



Majority of Americans Don't Understand the Presidential Procedure for a Nuclear Strike

Ipsos Poll on Behalf of NPR

Washington, DC, September 12, 2017 — The latest Ipsos/NPR poll explored American attitudes towards North Korea, focusing on how much Americans actually know about the nuclear conflict and the extent to which they care.

To better gauge American understanding of North Korea and their nuclear capabilities, we explored American's knowledge through fact based questions. Overall, only 18% were able to get an 'A' with nine or more correct, while a plurality (37%) got five or less correct, earning them an 'F.' Democrats struggled the most, with nearly two in five (41%) getting an 'F.' Republicans proved to be most knowledgeable, with 74% receiving a 'C' or higher. Notably, a majority of Americans (57%) were able to identify North Korea on a map of Asia. Outside of geography, Americans generally struggled on questions about North Korea's nuclear capabilities. Many were divided on the distance North Korean ballistic missiles can travel, with only 41% correctly guessing they could hit the continental US. Similarly, only 26% knew North Korea is capable of killing roughly 300,000 in South Korea in the first 48 hours of a war using only conventional weapons. In addition to little understanding about North Korea, many Americans incorrectly guessed the presidential procedure for initiating a nuclear strike. Only a quarter of Americans (24%) understand the lack of checks and balances, allowing the president to order a nuclear strike without any coordination with the Secretary of Defense, confirmation with the Joint Chiefs of Staff or approval from Congress.

Beyond the knowledge questions, Americans are more divided on their feelings about a potential North Korean conflict and nuclear strike. A majority of Americans (51%) do not trust President Trump to handle the conflict with North Korea, though this division falls along party lines. While a majority (54%) believe the US should never use nuclear weapons, over a third of Americans (37%) disagree. Americans were also divided when asked about their level of agreement with actions against North Korea that would have impacts on the US. Only 51% support sabotaging North Korea's nuclear program through cyber-espionage, even if it opens the US to be attacked by the same. Even fewer (41%) support using targeted first strikes to destroy North Korea's nuclear program, even if it potentially results in thousands of deaths. Despite a lack of consensus on next steps, Americans overwhelmingly agree that Kim Jong Un, the Supreme Leader of North Korea, is far more likely to start an armed conflict than Donald Trump (50%).

Grades for Knowledge Questions Q2 through Q7

	Total (N= 1005)	Democrat (N= 322)	Republican (N= 357)	Independent (N= 219)
A – 9 or more correct out of 12	18%	17%	20%	20%
B – 8 correct out of 12	15%	12%	19%	13%
C – 6 or 7 correct out of 12	30%	31%	35%	29%
F – under 5 correct out of 12	37%	41%	26%	38%

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Topline

1. Which three of the following topics do you find the most worrying? (Select up to three)

	Total (N= 1005)	Democrat (N= 322)	Republican (N= 357)	Independent (N= 219)
Healthcare	38%	43%	30%	39%
Terrorism	37%	32%	51%	32%
Climate Change	23%	35%	12%	18%
Crime	23%	19%	28%	18%
Political extremism or polarization	22%	26%	16%	29%
Nuclear conflict	21%	20%	24%	17%
Immigration	18%	13%	26%	19%
Taxes	17%	10%	21%	20%
Education	16%	20%	15%	13%
Unemployment	16%	16%	13%	17%
Social inequality	15%	22%	6%	18%
Government budget and debt	14%	7%	19%	19%
Foreign conflicts	11%	9%	14%	11%
Other specify	4%	4%	4%	4%
None of these	3%	2%	1%	4%

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2. On the map of East Asia below, which country is North Korea?



	Total (N= 1005)	Democrat (N= 322)	Republican (N= 357)	Independent (N= 219)
1 – Mongolia	6%	7%	3%	4%
2 – China	3%	3%	5%	1%
3 – Myanmar	1%	*	2%	1%
4 – Thailand	*	1%	*	*
5 – Laos	2%	1%	3%	1%
6 – Cambodia	1%	1%	1%	*
7 – Vietnam	1%	2%	*	*
8 – Malaysia	1%	1%	1%	2%
9 – Indonesia	*	*	-	*
10 – Papua New Guinea	2%	2%	1%	1%
11 – Philippines	1%	2%	1%	*
12 – North Korea	57%	51%	61%	68%
13 – South Korea	1%	1%	1%	1%
14 – Japan	1%	1%	*	1%
Don't know	25%	28%	21%	21%

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3. To the best of your knowledge, are the following statements TRUE or FALSE? * denotes correct answer
China is the United States' largest trading partner

	Total (N= 1005)	Democrat (N= 322)	Republican (N= 357)	Independent (N= 219)
*True	78%	80%	78%	76%
False	9%	8%	11%	8%
Don't know	13%	12%	11%	16%

