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# Americans' Views of China Improve as Economic Concerns Ease

*In case of conflict, most Americans  
back using force to defend Asian  
allies against China*

BY *Richard Wike*

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# Americans' Views of China Improve as Economic Concerns Ease

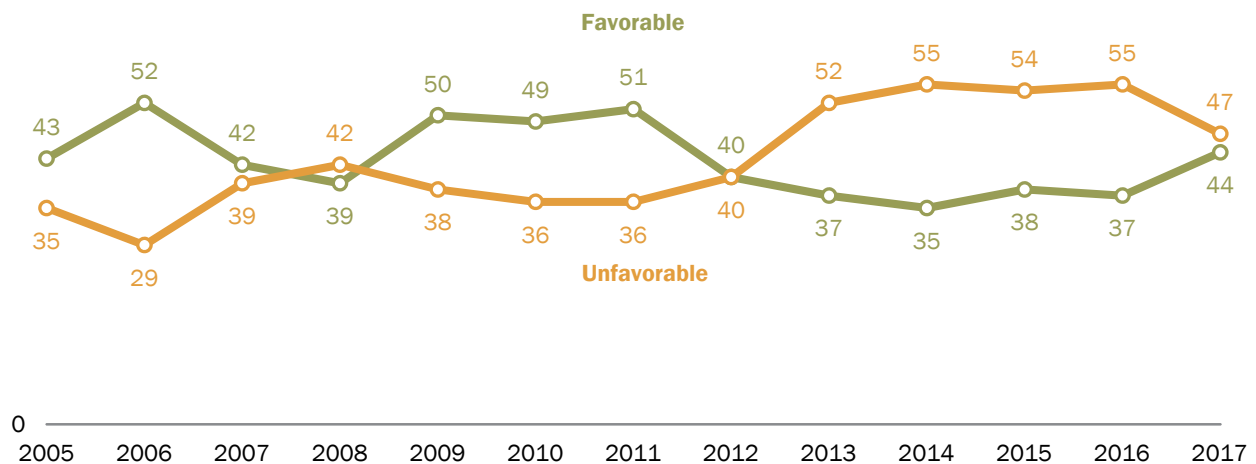
*In case of conflict, most Americans back using force to defend Asian allies against China*

When U.S. President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping meet later this week at Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida, the agenda will include a host of thorny issues, including trade, territorial disputes between China and its neighbors, and what to do about North Korea's growing nuclear capabilities. These issues are also on the minds of many Americans, especially China's economic impact on the U.S. But concerns about U.S. debt, job losses and trade deficits have generally eased. And over the past year, Americans' stance toward China has softened.

## Americans are now divided in their views of China

*U.S. views of China*

80%



Source: Spring 2017 Global Attitudes Survey. Q12c.

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A new Pew Research Center survey finds 44% of Americans have a favorable opinion of China, up from 37% a year ago. The growth in positive ratings for China may be due in part to declining concerns about economic threats from China. The share of the public that sees the amount of U.S. debt held by Beijing, the loss of jobs to China and the trade deficit with China as very serious problems has dropped significantly in recent years. For example, 61% said the trade deficit was a

very serious problem in 2012, compared with 44% today. Concerns about Chinese cyberattacks have, on the other hand, risen to 55% from 50% five years ago.

These shifts in views of China are taking place amid improving assessments of the U.S. economy. Roughly six-in-ten Americans (58%) now say the country's economic situation is either very or somewhat good, up from 44% in 2016 and 40% in 2015. (*For more on ratings of the U.S. economy, see "As Republicans' views improve, Americans give the economy its highest marks since financial crisis."*)

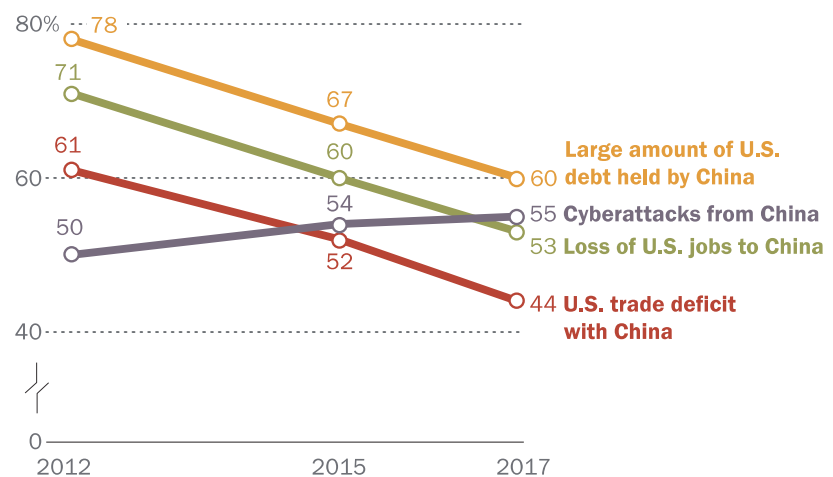
Still, debt, trade and jobs have not disappeared as sources of concern for Americans, and overall about half the public (52%) continues to see China as more of an economic threat than a military one.

