

SOUTH KOREANS

— AND —

THEIR NEIGHBORS

2018

ASAN POLL

THE ASAN INSTITUTE for POLICY STUDIES

South Koreans and Their Neighbors 2018



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The Asan Institute for Policy Studies is an independent, non-partisan think-tank with the mandate to undertake policy-relevant research to foster domestic, regional, and international environments conducive to peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, as well as Korean reunification.

PUBLIC OPINION STUDIES PROGRAM

Public Opinion Studies Program at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies conducts some of most widely cited public surveys in international relations and political science. Its regular polls produce reliable data for political leaders and the general public, creating more informed policy debates and decisions. The Program also publishes survey reports dealing with both international and domestic issues in Korea.

The full text of each survey report is available on the Asan Institute website (www.asaninst.org) under the Publication-Public Opinion Survey section.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 2018

Since 2010, the Asan Institute for Policy Studies (<http://en.asaninst.org/>) has been tracking South Korean public opinion on international and domestic issues. And by collecting major findings from the Asan Institute's regular and special surveys in international politics, the Asan Institute has published the "South Koreans and Their Neighbors" series since the 2014 Asan Plenum.

From March 21-22, 2018, as the security dynamics shifted on the Korean Peninsula, the Asan Institute polled South Korean attitudes toward regional security. The report, "South Koreans and Their Neighbors 2018" reveals a number of significant findings, including South Korean views about neighboring countries, future relationships with the U.S. and North Korea, the upcoming inter-Korean and U.S.-North Korea summits, great power relations, and North Korean denuclearization.

In March 2018, the U.S.'s favorability stood at 5.64, making it South Koreans' most favored nation. It was followed by China (3.90) and Japan (3.52). While all other nation's favorability dropped from November 2017 to March 2018, North Korea's rating increased by a full point (Nov 2017=2.52, Mar 2018=3.52), reaching its highest level since 2013.

President Donald Trump was the most favored foreign leader among South Koreans, though his favorability dropped from 4.35 in November 2017 to 3.76 in March 2018. And during the same period, President Xi Jinping's favorability decreased from 4.02 to 3.29. Surprisingly, Chairman Kim Jong-un (2.02) outscored Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (1.79) for the first time since July 2014. The upcoming summits explain the sudden increase of favorability of both North Korea and Kim Jong-un.

Regarding South Korea's future relationships with the U.S. and North Korea, respectively, 57.8% and 66.4% of South Koreans predicted that relations with the U.S. and North Korea will improve. It appears that the current mood of reconciliation after the Winter Olympics and the upcoming bilateral summits have influenced on this optimism.

Since 2012, a majority of South Koreans constantly viewed North Korea as either "one of us" or "neighbor." In the midst of escalated tension between the U.S. and North Korea in 2017, 55.8% considered North Korea as either "one of us" or "neighbor." 31.9% identified them as a "stranger" or "enemy."

Regarding the Moon administration's North Korean policy, in March 2018, 60% said that they are satisfied (dissatisfied 34.1%). This is nearly 20% points higher than the rating of the Park administration's North Korean policy in September 2014. Over half of the respondents in each age group answered that they are satisfied with the current North Korean policy.

Among South Koreans, the expectations for upcoming summits were heightened. A majority of respondents (64.9%) believed that the inter-Korean summit in April will produce positive outcomes, while 30.4% stated the opposite. Also, 54.9% answered that the U.S.-North Korea summit in May will produce positive outcomes, while 40.1% said that it will not.

When asked which country South Korea should strengthen ties with if the U.S. and China continue their rivalry, 67.6% of respondents chose the U.S. over China (23.4%) in March 2018. Since July 2014, South Koreans have repeatedly chosen the U.S. over China as a future partner (2014=59.6%, 2015=58.7%, 2016=59.5%, 2017=67.3%). Those who have selected China fluctuated between a fifth and a third.

When asked to identify the country that should take the most active role in solving North Korea's nuclear-related problems, the respondents ranked South Korea (45.4%) and the U.S. (30.7%). Compared to 2016, the rates for both South Korea (2016=26%, 2018=45.4%) and the U.S. (2016=19.2%, 2018=30.7%) significantly increased. And regarding which country will take the lead, South Koreans selected the U.S. (51.4%), followed by South Korea (26.7%) and China (12.6%).

About the North Korean denuclearization, despite the turn of events on the Korean Peninsula, 23.7% predicted that North Korea will never be denuclearized. Another 20.5% responded that they do not know or refused to answer. The average time period among 557 respondents who believed North Korea could possibly be denuclearized was 10.9 years.

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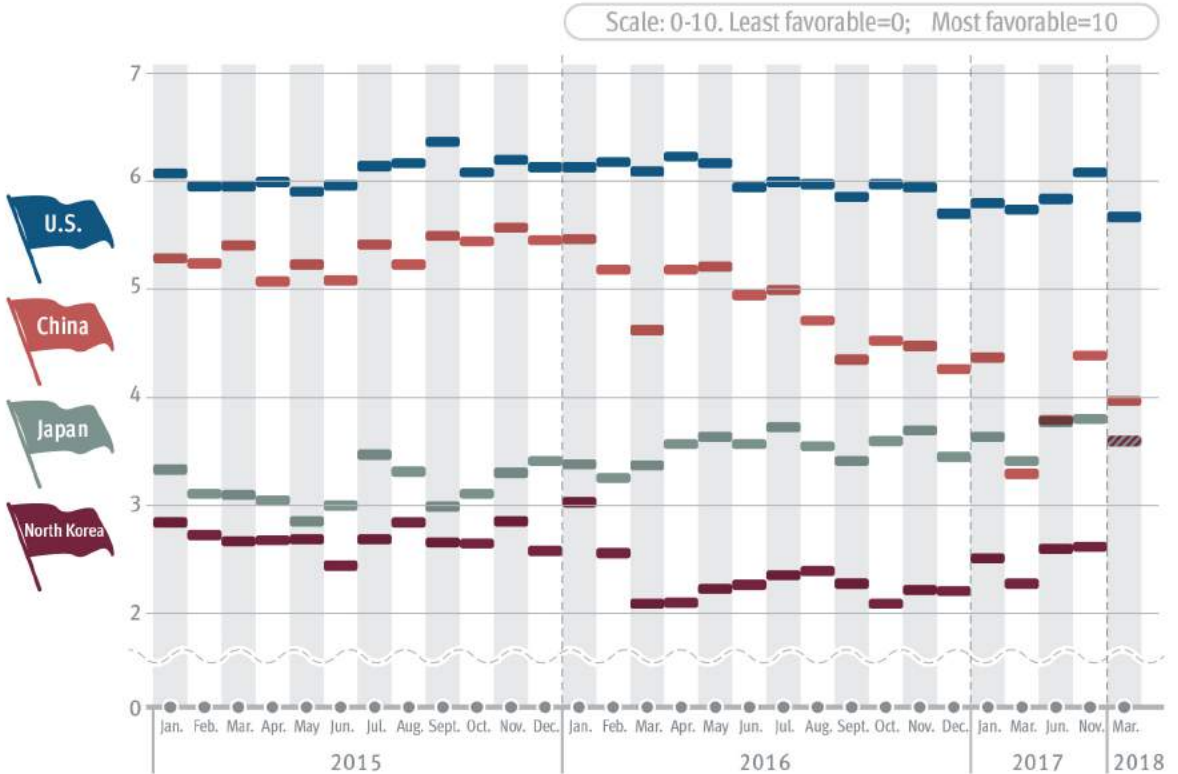
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COUNTRY FAVORABILITY

