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Americans Say U.S.- German Relations Are in Good Shape, but Germans Disagree

Partisan differences in U.S. over relationship with Germany

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Americans Say U.S.-German Relations Are in Good Shape, but Germans Disagree

Partisan differences in U.S. over relationship with Germany

Americans and Germans express very different opinions about the state of relations between their two countries. While roughly two-in-three Americans characterize relations as good, a 56% majority of Germans take the opposite view.

The two publics also have different perspectives on the core elements of the U.S.-German relationship. A 45% plurality of Germans believe economic and trade ties are the most important component of the relationship, while just around one-third point toward shared democratic values. Only 16% say security and defense ties are most important.

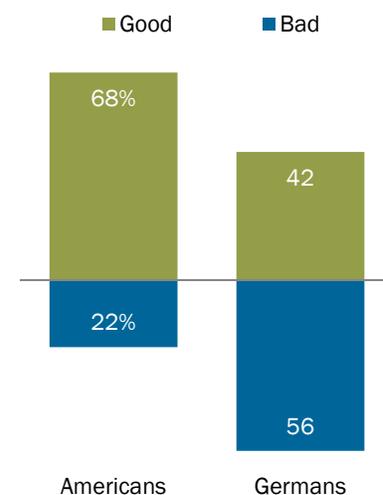
Americans are almost evenly divided between those who say security and defense are the most important element of the relationship and those who name economic and trade ties. About one-in-five cite shared values about democracy.

In both nations, there are partisan differences over what binds the two countries together.¹ Among Americans, Republicans clearly see defense ties as most important (47%), with 28% naming economic and trade ties and just 12% naming shared values. Democrats are almost evenly divided across the three options.

¹ In the U.S., respondents were asked which party they identify with. In Germany, respondents were asked which party they voted for in September's [national election](#).

Large gap in views of U.S.-German relations

Relations between the U.S. and Germany are ...

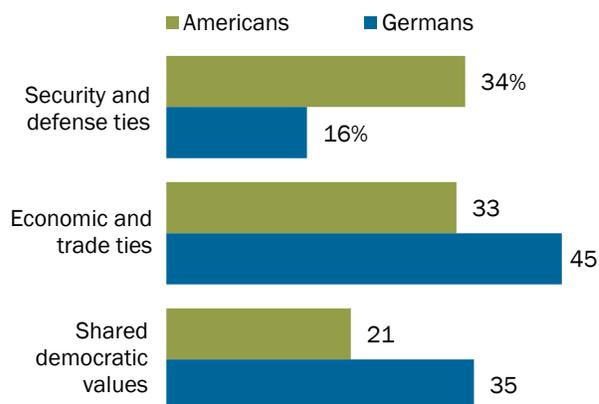


Source: Pew Research Center survey conducted in the U.S. Oct. 6-10, 2017. Q6. German results from Körber-Stiftung survey conducted Oct. 4-18, 2017.

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Differing perspective on most important aspect of U.S.-German relationship

Which of the following is most important when it comes to U.S.-German relations?



Source: Pew Research Center survey conducted in the U.S. Oct. 6-10, 2017. Q7. German results from Körber-Stiftung survey conducted Oct. 4-18, 2017.

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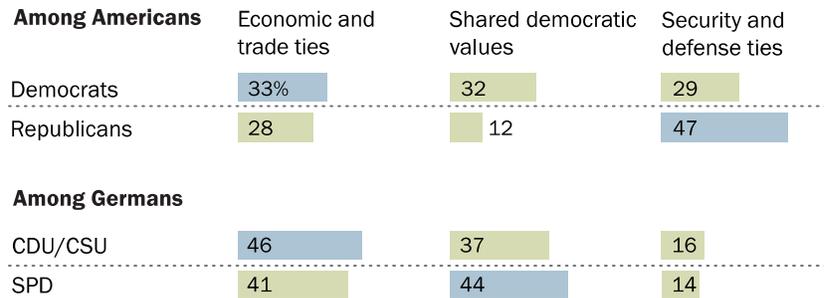
In Germany, supporters of Chancellor Angela Merkel’s center-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and its partner the Christian Social Union (CSU) tend to see economy and trade as the relationship’s most important aspect while placing relatively little importance on defense. Those who back the center-left Social Democratic Party (SPD) are split between democratic values and economic ties.

