

Democracy And Election After Democratization in South Korea

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Résumé

Démocratie et élections après la démocratisation en Corée du sud

Il est généralement admis que la démocratie coréenne a désormais réussi à faire ses preuves et qu'elle s'est enracinée fermement. Certains spécialistes affirment même que la démocratie en Corée est sur la voie de la consolidation. Cette contribution fait valoir que la démocratie coréenne a de graves défauts qui découlent des caractères acquis lors de la transition démocratique. Les forces démocratiques et les dirigeants politiques coréens ont échoué à les surmonter à cause du régionalisme, du parti autoritaire, de la faiblesse du droit et de l'acceptation aveugle du néolibéralisme. En raison de ces problèmes, les gouvernements démocratiques n'ont pas réussi à consolider la démocratie en Corée. Ils ont ainsi contribué involontairement au retour au gouvernement des anciens groupes autoritaires, qui tentent de faire revenir la société coréenne à la situation pré démocratique.

Abstract

It is commonly said that Korean democracy has already passed the first 'turnover test', and that democracy has taken root firmly in Korean society. Some scholars even argue that Korea's democracy is on the road to full consolidation. It is, however, argued here that Korean democracy has had serious defects stemming from the distinctive nature of democratic transition, and that democratic forces and political leaders failed to overcome them largely due to those problems they possessed – regionalism, authoritarian party organization, weak rule of law, and mindless acceptance of neoliberalism. As a result of these problems, democratic governments have failed to consolidate Korea's democracy, and contributed unintentionally to the comeback to government of the old authoritarian groups, which attempt to put Korean society back to the pre-democracy conditions.

Recently, South Korea held a National Assembly election in April 2008.¹ It was the 6th election for the National Assembly, and the 15th election, if presidential and local elections included, since the founding election in 1987. During the election, there occurred no serious electoral frauds except for minor violations of election laws, let alone no dispute over the election outcome. Moreover, already in December 1997, an opposition party candidate, *Kim Dae Jung*, took over power by winning the 15th Presidential election for the first time in almost 50 years after independence. For this reason, it is said that Korean democracy has already passed the first 'turnover test' (Huntington, 1991) and that democracy has taken root firmly in Korean society. Some scholars even argue that Korea's democracy is on the road to full consolidation (Diamond and Shin, 2000 : 3).

It is argued here that since 1987 Korean democracy has had serious defects stemming from the distinctive nature of democratic transition, and it is also argued that democratic forces and political leaders failed to overcome them largely due to the limitations they possessed – regionalism, authoritarian party organization, weak rule of law, and mindless acceptance of neoliberalism. As a result of these problems, democratic governments have failed to consolidate Korea's democracy, and finally, contributed unintentionally to the comeback to government of the old authoritarian groups, which attempt to put Korean society back to the pre-democracy conditions.

Pre-1987 period – ‘ Transplanted, but failed ’ democracy

In September 1945, when American troops entered the southern part of Korea after the surrender of Japanese armed forces, they found a country with no experience of a democracy. Before Japan annexed the Kingdom of Joseon in 1910, the political model was an absolute monarchy. The social and cultural system was deeply penetrated by Neo-Confucian philosophy, and the economic system was predominated by feudalism, with a rudimentary market system based on agriculture and almost with no modern industrial structure (Nahm, 1993). Due to the internal schism between domestic social-political groups and also to the rise of the Cold War during the American occupation, Korea ended up with the establishment of a separate government in the southern part of the Korean peninsula.

Although the U.S. helped lawmakers to transplant various institutions of ‘ American democracy ’, the young Korean democracy faced highly unfavorable conditions (Lee, 1990 : 19). The vast majority of Korean citizens had little understanding of democratic idea itself and its institutions. The political party system was highly fragmented and polarized. Most of political parties were at best proto-parties, founded by and grounded in a few charismatic leaders as political machines. The division of Korea into two hostile states and the subsequent Korean War (1950-53) seriously hampered the development of a stable party system composed of ideologically diversified parties. Given the hegemony of anti-Communism and rightist nationalism, even liberal or centrist, let alone moderate socialist, parties were suspected of supporting North Korean regime, and for that reason, they were brutally oppressed.

During the 1950s, President *Rhee Syng Man* gradually consolidated his one-man rule. In 1960, he was expelled from the presidency by those students and urban dwellers, who got angry at a widespread election fraud, and went into exile. A new constitution, which provided for a cabinet system and a bicameral parliament, was passed in June 1960, and subsequently, the Second Republic was inaugurated. However, the new *Chang Myon* government, which originated from the former opposition party, became widely corrupt and, moreover, was incapable of managing popular political-economic demands. In consequence, Korean democracy became uncontrollable and, finally, a group of military officers led by General *Park Chung-hee* led a coup and took over government power in May 1961. The same military officers stepped down from duty and became politicians, and they wrote a new constitution, which restored the presidential system. It was approved by a referendum in December 1962, and under the new constitution, civilian-turned *Park* was elected as president in October 1963.

He was reelected for another four-year term in 1967, and during his second term, amended the constitution so as to serve a third term. In the 1971 presidential election *Park* barely defeated the candidate of the opposition party, *Kim Dae-jung*, despite of massive election fraud. *Park* declared martial law and suspended the constitution in October 1972, mainly because he was afraid that he might be unable to win the next election under the current constitution which stipulated the direct election by popular vote. After dissolving the National Assembly and banning the activities of political parties, he drafted a constitutional amendment

with the advice of a handful of scholars and lawyers. In December 1972, the notorious *Yushin* (reform) Constitution was legitimized through the national referendum. It allowed Park to stay in power as president indefinitely by abrogating the three-term limit, and institutionalize indirect election of president through the National Council for Reunification (*Tongil Juche Kukmin Hoiui*). It gave extraordinary power to the president, such as the right to dissolve the National Assembly, the extra-constitutional power to enact special measures, and the right to nominate one third of the NA members. As a result, the power of the NA was considerably weakened, especially with the power of legislative oversight over the executive branch being eliminated. The *Yushin* system was legitimized by the necessity for strong leadership, which, it was argued, would help stave off the heightened military threat from North Korea amid an eroding American military security commitment and promote economic prosperity by getting rid of 'luxury and inefficiency' of parliamentary politics.

However, as Korean economy went into a deep recession at the end of 1970s and as students' and workers' protest spread over, President *Park* was in big trouble and was finally assassinated by his close aide in October 1979. President *Park*'s death did not lead to democratic opening and consolidation. A brief democratic opening in the spring of 1980 was intercepted by another round of military intervention. Several factors – such as weak political leadership of the transitional government, internal division among political leaders, and economic crisis – provided the military with an opportunity to intervene in politics, as in 1960. After controlling the military through a mutiny on 12 December 1979, a new military group led by General *Chun Doo Hwan* imposed a ban on political activity and brutally repressed the *Kwangju* uprising and other popular protests by massacring a few hundreds of innocent citizens including junior high school girls. They wrote a new constitution and enacted it through national referendum on 27 October 1980. The new constitution explicitly limited the presidency to a seven-year singly term, but gave strong powers to the president, such as the power to disband the NA, impose extraordinary measures, and submit constitutional amendment bills as well as laws.

Transition to democracy in South Korea

Like his predecessors, *Chun* also attempted to extend his term through a constitutional manoeuvre. However, his plots were revealed and triggered an avalanche of mass protests. Faced with an unexpectedly strong resistance, President *Chun* changed his mind so that he could control the government behind the scene by supporting his successor through the existing constitutional rule of indirect election of president. Opposition parties and civil society did not accept it, and instead, pushed very hard for a direct election of president after the revision of the existing constitution. A couple of incidents intensified popular protests. In May 1986, four Seoul National University students burned themselves to death, calling for the "overthrow of the Fifth Republic regime". In January 1987, a Catholic priest disclosed the fact that a college student, *Park Jong-chul* was tortured to death. In May 1987, another college student from Yonsei University, *Lee Han-yol*, died during the anti-government demonstration. At this point, the middle class people began to join the anti-dictatorship demonstration (Kil, 2001: 49-50). The *Chun* government seriously deliberated on the deployment of military force to suppress popular protests. However, the U. S. government warned against it, and President *Chun* succumbed and *Roh Tae-woo*, the candidate of the ruling Democratic Justice Party (DJP), made the June 29 Declaration, in which *Roh* acceded to all of the opposition's demands, thereby defusing the political crisis and providing for the first direct election of the president in 16 years. The June Declaration paved the way for a 'transition by pact' to democracy (Adesnik and Kim, 2008).

