

Democratic Transition and the Consolidation of Democracy in South Korea

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Abstract

This article discusses the negative effects that the path to democratic transition in South Korea had on the nation's consolidation of democracy. Unlike previous studies which argue that negotiating pacts among elites is the most successful formula for democratic transition, the South Korean case shows that a smooth democratic transition through a political pact became an important factor for the institutionalization of democratic rules and procedures. By focusing on the undemocratic experience of the Kim Young Sam civil government, the essay posits that the failure of Kim's government essentially resulted from structural problems in the process of democratic transition, as well as from Kim's leadership style.

Since South Korea began the process of democratic transition from an authoritarian regime in 1987, its democracy has endured without any imminent sign of an authoritarian regression. In fact, South Korea's democratic transition emerged from both an economically successful authoritarian regime and politically smooth pactmaking. In South Korea, the "transition by crisis of success" is in a relatively advantageous position for democratic consolidation.¹ However, like other new democracies, South Korea also has suffered from many problems that emerged in the consolidation phase, such as dual transitions and institutionalization of democratic norms or rules in terms of political society, civil society, economic society, and the state apparatus. Korea's civil government unfortunately has failed to solve these problems. Consequently, it is difficult to say that Korean democracy has officially consolidated.

The experience of the Kim Young Sam civil government (1993-1998) showed the characteristics of a "delegative democracy," which means that the elected president attempts to rule through broad media appeals and personalist

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¹ Stephan Haggard and Robert Kaufman, *Political Economy of Democratic Transitions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

movements, thereby bypassing intermediate political institutions.² According to O'Donnell, a delegative democracy is a mixture of select democratic norms of majoritarian rule and authoritarian practice. In contrast to representative democracies, delegative democracies “have achieved neither institutional progress nor much governmental effectiveness in dealing with their respective social and economic crises.”³

In South Korea, with a high level of support from the people, former president Kim Young Sam took the lead in a series of reforms early in his term of office, such as the removal of corruption, the establishment of civilian supremacy over the military, the implementation of the real-name financial transaction system, and the amendment of politically inspired laws. However, after five years, the Kim government (which advocated clean and frugal politics) was harshly vilified by the people. At the end of his term in office, Kim lost his control of the economic policy-making process due to his role in causing a financial crisis, the so-called “IMF economic crisis.”

Why did his government turn away from the people? This is because of Kim's weakened political leadership, the government's inconsistent economic policies, and the corruption of the democratic forces themselves. However, a more substantive reason is that Kim's reforms depended on his extremely personal style of leadership, rather than on formal political institutions. In other words, because the Kim Young Sam government was personalized and was not integrated into a broader framework of contestation and accountability, it was deprived of feedback that was essential for correcting mistakes and, consequently, its reforms were more exposed to the possibility of popular backlash and reversal.⁴

Recent studies on the “third wave of democratization” have been concerned with such issues as institutional designs and their outcomes, prior regime types and their implications for transition paths and consolidation tasks, and modes of regime transition and their implications for democratic consolidation.⁵ Empirical studies on the relationship between a certain type

² Guillermo O'Donnell, “Delegative Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy* 5, no. 1 (January 1994): 55-69.

³ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁴ Stephan Haggard and Robert Kaufman, “The Challenges of Consolidation,” *Journal of Democracy* 5, no. 4 (October 1994): 13.

⁵ Arend Lijphart and Carlos Waisman, *Institutional Design in New Democracies: Eastern Europe and Latin America* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996); Terry Lynn Karl and Philippe Schmitter, “Modes of Transition in Latin America, Southern and Eastern Europe,” *International Social Science Journal* (May 1991): 269-284; Gretchen Casper and Michelle Taylor, *Negotiating Democracy: Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996); Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); and Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, “Toward Consolidated Democracies,” *Journal of Democracy* 7, no. 2 (April 1996): 14-33.

of democracy and a distinctive mode of regime transition have been relatively small in number. These studies are less concerned with why and how a mode of transition affects certain types of democratic consolidation, and more focused on what consequences to expect from certain types of transition. In addition, some scholars argue that negotiating pacts among elites are the most successful formula for a democratic transition.⁶

However, as Hagopian argues, the Brazilian case shows that political pacts limit the extension of democracy.⁷ The South Korean case also demonstrates that a smooth democratic transition through political pactmaking became an important confining factor against further institutionalization of democratic ideas. Thus, in order to examine the relationship between the path of democratic transition and its implication for democratic consolidation, it is necessary to focus on the process of transition itself, considering each country's political and social contexts.⁸

The purpose of this article is to examine why and how the democratic transition through political pacts negatively affected the process of democratic consolidation in South Korea. Based on the presupposition that facilitating factors for democratic transition conversely impeded democratic consolidation in South Korea, this research focuses on structural problems in the process of democratic transition from authoritarian rule which led to the failure of the Kim Young Sam civil government. The structural problems consist of the grand conservative ruling coalition with vested interests, the strong presidential system, and the undemocratic characteristics of the party system. In addition, Kim's leadership style was an important factor in the failure of the first civilian government. In this research, these structural and leadership factors are the independent variables and the failure of Kim's government is the dependent variable.

The first section of this essay presents a literature review, which includes views on the conceptualization of democratic consolidation and the relationships between paths of democratic transition and democratic consolidation, as well as a description of the approach that was used to achieve the research on

⁶ Karl and Schmitter, "Modes of Transition in Latin America, Southern and Eastern Europe"; Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991); and Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

⁷ Frances Hagopian, "Democracy by Undemocratic Means? Elites, Political Pacts and Regime Transition in Brazil," *Comparative Political Studies* 23 (July 1990): 147-170.

⁸ Gerardo Munck and Carol Leff emphasize the process of transition from authoritarian rule as an important determinant factor that affects not only the prospects of democratic consolidation but also the success of the transition to democracy in the first place. See their article, "Modes of Transition and Democratization: South America and Eastern Europe in Comparative Perspective," *Comparative Politics* 29, no. 3 (April 1997): 344-345.

which this article is based. Next, the essay briefly looks at the process of South Korea's democratic transition, then turns to a discussion of some of the factors affecting the failure of Kim's government.

Literature on Democratic Transition and Democratic Consolidation

Since the mid-1970s, the spread of democracy to many countries in Southern Europe, Latin America, Asia, Eastern Europe, and Africa has been remarkable.⁹ The number of states that qualify empirically as democracies has grown steadily from forty-two in 1972, to fifty-two in 1980, to seventy-six in 1994,¹⁰ and to ninety in 2007.¹¹ With the collapse of communism at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, democracy reached every region of the world for the first time in history. Huntington calls this phenomenon the "Third Wave" of democratization.¹² He, in particular, argued in 1991 that the then present democratic transitions were taking place in countries in which the preconditions for democracy had not sufficiently matured.

The global expansion of democracy poses a fascinating challenge for social scientists. Their main concerns are to examine the driving forces propelling the wave of democratization, to reexamine the established theories which emphasize the importance of socioeconomic and cultural factors in democratic development, and to explore the ways in which new democracies can be sustained and consolidated. In particular, recent studies focus on the democratic consolidations of new democracies in terms of their nature, process, and other factors affecting the various types.

The Concept of Democratic Consolidation

Democratization involves holding free elections on a regular schedule and determining who governs on the basis of the results. Democratization is also a complex historical process, consisting of several analytically distinct, but empirically overlapping, stages.¹³ It involves bringing about the end of an undemocratic regime, the inauguration of a democratic regime, and then the consolidation of a democratic system. Among these phases of democratization, the transition and consolidation phases have received the most attention from the scholarly community.

