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Americans and Germans Differ in Their Views of Each Other and the World

Differences especially stark on defense spending and security issues

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How we did this

In 2017, Pew Research Center and Körber-Stiftung began collaborating on joint public opinion surveys to gauge the state of relations between the United States and Germany. The questions were developed together, and each organization fielded a survey within their own country starting that year and continuing in 2018 and 2019. Many of the questions have been repeated each year to allow both organizations to track attitudes over time. Topics include relations with other countries, defense spending and military deployments, and general foreign policy attitudes.

The results have been published in both countries, and the previous years' reports from Pew Research Center are [here](#) and [here](#).

The Körber-Stiftung findings are contained within the larger “Berlin Pulse” report and can be found [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

The 2019 findings come from a Pew Research Center survey conducted by SSRS in the U.S. from Sept. 17-22 among 1,004 respondents and a Körber-Stiftung survey conducted by Kantar in Germany from Sept. 9-28 among 1,000 respondents. This analysis also includes results from the 2019 Pew Research Center Global Attitudes survey in each country, conducted among 1,503 people in the U.S. from May 13-June 18 and 2,015 people in Germany from May 31-July 25.

Here are the [questions](#) used for this report, along with the responses, and its [methodology](#).

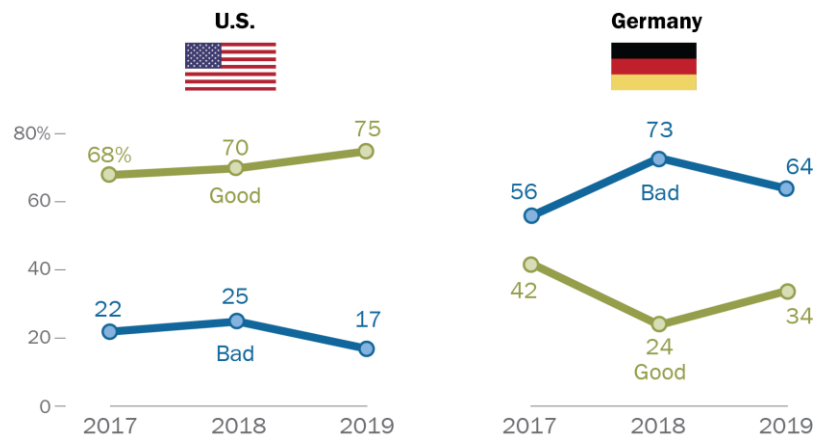
Americans and Germans Differ in Their Views of Each Other and the World

Differences especially stark on defense spending and security issues

Three years into a turbulent period of American-German relations, with Donald Trump at the helm of American foreign policy and Angela Merkel leading Germany, there continues to be a wide divergence in views of bilateral relations and security policy between the publics of both countries. Political divides on both sides of the Atlantic continue to shape attitudes about relations with other nations, perceptions about defense spending and Americans' and Germans' views of each other.

Americans and Germans diverge sharply in their views of bilateral relations

% who say relations today between the U.S. and Germany are ...



Note: Don't know responses not shown.

Source: Pew Research Center survey conducted in the U.S. Sept. 17-22, 2019. Q4. German results from Körber-Stiftung survey conducted Sept. 9-28, 2019.

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But there has been some improvement in Germans' overall evaluation of the relationship with the United States, and young people in both countries are more optimistic about the state of bilateral relations in 2019. Still, attitudes in the two nations remain far apart, especially on the use of military force, obligations under NATO and relations with other world powers such as Russia and China.

On the core question of relations between the U.S. and Germany, publics in each country sharply diverge in their evaluations. Americans, for the most part, are quite keen on the current state of relations, with three-quarters saying the relationship is in good shape. This represents a 7 percentage point increase in positive sentiment since 2017.

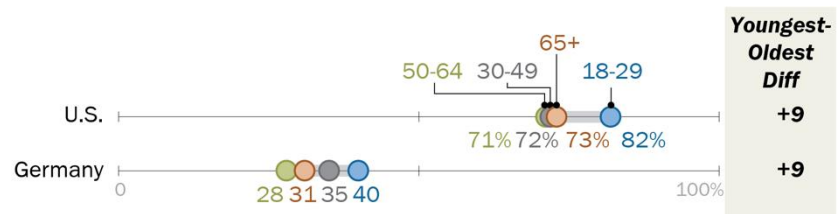
Among Germans, only 34% say the relationship is good, with a scant 2% saying the relationship is *very* good. However, this represents a more positive evaluation than in 2018, when only 24% of Germans said the relationship was going well. This corresponds to an increase in overall favorable

views toward the U.S. found in Pew Research Center's [2019 Global Attitudes survey](#), especially among people who place themselves on the ideological right in Germany, even as favorable opinions of the U.S. remain low.

