



# Americans Support Continued US Participation in Iran Deal

October 2017

**Craig Kafura**, Research Associate, Public Opinion and Foreign Policy  
**James Dingwall**, Intern, Chicago Council on Global Affairs

## Introduction

In President Trump's first major speech before the United Nations General Assembly, he described Iran as a "rogue nation" and said the UN-backed nuclear agreement with Iran is an "embarrassment" to the United States. Despite this criticism, he has allowed sanctions relief for Iran to continue and his administration recertified the agreement last July. As the 90 day deadline for President Trump to recertify the Iran deal approaches in mid-October, a majority of Americans continue to support the agreement.

## US Public Concerned about Proliferation

The American public is concerned about nuclear proliferation from both friendly and hostile nations. Six in ten (62%) say that "the possibility of any new countries, friendly or unfriendly, acquiring nuclear weapons" is a critical threat, below international terrorism (75%) and cyberattacks (74%). An even greater majority are concerned about North Korea's nuclear program (75% critical threat). When last asked in 2015, 57 percent of Americans described Iran's nuclear program as a critical threat.

## Majority of Americans Favor US Participation in Iran Deal

Apparently, a majority of Americans believe the UN-backed nuclear agreement helps to deter this threat from Iran. Six in ten (60%) say that the United States should participate in the "agreement that lifts some international economic sanctions against Iran in exchange for strict limits on its nuclear program for at least the next decade," unchanged from 2016 (when it was also 60%).

The Iran agreement was a political football during the 2016 presidential primaries, with Donald Trump even threatening to tear it up. These partisan divides are equally apparent in public opinion. While 73 percent of Democrats favor participation, just one-half (48%) of Republicans agree (58% among Independents). Forty-four percent of core Trump supporters (those with a very favorable view of the president) think the United States should participate in the Iran deal, a relatively high number given the prominence with which Trump has attacked the deal.

Chicago Council Surveys conducted over the last several years (2014-2017) show a remarkable stability of American opinion towards the Iran nuclear deal, both before and after the agreement was officially signed. Overall, about six in ten have supported the idea of imposed limits on Iran's nuclear development in exchange for sanctions relief. Partisan views have also remained consistent over the past several years, with Democrats and Independents consistently supporting the deal, while Republicans have been consistently divided roughly in half.

## **Methodology**

The analysis in this report is based on data from the 2017 Chicago Council Survey of the American public on foreign policy. The 2017 Chicago Council Survey was conducted by GfK Custom Research using their large-scale, nationwide online research panel between June 27 and July 19, 2017 among a weighted national sample of 2,020 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. The margin of error is  $\pm 2.4$  percentage points.

Partisan identification is based on respondents' answer to a standard partisan self-identification question: "Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?"

Core Trump supporters are identified as those respondents who answered "very favorable" to the question: "Do you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable view of the following world leaders: US President Donald Trump?" This group, 21 percent of the overall sample, self-identify primarily as Republicans (62%), but also includes a third that identify as Independents (31%), and a handful of Democrats (5%).

The 2017 Chicago Council Survey is made possible by the generous support of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Charles Koch Institute, the Korea Foundation, the Robert R. McCormick Foundation, and the personal support of Lester Crown and the Crown family.

## **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](http://thechicagocouncil.org) and follow [@ChicagoCouncil](https://twitter.com/ChicagoCouncil).

## Appendix

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:

### 5/10. International terrorism

	Critical threat (%)	Important but not critical threat (%)	Not an important threat (%)	Refused (%)
2017				
<u>Overall</u>	75	23	2	0
Republican	81	17	1	0
Democrat	72	25	2	0
Independent	71	25	3	1

### 5/29. North Korea's nuclear program

	Critical threat (%)	Important but not critical threat (%)	Not an important threat (%)	Refused (%)
2017				
<u>Overall</u>	75	23	2	0
Republican	81	17	2	0
Democrat	75	24	1	0
Independent	72	25	3	0

### 5/35B. The possibility of any new countries, friendly or unfriendly, acquiring nuclear weapons

	Critical threat (%)	Important but not critical threat (%)	Not an important threat (%)	Refused (%)
2017				
<u>Overall</u>	62	34	3	0
Republican	67	29	4	1
Democrat	61	36	2	0
Independent	60	36	3	1

### 5/16. Cyber-attacks on U.S. computer networks

	Critical threat (%)	Important but not critical threat (%)	Not an important threat (%)	Refused (%)
2017				
<u>Overall</u>	74	24	1	0
Republican	73	24	2	0
Democrat	78	22	1	0
Independent	73	26	1	1

Q140/6. Based on what you know, do you think the US should or should not participate in the following international agreements? *The agreement that lifts some international economic sanctions against Iran in exchange for strict limits on its nuclear program for at least the next decade.*

	Should participate (%)	Should not participate (%)
2017		
<u>Overall</u>	60	36
Republican	48	48
Democrat	73	25
Independent	58	40

Q140/7 [2016]: Based on what you know, do you think the U.S. should or should not participate in the following international agreements? *The agreement that lifts some international economic sanctions against Iran in exchange for strict limits on its nuclear program for at least the next decade.*

	Should participate (%)	Should not participate (%)
2016		
<u>Overall</u>	60	36
Republican	46	52
Democrat	74	22
Independent	57	39

Q238 [2015]: As you may know, the U.S. and other countries recently reached the outlines of an agreement with Iran that will ease some of the economic sanctions against Iran. In exchange, Iran will limit its nuclear enrichment capacity and research and development for ten years, give international inspectors greater access to nuclear facilities, and increase the time it would take for Iran to develop a nuclear weapon from 2-3 months to at least a year. Do you support or oppose the outlines of this agreement?

	Support (%)	Oppose (%)
2015		
<u>Overall</u>	59	36
Republican	46	50
Democrat	74	23
Independent	57	40

Q238 [2014]: As you may know, the U.S. and other countries have reached an interim deal with Iran that eases some of the international economic sanctions against Iran. In exchange, the deal requires that Iran accept some restrictions on its nuclear program - but not end it completely - and submit to greater international inspection of its nuclear facilities. Do you favor or oppose this interim agreement?

2014	Favor (%)	Oppose (%)
<u>Overall</u>	62	34
Republican	54	43
Democrat	72	25
Independent	59	37