

The Current State of South Korea's Democracy*

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This article endeavors to contribute to an understanding of the current state of South Korea's democracy. With an innovative dataset from the Varieties of Democracy project, it first scrutinizes the state of South Korea's democracy today from a cross-national perspective, showing the status of South Korea's democracy is virtually at the bottom among advanced industrial democracies across all dimensions of democratic authenticity, quality, and depth. In addition, it confirms that South Korea's democracy has continued to be eroded over the past ten years across all dimensions of democracy: its authenticity, liberal quality, participatory quality, deliberative quality, and depth. It concludes with the finding that South Korea's democracy today is in an extremely perilous position.

Keywords: *Democratic Authenticity, Democratic Depth, Quality of Democracy, South Korea*

1. INTRODUCTION

For students of democratization, the experience of South Korea has been an example of how a nation can successfully transition to and consolidate democracy (Hahm, 2008). However, a number of recent scholarly efforts, reflecting the recent global danger of democratic deconsolidation (Foa and Mounk, 2016), have begun to lose faith in this assessment, disputing the promises of South Korea's democracy (Kang, 2016; Haggard and You, 2015; Lee, 2015). This article endeavors to contribute to an understanding of the current state of South Korea's democracy by examining the empirical foundations of the debate.

In order to fulfill this objective, this article detects the analytic limitations of binary categorical and unidimensional discrete measures in differentiating between democracies. Introducing an innovative dataset from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project as a multidimensional continuous measure of democracy (Coppedge *et al.*, 2016b; Lindberg *et al.*, 2014; Coppedge *et al.*, 2011), it first scrutinizes the state of South Korea's democracy today from a cross-national perspective. Locating South Korea within the Organization for Economic and Co-operation and Development (OECD) member countries, it shows that the status of South Korea's democracy is virtually at the bottom of the sample of advanced industrial democracies across all dimensions of democratic authenticity, quality, and depth.

In the penultimate section, this article deals with how South Korea's democracy has evolved since undergoing democratic transition. At the aggregate level, it confirms that, across all dimensions, South Korea's democracy, after attaining its highest level in the late 2000s, has continued to be eroded over the past ten years. At the disaggregate level, it shows that the erosion of democratic authenticity has originated from, among other factors, the decay of freedom of expression; that the erosion of the liberal quality of democracy is

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attributed in large part to the decay of judicial constraints on the executive; that the erosion of the participatory quality of democracy has its biggest root in the decay of participation in civil society; that the erosion of the deliberative quality of democracy is caused largely by the decay of engaged society; and that the erosion of democratic depth has its foundations in the increasing inequality in the distribution of resources. The concluding section implies that South Korea's democracy today is in an extremely perilous position from a comparative perspective across nations as well as over time in every dimension of democracy.

2. THE STATUS OF SOUTH KOREA'S DEMOCRACY: A CROSS-NATIONAL COMPARISON

This section and the following address the questions of where South Korea's democracy is from a cross-national perspective and how it has evolved over time. Depending on their analytic aims, political scientists have conceived democracy either as a binary-categorical variable—a political regime can be either democratic or non-democratic, or as a unidimensional-discrete variable—a political regime can be more or less democratic. The Democracy-Dictatorship (DD) index (Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland, 2010)¹ and Boix-Miller-Rosato (BMR) index (Boix, Miller, and Rosato, 2013)² represent the former strategy of measurement that has the classificatory strength to make a distinction between those nations with 'minimalist' attributes of democracy and those without them. As shown in the second column of Table 1, the BMR index classifies all thirty-five OECD countries³ as democracies, without discriminating analytically among them.⁴ According to this binary-categorical measure, South Korea is as democratic as the other OECD countries.

The Freedom House (FH) score (Freedom House, 2016)⁵ and Polity score (Marshall, Gurr, and Jaggers, 2016)⁶ embrace the latter strategy of measurement that possesses the diagnostic advantage that the DD and BMR indices lack, differentiating between good and poor democracies. As displayed in the third and fourth columns of Table 1, there emerges a variation in democratic-ness among OECD member countries, ranging from 3.5 to 1 in FH scores and 6 to 10 in Polity scores.⁷

According to this unidimensional-discrete measure, in the FH scheme, South Korea is more democratic than Greece, Latvia, Mexico, and Turkey, as democratic as Hungary, Israel, Italy, and Japan, and less democratic than the other OECD countries. In the Polity scheme, it

¹ The data is available at <https://sites.google.com/site/joseantoniocheibub/datasets/democracy-and-dictatorship-revisited> (accessed on October 10, 2016).

² The data is available at <https://sites.google.com/site/mkmtwo/data> (accessed on October 10, 2016).

³ I conceive OECD countries as a sample of advanced industrial democracies that are the domain of comparison in this research.

⁴ In the BMR measurement scheme, 1 indicates a democracy and 0 indicates a non-democracy.

⁵ The data is available at <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2016> (accessed on October 10, 2016).

⁶ The data is available at <http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscrdata.html> (accessed on October 10, 2016).

⁷ Mexico and Turkey are no longer considered to be democracies according to the FH criteria that defines a minimum threshold of 2.5 to qualify as democratic. No OECD countries falls short of the Polity criteria, which sets a minimum threshold of 6 to qualify as democratic.

