



2026 Annual Survey

American Public Attitudes on U.S. Foreign Policy and the Korean Peninsula

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Executive Summary

The 2026 Korea Economic Institute of America (KEI) survey, conducted with YouGov, finds that American support for U.S. alliances, and for the alliance with South Korea in particular, has held strong through a year of significant change in U.S. foreign policy. Three-quarters of Americans believe alliances benefit the United States, and Republicans have grown more likely to say so. Seven in ten Democrats and Republicans alike think the U.S.-South Korea alliance serves U.S. national security.

Opinion has shifted on threats and trade. Fewer Americans perceive China, North Korea, and Russia as critical threats than a year ago, while more view Iran as one. Trade is becoming a partisan dividing line, as Democrats and Independents increasingly favor lower tariffs and fewer Republicans do. On North Korea, Americans back diplomacy while holding firm on denuclearization.

The 2026 KEI survey, fielded with YouGov from August 21 to September 1, 2026, among 1,207 U.S. adults, is the seventh such survey KEI has run annually since 2020. It tracks American views of the world, U.S. alliances and adversaries, South Korea, trade and foreign investment, and Korean security issues. The report covers each topic in turn, comparing 2026 results with earlier years and noting where they diverge, across self-identified Democrats, Republicans, and Independents.

American Support for Alliances Remains Strong

Views of alliances held steady overall, with Republicans growing more positive over the past year.

- Three-quarters of Americans (75 percent) believe U.S. alliances either mostly benefit the United States (19 percent) or benefit both the United States and its allies (56 percent).
- Among Republicans, that share rose from 63 percent in 2025 to 73 percent in 2026, and the share viewing alliances as mostly benefiting the United States doubled, from 9 percent to 18 percent.

Perceived threats moved in two directions.

- The share of Americans who perceive China as a critical threat fell from 48 percent in 2025 to 37 percent in 2026, with the steepest drop among Republicans (from 65 percent to 48 percent). North Korea fell from 37 percent to 30 percent, and Russia from 54 percent to 41 percent.
- Iran was the only country to rise, from 34 percent to 41 percent, tying Russia as the top perceived threat.
- Virtually no one considers Cuba a critical threat (3 percent). Cuba was not included in the 2025 survey.

Support for South Korea and the Alliance Holds

Support for the U.S.-South Korea alliance remains high across party lines. Majorities believe the alliance serves U.S. national security, support maintaining troops in South Korea, and favor defending South Korea if North Korea invades.

- Two-thirds of Americans (68 percent) hold favorable views of South Korea, largely unchanged since the question was first asked in 2020.
- Two-thirds (64 percent) think the U.S.-South Korea alliance is in the national security interests of the United States. There was virtually no partisan gap, with 71 percent of Democrats and 73 percent of Republicans in agreement.
- If North Korea were to invade, 71 percent would favor using U.S. troops to defend South Korea.
- A majority (58 percent) supports South Korea's development of nuclear-powered submarines, including 56 percent of Democrats and 64 percent of Republicans.
- Seven in ten (71 percent) oppose South Korea developing a nuclear weapon.
- Food draws the most interest among South Korean cultural exports (41 percent), nearly double beauty products (21 percent). A plurality (43 percent) of Americans are interested in none of the eight items in the survey, including a majority of Republicans (52 percent) and a third of Democrats (33 percent).

Views on Trade Shift Along Party Lines

More Americans want to expand trade with the world, but fewer want more trade with major partners, including South Korea, Canada, Mexico, and Japan. Support for lower tariffs has grown among Democrats and Independents, while fewer Republicans support lowering them, especially on China. Americans have cooled on foreign investment in general, though perceptions of South Korean investment remain stable and positive.

- A third of Americans (30 percent) believe trade with the world should increase, up nine percentage points from 2025. Support for more trade with South Korea fell four percentage points, to 22 percent.
- More than a third (37 percent) think that imports from the rest of the world should face lower tariffs. Support for lower tariffs against South Korea grew by five percentage points year-over-year, to 38 percent.
- Views on tariffs are increasingly partisan. While fewer Republicans believe tariffs should be lower, more than half of Democrats (55 percent) think tariffs on trade with the world should be lowered, up seventeen percentage points. Support for lower tariffs on South Korean goods grew by ten percentage points to 55 percent among Democrats.
- Six in ten (60 percent) say South Korean investment benefits the U.S. economy, compared with 49 percent for foreign investment in general, down from 56 percent in 2025. The share who say foreign investment creates U.S. jobs fell from 54 percent to 43 percent.

Americans Back Engagement With North Korea

Americans hold strongly unfavorable views of North Korea but are open to engagement. A narrow majority supports a summit between President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, while nearly nine in ten think it is important that North Korea give up its nuclear weapons. Americans divide almost evenly on arms control, and broad majorities favor pressing North Korea to improve its human rights record and providing humanitarian assistance to its civilians.

- Nearly seven in ten Americans (68 percent) hold unfavorable views of North Korea, including 50 percent who hold very unfavorable views.
- While 18 percent support a Trump-Kim meeting with no preconditions, 16 percent support a meeting if North Korea first agrees to halt missile tests, and another 20 percent favor a meeting if North Korea gives up its nuclear weapons. Just 17 percent say the two should not meet under any conditions.
- Nearly nine in ten Americans (87 percent) believe it is important that North Korea give up its nuclear capabilities.
- Americans are divided on an arms control agreement, with 53 percent in favor and 47 percent opposed.
- Broad majorities support pushing for human rights improvements in North Korea (82 percent) and providing humanitarian assistance to North Korean civilians (72 percent).

American Views of the World, Alliances, and Adversaries

Background

The international system is changing in ways that have drawn renewed attention to the role of the United States in the world. Wars in Europe and the Middle East continue, relations among major powers [remain strained](#), and longstanding U.S. alliances are faced with new questions over trade, security, and diplomacy. At home, Americans remain [deeply divided](#) on domestic issues, from immigration to reproductive rights. On several major questions about America's place in the world, however, the public remains notably consistent.

The 2026 survey finds that Americans continue to see the United States as the most influential country in the world. Europe and the Middle East rank highest among regions viewed as vital to U.S. national interests. Threat perceptions have shifted over the past year, particularly toward Iran. At the same time, Americans continue to see value in the U.S. alliance system despite the Trump administration's regular public criticism of allies. Together, the findings suggest that Americans are responding to changes in the international environment without turning away from U.S. engagement abroad.

Influence and Interests

American public perceptions of the U.S. role and place in the world have been relatively stable since the survey began asking the question in 2020. In 2026, Americans continue to see the United States as the most influential country, with 83 percent saying it is either very (66 percent) or fairly (17 percent) influential. This is largely unchanged from 2025. China remains the second-most influential country according to Americans, with 74 percent rating it as very (48 percent) or fairly (26 percent) influential, also largely unchanged since 2025. Meanwhile, 38 percent say South Korea is very (9 percent) or fairly (29 percent) influential in 2026, 60 percent say the same about Japan, and 29 percent say the same for North Korea. The only clear shift is on Iran. In 2025, 33 percent of respondents said Iran was very or fairly influential, compared with 42 percent now.

Figure 1. Americans Rate Iran as More Influential, Russia as Less

% saying each country or region is 'very' or 'fairly' influential in world affairs, 2025 and 2026

Very influential Fairly influential

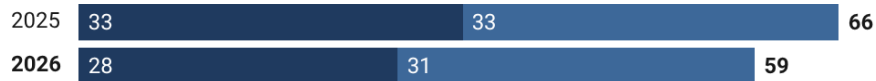
United States



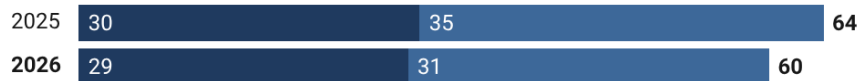
China



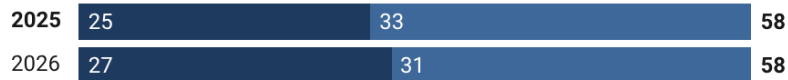
Russia



European Union



Israel



Japan



Iran



South Korea



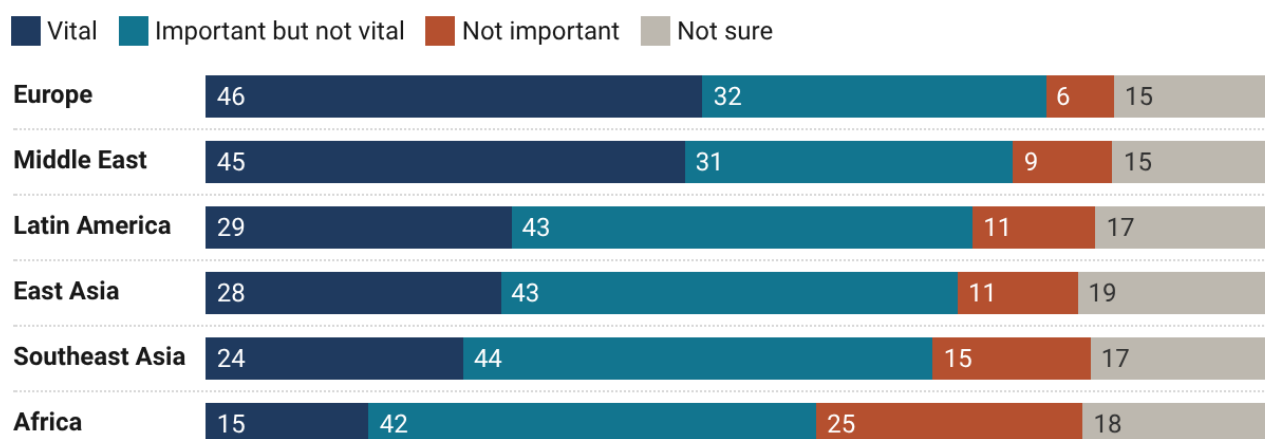
North Korea



When asked what regions matter to U.S. national interests, Americans rank Europe and the Middle East highest. While 46 percent say Europe is vital to U.S. national interests, 45 percent think the same about the Middle East. Latin America (29 percent vital), East Asia (28 percent), and Southeast Asia (24 percent) make up the second tier. Africa lags behind, with just 15 percent saying it is vital to U.S. national interests and 25 percent saying it is not important.

Figure 2. Europe and the Middle East Rank Highest in Perceived U.S. National Interests

% saying each region is vital, important but not vital, not important, or not sure for U.S. national interests, 2026



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Iran Rises as a Perceived Threat While China, North Korea, and Russia Decline

Regional priorities appear to track perceived threats among survey respondents. Iran and Russia are the top perceived threats among the American public, with 41 percent considering each a critical threat to U.S. national security interests over the next ten years. The survey was fielded as Russia continues its war against Ukraine, and the United States against Iran. While 37 percent say China is a critical threat, 30 percent say the same about North Korea. Cuba is of very little concern to Americans. Just 3 percent cite Cuba as a critical threat, and a plurality (31 percent) say it is no threat at all.

Figure 3. Threat Perceptions Fell for China, North Korea, and Russia, While Iran Rose

% saying each country poses a critical threat to U.S. national security, 2025 and 2026

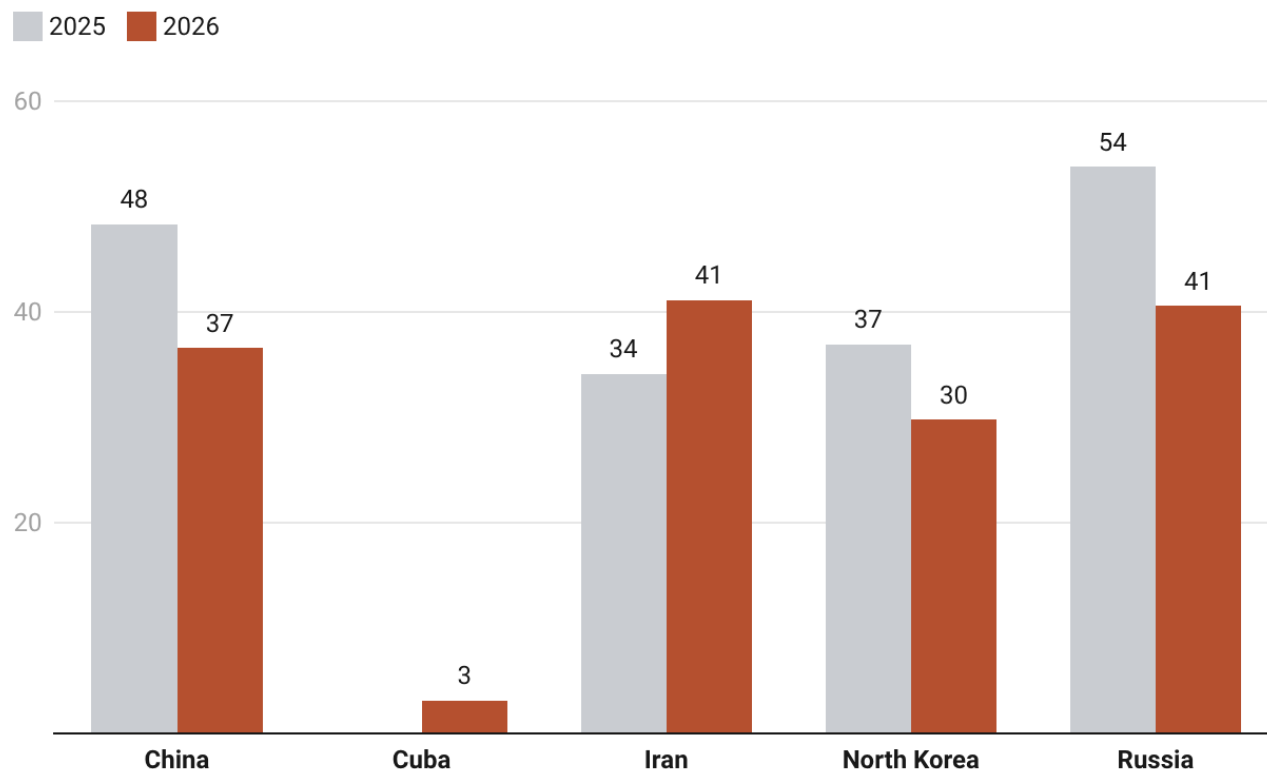


Chart: Note: Cuba was not included in the 2025 survey. • Created with Datawrapper

