

SOUTH KOREANS

— AND —

THEIR NEIGHBORS

2015

ASAN POLL

THE ASAN INSTITUTE for POLICY STUDIES

South Koreans and Their Neighbors 2015



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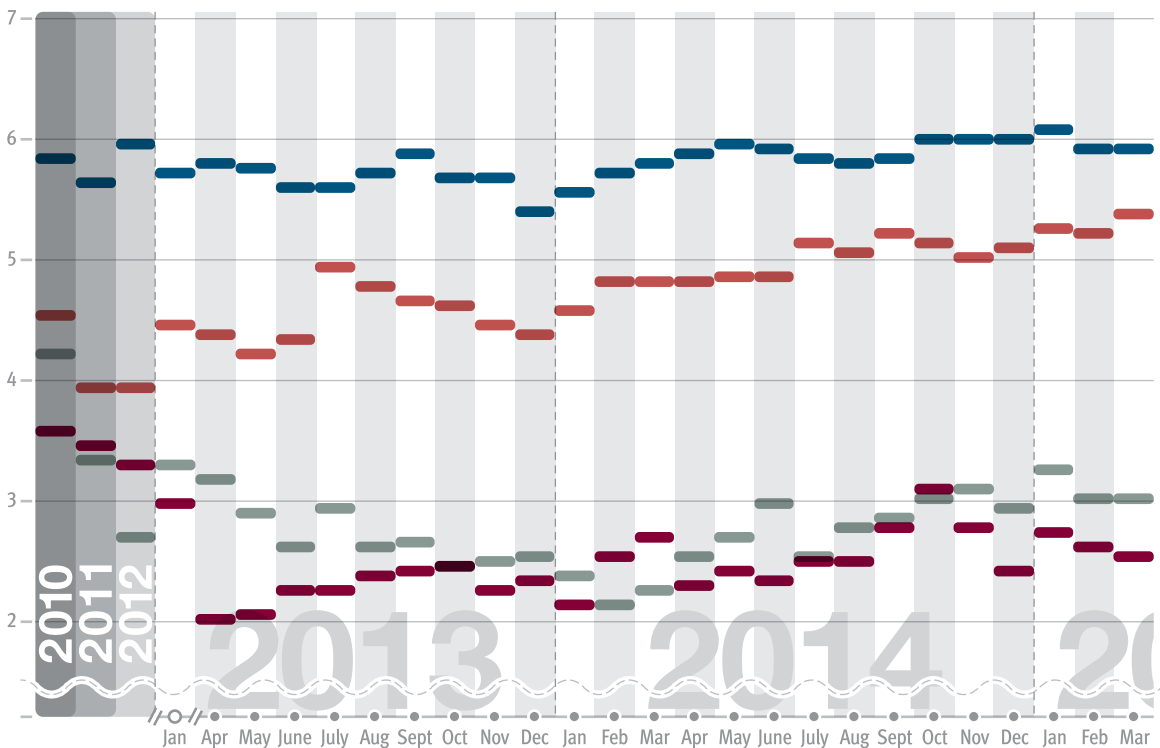
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COUNTRY FAVORABILITY

How would you rate the favorability of the following countries?



Scale: 0-10. Least favorable=0; Most favorable=10

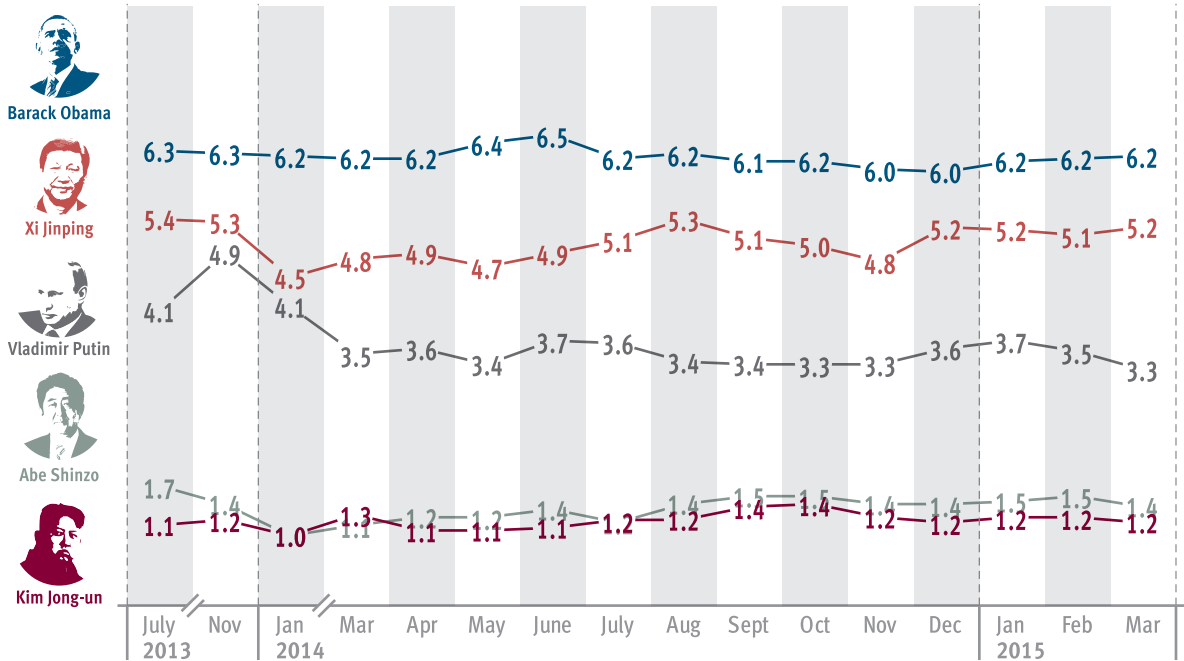


Respondents were asked to rate the favorability of the following countries on a scale of zero to ten. Dating back to 2010, the United States has been consistently ranked as South Koreans’ most favored nation with little variation. Improving ROK-China relations saw China’s favorability also rise slightly. Its ratings have been on an increasing trend since President Park Geun-hye and President Xi Jinping both took office in 2013. Ratings for Japan and North Korea continued to struggle. Japan’s ratings for the past few months remained above that of North Korea, although that could easily change given how toxic ROK-Japan relations has become.

