

Chinese Public Supports Trade and Security Cooperation, Still Sees the United States as a Threat

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Beginning in the autumn of 2025, a notable shift has taken place in American public opinion toward China. American favorability toward China rose from all-time lows in 2024 to 35 out of 100 in [late 2025](#) and 39 out of 100 in [2026](#) according to the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, still negative but approaching neutrality. In the same report, support for engagement with China over a policy of containment achieved a narrow majority (57%). This survey demonstrates that the Chinese and American publics are now in reasonably close agreement on these points. However, unlike American public opinion of China, Chinese public opinion of America has remained largely static since [October 2025](#). However low American attitudes toward China might still be despite a notable rise, they are climbing to meet Chinese attitudes toward America in all but one category – national security threat perceptions.

Chinese favorability toward the United States is currently 32 out of 100, a one-point decrease from late 2025. Threat perceptions likely account for much of this negative assessment. Nine in ten Chinese view U.S. interference in Taiwan is a national security threat, while three in four Chinese agree U.S. international economic policy is also a major threat. The May summit in Beijing between U.S. President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping appears to have helped moderate many of these negative views, but the overall effect was a convergence of opinions, not an overall change.

As with the American public's support for engagement, Chinese remain highly supportive of trade and security cooperation despite high overall negativity toward the United States. These findings should be read as cause for cautious optimism for those seeking more stable U.S.-China relations. It now appears that both publics are open to cooperation in the face of distrust, which creates the opportunity for more substantive results from formal diplomatic relations should both governments come into agreement with their populations.

China Pulse is a twice-annual survey research project measuring Chinese public opinion on international relations conducted by The Carter Center and Emory University. The data in this brief come from a survey fielded between April 16 and June 26, 2026.

Key Findings

- Chinese public sentiment toward the United States remains low, averaging 32 out of 100 in the current survey and 33 out of 100 during the fall and winter of 2025.
- Almost three quarters of Chinese view the United States as a national security threat.
- College educated Chinese continue to be the most likely to agree that the United States is a national security threat compared to other levels of educational attainment. However, this gap is narrowing as threat perception increases among less educated Chinese.
- U.S. policies toward Taiwan and international trade remain the most frequently identified national security threats (85% agree and 78% agree, respectively) while threat perceptions from political values like democracy and human rights increased sharply (28% agree in 2025 to 40% in 2026).
- After the May summit, threat perceptions around Taiwan significantly decreased among college educated Chinese (from 90% to 81%). Declines also occurred among women (87% to 81%) and those under 40 (88% to 84%).
- Geo-economic threat perceptions among Chinese under 40 notably decreased after the May summit (from 85% to 78%) despite little change in the overall threat perception.
- Increases in threat perception from U.S. cultural values after the May summit increased among those under 40 (from 33% to 45%), those without a college education (38% to 46%) and men (40% to 49%).
- Most agree that China should actively pursue cooperation with the United States on issues related to international trade (73%), science and technological innovation

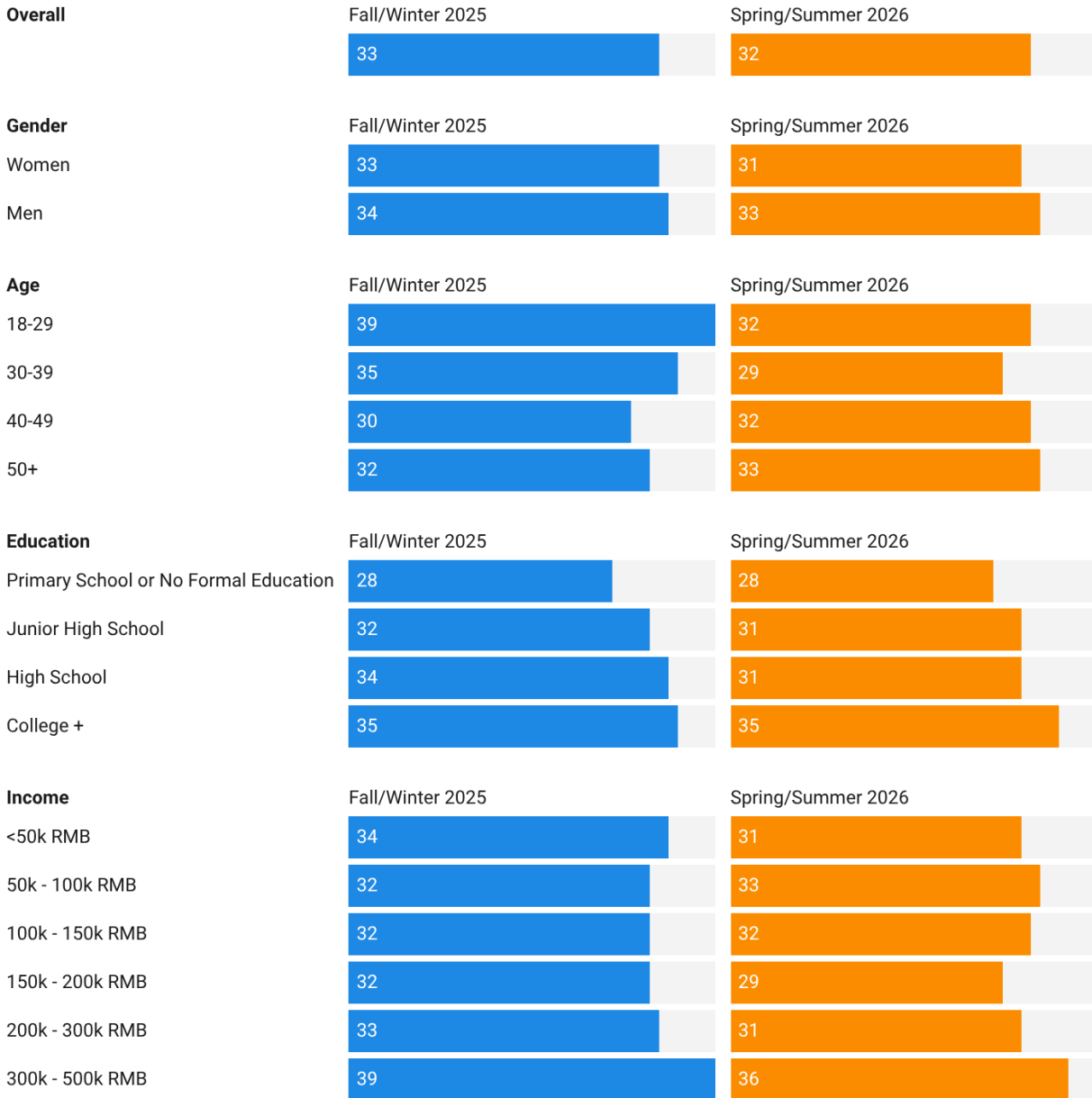
(68%), and global security (64%). Cooperation around education, once considered a mainstay of U.S.-China exchange, now receives the least support (33%).

