



# Pro-Trade Views on the Rise, Partisan Divisions on NAFTA Widen

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On August 16, talks to renegotiate the terms of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) will commence in Washington, DC. President Donald Trump has portrayed this effort as an opportunity to rebalance more towards the United States' favor what he has called [“the worst trade deal maybe ever signed anywhere.”](#) At the same time, the 2017 Chicago Council Survey reveals that US opinion on the benefits of international trade is now more favorable than ever, despite growing partisan divisions over NAFTA. Record majorities of Americans now say that international trade is good for the US economy, US consumers, and creating jobs.

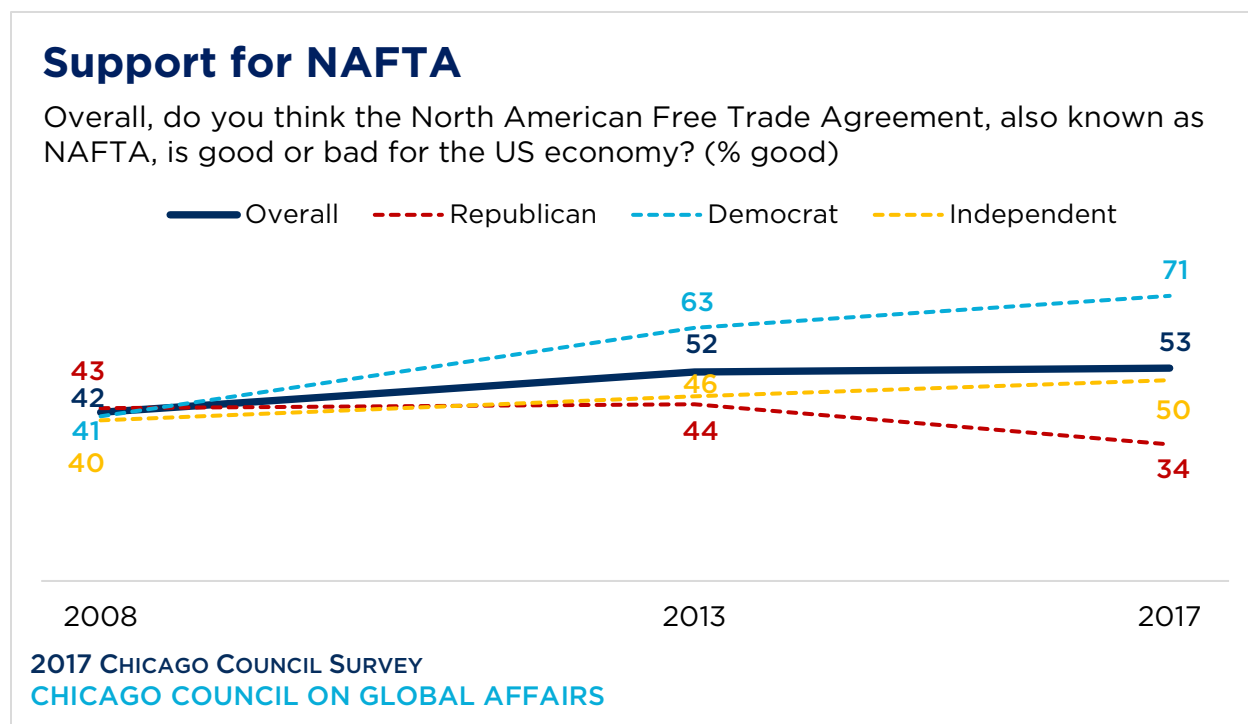
## Key Findings

- A majority believe that NAFTA is good for the US economy (53%), similar to results in 2013 (52%) and up from 42 percent in 2008.
- Partisan divides on NAFTA have widened significantly, largely due to Democrats' marked increase in support for the Agreement (from 41 in 2008 to 71 percent). To a lesser extent, Republican support has decreased (from 43 in 2008 to 34 percent).
- Half of the US public thinks that trade deals generally benefit both the United States and other countries (50%). But a third say that such deals mainly benefit other countries (34%). Only seven percent think trade deals mostly benefit the United States.
- Record numbers of Americans say that international trade is good for the US economy (72%) and US consumers (78%). For the first time in Chicago Council polls since first asked in 2004, a majority now say that trade is good for creating jobs in the United States (57%).

## NAFTA Still Seen as an Asset for the United States

Heading into trade talks, 53 percent of Americans think that the North American Free Trade Agreement, or NAFTA, is good for the US economy. Support for NAFTA has strengthened since 2008, when just 42 percent of the US public thought NAFTA was good for the US economy. These readings are also consistent with a [spring 2017 Pew Research Center poll](#) in which 51 percent of Americans said that NAFTA is “a good thing for our country.”

