

Tracking Democracy: The Path in South Korea

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Abstract: The path to democracy is not a linear path. Looking at a case study of South Korea, where democracy was in turmoil for 31 years from 1956-1987, this study focuses on the historical events leading up to each constitutional change. This paper categorized each constitutional change into positive and negative for democracy and will focus on four instances where the constitutional amendments significantly affect democratic institutions. The salient actor in the democratic transition in South Korea was mass movements. In multiple cases, mass mobilization pushed the regime to change and accept more democratic institutions due to the international attention that mass movements brought.

Introduction

South Korea is known as a divided war-torn country and the first proxy war between Russia and the US. Then later, the picture changed, and Korea became one of the Asian tigers, one of the four characterized as top economies in Asia and one of the fastest-growing economies above 7% per year. What is omitted from common knowledge is what happened between the Korean war and the 1988 Olympic Games. South Korea's struggle with the democratic transition is often ignored outside of the country. Democracy is not an easy transition, and understanding that the path to democracy is not always linear will help apply a personal aspect to theorems in democratization. Each country examined must also analyze the current context of the country and the shared historical past that influences the presidential profiles and policy. When thinking of the idealized path for democracy, one may think of the United States and how the desire for freedom and participation in government won a war. Democratic norms were established and written down and thus followed. We also see many democracies that have gone back on their democratic institutions after establishing them. For other countries, democracy does not come easy; the democratic transition is different in countries that are distant from other democracies, have gone through colonization, lack infrastructure, and other factors that may contribute to an unbalanced or partial democracy. Thus this research paper asks how mass mobilization affected Korea's path to democratization. Exploring what contributed to South Korea's transition, this paper also examines the implications of being a United States ally on the path to democracy.

This paper focuses on constitutional amendments and categorizes them into positive and negative for democracy. Looking at the constitutional amendments is a way to measure legitimate changes to the government that had to be adjusted going through different people. Democratic backsliding is trending into other ways of altering the democratic institutions legitimately for more power. To combat this, understanding South Korea's path forward is vital.

The amendments create a snapshot of the times put into the constitution and maps the progression and backsliding in legal ways. The South Korean government was creating legitimate changes to its government and distancing itself from democracy. Student movements and mass mobilization appear before each positive amendment in the Korean constitution. The constitution was altered nine times during the fight for democracy from 1960 to 1988. The theory within this research details that mass mobilization is the key to democracy in each stage. Mass mobilization holds the government accountable by capturing attention of international actors to help stop democratic backsliding. Without mass mobilization, democratic institutions in South Korea would not have been introduced in 1960 and 1987.

For military leaders in South Korea, international attention was negative. With close United States allies living in the country, they could not wholly alter the government without consequences. Mass mobilization in 1960 and 1987 captured the attention of foreign actors in a way that threatened the legitimacy of the executive branch. During President Park's rule from 1962-1979, the economy became more prosperous, requiring less aid from the United States, and the Vietnam War thoroughly distracted the world. His effective protest repression kept his rule stronger than President Rhee's or President Chun's.

This research is significant because it is vital to understand the nonlinear path of democratization. Many countries are still fighting for a democracy that suits their needs. In South Korea's case, there was a constitution with a westernized ideal, but it fell into military rule and dictatorship for 27 years until the population demanded it to be changed. Democracy might work well on paper and in theory, but the circumstances of the country matter more. One may observe democratization theories that place countries into black-and-white boxes. Instead, the theory is that democratization can also come in waves of backsliding, for example, in the case of South Korea. This case will help us understand non-Western transitions to democracy while also illustrating a country with a colonized past. In addition, this study will determine what an United States ally can contribute to the relationship with democracy.

Context

Looking at the context of the country of South Korea helps to ensure that no misconceptions are perceived on the path to democracy. Korea has a complicated past with kingdoms, outsiders, and democracy. The Joseon Dynasty was the last of Korea's independence. Lasting nearly 500 years, it ended with the Japanese invasion in 1895 and then the creation of Korea as a Japanese imperial state in 1910 (*A History of Joseon: Korea's Last Dynasty*, 2021). With the end of World War II, the United States and the Soviet Union split Japan's claim on Korea at the 38th parallel. Each superpower set up its respective government type and helped the transition into independence. Amid the Cold War, the South Korean Constitution was created; it was the supreme law of the Republic of Korea. Between July 1948, the date of adoption of the constitution, and 1987, there were nine amendments and six republics. The constitution mirrored many western constitutions. In creation, the president was elected by a national assembly; this quickly changed with the first amendment in 1952. Rhee Syngman, the first president, introduced a direct election and a bicameral parliament, despite initial proposals to establish a parliamentary system (*Constitutional History of Korea*, 2018). President Rhee subsequently amended the constitution in 1954, removing term limits for the first president of the Republic of Korea. This idea is intriguing because the president wanted ultimate power, but after he left, he expected the government to function as a democracy again. However, even with President Rhee's popularity, the amendment only received 135 votes out of 203 members, just barely passing into the first amendment that negatively changed the democratic institutions of South Korea (*Constitutional History of Korea*, 2018).

