

World Opinion on China More Positive than on U.S., But Slipping

April 17, 2006

Most Countries, Including in Asia, Comfortable With China's Growing Economic Power



As President Hu Jintao makes the first visit of his presidency to Washington this month, global public opinion polls reveal that China's ratings in world opinion are substantially better than those of the United States—though they have slipped a bit lately, concurrent with the ascension of Hu Jintao to the Chinese presidency.

Skyline of Shanghai, China (PNL)

Global Views of China and the United States

Number of countries in which majority or plurality says country's influence in world is:



Average global ratings for country's influence in the world:

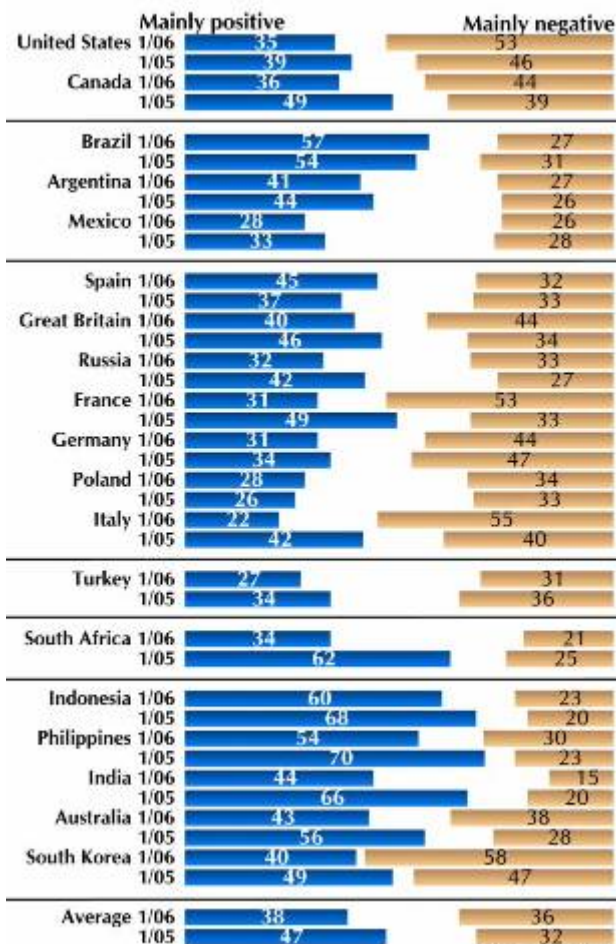


BBC 1/06 A poll of 33 nations completed in January 2006 by GlobeScan and the Program on International Policy Attitudes for the BBC World Service asked respondents to evaluate whether certain countries are having a positive or negative influence in the world. China's influence was rated positively by a majority or plurality in 20 out of 33 countries, while just 10 countries gave it a negative rating. . On average 45 percent gave China a positive rating and 27 percent a negative rating.

The United States' influence in the world on the other hand, was rated positively in just 13 countries, and negatively in 18. On average, views were evenly divided, with 40 percent seeing the U.S. role as positive and 41 percent negative.

Trends in Views of China

Change in Evaluations of China



BBC, 12/2005

China's ratings, however, have slipped somewhat over the previous year or so. Among 20 countries polled at the beginning of 2005 and then again in 2006, in 12 of them ratings of China went down, while in two of them ratings improved. On average, its positive rating dropped by nine points.

