

SOUTH KOREANS

— AND —

THEIR NEIGHBORS

2016

ASAN POLL

THE ASAN INSTITUTE for POLICY STUDIES

South Koreans and Their Neighbors 2016

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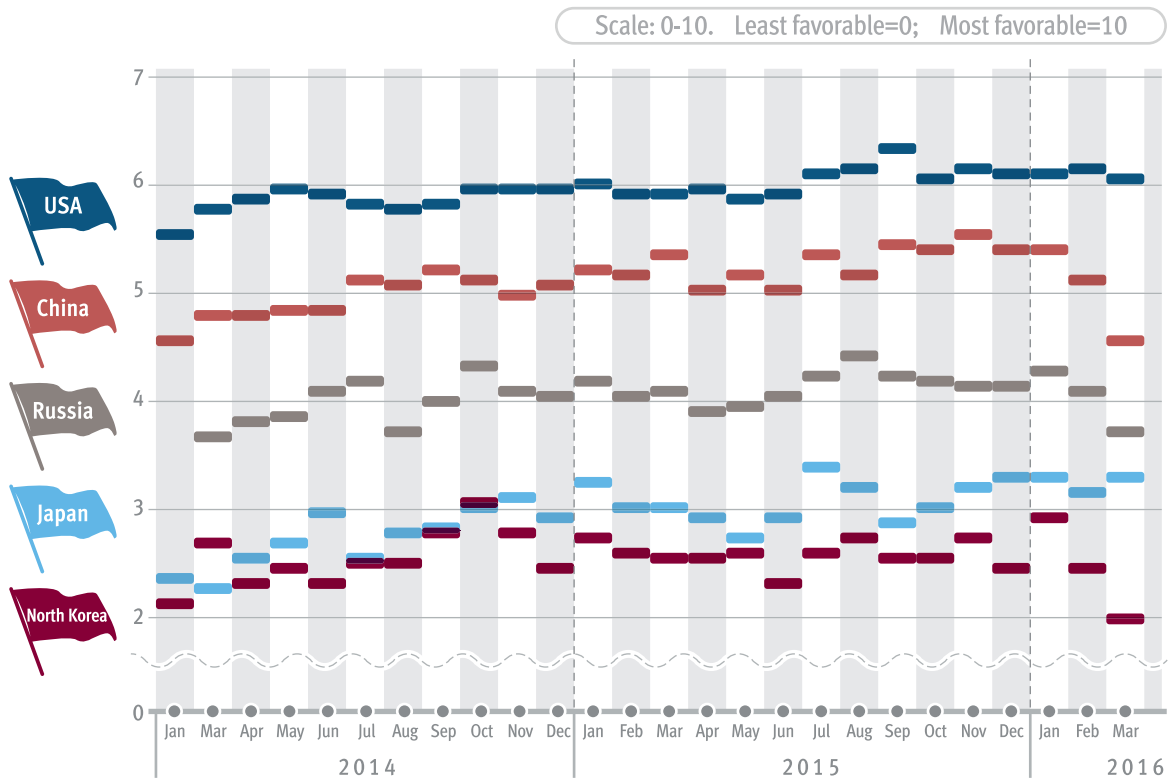
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COUNTRY FAVORABILITY



How would you rate the favorability of the following countries?

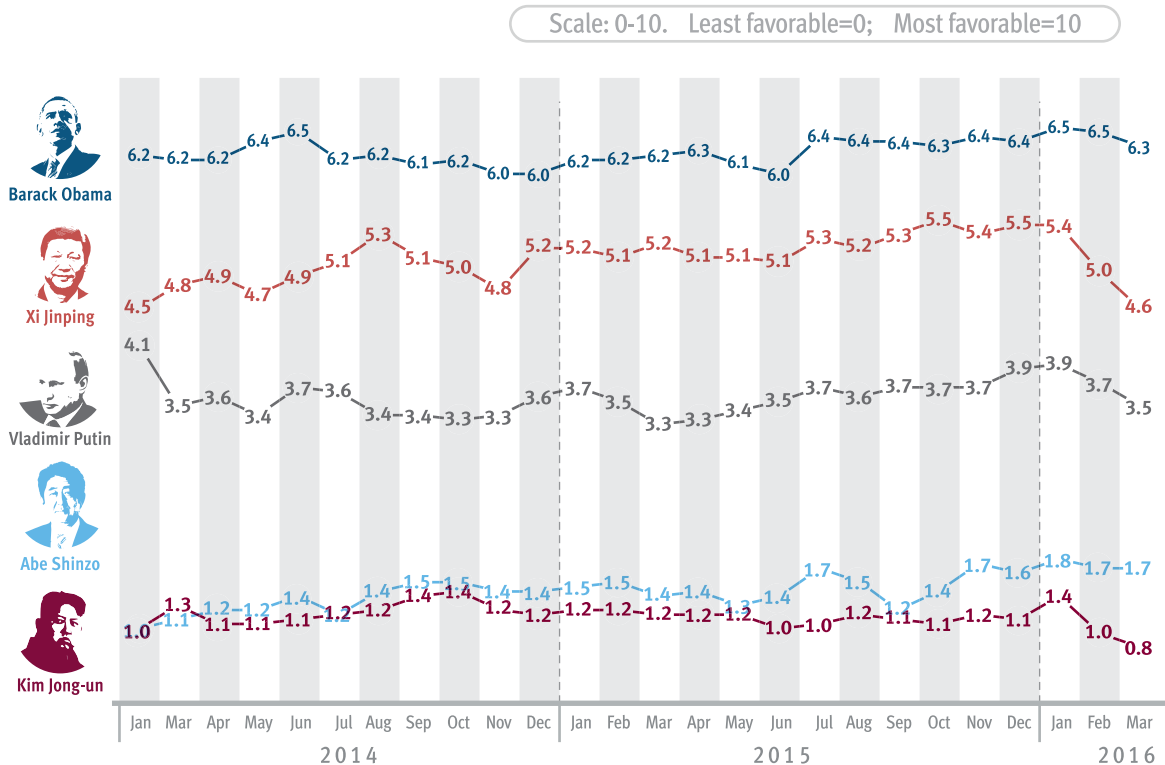


Respondents were asked to rate the favorability of each country on a scale of zero to ten, with zero representing “least favorable.” On this scale, the United States consistently ranked as South Korea’s most favored nation. The rating was especially high during the second half of 2015, reaching its peak in September (6.35). China’s favorability also rose to a peak in November (5.54) when South Korea, China, and Japan held their first trilateral summit. In March 2016, however, China’s favorability plummeted, recording one of the lowest ratings (4.57) since President Park took office. The favorability ratings for Japan and North Korea remain virtually unchanged, although Japan’s rating in 2015 consistently averaged above 3. Ratings in March 2016 were especially low for North Korea (1.98) and Russia (3.73), falling to their lowest levels.

