

The Citizens' Movement in Korea

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Abstract

Exploring the social and political background of the citizens' movement and its trajectory in the 1990s, this paper analyzes why the citizens' movement became so influential in Korea in the 1990s. This paper shows that the citizens' movement as a new type of social movement appeared during the period of democratic transition in response to both the collapse of Eastern European state socialism and the continuation of authoritarian regimes, despite the success of the struggle for democracy in Korea. This paper also points out that contentious politics was an outcome of the regime change that took place in 1997, culminating in the impeachment of the president in 2004, which contributed to the formation of conservative citizens' movement organizations. According to this paper's argument, like political society, civil society is neither homogeneous nor monolithic but is divided or fragmented in terms of political ideology and interests.

Keywords: citizens' movement, democratic transition, contentious politics, political involvement, divided civil society

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Introduction

The citizens' movement¹ has suddenly become a predominant mode of social movement since 1990 in Korea, replacing the radical, pro-democracy social movements that were dominant in the 1980s. The citizens' movement has also been widely supported by the public, though some radical activists have also criticized it as being based on the urban middle class. The rise of this new type of social movement heralded a new era in the citizens' movement of the 1990s, representing the changing relationship between state and civil society while breaking ground for a new kind of democracy in Korea. The citizens' movement also totally changed the image of social movements from violent protests in the streets against the authoritarian state to peaceful movements taking place out of concern for ordinary citizens, usually associated with consumption, education, housing, the environment, and gender equality. The sudden upsurge of the citizens' movement reveals the complexity of democratic transition and the possibilities and limits of institutional politics in Korea in the 1990s and 2000s.

While social movements have been part of a long tradition of collective action in Korea, the issues and major actors of these movements have also been changed drastically in accordance with political development. In the 1980s, student movements continued to be radicalized with the continuation of the military regime even after the assassination of President Park Chung-hee, who seized power by military coup in 1961 and ruled for 18 years until 1979. In the 1980s, radical movements destroyed the old political taboos created by the military regime, popularizing revolutionary ideas and forming pro-

1. The term "citizens' movement" (*simin undong*) refers to the new type of social movement that emerged in Korea in the late 1980s as an alternative to the *minjung* movement, which touted radical goals and militant strategies. This new type of social movement has been called by various names such as the civil society movement, civil organization movement, civil movement, and NGO movement. See Cho H. (1993) and Cho D. (2000).

gressive intellectual organizations (Yun 2002; Park 2005). Controversial ideas such as revolutionary socialism and anti-imperialism became popular among university students, and Marxist theories proliferated in spite of the state's control of the publication and circulation of leftist books.²

Immediately following the June 29th Declaration of Democratization, during the hot summer of 1987, workers raised massive strikes across the nation, demanding wage increases and workers' rights. The eruption of strikes revealed another dimension of democratization: the labor question, which was neglected by the political leaders of the opposition parties. More than half of the 3,600 strikes in three months were wildcat strikes that took place among large companies without unions. Spontaneous worker protests erupted in the changing political situation in which oppressed workers were able to voice their anger and grievances with the weakening of oppression by the military regime.

Unlike the radical opposition and militant labor movements, the newly-emerged citizens' movement heralded a new mode of protest politics that diverged sharply from the radicalism of both the students and workers. The citizens' movement in Korea also reflected the global shift of protest politics with the collapse of state socialism in Eastern Europe at the international level, as well as political underdevelopment at the national level. The collapse of the Eastern European bloc rapidly weakened radicalism and affected the direction of social movements in the late 1980s and early 1990s by discouraging leftist discourse and revolutionary practice. However, mass anger exploded when the minority ruling party and two opposition parties merged into a majority ruling party in the National Assembly. The authoritarian regime tried to regain power, provoking massive public condem-

2. Under the National Security Law, those who possessed or read Marxist books were regarded as dangerous persons posing a threat to national security. Utilizing both the police and the security agency surveillance system, the military regime tried to crack down on radical organizations and repress the dissemination of radical ideology and socialist ideas.

nation. More moderate citizens' movement organizations were formed, and the citizens' movement emerged as a new type of social movement amid the transition.

Another turn in the citizens' movement took place when the opposition party won the presidential election in 1997. The regime change turned party politics into "contentious politics," as the former ruling authoritarian party refused to accept defeat in the presidential election and blocked every action of the minority ruling party in the National Assembly. Lee Hoi-chang, who lost the presidential election in 1997 and became leader of the new opposition party, utilized his leadership as leverage for the next presidential election in 2002. He used a contestation strategy to oppose Kim Dae-jung by taking an unyielding stance so as to strengthen his support. When it could not win the presidential election again in 2002, the opposition party chose to pursue the impeachment of President Rho Moo-hyun in 2004. Though this strategy failed completely when Rho Moo-hyun was reinstated, it served to consolidate conservative social groups, and eventually the New Right National Coalition, the conservative citizens' movement organization, was established in November 2005. Contentious politics has reshaped civil society by mobilizing conservative citizens and politicizing civil society along the lines of political ideologies.

This paper explores the trajectory of the citizens' movements in Korea, by examining their transformation and the changing relationship between the government and social movement organizations that occurred along with regime change. Above all, this paper examines the formation of the movement as a new type of social movement in the wave of democratization in the late twentieth century. It also deals with the transformation of discourses on social movements, from the *minjung* movement to the citizens' movement, and civil society. The new discourse laid the foundation for the mushrooming of citizens' movement organizations. This paper also discusses the interplay between the citizens' movement and contentious politics, arguing that political involvement has been the most important factor for the citizens' movement, which has obtained mass sup-

port from the public. Finally, we discuss the realignment of civil society as conservative groups began to organize and the division of civil society after the efforts to impeach the president failed in 2004.

