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Americans and Germans are worlds apart in views of their countries' relationship

By Jacob Poushter and Alexandra Castillo

At a time of [rising tensions](#) between their countries, people in the United States and Germany express increasingly divergent views about the status of their decades-long partnership. They are divided not only on the overall state of the relationship, but also on future levels of cooperation, the importance they ascribe to each other on foreign policy and the efficacy of retaliatory tariffs. Despite these differences, people in the U.S. and Germany still find common ground on the benefits of free trade, the importance of NATO and the continued need to spend on defense, according to surveys conducted in the U.S. by Pew Research Center and in Germany by Körber-Stiftung in September 2018.

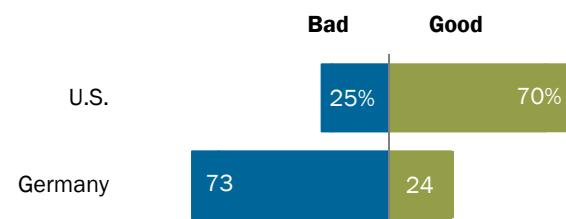
Here are seven charts that explain the status of this complicated relationship:

1 Americans and Germans are worlds apart on the overall state of their relationship. In the U.S., seven-in-ten say the relationship is good, while 73% in Germany say the relationship is bad. Among Germans, this constitutes a [sharp elevation](#) in negative assessments since 2017, when 56% said the relationship was bad.

Despite their generally negative perceptions, only one-in-ten Germans say the relationship with the U.S. is *very* bad. Most Americans (58%), for their part, say the relationship is *somewhat* good, while a far smaller share (12%) say it is *very* good.

Americans and Germans diverge sharply in their views of bilateral relations

Relations today between the U.S. and Germany are ...



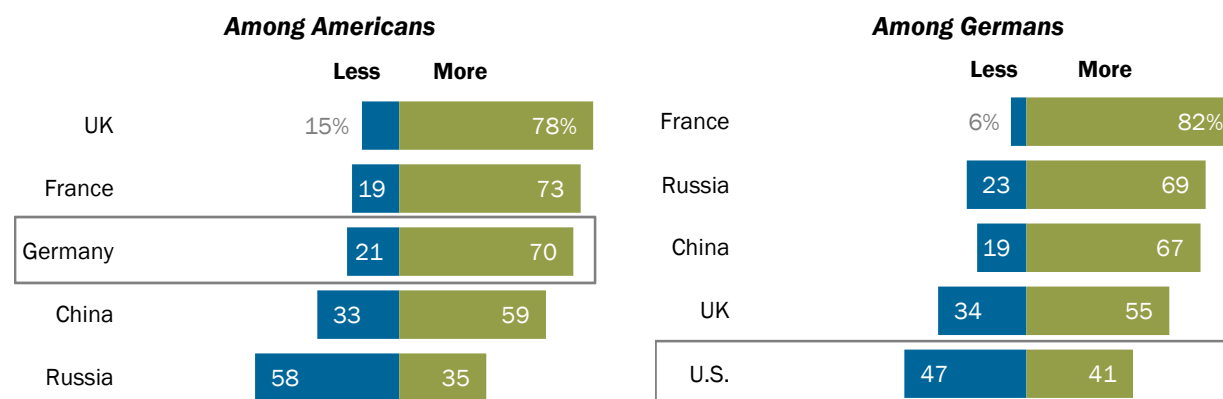
Source: Pew Research Center survey conducted in the U.S. Sept. 11-16, 2018. Q6. German results from Körber-Stiftung survey conducted Sept. 13-26, 2018.

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2 Seven-in-ten Americans say the U.S. should cooperate more with Germany, but only 41% of Germans say Germany should cooperate more with the U.S. German views on this question have become more negative in the past year: In 2017, a 56% majority of Germans said they should collaborate more with the U.S.

Americans want more cooperation with European allies – including Germany – but Germans are less likely to want cooperation with the U.S.

Please tell me if the U.S./Germany should cooperate more or less with ...



