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U.S. Views of China Turn Sharply Negative Amid Trade Tensions

Over half of Americans see friction in the current bilateral economic relationship, and more now see China as a threat

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U.S. Views of China Turn Sharply Negative Amid Trade Tensions

Over half of Americans see friction in the current bilateral economic relationship, and more now see China as a threat

Over the past year, the United States and China have slapped a [series of escalating tariffs](#) on one another, with the U.S. now taxing [more than \\$250 billion worth](#) of Chinese goods.

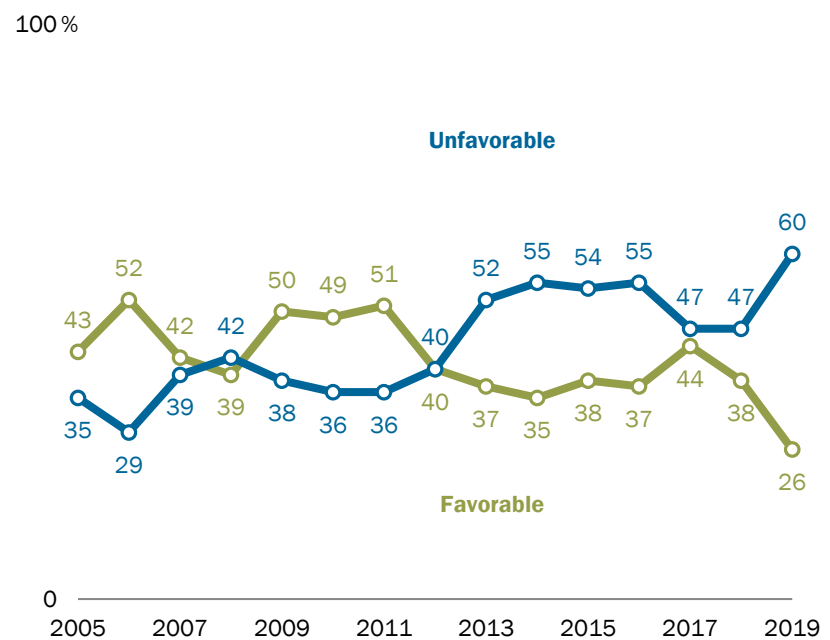
Despite [periodic, high-level meetings](#) intended to defuse these trade tensions, results of a new Pew Research Center survey indicate Americans believe economic ties between China and the U.S. are poor. And, amid these economic concerns, unfavorable opinions of China have reached a 14-year high. Today, 60% of Americans have an unfavorable opinion of China, up from 47% in 2018 and at the highest level since Pew Research Center began asking the question.

Americans also increasingly see

China as a threat. Around a quarter of Americans (24%) name China as the country or group that poses the greatest threat to the U.S. in the future, twice as many as said the same in 2007. China is tied with Russia (24%) as the country or group most cited as a threat to the U.S. The only other country to measure in the double digits is North Korea (12%).

Share of Americans who have unfavorable view of China reaches new high

% who say they have a ___ opinion of China



Note: Don't know responses not shown.

Source: Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey. Q8b.

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While people are concerned about the current bilateral economic relationship and increasingly see China as a potential adversary, they do not necessarily think China's growing economy is bad for the United States. More Americans say China's growing economy is good for the U.S. than that it is bad (50% vs. 41%, respectively). But, when it comes to China's increasing military strength, opinion is more uniformly critical: 81% of Americans think China's growing military power is bad for the U.S.

Republicans and Democrats largely agree in their assessments of how China's growing economy and military will affect the U.S. But, while both Republicans and Democrats have unfavorable views of China, Republicans' opinions are somewhat more negative: 70% of Republicans and independents who lean Republican have an unfavorable opinion of China today, compared with 59% of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents.

Partisans also diverge sharply when it comes to the state of current bilateral economic relations as well as their evaluations of which country has the world's strongest economy. Republicans are more likely to say current economic ties between the United States and China are good, as well as to see the U.S. as the leading global economy. Party affiliation also colors which country or group people consider the most threatening to the U.S.: Republicans are more than twice as likely to name China as they are any other country (32%), while Democrats name China second – behind Russia – as the most threatening country (36% name Russia, 19% China).

