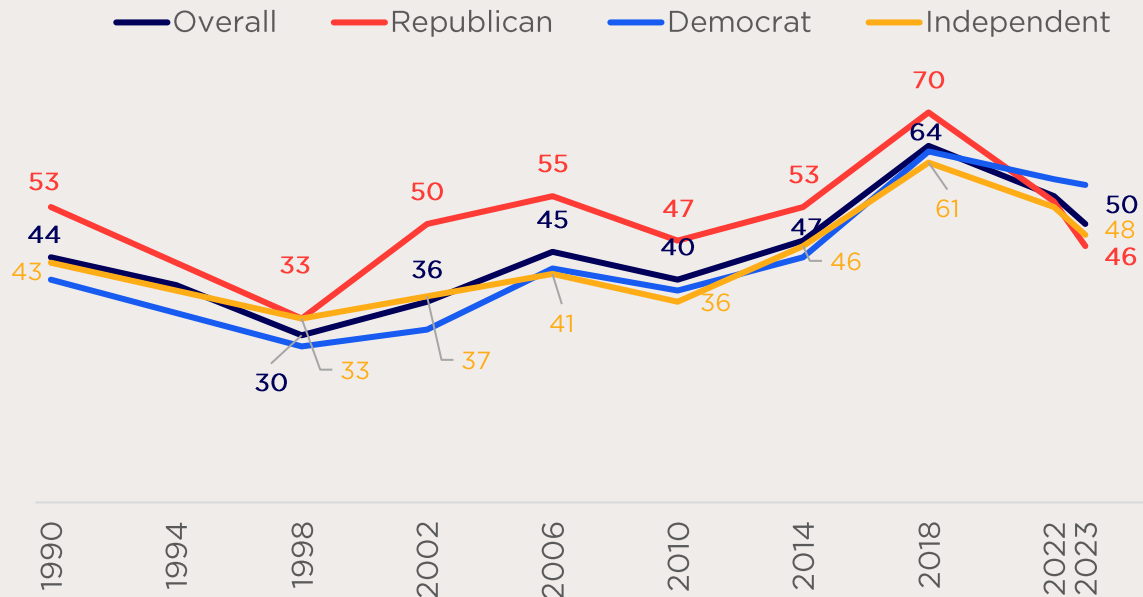


Accordingly, nearly two-thirds (64%) of Americans [favor maintaining long-term military bases](#) in South Korea. That number has remain largely unchanged since the question was first asked in 2002 when it was 67 percent.

However, support for defending South Korea has steadily declined since 2017, when 62 percent said they would favor using US troops to defend South Korea if North Korea invaded. In 2023, that number is 50 percent. Much of that decline is driven by a drop among Republicans, which went from 70 percent in 2017 to 46 percent in 2023. Democrats, meanwhile, went from 59 percent in 2017 to 57 percent in 2023.

Use of US Troops if North Korea invaded South Korea

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 North Korea invaded South Korea?



