



# As China Rises, Americans Seek Closer Ties with Japan

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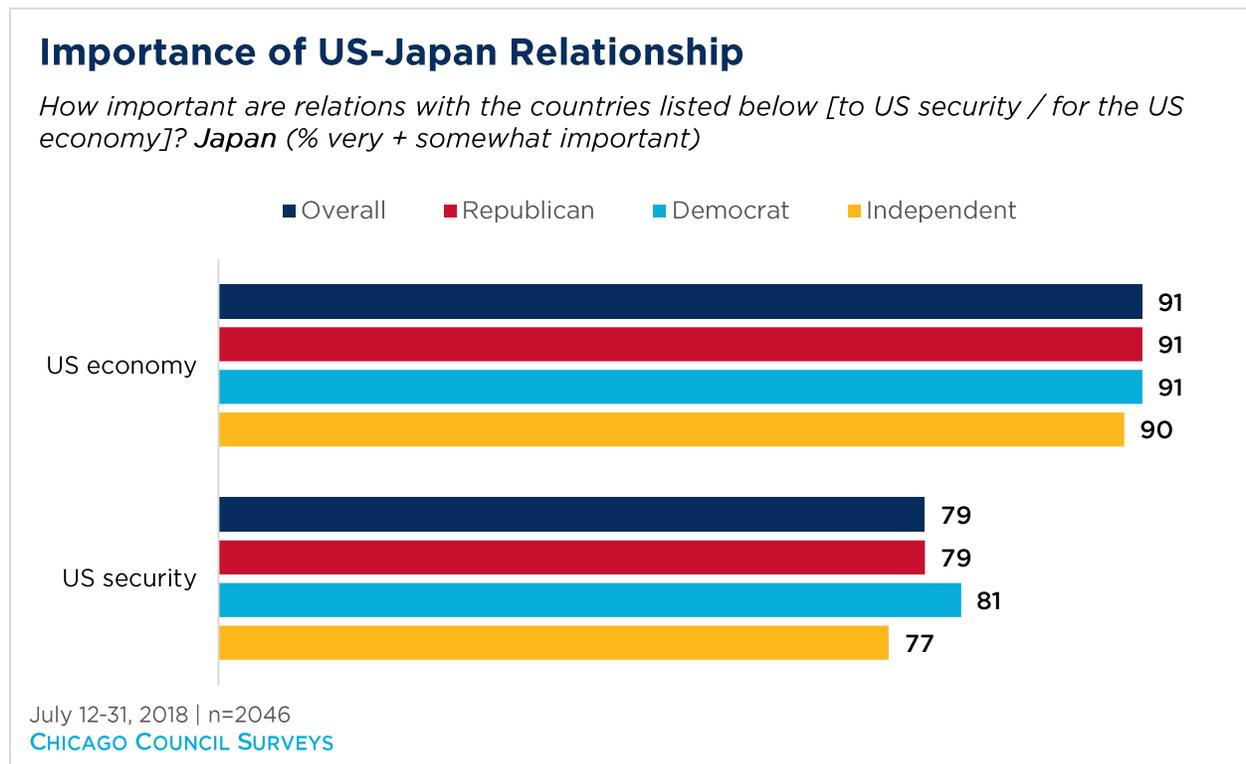
Over the first two years of the Trump administration, the United States has simultaneously aggrieved Japan, a pivotal US ally in Asia, while also taking a more confrontational stance against China. This has raised broad concerns about the future of US involvement in Asia and the basis of support for the US-Japan alliance. While the American public is hesitant to get involved in a conflict between China and Japan, public support for US bases in Japan is at an all-time high, and Americans across party lines want to build strong relations with US allies in Asia.

## Key Findings

- Americans view the US-Japan relationship as an important one for the US economy (91%) and for US security (79%).
- Across the political spectrum, Americans prefer closer ties with traditional allies (66%), even if doing so diminishes US relations with China. This is one of the few issues where the gap between Republicans and Democrats narrowed in the 2018 survey.
- Public support for US bases in Japan is at an all-time recorded high of 65 percent, with majority support among Republicans (72%), Democrats (65%), and Independents (61%).
- The American public supports defending Japan against North Korean attack (64% favor) but does not support involving US troops in a Japan-China conflict over disputed islands (41% favor).
- Americans' rating of Japan's global influence has declined, going from 6.6 in 2002 to 5.7 in 2018 (mean rating on a 0-10 scale).

