

ASAN POLL

South Korean Perceptions of  
ROK-US Relations and Foreign Affairs

THE ASAN INSTITUTE  
FOR POLICY STUDIES

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The Asan Institute for Policy Studies was founded with a mission to become an independent think tank that provides effective policy solutions to issues which are critical to Korea, East Asia, and the rest of the world.

The Institute aims to foster wide-ranging and in-depth public discussions which are essential for a healthy society. By focusing on areas including foreign affairs, national security, public governance, energy, and the environment, it strives to address some of the major challenges that our society faces today.

The Institute addresses these challenges not only by supplying in-depth policy analysis but also by endeavoring to promote a global and regional environment favorable to peace, stability, and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula.

In addition to policy analysis and research, the Institute undertakes the training of specialists in public diplomacy and related areas in an effort to contribute to Korea's ability to creatively shape its own future.

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## Public Opinion Studies Center

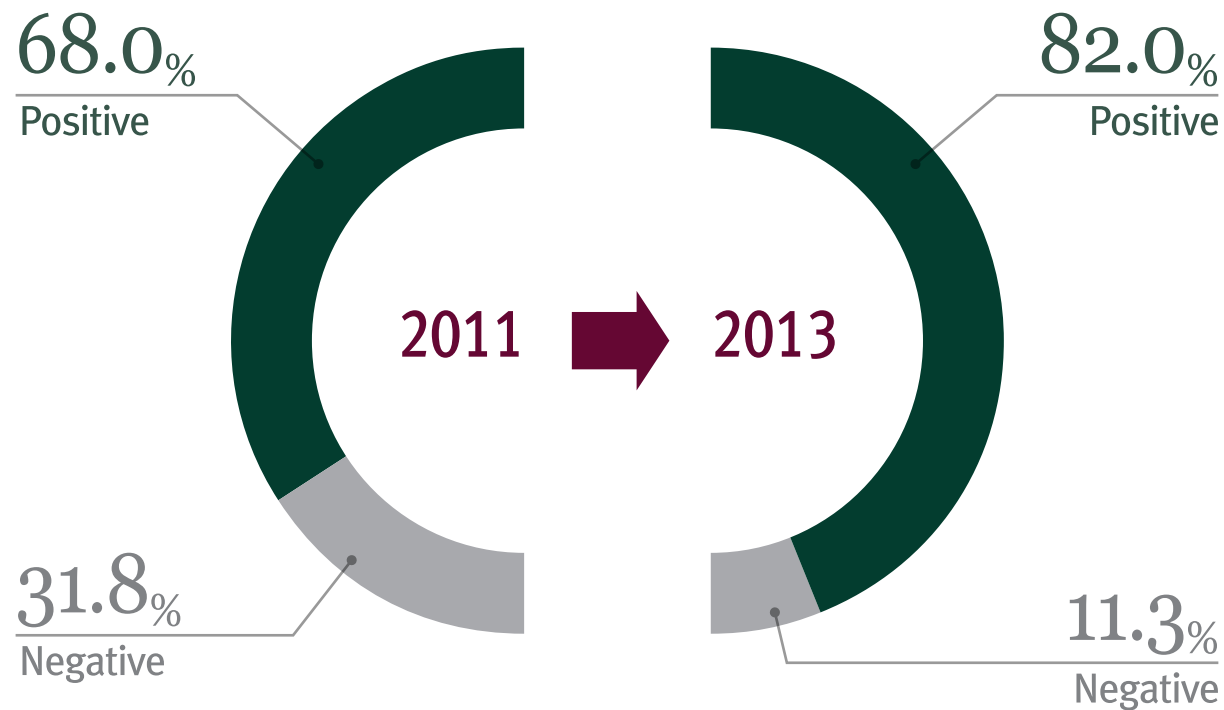
The Public Opinion Studies Center at the Asan Institute conducts some of the most widely cited public opinion surveys in international relations and political science. Its regular polls produce reliable data for political leaders and the general public, creating more informed policy debates and decisions. The Center also publishes a monthly survey report dealing with both international and domestic issues in Korea. Major publications include *The Vote Choice of Korean Electorates: 2012 National Assembly Election (in Korean)* and, *Electoral Reform in Korea: Reapportionment and Redistricting (in Korean)* which respectively cover Korean voting behavior and the election system. Other Survey Reports, such as “South Korea in a Changing World: Foreign Affairs,” “The Asan Post-election Report,” “Asan Breaking Poll: The Death of Kim Jong-Il and Its Effects on South Korean Public Opinion,” and “The Asan Institute Opinion Poll in the Wake of the Attack on Yeonpyeong Island,” gauge public sentiment on salient issues in Korean society.


