
Perceptions of Security on the Korean Peninsula: Part 1

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Abstract:

Purpose: The purpose of this article is to examine perceptions of the security situation on the Korean Peninsula and to identify factors influencing how individuals assess the regional security environment. The study focuses on the role of selected sociodemographic characteristics, personal experiences, and attitudes related to military service in shaping perceptions of security.

Methodology: The study employs an empirical research approach based on a questionnaire survey conducted among respondents from different backgrounds. The analysis considers variables including age, gender, place of origin, education, previous visits to the Korean Peninsula (including South Korea and North Korea), and attitudes toward military service. Descriptive statistics and comparative analyses were applied to examine differences in perceived security levels among selected groups of respondents.

Findings: The analysis indicates that perceptions of security on the Korean Peninsula are influenced by a range of individual characteristics and experiences. The study highlights the importance of personal exposure to the region, as well as sociodemographic factors, in shaping assessments of security-related issues. The findings contribute to a better understanding of how public perceptions of international security situations are formed.

Practical implications: The results may be useful for researchers, policymakers, and institutions involved in security studies, international relations, and public communication. Understanding the factors influencing perceptions of security can support more effective analysis of public attitudes toward conflicts, geopolitical tensions, and regional security challenges.

Keywords: Korean Peninsula, security perception, security environment, public opinion, questionnaire research, empirical analysis, sociodemographic factors.

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1. Introduction: Framing the Study in Korean Peninsula Security

The Korean Peninsula has remained a subject of sustained international interest for several decades. Although the unified Korean state that historically encompassed the peninsula ceased to exist nearly eighty years ago, Korea had functioned as a single independent political entity for most of the previous millennium. Since the conclusion of the Second World War, however, the peninsula has been divided between two sovereign states that emerged in its aftermath and have coexisted for decades.

While the peninsula continues to be inhabited predominantly by Koreans, the political, social, economic, and cultural divergence between the populations of North and South Korea has become increasingly pronounced, rendering the once relatively homogeneous ethnic community progressively more fragmented with each passing year (Kwak and Joo, 2017).

The coexistence of two Korean states—the Republic of Korea, RoK (South Korea) in the south and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, DPRK (North Korea) in the north—represents one of the key factors shaping the security environment in East Asia. The unresolved division of the Korean Peninsula, which emerged after the end of the Second World War and was consolidated following the Korean War (1950–1953), continues to generate political, military, and diplomatic tensions at both regional and international levels (Scott, 2009).

The persistent confrontation between the two states, characterized by ideological differences, competing security interests, and periodic military provocations, has become a significant challenge for regional stability. Furthermore, the involvement of major international actors, including the United States, China, Japan, and Russia, contributes to the complexity of the security dynamics surrounding the Korean Peninsula. Consequently, developments on the peninsula remain an important element of the broader East Asian security architecture and a subject of continued analysis within international security studies.

Given the dynamic security environment in East Asia, which has been characterized by persistent tensions for decades, the Korean Peninsula remains a particularly compelling area of research. Moreover, because the Korean War ended with an armistice rather than a formal peace treaty, the two Koreas remain technically in a state of war, further underscoring the region's strategic significance.

The author sought to examine respondents' opinions regarding the general public's perception of security on the Korean Peninsula. Interest in the security situation in East Asia is shaped by several distinctive factors. Media coverage of developments in the Far East fluctuates considerably, often reflecting shifts in the global security agenda. Since the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the emergence

of a direct military threat in Europe, European media attention to events in East Asia has noticeably declined.

Nevertheless, the Korean Peninsula has consistently remained a focal point of international interest. Owing to the persistent tensions between North and South Korea, global attention has long been directed toward the peninsula, primarily in the context of North Korea's nuclear programme and the security threats posed by Pyongyang. The intensity of international debate surrounding Korean affairs reflects the peninsula's enduring strategic importance. This study assumes that geographical distance from the Korean Peninsula is associated with heightened perceptions of security concerns related to developments in Korea.

This article is an introduction to the research results that will be discussed in a series of articles on the perception of security on the Korean Peninsula. It presents the research sample and outlines the circumstances under which the study was conducted. Furthermore, the first part of the results explores the relationship between respondents' personal experiences and their assessment of security on the Korean Peninsula. This article aims to analyze the factors shaping respondents' perceptions of security on the Korean Peninsula.

