

In Tariffs Debate, Gen Z and Millennials Favor Lower Prices and More Choices

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Shortly after taking office in 2025, US President Donald Trump announced the [most extensive set of tariffs](#) since the 1930 Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act in a bid to reinvigorate the domestic economy and prioritize the American workforce. One year on, reports show the economic experiment has failed to materialize as promised: American businesses and consumers have absorbed [nearly 90 percent of 2025's import taxes](#), amounting to an average [\\$2,500 in tariff-related costs per household](#). Marred by high costs of living, inflation, and a tenuous job market, the current economic landscape has frustrated many Americans.

Data from the 2025 Chicago Council Survey, fielded July 18-30, finds the US public at large is at odds with the Trump administration's economic policy. But when it comes to how the United States should pursue its economic policies, a generational divide emerges that pits younger Americans' preference for open markets against older generations' instinct toward protectionism. Millennials and Generation Z are broadly supportive of globalization and international trade, prioritizing low prices and more choices over protecting American manufacturing, and do not view tariffs as an effective means to achieve the foreign policy goals of the United States. Such views have opened the door for political candidates offering alternative economic visions like 34-year-old Zohran Mamdani, whose message of affordability and economic relief heavily won him the vote of young Americans and the New York City mayoral race.

Key Findings

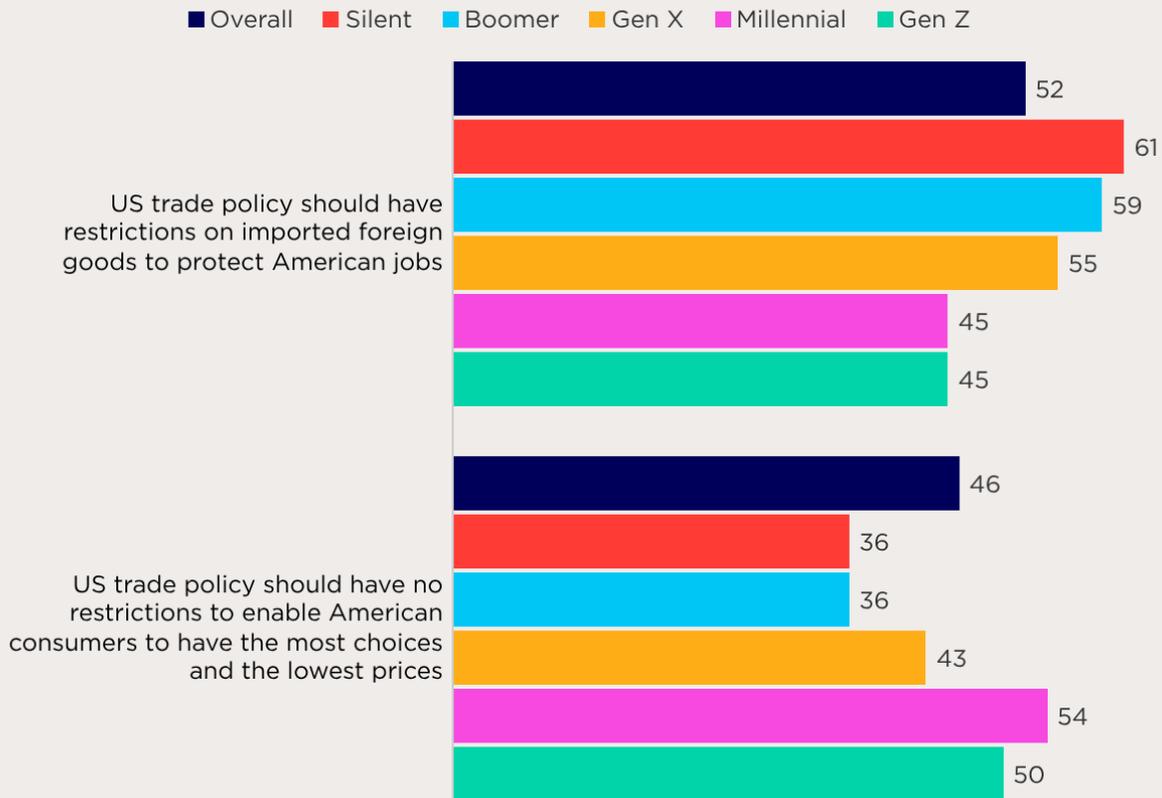
- Slim majorities of Millennials and Generation Z think US trade policy should have no trade restrictions to enable American consumers to have the most choices and the lowest prices (54% and 50%, respectively).
- Millennials and Generation Z are the least likely of all age groups to believe placing tariffs on other countries' goods is an effective approach to foreign policy (13% and 11%, respectively).
- Three-quarters of Millennials and Generation Z believe globalization is mostly good for the United States (75% and 76%, respectively).
- More than two-thirds of Millennials and Generation Z think trade between the United States and its top trading partners strengthens US national security—with the exception of Saudi Arabia and China, which are viewed more critically.