The full text of each survey reports is available on the Asan Institute website ([www.asaninst.org](http://www.asaninst.org)) under the Publication-Public Opinion Survey section.





What do you think about the relationship between South Korea and the United States?




 In the past two years there has been a significant increase in the percentage of South Koreans that positively assess the ROK-U.S. relationship. While a majority (68%) positively assessed the relationship in 2011, that number grew to 82% in 2013. This increase is partly attributable to the recent tensions sparked by a bellicose North Korea,

but that is not the sole reason. Not only have there been virtually no major incidents disrupting the relationship since 2003, but the partners learned hard lessons from the events of 2002 allowing them to better handle disruptions.



What is the most important component of the South Korea-U.S. relationship?



 The primary component of ROK-U.S. relationship to the South Korean people is the military alliance. Given the very real threat of North Korea, and increasing tensions in the region, this is not a surprise. Economic cooperation-now symbolized by the KORUS FTA-follows.



Do you think the ROK-U.S. Alliance will be necessary in the future?

Do you think the ROK-U.S. Alliance will be necessary after the reunification?

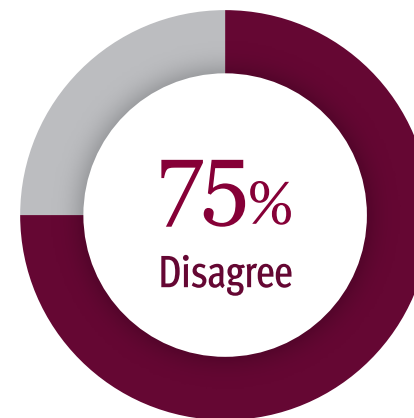


With the intractability of the North Korea problem, it thus follows that more than 90% of South Koreans in every year since the question began being asked see the alliance being necessary in the future. However, the alliance should not be seen as only addressing concerns about North Korea. Its importance goes beyond that. Even if the South's primary threat was removed via reunification-in whatever form that

may occur-a clear majority of the South Korean public continues to see the alliance with the United States as being necessary. This speaks to the unease with which South Koreans view their immediate neighborhood. With Japan moving to the right on a range of issues and China increasingly assertive, North Korea is but the most pressing problem among several.



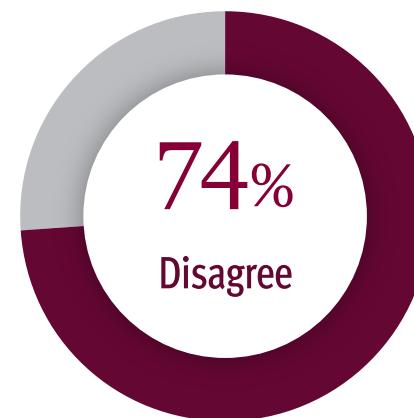
Do you think South Korea is able to deter the North without any help from the United States?




## WAR AGAINST THE NORTH



Do you think South Korea will be able to win the war against the North without any help from its allies?

