

Prior to Attack on Israel, Majority of Americans Supported Talks with Hamas

Dina Smeltz, Senior Fellow, Public Opinion and Foreign Policy, Chicago Council on Global Affairs

Lama El Baz, Research Assistant, Public Opinion and Foreign Policy, Chicago Council on Global Affairs

October 2023

Before Hamas [launched its attack](#) on Israel and the Israeli government declared a state of war, a poll conducted by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs on September 7-18, 2023, showed that Americans value the US security partnership with Israel yet they favor either a two-state or one-state solution to the conflict, rejecting the status quo. While sentiments are shared among Americans of all partisan affiliations, Republicans were far more inclined to support Israel's position on a range of issues.

Key Findings

- Two in three Americans and majorities across political affiliations said the US-Israeli security relationship does more to strengthen (64%) than weaken (32%) US national security.
- At the same time, majorities across political stripes also say the status quo between Israel and the Palestinians is unacceptable. Six in 10 say that either a two-state solution or one state solution is acceptable.
- Prior to the recent attack by Hamas, six in 10 (57%) said the United States should be ready to meet with leaders of Hamas, including half of Republicans (51%), and majorities of Democrats (61%) and Independents (59%).
- On most other questions there are great partisan differences. While most Americans preferred the United States take neither side in the conflict (64%), Republicans were equally likely to say they should take Israel's side (49%) as no side (48%).
- As in 2022, six in 10 Democrats (62%) and half of Independents (51%) supported placing restrictions on US military aid to Israel so that Israel

cannot use that aid toward military operations against Palestinians. While Republicans opposed (55%), they had become more likely to support restrictions than they had been two years ago (when only 32% did).

- Republicans and Democrats divided most sharply in their opinion of Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, with 61 percent of Republicans but just 24 percent of Democrats expressing a favorable view.

Most Americans Say Security Relationship with Israel Makes US National Security Stronger

Past Chicago Council Surveys have found that Americans generally feel favorably toward Israel and tend to see Israel as an ally or partner to the United States.¹ The 2023 Council poll also reveals that two in three Americans and majorities across political affiliations thought the US-Israeli security relationship does more to strengthen (64%) than weaken (32%) US national security². This reading puts Israel on par with other US allies such as Taiwan (65%), Mexico (62%) and Ukraine (60%), and ahead of Saudi Arabia (45%; see appendix Figure 1).

Most Find Status Quo between Israel and the Palestinians Unacceptable

While the security relationship with Israel is viewed favorably, most Americans continued to say the current political situation between Israel and the Palestinian people is an unacceptable solution. When asked whether each of three options—the status quo, a two-state solution or a one state-solution—only a third overall said the status quo is acceptable, up slightly from 2021 (when 26% found this acceptable). Six in 10 stated that either a two-state solution with the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip or a one-state solution incorporating both Israeli and Palestinian territories in which Israelis and Palestinians are treated as equal citizens would be acceptable.

