

Republicans and Democrats Support US Alliances, But for Different Reasons

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For the past 75 years, the US alliance system has been at the heart of American foreign policy. Support for this system has been broadly bipartisan over its history, but Donald Trump's emergence as the Republican Party's leader has shaken that foundation. Both in office and now as a candidate, he has called into question US commitments around the world and taken a transactional approach to international ties. If he wins a second term, speculation abounds about how the US alliance system will shift. Even if he loses the 2024 election, a broader re-evaluation may be under way among the Republican public.

The 2024 Chicago Council Survey finds broad support among Americans for alliances, but there are differences in the intensity of partisan support on key issues. While Democrats champion the benefits of these US security agreements, a sizable minority of Republicans believe that the costs of collective security are disproportionately underwritten by the United States.

Key Findings

- Maintaining US military alliances (46%) and maintaining US military superiority (48%) are the items rated most highly as very effective ways to achieve US foreign policy.
- A majority of Americans (64%) say US security alliances around the world are beneficial to both allies and the United States (51%) or just the United States (13%). But there are partisan divides: 74 percent of Democrats take that view versus 55 percent of Republicans.

- Among the four in 10 Republicans (39%) who think security alliances mostly benefit our allies, 64 percent say this is because US allies do not pay their fair share.
- Americans think US relations with Taiwan (62%), Ukraine (59%), and Israel (55%) do more to strengthen US national security.
- Majorities also support long-term military bases in Germany (64%), South Korea (63%), and Japan (62%). Half oppose long-term military bases in Turkey (50%), and Americans are evenly split on bases in Australia (48% support and oppose).
- Half say the US military presence in Europe (50%) increases stability, and pluralities say the same about Asia (49%) and the Middle East (39%). When it comes to Africa (49%) and Latin America (44%), pluralities say it has no effect.

Maintaining Alliances and Superior Military Power Seen as Best US Tools

For the past seven decades, US officials have generally viewed the US alliance system as a geopolitical strength for the United States—one that is unmatched by competing powers. In recent years, however, some Republican leaders have suggested that alliances are more of a burden than an asset, primarily due to their perceived unequal costs.

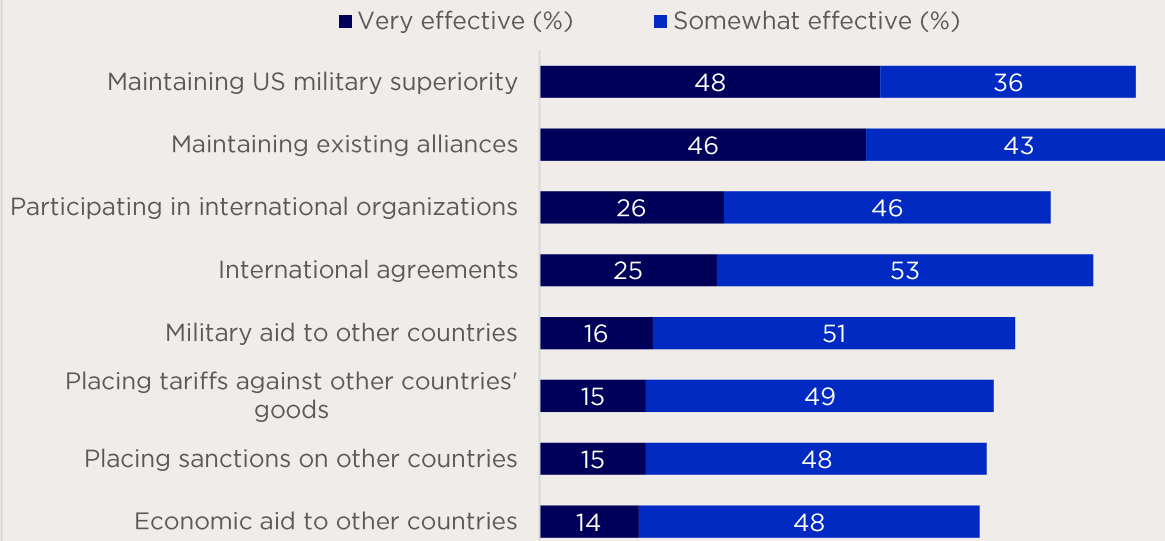
For their part, the American public recognizes the value of US security relationships with other countries, especially those considered US allies. Americans think US relations with most of the countries asked about, including official allies like Germany (75%), Japan (74%), and South Korea (69%), strengthen US national security rather than weaken it. They also feel America’s less official partnerships with Taiwan (62%), Ukraine (59%), Mexico (60%), and Israel (55%, down from 64% in 2023) strengthen US security.¹

Moreover, of all the potential tactics in the United States foreign policy toolbox, maintaining US military alliances (46% very, 43% somewhat effective) and maintaining US military superiority (48% very, 36% somewhat) are the items rated most highly as very effective ways to achieve US foreign policy goals. This has been true since the Chicago Council Survey first began asking this question in 2012.