South Korea is North Korea's largest trading partner

	Total (N= 1005)	Democrat (N= 322)	Republican (N= 357)	Independent (N= 219)
True	11%	15%	10%	5%
*False	56%	48%	62%	65%
Don't know	33%	37%	27%	30%

Formally, North and South Korea remain at war

	Total (N= 1005)	Democrat (N= 322)	Republican (N= 357)	Independent (N= 219)
*True	62%	61%	67%	60%
False	16%	20%	14%	18%
Don't know	21%	19%	18%	22%

The economy of North Korea is about the same size as Birmingham, Alabama's

	Total (N= 1005)	Democrat (N= 322)	Republican (N= 357)	Independent (N= 219)
*True	25%	24%	31%	21%
False	24%	24%	23%	26%
Don't know	52%	53%	46%	53%

4. To the best of your knowledge, are the following statements TRUE or FALSE? * denotes correct answer
North Korea has nuclear weapons

	Total (N= 1005)	Democrat (N= 322)	Republican (N= 357)	Independent (N= 219)
*True	87%	90%	88%	85%
False	4%	4%	4%	5%
Don't know	9%	7%	8%	11%



North Korea does not has ballistic missiles capable of hitting the continental U.S.

	Total (N= 1005)	Democrat (N= 322)	Republican (N= 357)	Independent (N= 219)
True	20%	20%	22%	18%
*False	58%	56%	61%	60%
Don't know	22%	24%	18%	22%

Seoul, South Korea is 35 miles from North Korea

	Total (N= 1005)	Democrat (N= 322)	Republican (N= 357)	Independent (N= 219)
*True	54%	52%	60%	56%
False	9%	9%	12%	4%
Don't know	37%	39%	28%	40%

The United States has about 30,000 troops currently stationed in South Korea

	Total (N= 1005)	Democrat (N= 322)	Republican (N= 357)	Independent (N= 219)
*True	56%	57%	61%	53%
False	8%	7%	9%	9%
Don't know	35%	36%	29%	38%

5. To the best of your knowledge, what is the farthest North Korean ballistic missiles can travel: * denotes correct answer

	Total (N= 1005)	Democrat (N= 322)	Republican (N= 357)	Independent (N= 219)
Short distance, capable of hitting Japan	13%	15%	11%	12%
Intermediate distance, capable of hitting Alaska or Hawaii	32%	33%	34%	35%
*Long distance, capable of hitting the continental U.S.	41%	38%	48%	35%
Don't know	14%	13%	8%	18%



6. If war broke out with North Korea, how many civilian fatalities do experts believe North Korea could cause in South Korea in the first 48 hours using conventional rather than nuclear weapons? * denotes correct answer

	Total (N= 1005)	Democrat (N= 322)	Republican (N= 357)	Independent (N= 219)
Three thousand	5%	7%	5%	3%
Thirty thousand	13%	14%	13%	13%
*Three hundred thousand	26%	26%	29%	25%
One million	22%	21%	26%	20%
Don't know	33%	31%	27%	39%

7. If the U.S. president wanted to order a nuclear strike, what procedure would he have to follow? * denotes correct answer

	Total (N= 1005)	Democrat (N= 322)	Republican (N= 357)	Independent (N= 219)
*He would just have to order it	24%	26%	24%	22%
Get approval from Congress	44%	48%	34%	55%
Coordinate with the Secretary of Defense	20%	17%	23%	14%
Get confirmation from the Joint Chiefs of Staff	12%	9%	18%	9%

8. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
You trust President Trump to handle the conflict with North Korea

	Total (N= 1005)	Democrat (N= 322)	Republican (N= 357)	Independent (N= 219)
Strongly agree	22%	7%	46%	17%
Somewhat agree	22%	12%	35%	23%
Somewhat disagree	11%	10%	9%	12%
Strongly disagree	40%	67%	7%	39%
Don't know	6%	5%	2%	8%
<i>Agree (Net)</i>	<i>43%</i>	<i>18%</i>	<i>81%</i>	<i>40%</i>
<i>Disagree (Net)</i>	<i>51%</i>	<i>77%</i>	<i>16%</i>	<i>51%</i>

The U.S. should never use nuclear weapons

	Total (N= 1005)	Democrat (N= 322)	Republican (N= 357)	Independent (N= 219)
Strongly agree	26%	34%	12%	33%
Somewhat agree	29%	30%	28%	27%
Somewhat disagree	23%	19%	33%	16%
Strongly disagree	14%	8%	22%	14%
Don't know	8%	8%	4%	11%
<i>Agree (Net)</i>	<i>54%</i>	<i>65%</i>	<i>41%</i>	<i>59%</i>
<i>Disagree (Net)</i>	<i>37%</i>	<i>27%</i>	<i>55%</i>	<i>30%</i>

