



# Press Release

Date: April 9, 2026

For immediate release.

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## 2026 Asan Annual Poll:

### *South Koreans and Their Neighbors 2026*

– Takaichi Viewed More Favorably Than Trump;  
80% Support Nuclear Armament & 60.4% Nuclear Redeployment,  
Even As 97.1% Support ROK-U.S. Alliance –

SEOUL, April 9, 2026 – The Asan Institute for Policy Studies has released its flagship annual poll, “**South Koreans and Their Neighbors 2026.**” The survey reveals views towards neighboring countries, the ROK-U.S. alliance, nuclear deterrence and more. This year’s survey reveals three major shifts in South Korean public opinion.

1. **First, Japan’s image improved markedly.** Favorability towards Japan (5.11) reached its highest level, ranking as net positive for the first time. In addition, Japanese Prime Minister Takaichi (3.24) was ranked more favorably than U.S. President Trump (2.91). This is the first time a Japanese leader has been viewed more favorably than a U.S. leader in our survey.
2. **Second, South Koreans continued to distinguish between President Trump and the United States as a country.** Despite unfavorable sentiment towards President Trump, overall views of the United States (favorability: 5.90 out of 10) remain as strong as ever, including the ROK-U.S. alliance (97.1%), the U.S. military presence in Korea (82.3%), and preference for the United States (71.4%) over China (10.8%).
3. **Third, support for stronger nuclear deterrence rose on multiple fronts.** Even as there was a 10%p increase in confidence in the U.S. extended nuclear deterrence commitment to 59%, a record 80% (2025: 76.2%) of South Koreans supported acquiring an indigenous nuclear weapons capability.

Other findings are as follows:

- **Country favorability:** The United States remained the most favored country (5.90, on the scale of 0 to 10, with 5 being neutral). Japan’s favorability rose to 5.11, surpassing the neutral midpoint for the first time and reaching its highest level on record. China (3.28) and North Korea (3.37) remained below neutral, and Russia (2.86) was the least favored country.

- **Leader favorability:** Japanese Prime Minister Takaichi recorded the highest favorability (3.24), the first time a Japanese leader ranked first. U.S. President Trump dropped to 2.91, followed by Xi Jinping (2.29), Vladimir Putin (1.79), and Kim Jong Un (1.45).
- **ROK–U.S. alliance:** This year recorded the highest support for the ROK–U.S. alliance (97.1%, previous highest was 96.4% in 2022) as well as the U.S. military presence in South Korea (82.3%, previous highest was 82.1% in 2022 and 2016). There was, however, a 13.8%p decrease to 46.8% in those who thought the U.S. military should continue to be stationed in South Korea following unification, marking its first fall below majority support since 2020.
- **Nuclear deterrence:** Public confidence that the United States would use nuclear weapons to defend South Korea rose 10.2%p to 59.1%, with a similar increase in confidence in the event of U.S. exposure to a potential attack. Support for indigenous nuclear armament reached an all-time high of 80%. Even when presented with potential costs—international sanctions (63%), withdrawal of USFK (52.2%), or domestic infrastructure burdens (54.1%)—support remained above majority thresholds.
  - Support for redeploying U.S. tactical nuclear weapons stood at 60.4%, with 24.4% opposed and 15.2% selecting “don’t know.” This was a slight change from 2025 when 66.3% expressed support and 33.7% were opposed, with an increase in those unsure. There was a 14.5%p decrease in support (45.9%) when respondents were asked to bear higher defense cost-sharing burdens and a 25%p decrease when asked to host nuclear weapons in their area of residence (35.4%).
- **U.S.–China competition:** When asked whether the United States or China would be stronger in ten years, there was a 7.2%p decline in those who chose the United States, even though it was considered more likely by a 3:1 margin (46% vs 15.1%). There was an even sharper 14.4%p decrease to 71.4% in those who would side with the United States over China, but there was also a decrease in those choosing China from 14.2% in 2025 to only 10.8%.

*This year’s Asan Poll was conducted from February 7 to 11, 2026. The results are based on a representative, weighted sample of 1,000 respondents across South Korea.*

The executive summary and findings can be downloaded at:

[https://asaninst.org/bbs/board.php?bo\\_table=s1\\_6\\_1\\_eng&wr\\_id=25](https://asaninst.org/bbs/board.php?bo_table=s1_6_1_eng&wr_id=25)

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#### **About the Asan Institute for Policy Studies**

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