|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **The Asan Institute for Policy Studies** |

|  |
| --- |
| **The Asan Institute Opinion Poll in the Wake of the Attack on the Yeonpyeong Island** |

**Dr. Kim Ji Yoon**

**Dr. Woo Jung Yeop**

**Table of Contents**

1. Background ------------------------------------------------------------------------------ 02

2. Main Survey Findings ------------------------------------------------------------------ 03

3. Presidential Job Approval Ratings ---------------------------------------------------- 04

4. Rating of Government’s Response to the Yeonpyeong Island Attack ------------ 06

5. Prospects for Future Confrontation ---------------------------------------------------- 08

6. Public Opinion on North Korea’s Nuclear Weapons Program ----------------------16

7. Public Opinion on China -----------------------------------------------------------------18

**1. Background**

**The** **Asan Institute for Policy Studies** (Director: HAHM Chaibong) conducted a public opinion poll on Saturday, November 27, 2010, in the immediate aftermath of North Korea’s deadly artillery attack on Yeonpyeong Island in South Korea. The main purpose of the poll was to track any changes in President Lee Myung-bak’s approval ratings following the artillery attack and North Korea’s recent revelation of a new uranium enrichment program. It should be noted that President Lee’s job approval ratings had been on the rise recently, following the success of the G-20 Summit hosted in South Korea. This poll investigates South Korean public opinion regarding the Lee administration’s handling of the latest crisis and the government’s subsequent policy responses.

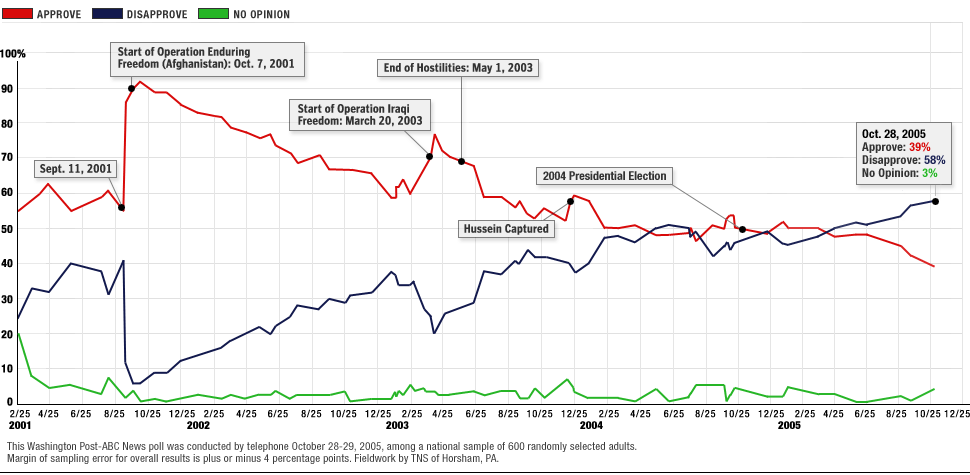
The Asan Institute poll was conducted from 10:00 a.m. to 9:10 p.m. on November 27, 2010 in the form of a nationwide telephone survey of 1,000 respondents over the age of 19. The poll results have a 95% confidence rate and the maximum margin of sampling error is 3.1% points. The fieldwork for the poll was conducted by 『Research & Research』, and a stratified quota sampling method was employed.



In order to accurately compare our survey results with the media reports conducted immediately after the G-20 summit, (『Donga Ilbo』 report: “President Lee’s Job Approval Hits 60% for the First Time Since the Inauguration,” November 12, 2010), we requested that 『Research & Research』 undertake the survey. Since the institute 『Research & Research』 is the same one that conducted the survey following the Seoul G-20 Summit we aimed to minimize the deviations that could result from using different survey processes to observe the changes in ratings. According to 『Moneytoday』’s periodic public poll (conducted on November 3 and published on November 8), President Lee’s job approval rating had risen to 52.9% as a result of the success of the Seoul G-20 Summit. 『Research & Research』’s survey indicated an approval rating of 52% on November 2, which reflected the public enthusiasm for the G-20 Summit.

Another goal of the 『Asan Institute』 poll was to determine whether there was a surge in public support for President Lee following this latest crisis, since it was the first time since the Korean War that North Korea had committed a direct artillery attack on South Korean territory. As shown in the case of the U.S. [Figure 1], President Bush’s approval ratings increased by 37% three days before and after the September 11 terrorist attacks. This phenomenon is known as “the rally around the flag effect,” which occurs when a national crisis leads the public to rally support around the president.

