



Variation in Militarized Provocations: An Electoral Analysis

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Research Question

How do South Korean (SK) elections affect the probability of North Korean (NK) militarized provocations?

Theory

Militarized provocation is an instrumental strategy countries employ to achieve desired end goals such as deterrence, signaling resolve, and strengthening negotiating leverage.

- Adversary elections could render the option of provocations more attractive to the provocateur by increasing the probability of payoffs to such behavior via providing them with opportunities to signal their resolve and potentially affect election outcomes.

Hypothesis

- H1:** As a SK election approaches, NK will be more likely to engage in provocations.
H2: As a SK inauguration approaches, NK will be more likely to engage in provocations.

Data & Method

- Data on all NK provocations from 1953 to 2023, and SK elections from 1958 to 2020 were collected.
- Weeks were used as the unit of analysis, and both data sets were coded as binary response variables.
- Logistic regression was conducted to estimate the effects of SK elections on NK provocation patterns.

“Database: North Korean Provocations.” Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 2019
 “ROK Elections and DPRK Provocations.” CSIS, 2017
 “U.S. Elections.” CSIS, 2017
 “Gross Domestic Product for Republic of Korea.” Federal Reserve Economic Data

Results

Table 1: South Korean Elections & North Korean Militarized Provocations

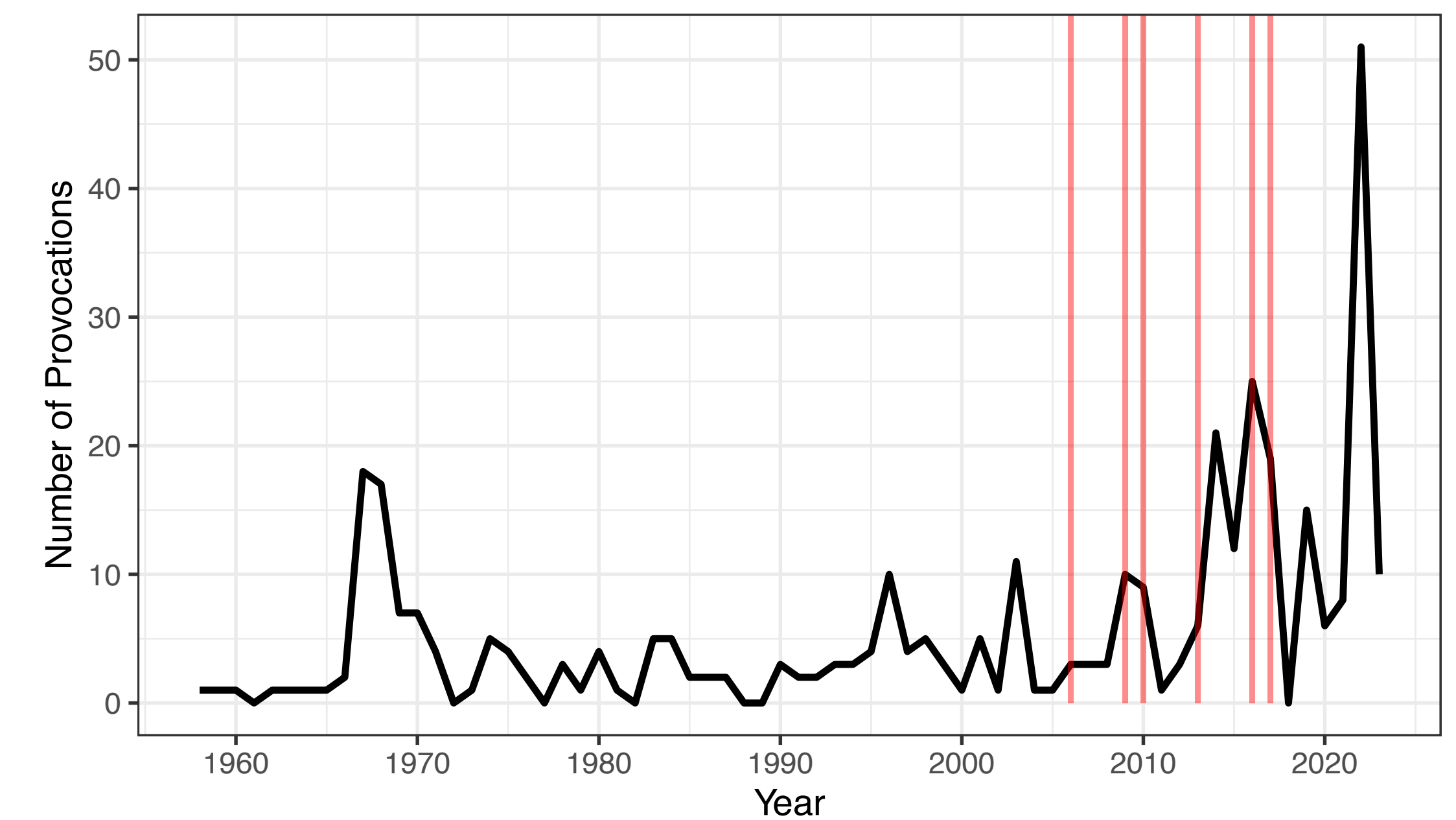
	<i>Dependent Variable:</i>				
	North Korean Militarized Provocation				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Year	0.032*** (0.004)	0.032*** (0.004)	0.033*** (0.004)	0.032*** (0.004)	0.032*** (0.004)
Election within past 1-4 weeks	0.449 (0.286)				
Election within past 5-8 weeks		0.077 (0.325)			
Election within past 9-12 weeks			0.601** (0.272)		
Election within past 13-16 weeks				0.271 (0.303)	
Election within upcoming 1-4 weeks					0.754*** (0.261)
Constant	-66.672*** (7.204)	-67.119*** (7.233)	-67.759*** (7.252)	-67.120*** (7.246)	-65.945*** (7.227)
Observations	3,454	3,450	3,446	3,442	3,453
Log Likelihood	-946.690	-944.087	-941.856	-943.520	-938.972
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,899.380	1,894.173	1,889.712	1,893.040	1,883.944

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

- On average, the probability that NK engages in a provocation increases yearly by 0.2%.
- NK is 4.5% more likely to engage in a provocation if a SK election has been held within the past 2-3 months.
- NK is 5.6% more likely to engage in a provocation if a SK election will be held in the upcoming month.

Discussion, Limitations, & Next Steps

North Korean Provocations by Year
Nuclear Provocations Highlighted



Potential Explanations:

- 4.5% increase → There are approximately 2 months between a SK election and inauguration. NK may be strategizing its provocation timing to effectively signal its position and resolve to the new leader.
- 5.6% increase → NK may be engaging in provocations to potentially affect election or policy outcomes.

Additional independent variables that could increase the probability of NK provocations such as US-SK joint military exercises, and leader statements should be incorporated into the model.

Control variables such as the party in power should be accounted as well for a more complete analysis.

Conclusion

The regression indicates a positive and statistically significant relationship between a SK election that has been held in the past 2-3 months or will be held in the upcoming month, and NK provocation.

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