Source: Pew Research Center survey conducted in the U.S. Sept. 11-16, 2018. Q2a-e. German results from Körber-Stiftung survey conducted Sept. 13-26, 2018.

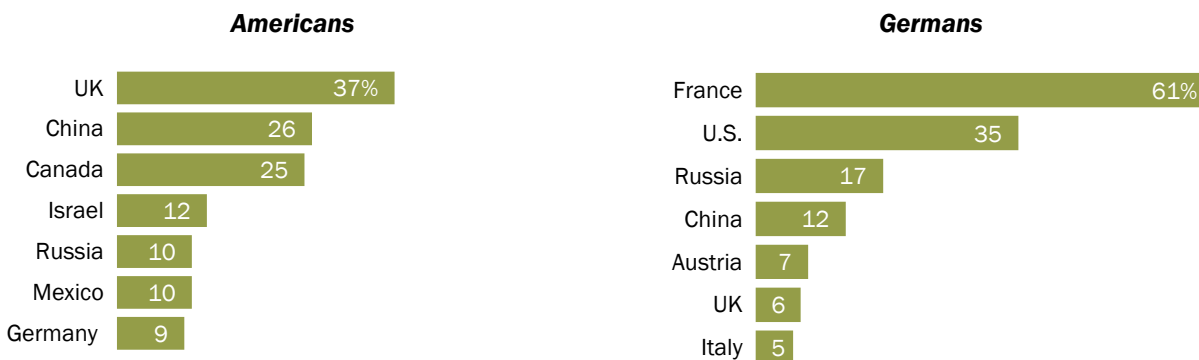
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When asked about cooperation with other major powers, Americans and Germans generally agree that their countries should cooperate more with France, the United Kingdom and China. But when it comes to Russia, people in the U.S. and Germany sharply diverge. A majority of Americans (58%) want to cooperate less with their Cold War adversary, while nearly seven-in-ten Germans (69%) want to cooperate more with Russia, the source of [about a third of Germany's natural gas imports as of 2015](#).

3 Few Americans name Germany as their country's most or second-most important foreign policy partner, but about a third of Germans name the U.S. Only 9% in the U.S. name Germany as one of their top two foreign affairs partners, far fewer than the 37% who name the UK and 26% who name China. Since 2017 the share of Americans saying Canada is their country's first- or second-priority partner has increased to 25%. In fact, Germany is no longer among the top five countries cited by Americans.

Germans are about four times more likely than Americans to view the other country as an important partner for foreign policy

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



Note: Combined responses. Only top seven countries shown.

Source: Pew Research Center survey conducted in the U.S. Sept. 11-16, 2018. Q1a-b. German results from Körber-Stiftung survey conducted Sept. 13-26, 2018.

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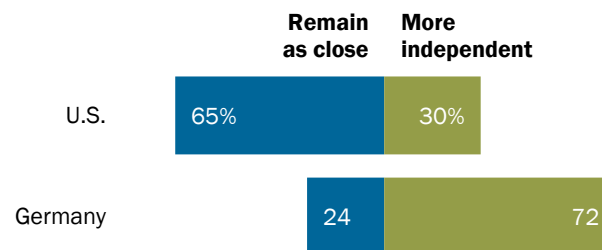
In Germany, most people (61%) continue to identify France as the most or second-most important foreign policy partner, while 35% mention the U.S. That's down from 43% in 2017.

4 Most Germans want to be more independent from the U.S. on foreign policy, but most Americans want to remain close with Europe. A wide majority of Germans (72%) say they want their country to be more independent from the U.S. on foreign policy, while about a quarter (24%) want it to remain as close to the U.S. as it has been. In the U.S., roughly two-thirds of Americans (65%) want to remain close with Europe, rather than be more independent on foreign policy (30%).

Views in the U.S. on independence or closeness to Europe are [similar to when the question was asked](#) over a decade ago.

Americans want to remain close to Europe, but Germans want more foreign policy independence from U.S.