Low Favorability Toward the United States Remains Static

The Chinese public continues to express low favorability toward the United States. On a scale of 0 to 100, in which 0 is as negative as possible, 50 is neutral, and 100 is as positive as possible, the average score for the United States was 32, squarely in the negative. Compared to the 33 average favorability revealed in the *China Pulse* survey from late 2025, this figure appears static. However, within age and education demographics a pattern emerges between the two waves. Namely, differences in favorability toward the United States are narrowing. In late 2025, the youngest demographic ranked the United States more favorably (39 compared to 30 for Chinese in their 40s and 32 for Chinese aged 50 and above). In the most recent survey, this difference has functionally disappeared as younger Chinese ranked U.S. favorability significantly lower, coming into close agreement with older generations. Across education levels, no notable change occurred for the least and most educated, while those with junior high school and high school educations both decreased.

Favorability Toward the United States Remains Low

"We'd like you to rate how you feel toward each of the following countries/regions on a scale of 0 to 100, which we call a 'feeling thermometer.' On this feeling thermometer scale, ratings between 0 and 49 degrees mean that you feel unfavorable and cold (with 0 being the most unfavorable/coldest). Ratings between 51 and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm (with 100 being the most favorable/warmest)."

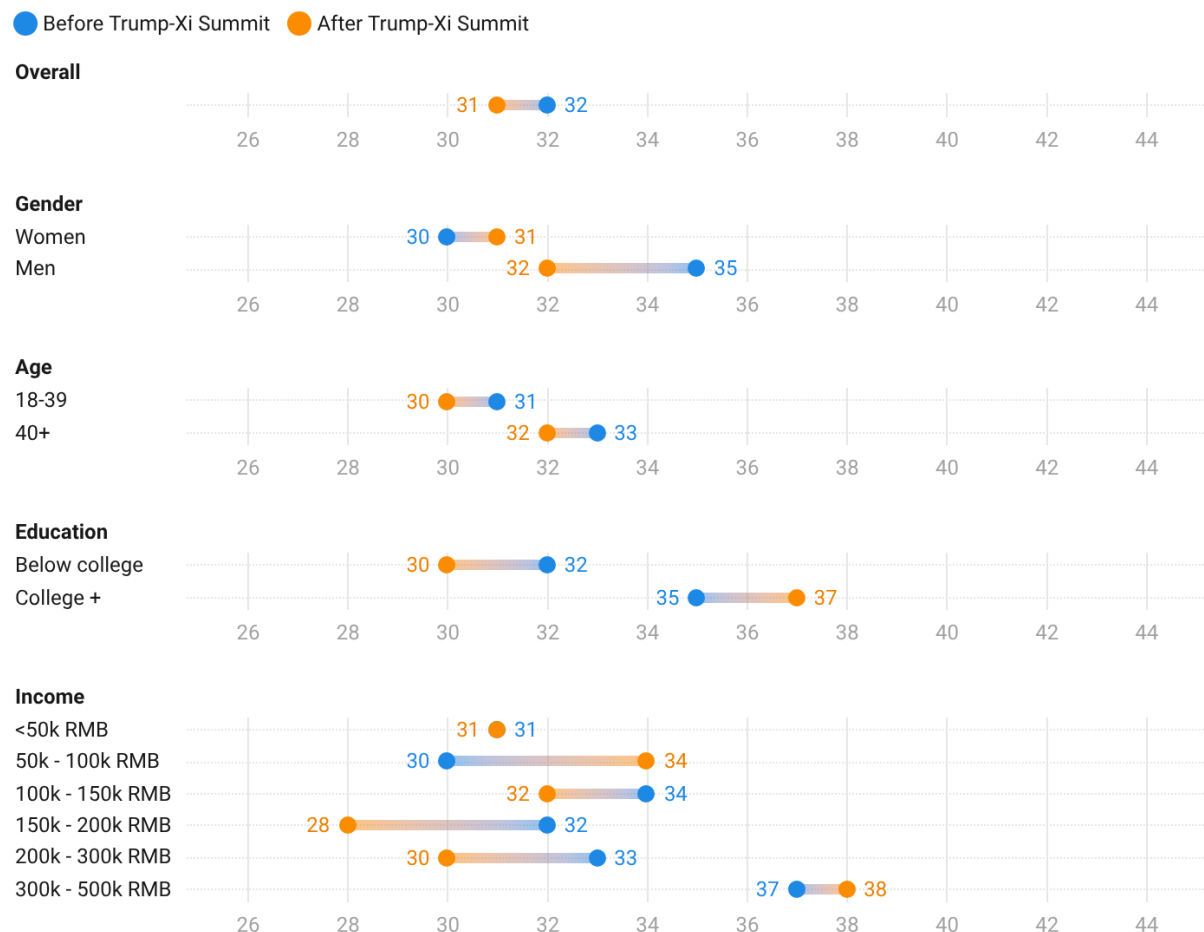


Source: China Pulse | October 2025 - January 2026 | n = 2,506 | & April - June 2026 | n = 2,500 | The Carter Center & Emory University • Created with Datawrapper

