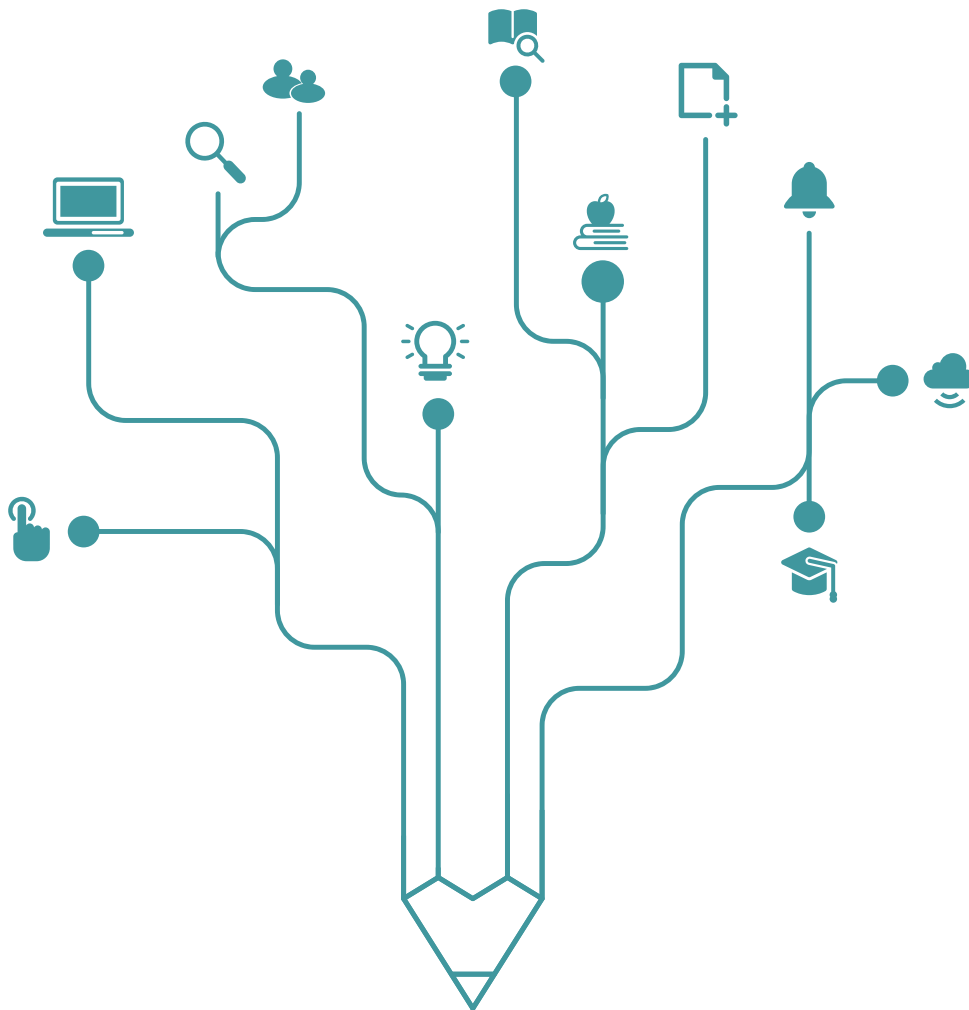


# Human Rights versus National Security in Public Opinion on Foreign Affairs South Korea Views of North Korea 2008-2019

*Joonbum Bae(KDI School of Public Policy and Management)*



Human Rights versus National Security in Public Opinion on  
Foreign Affairs South Korean Views of North Korea 2008-2019

Joonbum Bae and Julia YuJung Lee

September 19, 2022

Word Count:

# 1 Introduction

Human rights are an integral part of democratic rule. Democratic institutions check government repression and cultivate norms favoring human rights (Hill Jr and Jones 2014). Leaders violating the rights of its own citizens typically risk losing office due to the formal and informal rules upholding human rights in democracies, and hence largely refrain from such actions. Research also shows a strong relationship between human rights and democratic rule across the globe. People living in democracies favor human rights more than those in non-democracies (De Mesquita et al. 2005; Grewal and Voeten 2015). Robust protection and guarantees of human rights not only set apart democracies from autocracies, but stronger democracies from weaker ones as well.

However, opinion favoring human rights in one's own democracy does not necessarily translate into advocating for rights abroad. Promotion of basic rights overseas can risk harm to other competing foreign policy priorities, including national security. Actions to extend human rights in another country also entails costs, both in terms of material resources and possibly human casualties. How important is human rights in mass opinion on foreign policy in democracies? How much of a priority does the public in democratic polities put on human rights relative to security concerns? What factors impact the relative weight put on human rights vis-a-vis other foreign policy priorities?

To assess whether and how the public values human rights relative to other priorities in foreign affairs, this paper utilizes survey questions that capture the public's relative preferences between human rights and security in South Korean public opinion regarding relations with North Korea. It analyzes these preferences over time and across different security contexts, testing various hypotheses from theories of human rights, foreign policy, and public opinion. It asks a) which traits correlate with a higher value put on human rights relative to other competing priorities in foreign policy, b) how shifts in the security environment and partisan messages from political elites influence the relative weight put on human rights, and c) the extent that the value put on human rights is resilient to such

changes.

In particular, this paper sheds light on the trade-off that exists between improving relations with a regime that is both a serious security threat and a perpetrator of grave human rights violations. When another state poses the threat of war but also perpetrates extensive human rights violations, efforts to improve relations necessarily entails deemphasizing its human rights record and the suffering of victims. Particularly in democracies, attempts at detente with a threatening regime calls for emphasizing the benefits of closer ties and at times the positive traits of the opposing leader in an effort to build support for the initiative. Political communications and public attention can shift away from the repressive and brutal nature of a regime. Human rights, as a consequence, becomes relatively less important as a foreign policy priority of the public.