[Figure 1]



(Source: Washington Post,

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/daily/graphics/bushApproval\_031305.html

accessed on Dec 2, 2010)

**2. Main Survey Findings**

President Lee’s approval ratings fell from 60% (post- G-20 summit) to 44.7% following the Yeonpyeong shelling incident. In the case of the United States, the presidential approval rating is likely to increase during and after national crises, such as the September 11 attacks because public opinion usually revolves around national issues. However, in the case of South Korea, where national security issues always become highly politicized due to the standoff between the North and the South, public opinion tends to concentrate more on the government’s subsequent policy responses than actual crises. The fact that progressives and conservatives are both unsatisfied with the government’s response to the crisis explains the drop in the presidential approval rating.

The findings indicate that 65.7% of respondents were dissatisfied with the government’s response to the Yeonpyeong artillery attack and 80.3% agree that there should have been a stronger military response. Overall the data suggests that the public perceives the government’s response to have been too weak.

Nonetheless, a majority of respondents (65.2%) say that the ROK needs to avoid war at all costs if military conflict occurs between the North and the South. The result implies that public consensus has not yet been fully formed with regard to military conflicts first provoked by North Korea. In the case of the Yeonpyeong Island attack, the public reacted emotionally, and the respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the incumbent government’s weak response. However, in a hypothetical situation where the public is less likely to react emotionally, the respondents state that the South should avoid war at all costs.

The public’s contradictory stance is expected to put substantial pressure on the government during the decision-making process. If North Korea provokes any future conflicts the government will have difficulty deciding on the intensity of the military’s response. This will likely to lead to further heated debates on North Korean policy issues.

**3. Presidential Job Approving Ratings**

***Presidential Approval Ratings Fall to 44.7%, while 46.5% of the Respondents Disapprove of President Lee’s Job Performance.***

[Figure 2]

With regard to the presidential approval rating, 9.8% of respondents “strongly approve” of the president’s job performance, while 34.9% “somewhat approve,” 33.0% “somewhat disapprove,” and 13.5% “strongly disapprove.” A smaller group of respondents (8.8%) said they have no opinion or gave no reply. When combined, these figures add up to a positive assessment of 44.7% and a negative assessment of 46.5% for President Lee, indicating that the Yeonpyeong Island attack and the North’s disclosure of its uranium enrichment program have led to a drop in the presidential approval ratings.

Among male respondents 42.7% gave the president a positive assessment while 50.4% gave him a negative assessment. The females surveyed responded with a positive assessment of 46.7% and a negative assessment of 42.7% respectively. We inferred from the results that a higher percentage of female respondents had a lower job approval rating for President Lee Myung-bak. Furthermore, the results suggest that the presidential approval rating is negatively correlated with the responses from the younger age groups, those with a higher level of education, and with more progressive political ideology. Noticeable differences were found across various age groups, those in their thirties have a lower approval rating of President Lee Myung-bak than those in their twenties (30.3% positive, 60.2% negative).

With regard to the Yeonpyeong artillery attack, 79.4% of respondents who gave a positive assessment of the government’s response to the crisis also gave a positive response to the presidential job approval ratings. Those respondents that had a negative assessment of the government response (60.7%) also gave a negative response for the presidential approval ratings. Therefore, we can conclude that the public perception of the government’s response to the Yeongpyeong artillery attack had a substantial effect on the presidential job approval ratings. One interesting finding is that the percentage of moderates who gave the president a negative assessment is relatively high.

[Figure 3]

Furthermore, according to the findings the group that used the Internet as their main source for gathering information (positive: 36.2%, negative: 57.7%) gave a relatively more negative assessment of the president in the job approval ratings than the group that used TV (positive: 47.0%, negative: 44.1%), newspapers, or magazines (positive: 51.0%, negative: 40.2%) as their main source of information.

Compared with 『Research & Research』’ survey results from November 2, the presidential approval ratings decreased from 52.0% to 44.7% in less than a month. In particular, the changes are more visible in male respondents (positive assessment 55.4%→42.7%: 11.7% decrease) than female respondents (positive assessment 49.7%→46.7%: 3% decrease).



The data for respondents’ political affiliation shows a relatively even drop of approximately 10% across all groups: conservative (65.3%→58.6%), moderate (48.7%→38.5%) and progressive (38.0%→27.6%).