The new survey by Pew Research Center, conducted May 13 to June 18, 2019, among 1,503 adults, also finds that older Americans tend to have more negative views of China than younger

From many vantage points, negative views of China predominate

% who say current economic ties between the U.S. and China are ...



% who say they have ___ in Chinese President Xi Jinping to do the right thing in world affairs



% who say they have a ___ opinion of China



% who say China's growing military power is a ___ for the U.S.



% who say China's growing economy is a ___ for the U.S.



Note: Don't know responses not shown.

Source: Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey. Q8b, Q37b, Q38b, Q41 & Q42.

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Americans. Older Americans are also more likely to be concerned about the impact of both China's growing military *and* economic strength on the United States, though they are more likely to see the U.S. as the leading economic power than younger Americans.

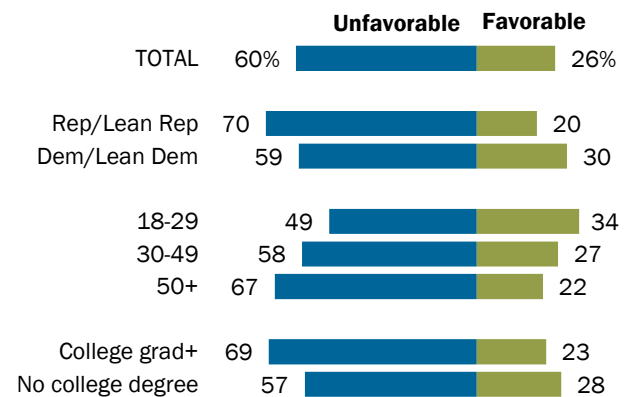
Unfavorable opinion of China reaches new high

American opinion of China has fluctuated somewhat over time, with positive views outnumbering negative ones during President Barack Obama's first term in office, but negative views mostly predominating since. Still, unfavorable opinion has never been higher than it is now, based on Pew Research Center's 14 years of polling on the topic. Today, 60% of Americans have an unfavorable opinion of China, including around a quarter who have a *very* unfavorable opinion. This 13 percentage point increase in unfavorable opinion from 2018 to 2019 also marks the largest year-on-year change in public opinion toward China since 2005.

As has historically been the case in Pew Research Center polling, older people tend to have more negative opinions of China than younger people. About half of 18- to 29-year-olds (49%) express an unfavorable view of China, compared with 58% of those ages 30 to 49 and two-thirds of people 50 and older (67%). People with at least a four-year college degree are also more negative toward China (69%) than those who have not completed college (57%).

Republicans, college-educated and older Americans hold more unfavorable views of China

% who say they have a ___ opinion of China



Note: Don't know responses not shown.

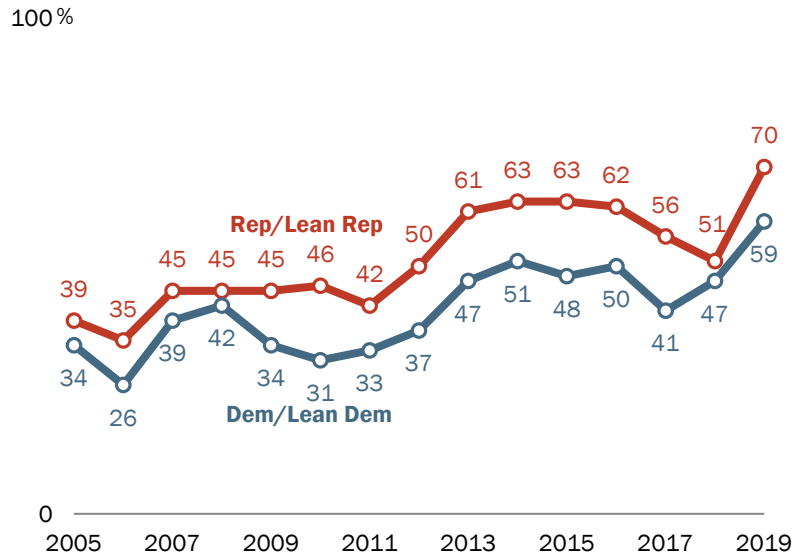
Source: Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey. Q8b.

