



RED LINES

Global Attitudes on the Use
of AI to Target and Attack People

AI Weapons Survey Report 2026



LEX INTERNATIONAL

About Lex International Fund

Lex International Fund is a philanthropic fund dedicated to strengthening international law. At Lex, we seek to help reverse the trend toward a worsening global security situation and breakdown of trust in frameworks and institutions by helping shift the narrative around international law and supporting new coalitions of actors. We work with civil society movements, international organisations, governments, media, businesses and scientists to shape global norms and create bold, innovative solutions to global challenges.

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Executive Summary

In light of the increasing use of AI in armed conflicts across the globe, this report presents the findings from an international survey that assessed public attitudes toward the use of AI-enabled weapons against people.

The survey was conducted by Ipsos, on behalf of Lex International Fund, from April to May 2026 in Brazil, China, France, Iraq, Pakistan, South Africa, Ukraine, and the United States, and surveyed over 6,000 adults.

These countries were selected to provide regional balance and reflect a range of experiences relevant to ongoing debates about AI and warfare, including countries affected by armed conflict, countries engaged in international discussions on military AI, and major geopolitical and technological actors.

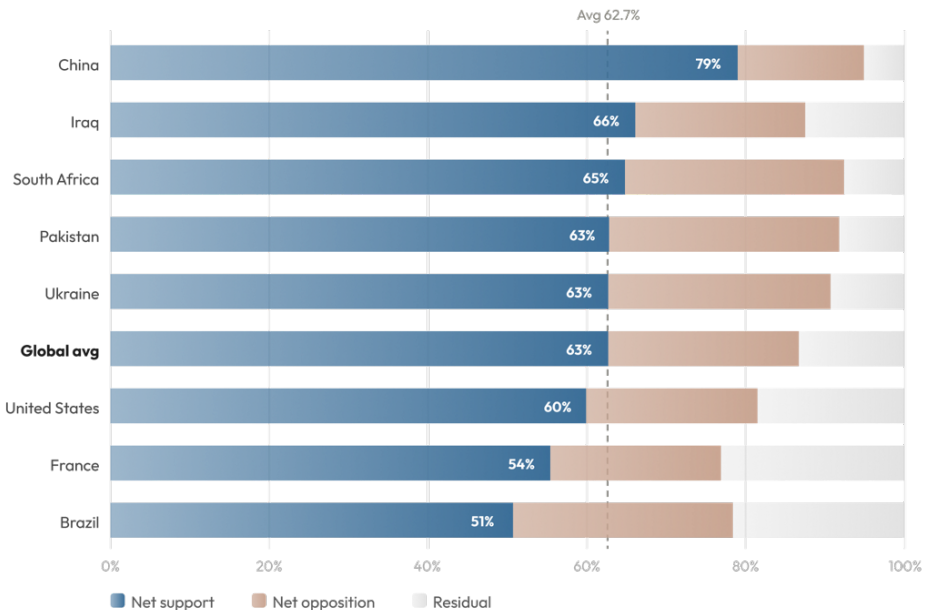
The question posed to respondents was:

- **How would you feel about an international ban on the use of AI-enabled weapons to target and attack people?**

Key Findings

1. Majorities in every country surveyed support a ban on the use of AI weapons to target and attack people
2. Opposition to a ban is the minority opinion in every country surveyed
3. Conflict-affected populations endorse a ban at rates above the global average
4. Populations in heavily militarised countries favour a ban

“How would you feel about an international ban on the use of AI-enabled weapons to target and attack people?” — Responses by country



Red Lines

Introduction

AI is increasingly being integrated into the conduct of hostilities. Conflicts in recent years, and recent months, have revealed the extent to which AI is being incorporated into weapon systems and decision support systems. From Ukraine to Gaza and Iraq to Iran, recent conflicts have demonstrated the growing role of AI in systems involved in surveillance, targeting, and the use of force. This introduces new risks to civilians.

As real-world examples of AI in warfare mount, governments now face urgent decisions on regulating these new technologies. This year, the United Nations stands at a critical juncture: the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons' (CCW) Review Conference in November presents an opportunity for the international community to launch negotiations on new regulations and prohibitions for AI-enabled weapons.

