

ASAN REPORT

Fundamentals of South Korean Public Opinion on Foreign Policy and National Security

J. JAMES KIM, KANG CHUNGKU, HAM GEON HEE

SEPTEMBER 2021



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The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

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Executive Summary

Outsiders often marvel at the mercurial nature of South Korean mass voting behavior. It was only a year ago that the ruling progressive party swept the general election by gaining a filibuster-proof majority in the National Assembly. In this year's local by-election for open mayoral seats in the two largest metropolitan areas, however, nearly twice as many voters supported the opposition conservative candidates in what turned out to be a referendum on the ruling party. Similar swings can also be observed in South Korean public opinion. Our own survey indicates, for instance, that there was over 37.3%p swing in South Korean public assessment of inter-Korean relations between 2018 and 2019. While these types of dramatic shifts are not necessarily the norm, they raise questions about how we should approach our understanding of the South Korean public. In particular, what explains South Korean public opinion? Can we discern any systematic patterns? If so, what are the underlying factors at work?

This report aims to identify and explain fundamental trends in South Korean public attitudes about foreign policy and national security. Our topical choice is driven by several factors. In theory, public opinion on these matters should be trivial if the age-old adage holds true that "politics will cease at the water's edge." This, however, is not necessarily the case in South Korea. Although we cannot speak for all matters of foreign policy and national security, there is ample evidence suggesting deep meaningful differences in South Korean public opinion on matters related to, for instance, North Korea or the United States. It would be remiss of us to ignore these divisions given their consequential impact on politics and policy. Even more importantly, recent developments in the international arena suggest that we may have reached a critical turning point in great power relations and alliance formation; hence, the timing of this study is most apropos to review whether the South Korean public is keeping pace with these changes.

Established wisdom in public opinion research teaches us that collective policy preferences tend to be rational, stable, coherent, and mutually consistent. If there are any noticeable changes in collective policy preference, they tend to be sensible and predictable. For instance, the public seems to hold a very favorable view of the US and sees the US as an important ally for maintaining regional peace and stability. This support appears robust even after four years of difficult bilateral relations under the Trump Presidency in Washington. Even though changing circumstances may necessitate some adjustments

in ROK-US alliance, South Koreans today seem to favor the continuation of this relationship even after unification. The approach on China is more cautious perhaps reasonably so given the precarious history of bilateral relations dating back to the Chosun era. Currently, there appears to be a genuine concern about the potential threat that China will pose to South Korea's national interest. This is only reasonable given how South Koreans feel about their homeland's relationship to the US. While South Koreans do not seem to perceive Japan as much of a threat compared to China, they still hold a negative view of this neighboring country given the checkered history intermingled with issues of national identity. North Korea is clearly a significant concern for many South Koreans but there is broad agreement that addressing this challenge is more difficult and there are differences of opinion among subgroups about how to deal with these problems. For instance, our data shows that there are notable differences across ideology, gender, and even age. Conservative, male, and younger as well as older cohorts tend to be more skeptical of Pyongyang and favor a more hawkish stance against North Korea. Progressive, female, and middle-aged cohorts tend to favor a more dovish policy.

Our findings also show that breaking events coupled with elite discourse can also shape public opinion. For instance, South Korean public opinion about North Korea was more favorable during engagement in 2018 but less so after the failed Hanoi Summit in early 2019. Of course, the impact of elite framing and current events may depend on the accessibility and cost of information. This explains why broad shifts in the mood of South Korean public opinion was uniform across all subgroups. For instance, 84.1% of the respondents characterized inter-Korean relations in 2020 as "bad" while only about 63% thought the same in 2018. Part of this was due to the events that transpired between 2018 and 2020. However, we saw more swings (+50%p) in sentiments among respondents aged between 20 and 50. There was less change among older cohorts (i.e., 50s: 37.8→84.9%= 47.1%p, 60s: 51.3→86.9%= 35.6%p). Part of this was due to the fact that individuals in the lower age category had higher hopes about the success of diplomacy. The failed Hanoi talks essentially led to greater disappointment. In short, what this goes to show is that elite framing and current events in combination with individual characteristics, such as ideology and capacity to process information, can shape opinion formation and change.

Aside from this, some more detailed findings from this report are as follows:

- Nearly 77% of surveyed respondents expressed interest in unification. 53.5% stated that the speed with which to move forward on unification should be adjusted and more than 1 in 4 (25.5%) stated that there is no need to rush unification.
- Views about unification were tempered by expectations about its cost as 63% of those surveyed stated that they anticipated South Korea's post-unification economy to be worse off. The respondents stating that they are not willing to pay for unification increased from 20.6% in 2011 to 45.5% in 2020.
- When asked how the respondents perceived North Korea, 27.9% said "neighbor," 25.7% stated "enemy," 11.5% said "stranger," and 21.1% said "one of us."
- Nearly 79% of those surveyed stated that South Korea should provide economic aid to North Korea only if Pyongyang changes its behavior. 21.3% stated that aid should continue unconditionally.
- 94.9% of those surveyed agreed that the human rights situation in North Korea was serious and 78.3% stated that this issue should be addressed immediately.
- Over 57% of the respondents stated that they assessed the likelihood of war with North Korea to be low. Over 72% of those surveyed stated that South Korean military cannot deter North Korea in the event of a contingency on the Korean Peninsula.
- Nearly 95% of South Koreans believe that North Korea possesses a working nuclear capability and over 93% believes that North Korea will not abandon this capability.
- Nearly 70% of the respondents supported developing indigenous nuclear capability and over 61% supported reintroducing tactical nuclear weapons.
- With respect to the ROK-US alliance, over 78% supported either maintaining or strengthening the bilateral relationship. Over 86% supported keeping the alliance even after unification.

- With regards to US Forces Korea, over 70% supported either maintaining or increasing the troop level.
- On burden sharing, over 41% supported maintaining the current level of South Korean contribution to the Special Measures Agreement.
- On wartime operational control (OPCON) transfer, 42.5% favored condition-based transfer while 27.2% favored schedule-based transfer.
- 25.9% of the respondents saw China as a significant security threat after North Korea (55.8%). 66.7% named China as the greatest threat to South Korea after unification.
- 71.5% of survey respondents assessed Japan's influence in the region to be negative.
- Only 11.3% of the respondents stated that Japan is a national security threat. 23.1% saw Japan as a potential security threat after unification.
- South Koreans are concerned about global issues, such as climate change, cybersecurity, humanitarian aid, and public health, among others.

Together, what these findings reveal are important intricacies of South Korean public opinion on matters related to foreign policy and national security. While these details may not necessarily drive policy, they reveal important truths about the political challenges associated with navigating a foreign policy that runs against South Korean public sentiment. This knowledge will prove especially useful as South Korea winds up for a presidential election in 2022. Although foreign policy rarely dictates the outcome of the election, how each candidate positions themselves on these issues may contribute to their rise or demise.

1. Introduction¹

Outsiders often marvel at the mercurial nature of South Korean mass voting behavior. It was only a year ago that the ruling progressive party swept the general election by gaining a filibuster-proof majority in the National Assembly. In this year's local by-election for open mayoral seats in the two largest metropolitan areas, however, nearly two in three voters supported the opposition conservative candidates in what turned out to be a referendum on the ruling party. Similar swings can also be observed in South Korean public opinion. Our own survey indicates, for instance, that there was over 37.3%p swing in South Korean public assessment of inter-Korean relations between 2018 and 2019. While these types of dramatic shifts are not necessarily the norm, they raise questions about how we should approach our understanding of the South Korean public. In particular, what explains South Korean public opinion? Can we discern any systematic patterns? If so, what are the underlying factors at work?

This report aims to identify and explain fundamental trends in South Korean public attitudes about foreign policy and national security. We have chosen these topics for several reasons. In theory, public opinion on these matters should be trivial if the age-old adage holds true that “politics will cease at the water's edge.” This, however, is not necessarily the case in South Korea. Although we cannot speak for all matters of foreign policy and national security, there is ample evidence suggesting deep meaningful differences in South Korean public opinion on these issues.² It would be remiss of us to ignore these divisions given their consequential impact on politics and policy.³ Even more importantly, recent developments in the international arena suggest that we may have reached a critical turning point in great power relations and alliance formation;⁴ hence, the timing of this study is most apropos to review whether the South Korean public is keeping pace with these changes.

Established wisdom in public opinion research teaches us that collective policy preferences tend to be rational, stable, coherent, and mutually consistent.⁵ If there are any noticeable changes in collective policy preference, they tend to be sensible and predictable. For instance, the public seems to hold a very favorable view of the US and sees the US as an important ally for maintaining regional peace and stability. The support appears robust even after four years of difficult bilateral relations under the Trump presidency in Washington. Even though changing circumstances may necessitate some adjustments in ROK-US alliance, South Koreans today seem to favor the continuation of this relationship even after unification. The approach on China is more cautious perhaps reasonably so given the precarious history of bilateral relations dating back to the Chosun era. Currently, there appears to be a genuine concern about the potential threat that China will pose to South Korea's national interest. This is only reasonable given how South Koreans feel about their homeland's relationship to the US. While South Koreans do not seem to perceive Japan as much of a threat compared to China, they still hold a negative view of this neighboring country given the checkered history intermingled with issues of national identity. North Korea is clearly a significant concern for many South Koreans but there is broad agreement that addressing this challenge is more difficult and there are differences of opinion among subgroups about how to deal with these problems. For instance, our data shows that there are notable differences across ideology, gender, and even age. Conservative, male,

1. The authors would like to thank Choi Kang, Cha Du Hyeogn, Scott Snyder, and Park Jiyoung for helpful comments and feedbacks on earlier versions of this report. All standard caveats apply.
2. 손열, 오승희, 이영현. 2019. “여론으로 보는 문재인 정부 외교안보 정책 중간평가: 다면적 위협 인식에 대응하는 복합 전략 펼쳐야.” 『EAI 이슈브리핑』; 이내영. 2011. “한국사회 이념갈등의 원인: 국민들의 양극화 인가, 정치엘리트들의 양극화인가?” 『한국정당학회보』 10(2): 251-287. 정한울. 2020. “한국인이 보는 사회갈등구조의 변화와 정치/이념 양극화의 실상.” 『EAI 위킹페이퍼』; 차정미. 2017. “한국의 대중국 인식에 대한 이념의 영향.” 『아세아연구』 60(2): 46-80.

3. John H. Aldrich. 1995. *Why Parties? The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in America*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL; James A. Stimson, Michael B. MacKuen, and Robert S. Erikson. 1995. “Dynamic Representation.” *American Political Science Review*. 89: 543-65; Paul Burstein. 2003. “The Impact of Public Opinion on Public Policy: A Review and an Agenda.” *Political Research Quarterly*. 56(1): 29-40; Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro. 1983. “Effects of Public Opinion on Policy.” *American Political Science Review*. 77: 175-90. 박영환, 박수진. 2014. “여론과 대외정책 인식: 한미 FTA 사례.” 『의정연구』 20(1): 62-85.
4. Hal Brands, Oriana Skylar Mastro, Alina Polyakova, William C. Wohlforth. 2017. “How are the Dynamics of Great Power Relations Changing?,” *The Future of the Global Order Colloquium Fall 2017*. Perry World House: Pennsylvania; Stephen J. Hadley. 2014. “America, China and the ‘New Model of Great Power Relations,’” *Speech by the 2014 Telstra Distinguished International Fellow*. The Lowy Institute; 2017. “National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” *The White House*: Washington DC.
5. Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro. 1992. *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL.

and younger as well as older cohorts tend to be more skeptical of Pyongyang and favor a more hawkish stance against North Korea. Progressive, female, and middle-aged cohorts tend to favor a more dovish policy.

Our findings also show that breaking events coupled with elite discourse can also shape public opinion.⁶ For instance, South Korean public opinion about North Korea was more favorable during engagement in 2018 but less so after the failed Hanoi Summit in early 2019. Of course, the impact of elite framing and current events may depend on the accessibility and cost of information.⁷ This explains why broad shifts in the mood of South Korean public opinion was uniform across all subgroups. For instance, 84.1% of the respondents characterized inter-Korean relations in 2020 as “bad” while only about 63% thought the same in 2018. Part of this was due to the events that transpired between 2018 and 2020. However, we saw more swings (+50%p) in sentiments among respondents aged between 20 and 50. There was less change among older cohorts (i.e., 50s: 37.8→84.9%= 47.1%p, 60s: 51.3→86.9%= 35.6%p). Part of this was due to the fact that individuals in the lower age category had higher hopes about the success of diplomacy. The failed Hanoi talks essentially led to greater disappointment. In short, what this shows is that elite framing and current events in combination with individual characteristics, such as ideology and capacity to process information, can shape opinion formation and change.⁸

This report is divided into four sections. In the following section, we explore South Korean public attitudes about issues directly relevant to the Korean Peninsula. In particular, we take a close look at the issues of North Korea and ROK-US alliance. We track how South Korean public perceptions about unification, inter-Korean relations, North Korean security threat, and ROK-US alliance have changed over time. Our findings show

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6. Philip Converse. 1962. “Information flow and stability of partisan attitudes,” *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 26: 578-99; William J. McGuire. 1969. “The nature of attitudes and attitude change,” In G. Lindzey and E. Aronson (eds.), *Handbook of Social Psychology* (2nd Ed). Addison-Wesley: Reading, MA. 136-314.
 7. Matthew A. Baum and Philip B. K. Potter. 2019. “Media, Public Opinion, and Foreign Policy in the Age of Trump.” *Journal of Politics*. 81(2): 747-56.
 8. John R. Zaller. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge University Press: New York, NY.

