

Rating World Leaders: 2016

What People Worldwide
Think of the U.S., China, Russia,
the EU and Germany



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“Do you approve or disapprove of the job performance of the leadership of the United States?”

George Gallup first asked this famous question of America 75 years ago. Franklin Roosevelt was president at the time, and the nation has evaluated every president after him using this single question. Now known as the president's job approval rating, this metric is a staple in modern politics.

Ten years ago, we decided to pose this same question to the entire world. And now, every year, people in more than 130 countries tell us what they think of U.S. leadership. Additionally, people also tell us how they feel about the leadership of other major powers such as the European Union, Germany, Russia and China.

Our first global study in 2007 found subpar approval ratings of the U.S. Only 38% of the world approved of U.S. leadership, nearly matching the global approval ratings of China's leadership. Two years later, President Barack Obama took office and approval ratings of the U.S. soared. Nearly half of the world (49%) approved of U.S. leadership at that time — still the highest approval rating of a world power that Gallup has seen in its history of tracking. With rare exceptions, U.S. approval ratings have remained mostly stable during Obama's time in office and have been among the highest in the world when compared with Russia, China, the EU and Germany.

But despite the generally high approval ratings for the U.S., there is still room for improvement. Nearly three in 10 (28%) now disapprove of U.S. leadership — its highest point during Obama's presidency so far. In fact, in 2015, Russia provided the U.S. its lowest approval rating from any country in the history of Gallup's tracking, with only 1% of people approving of U.S. leadership.

But should the U.S. even care about how the world feels about its leadership?

The short answer is yes.

Global thought leader Joseph Nye popularized a concept known as soft power, which refers to the amount of power countries possess outside of economic and military might. It is a power of influence that allows countries to get others to cooperate with them not because they have to, but because they want to. Recent research suggests this concept is quantitatively true. Academics at Dartmouth and Sydney University found that “public opinion about U.S. foreign policy in foreign countries does affect their policies toward the U.S.”

The data in this report quantify what people worldwide think of the leadership of the U.S., the EU, Russia, Germany and China. It offers an unprecedented look at how the world has viewed each of them for the past decade; it covers where they are the most and least popular; and it closely looks at how countries in the international headlines — such as Russia and Iran — rate them. But most importantly, this report may be one of the best ways to gauge the soft power of the U.S. and other major world powers.

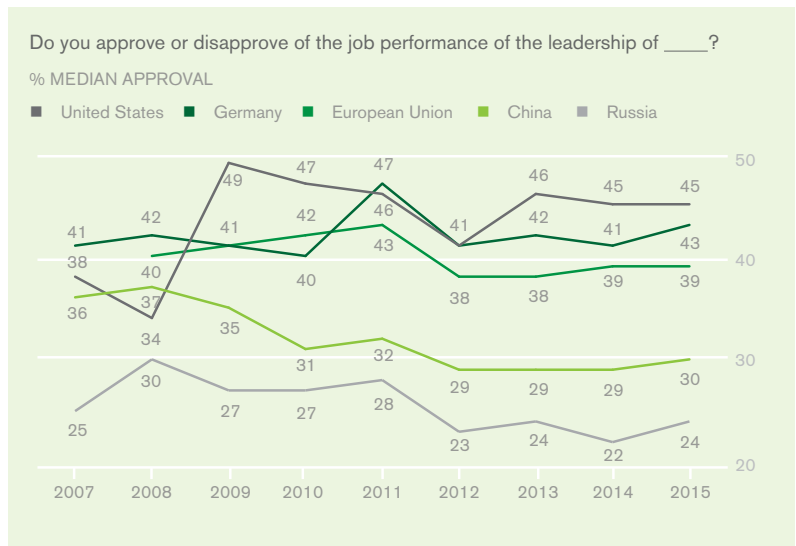


Jon Clifton
Managing Director
Gallup World Poll

Since President Barack Obama took office in 2009, the image of the U.S. has been relatively strong worldwide. Approval ratings of U.S. leadership have not yet returned to the high levels observed when he first took office (49%), but in most years, they have been higher than the ratings for other major global powers — several of whom have had similar continuity in their leadership.

The same is true as Obama prepares to leave office. For the third consecutive year, the leadership of the U.S. earns the highest approval ratings among five major global powers. Median approval of U.S. leadership across 132 countries and areas in 2015 is 45% — unchanged from 2014. The U.S. narrowly tops Germany, which has a median approval rating of 43%. The EU follows closely behind with a rating of 39%.

A sizable gap remains between ratings of the United States, Germany and the EU and ratings of the leadership of China and Russia. Median approval of China's leadership has been stable since 2012 and currently stands at 30%. Russia's leadership continued to have higher visibility in 2015 than in the past several years, but approval ratings remain low at 24%.



Report Highlights



Just 1% of Russians approved of U.S. leadership in 2015 — the worst rating in the world last year and the lowest approval Gallup has measured for the U.S. in the past decade.



Majorities of residents in 48 countries approve of Germany's leadership. Nineteen of these are EU member countries, and another five are in Europe.



Majorities in 10 countries disapprove of the leadership of the EU, with Russians giving the EU its highest disapproval rating (73%) of all countries surveyed. Four EU member countries rank toward the top of the list: Greece, Cyprus, Italy and the United Kingdom — which voted to leave the bloc in June 2016.



