
Rating World Leaders

The U.S. vs. Germany, China and Russia

2024



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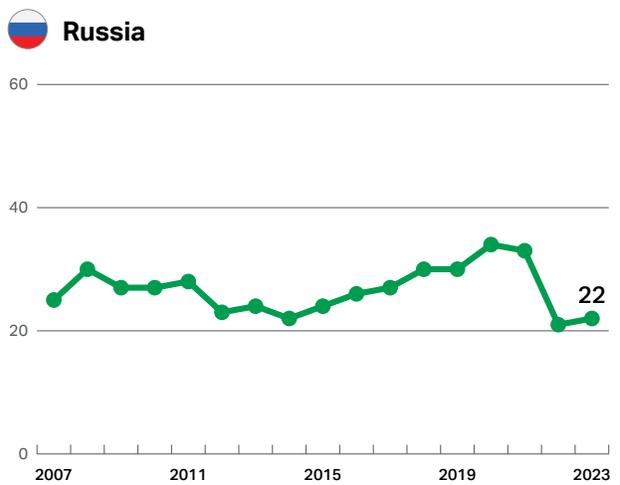
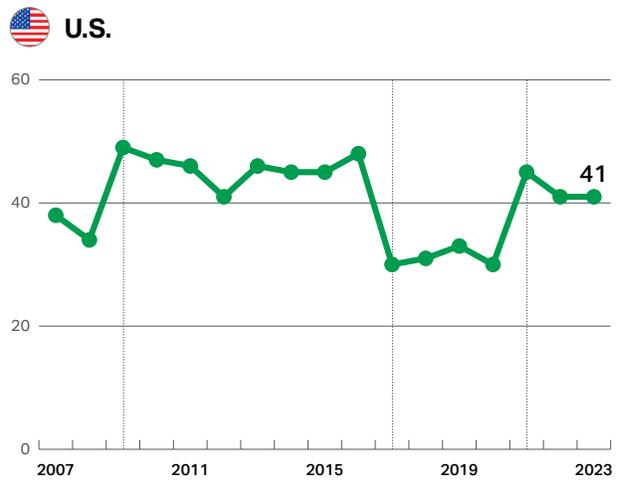
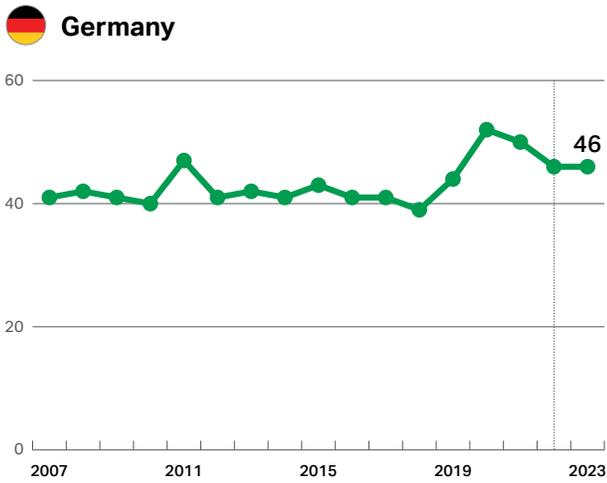
Table of Contents

2	Global Leadership Ratings
3	Ratings for U.S., German Leadership Remain Stable
4	Global Approval of U.S. Leadership
5	U.S. Approval Steady Before Election Year
6	Notable Losses and Gains
8	Global Approval of Russia's Leadership
9	Inside Russia's Unpopularity
11	U.S. Leadership Approval in Europe
12	Europe: Approval Steady, but Disappointment Is Clear
14	Germany Increases Lead in Europe, Russia Deeply Unpopular
15	U.S. Leadership Approval in the Americas
16	Americas: Approval Ratings Tepid, Closely Divided
18	U.S. Still on Top in the Americas
19	U.S. Leadership Approval in Asia
20	Asia: U.S. Leadership Ratings Split in 2023
22	Germany Leads Approval Ratings in Asia
23	U.S. Leadership Approval in Africa
24	Africa: Shining Spot for U.S. Leadership Starts to Show Wear
26	China Leads in Africa, Russia Regains Ground
27	Comparisons of Soft Power Indicators
29	Relative Soft Power
31	Implications Beyond 2024
32	Methodology

Global Leadership Ratings

APPROVAL OF GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

— Median approval (%) ····· Change in leader



Ratings for U.S., German Leadership Remain Stable

Russia still globally unpopular

Gallup surveys in more than 130 countries show that the world order remained largely unchanged in 2023. With approval ratings stuck in the 40s, neither the U.S. nor Germany received a global endorsement of their leadership. However, both were still in much stronger positions than China and Russia — whose approval rating remained near a record low after its invasion of Ukraine.

In the third year of Joe Biden's presidency, the median global approval rating of U.S. leadership stood at 41% across 133 countries and territories. This rating is the same as the previous year and lower than the 45% approval rating received during his first full year in office.

In the second full year under Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Germany remained the top-rated global power for the seventh year in a row. In 2023, median approval of Germany's leadership across 134 countries and territories stood at 46% — unchanged from 2022. Both ratings are down from 50% in 2021 but are still higher than most throughout former Chancellor Angela Merkel's lengthy tenure.

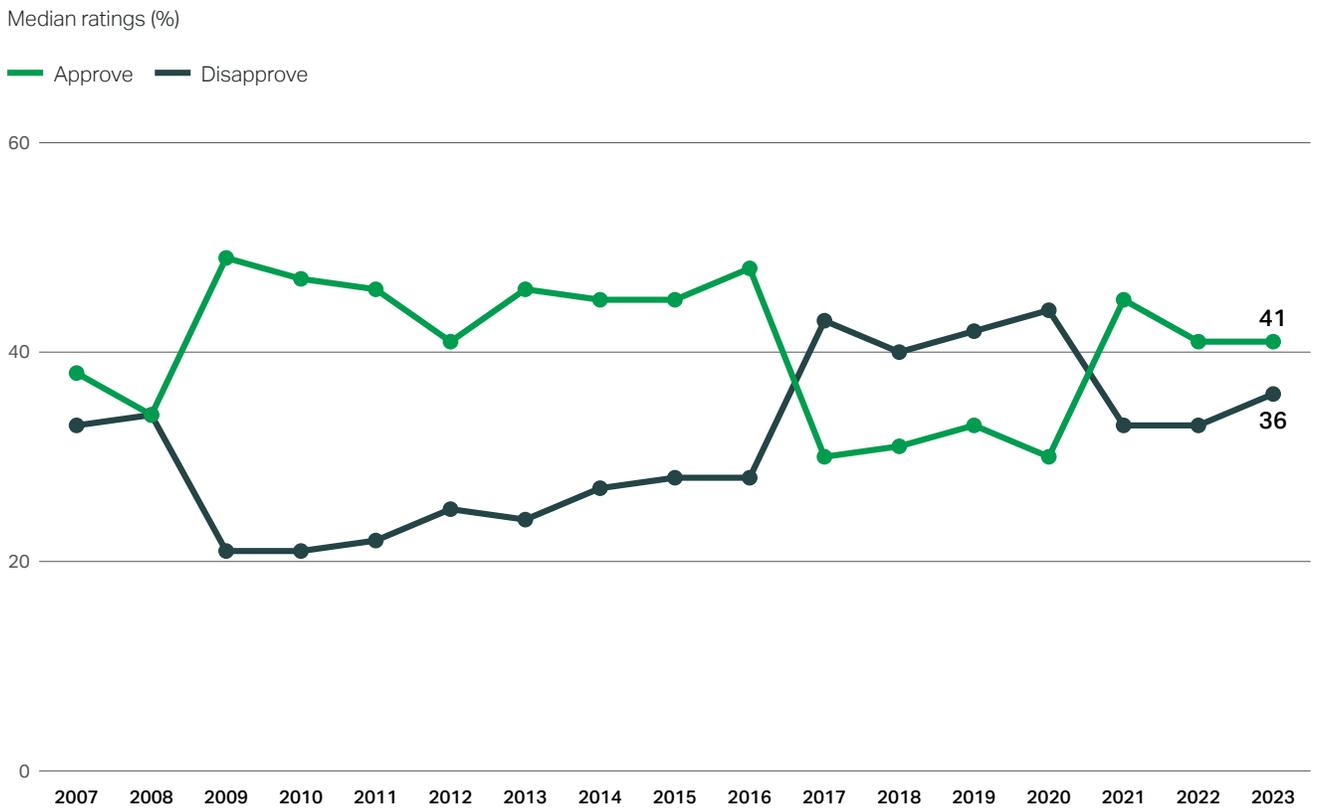
Germany and the U.S. continued to net higher approval ratings than China or Russia. China's approval rating edged up slightly to 30% but was still on the lower end of its trend. Russia's global approval rating of 22% in 2023 is statistically as poor as its 21% rating after it invaded Ukraine in late February 2022.

While the U.S. and its allies in Europe condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine, approval of Russia dropped in virtually every region of the world in 2022, providing evidence that the rebuke of its actions was much broader. As Russia's war against Ukraine rages on, disdain remains just as strong in Europe. However, there are signs it is softening elsewhere, particularly in Africa.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 U.S. leadership ratings around the world remained flat; Germany was the top power for the seventh straight year.
- 2 Approval of U.S. leadership saw double-digit drops in nine countries — including key regional partners — between 2022 and 2023 and double-digit increases in 13 countries.
- 3 While ratings for the U.S. slipped in Africa, China and Russia gained ground.
- 4 For the second straight year, the majority of adults worldwide disapproved of Russia's leadership.
- 5 A new analysis compares "soft power" indicators and examines the soft power of U.S. leadership relative to China's.

Global Approval of U.S. Leadership



U.S. Approval Steady Before Election Year

But disapproval crept up

U.S. leadership ratings around the world rebounded in 2021 during the first year of Biden’s presidency but retreated in his second year and stayed the same in his third.

In his first foreign policy speech as president, Biden vowed to repair U.S. alliances through diplomacy and restore the image of the U.S.

If “restore” means earning higher approval ratings abroad than the record-low ratings of his predecessor — whom he will face in the coming presidential election — then Biden has met that bar in the first three years of his presidency.

However, if “restore” means earning approval ratings that reach the heights seen during Barack Obama’s two terms, Biden achieved that only briefly early in his first year in office.

