

Americans Say US Tariffs on China Have Been Bad for Both Nations

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This month, US President Donald Trump travels to Beijing for a summit with Chinese leader Xi Jinping. On the agenda: the still-simmering trade tensions between the world's two largest economies, which have been exacerbated by the ongoing global economic challenges resulting from the US war with Iran. Two Chicago Council-NPR-Ipsos surveys, conducted in the United States March 13-15 and May 1-3, 2026, find that Americans see tariffs on Chinese imports as having been bad for both sides. Majorities say they would favor a deal that lowers tariffs in exchange for larger agricultural goods purchases by China. And though MAGA Republicans view the US tariff policy as a success, other Republicans sharply disagree—pointing to future splits in the party on the US approach to China.

Key Findings

- Americans see tariffs on Chinese imports as a lose-lose: Majorities say they have been bad for the Chinese (72%) and the US (66%) economies.
- In the public's estimation, the greater threat to the United States from China is its growing economic power (56%) rather than its growing military power (29%).
- Most Americans (78%) say China wants to play a dominant role in the world—though only 41 percent of Chinese agree, per a 2025 Chicago Council-Carter Center poll.
- By a five-to-two margin, more Americans consider China a rival (37%) or adversary (21%) than an ally (2%) or necessary partner (18%).
- Republicans are internally divided on China policy, especially the effects of the tariffs: While MAGA Republicans back the Trump tariffs, non-MAGA Republicans consider them to be bad for the United States and the cost of living at home.

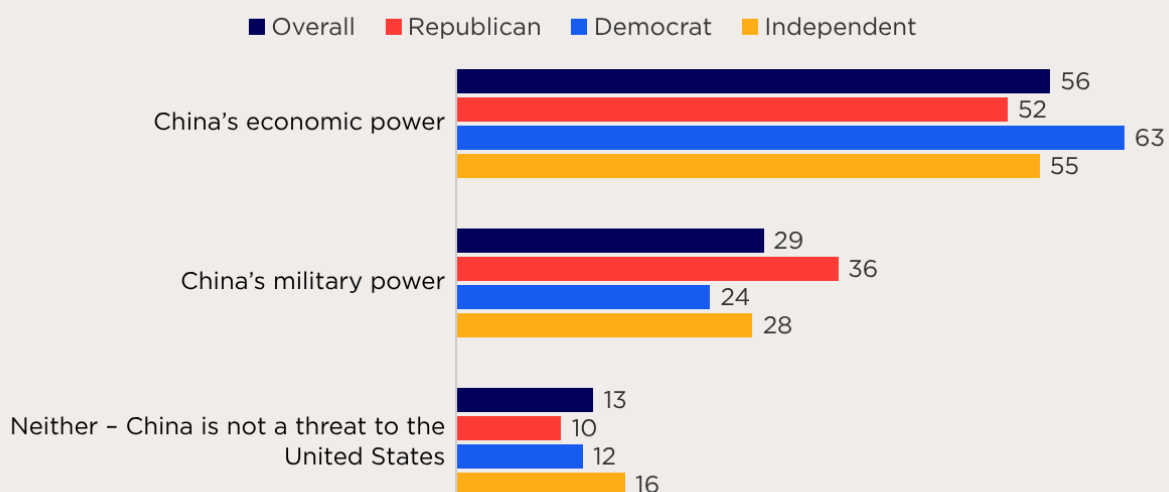
Americans Primarily Concerned About Threat of China's Economic Power

As a peer competitor with the second-largest economy and the second-highest level of military spending, China presents both economic and military challenges to the United States. But at present, the American public is most concerned about Beijing's economic clout: A majority say that China's growing economic power (56%) is a greater threat to the United States than China's growing military power (29%). Another 13 percent say that China is not a threat to the United States.

The focus on China's economic power holds across party lines, with six in 10 Democrats (63%) and majorities of Independents (55%) and Republicans (52%) in agreement that China's growing economic power poses the greater threat to the United States. However, Republicans are the partisan group most likely to see China's growing military power as the greater threat to the United States (36%, vs. 28% of Independents and 24% of Democrats). As prior Council polls have found, Republicans are also generally more likely to view the rise of China as a threat. In the [2025 Chicago Council Survey](#), two-thirds of Republicans (66%)—compared to half of Americans overall and 44 percent of Democrats and Independents—said the development of China as a world power represented a critical threat to the United States.

Greater Threat: China's Economic or Military Power?

Which do you think is a greater threat to the United States, China's growing economic power or China's growing military power? (%)