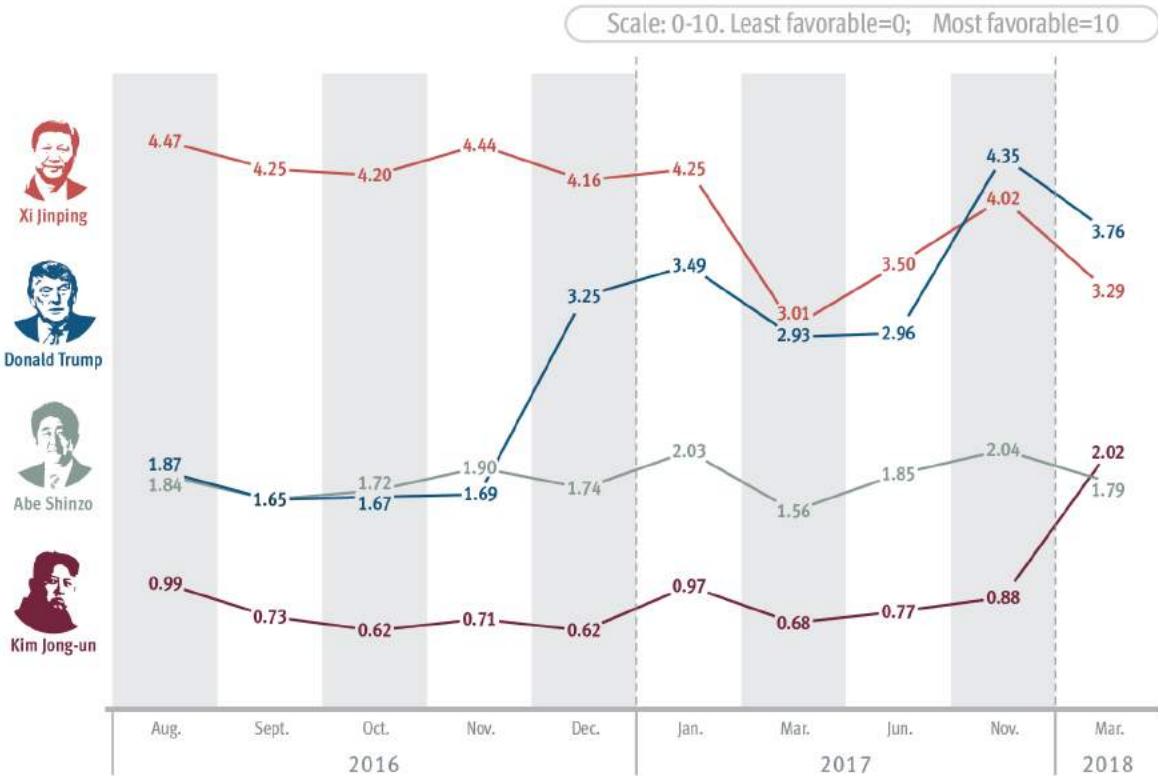
How would you rate the favorability of the following countries?



Respondents were asked to rate the favorability of each country on a scale of zero to ten, with zero representing “least favorable.” In March 2018, the U.S. received a 5.64, making it South Koreans' most favored nation. China's favorability recovered to 4.33 in November 2017 from an all-time low of 3.21 in March 2017, but dipped back to 3.90 in March 2018. Japan and North Korea both scored 3.52, making them the least favored countries by South Koreans. It is noteworthy that while all other nations' favorability dropped from November 2017 to March 2018, North Korea's rating increased by a full point, reaching its highest level since 2013. It is rare to see such a large increase during a span of only four months.

LEADER FAVORABILITY

How would you rate the favorability of the following leaders?



Respondents were asked to rate the favorability of major leaders on a scale of zero to ten, with zero representing “least favorable.” President Donald Trump received a 3.76 in March 2018, making him the most favored foreign leader among South Koreans. However, his favorability rating is low compared to past U.S. presidents’. President Xi Jinping’s favorability dropped from 4.02 in November 2017 to 3.29 in March 2018. Surprisingly, Chairman Kim Jong-un (2.02) outscored Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (1.79), making Abe the least favored leader by South Koreans. It is important to note that Chairman Kim Jong-un outscored Prime Minister Shinzo Abe for the first time since July 2014. The upcoming summits explain the sudden increase of favorability of both North Korea and Kim Jong-un.



SOUTH KOREA'S FUTURE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE U.S. AND NORTH KOREA

2013. 6/7~9
 2014. 1/4~6
 2015. 1/14~16
 2016. 2/17~19
 2018. 3/21~22

How do you see South Korea's relationships with the U.S. and North Korea changing in the future?



When respondents were asked to evaluate South Korea's future relationships with the United States and North Korea, a majority responded that its relations with both countries will improve. However, while a commanding majority (74.9%) in February 2016 believed that relations with the U.S. will improve, the number decreased to 57.8% in March 2018. On the other hand, while only 16.2% of South Koreans predicted that relations with North Korea will improve in February 2016, in March 2018, 66.4% responded that relations will improve. It seems that the current mood of reconciliation after the Winter Olympics and the upcoming bilateral summits have influenced this optimistic attitude.