Korea's path of democratic transition consists of two compromises between authoritarian groups and the opposition (Lee, 2007). The first compromise occurred when the old authori-

tarian elites and their political opposition reached the agreement on the development of a democratic procedure in order to avoid mutual catastrophe. They were afraid of interference by extremists on both the right and the left, namely, the military and the students (Saxer, 2003 : 51). The first compromise gave birth to a new constitution and, subsequently, two founding elections – 13th Presidential election in December 1987 and 13th NA election in April 1988. In the 13th presidential election, *Roh Tae-woo*, candidate of the old guard (DJP), won the presidency, one of the most important reasons being the failure of two opposition leaders, *Kim Young-sam* and *Kim Dae-jung*, to form a united front. The 13th NA election ended up with the situation in which no single party, including the ruling party, occupied an absolute majority, thereby being unable to pass legislation.

The second compromise was made possible under the circumstances that no political party took an absolute majority in the National Assembly. President *Roh's* ruling party, Democratic Justice Party (DJP), took only 42 percent of 299 seats in the National Assembly election in 1988. The first opposition party, Party for Peace and Democracy (PPD) led by *Kim Dae-jung* won 71 seats, and the second opposition party, Reunification Democratic Party (RDP) led by *Kim Young-sam* and the third opposition party, New Democratic Republican Party (NDRP) led by *Kim Jong-pil*, took 59 and 35 seats each. President *Roh* needed cooperation from opposition parties in order to pass legislation or to implement policy. Moreover, he was lack of legitimacy because he was also a member of a military regime although he was elected by popular vote. As a result, he could not meet the expectations of the public, particularly, their desires for political and economic democracy and lost control of social unrest caused by students' demonstrations and workers' strikes. Opposition leaders, *Kim Dae-jung*, *Kim Young-sam* and *Kim Jong-pil*, had strong ambitions to be the next president but none of them could assure that they would secure sufficient votes to win the election. It was under these circumstances that in February 1990 President *Roh* and two opposition leaders, *Kim Young-sam* and *Kim Jong-pil*, agreed to combine their parties into a new party, Democratic Liberal Party (DLP) in order to form a " grand conservative coalition " (*Bosu-dae-yonhap*) (Lee, 2007 : 111).

Korea's path of democratic transition consisted of two rounds of compromises between the old authoritarian groups and the oppositions. The first one happened in 1987, after DJP's new leader *Roh Tai-woo* announced June Declaration, and the second occurring in 1990, when the ruling party and two opposition parties agreed to merge into a new party, as shown above. The first political pact between the old authoritarian and opposition parties made it possible to prevent the head-on clash between the old authoritarian groups and the oppositions. The second compromise between the two groups provided an important chance for the first genuine civilian government to be given birth to, by peacefully taking power from authoritarian elites. But, at the same time, the same elite pacts left the old authoritarian groups' resources and power bases intact, thereby making the consolidation and deepening of Korean democracy.

From the perspective of the old authoritarian groups, one of the most important benefits accrued from two rounds of political pact was that they could get access to government institutions such as presidency and National Assembly, and also exert a considerable influence on public policy making, especially on the rule-of-game related to election of legislators. Since the mid-1990s, civic organizations or new social movement organizations continually demanded reform in electoral system – for example, a radical increase in proportional representation from the current 20~25 percent to 33~50 percent – so that new parties could have a better chance to get access to government power. However, as shown in Table 1 and Table 2, by adhering to the old system, they successfully resisted such an electoral reform which might lead to a loss in NA seats.

Table 1. The Electoral system as of November 2009

Assembly	No. of ballots per elector	Tier	Electoral formula	District magnitude	No. of districts	Assembly size	Party threshold
13 th (1988)	1	L ¹	Plurality	1	224	299	5 constituency seat
13 th (1988)	1	H ²	LR-Hare	75	1 ⁵	299	5 constituency seats
14 th (1992)	1	L	Plurality	1	237	299	3% of valid votes or 5 constituency seats
14 th (1992)	1	H	LR-Hare	65	1 ⁴	299	3% of valid votes or 5 constituency seats
15 th (1996)	1	L	Plurality	1	253	299	5% or 5 district seats
15 th (1996)	1	H	LR-Hare	46	1 ⁷	299	5% or 5 district seats
16 th (2000)	1	L	Plurality	1	227	273	~
16 th (2000)	1	H	LR-Hare	46	1 ⁷	273	~
17 th (2004)	2	L	Plurality	1	243 ³	299	3% or 5 district seats
17 th (2004)	2	H	LR-Hare	56	1 ⁸	299	3% or 5 district seats
18 th (2008)	2	L	Plurality	1	245	299	~
18 th (2008)	2	H	LR-Hare	54	1 ⁸	299	~

1. L - largest remainder

2. H - Hare quota

3. Ratio of voters, largest to average constituency size, was reduced to 3:1.

4. Voting age was lowered to 19.

5. If one party wins at least half of constituency seats, proportional representation seats are allocated to all the parties which obtained at least 5 seats, according to the portion of each party's seats in the constituency; if all the parties gain less than half of constituency seats, the strongest party is awarded half of the national list seats. The remaining seats are allocated to the parties which obtain at least 5 seats in the NA.

6. Proportional representation seats are allocated to the parties, which obtain at least 5 seats in the NA or at least 3 percent of the total valid constituency votes, in proportion to the seats they obtain.

7. Both in the 15th and 16th NA elections, after one seat was allocated to those parties which obtained 3~5% of constituency votes, the remaining proportional representation seats were allocated to the parties, which obtain at least 5 seats in the NA or at least 5 percent of the total valid constituency votes, in proportion to the seats they obtain.

8. From the 17th NA election, the number of seats on proportional representation is 54. These seats are divided proportionately among the political parties based upon their votes obtained in the districts, on condition that they have obtained at least 3% of the total valid votes cast or secured five district constituency seats or more.

Source : Kim and Park (2009)

Table 2. Parliamentary Elections (1988~2008)

Party	1988		1992		1996		2000		2004 ²		2008	
	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes
Total	299	100	299	100	299	100	273	100	299	100	299	100
DJP	125	34.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
PPD	70	19.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
RDP	59	23.8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
NDRP	35	15.6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hankyoreh DP	1	1.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DLP	-	-	149	38.5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DP	-	-	97	29.2	15	11.2	-	-	-	-	-	-
UPP	-	-	31	17.4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
NPRP	-	-	1	1.8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
NKP	-	-	-	-	139	34.5	-	-	-	-	-	-
NCNP	-	-	-	-	79	25.3	-	-	-	-	-	-
ULD	-	-	-	-	50	16.2	17	9.8	4	3.0	-	-
ULD	-	-	-	-	50	16.2	17	9.8	0	3.0	-	-
GNP	-	-	-	-	-	-	133	39.0	100	38.0	131	43.5
GNP	-	-	-	-	-	-	133	39.0	21	36.0	22	37.7
MDP	-	-	-	-	-	-	115	35.9	5	8.0	-	-
MDP	-	-	-	-	-	-	115	35.9	4	7.0	-	-
DPP	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	3.7	-	-	-	-
KNP	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.0 ¹	-	-	-	-
Uri-Party	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	129	42.0	-	-
Uri-Party	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	23	38.0	-	-
United DP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	66	28.9
United DP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	15	25.2
KDLP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	4.0	2	3.4
KDLP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	13.0	3	5.7
New Progressive Party									-	-	0	1.3
New Progressive Party									-	-	0	2.9
National Unity Party ²¹									1	0.0	-	-
National Unity Party ²¹									0	0.0	-	-
Pro-Park	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	3.7
Pro-Park	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	13.2
LFP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	14	5.7
LFP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	6.8
CKP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.4
CKP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	3.8
Independents	9	4.8	21	11.5	16	11.8	5	9.4	2	5.0	25	11.1

1. One seat from *Chungchongnam-do*. 2. Electoral formula changed from one vote to two vote per person. The upper column for seats in constituencies while the lower for seats in party-list representation.

At any rate, it was only after the inauguration of President *Kim Young-sam* in February 1993 that the first step of democratization – that is, democratic transition – completed and the second step of democratization – that is, democratic consolidation – began. However, it was neither smooth nor successful. Largely due to the nature of the grand coalition, President *Kim Young-sam*, the first civilian president in 32 years of Korea's political history, had to meet many

difficulties in implementing social, political reforms which were needed to consolidate a fledgling democracy. Among other things, he had to confront internal division and conflict between democratic and authoritarian groups. President *Kim* found himself being squeezed in between, on the one hand, the need for implementing reform policies consistently, and, on the other hand, the need for maintaining the coalition (Lee, 2007). In addition, he had not secured popular support which was urgently needed for successful implementation of democratic reforms. For many social groups, especially trade unions and civic organizations, were hesitant to support President *Kim* mainly due to his past political decision, i.e., his collaboration with anti-democratic, authoritarian groups. Thus, without popular support, he had to confront the old guard within his party (DLP) and push his reform efforts on his own. President *Kim*'s reform efforts were made in many areas, such as the military and national security agency's influence on or interference in politics, electoral laws, industrial relations system, education, and judicial system.

