



# Americans Support Foreign Aid, but Oppose Paying for It

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**November 2017**

In 2015 the United States spent \$39 billion in foreign aid to other countries, including military assistance, representing 1.3 percent of the federal budget. President Trump's budget proposal this spring cut foreign aid to other nations [by over one-third](#). Data from the 2017 Chicago Council Survey shows that Americans view spending on domestic programs as a higher priority than foreign aid. However, majorities of the American public support specific foreign aid policies and see aid as helpful for US foreign relations. Because it's a lower priority, majorities think aid to other countries should be cut, but they also overestimate how much of the budget is actually pegged for foreign aid.

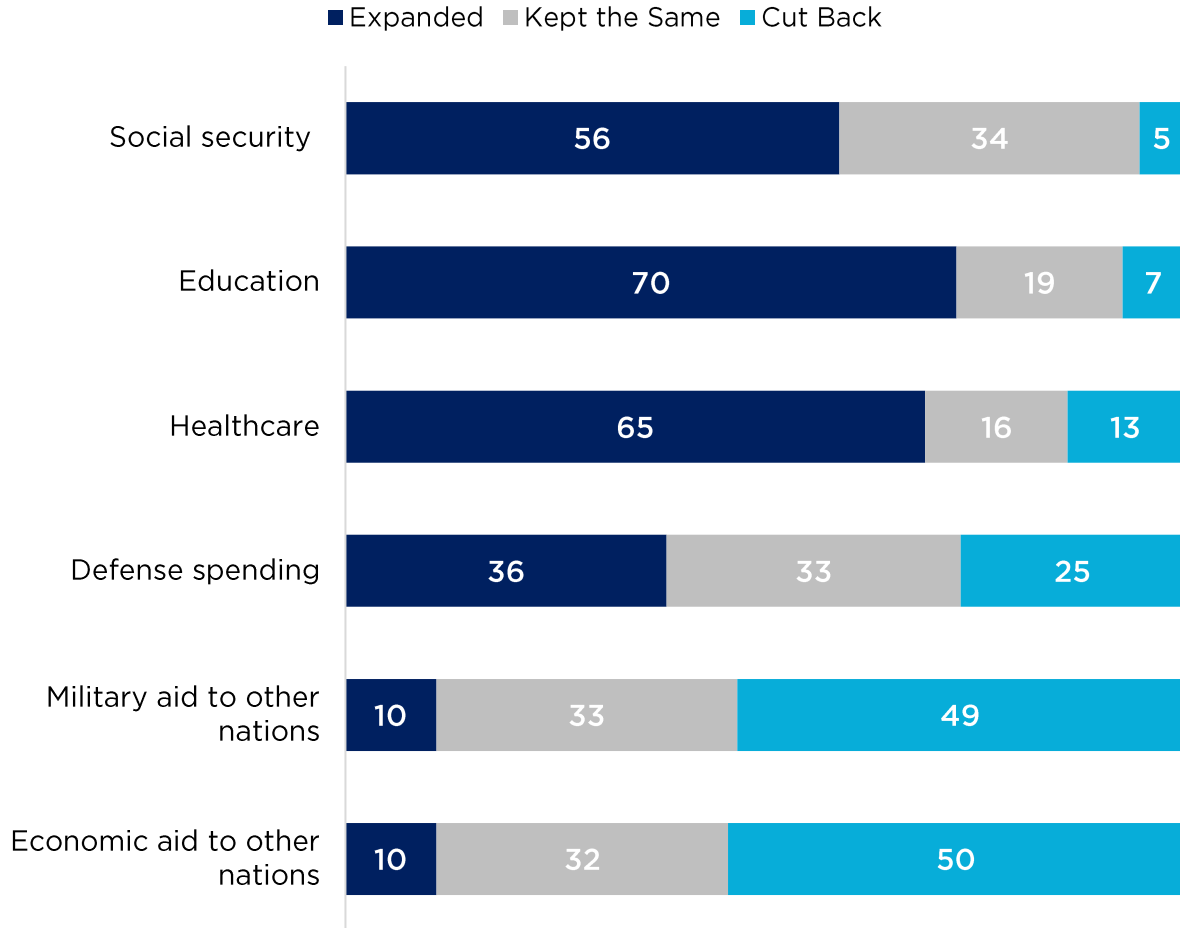
## **Domestic Spending is the Priority, but Support for Foreign Aid is Strong**

The American public's view of the benefits of foreign aid is complicated; Americans support aid programs but would like to cut aid spending and have mixed feelings about its impact.

