



Record Number of Americans Endorse Benefits of Trade

Dina Smeltz, Senior Fellow, Public Opinion and Foreign Policy

Craig Kafura, Research Associate, Public Opinion and Foreign Policy

August 2018

The Trump administration came into office highly critical of the effects of existing trade deals such as NAFTA and TPP on the US economy. The president proceeded to cancel United States participation in the TPP and demanded a renegotiation of NAFTA. He deployed tariffs to get trading partners to agree to new deals and opened up trade battles on a series of fronts. While recent polls show that American views of President Trump's performance on trade are divided along partisan affiliations, the just-completed 2018 Chicago Council Survey finds that the largest majorities of Americans yet recorded say that trade is good for the US economy, US consumers, and US job creation. In addition, a growing majority believe that NAFTA is good for the US economy, and six in ten approve of US participation in a renewed Trans-Pacific trade agreement.

Key Findings

- The highest percentages ever registered in this survey (since 2004) say that trade is good for the US economy (82%), good for consumers like you (85%), and good for creating jobs in the United States (67%).
- Support for NAFTA is also at its highest level yet (63%), and a majority (61%) supports US participation in the revised Pacific trade agreement, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership.
- Democrats express the most favorable views of these two trade agreements, while majorities of Independents now also support them. While Republicans as a group tend to oppose them, a majority of non-Trump Republicans¹ support them, demonstrating splits within the party faithful.
- Only four in ten Americans say that reducing the US trade deficit should be a very important goal for US foreign policy, though it is a higher priority for Republicans.

¹ As in the 2017 Chicago Council Survey, Trump Republicans are self-identified Republicans with a “very favorable” view of President Trump. Non-Trump Republicans are all other self-identified Republican respondents. See methodology for more details.

- Seven in ten are concerned about a possible trade war with China; just over half are concerned about a trade war with Mexico. In both cases, trade wars are a greater concern for Democrats.

Americans Now Love Trade

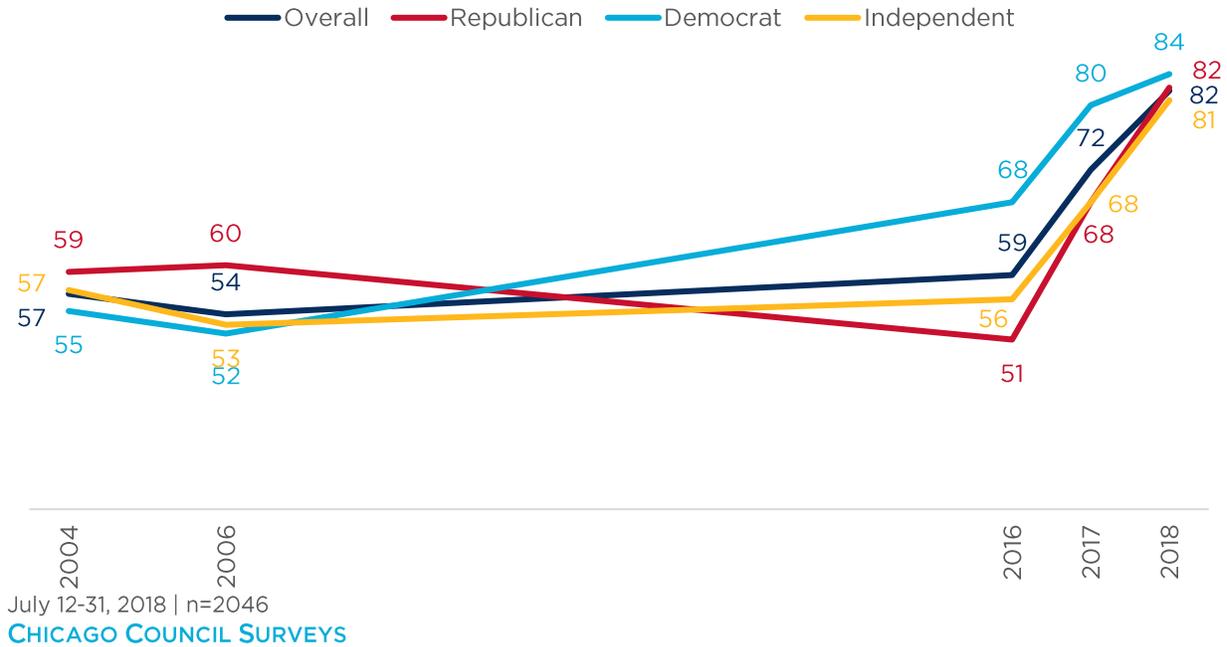
Record percentages of Americans now say that trade is good for the US economy (82%), consumers like you (85%), and creating jobs in the United States (67%).