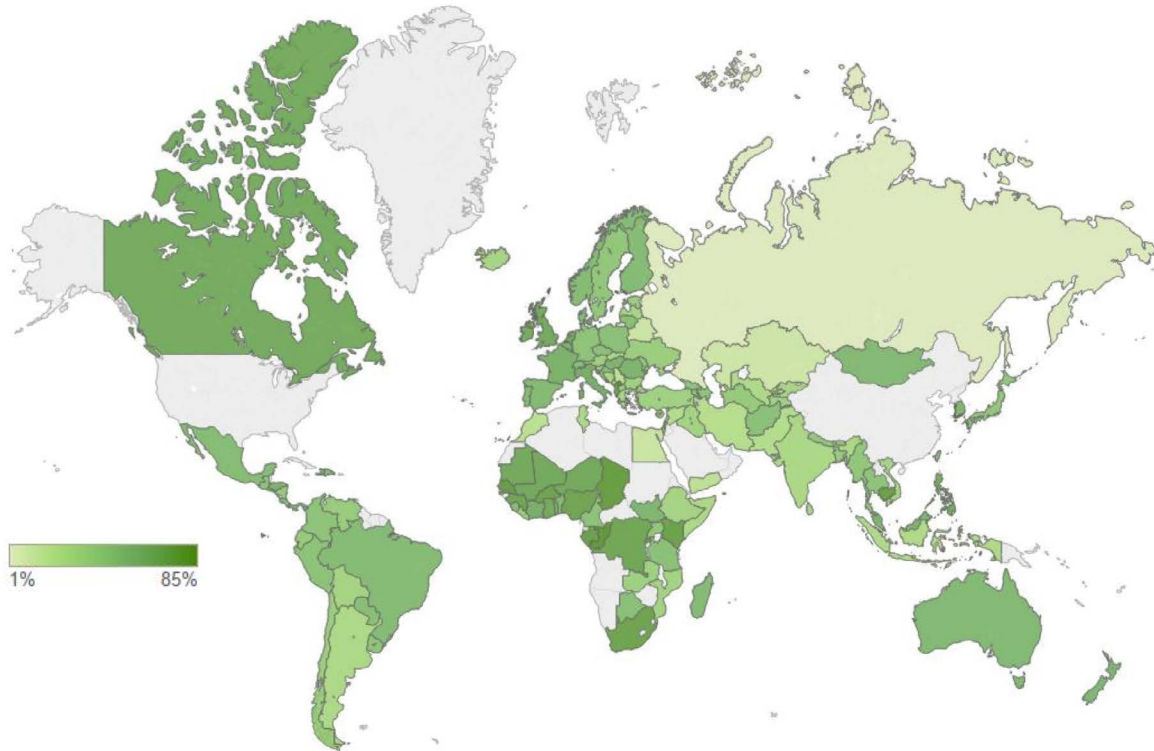
China's leadership remains the least well-known worldwide (the median with no opinion is 33%), as it has been for the past decade.



Russia is the only country whose leadership continues to receive higher disapproval ratings than approval ratings. Median approval is 24%, while median disapproval is 33%.

United States

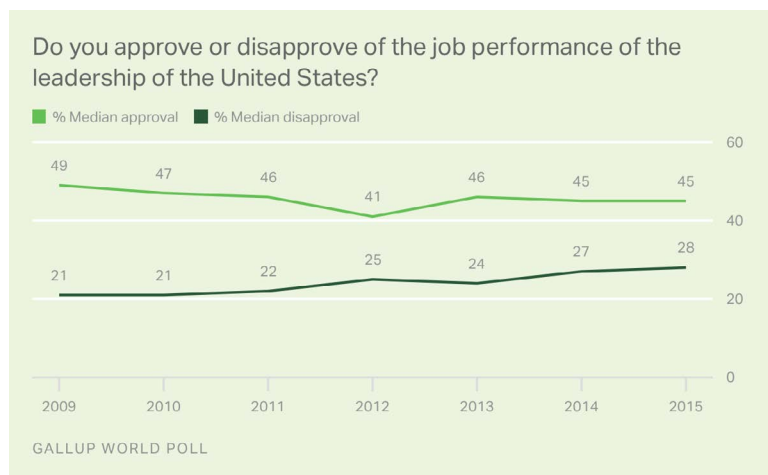
Approval of U.S. Leadership



U.S. Leadership Image Largely Stable Worldwide

For the third consecutive year, the U.S. receives the highest approval ratings of all major global powers asked about in 2015, with a median approval rating of 45%. The rating in Obama's penultimate year as president remains unchanged from 2014.

The 28% median disapproval is one of the highest ratings measured during Obama's presidency, but it is still much lower than the levels seen during the last two years of the George W. Bush administration. The disapproval rating for the U.S. is higher than Germany's (21%), but similar to that for the EU (28%) and China (30%). Russia's disapproval rating is the highest at 33%.



When asked separately to rate their own country's leadership in 2015, 38% of Americans said they approve and 61% said they disapprove. These attitudes have been fairly consistent since 2012.

Majorities of residents in 46 countries approve of the leadership of the U.S. Approval of U.S. leadership is highest for the second consecutive year in Kosovo, where 85% approve. Just 1% of Russians approved of U.S. leadership in 2015 — the worst rating in the world last year and the lowest approval Gallup has measured for the U.S. in the past decade. Remarkably, this is even worse than their previous record-low 4% approval in 2014.

Highest Approval of U.S. Leadership	
	Approve
Kosovo	85%
Congo Brazzaville	80%
Senegal	76%
Chad	76%
Albania	74%
Cambodia	74%
Rwanda	74%
Kenya	73%
Gabon	73%
Burkina Faso	72%

Majorities in 15 countries disapprove of U.S. leadership, with the list dominated by countries in the former Soviet Union and the Middle East and North Africa. Russians give U.S. leadership the highest disapproval rating (89%) among all countries surveyed.

Highest Disapproval of U.S. Leadership	
	Disapprove
Russia	89%
Palestinian Territories	79%
Lebanon	72%
Pakistan	71%
Kazakhstan	70%
Yemen	69%
Belarus	67%
Egypt	62%
Austria	60%
Syria	59%

Approval ratings have declined by 10 percentage points or more in seven countries. Cameroon led the world in declines, with ratings dropping by 25 points. But this drop reflects an increase in the percentage who did not express an opinion (rising from 18% to 39%) rather than a dramatic increase in disapproval.

