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# Americans Favor US-China Trade, Split Over Tariffs

*Majority now say the United States is economically stronger than China*

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Over the past 18 months, the United States and China have engaged in a steady escalation of tariffs. Beginning with steel and aluminum tariffs imposed by the Trump administration in March 2018, the trade conflict has expanded to cover hundreds of billions of dollars in bilateral trade. Recent rounds of negotiations have made no new progress and have led to both sides escalating further. The most recent US tariffs on Chinese imports [went into effect on September 1](#), covering \$112 billion of goods. Beijing has countered with retaliatory tariffs and has [halted all agricultural purchases](#) from the United States, a move targeted at already-struggling US farmers.

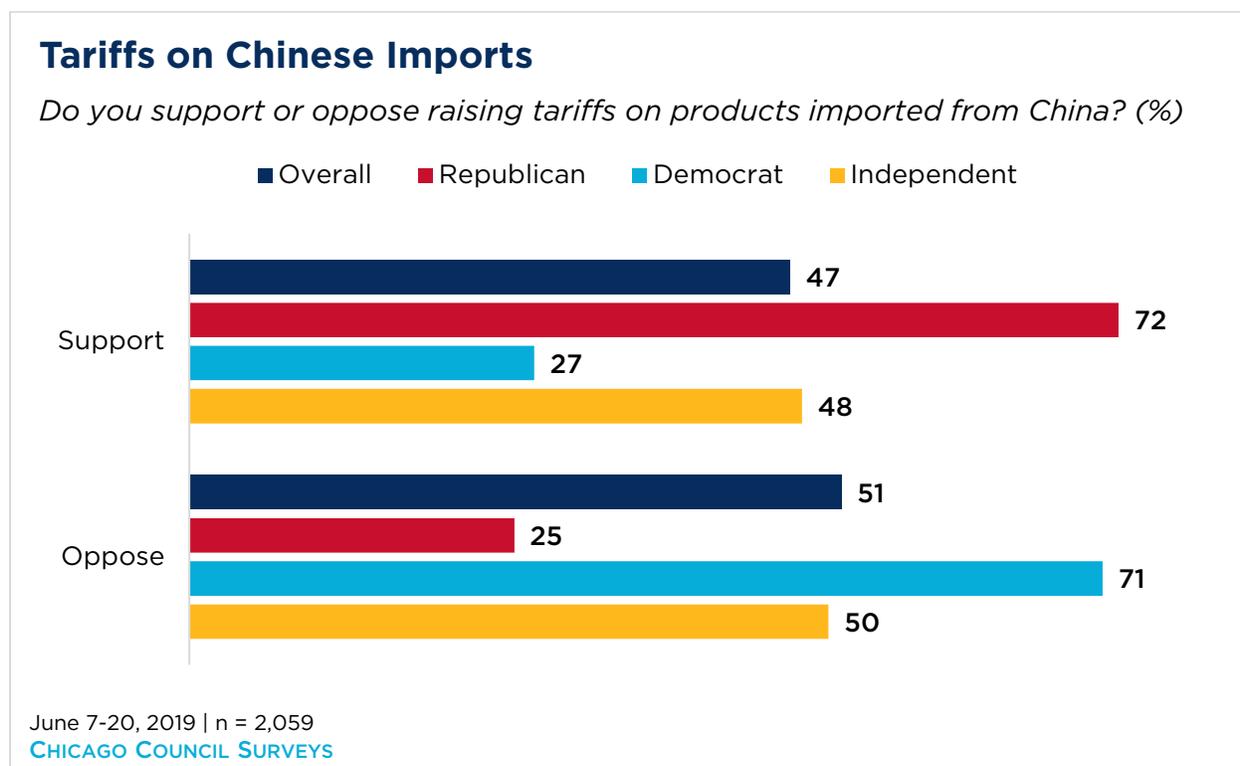
While Americans broadly support engaging in trade with China, they are split along partisan lines on how to engage in that trade. Republicans support raising tariffs on Chinese imports and believe it will help the US economy in the long run, while Democrats oppose doing so and believe it will be harmful.

## Key Findings

- Americans are divided over imposing additional tariffs on Chinese goods, with a narrow majority opposing them (51%; 47% support).
- Tariffs divide Americans sharply along party lines: 72 percent of Republicans support, and 71 percent of Democrats oppose, raising tariffs on products imported from China.
- Majorities across party lines support engaging in trade with China, though Republicans are divided over whether US-China trade does more to strengthen (48%) or weaken (49%) US national security.
- A plurality of Americans (38%) say the US is stronger economically than China, a shift from 2014 when nearly half (45%) saw China as the stronger economy.

