



Asan Public Opinion Report

South Korean Attitudes toward
North Korea and Reunification

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The Asan Institute for Policy Studies is an independent, non-partisan think tank that undertakes policy-relevant research to foster domestic, regional, and international environments that promote peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula, East Asia, and the world-at-large.

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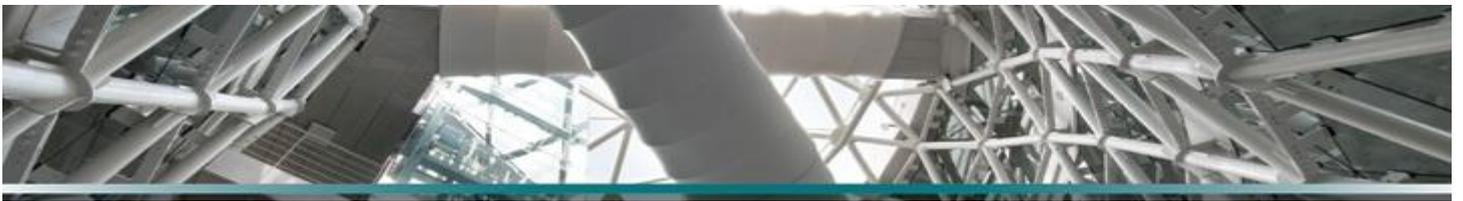
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Executive Summary

In her 2014 New Year's press conference, President Park Geun-hye's labeling of unification as a "bonanza" drew significant attention. The president accurately understood that the perceived economic burden of reunification was the primary reason the interest of South Koreans in reunification has dwindled. However, this report finds that the economic gap is not solely responsible for the growing divide between the South and the North. The South Korea public sees the differing political and values systems as also increasing that divide. More importantly, the ethnic bond that is thought to tie the two Koreas together is weakening among South Koreans.

Data from recent public opinion surveys depict a South Korean public with complicated views of North Korea. While skepticism of the North's intentions remains high, the South Korean government continues to pursue improved relations with its impoverished, hostile neighbor. Using data from the Asan Institute's public opinion surveys, this report investigates attitudes on North Korea, its people, and South Korea's policy toward North Korea.

Perceptions of North Korea as a country remain largely negative. The favorability of North Korea is consistently the lowest among any country included in the survey, challenged only by views of Japan. Views of North Korea's leader—Kim Jong Un—are similar. These views, however, appear to be primarily political and do not extend to the people of North Korea.

As the data make clear, perception of the North Korean people are much more positive than are views of North Korea the country. However, that relationship is not as close as one might imagine. When questioned on personal affinity, North Koreans were ranked third out of four citizenries, coming in slightly below China. Even so, the overall score was significantly improved over views of the country. Of concern, however, is that the youngest South Koreans report the largest distance with North Koreans.

This youth detachment from North Korea is perhaps the most important recurring theme in the public opinion data over the past five years. While this cohort is clearly progressive on issues such as gay marriage, it also identifies as conservative on hard security issues. Those currently in their twenties are far more conservative when it comes to North Korea than are those currently in their thirties and forties.

For President Park, there has been difficulty in differentiating her North Korea policy from that of her predecessor, Lee Myung-bak. While President Lee was widely regarded as being too hardline on North Korea, President Park's policy was rated as being virtually identical. However, that may not be a problem in terms of her presidency. A plurality of the public preferred the current policy or a harder-line policy when it comes to the North.

The visit by a high ranking North Korea delegation following the close of the Incheon Asian Games did little to sway public opinion on North Korea. Inter-Korean relations remained relatively unimportant when compared to other challenges facing the country. The visit also failed to shift public attitudes across a variety of more specific issues.



This report takes a closer look at the opinions held by the South Korean public on North Korea and unification. These attitudes are often highly pragmatic, and seem to indicate a public generally suffering from North Korea fatigue.

The South Korean government needs to foster an accommodating environment for unification. This includes, but is not limited to, emphasizing economic prosperity in the unified Korea and strengthening the ethnic connection with North Korea. In that regard, maintaining human exchanges is important before the emotional connection is lost entirely.



Introduction

South Korea's relationship with North Korea is complicated. While the ultimate goal remains reunification, that goal seems no closer today than it did decades ago. The South Korean government has undertaken a range of policy options under different administrations, none of which has led to sustained improvements in relations. Yet, each South Korean leader hopes to cement his or her legacy by being the first leader to lay a clear path toward reunification.

The Park Geun-Hye administration announced its intention to pursue reunification early in its tenure when the president referred to reunification as a “bonanza” in early 2014. This emphasized the role reunification would play in boosting a South Korean economy perceived to be stalled. She also created a new presidential commission—The Preparatory Commission for Unification—to help lay out the first steps forward in fulfilling the plan.

The public, however, remains largely unconvinced. The pace of reunification—as well its form—is up for debate. More importantly, Korea's youngest complicate the picture. Their perceptions of North Korea suggest that the importance of reunification could slowly fade over time. Their views are shaped by North Korea's aggression and by a growing cultural distance. Tracking these attitudes over time will be vital in determining how South Korea will approach the challenge of reunification by choice. At some point in the future—assuming the North Korean regime survives far enough into that future—South Koreans may decide that reunification is not in their collective interest.

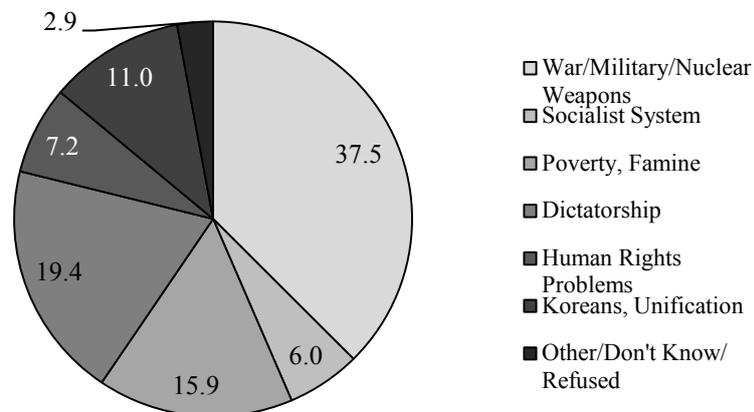
Perceptions of North Korea

North Korea has a serious image problem in South Korea. The same is true of its image around the world, but it is South Korea that is actively seeking to create support—both internationally and domestically—for reunification of the Korean Peninsula. The image problem is understandable. In recent years there have been repeated missile launches, nuclear tests, well-documented human rights abuses, and killings of South Korean nationals. President Park's declaration that reunification would be a “bonanza” has not changed these perceptions.

It is then no surprise that when presented with a range of response options, a plurality (37.5%) of respondents most associated North Korea with “war, military, and nuclear weapons” (Figure 1). This response was evenly distributed across all age cohorts but that was not the case for self-identified political ideologies. While 28.8 percent of self-identified progressives associated these words with North Korea, 36.5 percent of moderates and 45.1 percent of conservatives stated the same.



Figure 1: Image of North Korea¹



Overall, the second-most cited word was "dictatorship" (19.4%) followed by "poverty and famine" (15.9%). Only 7.2 percent of respondents cited North Koreans as being of the same ethnicity.

Those in their twenties were least likely to see North Koreans as a people sharing the same bloodline with South Koreans, with only 5.4 percent citing this response option. Instead, they were more likely to conjure up negative images of North Korea. It is those in their forties who most strongly associate 'one Korea' with North Korea (18.2%). The fact that it is not the old generation but those who are in their forties who are the most ethnically nationalistic is interesting. This can be understood from the ideological positions taken by the two generational groups. Those who are in their forties—largely the 386 generation—are currently considered to be progressive and pro-North Korea in terms of national security.

