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# American Public Backs US Military Presence in Japan

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**November 2019**

At the highest level, the relationship between President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan has been cordial and at times productive. The two leaders have met often, and in October the United States and Japan [signed a trade agreement](#) focused on agriculture and digital trade. However, President Trump's longstanding skepticism toward US alliances and the coming negotiations over Japanese support for American troops in Japan could strain the relationship. Despite the challenges ahead, Americans remain supportive of the US military presence in Japan and say the US-Japan relationship strengthens US security.

## Key Findings:

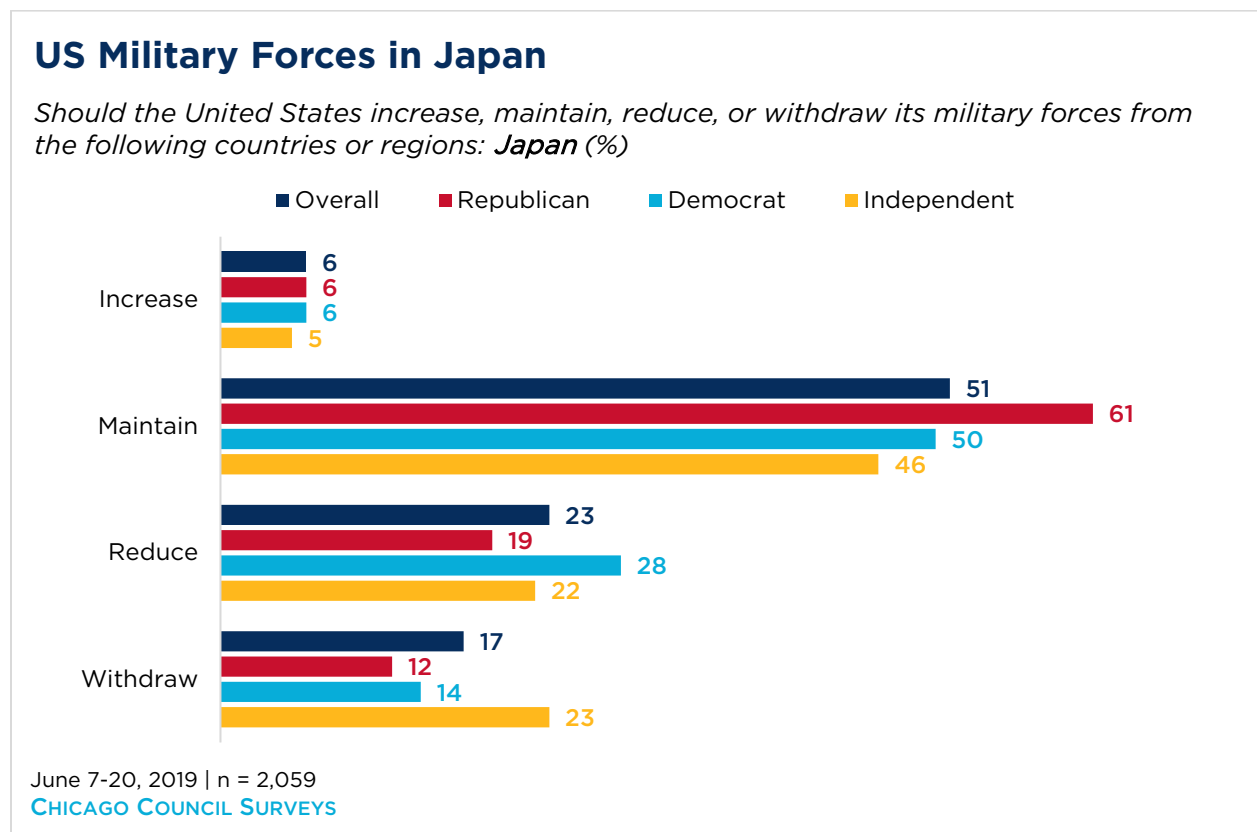
- A majority of Americans (57%) say the United States should maintain or increase its military forces in Japan.
- Americans' rating of Japan's global influence has risen slightly over the past year to an average of 5.9 out of ten, up from 5.7 in 2018.
- Eight in ten Americans (78%) say the US relationship with Japan strengthens US national security.
- While a majority of Americans continue to oppose using US troops in a conflict between China and Japan over disputed islands (55%), support has risen steadily in recent years and is now at an all-time high (43%).