Thus, despite of such unfavorable conditions, President *Kim Young-sam* contributed to the democratic consolidation. First of all, he succeeded in re-establishing the supremacy of civilian control over the military apparatus and national security agency. Immediately after inauguration, he took decisive action to disband the politicized clique of military officers that had served as a pillar of military and as a national security apparatus under the old authoritarian regimes. Then, he proceeded to push the National Assembly to revise laws on major intelligence agencies, that is, Korean CIA and Military Security Command, which would oblige them to disengage from politics and put them under congressional oversight with respect to their expenditure, personnel management and intelligence gathering. The new law prohibited these intelligence agencies from conducting surveillance of government officials, professional politicians, and private persons. President *Kim* went even further. He prosecuted two former presidents, ex-generals *Chun* and *Roh*, on charges of corruption, military mutiny, treason for staging the December 1979 coup, and the massacre of civilians during the *Kwangju* uprising in 1980. Such measures and actions helped South Korea being liberated from its authoritarian past (Im, 2004 : 183-184).

On the other hand, President *Kim* failed in most of other areas. Since there was neither parliamentary nor popular support, reform efforts in these areas were driven by *Kim*'s will, and, what was worse, they were implemented inconsistently. As a result, he failed not only in implementing most of reform policies, but also in securing popular support. As a result, his popularity plummeted at the end of his tenure when a corruption scandal involving his own son and close advisors broke out. His approval rate dropped sharply from 70.9 percent to 6.1 percent in December 1997.

In short, President *Kim Young-sam*, who took power through a grand coalition with the old authoritarian groups, did not succeed in consolidating Korean democracy. This task was naturally given to President *Kim Dae-jung*, an opposition leader excluded from the previous ruling coalition in 1990. He took a chance to be elected as the 15th president, only by aligning with the leader of *Chungchong* – based conservative party(ULD), *Kim Jong-pil*. What was worse, President *Kim*'s ruling coalition, National Congress for New Politics(NCNP) and United Liberal Democrats(ULD), occupied a few seats less than a majority in the National Assembly during most of his presidential term. Despite such unfavorable conditions, President *Kim Dae-jung* contributed much to the consolidation of democracy.

First of all, his inauguration as president made Korean democracy pass the first 'turnover test' (Huntington, 1991) and put it on the road to full consolidation(Diamond and Shin, 2000 : 3). In addition, during his presidency, civil society expanded widely and developed rapidly, thereby improving political accountability. Between 1997 and 2000, the number of civil associations increased from 3,500 to 6,000. If local branches being included, the number doubled, from 10,000 to 20,000, respectively. These civil associations regularly monitored behaviors of

government officials and politicians, making public and taking to the court a variety of illegal, corrupt, or irrational (anti-democratic) behaviors (Im, 2004 : 186). Furthermore, President *Kim Dae-jung* contributed much to improving and expanding South-North Korea relationship, by realizing the historical summit meeting with *Kim Jong-il*, North Korean leader in June 2000. Lastly, he successfully managed the financial crisis, which broke out at the end of President *Kim Young-sam*'s term, by implementing free trade policies and by introducing tripartite consultation and social safety nets system. What is most important was the June 2000 Summit Meeting of South and North Korean Leaders, which transformed a up-to-then confrontational South-North Korean relations into a more cooperative and friendly one.

Despite these contributions, President *Kim Dae-jung* also left a few of negative legacies which had impacts on the democratic consolidation. First, *Kim Dae-jung* government was inaugurated through and sustained by a political pact between two political parties, each of which had its stronghold in *Jeolla* provinces and in *Chungchong* provinces respectively although they rarely shared ideological or policy stances. Moreover, it was a minority government even if two coalition partners' seats were added up. As a result, President *Kim Dae-jung* and his party had to compromise with conservative anti-communist parties to pass its legislations. One of the most prominent examples is the National Security Act.² As a victim of the notorious NSA, President *Kim* avowed to revise it if he inaugurated as president. However, largely due to the intransigent opposition from conservative politicians, including Grand Korea Party and United Liberal Democrats, which occupied the majority of seats in the National Assembly, he failed to keep his promise. As well known, NSA has been one of the most ' efficient ' institutions, with which anti-communist authoritarian groups could maintain their vested interests by suppressing social or political forces of socialist or even liberal kind (Choi, 2003).

Second, IMF and other international financial institutes – World Bank and ADB – imposed very harsh conditions for their emergency loans. Terms of loan included financial market liberalization, labor market flexibility, high interest rate, cut in government expenditure, corporate tax reduction, and so on. Such policy prescriptions were said to originate from neo-liberalism or Anglo-American model of capitalism, and led to a skyrocketing bankruptcy of especially small – and medium-size firms, a high unemployment rate, a sharp increase in non-standard employment, and even neoliberal restructuring (i.e., downsizing or rationalizing) of state apparatus and policies. In doing so, President *Kim* eroded his traditional power basis - especially, workers and middle classes(Jung, 2005).

Third, lastly, like his precedent, his son was also involved in political corruption. Although the amount of illegal contributions collected by his son was much smaller, compared to those of *Chun Doo-hwan* and *Roh Tae-woo*, former presidents, corruption scandals by his son turned out to be a fatal blow to the authority and leadership of President *Kim* and his government.

Let me summarize legacies which two President *Kim*'s handed down to the next generation of Korean democracy. Concerning positive legacies, first, during a decade under the two *Kim*'s presidencies, electoral competition was institutionalized, political rights and civil liberties were restored to some extent, and governments became more or less accountable and functional. As mentioned in the first part of this paper, since the founding election of South Korea's new democracy in 1987 through the end of President *Kim Dae-jung*'s tenure, Koreans elected three presidents in consecutive five-year intervals and four National Assemblies in four-year intervals. Elections at the sub-national level to choose both heads of local government and councilors of local council were also held three times, that is, in 1995, 1998, and 2002. In addition, losers in the elections at various levels never called into question the fairness and free atmosphere of electoral process. Some political rights and civil liberties were also restored by amending some clauses in the notorious National Security Law, which had very often been abused for the political interests of conservative authoritarian groups.

Despite of these contributions to South Korea's democratic consolidation, two President *Kim's* left some legacies which had negative impacts on the next generation of Korean democracy.

First, the two *Kim's* were incapacitated in the second half of their presidencies because of corruption scandals that involved their families and close associates. In this respect, they were not much different from their precedents. It is true that the amount of illegal contributions collected by the sons of *Kim Young-sam* and *Kim Dae-jung* were much smaller than those of *Chun Doo-hwan* and *Roh Tae-woo*. In addition, as party bosses, they might have needed to raise money through informal political rings with businessmen so as to distribute political funds to their followers. Nonetheless, the corruption scandals involving their sons hit a fatal blow on the authority and leadership of the democratic governments of the two *Kim's*. (Im, 2004: 191-2). Transparency International (TI) has placed South Korea as the most corrupt country among OECD members, although it slowly improved. CPI for South Korea was 4.2 in 1998, 4.0 in 2000, and 4.5 in 2002. It ranked 43rd in 1998, 48th in 2000, and 40th in 2002.

A rampant corruption has had negative impacts on the rule of law. According to a public opinion polls conducted by Sejong Research Institute in 1995, respondents who believed keeping laws and rules would mean a loss amounted to 67.7 percent (Sejong Research Institute, 1995). A recent survey conducted in 2008 shows that this does not change much. According to it, a majority (62.8%) of respondents answered that laws were not well observed in our society, and as a reason for it, a third of them (34.3%) mentioned law-keeping rather causes a loss, while a fifth (20.1%) citing other people do not keep laws (Korea Legislation Research Institute, 2008).

Another negative legacy of two democratic governments is regionalism. In South Korea, voters tended to vote according to their hometown self-identification, and contenders for presidency and National Assembly mobilized regionalist interests and sentiments as the main vehicle for obtaining votes. Regionalist voting and mobilization was also present under the authoritarian *Park Chung-hee* and *Chun Doo-hwan*, but it was not dominant. The dominant cleavage was a urban-rural division, where rural residents voted for the ruling party and its candidates while urbanites voting for the opposition party and its candidates. Such voting behavior and mobilization based on a rural-urban cleavage was transformed into regionalist one during the founding elections held in 1987 and in 1988. Three factors contributed to regionalist politics in South Korea.

First, as two prominent opposition leaders, representing two different regions, *Kim Young-sam* and *Kim Dae-jung*, co-operated in their struggle against authoritarian regimes until June 1987 Declaration, but thereafter they failed to form a united front acceptable to all democrats. Instead, they ran and competed for presidency. Second, since they shared democratic credibility and almost the same ideological and policy stances, they chose to appeal to voters as a favorite son of their respective home provinces. Third, it was in a sense inevitable for them to employ regionalist mobilization strategy, largely due to the fact that other strategies, for example, ones based on class or religious divisions were long time suppressed and institutionalized in NSA by the authoritarian regimes. Under such circumstances, a regionalist mobilization strategy was less risky and more efficient than others, which might be considered as more controversial and therefore more risky. Moreover, the old authoritarian groups represented by *Roh Tai-woo*, candidate of the ruling party (DJP), intentionally encouraged the rivalry between the two opposition leaders by instigating regionalist sentiments.