Median approval of U.S. leadership stood at 49% before the often-criticized U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021.¹ However, the United States’ overall rating slipped after that, and Biden ended his first full year in office with a 45% global approval rating and a 33% disapproval rating.

Approval ratings declined further in Biden’s second year, and since then, median approval of U.S. leadership abroad has been stuck at 41%. Disapproval crept up to 36% in 2023.

Ratings of U.S. leadership approval in the 83 countries and territories surveyed before the outbreak of war between close U.S. ally Israel and Hamas in October 2023 stood at 42%. Across 51 additional countries and territories surveyed after the war started, median approval was a similar 39%.

Historically, the 41% approval rating is lower than Obama’s rating of 46% in the third year of his first term but higher than Donald Trump’s (33%) or either of the ratings in the last two years of George W. Bush’s presidency (38% and 34%).

¹ Note: This is not a global percentage; rather, it is the median rating among the 46 countries and territories surveyed before the August 2021 withdrawal.

Notable Losses and Gains

Approval ratings of U.S. leadership decreased substantially — by 10 percentage points or more — between 2022 and 2023 in nine of the 131 countries and territories surveyed in both years.

Ratings declined the most — by at least 20 points — in Uganda (29 points) and Gambia (21 points).

The sharp drop in Uganda coincides with the U.S. decision to drop the country from the African Growth and Opportunity trade program and enact other sanctions in its condemnation of the country's recently passed Anti-Homosexuality Act.

Notably, the lack of approval among Ugandans and Gambians did not translate into higher disapproval in either country. Rather, more people shifted to saying they didn't know or refused to answer the question.

Although to a lesser degree, the image of the U.S. was also diminished in the eyes of several key U.S. global partners. In Ukraine, new NATO member Finland, Kenya and India, approval ratings dropped by at least 10 points.

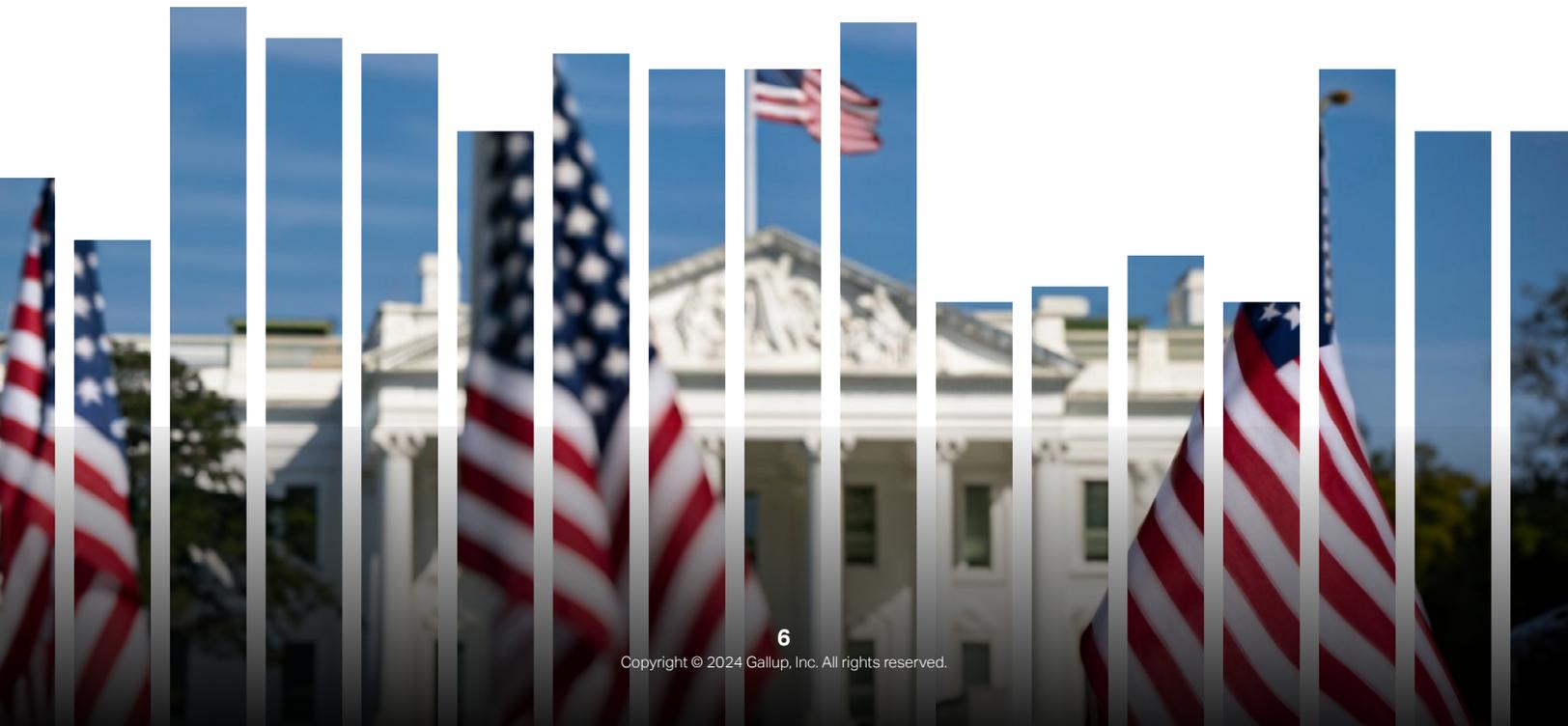
After reaching a record high of 66% in 2022, approval of U.S. leadership in Ukraine dropped significantly to 53% amid growing opposition to Ukraine aid in the U.S.

Ratings in India, too, declined from record highs. After nearly brushing 50% in 2022, approval ratings of U.S. leadership dropped to 38% amid tensions between the two countries over the Indian government's alleged involvement in an assassination plot on U.S. soil.

At the same time, ratings of U.S. leadership increased substantially — by 10 points or more — in 13 countries.

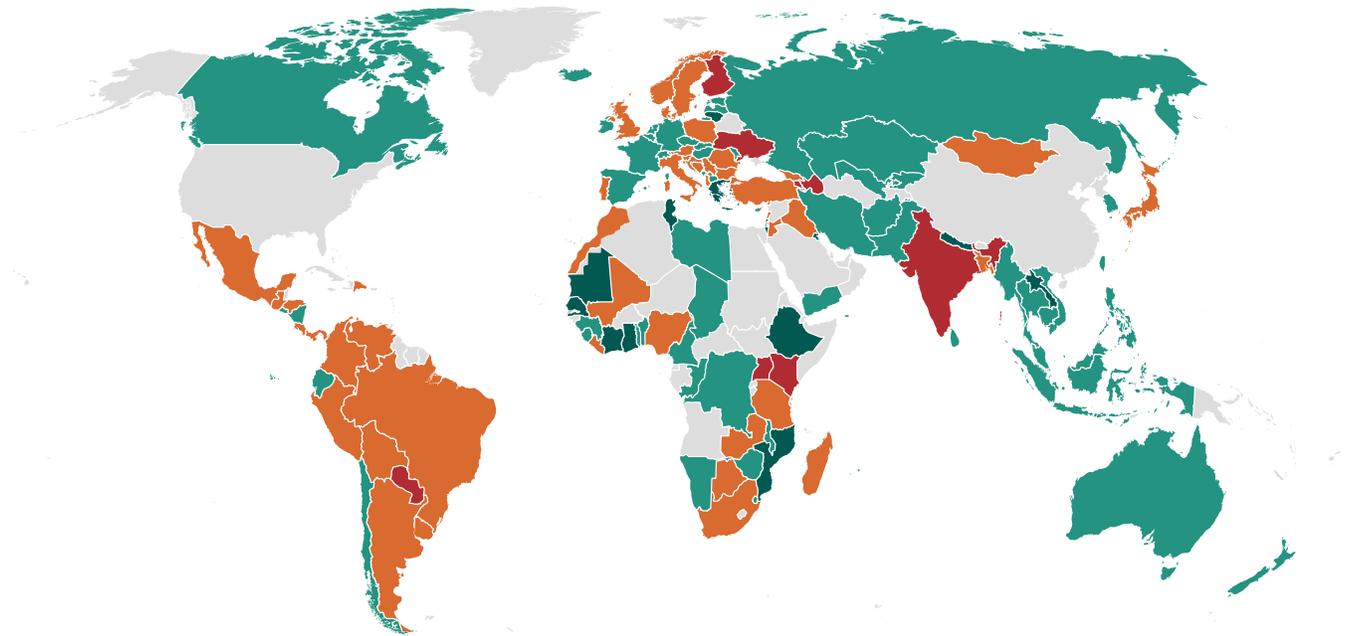
More than half of the countries with substantial increases were in sub-Saharan and North Africa. This list included Tunisia, Mozambique, Senegal and Ethiopia, where approval returned to levels not seen since before the pandemic.

Approval of U.S. leadership also soared to record highs in Israel; 81% of Israelis surveyed two weeks after the Hamas attacks said they approved of U.S. leadership.