⁹ Howard Wiarda, *Introduction to Comparative Politics: Concepts and Processes* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1993), 83.

¹⁰ Larry Diamond, "Democracy in Latin America: Degrees, Illusions and Directions for Consolidation," in *Democracy and Communism: Theory, Reality, and the Future*, ed. Sung-chul Yang (Seoul: Korean Association of International Studies, 1995), 171.

¹¹ See the Freedom House Web site, <http://www.freedomhouse.org>.

¹² Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*.

¹³ O'Donnell and Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*.

The transition phase of democratization is regarded as a period of great political uncertainty. This phase entails the broader and more complex processes associated with the institutionalization of a new democratic set of rules for political life, so this stage is regarded as a hybrid regime.¹⁴ The main feature of this stage is that institutions of the old regime coexist with those of the new regime and authoritarians and democrats often share power, whether through conflict or by agreement.¹⁵ The end of the period of democratic transition is complete when a new democracy has promulgated a new constitution and held free elections for political leaders with few barriers to mass participation. However, it is difficult to distinguish the beginning of the phase of consolidation from the end of the period of democratic transition. How can analysts determine whether a regime is consolidated? Higley and Gunther argue that democracies become consolidated only when the elite consensus on procedures is coupled with extensive mass participation in elections and other institutional processes.¹⁶ Valenzuela also states that the process of consolidation reaches closure when the authority of fairly elected government and legislative officials is properly established and when major political actors, as well as the public at-large, expect the democratic regime to last well into the future.¹⁷

Scholars have used different definitions of democratic consolidation. These definitions are based on two conceptions of democracy. One is a “minimalist conception,” emphasizing procedural or formal democracy. The other is a “maximalist conception,” focusing on the outcomes of politics, such as institutionalization of political institutions, social justice, and economic equality. Based on the Schumpeterian conception of democracy (that equates democracy with regularly held electoral competition), Schmitter defines the minimalist conception of a consolidated democratic regime as “the process of transforming the accidental arrangements, prudential norms, and contingent solutions that have emerged during the transition into relations of cooperation and competition that are reliably known, regularly practiced, and voluntarily accepted by those persons or collectives that participate in democratic governance.”¹⁸ According to Linz, a consolidated democracy is one in which

¹⁴ Ibid., 6.

¹⁵ Guillermo O’Donnell, “Challenges to Democratization in Brazil,” *World Policy Journal* 5 (Spring 1988): 283.

¹⁶ John Higley and Richard Gunther, *Elites and Democratic Consolidation in Latin America and Southern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

¹⁷ Julio Samuel Valenzuela, “Democratic Consolidation in Post-Transitional Settings: Notion, Process, and Facilitating Conditions,” in *Issues in Democratic Consolidation: The New South American Democracies in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Scott Mainwaring, Guillermo O’Donnell, and Julio Samuel Valenzuela (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1992), 70.

¹⁸ Philippe Schmitter, “The Consolidation of Democracy and Representation of Social Groups,” *American Behavioral Scientists* 35 (March/June 1992): 424.

“none of the major political actors, parties, or organized interests, forces, or institutions consider[s] that there is any alternative to the democratic process to gain power and that no political institutions or groups has a claim to veto the action of democratically elected decision makers.... To put it simply democracy must be seen as ‘the only game in town.’ ”¹⁹

Compared with a minimalist conception of democracy, many scholars adopt “outcome-oriented conceptions” of democracy, or a maximalist conception of democratic consolidation. These scholars argue that both political and socioeconomic democracy is needed for a country’s democracy to be consolidated. This conception includes not only procedural, or formal, democracy, but also substantive democratic elements, such as guarantees of basic civil rights, democratic accountability and responsiveness, civilian control over the military, democratic and constitutional checks on executive authority, and punishment of occupational and human rights abuses.²⁰ According to Diamond, democratic consolidation means the quality, depth, and authenticity of democracy in its various dimensions has been improved: “political competition becomes fairer, freer, more vigorous and executive; participation and representation broader, more autonomous, and inclusive; civil liberties more comprehensively and rigorously protected; accountability more systematic and transparent.”²¹ Linz, Stepan, and Gunther analyze the extent of democratic consolidation of newly emerging democratic regimes by using the following criteria:

- Structural: this overlaps somewhat with our definition of democracy. It posits that no significant reserve domains of power should exist that preclude important public policies from being determined by the laws, procedures, and institutions that have been sanctioned by the new democratic process.
- Attitudinal: when a strong majority of public opinion acknowledges that the regime’s democratic procedures and institutions are appropriate and legitimate, and where support for antisystem alternatives is quite low or isolated from the prodemocratic forces.
- Behavioral: when no significant national, social, economic, political, or institutional actor spends significant resources attempting to achieve its objectives by challenging the regime’s institutions or rules with appeals for a military coup or revolutionary activities, and when the

¹⁹ Juan Linz, “Transitions to Democracy,” *Washington Quarterly* 13 (Summer 1990): 158.

²⁰ Hyug Baeg Im, “The Prospects for Democratic Consolidation in South Korea: Facilitating and Obstructing Conditions,” paper presented at the International Conference on Politics and Security on the Korean Peninsula, Michigan State University, April 5-6, 1996, 3.

²¹ Larry Diamond, “Democracy in Latin America: Degrees, Illusions and Directions for Consolidation,” 162.

prodemocratic forces abide by its rules and do not engage in semi-loyal politics.²²

As Huntington insists, compared with a maximalist conception of democracy, the minimalist conception provides the analytical precision and empirical referents that make the concept a useful one.²³ Much recent empirical research on democratization also favors a procedural or minimalist conception of democracy.²⁴ However, many scholars with a maximalist conception of democracy also have tried to broaden the conception of democracy and to strive for qualitative development of democracy in the world. After all, the two conceptions are quite heuristic in that their usage depends on the scholar's own point of view, as well as on his or her research goals.

This article focuses on the quality of democracy in order to examine the structural problems of the Kim Young Sam civil government, based on a maximalist conception of democracy. Although former president Kim initiated the democratic consolidation period, he failed to deepen or consolidate the democratic rules and ideas in Korean political society because of structural problems. This led to his personalistic rule and dogmatic leadership style, rather than to the rule of law. Thus, it is possible to understand the effects of the path of democratic transition on the consolidation process in South Korea by examining both structural factors and Kim's leadership, which led to the failure of Kim's government.

The Relationships between Transitional Modes and Democratic Consolidation

Several of the newly emerging democratic regimes are far from consolidated. They are merely surviving without consolidating. In particular, in the less developed regions of the world, these fragile democratic regimes have experienced significant uncertainty over the rules of the game, due to their terrible economic conditions and other social problems. Although many Third-World countries have experienced transitions to procedural democracy, such as free elections with few barriers to mass participation and meaningful party competition, this democratic change definitely does not guarantee democratic

²² Juan Linz, Alfred Stepan, and Richard Gunther, "Democratic Transition and Consolidation in Southern Europe, with Reflections on Latin America and Eastern Europe," in *The Politics of Democratic Consolidation: Southern Europe in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Richard Gunther, Hans-Jürgen Puhle, and Nikiforos Diamandouros (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 79.

²³ Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, 6.