Accordingly, voters were divided along the regional division and since then, the pattern continues to occur until now. For example, as shown Table 3, in the 13th Presidential election,

Kim Dae-jung received an absolute majority (87%) of votes in his home province – *Cholla*, whereas in *Kyungsang* province he received only 3 percent. *Kim Young-sam* won the majority of votes (53.7%) in his home province (South *Kyungsang*) while obtaining only 1.2 percent in *Cholla* province in 1987 Presidential election. *Roh Tai-woo* won more than two thirds of votes in his home province (North *Kyungsang*) while obtaining only one third in South *Kyungsang* and 9.9 percent of votes in *Cholla*. *Kim Jong-pil* received the most votes (34.6%) in his home province (*Choongcheong*) whereas obtaining only less than 10 percent in other provinces. This pattern of regionalist voting was, though to a smaller degree, reproduced in the 13th NA election held in April 1988. *Kim Young-sam*'s South *Kyungsang* based party (RDP) received the more numerous votes than other parties, *Kim Dae-jung*'s *Cholla* based party (PPD) winning more than two thirds of votes in *Cholla*, *Kim Jong-pil*'s *Choongchung* based party (NDRP) 42 percent of votes in *Choongcheong* province, and *Roh*'s North *Kyungsang* based party (DJP) 50 percent of votes in North *Kyungsang* province, respectively.

Once installed in the founding elections in 1987 and in 1988, regionalist voting pattern was reproduced and even expanded especially after February 1990 when three parties merged – DJP, RDP, and NDRP – to form a hegemonic party – DLP. The three-party merger was based on a grand regional coalition – North and South *Kyungsang* and *Chungcheong* – and brought about a grand regionalism aiming to isolate and exclude a small minority region – *Cholla*. Since then, regional hostilities, mostly between *Kyungsang* and *Cholla* province while *Choongcheong* province switching its coalition partners from election to election, have become rampant and threatening to national integrity, and in every round of national election regionalist voting pattern recurred, as seen in Table 3. The 15th Presidential election was the high time because *Kim Dae-jung*, who had lost two consecutive presidential elections since 1987, formed another political pact with a conservative but regionalist party (UDP), by opening advocating the so-called defensive regionalism.

To summarize, both *Kim Young-sam* and *Kim Dae-jung*, together with other major politicians such as *Roh Tai-woo* and *Kim Jong-pil*, were to be blamed for a rampant and divisive regionalism in South Korean politics. Like previous presidents, in the presidency, each of them appointed ministers and other high-ranking political appointees on the basis of regionalism and continued to rely on support from regionalist parties or party coalitions, thereby reinforcing regionalist tendency of politics (Im, 2005 : 188-9). Moreover, in 1996, *Kim Dae-jung*, who was desperate to win the 15th Presidential election, openly proclaimed and made a region-based political pact with an anti-communist conservative party leader⁴ (*Kim Jong-pil* of United Liberal Democrats, ULP) which had a stronghold in *Choongcheong* province (Hwang, 1996). It was for this reason that President *Kim Dae-jung* and his party was blamed for divisive regionalism although he successfully held a historic North-South Korea summit meeting and contributed much to coping with an economic crisis.

It was under these circumstances that *Noh Moo-hyun* and his Uri-Party succeeded in winning both presidency in 2002 and the NA in 2004. *Noh* and Uri-Party members stood for anti-regionalism and party democracy, and the public responded. Both the 16th Presidential election and the 17th NA election, held in 2002 and in 2004 respectively, were the occasions in which regionalist election campaigns and voting behaviors were the weakest since 1987. However, unfortunately, it turned out to be an episode. The subsequent elections proved that regionalism was still lingering. *Kyungsang* based GNP and its presidential candidate, *Lee Myung-bak*, won the majority of votes in their home province, while *Cholla* based DP and its candidate, *Chung Dong-young*, winning the majority of votes in their home province.

Table 3. Regional Voting Pattern in South Korea

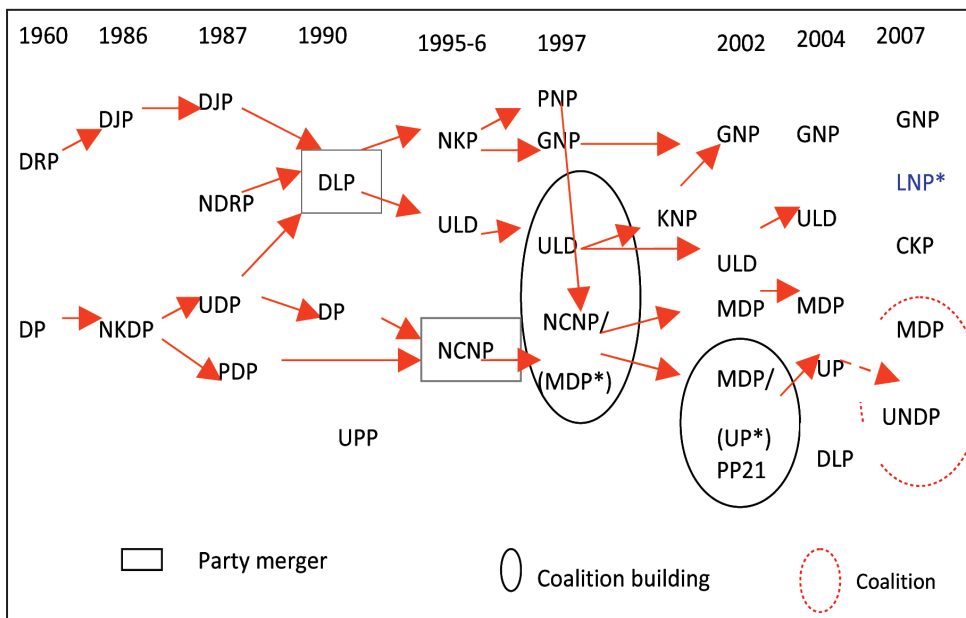
Election	Province	DJP ¹	RDP	NDRP ²	PPD ³
13 th President (1987)	Kyungsang South	36.6	53.7	6.9	2.1
	Kyungsang North	68.1	26.6	2.5	2.4
	Cholla	9.9	1.2	0.5	88.4
	Choongcheong	33.1	20.1	34.6	11.9
13 th NA (1988)	Kyungsang South	36.1	45.7	8.6	1.5
	Kyungsang North	49.9	26.1	14.9	7.2
	Cholla	23.0	0.9	1.6	69.1
	Choongcheong	34.7	15.3	42.1	3.0
14 th NA (1992)	Kyungsang			48.0	12.0
	Cholla			24.0	62.0
	Choongcheong			40.0	23.0
14 th President (1992)	Kyungsang			65.0	10.0
	Cholla			4.0	91.0
	Choongcheong			36.0	27.0
15 th NA (1996)	Kyungsang		48.0	14.0	4.0
	Cholla		18.0	0.0	72.0
	Choongcheong		28.0	47.0	8.0
15 th President (1997)	Kyungsang			58.0	13.0
	Cholla			3.0	93.0
	Choongcheong			27.0	43.0
16 th NA (2000)	Kyungsang		56.0	7.0	13.0
	Cholla		4.0	2.0	67.0
	Choongcheong		23.0	35.0	30.0
16 th President (2002)	Kyungsang			58.0	25.0
	Cholla			5.0	92.0
	Choongcheong			31.0	52.0
17 th NA (2004)	Kyungsang		52.0	0.0	0.0 (32.0) ⁴
	Cholla		0.0	0.0	31.0 (55.0)
	Choongcheong		23.0	23.0	3.0 (45.0)
17 th President (2007)	Kyungsang			62.0	10.0
	Cholla			9.0	80.0
	Choongcheong			37.0	22.0
18 th NA (2008)	Kyungsang		52.0	2.0	6.0
	Cholla		6.0	0.0	59.0
	Choongcheong		32.0	34.0	23.0

Note : **1** - Kyungsang Province based parties (DJP, DLP, NKP, GNP) or candidates ; **2** - Choongchung Province based parties (NDRP, ULD, LFP) or candidates ; **3** - Cholla Province based parties (PPD, DP, NCNP, MDP, DP) or candidates ; **4** - Uri-Party (An anti-regionalist party, splintered from MDP and having a stronger support in Cholla province than in any other region.

