CRITICAL ISSUES POLL

Only a Quarter of Americans Say Iran Is in a Worse Position to Get Nukes After War

Americans Prefer Van Hollen to Schumer for Senate Leadership by Nearly 3 to 1

Shibley Telhami, Principal Investigator

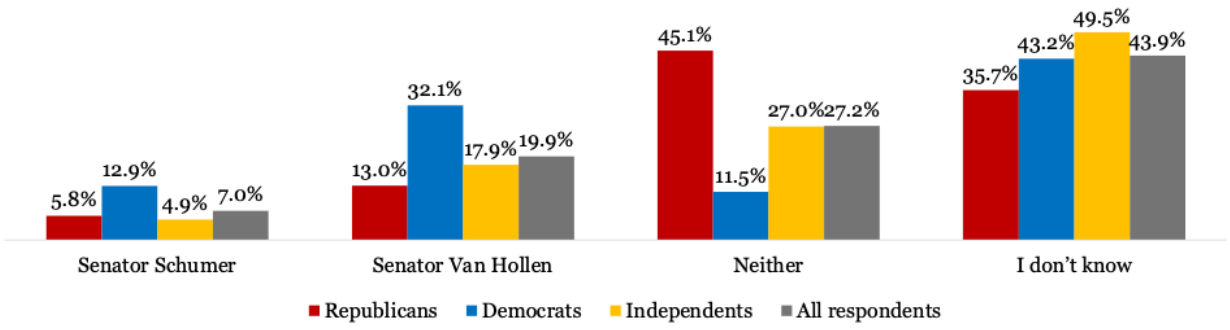
Over the period November 13-15, 2026, a new round of the University of Maryland Critical Issues Poll was fielded by Ipsos among 1,016 U.S. adults to probe two timely issues: the contest for Senate majority leadership between Senator Chuck Schumer, Democrat of New York, and Senator Chris Van Hollen, Democrat of Maryland, and public attitudes toward aspects of the Iran war, especially Iran's nuclear program. Below are the key findings.

1. **By a ratio of nearly three to one, Americans say they prefer Senator Van Hollen over Senator Schumer, but with over 40% saying they "don't know."**

   Among Democrats, 32.1% favor Van Hollen, while 12.9% favor Schumer, and 11.5% choose neither. Among Republicans, 13% choose Van Hollen, while 5.8% choose Schumer, and 45.1% say neither.

Overall, 43.9% say they don't know. It is notable that the poll went into the field the day after Van Hollen announced he was challenging the Senate majority leader, so many people may not have had a chance to evaluate the candidates. Although Schumer has had a high national profile, many Americans may not be as familiar with Van Hollen. As the contest nears a vote in the Senate, scheduled for December 1, 2026, it is likely that more Americans will be in a position to give an opinion.

Q1. As you may know, Senator Chris Van Hollen, Democrat of Maryland, is challenging Senator Chuck Schumer, Democrat of New York, as Senate majority leader. Who would you like to see lead the Senate majority? [REVERSE SCALE 1-2; 2-1]

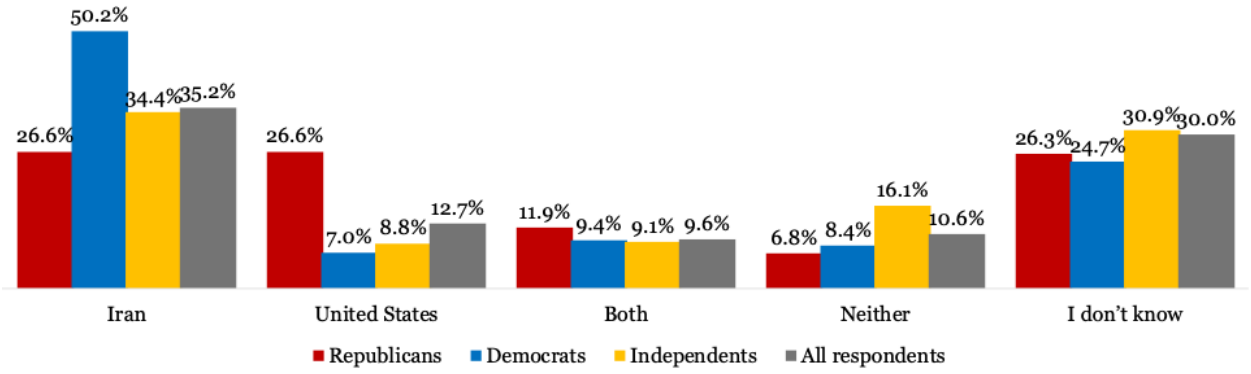


Source: University of Maryland Critical Issues Poll fielded by Ipsos from November 13-15, 2026, among 1,016 US adults with a margin of error of +/- 3.2 percentage points.

