

Gen Z Isn't Concerned About China

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Amid intensifying US-China tensions—from the [US-China trade war](#) to ongoing [restrictions on advanced technology exports](#) and [debates over student visas](#)—American public opinion is often portrayed as consistently negative toward China. However, this narrative misses an important aspect: generational change. Younger Americans have come of age in a more interconnected world shaped by digital exchange and cross-border education, where social media trends have made engagement with Chinese culture increasingly ordinary. Some Gen Z Americans have joked that they're in "[a very Chinese time](#)" of their life.¹

Reflecting these generational shifts, data from a joint Chicago Council-NPR-Ipsos survey, conducted in the United States between March 13-15, 2026, and the 2025 Chicago Council Survey find that attitudes toward China are becoming increasingly differentiated across age groups. Younger generations consistently express less antagonistic and more flexible views on China's role in the world, as well as greater skepticism toward restrictive economic and social policies. These patterns point to a potential long-term shift in how US leaders understand and engage with China.

Key Findings

- Minorities of Millennials (43%) and Generation Zers (34%), compared to majorities of Boomers (62%) and Generation Xers (56%), view the development of China as a world power as a critical threat to the United States.
- Majorities of Gen Zers (59%) and Millennials (58%), compared to half of Boomers and Gen Xers (48% each), favor a policy of friendly cooperation and engagement with China.

¹ Americans are categorized into generational cohorts based on their birth year. This research covers four generational cohorts, following standard cohort definitions: Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964), Gen X (born 1965-1980), Millennials (born 1981-1996), and Gen Z (born 1997-2013).

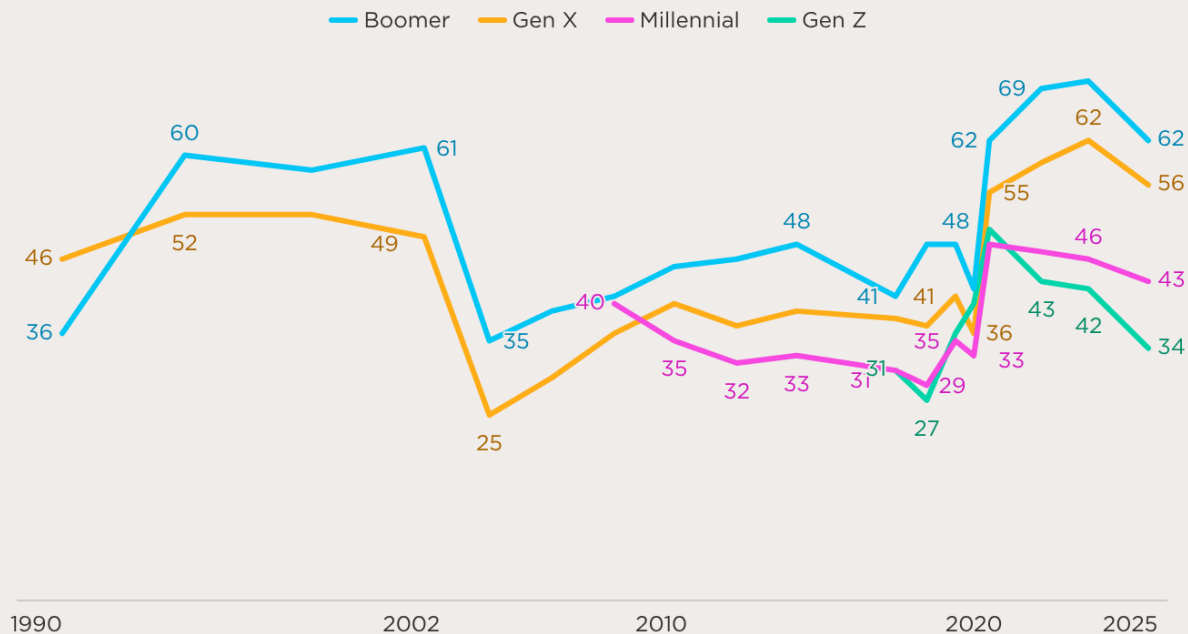
- A quarter of Gen Z respondents (25%) say China is not a threat to the United States, compared to much smaller shares of older cohorts.
- Millennials (49%) and Gen Zers (43%) are less likely than Boomers (69%) and Gen Xers (64%) to view China as a rival or an adversary.
- Americans across generations believe imposing tariffs on China has increased the cost of living in the United States, but they diverge on whether the tariffs have harmed China's economy.
- Millennials and Gen Zers show strong opposition to restrictive policies targeting Chinese students, higher tariffs, and reduced trade overall.

