

Democrats and Republicans Support International Trade

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As part of its Foreign Policy for the Middle Class, the Biden administration has intimated that a rethink of American trade policy is in order. As the US economy has become increasingly globalized, administration officials say the benefits of globalization have failed to reach the American public more broadly. But the 2021 Chicago Council Survey shows majorities say international trade is good for the United States and good for them personally, and support participating in free trade agreements.

Key Findings

- Two in three Americans (68%) say globalization is mostly good for the United States.
- Three-quarters (75%) think international trade is good for the US economy, and 82 percent say it is good for consumers like them. Six in 10 (60%) think it is good for creating jobs in the United States, and nearly eight in ten (79%) think international trade is good for their standard of living.
- Six in ten (62%) think the United States should participate in the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership. And 80 percent say the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement is good for the US economy.
- At the same time, 56 percent say middle class Americans do not benefit very much (44%) or not at all (12%) from US foreign policy. And 57 percent say working-class Americans do not benefit very much (44%) or do not benefit at all (13%).
- In contrast, 94 percent think large companies benefit either a great deal (59%) or a fair amount (34%) from US foreign policy. And 87 percent say wealthy Americans benefit from US foreign policy.

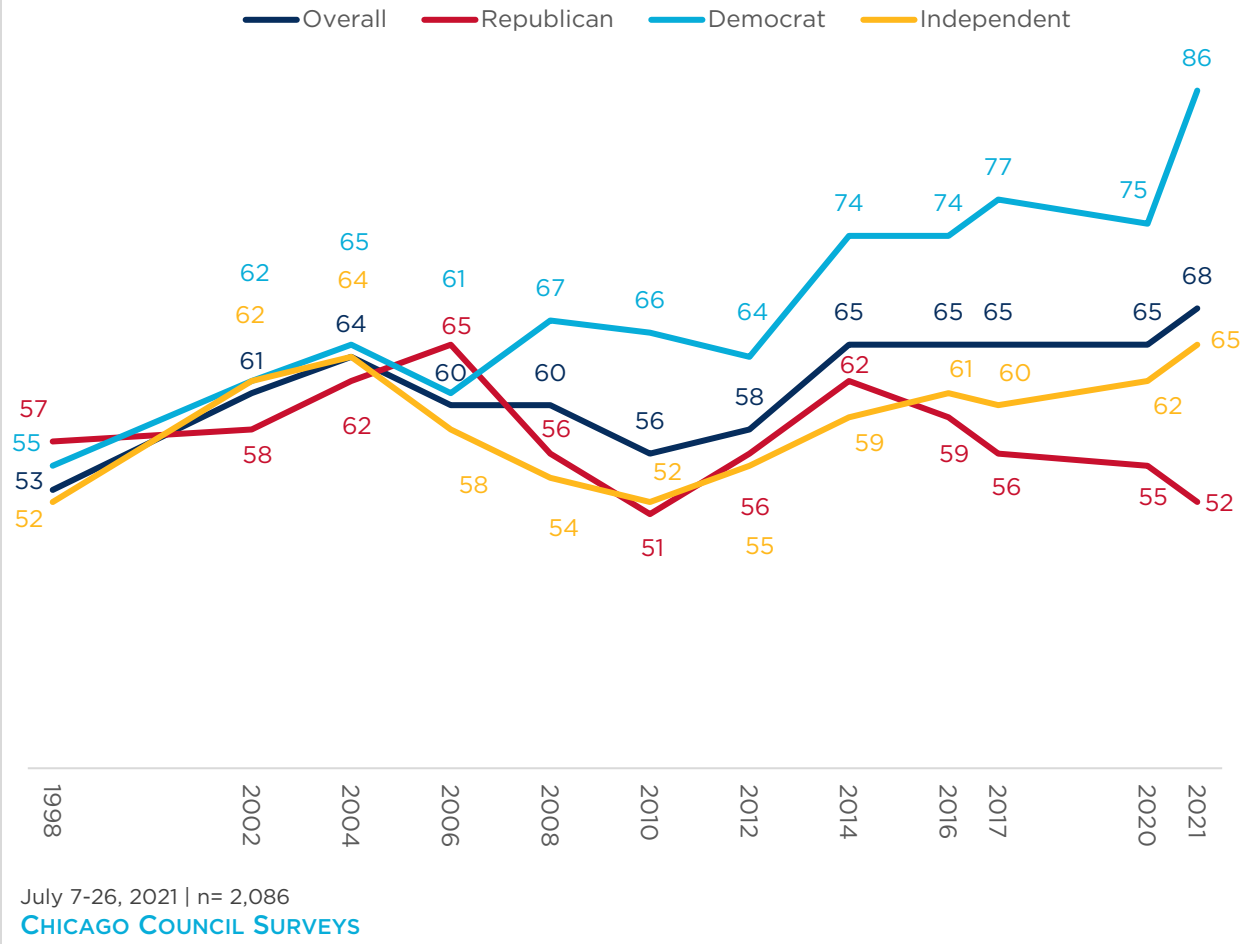
Americans Say International Trade Is Good for the US Economy