[Figure 4]

**4. Assessment of Government’s Response to Yeonpyeong Island Attack**

***87.3% of Respondents Say North Korea Is Responsible for the Attack on Yeonpyeong Island.***

A large majority of respondents (87.3%) stated that North Korea is responsible for the artillery attack on Yeonpyeong Island. Unlike the *Cheonan* incident earlier this year, it was fairly evident from the beginning that North Korea was responsible for this attack. This seems to explain the high public opinion figure (87.3%). However, even after North Korea’s Central News Agency announced that Pyongyang gave the orders for the attack, 12.7% of the respondents still stated that North Korea was not responsible for the attack.

***65.7% Negatively Assessed the Lee Administration’s Handling of the Yeonpyeong Crisis.***

Only 25.9% of those surveyed (5.4% “very positive” and 20.5% “somewhat positive”) gave positive responses to the question “How do you evaluate the Lee administration’s handling of the crisis after the North’s artillery attack?” 65.7% of respondents gave a negative assessment (23.0% for “very negative” and 42.7% for “somewhat negative”).

[Figure 5]

The negative assessment prevailed among those respondents who are younger and possess a higher level of education.

Disapproval of the government’s response to the incident was especially high in male respondents (74.6%). All those affiliated with a political party, except for those supporting the Grand National Party, showed a negative assessment of the government’s response. Even amongst the Grand National Party supporters, the negative assessment was slightly higher, 45.9% versus 44.7%. However, it is somewhat difficult to conclude that the negative assessment is higher since it is within the statistical margin of error.

Regardless of political affiliation, there was a majority in each political group that negatively assessed the recent crisis (conservative: positive 27.6%, negative 66.7%; moderate: positive 25.9%, negative 64.6%; progressive: positive 17.6%, negative 76.5%).

64.3% of the respondents who supported the view that the government should have opted for a stronger military response had a relatively negative assessment of the government’s response (58.3% against a stronger military response have a negative assessment). The people who believed that the military response after the incident was too weak showed a tendency to negatively assess the government’s response.

The positive relationship between those demanding a stronger military response and those who were more likely to criticize the government for a weak military response to the Yeonpyeong Island incident is visible in different questionnaires and cross-tabulations. 70% of the respondents demanding a military response in the case of another North Korean provocation, similar to the Yeonpyeong attack, negatively assessed the government’s response. This is a higher percentage than the negative assessment amongst the respondents demanding negotiation and diplomacy (56%, 62%). 72% of the respondents who support war in the case of a military conflict between the North and the South negatively assessed the response of the Lee administration (oppose war 62%). Thus, the conservatives that demand military retaliation against North Korea have a more negative view of the government’s response. In short, the government’s response was a greater disappointment to the conservatives than to the moderates or progressives.

[Figure 6]

***80.3% Say South Korea Should Have Opted for a Stronger Military Response.***

A large majority of the respondents (80.3%) agree with the statement that the South Korean government and the military should have opted for a stronger military response after the North’s attack on Yeonpyeong Island. (51.4% for “strongly agree” and 28.9% for “somewhat agree”).

Especially, most of the respondents who are male (86.6%), politically conservative (87.5%) and in favor of current North Korea policies (85.5%) were supportive of a stronger military response.

[Figure 7]

**5. Prospects for Future Confrontation**

***In the Case of Another North Korean Provocation, 40.6% Favor a Military Response While Avoiding Escalation to an All-Out War.***

Contrary to public demands for a stronger military response to the Yeonpyeong Island incident, the respondents supported limited and a less than full military response in the case of another North Korean provocation.

In response to the question of how the South Korean government should respond if North Korea stages another provocation similar to the Yeonpyeong Island attack, 40.5% say the South should respond militarily but within limits so as to avoid an all-out war, 25% say the South should strongly retaliate with full military mobilization, 16.4% favor a diplomatic response for the sake of economic stability, and 15% favor dialogue with the North in order to jointly resolve the crisis.

The results show overall support for a limited military response while avoiding escalation to an all-out war, regardless of political orientation and party affiliation. However, the conservatives support a greater use of force. 30.0% of respondents who believe that the current North Korea policy approach needs to change say it should be achieved through dialogue with the North; and 19.6% say the conflict should be resolved through diplomatic measures. These results indicate clear discrepancies with the supporters of current North Korea policy approach on dialogue and diplomatic responses (7.6%, 14.7%).

[Figure 8]

[Figure 9]

[Figure 10]

***60.9% Think the Possibility of a War Is Not High.***

60.9% of respondents say that the possibility of the Yeonpyeong Island attack leading to an all-out war is not high.