LEADER FAVORABILITY



How would you rate the favorability of the following leaders?



Respondents were asked to rate the favorability of major leaders on a scale of zero to ten, with zero representing “least favorable.” President Barack Obama maintained a score well above 6.0 and continued his position as the most favored foreign leader among South Koreans. President Obama was followed by President Xi Jinping, whose favorability fell precipitously in February and March of this year. Russian President Vladimir Putin maintained a consistent level of favorability, finishing third. Prime Minister Abe Shinzo’s favorability improved after the trilateral summit in November 2015, while Kim Jong-un reached a rating below 1.0 during March 2016 for the first time since January 2014.



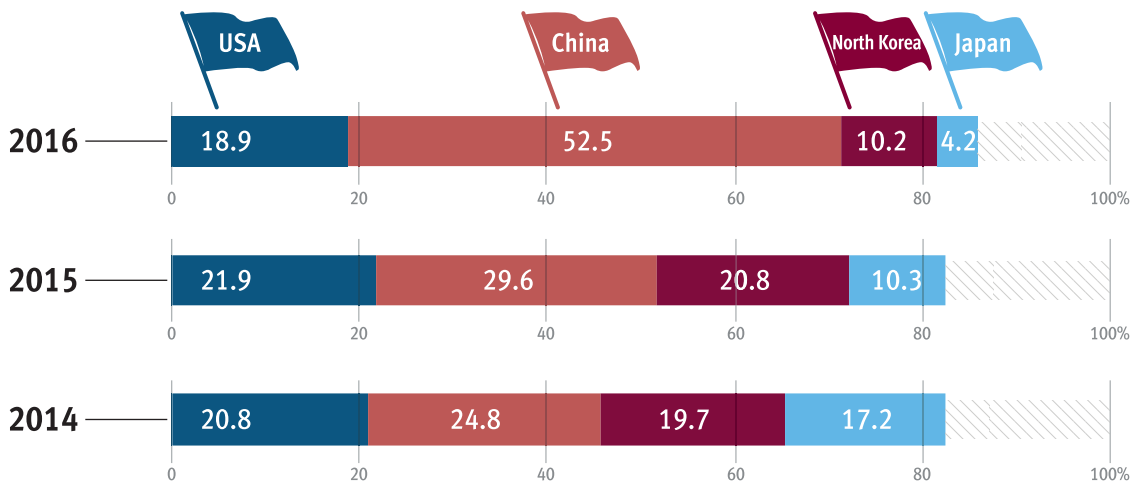
OBSTACLES TO UNIFICATION

2014. 8/20~22

2015. 8/11~13

2016. 3/22~24

Which country poses the biggest obstacle to Korean unification?



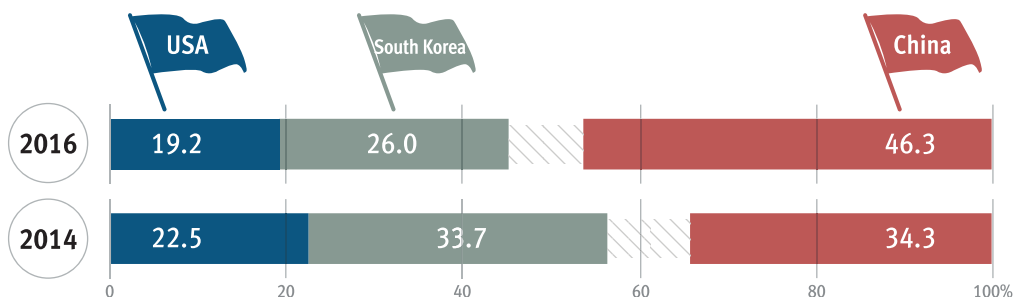
In 2015, China (29.6%) was identified as the greatest obstacle to Korean unification, followed by the United States (21.9%) and North Korea (20.8%). In the span of less than a year, China's percentage nearly doubled to 52.5%. In contrast, those who identified the United States and North Korea as the greatest obstacle fell to 18.9% and 10.2%, respectively.

IMPORTANT NEIGHBOR TO DENUCLEARIZING NORTH KOREA

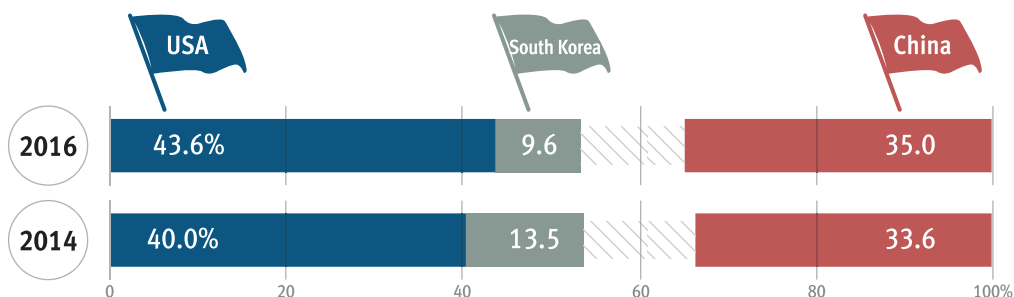
2014. 5/4~6

2016. 3/22~24

Q1. Which country *should* take an active role in solving North Korea's nuclear-related problems?



Q2. Which country *will* take an active role in solving North Korea's nuclear-related problems?



Respondents were asked to identify the country that should take the most active role in solving North Korea's nuclear-related problems. They ranked China (46.3%), South Korea (26.0%), and the United States (19.2%) as countries that should take the lead. Compared to the 2014 results, the rates for China increased while the rates for the United States and South Korea declined. When asked to identify the one nation that *will* take an active role, respondents named the United States (43.6%), followed by China (35.0%) and South Korea (9.6%). The results are consistent with the 2014 results.