China is viewed as principally a military threat by slightly more than a third of Americans (36%). If an Asian ally such as Japan, South Korea, or the Philippines were to become embroiled in a military conflict with China, most Americans (58%) would back the use of force against Beijing. Nearly two-in-three Republicans (65%) and 62% of independents hold this view. And by a 52%-39% margin, Democrats also favor using force to defend an Asian ally.

Economic and military issues are not the only concerns the public has about China – many also name cyberattacks, China's impact on the environment and Beijing's human rights policies as major problems.

### Declining concerns in U.S. about economic threats from China, but rising worries about cyberattacks

— is a very serious problem for the United States



Source: Spring 2017 Global Attitudes Survey. Q38Na,b,f,h.

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In general, Republicans hold more negative attitudes toward China and express stronger worries about economic challenges in the U.S.-China relationship. Most strikingly, 71% of Republicans say job losses to China are a very big problem for the U.S., compared with only 47% of Democrats. While jobs are the top Republican concern about China, among Democrats it is China's impact on the global environment. More than six-in-ten Democrats (63%) call it a serious problem, compared with only 44% of Republicans.

President Xi gets largely negative ratings from Americans: 60% have not too much or no confidence in him to do the right thing in world affairs. Just 31% say they have a lot or at least some confidence in the Chinese leader.

These are among the key findings of a new Pew Research Center survey, conducted among 1,505 respondents in the U.S. from Feb. 16 to March 15, 2017.

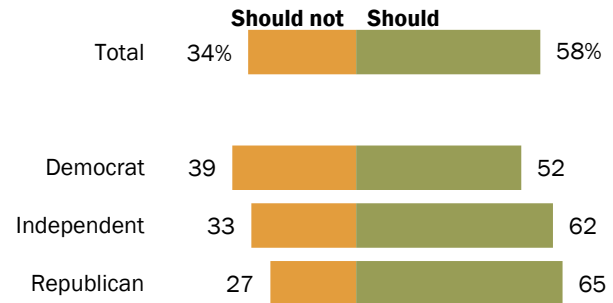
## Democrats, young people more favorable toward China

Overall, the American public is closely divided between those expressing favorable and unfavorable views of China. But there are notable differences along partisan lines, with Democrats significantly more likely than Republicans or independents to offer a positive opinion of China.

However, despite a 2016 presidential campaign season that featured a fair amount of negative rhetoric about China from then-candidate Trump and other GOP contenders, ratings have actually become more positive

## Bipartisan willingness to use force to defend U.S. allies in conflict with China

*If one of our allies in Asia got into a serious military conflict with China, we \_\_\_ use force to defend them*

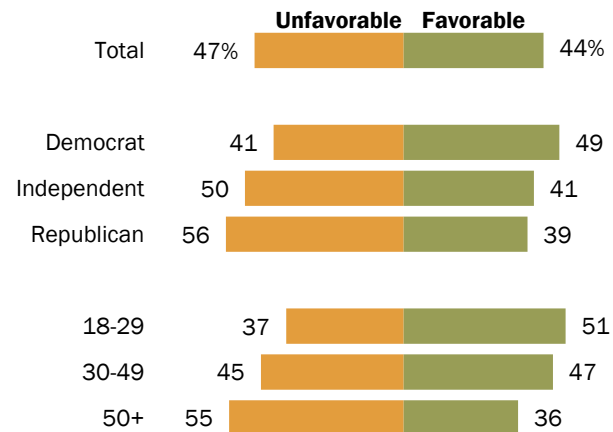


Source: Spring 2017 Global Attitudes Survey. Q55a.