## Deep Partisan Divisions on Raising Tariffs

Americans are deeply divided over President Trump's proposal to increase tariffs on Chinese imports. Overall, a narrow majority of Americans (51%) oppose raising tariffs on Chinese imports, while nearly as many (47%) support doing so. Opinion divides sharply along partisan lines: seven in ten Republicans (72%) support increased tariffs, while seven in ten Democrats (71%) oppose increased tariffs. Independents, like the public overall, are divided (48% support, 50% oppose).



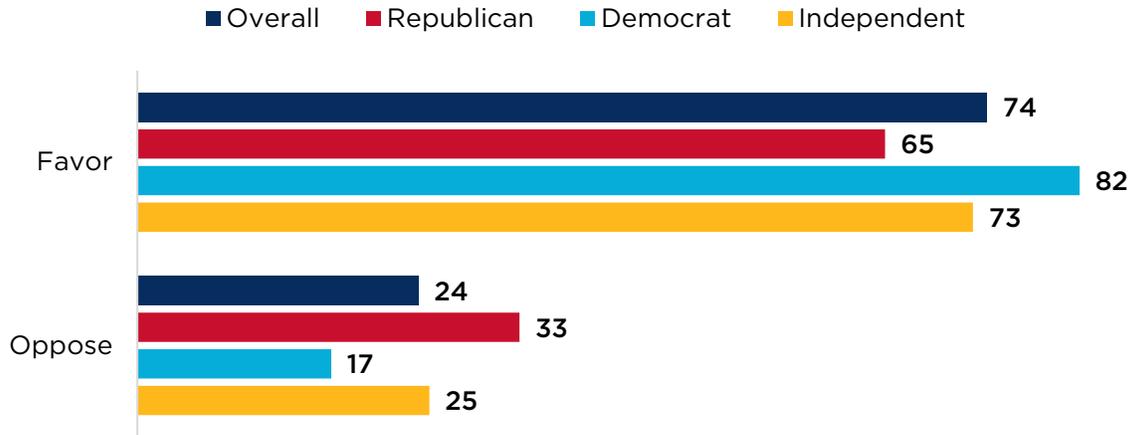
Americans are also deeply divided over the potential impacts of the tariffs and the ongoing trade war with China. A [Fox News poll](#) from May 11-14, 2019 found that while a plurality of registered voters think that the strategy of increasing tariffs on imports from China will hurt the US economy in the long run (45%), a third say it will help the economy (34%) and 11 percent say it will not make much of a difference. Republicans, matching their support for the tariffs, say that increased tariffs will help the US economy in the long run (65%), while a similar proportion of Democrats say they will hurt the US economy in the long run (69%)

## Bipartisan Support for Engaging in Trade with China

Despite the divide among Americans on raising tariffs, a majority (74%) supports engaging in trade with China. That agreement crosses party lines, with majorities of Republicans (65%), Democrats (82%), and Independents (73%) all in favor of trade with China.

## Trade with China

Do you favor or oppose engaging in trade with the following countries? **China** (%)



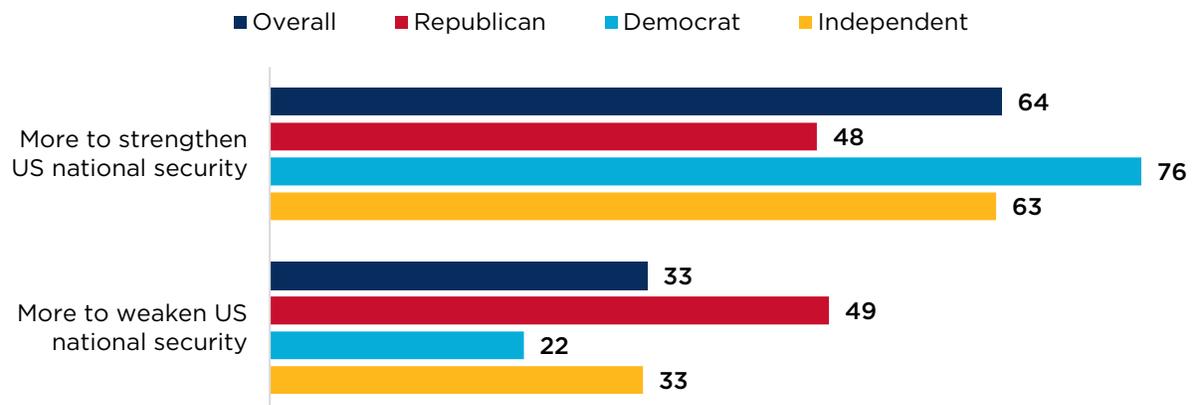
June 7-20, 2019 | n = 2,059  
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## Americans Say US-China Trade Strengthens US National Security

One reason why Americans support trade with China may be the perceived security benefits of the trade relationship, though they do not necessarily think it decreases the chance of conflict. A majority of Americans (64%) say that US-China trade does more to strengthen US national security rather than to weaken it. Three in four Democrats (76%) say the same, as do two-thirds of Independents (63%). Republicans, however, are divided: similar proportions say that US-China trade strengthens (48%) and weakens (49%) US national security.

