

Plus ça Change? South Korean Public Opinion of the United States During the Trump Administration

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- ▶ South Korea is a long-standing US ally and key actor in the US system of bilateral alliances in the Asia Pacific. It is one of the few consolidated, liberal democracies in the region.
- ▶ Donald Trump and his administration pursued unconventional, erratic, and, at times, confrontational diplomacy with South and North Korea.
- ▶ What did South Koreans think of United States and President Trump during the president's four years in office? How did opinions compare to previous years/administrations and other regional states and leaders?

- ▶ Assess South Korean public opinion regarding the following:
 1. US image
 2. POTUS, with a focus on Donald Trump
 3. Trump administration policies, with a focus on North Korea policy
- ▶ Compare opinions towards the US and POTUS vis-à-vis other regional actors and leaders.
- ▶ Consider differences in opinion by generations (democratic/authoritarian) and political groups (conservative/progressive).

- ▶ Data: Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Surveys, 2003-2019 (longitudinal dataset constructed)
- ▶ Methods: Descriptive and predictive analysis
- ▶ Outcome Variables: Multiple
 1. Country image/approval (US, China, EU, Russia, North Korea, Japan), 2003-2019
 2. Leadership "confidence" (POTUS, Chinese President, Russian President, Kim Jong-un, and Japanese PM), 2002-2019
 3. Approval of Trump administration policies
- ▶ Subgroup analysis: generations and political groups

- ▶ Six (6) Trump policies evaluated:
 1. US withdrawal from international climate change agreements
 2. Building a wall on the border between the US and Mexico
 3. US withdrawal from the Iran nuclear weapons agreement
 4. Allowing fewer immigrants into the US
 5. US increasing tariffs or fees on imported goods from other countries
 6. **US negotiations with North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un about the country's nuclear weapons program (focus)**

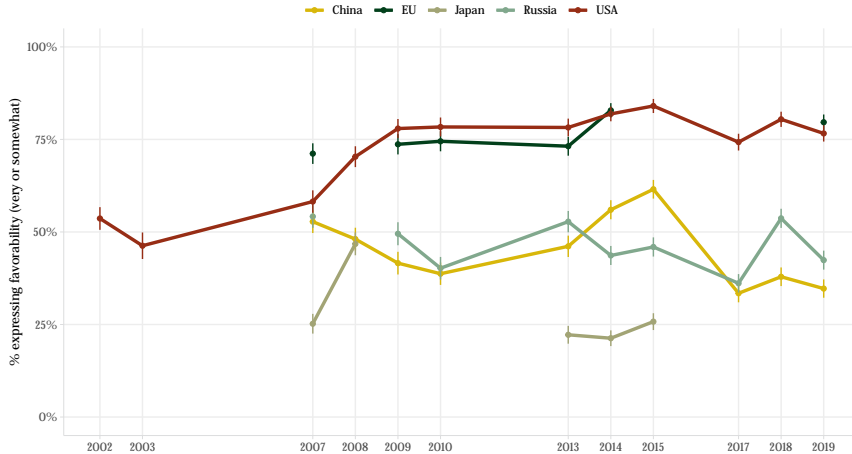
- ▶ Three generations identified by historical period/regime type and when citizens came of age (see: political socialization):
 1. Democratic (born after 1975)
 2. Authoritarian (born before 1962)
 3. Transition (born in-between; see also '386')

- ▶ Three political groups, measured by political self-identification:
 1. Conservative
 2. Centrist
 3. Progressive

Weighted Averages US Image

Figure 1

South Koreans' Favorability Ratings Toward the USA & Select Regional Powers, 2002–2019