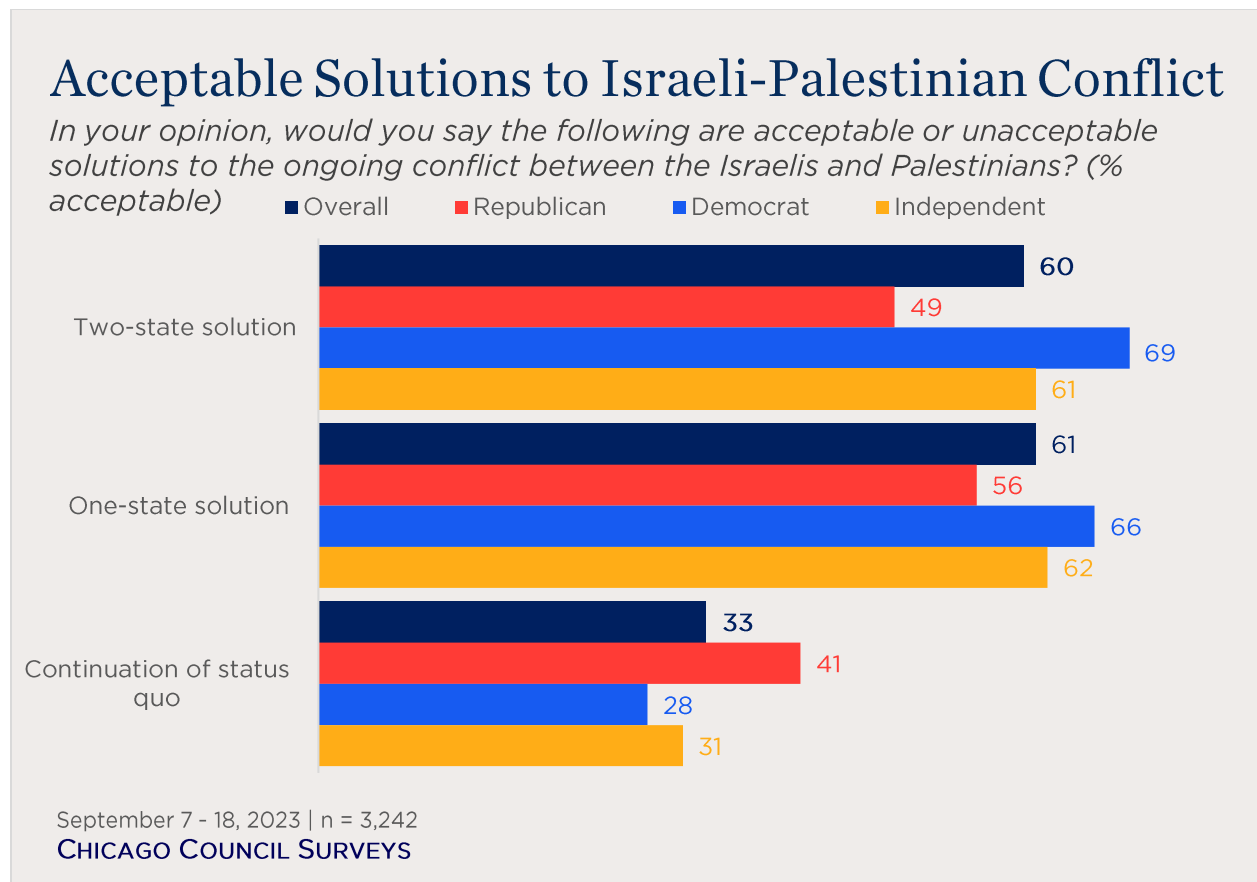
Broken down by political party support, Republicans (53% unacceptable), Democrats (63% unacceptable) and Independents (63% unacceptable) agreed the status quo is not acceptable. But Republicans were somewhat

¹ When asked to rate their feelings toward Israel on a thermometer scale in 2022, with zero representing very cold, unfavorable feelings and 100 representing very warm, favorable feelings, Americans rated Israel a 58. This rating was similar to those given to other important US partner countries, including Mexico (61), South Korea (60), and India (55), but significantly below the ratings given to some of America's closest allies, such as Canada (81) and Great Britain (74). See <https://globalaffairs.org/research/public-opinion-survey/americans-split-military-aid-israel-say-political-status-quo>

² The different countries asked in this question were asked as partial sample batteries. The sample size for these batteries are between 2,400-2,500.

more likely in the 2023 survey than in 2021 to say that the current situation is acceptable (see also Appendix Table 1).

