



# Asian Barometer 2024

## Trends in Swedish views of China, India, and Japan



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## Executive Summary

- The Asian Barometer 2024 follows up on the first report published in 2022, drawing on new data from the latest round of the SOM public opinion survey which was conducted in the autumn of 2023. This allows comparison of responses between the two surveys and examination of how Swedish public opinion about China, India, and Japan has developed over time.
- Overall, there was little change in the Swedish public's responses to question about the three Asian countries, indicating that the views identified in the 2022 barometer survey largely still stand.
- Swedish public opinion about China continued to be very negative, with the majority of respondents disagreeing that it was a country which respected democratic rights and acted responsibly internationally. The majority of respondents continued to be adverse to more Swedish cooperation with China and to more investment from the country.
- Views about India showed some of the biggest changes. There was an increase in the proportion of respondents who agreed that India had a developed economy and that it will be an important global actor in the future. Views about its respect for democratic rights and international responsibility, however, became slightly more negative.
- Swedish public opinion about Japan, which was found to be overwhelmingly positive in the 2022 barometer, showed very little change. This indicates that Swedes' views about Japan are relatively established.



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## Introduction

What does the Swedish public think about China, India, and Japan? How do they believe that Sweden should conduct its relations with these countries in the coming years? How are their opinions changing over time? Whilst recent public debates on foreign and security policy in Sweden have been focused on NATO and Russia's war in Ukraine, Sweden's political and economic relationships with Asia continue to represent a vitally important aspect of its international affairs. From the end of the Second World War, the rise of various Asian countries, beginning with Japan and more recently followed by China and India amongst others, has meant greater dispersion of economic and political power across the globe in what has been described as increasing multipolarity.<sup>1</sup> Asia has become increasingly significant for Europe in terms of trade and security. Swedes' views of Asia can tell us something about their awareness and understanding of these trends. These public opinions can also be important in enabling and constraining Swedish government policies towards the region.

In 2022, identifying a need to better understand Swedish public views of Asia, we published the first *Asian Barometer*.<sup>2</sup> It aimed to provide a snapshot of Swedish public opinion on the three major Asian countries.<sup>3</sup> This report is a follow up, drawing on data from the latest round of the National SOM Survey to reveal how opinions about

Asia have developed over the past two years. In the previous survey we presented respondents with eight statements chosen to target their perceptions of the three Asian countries' domestic and international politics, as well as their views about Swedish engagement with these countries. This time we also added a question regarding respect for human rights (Text box 1). Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed with each statement.

- ... is a country that will be an important global actor in the future
- ... is a country with a developed economy
- ... is a country that I would like to visit
- ... is a country that respects democratic rights
- ... is a country that respects human rights
- ... is a country that acts responsibly internationally
- ... is a country that Sweden should cooperate with
- ... is a country that I want to invest more in Sweden
- ... is a country that Sweden can learn from

*Text Box 1: Statements in the survey, in the order discussed in this report.*

The survey was completed by 1771 people aged between 16 and 85 during the autumn of 2023, with questionnaires sent out from September and collection stopped in December. More details about the SOM survey are provided at the end of this report.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/10/05/usa-china-multipolar-bipolar-unipolar/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ui.se/butiken/uis-publikationer/ui-report/2022/the-asian-barometer-2022-measuring-the-swedish-publics-views-of--china-india-and-japan/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ui.se/butiken/uis-publikationer/ui-report/2022/the-asian-barometer-2022-measuring-the-swedish-publics-views-of--china-india-and-japan/>

<sup>4</sup> This report has been prepared jointly by researchers from the Asia Programme and the Swedish National China Centre (NKK) at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI)



The autumn of 2023 marked approximately a year and a half after the start of the full-scale war between Russia and Ukraine. The evolving positions of China, India and Japan, on Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as well as developments in the respective countries' bilateral relations with Russia were discussed in traditional and social media in Sweden. It was also during this period that Hamas attacked Israel on October 7. In events connected to the three Asian countries focused on in this report, during 2023 tensions between the US and China continued to simmer, with an incident in February where a Chinese balloon was shot down over US airspace generating much media attention. China's economy showed signs of faltering, while internationally it brokered a peace deal between Saudi Arabia and Iran and offered to mediate in the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Hamas conflicts.<sup>5</sup> India hosted the G20 summit in New Delhi during September.<sup>6</sup> In April, it was widely reported that India had overtaken China as the world's most populous country, and the possible economic consequences of this demographic change was mentioned by Swedish media outlets. The Indian election took place in the spring of 2024, meaning that the period in which the survey was conducted might be considered as the run up to this. US President Biden visited Japan in May<sup>7</sup> and the country received a record number of tourists as it recovered post-pandemic.

## How are public perceptions of other countries formed?

The Swedish Institute (SI) recently published the report "Mechanisms underpinning perceptions" which examined in detail people's ideas about other countries, how these are formed, and how they might

change.<sup>8</sup> According to the report, people's perceptions of other countries are both mental pictures (or images/stereotypes) of these countries, and an understanding about these countries based on notions about the 'Self' and the particular 'Other'. As such, how Swedish people think about Sweden also makes a big difference to how they think about foreign countries.

The SI report divides perception formation into three stages: 1) Information acquisition; 2) Information organisation; and 3) Perception formation. For the first stage, information acquisition, it highlights the key role played by media coverage. However, it also points to other factors at three levels that affect information acquisition and the formation of foreign country perceptions. For the *global* level, geopolitical and geographical proximity, together with economic interlinkages, are important for perceptions which can be made more positive or negative by fluctuations in mutual trade or investment. For the *national* level, the report indicates how the political system and civil society can affect positive or negative perceptions of the foreign country, suggesting that changes in domestic politics may lead to shifts in perceptions. At the *individual* level, education and personal exposure to the foreign country impact on perceptions about it. The information people acquire about foreign countries at these levels is then filtered through their established values, morals, and emotions to form the perceptions they hold about these countries. The report concludes that factors at these three levels constantly interact, dynamically changing the image people have of foreign countries through events such as major geopolitical shifts and divergences or alignments in political systems and culture.

and the European Institute of Japanese Studies (EJIS) at the Stockholm School of Economics.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cfr.org/blog/china-year-review-2023>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-66682770>

<sup>7</sup> <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/05/18/politics/biden-fumio-kishida-meeting-japan/index.html>

<sup>8</sup> [https://si.se/app/uploads/2023/05/ppmi\\_mechanisms-underpinning-perception.pdf](https://si.se/app/uploads/2023/05/ppmi_mechanisms-underpinning-perception.pdf)



A recent European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) report based on a European public opinion survey adds to this picture of how public perceptions of foreign countries are formed.<sup>9</sup> It states that European citizens tend to base their opinions about foreign policy on current circumstances, rather than on speculations about the future such as the possibility Trump will be re-elected or there will be a military confrontation between the US and China. This points to a need for caution when taking possible scenarios as the reason for perceptions of other countries. The report also suggests the European public bases its foreign policy preferences largely on its values, particularly democracy and human rights.