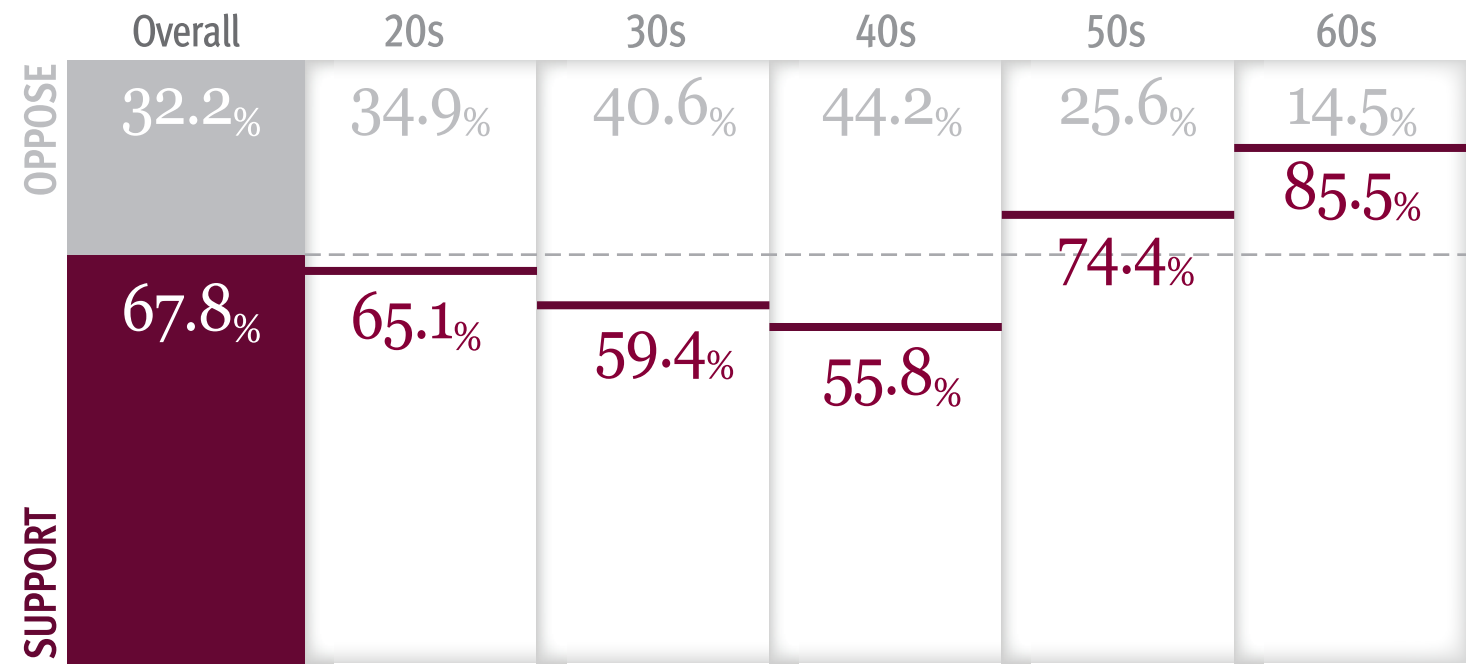


 One reason that support for the alliance with the United States remains remarkably high is that three-quarters of the South Korean public does not believe that the South Korean military alone can deter North Korea.

Moreover, three-quarters of the South Korean public does not believe that the South alone could defeat North Korea should a war break out on the Korean Peninsula. This clearly provides rationale for the high support shown for the military component of the ROK-U.S. alliance.



Do you support or oppose the long-term stationing of U.S. military forces in South Korea?



