REGIME CHANGE AND REGIME MAINTENANCE
IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

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South Korean Politics in Transition: Democratization, Elections, and the Voters

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REGIME CHANGE AND REGIME MAINTENANCE IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

In recent years there have been some dramatic changes of political leadership in the Asia–Pacific region, and also some dramas without leadership change. In a few countries the demise of well-entrenched political leaders appears imminent; in others regular processes of parliamentary government still prevail. These differing patterns of regime change and regime maintenance raise fundamental questions about the nature of political systems in the region. Specifically, how have some political leaders or leadership groups been able to stay in power for relatively long periods and why have they eventually been displaced? What are the factors associated with the stability or instability of political regimes? What happens when longstanding leaderships change?

The **Regime Change and Regime Maintenance in Asia and the Pacific Project** will address these and other questions from an Asia–Pacific regional perspective and at a broader theoretical level.

The project is under the joint direction of Dr R.J. May and Dr Harold Crouch.

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SOUTH KOREAN POLITICS IN TRANSITION: DEMOCRATIZATION, ELECTIONS, AND THE VOTERS*

The restoration of direct presidential elections in 1987 provided momentum for democratization in South Korea. Indeed, popular election of the president had become a symbol of democratization since President Park Chung-hee abolished it in 1972. It may be still a matter for debate whether South Korea is a fully democratized country, but since the democratic 'founding' election of 1987, it has held free and competitive elections five times nationwide (a second presidential election in 1992, three more National Assembly elections in 1988, 1992 and 1996, and an election in 1995 for local government bodies) and the electoral process has begun to occupy a central place in South Korean politics. This paper focuses on the meaning of elections in South Korea during the democratization period (1985-92). It begins by briefly reviewing the political process from 1945 to 1987, with particular attention to South Korea's democratic experiments, and then discusses how the old and new cleavages—that is, the cleavages of government versus opposition, and of regionalism—have shaped electoral choice in elections during the democratization period. The paper also discusses the role played by regional cleavages, which have continued to prevail in electoral contests since 1987, within the current presidential system of government in South Korea.

Democratic experiments in South Korea 1948–85

More than four decades have passed since the first government of South Korea was created by a popular election in 1948. As in several other newborn nations of that period,[1] the introduction of democratic institutions after the Second World War gave ordinary Koreans the right to choose who would run the country.[2] Until recently, however, democratic 'experiments' in Korea have failed to sustain a workable democratic system.[3]

The first democratic experiment under the Rhee Syngman government (1948-60) ended in failure, marred by election rigging, irregular constitutional changes, and repression of the opposition. The Rhee government became increasingly dictatorial, using police and the bureaucratic apparatus to enforce its power until it was toppled by student uprisings in April 1960, prompted by massive election fraud in March. The second experiment, by the Chang Myon government (1960-61), adopted a parliamentary system under Democratic Party leadership. But it too failed only nine months after its inauguration, as a result of the military coup led by Major General Park Chung-hee in May 1961 (Kim 1974; Han 1974). The military junta that came to power after the coup eventually transformed itself into a political machine, seeking popular support and legitimacy by means of competitive elections. From 1963 to 1972 (the period before adoption of the *Yushin* Constitution that abolished popular elections for the presidency and strengthened presidential power),[4] Park Chung-hee and his Democratic Republican Party succeeded in securing three consecutive terms in office. This was achieved through competitive elections, albeit making use of the so-called '*yodang* [party in power] premium', which included such methods as mobilizing administrative networks and monopolizing absentee votes (mainly from the army). The latter years of rule under Park (1972-79) deteriorated into 'Korean-style democracy', a euphemism for authoritarian government under the *Yushin* system, and ended with the violent death of Park at the hands of his chief intelligence aide.

The collapse of the Park regime seemed to offer a renewed chance for restoring democracy, but it eventually confirmed the observation made by Pastor in the Latin American context:

> People then were mistaken in equating the fall of tyrants with the rise of democracy. They were separate events, and the second did not always follow from the first (Pastor 1989:6).

The new military junta led by Major General Chun Doo-hwan staged a 'coup-like incident' in December 1979 in the course of investigation of Park's assassination. Chun briskly ascended to the presidency in August 1980 through the rubber-stamp electoral college set up under the

Yushin system. He purged all the established politicians, banned all political parties, forced the dismissal of the interim government under then President Choi Kyu-hah (who had reaffirmed a new constitution and a fair general election), and violently suppressed civil unrest, which was heightened by the Kwangju massacre (Lee 1981). In February 1981, Chun reassumed his seven year, one-term presidency through a new electoral college set up under the new constitution, and his Democratic Justice Party secured a simple majority in the National Assembly elections held in March that year (Suh 1982). (See Table 1 for the election results.)