The reasons for choosing the case of inter-Korea relations are three-fold. First, much of the previous work on human rights and foreign policy opinion study countries that enjoy a relatively benign international security environment, mostly in North American and Western Europe. The Korean case allows us to explore the importance of human rights in the presence of a sustained and serious security threat. It thus provides a “hard case” for the relevance of human rights in mass opinion.

Second, human rights in North Korea is subject to partisan divisions in South Korea. The two main political parties diverge significantly in terms of their policy and strategy toward North Korea as well the place accorded to North Korean human rights in inter-Korea relations. This is a departure from the foreign policy of most established democracies, where support for human rights abroad usually is not subject to partisan politicization. The presence of serious external security threats coupled with partisan politicization renders South Korean public opinion on North Korea a useful case for examining the relative importance of human rights in mass opinion on foreign affairs.

Lastly, unlike much of the literature that focuses on established democracies with a long tradition of commitment to human rights, this case captures the dynamics of public

opinion formation on human rights in a relatively young democracy (South Korea introduced democratic elections in 1987) with a shorter history of emphasis on human rights. Such a case may have more general applicability for the relevance of human rights in public opinion since, globally, established democracies are the minority.

By assessing the importance of human rights relative to national security concerns in the context of a serious external threat, shifting foreign policies, and competing partisan messages, this paper provides a more nuanced analysis of the variation that exist in popular support for human rights in foreign affairs. It also provides insight on the degree to which the foreign policy of democracies are influenced by mass opinion on human rights issues abroad. A growing body of scholarly work has pointed to the increasing impact human rights norms have on state behavior. A tendency to prioritize security over human rights by large segments of the population or partisan polarization over human rights would point to the limited scope of the influence of human rights norms despite its increased salience. Conversely, widespread support for human rights regardless of divisions amongst political elites would be consistent with the continuing spread in norms regarding human rights.

The findings matter for policy as well. Aldrich et al. (1989) find that public opinion on foreign policy matters in shaping government policy when political parties present distinct positions regarding an issue. A clear preference by the public for reduction of tensions with the North Korean regime even at the cost of improving human rights in North Korea would indicate that Seoul's past approach of prioritizing improvement in relations with Pyongyang is likely to receive at least tacit support from the public. This raises questions regarding the scope for coordination with partners and allies that have put a higher priority on human rights. For example, the US - South Korea's closest ally a key actor in the North Korean nuclear crisis - has domestic legislation receiving bi-partisan support that stipulates that progress on relations with North Korea be contingent on improvement in human rights (along with the nuclear issue). The absence of such hierarchies between security and human rights amongst the public, or clear partisan differences regarding the weight that

North Korean human rights should have in policy, would suggest better prospects for future coordination between the two allies.

## **2 The Korean Context**

### **2.1 Diverging Approaches to North Korea**

While tension and rivalry primarily characterized relations between Pyongyang and Seoul since the Korean War, Kim Dae Jung taking office in Seoul, Korea in 1998 marked a break from decades of enmity and antagonism. Pledging a policy of “sunshine” toward North Korea, the Kim government committed itself to non-aggression, making explicit that it did “not seek the North’s collapse” and that there would be no attempts at unification through the use of force. It also initiated food, medical, and economic aid to the “brothers” in the North. Political dialogue, including regular ministerial level meetings on security, also ensued to probe whether significant reductions in tension were possible (Levin and Han 2002).

With the implementation of the sunshine policy, the South Korean government began to present North Korea to the domestic public as a subject for “cooperation and reconciliation,” “peaceful coexistence,” and ultimately a partner in the unification process. For many within the Kim administration, the long-term goal of engagement encompassed not just promoting openness in the North and improving relations, but fostering a new identity amongst the people on the peninsula through such messages by “bring all Koreans closer together” in a strengthening of pan-Korean identity (Moon 2005). Kim’s successor, Roh Moo-hyun (in office from 2003 to 2008) and his administration continued, and in some ways deepened, the same approach toward the North despite the onset by a second nuclear crisis in 2003 triggered by North Korea’s withdrawal from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

The election of conservative Lee Myung-Bak in December of 2007 marked the end of ten years of the sunshine policy and a reversion of inter-Korea relations to the pre-sunshine era.

Lee criticized the sunshine policy during the election campaign as ineffective and vowed to implement a more “principled” approach toward the North. Government communications regarding North Korea took on a markedly negative tone that continued with the election of the conservative Park Geun-Hye in 2012. Cooperative agreements and joint economic initiatives with the North Koreans that had been implemented during the sunshine era began to be put on hold (Bae 2020).

Sanctions were imposed shortly after North Korea’s second nuclear test in 2009. In response to the sinking of Cheonan, a South Korean navy ship on March 26, 2010, Lee announced that it no longer permitted North Korean ships to use its shipping lanes and further prohibited trade and exchanges between the North and South (Lee 2010). In addition, much of the plans to expand the Kaesong Industrial Complex, an economic zone jointly operated by North and South Korea and perhaps the culmination of the Sunshine Policy, were suspended during Lee’s administration. Park ultimately closed the complex. In short, cooperation between the two states came to a virtual halt under conservative rule. Rhetoric from the North also returned to the vindictive and antagonistic tone of the Cold War.