The overall increases in positive views of trade are driven by double-digit increases among Republicans and Independents, as well as slight increases among Democrats, who already held broadly positive views of trade. Moreover, self-described Republicans and Democrats voice equally positive opinions of trade, closing the partisan gap on trade from recent years. Eight in ten Democrats (84%), Republicans (82%), and Independents (81%) say international trade is good for the US economy. Similar proportions say international trade is good for consumers like them (84% Republicans, 86% Democrats, 86% Independents). About two in three across partisan groups also say trade is good for job creation (67% overall, with 65% Republicans, 71% Democrats, 65% Independents). Within Republican party support, similarly-sized majorities of both Trump- and non-Trump Republicans view trade in positive terms.

International Trade and the US Economy

Overall, do you think international trade is good or bad for the US economy? (% good)



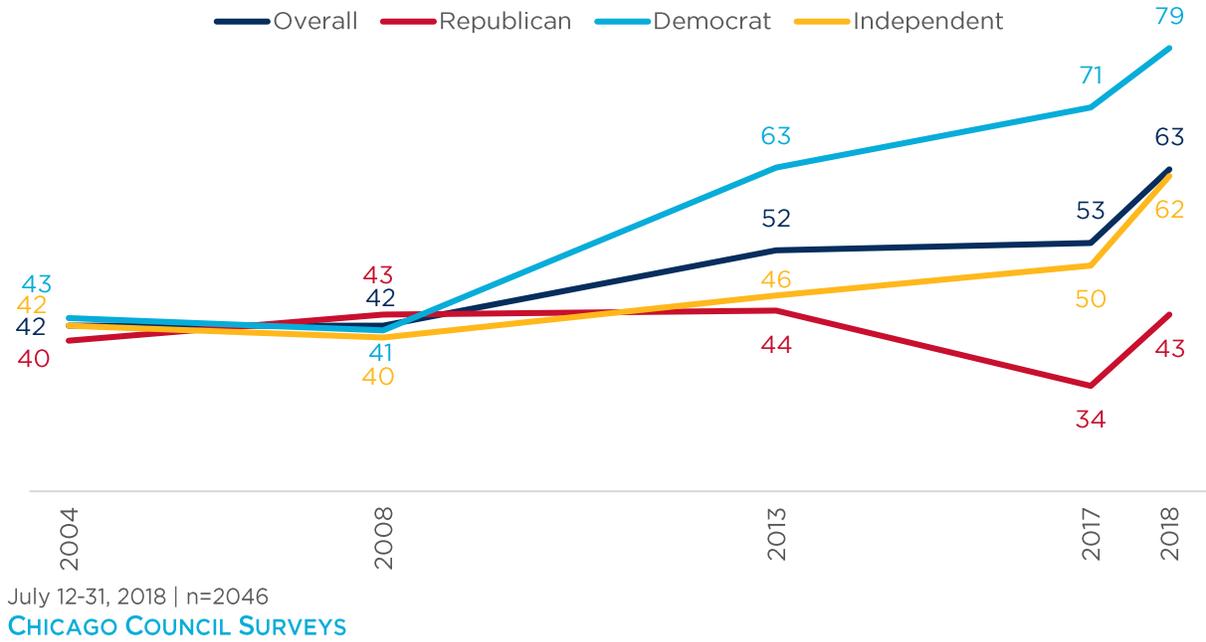
NAFTA More Popular than Ever

In 2017, the Chicago Council Survey also found majority support for trade, but Americans were more discriminating in their views toward trade agreements. Today, 63 percent of Americans say NAFTA is mostly good for the US economy, up from 53 percent in 2017, and an all-time high since the Chicago Council Survey first asked this question in 2008. Democratic support for NAFTA has risen from 71 percent to 79 percent over the past year. During the same time frame, positive views of NAFTA among Independents have also risen sharply, with a majority of Independents now saying it is mostly good (62%).

While Republicans are still more likely to say that NAFTA is mostly bad (53%) than good (43%), their views have become more positive since last year. In fact, a majority of non-Trump Republicans are positive toward NAFTA (61% good), while Trump Republicans—those with a very favorable view of President Trump—hold far more negative views (68% bad, 30% good).