2. More Americans say Iran controls the Strait of Hormuz, 35.2%, than say the United States controls it, 12.7%, with nearly a third saying they don't know.

President Donald Trump and other US officials have frequently stated that the United States now fully controls the Strait of Hormuz. Our poll finds that only 12.7% of Americans, including 26.6% of Republicans, 7.0% of Democrats, and 8.8% of independents say the US controls Hormuz. In contrast, 35.2% say Iran controls the strait, including 26.6% of Republicans, 50% of Democrats, and 34.4% of independents. Overall, 30% say they didn't know.

Q2. As you may know, the Strait of Hormuz is an important passageway through which roughly 20% of the world's oil and gas supply passes. Who do you think controls the Strait of Hormuz now? [REVERSE SCALE 1-4; 4-1]



Source: University of Maryland Critical Issues Poll fielded by Ipsos from November 13-15, 2026, among 1,016 US adults with a margin of error of +/- 3.2 percentage points.

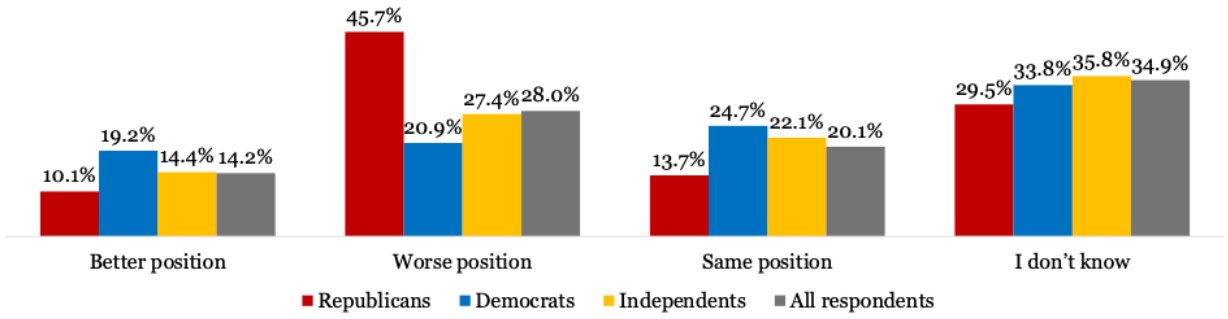
3. **Only 28% of Americans say Iran is in a worse position to develop nuclear weapons compared to the period before the current war, while 23.6% say it is in a worse position compared to when the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA) was still in effect.**

   President Trump has frequently asserted that the United States has destroyed Iran's nuclear program, setting back its ability to acquire nuclear weapons. Our poll found that, compared to the period preceding the current war, 28% of Americans say Iran is in a worse position to develop nukes, including 45.7% of Republicans, 20.9% of Democrats, and 27.4% of independents. Overall, 20.1% of Americans say Iran is in the same position and 14.2 say it is in a better position, while 34.9% say they don't know.

   Compared to when the Iran nuclear deal was in effect (2015-2018), before the US withdrew during Trump's first term, 23.6% of Americans say Iran is now in a worse position to develop nuclear weapons, including 35% of Republicans, 21% of Democrats, and 21.5% of independents. Overall, 14.3% say Iran is in the same position, while 20.7% say it is in a better position, and 38.4% say they don't know.

Q3A. In your opinion, is Iran in a better or worse position to develop nuclear weapons today compared to the following? [REVERSE SCALE 1-2; 2-1]

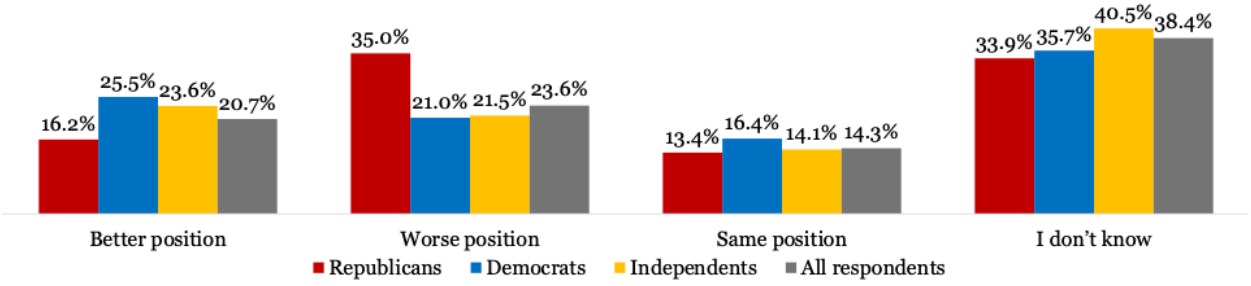
Compared to the period preceding the start of the Iran War in February 2026



Source: University of Maryland Critical Issues Poll fielded by Ipsos from November 13-15, 2026, among 1,016 US adults with a margin of error of +/- 3.2 percentage points.