Democratic Transition and New Challenges

As struggles for democracy were gaining mass support from the people in early 1987, the military regime of the 5th Republic reluctantly conceded to changing the electoral rules for the presidential election. However, the ruling party did not accept the demand for a free and competitive presidential election and the stalemate over negotiations continued for several months. Chun Doo-hwan wanted to transfer power to Roh Tae-woo, ex-military general and minister of Home Affairs for the Chun Doo-hwan regime, after his term in late 1987. In spite of escalating political protests against the military regime, on April 29 1987, President Chun Doo-hwan abruptly announced he was canceling negotiations for constitutional reform, which justified the monopoly of power by the ruling party, thus disbanding a competitive presidential election.

This immediately provoked protests by university students and citizens on an unprecedented scale across major cities in May and June. As university students were being brutally attacked and killed by police, ordinary citizens began to join the protests in June.³ Escalated demonstrations against the military regime culminated in the spectacle of a mass demonstration by two million protesters in 22 cities across the nation in late June, paralyzing the riot police and the administrative functions of the government. Eventually, on June 1987, Roh Tae-woo announced he would accept the demands of the demonstrators, which included a fair and competitive presidential

3. Bak Jong-cheol, a Seoul National University student, was tortured to death during police interrogation on January 14, 1987. Yi Han-yeol, a junior at Yonsei University, was shot by a tear gas bullet during a demonstration at the gate of Yonsei University on June 9, 1987 and died on July 5 due to brain damage.

election. That was an outcome of the strategic choice of the ruling party to prevent the collapse of its own power due to the mass protests of university students, political activists, religious organizations, and ordinary citizens. On the brink of collapse, the military regime inevitably chose democratization through a compromise within which the ruling party could find room to maneuver. As in the case of the People Power Revolution in the Philippines in 1986, massive rallies and street demonstrations mollified the oppressive power of the military regime in Korea in 1987. With assurance of victory in the fair election, soft-liners, mostly political leaders of the opposition parties, accepted offers of negotiation for democratization with the ruling party. Though hard-liners, mostly students and political radicals, were reluctant to enter into a compromise with the military regime, they could not block negotiations among political leaders.

In December 1987, however, the first free and competitive presidential election in sixteen years ended up with continuation of the authoritarian regime. Paradoxically, the long-lasting authoritarian regime was legitimized by the formal procedure of the competitive elections. Though a prolonged struggle for democracy successfully changed the rules that had been set by the authoritarian regime, it failed to bring down the authoritarian state due to a split between opposition candidates. Competition between two prominent opposition leaders, Kim Dae-jung and Kim Young-sam (popularly known as “the two Kims”),⁴ resulted in the failure to make a unified opposition party candidate. Roh Tae-woo of the Democratic Justice Party was barely able to win the presidential election in December 1987, with only 36.6% of votes.⁵ As the pro-democracy voters were divided evenly in two, Roh Tae-woo was able to profit from this split with almost one-third of the total votes. The failure to remove the authori-

4. In addition to the term “the two Kims,” “the three Kims” was also widely used in popular discourse to refer to the three leading politicians who all shared the same last name. They were Kim Dae-jung, Kim Young-sam, and Kim Jong-pil, respectively.

5. Two leading opposition leaders comprised 55.1% of the total vote, with 27.1% for Kim Dae-jung and 28% for Kim Young-sam.

tarian regime through a fair election dismayed social movement organizations and lifelong political dissidents who had devoted themselves to bringing down the military dictatorship. It generated utter despondency among many people who had wished for the military regime to end and desperately struggled for democracy.

The outcome of the 1987 presidential election significantly deterred the transition to democracy in two ways. Firstly, the dictatorial regime regained its damaged power through formal legitimacy, one of the core institutional features of formal democracy, which was confirmed by the presidential election. The regime was thus able to maintain its power and use political leverage to counter popular demands for radical reform. Secondly, the opposition movement lost momentum for a while because the long struggle for democracy failed as a result of the personal rivalry between the two opposition leaders. Although the opposition movement in civil society was well developed during the anti-military dictatorship struggle, it did not develop into a political organization that could pursue its political agenda. The opposition parties' loss demoralized the opposition movement in general. In addition, Roh Tae-woo initiated party mergers with Kim Young-sam, one of the key opposition political leaders, and Kim Jong-pil in order to overcome the minority status of the ruling party in the National Assembly. This was Roh's political strategy for countering pressures for democratic reform from civil society.⁶ Kim Young-sam considered the party merger his best strategy for becoming a presidential candidate in the subsequent 1992 election. He knew that as a leader of the third largest party, he would have no possibility of winning the election. Therefore, becoming the leader of a newly-merged party was the best strategy for him to win. Because Kim Jong-pil was the leader of a small, ultra-rightist political bloc, he also considered the party merger a good opportunity to expand the power of the conservative forces. The formation of the Democratic

6. Choi Jang Jip called it a “full-scale transformation strategy” that would totally transform the power matrix in political society in reaction to pressure from civil society. See Choi (1996).

Liberal Party was a political earthquake that transformed the structure of the political game and deepened the cleavage between political society and civil society.