Despite these divergences in opinion, young people in both countries have more positive views of the U.S.-German relationship. In the U.S., for example, 82% of people ages 18 to 29 say the relationship is good, compared with 73% of those ages 65 and older. Similarly, in Germany, four-in-ten young people say relations with the U.S. are good, compared with only 31% of those 65 and older.

In both nations, young people have the most positive view of U.S.-Germany relationship

% who would describe relations today between the U.S. and Germany as good



Source: Pew Research Center survey conducted in the U.S. Sept. 17-22, 2019. Q4. German results from Körber-Stiftung survey conducted Sept. 9-28, 2019. "Americans and Germans Differ in Their Views of Each Other and the World"

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These are among the major findings from a Pew Research Center survey of 1,004 adults conducted in the U.S. from Sept. 17-22, 2019, and a [Körber-Stiftung survey](#) of 1,000 adults conducted in Germany from Sept. 9-28, 2019. This analysis also includes results from Pew Research Center's Spring 2019 Global Attitudes survey, conducted among 1,503 adults in the U.S. from May 13-June 18, 2019, and 2,015 adults in Germany from May 31-July 25, 2019.

Sharp divides in German and American views of security issues, from use of force to defense budgeting

Differences on security issues predominate when looking at American and German public opinion. For example, Americans and Germans take opposing views on [Article 5 obligations](#) under NATO. When asked whether their country should or should not use military force to defend a NATO ally in the event of a potential Russian attack, six-in-ten Americans say their country should defend that ally, while an equal share of Germans say their country *should not*.

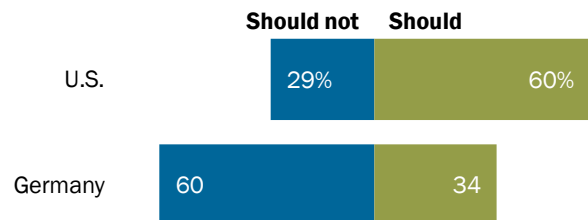
Meanwhile, 63% in Germany say that the U.S. *would* defend a NATO ally in the event of military conflict with Russia.

Americans are also more likely than Germans to say it is sometimes necessary to use military force. About eight-in-ten Americans believe it is sometimes necessary to use force to maintain order in the world, yet only about half of Germans agree.

In both nations, those on the ideological right are more likely than those on the left to feel that the use of force can be justified. While nine-in-ten American conservatives see military force as necessary, only 65% of liberals agree. In Germany, nearly six-in-ten adults on the right see military force as necessary, while about a third on the left agree.

Americans and Germans take opposing views on whether their country should defend NATO allies against Russia

% who say that if Russia got into a serious military conflict with one of its neighboring countries that is a NATO ally, their country ___ use military force to defend that country



Note: Don't know responses not shown.

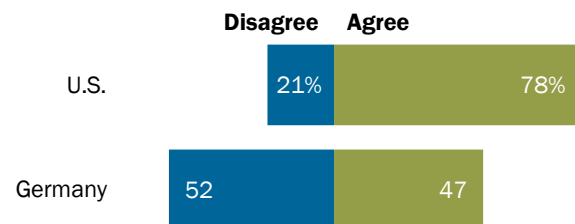
Source: Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey. Q24.

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Americans far more likely than Germans to say military force is sometimes necessary

% who ___ that it is sometimes necessary to use military force to maintain order in the world



Note: Don't know responses not shown.

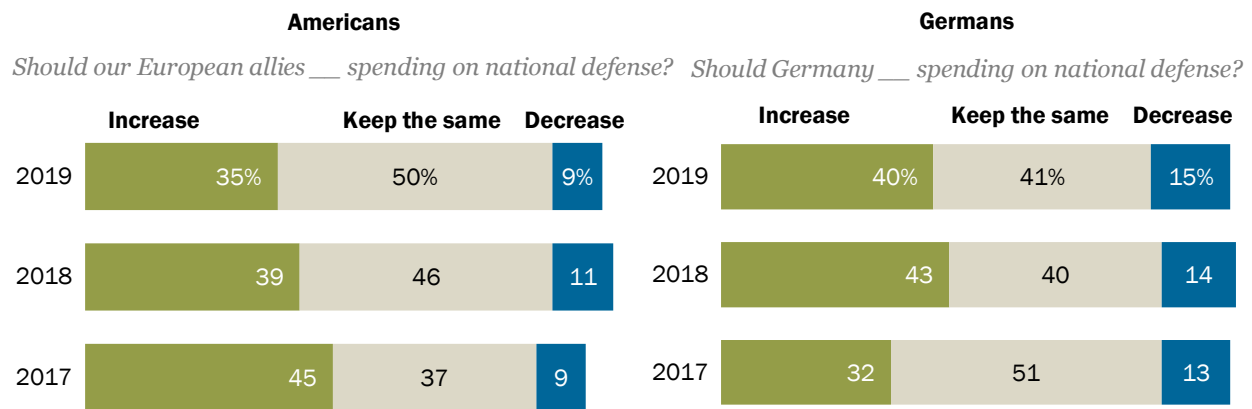
Source: Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey. Q50h.