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## Views of China more favorable among Democrats, those younger than 30

*U.S. views of China*



Source: Spring 2017 Global Attitudes Survey. Q12c.

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among Republicans. A year ago, 27% had a favorable opinion, compared with 39% today. Democrats also express more positive ratings this year (49% favorable vs. 39% in 2016). Views among independents are essentially unchanged (41% favorable vs. 40% last year).

Another important dividing line in American attitudes toward China is age. Young people are consistently more likely than older people to see China in a favorable light.

## Americans see variety of problems in relationship with China

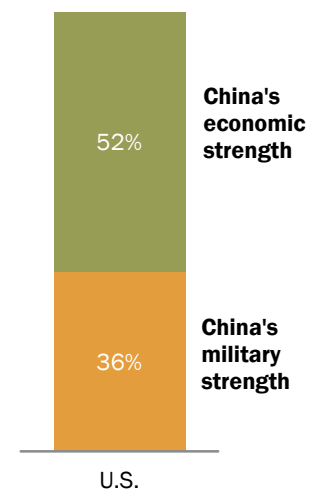
On balance, Americans today tend to be more concerned about China's economic strength than its military prowess. Still, the share of the public that believes China is primarily a military threat has risen somewhat over time. In 2012, 28% were more concerned about China's military strength, while 36% now hold this view.

Although economic concerns about China have become less prevalent in recent years, many Americans are still worried about China's economic strength. The amount of American debt held by China, for instance, is the top concern among the eight sources of tension between the two countries included in the survey.

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### Americans are more concerned about China's economic strength than its military power

*Which concerns you more about China?*



Note: Volunteered categories "Both" and "Neither" not shown.

Source: Spring 2017 Global Attitudes Survey. Q53.

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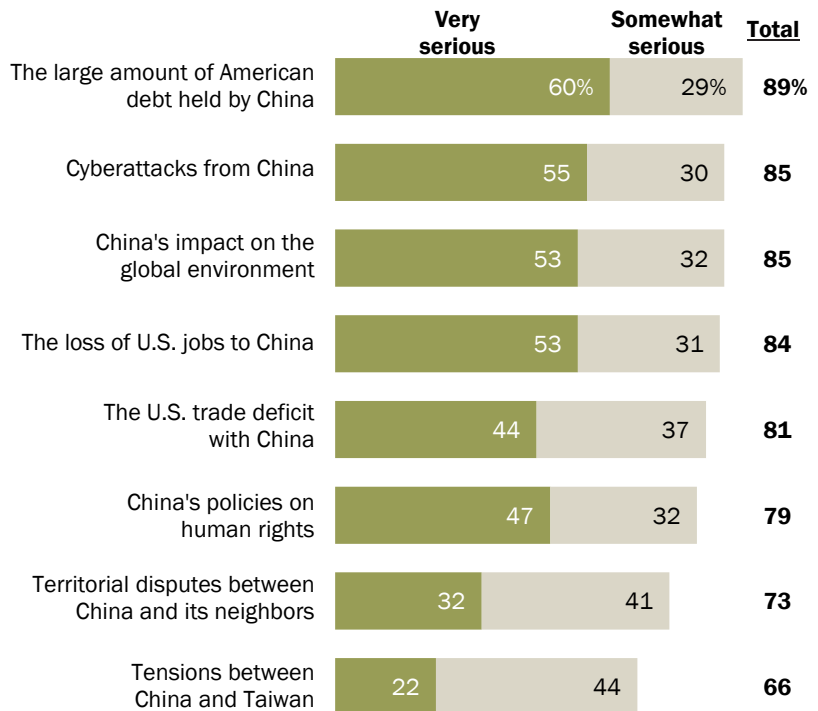
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Large majorities of Americans consider all eight of these issues at least a somewhat serious problem for the U.S., and more than half say the amount of U.S. debt held by China, cyberattacks, China's environmental impact and job losses are *very* serious problems.

Republicans are much more concerned than Democrats about the economic aspects of the U.S.-China relationship. They are much less worried than Democrats about China's impact on the global environment.