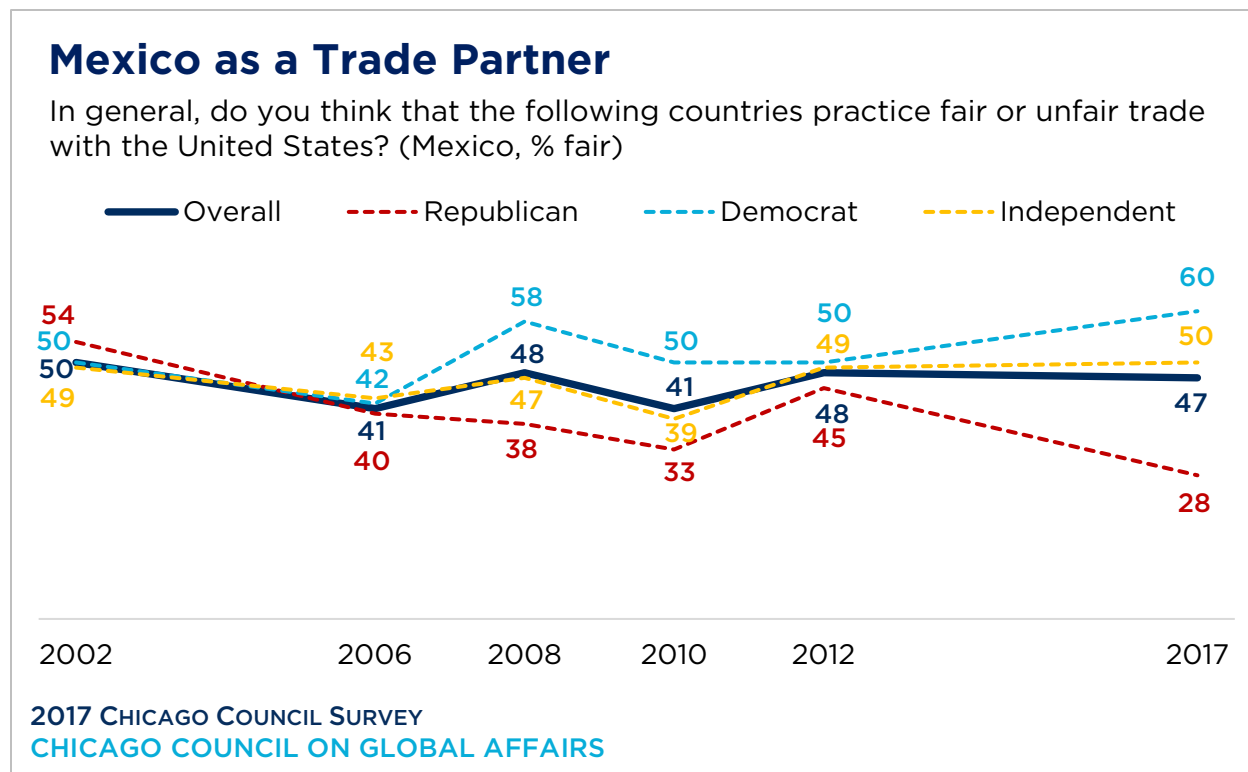
Particularly striking is the growing partisan gap in opinion about NAFTA, with Republicans much more critical than Democrats of the agreement. The results reveal an increased partisan gap from just a two percentage point difference in 2008 to a dramatic 37 percentage point difference in 2017. Among Democrats, support for NAFTA has surged from 41 percent in 2008 to 71 percent today. Republican support for NAFTA has declined from 43 to 34 percent over the same time period. President Trump’s core supporters—those who express a very favorable view of him—are the least likely to say NAFTA is good for the US economy (23%).



## Partisan Divide Is Widest on Evaluations of Mexico’s Trading Practices

Overall, Americans are divided between those who say they believe that Mexico is practicing fair (47%) or unfair (46%) trade with the United States. At the same time, a majority continue to describe Canada as practicing fair trade (79%). On these measures, too, the partisan divide over both nations’ trading practices has grown notably since 2012.

In line with their more negative views of NAFTA, Republicans are less likely than Democrats to describe either country as a fair trader. Just 28 percent of Republicans indicate that Mexico practices fair trade with the US, currently the lowest level since the Chicago Council Survey began asking this question in 2002. In sharp contrast, six in 10 Democrats now believe that Mexico is being fair as a trader (60%), the highest proportion ever recorded for Democrats in the past 15 years. Independents fall between the two parties with half (50%) viewing Mexico's trade practices as fair.