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While unfavorable opinion of China increased among partisans of all stripes over the past year, Republicans and Republican-leaning independents have become particularly negative in their evaluations of China. Seven-in-ten Republicans and Republican leaners have an unfavorable opinion of China today, up from 51% in 2018. Among Democrats and Democratic leaners, unfavorable opinion increased somewhat less over the same period, from 47% to 59%.

Negative views of China increased sharply over the past year, particularly among Republicans

% who say they have an unfavorable opinion of China



Source: Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey. Q8b.

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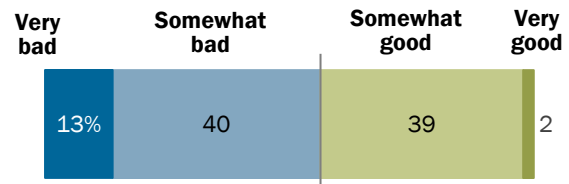
More Americans say current U.S.-China economic ties are poor

Shifting attitudes toward China are colored, in part, by the context of the continued trade frictions and tariffs between the United States and China. Today, just over half of Americans (53%) believe current economic ties between the U.S. and China are bad. Fewer (41%) think economic relations between the two nations are good, with just 2% of American adults saying ties are *very* good. Partisanship is associated with views of the U.S.-China economic relationship: While 49% of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents see current ties as good, around one-third (36%) of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents share this view. And, despite having more favorable views of China, younger Americans (ages 18 to 29) are about as likely as those 50 and older to have negative views of current economic relations with China (58% and 53%, respectively, say ties are bad).

Previous Pew Research Center work on [U.S. views of China](#) has shown that Americans often express more concern about China over economy-related issues, such as Chinese-held American debt and job loss to China. The most recent survey again reveals how Americans see China through an economic prism, one that in recent months has been clouded by bellicose discourse around trade disputes. Those in the U.S. who see economic ties with China as bad are much more likely than those who think the nations have good economic ties to have *overall* unfavorable views of China (71% vs. 47%).

Americans see current economic relations with China under strain

% who say current economic ties between the U.S. and China are ...



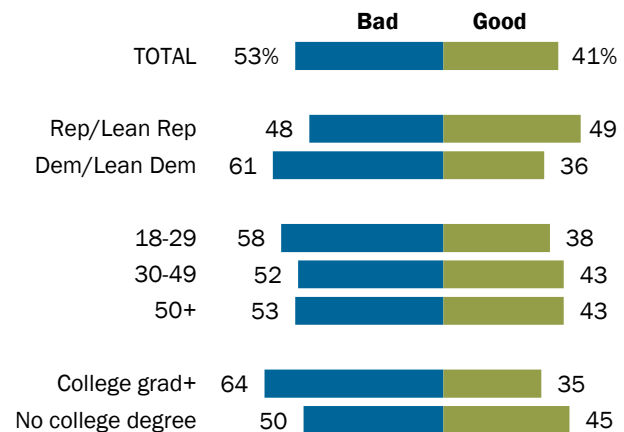
Note: Don't know responses not shown.

Source: Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey. Q37b.

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Party, education plays significant role in views of U.S.-China economic ties

% who say current economic ties between the U.S. and China are ...



Note: Don't know responses not shown.

Source: Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey. Q37b.

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Americans increasingly see China as a threat

Some [elected officials](#) and [policymakers](#) increasingly have been highlighting the ways in which China threatens the United States, even reviving the [Committee on the Present Danger](#). Alongside these high-level shifts, the American public has grown more concerned about China's future impact on the U.S. When asked to name the country or group that poses the greatest future threat to the U.S., China is one of the two most frequently named entities, with about a quarter of Americans citing the country as the greatest future threat (24%). This is a 5 percentage point increase from 2014, when 19% of Americans considered China to be the U.S.'s greatest future threat, and twice as many as said the same in 2007. Russia is the only other country named with similar frequency; another 24% of Americans consider it the country's largest future threat this year. While largely unchanged since 2014, this marks a 12-fold increase from 2007. Over this same period, concerns about Iran and Iraq have fallen precipitously (from 24% in 2007 to 6% in 2019 for Iran, 21% to 1% for Iraq).

