

Survey Period (April – May, 2023)

Executive Summary

K I N U  
Unification  
Survey  
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Public Opinion on  
South Korea's  
Nuclear Armament



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Executive Summary

K I N U  
Unification  
Survey



Executive Summary



I

# KINU Unification Survey

# I. KINU Unification Survey

## 1. Research Objectives

### ■ Through face-to-face surveys, KINU Unification Survey seeks to:

- (1) Research changes in the South Korean public's perception on reunification, policy towards North Korea, North Korean defectors, inter-Korean integration, and security;
- (2) Identify various factors that determine and influence such perception; and
- (3) Contribute to establishing unification and North Korea policies that are supported by public opinion and consensus based on the above research findings.

### ■ History of KINU Unification Survey

- The KINU Unification Survey has been accumulating data since 2014. Since 2019, the survey has been conducted twice a year, in the first half of the year and the second half of the year.
- Unless otherwise noted, statistics in this summary report are based on data collected in April 2023.

**<Table I - 1> Survey Periods (2014~2023)**

| Survey No. | Year                  | Survey Periods    |
|------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 1          | 2014                  | Sep. 22 ~ Oct. 6  |
| 2          | 2015                  | Jul. 27 ~ Aug. 14 |
| 3          | 2016                  | Jun. 2 ~ Jun. 24  |
| 4          | 2017                  | Mar. 21 ~ Apr. 14 |
| 5          | 2018                  | Apr. 5 ~ Apr. 25  |
| 6          | 2019, 1 <sup>st</sup> | Apr. 5 ~ Apr. 25  |
| 7          | 2019, 2 <sup>nd</sup> | Sep. 7 ~ Oct. 8   |
| 8          | 2020, 1 <sup>st</sup> | May 20 ~ Jun. 10  |
| 9          | 2020, 2 <sup>nd</sup> | Nov. 10 ~ Dec. 3  |
| 10         | 2021, 1 <sup>st</sup> | Apr. 26 ~ May 18  |
| 11         | 2021, 2 <sup>nd</sup> | Oct. 21 ~ Nov. 22 |
| 12         | 2022                  | Apr. 6 ~ May 2    |
| 13         | 2023                  | Apr. 15 ~ May 10  |

## 2. Cohorts in Korean Society

### ■ Cohort of KINU Unification Survey

- KINU Unification Survey uses the cohort classification based on the birth year of respondents. The cohort classification is based on previous research.

**<Table I - 2> Cohort Classification in the KINU Unification Survey**

| Cohort                       | Birth Year       | Frequency (2023) | Percentage (%) |
|------------------------------|------------------|------------------|----------------|
| War generation               | Born before 1950 | 77               | 7.7            |
| Industrialization generation | 1951-1960        | 171              | 17.1           |
| 386 generation               | 1961-1970        | 212              | 21.2           |
| X generation                 | 1971-1980        | 178              | 17.8           |
| IMF generation               | 1981-1990        | 152              | 15.2           |
| Millennials                  | Born after 1991  | 211              | 21.1           |
| Total                        |                  | 1,001            | 100.0          |

## 3. Overview of the 2023 Survey

**<Table I - 3> Overview of Survey**

| Classification     | Contents  |
|--------------------|---|
| Population         | South Korean adults over 18   |
| Sampling frame     | South Korean Resident Registration Data (the Ministry of the Interior and Safety, March 2023) |
| Sampling method    | Stratified Random Sampling (by gender, region, and age)                                       |
| Sampling unit      | 1,001   |
| Sampling error     | Assuming random sampling, sampling error is $\pm 3.1\%$ at the 95% confidence level.          |
| Survey Method      | Face-to-Face Interview with structured questionnaire  |
| Survey Period      | April 15th - May 10th, 2023   |
| Research Institute | Hankook Research  |

## 4. Summary of Findings

### ■ KINU Unification Survey 2023

- The KINU Unification Survey 2023 was conducted under the theme "Public Opinion on South Korea's Nuclear Armament".
- More than 40 new questions were developed and added to the existing questions on attitudes toward South Korea's nuclear armament and related issues.
- The Washington Declaration was announced on April 27, 2023, which was in the middle of the survey period.
  - 504 people responded between April 15 and April 26, and 497 people responded between April 27 and May 10.
  - This creates a kind of natural experiment condition. If the change in public opinion before and after April 27 is statistically significant, it can be considered an effect of the Washington Declaration.

### ■ Public Opinion on South Korea's Nuclear Armament

- The KINU Unification Survey, which has consistently asked the same question, shows that public opinion on the need for nuclear weapons has declined significantly in recent years, contrary to media reports.
- Support for nuclear armament was highest in 2021 (71.3%), but has already begun to decline in 2022.
  - 69% in 22, 60.2% in 23
- Considering that North Korea's missile provocations became more frequent from 2021 to 2023, and relations with China deteriorated, the decline in support for the nuclear armament was likely influenced by domestic political factors and the fact that the issue of Korea's own nuclear armament began to be discussed in the public arena.
- The Russian-Ukrainian war did not have a significant impact on South Korean public opinion on nuclear weapons.

- Similar to the weakening of public opinion in favor of South Korea having its own nuclear weapons, public opinion calling for US nuclear weapons to be redeployed to the South has also declined since 2021.
  - 61.8% in 21, 60.4% in 22, 53.6% in 23
  
- When asked, "If you had to choose between the presence of US forces in Korea and the possession of nuclear weapons for our national defense, which one would you choose?" in 2023, 49.5% chose US forces. Only 33.8% would choose to have nuclear weapons.
  - What this suggests is that South Koreans are more likely to trust the traditional security system of the ROK-US alliance and the US Forces Korea.
  
- The South Korean public understands that South Korea could face a number of serious crises if it actually attempted to develop nuclear weapons. They also clearly recognize that the US would oppose South Korean nuclear development.
  
- When presented with six different possibilities of risks and asked whether nuclear weapons would be necessary in the face of those possibilities, public opinion in favor of continuing nuclear development dropped dramatically. Across all six items, only 36% to 37% agree with nuclear development. This is in stark contrast to other surveys' findings of over 70% support for nuclear weapons.
  
- When asked, "If a candidate or party in an election promised to develop South Korea's own nuclear weapons, would you vote for that candidate or party?"
  - 48.7% of respondents said that "Developing nuclear weapons is not an important factor in my vote". Only 17.7% said they would support a political party or candidate with a nuclear weapons program, while 33.7% said they would not support such a candidate or party.
  - Younger generations were more likely to say they would not vote for a candidate who pledged to develop nuclear weapons, and support for nuclear weapons pledges was higher among the War Generation and the Industrialization Generation.
  
- High support for the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) regime was found. 68.2% of all

respondents agreed with the current system, which prohibits non-nuclear states from developing nuclear weapons. Among Democrats, 74.9% agreed, compared to 65.3% of PPP supporters.

## ■ ROK-US Relations and South Korea's Nuclear Armament

- Most South Koreans trust the nuclear umbrella policy and believe it protects them from the North Korean nuclear threat.
  - 72.1% of all respondents and 85.3% of PPP supporters said they trust the US nuclear umbrella policy.
  - 68.5% of all respondents and 75.6% of PPP supporters said the nuclear umbrella policy has prevented North Korea from attacking South Korea with a nuclear weapon.
- 90% of respondents believe that the US Forces Korea is needed now. However, 54.3% believe that the U.S. Forces Korea will be needed after unification, down from 60.0% in the 2022 survey.
  - The escalation of the US-China conflict may have affected attitudes toward the long-term role of US forces in Korea.
- The need for the ROK-US alliance in the future has remained above 90%, peaking at 95.1% in 2022. This year, however, it dropped to 87.2%.
  - This change may be due to polarization in South Korean domestic politics, meaning that the current administration's efforts to strengthen ROK-US relations may have lowered the perceived need for the alliance among opposition supporters who are critical of the government.
- Among all respondents, 27.7% believe that ROK-US relations have gotten better over the past year, the highest percentage since the survey began. In contrast, 10.4% said it had gotten worse, and 61.9% said it hadn't changed much.
- In the 2020 survey, 35% of all respondents said the US cares for South Korea's national interests, rising to 46.4% in 2023. The increase was especially large among PPP supporters (62.8%). Among Democrats, there was no significant change since 2020.

- 70.8% of all respondents supported the OPCON transfer. 65.3% from the PPP and 78.3% from the Democratic Party. While there are differences across political parties, there is a general consensus on the need of OPCON transfer.
- Regardless of the need for a ROK-US alliance or positive attitudes for the US, there is a public consensus that the ROK government should retain wartime operational control, which is an important part of sovereignty.

## ■ North Korea's Nuclear Threat and South Korea's Nuclear Armament

- South Koreans believe that South Korea's military power is superior to North Korea's, excluding nuclear weapons.
- Based on conventional military power, the majority (57.2%) believe that North Korea is either slightly weaker (28.1%) or much weaker (29.1%) than South Korea.
- Economic sanctions and inter-Korean dialogue are both perceived to be ineffective in denuclearizing North Korea.
  - 72.9% believe economic sanctions are ineffective in denuclearizing North Korea; 66.2% believe inter-Korean dialogue is ineffective in denuclearizing North Korea.
- 51.3% of all respondents were in favor of allowing access to North Korean broadcasting when asked, "Recently, there have been discussions about allowing access to North Korean newspapers and broadcasts in South Korea. Do you support or oppose allowing North Korean broadcasting?"
- 45.1% of respondents say they are worried about the North Korean nuclear threat.
- However, only 34.9% said they were interested in the North Korean nuclear threat.
- Fewer said the North Korean nuclear threat affects their lives. Similarly low levels of concern among supporters of the PPP (19.1%), supporters of the Democratic Party (19.7%), and those with no party affiliation (15.9%).
- The likelihood of a nuclear war with North Korea within 10 years rose slightly in the 2023 survey.

## ■ Public Opinion on the International Relations in Northeast Asia

- Despite the slight improvement in favorability toward China in this survey, there was an increase of nearly 13% in the number of respondents who said the ROK-China relationship as having gotten worse over the past year.
- About 6% decrease in the number of respondents who want the United States to have an advantage over China in the US-China power competition, and a 3.7% increase in the number of respondents who want China to have an advantage, compared to the 2021 survey.
  - 53.4% favor US dominance; 9.9% favor China dominance
- When asked, "Do you think China could overtake the United States to become the new superpower?" 61.4% say China can overtake the United States, about 23% higher than the 38.6% who say it cannot.
  - The IMF generation expects China to overtake the U.S. at a higher rate (70.4%) than other generations.
- 38.6% think it is likely that China will attack Taiwan in the near future. 39.6% think it is unlikely.
- 52.8% say South Korea should actively participate in important issues in the international community.
- 52.4% agree with a military alliance between South Korea and Japan to counter the threat from North Korea, 4.8% higher than the 47.7% who disagree.
  - 55.5% of respondents support a ROK-Japan military alliance to counter the threat from China, about 3% more than support for a ROK-Japan military alliance to counter the threat from North Korea.
  - This high level of support for the ROK-Japan military alliance suggests that the majority of South Koreans view and understand military cooperation in terms of regional security as the US-China rivalry intensifies, creating a neo-Cold War structure in the region.
  - Millennials have the most negative attitudes toward the ROK-Japan military alliance.



- 52.6% of all respondents believe that Japan has the right to develop nuclear weapons for its own security if it is threatened with nuclear weapons.
- 74% believe Japan is likely to develop nuclear weapons, about 22% higher than the percentage of respondents who agree with Japan's right for developing nuclear weapons (52.6%).

## ■ The Impact of the ROK-US summit on Public Opinion

- This year's KINU Unification Survey sample was split roughly in half before and after the Washington Declaration (504 before, 497 after). This creates a kind of natural experiment condition. If the change in public opinion before and after April 27 is statistically significant, it can be considered an impact of the Washington Declaration.
- Favorability toward the US, Japan, and Russia increased after the summit, while favorability toward China and North Korea did not change significantly. In particular, perceptions of the US improved overall after the summit.
- The large increase in favorability toward Japan is likely due to Prime Minister Kishida's visit (scheduled at the time of the survey), as well as the idea that the outcome of the ROK-US summit will have a positive impact on Japan's relationship with South Korea.
- Not only did perceptions of Japan as a current military threat decrease, but there was a clear improvement in perceptions of Japan as a future military threat before and after the summit.
- Support for South Korea's nuclear arsenal increased from 59.9% to 60.6% after the summit, although this difference is not statistically significant. This suggests that the Washington Declaration, which called for expanded deterrence in exchange for South Korea's giving up of its own nuclear armament, did not change South Korean public opinion in favor of nuclear armament.
  - On the other hand, trust in the US nuclear umbrella policy increased from 68.7% to 75.6% after the summit.
  - Positive evaluations of the effectiveness of the U.S. nuclear umbrella policy increased slightly after the summit.

Executive Summary

K I N U  
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II

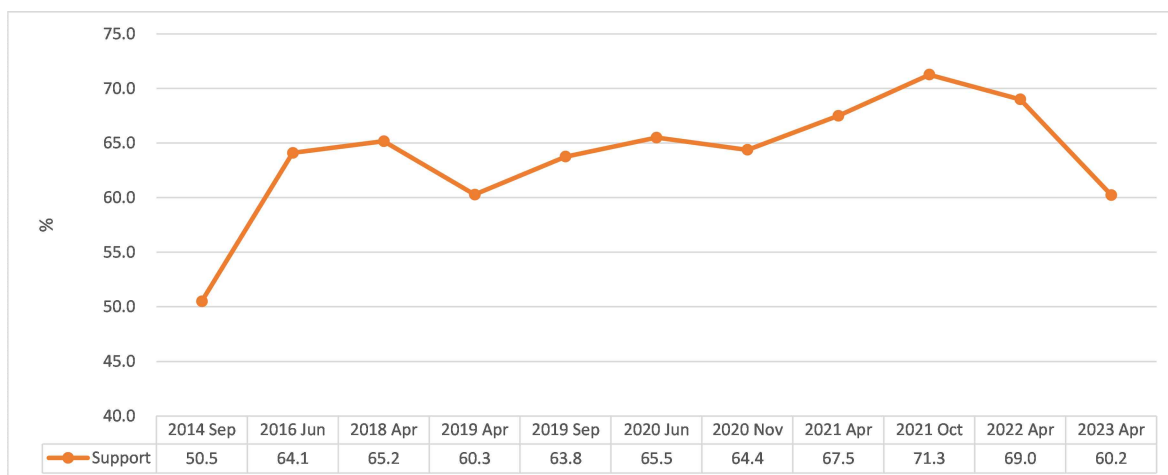
# Public Opinion on South Korea's Nuclear Armament

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## II. Public Opinion on South Korea's Nuclear Armament

### 1. The Necessity of South Korea's Nuclear Armament

<Figure II - 1> Public Opinion in favor of Nuclear Armament



#### ■ Survey Questions

- Since 2014, the KINU Unification Survey has been surveying public opinion on the need to have nuclear weapons using the three questions below. The results of these questions are summarized in the graph above.
- 2014 survey question: "South Korea needs to have nuclear weapons, too."
  - 1=oppose strongly; 2=oppose somewhat; 3=support somewhat; 4=support strongly.
  - 3+4 = "support"
- 2016 and 2018 survey question: "Do you think South Korea should have nuclear weapons?"
  - 1=South Korea shouldn't have nuclear weapons. The current national defense is enough; 2=South Korea shouldn't have nuclear weapons. The military must strengthen its defense based on conventional weapons; 3=The United States should deploy strategic nuclear weapons to the Republic of Korea; 4=South Korea should develop nuclear weapons on its own.
  - 3+4 = "support"

- 2019 and after: "There is an argument that South Korea should also possess nuclear weapons if North Korea does not give up its nuclear weapons. What do you think of this argument?"
  - 1=oppose strongly; 2=oppose somewhat; 3=support somewhat; 4=support strongly.
  - 3+4 = "support"

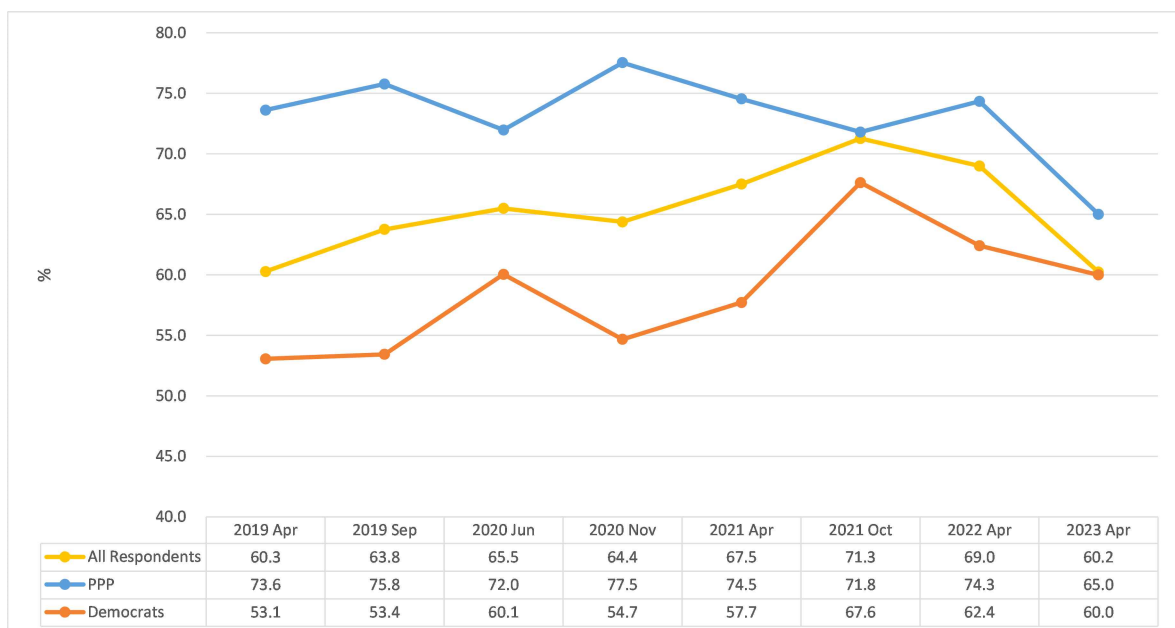
## ■ Decline in public support for nuclear armament

- Recently, there have been several media reports indicating that public opinion in South Korea is in favor of the country's own nuclear arsenal. According to surveys by the Chicago Council on International Affairs (71.0%), the Asan Institute for Policy Studies (70.2%), SAND Institute (74.9%), the Institute for Peace and Unification Studies of the Seoul National University (55.5%), the UniKorea Foundation (68.1%), and the Chey Institute for Advanced Studies (76.6%), the percentage of public opinion in favor of South Korea's independent nuclear armament is over or close to 70%.<sup>1)</sup>
- However, the KINU Unification Survey, which has consistently asked about the need to possess nuclear weapons with the same question, shows that public opinion supporting nuclear armament has dropped significantly in recent years, contrary to media reports.
- This is likely due to the fact that the debate on South Korea's indigenous nuclear development, which has been centered on some politicians and experts, has spread to the general public, raising awareness of the problems and costs associated with developing and maintaining nuclear weapons.
- This downward trend did not begin in 2023. Support for South Korea's nuclear program peaked in 2021 and had already begun to decline in 2022.
- Considering that North Korea's missile provocations became more frequent from 2021 to 2023, and relations between South Korea and China deteriorated, the decline in the need for nuclear armament may have been influenced by domestic political factors and the fact that the issue of nuclear armament began to be discussed in the public arena.

1) Dong-A Ilbo. "76.6% of South Koreans 'Need to Develop Independent Nuclear Weapons'... Growing Voices for 'Independent Nuclear Armament'". January 30, 2023.

- There have been analyses and media reports suggesting that South Korean public opinion on nuclear armament was influenced by the Russian-Ukrainian war that began in 2022.<sup>2)</sup> The argument is that South Koreans believed that Ukraine would not have been invaded by Russia if it had had nukes, which led to an increase in public opinion that South Korea should have nukes as well. In reality, however, support for nuclear armament had already begun to decline in the 2022 KINU Unification Survey, which was conducted after the Russian-Ukrainian war began. Therefore, it is not likely that the Russian-Ukrainian war had a significant impact on South Korean public opinion in favor of nuclear weapons.

