

To: Interested Parties  
From: Margie Omero, GBA Strategies  
Date: June 13, 2018  
Re: Trust & The Tech Sector: Recent results from national research

## **OVERVIEW**

This recent national qualitative and quantitative project shows Americans value the tech industry—its role in our economy, and its ability to add ease and convenience to daily lives. Views toward tech are positive broadly, beneath the surface, and across demographic groups. But tech is not without some vulnerabilities and concerns, as many predictably worry about privacy and trust. A plurality feel tech faces the right amount of regulation, and majorities support a variety of interventions.

### ***Methodology***

*This memo summarizes key findings from qualitative and quantitative research, commissioned by the Tech CEO Council and conducted by GBA Strategies. The specifications of the project are below:*

**Qualitative Research:** *Twelve (12) Focus Groups*

- *Conducted January 22<sup>nd</sup> – February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2018*
- *Three groups per market*
- *Richmond (VA), Janesville (WI), Orlando (FL), Las Vegas (NV)*

**Quantitative Research:** *National Survey Of Registered Voters*

- *Conducted April 22-26, 2018*
- *Interviewed 1000 registered voters on landlines and cell phones, using live interviewers*
- *Margin of error:  $\pm 3.1$  percentage points at the 95 percent confidence interval*

## **KEY FINDINGS**

- Views toward the tech industry overall are positive broadly and beneath the surface.
  - Computer and device manufacturers, as well as technology service providers are more trusted than energy companies, financial companies and social media companies.
- Worries about social media—at least at this moment—are divergent from views toward the industry as a whole.
  - Voters make distinctions between the need for regulation of social media compared to other tech sectors.
- Americans are supportive of many government interventions designed to support and grow the tech industry.

**RESEARCH RESULTS**

**Americans see tech fueling better personal connections and efficiencies.**

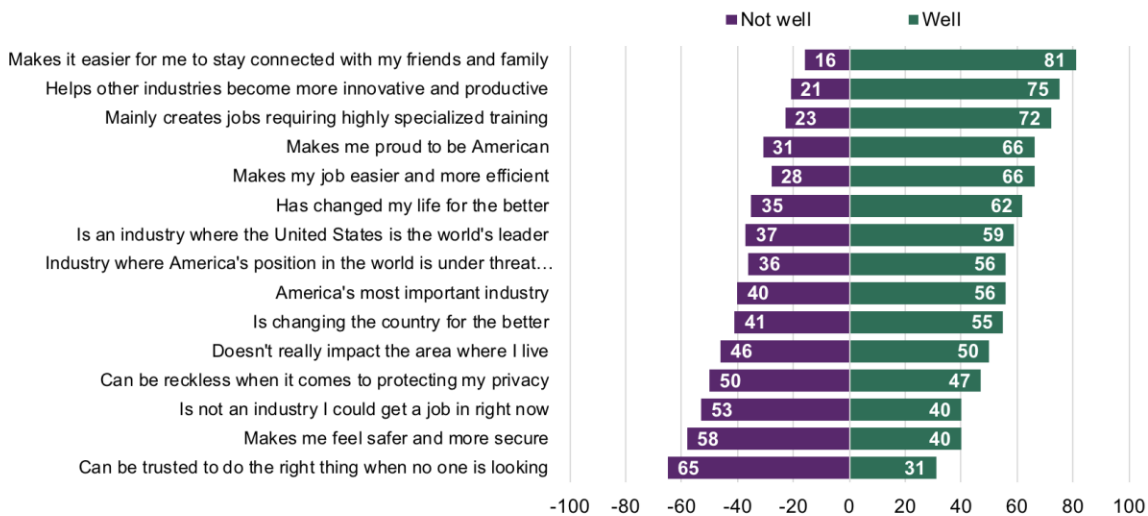
Positive views toward tech extend beyond just an industry label, often centering on personal experiences with tech products. The industry is well-described by “has changed my life for the better,” “makes it easier for me to stay connected with friends and family,” “makes my job easier and more efficient,” and “helps other industries become more innovative and productive.”

More view tech through the lens of their own personal products and experience. A plurality of survey respondents (25%) say “personal hardware” like cell phones and laptops is the first thing that come to mind when they think of the tech industry. This is very much consistent with the qualitative research, where respondents’ cell phones were the most salient example of tech, and kids navigating tablets were a sign of their potential ability to enter the industry.

**Views toward the tech industry also remain positive.**

Perhaps in part because of the ubiquity of personal technology, views toward the tech industry broadly are very strong. On a scale of 0 to 100, the industry on average receives a favorable rating of 55, higher than President Trump (42), respondents’ own governor (47), and their local county government (51).

Please tell me whether this statement describes the tech industry very well, well, not too well, or not at all well.