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When it comes to defense spending, differences between Americans and Germans also emerge. When asked whether the U.S.'s European allies should increase, decrease or maintain their defense spending, half of Americans say that spending levels should remain the same. This marks a notable shift in view from 2017, when 45% of Americans felt their allies in Europe should dedicate *more* resources to national defense.

Fewer Americans see a need for European allies to increase national defense spending, but Germans are divided between increasing or maintaining budgets



Note: Don't know responses not shown.

Source: Pew Research Center survey conducted in the U.S. Sept. 17-22, 2019. Q3. German results from Körber-Stiftung survey conducted Sept. 9-28, 2019.

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Germans view their country's defense spending differently. The public is divided on whether to increase or maintain current levels of spending on national defense, with about four-in-ten taking each view. Like in the U.S., views on this issue in Germany have changed since 2017. At that time, about half of Germans were content with their country's defense spending, while about a third felt it should be increased.

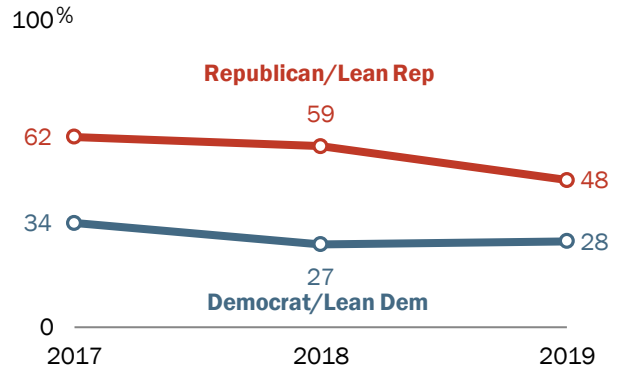
In both countries, relatively few believe Europeans are spending too much on national defense, and that share has remained fairly stable since 2017.

In the U.S., Republicans and Republican-leaning independents are more likely than Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents to favor increased defense spending in Europe. However, the share among Republicans who think the U.S.'s European allies should increase their defense budgets has fallen by 14 percentage points between 2017 and 2019. There has also been a more modest decline in this view among Democrats.

In Germany, partisan gaps also emerge. Supporters of the CDU/CSU are on balance in favor of defense spending increases. However, supporters of the Greens express more skepticism, with only 28% saying they want to raise defense spending. Members of the SPD fall in the middle, with 41% saying Germany should increase defense spending.

Republican support for increased defense spending from Europe has waned since 2017

% of ___ who say American allies in Europe should increase their spending on national defense



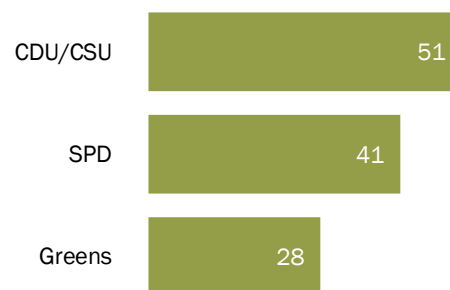
Source: Pew Research Center survey conducted in the U.S. Sept. 17-22, 2019. Q3.

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Supporters of CDU/CSU more likely to favor increased defense spending

% who voted for ___ in the 2017 Bundestag elections who say Germany should increase its defense spending



Source: Körber-Stiftung survey conducted in Germany Sept. 9-28, 2019. Q3.

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Americans support military bases in Germany, while Germans express doubts

Americans and Germans also take differing stances on the U.S. military presence in Germany. People in the U.S. see their country's military bases in Germany as much more important to the security of their country than Germans do: 85% of Americans believe these bases are important to the U.S.'s security interests, and nearly six-in-ten see them as *very* important.

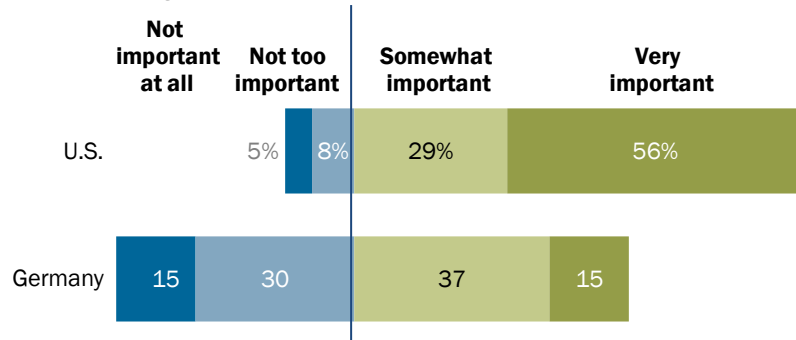
In the U.S., there is a partisan divide on this issue, though support for the American military presence in Germany is high among both Republicans and Democrats.