International trade has become a convenient scapegoat for administrations of both parties. While congressional Democrats have traditionally been more hesitant to join international trade pacts, their Republican counterparts have recently joined them. In its early days, the Trump administration withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, and the Biden administration has made no move to rejoin. The Trump administration ended up renegotiating the North American Free Trade Agreement and the trade agreement with South Korea with limited gains. Since taking office, Biden administration officials have said there was a need to rethink how to better distribute the gains from trade, as Secretary of State Tony Blinken noted in a [March 2021 speech](#). But the American public is not nearly as negative on trade as successive administrations assume.

According to the [2021 Chicago Council Survey](#), more than two-thirds of Americans (68%) say globalization is mostly good for the United States. And that is true for Americans of all political stripes, although a larger majority of Democrats (86%) than Republicans (52%) agree. This is not a one-time finding. When the question was first asked in 1998, when 57 percent of Republicans, 55 percent of Democrats, and 53 percent overall agreed. Democrats have trended upward on this question since 2006, when 61 percent said globalization was good, to what is now their highest level of support ever.

American Opinions on Globalization

Turning to something else, do you believe that globalization, especially the increasing connections of our economy with others around the world, is mostly good or mostly bad for the United States? (% Mostly good)

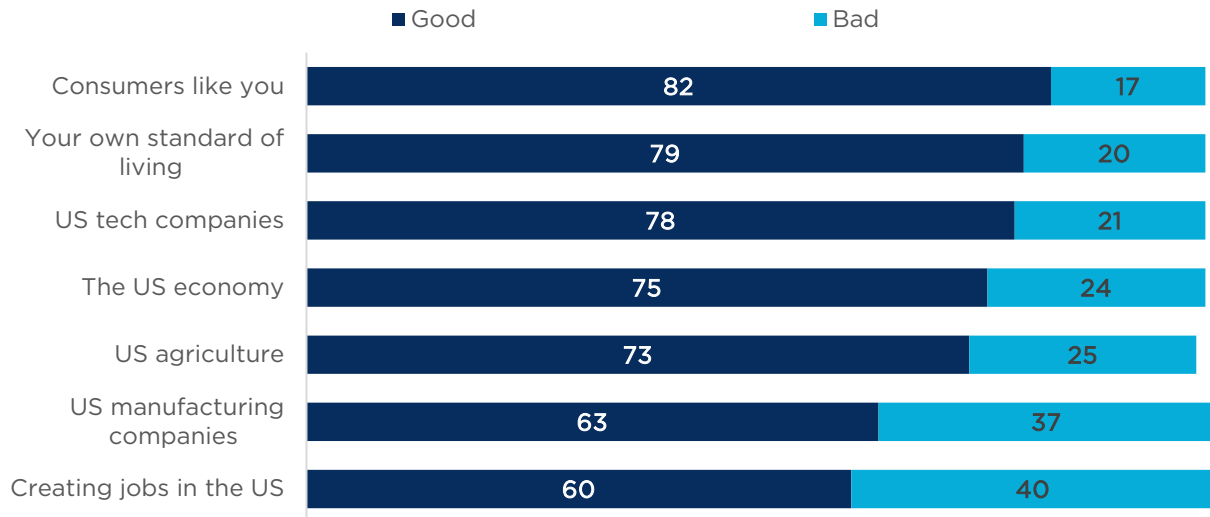


More specifically, three-quarters (75%) say international trade is good for the United States. This support for trade seems at least partially based on the lived experience. Eight in ten (82%) say international trade is good for “consumers like you,” and 79 percent say it is good for “your own standard of living.”