After the United States supervised the transition of power to Rhee Syngman as president in 1948, he abused his power and continued to alter the constitution and purged the government of all of his enemies. In 1960, tampered elections provoked student-led demonstrations resulting in demands for Rhee's resignation (Ferrell & Norton). This first movement in 1960 was the start

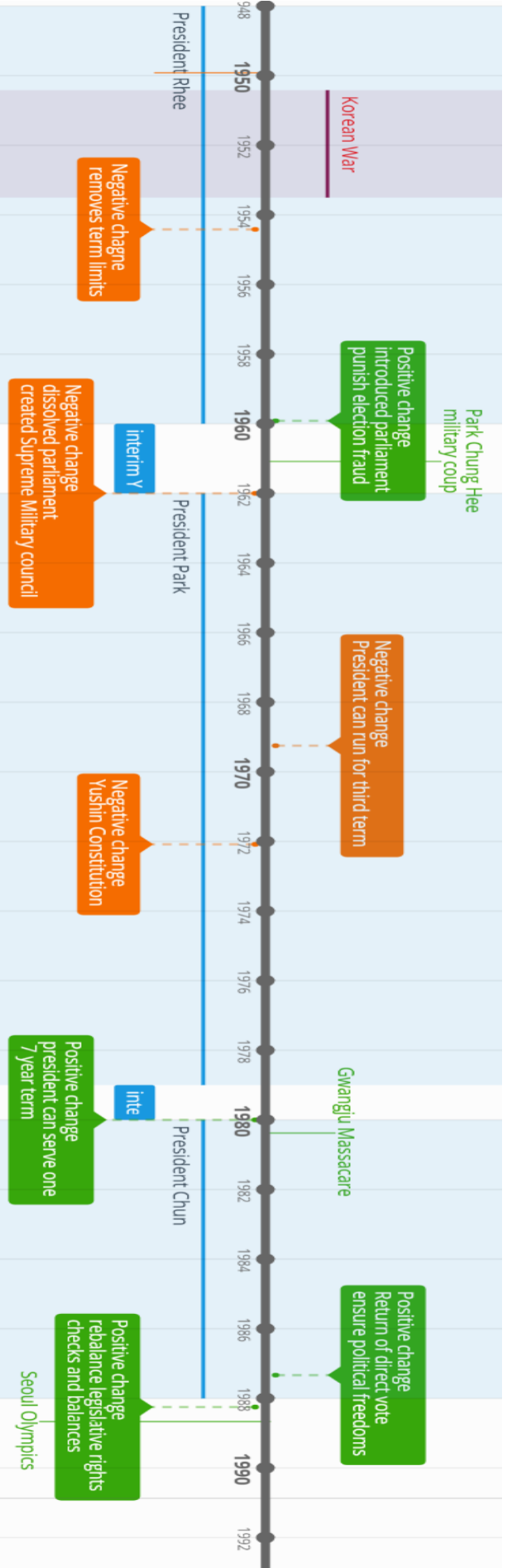
of the educated elites in Korea, and protest models became adaptable to the current regime. While the movements got what they wanted, Rhee out of the office and a new election, the alterations to the constitution created a shift and strengthened presidential power.

Park Chung-Hee became president after a coup following Rhee's resignation. He was a military general who created significant economic reform in Korea and achieved industrial and export-led income at the cost of exploiting human labor. While he was popular for his reforms in the 1970s, he established military rule and close control of the media to suppress opposition. Labor unions and students were rising, met with strict repression by President Park, and thus forced into hiding. Martial law was a power in the constitution used frequently in this period (*Park Chung Hee | Biography, Assassination, & Facts, 2022*). The Korean constitution states that a president can declare martial law during emergencies and times of turmoil. A president can use this power when the government needs or wants direct military control of normal civilian functions.

Following the assassination of President Park, President Chun, another military general, gained power. Both were excessively suppressive of dissent and declared martial law multiple times, giving him supreme rule and police power. At this time, the labor and student movements were motivated due to the severe repression done by the state (Stone, 1974). The masses mobilized to bring back the democratic freedoms of direct elections, freedom of speech, and ideals of democracy that the president denied for nearly 30 years. President Chun capitalized on the anticommunism sentiment creating a department to arrest and torture pro-democracy protestors, further dissolving the checks and balances against the president. He contributed to the Gwangju Massacre in 1980, where protestors were brutally murdered, and all communications from the city were cut off to the rest of the country (Szczepanski, 2019). The government denied all happenings in the city until a German reporter proceeded in and captured footage of the massacre. The breaking point was the deaths of two college students in Seoul by the police demonstrations that erupted before the Olympics. The 1987 protests

ushered in a referendum that successfully altered the constitution, and democratic institutions were fulfilled.

Figure 1. Korean context timeline



Literature Review

Scholars disagree on achieving a democratic transition. There are many theories; some are exclusive, and others are inclusive of different ideas about what is needed to lead to a country's democratization. Most theories of democratization are not exclusive to a particular path to democracy but instead are open to the cooperation of theories. This paper will touch on economic factors, elites in democratization, and the power of mass movements. With each argument presented building upon the next. This research will tie together the previous research with a more personal aspect that shows that each country's story towards democracy is complex and has many contributing factors. This research will also document the inconsistencies regarding democratic transitions and why South Korea succeeded. Focusing on South Korea will also add a dynamic of a post-colonized state and an American ally state that can add a new dimension to the previous theories.

The first theory that this paper will detail that contributes to democratic transition is the movement of the masses. The idea of movements disrupting democracy shows up in Medearis' paper "Social Movements and Deliberative Democratic Theory," stating that movements must act in disruptive ways to combat the hierarchical power to get into the public discourse scene. Marginalized groups must often work coercively to achieve democratic aims in these countries. This approach talks about how movements need to grab attention in disruptive ways, often causing chaos, but "do not always remain in a fixed position; rather, they often shift between co-optation, cooperation, and conflict with the regime" (Rivetti & Cavatorta, 2014). This paper tells us that motivations will be fluid along with their tactics. Van de Velde also contributes to this argument by claiming that student movements post-2011 debase the institutional policy and prefer unconventional ways of sharing their voice. The students avoid voting and making partisan alliances and instead lie on the outskirts. This new student movement creates a politically apathetic youth that desires to simply do it themselves instead of trusting the institutions. These ideas might conflict with the ideals of democracy while also striving for it.