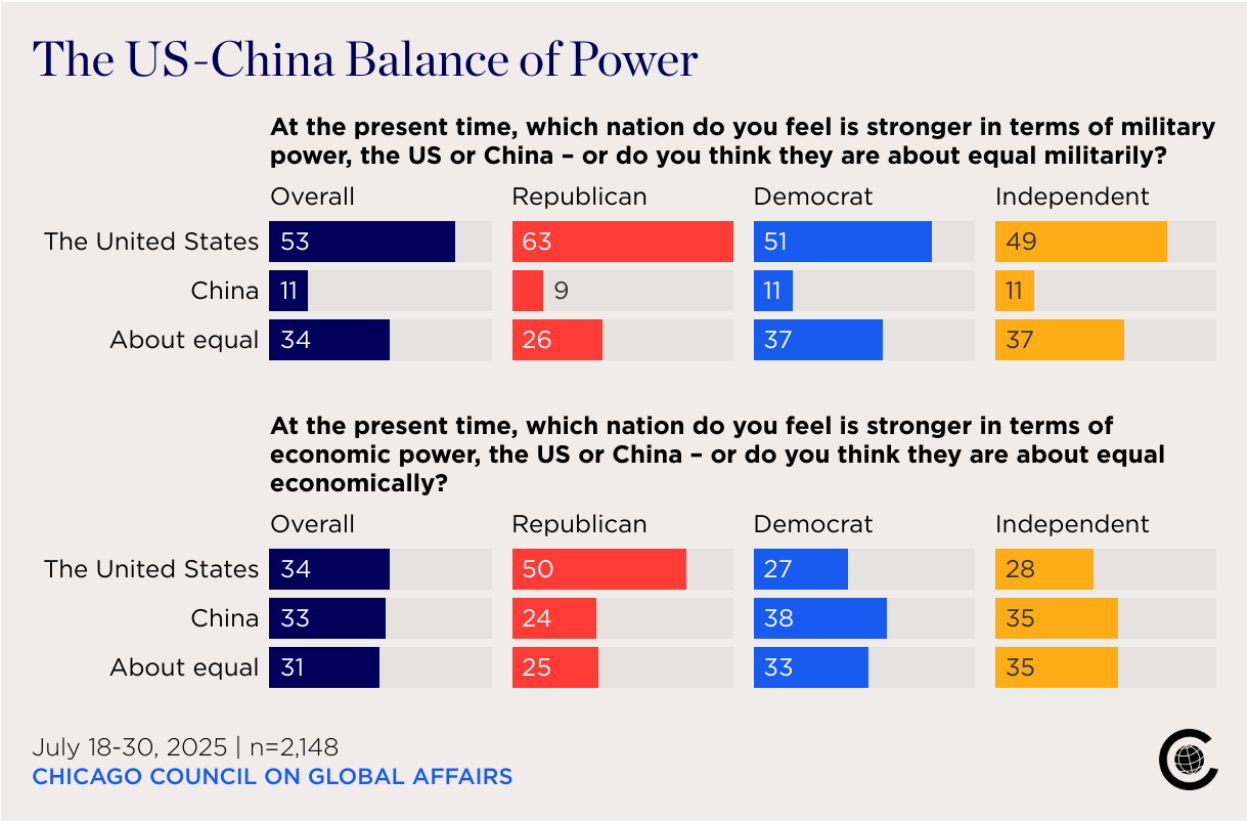


March 13-15, 2026 | n=1,025

CHICAGO COUNCIL ON GLOBAL AFFAIRS / NPR / IPSOS



One reason Americans may be more concerned by China’s economic might: They are more likely to see China as an equal in economic power than military power. According to the 2025 Chicago Council Survey, Americans are evenly split in their evaluation of the economic balance of power: A third (34%) see the United States as the stronger economic power, another third (33%) see China as stronger, and three in 10 (31%) see the two nations as about equally matched.

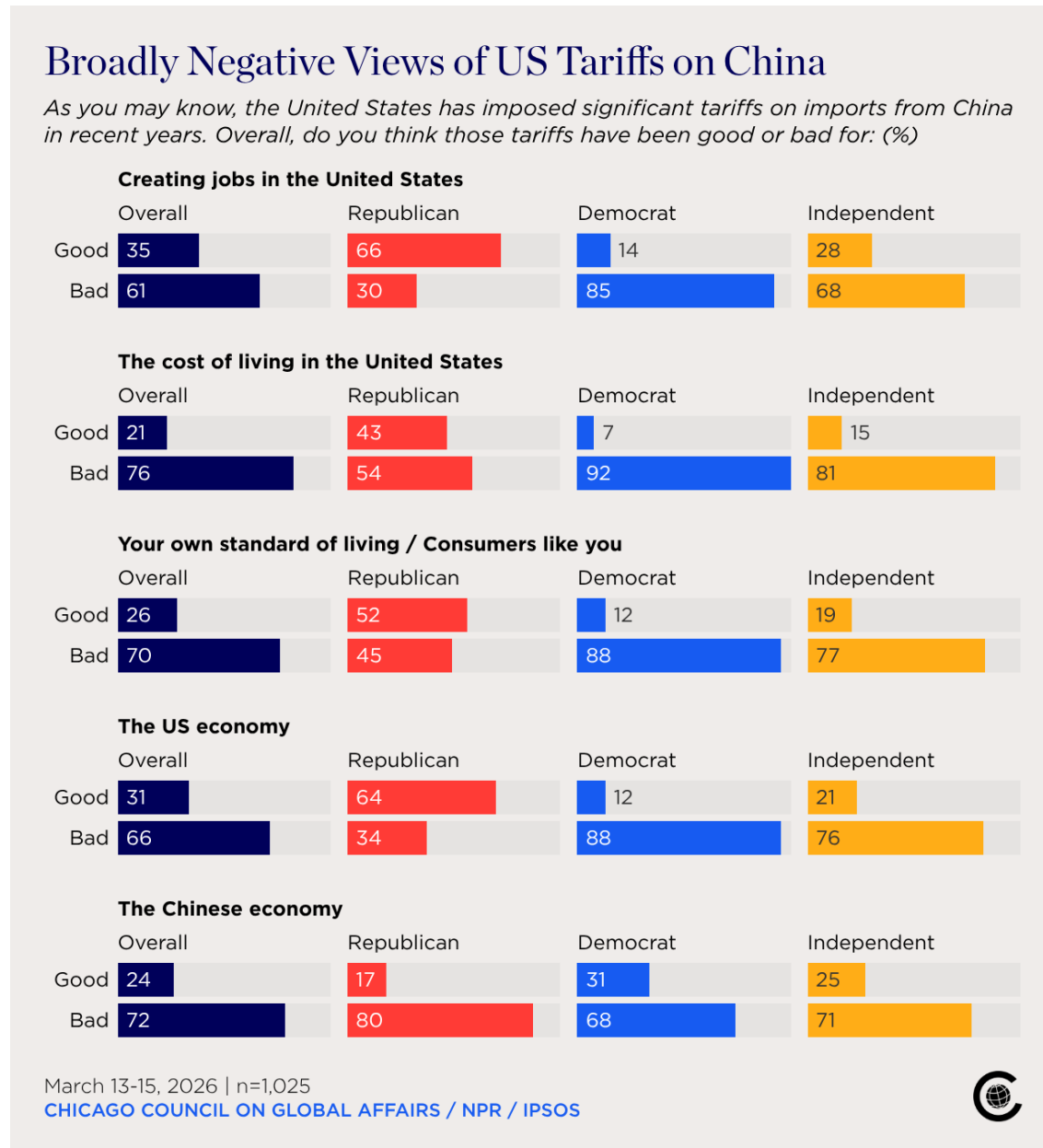


Americans See US Tariffs on China as a Lose-Lose Proposition

One approach the United States has taken to curb China’s growing economic power—and to lessen US reliance on Chinese supply chains—has been the use of tariffs. Initially imposed under the first Trump administration, sustained by the Biden administration, and expanded further in Trump’s second term, these tariffs have been a significant point of tension in the US-China relationship. While tariffs today have fallen from their 2025 peaks—at one point [reaching a whopping 145 percent](#)—the additional costs of exports have hurt Chinese firms that export to the United States.

Americans think the tariffs have been bad for the Chinese economy (72%). But majorities also say that the tariffs have also been bad for creating jobs in the United States (61%), for the US economy (66%), for their own standard of

living and consumers like them (70%), and for the cost of living in the United States (76%).