Millennials and Generation Z Want Lower Prices and More Choices

Millennials and Generation Z tend to think US trade policy should have no restrictions to give American consumers the most choices and the lowest prices (54% Millennials, 50% Generation Z). While most older Americans say they want a protectionist trade policy that places restrictions on imported foreign goods to protect American jobs (55-61%), data suggest Americans of all ages are growing weary of trade protectionism.

View of US Trade Policy

Generally speaking, do you think US trade policy should have restrictions on imported foreign goods to protect American jobs, or have no restrictions to enable American consumers to have the most choices and the lowest prices? (%)



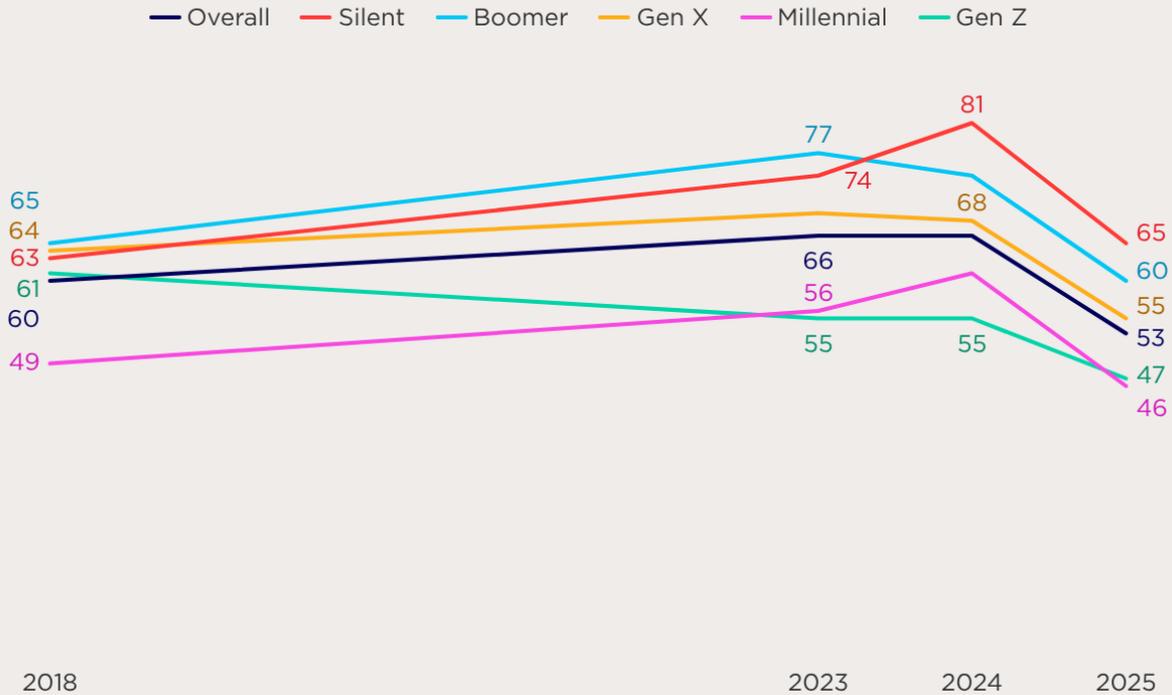
July 18-30, 2025 | n=2,148
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Americans across all generational cohorts have grown less likely to favor restricting foreign imports to protect employment since last year. This decline is most prominent among the Silent Generation (16 percentage point drop) and Millennials (15 percentage point drop).