September 7 - 18, 2023 | n = 3,242

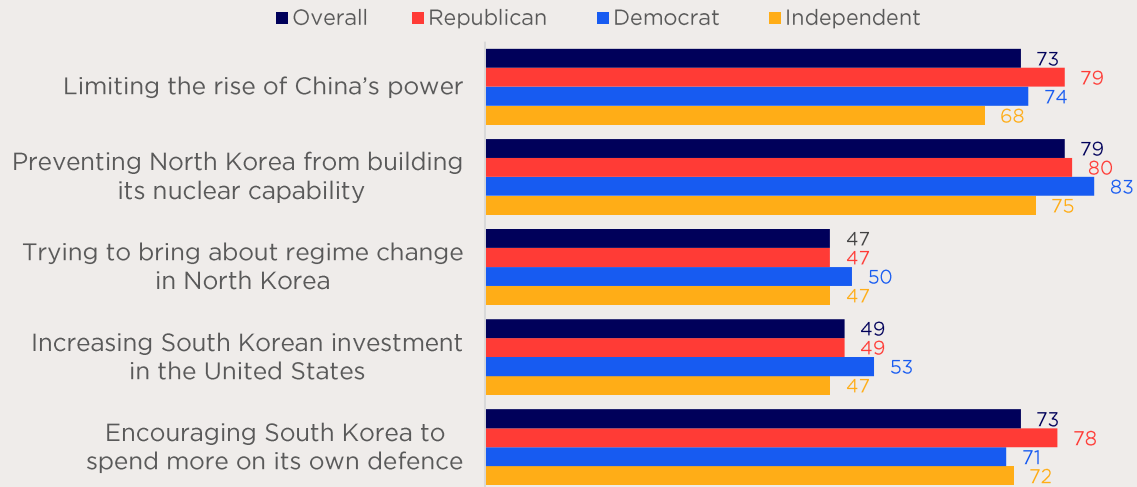
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This decline has two likely driving factors. The first is that threat perceptions of North Korea have declined in that same time. In 2017, 75 percent cited North Korea's nuclear program as a critical threat. In 2023, that number was just 52 percent. The second factor is likely Republican leadership that has continued to call into question the [value of US alliances](#) around the world.

Moving forward, security remains at the core of the US-South Korea alliance for the American public. Nearly eight in 10 (79%) say preventing North Korea from building its nuclear capability remains a priority. But that is no longer perceived to be the only role for the relationship with South Korea. Seven in 10 (73%) think limiting the rise of China's power should also be a priority, as should be encouraging South Korea to spend more on its own defense (73%). However, there is little appetite for trying to bring about regime change in North Korea. Just 47 percent say that should be a priority for America's relations with South Korea.

US Relations with South Korea

Priority of the following in US relations with South Korea (% very + somewhat high)



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Americans Want to Focus on Challenges Other Than North Korea

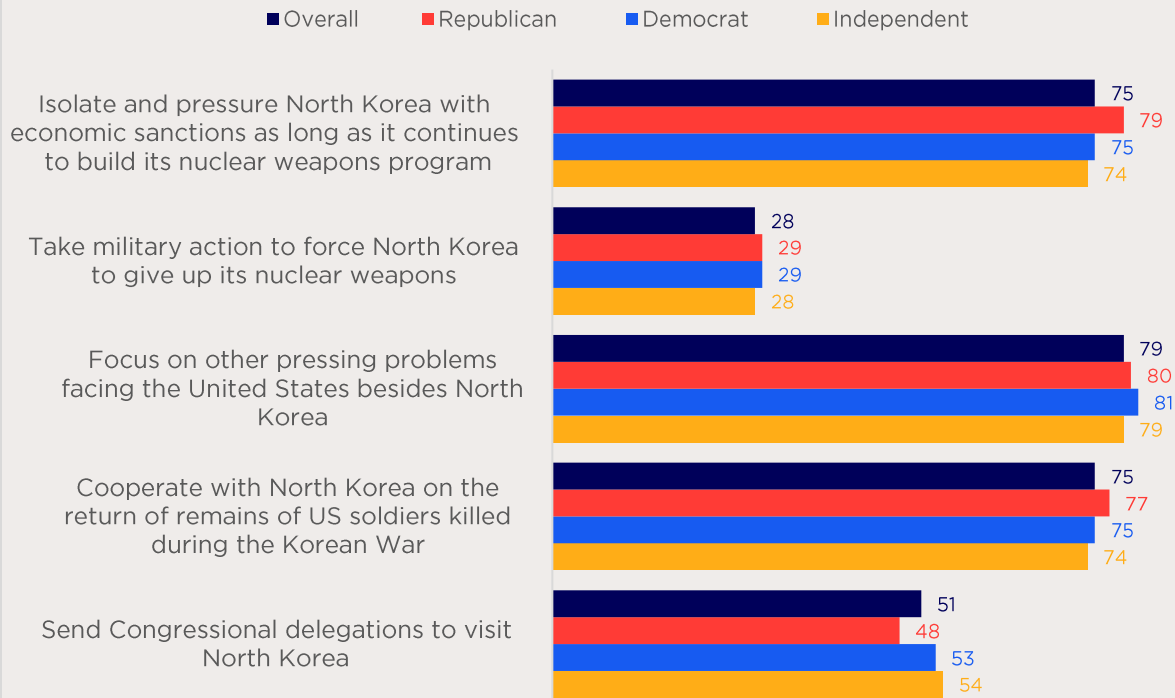
Even as North Korea ramps up its missile testing, including multiple launches of missiles capable of hitting the US mainland, threat perceptions of North Korea among the American public remain near all-time lows. In 2023, 52 percent of Americans say North Korea's nuclear program is a critical threat facing the United States. That is unchanged from 2022 and is 23 percentage points lower than the peak in 2017 when it was 75 percent.

