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# As Trade Tensions Rise, Fewer Americans See China Favorably

*Concerns about China include economic threats, cyberattacks,  
environmental damage and human rights*

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# As Trade Tensions Rise, Fewer Americans See China Favorably

*Concerns about China include economic threats, cyberattacks, environmental damage and human rights*

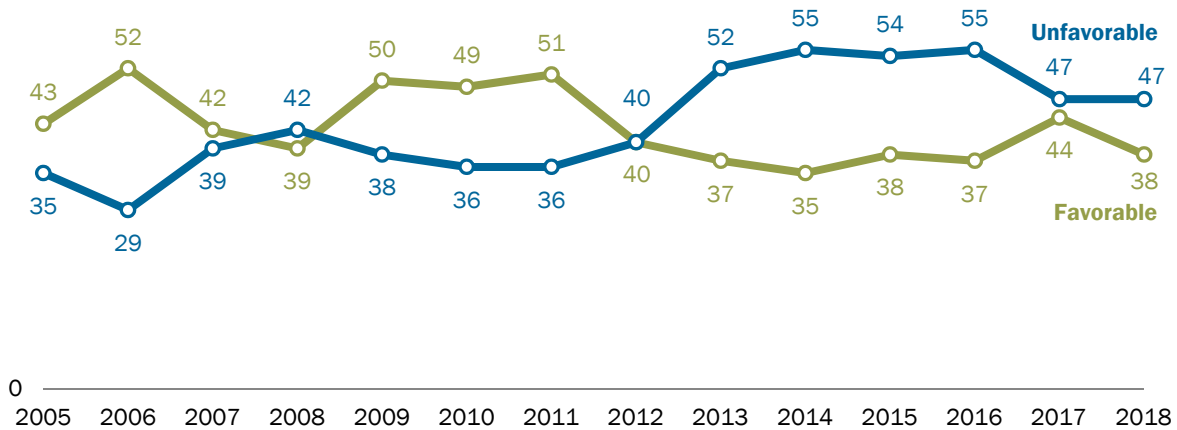
Trade disputes have dominated relations between the world's two biggest economies in recent weeks, as Washington and Beijing have slapped tariffs on goods from their respective countries. Although tensions over trade are hardly new, they have intensified during the Trump administration, and as a new Pew Research Center survey illustrates, American attitudes toward China have become somewhat less positive over the past year.

Overall, 38% of Americans have a favorable opinion of China, down slightly from 44% in 2017. Attitudes toward China have fluctuated to some extent in recent years, becoming more negative during the 2012 election cycle, but more positive in 2017, before this year's decline.

## American attitudes toward China turn slightly less positive

*U.S. views of China*

80%



Source: Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey. Q17b.

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When asked whether they are more concerned about China's military or economic strength, a growing number of Americans choose the latter. Economic issues also feature prominently in the list of concerns Americans have about China. Roughly half or more of those polled say the large amount of U.S. debt held by China, the loss of U.S. jobs to China and the trade deficit with China are very serious problems. However, many are also worried about other issues, including Chinese cyberattacks, China's impact on the global environment and Beijing's human rights record.

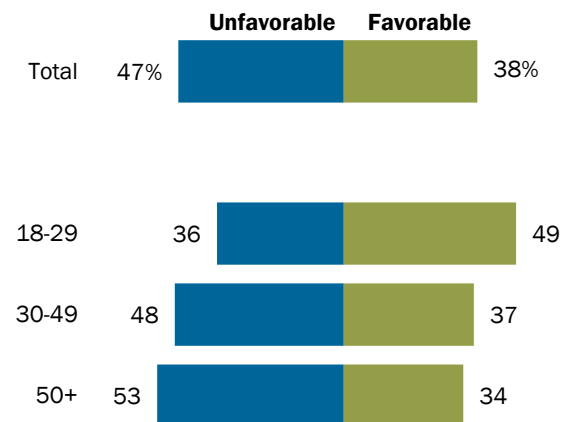
Overall, specific concerns about China have remained stable over the past year. Worries about job losses, debt and the trade deficit are actually less common today than in 2012, when the economic mood in the U.S. was generally more negative. Over the same time period, however, Americans have become more concerned about the threat of cyberattacks from China.