Table 1 Different Measurements of Democracy in OECD Countries

	<i>BMR</i>	<i>FH</i>	<i>Polity</i>	<i>V-Dem</i>				
				<i>Electoral Democracy</i>	<i>Liberal Democracy</i>	<i>Participatory Democracy</i>	<i>Deliberative Democracy</i>	<i>Egalitarian Democracy</i>
Australia	1	1	10	0.921	0.870	0.707	0.827	0.826
Austria	1	1	10	0.886	0.816	0.672	0.816	0.833
Belgium	1	1	8	0.914	0.849	0.663	0.849	0.881
Canada	1	1	10	0.890	0.831	0.631	0.805	0.833
Chile	1	1	10	0.898	0.838	0.601	0.787	0.694
Czech Republic	1	1	9	0.913	0.850	0.647	0.770	0.842
Denmark	1	1	10	0.927	0.903	0.718	0.912	0.906
Estonia	1	1	9	0.921	0.875	0.679	0.847	0.866
Finland	1	1	10	0.921	0.889	0.658	0.875	0.885
France	1	1	9	0.958	0.910	0.746	0.903	0.925
Germany	1	1	10	0.786	0.748	0.577	0.758	0.741
Greece	1	2	10	0.882	0.790	0.591	0.812	0.790
Hungary	1	1.5	10	0.764	0.644	0.530	0.450	0.645
Iceland	1	1	-	0.880	0.800	0.711	0.788	0.829
Ireland	1	1	10	0.915	0.831	0.654	0.795	0.847
Israel	1	1.5	6	0.747	0.610	0.488	0.587	0.602
Italy	1	1.5	10	0.875	0.747	0.698	0.776	0.803
Japan	1	1.5	10	0.875	0.813	0.615	0.804	0.824
Latvia	1	2	8	0.893	0.825	0.718	0.807	0.819
Luxembourg	1	1	10	-	-	-	-	-
Mexico	1	3	8	0.676	0.493	0.433	0.509	0.388
Netherlands	1	1	10	0.911	0.852	0.632	0.830	0.868
New Zealand	1	1	10	0.895	0.834	0.753	0.699	0.826
Norway	1	1	10	0.928	0.901	0.674	0.906	0.906
Poland	1	1	10	0.895	0.817	0.643	0.761	0.815
Portugal	1	1	10	0.924	0.869	0.654	0.835	0.868
Slovakia	1	1	10	0.800	0.703	0.595	0.584	0.668
Slovenia	1	1	10	0.837	0.769	0.674	0.679	0.777
South Korea	1	1.5	8	0.805	0.702	0.559	0.632	0.707
Spain	1	1	10	0.912	0.828	0.673	0.847	0.866
Sweden	1	1	10	0.925	0.896	0.689	0.902	0.897
Switzerland	1	1	10	0.943	0.908	0.839	0.929	0.913
Turkey	1	3.5	9	0.574	0.410	0.310	0.366	0.417
United Kingdom	1	1	10	0.957	0.928	0.743	0.894	0.915
United States	1	1	10	0.941	0.902	0.691	0.893	0.797

Sources: The BMR index is from information available at <https://sites.google.com/site/mkmtwo/data>; FH scores are from information available at <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2016>; Polity scores are from information available at <http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscrdata.html>; and V-Dem indices are from information available at <https://www.v-dem.net/en/data/data-version-6-2/> (accessed on October 10, 2016).

Note: All data is from 2012 except for the BMR index, which pulls data from 2010.

is more democratic than Israel, as democratic as Belgium, Latvia, and Mexico, and less democratic than the other OECD countries. As most (26 out of 35 OECD member countries in FH score and 25 out of 34 in Polity score) attain the highest score in each scheme, however, the capability to distinguish between advanced democracies appears to still be somewhat lacking. Moreover, the unidimensional measurement of the FH or Polity scores appears to constrain the ability of researchers to capture the complexity of mature democracies, including OECD countries.

Conceiving democracy as a multidimensional continuous variable, the V-Dem index provides us a unique opportunity to measure various aspects of democracies using a more fine-tuned set of scales (Lindberg *et al.*, 2014). The V-Dem index consists of multidimensional indicators that include: (1) electoral democracy⁸; (2) liberal democracy⁹; (3) participatory democracy¹⁰; (4) deliberative democracy¹¹; and (5) egalitarian democracy.¹² The level

⁸ The electoral democracy indicator measures the extent to which the ideal of an electoral democracy, or *the core value of making rulers responsive to citizens* is achieved. It is a composite index consisting of (1) a *clean elections* score to measure the extent to which elections are clean and not marred by fraud or systematic irregularities; (2) an *elected executive* score to measure the extent to which elections affect the composition of the chief executive of the country; (3) a *freedom of association* score to measure the extent to which political and civil society organizations can operate freely; (4) a *freedom of expression* score to measure the extent to which, in between elections, there is freedom of expression and an independent media capable of presenting alternative views on matters of political relevance; and (5) a *share of population with suffrage* score to measure the extent to which the ideal of an electoral democracy is achieved through electoral competition for the electorate's approval under circumstances when suffrage is extensive (Coppedge *et al.*, 2016a: 44).