¹ They are more divided on Saudi Arabia (46% strengthen vs. 48% weaken).

US Opinion on Ways to Achieve Foreign Policy Goals

How effective do you think each of the following approaches are to achieving the foreign policy goals of the United States – very effective, somewhat effective, not very effective, or not effective at all?: (very/ somewhat effective %)



June 21 - July 1, 2024 | n=2,106
Chicago Council Surveys

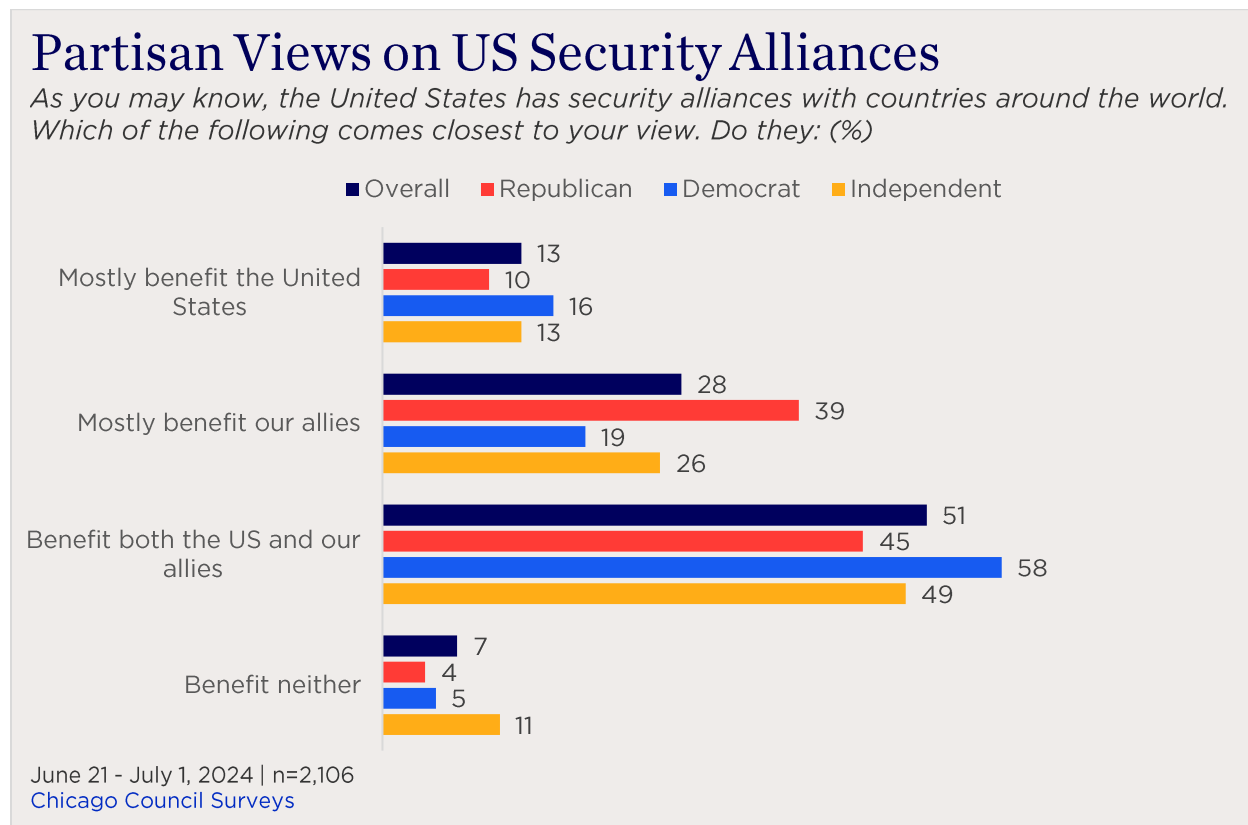
Consistent with past surveys, Republicans rate superior military power (63% very effective) higher than alliances (41%); Democrats rate alliances (56% very effective) higher than military power (42%). Independents rate them about equally (40% alliances, 42% military power).

