

## Executive Summary

# 2025 Global Survey on Korean Unification

**Survey Period** August 11–18, 2025

### Principal Investigator

**Sangsin Lee,**  
Senior Research Fellow, KINU

### Co-Investigators

**Tae-eun Min,**  
Research Fellow, KINU

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# I. Global Survey on Korean Unification



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# I. Global Survey on Korean Unification

## 1. Purpose and Methodology of the Study

### **Purpose of the Survey**

- Among the Lee Jae-myung administration’s national policy priorities is the goal of “redefining inter-Korean relations through reconciliation and cooperation and institutionalizing peaceful coexistence,” which includes “efforts to resume dialogue through cooperation among authorities, civil society, and the international community.”
- The aim is to institutionalize peaceful coexistence on the Korean Peninsula, thereby transforming the Korean Peninsula risk into a Korean Peninsula premium.
- Peace on the Korean Peninsula is not solely a regional concern but a global security issue; without broad international support, this objective cannot be achieved.
- This study conducts public-opinion surveys in major countries around the world, analyzes the findings to assess global citizens’ views on Korean unification, and provides foundational data for designing tailored unification public diplomacy.

### **Survey Method**

- Each year, target countries are selected, and a sample of 1,000 respondents is surveyed in each country (2,000 in the United States).
- Data collection is conducted through online panel-based web surveys.
- A multistage stratified sampling method is employed, based on gender, age, and region of residence.

### Selection of Survey Countries

- In 2024, the survey was conducted in eight countries: the United States, Japan, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Vietnam, Poland, and Australia. In 2025, eight countries were surveyed: the United States, Japan, Germany, Mongolia, Sweden, Italy, Canada, and Poland.
- With the 2025 survey, all G7 countries have been surveyed at least once.
- The United States and Japan—core countries directly related to Korean Peninsula affairs—are surveyed annually as a principle. In addition, countries with experiences of division such as Germany, Vietnam, Croatia, Serbia, and Cyprus, as well as Indo-Pacific countries including Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and India, have also been reviewed, or will be included as subjects of future investigations. Eastern and Central European countries directly affected by the Russia–Ukraine war (e.g., Poland, Romania, Bulgaria) are also under consideration for future surveys.
- Public-opinion surveys in China and Russia remain difficult under current conditions. However, given the significant influence these two countries exert on the Korean Peninsula, both should be included as survey targets when circumstances permit.

**[Table I-1] List of Countries Surveyed in the Global Survey on Korean Unification: 2024~2025**

Surveyed Countries	Germany	Mongolia	U.S.	Vietnam	Sweden	U.K.	Italy	Japan	Canada	Poland	France	Australia
2024	○		○	○		○		○		○	○	○
2025	○	○	○		○		○	○	○	○		

### Characteristics of Respondents in the 2025 Survey

- The 2025 survey was conducted in eight countries—the United States, Japan, Germany, Mongolia, Sweden, Italy, Canada, and Poland—with a total of 9,519 respondents.
- The United States was surveyed with 2,000 respondents, while 1,000 respondents were surveyed in each of the other countries. The additional 519 respondents represent an oversample conducted to improve data quality.

[Table I-2] Distribution of the 2025 Global Survey on Korean Unification

		Number of Samples	%
Gender	Male	4,632	48.7
	Female	4,887	51.3
Age	18-29	1,681	17.7
	30-39	1,686	17.7
	40-49	1,622	17.0
	50-59	1,556	16.4
	60 and above	2,974	31.2
	Countries	U.S.	2,080
	Japan	1,075	11.3
	Germany	1,080	11.4
	Poland	1,059	11.1
	Italy	1,059	11.1
	Canada	1,047	11.0
	Sweden	1,079	11.3
	Mongolia	1,040	10.9
<b>Total</b>		<b>9,519</b>	<b>100</b>

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## 2. Summary of Key Findings

### II. South Korea and North Korea

- Overall, South Korea is perceived as a trustworthy and cooperative state, whereas North Korea is viewed as a source of threat and distrust.
- Europe and North America generally regard South Korea as a mature partner; Japan, however, shows cool and distrustful attitudes toward both Koreas.
- In most countries, North Korea is seen as threatening, while South Korea is not. Japan is the notable exception, perceiving South Korea as a threat as well.
- In cultural and economic imagery, South Korea is viewed as advanced, whereas North Korea is regarded as underdeveloped.
- Poland tends to view South Korea as an “ambitious” state, while Japan and Mongolia show tendencies to see it as “dependent.”
- Japan exhibits high knowledge of Korean Peninsula issues but also relatively negative images of both Koreas. Mongolia displays high interest in Korean Peninsula affairs and maintains a balanced, positive view of both South and North Korea.
  - South Korea enjoys broad international trust, but Japan’s persistent coolness may pose a challenge to South Korea’s image balance in Northeast Asia.
- Mongolia has been deepening its economic and political ties with South Korea while maintaining traditional friendly relations with North Korea. These factors likely contribute to Mongolian respondents’ positive attitudes toward both Koreas.

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### III. Peace and Unification on the Korean Peninsula

- Regarding international support for peace on the Korean Peninsula, the United States is highly willing to provide all forms of support, whereas Japan remains reluctant.
- Germans, having experienced national unification, show positive attitudes toward Korean unification as well.
- While the international community agrees with the ideal of unification, it is skeptical about its practical feasibility.
  - Most surveyed countries recognize the need for Korean unification but assess its likelihood as low.
- Japan records the lowest levels for both the perceived necessity and feasibility of unification, while Mongolia records the highest. Japan's skepticism may reflect its strategic perception that unification might not serve Japanese national interests.
- In most countries, 70–80% view North Korea's nuclear weapons as an "offensive threat." Threat perceptions are strongest in Japan (81.5%) and the United States (73%), and relatively weaker in Europe.
- Mongolia stands out as the only country where a high share of respondents (69%) view North Korea's nuclear weapons as "for self-defense," influenced by its traditionally friendly relations with Pyongyang.
- Preferred approaches to North Korean denuclearization follow this order: diplomatic measures first, followed by economic sanctions, and lastly military options.

#### **IV. International Affairs and Security**

- Outlook on U.S.–China relations: 86% expect relations to “worsen or remain stagnant,” reflecting perceptions of a structurally entrenched rivalry.
- Credibility of the U.S. nuclear umbrella: the average stands at 38%, with high confidence only in South Korea (71%) and Poland (49%).
- U.S. Forces Korea (USFK): 75% of Americans support maintaining or increasing troop levels, indicating sustained public support for the U.S. role in international security.
- Japan–North Korea relations: 49% of Japanese respondents view dialogue with North Korea as necessary.

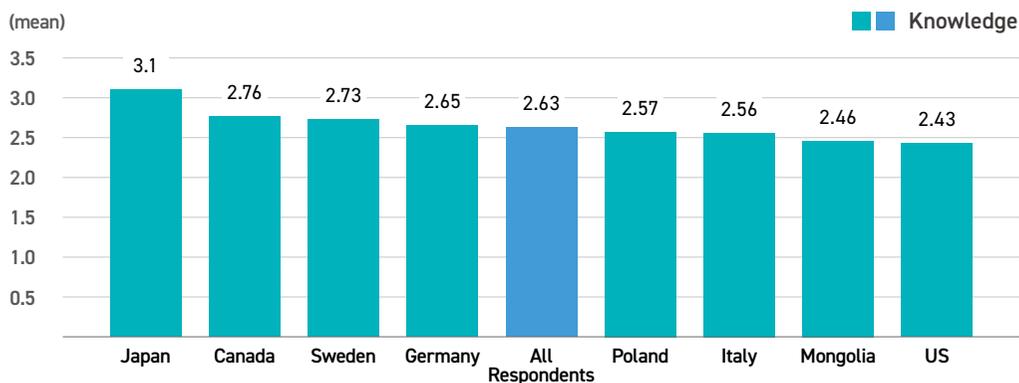
## **II. South Korea and North Korea**



## II. South Korea and North Korea

### 1. Level of Knowledge about the Korean Peninsula

[Figure II-1] Level of Knowledge about the Korean Peninsula



#### Survey Questions and Scales

- (1) “Which of the following is the capital of South Korea?”  
(1=Pyongyang; 2=Kaesong; 3=Seoul; 4=Busan; 5=Don’t know)
- (2) “Which of the following countries has the smallest population?”  
(1=South Korea; 2=North Korea; 3=Japan; 4=Vietnam; 5=China; 6=Don’t know)
- (3) “The official language of South Korea is Chinese.” (1=yes; 2=no; 3=don’t know)
- (4) “North Korea is a communist country.” (1=yes; 2=no; 3=don’t know)

- For the four items above, correct answers were coded as 1, while incorrect answers—including “don’t know”—were coded as 0. These were then summed to construct a four-point index measuring the respondent’s knowledge of the Korean Peninsula.
- The graph displays the mean knowledge score for each country. Higher average scores indicate greater knowledge of Korean Peninsula-related issues.