After Park was impeached, former President Roh’s chief of staff Moon Jae-In took office and efforts at rapprochement with Pyongyang were renewed. In a flurry of diplomatic activity, Moon met with Kim Jong-Un three times while President Trump also met with the North Korean leader twice. Despite repeated assurances on the part of Moon that it was “clear Kim Jong-Un has the will to denuclearize,” progress on denuclearization or improved ties with the outside world never materialized. Nevertheless, the Moon administration was steadfast in advocating improvement of relations with Pyongyang until it left office, to be replaced by a conservative government in 2021. The highly salient and sustained nature of the shift in foreign policy (and government messages) from the South Korean government provides an opportunity to infer the influence of elite messages.

## 2.2 North Korean Human Rights

As partisan differences in policy toward North Korea emerged and solidified, North Korean human rights has become increasingly politicized in South Korean politics (Bae and Moon 2014). Perhaps surprisingly, South Korean progressives have been more reserved about, and in some cases outright opposed to, raising awareness about North Korea's human rights record. The liberal Moon Jae-in government declined to co-sponsor on the UN human rights council's North Korea resolution for four years in a row from 2019 to 2022. Before this, South Korea had taken a more active role in passing North Korean human rights resolutions at the UN, co-sponsoring it for the 11 consecutive years from 2008 to 2018, mostly under the conservative rule of Lee Myung-Bak and Park Geun Hye. In 2007, the last year of rule under liberal president Roh Moo Hyun, the South Korean government had abstained from the UN vote on the North Korean human rights resolution.

The Moon administration's reluctance to support the documentation and improvement of North Korean human rights extends to domestic policy. Since Moon's inauguration in 2017, there has been no traction on implementation of the North Korean Human Rights Act passed under the previous administration in 2016. The ambassador at large for North Korean Human Rights post has also remained vacant since he took office. Moreover, the ruling party has actively curbed activities by North Korean human rights organizations. In 2020, it passed legislation barring human rights organizations from demonstrating at the border with North Korea. The bill also outlawed posting signs that can be read from the northern side of the border, broadcasts via loudspeakers that can be heard by North Koreans, and dissemination of "unapproved products" in North Korea. The Unification Minister, a former member of the ruling party leadership, has publicly questioned whether accounts of North Korean defectors regarding human rights violations are credible.

To much of the world, such moves from a liberal government were more puzzling because key figures in the South Korean government and majority party in the National Assembly, including President Moon himself, had been democratic activists during the dictatorship of



South Korea. Many of them, including the administration's first chief of staff and the first majority leader of the current National Assembly, had been imprisoned for their advocacy for democracy and human rights during the period of military rule. A government led by those that should value human rights was showing no interest in it, and even curtailing key components of freedom of assembly and expression in South Korea for those that were working to bring more attention to North Korean human rights. Instead, it has been the conservative party that has urged that the government take a more active role in improving North Korean human rights.

The Moon administration in Seoul's rationale for curbing criticism of North Korea's human rights record is security. South Korean involvement in North Korea's human rights has long been met with rebukes by the North Korean regime. The North Korean state has threatened to use violence in retaliation for demonstrators, many of them by defectors from North Korea, releasing balloons with pamphlets criticizing North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. For the Moon government, that has invested considerable effort into improving relations with North Korea, activities to further the human rights of North Koreans not only endanger benefits from closer ties with the regime in Pyongyang, it also poses a security threat to South Korea. Relations with North Korea's regime, therefore, take priority over the human rights of the people of North Korea.

South Korea's main conservative party has opposed the bill limiting demonstrations and the dissemination of information in North Korea. It has also been more proactive in international efforts to bring to light and document North Korean human rights violations. A prior conservative government created the ambassador level post to deal exclusively with North Korean human rights issues. A South Korean ambassador to the UN appointed under conservative administration gathered attention for publicly criticizing North Korea's human rights record at the UN Security Council. Two defectors that are current members of the National Assembly from the main opposition party are part of this effort. The higher visibility and presence of North Korean human rights by the conservatives has resulted in

partisan divisions on the issue of North Korean human rights in South Korean politics.

### 3 Literature

Empirical evidence on public opinion on human rights, particularly in democracies, has focused on how people view their government's domestic human rights record (Poe and Tate 1994). Evidence suggests citizens exhibit accurate and predictable opinions of their country's human rights standards. For example, a study of 55 countries from around the world reveal that citizen's perceptions of human rights in their country is largely consistent with expert opinions of the country's performance on human rights (Carlson and Listhaug 2007). Similarly, Anderson et al. (2002) shows that citizens in countries with repressive governments hold more negative views towards their country's human rights conditions compared to states with better human rights records.

At the same time, mounting evidence has shown how public opinion on human rights abroad can be important for understanding a government's foreign policy. Studies on foreign interventions find that the public tends to support aid or interventions for humanitarian purposes (Eichenberg 2005). In the U.S., for example, members of Congress tend to rely on public opinion when supporting or opposing humanitarian interventions (Hildebrandt et al. 2013).

While these studies are informative, they do not offer insight into how citizens weigh human rights issues abroad against other foreign policy priorities. Even when citizens are aware of human rights atrocities in another country, it is not clear how citizens would respond when other interests are at stake. Raising the issue of human rights to another country can be costly in terms of economic benefits or national security, for example. It is not clear, therefore, whether and when human rights take precedence over other foreign policy priorities for the public.

The literature on foreign policy opinion suggest various conditions under which people would assign higher priority to human rights compared to other issues in international af-

fairs. South Korea's North Korean policy has been increasingly politicized. When there are partisan divisions, members of the public are more likely to be swayed by leaders that are politically aligned with them. South Korea's conservative party leaders have stressed the importance of the North Korean human rights issue. Several of their prominent members are defectors that have been vocal about repression in their former homeland or former North Korean human rights activists. Liberals have tended to avoid highlighting the violation of basic rights over the border and at times have discounted the credibility of reports of human rights violations. This leads to the first hypothesis:

*H1 (partisanship):* Conservatives prioritize human rights relative to security in foreign affairs.

