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# “Nevertheless”

## Public Perceptions of Humanitarian Aid in South Korea

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This paper analyzes a survey on public perceptions of South Korean humanitarian aid to North Korea. The poll revealed that a majority of Koreans favor maintaining sanctions and are concerned over the abuse of humanitarian aid by the Kim Jong Un regime. They believe inter-Korean cooperation needs to be symmetric. *Nevertheless*, more than six of the ten survey participants advocated support for vulnerable groups in the DPRK. Opinions on humanitarian assistance significantly depended on subjective perceptions of whether humanitarian aid violates international sanctions on North Korea. This paper also provides policy recommendations based on the analysis of the survey.

### Introduction

Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU) is conducting a study “The Psychology of Peace (2),” designed to identify the value system of South Koreans, social perception, the psychology of the division of the Korean Peninsula and reconciliation, and the current status of peace education. This paper analyzes public perception in South Korea toward unification and North Korea policy as revealed through a survey conducted as part of the study.<sup>1)</sup>

Participants were asked to rate their agreement with eight statements about unification and North Korea policy on a scale of 1 (completely disagree) to 6 (completely agree). Table 1 shows the statements, the average scores (mean) and standard error (SE). Picture 1 represents the percentage of respondents that agreed to each statement (those disagreeing were the total number of respondents who gave a rating from 1 to 3; those agreeing were the total number of respondents who gave a rating from 4 to 6).

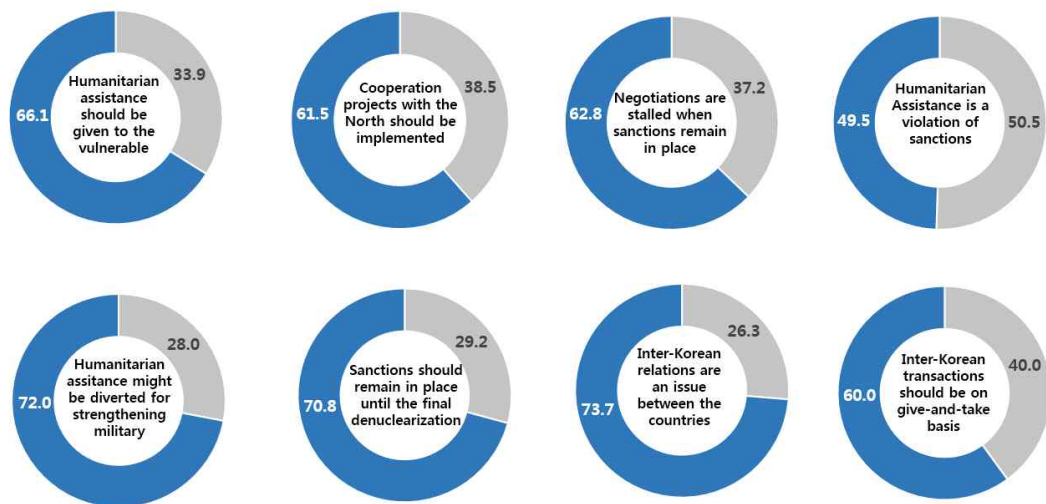
Table 1. Mean, Standard Errors (SE) and Factor Analysis of Eight Statements about Unification and North Korea Policy

Type	Statements	Mean (SE)
Liberalism-oriented <sup>2)</sup>	(1) Humanitarian aid for vulnerable groups (children, pregnant women, senior citizens etc.) in the DPRK should be provided independent of sanctions against the country.	3.8(0.04)
	(2) The ROK government should actively look for inter-Korean cooperation projects that are potentially immune to sanctions and request the UN to endorse the projects.	3.7(0.04)
Realism-oriented	(3) Negotiations with the DPRK will not make progress as long as sanctions remain in place.	3.8(0.04)
	(4) Humanitarian aid to North Koreans infringes on sanctions against the country.	3.6(0.04)
	(5) Humanitarian aid for North Koreans will be abused by the DPRK government to strengthen its military power.	4.2(0.04)
	(6) Sanctions against the DPRK should not be relaxed until the country completes denuclearization.	4.1(0.04)
	(7) Inter-Korean relations need to be considered as a matter between two states rather than a matter of the Korean people.	4.1(0.04)
	(8) Transactions between the ROK and DPRK should occur only when the transactions are symmetrical.	3.7(0.03)

1) The poll was conducted by Nielsen Korea from May 20 to June 24, 2019, with 1,000 South Koreans aged 19. It covered all 16 first-level administrative divisions (provinces, special cities and metropolitan cities) of South Korea. The survey was conducted in the form of one-on-one, face-to-face interviews. Proportionate sampling by sex, age and region was adopted to select respondents. The final outcomes of this survey are scheduled to be published in December 2019.

