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Peaceful power transfers or successions and democratic consolidation in South Korea

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Abstract This article sheds light on the positive role of power transfers or leadership successions in the democratic consolidation process in South Korea. In this study, we argue that democratic consolidation in South Korea is slowly taking place, and it is best measured by institutional rather than an individual president's accomplishment. Therefore, democratic consolidation is not directly related to the success or failure of presidents since the transition to democracy occurred in 1987. Regardless of each president's performance, repeated power shifts and successions through fair elections are likely to lead to the creation of a favorable political environment for democratic institutions to mature, which will support continued democratic consolidation in South Korea.

Keywords President · Power transfer · Power succession · Democratic consolidation

Introduction

South Korea has maintained the presidential system for most of its modern political history since its first government was established in 1948 (Choi 2013). In the South Korean

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political system, the president is the primary political actor with the dominant political and administrative authority. In contrast, the prime minister in the South Korean system has no political autonomy. The president nominates and appoints the prime minister as well as the other cabinet members, although the National Assembly holds hearings and makes recommendations prior to the formal appointment. Since ratification of these appointments for cabinet members by the National Assembly is not required, presidential power is not checked by the legislature (see Hahm et al. 2013).

Due to the negative side effects of power concentration in the South Korean presidential system, there have been controversies concerning that system. Some argue that the British- and German-style parliamentary systems would be better for South Korea, while others suggest that merely reducing the power of the president would be better than modifying the entire governmental system (Choi 2013). Since South Korea became a democracy in 1987, this debate has received a lot of attention because of its implications for *democratic consolidation*.

O'Donnell and Schmitter (1991, p. 8) define democratization as "the processes whereby the rules and procedures of citizenship are either applied to political institutions previously governed by other principles (e.g., coercive control, social tradition, expert judgment, or administrative practice) or expanded to include persons not previously enjoying such rights and obligations (e.g., non-taxpayers, illiterate adults, women, youth, ethnic minorities, foreign residents), or extended to cover issues and institutions not previously subject to citizen participation (e.g., state agencies, military establishments, partisan organizations, interest associations, productive enterprises, educational institutions, etc.)." This process is made up of liberalization, democratic installation, and democratic consolidation. Defining the first two of these is straightforward. Liberalization refers to opening up political, economic, and social arenas for individual and group actions. Democratic installation is the transition to a system allowing party competition, electoral choices, and direct or indirect political participation in the policy decision-making process (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1991, p. 9).

Defining democratic consolidation, however, is a difficult task because of the variety of notions of democracy (see Heo and Hahm 2013 for details). There have been two perspectives concerning democratic consolidation: minimalist and maximalist. A "minimalist" definition concerns only elections. According to this interpretation, democracy is consolidated as long as free, fair, and competitive elections are held, and so long as they are, there is a very little possibility of returning to authoritarianism. On the other hand, the "maximalist" definition focuses on mature political institutions regularly practicing the democratic rule of law and respecting civil rights, in addition to holding free and competitive elections (Rose and Shin 2001; Schedler 1998, pp. 21–22).

According to O'Donnell (1996), however, the "maximalist" definition of democratic consolidation is not practical on the grounds that it has too many requirements. Schedler (1998) also contends that the minimalist definition should be adopted to define democratic consolidation because it is clear and empirically provable, whereas the maximalist definition is difficult to apply in empirical studies. The debate has yet to end, and mixed use of these definitions in comparative politics studies is ongoing (e.g., Diamond 1999; Diamond and Shin 2000; Linz and Stepan 1996).

Debates concerning democratic consolidation are not limited to definitions. What factors effect the success or failure of democratic consolidation has also received a lot of scholarly interest (see Diamond 1994, 1999; Gasiorowski and Power 1998; Haggard and Kaufman 1994; Linz and Stepan 1996; O'Donnell 1996; Power and Gasiorowski 1997; Schmitter 2010). For instance, Linz and Stepan (1996) assert that mature democratic

political institutions and the practice of the rule of law are critical to achieving democratic consolidation. O'Donnell (1996) disagrees, contending that it is not important whether there are formal democratic structures or institutions. What matters most is if political actors practice the rules of democratic institutions.

