

NESA Center Alumni
Survey Report (October 2022)

Perceptions of the Indo-Pacific

Views from the NESA Region

NEAR EAST SOUTH ASIA CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

This survey was sent to alumni of the Near East South Asia (NESA) Center for Strategic Studies in August of 2022. It should not be interpreted as comprehensive in its measurement of the views of NESA regional states. Rather, it is a compilation of the trans-NESA region strategic community.

Letter from the Dean

Dear Colleagues,

As we exit the pandemic environment, challenges such as climate change, transnational threats, and the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine reveal the necessity of transparency throughout the international system.

At NESAC, our global alumni network of security professionals is at the core of what we do. We are very proud of the relationships with our more than 12,500 alumni, and the valuable perspectives they offer.



As such, we tapped our alumni network in August 2022, distributing a survey with eight questions about a concept that is shaping the global system and that is seen by some as defining a region that will prove important in the next century – that concept is the Indo-Pacific region. We were very impressed by the interest the survey garnered. I am proud to say the survey received nearly 350 responses from more than 45 countries. The vast majority of responses were thoughtful, insightful, and have given us many critical data points to consider.

I would like to offer my sincere thanks to all the NESAC Alumni who took time from their busy schedules to complete this survey, as well as previous surveys from the last two years.

The many valuable insights collected from our alumni will be communicated to the leadership of the United States Department of Defense and throughout the United States Government and will help to shape our NESAC Center program curricula in the years to come. We invite you to peruse the findings of the survey in the following report and look forward to hearing from you in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Kangas', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dr. Roger Kangas
Academic Dean
NESAC Center for Strategic Studies

About the NESACenter

VISION

A secure, prosperous NESACenter region committed to collaborative, inclusive security and whole-of-government approaches to security and socio-political challenges.

MISSION

To build and sustain communities of influence and partnership among security professionals and other key stakeholders throughout the NESACenter region. The efforts of our expansive alumni network—numbering more than 12,500 NESACenter alumni—ensure that foreign policy communities around the world are becoming better equipped to provide answers and analysis towards some of the toughest security challenges impacting our world.

ABOUT

Based at the National Defense University (NDU) in Washington, D.C., the Near East South Asia (NESACenter) Center for Strategic Studies is the preeminent U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) institution for promoting security cooperation with partner countries in the NESACenter region.

Established in 2000 when the U.S. Department of Defense recognized the need for an organization dedicated to the challenging region extending from North Africa across the Arabian Peninsula and into South Asia, the NESACenter works to enhance security cooperation between the U.S. and the Near East and South Asia by providing a collaborative space for policymakers to build security strategy and cultivate partnerships.

The NESACenter has the unique ability to leverage the collaborative interests and knowledge of U.S. military organizations, including U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM), U.S. Army Central (ARCENT), the Joint Staff, as well as the U.S. Department of State, to render specialized conferences, seminars, workshops, and Track II diplomatic efforts.

The NESACenter boasts an alumni network of security professionals from over 138 countries spanning the NESACenter region and beyond. With the efforts of our partners and program participants, foreign policy communities around the world are better equipped to provide answers and analysis towards tough security challenges impacting our world.