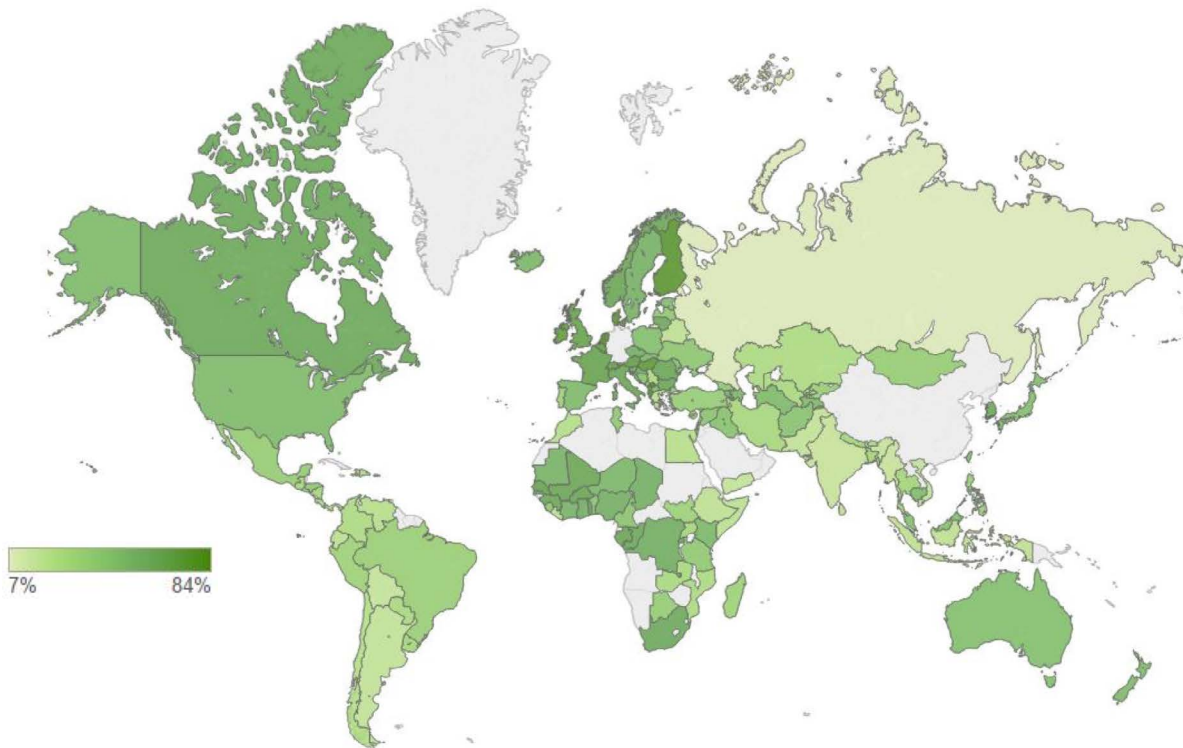
Biggest Losses		
	Approval in 2015	Change from 2014
Cameroon	45%	-25
Zambia	33%	-20
Sierra Leone	49%	-19
Singapore	36%	-19
Botswana	47%	-14
Benin	51%	-12
Egypt	10%	-10

Approval ratings have increased by 10 points or more in seven countries. In addition to Malaysia, which led the world with a 27-point increase, ratings also increased by 10 points or more in Sri Lanka, where fieldwork overlapped with Secretary of State John Kerry's historic visit there — the first visit by a U.S. secretary of state in decades.

Biggest Gains		
	Approval in 2015	Change from 2014
Nigeria	70%	+10
Sri Lanka	27%	+10
Ghana	67%	+13
South Africa	71%	+13
Kenya	73%	+15
Uruguay	44%	+15
Malaysia	56%	+27

Germany

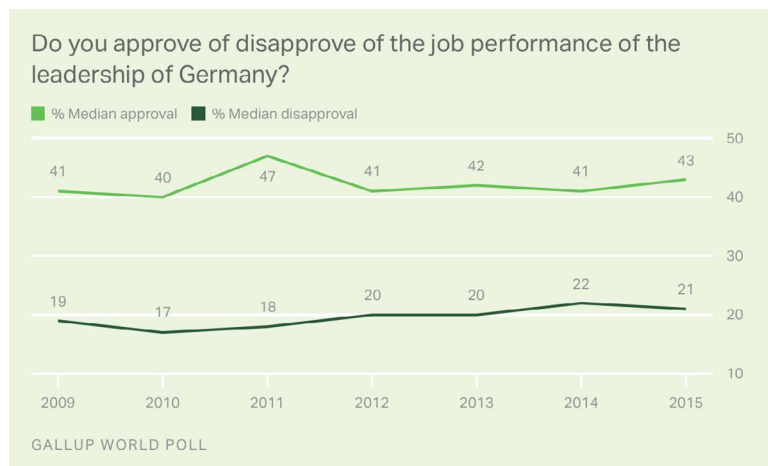
Approval of Germany's Leadership



Germany Ranks Second In the World

Median approval of Germany's leadership is up slightly from 41% in 2014 to 43% in 2015, and median disapproval is about half as high at 21%.

When asked separately about their own country's leadership in 2015, Germans were much more positive. Seventy-two percent of Germans approved of their country's leadership — in line with the 71% in 2014 and one of the highest for Germany since Gallup started asking the question. Similarly, 72% of Germans said they approve of the job performance of German Chancellor Angela Merkel.



Majorities of residents in 48 countries approve of Germany's leadership. Nineteen of these are EU member countries, and another five are in Europe. Worldwide, approval of Germany's leadership is highest in Kosovo at 84%.

Highest Approval of Germany's Leadership	
	Approve
Kosovo	84%
Netherlands	81%
Albania	78%
Finland	76%
Denmark	76%
Hungary	73%
Ireland	71%
Austria	70%
Switzerland	70%
Belgium	69%

Majorities in eight countries disapprove of Germany's leadership, with three in four Russians (76%) giving the highest disapproval ratings of all countries surveyed.

