

ASAN REPORT

U.S.-North Korea Summit and South Koreans' Perceptions of Neighboring Countries

PUBLIC OPINION STUDIES PROGRAM

JULY 2018



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The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

About

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, East Asia, and the world-at-large.

The Public Opinion Studies Program at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies conducts some of the 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.

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The views expressed herein are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.

Table of Contents

Introduction	06
U.S.-North Korea Summit and South Koreans' Perceptions of Neighboring Countries	08
Country Favorability	08
Leader Favorability	09
South Koreans' Perception of the U.S.-North Korea Summit	11
Evaluation of the U.S.-North Korea Summit	11
Denuclearization of North Korea	14
North Korea's Willingness to Follow Through	16
Important Issues after U.S.-North Korea Summit	18
Moon Administration's North Korea Policy	18
Prospects for inter-Korean Relations and U.S.-North Korea Relations	20
Policy Recommendations	21
Conclusion	24
Survey Methodology	26

List of Figures

Figure 1.	Country Favorability	09
Figure 2.	Leader Favorability	10
Figure 3.	Evaluation of the U.S.-North Korea Summit	12
Figure 4.	Expectations on Whether North Korea will keep its Promise to Denuclearize	16
Figure 5.	Trusting North Korea	17
Figure 6.	Prospects for inter-Korean Relations and U.S.-North Korea Relations	21

List of Tables

Table 1.	Evaluation of the U.S.-North Korea Summit, by Age and Political Leaning	13
Table 2.	Prospects for the Denuclearization of North Korea	14
Table 3.	Expected Time for the Denuclearization of North Korea	15
Table 4.	Reasons for Satisfaction with the Moon Administration's North Korea Policy	19
Table 5.	On the Need for a Formal Declaration Terminating the War, by Age	20
Table 6.	Favorability Rating of North Korea and Kim Jong-un	22
Table 7.	On the Decision to Halt ROK-U.S. Joint Military Exercises	23

Introduction

On June 12, 2018, President Donald Trump and Chairman Kim Jong-un met in Singapore for the first ever summit between U.S. and North Korean leaders. Labeled the “meeting of the century”, the summit grabbed international attention ever since President Trump accepted Chairman Kim’s invitation on March 9. At one point, President Trump cancelled the talks after a fiery exchange of words. But, despite the temporary setback, the summit went ahead as originally scheduled.

The U.S.-North Korea summit took place after decades of tensions and hostilities between the two countries. During the summit, the two sides signed and announced a joint statement, the key points of which were:

1. The United States and the DPRK commit to establish new U.S.-DPRK relations in accordance with the desire of the peoples of the two countries for peace and prosperity.
2. The United States and the DPRK will join their efforts to build a lasting and stable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula.
3. Reaffirming the April 27, 2018 Panmunjom Declaration, the DPRK commits to work towards complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.
4. The United States and the DPRK commit to recovering POW/MIA remains, including the immediate repatriation of those already identified.

However, many experts criticized the joint statement for its lack of detail. While the statement called for “complete denuclearization,” it provided neither a timeline nor a road map to North Korea’s denuclearization. More importantly, it made no mention of the demand for North Korea’s complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization (CVID) as Sec. of State Pompeo had insisted on numerous occasions leading up to the summit. Experts also criticized President Trump’s decision to halt joint military exercises with South Korea without any prior consultation with the ROK government.

So how do ordinary South Koreans, as opposed to experts, view the U.S.-North Korea summit? This report analyzes South Koreans’ views of the June meeting. It looks at their opinion toward neighboring countries and their leaders, including the U.S. and North Korea, before and after the summit. We also compare their perceptions of North Korea’s trustworthiness before and after the summit. Finally, the report reviews the current government’s policy toward North Korea, the outlook of South Koreans on the future of inter-Korean relations and U.S.-North Korea relations, and examines future challenges.

We find that the perception of North Korea and Kim Jong-un improved considerably following the U.S.-North Korea summit. North Korea’s favorability rose from 3.52 to 4.71 and Kim Jong-un’s did from 2.02 to 4.06 (0=least favorable, 10=most favorable). President Trump, who has not been very popular among South Koreans until now, also saw his favorability rise from 3.76 to 5.16. In addition, 71.8% of South Koreans rated the U.S.-North Korea summit as positive. Many South Koreans found it meaningful that the heads of the two nations, hostile for the past 70 years, met and discussed peace and denuclearization. Respondents who were pessimistic or unsure about the prospect for denuclearization decreased from 44.3% in March to 24.7% in June after the talks. The expected deadline for denuclearization was also shortened by four years (10.9 to 6.5 years). As perceptions on the prospect for the denuclearization of North Korea improved, 62.6% of South Koreans were optimistic about North Korea’s implementation of the agreement. This was related to North Korea’s perceived reliability as a negotiating partner by South Koreans, which improved significantly (54%) compared to 2013 (10.7%) when inter-Korean relation was at a low point. The Moon Jae-in administration’s policy toward North Korea received overwhelming support (72.3%) following the April-May inter-Korean talks, the April 27 Panmunjom Declaration, and the closing of the North’s nuclear test site in May. The percentage of South Koreans who viewed future inter-Korean relations and U.S.-North Korea relations as positive also reached 83.2% and 76.7%, respectively. However, although the two summits improved South Koreans’ overall perceptions of North Korea, the opinion of the youth (20s), who have always been relatively more hostile to North Korea, remained largely unchanged.