These theories, however, overlook the effects of both formal and informal practice of democratic rules and the process of political power transfer (succession) on the institution of the presidency; all of these forces significantly affect the democratic consolidation process in South Korea. Thus, we argue that peaceful power transfers and/or successions support democratic consolidation in South Korea.

Theoretical review of presidential politics in South Korea

South Korea started with a presidential system when Rhee Syngman came to power in 1948. At that time, the presidential term was 4 years and the office holder limited to two terms. However, President Rhee amended the constitution and removed the term limit. To stay in power, he also engaged in election fraud. Massive protests broke out, which ended the Rhee Syngman administration. Since the presidential system had failed, a parliamentary system was adopted for the new government. Yet, the parliamentary system did not work well either. The government was too weak and the country was unstable. In 1961, Major General Park Chung Hee came to power through a military coup and reinstated the presidential system. Since then, South Korea has maintained various forms of the presidential system.

Since President Park Chung Hee (1961–1979) lacked political legitimacy, he focused on economic development. To transform an agrarian society to a modern industrialized state, he relied on economic technocrats. As a result, a strong bureaucracy was created. To push his policy initiatives, he also strengthened presidential power, which gave way to the emergence of an authoritarian presidential system (Hahm and Plein 1995, 1997; Hahm 2001, 2002). President Park stayed in power for 18 years until he was assassinated by the Korean Central Intelligence Agency Director Kim Jae-kyu in 1979.

Most Korean people expected a democracy to follow, but Chun Doo Hwan (1981–1988) came to power through another military coup. His government was similar to President Park's, an authoritarian presidential system. This long-lasting experience of strong presidential systems left power concentration in the presidency even after the transition to democracy in 1987. Thus, we need to understand the history of institutional changes in the South Korean government to understand the democratic consolidation process.

Furthermore, in order to understand how the president gets involved in policy making, it is necessary to understand the presidency as personal leadership as well as an impersonal institution. The reason for this need is that every president's personal leadership style has significantly affected South Korea's democratic institutional development (Hahm 2002). Therefore, understanding the characteristics of each president's leadership style is crucial for studying South Korea's presidency.

Not surprisingly, presidential politics has received a lot of scholarly attention, although it is one of the least understood subjects.[1] Considerable research has been dedicated to how and how well South Korea's president leads and promotes its impressive economic and industrial growth. At the same time, rapid economic progress has also brought new realities to the authoritarian structure of the South Korean presidency. A new presidential system

[1] The following theoretical review heavily draws on Hahm (2001, pp. 73–76).

with a single five-year term and political accountability has reduced the influence of the president over the bureaucracy, other social and business actors, and overall policy control (Hahm and Plein 1995, 1997).

This institutional change has contributed to socioeconomic fragmentation and conflict, leading to turf battles among government agencies as well as private-sector social and business leaders. As a result, the current presidential system has also lost its effectiveness as a streamlined and cohesive instrument of policy development and control. Indeed, the current presidential system is considered more of an impediment to, rather than a vehicle for, political and economic development. Yet, in spite of the overall decrease in influence over social and economic matters in the role of the presidency—given the authoritarian tradition in South Korean politics—the presidency will likely remain the primary locus of social and economic progress in the current era of social and political democratization and economic internationalization.

Despite the generally accepted importance of presidential arrangement, there is little consensus in the literature regarding the underlying factors that might explain the decline of a strong presidency or the office's diminishing influence on policy. Traditionally, the developmental state literature has taken a descriptive and historical approach, and explanations of structural features of the authoritarian executive–bureaucratic relationship have concentrated on factors unique to or distinctive of South Korean history, culture, and social behavior (Cumings 1987; Evans 1987, 1995; Heo and Hahm 2013; Koo 1987, 1990). Such approaches, however, have failed to explain the decline of the strong executive in South Korean government, which has occurred over the past 25 years.