In light of the reassessment of the threat presented by North Korea, much of the American public appears ready to move on. Nearly eight in 10 (79%) say the United States should focus on other pressing problems facing the United States besides North Korea. That sentiment is equally shared by Democrats (81%), Republicans (80%), and Independents (79%) and is largely unchanged from 2022 (77%).

There also remains little appetite for confrontation. Just 28 percent favor taking military action to force North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons. That is the lowest number since the question was first asked in 2021 when it was 35 percent.

Partisan Response to US Actions in Relations with North Korea

Please tell me whether you would support or oppose each of the following kinds of US actions in its relations with North Korea (% support)



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Instead, the American public is open to diplomacy. Two-thirds (66%) of Americans think US government leaders should be ready to meet and talk with the leaders of North Korea. This top-down diplomacy was the hallmark of the Trump administration, and the public remains supportive of that type of engagement. However, there is less support (51%) for sending congressional delegations to visit North Korea.

In terms of substantive cooperation, there is broad support for working with North Korea in one specific area. Three-quarters (75%) of Americans say the United States should cooperate with North Korea on the return of remains on US soldiers killed during the Korean War.

Conclusion

The American public continues to see value in the relationship with South Korea. Not only is it perceived to do more to strengthen US national security, but its cultural prevalence has likely increased its perceived influence on world affairs. And when it comes to North Korea, Americans may be

experiencing something of Pyongyang fatigue. While they are not ready to shut the door, the security emphasis on Ukraine means there are other challengers that are perceived as being more important to the United States.

Methodology

This analysis is based on data from the 2023 Chicago Council Survey of the American public on foreign policy, a project of the Lester Crown Center on US Foreign Policy. The 2023 Chicago Council Survey was conducted September 7-18, 2023 by Ipsos using its large-scale nationwide online research panel, KnowledgePanel, in both English and Spanish among a weighted national sample of 3,242 adults aged 18 or older living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. The margin of sampling error for the full sample is ± 2.0 percentage points. The margin of error is higher for partisan subgroups or for partial-sample items.

Partisan identification is based on how respondents answered a standard partisan self-identification question: “Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?”

The 2023 Chicago Council Survey is made possible by the generous support of the Crown family, the Korea Foundation, and the United States-Japan Foundation.

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About the Lester Crown Center on US Foreign Policy

Established in 2018 with a transformative gift from the Crown Family, the Lester Crown Center on US Foreign Policy is driven by the belief that the public plays a critical role in determining the direction of US foreign policy and that an informed and engaged public is critical for effective policymaking. The centerpiece of the Lester Crown Center is its annual survey of American public opinion and US foreign policy, the Chicago Council Survey, which has been conducted since 1974. For the latest research from the Crown Center, follow [@ChiCouncilFP](https://twitter.com/ChiCouncilFP).

Appendix

Question 12

Q12. How much confidence would you say you have in the following countries and multilateral organizations to deal responsibly with world problems?