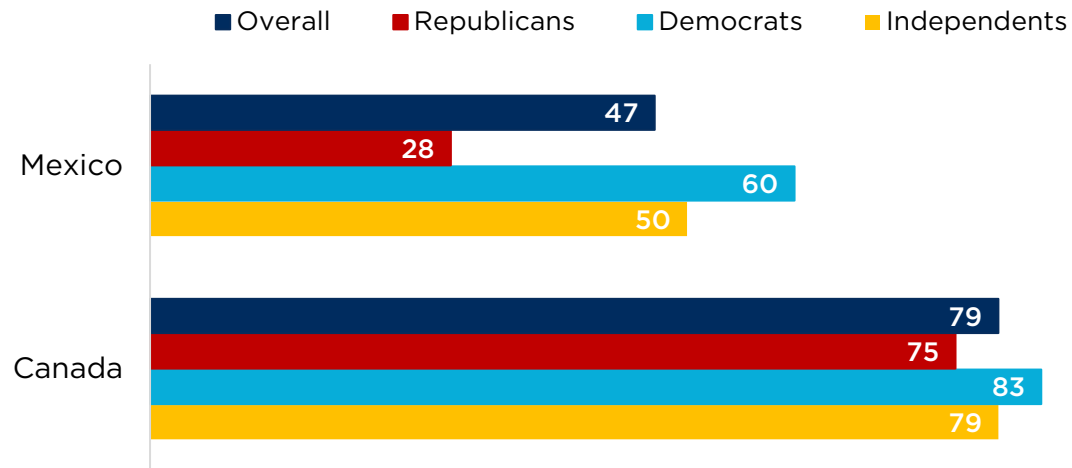


Majorities across the board describe Canada's trade practices with the United States as fair, though Republicans (75%) are now less likely to feel this way than in 2012 (when 92% said Canada traded fairly). Eight in ten Democrats (83%) and Independents (79%) continue to view Canada as practicing free trade, broadly consistent with previous results.

Core Trump supporters are the least likely to view Mexico as practicing fair trade (20%). Their views are similar to Republicans on Canadian trade practices (73% fair).

## Canada and Mexico as Trade Partners

In general, do you think that the following countries practice fair or unfair trade with the United States? (% fair)



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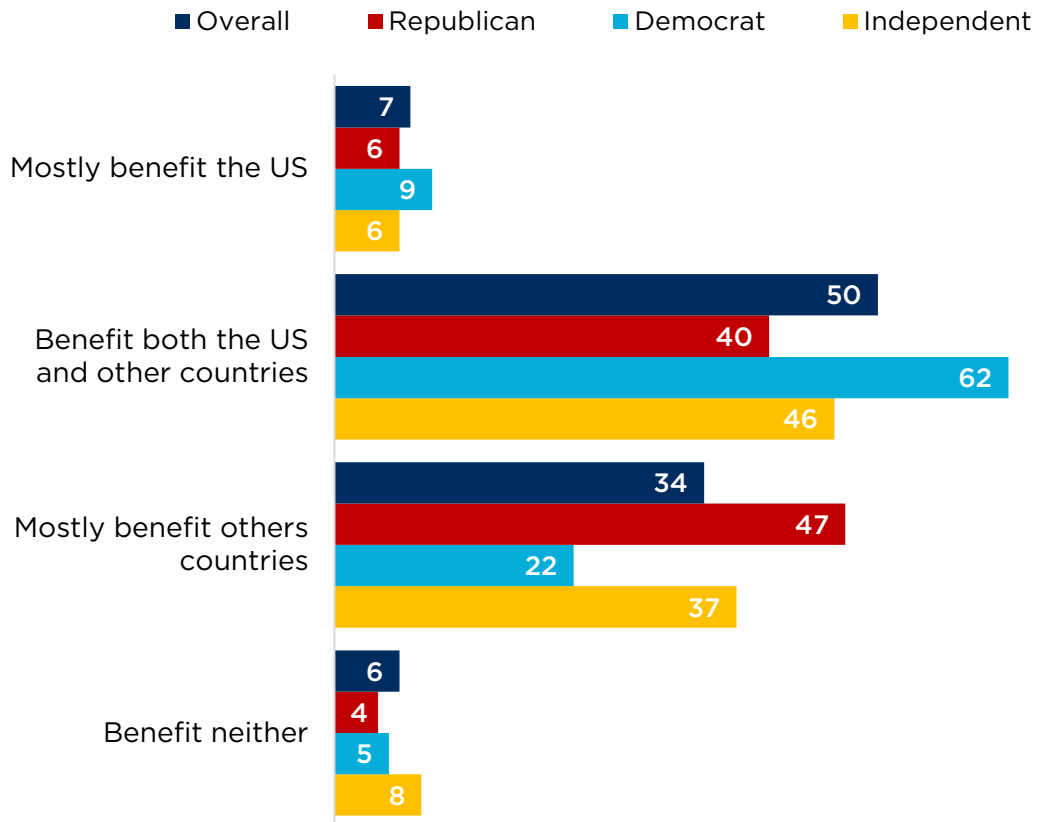
### Republicans See Trade Deals as Zero-Sum, with the Us on the Losing Side