In sum, from the establishment of the Republic of Korea in 1948 up to the early 1980s, there were two critical moments of regime transition from authoritarian rule towards competitive democracy, both triggered by instances of regime collapse: one following the student uprising in 1960, and the other following the sudden death of Park Chung-hee in 1979. Both chances for attaining democracy, however, were nullified by the intervention of the military, which had become an indispensable institution as a result of apparent external threats, exemplified by the Korean War. There are, nonetheless, two aspects that sharply differentiate the two cases of military intervention, in terms of processes. First, when staging the coups, Park overthrew a democratically established government, while Chun simply took over government in a power vacuum created by Park's assassination. Secondly, in projecting their rule, respectively, Park sought popular support through validation by electoral contest (although later Park also resorted to an indirect electoral method), whereas Chun made little effort to legitimate his leadership through popular elections. 'Even if he had', Han Sung-joo argues, he 'probably would not have succeeded' (Han 1974:283). The society of the 1980s was substantially different from that of the 1960s, given the social and economic changes that had taken place,[5] and had difficulty accepting 'the objective institutional needs' of the military (Graham 1991).

The 1985 National Assembly elections provided a test for the Chun government, which was scheduled to step down by February 1988. The newly-formed New Korea Democratic Party (NKDP), consisting mainly of once-banned opposition politicians, emerged as the number one

opposition party, in effect repudiating the opposition parties established in the early years of the Chun government and challenging the regime by its phenomenal success at the polls (Koh 1985; Kim 1986). In these elections, two thirds of the national-list seats, comprising of one third of the total Assembly seats, were to be allocated to the party which gained the biggest share of the contested seats, and the remaining one third was to be allocated to the other parties, in proportion to seats won. (For a detailed discussion on the allocation system of the national-list seats, see Yun 1985 and Kim 1993). (The election results are set out in Table 1.)

Table 1: The National Assembly election results (1981-1985) (distribution of national-list seats shown in brackets)

	1981		1985	
	1981		1985	
Party[a]	Votes (%)	Seats	Votes (%)	Seats
DJP	35.6	90 (61)	35.3	87 (61)
DKP	21.6	57 (24)	19.7	26 (9)
KNP	13.3	18 (7)	9.2	15 (5)
NKDP	-	-	29.3	50 (17)
Minor Parties	18.8	8	3.3	2
Independents	10.7	11	3.2	4
Total	100.0	184 (92)	100.0	184 (92)

[a]DJP - Democratic Justice Party; DKP - Democratic Korean Party; KNP - Korean National Party; NKDP - The New Korean Democratic Party.

Source: Chungang-son'go-kwalli-wiwonhoe [Central Election Management Committee], *Che 11 Dae Kukhoeuiwon Son'go Sanghwang* [*The 11th National Assembly Election Proceedings*], 1981, and *Che 12 Dae Kukhoeuiwon Son'go Ch'ongram* [*The 12th National Assembly Election Proceedings*] 1985.

Soon after, the new opposition, which had absorbed most of the DKP's parliamentary members after the election, led a campaign to revise the constitution to allow for direct election of the president. The campaign met with opposition from the ruling party, which ultimately decided to defend the existing constitution (deviating from its initial position, that if any revision had to be made, a parliamentary system of government was preferable). The ensuing deadlock led to civil unrest, which reached a peak in June 1987 but was finally resolved when Roh Tae-woo, the DJP's presidential nominee designated by President Chun and a former member of the new military junta, acceded to the opposition's demands for restoring popular presidential elections, along with several other democratization measures.[6]

By 'convoking' direct presidential elections, the deadlock, which had compelled the government to choose between violent repression and co-optation, was quickly resolved. The process of democratic transition began with the emergence of a structured opposition demanding a more representative form of government and resulted in a *'reforma-pactada'*, in which the rules of the authoritarian regime (the rules of electoral competition in particular) were abandoned, without immediately removing the incumbents from power.[7]

With the reemergence of the electoral process on the centre stage of politics, the democratization process proceeded to competition between parties seeking institutionalized support. As Colomer has noted, however, 'electoral results tend to change the delimitation of the actors and formulate new relevant issues, so that the outcome obtained by way of interactions by agreement may then be more or less dramatically altered' (Colomer 1991:1299). In the following two sections, the role played by political cleavages—old and new—in the 'founding' elections, and in the aftermath of those elections, will be discussed with particular attention to the implications for the party system and the future of Korean democracy.

Democratic founding elections and the voters

The 'first post-authoritarian' elections in 1987 shared some of the characteristics of 'founding' elections suggested by O'Donnell and Schmitter.[8]

> Founding elections are ... moments of great drama. Turnout is very high. Parties advocating cancellation, postponement, or abstention are swept aside by the civic enthusiasm that attends such moments.... Moreover, founding elections seem to have a sort of freezing effect upon subsequent political developments. Where they are followed by successive iterations of the electoral process, few new parties get into the game, and many minor ones are likely to drop out (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986:62).