Elite messages shape people's views on a wide range of political issues including foreign policy (Zaller et al. 1992). The public is influenced by "cues" from political leaders on key issues. In foreign affairs, government with their policy-making initiative and informational advantage can be particularly influential via their communications (Berinsky 2007). North Korean human rights has rarely been on the agenda for liberal governments as they pursue rapprochement with the North Korean regime via the "sunshine policy." Political messages from the administration will underscore the benefits of lowered tension and peace as relations improve with the regime. The record of human rights violations will be set aside as reconciliation is sought via trust building measures and talks. Therefore, in contrast to conventional wisdom, the general public is expected to put a lower priority on human rights under liberal rule relative to security.

*H2 (elite cues):* Under liberal rule, the public prioritizes security relative to human rights in foreign affairs.

Studies have also shown that foreign policy events also influence public opinion. The number of casualties in an ongoing war, for example, provides information that the public can base their opinions on. Studies show that public support for war declines as casualties rise because people, especially women, believe that the human costs are not worth the objectives of war (Mueller 1973; Eichenberg 2003). Similarly, developments that increase the level of threat a country faces can alter opinions in that country. Nuclear tests that unambiguously enhances the capabilities of a foreign threat and signal its intentions against the status quo lead to downturns in opinion of relations with the threat. North Korea has carried out six nuclear tests.

*H3 (threat of war):* Nuclear tests increase security concerns relative to human rights in foreign affairs.

While nuclear tests raise the costs of a potential war by boosting an adversary's capabilities, the perceived probability of a war also increases the expected costs of a conflict. Thus, those that assess the chances of a war with an adversary to be high are more likely to also value national security over other competing priorities including human rights. Within the context of a serious security threat, self-interest can be behind such views. Studies on the Vietnam War show that those who were more likely to be sent to war due to the lottery were more likely to be against the war (Erikson and Stoker 2011). Thus, the public may be willing to forego human rights concerns if they perceive the benefits of lower tensions to be large (and the costs of war to be high).

*H4 (perceived threat of war):* A higher assessed threat of war increases security concerns relative to human rights in foreign affairs.

Scholars posit gender as an important factor in views on a wide range of foreign policy

issues, including those related to human rights. Several studies show that women are in general opposed to violence, war, and defense spending, and more supportive of humanitarian aid than men (Eichenberg 2003). While they are in general more averse to rising costs of conflict (Bae and Lee 2021), especially when those costs are human lives, some have argued that women are willing to tolerate the costs of conflict when its aims are humanitarian. Thus, these studies suggest that, women may support efforts to further human rights abroad even when it could be costly.

*H5 (gender):* Women prioritize human rights relative to security compared to men in foreign affairs.

Works exploring the role of norms and values in international relations also identify individual-level factors that are likely to lead to a high value placed on human rights vis-a-vis national security. Strongly held norms about the inviolable nature of certain rights for other peoples should be correlated with support for their human rights. Studies suggest that people adhere to such beliefs about basic rights even when they are potentially costly. One example is public opposition to torture. Evidence shows that, contrary to popular belief, the majority of Americans during the Bush administration were against torture even if used to prevent terrorism (Gronke et al. 2010). Scholars have also shown that notions of the universal nature of human rights has spill-over effects, for example by promoting the consumption of ethically produced goods (Hertel et al. 2009). It follows that those expressing a belief that others are entitled to a minimal standard of living or the pursuit of a better life would also be more likely to support human rights even in the presence of national security threats.

*H6 (fundamental rights):* Citizens who believe others have the right to a better life are more likely to prioritize human rights over national security in foreign affairs.

Public support for human rights in another state could also be driven by the sense that they belong to same national community. Heterogeneity within a polity can lead to lower provision of public goods as individuals resist contributing to services for groups that they do not view as belonging to the same community. According to Tilly, nationalism is based on a community of “homogeneous peoples” with “distinctive political interests.” Shin (2006) argues that the sense of nationalism between the two Koreas originates from common blood and shared ancestry. South Koreans that hold a sense of common nationhood with North Koreans could value human rights for North Koreans more than those that do not.

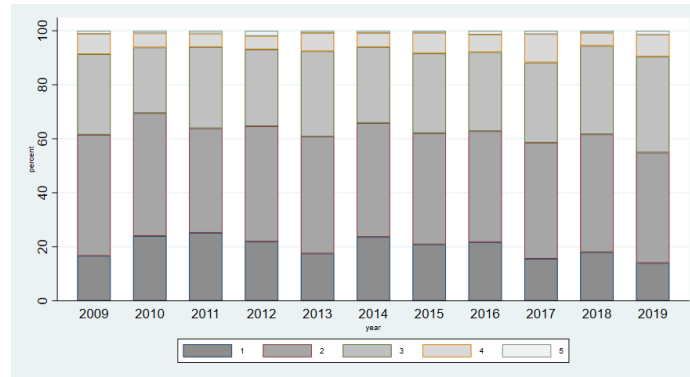
*H7 (nationhood):* Citizens who have a shared sense of nationhood with North Korea are more likely to prioritize human rights over national security in foreign affairs.

## 4 Data and Empirical Analysis

The annual Institute for Peace and Unification Studies (IPUS) survey, housed at Seoul National University, asks “Should the South Korean government continuously raise the issue of North Korean human rights?” Responses range from strongly agree, somewhat agree, not sure or undecided, somewhat disagree, to strongly disagree. Responses over time, shown in Figure 1, provide a baseline for how important the South Korean public perceives the human rights record of North Korean regime to be as a matter of policy for the government in Seoul.