Highest Disapproval of Germany's Leadership	
	Disapprove
Russia	76%
Greece	70%
Palestinian Territories	69%
Pakistan	62%
Haiti	60%
Yemen	59%
Lebanon	58%
Belarus	51%
Spain	46%
Philippines	45%

Approval ratings have declined by 10 percentage points or more in nine countries. Cameroon led the decline, dropping 20 points from 63% to 43%. But again, this is more related to an increase in the percentage saying they don't know or refuse to answer the question than an increase in disapproval.

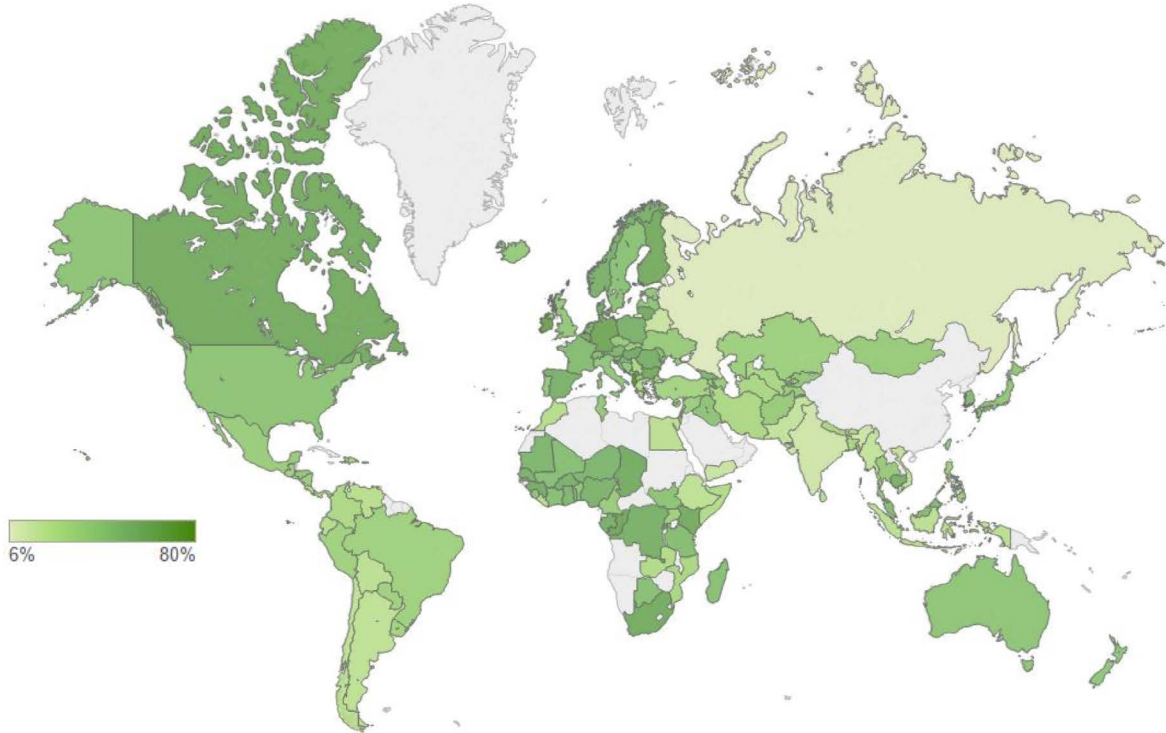
Biggest Losses		
	Approval in 2015	Change from 2014
Greece	19%	-10
Senegal	66%	-11
Paraguay	27%	-12
Singapore	28%	-13
Botswana	37%	-14
Cote d'Ivoire	54%	-15
Zambia	27%	-16
Benin	44%	-17
Cameroon	43%	-20

Approval ratings have increased by 10 points or more in nine countries. Increases came from countries all over the world, but the largest swing was 15 points in South Africa.

Biggest Gains		
	Approval in 2015	Change from 2014
South Africa	61%	+15
Ghana	58%	+12
Malaysia	46%	+11
Dominican Republic	22%	+11
Afghanistan	44%	+11
Tajikistan	50%	+11
South Sudan	33%	+10
Honduras	41%	+10
Uruguay	30%	+10

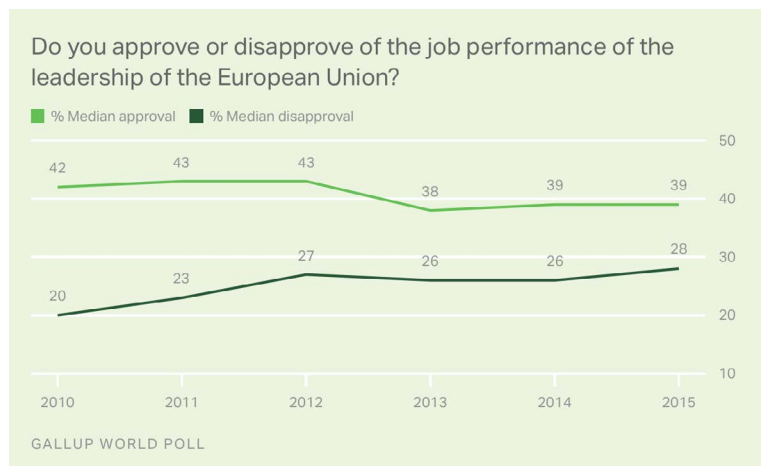
European Union

Approval of EU's Leadership



EU Ratings Remain Stable

Median approval of the EU's leadership is flat at 39%. Median disapproval is 28%, which is on the higher end for typical ratings of the EU and considerably higher than the median disapproval for Germany's leadership (21%).



Majorities of residents in 37 countries approve of the EU's leadership. Seventeen are EU member countries. Approval of the EU's leadership is highest in Albania (80%), which became an official candidate for accession to the EU in June 2014. Russians are the least likely to approve of the EU's leadership, at 6%.

