

22 Nation Poll Shows China Viewed Positively by Most Countries

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China's Economic Growth Considered Positive But Not Its Increasing Military Power

[Questionnaire](#)

A new BBC World Service Poll of 22 countries finds that China is viewed as playing a significantly more positive role in the world than either the US or Russia, a role more on par with Britain. Asked about possible future trends, most are positive about China significantly increasing its economic power in the world but most are negative about China significantly increasing its military power.

The poll of 22,953 people was conducted for the BBC World Service by the international polling firm GlobeScan together with the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland. The 22-nation fieldwork was coordinated by GlobeScan and completed during December 2004 in most countries.

The survey shows that China is viewed as having a mainly positive influence in the world by a majority or plurality of citizens in 14 countries. On average across all countries polled (excluding China itself), almost half (48%) see China's influence as positive and just 30 percent see it as negative, with another 22 percent being noncommittal. In only three countries does a plurality view Chinese influence as negative—Germany (47%), US (46%), and Poland (33%). In no country did a majority of the public have a negative view of China. Boding well for China's future, young people (18-29) worldwide are much more prone to view China positively (58% on average).

Particularly striking is that even in neighboring Asian countries that have historically shown substantial suspicion of China, views are relatively benign. Most notable is India where 66 percent view China positively, despite decades of tensions and a history of border clashes. Positive views are also found in the Philippines (70%), Indonesia (68%), and Australia (56%). However South Korea is divided (49% positive, 47% negative). In Japan few say China is having a negative influence (22%), but also few say it is having a positive influence (25%), while 53 percent do not take a position one way or the other.

Though there has been much focus on the competitive threat from China's enormous potential, China's growing economic power is seen as positive in most countries. Asked if they think it would be positive or negative if China were to become "significantly more powerful economically than it is today," in sixteen countries a majority (11 countries) or a plurality (5 countries) see it as positive. Strikingly, this positive view is found in some countries, such as Mexico (54%), whose manufacturing sectors face significant competition with China. On average 49 percent view it as positive and 33 percent as

negative. In only four countries do a plurality see it as negative—Italy (47%), Spain (47%), Turkey (42%), and Argentina (41%). Views are evenly divided in two countries—the US and Germany.

Economic power aside, most citizens around the world do not want to see Chinese military power grow. Asked how they would feel if “China becomes significantly more powerful militarily than it is today,” in seventeen countries more said that it would be negative. On average, 59 percent said it would be negative and just 24 percent positive.

The countries most concerned about the potential growth of Chinese military power are Germany (87%), Australia (79%), Japan (78%), Spain (76%), the US (75%), and Italy (74%). Interestingly, the one country in which a majority viewed increased Chinese military power positively was China’s neighbor India (56%). The Lebanese also leaned positively (44% to 27%). South Africans and Filipinos were evenly divided.

Most citizens in the EU nations polled have a negative view of increasing Chinese military power (Germany 87% “negative,” Spain 76%, Italy 74%, Britain 65%, Poland 65%, France 64%). This is an interesting finding, given that the European Union is currently considering lifting its post-Tiananmen Square embargo on the sale of arms and arms technology to China.

China is viewed much more positively than two other major powers, the US and Russia, which are viewed quite negatively. Russia is viewed as having a negative influence in the world by citizens of fourteen countries and a positive influence in just five, with an average across all countries of 36 percent viewing it positively and 40 percent negatively. The US is also viewed negatively in fifteen countries and positively in just six, with an average of 38 percent viewing it positively and 47 percent negatively.

Indeed, China is viewed nearly as positively as Britain by citizens polled worldwide—on average 50 percent view Britain as having a positive influence as compared to 48 percent for China.

Steven Kull, director of PIPA comments, “It is quite remarkable that with its growing economic power China is viewed as so benign, especially by its Asian neighbors that it could threaten or seek to dominate. However, this cordial view from around the world does appear to depend on China restraining itself from seeking to convert its burgeoning economic power into a threatening military presence.”

Doug Miller, President of GlobeScan comments, “China clearly has the respect of the world because of its exceptional economic achievements, and most people seem to hope for its continued economic success. However, with military approaches generally unsupported in today’s world, citizens worldwide are hoping China will pursue a soft power route to world influence.”

Regional and Demographic Variations

While, as mentioned, large majorities in some key Asian countries view China's current influence as positive—India (66%), Indonesia (68%), the Philippines (70%)—others were more mixed. South Koreans are divided (49% positive, 47% negative), as are the Japanese (22% positive, 25% negative, 53% undecided), while a majority of Australians (56% to 28%) viewed China positively.

Europeans show more mixed feelings. Positive views are expressed by pluralities in France (49%), Britain (46%), and Russia (42%), while pluralities show negative views in Germany (47%) and Poland (33%). Divided views are expressed in Italy, Spain, and Turkey.

North Americans are also mixed. A plurality of Americans express negative views of China's influence (46%), while more Canadians (49%) and Mexicans (33% positive) express positive views.

Latin Americans show fairly positive feelings. Majorities in Chile (56%) and Brazil (53%) have positive views, while a plurality of Argentines (44%) do so as well.

In the one Arab country polled—Lebanon—a very large majority was positive (74%), as was a large majority (62%) in the one African country polled—South Africa.

Worldwide, young people are much more prone to view China as benign. Among those 18-29 years old, a robust 58 percent view China positively, while this true of only 43 percent of those over 60.

Those with lower levels of education are less apt to view China positively (45%) than are those with medium (51%) or high levels of education (52%). Interestingly, men are more trusting of China (53%) than are women (47%).

The BBC World Service Poll was conducted from November 15, 2004 to January 5, 2005 with a representative sample of 22,953 people across the 22 countries. In eight of the countries the sample was limited to major metropolitan areas. The margin of error per country ranged from +/-2.5–4%. For more details, please see the Methodology or visit www.pipa.org.