⁹ The liberal democracy indicator measures the extent to which the ideal of a liberal democracy, or *the importance of protecting individual and minority rights against the tyranny of the state and the tyranny of the majority* is achieved. It is a composite index, in addition to the degree of electoral democracy, consisting of (1) an *equality before the law and individual liberty* score to measure the degree of constitutionally protected civil liberties; (2) a *judicial constraints on the executive* score to measure the degree of the establishment of rule of law and an independent judiciary; and (3) a *legislative constraints on the executive* score to measure the degree of effective checks and balances that exist against the executive power (Coppedge *et al.*, 2016a: 46).

¹⁰ The participatory democracy indicator measures the extent to which the ideal of a participatory democracy, or *active participation by citizens in all political processes, electoral and non-electoral*, is achieved. It is a composite index, in addition to the degree of electoral democracy, consisting of (1) a *civil society participation* score to measure the degree of engagement in civil society organizations; (2) a *direct popular vote* score to measure the degree of direct rule by citizens; (3) a *local government* score to measure the degree of influence of second-level sub-national elected bodies; and (4) a *regional government* score to measure the degree of influence of first-level sub-national elected bodies (Coppedge *et al.*, 2016a: 47).

¹¹ The deliberative democracy indicator measures the extent to which the ideal of deliberative democracy, or *the process in which political decisions are made is motivated by the common good* is achieved. It is a composite index, in addition to the degree of electoral democracy, consisting of (1) a *common good* score; (2) an *engaged society* score; (3) a *range of consultation* score; (4) a *reasoned justification* score; and (5) a *respect counterarguments* score. A deliberative process is one in which public reasoning focused on the common good motivates political decisions— as contrasted with emotional appeals, solidary attachments, parochial interests, or coercion. According to this principle,

of electoral democracy captures the *democratic authenticity* of a polity to fully qualify as a “free representative” democracy “instead of falling into another regime category” (Fishman, 2016: 296). The degree of liberal, participatory, or deliberative democracy is reserved for a political system’s *quality of democracy* to link to normative aspirations for outcomes that “may become possible under democracy but are clearly not required for a polity to warrant admission into the democratic regime category” (Fishman, 2016: 296). The level of egalitarian democracy reflects the democratic depth of a polity to identify variation in elements of democratic life “such as the forging of spaces favorable to the political participation and influence of socially disadvantaged sectors” (Fishman, 2016: 303).¹³

As presented in the fifth to ninth columns of Table 1, the five indicators in the V-Dem dataset reveal South Korea’s levels of democratic authenticity, quality, and depth. It earns a score of .805 for electoral democracy, .702 for liberal democracy, .559 for participatory democracy, .632 for deliberative democracy, and .707 for egalitarian democracy. To put these numbers in a comparative perspective, I have reassembled comparable statistics from other OECD countries for each indicator, calculating the mean value of the sample with a 95 percent confidence interval, into three clusters: (1) the group of countries that fall short of the lower boundary of the 95 percent confidence interval; (2) the group of countries that are between the lower and upper boundaries of the 95 percent confidence interval; and (3) the group of countries that go beyond the upper boundary of the 95 percent confidence interval.

Table 2 shows that the mean value of democratic authenticity in OECD countries is .873 and the level of South Korea’s democratic authenticity (.805) falls below the lower boundary of the 95 percent confidence interval (.845). The authenticity of South Korea’s democracy, together with those of Germany, Hungary, Israel, Mexico, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Turkey, falls below the OECD average score.¹⁴

democracy requires more than an aggregation of existing preferences. There should also be respectful dialogue at all levels—from preference formation to the final decision—among informed and competent participants who are open to persuasion (Coppedge *et al.*, 2016a: 48).

¹² The egalitarian democracy indicator measures the extent to which the ideal of egalitarian democracy, or *material and immaterial inequalities should not inhibit the exercise of formal rights and liberties, and diminish the ability of citizens from all social groups to participate*, is achieved. It is a composite index, in addition to the degree of electoral democracy, consisting of (1) an *equal distribution of resources* score to measure the extent to which resources are distributed equally across all social groups; and (2) an *equal protection* score to measure the extent to which the rights and freedoms of individuals are protected equally across all social groups (Coppedge *et al.*, 2016a: 49).

¹³ If a researcher, departing from the minimalist conception of democracy or electoral democracy, tries to gauge the gap between the various ideals of democracy and the various practices of democracy in a country, the V-Dem dataset has the comparative advantage due to its fine-tuned measures that reflect variations in quality of democracy in the respective ideals with extended temporal (1990-2014) and spatial (177 countries) coverage (Geissel, Kneuer, and Lauth, 2016; Coppedge *et al.*, 2016b; Munck, 2016). For similar analytic purpose, it is possible to utilize the Democracy Barometer dataset (<http://www.democracybarometer.org/index.html>); but it covers more limited time (1990-2014) and space (70 countries), using smaller number of variables (freedom, control, and equality).