LEADER FAVORABILITY

How would you rate the favorability of the following leaders?

Scale: 0-10. Least favorable=0; Most favorable=10



Respondents were asked to rate the favorability of major leaders on a scale of zero to ten. Mirroring the country favorability ratings, President Barack Obama has maintained a score above 6.0 and continued his reign as the most favored leader. Following President Obama was President Xi Jinping, who appears to have developed a nice rapport with President Park Geun-hye. Despite Western criticisms of Russia’s involvement in Crimea, President Vladimir Putin has managed a relatively consistent rating and came in third. Prime Minister Abe Shinzo and Kim Jong-un continued to battle for South Koreans’ least favored status.

MOST IMPORTANT FOREIGN POLICY ISSUE

2015. 3/18-20

What is the most important foreign policy issue for South Korea?

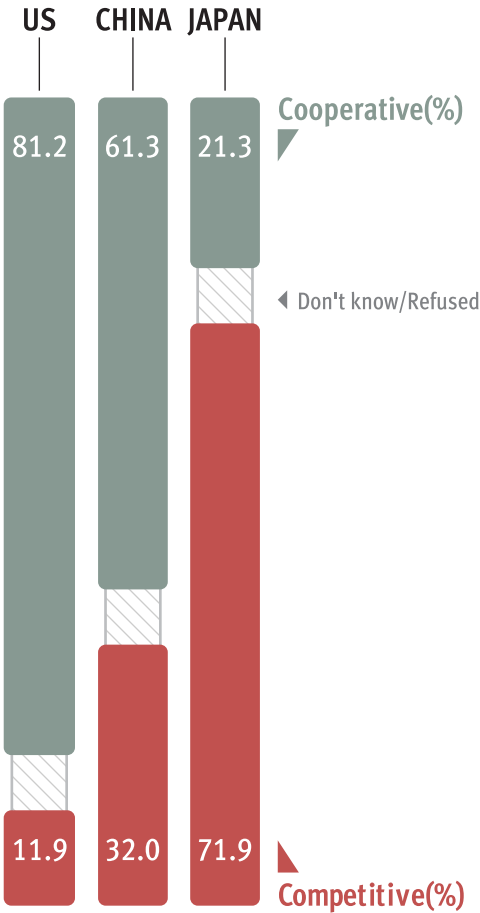


Respondents were asked to rank South Korea's most important foreign policy issues. 26.8% identified improving inter-Korean relations as the most important. Maintaining the ROK-US Alliance (21.4%), strengthening ROK-China cooperation (16.9%), and denuclearizing North Korea (13.8%) were also seen as important priorities for South Korea. The results indicate that while South Koreans continue to see North Korea as the most important foreign policy issue, they also value their country's relationships with the US and China. The desire to maintain the historic alliance with the US and, at the same time, develop a cooperative relationship with China appears to feature strongly in the South Korean calculus. On the other hand, only 5.1% of South Koreans identified ROK-Japan relations as a priority. Despite the South Korean government's growing sensitivity to ROK-Japan relations, the results indicate that the public does not consider it a particularly important issue at this time.

SOUTH KOREA'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH NEIGHBORS

2015. 3/2~4

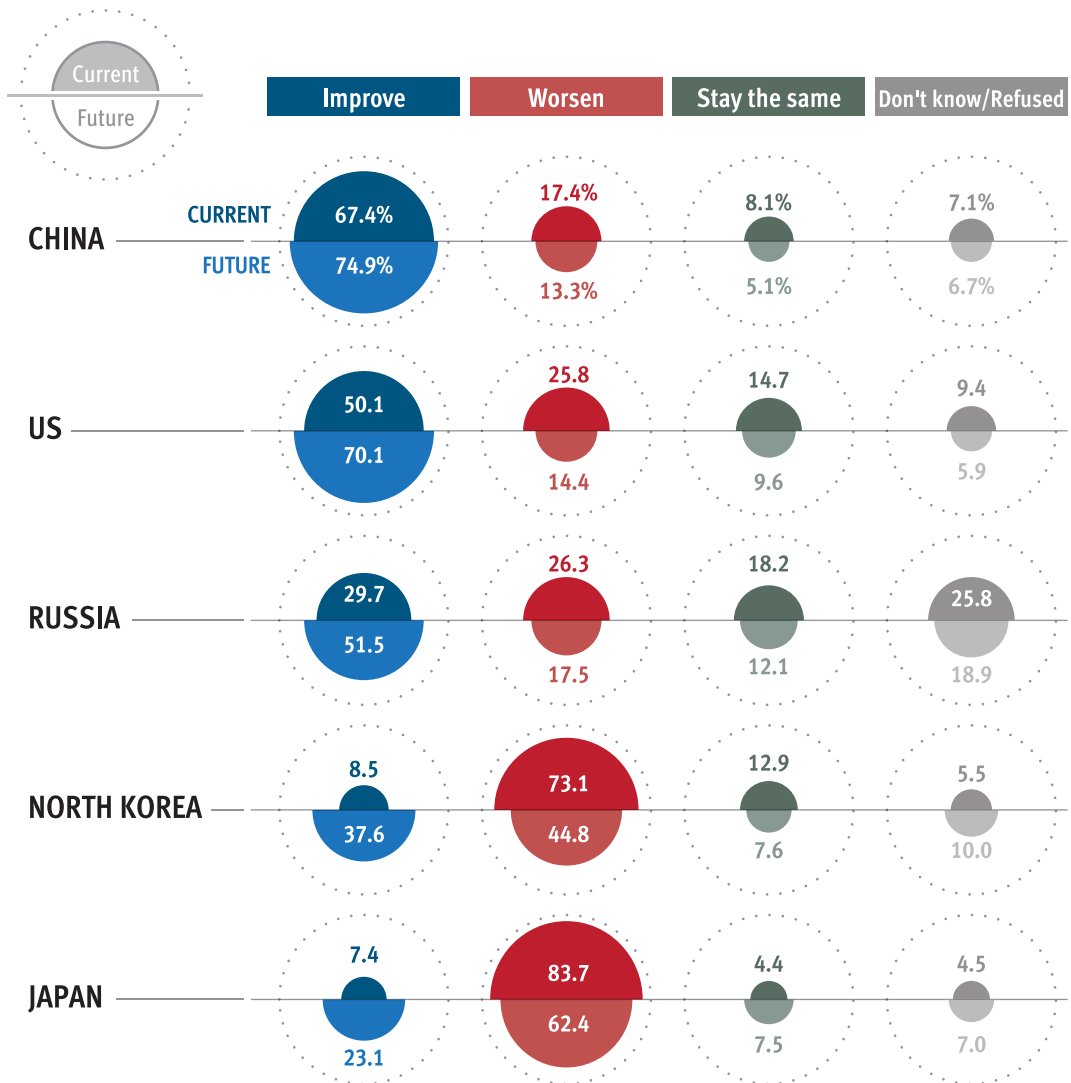
How do you assess South Korea's relationships with the following neighbors?