Among Republicans and Republican-leaning independents, nine-in-ten see U.S. military bases in Germany as an important part of their country's national defense. Among Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents, that share is about eight-in-ten.

Germans, by contrast, are not sold on the idea that American military bases are important to German security. While about half of Germans see U.S. military bases as important for their country's national security, 45% disagree.

Americans and Germans differ over importance of U.S. military bases in Germany to national security

% who think U.S. military bases in Germany are ___ for their country's national security



Note: Don't know responses not shown. Full question wording: "As you may know, the United States currently operates several military bases in Germany with approximately 35,000 active-duty American troops. How important do you think these military bases are for [U.S./German] national security? Very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not important at all?"

Source: Pew Research Center survey conducted in the U.S. Sept. 17-22, 2019. Q6. German results from Körber-Stiftung survey conducted Sept. 9-28, 2019.

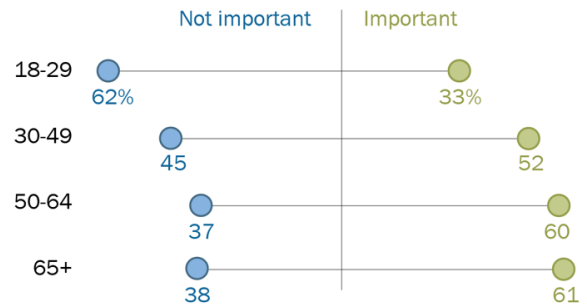
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Younger Germans especially doubt the importance of American military bases in their country. Roughly six-in-ten of Germans ages 18 to 29 think U.S. military bases in Germany *do not* contribute to German national security, while 61% of those 65 and older believe the bases *are* important to Germany's defense.

Older Germans more likely to see U.S. military bases in their country as important

% who say U.S. military bases in Germany are ___ for Germany's national security



Note: Don't know responses not shown. Full question wording: "As you may know, the United States currently operates several military bases in Germany with approximately 35,000 active-duty American troops. How important do you think these military bases are for [U.S./German] national security? Very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not important at all?"

Source: Körber-Stiftung survey conducted in Germany Sept. 9-28, 2019. Q6.

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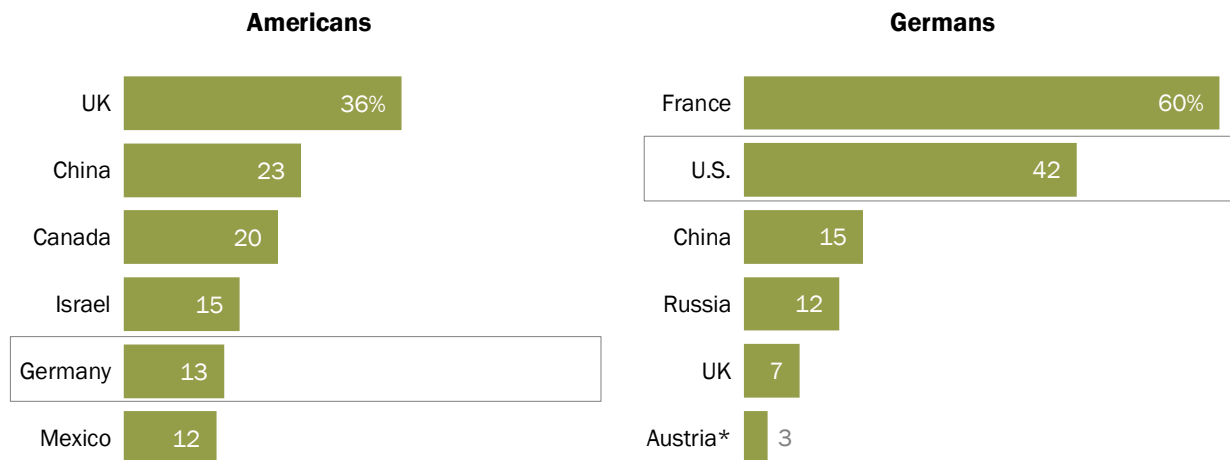
Americans, Germans differ on foreign policy partners and cooperation

There are stark differences between and within the U.S. and Germany when it comes to which foreign policy partner is considered most important.

Among Americans, 36% choose the United Kingdom as the most or second-most important foreign policy partner. Roughly two-in-ten say China (23%) and Canada (20%) are top partners, but Germany is chosen by only 13% as the most or second-most important partner, in between Israel at 15% and Mexico at 12%.

Germans more likely to see the U.S. as an important partner than Americans are to see Germany as one

% who say ___ is the most or second-most important partner for American/German foreign policy



* European countries/European Union and Italy also had 3%.