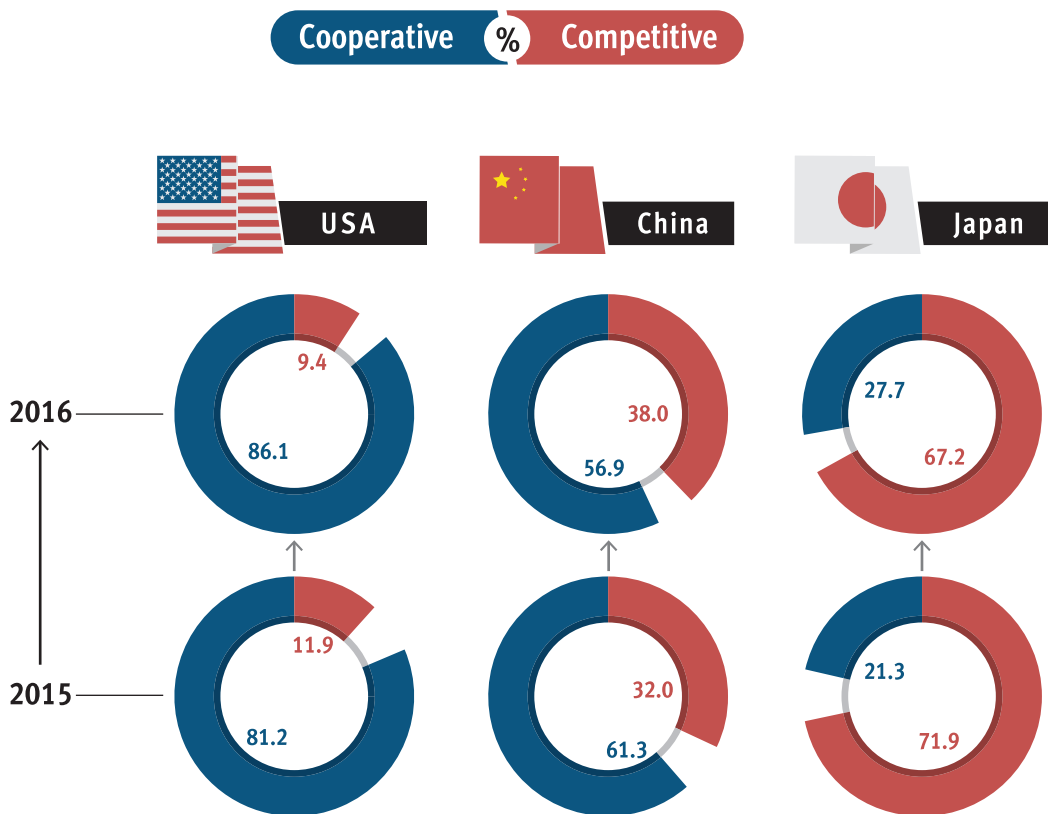


SOUTH KOREA'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH NEIGHBORS

2015. 3/2~4

2016. 3/2~4

How do you assess South Korea's relationship with the following countries?

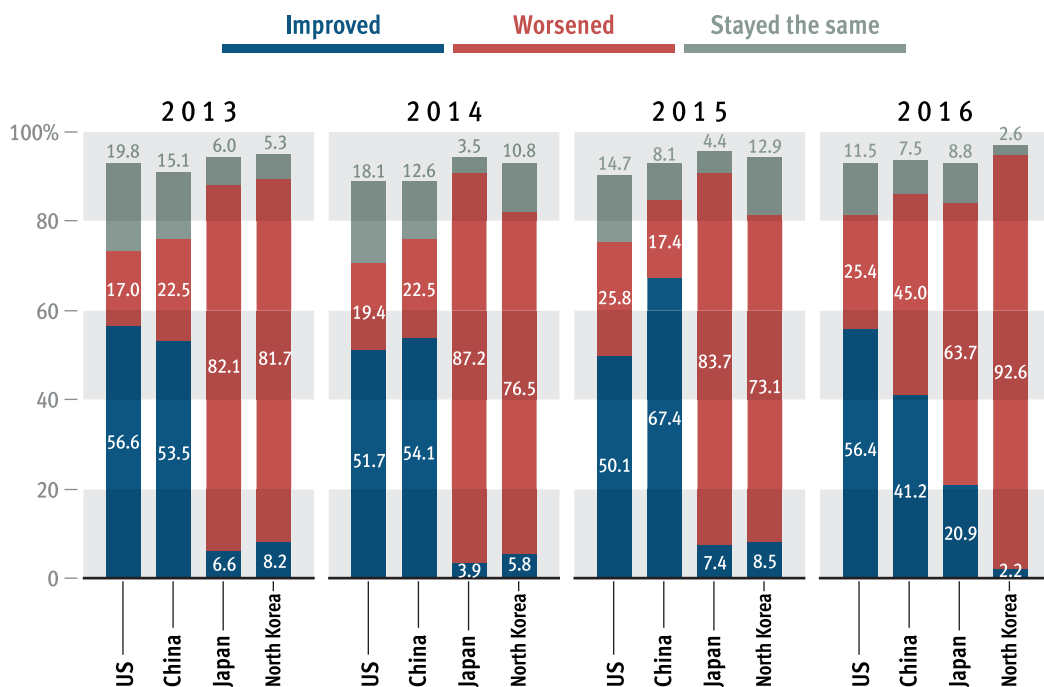


Respondents were asked to identify the nature of South Korea's relationship with the United States, China, and Japan. An overwhelming 86.1% described South Korea's relationship with the United States as cooperative, while 56.9% said the same about its relationship with China. Consistent with the country and leader favorability ratings, 67.2% identified South Korea's relationship with Japan as competitive.