## US-China Trade and US National Security

Does trade between the United States and China do more to strengthen US national security or weaken US national security? (%)

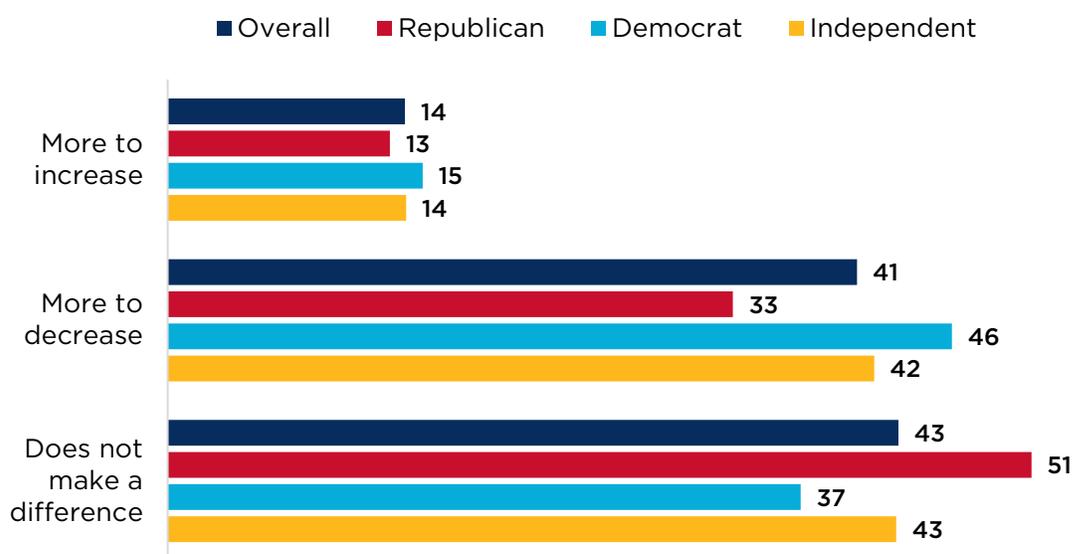


June 7-20, 2019 | n = 1,047  
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However, that benefit to US national security may not come in the form of a decreased chance of conflict. Four in ten Americans (41%) say that trade between the United States and China decreases the likelihood of military conflict between the two nations, while a similar proportion (43%) say it makes no difference. Few Americans think that US-China trade increases the chance of military conflict (14%). Democrats are somewhat more optimistic about the impacts of trade on the possibility of military conflict—nearly half (46%) say it decreases that possibility—while Republicans are more likely to say it makes no difference (51%).

## US-China Trade and Military Conflict

*In your opinion, does trade between the United States and China do more to increase or decrease the likelihood of military conflict between the United States and China, or does it not make a difference? (%)*