Despite majority support for a spectrum of foreign aid programs, Americans have consistently prioritized domestic spending over foreign assistance in the US federal budget. A majority of Americans would like to see federal spending on education, healthcare, and social security expanded and a plurality feel the same about defense spending. Of six federal programs—social security, education, healthcare, defense spending, military aid, and economic aid—respondents prefer cutting spending on military aid and economic aid.

## Federal Spending

Below is a list of present federal government programs. For each, please select whether you feel it should be expanded, cut back, or kept about the same:



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However, Americans express majority support when assistance is more specific. Majorities favor providing aid for disaster relief (82%), food and medical assistance (80%), and helping farmers in needy countries be more productive (76%). Majorities also support aid for broader goals such as women's education abroad (70%), assisting developing economies (65%), and promoting democracy (56%).

## Foreign Aid

Do you support or oppose the following types of foreign aid (% favor)



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What's more, while most Americans think foreign aid helps rather than hurts US relations with other countries (64% helps, 8% hurts) and more think that it helps national security (41%) rather than hurts it (16%), more Americans say foreign aid hurts the economy (41%) rather than helps it (29%).

### The Dichotomy of Supporting Programs but Not Funding Them

It's possible Americans overestimate how much of the federal budget is spent on foreign aid. The 2014 Chicago Council Survey tested this by asking respondents how much they think the United States spends on military and economic aid to other countries. They averaged 8.5 percent of the federal budget when, in reality, foreign assistance programs only took up 1.4 percent of the federal budget that year. However, that same year, majorities of Americans preferred reducing spending on military (59%) and economic aid (60%).

While supportive of foreign assistance, items that relate to foreign aid are considered lesser foreign policy priorities; combating world hunger, promoting and defending human rights, and providing famine relief were deemed least important from a list of 11 potential items. Top priorities were protecting American jobs and responding to direct threats like nuclear proliferation.<sup>1</sup> Majorities of Americans also think that military aid (69%) and economic aid (66%) are effective means of achieving foreign policy goals. However, Americans view these as less effective than maintaining

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<sup>1</sup> Americans also see defending allies' security as less important than defending human rights and combatting world hunger.

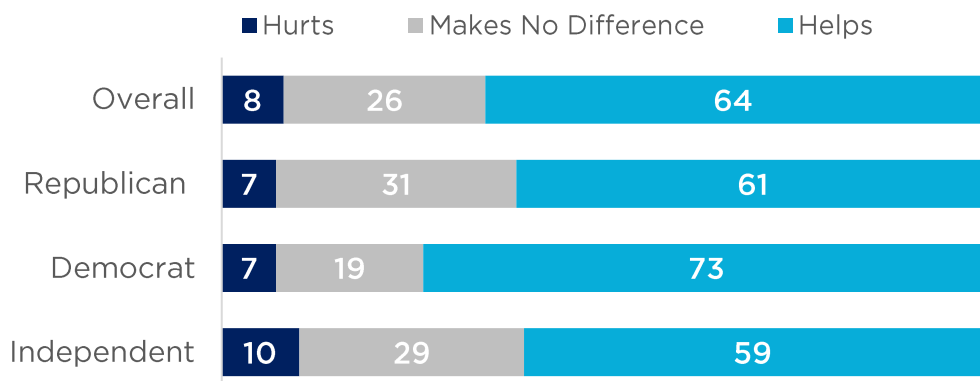
military superiority, maintaining alliances, building new alliances, and signing international agreements.