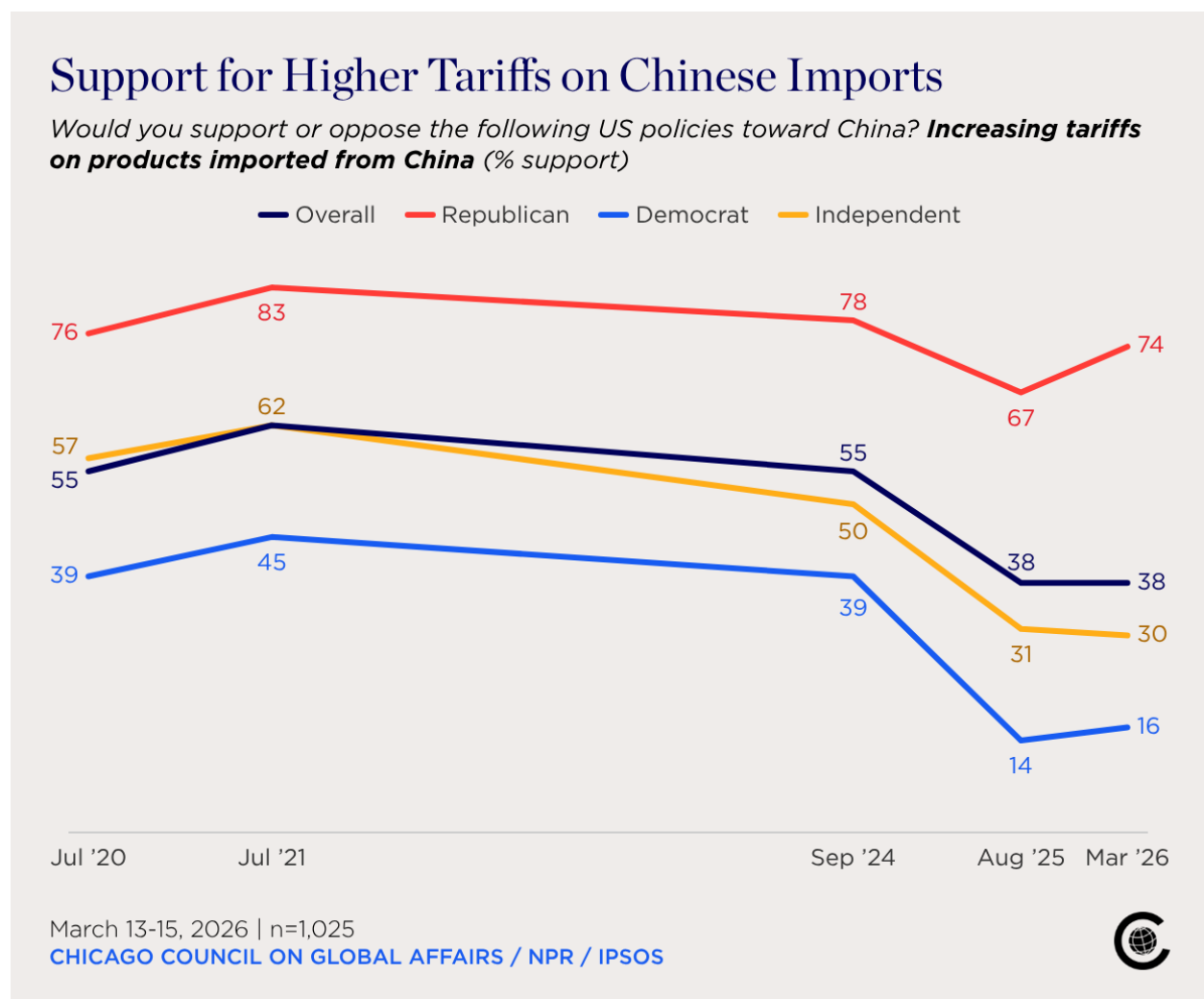


Democrats and Independents are largely aligned in their deeply negative evaluations of the effects of US tariffs on China. At least two-thirds say that tariffs are bad for each of the affected areas asked about. They are particularly negative when it comes to core cost concerns: 92 percent of Democrats and 81 percent of Independents say tariffs on Chinese imports have been bad for the cost of living in the United States.

Republicans are more positive, but not across the board. Two-thirds say that the tariffs have been good for creating jobs in the United States (66%) and the US economy (64%). And eight in 10 Republicans view the tariffs as having been bad for the Chinese economy. But they are divided on the impact to consumers like them and their own cost of living (52% good, 45% bad). Republicans are also on the negative side of the ledger when asked about the tariffs' impact on the US cost of living (43% good, 54% bad).

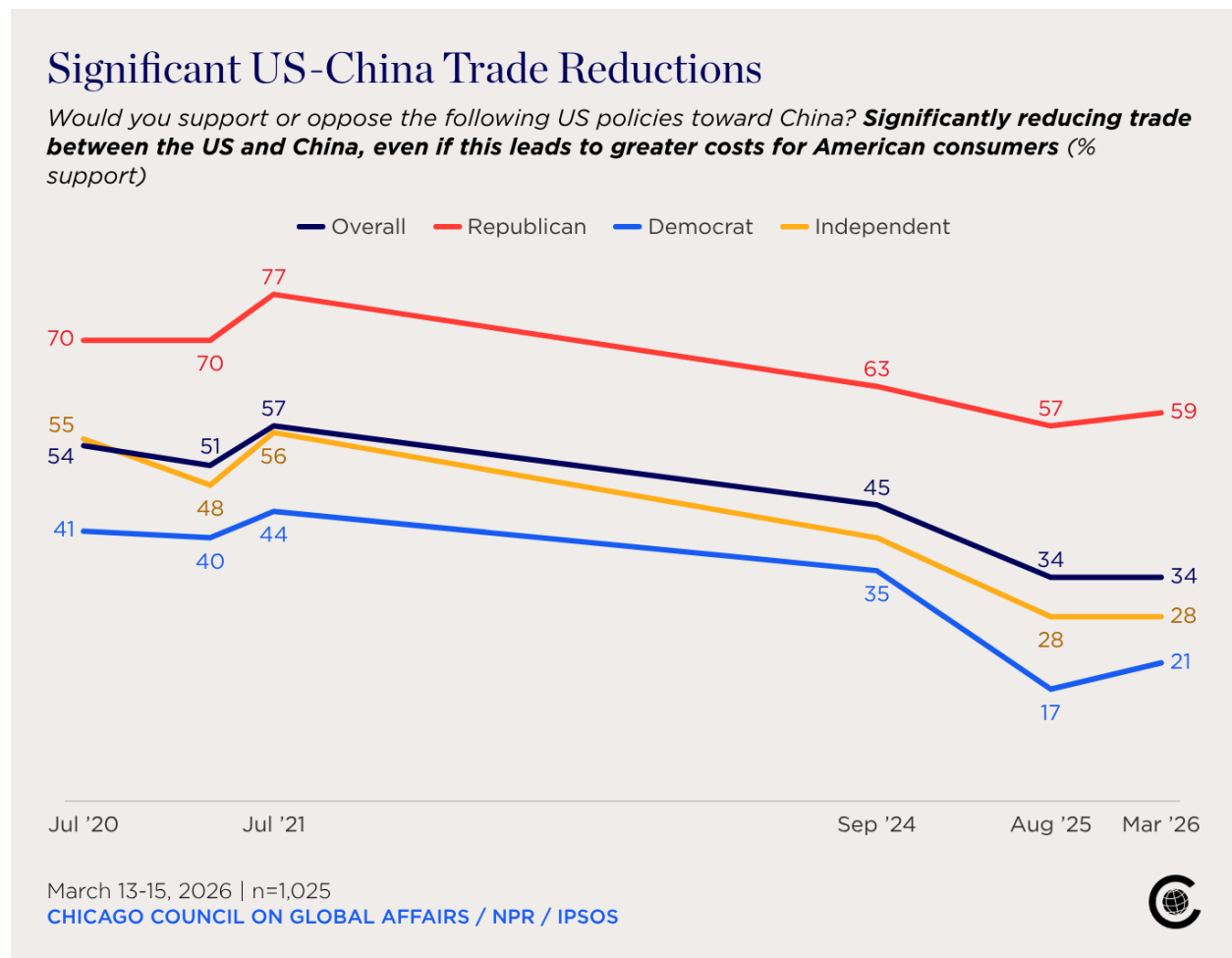
Majority of Americans Oppose Higher Tariffs on Chinese Imports