**<Figure II - 2> Support for Nukes: by Party Affiliation**

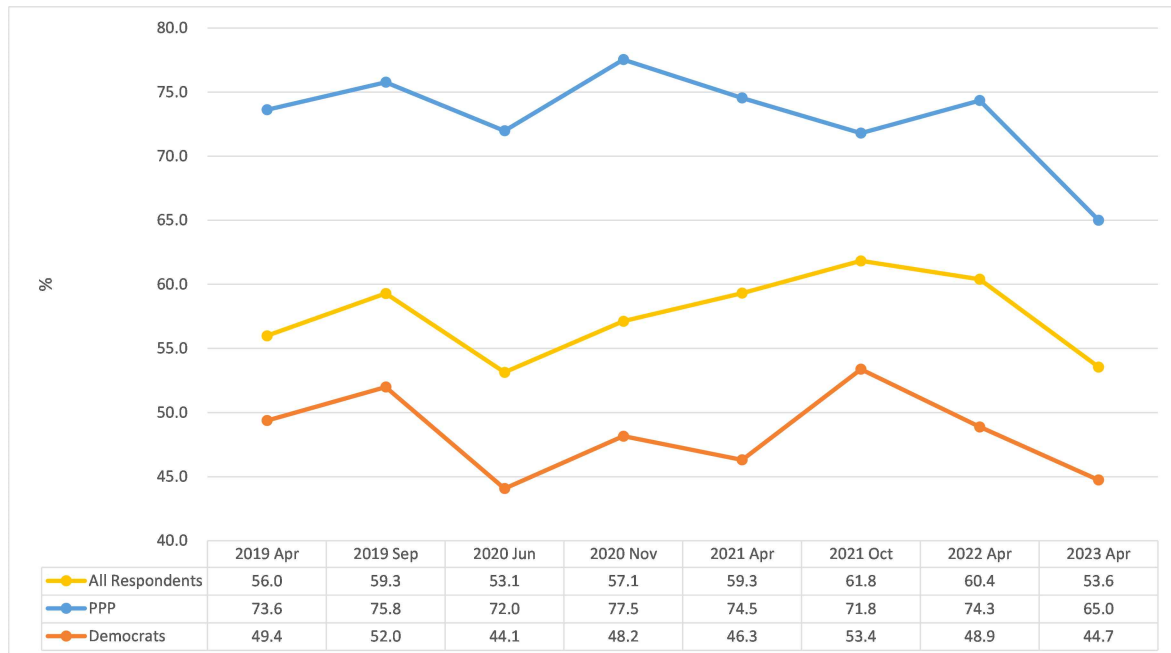


- When comparing public opinion on the need for a nuclear armament by party affiliation, PPP supporters were relatively more supportive of a nuclear armament than Democratic Party supporters. However, while 74.3% of PPP supporters were in favor of nuclear armament in the 2022 survey, this number dropped to 65.0% in 2023 (<Figure II - 2>).
- Democratic Party supporters are less enthusiastic about the need for a nuclear armament, with 60% favoring it in the 2023 survey.

2) New York Times. "In South Korea, Ukraine War Revives the Nuclear Question." April 6, 2022.

## 2. The Necessity of US Nuclear Weapons Redeployment

<Figure II - 3> Support for US Nukes Redeployment: by Party Affiliation



### ■ Survey Questions

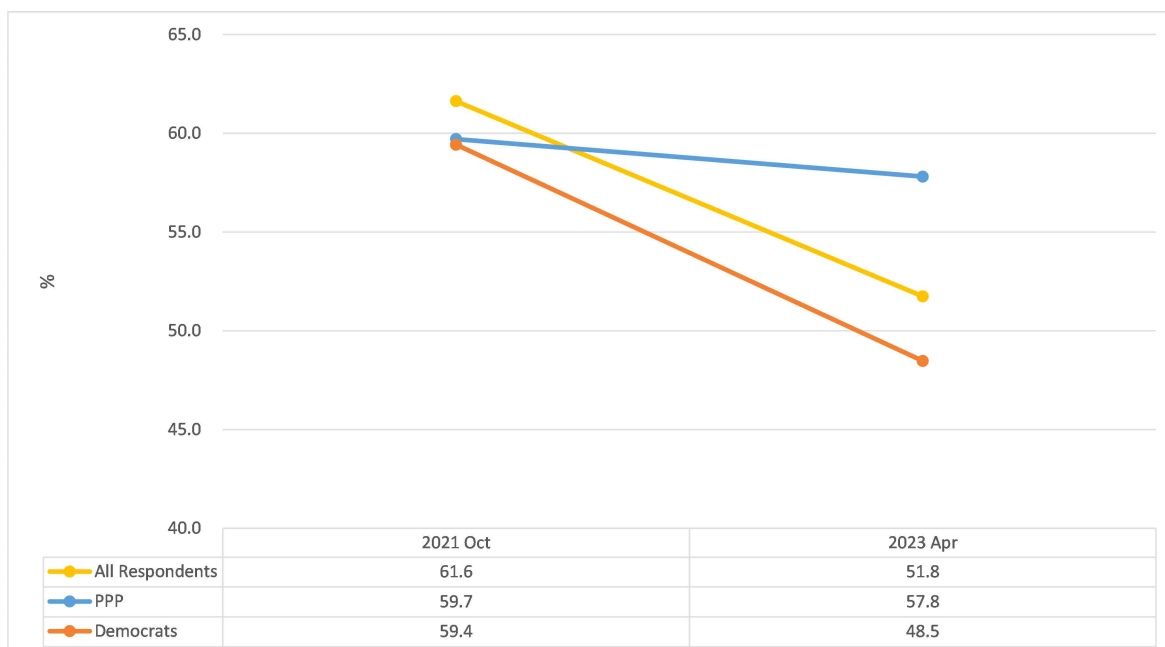
- “There is an argument that the US nuclear weapons should be redeployed to South Korea if North Korea does not give up its nuclear weapons. What do you think of this argument?”
  - 1=oppose strongly; 2=oppose somewhat; 3=support somewhat; 4=support strongly.
  - 3+4 = “support”

### ■ Weakening public opinion in favor of redeployment

- Similar to the declining of public opinion in favor of South Korea's own nuclear armament, public support for the redeployment of US nuclear weapons to South Korea has been declining since 2021. The reasons for the decline are likely to be the same.
- Among PPP supporters, support for redeploying US nukes dropped from 74.3% in 2022 to 65.0% in the 2023 survey.
- Among Democrats, support for nuclear redeployment fell below a majority, to 44.7%.

### 3. Support for Nuclear Armament after Unification

<Figure II - 4> Support for Nuclear Armament: by Party Affiliation



#### ■ Survey Questions

- “What do you think about possessing nuclear weapons after the reunification of North and South Korea?”
  - 1=oppose strongly; 2=oppose somewhat; 3=support somewhat; 4=support strongly.
  - 3+4 = “support”

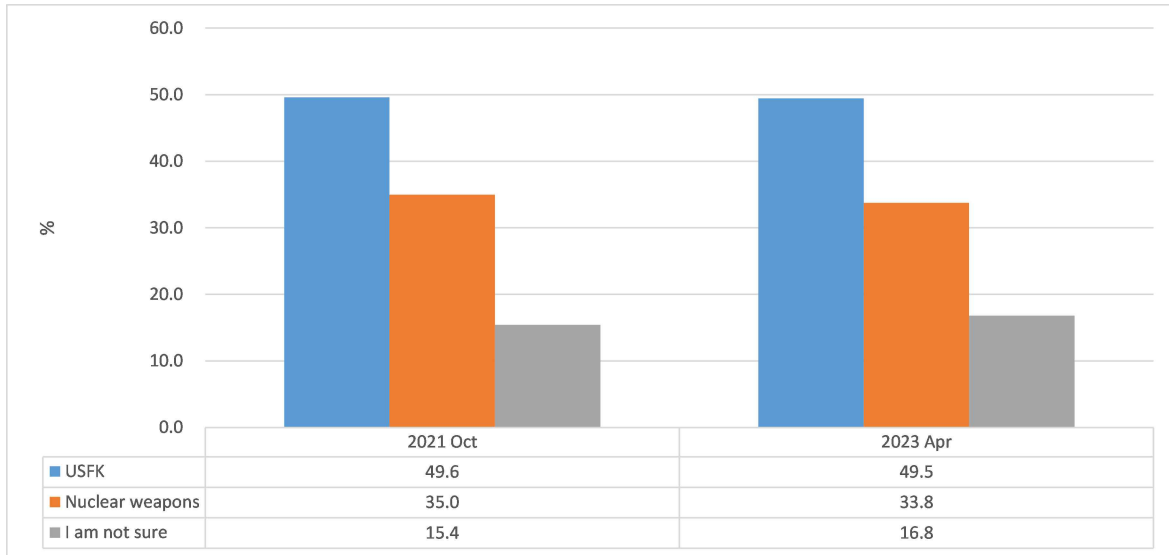
#### ■ Support for nuclear armament after unification has declined.

- Similar to the changes in public opinion on indigenous nuclear armament and US nuclear weapons redeployment, there has been a downward trend in public opinion on the need to have nuclear weapons after reunification.
- Among PPP supporters, the downward trend was relatively small, from 59.7% to 57.8%. However, among Democratic Party supporters, the decline was nearly 11%, and among all respondents, the decline was about 10%.



## 4. USFK and South Korea's Nuclear Armament

<Figure II - 5> USFK and South Korea's Nuclear Armament



### ■ Survey Questions

- “If you had to choose between the presence of US forces in Korea and the possession of nuclear weapons for our national defense, which one would you choose?”
  - 1=USFK; 2=Nuclear weapons; 3=I am not sure.

### ■ Favoring security through alliances over nuclear weapons.

- When asked simply whether they support or oppose South Korea having nuclear weapons, 60.2% in the 2023 survey favored nuclear weapons. However, when asked to choose between having US troops stationed in South Korea and having nuclear weapons, nearly half of respondents chose US troops over nuclear weapons.

<Table II - 1> Cross-analysis of Attitudes on Nuclear Weapons

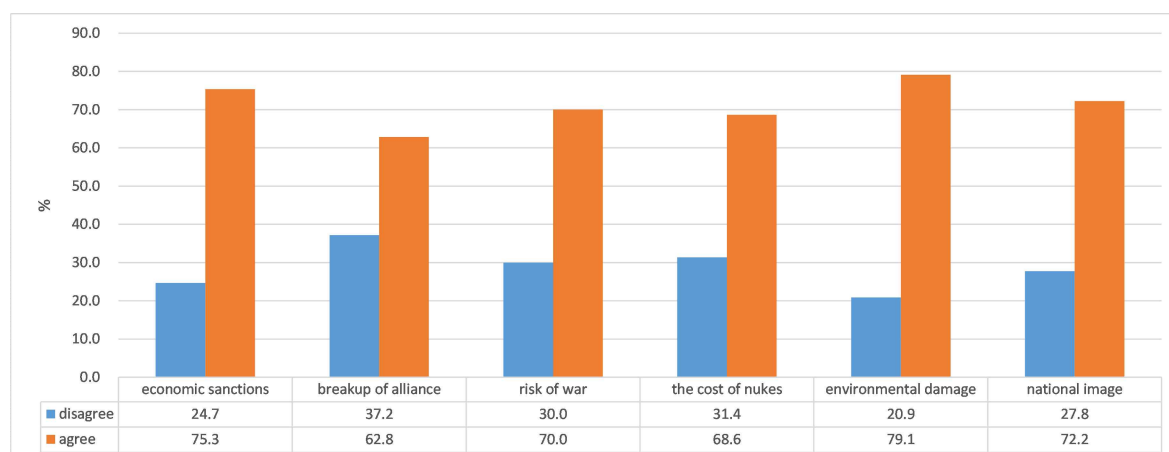
(unit: %)

|                                  |         | Choice between USFK and nuclear weapons |                 |          |       |
|----------------------------------|---------|---|-----------------|----------|-------|
|                                  |         | USFK                                    | Nuclear Weapons | Not Sure | Total |
| Attitudes on South Korea's Nukes | Oppose  | 58.5                                    | 20.4            | 21.1     | 100   |
|                                  | Support | 43.5                                    | 42.6            | 13.9     | 100   |
|                                  | Total   | 49.5                                    | 33.8            | 16.8     | 100   |

- 43.5% of respondents who favored South Korea's nuclear armament chose the US military when asked to choose between the USFK and nuclear weapons. In contrast, only 20.4% of those who were opposed to having nuclear weapons switched their opinion in favor of having nuclear weapons.
- This attitudinal shift suggests that the 60% to 70%+ support for nuclear weapons in many previous polls may be due to overly simplistic survey designs.
- What this analysis suggests is that South Koreans are more likely to trust the traditional security system of the ROK-US alliance and the US Forces Korea.

## 5. Risks of Nuclear Armament

<Figure II - 6> Risks of Nuclear Armament



### ■ Survey Questions

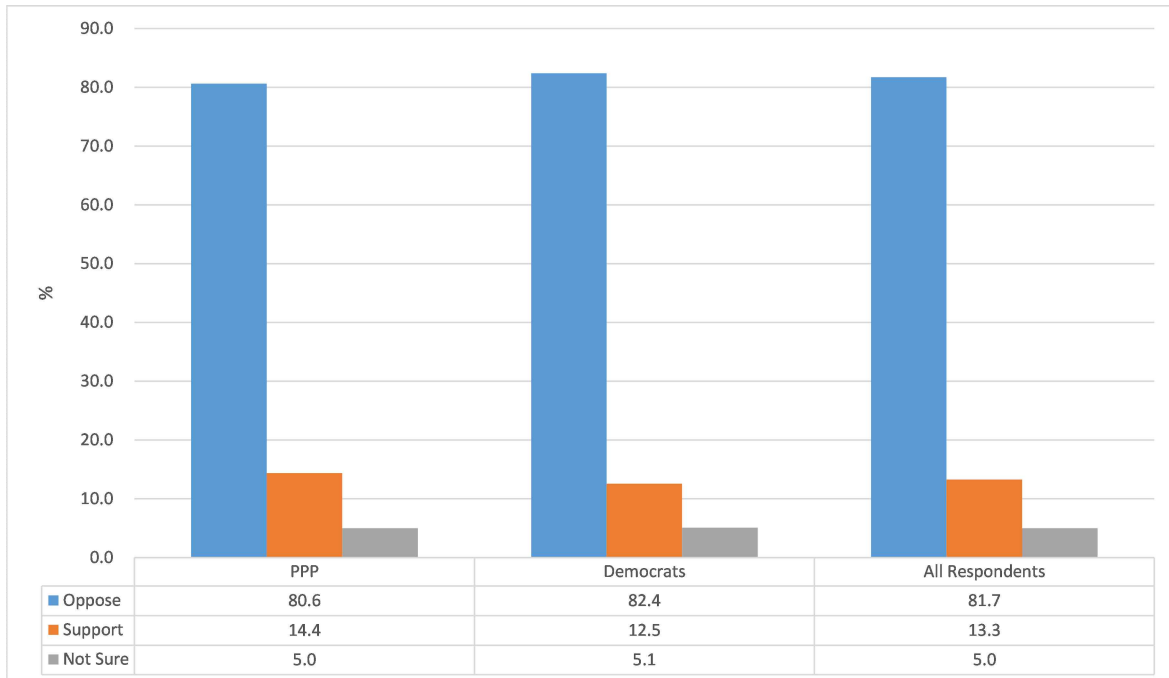
- The 2023 survey presented six possible risks that could occur if South Korea pursued nuclear weapons, and measured agreement with each.
  - (economic sanctions) "It has been argued that if South Korea develops nuclear weapons, it will cause an economic crisis due to international economic sanctions. Do you agree or disagree with this claim?"
  - (breakup of alliance) "It has been argued that if South Korea develops nuclear weapons, the United States will break the ROK-US alliance and withdraw US troops from South Korea. Do you agree or disagree with this claim?"
  - (risk of war) "It has been argued that if South Korea develops nuclear weapons, it will provoke North Korea and China and increase the risk of war on the Korean Peninsula. Do you agree or disagree with this assertion?"
  - (the cost of nukes) "It has been argued that if South Korea develops nuclear weapons, it will suffer economic hardship due to the cost of developing nuclear weapons. Do you agree or disagree with this claim?"
  - (environmental damage) "There is an argument that if South Korea develops nuclear weapons, the process of developing nuclear weapons will cause environmental damage. Do you agree or disagree with this claim?"

- (national image) "It has been argued that South Korea's international image as a peaceful country will be damaged if it develops nuclear weapons. Do you agree or disagree with this claim?"
- 1=disagree strongly; 2=disagree somewhat; 3=agree somewhat; 4=agree strongly.
- 1+2="disagree"; 3+4="agree"

## ■ the risks of nuclear armament

- Over 60% of respondents agreed with all six possibilities of risks presented. In particular, 79.1% of respondents agreed with the possibility of environmental damage, indicating that the Korean public tends to perceive nuclear issues in relation to the environment.
- 37.2% agreed that South Korea's nuclear program would not cause a problem such as the breakup of the ROK-US alliance or the withdrawal of US troops from South Korea, which is relatively high compared to other items. This is likely due to high trust in the US and the ROK-US alliance.
- At the same time, however, the majority of respondents clearly recognized that the United States would not tolerate South Korea developing nuclear weapons.

<Figure II - 7> US Attitudes toward a Nuclear South Korea: by Party Affiliation

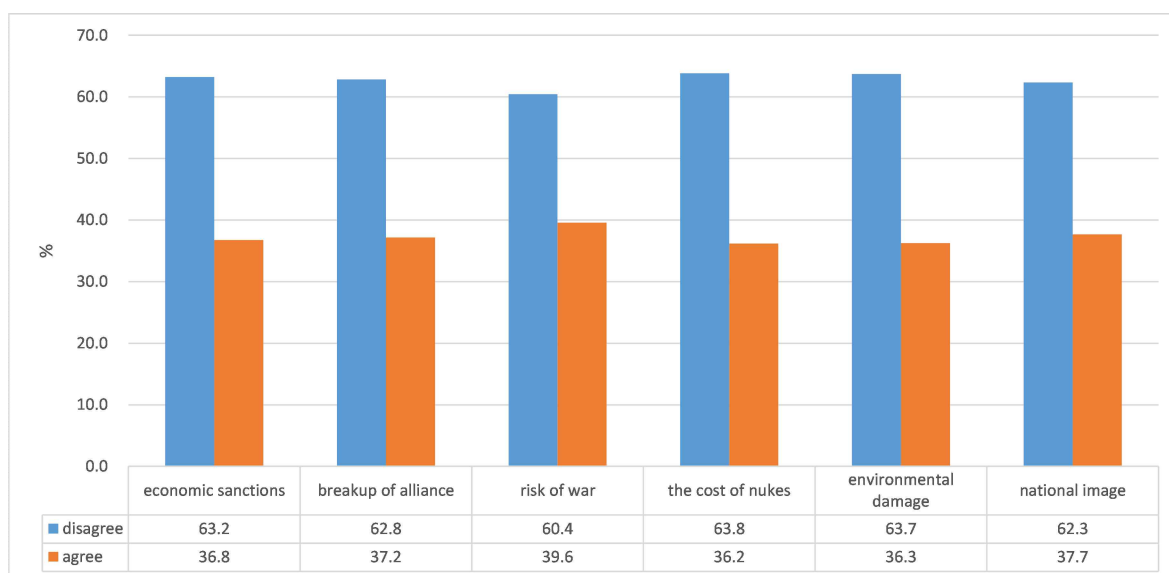


## ■ Survey Questions

- "Do you think the United States would support South Korea building nuclear weapons? "
  - 1=US will strongly oppose it; 2=US will somewhat oppose it; 3=US will somewhat support it; 4=US will strongly support it; 5=I am not sure.
  - 1+2="oppose"; 3+4="support"; 5="not sure"
- 81.7% of all respondents say the US would oppose South Korea developing nuclear weapons. There are no party differences in this expectation.
- In sum, the South Korean public understands that South Korea could face a number of serious crises if it actually attempted to develop nuclear weapons. They also clearly recognize that the US would oppose South Korean nuclear development.

## 6. Conditions for Nuclear Armament

<Figure II - 8> Conditions for Nuclear Armament



### ■ Survey Questions

- This survey asked about six possible risks that could accompany nuclear development, followed by a question about whether nuclear development should be pursued despite the possibilities.
  - (economic sanction) "Do you agree or disagree with the statement that South Korea should develop nuclear weapons despite the possibility of an economic crisis due to international sanctions?"
  - (breakup of alliance) "Do you agree or disagree with the statement that South Korea should develop nuclear weapons despite the US breaking the ROK-US Alliance and the possible withdrawal of US troops from South Korea?"
  - (the risk of war) "Do you agree or disagree with the statement that South Korea should develop nuclear weapons despite the possibility of increasing the risk of war on the Korean Peninsula by provoking North Korea and China?"
  - (the cost of nukes) "Do you agree or disagree with the statement that South Korea should develop nuclear weapons despite the possibility of economic hardship due to the cost of developing nuclear weapons?"