In 2019, China and Russia are named twice as often as the third-most mentioned country: 12% of Americans consider North Korea the greatest future threat.

But partisan differences are stark when it comes to concerns about China and Russia. Republicans and Republican-leaning independents (32%) are much more likely than Democrats and Democratic leaners (19%) to name China as the biggest threat to the U.S. in the future. Among Republicans, China is the most frequently named threat in 2019; in comparison, Democrats most frequently cite Russia as the U.S.'s greatest future threat.

Americans similarly concerned about Russia and China

% who say ___ poses the greatest threat to the U.S. in the future

	2007	2014	2019	2014-19 Change
	%	%	%	
China	12	19	24	+5
North Korea	8	7	12	+5
Russia	2	23	24	+1

Note: Open-ended question. Top three responses in 2019 shown. See topline for additional responses.
Source: Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey. Q23.

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Russia is the only other country named with similar frequency; another 24% of Americans consider it the country's largest future threat this year. While largely unchanged since 2014, this marks a 12-fold increase from 2007. Over this same period, concerns about Iran and Iraq have fallen precipitously (from 24% in 2007 to 6% in 2019 for Iran, 21% to 1% for Iraq).

Republicans more concerned about China than Russia

% who say ___ poses the greatest threat to the U.S. in the future

	Rep/ Lean Rep	Dem/ Lean Dem	Rep-Dem Diff
	%	%	
China	32	19	+13
North Korea	11	14	+3
Russia	13	36	-23

Note: Statistically significant differences in **bold**. Open-ended question. Top three responses shown. See topline for additional responses.

Source: Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey. Q23.

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A [separate Pew Research Center survey conducted in July](#) found a similar pattern, with Democrats much more likely than Republicans to view Russia's power as a major threat to the well-being of the U.S., and Republicans modestly more likely than Democrats to say this about China. There was no partisan difference in the shares naming China's influence as the country's greatest future threat in 2014.

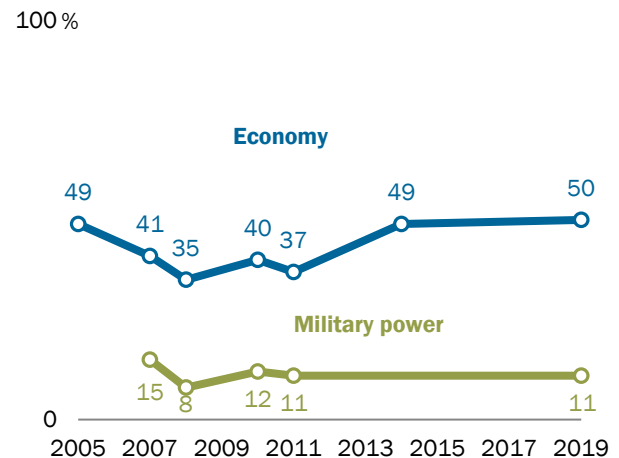
China's military growth, not economic growth, seen as potential problem for the U.S.

China's navy and air force are [the largest in Asia](#), and [defense spending has risen rapidly](#) over the past decade. Against this backdrop, a large majority of Americans (81%) say China's growing military power is a bad thing for the U.S. Only about one-in-ten (11%) say it's a good thing. Even among those with favorable views of China, roughly seven-in-ten (69%) view its expanding military power negatively. Nationwide, the sense that China's growing military would be beneficial for the U.S. has remained largely unchanged over the past decade.

Across age groups, concern about China's growing military power is highest among older Americans. Among those ages 50 and older, 84% say it is a bad thing, while 76% of those 18 to 29 say the same. Those with at least a four-year college degree are more likely than those without to view China's growing military power negatively. There are notably no significant partisan divisions over this issue.

Few Americans see China's growing military as a good thing

% who say China's growing ___ is a good thing for the U.S.



Source: Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey. Q41 & Q42.