Do you think the relationship between the U.S. and Europe/U.S. and Germany should remain as close as it has been or do you think that the U.S./Germany should take a more independent approach to foreign policy than it has in the past?



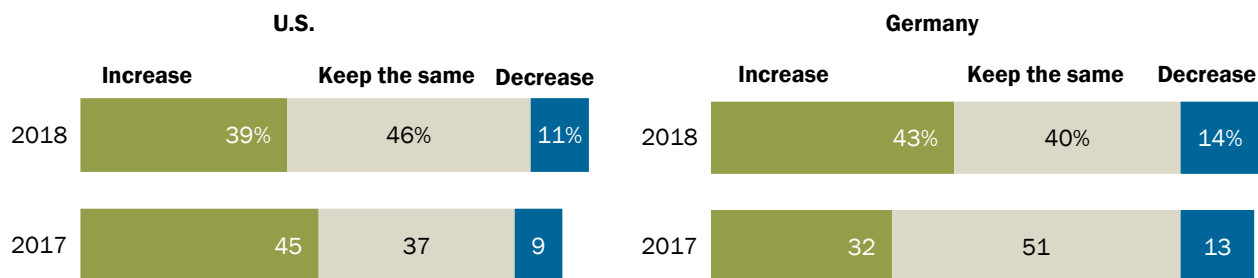
Source: Pew Research Center survey conducted in the U.S. Sept. 11-16, 2018. Q5. German results from Körber-Stiftung survey conducted Sept. 13-26, 2018.

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5 American and German views on defense spending are generally similar, but there have been notable shifts in opinion in both countries over the last year. Americans have become *less* likely to say European allies should increase spending on national defense (39% hold this view this year, down from 45% in 2017). Meanwhile, Germans have become *more* likely to say their country should increase defense spending (43% have this opinion this year, up from 32% in 2017).

Germans increasingly want to spend more on defense, even as fewer Americans see a need for European allies to enlarge defense budgets

Should European allies/Germany increase spending on national defense, keep it about the same or decrease it?



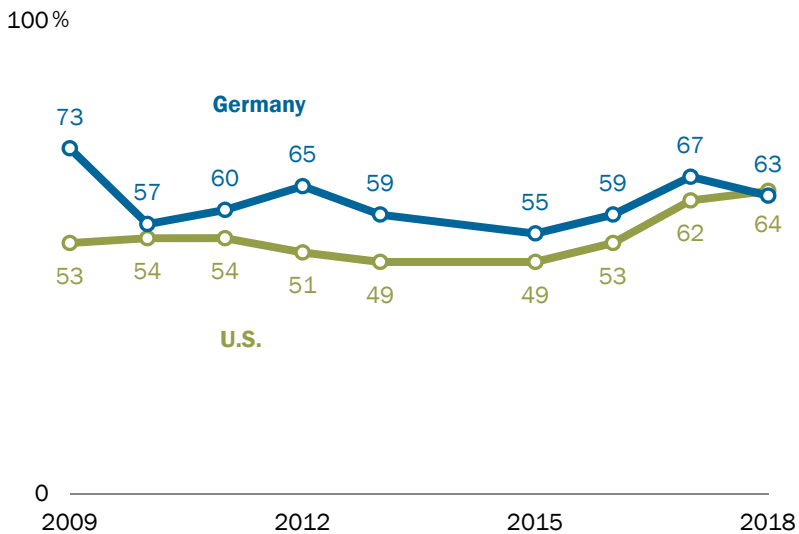
Source: Pew Research Center survey conducted in the U.S. Sept. 11-16, 2018. Q4. German results from Körber-Stiftung survey conducted Sept. 13-26, 2018.

6 Americans and Germans clearly align on NATO.

Nearly identical percentages of Americans (64%) and Germans (63%) have favorable views of the organization. Moreover, German and American opinions have largely moved in tandem – and remained favorable – since this question was first asked in 2009.