Partisan divides also shape public opinion about other facets of the bilateral relationship. In the U.S., Democrats are more likely than Republicans to believe Germany is doing the right amount to help solve global problems. While supporters of both parties agree the U.S. should cooperate more with Germany, this belief is more common among Democrats.

Partisan differences on most important factor in U.S.-German relations

Which of the following is most important when it comes to U.S.-German relations?

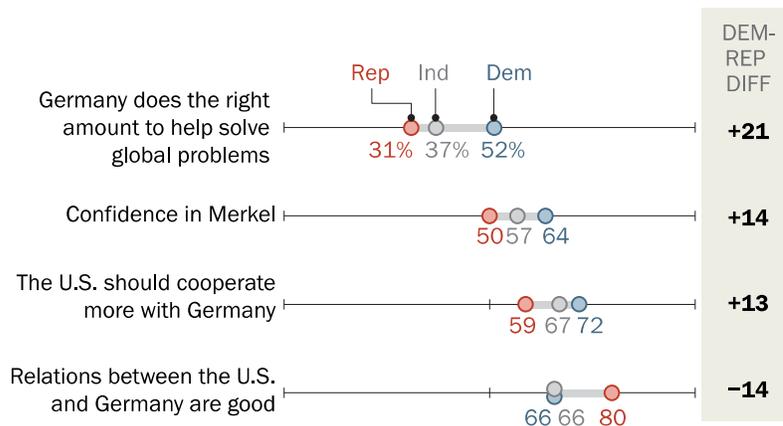
■ Top choice for each party



Source: Pew Research Center survey conducted in the U.S. Oct. 6-10, 2017. Q7. German results from Körber-Stiftung survey conducted Oct. 4-18, 2017.

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Democrats more positive on Germany, Merkel; less positive on U.S.-German relations



Note: All differences shown are statistically significant.

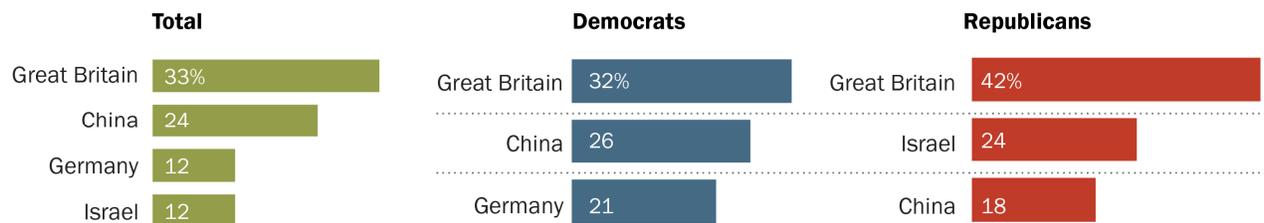
Source: Pew Research Center survey conducted in the U.S. Oct. 6-10, 2017. Q3e, Q4c & Q6. Spring 2017 Global Attitudes Survey.

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In addition, Democrats are more likely to name Germany as a top foreign policy partner for the U.S. Among Democrats, 21% believe Germany is one of the two most important partners for the U.S., putting it in the third spot overall behind Great Britain (32%) and China (26%). Among Republicans, Germany is tied for the seventh spot, alongside Russia, with just 5% of Republicans citing it as a top partner.

Republicans and Democrats differ slightly on top foreign policy partners for the U.S.

___ is the first or second most important partner for American foreign policy



Note: Combined responses.

Source: Pew Research Center survey conducted in the U.S. Oct. 6-10, 2017. Q1a-b.

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Democrats are also more likely to see trouble in the U.S.-German relationship. Roughly three-in-ten believe relations with Germany are bad, compared with just 12% of Republicans. However, majorities of both parties describe relations as good.