Highest Approval of EU Leadership	
	Approve
Albania	80%
Malta	70%
Rwanda	69%
Ireland	67%
Luxembourg	66%
Kosovo	66%
Germany	63%
Congo Brazzaville	63%
Finland	60%
Bulgaria	60%

Majorities in 10 countries disapprove of the leadership of the EU, with Russians giving the EU its highest disapproval rating (73%) of all countries surveyed. Four EU member countries rank toward the top of the list: Greece, the United Kingdom — which voted to leave the bloc in June 2016 — Cyprus and Italy.

Highest Disapproval of EU Leadership	
	Disapprove
Russia	73%
Greece	64%
Lebanon	62%
Palestinian Territories	61%
Pakistan	59%
Yemen	59%
Italy	57%
Cyprus	57%
United Kingdom	56%
Belarus	54%

Approval ratings have declined by 10 percentage points or more in eight countries. Almost all are in Africa, but ratings also dropped in Singapore.

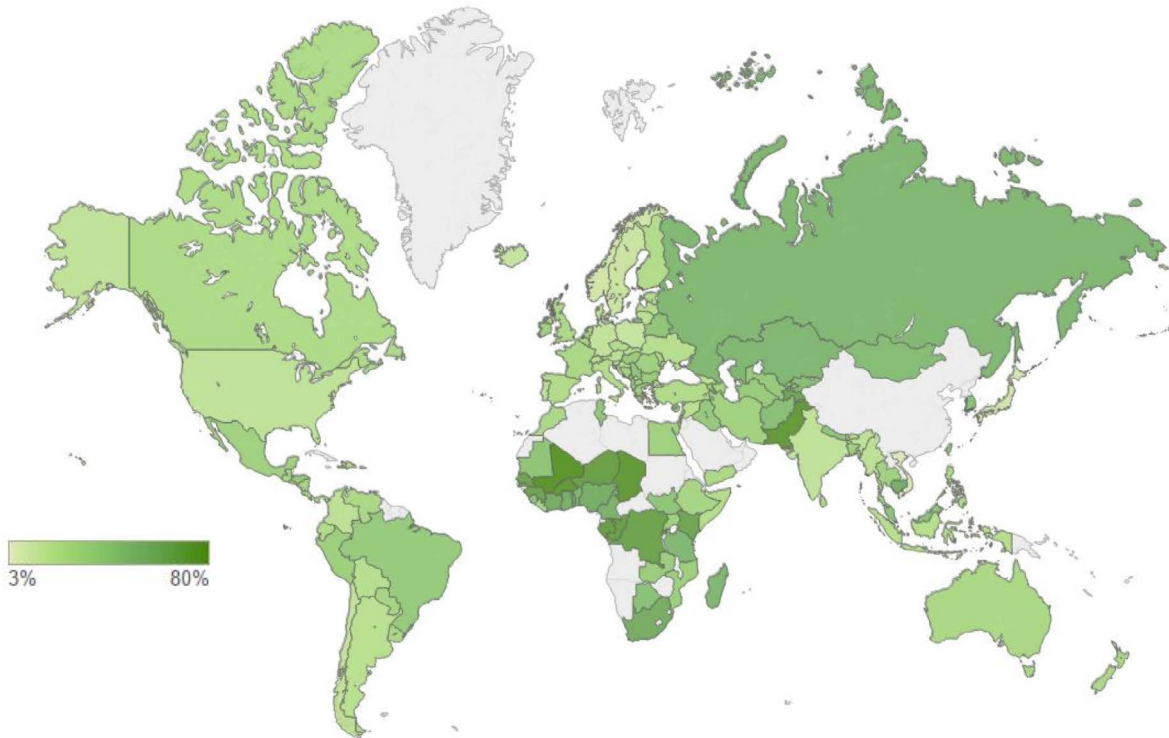
Biggest Losses		
	Approval in 2015	Change from 2014
Togo	46%	-10
Singapore	24%	-11
Benin	41%	-14
Botswana	46%	-15
Senegal	55%	-17
Cote d'Ivoire	46%	-17
Zambia	24%	-19
Cameroon	36%	-22

Approval ratings have increased by 10 points or more in eight countries. Hungary is the sole EU member on this list.

Biggest Gains		
	Approval in 2015	Change from 2014
Ghana	52%	+16
Kyrgyzstan	39%	+14
Uruguay	31%	+14
Hungary	59%	+13
South Africa	60%	+12
Honduras	40%	+11
Cambodia	57%	+11
Malaysia	48%	+10

China

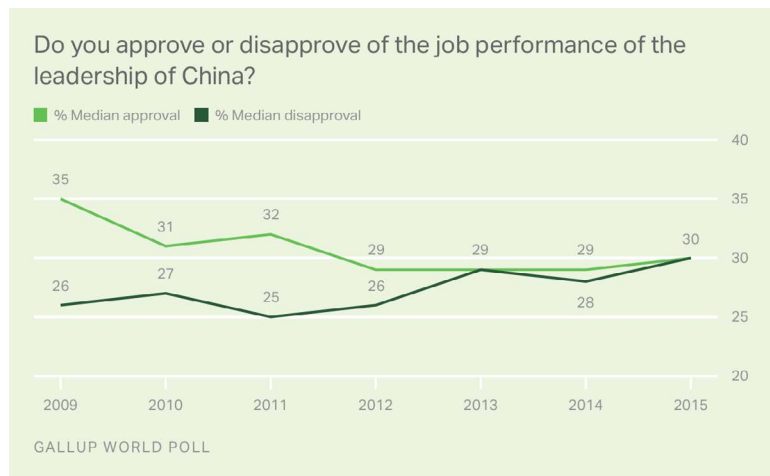
Approval of China's Leadership



Chinese Leadership Still Unknown

Median approval of China's leadership is flat at 30%. Median disapproval is the same as median approval, at 30%. China's leadership remains the least well-known worldwide (the median with no opinion is 33%), as it has been for the past decade.