With these theories, scholars are ignoring the post-colonization of countries and looking at contemporary democratic transitions. It stated that in third-world nations, “students were an important part of independence movements and have an established place in the society’s political mythology, activist movements are seen as a normal part of the political system” (Gill & DeFronzo, 2009). This place for students changes when we look at more developed nations that see student activists not as legitimate political actors but as disruptors. The population makeup of postcolonial countries varies significantly from the current state. It is significant to look at student movements when observing the initial shaping of democracy from another form of government. Sharp’s observations in *From Dictatorship to Democracy* describe how the most common path from dictatorship is into another dictatorship during the transition of power. These ideas of mass movements also need to maintain democracy after a power transition. To mobilize just for change is not enough, but setting up a path for democracy and holding groups responsible for this planning is how a state can keep from slipping back into dictatorship.

Another prominent theory is that economic factors lead to a democratic transition. This approach added to the discussion by Martin & Wacziarg in *The Democratic Transition* that “The democratic transition partly overlaps with other socioeconomic trends, chiefly the demographic transition, and the process of industrialization and modernization with which it is associated”. The growth of the economy largely contributed to democratic reform. The more money people have, they likely want more of a say in how the government works and more time to participate in government when the industry modernizes. Authoritarian regimes sometimes start to liberalize their political sphere to allow economic reforms. In this way, regimes may end up with democracy by accident (Pratt, 2004). This case also does not apply to South Korea because of the strict control measures that South Korea used to create economic growth. The literature suggests that democracy may help foster economic globalization but that globalization itself does not promote democracy (Milner & Mukherjee, 2009). Knowing that other parts may be in

play is crucial when understanding democratization and each case. Economic gains may play a part in activating different aspects of democracy.

There are also arguments that elites constitute a significant player in democratization. In *“Student Activism, Structural Adjustment and the Democratic Transition in Africa”* by Zeilig & Dawson 2008, the once “elite” student group was marginalized, propelling them to protest the new system of government. When universities were in decline, the students countered the government by asking for reform. In Ibrahim's paper “Crises, Elites, and Democratization in the Arab World,” he talks about how when the regime loses the support of elites, that is when a shift in democratization begins. In the Arab world, the flaw in democratization is focusing only on “steady, even if modest, economic development, and a marked measure of social equity. Without these two requisites, the road to democracy will be quite rocky, and reversals likely” (Ibrahim, 1993). Then we look at how elites influence the military and civil society to maintain stability. Elites can be in the way of derailing democratization or aiding, unintentionally or not, in its implementation. This goes to say that the elites have more self-serving motives and do not have democratic movements on their minds but how their lives could be improved by standing for democracy. Students In South Korea acted as elites since they were a new, highly educated group. The students adopted a form of participation other than voting. President Rhee was created with the United States intervention in the creation and education of elites. Rhee was of the (Yangban) higher class and could learn English in Korea and get his degrees at George Washington University, Harvard, and Princeton. He even spoke to President Roosevelt about helping Korea obtain its independence from Japan. Unsurprisingly, the United States backed his appointment as president since his name was already well-known in America for his political actions. All he now needed was to gain legitimacy in South Korea (Ferrell & Norton). While the power of elites is influential in maintaining democracy, one must ask when it thwarts democratic values.

The literature understands what factors may contribute to a democratic transition but leaves out details on how these democratic transitions are achieved and the inconsistencies with the transition. By looking at South Korea, which had a democracy in writing during and after the Korean war in 1948, the country reverted to military rule. Still, South Korea succeeded in a democracy 27 years later. The path to democracy is not simple steps to check off so that once all are achieved, it will be realized. Many factors for establishing democracy may be there, but still, it may not be a democratic regime. Determining the most important order of events and salient values will help more countries in the fight against regimes. Focusing on how these three precursors to democracy interact with the South Korean regime will add to existing theories in the democratization field. Since many theories center on one factor of democratization, this paper will be able to show how they work together and against each other in a specific case. South Korea had a setup for democracy as a post-war and post-colonized state. This case can apply different theories to answer why positive democracy still might not be achieved with all factors.

Methodology

The methodology most appropriate for this case analysis on South Korea is a historical process tracing of events leading up to important constitutional amendments. This research paper strives to answer why South Korea's democratic transition occurred in 1987. The theory that this paper frames the argument on is that mass mobilization will move undemocratic regimes to democratization with the presence of international pressure.

Focusing on the independent variables of mass movements, economy, and elites, constitutional amendments will be analyzed to show the legitimate ways a government can become less democratic. When comparing events leading up to the amendments, this research narrowed down the effective mass movement strategies and what halted the movements. Further observation of democratic transitions allows us to analyze why some regimes shift into

democracy and some back into dictatorship. This phenomenon can then be applied to other countries.

The emphasis on South Korea allows this paper to isolate different variables and set up other countries for success. To consider the cultural and political context of the time, a deep dive into Korea brings light to a post-colonization country in the struggle for democratization. Since South Korea started with a constitution that mirrored the United States and UK constitutions, it later had issues implementing democratic institutions. This makes the dependent variable interesting; democratic backsliding happens in many countries, and this paper will narrow down to specifics. Using democratization as the dependent variable measures the steps and stages of how South Korea progressed and regressed. Democratic backsliding has been an increasing phenomenon, and understanding its pieces and parts will also help us understand this specific case. In Bermeo's paper "On Democratic Backsliding," the term is detailed as "that some of the most blatant forms of backsliding are now less common; and that more vexing forms of backsliding are becoming more common. Ironically, we now face forms of democratic backsliding legitimated through the institutions that democracy promoters have prioritized." (Bermeo 2016). These legitimate institutions that degrade democracy are precisely what this paper hopes to understand. Democratic backsliding has been an increasing phenomenon, and "US allies often led this trend. Turkey, Hungary, Israel, and the Philippines are all examples. Several more established democracies have taken half-steps in their direction, including the United States, where voting rights, the politicization of courts, and other factors are considered to cause concern by many democracy scholars" (Fisher, 2021). The United States had democratic projects in a few other countries simultaneously as Korea in El Salvador and the Philippines. Both countries had long dictator regimes and low economic gain. El Salvador's bloody civil war resulted in military elites running most of the country (El Salvador Period of Democratic Transition). While all these countries had similar starting points with democracy, South Korea today is known as the United States "golden child." Unfortunately, many countries

are using legitimate institutions for an undemocratic agenda. This new age of democratic backsliding has its dangers to where international pressure cannot force a government to comply because they are doing everything, even the democratic backsliding, more legally and legitimately than before.