U.S.-North Korea Summit and South Koreans' Perceptions of Neighboring Countries

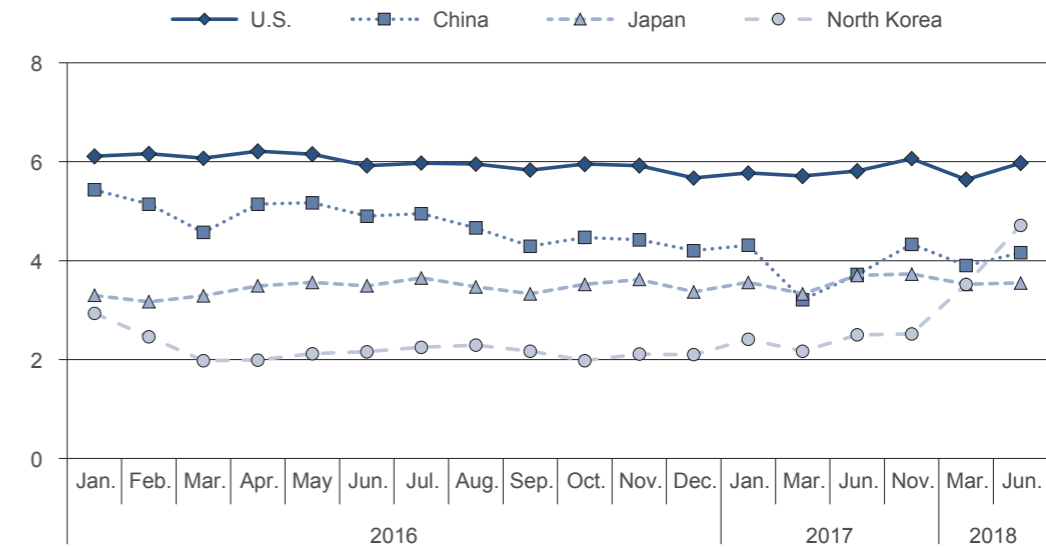
Country Favorability

The U.S. remained as the most favored country among South Koreans in the June survey. The favorability rating of the U.S. was 5.97, which was lower but still close to the rating after President Trump's state visit in November 2017 (6.06). The U.S.' favorability rating moved above the mid-5-point range since 2016 and was much more consistent than other neighboring countries. Despite dipping a bit in March 2018 to 5.64, favorable sentiment towards the U.S. rebounded again in June. Prior to the U.S.-North Korea summit, there was concern over whether ROK-U.S. cooperation on the North Korean nuclear issue would work due to their differing positions. However, the survey results suggest that the U.S.-North Korea summit has alleviated such concerns.

The most notable outcome in the June survey was North Korea's favorability rating, which reached a record high at 4.71. North Korea's favorability reached the 3-point mark in March 2018 (3.52) and increased by 1.19 points in June (4.71). This is the first time North Korea's favorability rating exceeded the 4.0 since the Asan Institute for Policy Studies started tracking South Korea's favorability ratings of neighboring countries. The sudden increase in favorability was caused by the two inter-Korean summits in April and May and the U.S.-North Korea summit in June. This dramatic increase was remarkable given that the threat of war was looming on the Peninsula only a few months ago.

China's and Japan's favorability rating did not show much change. In June, the favorability rating of China and Japan were 4.16 and 3.55, respectively. Although China's favorability rating increased from 3.90 in March to 4.16, it was lower than that of North Korea's for the first time. Japan's favorability rating was the lowest among South Korean neighbors (3.55). The score is expected to remain low unless there is a political breakthrough between the two countries.

Figure 1. Country Favorability¹ (0=least favorable, 10=most favorable)



Leader Favorability

As expected, both Chairman Kim and President Trump's favorability experienced dramatic increases over the past three months (0=least favorable, 10=most favorable). Kim Jong-un's favorability rating also hit a record high (4.06) and exceeded the favorability ratings of both Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (2.04) and President Xi Jinping (3.89). Kim Jong-un, who was consistently ranked as one of the least favorable leaders by South Koreans, became the second most favorable leader, only trailing President Trump (5.16). The dramatic increase was astonishing, considering that Chairman Kim's favorability rating was only 0.88 in November 2017. His score has consistently been recorded around the 1-point range since 2013 when the Asan Institute first started tracking his favorability. The results indicate that South Koreans' perception of Kim Jong-un greatly improved after the recent summits held with President Moon Jae-in and President Trump.