Alliances Seen as Mutually Beneficial, but Partisan Gaps Emerging

Scholars who focus on alliances point out that [their benefits](#) are often less visible, and therefore less understood, than the costs associated with them. But Americans are fairly strong proponents of US alliances. Nearly two-thirds of Americans (64% combined) say US security alliances around the world benefit both the United States and its allies (51%) or mostly benefit the United States (13%).

Democrats are most emphatic about the positives of alliances. In total, 74 percent say alliances benefit either the United States and allies (58%) or the United States alone (16%). One-quarter (24%) say alliances mostly benefit allies (19%) or benefit neither (5%). Republicans are more divided. While 55 percent of Republicans say alliances benefit either the United States (10%) or the United States and allies (45%), a sizable minority (39%) say it mostly benefits the allies (and 4% say neither). Independents are in between: six in 10

consider alliances to mostly benefit either the United States or the United States and its allies (62% combined), but nearly four in 10 think otherwise (26% allies, 11% neither).



Democrats’ robust backing for alliances also reflects their greater inclination [to support multilateral approaches](#) to foreign policy and to prioritize leading international cooperation in US foreign policy. For example, seven in 10 Democrats agree that the United States should be more willing to make decisions with its allies even if it results in a policy that is not the United States’ first choice (71%, higher than the overall average of 58%). While a majority of Independents also agree (58%), just 46 percent of Republicans are of the same mind (and 53% disagree).²

Reasons for Supporting Alliances: Diplomatic and Military Strength

Those respondents who think alliances mostly benefit the United States and its allies (64% of the overall sample) were further asked why they held this view. The most frequent response is that alliances strengthen US diplomatic efforts around the world (57%). And 50 percent say alliances strengthen US military efforts around the world. The deterrent aspect of alliances is less recognized, though a sizable minority associate alliances with preventing the

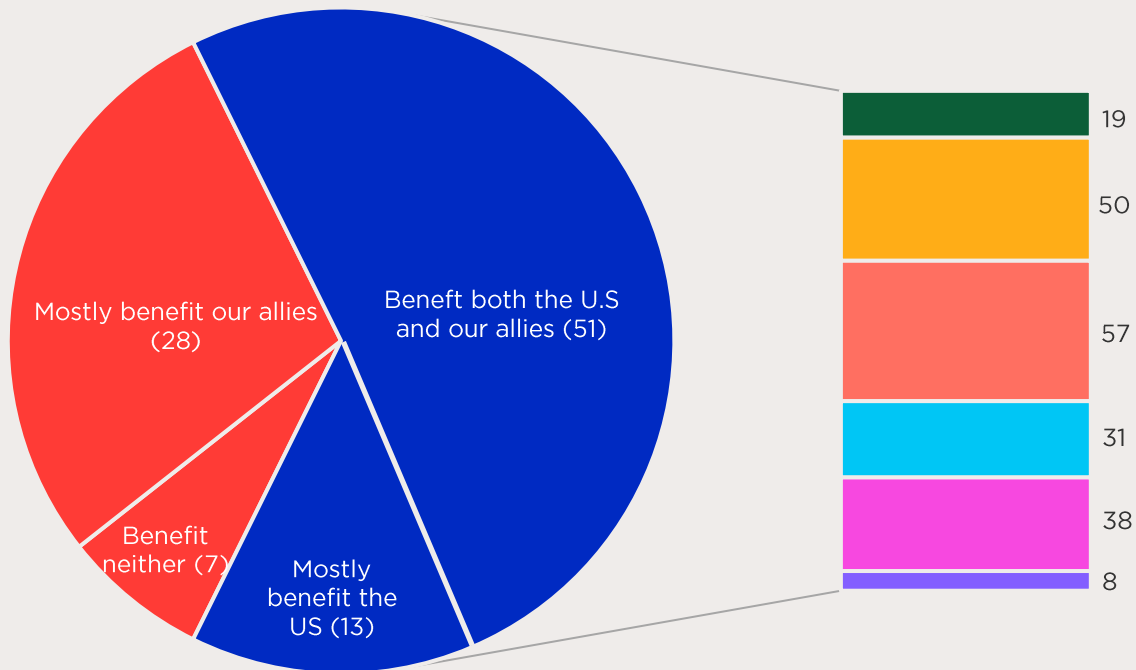
² See Appendix for full results.