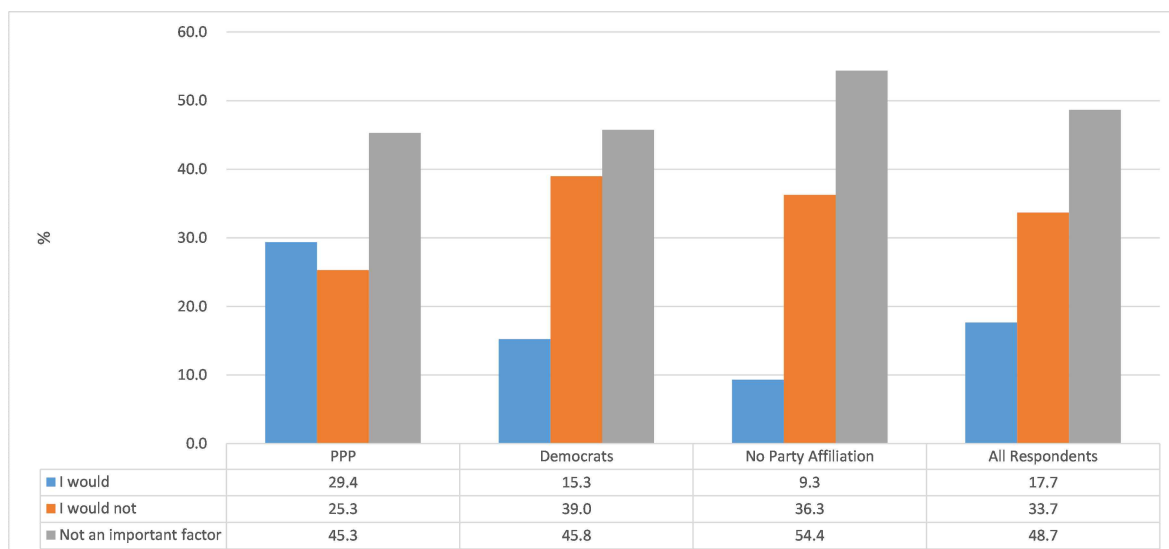
- (environmental damage) "Do you agree with the statement that South Korea should develop nuclear weapons despite the potential for environmental damage in the process?"
- (national image) "Do you agree or disagree with the statement that South Korea should develop nuclear weapons despite the potential damage to its peaceful international image?"
- 1=disagree strongly; 2=disagree somewhat; 3=agree somewhat; 4=agree strongly.
- 1+2="disagree"; 3+4="agree"

### ■ Do South Koreans want nuclear weapons?

- When presented with six different possibilities of risks and asked whether nuclear weapons would be necessary in the face of those possibilities, public opinion in favor of continuing nuclear development dropped dramatically.
- Across all six items, only 36% to 37% agree with nuclear development. This is in stark contrast to other surveys' findings of over 70% support for nuclear weapons.
- The implications of these findings are that many polls and discussions about South Koreans' desire for nuclear weapons need to be rethought at a fundamental level.
- Given the constant North Korean nuclear threats, the escalating US-China conflict in Northeast Asia, and the "fear of abandonment" sparked by former US President Trump's threats to end the ROK-US alliance, it is natural for the South Korean public to want more security.
- However, this study shows that South Koreans may prefer to maintain their security through alliances and diplomatic means rather than nuclear weapons.

## 7. Domestic Politics of South Korea and Nuclear Armament

<Figure II - 9> Nuclear Weapons and Voting Intentions: by Party Affiliation



### ■ Survey Questions

- "If a candidate or party in an election promised to develop South Korea's own nuclear weapons, would you vote for that candidate or party?"
  - 1= "I would"; 2= "I would not"; 3= "Developing nuclear weapons is not an important factor in my vote."

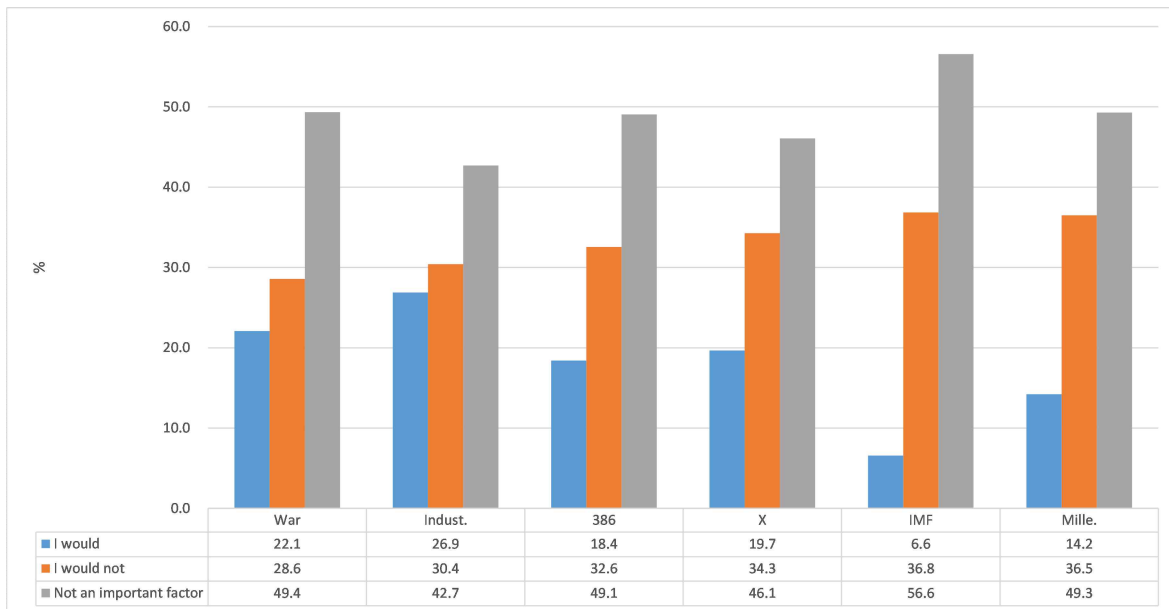
### ■ Nuclear armament and voting

- 48.7% of respondents said that "Developing nuclear weapons is not an important factor in my vote". Only 17.7% said they would support a political party or candidate with a nuclear weapons program, while 33.7% said they would not support such a candidate or party.
- South Korea's nuclear armament debate has been dominated by candidates who have claimed to support nuclear weapons development to differentiate themselves from other candidates. However, the findings suggest that nuclear weapons are unlikely to be a major election issue.
- Among the PPP supporters, 29.4% favor candidates and parties with nuclear development pledges. Only 25.3% would not support them. Given the polarized nature



of South Korea's domestic politics and the party nomination system, it is important for politicians to secure support within their own party in order to win elections. Thus, politicians may continue to try to win over conservative voters with nuclear pledges.

**<Figure II - 10> Nuclear Armament and Voting: by Cohorts**

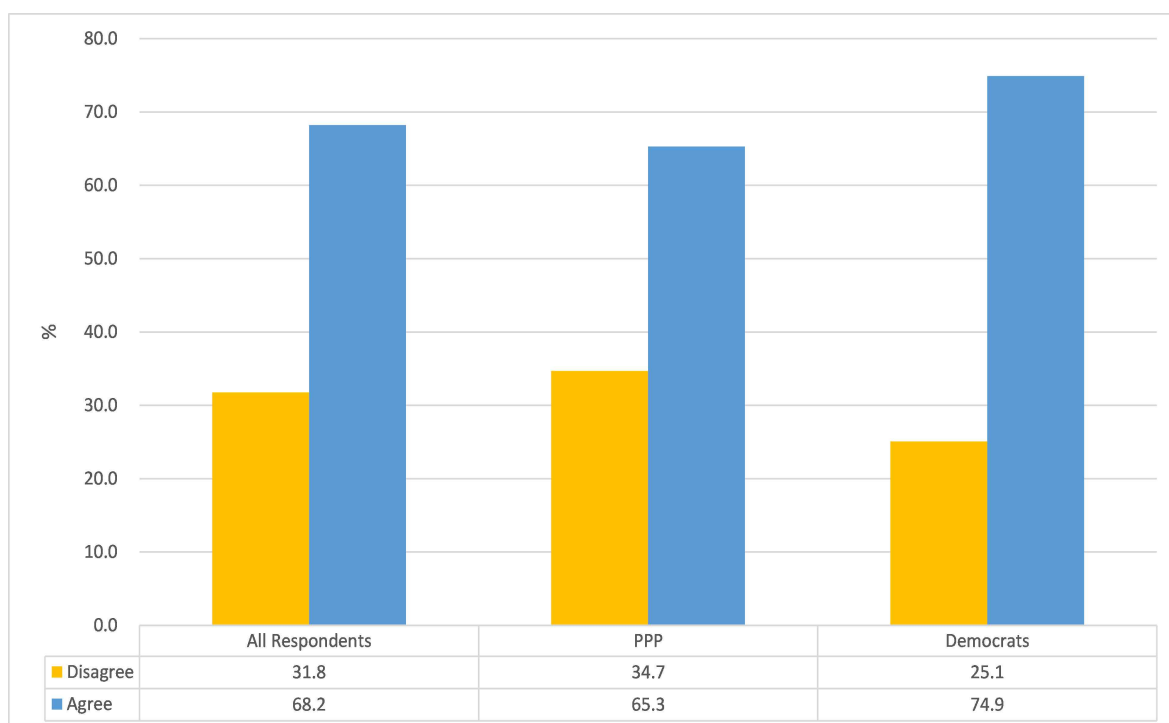


### ■ Generational differences

- Younger generations were more likely to say that nuclear armament is not an important factor for voting. It was 56.6% among the IMF generation, and nearly half of millennials at 49.3%.
- The Industrialized Generation was most likely to say they would vote for a party or candidate who promised to develop nuclear weapons, with 26.9% saying they would. This was the lowest among the IMF generation at 6.6%, indicating a clear generational difference.
- Younger generations were more likely to say they would not vote for a candidate who pledged to develop nuclear weapons, and support for nuclear weapons pledges was higher among the War Generation and the Industrialization Generation.

## 8. Attitudes on Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime

<Figure II - 11> Attitudes on NPT: by Party Affiliation



### ■ Survey Questions

- "Countries that do not currently have nuclear weapons should be prevented from developing them in the future."
  - 1=disagree strongly; 2=disagree somewhat; 3=agree somewhat; 4=agree strongly.
  - 1+2="disagree"; 3+4="agree"

### ■ High support for the Nuclear Nonproliferation regime.

- Attitudes toward the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) regime were examined using the question above and found to be highly supportive.
- 68.2% of all respondents agreed with the current regime, which prohibits non-nuclear states from developing nuclear weapons. In particular, 74.9% of Democratic Party supporters agreed, much higher than 65.3% of PPP supporters.

- The results suggest that South Koreans would not see the need to develop nuclear weapons if South Korea's security can be secured through traditional methods such as the nuclear nonproliferation regime, the ROK-US alliance, diplomacy and economic sanctions.

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III

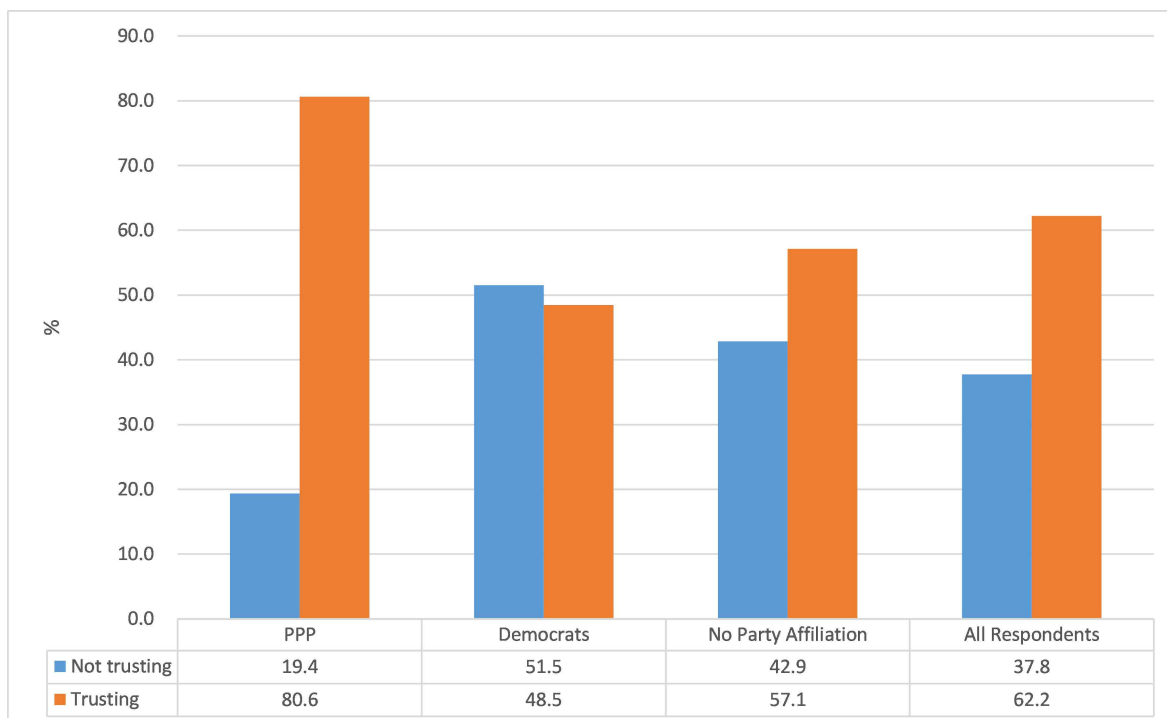
# ROK-US Relations and South Korea's Nuclear Armament

Dr. Sangsin Lee (KINU)

### III. ROK-US Relations and South Korea’s Nuclear Armament

#### 1. Trust in US policy on the Korean Peninsula

<Figure III - 1> Trust in US policy on the Korean Peninsula: by Party Affiliation



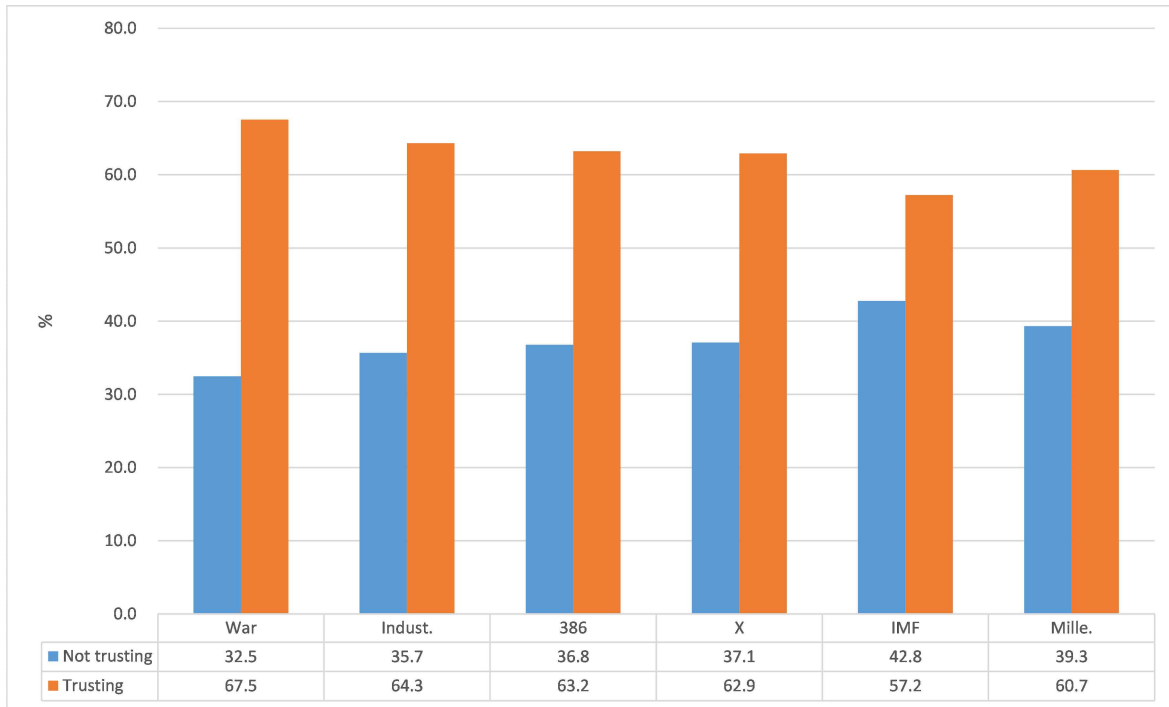
#### ■ Survey Questions

- “How much do you trust the US policy toward the Korean Peninsula? ”
  - 1=not at all; 2=not very much; 3=somewhat trusting; 4=very trusting.
  - 1+2=“not trusting”; 3+4=“trusting”

#### ■ Confirmed high levels of trust in the US

- 62.2% of all respondents said they trust US policy on the Korean Peninsula.
- However, there is a large gap in support by political party. 80.6% of PPP supporters trusted the US, compared to 48.5% of Democrats, indicating a gap between the two parties' views of the US.

<Figure III - 2> Trust in US policy on the Korean Peninsula: by Cohorts



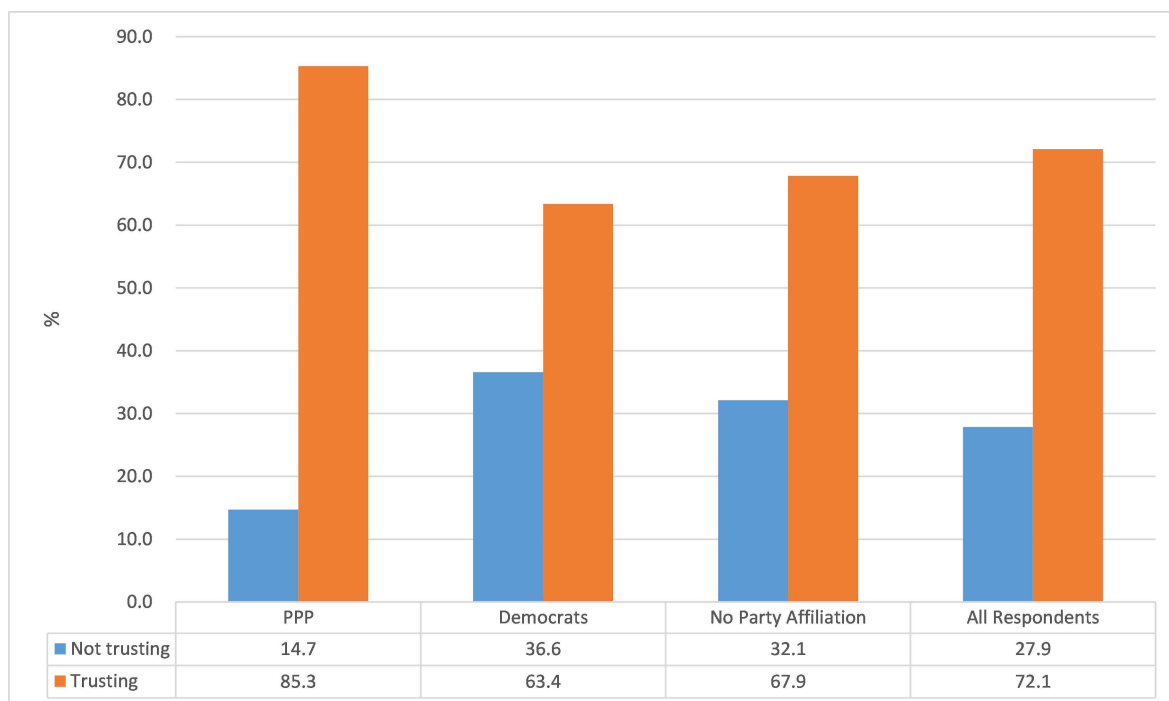
### ■ Gen 386 and Gen X also have high trust in the US

- Generation 386 and Generation X are known to be the most progressive generations, and they are also thought to have anti-American attitudes.<sup>3)</sup>
- However, Gen 386 (63.2%) and Gen X (62.9%) are more trusting of the United States than IMFs (57.2%) or Millennials (60.7%).
- Generational differences in general favorability toward the US and China are not statistically confirmed or significant.

3) 김서윤, "586은 반미, 우리는 반중! MZ 세대의 중국 혐오를 키운 것은?" 『주간조선』, 2021.5.24.

## 2. Trust in US Extended Deterrence

<Figure III - 3> Trust in US Extended Deterrence: by Party Affiliation



### ■ Survey Questions

- “How much trust do you have in the US nuclear umbrella policy that the US will retaliate with a nuclear strike against North Korea if North Korea attacks South Korea with a nuclear weapon?”<sup>4)</sup>
  - 1=not at all; 2=not very much; 3=somewhat trusting; 4=very trusting.
  - 1+2=“not trusting”; 3+4=“trusting”

### ■ Trust in the US nuclear umbrella

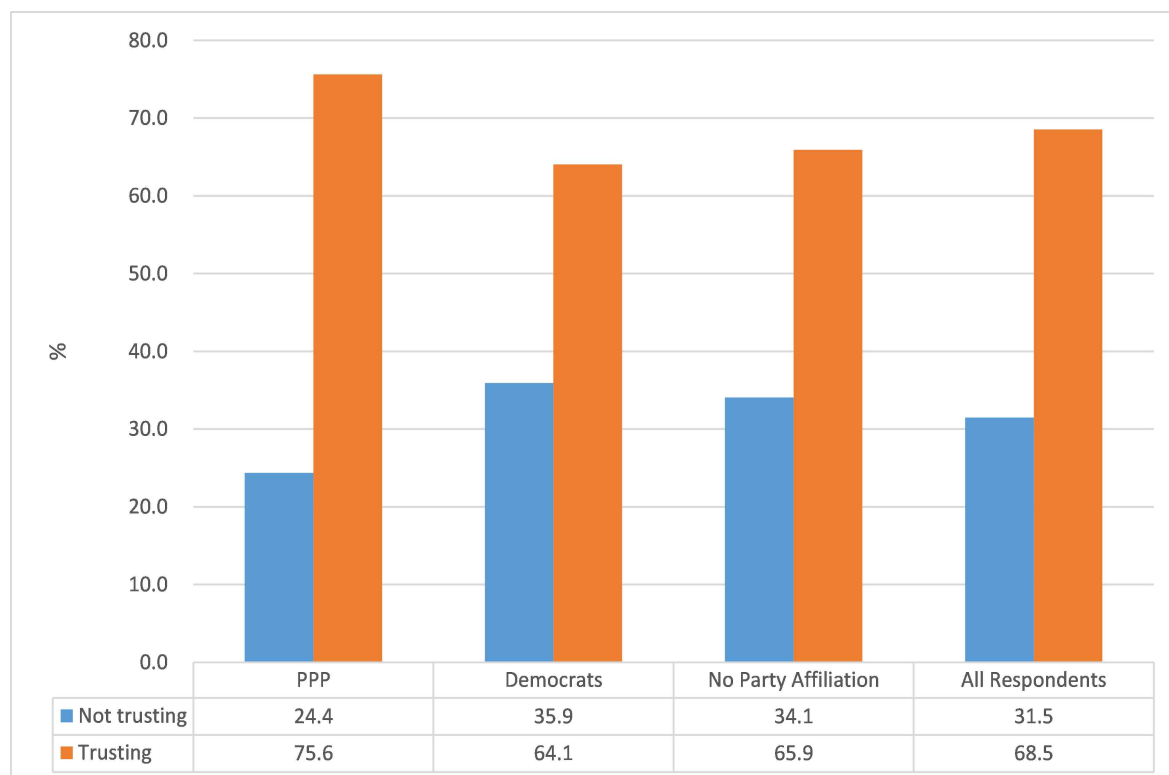
- 72.1% of all respondents and 85.3% of PPP supporters said they trust the nuclear umbrella policy.
- This high level of trust is one of the most important foundations of the ROK-US relationship.