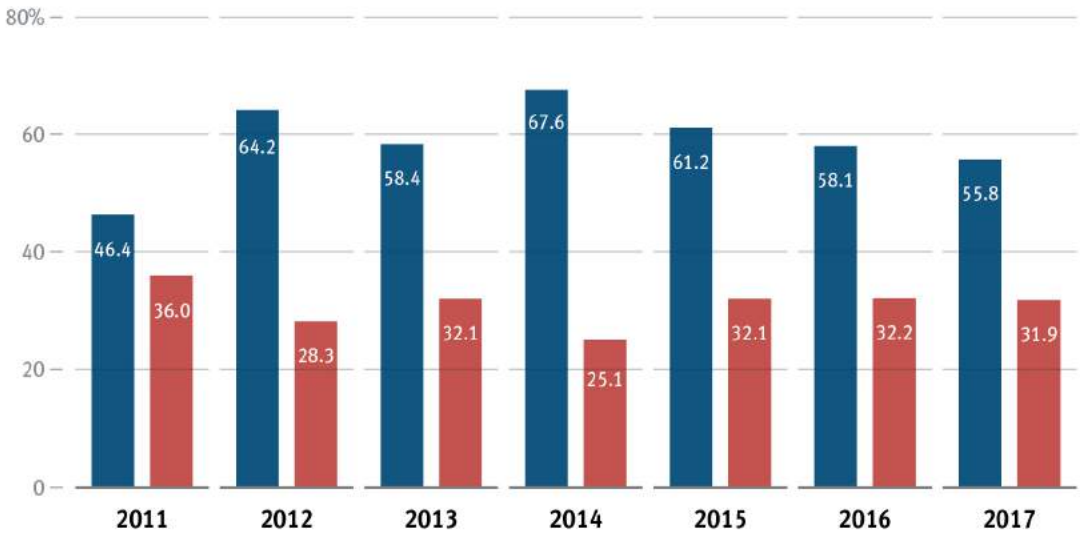
PERCEPTION OF NORTH KOREA

How do you view North Korea?

- 2011. 8/26-10/4
- 2012. 9/24-10/1
- 2013. 9/4-27
- 2014. 9/1-17
- 2015. 9/2-30
- 2016. 9/9-10/14
- 2017. 10/19-11/14



One of us/Neighbor % Stranger/Enemy



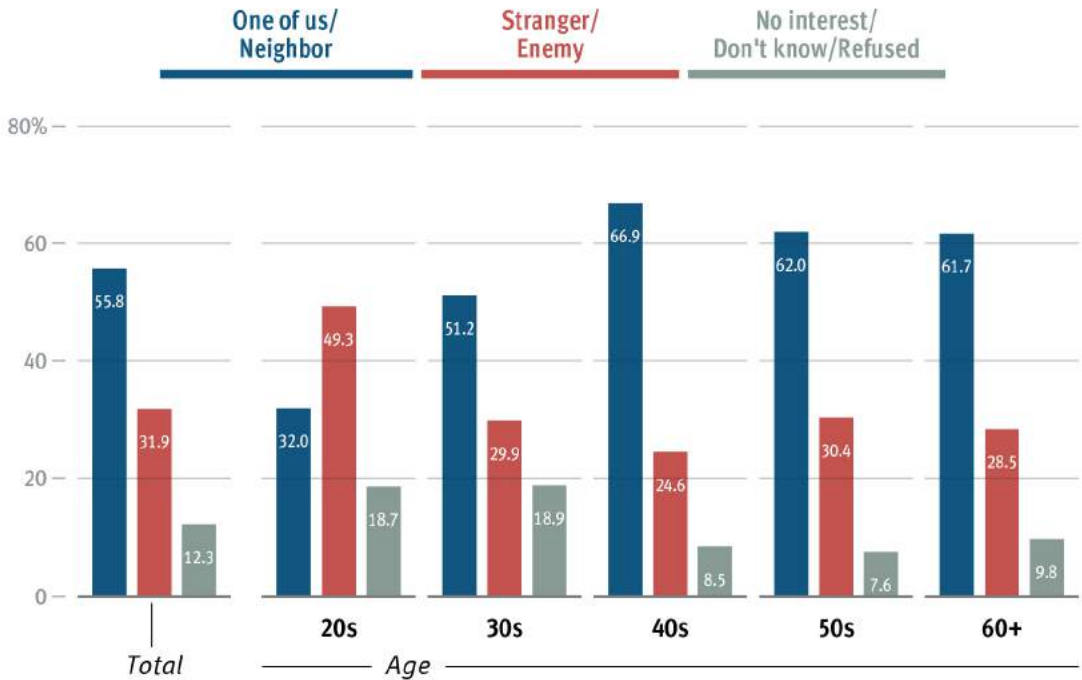
Respondents were asked how they view North Korea. Since 2012, a majority of South Koreans have viewed North Korea as either “one of us” or “neighbor.” Even in the midst of escalated tension between the U.S. and North Korea in 2017, 55.8% of South Koreans viewed North Korea as either “one of us” or “neighbor.” 31.9% identified them as a “stranger” or “enemy.”



PERCEPTION OF NORTH KOREA BY AGE

2017. 10/19~11/14

How do you view North Korea?