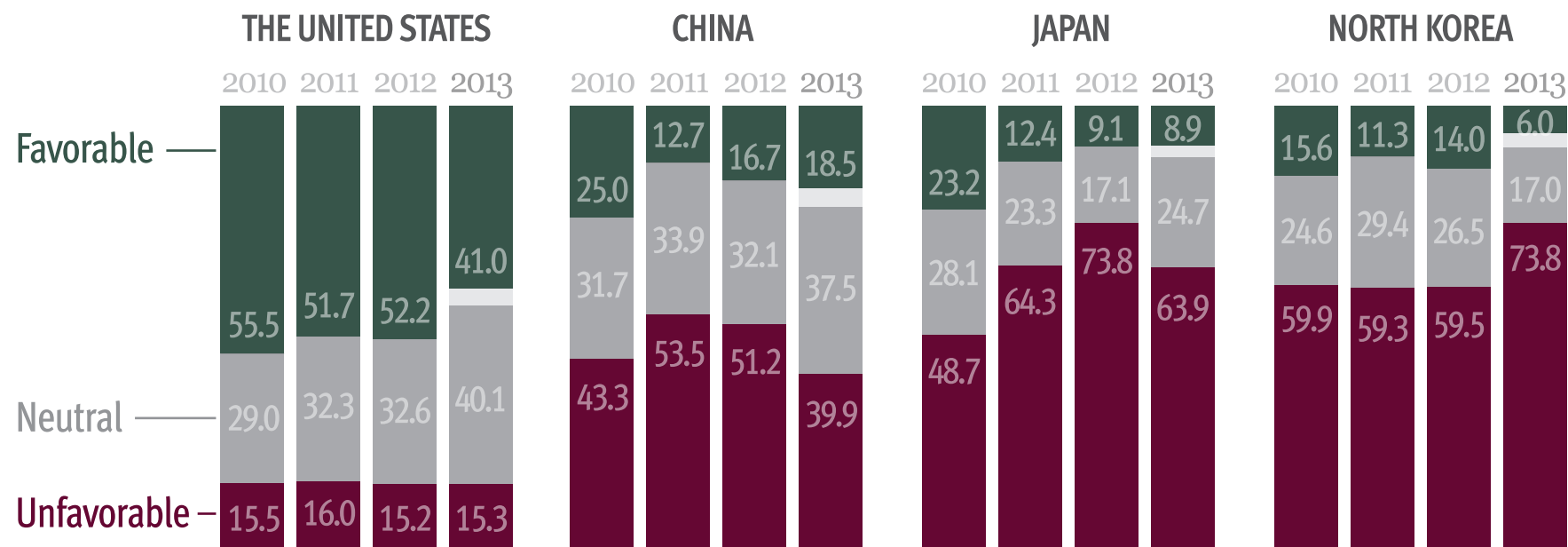
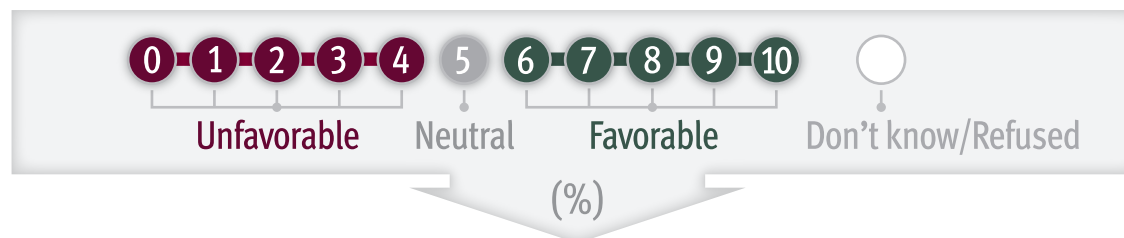
Of course, one core component of the alliance in its current form are the U.S. military bases located throughout South Korea. The location of these bases is contentious, especially with a large base-scheduled to be moved-located in the center of Seoul. However, Asan polling shows that the stationing of U.S. troops in South Korea has fairly broad support, with 68% overall supporting the long-term stationing of

U.S. troops in South Korea. Also of note is that those in their 20s do not follow the progressive nature of those in their 30s and 40s when it comes to the alliance and other security-related matters. On a host of issues related to North Korea and international security, the youngest South Koreans identify more closely with those in their 50s and 60s.

# FAVORABILITY TOWARDS NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES



How much do you like each of the following countries in the world?