- Nearly 77% of surveyed respondents expressed interest in unification. 53.5% stated that the speed with which to move forward on unification should be adjusted and more than 1 in 4 stated that there is no need to rush unification.
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- On wartime operational control (OPCON) transfer, 42.5% favored condition-based transfer while 27.2% favored schedule-based transfer.

In the next section, we examine trends in South Korean public opinion about regional security matters, such as China, US-China competition, and Korea-Japan relations. Our findings here show

- 25.9% of the respondents saw China as a significant security threat after North Korea (55.8%). 66.7% named China as the greatest threat to South Korea after unification.
- 71.5% of survey respondents assessed Japan's influence in the region to be negative.
- Only 11.3% of the respondents stated that Japan is a national security threat. 23.1% saw Japan as a potential security threat after unification.

Finally, we devote the penultimate section to a discussion about South Korean mass attitudes on global issues, such as climate change, cybersecurity, humanitarian aid, and public health, among others. Findings here show that South Koreans are concerned about global issues, maybe more so than other issues mentioned above. In the final section, we will discuss the findings from each section and conclude with policy implications that can be derived from our findings.

2. Korean Peninsula

In this section, we tackle two sets of questions related to the Korean Peninsula, including North Korea and ROK-US alliance. Although both issues have implications for the region and world, they have more direct consequences for the Korean Peninsula. Subsequently, it is only reasonable for the public to form more informed opinions about these matters compared to other issues, such as the Iran nuclear negotiations or Ukraine-Russia standoff.

2.1 North Korea

South Korean public opinion on North Korea not only provides a useful insight into South Korea's motivations behind its North Korea policy but broader ramification of choices that policymakers will have to deal with regarding North Korea and inter-Korean relations. Although North Korea is the single most important national security concern in South Korea, there are many dimensions to this problem and each require separate treatment. In this section, we identify and discuss four issues: unification, inter-Korean relations, threat perception, and South Korean policy on North Korea. The unification question speaks to the broader nature of the end game on inter-Korean relations. Do South Koreans support or reject unification? If the former, what type of unification do they prefer – unification by absorption or confederation? Ultimately, the survey tries to assess South Korean intentions and preferences about the long run consequences of the relationship among two Koreas. An insight into South Korean public attitude about unification will provide important clues about the political constraints for policymakers when it comes to managing the North Korean problem.

Questions related to South Korean perception about North Korea speaks to the more immediate concerns related to inter-Korean relations. Do South Koreans perceive North Korea as a neighbor or adversary? Is economic cooperation with North Korea desirable? Next, we explore how South Koreans think about the North Korean security threat. Although there are numerous expert assessments about the North Korean threat and capabilities, how South Koreans perceive this threat provides an important insight into the political constraints on managing this threat. This leads us to the final question about what to do about North Korea. Should South Korea focus on deterrence or engagement or a mix of both? What do South Koreans think about the possibility of

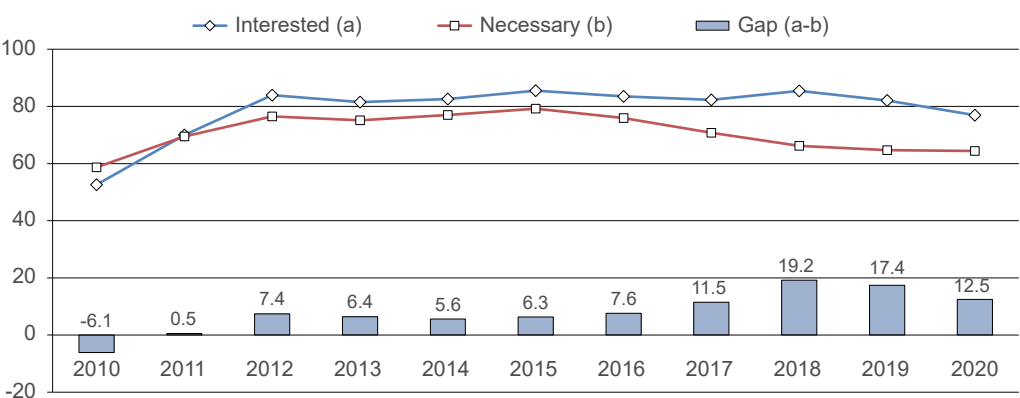
economic cooperation with North Korea? Do South Koreans care about human rights in North Korea?

2.1.1 Unification

Unification is an important policy goal laid out by successive South Korean administrations since the Korean War and the South Korean government has established a separate ministry devoted to carry out this objective since 1998. It clearly occupies an important place in the South Korean government’s policy but what does the South Korean public think about this issue and has it changed over time?

When we examined the broader public interest in unification, nearly 77% (76.9%) expressed interest. This is not out of the ordinary given the consistently high level of interest in unification over time (2015: 85.5%, 2017: 82.3%). Our data shows that the South Korean public’s interest in unification was at its highest in 2018 (85.4%) when Pyeong Chang Winter Olympics was held in February and the US and North Korea held their first summit in June (See Figure 1). Meanwhile, public interest in unification was at its lowest in 2010 marked by the sinking of Cheonan and artillery strike on Yeonpyeong Island.

Figure 1. South Korean Interest and Necessity of Unification⁹ (%)



9. Source: Asan Annual Survey (2010~2020).

There were interesting intergenerational differences with older respondents expressing greater interest in unification than younger respondents. This is only natural given that the older generations tend to have personally lived through the Korean War and are more likely to maintain personal ties to North Korea. This is not the case for younger South Koreans. Nonetheless, the historical legacy of Korean War is deeply engrained among all Koreans. Hence, it is not all that surprising to see more than 7 in 10 Koreans expressing strong interest in unification.

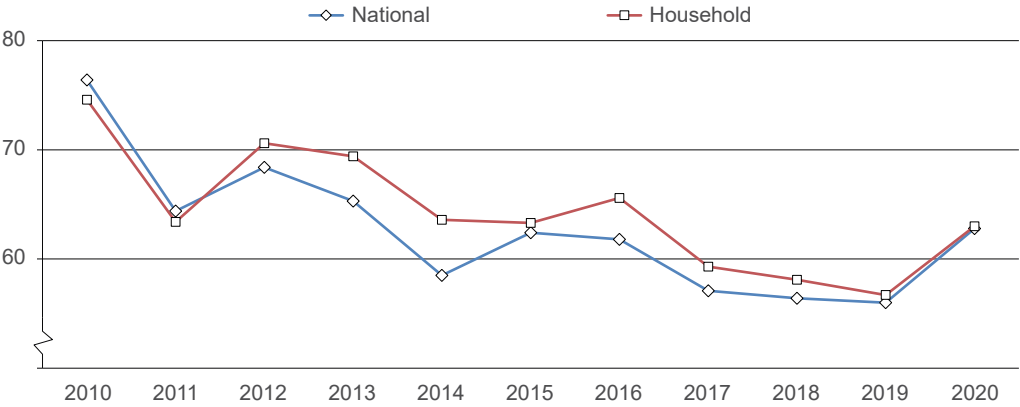
The opinion was more split when respondents were asked about the way in which unification ought to proceed. For instance, when asked whether the respondent preferred a confederal framework that permitted local autonomy as opposed to unification by absorption into South or North, the answer was generally split among those that preferred a confederal structure (52.1%) as opposed to unification under a South Korean political system (45.9%). Ideological orientation seemed to matter. For instance, more self-identified conservatives tended to prefer unification by absorption (55.5%) in place of confederation (40.4%). Moderates appeared genuinely split between the two while progressives preferred a confederation (60.6%) over absorption (38.3%).

With regards to timing, nearly 54% (53.5%) of the respondents stated that the speed with which to move forward with unification should be adjusted. This was especially true among respondents in their 40s (59.4%) and 50s (56.4%). More than 1 in 4 (25.5%) stated that there is no need to rush unification. Over 10% (10.1%) of the respondents answered that the two Koreas should never reunify and 10.9% stated that they wanted unification to occur as soon as possible. Together, these findings suggest that there is little to no urgency on the question of timing of unification.

2.1.1a The Economic Impact of Unification

The above views appear to be driven in part by the individual’s anticipated outlook on post-unification economy. When asked whether the respondent expected their household economic situation to be better or worse after unification, 63% held a negative outlook. Similar patterns were also observed with respect to the macro-economic outlook with approximately 63% (62.8%) expecting South Korea’s post-unification economy to be *worse off* ($r=0.936$). While this view trended downward over time, this figure has never been below 50% since 2010 (See Figure 2).

Figure 2. Economic Impact of Unification¹⁰ (%)



Female respondents (67.5%) as well as those aged under 40 (20s: 69%, 30s: 67.1%) and 60 and over (69.1%) were especially pessimistic about their economic prospects post-unification. Conservatives (75.9%) and moderates (66.9%) were also more pessimistic than progressives (50.5%). Household income also appeared to be negatively correlated with negative outlook among those earning less than KRW 4 million being more negative (Less than KRW 2 million: 68.4%, KRW 2~4 million: 67.7%) about the economic impact of unification in comparison to those earning more than this amount.

The connection between unification and economic outlook became even clearer when we asked the respondents whether they would support unification even if it would result in negative economic consequences. Nearly 60% answered that there was no need to rush unification if it required significant sacrifice at the personal (58.9%) or national level (60.7%). Women and conservative respondents were especially sensitive to the economic consequences of unification with over 60~65% of both sets of respondents stating that they did not think it is ideal to rush unification if there are significant negative economic consequences. In sum, these findings suggest that while most of the South Korean public supports the idea of unification, they do not wish to go through this process if it requires significant economic sacrifice.

We also examined South Korean public’s propensity to bear the cost of unification by asking the survey respondents to state the amount that they are willing to contribute

10. Source: Asan Annual Survey (2010~2020).

towards unification on an annual basis. The average cost tolerance for unification on a per individual basis was about KRW 400,000, which is approximately USD \$363 (KRW 1,100 = USD \$1). We observed significant gaps across gender, ideology, and income with male, progressive, and high income earners (> KRW 6 million) tending to have higher cost tolerance than female, conservative, and low income earners (< KRW 2 million).

Table 1. Willingness to Pay Unification Tax¹¹ (%)

	2011 (a)	2020 (b)	Net changes (b-a)
Not willing to pay	20.6	45.5	+24.9%p
Less than 10,000 Won	10.0	15.4	+5.5%p
10,001~100,000 Won	34.5	16.7	-17.8%p
100,001~500,000 Won	20.5	8.1	-12.4%p
500,001 Won+	14.5	14.3	-0.2%p

We also observed that propensity to pay for unification is decreased over time with percentage of people stating that they are “not willing to pay” for unification increase from 20.6% to 45.5% between 2011 and 2020 (See Table 1). We checked to see if there was any connection between propensity to pay for unification and economic outlook. We found that there is weak evidence for this linkage after controlling for ideology, age, and general attitudes on unification.¹²

When asked to name the single most important concern associated with unification nearly 30% (29.3%) expressed their worry about the “economic costs of unification.” “ideological differences” (21.2%), “wealth gap between North and South” (13.5%) as well as “cultural differences” (13.3%) and “political division” (12.3%) were also identified as important concerns. When asked to name the potential benefits of unification, 34.4% stated that “decreased likelihood of conflict” followed by “access to North Korea’s natural resources” (16.8%), “technology/labor cooperation” (14.1%), and “territorial expansion” (11.9%).

11. Source: Asan Annual Survey (2011, 2020).

12. To be more precise, more progressive individuals were more willing to pay higher taxes for unification; but people who thought that there was no need to rush unification tended to not favor unification tax.

Together these findings suggest that the South Korean perspective on unification is conditioned by varying expectations about the socioeconomic consequences of unification. When we compared the respondent’s views about the economy and his/her household wealth, they were significantly more pessimistic today than in the past. For instance, when asked how South Korea’s economy has fared over the past year, nearly 78% (77.9%) of the respondents answered that the economy has gotten worse in 2020. In 2011, only 58.3% of the respondents stated the same (See Table 2). When asked about the respondent’s income and household wealth, nearly 58% (57.9%) of the respondents answered that the situation is worse today than in the previous year; the same figure was only 50.3% in 2011.