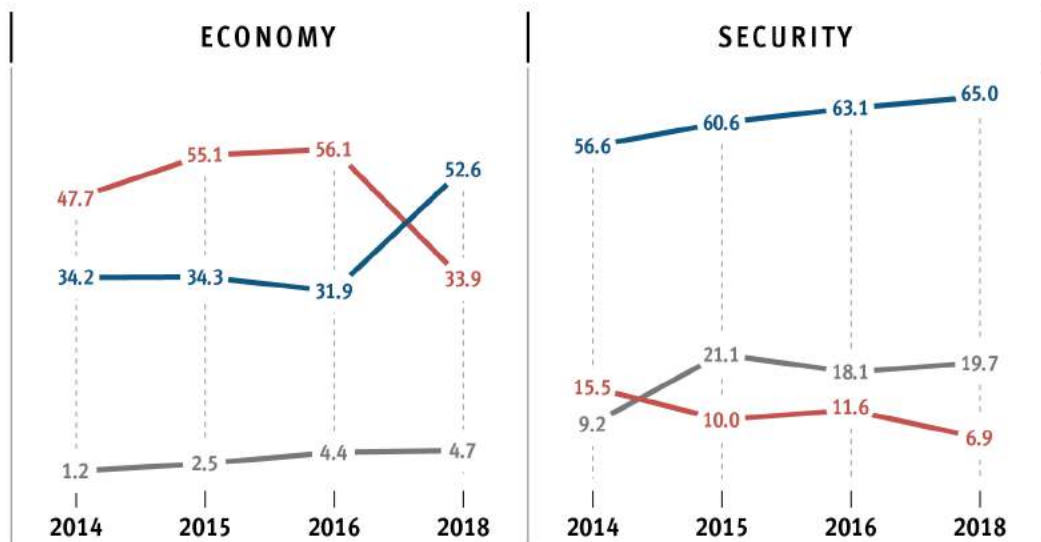


When broken down by age group, the data revealed that the older age groups felt a closer affinity to North Korea than the younger age groups. More than 60% of respondents in their 40s and over viewed North Korea as either “one of us” or “neighbor” (40s=66.9%, 50s=62%, 60+=61.7%). A majority of respondents in their 30s (51.2%) also perceived North Korea as either “one of us” or “neighbor.” However, more respondents in their 20s viewed North Korea as either a “stranger” or “enemy” (49.3%) than “one of us” or “neighbor” (32%).

MOST IMPORTANT NEIGHBOR FOR SOUTH KOREA'S ECONOMY/SECURITY

2014. 3/10-12
2015. 3/18-20
2016. 3/22-24
2018. 3/21-22

 Which country is most important for South Korea's economy/security?



Respondents were asked to identify the most important neighbor for South Korea's economy and security. Economically, 52.6% of South Koreans viewed the United States as the most important neighbor. This is the first time since the Asan Institute started tracking South Koreans' view since 2014 that the U.S. was considered more economically important than China. China's rate dropped from 56.1% in 2016 to 33.9% in 2018. Meanwhile, since 2014, a majority of South Koreans have viewed the U.S. as its most important security partner. This year was no different as 65% of South Koreans selected the U.S. over China.

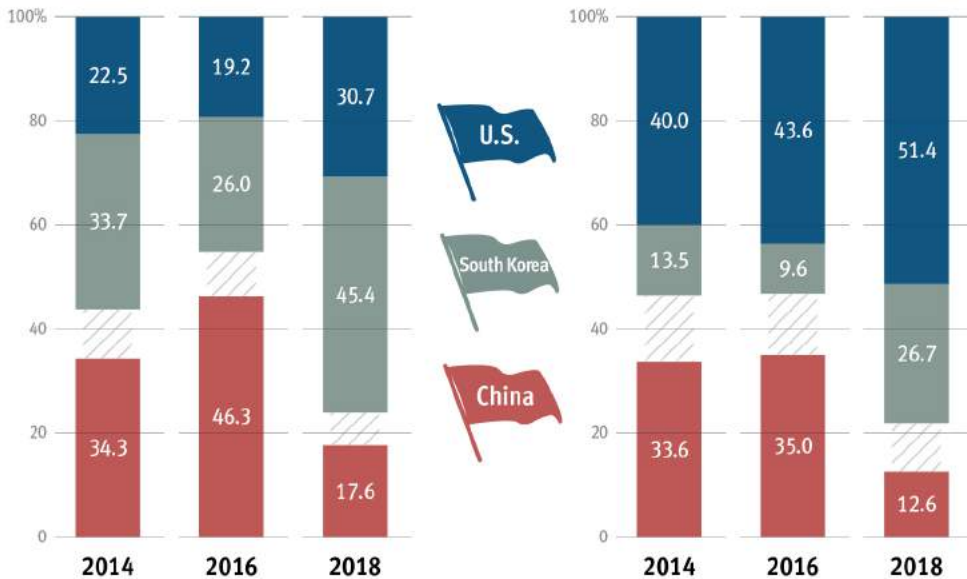


IMPORTANT NEIGHBOR TO DENUCLEARIZATION OF THE KOREAN PENINSULA

2014. 5/4-6
2016. 3/22-24
2018. 3/21-22

Q1. Which country *should* take an active role in solving North Korea's nuclear-related problems?

Q2. Which country *will* take an active role in solving North Korea's nuclear-related problems?



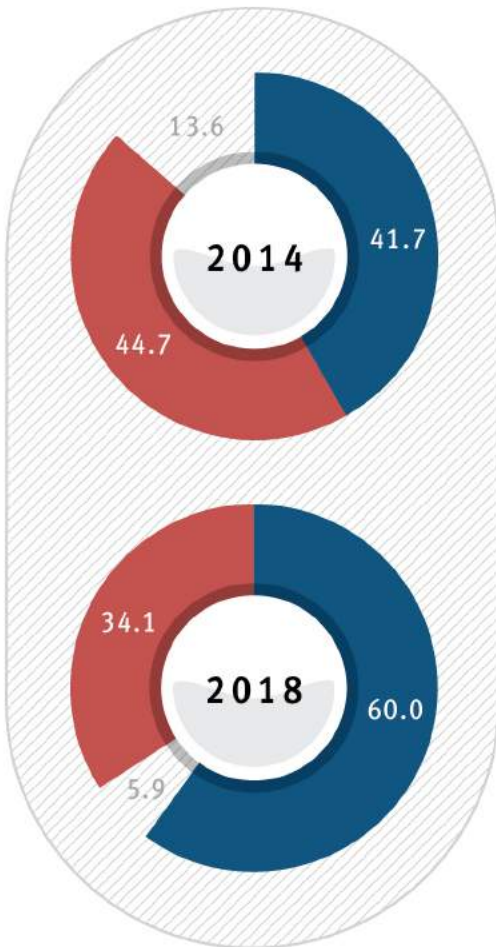
Respondents were asked to identify the country that should take the most active role in solving North Korea's nuclear-related problems. They ranked South Korea (45.4%) and the U.S. (30.7%) as countries that should take the lead. Compared to the 2016 results, the rates for both South Korea (2016=26%, 2018=45.4%) and the U.S. (2016=19.2%, 2018=30.7%) significantly increased, while the rates for China (2016=46.3%, 2018=17.6%) plummeted. When asked to identify the one nation that will take an active role, respondents chose the United States (51.4%), followed by South Korea (26.7%) and China (12.6%). President Moon's "driver seat" statement and the upcoming summits have influenced the respondents' perception of South Korea's role in solving North Korea's nuclear problem.