## Economics, environmental issues, cyberattacks top Americans' list of concerns about China

*How serious of a problem is ...*

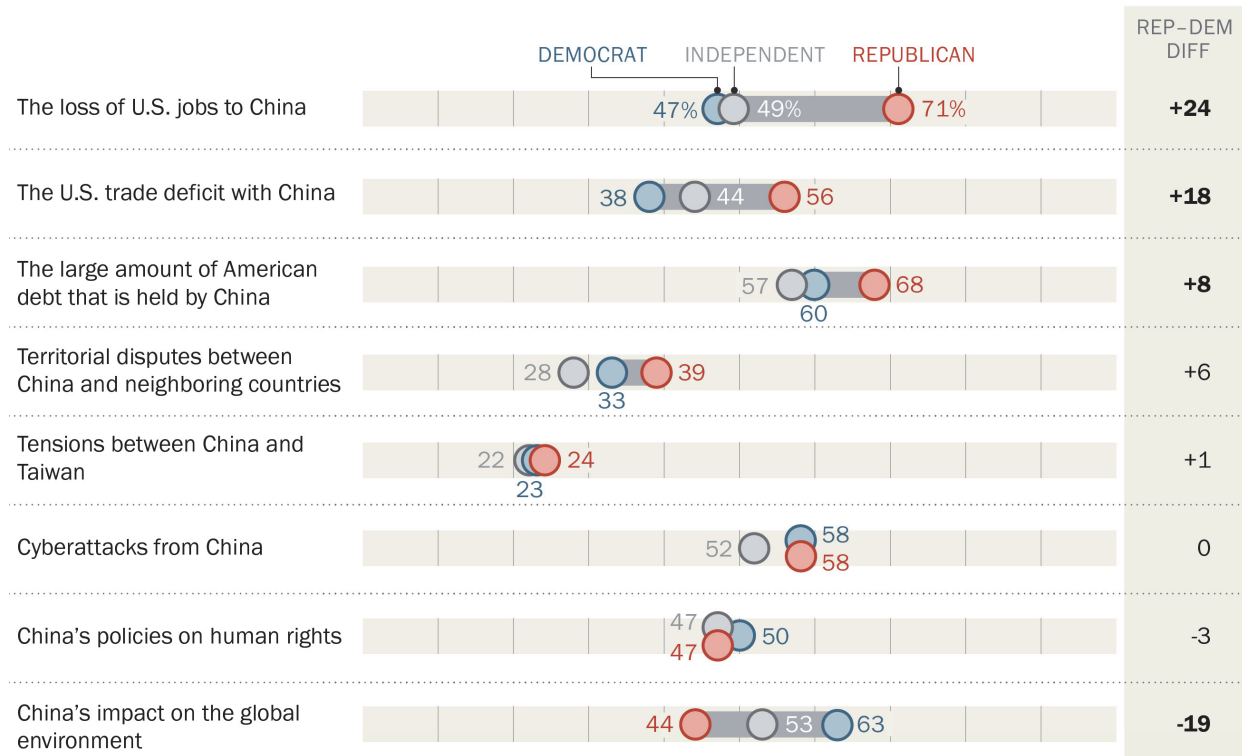


Source: Spring 2017 Global Attitudes Survey. Q38Na-h.

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## Republicans more concerned about economic tensions with China, Democrats worried about China's environmental impact

\_\_\_ is a very serious problem for the U.S.



Note: Statistically significant differences in **bold**.

Source: Spring 2017 Global Attitudes Survey. Q38Na-h.