**Among the surveyed countries, Japanese respondents demonstrated the highest level of knowledge about the Korean Peninsula**

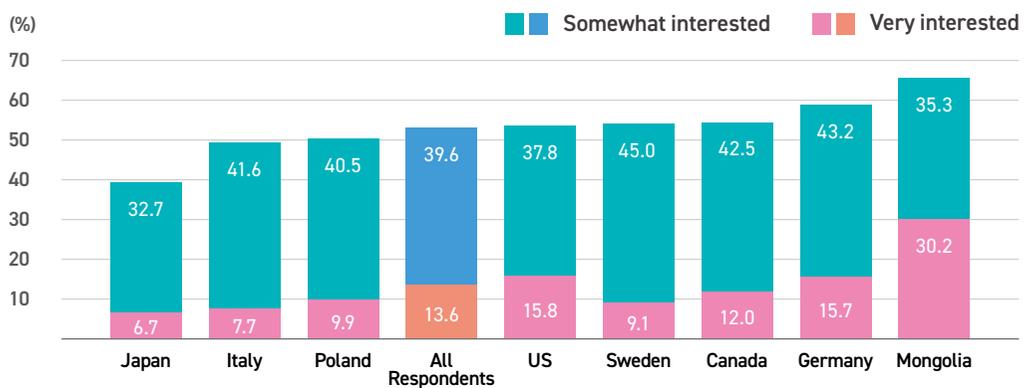
- The average knowledge score for Japanese respondents was 3.10, making Japan the only country in which respondents answered

more than three out of four knowledge items correctly.

- This likely reflects Japan’s high level of interest in South Korea—its geographically and politically close neighbor—as well as its concern regarding North Korea, which it perceives as the most direct threat to its national security.
- Despite being a key ally, the United States recorded the lowest average score at 2.43. This aligns with previous research showing that Americans generally focus more on domestic politics than on foreign or international affairs, and that Korean Peninsula issues do not rank as a major public concern in the United States.

## 2. Interest in the Korean Peninsula

[Figure II-2] Interest in the Korean Peninsula



### Survey Questions

- **Question** “How interested are you in the situation on the Korean Peninsula?”
- **Scale** 1=Very interested; 2=Somewhat interested; 3=Not very interested; 4=Not at all interested
- The graph compares countries by displaying the percentage of respondents who reported having “an interest” in Korean Peninsula issues.

### Japan’s Low Interest and Mongolia’s High Interest

- Despite being the country most directly affected by developments

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on the Korean Peninsula, Japan recorded the lowest level of reported interest: only 39.4% of respondents indicated that they were somewhat or very interested.

- Japan's low interest may reflect its generally negative perceptions of both South and North Korea—suggesting an attitude that Korean Peninsula affairs are not important enough to warrant close attention.
- Another hypothesis is that, although Japan has comparatively high knowledge about the Peninsula, many Japanese do not believe developments there will significantly impact Japan.
- European and North American countries generally showed interest levels around 50%, whereas Mongolia recorded the highest level of interest, with 65.5% expressing some degree of interest.
- Mongolia demonstrated relatively low knowledge of the Peninsula but the highest level of interest among all surveyed countries.

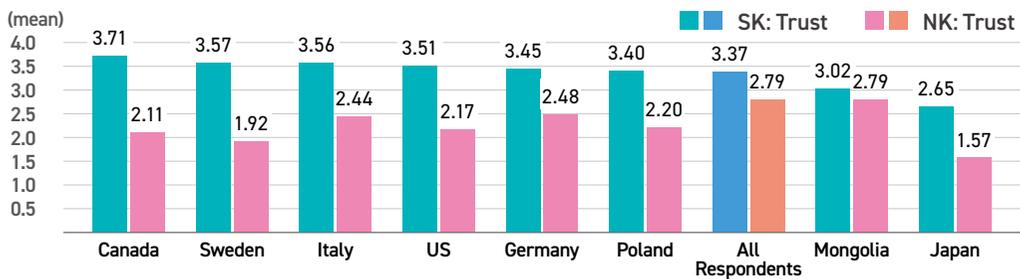
### 3. National Images of South and North Korea

#### Measurement of National Images

- People generally evaluate other countries through broad national images such as “friend,” “enemy,” “dangerous state,” “rogue state,” “dependent state,” “backward country,” or “advanced country.”
- In this survey, national images of South Korea and North Korea were assessed using six dimensions: trust, respect, threat, uncivilized, ambition, and dependence.

#### (1) Levels of Trust toward South and North Korea

[Figure II-3] Trust Images toward South and North Korea



#### Survey Questions

- **Question** “South Korea(or North Korea) is an untrustworthy country”
- **Scales** 1=strongly agree; 2=somewhat agree; 3=neutral; 4=somewhat disagree; 5=strongly disagree
- The graph displays the country-level mean scores for this item. Higher average values indicate greater trust toward South Korea (or North Korea).

#### Different Perspectives in Asia:

##### Trust toward South and North Korea

- European and North American countries show a clear contrast in trust toward the two Koreas: trust in North Korea is low, while trust in South Korea is relatively high.
- Using the midpoint value of 3 as a benchmark, all countries except Japan exhibit mean trust scores for South Korea above 3—

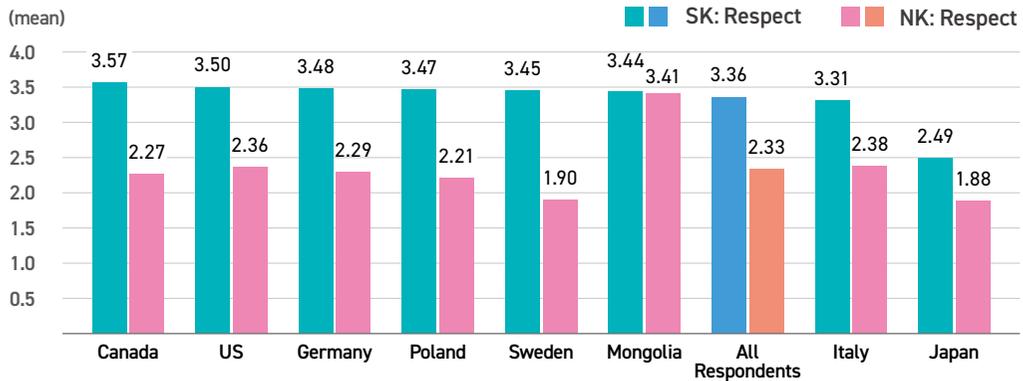
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indicating trust levels at or above the neutral midpoint. Japan is the only country with a mean trust score below 3 (2.65), suggesting that Japanese respondents on average slightly distrust South Korea.

- In contrast to South Korea, North Korea's trust scores fall below 3 in every surveyed country, indicating consistently low levels of trust.
- Mongolia records trust scores of 3.02 for South Korea and 2.79 for North Korea—the smallest gap between the two Koreas among all countries. However, the difference between Mongolia's trust in South Korea and trust in North Korea is statistically significant at the 99% confidence level. Even in Mongolia, which has historically close ties with North Korea, South Korea is perceived as the more trustworthy state.
- European and North American countries display sharply differentiated trust perceptions: South Korea is viewed as a trustworthy country, whereas North Korea is clearly viewed as untrustworthy.
- Mongolia and Japan, both Asian countries, perceive trust in the two Koreas differently from Europe and North America.
  - Mongolia views South and North Korea as possessing similar levels of trustworthiness.
  - Japan trusts South Korea more than North Korea, but in absolute terms Japanese respondents view both Koreas as having low trustworthiness.

