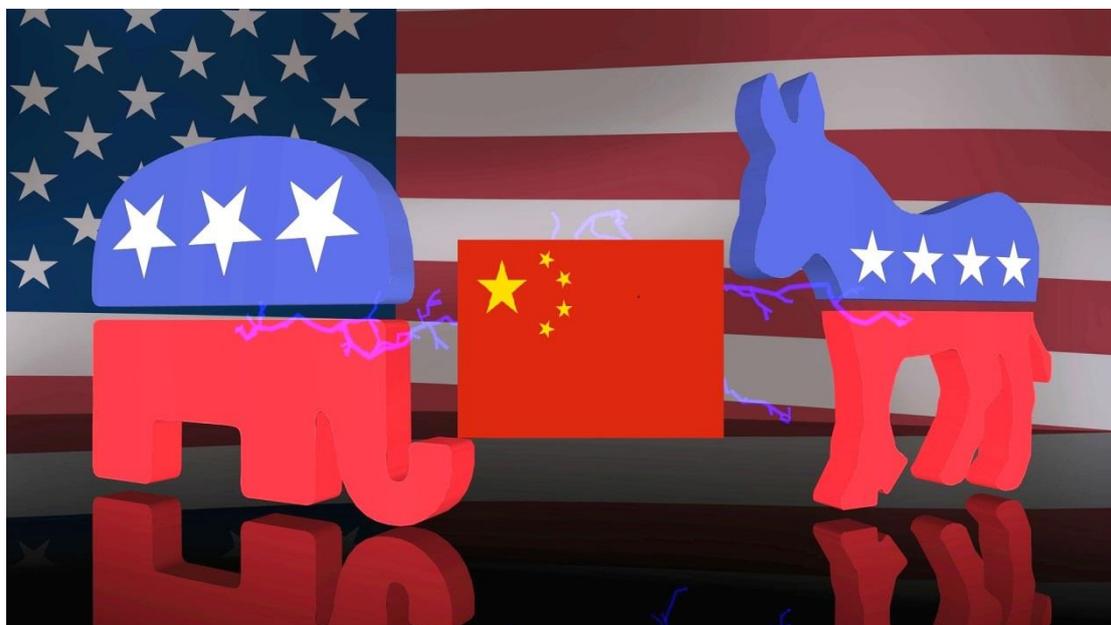


## Prospects & Perspectives



The Democrats and Republicans are getting closer on the matter of Washington's China policy, commonly taking a hard-line stance on the severe trade imbalance between Washington and Beijing.

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<https://pixabay.com/zh/%E5%A4%A7%E8%B1%A1-%E9%A9%B4-%E5%B1%81%E8%82%A1-%E5%BE%BD%E6%A0%87-%E6%80%BB%E7%BB%9F%E7%AB%9E%E9%80%89-3d-%E6%94%BF%E5%85%9A-%E9%80%89%E4%B8%BE-%E6%8A%95%E7%A5%A8-2798628/>.

## What Will Be Donald Trump's Policy toward China after the U.S. Midterm Elections ?

By *Liang-chih Evans Chen*

The 2018 U.S. midterm elections are considered to be the American public's "vote of confidence" or judgment on the first two years of President Donald Trump's administration. The results may represent a test to determine the level of support for his policies. The mixed outcome of the elections on November 6 demonstrate how significantly the Trump administration has divided the country on domestic issues, but it gives Beijing very little insight into whether Washington might change its hard-line policy



toward China.

### **President Trump Will Not Change His China Policy**

The idea that President Trump might change his attitude toward China if the Democrats made gains in the midterm elections arises from two considerations. First, because the Republicans lost control of the House of the Representative to the Democrats, Trump's power will be weakened by a divided Congress. This argument may be wrong, however. Congress does influence the making of American foreign policy, such as having to ratify international trade agreements or treaties, but President Trump does not generally address trade imbalances with other countries by signing governmental agreements or national treaties. This presents a difficulty on Capitol Hill with regard to providing checks and balances against the White House.

Second, a number of Chinese elites in both government and scholarship might prefer to see the Republicans ousted by the Democrats in Congress, particularly with regard to the Trump administration's attitude toward China, as the Democrats' positions on foreign policy—especially China policy—do not take such a hard-line as those of their Republican counterparts. This understanding could be wrong, however. Although the Democrats and Republicans may take different positions on U.S. foreign relations, the parties are getting closer on the matter of Washington's China policy, commonly taking a hard-line stance on the severe trade imbalance between Washington and Beijing. Looking back to the 2016 presidential campaign, both the contender for the Democratic nomination, Bernie Sanders, and eventual Democratic presidential candidate, Hillary Clinton, supported America's withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), fearing that the agreement could result in the loss of millions of domestic jobs.

### **A Consensus of the Republican and the Democrat: the China Policy**

Currently, the so-called "Trump Doctrine," in terms of U.S. policy toward China, may be viewed as a consensus between the Republicans and Democrats, the government and the public. President Trump does not consider that the international trade system that has developed since the end of World War II is an advantage to the United States. Instead, he views the U.S. as the biggest victim of free trade and globalization. In order to overcome huge trade deficits between the United States and



other countries, and China in particular, Washington must cultivate a new, free, and fair international trade with its economic partners. Furthermore, President Trump wants not only to put his slogans of “America First” and “Make America Great Again” into practice, but also to show his concern for the interests and security of his core constituency in places such as Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Wisconsin. Because the President promised to be tough on international trade, economic measures can indeed reshape America’s relationship with China, Washington’s most important “strategic competitor” at the moment.

### **The 2018 G20 Buenos Aires Summit: Key for U.S.-China Trade War**

The U.S.-China Diplomatic and Security Dialogue (D&SD), held on November 9 in Washington, D.C., marked a critical turning point in the development of the trade war between Washington and Beijing. Both the United States and China are willing to tackle the economic and trade imbalances between them. Although the two powers made no deals on their international trade and made no compromises on issues related to the Taiwan Strait, the South China Sea, or religious freedom and human rights, Washington and Beijing attempted to promote their relations through official dialogue and exchange. It was timely for the United States and China to conduct a strategic dialogue on diplomatic and security matters at this moment, as it immediately followed the U.S. midterm elections and Donald Trump will meet with Xi Jinping at the 2018 G20 Buenos Aires Summit at the end of November. Currently, it remains very difficult to predict whether Washington and Beijing can resolve their trade conflict or imagine how they could reach a compromise. Many Americans still believe that President Trump will remain tough on Beijing with regard to the trade imbalance between the two powers, China’s violations of intellectual property rights, and China’s predatory economic behavior around the world. Because Beijing is viewed by Washington as a revisionist power and a strategic competitor, the Trump administration will continue to strike back against China.

In the 2018 U.S. midterm elections, some argued that President Trump lost the game to the Democrats, but the President claimed victory for his administration. Whether he won or lost the midterms, President Trump seems to have some advantages in creating a counterbalance to China, which has become much more assertive in the region and around the globe. After the elections, President Trump’s policy toward China may not be consistent with his policy prior to the midterms, but he is unlikely to make concessions to China in the geopolitical game between Washington and Beijing.



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