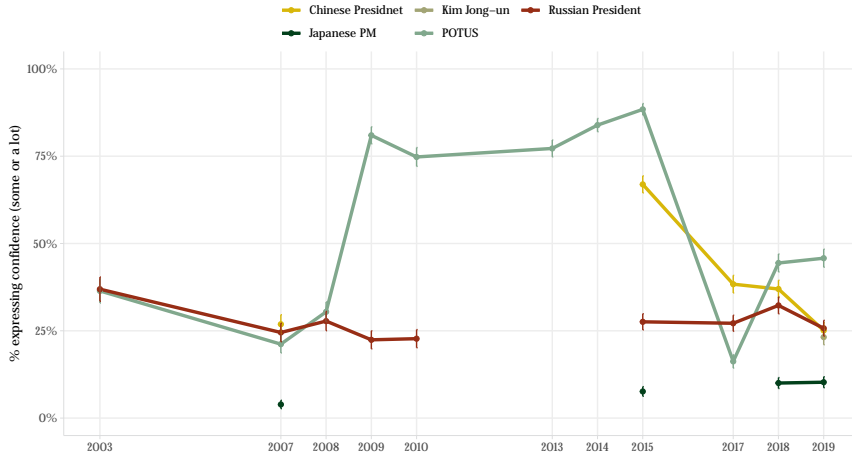


Source: Pew Global Indicators Database. Error bars = 95% CI

Confidence in POTUS

Figure 2

South Koreans' Confidence in POTUS & Select Regional Leaders, 2003–2019

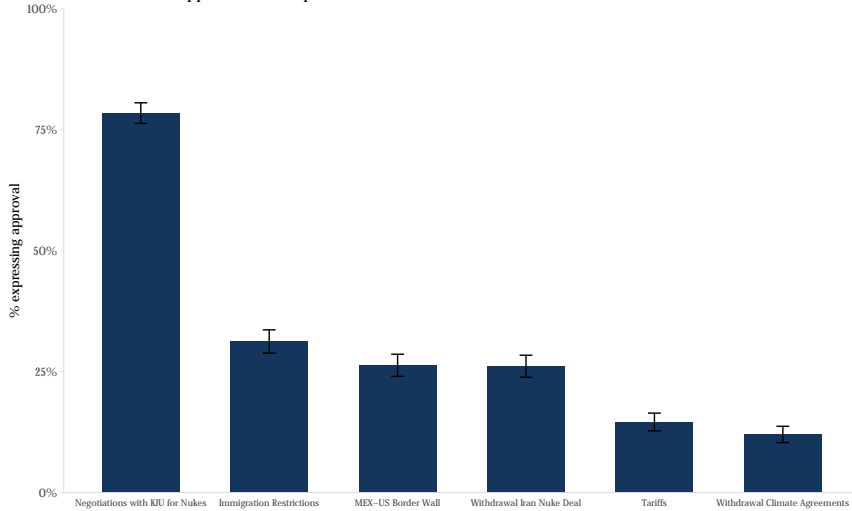


Source: Pew Global Indicators Database. Error bars = 95% CI

Evaluation of Trump Admin. Policies

Figure 3

South Koreans' Approval of Trump Administration Policies, 2019



Source: Pew Global Indicators Database. Error bars = 95% CI

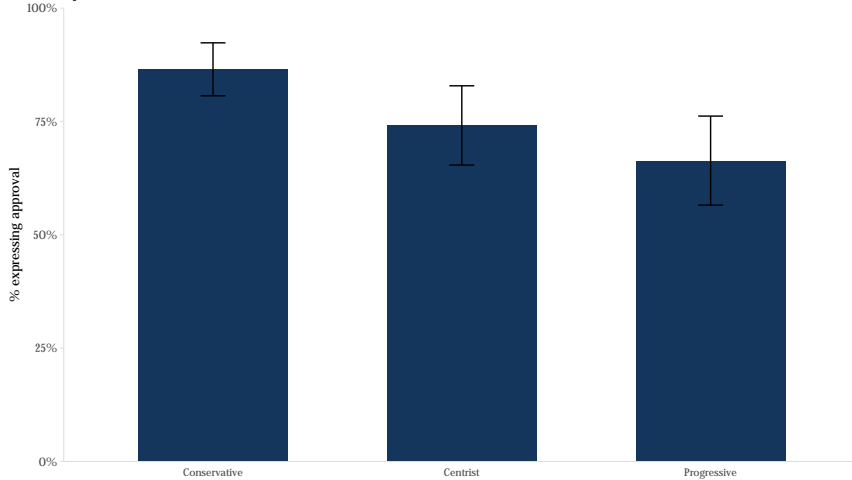
- ▶ After rebounding from the George W. Bush years, US favorability recovered and has remained high (even through the tumultuous Trump years). It is significantly higher than other regional actors and only rivaled by the EU. *Are there any notable differences across relevant subgroups?*
- ▶ Obama enjoyed moral authority. Conservative presidents have not. However, confidence in Trump recovered from its low point in 2017. He was significantly more popular in 2019 than any other regional leader. *Who/what explains the rebound?*
- ▶ Trump administration policies were, overall, very unpopular. However, Trump's preference for direct negotiations with Kim Jong-un was extremely popular. *With whom was it popular?*

- ▶ US Image (2017-2019)
 - a No generational differences.
 - b Conservatives are significantly more likely to approve of the US (2.24 times, or 124 percent) than centrists. Progressives are much less likely (51 percent).
- ▶ Confidence in POTUS (2017-2019)
 - a Democrats are much less likely to have confidence in Trump (authoritarians show no effect). However, there is no 'democratic effect' in 2019.
 - b Conservatives are 1.7 times more likely to have confidence in Trump. Notably, in 2017, there were no political differences. In 2019, there were substantive differences. Trump's gains are accounted for, in part, by conservatives.
- ▶ Approval of Trump's North Korea Policy (2019 only)
 - a No generational differences.
 - b Progressives 2.16 times (116 percent) more likely than centrists to approve. Conservatives are 43 percent times less likely to approve (still high, however).