## (2) Respecting Other Countries

[Figure II-4] Respecting Other Countries



### Survey Questions

- **Question** “South Korea(or North Korea) respects the positions of other countries.”
- **Scales** 1=strongly disagree; 2=somewhat disagree; 3=neutral; 4=somewhat agree; 5=strongly agree
- The graph displays the country-level mean scores for this item. Higher average values indicate a stronger perception that South Korea (or North Korea) respects other countries.

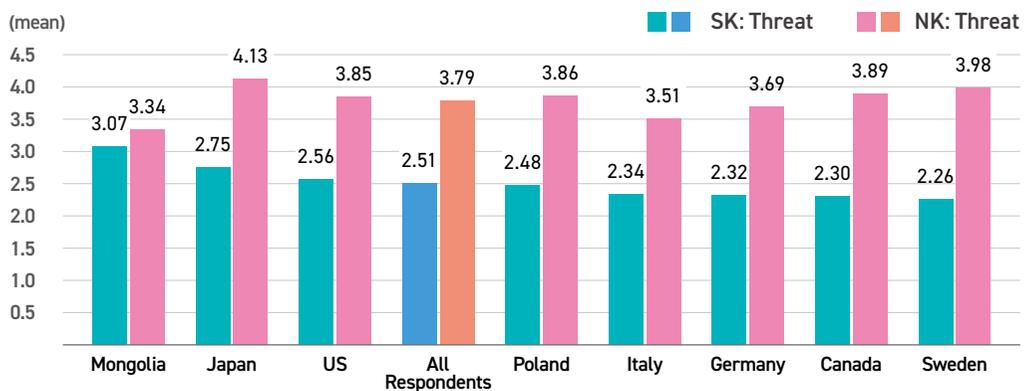
### Different Perspectives in Asia: Respect

- The evaluation that a country “respects the positions of other countries” can be interpreted as an assessment of whether South Korea or North Korea adheres to the norms and practices expected of members of the international community.
- North Korea has long sought recognition as a normal state, yet its mean respect score is below 3 in all countries except Mongolia. This indicates that North Korea is generally not perceived as complying with international rules and norms.
- As with trust, perceptions in Asian countries differ markedly from those in North America and Europe. Japan in particular assigns a low score of 2.49 to South Korea’s respect for other countries, reflecting a negative evaluation.

- In essence, while Europe and North America tend to view South Korea and North Korea in a mirror-image or oppositional pattern, Asian countries often perceive the two Koreas as more similar in their level of respect.
- Interestingly, the country with diplomatic relations with both Koreas—Sweden—shows the largest gap between perceptions of South Korea and North Korea (South Korea 3.45 vs. North Korea 1.90). This suggests that diplomatic ties do not necessarily translate into positive public perceptions.

### (3) Threat to Other Countries

[Figure II-5] Threat to Other Countries



#### Survey Questions

- **Question** “South Korea(or North Korea) poses a threat to other countries.”
- **Scales** 1=strongly disagree; 2=somewhat disagree; 3=neutral; 4=somewhat agree; 5=strongly agree
- The graph presents the country-level mean scores for this item. Higher average values indicate stronger perceptions that South Korea (or North Korea) poses a threat to other countries.

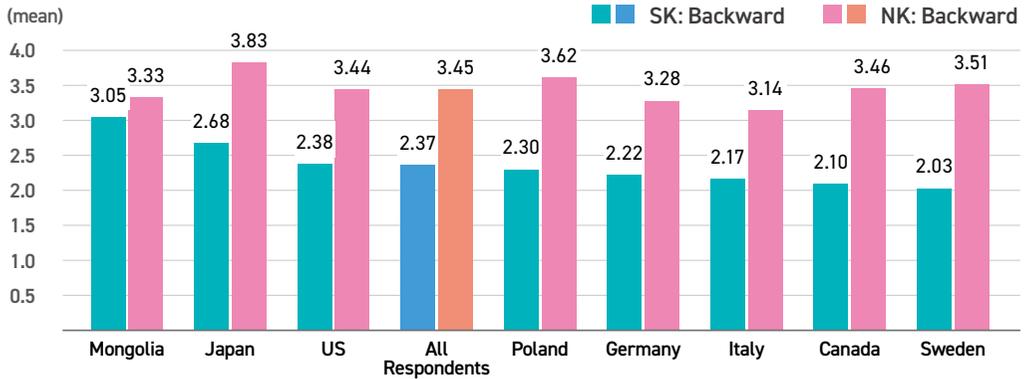
#### Different Perspectives in Asia: Respect

- Japan perceives North Korea as the greatest threat. However, compared with other Western countries, Japan also assigns a relatively higher threat score to South Korea.

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- The same national-image pattern observed in earlier items appears again in perceptions of threat. The United States and European countries tend to view the two Koreas dichotomously: “South Korea = trust / safety” and “North Korea = distrust / threat.” This reflects that many Europeans and Americans—who generally possess limited knowledge of Korean history, culture, and context—are likely to simplify Korean Peninsula issues into binary categories.
  - In contrast, Asian countries—whose national interests and historical experiences are more directly intertwined with the Korean Peninsula—appear to understand South Korea and North Korea through the lens of their own strategic interests and historical relationships.

#### (4) Culturally Backward Country

[Figure II-6] Culturally Backward Country



##### Survey Questions

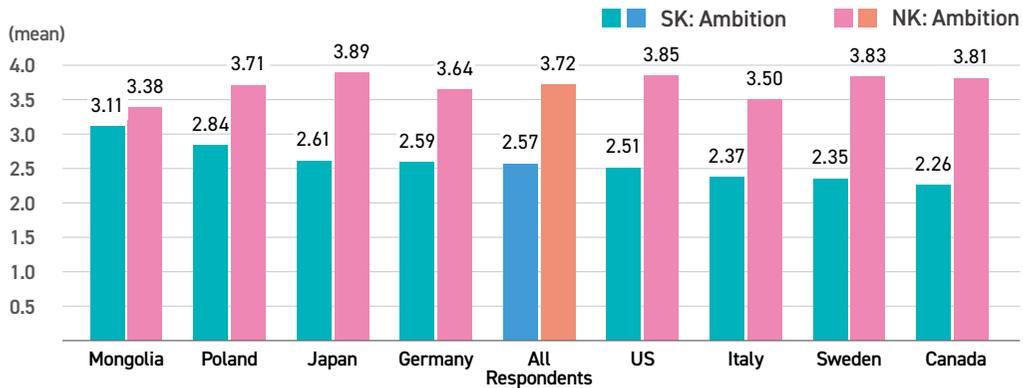
- **Question** “South Korea(or North Korea) is culturally backward and uncivilized.”
- **Scales** 1=strongly disagree; 2=somewhat disagree; 3=neutral; 4=somewhat agree; 5=strongly agree
- The graph shows the country-level mean scores for this item. Higher average values indicate stronger perceptions that South Korea (or North Korea) is a culturally backward country.

##### Different Perspectives in Asia: Cultural Backwardness

- South Korea receives high cultural evaluations in all countries except Mongolia. Mongolia’s mean score for South Korea’s cultural image is 3.05—slightly above the neutral midpoint of 3.
- North Korea, by contrast, is consistently viewed as culturally less developed than South Korea.
- Mongolia and Japan—both Asian countries—differ in how they perceive the cultural development of the two Koreas. Mongolia tends to rate South and North Korea similarly across almost all image dimensions. Japan shows the strongest negative perceptions of North Korea among all surveyed countries, yet it also holds comparatively negative views of South Korea.