Note: Combined responses. Only top six countries shown.

Source: Pew Research Center survey conducted in the U.S. Sept. 17-22, 2019. Q1a-b. German results from Körber-Stiftung survey conducted Sept. 9-28, 2019.

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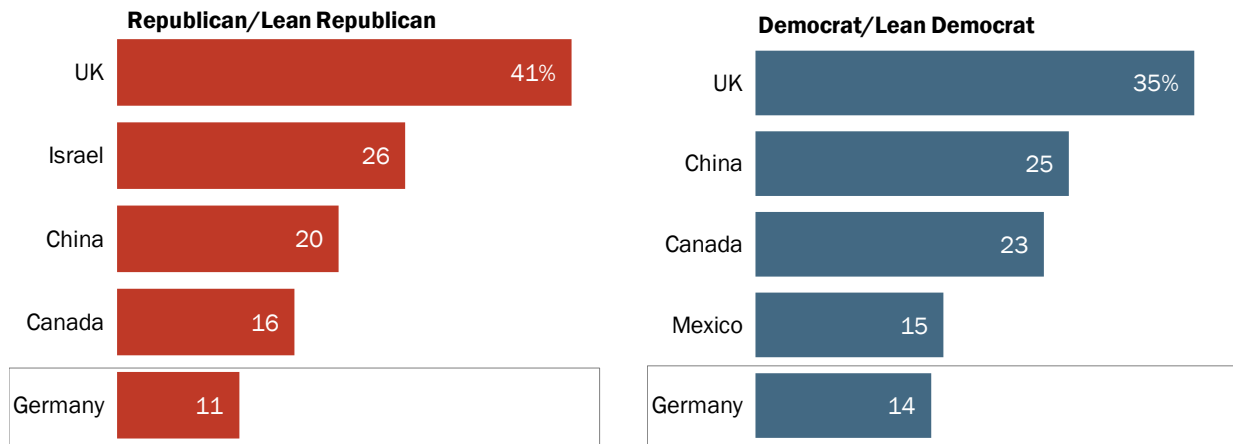
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Among Germans, France is clearly seen as the top foreign policy partner, with six-in-ten saying this. A large share also say the U.S. is a vital partner (42%), and this represents a rise in such sentiments from 2018, when only 35% named America as a top foreign policy partner. China (15%), Russia (12%) and the UK (7%) round out the top five. (The survey was conducted before the UK left the European Union on Jan. 31, 2020.)

In the U.S., political affiliation dictates who people think is the most important foreign policy partner. While both Republicans and Democrats agree that the UK is their most important partner, Republicans and Republican-leaning independents are keener on Israel as a partner (26%) than Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents (9%). Democrats also place more emphasis on Canada and Mexico for their top foreign policy affiliate. However, views of Germany are similar among partisans in the U.S., with both sides ranking Germany fifth on the list of most or second-most important foreign policy partners.

Democrats and Republicans are about as likely to name Germany as a top foreign policy partner, but Republicans are keener on Israel

% who say ___ is the most/second-most important partner for American foreign policy



Source: Pew Research Center survey conducted in the U.S. Sept. 17-22, 2019. Q1a-b.

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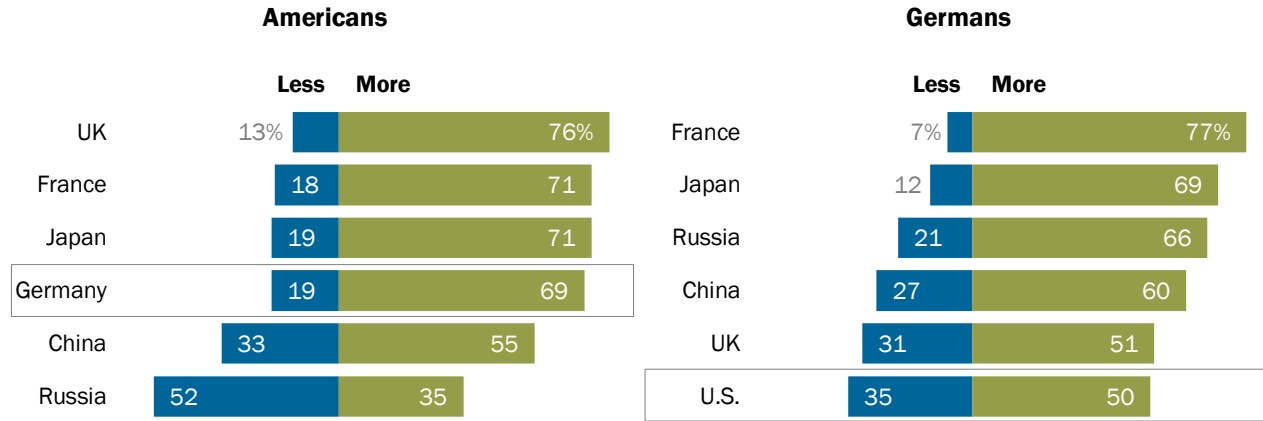
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For Germans of differing political stripes, the differences are less dramatic. Supporters of the CDU/CSU, as well as those who support the SPD and Greens, name France as the first or second-most important partner, followed by the U.S.

