

Americans Continue to Support Involvement with the International Criminal Court (ICC)

Despite this Support, Some Oppose the US Becoming a Full Member of the Court

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Despite this Support, Some Oppose the US Becoming a Full Member of the Court

Washington, DC – Americans continue to have fairly low self-reported knowledge of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and its work, although they also show a clear tendency to support the general tenets of the organization, according to a new survey of over 1,000 US adults conducted on behalf of the American Bar Association. When asked what they know about the ICC, over half of Americans (64%) report knowing “nothing at all” about it, while just over one in ten (15%) report knowing a great deal or a fair amount about the ICC.

Almost three in five (59%) indicate that they ‘don’t know’ if the US is a current member of the ICC during this wave of the study. Of those individuals who know at least a little bit about the ICC, nearly two thirds (63%) believe that the United States is currently a member, up slightly from a similar study conducted in February (52%).

Perceptions of the Court and Its Work

Despite this lack of familiarity with the ICC¹, support for the work of the Court remains strong, and the American public appears to favor US involvement in these issues. Six in ten (60%) agree that “it is important for the United States to participate in international organizations that support human rights and that hold individuals accountable for mass atrocities,” which rises to just under seven

¹ The ICC was subsequently defined for respondents as follows: The International Criminal Court (ICC) is the world’s only permanent international tribunal created by a treaty for the purpose of investigating and prosecuting war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity (mass atrocities). Currently, 122 countries are members of the International Criminal Court. The United States formally announced in 2002 that it would not become a member of the International Criminal Court for a multitude of reasons, including questions about the court’s jurisdiction and structure.

in ten (69%) among those who know something about the ICC, consistent with the findings from earlier this year. Furthermore, nearly half (48%) of Americans, including 59% of those who know something about the Court, agree that the US should “dedicate US resources (financial, military, intelligence, etc.) to international organizations that support human rights and that hold individuals responsible for mass atrocities.”

The survey also explored possible reasons for opposition to the work of the ICC among the American public. Levels of concern increase with knowledge about the ICC, but do not reach a majority. Just under a quarter of US adults (23%) agree that joining an organization like the ICC could hurt the United States’ autonomy, with over a third (36%) of those who are more familiar with the ICC agreeing. Similarly, one in five (20%) agree that it is “not in our best interests to dedicate US resources” to organizations like the ICC, including nearly a third (30%) of those with more knowledge of the Court. These findings are on par with the sentiments expressed in the February survey.

ICC Membership and the United States

Despite these concerns, nearly four in ten (37%) support the United States becoming more involved or fully joining the ICC. Among those who are familiar of the ICC, over half (59%) believe that the United States should be more involved or fully join the ICC. At the same time, a quarter of both the general public (25%) and those familiar with the ICC (24%) believe that the United State should not fully join the ICC.

While there is some opposition to full membership, over half of those familiar with the ICC (56%) believe that the United States should continue to dedicate resources such as satellite photos to the Court. Nearly as many (49%) support the United States becoming more involved, without becoming a full member, while four in ten (41%) support the United States becoming a full member.



ISIS/The Islamic State Situation

The International Criminal Court is investigating whether charges can be brought against citizens of ICC member countries for international atrocity crimes committed in support of ISIS/The Islamic State. Current member countries of the ICC include key US allies, such as the United Kingdom, France, Jordan, and Tunisia. The United States is not a member of the ICC and, therefore, is not obligated to cooperate with any investigations by the ICC. At present, US law prohibits the United States from allocating funds to the ICC, voluntarily or otherwise.

Despite these laws, a majority of Americans that have some knowledge of the ICC (55%) support amending US law to allow for the allocations of funds to the ICC to assist in ISIS/The Islamic State investigations, while 28% believe that the US should not get involved in prosecuting individuals who have committed atrocity crimes as part of ISIS/The Islamic State. Among the general public, support for amending laws to allow the US to fund the ICC is slightly lower (42%).

When framed differently – pointing out concerns that if the US was to assist the ICC, the Court may one day also target American citizens or citizens of our allies (such as Israel) – attitudes are similar. A majority (55%) of those familiar with the ICC still support the United States amending its current laws in order to help fund or assist in the potential investigations against ISIS/The Islamic State supporters, while 27% feel that the US shouldn't get involved. Among the general public, support for changing US law to allow funding of the ICC shifts downward to just less than four out of ten (39%).

These are some of the findings of an Ipsos poll conducted on behalf of the American Bar Association from December 4-8, 2014. The previous wave of the study was conducted from February 21-24, 2014. For these surveys, representative randomly selected samples of 1,004 and 1,005 adults, respectively, were interviewed by telephone. With a sample of this size, the results are considered accurate to within ± 3.1 percentage points for both studies, 19 times out of 20, of what they would have been had the entire adult population of U.S. been polled. The margin of error will be larger within sub-groupings of the survey



population. These data were weighted to ensure that the sample's age/sex composition reflects that of the actual U.S population according to Census information.

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