The new survey by Pew Research Center, conducted May 14 to June 15, 2018, among 1,500 adults, also finds that young people typically have more positive attitudes toward China. About half of 18- to 29-year-olds (49%) express a favorable view of China, compared with only 37% of those ages 30 to 49 and 34% of people 50 and older. Younger people are also much less concerned than older generations about cyberattacks and job losses to China.

There are also notable differences along partisan lines. Republicans and Republican-leaning independents are especially worried about economic issues – such as debt, job losses and the trade deficit – in the U.S.-China relationship, while Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents are particularly worried about the impact of China's growth on the global environment.

### Young more favorable toward China

*U.S. views of China*



Source: Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey. Q17b.

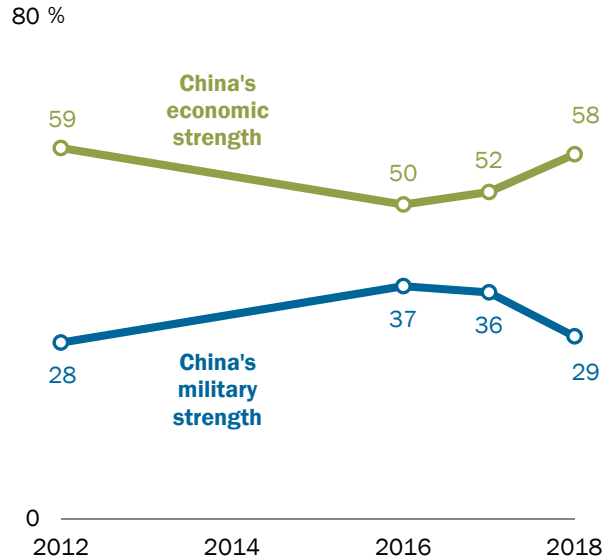
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## Americans concerned about China's economic strength

Most Americans say they are more concerned about China's economic strength than its military capabilities. Nearly six-in-ten Americans (58%) believe China's economic power is the greater threat, a 6-percentage point increase from 2017. The share of the public saying China's military power is the bigger worry has declined 7 points over the past year. Concerns about China's military had been on the rise in recent years, but the balance of opinion on this question now echoes that of 2012, when Pew Research Center first asked this question. Younger Americans (ages 18 to 29) are more likely than those ages 50 and older to identify China's economic strength as the bigger threat of the two (65% vs. 52%).

### Resurgence in U.S. concern over China's growing economy

Which concerns you more about China?



Note: Volunteered categories "Both" and "Neither" not shown.  
Source: Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey. Q40.

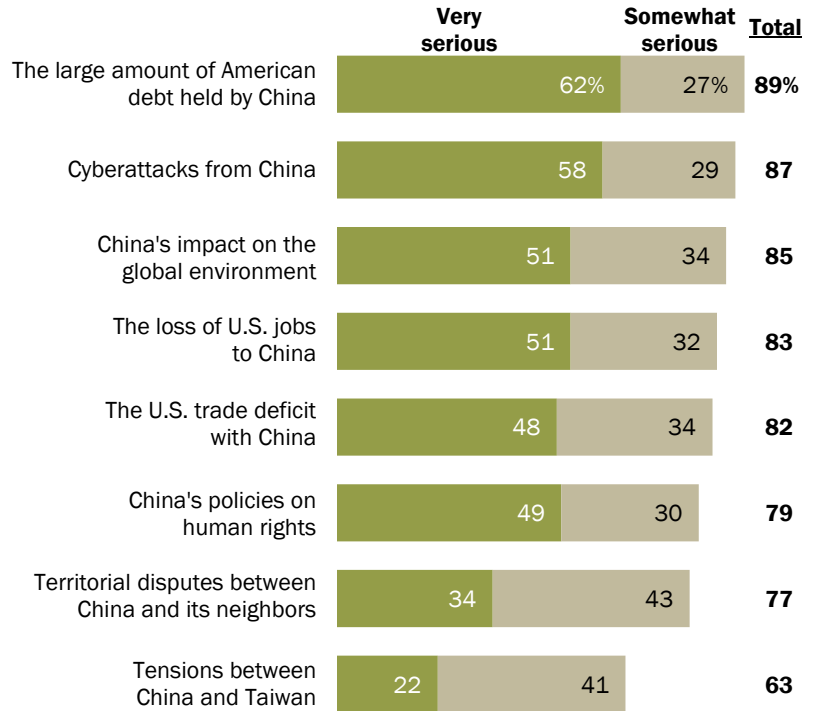
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When asked about eight specific issues affecting the U.S.-China relationship, majorities of Americans rank all eight as at least a somewhat serious problem, with roughly six-in-ten citing the large amount of U.S. debt held by China and cyberattacks as *very* serious problems.