From 2009 and 2019, South Korean citizens in general have been supportive of the government continuing to bring North Korea’s human rights situation to light. Each year, more than half of South Korean respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with their government continuously raising the issue of North Korea’s human rights. Only a small minority disagreed with the government doing so. There is some variation in the responses over time, with the latter years showing a moderate increase in those that have expressed a

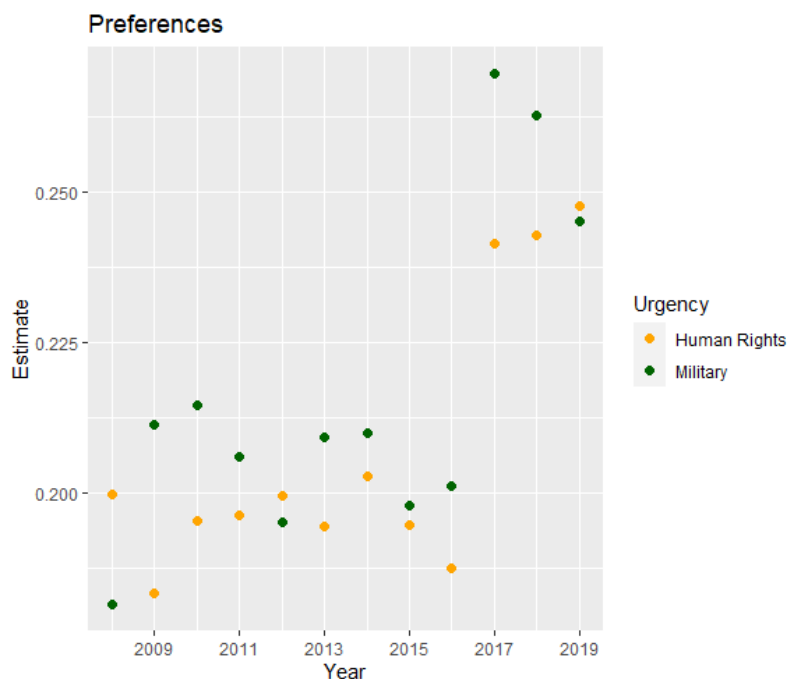
Figure 1: Should the South Korean government continuously raise the issue of North Korean human rights?



Notes: 1=strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree

neutral position on the government's actions on North Korean human rights. However, this question has limited value for assessing how much human rights matter when respondents weigh it against other priorities in foreign policy. If improving the security of South Koreans takes precedence over the human rights of North Koreans, for example, even very high levels of support for human rights might not matter for policy.

Figure 2: Human rights vs. relaxation of military tension



Notes: Estimates from loglinear preference models based on paired comparison.

We next examine priorities in South Korean public opinion on policy toward North Korea from 2007 to 2019. Our outcome variable measures public support for human rights foreign policy versus national security. Since 2007, the IPUS survey has asked how important or urgent the issue of human rights and the relaxation of military tensions were for reunification with North Korea. Respondents can choose on a scale from 1 to 4 that runs from not urgent at all, somewhat not urgent, somewhat urgent, or very urgent. Although these questions assume that respondents are not against unification, this premise may not be warranted given long-term opinion trends and we run various diagnostic tests to assess whether key findings are sensitive to respondents that are not enthusiastic about reunification between North and South Korea.

As shown in Figure 2, the responses to the two questions on the urgency of human rights and relaxation of military tensions together offer insight into how the public reconciles the potentially competing logics of security and human rights as well as whether the importance



of one relative to the other has shifted over time. If the current government's logic of prioritizing security over human rights was a reflection of the general public's preferences, a negative correlation would be observed between the importance of human rights and relaxing tensions.<sup>1</sup>

In order to infer the relative weight put on human rights versus security within a multivariate setting, we create a new dependent variable that captures the priorities of the public by subtracting the responses to the question of how important relaxation of military tensions with North Korea were from the responses to how important human rights were. The answers to both questions range from 1 (not urgent at all) to 4 (very urgent) and hence the newly created variable ranges from -3 to 3. The -3 outcome is only possible when a respondent replied that human rights are very important and relaxing military tensions is not important at all. The only way for 3 to be the outcome is when human rights is not important at all and relaxing military tensions is very important. The same level of urgency or importance for both issues results in a value of 0.

With a measure of the relative priorities put on human rights and security, we can assess the performance of various theories on mass opinion on human rights and examine whether the preferences regarding human rights and security shift within the context of the different elite messages and key foreign policy events. During the years analyzed (2007 to 2019) North Korea carried out five nuclear tests (in 2009, 2013, two in 2016, and 2017) and the variable *Nuclear Test Year* codes either the year of the nuclear test (if the survey took place after the test) or the years immediately following a nuclear test dichotomously as a 1 and the remaining years as a 0.

Governments, with their policy-making initiative and informational advantage in foreign affairs, can be particularly influential via their communications. Liberal governments have

---

<sup>1</sup>Figure 2 is plotted using Hatzinger and Dittrich's (2012) *prefmod* package in R to estimate from loglinear preference models based on paired comparison. Human rights and military tensions are not the only important issues in inter-Korea relations. However, among the six issues that the survey asks, they are the most important. The appendix shows the rank order among these six issues using the same method. Relaxing military tension and North Korean human rights were the top two issues the public deemed important.

rarely put North Korean human rights on the agenda as they attempted to improve relations with the regime in Pyongyang and therefore the general public is expected to put a low priority on human rights under their rule. Conversely, South Korea's conservative governments have emphasized North Korea's human rights record and therefore a commensurate response that values human rights from the public is expected. The *Sunshine policy* variable captures such disparity by coding years of liberal control as a 1 and conservative control as a 0.