Table 2. Assessment of Economic Condition Over Past Year¹³ (%)

	National Economy		Household Economy	
	2011	2020	2011	2020
Worsen	58.3	77.9	50.3	57.9
Stay the Same	36.1	16.3	43.8	36.6
Improve	5.6	5.8	5.9	5.5

Clearly, opinions about unification are conditioned by South Korean people’s perception about the economy. What this implies is that the government must address South Korea’s economic problems (i.e., rising home price, growing household debt, youth unemployment, and income inequality) if it wants to get more serious about unification.

History suggests that policy commitments will be fleeting and inconsistent without strong political will. Survey evidence suggests that ideological and intergenerational differences can stand in the way of forming a robust national consensus on unification. Without radical changes to South Korean government’s approach to unification, this policy question will remain as a difficult puzzle for policymakers.

2.1.2 Inter-Korean Relations

While unification may be more of a long-term proposition for the South Korean

13. Source: Asan Annual Survey (2011, 2020).

public, there is more immediate interest surrounding the management of inter-Korean relations. After the failure of Hanoi talks in February 2019, Pyongyang has moved swiftly to break off diplomatic ties and adopted a more confrontational rhetoric towards South Korea and the United States. By all measures, the level of interaction between the two Koreas experienced a significant decline after 2018. The Ministry of Unification’s data indicates that the number of inter-Korean dialogue declined from a recent high of 36 in 2018 to zero in 2019 and 2020 (See Figure 3). Cross-border flow of goods and people also decreased significantly since 2018 as well¹⁴ (See Figures 4 and 5).

Figure 3. Inter-Korea Dialogues by Type, 2002~2020¹⁵ (Number of Meetings)

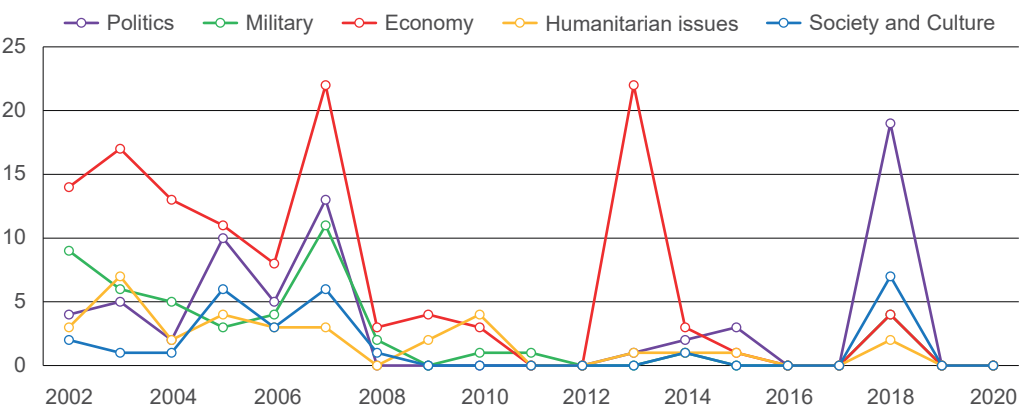


Figure 4. Cross-Border Movement of People, 2003~2020¹⁶ (Persons)

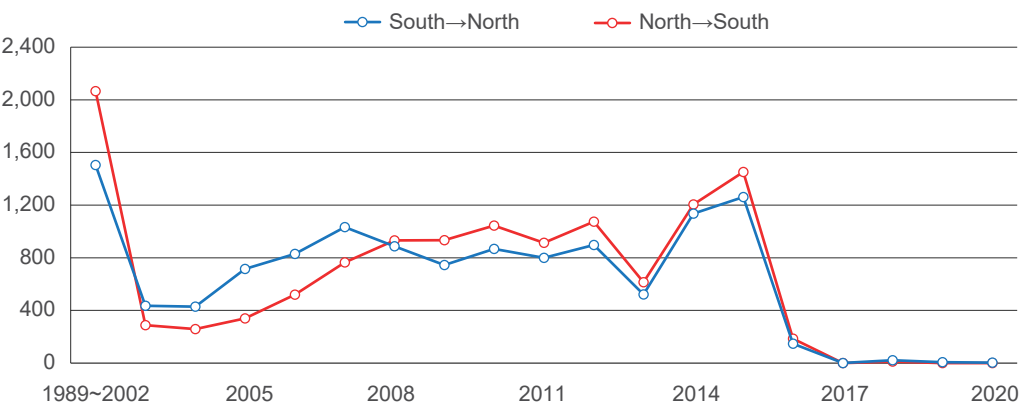
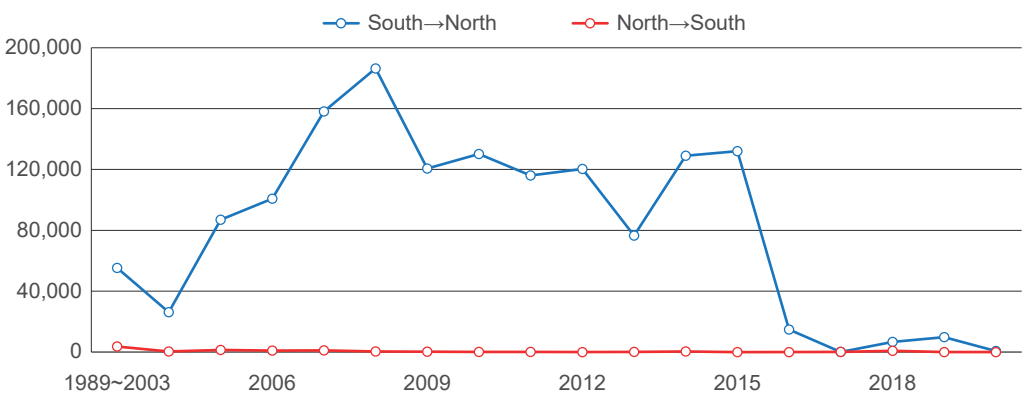


Figure 5. Trade Volume, 1989~2020¹⁷ (USD Millions)



How do these developments impact South Korean public opinion about inter-Korean relations? When asked whether the survey respondent saw North Korea as a “neighbor,” “enemy,” “one of us” or “stranger” nearly 28% (27.9%) answered that they perceived North Korea as a “neighbor.” Approximately 26% (25.7%) said “enemy” and 11.5% stated “stranger.” Overall, nearly 50% characterized North Korea as either a “neighbor” or “one of us” while approximately 37% characterized North Korea as an “enemy” or “stranger.” Ideology appears to have played a decisive role as progressives tended to use friendlier characterization while conservatives were more adversarial in their view.

While the data seems to suggest that approximately half of respondents characterized North Korea favorably, cross temporal analysis suggests that public perception about North Korea has gotten worse in 2020 compared to previous years. For instance, the percentage of respondents with a favorable view of North Korea edged up to 67.5% in 2014. It ranged from 46.4% to 64.2% during 2011~2020 (See Figure 6). 49% of the respondents characterizing North Korea as “one of us” or “neighbor” in 2020 is low compared to all previous data going back to 2012. 37.2% of the respondents characterizing North Korea as either a “stranger” or “enemy” is an all-time high.

14. This data also includes cross-border flows of people and goods to Kaesong Industrial Complex and Mt. Geumgang when access to these areas were possible.
15. Source: Republic of Korea, Ministry of Unification.
16. Source: Republic of Korea, Ministry of Unification.
17. Source: Republic of Korea, Ministry of Unification.

Figure 6. Perception of North Korea¹⁸ (%)

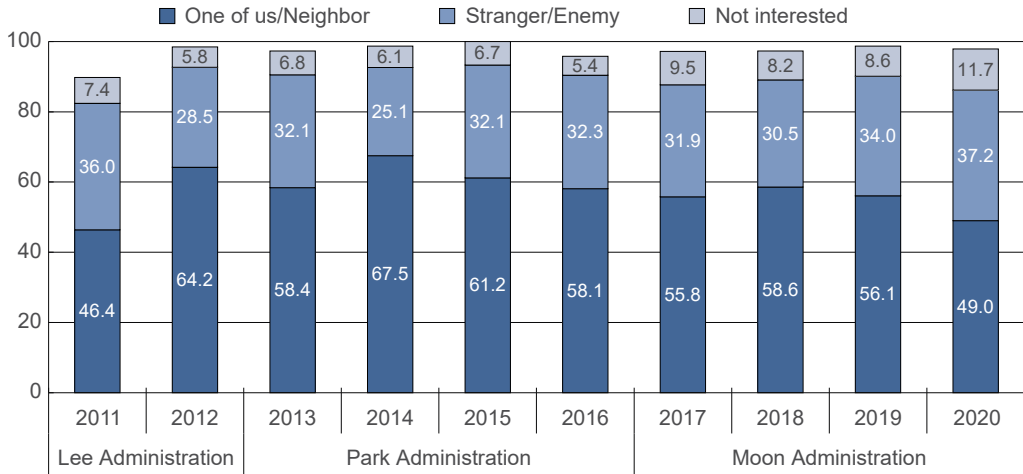
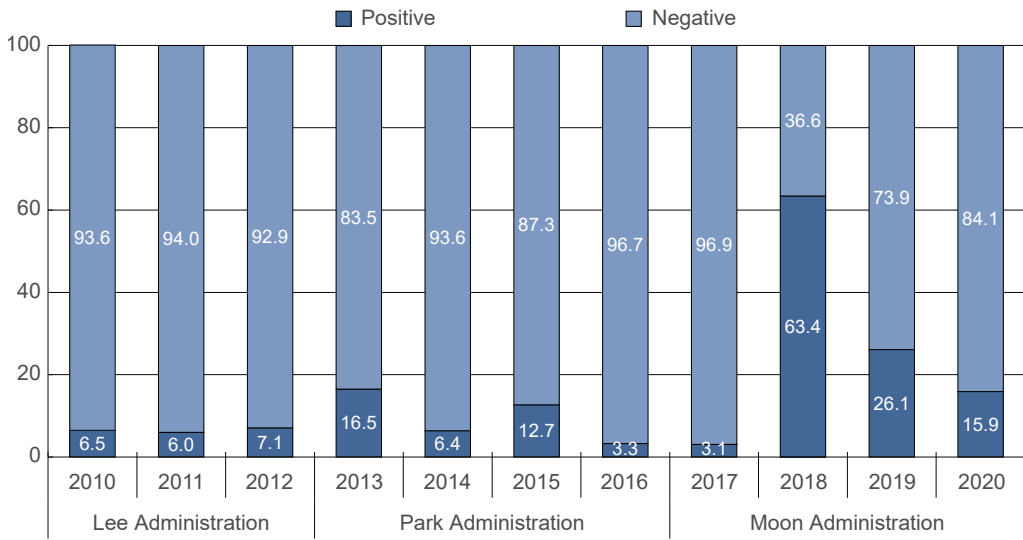


Figure 7. Views on Inter-Korean Relations¹⁹ (%)



18. Source: Asan Annual Survey (2011~2020). We asked respondents how they view North Korea. And the responses were recorded into two categories such as friendly (either ‘one of us’ or ‘neighbor’) and hostile (either ‘stranger’ or ‘enemy’). And Figure 6 here updated Figure 1 in the following *Issue Brief*: J. Kim, K. Kim, and C. Kang. 2018. “South Korean Youth’s Perceptions of North Korea and Unification,” *Issue Brief*. The Asan Institute for Policy Studies: Seoul.
19. Source: Asan Annual Survey (2010~2020).

A better way to measure South Korean sentiment about inter-Korean relations is to be more direct about this question. As shown in Figure 7, 84.1% of the respondents saw inter-Korean relations as being “bad.” Nearly 16% (15.9%) stated that they thought North-South relations was “good.” This is a marked reversal from 2018 when only about 63% (63.4%) of the respondents stated that inter-Korean relations was “bad.” There is little doubt that this turnaround is likely to be driven by current events.

Table 3. Negative Views on Inter-Korean Relations by Demographics²⁰ (% , n-size)

		2018 (n=1,200)	2020 (n=1,500)	Net changes
Total		36.6	<u>84.1</u>	<u>47.5</u>
Gender	Male	33.2	83.0	49.8
	Female	39.9	85.1	45.2
Test Statistics		$\chi^2=5.768, df=1, p<.05$	n.s.	
Age	20s	31.1	<u>85.1</u>	<u>54.0</u>
	30s	24.4	79.1	<u>54.7</u>
	40s	31.7	82.2	<u>50.5</u>
	50s	37.8	<u>84.9</u>	<u>47.1</u>
	60+	51.3	<u>86.9</u>	35.6
Test Statistics		$\chi^2=42.249, df=4, p<.001$	n.s.	
Ideology	Conservative	58.4	<u>92.2</u>	<u>33.8</u>
	Moderate	37.8	85.8	48.0
	Progressive	17.5	<u>77.1</u>	<u>59.6</u>
Test Statistics		$\chi^2=135.379, df=2, p<.001$	$\chi^2=38.046, df=2, p<.001$	

20. Source: Asan Annual Survey (2018, 2020). While a negative view on inter-Korean relations greatly increased, the difference between male and female respondents was within the margin of errors. Within both of the categories, the increase approximately ranged 45 to 50 percentage points.