Both U.S. and Germany are positive toward NATO

Favorable views of NATO



Source: Pew Research Center survey conducted in the U.S. Sept. 11-16, 2018. Q3. German results from Körber-Stiftung survey conducted Sept. 13-26, 2018. Trend data from the Global Attitudes Survey.

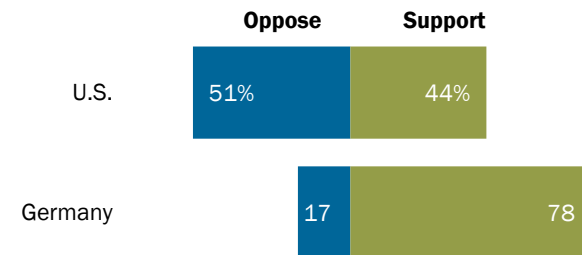
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7 Americans and Germans have different views toward tariffs. In June 2018, the Trump administration's tariffs on European steel and aluminum went into effect. In response, Germany and its European Union allies placed [tariffs on American goods](#), ranging from bourbon to motorcycles. In the U.S., more Americans oppose than support the initial tariffs imposed on German and other EU products (51% vs. 44%). Germans, however, support retaliatory tariffs by a large margin: Nearly eight-in-ten (78%) support increasing tariffs on imported U.S. products in response to American tariffs on German goods.

Even with the backdrop of tense trade relations between the two countries, people in both nations continue to share similar values regarding the benefits of free trade. Most Americans (68%) and Germans (53%) think free trade is beneficial for them personally. And overwhelming majorities in both countries [continue to say](#) that growing trade and business ties with other nations is good for their country.

Americans oppose initial tariffs on Germany, but Germans strongly favor retaliatory tariffs

The U.S. has recently increased tariffs or fees on imported goods from Germany and other European countries. In response, Germany and other European countries have increased tariffs on American goods. Do you support or oppose the U.S. policy of increased tariffs on Germany and other European countries/the German and EU policy of increased tariffs on the U.S.?



Source: Pew Research Center survey conducted in the U.S. Sept. 11-16, 2018. Q8. German results from Körber-Stiftung survey conducted Sept. 13-26, 2018.

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Methodology

This analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted September 11-16, 2018 among a national sample of 1,006 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in the United States (406 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 600 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 369 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 and Spanish. 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 the total sample:

Survey conducted September 11-16, 2018

Group	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus ...
Total sample	1,006	3.8 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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Topline Questionnaire

**Pew Research Center
September 2018 Survey**

Methodological notes:

- Survey results are based on a national sample of the United States. For further details on sample design, see Methodology section.
- Due to rounding, percentages may not total 100%. The topline “total” columns show 100%, because they are based on unrounded numbers.

		September, 2018	October, 2017
		United States	United States
Q1a. Which country currently is the most important partner for American foreign policy?	Australia	0	0
	Canada	12	3
	China	18	15
	France	1	3
	Germany	3	5
	Great Britain (includes United Kingdom/England)	21	20
	Israel	8	9
	Italy	1	0
	Japan	1	3
	Mexico	4	2
	North Korea	0	1
	Poland	0	0
	Russia	5	4
	South Korea	0	1
	Turkey	0	0
	The European Union (EU)	3	1
	Other	2	4
	DK/Refused	19	29
Total	100	100	

Data is displayed vertically.

		September, 2018	October, 2017
		United States	United States
Q1b. ASK IF RESPONDED TO Q1a: And which country is the second most important partner for American foreign policy?	Australia	2	0
	Canada	17	9
	China	9	12
	France	7	8
	Germany	7	11
	Great Britain (includes United Kingdom/England)	19	18
	Israel	5	4
	Italy	1	0
	Japan	3	6
	Mexico	7	4
	North Korea	1	1
	Poland	0	0
	Russia	7	5
	South Korea	2	1
	The European Union (EU)	3	3
	Other	3	5
	DK/Refused	8	12
	Total	N= 100	100
		849	741

Data is displayed vertically.