²⁴ O'Donnell, "Challenges to Democratization in Brazil"; Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1971); Juan Linz, "Transitions to Democracy"; and Scott Mainwaring, "Transitions to Democracy and Democratic Consolidation: Theoretical and Comparative Issues," in *Issues in Democratic Consolidation: The New South American Democracies in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Scott Mainwaring, Guillermo O'Donnell, and Julio Samuel Valenzuela (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1992).

stability. Some democratic regimes either have been terminated by coups and other violent events or gradually have given way to single-party authoritarian regimes.²⁵

Many scholars have tried to find explanatory variables affecting democratic consolidation, such as authoritarian regime type, the modes of regime transitions, institutional designs, and structural contexts. Still, empirical studies on the relationship between a certain type of democracy and its distinctive mode of regime transition have been relatively few in number.²⁶ Nevertheless, many scholars assume that the modes of democratic transition affect the consolidation phase because they believe that the features of the democratic transition process influence the patterns, contents, and degrees of democratic consolidation in distinct ways. They argue that it is necessary to examine why and how transitions take place in order to understand the prospects for democratic consolidation.

Many scholars classify variable modes of transition from authoritarian rule based on the pace of democratization, the means of democratic change, attitudes of authoritarian regime elites toward democracy, strategies of transition, and relative actor strength. For instance, Mainwaring classifies three paths from liberalization to democratization: (1) a transition through transaction; (2) a transition through extrication; and (3) a transition through regime defeat. A transition through transaction means that “the authoritarian government initiates the process of liberalization and remains a decisive actor throughout the transition. This does not imply that the opposition plays an insignificant role in the process or that the government controls the entire process.”²⁷ A transition through extrication means that “an authoritarian government is weakened, but not as thoroughly as in a transition by defeat. It is able to negotiate crucial features of the transition, though in a position of less strength than in cases of transition through transaction.”²⁸ A transition through regime defeat means that “a transition takes place when a major defeat of an authoritarian regime leads to the collapse of authoritarianism and the inauguration of a democratic government.”²⁹ According to Mainwaring, these classifications indicate differential positions of power in the negotiations and

²⁵ John Higley and Richard Gunther, eds., *Elites and Democratic Consolidation in Latin America and Southern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 3.

²⁶ Gerardo Munck and Carol Leff, “Modes of Transition and Democratization: South America and Eastern Europe in Comparative Perspective”; Gretchen Casper and Michelle Taylor, *Negotiating Democracy: Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*; and Lisa Anderson, “Political Pacts, Liberalism, and Democracy: The Tunisian National Pact of 1988,” *Government and Opposition* 26, no. 2 (Spring 1991): 244-260.

²⁷ Mainwaring, “Transitions to Democracy and Democratic Consolidation: Theoretical and Comparative Issues,” 322.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

interactions between regimes and opposition, underscoring decisive differences in how much authoritarian regimes influence the transition process. That is, the mode of transition is an important factor that is useful for predicting the future of new democracies.

Some scholars emphasize the substantial role of political elites in the process of transition from authoritarian rule to a democratic regime.³⁰ They believe that the success of democratization is determined by political actors and their strategies. Most scholars identify a “political pact” as a useful strategy to achieve democratic regimes, meaning that there is “agreement among a select set of actors which seeks to define rules governing the existence of power on the basis of mutual guarantees for the ‘vital interests’ of those entering into it.”³¹ Such pacts are initially regarded as temporary solutions intended to avoid certain worrisome outcomes and to pave the way for more permanent arrangements for the resolution of conflicts. According to O’Donnell and Schmitter, “Some of the elements of those pacts may eventually become the law of the land, being incorporated into constitutions or statutes; others may be institutionalized as the standard operating procedures of state agencies, political parties, interests associations, and the like.”³²

O’Donnell and Schmitter point out that, “with the exception of Costa Rica, all of the unpacted democracies existing at different times in other Latin American countries were destroyed by authoritarian reversals.”³³ Karl and Schmitter also insist that the most successful formula for democratic transition has been negotiating pacts among elites.³⁴ Moreover, Karl claims that there may be important differences between countries such as Uruguay, a pacted transition, and Brazil, a unilaterally imposed transition.³⁵ For instance, while pacted democracies made through compromise among powerful contending elites may be flexible regarding future bargaining and the revision of existing rules, democracies imposed by one dominant group, such as the military, have less room for permitting challenges from opposition groups. Pacts have thus been regarded as valuable tools for managing democratic transition.³⁶

However, political pacts may face practical difficulties in the process

³⁰ John Higley and Richard Gunther, *Elites and Democratic Consolidation in Latin America and Southern Europe*, and John Higley and Michael Burton, *Democratic Transitions and Democratic Breakdown: The Elite Variable* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1988).

³¹ O’Donnell and Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*, 37.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 45.

³⁴ Karl and Schmitter, “Modes of Transition in Latin America, Southern and Eastern Europe,” 280.

³⁵ Terry Lynn Karl, “Dilemmas of Democratization in Latin America,” *Comparative Politics* 23, no. 19 (October 1990): 1-21.

³⁶ Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, 276.

of transition to democracy, depending on each country's institutional and structural contexts. For example, in her analysis of political pacts in the case of Brazil, Hagopian demonstrates that a fragile democracy such as Brazil, having experienced a weak democratic tradition and two decades of military rule, cannot be consolidated and extended by political pacts alone.³⁷ She argues that the political pacts bargained by elites that made the regime transition possible, limited the extension of democracy. By restoring many sources of their political power to old regime elites as the price for their support of democratization, political pacts left the military with a substantial degree of formal and informal power over civilians. This preserved clientelism and undermined the ability of political parties to transform themselves into genuine transmission belts for nonelite interests.³⁸ She concludes that "in Brazil pacts did not broaden and deepened democracy, nor did the politicians who forged them create strong democratic institutions and resolve to adhere to democratic political practices."³⁹ Thus, democracy initiated by political pacts does not always result in democratic consolidation. In many instances, it produces the opposite effect.

An Integrative Approach to Democratic Transition and Consolidation

There have been several theoretical generalizations (from modernization theory through transitional and structural approaches) about democratization. These provide answers to questions about why democracy is here and not there or why democratization is taking place.⁴⁰ Modernization theory, which was elaborated by Lipset, focuses on socioeconomic development. Democracy is related to a country's socioeconomic development or level of modernization. According to Lipset, "The more well-to-do a nation, the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy."⁴¹

The transition approach emphasizes political processes and elite initiatives and choices that account for democratic transitions from authoritarian rule. Many scholars focus on political actors who play a crucial role in producing democratic transitions.⁴² They understand that democratic transition is produced by the agency of elite initiatives and actions.

³⁷ Hagopian, "Democracy by Undemocratic Means? Elites, Political Pacts and Regime Transition in Brazil," 153.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 147.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁴⁰ David Potter, David Goldblatt, Margaret Kiloh, and Paul Lewis, eds., *Democratization* (New York: Polity Press, 1997), 10-24.

⁴¹ Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1959), 31.

⁴² Dankward Rustow, "Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model," *Comparative Politics* 2 (April 1970): 337-363; Guillermo O'Donnell, "Challenges to Democratization in Brazil," *World Policy Journal* 5 (Spring 1988): 281-300; and Mainwaring, "Transitions to Democracy and Democratic Consolidation: Theoretical and Comparative Issues."

The structural approach emphasizes that democratization processes are explained by changing the structures of power. The basic premise of the structural approach to democratization is that particular interrelationships of certain structures of power, as they gradually change through history, provide constraints and opportunities that can influence the content of elite choices. For instance, as one can see in Moore's *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, a common pattern of changing relationships between three social classes and the state led to certain forms of government.⁴³ The structural approach focuses on changing structures of class, state, and transnational power. This approach argues that democratization processes are determined by reference to the structural constraints and opportunities.