Support For Import Restrictions

Generally speaking, do you think US trade policy should have restrictions on imported foreign goods to protect American jobs, or have no restrictions to enable American consumers to have the most choices and the lowest prices? (% should have restrictions)



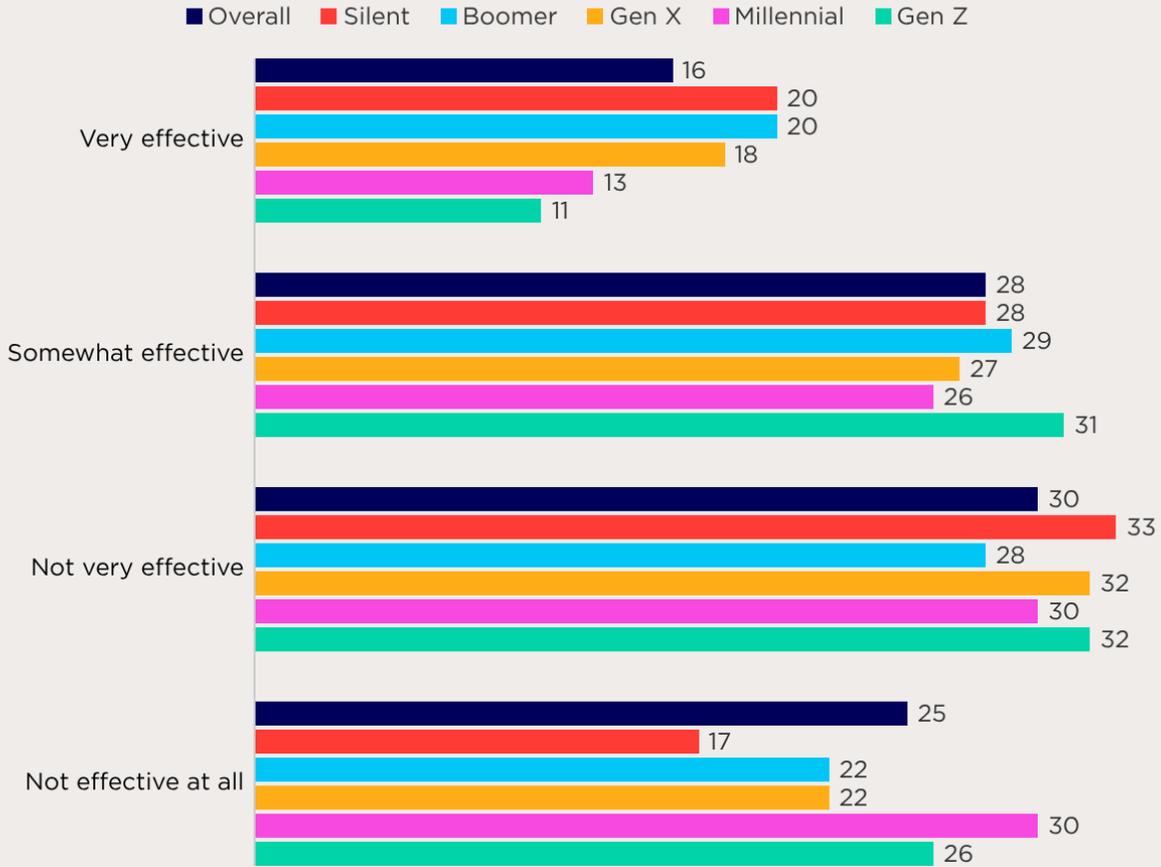
July 18-30, 2025 | n=2,148
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For many Americans, tariffs have also lost their luster, likely in response to rising household costs following Trump’s Liberation Day announcement and, more recently, the war in Iran. No more than half of Americans across generational cohorts consider placing tariffs against other countries’ goods an effective approach to achieve US foreign policy goals. In fact, Millennials and Generation Z are least likely to consider tariffs a very effective approach to US foreign policy (13% and 11%, respectively) and most likely to think they are very ineffective (30% and 26%, respectively). Their bleak view of tariffs as a foreign policy approach could be because young Americans often bear a [disproportionate share of the economic burden](#) from tariffs due to their consumption patterns and financial standing.