The voter turnout in the 1987 presidential election was the highest since the 1960s, reaching 89.2 per cent, about 10 per cent higher than that of the previous (1971) presidential election (79.8 per cent).[9] The extraordinarily high turnout of the 1985 National Assembly elections (84.6 per cent) may be said to have heralded that of 1987.[10] More importantly, however, the pattern of turnout deviated from those of the past, where the *tojo ch'on'go* (urban low/rural high) phenomenon had prevailed.[11] For example, Seoul voters, who had been notorious for their low turnout previously, achieved a turnout of 88.1 per cent, far above the 1971 record of 71.3 per cent.[12] The voters also participated enthusiastically in the election campaign, which was restored after sixteen years of suspension: for example, on some occasions, each of the three main candidates—Roh Tae-woo, Kim Young-sam, and Kim Dae-jung—attracted over a million people to their election rallies (Chosun-ilbo-sa 1988:25).

The bases for electoral competition for the five-year, one-term limited presidency were, however, drawn largely from the past. That is, Roh Tae-woo of the ruling DJP was the successor to the Chun regime, thus representing the governing side of the authoritarian regimes of the past; Kim Young-sam of the Reunification Democratic Party (RDP) and Kim Dae-jung of the Party for Peace and Democracy (PPD), whose

Table 2: Regional vote distributions of the 1987 presidential election (and the 1988 National Assembly election) (%)

Candidate (Party)[a] Region	Roh Tae-woo (DJP)	Kim Young-sam (RDP)	Kim Dae-jung (PPD)	Kim Jong-pil (NDRP)	Other	Total
Seoul	30.0 (26.2)	29.1 (23.4)	32.6 (27.0)	8.2 (16.1)	0.1 (7.3)	100.0 (100.0)
Kyonggi / Inch'on	41.0 (36.4)	28.1 (24.1)	22.1 (15.5)	8.7 (17.6)	0.1 (6.4)	100.0 (100.0)
Kangwon	59.3 (43.6)	26.1 (21.6)	8.8 (4.0)	5.4 (20.2)	0.4 (10.6)	100.0 (100.0)
North Ch'ungch'ong	46.9 (43.7)	28.2 (16.0)	11.0 (1.4)	13.5 (33.3)	0.4 (5.6)	100.0 (100.0)
South Ch'ungch'ong / Taejon	26.2 (30.2)	16.1 (15.0)	12.4 (3.8)	45.0 (46.5)	0.3 (4.5)	100.0 (100.0)
North Cholla	14.1 (28.8)	1.5 (1.3)	83.5 (61.5)	0.8 (2.5)	0.1 (5.9)	100.0 (100.0)
South Cholla / Kwangju	7.3 (19.5)	1.0 (0.7)	91.3 (73.6)	0.3 (1.1)	0.1 (5.1)	100.0 (100.0)
North Kyongsang / Taegu	68.1 (49.9)	26.6 (26.0)	2.5 (0.8)	2.4 (14.9)	0.4 (8.4)	100.0 (100.0)
South Kyongsang / Pusan	36.6 (36.1)	53.7 (45.7)	6.9 (1.5)	2.6 (8.6)	0.2 (8.1)	100.0 (100.0)
Cheju	49.8 (36.0)	26.8 (27.1)	18.6 (6.0)	4.5 (3.4)	0.3 (27.5)	100.0 (100.0)
Total	36.6 (34.0)	28.0 (23.8)	27.1 (19.3)	8.1 (15.6)	0.2 (7.3)	100.0 (100.0)

[a]DJP - Democratic Justice Party; RDP - Reunification Democratic Party; PPD - Party for Peace and Democracy; NDRP - New Democratic Republican Party.

Source: Chungang-son'go-kwalli-wiwonhoe [Central Election Management Committee], *Che 13 Dae Kukhoeuiwon Son'go Ch'ongram* [*Election Returns of the 13th National Assembly Election*], 1988.

careers as freedom fighters went back to the era of the Park Chung-hee regime represented the opposition forces, even though they failed to agree upon a single candidacy. Kim Jong-pil of the New Democratic Republican Party (NDRP), a former prime minister under Park, and his party, revitalized from the defunct DRP (1963-80), joined the three-way race of Roh and the two Kims although he had little chance of winning since he represented the governing side from the rather remote past. No other parties representing new interests prospered in the competition, resulting in Roh and the three Kims polling a total of 99.8 per cent of the formal votes (see Table 2).

If there was a new factor in play (or more precisely, a revived one, as candidates in past presidential elections had also enjoyed 'home region advantages') it was the regional cleavages that the political actors actively sought to mobilize. By tapping their relative popularity in the regions where they had personal ties, the four candidates sought to secure their chances of winning in the simple plurality race of the 'three big and one small'. Kim Dae-jung and Kim Young-sam, unable to compromise to form a unified democratic opposition, made strong appeals to the voters in the regions where they had ties— that is, in Cholla (and Kwangju) and South Kyongsang (and Pusan), respectively. This may have been an easier strategy for them than for the other candidates, because of their already established political renown. For Roh Tae-woo, a son of North Kyongsang (and Taegu), where Park Chung-hee had also been strong, a similar regional appeal may have posed few difficulties. The election campaign thus became increasingly regionalistic, and as the campaign became a race of regional appeal, Kim Jong-pil also began to solidify his regional basis in South Ch'ungch'ong (and Taejon).