While there were protests and rallies organized by radical students and those who opposed the merger of political parties, these were not so appealing to the public. With the sudden collapse of Eastern European regimes and the eruption of the Tiananmen Square protest in China in the late 1980s, political mobilization initiated by radical students and leftist organizations did not receive much attention and support from the public. The demise of the state socialist blocs discouraged the activities of radical political organizations and student organizations. At the same time, the continuation of authoritarian rule put pressure on social movement organizations to explore new political strategies. The militant political movements that dominated the social movements of the 1980s became less tenable within this drastically changing political environment. Discourses in civil society and the citizens' movement itself emerged as an alternative social movement to radical political movements.⁷ These discourses accentuated the role of the citizen in reforming politics rather than a revolutionary overthrow of the state. In addition to political reform, more concern was also shown for ordinary people in terms of issues such as housing shortages, consumer safety, fair elections, water pollution, women's rights, etc.

The rise of the citizens' movement also represented a fundamental shift from an anti-authoritarian political movement based on student organizations in the 1980s to a social movement based on citizens' organizations in the 1990s. As the democratic transition proceeded, democracy as a common goal of anti-authoritarian movement organizations became less imminent. The democratic transition generated a new social and political environment in which each

7. Discourses on civil society reappeared in the early 1990s in critical journals. While civil society appeared in religious literature from the 1960s, it was not connected to social movements. However, discourses on civil society in the early 1990s were directly related to social movement under the changing political situation. See Shin (1991), You (1991), Paik (1991) and You and Kim (1994).

social movement organization was able to stake its own claim to legitimacy. While different social movement organizations and social groups engaged in the struggle for democracy, they began to be differentiated from one other. Until 1987, environmental groups, feminist organizations, campus student organizations, and political activist organizations concentrated on toppling down the military regime. Even though the democratic transition was not yet secured, democratization was no longer common ground for collective action. As political society experienced significant changes after 1987, civil society also experienced changes in its composition and its relationship with the state.

The Era of the Citizens' Movement and Political Underdevelopment

As political parties monopolized the process of democratization, social movement organizations were able to explore new visions and new organizational approaches to the consolidation of democracy. Social movement activists and organizations had three main responses to this. First, some organizations returned to their genuine arena of activities to promote democracy. Some organizations such as the YMCA and Heungsadan (Young Korea Academy) began to emphasize the role of religious or community organizations in society.⁸

Second, as the social movement was diversified, social movement organizations with issue-specific orientations mushroomed. For instance, the Korean Federation for Environmental Movements (KFEM), the largest environmental movement organization, was

8. The YMCA was established in 1903 by national leaders who played a key role in the national liberation movement during the period of Japanese rule and it was a center of the anti-authoritarian movement in the 1970s. Heungsadan was formed by An Chang-ho to encourage young people to promote the independence movement under Japanese rule. As a part of the patriotic enlightenment movement, lectures on national history and democracy, and the social and political activities of members have been a major part of the organization.

established in 1993. The founder of KFEM was a former student activist who was imprisoned for six years for his activism against the military dictatorship. Since the late 1980s, women's organizations also began to emphasize their own struggles to empower women and promote feminist ideology, rather than acting as a mere part of the anti-authoritarian movement.⁹ Prior to 1987, those organizations were actively engaged in an anti-authoritarian coalition movement in connection with student organizations and opposition movement organizations.

Third, a new type of social movement emerged in the early stage of democratic transition. While a militant anti-authoritarian movement was the dominant type of social movement, marked by street protests and demonstrations, a new type of social movement emerged. The new type of social movement organizations was "comprehensive social organizations" that dealt with a variety of issues such as political corruption, housing, transportation, human rights, legal justice, economic justice, environmental protection (Choi 2000, 37-39). These social movement organizations diverged according to political ideology. For example, the liberalists organized their own social movement organization in 1989, the Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice (CCEJ), which promoted economic justice, environmental protection, and political democracy nationwide. From the outset, it was concerned with issues related to housing, rent, transportation, and drinking water, as well as political democracy. It announced a new type of social movement based on citizens' interest and participation. It represented a liberalist approach to democratic reform, rejecting the radical transformation of political institutions and the economic system. The progressive group also formed the People's Solidarity for People's Democracy (PSPD) as a progressive

9. Women's movement organizations also diverged according to their orientation and the target groups they worked for. For example, the Korean Women's Association United (KWAU), created as a coalition of 21 organizations in 1987, became a center of the progressive feminist movement with radical feminist ideology, whereas Korea Women Link, created in 1987, emphasized gender equality for women.

counterpart to the liberal CCEJ in 1994. The PSPD declared the need for progressive reform to deepen democracy beyond the existing political democracy, which was the outcome of political negotiations among elites. It criticized the sharp split of the citizens' movement away from the *minjung* movement, which had focused on people who were politically oppressed and economically deprived.¹⁰ It raised a more fundamental question: what kind of democracy do we need, and for whom? It pursued a people's democracy that was rooted in participatory democracy.

The citizens' movement has been very successful in mobilizing around issues that concern ordinary citizens. The influence of citizens' movement organizations has been far more powerful than that of labor unions or political parties with regard to public issues. In contrast to labor unions and political parties, citizens' movement organizations raised public issues pertinent to all people, regardless of class or partisanship. Their commitment to ensuring benefits for all earned them public acceptance. They were regarded as an agency for reform of a corrupt bureaucracy, outdated political parties, and big *jaebeol*.