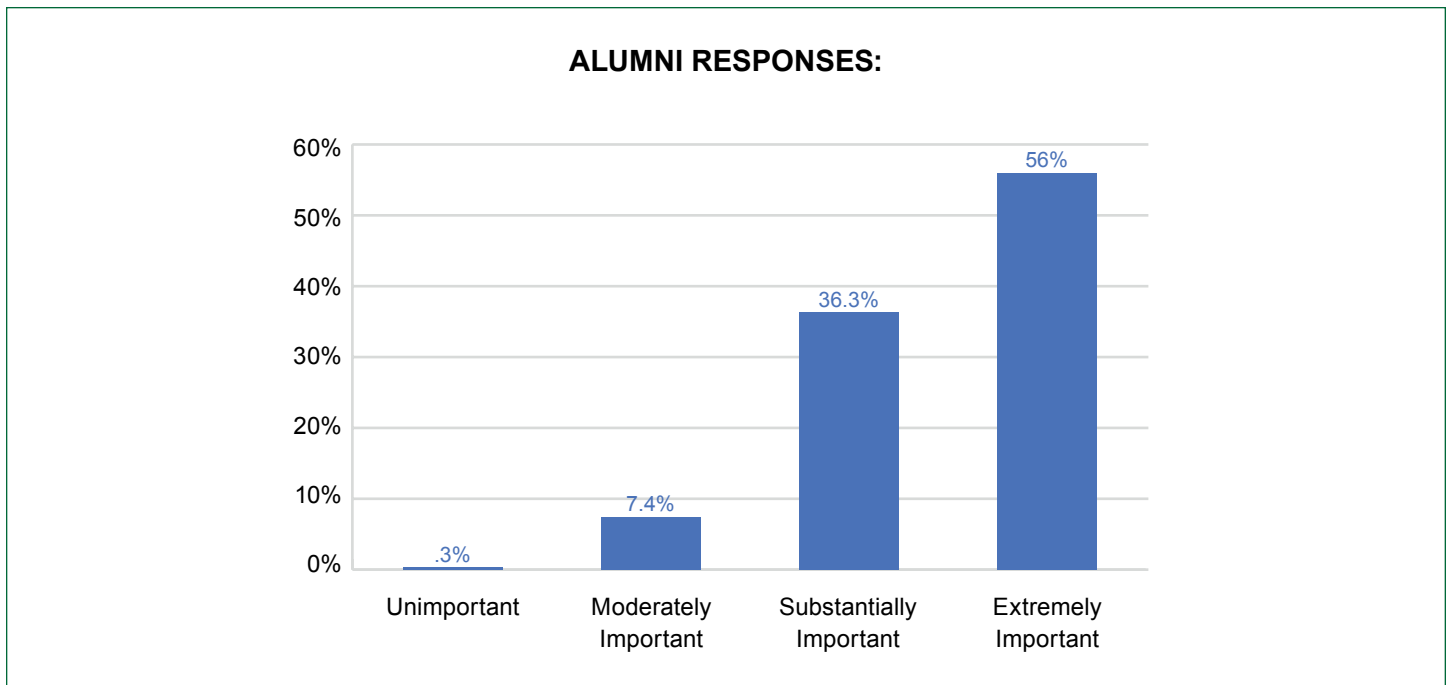
Visit the NESACenter website at [NESACenter.org](https://www.nesa-center.org) for more information on the NESACenter, including other survey reports and publications.

1 How important is the Indo-Pacific region to the countries of the NESAs region?

Response options: Unimportant, Moderately Important, Substantially Important, or Extremely Important.

SYNOPSIS:

The results of this question were unsurprising, given the global trend lines regarding engagement and trade with the Indo-Pacific. NESAs regional states are either deeply engaged in trade with the Indo-Pacific’s largest economies, or actively seek to enhance trade with those powers. Overall, 92% of respondents determined the Indo-Pacific to be at least substantially important to the NESAs region. The difference in response between substantially important (36.3%) and extremely important (56%) is reflective of how connected NESAs states are to the Indo-Pacific.