In this election, the regime successor, Roh, won the presidency with 36.6 per cent of the votes (see Table 2). Rho's victory, however, was by no means a mandate for renewed authoritarianism. It was simply a case of the opposition forces failing to gain political power because of strategy errors and difficulties, especially insofar as they were badly divided. Equally, as Lee Man-woo put it, 'there was no particular reason why the achievement of democracy had to be equated with the victory of one of the two Kims' (Lee 1990:52). What marked this election was that the issue of regime legitimacy, which used to sharply divide the

opposition and the government, became increasingly less politically significant. The apparent inheritor of the legacy of Park's and Chun's authoritarian regimes, Roh Tae-woo was successful, at least partly, in turning aside the thorny issue of legitimacy both by actively promoting the stunning concessions of his June 29 declaration on democratization, while supporting political stability and continued economic growth, and by engaging in the emotion-charged regionalistic electoral contests pursued by his opponents. The critical decision of the two Kims to split at the precise moment of optimum opportunity for victory may have turned their positive public images as freedom fighters into those of self-interested politicians. This made it even harder to put the issue of legitimacy—perhaps the only issue where the opposition had overwhelming appeal—at the forefront.

Nonetheless, it was a combination of the old and the new cleavages that determined the individual voters' choices and ultimately the election outcomes. For some (and obviously a major portion of the voters), the regional cleavage, which became highly visible during the election campaign, was the most important ground for their decision. For others, judgments of past performance were still important. As a result, Roh won his victory on the support of the older and less educated segments of the voters, who could go along with the positive side of his past, and on his regional strongholds of North Kyongsang. Kim Young-sam and Kim Dae-jung shared the votes of the younger and the better educated,[13] who had long been societal bases of opposition, on top of the votes of their respective regional strongholds. The support of Kim Jong-pil was largely limited to his regional strongholds. The role played by the regional cleavage in this democratic 'founding' election was thus far-reaching, in that each of the candidates clearly dominated the others, rather than enjoying only relative advantage, in their respective regional strongholds.

Aftermath of the founding elections: the voters and political actors

The 1988 National Assembly election, held a few months after the 1987 presidential election, was a first-past-the-post contest for the 224 contested seats, and the outcome was a virtual replication of the 1987

result.[14] However the turnout was far lower, 75.8 per cent. Moreover, the forces of regional cleavage spilled-over into this election, on an even greater scale. This was particularly so for the PPD: all of its members in Cholla (North and South) and Kwangju—a special city in the Cholla region—were elected, but in other regions (except the neutral regions of Seoul and Kyonggi) none of its members was elected. Even its share of the votes was decimated, except in Seoul, where it was the strongest of all. In Kyonggi only one of its members was elected. In this regard, the other parties fared much the same, winning roughly 80 per cent of the seats in their respective regional strongholds. This pattern of region-party alliance was unprecedented. In past National Assembly elections the *yoch'on-yado* (government rural/opposition urban) phenomenon had prevailed; the urban/rural cleavage exerted small but significant effects upon voting choice in the 1988 election.

What was distinct in the 1988 election was that the ruling DJP failed to gain a simple majority although it won the biggest share of the National Assembly seats. It was the first time in the history of Korean electoral politics that the ruling party lost its majority status. Unlike the presidential elections, in which a pluralist winner takes all, the pluralist position of the DJP in the Assembly simply meant that the president and his government needed support from the opposition parties to ratify the executive's programme. In previous assemblies this had been largely carried through by invoking the ruling party's dominant position.

Notwithstanding the achievements of the *yoso-yadae* (small government party, big opposition) Assembly—exemplified by the assembly hearings on 'the Fifth Republic irregularities', including the 1980 Kwangju massacre (Han 1989b; Lee 1990)—the situation lasted for less than two years, ending in January 1990 with the creation of the Democratic Liberal Party (DLP). The DLP was a grand alliance of parties from both sides of parliament, including the ruling DJP of Roh, the opposition RDP of Kim Young-sam, and the NDRP, led by Kim Jong-pil, which was generally considered to be the most likely to join with the ruling party (Park 1990; Lee 1990). The potentially dominant DLP emerged as a result of decisions in higher level political circles, which were obviously incongruent with the electoral verdict of the Korean

Table 3. Regional vote distributions of the 1992 presidential election (and the 1992 National Assembly election) (%)