## Americans See Japan as Important for US Security and the US Economy

Americans overwhelmingly agree that the US-Japan relationship is important for the US economy, with nine in ten Americans across party lines saying the relationship is important (91%). In comparison to other countries around the world, this places Japan in the same league as China (92%) and Canada (90%). However, when it comes to US security, Americans are more likely to name other countries ahead of Japan. While a majority of Americans (79%) see Japan as important for US security, this is fewer than those who name US neighbors such as Canada (84%) or other major powers such as China (85%) or Russia (83%).



## Public Wants Closer Ties with Asian Allies

As China grows more influential around the world, and in Asia in particular, how the United States balances engaging a rising China with maintaining traditional US alliances is becoming an issue of increasing consequence. In 2018, a growing majority of Americans (66%) say that the United States should place a higher priority on building up strong relations with traditional allies such as Japan and South Korea, even if this diminishes US relations with China. Support for building ties with Japan and South Korea has risen notably since 2010, when 58 percent preferred this approach.

## US Policy in Asia

Now thinking about US foreign policy in Asia, do you think the US should put a higher priority on:

- Building up our strong relations with traditional allies like South Korea and Japan, even if this might diminish our relations with China
- Building a new partnership with China, even if this might diminish our relations with our traditional allies



July 12-31, 2018 | n=1011

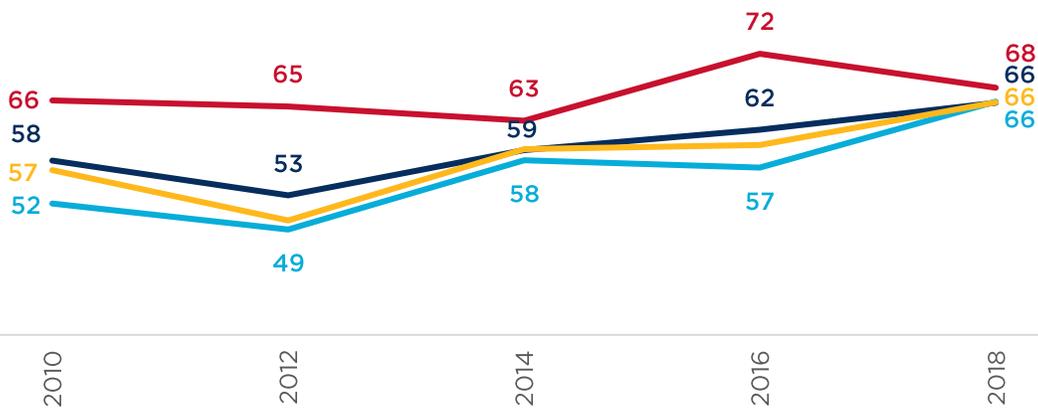
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Notably, this is one of the few issues on which Republicans, Democrats, and Independents have converged over time. When this question was first asked in 2010, Republicans (66%) were far more likely than Democrats (52%) to favor traditional allies. Now, two-thirds of Republicans (68%), Democrats (66%), and Independents (66%) all say that the US should focus on strong relations with traditional allies.

## US Policy in Asia

Now thinking about US foreign policy in Asia, do you think the United States should put a higher priority on: (% building up our strong relations with traditional allies like South Korea and Japan, even if this might diminish our relations with China)