The stability of low favorability toward the United States also holds when comparing Chinese public opinion before and after the May summit between President Donald Trump and President Xi Jinping. Overall, post-summit favorability decreased by 1 point (32 to 31). Differences in favorability by gender narrowed as differences in favorability between those with and without a college education increased. Many middle-income Chinese ranked U.S. favorability lower after the summit, but none of these demographics experienced enough change to alter the general picture of low U.S. favorability.

Trump-Xi Summit had Little Impact on U.S. Favorability

"We'd like you to rate how you feel toward each of the following countries/regions on a scale of 0 to 100, which we call a 'feeling thermometer.' On this feeling thermometer scale, ratings between 0 and 49 degrees mean that you feel unfavorable and cold (with 0 being the most unfavorable/coldest). Ratings between 51 and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm (with 100 being the most favorable/warmest)." (Before and after May 13-15, 2026)



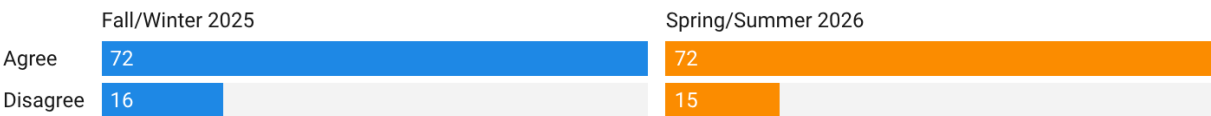
Source: China Pulse | April - June 2026 | n = 2,500 | The Carter Center & Emory University • Created with Datawrapper

The United States Remains a National Security Threat for the Chinese Public

Chinese assessment of the United States as posing a national security threat did not change between late 2025 and the spring and summer of 2026. In both surveys, most of the Chinese public (72%) views the United States as a national security threat with very little room for neutrality on the issue.

Chinese Public Continues to See the United States as a National Security Threat

"To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The U.S. poses a threat to China's national security?" (%)