Changes in U.S. Leadership Approval (2022-2023)

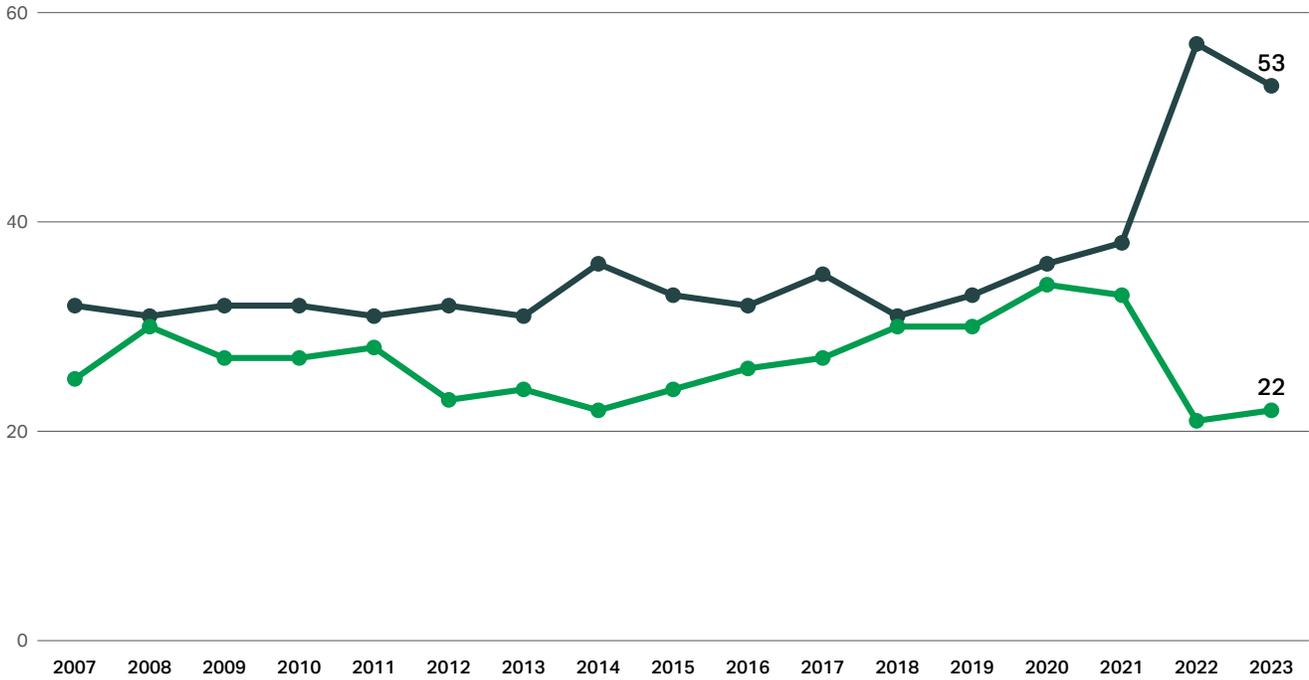
■ Declines of -10 pts. or more ■ Declines of -9 to -1 pts. ■ Increases of 0 to +9 pts. ■ Increases of +10 pts. or more



Global Approval of Russia's Leadership

Median ratings (%)

Approve Disapprove



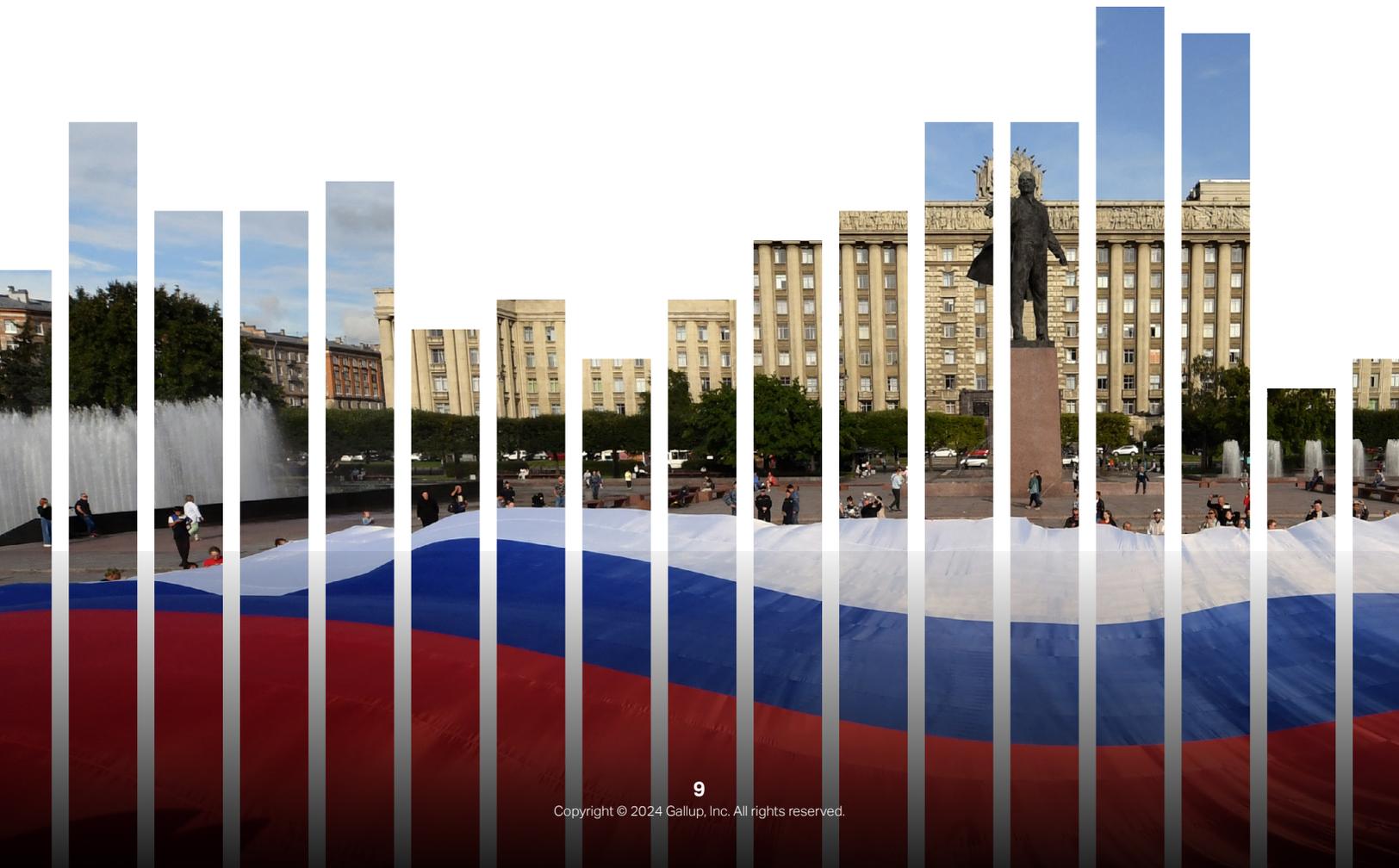
Inside Russia's Unpopularity

Two years after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the majority of the world still disapproved of its leadership.

Global approval of Russia's leadership sank from a median of 33% in 2021 to 21% in 2022. The drop erased steady gains in approval achieved between 2014, when Russia first invaded Ukraine and occupied the Crimean Peninsula, and 2020, when approval hit a high of 34%. In the second year of the country's war against Ukraine, the world had not forgotten or forgiven Russia. Approval remained mired at 22% in 2023.

Majorities in 71 countries surveyed disapproved of Russian leadership. High-income, Western-aligned democracies tended to give the highest disapproval ratings, with figures exceeding 90% in 11 European countries — including Ukraine, where 93% disapproved.

As global approval fell, disapproval of Russian leadership soared. Across 134 countries and territories surveyed in 2023, a median of 53% said they disapproved of Russia's leadership — down slightly from the record-high 57% in 2022.

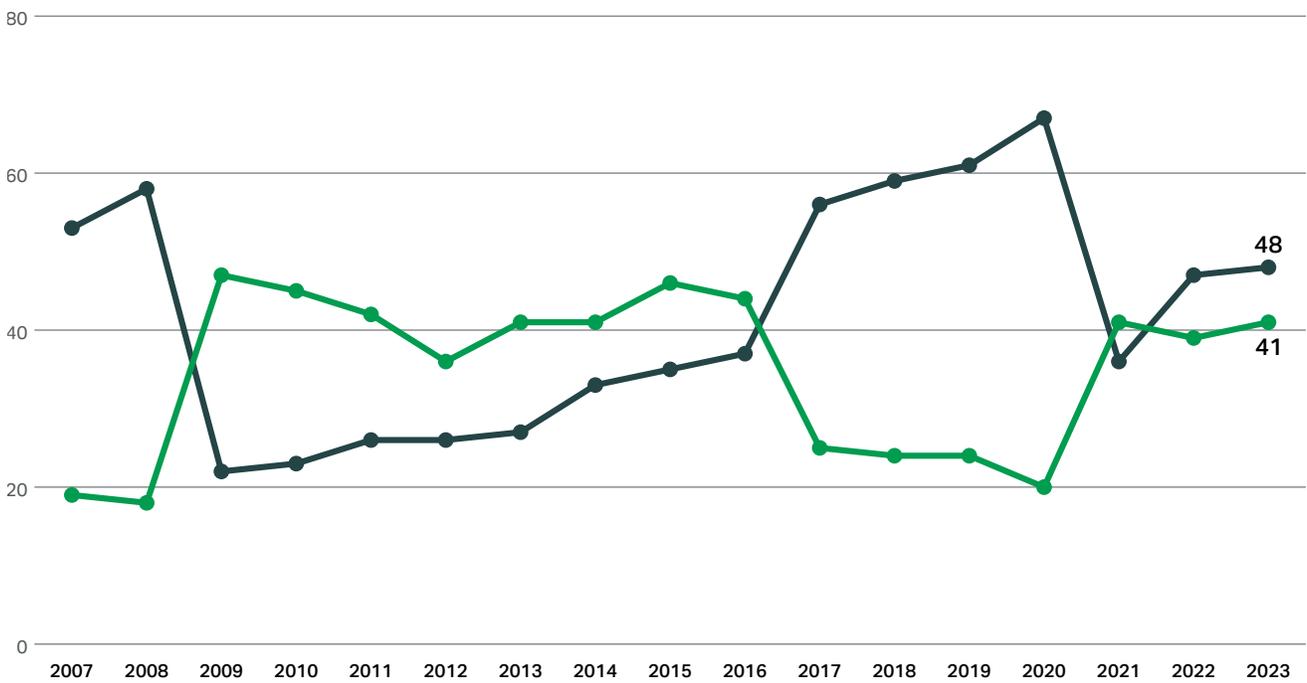


A closer look at U.S. leadership ratings at the regional and country level in 2023 — and where they have improved or declined since 2022 — reveals the areas of greatest vulnerability and strength in the years to come.

U.S. Leadership Approval in Europe

Median ratings (%)

Approve Disapprove



Europe: Approval Steady, but Disappointment Is Clear

More disapproved than approved

In the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, approval ratings of U.S. leadership in Europe remained relatively steady.

In 2021, approval ratings of U.S. leadership rebounded to levels not seen since the Obama administration. The 41% median approval rating in Europe was only slightly lower than the 44% approval rating during Obama's last year in office.

These higher ratings reflected Biden's successful outreach to Europe and NATO partners early in his presidency, which not only raised the profile of U.S. leadership in Europe and within the bloc but likely aided his attempts to unify NATO's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in early 2022.

In the aftermath of Russia's invasion, approval ratings of U.S. leadership in Europe have remained relatively steady. Median approval in 2023 was the same as in 2021 — 41%.