NAFTA

Overall, do you think the North American Free Trade Agreement, also known as NAFTA, is good or bad for the US economy? (% good)



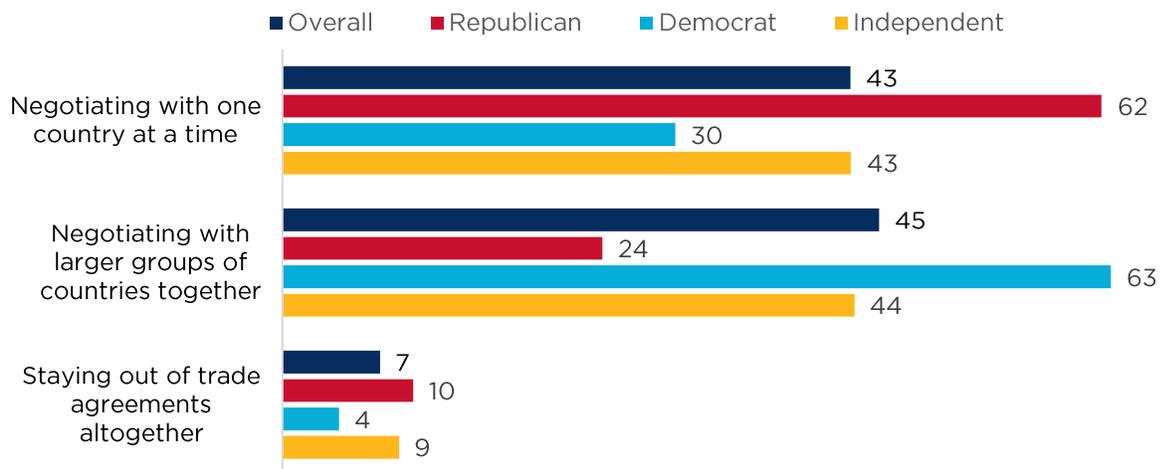
Majority Support Joining the New CPTPP

A majority of Americans (61%) also believe the United States should participate in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), a trade agreement formed among 11 Pacific nations when Trump withdrew the United States from the original Trans-Pacific Partnership. As with NAFTA, a majority of Democrats (76%) and Independents (60%) favor US participation, while Republicans tend to oppose it (49% oppose, 45% favor). Within the Republican party support, a slight majority of non-Trump Republicans favor the CPTPP (54% favor, 39% oppose) compared to a majority of Trump Republicans who oppose it (37% support, 57% oppose).

Americans overall are divided on whether the United States gets best results in trade negotiations by negotiating one country at a time (43%) or with a larger group of countries (45%). Only seven percent would rather stay out of trade agreements altogether. Republicans seem to be following the president's preference on this matter; a majority of GOP supporters prefer negotiating with one country at a time, which has been President Trump's stated preference. By contrast, a majority of Democrats prefer negotiating with a group of countries, while Independents are divided between the two options.

Negotiating International Trade Agreements

Do you believe the United States achieves better results in international trade agreements by negotiating with one country at a time, by negotiating with larger groups of countries together, or staying out of trade agreements altogether? (%)