When it comes to cooperation with other countries, there is again a divergence between American and German views. Nearly seven-in-ten Americans (69%) say that they want to cooperate more with Germany, compared with only half of Germans who say the same about the U.S. Nonetheless, the percentage of Germans who say they want to cooperate more with the U.S. has increased nine points since 2018. At that time, fully 47% wanted to cooperate less with America.

Americans want more cooperation with European allies, but Germans less likely to say the same about the U.S.

% who say the U.S./Germany should cooperate more or less with ...



Note: "Same" and "Don't know" volunteer responses not shown.

Source: Pew Research Center survey conducted in the U.S. Sept. 17-22, 2019. Q2a-f. German results from Körber-Stiftung survey conducted Sept. 9-28, 2019.

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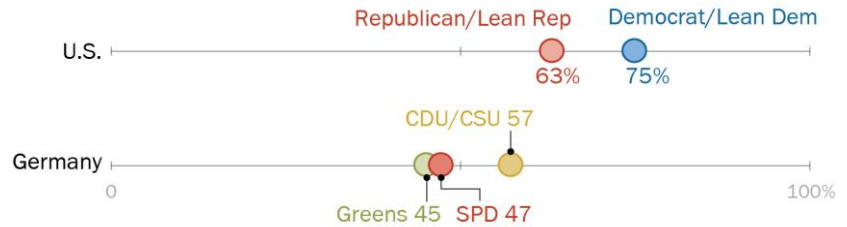
One area of convergence is the broad support in both the U.S. and Germany for more cooperation with France and Japan. And similar majorities in the U.S. and Germany want to cooperate more with China. However, a greater share of Americans want to cooperate more with the UK (76%) than of Germans who say the same (51%).

When looking at attitudes toward cooperation with Russia, Germans are almost twice as likely as Americans to want greater collaboration. Increased cooperation with Russia is a more common preference among Republicans in the U.S. (41%) than Democrats (32%), as well as among Germans living in former East Germany (75%) than in the former West (63%).

Democrats in the U.S. are more likely to want greater cooperation with Germany than Republicans. And in Germany, supporters of CDU/CSU are more willing to want greater cooperation with the U.S. than those who support the Greens and the SPD. This jibes with [data on the international image of the U.S.](#), where those on the ideological right in Germany tend to be more favorable toward the U.S. overall.

Supporters of different parties take alternate stances on U.S.-German cooperation

% among ___ who say their country should *cooperate more* with the U.S./Germany



Note: German voting behavior based on 2017 Bundestag elections.
 Source: Pew Research Center survey conducted in the U.S. Sept. 17-22, 2019. Q2e.
 German results from Körber-Stiftung survey conducted Sept. 9-28, 2019.
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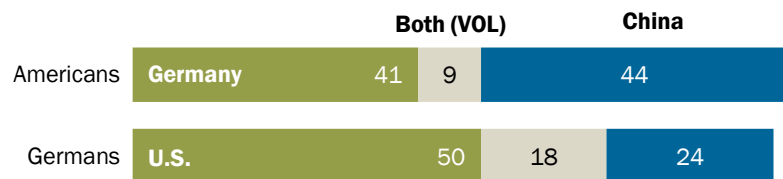
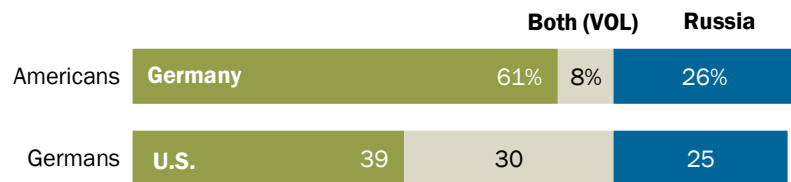
Closer ties with Russia and China?

When asked to choose between having a close relationship to Germany or Russia, Americans clearly favor Germany (61% to 26%). When Germans are asked to choose between Russia and the U.S., however, the gap is smaller (39% to 25%), and three-in-ten Germans volunteer *both*.

But as it relates to a rising China, attitudes diverge the other way. Germans are about twice as likely to say they prefer a close relationship to the U.S. over China (50% to 24%), while Americans are almost equally divided (41% prefer Germany, 44% say China).

Germans prioritize the U.S. relationship over China, but more divided on Russia

% of ___ who say it is more important for their country to have a close relationship to ...