Matching their views of the effects of US tariffs on China thus far, support for increasing tariffs on Chinese imports has dramatically fallen in the past year. In the fall of 2024, a majority of Americans (55%) favored higher tariffs on China. Today, support has fallen to 38 percent, including three in 10 Independents (30%) and 16 percent of Democrats. By contrast, Republican support has rebounded in recent months (74%, up from 67% in August 2025).



Most Oppose Significant US-China Trade Reductions

Support for broader reductions in US-China trade also remains low, and far below the majority support seen five years ago. Today just a third of Americans (34%) favor broad reductions in trade, down from 57 percent in 2021. A majority of Republicans (59%) continue to support this kind of broad cut in US-China trade, compared to minorities of Independents (28%) and Democrats (21%). Over the past five years, support has fallen across partisan lines, with Independents declining the most—28 percentage points from their peak in 2021.



Partisan Agreement on a Trade Deal with China, Tech Export Restrictions

Given American views of how US tariffs on Chinese imports have played out, the public is open to a trade deal with Beijing that lowers US tariffs. Seven in 10 Americans (72%) support a deal with China that reduces tariffs on Chinese imports in exchange for more Chinese purchases of US agricultural exports,

including large majorities of Democrats (77%), Independents (74%), and Republicans (70%).

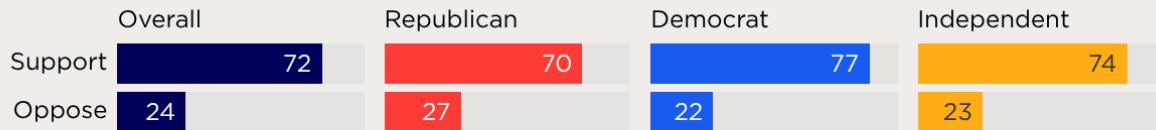
The public also continues to support prohibiting US companies from selling sensitive high-tech products to China (69%, similar to 2025 findings). These prohibitions are popular across partisan groups: Republicans overwhelmingly favor such restrictions (87%), while two-thirds of Independents (65%) and six in 10 Democrats (61%) support them as well. Despite this broad bipartisan view, the Trump administration—in contrast to the Biden administration—[has been more willing](#) to allow some sales of US high technology products to Beijing. The most high-profile example thus far has been the decision to allow NVIDIA’s advanced H200 chips to be sold to customers in China—though due to restrictions on the Chinese side, those sales [have yet to materialize](#).

Partisan Divisions on US-China Policies

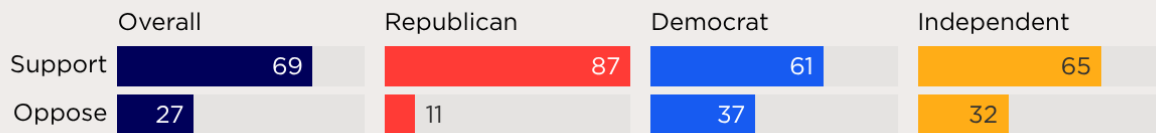
Would you support or oppose the following US policies towards China? (% support)

■ Overall ■ Republican ■ Democrat ■ Independent

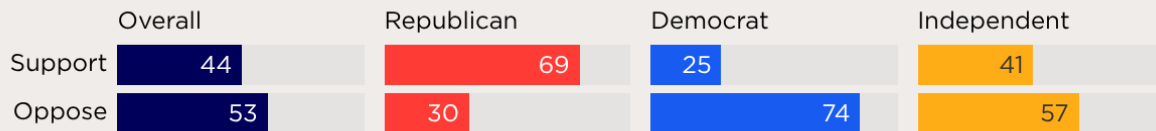
Reducing tariffs on Chinese imports in exchange for China purchasing more US agricultural exports



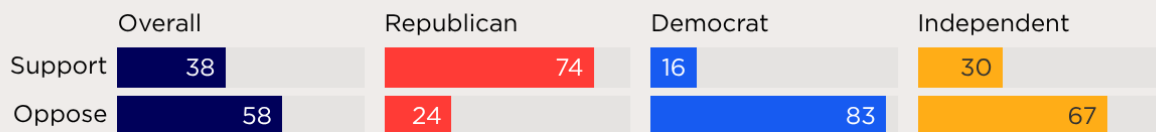
Prohibiting US companies from selling sensitive high-tech products to China



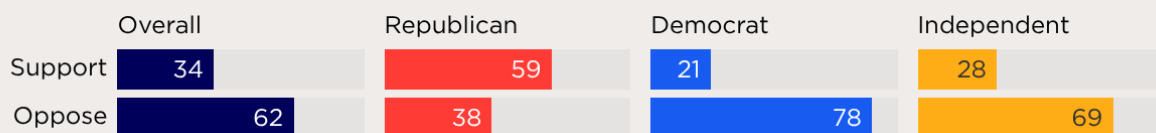
Limiting the number of Chinese students studying in the United States



Increasing tariffs on products imported from China



Significantly reducing trade between the US and China, even if this leads to greater costs for American consumers