EVALUATION OF THE CURRENT NORTH KOREAN POLICY

2014. 9/7-10
2018. 3/21-22

Are you satisfied with the current North Korean policy?

Satisfied % Dissatisfied



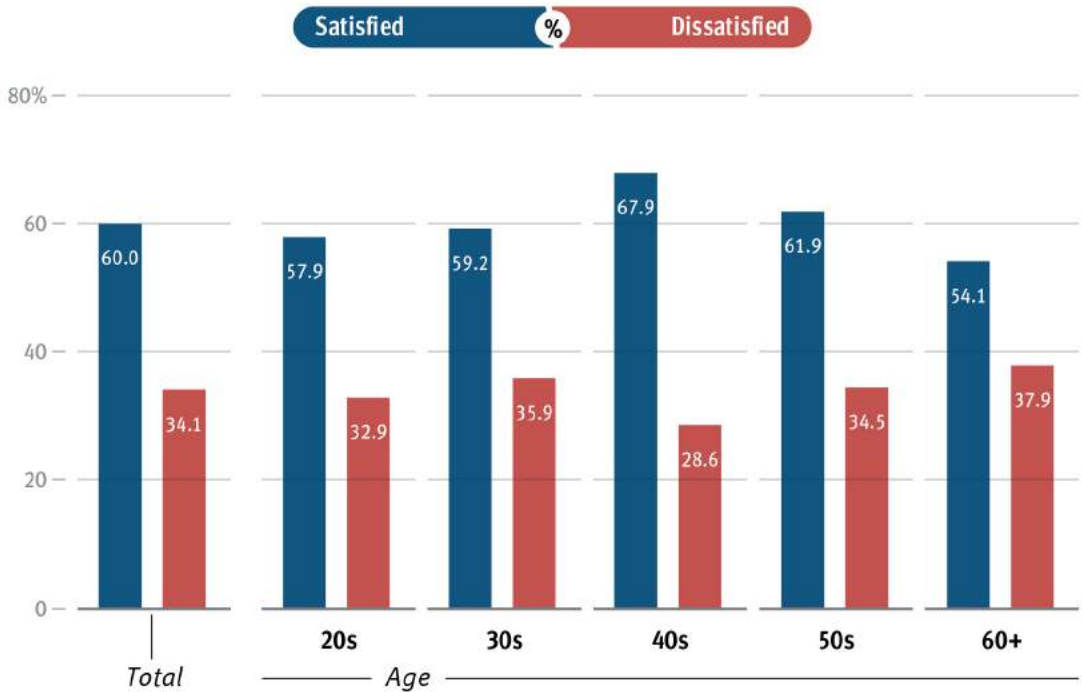
When asked whether respondents are satisfied with the Moon administration’s North Korean policy, 60% answered that they are satisfied. This was nearly 20% points higher than the rating of the Park administration’s North Korean policy in 2014. 34.1% of respondents answered that they are dissatisfied, while only 5.9% answered that they don’t know or refused to answer.



EVALUATION OF THE CURRENT NORTH KOREAN POLICY BY AGE

2018. 3/21~22

Are you satisfied with the current North Korean policy?

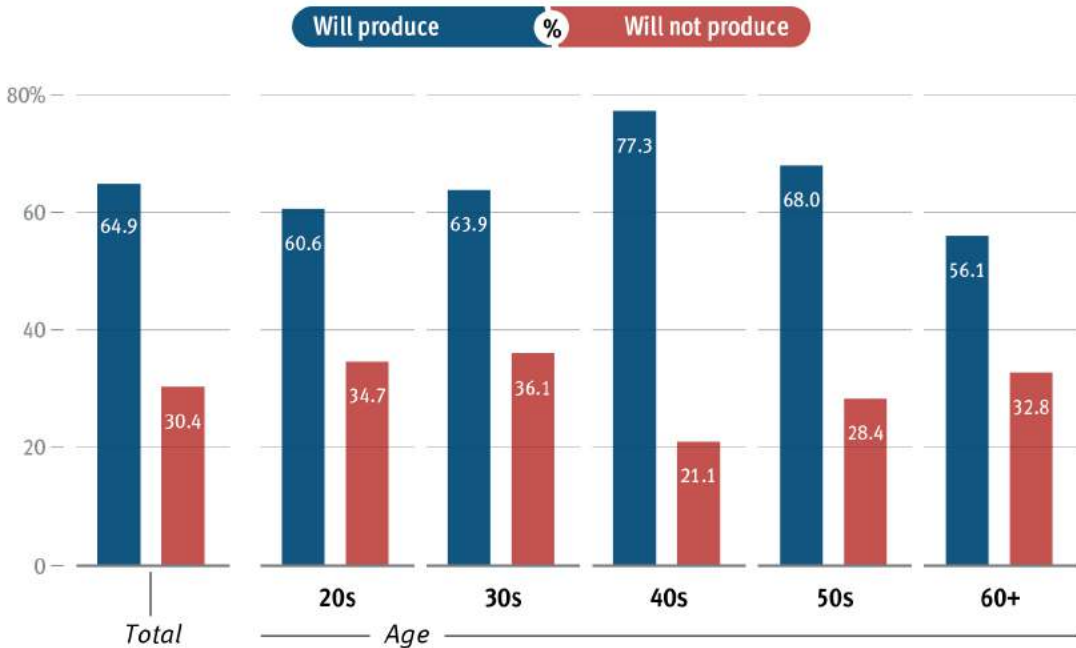


Satisfaction with the South Korean government’s current North Korean policy was widespread across age groups. Over half of the respondents in each age group said that they are satisfied with the Moon administration’s North Korean policy. Specifically, the level of satisfaction was the highest among the respondents in their 40s (67.9%), followed by the 50s (61.9%) and the 30s (59.2%). The respondents in their 60s and over were the most dissatisfied (37.9%).

PROSPECTS FOR THE INTER-KOREAN SUMMIT

2018. 3/21-22

Do you think the inter-Korean summit in April will (or will not) produce positive outcomes?