SOUTH KOREA'S CURRENT RELATIONSHIPS WITH NEIGHBORS

2013. 6/7~9
2014. 1/4~6
2015. 1/14~16
2016. 2/17~19

 **Do you think South Korea's relationships
with the following neighbors have improved or worsened?**



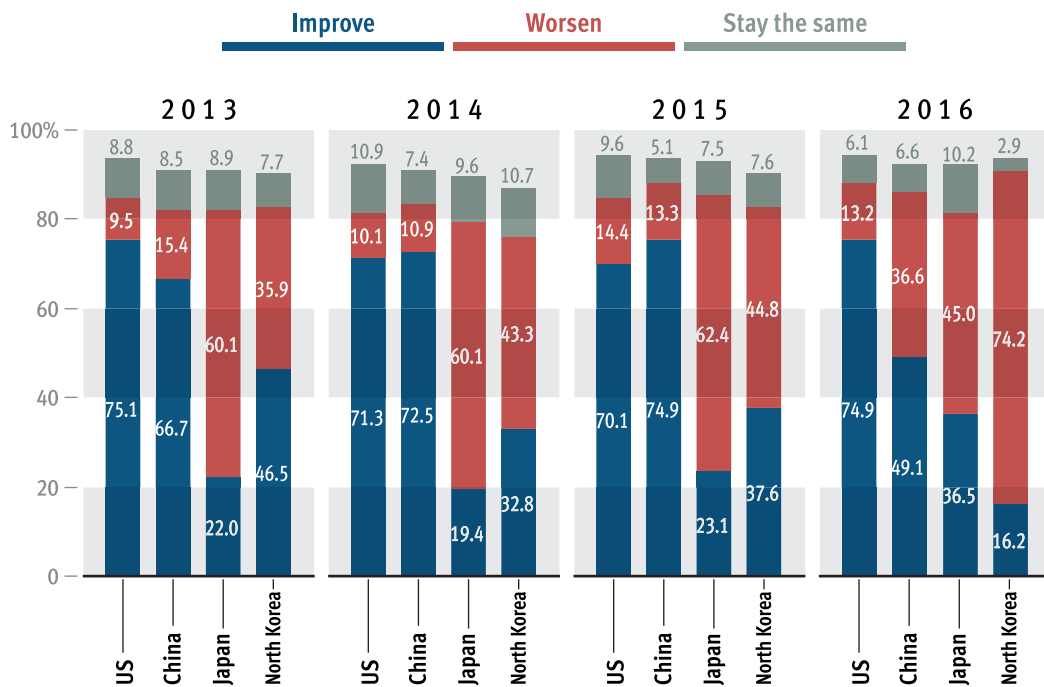
A majority of respondents (63.7%) stated that South Korea's relationship with Japan has worsened. This, however, marks an improvement from last year's survey when 83.7% noted a deteriorating trend. A striking 92.6% indicated that inter-Korean relations have worsened. On the other hand, 41.2% identified an improvement in South Korea's relationship with China, although the figure suffered a significant drop from last year (67.4%). As expected, a majority of South Koreans (56.4%) saw an improved relationship with the United States.



SOUTH KOREA'S FUTURE RELATIONSHIPS WITH NEIGHBORS

2013. 6/7~9
2014. 1/4~6
2015. 1/14~16
2016. 2/17~19


How do you see South Korea's relationships
with the following neighbors changing in the future?

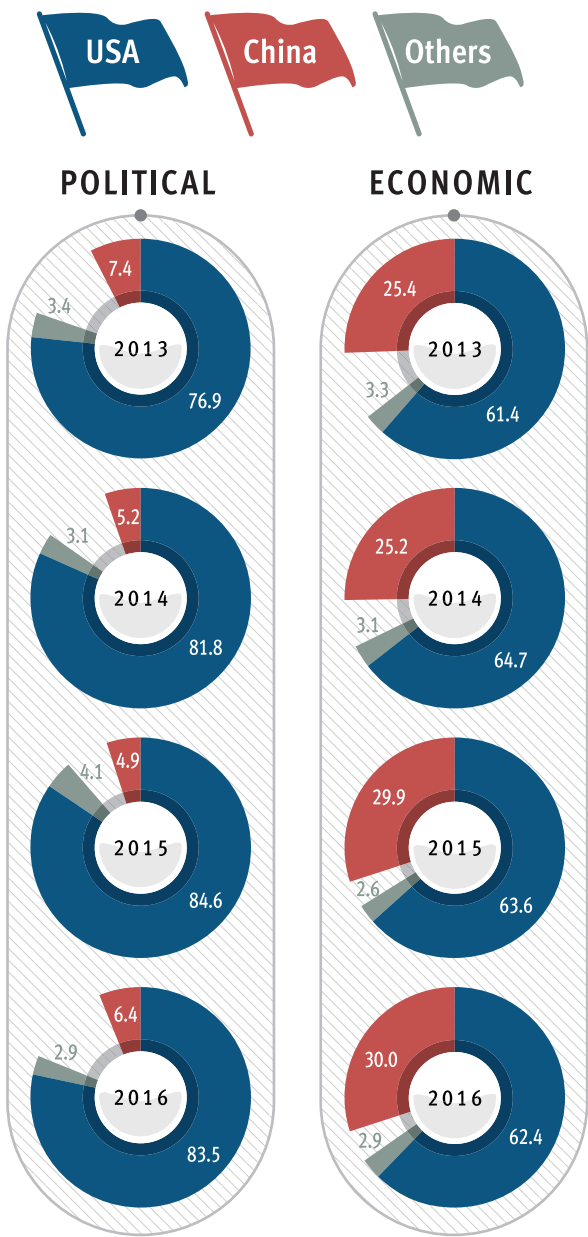


When respondents were asked to evaluate South Korea's future relationships with its neighbors, a significant majority responded positively to its relationship with the United States (74.9%). Once again, the projections for China declined sharply to 49.1% from last year's 74.9%. Nearly half of the respondents (45%) anticipated deteriorating South Korea-Japan relations, although the figure was an improvement from last year (62.4%). According to 74.2% of South Koreans, inter-Korean relations were most likely to deteriorate in the future.

CURRENT INFLUENCE ON GLOBAL AFFAIRS

2013. 7/22~24
 2014. 3/13~15
 2015. 3/11~12
 2016. 3/22~24

 Which country currently has the greatest political/economic influence on global affairs?



Respondents were asked to assess the United States' and China's current political and economic influence on global affairs. In political influence, the United States dominated against China. In 2013, 76.9% said the United States was the most politically influential. This number rose to 83.5% in 2016. On the other hand, only 7.4% reported that China exerted the most political influence in 2013. This figure dropped even further to 6.4% in 2016. China fared better in economic influence (30%), although the United States still rated significantly higher (62.4%).