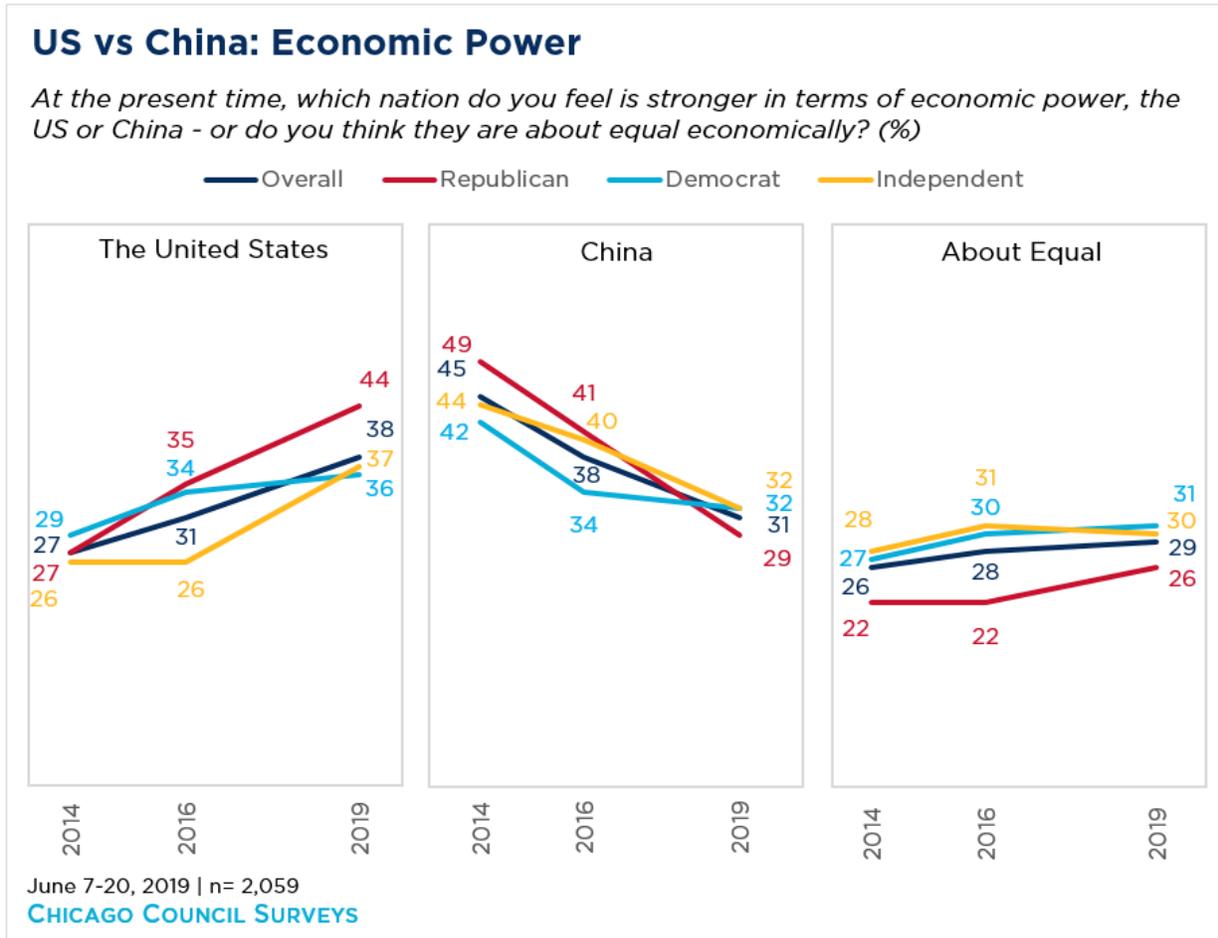
June 7-20, 2019 | n = 1,012  
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## Americans More Confident in US Economic Power

The escalating US-China trade conflict comes at a time when Americans are more confident in their economic power vis-à-vis China than in years past. Today four in ten Americans (38%) say that the US is stronger economically than China, while three in ten (31%) say China is the stronger power. This marks a notable shift over the past five years. In 2014, nearly half of Americans (45%) saw China as a stronger economic power than the United States, and only 27 percent saw America as the stronger economy.

That shift in American confidence in US economic power has occurred across partisan lines. Republicans, in particular, have shifted in their views of the balance of economic power between the US and China. In 2014, half of Republicans (49%) said the two countries were equally powerful economically; today, only 29 percent say

the same, a decline of twenty percentage points over the past five years. Republicans are far more likely today to say that the United States is more powerful economically than China (44%, up from 27% in 2014). Democrats' views have also shifted towards seeing the United States as the stronger economy, but to a lesser extent (36%, up from 29% in 2014).



Does this heightened confidence in US economic power translate to greater confidence in winning the trade war with China? Here, too, Americans are divided. A [CBS News poll](#) conducted May 17-20, 2019 found that a third of Americans (33%) think neither country will win the trade war in the long run, while similar proportions think the US (27%) and China (24%) will win. Despite Americans' rising confidence in US economic power, they are unsure how well the US economy will withstand the ongoing trade dispute with China.

## Methodology

The analysis in this report is based on data from the 2019 Chicago Council Survey of the American public on foreign policy, a project of the Lester Crown Center on US Foreign Policy. The 2019 Chicago Council Survey was conducted June 7-20, 2019 by IPSOS using their large-scale nationwide online research panel, KnowledgePanel, among a weighted national sample of 2,059 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  $\pm 2.3$ , including a design effect of 1.1607. 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?"

The 2019 Chicago Council Survey is made possible by the generous support of the Crown family and the Korea Foundation.

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