



What Americans Really Want from U.S. Foreign Policy

Five Key Things You Need to Know

1. **Change America's course in the world.** The Trump administration's foreign policy is deeply unpopular and offers an important chance for clear alternatives.
 - Most Americans (57%) disapprove of Trump's foreign policy.
 - Six in ten Americans (62%) believe that under Trump America is losing respect around the world.
2. **Connect what's happening in the world to their personal lives. Many voters do not understand what we are doing as a nation today.** Many Americans see America in a global competition, and they don't yet see a plan for success. They want a foreign policy that keeps them safe at home and boosts their economic opportunities.
 - **Strong at home to compete abroad.** Nearly 7 in 10 Americans (68%) strongly agree that America should invest more at home in infrastructure, health care, and education to remain competitive in the world, and not just increase military spending.
 - **The enduring threat from terrorism.** About two-thirds of Americans (63%) say the top priority of U.S. foreign policy in the next five years is protecting against terrorist threats from groups such as ISIS and Al Qaeda.
 - **Democracy protection at home.** More Americans say that protecting democracy from foreign interference is a top priority (46%) than those who say promoting democracy around the globe is a top priority (19%).
3. **Offer new arguments about America's place and role in the world.** Americans are strongly concerned about the emergence of new security threats including cyberattacks and drones and see coordination with governments across the world as essential. There is room for updating the national conversation about America's place in the global economy, one that competes with Trump's "America first" nationalism and focus on trade wars.
 - **Work with others to deal with new security threats.** Two-thirds of Americans (64%) strongly agree that these new threats require coordinated action with other countries.
 - **An openness to trade.** Most Americans (55%) strongly agree that international trade benefits the United States because it opens markets for our goods and services, and we should be active in setting and enforcing fair rules for the global economy.

4. Focus on the countries and issues that matter to them most. America's overall mindset on foreign policy is focused more on China and Russia and less on the Middle East.

- China is viewed as mostly a competitor of the U.S. by a majority of Americans (56%) – and many think America lacks the long-term plan China has for itself in the world.
- North Korea, at 76% and Iran, at 71%, top the list of countries described by strong majorities of voters as mostly an enemy, with Russia, at 57%, also designated as mostly an enemy of the United States by most voters.

5. Listen to the full range of diverse views that has emerged – including generational divides. The old labels of foreign policy views like “neoconservatives” and “liberal internationalists” don’t apply. A new, fragmented landscape of public opinion has emerged under the Trump administration, and voters could be classified into four main camps:

- **Trump nationalists** – One-third (33%) who prioritize restrictive immigration, increased military spending, and protecting American jobs.
- **Global activists** – About one-quarter (28%) who spotlight climate change and global poverty as top concerns and are more skeptical of direct U.S. military engagement.
- **Foreign policy disengaged** – Nearly one in five (21%) of the electorate is disengaged from foreign policy and don’t see foreign policy impacting their lives.
- **Traditional internationalists** – Another one in five (18%) favor working with allies and international institutions, see an obligation to use force in response to genocide, support international trade, and want to defend democratic values.

Important generational divides have emerged on foreign policy:

- Millennials (36%) and Gen Z (47%) both list combating climate change as their top priority.
- In contrast, Gen X (42%) and Boomers (45%) list protecting against threats from terrorist groups like ISIS and al Qaeda as their top priority.
- The oldest group of Americans, the Silent Generation (53%), sees reducing illegal immigration as the top priority.

This information is based on opinion research conducted January -March 2019 by the Center for American Progress and GBAO, including a series of focus groups, qualitative interviews, and a national poll of 2,000 registered voters conducted February 25 – March 3, 2019.