¹⁴ To produce democratic authenticity scores (electoral democracy index in the V-Dem dataset), I disaggregate democratic authenticity scores of South Korea and Germany into their components as an exemplary case: (1) clean elections score: .929 for South Korea and .995 for Germany; (2) elected executive score: 1 for South Korea and .750 for Germany; (3) freedom of association score: .878 for

Table 2. Democratic Authenticity in OECD Countries (2012)

<i>Below-average group</i> (<i><0.845</i>)		<i>Around-average group</i> (<i><0.873<</i>)		<i>Above-average group</i> (<i>0.902<</i>)	
Slovenia	0.837	Chile	0.898	France	0.958
South Korea	0.805	New Zealand	0.895	United Kingdom	0.957
Slovakia	0.800	Poland	0.895	Switzerland	0.943
Germany	0.786	Latvia	0.893	United States	0.941
Hungary	0.764	Canada	0.890	Norway	0.928
Israel	0.747	Austria	0.886	Denmark	0.927
Mexico	0.676	Greece	0.882	Sweden	0.925
Turkey	0.574	Iceland	0.880	Portugal	0.924
		Italy	0.875	Australia	0.921
		Japan	0.875	Finland	0.921
				Estonia	0.921
				Ireland	0.915
				Belgium	0.914
				Czech Republic	0.913
				Spain	0.912
				Netherlands	0.911

Source: see Table 1.

Table 3 displays an ordering of the OECD countries according to their degree of liberal democracy. The mean value is .802 and the 95 percent confidence interval is between .761 and .842. South Korea's liberal quality of democracy (.702) fails to reach the lower boundary of the 95 percent confidence interval. In addition to South Korea, other countries that fall into the below-average group in this category include Germany, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Mexico, Slovakia, and Turkey.

Table 4 contains the standing of the participatory quality of democracy in OECD countries, with a mean value is .643 and a 95 percent confidence interval between .610 and .677. The participatory quality of democracy of South Korea (.559) falls short of the lower boundary of the 95 percent confidence interval. Along with South Korea, Chile, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Mexico, Slovakia, Mexico, and Turkey constitute the group of countries ranking below-average in the participatory quality of their democracies.

Table 5 presents the deliberative quality of democracy in OECD countries. The mean value is .772 with a 95 percent confidence interval between .725 and .818. The deliberative quality of democracy in South Korea (.632) fails to reach the lower boundary of the 95

South Korea and .898 for Germany; (4) freedom of expression score: .871 for South Korea and .970 for Germany; (5) share of population with suffrage score: 1 for South Korea and 1 for Germany. The democratic authenticity score is then calculated with the following formula:

$$\text{Democratic authenticity score} = .5 * (\text{clean elections} * \text{elected executive} * \text{freedom of association} * \text{freedom of expression} * \text{share of population with suffrage}) + .5 * (.25 * \text{clean elections} + .125 * \text{elected executive} + .25 * \text{freedom of association} + .25 * \text{freedom of expression} + .125 * \text{share of population with suffrage})$$

See Coppedge *et al.* (2016b) for a theoretical justification of this formula and Coppedge *et al.* (2016a) for a technical guidance of it.

Table 3. The Liberal Quality of Democracy in OECD Countries (2012)

<i>Below-average group</i> (<i><0.761</i>)		<i>Around-average group</i> (<i><0.802<</i>)		<i>Above-average group</i> (<i>0.842<</i>)	
Germany	0.748	Chile	0.838	United Kingdom	0.928
Italy	0.747	New Zealand	0.834	France	0.910
Slovakia	0.703	Ireland	0.831	Switzerland	0.908
South Korea	0.702	Canada	0.831	Denmark	0.903
Hungary	0.644	Spain	0.828	United States	0.902
Israel	0.610	Latvia	0.825	Norway	0.901
Mexico	0.493	Poland	0.827	Sweden	0.896
Turkey	0.410	Austria	0.816	Finland	0.889
		Japan	0.813	Estonia	0.875
		Iceland	0.800	Australia	0.870
		Greece	0.790	Portugal	0.869
		Slovenia	0.769	Netherlands	0.852
				Czech Republic	0.850
				Belgium	0.849

Source: see Table 1.

Table 4. The Participatory Quality of Democracy in OECD Countries (2012)

<i>Below-average group</i> (<i><0.610</i>)		<i>Around-average group</i> (<i><0.643<</i>)		<i>Above-average group</i> (<i>0.677<</i>)	
Chile	0.601	Norway	0.674	Switzerland	0.839
Slovakia	0.595	Slovenia	0.674	New Zealand	0.753
Greece	0.591	Spain	0.673	France	0.746
Germany	0.577	Austria	0.672	United Kingdom	0.743
South Korea	0.559	Belgium	0.663	Denmark	0.718
Hungary	0.530	Finland	0.658	Latvia	0.718
Israel	0.488	Portugal	0.654	Iceland	0.711
Mexico	0.433	Ireland	0.654	Australia	0.707
Turkey	0.310	Czech Republic	0.647	Italy	0.698
		Poland	0.643	United States	0.691
		Netherlands	0.632	Sweden	0.689
		Canada	0.631	Estonia	0.679
		Japan	0.615		

Source: see Table 1.

percent confidence interval, falling into the below-average group that consists of Hungary, Israel, Mexico, New Zealand, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Turkey.

Table 6 reveals the democratic depth of the OECD countries. The mean value is .795 with a 95 percent confidence interval between .751 and .838. The democratic depth of South Korea (.707) fails to surpass the lower boundary of the confidence interval, placing South Korea into the below-average group that consists of Chile, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Mexico, Slovakia, and Turkey.