March 13-15, 2026 | n=1,025

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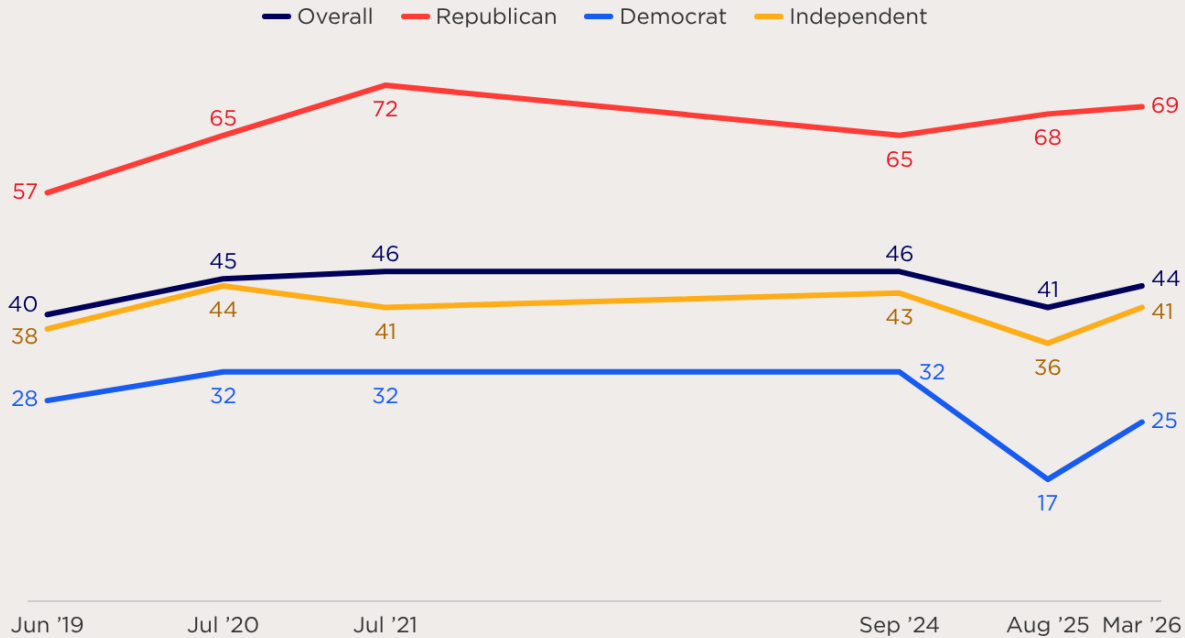
Republicans Support—and Other Americans Oppose—Limits on Chinese Students

Another major source of US-China exchange is in the educational sector. For over a decade between 2009 and 2024, China was the single-largest source of foreign students studying in the United States. After peaking in 2019 at nearly 370,000 students—a third of the total foreign student population—fewer and fewer young Chinese have come to study in the United States. Today China remains a major source of foreign students—over a quarter million, or 23 percent of the total—but the growing tensions between the two countries and a growing sense of anti-Chinese discrimination among recent students have reduced Chinese interest in studying in the United States. This may drop even more sharply in the coming years, as [recent data suggests](#) far fewer students are coming to the United States for their education.

Just over half of Americans (53%) oppose limiting the number of Chinese students studying in the United States, including three-quarters of Democrats (74%) and 57 percent of Independents. By contrast, seven in 10 Republicans (69%) favor limits on Chinese students. Over the past seven years, Republican support for imposing limits on the number of Chinese students in the United States has grown (from 57% in 2019 to 69% today). Democrats and Independents have remained opposed at consistent levels over the same period.

Restricting Chinese Students in the United States

Would you support or oppose the following US policies toward China? **Limiting the number of Chinese students studying in the United States** (% support)



March 13-15, 2026 | n=1,025

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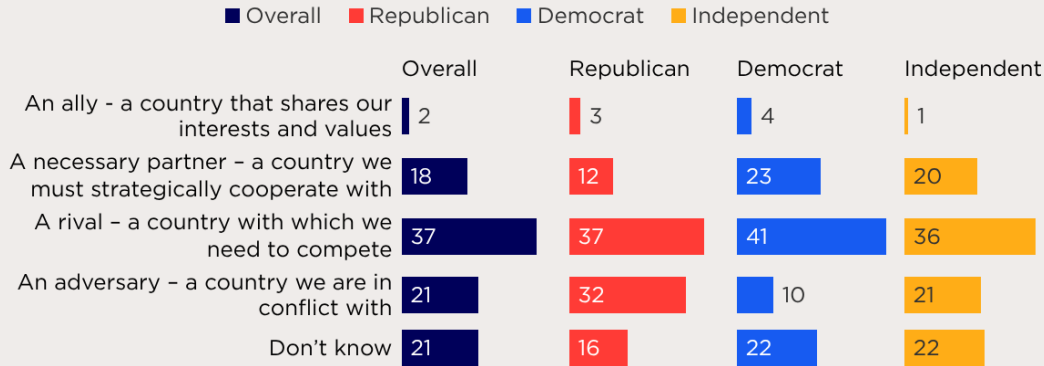
Most Americans View China as a Rival or Adversary to the United States

The July 2025 Chicago Council Survey found that American views of China had improved for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic. This survey reveals an additional softening in views. Most Americans tend to describe China as either a rival to compete with (37%, up from 31% in 2021) or an adversary in conflict with the United States (21%, down from 29%). Two in 10 (21%) say they don't know—and 18 percent view China as a necessary partner. Very few (2%) view China as an ally that shares US interests and values.

Across partisan lines, viewing China as a rival is the most common response, including similar proportions of Democrats (41%), Republicans (37%), and Independents (36%). Republicans (32%) are the most likely to describe China as an adversary—something few Democrats (10%) agree with—and Independents fall in between (21%). Conversely, while 23 percent of Democrats and 20 percent of Independents view China as a necessary partner, just 12 percent of Republicans agree.

Partisan Views of China

Generally speaking, which of following descriptions do you feel best reflects the relationship between the United States and the countries listed below? **China** (%)



