

World Publics Think China Will Catch Up With the US—and That's Okay

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Majorities around the world believe that China will catch up with the United States economically. It's a prospect that leaves most of those polled—even Americans—unperturbed.

A window washer works on a skyscraper in Shanghai, China (Fumiko)

A multinational poll by The Chicago Council on Global Affairs and WorldPublicOpinion.org finds that in most countries polled, majorities or pluralities believe the Chinese economy will grow to be as large as the US economy. In no country do most people think this would be mostly negative. Majorities in every country polled believe this is either a good thing or equally positive and negative.

“What is particularly striking is that despite the tectonic significance of China catching up with the US, overall the world public's response is low key—almost philosophical,” said Steven Kull, editor of WorldPublicOpinion.org.

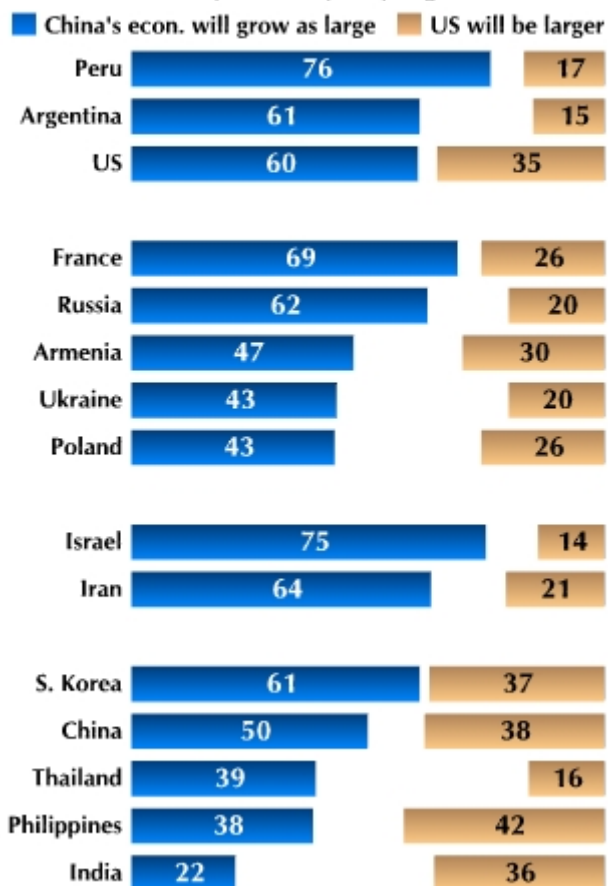
This sanguine reaction is not because China is widely trusted. World publics do not trust China any more than they trust the United States and distinctly less than they trust Japan.

This is the fifth in a series of releases from a wide-ranging international survey, which was conducted in countries that represent 56 percent of the world's population: China, India, the United States, Russia, Indonesia, France, Thailand, Ukraine, Poland, Iran, Mexico, South Korea, the Philippines, Australia, Argentina, Peru, Armenia and Israel, plus the Palestinian territories. Not all questions were asked in all countries. Not all questions were asked in all countries.

Bullish on China

Rise of Chinese Economy

Do you think that it is more likely that someday China's economy will grow to be as large as the US economy or that the US economy will always stay larger than China's?



WFO/CCGA Of the 15 countries asked whether it was

“likely that someday China’s economy will grow to be as large as the U.S. economy,” majorities agreed in eight and pluralities in five.

The Chinese themselves are among the more skeptical countries. Only 50 percent say that their economy will catch up to the US economy. That is considerably less than the percentage of Americans who believe China’s economy will grow to be as large as theirs (60%).

