



India and the World

Perspectives from Northern Europe on India in world affairs. Issued on a regular basis by the Project for Nordic-India Relations at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI).



Public views of India's engagements with the world

Does public opinion in a country on its partners or rivals necessarily influence the foreign policy pursued by that country's leadership? Not really. But perceptions held by a population may enhance or restrict the space national political leadership has to manoeuvre at certain important junctions. As India celebrates 75 years of independence, it is setting the target of becoming a developed country by 2047; it has already stated its ambitions of becoming a "leading power". Whether these goals will be reached is too early to tell, but the coming decades are in many ways India's moment. It is also the moment for others to build relations with an emerging power. Thus how the Indian public views the world, and how the world's publics view India in turn, may become important for India and its partners as they make choices when attempting to seize that moment.

New public opinion surveys from [Centre for Policy Research](#) (CPR) and [The Observer Research Foundation](#) (ORF) are of interest in this regard. While ORF's questionnaire was directed to young Indians specifically, both surveys were issued in several Indian languages and include a wide sample of India's society. For sure, Indians have a sense of their significance to the world. When asked by CPR, respondents suggest that India is the most influential country in Asia, followed by the US and China. But it is not the great powers that matter most to the Indian public. The results from both studies show that Indians view relations with the neighbourhood to be of the greatest importance. Both studies highlight that few respondents believe that India's relationship with Pakistan will improve, while Bangladesh is viewed favourably. According to both studies, Indians view Russia to be their most trusted partner, partly for historical reasons, followed by the US. Interestingly, however, ORF found that most of the respondents believe it would be highly or somewhat likely that the US will become India's leading partner in the coming ten years, and that the US will be crucial for India's rise. Additionally, more respondents agree than disagree with India aligning with the US to balance China, yet almost half of the respondents suggested that India should remain neutral if tensions escalate between the US and China. More troubling for Europe perhaps, is that only 3% found the EU to be India's most trusted partner.

How do European publics view India in world affairs? There is almost no data on the topic. Yet, a forthcoming, first-of-its-kind public opinion survey from UI on how Swedes view India will provide some insights. The study shows among other things that Swedes across all social, economic, demographic, and political segments believe that India will become increasingly important in world affairs.

More Swedes agree than disagree with increased cooperation with India despite holding less positive views on India's behaviour internationally. But perceptions of India differ in the population. Swedes with a liberal bent, higher income, and longer education generally hold favourable attitudes towards India, while respondents with lower income, shorter education, and far-right sympathies generally hold negative views. The survey also shows that there is a wide knowledge gap in Sweden regarding India, providing scope for both Sweden and India to engage in activities to cultivate perceptions.



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