

# Public Opinion and Narrowing the Security Gap in 2016



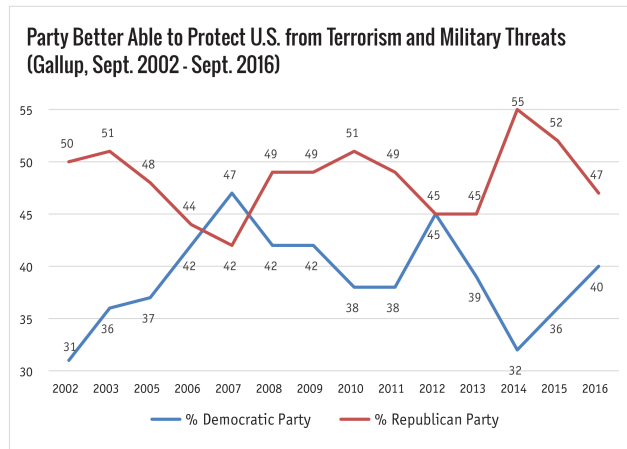
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Want to know who will win on Election Day? Look at how Americans perceive which party is better able to protect the nation from foreign threats and acts of terror. The so-called “security gap” is a key indicator about how the two major parties will perform when Americans head to the voting booths. Gallup asks Americans this question every September, and we’ve been hard at work here at Third way to make sense of the “security gap” since our founding in 2005.

**This September, Gallup announced the results of the 2016 survey and found that the Security Gap had shrunk to seven points, with Republicans favored 47% to Democrats’ 40%. This is the same margin that Democrats faced in the 2008 election cycle, when President Barack Obama won a majority of the popular vote.**



This shows that Democrats have worked to close the 23-point gap that existed in the 2014 cycle, for which they paid heavily in the electoral results, as documented in a [Third Way report](#). We would note that in this century, Democrats have never gained seats in the House when the security gap has been greater than seven points.

Beyond the overall security gap, there is other public opinion data of which policymakers should be aware before the election.

### **National Security is the Second-Most Important Issue to Voters**

A Washington Post/ABC [poll](#) fielded September 5-8 asked voters what “is the single most important issue in your choice for President?”

- 35% said the economy and jobs, while “terrorism and national security” came in second at 19%, besting corruption in government (16%), immigration (8%), and law and order (6%).

### **Hillary Clinton’s Lead is Shrinking, but Trump Remains Toxic**

Hillary Clinton’s double-digit [lead](#) over Donald Trump in head-to-head matchups following the conventions has shrunk in the last month.

- The latest Fox News poll, fielded August 28-30, finds Clinton with a six-point lead over Trump, as does an NBC poll fielded from August 29 to September 4. However, the latest CNN poll, fielded September 1-4, finds Trump with a two-point lead over Clinton

However, Clinton remains ahead in a number of swing-states, including:

- Florida (+2), Michigan (+5), Nevada (+1), North Carolina (+4), Ohio (+7), Pennsylvania (+5), and Virginia (+8)

While Trump is closing the overall gap, he remains extremely vulnerable on personal traits.

- For example, the CNN poll asked which candidate “has the temperament to serve effectively as president,” and Clinton bests Trump 56% to 36%. On the question of who “Can better handle the responsibilities of commander-in-chief,” Clinton leads Trump 50% to 45%.

## **Homegrown Terrorism**

Voters are very afraid, and don’t believe the government is doing enough. However, overall, they support democratic proposals.

A Pew poll conducted August 23 to September 2, found that 40% believe the ability of terrorists to launch an attack on the U.S. is greater now than it was on 9/11.

- This is the highest percentage since 9/11.

A Washington Post/ABC News poll from June 20-23 asked “How concerned are you about so-called ‘lone-wolf’ terrorist attacks in which individuals in this country decide to take terrorist action on their own.”

- 86% said they were concerned, with 53% saying “very concerned.”
- This poll also found that less than a third of respondents (31%) believe the government is doing a “great deal” or “good amount” to prevent these attacks.

Voters are strongly in favor of banning gun sales to people on the no-fly list.

- For example, 76% of respondents to a USA Today poll fielded June 26-29 support the ban, while just 14% oppose it.

### **Russia May Not be a Vulnerability for Trump, but Putin is Very Unpopular**

A Monmouth University poll fielded August 4-7 asked voters “Are you concerned or not concerned that Donald Trump would be too friendly toward Russia?”

- 45% said they were concerned, 49% said they were not.

However, a Bloomberg poll fielded August 5-8 asked voters if they had a favorable opinion of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

- Just 10% said yes, while 64% said they had an unfavorable opinion of him.

A CNN/ORC poll from July 29-31 asked respondents if they felt “the Russian government is attempting to influence the outcome of the U.S. presidential election.”

- 48% said yes, 44% said no.

### **Growing Support for the Iran Deal; Divided over “Ransom” Payment**

A Morning Consult poll fielded August 18-20 asked “As you may know, the United States and other countries have announced a deal to lift economic sanctions against Iran in exchange for Iran agreeing not to manufacture nuclear weapons. Do you support or oppose this agreement?”

- 49% of Americans support the agreement, 36% oppose.
- 41% of independents support the agreement, 38% are opposed, and a sizeable 21% are unsure.

- This was a large reversal from a year ago, when Morning Consult found that 56% of Americans opposed the agreement, and just 27% supported it.

The Morning Consult poll also asked, “As you may know, the United States agreed to pay \$400 million dollars to Iran in the nuclear deal negotiated in 2015. The State Department has said that they made the previously negotiated payment to Iran, but only after Iran released several American prisoners. Based on what you know, do you support or oppose the United States making the payment to Iran only after securing the release of American prisoners?”

- Support and opposition were tied at 41%.
- 37% of independents support the payment, 40% are opposed, and 23% are unsure.

### **Americans Remain Opposed to Banning Muslims from Entering the U.S.**

A variety of polls show Americans remain opposed to a ban, temporary or permanent, on Muslims entering the U.S. For example:

- 59% of registered voters in a CBS News/New York Times poll from July 8-12 believe the U.S. should not temporarily ban Muslims from entering the U.S. 35% said they should be banned.
- A Pew poll from August 9-16 asked if “Muslims living in the U.S. should be subject to more scrutiny than people in other religious groups.” 65% said they should not be and 29% said they should.

Refugees are welcomed by Americans:

- While public opinion was opposed to the U.S. accepting Syrian refugees last December, following the terror attacks in San Bernardino and Paris, the public is once again welcoming refugees. According to a Globescan [poll](#) conducted in May 63% of Americans said the U.S. government should do more to help refugees, and 71% said they welcome refugees to the U.S.

### **Public Believes Clinton Hasn't Been Honest About Her E-mail, Has Heard Enough About It**

A Monmouth University [poll](#) from August 4-7 asked voters if, “Hillary Clinton has been or has not been honest about how she handled using a personal email account during her time as secretary of state?”

- 64% said she has NOT been honest, while just 27% believe she has.

Similarly, a Morning Consult [poll](#) found that 62% believe Clinton’s e-mail use was “unethical,” compared to just 15% who believed it ethical.

- However, the Monmouth poll also found that 63% of voters are “tired of hearing about it,” compared to 34% who believe the media should continue to cover it.