2) The author appreciates an anonymous reviewer who suggested “liberal perspective” and “realistic perspective” as two constructs for each factor. Principal axis factoring method and oblique rotation

Picture 1. Proportion of Agreed Respondents by Statement (%)



※Blue: Agreed, Gray: Disagreed

### “Nevertheless”

South Koreans seem to have a somewhat contradictory perception concerning unification and North Korea policy. While they agree with humanitarian aid to the DPRK (66.1%), they are also worried that such aid may be abused by the North Korean regime (72.0%) or violate sanctions against the country (49.5%). The majority of survey participants (61.5%) were favorable to exploring inter-Korean cooperation projects. However, a larger portion (70.8%) believed sanctions, which are structural restrictions on inter-Korean cooperation, should remain in place.

were used for factor analysis. The reliability coefficients of the liberal perspective and realistic perspective are .70 and .76, respectively. The correlation coefficient between the averages of two factors was  $-.30$  ( $p < .01$ ).

Such inconsistency in perceiving unification and North Korea policy is a phenomenon commonly observed in groups that strive to make peace after experiencing long periods of conflict. The period of peace-making shares many characteristics of conflicts, but also demonstrates those of emerging peace. Specific characteristics observed in peace-seeking negotiations and actions imply that the society is getting closer to peace. However, they also indicate that such a hopeful atmosphere may not last if the conflicting parties unwillingly return to the path of violent confrontations in order to avoid the risks of failed negotiations. Therefore, this phase is a time of duality,<sup>3)</sup> when the signals of conflicts and those of peaceful co-existence overlap. In 2018, the author explained the state of mind at this phase as “half-joy and half-fear.”<sup>4)</sup>

A factor analysis (Table 1) shows that eight statements on unification and North Korea policy can be broken down into two factors. The results are consistent with the psychology of duality and that of half-joy and half-fear. Public perception on unification and North Korea policy in South Korea consists of two factors: an attitude in favor of humanitarian aid to the DPRK and inter-Korean cooperation projects; and support for sanctions against the North and concerns about abusing humanitarian assistance by the authority.

How South Koreans' perception on assistance toward North Korea should be interpreted? The majority of Koreans back continued sanctions and symmetric inter-Korean cooperation due to concerns over the possible abuse of humanitarian aid by the authority. A correct understanding of the contradictory results is that “nevertheless,” people in the South are convinced that humanitarian assistance needs to be provided for vulnerable groups in the DPRK.

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3) Daniel Bar-Tal and Eran Halperin, “The Psychology of Intractable Conflicts: Eruption, Escalation, and Peacemaking,” in *Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, eds. Leonie Huddy, David O. Sears and Jack S. Levy (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 925–926.

4) Park, Juhwa, “Challenges for Building Social Consensus on Peace in the Korean Peninsula after PyongChang Winter Olympics,” KINU Online Series, pp. 2-3, <<http://www.kinu.or.kr/www/jsp/prg/api/dlVE.jsp?menuIdx=645&category=72&thisPage=5&searchField=title&searchText=&biblioId=1495172>>.

### Differing Perceptions on the DPRK among Those in Their 20s and 30s

In all age groups, more than 60% of the respondents supported humanitarian assistance for vulnerable groups in the DPRK. Respondents in their 40s were most likely to be supportive; those in their 20s were the least likely. Although survey participants in their 20s and 60s and over appear to be less favorable to aid, T-test analysis revealed little deviation between age groups. ( $p < .10$ ).

Table 2. Agreement Rates on Humanitarian Aid by Age, Mean (M) and Standard Error (SE)

Type	No. of Cases	Agree-ment rate	M(SE)	Type	No. of Cases	Agree-ment rate	M(SE)
20s	173	60.7	3.6(.09)	Men	91	54.9	3.4(.14)
30s	165	67.9	3.9(.10)	20s Women	82	67.1	3.8(.11)
40s	197	73.6	4.0(.08)	Men	84	72.6	4.0(.13)
50s	201	66.2	3.8(.09)	30s Women	81	63.0	3.7(.14)
60s+	264	62.9	3.7(.08)	Men	100	76.0	4.1(.12)
Conse- rvative	244	52.5	3.4(.09)	40s Women	97	71.1	3.9(.11)
Neu- tral	437	63.6	3.7(.05)	Men	103	65.0	3.8(.15)
Progre- ssive	319	79.9	4.2(.07)	50s Women	98	67.3	3.9(.11)
				Men	118	64.4	3.7(.13)
				60s+ Women	146	61.6	3.7(.10)