There is also consensus that trade benefits specific sectors in the US economy, such as US tech companies (78%), US agriculture (73%), and US manufacturing companies (63%). And six in ten (60%) think trade is good for creating jobs in the United States. This latter point is especially important considering that 98 percent say protecting the jobs of American workers is either a very (79%) or somewhat (19%) important foreign policy goal.

Beneficiaries of Trade

Overall, do you think trade is good or bad for: (%)



July 7-26, 2021 | n= 2,086

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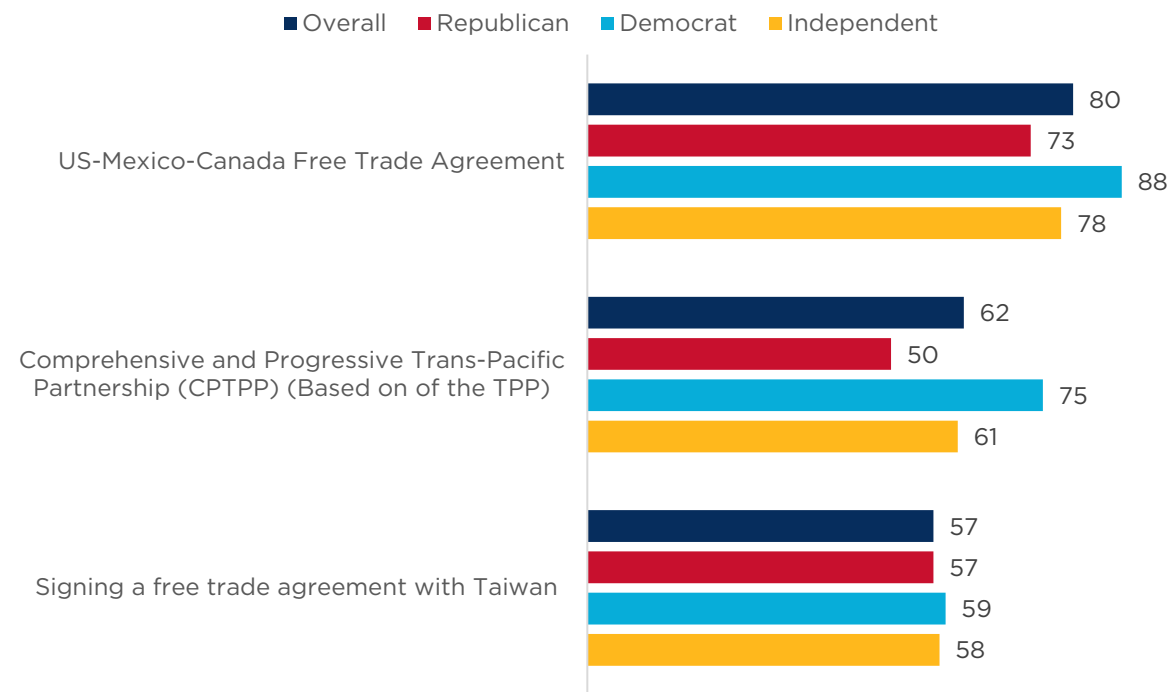
Americans Support Trade Deals

There seems to be a broad view among politicians in both parties that Americans do not favor free trade agreements, believing that such trade agreements benefit people in other countries more than they benefit Americans. The most recent Republican administration punished trade partners to force them into renegotiating trade agreements—ultimately for little gain—as [noted by Phil Levy](#) in a piece for the Reagan Foundation. The Biden administration [looks set](#) to focus on enforcing existing agreements—with special attention paid to labor conditions in other countries that might undercut American competitiveness—rather than negotiating or joining new ones.