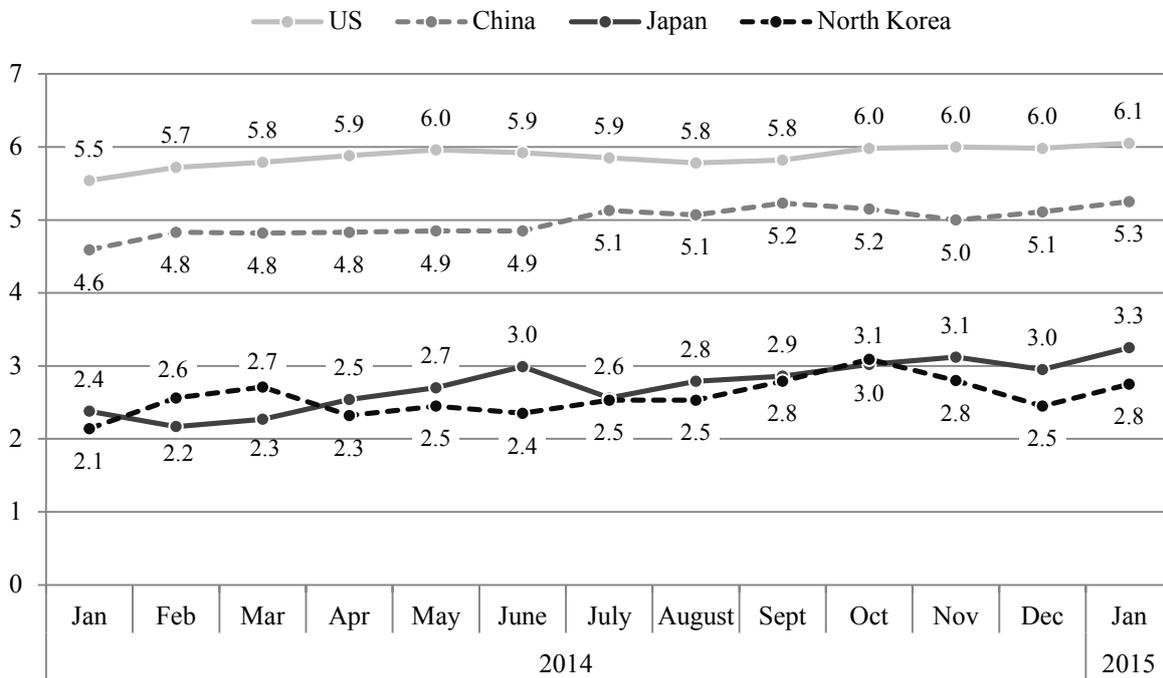
While 15.9 percent stated they most closely associated North Korea with poverty and famine, this result exhibited significant splits along ideological lines as well. Among self-identified conservatives 12.2 percent identified this as the most prominent association with North Korea while 21.8 percent of progressives stated the same. This helps to partly explain the different approaches to North Korea taken by the official political parties. Poverty and famine are humanitarian issues to be combated with large scale aid donations—an approach taken by progressive administrations. But threats of war, military action, and nuclear weapons are a security threat, leading conservative parties to take a more hardline approach when dealing with the North.

The overall negativity in attitudes on the North is also reflected in the country's favorability ratings. As shown in Figure 2, North Korea has generally been the least favored country among the Korean public over the past twelve months. Its only serious competition is Japan—a country with which South Korea is currently engaged in a diplomatic cold war.

¹ Asan Daily Poll. Survey conducted September 4-6, 2014.



Figure 2: Country Favorability²



Long-distance Relationship

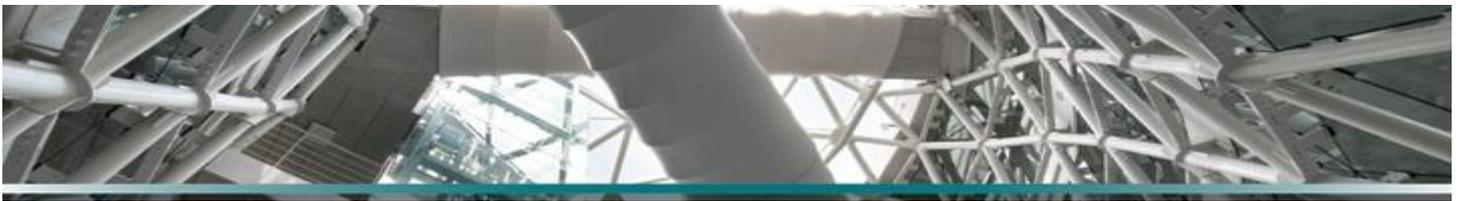
The two Koreas share the same ethnicity, the same history, and the same language. These commonalities continue to be stressed in the push to raise interest in reunification, and this approach assumes that these commonalities remain stronger than the differences which have emerged in the past 60 years. That may be true for now, but these commonalities are already diminishing. Recent research suggests that the ethnic component of identity is of decreasing importance to the youngest South Koreans.³ Subsequent generations will likely continue to see the commonalities between the South and North diminish further. If that is the case, the argument that reunification by choice is inevitable will weaken in the future.

Indeed, the Korean public is losing its connection with North Koreans. When asked how interested they were in the North Korean people, 56.0 percent of respondents answered that they were interested in them. Although this is slightly more than a majority, the level of interest in the North Korean people was less than that of the interest in North Korea the country (67.0%). This result suggests that South Koreans view North Korea as more of a nation threatening South Korean security than as people sharing the same ethnic nationality.

Another important piece of data to watch over the coming years will be that of personal affinity. In a recent survey, respondents were asked to identify how “close” they felt to

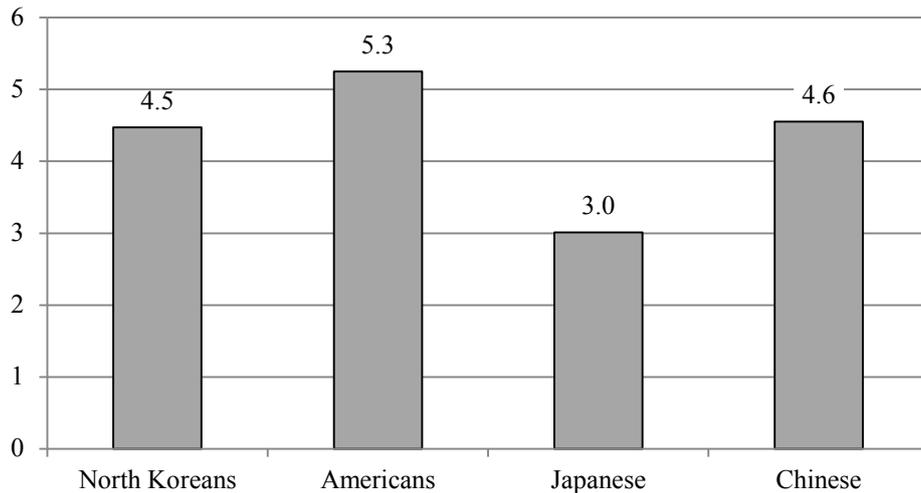
² Asan Daily Poll. Each country’s favorability score is its mean score on a scale from zero to ten, with zero representing “zero favorability”.