Efficacy of Placing Tariffs on Foreign Goods

How effective do you think each of the following approaches are to achieving the foreign policy goals of the United States? **Placing tariffs against other countries' goods** (%)



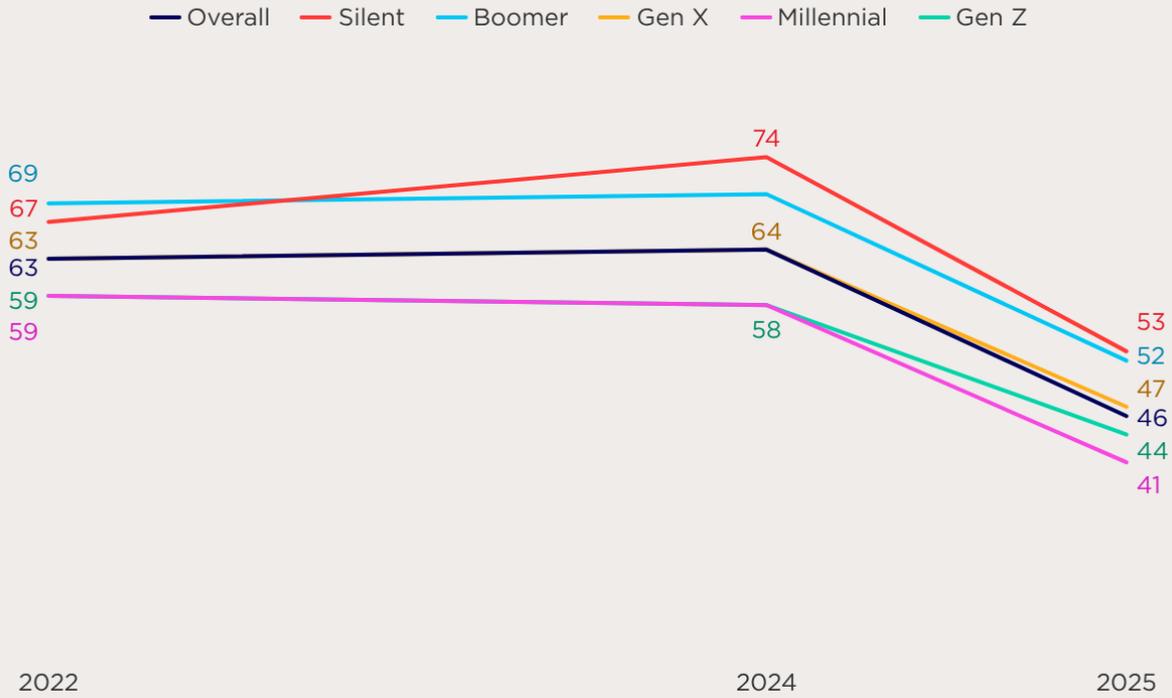
July 18-30, 2025 | n=2,148
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Still, confidence in tariffs has declined considerably among Americans of all ages. In 2024, two-thirds or more of the Silent Generation, Boomers, and Generation X felt placing tariffs against other countries' goods was an effective way to achieve US foreign policy goals. That level has since fallen to just half.

Decline in Tariff Efficacy

How effective do you think each of the following approaches are to achieving the foreign policy goals of the United States? **Placing tariffs against other countries' goods** (% somewhat + very effective)



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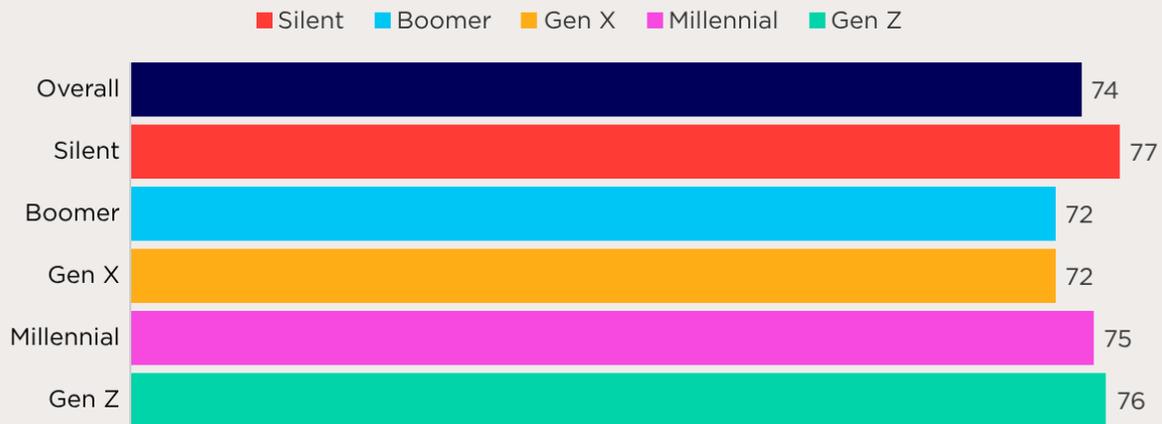