To operationalize the change in regime from an anti-democratic regime to a democratic one, this paper looks at the different amendments made to the Korean constitution. These amendments are translated and found on constitutionnet.org and The National Museum of Korean Contemporary History and categorized below. To gauge the amendments, this research starts by labeling the institutions put in place or removed as positive for democracy or negative for democracy. Some examples of this might include the dissolution of term presidential term limits as a weakening of democracy. This is determined as negative for democracy since it dissolved an institution that created more opportunities for elections and voting.

Looking at the constitutional amendments is a way to measure legitimate changes to the government that had to be changed going through different people. The amendments create a snapshot of the times put into the constitution and maps the progression and backsliding in legal ways. The South Korean government was creating legitimate changes to its government and distancing itself from democracy. All of the amendments fit into categories of positive or negative for democracy. The Korean constitution was created in 1948 and had nine amendments after its creation. This paper focuses on four significant amendments, from the positive in 1960 and 1987 to the negative in 1969 and 1972. These specific amendments made the most drastic changes to democratic institutions.

<i>Figure 2. Constitutional Amendments</i>	
Positive change to constitution	Negative change to constitution
1960 X2 - Introduced parliament, punish those who commit election fraud	1954 - Removed term limits (Rhee Syngman)
1980 - The president is to serve one 7-year term (Chun Doo-Hwan)	1962 - Dissolved parliament added supreme military council (Park Chung-Hee)
1987 - Return of direct popular vote - one five year presidential term (referendum)	1969 - Removed term limits on the third consecutive term (Park Chung-Hee)
1988 - Legislative rights of individual protected and continued checks and balances Final amendment to the constitution	1972 - Restoration order (Yushin) constitution suspended, national assembly dismissed the president has unlimited terms and can name judges, assembly members and is elected by National Conference for Unification (Park Chung-Hee)

For independent variables this paper analyzes the causes of each constitutional amendment. The precursors to amendments focus on mass mobilization concentrating on student and labor movements while also analyzing the economic factors used as shields. The literature defines mass mobilization as “an effort to understand citizen movements against governments, what citizens want when they demonstrate against governments,” as defined by the *Mass Mobilization Project*. Students made up about one-third of the participants in protests in the period where we can contribute the outcomes of mass movements to students as the majority.

This research paper examines the Stanford University Korea Democracy Projects data on social groups participating in protests and their data on the frequency of issues raised at demonstrations. This paper is written by Korean and American scholars who are experts in Korean history. Their data is very detailed on what was going on in each decade. This paper contributes historical moments to the movements and demands made at specific time periods, as reported. The data covers the 1970-1990 time periods. The National Museum of Korean Contemporary History also has data and brief interviews that are analyzed from Rhee

Syngman's time and the democratic transition paired with a historical analysis of the democratic movements.

This research finds a casual relationship between mass mobilization and the governments' reactions that spark constitutional amendments. This research adds to the literature about democratization, where many theories explain why governments transition but not how the path may not be linear or permanent. This paper's theory also ties together mass mobilization and international attention. As a case study, South Korea is also necessary for tracking the path to democracy as a United States ally, highlighting the boomerang effect. The "boomerang effect: when domestic avenues of influence are closed off to local advocacy groups, they may mobilize international allies who then lobby their own government to put pressure on the target state" (Risse, 2000). For military leaders in South Korea, international attention was almost always negatively brought about by mass movements of citizens. With United States allies living in the country, the regime could not completely throw out the constitution without international consequences. Mass mobilization in 1960 and 1987 captured the attention of foreign actors in a way that threatened the legitimacy of the executive branch. During President Park's rule in 1962-1979, the economy became more prosperous, requiring less aid from the United States, and the Vietnam War thoroughly distracted the world. Economic growth was an effective barrier to international criticism.

Positive Democratic Changes to the Constitution

1960 Constitutional Change

In 1960, the South Korean constitution was changed by demand of protests, especially citing fraudulent elections and issues surrounding how President Rhee disabled and destroyed the opposition party. Students organized different marches and sit-ins where the government reacted with force. This period was the birth of South Korean democracy, but we cannot erase

the fact that there was also an increase in undemocratic institutions. Competition for the presidency started in the early 1950s. The creation of a counterparty and the election system developed during this time. The vice presidential elections were a close race, and this competition led to democratic compromises and healthy debate. Unfortunately, the presidency had no competition, and the suspicious deaths of competitors left Rhee to be the only candidate.

At the beginning of South Korea as a country, Rhee Syngman was a leader revered and respected by the people. He was seen as the guardian of the new nation, and when he lost that trust, the people did not sit quietly. One of the issues with this image was the economic repercussions. President Rhee refused to open Korea to trade with Japan and relied heavily on the American dollar (Seth, 2013). In 1956 American aid was limited, increasing the Korean people's discontent. President Rhee was the father of the nation, but far too many were suffering. The economy grew at a rate of "about 4 percent a year, less than 2 percent per capita with the high birth rate factored in," but most of the growth was from US aid (Seth, 2013). Rhee focused on stopping imports and working on domestic industry, but because of the lack of natural resources in South Korea, this plan failed miserably. With the economy at its lowest, the people had reason to be upset. After colonization and a devastating war, there seemed to be no improvement in quality of life. Protests and unions were the easiest places to turn. The 1960 political unrest went through 3 stages, student demonstrations, mass demonstrations, and US intervention.