- Overall
- Republican
- Democrat
- Independent



July 12-31, 2018 | n=1011

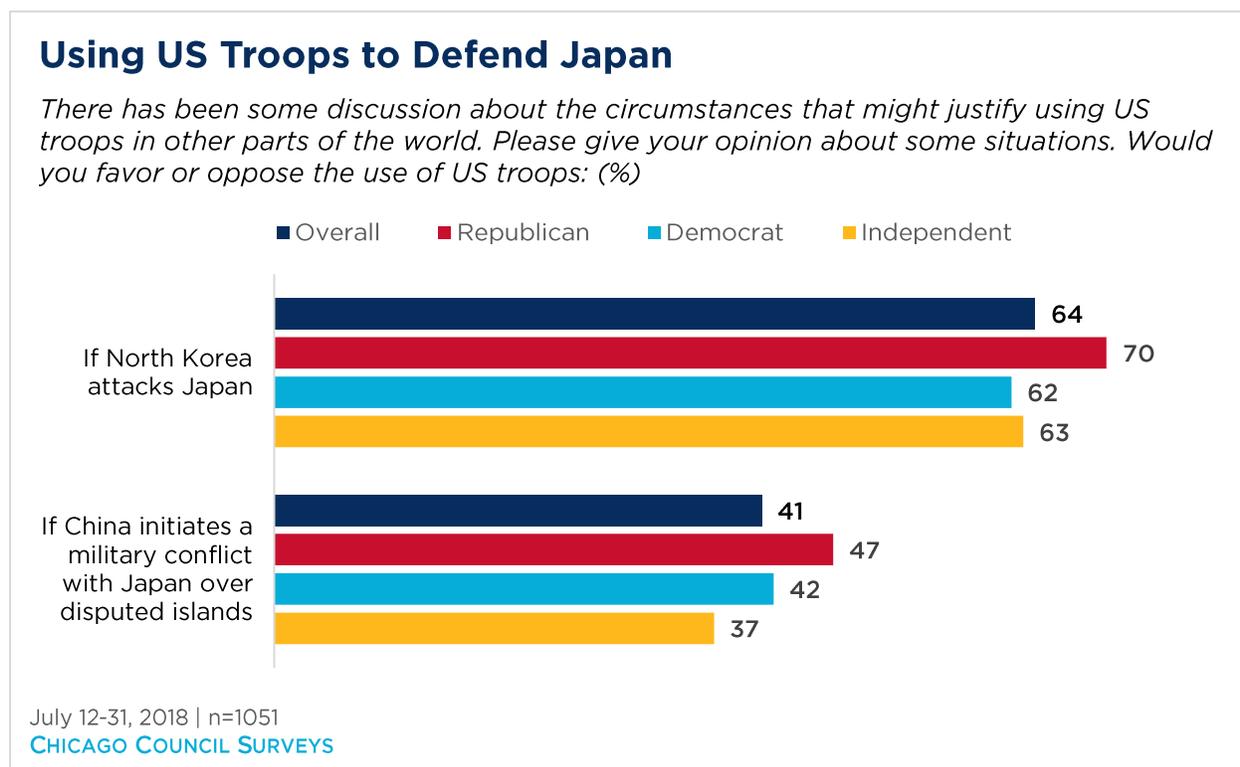
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## Public Supports Defending Japan Against North Korea; Hesitant to Get Involved on Island Dispute with China

Of course, a key element in US relations with Japan are security assurances, which include commitments to defend Japan if attacked as well as maintaining long-term military bases in the country. For Japan, the most likely sources of conflict emanate from North Korea and China. However, the American public reacts differently to scenarios identifying each of these countries as a potential aggressor.

The public's support for the use of US troops to defend Japan from a North Korean attack has risen sharply in recent years. Today, two in three Americans (64%) say they would support using US troops if North Korea attacks Japan, with majorities of Republicans (70%), Democrats (62%), and Independents (63%) in agreement. This represents a significant increase from 2015, when the question was first asked. Then, only half of Americans (49%) supported the use of US troops to defend Japan.

However, notably fewer support US military involvement in the case of China initiating a military conflict with Japan over disputed islands. Only four in ten Americans (41%), and minorities of all partisan groups, favor the use of US troops in this scenario.