Note: Don't know responses not shown.
 Source: Pew Research Center survey conducted in the U.S. Sept. 17-22, 2019. Q5a.
 German results from Körber-Stiftung survey conducted Sept. 9-28, 2019.
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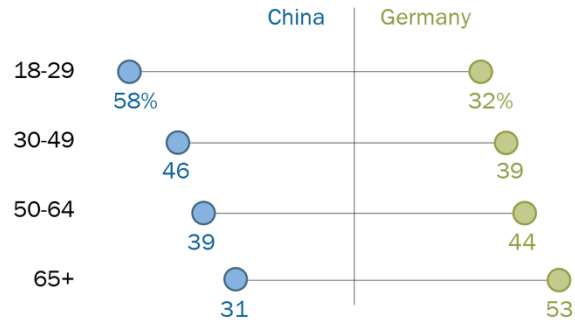
In the U.S., younger Americans are much more likely than older Americans to want a close relationship with China over Germany. For example, 58% of Americans ages 18 to 29 say it is more important for their country to have a close relationship to China than say the same about Germany (32%). But among older Americans, more say the relationship with Germany is more important than the relationship with China.

There are also slight partisan differences in the U.S. on the choice of a close relationship with Russia or Germany. About two-thirds of Democrats (66%) say they prefer close ties with Germany, compared with 57% of Republicans. And 31% of Republicans prefer close relations with Russia compared with 21% among Democrats.

Among Germans, there is far more support for a close relationship with Russia in the former East than in the former West. Nearly four-in-ten East Germans say that they prefer close ties with Russia, compared with only 23% who say the same about the U.S. And West Germans are twice as likely to prefer a close relationship with the U.S. than with Russia.

Younger Americans see relationship with China as more important than Germany

% ages ___ who say it is more important for their country to have a close relationship to ...

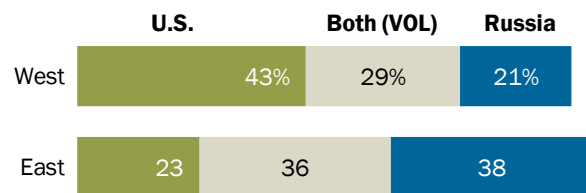


Note: "Both" and "Don't know" volunteer responses not shown. Older Americans were significantly more likely to volunteer "Both." Source: Pew Research Center survey conducted in the U.S. Sept. 17-22, 2019. Q5b. "Americans and Germans Differ in Their Views of Each Other and the World"

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Germans in the former East prioritize relations with Russia over U.S.

% in former ___ Germany who say it is more important for their country to have a close relationship to ...



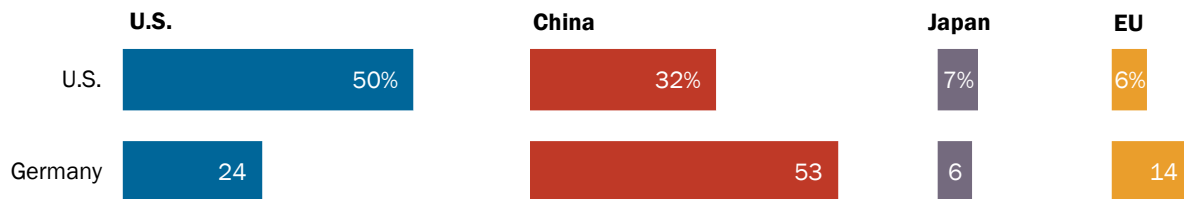
Note: Don't know responses not shown. East and West Germany respondents live in former German Democratic Republic and pre-1990 Federal Republic of Germany, respectively. Source: Körber-Stiftung survey conducted Sept. 9-28, 2019. "Americans and Germans Differ in Their Views of Each Other and the World"

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When asked which country is the world's leading economic power, Americans and Germans give starkly different answers. Half of Americans name the U.S., with about a third (32%) choosing China. However, roughly half of Germans name China (53%) as the leading economic power compared with 24% who name the U.S. Relatively few in both countries see Japan or the countries of the European Union as the leading economic power, although 14% in Germany name the EU, about twice as many as in the U.S.

Half of Americans see their country as the top economic power; Germans more likely to name China

% who say ___ is the world's leading economic power



Source: Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey. Q33.