Respondents were asked to identify the nature of South Korea's relationships with the three major players in the region: the United States, China, and Japan. An overwhelming 81.2% of South Koreans described ROK-US relationship as being cooperative while 61.3% said the same about ROK-China relations. Consistent with the country favorability and leadership ratings, 71.9% identified South Korea's relationship with Japan as being competitive.

SOUTH KOREA'S CURRENT/FUTURE RELATIONSHIPS WITH NEIGHBORS

2015. 1/14~16





Do you think South Korea's relationships with the following neighbors have improved or worsened?

The majority of South Koreans (83.7%) stated that the already bitter ROK-Japan relations has worsened as of late. The same can be said about inter-Korean relations, with 73.1% indicating as such. On the other hand, 67.4% identified China as the country whose relationship with South Korea has improved the most. This can be attributed to the robust relationship between the two countries' leaders. 50% also assessed an improved ROK-US relationship.



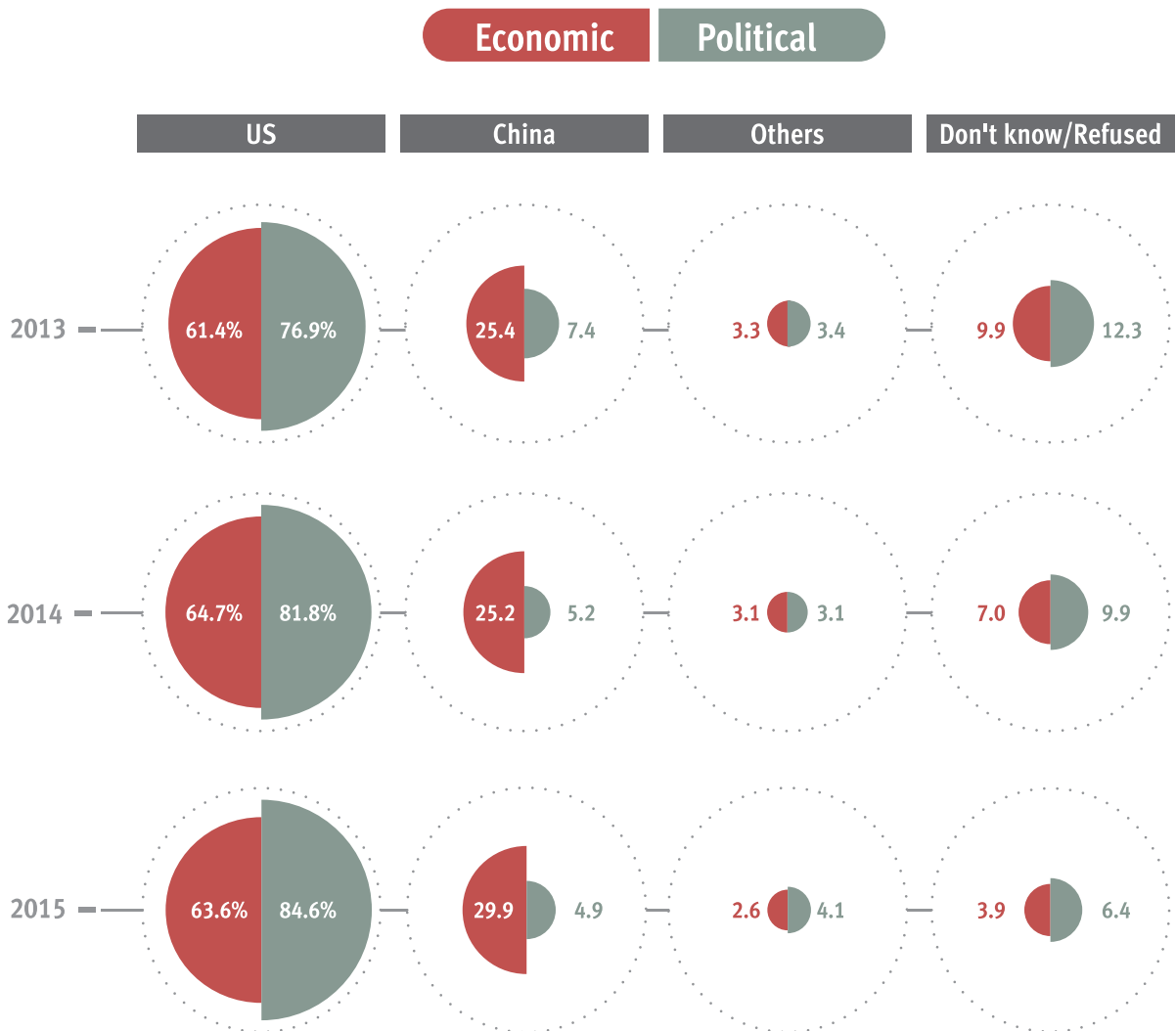
How do you see South Korea's relationships with the following neighbors changing in the future?