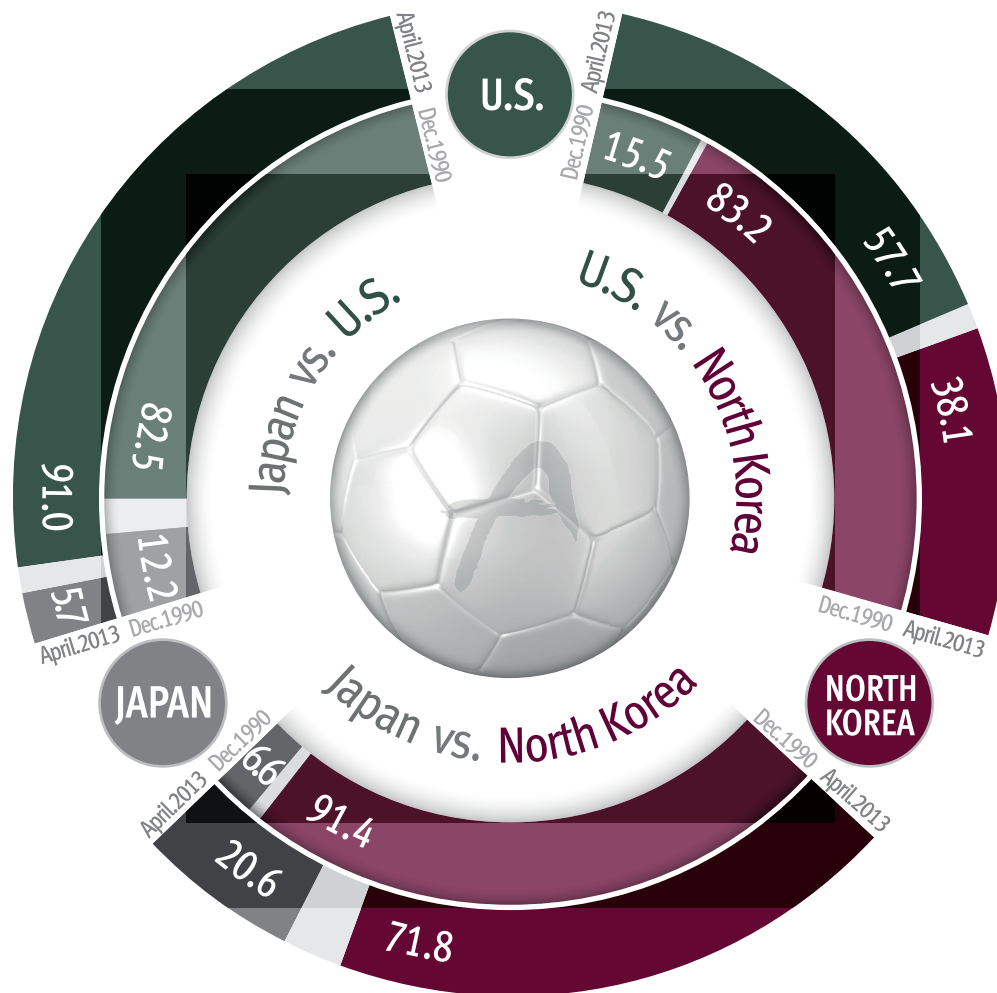
Among the countries included in the survey, the United States has consistently been rated as the most favorable by the South Korean public. However, the South Korean public's view of the rest of the region is complex. For the first time since 2010, North Korea is now

the least favored nation, having replaced Japan for that dubious honor. China currently occupies the middle ground among the countries included, indicative of the complicated nature of the South Korea-China relationship.



If there is a soccer game between two countries,  
which country would you cheer for?

(Dec. 1990 | April. 2013)



A more informal way to measure favorability is through who the South Korean public would cheer for in a hypothetical soccer game. This survey was first conducted in 1990<sup>1</sup>, and was re-created by the Asan Institute in April 2013. One thing that did not change from 1990 was the high unpopularity of Japan. In hypothetical matchups with both the United States and North Korea, a overwhelming majority stated that they would not cheer for Japan. The biggest change, however, was in a hypothetical matchup between the United States and North Korea. While 83% stated they would cheer for North Korea in 1990, 58% stated they would cheer for the United States in 2013.