It is important to keep track of some important differences across age and ideology, however. For instance, we saw over 50%p swing in sentiments during 2018~2020 among respondents aged between 20 and 50 (See Table 3). There was less change among older cohorts (i.e., 50s: 37.8→84.9%= 47.1%p, 60s: 51.3→86.9%= 35.6%p). There were marked contrasts among conservatives and progressives with over 92% (92.2%) of conservatives seeing inter-Korean relations as being “bad” while about 77% (77.1%) of progressives agreed with this assessment. Opinion swing during 2018~2020 was largest among progressives (17.5→77.1%= 59.6%p). There were noticeable changes among conservatives (58.4→92.2%= 33.8%p) and moderates (37.8→85.8%= 48%p) as well. What this suggests is that the progressives tended to have most wide swings in opinion about North Korea based on what they observed about North Korean behavior.

When respondents were asked to name the country responsible for the current state of inter-Korean relations, a little over 66% (66.3%) chose North Korea; over 14% (14.4%) named the US followed by China (13.1%) and South Korea (6.3%). There were noticeable differences across the ideological spectrum with significantly more conservatives (68.8%) than progressives (61.4%) placing blame on North Korea. Progressives (22.1%) were, however, three times more likely than conservatives (7.9%) to blame the United States.

One aspect of inter-Korean relations that the current South Korean administration has emphasized over the past four years is economic cooperation and aid to North Korea. We attempted to see where the public stood on this issue by asking whether the respondent thought that economic aid should be conditioned on North Korean behavior. 78.7% answered that South Korea should aid North Korea if North Korea changes its behavior. 21.3% stated that South Korea should send economic aid to North Korea without condition (See Table 4). There were clear ideological differences with more conservatives (91.6%) than progressives (63.7%) favoring conditional economic aid. Women (82.8%) were also more likely than men (74.4%) to agree that economic aid should be conditional.

This sentiment was also reflected in public attitudes about coercive diplomacy. When asked to choose between “sanctions relief conditioned on change in North Korean behavior” versus “sanctions relief in exchange for strengthening inter-Korean cooperation,” nearly 57% (56.9%) supported the former and only 29.5% favored the latter (neutral: 13.6%).

Table 4. Attitudes about Economic Aid to North Korea²¹ (%)

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Should be continued unconditionally	26.6	31.5	24.8	31.3	27.8	24.7	22.0	23.5	27.7	21.3
Should be provided with condition	<u>73.4</u>	<u>68.5</u>	<u>75.2</u>	<u>68.7</u>	<u>72.2</u>	<u>75.3</u>	<u>78.0</u>	<u>76.5</u>	<u>72.3</u>	<u>78.7</u>

Finally, an important issue in inter-Korean relations is human rights. While North Korea’s track record for human rights has always been poor to say the least, many critics point out that the current administration has turned a blind eye on this issue in the name of better inter-Korean relations. When asked whether the human rights situation in North Korea was serious, nearly 95% (94.9%) agreed that it was. Over 78% (78.3%) also stated that human rights should be addressed more immediately by the two Koreas.

Together, this suggests that the South Korean public has clear-eyed expectations about inter-Korean relations and that most would generally prefer a more cautious approach. This is indicated by the fact that the South Korean perception of North Korea is neither completely amicable nor adversarial. At the same time, however, there appears to be a general understanding that inter-Korean relations is challenged due to North Korea’s confrontational behavior. This explains the more cautious and principled approach to economic aid and human rights.

2.1.3 North Korea as a National Security Threat

The above findings suggest that there is a dual nature to the South Korean perspective on North Korea. What we also saw was that this view is likely to be event-driven but mediated by ideological, age, and gender differences. While we must be mindful that the two Koreas share similar historical and cultural roots, the Korean War has also taught many South Koreans that North Korea is a national security threat. In this section, we attempt to see how these forces interact in shaping South Korean perception about the North Korean threat.

21. Source: Asan Annual Survey (2011~2020).

One way to gain an insight into South Korean perception about the North Korean security threat is by gauging public perception about the likelihood of war. Over 57% (57.3%) of our survey respondents stated that they saw the likelihood of war with North Korea to be low. But there were notable differences across age group with respondents in their 30s (38%), 40s (39.5%), and 50s (36.6%) sensing this probability to be significantly lower than those in their 20s (54.9%) and over 60 (44.5%).

This suggests that threat perception is conditioned by individual experience and information processing.²² Younger individuals, for instance, are more likely to be anxious about the threat that North Korea poses because they do not have a priori information about a war with North Korea. It is the lack of information that creates anxiety and raises threat perception. The older generation, however, have experienced the Korean War firsthand. Hence, their fear of the North Korean threat is visceral. Middle aged individuals, who have some information about North Korea but not enough a priori knowledge about a war on the Korean Peninsula, are not likely to have as strong of an opinion about this matter.

Not surprisingly, threat perception also appears to be conditioned by the ideological disposition of respondents as conservatives are more likely (51.2%) to think war with North Korea is likely than progressives (30.8%).

When a follow-up question is asked as to why the respondent (*n*=641) answered that war with North Korea is likely, 55.9% stated that “the North Korean regime needed to go to war in order to stay in power.” 21.7% stated that North Korea would have to choose war because of “diplomatic and military pressure from the US and other powerful nations.”²³ 17% stated that war is a means for “North Korea to achieve unification by force” and 5.1% blamed “the current South Korean administration’s North Korea Policy.”

22. Ifat Maoz and Clark McCauley. 2009. “Threat Perceptions and Feelings as Predictors of Jewish-Israeli Support for Compromise with Palestinians” *Journal of Peace Research*. 46(4): 525-39; Moran Bodas, Maya Siman-Tov, Shulamith Kreitler, and Kobi Peleg. 2015. “Perception of the threat of War in Israel - implications for future preparedness planning.” *Israel Journal of Health Policy Research*. 4: 35.

23. Not surprisingly, progressives (30.4%) were three times more likely than conservatives (11.9%) to make this case.

Among those who thought that war with North Korea ($n=859$) was not likely, 39.7% answered that “this is because North Korea would be concerned about US involvement.” 36.4% stated that “North Korean economy is too weak” followed by “lack of Chinese support” (7.6%), “North Korea will not wage war against a fellow Korean” (7.5%), and “fear of South Korean defense capability” (4.3%).

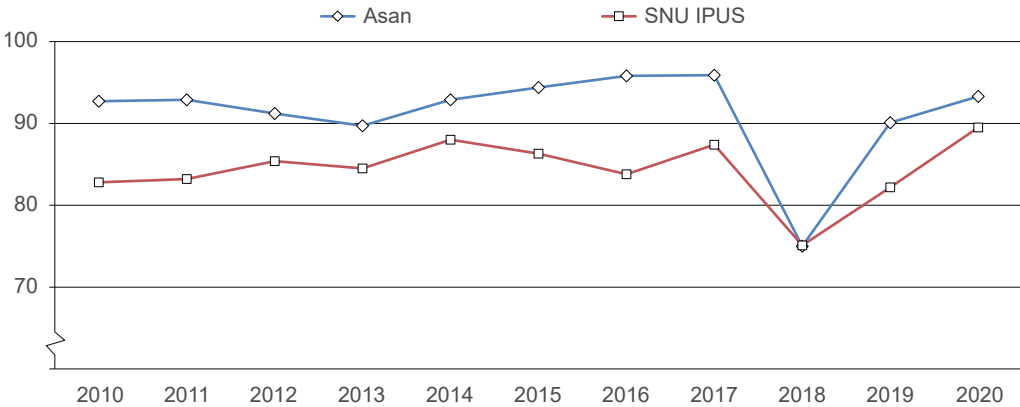
Lack of trust in South Korea’s deterrence capability is also reflected in the fact that over 72% (72.3%) of the respondents stated that the South Korean military cannot deter North Korea. More women (79.9%) and conservatives (81.1%) than men (64.5%) and progressives (63.7%) tend to express low confidence in South Korean national defense.

When asked about the likelihood that South Korea can prevail militarily in the event of a contingency on the Korean Peninsula, 67% of the respondents answered that South Korea will lose in the event of a military confrontation with North Korea. There are some clear ideological differences with 73.5% of the conservatives expressing low confidence in the South Korean military, which is significantly higher than 60.6% for self-identified progressives. More men (45.5%) have also expressed confidence in South Korea’s military capability compared to women (20.7%).

Lack of confidence in South Korean national defense may be due to the fact that a significant share of the South Korean population believes that North Korea possesses a functioning nuclear capability and there is a good chance that Pyongyang intends to use it. According to our survey, in 2020, nearly 95% (94.9%) of the respondents believes that North Korea possesses a working nuclear weapon and that over 93% (93.3%) believes that North Korea will not give up this capability willingly (blue line in Figure 8). While the sentiment can shift according to changes in the geopolitical environment, this perception has never been below 70% even during the best of times. Heightened South Korean expectation about North Korea’s denuclearization in 2018 was also observed in another survey (See Figure 8).

When asked about the likelihood that North Korea will “use” nuclear weapon in the event of a military contingency on the Korean Peninsula, approximately 53% (52.9%) answered that this likelihood is high. There were clear age, gender, and ideological differences. More women (56.8%) than men (49%), for instance, believed that North Korea is likely to use nuclear weapon. More individuals in their 20s (64.3%) and 60-and-over (55%) also saw this likelihood to be high in comparison to others in their

Figure 8. Prospects on North Korean Denuclearization: Percentage of Not likely²⁴ (%)



30s (52.1%), 40s (46.5%), and 50s (47%). Finally, more conservatives (57.8%) and moderates (57.9%) than progressives (44.2%) assessed this threat to be high.

2.1.4 Addressing the North Korean Challenge

Excluding the military option, what is South Korean public’s most preferred method for addressing the North Korean security challenge? When asked this question in 2020, 42.7% of the respondents answered “strengthening economic cooperation with North Korea” as their most preferred choice. 29% favored “coercive diplomacy in the form of economic pressure” followed by 22% stating that “the US needs to provide security guarantees for the North Korean regime.” Only 6.3% preferred “military pressure.” Together what this suggests that the plurality of South Koreans prefer a peaceful means of managing the North Korean issue over confrontation.

24. Source: Asan Annual Survey (2010~2020), Institute for Peace and Unification Studies at Seoul National University (2010~2020). According to the CNN poll conducted in June 2018, after the high-profile meeting between Trump and Kim Jong-un, over the half of Americans (56%) viewed North Korea’s denuclearization as unlikely. The data was collected right after the Singapore summit but only 38% said that North Korea will give up its nuclear weapons and facilities by 2021. When they were asked on how likely North Korea eventually give up its nuclear weapons and facilities, 70% said that North Korea will not give up its nuclear weapons. 27% thought otherwise (Source: CNN, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/06/19/politics/north-korea-cnn-poll/index.html>).

Policy preferences clearly differed across gender, age, and ideology. Men, for instance, were generally split among those that preferred economic cooperation (35.9%) to economic pressure (30.4%) and security guarantees for the North Korean regime (25.6%). Female respondents favored economic cooperation (46.7%) over pressure (27.6%) and security guarantees (18.5%). Likewise, respondents aged under 60 were similar to females while those over 60 were similar to males. Finally, moderates and progressives more strongly favored economic cooperation to economic pressure or security guarantees while conservatives favored economic pressure over economic cooperation and security guarantees.