While economic strain was a big issue, Korean citizens took to the streets because of the blatant interference in elections. In 1958, Rhee and his party prepared for the next election. Stuffed ballot boxes in certain districts were arranged, and the police stood firmly with Rhee. The police and hired gangsters attacked the opposition to scare them away from petitioning to be on the ballot. The leading contender became ill, and President Rhee took advantage of this and moved the election date from May to March 15. The opposition leader later died in the

hospital, leaving a suspicious light on Rhee during the election. This suspicion of the president and his cabinet led to a strong counterparty bringing dissatisfied elites created the counterparty and remained a legitimate party, even with President Rhee cracking down on the opposition.

One main contention that led students to fume into the streets was a rally and counter-rally in Daegu. It was on a Saturday in Daegu, one of the larger cities in South Korea, and President Rhee designated it a minor holiday so all could attend the political rally and show their support for him. Most businesses closed so all could attend. The following Sunday, the opposition party tried to do the same thing, but the police and the government forced schools and businesses to open on a Sunday so no one could attend. High schoolers protested, saying this was politicization of schools, and over 240 students were arrested (Stone, 1974). The government involved schools in its fight for power, which angered the new generations of politically active. This is evidence of the power of education, and the values taught in schools. The classroom was a place for students of all those troubled by the war and economic strain to desire more. If they learn ways to better their situation, they also accept the means. After Korean independence in 1945, elementary school was mandated, and education rose to “99% of children of the right age were in elementary school. At the same time, there was a steep rise in the number of students enrolled at middle and high school, as well as university” (Stone, 1974). This push towards education created a new generation of educated citizens with new values and knowledge of freedom. In the Daegu rally case, students are forced to go to school where they will learn of democratic institutions and be prepared to be civic adults but are instead pawns in a political scheme on a Sunday. Not only was this a step into controlling the personal lives of the everyday citizen, but the democratic shortcuts Rhee’s government was making were glaringly evident even to the students.

Figure 3. National Museum Of Korean Contemporary History

Q. What part did education play in the 19th April Revolution of 1960? How could it have happened?

Kang Won-taek / Political Science Professor, Seoul National University

I think that education played a huge role. I think education in democracy, and through that, learning of liberal democracy, was simply crucial.

Above is a question prompt on the *National Museum Of Korean Contemporary History* asking a professor at Seoul National University, one of the schools where students have historically been protesters and are also the most prestigious school in South Korea. This answer led to a change in the constitution in 1960 and sparked future democratic protests in South Korea. In addition, the founding of many student and youth democratic groups started in school settings where clubs and activities were encouraged. This trend from the 1950s until now in South Korea is evidence of the power of wronged students.

Student groups became more organized with their methods in the early 1960. This organization forces the president to take more devastating measures to stop them. Students of Korea University arranged a march on the national assembly building to show solidarity. On their way back to campus were attacked by hired gangsters that injured the students sparking another movement the next day. Students would not let their own be battered and killed for no reason, so they marched to the president's house, where police fired and killed approximately 100 people. Rhee declared martial law, and the rioting stopped, but the damage he inflicted was too significant to overcome. Mass movements through Seoul and outlying cities were impossible to control with Rhee's foundation of power. It is evident that even with strict control, the minds of the masses had changed their opinion of President Rhee. From the military base and embassy, the United States was cautiously eyeing what Rhee was doing and issued a statement saying, "as a reflection of public dissatisfaction over the conduct of the recent elections and repressive measures unsuited to a free democracy," the Ambassador visited Rhee and urged him to step

down (Stone, 1974). The mass protests drew the United States' attention, causing them to step in. The mass protests made the aspiring democracy look illegitimate, and only after the final month of protests, with more citizens participating and increased deaths, was there pressure from the US. The United States did not care about the alteration of the constitution, but the citizen mass discontent unknowingly used the boomerang effect to bring changes. After Rhee's resignation, those responsible for election fraud were purged, and police power weakened. The 1960 constitutional amendments had a positive effect on democracy in purging those who were harming the democratic institution of voting.

Figure 4. National Museum Of Korean Contemporary History

Kim Yong-ho/ Political Science Professor, Inha University

Q. What is the significance of the 19th April Revolution in South Korean political history?

After the 19th April Revolution, no ruling group could repudiate liberal democracy.

What's more, dictators had to justify their seizure of power as being a temporary limiting of freedoms.

They could not deny the value of liberal democracy, they emphasized the temporary nature of the restrictions on freedom. Hence, the 19th April Revolution was crucial, it played an important role in creating a spirit of liberal democracy and popular sovereignty in Korea.

While absolute power was used to declare military rule, this was only temporary. It is repeatedly stated in the constitutional amendments that some changes are temporary and that military rule is also a temporary caution to some threats. Military rule is explicit in the constitution when a threat to the state or an increase of turmoil is present to keep the country on track. Military rule was enacted five times between the nine amendments. The amendment of 1980 changed the set term limits, which applied to all but the current president in power. This temporary power helps ease tensions with mass protests in the hope of an adaptation of governance. These did create issues with the distribution of power; for example, Rhee's abuse of police and military power weakened many institutions. The constitutional amendments in 1960 distanced the president from the police. The government did not have the resources to stop protesters for the next few years. With unhappy ideological divisions, the military and police

split from government control, and the coup of 1961 was staged. A military leader was put in place to regain the iron fist of control.

1987 Constitutional Change

The most legitimate change to the constitution was made in 1987 because it was a government and opposition collaboration project. The amendment was confirmed through a public referendum with 93% approval (*Constitutional History of Korea*, 2018). Sparked by mass movements and the coming Olympic Games, the international eyes were on Korea once again. With this amendment, the president was elected by direct popular vote after 15 years, and the term limits were strictly defined.