4) The following explanation was inserted before the question: “The United States' "nuclear deterrence" or "nuclear umbrella" policy means that if a U.S. ally without nuclear weapons, such as South Korea or Japan, is attacked by a hostile nation with nuclear weapons, the United States will retaliate with a nuclear strike on its behalf. The United States has publicly promised to provide a nuclear umbrella to South Korea.”



### 3. Effectiveness of Extended Deterrence

<Figure III - 4> Effectiveness of Extended Deterrence: by Party Affiliation



#### ■ Survey Questions

- “It has been argued that the US nuclear umbrella policy has deterred North Korea from launching a nuclear attack on South Korea. How much do you agree with this argument?”
  - 1=disagree strongly; 2=disagree somewhat; 3=agree somewhat; 4=agree strongly.
  - 1+2=“disagree”; 3+4=“agree”

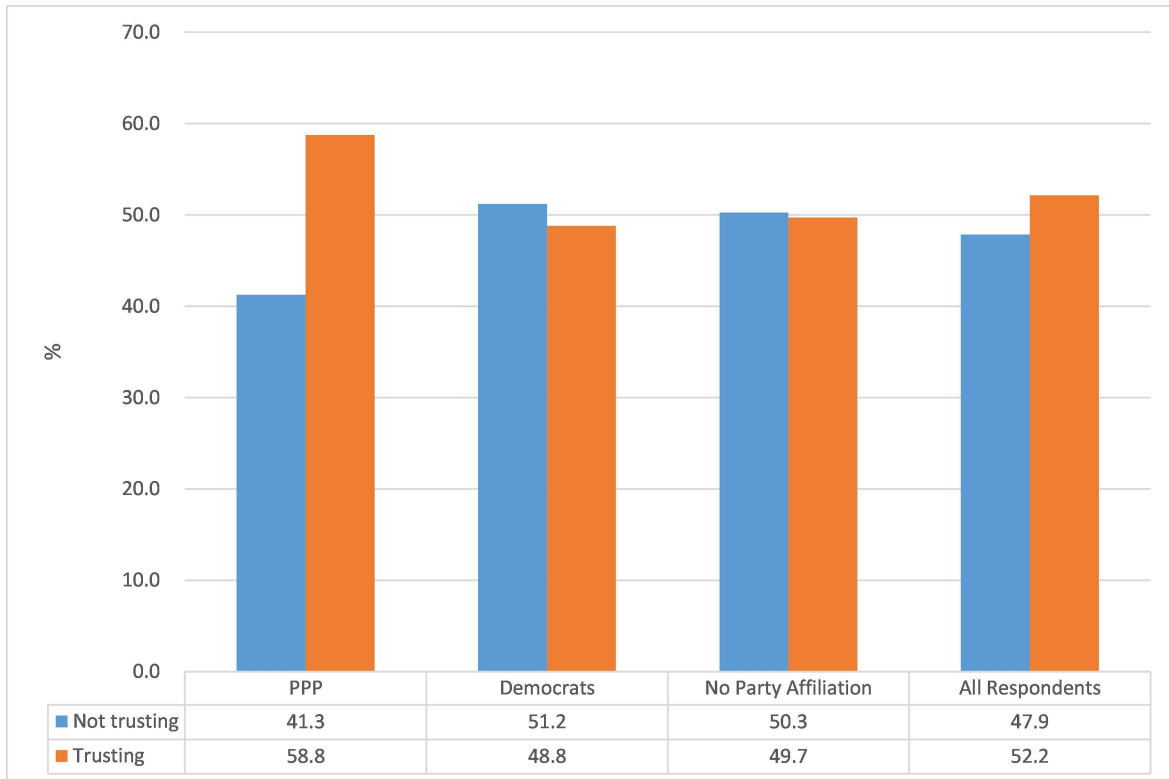
#### ■ Evaluation of the effectiveness of nuclear umbrella policy

- Opinion that the US nuclear umbrella policy will work and belief that the policy is actually protecting the country from nuclear threats are two different issues. Therefore, the KINU Unification Survey measured trust in the nuclear umbrella policy and evaluation of its effectiveness with separate questions.

- 68.5% of all respondents and 75.6% of PPP supporters believe that the nuclear umbrella policy is working effectively.
- In other words, the majority of South Koreans trust the nuclear umbrella policy and believe it protects the country from the North Korean nuclear threat.

## 4. Extended Deterrence and South Korea's Nuclear Armament

<Figure III - 5> Extended Deterrence and South Korea's Nuclear Armament:  
by Party Affiliation



### ■ Survey Questions

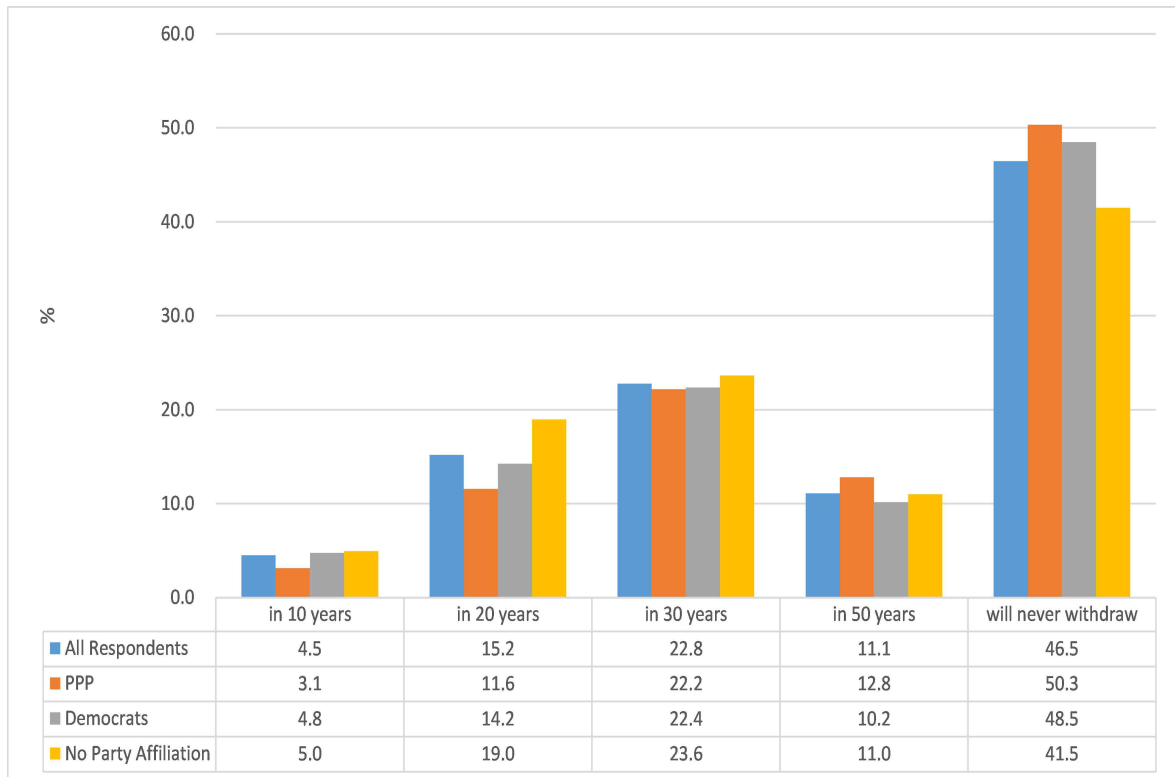
- "Do you agree with the argument that South Korea does not need to build its own nuclear weapons because the US nuclear umbrella policy protects South Korea?"
  - 1=disagree strongly; 2=disagree somewhat; 3=agree somewhat; 4=agree strongly.
  - 1+2="disagree"; 3+4="agree"

### ■ US nuclear umbrella and South Korea's nuclear armament

- In <Figure II - 1>, 60.2% of respondents were in favor of South Korea's nuclear armament. When this is combined with the US nuclear umbrella policy, 52.2% of respondents believe that South Korea does not need to build nuclear weapons.
- This suggests that public opinion on South Korea's nuclear program is highly influenced by changes in the international and domestic political landscape.

## 5. Withdrawal of USFK

<Figure III - 6> Possibility of USFK Withdrawal: by Party Affiliation



### ■ Survey Questions

- “How likely do you think it is that the United States will withdraw US troops from South Korea?”
  - 1=The US will withdraw US troops from South Korea in 10 years; 2= The US will withdraw US troops from South Korea in 20 years; 3= The US will withdraw US troops from South Korea in 30 years; 4= The United States will withdraw its troops from South Korea in 50 years; 5= The United States will never withdraw its troops from South Korea.

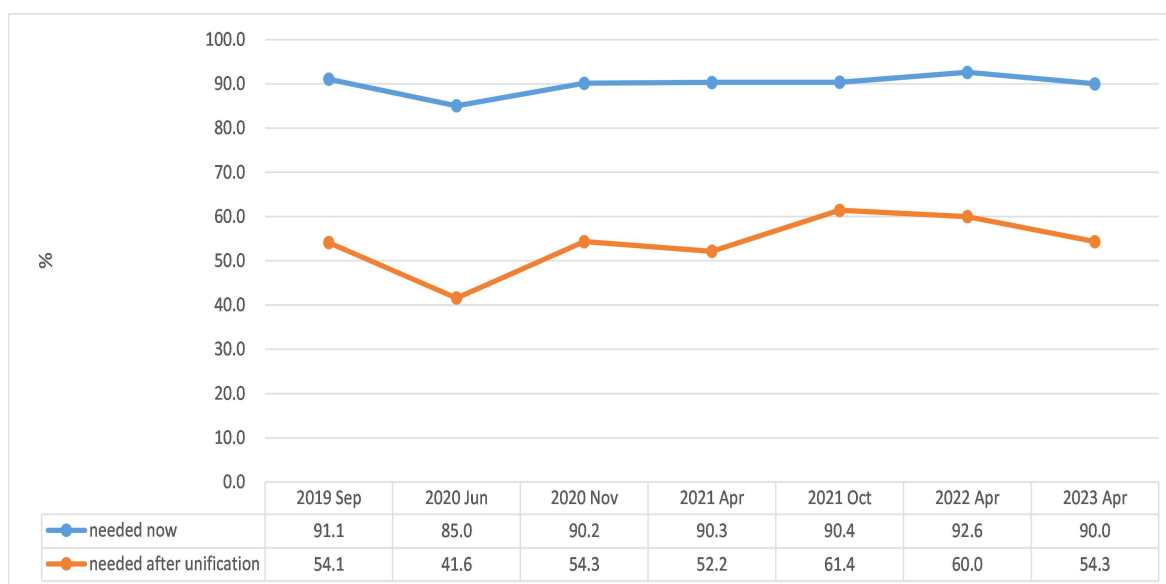
### ■ Sustainability of the US military presence in South Korea

- No correlation was found between South Korea's need for a nuclear armament and the likelihood of US troop withdrawal. In other words, it is not the fear of withdrawal of US troops that leads South Koreans to believe they need nuclear weapons.

- 46.5% of all respondents believe that the US military will not withdraw from South Korea. This indicates that confidence in the stability of the ROK-US alliance is strong. Or, they believe it is in the interest of the US to have troops in South Korea.
- Despite Trump's talk of withdrawing US troops from South Korea, most South Koreans think it is unlikely.

## 6. Necessity of USFK

<Figure III - 7> Necessity of USFK: Now and After Unification



### ■ Survey Questions

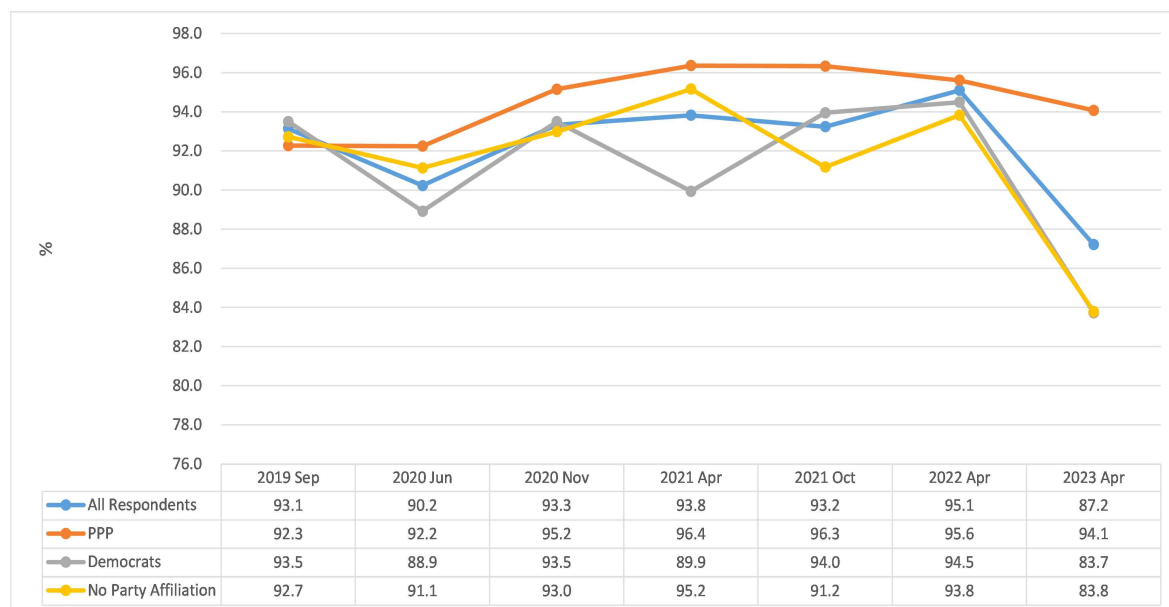
- “Do you think that US Forces Korea is needed now?”; “Do you think that US Forces Korea will be needed even after Unification of Korea?”
  - 1=Not at all needed; 2=Not particularly needed; 3=Somewhat needed; 4=Very needed.
  - 3+4=“needed”

### ■ National consensus on the need for USFK

- Since 2019, when we began asking this question, support for the current need for US Forces Korea has remained at 90%. This shows that there is a national consensus on the value and importance of the US Forces Korea presence.
- On the other hand, opinions on whether USFK should continue to be stationed on the Korean Peninsula after unification dropped 5.7% to 54.3%, down from 60.0% in 2022. The US-China conflict may have affected attitudes toward the long-term role of the US Forces Korea.

## 7. Necessity of ROK-US Alliance

<Figure III - 8> Necessity of ROK-US Alliance: by Party Affiliation



### ■ Survey Questions

- "Do you believe that ROK-US Alliance will still be necessary in the future?"
  - 1=Not at all needed; 2=Not particularly needed; 3=Somewhat needed; 4=Very needed.
  - 3+4="needed"

### ■ Changes in necessity of ROK-US alliance

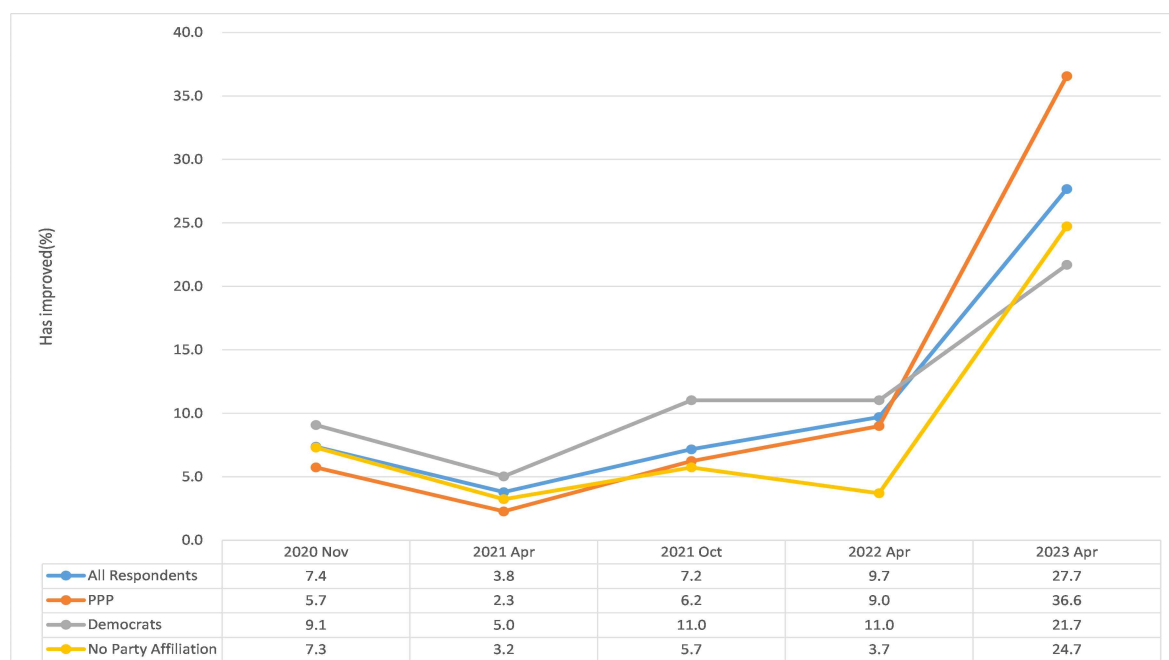
- The need for the ROK-US alliance has remained above 90%, peaking at 95.1% in 2022. This year, however, it dropped to 87.2 percent.
- While an overwhelming majority of South Koreans still recognize the need for the alliance, this is an interesting shift as there have been no specific events over the past year that would weaken the relationship.
- Democratic Party supporters dropped from 94.5% in 2022 to 83.7% this year. Similarly, nonpartisan respondents dropped from 93.8% to 83.8%.

- This suggests that the change is driven more by the polarization of Korean domestic politics than by ROK-US relations. In other words, the current administration's efforts to strengthen ROK-US relations may have caused opposition supporters who are critical of the government to lower their assessment of the need for ROK-US alliance.



## 8. Evaluation of ROK-US Relations over the Past Year

<Figure III - 9> Positive Evaluation of ROK-US Relations: by Party Affiliation



### ■ Survey Questions

- "How do you evaluate ROK-US relations over the past year?"
  - 1 = Has improved; 2 = Has worsened; 3 = Has not changed much
  - 1 = "Has improved"

### ■ Improvement of ROK-US relations

- 27.7% of all respondents said that ROK-US relations have gotten better over the past year, the highest percentage since the survey began. 10.4% said it had gotten worse, while 61.9% said it hadn't changed much.

<Table III - 1> Evaluation of ROK-US Relations

(unit: %)

| Evaluation           | 2020 Nov | 2021 Apr | 2021 Oct | 2022 Apr | 2023 Apr |
|----------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Has improved         | 7.4      | 3.8      | 7.2      | 9.7      | 27.7     |
| Has worsened         | 38.0     | 25.9     | 14.2     | 10.7     | 10.4     |
| Has not changed much | 54.6     | 70.3     | 78.6     | 79.6     | 61.9     |

## 9. US Consideration for South Korea's Interests

<Figure III - 10> US Consideration for South Korea's Interests: by Party Affiliation



### ■ Survey Questions

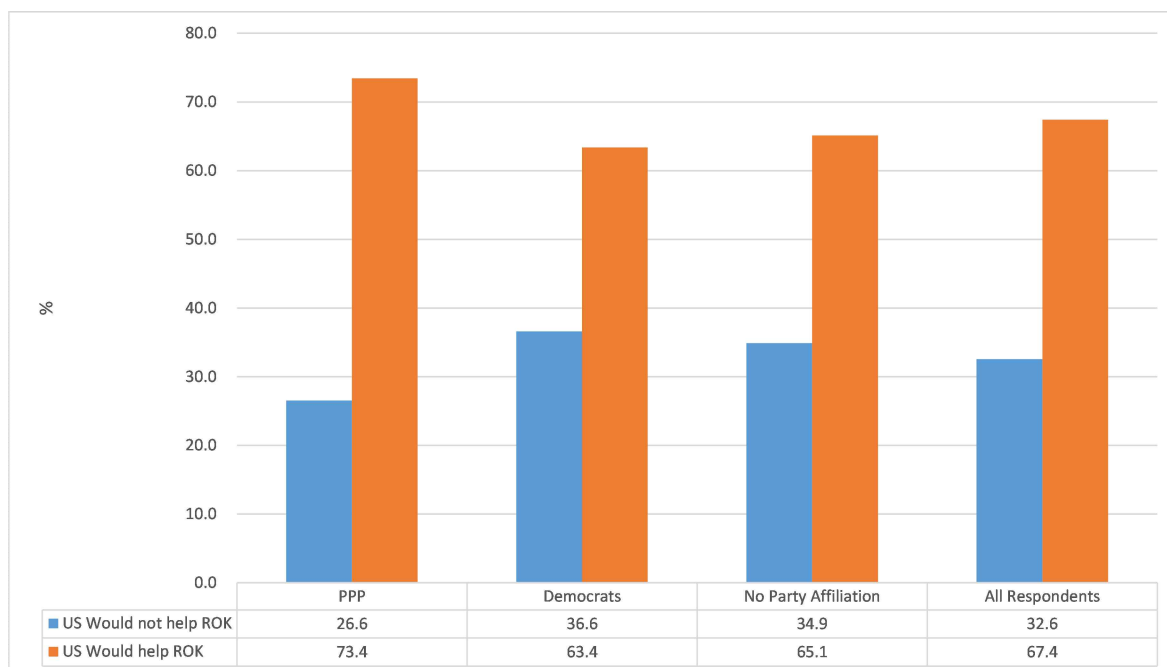
- "To what extent do you think the United States considers the interests of countries like South Korea when making decisions in international policy?"
  - 1 = Considers very much; 2 = Considers fairly; 3 = Does not considered very much; 4 = Does not considered at all
  - 1+2="US consideration for South Korea's interests."