The way perceptions are formed through both the information people acquire and their own values means we might expect perceptions about the three Asian countries to show some change over time, but apart from where there is a major geopolitical shift then this change is likely to be quite limited and gradual. This has indeed proven to be true; the Swedish public's responses to the 2023 survey showed only small changes from those in the previous survey. However, the small changes observed in responses to these questions can still tell us about the ongoing trends in public opinion about China, India, and Japan. Not only change, but also stability in perceptions over time, is of interest, because it reveals the way in which particular views or attitudes have become more fixed amongst the Swedish public.

## Structure of the report

This report describes how the Swedish public responded to nine statements about China, India, and Japan inserted into the SOM public opinion survey 2023. It goes through each statement discussing and comparing

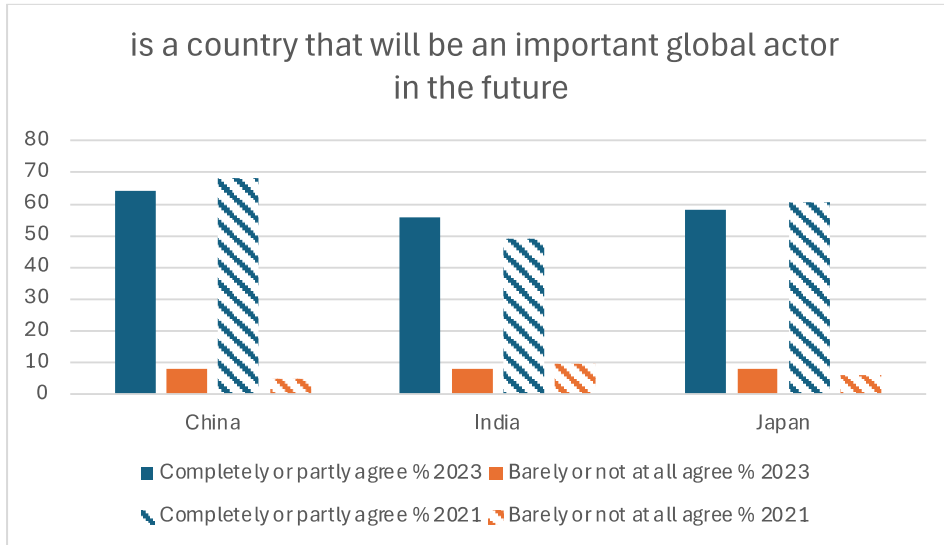
responses for all three countries, beginning with statements focused on the public's general views of the three Asian countries and then moving on to statements targeting their views about Swedish engagement. For each statement, as well as presenting the results, the report provides further discussion of what factors might have influenced Swedish perceptions.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://ecfr.eu/publication/keeping-america-close-russia-down-and-china-far-away-how-europeans-navigate-a-competitive-world/#what-the-public-wants>



## General views on the three Asian Countries



**China** saw a slight increase in the proportion of respondents disagreeing that the country will be an important global actor in the future (8% compared to 4%). This might indicate increased uncertainty about China’s future role in the world, based on signs of a downturn in its economy and the ongoing friction it faces in foreign relations.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, roughly two thirds of respondents continue to agree China will be an important actor. The Swedish government also recently reaffirmed that it considers China a significant global actor with growing influence.<sup>11</sup>

**India** remains the country that the smallest proportion of respondents felt will be important in the future. This corresponds to a Pew survey where relatively few Swedes saw India as becoming more influential.<sup>12</sup> However, in contrast to the other two

countries, the proportion of respondents agreeing increased (56% compared to 49%). This change could be the result of Swedish debates frequently mentioning India in connection to global challenges and international conflicts.<sup>13</sup> Media reported on India’s hosting of the G20<sup>14</sup> and the BRICS summit in Johannesburg where the grouping of non-western countries was often portrayed as forming a counterweighing block to the western nations.<sup>15</sup> There were also many reports of India becoming the world’s most populous country.<sup>16</sup>

For **Japan**, the proportion of respondents agreeing and disagreeing with this statement changed the least. This likely reflects the fact that the Swedish public’s views about Japan’s role in the world are relatively fixed.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.dn.se/ekonomi/kinas-ekonomi-gar-trogare-an-vantat/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.government.se/speeches/2024/05/speech-by-minister-for-foreign-affairs-tobias-billstrom-at-the-china-forum-in-stockholm/>