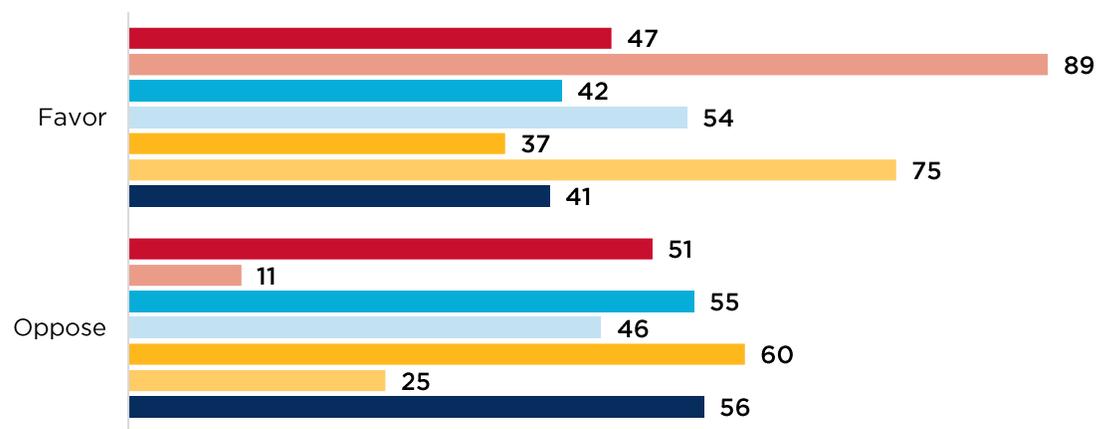
While the overall American public is hesitant to involve itself in a conflict between China and Japan over disputed islands, American foreign policy opinion leaders are more willing to commit US troops to this conflict. In a new Chicago Council on Global Affairs—University of Texas National Security Network survey of foreign policy

opinion leaders,<sup>1</sup> nearly nine in ten Republican leaders (89%), and three in four Independent leaders (75%), say they favor the use of US troops in such a scenario. Democratic leaders are more divided, but a narrow majority (54%) support US involvement as well.

## US Involvement in China-Japan Conflict

*There has been some discussion about the circumstances that might justify using US troops in other parts of the world. Would you favor or oppose the use of US troops: If China initiates a military conflict with Japan over disputed islands (%)*

■ Republican public    
 ■ Republican leaders    
 ■ Democrat public    
 ■ Democrat leaders  
■ Independent public    
■ Independent leaders    
■ Overall public



Leaders: Aug. 2 - Oct. 16, 2018 | n=588

Public: July 12-31, 2018 | n=1051

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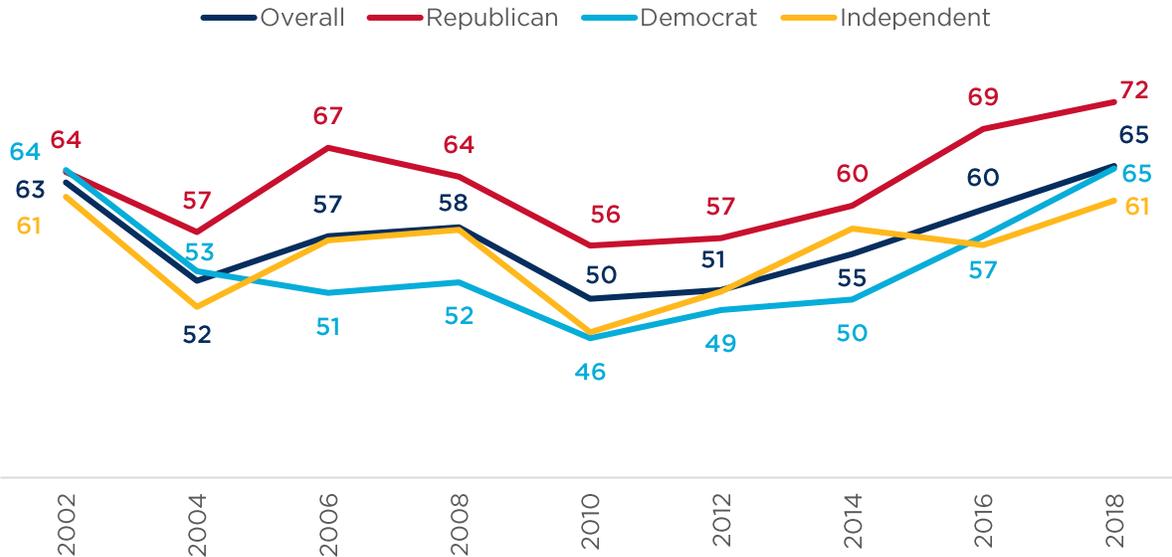
## Highest Recorded Level of American Support for US Bases in Japan

American support for long-term US military bases in Japan has been on the rise since 2010, and this year has reached an all-time recorded high: 65 percent of Americans say the US should have bases in Japan. This rise in support has occurred across partisan lines, with majorities of Republicans (72%), Democrats (65%), and Independents (61%) all backing US bases in Japan. This support extends to American opinion leaders: large majorities of Republican (86%), Democratic (83%), and Independent (75%) leaders support US bases in Japan.