### ■ Improved US image and the impact of polarization in Korean politics

- In the 2020 survey, 35% of all respondents said the US considers South Korea's national interests, rising to 46.4% in 2023. The increase was particularly large among PPP supporters (62.8%). Among Democrats, there was no significant change since 2020.
- While the overall image of the US has improved, the increasingly polarized domestic politics may be having an impact.

## 10. US Support for South Korea-China Conflict

<Figure III - 11> US Support for South Korea-China Conflict: by Party Affiliation



### ■ Survey Questions

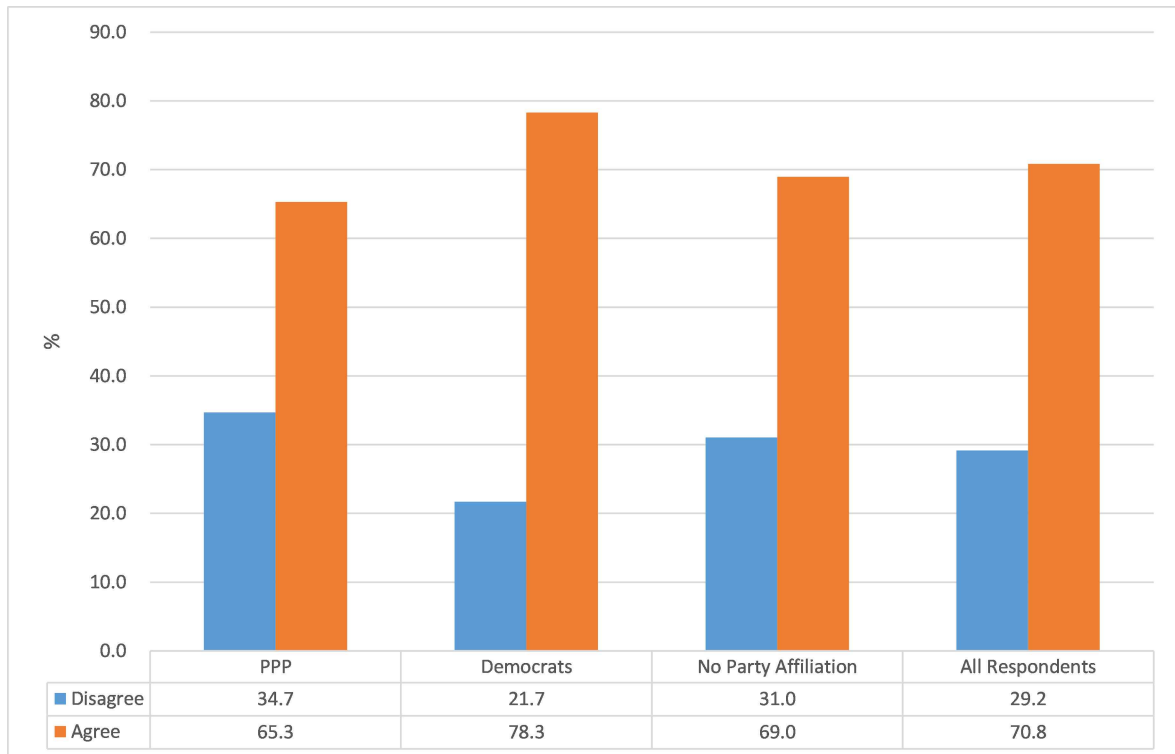
- “In the event of a military conflict between China and South Korea, do you agree or disagree that the United States would help South Korea against China?”
  - 1=disagree strongly; 2=disagree somewhat; 3=agree somewhat; 4=agree strongly.
  - 1+2=“would not help South Korea”; 3+4=“would help South Korea.”

### ■ The role of the ROK-US alliance in conflict with China

- A hypothetical situation of a military conflict between South Korea and China was presented to measure trust in the alliance. While trust in the ROK-US alliance is high, it is a different matter to believe that the alliance will work in a specific crisis scenario as opposed to general, abstract trust.
- 67.4% of all respondents and 73.4% of PPP supporters believe the US would help in the event of a conflict between South Korea and China. Among Democrats, 63.4% also trust the alliance.

## 11. OPCON Transfer

<Figure III - 12> OPCON Transfer: by Party Affiliation



### ■ Survey Questions

- “Do you favor or oppose South Korea transferring wartime operational control (OPCON)<sup>5)</sup> from the US Command to the ROK Armed Forces?”
  - 1= disagree strongly; 2= disagree somewhat; 3= agree somewhat; 4= agree strongly.
  - 1+2= “disagree”; 3+4= “agree”

### ■ Broad consensus on the need for OPCON transfer

- Despite the US' reluctance to transition of OPCON, 70.8% of all respondents recognize the need to do so.
- Attitudes on the issue vary by political party, with 65.3% of PPP supporters and 78.3%

5) The following explanation was inserted before the question: “Wartime Operational Control is the authority to command and control the armed forces in times of war. Currently, the ROK-US Combined Forces Command, whose commander is a US Army general, has Wartime Operational Control of the South Korean military.”

of Democratic Party supporters in favor, but even among conservatives, nearly two-thirds support OPCON transfer.

- Regardless of the need for a ROK-US alliance or positive attitudes for the US, there is a public consensus that the ROK government should retain wartime operational control, which is an important part of sovereignty.
- However, the level of public's understanding of the concept of wartime operational control and the role of US Forces Korea (USFK) is not considered to be very high. Public opinion on this issue is likely to change in response to changes in the ROK-US relations and the political climate in Northeast Asia.

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IV

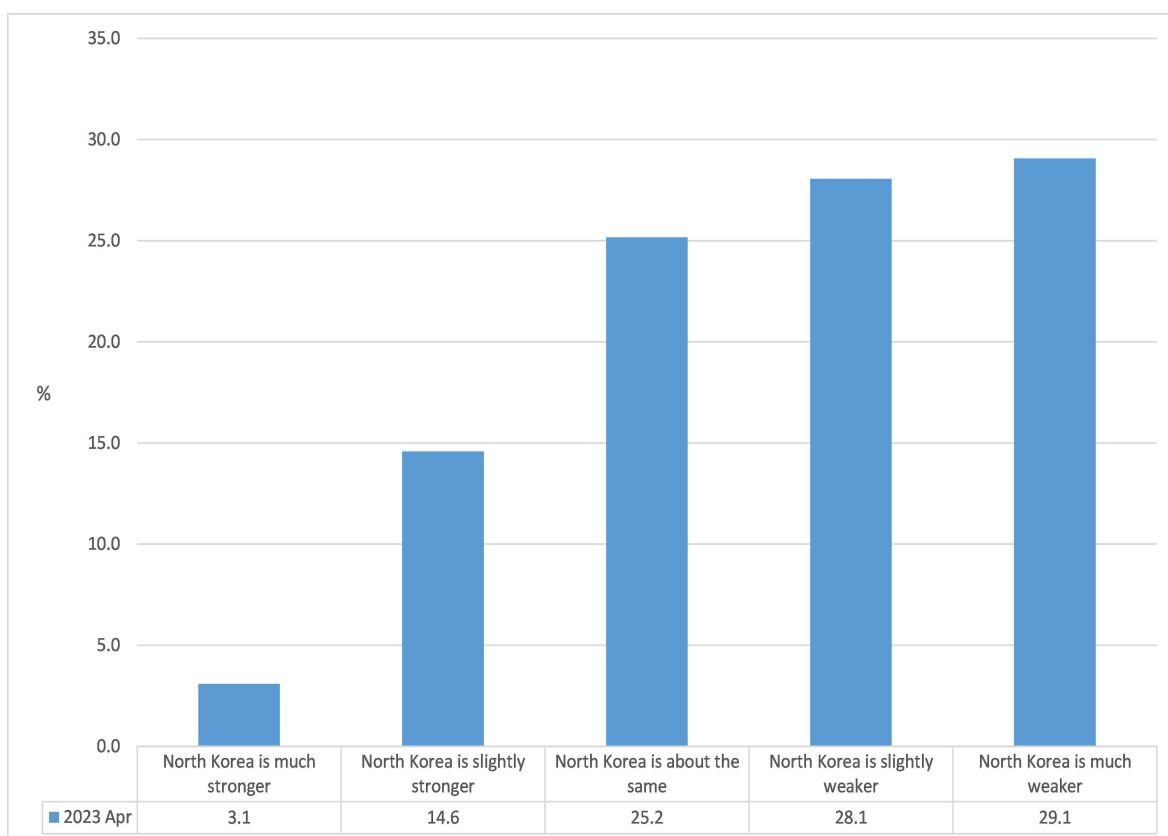
# North Korea's Nuclear Threat and South Korea's Nuclear Armament

Prof. Kwang-il Yoon  
(Sookmyung Women's Univ.)

## IV. North Korea's Nuclear Threat and South Korea's Nuclear Armament

### 1. Comparing North and South Korean Conventional Military Power

<Figure IV - 1> North and South Korean Conventional Military Power



#### ■ Survey Questions

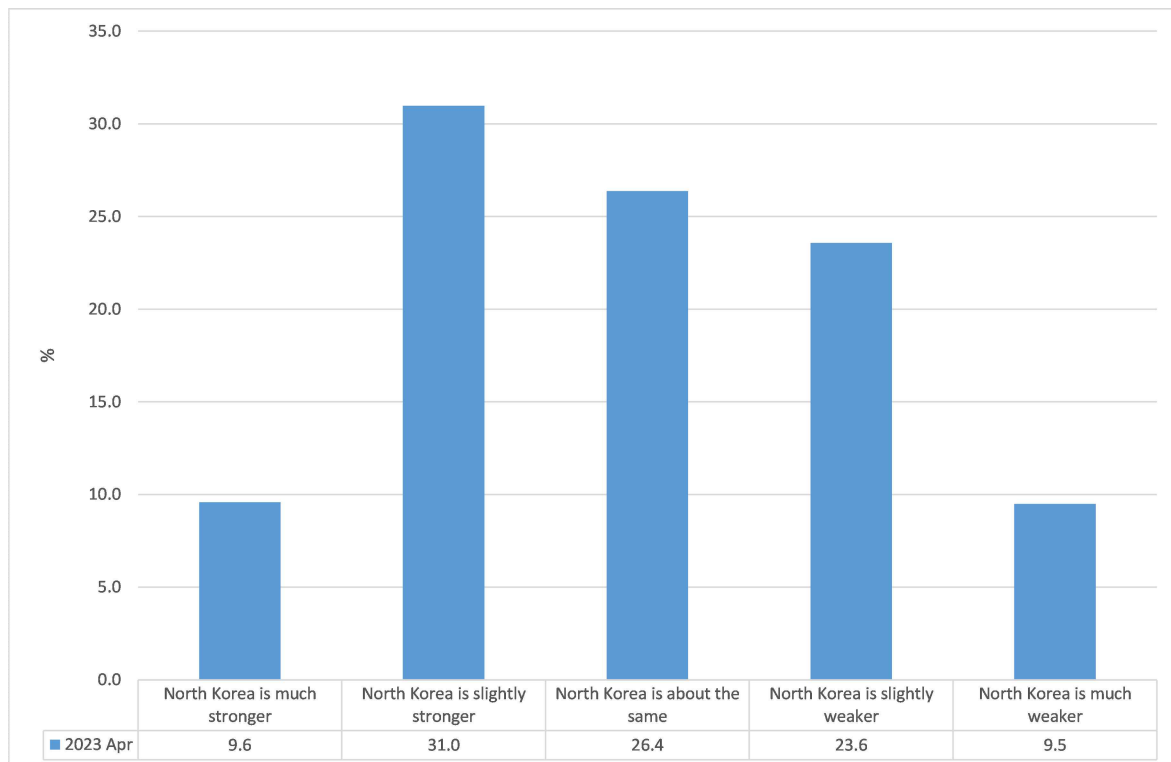
- “If North Korea did not have nuclear weapons, do you think its military power would be stronger or weaker than South Korea's?”
  - 1= Without nukes, North Korea's military power is much stronger than South Korea's;
  - 2= Without nukes, North Korea's military power is slightly stronger than South Korea's;
  - 3= Without nukes, North Korea's military power is about the same as South Korea's;
  - 4= Without nukes, North Korea's military power is slightly weaker than South Korea's;
  - 5= Without nukes, North Korea's military power is much weaker than South Korea's



■ South Korea's military power is superior to North Korea's, excluding nuclear weapons.

- Based on conventional military power, the majority (57.2%) believe that North Korea is either slightly weaker (28.1%) or much weaker (29.1%) than South Korea.
- This finding suggests that nuclear weapons play a relatively large role in assessing North Korea's military power.

<Figure IV - 2> North and South Korean Military Power



■ Survey Questions

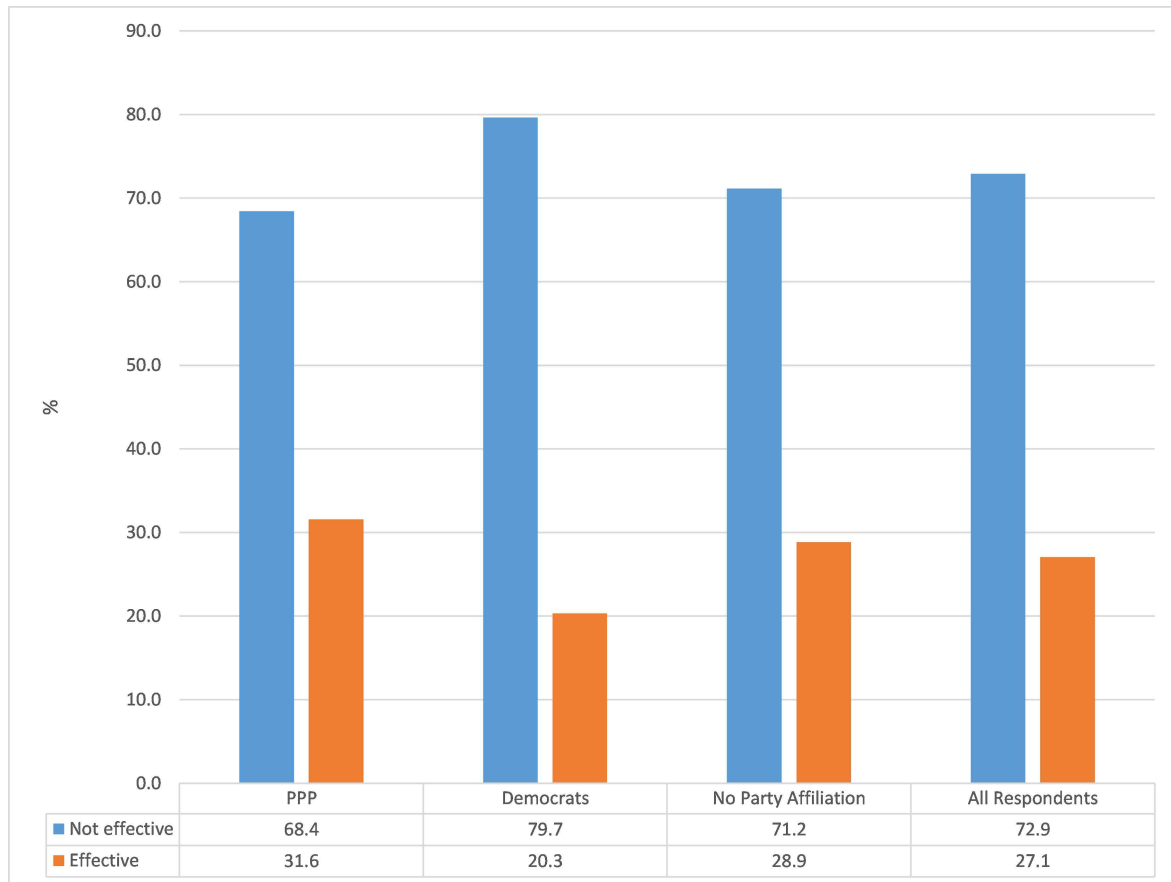
- “Do you think the military power of North Korea stronger than South Korea? Or weaker than South Korea?”
  - 1= North Korea's military power is much stronger than South Korea's; 2= North Korea's military power is slightly stronger than South Korea's; 3= North Korea's military power is about the same as South Korea's; 4= North Korea's military power is slightly weaker than South Korea's; 5= North Korea's military power is much weaker than South Korea's

■ **North Korea's military power is perceived as equal to or slightly inferior to that of the South, if nuclear weapons are not explicitly excluded**

- There is no significant difference between those who perceive North Korea to be slightly stronger (31.1%) or much stronger (9.6%) than South Korea (40.7%) and those who perceive South Korea to be slightly weaker (23.6%) or much weaker (9.5%) than North Korea (43.1%).
  - Compared to the previous results (<Figure IV - 1>), these results suggest that nuclear weapons play a large role in the assessment of North Korea's military power.
  - No significant difference when compared by political party affiliation.

## 2. Economic Sanctions and Denuclearization of North Korea

<Figure IV - 3> Effectiveness of Economic Sanctions on North Korea: by Party Affiliation



### ■ Survey Questions

- “How effective do you think the policy of using economic sanctions to pressure North Korea into denuclearization is?”
  - 1= Not at all effective; 2= Not very effective; 3= Somewhat effective; 4= Very effective.
  - 1+2= “not effective”; 3+4=“effective”

### ■ Economic sanctions are not effective

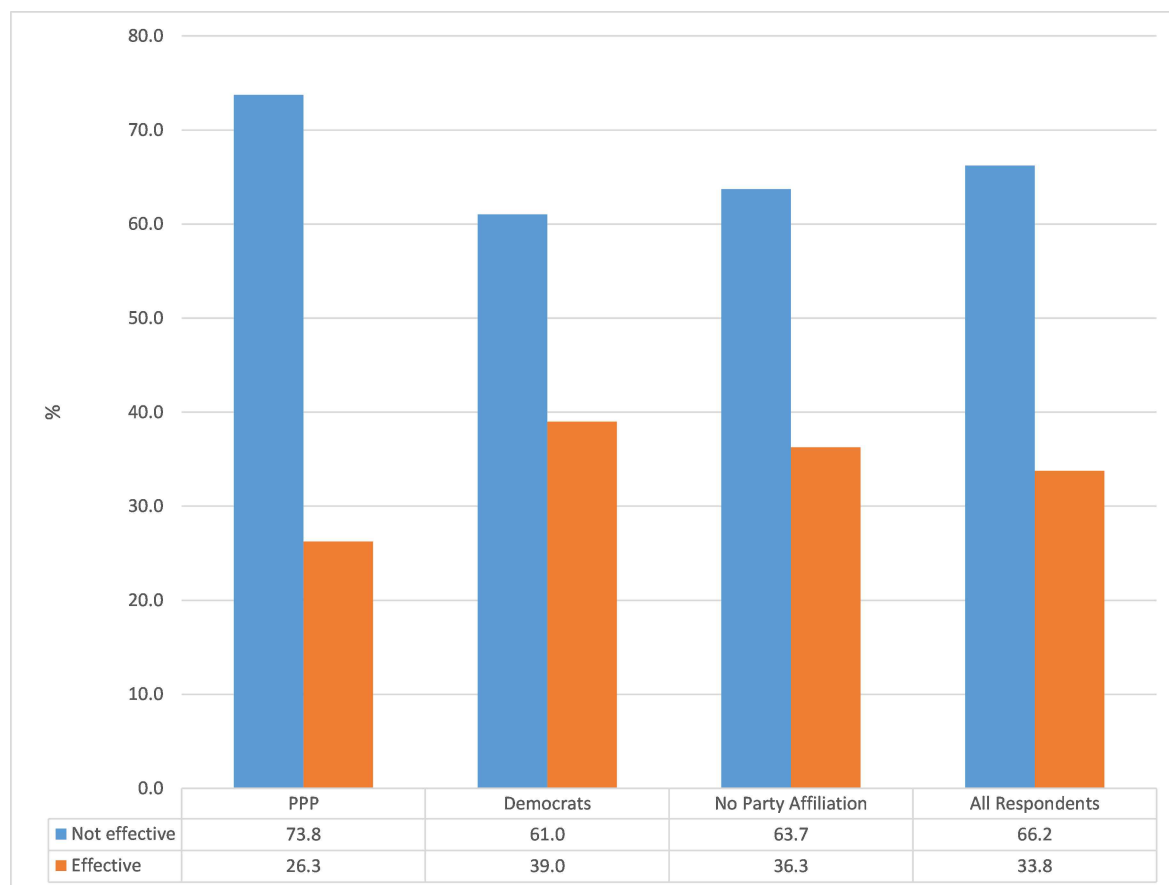
- Supporters of the PPP, the Democratic Party, and those with no party affiliation make up the majority of all respondents (97.8%). All three categories are skeptical of the

effectiveness of economic sanctions in inducing denuclearization within 70%.