However, disappointment with U.S. leadership continues to lurk. While approval remained relatively flat, disapproval soared to a median of 47% in 2022 and 48% in 2023.

That said, not everyone in Europe was disappointed. Majorities approved of U.S. leadership in eight countries, including fellow G7 and NATO member Germany, where the 52% who approved in 2023 is notably the highest rating that Gallup has tracked since 2012. U.S. leadership continues to be held in the highest esteem in Kosovo (as it typically is), at 84%.

On the other side of the ledger, the image of U.S. leadership in Europe continued to be worst in Russia, where 6% approved in 2023. Although the current approval rating in Russia is up two points from the previous year, the 88% who disapproved nearly ties the previous high set in 2015.



U.S. Leadership Approval Across Europe in 2023

	Approve	Disapprove	Don't know/ Refused	Change in approval from 2022 to 2023 (pct. pts.)
Kosovo	84%	6%	10%	-6
Poland	73%	14%	13%	-7
Albania	63%	16%	21%	-6
Ireland	56%	40%	4%	0
Lithuania	53%	21%	26%	14
Ukraine	53%	22%	25%	-13
Germany	52%	42%	7%	8
Portugal	51%	27%	22%	-3
Estonia	50%	31%	18%	9
Finland	48%	43%	9%	-14
Spain	45%	52%	4%	6
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	45%	48%	7%	-1
Belgium	44%	45%	11%	6
Denmark	44%	49%	7%	-3
Latvia	43%	33%	24%	5
Netherlands	43%	53%	3%	1
Norway	43%	52%	5%	-1
Austria	42%	51%	8%	-1
Republic of Moldova	42%	38%	20%	9
France	41%	47%	12%	4
Luxembourg	39%	57%	4%	3
Malta	39%	48%	14%	4
Switzerland	39%	55%	6%	0
Romania	38%	32%	31%	-3
Czech Republic	37%	34%	28%	6
Greece	37%	50%	13%	17
North Macedonia	37%	46%	17%	3
Italy	36%	56%	8%	-6
Sweden	35%	61%	5%	-5
Hungary	31%	41%	28%	4
Montenegro	30%	49%	21%	0
Slovakia	28%	56%	16%	3
Bosnia and Herzegovina	27%	52%	21%	-4
Iceland	26%	57%	17%	3
Croatia	25%	60%	16%	-8
Slovenia	25%	65%	9%	-3
Bulgaria	15%	54%	31%	-8
Serbia	10%	69%	21%	-2
Russian Federation	6%	88%	6%	2

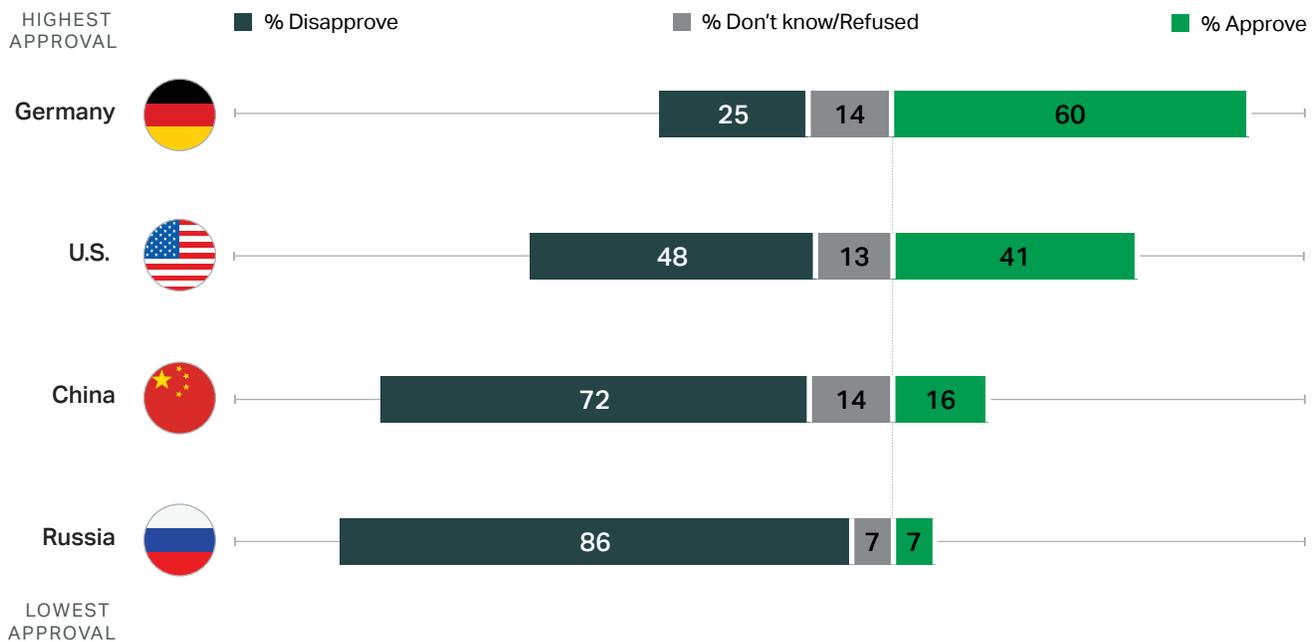
Germany Increases Lead in Europe, Russia Deeply Unpopular

Of the four countries, Germany’s leadership continued to be the most popular in Europe, with a median approval of 60% in 2023. This rating is up from 56% the previous year but still lags the 63% measured in the last year of Angela Merkel’s tenure.

The U.S. remained in second place behind Germany, with a median 41% approval rating that is similar to its ratings since 2021. China’s approval rating remained unchanged from the previous year, although disapproval rose seven points. Russia’s rating was 7% — the same level as in 2022 after its invasion of Ukraine.

Europe

Do you approve or disapprove of the job performance of the leadership of ... ?



Median approval

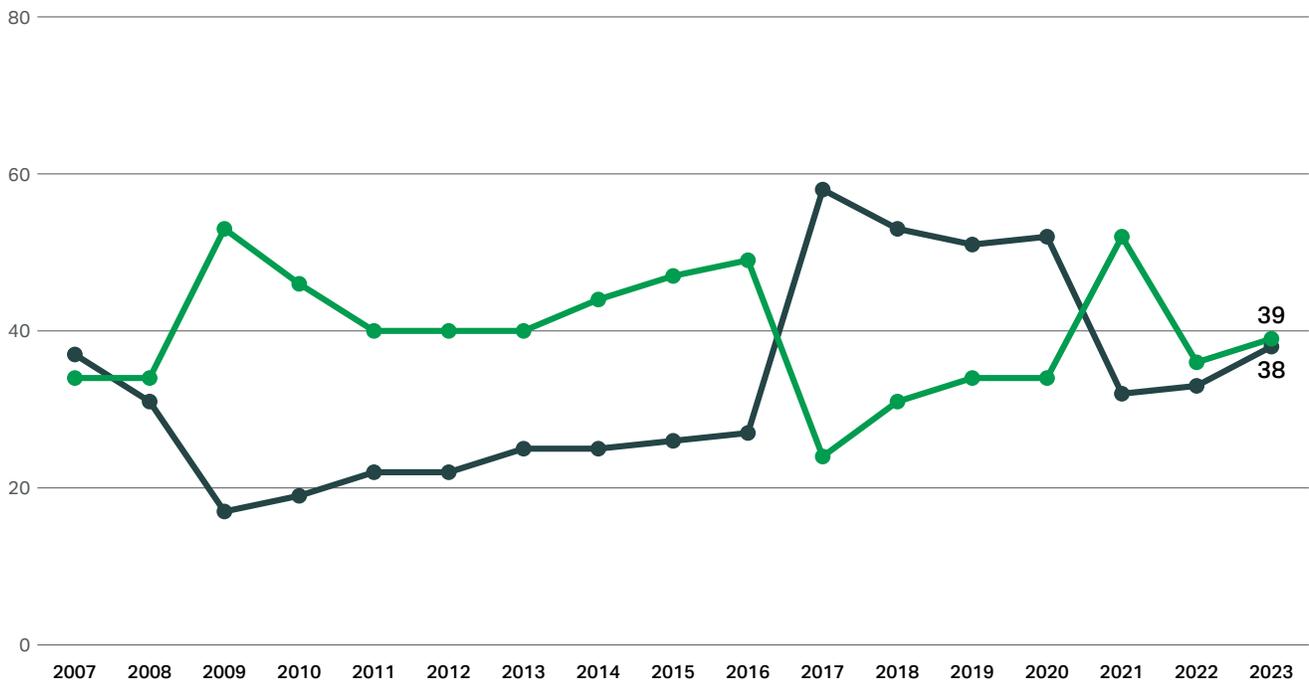
Source: Gallup 2023

* Medians may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

U.S. Leadership Approval in the Americas

Median ratings (%)

Approve Disapprove



Americas: Approval Ratings Trepid, Closely Divided

Majorities in closest neighbors — Mexico and Canada — disapproved

After surging between 2020 and 2021, approval of U.S. leadership in the Americas in 2023 was lukewarm at best.

Last year, median approval of U.S. leadership across 19 countries in the Americas stood at 39%. This number was up marginally from the 36% measured in 2022, but the increase was not enough to see ratings return to the relatively euphoric 52% seen in 2021.

Median disapproval of U.S. leadership in the Americas also edged up in 2023, rising from 33% in 2022 to 38% last year. This five-point increase left residents of the region almost evenly split.

Unlike in 2022, when ratings of the U.S. suffered substantial declines in 12 countries, approval declined more than 10 points in just one country in 2023 — Paraguay. But notably, the U.S. did not recoup its losses anywhere in the region.

This included the United States' immediate neighbors, Mexico and Canada. In Canada, U.S. approval plummeted from 55% in 2021 to 33% in 2022 as the two countries narrowly averted a trade war. U.S. approval dropped from 52% to 36% in Mexico amid rising tensions at the U.S. southern border.

One year later, approval ratings of the U.S. in Canada warmed to 40%, while ratings in Mexico continued to cool to 32%. Both have the distinction of being the only two countries in the Americas where the majority of residents disapproved of the leadership of the U.S.

Still, approval ratings in Canada and Mexico were far from the worst in the region. The image of U.S. leadership in the Americas was lowest in Uruguay, where the 19% approval rating was reminiscent of low measures during the Trump administration.