## (5) Ambition to Dominate Other Countries

[Figure II-7] Ambition to Dominate Other Countries



### Survey Questions

- **Question** “South Korea( or North Korea) would like to dominate other nations.”
- **Scales** 1=strongly disagree; 2=somewhat disagree; 3=neutral; 4=somewhat agree; 5=strongly agree
- The graph presents the country-level mean scores for this item. Higher average values indicate stronger perceptions that South Korea (or North Korea) harbors ambitions to dominate other countries.

### Different Perspectives in Asia:

#### Perceptions of Dominant Ambition

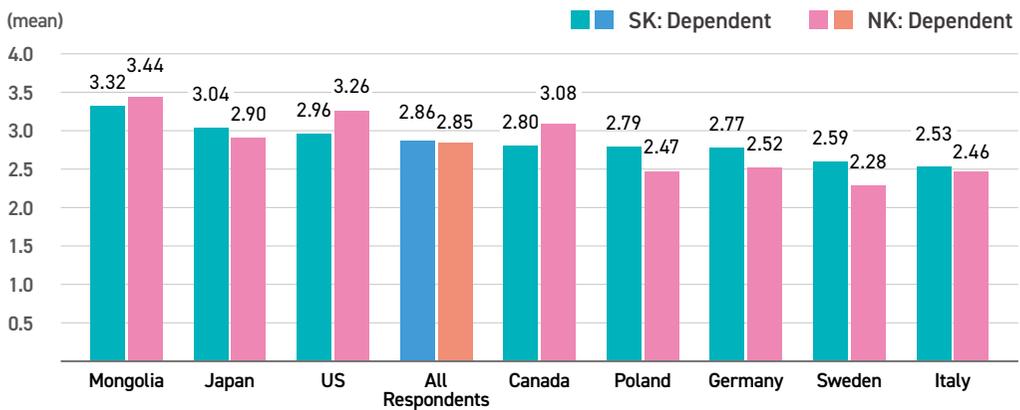
- Most surveyed countries assess South Korea as having low levels of dominant ambition, while viewing North Korea’s ambition as at or above the midpoint. Mongolia again shows little distinction between the two Koreas, rating South Korea’s ambition highest among all countries (3.11) and North Korea’s lowest (3.38).
- Poland, while broadly similar to other European and North American countries in most national-image dimensions, stands out in this category by rating South Korea’s dominant ambition relatively high.
- To understand Poland’s evaluation more precisely, additional survey items and deeper analysis would be necessary. One plausible explanation is Poland’s recent large-scale acquisition of

South Korean military equipment, which may have contributed to perceptions of South Korea as an emerging military power.

- If South Korea’s recent boom in defense exports (the “K-defense” surge) continues in parallel with Europe’s rearmament trend, European countries may begin to perceive South Korea in a pattern similar to Poland. South Korea may therefore need proactive public diplomacy to prevent such perceptions from spreading excessively.

## (6) Dependent State

[Figure II-8] Dependent State



### Survey Questions

- **Question** “South Korea(or North Korea) is often influenced by how other countries perceive or respond.”
- **Scales** 1=strongly disagree; 2=somewhat disagree; 3=neutral; 4=somewhat agree; 5=strongly agree
- The graph displays the country-level mean scores for this item. Higher average values indicate stronger perceptions that South Korea (or North Korea) is a dependent state.

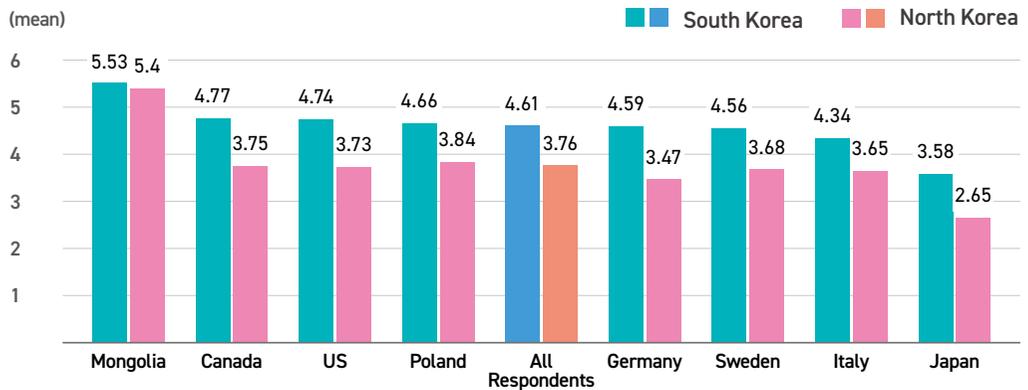
### Different Perspectives in Asia: Perceptions of Dependence

- This indicator—“being sensitive to how other countries perceive or respond”—is the only national-image dimension in which evaluations of South Korea and North Korea are relatively similar across countries.

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- Except for the Asian countries, Sweden, Italy, Poland, Germany, Canada, and the United States view South Korea as an independent state (mean scores at or below 3).
  - Perceptions that South Korea is dependent are highest in Mongolia, followed by Japan and the United States.
  - Perceptions that North Korea is dependent are highest in Mongolia, followed by the United States and Canada. These three countries evaluate North Korea as more dependent than South Korea, whereas the remaining five countries evaluate South Korea as more dependent than North Korea.
  - This item again reveals differences between Asian and Western countries. Only Japan and Mongolia assign South Korea a dependence score above 3. Across all surveyed countries, the perceived dependence of South Korea and North Korea does not differ substantially.

## 4. Respondents' Own Country's Relations with South and North Korea

[Figure II-9] Respondents' Own Country's Relations with South and North Korea



### Survey Questions

- **Question** “How positive or negative is your country’s current relationship with South Korea(or North Korea)?”
- **Scales** 1=very negative; 4=not negative nor positive; 7=very positive
- The graph displays the country-level mean scores for this item. Higher average values indicate more favorable evaluations of respondents’ own country’s relationship with South Korea or North Korea.

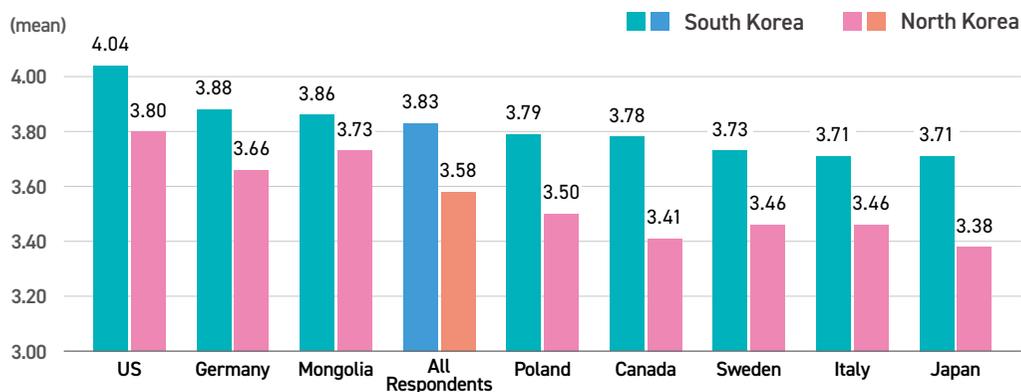
### Overall, Respondents Evaluate Their Country’s Relations with South Korea Positively and Relations with North Korea Negatively

- In every surveyed country, relations with South Korea received positive evaluations, with mean scores exceeding 4 (the midpoint).
  - For North Korea, all countries except Mongolia rated their bilateral relations below 4, indicating negative evaluations.
  - Mongolia evaluated its relations with both South Korea and North Korea positively, and at higher levels than other countries.

- 
- Japan shows a distinctive pattern: compared with other countries, Japanese respondents evaluate their country's relations with both South Korea and North Korea more negatively.
    - This likely reflects persistent concerns about North Korea's military threat and unresolved abductee issues.
    - Despite bilateral governmental efforts since 2022 to improve relations, Japanese public perceptions of South Korea remain negative. Considering that regional support is essential in any future unification process, further efforts will be needed to improve South Korea's image in Japan.
  - Americans' perceptions of U.S.–North Korea relations are not particularly negative and are similar to those of other Western countries. Despite the effective halt in U.S.–North Korea dialogue since the 2019 Hanoi Summit, Americans do not view the bilateral relationship as especially poor.
    - This suggests that U.S. public opinion could shift positively if a new opportunity—such as a renewed U.S.–North Korea summit—were to emerge.