## Americans Say US Relationship with Japan Strengthens US National Security

As a key US ally in the Indo-Pacific and host of US military forces, Japan plays a critical role in the United States' security position in the region. Eight in ten Americans (78%) say that the US relationship with Japan strengthens US national security, including majorities of Republicans (78%), Democrats (80%), and Independents (77%). More Americans say that the US relationship with Japan strengthens US national security than for any other country asked about in the 2019 Chicago Council Survey, above other US allies such as Germany (75%), South Korea (70%), and the Philippines (60%).

## Public Supports US Military Forces in Japan

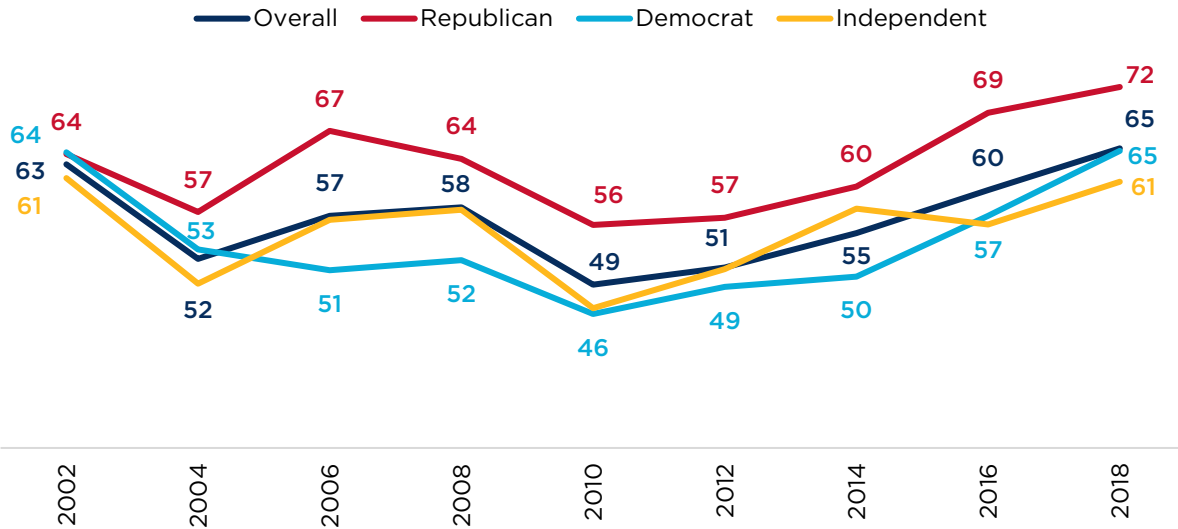
The United States continues to maintain a significant military presence in Japan, with more than 50,000 military personnel stationed in the country. When combined, a majority of Americans (57%) favor increasing or maintaining US military forces in Japan, including majorities of Republicans (67%) and Democrats (55%), as well as half of Independents (51%). While relatively few favor increasing the US military presence in Japan (6%), a majority (51%) favor maintaining US military forces in the country. Two in ten (23%) say the United States should reduce its forces deployed to Japan, and 17 percent favor withdrawing American military forces from the country altogether.



These findings parallel prior Council results on long-term American military bases in Japan. In the 2018 Chicago Council Survey, two-thirds of Americans (65%) said the United States should have military bases in Japan, the highest level recorded in Council polling since the question was first asked in 2002. That support held across partisan lines, including majorities of Republicans (72%), Democrats (65%), and Independents (61%).

## US Bases in Japan

Do you think the United States should or should not have long-term military bases in the following places? **Japan** (% should have)