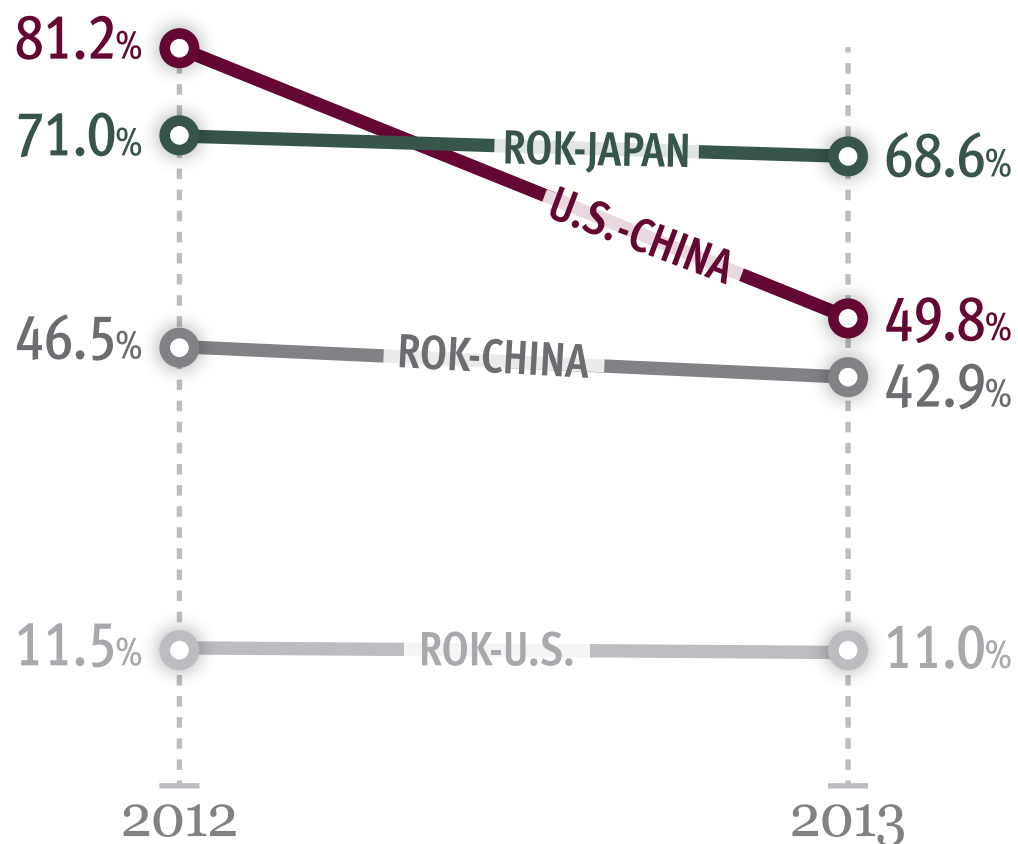
<sup>1</sup>Shin, Gi-Wook. 1996.

"South Korean Anti-Americanism: A Comparative Perspective"  
*Asian Survey* 36(8), 787-803.



At present, do you think the following countries are competitive or cooperative?