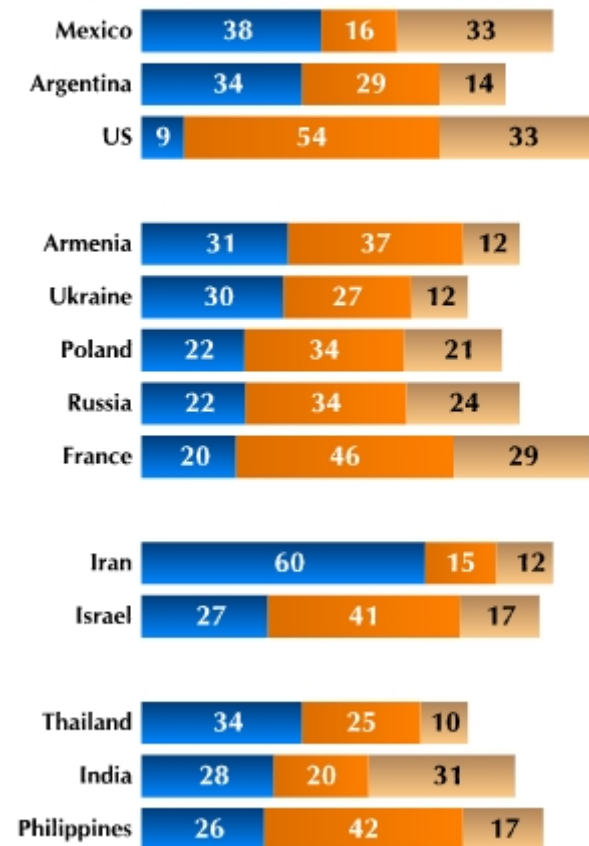
It’s also less than those polled in Peru (76%), Israel (75%), France (69%), Iran (64%), Russia (62%), Argentina and South Korea (both 61%). The percentage of Chinese respondents who believe their country will catch up with the United States is even lower than the average of respondents in all 15 countries surveyed (54%).

In only two countries do those believing “the US economy will always stay larger than China’s” outnumber those who think China will catch up. Filipinos say the US economy will remain larger by a margin of 42 percent to 38 percent. Indians also tend to believe this by 36 percent to 22 percent, though even larger numbers refuse to answer (42%).

China's Rise Neither Good nor Bad

Effect of China's Rise
If China's economy were to grow to be as large as the U.S. economy, do you think that would be mostly positive, mostly negative, or equally positive and negative?

Mostly positive Equally + & - Mostly negative



WPO/CCGA Asked how they would feel if China were

to catch up with the United States, publics show little concern. In no country among the 13 asked does even a plurality say that this would be mostly negative. The most common view is that this would be equally positive and negative, with slightly more saying that it would be positive than saying it would be negative.

The highest level of concern is in the United States, where one in three is worried. But a majority of Americans (54%) say instead that China's economic rise would be "neither positive nor negative" while another one in ten (9%) say it would be mostly positive.

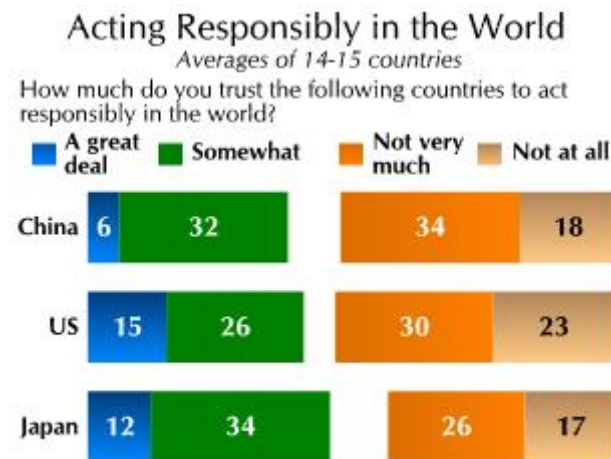
This idea that China's rise would be equally positive and negative is also the most common view in France (46%), the Philippines (42%), and Israel (41%). However in France, those who believe this would be mostly negative outnumber those who say it would be positive by 29 percent to 20 percent. In the Philippines, the reverse is true: More say this would be positive (26%) than negative (17%). Even in Israel—which looks to the United States for support—more say it would be positive (27%) than negative (17%).

In Russia—which may view China as both a rival and a counterweight to the United States—negative and positive views about China’s rise are almost equally balanced. Thirty-four percent say it would be equally positive and negative, while almost exactly the same numbers say it would be positive (22%) as negative (24%). Reactions in Poland and India—both of which tend to have fairly positive views of the United States—are similarly balanced. Poles are indifferent overall, with 22 percent calling China’s rise positive, 21 percent negative and 34 percent both equally. In India, negative and positive views are also roughly equal (31% and 28%, respectively) though fewer say it is equally negative and positive (20%).