### Partisan Divides Across the Board

While majorities across political affiliation believe that foreign aid helps US relations with other countries, there are partisan divisions on other impacts.

#### US Relations with Other Countries

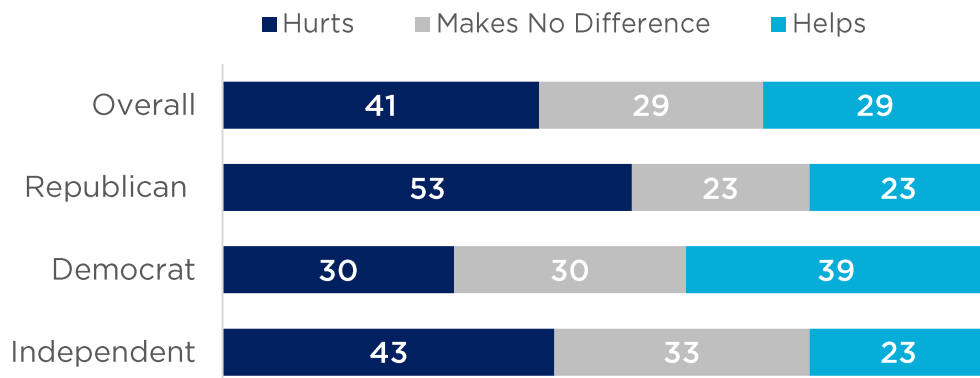
Do you think that giving foreign aid to other countries helps, hurts, or makes no difference for US relations with other countries?



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#### The US Economy

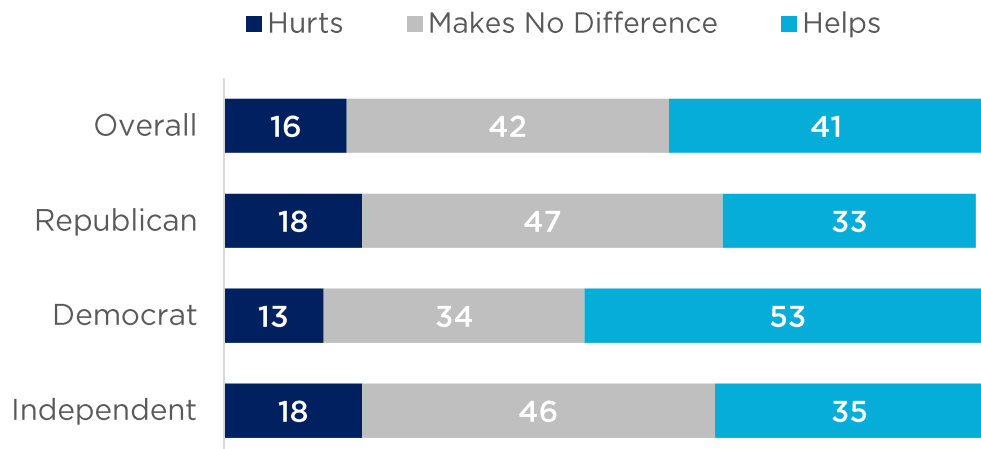
Do you think that giving foreign aid to other countries helps, hurts, or makes no difference for the US economy?



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## Our National Security

Do you think that giving foreign aid to other countries helps, hurts, or makes no difference for our national security?



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Far more Democrats (53%) than Republicans (33%) think foreign aid helps national security. And far more Republicans (53%) than Democrats (30%) believe foreign aid hurts the US economy. Republicans are far more likely to say that economic aid should be cut back (68%) than Democrats (36%). Even greater majorities of core Trump supporters favor cutting back economic aid to other countries (77%). By a smaller margin, Republicans are also more favorable toward cutting military aid to other countries (54%) than Democrats (42%).