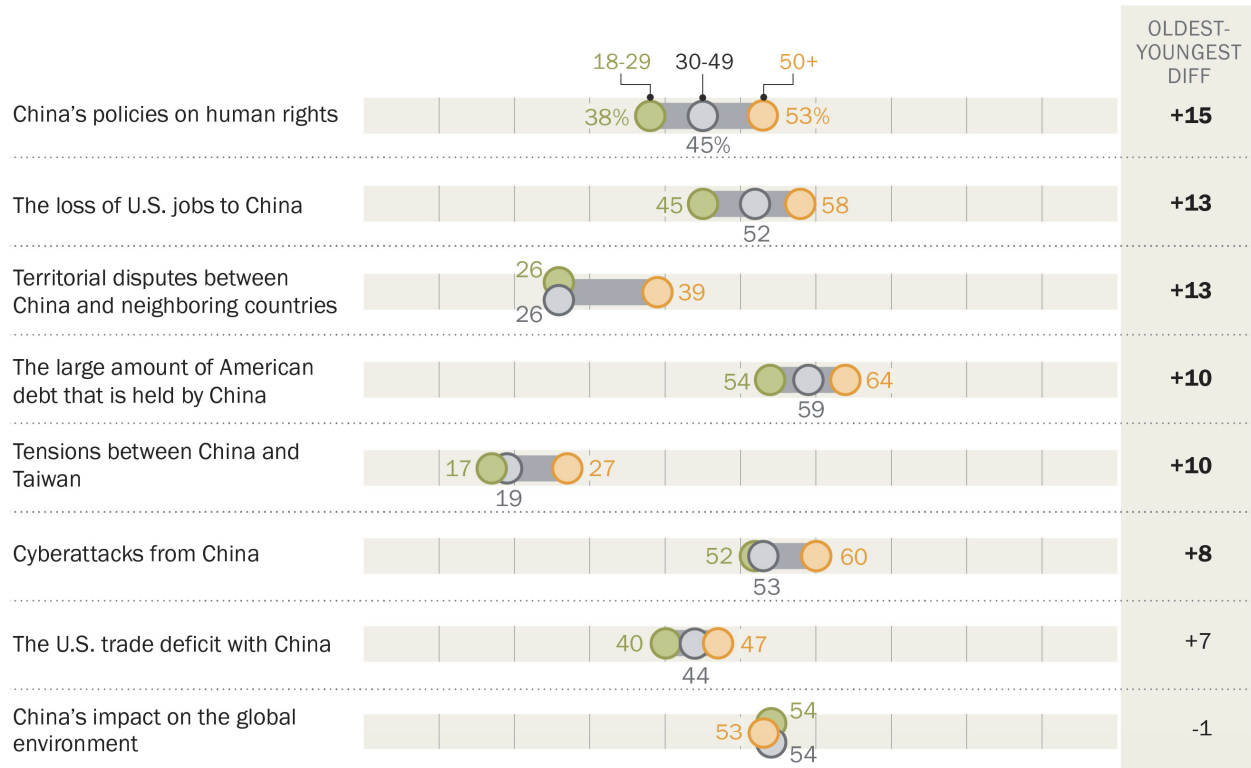
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In general, older Americans tend to see more serious challenges in U.S.-China relations than young people do. For instance, 53% of those ages 50 and older say China's human rights policies are a very serious problem, compared with just 38% of 18- to 29-year-olds.



## Older Americans more likely to view many issues in U.S.-China relationship as very serious problems

\_\_\_ is a very serious problem for the U.S.



Note: Statistically significant differences in **bold**.

Source: Spring 2017 Global Attitudes Survey. Q38Na-h.

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## Acknowledgments

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## Methodology

### About the Pew Research Center's Spring 2017 Global Attitudes Survey

Results for the survey are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International. The results are based on national samples, unless otherwise noted. More details about our international survey methodology and country-specific sample designs are [available here](#).

[Detailed information on survey methods for this report](#)

[General information on international survey research](#)

# Topline Questionnaire

**Pew Research Center**  
**Spring 2017 Survey**  
**April 4, 2017 Release**

## Methodological notes:

- Survey results are based on national samples. For further details on sample designs, see Methodology section and our [international survey methods database](#).
- Due to rounding, percentages may not total 100%. The topline “total” columns show 100%, because they are based on unrounded numbers.
- Since 2007, the Pew Research Center has used an automated process to generate topline for its Global Attitudes surveys. As a result, numbers may differ slightly from those published prior to 2007.
- Not all questions included in the Spring 2017 survey are presented in this topline. Omitted questions have either been previously released or will be released in future reports.

		Q12c. Please tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion of _____. c. China					
		Very favorable	Somewhat favorable	Somewhat unfavorable	Very unfavorable	DK/Refused	Total
United States	Spring, 2017	5	39	33	14	10	100
	Spring, 2016	6	31	36	19	9	100
	Spring, 2015	4	34	33	21	8	100
	Spring, 2014	7	28	34	21	10	100
	Spring, 2013	7	30	32	20	12	100
	Spring, 2012	6	34	25	15	19	100
	Spring, 2011	12	39	22	14	12	100
	Spring, 2010	10	39	24	12	14	100
	Spring, 2009	9	41	25	13	13	100
	Spring, 2008	9	30	26	16	19	100
	Spring, 2007	8	34	25	14	18	100
	Spring, 2006	12	40	19	10	19	100
Spring, 2005	9	34	22	13	22	100	