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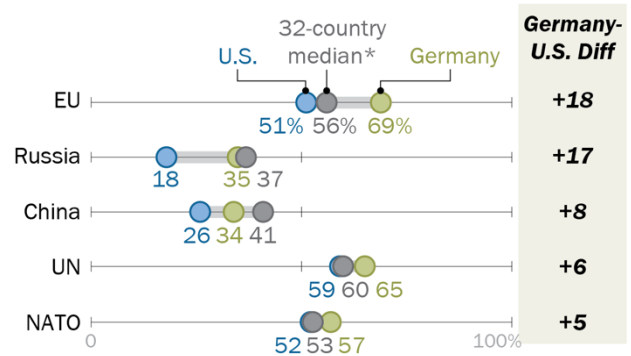
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Americans and Germans differ in their views of international organizations and leaders

Americans and Germans also hold different opinions on countries and international organizations. On balance, Germans tend to view these nations and organizations more positively than Americans. This divide is starkest when it comes to views of the EU. While roughly seven-in-ten Germans favor the union, only about half of Americans agree. A similarly wide gap exists between German and American perceptions of Russia, though favorable opinions of Russia are less widespread in both countries than positive views of the UN and EU. There is greater consensus on the UN and NATO, though notably, Germans tend to think more highly of these organizations than Americans. About one-in-five Americans express no opinion of either the EU or NATO.

Americans and Germans differ in their views of Russia and the EU, but have more similar views of the UN and NATO

% who have a favorable opinion of ...



* Median does not include Germany or the U.S. NATO median represents percentages from 14 NATO member countries.

Note: All differences shown statistically significant.

Source: Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey. Q8b-e,g.

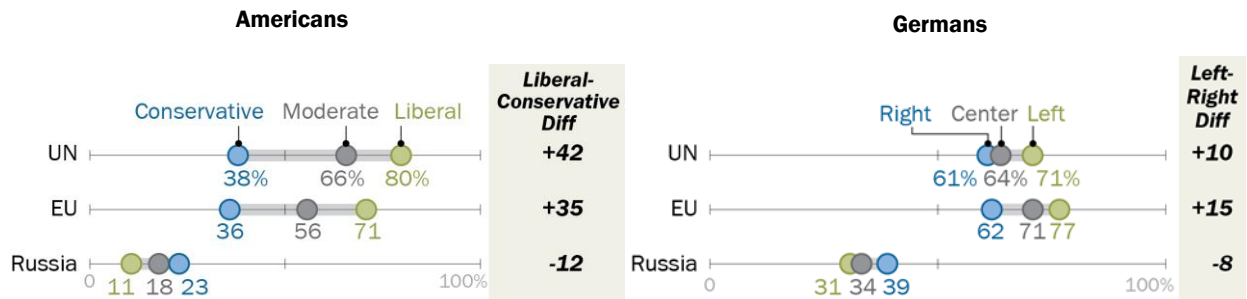
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In the U.S. and Germany, views on these countries and organizations vary based on ideology. Conservative Americans and Germans on the right of the ideological spectrum are more likely than American liberals and Germans on the left to view Russia favorably. On the other hand, liberals and those on the left are more likely to favor the UN and EU than conservatives and those on the right. For all countries and organizations where those on the right and left did not see eye-to-eye, the divide is notably wider between Americans than it is between Germans.

Ideological differences in views of the UN, EU and Russia

% of Germans/Americans on the ideological ___ who have a favorable opinion of ...



Note: All differences shown are statistically significant. In U.S., ideology is defined as conservative (right), moderate (center) and liberal (left). Source: Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey. Q8c,d&e.

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Additionally, Germans living in former East Germany tend to view Russia more favorably and the EU less favorably than those living in the former West. Just over four-in-ten of those living in the former East say they have a favorable opinion of Russia (43%), compared with one-third of those in the former West. And 71% in the former West favor the EU, while 59% in the former East agree.

Acknowledgments

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Methodology: U.S. survey

This analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted September 17-22, 2019 among a national sample of 1,004 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in the United States (302 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 702 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 492 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted under the direction of SSRS. A combination of landline and cell phone random digit dial samples were used. Interviews were conducted in English (969) and Spanish (35). Respondents in the landline sample were selected by randomly asking for the youngest adult male or female who is now at home. Interviews in the cell sample were conducted with the person who answered the phone, if that person was an adult 18 years of age or older. For detailed information about our survey methodology, see <http://www.pewresearch.org/methodology/u-s-survey-research/>

The combined landline and cellphone sample are weighted to provide nationally representative estimates of the adult population 18 years of age and older. The weighting process takes into account the disproportionate probabilities of household and respondent selection due to the number of separate telephone landlines and cellphones answered by respondents and their households, as well as the probability associated with the random selection of an individual household member. Following application of the above weights, the sample is post-stratified and balanced by key demographics such as age, race, sex, region, and education. The sample is also weighted to reflect the distribution of phone usage in the general population, meaning the proportion of those who are cellphone only, landline only, and mixed users.

The following table shows the unweighted sample size and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the U.S. in the survey:

Group	Unweighted sample size	Weighted %	Plus or minus ...
Total sample	1004	100	3.35 percentage points
Rep/Lean Rep	369	42	5.54 percentage points
Dem/Lean Dem	511	58	4.71 percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for subgroups are available upon request.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

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Methodology: Global Attitudes Survey

About Pew Research Center's Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey

Results for the survey are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Gallup and Abt 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](#).