United States from being attacked (38%) and 31 percent say they strengthen US national security. For the most part, these views are distributed similarly across partisans, though Democrats are most inclined to credit alliances for fortifying diplomatic efforts.

Rationale for Positive Views on US Security Alliances

You said that alliances either benefit the United States or benefit both the United States and our allies. Among the following, which best represents your view? (%)

- Alliances decrease the cost of defense for the United States
- Alliances strengthen US military efforts around the world
- Alliances strengthen US diplomatic efforts around the world
- Alliance strengthen US security at home
- Alliances make it less likely that the United States will be attacked
- None of the above



June 21 - July 1, 2024 | n=2,106 | n=1,362
Chicago Council Surveys

Reasons for Opposing Alliances: Costs of Defense and Ally Burden-Sharing

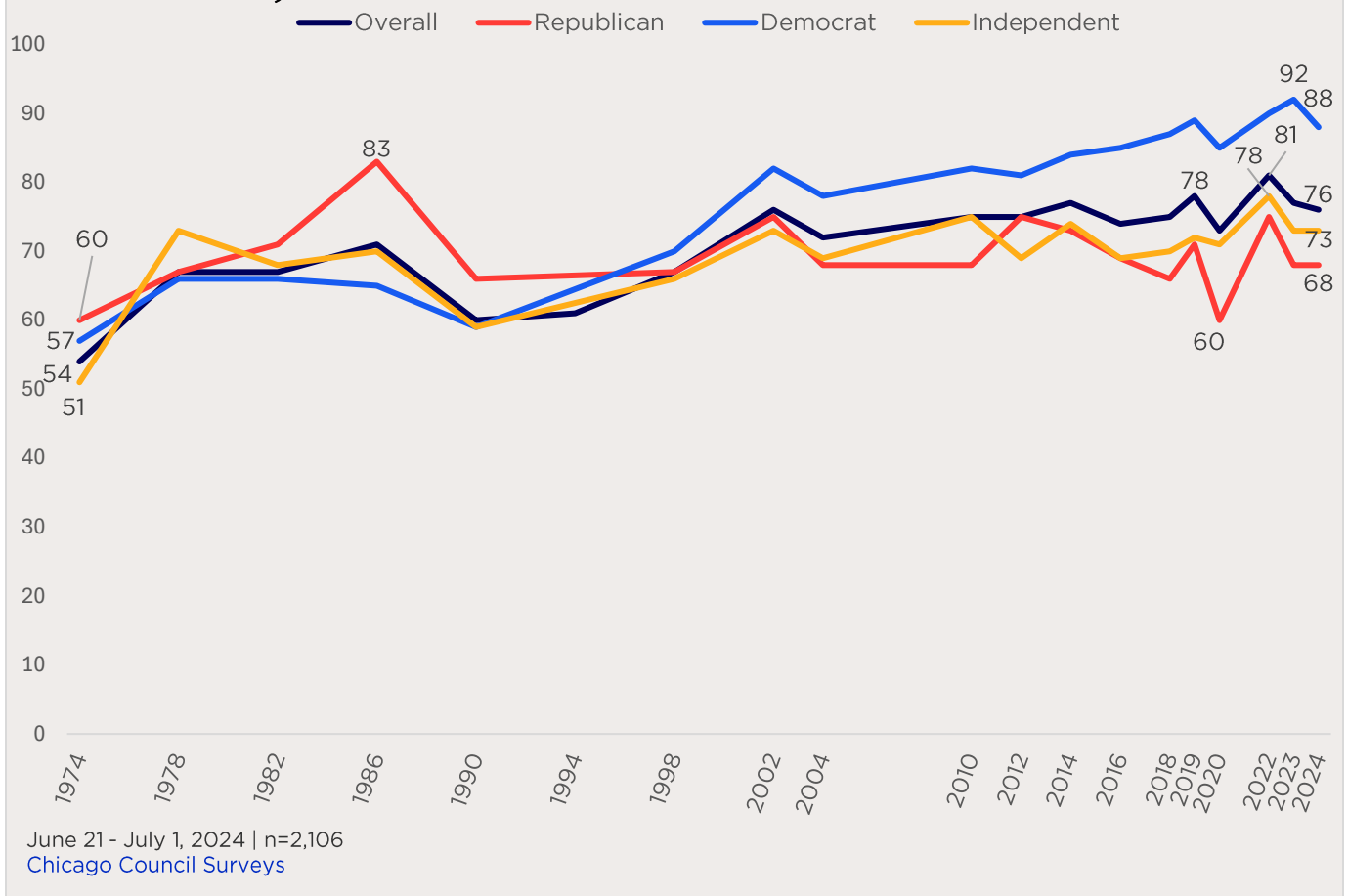
Those who say alliances mostly benefit US allies or benefit neither country—35 percent of the sample overall—seem most concerned about costs. Nearly half (47%) say allies do not pay their fair share and 45 percent think alliances increase the cost of defense for the United States. Republicans are particularly inclined to say that allies do not pay their fair share (64 percent versus just 30 percent among Democrats).