Younger Generations Less Likely to See China's Rise as a Threat

Over the past two decades, younger Americans have consistently expressed less concern about China's rise than older generations. Notably, while the COVID-19 pandemic prompted a sharp increase in threat perceptions across generations, older Americans have largely been the ones to maintain those heightened concerns. The share of Boomers viewing China's development as a critical threat rose from 42 percent in January 2020 to a peak of 70 percent in 2023 before settling at 62 percent in 2025. Gen X followed a nearly identical trajectory, increasing from 36 percent in 2020 to 62 percent in 2023 before declining only slightly to 56 percent in 2025. Millennials also became more concerned after 2020, though to a lesser extent, rising from 33 percent to 48 percent; in 2025, 43 percent named China's rise as a critical threat. Gen Z, meanwhile, remained the least-concerned generation, with threat perceptions steadily declining from 50 percent in 2020 to just 34 percent in 2025. It is the only generation whose sense of threat from China has fallen below pre-pandemic levels.

Generational Views of China's Development as a Threat

Below is a list of possible threats to the vital interests of the United States in the next 10 years. For each one, please select whether you see this as a critical threat, an important but not critical threat, or not an important threat at all. **The development of China as a world power (%)**



July 18-30, 2025 | n=2,148
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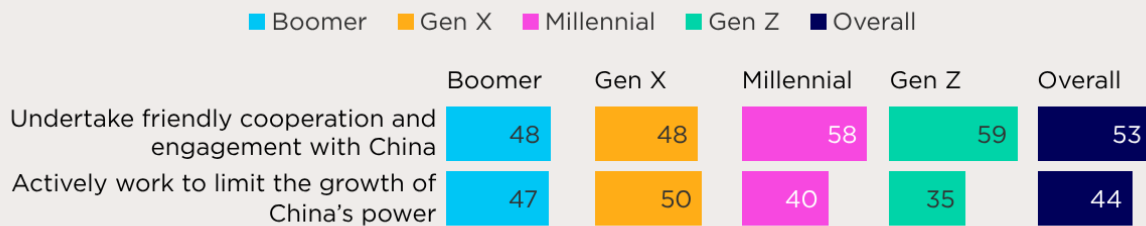


Millennials, Gen Zers Favor Engagement with China

Matching shifting views of the threat posed by China, support for a US policy of cooperation and engagement with China has rebounded sharply from the lows of 2024.

Generational Views: Engagement or Containment?

In dealing with the rise of China's power, do you think the United States should: (%)