July 12-31, 2018 | n=2046

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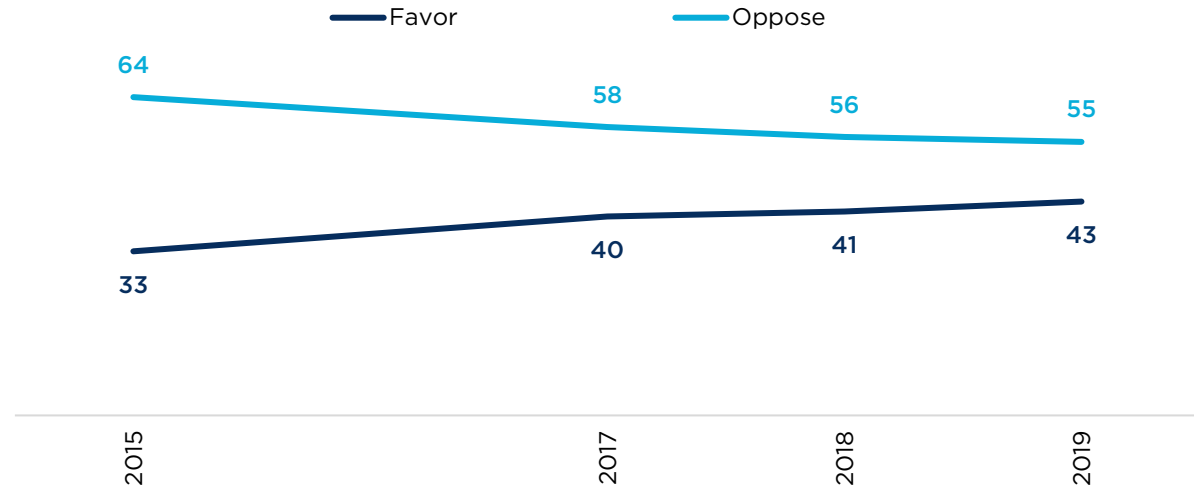
## Americans Oppose Involving US Troops in Japan-China Conflict

Though Americans value the US-Japan relationship and favor the US military presence in Japan, they remain hesitant to commit US troops to a conflict between China and Japan over disputed islands. A majority of Americans (55%) oppose the use of US troops in such a scenario, while four in ten (43%) are in favor. However, public support for using US troops in this case has risen ten percentage points since the question was first asked in 2015. The growing support for US involvement has occurred across partisan groups, but especially among Republicans. Today, Republicans are divided over whether the US should use troops (48% favor, 49% oppose) in a conflict between China and Japan, while majorities of Democrats (58%) and Independents (57%) remain opposed.

In other scenarios, the American public is more willing to commit US troops to the defense of Japan. In the 2018 Chicago Council Survey, 64 percent of Americans favored using US troops to defend Japan from an attack by North Korea, up from 48 percent in 2015.

## US Involvement in a China-Japan Conflict

*There has been some discussion about the circumstances that might justify using US troops in other parts of the world. Please give your opinion about some situations. Would you favor or oppose the use of US troops: **If China initiated a military conflict with Japan over disputed islands** (%)*



June 7-20, 2019 | n = 2,059

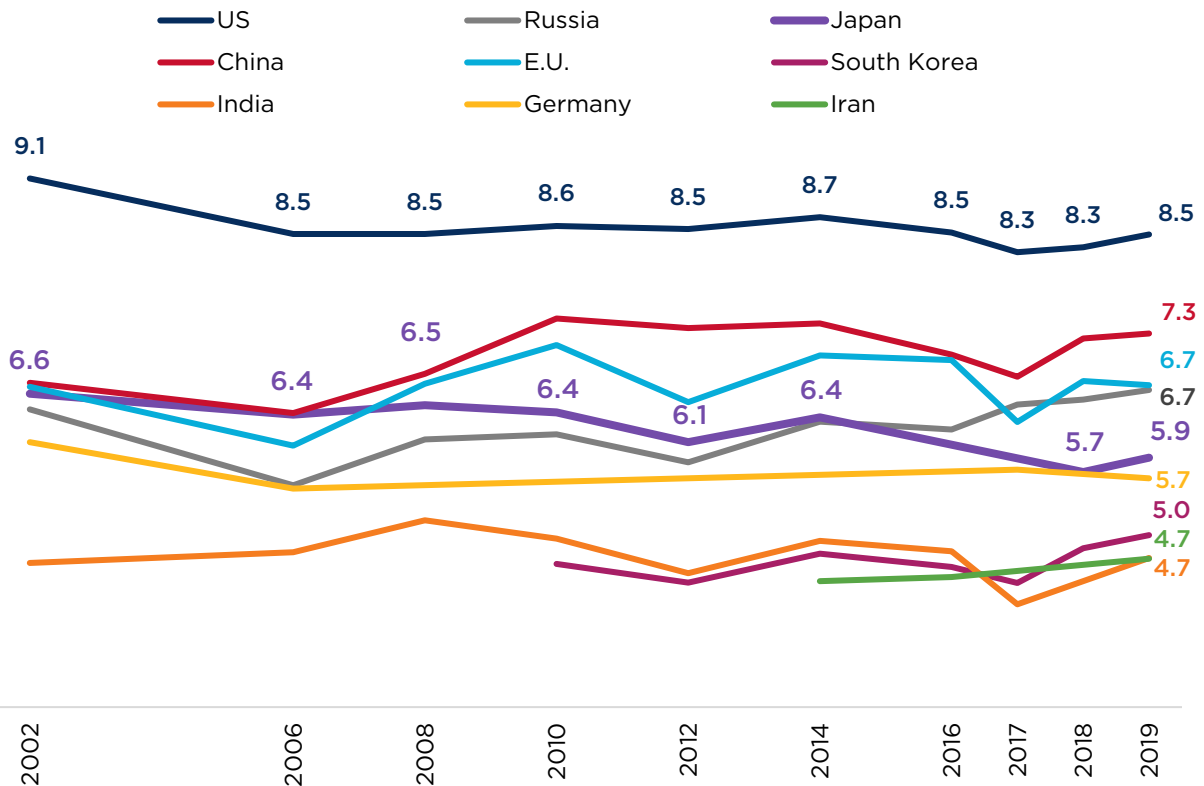
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## American Views of Japan's Influence