A question in the IPUS survey also directly asked respondents to assess the possibility of a war with North Korea in the future with answers ranging from "not at all likely" to "highly likely." We use the responses as a measure for an individual's perception for *Threat of War*." As a robustness test, we also use a dichotomous variable to code those that responded that "the most important reason reunification was necessary" was for "eliminating the risk of war between North and South Korea." Those that chose a lower risk of conflict as the primary rationale for unification, we reason, were the ones that assessed the costs of war to be highest.

We also utilize other responses to the question of what the most important reason for reunification. As an indicator of citizens that had a strong belief in the basic rights for others, we used those who responded that "North Koreans should also lead a better life" as the main reason that unification was necessary. Those who have a stronger sense of community or nationhood are measured, again dichotomously, by coding those who chose North and South Korea "are the same nation" as the answer for why unification was necessary a 1 and the remainder 0.

We also test for the relevance of individual-level factors that affect attitudes towards human rights such as gender, political ideology, and education levels. Since the key dependent variables are based on questions that include a hypothetical about unification, the models also control for how the respondents responded to the question of how necessary it was for the two Koreas to unify (with possible answers being 1) very necessary 2) somewhat

necessary 3) neither necessary nor unnecessary 4) somewhat unnecessary 5) not necessary at all).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics

variable	obs.	mean	std.dev.	min.	max.
Relative of human rights vs. security	14,284	-0.04	0.86	-3	3
political ideology	14,284	2.95	0.83	1	5
age	14,284	42.60	13.42	19	74
female	14,284	0.49	0.50	0	1
income	14,284	7.33	2.36	1	12
edu	14,284	3.35	0.76	1	5
less support for reunification	14,284	2.47	1.16	1	5

variable	obs.	percent
female	14,284	49.4%
married	14,284	71.1%

In all of our models, we control for variables that may influence foreign policy opinion such as age, income, marital status. Year fixed effects are included. A count variable beginning with the first year in the dataset is also included to capture any changes over time. Table 1 lists descriptive statistics of the key responses and variables in the survey.

## 5 Results

Table 2: Results: Levels of urgency of different North Korean Policies

DV: Urgency of different North Korean policies		
	(1)	(2)
DV:	human rights	reduce military tensions
political ideology	1.00 (0.03)	0.96 (0.03)
sunshine policy	1.41*** (0.16)	2.14*** (0.24)
nuclear test year	0.62*** (0.07)	0.84 (0.10)
perceived threat of war	1.16*** (0.04)	1.15*** (0.04)
nationhood	1.00 (0.05)	1.04 (0.05)
right to better life	1.07 (0.11)	0.78** (0.08)
female	1.18*** (0.05)	1.04 (0.05)
age	1.00 (0.00)	1.01** (0.00)
married	0.99 (0.06)	0.95 (0.06)
income	1.04*** (0.01)	1.05*** (0.01)
education	1.18*** (0.05)	1.17*** (0.05)
less support for reunification	1.18*** (0.05)	0.68*** (0.01)
intercept	3.16*** (0.77)	1.96*** (0.48)
Year FE	Y	Y
Obs.	13097	13089

Odds ratios reported. \*p<0.1; \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\* p<0.01;  
Robust standard errors in parentheses

We first assess factors that influence the importance of human rights and military tension reduction in separate models in Table A1. The dependent variables in columns 1 and 2 of Table A1 are the degree of urgency of human rights and the urgency of the relaxation of military tensions, respectively, in relations with North Korea. When analyzing the urgency of North Korean human rights and reduction of military tensions independently, ideology does not seem to be correlated with the degree of urgency regarding either human rights or

reduction of military tensions.

Consistent with the literature that states that women have a higher tendency to support humanitarian cause compared to men, gender is positively associated in a statistically significant manner with the degree of importance put on North Korean human rights. It is not, however, correlated with reduction of military tension.

Nuclear tests led to a lower sense of urgency for human rights. A higher assessed probability of war led to more importance being put on reducing military tensions (but also human rights). On the other hand, citizens who believe that the two Koreas are part of the same nation were both strongly and positive associated with a higher urgency of reducing military tensions but showed no particular relationship with views on human rights for North Koreans. Opinions of North Koreans also deserving a better life did not exhibit a strong relationship with views on human rights or military tension.

Those that did not feel that unification was necessary were, predictably, less likely to respond that either human rights North of the border or lowering the military threat from Pyongyang were urgent. When exploring demographic characteristics, more years of education and higher income are associated with higher urgency regarding both North Korean human rights and reduction of military tension. The two questions in isolation, however, do not offer leverage on the question of which issue citizens would prioritize if needed.

Table 3: Results: Explaining relative foreign policy opinions

DV: Relative urgency of human rights vs. security			
	(1)	(2)	(3)
political ideology	0.01 (0.010)		0.02** (0.01)
sunshine policy	(-0.17)*** (0.03)	-0.10*** (0.03)	-0.16*** (0.03)
nuclear test year	-0.07** (0.03)	-0.13*** (0.04)	-0.06* (0.04)
perceived threat of war	0.01 (0.01)		0.01 (0.0)
nationhood	0.02 (0.02)		0.03* (0.02)
right to better life	0.18*** (0.04)		0.18*** (0.04)
female	0.03** (0.01)	0.03** (0.01)	0.03** (0.02)
married		0.01 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)
age		-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
income		-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
education		0.02 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)
less support for reunification		0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
intercept	0.02 (0.05)	0.03 (0.07)	-0.00 (0.08)
Year FE	Y	Y	Y
Obs.	13172	14301	13085

\*p<0.1; \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\* p<0.01;

Robust standard errors in parentheses

In Table A2, we present coefficients from a linear model with the same control variables with the newly created relative priority variable as the outcome. Several of the results from the previous analysis remain the same while others change when the dependent variable takes into account potential trade-offs between the degree of urgency for human rights compared to military tension.