July 18-30, 2025 | n=1,065

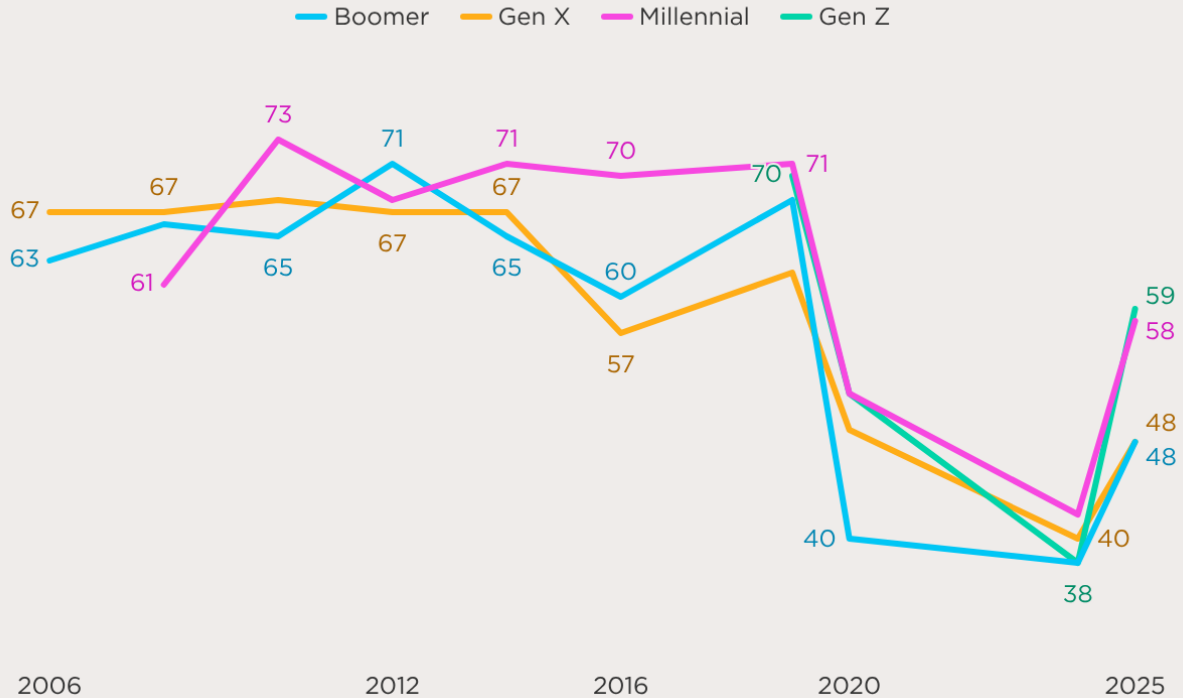
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In the [2025 Chicago Council Survey](#), six in 10 Gen Zers (59%, up from 38% in 2024) and Millennials (58%, up from 42%) favored a policy of friendly cooperation and engagement with China, a sharp shift in one year. Gen Xers and Boomers have also become more likely to favor an engagement approach since 2024, though they have shifted comparably less (48% each, up from 40% and 38% respectively). Overall, Boomers and Gen Xers are split between a policy of engagement and a one of actively working to limit the growth of China's power.

Generational Views on Engagement with China

In dealing with the rise of China's power, do you think the United States should: (% undertake friendly cooperation and engagement with China)



July 18-30, 2025 | n=1,065

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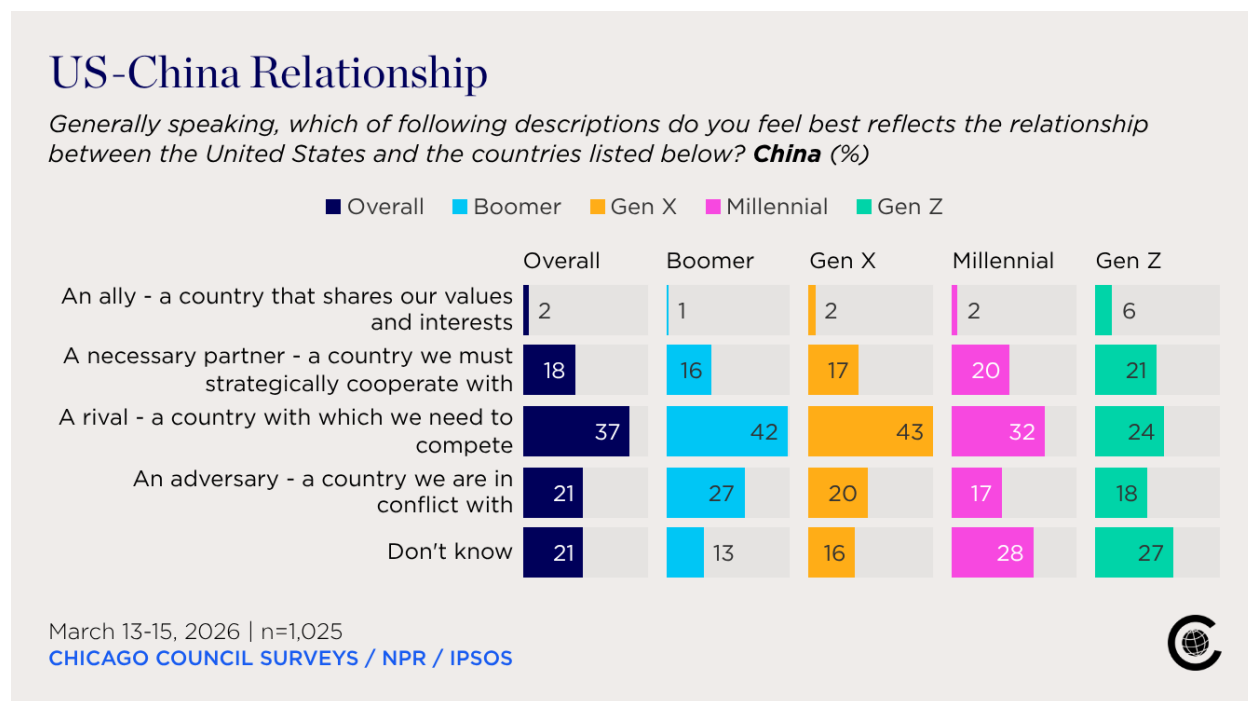