Territorial disputes between China and its neighbors (34% very serious) and tensions between China and Taiwan (22%) generate fewer concerns than the other issues tested.

## Americans most concerned with debt, cyberattacks from China

*How serious of a problem is ...*



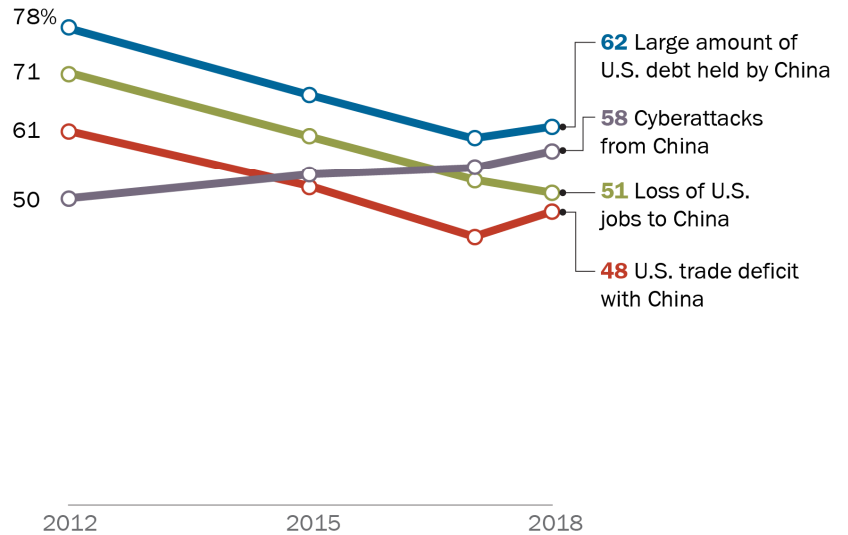
Source: Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey, Q36a-h.

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Worries about economic problems are less common now than in 2012, when these questions were originally asked. Concerns about cyberattacks have continued to increase modestly over the past six years.

## Americans continue to worry about Chinese hacking, economic issues

\_\_\_ is a very serious problem for the U.S.