These increasing partisan divisions about the practices of Mexico and Canada reflect differing perceptions about who benefits from trade agreements. The prevailing view among the overall US public is that both the United States and its trading partners mostly benefit from trade deals (50%). However, one in three says that trade deals mostly benefit other countries (34%). A further seven percent think trade deals mostly benefit the United States, and six percent do not think that either party benefits.

Reflecting President Trump's statements about trade agreements on the campaign trail, a majority of core Trump supporters (58%) say that other countries make out better than the United States, and a plurality of Republicans (47%) agree. On the other hand, both a majority of Democrats (62%) and a plurality of Independents (46%) think that US trade deals mostly benefit both countries.

## Trade Deals between the US and Other Countries

Which of the following comes closest to your view on trade deals between the US and other countries? Do they:



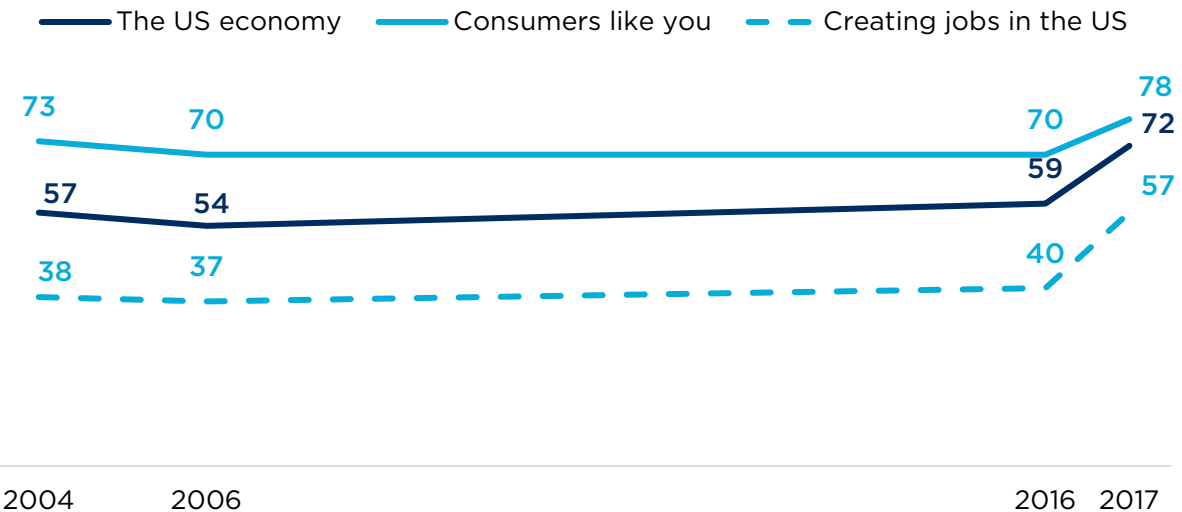
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### Support for International Trade in General Is Stronger Than Ever

More Americans than ever are convinced that international trade is generally advantageous to the United States, despite some misgivings about the fairness of trade agreements. Record numbers of Americans say that international trade is good for the US economy (72%), US consumers (78%), and for creating US jobs (57%). The 2017 results mark the first time since these questions have been asked that a majority credit international trade for creating jobs in the United States.

