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## Politico-Harvard poll: Americans say 'TPP who?'

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September 23, 2016

There could be a sliver of hope for the languishing Trans-Pacific Partnership deal after all, despite the beating it's taking from Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton in their race for the White House, a first-ever POLITICO-Harvard poll suggests.

That's because nearly a year after the White House finished negotiating the landmark trade pact, most Americans still don't know about the agreement, considered the economic linchpin of President Barack Obama's rebalance toward Asia.

Seventy percent of those polled in a survey commissioned by POLITICO and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health said they hadn't heard or read anything about the TPP, and among the 29 percent who had, views of the agreement were mainly negative: 63 percent of those respondents were against it, and 68 percent opposed a vote on its ratification in the lame-duck session of Congress.

The percentages show that efforts of labor and environmental groups to stir up opposition to the agreement have had limited impact, providing the White House with an opening to make both its economic and national security case for the agreement to the rest of the public.

"There is a lot of misinformation swirling around about TPP and free trade, and that's particularly true in this election year," said Matt McAlvanah, a spokesman for the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, when informed of the survey results. "We look forward to discussing the benefits of TPP with the 70 percent in this poll who have not yet made up their minds."

Meanwhile, in a dramatic turnaround from just a decade ago, nearly half of all Republicans say free trade agreements have hurt their communities, and a full 85 percent say trade deals have lost more jobs than they have created, the survey found.

Conversely, more Democrats now support free trade, with about a quarter believing it has hurt their communities and just over half saying it has cost U.S. jobs.

The flipped script befits a presidential election that has upended the traditional rules, helping explain how Donald Trump outflanked his GOP rivals with slams on trade with China and Mexico.

It also poses potential problems for the White House's hopes of winning approval of the TPP, since it is counting on the Republicans to provide the bulk of the votes.

The Republican shift away from free trade "is disconcerting," Sen. Jeff Flake said during a discussion on Thursday at the right-leaning American Enterprise Institute. Just last year, the party voted overwhelmingly to give Obama trade promotion authority to complete the sprawling trade pact, which involves Canada, Mexico, Japan and eight other Pacific Rim countries.

That vote "gives me hope that in the end, as we get past this political silly season, then we get back to doing what we should do," Flake said, referring to the possibility of winning approval of the pact after the November election.

Asked earlier this week about the results showing diminishing Republican support for free trade, U.S. Trade Representative Michael Froman said he took comfort from other recent surveys, including one by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs.

That poll showed that 68 percent of Democrats and 51 percent of Republicans believe that trade benefits the U.S. economy and American companies, compared to 55 percent of Democrats and 59 percent of Republicans in 2004, when George W. Bush was in the White House.

The survey, which the think tank released earlier this month, also showed that to differing degrees both Republicans and Democrats believe trade is good for consumers and boosts the standard of living, but bad for job security and job creation.

Some of the POLITICO-Harvard poll's other findings include:

— Americans are much more concerned about trade with China and Mexico, two of Trump's most frequent targets, than with other countries.

— Only 39 percent of U.S. citizens know China is not a member of the TPP deal; the rest believe it is or aren't sure.

— Midwesterners harbor the most concern about free trade, with more than half saying trade deals have hurt their communities.

— Despite the United States' long and deep relationship with the United Kingdom, more Americans oppose boosting trade with the country to help it with its "Brexit" from the European Union than support the idea.

— More than half of Americans think the economy has stayed the same or gotten worse since the 2008 downturn.

— The vast majority of Americans favor government policies to bring jobs back to the U.S., but only a quarter think those policies would be very effective.

The results showing a partisan divide on trade mark a drastic shift from just 10 years ago, when a Pew Research Center survey found Republicans much more positive about free trade and

Democrats more negative. Only 27 percent of GOP respondents in that poll said trade agreements hurt their family's financial situations, while 41 percent of Democrats held that view.

But the POLITICO-Harvard survey shows negativity trending overall, with two-thirds of independents and 54 percent of Democrats opining that trade deals have cost U.S. jobs.

Similarly, two-thirds of Republicans think free trade has lowered wages, while half of independents and 38 percent of Democrats expressed that view.

Despite such results, Froman said he did not expect the traditional pattern of support for trade agreements, with Republicans supplying the bulk of votes and Democrats a smaller share, to change much in the future.

“I don’t see that fundamentally changing,” Froman said at the AEI discussion with Flake. “We will continue to build that support on the Democratic side of the aisle, but we’re going to need, obviously, the support of the core part of the Republican party as well.”

Whether Trump’s hostility to the TPP and other trade deals becomes the mainstream view of the Republican Party “depends on the narrative that develops after the election,” said Flake, a Republican free trader who opposes Trump.

The POLITICO-Harvard poll also found stark partisan differences in opinions about trade with individual countries, especially China and Mexico. A resounding 64 percent of Republicans think trade with China hurts the United States, compared with 43 percent of independents and 38 percent of Democrats.

Similarly, 61 percent of Republicans believe trade with Mexico has damaged the economy, a view shared by only 35 percent of independents and 17 percent of Democrats.

Respondents were less hostile to trade with Canada, despite that it is also a member of the North American Free Trade Agreement. Japan also fared better in public opinion than it has in years past, with 30 percent saying trade with the Asian nation has helped the U.S. and 21 percent saying it has hurt. South Korea and the European Union shared similarly benign results.

But in each case, more Republicans than Democrats or Independents felt negatively about trade with other countries. Republicans were also more likely than Democrats to say trade agreements have hurt their community, with 47 percent and 24 percent, respectively, holding that view.

Those who believed trade has hurt their communities were more likely to be aware of the TPP, indicating that their negative views of past trade deals made them more likely to pay attention to the current debate on the agreement.

The greatest concern about free trade is in the Midwest, where 53 percent of respondents said they believe trade agreements have hurt their community; that compares to just over a quarter holding that view in the Northeast, South and West.

The results help explain why Trump's criticisms of free trade have resonated so strongly in industrial states like Ohio and Pennsylvania and why Bernie Sanders' criticism of the TPP had Clinton running scared in the region during the Democratic primaries, prompting her to harden her position.

The negative beliefs continue with views on the general state of the economy. Despite a growing number of positive indicators since the 2008 downturn, including falling unemployment and growth in the gross domestic product, 56 percent of Americans think the economy has either stayed the same or gotten worse since the recession and a majority believe it has gotten harder for lower- and middle-income people to get ahead financially. As with the results on trade, more Republicans than Democrats express these views.

One reason that trade currently polls better with Democrats than Republicans could simply be because there's a Democrat in the White House, said Dan Ikenson, director of the trade policy center at the free-market Cato Institute.

Looking at surveys over the years, "you tend to see an uptick in support in the party of the president and you tend to see a decline in support among the opposition party," Ikenson said.

"That explains a little of it, I think."

But current polls might also reflect a shift in party affiliation among voters, Ikenson said, referring to "less-educated white males, blue-collar folks who probably used to support Democrats, but who are now Republicans. For cultural reasons, I think they are more prone to subscribe to the characterization of trade that Trump likes to use, the sort of nationalist view of us versus them."

Still, it could be a while before voting patterns shift in Congress because the views of each party's big donors — labor for Democrats and business for Republicans — haven't changed as much as their rank-and-file members, he said.

"Politics is very slow in responding to reality," Ikenson said.