- By party affiliation, Democratic Party supporters (79.7%) are about 10 percentage points more skeptical of the effectiveness of economic sanctions than PPP supporters (68.4%) and those with no party affiliation (71.2%).
- PPP and non-partisan respondents rate the effectiveness at similar levels, around 30%.

### 3. Inter-Korean Dialogue and Denuclearization of North Korea

<Figure IV - 4> Effectiveness of Inter-Korean Dialogue: by Party Affiliation



#### ■ Survey Questions

- “How effective do you think the continued promotion of inter-Korean dialogue and inter-Korean cooperation is in inducing North Korea to denuclearize?”
  - 1= Not at all effective; 2= Not very effective; 3= Somewhat effective; 4= Very effective.
  - 1+2= “not effective”; 3+4= “effective”

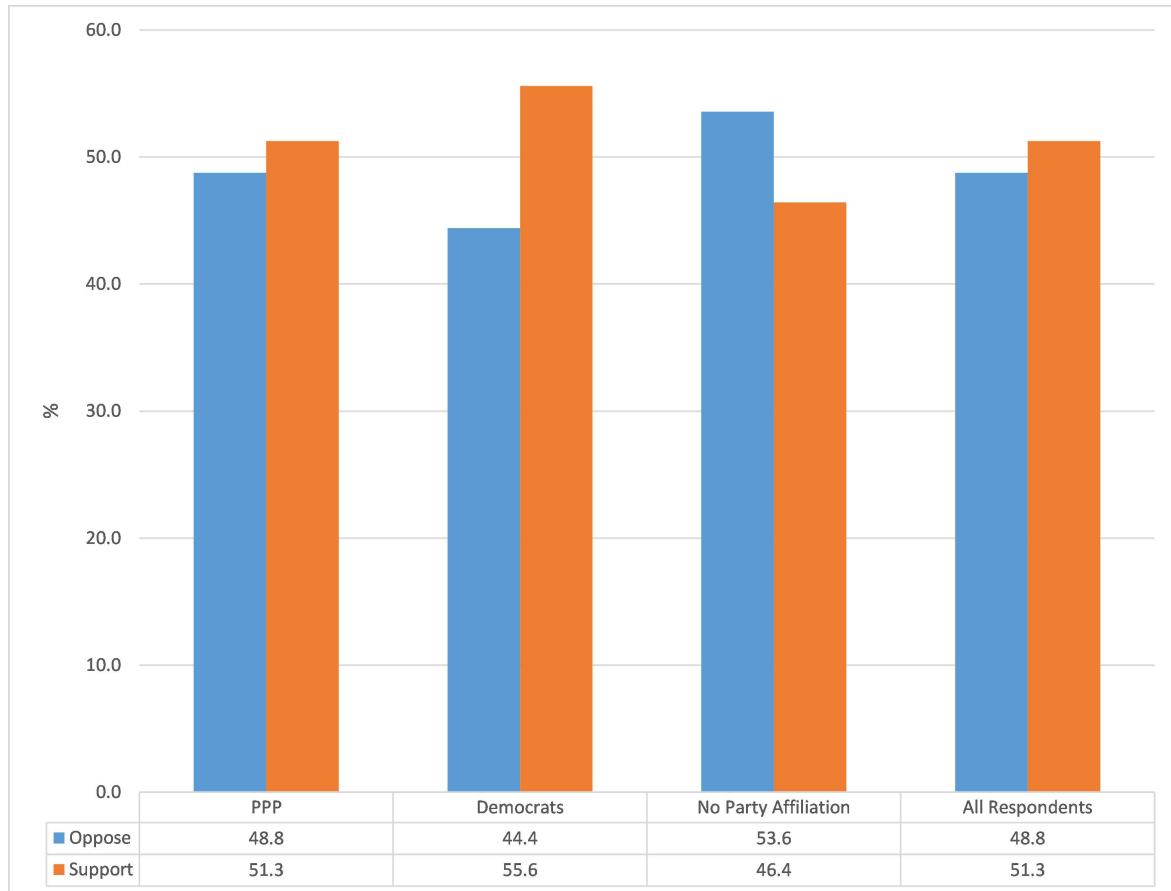
#### ■ Inter-Korean dialog is not effective either

- Both PPP and Democratic Party supporters and those with no party affiliation are generally skeptical of the effectiveness of inter-Korean dialogue in inducing denuclearization.

- By party affiliation, PPP supporters (73.8%) are about 12 percentage points more skeptical of the effectiveness of inter-Korean dialogue in inducing denuclearization than Democratic Party supporters (61.0%) and those with no party affiliation (63.7%).
- Unlike the effectiveness of economic sanctions, Democrats and those with no party affiliation are similarly positive about the effectiveness of inter-Korean dialog at levels in the low 30%.

## 4. Allowing Access to North Korean Newspapers and Broadcasts

<Figure IV - 5> Allowing North Korean Media: by Party Affiliation



### ■ Survey Questions

- “Recently, there have been discussions about allowing access to North Korean newspapers and broadcasts in South Korea. Do you support or oppose allowing North Korean broadcasting?”
  - 1= oppose strongly; 2= oppose somewhat; 3= support somewhat; 4= support strongly.
  - 1+2= “oppose”; 3+4= “support”

### ■ Divided opinion on allowing North Korean media

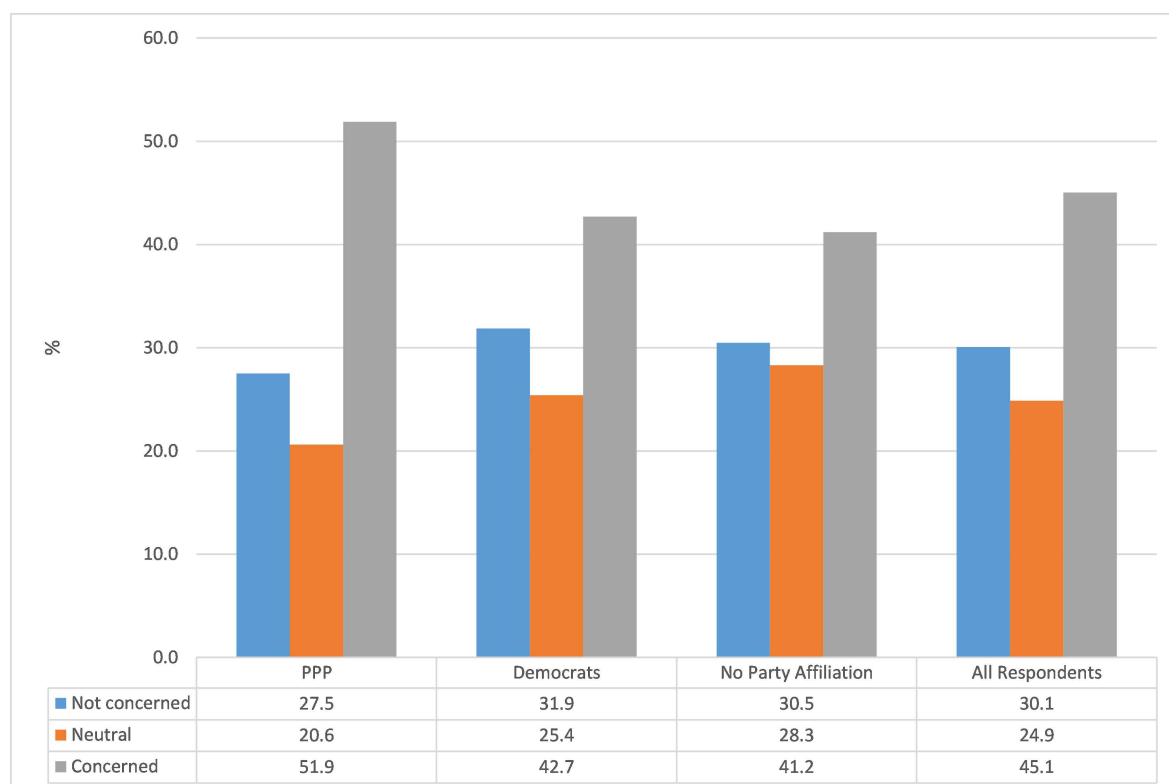
- With exception of the respondents with no party affiliation, about half of PPP and Democratic Party supporters are in favor of opening up the North Korean media, but almost equally opposed.

- By party affiliation, Democrats (55.6%) are slightly more likely to favor of allowing North Korean media than People Power supporters (51.3%), while those with no party affiliation (46.4%) are slightly more likely to oppose it than support it.



## 5. Concerns about the North Korean Nuclear Threat

<Figure IV - 6> Concerns for the North Korean Nukes: by Party Affiliation



### ■ Survey Questions

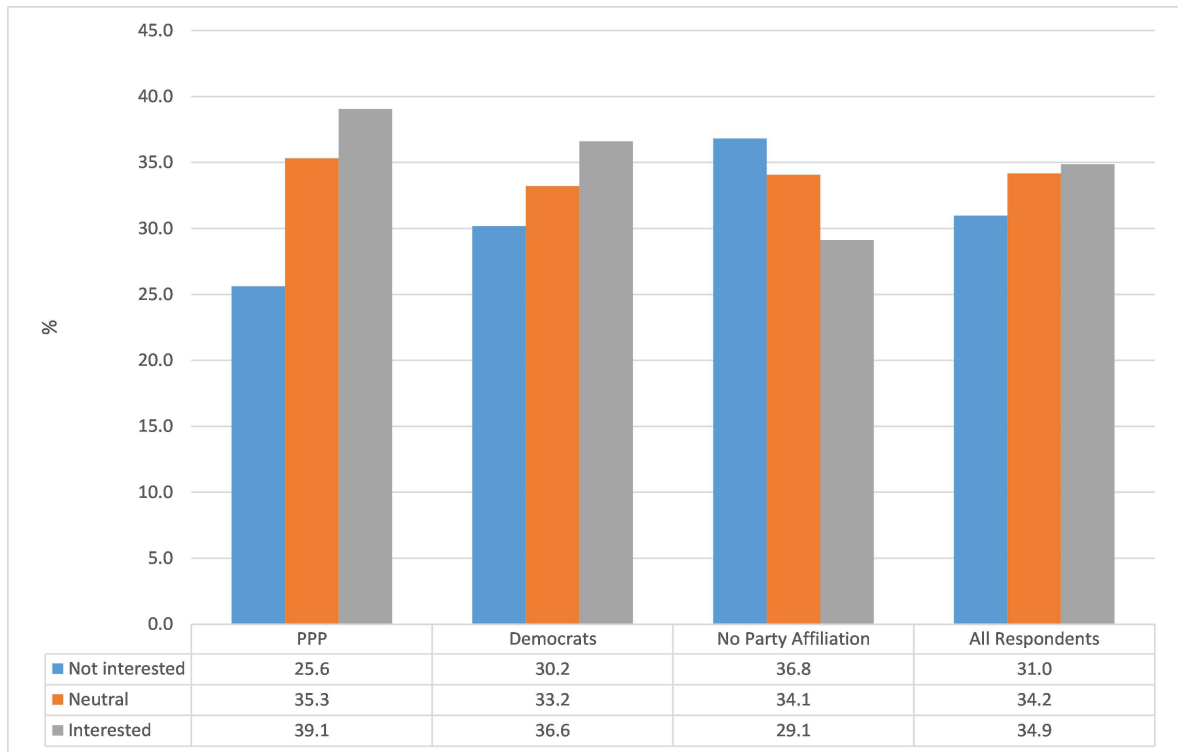
- “To what extent are you concerned about the North Korean nuclear threat?”
  - 1=not concerned at all; 2=somewhat not concerned; 3=neutral; 4=somewhat concerned; 5=very concerned
  - 1+2=“not concerned”; 4+5= “concerned”

### ■ Near majority concerned about nuclear threats

- While a majority (51.9%) of PPP supporters said they are concerned about the North Korean nuclear threat, Democratic Party supporters (42.7%) and those with no party affiliation (41.2%) are equally concerned about nuclear threats.

## 6. Interest in the North Korean Nuclear Threat

<Figure IV - 7> Interest in the North Korean Nukes: by Party Affiliation



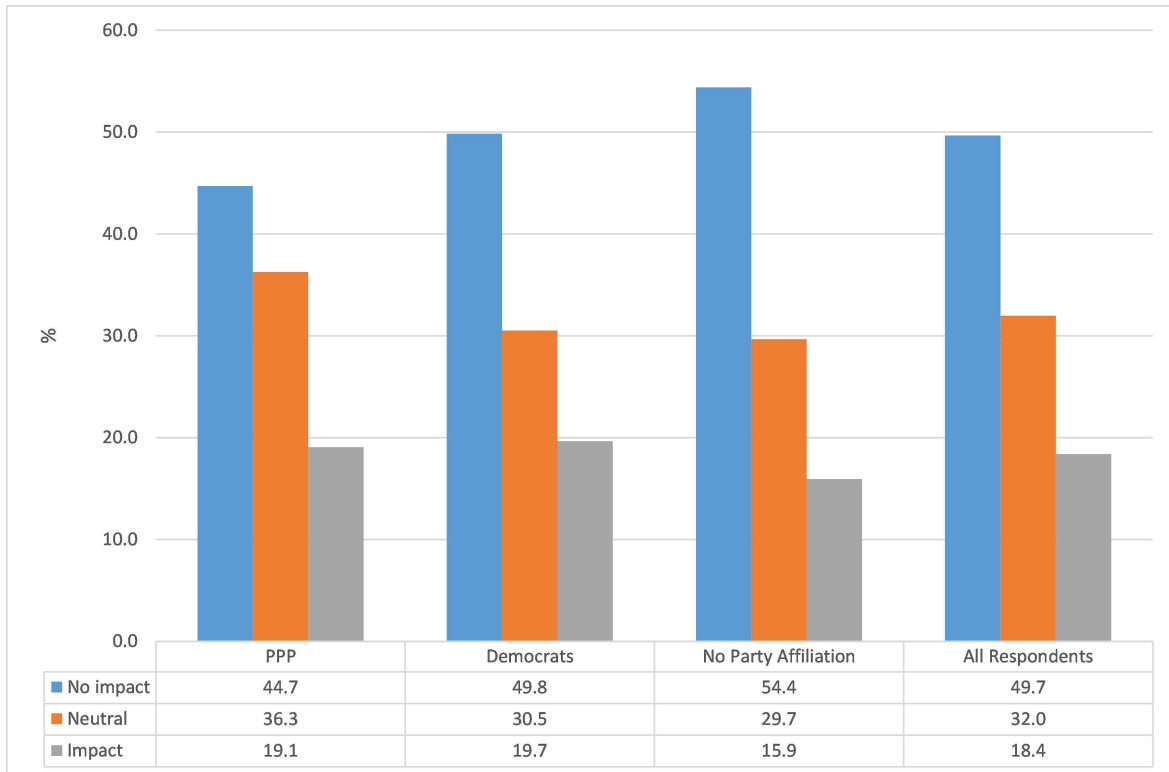
### ■ Survey Questions

- “How interested are you with North Korea's nuclear threats(for example, listening to stories, reading news articles or books, watching TV, etc.)?”
  - 1=not interested at all; 2=somewhat not interested; 3=neutral; 4=somewhat interested; 5=very interested
  - 1+2= “not interested”; 3=“neutral”; 4+5=“interested”

### ■ Relatively low interest in the North Korean nuclear threat.

- Supporters of the PPP (39.1%) and the Democratic Party (36.6%) show similar levels of interest, while those with no political affiliation (29.1%) show somewhat lower levels of interest.
  - This may reflect fatigue with North Korea's frequent missile provocations and nuclear threats.

**<Figure IV - 8> Impact of North Korean Nukes on My Life: by Party Affiliation**



### ■ Survey Questions

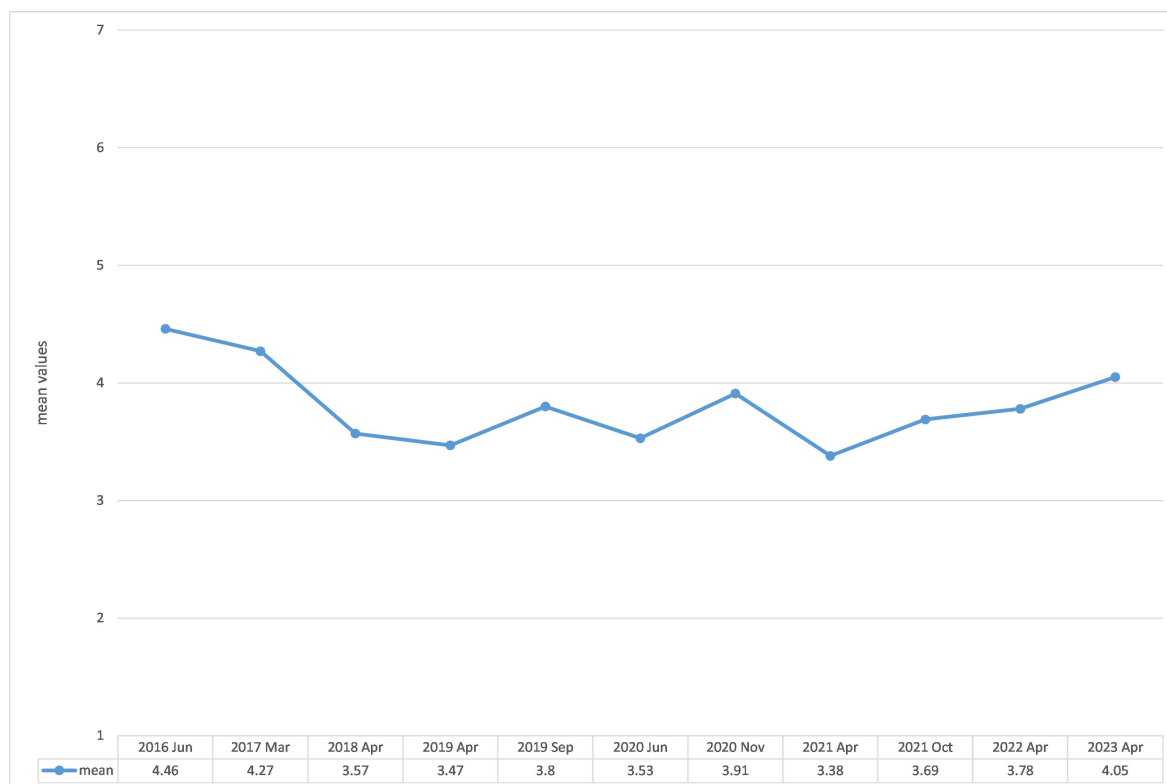
- “How much impact does North Korea's nuclear threat have on your life?”
  - 1=it has no impact at all; 2=it has little impact; 3=neutral; 4=it has some impact; 5=it has strong impact
  - 1+2= “no impact”; 3=“neutral”; 4+5=“impact”

### ■ The nuclear threat does not have a significant impact on Koreans’ lives.

- Similarly low levels of impact of the North Korean nuclear threat on their lives are found among supporters of the PPP (19.1%), supporters of the Democratic Party (19.7%), and those with no political affiliation (15.9%).
  - As with interest, the perceived impact is very low, likely reflecting fatigue with North Korea's frequent missile provocations and nuclear threats.

## 7. The Possibility of Nuclear War with North Korea

<Figure IV - 9> Nuclear War with North Korea (2016~2023)



### ■ Survey Questions

- “How likely do you think a nuclear war will break out with North Korea in 10 years?”
  - 0=not likely at all; 5=neutral; 10=very much likely.
  - The values shown in the graph are the mean.

### ■ The likelihood of nuclear war are on the rise.

- The mean value remained in the 3-point range during the Moon Jae-in administration before reaching 4.05 this year.
  - It is lower than in 2016 (4.46) and 2017 (4.27), the first two highest years of the survey, but trending upward since the October 2021 survey
  - While maintaining a lower mean than neutral (5), the rising likelihood of nuclear war outbreaks requires closer analysis and measures on why and how to manage them.