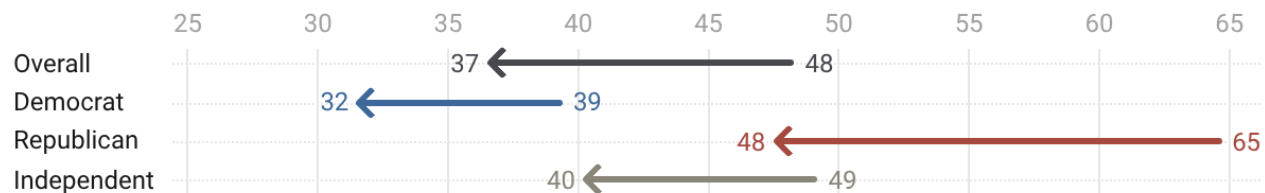
Democrats and Republicans largely moved in sync on threat perceptions from 2025 to 2026, with the exception of North Korea. The share of Republicans who see North Korea as a critical threat fell from 2025 (42 percent) to 2026 (34 percent), while Democratic concern rose from 26 percent in 2025 to 34 percent in 2026. In 2025, 65 percent of Republicans considered China a critical threat, compared with 48 percent in 2026, a seventeen-percentage-point drop. Democrats showed a more modest decline of seven percentage points, from 39 percent to 32 percent.

Figure 4. Partisan Threat Perceptions Shifted Across Countries

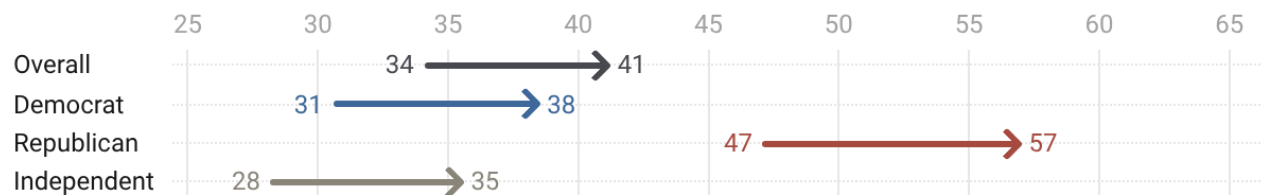
% saying each country poses a 'critical threat' to U.S. national security, by party identification, 2025–2026; arrows show change from 2025 to 2026

Overall Democrat Republican Independent

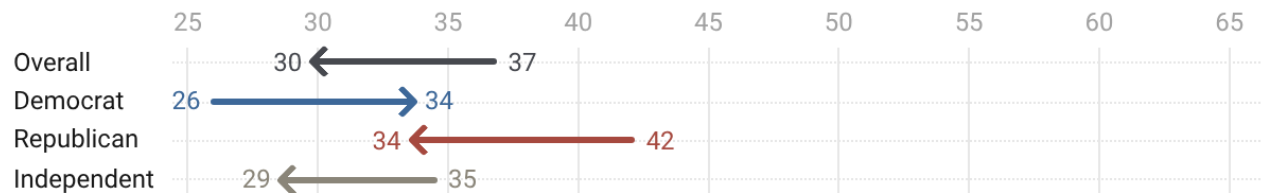
China



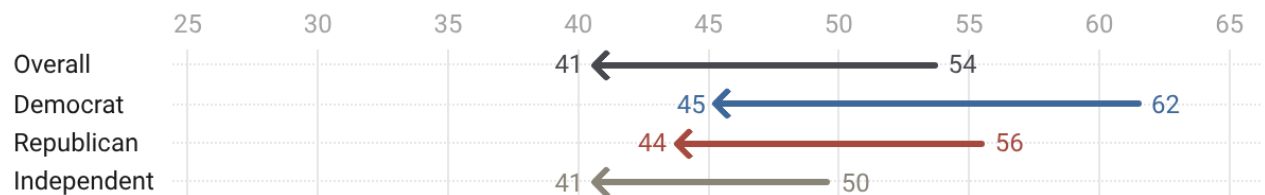
Iran



North Korea



Russia



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Alliances Continue to Be Seen as Beneficial

The U.S. alliance system has been a core pillar of U.S. national security since the end of World War II. Today, the Trump administration is seeking to reorient trade and security relations with many of those allies. Trade wars, [threats on territory](#), and [potential troop withdrawals](#) have all [made headlines](#) over the past year. The American public, however, continues to see benefits in alliances.

Three-quarters of Americans (75 percent) say that security alliances either mostly benefit the United States (19 percent) or benefit both the United States and its allies (56 percent). This is largely unchanged from 2025. Just 7 percent say that these alliances benefit neither the United States nor the partner state(s).

Figure 5. Most Americans Continue to Support U.S. Alliances

% saying U.S. security alliances mostly benefit the United States, its allies, both, or neither, 2025 and 2026



Created with Datawrapper

While Democrats and Republicans broadly agree on alliances, Republicans have grown more positive. In 2025, 35 percent of Republicans said alliances mostly benefit U.S. allies while 9 percent said they mostly benefit the United States. Now, 27 percent say these alliances mainly benefit U.S. allies, while 18 percent say they mostly benefit the United States. (In both years, roughly 55 percent of Republicans say alliances benefit both.) The drivers of this shift are unclear, but it may reflect a Republican in the White House working to reshape alliance relations.

Figure 6. Views of Who Benefits Most From Alliances Shifted Most Among Republicans

% describing who benefits from U.S. security alliances among Democrats and Republicans; arrows show change from 2025 to 2026

Democrat Republican

Mostly benefit the U.S.



Mostly benefit our allies



Benefit both the U.S. and our allies



Benefit neither

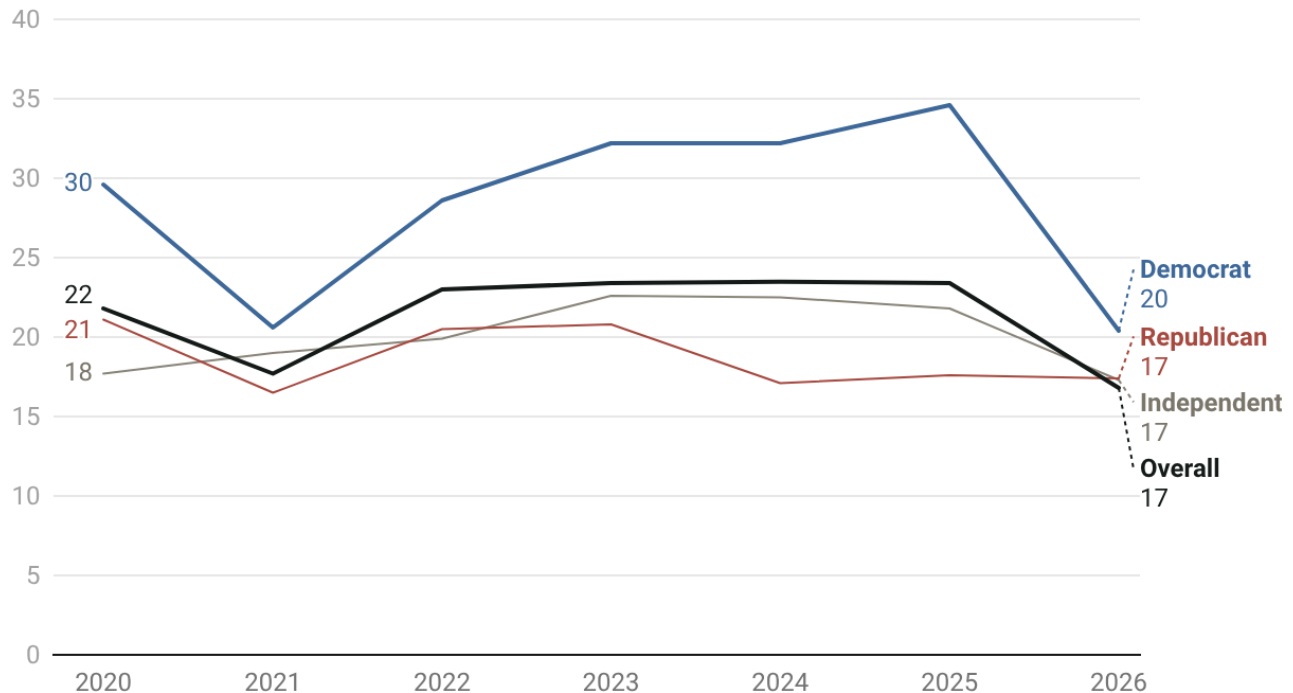


Chart: Note: Overall and Independent results omitted for clarity. • Created with Datawrapper

Despite solid majorities seeing benefits in alliances, the survey does not find unqualified support for alliances broadly. Just 17 percent—the lowest share since the question was first asked in 2020—say that the United States should maintain all alliances as they are. This includes 20 percent of Democrats, 17 percent of Republicans, and 17 percent of Independents.

Figure 7. Support for Maintaining All U.S. Alliances As-Is Fell in 2026

% saying the United States should maintain all current alliances as they are, overall and by party identification, 2020–2026



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While there is virtually no support to end all alliances (2 percent), there is strong support for reform. Pluralities of Americans (26 percent), Democrats (26 percent), Republicans (31 percent), and Independents (27 percent) prefer to maintain all alliances, but with reforms. The survey does not specify what those reforms might be; further study is needed. Another 23 percent of Americans, including 21 percent of Democrats, 28 percent of Republicans, and 25 percent of Independents, prefer maintaining some alliances, possibly with reforms, while ending others.

Figure 8. Alliance Reform Draws Support Across Party Groups

% preferring reform-oriented alliance options, 2026

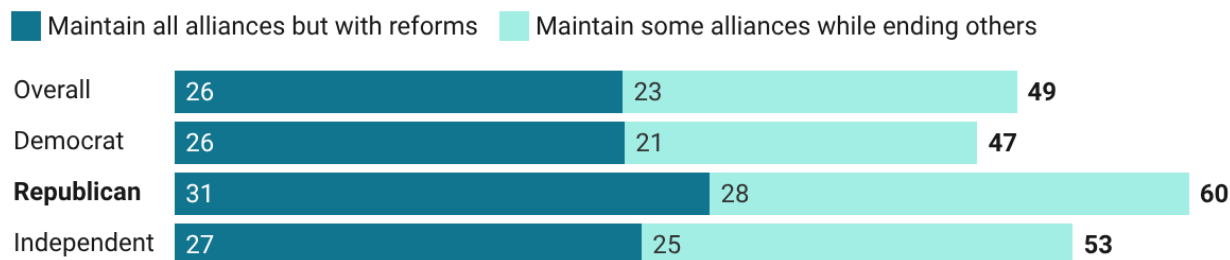


Chart: Note: Selected response options shown; bars do not represent the full distribution of responses. • Created with Datawrapper

American Views on South Korea

Introduction

The U.S.-South Korea relationship spans security, trade, and a growing range of cultural ties. Americans view South Korea not only through the longstanding military alliance and economic relationship, but also through popular culture and consumer goods, especially food, music, film, and beauty products. At the same time, questions about the [28,500 U.S. troops](#) stationed in South Korea, the defense of South Korea, and the future of regional security remain central to this bilateral relationship. These dimensions offer a way to examine whether changes in the broader political and security environments affect how Americans view South Korea.

The 2026 survey finds that attitudes toward South Korea remain generally positive. Nearly seven in ten Americans have a favorable view of the country, and roughly two-thirds say that trade with South Korea benefits the United States and that the military alliance serves U.S. national security interests. Majorities also support maintaining or increasing the U.S. troop presence and using U.S. forces to defend South Korea in the event of a North Korean invasion.