A large insurgence of activists pushed positive changes toward democracy through the 1980s. The pressure built up in the 1970s came to fruition in 1987. The Stanford Korea Democracy Project Report data by Bystydziński & Schacht, 2007, listed issues presented at protests from 1970-1991 below.

Figure 5. Issues raised at protests 1970-1991 (Bystydziński & Schacht, 2007)

Specific Issues	Frequency	Percent
Anti-repression	1105	24.27
Labor conditions, rights, etc.	748	16.43
Educational freedom	291	6.39
Constitution	254	5.58
Anti-censoring, freedom of press, or critique of media	243	5.34
Return to democracy	238	5.23
Critique of Chun gov.	140	3.07
Anti-military training in school	119	2.61
Critique of PCH regime	118	2.59
Solidarity with other activists	100	2.2
Reunification or NK issues	94	2.06
Anti-repressive laws	84	1.84
Critique of Roh gov.	76	1.67
Critique of individuals	73	1.6

Many democratic values ranked in the top issues raised. Anti-repression was the most salient issue raised in protests, but labor conditions, educational freedoms, and a few more relating to democratic norms were raised at protests. The table below shows the breakdown of

participants in the movements divided by time. Most activists were students, but in many cases, the labor movement followed that for support. The 1970s during President Park's time and then the whole of President Chun's term in 1980-1987.

Figure 6. Groups participating in Protests by decade (Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2007)

1970s	Percent	1980-1987	Percent
Students/Youth	31.71	Students/Youth	48.41
Laborers	17.00	Laborers	23.65
Christians	16.50	Christians	4.92
Journalists	6.39	Intellectuals	3.65
Christian students	6.30	General activists	3.65
Other	22.10	Other	15.72
Total	100.00	Total	100.00

The mass movements were a significant part of bringing change to the country. Multiple groups were part of the protests, making it harder to halt. To understand the positive change to the constitution in 1987, it is reasonable to assess the economical situation in the 1980s.

Chun Doo-Hwan was the president from 1980-1988 following the assassination of Park Chung-Hee. The economic policy-making process did not progress well at the beginning since President Chun was a military leader. During the previous President's time, great strides were made in economic prosperity. The issue lies with bureaucrats vs. the brains of the policies, and their disagreements were causing delays in the policy. Elites used to growth-first policies did not agree with new ideas of balance to bring money back to the people (Lee, 2021). President Chun also initiated budget cuts in the military, where some of his old colleagues felt betrayed. This created a distance between the government and the military for the first time since Rhee. Towards the end of President Chun's regime, "the economy grew 10 percent annually with inflation at 5 percent and the unemployment rate at 2.8 percent. The country achieved its first trade surplus in 1986" (Lee, 2021). The economy was on a slow upward trend with the export-focused economy. This created a stable environment for people to interact with the government more and critique. One of the issues that President Chun faced was how to distract

people from fighting his rule. The years right before the 1987 democracy push were some of the fastest-growing years for the economy. Increased openness with countries and diversifying exports led to this great progress. The progress also increased interaction with the world outside South Korea by bringing new ideas and living standards. This is evidence that people living in South Korea could see that the state they lived in was not treating them fairly, and now there was little excuse for the prolonged repression and limited educational freedoms.

Led by students, the final democracy struggle from 1985-1987 was where a return to democracy was demanded and eventually accepted. The movements demanded “constitutional revision, including direct presidential elections. However, on 27 April 1987, Chun announced that he could no longer tolerate discussions on constitutional revision and that he would protect the current constitution” (*Constitutional History of Korea*, 2018). Following this declaration, a student's brutal death due to police torture was revealed. It had previously been covered up, but new evidence exposed by Christians for Democracy turned the student, Park Jong-Chul, into a martyr. Students mourned the loss of one of their own while blaming the government for ordering his death and thus covering it up. Outrage was widespread. The youth had grown with the country and had so many new opportunities now that were taken away. The “National Council for the Representatives of College Students is an umbrella organization that could lead student activism. The NCRC’s activities were not limited to political demonstrations but also extended to the reunification movement and monitoring elections” where they could take an active part in safekeeping the integrity of democratic norms (Bystydzieński & Schacht, 2007). Students who were denied democracy wanted to create organizations that took what little power they had and organized it against the government. To an upcoming Olympic Games, where students took to the streets to ensure their election was valid. This is evidence that student movements were so distrustful of the system that they had to create their own guard against election fraud. It also shows how organized the students were in creating a multi-university system and organizing themselves for a particular cause.

The biggest shift in the democratic movement was the increased international focus on South Korea's internal conflict. The Chun regime made small changes to the strict repression due to an upcoming general election and the 1988 Olympic Games. The regime was continuously struggling with a lack of legitimacy. Due to the Olympic spotlight, "it was imperative for them to demonstrate how democratic their regime was to the voters and the international audience" (Bystydzieński & Schacht, 2007). The Olympics were a huge event to put South Korea on the map as the second Asian country to host the games (Kore, 2021). The "external pressure had a measurable effect on the Chun regime by restraining its willingness to use excessive force against peaceful demonstrators" (O'Neill & Lerner, 2018). This is evidence that the regime struggled with legitimacy because of mass movements, which drove them to change the approach to ensure international actors were not questioning their legitimacy. Violent force against protesters was President Chun's strategy before, but now, with the attention on the country, it was a risk. With the torture and deaths above discovered to be covered up, the regime had unraveled entirely. The two student martyrs proved that President Chun had schemes up his sleeve while acting pleasant. Since the Olympics were set for 1988, the protests invigorated with betrayal did not stop and pushed the regime to make concessions. The 1987 change in the constitution boosted checks to the executive branch and created a more structured legislature (*Constitutional History of Korea*, 2018). The regime realized that to get what it needed, recognition and money from the Olympic Games, it could no longer ignore and repress the masses. Reflecting on the history leading up to each constitutional amendment, mass mobilization played a critical factor in each constitutional change. The government felt threatened by the masses right before the Olympics, and the president was forced to make concessions to the people.