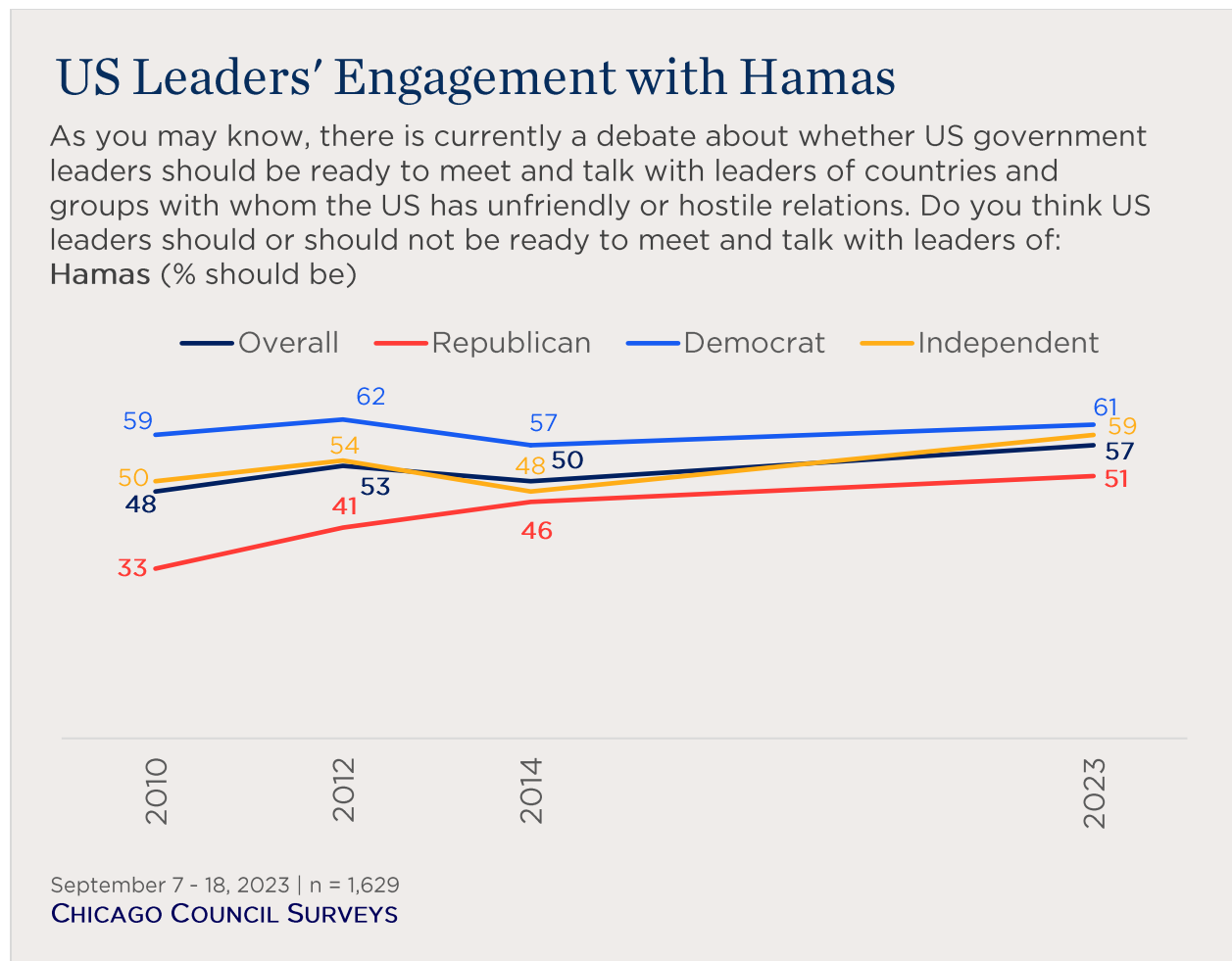
On a two-state option, half of Republicans (49%) and six in 10 Independents (61%) continued to say it is acceptable, while Democrats were even more favorable toward two states (69% up from 61% in 2021). Attitudes toward a one state solution had not changed much since 2021, with roughly six in 10 Republicans (56%) and Independents (62%) and somewhat more (66%) Democrats saying a one state solution is acceptable.