<sup>1</sup> For methodological details on the opinion leader survey, please see the Appendix.

## US Bases in Japan

Do you think the United States should or should not have long-term military bases in the following places? **Japan** (% should have)



July 12-31, 2018 | n=2046

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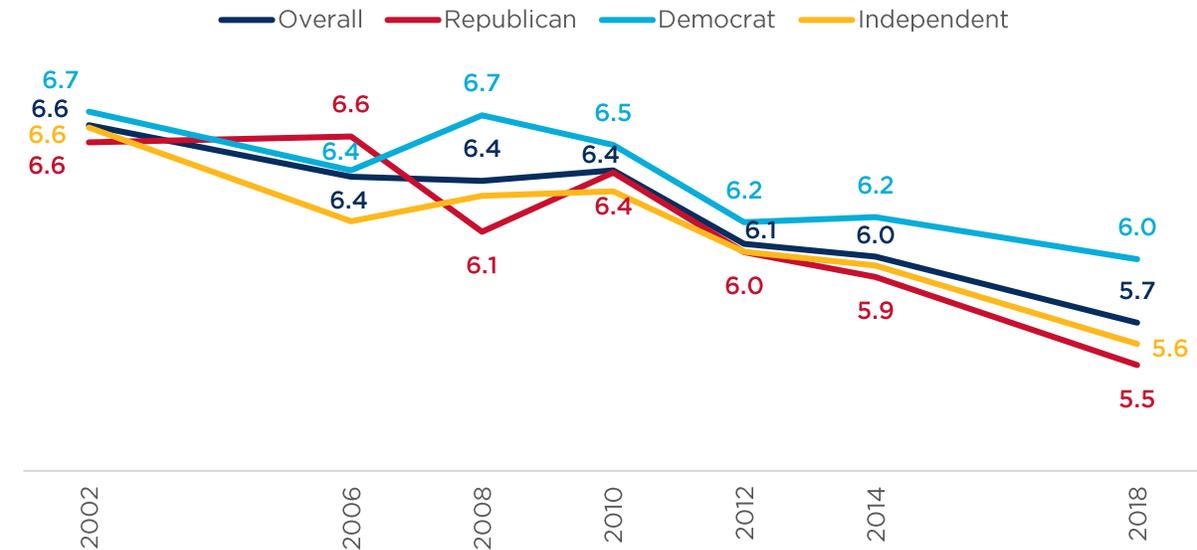
## Americans See Japanese Influence on the Decline

While Americans have long viewed Japan warmly and seen it as an ally,<sup>2</sup> the public's rating of Japanese influence has declined notably over the past fifteen years. When asked to rate countries' influence in the world on a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 meaning they are not at all influential and 10 meaning they are extremely influential, Americans today rate Japan an average of 5.7. This is down nearly a full point from 2002, when Americans rated Japan an average of 6.6 out of 10. Views of that decline cross partisan lines, though today Democrats (6.0) on average rate Japanese influence more highly than Republicans (5.5) or Independents (5.6).

<sup>2</sup> See Friedhoff and Kafura, [American Views toward US-Japan Relations and Asia-Pacific Security](#), April 18, 2018.

## Japanese Influence in the World

*I would like to know how much influence you think each of the following countries has in the world. Please answer on a 0 to 10 scale; with 0 meaning they are not at all influential and 10 meaning they are extremely influential. Japan (mean score)*