Two unique factors in the early 1990s made the development of the citizens' movement possible. One was the underdevelopment of the democratic polity. Institutionalized political parties controlled by bosses could not show political accountability in solving major issues since political leaders used party organizations to maximally damage political opponents. Because political leaders exercised power to nominate candidates for general elections in each region, congressmen and women had to do their best to impress their boss favorably. Personal rivalry among political bosses has been reproduced in the

10. The *minjung* movement is defined as a social movement for liberation of the politically oppressed and economically deprived people, including workers, farmers, and the urban poor. Radical students and some political activists considered their organizations and activities part of the *minjung* movement in the 1980s in the sense that they pursued the liberation of the *minjung*. Unlike the citizens' movement organizations, the *minjung* movement organizations pursued a radical transformation of the political system as well as of economic institutions.

institutional sphere in a more nasty fashion. Regular sessions in the National Assembly were repeatedly full of shouting and physical skirmishes among elected politicians. The personalization of party politics discouraged ordinary citizens from becoming involved in political parties and dominated politics with personal ties rather than political ideology and policy orientation (Kim B. 1998, 116-123).

Another reason for the development of the citizens' movement was the conservative ideology of existing political parties. Neither the ruling nor the opposition party was able to represent through their policies progressive interests associated with labor, gender, environment, agriculture, and human rights. The ideological difference between the ruling party and the opposition party was not so significant in the sense that they were both conservative in terms of policy orientation and organizational structure. Thus, citizens' liberal or progressive demands for economic and social reforms were not fully represented by the political parties in the National Assembly. In spite of more than a decade of democratization, as some commentators argue, democratization in Korea after 1987 ended with a conservative democracy that excluded the interests of citizens from party politics (Choi 2004). When citizens' movement organizations criticized institutional politics and proposed alternatives, people began to think of citizens' organizations as representing their interests and demands. The increasing support for those organizations reflected their popularity in Korean society.¹¹

Contrary to the citizens' movement, party politics and the general political culture in Korea underwent a political involution. First, there was permanent instability in party organizations because these parties were run by political bosses (Choi 2000, 33). Political parties

11. Gallup International reported citizens' movement organizations to be the most trusted social institution in Korea. Surveys showed that 76% of Koreans regards citizens' movement organizations as reliable. In contrast, only 11% of Koreans consider the National Assembly to be reliable. The National Assembly was ranked the lowest in the survey. Other percentages of perceived reliability include 51% for religious organizations, 44% for media, 35% for big business, and 25% for the government (<http://www.gallup.co.kr/News/2002/release129.html>).

had previously been considered private organizations. The boss of each party had total control over its politics, from the nomination of candidates in the general election to policy discussions at the National Assembly. As presidential elections have taken place every five years since 1987, the names of political parties have also changed almost every five years. The new candidates of each party did not want to inherit the tradition of their predecessors, and instead tried to clean up their image by changing names. Furthermore, unexpected party realignments occurred frequently according to agreements among bosses of political parties.¹² While political leaders wanted to build a new political identity and image and changed the name of the parties so as to create winning coalitions in elections, they contributed to the underdevelopment of a stable political party system as a public organization. Retirement of each boss brought about identity crises within all political parties.¹³

Second, institutional politics has been frequently paralyzed due to conflicts between the ruling party and the opposition party. Without policy competition, each party has been more concerned about attacking the leaders of other parties. This tendency has been more conspicuous since the former authoritarian party lost the presidential election in 1997. As the new opposition party, the Grand National Party, which had ruled for over thirty years, still dominated the

12. The current ruling party, the Uri Party, was formed in 2003, when a reformist fraction broke away from the Millennium Democratic Party, which was a reorganized party that originated from the National Congress for New Politics formed by Kim Dae-jung in 1995. Kim Dae-jung announced his exit from politics after he lost the presidential election in 1992 and returned to politics in 1995 with the formation of the National Congress for New Politics. The largest opposition party, the Grand National Party, had sprung out of the New Korea Party. Kim Young-sam changed the name of the Democratic Liberal Party to the New Korea Party before the presidential election in 1992, and Lee Hoi-chang, a candidate for the presidential election in 1997, changed it again to the Grand National Party.

13. As Kim Dae-jung finished his term of presidency and retired from politics, the Millennium Democratic Party experienced a crisis of party identity. The attachment of voters to the party also diminished even in the Jeolla region, which traditionally had been considered a party stronghold.

National Assembly as the majority party, party politics at the National Assembly had become anarchic, marked by verbal insults, outrageous behavior, and physical confrontations. Party politics at the National Assembly contributed to the discrediting of politicians and the increase in political cynicism amongst people. In addition to the bribery and corruption that had already damaged politicians' reputations, the unruly behavior of politicians at the National Assembly made voters suspicious of the credibility of the parliamentary system. The new democracy had fallen into danger due to the continuous political involution.

Third, as political parties failed to represent the demands and interests of the people, citizens' movement organizations replaced the role of the political party in submitting new bills and policy proposals. Since political parties have been mostly interested in their own power struggles, citizens' movement organizations have played the role of quasi-legislative organizations. Citizens' movement organizations presented reform bills associated with a variety of issues ranging from the environment to the governance of business organizations.¹⁴ Interestingly, political parties at the National Assembly mainly acted to discard bills submitted by citizens' movement organizations by delaying discussions about them during their term. These bills would be automatically invalidated when the regular term expired.¹⁵ In the 1990s, the increasing role of citizens' movement organizations in representing people's demands and interests became prominent, while institutional politics revealed the incompetence and irresponsibility in the National Assembly.

Citizens' movement organizations at the local level have flourished since 1993, when the local government system was reintroduced after 32 years. The military junta controlled by Park Chung-

14. Since 1995 the PSPD submitted 106 reform bills to the National Assembly including a bill for minority stockholders' rights and a bill for social security reform (PSPD 2004, Appendix 128).