These results reiterate some of the findings from a [June 2023 University of Maryland survey](#) that found a strong majority of Americans (73%)—including 64 percent of Republicans and 80 percent of Democrats—said they would support “a single democratic state in which Jews and non-Jews would be equal, even if that meant Israel would no longer be a politically Jewish state.” Only seventeen percent overall (with 27% of Republicans and 12% of Democrats) said they would support “preserving Israel as a politically Jewish state, even if it meant that millions of indigenous non-Jews living under its authority would not have citizenship and equal rights.”

At time of Survey, Six in 10 Americans Favored US Meeting with Hamas Leaders

Reflecting Americans' rejection of the current political situation, a majority of Americans (57%, the highest percentage yet recorded) said US leaders should be willing to meet and talk with leaders of Hamas. For the first time, a bare majority of Republicans (51%) and the highest recording yet of Independents (59%) thought the US should meet with Hamas leaders. Six in 10 Democrats (59%) also agreed (61%) similar to previous levels.



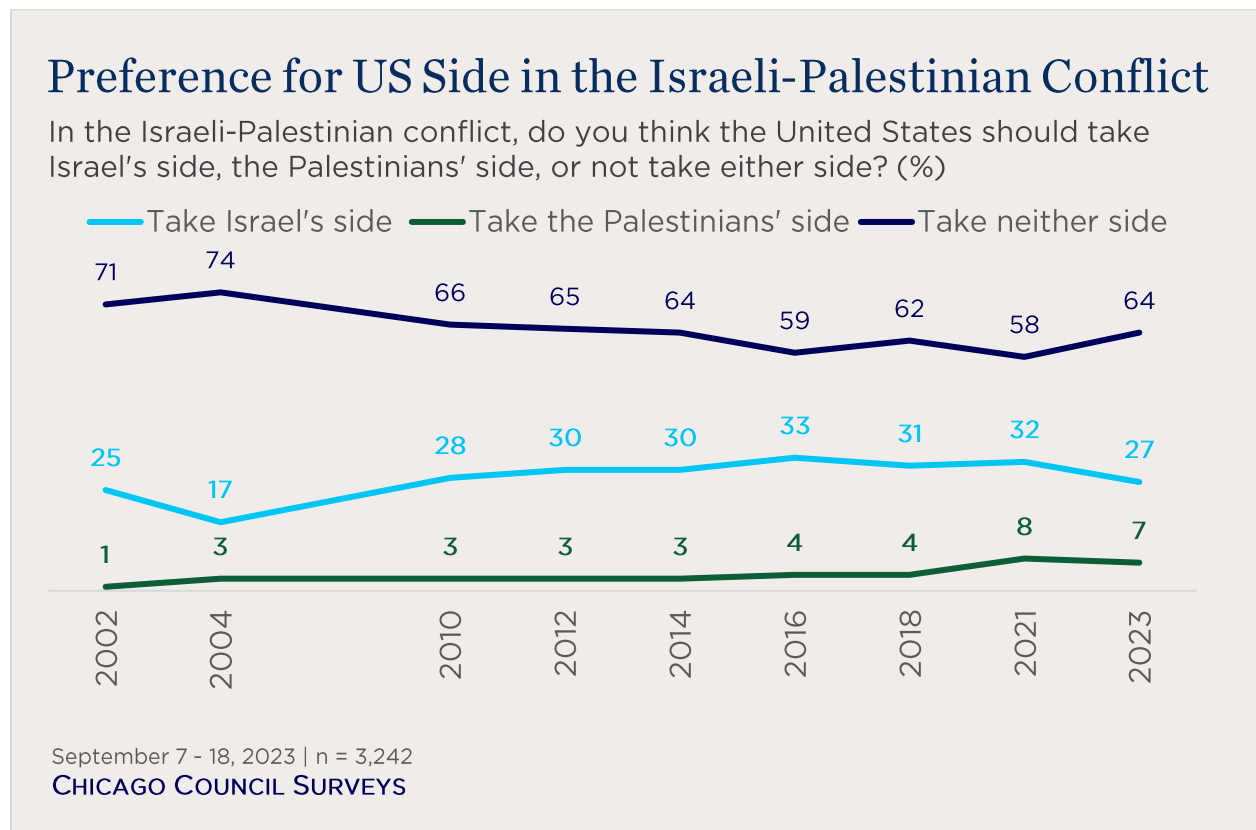
Half of Republicans, Majority of Democrats Do Not Want to Take Sides