A number of factors have contributed to the weakening of presidential influence on policy. One of the most obvious changes, compared with the authoritarian period, is the single five-year presidential term. During the authoritarian regimes, a president's tenure was uncertain, meaning the condition called lame duck was not possible. But, the current fixed, single-term limit of the president has modified bureaucratic and other social actors' perception of reward and loyalty. In other words, ever since South Korea was democratized in 1987, South Korean presidential terms have been fixed, which was immediately matched with a weak presidential management style.[2] South Korean presidential terms will continue to be fixed going forward. It means that in order to run the government smoothly, the president might have to build coalitions to broker competing interests. As a result, social and business actors will continue to have greater and greater influence on policy making, and the weakening of the president's power is likely to continue.

In contrast, under Presidents Park Chung Hee and Chun Doo Hwan, there was a strong "principal–agent" relationship between the president and the bureaucracy (Hahm 1999; Hahm and Plein 1995, 1997). For these presidents, the executive–bureaucratic nexus was marked by presidential efforts to direct and strengthen the bureaucracy against the inevitable tides of democratization and policy initiatives. This continuity created considerable stability in basic policy by permitting the bureaucracy to engage in long-term and consistent planning on policy affairs without fear of sudden or unexpected policy conflicts or shifts. Bureaucratic loyalty to the president granted extensive administrative discretion and provided a basis for job security and professional advancement. As a consequence, policy could succeed if mutual consent between the president and the bureaucrats was

[2] Even President Chun Doo Hwan's often-stated public commitment for a single seven-year presidential term imposed upon his political influence in dealing with the bureaucracy and with business interests (see Cotton 1992; Hahm et al. 2013).

accomplished. In this regard, there have been positive impacts of the bureaucracy on economic development.

However, the new presidential system with the single five-year term, which came as a result of democratization, is modifying executive–bureaucratic relationships. For example, bureaucrats might not comply with presidential initiatives for economic development because the president will be in office only 5 years. They might consider presidential policy initiatives as temporary political actions. Thus, bureaucrats might not want to take any chances that could jeopardize their career in the long run. As a result, those who have long-term career ambitions might be hesitant to dedicate themselves to short-term presidential initiatives. In short, since loyalty to the president might not guarantee positive career prospects, bureaucrats with long-term ambitions become extremely cautious in supporting the policies of someone with short-term influence. This presents a basic conflict of interest, which can alter the relationship between the president and the bureaucracy. These changes risk fragmentation in government and turf battles over bureaucratic jurisdictions and funding.

Under these circumstances, political accountability is likely to be determined based on the terms set by major political and social actors, such as parties, interest groups, or individuals. As a result, a president's success cannot depend on economic growth alone. Instead, social and economic policy together will be the key factors of determination. Thus, to become a successful president, one must have a good understanding of the role of the state in markets and society, the ability to mediate conflict among competing interests, and success at crafting effective coalitions in an increasingly democratized society (Hahm and Plein 1997, p. 136; Hahm 2001).

Under these social and political environments, there is an additional but crucial factor to understand presidential politics in South Korea. Obviously, South Korean presidents need to perform well during their terms—such as maintaining a sound economy—but it is equally essential to accomplish a successful succession, so that policies and agendas started in one president's term continue into the next. In fact, in order to be evaluated as a successful president in history—because it takes more than one presidential term of 5 years to produce tangible outcomes from a presidential policy agenda—the successor must be successful with the same policies and agendas (see Hahm 2001, p. 75 for details). The latter condition has grown to become an essential factor in presidential politics in South Korea because not many South Korean presidents' legacies have been successfully continued, without interruption, into the next administration.