³ Kim Jiyoung. “National Identity under Transformation: New Challenges to South Korea.” The Asan Forum, January 25, 2014. <http://www.theasanforum.org/national-identity-under-transformation-new-challenges-to-south-korea/>



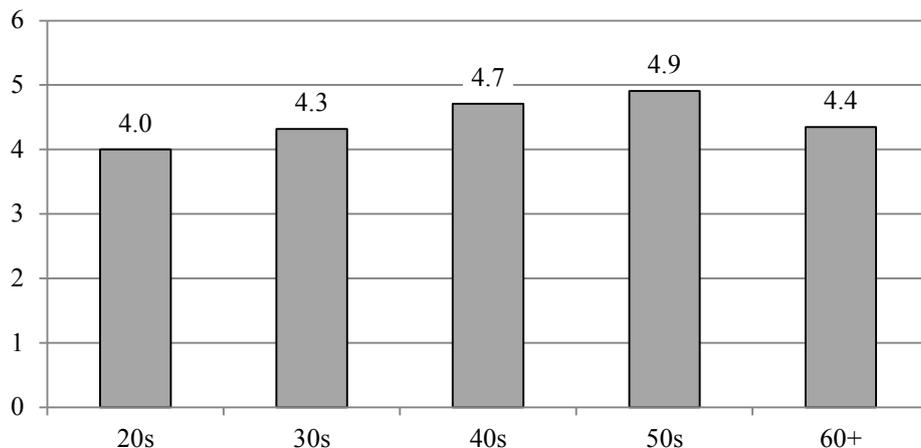
citizens of the other countries included in the survey. This was measured on a zero to ten scale with zero representing the greatest distance and ten representing the greatest closeness. The mean was then calculated for each response option and is shown in Figure 3. Of the four countries included, U.S. citizens were the only group to receive a score above 5.0. China ranked second with a score of 4.6 with North Koreans coming in third.

Figure 3: Personal Affinity⁴



Age cohort breakdowns quickly reveal one key point. Those in their twenties feel more distant toward North Korea than any other cohort (Figure 4).⁵ This is partly because those in their twenties are losing the recognition of North Korea being ‘our’ nation most quickly for obvious reasons. In particular, entering early adulthood during a confrontational period between the South and North—with the sinking of the *Cheonan* and the shelling of *Yeonpyeong* Island the two most important events—is shaping their view of North Korea as more of an enemy than as ‘one of us’.

Figure 4: Closeness to North Korea: By Age



⁴ Survey conducted September 7-10, 2014

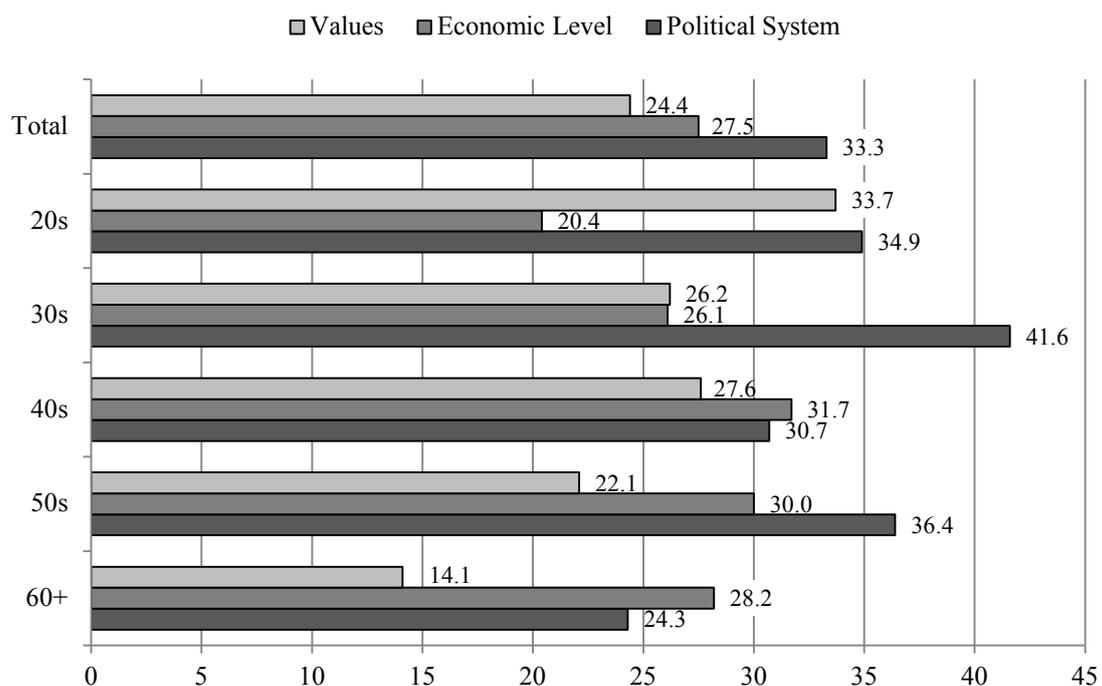
⁵ It should be noted, however, that those in their twenties reported greater distance toward all countries.



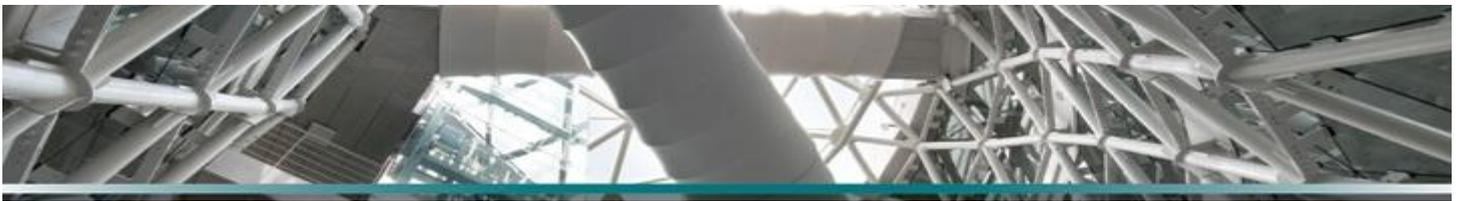
Also, those in their twenties define their identities in different ways from older South Koreans. The young generation’s identity formation is primarily limited to South Korea. This should increase the perceptions of distance with North Koreans over time. This growing distance among an already unengaged—in terms of North Korea and North Koreans—public will be a challenge for policy makers in the years to come.

The reasons for this perceived distance will also be important to track over time. To that end, respondents were asked to identify the primary reason for their perceived distance among three options: differing political systems, different economic levels, and “values”. The latter was not defined. The most commonly cited reason for the distance between South and North Koreans was the differing political systems, with 33.3 percent stating as such (Figure 5). A further 27.5 percent stated that it was the difference in the level of economic development that exacerbated the distance between the two peoples. Finally, 24.4 percent stated that there was a difference in values. Of course, this difference in values could easily have grown out of the difference in political and economic systems.

Figure 5: Reason for Perceived Distance



It should be noted that the young generations’ dissociation with North Korea due to the perceived difference in values is significant compared with older generations. For those in their twenties this difference was considered critical. One-third (33.7%) of this cohort stated that the value difference between North and South made them feel distant to North Korea. This result indicates that social integration will be another problem in a unified Korea.

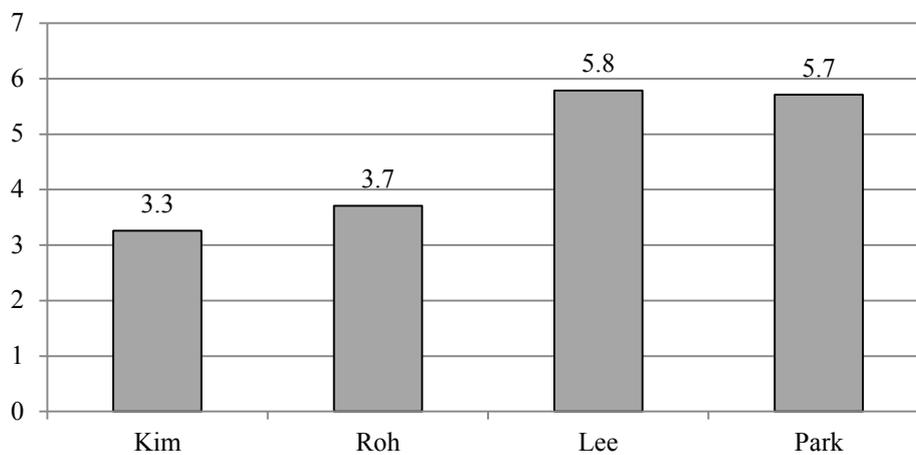


Policy Perceptions

President Park came into office promising an effort to rebuild trust with North Korea. Thus far, North Korea has proved an uncooperative partner. This has limited the Park administration's ability to take meaningful steps to improve inter-Korean relations. While the current administration does have a significantly different approach to North Korea from that of its predecessor, little has changed on a functional level. This is being reflected in the data.