When asked to rate Japanese influence in the world on a zero to ten scale, with zero representing no influence and ten representing a lot of influence, Americans give Japan an average rating of 5.9. This makes Japan the fifth most influential country of the nine presented in the 2019 Chicago Council Survey, behind the United States (8.5), China (7.3), the European Union (6.7), and Russia (6.7). Americans' rating of Japan's global influence compared to other nations has declined in recent years. In 2002 and 2006, Americans saw Japan and China as similarly influential around the world. From 2008 through 2012, Japan fell behind China and the European Union in global influence but remained ahead of Russia. Since 2014, Japan has fallen below Russia in influence estimates.

## Global Influence

I would like to know how much influence you think each of the following countries has in the world. Please answer on a 0 to 10 scale; with 0 meaning they are not at all influential and 10 meaning they are extremely influential. (mean)



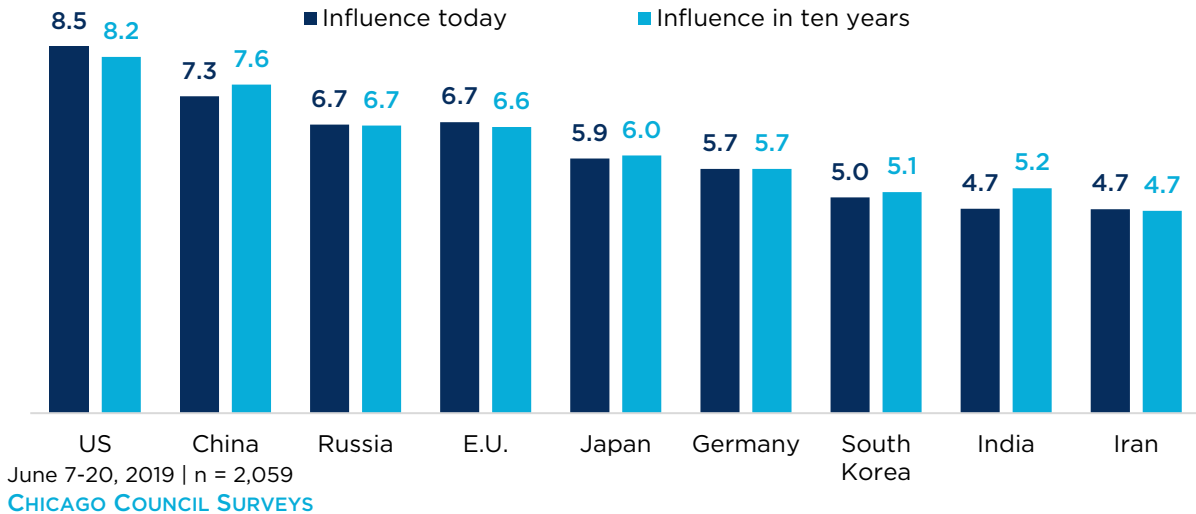
June 7-20, 2019 | n = 2,059  
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However, when asked about Japan's influence in ten years' time, Americans do not project further declines. On the same ten-point scale, Americans give Japan an average influence rating of 6.0, which keeps Japan more or less at the same level of influence relative to other nations as is the case currently.