15. Only nine cases were partially discussed in the National Assembly out of 106 cases submitted by the PSPD since 1995.

hee abolished the local government system in 1961. It was revived as a democratic institution in 1993 when the Kim Young-sam administration kept the promise he made during the 1992 presidential election. The revival of the local government system was considered a part of democratic reform policy toward grass-roots democracy. With the introduction of the local government system, local branches of citizens' movement organizations based in Seoul were established. For instance, the KFEM and the CCEJ started local branches in major cities. In addition, autonomous community organizations based in local cities were also formed. Mostly they were organized by local activists who had participated in protest movements as university students.

This revolution in the citizens' movement resulted in the great expansion of the number of citizens' movement organizations and the empowerment of citizens in the new democracy. In 2005, the total number of citizens' movement organizations was almost 23,500, and 5,556 of those were oriented toward social movements. More than half were established in the 1990s (NGOs Times 2006).

The most important action against politics took place in 2000, when citizens' organizations began to campaign across the nation during the period of nomination of candidates and the general election campaign in January 2000. First, on January 4, the Citizens' Alliance for the 2000 General Election (CAGE) unveiled on its Internet homepage a list of 164 unqualified candidates. Separately, almost 1,000 citizens' movement organizations joined the CAGE, four months ahead of the mid-January 2000 general election (Kim 2000, 143). The CAGE also issued the names of politicians with bad reputations for corruption and incompetence.¹⁶ The CAGE was a nationwide coalition for political reform by civic groups, including major citizens' movement organizations, specialized social organizations,

16. It displayed the names of 86 candidates who were to be rejected by voters and the names of 22 candidates who would be the target of concerted effort by the rejection campaign.

and locally based organizations.¹⁷ It was the first time that citizens' movement organizations directly engaged in the national election by campaigning to defeat corrupt candidates. Instead of supporting some candidates, the organizations launched a negative campaign by naming incompetent and corrupt politicians so as to change the makeup of the National Assembly as well as that of party politics.

The rejection campaign shattered the corrupt politicians and resilient party structure, as voters fervently supported the nationwide campaign activity of the CAGE. As a result, 59 out of 86 blacklisted candidates were defeated, and 94 out of 207 incumbent congressmen failed to be reelected. The movement was much more successful than expected, considering that some of the blacklisted politicians had strong regional support. Regardless of the rejection campaign, many of those on the blacklist were reelected in the Yeongnam region.¹⁸ Those who suffered the greatest damage from the negative campaigning were lawmakers in Seoul and the greater metropolitan area, where voters were relatively free from voting behavior based on regionalism. More than 95 percent of the candidates running in those areas who had been blacklisted lost the election.¹⁹

The success of the citizens' movement and the failure of institutional politics were two sides of the same coin of Korean democratization in the 1990s. Despite the mass distrust for political parties and politicians, however, political society did not show any willingness to change itself. When the confrontation between the citizens' movement and the political society took place in the general election in

17. It includes a variety of civil associations such as women's movement groups, environmental organizations, and human rights associations, as well as professional organizations such as university professors' organizations and the teachers' union.

18. Contrary to the general trend, voters in the Yeongnam region were to support the candidates of the old ruling party, the Democratic Liberal Party. Almost 45.5 percent, 19 out of 35 listed in the blacklist, won the election in the Yeongnam region, the stronghold of the DLP. See Kim H. (2000, 144).

19. It was clearer in Seoul, where 10 out of 11 candidates on the blacklist were defeated. In addition, 5 out of 6 candidates on the blacklist lost the election in Gyeonggi-do province in 2000. See *Maeil Business Newspaper*, April 14, 2004.

2000, party politicians took no notice of changing civil society with regard to political interests or voting behaviors. The "rejection campaign," later called a "voter's revolution," succeeded in significantly transforming political society.

Contentious Politics and the Divided Civil Society

After the Grand National Party was defeated twice in the last two presidential elections, it was difficult for party members to accept the fact that the candidate of the minority ruling party won the election again. They felt overwhelmed by the encroachment of young radicals, who were considered a threat to their vested interests. Feelings of personal impotence and powerlessness on the part of conservatives became resources for extreme rightist mobilization. In addition to the opposition party, there were various groups that felt deprived of power and authority during the regime change, such as civilian organizations that were sponsored and controlled by the dictatorial regime until 1997, conservative mass media, and religious organizations that collaborated with the military regime.

When the Grand National Party lost the presidential election in 1997, it regarded the defeat as a consequence of a strategic mistake that allowed an ad hoc electoral coalition between Kim Dae-jung and Kim Jong-pil. Because the two political leaders were so different in their political ideologies and political backgrounds, they seemed to be impossible to unite. Kim Dae-jung experienced political oppression during the Park Chung-hee regime when Kim Jong-pil was prime minister. Furthermore, Kim Jong-pil was an anti-communist hardliner toward North Korea, whereas Kim Dae-jung was a pragmatic politician in favor of peaceful dialogue between South and North Korea. There was nothing in common between the two politicians. However, Kim Dae-jung and Kim Jong-pil succeeded in making an electoral coalition, and Kim Dae-jung barely defeated Lee Hoi-chang of the majority opposition party. Kim Dae-jung appointed Kim Jong-pil prime minister.