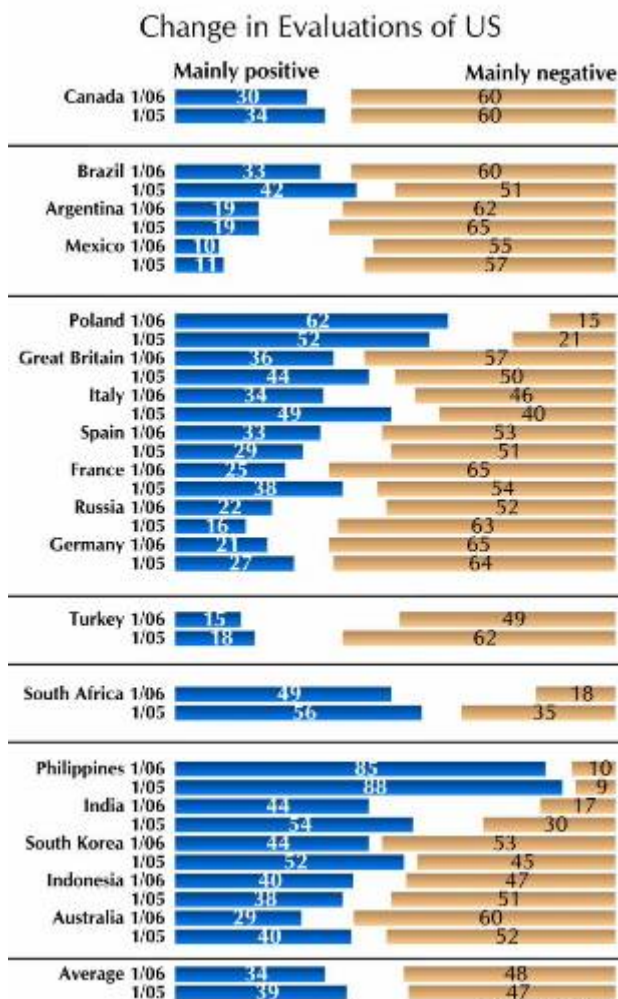
What is most striking is the change that has occurred in European countries and Canada. While at the start of 2005 four of the seven European countries polled plus Canada had a plurality with a positive view of China, today only one country—Spain—still has a plurality positive view. France's positive rating dropped from 49 percent to 31 percent, while a majority of 53 percent now view China negatively. Italy's positive rating dropped from 42 percent to 22 percent, and a 55 percent majority now have a negative view. Positive views dropped in Great Britain (46% to 40%) and Canada (49% to 36%), with pluralities now having a negative view. Views in Russia also worsened—positive views dropping from a plurality positive of 42 percent to a divided 32 percent positive, 33 percent negative. Finland—polled for the first time—also came in 54 percent negative.

Negative shifts also occurred in Asia, most notably in South Korea. In 2005 South Koreans had been divided on China (49% positive, 47% negative), while currently a 58 percent majority views China negatively. Drops in positive ratings have also occurred in

India (66% to 44%), the Philippines (70% to 54%), Australia (56% to 43%) and Indonesia (68% to 60%), but in all of these cases a plurality or majority are still positive.

Trends in Views of the U.S.

However, ratings of the United States have also fallen from 2005 levels. Among the 20 nations polled at the start of 2005 as well as this year, on average positive ratings have dropped five points; ratings have significantly declined in seven of these tracking countries while significantly improving in only five.



BBC, 12/2005 Within Europe there has been a

hardening of negative attitudes toward America compared to a year ago. Those expressing a negative view have risen in France (from 54% to 65%), and Great Britain (50% to 57%), and in Italy a plurality of 46 percent now has a negative view of the US (only 34% positive) as compared to 2005, when 49 percent had a positive view and only 40 percent had a negative view. Negative views have also increased in China (from 42% to 62%), in Australia (from 52% to 60%) and in Brazil (from 51% to 60%). Interestingly, no more Iranians were negative about the US role in the world than Germans or French (each with 65% negative).

But there have also been some positive trends. In Russia, negative views are down from 63 percent to 52 percent, and in Turkey from 62 percent to 49 percent. In Poland, positive attitudes expressed by 52 percent in 2005 have risen to 62 percent.

Views of China's Growing Economic Power

Perhaps the most striking finding is how much countries around the world have shown comfort with China's growing economic power. The BBC poll completed in January 2005 asked respondents if they thought it would be positive or negative if China were to become "significantly more powerful economically than it is today." Interestingly, this potential development elicited an even more positive response than the assessment of China's influence today. In 17 countries a majority (12 countries) or a plurality (5 countries) saw this as a positive prospect. On average 49% viewed it as positive and 33% as negative. In no country did a majority see this prospect as negative, and in only four countries did a plurality see it as negative—Italy (47%), Spain (47%), Turkey (42%), and Argentina (41%). Views were evenly divided in two countries—the US and Germany. Strikingly, this included some countries, such as Mexico (54%), whose manufacturing sectors are in a difficult competition with China.

Also, this prospect was viewed positively in most Asian countries including India (68%), Philippines (63%), South Korea (54%), and Australia (52%). Only Japan was less definite with a plurality of 35% saying it would be positive, 23% saying it would be negative and 34% characteristically not taking a position.

However, in sharp contrast to these sanguine attitudes about the growth of China's economic power, most citizens around the world are decidedly cooler about the prospect of growing Chinese military power. 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% said it would be negative and just 24% positive.

Europeans and Americans were especially likely to show such concern. Three out of four Americans took this position as did most Europeans (Germany 87% "negative," Spain 76%, Italy 74%, Britain 65%, Poland 65%, France 64%). These European findings are interesting given that the European Union has considered lifting its post-Tiananmen embargo on the sale of arms and arms technology to China.

Asians showed a complex pattern of attitudes. Most striking, the one country in the world in which a majority viewed increased Chinese military power positively was China's neighbor India (56%). And Filipinos were evenly divided. But the prospect was viewed negatively in Australia (79%), Japan (78%), South Korea (58%), and Indonesia (55%).