A higher percentage of female respondents (39.8%) than male respondents (28.8) predicted that the Yeonpyeong Island incident would lead to a war. Furthermore, a higher percentage of the respondents with a lower level of education and those who are younger predicted that the situation would lead to war.

The respondents who believed that future North Korea policy needs to take a more moderate approach are more likely to be concerned about the possibility of war (supporters of moderate approach 39.5%, supporters of current approach 32.7%).

***65.2% Say No to War Under All Circumstances, 33.0% Say They Are Willing to Risk a War to Deliver a Strong Military Response.***

In the case of a future military confrontation between the Koreas, 65.2% of respondents say a war must be avoided at all costs, while 33% say they are willing to risk a war in order to deliver a strong military response to North Korea.

The respondents who are female (75.5%), progressive (74.9%), Democratic Labor Party supporters (81.1%) and/or Democratic Party supporters (77.0%) are more likely to be against war; and the respondents who are male (44.4%), conservative (40.0%) and/or Grand National Party supporters are likely to be in favor of war.

[Figure 11]

[Figure 12]

[Figure 13]

[Figure 14]

Even amongst the respondents who support a stronger military response, 60.2% are against war and only 38.2% are in favor of war. In sum, the public opinion is inconsistent with the demands for a stronger military response on the one hand and the national consensus against war on the other.

79.7% of the respondents, who demand the incumbent take a more moderate approach towards North Korean policy like the former government, say that a war must be avoided in all cases; and 40.4% of those who believe that the government needs to continue with its current approach say that a strong military response is necessary even despite a risk of war. The groups present a clear disparity regarding war.

A high percentage (79.4%) of respondents, who believe that dialogue and diplomacy are the best ways to counter North Korea’s nuclear program, are against war; and a high percentage (45.0%) of respondents who prefer coercion are in favor of war.

***64.8% Favor Continuing in the Overall Direction of the Current North Korea Policy.***

64.8% of respondents believe that the South Korean government should maintain its current policy towards North Korea despite the latest attack, while 30.4% favor a more moderate approach towards the North.

The relationship between age and a preference for the moderate approach in dealing with North Korea shows that those in their 30s have relatively high support (42.3%) for the moderate approach; and interestingly those in their 20s show more support (71.4%) for the current North Korea policy approach than other age groups.

[Figure 15]

Regarding responsibility for the North Korean nuclear program, the respondents criticizing the current administration preferred a return to the previous government’s North Korean policy approach (53.5%) and respondents blaming the North’s nuclear program on the previous administration are likely to support the incumbent’s North Korea policy approach (81.7%).

[Figure 16]

***75.9% Feel the ROK-US Joint Naval Exercise Must Take Place.***

A large majority of respondents (75.9%) say that the ROK-US joint military exercise in the West Sea (beginning Sunday, November 28 with the participation of the U.S. aircraft carrier the *USS George Washington*) should be carried out in order to protest against the North Korean provocations. On the other hand, 18.8% believe that the exercise must be canceled so as to not provoke the North.

***57.5% Feel that Aid to North Korea and Projects Promoting Cooperation with the North Should be Suspended Until Pyongyang Apologizes and Delivers Compensation.***

More than half of the respondents (57.5%) say that aid to North Korea such as relief for flood victims and projects for cooperation with North Korea, including the Kaesong Industrial Complex, should be suspended until the North delivers an apology and compensation for the latest attack. Moreover, 21% say all aid and cooperation must stop and should not resume in the near future. On the other hand, 16.1% favor continuing aid and cooperation despite the latest attack.

Regardless of age and political orientation, a majority of the South Korean public seems to sympathize with the view that the South should suspend inter-Korea exchanges and cooperation until the North gives an apology and compensation for the damage cause by the attack. However, the results show that age and political orientation have an influence on the publics’ opinion: ranging from complete discontinuation of aid and cooperation to continuation despite the latest attack.

[Figure 17]

[Figure 18]

**6. Public Opinion on North Korea Nuclear Development**

***43.3% Think the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun Administrations Are Responsible for North Korea’s Development of Nuclear Weapons.***

43.3% of respondents believe that North Korea’s development of nuclear weapons is attributable to the past policies of the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun administrations who supported North Korea. On the other hand, 35.4% said that the current Lee administration’s hard line policy toward North Korea is responsible for North Korea’s nuclear weapons development. 21.3% of respondents said they don’t know or gave no reply.