While Americans across political stripes mostly agreed on the importance of Israel as a US security partner and the unsustainability of the status quo, there were much starker partisan differences in other attitudes toward Israel.

Two in 3 Americans (64%) thought the United States should not take either side in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, up slightly from 2021 (58%) and

consistent with previous readings. As they have in past surveys, solid majorities of Democrats and Independents wanted the United States to stay impartial. Relatively few preferred the United States to take the Palestinians' side, though this was higher among younger Americans.³

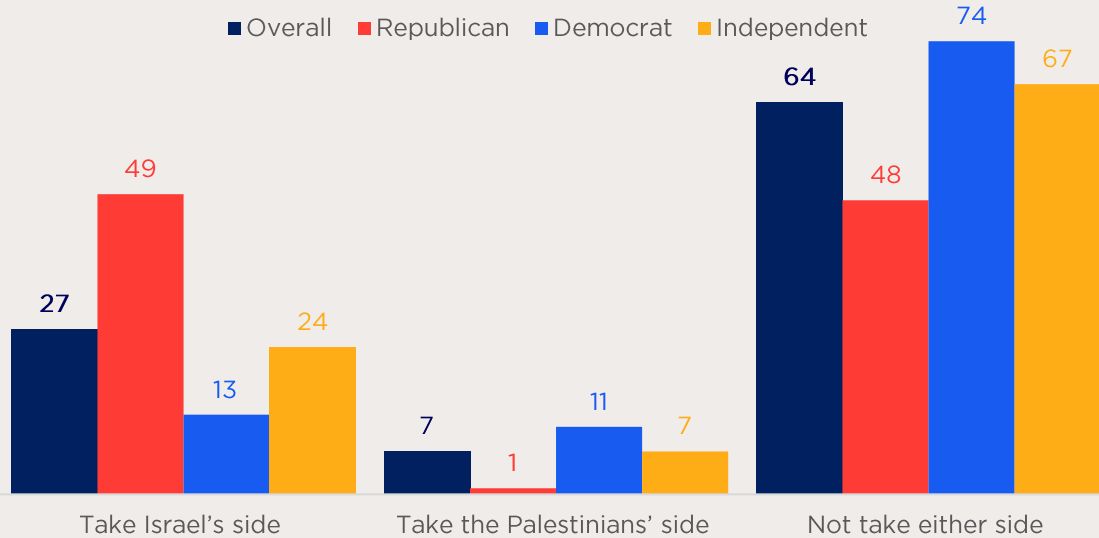
At the time of this survey, Republicans were equally likely to say the United States should side with Israel (49%) as say neither side (48%). While this percentage is higher than other partisan supporters, it represents a drop for Republicans; between 2016 and 2021, a majority of GOP supporters favored taking Israel's side. Similar to their relatively higher support for siding with Israel, [a 2021 Chicago Council Survey](#) found a much larger percentage of Republicans (72%) than Independents (49%) or Democrats (41%) who would favor using US troops to help Israel defend itself in the event of an attack from its neighbors (53% of the overall US public) (see also Appendix Figure 2).