Finally, while bipartisan majorities continue to support these specific aid policies, Republicans have become less favorable towards all forms of foreign assistance, with the exception of aid to help farmers be more productive in needy countries. On the other hand, Democrat support for all types of foreign aid has been consistent. Independent support remains consistent for some types of aid—food, medical, and agricultural aid—but has dwindled for others—developing economies, promoting democracy, and women’s education.

## Do you favor or oppose the following types of foreign aid: (favor)

Food and medical assistance to people in needy countries				
	Overall	Republican	Democrat	Independent
2002	84%	80%	83%	87%
2004	82%	81%	86%	80%
2010	74%	68%	82%	73%
2017	80%	72%	89%	78%
Aid to help farmers in needy countries become more productive				
2010	73%	67%	83%	70%
2017	76%	71%	84%	74%
Aid that helps needy countries develop their economics				
2002	74%	74%	74%	76%
2004	70%	72%	75%	65%
2010	62%	52%	73%	61%
2017	65%	56%	77%	62%
Aid for women's education in needy countries				
2002	80%	72%	84%	84%
2004	76%	73%	80%	73%
2017	70%	55%	84%	69%
Assistance to promote democracy abroad				
2002	64%	65%	68%	64%
2004	53%	61%	54%	49%
2017	56%	50%	68%	50%

## Methodology

The analysis in this report is based on data from the 2017 Chicago Council Survey of the American public on foreign policy. The 2017 Chicago Council Survey was conducted by GfK Custom Research using their large-scale, probability-based, nationwide online research panel between June 27 and July 19, 2017 among a representative weighted national sample of 2,020 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. This panel is the largest national sampling frame from which fully representative samples can be generated to produce statistically valid inferences for study populations. The margin of error for the full sample is  $\pm 2.4$  percentage points.

Partisan identification is based on respondents' answer to a standard partisan self-identification question: "Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?"

Core Trump supporters are identified as those respondents who answered "very favorable" to the question: "Do you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable view of the following world leaders: US President Donald Trump?" This group, 21 percent of the overall sample, self-identify primarily as Republicans (62%), but also includes a third that identify as Independents (31%), and a handful of Democrats (5%).

The 2017 Chicago Council Survey is made possible by the generous support of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Korea Foundation, the Charles Koch Institute, and the personal support of Lester Crown and the Crown family.

## About the Chicago Council on Global Affairs

The Chicago Council on Global Affairs is an independent, nonpartisan membership organization that provides insight—and influences the public discourse—on critical global issues. We convene leading global voices, conduct independent research, and engage the public to explore ideas that will shape our global future. The Council is committed to bringing clarity and offering solutions to issues that transcend borders and transform how people, business, and governments engage the world. Learn more at [thechicagocouncil.org](http://thechicagocouncil.org) and follow [@ChicagoCouncil](https://twitter.com/ChicagoCouncil).

## Appendix

**Q8:** How effective do you think each of the following approaches are to achieving the foreign policy goals of United States – very effective, somewhat effective, not very effective, or not effective at all?

### 8/7. Economic aid to other countries

	Very effective (%)	Somewhat effective (%)	Not very effective (%)	Not effective at all (%)	Refused (%)
2017					
<u>Overall</u>	18	48	27	7	1
Republican	9	45	38	8	1
Democrat	27	52	17	3	1
Independent	15	46	28	10	0

### 8/8. Military aid to other countries

	Very effective (%)	Somewhat effective (%)	Not very effective (%)	Not effective at all (%)	Refused (%)
2017					
<u>Overall</u>	13	56	25	6	1
Republican	9	62	23	4	1
Democrat	18	54	22	4	1
Independent	11	51	29	8	1

**Q205:** Here are some types of foreign aid. Please state whether you would favor or oppose:

### 205/1. Food and medical assistance to people in needy countries

	Favor (%)	Oppose (%)	Refused (%)
2017			
<u>Overall</u>	80	18	2
Republican	72	26	0
Democrat	89	11	2
Independent	78	21	2