First, as in Table A1, higher assessed cost to war led to military tension being prioritized

over human rights. Relaxation of military tension also receives priority over human rights in the period immediately following a North Korean nuclear test. Consistent with H3 and H4, increasing expected cost of war results in human rights in North Korea being given less weight in the opinions of South Korean citizens relative to military security.

In contrast to Table 1 however, where women were not more likely than men to express the importance of human rights, the gender variable emerges as significant in Column 3. Relative to relaxing military tensions, women were more likely to stress the importance of human rights. As the results in Table 1 show, this is not because women put a lower priority on security issues than men. Similarly, those that believe North Koreans have the right to a better life has a higher preference for human rights over military security. Ideology also gains statistical significance. Conservatives are more likely to attach importance to human rights relative to relaxation of military tension. These results are consistent with H1, H5 and H6.

At the same time, when the dependent variable is the relative weight put on human rights over military security, education and income lose their statistical significance. While the wealthier and highly educated are more likely to respond that they value human rights or a peaceful turn in the security environment, they do not put more importance on one over the other than less educated or the poor. Similarly, we find no support in this model for the argument in hypothesis 2 that the sense of brotherhood or nationhood with North Korea affects preferences for human rights relative to military security. This stands in contrast to H7.

Finally, when liberal governments in power engage Pyongyang via the sunshine policy in an attempt to improve relations, the public tends to prioritize lowering military tension over human rights in North Korea. This finding supports H2 and only emerges with the relative measure of preferences between security and human rights.

## 6 Discussion and Conclusion

Examining the relative priority of two important foreign policy issues, human rights and national security, this study provides a more nuanced understanding of the factors that lead to the support of human rights. Regarding theories that have stressed the relevance of ideas and identity in the spread of the influence of human rights, our findings show that norms that draw on a sense of universalism - that others also deserve a chance at a better life - are closely associated with a priority on human rights for the same others. In contrast, those that shared a sense of nationhood with North Koreans did not extend the same focus on human rights vis-a-vis security concerns to them.

In terms of foreign policy, the findings demonstrate the downsides to attempting rapprochement with a cruel and inhumane regime that at the same time poses a dire security threat. As a government makes the case for the benefits that can come from making peace with a regime that is a systematic violator of human rights, it can often present the other side in a positive manner: as willing to cooperate, pragmatic, open to negotiation, and sharing common interests. Such communications from political elites can draw attention away from the human rights violations that the opposing regime is guilty of. This leads to a decline in those that attach greater importance on human rights relative to the relaxation of military tension. Future studies could explore how transient or lasting such changes in the hierarchy among different issue areas in foreign policy are.