Q12/5. South Korea (% a great deal/fair amount)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
2015	36	34	41	34	-7
2017	42	40	48	40	-8
2018 (JHA)	50	53	52	47	1
2023	48	42	54	48	-12

Summary of Q12 – 2023 data only

Q2. Confidence in countries to deal with problems responsibly (% a great deal + fair amount)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
Q12/1. The United States	70	65	80	65	-15
Q12/2. China	19	12	22	20	-10
Q12/3. Russia	12	7	12	14	-5
Q12/4. Japan	62	59	69	60	-10
Q12/5. South Korea	48	42	54	48	-12
Q12/6. The European Union	63	53	76	58	-23
Q12/7. India	32	28	35	34	-7

Question 5

Q5. Below is a list of possible threats to the vital interests 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.

Q5/29. North Korea's nuclear program (% critical threat)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
2015	55	58	53	56	5
2016	60	63	64	52	-1
2017	75	80	76	70	4
2018	59	61	62	53	-1
2019	61	67	62	55	5
January 2020	52	57	58	41	-1
2020	51	53	54	47	-1
March 2021	59	65	61	53	4
2022	52	57	55	45	2
2023	52	57	53	48	4

Q5/29. North Korea's nuclear program (% critical threat)

	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
2015	55	58	53	56	5
2016	60	63	64	52	-1
2017	75	80	76	70	4
2018	59	61	62	53	-1
2019	61	67	62	55	5
January 2020	52	57	58	41	-1

Summary of Q5 – 2023 data only

Q5. Perception of threats to vital US interests (% critical threat)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
Q5/6a. Large numbers of immigrants and refugees coming into the US	42	72	18	39	54
Q5/8a. Climate change	52	16	82	51	-66
Q5/10. International terrorism	52	59	50	47	9
Q5/33. The military power of Russia	46	47	51	41	-4
Q5/29. North Korea's nuclear program	52	57	53	48	4
Q5/15. Iran's nuclear program	49	56	45	46	11
Q5/28b. A global economic downturn	54	59	55	50	4
Q5/38b. Weakening democracy in the United States	69	73	73	65	0
Q5/3. The development of China as a world power	58	71	52	53	19
Q5/40. Political polarization in the United States	61	62	64	58	-2
Q5/16. Cyber-attacks on US computer networks	72	74	72	72	2

Question 30

Q30. 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:

Q30/1. If North Korea invaded South Korea (% favor)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
1990	44	53	40	43	13
1994	39	--	--	--	--
1998	30	33	28	33	5
2002	36	50	31	37	19
2004	43	49	43	39	6
2006	45	55	42	41	13
2008	41	51	32	45	19
2010	40	47	38	36	9
2012	41	51	40	36	11
2014	47	53	44	46	9

2015	47	53	50	42	3
2017	62	70	59	61	11
2018	64	70	63	61	7
2019	58	63	57	56	6
2020	58	57	58	58	-1
March 2021	53	57	51	53	6
2021	63	68	61	62	7
2022	55	54	58	53	-4
2023	50	46	57	48	-11

Summary of Q30 – 2023 data only

Q30. Favor use of US troops (%)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
Q30/1. If North Korea invaded South Korea	50	46	57	48	-11
Q30/14. If China initiates a military conflict with Japan over disputed islands	43	45	45	41	0
Q30/13. If Russia invades a NATO ally like Latvia, Lithuania, or Estonia	57	48	68	55	-20
Q30/13G. If Russia invades a NATO ally like Germany	64	64	69	60	-5
Q30/21. To stop immigrants from coming into the US from Mexico	47	79	23	44	56
Q30/26. To combat drug cartels in Mexico	51	64	41	50	23

Question 451S

Q451S. Does the US security relationship with the following countries do more to strengthen US national security or weaken US national security?

More to strengthen (%)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
Q451S/2. Saudi Arabia	45	45	49	43	-4
Q451S/3. Israel	64	76	58	60	18
Q451S/4. Japan	77	76	81	74	-5
Q451S/5. South Korea	71	67	78	68	-11
Q451S/9. Mexico	62	54	73	60	-19
Q451S/10. Germany	77	75	83	73	-8
Q451S/11. Taiwan	65	65	71	62	-6
Q451S/12. Ukraine	60	49	77	55	-28

Q40. Do you think the United States should or should not have long-term military bases in the following places?