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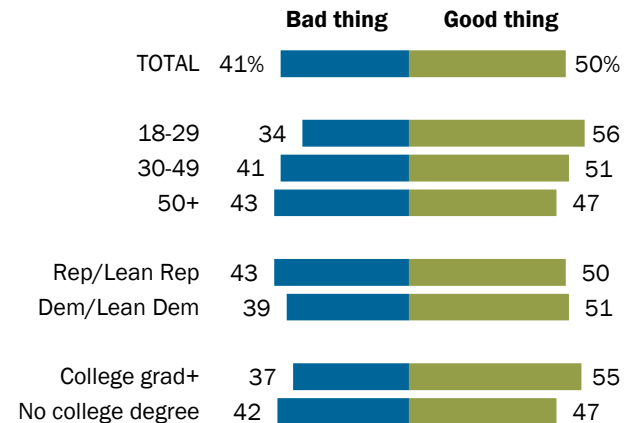
But even while many Americans are concerned about the potential impact of China's military growth, they are somewhat sanguine about how China's economic growth affects the United States. Half of Americans think China's growing economy is a good thing for the U.S. while 41% say it's a bad thing. When first asked in 2005, similar proportions felt the same (49% good, 40% bad). Such optimism was not always the case, though. Those saying China's economic achievements were good for America dropped to less than 40% in 2008 and 2011. However, in 2014 these attitudes rebounded slightly.

Interestingly, roughly half of both Republicans (50%) and Democrats (51%) agree that Chinese growth is good for the U.S. This relative agreement stands in marked contrast to evaluations of the state of current bilateral economic relations, which are colored by partisanship.

Younger Americans – who are more favorable toward China overall – are also more likely than older Americans (56% vs. 47%) to see benefits to China's growing economy. Those with at least a four-year college degree are also slightly more likely than those without to say China's growing economy is good for the U.S.

Younger Americans see benefits of Chinese growth for U.S.

% who say China's growing economy is a ___ for their country



Note: Don't know responses not shown.

Source: Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey. Q41.

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Americans see their own country leading economically

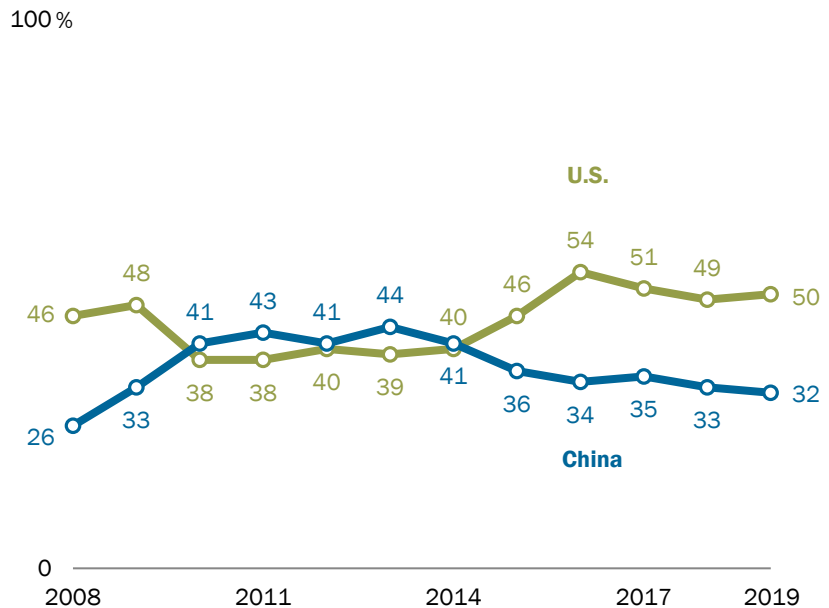
Although China's economy has grown consistently at above 6% for more than a decade, Americans' views of which country – China or the U.S. – has the strongest economy have fluctuated considerably over this same period. Since 2015, however, when asked to choose between the U.S., China, Japan and the countries of the European Union as the world's leading economic power, Americans tend to choose their own country. Today, half of Americans say the U.S. is the dominant economy, whereas roughly one-third (32%) name China – an 18 percentage point difference.

There is a stark partisan difference in how Americans evaluate the world's top economic power. Republicans and Republican-leaning independents are more than three times as likely to name the U.S. as they are China (67% and 21%, respectively). In contrast, Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents are equally likely to name the U.S. and China (both 40%).