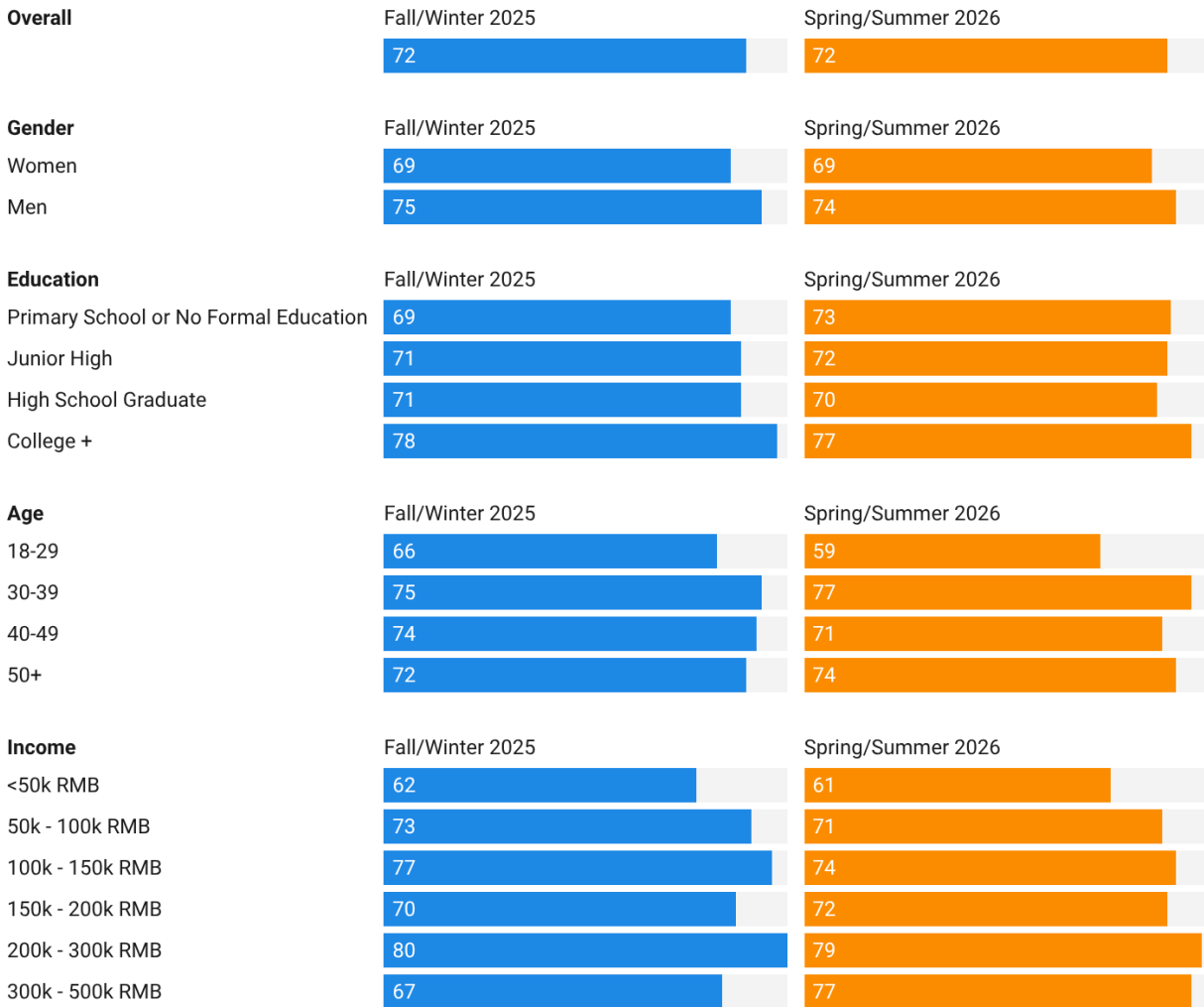


Net Agreement: Fall/Winter 2025 - 56 pts | Spring/Summer 2026 - 57 pts
Source: China Pulse | October 2025 January 2026 | n = 2,506 | & April - June 2026 | n = 2,500 | The Carter Center & Emory University • Created with Datawrapper

On closer inspection, a few demographic patterns in threat perception also hold between the survey waves. Men are more likely than women to view the United States as a threat in both waves. In late 2025, college educated Chinese were significantly more likely to view the United States as a national security threat compared to those without a college education. This gap narrowed in the spring and summer of 2026, but the highest threat perception remains among the college educated. Conversely, in our most recent survey Chinese in their 30s are significantly more likely to consider the United States a threat compared to other age cohorts while 18- to 29-year-olds were the least likely. In late 2025, the differences between all age groups were much less pronounced.

U.S. National Security Threat Perception

"The U.S. poses a threat to China's national security?" (% Agree)



Source: China Pulse | October 2025 - January 2026 | n = 2,506 | & April - June 2026 | n = 2,500 | The Carter Center & Emory University • Created with Datawrapper

The Chinese public's overall assessment of the United States as a threat did not change after the Trump-Xi summit in May. However, this is not to say that nothing changed in Chinese public opinion during the most recent survey. As with U.S. favorability, comparing Chinese public opinion before and after the Trump-Xi summit reveals a convergence. Threat perception among Chinese with a college education decreased significantly (79% to 69%) and it rose among those without a college education (69% to 72%).

Similarly, age and gender differences narrowed. General agreement that the United States is a national security threat increased among Chinese 39 or younger (65% to 70%) and decreased for those 40 and older (76% to 73%). Chinese women were more likely to agree the United States was a national security threat after the summit (67% to 72%) while men became less likely (75% to 70%). Thus, while responses before and after the summit in the most extreme category (college +) reveal significant moderation, the overall change during the survey period is a narrowing of Chinese public opinion.

Most Educated See the U.S. as Less of a Threat Post-Summit

"To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The U.S. poses a threat to China's national security?" (% agree before and after May 13-15, 2026)