Only in Iran does a majority (60%) say that it would be mostly positive for China to catch up. Their favorable outlook may stem in part from heavy Chinese investment in Iranian oil as well as Iranian desires to have a counterweight to American power. But the view that this would be positive is also the most common response in Mexico (38%), Argentina (34%), Thailand (34%), and Ukraine (30%).

On average, across all countries polled, the most common response is that seeing China catch up with the United States would be equally positive and negative (32%), though those who think it would be mostly positive (29%) outweigh those who think it would be negative (20%).

China and the US: Equally Distrusted



WPO/CCGA The world’s seemingly sanguine view of

Chinese possible economic ascendance does not mean most publics think they can trust Chinese leaders. Ten out of 15 publics polled say they do not trust China “to act responsibly in the world.” On average, those who say they cannot trust China “at all” or “very much” outnumber those who say they can trust it “somewhat: or a great deal” by 52 percent to 38 percent (10 percent do not answer).

“Though people are not threatened by the rise of China, they do not appear to be assuming that it will be a new benign world leader,” said Christopher Whitney, executive director for studies at The Chicago Council on Global Affairs. “They seem to have a clear-eyed view that China is largely acting on its own interests.”

Attitudes toward China in this respect are similar to attitudes toward the United States, which is also distrusted in 10 out of 15 publics polled. Those who distrust the United States outnumber those who trust it by 53 percent to 41 percent (6 percent do not answer).

But this does not mean that people simply do not trust major powers. There is substantially more confidence in Japan, which is trusted to act responsibly in 10 out of 16 countries. On average the margin is slightly in favor of trusting Japan by 46 percent to 43 percent (11 percent do not answer).

Those most likely to distrust China are the French. Three out of four French respondents (76%) say they feel that China can either not be trusted at all (33%) or not very much (43%). That's even more than those who distrust the United States (72%). Peruvians are also strongly inclined to distrust China (70%) as are Argentines (65%) and South Koreans (61%).

Thais (59%), Americans (58%) and Russians (56%) are about equally doubtful that China can be trusted to act responsibly. In Thailand (53%) and the United States (60%) majorities also say that China does not take their country's interests into account when making foreign policy. A plurality agrees in Russia (47% to 42%).

Pluralities tend to think China cannot be trusted in India (49% to 42%), Israel (47% to 42%) and in Poland (47% to 28%), though large numbers of Poles are not sure (25%). Israelis (61%) and Poles (69%) also say Chinese foreign policy does not take their interests into account. Indians also lean toward this opinion (46% to 43%).

Those most likely to believe China can be trusted include three of its Asian/Pacific neighbors: Australia (59%), Indonesia (59%) and the Philippines (57%). The trade of all four countries with China is growing rapidly. Australia and the ASEAN countries (which include Indonesia and the Philippines) are negotiating free trade agreements with growing economic ties with China. Ukrainians also tend to trust China (46% to 29%) even though they do not think that it takes their interests into account in foreign policy decisions (62%).

The countries that do not trust China also tend to be those that do not trust the United States. Two South American countries are the most distrustful of the United States: Argentina (84%) and Peru (80%). Russia is next with 73 percent saying the United States cannot be trusted. Two-thirds of Russians (66%) also say that US foreign policy does not take Russian interests into account. Most French respondents also say the United States cannot be trusted (72%).

Indonesia is an exception to the rule that countries tend to distrust both powers. Although Indonesians trust China, they do not trust the United States (64%). Armenia is another: divided about China but distrustful of the United States (58%).

Majorities in China (59%), Thailand (56%), South Korea (53%) and India (52%) also regard the United States with suspicion. A majority of the Chinese (58%) also say that the United States does not take their interests into account when making foreign policy, as do pluralities in Thailand (49% to 23%, 28% not sure) and India (46% to 44%).

A slim majority of Poles (51%) trust the United States to act responsibly even though a far larger one (76%) says that US foreign policy does not take their interests into account. Ukrainians also tend to trust the United States (49% to 37%) although they do not think it considers their interests (63%). Four out of five Israelis both trust the United States (81%) and believe it takes their interests into account (82%).

In contrast, the other great Asian economy—Japan—gets a considerably more positive reaction from world publics. Majorities or pluralities in 10 of the countries polled say that it can be trusted to act responsibly, led by Indonesia (76%), Australia (72%), the United States (71%) and the Philippines (67%). A majority of the French (59%) also trust Japan.