Table 5. Favored Policy Option for North Korea²⁵ (%)

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Economic Cooperation	<u>41.5</u>	<u>59.8</u>	<u>52.5</u>	<u>53.8</u>	<u>55.1</u>	35.7	29.4	<u>42.3</u>	<u>37.9</u>	<u>42.7</u>
Economic Pressure	<u>33.0</u>	24.4	<u>29.5</u>	<u>27.9</u>	<u>28.4</u>	<u>41.6</u>	<u>44.5</u>	<u>31.3</u>	<u>30.9</u>	<u>29.0</u>
Guarantee of Regime	18.1	10.7	11.8	13.9	10.5	13.4	17.9	<u>22.4</u>	<u>25.5</u>	<u>22.0</u>
Military Pressure	7.5	5.1	6.1	4.4	5.9	9.3	8.2	4.1	5.7	6.3

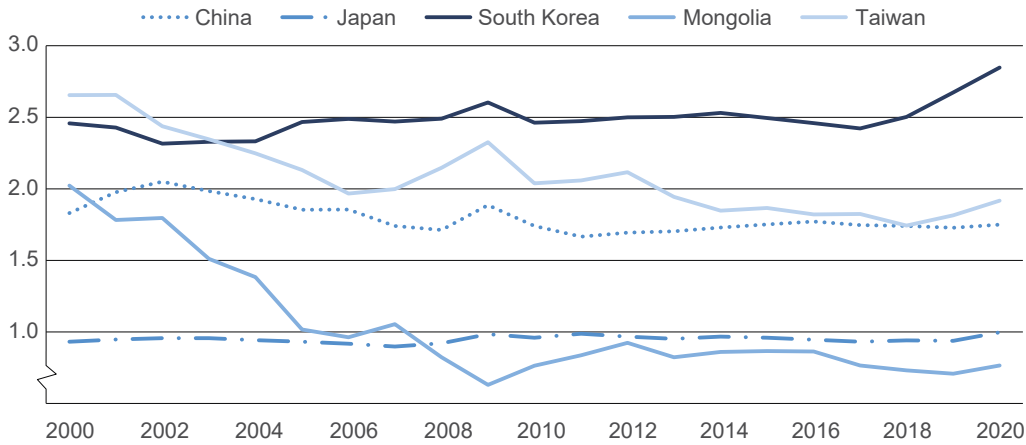
Cross-temporal comparison reveals an interesting pattern in the relative preference ordering for specific policy options. They seem to be driven in part by context as well as government framing of this issue. For instance, when President Park Geun-hye proposed that economic cooperation with North Korea would be a “bonanza” for South Korea before the 6th nuclear test in 2016, public support for economic cooperation was quite strong. However, sentiment quickly shifted in support for more coercive diplomacy due to escalating tensions in 2016~17. We can see another turn in public attitude as the Moon administration worked to promote greater cooperation with North Korea after the Winter Olympics in 2018. In all of these instances, context and leadership orientation served as important cues for shaping South Korean public opinion.

It bears mentioning that South Korean public preference for the military option is

25. Source: Asan Annual Survey (2011~2020).

quite low. This cannot be explained solely by the government’s policy orientation since the national security posture vis-à-vis North Korea has not changed significantly across different administrations.²⁶ If we look more closely at South Korea’s defense spending, for instance, it has kept pace with the growing North Korean threat.

Figure 9. Military Spending as a Percentage of GDP, 2000~2020²⁷ (%)



The more likely explanation is that the public is concerned about the perceived capability imbalance and risks associated with potential collateral damage in the event of a contingency. To put it more simply, North Korea has nuclear weapons and South Korea does not. One remedy to this shortcoming is the development of an indigenous nuclear capability. When asked whether the survey respondent would support “the development of nuclear weapons in South Korea” nearly 70% (69.3%) answered in the affirmative. While there are some noticeable subgroup differences, support for indigenous nuclear development appears to cut across a broad cross-section of the society.²⁸

26. We do not mean to downplay the fact that progressive administrations under Kim Dae-jung, Roh Moo-hyun, and Moon Jae-in have favored a more pro-engagement policy vis-à-vis North Korea than conservative administrations. The point here is that the South Korean public would not see a fundamental change in the South Korea’s relationship with North Korea since the Korean War.

27. Source: SIPRI.

28. The data shows that more males (76.6%) than females (62.2%) and more conservatives (79.4%) than moderates (67.3%) and progressives (65.3%) support indigenous nuclear development.

Table 6. Attitudes about Nuclear Armament²⁹ (%)

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Developing Nuclear Weapons											
Support	55.6	62.6	66.0	62.9	61.3	62.3	59.9	64.1	54.8	67.1	69.3
Oppose	44.5	37.4	34.0	37.1	38.7	37.7	40.1	35.9	45.3	32.9	30.7
Reintroducing Tactical Nuclear Weapons											
Support				67.0				61.8			61.3
Oppose				28.8				38.2			25.0

When asked to choose the reasons for supporting this idea, the answer was split among those who viewed it as a “matter of national sovereignty” (33.7%), “international standing or prestige” (33.4%), and “national security” (32.1%). Conservatives (40.3%) leaned more heavily on the national security argument while the progressives (40.2%) saw it more as a matter of national sovereignty.

Among those who did not support indigenous nuclear development, 43.5% answered that it was because of possible sanctions against South Korea followed by concerns about regional nuclear arms race (26.3%), negative impact on inter-Korea relations (14.8%), and adequacy of US extended deterrence (7.2%). Clearly, the South Korean public needs more assurance from the US about its extended deterrence guarantees.

Another option that has gained some momentum of late is the idea of reintroducing US tactical nuclear weapons onto the Korean Peninsula. Data shows that, in 2020, 61.3% of the respondents supported this move. 25% opposed. There were noticeable differences along gender, age, and ideology. For instance, men (71.3%) were more likely than women (51.4%) to support this idea. Individuals over 60s (68.1%) were more supportive in comparison to those younger than 60 (40s: 61.5%, 50s: 61.1%, 30s: 59.4%, 20s: 51.4%). Conservatives (69.8%) were also more supportive compared to moderates (60.4%) and progressives (56.9%).

29. Source: Asan Annual Survey (2010~2020). Asan Poll (2013).

2.2 ROK-US Alliance

History shows us that the ROK-US alliance and extended deterrence were instrumental in keeping peace on the Korean Peninsula post-armistice. However, there is a growing concern about each side’s bilateral commitments especially after the presidential elections in respective countries during 2016~2017. In light of this reality, it is timely to explore where the South Korean public stands in relation to policy elites when it comes to South Korean thinking about the alliance.

Our discussion of the ROK-US alliance is divided into three parts. In the first part, we explore South Korean public perception of the alliance and extended deterrence. Primarily, the key question of concern is the level of trust that the public maintains in the ROK-US alliance and US extended deterrence. Next, we explore how South Koreans think about some outstanding issues in the alliance: namely, special measures agreement and transfer of wartime operational control. Finally, we examine how the public perceives the United States given that the public’s general impression of the US may influence how South Koreans perceive the alliance relationship.

2.2.1 The Alliance and Extended Deterrence

One question gauged South Korean public thinking about what South Korea should do with respect to the ROK-US alliance. 41% said that Seoul should strengthen the relationship. 37.3% stated that Seoul should maintain status quo. 21.7% believed that South Korea should pursue an independent foreign policy.

We found qualitative differences across gender, age, and ideology. For instance, only about 17.6% of men wanted South Korea to pursue a more independent foreign policy while about 25.6% of women felt the same way. Also, while only 11.3% of conservatives stated that South Korea should seek an independent foreign policy, 19.3% of moderates and 30.8% of progressives stated the same. 61.6% of conservatives also wanted to strengthen the alliance, which is nearly double the share of moderates (33.9%) and progressives (36%).

In thinking more instrumentally about the alliance, one question in the survey asked whether the respondent believed that the US would intervene in the event of a military contingency on the Korean Peninsula. Nearly 87% (86.6%) of the respondents

answered in the affirmative. When respondents were asked whether they believed that the US would use nuclear weapons in response to a North Korean nuclear attack on South Korea, 51.1% answered in the affirmative. Together, the data suggests that the South Korean public’s confidence in the US extended deterrence applies mainly to conventional conflict on the Korean Peninsula. This explains why the South Korean public has a favorable view of indigenous nuclear weapons development.

By all measures, the South Korean public views about the ROK-US alliance is overwhelmingly positive. When asked about the need for continued maintenance of ROK-US alliance, 95.9% answered in the affirmative. Extending this idea further, when asked whether the ROK-US alliance is necessary even *after* unification of the Korean Peninsula, 86.3% answered in the affirmative. It is worth pointing out that the South Korean public’s support for the alliance has remained strong during and after the challenging the Trump Presidency.

Table 7. Necessity of ROK-US Alliance³⁰ (%)

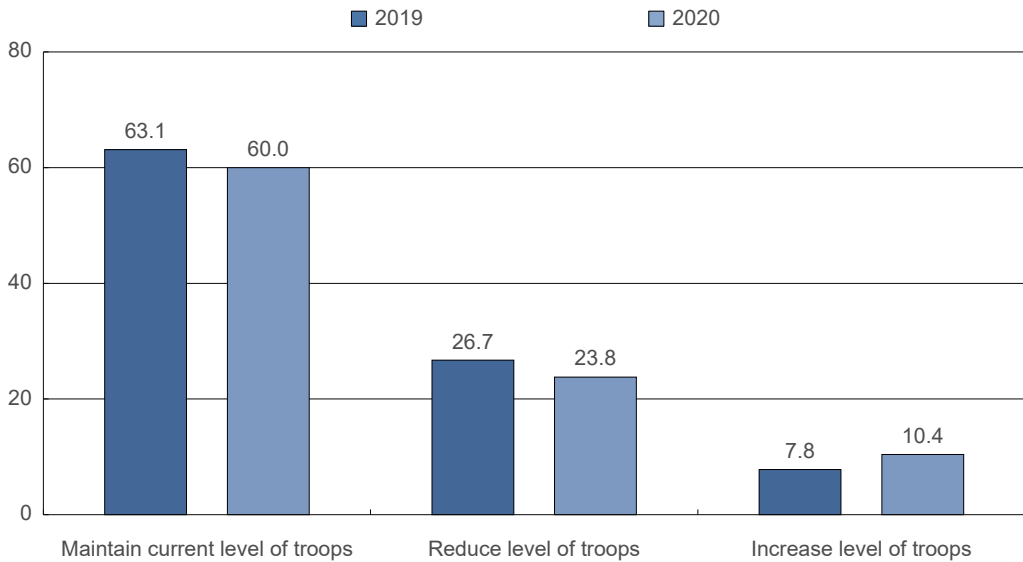
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Current (a)	94.0	96.0	95.0	94.9	94.1	95.6	94.1	<u>91.9</u>	<u>95.9</u>
Post-unification (b)	84.0	<u>83.3</u>	81.1	81.8	81.8	<u>80.0</u>	85.2	80.4	<u>86.3</u>
Gap (a-b)	10.0	<u>12.7</u>	13.9	13.1	12.3	15.6	8.9	11.5	<u>9.6</u>

2.2.2 USFK and OPCON

Strong support for the alliance also extends to public views about the US Forces Korea (USFK). When asked about the presence of USFK in South Korea, 72% expressed support. Over 70% (70.4%) of the respondents also stated that they supported either maintaining the current troop level or increasing the size of USFK. Only 23.8% supported reducing the number of US troops in South Korea.

30. Source: Asan Annual Survey (2010~2020). From 2010 to 2011, only the current necessity of the alliance between two countries were asked ('10: 87.2%, '11: 91.1%). And Table 7 were listed for comparing it with its necessity in post-unification, the answers to a pair of questions from 2012 to 2020 were suggested.

Figure 10. Level of USFK Presence in the Future³¹ (%)



There was some disagreement about the need for continued USFK presence post-unification. Nearly 54% (53.7%) stated that the USFK should no longer be stationed in South Korea. 46.3% supported continued presence. There were significant differences across gender, age, and ideology. More men (57.3%) than women (35.5%), for instance, supported continued USFK presence post-unification. People aged 60-and-over (54.1%) expressed greater support for continued USFK presence compared to those under 60 (40s: 36%, 50s: 43.6%, 20s: 46.7%, 30s: 47.9%). Similarly, more conservatives (60.8%) expressed support for continuation of the USFK compared to moderates (48.8%) and progressives (34.5%).

When we dig deeper into more specific issues like the transfer of wartime operational control (OPCON) from the US to South Korea, 42.5% favors OPCON transfer being condition-based; 27.2% supports a scheduled-based approach that the current South Korean administration favors. There appears to be clear differences according to gender and ideology with more men (46.7%) preferring condition-based approach to other methods while a majority of women either supports condition-based approach (38.3%) or does not have an opinion on this matter (34.9%). Most conservatives have a strong

31. Source: Asan Annual Survey (2020). Asan Poll (2019).

leaning towards the condition-based approach (54.1%) while the progressives appear split among those that support the condition-based approach (36.7%) and those that favor the schedule-based (39.4%) one.

Table 8. Attitudes toward OPCON Transfer³² (%)

	Percentage
Condition based transfer	42.5
Transfer without condition	27.2
Should eliminate transfer plan	7.9

On the issue of burden sharing or Special Measures Agreement (SMA), modal response was “maintaining the current level” (41.1%) followed by “increasing South Korea’s contribution” (26%; a+b) and “lowering South Korea’s contribution” (23.4%). It bears mentioning that the survey was conducted before the defense cost sharing agreement was finalized in March 2021. Nonetheless, the data we saw here is consistent with the pattern we have observed in the past. Traditionally, there are no noticeable subgroup differences on this issue. Last year was no exception.