Respondents were asked to classify the North Korea policies of the current administration—as well as the previous three—along a zero to ten scale, with zero representing a softline policy and ten representing a hardline policy. The mean scores are presented in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Policy Perceptions⁶



Unsurprisingly, the late President Kim Dae-jung's North Korea policy was perceived to be most engagement-oriented, receiving the lowest score (3.3) followed by the late President Roh Moo-hyun (3.7). As shown, the public sees little difference between the policies of presidents Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye. While the former received a 5.8 on the zero to ten scale, the latter received a 5.7. Despite efforts by the Park administration to differentiate its policy from that of the hardline taken by the Lee administration, the public has yet to make that distinction. The scores for both administrations are nearly identical.

The views of President Park's North Korea policy as hardline should not be seen as negative. The public is thus far almost evenly split in its evaluation of the policy. While 44.7 percent cite dissatisfaction with the current policy, 41.7 percent report being satisfied.

There was significant variation by age cohort. Despite similar views on national security and the threat of North Korea shared by those in their twenties and those in their sixties, they are far apart on their evaluations of current North Korea policy. While 25.9 percent of those in their sixties report dissatisfaction with current policy, 51.3 percent of those in their twenties state the same. This suggests that approval of the president's overall performance is coloring

⁶ Asan Daily Poll. Survey conducted September 7-10, 2014.



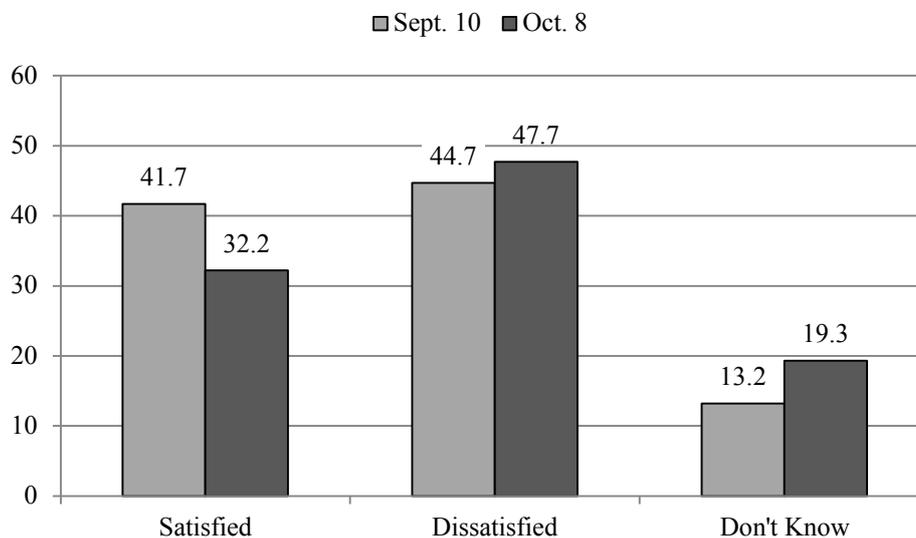
evaluations of her North Korea policy as these two cohorts also evaluate the Park presidency far differently. The differences were also stark between self-reported political ideologies. Among those who identified themselves as being progressive, 60.3 percent reported being dissatisfied with current policy toward North Korea. Among those who identified as conservative, that number was 31.0 percent.

High Level Visit Changes Little

At the close of the 2014 Incheon Asian Games in early October, a surprise visit by a high ranking North Korean delegation set the media and Korea observers abuzz. The community was rife with speculation about the visit's meaning, and there was optimism that it presented the beginning of a breakthrough in inter-Korean relations. Those hopes were ultimately dashed. A survey conducted immediately after the visit shows that the public was never convinced that anything would come of the visit in the first place.

As noted, public satisfaction with the Park administration's North Korea policy was ambivalent in early September. Following the visit, however, reported satisfaction declined significantly. While 41.7 percent reported satisfaction in the earlier survey, 32.2 percent reported satisfaction immediately following the high level delegation (Figure 7). While dissatisfaction increased from 44.7 percent to 47.7 percent, there was a 6.1 percentage point increase in "don't know" responses.⁷

Figure 7: Satisfaction with North Korea Policy



In general, positive movement in inter-Korean relations is assumed to increase satisfaction with government policy on North Korea. In this case, however, the fact that the meeting was a surprise may have had the opposite effect. Not only did it make the South Korean government look unprepared, but it also made the Park administration look reactive. One of

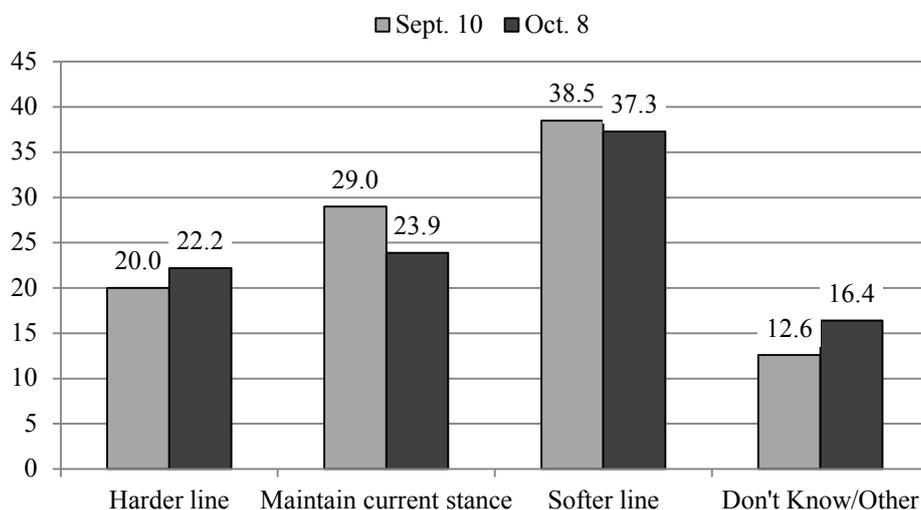
⁷ Asan Daily Poll. The former survey was conducted September 7-10, 2014. The latter was conducted October 6-8, 2014.



the highlights from her first year in office was to seize the initiative when North Korea threatened to close the Kaesong Industrial Complex. Her decision to call North Korea's bluff and unilaterally shutter the complex was a popular one with the South Korean public. At last, it felt like it was South Korea that would dictate the tone of inter-Korean relations. This time, it appeared to be North Korea that gained the upper hand.

When it comes to attitudes on preferences for North Korea policy a plurality of the public wanted a softer line than the current policy (Figure 8). In the September 7-10 survey, 38.5 percent of respondents stated as such, while 20.0 percent preferred a harder line. (29.0% wanted to maintain the current stance.) There was little change in the October survey. The slight decrease in maintaining the current stance seems to reflect increased dissatisfaction.

Figure 8: Preferred Policy Stance on North Korea



However, there are two key points to draw from the data. First, the South Korean public prefers a hardline position overall. While the figure shows a plurality preferring a softer policy stance, this is misleading. As was previously established, the public considers the Park administration's North Korea policy to be hardline in nature. Thus, the response option to maintain the current policy can be considered support for a hardline position. Combining that with those who prefer a harder line reveals that a plurality prefers a hardline policy.

Second, the North Korean delegation's visit to Seoul and the flurry of diplomatic and media activity that followed did little to sway the South Korean public. There was virtually no change in the public's preferred policy stance from before the visit to after. This should come as no surprise. The public has watched keenly as deal after deal has fallen through with North Korea. While the government has the duty to follow through on potential breakthroughs with North Korea, the South Korean public is not rushing to judgment. It will believe things have changed once there is more tangible evidence that they have actually changed.