Americans put a high priority on protecting American jobs. In the 2021 Chicago Council Survey, 79 percent say protecting the jobs of American workers is a very important US foreign policy goal. This places it just below preventing cyberattacks (83% very important)—the most important priority in the survey this year—and just ahead of preventing the spread of nuclear weapons (75% very important). Indeed, protecting American jobs has consistently been one of the top two priorities for the American public in Council surveys dating back to 1974.

Support for Free Trade Agreements

See footnote for exact question wordings.



July 7-26, 2021 | n= 2,086

CHICAGO COUNCIL SURVEYS

Even with this emphasis on jobs, Americans are largely supportive of trade deals. When asked about the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement—the successor to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)—80 percent of Americans say it is good for the US economy, up from 70 percent in 2019.¹ And that support is bipartisan, with 73 percent of Republicans and 88 percent of Democrats in agreement. A majority of Americans (62%) also say the United States should participate in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership—the successor to the Trans-Pacific Partnership. Here, there is a larger

¹ The data in this chart comes from three questions:

- Overall, do you think the US-Mexico-Canada free trade agreement, also known as USMCA, is good or bad for the US economy? (% good)
- Based on what you know, do you think the US should or should not participate in the following international agreements? The Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), a trade agreement among eleven Pacific nations based on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement (% should participate)
- Taiwan has been self-governed since 1949, but China claims it as part of its territory. The US supports Taiwan's right to self-government and does not recognize China's territorial claims on Taiwan. Would you favor or oppose the following US policies toward Taiwan? (% support).

partisan split on participation, but 50 percent of Republicans support participation, as do 75 percent of Democrats.

United States Seen as Less Competitive; Broad Support for Industrial Policy

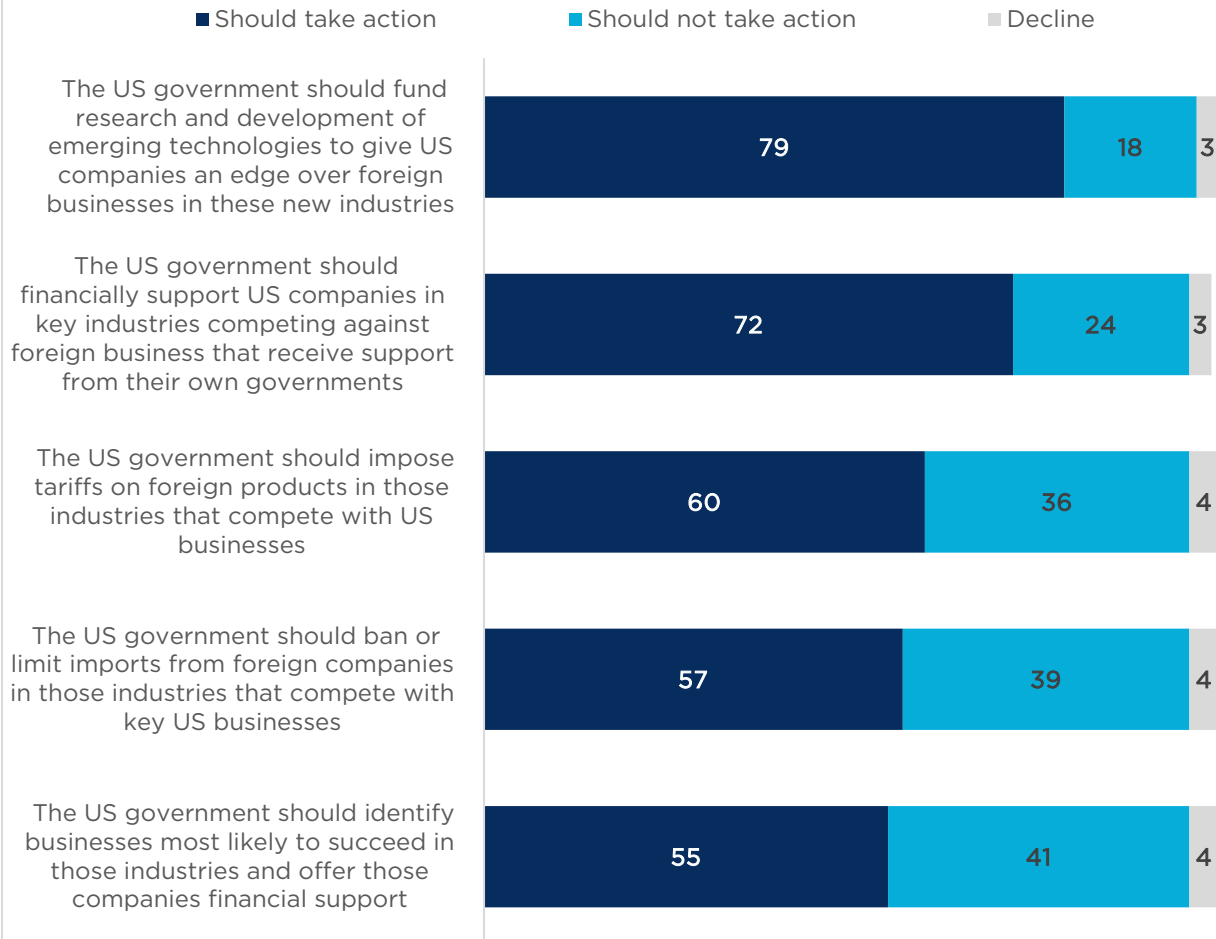
As the United States ramps up efforts to better compete on the global economic stage, a majority of the American public (54%) thinks the United States is now less competitive in the global economy than it was 10 years ago. But there are indications that this perception may be driven by partisanship. When the question was first asked in 2018—during the Trump administration—45 percent said the United States was less competitive, including 40 percent of Republicans and 53 percent of Democrats. In 2021, however, those numbers have flipped. With Joe Biden now president, 59 percent of Republicans and 46 percent of Democrats say the United States is less competitive than 10 years ago.