The survey also highlights partisan differences and uncertainty. Democrats show greater interest than Republicans in South Korean cultural products. Majorities support South Korea developing nuclear-powered submarines, but that support does not extend to nuclear weapons. Altogether, the findings show broad support for the U.S.-South Korea relationship even as Americans differ on how some parts of that relationship should develop.

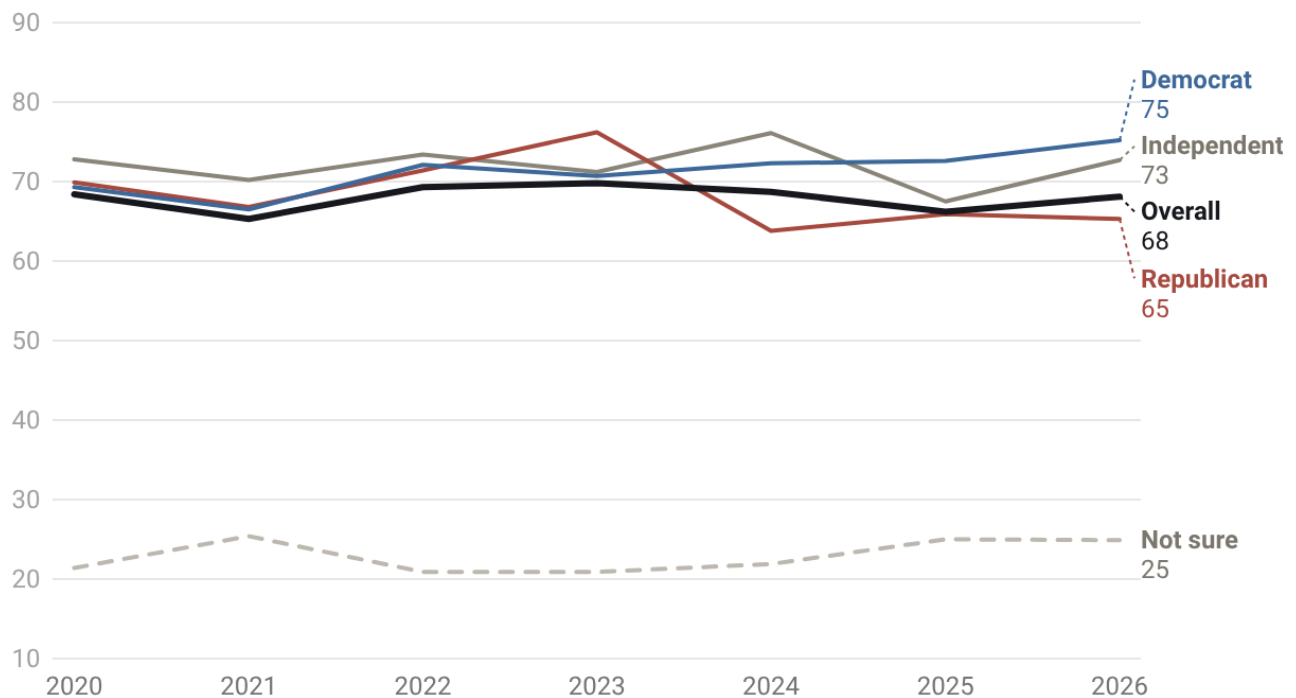
Americans View South Korea Favorably, Remain Interested in Korean Culture

Over the past ten years, South Korea has become an international cultural powerhouse. The country's music, movies, health products, and food are present in American lives in ways they never have been before. But the data does not show whether this visibility is producing more favorable views of South Korea. Overall, 68 percent of Americans now say they hold a favorable view of South Korea, while just 7 percent say they hold an unfavorable view. One-quarter of respondents (25 percent) are not sure. These numbers have shifted little since 2020, when the question was first asked.

However, a ten-percentage-point gap now separates Democrats and Republicans. This gap reflects a gradual rise in South Korea's favorability among Democrats, from 69 percent in 2020 to 75 percent in 2026, and a smaller decline among Republicans. In 2023, Republicans gave South Korea a 76 percent favorability rating, tied for the highest of any partisan group in the survey. In 2024, Republican favorability toward South Korea dropped twelve percentage points to 64 percent—the lowest favorability for any partisan group since the survey began—and has not recovered. The timing coincided with the 2024 presidential election, although the survey alone cannot determine what drove the change.

Figure 9. South Korea Favorability Remains Stable Overall as Partisan Views Diverge

% with a favorable opinion of South Korea, overall and by party identification; overall "not sure" shown separately, 2020-2026



Created with Datawrapper

Interest in Korean cultural products may partly explain this gap. Democrats express interest in Korean cultural goods at higher rates than Republicans in every category in the survey. Whether Korean food (a sixteen-percentage-point gap) or Korean literature (a five-percentage-point gap), Democrats are consistently more likely to say they are interested, though the survey does not identify what drives that gap. Americans overall (59 percent), Democrats (69 percent), Republicans (51 percent), and Independents (61 percent) broadly agree that South Korean cultural products positively influence its image in the United States. Another 35 percent overall said they do not know.

Figure 10. Democrats Express Greater Interest in Korean Cultural Products Across Categories

% saying they are interested in each South Korean cultural category, 2026

Category	Overall	Democrat	Republican	Independent	▼ D-R Gap
Korean food	41	48	32	44	16
Korean beauty products	21	30	14	19	16
Korean pop music	16	24	10	15	14
Korean fine art	16	22	11	14	11
Korean fashion	14	18	10	13	9
Korean movies	19	23	15	22	8
Korean television dramas	15	20	12	16	8
Korean literature	6	9	4	7	5
None of the above	43	33	52	42	-19



Table: Note: D-R Gap = Democrat share minus Republican share. Multiple responses allowed. • Created with Datawrapper

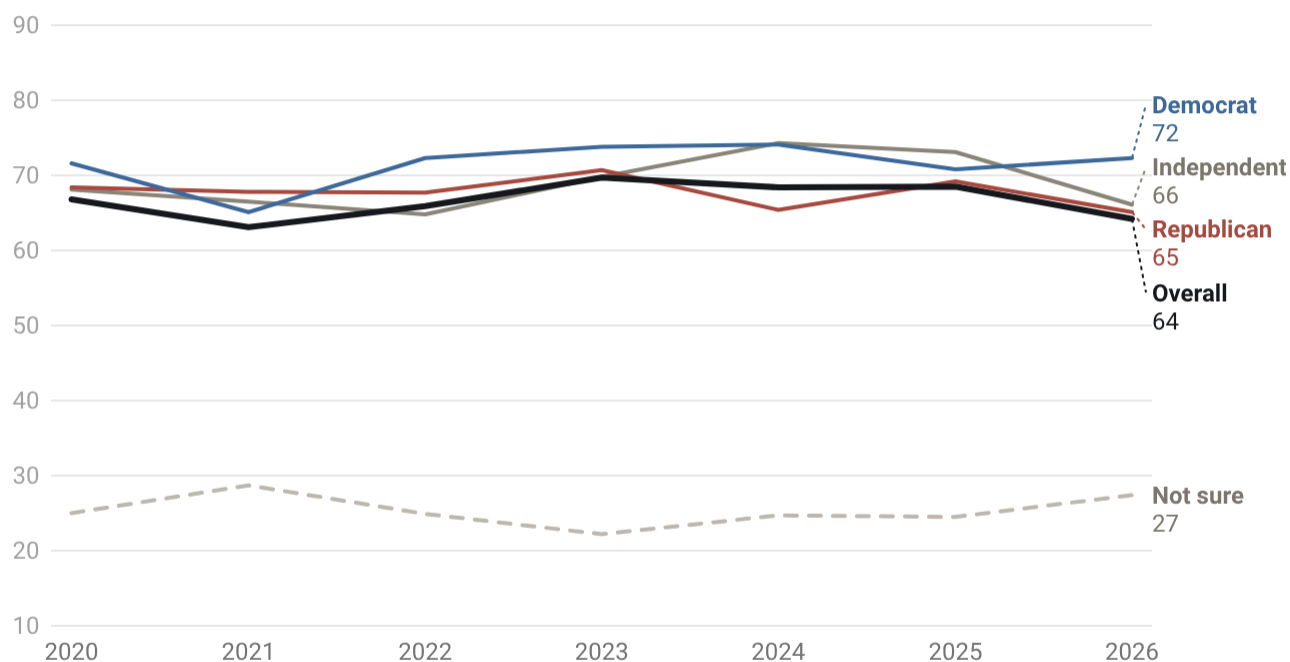
Support for the U.S.-South Korea Alliance Remains Robust

The United States and South Korea have built their relationship over the past seventy years around security and trade, but that relationship has faced new pressures during the second Trump administration. Washington has threatened [partial troop withdrawals](#), pushed South Korea to take on greater responsibility for its own defense, pressured South Korea to [send troops to Iran](#), and applied [tariffs to South Korean exports](#) into the United States. Despite the administration's criticism of the [bilateral trade relationship](#), nearly two-thirds of Americans (64

percent) say that trade with South Korea benefits the United States, including majorities of Democrats (72 percent), Republicans (65 percent), and Independents (66 percent).

Figure 11. Bipartisan Support for Trade With South Korea Remains Strong

% saying trade with South Korea is beneficial to the United States, overall and by party identification; overall "not sure" shown separately, 2020–2026

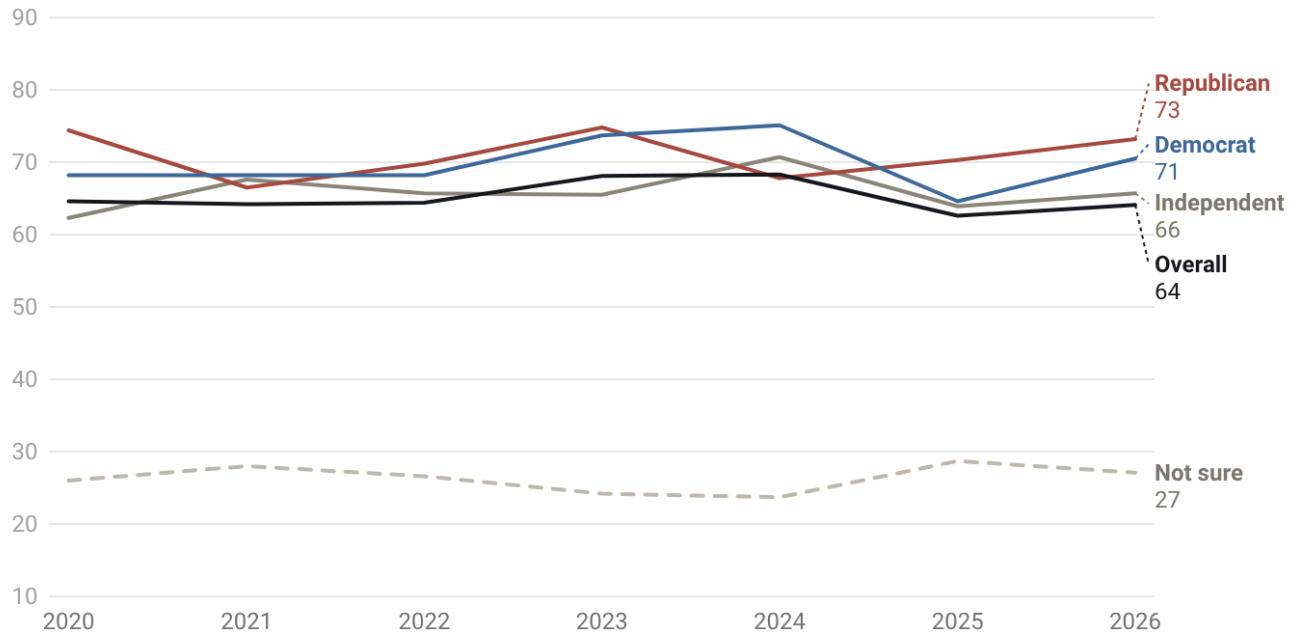


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President Trump has also criticized the military alliance. He recently ordered [joint exercises curtailed](#), and his administration floated the idea of a partial troop withdrawal. Yet, this has not dented public support. Nearly two-thirds of Americans (64 percent) say the military alliance serves U.S. national security interests, including 71 percent of Democrats, 73 percent of Republicans, and 66 percent of Independents.