Given the recent rise of AI in armed conflict and the civilian harm already attributed to it, this survey sought to capture cross-regional public opinion on using AI to target individuals, and to assess whether global populations support establishing red lines against the use AI weapons against humans—offering timely insight on public attitudes relevant to ongoing international law and policy discussions.

In partnership with Ipsos, this survey was conducted from April to May 2026 in Brazil, China, France, Iraq, Pakistan, South Africa, Ukraine, and the United States.¹

¹ For this survey, Ipsos interviewed a total of 6,004 adults aged 18-74 in South Africa and the United States, and 16-74 in all other countries. The sample consists of approximately 1,000 individuals each in Brazil, France, mainland China, and the United States, and 500 individuals each in Iraq, Pakistan, Ukraine, and South Africa. Samples in France and the United States can be considered representative of their general adult populations under the age of 75. Samples in Brazil, mainland China, Iraq, Pakistan, Ukraine, and South Africa are more urban, more educated, and/or more affluent than the general population. The survey results for these countries should be viewed as reflecting the views of the more “connected” segment of their population.

Respondents were asked the following question:

- Artificial intelligence (AI) refers to a computer technology that can perform tasks that typically require human intelligence.
- AI is increasingly being used in weapons, allowing such weapons to independently select and attack people and other targets, with little or no direct human control.
- **How would you feel about an international ban on the use of AI-enabled weapons to target and attack people?**
- Answer options: Strongly support; Somewhat support; Somewhat oppose; Strongly oppose; Not sure

The country selection was guided by two aims:

- **Achieve regional balance.** The survey covered countries across East Asia, South Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, Latin America, and North America.
- **Capture perspectives from countries with differing experiences of armed conflict, technological development, and participation in international discussions on AI and warfare.** The survey included countries whose populations may have experienced its effects firsthand (e.g. Iraq, Pakistan, Ukraine), and countries engaged to varying degrees in the military AI domain (e.g. China, France, United States).

The survey had several research objectives:

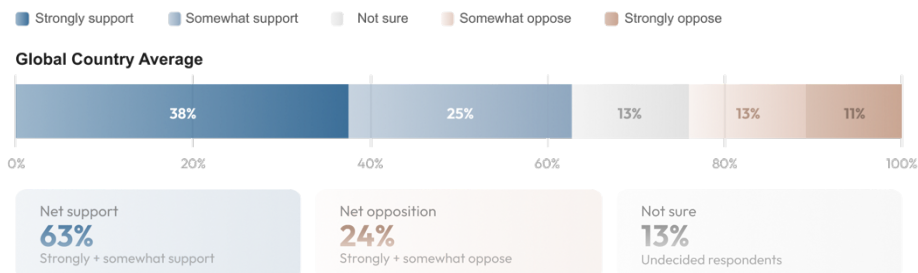
- Present a globally applicable trend in popular opinion toward banning the use of AI weapons against people.
- Explore public attitudes toward the use of AI in systems used to target and attack people.
- Compare whether populations exposed to the use of AI in armed conflict hold stronger views on banning the use of AI weapons than unexposed populations.
- Compare public attitudes across different political and conflict contexts.

Analysis

1. Majorities in every country surveyed support a ban on the use of AI weapons to target and attack people

In every single country surveyed, the majority of respondents supported an international ban on the use of AI-enabled weapons to target and attack people.

The survey yielded a global average of 63%—nearly two-thirds—net support² for a ban, which holds across country samples that span different geographic, political, economic, cultural, and security contexts. The range of support for a ban runs from 51% in Brazil to 79% in China, which means even the lowest-support country still had a majority in favour. That a single position commanded majority support across such a diverse set of countries suggests that opposition to AI weapons targeting humans may cut across cultural, economic, and political lines in a way that few other security questions do. This convergence provides an unusually strong empirical foundation for claims about the public will.



Moreover, it is worth noting that **“Strongly support” was the single most-chosen answer across all countries surveyed.** Globally, 38% of respondents chose “Strongly support”, compared to 25% who chose “Somewhat support”. The fact that the most common response in the survey is the *strongest* form of

² Net support is the combined average of respondents who answered “Strongly support” or “Somewhat support”.