Both the transition and structural approaches are integrated by Karl.⁴⁴ She emphasizes an interactive approach which seeks to relate structural constraints and actors' choices. She introduces the "contingent choice theory," which means that democratization results from the combination of structural contexts and elite choices. Karl argues that democratization processes can be examined well by combining an agency of elite actions and structural and institutional constraints, which determine the scope of options available to decision makers.

Snyder and Mahoney argue that studies of democratization have been less concerned with political institutions such as electoral laws, constitutional rules, and party systems, than with socioeconomic structures and contingent elite choices.⁴⁵ They also argue that institutional variables can help bridge the structuralist and voluntarist extremes which have dominated works on democratization. According to them, old regime institutions, as well as socioeconomic structural forces, have an important impact on the capacities and behaviors of incumbents.

In order to understand the effect of democratization processes on the consolidation of South Korean democracy, this study employs an integrative approach, which consists of political institutions, socioeconomic and political structure, and the agency of elite initiatives. Although the democratic transition through political pacts relies mainly on elite initiatives and their settlement, the transition process consists of not only elites, but also of other structural and institutional factors. Thus, it is necessary to examine not only institutional and structural factors, but also the role of elite leadership to understand the prospects for democratic consolidation in South Korea.

⁴³ Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1966).

⁴⁴ Karl, "Dilemmas of Democratization in Latin America."

⁴⁵ Richard Snyder and James Mahoney, "The Missing Variable: Institutions and the Study of Regime Change," *Comparative Politics* 32, no.1 (October 1999): 103-122.

The Process of South Korea's Democratic Transition

In June 1987, South Korea began the process of democratic transition. The “6 · 29 Declaration” of Roh Tae Woo, the candidate of the ruling Democratic Justice Party (DJP) in the presidential election of December 1987, provided the breakthrough for South Korean democratization. Since then, South Korea has held four presidential and five general elections. South Korea's democratic transition is divided into two phases: the transition phase, 1987 to 1992, and the consolidation phase, 1993 to the present. By electing a civilian president, Kim Young Sam, in December 1992, South Korea passed from the democratic transition phase into the phase of democratic consolidation.

O'Donnell argues that the democratic transition process is uncertain and complex and the possibilities for authoritarian regression are numerous.⁴⁶ However, in South Korea, the likelihood of authoritarian regression through a military coup d'état is considered very remote. This is because South Korea's democratic transition emerged from a compromise between the old authoritarian elites and their political opposition. According to Karl's typologies, South Korean democratization was a “transition by pact,” based on a compromise among political elites.

According to Huntington's typology, based on the balance of forces between the government and the opposition, the South Korean form of democratization was an example of “transplacement,” in which the government made a concession and opposition groups accepted it in order to avoid mutual catastrophe.⁴⁷ Both the reform group within the government and the moderate opposition group felt that a total collapse of government would not serve their best interests or those of their country. Consequently, the two sides agreed to a proposal for the development of a democratic procedure. Under this form of democratization, while the reform group within the government made a concession to restore formal democracy, the moderate opposition group did not ask for the reform group's immediate exit from power; rather, it took advantage of the reform group's relatively weak incumbency.⁴⁸ As a result, South Korea's democratic transition through negotiations and pacts among political elites made it possible to sustain continuity in political, social, and economic structures. The new South Korean democratic government also was

⁴⁶ Guillermo O'Donnell, “Transitions, Continuities, and Paradoxes,” in *Issues in Democratic Consolidation: The New South American Democracies in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Scott Mainwaring, Guillermo O'Donnell, and Julio Samuel Valenzuela (Norte Dame, IN: University of Norte Dame Press, 1992), 17-56.

⁴⁷ Chung-si Ahn, “Democratization and Political Reform in Korea: Development, Culture, Leadership, and Institutional Change,” in *Korea in the Global Wave of Democratization*, ed. Doh Chull Shin, Myeong-han Zoh, and Myung Chey (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 1994), 162.

⁴⁸ Hyug Baeg Im, “Politics of Democratic Transition from Authoritarian Rule in South Korea,” *Korean Social Science Journal* 21 (1995): 144-145.

not confronted with a sudden and drastic change in the sociopolitical order.

However, the process of democratic transition has not been a smooth one. Although President Roh was elected by direct public vote, his legitimacy suffered because he also had been a leader of a military regime. South Korea's authoritarian elites not only survived, but also coexisted with democrats. Yet, after beginning the process of democratic transition, the various demands of the public were not satisfied. The process of democratization did not proceed fast enough for the public. The continuously unstable socioeconomic situation derived from student and labor demonstrations made it difficult for a new democracy to maintain its efficiency. To protect his tenure and guarantee his personal security after his retirement, President Roh formed a "grand conservative ruling coalition" with major opposition leaders.

South Korea's path of democratic transition thus consists of two compromises between authoritarian groups and the opposition. South Korea's phase of democratic consolidation began with the inauguration of President Kim Young Sam, the first civilian president in thirty-two years, on February 25, 1993. As a civilian president, Kim enjoyed a higher level of support (41.4 percent) than Roh. The outcome of the presidential election bestowed upon his government both the legitimacy to rule and the strength to lead the nation.⁴⁹ With strong support from the public early in his tenure, Kim called for the removal of corruption, the establishment of civilian supremacy over the military as part of a firm military reform program, the implementation of the real-name financial transaction system, and the amendment of politically inspired laws. With his personal initiative and drive, Kim's reforms contributed to the consolidation of democracy by eliminating most vestiges of authoritarian government, by strengthening the legitimacy of the civilian government, and by complementing the formal and legal aspects of democracy to create a climate for clean and frugal politics.⁵⁰

However, as has been found in many new democracies, it is not a simple task for their leaders to make their fragile democratic regimes stable. Although Korea's democratic consolidation began with Kim's inauguration, it was hard to say that Korean democratization had consolidated, not only procedurally but also substantially, during the Kim government. Kim's reform programs did not produce positive outcomes in the short-term; they merely suggested a certain direction toward a more democratic society. His reform programs were in many areas, such as electoral law, business-labor relations, education, and judicial reform.⁵¹ Most of these programs, however, were not thoroughly

⁴⁹ Soong-Hoom Kil, "Political Reforms of the Kim Young Sam Government," *Korea and World Affairs* 17 (Fall 1993): 419.

⁵⁰ Young-Chul Paik, "Political Reform and Democratic Consolidation in Korea," *Korea and World Affairs* 18 (Winter 1994): 734-735.

⁵¹ Young-jo Lee, "The Dilemmas of Reform Politics in the Kim Young Sam Government," in *Korean Society and Democracy* (in Korean), ed. Jang-jip Choi and Hyun-chin Lim (Seoul: Nanam Press, 1997), 360.

implemented. Even though they were first driven by Kim's will, they were not implemented consistently. His reforms were overly ambitious and broad in scope. As a consequence, his reforms did not have the support of either some vested group members or of reform groups. The lack of support was attributed to Kim's self-righteous leadership style, which disregarded laws, and to the undemocratic decision-making process that was characteristic of his staffs.⁵²

As one of his close advisors said, although President Kim had strong motivation and will, his capabilities did not backup his desire.⁵³ Even though his reform programs, based on his initiatives, were effectual in the early period of his tenure, they could not be maintained continuously because of the lack of popular and institutional support. Indeed, the failure of Kim's government was marked by the decline of his popularity and poor economic conditions at the end of his tenure.