Majority Support for NATO

Despite Republicans' concerns about costs of alliances in general, in the specific context of NATO, six in 10 Republicans and Independents say it is still essential to US security (61% Republicans, 60% Independent, 83% Democrats). In addition, Republicans also endorse keeping the US commitment to the transatlantic alliance, along with other partisans (68% Republicans, 73% Independents, 88% of Democrats).³

Views on Maintaining and Increasing NATO Commitment

Do you feel we should increase our commitment to NATO, keep our commitment to what it is now, decrease our commitment to NATO, or withdraw from NATO entirely? (% increase + keep commitment same)



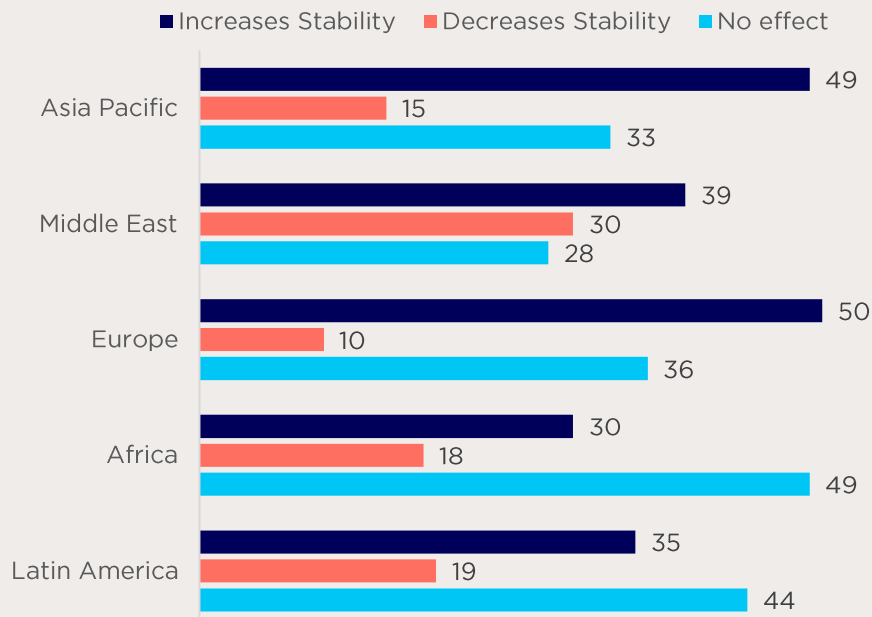
³ For more about US attitudes toward NATO, see Council report “As NATO Reaches 75th Year, Americans Still View It Is Still Essential to US Security,” <https://globalaffairs.org/research/public-opinion-survey/nato-reaches-75th-year-americans-say-it-still-essential-us-security>.

American Military Presence

A core component of the US alliance system is the presence of US military personnel [around the globe](#), with more than 700 military bases in roughly 80 countries. While advocates of the US forward presence claim these bases are a stabilizing force around the world that helps to deter adversaries, opponents often cite evidence of unequal cost-sharing. The American public falls somewhere in between, often taking its view on a region-by-region basis. Majorities or pluralities say the US military presence increases stability in Europe (50%), the Asia Pacific (49%), and the Middle East (39%). However, in Africa (49%) and Latin America (44%), pluralities think the US military presence has no effect on regional stability.