1 Competitive 2 Cooperative ? Don't know/Refused



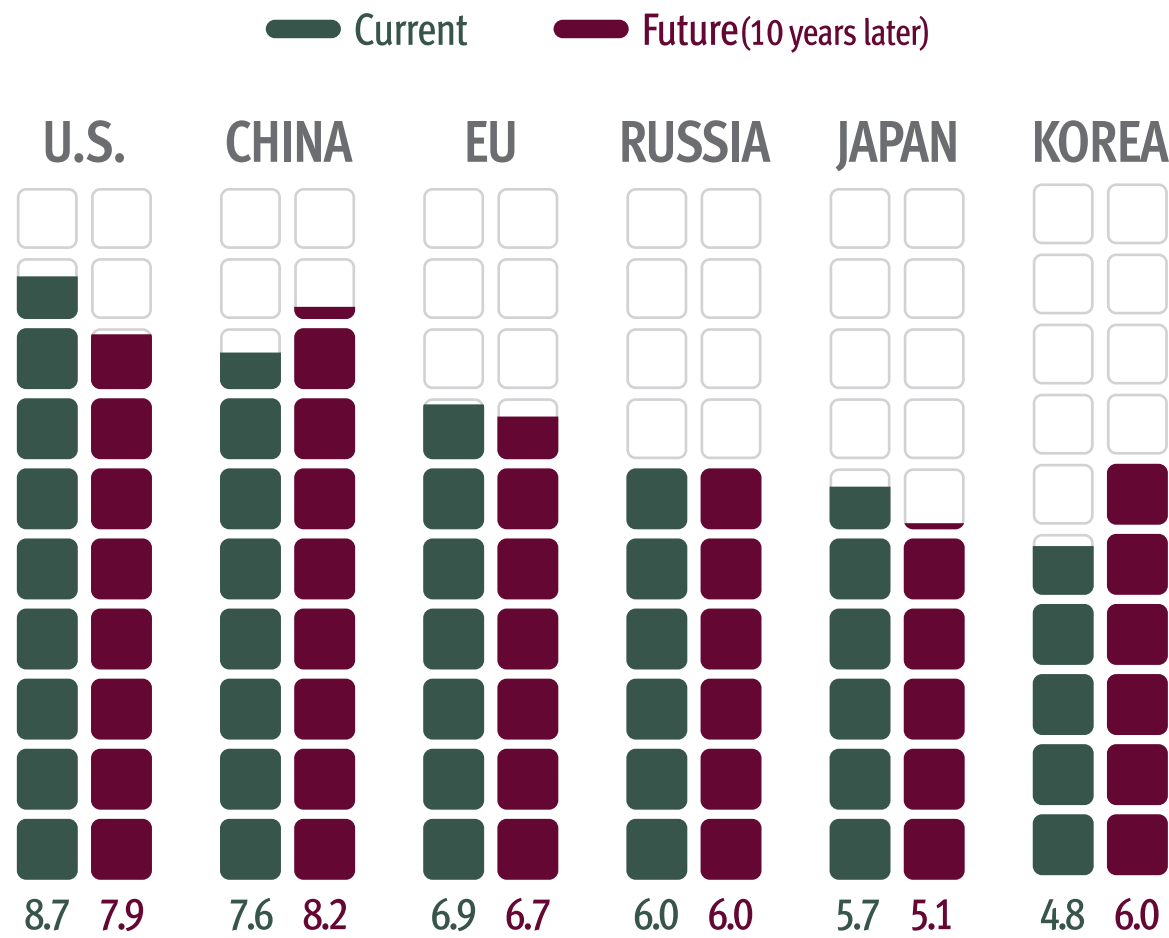
While views of competition and cooperation in the region remained largely steady from 2012 to 2013, one major change has taken place on how the South Korean public views the relationship between the United States and China. While it was viewed as highly competitive in 2012, in 2013 the split was much more even. It is difficult to say what has driven this shift, and even more difficult to predict if this view will hold.