As figure 1 shows, public approval of Kim's performance as a president decreased from 70.9 percent in March 1993, to 6.1 percent in December 1997. Kim's popularity had not abruptly decreased at the end of his tenure. It had steadily declined since his inauguration. By the end of Kim's presidency, the government was faced with a legitimacy crisis because of his son's, Kim Hyun-Choul's, and his close advisors' involvement in the so-called "Han-bo scandal." The domestic economic crisis caused by Han-bo Steel and Kia Motors caused the "IMF financial crisis" at the end of 1997.⁵⁴

Due to the 1997 economic crisis, Kim's government lost its control over national affairs. In spite of his early successful reform politics, the fundamental reason why his government failed to control the crisis was that his reforms had been implemented mainly without the support of reform groups and the public. Some structural matters also confined his reforms, causing Kim to rely on his personal rule and to be discredited by the public.⁵⁵ Overall, it appears that the failure of Kim's government was caused by structural factors and Kim's self-righteous leadership style, not by its momentous or temporary policy-making errors.

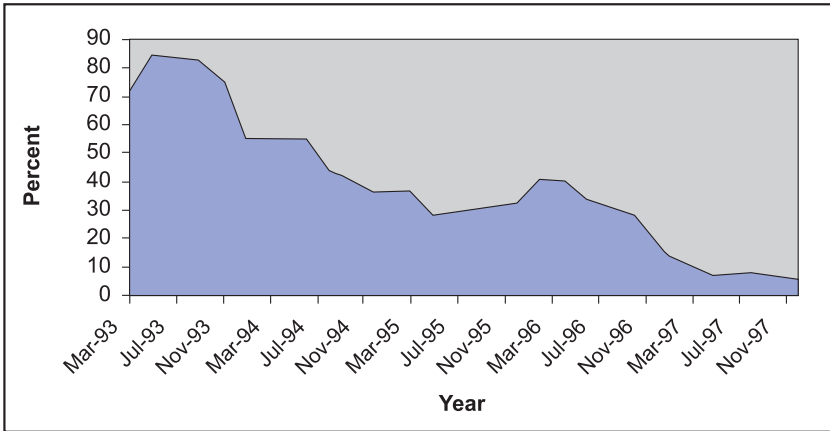
⁵² Jun-ki Min, "Democratization in South Korea and Evaluation of Kim Young Sam Government" (in Korean), *Social Science Researches* 23 (1997): 46-55, and Young-jo Lee, "The Dilemmas of Reform Politics in the Kim Young Sam Government," 382-383. In fact, Kim's reform programs, which were called for early in his tenure, were fulfilled by his self-righteous decision. Thus, those programs were not supported by either reform groups or the ruling party.

⁵³ *Chosun Daily Newspaper*, November 15, 1997.

⁵⁴ Of course, the reasons for the IMF financial crisis are debated among scholars. While some find causes in domestic areas, others find causes in foreign influence. Assuming the crisis was caused by the interaction of both domestic and international factors, I point out only one of the domestic causes in order to explore why the Kim government lost control over the economic policy-making process. For the causes and results of the "IMF crisis" of Korea, see the IMF Web site, <http://www.imf.org>.

⁵⁵ Chai-bong Hahm and Sang-young Rhyu, "Democratic Reform in Korea: Promise of Democracy," *Korea Focus on Current Topics* 5, no. 5 (September/October 1997): 42-46.

Figure 1. The Popularity of the Kim Young Sam Government



Source: *Chosun Daily Newspaper*, February 19, 1998.

Factors Affecting the Failure of the Kim Young Sam Civil Government

There are several factors that caused the failure of the Kim government. These consist of both structural and institutional factors, as well as Kim's leadership style. Although these factors played a positive role in the democratic transition process, they became confining factors in the phase of democratic consolidation. In particular, both structural and institutional factors provided conditions that led to the successful linkage of Kim's reform programs to the strength of his personal rule. Structural and institutional factors that played a positive role in the initiation of Korea's democratic transition became an eventual roadblock to the success of Kim's government. The combination of the structural and institutional factors with Kim's undemocratic leadership style was the principal cause of the failure of the Kim government.

A Grand Coalition

Democratic transition processes are uncertain and complex. This is because authoritarian elites still exist in government but now must coexist with democrats. In addition, various public demands may erupt explosively. South Korea is no exception to this rule. After the initiation of the democratic transition in 1987, the continuously unstable sociopolitical situation created the need for a second political compromise between the ruling party and the opposition (referenced as the "grand conservative ruling coalition"). This grand coalition was viewed as yet another milestone in South Korea's democratic transition.

Although the second compromise permitted President Roh to continue to rule until the end of his tenure, it also provided an important chance for Kim

to peacefully take power from authoritarian elites. Yet, despite the fact that the second compromise played a positive role in the emergence of Korea's first civil government, it became a confining factor that negatively affected the ability of Kim's government to consolidate democracy.

After the launch of democratization, the Roh regime had little legitimacy as a democratic government because it was too closely related to the previous authoritarian regimes. Moreover, Roh Tae Woo did not have a feel for democratic politics and he could not fulfill the expectations of the public, particularly its desire for political and economic democracy. In particular, after the summer of 1987, the explosion of labor disputes could not be controlled by the Roh regime. This was because Roh was less reform-minded than he was determined to maintain the status quo. He could not control social conflicts and was forced to find a compromise formula with the opposition in order to restore sociopolitical stability.

Roh's weak leadership resulted in sociopolitical instability. The proliferation of independent labor unions produced an explosion of labor disputes. Their size and power expanded nationwide. In 1989, the percentage of organized labor reached 72.9 percent for workplaces with more than three hundred employees. There were 3,625 recorded labor disputes from June 1987 to the end of that year, 1,873 in 1988, and 1,161 in 1989, compared to only 265 in 1985, and 276 in 1986. As a result, real wages for labor increased by 14 percent in 1989.⁵⁶ Highly increased wages exceeded the growth of productivity and weakened South Korea's price competitiveness in the international market.

The decline of crucial economic indicators accentuated the weakening of President Roh's political leadership. As table 1 indicates, the Gross National Product (GNP) increased by an average of 11.3 percent from 1987 to 1988, but decreased by 6.7 percent and 9 percent in 1989 and 1990, respectively. The consumer price index (CPI) increased by 7.1 percent in 1988 and 5.7 percent in 1989, in contrast to 2.5 percent in 1985, 2.8 percent in 1986, and 3 percent in 1987. The production index of the manufacturing sector declined from an average of 14.9 percent in 1985-1988, to 2.6 percent in 1989.

Politically, the ruling DJP also failed to secure a majority in the National Assembly elections held on April 26, 1988. As table 2 indicates, National Assembly election results were unfavorable for the DJP: of a total of 299 seats, the ruling party gained 125 seats, the first opposition party, the Party for Peace and Democracy (PPD), won 71 seats, the second opposition party, the Reunification Democratic Party (RDP), secured 59 seats, and the third opposition party, the New Democratic Republican Party (NDRP), won 35 seats. The election made it possible for the opposition parties to block executive efforts to subvert the National Assembly.⁵⁷ This dealt a fatal blow to the Roh

⁵⁶ Ibid., 152.