All in all, South Korea's place among advanced industrial democracies falls short of our expectations in all dimensions of democratic authenticity, quality, and depth. Out of 34 OECD countries, South Korea ranks 29th in democratic authenticity, 30th in the liberal quality of its democracy, 30th in the participatory quality of its democracy, 29th in the deliberative

Table 5. The Deliberative Quality of Democracy in OECD Countries (2012)

<i>Below-average group</i> (<i><0.725</i>)		<i>Around-average group</i> (<i><0.772<</i>)		<i>Above-average group</i> (<i>0.818<</i>)	
New Zealand	0.699	Austria	0.816	Switzerland	0.929
Slovenia	0.679	Greece	0.812	Denmark	0.912
South Korea	0.632	Latvia	0.807	Norway	0.906
Israel	0.587	Canada	0.805	France	0.903
Slovakia	0.584	Japan	0.804	Sweden	0.902
Mexico	0.509	Ireland	0.795	United Kingdom	0.894
Hungary	0.450	Iceland	0.788	United States	0.893
Turkey	0.366	Chile	0.787	Finland	0.875
		Italy	0.776	Belgium	0.849
		Czech Republic	0.770	Estonia	0.847
		Poland	0.761	Spain	0.847
		Germany	0.758	Portugal	0.835
				Netherlands	0.830
				Australia	0.827

Source: see Table 1.

Table 6. Democratic Depth in OECD Countries (2012)

<i>Below-average group</i> (<i><0.751</i>)		<i>Around-average group</i> (<i><0.795<</i>)		<i>Above-average group</i> (<i>0.838<</i>)	
Germany	0.741	Austria	0.833	France	0.925
South Korea	0.707	Canada	0.833	United Kingdom	0.915
Chile	0.694	Iceland	0.829	Switzerland	0.913
Slovakia	0.668	Australia	0.826	Denmark	0.906
Hungary	0.645	New Zealand	0.826	Norway	0.906
Israel	0.602	Japan	0.824	Sweden	0.897
Turkey	0.417	Latvia	0.819	Finland	0.885
Mexico	0.388	Poland	0.815	Belgium	0.881
		Italy	0.803	Netherlands	0.868
		United States	0.797	Portugal	0.868
		Greece	0.790	Estonia	0.866
		Slovenia	0.777	Spain	0.866
				Ireland	0.847
				Czech Republic	0.842
				Netherlands	0.911

Source: see Table 1.

quality of its democracy, and 28th in democratic depth. In every dimension of democracy, South Korea is one of the six countries—Hungary, Israel, Mexico, Slovakia, and Turkey—that are consistently ranked at the bottom. As shown in Table 7, according to aggregate grades of democracy,¹⁵ the place of South Korea (.612) is 30th, falling below the lower boundary of the confidence interval (.709) and standing ahead of only four countries—Hungary, Israel, Mexico, and Turkey. To take into account FH data that disqualifies Mexico and Turkey from

¹⁵ The aggregate level of democracy indicator is the average score of electoral democracy, liberal democracy, participatory democracy, deliberative democracy, and egalitarian democracy.

Table 7. The Aggregate Level of Democracy in OECD countries (2012)

<i>Below-average group</i> (<i><0.709</i>)		<i>Around-average group</i> (<i><0.752<</i>)		<i>Above-average group</i> (<i>0.796<</i>)	
Germany	0.696	United States	0.788	Switzerland	0.906
Netherlands	0.676	Italy	0.780	France	0.888
Slovakia	0.670	Spain	0.775	United Kingdom	0.887
South Korea	0.612	Australia	0.774	Denmark	0.865
Israel	0.607	Greece	0.773	Norway	0.853
Hungary	0.607	Slovenia	0.770	Estonia	0.834
Mexico	0.418	Canada	0.755	Sweden	0.828
Turkey	0.310	Japan	0.755	Finland	0.819
		Poland	0.751	Portugal	0.811
		Chile	0.743	Ireland	0.809
				Austria	0.805
				Czech Republic	0.804
				Belgium	0.804
				Latvia	0.802
				Iceland	0.802
				New Zealand	0.802

Source: see Table 1.

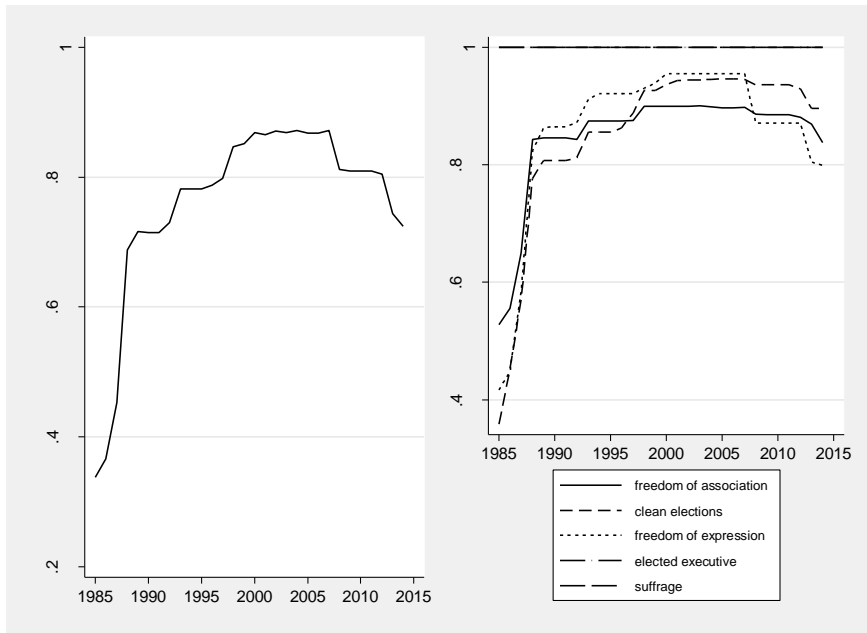
democratic status and Polity data that assesses Israel as a borderline democracy, South Korea's democracy virtually lies at the bottom of all advanced industrial democracies.