Table 9. Attitudes toward SMA³³ (%)

Response Options	2019	2020
Should be maintained at current level	45.6	41.1
Should be raised to a lever lower than what the US demand (a)	29.9	23.1
Should be lower than the current level	17.2	23.4
Should be raised to US demands (b)	3.0	2.9
Don’t know/Refused	4.3	9.6

32. Source: Asan Annual Survey (2020).

33. Source: Asan Annual Survey (2020). Asan Poll (2019).

2.2.3 The US in the Eyes of South Koreans

We attempted to explore the public’s general assessment about the US and its influence on South Korea. The results appear mixed and somewhat driven by ideological disposition of the South Korean public. For instance, 59% of the respondents agreed with the statement that “the US should bear some responsibility for the fact that the Korean Peninsula is divided.” While this sentiment was especially strong among progressives (71%), moderates appeared genuinely split (agree: 57.4%, disagree: 42.6%) while conservatives seem to disagree with this view (57.3%, agree: 42.7%).

When asked whether “the US has been an impediment to South Korea’s democratization,” 64.7% disagreed (agree: 35.3%). This view was especially strong among conservatives (78.8%) followed by moderates (67.8%) and progressives (52.3%).

On the issue as to whether the respondent saw “the US as a hindrance to inter-Korean reconciliation and cooperation,” 56.8% did not think so. Again, opinion was divided mainly along ideological lines with 74.4% of conservatives disagreeing with this statement. Moderates (disagree: 58.9%, agree: 41.1%) appeared to be split while 56.7% of progressives saw the US as the cause of this problem.

On the question as to whether the interests of the US and South Korea coincided, 55.5% agreed (disagree: 44.5%). Conservatives led this thinking with 67.7% supporting this view followed by moderates (55.3%) and progressives (47.9%).

One issue, where there seemed to be little to no disagreement is on the matter of economic development. When asked whether the respondent thought that “it was possible for South Korea to develop as a result of US help,” 76.3% agreed (disagree: 23.7%). We found that ideological differences mattered less on this issue.

In conclusion, our most recent survey data confirms that the South Korean public trust and support for the ROK-US alliance remains robust and strong. Although the data shows some gaps in South Korean views about the US along ideological lines, there is also evidence which suggests that the general outlook on the bilateral relationship is both dynamic and multidimensional.

Table 10. US in the Eyes of South Koreans³⁴ (%)

Statements	Agree	Disagree
The US should bear some responsibility for the fact that the Korean Peninsula is divided.	59.0	41.0
The US has been an impediment to South Korea's democratization.	35.3	64.7
The US is a hindrance to inter-Korean reconciliation and cooperation.	43.2	56.8
The interests of the US and South Korea coincide.	55.5	44.5
It was possible for South Korea to develop as a result of US help.	76.3	23.7

2.3 Regional Security

Among the issues that have been gaining greater traction in South Korea over the past year is the great power competition between China and the United States. As a treaty-bound ally of the United States, South Korea maintains a close relationship with Washington. China, however, is South Korea's largest trade partner. While the Moon administration has maintained that South Korea would like to remain "neutral" between Washington and Beijing, general public sentiment has always favored the former over the latter.

This view remains unchanged in the latest survey as 25.9% of South Koreans see China as a significant security threat after North Korea (55.8%). When asked which country in the region would be the greatest threat against South Korea's national interest *post-unification*, 66.7% named China.

Even though South Korea's economic interest may be closely tied to China, history of Chinese involvement in the Korean Peninsula as well as China's past threats against South Korea for the deployment of a missile defense system on the Korean Peninsula have all contributed to South Korean public thinking on this issue.³⁵ Recent handling

34. Source: Asan Annual Survey (2020).
35. Odd Arne Westad. 2021. *Empire and Righteous Nation: 600 Years of China-Korea Relations*. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA.

Table 11. Threat to South Korean Security³⁶ (%)

	North Korea	China	Japan	US	Russia
Current (a)	55.8	25.9	11.3	6.1	0.4
Post-unification (b)	-	66.7	23.1	8.1	1.5
Changes (b-a)	-	40.8	11.8	2.0	1.1

of the coronavirus pandemic as well as the crackdown on pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong have only confirmed South Korean concerns about China's growing influence in the region. When asked to assess how they saw China's influence in the region, 66.3% expressed negativity. This feeling is on par with North Korea (68.9%) but it also stands in stark contrast to 63.6% of the respondents stating that they assess the US influence in the region to be positive (See Table 12).

Another regional issue of concern to the South Korean public is Korea-Japan relations. Even though both countries have many overlapping security and economic interests, the diplomatic relationship has been marred by unresolved historical and territorial issues dating back to the end of 19th century and the first half of 20th century. Most recently, South Korean high court rulings on forced labor and Comfort Women have escalated tensions between Seoul and Tokyo. South Korean government has also lodged multiple complaints against Japan for its recent announcement to dispose of the waste water from Fukushima nuclear reactor under IAEA supervision and guideline.

Although Korea-Japan relations is not completely broken, bright spots are few and continued negativity is fueled by public opinion. Our survey indicates, for instance, that 71.5% of the South Korean public think that Japan's influence in the region is negative (See Table 12). It is important to keep in mind, however, that this attitude is driven less by concerns about South Korea's national security than national identity. This is confirmed by the fact that the South Korean public does not see Japan as a major national security threat. Only 11.3% of the respondents stated that Japan is a national security threat while 23.1% saw it as a potential threat post-unification (See Table 11).

36. Source: Asan Annual Survey (2020).

Table 12. Influence of Neighbors on South Korea³⁷ (%)

	North Korea	China	Japan	US	Russia
Positive (a)	11.9	15.5	12.5	<u>63.6</u>	11.7
Neutral	19.2	18.2	16.0	18.8	32.9
Negative (b)	<u>68.9</u>	<u>66.3</u>	<u>71.5</u>	17.6	55.4
Changes (a-b)	-57.0	-50.8	-59.0	46.0	-43.7

There are important policy implications to be derived from these findings. One is that the South Korean government will have to contend with strong domestic preference for the United States as US-China competition becomes more contentious and room for strategic ambiguity is reduced. Given the robustness of our finding, any sitting administration in Seoul that distances itself from Washington and gets too close to Beijing may have to deal with costly political consequences. Second is that US policy of promoting a more networked region in Northeast Asia will face challenges due to the difficulty of Korea-Japan relations. Tensions between Seoul and Tokyo tend to follow domestic political cycles where incumbent ruling parties will be incentivized to invoke nationalist sentiments. There may be different ways to manage this problem, but the more fruitful approach has been to maintain modest expectations about the Korea-Japan relations while looking for opportunities to expand cooperation where possible.

2.4 Global Security Agenda

Looking beyond Northeast Asia and the Korean Peninsula, South Korea’s role as a middle power can best be utilized on issues of global concern. While different South Korean administrations have had varying approaches regarding these issues, we look to see where the South Korean public stands on matters such as climate change, environment, terrorism, public health, cybersecurity, maritime security, social conflict, and natural disaster, among others.

First question we asked is whether the individual respondent recognizes the seriousness of these types of concerns. Over 79% (79.1%) of the respondents acknowledged that

37. Source: Asan Annual Survey (2020).

these issues affect their daily lives. Over 95% (95.1%) of the respondents also stated that these non-traditional security concerns pose a direct threat to South Korea’s national security. From the list of issues that we identified, infectious diseases or epidemic (95.4%), environmental pollution (93.7%), and climate change (90.3%) were named as the most pressing concerns. Not too far behind were issues such as cybersecurity (89.2%), humanitarian disaster (84.3%), social conflict (84%), natural disaster (82.4%), and resource scarcity (80.5%). Lastly, maritime security (76.7%) and terrorism (65.7%) were also mentioned (See Table 13). Overall, the finding here suggests that there is significant public awareness and interest about these issues and if utilized properly, these are areas that the South Korean government can gain significant public support provided that there is adequate leadership.

Table 13. Security Threat to South Koreans³⁸ (%)

	Threatful	Not threatful
Infectious diseases or epidemic	<u>95.4</u>	4.6
Environmental pollution	<u>93.7</u>	6.3
Climate change	<u>90.3</u>	9.7
Cyber attacks	89.2	10.8
Humanitarian disaster	84.3	15.7
Social conflict	84.0	16.0
Natural disaster	82.4	17.6
Resource scarcity	80.5	19.5
Maritime security	76.7	23.3
Terrorism	65.7	34.3

38. Source: Asan Annual Survey (2020).

3. Conclusion

Data from our annual survey reveals that there are aspects of South Korean public opinion, which seem quite stable and predictable over time. For instance, South Korean opinion on the US, China or Japan has not changed much over the last decade. In general, the public seems to hold a very favorable view of the US and sees the US as an important player in the region. Although changing circumstances may require some adjustments in the ROK-US alliance, South Koreans seem to favor the continuation of this relationship. The approach on China is more cautious. There appears to be a genuine concern about the threat that China may pose to South Korea's national interest. While South Koreans do not seem to perceive Japan as much of a threat compared to China, they still hold a negative view of this neighboring country. North Korea is clearly a significant concern but there is broad agreement that addressing this challenge is more difficult. Our data shows that there are notable differences across ideology, gender, and even age. Conservative, male, and younger as well as older cohorts, for instance, tend to be more skeptical of Pyongyang and favor a more hawkish stance against North Korea. Progressive, female, and middle-aged cohorts tend to favor a more dovish policy.

Together, what these findings reveal are important intricacies of South Korean public opinion on matters related to foreign policy and national security. While these details may not necessarily drive policy, they reveal important truths about the political challenges associated with navigating a foreign policy that runs against South Korean public sentiment. This knowledge will prove to be especially useful as South Korea winds up for a presidential election in 2022. Although foreign policy rarely dictates the outcome of the election, how each candidate positions themselves on these issues may contribute to their rise or fall.

Survey Methodology

Asan Annual Survey

2010

Sample size: 2,000 respondents over the age of 19
Margin of error: $\pm 2.2\%$ at the 95% confidence level
Survey method: Personal Interview Survey (Face-to-face Method)
Period: August 16 – September 17, 2010
Organization: Media Research

2011

Sample size: 2,000 respondents over the age of 19
Margin of error: $\pm 2.2\%$ at the 95% confidence level
Survey method: Mixed-Mode Online Survey employing RDD for mobile and landline telephones
Period: August 26 – October 4, 2011
Organization: EmBrain

2012

Sample size: 1,500 respondents over the age of 19
Margin of error: $\pm 2.5\%$ at the 95% confidence level
Survey method: RDD for mobile and landline telephones and online survey
Period: September 24 – November 1, 2014
Organization: Media Research

2013

Sample size: 1,500 respondents over the age of 19
Margin of error: $\pm 2.5\%$ at the 95% confidence level
Survey method: RDD for mobile and landline telephones and online survey
Period: September 4 – 27, 2013
Organization: Media Research

2014

Sample size: 1,500 respondents over the age of 19
Margin of error: $\pm 2.5\%$ p at the 95% confidence level
Survey method: RDD for mobile and landline telephones and online survey
Period: September 1 – 17, 2014
Organization: Media Research

2015

Sample size: 1,500 respondents over the age of 19
Margin of error: $\pm 2.5\%$ p at the 95% confidence level
Survey method: RDD for mobile and landline telephones and online survey
Period: September 2 – 30, 2015
Organization: Media Research

2016

Sample size: 1,500 respondents over the age of 19
Margin of error: $\pm 2.5\%$ p at the 95% confidence level
Survey method: RDD for mobile and landline telephones and online survey
Period: September 9 – October 14, 2016
Organization: Media Research

2017

Sample size: 1,200 respondents over the age of 19
Margin of error: $\pm 2.8\%$ p 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

2018

Sample size: 1,200 respondents over the age of 19
Margin of error: $\pm 2.8\%$ p at the 95% confidence level
Survey method: RDD for mobile and landline telephones and online survey
Period: November 8 – December 5, 2018
Organization: K-Stat Research

2019

Sample size: 1,500 respondents over the age of 19
Margin of error: $\pm 2.5\%$ p at the 95% confidence level
Survey method: RDD for mobile and landline telephones and online survey
Period: December 5 – 24, 2019
Organization: K-Stat Research

2020

Sample size: 1,500 respondents over the age of 19
Margin of error: $\pm 2.5\%$ p at the 95% confidence level
Survey method: RDD for mobile and landline telephones and online survey
Period: December 3 – 17, 2020
Organization: EmBrain Public

Asan Poll

2013

Sample size: 1,000 respondents over the age of 19
Margin of error: $\pm 3.1\%$ p at the 95% confidence level
Survey method: Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) with Random Digit Dialing for mobile and landline phones
Period: February 13 – 15, 2013
Organization: Research & Research

2019

Sample size: 1,000 respondents over the age of 19
Margin of error: $\pm 3.1\%$ p at the 95% confidence level
Survey method: Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) with Random Digit Dialing for mobile and landline phones
Period: January 7 – 9, 2019
Organization: Research & Research

Appendix I: Chronicles of Inter-Korean Relations from 2010 to 2020³⁹

2010

Jan 27. North Korea fires artillery rounds near NLL (Northern Limit Line).
 Jan 28. North Korea fires artillery shots near NLL.
 Jan 29. North Korea fires artillery shots near NLL.
 Mar 26. The sinking of South Korean Warship Cheonan.
 May 15. Two Koreas trade fire after North Korean ship violates NLL.
 Jun 9. South Korea installs loudspeakers for psychological warfare against North Korea.
 Aug 8. North Korea seizes South Korean fishing vessel the Daeseung 55.
 Aug 9. North Korea fires artillery shots to south of the NLL.
 Oct 29. North Korea fires at a South Korean military guard post in the DMZ.
 Oct 30. Reunion of separated families (Oct 30~Nov 2).
 Nov 3. Reunion of separated families (Nov 3~5).
 Nov 23. North Korea fires dozens of shells at the Yeonpyeong Island.
 Dec 27. MND (Ministry of National Defense) singles out 'North Korean regime and military' as an enemy of South Korea.