## Global Influence: Current and Future

I would like to know how much influence you think each of the following countries has in the world. Please answer on a 0 to 10 scale; with 0 meaning they are not at all influential and 10 meaning they are extremely influential. (mean)

Using the same 10 point scale, please say how much influence you think each of the following countries will have in the world 10 years from now. (mean)



Though Americans may not see Japanese global influence as measuring up to other major global powers, findings from the 2018 Chicago Council Survey show that the US public sees the US-Japan relationship as an important one. In 2018, eight in ten Americans (79%) said that US relations with Japan were important to US security, just behind major powers such as China (85%) and Russia (83%). In addition, nine in ten Americans across party lines said that the US economic relationship with Japan was important for the US economy, comparable to public views of the US economic relationships with China (92%) and Canada (90%).<sup>1</sup> And in 2019, nearly nine in ten Americans (87%) say they favor US-Japan trade, with very similar proportions of Republicans, Democrats, and Independents all in support.

<sup>1</sup> For more details, see: [“As China Rises, Americans Seek Closer Ties with Japan.”](#) Craig Kafura and Karl Friedhoff. Chicago Council on Global Affairs. December 11, 2018.

## Methodology

The analysis in this report is based on data from the 2019 Chicago Council Survey of the American public on foreign policy, a project of the Lester Crown Center on US Foreign Policy. The 2019 Chicago Council Survey was conducted June 7-20, 2019 by IPSOS using their large-scale nationwide online research panel, KnowledgePanel, among a weighted national sample of 2,059 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. The margin of sampling error for the full sample is  $\pm 2.3$ , including a design effect of 1.1607. The margin of error is higher for partisan subgroups or for partial-sample items.

Additional results come from the 2018 Chicago Council Survey, conducted by GfK Custom Research using their large-scale, nationwide online research panel July 12-31, 2018 among a weighted national sample of 2,046 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. The margin of sampling error for the full sample is  $\pm 2.37$ , including a design effect of 1.1954.

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?"

The 2019 Chicago Council Survey is made possible by the generous support of the Crown family and the Korea Foundation.

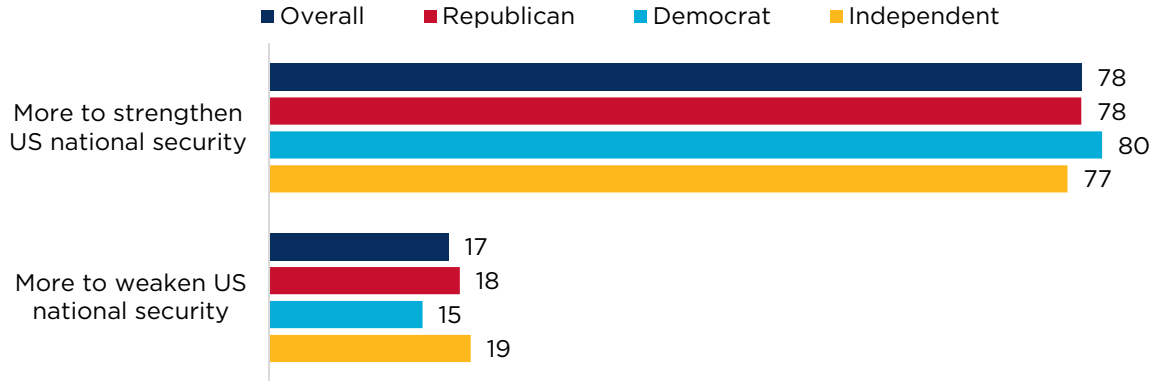
## About the Chicago Council on Global Affairs

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](https://thechicagocouncil.org) and follow [@ChicagoCouncil](https://twitter.com/ChicagoCouncil).

## Appendix

### Security and the US-Japan Relationship

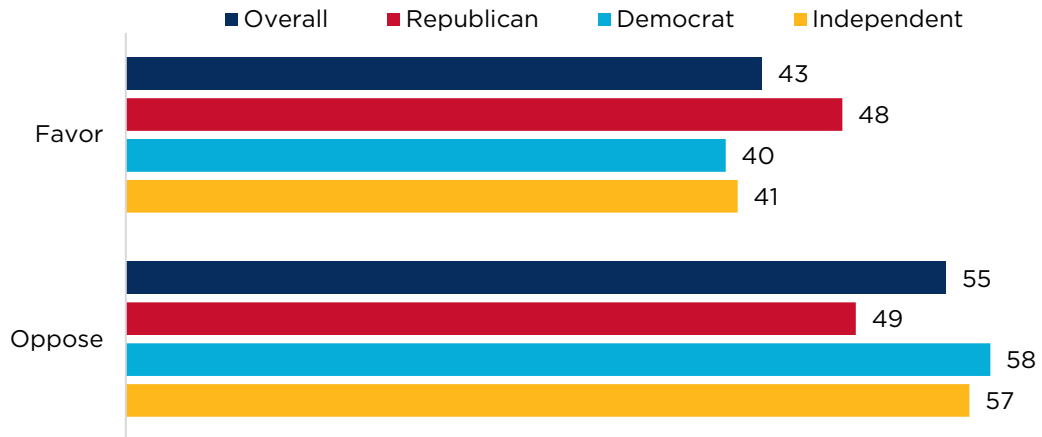
Does the US relationship with the following countries do more to strengthen US national security or weaken US national security? **Japan** (%)