In Germany, CDU/CSU and SPD voters agree that their country's relations with the U.S. are in bad shape. At the same time, supporters of these parties also see the U.S. as a top foreign policy partner.

These are among the key findings from parallel surveys fielded in the U.S. by Pew Research Center and in Germany by the Körber-Stiftung. The U.S. survey was conducted Oct. 6-10, 2017, among 1,012 respondents. The Germany survey was conducted Oct. 4-18, 2017, among 1,005 respondents. Additional findings are included from a Pew Research Center survey of Germany and the U.S., conducted Feb. 16-April 7, 2017, among 2,507 respondents.

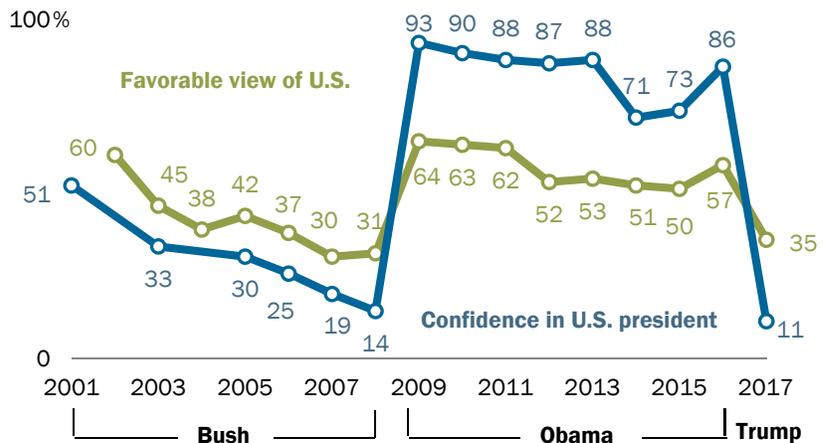
Correction (March 2018): A previous version of this report misstated results for Great Britain on survey questions Q1a-b in the United States. These results were revised March 1, 2018, as were the report and any graphics that used these results. The changes do not impact the report's overall analysis.

Trump unpopular in Germany, but Merkel gets high ratings in U.S.

The first year of Donald Trump's presidency has been characterized by new tensions for the transatlantic alliance and for U.S.-German relations. Before taking office, Trump called Merkel's refugee policy a "[catastrophic mistake](#)." Their first White House meeting made news when the two leaders [awkwardly failed to shake hands](#). Merkel has questioned the U.S. administration's commitment to America's European allies, declaring in 2017 that Germany could no longer "[completely depend](#)" on the U.S.

In Germany, ratings for the U.S. drop

Among Germans ...



Source: Spring 2017 Global Attitudes Survey.

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Tensions at the official level are reflected in German public opinion. In a spring 2017 Pew Research Center poll, only 11% of Germans said they had confidence in Trump to do the right thing in world affairs. A year earlier, 86% had expressed confidence in Trump's predecessor, Barack Obama.

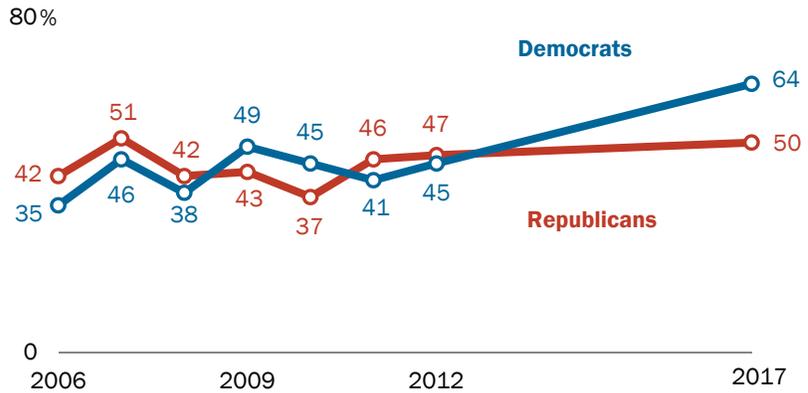
The change in American leadership has led to a shift in overall ratings for the U.S. in Germany. Just 35% of Germans had a favorable opinion of the U.S. in 2017, down from 57% in 2016. (*For more on declining ratings for the U.S. globally, see ["U.S. Image Suffers as Publics Around World Question Trump's Leadership."](#)*)