● Before Trump-Xi Summit ● After Trump-Xi Summit

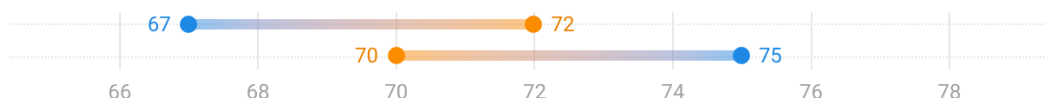
Overall



Gender

Women

Men



Age

18-39

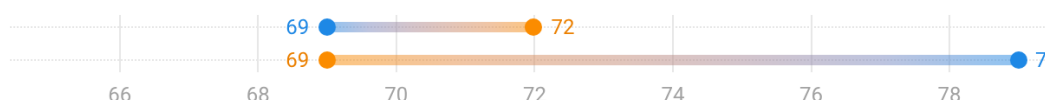
40+



Education

Below college

College +



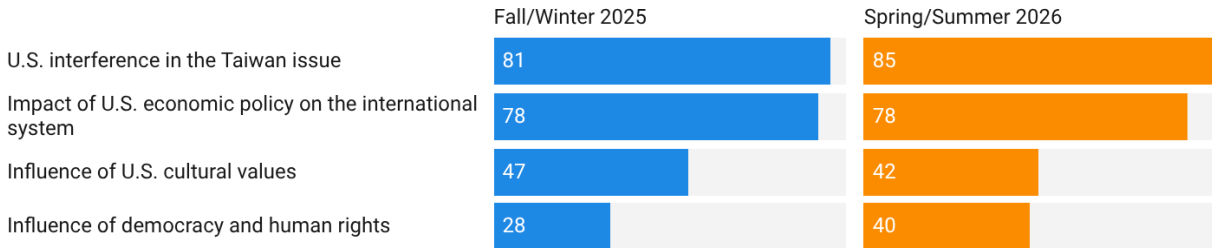
Source: China Pulse | April - June 2026 | n = 2,500 | The Carter Center & Emory University • Created with Datawrapper

Taiwan and Trade Top Chinese Concerns with the United States, Influence of Democracy and Human Rights Spiked

Among Chinese who agree the United States is a national security threat, very large majorities believe the most significant sources of that threat come from American interference in the Taiwan issue and the impact of American economic policies on global trade. Concern over Taiwan increased from late 2025 (81%) to the spring and summer of 2026 (85%) while concern over U.S. policies on the global economy remained static (78%). Notably, the percent of Chinese who believe that the influence of democracy and human rights posed a national security threat increased significantly (from 28% to 40%).

Taiwan and Trade are Consistent Points of U.S. Threat Perception

"In which of the following areas do you think the United States poses the most significant threat to China's national security? Select all that apply." (%)

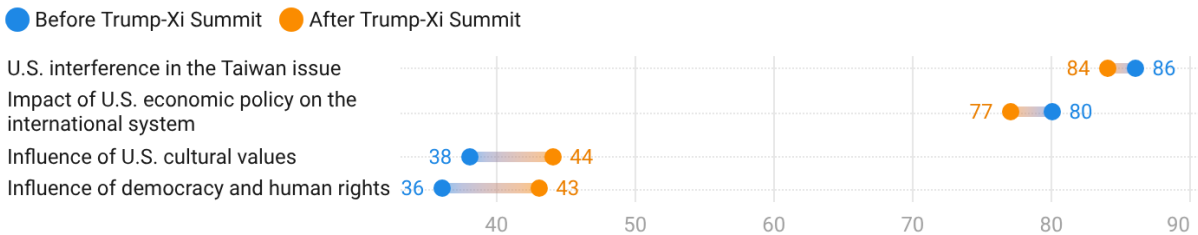


Source: China Pulse | October 2025 - January 2026 | n = 2,506 | & April - June 2026 | n = 2,500 | The Carter Center & Emory University • Created with Datawrapper

Comparison of data from before and after the May Trump-Xi summit demonstrates that concern over U.S. interference in Taiwan and in the global economy in April and early May were very close to where they were in late 2025, with little change after the summit. Instead, change occurred in the perception of U.S. threats more related to the realm of ideas. Concern over the influence of cultural values began lower in April 2026 than it was in late 2025 and never rose above that earlier overall figure. Concern about the influence of democracy and human rights, however, was already higher than the late 2025 figure when the current survey began (36% before the summit). This figure continued to increase after the summit (to 43%) to almost tie with threat perceptions related to cultural influence.

Leader-to-Leader Diplomacy Did Little to Change Dominant Threat Perceptions

"In which of the following areas do you think the United States poses the most significant threat to China's national security? Select all that apply." (% before and after May 13-15, 2026)



Source: China Pulse | April - June 2026 | n = 2,500 | The Carter Center & Emory University • Created with Datawrapper

Threat Perception: Taiwan and Geo-economics

Although overall concerns over American interference in cross-strait relations remained stable before and after the Trump-Xi summit, some demographics moderated in the weeks after the summit relative to very high highs in April and early May. Concern among college educated Chinese decreased significantly before and after the summit (from 90% to 81%). This is consistent with the significant decrease among college educated Chinese in the general assessment of the United States as a national security threat. Decreases also occurred among women (87% to 81%) and Chinese aged 18 to 39 (88% to 84%). The only demographic that experienced an overall increase was men (85% to 88%).

Perception of U.S. Threat Involving Taiwan Still High Post-Summit; Most Educated Show Largest Shift

"In which of the following areas do you think the United States poses the most significant threat to China's national security? Interfering in the Taiwan issue." (% agree before and after May 13-15, 2026)

● Before Trump-Xi Summit ● After Trump-Xi Summit

Overall



Gender

Women



Men



Age

18-39



40+



Education

Below college



College +



Source: China Pulse | April - June 2026 | n = 2,500 | The Carter Center & Emory University • Created with Datawrapper

As expected with a summit called to negotiate, among other things, a truce in an ongoing trade war, Chinese concerns about U.S. economic influence internationally were high in the weeks before Trump and Xi met. Although these concerns remained high after the summit (decreased from 79% to 77%), a significant decrease occurred in Chinese 18 to 39 years old (85% to 78%). Minor changes also occurred for Chinese over 40 years old and across gender and education categories.