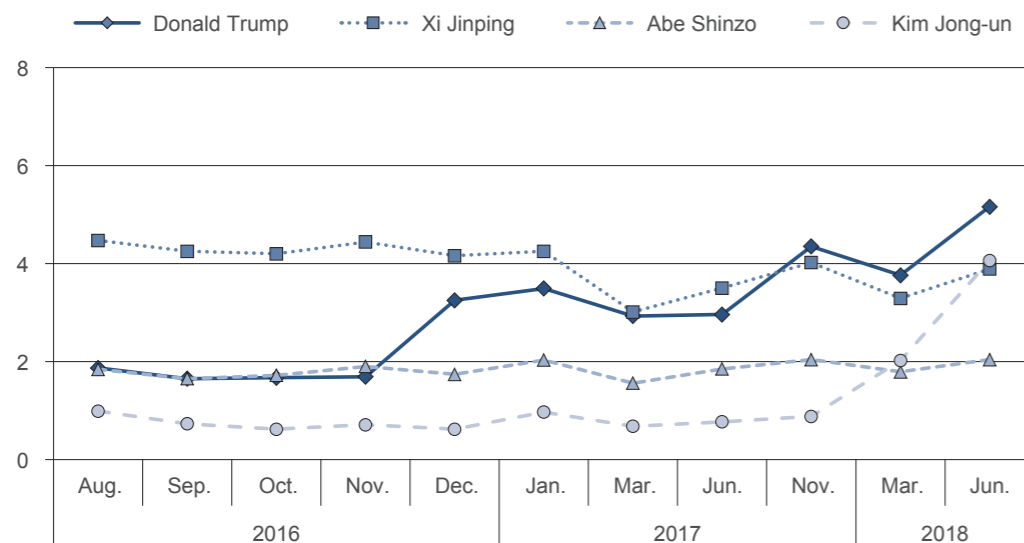
1. Source: Surveys of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies (Date: January 2016~June 2018).

Please take note that the number of surveys conducted on the favorability of neighboring countries and leaders changed since 2017.

President Trump also received a record high of 5.16 points after the U.S.-North Korea summit. This is an increase of 1.4 points over the past three months (March 2018=3.76) and shows that South Koreans' perception of Trump is continuing to improve. This is the first time his favorability rating entered the 5-point range. His score is even more impressive when compared to his ratings during the 2016 presidential election (1.69). The change is due to his willingness to meet with Chairman Kim Jong-un and his role in alleviating tension on the Korean Peninsula in 2018.

Both President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe experienced slight increases in June. Despite the increase, President Xi's rating was still lower than his average ratings in 2014 and 2015 when Korea-China relations were at their all-time best. Nearly a year has passed since President Moon and President Xi met at the sidelines of the APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) Summit in Vietnam to patch relations over the controversial THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) issue. However, the

Figure 2. Leader Favorability² (0=least favorable, 10=most favorable)



2. Source: Surveys of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies (Date: August, 2016~June 2018).

President Trump's favorability rating was tracked as either "candidate Trump," or "President Trump."

results show that the distrust of China created over their decision to take economic retaliation has been deeply embedded in South Koreans' minds. During the same period, Abe's favorability rating increased from 1.79 in March 2018 to 2.04 this June, but he was ranked as the least favorable leader among South Koreans. The small increases indicate that South Koreans did not view China and Japan as having any major role in creating this current mood of peace on the Korean Peninsula.

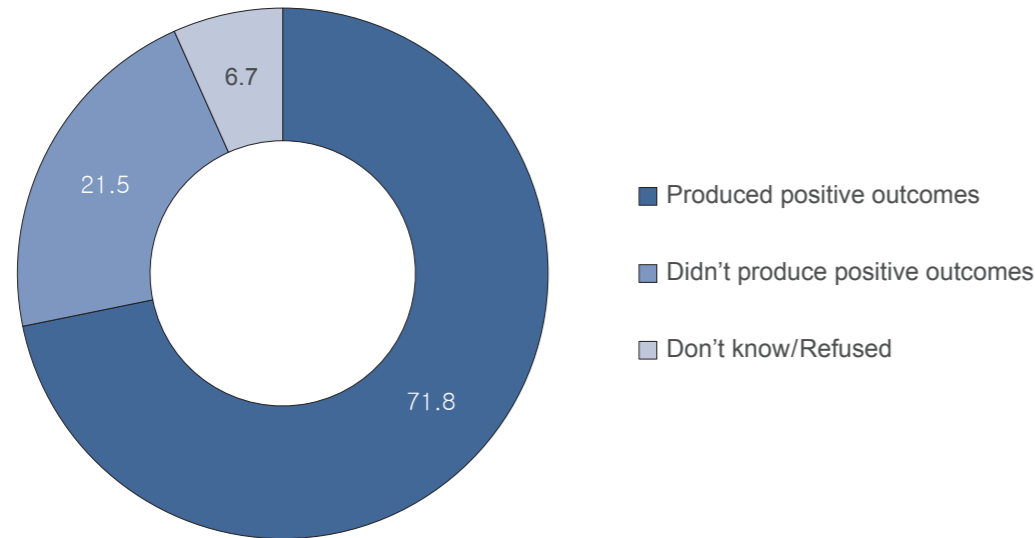
South Koreans' Perception of the U.S.-North Korea Summit

Evaluation of the U.S.-North Korea Summit

The U.S.-North Korea summit in June 2018 was of great interest to the world, but even more so to the South Koreans, as it directly impacted their daily lives. South Koreans had high hopes for the summit. According to a survey conducted in March, a majority of South Koreans (54.9%) expected that a summit between the two leaders would create positive outcomes. However, sizable numbers of South Koreans (40.1%) were skeptical at the same time about whether the summit could produce positive outcomes because of the two sides' differing positions on denuclearization.