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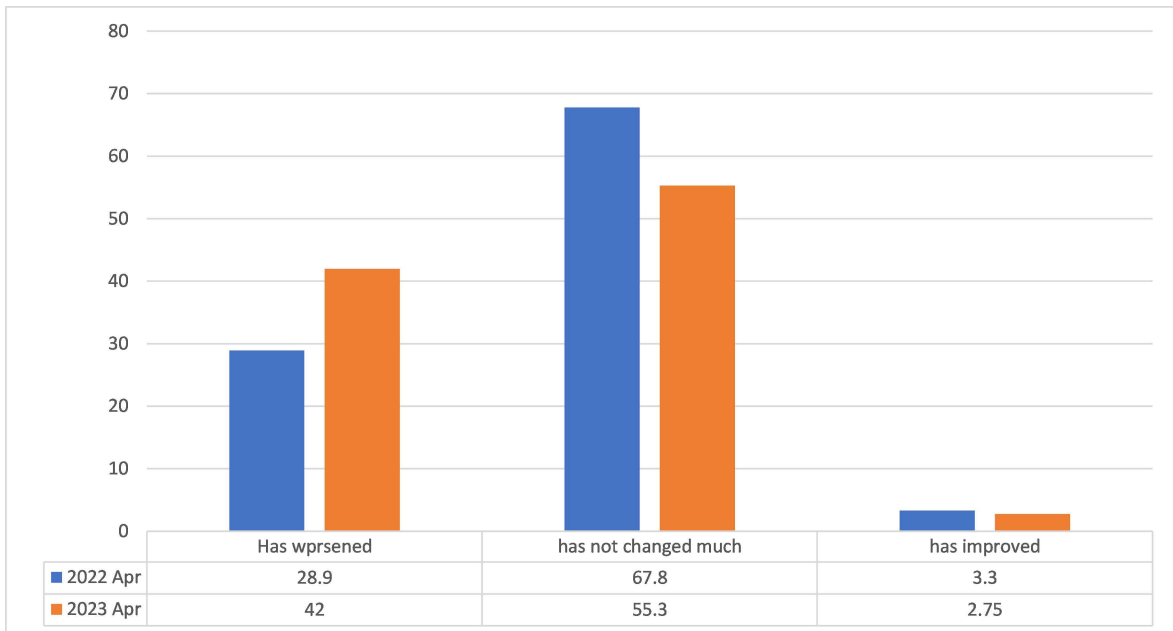
# Public Opinion on the International Relations in Northeast Asia

Dr. Tae-eun Min (KINU)

## V. Public Opinion on the International Relations in Northeast Asia

### 1. South Korea-China Relations

<Figure V - 1> South Korea-China Relations



#### ■ Survey Questions

- "How do you evaluate ROK-China relations over the past year?"
  - 1 = has improved; 2 = has worsened; 3 = has not changed much.

#### ■ Significant increase in negative evaluation of ROK-China relations

- Despite a slight improvement in favorability toward China in the survey, the number of respondents who believe that ROK-China relations have gotten worse over the past year has increased by about 13%.
- In recent years, the US has been pursuing the Indo-Pacific strategy to contain China, and the US-ROK relationship has become closer. On the other hand, the distance between China and South Korea has increased. Public perception reflects this shift in international relations.

- This interpretation is supported by the fact that when respondents were asked about the reasons for the deterioration of ROK-China relations, the number of respondents who attributed the deterioration to China decreased significantly compared to the previous year's survey, while the number of respondents who attributed the deterioration to South Korea increased (<Table V - 1>).

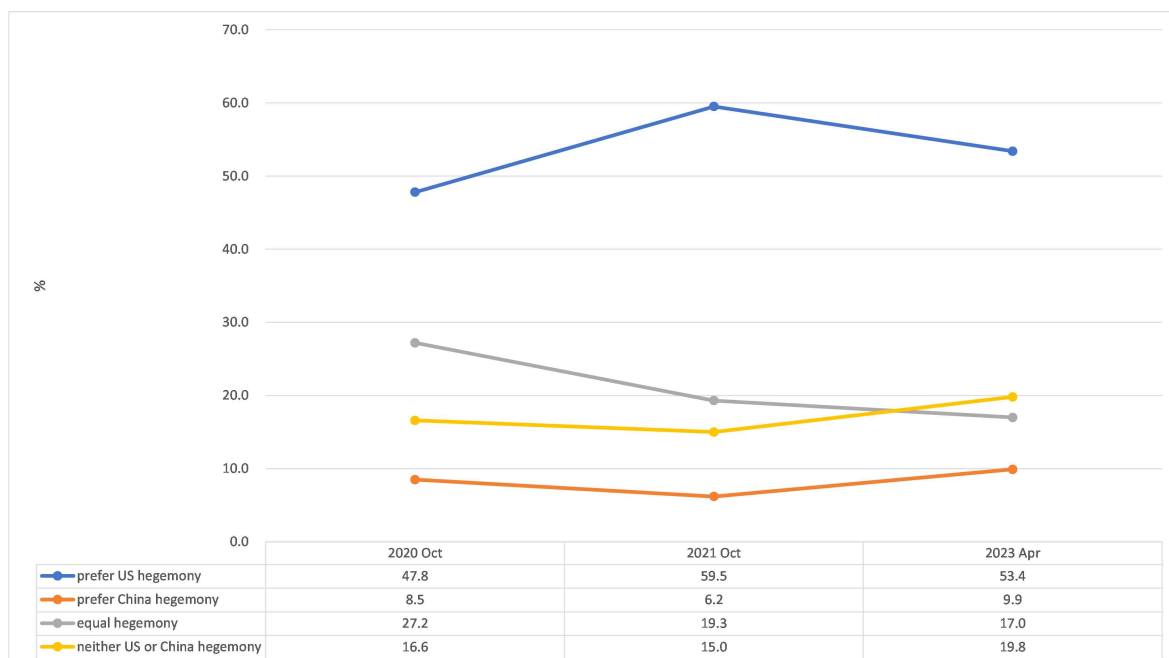
**<Table V - 1> Attribution of Negative ROK-China Relations**

(unit: %)

|          | due to China | due to South Korea | due to both | due to international environment |
|----------|--------------|--------------------|-------------|----------------------------------|
| 2022 Apr | 57.1         | 4.2                | 24.9        | 13.8                             |
| 2023 Apr | 40.6         | 16.3               | 33.8        | 9.3                              |

## 2. US-China Power Competition

<Figure V - 2> US-China Power Competition



### ■ Survey Questions

- “The US and China are competing for hegemony over economy and security. Which country do you want to have an advantage in the US-China competition?”
  - 1 = I want America to have an advantage; 2 = I want China to have an advantage; 3 = I want both countries to have equal hegemony; 4 = I don't want either the US and China to hold hegemony in the world.

### ■ Fewer respondents want US dominance

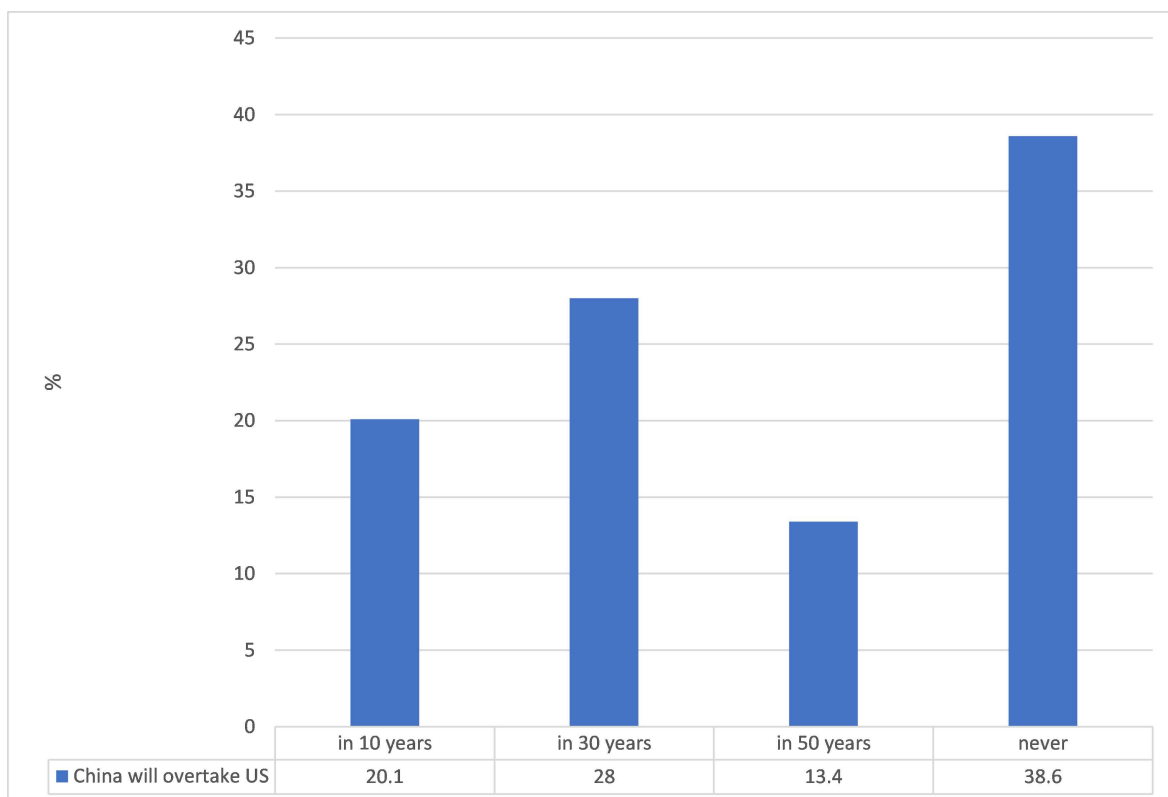
- Despite the recent strengthening of the ROK-US relationship, those who want the US to be dominant are down about 6% from the October 21 survey, while those who want China to be dominant are up 3.7%.
- Compared to 2020, when this question was first asked, there is a significant decrease (down 10.2%) in those who want the US and China to have equal hegemonic status.
  - Those who don't want either country to be a hegemonic power also increased by 3.2% from the 2020 survey.



- These results suggest that despite South Korea's growing national power, South Korea have experienced diplomatic difficulties due to the intensification of the US-China rivalry.
- In the same vein, fatigue from the US-China power competition appears to have increased the public's negative perceptions of both countries becoming hegemonic power.

### 3. Will China Overtake the US?

<Figure V - 3> Will China Overtake the US?



#### ■ Survey Questions

- “Do you think China could overtake the United States to become the new superpower?”
  - 1= In 10 years, China will overtake the United States; 2= In 30 years, China will overtake the United States; 3= China will overtake the United States in 50 years; 4= China will never overtake the United States.

#### ■ China is likely to overtake the US

- 61.4% say China can overtake the US, about 23% higher than the 38.6% who say it cannot.
- A higher percentage (70.4%) of the IMF generation expects China to overtake the US than the other generations (<Table V - 2>).

- This is likely due to the fact that the IMF generation witnessed China's economic growth in their teens and twenties, a time when their understanding of international politics and economics is being formulated, while they experienced difficulties in entering the job market due to the international financial crisis, and therefore have a high opinion of China's potential.

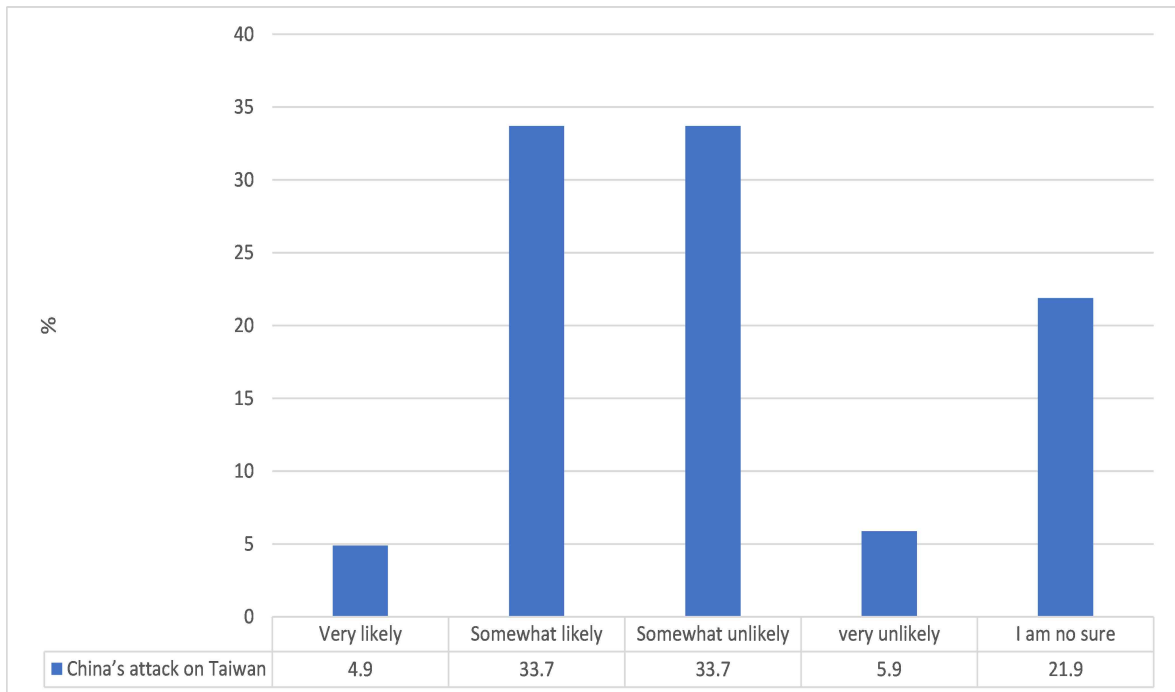
**<Table V - 2> China's Potential to Overtake the US: by Cohorts**

(unit: %)

|                      | War gen. | Industriali<br>zation<br>gen. | 386 gen. | X gen. | IMF gen. | Millennials |
|----------------------|----------|-------------------------------|----------|--------|----------|-------------|
| will overtake        | 57.1     | 61.4                          | 59.0     | 62.4   | 70.4     | 58.3        |
| will not<br>overtake | 42.9     | 38.6                          | 41.0     | 37.6   | 29.6     | 41.7        |

## 4. China's Attack on Taiwan

<Figure V - 4> China's Attack on Taiwan



### ■ Survey Questions

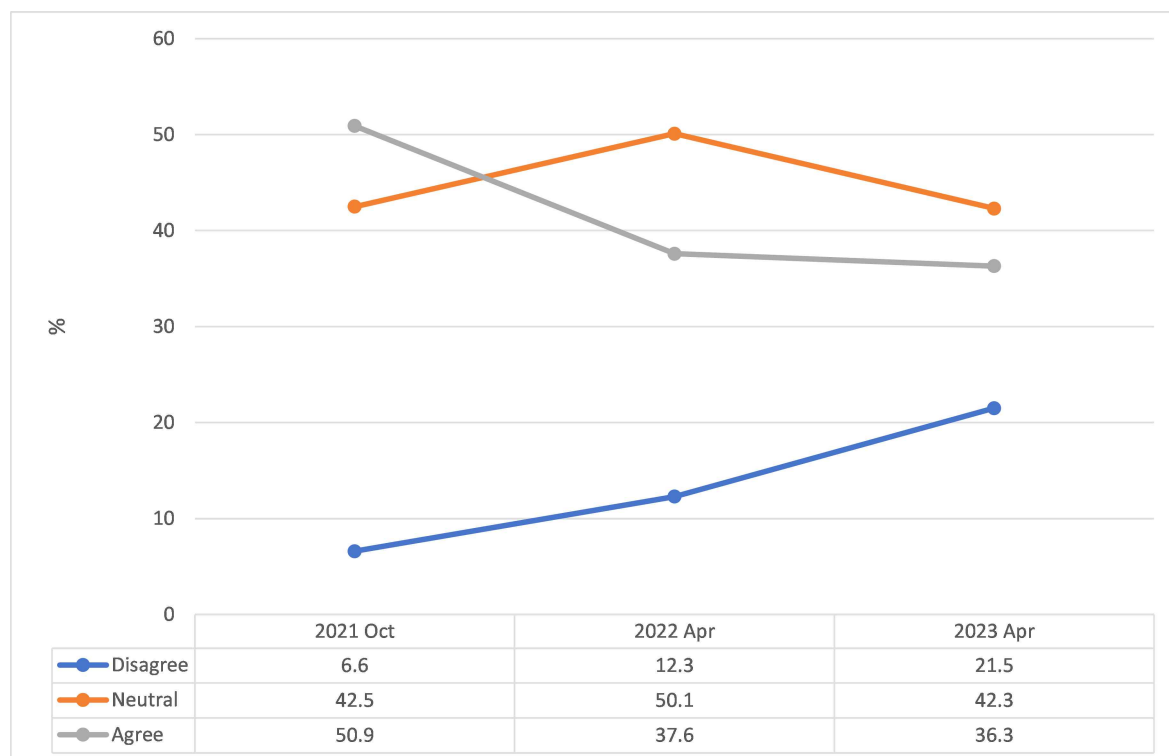
- "How likely do you think it is that China will attack Taiwan militarily in the near future?"
  - 1=very likely; 2= somewhat likely; 3= somewhat unlikely; 4= very unlikely; 5=I am not sure.

### ■ Likely: 38.6% vs. Unlikely: 39.6%

- While the international community, led by the US, has recently expressed concern about a possible Chinese attack on Taiwan, 40 percent of Koreans believe it is unlikely.
- More than one-fifth of respondents, about 22%, said they were "not sure," indicating a significant number of people are indifferent or undecided on the issue.

## 5. Cross-Strait Relations: The Need for South Korean Intervention in the China-Taiwan Conflict

<Figure V - 5> South Korean Intervention in the China-Taiwan Conflict



### ■ Survey Questions

- “If China wants to unify with Taiwan by force, South Korea should join the effort to prevent it.”
  - 1=disagree strongly; 2=disagree somewhat; 3=neutral; 4=agree somewhat; 5=agree strongly.
  - 1+2=“disagree”; 3=“neutral”; 4+5=“agree”

### ■ For the first time since 2021, fewer people agree that South Korea should intervene in the China-Taiwan conflict.

- 36.3% say South Korea should help stop China if it attacks Taiwan, a decrease of nearly 15% from the survey two years ago.

- These results contrast with responses to a question about the scope of South Korea's diplomacy in the international community (<Table V-3>).

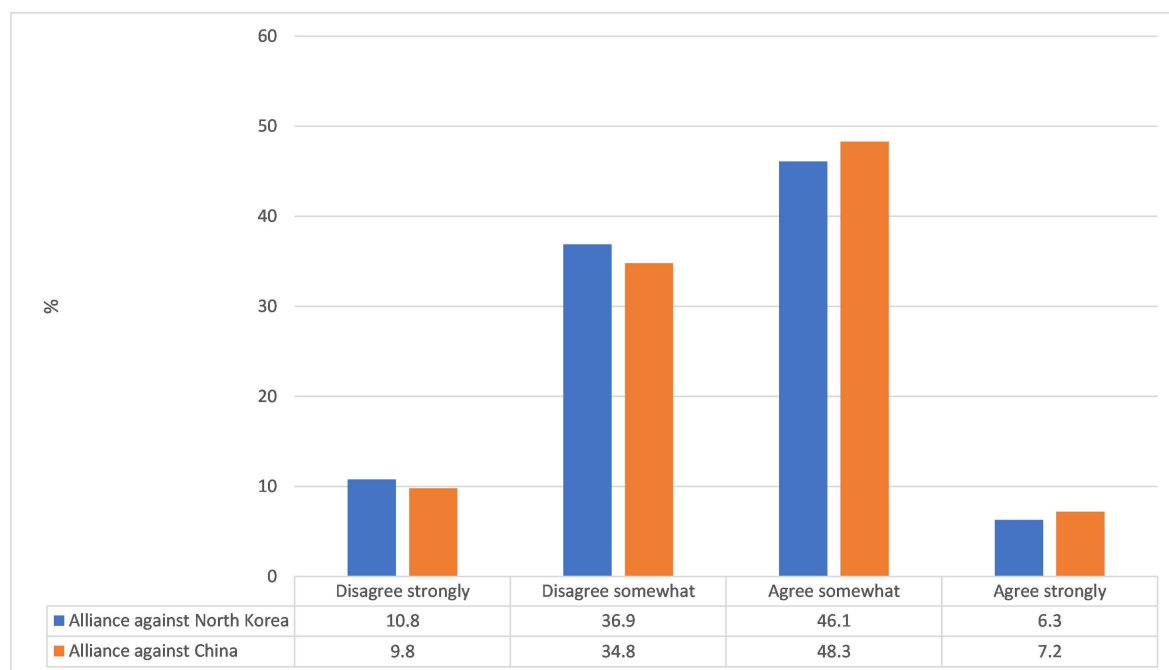
**<Table V - 3> Scope of South Korea's Diplomacy**

| Scope of South Korea's diplomacy  | percentage (%) |
|---|----------------|
| ROK should actively participate in important issues in the international community.                                 | 52.8           |
| ROK should only actively participate in important issues in the Asian region.                                       | 10.5           |
| ROK should only actively participate in important issues in the Northeast Asian region around the Korean Peninsula. | 24.6           |
| ROK should only actively participate in important issues on the Korean Peninsula                                    | 9.2            |
| ROK should stay out of international politics as much as possible.  | 3.0            |

- While 52.8% believe that South Korea should actively participate in international affairs, only 36.3% believe that South Korea should intervene in the China-Taiwan conflict. This shows a gap between normative attitudes and preference about the actual situation.
  - In other words, South Koreans normatively believe that they should actively engage in international affairs, but when they think about specific real-world issues, they consider the actual costs to the country and individuals.
- These findings suggest that regardless of people's normative support for international engagement, such as the recent support for Ukraine, there may be opposition when that support incurs national and personal costs.
- This dual attitude between norms and reality is observed regardless of party affiliation.
  - Fewer People are supporting the efforts to prevent China from annexing Taiwan regardless of party affiliation or government support.