40/3. South Korea (% should have)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap

2002	67	74	66	64	8
2004	62	71	62	56	9
2006	62	73	57	61	16
2008	63	72	59	59	13
2010	60	68	58	58	10
2012	60	68	57	58	11
2014	64	70	61	64	9
2016	70	76	70	64	6
2018	74	79	73	71	6
January 2020	69	80	65	65	15
2021 Trilateral	66	70	65	65	5
2022	72	77	72	69	5
2023	64	63	66	62	-3

Summary of Q40 – 2023 data only

Q40. Long-term military bases in the following places (% should have)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
Q40/1. Japan	63	65	62	62	3
Q40/3. South Korea	64	63	66	62	-3
Q40/6. Germany	61	67	63	55	4
Q40/7. Turkey	50	48	51	50	-3
Q40/8. Australia	49	52	49	48	3
Q40/10. Poland	54	53	54	54	-1
Q40/15. NATO allies like Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia	53	45	61	52	-16

Question 44.

Q44. Do you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable view of the following world leaders?

Q44/3b. South Korean President Yoon Seok-yeol (% very + somewhat favorable)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
2023	58	57	63	55	-6

Summaries of Q44 – 2023 data only

Q44. View of the following world leaders (% very + somewhat favorable)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
Q44/1. Russian President Vladimir Putin	6	8	4	7	4
Q44/2. Chinese President Xi Jinping	8	6	9	9	-3
Q44/5. Former US President Donald Trump	36	75	8	32	67
Q44/5b. US President Joe Biden	43	6	81	37	-75
Q44/3b. South Korean President Yoon Seok-yeol	58	57	63	55	-6
Q44/7b. Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio	63	64	66	61	-2

Q44/12. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky	67	55	84	61	-29
Q44/13. Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu	39	61	24	35	37

Question 50

Q50. I would like to know how much influence you think each of the following countries has in the world. Please answer on a 0 to 10 scale; with 0 meaning they are not at all influential and 10 meaning they are extremely influential.

Q50/8. South Korea (mean score)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
2010	4.7	4.5	5.0	4.5	-0.5
2012	4.4	4.2	4.6	4.5	-0.4
2014	4.4	4.2	4.6	4.3	-0.4
2016	4.6	4.5	4.8	4.5	-0.3
2017	4.4	4.4	4.6	4.3	-0.2
2018	4.8	4.6	5.1	4.7	-0.5
2019	5.0	4.9	5.1	5	-0.2
2021	4.5	4.7	4.6	4.4	0.1
2023	5.1	4.9	5.4	5	-.5

Summary of Q50 – 2023 data only

Q50. Influence countries have on the world (mean score)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
Q50/1. The United States	8.4	8.7	8.6	8	.1
Q50/2. Russia	6.3	6.4	6.7	6.2	-.3
Q50/3. Japan	6	6.1	6.1	5.8	0
Q50/5. China	7.5	7.7	7.5	7.3	.2
Q50/8. South Korea	5.1	4.9	5.4	5	-.5
Q50/9. Germany	5.7	5.5	6	5.6	-.5
Q50/11. The UK	5.9	6.1	5.9	5.7	.2
Q50/12b. Israel	5.4	5.6	5.5	5.1	.1
Q50/13. Saudi Arabia	5.7	5.7	5.8	5.5	-.1

Question 175

Q175. 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 US has hostile or unfriendly relations. Do you think US leaders should or should not be ready to meet and talk with leaders of:

Q175/4. North Korea (% should)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
2010	63	50	72	63	-22
2012	70	63	78	69	-15
2014	62	58	69	58	-11

2023	66	68	65	67	3
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Summary of Q175 - 2023 data only