When respondents were asked to evaluate South Korea's future relationships its neighbors, many responded positively to China (74.9%) and the US (70.1%). Even 51.5% saw ROK-Russia relations improving. At the same time, they were overly critical of ROK-Japan relations, as 62.4% stated that it will worsen. It appears that the relationship has reached its nadir, with no signs of improvement any time soon.

CURRENT INFLUENCE IN GLOBAL AFFAIRS

2013. 7/22~24
 2014. 3/13~15
 2015. 3/11~12

Which country currently has the strongest economic/political influence in global affairs?

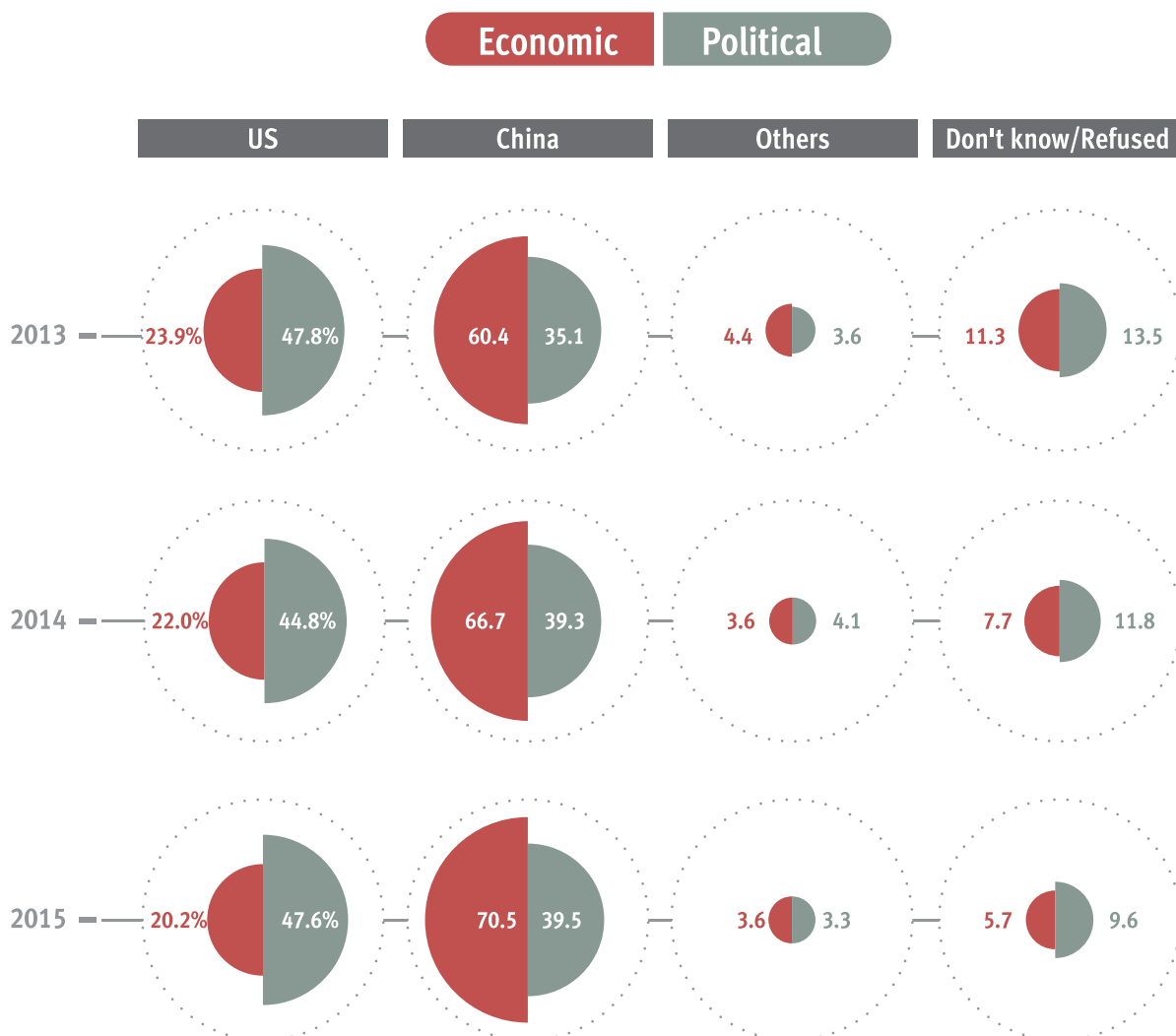


As the competition between the US and China intensifies, respondents were asked to assess the two countries' current political and economic influence in global affairs. In political influence, the US dominated China with an overwhelming support rate. In 2013, 76.9% said the US possessed the strongest political influence. This number rose to 84.6% in 2015. On the other hand, only 7.4% said the same about China in 2013. This number dropped to 4.9% in 2015. China fared better in economic influence although the US was still rated significantly higher. 63.6% picked the US while 29.9% chose China as the greatest economic power today.

FUTURE INFLUENCE IN GLOBAL AFFAIRS

2013. 7/22~24
 2014. 3/13~15
 2015. 3/11~12

Which country will have the strongest economic/political influence in global affairs?