Figure 12. Bipartisan Majorities Say the Alliance Serves U.S. Security Interests

% saying the U.S.-South Korea alliance is in the national security interests of the United States, overall and by party identification; overall "not sure" shown separately, 2020–2026

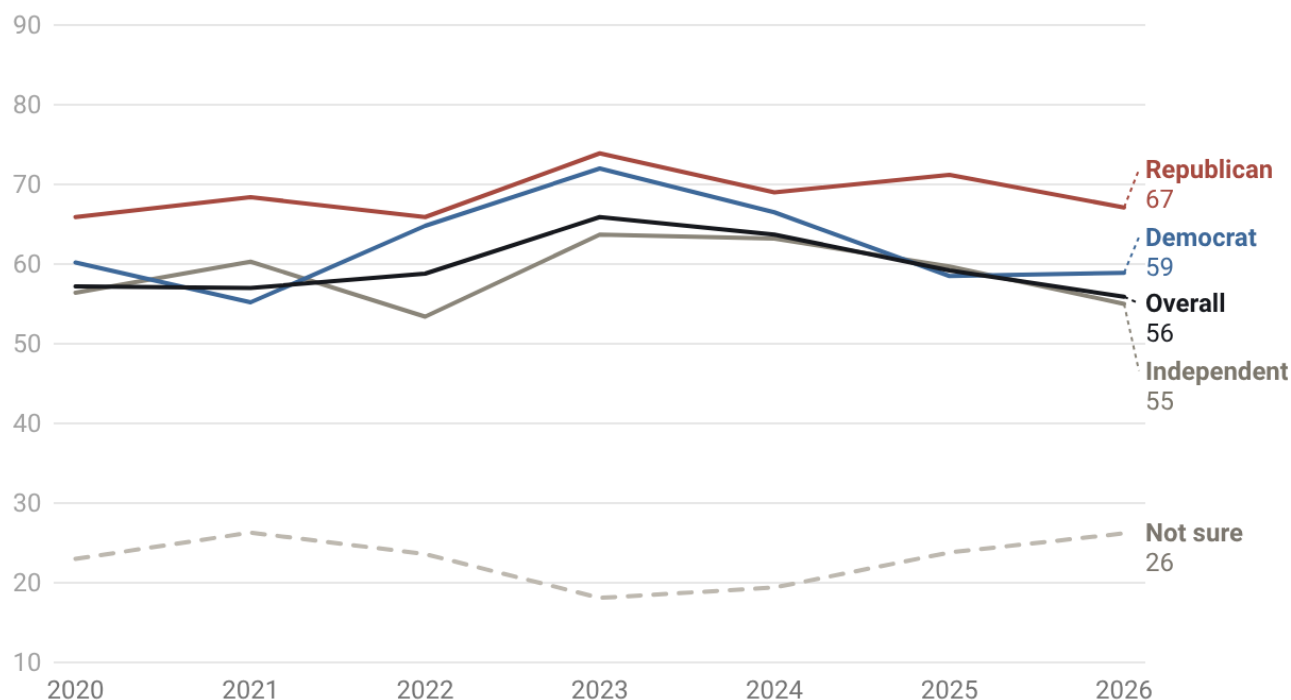


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Support for the military alliance extends to the troop presence in South Korea. A majority (56 percent) support either increasing (8 percent) or maintaining (48 percent) the current 28,500 troops in South Korea. Far fewer support reducing (12 percent) or withdrawing (6 percent) those troops. These numbers have historically been similar across parties, with no consistent gap.

Figure 13. Americans Favor Keeping U.S. Troops in South Korea

% saying the United States should increase or maintain its military forces in South Korea, overall and by party identification; overall "not sure" shown separately, 2020–2026

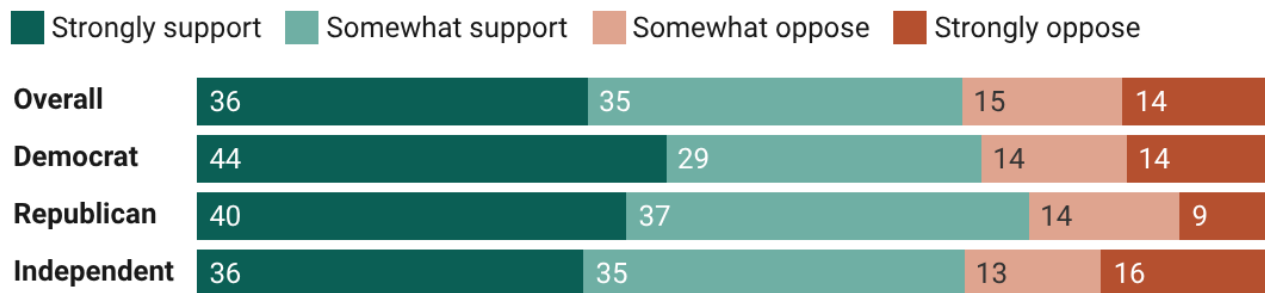


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Support for the alliance and troop presence also extends to using them if the need arises. If North Korea invaded South Korea, a majority of Americans (71 percent) would favor using U.S. troops to defend South Korea. This includes 73 percent of Democrats, 77 percent of Republicans, and 71 percent of Independents. At a time of deep polarization in U.S. politics, that support holds across party lines.

Figure 14. Seven in Ten Americans Back Defending South Korea if Invaded

% supporting or opposing the use of U.S. troops to defend South Korea in the event of a North Korean invasion, 2026

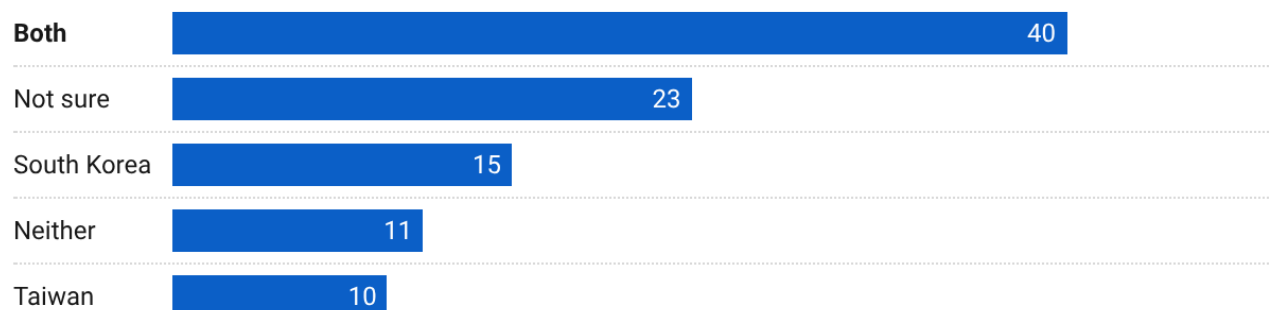


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The survey also tested a harder scenario. If simultaneous conflicts forced the United States to choose between defending South Korea and defending Taiwan, a plurality of Americans (40 percent) would defend both, and just 11 percent would defend neither. Nearly a quarter (23 percent) were not sure.

Figure 15. Americans Are Most Likely to Favor Defending Both South Korea and Taiwan

% saying the United States should defend Taiwan, South Korea, both, neither, or not sure, 2026



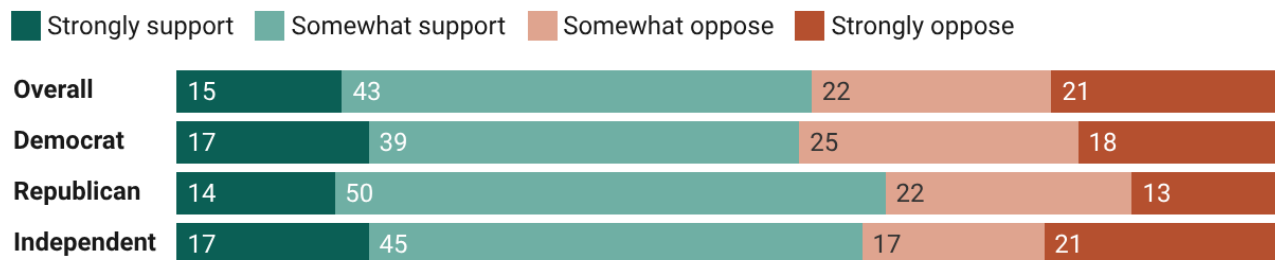
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Nuclear Submarines, Yes; Nuclear Weapons, No

As the alliance evolves and South Korea takes on more responsibility for its own defense, a potential addition to its military capabilities is nuclear-powered [submarines](#). South Korea took a step in that direction in [May 2026](#), when it released a plan to develop such a submarine. A majority of Americans (58 percent) support South Korea developing nuclear-powered submarines, a finding largely consistent across Democrats (56 percent), Republicans (64 percent), and Independents (62 percent). Four in ten Americans (42 percent) oppose South Korea's development of nuclear-powered submarines.

Figure 16. Majorities Support South Korea Developing Nuclear-Powered Submarines

% supporting or opposing South Korea's development of nuclear-powered submarines, 2026

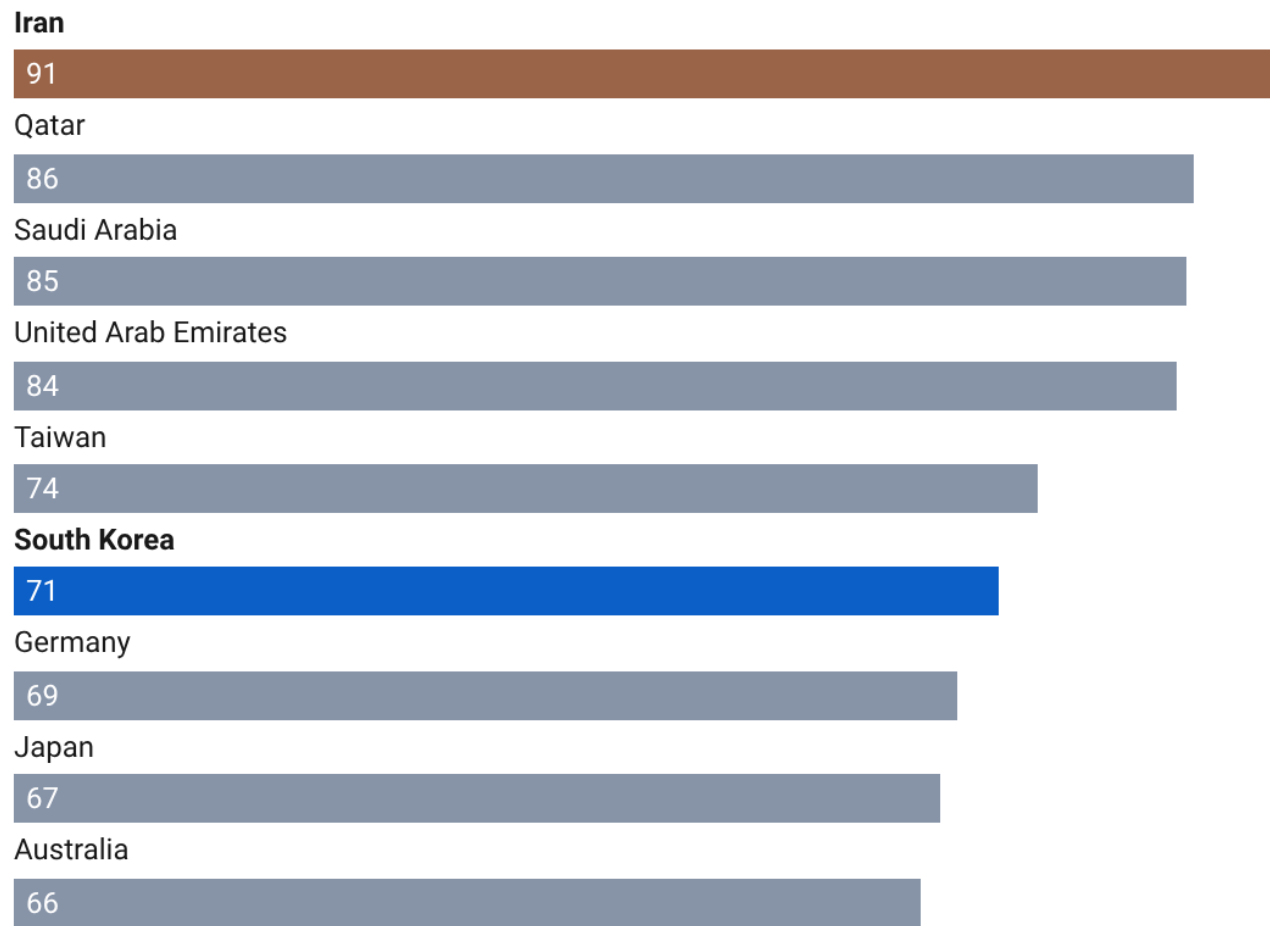


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But support for nuclear-powered submarines does not extend to nuclear weapons. On average, roughly three-quarters of the American public (77 percent) oppose any country, including South Korea, developing nuclear weapons. Opposition is highest for Iran (91 percent), and lowest for Australia (66 percent). For South Korea, 71 percent of Americans surveyed oppose it developing nuclear weapons, a figure consistent among Democrats (69 percent), Republicans (72 percent), and Independents (71 percent).

Figure 17. Seven in Ten Oppose South Korea Developing Nuclear Weapons

% opposing each country developing nuclear weapons, 2026



Created with Datawrapper

Attitudes on Foreign Trade and Foreign Direct Investment

Background

Since returning to the White House in 2025, President Trump has made trade policy, and tariffs in particular, a cornerstone of his administration. Its stated objectives include reshoring U.S.

industry, especially strategic industries, creating domestic jobs, securing supply chains, and raising government revenue.