## Benefits of International Trade

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

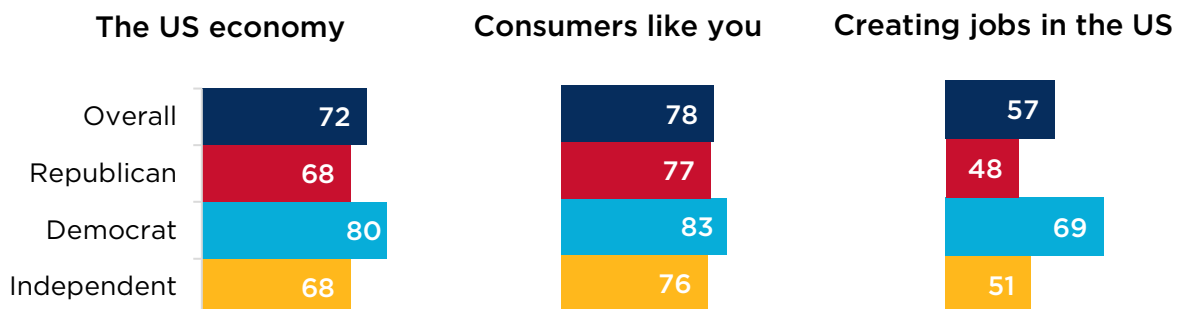


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Democrats are most positive about the impacts of trade, with large majorities saying trade is good for the US economy (80%), consumers (83%), and creating jobs (69%). But Republicans' impressions have also risen greatly over the past year to their highest levels of support, likely reflecting the political shift in the administration. Large majorities of GOP supporters now say that international trade is good for the economy (68%) and consumers (77%), and nearly half (48%) say that trade is good for creating US jobs. Independents are also at their highest point of support yet, with majorities seeing the benefits of trade for the economy, consumers, and jobs.

## Benefits of International Trade

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Even among core Trump supporters, majorities say that trade has positive impacts on the US economy (62%) and consumers (69%). Like Republicans, almost half (48%) see it as good for job creation in the US.

In sum, these results suggest that Republicans tend to doubt the idea that trade agreements are a win-win for all parties involved, and their critical views of NAFTA reflect that suspicion. Nevertheless, some may be betting on the Trump administration's ability to negotiate better terms for the United States. This would help to explain their increased optimism about the benefits of international trade over the past year. On the other hand, most Democrats trust that trade agreements benefit all parties involved, signified by their elevated support for the beleaguered NAFTA agreement since 2013 and their record-breaking confidence in the benefits of trade.

## About the Chicago Council on Global Affairs

The Chicago Council on Global Affairs is an independent, nonpartisan organization that provides insight – and influences the public discourse – on critical global issues. We convene leading global voices and conduct independent research to bring clarity and offer solutions to challenges and opportunities across the globe. Ranked [No. 1 Think Tank to Watch](#) worldwide, the Council on Global Affairs is committed to engaging the public and raising global awareness of 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](#).

## About the Chicago Council Survey

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.



## Appendix

**Q190N:** Overall, do you think the North American Free Trade Agreement, also known as NAFTA, is good or bad for the US economy?

2017	Good (%)	Bad (%)	Refused (%)
<u>Overall</u>	53	42	6
Republican	34	60	7
Democrat	71	25	4
Independent	50	46	4

**Q80:** In general, do you think that the following countries practice fair or unfair trade with the United States?

### 80/3. Mexico

2017	Practice fair trade (%)	Practice unfair trade (%)	Refused (%)
<u>Overall</u>	47	46	46
Republican	28	65	7
Democrat	60	35	5
Independent	50	45	5

### 80/4. Canada

2017	Practice fair trade (%)	Practice unfair trade (%)	Refused (%)
<u>Overall</u>	79	15	6
Republican	75	18	7
Democrat	83	12	5
Independent	79	16	5

**Q189:** Which of the following comes closest to your view on trade deals between the United States and other countries. Do they:

	Mostly benefit the US (%)	Mostly benefit other countries (%)	Benefit both the US and other countries (%)	Benefit neither (%)	Refused (%)
2017					
<u>Overall</u>	7	34	50	6	3
Republican	6	47	40	4	3
Democrat	9	22	62	5	2
Independent	6	37	46	8	2

**Q190:** Overall, do you think international trade is good or bad for:

190/1. The US economy

	Good (%)	Bad (%)	Refused (%)
2017			
<u>Overall</u>	72	26	2
Republican	68	29	3
Democrat	80	19	1
Independent	68	30	2

190/3. Consumers like you

	Good (%)	Bad (%)	Refused (%)
2017			
<u>Overall</u>	78	20	2
Republican	77	20	3
Democrat	83	16	1
Independent	76	22	2

190/4. Creating jobs in the United States

	Good (%)	Bad (%)	Refused (%)
2017			
<u>Overall</u>	57	41	2
Republican	48	50	2
Democrat	69	30	1
Independent	51	47	2