Younger Americans Are Less Likely to Frame China as a Rival or Adversary

The relationship between the United States and China occupies a central place in contemporary global politics. As policymakers navigate both cooperation and competition, the US public is forming its own views about the nature of the relationship. Americans across generations view US-China relations through a more competitive than cooperative lens, but younger Americans' views of China are still taking shape: 28 percent of Millennials and 27 percent of Gen Zers say they don't know how best to characterize the relationship.

Older Americans express the most skeptical stance. Seven in 10 Boomers (69%) view China as a rival or an adversary, as do 64 percent of Gen Xers, while only two in 10 of each generational cohort say China is an ally or partner (19% of Gen X, 17% of Boomers). While younger generations also lean toward considering US-China relations adversarial or rivalrous, views are more

divided. Half of Millennials (49%) view China through a lens of competition or conflict, while 22 percent view it as a partner or ally. Gen Z is even more closely divided (43% rival or adversary vs. 28% ally or partner).

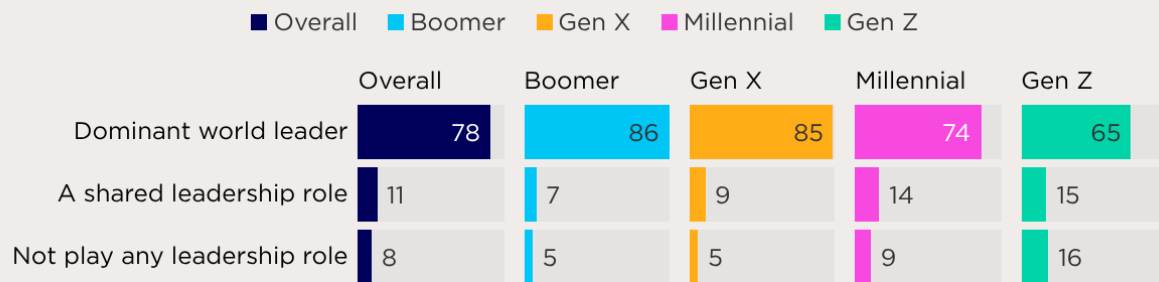


An Age Gap in Views of China's Global Ambitions

While almost eight in 10 Americans overall (78%) believe China wants to become the dominant world leader, that view is most widely held among older Americans. Large majorities of Boomers (86%) and Gen Xers (85%) believe that China wants to become the dominant world leader, compared to three in four Millennials (74%) and two-thirds of Gen Zers (65%). Younger cohorts are instead more open to the possibility that China's desired global role might be more collaborative, or that China may not want any leadership role in the world.