Meanwhile, American views of Germany's leader have remained positive. Since Pew Research Center first asked about Angela Merkel in the U.S. in 2006, three main findings have stood out. First, positive ratings for Merkel have consistently outweighed negative ones, and this was true again in the 2017 survey, when 56% expressed confidence in her to do the right thing in world affairs, while just 31% lacked confidence. Second, Merkel has become better known – as recently

as 2012, 31% of Americans had no opinion about the German leader, but in 2017 only 14% offered no opinion. Third, a partisan divide has emerged over Merkel. In 2012, there was virtually no difference between Democrats and Republicans, but in 2017 64% of Democrats had confidence in the chancellor, compared with only 50% among Republicans.

Democrats now have more confidence than Republicans in Merkel

Confidence in German Chancellor Angela Merkel to do the right thing regarding world affairs



Source: Spring 2017 Global Attitudes Survey.

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Many Germans name U.S. as important foreign policy partner; fewer Americans name Germany

When asked which countries are their most important partners in global affairs, more than four-in-ten Germans say the U.S. is either their first or second most important. More than six-in-ten name France, while much fewer name Russia (11%), China (7%) or the UK (6%).

Americans are much less likely to see Germany in this way – only 12% name Germany as one of America’s top two partners. Still, Germany does make the top four, trailing Great Britain (33%) and China (24%) and tying with Israel (12%).

Germans are more likely than Americans to see the other as an important partner in foreign affairs

___ is the first or second most important partner for American/German foreign policy



Note: Combined responses.

Source: Pew Research Center survey conducted in the U.S. Oct. 6-10, 2017. Q1a-b. German results from Körber-Stiftung survey conducted Oct. 4-18, 2017.

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In both nations, there is a generational divide on this question. Among Germans of all age groups, France is most commonly named as their nation’s first or second most important foreign policy partner, followed by the U.S. However, among Germans ages 18 to 29, the U.S. trails France by less than 10 percentage points. Among Germans ages 60 and older, the U.S. trails France by nearly 30 points.

In the U.S., those ages 45 and older most commonly name Great Britain as their nation’s first or second most important partner in world affairs. Americans ages 30 to 44 are split between Great Britain and China, and among those ages 18 to 29, China takes the top spot.

Though both Republicans and Democrats tend to name Great Britain as their nation's first or second most important foreign policy partner (42% and 32% respectively), among Republicans the second most common response is Israel (24%) and the third most common is China (18%). Among Democrats, China takes the second spot (26%) followed by Germany (21%).

Mutual preference for more international cooperation

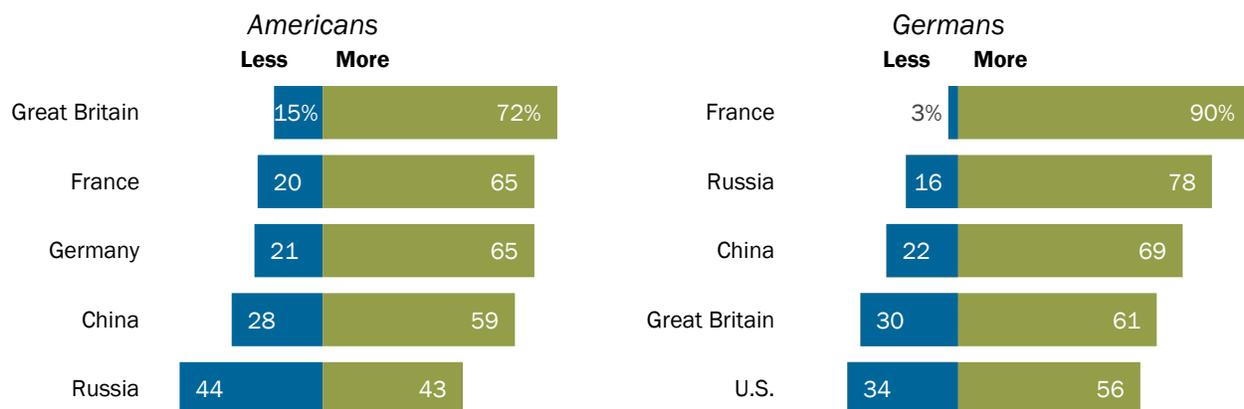
Both the American and German publics support cooperating more with a number of global powers in the future. Majorities across both nations want to work more with each other, as well as with France, Great Britain and China. However, fewer Germans want their country to cooperate more with the U.S. than with any other country tested. And roughly one-third in Germany (34%) say they want to cooperate *less* with the U.S. in the future.