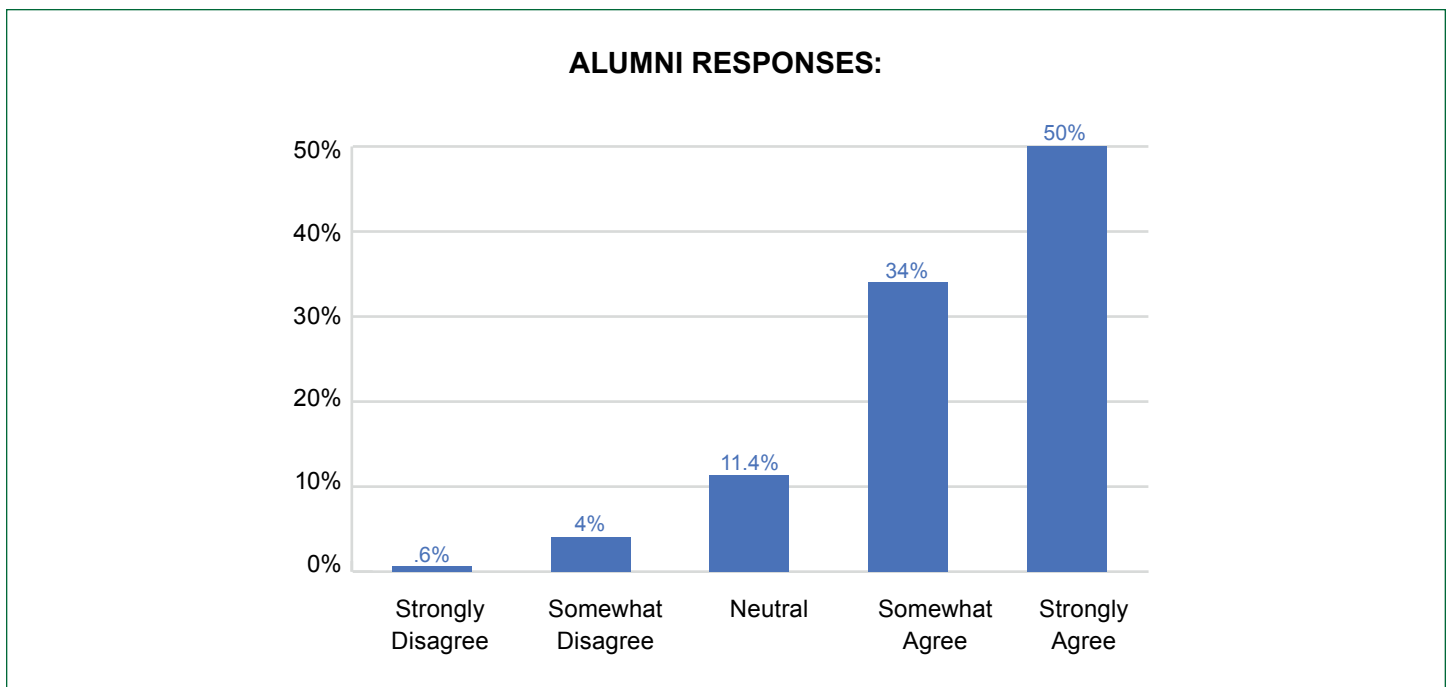


2 Do you agree that the Indo-Pacific should be the priority region for the United States?

Response options: Strongly Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Neutral, Somewhat Agree, or Strongly Agree.

SYNOPSIS:

The second question of the survey also proved unsurprising in its results. A total of 84% of respondents agreed that the Indo-Pacific should be the priority region for the United States to some degree. One insightful result from the question is that NESAs region respondents recognized the economic, security, and diplomatic requirements of the Indo-Pacific region for the United States, despite displacing the NESAs region itself as the focal point of United States foreign policy.