June 7-20, 2019 | n = 2,059  
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### Use of US Troops in Japan-China Conflict

Would you favor or oppose the use of US troops: *If China initiates a military conflict with Japan over disputed islands* (%)



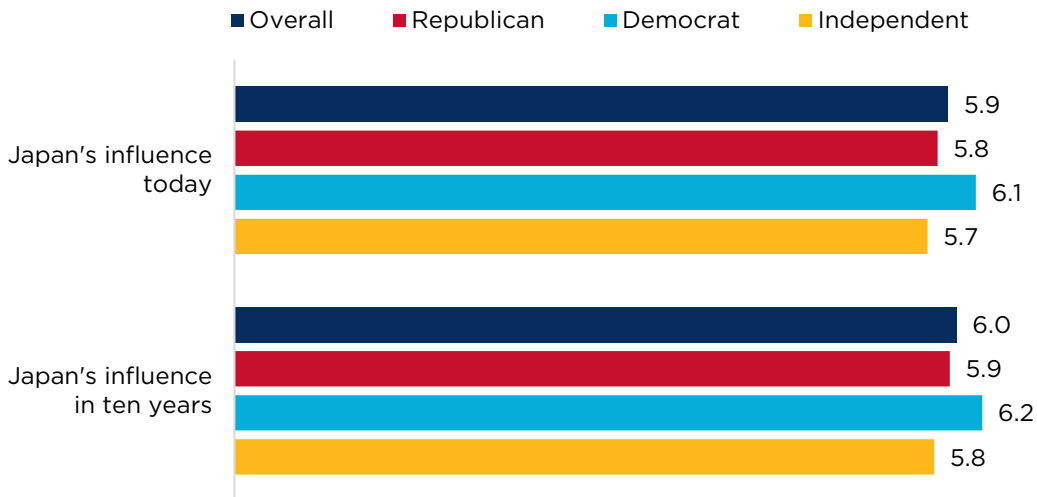
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## Japan's Influence Now and in Ten Years

I would like to know how much influence you think each of the following countries has in the world. Please answer on a 0 to 10 scale; with 0 meaning they are not at all influential and 10 meaning they are extremely influential. **Japan** (mean)

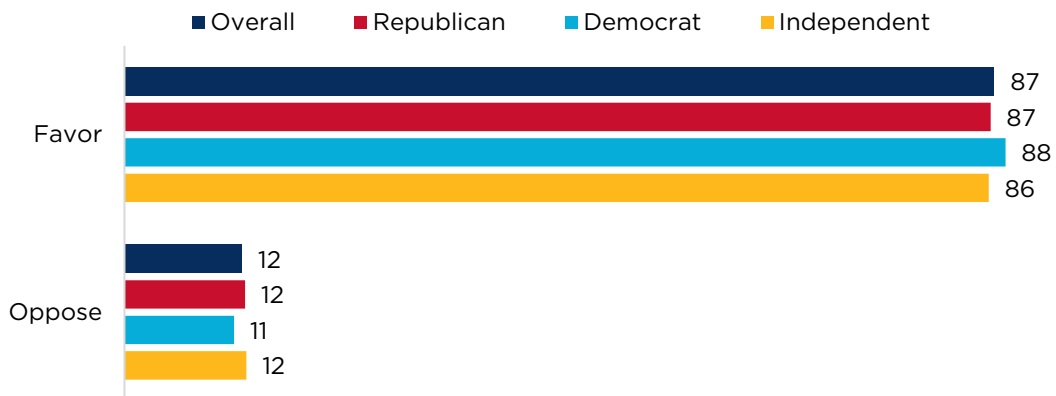
Using the same 10 point scale, please say how much influence you think each of the following countries will have in the world 10 years from now. **Japan** (mean)



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## Trade with Japan

Do you favor or oppose engaging in trade with the following countries? **Japan** (%)



June 7-20, 2019 | n = 2,059  
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