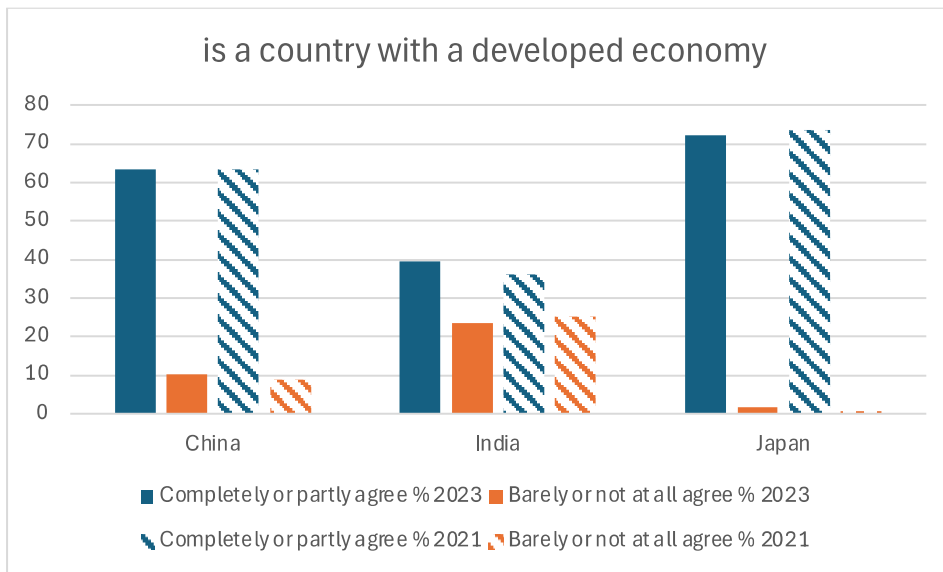
<sup>12</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2023/08/29/views-of-india-lean-positive-across-23-countries/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://folkochforsvar.se/content/indiens-dilemma-efter-rysslands-invasion-av-ukraina-en-balansakt-med-hog-politisk-insats/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.svd.se/a/eJonq9/g20-deklaration-utan-fordomande-av-ryssland>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/utrikes/brics-utmanar-vast-om-makten-det-kommer-att-ta-tid>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.dn.se/varlden/indien-har-gatt-om-kina-som-varldens-folkrikaste-land/>



The majority continued to agree that **China** was a country with a developed economy, with only a very small increase in the proportion disagreeing about this. This reflects the fact that, while in some areas China seeks to maintain a “developing” status,<sup>17</sup> views of its economic success are firmly established.

For **India**, views about the status of its economy remain relatively mixed. However, the proportion of respondents agreeing that its economy is developed increased (40% compared to 36%). This may be the result of greater attention to India’s economy in Swedish media and public discourse,<sup>18</sup> where it is sometimes presented as the next economic superpower<sup>19</sup> and has been suggested as an alternative to China from which nations are seeking to “decouple”.<sup>20</sup> Still, the proportion of respondents viewing India as developed remains quite low given that it is the world’s fifth largest economy. It is likely this reflects continuing uncertainty

about the country which also has extensive poverty,<sup>21</sup> something reinforced by the fact that once again approximately 30% of respondents answered “don’t know” to this statement.

There was very little change in responses regarding Japan. The vast majority of respondents agreed **Japan** has a developed economy. Because Japan became the second largest economy in the world in the late 1970s, the idea of it as a wealthy and developed nation is likely well established.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/china-still-gets-developing-nation-preferential-treatment>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.business-sweden.com/sv/insikter/bloggar/dags-for-indien/>

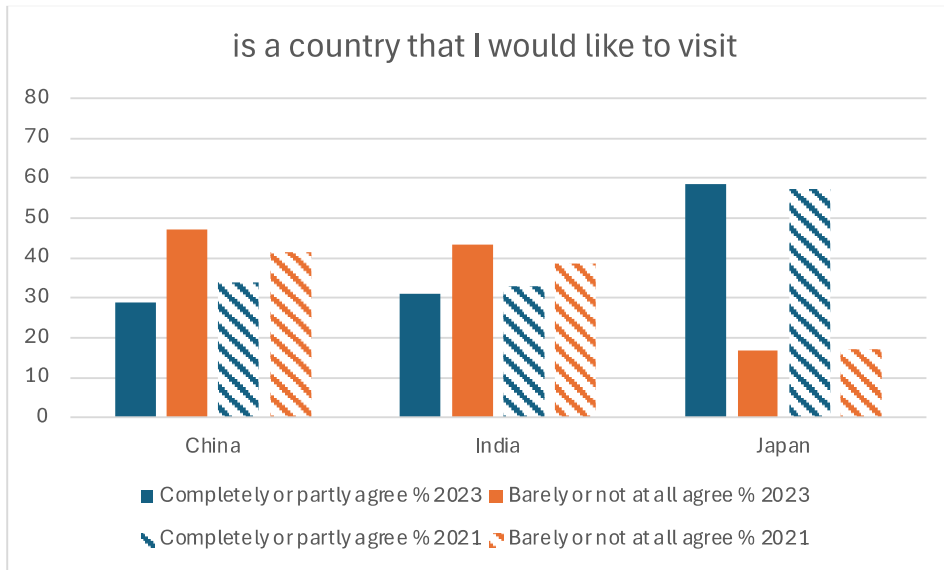
<sup>19</sup> <https://omev.se/2024/02/20/indien-ar-nasta-globala-ekonomisk-stormakt/>; <https://www.business-sweden.com/sv/om->

<https://www.omvarlden.se/nyheter/indien-bli-varldens-nasta-grona-superkraft/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/a/69XWm8/indien-gar-om-kina-kan-bli-maktigast-i-varlden>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.omvarlden.se/nyheter/indiens-bistand-det-mjukare-alternativet-till-kina>





The previous round of the survey was conducted when the Covid-19 pandemic continued to cast its shadow over the world, and it could have been expected that this may have affected responses to questions about visiting the three Asian countries. However, even in the more recent survey there continues to be ambivalent views about visiting both China and India. With their rich cultures and historical interest, it might perhaps have been expected that more people would want to visit these countries.

There was an increase in the number of people who did not want to visit either China (47% compared to 42%) or India (43% to 39%). For **China**, this might reflect the ongoing difficulties the country has building soft power.<sup>22</sup> In the past year, China has been trying to attract more foreigners to visit as part of its recovery from the pandemic,<sup>23</sup> but the results suggest that in Sweden at least

these efforts are not succeeding. Comparatively, in 2023, the number of US students spending time at Chinese universities also declined to their lowest level in decades.<sup>24</sup> The Swedish public are also divided about whether they want to visit **India** which might perhaps reflect perceptions about the difficulty of travelling there in contrast to other more popular Asian destinations.