Young Americans See Globalization and Trade as Beneficial to the United States

Despite the turbulent shift in the United States' role in the global economy since Trump announced his Liberation Day tariffs, Americans remain steadfast in their support for globalization. Overall, Americans tend to see increased economic connections as mostly good for the United States (74%). There is further consensus across generations that globalization benefits the United States, with three-quarters of Millennials and Generation Z in agreement.

View of Globalization

Do you believe that globalization, especially the increasing connections of our economy with others around the world, is mostly good or mostly bad for the United States? (% mostly good)



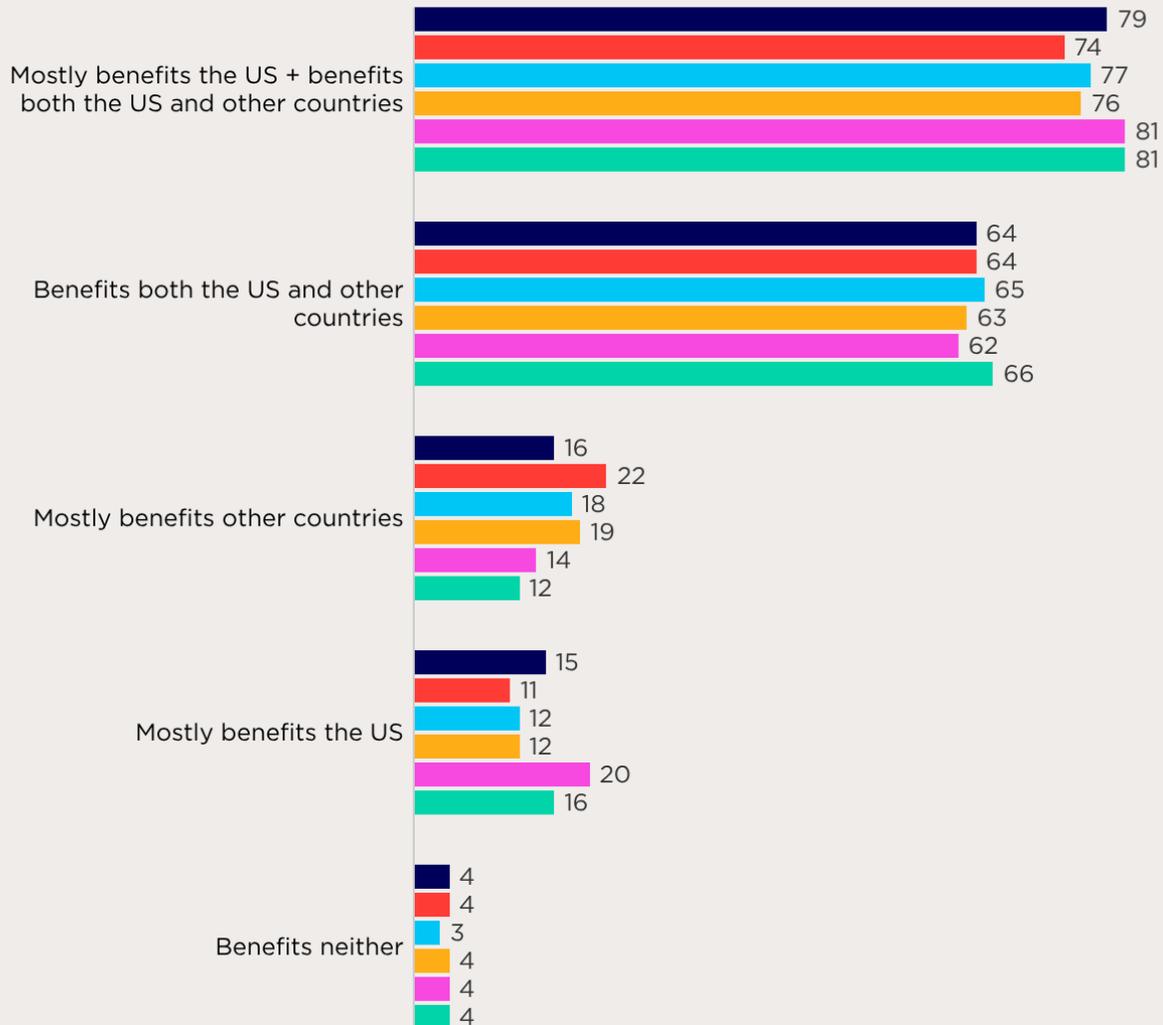
July 18-30, 2025 | n=1,333
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Majorities of young Americans also agree with their elders that international trade benefits both the United States and other countries equally (62% Millennials, 66% Generation Z). However, older Americans are more likely to think other countries receive more benefits from trade than the United States (22% Silent, 18% Boomer, 19% Generation X vs. 14% Millennial, 12% Generation Z). These findings suggest older Americans are more sympathetic than younger Americans to the Trump administration's argument that other countries have disproportionately benefitted from—or even taken advantage of—the United States' openness to international trade.