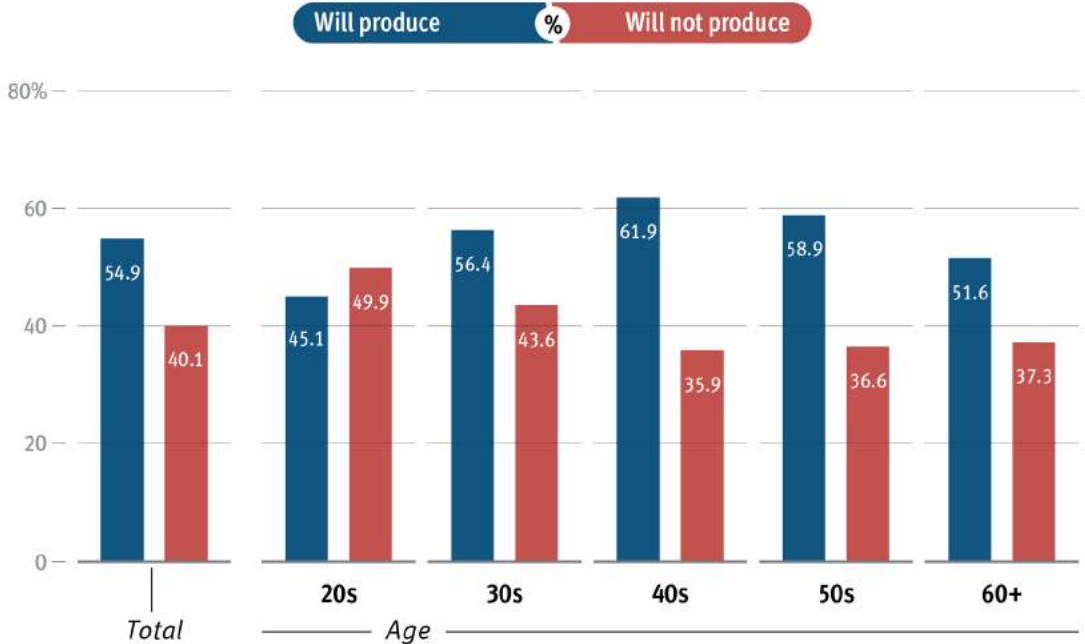
Respondents were asked whether they believed that the inter-Korean summit in April will (or will not) produce positive outcomes. A majority (64.9%) of South Koreans answered that the inter-Korean summit will produce positive outcomes, while 30.4% stated the opposite. 4.7% responded that they did not know or refused to answer. When broken down by age group, respondents in their 40s were most optimistic of the results (77.3%), followed by the 50s (68%). Pessimistic views on the upcoming summit were relatively higher among the younger age groups and the 60 and older age group (30s= 36.1%, 20s=34.7%, 60+=32.8%).



PROSPECTS FOR THE U.S.-NORTH KOREA SUMMIT

2018. 3/21~22

Do you think the U.S-North Korea summit in May will (or will not) produce positive outcomes?



When asked whether they believed that the U.S.-North Korea summit in May will (or will not) produce positive outcomes, 54.9% of respondents answered that it will produce, while 40.1% said that it will not produce. 5% responded that they did not know or refused to answer. When broken down by age group, those in their 40s were the most optimistic about the summit (61.9%), followed by the 50s (58.9%) and 30s (56.4%). Respondents in the 20s were the only age group in which more respondents believed that the summit will not produce positive outcomes (49.9%) than will produce positive outcomes (45.1%).

REASONS FOR OPTIMISM TOWARD THE U.S.-NORTH KOREA SUMMIT

2018. 3/21-22

What is the reason that you think the U.S.-North Korea summit will produce positive outcomes?

North Korea seems determined to make a deal to alleviate the sanctions

A surprise deal between the two leaders can be made

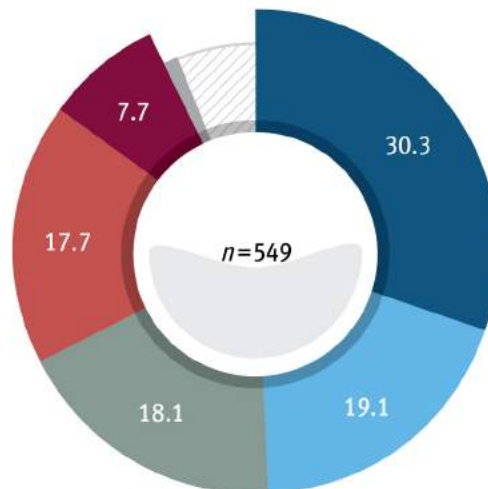
North Korea stated its willingness to denuclearize

Both countries will benefit from a deal

Neighboring countries are supportive of the talks

Other

Don't know/Refused



When asked for the reason why they believed the U.S.-North Korea summit will produce positive outcomes, nearly a third (30.3%) stated that North Korea seems determined to make a deal in order to alleviate the sanctions posed on them. 19.1% expected that a surprise deal between the two leaders can be made. Another 18.1% believed the summit will produce positive outcomes because the North Korean government itself stated its willingness to denuclearize. 17.7% argued that a positive outcome will come out of the summit because the two countries share similar interests and will ultimately benefit from a deal.



REASONS FOR PESSIMISM TOWARD THE U.S.-NORTH KOREA SUMMIT

2018. 3/21-22

What is the reason you think the U.S.-North Korea summit will not produce positive outcomes?

Cannot trust North Korea's commitment to denuclearize

Two countries can't reach an agreement in the summit

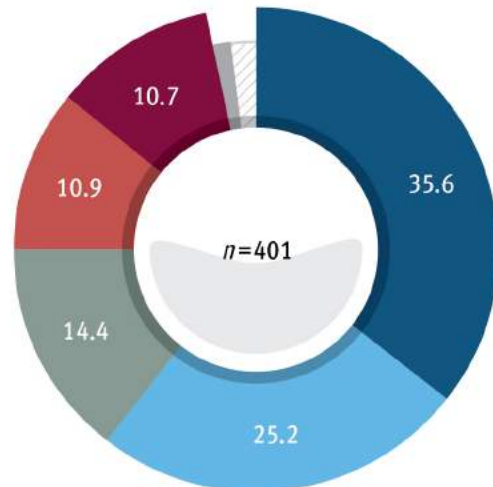
The two leaders' temperaments might hinder a deal