		Q30b. For each, tell me how much confidence you have in each leader to do the right thing regarding world affairs — a lot of confidence, some confidence, not too much confidence or no confidence at all. b. Chinese President Xi Jinping					
		A lot of confidence	Some confidence	Not too much confidence	No confidence at all	DK/Refused	Total
United States	Spring, 2017	2	29	29	31	9	100
	Spring, 2014	2	26	26	32	14	100

		Q38Na. I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems for the U.S. For each one please tell me if you think it is a very serious problem, somewhat serious, not too serious or not a problem at all. a. the loss of U.S. jobs to China					
		Very serious	Somewhat serious	Not too serious	Not a problem at all	DK/Refused	Total
United States	Spring, 2017	53	31	10	4	1	100
	Spring, 2015	60	29	8	2	1	100
	May, 2012	71	19	6	2	2	100

		Q38Nb. I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems for the U.S. For each one please tell me if you think it is a very serious problem, somewhat serious, not too serious or not a problem at all. b. the U.S. trade deficit with China					
		Very serious	Somewhat serious	Not too serious	Not a problem at all	DK/Refused	Total
United States	Spring, 2017	44	37	10	5	3	100
	Spring, 2015	52	34	7	4	3	100
	May, 2012	61	28	4	3	4	100

		Q38Nc. I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems for the U.S. For each one please tell me if you think it is a very serious problem, somewhat serious, not too serious or not a problem at all. c. China's policies on human rights					
		Very serious	Somewhat serious	Not too serious	Not a problem at all	DK/Refused	Total
United States	Spring, 2017	47	32	9	6	6	100
	Spring, 2015	53	32	6	4	5	100
	May, 2012	48	33	10	4	6	100

		Q38Nd. I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems for the U.S. For each one please tell me if you think it is a very serious problem, somewhat serious, not too serious or not a problem at all. d. tensions between China and Taiwan					
		Very serious	Somewhat serious	Not too serious	Not a problem at all	DK/Refused	Total
United States	Spring, 2017	22	44	17	9	8	100
	Spring, 2015	21	45	17	7	10	100
	May, 2012	27	39	15	6	13	100

		Q38Ne. I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems for the U.S. For each one please tell me if you think it is a very serious problem, somewhat serious, not too serious or not a problem at all. e. China's impact on the global environment					
		Very serious	Somewhat serious	Not too serious	Not a problem at all	DK/Refused	Total
United States	Spring, 2017	53	32	7	5	3	100
	Spring, 2015	49	36	7	3	4	100
	May, 2012	50	31	10	4	6	100

		Q38Nf. I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems for the U.S. For each one please tell me if you think it is a very serious problem, somewhat serious, not too serious or not a problem at all. f. the large amount of American debt that is held by China					
		Very serious	Somewhat serious	Not too serious	Not a problem at all	DK/Refused	Total
United States	Spring, 2017	60	29	6	3	2	100
	Spring, 2015	67	22	5	3	2	100
	May, 2012	78	14	3	2	3	100

		Q38Ng. I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems for the U.S. For each one please tell me if you think it is a very serious problem, somewhat serious, not too serious or not a problem at all. g. territorial disputes between China and neighboring countries					
		Very serious	Somewhat serious	Not too serious	Not a problem at all	DK/Refused	Total
United States	Spring, 2017	32	41	15	8	3	100

		Q38Nh. I am going to read you a list of things that may be problems for the U.S. For each one please tell me if you think it is a very serious problem, somewhat serious, not too serious or not a problem at all. h. cyberattacks from China					
		Very serious	Somewhat serious	Not too serious	Not a problem at all	DK/Refused	Total
United States	Spring, 2017	55	30	8	4	2	100
	Spring, 2015	54	32	7	4	3	100
	May, 2012	50	29	10	2	8	100

		Q53. Which concerns you more about China?					
		Its economic strength	Its military strength	Both (VOL)	Neither (VOL)	DK/Refused	Total
United States	Spring, 2017	52	36	6	2	3	100
	Spring, 2016	50	37	5	4	4	100
	May, 2012	59	28	7	4	2	100

		Q55a. If one of our allies in Asia, such as Japan, South Korea or the Philippines, got into a serious military conflict with ____, do you think we should or should not use military force to defend them? a. China				
		Should use military force	Should not use military force	Depends (VOL)	DK/Refused	Total
United States	Spring, 2017	58	34	NA	8	100
	Spring, 2015	56	34	5	5	100

In 2015, asked as a standalone question and respondents were given the option of 'depends' as a volunteered category.