Almost eight-in-ten in Germany want to see their country working more with Russia. Americans are split – just 43% want increased cooperation with Moscow while 44% hold the opposite view. Democrats are much more likely than Republicans to say the U.S. should cooperate *less* with Russia in the future (55% versus 35% respectively). But when it comes to working with Germany, France, Great Britain and China, Democrats are more likely than Republicans to want increased cooperation.

Young Americans (those ages 18-29) are more likely than older Americans (ages 60 and older) to say the U.S. should work more with France and Germany in coming years.

Americans and Germans want greater cooperation with most world powers

In the future, our country should cooperate ___ with ...



Source: Pew Research Center survey conducted in the U.S. Oct. 6-10, 2017. Q3a-e. German results from Körber-Stiftung survey conducted Sept. 5-15, 2017.

U.S. and Germany see others doing too little to solve global problems

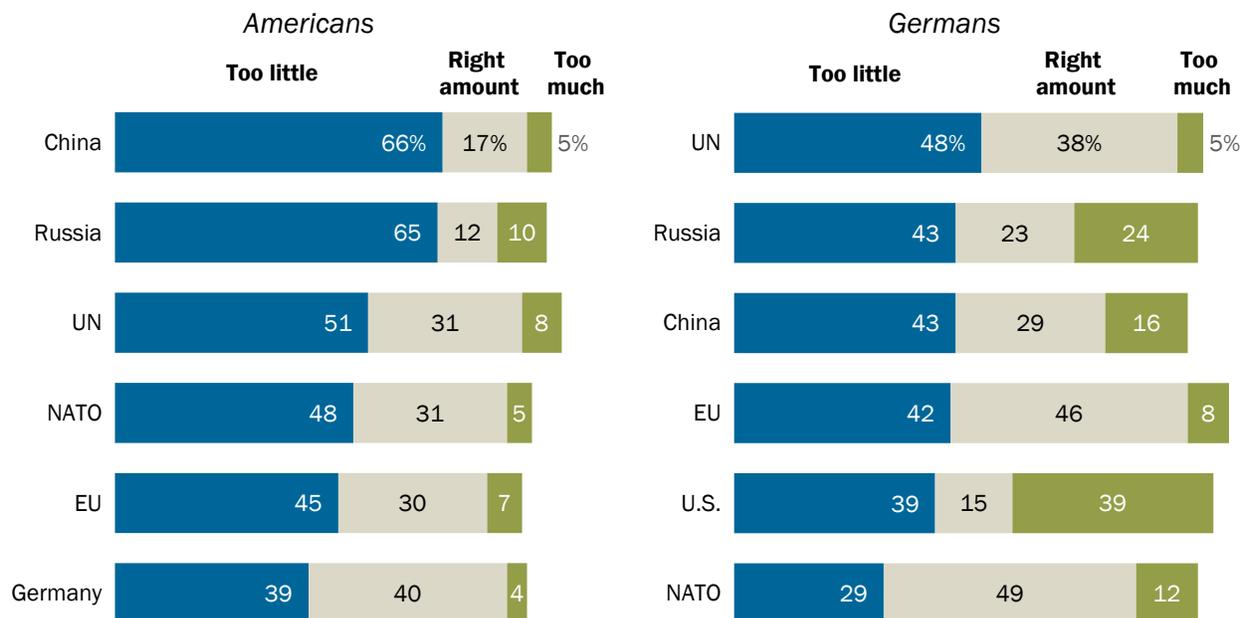
When it comes to dealing with problems around the world, Americans are split on whether Germany does its fair share. About as many Americans say Germany does too little (39%) as say their European ally does the right amount (40%). Just 4% believe Germany is doing too much.