Table 1. South Korea's Principal Economic Indicators from 1985 to 1997

	Growth Rate of GNP (%)	Unemployment Rate (%)	Increase Rate of Consumer Price (%)	Production Index of Manufacturing (%)
1985	7.0	4.0	3.1	4.1
1986	12.9	3.8	1.4	21.9
1987	13.0	3.1	6.0	19.7
1988	12.4	2.5	7.3	13.8
1989	63.7	2.6	5.0	2.6
1990	9.0	2.4	9.4	8.6
1991	9.1	2.3	9.2	9.1
1992	5.0	2.4	4.6	5.1
1993	5.8	2.8	5.8	5.0
1994	8.4	2.4	5.6	10.4
1995	8.7	2.0	4.7	10.8
1996	6.9	2.0	4.9	7.5
1997	4.9	2.6	6.6	6.2

Sources: Bank of Korea, *Quarterly Economic Review* (years 1986 through 1998); Bank of Korea, *Monthly Statistical Bulletin* (February 1991); Ministry of Finance and Economy, *Monthly Economy* (1998); National Statistical Office, *Major Statistics of Korean Economy* (Daejeon, Korea: 1998); George Kurian, ed., *The Encyclopedia of the Third World* (New York: Facts on File, 1992); and World Bank Book, *World Tables*, 1992 (1993).

regime, forcing the president to cooperate with the opposition parties.

In the 1988 general election, Kim Young Sam's party (the RDP) fell to the status of a third party, forcing him to adopt an epochal strategy, cooperation with the ruling party, to take power in the next presidential election. Kim ultimately adopted an abnormal strategy which, with help of authoritarian elites, would realize a civilian government in Korea for the first time. His strategy was basically successful, as he became the presidential candidate of the new ruling party, the Democratic Liberal Party (DLP), and was elected the fourteenth president in December 1992.

Based on the existing state apparatus and party structure, Kim Young Sam could implement his reform programs relatively smoothly early in his tenure. However, due to the nature of the grand coalition, his reform politics faced

⁵⁷ Heng Lee, "Uncertain Promise: Democratic Consolidation in South Korea," in *The Politics of Democratization: Generalizing East Asian Experiences*, ed. Edward Friedman (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 150.

Table 2. Distribution of Legislative Seats in the 1988 Parliamentary Election

Political Parties	Number of Seats	Percentage of Seats
Democratic Justice Party	125 (87/38) *	41.8
Party for Peace and Democracy	70 (54/16)	23.4
Reunification Democratic Party	59 (46/13)	19.7
New Democratic Republican Party	35 (27/8)	11.7
Party for the Korean People and Democracy	1 (1/0)	0.4
Independents	9 (9/0)	3.0
Total	299 (224/75)	100

Source: Compiled by the author from the National Election Commission's Web site, www.nec.go.kr.

* The number of assemblymen in a local constituency/those in the national constituency.

internal conflicts between democratic and vested (or authoritarian) groups.⁵⁸ During his tenure, Kim found himself in trouble between, on the one hand, the need for strong implementation of reform programs, and, on the other hand, the necessity to maintain the coalition. Moreover, reform-minded groups were small in number and restricted just to Kim's closest aids. Because Kim failed to build an alliance with reform groups and organizations within civil society, the success of his reforms relied on his own effort.⁵⁹ Indeed, the absence of a reform alliance became an essential reason why it was difficult to consistently implement his reforms.

In short, the grand ruling coalition was the second compromise between the ruling party and the opposition parties in South Korea's process of democratic transition. The grand coalition broke the stalemate between the Roh regime and the opposition. With this coalition in place, the opposition parties and the Roh regime were able to manage a relatively smooth transition from authoritarian to representative government. Moreover, the opposition, especially Kim Young Sam, had its first chance to take control of power in thirty-two years. Although Korean democratization could proceed without sudden changes and the Kim government could take power in a coalition with authoritarian groups, the coalition also had a negative effect because it was created in secret without public participation. The grand coalition threatened the institutionalization of the democratic transition, and some observers feared it set an undemocratic precedent.

⁵⁸ Young-jo Lee, "The Dilemmas of Reform Politics in the Kim Young Sam Government," 377-78. Lee regards heterogeneity of the ruling party members as one of the negative effects of a grand coalition.

⁵⁹ Bae-ho Hahn, "Assessing the Kim Young-Sam Administration's First Four Years," *Korea Focus on Current Topics* 5, no. 2 (March/ April 1997): 11.

Finally, a coalition with authoritarian elites became a heavy political burden for Kim's government. The grand conservative coalition in the transition process was a means to smoothly eliminate authoritarian legacies, but it also created trouble for Kim Young Sam whenever he was faced with overcoming the difficulties of implementing the reform programs.

A Strong Presidential System

Korea has had a presidential form of government since it was established as an independent government in 1948, except for the short period of the Second Republic's parliamentarianism in 1960. Although parliamentarianism has been an alternative possibility since 1948, its realization must have frustrated the politicians' lust for power or the possibilities for a military coup.⁶⁰ Indeed, a presidential system, a means to swiftly and firmly obtain power, has been preferred by political elites in order to gain and maintain power.

South Korea's presidential system is not purely this type. It also has not been marked by democratic practices. Yet, it is a system that is preferred by Korean people, who are more familiar through their relatively long experience with a presidential system than with parliamentarianism. A 1997 poll showed that South Koreans preferred a presidential system to parliamentarianism.⁶¹ In the democratization movement of June 1987, the people wanted to choose a president through direct elections rather than by indirect vote under the authoritarian regime. As a consequence, the implementation of a presidential system, based on direct election, ended military government. This was because the people thought that only a directly elected president had legitimacy.

After Roh Tae Woo's "6-29 Declaration" in 1987, the new democratic constitution was approved in a referendum. It was achieved through the first collaboration between the government and the opposition. Under this new constitution, Roh Tae Woo was directly elected as president and the Sixth Republic was created. The main democratic characteristics of this new constitution were that it adopted a direct popular vote for the president, abolished the right of the president to dissolve the National Assembly, and gave the National Assembly the right to investigate the activities of the executive branch.⁶² More importantly, under this constitution, a peaceful transfer of power occurred for the first time in Korean constitutional history. The Kim civilian government was peacefully inaugurated under this constitution in 1993.

One of the negative legacies of South Korea's path of democratic transition was the maintenance of a presidential system. A strong presidential system in South Korea was an important basis for the country's rapid economic development. This system was preferred by the military groups because it was

⁶⁰ *Korea Central Daily Newspaper*, September 24, 1997.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, October 28, 1997.

⁶² Dae-Kyu Yoon, "Constitutionalism in Korea," *Asian Affairs* 25, no. 2 (June 1994): 181.

a useful tool to strongly control and mobilize economic and societal interests. It was also an effective institutional design that permitted the opposition to take power from authoritarian rule because their replacement by an elected president would finish authoritarian rule. The current presidential system was the result of the democratization movement of 1987.

Although authoritarian elites wanted to maintain the indirect election of the president, the public wanted his direct election. Since 1987, this system has been a symbol of democratization, in large measure because it contributed to the beginning of democracy in South Korea. However, the long legacy of authoritarian rule left the people nostalgic for a strong leader. When the transition was made from this legacy to a presidential system, the president was expected to play a substantially strong role in many areas, even though the new 1987 constitution limited presidential power. Since the adoption of the 1987 constitution, the president's real power has not been challenged, either in the decision-making process or in the implementation of policies.

Although Roh Tae Woo was not a powerful leader because of his close relations with the previous authoritarian regime, Kim Young Sam could exercise strong presidential power because he had led the fight for democracy throughout his lifetime and enjoyed a high level of support among voters in the 1992 presidential election. Early in his tenure, Kim could implement very important reforms such as the real-name accounting system, civilian control over the military, and revision of politically inspired laws. However, because other political institutions were not institutionalized, the concentration of power in the executive branch of government resulted in negative, rather than positive, effects. Without the support of reform-minded groups and institutional backing, Kim relied on his personalistic rule to achieve his goals. Kim's abuse of his strong power ultimately resulted in the loss of legitimacy of his leadership by the end of his tenure.