2. Research Methodology

The topic of security perceptions on the Korean Peninsula is a significant area of research. It has been studied primarily within Korea, one example being the work of Sunggu Jo, who examined security perceptions among Korean students (Sunggu Jo, 2023). The research presented by the author takes a different approach, as it focuses on a different research group. In this context, Sunggu Jo's work provides a particularly interesting point of reference.

The empirical research employed a diagnostic survey method using a questionnaire (Pelc, 2012). The survey was conducted in both English and Polish and was completed by a total of 234 respondents. Of these, 39 participants completed the questionnaire in Polish, while 197 completed it in English. The significant disparity between the number of responses submitted in English and those submitted in Polish can be attributed to several factors.

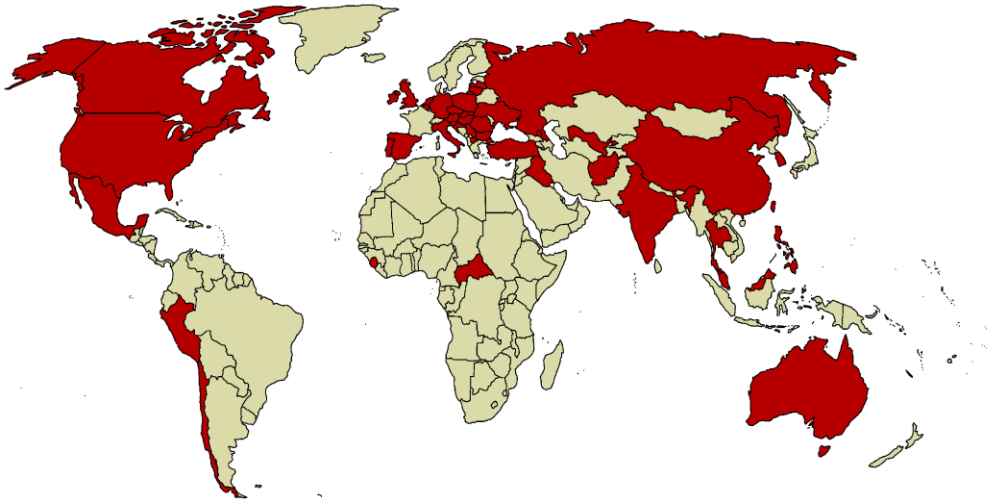
First, interest in East Asia—a region geographically distant from Poland—remains relatively limited among Polish citizens. Consequently, the author's requests for participation in the Polish-language survey received a less enthusiastic response. However, given Poland's extensive historical involvement in the peace process on the Korean Peninsula (Blicharz, 2018), one might have expected a higher level of responsiveness to the survey (Bogusz *et al.*, 2024). Furthermore, it should be noted that respondents of Polish origin also had the option of completing the questionnaire in English, which may have contributed to the lower number of Polish-language responses.

Afghanistan, Australia, Austria, Bulgaria, Chile, China, Croatia, Czech Republic, Chechnya, Philippines, Spain, Netherlands, India, Iraq, Ireland, South Korea, Lithuania, Latvia, Macedonia, Malaysia, Mexico, Germany, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Central African Republic, Russia, Romania, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, Slovenia, United States, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Spain, the United Kingdom, Hungary, Italy.

The respondents' current place of residence, which was often different from their place of birth, is presented in Figure 2, and the list includes the following countries: Afghanistan, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, China, Croatia, Czech Republic, Chechnya, Germany, Hungary, India, Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Malaysia, Mexico, the Netherlands, Peru, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, South Korea, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, the United States, Thailand, Taiwan, Turkey, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and the United Kingdom.

The author believes that nationality and place of residence are crucial to the researched topic, as they significantly influence the perception of the phenomena addressed in this dissertation.

Figure 2. *Country of residence of responders*



Source: Author's own research.

3. Research Design and Method

The respondents were analyzed and characterized according to selected sociodemographic and experiential variables, including age, educational attainment, gender, previous travel to the Korean Peninsula, and attitudes toward military service. The ratio of women to men who responded to the survey questionnaires was similar, with 119 (50.6%) women and 116 (49.4%) men responding.

The research sample consisted of people of varying ages. The author, in defining age ranges, linked them to the respondents' likely occupation. Therefore, the first group, those aged 19-25, is most likely comprised of people pursuing higher education. This is the largest group (42.1%).