FUTURE INFLUENCE ON GLOBAL AFFAIRS

2013. 7/22~24

2014. 3/13~15

2015. 3/11~12

2016. 3/22~24

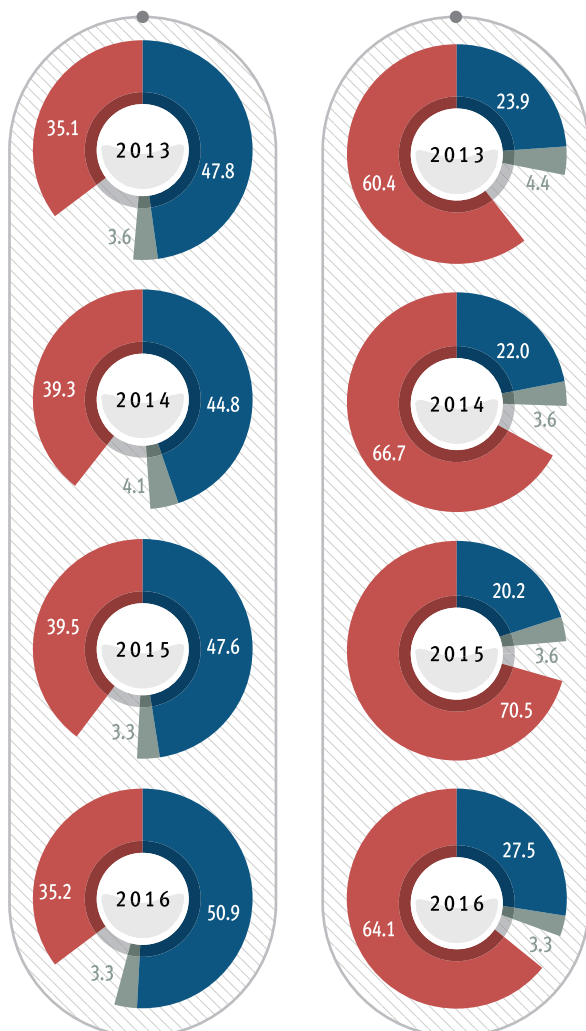


Which country will have the greatest political/economic influence on global affairs?



POLITICAL

ECONOMIC



When respondents were asked to rate the future influence on global affairs, 64.1% anticipated China to have the greatest economic influence in the future, while only 27.5% said the same about the United States. In terms of political influence, 50.9% said the United States will continue to be politically dominant, while only 35.2% said the same about China.

LIKELIHOOD OF WAR ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA

2010. 8/16~9/17
2011. 8/26~10/4
2012. 9/24~10/1
2013. 9/4~9/27
2014. 9/1~9/17
2015. 9/2~9/30
2016. 2/10~2/12

How likely is a war on the Korean Peninsula?



Respondents were asked about the likelihood of war on the Korean Peninsula. Almost every year since 2010, the majority of South Koreans stated that war was unlikely. The gap was the greatest this year, when 34.4% said a war was likely, as opposed to 58.9% who said it was unlikely.



DEVELOPING NUCLEAR WEAPONS IN SOUTH KOREA

2010. 8/16~9/17
2011. 8/26~10/4
2012. 9/24~10/1
2013. 9/4~9/27
2014. 9/1~9/17
2015. 9/2~9/30
2016. 2/10~2/12

Do you support/oppose South Korea's nuclearization?

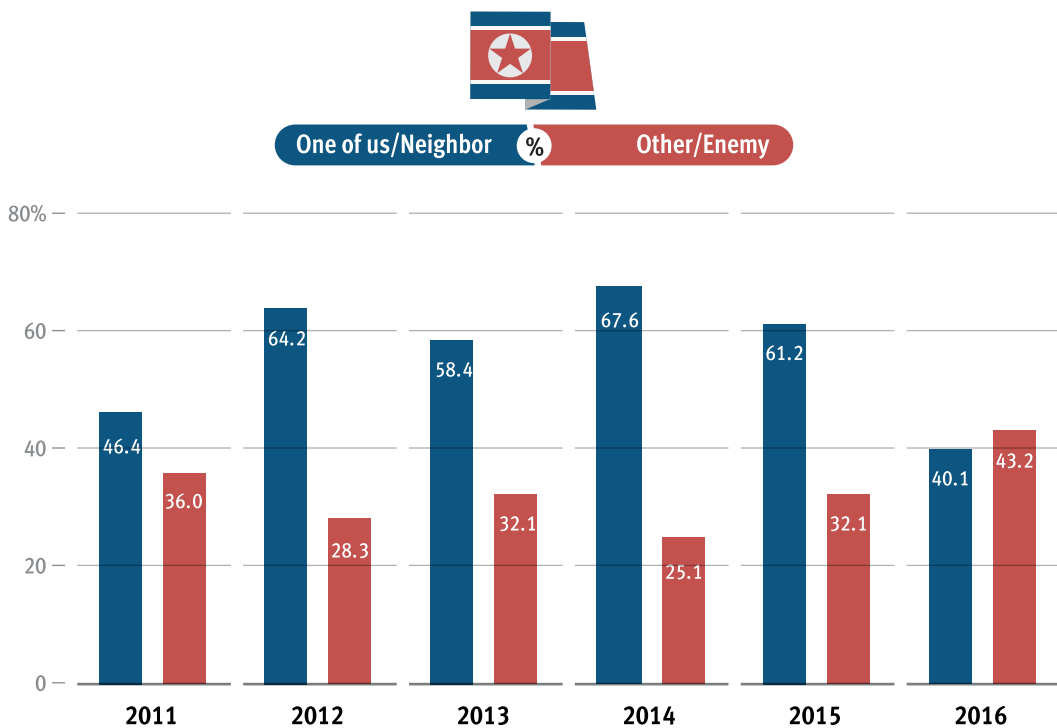


When respondents were asked if they supported South Korea's nuclearization, 64.7% were affirmative while 31.2% opposed the idea in 2016. The rate of support has remained consistently high. It appears that this issue will remain relevant as long as North Korea continues to develop its own nuclear weapons.

PERCEPTIONS OF NORTH KOREA

2011. 8/26~10/4
2012. 9/24~10/1
2013. 9/4~27
2014. 9/1~17
2015. 9/2~30
2016. 2/10~12

How do you view North Korea?