After the summit, many experts were critical about its lack of detailed denuclearization measures and timeline. However, a large majority of South Koreans evaluated the summit as a success. 71.8% of South Koreans believed that the summit had achieved positive results, while only 21.5% disagreed. This was similar to the results of a survey conducted by Gallup Korea immediately after the talks (June 14th). Despite the fact that summit's outcome was short on substance, in South Koreans' minds it was a positive first step towards denuclearization. 66% of the respondents in the Gallup poll said that the U.S.-North Korea talks were positive, and only a minority (11%) said they were negative.³

When asked about their reasons for the positive evaluation of the U.S.-North Korea talks ($n=718$), 52.7% of the respondents pointed to the fact that the two leaders met despite their previous animosity as the biggest reason. It seems that the meeting itself

Figure 3. Evaluation of the U.S.-North Korea Summit⁴ (%)

carried significant symbolic weight, leading to their positive evaluation. Another 16.1% stated the growing possibility of normalizing relations between the two countries as their main reason. 15.2% selected the decision to release a joint statement by the two leaders and 12.8% stated the decision to hold high-level talks in the coming future. The reason that Koreans saw the U.S.-North Korea talks positively was not the agreement itself, but the fact that it gave significance to the summits.

On the other hand, 37.2% of the respondents ($n=215$) who negatively viewed the summit argued that the summit failed to provide a detailed dismantlement process. Another 23.4% argued that North Korea will not follow through with its agreements. 17% criticized that the summit was merely “symbolic,” while another 15.3% stated that the decision to stop joint ROK-U.S. military drills was too radical.

3. Gallup. *Daily Opinion No. 310 (2nd week of June, 2018)*. Seoul: Gallup Korea.

<http://www.gallup.co.kr/gallupdb/reportContent.asp?seqNo=932&pagePos=1&selectYear=&search=&searchKeyword=> (in Korean).

4. Source: Survey of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies (Date: June 18-20, 2018).

Breakdown by age shows that a majority of South Koreans in all age groups assessed the summit was a success (see Table 1). Particularly, those in their 30s-50s were more favorable of the summit than those in their 20s and 60 or older. South Koreans in their 40s were the most optimistic, as 82.5% stated that the summit created positive outcomes (30s=77.8%, 50s=72.6%). When assessed by political ideologies, the progressives were considerably more supportive than the moderates and the conservatives. While 84.7% of progressives viewed the summit positively, moderates and conservatives were slightly less enthusiastic (moderates=67.1%, conservatives=63.2%).

Interestingly, a large number of women in their 20s did not view the summit in a positive light. South Korean women in their 20s are considered the most progressive in social, political, and security issues and are one of the strongest supporters of President Moon. Only 59.7% answered that the summit was successful. This result is a stark contrast to the 70.5% of men in their 20s who believed the summit was successful.

Table 1. Evaluation of U.S.-North Korea Summit, by Age and Political Leaning⁵ (%)

		Positive	Negative
Total		71.8	21.5
Age	20s	65.4	29.3
	30s	77.8	17.6
	40s	82.5	14.5
	50s	72.6	20.4
	60+	63.1	25.0
Ideology	Progressive	84.7	12.2
	Moderate	67.1	26.0
	Conservative	63.2	30.8

5. Source: Survey of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies (Date: June 18-20, 2018).

Denuclearization of North Korea

Perceptions on the denuclearization of North Korea became more optimistic after the summit. In June, only 10.2% believed North Korea will keep and continue to further develop its nuclear weapons program. This was a drop of 13.5% points from the figure in March 2018, when 23.7% answered that North Korea would not be denuclearized. The number of those who answered “Don’t know/Refused” also decreased by 6% points from 20.5% before the talks to 14.5% after the talks (see Table 2). The results show that both those who were critical of the chances of North Korea denuclearizing and those who were hesitant to answer declined after the summit. This indicates that South Koreans have become more optimistic about the denuclearization of North Korea following the summit.

Table 2. Prospects for the Denuclearization of North Korea⁶ (%)

	Pre-Summit (March)	Post-Summit (June)
Won't be denuclearized	23.7	10.2
Don't know/Refused	20.5	14.5
N-size	443	247

Next, we analyzed South Korean’s estimation of how long it would take North Korea to denuclearize ($n=753$). On average, South Koreans predicted that it would take 6.5 years to completely denuclearize North Korea (see Table 3). This is a decrease of more than 4 years from when people were asked this question just three months ago (10.9 years). North Korea’s decision to suspend its nuclear and missile tests and the dismantlement of the Punggye-ri nuclear test site influenced South Koreans’ perceptions. However, due to the fact that the North Korean nuclear issue hasn’t been solved for more than 20 years and involves complex political-security and technical issues, a large number of South Koreans still believe that it will take a considerable period of time to fully denuclearize North Korea.

6. Source: Surveys of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies (Date: March 21-22, 2018, June 18-20, 2018).