³ Thirteen percent of Americans between the ages of 18-29 think the US should take the Palestinians' side in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as compared to the 8 percent of Americans aged 30-44, the 4 percent of Americans aged 45-59, and the 3 percent of Americans over the age of 60. Across Democrats, those that are between the ages of 18-29 are also more likely to say that the US should take the Palestinians' side in the conflict than their older counterparts (20% of 18-29 vs. 12% of 30-44 vs. 6% of 45-59 vs. 6% of 60+)

Partisan Preferences for US Side in Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, do you think the United States should take Israel's side, the Palestinians' side, or not take either side? (%)



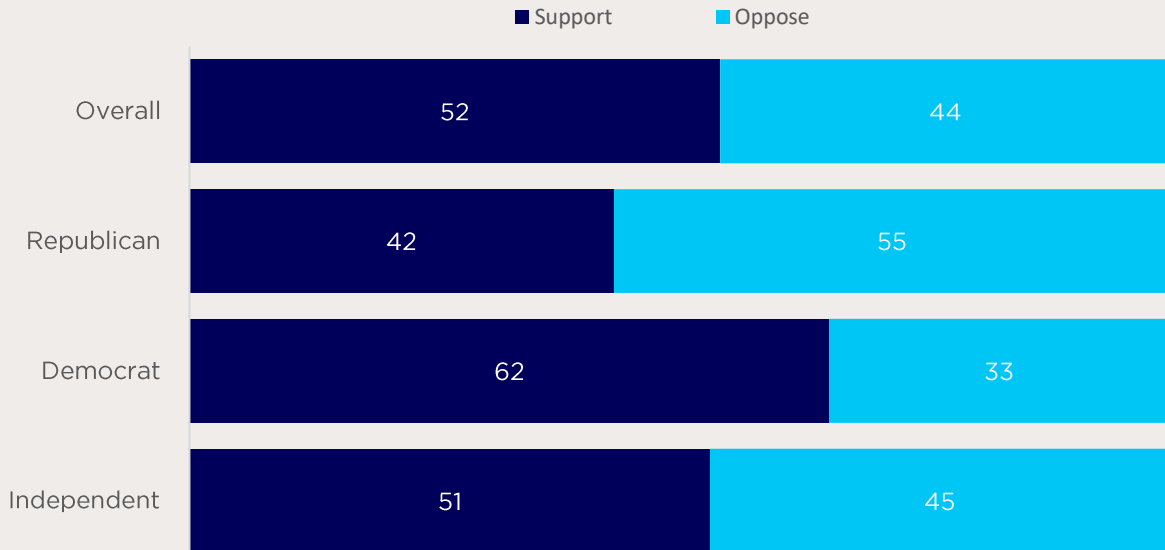
September 7 - 18, 2023 | n = 3,242
CHICAGO COUNCIL SURVEYS

In September, Democrats Favored Restrictions in US Military Aid; Republicans Did Not

When asked whether the United States should condition its military aid to prevent Israel from using that assistance in military operations against the Palestinians, a majority of Republicans opposed those restrictions (55%), though they were more likely to support them in the 2023 survey than they were two years ago (42%, up from 32% in 2021). Independents tended to support restrictions on military aid (51%) as did six in 10 Democrats (62%), consistent with survey results in 2021.

Attitudes Toward Restricting US Military Aid to Israel

Do you support or oppose putting restrictions on US military aid to Israel so that it cannot use that aid toward military operations against Palestinians? (%)



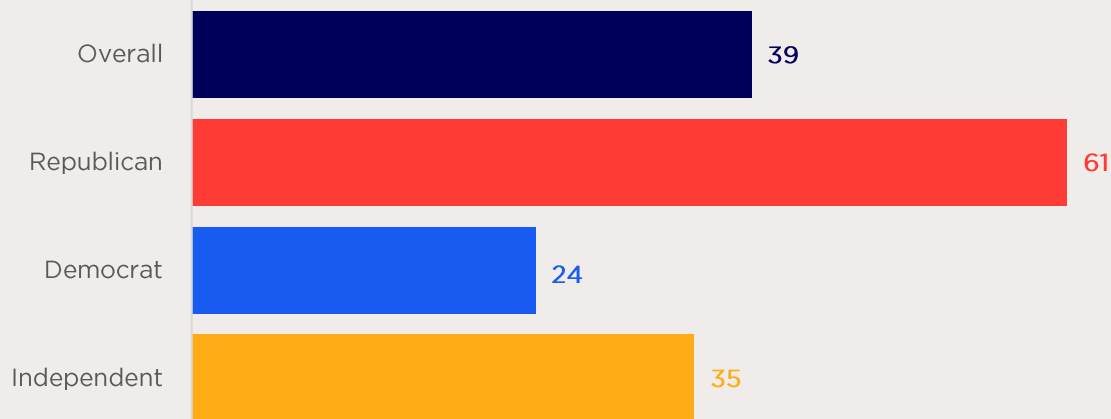
September 7 - 18, 2023 | n = 3,242
CHICAGO COUNCIL SURVEYS