Germans are conflicted on the role the U.S. is playing in addressing global issues. Equal shares of the public believe the U.S. is doing too little (39%) or too much (39%). Few say the U.S. is doing the right amount (15%).

Both nations tend to agree that China, Russia and the United Nations are doing too little. Americans are more likely to feel this way, with broad majorities saying China (66%) and Russia (65%) are not doing their share and roughly half saying the same about the UN. Germans are less sure, with smaller pluralities expressing this view.

Americans say other powers are doing too little to help solve global problems; Germans split between Americans doing too little and too much

Do you think ___ does too much, too little or the right amount to help solve global problems?



Source: Pew Research Center survey conducted in the U.S. Oct. 6-10, 2017. Q4a-e, g. German results from Körber-Stiftung survey conducted Oct. 4-18, 2017.

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Americans tend to believe the European Union and NATO are not doing enough to help solve global problems. Germans believe that, on balance, NATO is doing the right amount, though they are more split on the EU.

U.S. Democrats are more in line with the German public on these issues. Democrats are more likely than Republicans to say Germany, the EU and NATO are doing about what they should be to address international problems. In Germany, more than half of CDU/CSU voters (54%) believe the EU does the right amount on the world stage, while SPD voters (52%) say the EU does too little.

Differing views about defense spending

One issue on which successive American presidents have encouraged Germany and other European allies to [contribute more](#) is defense. President Trump has repeatedly called on NATO members to spend more on security, and the Obama administration similarly implored European allies to boost their military spending.

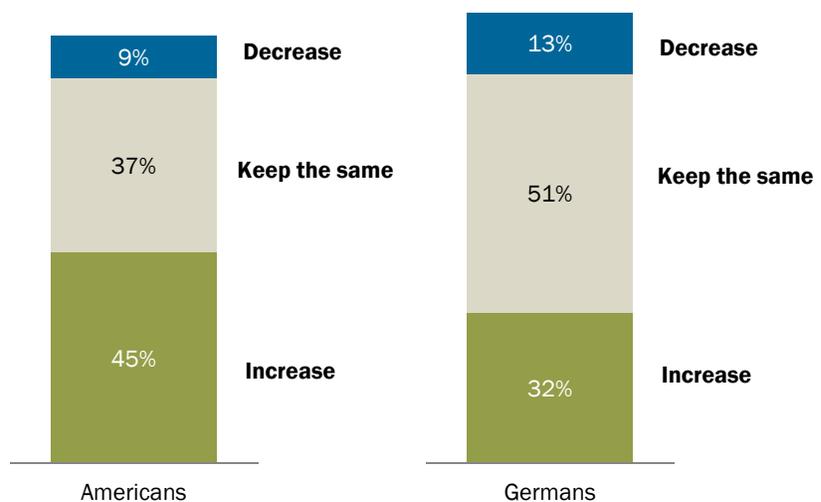
In the U.S., 45% say the country's allies in Europe should spend more on their national defense, while 37% say spending levels should stay about the same and only 9% think they should be decreased. But there is a wide partisan gap on this issue, with 63% of Republicans calling for more spending from allies, compared with just 33% among Democrats.

When asked about their own defense spending, only about one-in-three Germans (32%) want to see it increased. Roughly half say it should stay where it is, while 13% want it cut.

Americans say European allies should spend more on defense; Germans say their country spends enough

European allies should ___ their defense spending

Germany should ___ its defense spending



Source: Pew Research Center survey conducted in the U.S. Oct. 6-10, 2017. Q5. German results from Körber-Stiftung survey conducted Oct. 4-18, 2017.