A high percentage of the older age groups believe that the previous administrations are responsible for North Korea’s development of nuclear weapons; a high percentage of those in their 30s and the 40s believe that the incumbent government is responsible; and a high percentage of those in their 20s believe that the previous administration has more responsibility than the incumbent one (responsibility of the predecessors 47.1%, responsibility of the incumbent 39.8%). We can analyze these results as being the product of the younger generation’s (those in their 20s) preference for a hard-line North Korean policy, similar to their preference for the incumbent government’s hard-line policy approach.

[Figure 19]

Regarding who should take responsibility for North Korea’s development of nuclear weapons, the respondents’ support for the Lee administration, party support, political ideology, etc have a substantial influence on their responses.

Regarding a prospective North Korean policy approach, support for the current approach correlates with blaming the previous administration (54.7%); and the moderate approach correlates with blaming the incumbent administration (62.3%).

[Figure 20]

***50.7% Favor Strong Measures Such As Economic Sanctions to Achieve North Korea’s Denuclearization.***

50.7% of those surveyed said they favor applying strong pressure such as economic sanctions, in order to persuade North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons program. On the other hand, 43.8% favor dialogue and negotiations with the North to achieve the same results.

Conservatives (60.9%) and Grand National Party supporters (63.2%) prefer strong pressures; progressives (60.4%), Democratic Party supporters (55.2%) and Democratic Labor Party supporters (70.9%) prefer dialogue and negotiations with the North. This evident distinction indicates that political orientation and ideology have a great influence on establishing public opinion on North Korean nuclear policy.

[Figure 21]

**7. Public Opinion on China**

***91.9% Express Dissatisfaction with the Chinese Response to North Korea’s Attack on the Yeonpyeong Island.***

An overwhelming majority of the respondents (91.9%) indicate that they are dissatisfied with the Chinese reaction to the attack on Yeonpyeong Island (57.2% for “very dissatisfied”, and 34.7% for “somewhat dissatisfied”).

The evaluation indicates overall public dissatisfaction with China’s policy regarding the Korean peninsula since the *Cheonan* ship sinking. This sentiment is visible in all groups, including those stratified for age, gender, political orientation and party support.

***58.2% Say it is Necessary to Send a Strong Message of Protest to China Even at the Risk of Damaging Economic Ties with China.***

58.2% of the respondents believe that the South Korean government should send a strong message of protest to the Chinese government if Beijing does not take a clear stance against North Korean provocations, even at the risk of damaging economic relations with China. On the other hand, 34.6% of the respondents favor avoiding diplomatic conflict with China given the importance of economic ties with China.

[Figure 22]

Many conservatives (63.7%) demand a hard-line approach; many progressives (49.7%) demand a soft-line approach.

A relatively high percentage of the respondents who negatively assess the president’s job performance prefer a hard-line approach (60.8%) compared with those respondents who positively assess the president’s job performance (55.4%).

***60.1% Think China’s Decision to Cancel Its Foreign Minister’s Trip to Seoul Was Disrespectful to South Korea and an Effort to Turn a Blind Eye to North Korea’s Provocation.***

China’s decision to abruptly cancel its Foreign Minister’s trip to Seoul ahead of the scheduled ROK-U.S. joint naval exercise in the West Sea was regarded as an act of disrespect against South Korea and a move to turn a blind eye to North Korea’s provocations by a majority of the respondents (60.1%). On the other hand, 29.9% said that the decision was only to be expected given that the naval exercise may be threatening to China.

**The Asan Institute Opinion Poll in the Wake of the Attack on the Yeonpyeong Island**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Category | Content |
| Population | Nationwide Adult Males and Females (19+) |
| Sample Size | 1000 |
| Sampling  Method | Random Sampling from National Identity Registration Data (June 30, 2010) |
| Margin of Error | 95% Confidence 3.1% |
| Survey Tool | Structured Questionnaire |
| Survey Method | Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviews |
| Response Rate | 21.1% |
| Survey Date | November 27, 2010 |
| Survey Institution | Research & Research, Inc (President: NO Kyu-Hyung) |

The Asan Institute for Policy Studies (AIPS) was founded as an independent think tank to provide innovative policy solutions and spearhead public discourse on the core issues that Korea, East Asia and the global community face. In particular, the AIPS’ mandate is to contribute to the peace, prosperity, and unification of the Korean peninsula by engaging issues pertaining to national security, foreign affairs and governance, both domestic and global. “Human security” matters such as human rights, humanitarian crises, energy and environment are also major focus. The goal of the Institute is not only to offer policy solutions but also to train experts in public diplomacy and related fields in order to strengthen Korea’s capacity to better tackle some of the most pressing problems affecting the country, the region and the world today.