Most Chinese Still Alert to U.S. Geo-economic Threat Post-Summit

"In which of the following areas do you think the United States poses the most significant threat to China's national security? Influence of U.S. economic policy toward the international system." (% agree before and after May 13-15, 2026)

● Before Trump-Xi Summit ● After Trump-Xi Summit

Overall

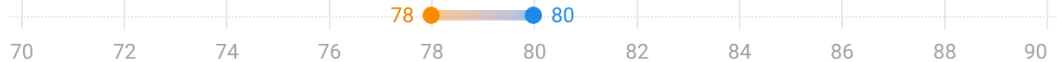


Gender

Women



Men



Age

18-39



40+



Education

Below college



College +



Source: China Pulse | April - June 2026 | n = 2,500 | The Carter Center & Emory University • Created with Datawrapper

Threat Perception: Cultural and Political Values

Agreement that the influence of U.S. cultural values poses a threat to China's national security increased for nearly all demographic categories after the Trump-Xi summit. However, these increases occurred from a much lower starting point than the overall agreement discovered in late 2025. Prior to the summit, only 38 percent agreed that U.S. cultural values posed a threat. After the summit, this figure rose to 44 percent. Increases also occurred across gender. Among women, threat perception from cultural values rose from 35 to 40 percent. Among men, threat perception rose from 40 to 49 percent. Similarly, all ages experienced an increase. Agreement among Chinese aged 39 years old or young increased from 33 to 45 percent. Agreement among Chinese over 40 only increased by two points (from 41% to 43%). Education marks the only departure from this trend. While those without a college education increased in their agreement that U.S. cultural values were a threat (38% to 46%). College educated Chinese remained largely static in their minority assessment (36% to 35%).

Perceived Threat from U.S. Cultural Values Increased Post-Summit

"In which of the following areas do you think the United States poses the most significant threat to China's national security? Influence of U.S. cultural values." (% agree before and after May 13-15, 2026)

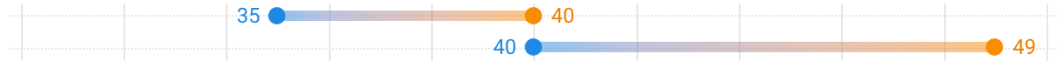
● Before Trump-Xi Summit ● After Trump-Xi Summit

Overall



Gender

Women

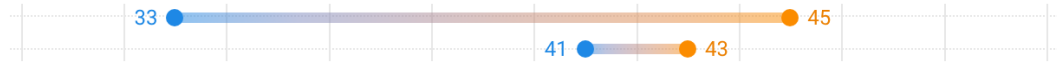


Men



Age

18-39



40+



Education

Below college



College +



Source: China Pulse | April - June 2026 | n = 2,500 | The Carter Center & Emory University • Created with Datawrapper

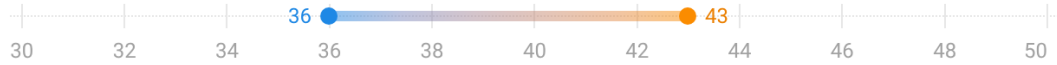
Threat perception from democracy and human rights marks a significant change from late 2025. Comparing responses before and after the summit, reveals increases in threat perception for every demographic except Chinese 40 years old and above, who were already ranking democracy and human rights as a higher threat in April than was recorded in late 2025. Threat perception among women increased from 35 to 39 percent and increased significantly among men from 37 to 47 percent. For Chinese 18 to 39 years old, threat perception significantly increased from 31 to 46 percent. Agreement increased across the educational spectrum, from 37 to 44 percent for those without a college education and from 34 to 41 percent for those with a college education.

Perceived U.S. Threat Over Democracy and Human Rights Largely Driven by Younger Chinese

"In which of the following areas do you think the United States poses the most significant threat to China's national security? Democracy and human rights." (% agree before and after May 13-15, 2026)

● Before Trump-Xi Summit ● After Trump-Xi Summit

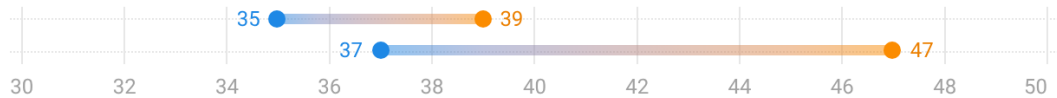
Overall



Gender

Women

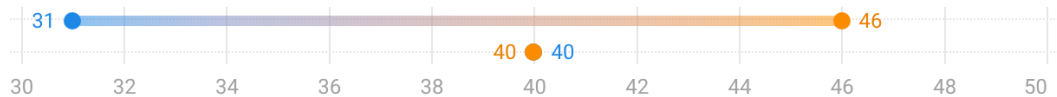
Men



Age

18-39

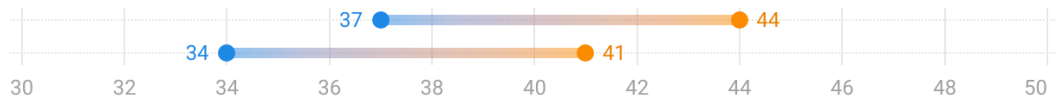
40+



Education

Below college

College +



Source: China Pulse | April - June 2026 | n = 2,500 | The Carter Center & Emory University • Created with Datawrapper

Support for U.S.-China Cooperation Continues Despite Low U.S. Favorability and High Threat Perception

Despite all the concerns and negative feelings expressed above, most of the Chinese public remain supportive of U.S.-China cooperation on economy and trade (73%), science and technological innovation (68%), and global security (64%). Cooperation on public health and climate change received only minority support (45% and 37%, respectively). Cultural exchange also received minority support (47%), while education, long an important pillar of U.S.-China cooperation received the least support (33%).