China's Desired Leadership Role

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



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

CHICAGO COUNCIL SURVEYS / NPR / IPSOS

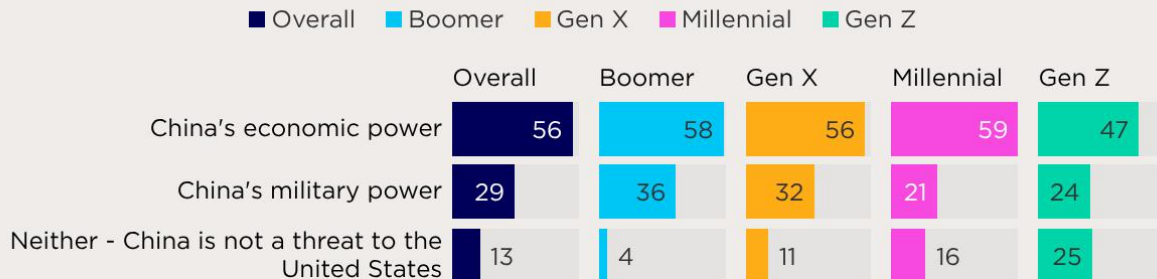


Generation Z Less Likely to Say China Is an Economic Threat

Perceptions of what kind of threat China poses to the United States also vary by generation. When asked whether China's economic power or military power is a greater threat to the United States, there is broad agreement across all generations that the bigger threat is China's economic power (58% Boomers, 56% Gen Xers, 59% Millennials, and 47% Gen Zers). About a third of Boomers (36%) and Gen Xers (32%) see China's military power as superior, compared to about a quarter of Millennials (21%) and Gen Zers (24%) who say the same. Significantly, a quarter of Gen Zers (25%) say China is not a threat to the United States at all, as opposed to 16 percent of Millennials, 11 percent of Gen Xers, and only 4 percent of Boomers.

China's Threat to the US

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 SURVEYS / NPR / IPSOS



Resistance to Restrictive China Policies Strongest Among Millennials and Gen Zers

When asked about how they view certain US policies toward China, there are clear generational divides among Americans. Still, some areas of rare cross-generational agreement exist. One commonality is support for reducing tariffs on Chinese imports in exchange for increased US agricultural exports (80% Boomers, 74% Gen Xers, 70% Millennials, 64% Gen Zers). Prohibiting US companies from selling sensitive high-tech products to China also has fairly broad appeal, including majorities of Boomers (80%), Gen Xers (81%), and Millennials (62%), though Gen Z is divided over the question (49% support, 46% oppose).

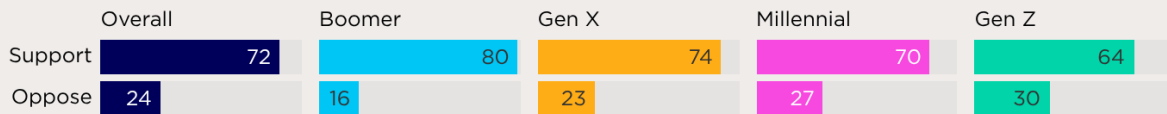
On other restrictive measures, intergenerational splits become more evident. For example, while older generations tend to support limiting the number of Chinese students studying in the United States (56% Boomer, 63% Gen X), significant majorities of Millennials (65%) and Gen Zers (64%) oppose such restrictions.

US-China Policies

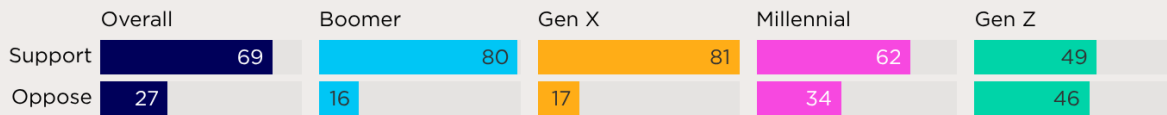
Would you support or oppose the following US policies towards China? (%)

■ Overall ■ Boomer ■ Gen X ■ Millennial ■ Gen Z

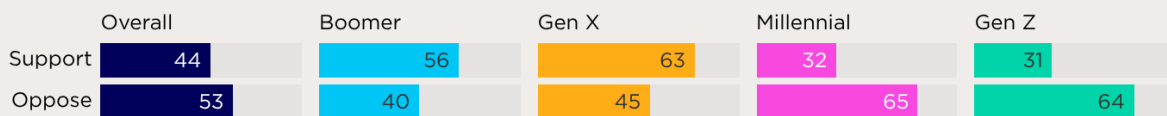
Reducing tariffs on Chinese imports in exchange for China purchasing more US agricultural exports