Younger Americans are also more likely than older Americans to say China is the leading economic power: 37% of those ages 18 to 29 name China as the leading economic power, while 27% of those 50 and older do the same. Those who say that China's growing economy is a bad thing for the U.S. are similarly more likely to say China is the top economic power than those who say the growing economy is a good thing.

More Americans continue to name the U.S. than China as the world's leading economic power

% who say ___ is the world's leading economic power



Note: Data for "Japan" and "The countries of the European Union" and for the volunteered categories "Other" and "None/There is no leading economic power" not shown. Don't know responses not shown.

Source: Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey. Q33.

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Americans have limited confidence in President Xi

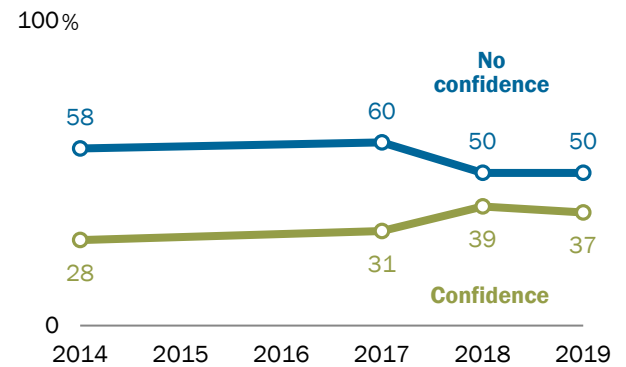
On balance, Chinese President Xi Jinping receives negative ratings from the American public. Half of U.S. adults surveyed say they have little or no confidence in the Chinese leader, while 37% have at least some confidence. This is [little changed from 2018](#) but has increased 9 percentage points since the question was first asked in 2014.

Equal shares of Democrats and Republicans (50%) say they lack confidence in the Chinese president. For Republicans, this marks increased confidence in Xi since 2014, when 65% said they had little to no confidence in him. Democratic confidence in him has remained largely unchanged over the past five years.

Fewer Americans voice confidence in Xi than say the same of leaders from other Asian nations, including Japan's Shinzo Abe (61% confidence) and India's Narendra Modi (42%). However, many more think Xi will do the right thing regarding world affairs than North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, in whom a mere 9% of Americans have confidence.

Confidence in Xi remains low in the U.S. but shows modest increase from 2014

% who say they have ___ in Chinese President Xi Jinping to do the right thing regarding world affairs



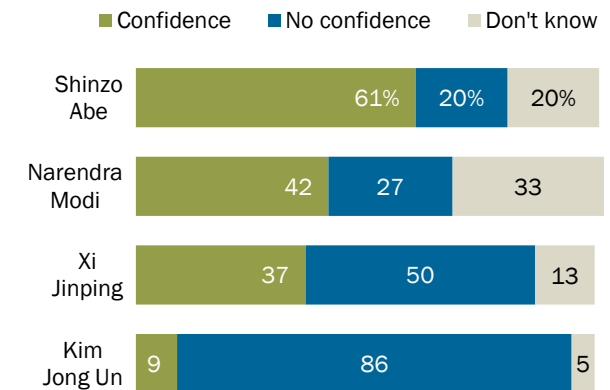
Note: Don't know responses not shown.

Source: Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey. Q38b.

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Many Americans lack confidence in Xi, but lower ratings of North Korea's Kim

How much confidence do you have in ___ to do the right thing regarding world affairs?



Note: Due to rounding, percentages may not total 100%.

Source: Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey. Q38b,f,g,i.

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Methodology

About Pew Research Center's Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey

Results for the survey are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction Abt Associates. The results are based on a national sample. More details about our international survey methodology and country-specific sample designs are [available here](#).

Topline questionnaire

Pew Research Center
Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey
August 13, 2019 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, Pew Research Center has used an automated process to generate toplines 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 2019 Global Attitudes Survey are presented in this topline. Omitted questions will be released in future reports.