There continued to be a large proportion of respondents who said they would like to visit **Japan**, showing the mixed views for the other two countries are not an aversion to Asian travel entirely. Japan was listed as number 12 in a 2019 article describing the Swedish public's favourite countries to visit.<sup>25</sup> More broadly, the number of international tourists visiting Japan during 2023 surged to six times that of a year earlier, reaching around 25 million.<sup>26</sup>

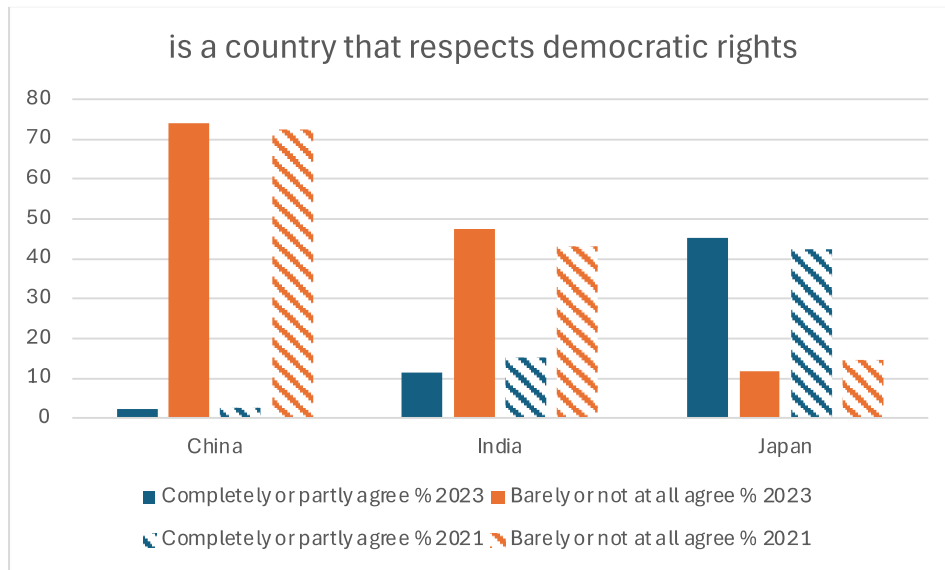
<sup>22</sup> <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/global-opinion-turns-against-beijing-failure-soft-power>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202406/04/WS665e4c89a31082fc043caaf9.html>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.cfr.org/blog/china-year-review-2023>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.aftonbladet.se/resa/a/g7KR3a/varldens-basta-lander-om-lasarna-far-valja>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.travelandleisureasia.com/hk/destinations/asia/japan-overtourism-cause-impact-solutions-path-ahead-tourism/>



For **China**, the vast majority of respondents continued to feel that the country did not respect democratic rights, with a slight increase in the proportion disagreeing. This suggests Swedish public is relatively set in its negative appraisal of China and that this continues to become gradually worse, as is seen in other parts of the world.<sup>27</sup> Given the attention Swedish media and political debates pay to Chinese human rights issues such as the situation in Xinjiang and Hong Kong,<sup>28</sup> this result is perhaps not overall surprising.

For **India**, the proportion which disagreed that it respects democratic rights increased (from 43% to 47%). This corresponds to the Pew survey which found views of India in Europe have worsened since 2008, whilst becoming positive in other parts of the world such as Africa.<sup>29</sup> The increase in negative responses regarding India's democratic rights is not surprising given the extensive coverage

given to democratic backsliding within India by Swedish media.<sup>30</sup> The research project V-Dem, led by the political science department in Gothenburg, recently stated that India has shifted from being a democracy to an autocracy.<sup>31</sup> The Swedish government has also pointed to the weakening of democratic rights in India.<sup>32</sup>

Views about **Japan's** respect for democratic rights became slightly more positive, with the proportion agreeing increasing (from 42% to 45%). However, the number of people agreeing that it respects democratic rights is still relatively low, compared to the positive responses to other statements about Japan. This could reflect a general skepticism about rights in Asia, or a lack of knowledge (38% responded "don't know").

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.cfr.org/blog/chinas-public-image-actually-getting-worse>

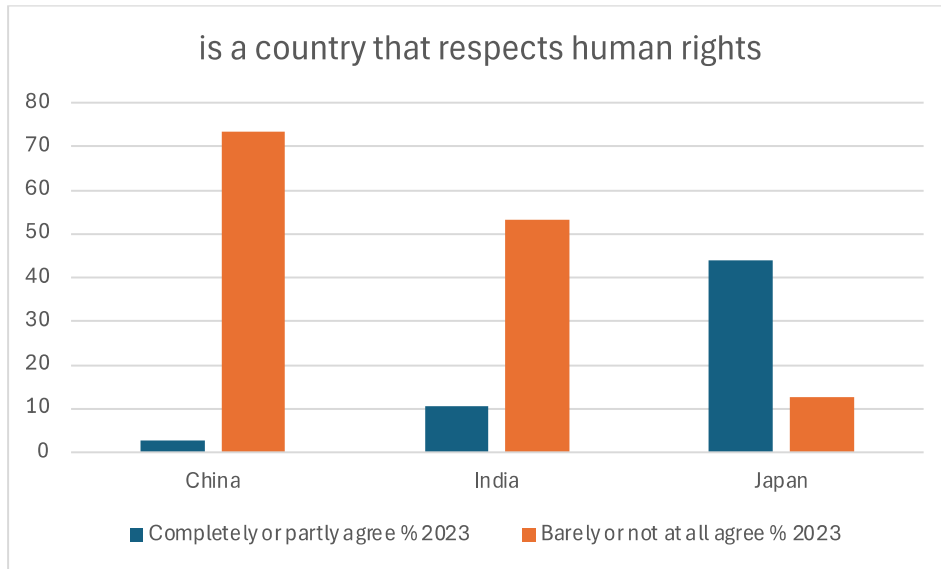
<sup>28</sup> <https://www.svd.se/a/mQp46L/uigurer-presasas-till-tystnad-om-kinas-fanglager>;  
<https://www.dn.se/varlden/marianne-bjorklund-domarna- visar-att-val-och-demokrati-ar-brottsligt-i-dagens-hongkong/>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2023/08/29/views-of-india-lean-positive-across-23-countries/>