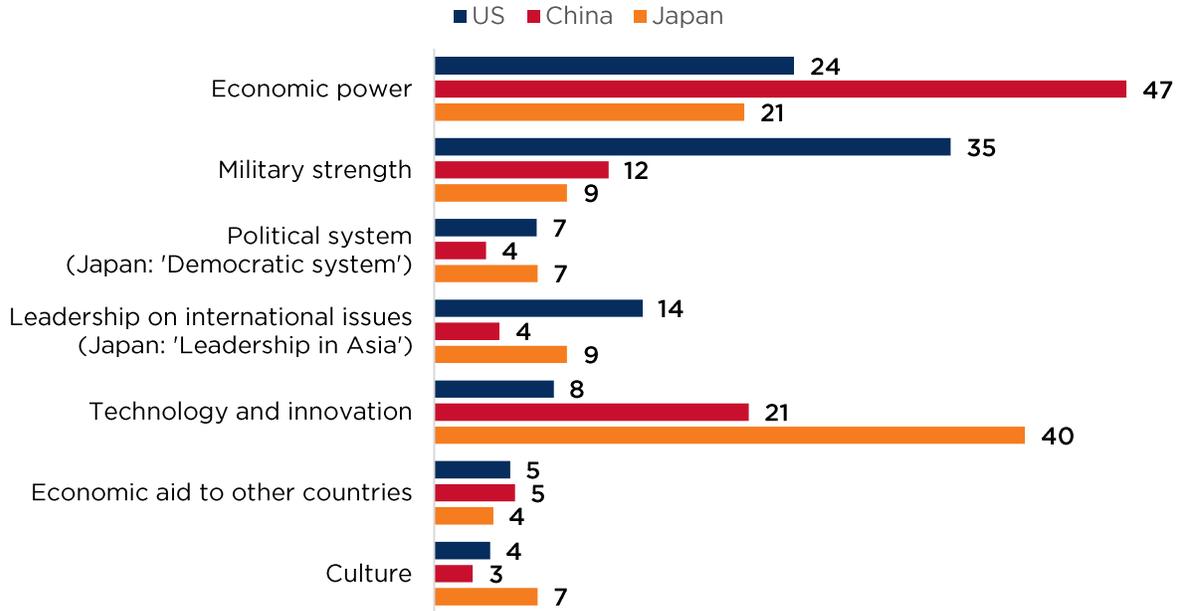
July 12-31, 2018 | n=2046

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When asked about the sources of Japanese influence, Americans point primarily to Japan's technology and innovation. According to a February/March 2018 Chicago Council Survey, 40 percent of Americans name this as the most important factor in determining Japan's influence in the world today. When asked about US influence, Americans point to US military strength (35%) and economic power (24%), with few citing American technology and innovation. Americans are more likely to point to technology in explaining Chinese influence abroad (21%), but the most important factor Americans see in Chinese influence is China's economic power (47%).

## Sources of Influence

Among the following, which do you think are the two most important in determining [the United States'/China's/Japan's] influence in the world today? (% most important)



Japan: Feb. 20-Mar. 6, 2018 | n=1037

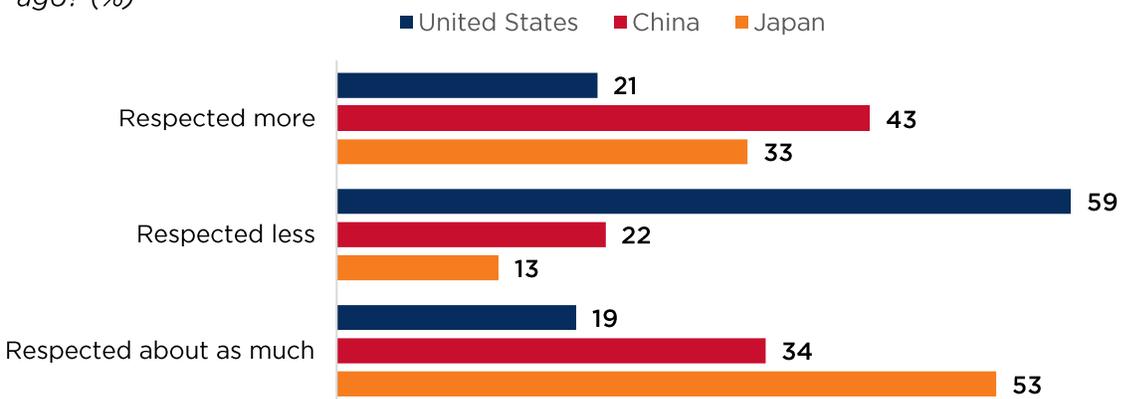
US/China: July 12-31, 2018 | n=2046

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Though Americans view Japanese influence as declining, they also see Japanese respect around the world as stable (53%) or even increasing (33%). At the same time, they see respect for the United States on the decline: 59 percent say the United States is respected less now than it was ten years ago, while 21 percent say the United States is more respected.