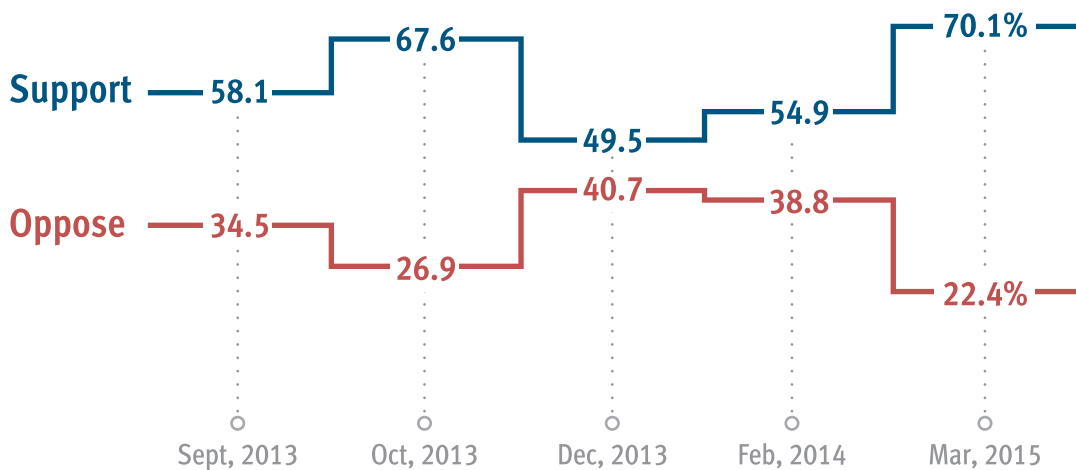


When respondents were asked to rate the two countries' future influence in global affairs, however, the results showed a dramatic shift. In 2015, 70.5% picked China to be the future economic influencer while only 20.2% said the same about the US. In political influence, 47.6% said the US will continue to wield political superiority in the future. 39.5% said the same about China. The results reinforce the common perception that China, based on its growing economy, will challenge the US for regional and global hegemony.

KOREA-JAPAN SUMMIT

2013. 8/30~9/1
2013. 10/21~23
2013. 12/29~31
2014. 2/23~25
2015. 3/18~20

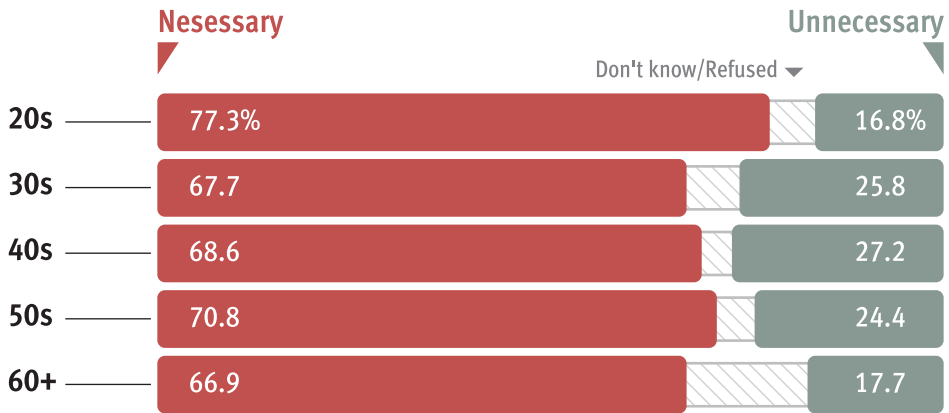
Do you support or oppose a Korea-Japan summit?



With ROK-Japan relations showing no signs of improvement, we asked respondents if they support a Korea-Japan summit between President Park Geun-hye and Prime Minister Abe Shinzo. Perhaps realizing the importance of improved relationship between the two countries, an increasing number of respondents supported a Korea-Japan summit. In 2015, 70.1% supported a future summit meeting between the two leaders. This was a significant increase from last year when 54.9% supported the summit.

NECESSITY OF A KOREA-JAPAN SUMMIT BY AGE

2015. 3/18~20



When we analyzed the previous results by age, we found that respondents in their 20s (77.3%) were most supportive of a Korea-Japan summit in 2015. The age group that opposed the summit most strongly consisted of South Koreans in their 40s. Even then, only 27.2% said a summit was unnecessary.

SUPPORT FOR KOREA-JAPAN SUMMIT

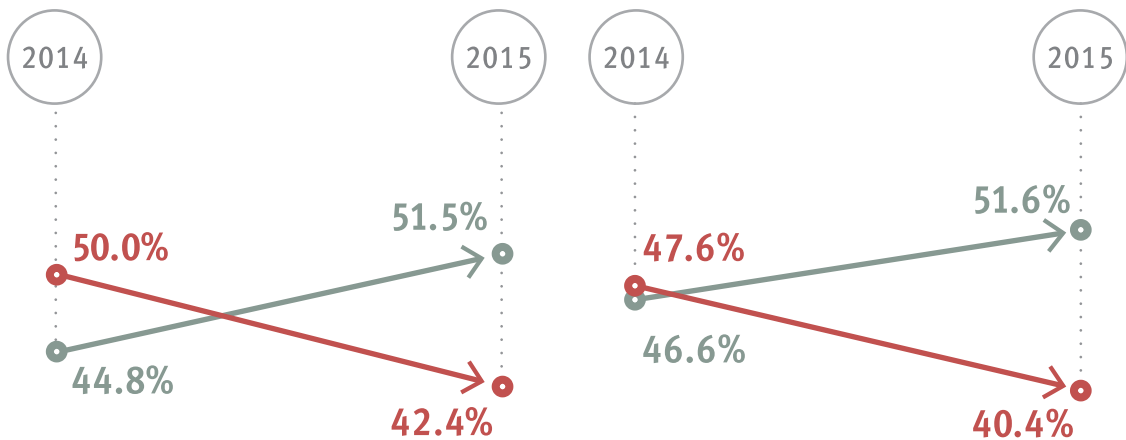
2014. 2/23-25

2015. 3/18~20

Do you support a Korea-Japan summit if Japan continues its claim over Dokdo?