<sup>30</sup> <https://kvartal.se/artiklar/indiens-vag-fran-demokratin/> ;  
<https://globalbar.se/2024/04/global-podd-137-riskerar-indiens-demokrati-att-utrotas-ihop-med-fattigdomen/>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.ui.se/utrikesmagasinet/analyser/2024/april/val-i-varldens-storsta-autokrati/>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.regeringen.se/rapporter/2022/06/manskliga-rattigheter-demokrati-och-rattsstatens-principer-i-indien/>



For the 2023 survey, we also added a statement about human rights to gauge whether views about this aligned or differed from views about democratic rights. The results for the three countries are quite similar to those for democratic rights: The vast majority of respondents disagreed that **China** was a country which respected human rights. This is not surprising given the frequent coverage which Swedish media gives to suspected human rights abuses by the country<sup>33</sup> and reporting on its attempts to influence human rights practices and governance internationally.<sup>34</sup>

The proportion of respondents disagreeing that **India** respects human rights is much smaller and the proportion agreeing with this statement larger. This result is interesting given that India is also suspected of having a challenging human rights situation in particular areas.<sup>35</sup> It might possibly be because of a conception of India

as a democracy, in contrast to the understanding of China as an authoritarian regime. A much higher percentage of respondents answered “don’t know” for this statement for India than for China (29% compared with 19%), which could indicate a lack of information about the social situation within the country. It might also suggest something of a selective focus from the Swedish public when it comes to human rights issues in foreign countries.

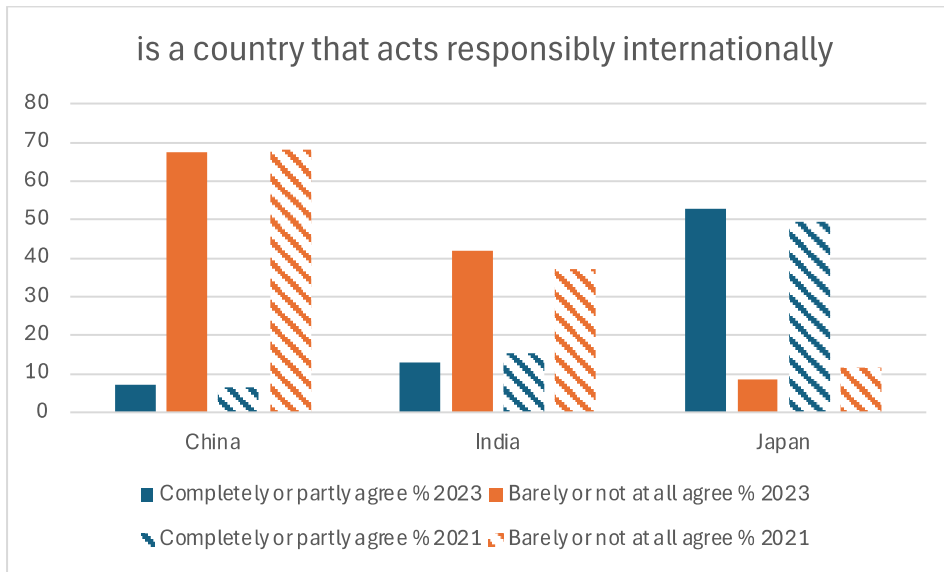
The responses for **Japan** are contrastingly positive, although still the proportion agreeing it respect human rights is quite low. The Swedish public’s perceptions of human rights in these countries may be considered significant given how European citizens tend to base their views about foreign policy greatly on the idea that the EU should be promoting human rights and democracy around the world.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.di.se/ledare/varlden-maste-leva-med-kina-dilemmat/>

<sup>34</sup> <https://kinacentrum.se/publikationer/forenta-nationerna-med-kinesiska-sardrag-vad-kinas-paverkan-pa-varldsorganisationens-arbete-betyder-for-sverige/> ; <https://www.dn.se/varlden/fn-varnar-for-brott-mot-manskliga-rattigheter-i-rapport-som-kina-forsokt-stoppa/>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.amnesty.se/aktuellt/indien-val-myndigheter-muslimska-egendomar/>

<sup>36</sup> <https://ecfr.eu/publication/keeping-america-close-russia-down-and-china-far-away-how-europeans-navigate-a-competitive-world/#what-the-public-wants>



For **China**, this result stayed much the same with the majority of respondents disagreeing that it acts responsibly internationally. It is likely that this negative appraisal is largely the result of perceptions about how China is supporting Russia,<sup>37</sup> but it could also be due to an understanding of China’s actions in fuelling conflict with the US,<sup>38</sup> or regarding regional issues such as Taiwan<sup>39</sup> and the South China Sea<sup>40</sup> which are reported on in Swedish media. Surveys have also indicated that China’s environmental impacts also negatively influence European views of its responsibility.<sup>41</sup> These negative views challenge China’s attempts to present itself as a responsible stakeholder.<sup>42</sup>

The proportion of respondents which disagreed that **India** was responsible increased. This corresponds to the general worsening of views about India seen in

European countries<sup>43</sup> and may be a result of awareness of India role in the Ukraine conflict.<sup>44</sup> Public perceptions about India’s international role may be significant because both the EU and NATO have aspirations to secure the country as a strategic partner in the Indo-Pacific,<sup>45</sup> something stronger distrust could impede. Still, the proportion of respondents who do not feel India is responsible remains considerably lower than that for China.

Views about **Japan’s** international responsibility, already positive, became slightly more so. This small increase could be explained by Japan’s support for Ukraine and sanctions on Russia, reported somewhat in Swedish media.<sup>46</sup> The lack of larger change may be because perceptions of Japan’s international role are based on longstanding ideas.

