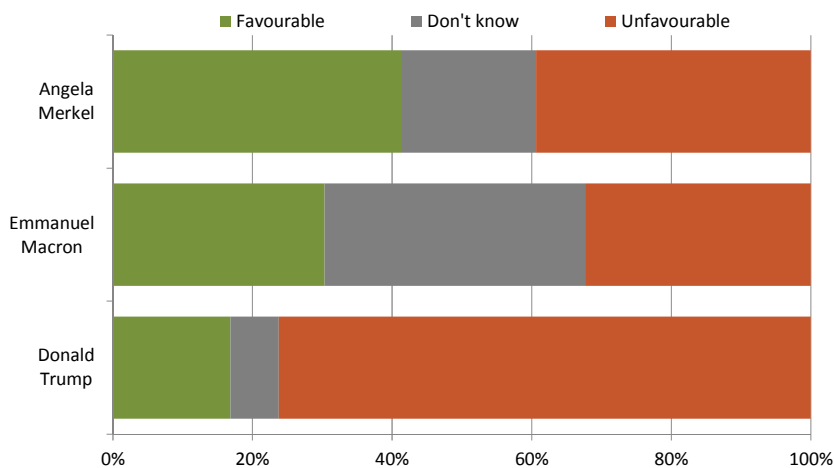


13 July 2018

## Trump the divider: why he will not succeed in Europe

Even UK voters prefer Merkel over Trump: favourable versus unfavourable views



Responses to question “do you have a favourable or unfavourable opinion of the following...?” in %.  
Survey taken 9-10 July 2017; sample size: 1,648 adults from Great Britain. Source: YouGov

- Upsetting the established order:** Having already turned the last G7 summit into a near fiasco in early June, US President Donald Trump again showcased his apparent disdain for multilateral institutions and time-honoured rules of behaviour this week. After questioning the value of the NATO alliance in Brussels, he went on to London to scold UK Prime Minister Theresa May for taking an overly soft approach in her Brexit negotiations with the EU. Adding insult to injury, Trump endorsed May’s main rival, Boris Johnson, as a “great” potential UK prime minister.
- Divide and dominate:** At first glance, Trump’s disruptive approach may make some sense from a narrow “America first” perspective. In any bilateral negotiation with any other country in the world, the US would be the stronger party. By upending alliances and disrespecting rules meant to bind all, the US can gain the opportunity and leeway to settle disputes through a series of bilateral “deals” on terms tilted in favour of US preferences.
- The costs of disruption:** In the 1940s and 1950s, the US had a reason to take the lead in establishing the global post-war order and its multilateral institutions. Allies can be useful. Even in economic terms, trust matters. Common rules and multilateral institutions facilitate wealth-enhancing exchanges across borders by reducing transaction costs. Elevated uncertainty would harm all sides over time, including the US.
- Will Trump succeed?** Trump may be his own worst enemy. By taking on many countries at the same time with behaviour considered unacceptable beyond his own base of fans, Trump may bring others closer together rather than dividing them. Because he is so unpopular in Europe, his attacks on the EU look set to strengthen rather than weaken the EU’s cohesion. In its approach to trade disputes with the US, the multilateral EU is unusually united.
- #TrumpforBoris:** Trump’s latest praise and endorsement for Boris Johnson could boost the ex-foreign minister’s stock among Conservative party Brexit-hardliners. However, it probably will not improve his chances of leading the Conservatives or his country from No. 10 Downing Street. Trump’s rating among the broader UK voter base is too poor for that (see chart). YouGov polling shows that only 17% of Britons hold favourable views of Trump. This compares to 41% with favourable views of German leader Chancellor Angela Merkel and 30% of French leader Emmanuel Macron – despite the tricky ongoing Brexit negotiations.
- A deal with China in the end?** In purely economic terms, the verdict on Trump’s disruptive approach is still out. We continue to see a good chance that, under pressure from the US, China will eventually strike a deal under which it will open its markets faster than before and stop some of its [harmful discriminatory practices](#). If so, this could offset some of the damage Trump has done by questioning the rules of the world trading system and abrogating planned multilateral trade deals with the EU (TTIP) and much of Asia (TPP). Still, it would have to be a really excellent deal with China to mitigate the long-term costs of his disruptive behaviour.

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