Predicted Probabilities
US Favorability by Political ID

Figure 4

**South Koreans' Favorability Ratings of the USA
By Political Identification**

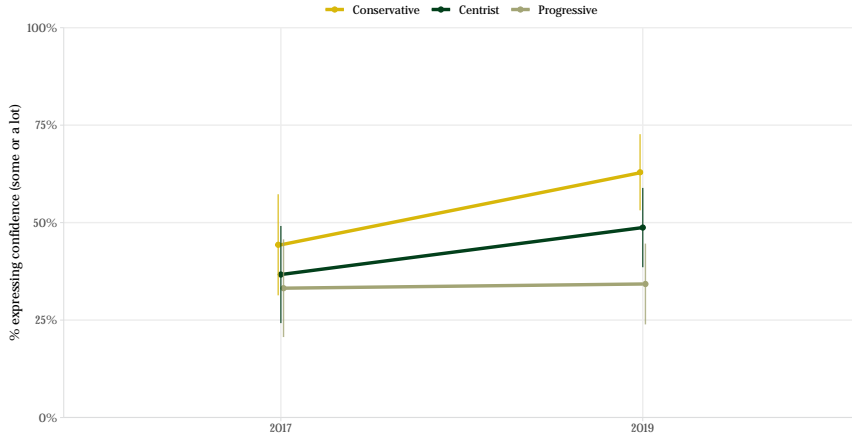


*Source: Pew Global Indicators Database. Error bars = 95% CI.
Estimates are predicted probabilities, derived from logit regressions.*

Confidence in DJT by Political ID
2017 and 2019

Figure 5

**South Koreans' Confidence in Donald Trump, 2017 & 2019
By Political Identification**

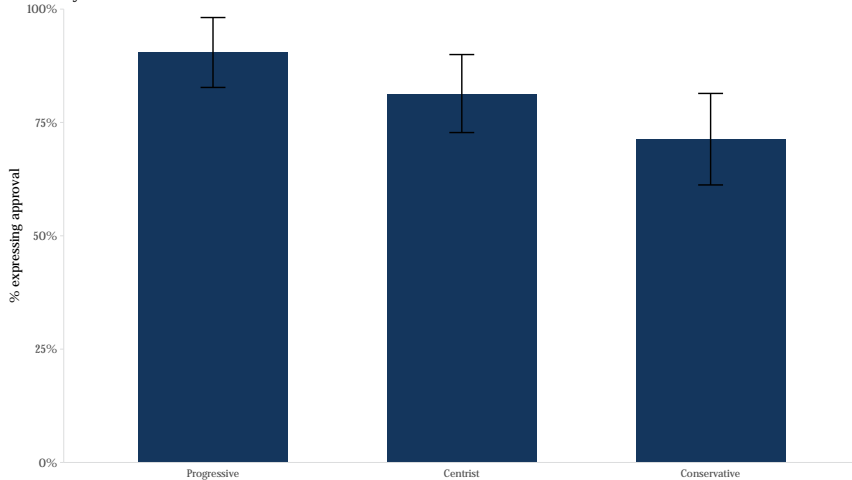


Source: Pew Global Indicators Database. Error bars = 95% CI.
Estimates are predicted probabilities, derived from logit regressions.

Approval of DJT's North Korea Policy

Figure 6

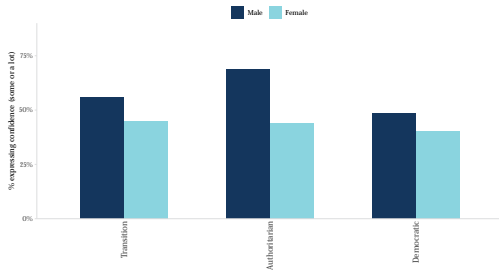
South Koreans' Approval of Trump's North Korea Policy, 2019
By Political Identification



Source: Pew Global Indicators Database. Error bars = 95% CI.
Estimates are predicted probabilities, derived from logit regressions.

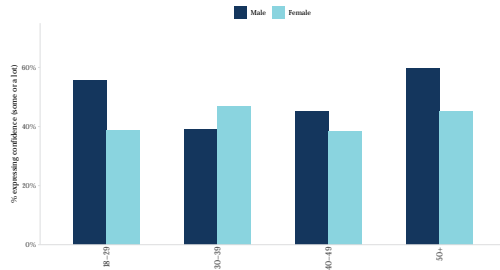
- ▶ South Koreans' opinion of the US and POTUS are not always associated. High US favorability, established during the Obama administration, remained throughout the Trump years, even when confidence in POTUS bottomed out.
- ▶ The United States remained the most favorably appraised major nation-state actor in the region, by a long shot. By 2019, Trump was the regional leader with best appraisal (excluding President Moon).
- ▶ Negative views of President Trump were not consistent across the years observed. Following low confidence in 2017, Trump gained substantially in approval, driven in part by conservatives (and possibly men; not considered).
- ▶ South Koreans by and large approved of Donald Trump's North Korea policy of engaging Kim Jong-un in order to negotiate de-nuclearization. Progressives were the most supportive (lit. almost everyone), but conservatives were also supportive (approx. 3-in-4).
- ▶ Am I missing gender analysis? (See Appendix)

South Koreans' Confidence in Donald Trump, 2019
Age Generation by Sex



Source: Pew Global Attitudes Database.

South Koreans' Confidence in Donald Trump in 2019
Age Cohorts by Sex



Source: Pew Global Attitudes Database.

Thank You