Distribution of Trade Benefits

Which of the following comes closest to your view on trade between the United States and other countries? Does it: (%)



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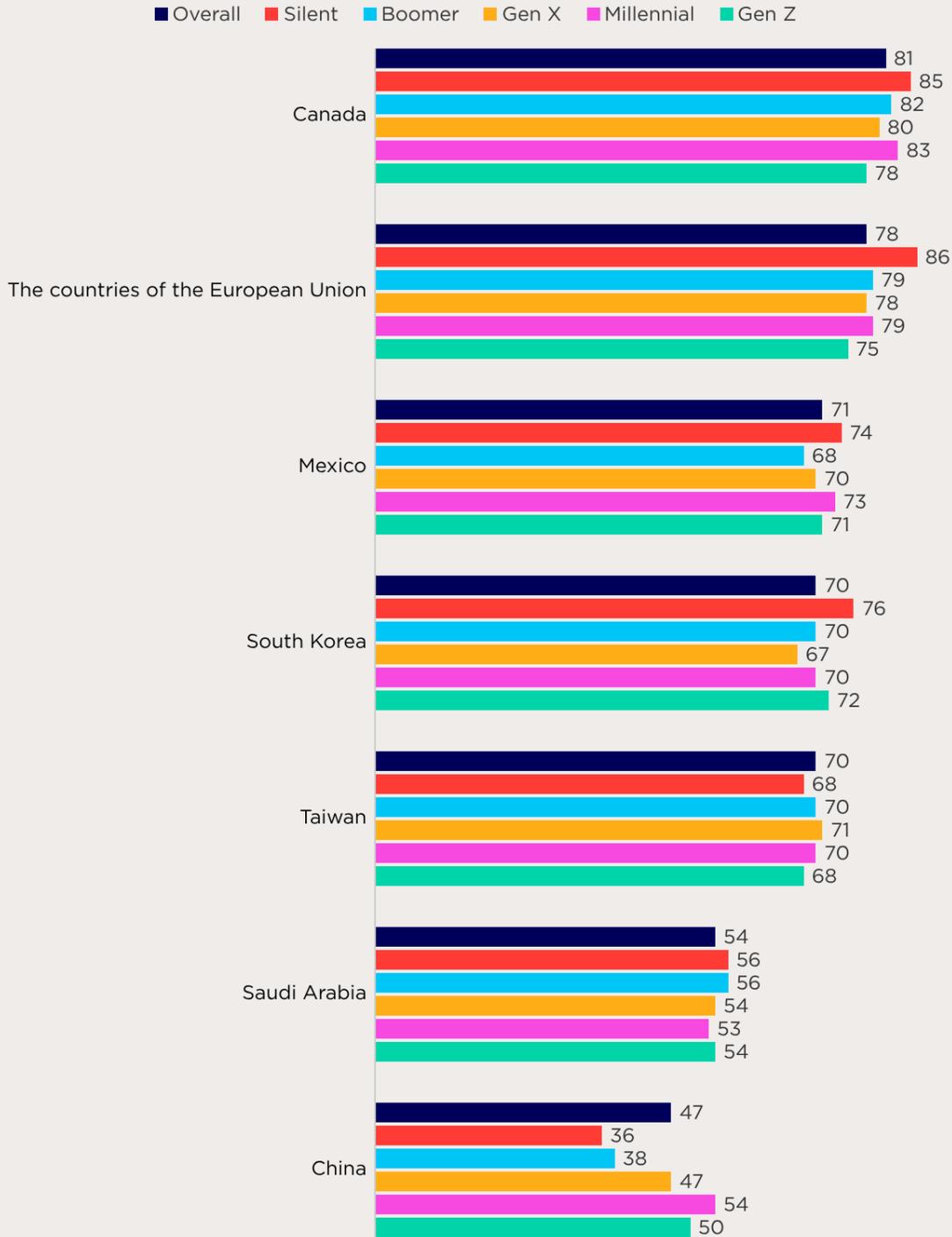
With the exception of Saudi Arabia and China, more than two-thirds of Americans across all generational cohorts think the United States' trade relationships bolster US national security. Millennials and Generation Z also see trade between the United States and top trading partners—like Canada, Mexico, and the European Union—as strengthening US national security. While fewer Americans view the US-Saudi trade partnership as strengthening US