In 2025, the Trump administration introduced [sweeping tariffs](#) on imports from all U.S. trading partners under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), which the Supreme Court later [struck down](#), along with [tariffs targeting specific goods](#), including automobiles, steel, and pharmaceuticals, under Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962. In 2026, the administration moved to replace the IEEPA tariffs, first through Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974 as an immediate response to the Supreme Court ruling, and now through Section 301 tariffs [on major U.S. trading partners](#), including South Korea.

Trade and investment remain [a critical element](#) of the U.S.-South Korea relationship. In 2025, total trade between the two countries reached USD 242 billion, making South Korea the United States' eighth-largest trading partner. The U.S.-South Korea Free Trade Agreement (KORUS FTA) became the second-largest U.S. trade agreement in 2012, and South Korea has emerged as one of the largest sources of foreign direct investment (FDI) in the United States. The total stock of South Korean FDI in the United States was USD 37 billion in 2025. South Korean investment flows to the United States are gaining momentum under a new bilateral tariff agreement and an accompanying memorandum of understanding (MOU), under which South Korea [commits USD 350 billion](#) to investment projects in the United States.

Starting in 2025, the KEI survey placed greater emphasis on trade policy to reflect its growing saliency. This year offers the first opportunity to measure how American attitudes have shifted against the baseline established in September 2025.

Foreign Trade

More Americans in 2026 want increased trade with the world than last year, although a plurality still believe international trade should remain at current levels. In 2026, 35 percent of Americans believe that international trade with the world should be kept the same, compared to 31 percent in 2025. In 2026, 30 percent of Americans believe trade with the world should increase, up nine percentage points from 2025. That growing support does not extend to the largest U.S. trading partners. One in five (22 percent) of Americans say trade with South Korea should increase, down from 26 percent in 2025. Support for more trade with Japan fell by a similar four percentage points, albeit from a higher level (from 33 percent in 2025 to 29 percent in 2026).

Support for increased trade with Canada and Mexico, the [two largest U.S. trading partners](#), also fell by four percentage points from last year. A plurality of Americans (35 percent) say trade with the world should stay the same, while 9 percent say it should decrease, down slightly from 12 percent in 2025.

Attitudes toward trade with China remain stable. A plurality (35 percent) think trade with China should decrease, while just 12 percent support an increase. China is the only trading partner for which more Americans want less trade than want the same amount (30 percent).

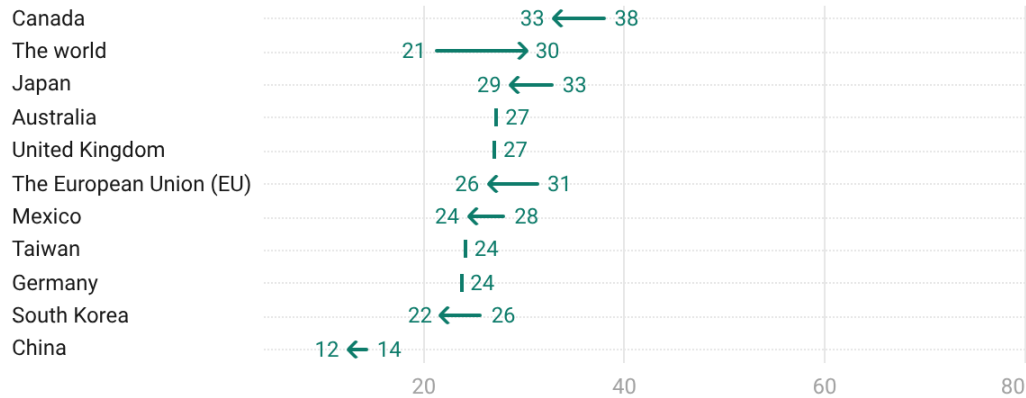
Views on trade split along party lines. Democrats are more likely than Republicans to support increased trade with several trading partners, most clearly Canada. Among Democrats, 46 percent support more trade with Canada, roughly twice the share of Republicans (24 percent). Four in ten Democrats (39 percent) believe trade with the world should increase, versus just 24 percent of Republicans. On South Korea, 27 percent of Democrats and 14 percent of Republicans support increased trade, while a majority of Republicans (52 percent) say trade with South Korea should be kept at current levels. Support for increased trade with China is relatively low among both Democrats and Republicans, while more Republicans, 50 percent, believe trade with China should be decreased.

Figure 18. More Want to Expand Trade With the World, Fewer With Top Partners

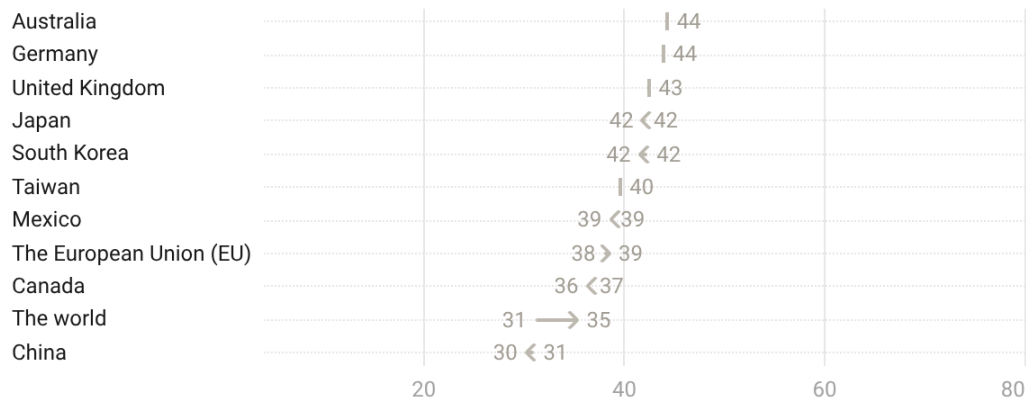
% saying U.S. trade with each country or region should be increased

■ Should be increased ■ Should be kept the same ■ Should be decreased

Should be increased



Should be kept the same



Should be decreased

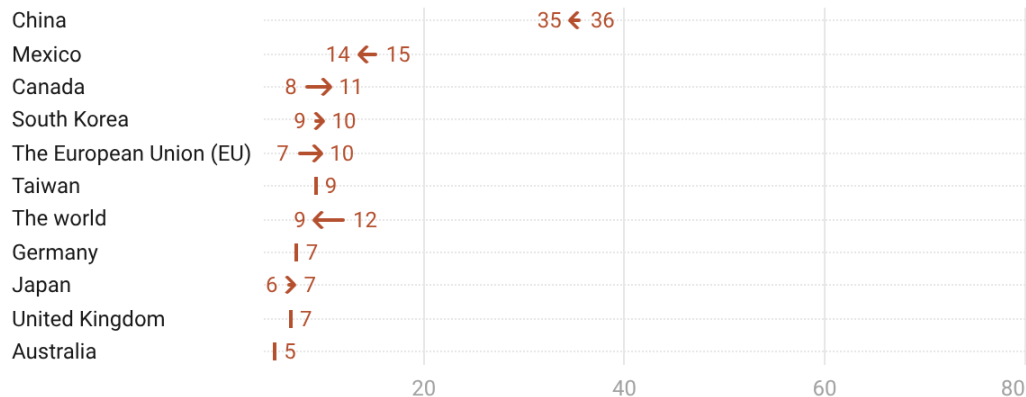
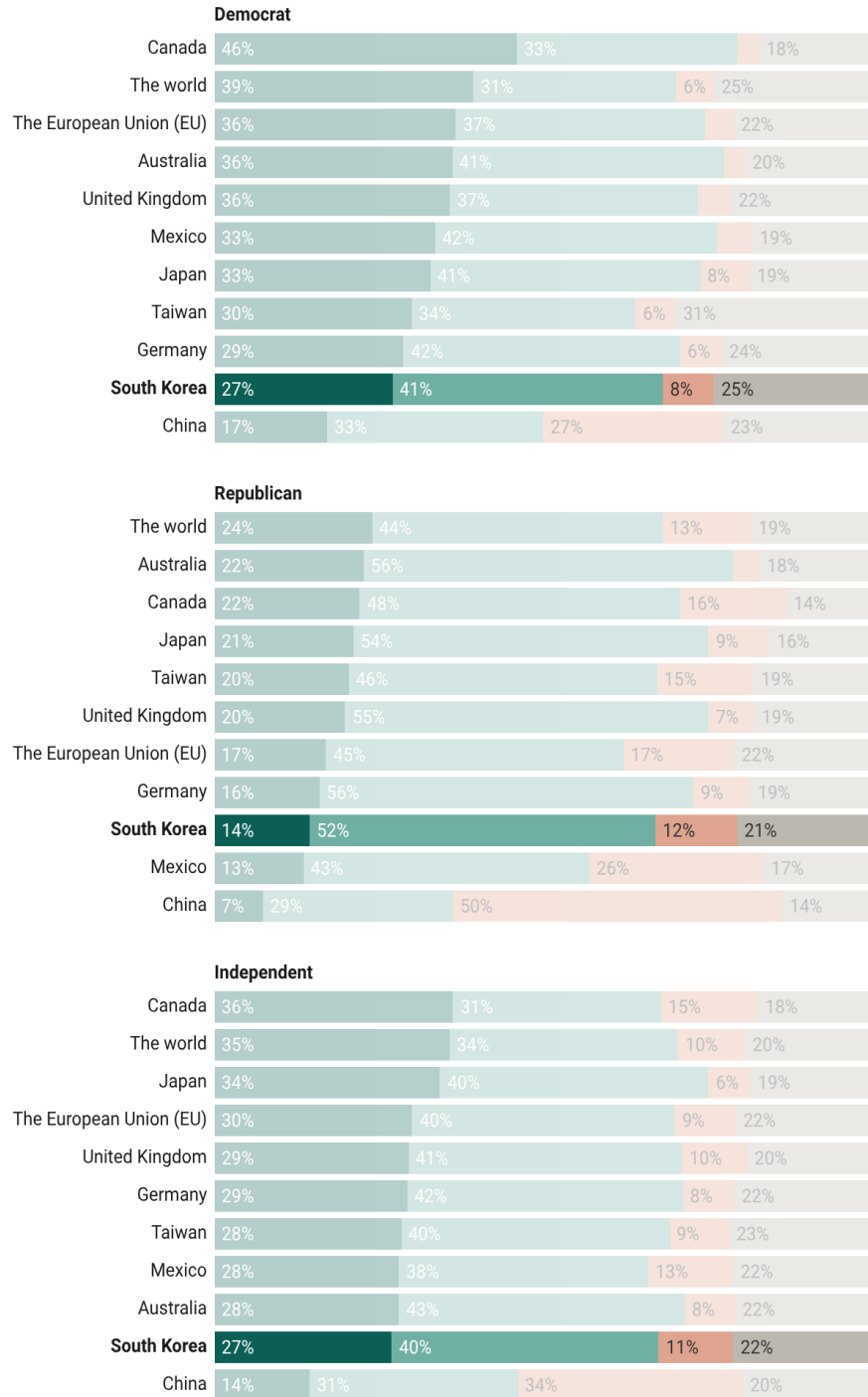


Chart: Note: Question and response wording changed in 2026. Australia and Taiwan added in 2026 • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 19. Democrats and Independents More Positive Toward Trade

Question: How do you think the following should be changed, if at all? The amount of U.S. trade with...

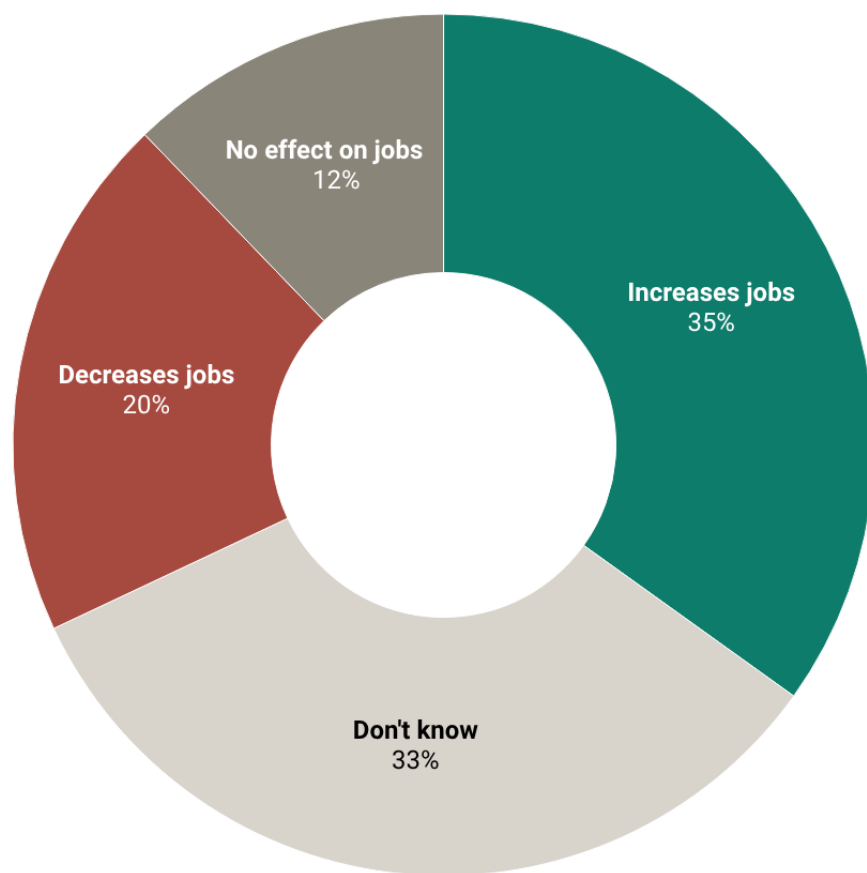
Should be increased Should be kept the same Should be decreased Don't know



When asked how international trade affects U.S. labor markets, 35 percent of Americans think trade increases the number of jobs available to U.S. workers, while 20 percent believe trade decreases them. A large share of Americans is unsure about the impact of international trade on job availability in the United States.