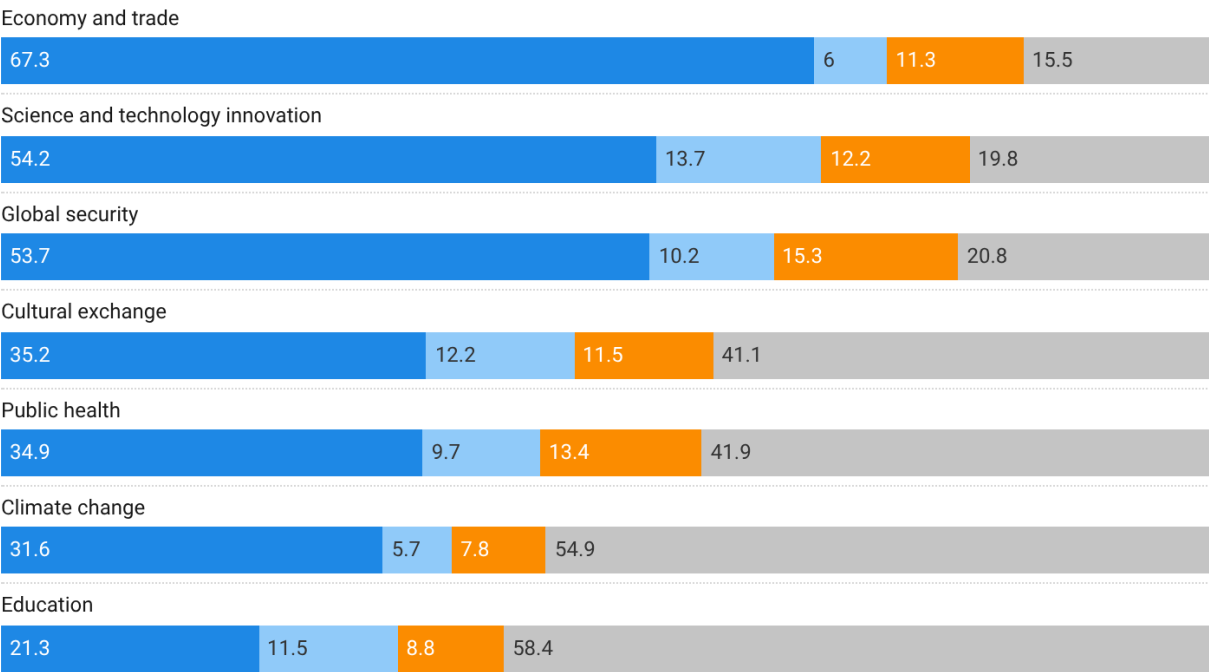
In late 2025, we asked the Chinese public which of these seven options were areas where the United States and China had mutual interests. This created a potential ambiguity by conflating identification of a mutual interest with support for cooperation. The current survey asked the same question about mutual interest but added an additional question asking respondents where they would support the Chinese government actively pursuing cooperation with the United States. The result is that we can now have data on the proportion

of Chinese people that see areas of mutual interest that are not appropriate for U.S.-China cooperation. The responses are a small minority in all cases but worth reporting to emphasize the overall support for cooperation. The areas with the largest groups identifying a mutual interest but not supporting cooperation were global security (15%), public health (13%), science and technological innovation (12%), cultural exchange (12%), and economy and trade (11%). These cannot be automatically assumed to be points of competition as the survey does not ask where the United States and China should compete.

Shared Interests and Cooperation

"In which of the following areas do you think China and the United States have common interests? Please select all the options you agree with" and "In which of the following areas do you think the Chinese government should actively pursue cooperation with the United States? Please select all the options you agree with." (% comparison of answers to both questions.)

Shared interest and should cooperate Should cooperate, but no shared interest Shared interest, but should not cooperate Neither



Source: China Pulse | April - June 2026 | n = 2,500 | The Carter Center & Emory University • Created with Datawrapper

Conclusion

Relations between the United States and China have been deteriorating for a decade. Through the first Trump administration (2017-2021) and the Biden administration (2021-2025), the U.S. approach to the relationship was largely, often openly, one of [great power competition](#) and rivalry. In China, the United States is frequently described as a [declining](#)

hegemon while China itself is a civilization on the [rise](#). During the second Trump administration, which initially [reignited](#) the earlier trade war, the relationship has come to be characterized by comparatively friendly leader-to-leader diplomacy sitting uneasily alongside [competition](#) in AI, resulting in a tenuous [stalemate](#) under the heading of a “[constructive relationship of strategic stability](#).”