Region \ Candidate (Party)[a]	Kim Young-sam (DLP)	Kim Dae-jung (DP)	Chung Ju-young (UNP)	Other	Total
Seoul	36.4 (34.8)	37.8 (37.3)	18.0 (19.4)	7.8 (8.5)	100.0 (100.0)
Kyonggi / Inch'on	36.6 (36.5)	31.9 (31.6)	22.7 (19.9)	8.8 (12.0)	100.0 (100.0)
Kangwon	41.5 (38.7)	15.5 (11.7)	34.1 (32.0)	8.9 (17.6)	100.0 (100.0)
North Ch'ungch'ong	38.3 (44.3)	26.0 (23.7)	23.9 (21.8)	11.8 (10.2)	100.0 (100.0)
South Ch'ungch'ong / Taejon	36.3 (37.9)	28.6 (22.0)	24.5 (17.9)	10.6 (22.2)	100.0 (100.0)
North Cholla	5.7 (32.1)	89.1 (54.8)	3.2 (4.8)	2.0 (8.3)	100.0 (100.0)
South Cholla / Kwangju	3.5 (20.1)	93.4 (66.3)	1.8 (4.7)	1.3 (8.9)	100.0 (100.0)
North Kyongsang / Taegu	62.5 (48.2)	8.9 (9.7)	17.3 (21.2)	11.3 (20.9)	100.0 (100.0)
South Kyongsang / Pusan	72.8 (48.5)	10.9 (14.0)	8.9 (15.4)	7.4 (22.1)	100.0 (100.0)
Cheju	40.0 (34.1)	32.9 (19.9)	16.1 (-)	11.0 (46.0)	100.0 (100.0)
Total	42.0 (38.5)	33.8 (29.2)	16.3 (17.4)	7.9 (14.9)	100.0 (100.0)

[a]DLP - Democratic Liberal Party; DP - Democratic Party; UNP - Unification National Party.
Source: Chungang'son'go-kwalli-wiwonhoe [Central Election Management Committee]. *Che 14 Dae Kukhoeuiwon Song'go Ch'ongram* [*Election Returns of the 14 National Assembly Election*], 1993.

voters who had 'refused to allow the emergence of a "too-strong" government' (Park 1990:1156).

The voters' perception was thus at variance with the DLP view, that 'the merger would bring political stability and economic growth to the nation, which had been afflicted by unrest and instability in the course of democratisation in recent years' (Lee 1990:127). Later the same year, the party led by Kim Dae-jung (left alone in opposition) and the 'small' Democratic Party formed by a few of the former members of the RDP who declined to join the new ruling DLP were merged under the name the Democratic Party (DP).

On the assumption that the 1987-1988 elections were fought on the basis of the two main electoral cleavages of region, and pro-government *versus* pro-democratic-reform, it seemed likely that the new ruling DLP would have a far more advantageous position in future electoral contests than its immediate predecessor, the DJP, not to mention its current competitor, the DP. That is, the DLP would have a wider regional basis as a result of the merger of the three parties with strong regional appeal, and it could also have been expected to broaden the societal basis of its support by the inclusion of Kim Young-sam and his party, who had shared the societal basis of the opposition. The electoral fortune of the DP may have lain in its advancing, as the sole opposition party, into the gaps in the societal basis of traditional opposition support which Kim Young-sam's actions had created. In this way, it could have hoped to overcome its solid but numerically limited regional basis of electoral support.

The outcomes of the National Assembly and subsequent presidential elections in April and December 1992, however, indicated that the DLP had only modest success in maintaining the widened regional basis, particularly in the regions where Roh and Kim Jong-pil had been strong, and virtually failed to broaden its societal basis of support (Bae 1995:95-101). Indeed, the DLP and Kim Young-sam won more support from those social segments which used to support the ruling parties, despite efforts to distance themselves from the outgoing government and notwithstanding Kim's background as a long-time opposition leader. As expected, Kim Young-sam and his DLP performed best in his regional strongholds. Kim Dae-jung and his DP again failed to gain substantial

support beyond his regional strongholds (including Seoul); this was reflected in the modest support he got from former opposition supporters. The newcomer Chung Ju-young, former chairman of the Hyundai conglomerate, and his Unification National Party (UNP) reaped the biggest reward, attracting the floating or cross-pressured voters from both opposition and government sides. He also had some success in Kangwon, where Chung claimed personal regional ties, and where the ruling parties' dominance had previously been assured. Overall, the DLP secured government by winning the assembly majority, albeit by a small margin, and by having its presidential candidate elected. The turnout in the Assembly election, at 71.9 per cent, was the lowest ever, while the 81.9 per cent turnout in the presidential election was also well down on that of 1987.

The single most important variable shaping the voters' choice in the 1992 elections appears to have been the regional factor, and not a pro-government *versus* pro-democratic political alignment. This suggests that the DLP merger, despite its rhetoric, was nothing more than a grand regional coalition. In this sense, the parties in the opposition were no exception: their sustained existence may have owed much more to their ability to occupy a geographical space than to their pro-democratic (or liberal) political stance.

Regionalism and presidentialism: towards coalition politics?

Few would dispute the importance of regionalism in voting behaviour in Korean electoral politics since 1987. Given the limited ideological space (and general conservatism) in Korean politics, no party of significance had either the mandate or the capability to make a specific class appeal. This may have left the regional cleavage—always a latent resource for political exploitation despite its subtlety in a society relatively homogeneous in race, language and culture—as a critical source of partisan mobilization in a period of electoral uncertainty. Having assumed a central place, the regional cleavage continues to prevail in electoral contests, and the region-party alliance has become an enduring pattern.