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Methodology – October 2017 Survey

This report is based on telephone interviews conducted October 6-10, 2017 among a national sample of 1,012 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 U.S. states (406 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 606 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 378 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted under the direction of SSRS. A combination of landline and cell phone random digit dial samples were used. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Respondents in the landline sample were selected by randomly asking for the youngest adult male or female who is now at home. Interviews in the cell sample were conducted with the person who answered the phone, if that person was an adult 18 years of age or older. For detailed information about our survey methodology, see <http://www.pewresearch.org/methodology/u-s-survey-research/>

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and region to parameters from the March 2017 supplement of the U.S. Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey and county-level population density to parameters from the 2010 Decennial Census. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status (landline only, cell phone only, or both landline and cell phone), based on extrapolations from the 2016 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both landline and cell phones have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size among respondents with a landline phone. The margins of error reported and statistical tests of significance are adjusted to account for the survey’s design effect, a measure of how much efficiency is lost from the weighting procedures.

The following table shows the unweighted sample size and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for the total sample:

Survey conducted October 6-10, 2017

Group	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus ...
Total sample	1,012	3.7 percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for subgroups are available upon request.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

Topline Questionnaire – October 2017 Survey

**Pew Research Center
October 2017 Survey**

Methodological notes:

- Survey results are based on a national sample of the United States. For further details on sample design, see Methodology section.
- Due to rounding, percentages may not total 100%. The topline “total” columns show 100%, because they are based on unrounded numbers.
- Not all questions included in the October 2017 survey are presented in this topline. Omitted questions have either been previously released or will be released in future reports.
- A previous version of this topline misstated results for Great Britain on survey questions Q1a-b in the United States. These results were revised March 1, 2018. The changes do not impact the report’s overall analysis.

		October 2017
		United States
Q1a. Which country currently is the most important partner for American foreign policy?	Austria	0
	Canada	3
	China	15
	France	3
	Germany	5
	Great Britain	20
	Israel	9
	Italy	0
	Japan	3
	Mexico	2
	Poland	0
	Russia	4
	South Korea	1
	The European Union (EU)	1
	Other	5
	DK/Refused	29
Total	100	

Data is displayed vertically.

		October 2017
		United States
Q1b. ASK IF RESPONDED TO Q1a: And which country is the second most important partner for American foreign policy?	Austria	1
	Canada	9
	China	12
	France	8
	Germany	11
	Great Britain	18
	Israel	4
	Italy	0
	Japan	6
	Mexico	4
	Russia	5
	South Korea	1
	The European Union (EU)	3
	Other	5
	DK/Refused	12
	Total	100
N=	741	

Data is displayed vertically.

		October 2017
		United States
COMBINED Q1a/Q1b. Which country currently is the most important partner for American foreign policy? And which country is the second most important partner for American foreign policy?	Austria	1
	Canada	10
	China	24
	France	8
	Germany	12
	Great Britain	33
	Israel	12
	Italy	1
	Japan	7
	Mexico	5
	Poland	0
	Russia	8
	South Korea	2
	The European Union (EU)	3
	Other	7
DK/Refused	37	

Data is displayed vertically. Data represents combined responses from Q1a and Q1b.

		Q3a. Please tell me if the United States, in the future, should cooperate more or less with _____. a. France				
		Cooperate more	Cooperate less	Cooperate the same as before (VOL)	DK/Refused	Total
United States	October 2017	65	20	6	9	100

		Q3b. Please tell me if the United States, in the future, should cooperate more or less with _____. b. Great Britain				
		Cooperate more	Cooperate less	Cooperate the same as before (VOL)	DK/Refused	Total
United States	October 2017	72	15	5	9	100

		Q3c. Please tell me if the United States, in the future, should cooperate more or less with _____. c. Russia				
		Cooperate more	Cooperate less	Cooperate the same as before (VOL)	DK/Refused	Total
United States	October 2017	43	44	4	9	100