The South Korean constitutional framework has adhered to a presidential system through its nine revisions, except during the Second Republic. The president's power is still very critical in all areas of society, regardless of his constitutionally-prescribed powers. Democratic presidents have taken advantage of a strong presidential power base after they have become president. The presidential system contributed to the opposition's taking power in the process of democratic transition. This also resulted in the concentration of power in the presidency owed to the circumstance that other political institutions were not institutionalized. Thus, the possibility that a president may abuse his strong power has increased. The presidential system could positively affect both democratic transition and democratic consolidation. In the early stage of his tenure, Kim easily could effect various reforms. However, the presidential system also negatively influenced Kim and led him to rely on his personalistic rule rather than on the rule of law.⁶³

The Boss-centered Party System

Most Korean political parties are dependent on specific individuals rather than on ideology.⁶⁴ Thus, “party bossism” is a major characteristic of the Korean party system.⁶⁵ “Party bossism” means that parties are managed not by policy-centered, but by boss-centered, organizations. The party boss almost single-handedly creates a political party at will. The boss manages an election by controlling the power to nominate party candidates in every district, with the outcome that “the successfully elected representatives arrive at the National Assembly and function like robots under the strict guidance and leadership of the party boss.”⁶⁶ Party competition most often tends to be limited because party leaders seek to mold political activists to their will. Political elites often change the party system after an election by merging or splitting existing parties.⁶⁷ In this sense, parties are ephemeral. No political party in South Korea has retained its original name. This is because the fate of parties absolutely depends on their top leaders.

Under a strong presidential system, less disciplined parties have not played an influential role in inducing democratization. South Korea’s smooth democratic transition through a political pact among elites did not lead to a change in its boss-centered party system. A weak party system was maintained by political elites in order to achieve their political goals. Parties have played only the role of providing support to their particular elites’ or leaders’ decisions. Paradoxically, although political parties externally seemed to play a role in democratization, they did not substantially contribute to Korean democratization.

Moreover, Korea’s less disciplined and weakly organized party system has not contributed to democratic consolidation. The parties still are not institutionalized; they frequently are merged into new parties and their names are changed, based not on a distinct ideology, but on the political will of party leaders. This noninstitutionalized party system has presented a predicament for the achievement of democratic consolidation. For example, after Kim Young Sam came into the presidential office, the ruling party (DLP) was composed

⁶³ For the rule of law, see Juan Mendez, Guillermo O’Donnell, and Paulo Pinheiro, eds., *The (Un)Rule of Law and the Underprivileged in Latin America* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1999).

⁶⁴ Aie-Rie Lee and Yong U. Glasure, “Party Identifiers in South Korea,” *Asian Survey* 35, no. 4 (April 1995): 368.

⁶⁵ In fact, party bossism is not only a main characteristic of Korean party politics, but also a chief impediment to the institutionalization of the party system. For its problems, see Im, “Politics of Democratic Transition from Authoritarian Rule in South Korea.”

⁶⁶ Sung-chul Yang, “An Analysis of South Korea’s Political Process and Party Politics,” in *Politics and Policy in the New Korean State*, ed. James Cotton (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 20.

⁶⁷ Hee Min Kim, “Building a New Party System in Korea,” *Asian Perspective* 19, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 1995): 196.

of many old political elites who were nominated by Roh Tae Woo, virtually guaranteeing their success in the 1992 general election. Kim tried to replace these elites with new reform-minded groups by means of the 1996 general election. In order to achieve this goal, Kim abandoned the ruling party (DLP) and formed the New Korea Party (NKP). Kim wanted to create his own party, which consisted of politicians who followed and supported his political ideas. As a result, early in his tenure, members of the ruling DLP were not supportive of Kim's reform programs. He did not have organizations, such as a supportive political party, to provide strong backing for his reforms. Thus, the DLP as a ruling party was not the main institution for democratic reform.⁶⁸ As a consequence, Kim had to rely on his own political will and effort to implement his reform programs.

Even after the new ruling party (NKP) was created, political parties still were not the main actors in reforms. They did not play a role in making reform policies and mediating between the citizens and their government. Instead, they played a role in supporting government-led policies and plans. The new ruling NKP did not take a place at the center of politics; rather, it played a marginal role in the decision-making process. It was not concerned with policy development and could not correct the executive's mistakes. The privatized party system controlled by Kim was utilized to realize Kim's own political goals and, as a result, negatively affected the potential for the success of his government in the end.

Kim's Political Leadership

In the process of democratic consolidation, a government usually becomes involved in a structural dilemma. The pressing tasks of a democratic government are not only to eliminate the vestiges of an old authoritarian structure in order to create a democratic political order, but also to satisfy the demands of the electorate for continuous economic growth and sociopolitical stability. However, these two goals may not be accomplished simultaneously. This is because a democratic government's reform of politics does not bring forth specific positive effects in the short-term. Often, the public is not satisfied with the results of reforms. To accomplish the two tasks, the government needs technical skills and strategies in order to sooth discontented groups. Governmental efficiency in problem-solving is essential to the achievement of democratic consolidation. A democratic government's success or failure depends on the government's problem-solving ability.

In Third-World democratization, the government's ability to solve a large number of pressing tasks depends on the characteristics of political leadership. The role of the political elite is emphasized not only in the democratic

⁶⁸ Min, "Democratization in South Korea and Evaluation of Kim Young Sam Government," and Hahn, "Assessing the Kim Young-Sam Administration's First Four Years," 10-11.

transition phase, but also in the democratic consolidation phase. However, when democratic institutions are not sufficiently developed, the choices of political leaders and the active implementation of these decisions determine the success or failure of the democratization process. The government's efficiency can be understood as the political leaders' ability to control the root problems that led to the process of democratic transition. Ultimately, the success of democratic consolidation depends on whether political leaders can favorably settle conflicts facing a government. According to Karl, in the consolidation phase, political leaders need qualitatively different skills and commitments from those exhibited during the democratic transition phase.⁶⁹

Structural and institutional constraints are important factors for explaining the failure of a civilian government. However, it is difficult to understand the causes of the failures of Kim's government, without exploring his personality and political leadership style, as both were important variables in the deficiencies of his administration. Although Kim's realist leadership style contributed to the initiation of the democratic transition in Korea, it also negatively affected the process of democratic consolidation.

Kim's political decisions relied mainly on his personal intuition or sensitivity. To him, this political sensitivity was one of his most important political resources. Although he was used to hearing various opinions from many people, his final decisions were made intuitively. Kim's decisionmaking was largely dominated by his political sense and intuition—other people's opinions were merely supplemental. This decision-making style showed that Kim preferred his own feelings and intuitions to rational and systematic discussion with his staff. In addition, Kim exemplified the virtues of a democratic leader such as courage, will, resolute honesty, strong executive power, and a career in the struggle for democratization against authoritarian regimes. Among these elements, he emphasized the importance of a leader's moral superiority, courage, and strong executive power. He argued that a political leader should realize his will based on his correct decisions. Besides, he personally preferred strong leadership and a single ruling system such as a presidential system, in which strong leadership could be maintained.

Kim's personal intuition and his power to execute policy played an effective role in the transitional reforms that eliminated the vestiges of old authoritarianism and established political competition. As an influential opposition leader, Kim contributed not only to the democratic transition from authoritarian rule, but also, as a civilian president, to the democratic consolidation phase. In the democratic transition process, Kim's strong confidence in democracy secured his ongoing influence as an opposition leader during the long-existing authoritarian rule, and, consequently, he was a critical threat to authoritarian groups. Moreover, in the process of not only political

⁶⁹ Karl, "Dilemmas of Democratization in Latin America," 17.

pactmaking, but also the formation of the grand coalition that emerged among authoritarian leaders, his confidence in democracy contributed to the abolition of authoritarian practices and to the initiation of a democratic system. The Kim government, as a civilian government that emerged from the public's support in a democratic election process, gained legitimacy, the lack of which is a dilemma that plagues many authoritarian regimes.