Do you support a Korea-Japan summit if Japan continues provocations over historical issues?

● SUPPORT ● OPPOSE



In 2014, the South Korean public was rather ambivalent toward a Korea-Japan summit when given the precondition that Japan would continue provocations over historical issues. In 2015, however, the support rates showed improvements. Specifically, 51.5% answered that they would still support a summit if Japan continues its claim over Dokdo (42.4% opposed). Another 51.6% expressed support if Japan continues provocations over historical issues (40.4% opposed).

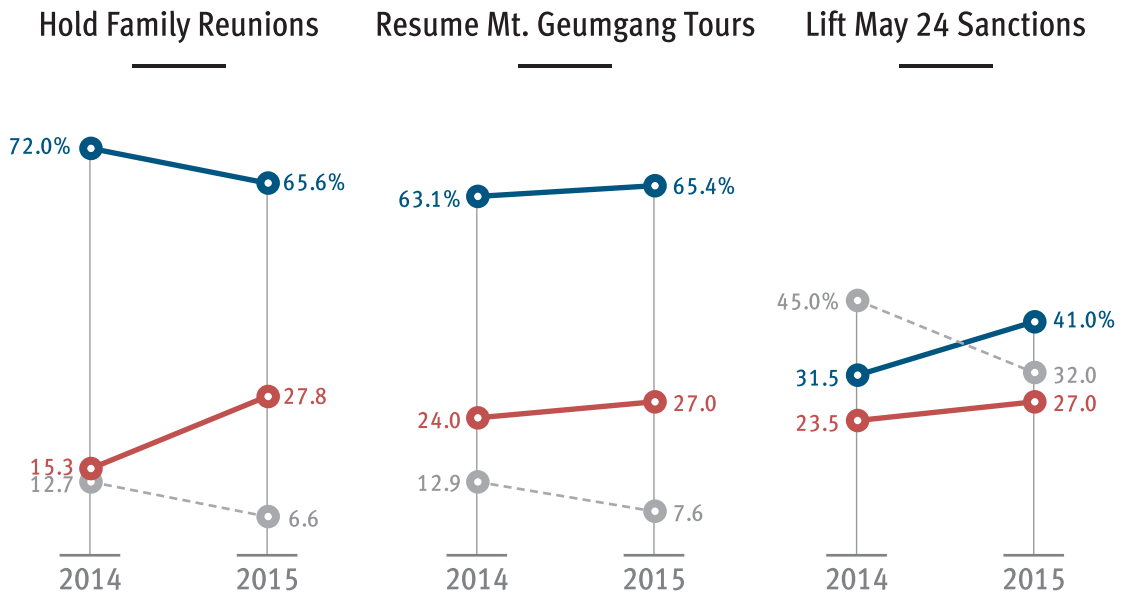
APPROPRIATE POLICY TOWARD NORTH KOREA

2014. 10/8~10

2015. 3/18~20

 Do you agree/disagree with the following policy toward North Korea?

 Agree  Disagree  Don't know/Refused



How should the South deal with the North? In 2015, 65.6% of respondents stated that the two Koreas should hold family reunions. Also, 65.4% supported the resumption of Mount Geumgang tours. While 41.0% stated that the May 24 sanctions should be lifted, 32.0% also answered that they didn't know or refused to answer. It appears that many South Koreans are simply unaware of the specifics of the May 24 sanctions.

NECESSITY OF AN INTER-KOREAN SUMMIT

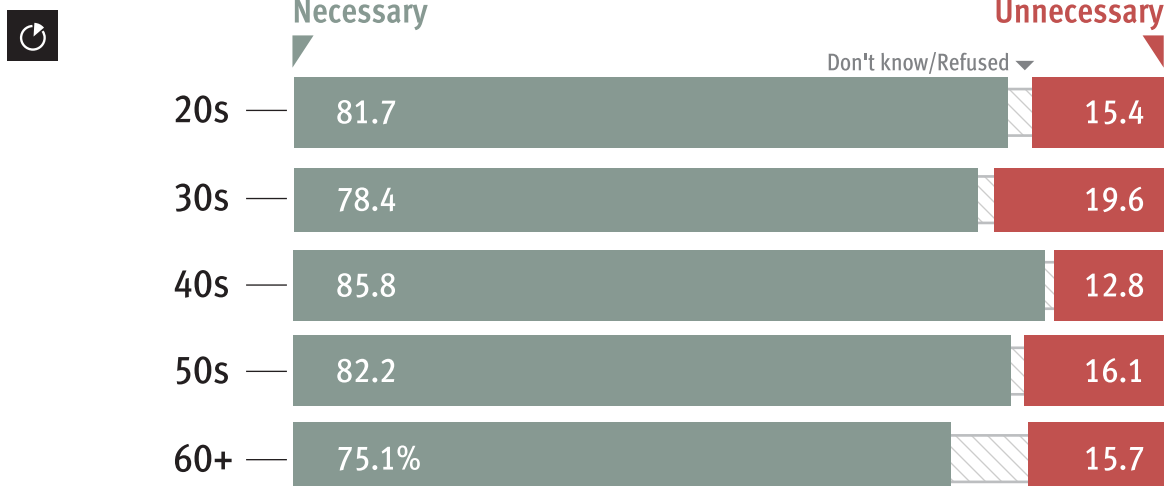
2014. 9/6~8
2014. 10/8~10
2015. 3/18~20

 Do you think an inter-Korean summit is necessary or unnecessary?



NECESSITY OF AN INTER-KOREAN SUMMIT BY AGE

2015. 3/18~20



Respondents were overly supportive of an inter-Korean summit between President Park Geun-hye and Kim Jong-un. In 2015, 80.6% said a summit between the two leaders was necessary. With many supporting summit meetings with both North Korea and Japan, South Koreans appear to realize the importance of improved relations with their neighbors.