## 5. Importance of South Korea and North Korea in Respondents' Own Foreign Policy

[Figure II-10] Importance of South Korea and North Korea in Respondents' Own Foreign Policy



### Survey Questions

- **Question** “How important do you think South Korea is to your country’s foreign policy?”
- **Scales** 1=Very important; 2=Somewhat important; 3=Not very important; 4=Not at all important; 5=Don’t know
- The graph displays the mean scores excluding “don’t know” responses. Higher average values indicate a stronger perception that relations with South Korea (or North Korea) are important in the respondent’s country’s foreign policy.

### All Countries Perceive South Korea as More Important than North Korea

- In every surveyed country, respondents viewed relations with South Korea as more important than relations with North Korea.
- U.S. ranked relations with South Korea as the most important; it also assigned relatively high importance to relations with North Korea.
- Countries assigning the lowest importance to relations with North Korea were Japan (3.38) Canada (3.41), and Italy (3.46).



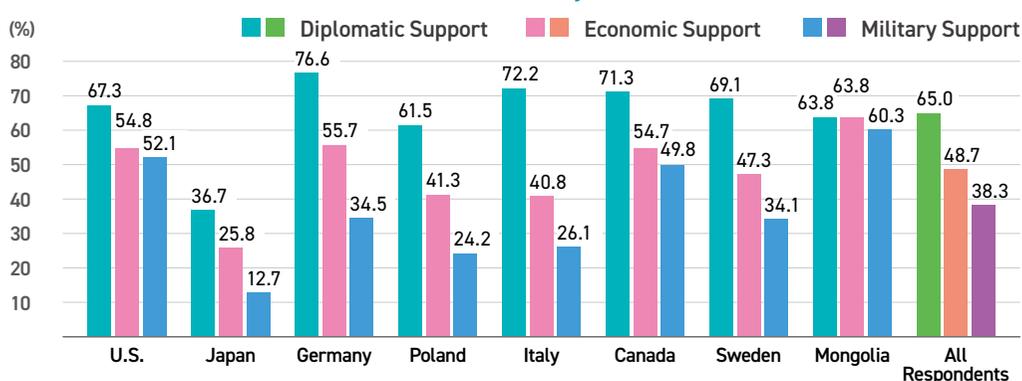
# **III. Peace and Unification on the Korean Peninsula**



### III. Peace and Unification on the Korean Peninsula

#### 1. Peace on the Korean Peninsula and Support from the International Community

[Figure III-1] Peace on the Korean Peninsula and Support from the International Community



#### Survey Questions

- Question**
  - Diplomatic Support** “If diplomatic support from your country is needed for peace on the Korean Peninsula, what do you think your country should do?”
  - Economic Support** “If economic support from your country is needed for peace on the Korean Peninsula, what do you think your country should do?”
  - Military Support** “If military support from your country is needed for peace on the Korean Peninsula, what do you think your country should do?”
- Scales** 1=Provide diplomatic(or economic/military) support for peace on the Korean Peninsula; 2=No need to provide diplomatic(or economic, military) support for peace on the Korean Peninsula; 3=Don’t know
- The graph presents, by country, the percentage of respondents who gave a positive response (“My country should provide diplomatic/economic/military support”).

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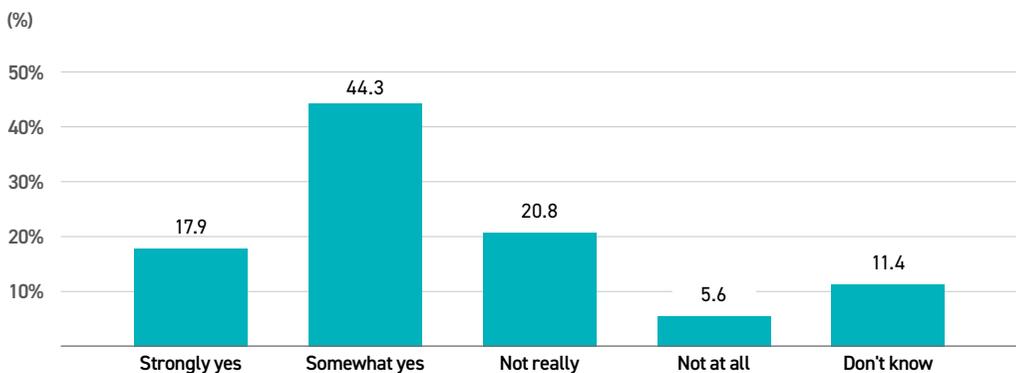
**The Most Supportive: the United States;  
the Most Reluctant: Japan**

- Among the surveyed countries, the United States and Japan are the two that can most substantively influence peace on the Korean Peninsula. The United States shows consistently high levels of support: 67.3% for diplomatic support, 54.8% for economic support, and 52.1% for military support.
  - These positive attitudes are somewhat unexpected given the Trump administration’s tendencies toward unilateralism or isolationism.
  - This indicates that, independently of the Trump administration’s alliance policy, the American public values the United States’ responsibilities as an ally on the Korean Peninsula and believes the United States should fulfill those responsibilities even when doing so entails significant cost.
  - The findings thus suggest that U.S. foreign policy under President Trump and U.S. public opinion do not necessarily align.
- Japan shows the most reluctant stance toward providing support for peace on the Korean Peninsula among all surveyed countries.
  - In every country except Japan, more than 50% of respondents supported diplomatic assistance; Japan alone recorded only 36.7%. Agreement with economic and military assistance was also low, at 25.8% and 12.7%, respectively.
  - Despite trilateral security cooperation efforts among South Korea, the United States, and Japan, Japanese public opinion remains reluctant—likely due to Japan’s negative national images of both South and North Korea.
  - This implies that, beyond simply emphasizing the strategic importance of security cooperation, South Korea will require long-term unification public diplomacy aimed at improving its national image in Japan.

- Beyond diplomatic support—which imposes relatively low costs—agreement with economic support exceeded 50% in Germany (55.7%), Canada (54.7%), and Mongolia (63.8%).
  - However, Italy (40.8%) and Poland (41.3%), despite both being significant players, showed relatively low agreement with economic support.
  - This likely reflects each country’s economic conditions and, in Poland’s case, its need to address the direct threat posed by Russia.
- Mongolia stands out by showing more than 60% agreement for diplomatic, economic, and military support.

## 2. Lessons from German Unification

[Figure III-2] Lessons from German Unification



### Survey Questions

- **Question** “In light of the German unification experience, would you recommend Korean unification?”
- **Scales** 1=Strongly yes; 2=Somewhat yes; 3=Not really; 4=Not at all; 5=Don’t know
- This item was used only in the Germany survey. It was designed to capture the views and experiences of German respondents, who have directly undergone national unification.

