

# ReThink Media China/Russia Casualties Findings

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## Methodology

ReThink Media conducted a poll on May 3-6, 2021, sampling 1,037 American adults. The poll was conducted online and included oversamples of Black/African American, Latinx/Hispanic, and Asian/South Asian/Indian American respondents. The sample was also balanced by age, region, and education. The poll was conducted via online panels using Qualtrics. The margin of error is +/- 3.02% for the full sample, and +/- 4.4% for the China/Russia subsamples. It is higher for other sub-groups.

## Key findings

### General attitudes toward China vs. Russia

- Despite the events of the last four years, Democrats and Republicans have about the same opinion of Vladimir Putin: among Democrats, 16% approve and 66% disapprove, while among Republicans, 17% approve and 65% disapprove.
- Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping have similar disapproval ratings: 43% rate Xi as very unfavorable, with 44% rating Putin as very unfavorable—again, with little partisan difference.
- Despite the split in tolerance for civilian casualties that we see between the two countries (see below), both Russia and China are viewed about the same in terms of whether they are an American ally or enemy. (13% view China as an ally and 38% as not an ally; 12% view Russia as an ally and 40% as not an ally.)

### Civilian casualties in China vs. Russia

- Although a clear majority of respondents (71%) believe that “we should take all available measures to avoid” civilian casualties, they were more tolerant of hypothetical civilian casualties in Asia than in Eastern Europe. When presented with a hypothetical scenario in which a US adversary (China or Russia) has invaded a nearby US ally, respondents were more supportive of US airstrikes against China than against Russia—despite the presence of civilians. 53% of respondents strongly or somewhat supported airstrikes against China in this scenario, while 47% strongly or somewhat supported the same action against Russia.
- Respondents’ appetite for airstrikes decreased when they were told that, in this hypothetical scenario, at least 10,000 civilians in the neighboring allied nation would die. However, the split in tolerance for intervention in Asia vs. Eastern Europe held (37% vs 27% total support, respectively).
- When told that ground deployment would result in fewer local casualties than airstrikes but a greater loss of US troops, respondents were more likely to support a ground invasion in Eastern Europe (36%) as opposed to in Asia (25%). 45% of respondents instead supported airstrikes in Eastern Europe, versus 53% in Asia.
- There was more support for airstrikes in both Russia and China in the context of a hypothetical attack on US troops (Support for airstrikes in Russia: 62% scenario 1, 66% “shock and awe” scenario; Support for China: 59% for both scenarios).

## Breakdown by demographics

- White respondents with a college degree were more supportive of airstrikes (a range of 81–42% support throughout the survey) than white respondents without a college degree (61–17%) or respondents of color (58–44%).
- For Russia, when we told respondents that there would be 10,000 civilian casualties in the allied country, both white and POC respondents were much less likely to support airstrikes (support decreased from 45 to 23% for white respondents, and from 51 to 35% for POC).
- For China, white respondents were less likely to support airstrikes after we told them about the estimated civilian casualties, but POC respondents' support didn't shift (from 54 to 28% for white respondents, and 52 to 54% for POC).
- When asked about a “shock and awe” campaign in China, there was no difference between white and POC respondents in terms of their support (66 vs. 64%). However, the same question about Russia yielded higher support among whites (68%) than it did among POC (43%).
- Although both white *and* POC respondents preferred airstrikes to ground deployment in both scenarios, the preference for airstrikes was much higher among POC in the China scenario than it was in the Russia scenario (49 vs. 34%, respectively).
- Men consistently expressed more support for airstrikes than women. Men's support for airstrikes ranged from 74 to 40% in the hypothetical scenarios, while women's support was 56-24%. Female respondents were more likely to say that they were “not sure” (a trend that holds true across many polls. They were also more likely to oppose airstrikes (26-49% opposition from women across the hypotheticals, versus 16-41% opposition from men)
- Strong Democrats and strong Republicans expressed consistently similar pro-strike opinions throughout the entire hypothetical—the opening hypothetical had 62% support and 25% oppose among strong Democrats, while among strong Republicans, 61% supported and 26% opposed.
- The final “shock and awe” scenario resulted in increased support for airstrikes among Republicans (from 63% to 72%), but not among Democrats (from 61% to 59%).
- These results might be different under a different president: Democrats are more likely to support military interventions taken by a Democratic president than by a Republican, particularly a divisive figure like former President Trump.

## Additional findings

- Full-scale invasions are the only military actions that are opposed by a majority from the get-go, even if they are contextualized as warranted (30% support/52% oppose). Airstrikes are the most popular (particularly drones: 57% support/25% oppose)—likely because they are seen as risking fewer American lives.
- Americans lean in favor of preventing civilian casualties (often strongly) in the head-to-head forced choices—until they are told that the lives of American troops will be jeopardized. (56% of respondents agreed that “we should opt for military action that jeopardizes the fewest number of US troops, even if it causes a higher number of civilian casualties” vs. 44% supporting “military action that causes the fewest civilian casualties, even if it puts a greater number of US troops at risk.”)