205/2. Aid that helps needy countries develop their economies

	Favor (%)	Oppose (%)	Refused (%)
2017			
<u>Overall</u>	65	32	2
Republican	56	41	3
Democrat	77	23	0
Independent	62	37	2

205/3. Aid to help farmers in needy countries become more productive

	Favor (%)	Oppose (%)	Refused (%)
2017			
<u>Overall</u>	76	22	2
Republican	71	27	2
Democrat	84	16	0
Independent	74	24	2

205/5. Assistance to promote democracy abroad

	Favor (%)	Oppose (%)	Refused (%)
2017			
<u>Overall</u>	56	42	2
Republican	50	47	3
Democrat	68	31	1
Independent	50	49	1

205/7b. Aid for women's education in needy countries

	Favor (%)	Oppose (%)	Refused (%)
2017			
<u>Overall</u>	70	28	2
Republican	55	43	3
Democrat	84	16	0
Independent	69	30	2

205/8. Disaster relief for needy countries

	Favor (%)	Oppose (%)	Refused (%)
2017			
<u>Overall</u>	82	16	1
Republican	79	20	2
Democrat	89	11	0
Independent	79	19	1

Q25: Below is a list of present federal government programs. For each, please select whether you fell it should be expanded, cut back, or kept about the same.

25/4. Military aid to other nations

	Expanded (%)	Kept about the same (%)	Cut back (%)	Not sure (%)	Refused (%)
2017					
<u>Overall</u>	10	33	49	8	0
Republican	8	32	54	7	0
Democrat	13	38	42	7	0
Independent	7	29	54	10	0

25/5. Economic aid to other nations

	Expanded (%)	Kept about the same (%)	Cut back (%)	Not sure (%)	Refused (%)
2017					
<u>Overall</u>	10	32	50	8	0
Republican	5	22	68	5	1
Democrat	17	40	36	7	0
Independent	8	30	50	12	0

Q7: Below is a list of foreign policy goals that the United States might have. For each one please select whether you think that it should be a very important foreign policy goal of the United States, a somewhat important foreign policy goal, or not an important goal at all:

### 7/11. Promoting and defending human rights

	Very important (%)	Somewhat important (%)	Not important at all (%)	Refused (%)
2017				
<u>Overall</u>	36	51	13	0
Republican	19	62	19	0
Democrat	52	43	5	0
Independent	34	51	15	0

### 7/12. Combatting world hunger

	Very important (%)	Somewhat important (%)	Not important at all (%)	Refused (%)
2017				
<u>Overall</u>	40	49	11	1
Republican	21	62	16	1
Democrat	57	38	5	0
Independent	35	52	12	1

### 7/12b. Providing famine relief

	Very important (%)	Somewhat important (%)	Not important at all (%)	Refused (%)
2017				
<u>Overall</u>	36	51	12	0
Republican	24	56	20	0
Democrat	45	50	4	0
Independent	38	47	15	1

### 7/19. Defending our allies' security

	Very important (%)	Somewhat important (%)	Not important at all (%)	Refused (%)
2017				
<u>Overall</u>	40	54	6	0
Republican	35	59	6	1
Democrat	46	50	4	0
Independent	37	56	7	0

**Q212:** Do you think that giving foreign aid to other countries helps, hurts, or makes no difference for:

212a. Our national security

	Helps (%)	Hurts (%)	Makes no difference (%)	Refused (%)
2017				
<u>Overall</u>	41	16	42	1
Republican	33	18	47	1
Democrat	53	13	34	1
Independent	35	18	46	1

212b. The US economy

	Helps (%)	Hurts (%)	Makes no difference (%)	Refused (%)
2017				
<u>Overall</u>	29	41	29	1
Republican	23	53	23	1
Democrat	39	30	30	0
Independent	23	43	33	1

212c. US relations with other countries

	Helps (%)	Hurts (%)	Makes no difference (%)	Refused (%)
2017				
<u>Overall</u>	64	8	26	1
Republican	61	7	31	1
Democrat	73	7	19	1
Independent	59	10	29	1