When Kim Dae-jung's administration took the stage, the Grand National Party became an opposition party for the first time since the 1960s and did not know how to deal with this unprecedented situation. The simple choice was to debase Kim's leadership by criticizing and raising objection to Kim's policies. Kim had a hard time controlling high officials within the state organization and sometimes encountered strong resistance when he pursued reform of governmental organizations. Kim experienced stubborn resistance from both inside and outside. Especially when Kim Dae-jung began to restructure the security organizations from the past that had monitored and oppressed Kim Dae-jung himself, the core members of those organizations strongly resisted. Even if Kim Dae-jung had tried to pursue liberal reforms, he would not have been able to carry out much reform due to this strong resistance.

The more damaging defeat of the Grand National Party took place five years later, in the presidential election on 2002. Roh Moo-hyun, a candidate of the Millennium Democratic Party, beat Lee Hoi-chang, a candidate of the Grand National Party. Lee represented traditional elites as well as the conservative party. As a former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, he was expected to win the presidential election because Roh Moo-hyun was a lawyer with only a high school degree and did not have power within the ruling party. However, Roh Moo-hyun was able to become a presidential candidate due to the new primary system for choosing a candidate, which the Millennium Democratic Party had introduced to overcome the low popularity of the party in the last year of Kim Dae-jung's term. Rho was able to win the primary with the vote of ordinary party members. Although Roh did not have much power within the party, he enjoyed popularity among the people. Ironically, Roh broke away from the Millennium Democratic Party after he became president since the old guards close to Kim Dae-jung did not fully support Roh in the election campaign. They were not satisfied with the Roh's candidacy in the Millennium Democratic Party because Roh was not a power man within the party. Roh's candidacy was an unexpected outcome of the new rule for choosing a presidential candidate within the party.

When Roh formed his own party in November of 2003, the Uri Party, it was the third largest party, with 47 seats out of 299 seats in the National Assembly. The Grand National Party and the Millennium Democratic Party succeeded in building a coalition for the impeachment of President Roh. With the breakaway of the Uri Party from the Millennium Democratic Party, the Millennium Democratic Party members were angry about the behavior of the president. The Grand National Party, which possessed 144 seats, and the Millennium Democratic Party, with 62, was able to override the Uri Party in the National Assembly. The impeachment of President Roh was a culmination of the contentious politics in which bosses of political parties played a dangerous game to destroy political opponents.

The dilemma faced by the conservatives was that the conservative political party was not able to provide any viable alternative to change the political impasse. Nevertheless, they could no longer wait for the next election, complying with the frustrating political conditions that were an immediate threat to their interests. The impeachment of President Roh in March 2004 was the outcome of a long-awaited action initiated by the coalition between the Grand National Party and the Millennium Democratic Party. When both parties played this dangerous game, both parties became engulfed by huge corruption scandals during the presidential election. Both parties desperately needed to escape the possible political disaster in the general election that would be held one month later. The impeachment was a strategic choice on the part of political leaders of both parties to drastically change the political game for the general election.

The general election during the suspension of the presidency of Roh in April 2004 drastically transformed the power balance in the National Assembly. The general election in 2004 ended with the victory of the Uri Party over the two conservative parties that initiated the impeachment of President Roh: The Uri Party became a majority party with 152 seats, gaining 105 seats; The Grand National Party got 121 seats, losing 23 seats; The Millennium Democratic Party got 9 seats, losing 53 seats. Later, the Constitutional Court declared the impeachment invalid. In the end, the impeachment turned out to be

a total failure, and conservative forces were unable to regain political hegemony and topple Roh before the next presidential election.

The new parliament that started in September 2004 continued to display more contentious politics than before. Even though political leaders pledged to cooperate so as to generate a positive sum game, the culture of contentious politics reemerged soon with fierce confrontation between the ruling Uri party and the opposition Grand National Party, turning the regular sessions of the National Assembly into another battleground. When the Uri Party attempted to pass a law to probe pro-Japanese collaborators from the period of Japanese rule, Park Keun-hye, the leader of the Grand National Party, vehemently opposed the attempt, assuming that the law was intended to undermine her political position by investigating her father, Park Chung-hee's past.²⁰ Because revealing the past career of Park Chung-hee would also damage the legitimacy of the Grand National Party, the party refused to discuss the issue from the beginning. The Grand National Party boycotted the regular session in the National Assembly as a protest against the prime minister's public accusation of the Grand National Party at the start of the National Assembly's regular session. The prime minister accused the Grand National Party of corruption in the last presidential election, and lawmakers of the Grand National Party demanded a public apology from the prime minister. As the prime minister did not intend to give a public apology, the Grand National Party boycotted the regular session in the National Assembly for two weeks. The beginning of the 17th National Assembly started with a full-fledged confrontation between the two parties. Though lawmakers from the Grand National Party were replaced by younger members, the party did not show any actual change in behavior or activity. The Uri Party also displayed a problem of leadership. Although it succeeded in becoming a majority ruling party

20. Former President Park Chung-hee graduated from the Japanese Military Academy and served as a second lieutenant in the late period of Japanese colonial rule in Korea.

with a surprising victory in the general election, lawmakers from the Uri Party were quite diverse in terms of political ideology and interests. A lack of uniformity among party lawmakers generated dissonances with respect to diverse issues. The persistence of weak party politics became a serious obstacle to democratic consolidation since it contributed to a sharp increase in political cynicism among the people. The rapid drop in voter turnout thereby is a danger to the new democracy in Korea.