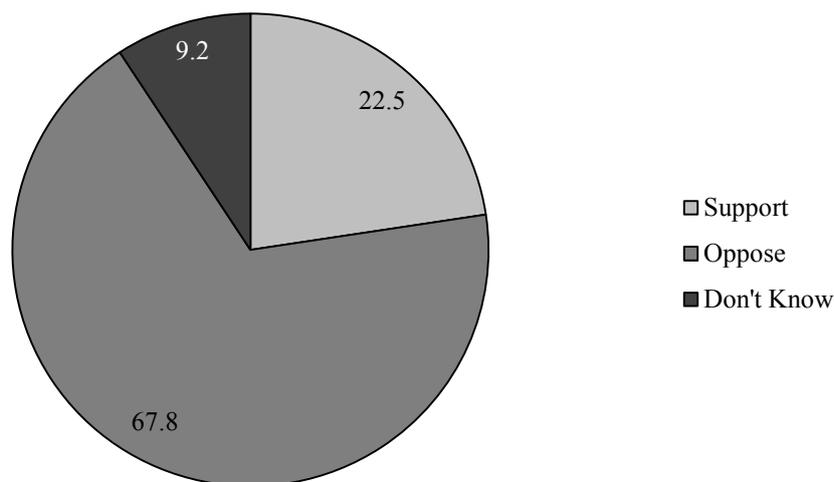


Attitudes on Aid

Economic and humanitarian aid are major pillars of North Korea policy for each South Korean president, but it has always been a subject of much debate in terms of its scope and size. While humanitarian aid has largely continued under all presidents, economic aid was cut off under Lee Myung-bak and that policy continues under Park Geun-hye.

The resumption of economic aid is largely opposed by the South Korean public, with 67.8 percent in opposition unless there is a significant change in “attitude” by North Korea (Figure 9).⁸ What would represent such a change is not made clear in the response options, but it would generally require a commitment to cease provocations and likely include an official apology for the sinking of the *Cheonan* and the shelling of *Yeonpyeong*. Unlike other results on North Korea policy, there is very little variation among age cohorts. While there is some variation among political ideologies, even a majority (55.1%) of those who identify as progressive oppose the resumption of economic aid. Among self-identified conservatives, that number is 77.0 percent.

Figure 9: Resuming Economic Aid to North Korea



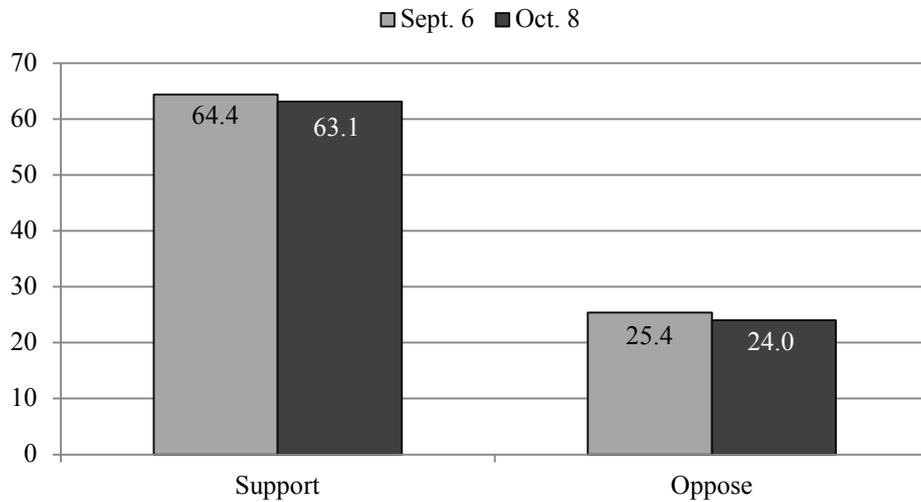
Among those that oppose providing economic aid to North Korea, the primary stated reason for opposition—selected by 46.3 percent—was that such aid did not help improve the lives of everyday North Koreans. The next largest segment (23.5%) stated opposition to economic aid because its provision would delay the reform of North Korea’s economy.

While there was clear opposition to economic aid, there was variation in attitudes toward specific policies such as resuming tours to Mt. Geumgang and reunions of separated families. A resumption of the tours to Mt. Geumgang—suspended in 2008 following the shooting of a South Korean tourist at the resort by a North Korean soldier—was widely supported.

⁸ Survey conducted September 4-6, 2014



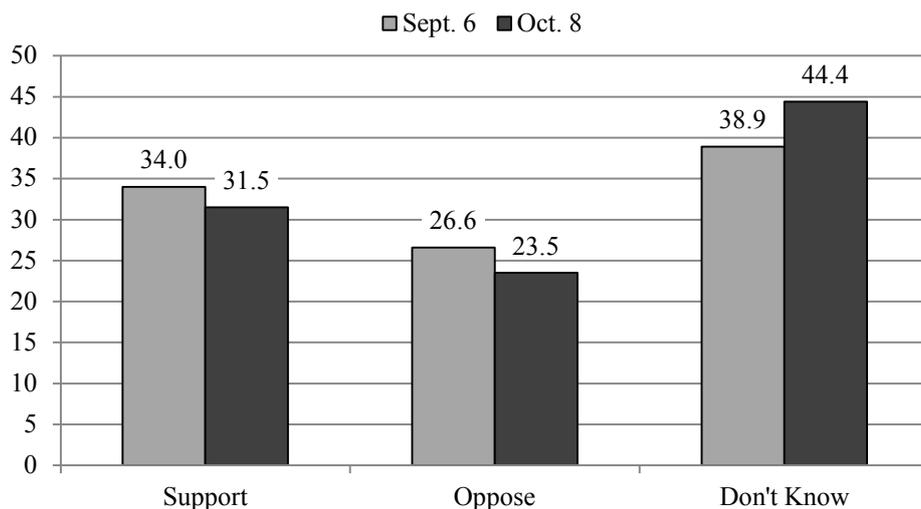
Figure 10: Support for Resuming Mt. Geumgang Tours



Support for resuming these tours was not based on the recent North Korean delegation visit, however. Instead, this support seems to be long-standing. Of course, any such resumption would not come free of charge, and North Korea would be sure to make demands to resume the tours. It is unclear what the South Korean public would deem an acceptable trade-off.

Much of the aid that South Korea would seek to supply to North Korea is limited by the May 24 sanctions, enacted under President Lee Myung-bak. Before the North's delegation visit, the public was ambivalent on the repeal of these sanctions, likely stemming from a lack of understanding of the actual sanctions. The visit also did not change this (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Lifting 5.24 Sanctions



With a plurality of the Korean public undecided on lifting or maintaining the sanctions, it would appear that the Park administration has ample leeway in approaching the problem. If it can create a solid case for lifting those sanctions, the public could be swayed into support. Self-identified conservatives were the most likely to oppose a repeal, with 35.1 percent in

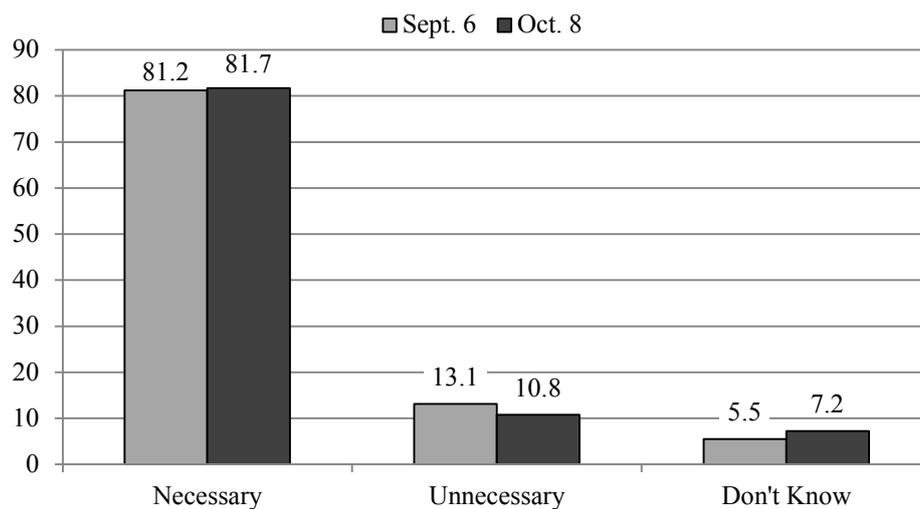


opposition. Yet, 27.8 percent of this group was in favor. Should the administration see a window and decide to move, lifting sanctions should pose little trouble on the domestic front.