The change to the constitution was the most democratic in its measures, but also in passing it. It was passed by the National Assembly and then "subsequently approved by 93 percent of the voters in a national referendum on October 28. The bill was the product of

painstaking negotiation and compromise among the major political parties in the National Assembly, unlike the preceding two constitutions, which were essentially unilaterally drafted by the executive branch" (*South Korea - The Constitutional Framework*). This shows great progress on multiple levels of democracy. Since the constitution was amended nine times in the span of 34 years, its power was diminished. This final amendment sealed the constitution, and no more presidents have changed it. This is evidence that the final changes were the most legitimate and that the government took measures to make it nearly impossible to change the constitution on future whims.

Negative Changes to the Constitution

1969 constitution change

The negative changes to the constitution reside almost exclusively with President Park. While Rhee started the path to editing the constitution for personal gain, President Park took it even further. President Park Chung-Hee came into power in 1961 with a military coup that overthrew the second republic of South Korea (*Park Chung Hee | Biography, Assassination, & Facts, 2022*). He was president until 1979 with his assassination by his own Korean Central Intelligence Service. His rule encompassed Korea's third and fourth republic, and President Park made the most alterations to the constitution, numbering at three.

President Park is well known for his grand economic plans and strategies for South Korea's growth. President Park "launched the First Five-Year Economic Development Plan in 1962, the South Korean economy grew enormously, and the economic structure was transformed radically. South Korea's real gross national product expanded by an average of more than 8 percent per year" (*South Korea - The Economy*). During President Rhee's time, the economy was at about a 3% increase with the help of the United States. President Park was trying to leave this legacy behind. His five-year plan "orchestrated the transformation of Korea

from an agricultural to an industrial society" (Shin, 1998; Kong, 2000). This five-year plan also included a big push into the cities. The labor class "flocked from the countryside to the urban centers in hopes of a better life" (Koo, 2001). Under President Park's plan, the manufacturing sector grew from "14.3 percent of the GNP in 1962 to 30.3 percent in 1987. The ratio of domestic savings to GNP grew from 3.3 percent in 1962 to 35.8 percent in 1989." (*South Korea - The Economy*). This considerable increase put South Korea on the fast track to becoming a vital economic anchor in Asia. The middle class was developing in South Korea, and families had more to pass on to their children and give them better lives (Koo, 1991). His plans lifted a lot of the economic insecurity that had been around since 1910, starting with Japanese rule. With the success of his economic plans, many wanted to keep him in power, as seen in his consistent reelection. Therefore, the United States did not need to involve itself as much in South Korea's growth. The economic growth was an effective shield from the international eyes.

During the conclusion of Park's second term, he began to campaign again, but the current constitution limited presidents to only 2 four year terms. President Park's party "passed a constitutional amendment that would make a president eligible for three consecutive four-year terms." (Lew & Im, 2022). President Park defeated the opposition for his third term, but "the opposition made substantial gains, especially in major urban areas, securing 89 seats in the National Assembly," where the dominant party held 113 seats (Lew & Im, 2022). This growth of the opposition was one of the last democratic moments of Park's Presidency.

The students were not a fan of the added third presidential term, starting to protest strongly against President Park, but a second issue pushed the students into action. President Park put into place mandatory military hours for college students in 1971. He used this to discipline the student population who protested Park Chung Hee's revision to the 1969 constitution to allow him to run for a third presidential term" (Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2007). His attempts to quiet the students backfired and brought even more to the protests. They did not want to participate in a military they did not even support. Most student protests in 1971 were

over military training, and President Park returned the favor by stationing soldiers all around college campuses. The 1969 constitutional amendment allowed President Park to demonstrate his control over the constitution and institutions. The amendment allowed him to make further, more drastic changes in 1972.

1972 Constitution change

Mass movements slowed down from 1972-1975 due to President Park's strict repression and prevention measures. President Park declared martial law in 1972, citing the recent North-South Dialogue (Situation in the Korean Peninsula). This caused student protests to slow in 1972, fearing more significant repercussions. After Martial Law was enacted, President Park initiated the Yushin Constitution. The Yushin constitution suspended the previous constitution, dissolved the legislature, and permitted the president's reelection for an unlimited number of six-year terms (Lew & Im, 2022). One of the most significant changes was the creation of The National Conference for Unification. "The conference was to be a body of between 2,000 and 5,000 members who were directly elected by the voters for a six-year term. The president was the chairman of the conference." This conference was in charge of electing the president and eliminating citizens' direct votes for the president (Lew & Im, 2022). Park was elected by the National Conference for Unification two more times, serving seven terms in total. This infringement on democracy is evidence of an adverse change in the constitution because the president used an emergency to alter the constitution and continue running for president. While the National Conference for Unification was democratic in ideas, President Park made sure they were all his supporters giving his elections no competition. Park had the power to appoint "one-third of the National Assembly, effectively guaranteeing a legislative majority, as well as all members of the judicial system, including Constitutional Court justices" (Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2007). The Yushin Constitution "transformed the presidency into a legal dictatorship" (Eckert et al., 1991). His new constitutional changes were drastic and wholly altered the

government's power structure. From 1972 onwards, the president had almost complete authority over legislature, elections, judges, the military, and education. This change did not come peacefully.