3. THE STATUS OF SOUTH KOREA'S DEMOCRACY: AN OVER-TIME COMPARISON

The V-Dem indicators enable students of democratization to investigate the status of South Korea's democracy not only across nations, but also over time. Moreover, each dimension of the V-Dem indicators can be broken down into disaggregate components: (1) democratic authenticity consisting of (a) freedom of association; (b) clean elections; (c) freedom of expression; (d) elected executive; and (e) suffrage; (2) the liberal quality of democracy consisting of (a) equality before the law and individual liberties; (b) judicial constraints on the executive; and (c) legislative constraints on the executive; (3) the participatory quality of democracy consisting of (a) civil society participation; (b) a direct popular vote; (c) the power of elected local governments; (d) the power of elected regional governments; (4) the deliberative quality of democracy consisting of (a) reasoned justification; (b) common good justification; (c) respect for counterarguments; (d) range of consultation; and (e) engaged society; and (5) democratic depth consisting of (a) equal protection; and (b) the equal distribution of resources.¹⁶

Utilizing these distinctive properties of the V-Dem data, in this section, I have evaluated the historical evolution of South Korea's democracy over the past thirty years at the aggregate as well as disaggregate levels. Figure 1 shows longitudinal changes of democratic authenticity in South Korea between 1985 and 2014. The right panel decomposes the aggregate index of democratic authenticity, which is displayed in the left panel, into five

¹⁶ For details, see endnotes 7 to 11.

Figure 1. Democratic Authenticity in South Korea, 1985-2014

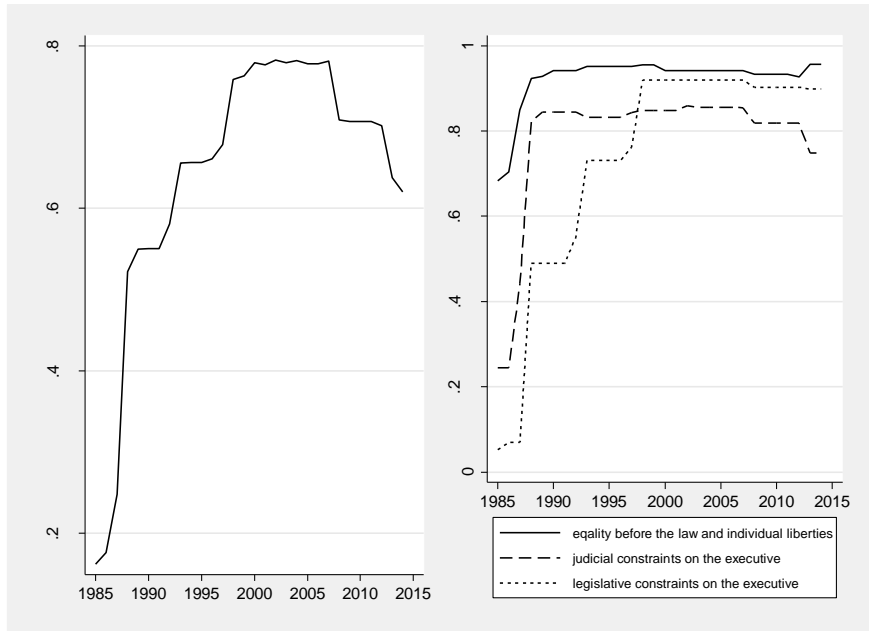
Source: see Table 1.

components. At the aggregate level, the status of democratic authenticity leapt from .367 in 1986 to .688 in 1988, continued increasing to .871 in 2007, and then gradually decreased to reach .724 in 2014, a level comparable to the figure recorded in 1992. As the figures for elected executive and suffrage remained the same over time, the recent erosion of democratic authenticity is attributed to the change of freedom of association, which diminished from .900 in 2003 to .838 in 2014, of clean elections, which shrank from .946 in 2006 to .896 in 2014, and of freedom of expression, which dwindled from .955 in 2007 to .799 in 2014. In terms of magnitude, the decay of freedom of expression seems to be the most critical factor explaining the erosion of democratic authenticity in South Korea.

The historical evolution of the liberal quality of democracy in South Korea is illustrated in Figure 2. At the aggregate level, it jumped from .176 in 1986 to .522 in 1988, continued to rise progressively to .782 in 2004 and then deteriorated to .620 in 2014, a level comparable to the figure recorded in 1992. At the disaggregate level, the component of equality before the law and individual liberties have improved somewhat, moving from .927 in 2012 to .956 in 2014. The component of legislative constraints on the executive has slightly worsened, falling from .920 in 2007 to .898 in 2014. The component of judicial constraints on the executive has dramatically waned, shrinking from .859 in 2002 to .748 in 2014. The recent erosion in the liberal quality of democracy in South Korea appears in large part due to the decay in judicial constraints on the executive.