## Respect in the World

Do you think that the following countries are respected more in the world today than they were ten years ago, are respected less, or are respected about as much now as ten years ago? (%)



July 12-31, 2018 | n=1035

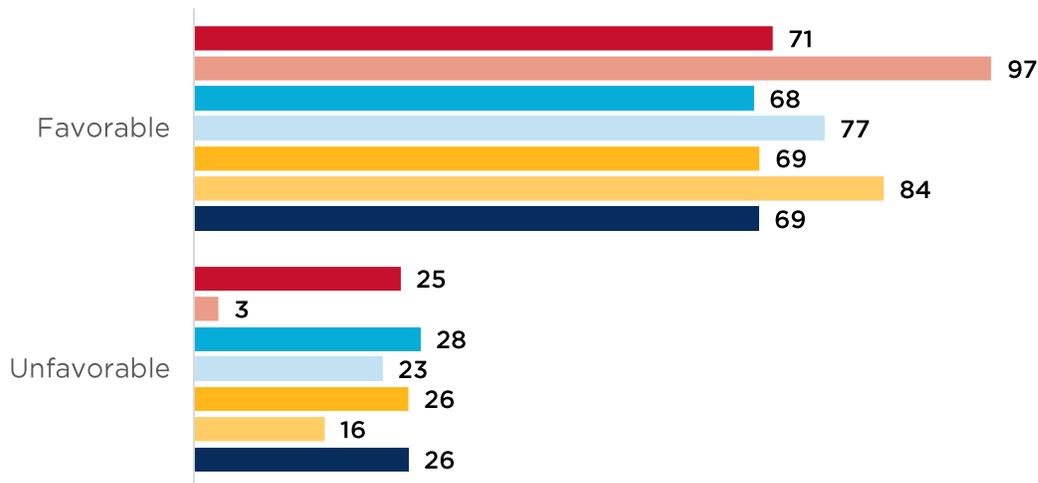
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In addition to seeing Japan retaining global respect, Americans have a fairly warm view of long-serving Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. A majority of the public (69%) says they have a favorable view of PM Abe, including majorities of Republicans (71%), Democrats (68%), and Independents (69%). American foreign policy opinion leaders hold the Japanese Prime Minister in even higher esteem, with large majorities of Democrats (77%) and Independents (84%)—and an overwhelming 97 percent of Republican leaders—holding a favorable view.

## Views of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe

*Do you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable view of the following world leaders? Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe*

■ Republican public    
 ■ Republican leaders    
 ■ Democrat public    
 ■ Democrat leaders  
■ Independent public    
■ Independent leaders    
■ Overall public



Leaders: Aug. 2 - Oct. 16, 2018 | n=588  
 Public: July 12-31, 2018 | n=2046

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## Methodology

The analysis in this report is based on data from the 2018 Chicago Council Survey of the American public on foreign policy, a project of the Lester Crown Center on US Foreign Policy. The 2018 Chicago Council Survey was conducted by GfK Custom Research using their large-scale, nationwide online research panel July 12-31, 2018 among a weighted national sample of 2,046 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. The margin of sampling error for the full sample is  $\pm 2.37$ , including a design effect of 1.1954. The margin of error is higher for partisan subgroups or for partial-sample items.

Partisan identification is based on respondents' answer to a standard partisan self-identification question: "Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?"

Additional results come from the 2018 Chicago Council-University of Texas Opinion Leaders Survey. The leadership survey was conducted August 2 to October 16, 2018 among 588 foreign policy opinion leaders from executive branch agencies, Congress, academia, think tanks, the media, interest groups and NGOs, religious institutions, labor unions and business. To more closely reflect the composition of previous Chicago Council opinion leader surveys, these data have been weighted by target sample group to reflect the proportional representation of leader groupings within previous leader samples. More results, and details on the survey, will be forthcoming.

Finally, some results come from a survey conducted by GfK Custom Research using their large-scale, nationwide online research panel between February 20 and March 6, 2018 among a weighted national sample of 1,037 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. The margin of error is  $\pm 3.2$  percentage points with a design effect of 1.1328.

The 2018 Chicago Council Survey is made possible by the generous support of the Crown family, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the US-Japan Foundation, the Korea Foundation, and the Robert R. McCormick Foundation.

### **About the Chicago Council on Global Affairs**

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