



CHINA

# Viewed as Top Competitor, Support for Finding a Clearer Plan to Compete

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America and China are locked in a trade war that has negative economic consequences inside both China and America and around the world. The current trade war is just part of a broader competition between the two countries over which model of political and economic development will lead the world in the 21st century.<sup>1</sup>

Views of American voters

### On China, investments and alliances are both preferred to steep tariffs

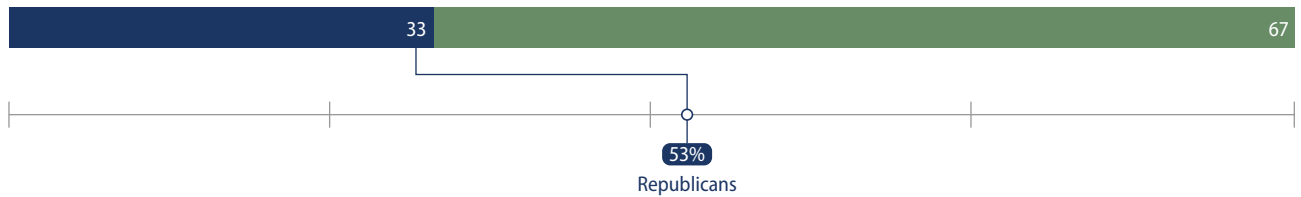
Share of respondents, by political affiliation

Q. "For each pair, please tell me which statement comes closer to your own view, even if neither is exactly right." (Split sample tests below)

**The United States should impose steep tariffs**

on Chinese goods, up to 25 percent, to counteract unfair government subsidies of Chinese businesses and try to force China to accept a fairer trade deal.

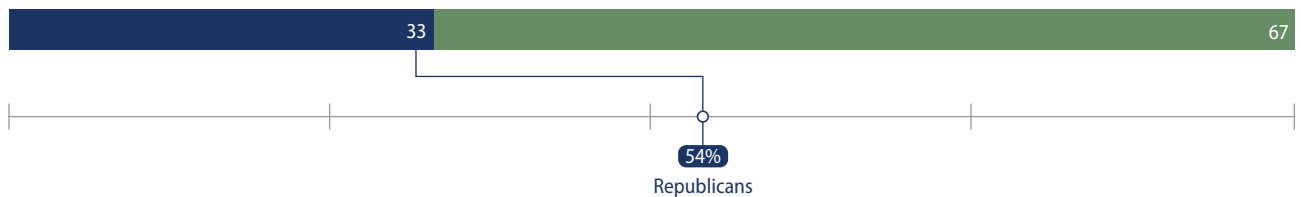
Rather than launch a trade war with China, which will only increase costs of products for U.S. consumers, the United States should build strong alliances with European and other Asian allies to force China to abide by fair rules.



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on Chinese goods, up to 25 percent, to counteract unfair government subsidies of Chinese businesses and try to force China to accept a fairer trade deal.

Rather than launch a trade war with China, which will only increase costs of products for U.S. consumers, the United States should invest more in infrastructure and fund more research and development, to better compete with China and create good jobs here at home.



Source: Center for American Progress and GBAO, "Foreign Policy Research – Phase III" (Washington: 2019), available at <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/content/uploads/2019/07/29142002/FP-condensed.pdf>.

- **China widely seen as a competitor, not a military adversary.** A majority, or 56 percent, of American voters see China as mainly a competitor of the United States, including majorities of Democrats, independents, and Republicans, at 59 percent, 56 percent, and 53 percent, respectively. No other nation is seen as mainly a competitor by a majority of American voters of any political affiliation or generation.
- **Caution over aggression.** A plurality, or 47 percent, of voters say the United States should take a cautious approach to China. By contrast, only 1 in 10 (11 percent) American voters says military action should be on the table to halt Chinese expansion in the South China Sea.
- **Overwhelming support for building alliances and increasing investment at home to compete over trade wars with China.** Virtually all American voters—94 percent—agree strongly or in part that the United States must make new investments at home and build strong alliances in Europe and Asia to compete with China and respond to its rise. Two-thirds, or 67 percent, of American voters prefer building strong alliances with European and Asian allies as well as investing more in infrastructure and research and development at home to better compete with China, while creating good jobs in the process, over the current policy of imposing steep tariffs on Chinese goods.
- **Strong support for trade wars among conservative nationalists.** Support for tariffs and trade wars over alliances and domestic investment remains solid among President Donald Trump’s core supporters. Nearly two-thirds, or 63 percent, of Republican men choose tariffs and trade wars over domestic investment and alliances, as do more than half—53 percent—of Trump’s 2016 voters. The Fox News effect is strong: More than half, or 52 percent, of Fox News viewers favor tariffs and trade wars over alliances and domestic investment versus just one-third—33 percent—of the public as a whole.

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## Key points

- American voters widely view China as America’s No. 1 geopolitical competitor—and they believe that Chinese leaders have a long-term strategic plan for China while American leaders don’t have one for the United States.
- Americans don’t believe that the Trump administration has a clear long-term vision for what it hopes to accomplish with its trade war with Beijing. Voters believe that America is currently locked into an escalating economic conflict with China with no plan to get itself out in a way that strengthens its position.
- President Trump has weakened America’s ability to compete successfully with China by pursuing regressive domestic policies at home while denigrating U.S. allies abroad—especially Japan and South Korea. U.S. leaders are not investing in the country’s future at home or assembling allies abroad, which is what the American people want.

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## The progressive policy alternative

- **Invest at home to compete with China.** The United States needs a long-term strategic plan for increased public investment at home in the industries and technologies of the future, including in new clean energy technologies such as wind, solar, and advanced nuclear power. America must not accept second place to China in the race for global leadership in the future.
- **Solidify and enhance alliances abroad.** America is stronger when it works together with its allies abroad, and its existing alliances in both Europe and East Asia will be especially important in the global strategic competition with China. The more allies the United States can assemble to stand up to China's tactics, the more secure America will be.
- **Work with China on vital issues where possible.** While the United States competes with China on a global level, it must also find ways to work with Beijing where possible—especially on critical issues that know no borders, such as climate change and outbreaks of infectious disease.

American voters see the United States in a competition with China for power and influence around the world—and they worry that America's political leaders don't have a plan to win this contest. In their eyes, that plan would include increased investment in the industries and technologies of the future while shoring up and building out U.S. alliances overseas.

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*This information is based on a national poll of 1,200 registered voters conducted July 10 to 14, 2019, by the Center for American Progress and GBAO. It is also informed by a series of focus groups, qualitative interviews, and a national poll of 2,000 registered voters conducted February 25 to March 3, 2019. Polling results are on file with the authors.*

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## Endnotes

- 1 For further reading on this topic, see Melanie Hart and Kelly Magsamen, "Limit, Leverage, and Compete: A New Strategy on China" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2019), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/reports/2019/04/03/468136/limit-leverage-compete-new-strategy-china/>; Melanie Hart and Blaine Johnson, "Mapping China's Global Governance Ambitions: Democracies Still Have Leverage to Shape Beijing's Reform Agenda" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2019), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/reports/2019/02/28/466768/mapping-chinas-global-governance-ambitions/>.