Student movements in 1973 and 1974 protested the new Yushin Constitution while continuing to advocate for their educational freedom. Students were the largest group protesting and threatened President Park's rule enough for him to target the students into silence. He issued many emergency decrees, some of them being "Emergency Decree 4: which forbade student organizing and specifically illegalized the student organization National Democratic Youth-Student League. Emergency Decree 4 and Emergency Decree 7 closed down Korea University" (Bystydzieński & Schacht, 2007). The amount of power put into silencing the students helps to understand the sheer might of the protests. Even with harsh decrees and arrests, the movement did not die. While much of the protests were more personal, like combatting mandatory military service or pushing for educational freedom, the regime was threatened. The country's economic gains were not a push for democracy but did give more power to movements since the considerable influx of bodies. Those who moved to cities from rural areas for better jobs were forced into hard labor and disenchanting. Other movements, like the labor movements, also rose up during the Yushin constitution. The Korean Democracy Projects data on protest tactics over the timeline is very diverse. President Park's harsh regime silenced and repressed many top protest tactics. As observed, many protest tactics were big and attention-getting, like rallies, sit-ins, and strikes. These tactics were capable of capturing government attention and possibly international attention.

Figure. 7 Diversity of Protests Tactics (Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2007)

Tactics	Frequency	Percent
Demonstration or Rally	789	20.64
Declaration	579	15.15
Meeting (internal or with target groups), determination	306	8.00
Sit in, take over space (nong-sung)	299	7.82
SMO founding	284	7.43
Propaganda	265	6.93
Requests	233	6.09
Prayer or religious ceremony	134	3.51
Strike	109	2.85
Fasting	103	2.69
Parade or march	101	2.64
Memorial event	86	2.25
Boycott	73	1.91
Protest via legal or formal channels	61	1.60
Symbolic protest/dramaturgy	60	1.57
Self torture, defacement, immolation, etc.	59	1.54
Violence	58	1.52
Criticize or spoken protest	52	1.36
Press Conference	42	1.10
Consciousness Raising, debates, forums	30	0.78
Silent rally	15	0.39
Resignation, quit work/job	15	0.39
Fundraising	15	0.39
Peaceful cultural event	9	0.24
Spontaneous disruption	8	0.21
Other	8	0.21

Other movements existed but could not work together during President Park's harsh rule. Labor protests also spiked during President Park's time; in 1971 and 1975, there were high activity levels. Movements concerning human rights and workers' rights came up during the economic reform as some were being worked to death in horrible conditions to better South Korea. Labor unions could not form with direct government intervention, and those working protested to show that the regime "legitimized a repressive stance against free union growth by establishing national priorities of rapid industrialization and political stability" (Bystydzieński & Schacht, 2007). In their opinion, the regime put the state's growth above their well-being. Labor union strikes were not allowed to meet from 1972-1980, removing unions' main power (Kim & Bae, 2004). The power of labor unions was muted; this is evidence of President Park's practical strategies for countering mass movements before they arose.

Some differences in the protests of the 1970s are the lack of a central movement. President Park was able to have different pressures on each movement to halt them from making significant changes. Closing down major universities that were part of the student movement halted much teamwork between schools and players. Repression during military rule and arrests of opposition put out a threat that quieted down the movements. The labor movement and students did not have the opportunity to organize well together. President Park combatted his opposition with specific preventative tactics. He did not need to rely on military power even though it was in his complete control. The Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) was founded under his guidance and used "to torture and silence and opponents. At one time, it was estimated that there were 30,000 KCIA agents" (Chiha, 2021). His reach also went into the classroom to ensure students were taught that the "regime was the leader of the world's greatest liberal democracy" (Chiha, 2021). His hands were constricting the throats of many groups, simultaneously effectively countering the power of mass mobilization.

After President Park's death, President Chun could not effectively suppress the masses. The 1987 movement rallied every group together, and citizens without a major group joined. There was no direct tactic that President Chun could take to combat them except military force that made him look illegitimate. President Park was able to get complete control of his position and stop many issues before they arose. President Park also raised the economy and created a middle class in South Korea that relieved much international pressure on his regime while President Chun faced international backlash at every turn. The Gwangju Massacre at the beginning of Chun's regime was publicized, showing brutal force against protesters. The massacre was shown to the western world and published on the news bringing lots of unwanted attention to his regime. He was much more careful with the coming of the 1988 Olympics, especially since the games were up for debate if mass protests persisted.

Conclusion

South Korea's final step towards a fully functioning democracy in 1987 was not without a fight. Understanding where South Korea started with its constitution in 1948 and battled with undemocratic reforms of the constitution is essential in understanding the nonlinear path of democracy. Presidents took legitimate ways to alter their government and grab more power for themselves. The recent addition of seeming legitimate puts great importance on the image of a state, as a United States ally and prospect from the Cold War remains a center for democratic progress of high importance. Looking at the nine constitutional amendments and the history leading up to each can make inferences about what factors were most salient in bringing South Korea to a democracy.

This research is significant to the democratic backsliding theories because it is vital to understand the legitimate changes made to the constitution by the president. Unfortunately, many countries still fight for a democracy that suits their needs, and this backsliding is becoming more common. Democracy might work well on paper and in theory, but the circumstances of the country matter more. This case helps us understand non-Western transitions to democracy while also illustrating a country with a colonized past. In addition, a country that is a United States ally and partners with them can contribute to the pros and cons of this relationship and democracy.

With historical process tracing, student movements and international attention are intertwined factors contributing to South Korea's transition. These factors help us understand how messy democratic transitions are and that there cannot be one path or reason toward democracy. South Korea is one of the countries that had a significant gap in time from democratic structure to democracy. In 27 years, the country could flow back and forth between positive and negative amendments to the constitution. Mass mobilization was a present and powerful force for each constitutional change and pushed South Korea into the democracy it is

today. We have also seen an evolution of mobilization in present-day South Korea that can be explored further in this same structure.

Further studies with the same structure can investigate a country's most salient value in democratization. For example, comparing cases like El Salvador and the Philippines to South Korea which occur at a similar time would bring insight into the United States' involvement. Further studying of the significance of the United States' intervention in democratization by studying a country with the significant presence of the United States compared to the lack of foreign involvement.

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