Gallup does not ask residents in China to rate their own country's leadership or that of other countries because of the sensitive nature of the question.



Majorities of residents in 23 countries approve of China's leadership. All of these countries are in Africa, except for Pakistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. Approval of China's leadership is highest worldwide in Mali, where 80% approve. Residents in 64 countries are more likely to approve than disapprove.

Highest Approval of China's Leadership	
	Approve
Mali	80%
Chad	76%
Burkina Faso	76%
Rwanda	76%
Pakistan	75%
Gabon	72%
Niger	71%
Congo Brazzaville	70%
Congo (Kinshasa)	68%
Guinea	67%

Majorities in 29 countries disapprove of China's leadership. Most are Western countries in Europe and North America, including the U.S. (71%). Residents in 54 countries are more likely to disapprove than approve.

Highest Disapproval of China's Leadership	
	Disapprove
Kosovo	78%
Austria	77%
Italy	76%
Germany	74%
Norway	74%
Spain	72%
United States of America	71%
Sweden	71%
Switzerland	68%
Denmark	67%

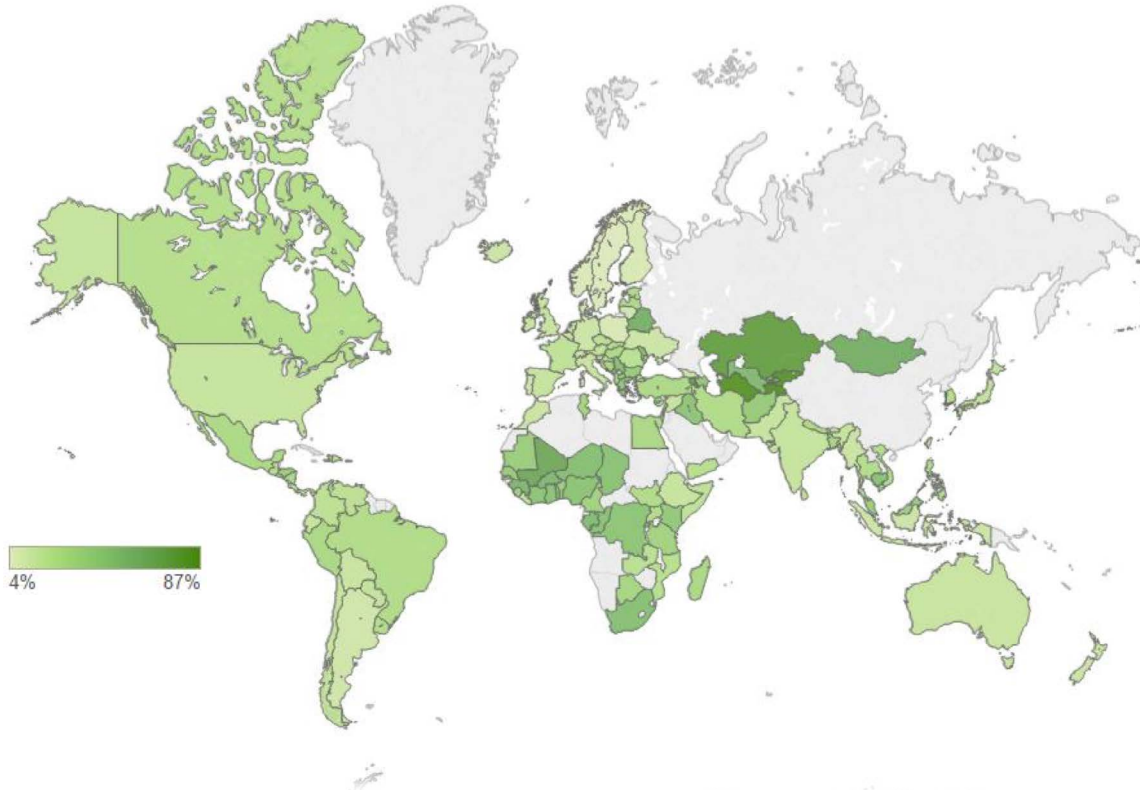
There are double-digit declines in eight countries and double-digit increases in 13. Afghanistan leads the increases in approval, rising 20 percentage points from 25% in 2014 to 45% in 2015. This increase coincides with increased cooperation between China and Afghanistan in the past several years, but the current rating is also more consistent with some measures in earlier years.

Biggest Losses		
	Approval in 2015	Change from 2014
Liberia	28%	-11
Togo	60%	-12
Cameroon	55%	-14
Botswana	44%	-15
Singapore	25%	-17
Benin	51%	-17
Cote d'Ivoire	59%	-17
Zambia	34%	-26

Biggest Gains		
	Approval in 2015	Change from 2014
Afghanistan	45%	+20
Mongolia	47%	+16
Chad	76%	+13
Kazakhstan	51%	+12
Madagascar	51%	+12
Uruguay	25%	+12
Ghana	58%	+12
Armenia	33%	+11
South Africa	59%	+11
Cambodia	57%	+11
Dominican Republic	22%	+10
Honduras	38%	+10
South Korea	43%	+10