Strategic interests of neighboring countries are clashing

U.S. won't give up its North Korea policy of maximum pressure

Other

Don't know/Refused

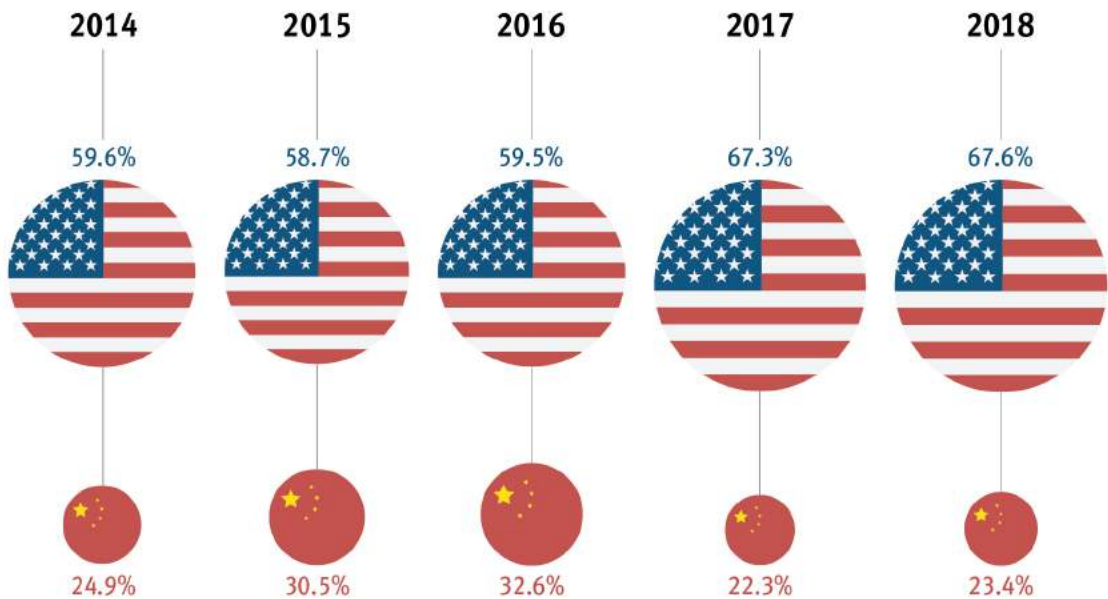


Of the respondents that did not think the North Korea-U.S. summit will produce a positive outcome, 35.6% stated that they cannot trust North Korea's commitment to denuclearize. 25.2% were skeptical whether the two countries could reach an agreement. Another 14.4% claimed that both leaders' temperaments may break a potential deal. 10.9% of respondents stated the clashing strategic interests of neighboring countries will hinder a positive outcome, while another 10.7% believed that the U.S. would not give up its North Korea policy of maximum pressure.

SOUTH KOREA'S FUTURE PARTNERS

2014. 7/4-6
2015. 3/11-12
2016. 3/22-24
2017. 6/1-3
2018. 3/21-22

🔄 If the U.S. and China continue their rivalry, which country should South Korea strengthen ties with?



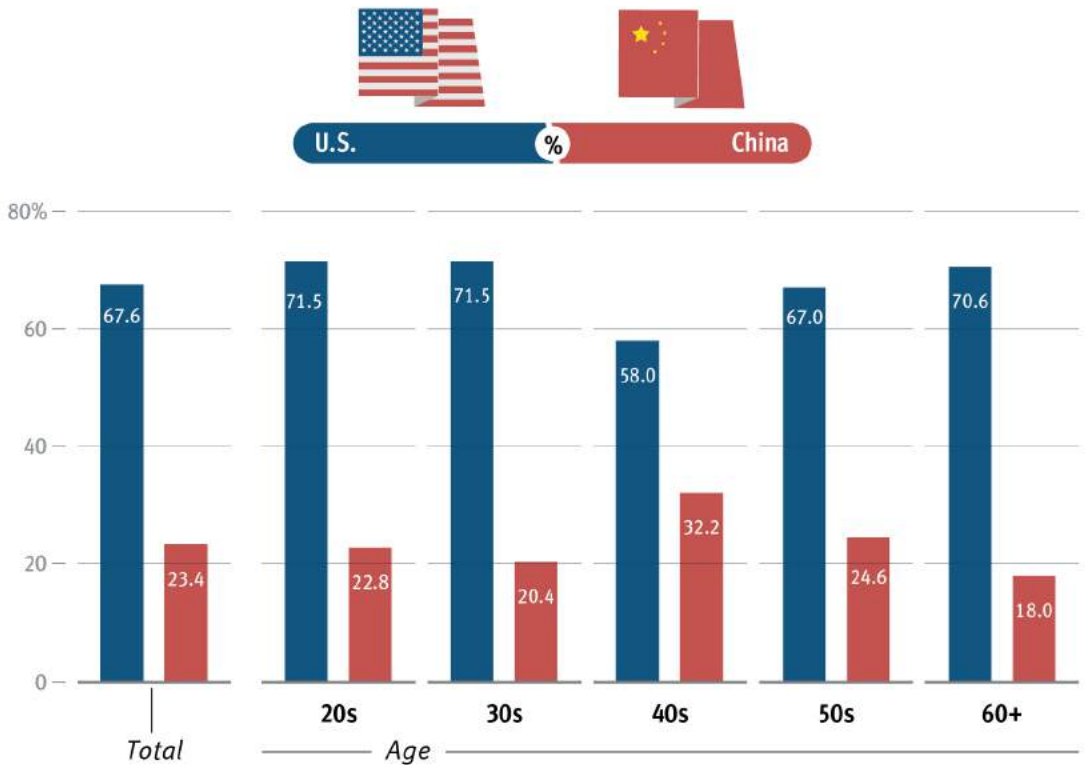
When asked which country South Korea should strengthen ties with if the United States and China continue their rivalry, a vast majority of respondents chose the United States (67.6%) over China (23.4%). Since July 2014, South Koreans have repeatedly chosen the U.S. over China as a future partner. Those who have selected China have fluctuated between a fifth and a third.



SOUTH KOREA'S FUTURE PARTNERS BY AGE

2018. 3/21~22

🔄 If the U.S. and China continue their rivalry, which country should South Korea strengthen ties with?