The meeting of separated families, however, largely receives a free pass. Even if North Korea demands economic aid in exchange for the reunions, 72.0 percent of the South Korean public supported it. Such meetings are apparently perceived to be humanitarian in nature to most South Koreans.

Holding a summit with North Korea is another area where the administration can expect little pushback. Each administration since Kim Dae-jung has sought such a summit—only Lee Myung-bak failed to accomplish it—and President Park has already stated her willingness to meet Kim Jong Un. Should such a summit be agreed to, it would be largely uncontroversial in South Korea. As shown in Figure 12, 81.7 percent thought an inter-Korean summit was necessary in the most recent survey. That was virtually unchanged from when the question was asked before the high level delegation visit.

Figure 12: Necessity of a South-North Summit

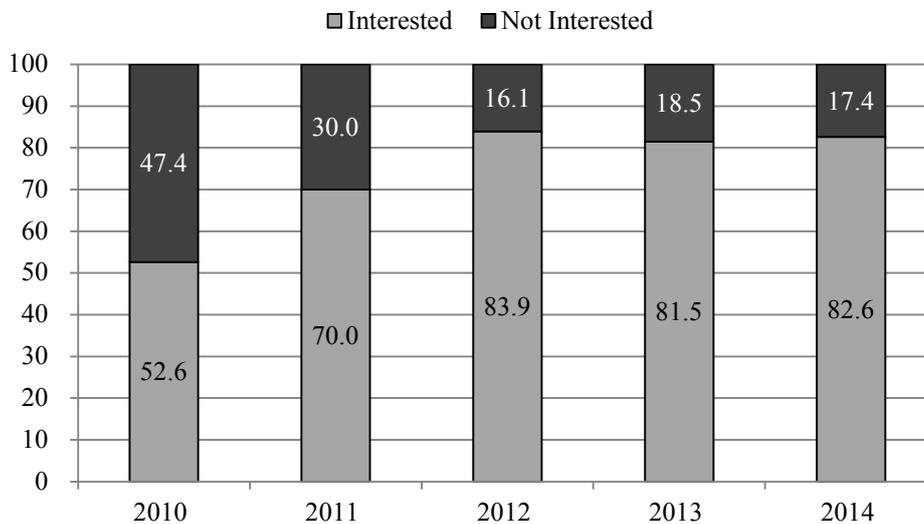


Attitudes on Reunification

The issue that looms largest over inter-Korean relations is, of course, reunification. While both sides state that reunification is their ultimate goal, reaching an agreement on what a peaceful reunification would look like is unlikely. Despite this reality, over the past five years the Korean public has displayed an elevated interest in reunification, as shown in Figure 13.



Figure 13: Interest in Reunification⁹



At first glance, it would appear that interest in reunification has increased significantly over time. The truth is that the data in 2010 was likely abnormally low. The survey that produced that result was conducted after the sinking of the Cheonan—but before the shelling on *Yeonpyeong*—and captured a public that was reevaluating its interest in North Korea.

Age cohort breakdowns reveal an increase in interest among all age cohorts, but it also highlights that Korea’s youth are consistently less interested in reunification than are their older countrymen. In 2010, just 39.2 percent of those in their twenties expressed interest in reunification. In 2014, that number was 71.8 percent. A significant increase, to be sure, but still lowest among all cohorts and nearly 20 percentage points lower than those 60 and older.

Table 1: Interest in Reunification: By Age

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
20s	39.2	64.4	77.1	72.4	71.8
30s	50.5	66.6	81.8	75.8	75.8
40s	57.0	77.2	84.0	87.2	81.7
50s	58.0	72.2	87.2	85.3	89.9
60+	58.3	68.6	88.9	85.4	91.7

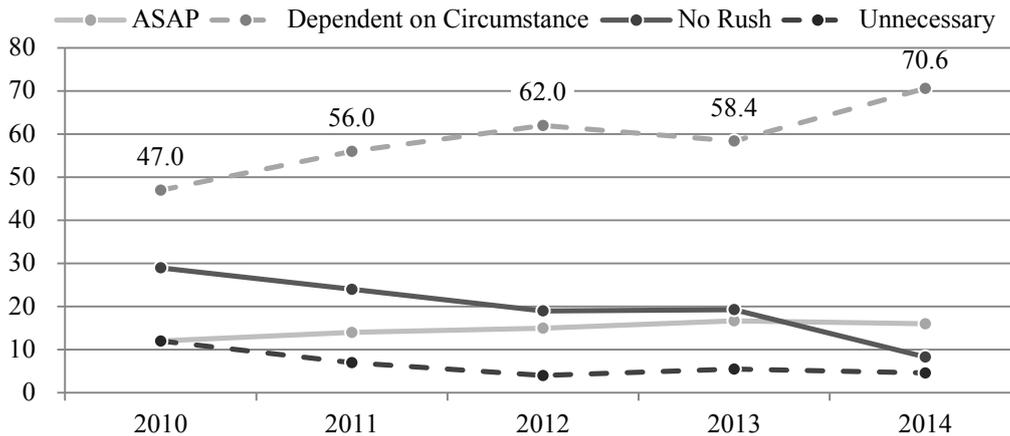
The most recent figures are likely disappointing for the Park administration. President Park spent much of 2014 pushing the “reunification as bonanza” line. The Korean word chosen for bonanza was *daebak*—a slang term primarily used by Korea’s youth. While the choice of words was a clear attempt to reposition reunification as an important issue among the youth, the effort does not seem to have resonated. Interest overall remains near its peak, but interest among Korea’s youth has declined since 2012.

⁹ Asan Annual Survey: 2010-2014.



The Park administration's primary tool in raising the public's interest in unification is touting the economic benefits. The pitch says that coupling the North's labor with the South's technological prowess would lead to a reinvigorated Korean economy. This vision, however, has not led to a significantly increased desire for reunification. Instead, the public continues to take a wait-and-see approach (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Preferred Pace of Reunification

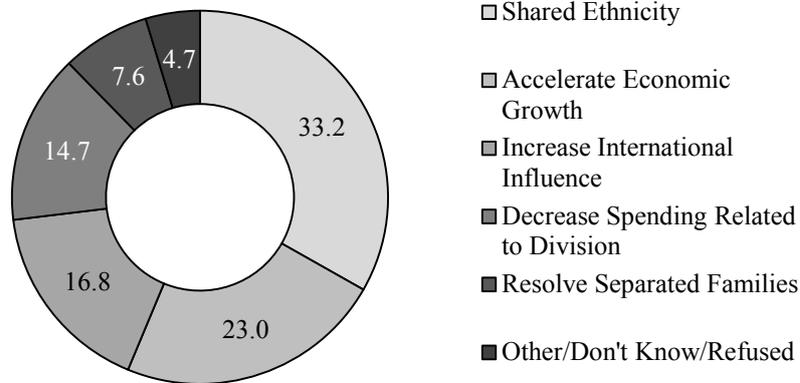


Given that South Korea is by far the more affluent country, and thus has much more to lose should reunification bring significant problems, a cautious approach makes sense. Over the past five years such an approach has gained favor, and in 2014 70.6 percent favored a circumstances dependent approach to reunification. One concern is that the public will never deem the circumstances favorable, and over time the hope of reunification will fade. Those who answered that reunification should be done as soon as possible remains static.