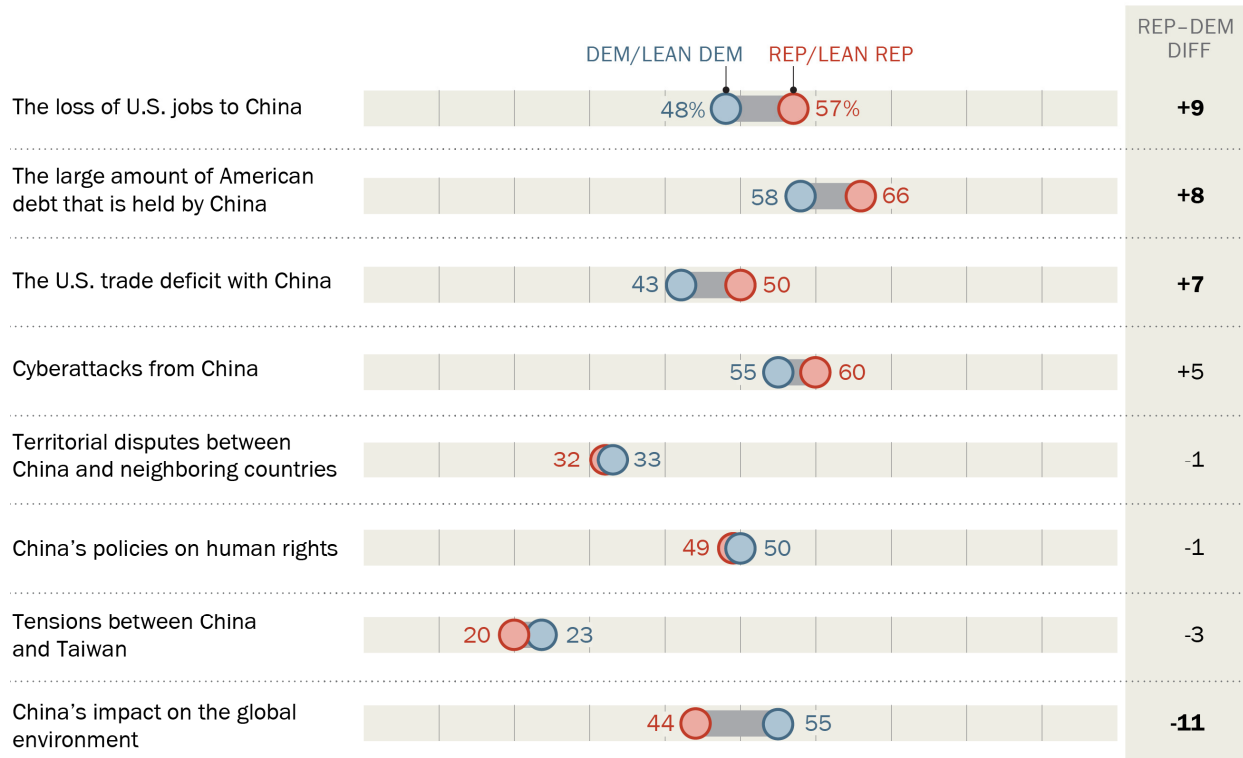


Source: Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey. Q36a,b,f,h.

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## Republicans more worried about economic issues with China

\_\_\_ is a very serious problem for the U.S.



Note: Statistically significant differences in **bold**.

Source: Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey. Q36a-h.

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Republicans are somewhat more likely than Democrats to say economic tensions between the U.S. and China are very serious problems. The partisan gap is especially notable when discussing U.S. jobs moving overseas to China, Chinese-held American debt and the bilateral trade deficit. Only when asked about China's environmental impact do significantly more Democrats voice anxiety.



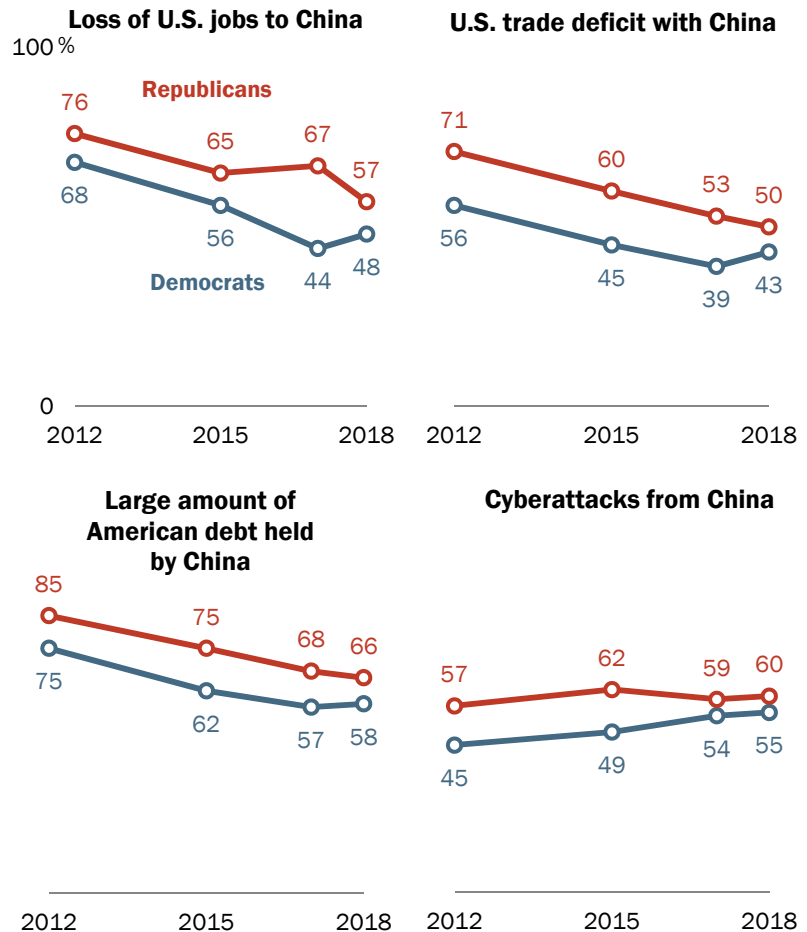
Since 2012, worries about economic issues in the U.S.-China relationship have diminished among both Republicans and Democrats, though a partisan gap still remains.