Indeed, until now, every incoming president has tried to interrupt the predecessors' policy agendas in order to overcome political deficiencies such as lack of procedural legitimacy or to gain other relative political advantages. An example of the first includes the presidential successions from Chun Doo Hwan to Roh Tae Woo in 1988 and from Roh Tae Woo to Kim Young Sam in 1993. The second can be represented by the successions from Roh Tae Woo to Kim Young Sam in 1993, Kim Young Sam to Kim Dae Jung in 1998, Roh Moo Hyun to Lee Myung Bak in 2008, and from Lee Myung Bak to Park Geun Hye in 2013. For instance, since Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung have been active in politics for the last 40 years, it is certain they should share responsibility for the misconduct of politics to a great extent. However, after the inauguration, they behaved as if neither had anything to do with past wrongdoings.

In contrast, an example of a successful succession of presidential policy can be shown by the 1988 Summer Olympic Games. It was designed, prepared, and ultimately held spanning a fifteen-year period by three presidents: Park Chung Hee, Chun Doo Hwan, and

Roh Tae Woo.[3] Thus, for the current incoming president, Park Geun Hye, to be evaluated as a successful president, she must not only perform well during her term but also insure successful succession of her policy agenda in the next presidential election, to be held in December 2017.

Therefore, the increase of the level of reciprocity across conservative or center-left presidents and administrations through peaceful power transfers or successions is the critical element to developing the presidential system institutionally and to consolidate democracy in South Korea. Reciprocity means that an incumbent president respects the predecessor's legacy, such as the direction of policy agenda, and can reasonably expect that the next successor will in turn respect his or her policy agenda too. This kind of democratic reciprocity leads to policy consistency and stability, which is a critical factor for the successful institutionalization of the presidential system and secure democratic consolidation in South Korea.

Is South Korea's democracy consolidated?

Students in comparative politics disagree on whether South Korea's democracy has been consolidated.[4] Hahm (2008) and Kim (2000) each argue that South Korea's democracy is already consolidated on the grounds that it regularly holds free, fair, and competitive elections according to the constitution. Moreover, there is virtually no chance of going back to authoritarianism, considering that the military is under civilian control. Thus, Hahm (2008, p. 129) even suggests that "South Korea's democracy is consolidated in the maximalist sense."

By contrast, Shin (1999, p. 250) contends that South Korea's democracy has a long way to go because democratic institutions do not regularly practice democratic values and democratic norms are not always respected. For example, the democratic rule of law is often ignored in South Korea, a strong indication of the immaturity of a democratic institution (Im 2000). Thus, Diamond and Kim (2000, p. 2) conclude, "Political institutions remain shallow and immature, unable to structure [either] a meaningful choice of policy course [or] to provide the responsive accountability and transparency expected by the South Korean public."

Indeed, since the transition to democracy in 1987, South Korea has elected six new presidents and has experienced power shifts between political parties. However, the political party system is still weak, and individualism and regionalism have been the dominant characteristics of South Korean politics. As a result, the average lifespan of a political party has been very short. New political parties are created as needed, changing their names with the death of their former political leader. Individualism and regionalism are waning, but they remain two of the main characteristics of South Korean politics.

Since the political party system did not develop as a separate entity, prominent leaders built their own factions. Thus, political participants sometimes ignored the rule of law, upon the request of their leaders, and then violence erupted in the legislative process as well as on the street. In fact, politicians frequently took political issues to the street when political negotiations between the majority and the minority failed. If the political majority

[3] The only stable presidential succession in South Korea was from Park Chung Hee to Chun Doo Hwan. This stability can be partly attributed to the generally positive evaluation of Park Chung Hee's performance regardless of his authoritarian dictatorship.

[4] The following section heavily draws on Heo and Hahm (2013).

invoked majority rule in the National Assembly to pass policy resolutions, the political minority often attempted to block the process, occupying the podium in the National Assembly floor. They also condemned the majority-vote process as a "tyranny of the majority," although majority rule is the most fundamental rule of modern democratic systems (Heo and Hahm 2013).