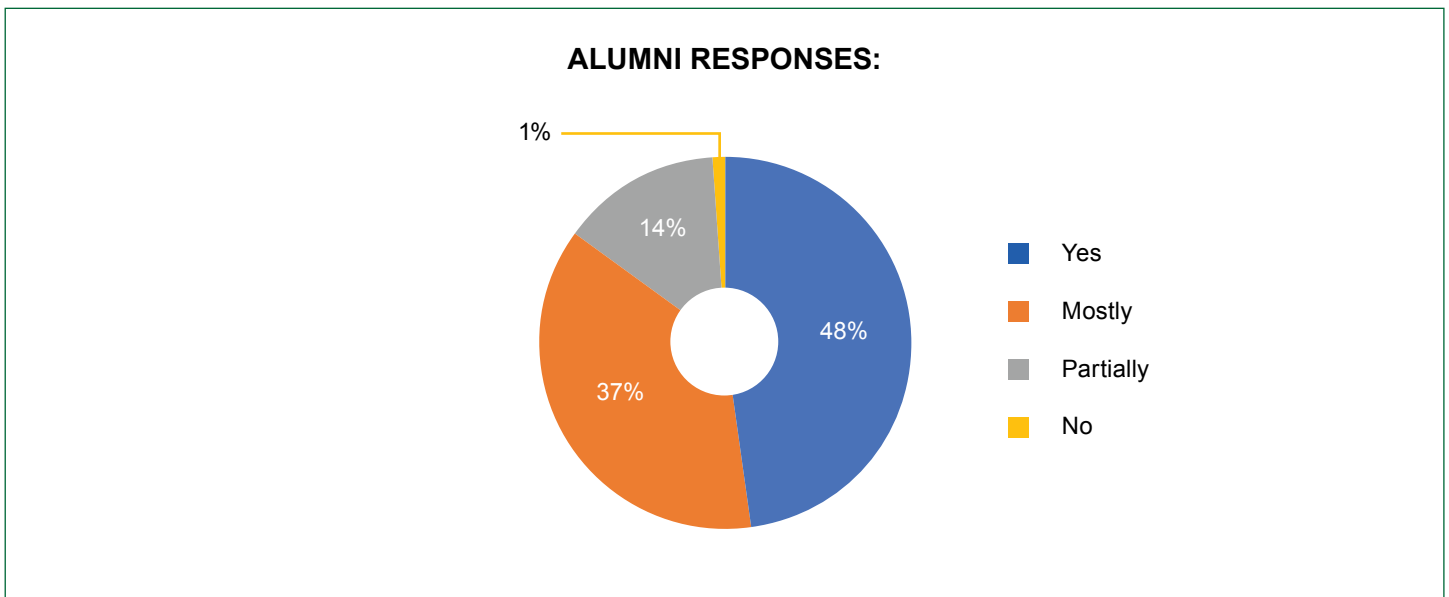


3 Is interest in the Indo-Pacific driven by competition between the United States and China?

Response options: Yes, Mostly, Partially, or No.

SYNOPSIS:

China as a topic dominates a large number of Washington foreign policy conversations and the results of this question reveal that the NESAs region recognizes the complex relationship between the United States and China. A total of 85% of respondents view the United States’ interest in the Indo-Pacific as being related to competition with China to a large degree. A further 14% of respondents saw China as a contributing factor, which means that 99% of respondents see competition with China as a major foreign policy consideration for the United States.