2011

Apr 12. Hacking of South Korea's NH (NongHyup Bank) computer network.
 Aug 10. South Korea to counter-fires North Korean artillery provocation.
 Dec 17. Death of Chairman Kim Jong-Il.
 Dec 19. North Korea test-fire two short-range missiles into the East Sea.
 Dec 28. Kim Jong-Il's state funeral held in Pyongyang.

2012

Jan 11. North Korea launches three short-range ballistic missiles toward the East Sea.
 Jan 21. UN Committee on Sanctions against North Korea announces "standards on luxury items."

Mar 22. UN Human Rights Council passes a resolution on North Korean Human Rights.

Apr 13. North Korea launches Gwangmyongsong-3, failure to enter into orbit (Cheolsan).

Sep 21. North Korean shipping boats violate NLL on six occasions (12, 14, 15, 20, 21~22).

Sep 27. North Korea test-fires a short-range missile in South Pyongan Province.

Dec 1. North Korea says it will launch a working satellite, Gwangmyongsong-3-2.

Dec 12. North Korea launches a long-range missile toward the East Sea (Cheolsan).

2013

Jan 22. UN Security Council adopts a resolution 2087.

Feb 12. North Korea conducts 3rd nuclear test (Punggye-ri).

Mar 7. UN Security Council adopts a resolution 2094 on sanctions against North Korea.

Mar 15. North Korea fires off two shots of short-range missiles into the East Sea.

Mar 27. North Korea cuts off military communication lines with South Korea.

Apr 8. North Korea announces suspension of KIC (Kaesong Industrial Complex) and withdrawal of all North Korean employees.

May 18. North Korea says the launch of six MRLs (Multiple Rocket Launchers) for three days.

Dec 12. Jang Song-thaek executed on charges of plotting to overthrow the state.

2014

Feb 20. Reunion of separated families (Feb 20~25, Kumgansan Mountain).

Feb 21. North Korea launches four MRLs toward the East Sea.

Feb 24. North Korean patrol boat violates NLL in the West Sea.

Feb 27. North Korea fires four Scud series missiles toward the East Sea.

Mar 3. North Korea fires two Scud series missiles off its eastern coast.

Mar 4. North Korea launches seven new MRLs toward the East Sea.

Mar 16. North Korea launches 25 short-range rockets toward the East Sea.

Mar 22. North Korea launches 30 short-range rockets toward the East Sea.

Mar 23. North Korea launches 16 short-range rockets toward the East Sea.

Mar 26. North Korea test-fires two Nodong series missiles toward the East Sea.

Mar 31. Two Koreas exchange fire across the western sea border.

May 20. North Korean patrol and guard boats violate NLL in the West Sea.

May 22. North Korean provokes with artillery firing toward South Korean vessels in the West Sea.

39. Source: Ministry of National Defense (2020). Defense White Paper. Selected from 'Chronicle of inter-Korean Military Relations' in the Appendix of White Paper published from 2010 to 2020. https://www.mnd.go.kr/cop/pblictnt/selectPublicationsUser.do?siteId=mnd&componentId=14&categoryId=15&pageIndex=2&publicationSeq=36&id=mnd_040501000000.

Jun 26. North Korea launches three MRLs toward the East Sea.
 Jun 29. North Korea launches two Scud series missiles toward the East Sea.
 Jul 2. North Korea launches two MRLs toward the East Sea.
 Jul 9. North Korea launches two Scud series missiles toward the East Sea.
 Jul 13. North Korea launches two Scud series missiles toward the East Sea.
 Jul 14. North Korea launches more than 150 MRLs and costal artillery toward the East Sea.
 Jul 26. North Korea launches one Scud series missile toward the East Sea.
 Jul 30. North Korea launches four new MRLs toward the East Sea.
 Aug 12. North Korean fishing boat violates NLL in the West Sea.
 Aug 14. North Korea launches five new short-range missiles toward the East Sea.
 Sep 1. North Korea fires one new short-range missile toward the East Sea.
 Sep 6. North Korea launches three new short-range missiles toward the East Sea (Wonsan).
 Sep 19. North Korean guard boat violates NLL.
 Oct 7. Koreas exchange fire after North Korean patrol boat violates NLL.
 Oct 18. North Korean troops approach the MDL (Military Demarcation Line) in Cheolwon. South Korea conducts warning fire.
 Oct 19. North Korean troops approach the MDL in Paju. South Korea conducts warning fire.
 Nov 10. North Korean troops cross the MDL in Paju. South Korea conducts warning fire.
 Dec 5. Patrol boat violates the NLL west of Yeonpyongdo Island.

2015

Feb 6. North Korea launches four Scud missiles into the East Sea.
 Feb 8. North Korea launches five short-range missiles into the sea off the eastern coast.
 Mar 2. North Korea launches two short-range ballistic missiles into the East Sea (Nampo).
 Mar 12. North Korea launches seven surface-to-air missiles into the East Sea.
 Apr 3. North Korea launches four short-range missiles to the South from the west coast.
 Apr 7. North Korea launches two short-range missiles (Pyongwon).
 May 9. KCNA (Korean Central News Agency) reports successful SLBM test launches. North Korea launches three Scud missiles from the East Sea.
 May 14. Firing exercises for warships and artillery barrages near Yeonpyeongdo Island.
 Jun 14. North Korea launches three short-range missiles into the East Sea.

Jun 30. North Korean patrol boat crosses NLL in the West Sea.
 July 11. North Korean troops crosses the MDL. South Korea conducts warning fire.
 Aug 4. North Korea's landmine provocations in the DMZ.
 Aug 20. North Korean artillery provocations in Yeoncheon.
 Oct 10. Formal military review in commemoration of the ruling party's 70th anniversary.
 Oct 20. 1st reunion of separated families (through Oct 22, Kumgansan Mountain).
 Oct 24. 2nd reunion of separated families (through Oct 26, Kumgansan Mountain).
 Nov 28. North Korea test-fires an SLBM in the East Sea.
 Dec 18. UN General Assembly adopts resolution condemning human rights crisis in North Korea.

2016

Jan 6. North Korea conducts 4th nuclear test.
 Feb 7. North Korea launches a long-range missile (KMS-4, Dongchang-ri).
 Feb 8. Patrol boat crosses NLL in the West Sea.
 Mar 2. The UNSC adopts a resolution 2270 regarding North Korea's 4th nuclear test and long-range missile launch.
 Mar 3. North Korea fires six short-range missiles into the East Sea.
 Mar 10. North Korea launches two short-range ballistic missiles into the East Sea.
 Mar 18. North Korea launches two mid-range ballistic missiles into the East Sea.
 Mar 21. North Korea launches five short-range missiles into the East Sea.
 Mar 29. North Korea fires a short-range missile from Wonsan toward inland provinces.
 Mar 31. Jams GPS signals in South Korea by producing maximum output of radio waves.
 Apr 1. North Korea fires a short-range missile into the East Sea (Sondok).
 Apr 15. North Korea launches a Musudan missile into the East Sea.
 Apr 23. North Korea claims a successful test-fire of SLBM near the coast of Sinpo.
 Apr 28. North Korea fire two Musudan missiles from Wonsan.
 May 27. North Korean fishing boat and patrol boat crosses NLL in the West Sea.
 May 31. North Korea fires one Musudan missile from Wonsan.
 Jun 22. North Korea fires two Musudan missiles from Wonsan.
 Jun 23. North Korea test-fires the Hwasong-10, a mid-range strategic ballistic missile.
 Jul 8. Decision to reach to deploy THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense).
 Jul 9. North Korea launches one SLBM off the coast of Sinpo.
 Jul 19. North Korea launches three ballistic missiles into the East Sea (Hwangju).
 Aug 3. North Korea launches two Rodong-1 missiles into the East Sea (Unnyul).
 Aug 24. North Korea fires one SLBM off the coast of Sinpo.

Sep 5. North Korea fires three ballistic missiles into the East Sea.
 Sep 9. North Korea conducts 5th nuclear test.
 Oct 15. North Korea launches mid-range Musudan missile in Pyongbuk (Gusong).
 Oct 20. North Korea launches mid-range Musudan missile in Pyongbuk (Gusong).
 Nov 30. The UNSC adopts a resolution 2321 regarding North Korea's 5th nuclear test.

2017

Feb 12. North Korea launches a ballistic missile (Gusong).
 Feb 13. Kim Jong-nam assassinated in Malaysia.
 Mar 6. North Korea launches four ballistic missiles (Dongchang-ri).
 Apr 5. North Korea launches a ballistic missile (Sinpo).
 Apr 15. Military parade celebrating the 105th anniversary of Kim Il-sung's birth.
 Apr 16. North Korea launches a ballistic missile (Sinpo).
 Apr 29. North Korea launches a ballistic missile (Bukchang).
 May 14. North Korea launches a ballistic missile (Gusong).
 May 21. North Korea launches a ballistic missile (Bukchang).
 May 29. North Korea launches a ballistic missile (Wonsan).
 Jun 2. The UNSC adopts a resolution 2356 regarding North Korea's IRBM launch.
 Jun 8. North Korea launches a surface-to-ship cruise missile (Wonsan).
 Jul 4. North Korea launches a ballistic missile (Banghyon).
 Jul 28. North Korea launches a ballistic missile (Mupyong).
 Aug 5. The UNSC adopts a resolution 2371 regarding North Korea's ballistic missile launch.
 Aug 26. North Korea launches three ballistic missiles (East Sea).
 Aug 29. North Korea launches a ballistic missile (Sunan Airfield).
 Sep 3. North Korea conducts 6th nuclear test (Punggye-ri).
 Sep 11. The UNSC adopts a resolution 2375 regarding North Korea's 6th nuclear test.
 Sep 15. North Korea launches a ballistic missile (Sunan Airfield).
 Nov 29. North Korea launches a long-range ballistic missile (Pyongsong).
 Dec 22. The UNSC adopts a resolution 2397 regarding North Korea's Hwasong-15 launch.

2018

Feb 8. Military parade celebrating the 70th anniversary of KPA (Korea People's Army).
 Feb 9. High-level delegation visits South Korea through a direct sea route over the West Sea.

Feb 25. High-level delegation visits South Korea through Kyeongui Line, land route.
 Mar 5. South Korean Special envoy visits North Korea.
 Apr 23. Two Koreas suspends loudspeaker propaganda broadcasts.
 Apr 27. 1st inter-Korean Summit adopts the Panmunjom declaration.
 May 1. Begins to remove loudspeakers for propaganda broadcasts.
 May 26. 2nd inter-Korean Summit at the Unification Pavilion.
 Jun 12. 1st US-North Korea Summit in Singapore.
 Aug 20. Reunion of separated families (Aug 20~26, Kumgansan Mountain).
 Sep 9. Military parade celebrating the 70th anniversary of the North Korean regime.
 Sep 18. 2018 inter-Korean Summit in Pyongyang adopts Pyongyang Joint Declaration.
 Oct 12. Inter-Korean military working-level talks (Panmunjom).
 Oct 15. Inter-Korean high-level talk (Peace House).
 Oct 20. Two Koreas complete landmine removal in JSA (Joint Security Area).
 Oct 25. Two Koreas complete removal of GPs (Gard Posts), personnel, and weapons from JSA.
 Nov 1. Two Koreas cease mutual hostilities on land, sea, and air.
 Nov 30. Two Koreas complete removal of facilities from 10 GPs on both sides.