Part of the reason that political violence has been common and the rule of law has not been honored is the lack of political culture that values the legal system and democratic political structure. As a result, democratic institutions are maturing slowly and political struggle frequently occurs, which results in political instability. For example, South Korea's legislature, the National Assembly, is notorious for using violence, which is ironic because it is the organization that makes the laws. In addition, opposition leaders often refuse to accept the majority rule, accusing the president of being authoritarian if the president does not take into consideration their opinions in policy decisions or if the ruling party uses its clout to pass laws by majority rule. Violence and physical contact between members of the ruling and opposition parties in the National Assembly have been so common that, according to the 2003 East Asian Barometer Survey, 84.7 percent of respondents do not trust the National Assembly (Shin and Park 2008).

Protests in the street have been another measure that politicians have employed. According to democracy theorist Larry Diamond, a democracy may be considered consolidated when democratic norms and behavior occur at all levels of political participation, individual and organizational. He writes, "democracy can be consolidated only when no significant collective actors challenge the legitimacy of democratic institutions or regularly violate its constitutional norms, procedures, and laws" (Diamond 1999, p. 67). However, the South Korean case is far from Diamond's definition of democratic consolidation: The political party system is still weak, and the rule of law has been repeatedly challenged. In other words, democratic values are not *habitually practiced* in South Korea. For this reason, the maximalists argue that South Korea's democracy is far from consolidation.

Peaceful power transfers and successions in South Korea

Miraculously, under these unfavorable political environments, there have been six peaceful power transfers or successions in South Korea since 1987 (see Table 1). First, power was peacefully transferred from the military dictator Chun Doo Hwan to Rho Tae Woo in 1988. Roh was Chun's handpicked successor and not expected to win in a popular election. Yet, he did win in 1987 in a fair election because the two opposition leaders, Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung, both ran against him. Opposition votes were thus split, giving significant advantage to Roh Tae Woo.

Table 1 Political transfers or successions

Political transfer	Political succession
Kim Young Sam ⇨ Kim Dae Jung	Chun Doo Hwan ⇨ Roh Tae Woo
Roh Moo Hyun ⇨ Lee Myung Bak	Roh Tae Woo ⇨ Kim Young Sam
	Kim Dae Jung ⇨ Roh Moo Hyun
	Lee Myung Bak ⇨ Park Geun Hye

Prior to that period, Chun Doo Hwan came to power through a bloodless military coup after the assassination of Park Chung Hee on October 26, 1979. Although Chun Doo Hwan did not become a president through a democratic process, he did the groundwork for a peaceful power transfer (Park 2010, p. 23). Cooperating with public demand for democracy, President Chun Doo Hwan also amended the national constitution, including the presidential term limit with a single five-year term after the transition to democracy in 1987. His successor, President Roh Tae Woo, also facilitated the transition to democracy.

Although he had a military career similar to his predecessor's and his past involvement in Chun's military coup drew a long shadow over his political career, Roh was good at mediating conflict among competing interests in a rapidly democratizing society after 1987. He also crafted effective coalitions to achieve foreign policy success, as in the so-called "Northern Policy," which normalized diplomatic relations with most of the then-socialist countries.

The second successful transition—the first power transfer after democratization—occurred from Roh Tae Woo to Kim Young Sam in 1993. Kim was the presidential nominee of the ruling party and the first civilian president since Park Chung Hee came to power in 1961. Kim Young Sam had spent his entire career as a congressman and had fought for democracy against the military rule.[5] Once President Kim Young Sam came to office, he promised political reforms to get rid of bribery and corruption. These reform efforts were well received by the public, but they faced strong opposition. However, President Kim attempted to change old patterns of politics that lacked lawful public order. For one thing, he removed the military-authoritarian enclave instead of sustaining an alliance with it (Hahm and Kim 1999, p. 480). He further depoliticized the military through massive purges of politically oriented officers and intelligence agents (Park 2010, p. 24). This move solidified the civilian rule of the military, which significantly lowered the possibility of future military coups.