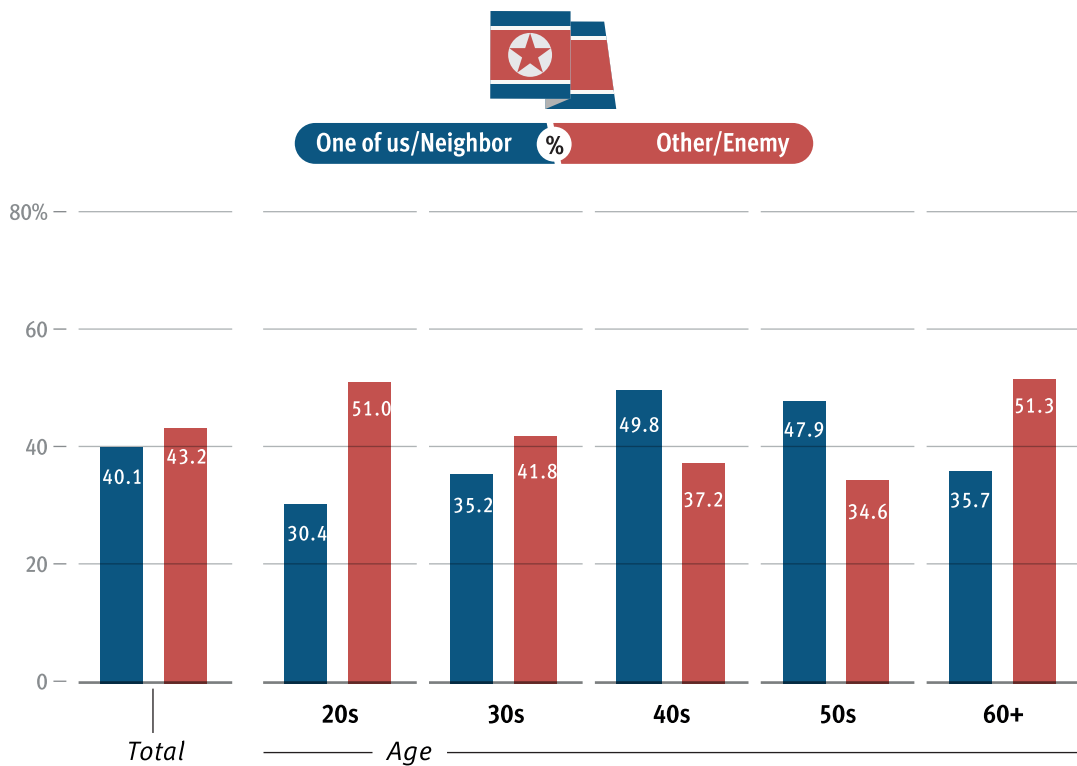
Respondents were asked about their views of North Koreans. In 2015, 61.2% identified North Koreans as ‘one of us’ or ‘neighbor.’ In 2016, this figure dropped to 40.1%, the lowest since 2011. By contrast, 43.2% identified North Koreans as ‘the other’ or ‘enemy.’



PERCEPTIONS OF NORTH KOREA BY AGE

2016. 2/10~12


How do you view North Korea?



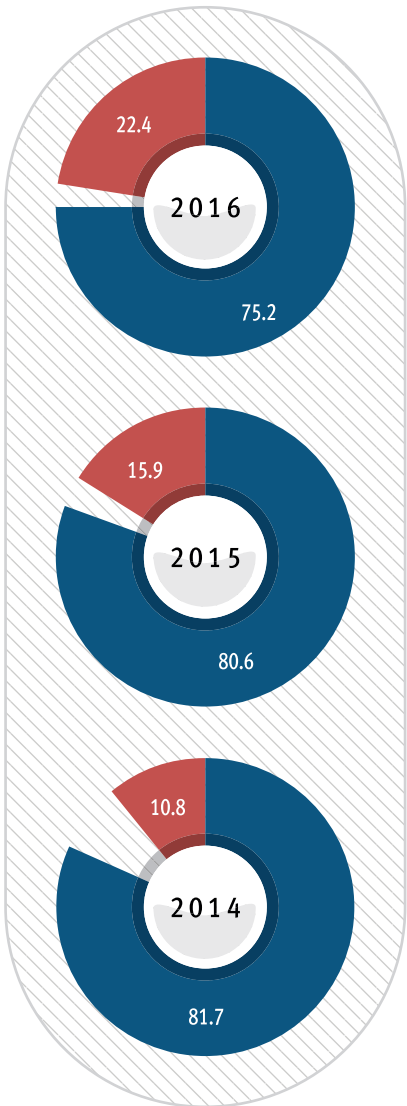
When South Koreans' views of North Korea are disaggregated by age, we see that respondents in their 40s and 50s view North Korea the most favorably (40s: 49.8%; 50s: 47.9%). On the other hand, approximately 51.0% of those in their 20s and 60s and above see North Korea as either 'the other' or 'enemy.' Respondents in their 30s showed the least amount of interest ('don't know/refused': 23.0%).

NECESSITY OF INTER-KOREAN SUMMIT

2014. 10/6~8
2015. 3/18~20
2016. 2/10~12

 Do you think an inter-Korean summit is necessary/unnecessary?

Necessary % Unnecessary



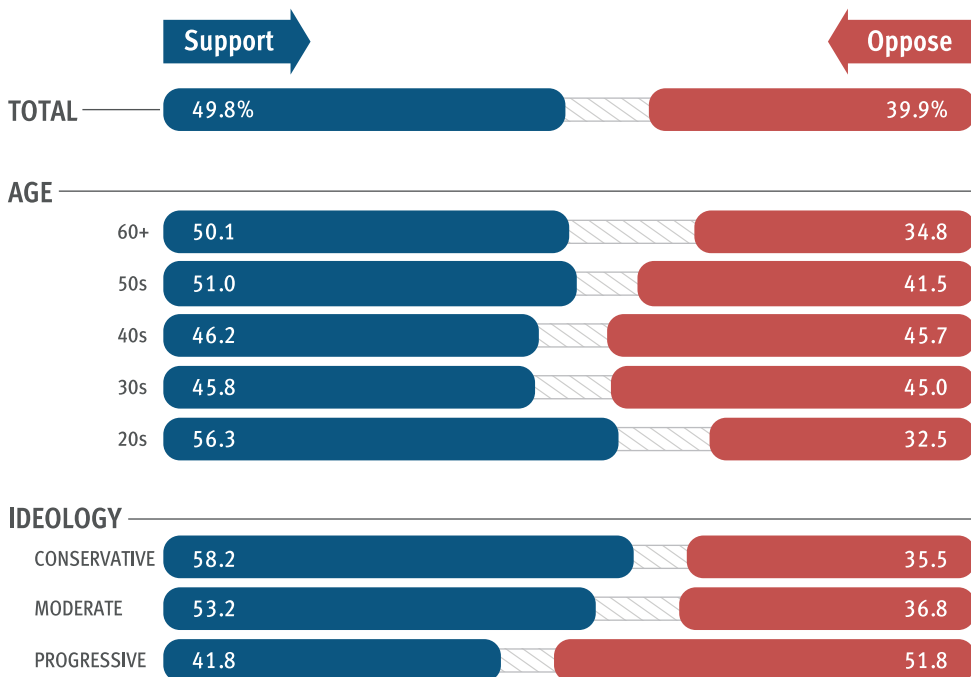
Respondents were asked about the necessity of a summit between the two Koreas. In 2015, 80.6% supported such a meeting. In 2016, the support rate remained high (75.2%). It appears North Korea’s recent provocations had an insignificant impact on how much South Koreans value dialogue.