Source : NEC, General Election, Presidential Election, each year

Third, still another negative legacy that two presidents of democratic government left is 'personalized' political parties and 'underdeveloped' party system. Since 1987, two Kim's created their own parties, then dissolved and merged with other parties, and split and recreated new parties, to meet their personal ambition or political needs, as shown in Table 4. To be specific, in 1987, *Kim Young-sam* created Reunification and Democratic Party (RDP) to run for president while *Kim Dae-jung* formed Party for Peace and Democracy (PPD). After losing the election, the former dissolved his party to join a grand regional coalition party (Democratic Liberal Party, DLP) in 1990, while the latter formed a new party (Democratic Party, DP) in 1990, by incorporating a minority of RDP who chose to remain after a majority of RDP members joined a new DLP. *Kim Young-sam*, once in power, reformulated the ruling DLP into NKP (New Korea Party) in 1996 after former NDRP members left DLP to form a new party called ULD (United Liberal Democrats) in early 1995. *Kim Dae-jung* left South Korea in 1992 to travel U.K. and the U.S.A. after being defeated in the 14th Presidential election, and in 1995 returned to form a new party (NCNP, National Congress for New Politics). Then, he won the presidency in 1997, through a political pact with *Kim Jong-pil*, *Choongchung* - based party leader.

Figure 1. Party system and Coalition-building (1960-2008)



Source : Kim, Youngmi. 2008, " Intra-party politics and minority coalition government in South Korea, " *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 9, No. 3, pp. 367-398.

Such a frequent formation and dissolution of political parties would be made possible only if a party leader held a strong authority or charisma. Each of them, *Kim Young-sam* and *Kim Dae-jung*, was such a charismatic leader largely because of their long-time leadership in democratization movement since the early 1970s.

They ran their respective parties autocratically as if they were 'feudal lords'. They controlled almost every aspect of party life. They nearly handpicked candidates for elected officials (i.e., parliamentary members), appointed party secretaries and officials, and distributed political funds to their followers in return for their loyalty. Such an autocratic leadership could be somewhat justified under the old authoritarian regimes. Since opposition parties were continually under heavy and close surveillance by the police and the national security agency, they would need a strong leadership to maintain organizational integrity. However, they tried to keep a firm control over their party even after the transition to democracy, thereby impeding the rise of new leadership fit for democratic society and the development of a responsive and accountable party system based on policy difference, which, in turn, would arise from other social cleavages such as class, gender, or generation (Im, 2005: 189).

Table 4. Life cycle of Korea's political parties (1981~2009)

Party ¹	Existed	Status	NA elections ²	Presidential elections ³	Durability (unit: months)
DJP	1/81-2/90	Merged into DLP	3	1	109
RDP	5/87-2/90	Merged into DLP	1	1	33
NDRP	11/87-2/90	Merged into DLP	1	1	27
DLP	2/90-2/96	Renamed NKP	2	1	72
NKP	2/96-11/97	Renamed GNP	1	-	21
DP(2)	9/90-11/97	Merged with GNP	2	1	86
GNP	11/97-11/09		3	3	145
PPC	9/07-11/09	Most of members merged with GNP	1	1	27
UPP	2/92-5/96	Dissolved	1	1	25
ULD	2/95-9/07	Merged with GNP	1	-	152
PFP	1/06-2/08	Merged with LFP	-	1	26
LFP	2/08-11/09		1	-	14
KNP	1/81-5/88	Merged into NKDP	3	1	49
DKP	1/81-5/88	Merged into NKDP	3	1	49
NKDP	1/85-5/88	Dissolved	2	-	49
PPD	11/87-4/90	Renamed NDP	1	1	29
DP(1)	6/90-9/90	Merged with DP(2)	-	-	4
NDP	4/90-9/90	Merged with DP(2)	-	-	6
NCNP	9/95-1/00	Renamed MDP	1	1	52
NPP	11/97-9/98	Merged with NCNP	-	1	11
MDP	1/00-2/08	Renamed as DP, then merged with DP(3)	2	2	86
Uri-Party	11/03-8/07	Merged with NUDP	1	-	46
NUDP	8/07-2/08	Merged with DP(3)	-	1	7
DP(3)	2/08-11/09		1	-	14
CKP	10/07-11/09		1	1	26
Hankyereh DP	3/88-7/90	Dissolved	1	-	33
PP(1)	3/88-9/88	Dissolved	1	-	7
PP(2)	11/90-92/5	Dissolved	1	-	19
KDLP	1/00-11/09		3	2	119
NPP	3/08-11/09		1	-	14
Geometric means					46.1

Note : For full names of the above parties, see Appendix 1.

Source : National Election Commission, *White Papers on National Assembly Election (Kukhoiuiwon-seongeo-chongnam)* and *Presidential Election (Daetongnyong-seongeo-chongnam)* (each election), and *Reports on the established parties and preparatory committees for new parties (Jeongdang-deungnok-mit-changdangjunbiwiwonhoi-gyolseong-shingo-hyonhwang)*

Fourth, both *Kim Young-sam* and *Kim Dae-jung* appeared to have no knowledge whatsoever of the potential threat that globalization or neo-liberal reform might pose to democracy or, to be more specific, democratic deepening and consolidation. *Kim Young-sam* was much more interested in obtaining OECD membership or in enhancing South Korean firms' international competitiveness⁴ than in negative effects of globalization. *Kim Dae-jung* had a more concern about borrowing loans from international financial institutes – such as IMF, World Bank, and ADB – and foreign private banks than about the terms of loan. As a result, the former implemented financial market liberalization and labor market reform very quickly without preparing safeguards against speculative capital, while the latter adopted Anglo-American model of capitalism without paying attention to the possible incompatibility of neo-liberal economic policy and social welfare.

However, it was well-known that time that by the mid-1980s, international financial institutes as well as OECD member countries had already been dominated by international financial capital (Robinson, 1996). And international financial capital sought to diffuse Anglo-American model of capitalism, its core element being free capital movement across national borders which required a restructuring of government organization and policy as well as of labor and inter-firm relations (Scott, 1997 ; Crouch and Streek, 1997 ; Kitschelt, et al. 1999). Once implemented in their full force, these policies inevitably accompanied many social problems – for example, increase in irregular employment and in youth unemployment, reduced social welfare benefits, widening (intra- and inter-state) economic inequality, and so on – as well as fierce inter-firm and/or inter-state competition. Most of Latin American countries, which implemented neo-liberal economic policies since the late 1970s and the early 1980s, experienced many problems and difficulties just explained. As a result, these same countries showed many democratic deficiencies (Kleinberg and Clark, 2000 ; Oxhorn and Ducatenzeiler, 1998).

Despite the seriousness of negative impacts which neoliberalism has, the two democratic governments implemented neoliberal policies wholeheartedly without any doubt. As a result, at the second half of *Kim Dae-jung* president's tenure, many problems began to arise, as in many Latin American countries. As shown in Table 5, per capita income (GDP) continued to rise since 1980, from US\$ 1,645 in 1980 to US\$ 11,176 in 1997. In 1998, it plummeted largely due to Korean currency devaluation to US dollar, to US\$ 7,355, but rose up again from 1999, reaching US\$ 11,493 at the end of President *Kim Dae-jung*'s tenure.

However, quality of life deteriorated. Unemployment, especially for youth of 15-25 years olds, ran high during the democratic governments, compared to the previous period. As seen in Table 5, irregular employment increased, especially after President *Kim Dae-jung* inaugurated in 1998, from 45.5 percent of the total employment in 1987 to 46.9 percent in 1998, and again to 51.7 percent at the end of his term in 2002. Accordingly, economic inequality widened. Gini's coefficient rose from 0.304 in 1989 to 0.312 in 2002.

Table 5. Trends in per capita GDP and economic income inequality

	1980	1985	1987	1991	1993	1995	1997	1998	2000	2001	2002
(1)	1645	2309	3321	4435	8177	11432	11176	7355	10841	10162	11493
(2)	5.2 (9.4)	4.0 (7.6)	3.1 (5.9)	2.5 (5.5)	2.9 (6.8)	2.1 (4.6)	2.6 (5.7)	7.0 (12.2)	4.1 (7.6)	3.8 (7.5)	3.1 (6.6)
(3)	-	-	45.5	44.4	41.1	41.9	45.7	46.9	52.1	50.8	51.7
(4)	-	-	0.304*	0.287	0.281	0.284	0.283	0.316	0.317	0.319	0.312

Note : (1) per capita GDP (US\$) (2) Unemployment rate(%). () - youth(15-29 years old) unemployment rate(%) (3) Irregular job (temporary + daily) - % of total employment (4) Gini's coefficient * 1989

Source : Korea Labor Institute. 2006. *KLI Labor Statistics 2006*.

Fifth, lastly, those problems such as political corruption, regionalism, personalized political parties, and economic inequality, which arose during democratic governments of two *Kim*'s, contributed to declining trust in democracy.⁵ According to Doh Chull Shin's survey published in 2001, 46 percent of respondents were very much in favor of democracy, while 45 percent being somewhat in favor of it. An overwhelming majority (91%) were in favor of democracy in principle. However, when asked whether 'democracy is always preferable to other form of government', only 45 percent endorsed democracy unconditionally. This is contrasting to previous survey results. An unconditional support for democracy decreased from 70 percent in 1996, to 69 percent in 1997, then, again 54 percent in 1998 and 55 percent in 1999. In addition, more than a third of Korean people speculated the possibility that an authoritarian regime might sometimes be preferable to democracy. Less than a half answered affirmatively that democracy was working satisfactorily, and approval rate declined from 49 percent in 1997 to 45 percent in 1999(Chu, Diamond and Shin, 2001 : 129).