March 13-15, 2026 | n=1,025

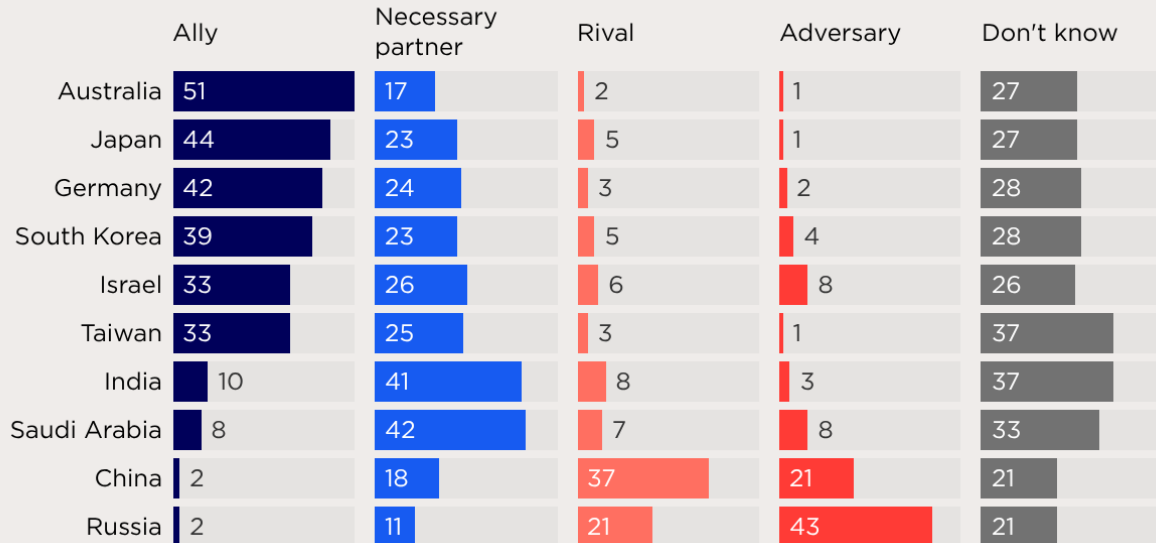
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And while Americans broadly see China as a rival or adversary, it is not the country most-viewed in these terms. That distinction falls to Russia: Four in 10 (43%) describe Russia as an adversary, and another two in 10 (21%) see the nation as a rival. On the other end of the spectrum, among the countries asked about, half of Americans (51%) view Australia as an ally that shares US values and interests, with four in 10 or more saying the same about other top US allies such as Japan (44%), Germany (42%), and South Korea (39%).

American Views of Other Nations

Generally speaking, which of following descriptions do you feel best reflects the relationship between the United States and the countries listed below? (%)



March 13-15, 2026 | n=1,025

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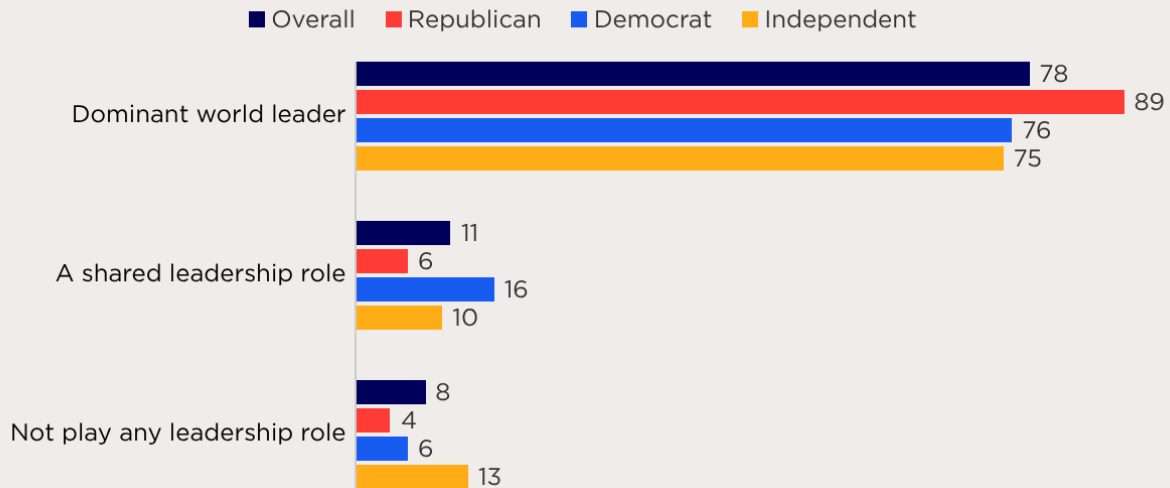


Most Americans Say China Wants to Dominate the World

Most Americans (78% overall) say that China wants to play a dominant role in the world. Relatively few Americans see China seeking a shared leadership role (11%) or no leadership role at all (8%). The view that China wants a dominant position is broadly held across partisan lines. Nine in 10 Republicans (89%), as well as three-quarters of Democrats (76%) and Independents (75%), say China wants to be the dominant world leader. Notably, Americans themselves say the United States should play a shared leadership role in the world (66%, per the 2023 Chicago Council Survey).

Americans Say China Wants a Dominant Global Role

What kind of leadership role do you think China wants to play in the world? (%)



March 13-15, 2026 | n=1,025

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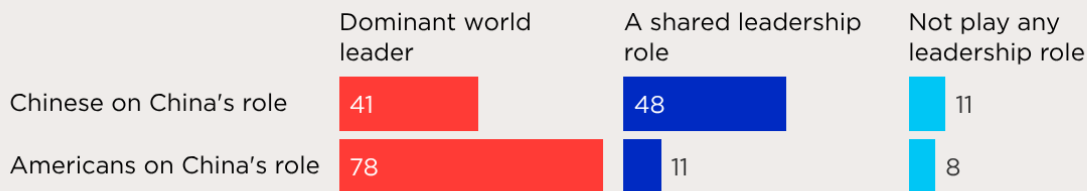


American perceptions of China's intentions also differ significantly from Chinese public opinion itself. In the [2025 Chicago Council-Carter Center survey of the Chinese public](#), a narrow plurality of Chinese respondents (48%) said that China should play a shared leadership role, while four in 10 (41%) said China should be the dominant world leader (and 11% favored no leadership role at all).

Americans Overestimate Chinese Desire for Global Dominance

China: What kind of leadership role should China play in the world? Should it be the dominant leader, play a shared leadership role, or should it not play any leadership role?

United States: What kind of leadership role do you think China wants to play in the world? (%)