July 12-31, 2018 | n=1017

CHICAGO COUNCIL SURVEYS

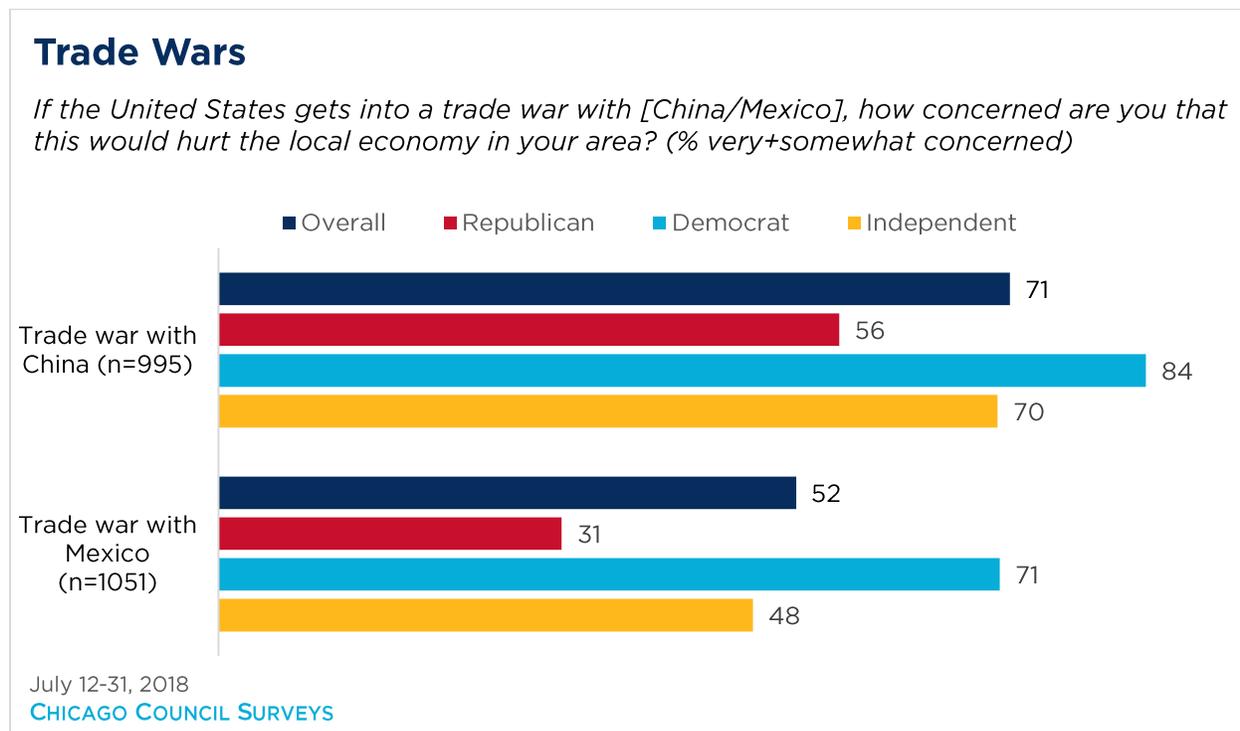
Republicans Are Concerned about the Trade Deficit, Democrats about Possible Trade Wars

President Trump has complained often about the US trade deficit with other countries, and Republican supporters are relatively more concerned about the issue than other Americans. But it remains a low priority for most Americans. Only four in ten (42%) say that reducing the US trade deficit should be a very important goal for US foreign policy, though it is a higher priority among Republicans (53%, vs. 34% of Democrats and 42% of Independents).

Americans are faced with the possibility of trade disruptions or trade wars more now than in recent years. In particular, trade tensions between the United States and China, simmering for years, have flared up in 2018 with both sides imposing tariffs and counter-tariffs on one another's goods beginning in early July.² While only four in ten (42%) Americans say that a possible trade war with China is a critical threat, seven in ten Americans are either very (31%) or somewhat (41%) concerned that a trade war with China will hurt their local economy. While there are few regional differences on trade issues across the United States, concern about a US-China trade war's impact on the local economy is greater in the Northeast and Midwest (79% each), though majorities elsewhere are also concerned (68% in the West and 65% in the South).

² ["Trump's Trade War With China Is Officially Underway."](#) Ana Swanson, *The New York Times*. July 5, 2018.

Trade disputes with Mexico, America's third-largest trading partner, are somewhat less concerning to the US public: just over half are very (19%) or somewhat (33%) concerned about the impact of a trade war with Mexico on their local economy. In both cases, Democrats are more concerned than Republicans about looming trade battles.



Jobs Creation More Important to Americans than Broader Choice and Lower Prices

Americans are decidedly more convinced that US trade policy should be focused on increasing American exports to other countries in order to create jobs in the United States (80%) versus restricting foreign imports to protect American jobs (17%). On the other hand, when the question is posed differently, a majority prefer to restrict foreign imports to protect American jobs (60%) versus a minority who say US trade policy should have no restrictions in order to provide US consumers with greater choices and the lowest prices (38%). Other polls have asked specifically about the newly-imposed tariffs on aluminum and steel, finding somewhat mixed reviews. For example, a June 14-17 CBS News poll found that 48 percent of Americans disapproved of the same steel and aluminum tariffs compared to 36 percent who approved, but a majority of Republicans approved (71%).³

The public's emphasis on jobs is not a new one. As in past Council polls, protecting American jobs is one of the most important goals for US foreign policy, higher among Republicans (79% very important goal) than Democrats (65%) or

³ For other examples, see results here: <http://www.pollingreport.com/trade.htm>

Independents (67%). Among Trump Republicans, it is an even higher priority (89% very important, 67% among non-Trump Republicans).

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 ± 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?"

In the overall survey sample, 27 percent self-identified as a Republican in the question above. Slightly more Republicans are defined as Trump Republicans than non-Trump Republicans. Specifically, 15 percent of the overall sample self-identified as Republicans *and* answered "very favorable" to the question: "Do you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable view of the following world leaders: US President Donald Trump?" Non-Trump Republicans, 12 percent of the overall sample, self-identified as Republican *and* said they have "somewhat favorable", "somewhat unfavorable," or "very unfavorable" of President Trump. Among all self-identified Republicans, 55 percent are "Trump Republicans" and 44 percent are "non-Trump Republicans."