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The U.S. should never be the first to use nuclear weapons

	Total (N= 1005)	Democrat (N= 322)	Republican (N= 357)	Independent (N= 219)
Strongly agree	40%	49%	32%	41%
Somewhat agree	28%	26%	30%	28%
Somewhat disagree	16%	9%	23%	15%
Strongly disagree	7%	6%	10%	5%
Don't know	9%	10%	5%	11%
<i>Agree (Net)</i>	<i>68%</i>	<i>75%</i>	<i>62%</i>	<i>69%</i>
<i>Disagree (Net)</i>	<i>23%</i>	<i>15%</i>	<i>33%</i>	<i>20%</i>

9. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
China does not want conflict with North Korea

	Total (N= 1005)	Democrat (N= 322)	Republican (N= 357)	Independent (N= 219)
Strongly agree	37%	37%	35%	43%
Somewhat agree	37%	38%	40%	36%
Somewhat disagree	7%	6%	8%	8%
Strongly disagree	1%	1%	2%	1%
Don't know	18%	18%	15%	13%
<i>Agree (Net)</i>	<i>74%</i>	<i>75%</i>	<i>75%</i>	<i>78%</i>
<i>Disagree (Net)</i>	<i>8%</i>	<i>7%</i>	<i>10%</i>	<i>9%</i>

The U.S. has an obligation to protect allies in East Asia

	Total (N= 1005)	Democrat (N= 322)	Republican (N= 357)	Independent (N= 219)
Strongly agree	31%	26%	40%	33%
Somewhat agree	43%	47%	38%	43%
Somewhat disagree	10%	13%	12%	7%
Strongly disagree	3%	3%	4%	3%
Don't know	12%	12%	6%	14%
<i>Agree (Net)</i>	<i>74%</i>	<i>73%</i>	<i>78%</i>	<i>76%</i>
<i>Disagree (Net)</i>	<i>14%</i>	<i>16%</i>	<i>16%</i>	<i>10%</i>

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North Korea intends to attack the United States with nuclear weapons

	Total (N= 1005)	Democrat (N= 322)	Republican (N= 357)	Independent (N= 219)
Strongly agree	18%	15%	22%	18%
Somewhat agree	37%	41%	40%	27%
Somewhat disagree	19%	17%	20%	29%
Strongly disagree	5%	5%	3%	7%
Don't know	21%	22%	14%	20%
<i>Agree (Net)</i>	<i>55%</i>	<i>56%</i>	<i>63%</i>	<i>45%</i>
<i>Disagree (Net)</i>	<i>24%</i>	<i>22%</i>	<i>23%</i>	<i>35%</i>

10. Do you support or oppose the following actions to deal with North Korea?
Putting sanctions on countries that trade with North Korea, even if it hurts the US economy

	Total (N= 1005)	Democrat (N= 322)	Republican (N= 357)	Independent (N= 219)
Strongly support	33%	35%	38%	31%
Somewhat support	35%	32%	41%	37%
Somewhat oppose	15%	17%	9%	15%
Strongly oppose	5%	5%	3%	8%
Don't know	12%	11%	8%	9%
<i>Support (Net)</i>	<i>68%</i>	<i>68%</i>	<i>79%</i>	<i>68%</i>
<i>Oppose (Net)</i>	<i>20%</i>	<i>21%</i>	<i>12%</i>	<i>23%</i>

Sabotaging North Korea's nuclear program through cyber-espionage, even if it opens the US to be attacked by the same

	Total (N= 1005)	Democrat (N= 322)	Republican (N= 357)	Independent (N= 219)
Strongly support	20%	15%	28%	21%
Somewhat support	31%	31%	36%	29%
Somewhat oppose	20%	23%	20%	18%
Strongly oppose	11%	13%	4%	14%
Don't know	18%	18%	11%	18%
<i>Support (Net)</i>	<i>51%</i>	<i>46%</i>	<i>64%</i>	<i>50%</i>
<i>Oppose (Net)</i>	<i>31%</i>	<i>36%</i>	<i>25%</i>	<i>33%</i>

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Using targeted first strikes to destroy North Korea’s nuclear program, even if it potentially results in thousands of deaths

	Total (N= 1005)	Democrat (N= 322)	Republican (N= 357)	Independent (N= 219)
Strongly support	16%	10%	26%	17%
Somewhat support	25%	20%	34%	26%
Somewhat oppose	23%	28%	23%	21%
Strongly oppose	17%	22%	6%	24%
Don't know	18%	20%	11%	12%
<i>Support (Net)</i>	<i>41%</i>	<i>30%</i>	<i>60%</i>	<i>43%</i>
<i>Oppose (Net)</i>	<i>41%</i>	<i>50%</i>	<i>29%</i>	<i>45%</i>