After the defeat of the conservative party, new developments began to appear, as conservative social blocs began to rebuild conservative citizens' organization as a counterpart to citizens' movement organizations. The conservatives regarded the success of Roh as based on the support of citizens' movement organizations that were mostly reform-oriented in nature and began to build conservative citizens' movement organizations. The first outcome was the formation of Citizens United for Better Society (CUBS), which declared liberal democracy and free market principles as its guiding lights. In fact, the CUBS is an organization of conservatives allied with the Grand National Party. One of the representatives of CUBS became a congressman of the Grand National Party through the April 2004 general election.

Religious conservatives organized by the Christian Council of Korea (CCK) began to mobilize mass rallies, condemning government policy toward North Korea and anti-American sentiments among the younger generation. Most church leaders engaged in the CCK supported the military dictatorship, participating in morning prayers for President Chun Doo-hwan in the 1980s. The CCK mobilized a huge anti-government demonstration in downtown Seoul against the attempt to abolish the notorious National Security Law.²¹ Furthermore, the CCK organized a series of rallies against the reform policy

21. The National Security Law was utilized by the military dictatorship to oppress political opponents and anti-authoritarian movements. The National Security Law was passed to prosecute leftists in 1948. The Public Security Law during the Japanese rule was the origin of the National Security Law.

of the government. For example, the CCK protested the attempt of the ruling party to revise the Private School Law that gave unlimited power to owners of private schools. Many church leaders considered the revision as a threat to their interests since many churches owned private schools. While the financial resources of private schools came from student fees and government subsidies, religious leaders rejected state intervention in their management of schools to monopolize discretionary power.²² The CCK organized a mass gathering of 5,000 preachers to protest the government's attempt to revise the Private School Law in November 2004. In accordance with the CCK, operators of private school held a mass rally in downtown Seoul.

The concerted action of conservative organizations was also a new development in 2004. Conservatives and vested interests groups grew impatient with consecutive defeats in the presidential election. Some militant conservatives began to agitate for a military coup in public.²³ When the impeachment of President Roh provoked an anti-impeachment candlelight demonstration organized by citizens' movement organizations in downtown Seoul, conservative organizations mobilized a pro-impeachment rally in front of the National Assembly. Those who participated in the pro-impeachment rally were mainly older people and veterans. After the Constitutional Court invalidated the impeachment, conservative groups began to form a coalition for collective action. The conservative groups were comprised of a variety of groups, from the former state-sponsored organizations under the military dictatorship to newly-organized conservative citizens'

22. Under the revised law, family members of school owners are not permitted to become principal of a school and a board must be set up at school with committee members intervening in budget and management affairs. This board, consisting of parents and teachers, nominates one third of board members of the school.

23. Kim Yong-seo, a professor of Ewha Womans University, argued in a public lecture after the impeachment that there were no other ways but military coup to destroy the leftist government and restore liberal democracy (*Pressian* April 31, 2004). Cho Gab-je, the editor of *Monthly Chosun*, frequently denounced the government for pro-North Korea.

movement organizations.²⁴ The Korean Veterans Association (KVA) began to play an important role in mobilizing anti-communist sentiment among the older generation. Then, in November 2004, the KVA organized the Korean National Security Net, which possessed 90 membership organizations, in order to wage ideological warfare on an Internet controlled by the progressive, younger generation.²⁵ Conservative mobilization culminated in the formation of the New Right in November 2004, declaring themselves anti-Roh Moo-hyun and supporters of pro-market democracy. The New Right accused Roh Moo-hyun of being a leftist and a pro-North Korean president. The New Right included conservative scholars, converts from student movements, and conservative Protestant church leaders. While it had not become an influential organization, conservative newspapers that held the largest newspaper market supported the organization.

The recent development of conservative organizations has mostly formed in opposition to the reform policies of the Roh Moo-hyun government. After the surprising victory in the general election in April 2004, Roh Moo-hyun pursued four major reform bills simultaneously with the majority ruling party to remove the authoritarian legacy in the regular session of the National Assembly.²⁶ Due to the control over the process of democratization by authoritarian forces even after the transition to democracy, the legal and institutional legacy of the dictatorship remains unchanged. One of the most notorious legacies of the National Security Law is that it was used to pros-

24. It comprises both extreme rightist groups and conservative groups. The extreme rightist groups include former politicians who served in authoritarian regime and anti-communist and religious organizations. Conservative groups cover moderate organizations such as the CUBS and the Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry. See Lee (2004).

25. The Korea National Security Net consists of 36 war veterans' organizations, 16 security organizations, 29 Internet sites for young people and 10 Internet media. In fact, the ARK was a coalition organization for rightist groups in Korea (*Hankyoreh*, November 11, 2004).

26. The four reform bills, introduced by the Uri Party, aim to repeal the National Security Law, fortify the control of private school owners, probe into the history of pro-Japanese Koreans, and exert more control over the newspaper market.

ecute anti-authoritarian movement activists and oppress political opponents during the years of military rule. The Grand National Party that had relied on the draconian National Security Law to sustain its authoritarian regime argues that the National Security Law is still needed because of the threat from North Korea, though young lawmakers within the party accept the necessity of abolishing the law.

The four major reforms initiated by the ruling party exacerbated the fear, anxiety, and danger of political defeat, induced by the case for the impeachment of President Roh. It triggered outrage from various conservative groups and politicians. The boycott of the regular session by the Grand National Party was an overreaction to the remarks of the prime minister. Though the Grand National Party returned to the National Assembly after the prime minister apologized, the boycott of the regular session of the National Assembly displayed a deep-rooted hostility toward the ruling party. Eventually, the revision or abolition of the authoritarian legacy was delayed due to the vehement resistance of the Grand National Party, which possessed no definite plan. The first session of the 17th assembly has been tarnished by the repeat of the irresponsible behavior that was frequently found in the past.