		Q3d. Please tell me if the United States, in the future, should cooperate more or less with _____. d. China				
		Cooperate more	Cooperate less	Cooperate the same as before (VOL)	DK/Refused	Total
United States	October 2017	59	28	5	8	100

		Q3e. Please tell me if the United States, in the future, should cooperate more or less with _____. e. Germany				
		Cooperate more	Cooperate less	Cooperate the same as before (VOL)	DK/Refused	Total
United States	October 2017	65	21	4	9	100

		Q4a. Now I'm going to read a list of countries and organizations. For each, tell me whether you think the country or organization does too much, too little or the right amount to help solve global problems? a. Russia				
		Too much	Too little	Right amount	DK/Refused	Total
United States	October 2017	10	65	12	14	100

		Q4b. Now I'm going to read a list of countries and organizations. For each, tell me whether you think the country or organization does too much, too little or the right amount to help solve global problems? b. China				
		Too much	Too little	Right amount	DK/Refused	Total
United States	October 2017	5	66	17	12	100

		Q4c. Now I'm going to read a list of countries and organizations. For each, tell me whether you think the country or organization does too much, too little or the right amount to help solve global problems? c. Germany				
		Too much	Too little	Right amount	DK/Refused	Total
United States	October 2017	4	39	40	17	100

		Q4d. Now I'm going to read a list of countries and organizations. For each, tell me whether you think the country or organization does too much, too little or the right amount to help solve global problems? d. The European Union				
		Too much	Too little	Right amount	DK/Refused	Total
United States	October 2017	7	45	30	18	100

		Q4e. Now I'm going to read a list of countries and organizations. For each, tell me whether you think the country or organization does too much, too little or the right amount to help solve global problems? e. The United Nations				
		Too much	Too little	Right amount	DK/Refused	Total
United States	October 2017	8	51	31	9	100

		Q4g. Now I'm going to read a list of countries and organizations. For each, tell me whether you think the country or organization does too much, too little or the right amount to help solve global problems? g. NATO, that is North Atlantic Treaty Organization				
		Too much	Too little	Right amount	DK/Refused	Total
United States	October 2017	5	48	31	16	100

		Q5. Now thinking about American allies in Europe, do you think that our European allies should increase their spending on national defense, keep it about the same or decrease it?				
		Increase	Keep the same	Decrease	DK/Refused	Total
United States	October 2017	45	37	9	9	100

		Q6. In general, how would you describe relations today between the United States and Germany? Would you say they are very good, somewhat good, somewhat bad or very bad?					
		Very good	Somewhat good	Somewhat bad	Very bad	DK/Refused	Total
United States	October 2017	9	59	18	4	10	100

		Q7. Which of the following is most important when it comes to U.S.-German relations?				
		Security and defense ties	Economic and trade ties	Shared democratic values	DK/Refused	Total
United States	October 2017	34	33	21	12	100

Methodology– Spring 2017 Global Attitudes Survey

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 – Spring 2017 Global Attitudes Survey

Pew Research Center Spring 2017 Survey

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.

		Q30a. 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. a. U.S. President Donald Trump					
		A lot of confidence	Some confidence	Not too much confidence	No confidence at all	DK/Refused	Total
Germany	Spring, 2017	1	10	34	53	1	100
	Spring, 2016	1	5	15	74	5	100

In 2016, asked 'U.S. presidential candidate Donald Trump.'

		Q30d. 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. d. German Chancellor Angela Merkel					
		A lot of confidence	Some confidence	Not too much confidence	No confidence at all	DK/Refused	Total
United States	Spring, 2017	16	40	15	16	14	100
	Spring, 2012	10	35	15	9	31	100
	Spring, 2011	7	39	15	10	29	100
	Spring, 2010	6	37	12	10	35	100
	Spring, 2009	6	41	14	10	29	100
	Spring, 2008	5	34	10	10	41	100
	Spring, 2007	6	38	11	9	35	100
	Spring, 2006	5	33	14	10	38	100