U.S. Leadership Approval Across the Americas in 2023

	Approve	Disapprove	Don't know/ Refused	Change in approval from 2022 to 2023 (pct. pts.)
Dominican Republic	55%	26%	19%	-3
El Salvador	55%	19%	26%	5
Honduras	50%	19%	31%	-5
Ecuador	46%	30%	24%	2
Guatemala	46%	30%	24%	-3
Paraguay	42%	28%	30%	-15
Canada	40%	58%	2%	7
Colombia	39%	27%	34%	-5
Costa Rica	39%	36%	25%	-3
Nicaragua	39%	29%	31%	6
Panama	34%	45%	22%	-3
Peru	33%	45%	22%	-2
Brazil	32%	38%	30%	-3
Mexico	32%	54%	14%	-4
Venezuela	27%	49%	24%	-5
Chile	25%	41%	34%	1
Bolivia	24%	42%	35%	-3
Argentina	23%	45%	32%	-3
Uruguay	19%	40%	40%	-6

U.S. Still on Top in the Americas

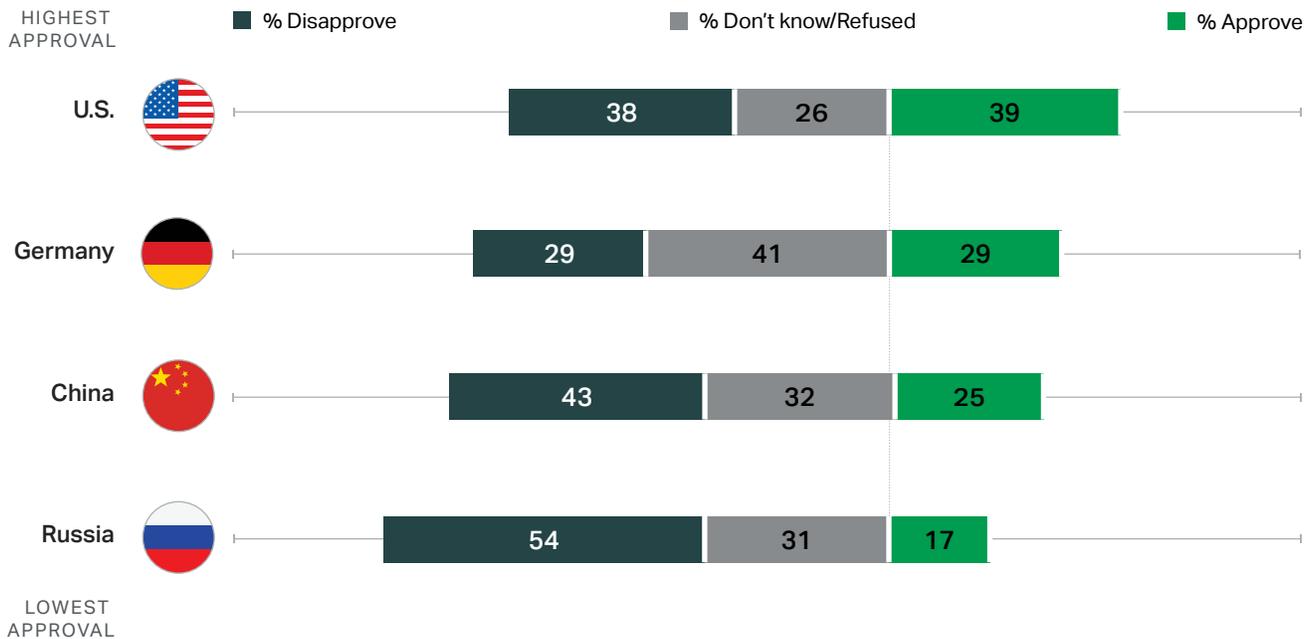
For years, the U.S. and Germany have been vying for the highest approval ratings in the Americas. The U.S. regained its top status from Germany in 2021 — and remained on top in 2023.

The median approval rating for U.S. leadership in 2023 stood at 39%, up marginally from 36% the previous year. Germany gained no ground and trailed the U.S. with an approval rating of 29%. Although approval of China was relatively flat at 25%, it remained well ahead of Russia, which was a distant fourth in the region with a 17% median approval rating.

Notably, disapproval of Russia in the region softened, dropping from 63% in 2022 to 54% in 2023. Rather than shifting to approval, which edged up only slightly, most of the disapproval moved to the don't know/refused category.

The Americas

Do you approve or disapprove of the job performance of the leadership of ... ?



Median approval

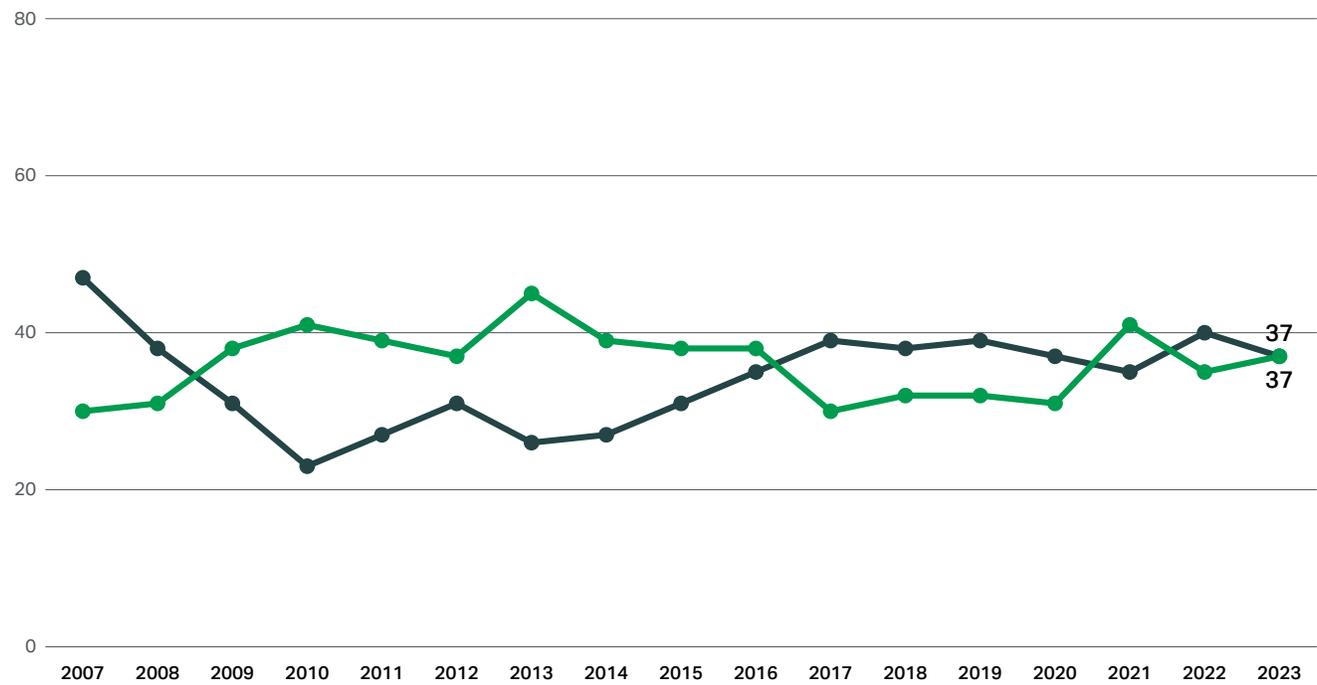
Source: Gallup 2023

* Medians may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

U.S. Leadership Approval in Asia

Median ratings (%)

Approve Disapprove



Asia: U.S. Leadership Ratings Split in 2023

Approval soared to record high in Israel

After a short-lived rally in 2021, approval and disapproval were evenly divided in the region.

Restoring American leadership in the Indo-Pacific has been one of the Biden administration's long-stated strategy goals. Nearly record-high approval ratings in Asia in 2021 suggested it may have had the momentum to do that.

However, that momentum stalled in 2022, and approval ratings tumbled. Although the 37% median approval rating of U.S. leadership across Asia in 2023 was marginally higher than the previous year's score of 35%, the image of the U.S. remained weaker than in 2021: Just as many in the region disapproved (37%) as approved.

Majorities in eight Asian countries approved of U.S. leadership in 2023, and almost all of them were repeats from 2022, except Kuwait: Israel (81%), the Philippines (67%), Vietnam (64%), Cambodia (63%), Mongolia (58%), Sri Lanka (58%), Kuwait (58%) and Myanmar (55%).

Ratings of U.S. leadership showed substantial improvement in just four countries in 2023: Israel, Kuwait, Nepal and Lao People's Democratic Republic. The 81% approval rating for the U.S. in Israel, surveyed shortly after the October 7 Hamas terrorist attack, was a new record high for any administration.

In addition to picking up few new gains, approval ratings declined substantially among three countries in the region, including key partner India, where approval ratings had reached a record high the previous year.

The image of U.S. leadership in Asia continued to be the worst in Iran (10%) — where approval is consistently low — and in the State of Palestine (11%).