Opinions on how long it will take North Korea to denuclearize differed according to ages and ideological inclinations. Younger South Koreans were relatively more pessimistic than the older age groups, as those in their 20s, on average, predicted that it would take 8.5 years and 30s expected 7.5 years. Those in their 40s and older believed North Korea would fully denuclearize in less than 6 years. The age group that showed the biggest difference before and after the talks were those in their 50s. In March, they predicted that denuclearization would take 16 years, whereas they predicted only 5.7 years in June, a difference of more than 10 years. Breakdown by ideological position showed that progressives were more optimistic than the conservatives and moderates. After the summit, the progressives estimated that the denuclearization period would take 6 years, while conservatives predicted 7 and moderates, 6.8 years.

Table 3. Expected Time for the Denuclearization of North Korea⁷ (Years)

		Pre-Summit (March)	Post-Summit (June)
Total		10.9	6.5
Age	20s	12.5	8.5
	30s	9.6	7.5
	40s	9.9	5.6
	50s	16.0	5.7
	60+	5.6	5.5
Ideology	Progressive	7.7	6.0
	Moderate	15.0	6.8
	Conservative	10.0	7.0
N-size		557	753

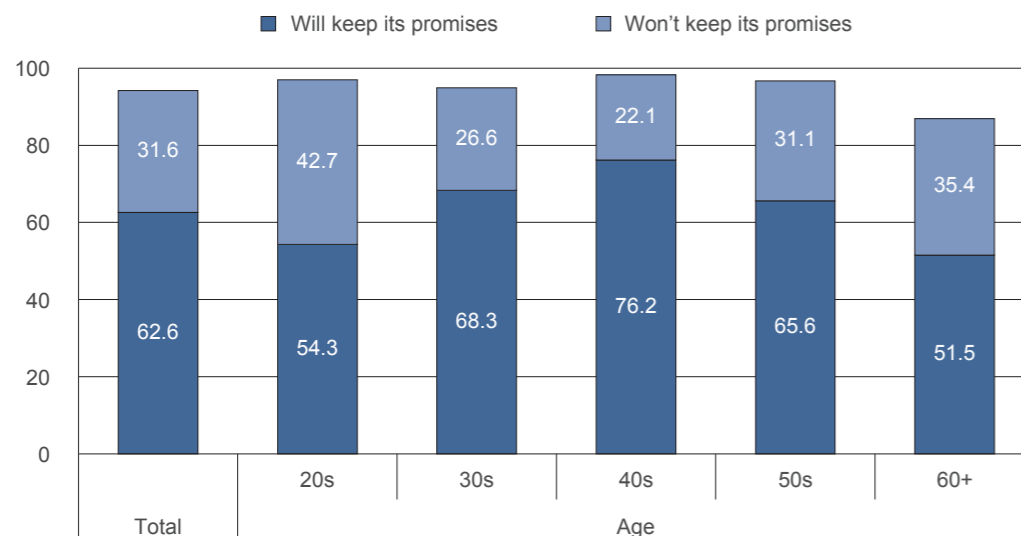
7. Source: Surveys of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies (Date: March 21-22, 2018, June 18-20, 2018).

North Korea's Willingness to Follow Through

Many experts have criticized the joint statement of President Trump and Chairman Kim for lacking specific details and measures. However, many South Koreans have evaluated the U.S.-North Korea summit as a success. It seems that the meeting between the two leaders, who only a few months ago threatened to use nuclear weapons against each other, held significant symbolic weight. It also appears that many South Koreans viewed this as a positive first step towards a peaceful resolution to the North Korean nuclear issue. In this case, we asked the extent to which North Korea would follow through with the agreements in the near future, and if they did, how well do South Koreans believe that the agreements will be implemented?

Many South Koreans were optimistic about North Korea's willingness to implement the agreements. While 62.6% of respondents predicted that North Korea will follow through, only 31.6% argued that they would not (see Figure 4). More than a majority

Figure 4. Expectations on Whether North Korea will keep its Promise to Denuclearize⁸ (%)