American Views on US Military Presence

Do you think that the US military presence increases or decreases stability in the following regions—or does it not have an effect either way? (%)



June 21 - July 1, 2024 | n=1,043
Chicago Council Surveys

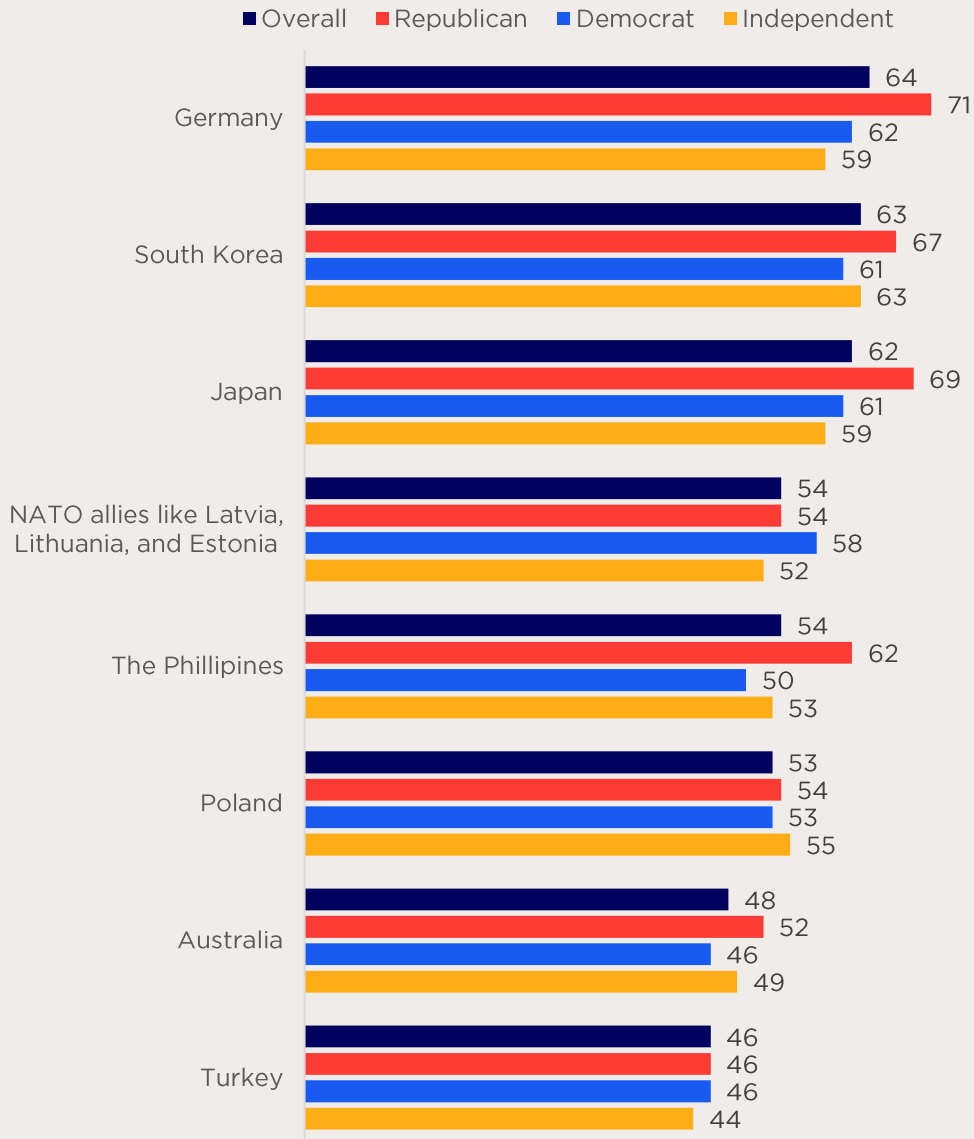
But when it comes to bases in specific countries, Republicans and Democrats are often in agreement. For Republicans, this is likely because they see these bases as helping to ensure the physical defense of the United States. For Democrats, they may be seen as helpful in bolstering US diplomatic efforts.

Majorities support these bases in Germany (64%), South Korea (63%), Japan (62%), the Philippines (54%), NATO allies like Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia (54%), and Poland (53%). In each case, majorities of Democrats, Republicans, and Independents are in support.

However, there are two notable exceptions to broad public support for US military bases abroad. The first is Australia. Here, 48 percent are in support with only a small gap between Republicans (52%) and Democrats (46%). The second is Turkey, where half of Americans (50%) oppose long-term US bases—and 46 percent support US bases. Half of Democrats and Republicans (50% each) along with 52 percent on Independents oppose US bases here.