U.S. Leadership Approval Across Asia in 2023

	Approve	Disapprove	Don't know/ Refused	Change in approval from 2022 to 2023 (pct. pts.)
Israel	81%	14%	5%	16
Philippines	67%	25%	8%	5
Vietnam	64%	16%	20%	5
Cambodia	63%	6%	31%	7
Kuwait	58%	27%	15%	16
Mongolia	58%	19%	23%	-1
Sri Lanka	58%	14%	28%	0
Myanmar	55%	7%	38%	3
Nepal	50%	30%	19%	14
South Korea	50%	37%	14%	4
Japan	48%	31%	21%	-1
Bangladesh	45%	36%	19%	-1
Taiwan, Province of China	44%	35%	21%	2
Thailand	41%	22%	37%	3
Armenia	39%	35%	26%	-16
Georgia	38%	34%	29%	-9
India	38%	27%	35%	-11
Australia	37%	59%	4%	4
Kazakhstan	37%	35%	28%	6
Lebanon	37%	44%	20%	-1
New Zealand	37%	57%	6%	5
Lao People's Democratic Republic	34%	26%	41%	17
Kyrgyzstan	33%	43%	24%	5
Indonesia	32%	50%	18%	7
Hong Kong, S.A.R. of China	31%	65%	4%	7
Uzbekistan	30%	45%	25%	1
Cyprus	29%	51%	19%	5
Iraq	29%	70%	1%	-6
Northern Cyprus	28%	41%	31%	-4
Singapore	28%	44%	28%	-8
Malaysia	27%	32%	41%	4
Yemen	26%	68%	6%	6
Jordan	25%	51%	23%	-4
Pakistan	24%	68%	8%	5
Azerbaijan	20%	62%	18%	-14
Afghanistan	19%	71%	10%	1
Türkiye	18%	66%	15%	-2
State of Palestine	11%	76%	13%	-2
Iran	10%	83%	8%	2

Germany Leads Approval Ratings in Asia

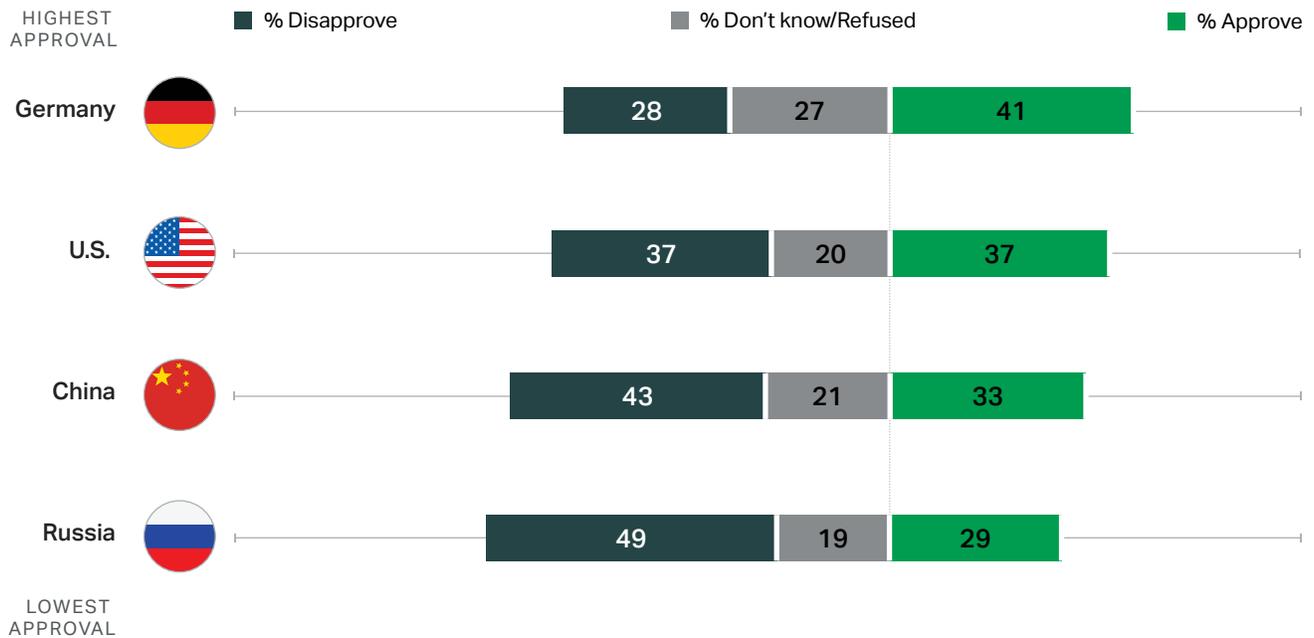
While Germany’s leadership continued to be the least well-known, it earned higher ratings in Asia than any of the other three countries and was the only one that earned higher approval than disapproval.

Germany’s median approval rating remained relatively flat, increasing only marginally from 39% in 2022 to 41% in 2023. The U.S. also saw a marginal increase from 35% in 2022 to 37% in 2023, but its rating was still lower than the 41% measured in 2021.

China’s 33% median approval rating increased from 28% the previous year, but its leadership continued to earn more disapproval than approval. Russia’s approval rating also improved slightly, from 26% in 2022 to 29% in 2023. Its approval was still lower than the 33% observed in 2021, and nearly half of residents in the region (49%) disapproved.

Asia

Do you approve or disapprove of the job performance of the leadership of ... ?



Median approval

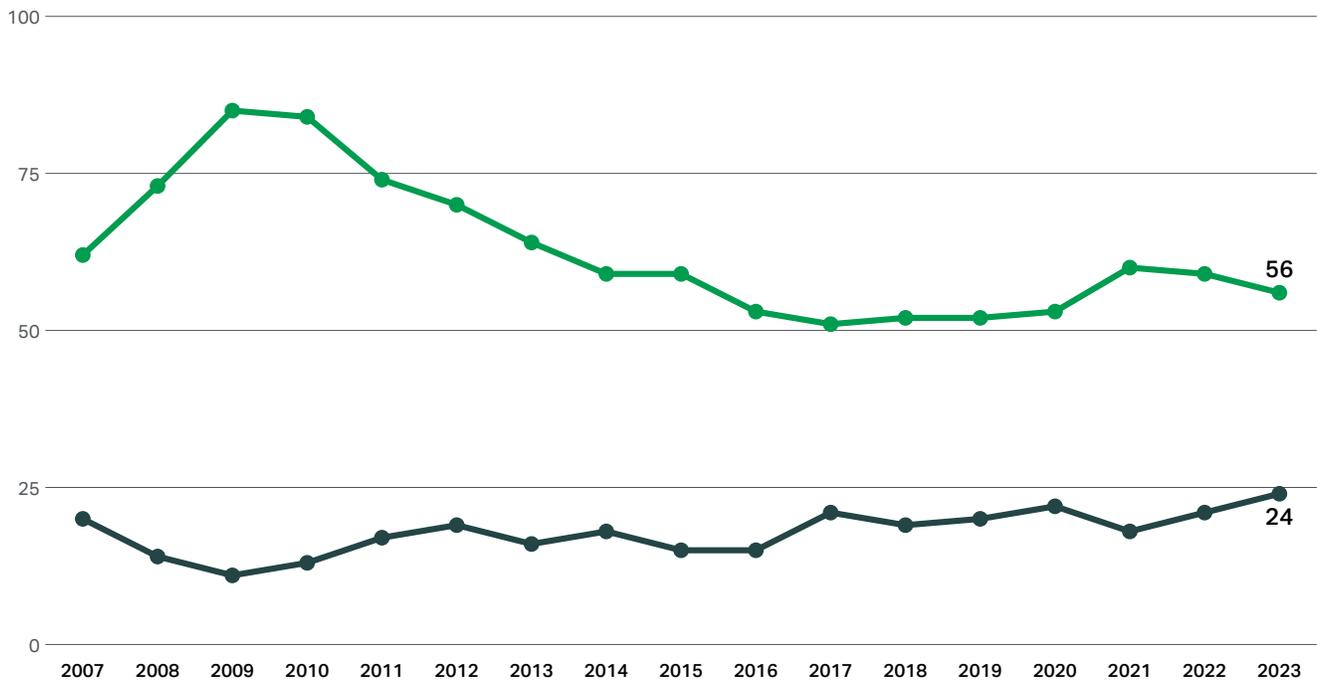
Source: Gallup 2023

* Medians may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

U.S. Leadership Approval in Africa

Median ratings (%)

Approve Disapprove



Africa: Shining Spot for U.S. Leadership Starts to Tarnish

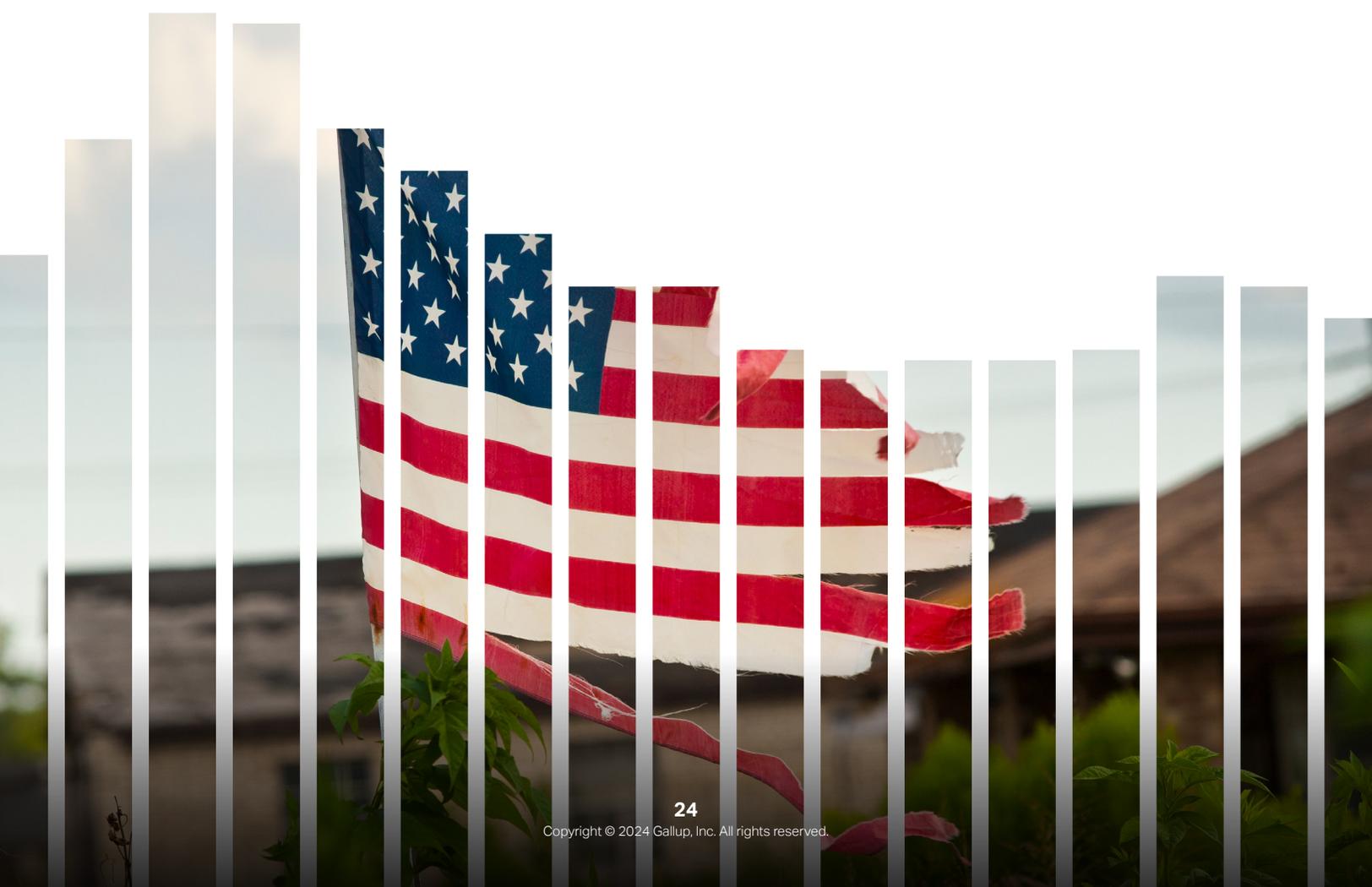
Uganda and Gambia led world in declines in U.S. leadership approval

As it has since 2007, the image of the U.S. remained strongest worldwide in Africa in 2023. Bolstered by majority approval in 22 sub-Saharan African countries, median approval of U.S. leadership stood at 56% in 2023 — down slightly from the previous year.