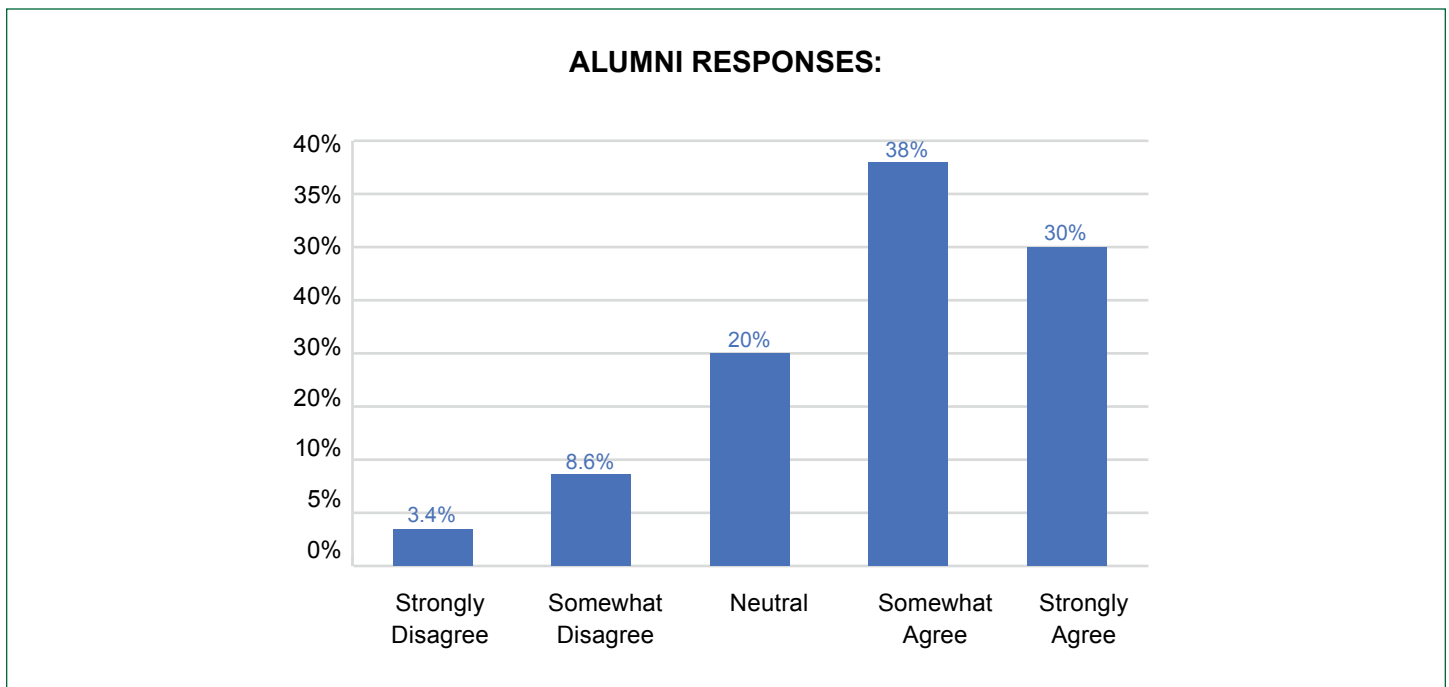


4 Does the Indo-Pacific region include the areas of the Western Indian Ocean?

Response options: Strongly Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Neutral, Somewhat Agree, or Strongly Agree.

SYNOPSIS:

The Indo-Pacific is defined in different ways. The United States conceives of the Indo-Pacific as ranging from the western coast of the Americas to the India-Pakistan border. Thus, the United States Indo-Pacific concept correlates to the area of responsibility of Indo-Pacific Command and includes only the Eastern Indian Ocean Region. Yet, there remains a debate among Indo-Pacific countries regarding the inclusion of the entirety of the Indian Ocean Region in the Indo-Pacific. This question revealed that a majority (58%) of NESAs region respondents agree that the Western Indian Ocean Region should be included in the Indo-Pacific concept. A further 20% of respondents were unsure. The results certainly reveal that the Indo-Pacific is a maritime concept, defined by the Indian and Pacific Oceans, and as such it makes sense to include the entirety of this maritime region from east to west.