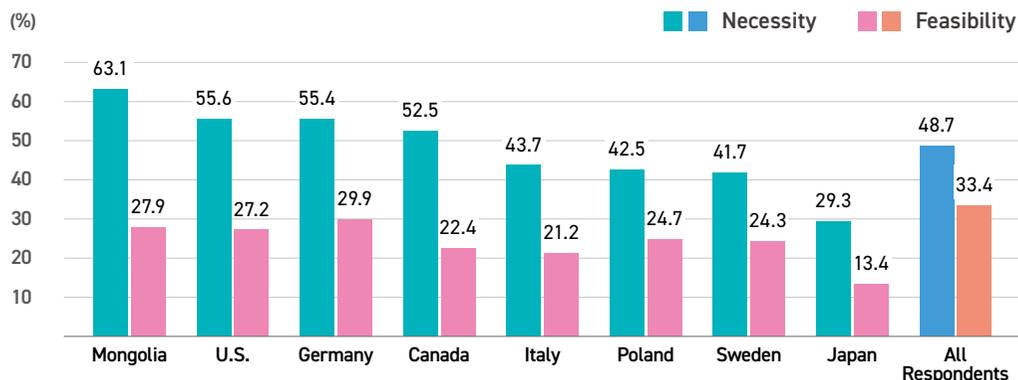
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## Recommendation for Unification

- When responses are grouped into positive (“strongly yes” + “somewhat yes”) and negative (“not really” + “not at all”), 62.2% fall into the positive category and 26.4% into the negative. This indicates that German respondents generally encourage Korean unification. However, a negative share of 26.4% cannot be considered negligible.
- In 2019, Germany’s MDR (Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk) conducted a survey of former East and West German residents asking whether they wished to “return to the former East Germany” (at a time when Germany had recorded historically low unemployment).
  - In that survey, 97% of former West Germans and 88% of former East Germans said they did not wish to return. Although the two surveys address different issues, the results are to some extent related.
  - Compared with the 2019 MDR survey, the current study shows a higher proportion of respondents who do not recommend unification. This shift is likely influenced by Germany’s political and economic conditions at the time of the 2025 survey (August). Politically, the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) has risen to become the second-strongest party after the CDU/CSU, surpassing the Social Democratic Party (SPD).
  - Economically, unemployment exceeded three million in August—its highest since 2015—and the unemployment rate reached 6.4%, compared to 4.8% at its low point in 2019. These factors likely contributed to more negative responses.

### 3. Necessity and Feasibility of Korean Unification

[Figure III-3] Necessity and Feasibility of Korean Unification



#### Survey Questions

- Question**  
**Necessity** “How necessary is unification between North and South Korea?”
- Scales** 1=Extremely necessary; 2=somewhat necessary; 3=somewhat not necessary; 4=not at all necessary; 5=Don’t know
- 1+2 = “necessity”. The figures in the graph represent the percentage of respondents who believe Korean unification is necessary.

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- Question**  
**Feasibility** “How likely is unification between North and South Korea?”
- Scales** 1=Very likely; 2=Somewhat likely; 3=Not very likely; 4=Not likely at all; 5=Don’t know
- 1+2 = “feasibility”. The figures in the graph represent the percentage of respondents who believe Korean unification is likely to occur.

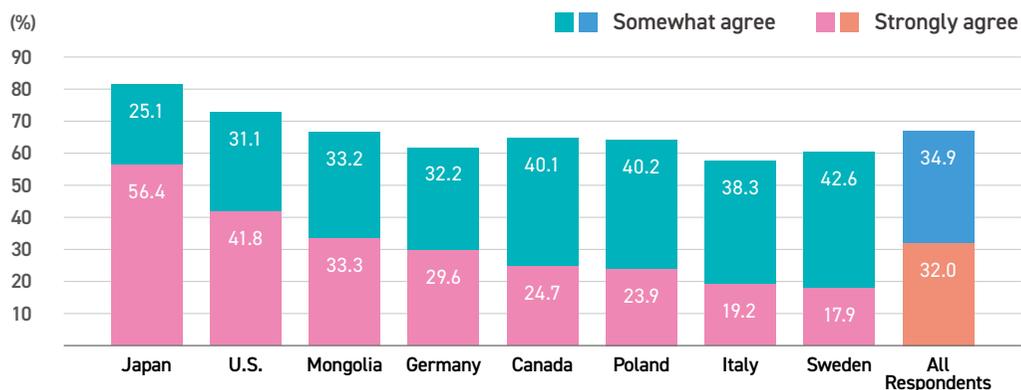
#### Across All Surveyed Countries, Korean Unification Is Seen as Necessary but Unlikely

- In most countries, there is a large gap between perceived necessity and perceived feasibility. Respondents generally believe that unification is needed, but are skeptical about whether it will realistically happen.

- Mongolia is a notable exception: necessity and feasibility are rated at similar levels, meaning Mongolian respondents view unification as both necessary and achievable.
- Germany—having experienced unification—shows comparatively high support for the necessity of Korean unification (55.4%). Germans also rate its feasibility relatively higher than other countries (29.9%).
- Japan rates both the necessity and feasibility of unification the lowest among all surveyed countries.
  - This may stem from the perception among Japanese citizens that Korean unification would not benefit Japan’s national interests.
  - Given that neighboring-country support will be essential for any future unification process, it will be important to develop unification public diplomacy aimed at improving these negative perceptions in Japan.

## 4. Threat Posed by North Korea's Nuclear Weapons

[Figure III-4] Threat Posed by North Korea's Nuclear Weapons



### Survey Questions

- **Question** “North Korea’s nuclear weapons pose a serious threat to peace in my country.”
- **Scales** 1=Strongly agree; 2=Somewhat agree; 3=Somewhat disagree; 4=Strongly Disagree; 5=don’t know
- The graph displays the combined percentage of respondents who answered “somewhat agree” or “strongly agree.”
- Higher levels of agreement (“somewhat agree” + “strongly agree”) indicate stronger perceptions that North Korea’s nuclear weapons pose a serious threat to the respondent’s country’s peace.

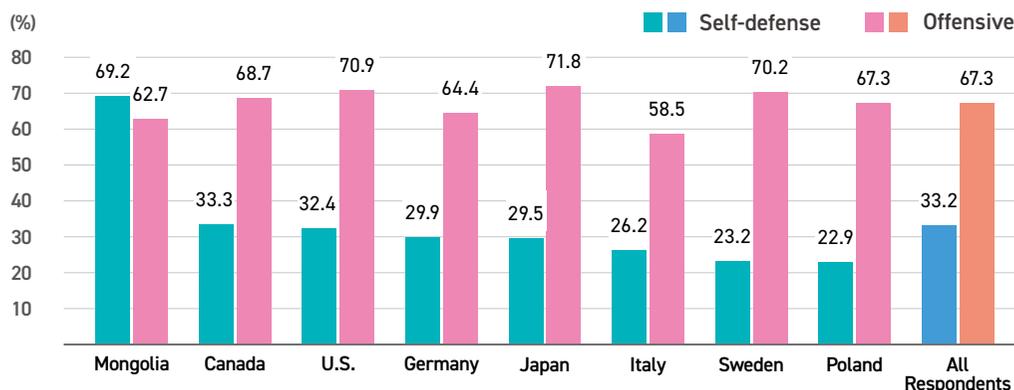
### Higher Threat Perceptions in Geographically Adjacent Countries

- Japan shows the highest level of perceived threat to national peace. Even when accounting for standard errors, its threat perception is significantly higher than in other countries. A total of 81.5% agree that North Korea’s nuclear weapons threaten Japan’s peace (“strongly agree” 56.4%, “somewhat agree” 25.1%), with the “strongly agree” share distinctly higher than in any other country.
- The United States records the next-highest level of threat perception, with 72.9% agreeing (“strongly agree” 41.8%, “somewhat agree” 31.1%).

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- In Mongolia—which not only maintains diplomatic relations with North Korea but has traditionally had friendly ties—66.5% nonetheless agree with the statement. This shows that countries geographically close to North Korea or directly involved in the nuclear issue (Japan, the United States, and Mongolia) exhibit the highest levels of threat perception.
  - In contrast, European countries generally show lower levels of strong agreement. Although more than 60% overall agree that North Korea’s nuclear weapons threaten their national peace (except Italy at 57.6%), the proportion selecting “strongly agree” remains below 30%, indicating relatively weaker intensity of concern compared with Japan and the United States.

## 5. Purpose of North Korea’s Nuclear Weapons

[Figure III-5] Purpose of North Korea’s Nuclear Weapons



### Survey Questions

- Question**
  - (1) **Self-defense** “North Korea’s nuclear weapons are intended for self -defense.”
  - (2) **Offensive** “North Korea’s nuclear weapons are intended to attack other countries.”
- Scales** 1=Strongly agree; 2=Somewhat agree; 3=Somewhat disagree; 4=Strongly Disagree; 5=don’t know
- The graph reports the percentage of respondents who agreed (“somewhat agree” + “strongly agree”) with each of the two statements.