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.dn.se/varlden/blinken-utan-kinas-stod-skulle-ryssland-ha-problem-i-kriget-mot-ukraina/> ; <https://kinacentrum.se/publikationer/chinas-rhetorical-support-for-russia-since-the-full-scale-invasion-of-ukraine-a-paradigm-shift-or-old-ideas-brought-to-light/>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.di.se/nyheter/majoritet-ser-krig-mellan-kin-a-och-usa-inom-fem-ar/>  
<sup>39</sup> <https://www.svd.se/a/KnAy0e/taiwan-68-kinesiska-stridsflyg-runt-on>  
<sup>40</sup> <https://tv.aftonbladet.se/video/361226/skeppen-krockar-brakar-om-omstridda-atollen>

<sup>41</sup> <https://ip-quarterly.com/en/what-europe-thinks-about-china>

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.chinadailyhk.com/hk/article/335279>

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2023/08/29/views-of-india-lean-positive-across-23-countries/>

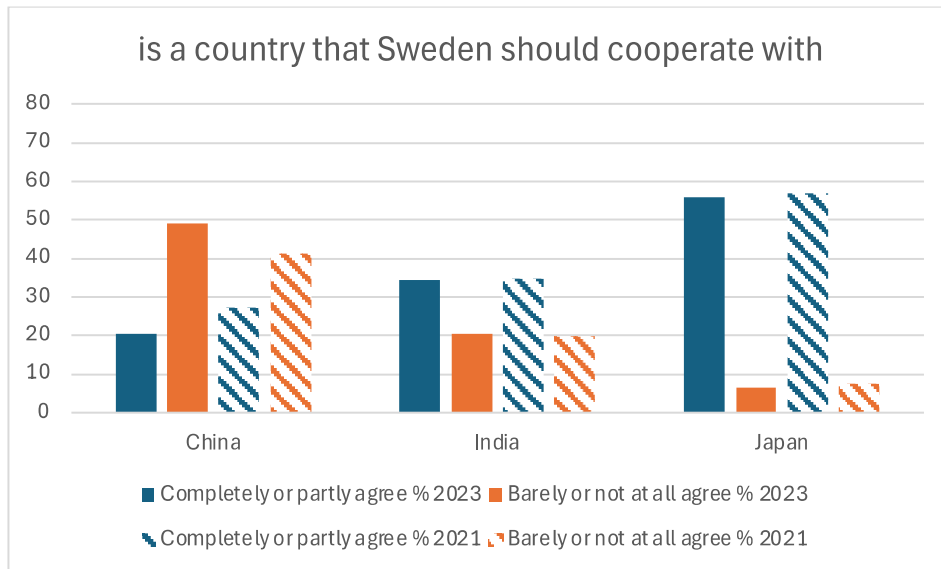
<sup>44</sup> <https://sydasien.se/analys/vapen-och-historia-indiens-tystnad-om-rysslands-krig/>

<sup>45</sup> <https://ecfr.eu/article/rebooting-eu-india-relations-how-to-unlock-post-election-potential/>

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.di.se/live/japan-lovar-nytt-stod-till-ukraina/> ; <https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/experten-kriget-har-andrat-japans-installning-till-ryssland>



## Swedish policy towards Asia



An increased proportion of respondents in the recent survey disagreed that Sweden should cooperate more with **China** (from 41% to 49%). This corresponds with the general worsening of already negative views about China across all the questions. It reflects the increasing discussion in Europe about “decoupling” and reducing dependencies on China.<sup>47</sup> China remains Sweden’s largest Asian trading partner,<sup>48</sup> but the current government has increasingly emphasised “de-risking” combined with cooperation in areas of mutual concern (such as climate change, global health, disarmament and conflict resolution).<sup>49</sup>

For **India**, the proportions remained much the same as in the 2021 survey. The numbers of people agreeing and disagreeing that Sweden should cooperate more with India are fairly even, although skewed towards

support for more cooperation. The Swedish government has expressed a desire to increase cooperation with India.<sup>50</sup> While views about India’s respect for democratic rights and responsibility are increasingly negative, this does not appear to translate into a similar trend regarding cooperation. This points towards an interesting trade-off between values and interests.

Views about increased Swedish cooperation with **Japan** remain overwhelmingly positive. The Swedish government similarly considers Japan an important trading partner<sup>51</sup> although economic and political cooperation between the two countries remains relatively limited.

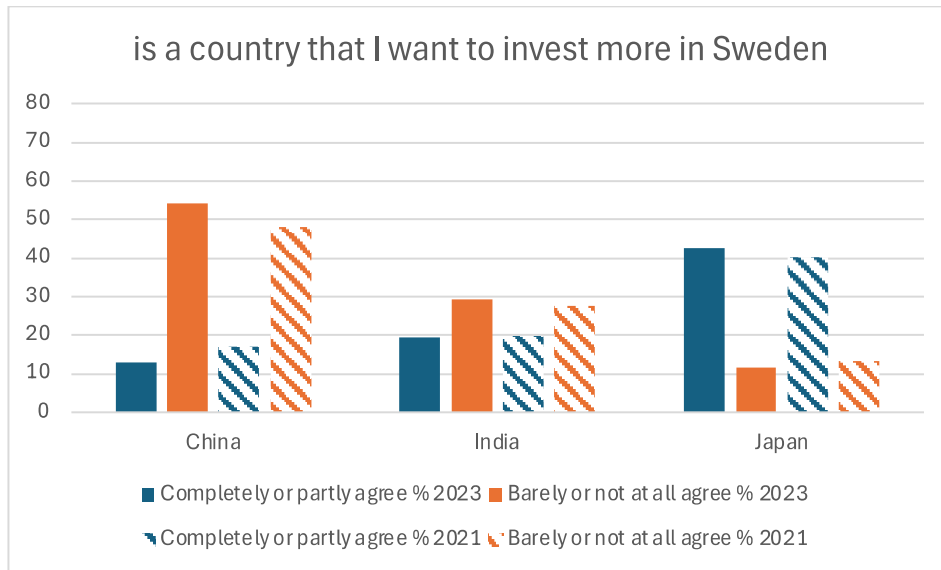
<sup>47</sup> <https://kinacentrum.se/en/publications/the-coming-decoupling-from-china-consequences-for-the-eus-economic-security-strategy/>

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.swedenabroad.se/en/about-sweden-non-swedish-citizens/china/business-and-trade-with-sweden/trade-between-sweden-and-china/>

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.regeringen.se/tal/2023/05/statsminister-ulf-kristerssons-tal-under-stockholm-china-forum/>

<sup>50</sup> [https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/skriftlig-fraga/starkta-diplomatiska-relationer-med-indien\\_ha11752/](https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/skriftlig-fraga/starkta-diplomatiska-relationer-med-indien_ha11752/)