		Q8b. Please tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable opinion of ____? b. China					
		Very favorable	Somewhat favorable	Somewhat unfavorable	Very unfavorable	DK/Refused	Total
United States	Spring, 2019	4	22	37	23	13	100
	Spring, 2018	5	33	32	15	14	100
	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

		Spring, 2019	Spring, 2014	Spring, 2007
		United States	United States	United States
Q23. What country or group poses the greatest threat to (survey country) in the future?	Afghanistan	1	1	0
	Canada	0	1	0
	China	24	19	12
	Iran	6	16	24
	Iraq	1	2	21
	Israel	0	1	0
	Japan	1	2	1
	Mexico	1	0	0
	North Korea	12	7	8
	Pakistan	0	6	0
	Russia	24	23	2
	Saudi Arabia	1	0	0
	South Korea	1	0	0
	Syria	1	1	0
	United States	3	2	1
	Terrorists	1	0	1
	Al Qaeda	0	2	3
	Middle Eastern countries	3	1	3
	Extremists	0	1	0
	ISIS	1	0	0
	None	1	0	0
	Other	9	4	7
DK/Refused	9	12	13	
Total	100	100	100	
N=	1503	1002	1008	

Data is displayed vertically.

		Q33. Today, which ONE of the following do you think is the world's leading economic power?							
		The United States	China	Japan	The countries of the European Union	Other (DO NOT READ)	None/There is no leading economic power (DO NOT READ)	DK/Refused	Total
United States	Spring, 2019	50	32	7	6	1	1	4	100
	Spring, 2018	49	33	6	7	1	1	4	100
	Spring, 2017	51	35	5	5	0	0	2	100
	Spring, 2016	54	34	6	2	0	1	3	100
	Spring, 2015	46	36	7	7	0	1	3	100
	Spring, 2014	40	41	8	7	0	0	4	100
	Spring, 2013	39	44	7	4	0	1	6	100
	Spring, 2012	40	41	6	5	0	1	7	100
	Spring, 2011	38	43	6	6	0	0	6	100
	Spring, 2010	38	41	8	6	0	0	7	100
	Spring, 2009	48	33	7	5	0	1	6	100
Spring, 2008	46	26	10	10	0	1	7	100	

		Q37b. Overall, do you think current economic ties between (survey country) and ____ are very good, somewhat good, somewhat bad or very bad? b. China					
		Very good	Somewhat good	Somewhat bad	Very bad	DK/Refused	Total
United States	Spring, 2019	2	39	40	13	5	100

		Q38b. 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, 2019	2	35	27	23	13	100
	Spring, 2018	5	34	27	23	12	100
	Spring, 2017	2	29	29	31	9	100
	Spring, 2014	2	26	26	32	14	100

		Q38f. 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. f. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe					
		A lot of confidence	Some confidence	Not too much confidence	No confidence at all	DK/Refused	Total
United States	Spring, 2019	13	48	10	10	20	100
	Spring, 2018	12	45	15	12	16	100
	Spring, 2014	6	43	16	19	17	100

		Q38g. 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. g. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi					
		A lot of confidence	Some confidence	Not too much confidence	No confidence at all	DK/Refused	Total
United States	Spring, 2019	4	38	15	12	33	100
	Spring, 2018	4	35	19	13	28	100

		Q38i. 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. i. North Korean leader Kim Jong-un					
		A lot of confidence	Some confidence	Not too much confidence	No confidence at all	DK/Refused	Total
United States	Spring, 2019	1	8	14	72	5	100

		Q41. Overall do you think that China's growing economy is a good thing or a bad thing for our country?			
		Good thing	Bad thing	DK/Refused	Total
United States	Spring, 2019	50	41	10	100
	Spring, 2014	49	42	8	100
	Spring, 2011	37	53	10	100
	Spring, 2010	40	47	13	100
	Spring, 2008	35	53	11	100
	Spring, 2007	41	45	13	100
	Spring, 2005	49	40	11	100

		Q42. Overall do you think that China's growing military power is a good thing or a bad thing for our country?			
		Good thing	Bad thing	DK/Refused	Total
United States	Spring, 2019	11	81	8	100
	Spring, 2011	11	79	10	100
	Spring, 2010	12	79	10	100
	Spring, 2008	8	82	10	100
	Spring, 2007	15	68	17	100