So far, the region-party alliance, crafted on the basis of the regional traits of party leaders and voters, seems to have promoted electoral stability rather than volatility. This was particularly so for the voters of Cholla and Kyongsang, known for their regional rivalry, as each region produced viable presidential candidates in both the 1987 and 1992 elections.[15]

However, this seemingly 'frozen' pattern of region-party alliance, which has yielded electoral stability, may yet give way to two potential sources of volatility. First, given that regionalism was expressed through voters' evaluations of political leaders, it is likely that sudden changes in party leadership will result in a redistribution of partisan support in a relatively short period. Considering the current electoral arrangement, in which the presidential term is fixed for five years, the potential for electoral volatility seems to be increasing. That is, as a change of leadership is predicated within the presidential term, it is likely that a redistribution of partisan support will occur along regional lines within that term, unless the incoming party leader shares regional traits with the outgoing one. Secondly, once mobilized as a source of political support, the forces of regionalism are likely to retain a central place in political contests, which were formerly highly personalized. As voters are regionally conscious and increasingly view party politics as a regional contest, it is likely that regional voting will spill over to regions which formerly showed little tendency towards regional voting if they are provided with a viable candidate. Consequently the unit of region-party alliance could reduce in size, from the region to the administrative province, providing a favourable environment for a burgeoning of minor parties with claims on regional interests. The relative success of the UNP in 1992 (and the NDRP in 1988) may have been partly due to the fact that they could draw solid support from their home regions and a small but significant degree of support from other 'neutral' regions.

The latter aspect deserves more attention in relation to Korea's presidential system of government. The pattern of region-party alliance, as the regional cleavage looms larger, has a centrifugal tendency that could result in a multi-party system. The relative success of Kim Jong-pil and his NDRP in 1987 and 1988, and Chung Ju-young and his UNP in 1992, cannot be fully understood without referring to the ever-increasing

regionalistic nature of the Korean electoral contests. A multi-party electoral contest may be unlikely to produce a simple majority for any party, as the election outcomes since 1987 have shown, thus imposing a limit upon the ability of the president (who may have received far less than a simple majority vote) to claim a popular mandate, and inviting executive/legislative deadlock whenever the ruling party fails to garner a majority in the Assembly. In such cases, as Mainwaring argues,

> ...immobilism and sharp conflict between the executive and the legislature, with potentially deleterious consequences for democratic stability and/or effective governance, often result.... If, in addition to being highly fragmented, the party system is also polarised, the difficulties of governing will be compounded' (Mainwaring 1993:215-216).

The experiment of the DLP coalition, which arbitrarily reshaped the four-party system (or more precisely the three-and-a-half system) into a two-party system so as to overcome the difficulties of governing as well as to project its rule by electoral means, seems to have achieved the DLP's immediate goals. That is, with nearly two thirds of members in the Assembly, the DLP successfully supported the Roh government in its last year, achieving a simple majority in the new Assembly (though its strength was below that in the previous Assembly) as well as electing its presidential candidate. Fortunately for the new 'civilian' government of Kim Young-sam, it commands a majority in the National Assembly, maintained on the one hand by recruiting new members and on the other by selectively curtailing potential splintering within the DLP through its popular clean-up campaign, enabling it to implement somewhat aggressive reform measures.[16]

However, the basis of the DLP coalition is by no means solid. As an odd merger of the former ruling elements (the DJP and the NDRP) and Kim's formerly opposition followers, the common and perhaps only interests to keep the coalition together may have been their reluctance 'to see the PPD led by Kim Dae Jung monopolise power through direct presidential elections' (Park 1990:1158). Once past election day, difficulties inevitably arose in keeping the coalition partners together.[17] Apart from the lack of a power-sharing mechanism against presidential

autonomy,[18] regionalism may provide a major incentive for the coalition partners to break up. The fact that the DLP failed to fill the three vacant assembly seats of Taegu/Kyongbuk, regional strongholds of the former DJP, in by-elections held in August 1993 and August 1994, may contribute to this tendency unless new incentives for keeping the coalition together are provided for President Kim's coalition partners. In the face of the 1995 local elections, in which the heads of the fifteen provinces and special cities were popularly elected, and elections for the local assembly and heads of the lower-level autonomous bodies, Kim Jong-pil's faction broke with the ruling DLP. His new party (United Liberal Democrats) was successful in electing the four heads of provinces and special cities—three in his regional strongholds (North Ch'ungch'ong, South Ch'ungch'ong and Taejon) and one in Kangwon.[19]

With the 1996 National Assembly elections approaching, the party system underwent a notable change. The ruling DLP changed its name to the New Korea Party (NKP), and Kim Dae-jung, who announced his retirement from politics just after the 1992 presidential election, returned to the political arena, forming the National Congress for New Politics (NCNP) by breaking from the then main opposition DP. The contest, which was fought by the four major parties, ended up as a regional one: the NKP dominant in Pusan and Kyongnam, the NCNP in Cholla, and Kim Jong-pil's ULD in Ch'ungch'ong. The DP, which had no regional strongholds, became a minor party of fifteen legislative members. The ruling NKP again failed to secure half the seats, winning 121 out of the 253 seats contested.