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.swedenabroad.se/en/embassies/japan-tokyo/about-us/team-sweden-providing-effective-export-support/>



The proportion of respondents averse to investment by **China** in Sweden increased in the recent survey (from 48% to 54%). This is not surprising. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine at the start of 2022 has further focused European attention on “de-risking” from China,<sup>52</sup> and this concept has dominated public and political discourse in Sweden as well.<sup>53</sup> In December 2023, the Swedish government introduced a new investment screening regime that tightened scrutiny on foreign investments including those from China.<sup>54</sup>

For **India**, the mixed views about increased investment remained unchanged, with slightly more people disagreeing which could relate to the negative trend in views of India more generally. The proportion of respondents answering “don’t know” to this, already sizeable, further increased (from 43% to 46%), suggesting that a perceived lack of

knowledge may be behind the Swedish public’s ambivalence about Indian investment in the country. India’s IT sector has had longstanding investments in Sweden, but it appears the public has little awareness of these. Much of the media coverage focuses instead on investment opportunities in India.<sup>55</sup>

Views about investment by **Japan** were unchanged, remaining positive although not showing huge enthusiasm and suggesting some lack of knowledge (41% responded “don’t know”). In 2023, the multinational Hitachi Energy, increased their extensive investment in Sweden,<sup>56</sup> which could have contributed to positive perceptions.

<sup>52</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/E\\_XPO\\_STU\(2024\)754446](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/E_XPO_STU(2024)754446)

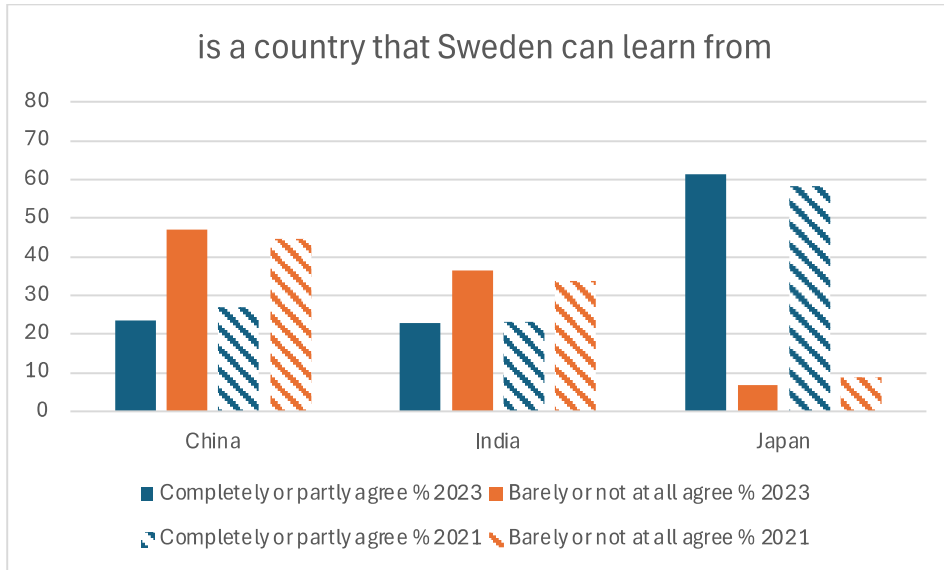
<sup>53</sup> <https://www.government.se/speeches/2024/05/speech-by-minister-for-foreign-affairs-tobias-billstrom-at-the-china-forum-in-stockholm/>

<sup>54</sup> <https://kinacentrum.se/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/the-china-dilemma-in-foreign-direct-investment-screening-comparing-the-finnish-and-swedish-approaches-2.pdf> ; [https://www.dagenssamhalle.se/offentlig-](https://www.dagenssamhalle.se/offentlig-ekonomi/naringsliv/sverige-skarper-granskningen-av-kinesiska-investeringar/)

[ekonomi/naringsliv/sverige-skarper-granskningen-av-kinesiska-investeringar/](https://www.svd.se/a/l37y43/indien-ar-europas-framtidshopp)

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.svd.se/a/l37y43/indien-ar-europas-framtidshopp> ; <https://www.svd.se/a/LIJmp/skiftet-indien-hetare-for-svenska-foretag>

<sup>56</sup> <https://www.hitachienergy.com/se/sv/news/press-releases/2023/04/hitachi-energy-beh-ver-anst-lla-fler-n-2-000-personer-i-sverige>



A slightly increased proportion of respondents disagreed with the idea Sweden could learn from **China** (from 45% to 47%). It is likely that, presented with frequent media discussion of China’s human rights issues, the country’s recent problems handling Covid-19, the economic slowdown, and its diplomatic failings, the Swedish public feels there is little they can learn from the country. Given this, it is perhaps surprising that almost a quarter of respondents agreed, indicating that there may be some aspects of Chinese culture, society or economics, seen as valuable.

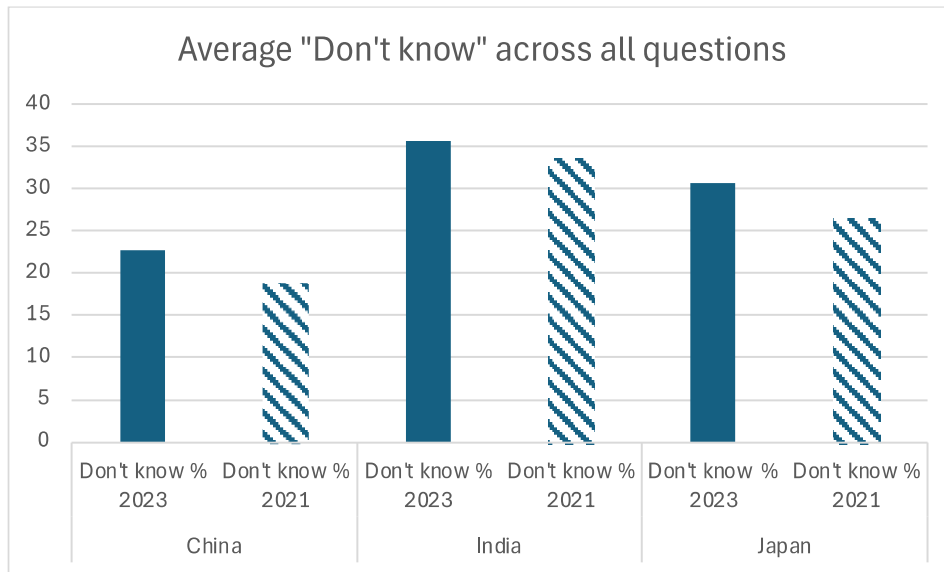
The results for **India** only changed a small amount, with an increased proportion disagreeing that they could learn from the country. This negativity about India as an example is somewhat puzzling given that India has expertise in the IT sector which Sweden is seeking to develop<sup>57</sup> and also because of the increasing discussion about India as an emerging economic superpower.<sup>58</sup>