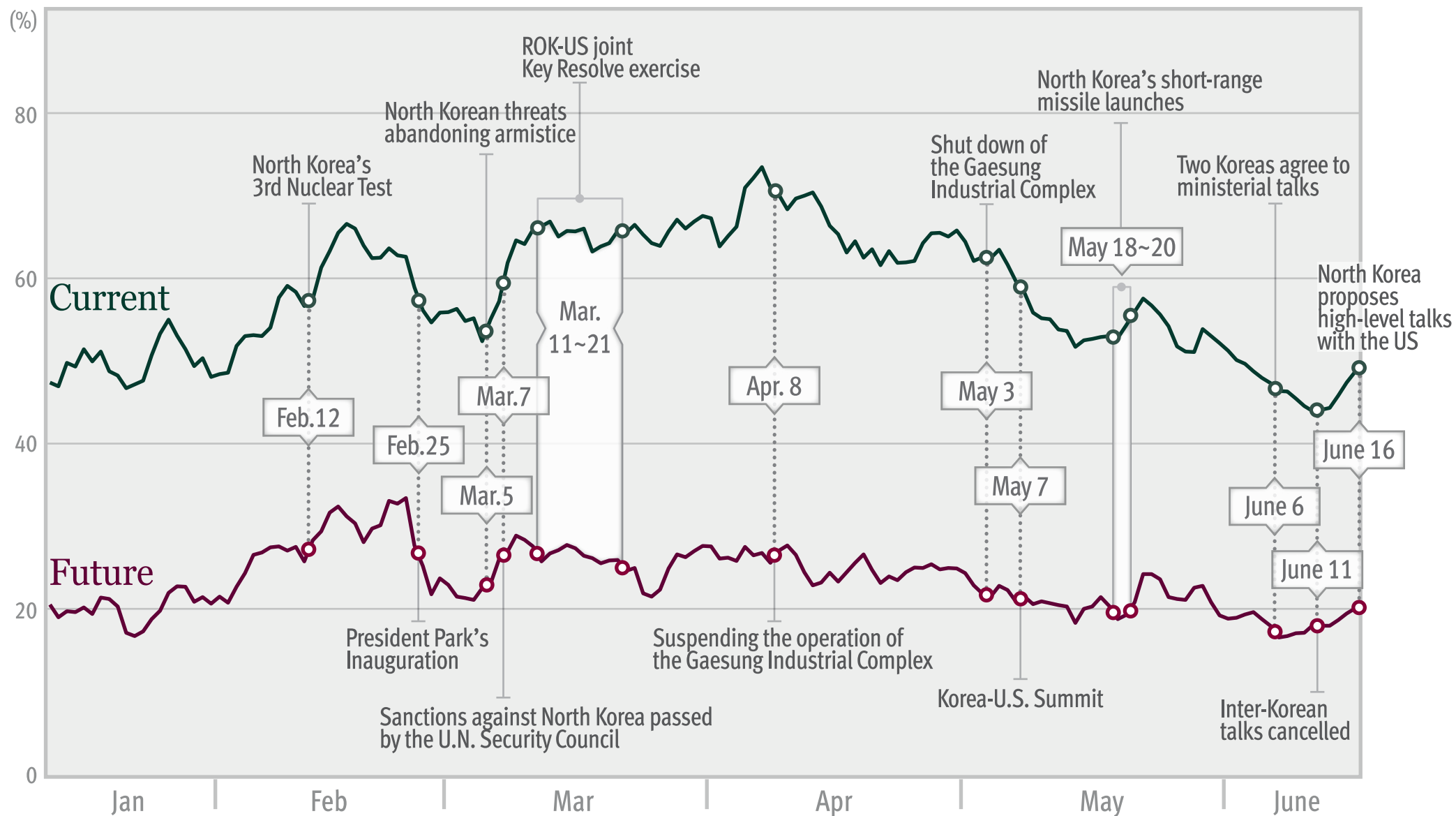
How much influence does each of the following countries have on global affairs?

Please answer on a 0 to 10 scale; with 0 meaning they are not at all influential and 10 meaning they are extremely influential. And also please answer how much influence you think each of the following countries will have on global affairs 10 years from now.



Northeast Asia is undergoing a significant reorganization due to the confluence of several factors. How South Koreans interpret this reorganization provides insight into their thinking on the region. South Koreans thought the United States currently had the most influence on global affairs, with China second most influential among the countries included in the survey. However, in ten years time the expectation is that China will surpass the United States, likely making it the most influential country in the world. While this finding certainly attracts attention, the most striking is how South Koreans perceive their own influence to increase.

# NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS OF NATIONAL SECURITY





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For more details on polling methodology,  
please visit [www.asaninst.org/eng](http://www.asaninst.org/eng)

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