An important metric to watch moving forward will be the reasons given that respondents support reunification. An accurate measure of this should allow the government to craft its approach to the issue, allowing for a policy that addresses both the concerns and expectations for reunification. As Figure 16 shows, a plurality currently cites the shared ethnicity of South and North Koreans as the primary reason that unification is necessary.

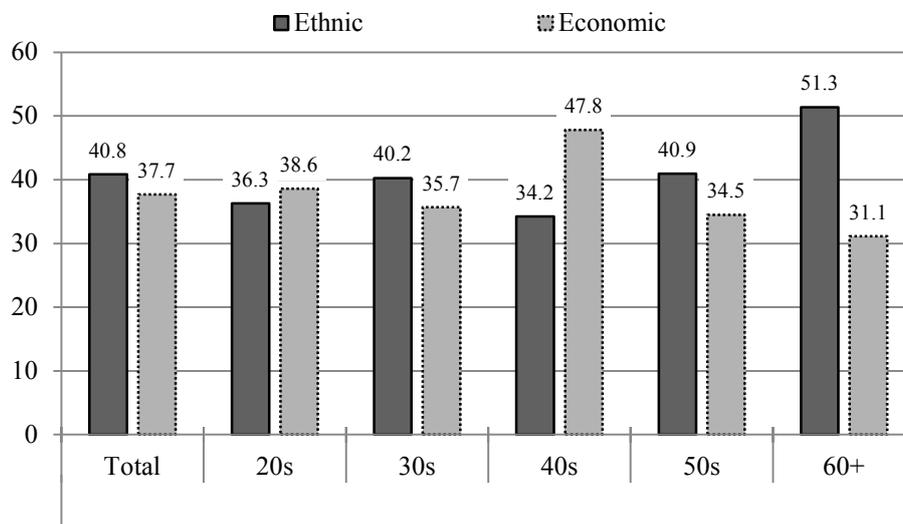


Figure 15: Reasons for Necessity of Reunification¹⁰



Four of the above response options can be grouped into two larger themes—ethnic and economic reasons. Shared ethnicity and resolving separated families are grouped under the ethnic, and accelerating economic growth and a decrease in spending related to the division are grouped under the economic. Figure 16 presents the results of these grouping, along with breakdown by age cohort.

Figure 16: Reunification Necessity: Ethnic vs. Economic



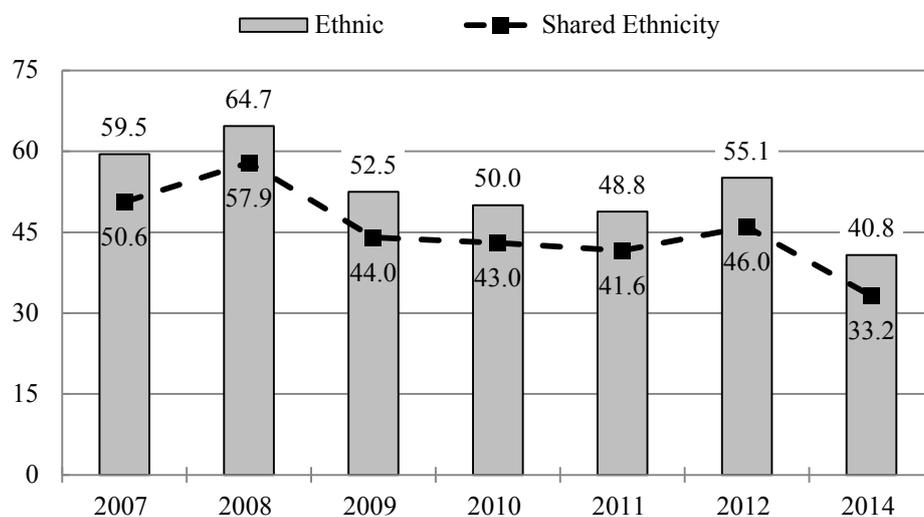
Overall, ethnic reasons are slightly stronger than economic reasons, but the difference is within the margin of error. When broken into age cohorts different approaches emerge. Unsurprisingly, older Koreans viewed reunification from an ethnic perspective, with 51.3 percent of those in their sixties and older stating that reunification is necessary for ethnic reasons. On the other hand, it was those in their forties (47.8%) who most strongly viewed reunification from an economic perspective.

¹⁰ Asan Daily Poll. Survey conducted September 4-6, 2014.



President Park’s decision to focus on the economic benefits of reunification may have had one unintended result in terms of the rationale for reunification—it minimized the importance of the ethnic. Figure 17 presents data gathered by the Reunification and Peace Institute at Seoul National University from 2007 to 2012, with Asan’s most recent data representing 2014. (There is no data for 2013.) While there was variation in the combined ethnic component from 2007 to 2012 (the grey bars), its overall decline was not that severe. But from 2012 to 2014 there is a steep decline in both those who cited the combined ethnic component as well as shared ethnicity more specifically as the reason why reunification was necessary.

Figure 17: Decline in Importance of Ethnicity in Reunification



When broken down by age cohort, the importance of ethnicity in reunification also appears to be waning over time. This is even true for the oldest Koreans. While 75.3 percent of those 60 and older cited the ethnic component in 2007, it declined to 51.3 percent in 2014. There was an even larger, and steadier, decline among those in their fifties. While 72.7 percent cited the ethnic component in 2007, it declined to 40.9 in 2014.

Table 2: Ethnicity in Reunification: By Age¹¹

	2007	2010	2011	2012	2014
Total	59.5	50.0	48.8	55.1	40.8
20s	51.0	40.6	37.8	46.3	36.3
30s	58.3	46.2	47.6	52.8	40.2
40s	56.4	53.4	47.7	52.1	34.2
50s	72.7	58.5	58.4	62.5	40.9
60+	75.3	65.9	61.5	73.7	51.3

¹¹ Data for 2008 and 2009 are excluded here. In the data from the original study, the age classifications are listed as 20s, 30s, 40s, and 50+. Thus, the results for these years for those in their 50s and 60+ are not directly comparable.



This decline in the importance of ethnic nationalism, if it continues, will undermine one of the central tenets of reunification by choice. This could very well weaken the reunification picture overall, as the Korean public has yet to fully buy in to the economic benefits that reunification could bring.

Reunification and Taxes

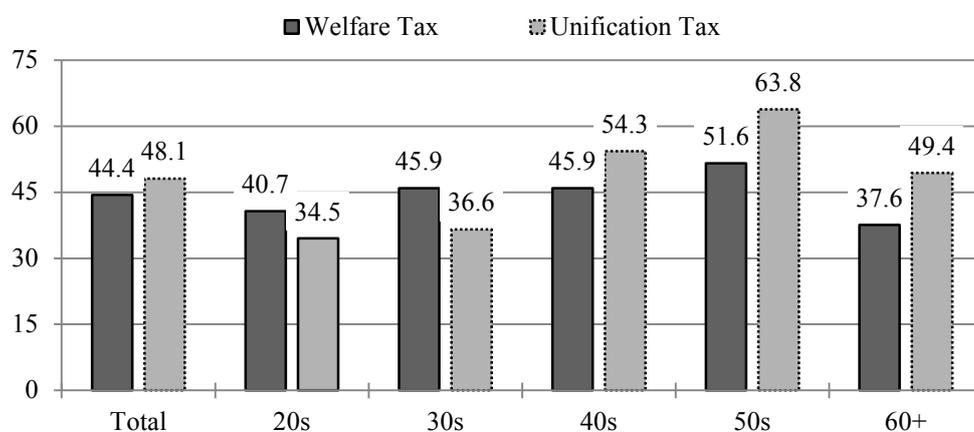
One of the major problems with potential reunification has long been the projected cost. While some of that would certainly be borne by the international community, exactly how much that would cover remains unclear due to the wide variation in estimates. Regardless of what the cost may be, the South Korean public is aware that some will be shouldered by South Korea.