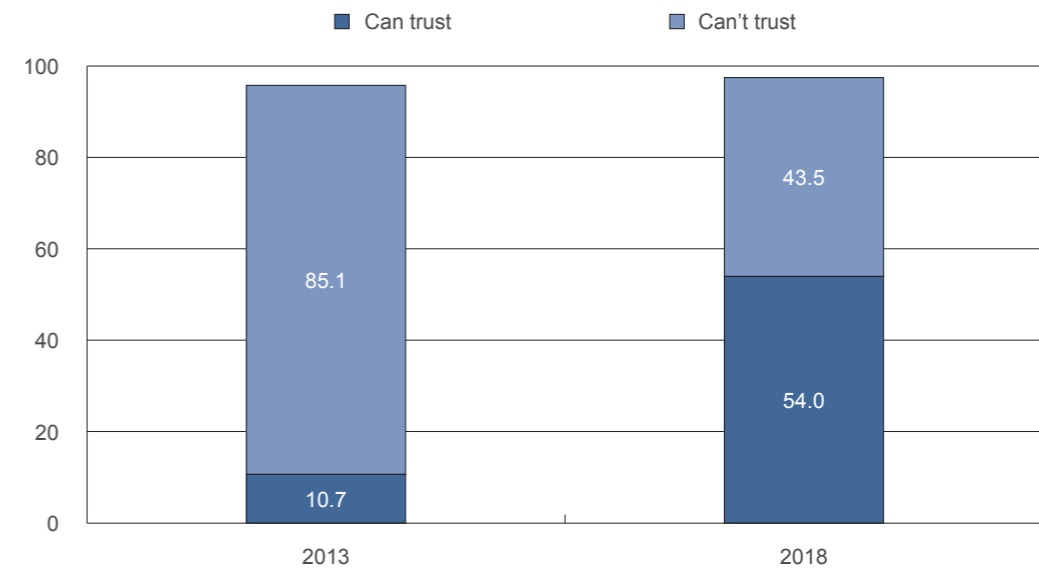


8. Source: Survey of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies (Date: June 18-20, 2018).

in all age groups were optimistic that North Korea would implement the agreements. 76.2% of respondents in their 40s said North Korea will follow through. 68.3% of those in their 30s and 65.6% of those in their 50s also agreed. However, those in their 20s (54.3%) and 60s or older (51.5%) were relatively less hopeful.

South Koreans' prospects on North Korea's willingness to implement the agreements made during the summit directly related to South Koreans' views on the North's credibility. Surprisingly, the answers to the question of whether North Korea can be trusted as a negotiating partner after the June summit was significantly different from those in 2013. In June 2018, a majority of South Koreans (54%) said North Korea can be trusted. This is 43.3% points increase compared to May 2013, when inter-Korean relations were in a stalemate (see Figure 5). However, a significant portion of the respondents (43.5%) answered that they still cannot trust North Korea. The number of people who distrust North Korea may seem large, but is still a substantial decrease of 41.6% points than in 2013 (85.1%). The improved favorability of North Korea and

Figure 5. Trusting North Korea⁹ (%)



9. Source: Surveys of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies (Date: May 8-10, 2013, June 18-20, 2018).

Kim Jong-un also positively affected North Korea's credibility. The results imply that a large number of South Koreans have gained faith in North Korea after the recent summits and acknowledge it as a trustworthy dialogue partner.

The change in overall credibility of North Korea was caused by Kim Jong-un's willingness to engage in dialogue. His appearances on the international stage greatly improved his image as well as North Korea's. The two inter-Korean summits, the closing of nuclear test sites, North Korea's announcement that it would suspend nuclear and missile tests, and finally, the U.S.-North Korea summit positively influenced the credibility of North Korea.

Important Issues after U.S.-North Korea Summit

Moon Administration's North Korea Policy

According to President Moon Jae-in's Berlin speech in 2017, the Moon administration's policy toward North Korea focuses on "reunification after peace." Since then, the government has expressed its willingness to take the "driver's seat" in resolving the North Korean nuclear issue and settling a permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula. This new North Korea policy stirred hope that inter-Korean relations would improve, but faced severe criticism, as it failed to suppress North Korea's nuclear and missile tests and provocations in 2017. However, with the two inter-Korean summits, along with the Panmunjom Declaration and the U.S.-North Korea summit, the policy is finally gaining momentum in terms of domestic support.

When asked whether they support the current administration's North Korea policy, 72.3% of South Koreans answered they were satisfied. Only 23.6% disagreed. Of the 723 respondents who answered that they are satisfied, 42.2% stated the possibility of resuming inter-Korean exchanges as the primary reason for their satisfaction. The second most chosen reason was the rising hope for resolving the North Korean nuclear issue (25.8%) (see Table 4). This displays that the perspective of how South Koreans see the North Korean issue is different from the experts at home and abroad. Unlike security experts who have set out to achieve denuclearization and CVID, many South Koreans have emphasized normalizing inter-Korean relations and stabilizing the situation

Table 4. Reasons for Satisfaction of the Moon Administration's North Korea Policy¹⁰ (%)

Responses	Percentages
The growing possibility of the reinstatement of inter-Korean exchanges	42.2
Rising hope for resolving the North Korean nuclear issue	25.8
Successfully brought about both the inter-Korean Summit and the U.S.-North Korea Summit	16.6
Agree with its overall North Korea policy	12.4
Other	1.4
N-size	723

on the Korean peninsula.

This result suggests that while South Koreans believe CVID is important, they are more interested in improving inter-Korean relations and resuming exchanges. In other words, South Koreans did not limit the "North Korea issue" to the "North Korean nuclear issue" but understood it by expanding the scope to inter-Korean relations and peace on the Korean Peninsula. This is why a large majority of South Koreans believed the summit to be successful. Although the agreement did not include CVID, many South Koreans viewed the summit as a stepping stone for peace on the Korean Peninsula.

This perception also influenced South Korean opinion on the need for a formal declaration terminating the war. An overwhelming number of South Koreans (84.6%) believed that a declaration is necessary. With the exception of those in their 60s and older, more than 80% of respondents from all age groups responded that a declaration would be necessary. As already reported by many media outlets, a declaration terminating the war is merely a political declaration that does not have any legal binding. Nevertheless, a great number of South Koreans believed that it is necessary because it would symbolically end the Korean War and give way to the next chapter of the Korean Peninsula.