When we breakdown the results by age, we see that South Koreans in their 40s (85.8%) are most supportive of an inter-Korean summit, although the high support rate can be found across all age groups. Even though North Korea has been South Koreans' least favored country and its leader, Kim Jong-un, has been even more disliked, South Koreans appear mindful of the importance of an improved relationship between the two Koreas.

SUPPORT FOR SENDING A SPECIAL ENVOY TO NORTH KOREA

2015. 3/18~20

 Do you support/oppose sending a special envoy to North Korea?



When asked if a special envoy should be dispatched to North Korea, 66.3% of respondents supported the idea. As seen in the previous results, South Koreans were supportive of policies that they consider to be diplomatic and engaging.

SUPPORT FOR THAAD

2015. 3/18~20

 Do you support/oppose THAAD?

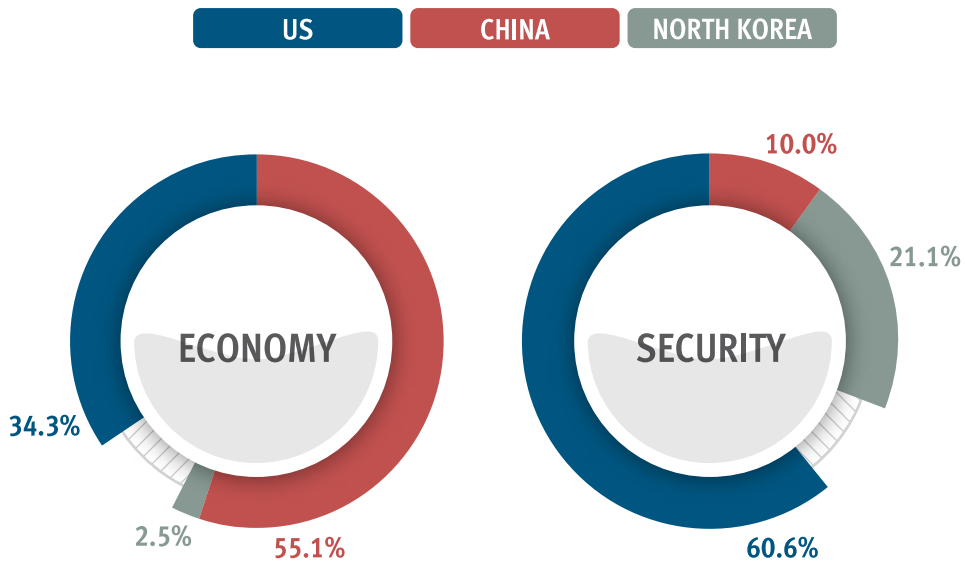


As North Korea continues to develop nuclear weapons, the implementation of THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) has been a controversial topic in South Korea. While THAAD could greatly improve South Korea's defense against North Korean threats, it could also influence South Korea's relations with China, a country that has recently voiced strong disapproval of the idea. As such, we asked South Koreans if they support or oppose THAAD. 61.4% were in support while 20.3% opposed. 18.3% answered that they don't know or refused to answer.

MOST IMPORTANT NEIGHBOR FOR SOUTH KOREA'S ECONOMY/SECURITY

2015. 3/18~20

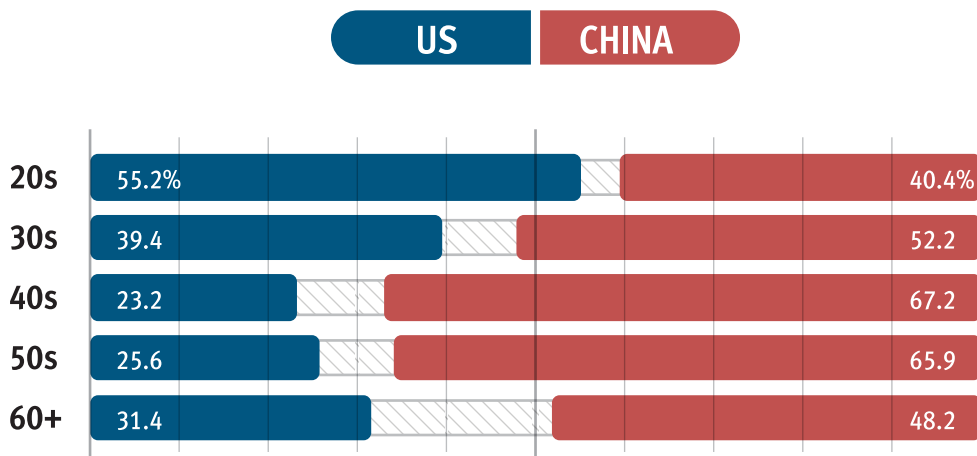
 Which country is most important for South Korea's economy/security?



As South Korea manages the rise of China and continues its alliance with the US, we asked respondents to identify the most important neighbor for South Korea's security and economy. Economically, 55.1% chose China as South Korea's most important neighbor while 34.3% said the same about the US. Concurrently, 60.6% chose the US as South Korea's most important security partner. Given the two countries' long-standing alliance, the support is well justified. Interestingly, 21.1% chose North Korea as the most important country for South Korea's security. This is more than double the number for China (10.0%).