SHUTDOWN OF KAESONG INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX BY AGE & IDEOLOGY

2016. 2/10~12

Do you support/oppose shutting down the Kaesong Industrial Complex?

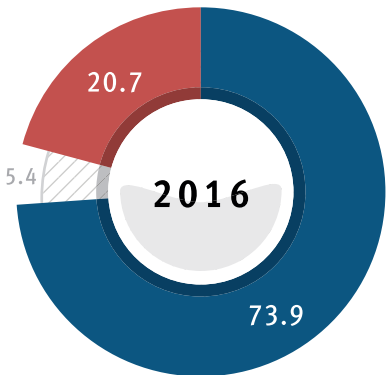
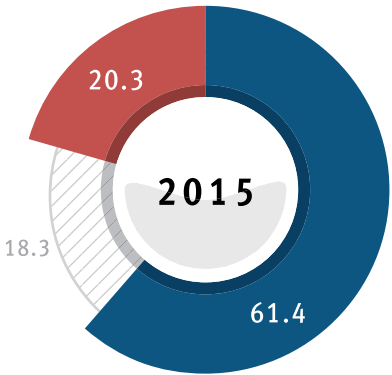


On February 11, 2016, the South Korean government closed the Kaesong Industrial Complex, which served as a symbol of inter-Korean cooperation. Respondents were asked if they supported or opposed the shutdown. Nearly half of the respondents (49.8%) supported the shutdown while 39.9% opposed. We see the greatest support among those in their 20s, and 50s and over. The divide is even more evident when we analyze the results by ideology. Among conservatives, 58.2% supported the government decision, while 41.8% of the progressives said the same. Moderates mostly supported the shutdown (support: 53.2%; oppose: 36.8%).

SUPPORT FOR THAAD

2015. 3/18~20
2016. 2/10~12

Do you support/oppose THAAD?



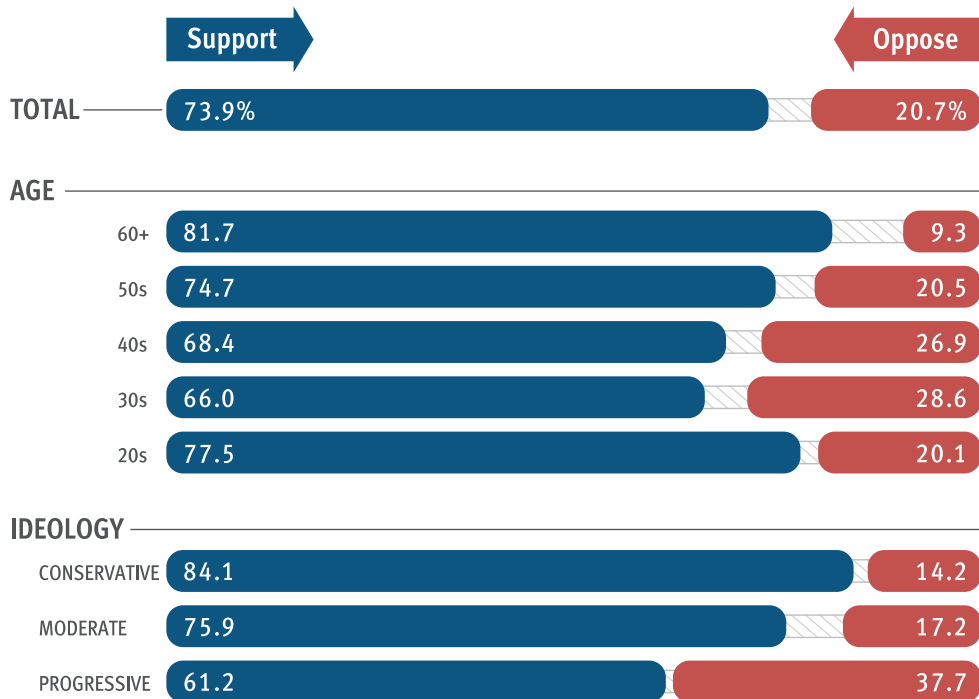
Installation of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) in South Korea has been a controversial domestic and regional issue. While THAAD could improve South Korea’s defense against the North Korean ballistic missile threats, it could also influence South Korea’s relations with China. We asked South Koreans if they supported or opposed the deployment of THAAD. In 2016, 73.9% supported the idea while 20.7% opposed. Compared to 2015, the number of respondents who opposed remained relatively unchanged (2015: 20.3%). However, respondents who supported THAAD rose by more than 12% (2015: 61.4%).



SUPPORT FOR THAAD BY AGE & IDEOLOGY

2016. 2/10~12

Do you support/oppose THAAD?



Breakdown by age reveals that support for THAAD is broad and deep across all age categories. South Koreans who are 60 and older were the most vocal (81.7%), followed by respondents in their 20s (77.5%). The divide was more apparent across ideology as 84.1% of conservatives supported THAAD in contrast to 61.2% of progressives.

