



The Social Basis of Preception on Reunification

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Executive Summary

In Korea, the issues of reunification and North Korea are areas in which differences of opinion is the biggest depending on ones' political position. Ever since the breakout of Korean War, liberals and conservatives have been competing against each other regarding various North Korean issues. In a democratic system, political elites' ultimate target cannot succeed once they deviate from the preference of their supporters. Thus, the elites try their best to 'advertise' the legitimacy of their policies and to widen people's support. Moreover, the elites should always keep track of their supporters' preferences through election votes. Understanding an individual Korean's perception towards reunification and other North Korean issues is the prerequisite requirement in order to get the bottom-up support from the public.

This research aims to comprehend Koreans' political preferences on South Korea-North Korea relations. In order to fulfill the initial goal, this research is conducted in the following sequences. The first step is understanding the continuities and changes in people's perceptions toward reunification and North Korea in the past decade. This is based on survey data of 2003-2018. The second step is discussing the basic structure for understanding and evaluating North Korean policies. This part aims to prove how variables such as generation difference, political position, and nationalism affect peoples' perceptions on reunification and North Korean issues. The third

step is discussing the precedent studies. The reunification as well as North Korean issues constitute a big part of national strategic agenda. Thus, a numerous research and publications has been made so far. I would like to analyze empirical studies that had been conducted in the last 5 years and point out their limits and prospects. The fourth step is presenting five variables that affect perceptions toward reunification and North Korea: (1) political orientation and party unity, (2) national identity, (3) generation gap, (4) class gap, and (5) 386 generation. The fifth step is providing a well-summarized picture of how each variable differs in its impact to people's perception. ♣

※ Translator's note: This is a summarized unofficial translation of the original paper which was written in Korean. All references should be made to the original paper.

※ This article is written based on the author's personal opinions and does not reflect the views of the Sejong Institute.