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

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 on Global Affairs 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 thechicagocouncil.org and follow [@ChicagoCouncil](https://twitter.com/ChicagoCouncil).

Appendix

Q190: Overall, do you think international trade is good or bad for:

190/1. The US Economy

2018	Good (%)	Bad (%)	Refused (%)
<u>Overall</u>	82	17	2
Republican	82	17	1
Democrat	84	15	1
Independent	81	19	1

190/3. Consumers like you

2018	Good (%)	Bad (%)	Refused (%)
<u>Overall</u>	85	13	2
Republican	84	16	1
Democrat	86	12	2
Independent	86	14	1

190/4. Creating jobs in the United States

2018	Good (%)	Bad (%)	Refused (%)
<u>Overall</u>	67	31	2
Republican	65	35	1
Democrat	71	27	2
Independent	65	34	1

Q190N1: Overall, do you think the North American Free Trade Agreement, also known as NAFTA, is good or bad for the United States economy?

2018	Good (%)	Bad (%)	Refused (%)
<u>Overall</u>	63	32	5
Republican	43	53	4
Democrat	79	16	6
Independent	62	34	4

Q140: Based on what you know, do you think the United States should or should not participate in the following international agreements?

140/8. The Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (or CPTPP), a trade agreement among eleven Pacific nations based on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement

2018	Should participate (%)	Should not participate (%)	Refused (%)
<u>Overall</u>	61	32	6
Republican	45	49	6
Democrat	76	19	5
Independent	60	33	7

QTA1: Do you believe the United States achieves better results in international trade agreements by negotiating with one country at a time, by negotiating with larger groups of countries together, or staying out of trade agreements altogether?

2018	Negotiating with one country at a time (%)	Negotiating with larger groups of countries (%)	Staying out of trade agreements (%)	Refused (%)
<u>Overall</u>	43	45	7	4
Republican	62	24	10	3
Democrat	30	63	4	3
Independent	43	44	9	4

Q7: Below is a list of possible foreign policy goals that the United States might have. For each one please select whether you think that it should be a very important foreign policy goal of the United States, a somewhat important foreign policy goal, or not an important goal at all:

7/16. Reducing our trade deficit with foreign countries

	Very important (%)	Somewhat important (%)	Not important at all (%)	Refused (%)
2018				
<u>Overall</u>	42	48	10	1
Republican	53	41	4	1
Democrat	34	54	12	1
Independent	42	47	11	0

Q5: Below is a list of possible threats to the vital interest 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:

5/41. The possibility of a trade war with China

	Critical threat (%)	Important but not critical threat (%)	Not an important threat (%)	Refused (%)
2018				
<u>Overall</u>	42	48	9	0
Republican	28	59	13	0
Democrat	54	41	5	1
Independent	40	49	11	0

QMONMOUTH A: If the United States gets into a trade war with China, how concerned are you that this would hurt the local economy in your area?

	Very concerned (%)	Somewhat concerned (%)	Not very concerned (%)	Not concerned at all (%)	Refused (%)
2018					
<u>Overall</u>	31	41	21	6	2
Republican	13	43	32	10	3
Democrat	43	40	13	2	2
Independent	31	39	21	7	1

QMONMOUTH B: If the United States gets into a trade war with Mexico, how concerned are you that this would hurt the local economy in your area?

	Very concerned (%)	Somewhat concerned (%)	Not very concerned (%)	Not concerned at all (%)	Refused (%)
2018					
<u>Overall</u>	19	33	32	13	2
Republican	8	23	49	19	2
Democrat	30	40	21	7	2
Independent	15	34	33	16	2

QIBID1: In your opinion, which should be the larger goal for US trade policy: restricting foreign imports to the United States to protect American jobs, or increasing American exports to other countries to create jobs in the United States?

	Restricting foreign imports to protect American jobs (%)	Increasing American exports to create jobs in the US (%)	Refused (%)
2018			
<u>Overall</u>	17	80	3
Republican	24	73	3
Democrat	13	85	2
Independent	17	81	2

QIBID2: 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?

2018	US trade policy should have restriction (%)	US trade policy should have no restriction (%)	Refused (%)
<u>Overall</u>	60	38	3
Republican	77	21	2
Democrat	49	49	3
Independent	59	40	1