Hong and Cho's analysis (2006) shows a similar result. As shown in Table 6, although there had been more people who gave priority to economic development than those giving priority to democracy, the proportion increased toward the end of President *Kim Dae-jung*' term. What is worse, as in Table 7, less people tended to believe that democracy mattered for solving economic difficulties. And, people who believe in democratic government's capacity to solve national problems also decreased between 1999 and 2001, as in Table 8. However, distrust in democracy, it is worthwhile to note, does not necessarily mean that South Korea has to abandon democracy altogether (Hong and Cho, 2006 : 128). Nevertheless, it is evident that more people were ready to accept authoritarian government (or national leader) if the circumstances dictated. As shown in Table 9, those who believe democracy is better all the time regardless of circumstances decreased from 68.6 percent in 1997 to 44.6 percent in 2001.

Table 6. Policy priority : economic development vs. democracy (unit : %)

	1997	1998	1999	2001
Economic development	51.2	65.2	49.9	62.6
Democracy	8.8	7.8	14.1	9.8
The same priority	37.7	25.7	35.5	27.3
Don't know	0.4	1.4	0.5	0.4
Number of respondents	1119	1010	1007	1005

Source : Hong and Cho (2006), p. 124

Table 7. How much does democracy contribute to the economic problem-solving

	1999	2001
Very much helpful	4.8	1.8
more or less helpful	40.3	19.2
No difference	44.7	54.1
more or less harmful	8.2	17.6
Very much harmful	2.0	3.8
Don't know/no response	1.0	3.5
Number of respondents	1007	1005

Source : Hong and Cho (2006), p. 126

Table 8. Which form of government is more suitable for problem-solving, democratic or authoritarian government ?

	1997	1999	2001
Democratic	44.0	51.8	38.3
Authoritarian	50.8	42.4	37.1
Not different	N.A	N.A	20.0
Don't know	5.2	5.8	4.6
Number of respondents	1010	1007	1005

Source : Hong and Cho (2006), p. 128

Table 9. Preference in political system

	1997	1998	1999	2001
Democracy is better under all the circumstances	68.6	53.7	55.1	44.6
Authoritarianism is acceptable under certain circumstances	20.6	31.4	30.2	36.9
Don't care	10.8	14.9	14.7	18.5
Number of respondents	1113	1010	1007	1005

Source : Hong and Cho (2006), p. 129

Another failure by a new generation of democrats

It was under these circumstances that *Noh Moo-hyun*, a political outsider and not much influential politician, won the presidency in December 2002. He rose as a hero during the hearings which put former two presidents – *Chun Doo-hwan* and *Roh Tai-woo* – on trial for their mutinies in 1979-1980 and illegal political funds. Afterwards, *Noh*, born in *Kimhae*, *Kyungsang* province, became a symbol of anti-regionalist politics and anti-corruption, by running as a NA candidate of Cholla-based party. In addition, in 2002 when the 16th Presidential election was held, there occurred many important events, including *Busan Asian Games* (where North Korean sports team and cheer leaders took part), *World Cup Games*, and death of two junior-high school girls due to accident by American tanks. These events or accidents made South Korean people take pride in mother country and have sympathy in and solidarity with Korean people. No other politicians within the ruling party (MDP) and candidates of opposition parties (i.e., GNP) could not beat him in patriotism (or anti-Americanism), anti-corruption and anti-regionalism.

Despite such advantages and popular support, he made a fatal mistake at the beginning of his tenure. He broke one of the most important campaign platforms. During the campaign, he promised not to send South Korean troop to Iraq, but he changed his mind and agreed to send them after a summit meeting with American President Bush. Since he owed very much to young generations – so-called the 386 generation – who were said to hold anti-American attitude, his supporters were disillusioned and began to stay aloof from him when President *Noh* betrayed them. In addition, his party took less than a half of NA seats. Furthermore, not a few politicians in his party did not pay due respect to him. As a result, he could not initiate any reform smoothly without resistance from old-generation NA members. There was no choice but to act like 'imperial president' until the 2004 NA election, when his new party (Uri-Party) won a majority of seats.

Uri-Party was a splinter party from Millennium Democratic Party(MDP), which legislators and politicians, sympathetic with President *Noh's* reform policy, formed in November 2003. At

the time of its formation, it was only a minority of 47 out of 299 NA members, but they pushed very hard for reform agendas, for example, anti-regionalism and party democracy, in alignment with President Noh. Moreover, President Noh, being head of minority government, behaved very aggressively, mostly without any meaningful outcome in the concrete form of legislation.

Such behavior of President Noh and Uri-Party aroused strong criticism and anger from opposition parties, finally leading to the impeachment by opposition parties. Three opposition parties agreed to impeach him, and they took action for it in March 2004, when it was about one month before the 17th NA election. Many Korean people, especially the younger generations, rose to protest impeachment by opposition parties, which were perceived as corrupt, regionalist, and anti-democratic by. The 16th NA election held in 2004 ended up with a complete victory of Noh's party, obtaining an absolute majority of seats in the NA. Noh became the first president of democratic governments who enjoyed a majority in the NA. (See Table 2)

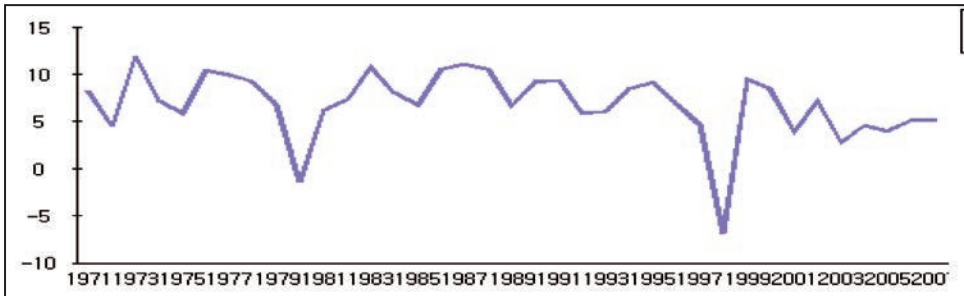
Despite of such advantage, President Noh also failed to consolidate Korean democracy. First of all, as his precedent democratic governments, his government pursued apparently contradictory policies. His foreign and economic policies were on the same track of pro-American and neoliberal ideology, while social policy and political reform were more or less progressive, more specifically egalitarian and liberal-individualist. As mentioned above, he changed his stance toward the U.S. already at the beginning of his presidency, and he continued his predecessor's capital and labor market policy based on market liberalism while putting patched on social welfare system. In addition, his government gave a high priority to political reform which aimed to make South Korea a full-blown liberal democracy, through revision of notorious National Security Act, Law of Private Schools, Law on Gender Equality, and so on.

As a result, President Noh and Uri-Party contributed to the expanding or deepening of democracy, but at the same time, they undermined the very social base of democracy, failing to consolidate it.

Toward the end of President Noh's presidential term, South Korean people came to see the slowdown of economic growth and the shrinking middle class or the increasing economic inequality.

Four decades ago, as shown in Figure 2, GDP per capita was comparable with levels in the poorer countries of Africa and Asia. It sustained double-digit economic growth for decades, growing faster than any other major economy in the 20th century. As a result, today the economy of Korea is a highly developed trillion dollar economy that is the fourth largest in Asia and 13th in the world, and its GDP per capita is roughly the same as that of Greece and Spain. Although the Asian financial crisis of 1997-98, however, forced the economic growth rate to plunge by 6.9% in 1998, it recovered by 9.5% in 1999 and 8.5% in 2000. Growth fell back to 3.3% in 2001 because of the slowing global economy, and falling exports. Led by consumer spending and exports, growth in 2002 was an impressive 7%. That was the last to see the growth rate rising above 5%. Between 2003 and 2007, growth moderated to about 4-5% annually. Compared to other high-income economies, this is still high. And per capita GDP continued to rise during Noh Moo-hyun government, showing a 80 percent increase from US\$ 12,100 in 2002 to US\$ 21,695 in 2007. See Table 9. However, since Korean voters were used to a two-digit growth rate, they considered a growth lower than 5 percent as economic stagnation. Moreover, benefits of economic growth were not distributed among the populace. In other words, as we will see soon, only a small portion benefited from it.

Figure 2. Economic growth rate



Source : National Statistics Office

Moreover, economic inequality deteriorated since 1997. As shown in Table 10, Gini's coefficient for two and more member urban households rose from 0.285 in 1996, to 0.298 in 2002, and then, to 0.306 in 2007. The absolutely poor increased from 4.6% in 1996 to 8.6% in 1998, dropping to 4.7% in 2002 and rising again to 6.9% in 2005. Especially, according to National Statistics Office, during the period from 2003 to 2007, average annual incomes of bottom 10% in income distribution increased from 9.3 million won to 11.81 million won, showing a 25.8% rise, while those of top 10% rising from 83.83 million won to 106.59 million won, a 27.2% increase. It means that economic growth benefited more the wealthy than the poor. When the value of real estate, like the price of home and land, is taken into account, then economic inequality became bigger. The Gini's coefficient of housing rose from 0.489 in 1993 to 0.568 in 2006.