Among the 36 countries surveyed in 2023, seven saw double-digit increases in approval ratings of the U.S., including Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mauritania, Mozambique, Senegal and Tunisia.

Ratings slipped substantially in three countries — Uganda, Gambia and Kenya. Of the three, only ally Kenya maintained majority approval.

Ratings of U.S. leadership were lowest in Libya (23%) and Somalia (25%), which was surveyed for the first time since 2016.



U.S. Leadership Approval Across Africa in 2023

	Approve	Disapprove	Don't know/ Refused	Change in approval from 2022 to 2023 (pct. pts.)
Guinea	80%	12%	8%	6
Togo	78%	13%	9%	8
Cote d'Ivoire	76%	18%	6%	13
The Republic of the Congo	75%	18%	7%	4
Mauritania	73%	18%	9%	13
Chad	72%	23%	5%	2
Ghana	71%	9%	20%	14
Liberia	70%	25%	5%	-2
Nigeria	70%	18%	12%	-8
Benin	69%	18%	12%	5
Sierra Leone	69%	5%	25%	4
Cameroon	66%	20%	15%	4
Zimbabwe	66%	25%	9%	1
Madagascar	61%	31%	9%	-1
Mauritius	60%	26%	14%	1
The Democratic Republic of the Congo	59%	18%	23%	1
Kenya	59%	31%	10%	-14
Comoros	56%	28%	15%	-2
Mozambique	55%	28%	17%	11
Burkina Faso	53%	31%	17%	*
Senegal	53%	18%	29%	10
Mali	52%	44%	4%	-9
Malawi	50%	37%	13%	1
Botswana	46%	27%	26%	-2
South Africa	45%	26%	29%	-6
Eswatini	42%	17%	41%	8
Namibia	42%	49%	9%	5
Tanzania	39%	30%	31%	-8
Ethiopia	38%	27%	36%	10
Zambia	37%	15%	48%	-5
Uganda	34%	13%	53%	-29
Tunisia	33%	56%	11%	12
Morocco	30%	23%	47%	-7
Gambia	29%	16%	55%	-21
Somalia	25%	40%	35%	*
Libya	23%	63%	14%	3

* Data was not collected in this country in 2022.

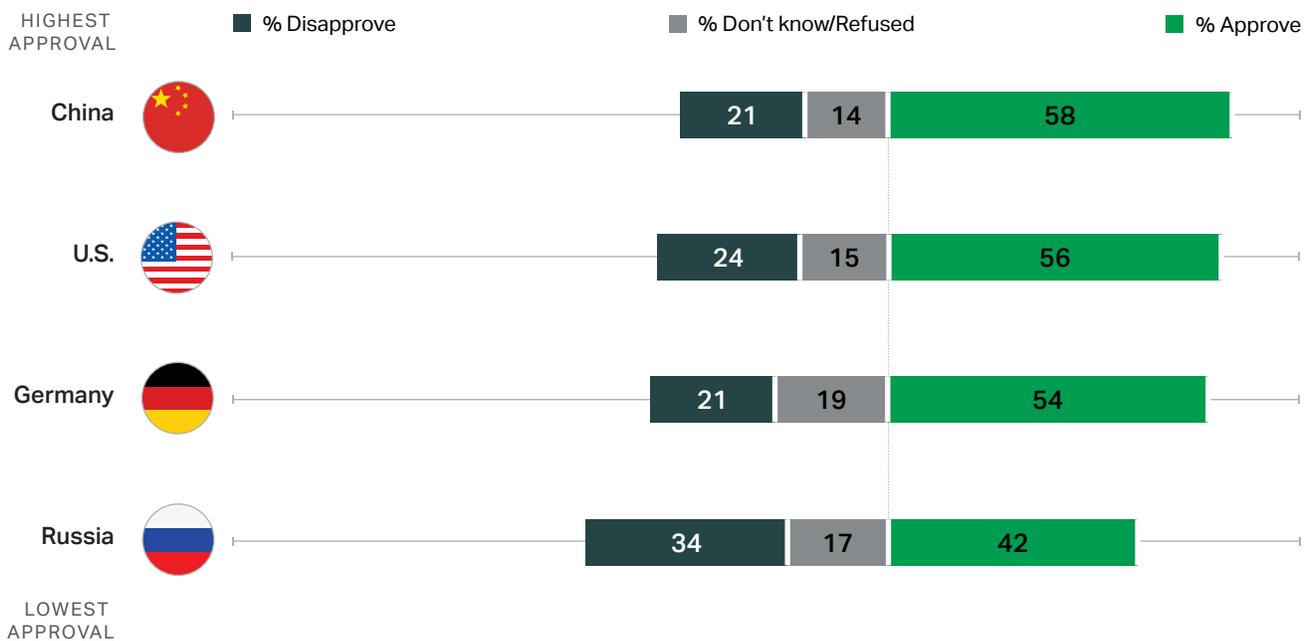
China Leads in Africa, Russia Regains Ground

While easily topping other countries in 2022, the U.S. lost its edge in Africa in 2023. China’s median approval in the region increased from 52% in 2022 to 58% in 2023 as fewer people said they had no opinion. This improvement moved it two percentage points ahead of the U.S., where approval slipped from 59% to 56%.

Germany’s leadership image improved slightly from 51% to 54%, placing it on a similar footing as the U.S. After losing ground in 2022, Russia’s median approval rating increased eight points in 2023 to 42% — matching its rating in 2021.

Africa

Do you approve or disapprove of the job performance of the leadership of ... ?



Median approval

Source: Gallup 2023

* Medians may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Comparisons of Soft Power Indicators

The trends in **median approval and disapproval ratings** of the leadership of the U.S., Germany, China and Russia provide an overview of shifts in “soft power,” defined as a country’s ability to influence others without coercive pressure. However, this approach masks interesting country-level differences over time.

Another way to examine soft power is to look at **net approval** — that is, the difference between the percentage who approve and those who disapprove of a country’s leadership. In this scenario, “don’t know/refused” is considered a neutral response. The resulting scale ranges between 100 and -100, where 100 means everyone approves of a country’s leadership, and -100 means everyone disapproves.

Net approval offers a useful proxy for absolute soft power — or the overall affinity a population has toward another country’s leadership. A high net approval score suggests greater trust and friendly intention that may facilitate cooperation and reduce conflict. The opposite holds for high net disapproval.

In 2023, 74 countries exhibited a positive net approval score of U.S. leadership, and 59 countries had a negative net approval score. Kosovo earned the highest score of +78 points (84% approved and 6% disapproved). Russia earned the lowest net approval score of -82 points (6% approved and 88% disapproved).

Morocco — where nearly half of adults (47%) said “don’t know” or “refused” when asked about U.S. leadership — reveals how net approval gauges absolute soft power in a meaningfully different way. A sole focus on the approval rate (30%) would suggest Moroccans hold a dim view of U.S. leadership (No. 103 out of 133 countries), whereas a sole focus on the disapproval rate (23%) would suggest a more sanguine outlook (No. 31 out of 133 countries). In contrast, a net approval score of +7 points lands Morocco closer to the middle of the pack (No. 66 out of 133 countries).

The same analysis of Chinese leadership reveals that 58 countries expressed a positive net approval score, and 76 countries had a negative score. Mali posted the highest net approval score of +65 points (81% approved and 16% disapproved). Sweden earned the lowest net approval score of -89 points (4% approved and 93% disapproved).

Relative Soft Power

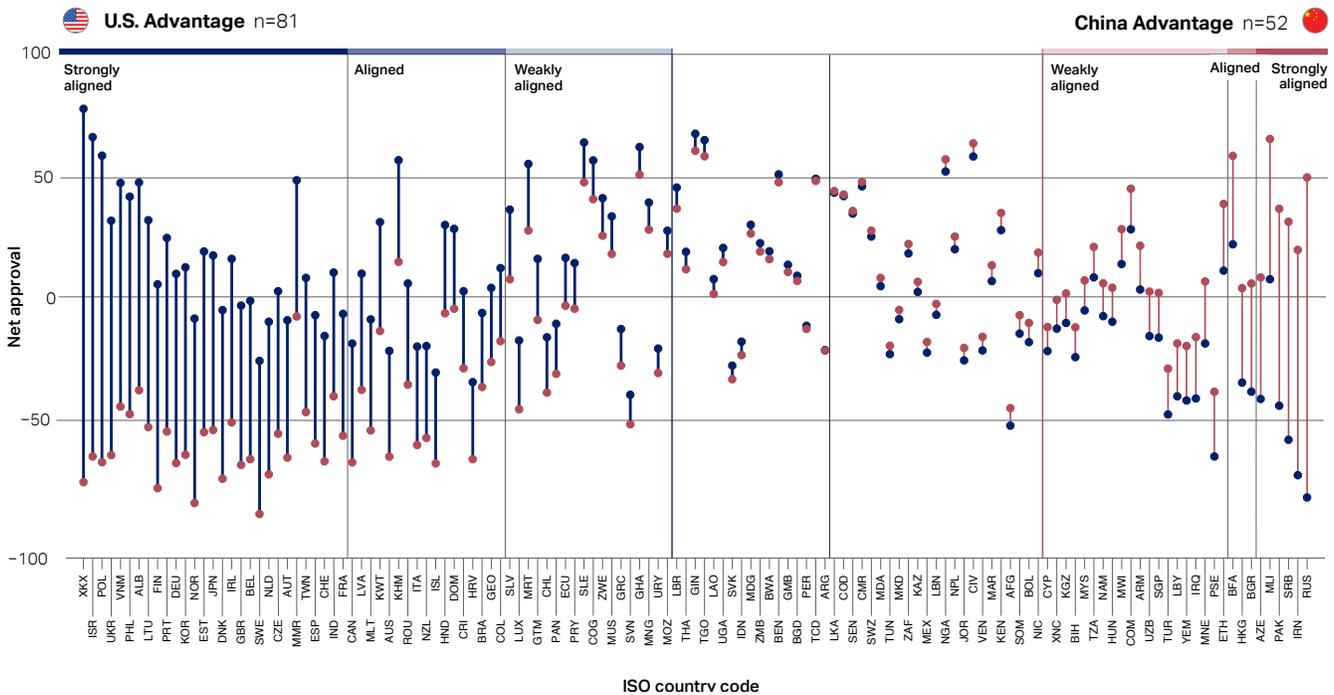
A comparison between U.S. and Chinese absolute soft power yields a novel measure of a related concept — relative soft power. In any country, U.S. net approval minus Chinese net approval results in a scale ranging between 200 and -200. A score of 200 means everyone approves of U.S. leadership and disapproves of Chinese leadership, while a score of -200 indicates the opposite. A score of 0 suggests parity, where the U.S. and China share the same net approval score.