Significant differences, however, were observed between age and gender groups. Men in their 20s were the least favorable to humanitarian assistance with an agreement rate below 60%. However, the cause gained support from 67.1% of women in the same age group, which indicated a 12.2%p gap between the two. Participants in their 30s showed a reversed pattern. The approval rate on humanitarian assistance for vulnerable North Koreans was 72.6% among men in their

30s, roughly 10%p higher than women of the same age, 63%. KINU conducted an additional survey of 300 people (150 in their 20s and 150 in their 30s) to better understand the positions of the two age groups on this issue. The same patterns were observed in the additional survey (54.8% for men in their 20s, 61.1% for women in their 20s, 68.0% for men in their 30s and 62.6% for women in their 30s). South Koreans in their 20s and 30s are deemed to have skepticism about both unification and the DPRK and do not share the same position with older generations on North Korea and unification policy. This survey revealed that young South Koreans have varying opinions on this issue and that gender is a major factor. An in-depth analysis on the perceptions of those in their 20s and 30s of this subject requires an additional analysis that is beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>5)</sup>

### **Relationship between the Perceived Violation of Sanctions and Humanitarian Assistance to Vulnerable Groups in the DPRK**

For South Koreans, a leading factor in forming their opinion on humanitarian assistance for vulnerable North Koreans was whether such a support was perceived as violating sanctions imposed against the Kim Jong Un regime. Humanitarian aid may or may not violate sanctions depending on the type of aid provided. This survey measured ROK citizens' subjective assessments of whether humanitarian aid violates sanctions. Figure 1 shows that around half the respondents (49.5%) considered humanitarian assistance provided to the DPRK to be a violation of sanctions. The rest (50.5%) believed otherwise.

Figure 2 indicates that 80% of respondents who do not perceive humanitarian aid as a violation of sanctions back humanitarian aid for vulnerable groups in the DPRK. Notably, around half (52.0%) of those who deem aid as prohibited even claimed that vulnerable North Koreans should be supported with humanitarian measures. This

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5) Due to page constraints, this paper was not able to include analysis results of all 8 statements by age and gender. Analysis results suggest that difference between gender was particularly visible among people in their 20s.



result reinforces more evidence that South Koreans are, nevertheless, willing to give humanitarian support for vulnerable groups in the North.

Picture 2. Approval Rates on Humanitarian Aid to North Korea Depending on the Perceived Violation of Sanctions (%)

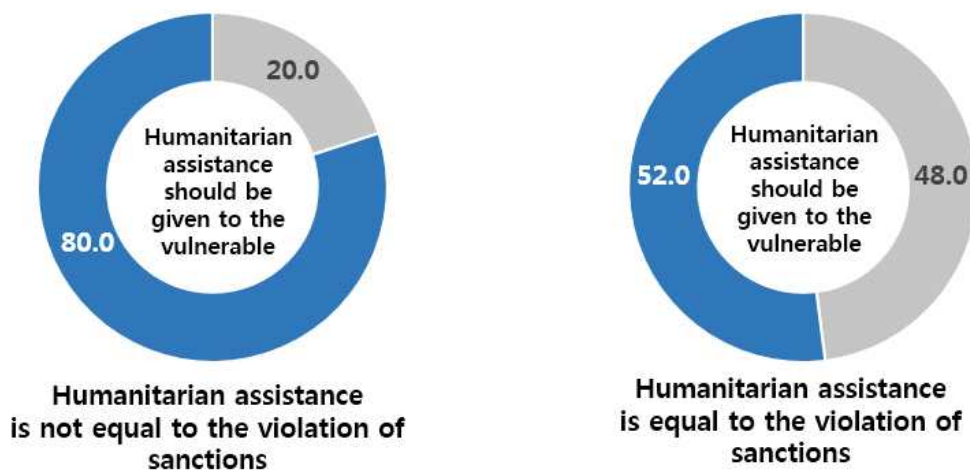


Table 3 represents the percentage, average and standard error of people who believe that humanitarian aid violates sanctions against the DPRK, broken down by demographic factors. More than 50% of survey participants in their 20s and 30s perceived humanitarian aid as a violation of sanctions versus just under half the respondents in their 40s, 50s and 60s and over who disagreed. The division of opinions becomes more complicated when gender is included. Of this survey's male respondents in their 20s, 75.8% saw humanitarian aid as a violation, which was the highest of all groups. Only 39.0% of female participants of the same age shared the view, making them one of the lowest group. Despite being the same age, South Korean women and men in their 20s are sharply divided over the perceived relationship between sanctions and humanitarian aid to the DPRK. As for those in their 30s, despite their favorable stance on providing assistance for vulnerable groups, 58.3% of men and 48.1% of women in this age group perceived humanitarian aid for the DPRK as prohibited under sanctions. The same pattern was observed

in the additional survey of 150 people in their 20s and 150 in their 30s; however, the gender difference narrowed among those in their 30s. These results call for further surveys and analyses targeting those in their 20s and 30s.