Support for Long-term Military Bases By Country

Do you think the United States should or should not have long-term military bases in the following places? (% should have)



June 21 - July 1, 2024 | n=1,043
Chicago Council Surveys

Conclusion

While the benefits of US alliances are often unseen and sometimes difficult to articulate, the majority of Americans are convinced of their value. They see alliances as adding backbone to US security and US diplomatic and military efforts. Even as the economy and inflation play a large role in the upcoming

2024 US election, and costs being a key factor among those who do not see benefits to the United States, the prevailing view is that alliances are worth US participation.

Methodology

This analysis is based on data from the 2024 Chicago Council Survey of the American public on foreign policy, a project of the Lester Crown Center on US Foreign Policy. The 2024 Chicago Council Survey was conducted June 21–July 1, 2024, by Ipsos using its large-scale nationwide online research panel, KnowledgePanel, in English and Spanish among a weighted national sample of 2,106 adults 18 or older living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. The margin of sampling error for the full sample is ± 2.3 percentage points, including a design effect of 1.1229. The margin of error is higher for partisan subgroups (± 4.2 points for Republicans, ± 3.9 points for Democrats, and ± 3.8 points for Independents.) 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 2024 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](#).

Appendix

Question 8

Q8. How effective do you think each of the following approaches are to achieving the foreign policy goals of the United States – very effective, somewhat effective, not very effective, or not effective at all?

Q8/2. Maintaining US military superiority					
Very effective (%)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
2012	42	50	40	39	10
2014	47	54	43	45	11
2015	40	50	37	34	13
2016	47	61	43	42	18
2017	47	66	38	43	28
January 2020	53	80	39	46	41
2022	51	66	42	48	24
2024	48	63	42	42	21
Somewhat effective (%)					
2012	42	40	44	41	-4
2014	37	34	42	37	-8
2015	40	35	45	40	-10
2016	38	30	43	39	-13
2017	37	29	42	38	-13
January 2020	35	19	42	39	-23
2022	36	27	43	36	-16
2024	36	27	43	37	-16

Q8/5. Maintaining existing alliances					
Very effective (%)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
2014	38	37	41	34	-4
2015	32	31	37	26	-6
2016	40	40	45	34	-5
2017	49	43	56	47	-13
January 2020	55	56	60	51	-4
2022	54	50	62	49	-12
2024	46	41	56	40	-15
Somewhat effective (%)					
2014	49	51	49	49	2
2015	52	51	52	54	-1

2016	50	48	49	52	-1
2017	42	48	35	44	13
January 2020	35	41	30	37	11
2022	39	43	33	41	10
2024	43	49	36	44	13

Question 33S

Q33S. As you may know, the United States has security alliances with countries around the world. Which of the following comes closest to your view. Do they:

Mostly benefit the US (%)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
2017	9	4	11	9	-7
2019	7	6	6	9	0
January 2020	13	10	16	11	-6
2020	7	3	9	8	-6
2023	9	6	9	10	-3
2024	13	10	16	13	-6
Mostly benefit our allies (%)					
2017	21	33	15	18	18
2019	21	25	16	23	9
January 2020	22	26	18	22	8
2020	17	26	9	20	17
2023	21	25	14	23	11
2024	28	39	19	26	20
Benefit both the US and our allies (%)					
2017	51	47	55	51	-8
2019	53	50	58	51	-8
January 2020	48	49	50	46	-1
2020	52	47	59	52	-12
2023	52	53	61	45	-8
2024	51	45	58	49	-13
Benefit neither (%)					
2017	15	10	16	17	-6
2019	15	15	16	14	-1
January 2020	4	13	12	17	1
2020	17	17	18	17	-1
2023	15	10	13	20	-3
2024	7	4	5	11	-1

Question 34A

Q34A. You said that alliances either benefit the United States or benefit both the United States and our allies. Among the following, which best represents your view?

Q34A. Beneficial Views on US Security Alliances (%)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap

Alliances decrease the cost of defense for the United States	19	15	21	19	-7
Alliances strengthen US military efforts around the world	50	53	51	46	2
Alliances strengthen US diplomatic efforts around the world	57	53	63	53	-10
Alliance strengthen US security at home	31	26	34	33	-8
Alliances make it less likely that the United States will be attacked	38	32	38	41	-6
None of the above	8	8	8	9	0

Question 34B

Q34B. You said that alliances either mostly benefit our allies or benefit neither. Among the following, which best represents your view?