Figure 20. More Americans Say Trade Adds Jobs Than Cuts Them

% saying how international trade affects the number of jobs available to U.S. workers, 2026



Created with Datawrapper

More Americans support lower tariffs than last year, but partisan views persist. Among all Americans, the largest year-over-year shifts are in support for lower tariffs on imports from South Korea and from the world in general. In 2026, 38 percent of Americans support decreased tariffs on goods imported from South Korea, up from 33 percent in 2025. Support for lower tariffs on imports from the rest of the world grew by nine percentage points, from 28 percent in 2025 to 37 percent in 2026.

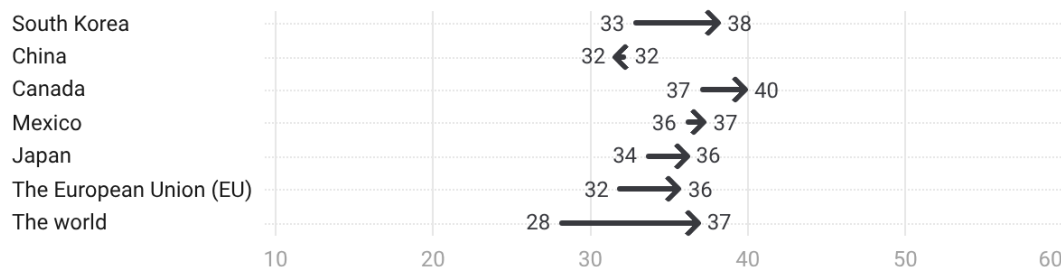
Democrats drive much of the increased support for lower tariffs, especially on goods from South Korea and the rest of the world. In 2026, a majority of Democrats say tariffs on imports from all trading partners except China should decrease. The largest shift among Democrats' attitudes is on imports from the rest of the world, where support for lower tariffs rose from 38 percent in 2025 to 55 percent in 2026. Independents also increasingly favor lower tariffs on every trading partner except China (39 percent in 2026, 32 percent in 2025). Among Independents, 44 percent support lower tariffs on goods from South Korea, up ten percentage points since 2025. Republicans are moving in the opposite direction. Across all trading partners, fewer Republicans than last year think tariffs should decrease. The biggest shift is on China, where 16 percent of Republicans support lower tariffs, down from 22 percent in 2025.

Figure 21. Democrats and Republicans Increasingly Split on Tariffs

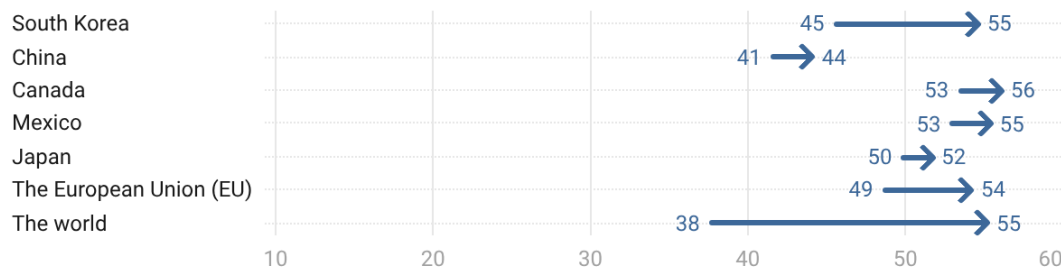
% of Americans, Democrats, Republicans, and Independents who believe tariffs should be decreased on imported goods from said trading partner; arrows show change from 2025 to 2026

■ Americans ■ Democrat ■ Republican ■ Independent

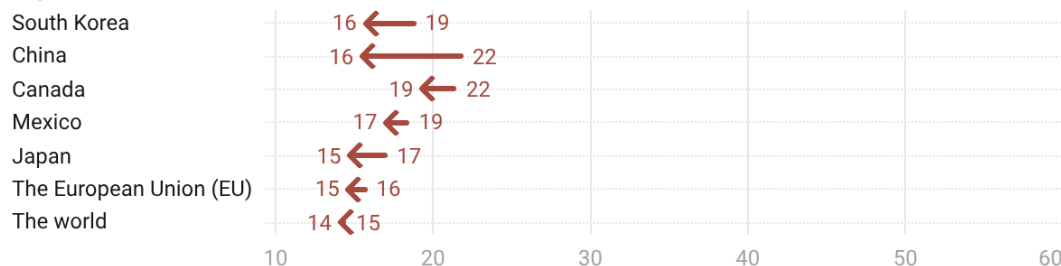
Americans



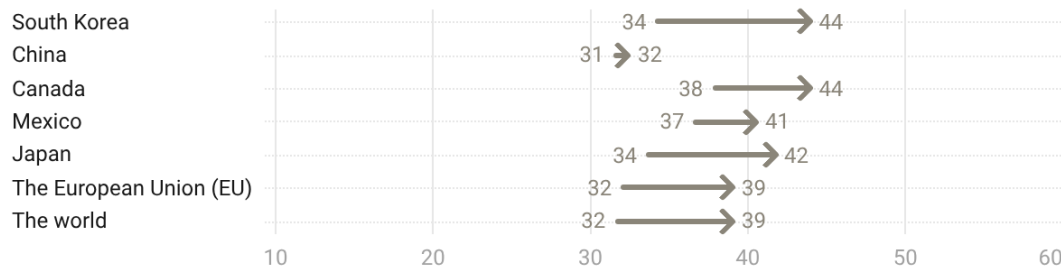
Democrat



Republican



Independent



Foreign Investment

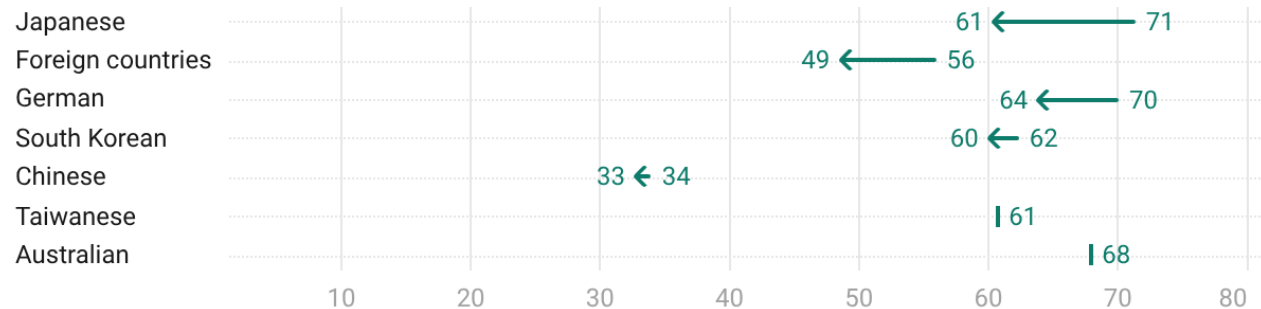
Americans still see foreign investment as more good than bad for the U.S. economy, but that view has weakened. In 2026, 49 percent of Americans believe foreign investment is good for the U.S. economy, down from 56 percent in 2025, while 14 percent think it is bad, about the same as in 2025 (15 percent). Americans have become increasingly uncertain about the benefits of foreign investment across the U.S. economy.

Figure 22. Views of South Korean Investment Remain Positive Despite Broader Declines in Views of Foreign Investment

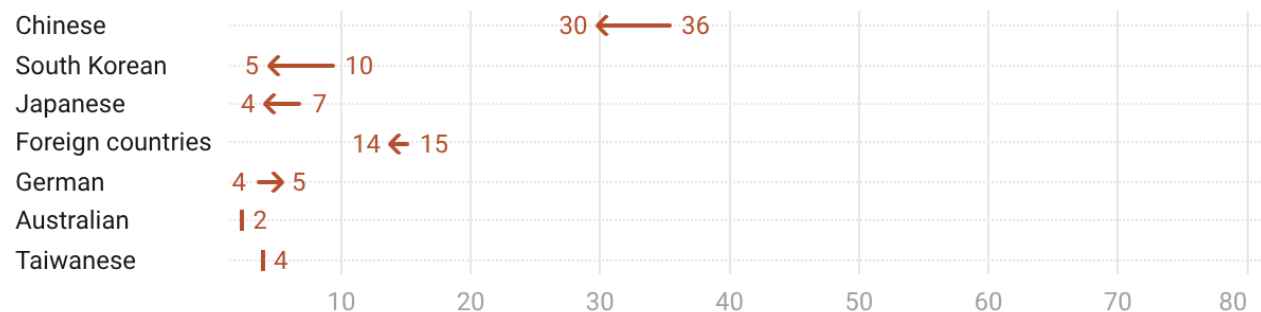
% saying investment from each country is good for the U.S. economy; arrows show change from 2025 to 2026

■ They are good for the US economy ■ They are bad for the US economy ■ Don't know

They are good for the US economy



They are bad for the US economy



Don't know

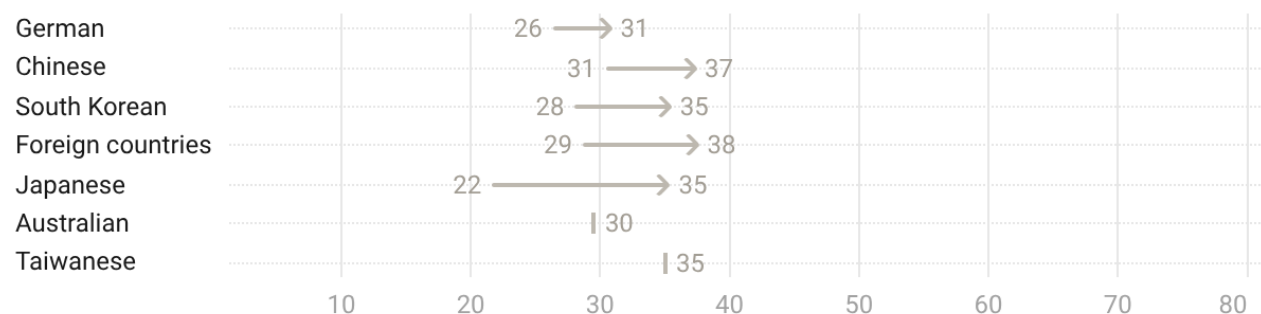


Chart: Note: Question and response wording changed in 2026. Australia and Taiwan added in 2026 • Created with Datawrapper

Americans see South Korean investment as somewhat more beneficial than foreign investment in general. Six in ten (60 percent) believe investment from South Korea benefits the U.S. economy, compared with only 4.5 percent who think it is bad for the economy. The share who view South Korean investment as beneficial to the economy has declined less since 2025 than for other countries typically viewed as U.S. partners.

Americans see Chinese investment in the United States as less beneficial. In 2026, 33 percent believe Chinese investment in the United States is good for the economy (34 percent in 2025), while almost as many, 30 percent, say it is bad (36 percent in 2025).

As with foreign investment more broadly, Americans are more positive about foreign investments in tech manufacturing plants as good for the U.S. economy. Australian (70 percent) and German (68 percent) investments draw the most support, while clear but slightly smaller majorities back South Korean (59 percent) and Japanese (61 percent) investments.

Americans are nearly split on Chinese investment in tech manufacturing. Some 32 percent view it as good for the economy, and 29 percent say it is bad.