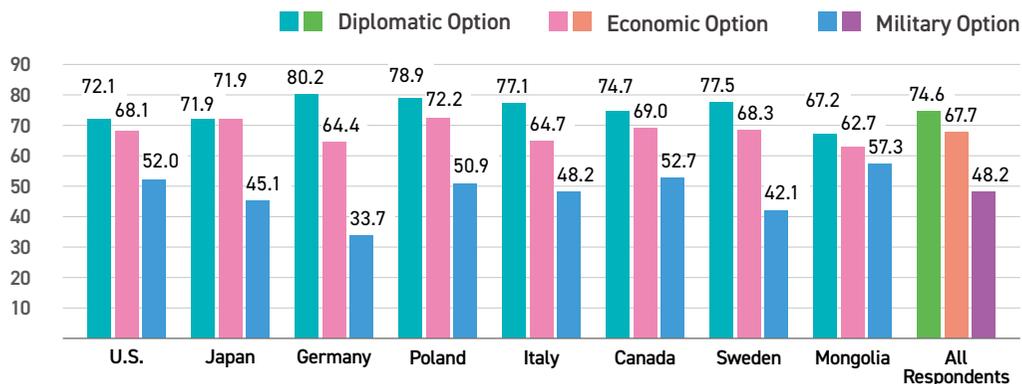
### Self-Defensive vs. Offensive

- Viewing North Korea’s nuclear weapons as self-defensive does not necessarily contradict viewing them as offensive. In other words, respondents may believe the weapons serve both purposes simultaneously.
  - The greater the distrust toward North Korea, the more likely respondents are to believe Pyongyang developed nuclear weapons for offensive use, and the more likely they are to support strong countermeasures.
- Except for Mongolia, only about 20–30% of respondents in each country view North Korea’s nuclear program as self-defensive.

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- In most countries, majorities believe North Korea’s nuclear weapons are intended for offensive purposes rather than defense.
  - Mongolia is the outlier: 69.2% of Mongolian respondents view the weapons as self-defensive, while 62.7% simultaneously view them as offensive.
  - North Korea maintains that its nuclear weapons are needed to protect itself from U.S. nuclear threats, framing them as purely defensive. The survey results, however, show that this claim has not gained international credibility.

## 6. Options to Denuclearization of North Korea

[Figure III-6] Options to Denuclearization of North Korea



### Survey Questions

- (1) **Diplomatic Option** “Diplomatic negotiations should be pursued to persuade North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons.”
- (2) **Economic Option** “Countries around the world should cooperate to impose economic sanctions on North Korea to make it abandon its nuclear weapons.”
- (3) **Military Option** “North Korea should be pressured militarily to give up its nuclear weapons.”

- **Scales** 1=Strongly agree; 2=Somewhat agree; 3=Somewhat disagree; 4=Strongly Disagree; 5=don't know

- The graph presents the percentage of respondents who agreed (“somewhat agree” + “strongly agree”) with each denuclearization option. The figures represent levels of support (%) for each approach.

### (1) Denuclearization Through Diplomatic Means

- In countries where perceived nuclear threat levels are high—such as the United States and Japan—support for diplomatic approaches is not especially high compared with other countries, at 72.1% and 71.9%, respectively. It is noteworthy that Germany, a country that has experienced national unification, shows the highest level of support for diplomacy as a means to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue.

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- Although diplomatic measures generally enjoy broad support—because they are relatively low-cost, require less time, and do not entail immediate physical risks—the countries that perceive North Korea as the greatest threat (e.g., Japan) exhibit only average levels of support for diplomacy. This likely reflects public skepticism about the effectiveness of diplomatic approaches based on the accumulated record of failed negotiations.

## **(2) Denuclearization Through Economic Measures**

- Support for economic measures is slightly lower than support for diplomatic measures overall (74.6% vs. 67.7%).
- Japan (71.9%) and Poland (72.2%) show particularly high support for economic sanctions. Japan also records the highest share of “strongly agree” responses (38.9%) among all surveyed countries. In contrast, Mongolia (62.7%) shows relatively lower support.

## **(3) Denuclearization Through Military Measures**

- Support for military measures—the strongest option—is significantly lower than for diplomatic or economic approaches: only 48.2% of respondents overall agree.
- By country, support is relatively high in Mongolia (57.3%), the United States (52.0%), Poland (50.9%), and Canada (52.7%), while Germany (33.7%) and Japan (45.1%) show lower levels.
- Japanese respondents show strong support for diplomatic and economic measures but remain hesitant about military options. As a neighboring state, Japan likely fears escalation and physical conflict, making its public more cautious than other respondents.
- It is also notable that Germany—having experienced national unification—shows the strongest opposition to using military means for North Korea’s denuclearization.

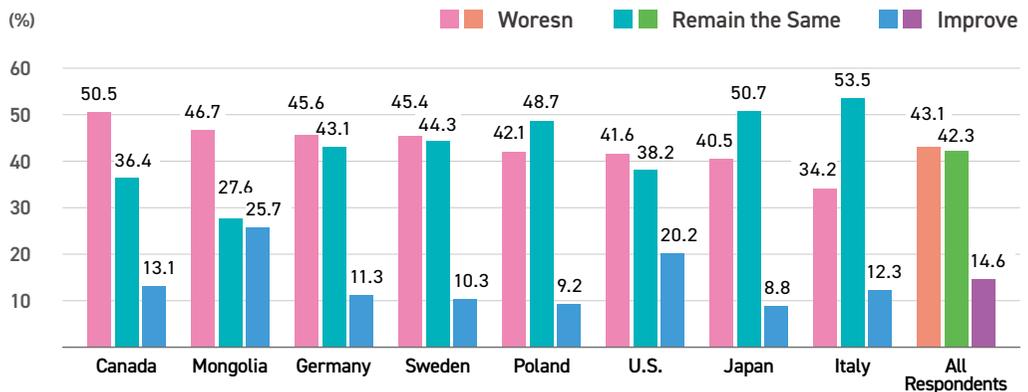
# **IV. International Affairs and Security**



# IV. International Affairs and Security

## 1. Five-Year Outlook on U.S.–China Relations

[Figure IV-1] Five-Year Outlook on U.S.–China Relations



### Survey Questions

- **Question** “Over the next 5 years, do you expect US-China relations to get better, stay the same, or get worse?”
- **Scales**
  - 1=They will become much worse;
  - 2=They will become somewhat worse;
  - 3=They will remain about the same;
  - 4=They will become somewhat better;
  - 5=They will become much better;
- Responses were coded as follows for the graph: 1 + 2 = “worsen,” 3 = “remain the same,” 4 + 5 = “improve.”

### Predominantly Negative Outlook on U.S.–China Relations

- Across all surveyed countries, 43.1% of respondents believe U.S.–China relations will worsen over the next five years (“much worse” + “somewhat worse”), and 42.3% expect relations to remain the same.
- Given the currently heightened tension between the two countries, this means that approximately 86% hold a negative outlook. This pattern is similar to the views observed in South Korea.

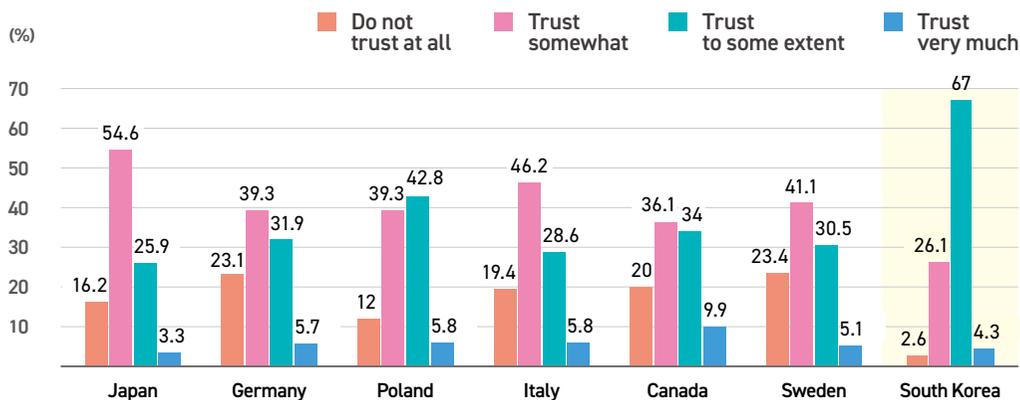
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- The KINU Unification Survey of the Korea Institute for National Unification asks the same question to South Korean respondents.
  - In the 2022 KINU Unification Survey, 31.5% answered that relations would worsen, and 58.6% answered that they would remain the same—indicating that nearly 90% of respondents projected a negative trajectory for U.S.–China relations.