But even with this partisan split, there is broad bipartisan support for the United States to undertake a comprehensive industrial policy that would seek to elevate US businesses in competition with foreign rivals.

In every example of industrial policy included in the survey, a majority of Americans support US government efforts to give advantage to US businesses over foreign competitors. The most-supported option (79%) is for the US government to fund research and development of emerging technologies to give US companies an edge over foreign businesses in these new industries. And the option with the least support—but still a majority (55%)—is for the US government to pick winners by identifying businesses most likely to succeed in those industries and offering those companies financial support.

Promoting Investment in Industry

Which of the following actions, if any, do you think the US government should take to promote investment in strategically important industries? (%)



July 7-26, 2021 | n= 1,071

CHICAGO COUNCIL SURVEYS

Conclusion

International trade and the gains or perceived losses from that trade will continue to be an important issue for the Biden administration and the American public. But the data suggests there is much broader support for international trade than Democratic or Republican administrations assume. Moreover, there is broad agreement that international trade delivers benefits to consumers and to companies and is even good for creating jobs in the United States.

Methodology

The 2021 Chicago Council Survey, a project of the Lester Crown Center on US Foreign Policy, is the latest effort in a series of wide-ranging surveys on American attitudes toward US foreign policy. The 2021 Chicago Council Survey is made possible by the generous support of the support of the Crown family and the Korea Foundation.

The survey was conducted from July 7 to 26, 2021, among a representative, probability-based national sample of 2,086 adults. The margin of sampling error for the full sample is +/- 2.33 percentage points, including a design effect of 1.1817. 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 usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?"

The survey was conducted by Ipsos Public Affairs, a polling, social science, and market research firm in Palo Alto, California, using a randomly selected sample of Ipsos's large-scale nationwide research panel, KnowledgePanel® (KP). KnowledgePanel is the first and largest online research panel that is representative of the entire US population. Ipsos recruits panel members using address-based sampling (ABS) methods to ensure full coverage of all households in the nation.