On the other hand, the United States is the only country out of eight asked where a majority believes that Japan takes its interests into account when making foreign policy decisions.

Majorities in six countries say Japan cannot be trusted, led by two countries invaded by Japan during World War II: South Korea (81%) and China (79%). The Peruvians (60%) are also leery of Japan as are Thais (60%), Argentines (52%) and Russians (51%).

Asian/Pacific Views of International Influence

Asian/Pacific publics see China's influence in the world as high, though not as high as the United States'. But they believe that China already wields nearly as much or more influence as the United States does in Asia.

Ten countries were asked to rate the world influence of the United States, China and Japan on a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 indicated the most influence. All 10 publics ranked the United States' influence as higher than China's. But China is close behind and on a par with Japan.

South Korea gives US influence a high 8.5, China a 6.7 and Japan a 6.5. Thai opinion is similar: the United States rates an 8.3 while China and Japan get the same score of 6.9. Indians rate US international influence slightly lower (7.3) though still higher than either Japan (6.2) or China (6) while Australians give the United States only a 6.1, only slightly above either Japan (5.7) or China (5.5).

Only Indonesia believes Japan's influence surpasses both China's and the United States'. Indonesia gives all three rather modest rankings: 6.9 for Japan, 6.4 for the United States and 6.3 for China.

China gives itself a 7.8, less than the 8.6 it gives to the United States but considerably above the 6.7 it gives to Japan. Americans give their country an 8.5 and rate the world influence of China and Japan as equal (6.4 both).

Four Asian/Pacific countries generally see China as already wielding nearly as much or more influence in Asia as the United States does. Australians and the Chinese themselves see China as more influential than the United States, though Indians and Indonesians see it as slightly less so.

China, India, Australia and Indonesia were asked to rate the influence in Asia of China, the United States and Japan on the same 0-10 scale.

The Chinese gave both themselves and the United States a score of 8, the highest scores given by any country, while giving Japan a 6.8. Australians think Chinese influence in Asia rates a 7.5, higher than that given by Aussies to the United States or to the Japanese (6.6 for both).

Indians place China's influence in Asia at 5.9, below Japan's (6.2) and well below the United States (7.1). Indonesians give China a 7, less than the United States' 7.5 and Japan's 7.3

Relations Seen as Improving or Stable

While most publics express distrust of China and the United States, views are mixed about whether relations are now moving in a positive or negative direction. Asked whether their relations with the United States and with China are improving, getting worse or staying the same, six out of 11 countries polled tend to say they are getting better in both cases, while the other five say they are staying the same.

Australia is the only country with a majority (59%) saying relations with China are on the upswing, though this is also the predominant view in India (50%), Indonesia (49%), Thailand (48%), Russia (44%) and Israel (40%). In the other countries, the most common view is that their country's association with China is stable: Ukraine (58%), Poland (52%), Armenia (49%), South Korea (47%) and the United States (47%).

Majorities in Asia's two most populous countries—India (58%) and China (53%)—see relations on the United States as getting better. This opinion is shared by pluralities in Australia (50%), Armenia (48%), Indonesia (46%) and Thailand (37%). The others say relations are stable: Poland (60%), South Korea (56%), Israel (52%), Ukraine (52%) and Russia (45%).

Free Trade More Popular in Asia than in US

Four Asian countries are more open to free trade agreements with each other and with the United States than Americans are. Majorities in Thailand favor agreements with China (61%) or Japan (63%). Koreans also tend to look favorably on such accords, especially

with China. Two-thirds would like such an agreement with China (66%) and a plurality of 50 percent (vs. 46% against) would like one with Japan. Pluralities in India also would like free trade with China (44% to 25%) and with Japan (48% to 26%).

All four Asian countries polled support free-trade agreements with the United States. China has the largest majority in favor of such pacts: 66 percent say they would like a free trade agreement with the United States and only 19 percent say they would not. Three out of five Thais (60%) would also like such an accord, as would a majority of Indians (55%) and South Koreans (54%).

In contrast, Americans themselves are somewhat leery of lowering their tariff barriers to Chinese or Japanese goods even in exchange for reciprocal action in favor of US goods. US respondents lean slightly in favor of free trade with their close ally Japan (47% to 43%) but a majority opposes such an agreement with China (56%).

To read more about opinion in the individual countries surveyed, click [here](#) to view the full report (PDF).