10. Source: Survey of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies (Date: June 18-20, 2018).

Table 5. On the Need for a Formal Declaration Terminating the War, by Age¹¹ (%)

		Necessary	Unnecessary
Total		84.6	11.9
Age	20s	88.5	11.1
	30s	88.7	10.8
	40s	89.2	9.4
	50s	82.5	14.1
	60+	77.5	13.6

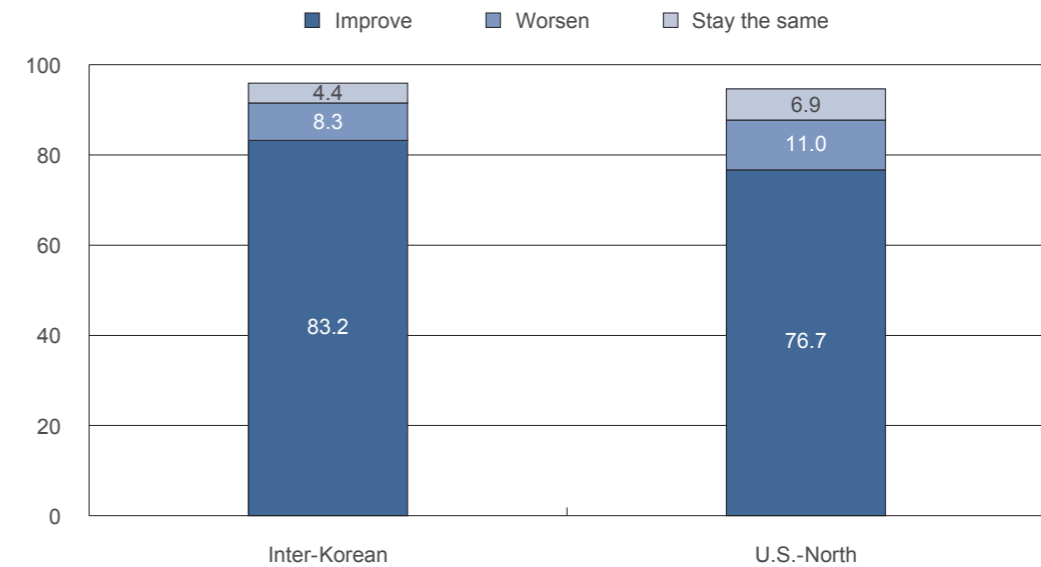
Prospects for inter-Korean Relations and U.S.-North Korea Relations

The fact that two leaders met, who have had such hostile relations, created an optimistic outlook for the future U.S.-North Korea relations. The rising favorability and credibility of North Korea among South Koreans also raises hopes for improved inter-Korean relations. How do South Koreans view the prospects for both inter-Korean and U.S.-North Korea relations?

After the summit, 83.2% of South Koreans predicted that inter-Korea relations will improve. The rate of pessimism was in the single digits (8.3%), and only 4.4% said it will not change. The U.S.-North Korea summit stirred up optimism among South Koreans, as those who have answered that they will improve increased by 16.8% points since March (66.4%). The number of those who answered that relations will deteriorate dropped nearly half to 8.3% from 16.6% in March.

Furthermore, a large majority (76.7%) also predicted that the U.S.-North Korea relations will improve. Only 11% expected it to deteriorate and another 6.9% believed it will not change. The U.S.-North Korea summit and the decision to hold high-level talks in the near future also factored into these high hopes for improved relations.

11. Source: Survey of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies (Date: June 18-20, 2018).

Figure 6. Prospects for inter-Korean Relations and U.S.-North Korea Relations¹² (%)

Policy Recommendations

As shown above, the favorability of North Korea and Kim Jong-un rose significantly in the June survey as the atmosphere of inter-Korean reconciliation was established. This was an amazing result, considering that only a few months ago the possibility of war on the Korean peninsula was real. Currently, the Moon administration is trying to stabilize inter-Korean relations without missing this opportunity and has already hosted high-level military talks and Red Cross talks with North Korea. However, the recent surveys indicate that there are factors that need to be considered.

It is undeniable that a majority of South Koreans view the current development on the Korean Peninsula positively. However, when analyzed by age groups, there are noticeable discrepancies that need a closer look. It seems that men in their 20s welcomed the atmosphere of reconciliation, but still showed caution. In general, the number of South Koreans in their 20s who viewed North Korea as a credible dialogue partner and view Kim Jong-un in a friendly manner was relatively lower than other age groups.

12. Source: Survey of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies (Date: June 18-20, 2018).

Table 6. Favorability Rating of North Korea and Kim Jong-un¹³ (0~10)

		North Korea	Kim Jong-un
Total		4.71	4.06
Age	20s	3.95	3.00
	30s	4.88	4.05
	40s	5.45	5.06
	50s	5.09	4.42
	60+	4.20	3.71

Moreover, the favorability of both North Korea and Kim Jong-un was also relatively low among the 20s and 60s or older—the two age groups who are traditionally conservatives on security issues. The favorability of North Korea among the 60s or older was 4.20 and 3.95 among the 20s. Similar patterns occurred in Kim Jong-un’s favorability rating. While all other age groups scored over the 4-point range, the 60s or older (3.71) and 20s (3.00) remained in the 3-point range. Those in their 20s were less positive than other age groups towards the U.S.-North Korea summit. 65.4% of those in their 20s believed the summit was a success, which was the second lowest, following those in their 60s or older at 63.1% (see Table 1).