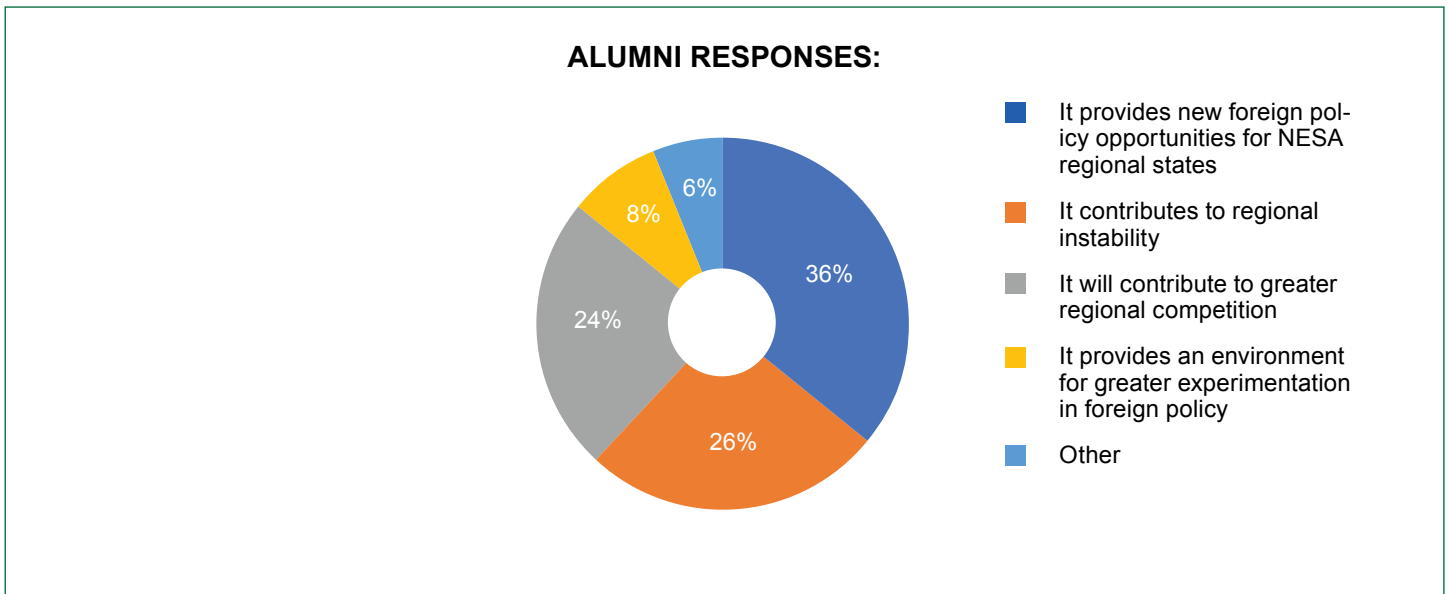


5 How does the importance that major powers place upon the Indo-Pacific region impact the NESAs region?

Response options: It provides new foreign policy opportunities for NESAs regional states, It contributes to regional instability, It will contribute to greater regional competition, It provides an environment for greater experimentation in foreign policy, or Other.

SYNOPSIS:

The fifth question of the survey reveals the strategic ambiguity of the Indo-Pacific concept in defining our current era. For the NESAs region, the emergence of the Indo-Pacific as a focal point for major Western powers and the NESAs region’s own diplomatic and economic turn towards Indo-Pacific markets will have repercussions. What those repercussions will be remains an open question. No answer reached a majority. NESAs respondents are roughly divided between three perspectives with regards to how major powers emphasize the Indo-Pacific. These three perspectives are that this emphasis by major powers will reveal opportunities for the NESAs region, will contribute to NESAs regional instability, and contribute to greater regional competition.