Even though the Park administration has focused on the long-term benefits of reunification, economic forecasts will play a significant role in gaining public acceptance. Overall, 86.6 percent of respondents stated that reunification is necessary. However, when the potential for an economic recession is conditioned, support dropped to 45.5 percent and opposition rose to 43.9 percent.

Any forecast for reunification will almost certainly mean an increased tax burden. Of course, a tax hike is never popular no matter the reason. The good news is that a plurality (48.1%) of the South Korean public reported a willingness to pay a reunification tax.¹² (40.8% opposed.) This was slightly higher than those that reported being willing to pay increased taxes to improve the welfare system. In fact, a majority (51.6%) opposed a welfare tax.¹³

The bad news may be that there is a wide discrepancy between age cohorts. Those in their twenties and thirties were nearly 20 percentage points less likely to support a reunification tax than their older countrymen (Figure 18). That difference was not nearly as pronounced when it came to the welfare tax.

Figure 18: Willingness to Pay Additional Taxes



¹² Asan Daily Poll. Survey conducted September 4-6, 2014.

¹³ Asan Daily Poll. Survey conducted August 12-14, 2013.



Conclusion

South Korea finds itself in a difficult situation. It is pushing an agenda of reunification that would solve its most important security concern, but its neighbor is uncooperative. More importantly, in the larger picture, inter-Korean relations are an issue the South Korean public would rather not think about. Even when the issue is forced to the front pages by North Korean provocations and breathless media attention, the issue is not seen as the most important by the public.

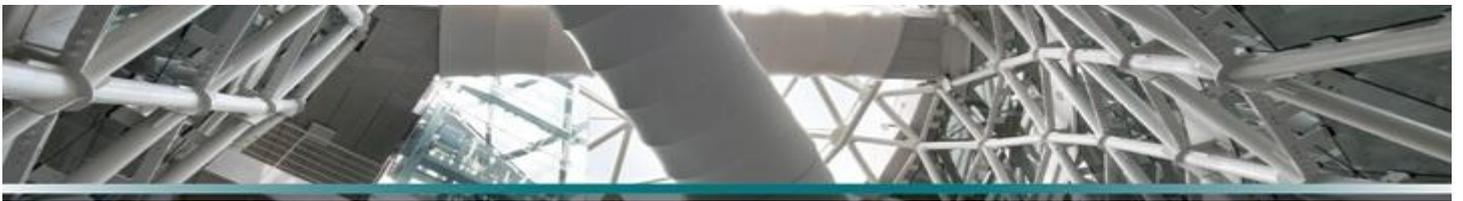
For many South Koreans, thanks in part to provocations and the depictions of the regime and leader by mass media, North Korea is seen as a security threat ruled by an unreasonable dictator and sentiment toward the North Korean people is less warm than that toward Americans and Chinese. Although more than 80 percent of South Koreans dutifully answer that Korea should be reunified, less than 20 percent support immediate reunification. Most of all, it is seen as a serious economic burden.

In the years ahead, the attitudes of the current youth could present an increasing challenge for policymakers. Reunification will remain an important topic for presidents as it presents an important pillar in legacy building. However, as those now in their twenties grow older, views of reunification as a necessity could fade.

Fading ethnic nationalism is indeed natural for the young generation. What is notable, however, is that it is also taking place among the older generations. The phenomenon helps to explain why the government's propaganda of reunification based on ethnic nationalism only creates echoes in the air.

In that regard, "reunification as bonanza" can be a good start due its practical approach rather than an emotional one. Nonetheless, the ambitious phrase addressed by President Park has not yet been realized with a detailed roadmap. The Preparatory Commission for Unification kicked off last July, but has yet to produce any specific plan or ideas. As a sequel to 2014's "bonanza", meaningful action by the Blue House and the Commission is anticipated in 2015.

These efforts are necessary to establish a link between the legitimacy and necessity of reunification. While its success is not guaranteed, it remains important nonetheless. In doing so, the government should take two independent tracks in dealing with North Korea. One track should deal with the North Korean regime and the other should be aimed at the North Korean people. The interest, sympathy, and ethnic bond with the North Korean people are rapidly fading. Therefore, communication and exchanges on a civil level should be sustained.



Appendix A

Survey Methodology

Asan Annual Surveys

2011

Sample size: 2,000 respondents over the age of 19

Margin of error: $\pm 2.19\%$ at the 95% confidence level

Survey method: RDD for mobile phones and online survey

Period: August 26 - October 4, 2011

Organization: M Brain

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: Millward Brown 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 - September 27, 2013

Organization: Millward Brown Media Research

2014

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 1 – September 19, 2014

Organization: Millward Brown Media Research

Asan Daily Poll

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

Margin of error: $\pm 3.1\%$ at the 95% confidence level

Survey method: RDD for mobile and landline telephones

Period: See report for specific dates of surveys cited.

Organization: Research & Research



Major Events in Inter-Korean Relations: 2013-October 2014

2013

- February 12 North Korea's third nuclear test
- March 8 UN Security Council adopts Resolution 2094
- March 21 UN Human Rights Committee adopts North Korea Human Rights Resolution
- May 8 Joint Declaration in Commemoration of the 60th Anniversary of the Alliance between the Republic of Korea and the United States of America
- May 18-20 North Korea's fires five short-range missiles
- June 7-8 US-China Summit
- June 27 Korea-China Summit
- July 1 Korea-US-Japan Foreign Minister Talks at ASEAN Regional Forum
- October 7 Korea-China Summit at APEC
- October 8 President Park Geun-hye's proposes "Eurasian Initiative"
- December 12 North Korea purges Jang Sung-taek

2014

- February 17 UN Commission of Inquiry publishes the final report on North Korea
- February 20-25 Reunion of separated families
- February 21 North Korea fires four short-range missiles
- February 27 North Korea fires four short-range missiles
- March 23 Korea-China Summit at Nuclear Security Summit
- March 28 President Park's Dresden Declaration
- March 31 North Korea exercises rifle drill near the West Sea
- April 17 UN Security Council holds meeting on North Korea's human rights crimes and related measures



- April 25 Korea-US Summit
- May 8 Ministry of National Defense releases results of investigation on North Korean drones
- May 20 Navy fires warning shots on North Korean vessel that crossed Northern Limit Line
- May 28 President Park interview with the Wall Street Journal. Expresses concern about possible nuclear domino effect resulting from a fourth North Korean nuclear test.
- May 30 President Park meets Michael Kirby, former Chair of the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in North Korea
- June 26 North Korea fires three short-range projectiles into the East Sea
- June 29 North Korea fires two short-range ballistic missiles
- July 2 North Korea fires two short-range projectiles into the East Sea
- July 3 Korea-China Summit
- July 7 North Korea announces intent to send cheerleaders to Incheon Asian Games
- July 9 North Korea fires two short-range ballistic missiles into the East Sea
- July 13 North Korea fires two short-range missiles into the East Sea
- July 14 North Korea fires about 100 artillery shells into the East Sea
- July 26 North Korea fires short-range missiles into the East Sea
- July 30 North Korea fires four short-range projectiles
- August 7 President Park holds first session of the Preparatory Committee for Reunification
- September 1 North Korea fires short-range ballistic missile from Jagang Province into East Sea
- September 6 North Korea fires three short-range projectiles from Wonsan Province into East Sea
- September 11 First North Korean athletes arrive for Incheon Asian Games
- September 19 North Korean patrol boat violates West Sea NLL



- September 24 President Park delivers keynote speech at the UN General Assembly
- September 28 North Korean Foreign Minister delivers speech at UN General Assembly
- October 4 Agreement on 2nd Inter-Korean high level talks after Asian Game closing
- October 10 North and South Korea exchange fire after the scattering of leaflets in Yeoncheon
- October 15 South Korea October 30 for 2nd high level talks
- October 30 Failure to hold 2nd high level talks