Q34B. Negative Views on US Security Alliances (%)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
Alliances increase the cost of defense for the United States	45	46	41	48	5
Allies don't pay their fair share	47	64	30	44	34
The United States shouldn't be constrained by other countries	26	29	23	24	6
Allies draw the United States into conflicts	40	37	40	42	-3
None of the above	14	3	19	19	-16

Question 451S.

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

Summary of Q451S – 2024 Data Only

More to strengthen (%)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
Q451S/2. Saudi Arabia	46	47	47	45	0
Q451S/3. Israel	55	70	49	51	21
Q451S/4. Japan	74	73	78	74	-5
Q451S/5. South Korea	69	67	73	68	-6
Q451S/9. Mexico	60	49	71	58	22
Q451S/10. Germany	75	75	77	73	-2

Q451S/11. Taiwan	62	62	67	58	-5
Q451S/12. Ukraine	59	48	72	55	24
More to weaken (%)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
Q451S/2. Saudi Arabia	48	47	45	51	2
Q451S/3. Israel	40	26	46	45	-20
Q451S/4. Japan	20	22	17	22	5
Q451S/5. South Korea	26	28	22	29	6
Q451S/9. Mexico	35	46	23	37	23
Q451S/10. Germany	20	19	18	23	1
Q451S/11. Taiwan	32	33	26	38	7
Q451S/12. Ukraine	36	47	22	41	25

Question 40

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

Summary of Q40 – 2024 data only

Q40. Long-term military bases in the following places (% should have)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
Q40/1. Japan	62	69	61	59	8
Q40/3. South Korea	63	67	61	63	6
Q40/6. Germany	64	71	62	59	9
Q40/7. Turkey	46	46	46	44	0
Q40/8. Australia	48	52	46	49	6
Q40/10. Poland	53	54	53	55	1
Q40/12. The Philippines	54	62	50	53	12
Q40/15. NATO allies like Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia	54	54	58	52	-4

Question 491

Q.491 Do you think that the US military presence increases or decreases stability in the following regions—or does it not have an effect either way?

Increases stability (%)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
Q491/1. Asia Pacific	49	53	51	44	2
Q.491/2. Middle East	39	47	35	36	12

Q491/3. Europe	50	53	52	47	1
Q491/4. Africa	30	31	34	26	-3
Q491/5. Latin America	35	39	34	33	5
Decreases stability (%)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
Q491/1. Asia Pacific	15	13	15	16	-2
Q.491/2. Middle East	30	23	34	32	-11
Q491/3. Europe	10	9	11	11	-2
Q491/4. Africa	18	15	16	23	-1
Q491/5. Latin America	19	12	20	22	-8
No effect (%)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
Q491/1. Asia Pacific	33	32	31	37	1
Q.491/2. Middle East	28	28	27	29	1
Q491/3. Europe	36	36	33	40	3
Q491/4. Africa	49	52	46	49	6
Q491/5. Latin America	44	46	42	43	4

Question 145B.

Q145B. Please select whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: When dealing with international problems, the US should be more willing to make decisions with US allies, even if this means that the United States will sometimes have to go along with a policy that is not its first choice.

Q145B. With US allies even if this means that the United States will sometimes have to go along with a policy that is not its first choice. (% agree)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
2018	64	42	80	66	-38
2019	65	44	84	66	-40
2020	62	37	84	63	-47
2024	58	46	71	58	-25

Summary of Q145B – 2024 Data Only

Q145B. With US allies even if this means that the United States will sometimes have to go along with a policy that is not its first choice.					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
Agree (%)	58	46	71	58	-25
Disagree (%)	40	53	27	41	26

Question 200.

Q200. Do you feel we should increase our commitment to NATO, keep our commitment to what it is now, decrease our commitment to NATO, or withdraw from NATO entirely?

Q200. Commitment to NATO (% increase + keep to what it is now)					
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent	R-D Gap
1974	54	60	57	51	4
1978	67	67	66	73	0

1982	67	71	66	68	5
1986	71	83	65	70	17
1990	60	66	59	59	7
1994	61	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
1998	67	67	70	66	7
2002	76	75	82	73	-7
2004	72	68	78	69	-10
2010	75	68	82	75	-15
2012	75	75	81	69	-7
2014	77	73	84	74	-12
2016	74	69	85	69	-17
2018	75	66	87	70	-22
2019	78	71	89	72	-19
2020	73	60	85	71	-25
2022	81	75	90	78	-15
2023	77	68	92	73	-24
2024	76	68	88	73	-20