Q3B. In your opinion, is Iran in a better or worse position to develop nuclear weapons today compared to the following? [REVERSE SCALE 1-2; 2-1]

Compared to when the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA) was still in effect (2015-2018) before the US withdrew



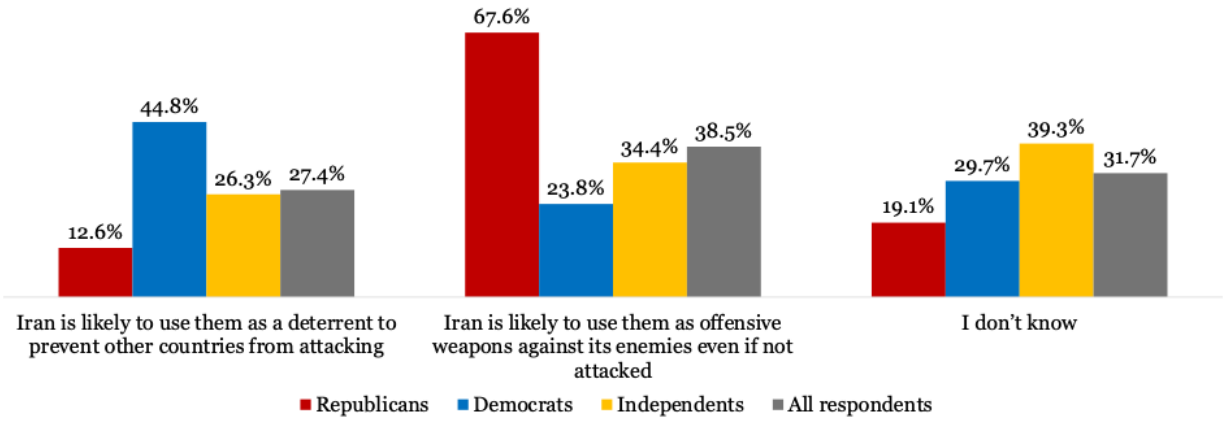
Source: University of Maryland Critical Issues Poll fielded by Ipsos from November 13-15, 2026, among 1,016 US adults with a margin of error of +/- 3.2 percentage points.

4. **Two thirds of Republicans say if Iran acquires nuclear weapons, it will use them offensively, compared to 23.8% of Democrats and 34.4% of independents.**

While Iran denies it has been seeking nuclear weapons – and experts disagree about its actual aims – the proposition that Iran would use nukes offensively, if it were to acquire them, has often been advanced by President Trump; he even asserted that Israel, which is known to have its own nuclear arsenal, 'won't exist', if not for the US. Where does the public stand on this issue? Here, the partisan divide is wide and about one third of the public says it doesn't know.

Notably, two-thirds of Republicans, 67.6%, say Iran would use such weapons offensively, compared to only 12.6% who say Iran would only use nuclear weapons as a deterrent. In contrast, 44.8% of Democrats say Iran would use nukes as a deterrent, while 23.8% say it would use them offensively.

Q4. If Iran were to acquire nuclear weapons, which of the following is closer to your view? [REVERSE SCALE 1-2; 2-1]



Source: University of Maryland Critical Issues Poll fielded by Ipsos from November 13-15, 2026, among 1,016 US adults with a margin of error of +/- 3.2 percentage points.

Methodology

This poll was conducted by Ipsos from November 13-15, 2026, using the probability-based KnowledgePanel®. This poll is based on a nationally representative probability sample of 1,016 adults age 18 or older.

The study was conducted in English. The data for the total sample were weighted to adjust for gender by age, race/ethnicity, education, Census region, metropolitan status, and household income. The demographic benchmarks came from the 2026 March Supplement of the Current Population Survey (CPS). The 2024 presidential vote choice benchmarks came from the federal elections 2024 election results for the U.S. President.

The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 3.2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, based on the entire sample of adults. The margin of sampling error takes into account the design effect, which was 1.10.