For example, concerns about the Chinese government holding large amounts of U.S. debt – the most serious issue for both parties – has decreased 19 percentage points for Republicans and 17 points for Democrats over the past six years.

Meanwhile, the gap between the parties on cyberattacks is narrowing, with 55% of Democrats and 60% of Republicans agreeing about the seriousness of this issue.

## Partisan gap remains, but concerns toward U.S.-China economic issues show similar decrease over time

\_\_\_ is a very serious problem



Source: Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey. Q36a,b,f,h.

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## Methodology

### About the Pew Research Center's Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey

Results for the survey are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Langer Research Associates. The results are based on national samples, unless otherwise noted. More details about our international survey methodology and country-specific sample designs are available [here](#).

<b>Country:</b>	United States
<b>Year:</b>	2018
<b>Survey:</b>	Global Attitudes Survey
<b>Sample design:</b>	List-assisted Random Digit Dial (RDD) probability sample of landline households (25% of sample) and list-assisted RDD frame of cell phone numbers (75% of sample). Landline and mobile samples are stratified by Census Division. Individuals within landline households are selected using the youngest male or female method among those currently at home. Interviews in the cell sample conducted with the person who answered the phone, if age 18 or older. For both landline and cell samples, up to seven phone calls are made to complete the interview with the selected respondent, with up to three additional calls for Spanish-language respondents. Pew Research Center undertakes all polling activity, including calls to mobile telephone numbers, in compliance with the Telephone Consumer Protection Act and other applicable laws.
<b>Mode:</b>	Telephone
<b>Language(s):</b>	English, Spanish
<b>Fieldwork dates:</b>	May 14 - June 15, 2018
<b>Sample size:</b>	1,500
<b>Margin of error:</b>	2.9 percentage points
<b>Representative:</b>	Adult population 18 plus
<b>Primary vendor:</b>	Langer Research Associates
<b>Weighting variables:</b>	Gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and nativity, region, population density, phone use and probability of selection of respondent
<b>Design effects:</b>	1.4

# Topline Questionnaire

**Pew Research Center  
Spring 2018 Survey  
August 28, 2018 Release**

## Methodological notes:

- Due to rounding, percentages may not total 100%. The topline “total” columns show 100%, because they are based on unrounded numbers.
- Since 2007, the Pew Research Center has used an automated process to generate topline for its Global Attitudes surveys. As a result, numbers may differ slightly from those published prior to 2007.
- Not all questions included in the Spring 2018 survey are presented in this topline. Omitted questions have either been previously released or will be released in future reports.

		Q17b. Please tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion of _____. b. China					
		Very favorable	Somewhat favorable	Somewhat unfavorable	Very unfavorable	DK/Refused	Total
United States	Spring, 2018	5	33	32	15	14	100
	Spring, 2017	5	39	33	14	10	100
	Spring, 2016	6	31	36	19	9	100
	Spring, 2015	4	34	33	21	8	100
	Spring, 2014	7	28	34	21	10	100
	Spring, 2013	7	30	32	20	12	100
	Spring, 2012	6	34	25	15	19	100
	Spring, 2011	12	39	22	14	12	100
	Spring, 2010	10	39	24	12	14	100
	Spring, 2009	9	41	25	13	13	100
	Spring, 2008	9	30	26	16	19	100
	Spring, 2007	8	34	25	14	18	100
	Spring, 2006	12	40	19	10	19	100
Spring, 2005	9	34	22	13	22	100	