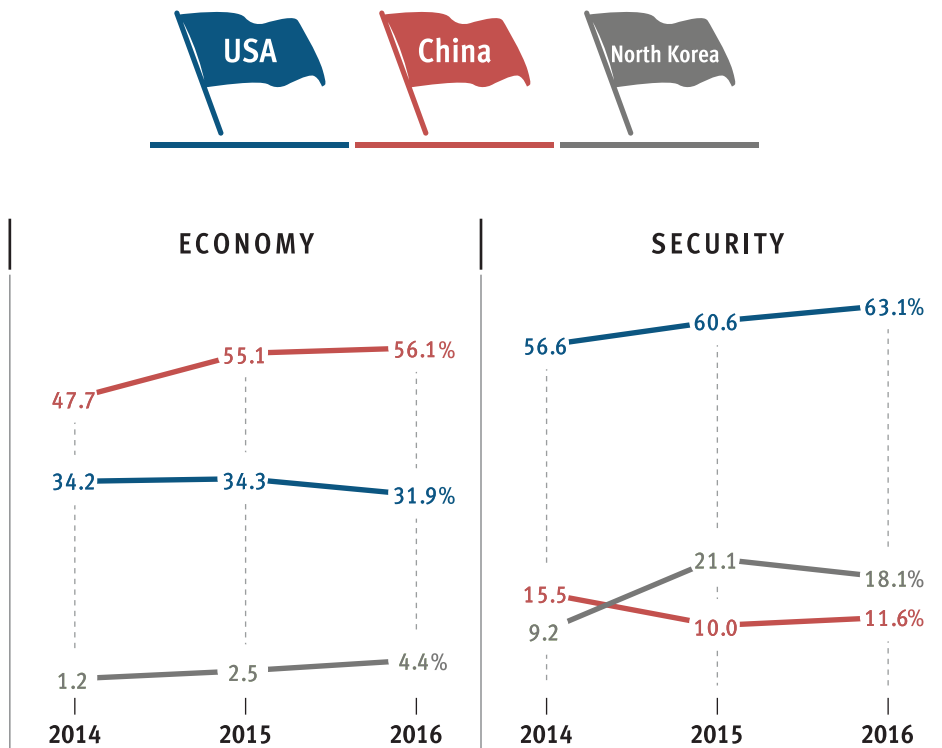
MOST IMPORTANT NEIGHBOR FOR SOUTH KOREA'S ECONOMY/SECURITY

2014. 3/10~12

2015. 3/18~20

2016. 3/22~24

 Which country is most important for South Korea's economy/security?



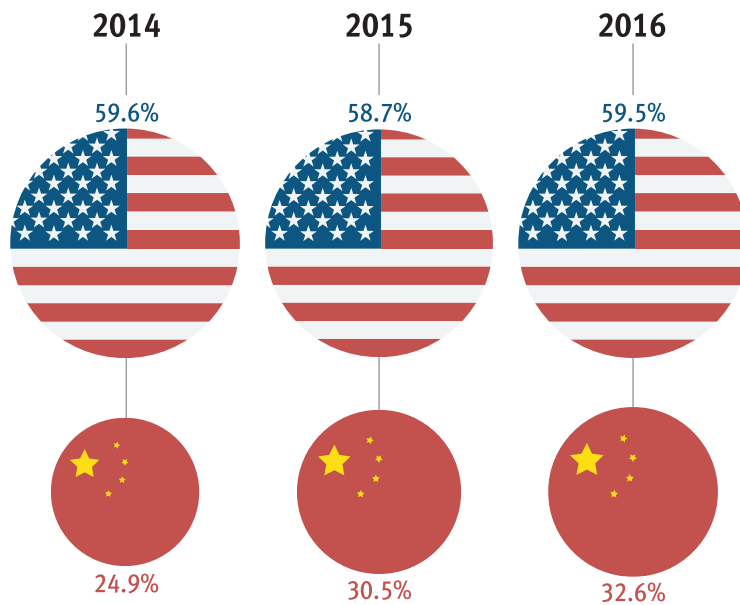
Respondents were asked to identify the most important neighbor for South Korea's security and economy. Economically, 56.1% chose China as South Korea's most important neighbor, while 31.9% identified the United States as such. Breakdown by age reveals that all age groups chose China over the United States as the most economically important neighbor. The numbers were particularly high among respondents in their 40s (71.5%) and 50s (62.6%). Meanwhile, 63.1% chose the United States as South Korea's most important security partner. In particular, 69.5% of respondents in their 50s and 66.9% of those aged 60 and older chose the United States over China. Lastly, 18.1% chose North Korea as the most important country for South Korea's security. This was larger than the support for China (11.6%).



SOUTH KOREA IN BETWEEN THE US & CHINA

2014. 7/4~6
2015. 3/11~12
2016. 3/22~24


 If the US and China continue their rivalry,
which country should South Korea strengthen ties with?

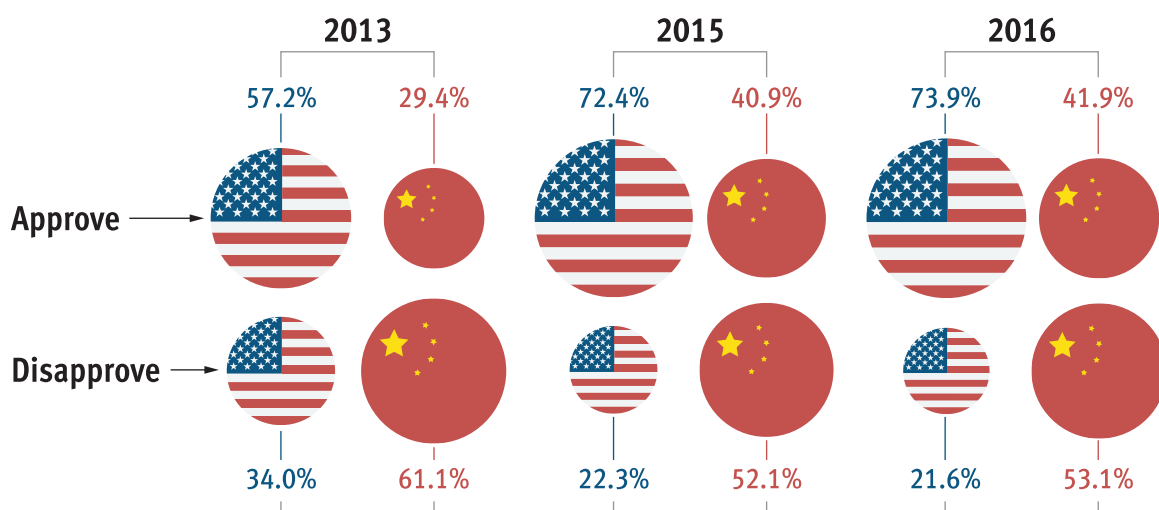


When asked which country South Korea should strengthen ties with if the United States and China continue their rivalry, a majority of the respondents chose the United States (59.5%) over China (32.6%). Breakdown by age reveals the highest preference for the United States by respondents who are 60 and older (68.2%), followed by respondents in their 30s (61.4%).

INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP

2013. 9/2~4
2015. 3/11~12
2016. 3/22~24

 Do you approve/disapprove the leadership of US/China in global affairs?



When respondents were asked to assess the role of the United States and China in global affairs, 73.9% approved of the American leadership while only 21.6% disapproved. They were less receptive to the Chinese leadership as 41.9% approved and 53.1% disapproved. These approval ratings for the United States and China were similar to those from 2015.

For more details on polling methodology,
please visit [**www.asaninst.org/eng**](http://www.asaninst.org/eng)



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