Public Opinion on the Korea-China Summit, Favorability of the Leaders of Neighboring Countries, Attitudes on the Minimum Wage

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The sample size of each survey was 1,000 respondents over the age of 19. The surveys were conducted by Research & Research, and the margin of error is ±3.1% at the 95% confidence level. All surveys employed the Random Digit Dialing method for mobile and landline telephones.
KEY FINDINGS

▶ Public opinion on the Korea-China summit: Positive 75.7%, Negative 10.5%

▶ Country Favorability Ratings:
  United States 5.61(0.13↓) > China 4.92(0.7↑) > Japan 2.96(0.03↑) > North Korea 2.27(0.2↑)1

▶ Perceptions of Korea-China relations: Cooperative 62.5%, Competitive 28.7%

▶ Most important issue for Korea-China relations:
  Mitigation of the North Korean nuclear crisis, 37.2%; Cooperation for the unification of the Korean Peninsula, 20.6%;
  Economic Cooperation including the Korea-China FTA, 20.1%

▶ Countries that are a threat to South Korea (free response):
  North Korea, 47.1%; China, 18.0%; Japan, 14.5%; United States, 9.5%

▶ Trust in neighboring countries:
  United States, 57.3%; EU, 48.0%; China, 31.7%; Japan, 11.4%; Iran, 6.1%; North Korea, 5.6%

▶ Favorability rating of the leaders of selected countries:
  President Obama, 6.29; President Xi Jinping, 5.35; Prime Minister Abe, 1.65; North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, 1.14
  (Scale: 0-10, No favorability = 0, Completely Favorable = 10)

▶ Most important social issues in Korean society:
  Job creation (33.2%) > Economic democratization (18.5%) > South-North relations (16.2%) > Income redistribution (11.3%)

▶ Average scores in the assessment of current national security for the first two weeks of July:
  Negative 43.9% - the percentage indicating the negative perception of national security has decreased since May

▶ Attitudes on minimum wage for next year:
  Should increase, 68.6%; Should maintain the current, 25.6%; Should decrease, 1.5%

1: Numbers in parentheses indicate the change from May to July.
KEY ISSUES

July 2nd  ▶  Korean National Assembly launches special committee to investigate accusations that National Intelligence Service influenced 2012 presidential election.
▶  South Korea and U.S. begin high-level talks on Special Measures Agreement to negotiate cost sharing of stationing U.S. military forces in South Korea.
▶  The National Assembly concludes one-month extra session (Passed: Bill calling for the records of conversation on NLL to be released, bills to restrict congressional privileges and a number of economic democratization bills including the Franchise Act, and the Monopoly Regulation and Fair Trade Act)

July 3rd  ▶  Koreas restore Panmunjom hotline

July 4th  ▶  Koreas agree to working-level talks over normalization of Kaesong on July 6th
▶  The Park Geun-hye Administration completes member selection for National Security Advisory Board

July 6th  ▶  1st working-level talks on normalization of Kaesong held at Panmunjom

July 7th  ▶  Koreas sign agreement to resume Kaesong operations

July 10th ▶  2nd working-level talks on Kaesong held at Panmunjom
▶  North Korea proposes working-level talks on renewal of tours to Mt. Kumgang and family reunions

July 15th ▶  3rd working-level talks held at Panmunjom
▶  Saenuri Party and the Democratic Party agree to investigate 2007 summit transcript
How do you assess President Park’s first Korea-China summit?

While a majority (75.7%) positively assessed the Korea-China summit, held on June 27, 2013, 10.5% of respondents assessed it negatively. The so-called “5060 generation”—referring to those in their 50s and 60s who are strong supporters of President Park—were the most positive. 82.5% of those in their 50s and 83.7% of those 60 and older positively assessed the summit. The 20s cohort, one that leans conservative on national security issues, was third most likely to assess the summit positive (73.8%).

The Park administration believes the state visit to China and the signing of bilateral memoranda outlining a Korea-China common vision reinforced the strategic cooperative relationship between the two countries. Many media outlets assessed the outcome of the summit positively for increasing Chinese support for the inter-Korean peace process and furthering cooperation in Northeast Asia, but also pointed out that China did not go far enough in condemning North Korea’s nuclear program.
How would you rate the favorability of each of the following countries? (Scale 0-10, “Completely unfavorable = 0; Completely favorable = 10)

While other favorability levels remained largely unchanged, China’s favorability increased following the Korea-China summit. In August 2012, its favorability score was 3.97, while in May 2013 it rose to 4.35. Following the summit, it increased to 4.92.

The increase in favorability for China was particularly large among the following: men, those aged 50 and older, those with an education level of a high school degree or below, and Saenuri Party supporters. These demographics tend to be relatively strong supporters of President Park. Among those who stated support for President Park, there was a statistically significant increase in the favorability of China.
How would you assess the relationship between Korea and China and the relationship between the U.S. and China?

Korea-China Relations

- Cooperative: 49.8% (1/3-5), 51.3% (3/30-4/1), 47.5% (4/29-5/1), 52.5% (6/1-3), 62.5% (7/1-3)
- Competitive: 40.9% (1/3-5), 41.3% (3/30-4/1), 42.9% (4/29-5/1), 38.0% (6/1-3), 28.7% (7/1-3)
- Don’t Know / Didn’t Answer: 9.3% (1/3-5), 7.4% (3/30-4/1), 9.6% (4/29-5/1), 9.4% (6/1-3), 8.8% (7/1-3)

U.S.-China Relations

- Cooperative: 21.5% (1/3-5), 25.4% (3/30-4/1), 40.0% (4/29-5/1), 26.6% (6/1-3), 31.9% (7/1-3)
- Competitive: 68.7% (1/3-5), 65.2% (3/30-4/1), 49.8% (4/29-5/1), 64.5% (6/1-3), 59.6% (7/1-3)
- Don’t Know / Didn’t Answer: 9.9% (1/3-5), 9.4% (3/30-4/1), 10.2% (4/29-5/1), 8.9% (6/1-3), 8.5% (7/1-3)

The Korean public saw Korea-China relations shifting to a more cooperative footing following the Korea-China summit. While the percentage of the respondents that assessed Korea-China relations as cooperative remained between 45% and 55% in surveys conducted in August 2012 and June 2013, respectively, that increased to 62.5% after the summit.