Figure 23. Americans View Most Foreign High-Tech Investment Positively, but Are Divided on China

% saying investment in U.S. high-tech manufacturing plants from each country is good or bad for the U.S. economy, 2026

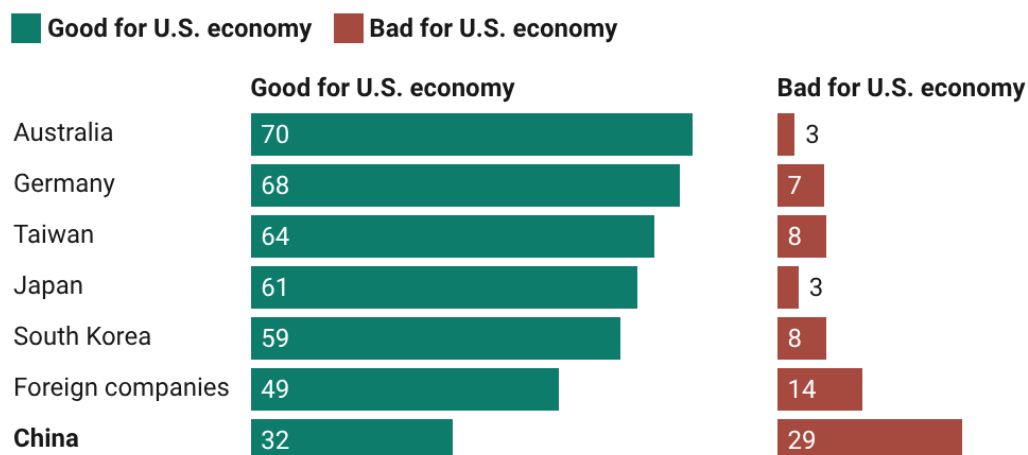
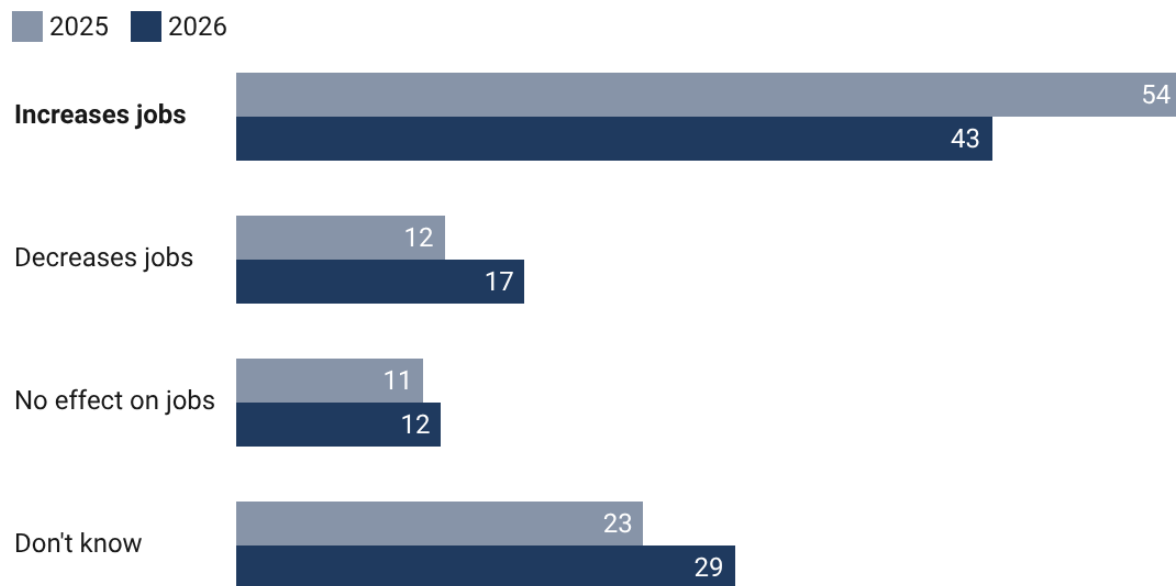


Chart: Note: "Don't know" responses not shown. • Created with Datawrapper

When asked how foreign investment affects the U.S. job market, fewer Americans see the benefits. In 2026, 43 percent of Americans believe investment from foreign countries adds jobs for U.S. workers, compared with 49 percent who think foreign investment is good for the U.S. economy. This may signal that Americans believe foreign investment benefits workers less than other participants in the economy. The share who believe foreign investment increases U.S. jobs has fallen eleven percentage points since last year. Still, more Americans believe foreign investment creates jobs for U.S. workers than think the same of international trade (35 percent).

Figure 24. Fewer Americans Say Foreign Investment Creates Jobs

% saying how foreign investment in the United States affects the number of jobs available to U.S. workers, 2025 and 2026



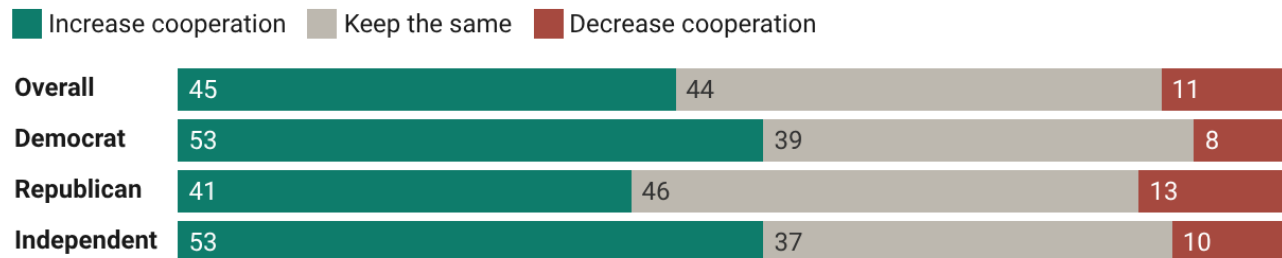
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Defense Supply Chain Cooperation

Americans are evenly split between increasing defense supply chain cooperation and keeping it at current levels. Asked about cooperating with allies such as South Korea and Japan, 45 percent think cooperation should increase, 44 percent think it should stay at current levels, and 11 percent want it to decrease. In 2025, 55 percent of Americans believed defense supply chain cooperation should increase, ten percentage points higher than today.

Figure 25. Americans Split on Expanding Defense Supply Chain Ties

% saying defense supply-chain cooperation with allies such as South Korea and Japan should be increased, kept the same, or decreased, 2026



Created with Datawrapper

Views on defense supply chain cooperation differ slightly by party. Majorities of both Democrats and Independents (53 percent) believe cooperation should increase. Republicans lean toward keeping defense supply chain cooperation at current levels, with 41 percent favoring an increase.

Broadly speaking, Americans remain positive toward international trade and foreign investment in the United States. More Americans believe international trade should increase than in previous years. However, positive attitudes toward trade with a handful of key trading partners, including South Korea, Canada, and Japan, have declined. Democrats and Independents show growing support for lowering U.S. tariffs, while fewer Republicans want lower tariffs, especially on products imported from China.

More Americans believe international trade creates U.S. jobs than those who do not, although many remain unsure. Americans are more skeptical than last year that foreign investments, such as those from Germany and Japan, benefit the U.S. economy, though attitudes toward South Korean investments remain positive and stable. Fewer Americans think foreign investment adds to the domestic job market than in 2025.

American Views on North Korea

Background

North Korea remains a persistent challenge for U.S. foreign policy, despite no longer dominating headlines as often as it did during periods of intense missile testing and summit diplomacy. Its nuclear weapons program, the U.S. military presence in South Korea, prospects for diplomacy, and longstanding concerns about human rights and humanitarian conditions continue to shape the U.S. approach toward North Korea.

The 2026 KEI survey finds that Americans continue to hold strongly negative views of North Korea while remaining open to some forms of diplomacy and assistance. A narrow majority is open to a meeting between Trump and Kim under some set of conditions, while nearly nine in ten say it remains important for North Korea to give up its nuclear capabilities. Americans are more divided over the possibility of an arms control agreement, but broad majorities across parties say that the United States should press North Korea on human rights and approve of providing humanitarian assistance to North Korean civilians.

Americans View North Korea Unfavorably but Support a Potential Summit

North Korean missile tests and other provocations have faded from headlines over the past ten years as they have become more normalized. But fewer headlines have not softened American views. More than two-thirds of Americans (68 percent) hold unfavorable views of North Korea, including 50 percent who hold a very unfavorable view.

Figure 26. Negative Views of North Korea Remain Widespread Across Parties

% with an unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion of North Korea, overall and by party identification, 2026



Created with Datawrapper

Negative views of North Korea do not mean Americans oppose diplomacy. In his first term, Trump met Kim three times, and he has said he plans to [meet him again](#) in his second term. Such a meeting would likely draw little controversy from the American public. A majority surveyed (55 percent) support another Trump-Kim summit, though many attach conditions. While 18 percent favor a meeting with no preconditions, 16 percent say such a meeting should take place only if North Korea first agrees to halt missile tests, and a further 20 percent favor a meeting only if North Korea first agrees to give up its nuclear weapons. Just 17 percent say Trump should not meet with Kim under any conditions.

Figure 27. Support for a Trump-Kim Meeting Depends on the Terms

% saying under what conditions President Trump should meet with North Korea's Kim Jong Un, 2026

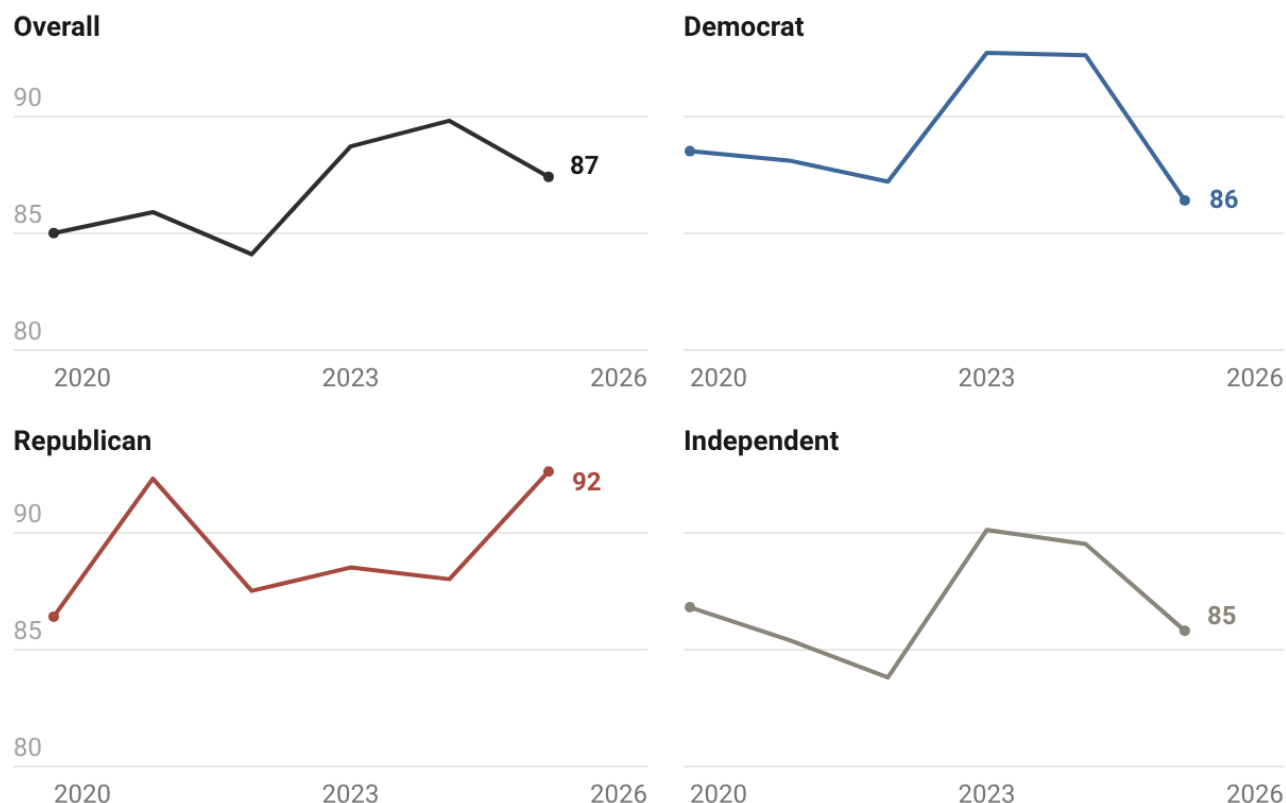


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That just one in five Americans make denuclearization a precondition for a summit does not mean the public is willing to accept North Korea as a nuclear power. A large majority of Americans (87 percent) continue to say it is important for North Korea to disarm. This is largely unchanged from 2020, when it was 85 percent. These views are also broadly consistent across party lines.