Also, those in their 20s did not fully trust North Korea. 54.4% said they could not trust what North Korea says in conversation. The percentage of respondents in their 20s who answered that they could trust North Korea (44.1%) was lower than that of the 60s or older. As for the implementation of the agreement in the future, 42.7% of the respondents in their 20s stated that North Korea would not implement the agreement (versus 35.4% of those over 60s, see Figure 4).

The “security conservatism” of the younger age group was also revealed in their prospects for the denuclearization deadline. Among the respondents ($n=753$), the estimated time

13. Source: Survey of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies (Date: June 18-20, 2018).

Table 7. On the Decision to Halt ROK-U.S. Joint Military Exercises¹⁴ (%)

		Agree	Disagree
Total		51.9	44.2
Age	20s	39.1	58.4
	30s	57.9	41.1
	40s	61.7	36.9
	50s	58.1	37.8
	60+	43.9	47.2

for denuclearization of North Korea was 6.5 years on average, while those in their 20s estimated it would take 8.5 years (see Table 3). It was the longest timespan across all age groups. They were also the most negative about stopping the ROK-U.S. joint military exercises (see Table 7). 39.1% of the 20s agreed to suspend the ROK-U.S. joint training, the lowest among age groups, and those responding to the opposite were the highest at 58.4%. The other security conservatives, those over 60s, also held negative views of suspending the exercises (43.9% in favor to 47.2% disagreeing). So although a peace mood has been created on the Korean Peninsula through the continuous summits and the measures for the denuclearization of North Korea, the younger age group has not seen the situation entirely optimistic.

The distrust of North Korea from South Koreans in their 20s is attributed to their fear of tensions on the Korean peninsula caused by North Korea’s armed provocations. According to *2017 Asan Annual Survey*, 57.4% of the 20s believed war would occur on the Korean peninsula. It was the second highest rate following those over 60 years old (64.4%). Of those, 24.2% stated the reason is because North Korea wants to unify the peninsula by force. Also, of those in their 20s, 62.7% said North Korea would use nuclear weapons if war broke out. It is important to note that the 20s predicted a higher possibility of war than any age group, except those aged 60 or older, and that their

14. Source: Survey of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies (Date: June 18-20, 2018).

reason was North Korea's will to forcefully unify the peninsula.

The security conservatism of young people has been covered several times in our survey reports. Among this group, the security conservatism of men was especially evident, which seems to have been affected by their military service experience which helped to form their negative perception of North Korea. Recently, the mood on the Korean Peninsula shifted from confrontation to reconciliation. The Moon administration should pay close attention to the views of North Korea from those in their 20s to continue this effort. In order to strengthen their confidence in dealing with North Korea, humanitarian, cultural and sports exchanges can be one of answers.

Conclusion

Many experts criticized the U.S.-North Korea summit for its lack of detailed plans and schedules. However, South Koreans put more emphasis on the meeting itself and assessed the summit as a success. Many, like President Trump, viewed the summit as a positive first step to the complete denuclearization of North Korea. After the summit, South Koreans' favorability of President Trump and Chairman Kim improved greatly with hope that U.S.-North Korea relations will improve. Also, many South Koreans believed North Korea will keep their promises this time and believed inter-Korean relations will improve.

However, there has been no visible progress since the summit. It will take some time to see actual results, depending on how smoothly the follow-up discussions go. The declaration terminating the Korean War and the signing of a peace treaty are also likely to be delayed. The current peaceful mood on the Korean Peninsula has increased the favorability of both North Korea and Kim Jong-un, but it would need progress from the North for these changed views to be maintained. If there is no tangible progress in peace talks and if North Korea fails to follow through with its agreement, it is likely that South Koreans' opinions will quickly change again.

It is worth noting that the current support for the Moon government's North Korea policy has been influenced by diplomatic events such as inter-Korean and U.S.-North Korea talks. In particular, Kim Jong-un's charm offensive before and after the summit

was a major factor in reversing the perception of South Koreans toward North Korea, which has important implications. In the future, the government should look for concrete and substantive steps to institutionalize the peace mood on the Korean peninsula. In addition, President Moon should play a more active role during negotiations with North Korea and strengthen cooperation with neighboring countries in order to maintain momentum for the stabilization of the Korean peninsula.

In the long run, the government must also address and resolve the issue of the negative perception of North Korea among the South Korean youth. Young people, accustomed to North Korean armed provocations and limited exchanges, have strong feelings towards them, which need to be rectified if progress is to be made. The controversy surrounding the Moon administration's decision to field a unified ice hockey team at the Pyeongchang Olympics illustrates how the South Korean youth are uninterested in emphasizing the common ethnic identity with the North. As the expectations for a new Northeast Asia and Korean peninsula are rising, the Moon administration should prepare policy measures to change the perceptions of North Korea by younger generation who are going to be the players in the future.

Survey Methodology

Asan Poll

Sample size: 1,000 respondents over the age of 19

Margin of error: +3.1% at the 95% confidence level

Survey method: Random Digit Dialing (RDD) for mobile and landline phones

Period: See footnote of each figure/table

Organization: Research & Research

2017 Asan Annual Survey

Sample size: 1,200 respondents over the age of 19

Margin of error: $\pm 2.8\%$ at the 95% confidence level

Survey method: RDD for mobile and landline telephones and online survey

Period: October 19 – November 14, 2017

Organization: Kantar Public

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R E P O R T

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