national security, slim majorities across age groups still consider it a value add.

Consensus breaks down when it comes to China: Millennials and Generation Z are divided on whether trade with China strengthens US national security or weakens it, while majorities of older generations believe the US-China trade relationship weakens it (60% Silent, 56% Boomer). In general, young Americans view China more warmly than older generations (see appendix table 1).

Effect of Trade on National Security

Does trade between the US and the following countries do more to strengthen US national security or weaken US national security? (% more to strengthen)



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Conclusion

Millennials and Generation Z have come of age in an interconnected and interdependent world, and their views on trade reflect that reality. In their eyes, globalization and free trade are not threats to their jobs, but assets to improve their standards of living and reduce the cost of goods. Skepticism of the Trump administration’s use of tariffs as a foreign policy tool among Millennials and Generation Z is not simply a reaction to rising prices, but an expression of a worldview that sees economic cooperation as a source of strength, not vulnerability.

Appendix

Question 45

Q45. Please rate your feelings toward some countries, with one hundred meaning a very warm, favorable feeling, zero meaning a very cold, unfavorable feeling, and fifty meaning not particularly warm or cold. You can use any number from zero to one hundred, the higher the number the more favorable your feelings are toward that country.

Q45. Feelings toward China (mean)					
	Silent	Boomer	Gen X	Millennial	Gen Z
China	33	30	32	40	41

Methodology

This analysis is primarily based on data from the 2025 Chicago Council Survey of the American public on foreign policy, a project of the Lester Crown Center on US Foreign Policy.

The 2025 Chicago Council Survey was conducted July 18–30, 2025, by Ipsos using its large-scale, nationwide, online research panel (KnowledgePanel) in English and Spanish among a weighted national sample of 2,148 adults 18 or older living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. The margin of sampling error for the full sample is ±2.2 percentage points, including a design effect of 1.07.

The 2025 Chicago Council Survey was made possible by the generous support of the Crown family and the Korea Foundation.

The data for the total sample were weighted to adjust for gender by age, race/ethnicity, education, Census region, metropolitan status, and household

income using demographic benchmarks from the 2024 March Supplement of the Current Population Survey (CPS). The specific categories used were:

- Gender (Male, Female) by Age (18–29, 30–44, 45–59, and 60+)
- Race/Hispanic Ethnicity (White Non-Hispanic, Black Non-Hispanic, Other Non-Hispanic, Hispanic, 2+ Races Non-Hispanic)
- Education (Less than High School, High School, Some College, Bachelor or Higher)
- Census Region (Northeast, Midwest, South, West)
- Metropolitan status (Metro, non-Metro)
- Household Income (Under \$25,000, \$25,000–\$49,999, \$50,000–\$74,999, \$75,000–\$99,999, \$100,000–\$149,999, \$150,000+)

About the Chicago Council on Global Affairs

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About the Lester Crown Center on US Foreign Policy

Established in 2018 with a transformative gift from the Crown Family, the Lester Crown Center on US Foreign Policy is driven by the belief that the public plays a critical role in determining the direction of US foreign policy and that an informed and engaged public is critical for effective policymaking. The centerpiece of the Lester Crown Center is its annual survey of American public opinion and US foreign policy, the Chicago Council Survey, which has been conducted since 1974.