When he assumed office, Kim emphasized the government's efficiency in several reform arenas. He produced remarkable results by reducing corruption, amending "laws for political processes" such as election schedules and campaigns, imposing the "real-name accounting system," and establishing civilian control over the military. These reforms were made possible by Kim's strong will. Based on his own intuition and judgment, Kim's policy decisions were decisive in his drive to reform South Korean politics.

However, his reform programs were marked by an element of surprise in that they bypassed even the president's close advisors. Because Kim regarded the maintenance of public security as an important element in the decision-making process, his policy decisions lacked transparency.⁷⁰ According to one of his close aides, Kim's remarkable reform programs were announced in the second day after he assumed office, without notice to his close advisors.⁷¹ Because of this, President Kim was criticized by some observers for a ruling style that was too improvisatorial, based on personal intuition, and lacking an officially institutionalized apparatus that would allow other political actors to participate in the decision-making process. Overall, his reform agenda was regarded as a "civilian dictatorship."⁷²

Kim's view of democracy shows another characteristic of his personality. His understanding of democracy was limited to political democracy, or procedural democracy.⁷³ He understood democracy as Schumpeterian. Thus, in the struggle for democratization, his main interest was institutional reform, such as the reform of the electoral system. He was mainly concerned with political problems. He believed that the most important elements of democracy were to realize a peaceful power transfer by regular and fair elections, a multiparty system, free communication, and a democratic legislature. Such political beliefs became the reason why he maintained a moderate strategy during the period of military dictatorship. He believed that democratic government could emerge through free and fair elections. The restoration of a democratic system was the essential goal under authoritarian rule.

His extremely focused goal positively affected the process of democratic

⁷⁰ *Chosun Daily Newspaper*, February 19, 1998.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, November 11, 1997.

⁷² Hahm and Rhyu, "Democratic Reform in Korea: Promise of Democracy," 46.

⁷³ Kang Ro Lee, "The Patterns of Kim Young Sam's Leadership" (in Korean), *Korean Political Science Review* 27, no. 2 (1994): 145-163.

transition. Kim regarded a direct election of the president as the best way to establish a democratic system. The movement for the direct election of the president was the most influential approach to mobilizing segments of the electorate during the transition period of 1987, including intellectuals, students, workers, and ordinary citizens. However, Kim's understanding of democracy as a procedure was not enough to achieve the consolidation of democracy. After coming into office, his reform programs were confined to political areas. He even argued that South Korean democracy was completed after the launching of a civilian government.⁷⁴ He did not consider the question of substantive democracy and how it involved improving the interests of all South Korean classes.⁷⁵ The phase of democratic consolidation still needs creative work, not only to generate continuous economic growth, but also to achieve qualitative improvement of public life through economic equity and social justice. Because he did not have a grander vision of democratic consolidation, Kim failed to manage various social conflicts which ultimately resulted in a financial crisis at the end of his tenure.

After coming into office, Kim's self-righteous leadership led him to fall into neo-authoritarian rule, causing him to rely on his close advisors or sometimes on his son, rather than on institutional channels. For instance, Kim's master plan for rule was made by a private group, the so-called "Dongsungdong Team," in the period of transition of power from authoritarian President Roh Tae Woo.⁷⁶ In addition, because his reform programs were implemented by his intuition and judgment and his closest advisors, without the support of organizational reform groups and institutional backing, his rule was regarded as "rule of man." Further, Kim's over-sensitiveness to public opinion and the mass media made his personal management style inconsistent. For instance, whenever ministers were criticized by the mass media, Kim replaced them immediately. During his tenure of five years, Kim appointed six prime ministers, seven vice premiers of the ministry of finance and economy, and six vice premiers of the board of national unification.⁷⁷

Conclusion

At the outset of this essay, it was held that a smooth democratic transition

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁷⁵ For substantial democracy, Im argues that Korean democracy is unconsolidated because the basic relations between capital and labor remain unchanged. According to him, Kim Young Sam followed a neoconservative strategy which favored business interests over worker and consumer interests. See Hyug Baeg Im, "Politics of Democratic Consolidation in Korea: Modernization of Confucianism," paper presented at the 16th World Congress of the International Political Science Association, Berlin, August 21-25, 1994.

⁷⁶ *Chosun Daily Newspaper*, November 15, 1997.

⁷⁷ *Seoul Daily Newspaper*, February 21, 1998.

through a political pact can have both positive and negative effects on democratic consolidation. Although a smooth democratic transition can maintain the sociopolitical order without critical upheaval, it also can cause new democracies to suffer from their authoritarian legacies, including in both institutional and structural elements.

This essay has focused on the negative effects of the path of democratic transition in South Korea on the country's democratic consolidation, especially regarding the failures of the Kim Young Sam civilian government. The South Korean case shows that a smooth democratic transition through political pacts contributed to the initiation and maintenance of democratic governance. Ironically, however, some institutional and political elements negatively affected democratic consolidation in South Korea. Although a grand coalition and direct election of the president positively affected the initial stage of democratic consolidation by inaugurating Kim's civilian democracy in 1993, a powerful presidency, the lack of reform groups, a boss-centered party system, and Kim's self-righteous leadership style led to the incapability of Kim's government to cope with the national financial crisis at the end of his tenure. Under structural constraints, Kim relied on his personal rule rather than on constitutional rule to achieve political reform. Subsequently, the failure of the Kim government showed the limits of personal rule in democratic consolidation.

The failure of Kim's civilian government provides some lessons to the next civil governments. There have been two presidencies since the Kim Young Sam government. President Kim Dae Jung followed Kim Young Sam in 1997, and, in turn, current President Roh Moo Hyun took over in 2002. The following lessons became major tasks that the next democratic governments must solve. First, the failure of Kim's government demonstrates that personalistic rule should be replaced by law and institutional rule. Although personal rule can raise and implement some reform programs without severe opposition, the effectiveness of the reforms can be decreased when they are not supported by widespread reform groups and institutional channels.

Second, it is necessary to reform political institutions, such as electoral laws and political party systems. Although I do not argue that the current presidential constitution should be replaced by another one, I agree with the necessity of constitutional revision or reform to check or limit the strong power of a president. Along with a boss-centered party system, a strong presidency can hinder the development of other political institutions, and the concentration of power in the office of a president can lead the abuse of power and undemocratic practices.

Third, under present contexts, government performance depends on the leadership of political elites and their personalities. Political leadership requires not only democratic reform-oriented ideas and vision, but also astute management capability to solve national problems and avoid crises. Political leadership also should consider democratic procedures in the policy decision-making and implementation processes. Regarding essential elements of

democratic leadership, Kim argued that “leaders should decide policy through consultation with members of their organization. Leaders treat their followers as individuals so that both share human affinity. Communication between leaders and followers is reciprocal and develops through persuasion and discussion.”⁷⁸

Finally, although it is hard to tell whether South Korea’s democracy is “consolidated” in 2007, it will be more consolidated when delegative democracy is replaced by representative democracy, and when personal rule is replaced by constitutional rule.

⁷⁸ Ho-jin Kim, *The State and Political System in Transition* (in Korean), (Seoul: Bakyounsa, 1990), 70.