Responses for **Japan** showed a notable, if small, shift with more people agreeing that Sweden could learn from the country. This suggests that Japan may be continuing to successfully present itself as a model of economic potential in the eyes of the Swedish public. Swedish students have taken opportunities to make study visits to Japan.<sup>59</sup> Combined with the positive responses to the questions about Swedish cooperation and desire to visit, this suggests that overall Swedes hold a very positive picture of Japan as a country they can engage with and learn from.

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.svd.se/a/pl5ApV/it-stormaktens-varning-sverige-halkar-efter>

<sup>58</sup> <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/utrikes/landet-pa-vag-att-bli-supermakt-svt-s-indienskorrespondent-om-manladningens-betydelse>

<sup>59</sup> <https://liu.se/nyhet/liu-student-utforskar-hallbar-ekonomisk-tillvaxt-och-kulturmoten-i-tokyo>



One noticeable result from the survey was the increase in the proportion of respondents answering with ‘don’t know’ to questions about all three Asian countries. For **China**, the mean proportion of “don’t know” responses across the eight statements in both the 2021 and 2023 surveys increased (from 19% to 23%). That this remains the lowest percentage of the three Asian countries is not surprising, given that there is extensive media reporting about China in Sweden.<sup>60</sup> The increase in respondents answering “don’t know” may reflect the increasing complexity of issues related to China, with its shifting involvement in the Russia-Ukraine conflict and domestic dynamics that are increasingly becoming difficult even for expert analysts to fully grasp.<sup>61</sup>

The mean proportion of “don’t know” responses for **India** also increased (from 34% to 36%). This high proportion suggests that there continues to be a lack of knowledge

about India among the Swedish public. There is more limited Swedish media reporting on the country<sup>62</sup> and it is less commonly featured in political discourse.

For **Japan**, this increased from 26 percent to 31 percent. Media reporting about Japan is moderately high, but there is limited public and political discussion of the country.<sup>63</sup> Swedish awareness about the country comes partly from its brand names.

This general increase in the number of respondents answering the questions with “don’t know” could reflect growing uncertainty about the Asian countries. It may also be connected to greater uncertainty about international affairs in general, with the world since 2022 undergoing a period of relatively intensive geopolitical turmoil.

<sup>60</sup> A Mediearkivet search for articles with the keyword ‘Kina’ published during 2023 in the online/print editions of Aftonbladet, Expressen, Svenska Dagbladet and Dagens Nyheter produced 5412 unique results.

<sup>61</sup> <https://merics.org/en/report/increasing-challenge-obtaining-information-xis-china>

<sup>62</sup> A Mediearkivet search for articles with the keyword ‘Indien’ published during 2023 in the online/print editions of

Aftonbladet, Expressen, Svenska Dagbladet and Dagens Nyheter produced 1567 unique results.

<sup>63</sup> A Mediearkivet search for articles with the keyword ‘Japan’ published during 2023 in the online/print editions of Aftonbladet, Expressen, Svenska Dagbladet and Dagens Nyheter produced 2478 unique results.





## Summary and conclusions

For **China**, views about its respect for democratic and human rights, and its international responsibility, continued to be very negative, becoming slightly more so in the recent survey. This same negative trend was reflected in views about whether Sweden should engage in cooperation with the country or seek more investment from it, where the vast majority of respondents answered negatively. There was a slight increase in the proportion of people disagreeing China would be an important global actor in the future, perhaps reflecting increased uncertainty about its economic prospects.

Views about **India's** economy and importance showed the most change, with an increase in the proportion of people feeling it had a developed economy and would be a significant actor in the future. The Swedish public's views about India's respect for human and democratic rights, and its international responsibility, continued to be relatively mixed but were more negative than positive overall. Swedes also continued to have fairly mixed views about increased cooperation with India, with a slightly higher proportion of respondents supporting this.

The perceptions about **Japan** did not show much change overall and continued to be overwhelmingly positive about the country. This could reflect the fact that Swedish attitudes regarding Japan are well-established and based on historical impressions of the country, so unlikely to change. A slightly higher proportion of respondents disagreed that Japan would be an important actor in the future, which may reflect ongoing uncertainty about Japan's economy. However, Swedes remained overall positive about engagement with the country.

## About the SOM survey

The data for the *Asian Barometer* was collected in collaboration with the annual National SOM Survey (Den Nationella SOM-undersökningen), which was carried out in the autumn of 2023. Each year since 1986, this nationwide study has asked members of the Swedish public over 100 questions. The survey is made up of seven waves sent to systematic probability samples of 3750 people aged between 16 and 85 years from across the country.

The *Asian Barometer* data was collected from questions inserted into the one wave of the survey. The questionnaires were sent out on 18 September 2023 and the collection of results was concluded at the end of 2023. In total, 1771 people completed the survey.

The questions, one each for China, India and Japan, presented respondents with nine statements about the country. For example, the first statement said: "India is a land that has a developed economy". The Survey respondents were asked in Swedish to choose whether they "completely agree", "partly agree", "hardly agree", or "do not agree at all" with each statement. There was also an option to choose "don't know".

Not all of the 1771 people who completed the survey gave responses to all nine statements for each country. For the 27 statements in the three questions, the lowest number of people who provided a response to a statement was 1683 (China statements d and f) and the highest number was 1702 (Japan statement a).



## About UI

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