Table 3. Percentage, M and SE of People Who Consider Humanitarian Aid to Be a Violation of Sanctions against North Korea

Type	Num-ber	Agree-ment rate	M(SE)	Type	Num-ber	Agree-ment rate	M(SE)
20s	173	58.4	3.7(.10)	Men	91	75.8	4.1(.13)
30s	165	53.3	3.6(.09)	20s Women	82	39.0	3.3(.13)
40s	197	42.1	3.4(.09)	Men	84	58.3	3.7(.13)
50s	201	47.8	3.5(.09)	30s Women	81	48.1	3.5(.12)
60s+	264	48.1	3.7(.09)	Men	100	46.0	3.5(.14)
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Neutral	437	53.5	3.7(.06)	Men	103	48.5	3.5(.15)
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				Men	118	49.2	3.7(.14)
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### Policy Implications

In total, 66.1% of respondents agreed that humanitarian aid should be provided for vulnerable groups (children, pregnant women, senior citizens etc.) in North Korea. More than 50% of Koreans who identify themselves as conservative also backed aid for the vulnerable, indicating that support for humanitarian efforts is widely shared across South Korea. Given that around 70% of the survey participants approved sanctions, South Koreans believe that humanitarian aid should be provided for vulnerable groups in the DPRK regardless of sanctions.

Notably, South Koreans in the survey distinguished humanitarian actions



from political and economic situations and general cooperation projects. More ROK citizens perceived inter-Korean relations as ties between two countries rather than seeing it as special ties shared among Korean people. In an approach to reopening the Gaesong Industrial Complex or resuming Mt. Geumgang tourism, the ROK government will need to consider that a majority of South Koreans support symmetrical inter-Korean transactions. However, South Koreans consider humanitarian aid to be an exception to the principle of symmetry in inter-Korean cooperation due to the dual sentiment of half-anger and half-joy found in this survey. They believe humanitarian actions should be considered purely on moral grounds.

Lately, some ROK media reported moves to connect humanitarian actions with political and economic conditions;<sup>6)</sup> however, it is questionable if this type of assistance can be considered true humanitarian aid if it is conditional depending upon certain actions or transactions and not based on universal values. There are a variety of criticisms and issues around humanitarian assistance (e.g. the Samaritan's dilemma), which include varied opinions on the political nature of humanitarian actions. However, the survey's findings suggest that providing humanitarian aid in connection with political and economic conditions may not be consistent with public perceptions in South Korea.

This survey revealed that sanctions imposed against Pyeongyang affect South Koreans' perceptions towards humanitarian assistance. Around 80% of Koreans who see humanitarian actions as allowed under sanctions were favorable towards such actions provided to vulnerable North Koreans. This indicates a clear goal for the Korean government: Seoul needs to raise public awareness that sanctions do not prohibit humanitarian assistance, in a detailed, active and easy-to-understand manner. Some types of humanitarian aid require exemptions, while others are entirely independent of sanctions. It is recommended to explain the system to the public in plain language with a focus on specific examples and without complicated details.

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6) "Washington 'Looks for a Freezing of North Korean WMDs While Considering Offering Humanitarian Aid and Establishing Liaison Offices,'" *The Kyunghyang Sinmun*, July 3, 2019, (in Korean) <[http://news.khan.co.kr/kh\\_news/khan\\_art\\_view.html?artid=201907032141005&code=970100#csidx98fa8242826d799b30c56b9a57d0108](http://news.khan.co.kr/kh_news/khan_art_view.html?artid=201907032141005&code=970100#csidx98fa8242826d799b30c56b9a57d0108)> (data accessed on July 4, 2019).

Lastly, the survey found that perceptions of unification and North Korea policy including humanitarian assistance differ by age and sex. It no longer appears to be practical to divide the public by two groups, the older generation and those in their 20s and 30s, in order to understand public opinion about unification and North Korea policy. It is time to study specific views on various demographic brackets.

Duncan Morrow, a scholar who studied the Northern Ireland peace process, said that we should contemplate what “we” should do to find the key to trust-building instead of what “they” should do. This survey helps uncover the opinions of South Koreans on what we should do and how to do it in order to build trust between the two Koreas.

*“Life’s most persistent and urgent question is, what are you doing for others?”*

– Martin Luther King Jr.

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