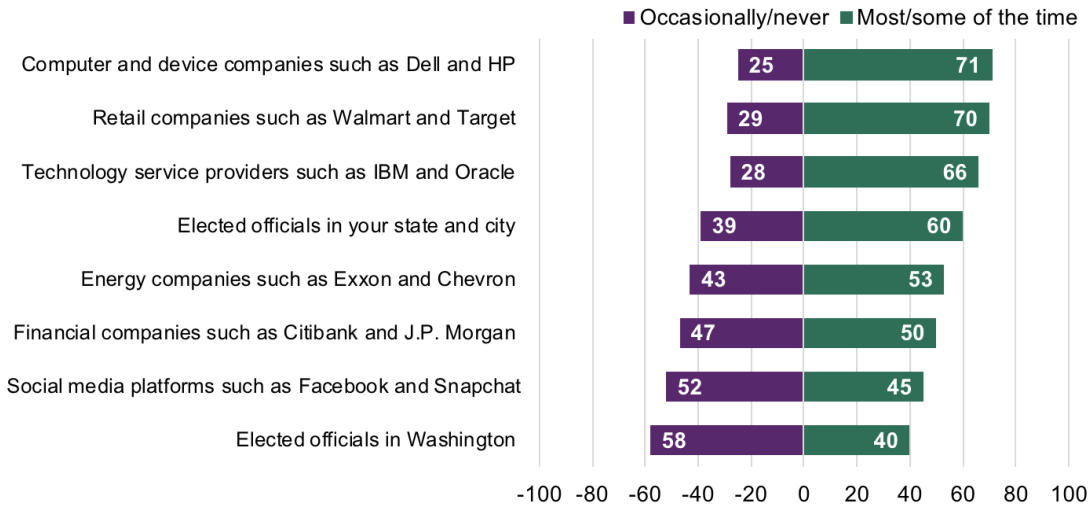
College men feel particularly intensely about their views on these measures. Six in ten college-educated men say tech “makes it easier for me to stay connected...” describes the industry very well, compared to 46% of non-college men and 44% of non-college women. There’s a similar pattern on “helps other industries” and “makes my job easier.”

**Device manufacturers and technology service providers are among the most trusted.**

Compared to other industry groups, “computer and device companies such as Dell and HP” are the most trusted, significantly more than elected officials both in Washington and locally.

“Technology service providers such as IBM and Oracle” also fare well. In fact, in a handful of focus groups these companies are named, unaided, as examples of tech companies. Advertising-based social media platforms, by contrast, are consistently among the least trusted.

Please tell me if you trust that group to do the right thing most of the time, some of the time, occasionally, or never.

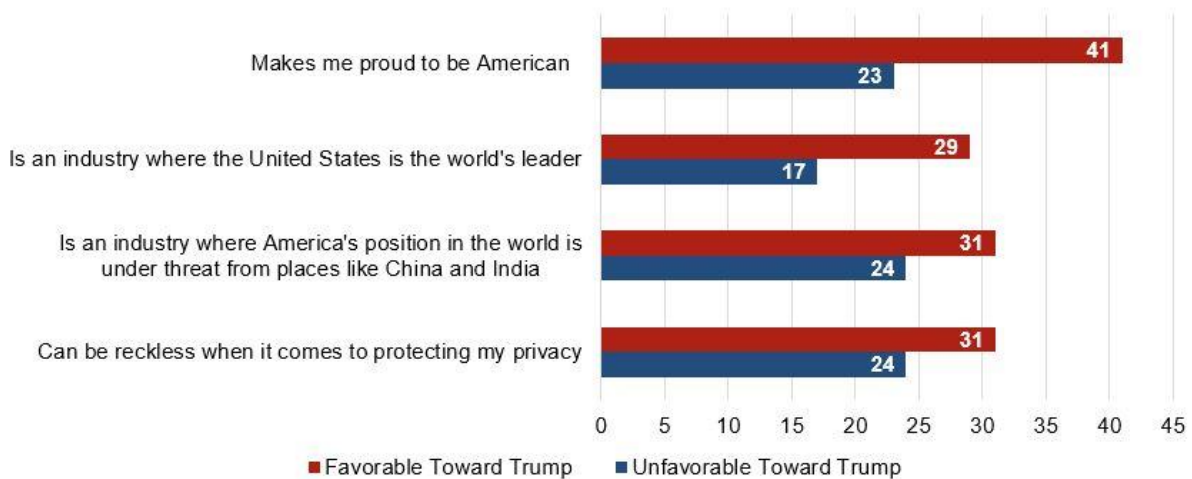


**People feel proud of the tech industry and value its importance to the country.**

Majorities say the tech industry makes them “proud to be American” and that the US is a world leader in the industry. Yet majorities also worry this leadership is under threat.

These questions divide Trump supporters and opponents. Those favorable toward the President are more likely to say the tech industry makes them proud, are more likely to think the US is a world leader and are more likely to say America’s position in tech is under threat.

**Phrases which describe the tech industry very well**



In the qualitative, participants stressed to not to overstate the importance of the industry or their worries about global threats. “It’s not the only thing to be proud of,” many said. Others also felt optimistic about American entrepreneurship, even in the face of global workforce advances. Similarly, in the survey, a smaller majority say tech is described as “America’s most important industry.”