Q175. Meet and talk with leaders of countries with whom the US has unfriendly relations (% should)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
Q175/1. The Taliban	47	48	45	49	3
Q175/2. Iran	72	65	76	74	-11
Q175/3. Hamas	57	51	61	59	-10
Q175/4. North Korea	66	68	65	67	3
Q175/5. Cuba	77	71	83	77	-12
Q175/8. China	83	79	87	82	-8
Q175/9. Russia	69	72	65	71	7

Question 358K

Q358K. In America's relations with South Korea, how high a priority should the US place on each of the following:

Q358K/1. Limiting the rise of China's power (% very + somewhat high priority)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
2012	52	56	52	48	4
2023	73	79	74	68	5

Q358K/2. Preventing North Korea from building its nuclear capability (% very + somewhat high priority)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
2012	78	82	78	74	4
2023	79	80	83	75	-3

Q358K/6. Trying to bring about regime change in North Korea (% very + somewhat high priority)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
2012	55	60	55	50	5
2023	47	47	50	47	-3

Q358K/7. Increasing South Korean investment in the United States (% very + somewhat high priority)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
2023	49	49	53	47	-4

Q358K/8. Encouraging South Korea to spend more on its own defence (%very + somewhat high priority)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
2023	73	78	71	72	7

Summary of Q358K - 2023 data only

Q358K. Priority of the following in US relations with South Korea (% very + somewhat high priority)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
2023	73	78	71	72	7

Q358J/1. Limiting the rise of China's power	73	79	74	68	5
Q358J/2. Preventing North Korea from building its nuclear capability	79	80	83	75	-3
Q358J/6. Trying to bring about regime change in North Korea	47	47	50	47	-3
Q358J/7. Increasing South Korean investment in the United States	49	49	53	47	-4
Q358J/8. Encouraging South Korea to spend more on its own defence	73	78	71	72	7

Question 819

Q819. Please tell me whether you would support or oppose each of the following kinds of US actions in its relations with North Korea:

Q819/4: Isolate and pressure North Korea with economic sanctions as long as it continues to build its nuclear weapons program (% support)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
2021	70	77	65	70	12
2022	75	79	77	71	2
2023	75	79	75	74	4

Q819/5: Take military action to force North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons (% support)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
2021	35	51	29	30	22
2022	31	35	29	29	6
2023	28	29	29	28	0

Q819/6: Focus on other pressing problems facing the United States besides North Korea (% support)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
2022	77	77	78	78	-1
2023	79	80	81	79	-1

Q819/7: Cooperate with North Korea on the return of remains of US soldiers killed during the Korean War (% support)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
2023	75	77	75	74	2

Q819/9: Send Congressional delegations to visit North Korea (% support)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
2023	51	48	53	54	-5

Summary of Q819 - 2023 data only

Q819. US actions in its relations with North Korea (% support)
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	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
Q819/4: Isolate and pressure North Korea with economic sanctions as long as it continues to build its nuclear weapons program	75	79	75	74	4
Q819/5: Take military action to force North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons	28	29	29	28	0
Q819/6: Focus on other pressing problems facing the United States besides North Korea	79	80	81	79	-1
Q819/7: Cooperate with North Korea on the return of remains of US soldiers killed during the Korean War	75	77	75	74	2
Q819/9: Send Congressional delegations to visit North Korea	51	48	53	54	-5

Question 402

Q402. Do you support or oppose the United States accepting immigrants from:

Q402. Acceptance of immigrants from: (% support)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
Q402/1. Sudan	51	31	65	53	-34
Q402/2. Afghanistan	52	32	66	56	-34
Q402/3. Ukraine	69	55	80	71	-25
Q402/4. Taiwan	66	53	75	68	-22
Q402/5. Russia	46	33	54	50	-21
Q402/6. Haiti	59	41	74	61	-33
Q402/7. Central America	60	41	75	62	-34
Q402/8. India	62	46	73	64	-27
Q402/9. China	48	29	60	51	-31
Q402/10A. Japan	66	51	77	70	-26
Q402/10B. South Korea	66	56	76	67	-20