		September, 2018	October, 2017
		United States	United States
Q1ab. Combined Q1a and Q1b	Australia	2	0
	Canada	25	10
	China	26	24
	France	7	8
	Germany	9	12
	Great Britain (includes United Kingdom/England)	37	33
	Israel	12	12
	Italy	1	1
	Japan	3	7
	Mexico	10	5
	North Korea	2	1
	Poland	0	0
	Russia	10	8
	South Korea	2	2
	Turkey	0	0
	The European Union (EU)	6	3
	Other	4	7
DK/Refused	25	37	
Total	100	100	

Data is displayed vertically.

		Q2a. Please tell me if the United States, in the future, should cooperate more or less with ____. a. France				
		Cooperate more	Cooperate less	Cooperate the same as before	DK/Refused	Total
United States	September, 2018	73	19	2	5	100
	October, 2017	65	20	6	9	100

		Q2b. Please tell me if the United States, in the future, should cooperate more or less with ____. b. Great Britain				
		Cooperate more	Cooperate less	Cooperate the same as before	DK/Refused	Total
United States	September, 2018	78	15	2	5	100
	October, 2017	72	15	5	9	100

		Q2c. Please tell me if the United States, in the future, should cooperate more or less with _____. c. Russia				
		Cooperate more	Cooperate less	Cooperate the same as before	DK/Refused	Total
United States	September, 2018	35	58	2	5	100
	October, 2017	43	44	4	9	100

		Q2d. Please tell me if the United States, in the future, should cooperate more or less with _____. d. China				
		Cooperate more	Cooperate less	Cooperate the same as before	DK/Refused	Total
United States	September, 2018	59	33	2	5	100
	October, 2017	59	28	5	8	100

		Q2e. Please tell me if the United States, in the future, should cooperate more or less with _____. e. Germany				
		Cooperate more	Cooperate less	Cooperate the same as before	DK/Refused	Total
United States	September, 2018	70	21	3	7	100
	October, 2017	65	21	4	9	100

		Q3. Please tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion of NATO, that is, North Atlantic Treaty Organization.					
		Very favorable	Somewhat favorable	Somewhat unfavorable	Very unfavorable	DK/Refused	Total
United States	September, 2018	30	34	14	9	14	100
	Spring 2017	20	42	15	8	15	100
	Spring, 2016	12	41	18	7	21	100
	Spring, 2015	9	40	20	11	20	100
	Spring, 2013	9	40	17	10	24	100
	Spring, 2012	12	39	15	7	26	100
	Spring, 2011	14	40	17	7	22	100
	Spring, 2010	13	41	15	6	25	100
	Fall, 2009	11	42	14	10	23	100

		Q4. Now thinking about American allies in Europe, do you think that our European allies should increase their spending on national defense, keep it about the same or decrease it?				
		Increase	Keep the same	Decrease	DK/Refused	Total
United States	September, 2018	39	46	11	5	100
	October, 2017	45	37	9	9	100

		Q5. Do you think the relationship between the U.S. and Europe should remain as close as it has been or do you think that U.S. should take a more independent approach to foreign policy than it has in the past?			
		Remain as close	More independent	DK/Refused	Total
United States	September, 2018	65	30	6	100

		Q6. In general, how would you describe relations today between the United States and Germany? Would you say they are very good, somewhat good, somewhat bad or very bad?					
		Very good	Somewhat good	Somewhat bad	Very bad	DK/Refused	Total
United States	September, 2018	12	58	21	4	6	100
	October, 2017	9	59	18	4	10	100

		Q7. Do you think free trade with other countries is generally beneficial or not beneficial for you personally?			
		Beneficial	Not beneficial	DK/Refused	Total
United States	September, 2018	68	26	5	100

		Q8. As you may know, the U.S. has recently increased tariffs or fees on imported goods from Germany and other European countries. In response, Germany and other European countries have increased tariffs on American goods. Do you support or oppose the U.S. policy of increased tariffs on Germany and other European countries?			
		Support	Oppose	DK/Refused	Total
United States	September, 2018	44	51	6	100