Largest Partisan Difference Found in Opinions of Netanyahu

While Republicans and Democrats differ in their views of taking a side in the conflict and restrictions on US military aid, they are farthest apart in their appraisals of Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu. More than twice as many Republicans (61%) as Democrats (24%) have a favorable view, along with 35 percent of Independents.

View of Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu

Do you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable view of the following world leaders? Israeli Prime Minister, Binyamin Netanyahu (% very + somewhat favorable)



September 7 - 18, 2023 | n = 1,636
CHICAGO COUNCIL SURVEYS

Conclusion

Hamas' surprise attack on Israel this past weekend was one of the most startling and unprecedented military incursions to be carried out against Israel since the Yom Kippur War in 1973. In the aftermath of these events, American attitudes toward Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could have shifted – but it is difficult to predict how. Perhaps, the brazen attack by Hamas could have shifted sympathies among Americans toward Israel; or, it could have called attention to an unsustainable and quickly deteriorating status quo and turned the tide among Americans toward a solution that gives Palestinians equal rights. Regardless, Americans are certain about one thing: something has to change in the ongoing dispute.

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 including a design effect of 1.2908. 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.

About the Chicago Council on Global Affairs

The Chicago Council on Global Affairs is an independent, nonpartisan membership organization that provides insight—and influences the public discourse—on critical global issues. We convene leading global voices, conduct independent research, and engage the public to explore ideas that will shape our global future. The Council is committed to bringing clarity and offering solutions to issues that transcend borders and transform how people, business, and governments engage the world. Learn more at thechicagocouncil.org and follow [@ChicagoCouncil](https://twitter.com/ChicagoCouncil).