		Q36a. For each one, please tell me if you think it is a very serious problem, somewhat serious, not too serious, or not a problem at all. a. The loss of U.S. jobs to China					
		Very serious	Somewhat serious	Not too serious	Not a problem	DK/Refused	Total
United States	Spring, 2018	51	32	11	4	2	100
	Spring, 2017	53	31	10	4	1	100
	Spring, 2015	60	29	8	2	1	100
	May, 2012	71	19	6	2	2	100

		Q36b. For each one, please tell me if you think it is a very serious problem, somewhat serious, not too serious, or not a problem at all. b. The U.S. trade deficit with China					
		Very serious	Somewhat serious	Not too serious	Not a problem	DK/Refused	Total
United States	Spring, 2018	48	34	10	5	3	100
	Spring, 2017	44	37	10	5	3	100
	Spring, 2015	52	34	7	4	3	100
	May, 2012	61	28	4	3	4	100

		Q36c. For each one, please tell me if you think it is a very serious problem, somewhat serious, not too serious, or not a problem at all. c. China's policies on human rights					
		Very serious	Somewhat serious	Not too serious	Not a problem	DK/Refused	Total
United States	Spring, 2018	49	30	9	5	7	100
	Spring, 2017	47	32	9	6	6	100
	Spring, 2015	53	32	6	4	5	100
	May, 2012	48	33	10	4	6	100

		Q36d. For each one, please tell me if you think it is a very serious problem, somewhat serious, not too serious, or not a problem at all. d. Tensions between China and Taiwan					
		Very serious	Somewhat serious	Not too serious	Not a problem	DK/Refused	Total
United States	Spring, 2018	22	41	17	7	12	100
	Spring, 2017	22	44	17	9	8	100
	Spring, 2015	21	45	17	7	10	100
	May, 2012	27	39	15	6	13	100

		Q36e. For each one, please tell me if you think it is a very serious problem, somewhat serious, not too serious, or not a problem at all. e. China's impact on the global environment					
		Very serious	Somewhat serious	Not too serious	Not a problem	DK/Refused	Total
United States	Spring, 2018	51	34	7	4	4	100
	Spring, 2017	53	32	7	5	3	100
	Spring, 2015	49	36	7	3	4	100
	May, 2012	50	31	10	4	6	100

		Q36f. For each one, please tell me if you think it is a very serious problem, somewhat serious, not too serious, or not a problem at all. f. The large amount of American debt that is held by China					
		Very serious	Somewhat serious	Not too serious	Not a problem	DK/Refused	Total
United States	Spring, 2018	62	27	6	3	3	100
	Spring, 2017	60	29	6	3	2	100
	Spring, 2015	67	22	5	3	2	100
	May, 2012	78	14	3	2	3	100

		Q36g. For each one, please tell me if you think it is a very serious problem, somewhat serious, not too serious, or not a problem at all. g. Territorial disputes between China and neighboring countries					
		Very serious	Somewhat serious	Not too serious	Not a problem	DK/Refused	Total
United States	Spring, 2018	34	43	14	5	4	100
	Spring, 2017	32	41	15	8	3	100

		Q36h. For each one, please tell me if you think it is a very serious problem, somewhat serious, not too serious, or not a problem at all. h. Cyberattacks from China					
		Very serious	Somewhat serious	Not too serious	Not a problem	DK/Refused	Total
United States	Spring, 2018	58	29	8	3	2	100
	Spring, 2017	55	30	8	4	2	100
	Spring, 2015	54	32	7	4	3	100
	May, 2012	50	29	10	2	8	100

		Q40. Which concerns you more about China?					
		Its economic strength	Its military strength	Both (DO NOT READ)	Neither (DO NOT READ)	DK/Refused	Total
United States	Spring, 2018	58	29	7	3	3	100
	Spring, 2017	52	36	6	2	3	100
	Spring, 2016	50	37	5	4	4	100
	May, 2012	59	28	7	4	2	100