Russia

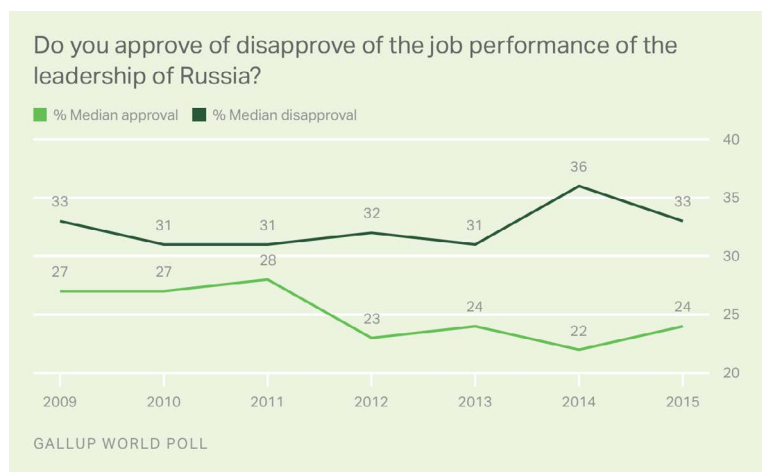
Approval of Russia's Leadership



Approval of Russia Remains Lowest In World

In addition to earning the lowest approval ratings worldwide among the five major global players every year, Russia's leadership is the only one with consistently higher disapproval than approval. Median approval is 24%, which is still on the low end of the trend. Median disapproval is 33%, which is consistent with previous years and still the highest for any of the major powers asked about.

When asked separately to rate the job performance of their own country's leadership, Russians' approval in 2015 remained at an elevated level. Nearly seven in 10 Russians (69%) approve of their country's leadership.



Majorities of residents in 14 countries approve of Russia's leadership. Seven are former Soviet states, including Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan, where Russia's leadership earns its highest approval ratings worldwide (87%, 86% and 85%, respectively).

Highest Approval of Russia's Leadership	
	Approve
Tajikistan	87%
Turkmenistan	86%
Kyrgyzstan	85%
Kazakhstan	75%
Armenia	69%
Mali	66%
Mongolia	62%
Belarus	59%
Rwanda	57%
Guinea	55%

Majorities of residents in 41 countries disapprove of Russia's leadership. This includes 22 of the 28 EU member states, the U.S., Canada and Ukraine. Residents in 75 countries are more likely to disapprove than to approve.

Highest Disapproval of Russia's Leadership	
	Disapprove
Finland	88%
Norway	85%
Italy	84%
Kosovo	84%
Sweden	83%
Netherlands	82%
Germany	81%
Austria	80%
Poland	80%
Ireland	79%

Approval ratings have declined by 10 percentage points or more in 11 countries, most of them in Africa.

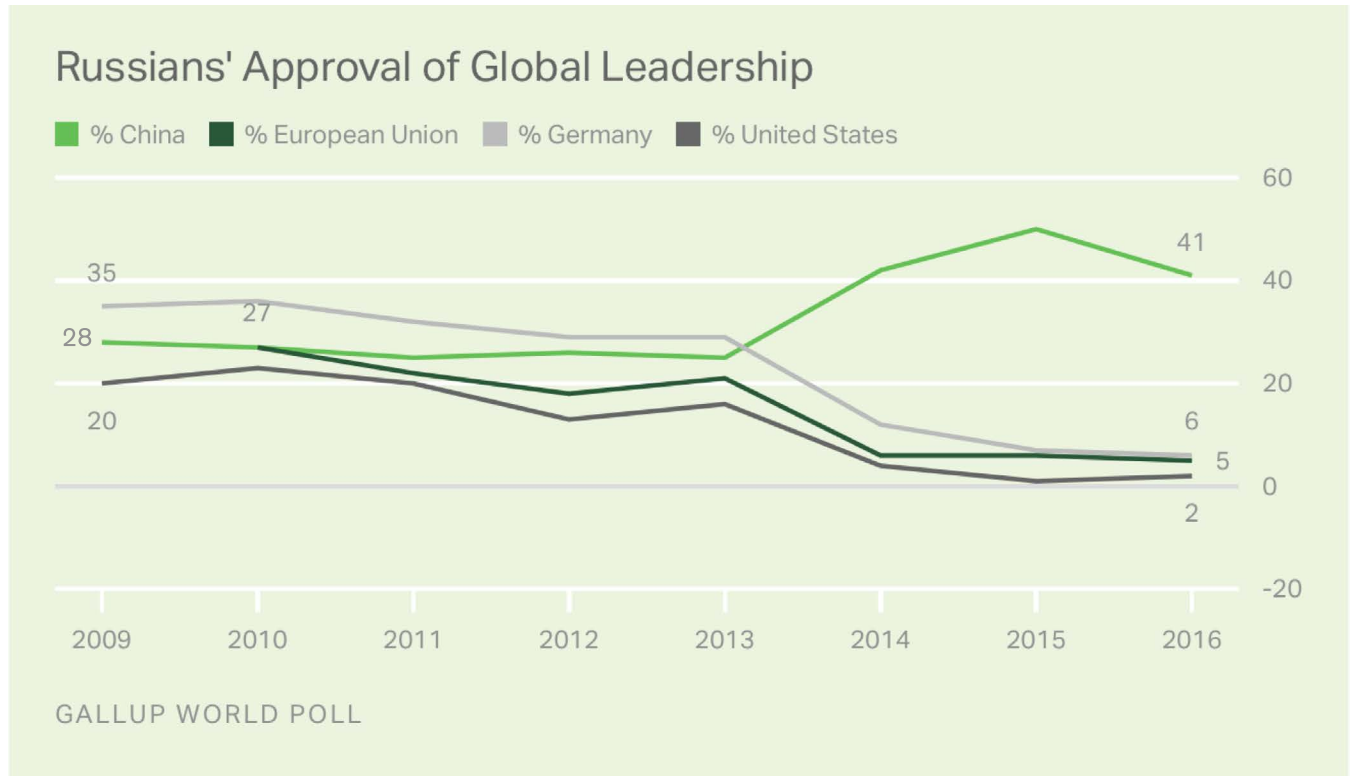
Biggest Losses		
	Approval in 2015	Change from 2014
Burkina Faso	54%	-10
Congo Brazzaville	47%	-10
Guinea	55%	-10
Singapore	14%	-10
Zambia	19%	-10
Cote d'Ivoire	45%	-12
Botswana	29%	-12
Cameroon	33%	-12
Togo	40%	-12
Senegal	38%	-17
Benin	37%	-19

Approval ratings have increased by 10 points or more in eight countries. Mongolia leads the increases, with approval rising from 41% to 62%.