2019

Feb 27. 2nd US-North Korea Summit in Hanoi, Vietnam.
 May 4. North Korea launches two ballistic missiles (Wonsan).
 May 9. North Korea launches two ballistic missiles (Gusong).
 Jul 25. North Korea launches two ballistic missiles (Wonsan).
 Jul 31. North Korea launches two ballistic missiles (Wonsan).
 Aug 2. North Korea launches two ballistic missiles (Younghung).
 Aug 6. North Korea launches two ballistic missiles (Kwail).
 Aug 10. North Korea launches two ballistic missiles (Hamheung).
 Aug 16. North Korea launches two ballistic missiles (Tongchon).
 Aug 24. North Korea launches two ballistic missiles (Sondok).
 Sep 10. North Korea launches two ballistic missiles (Kaecheon).
 Oct 2. North Korea test-fires a SLBM missile (Wonsan).
 Oct 31. North Korea launches two ballistic missiles (Sunchon).
 Nov 28. North Korea launches two ballistic missiles (Yeonpo).

2020

Mar 2. North Korea launches two ballistic missiles (Wonsan).

Mar 9. North Korea launches two ballistic missiles (Sondok).
Mar 21. North Korea launches two ballistic missiles toward the East Sea.
Mar 29. North Korea launches two ballistic missiles (Wonsan).
Apr 14. North Korea launches several ballistic missiles (Muncheon).
May 3. Two Koreas exchange gun-fires at GP.
Jun 16. North Korea destroys the liaison office in Kaesong.
Sep 22. A South Korean official shot dead by North Korean troops.

Appendix II: 2020 Asan Annual Survey Questionnaire

Q01. How much are you interested in national unification? (n=1,500)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
Not interested at all	3.1
Not very interested	20.0
Moderately interested	59.3
Very interested	17.6

Q02. If the South and the North are reunified, which of the following should be the method of unification? (n=1,500)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
Unification under the Southern system	45.9
South and North maintain their own systems and co-exist	52.1
Unification under the Northern system	0.1
Other	1.9

Q03. What is your opinion toward the necessity of unification? (n=1,500)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
Should be unified as soon as possible	10.9
Pace of unification should depend on the circumstances	53.5
No need to rush unification	25.5
Unification is not necessary	10.1

Q04. If the two Koreas are unified, how do you think this will affect your household economy?
(n=1,500)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
Will get much worse	9.0
Will worsen	54.0
Will improve	33.0
Will get much better	4.0

Q05. If the two Koreas are unified, how do you think this will affect the national economy?
(n=1,500)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
Will get much worse	15.1
Will worsen	47.7
Will improve	28.9
Will get much better	8.3

Q06. Suppose unification makes your economic condition worse. Do you think that it is still necessary?
(n=1,500)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
Unification must be achieved regardless of economic costs	15.1
Unification should not be hurried if economic costs are high	47.7
No need for unification	8.3

Q07. Suppose unification makes the economic condition of South Korea worse. Do you think that it is still necessary?
(n=1,500)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
Unification must be achieved regardless of economic costs	15.1
Unification should not be hurried if economic costs are high	47.7
No need for unification	8.3

Q08. South Korea's per capita tax-related burden in 2019 is about 10.14 million won. Are you willing to pay to additional tax to support the unification? If so, how much additional tax are you willing to pay? (If you are not willing to pay, please type zero in the response).
(n=1,500)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
Not willing to pay more	45.5
Less than 10,000 Won	15.4
10,001~100,000 Won	16.7
100,001~500,000 Won	8.1
500,001 Won+	14.3

Q09. If the two Koreas are unified, what benefits will you anticipate the most?
(n=1,500)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
Lowering the threat of war	34.4
Making use of the North's natural resources	16.8
Synergy achieved by the South's technology and the North's labor force	14.1
Expanding the nation's geographic territory	11.9
Alleviating the suffering of the families separated by the national division	9.5
Lifting the nation's standing and diplomatic stature in the world	8.1
Restoring the unity and identity of the Korean people	4.5
Other	0.7

Q10. If the two Koreas are unified, what will you worry about the most? (n=1,500)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
Economic burdens such as costs of unification	29.3
Confusion due to different ideologies and value systems	21.2
The income gap between the North and the South	13.5
Differences between the lives and cultures of the people of the North and the South	13.3
Political confusion and disorder	12.3
Crime and public security	6.9
Integration of the militaries of the South and the North	3.3
Other	0.3

Q11. How do you view North Korea? Select one of the followings. (n=1,500)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
One of us	21.1
Neighbor	27.9
Stranger	11.5
Enemy	25.7

Q12. How do you rate the seriousness of North Korean human rights problem?
(n=1,500)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
Not serious at all	0.7
Not serious	4.4
Serious on the whole	49.1
Very serious	45.9

Q13. Do you think North Korean human rights problem is an urgent issue to deal with?
(n=1,500)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
Strongly disagree	3.0
Somewhat disagree	18.7
Somewhat agree	53.1
Strongly agree	25.2

Q14. What do you think of the current state of inter-Korean relations? (n=1,500)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
Very bad	14.7
Not very good	69.3
Good on the whole	15.7
Very good	0.3

Q15. If so, which nation do you think should be blamed most for the current state of inter-Korean relations? (n=1,261)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
North Korea	66.3
US	14.4
China	13.1
South Korea	6.3

Q16. What do you think about South Korea's economic aid towards North Korea? (n=1,500)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
Should not be provided without an apology and promise to abstain from future provocations	78.7
Should be continued regardless of inter-Korean relations	21.3

Q17. In your opinion, how likely is a war between the two Koreas? (n=1,500)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
Not likely at all	7.0
Not likely	50.3
Likely on the whole	40.7
Very likely	2.1

Q18. Why do you think that a war between the two Koreas is not likely? (n=859)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
The North worries the US intervention	39.7
The economy of the North is too weak to wage a war	36.4
The North cannot count on China's support in the event of a war	7.6
The North wants to avoid a fratricidal war between the Koreas	7.5
The North fears the defense capability of the South	4.3
Other	4.5

Q19. Why do you think a war between the two Koreas is likely? (n=641)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
The North needs to maintain its current regime	55.9
Diplomatic/economic pressures imposed by the Great Powers like the US	21.7
The North wants to reunify by force of arms	17.0
Current administration's firm policy towards the North	5.1
Other	0.3

Q20. In the event of a war, do you think that the South Korean military, on its own, can win the war against North Korea? (n=1,500)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
Not likely at all	19.3
Not likely	47.7
Likely on the whole	25.3
Very likely	7.7

Q21. Do you think that the South Korean military without help from the US military is able to deter North Korea from starting a war? (n=1,500)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
Not likely at all	21.4
Not likely	50.9
Likely on the whole	22.1
Very likely	5.6

Q22. Do you think that North Korea possesses nuclear weapons? (n=1,500)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
Yes	94.9
No	5.1

Q23. What do you think about North Korea’s possibility of giving up its nuclear weapons? (n=1,423)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
Not likely at all	53.3
Not likely	40.1
Likely on the whole	4.6
Very likely	2.1

Q24. In your opinion, how likely is the nuclear attack of North at the event of the war between North and South Korea? (n=1,500)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
Very low possibility	12.0
Moderately low possibility	35.1
Moderately high possibility	34.1
Very high possibility	18.9

Q25. What policy do you think is desirable in dealing with North Korean nuclear threat? (n=1,500)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
Continuous military pressure on North Korea	6.3
Continuous economic pressure on North Korea	29.0
Strengthening economic ties between South and North Korea	42.7
The US should guarantee the survival of North Korean regime	22.0

Q26. Do you think that the US will use nuclear weapons to defend South Korea if the North attacks the South with nuclear weapons? (n=1,500)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
Not likely at all	7.3
Not likely	41.6
Likely on the whole	40.4
Very likely	10.7

Q27. What do you think of the opinion that South Korea should develop nuclear weapons to counter North Korea’s nuclear weapon development? (n=1,500)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
Strongly oppose	7.9
Oppose	22.8
Support	42.6
Strongly support	26.7

Q28. What is the reason behind your opposition to South Korea’s developing nuclear weapons? (n=460)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
Our security is more threatened if we develop nuclear weapons.	43.5
It might instigate the nuclear armament of the neighboring countries such as Japan and Taiwan.	26.3
Relations with the North will deteriorate.	14.8
The US nuclear umbrella is sufficient.	7.2
Other	8.3

Q29. What is the reason behind your consent on South Korea’s developing nuclear weapons? (n=1,040)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
We need the nuclear sovereignty as a sovereign state	33.7
By becoming a nuclear state, we can increase our influence in the world	33.4
We need to counter-balance against North Korea’s nuclear threats	32.1
Other	0.9

Q30. What do you think of the opinion that the strategic nuclear weapons should be deployed to South Korea? (n=1,500)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
Strongly oppose	6.0
Oppose	19.0
Support	42.3
Strongly support	18.9

Q31. How do you rate the influence of neighboring countries on South Korea? Please rate your view on a scale zero to ten, respectively, representing “Very negative” and “Very positive” with five being “Neutral.” (n=1,500)

Percentages (%)	North Korea	China	Japan	US	Russia
Positive	11.9	15.5	12.5	63.6	11.7
Neutral	19.2	18.2	16.0	18.8	32.9
Negative	68.9	66.3	71.5	17.6	55.4

Q32. Which of the following countries do you think is the biggest threat to current South Korea’s security? (n=1,500)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
North Korea	55.8
China	25.9
Japan	11.3
The US	6.1
Russia	0.4

Q33. Which of the following countries do you think will be the biggest threat to Korea’s security after unification? (n=1,500)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
China	66.7
Japan	23.1
The US	8.1
Russia	1.5

Q34. Do you think the South Korea-US alliance will continue to be necessary in the future? (n=1,500)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
Not necessary at all	0.9
Not necessary	3.3
Necessary	59.5
Very necessary	36.3

Q35. Do you think the South Korea-US alliance will continue to be necessary after Korea becomes unified? (n=1,500)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
Not necessary at all	2.3
Not necessary	11.4
Necessary	60.3
Very necessary	26.1

Q36. What do you think about the long-term US military presence in South Korea? (n=1,500)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
Should not be present	28.0
Should be present	72.0

Q37. Currently, the US has some 28,500 troops in South Korea. Do you think the size of US military should be reduced, maintained, or increased in the future? (n=1,080)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
Reduce level of troops	23.8
Maintain current level of troops	60.0
Increase level of troops	10.4

Q38. What is your opinion toward the US military stationing in South Korea after unification? (n=1,500)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
Should not be present	53.7
Should be present	46.3

Q39. What is your opinion toward the OPCON transfer? (n=1,500)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
Conditions based transfer	42.5
Transfer without condition	27.2
Should eliminate transfer plan	7.9
Don't know/Refused	22.4

Q40. What is your opinion toward the SMA (Special Measure Agreement)? (n=1,500)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
Should be maintained at current level	41.1
Should be raised to a level lower than what the US demands	23.1
Should be lower than the current level	23.4
Should be raised to what the US demands	2.9
Don't know/Refused	9.6

Q41. To what extent do you agree with the following opinions on the US? (n=1,500)

Statements	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
The US should bear some responsibility for the fact that the Korean Peninsula is divided.	59.0	41.0
The US has been an impediment to South Korea's democratization.	35.3	64.7
The US is a hindrance to inter-Korean reconciliation and cooperation.	43.2	56.8
The interests of the US and South Korea coincide.	55.5	44.5

Q42. What is your opinion toward the South Korea-US alliance? Please rate your view on a scale zero to ten, respectively, representing “Should pursue an independent foreign policy” and “Should strengthen the alliance” with five being “Maintain status quo.” (n=1,500)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
Should pursue an independent foreign policy	21.7
Maintain status quo	37.3
Should strengthen the alliance	41.0

Q43. What is your opinion on the state of our nation's economy compared to last year? (n=1,500)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
Much worse	27.7
Worse on the whole	50.1
About the same	16.3
Better on the whole	5.1
Much better	0.7

Q44. How has your income or household economy changed compared to last year?
(n=1,500)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
Much worse	16.7
Worse on the whole	41.2
About the same	36.6
Better on the whole	5.1
Much better	0.4

Q45. What is your opinion toward the sanctions on North Korea? Please rate your view on a scale zero to ten, respectively, representing “Sanctions relief conditioned on change in North Korean behavior” and “Sanctions relief in exchange for strengthening inter-Korean cooperation” with five being “Neither of them.”
(n=1,500)

Response Options	Percentages (%)
Sanctions relief conditioned on change in North Korean behavior	56.9
Neither of them	13.6
Sanctions relief in exchange for strengthening inter-Korean cooperation	29.5

Q46. What is your opinion toward the risk factors for South Korea? Please rate your view on a scale “Not threatful at all” to “Very threatful.”
(n=1,500)

Risk factors	Threatful (%)	Not threatful (%)
Infectious diseases or epidemic	95.4	4.6
Environmental pollution	93.7	6.3
Climate change	90.3	9.7
Cyber attacks	89.2	10.8
Humanitarian disaster	84.3	15.7
Social conflict	84.0	16.0
Natural disaster	82.4	17.6
Resource scarcity	80.5	19.5
Maritime security	76.7	23.3
Terrorism	65.7	34.3



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