China: April 25-June 16, 2025 | n=1,002
 United States: March 13-15, 2026 | n=1,025
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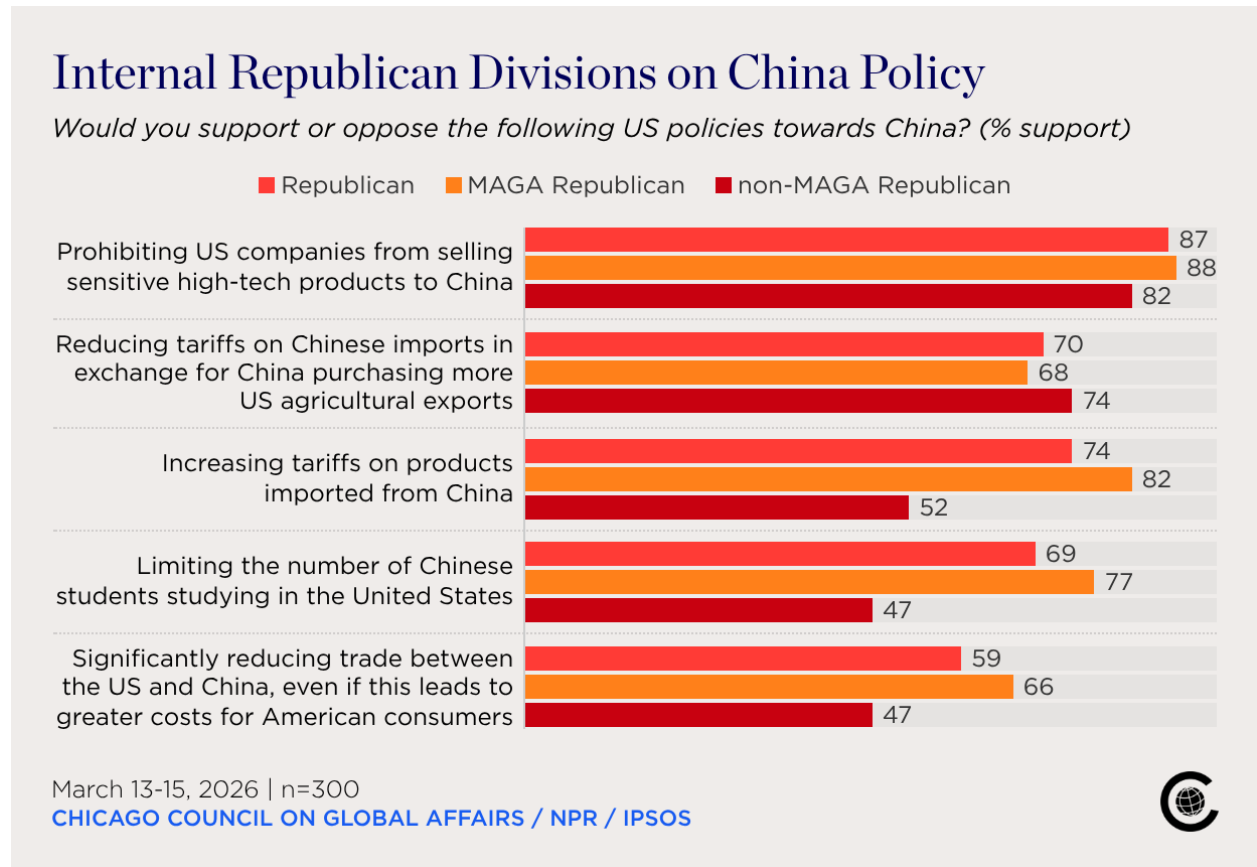
In Focus: MAGA Republicans on China

A recurring question in US foreign policy discussions is how a particular issue resonates with Trump's base—those who consider themselves to be part of the MAGA movement. In this poll, seven in 10 self-identified Republicans consider themselves to be a supporter of the Make America Great Again or MAGA movement (70%, 28% do not).

As past Council research has shown, MAGA Republicans are generally more hawkish on foreign policy issues, including when it comes to China. In the 2025 Chicago Council Survey, MAGA Republicans were far more likely to consider the development of China as a world power a critical threat to the United States (73%, vs. 55% non-MAGA Republicans), and were more likely to say that the United States should actively work to limit the growth of China's power (69%, vs. 51% of non-MAGA Republicans).

Those internal divisions on US-China relations persist today, though there are some areas of overlap between the two wings of the party. Matching the bipartisan consensus overall, both MAGA and non-MAGA Republicans favor prohibiting US companies from selling certain high-tech products to China and would support a trade deal that reduces tariffs on Chinese imports in exchange for larger Chinese purchases of American agricultural products. But on other issues, MAGA and non-MAGA Republicans diverge. MAGA Republicans are more likely to favor restrictions on Chinese students in the United States (77% vs. 47%), higher tariffs on Chinese imports (82% vs. 52%),

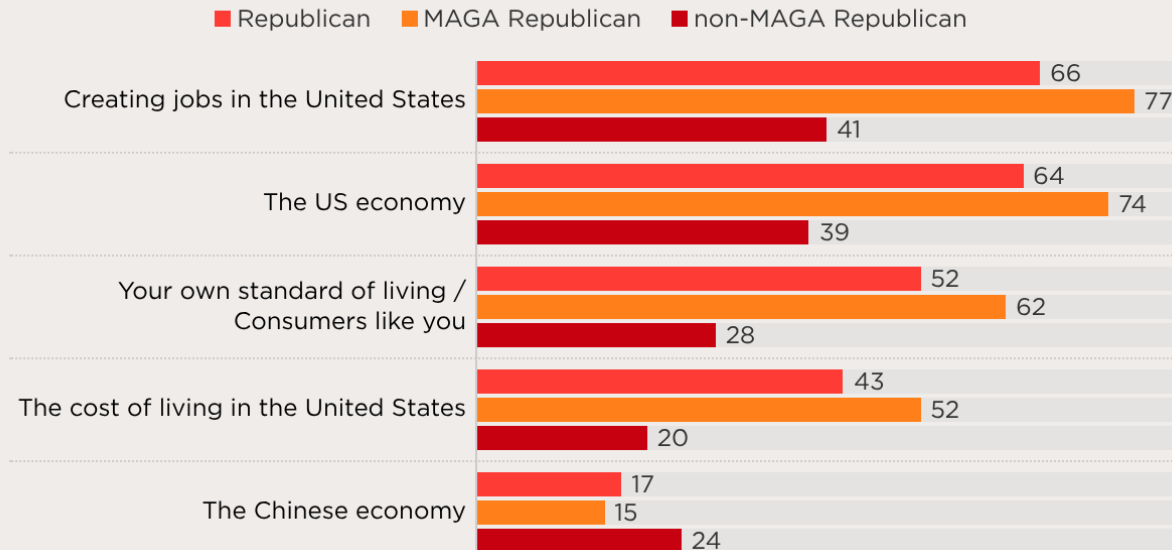
and support significant US-China trade reductions even if they lead to greater costs for US consumers (66% vs. 47%).



One reason for the far stronger support for higher tariffs among the MAGA wing: MAGA Republicans are far more likely than other Republicans to see the US-China tariffs as having been good for the United States on a range of measures. Indeed, MAGA Republicans see the tariffs on Chinese imports as having achieved the many goals laid out for them—creating US jobs, boosting the US economy, and harming China—much as the Trump administration argues. Non-MAGA Republicans disagree sharply, with majorities seeing the tariffs as having been bad for both the United States and China, and particularly bad for the cost of living in the United States.