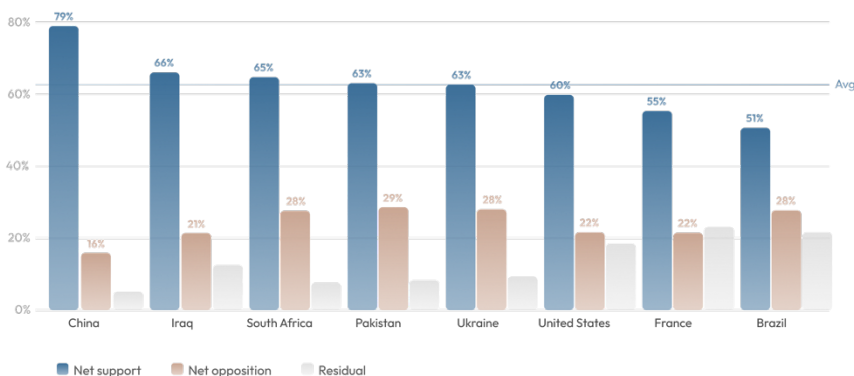
support indicates that respondents demonstrated not a soft or reluctant agreement, but an active conviction that AI should not be used to kill people.

2. Opposition to a ban is the minority opinion in every country surveyed

A global average of only 24% of respondents would oppose a ban. Net opposition³ ranged between 16% to 29%, making it a minority opinion in every country, without exception. Crucially, “Strongly oppose” was the *smallest* response category across the majority of countries surveyed. China presents a particularly striking result: only 2% of Chinese respondents “Strongly oppose” a ban—roughly 5 to 8 times lower than the equivalent figure in any other country surveyed.

This matters for how the issue should be characterised. **Whether AI weapons should be allowed to attack people is not a polarised question on which societies are evenly divided—it is one on which the majority consistently supports restrictions and relatively few strongly oppose them.** With the global proportion of support far outweighing the proportion of opposition, it is difficult to justify further delays in the process to regulate and prohibit AI weapons.

Support outweighs opposition in every country surveyed



³ *Net opposition* is the combined average of respondents who answered “Strongly oppose” or “Somewhat oppose”.

3. Conflict-affected populations endorse a ban at rates above the global average

In Iraq, Pakistan, and Ukraine—three countries with direct, lived experience of military AI systems use—their net support figures (66.1%, 63.1%, and 62.7%, respectively) exceeded or matched the global average (62.7%).⁴ These countries also exhibited very low rates of uncertainty around the issue. Compared to countries without domestic AI-driven conflict exposure like Brazil and France—which produced “Not sure” rates of 22% and 23%, respectively, the “Not sure” rates of Iraq (13%), Pakistan (8%), and Ukraine (9%) were roughly 2 or 3 times lower. This could indicate that countries with active AI-integrated conflict exposure or direct geopolitical stakes tend to have *lower* uncertainty, whereas populations with less exposure show more ambivalence.

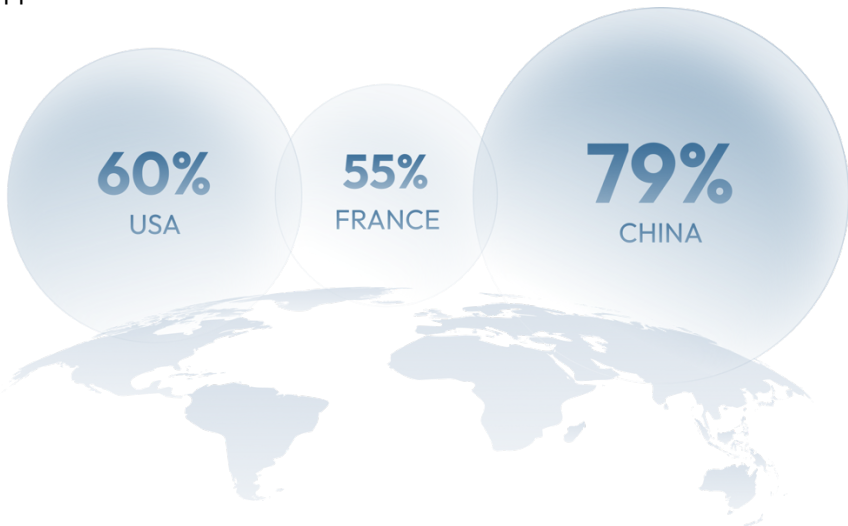
Ukraine’s results deserve particular attention. As a country currently engaged in an active war in which AI-enabled weapon systems play a documented and consequential role for defence, one might expect a population that could benefit from such weapons to be more ambiguous or lean toward opposing a ban. Yet a clear majority still support a ban, and less than one-tenth of respondents said they were “Not sure”.