### **Higher Positive Expectations among Americans and Their Implications**

- Among all surveyed countries, Americans show the second-highest share of positive expectations about U.S.–China relations (“somewhat better” or “much better”), at 20.2%, just after Mongolia (25.7%).
- Contrary to widespread predictions that strategic competition would intensify following Trump’s second election, U.S.–China relations have remained more stable than expected. This relative stability may have shaped American respondents’ views.
- Because the U.S. and China are the two key actors in any progress toward peace and eventual unification on the Korean Peninsula, their bilateral relationship is of critical importance for Korean Peninsula dynamics.
- As President Lee Jae-myung noted during his summit with President Trump, for South Korea to act as a “pace-maker” alongside a Trump administration that presents itself as a “peace-maker”, South Korea must pursue a balanced approach grounded in accurate data and evidence-based public diplomacy strategies.

## 2. Trust in the U.S. Nuclear Umbrella Policy

[Figure IV-2] Trust in the U.S. Nuclear Umbrella Policy



### Survey Questions

- **Question** “How much trust do you have in the U.S. nuclear umbrella policy that the U.S. will retaliate with a nuclear strike against your enemy if the enemy attacks \_\_\_\_\_ (your country) with a nuclear weapon?”
- **Scales** 1=Do not trust at all; 2=Trust very little; 3=Trust to some extent; 4=Trust very much;
- South Korea’s level of trust in the U.S. nuclear umbrella is drawn from the 2025 KINU Unification Survey, which used the same question. The KINU Unification Survey is an annual, face-to-face interview survey of 1,000 respondents.

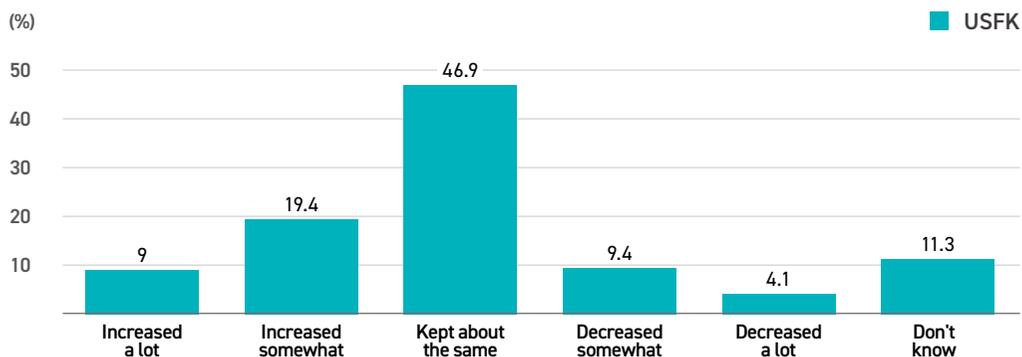
### South Korea and Poland Show the Highest Levels of Trust in the U.S. Nuclear Umbrella

- In Poland, 48.6% of respondents express trust in the U.S. nuclear umbrella—the highest among all surveyed countries.
- Japan shows the lowest level of trust, with only 29.2% indicating confidence in U.S. extended deterrence. Given the centrality of the U.S.–Japan alliance to Japan’s security, this is a notably low figure.
- Across all countries, only 38.2% of respondents trust the U.S. nuclear umbrella, meaning that fewer than half of respondents express confidence in U.S. extended deterrence.

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- The KINU Unification Survey, Korea’s annual face-to-face survey program, asks South Korean respondents the same question.
    - Because the KINU Unification Survey uses in-person interviews, direct comparison with the online-based Global Survey on Korean Unification should be made with caution.
    - In the 2025 KINU Unification Survey, 71.3% of South Koreans said they trust the U.S. nuclear umbrella (“Trust to some extent” 67.0%; “Trust very much” 4.3%).
    - Compared to U.S. allies and NATO members in this global survey, South Korea shows exceptionally high trust in the U.S. nuclear umbrella. Even when accounting for methodological differences, South Korea’s trust level is overwhelmingly high.
    - The implication is that South Koreans’ support for indigenous nuclear armament does not stem from distrust of the U.S. extended deterrence commitment.

### 3. U.S. Public Perceptions of U.S. Forces Korea (USFK)

[Figure IV-3] Appropriate Size of U.S. Forces in South Korea



#### Survey Questions

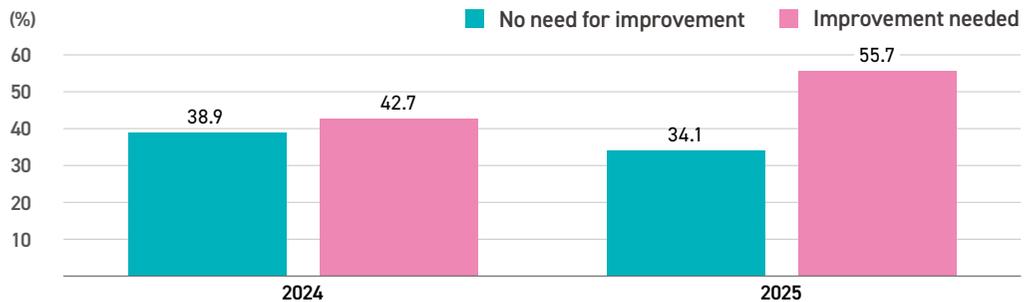
- **Question** “Should the number of US troops stationed in South Korea be increased, decreased, or kept about the same?”
- **Scales** 1=increased a lot; 2=increased somewhat; 3=kept about the same; 4=decreased somewhat; 5=decreased a lot; 6=don't know
- This question was administered only in the U.S. Survey.

#### About 75% of Americans Prefer Maintaining or Increasing the Current Level of U.S. Forces Korea

- Only 13.5% of Americans believe U.S. troops should be withdrawn from South Korea, while 75% prefer maintaining or increasing the current force level.
  - In other words, more than three-quarters of Americans do not support reducing U.S. Forces Korea (USFK).
- This indicates that the majority of Americans continue to view the U.S. role in international security as important.
  - Although the Trump administration pursues an America-first policy line, this does not necessarily reflect broader American public opinion.
  - A large share of Americans do not oppose the use of U.S. resources and expenditures for international security commitments.

## 4. North Korea-Japan Relations

[Figure IV-4] Improving Japan–North Korea Relations in the Context of the North Korean Nuclear Issue



### Survey Questions

- **Question** “Regardless of the nuclear issue, it is necessary to improve Japan–North Korea relations.”
- **Scales** 1=Strongly disagree; 2=Somewhat agree; 3=Somewhat disagree; 4=Strongly disagree; 5=Don’t know
- Responses were coded as follows for the graph:  
1 + 2 = “no need for improvement,” 3 + 4 = “improvement needed.”
- This question was administered only in the Japan Survey.

### 55.7% of Japanese Respondents Support Improving Japan–North Korea Relations Regardless of the Nuclear Issue

- In the 2025 survey, 55.7% of Japanese respondents agree that Japan should improve relations with North Korea regardless of the nuclear issue, while 34.1% disagree.
- Comparing the 2024 and 2025 results, the share of Japanese respondents who believe improvement is necessary rose from 42.7% to 55.7%—an increase of 13 percentage points.
- This indicates that, despite Japan’s highly negative perceptions of North Korea, the Japanese public approaches diplomatic and security issues pragmatically. This finding is highly significant for shaping South Korea’s policy toward Japan.





**Executive Summary**  
**2025 Global Survey on Korean Unification**