



## Trump's America First, Anti-Immigrant Policies Leave Voters Cold

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Donald Trump's America First rhetoric during the 2016 presidential campaign marked a sharp departure from the fundamental tenets of liberal internationalism that have guided U.S. foreign policy since World War II.

Trump's tirades against free trade, NATO allies, immigrants (legal and otherwise), and his general lack of interest in engaging with the world unless there was money in it for the United States horrified the foreign policy establishment of both parties.

Beyond concerns about Trump, many observers worried that his success reflected the demise of public support for internationalism.

Though the public supported robust internationalist policies after World War II and during the Cold War, Trump's emergence coincided with rising economic insecurity and inequality, intense political polarization, and dropping confidence in government to solve the problems facing the nation.

Had the public perhaps decided that internationalism's time had come and gone?

Would Trump's presidency usher in rising support for nativist and protectionist policies and calls to turn inward, away from the international arena?

A wide array of poll data from Trump's first year in office strongly suggests the answer is no. A large majority of Americans disapprove of Trump's handling of foreign policy and his America First policies are among the most unpopular elements of his foreign policy.

Trump's fiery attacks on unfair trading practices by China and Japan and his criticism of NAFTA as "the worst deal ever made" may have energized his base during the campaign, but since taking office Trump's course on trade has not been a popular one.

Though Trump pulled the United States out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership as soon as he took office and appears likely to pull out of the North American Free Trade Agreement, Americans remain committed to free trade.

A June 2017 survey from the Chicago Council on Global Affairs found that 72 percent of the public thinks international trade is good for the United States. An October 2017 poll from the Pew Research Center echoed this result, finding that Americans are more likely to believe NAFTA is good for the United States by 56-33 percent.

Trump is also clearly in the minority camp when it comes to immigration, another key pillar of the America First vision. Only 39 percent approved of Trump's handling of immigration as of November 2017. Most Americans simply don't share the president's dim view of immigrants. Trump began his campaign in 2015 complaining of Mexican immigrants that "They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists."

Last week, in a meeting about immigration at the White House, Trump's views again stirred debate after he complained about people coming from "shitholes" like Haiti and Africa and asked why the United States didn't get more people from Norway.

But according to a June 2017 Chicago Council on Global Affairs poll, just 37 percent of Americans see immigrants and refugees as a critical threat to U.S. interests. Seventy-one percent say that immigration is a good thing for the country today.

Poll after poll finds that a majority of Americans think that even illegal immigrants should have the opportunity to stay in the United States—68 percent in a recent Quinnipiac poll say they should be able to apply for citizenship.

Unsurprisingly, Trump and the Republicans face the same political headwinds in the debate over DACA reform. Seventy-nine percent thinks the "Dreamers"—undocumented immigrants brought to the United States as children—should be allowed to stay and become citizens.

Despite the disconnect on immigration, Trump has found somewhat more support on issues where Americans do sense security threats.

During the campaign, Trump argued that refugees fleeing the civil war in Syria should not be allowed to enter the United States, a view that receives majority support. Two-thirds of Americans supported preventing Syrian refugees from coming to the United States in a June 2017 poll, for example.

And though poll results have varied widely, it appears that a majority of Americans approves Trump's "travel ban" temporarily restricting visa applicants from six Muslim-majority countries to those who can show a close family relationship. The most recent poll by Politico/Morning Consult in July 2017 found that 60 percent of Americans support Trump's "travel ban."

On the other hand, most Americans have never been keen on Trump's favorite construction project. Despite his non-stop efforts to frame the southern border wall as a critical security issue, support for building it has remained below 40 percent since the month after Trump took office and a poll released last week found that Americans oppose building a wall on the Mexican border by 63-34 percent.

When it comes to dealing with the ultimate threat—nuclear weapons—Trump's approach is again clearly at odds with a majority. Trump's hard-line opposition to the Iran nuclear deal, for example, contrasts with the 67 percent of Americans who think the United States should not withdraw from the deal.

And though Trump's approach to North Korea has involved a good deal of saber rattling, tough talk on Twitter, and warnings that "time is running out," a majority of the public believes diplomacy needs more time.

Fifty-nine percent of the public believes the U.S. can solve the situation with diplomacy compared to just 27 percent who think force will be necessary. Further, 54 percent think it is more important to avoid war with North Korea than to remove its nuclear arsenal, while 39 percent think the opposite. Overall just 36 percent of Americans have confidence in Trump to handle the North Korea situation.

At a more general level, many Americans worry about Trump's temperament and his ability to handle crises. A recent poll, for example, found that 69 percent do not believe Trump is level-headed, while a Pew poll found that public confidence in Trump's ability to handle an international crisis dropped from 48 percent in April to 39 percent by October 2017.

And more broadly, Americans are worried about Trump's handling of foreign policy and the effect of the Trump Doctrine on the United States.

Public support for Trump's handling of foreign policy during his first year—at just 33 percent in November 2017—has been significantly lower than for other presidents at the same stage of their presidencies going back to Ronald Reagan.

Furthermore, 66 percent of Americans think that Trump's actions have damaged the United States' reputation around the world, while 55 percent believe that Trump has weakened the country's global leadership position compared to 31 percent who feel he has strengthened it.

For those who worried what Trump's election meant about the public's foreign policy attitudes, the polls provide a degree of solace. After a year in the White House with all the advantages conferred by his office and the bully pulpit, Donald Trump has utterly failed to increase support for the America First vision. Not only that, public confidence in Trump to manage international affairs has eroded significantly.

At the same time, the fact that even this much support exists in the United States for the illiberal, counterproductive, and dangerous policies espoused by Trump signals to political leaders that public support is not a given.

It also reveals that traditional justifications for American foreign policy no longer command such widespread support.

To ensure that Trump's combination of nativism and isolationism does not become the doctrine of the future, the United States will need other leaders to articulate a new foreign policy vision that acknowledges public concerns while doing a better job of explaining how and why the nation must engage the rest of the world.

This will not be an easy task. Globalization, automation, populism, and other powerful trends that are reshaping both international and domestic politics will not relent any time soon. To the extent that these forces help explain both Trump's success and public attitudes, we should expect continued debate and division over the future of American foreign policy.

If responsible politicians do not address these issues, Americans worried about economic competition from other nations or concerned about terrorism, immigration, and the influence of other cultures on their way of life may continue to look to leaders like Trump for answers.

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