11. In the context of the stand off with North Korea, who do you think is more likely to start an armed conflict?

	Total (N= 1005)	Democrat (N= 322)	Republican (N= 357)	Independent (N= 219)
Donald Trump, President of the United States	15%	24%	11%	11%
Kim Jong UN, Supreme Leader of North Korea	50%	37%	72%	47%
Both / About the same likelihood	22%	29%	9%	28%
Neither	5%	5%	3%	10%
Don't know	7%	6%	5%	5%

12. How do you get most of your news?

	Total (N= 1005)	Democrat (N= 322)	Republican (N= 357)	Independent (N= 219)
Television	61%	62%	63%	59%
Online / internet	56%	51%	58%	66%
Social media (Twitter, Facebook)	29%	27%	34%	27%
Print newspapers / magazines	24%	31%	21%	24%
Radio	18%	15%	21%	20%
Mobile News app	17%	17%	15%	18%
None of the above	2%	*	1%	2%

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13. Of the choices listed below, which is your main source of television news?

	Total (N= 1005)	Democrat (N= 322)	Republican (N= 357)	Independent (N= 219)
CNN	36%	49%	27%	31%
FOX News	34%	16%	56%	34%
ABC	26%	27%	21%	31%
NBC	24%	28%	21%	21%
CBS	22%	21%	24%	20%
MSNBC	12%	22%	6%	9%
Public Television	11%	14%	10%	10%
None of the above	12%	8%	9%	16%
Other	5%	5%	6%	6%

14. With which political party do you most identify?

	Total (N= 1005)	Democrat (N= 322)	Republican (N= 357)	Independent (N= 219)
Strong Democrat	17%	45%	-	-
Moderate Democrat	12%	32%	-	-
Lean Democrat	9%	23%	-	-
Lean Republican	7%	-	21%	-
Moderate Republican	13%	-	42%	-
Strong Republican	11%	-	37%	-
Independent	22%	-	-	100%
Other	2%	-	-	-
Don't know/Refuse	8%	-	-	-

15. How would you describe the area in which you live?

	Total (N= 1005)	Democrat (N= 322)	Republican (N= 357)	Independent (N= 219)
Rural	20%	11%	27%	22%
Suburban	46%	45%	47%	47%
Urban	34%	43%	26%	31%

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About the Study

These are findings from an Ipsos poll conducted September 11-12, 2017 on behalf of National Public Radio. For the survey, a sample of roughly 1,005 adults age 18+ from the continental U.S., Alaska and Hawaii was interviewed online in English. The sample includes 322 Democrats, 357 Republicans, and 219 Independents.

The sample for this study was randomly drawn from Ipsos's online panel (see link below for more info on "Access Panels and Recruitment"), partner online panel sources, and "river" sampling (see link below for more info on the Ipsos "Ampario Overview" sample method) and does not rely on a population frame in the traditional sense. Ipsos uses fixed sample targets, unique to each study, in drawing sample. After a sample has been obtained from the Ipsos panel, Ipsos calibrates respondent characteristics to be representative of the U.S. Population using standard procedures such as raking-ratio adjustments. The source of these population targets is U.S. Census 2013 American Community Survey data. The sample drawn for this study reflects fixed sample targets on demographics. Post-hoc weights were made to the population characteristics on gender, age, race/ethnicity, region, and education.

Statistical margins of error are not applicable to online polls. All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error and measurement error. Where figures do not sum to 100, this is due to the effects of rounding. The precision of Ipsos online polls is measured using a credibility interval. In this case, the poll has a credibility interval of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points for all respondents. Ipsos calculates a design effect (DEFF) for each study based on the variation of the weights, following the formula of Kish (1965). This study had a credibility interval adjusted for design effect of the following ($n=1,005$, $DEFF=1.5$, adjusted Confidence Interval=5).

The poll also has a credibility interval plus or minus 6.2 percentage points for Democrats, plus or minus 5.9 percentage points for Republicans, and plus or minus 7.6 percentage points for Independents.

For more information about conducting research intended for public release or Ipsos' online polling methodology, please visit our [Public Opinion Polling and Communication](#) page where you can download our brochure, see our public release protocol, or contact us.

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Ipsos researchers assess market potential and interpret market trends. They develop and build brands. They help clients build long-term relationships with their customers. They test advertising and study audience responses to various media and they measure public opinion around the globe.

Ipsos has been listed on the Paris Stock Exchange since 1999 and generated global revenues of €1,782.7 million in 2016.

GAME CHANGERS

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