Biggest Gains		
	Approval in 2015	Change from 2014
Mongolia	62%	+21
Afghanistan	39%	+19
Malaysia	36%	+14
Ghana	47%	+13
Iraq	45%	+11
South Africa	49%	+11
Uruguay	22%	+10
Canada	21%	+10

Countries in the Headlines in 2015

Russia

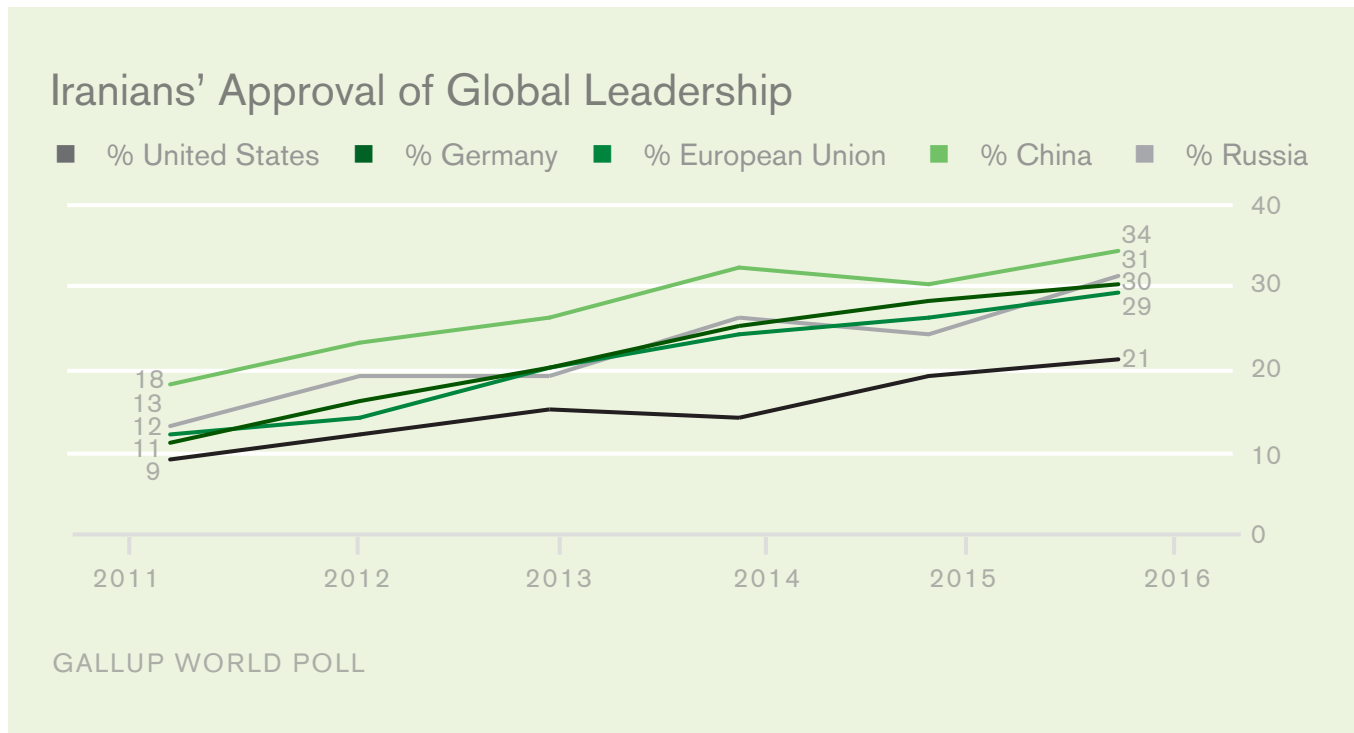


Just 1% of Russians approved of U.S. leadership in 2015 — the worst rating in the world that year and the lowest approval Gallup has measured for the U.S. in the past decade. Russians' ratings in 2016 so far do not look much better; 2% approve of U.S. leadership. Approval ratings of the EU and Germany, which along with the U.S. instituted economic sanctions against Russia for its actions in Ukraine and Crimea, are also in the single digits.

The low ratings in Russia reflect the country's increasingly tense relations with the U.S and the West since the crisis in Ukraine and the threat that many Russians, as well as residents of several former Soviet states, feel the U.S. now poses to their countries.

As Russians have soured on the U.S. and the West, they have warmed toward China — Russia's largest trade partner — as the two nations have deepened their diplomatic and economic ties.

Iran



Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Iran on his Middle East tour in early 2016, but even before that, based on approval ratings, China was on stronger footing with the Iranian public than other major world powers. About one in three Iranians (34%) so far in 2016 approve of the leadership of China. Though this is not a high rating, it is still higher than the ones for the U.S., the European Union, Germany and Russia.

At the same time, ratings of the U.S. have improved considerably since 2011, and disapproval is at its lowest point in years (50%). U.S. approval among Iranians increased five percentage points between 2014 and 2015 after Iran reached a nuclear deal with world powers and inched higher in 2016 to 21%.

Methodology

Results are based on face-to-face and telephone interviews with approximately 1,000 adults, aged 15 and older, in each country or area. Throughout 2015, residents were asked to rate U.S., German and Russian leadership in 132 countries or areas, and residents in 133 countries or areas were asked to rate the EU and China. For results based on the total samples, the margin of sampling error ranges from ± 2.5 percentage points to ± 5.2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. The margin of error reflects the influence of data weighting. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

With some exceptions, all samples are probability based and nationally representative of the resident population aged 15 and older.

Exceptions include areas where the safety of interviewing staff is threatened, scarcely populated islands in some countries and areas that interviewers can reach only by foot, animal or small boat.



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