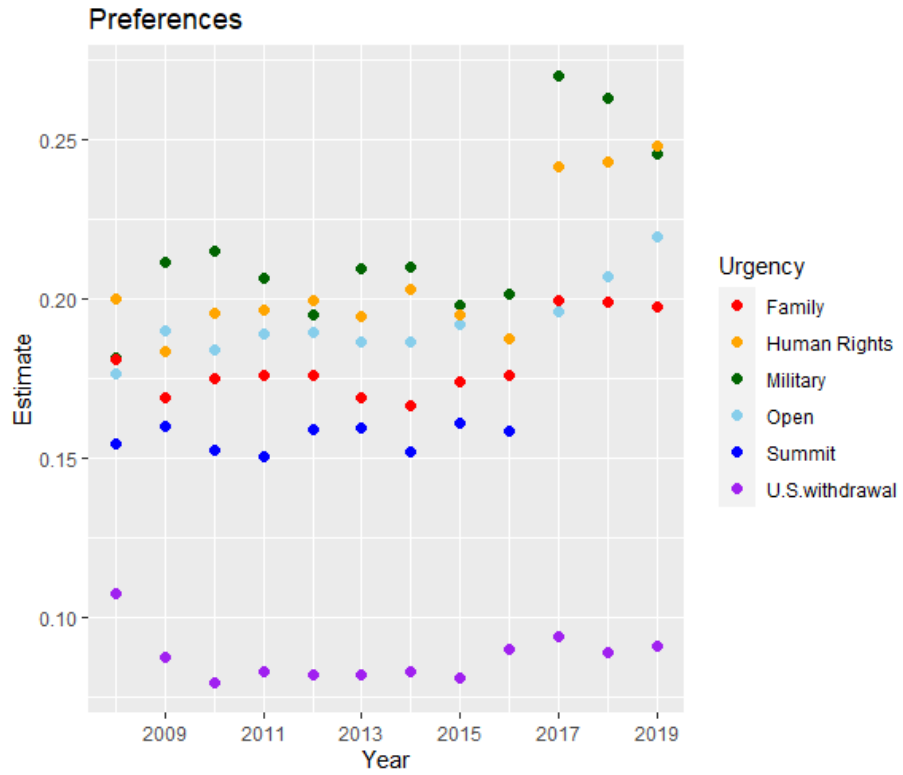
## References

- Aldrich, John H, John L Sullivan, and Eugene Borgida. 1989. "Foreign affairs and issue voting: Do presidential candidates" waltz before a blind audience?." *The American Political Science Review*: 123–141.
- Anderson, Christopher J, Patrick M Regan, and Robert L Ostergard. 2002. "Political repression and public perceptions of human rights." *Political Research Quarterly* 55 (2): 439–456.
- Bae, Jong-Yun, and Chung-in Moon. 2014. "South Korea's Engagement Policy: Revisiting a Human Rights Policy." *Critical Asian Studies* 46 (1): 15–38.
- Bae, Joonbum. 2020. "Limits of engagement? The sunshine policy, nuclear tests, and South Korean views of North Korea 1995–2013." *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 20 (3): 411–443.
- Bae, Joonbum, and YuJung Julia Lee. 2021. "Gender, Events, and Elite Messages in Mass Opinion on Foreign Relations." *Journal of Global Security Studies* 6 (2): ogz074.
- Berinsky, Adam J. 2007. "Assuming the costs of war: Events, elites, and American public support for military conflict." *The Journal of Politics* 69 (4): 975–997.
- Carlson, Matthew, and Ola Listhaug. 2007. "Citizens' perceptions of human rights practices: An analysis of 55 countries." *Journal of Peace Research* 44 (4): 465–483.
- De Mesquita, Bruce Bueno, George W Downs, Alastair Smith, and Feryal Marie Cherif. 2005. "Thinking inside the box: A closer look at democracy and human rights." *International Studies Quarterly* 49 (3): 439–457.
- Eichenberg, Richard C. 2003. "Gender differences in public attitudes toward the use of force by the United States, 1990–2003." *International Security* 28 (1): 110–141.

- Eichenberg, Richard C. 2005. "Victory has many friends: US public opinion and the use of military force, 1981–2005." *International security* 30 (1): 140–177.
- Erikson, Robert S, and Laura Stoker. 2011. "Caught in the draft: The effects of Vietnam draft lottery status on political attitudes." *American Political Science Review* 105 (2): 221–237.
- Grewal, Sharanbir, and Erik Voeten. 2015. "Are new democracies better human rights compliers?" *International Organization*: 497–518.
- Gronke, Paul, Darius Rejali, Dustin Drenguis, James Hicks, Peter Miller, and Bryan Nakayama. 2010. "US public opinion on torture, 2001–2009." *PS: political science & politics* 43 (3): 437–444.
- Hertel, Shareen, Lyle Scruggs, and C Patrick Heidkamp. 2009. "Human rights and public opinion: From attitudes to action." *Political Science Quarterly* 124 (3): 443–459.
- Hildebrandt, Timothy, Courtney Hillebrecht, Peter M Holm, and Jon Pevehouse. 2013. "The domestic politics of humanitarian intervention: Public opinion, partisanship, and ideology." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 9 (3): 243–266.
- Hill Jr, Daniel W, and Zachary M Jones. 2014. "An empirical evaluation of explanations for state repression." *American Political Science Review*: 661–687.
- Levin, Norman D, and Yong-Sup Han. 2002. "Sunshine in Korea: The South Korean Debate over Policies Toward North Korea, the USA: RAND."
- Mueller, John E. 1973. *War, presidents, and public opinion*. New York: Wiley.
- Poe, Steven C, and C Neal Tate. 1994. "Repression of human rights to personal integrity in the 1980s: A global analysis." *American political science review*: 853–872.
- Shin, Gi-Wook. 2006. *Ethnic nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, politics, and legacy*. Stanford University Press.

Zaller, John R et al. 1992. *The nature and origins of mass opinion*. Cambridge university press.

Figure A1: Urgency of Different Foreign Policies



Notes: Estimates from loglinear preference models based on paired comparison. Family=Family reunion for divided families between North and South Korea, Human rights=North Korean human rights, Military=relaxing military tension, open=opening up North Korea

## A7 Online Appendix

Table A1: Results: Levels of urgency of different North Korean Policies

DV: Urgency of different North Korean policies		
DV:	(1) human rights	(2) reduce military tensions
right to better life	1.12 (0.13)	0.92 (0.09)
nationalism	1.07 (0.06)	1.22*** (0.07)
threat of war	1.17*** (0.07)	1.46*** (0.09)
political ideology	0.99 (0.03)	0.96 (0.02)
age	1.00 (0.00)	1.01** (0.00)
female	1.16*** (0.05)	1.02 (0.05)
married	0.99 (0.06)	0.95 (0.06)
income	1.04*** (0.01)	1.04*** (0.01)
education	1.16*** (0.04)	1.16*** (0.04)
less support for reunification	0.63*** (0.01)	0.66*** (0.01)
nuclear test year	0.54*** (0.06)	1.09 (0.12)
sunshine policy	1.65*** (0.19)	1.67*** (0.18)
intercept	4.72*** (1.05)	2.70*** (0.60)
Year FE	Y	Y
Obs.	14296	14290

Odds ratios reported. \*p<0.1; \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\* p<0.01;  
Robust standard errors in parentheses. Threat of war measured by urgency to reduce threat for unification.

Table A2: Results: Explaining relative foreign policy opinions

DV: Relative urgency of human rights vs. security			
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Right to better life	0.13*** (0.04)		0.13*** (0.04)
brotherhood	-0.01 (0.02)		-0.00 (0.02)
cost of war	-0.07*** (0.02)		-0.07*** (0.02)
political ideology		0.02** (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)
female		0.03** (0.01)	0.03** (0.01)
married		0.01 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)
age		-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
income		-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
education		0.02 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)
less support for reunification		0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
nuclear test year		-0.13*** (0.04)	-0.13*** (0.04)
sunshine policy		-0.10*** (0.03)	-0.09** (0.03)
intercept	0.13*** (0.03)	0.03 (0.07)	0.04 (0.08)
Year FE	Y	Y	Y
Obs.	14333	14301	14284

\*p<0.1; \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\* p<0.01;  
Robust standard errors in parentheses. Threat of war measured by urgency to reduce threat for unification.