The second group consists of people aged 26-35, whose education has likely ended but whose acquired knowledge is still fresh (38.7%). The third group, aged 36-45, consists of people with a stable social situation (8.9%). The next group consists of people aged 46-55 (6.4%). The final group is aged 56-65 (3.8%). The author had no contact with older people.

The level of education represented by the respondents is related to age. Given that the largest group among respondents were those under 25, it can be assumed that they are still in education. Those with a secondary education accounted for 14% of the respondents, 36.6% had completed a first-cycle degree, and 31.9% had completed a second-cycle degree. 4.7% of those who completed the survey held a doctoral degree, and 9.4% held a post-doctoral degree or an academic title.

From the perspective of the research objectives, previous experience in the form of a visit to the Korean Peninsula, including either South Korea or North Korea, constitutes an important factor. Among the respondents, 12 individuals reported having visited North Korea, while 58 respondents had visited South Korea.

The author also examined the variable of attitudes toward professional military service. Thirty-six soldiers participated in research, representing 16.6% of the respondents, but this proved to have no impact on the overall research result.

The respondents were characterized based on a set of demographic and experiential variables that were considered relevant to the analysis of security perceptions. These variables included age, gender, level of education, previous travel to the Korean Peninsula, and military service experience. Collecting this information made it possible to describe the study sample comprehensively and to examine whether respondents' backgrounds were associated with differences in their perceptions of security on the Korean Peninsula.

Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to summarize the characteristics of the sample (Bedynska, 2007). Frequency distributions and percentages were calculated for each variable to provide an overview of the respondents' demographic profile and relevant experiences. These statistics also enabled an assessment of the representativeness and diversity of the study population, thereby providing an important context for interpreting the empirical findings presented in the subsequent sections.

The frequency distributions for all analyzed variables are presented in Table 1, which provides a detailed overview of the composition of the research sample.

Table 1. *Frequency Statistics for Gender, Age, Education, Active Military Service Status, and Visits to South Korea and North Korea*

Variable		N	%
gender	women	119	50,6
	men	116	49,4
age	19-25	99	42,1
	26-35	91	38,7
	36-45	21	8,9
	46-55	15	6,4
	56-65	9	3,8
level of education	High school	33	14,0
	BA diploma	93	39,6
	MA diploma	75	31,9
	Doctoral degree	11	4,7
	Scientific title	22	9,4
active military duty	yes	39	16,6

	no	195	83,0
experience of visit in North Korea	yes	12	5,1
	no	219	93,2
experience of visit in South Korea	yes	58	24,7
	no	171	72,8

Source: Author's own research.

4. Discussion: Interpreting Security Perceptions on Korean Peninsula

In the first stage of the statistical analysis, differences in the perceived level of safety were examined between respondents who had previously visited South Korea and those who had not, as well as between respondents who had visited North Korea and those without such experience. The objective of this analysis was to determine whether direct exposure to either of the two Korean states was associated with differences in subjective security perceptions.

Prior to conducting the comparative analyses, descriptive statistics were calculated for the dependent variable, *perceived safety level*. These statistics included the mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum values, skewness, and kurtosis, providing an initial assessment of the variable's distribution. Subsequently, the assumption of normality was evaluated using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test.

The test indicated that the distribution of the dependent variable deviated significantly from a normal (Gaussian) distribution. However, given the well-documented sensitivity of formal normality tests to sample size, the results were interpreted alongside measures of skewness and kurtosis.

Following commonly accepted methodological recommendations, the rule-of-thumb criterion for assessing approximate normality was applied. According to this approach, parametric statistical procedures may be considered appropriate when the skewness coefficient falls within the range of -1 to 1 , indicating that any departure from normality is relatively minor and unlikely to substantially affect the robustness of parametric analyses.

Since the distribution of the perceived safety variable satisfied this criterion, the assumption of approximate normality was regarded as sufficiently met, allowing the use of parametric tests in the subsequent analyses. The descriptive statistics and the results of the normality assessment for the dependent variable are presented in Table 2. These findings provided the methodological basis for the comparative analyses conducted in the following stage of the study (Górniak, Wachnicki 2008).