MOST IMPORTANT NEIGHBOR FOR SOUTH KOREA'S ECONOMY BY AGE

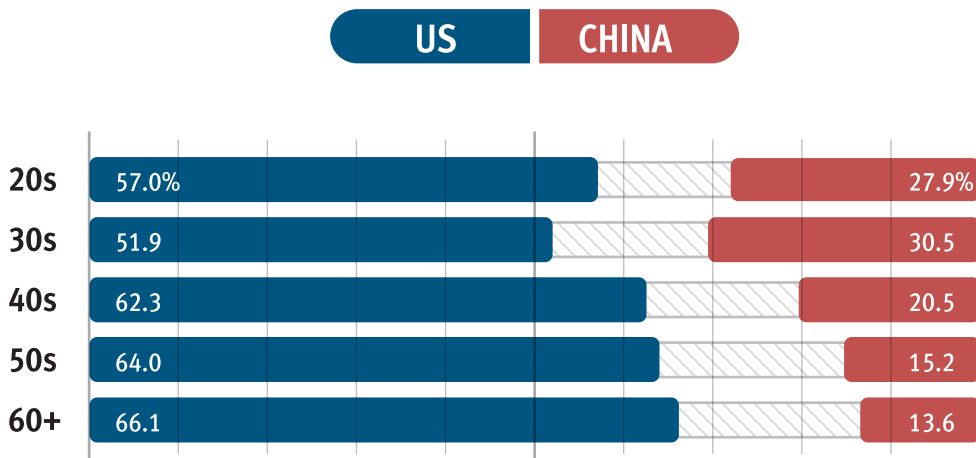
2015. 3/18~20



More than half of South Koreans chose China as South Korea's most important economic neighbor. A breakdown by age reveals that all age groups, with the exception those in their 20s (US: 55.2%, China: 40.4%), picked China over the US as the most economically important neighbor for South Korea. 67.2% and 65.9% of respondents in their 40s and 50s, respectively, were particularly favorable toward China's economic influence on South Korea.

MOST IMPORTANT NEIGHBOR FOR SOUTH KOREA'S SECURITY BY AGE

2015. 3/18~20

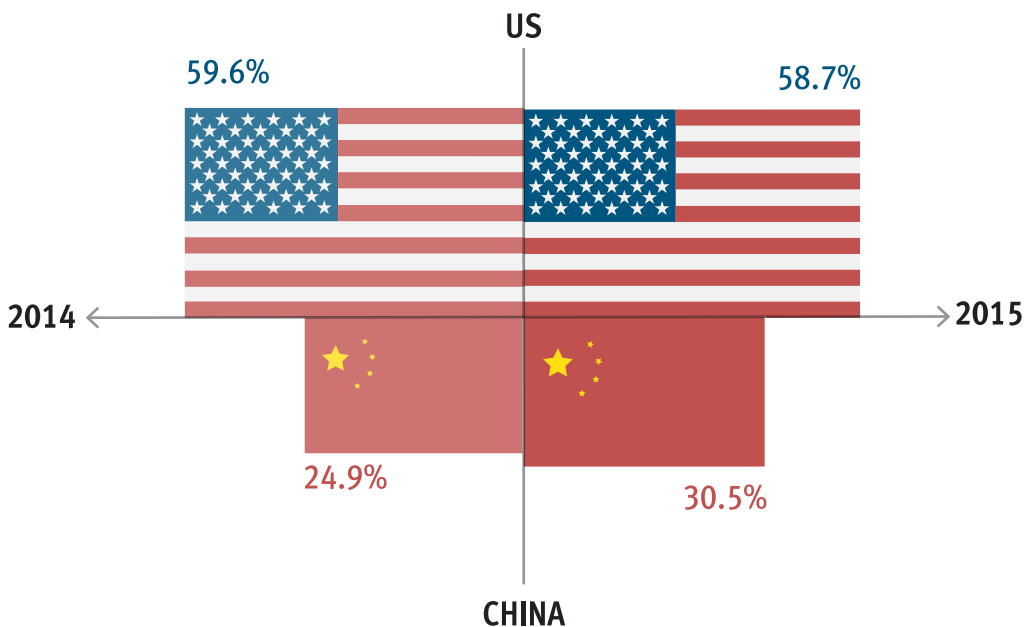


At the same time, older South Koreans chose the US as their country's most important security partner. Specifically, 64.0% of respondents in their 50s and 66.1% of those aged 60 and older chose the US over China. This overwhelming sense of support for the US as a security partner was seen across all ages.

SOUTH KOREA'S FUTURE PARTNER

2014. 7/4~6
2015. 3/11~12

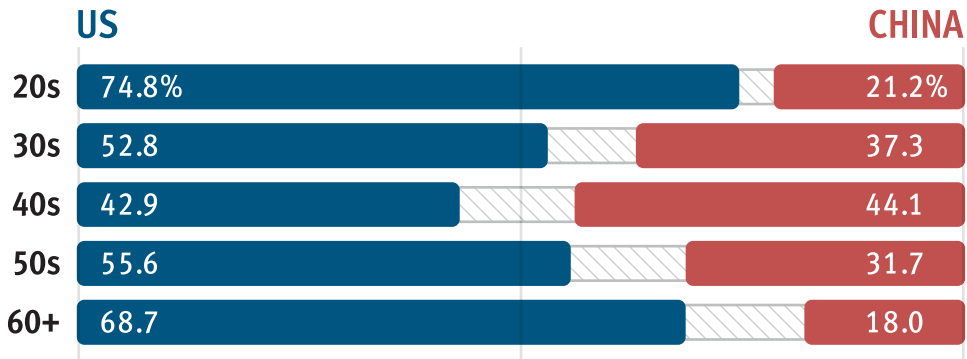
 If the US and China continue their competition, which country should South Korea strengthen ties with?



When respondents were asked to pick South Korea's future partner in 2015, 58.7% chose the US over China (30.5%). Given that more half of South Koreans picked China as South Korea's most important economic partner today, this particular result indicates that economic influence does not dictate the way South Koreans evaluate their country's future partner. It also suggests that South Koreans view their country's foreign relations strictly in a pragmatic manner.

SOUTH KOREA'S FUTURE PARTNER BY AGE

2015. 3/11~12



When we examine the previous results by age, we find that an overwhelming number of South Koreans in their 20s (74.8%) chose the US over China as South Korea's future partner. 68.7% of South Koreans who are 60 and older also chose the US. The only group that chose China over the US consisted of respondents in their 40s, although the difference between the two numbers was within the margin of error.

For more details on polling methodology,
please visit www.asaninst.org/eng



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