Table 10. Trends in per capita GDP and economic income inequality

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
(1)	12,100	13,480	15,082	17,531	19,722	21,695	19,231
(2)	3.3 7.0	3.6 8.0	3.7 8.3	3.7 8.0	3.5 7.9	3.2 7.2	3.2 7.2
(3)	51.7	49.5	48.8	47.9	47.3	46.0	44.4
(4)	0.298	0.298	0.304	0.304	0.303	0.306	0.306

Note : (1) per capita GDP (US\$) (2) Unemployment rate(%), () - youth(15-29 years old) unemployment rate(%) (3) Irregular job (temporary + daily) - % of total employment (4) Gini's coefficient

Source : Korea Labor Institute. 2006. *KLI Labor Statistics 2008*.

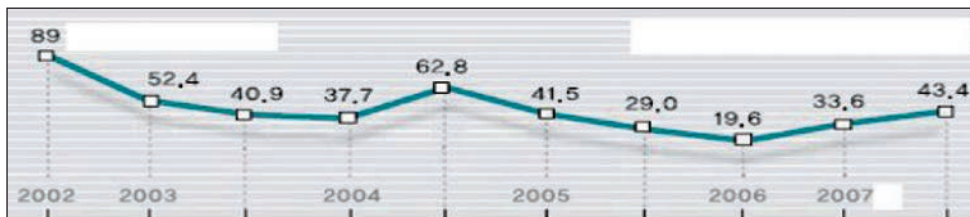
Recognizing the seriousness of economic inequality, *Noh Moo-hyun* government expanded some redistributive policies, including social safety nets, which *Kim Dae-jung* government introduced systematically for the first time in the history of South Korea's social welfare policy. Despite the distribution-oriented policy of the past 10 years, Korea's level of rectifying income inequality through redistribution stood at a mere one fourth the level of the average of the OECD member countries in the 1990s. The nation's immature social security system had failed to redistribute by way of taxation and other public transfers. As a result, two thirds of the middle class have sunk into poverty with only one third climbing up the income ladder to join rich groups. In addition, the number of poor people getting even poorer has rapidly increased, driving more and more people into absolute poverty. A special mention has to be made. *Noh Moo-Hyun* government introduced a comprehensive real estate tax system, which imposed

more burden on the rich. This infuriated the upper class, especially residing in the “Kangnam” area, the southern part of Han River in Seoul, where typical rich people lived.

In contrast to conservative policies in the realms of economy and foreign relations, Noh’s government, like *Kim Dae-jung*, posed a more or less progressive stance in politics and foreign relations. He recruited many progressive NGO activists and scholars in government posts and attempted to reform some non-democratic political institutions. In addition, he continued President *Kim*’s engagement policy toward North Korea, and, at the same time attempting to change the tone in the Korea-US relations. His neoliberal economic policies and pro-America foreign policy undermined their traditional strongholds, while political reform efforts and pro-North Korea policy stirring up the conservative part of society.

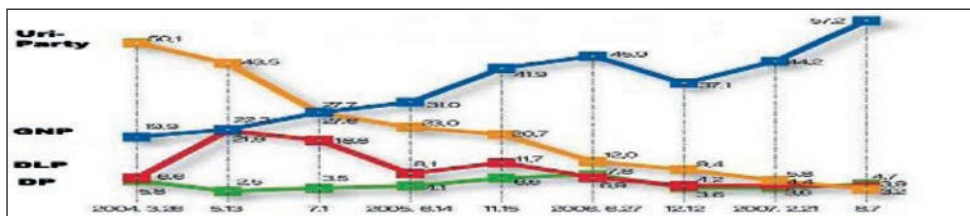
In consequence, President Noh was alienated from social, political forces on both sides of ideological spectrum. His approval rate and public support for *Uri-Party* dropped at end of 2004, and continued to be sluggish. According to a joint polls conducted by *Hankook Daily* and Media Research, as seen in Figure 3, 89 percent of respondents expected at time of his election that President-elect *Noh* would perform his job well. However, after 100 days in his job, his approval rate dropped to 52.3 percent. Afterwards it continued to fall until the impeachment in March 2004. But, it again fell after the impeachment, and stayed low throughout the period of March 2004-December 2006. Since then, it recovered the level of the first year of his term up to 43 percent. In the case of the ruling *Uri-Party*, as shown Figure 4, its public support at the polls recorded highest (50.1%) in March 2004, when President *Noh* was impeached by opposition parties, and then, dropped to 43.5 percent in May 2004, afterwards continuing to fall and finally reaching 4.7 percent in August 2007.

Figure 3. Approval Rate of President Noh Moo-hyun, 2003-2007



Source : *Hankook Daily* & Media Research.

Figure 4. Trend in Public Support for Uri-Party



Source : Lee 2008, *Hankyoreh* 21, December 10, 2008.

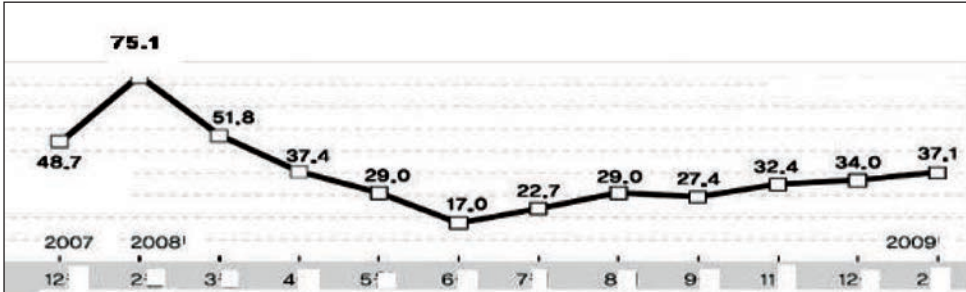
Note : *Uri-Party* (*Yollinwoori-dang*), *GNP* (Grand National Party, *Hannara-dang*), *DLP* (Democratic Labor Party, *Minjunodong-dang*), *DP* (Millenium Democratic Party, *Minju-dang*)

Comeback of the old authoritarian parties in the form of authoritarian neoliberalism

17th Presidential election and the 18th NA election took place under these circumstances. The 17th Presidential election was held on December 19, 2007, and Lee Myung-bak, conservative GNP's candidate, won the presidency. As a result, GNP became to occupy the Blue House for the first time in ten years. Although most of the pre-election polls anticipated his election, it came up as a shock to many Koreans. For GNP's presidential candidate, Lee Myung-bak, was suspected of illegal business activities, and he was also criticized for neoliberal policies, hazardous project, and authoritarian leadership style.⁶ Both his career – as CEO of a big conglomerate and as politician – and his policy stances, South Korean democrats suspected, would put Korean democracy in jeopardy. For, it was argued that his neoliberal policies and his authoritarian leadership style would definitely undermine the foundation of democracy, for example, civil liberties and political rights. The fact that despite various allegations and criticisms, he safely won the election by a large margin of 22 percent, was ominous to Korean democracy.

It was more so because President Lee's party, GNP, seized a lion's share of seats in the National Assembly election held four months later. For GNP gained a majority of seats in the election, despite of the increasing popular disillusion with President Lee and his ruling party. President Lee's popularity dropped sharply since he took office in February, as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Approval rate of President Lee since December 2007



Source : Hankook Daily, February 24, 2009.

For, first, he failed to immediately make good on his " get-the-job-done " image, and second, many of his Cabinet nominees proved to be among the wealthiest in Korea society, several of whom resigned over the alleged ethical lapses. Third, President Lee was also the target of angry rhetoric from North Korea over his tougher stance toward it, saying further cooperation between the two would only come after the North was to resolve the international standoff over its nuclear weapons and to launch a transformative reform from state-controlled to liberal market economy.

It was under these circumstances that the 18th NA election was held. It could happen that opposition parties, especially Democratic Party, would take a substantial portion of NA seats. However, it did not really occur. Rather, the 18th NA elections ended with the safe victory of the conservative GNP, which won a total of 153 seats, including 22 seats with 37.5 percent on the party vote. The previous majority party, United Democratic Party, was diminished to a minority status, taking 81 seats including 15 seats with 25.1% on the party vote. Liberty Forward

Party, the *Chungcheong* based conservative party led by *Lee Hoi-Chang*, gained a total of 18 seats. Pro-*Park Keun-Hye* Coalition, an improvised party separated itself from Grand National Party due to nomination conflict, came fourth, receiving 14 seats. Democratic Labor Party, which had succeeded in winning seats in National Assembly for the first time in Korea's electoral history since 1960, lost five from the previous ten seats.