On the banking side of power, President Kim Young Sam enacted the *real-name financial transaction system*. This law prohibited the practice of using someone else's name or a non-existent alias when opening a bank account or engaging in financial dealings. Henceforth, all financial transactions had to be made with the participants' real names. This law made a significant contribution toward making economic activities transparent. Purification and purging of old practices were the most critical elements of Kim Young Sam's scheme for democratization, the so-called "negative democratic consolidation" (Hahm and Kim 1999, p. 480).

Third, in the subsequent presidential election of 1997, the opposition party candidate Kim Dae Jung won the executive seat. This had significant political implications because it was the first power shift between ruling and opposition parties to occur through popular election. For the first time in South Korea's democracy history, the ruling and opposition parties switched their seats. Thus, the inauguration of Kim Dae Jung in 1998 as president was the first so-called *horizontal* transfer of power to the minority and marks an important progressive event in the consolidation of democracy in South Korea (Hahm 2001).

In his prior role as dissident, Kim Dae Jung was a survivor of assassination attempts, imprisonment, a death sentence, and exile. Once he assumed the presidency—and it was in the whirlwind of a financial crisis—he led the country to get out from under the management of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In addition, his appeasement policy—

[5] In 1990, Kim Young Sam unexpectedly merged his Peaceful Democracy Party with President Roh Tae Woo's ruling Democratic Justice Party to form the Democratic Liberal Party, now the ruling Saenuri Party. As the presidential candidate of the ruling party, he defeated Kim Dae Jung in the 1992 presidential election. He was only the third civilian to hold the office and the first since 1962.

the so-called Sunshine Policy—culminated in the first-ever inter-Korean summit in Pyongyang, North Korea, in June 2000 (Park 2010, p. 24). He subsequently received the Nobel Peace Prize for his inter-Korean peace efforts.

Next, for the fourth successful transfer, Kim Dae Jung was succeeded by his own party's candidate, Roh Moo Hyun in 2003. Surprising everyone, Roh won the 2002 presidential election and stayed in office for his entire term. He had been a self-taught human rights lawyer before becoming a congressman, and then he pulled off perhaps the most stunning presidential election victory in the nation's history when, as a maverick with no political faction of his own, he won the presidency in 2002 (Hahm and Lee 2008, p. 184).

Borne on the basis of popular participation, the Roh Moo Hyun administration endeavored to further dismantle the old authoritarian structure dominated by bureaucratic elites, corporate power, and the rich. Among his policy changes were the decentralization of administrative mechanisms, balanced regional development, alleviation of the gap between the rich and the poor, and the expansion of welfare for those in the low-income bracket (Park 2010, p. 25).

The distinct feature of democratic consolidation under Roh Moo Hyun, however, is the lessening of presidential influence on ruling party discipline. He intentionally did not intervene in the operations of the ruling party, calling this policy "the political separation between the president and the ruling party." In the past, the president was the *de facto* leader of the ruling party, much like a prime minister in the parliamentary system, and controlled its congressional members tightly, using the nomination authority of party candidates (Hahm and Lee 2008, p. 192). While Roh Moo Hyun furthered the consolidation of democracy while in office, South Koreans have come to regard him over the years as someone who not only said too much but also did so provocatively, recklessly, and with a bluntness inappropriate for a national leader, while doing little to improve their daily lives (*The Boston Globe*, February 23, 2007).

Fifth, power was peacefully transferred from Roh Moo Hyun in 2008 to Lee Myung Bak, the opposition party candidate after a free and fair presidential election. Formerly the mayor of Seoul and also the chief executive officer (CEO) of Hyundai Construction, who touted himself the "economy president," Lee was elected in a landslide victory in December 2007. Also known as the CEO President, he was elected largely because he was praised as a tough-minded decision maker who knew how to get things done. Voters who supported him believed his campaign claim that he would not focus on ideology, but would revive the national economy with pragmatic principles (Hahm and Choi 2009, p. 617).