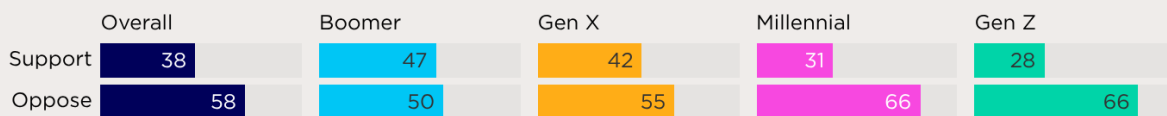
Prohibiting US companies from selling sensitive high-tech products to China



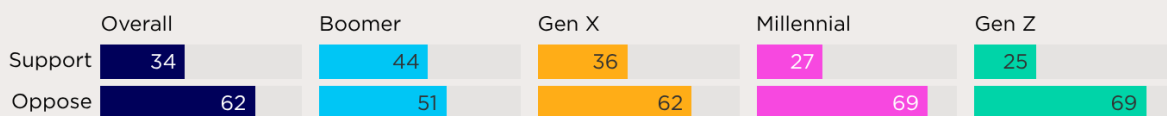
Limiting the number of Chinese students studying in the United States



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

CHICAGO COUNCIL SURVEYS / NPR / IPSOS



On more aggressive economic approaches, such as increasing tariffs on imported products or significantly reducing trade, younger cohorts are the most resistant. Roughly seven in 10 Millennials (69%) and Gen Zers (69%) oppose reducing trade between the United States and China, while about six in 10 Gen Xers (62%) say the same. In contrast, only half of Boomers (51%) are opposed to reducing trade, even if it leads to greater costs for them. Similarly, two-thirds of Millennials (66%) and Gen Zers (66%), along with half of Gen Xers (55%), oppose increasing tariffs on products imported from China while Boomers are split on the question (50% oppose, 47% support).