That Americans have grown more supportive of engagement with China over the past year is well [documented](#), as is an increase in American favorability toward China, even if the latter remains negative overall. This survey shows similar attitudes from the Chinese public toward the United States. Variations in U.S. favorability and agreement that the United States is a national security threat shrank between April and June 2026, indicating that leader-to-leader diplomacy moderated extreme opinions in China while not improving the U.S.’s image overall. Despite this, and like their American counterparts, the Chinese public remains supportive of U.S.-China cooperation on economic and security issues. Placed together, the Chinese and American publics appear open to the establishment of a new foundation for the relationship even while trust is quite low. For the Chinese public, this likely means that there is support for forthcoming leader-to-leader talks to be much more productive than management of the current uncertain truce.

Methodology

This study employs a repeated cross-sectional design, conducted in collaboration with a China-based survey company maintaining a large respondent panel. The current wave was fielded from April 16 to June 26, 2026, and surveyed 2,500 Chinese adults. Quota sampling was used to enhance the representativeness of the respondents to the Chinese population, including age, gender, and geographic distribution across the North, East, Southwest, Northeast, South Central, and Northwest regions. Weights were applied to the survey sample after collection to further improve representativeness. The same weights were applied to the data from the fall/winter 2025 wave referenced in this report. For this reason, fall/winter 2025 data will not match exactly the figures reported when the raw data was originally published in March 2026. The 50-question survey yielded a median completion time of 8.5 minutes.

Survey weights for each wave were constructed using iterative proportional fitting (raking) to align the sample with population targets for gender, age, educational attainment, Chinese Communist Party membership, and geographic region. Targets were 51% male; 17%, 19%, 17%, and 47% for age brackets 18–29, 30–39, 40–49, and 50+, respectively; 15% with a college degree or higher; 8.5% CCP membership; and regional shares of 12% North, 7%

Northeast, 30% East China, 29% South Central, 15% Southwest, and 7% Northwest. We were able to achieve convergence with a maximum relative weight of 5.56 (95th percentile weight is 3.0). Results are not sensitive to dropping the highest weighted observations. Because each wave is adjusted to these demographic weights, differences are likely not attributable to compositional change between waves on these variables. However, unobserved compositional differences not captured by these demographics may remain, although many major sources of compositional change are likely to be absorbed by the listed demographics.

For the pre/post analysis of President Trump's visit to Beijing, we used a coarser common scheme, reflecting the smaller sample sizes of the two subgroups: male 51%, under 40 45%, college+ 20%, CCP member 9%, and the same six regional targets, raking the pre- and post-periods separately and dropping the May 13–15 during-visit respondents. As with the full sample, unobserved compositional differences may remain, although any resulting bias would have to arise from differences not absorbed by the demographic dimensions on which the two samples are balanced.

About the Authors

Nick Zeller is a senior program associate and lead researcher in The Carter Center's China Focus initiative, a research associate at the Second Cold War Observatory, and non-resident fellow at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft. He has previously held visiting assistant professor positions in Chinese history at the University of South Carolina and Kennesaw State University and was an NSEP Boren Fellow at Tsinghua University in Beijing. He holds a doctorate in modern Chinese history from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Renard Sexton is a political scientist who studies conflict and development, particularly in Asia and Latin America. His research combines quantitative methods, fieldwork, and experiments, and has been published in top academic journals, policy forums and public outlets. From 2022 to 2023 he served as a senior advisor in the China/Taiwan unit at US Indo-Pacific Command through a Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) fellowship. He is currently Associate Professor of Political Science at Emory University, and the director of the Security and Conflict Lab.

Yawei Liu is the Senior Advisor on China at The Carter Center and an adjunct professor of political science at Emory University. An expert on U.S.-China relations and Chinese grassroots democracy, he is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and the associate director of the China Research Center in Atlanta. He is regularly invited to speak about

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About The Carter Center

Waging Peace. Fighting Disease. Building Hope.

A not-for-profit, nongovernmental organization, The Carter Center has helped to improve life for people in over 90 countries by resolving conflicts; advancing democracy, human rights, and economic opportunity; preventing diseases; and improving mental health care. The Carter Center was founded in 1982 by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and former First Lady Rosalynn Carter, in partnership with Emory University, to advance peace and health worldwide.

About The Carter Center's China Focus

The Carter Center is an independent, nonpartisan organization. Through its China Focus initiative, the Center seeks to improve the U.S.-China relationship through a thoughtful assessment of the international records of both countries. We convene leading Chinese and American policy professionals and academics, conduct pioneering research in Chinese public opinion, support next generation foreign policy experts, and publish research-backed opinion. Our goal is to contribute to lasting international peace between the world's two largest powers, which is the foundation for solving the biggest problems facing humanity today.

About Emory University's Department of Political Science

The intellectual mission of the Department of Political Science is twofold. First, we seek to engage in knowledge-building through rigorous theoretical and empirical research that enables us to address urgent contemporary political challenges related to democratic institutions and governance, identity and difference, inequality, and political violence. Second, we aim to train students who will become the next generation of scholars and practitioners through the skills we impart to them both in and outside of our classrooms. The rise of political polarization and populism in the United States and other countries make clear that democratic governance cannot be taken for granted. Global crises such as the COVID pandemic and climate change also demonstrate the need for solutions that are not only scientifically correct, but also politically feasible. More than ever, a greater understanding of the incentives and behavior shaping political life is necessary.