The forthcoming presidential election of December 1997 may be fought along the regional multi-party lines produced by the previous election. New participants, who may make regional appeals, are expected to proliferate, and no participant is expected to garner a simple majority of the votes. This may again necessitate coalition-building if the Korean presidential system of government continues to prosper, as the presidential system is more likely to be compatible with a two-party contest (Mainwaring 1993:200). Indeed, the presidential system facilitated the survival of the two-party system in Korea due to 'the proclivity of the politicians to gather around two major parties—one for

and the other against government' (Han 1989a:296). However, this means that the Korean party system may have to perpetuate a vicious cycle of fragmentation and coalition-building dependent on the leaders' regional traits.

A coalition based on regional cleavage may prove unstable because of its centrifugal tendency, but if it results in significant regional minorities being permanently excluded from power it will also endanger competition by rendering it a merely formal and empty process (Mainwaring 1993:223). Notwithstanding the point made by Kim and Koh over two decades ago, that 'in a society that is otherwise homogeneous, regional pride and identity may provide necessary safeguards against growing mobilisation by the centralized government, and against the possible dangers of totalitarian manipulation of the masses' (Kim and Koh 1972:854), highly personalized and emotion-charged regionalism hinders, in the long-run, the formation of a more responsive political system.

Given the ideological Left-Right rigidity of the society, the conversion of the old pro-government *versus* pro-democratic cleavage into a conservative/liberal division[20] and the establishment of this division as a central part of electoral competition, may be a viable option in the future. The strengthening of this line of cleavage may also counteract the forces of regional sentiment in electoral choice.

Notes

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1 For a review of the process of transplanting democratic institutions during the period 1945-48, see Oh Byung-hun (1967) and Gordenker (1958).

2 For a discussion on the historical significance of Unified *Silla*, whose territory and people formed the mainstream of subsequent Korean history, see Eckert *et al.* (1990:42-44). See also Lee (1993).

3 A minimal or 'realistic' definition of democracy was given by Schumpeter: 'the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote' in such a way that 'the reins of government should be handed to those who command more support than do any of the competing individuals or teams' (Schumpeter 1976:269, 273). Dahl also defined political democracy as a system in which the public is 'entitled to participate on a more or less equal plane in controlling and contesting the conduct of government: to participate, so to speak, in the system of public contestation' (Dahl 1971:4). In a democracy, as Przeworski put it, 'no one can win once for all: even if successful at one time, victors immediately face the prospect of having to struggle in the future' (Przeworski 1986:57); Przeworski described democratization as 'a process of institutionalising uncertainty' (*ibid.*:58). Huntington (1991), with a procedural definition of democracy, went on to argue that 'the sustained failure of the major opposition political party to win office necessarily raises questions concerning the degree of competition permitted by the system', given that 'the central procedure of democracy is the selection of leaders through competitive elections by the people they govern' (*ibid.*:8, 6). Also see Storm (1992). For a historical review of Korean democratic experiments see Han (1989a) and Park (1987).

4 Under the *Yushin* (revitalising reform) Constitution, which was adopted by a national referundum allegedly to promote national unification and effective socioeconomic development in the changing international situation, the president was to be indirectly elected by an easily manipulable electoral college, without restrictions on the presidential term. The fixed-term presidency used to be a major legal obstacle to prolonging one-man rule, and thus became a main source of constitutional amendment. The president also appointed one third of the National Assembly members (see Kim 1974). For a discussion of the *Yushin* system see Lee (1990).

5 From the early 1960s South Korean society went through a process of modernization. Some indicators are given in Appendix 1.

6 For a discussion of the events leading up to the June 29 declaration, see Lee (1990), Cotton (1989) and West and Baker (1988).

[7] For an application of O'Donnell and Schmitter's model of democratic transition to Korea, see Im (1990). Also see O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986), Linz (1990), and Colomer (1991).

[8] The term 'first postauthoritarian elections' used by Turner (1993) is interchangeable with 'founding elections'. The term 'transition elections', 'the first national electoral contests which follow the restoration of political freedoms', used by Bermeo (1987), is also similar to 'founding elections'. But writing in the East European context, Bogdanor (1990) cautioned that 'it is probably not until there have been at least two further free elections held under normal conditions that one will be in a position to make meaningful generalisations about the electoral process'. It seems logical to expect more uncertainty, or to emphasise the transitional nature of the elections, in regimes that have experienced sudden collapse.

[9] See Chungang-son'go Ch'ongram [Central Election Management Committee], *Che 13 Dae Taet'ongryong Son'go Ch'ongram* [*The 13th Presidential Election Proceedings*], Seoul: 1987; and *Taehanmin'guk Son'go Sa* [*Election History of the Republic of Korea*], Vol 1, 1973.