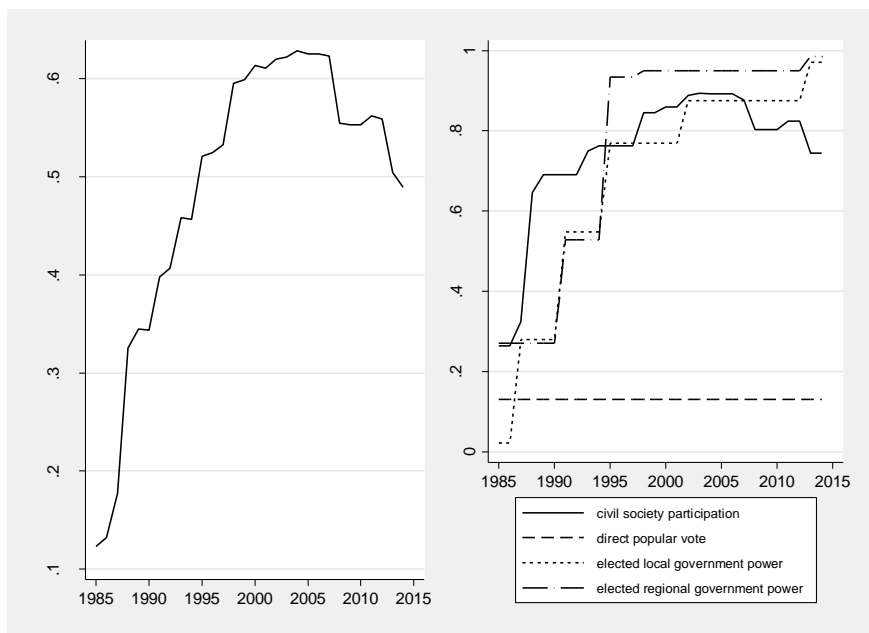
Figure 3 captures the longitudinal evolution of the participatory quality of democracy in South Korea. At the aggregate level, it soared from .132 in 1986 to .325 in 1988, continuing to improve to .629 in 2004 and then diminishing to .489 in 2014, a level comparable to the figure recorded in 1994. At the disaggregate level, while the component of direct popular

Figure 2. The Liberal Quality of Democracy in South Korea, 1985-2014

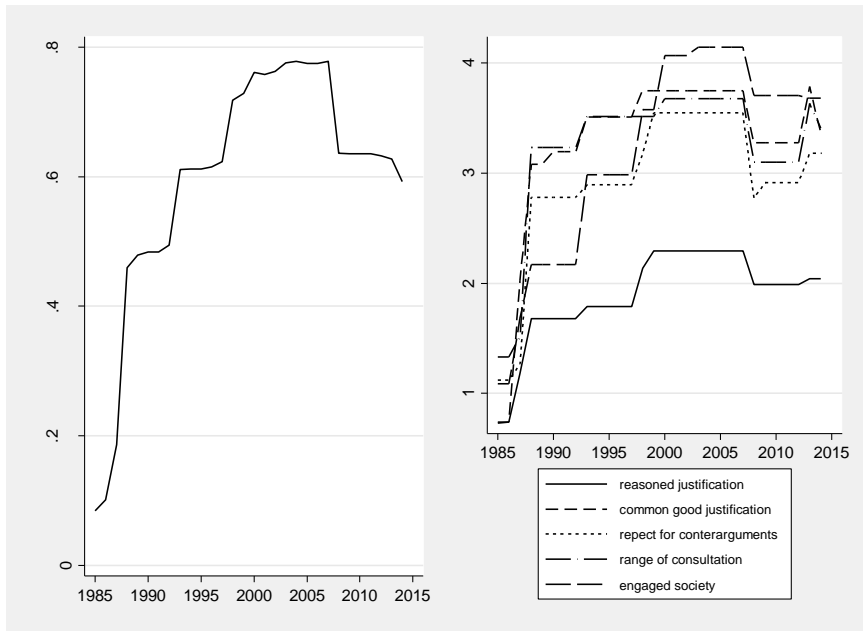


Source: see Table 1.

Figure 3. The Participatory Quality of Democracy in South Korea, 1985-2014



Source: see Table 1.