Figure 28. Support for North Korean Denuclearization Remains High Across Parties

% saying it is important that North Korea give up its military nuclear capabilities, by party identification, 2020–2026



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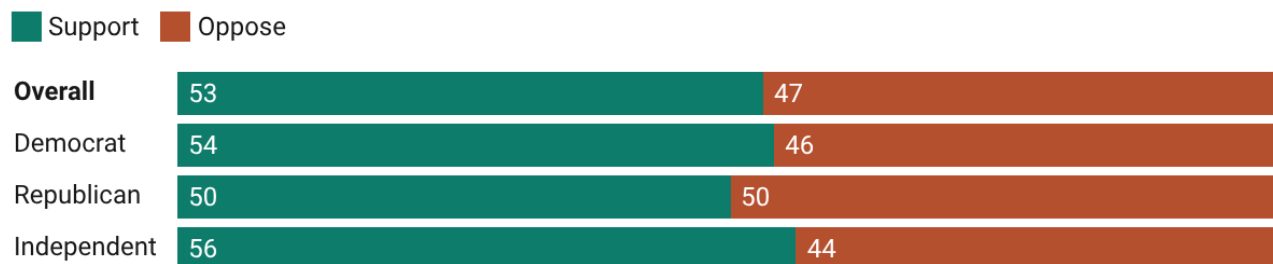
Americans also do not see the U.S. troop presence in South Korea as contingent on North Korea's nuclear weapons program. Asked how the United States should change its troop presence if North Korea gave up its nuclear weapons, 32 percent say the United States should either reduce (23 percent) or withdraw (9 percent) U.S. troops. Four in ten (41 percent) say the troop presence should be maintained (32 percent) or increased (8 percent), and 28 percent say they are unsure. These numbers have been largely stable since the question was first asked in 2020.

With North Korea taking no steps to denuclearize, the survey also asked whether Americans would accept an arms control agreement negotiated between the United States and North Korea. Such an agreement would likely mean that North Korea keeps some or all of its current

nuclear arsenal. On this, Americans are divided. Overall, 53 percent of the public support pursuing an arms control agreement and 47 percent oppose it. Democrats (54 percent support, 46 percent oppose), Republicans (50 percent support, 50 percent oppose), and Independents (56 percent support, 44 percent oppose) are similarly split.

Figure 29. Americans Are Closely Divided Over a U.S.-North Korea Arms Control Agreement

% supporting or opposing a U.S.-North Korea arms-control agreement, by party identification, 2026



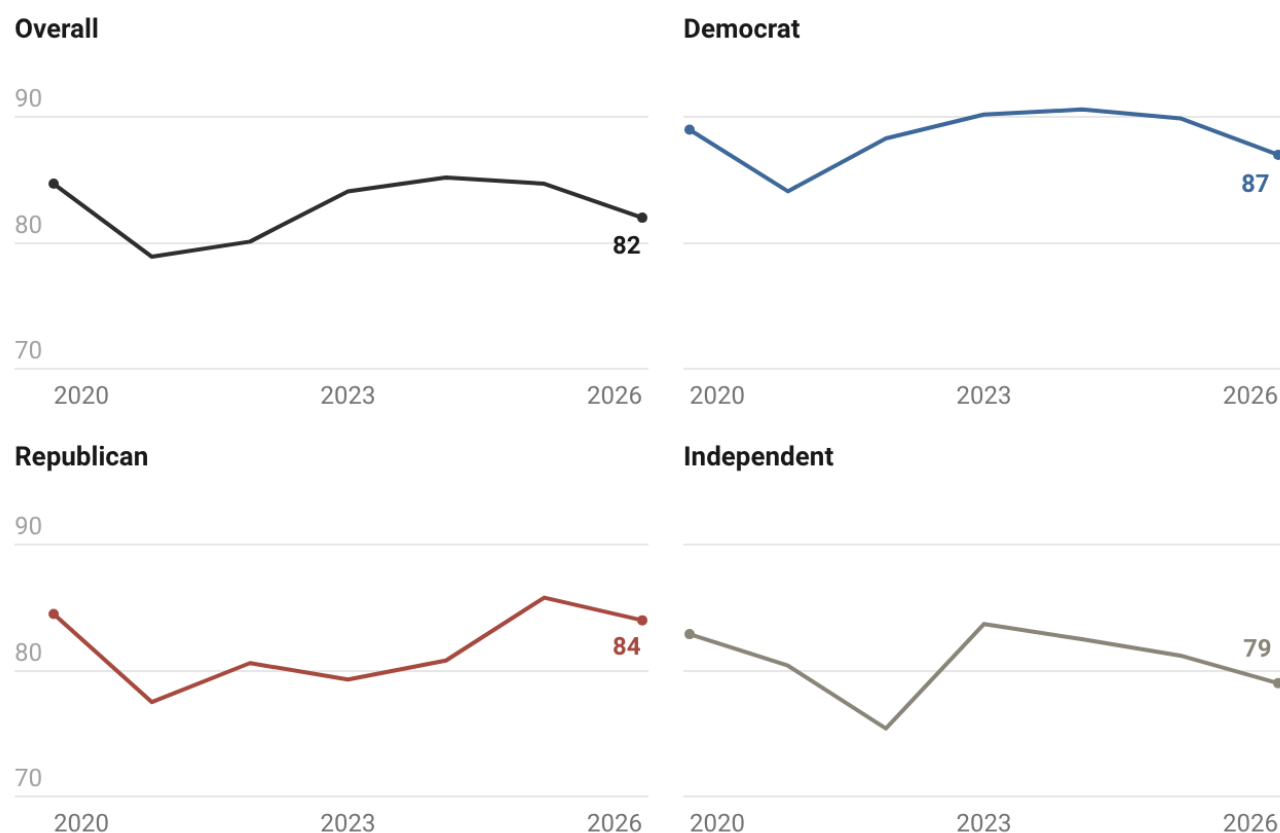
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The U.S. relationship with North Korea extends beyond nuclear weapons. There are [widespread, well-documented](#) human rights abuses in the country, but human rights rarely feature in negotiations between the two countries. That does not mean that the American public is ready to push them aside. Broad support for the United States to push for human rights improvements in North Korea has remained consistent since the KEI survey first asked this question in 2020.

In 2026, 82 percent of all Americans (87 percent of Democrats, 84 percent of Republicans, and 79 percent of Independents) support such an effort.

Figure 30. Support for Pressing North Korea on Human Rights Remains Broad Across Parties

% saying it is important for the United States to push for human rights improvements in North Korea, by party identification, 2020–2026

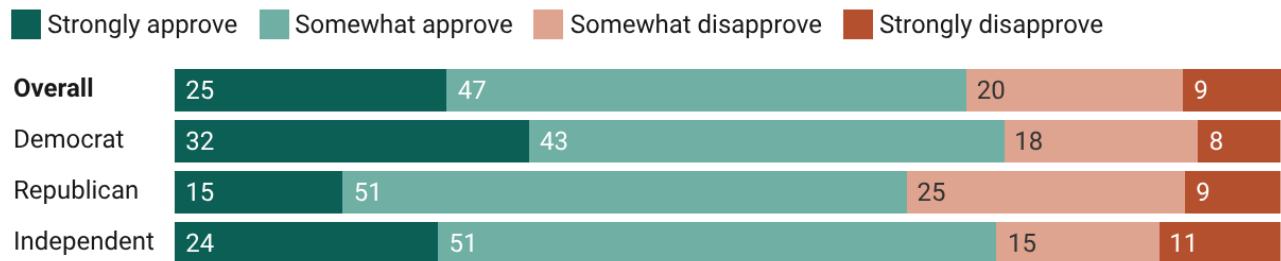


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North Korea also faces [well-documented food shortages](#) that it has, at times, sought to ease by asking the international community for assistance. The United States does not offer assistance directly to North Korea because of sanctions, but the American public supports doing so. In 2026, 72 percent approve of the United States providing direct humanitarian assistance versus 29 percent who disapprove. Democrats (75 percent) are somewhat more likely than Republicans (66 percent) to support such an effort, but not by a wide margin.

Figure 31. Majorities Across Parties Approve of U.S. Humanitarian Assistance to North Korean Civilians

% approving or disapproving of U.S. humanitarian assistance to North Korean civilians, by party identification, 2026



Created with Datawrapper

It should be noted that this question was asked from 2020 to 2025 with the same wording but different response options. The 2020 to 2025 response options asked only for approval or disapproval, with a “not sure” option. In 2026, the “not sure” option was removed, and approval and disapproval were each divided into strongly and somewhat categories. The results are striking. From 2020 to 2025, roughly 50 percent approved of providing humanitarian assistance. In 2026, that number jumped to 72 percent, a twenty-percentage-point increase. Disapproval jumped from roughly 18 percent on average from 2020 to 2025 to 29 percent in 2026. This suggests that those who would have previously responded “not sure” broke nearly two-to-one in favor of supporting humanitarian assistance when forced to choose.

Methodology

The 2026 survey was conducted August 21–September 1 among 1,207 respondents, with a margin of error of ± 3.6 percent. The final dataset represents a multi-wave survey of U.S. adults fielded annually between 2020 and 2026. Below is a description of the methodology used for the 2026 wave. Prior waves were collected according to the same methodology.

In 2026, the final dataset includes 1,207 observations, including 1,000 from a sample of U.S. adults, and 207 from an oversample of U.S. adults who are “interested in international news.” To achieve this final sample, YouGov interviewed 1,859 respondents, including a main sample of 1,154 U.S. respondents, and an oversample of 705 U.S. respondents (with the goal of screening for and surveying people who are interested in international news). During fielding, the main and oversample were balanced to known characteristics of the U.S. general population on age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, region, home ownership, and presidential vote choice. For the main sample, balancing was enforced on completes. For the oversample, balancing was enforced on starts.

After fielding, the main sample was matched down to a sample of 1,000. The respondents in the main sample were matched to a sampling frame on gender, age, race, and education. The sampling frame was constructed by stratified sampling from the full 2023 American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year sample with selection within strata by weighted sampling with replacements (using the person weights on the public use file).

After matching, the cases in both samples were weighted separately to the sampling frame using propensity scores. The matched (unmatched for oversample) cases and the frame were combined, and a logistic regression was estimated for inclusion in the frame. The propensity score functions both included age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, region, and home ownership status. The propensity scores were grouped into deciles of the estimated propensity score in the frame, and post-stratified according to these deciles.

The weights for both the main sample and oversample were then post-stratified on 2024 presidential vote choice, followed by a four-way stratification of gender, age (four categories), race (four categories), and education (four categories). Finally, the oversample weights went through an individual stratification on home ownership status. After post-stratification, the weighted oversample of U.S. respondents was then subsetting to those who qualified to complete the survey due to their interest in international news (N=207), and the weights were trimmed and recentered around 1, to produce the final weight for those interested in international news.

The matched and weighted main sample was then combined with the unmatched, weighted, and subsetting oversample. This combined dataset was then post-stratified on interest in international news (the distribution found in the main sample) in order to produce the final combined weight.

2025

Dates: September 2–12, 2025

Weighted Sample Size: 1,181

Margin of Error: +/- 3.34 percent at 95 percent CI

Interview Method: Web Only (English)

Organization: YouGov

2024

Dates: September 3–13, 2024

Weighted Sample Size: 1,184

Margin of Error: +/- 3.22 percent at 95 percent CI

Interview Method: Web Only (English)

Organization: YouGov

2023

Dates: August 22–29, 2023

Weighted Sample Size: 1,172

Margin of Error: +/- 3.5 percent at 95 percent CI

Interview Method: Web Only (English)

Organization: YouGov

2022

Dates: September 1–12, 2022

Weighted Sample Size: 1,172

Margin of Error: +/- 3.5 percent at 95 percent CI

Interview Method: Web Only (English)

Organization: YouGov

2021

Dates: August 30–September 7, 2021

Weighted Sample Size: 1,122

Margin of Error: +/- 3.25 percent at 95 percent CI

Interview Method: Web Only (English)

Organization: YouGov

2020

Dates: August 26–31, 2020

Weighted Sample Size: 1,064

Margin of Error: +/- 2.95 percent at 95 percent Confidence Interval (CI)

Interview Method: Web Only (English)

Organization: YouGov

About KEI

The Korea Economic Institute of America (KEI) is a U.S. policy institute and public outreach organization dedicated to helping Americans understand the breadth and importance of the relationship with the Republic of Korea. Through publications, media, events, and outreach programs, KEI advances scholarship and understanding of Korea that informs policymakers and the American public about the security, economic, and political implications of U.S. ties to the Korean Peninsula.

For over 40 years, KEI has promoted dialogue and understanding between the United States and South Korea through in-depth analysis and conversation. KEI draws on the expertise of resident staff, provides a platform for leading voices from the United States, South Korea, and beyond, commissions original research and analysis, and hosts discussions among policymakers and opinion leaders.

KEI maintains strong ties with U.S. think tanks and academic institutions, generating cutting-edge research on the Korean Peninsula that reaches experts, students, and the broader public.

In today's digital age, KEI reaches a global audience by livestreaming events and providing online commentary, data, and scholastic research through its "Inside the Investment" video series, "Eye on Korea" podcast, and livestreamed and recorded programming.

The U.S.-Korea partnership is built on shared values, but it requires continued effort to sustain. KEI is proud to help uphold this relationship and ensure a safer and more prosperous world.

2026 KEI Survey on American Public Attitudes on U.S. Foreign Policy and the Korean Peninsula

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KEI is registered under FARA on behalf of the Korea Institute for International Economic Policy.

Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, DC

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