The outcome of the 18th NA election made it very difficult for opposition parties to prevent the ruling party from passing undemocratic or anti-democratic legislation and from checking the authoritarian president. The liberal-democratic or progressive forces – which once occupied around 170 seats including liberal UDP's 161 seats, leftist LDP's 10 seats – were reduced to a minority in the National Assembly. On the other hand, the conservative political parties together took a lion's share, 185 seats in total – GNP 153 seats, LFP 18 seats, Pro-Park Coalition 14 seats. It is well known that conservatives are much more pro-US but anti-North Korea in foreign policy, pro-market but anti-statist in economic-social policy, and restrictive in civil rights and political freedom than progressives. So, it was expected already at the time of the election that there would be a radical retreat of democracy in South Korean society. In other words, since conservative parties and politicians, after the election in 2008, controlled both the Presidency and the National Assembly, popular sectors would be excluded, more often than before, from public policy making process. Conservatives would also attempt to curtail political influence of NGOs and individual citizens as well, especially those critical of government policies, by restricting individuals' and groups' freedom of expression and association.

In fact, all of these have been happening almost every day not just in parliament but also on the street. Korean democracy has been retreating after the inauguration of President Lee, especially after the NA election.

At any rate, the 18th NA election completed the comeback of South Korea's old authoritarianism to political center. At the same time, it signaled the retreat of new democrats to the back stage of South Korean politics. As seen before, it happened partly because of the peculiar nature of democratic transition itself, partly because of the strategic mistakes from the part of democrats. They were progressive in politics but conservative in economic policy. They pursued economic liberalization and applied market principles to all the realms of society, even to party organization and election system, without any due caution, while taking a progressive stance toward domestic politics and, to a lesser degree, foreign affairs. Their neoliberal economic policies, by dwindling the middle classes and enlarging the poor, alienated the middle and lower classes, while the latter political strategies infuriating the politically conservative constituencies.

Then, is there any prospect of making Korean democracy revive in the near future? It appears to be pessimistic. Progressives – liberal DP and leftist DLP – are still in disarray. They have not yet found any viable alternative programs for renovation of Korean economy and society. Moreover, they have not yet found a new competent leadership. As a result, they have not yet succeeded in regaining public trust. NGO's, which once played a very important role in democratizing Korean society and politics, are also in difficulty. The recent 'candle light demonstration' evidently showed that Korea's political parties and NGO's have to find new policy programs and strategies fit with the changing public attitudes and expectations. The public are now more pragmatic, individualistic, and participatory than before. The future of Korea's democracy will depend on how democratic parties and civic organizations can effectively mobilize them not just in the elections but also in everyday life.

Endnotes

- ¹ The National Assembly of South Korea is a unicameral legislature composed of 299 members. Single-member constituencies comprise 245 of the National Assembly's seats, while the remaining 54 are allocated by proportional representation on the basis of party list voting. Members serve four-year terms.
- ² The law has the avowed purpose " to restrict anti-state acts that endanger national security and to protect [the] nation's safety and its people's life and freedom. " Based on the Law for Maintenance of the Public Security of the Japanese Korea, it was passed in 1948, and made illegal both communism and recognition of North Korea as a political entity. It has been reformed and strengthened with the passing of the times. The Anti-communism Law was merged into the National Security Law during the 1980s. This law is acknowledged by some South Korean politicians and activists as a symbol of the anti-communism of South Korea's First Republic and its dictatorial period of 1964-1987. In 2004, legislators of the Uri Party, then with a majority, made a gesture as to annul the law, but failed owing to Grand National Party opposition. Many recent poll results show that more than half of the Korean people are against the abolition of the act, and the dispute continues. This law has been regularly blamed for restricting freedom of speech: Citizens may not join an organization with aims to overthrow the government ; Citizens may not create, distribute or possess materials that promote anti-government ideas ; Citizens may not neglect to report others who violate this law. The number of persons put in jail due to violation of NSA was 1,730 under the Roh Tai-woo presidency, 1,972 under the Kim Young-sam presidency, and around 1,000 even under the Kim Dae-jung presidency, respectively. <http://www.vop.co.kr/view.php?i=18037&mode=print>; [http://www.lawtimes.co.kr/LawNews/NewsAccs/ArticlePrint.aspx?serial=1430](http://lawtimes.co.kr/LawNews/NewsAccs/ArticlePrint.aspx?serial=1430)
- ³ It is worthy to note that around the 14th Presidential election of 1992 Kim Dae-jung sought support from a leftist political movement organization, which was perceived as pro-North Korea and pro-unification. But after the election, it was said that he found such political alliance of no use. Then, it is evident that he might have changed his mind during his trip to U.K. and the U.S. In other words, in order to win the presidential election, he might have decided to give up, and stay away from, leftist social-political groups, and instead, pursue a conservative alliance – a region-based coalition.
- ⁴ President Kim Young-sam tried very hard to persuade South Korea's businessmen that main targets of his reform for clean politics were not big conglomerates – which were suspected of providing illegal political funds – but political parties and politicians – who were suspected of receiving them from big businesses. After meeting individually major business leaders in summer 1993, he switched his economic policy from regulation- to liberalization-centered one. It included liberalizing financial market, increasing labor market flexibility, and so on.
- ⁵ There exist different explanations about this. Im (2005) contributes to rampant corruption for public distrust in democracy, while Hong (2006) and Hwang (2003) attempted to explain this from the perspective of incumbent government's economic performance.
- ⁶ Lee was accused of profiting from illegal speculation on land owned in Dogok-dong, an expensive ward in Seoul, and he was allegedly involved in the BKB scandal, in which the prosecutor charged the legal owner of an electronic financial service company for a large-scale embezzlement and stock price-fixing schemes. There were many other allegations raised by his rival Park Keun-hye and also by Democratic Party. During his campaign, he proposed several platforms which aroused a hot controversy. Among them was included the Grand Korean Waterway project, which was criticized for being too costly and devastating the environment. Concerning economic policy, he proclaimed to be a business friendly president, by further de-regulating the economy further and privatizing public health system, for example, expanding private health insurance and commercial medical service. What was most concerned about him had to do with his leadership style. He was well-known for his bulldoze style leadership, which had a negative implication for democratic consolidation. He tried to portray himself as a new Park Chung-hee, who is admired for his achievement in Korea's rapid economic development with a strong, but authoritarian leadership. One may be tempted to compare him to UK Prime minister Thatcher, but he is more close to President Park than her. For he is attempting to destroy parliamentary democracy as well as democratic civic organizations, while Mrs Thatcher respected democratic rule of game in parliament. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Myung_Bak

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Appendix 1. Abbreviations of Korean party names

- CKP - Creative Korea Party (*Changjo-hankuk-dang*)
- DJP - Democratic Justice Party (*Minju-jeongui-dang*)
- DKP - Democratic Korea Party (*Minju-hankuk-dang*)
- DKP - Democratic Korea Party (*Minju-Hankuk-dang*)
- DLP - Democratic Liberal Party (*Minju-jayu-dang*)
- DP(1) - Democratic Party (*Minju-dang*)
- DP(2) - Democratic Party (*Minju-dang*)
- DP(3) - United Democratic Party (*Tonghap-minju-dang*, since July 2008, Koreanname changed to *Minju-dang*)

GNP - Grand National Party (*Han-nara-dang*)
Hankyereh DP - Hankyereh Democratic Party (*Hankyereh-minju-dang*)
KDLP - Korea Democratic Labor Party (*Minju-nodong-dang*)
KNP - Korean National Party (*Hankuk-Kukmin-dang*)
LFP - Liberal Forward Party (*Jayu-seonjin-dang*)
MDP - Millenium Democratic Party (*Saecheonyon-minju-dang*)
NCNP - National Congress of New Politics (*Sae-jeongchi-kukmin-hoiui*)
NDP - New Democratic Alliance Party (*Shin-minju-yonhap-dang*)
NDRP - New Democratic Republican Party (*Shin-minju-konghwa-dang*)
NKDP - New Korea Democratic Party (*Shin-hankuk-minju-dang*)
NKP - New Korea Party (*Shin-Hankuk-dang*)
NPP - New Progressive Party (*Jinbo-shin-dang*)
NUDP - New United Democratic Party (*Dae-tonghap-minju-dang*)
PFP - People First Party (*Kukmin-jungsim-dang*)
PP(1) - Party of People (*Minjung-ui-dang*)
PP(2) - People's party (*Minjung-dang*)
PPC - Pro-Park Geun-hye Coalition (*Chin-Park-yondaee*)
PPD - Party of Peace and Democracy (*Pyeonghwa-minju-dang*)
RDP - Reunification Democratic Party (*Tongil-minju-dang*)
ULD - United Liberal Democrats (*Jayu-minju-yonhap*)
UPP - Unification People's Party (*Tongil-kukmin-dang*)
Uri-Party - Open Our Party (*Yollin-uri-dang*)