In 2023, the U.S. enjoyed a soft power advantage in more countries than China (81 vs. 52, respectively).

The United States' relative advantage in soft power was largest in **Kosovo at +154 points** (+78 U.S. net approval and -76 Chinese net approval). China's advantage was largest in **Russia at -132 points** (-82 U.S. net approval and +50 Chinese net approval).

Relative Soft Power

● U.S. ● China



Focusing on relative soft power offers a glimpse into shifting geopolitical alignments where Norway and Mali would fall into a category of strongly aligned countries.

Geopolitical Country Alignment in 2023

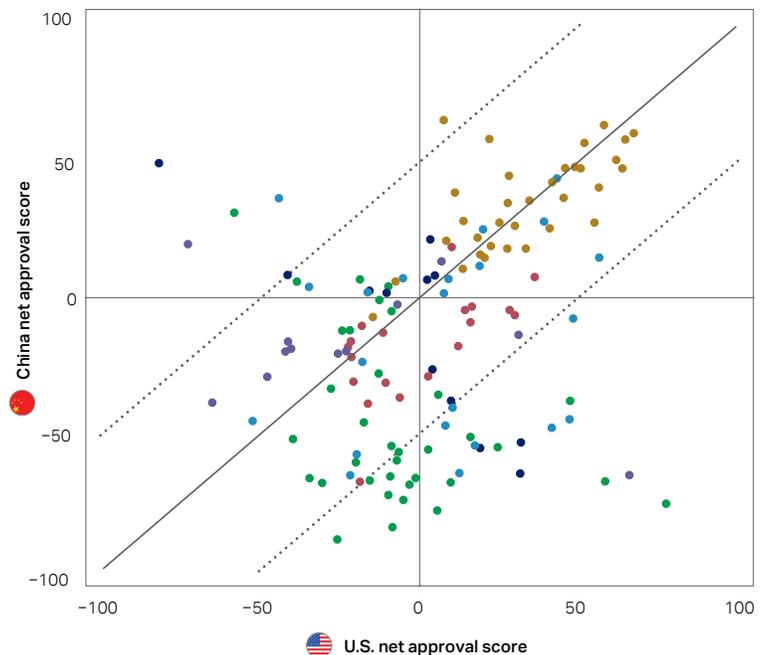
	United States	China
Strongly aligned (50+ point advantage)	29 countries	6 countries
Aligned (30- to 49-point advantage)	17 countries	3 countries
Weakly aligned (10- to 29-point advantage)	18 countries	20 countries
Non-aligned (0- to 9-point advantage)	17 countries	23 countries

While relative soft power appears better suited to capture geopolitical alignments, absolute soft power remains a useful gauge of a population’s general affinity toward another country’s leadership. One way to visualize both measures together is a scatterplot that arrays Chinese net-approval on the y-axis and U.S. net-approval on the x-axis. Each dot represents a country.

- The solid diagonal line is the inflection point in relative soft power. China enjoys an advantage with the 52 countries above the line, and the U.S. with the 81 countries below.
- The 29 countries below the lower dashed diagonal line are strongly aligned (50+ relative advantage) with the United States. The six countries above the upper dashed diagonal line strongly align with China.
- The solid horizontal line is the inflection point in Chinese absolute soft power. Above the line are 58 countries with a positive net approval score; below are 75 countries with a negative score.
- The solid vertical line is the inflection point in U.S. absolute soft power. To the right are 74 countries with a positive net approval score, and to the left are 59 countries with a negative score.

Comparison of Relative and Absolute Soft Power, U.S. vs. China

● Europe ● FSU ● Asia ● Americas ● MENA ● SSA



Key Takeaways

- 1) Many countries are arrayed near the solid line, which is the inflection point demarcating relative advantage. Forty countries appear “non-aligned” (meaning less than a 10-point advantage either way).
- 2) African countries are clustered in Q2, and few strongly align toward the U.S. or China.
- 3) The U.S. tends to have a relative advantage in European countries, but many of those dots still appear in Q3. While they have slightly negative views toward U.S. leadership, the aversion these populations have toward Chinese leadership creates opportunities/influence for the U.S.
- 4) Overall, the U.S. appears to have a meaningful relative soft power advantage over China in 2023.

Implications Beyond 2024

The lack of change in approval ratings of major powers in 2023 may be the world holding its breath in anticipation of a potential shake-up in the global order.

With the results in from Russia’s March 2024 election, the world already knows it will have President Vladimir Putin to deal with for at least the next six years. What will happen in November 2024 in the U.S. is far less certain. The results could fundamentally reshape U.S. foreign policy — again — and change its role in the global order.

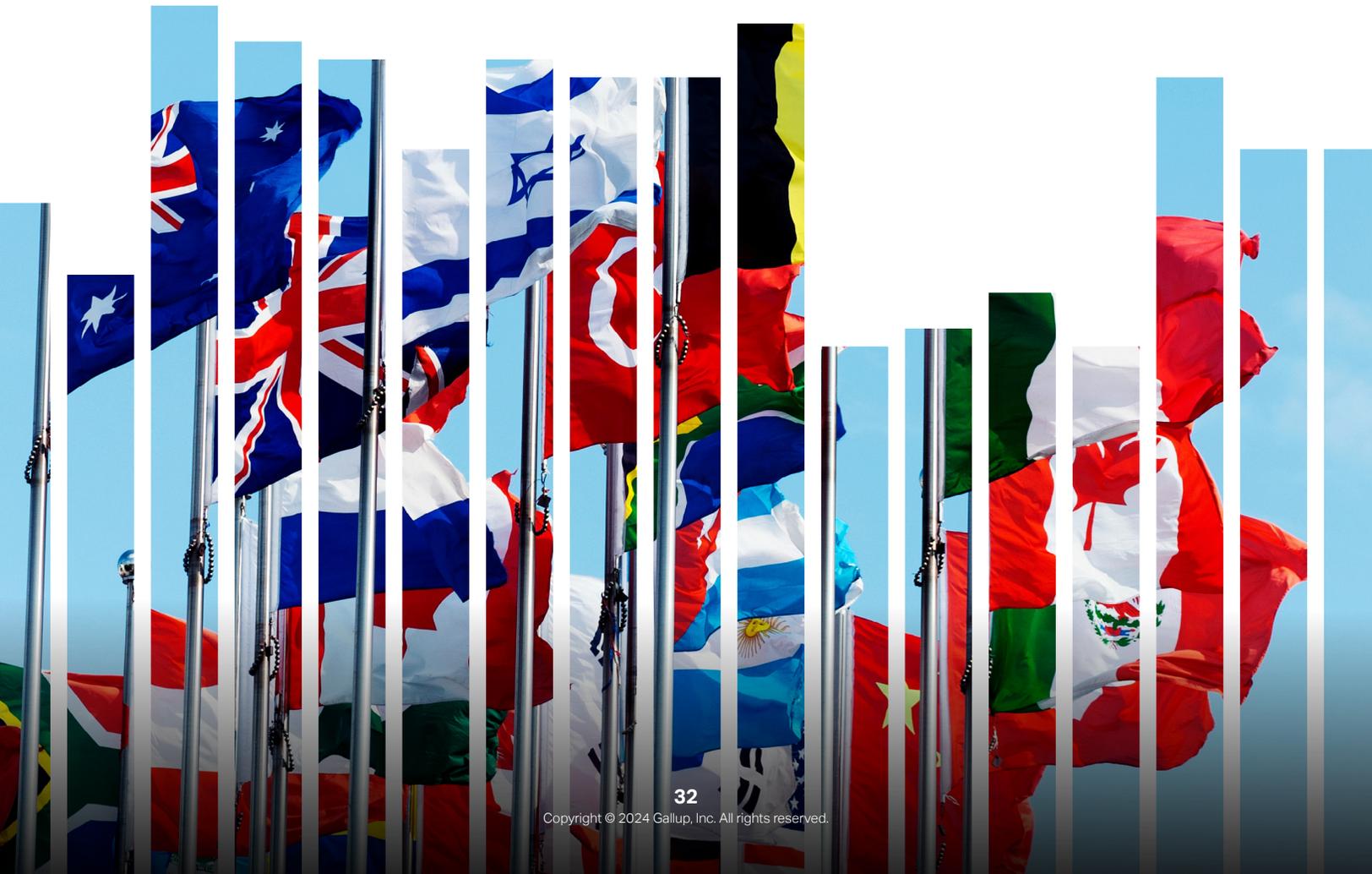
The world could also see changes in Germany. Although Germany’s elections will not take place until late next year, a resurgence of the country’s far-right is raising questions about its future leadership and role in Europe and abroad.

Methodology

Results for the 2023 approval ratings are based on nationally representative, probability-based samples among the adult population aged 15 and older in 133 to 134 countries and areas throughout 2023. Interviews took place over the telephone and in person.

For results based on the total sample of national adults, the margin of sampling error ranges from ± 1.2 to ± 5.6 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.



GALLUP®

World Headquarters

The Gallup Building
901 F Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20004

t +1.877.242.5587

f +1.888.500.8282

www.gallup.com