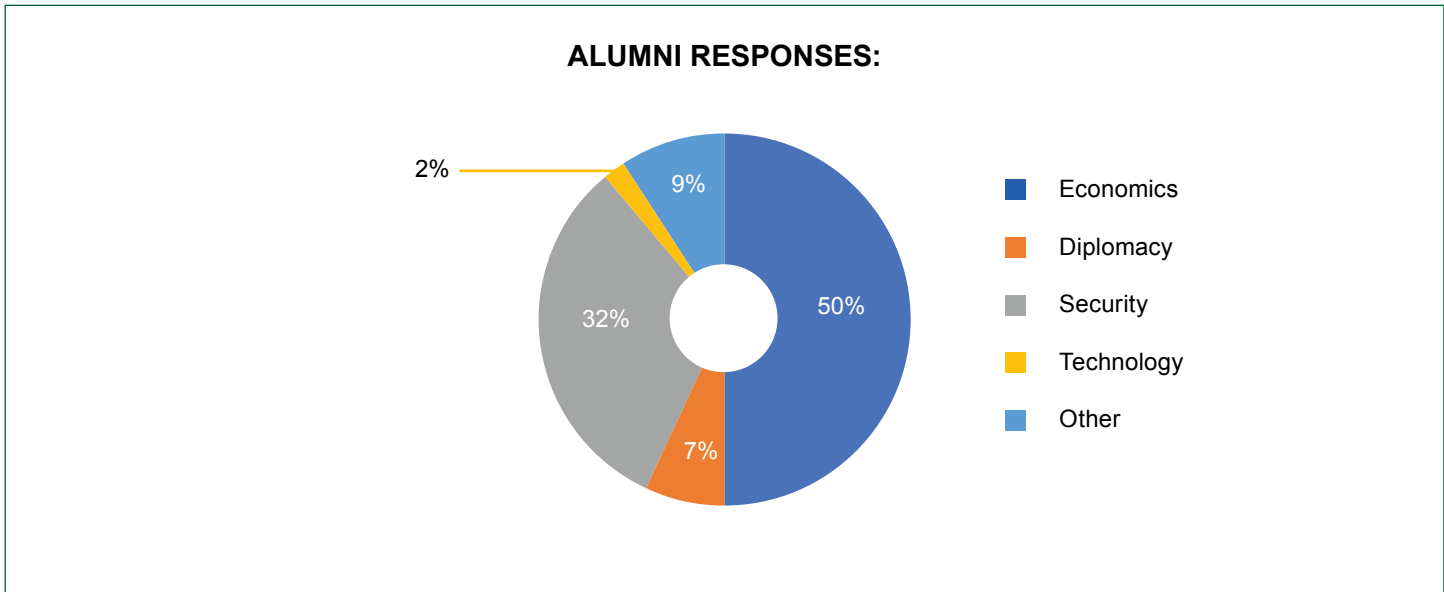


6 In what sector will events in the Indo-Pacific most impact the NESAs region?

Response options: Economics, Diplomacy, Security, Technology, or Other.

SYNOPSIS:

Headlines about the Indo-Pacific often refer to security challenges, strategic competition, or major power actions, but the Indo-Pacific concept evolved from a recognition of the growing economic gravity that this region exerts upon the world. Three of the world’s largest economies are located in the heart of the Indo-Pacific, and with the inclusion of France, the United States, South Korea, and the United Kingdom, the Indo-Pacific includes many of the world’s most powerful economic states. The Indo-Pacific concept should never be interpreted without including economic factors. NESAs regional respondents to the scale of 50% see economic factors as being the most influential aspects of the Indo-Pacific. The next most common response at 32% were security factors.

