

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

## Polls Show Wildly Different Views on Obama's Trade Policy

By William Mauldin

Do Americans support the Obama administration's trade policy? Turns out it depends on how you ask it.

On Thursday, the National Association of Manufacturers released [a poll](#) showing overwhelming support for free-trade agreements, as well as for collaboration by Congress and the administration on trade negotiations. In recent decades, the cooperation between the two branches of government has been codified in "fast track" legislation, also known as trade promotion authority.

In January, when the current fast track bill was introduced in Congress, environmental and labor groups released [a poll](#) that appeared to show the opposite view on fast track.

The polls from competing groups come as the Obama administration is seeking fast track authority to win approval of a proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership deal with the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Japan and eight other Pacific countries. That push has run into stiff opposition from Democrats in Congress.

According to the earlier poll, 62% of voters oppose granting President **Barack Obama** fast-track negotiating authority. The poll, conducted by Hart Research Associates and Chesapeake Beach Consulting, showed Republican voters are more concerned about giving fast-track authority to Mr. Obama than Democrats, even though Republican lawmakers are broadly more supportive of trade policy and fast track.

Why the discrepancy? The underlying issues are complex, and the authors of the poll distilled the issues into two completely different questions.

Here is the question the business group asked in its poll, which was conducted by McLaughlin & Associates:

"The president has constitutional authority to negotiate international agreements and Congress has constitutional authority to regulate trade with foreign nations. Do you believe that Congress and the president should work together so that America can negotiate and put in place trade agreements that eliminate barriers and level the playing field?"

Not surprisingly, only 5.7% of respondents said no.

Last month, the Sierra Club and the Communication Workers of America released a poll that mentioned the Pacific trade talks and asked this question:

“Congress will soon decide whether to give the president ‘fast-track’ authority for these negotiations, which would mean that once the administration’s negotiations are completed, Congress must take an up-or-down vote on the agreement as a whole, and could not make any amendments or changes in the agreement.”

After mulling that description, more than three-fifths of those polled said they opposed fast track. Besides the environmental and labor groups, the poll was also sponsored by the U.S. Business & Industry Council, a group of U.S.-focused businesses often opposed to trade agreements.

Fast track aside, the polls point to opposite conclusions about whether lawmakers who support the administration’s trade policy will face problems getting re-elected.

After the earlier poll, the Cato Institute, a free-market think tank in Washington, posted [a dismissive critique](#).

“The survey designers and sponsors have done the public a major disservice,” wrote **Dan Ikenson**, head of Cato’s trade studies program. “As a result, we are further from an informed debate than we were before the survey was conducted.”

**Bob Carpenter**, the Republic pollster who founded Chesapeake Beach Consulting, said his group developed the fast-track question with Hart and submitted it to the the CWA for approval.

“It’s important for the public to look closely at the wording of the question,” Mr. Carpenter said.