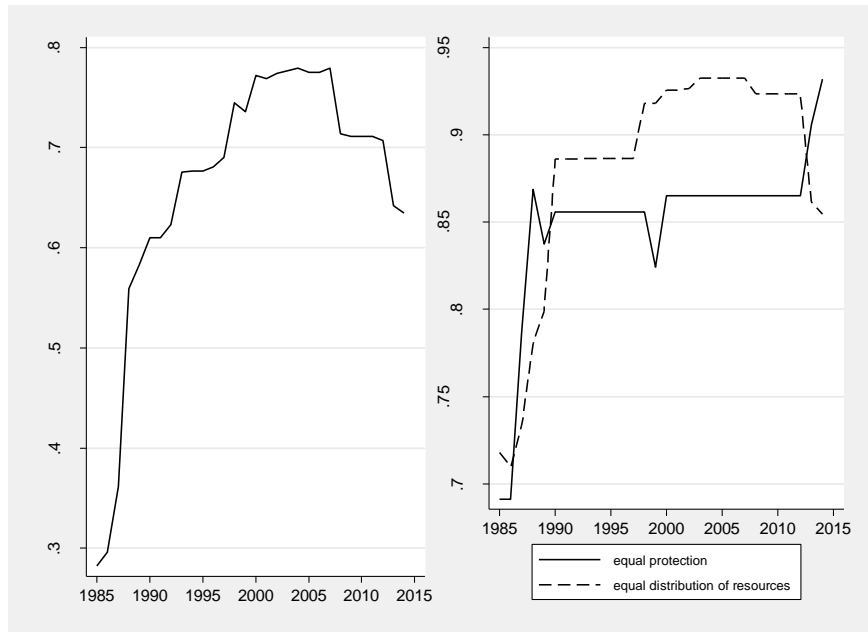
Figure 4. The Deliberative Quality of Democracy in South Korea, 1985-2014

Source: see Table 1.

vote remains the same, the component of elected regional government power has improved from .950 in 2012 to .985 in 2014 and that of elected local government power has upgraded from .875 in 2012 to .970 in 2014. The component of civil society participation has clearly dropped from .893 in 2003 to .744 in 2014. In short, the recent erosion of participatory quality of democracy in South Korea seems to have something to do with the decay of civil society participation.

Figure 4 illustrates the historical changes in the deliberative quality of democracy in South Korea. At the aggregate level, it leapt from .101 in 1986 to .460 in 1988, continuing to reach .778 in 2007 and then fading back down to .592 in 2014, a level comparable to the figure recorded in 1993. At the disaggregate level, all except for the component of engaged society have shifted up and down over time: reasoned justification went from 2.292 in 2007 to 1.998 in 2012 and then back up to 2.041 in 2014; common good justification went from 3.746 in 2007 to 3.274 in 2012 and then to 3.361 in 2014; respect for counterarguments shifted from 3.547 in 2007 to 2.915 in 2012 and then back up to 3.178 in 2014; and range of consultation changed from 3.673 in 2007 to 3.099 in 2012 before moving back up to 3.410 in 2014. The component of engaged society has consistently declined over time, moving from 4.144 in 2007 to 3.702 in 2012 and 3.679 in 2014.¹⁷ In sum, the recent erosion of the

¹⁷ For the components that form the deliberative quality of democracy score, I used measures of the original scale due to coding problems that I found in the V-Dem dataset Version 6.2. This procedure does not produce any bias in the detection of longitudinal changes. Compare the outputs in online analysis between original and relative scales at the V-Dem website, available at <https://www.v-dem.net/en/analysis/CountryGraph/> (accessed on October 16, 2014).

Figure 5. Democratic Depth in South Korea, 1985-2014

Source: see Table 1.

deliberative quality of democracy seems to be caused by the decay of engaged society in South Korea.

Finally, Figure 5 illustrates the longitudinal evolution of democratic depth in South Korea. At the aggregate level, it jumped from .296 in 1986 to .559 in 1988, continuing its upward movement to reach .779 in 2007 before plunging down to .634 in 2014, a level comparable to the figure recorded in 1992. At the disaggregate level, while a component of equal protection has greatly improved from .865 in 2012 to .932 in 2014, the component of equal distribution of resources has significantly worsened, going from .924 in 2012 to .855 in 2014. In other words, the recent erosion of democratic depth is more likely to be attributable to the increasingly inequitable distribution of resources in South Korea.

All in all, since South Korea's democratic transition in 1987, the nation's democracy improved considerably in terms of authenticity, quality, and depth up until the late 2000s. Since then, it has substantively worsened in every measurable dimension of democracy, falling back to the level of the early 1990s. To summarize our findings at the disaggregate level, (1) the decay in freedom of expression, among others, is the largest factor that has caused the erosion of democratic authenticity; (2) the decay of judicial constraints on the executive has had the highest impact on the erosion of the liberal quality of democracy; (3) the decay of civil society participation has been the most significant cause of the erosion of the participatory quality of democracy; (4) the decay of engaged society has had the most critical influence on the erosion of the deliberative quality of democracy; and (5) the decay of the equal distribution of resources has had the greatest bearing on the erosion of democratic depth.

4. CONCLUSION

Employing a new dataset from the V-Dem project that provides us a multidimensional continuous measure of democracy, this article finds that South Korea falls below the average of all OECD countries across all dimensions of democratic authenticity, quality, and depth.

It also reveals a consistent downward trend across every dimension of democracy in South Korea over the past ten years: the decay of the freedom of expression critically affects the erosion of democratic authenticity; the decay of judicial constraints on the executive is the main source of the erosion of the liberal quality of democracy; the decay of civil society participation has a significant bearing on the erosion of the participatory quality of democracy; the decay of engaged society is a critical factor in the erosion of the deliberative quality of democracy; and the increasingly unequal distribution of resources is the primary cause of the erosion of democratic depth. While many political scientists have acclaimed South Korea's democracy as a successfully consolidated one among the third-wave democratizers, the findings of this article raise doubt about the appraisal. Students of democratization might in the process of switching over to deconsolidation, rather than consolidation, of South Korea's democracy as their research agenda.

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