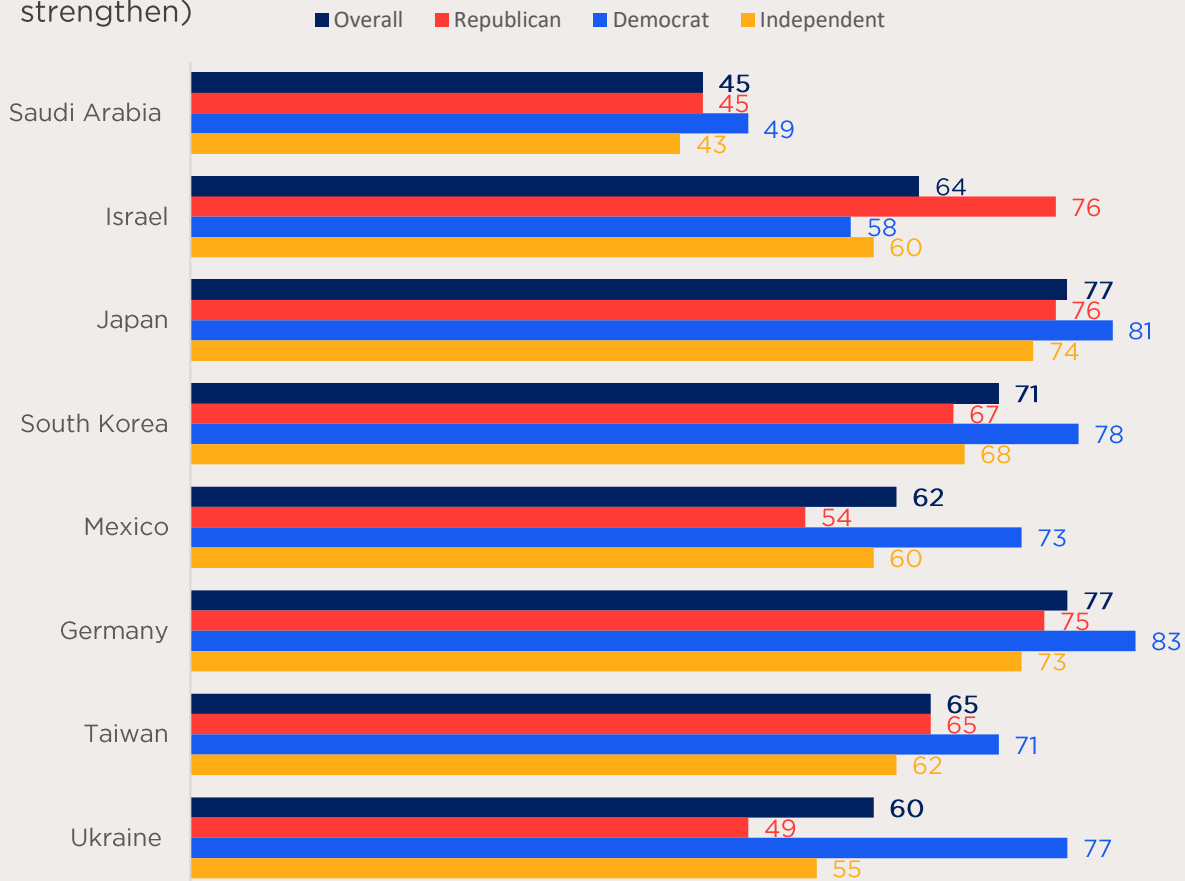
About the Lester Crown Center on US Foreign Policy

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

Appendix Figure 1. Value of US Security Relationships

Does the US security relationship with the following countries do more to strengthen US national security or weaken US national security? (% more to strengthen)



September 7 - 18, 2023 | n = 2,400-2,500
CHICAGO COUNCIL SURVEYS

Appendix Table 1. In your opinion, would you say the following are acceptable or unacceptable solutions to the ongoing conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians:

Q700C/1. A two-state solution with the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (% acceptable)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
2021	56	49	61	58	-12
2023	60	49	69	61	-20

Q700C/1. A two-state solution with the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (% unacceptable)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
2021	34	42	29	33	13
2023	32	44	22	32	22

Q700C/2. A one-state solution incorporating both Israeli and Palestinian territories in which Israelis and Palestinians are treated as equal citizens (% acceptable)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
2021	60	56	64	60	-8
2023	61	56	66	62	-10

Q700C/2. A one-state solution incorporating both Israeli and Palestinian territories in which Israelis and Palestinians are treated as equal citizens (% unacceptable)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
2021	34	37	31	34	6
2023	32	39	26	32	13

Q700C/3. Continuation of the status quo (% acceptable)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
2021	26	32	20	27	12
2023	33	41	28	31	13

Q700C/3. Continuation of the status quo (% unacceptable)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
2021	68	60	77	66	-17
2023	60	53	63	63	-10

Summary of Q700C - 2023 data only

Q700C/3. Solutions to ongoing conflict between Israelis and Palestinians (% acceptable)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
Two-state solution	60	49	69	61	-20
One-state solution	61	56	66	62	-10
Continuation of status quo	33	41	28	31	13

Q700C/3. Solutions to ongoing conflict between Israelis and Palestinians (% unacceptable)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
Two-state solution	32	44	22	32	22
One-state solution	32	39	26	32	13
Continuation of status quo	60	53	63	63	-10

Appendix Figure 2