## 6. ROK-Japan Military Alliance

<Figure V - 6> ROK-Japan Military Alliance



### ■ Survey Questions

- "To counter the threat from North Korea, South Korea and Japan should form a military alliance."
- "To counter the threat from China, South Korea and Japan should form a military alliance."
- 1=disagree strongly; 2=disagree somewhat; 3=agree somewhat; 4=agree strongly.

### ■ A majority agree with ROK-Japan military alliance

- 52.4% agree ("somewhat agree" + "strongly agree") with a military alliance between South Korea and Japan to counter the threat from North Korea, 4.8% higher than the 47.7% who disagree.
- 55.5% of respondents support a ROK-Japan military alliance to counter the threat from China, about 3% more than support for a ROK-Japan military alliance to counter the threat from North Korea.

- This high level of support for a military alliance between South Korea and the United States suggests that the majority of South Koreans view and understand military cooperation in terms of regional security as the US-China rivalry intensifies and creates a neo-Cold War structure in the region.

### ■ Polarized opinion on ROK-Japan Alliance

- The two items were combined to index attitudes toward the ROK-Japan military alliance on a 3-point scale.
  - 0 = "Agree with ROK-Japan Alliances against both North Korea and China"; 1 = "Agree with only one of the ROK-Japan Alliances"; 2 = "Disagree with ROK-Japan Alliances against either North Korea or China."
- 45.3% of respondents agreed with the ROK-Japan alliance against both North Korean and China, while 37.5% had a negative view of both alliances.
  - The lowest percentage, 17.3%, had a positive attitude toward only one of the two alliances.
- This result suggests that the opinion on ROK-Japan alliance is polarized.

### ■ PPP supporters actively support the ROK-Japan military alliance.

- The analysis based on the above mentioned Index shows a clear difference in attitudes toward the ROK-Japan Military Alliance depending on the political party affiliation (<Table V - 4>).

**<Table V - 4> Support for ROK-Japan Alliance: by Party Affiliation**

(unit: %)

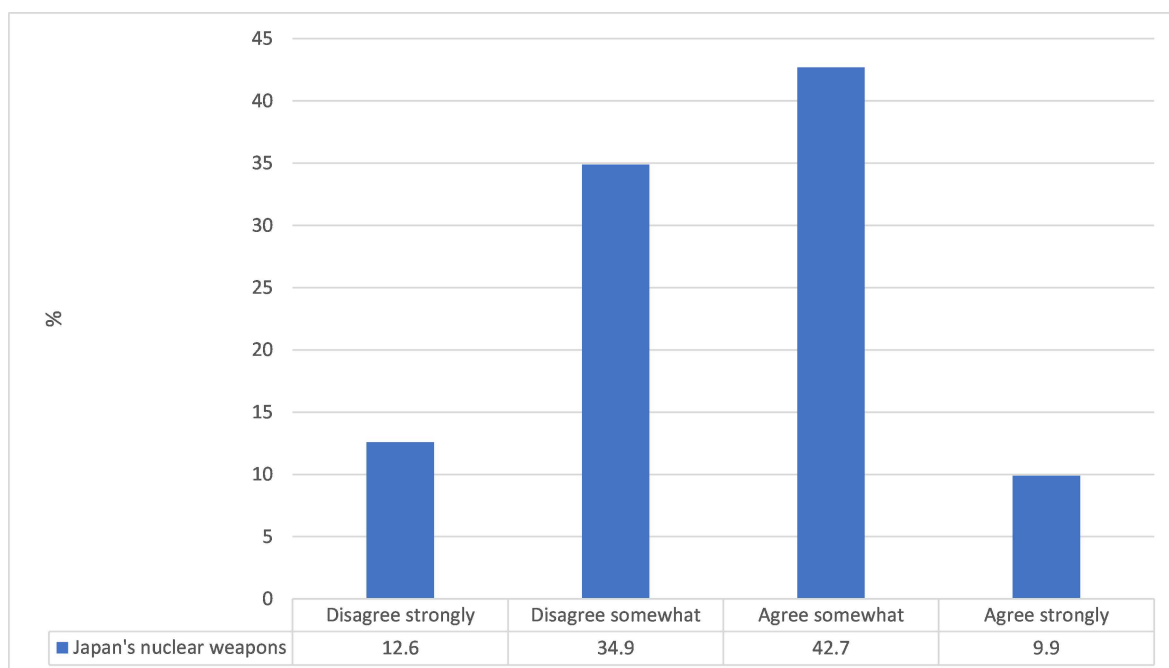
|  | PPP  | Democrats | No Party Affiliation |
|--|------|-----------|----------------------|
| Disagree with ROK-Japan Alliances against either North Korea or China. | 23.8 | 47.5      | 40.7                 |
| Agree with only one of the ROK-Japan Alliances                         | 14.1 | 18.3      | 20.1                 |
| Agree with both ROK-Japan Alliances against North Korea and China      | 62.2 | 34.3      | 39.3                 |



- Nearly two-thirds of PPP supporters, 62.2%, support both ROK-Japan alliances against North Korea and China.
- On the other hand, the support for the ROK-Japan military alliance regarding North Korea and China by the Democratic Party supporters and the people with no party affiliation show significant differences compared to the supporters of the PPP, with 34.3% and 39.3% respectively.
- When examined by cohort, the Millennials exhibits the most negative attitudes towards the ROK-Japan military alliance.
  - 42.4% of Millennials do not support the ROK-Japan alliance.
  - The fact that the Millennials, which values rationality and fairness and is increasingly raising its political voice, exhibits the most negativity towards the ROK-Japan military alliance, suggests that convincing this generation will be a crucial factor in securing public support for the strengthening of military cooperation between the two countries in the future.

## 7. Japan's Legitimacy to Develop Nuclear Weapons

<Figure V - 7> Japan's Legitimacy to Develop Nuclear Weapons



### ■ Survey Questions

- “Japan has the right to develop nuclear weapons for its own security if it is threatened by nuclear weapons.”
  - 1=disagree strongly; 2=disagree somewhat; 3=agree somewhat; 4=agree strongly.

### ■ Majority of respondents recognize Japan's legitimacy to develop nuclear weapons.

- 52.6% say Japan has the right to develop nuclear weapons (somewhat agree, strongly agree).
- There is no correlation with whether respondents support South Korea's nuclear development.
  - In other words, support or opposition to South Korea's nuclear development does not explain attitudes toward Japan's nuclear legitimacy.

- Responses differed by political party affiliation (<Table V - 5>).
  - PPP supporters agree with Japan's right to develop nuclear weapons at a rate about 10% higher than Democratic Party supporters and nonpartisan respondents.

**<Table V - 5> Japan's Legitimacy to Develop Nuclear Weapons: by Party Affiliation**

(unit: %)

|          | PPP  | Democrats | No Party Affiliation |
|----------|------|-----------|----------------------|
| Disagree | 40.6 | 51.2      | 51.9                 |
| Agree    | 59.4 | 48.8      | 48.8                 |

- When examined by cohort, the war generation is the most likely to agree with Japan's right to develop nuclear weapons (<Table V - 6>).

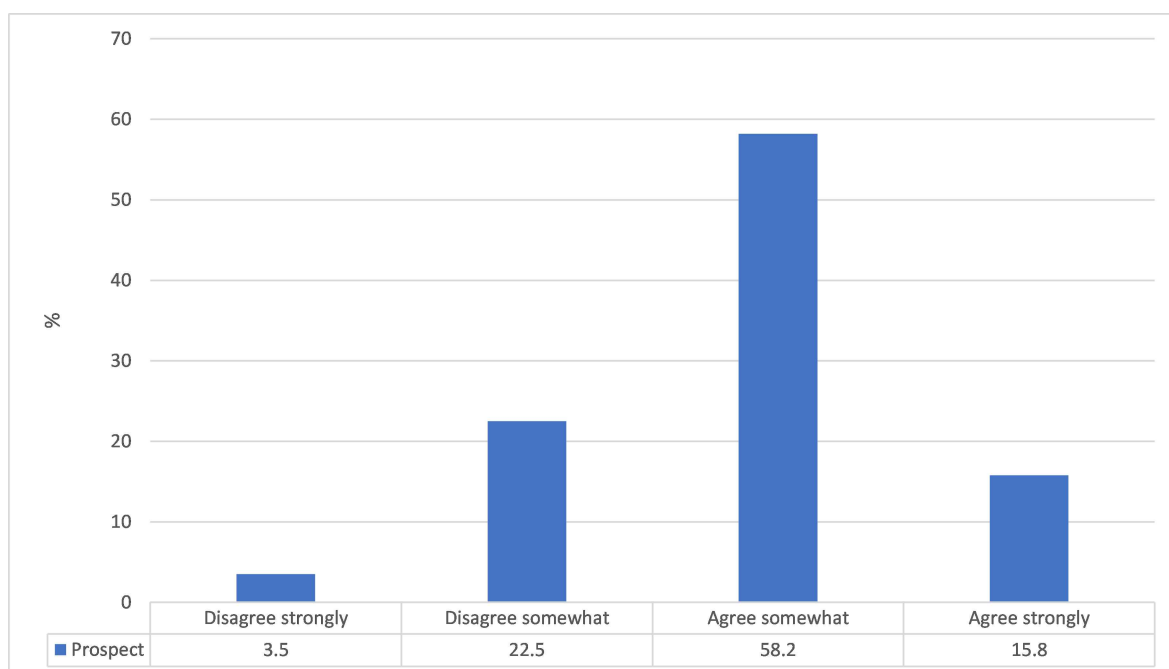
**<Table V - 6> Japan's Legitimacy to Develop Nuclear Weapons: by Cohorts**

(unit: %)

|          | War gen. | Industriali<br>zation<br>gen. | 386 gen. | X gen. | IMF gen. | Millennials |
|----------|----------|-------------------------------|----------|--------|----------|-------------|
| Disagree | 32.5     | 51.5                          | 50.5     | 48.3   | 44.7     | 47.9        |
| Agree    | 67.5     | 48.5                          | 49.5     | 51.7   | 55.3     | 52.1        |

## 8. Prospect for Japan's Nuclear Development

<Figure V - 8> Prospect for Japan's Nuclear Development



### ■ Survey Questions

- "Japan is likely to develop nuclear weapons."
  - 1=disagree strongly; 2=disagree somewhat; 3=agree somewhat; 4=agree strongly.

### ■ 74% of respondents believe Japan is likely to develop nuclear weapons.

- 74% of respondents believe that Japan is likely to develop nuclear weapons, about 22% higher than the percentage of respondents who agree that Japan has the right to develop nuclear weapons (52.6%).
- This could also be interpreted as a majority expecting Japan's rearmament to become more serious in the future.
- In addition, 62% of respondents believe that the US is helping Japan's rearmament. These perceptions may lead to public opinion that South Korea should strengthen its defense capabilities accordingly.
  - In this context, support for South Korea's nuclear armament may increase in the future.

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VI

# The Impact of the ROK-US Summit on Public Opinion

Prof. Bon-sang Koo  
(Chungbuk National Univ.)

## VI. The Impact of the ROK-US Summit on Public Opinion

### 1. Favorability of Neighboring Countries Before and After the ROK-US Summit

<Table VI - 1> Favorability of Neighboring Countries Before and After the ROK-US Summit

| Countries   | Before the Summit | After the Summit | Changes   |
|-------------|-------------------|------------------|-----------|
| US          | 1.55              | 2.08             | 0.53 (▲*) |
| China       | -1.05             | -1.07            | 0.02 (▼)  |
| Japan       | -1.34             | -0.62            | 0.72 (▲*) |
| Russia      | -1.86             | -1.38            | 0.48 (▲*) |
| North Korea | -2.22             | -2.22            | 0.00      |

\*: with t-test,  $p < 0.05$ .

#### ■ Survey Questions

- “How much do you like or dislike \_\_\_\_\_? Please rate each of the following countries on a scale of -5 to 5”
  - -5=strongly dislike; 0=neither like nor dislike; 5=strongly like.

#### ■ Changes before and after the ROK-US summit

- The sample for this year's Unification Consciousness Survey was split roughly in half before and after the Washington Declaration (504 before, 497 after). This creates a kind of natural experiment condition. If the change in public opinion before and after April 27 is statistically significant, it can be considered an effect of the Washington Declaration.
- Favorability toward the US, Japan, and Russia increased after the summit, while favorability toward China and North Korea did not change significantly. In particular, perceptions of the US improved in general after the summit.<sup>6)</sup>

6) For example, the percentage of respondents who said the US is doing a good job as a leader in the international community increased significantly after the summit.

- The large increase in favorability toward Japan is likely due to Prime Minister Kishida's visit (scheduled at the time of the survey), as well as the idea that the outcome of the ROK-US summit will have a positive impact on Japan's relationship with South Korea.
- The increase in favorability toward Russia is likely due to a combination of the rapid decline in favorability following the war in Ukraine, which was partially reversed by reduced media exposure due to the prolonged war, and the fact that, contrary to initial fears, Russia was not a major topic of discussion at the summit.

## 2. Military Threats from Neighboring Countries: Current Threats

<Table VI - 2> Current Military Threats from Neighboring Countries Before and After the ROK-US Summit

| Countries   | Before the Summit | After the Summit | Changes   |
|-------------|-------------------|------------------|-----------|
| US          | 3.18              | 3.09             | 0.09 (▼)  |
| China       | 4.59              | 4.79             | 0.20 (▲*) |
| Japan       | 4.35              | 4.26             | 0.09 (▼)  |
| Russia      | 4.55              | 4.73             | 0.18 (▲*) |
| North Korea | 5.34              | 5.54             | 0.20 (▲*) |

\*: with t-test,  $p < 0.05$ .

### ■ Survey Questions

- “In your opinion, how much of a military threat do the following countries pose to Korea?”
  - 1=not threatening at all; 4=moderate; 7=very threatening.
  - Values greater than 4 can be interpreted as a current military threat. To varying degrees, all four countries except the United States are perceived as a current military threat.

### ■ Changes before and after the ROK-US summit

- Military threats from the US and Japan decreased after the summit, while threats from China, Russia, and North Korea increased. In particular, the changes in military threats from China, Russia, and North Korea are statistically significant.
- It is possible that the threats from China, Russia, and North Korea have increased as a result of the ROK-US summit, because South Korea is working more closely with the United States on issues such as nuclear proliferation. The ROK-US Summit can be seen as an effort to foster an understanding of the confrontational dynamics between ROK-US-Japan and China-Russia-North Korea, rather than being solely about the relationship of the South Korea and the US.



### 3. Military Threats from Neighboring Countries: Future Threats

**<Table VI - 3> Future Military Threats from Neighboring Countries Before and After the ROK-US Summit**

| Countries   | Before the Summit | After the Summit | Changes   |
|-------------|-------------------|------------------|-----------|
| US          | 3.43              | 3.34             | 0.09 (▼)  |
| China       | 4.85              | 4.94             | 0.09 (▲)  |
| Japan       | 4.63              | 4.42             | 0.21 (▼*) |
| Russia      | 4.70              | 4.85             | 0.15 (▲*) |
| North Korea | 5.31              | 5.53             | 0.22 (▲*) |

\*: with t-test,  $p < 0.05$ .

#### ■ Survey Questions

- “In your opinion, how much of a military threat do the following countries pose to Korea in the future?”
  - 1=not threatening at all; 4=moderate; 7=very threatening.

#### ■ Changes before and after the ROK-US summit

- All four countries except the United States are perceived as potential military threats.
- Future military threats from the United States and Japan as potential military threats decreased after the ROK-US summit, while threats from China, Russia, and North Korea increased. In particular, the changes in perceptions of Japan, Russia, and North Korea are statistically significant.
- Previous research (Koo and Choi 2022) shows that distrust and fear of Japan is well reflected in the extent to which they perceive it as a future military threat.<sup>7)</sup> It is worth noting that perceptions of Japan's future military threat improved markedly after the summit. This suggests that closer ties with the United States through the summit may have reduced South Korea's fear of military threats from Japan to some extent.

7) Bon Sang Koo and Jun Young Choi, “Who takes the Japanese threat seriously? A survey-based analysis of South Koreans’ perceptions,” *Pacific Focus*, vol. 37, no. 2 (2022), pp. 289~315.

## 4. South Korea’s Nuclear Armament Before and After the ROK-US Summit

<Table VI - 4> Opinion on South Korea’s Nuclear Armament Before and After the ROK-US Summit

| ROK Nuclear Armament | Before the summit | After the summit | Changes   |
|----------------------|-------------------|------------------|-----------|
| Strongly disagree    | 11.5%             | 9.3%             | 2.2%p (▼) |
| Somewhat disagree    | 28.6%             | 30.2%            | 1.6%p (▲) |
| somewhat agree       | 44.6%             | 47.9%            | 3.3%p (▲) |
| Strongly agree       | 15.3%             | 12.7%            | 2.6%p (▼) |

with  $\chi^2$  test,  $p = 0.358$ .

### ■ Survey Questions

- “There is an argument that South Korea should also possess nuclear weapons if North Korea does not give up its nuclear weapons. What do you think of this argument?”
  - 1=disagree strongly; 2=disagree somewhat; 3=agree somewhat; 4=agree strongly.

### ■ Changes before and after the ROK-US summit

- After the summit, the proportion of those in favor increased from 59.9% to 60.6%, but this difference was not statistically significant.<sup>8)</sup> In other words, the Washington Declaration, which called for expanded deterrence in exchange for South Korea's giving up of its own nuclear armament, did not change South Korean public opinion in favor of nuclear armament.
- However, it can be argued that the strength of opinions in favor of nuclear armament has weakened somewhat, as the number of strong opinions (“Strongly disagree” + “strongly agree”) has decreased from 26.8% to 22.0%, while the number of weak opinions (“somewhat agree” + “somewhat disagree”) has increased.

8) Regression models including demographic variables, socioeconomic variables, political variables (ideology, party affiliation), and personality traits (RWA, SDO) also showed no significant differences before or after the summit.

## 5. Trust in US Extended Deterrence Before and After the ROK-US Summit

<Table VI - 5> Trust in US Extended Deterrence Before and After the ROK-US Summit

| Answers           | Before the summit | After the summit | Changes   |
|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|-----------|
| Not at all        | 2.6%              | 1.8%             | 0.8%p (▼) |
| Not very much     | 28.8%             | 22.5%            | 6.3%p (▼) |
| Somewhat trusting | 62.7%             | 68.8%            | 6.1%p (▲) |
| Very trusting     | 6.0%              | 6.8%             | 0.8%p (▲) |

with  $\chi^2$  test,  $p = 0.103$ .

### ■ Survey Questions

- “How much trust do you have in the US nuclear umbrella policy that the US will retaliate with a nuclear strike against North Korea if North Korea attacks South Korea with a nuclear weapon?”
  - 1=Not at all; 2=Not very much; 3=Somewhat trusting; 4=Very trusting.

### ■ Changes before and after the ROK-US summit

- Confidence in the US nuclear umbrella policy increased from 68.7% to 75.6% after the ROK-US summit.
- Statistical analyses controlling for multiple variables showed a significant decrease in the "not very confident" response.<sup>9)</sup> In other words, the Washington Declaration's call for extended deterrence may have strengthened South Koreans' trust in the US nuclear umbrella policy.

9) Ordinal logistic regression models including demographic, socioeconomic, political (ideology, party affiliation), and personality traits (RWA, SDO) variables showed an increase in trust in the US nuclear umbrella policy after the summit.

## 6. Effectiveness of Extended Deterrence Before and After the ROK-US Summit

<Table VI - 6> Effectiveness of Extended Deterrence Before and After the ROK-US Summit

| Answers           | Before the summit | After the summit | Changes   |
|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|-----------|
| Strongly disagree | 5.2%              | 0.8%             | 4.4%p (▼) |
| Somewhat disagree | 29.0%             | 28.5%            | 0.5%p (▼) |
| somewhat agree    | 57.9%             | 65.8%            | 7.9%p (▲) |
| Strongly agree    | 7.9%              | 5.4%             | 2.5%p (▼) |

with  $\chi^2$  test,  $p < 0.001$ .

### ■ Survey Questions

- “It has been argued that the US nuclear umbrella policy has deterred North Korea from launching a nuclear attack on South Korea. How much do you agree with this argument?”
  - 1=disagree strongly; 2=disagree somewhat; 3=agree somewhat; 4=agree strongly.

### ■ Changes before and after the ROK-US summit

- Positive evaluation of the effectiveness of the US nuclear umbrella policy increased slightly after the summit.
- Statistical analyses controlling for a number of variables show that the ROK-US summit is weakly positively associated with perceptions of the effectiveness of the nuclear umbrella policy.<sup>10)</sup> In other words, the Washington Declaration, which calls for expanded deterrence, appears to have had an impact on the perceived effectiveness of the U.S. nuclear umbrella policy.

10) Ordinal logistic regression models including demographic, socioeconomic, political (ideology, party affiliation), and personality traits (RWA, SDO) variables showed a slight increase in the perceived effectiveness of the US nuclear umbrella policy after the summit.