The overdevelopment of contentious politics contributed to the polarization of civil society. As political conflicts have been transmitted to civil society, the revival of the civilian organizations sponsored by the authoritarian regime in the past facilitates the formation of contentious civil society. Although direct confrontation between different citizens' organizations can still be productive, the conservative citizens' movement might be an impediment to the consolidation of democracy in a newly democratized society. When excessive competition and political confrontation among political parties prevails, democracy itself may create "an ungovernable situation" (Przeworski et al. 1995, 54). In addition, the fact that civil society is divided and the level of contention is so high significantly undermines the sustainability of fragile democracy. When a political party amplifies the level of social conflicts beyond the level of control, social conflicts

can generate a more chaotic situation than before. Instead of resolving social conflicts politically, authoritarian political parties fostered social conflicts by mobilizing reactionary citizens' organizations. Thus, the conflation of political and social conflicts might shatter the shaky base of Korea's unstable democracy.

Conclusion

The citizens' movement that developed in the 1990s significantly affected the trajectory of Korean democracy by redirecting representative politics to respond to citizens' concerns and interests and exercising pressure over the democratic reform that had been monopolized by politicians. Unlike student movements in the 1980s and the labor movement of the 1990s, the citizens' movement gained strong support from the people and contributed to the consolidation of democracy in Korea. However, the citizens' movement organizations are limited since they exist outside of institutional politics. The politics of pressure is the only way to exercise power over political parties, namely by mobilizing public opinion and organizing public protests. When the Citizens' Alliance for the 2000 General Election organized the negative campaign in the general election in 2000, it directly impacted voter's choices and affected election results. The citizens' movement has propped up a fragile democracy by shattering political involution. The plethora of citizens' movement organizations has given a strong impetus for new democracy in Korea.

The contentious party politics culminated with the impeachment of President Roh, and a subsequent general election transformed the matrix of party politics. The minority ruling party became the majority party and the majority opposition party became the minority party. However, the swapping of party status between the two did not significantly change the nature of party politics, as the opposition party continued to take an intransigent stance toward the ruling party. Vigorous confrontation and chronic political conflicts engulf politics in the National Assembly.

Furthermore, the development of conservative citizens' movement organizations escalated the antagonism between opposing parties. The conservative coalition consisting of the authoritarian party, religious organizations, and civic organizations nurtured by the military regime, along with a conservative mass media, worked together towards undermining the stability of Korean democracy. A divided civil society might be a dangerous situation for consolidating democracy. In fact, the failed impeachment of President Roh Moo-hyun and the victory of the ruling party in the general election did not result in increasing political stability. The conservatives' vehement resistance against the reform policy of the government accompanied the consolidation of diverse anti-reformist social forces that culminated in the formation of the New Right. Democracy in Korea must overcome the effects of political involution by strengthening party politics and increasing the political accountability of political parties to voters. Democratization itself is an uncertain sequential process in which the outcomes of strategic actions form a new environment for actors but the end result may not be predictable.

The development of civil society played a key role in democratic consolidation. With citizens' organizations active in responding to and mobilizing popular demands for political reform, democracy in Korea could have been much more reliable and sustainable. Nevertheless, democracy cannot be guaranteed without making political parties more responsive and accountable. When politics facilitates rather than resolves social conflict, civil society itself can be fragmented and even further polarized. In the case of Korea, the recent development of conservative citizens' organizations can undermine the stability of new democracy.

This paper challenges the conventional conceptualization of civil society that has been highly romanticized in recent literature. Civil society, for many theorists, was regarded as voluntarily organized citizens' engagement against despotic regimes and as social power to foster democratization (De Tocqueville 1969; Keane 1988; Putnam 1993). The concept of civil society has been abused to explain the third wave of democratization and too hastily predict the future of

new democracy. The Korean case shows that the development of voluntary organizations does not necessarily facilitate the process of democratic consolidation.²⁷ In particular, the rise of conservative citizens' organizations allied with authoritarian political parties undermined the stability of new democracy, reviving the old authoritarian control, and reversing the process of democratization against the authoritarian political system. As Foley and Edwards (1996, 46) argue, "if civil society is a beachhead secure enough to be of use in thwarting tyrannical regimes, what prevents it from being used to undermine democratic governments?"

The trajectory of the citizens' movement reveals that the concept of civil society mostly accepted by researchers on democracy and civil society obscures the dynamics of post-authoritarian civil society, viewing civil society as homogeneous and monolithic. As in the case of politics, in fact, civil society is divided and social cleavage within it can become a source of political degeneration, marked by violent confrontations among citizens' organizations. We need to probe into the more complex social and political changes that occur in post-authoritarian societies, without simply assuming that a flourishing civil society will facilitate democratic consolidation. While democratization has promoted not only citizens' movements for the consolidation of democracy, it has also provided a basis for the development of conservative citizens' movement that defies the rule of the civilian president. Without breaking down the personal or institutional system of the old authoritarian regime, a reactionary civil society might hamper the development of democracy in newly democratized societies.

27. Other recent researchers also warn about the romanticized concept of civil society (Foley and Edwards 1996; Berman 1997; Chandhoke 2001). For example, Berman succinctly shows that a well-developed German civil society in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century failed to contribute to political development. Instead, bourgeois civil society activists supported the Nazis and contributed to the collapse of the Weimar Republic.

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