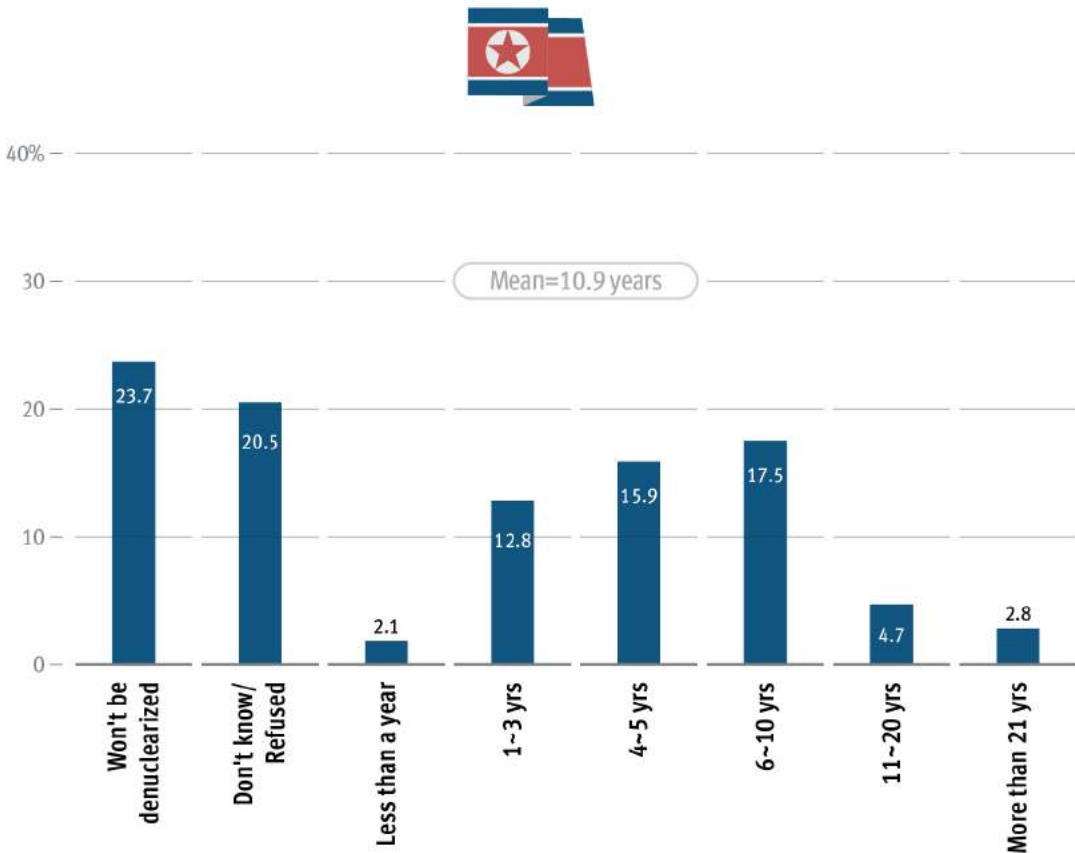


Breakdown by age reveals that the highest preference for the United States came from respondents in the younger age groups. Respondents in their 20s and 30s both recorded 71.5%, followed by the 60s and older age group (70.6%). In contrast, respondents in their 40s (32.2%) were the only age group in which over 30% preferred China over the United States.

PREDICTIONS ON NORTH KOREAN DENUCLEARIZATION

2018. 3/21-22

How long will it take for North Korea to be denuclearized?



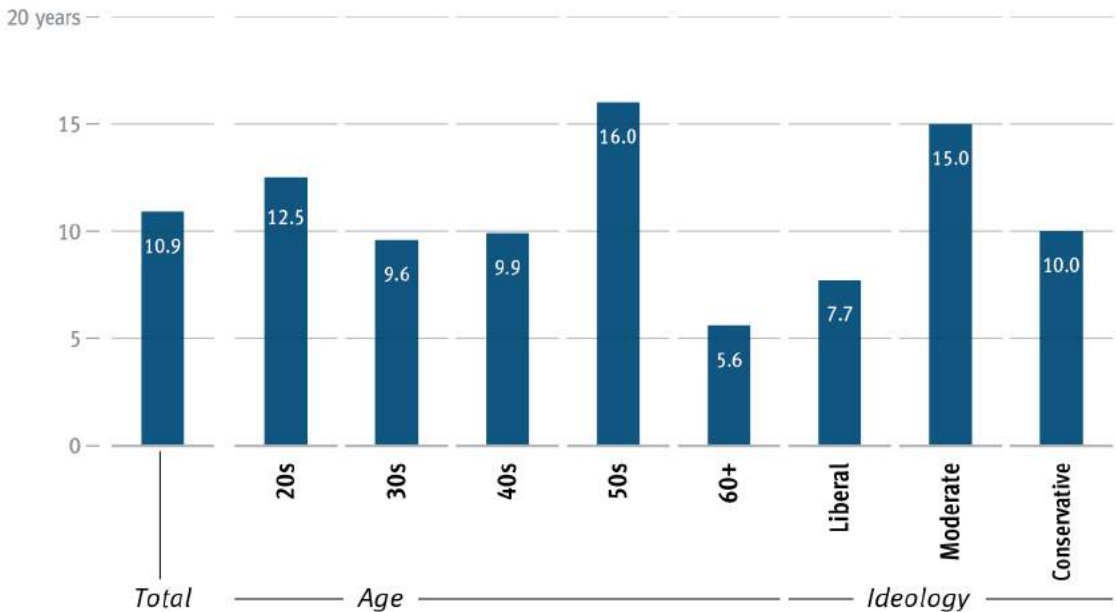
Respondents were asked how long will it take for North Korea to be denuclearized. Despite the turn of events on the Korean Peninsula, nearly a fourth (23.7%) predicted that North Korea will never be denuclearized. Another 20.5% answered that they do not know or refused to answer. The average time period among those who believed North Korea could possibly be denuclearized was 10.9 years (6-10 years= 17.5%, 4-5 years= 15.9%, 1-3 years=12.8%). Only 2.1% of the respondents answered less than a year.



PREDICTIONS ON NORTH KOREAN DENUCLEARIZATION BY AGE AND IDEOLOGY

2018. 3/21~22

How long will it take for North Korea to be denuclearized?



Among the respondents ($n=557$) who believed North Korea could possibly be denuclearized, breakdown by age shows that, on average, respondents in their 50s believed it would take 16 years. Those in their 20s speculated that it would take 12.5 years, while those in their 40s predicted 9.9 years. Respondents in their 60s and over were the most optimistic, predicting that the complete denuclearization of North Korea will take place within 5.6 years. When analyzed by ideological stances, on average, moderates believed it would take 15 years, conservatives predicted 10 years, and liberals speculated 7.7 years for North Korea to be denuclearized.

For more details on polling methodology,
please visit [**www.asaninst.org/eng**](http://www.asaninst.org/eng)



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