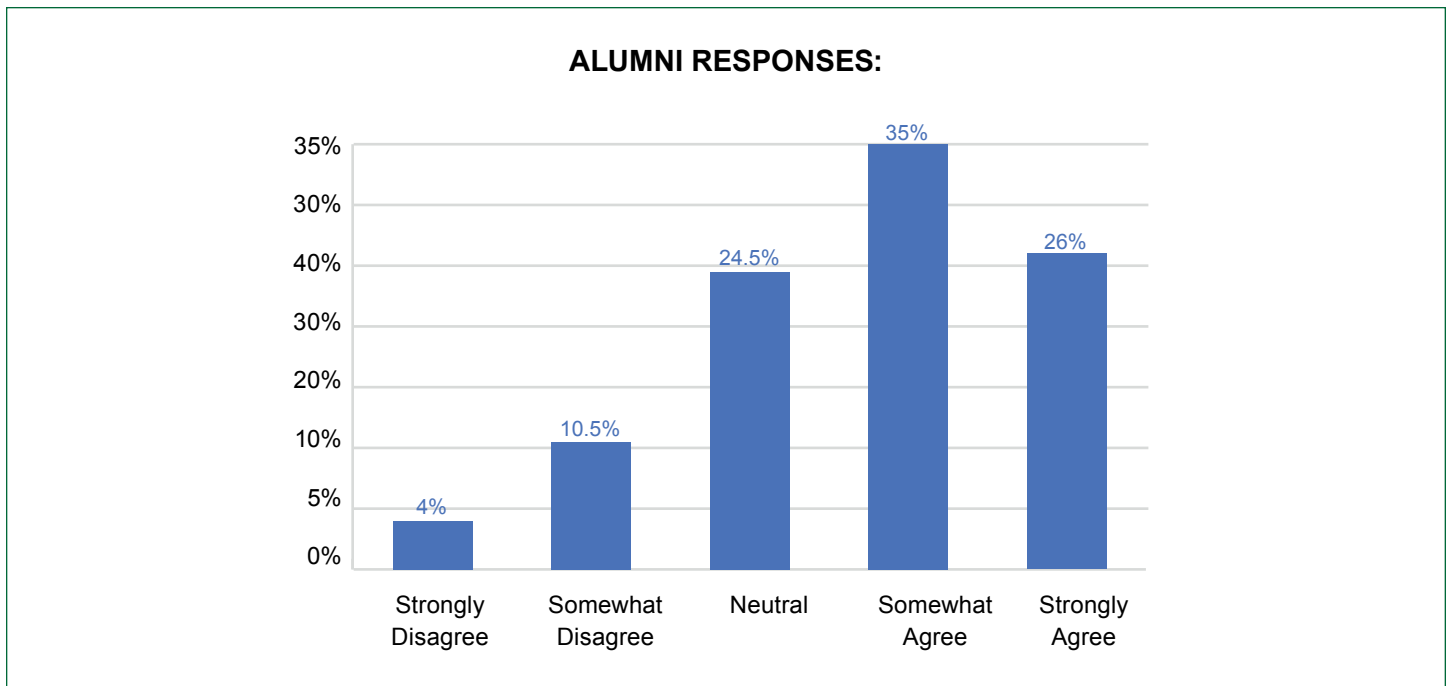


7 Do you agree with how the United States engages with the Indo-Pacific region?

Response options: Strongly Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Neutral, Somewhat Agree, or Strongly Agree.

SYNOPSIS:

The United States’ approach to the Indo-Pacific emphasizes the building and sustaining of partnerships and alliances, with priorities placed on upholding established rules and norms, economic development, responsible technological advancement, and information sharing. The NESAs regional respondents agreed to some degree with the methodology by which the United States approaches the Indo-Pacific to the scale of 61%. It should be noted that nearly 25% of respondents were neutral to the United States methodology and nearly 11% disagreed to some degree. There is diversity throughout the NESAs region as to how the United States engages in the Indo-Pacific, reflecting both some level of uncertainty about this new United States priority and their own region’s understanding of the Indo-Pacific as a concept.



8

What are your views on China’s engagement within the Indo-Pacific?

Response options: China’s actions are beneficial for the region, China’s actions are mostly beneficial for the region, China’s actions are both beneficial and destabilizing for the region, China’s actions are mostly destabilizing for the region, or China’s actions are destabilizing for the region.

SYNOPSIS:

This survey sought to gain insight into how NESAs regional states interpret United States approaches and perspectives on the Indo-Pacific, as well as NESAs regional states’ perspectives on the Indo-Pacific. The final question asked respondents to determine the nature of China’s engagement throughout the Indo-Pacific region. Of all the questions asked, the answers to this final question will likely be the most surprising to non-NESA region readers. They are not surprising for NESAs regional states. Nearly 45% of respondents see China’s actions as both beneficial and destabilizing for the region, a reflection of United States-China competition and the scale by which China has intensified its foreign engagement in recent years. Respondents to the scale of 20% see China’s engagement in the Indo-Pacific as beneficial to some degree. 37% of respondents see China as destabilizing to some degree. The results point to several conclusions, but the one that should be emphasized is that China is a major power and its activities throughout the NESAs region (and beyond) have created an understanding of what it means for the Indo-Pacific that China is a major power.