**There is optimism and division on the role of the industry and its jobs locally.**

Just half agree that the tech industry “doesn’t really affect the area where I live.” In the qualitative, respondents grappled with this question; since tech was “everywhere,” it was also amorphous and hard to define. Many cited local examples as tech, like Disney World MagicBands in Orlando and “blinking lights” in Las Vegas. Even learning new software at a plant, as mentioned in Janesville, could count as “tech.”

In both the qualitative and quantitative research, it was surprising to find how many felt tech jobs were accessible to them personally. But accessible is not the same as easy: nearly three-fourths say the industry “mainly creates jobs requiring highly specialized training.” In the groups, several noted they’d have to “go back to school” to get a tech job, and others assumed tech jobs required “sitting behind a desk” and “not talking to anyone.” In the survey, employed men and unemployed men say tech “is not an industry I could get a job in right now” at similar rates; there is also not much difference based on level of comfort with technology.

**Social media drives worry about trust and privacy.**

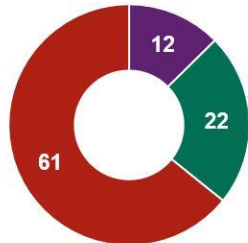
To be sure, the tech industry evokes some worry and concern, particularly when it comes to privacy and trust. Americans are mostly evenly divided on whether tech “can be reckless when it comes to protecting my privacy.” The industry is decidedly not described as “makes me feel safer and more secure” or “can be trusted to do the right thing when no one is looking.”

Interestingly, more than a quarter of Americans hold seemingly inconsistent views—that tech is “changing the country for the better” while at the same time being untrustworthy. Those who hold both these views simultaneously tend to be more tech-familiar: they are disproportionately more favorable to the tech industry, more optimistic about their own financial situation, and more likely to be white Democratic men, white college educated men, or 18-29 years old.

Social media seems to drive concerns about tech’s trust, worthiness, and privacy. Voters trust ad-supported social media platforms the least, hardware and software companies the most. Notably, the poll was conducted two weeks after Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg’s testimony before Congress. Given that and other recent news about social media’s role in the 2016 election, it’s no surprise the social media is less popular than tech more broadly. “Social media companies” are in fact viewed less favorably than President Trump, and when asked about tech’s downside, focus group participants cited social media side effects, like “kids looking at their phones.” Voters make similar distinctions between the need for regulation of social media compared to other tech sectors.

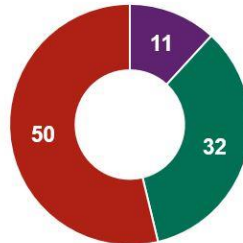
**Q** Next, I'm going to read you a few types of companies. For each type of company, please tell me whether that type of company is regulated too much, the right amount, or not enough.

**Social media companies**  
that advertise to people who post pictures and share stories



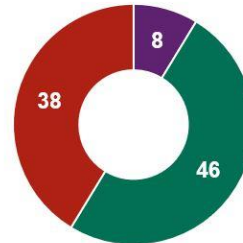
■ Too much  
■ Right amount  
■ Not enough

**Internet infrastructure companies**  
that build broadband and wireless networks



■ Too much  
■ Right amount  
■ Not enough

**Tech companies**  
who make software, computers and devices



■ Too much  
■ Right amount  
■ Not enough

**Despite division on government regulation broadly, when it comes to tech, majorities show support for a variety of specific government interventions**

A plurality say tech companies who “make software, computers and devices” are regulated “the right amount.” Yet, when offered a variety of government interventions, every single one receives majority support. Retraining people whose jobs are at risk from automation and establishing national privacy laws have the most intense support, but tax incentives, new trade deals, and new immigration laws are also popular.

While retraining, privacy, and infrastructure grants are less partisan, even changing our immigration laws receives majority support among Republicans.

Do you favor or oppose this proposal?	Favor	Oppose
Retrain people whose jobs are at risk because of automation or trade	82	13
Give communities grants to improve and modernize their local infrastructure	82	14
Establish national privacy laws so people own their personal data and have the ability to direct what internet companies and advertisers do with it	80	16
Invest more in government infrastructure and technology so people interacting with their government have a better experience getting things done	76	20
Create tax incentives to attract more tech jobs to the US	76	20

Negotiate new trade deals that help American tech companies compete for foreign customers	76	18
Change immigration policies to allow more scientists and engineers to work here	69	27

**CONCLUSION**

At a time of diminished trust in institutions nationwide, Americans continue to place great trust in the US tech sector, albeit with growing concerns about social media platforms. Americans value the tech industry—its role in our economy, and its ability to add ease and convenience to daily lives. Indeed, they are proud of the country’s leadership role in the global technology market. While Americans are generally divided on issues government regulation, many are supportive of proposals designed to support, grow and protect the US tech sector.