Sixth, power was again peacefully transferred from Lee Myung Bak to a candidate within the same ruling party with the free presidential election in 2012 and inauguration of Park Geun Hye earlier this year. President Park, who is a conservative politician, is South Korea's first female president. The daughter of President Park Chung Hee (1961–1979), Park Geun Hye enjoyed the support of the older generation who had participated in and witnessed economic development led by the former dictator. However, Park Chung Hee's legacy was his daughter's asset as well as her political burden. Thus, she had to heal some scars left by his 18-year rule—a period of not only hyper-charged economic growth but also one in which dissenters were tortured, jailed, and sometimes killed.

Discussion: peaceful power transfers or successions and democratic consolidation

Many scholars who study the process of democratization in South Korea after 1987 argue that South Korea experiences first, "decline or demise of authoritarianism"; second,

"transformation of democracy"; and third, "consolidation of democracy" (Burton and Ryu 1997; Hahm 2001, p. 84; Hahm and Kim 1999, p. 492). In particular, they argue that *experiences under the one military and four civilian presidents can be defined as the process of consolidation of democracy* (Hahm and Lee 2008; Leem 2001; Park 2005).

However, others argue that despite the political transition in the South Korean presidential system from authoritarian military dictatorship to civilian democracy, which necessitated a change in the way South Korean presidents exercise their leadership, one military and four civilian presidents, including Roh Tae Woo, Kim Young Sam, Kim Dae Jung, Roh Moo Hyun, and Lee Myung Bak, failed to exhibit the type of presidential leadership that reflected the new political system and culture (Kim 2004, p. 18). Specifically, conservative Kim Young Sam and center-left Rho Moo Hyun's political difficulties were intensified by poor macroeconomic performances. Conservative Roh Tae Woo, center-left Kim Dae Jung, and conservative Lee Myung Bak's political difficulties were intensified by a series of scandals, including their personal and siblings' bribery and corruption practices.

The concern with their failed presidential leaderships is not limited just to its impact on the inability of government to solve difficult problems with effective policies (Kim 2004, p. 44), the so-called "governability gap."[6] Furthermore, these experiences under the one military and four civilian administrations will undermine public perceptions of the legitimacy of presidential leadership, the so-called "legitimacy gap." Closing the "governability gap" or the "legitimacy gap" is increasingly elusive in South Korean presidential politics.

The failure of the presidents to provide effective leadership does not bode well for the further development of political democracy in South Korea (Kim 2004, p. 44). In this regard, we argue that these experiences of failed administrations are part of the trial and error of democratization in South Korea, specifically errors in this case. These failures, if they continue, will negatively affect the consolidation process of democracy by increasing the public's distrust of government as a whole. The public will increasingly blame poor presidential leadership for the resulting paralysis in the economy, in legislation, in political stability, and so on. As a result, the full-fledged democratic consolidation in South Korea is proceeding rather slowly and is even being delayed.

However, this does not imply that the process of democratization in South Korea will be reversed (Hahm 2001, pp. 84–85 for details). In other words, despite all the trials and errors in presidential politics under these administrations, democracy remains a valued goal in South Korea. In this context, we argue that democratization in South Korea is a slow process, best measured by institutional rather than an individual president's accomplishment.

Therefore, perhaps the true success of democratic consolidation is not related to whether these presidents after 1987 were uniquely successful or unsuccessful. But, rather, the overall success of democratic progress is demonstrated by the fact that presidential power was peacefully transferred from ruling party to ruling party equally as well as from ruling party to an opposition party and from opposition party to another opposition party or to the ruling party, each time with a free and fair presidential election. More important, these repeated peaceful power transfers or successions contributed to creating a favorable political environment for building democratic institutions and procedures and consolidating democracy in South Korea. Furthermore, this observation is not be limited to South Korea, but can be applied across the board to many new democracies in Asia and elsewhere facing similar problems.

[6] The following discussion heavily draws on Hahm (2001, pp. 84–85) and Hahm and Kim (1999, p. 492).

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