Taken together, **these findings challenge a persistent narrative in AI weapons debates: that support for regulation is driven by detachment from real-world security threats.** Populations most exposed to AI-enabled warfare are among its most committed opponents. Their support for a ban is an informed preference, formed under conditions of direct experience, and it should carry significant normative weight in the international community’s deliberations on setting restraints on AI weapons.

⁴ For the purposes of this report, percentage figures were rounded to the nearest whole number. However, for the purposes of this finding, the exact figures of net support for Iraq, Pakistan, Ukraine, and the global average have been provided.

4. Populations in heavily militarised countries favour a ban

Heavily militarised countries like China, France, and the United States are engaged to varying degrees in the military AI domain, some having yet to take a clear stance on the issue of establishing new rules on AI weapons. Yet their populations supported a ban at rates of 79%, 55%, and 60%, respectively; and in all three countries, support was approximately 2.5 to 5 times greater than opposition.



This is geopolitically significant, given that within diplomatic circles, support for regulating AI weapons is sometimes characterised as a sentiment confined to countries that are non-militarised or fear being victimised. The data contradicts that framing: the majority of populations in heavily militarised countries are in favour of a ban.

A notable finding is that in both China and the United States—two countries in deep strategic rivalry, with fundamentally different political systems, and divergent positions on international security issues—the majority of respondents support a ban. This suggests a convergent public sentiment among the two populations, which is not necessarily reflected in diplomatic discourse where the framing of military AI regulation is significantly shaped by the logic of great-power competition.

Additionally, the United States' rates of support for a ban warrants particular emphasis, since the United States government is among the most resistant to an international instrument on AI weapons. Despite the government's official position, the majority of Americans support a ban, clearly outweighing opposition, a position chosen by less than a quarter of respondents.

Altogether, these findings may suggest a significant **legitimacy gap between government action and popular will**.

Conclusion

The findings from this survey present compelling empirical cases for international action on AI weapons. Across eight countries spanning nearly every major world region, a clear 63% majority of the public supported a ban on the use of AI-enabled weapons to target and attack people. Opposition was a minority position across the board, not exceeding 29% in any country. Uncertainty responses ranged between 5% to 23%; smallest in countries most directly exposed to AI-driven conflict and largest in countries least directly exposed to the issue.

One of the most notable findings of the survey is that “Strongly support” was the single most-chosen response in every country, which suggests that the question of whether to ban using AI weapons to harm humans is one for which public opinion is intense and resolute, not uncertain or reluctant. Other significant results were that conflict-affected populations had above-average support for a ban, and the majority of populations in heavily militarised countries supported a ban—illustrating the notion that populations throughout the conflict spectrum share a strong moral intuition on this issue.

On the basis of these findings, it is increasingly difficult to justify further delay on this issue.

The findings of this survey also fit a broader historical pattern. Public discomfort with weapons technologies that violate intuitive moral limits—as seen with chemical weapons, anti-personnel landmines, cluster munitions, and nuclear weapons—has historically emerged before governments converged diplomatically on their prohibition.

In each case, a gap between public moral intuition and official policy eventually closed. This survey may be documenting the formation of a similar norm: using AI to kill human beings should not be permitted.

Protecting civilians involves preventing harm, not merely managing it. While the world is already witnessing new forms of violence wrought by the use of AI in armed conflict, the instances remain relatively isolated, and the proliferation of these technologies has not yet reached a point of no return. But this will not remain the case for long. At the 2026 CCW Review Conference, governments will have an opportunity to act and address the growing risks of militarised AI before even greater harm is done.

The will of the people is clear. It is now up to governments to enact it.



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