The data suggests that views of U.S-China relations were also influenced by the recent U.S-China summit. In the survey conducted from April 29 to May 1, 40% of respondents considered the relationship between the U.S. and China to be cooperative. When this question was asked in late 2012, only 18.8% saw it as such. (81.2% saw it as competitive.)
After the Korea-China summit, the public focus has been on the direction of Korea’s foreign policy on China. Koreans cite Korea-China cooperation on resolving North Korea’s nuclear program (37.2%), inter-Korean cooperation for reunification (20.6%), and economic cooperation (20.1%) as the most important issues. That Korea-China cooperation on the North Korea nuclear program is necessary was the most cited by all age groups. The second most important issue, however, received varying levels of importance among age cohorts. Among Koreans in their 20s, 30s, and 40s, the second most important issue was the FTA and economic cooperation, while for Koreans 50 and over the second highest response was inter-Korean cooperation for reunification.
Because of Korea’s geopolitically strategic location, it must constantly assess international politics, particularly with regard to potential threats. When asked, “Which country is the greatest threat to South Korea?” with no response options presented—that is, responses were freely offered by the respondent—Koreans cited North Korea (47.1%), China (18.0%), Japan (14.5%) and the United States (9.5%).

Unsurprisingly, nearly half of respondents cited North Korea as posing the greatest threat. Continued North Korean provocations, beginning with the North Korea’s rocket launch in December 2012, continuing with its third nuclear test in February, and current deadlock over the fate of Kaesong have heightened South Korean perceptions of North Korea as a major threat.

China was seen as the second most threatening country, although for different reasons. Koreans may feel threatened by China’s rise as a new military power and as an economic superpower set to rival the United States. This is evident in June’s poll assessing threat perceptions of neighboring countries: while 69.6% of respondents agreed that North Korea was a security threat, 60.7% considered China to be both an economic and security threat. The third highest response was for Japan (14.5%).
The Korean public trusts the United States and the EU, but distrusts Japan, Iran, and North Korea. When asked, 57.3% replied positively for the United States and 48.0% for the EU. China had the third highest affirmative responses (31.7%), followed by Russia (19.9%), and Israel (19%). Trust in Japan (11.4%), Iran (6.1%), and North Korea (5.6%) was weak. The order of the level of trust in the United States, China, Japan, and North Korea was identical to the order of the favorability of those countries.
Koreans show strong favorability for President Obama, and generally show favorability for President Xi. Unfavorability was particularly strong for Prime Minister Abe and Kim Jong-un.

President Obama had the highest score with 6.29, followed by President Xi at 5.35. Approval scores of Prime Minister Abe and Kim Jong-un were, respectively, 1.65 and 1.14. Polls conducted from July 1-3 show approval of Japan and North Korea to be 2.96 and 2.27, respectively. Although it is difficult to compare results from two different polls, favorability for the two leaders is more than one point lower than approval for the countries. That is, Koreans showed more disapproval towards the leaders than the countries’ politics, society, and culture.
What do you think is currently the most important issue for the country?

This month, the country’s most salient issues were perceived to be job creation (33.2%), economic democratization (18.5%), South-North relations (16.2%), redistribution of wealth (11.3%), education (9.9%), and consolidation of democracy (5.0%). For the first time since February, the issue of economic democratization was seen as being more important than South-North relations. Discussions over economic democratization began during the April provisional session of the National Assembly, and the influence of economic democratization can be seen in the June provisional session’s adoption of the Franchise Law and amendment to the Fair Trade Act that will regulate large companies’ exclusive relationships with affiliates.

While job creation and the economy still remain the most salient concern for Koreans, the media has severely criticized the government for being occupied throughout June and July with the controversy surrounding the NLL and the parliamentary probe into the NIS.
Please indicate your opinion of the current Korean national security situation.

The percentage of respondents that negatively assessed national security decreased as the threat from North Korea has faded from the headlines. As of July 1, 47.9% of South Korean people negatively assessed the national security situation, but that decreased to 40.7% by July 10th. On July 15, 42.8% of the respondents negatively assessed national security while 37.5% of the respondents positively assessed it. On a monthly basis, negative attitudes on national security have consistently decreased since reaching a peak of 66.3% in April.
The minimum wage for 2014 was set at 5,210 won—a 7.2% increase from 2013. Please indicate your opinion on whether the minimum wage should increase or decrease.

The Committee for the Minimum Wage determined the minimum wage for next year without coming to an agreement with labor and business sectors. The 7.2% increase in the minimum wage is 1.99% higher than the average increase over the past five years during the Lee Myung-bak administration.

While 68.6% of the respondents said the minimum wage should increase, 25.6% said it should remain the same. The survey results also show that progressive-leaning respondents are more likely to support increasing the minimum wage. The respondents who reported running their own businesses defied expectations that they would oppose increasing the minimum wage. In fact, they showed no difference from other occupational groups. Those who are engaged in agricultural, forestry, and fishery industries more strongly supported maintaining the current minimum wage (42.7%).