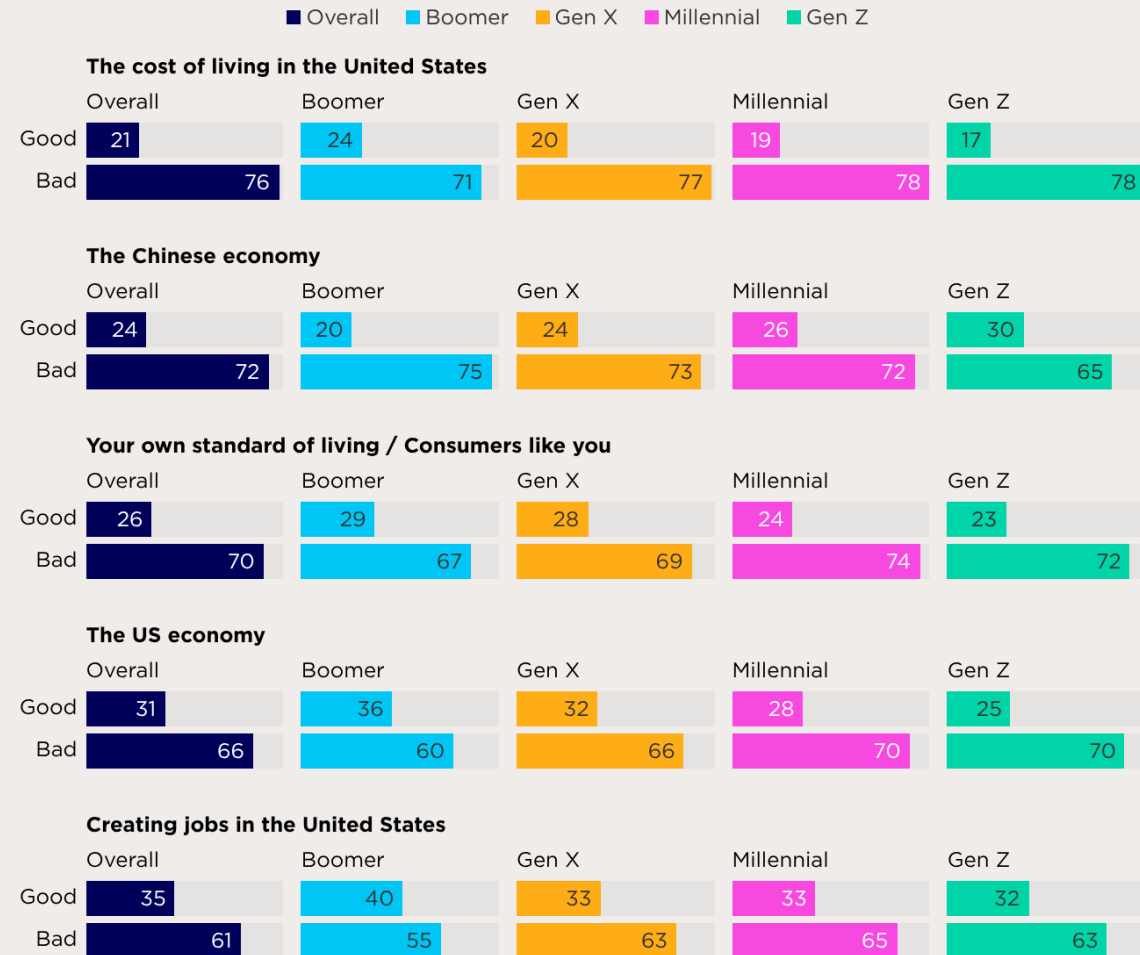
Widespread Negativity Toward Tariffs

Despite generational divisions over US economic policy vis-à-vis China, there is broad agreement across generations—ranging from 71 percent of Boomers to 78 percent of Millennials and Gen Zers—that tariffs on imports from China have had a negative impact on the cost of living in the United States (76% overall). At least two-thirds of Americans across generational groupings also say the tariffs have negatively impacted the Chinese economy, and at least six in 10 say they have been bad for their own standard of living. Slightly fewer shares see negative impacts on the US economy (66%) and creating jobs in the United States (61%).

On other effects of the US tariffs on China, Boomers are somewhat less negative, with Gen Xers aligning more closely with Millennials and Gen Zers. This distinction is clearest on job creation: 65 percent of Millennials and 63 percent of both Gen X and Gen Z believe the tariffs have been bad for job creation in the United States, compared to only 55 percent of the Boomer Generation. This pattern aligns with recent reporting showing [a widening generational gap in job market optimism](#), alongside [persistently higher youth unemployment rates](#) relative to older cohorts. For the three younger generations, concerns about higher prices and quality of life appear to be much more pressing than the purported geopolitical advantages of trade restrictions.

Impact of Imposing Tariffs on China

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: (%)



March 13-15, 2026 | n=1,025
CHICAGO COUNCIL SURVEYS / NPR / IPSOS



Conclusion

The generational divide in perceptions of China raises an important question for the future of American foreign policy. Much of the current US approach to China rests on an assumption of broad public consensus behind competition with Beijing. But younger Americans are less likely to see China as a threat, less inclined toward a competitive posture, and less willing to bear the costs that a competitive posture implies. Some of this may simply reflect where younger Americans' focus already lies: on the cost of living and economic challenges at home, rather than on geopolitical competition abroad. As generational replacement continues and younger generations make up a

larger proportion of the electorate, that gap between the assumptions driving Washington's China policy and the attitudes of the public it answers to may widen, raising real questions about what kind of relationship with China the next generation of Americans will want.

Methodology

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

The first, a Chicago Council-NPR-Ipsos survey, was conducted from March 13-15, 2026, by Ipsos in English among a weighted nationally representative probability sample of 1,025 adults age 18 or older living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. The margin of sampling error for the full sample is ± 3.1 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including a design effect of 1.04.

The second, the 2025 Chicago Council Survey, was conducted July 18-30, 2025, by Ipsos in English and Spanish among a weighted nationally representative probability 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 at the 95 percent confidence level, 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.

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

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+)

Americans are categorized into generational cohorts based on their birth year. Those born between 1928 and 1945 are considered the Silent Generation; between 1946 and 1964 are considered the Baby Boom Generation; between 1965 and 1980 are considered Generation X; between 1981 and 1996 are considered the Millennial Generation; and finally, between 1997 and 2013 are considered Generation Z.

About the Chicago Council on Global Affairs

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, businesses, 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.