

Combating global hunger as an American foreign policy priority

Key takeaways from the 2021 Chicago Council Survey

February 2022



Support for combating global hunger is on the rise

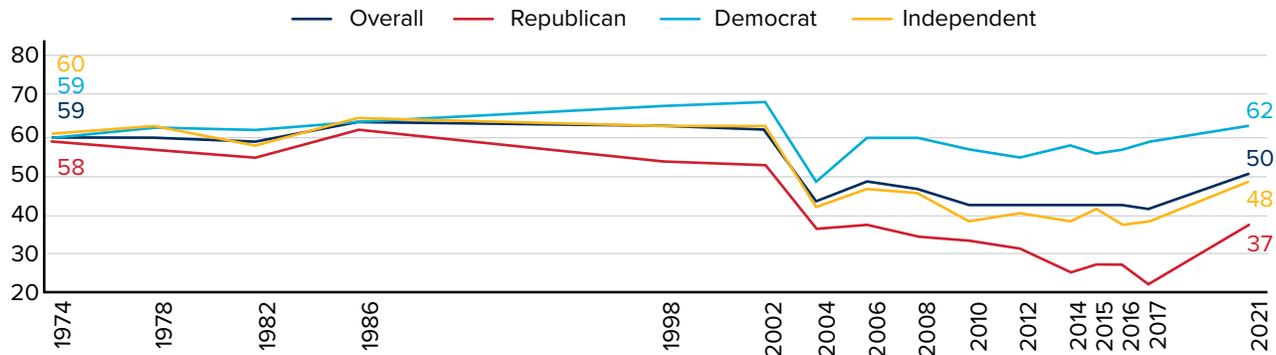
Global hunger can often get lost in American foreign policy discussions amid concerns about military engagements, trade relationships, and international cooperation and competition. However, the 2021 Chicago Council Survey found that a majority of Americans believe that combating global hunger should be of some importance to US foreign policy. Progress has been made in decreasing hunger over the last decade, but the COVID-19 pandemic and its ripple economic effects—as well as the climate crisis—have demonstrated that such progress is at risk of being undone unless the US government pays attention and prioritizes the issue.

According to the survey:

- 93 percent of Americans believe combating global hunger is an important foreign policy goal (50 percent say it is very important; 43 percent say it is somewhat important).
- 45 percent believe that humanitarian tools—such as sharing vaccines, combating hunger, and providing disaster relief—are not used enough in foreign policy (only 15 percent say they are used too much).
- Americans overwhelmingly believe that the United States should play a role in fighting global hunger (93 percent), with a majority (54 percent) overall answering that the United States should play a leading role.

Combating world hunger as a foreign policy goal

For each one please select whether you think that it should be a very important foreign policy goal of the United States, a somewhat important foreign policy goal, or not an important goal at all: **Combating world hunger** (% very important)

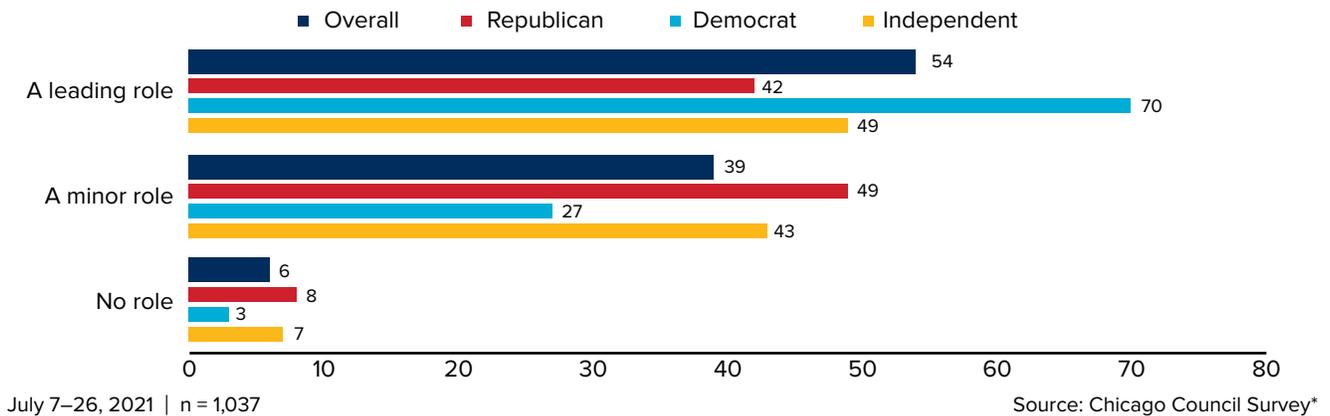


July 7–26, 2021 | n = 1,513

Source: Chicago Council Survey*

US role in combating world hunger

Should the United States play a leading role, a minor role, or no role in the following international efforts: **Combating world hunger** (%)



In 2021 the percentage of Americans who believe that combating global hunger should be a very important foreign policy goal reached a nearly two-decade high (50 percent, up from 43 percent in 2004). An additional 43 percent believe that it should be a somewhat important goal. This positive trend spans partisan groups, but it is particularly notable among Republicans. In just the last four years, the percentage of Republicans who classify combating global hunger as a very important foreign policy goal has increased substantially by 15 points (from 22 percent to 37 percent).

Not only do Americans believe that combating global hunger should be a goal in and of itself, but they also think it should be a tool to achieve other foreign policy goals. Nearly half of Americans (45 percent) believe that humanitarian foreign policy tools, including combating global hunger, are underutilized by the United States. Increasing evidence echoes American public opinion, demonstrating how combating global hunger can facilitate progress on other foreign policy priorities such as US national security.

More than half of Americans (54%) believe that the United States has a major role to play in combating hunger. The United States already addresses global hunger through several major foreign assistance development programs as well as a handful of smaller initiatives. Feed the Future, the US flagship global food security program, provides development assistance to address poverty, hunger, and malnutrition, focusing particularly on a dozen or so target countries. Additionally, the

McGovern-Dole Food for Education program supports global education and food security through school feeding, directly reaching millions of beneficiaries. The Food for Peace program tackles both emergency and non-emergency food security issues, particularly targeting the most vulnerable. This is in addition to significant humanitarian funding that focuses on meeting urgent and acute hunger and famine needs. The US government should ensure food assistance is distributed widely to those who lack adequate access to food through a combination of robust funding and systemic accountability for effective and inclusive use of funds.

Pending legislation can help address global hunger

In a representative democracy like the United States, the government is charged with enacting the will of the people. As it stands, global hunger is a clear foreign policy priority for the majority of Americans, one that the United States is uniquely positioned to address. Using humanitarian foreign policy tools such as hunger relief could also help accomplish other foreign policy goals. Existing programs to combat global hunger along with new initiatives have opportunities for authorization or re-authorization in the 2023 Global Food Security Act and the 2023 Farm Bill. For more information and analysis on this and many other issues, check out the full 2021 Chicago Council Survey and research from the Chicago Council's Center for Global Food and Agriculture.

*The Chicago Council commissioned IPSOS to carry out this national representative survey. Visit the [survey page](#) for more information.

Copyright ©2022 by Chicago Council on Global Affairs, an independent, nonpartisan organization. All rights reserved.

This article may not be reproduced in whole or in part, in any form (beyond that copying permitted by sections 107 and 108 of the US Copyright Law and excerpts by reviewers for the public press), without written permission from the publisher. For further information about the Chicago Council or this article, please write to Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 180 North Stetson Avenue, Suite 1400, Chicago, IL 60601 or visit thechicagocouncil.org.