China Tariffs Split MAGA, Non-MAGA Republicans

As you may know, the United States has imposed significant tariffs on imports from China in recent years. Overall, do you think those tariffs have been good or bad for: (% good)



March 13-15, 2026 | n=1,025
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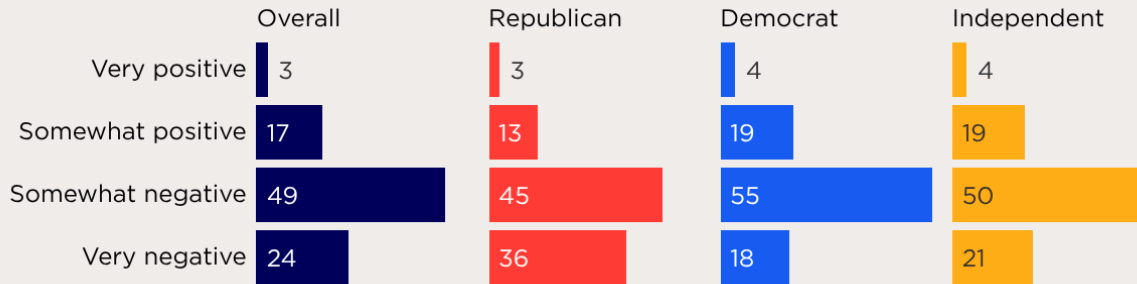
Americans See China as Playing Negative Role on Middle East Problems

One of the topics on the agenda for the upcoming Trump-Xi summit will be the ongoing US conflict with Iran and the subsequent disruptions to oil and fertilizer supplies around the world. As a May 1-3 Chicago Council-NPR-Ipsos poll finds, most Americans see China playing a negative role in resolving the key problems facing the Middle East (73%, 20% positive). This puts China near the bottom of all countries asked about, ahead of only Iran (18% positive) and well below other countries in the region such as Israel (31%), Pakistan (36%), and Saudi Arabia (38%).

This negative evaluation of China extends broadly across partisan lines: Eight in 10 Republicans (81%), and seven in 10 Democrats (73%) and Independents (70%) view China's role as a negative one. Republicans are the most intensely negative about China's role in the region, with a third (36%) saying China is playing a very negative role.

Most Say China Playing a Negative Role in Middle East

In your opinion, are the following countries playing a very positive, somewhat positive, somewhat negative, or very negative role in resolving the key problems facing the Middle East? **China** (%)



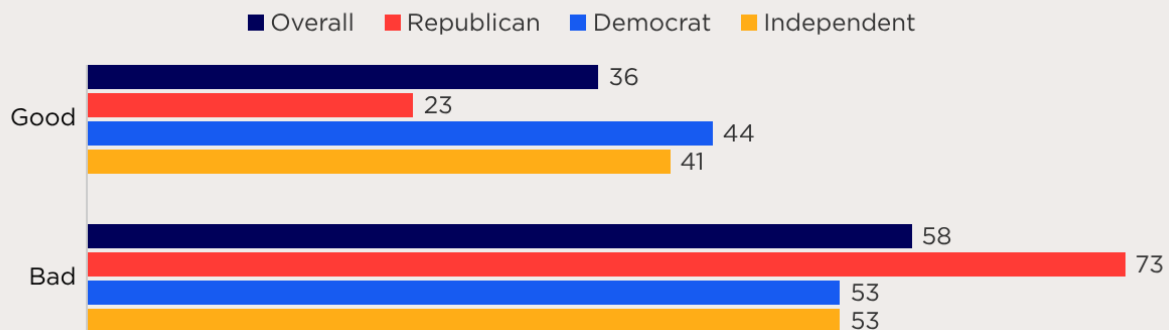
May 1-3, 2026 | n=1,018
CHICAGO COUNCIL ON GLOBAL AFFAIRS /NPR / IPSOS



Some commentators have argued that China's less-involved position in the US-Iran war has bolstered China's global position, allowing Beijing to stand in as a responsible power in contrast to the United States' more disruptive international role. However, that position is not widely held among the American public: Six in 10 Americans (58%) also see the US-Iran war as having been bad for China's position in the world, including three in four Republicans (73%) and narrow majorities of Democrats and Independents (53% each).

Effects of US-Iran War on China's Global Position

Overall, do you think the US-Iran war has been good or bad for: **China's position in the world** (%)



May 1-3, 2026 | n=1,018
CHICAGO COUNCIL ON GLOBAL AFFAIRS /NPR / IPSOS



Conclusion

The summit between Trump and Xi, delayed from its original late March date, comes at a time of relative [US-China détente](#) following an intense back-and-forth trade war between the two nations in 2025. That conflict ended in a November 2025 deal that lowered tariffs on Chinese imports in exchange for China making greater soybean buys and postponing extensive export controls on rare-earth elements.

As the Council-NPR-Ipsos poll demonstrates, Americans are hardly eager for a return to the high tariff rates of the prior year and would welcome an extension of the economic truce between the two powers. Republicans up for reelection this year may welcome one as well. At present, they are facing down a midterm election in which the president is increasingly unpopular, particularly on critical economic and cost-of-living issues. The US war with Iran, which has driven fuel costs sharply higher, has only accentuated these economic—and political—problems.

When tariffs are involved, however, the interests of the public and the party may not be enough for Trump. As repeatedly demonstrated, Trump has a deep commitment to tariffs as a primary tool of US policy, a belief that seems broadly shared among the economic policymakers of his second administration. His MAGA base is behind him on that tariff policy, seeing them as a win for the United States and a loss for China. Yet Trump has also demonstrated a degree of flexibility in dealing with Xi, being more open to dealmaking and economic engagements with Beijing than the China hawks who make up the MAGA base. Which Trump sits down with Xi—the tariff president of Liberation Day or the dealmaking president of APEC 2025—will either keep US-China relations on an even keel or tip the global economy further toward recession.

Methodology

This report is based on two Chicago Council-NPR-Ipsos surveys conducted by Ipsos using the probability-based KnowledgePanel.

The first was fielded from March 13-15, 2026 among a nationally representative probability sample of 1,025 adults age 18 or older. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 3.1 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, for results based on the entire sample of adults. The margin of sampling error takes into account the design effect, which was 1.04.

The second was fielded from May 1-3, 2026 among a nationally representative probability sample of 1,018 adults age 18 or older. The margin of sampling

error is plus or minus 3.2 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, for results based on the entire sample of adults. The margin of sampling error takes into account the design effect, which was 1.06.

Both studies were conducted in English. The data for the total sample were weighted to adjust for gender by age, race/ethnicity, education, Census region, metropolitan status, and household income. The demographic benchmarks came from the 2025 March Supplement of the Current Population Survey (CPS).

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+)

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The Chicago Council on Global Affairs is an independent, nonpartisan membership organization that provides insight—and influences the public discourse—on critical global issues. We convene leading global voices, conduct independent research, and engage the public to explore ideas that will shape our global future. The Council is committed to bringing clarity and offering solutions to issues that transcend borders and transform how people, business, and governments engage the world. Learn more at globalaffairs.org.

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.