The first independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to examine whether respondents' perceptions of security differed according to their previous visit to North Korea. The analysis revealed a statistically significant difference between respondents who had

visited North Korea and those who had not ($p < 0.05$), indicating that prior travel experience was associated with differences in perceived safety.

Table 2. Basic descriptive statistics with the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test

variable	<i>M</i>	<i>Me</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Sk.</i>	<i>Kurt.</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Maks.</i>	<i>K-S</i>	<i>p</i>
security level	3,78	4,00	0,90	-0,65	0,57	1	5	0,26	<0,001

Source: Author's own research.

The magnitude of this difference was assessed using Cohen's d , which yielded a value of 0.95. According to conventional benchmarks, this represents a large effect size, suggesting that the observed difference is not only statistically significant but also substantively meaningful. Thus, previous travel to North Korea appears to be strongly associated with respondents' subjective perceptions of security.

Specifically, respondents who had visited North Korea reported a higher average level of perceived security ($M = 4.58$) than those who had never visited the country ($M = 3.74$). This finding suggests that firsthand experience with North Korea may influence individuals' assessments of security on the Korean Peninsula, potentially leading to perceptions that differ from those held by respondents without direct exposure to the country. While the present analysis does not establish a causal relationship, the results indicate a clear association between travel experience and perceived security, warranting further investigation into the factors underlying this relationship.

Detailed statistical results of the independent-samples t -test, including group means, standard deviations, test statistics, significance levels, and effect size estimates, are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Effect of Previous Visits to North Korea on Perceived Security: Student's t -Test

variable	No visit (<i>N</i> = 219)		Previous visit in DPRK (<i>N</i> = 12)		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% <i>CI</i>		<i>d</i> Cohena
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	
security level	3,74	0,89	4,58	0,67	-3,22	0,001	-1,36	-0,33	0,95

Source: Author's own research.

A similar analysis was conducted for the independent variable *previous visit to South Korea*. As in the case of previous visits to North Korea, the results of Student's t -test indicated a statistically significant difference in perceived safety between respondents who had visited South Korea and those who had not. The magnitude of this difference was substantial, as evidenced by a large effect size§ ($d = 1.00$).

Specifically, respondents who had previously visited South Korea reported significantly higher perceived levels of safety ($M = 4.40$) than respondents who had never visited the country ($M = 3.56$). These findings suggest that direct experience with South Korea may be associated with a more favorable assessment of the security situation on the Korean Peninsula. Although the present analysis does not permit causal inferences, the observed relationship indicates that firsthand exposure to the region may play an important role in shaping perceptions of security. Detailed statistical results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. *effect of previous visits to Republic of Korea on perceived security: Student's t-Test*

	No visit ($N = 171$)		Previous visit in RoK ($N = 58$)				95% CI		
variable	M	SD	M	SD	t	p	LL	UL	d Cohena
security level	3,56	0,89	4,40	0,65	-7,68	<0,001	-1,05	-0,62	1,00

Source: *Author's own research.*

5. Conclusions

Researching the situation on the Korean Peninsula, with particular emphasis on security aspects, is a challenging task due to the specific nature of the area, the dynamic nature of events, and the volatile conditions prevailing in East Asia. The author was fully aware of this when defining the research area, and over time, she became more confident in her initial assumptions. Nevertheless, she remains convinced that the choice of topic was appropriate.

Even in the initial stages of the research, and later during its development, significant differences in the perception of the security conditions of the Korean Peninsula were evident between respondents and experts of Korean descent and those of other nationalities. Individuals with experience living on, or at least traveling to, the Korean Peninsula also expressed similar sentiments.

Research indicates that foreigners living in Korea and Koreans from the Republic of Korea are less concerned about threats from their northern neighbor, both in terms of their individual sense of security and from a broader perspective, i.e., possible events on the peninsula and in the region. Koreans also show significant trust in the United States, likely related to the continued presence of American troops in the Republic of Korea.

Assessing the results of the survey using the questionnaire, a significant disparity between the number of responses among English-speaking and Polish-speaking respondents should be noted. Respondents from Poland constitute a small portion of the total number of respondents.

With this article, the author intends to launch a series presenting the findings of research she has conducted over several years on the sense of security on the Korean Peninsula. The initial article provides information on the research context and sample. In subsequent articles, the author will present in greater detail the determinants of security subjectively identified by the respondents and analyze the findings obtained.

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