[10] See *Chungang-son'go-kwalli-wiwonhoe* [Central Election Management Committee], *Che 12 Dae Kukhoeuiwon Son'go Ch'ongram* [*The 12th National Assembly Election Proceedings*], Seoul, 1985.

[11] The *tojo ch'on'go* (urban-low, rural-high) phenomenon is a description of the observed tendency that voting rates are higher in the rural areas, where the voters are more prone to mobilization by the government's administrative networks than their metropolitan counterparts. See Mo, Brady and Ro (1991) and Kim (1980).

[12] The Seoul voters' turnout was once again lower (by 6.5 per cent) than the national turnout (75.8 per cent) in the 1988 National Assembly election, but in the 1992 National Assembly election (a gap of 2.7 per cent) and the 1992 presidential election (a gap of 0.5 per cent) there is no such clear tendency.

[13] An empirical study shows that the two Kims shared a similar pattern of societal support, which neatly counter-balanced the societal support for Roh Tae-woo, once the effects of regional voting were taken into account (see Bae 1995:107-144).

[14] There were also 75 uncontested (national-list) seats, making a total of 299 seats to be allocated in proportion to the seats (not the votes) gained by each party. The revision of the election law in 1994 provided that the national-list seats,

constituting one-third of the total, would be allocated in proportion to the votes gained by each party. See Table 2 for the election outcomes.

15 In 1987, there were two candidates in Kyongsang: in the North, Roh Tae-woo, and in the South, Kim Young-sam; but in 1992 Kim Young-sam was the only viable candidate in the region, gaining the support in the North that Roh had once enjoyed.

16 For a discussion of the new government's reforms, see Lee and Sohn (1994).

17 Mainwaring (1993:220-222) points to three factors which pose difficulties in building a stable coalition in presidential systems in comparison to parliamentary systems: lack of a binding mechanism in the post-election period (coalition formation generally taking place before the election), given the autonomous executive power; weaker commitments by individual legislators to toe the party line; and electoral incentives of parties to break coalitions, as some remain silent partners in the coalition without enjoying the benefits.

18 Exemplified by the purges of leading figures of former regimes, inevitably involving many politicians from Taegu/Kyongbuk, in the course of Kim's ever popular anti-corruption drive.

19 In this local election, held on 27 June 1995, each of the parties had some success in every party's regional stronghold: the ruling DLP won 5 out of 15 heads of the provinces and special cities, in South Kyongsang, Pusan, North Kyongsang, Kyonggi and Inch'on; the main opposition, DP won four in Seoul, North Cholla, South Cholla and Kwangju; and the Independents, won two in Cheju and Tae-gu. See Chungang son'go-kwalli'wiwonhoe [Central Election Management Committee]. *Chon'guk Tongshi Chibang Son'go Ch'ongram* [*The Local Election Proceedings*], 1995.

20 A similar point was made by Lee Kap-yun in forecasting the political configuration of partisan alignment soon after the 1985 National Assembly election (see Lee 1986:163).

Appendix 1

	1960	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990
Total pop. in millions (3)	25.0	29.2b	31.5	34.7	37.4	40.4	43.5
Urban pop. as % of total (3)	28.0	33.6b	43.2	48.4	57.3	65.4	74.4
Av. annual growth rate of GDP							
1960-70, 1970-80 & 1980-90(2)	—	8.6	—	9.6	—	9.7	—
Distribution of GDP (%) (4)							
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing	38.2	41.3	29.7	27.0	17.8	12.8	9.1
Industry	18.6	23.9	27.2	31.3	37.9	41.8	44.8
Service, etc.	43.2	35.8	43.1	41.7	44.3	45.4	46.1
GNP per capita (US dollars) (4)	82a	114	223	574	1418	2194	5569
Adult illiteracy ratio (%, age 15+)							
(1) & (2)	29.4	31.9	12.4	9.0	7.0	n.a.	4.0
Gross enrolment ratio by							
age group (%) (1)							
Primary School	96.0	100.0	103.0	107.0	109.0	97.0	108.0
Secondary School	27.0	34.0	42.0	56.0	80.0	90.0	87.0
Post-Secondary School	4.7	6.2	7.9	9.6	14.1	34.2	39.2
Distribution of adult population							
by education (%, Age 25+) (1)							
No Schooling	56.9	43.6	34.4	25.3	19.8	14.4	11.0c
Primary School	29.6	35.2	38.2	39.3	34.6	28.1	21.7c
Secondary School	10.9	17.5	21.8	28.7	37.0	46.5	51.3c
Post-secondary School	2.6	3.6	5.6	6.7	8.6	11.0	16.0c

a - 1961

b - 1966

c - Calculated from the 1990 Census

Sources: (1) UNESCO, *Statistical Yearbook, 1965, 1974, 1976, 1982, 1992*; (2) World Bank, *World Development Report, 1983, 1984, 1989, 1992, 1993*; (3) Economic Planning Board, *Population and Housing Census Report, 1960, 1966, 1970, 1975, 1980, 1985, 1990*; (4) Korean Statistical Association, *Korea Statistical Yearbook, 1966, 1971, 1982, 1991*.

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