

Trust and Confidence in Government in Transitional Democracies: South Korea in Comparative Perspective

Chung-Si Ahn(Seoul National University)

Won-Taek Kang(Soongsil University)

I. Introduction

Democracy has emerged as the leading political system in the post cold war world. While liberal democracy has no real rivals, however, political distrust and the growth of 'critical', 'disaffected' citizenry are the troubling reality of contemporary democracies everywhere. Studies show that over the past decades a loss of confidence in government and public institutions is almost a universal phenomenon. Citizens in most of the democracies have become less satisfied with their political institutions than they were decades before. (Nye, Zelikow, and King, 1997; Norris, 1999; Pharr and Putnam, 2000) Confidence in government has declined in many countries in the old, established democracies, as well as the new, nascent democracies. Trust, confidence, and satisfaction in politics are widely held intimately connected to the effectiveness of democratic government and the durability of democratic institutions. (Putnam, 1993; Fukuyama, 1995; Warren, 1999)

Contemporary South Korea is well known for its lack of political trust and low confidence in governments. South Korea had a relatively soft transition to democracy in 1987. The country has since made a remarkable progress in democratic changes. (Ahn and Jaung, 1999) In 1998, Korea also became the first country among Asia's new democracies to transfer the power peacefully to

the opposition party. In spite of this, its political process is torn by discontent with gridlock and bickering, and citizens perceive the performance of democratic institutions lagging far behind expectations. Mass dissatisfaction in government, feeling of alienation from politics, perception of widening elite-mass cleavage, low esteem to public agencies are familiar words in politics of democratizing Korea. (Shin, 1999) Declining confidence in government is feared to disengage people from 'positive social capital', or retract them to depend primarily on 'personal trust' built into kinship, regional identity, and informal networks of patron-client relationship. (Ahn, 2000a: 467) Therefore, addressing to the problems of political distrust and declining confidence in government in South Korea is a highly relevant case for concern.

What does it matter when people do not have trust and confidence in government? If we follow the classical liberalist vision of society, democracy is the better when there is the less government. The core belief of traditional liberalism is, so far as government "will have incentives not to act in the citizens' interest," that "citizens should distrust and be wary of government." (Hardin, 1999: 23) Accordingly, low confidence and mistrust in government (at least a modest degree of them) are considered healthy for democracy. If the subjective political feeling of citizens reflects "wariness rather than cynicism," lack of trust about untrustworthy politics and flawed public institutions is both sensible and necessary for more democracy. However, it is necessary to emphasize that the aim of democracy is to hold the political system for 'winning the mind of the people with utmost virtue' in Confucian proverbs, or to "take the most effective precautions for keeping (rulers) virtuous whilst they continue to hold the public trust." (James Madison, *The Federalist Papers*, No. 57, quoted from Newton, 2001: 212, Notes 2) At the same time, growing evidence attests that citizens' trust and confidence in politics matter much to the future of democracy and its sustained performance.

Distrust, dissatisfaction, and low confidence in government are said to disaffect the sustainability of democracy and the strength of democratic institutions

in many ways. Also, political trust, satisfaction and confidence in government are strongly associated with one another. Trust builds effective institutions, which helps government perform more effectively. And this in turn will encourage confidence in public institutions, and help to build vibrant civil society. On the contrary, continuously declining confidence in government might cause “a cumulative downward spiral”. (Nye, et. als., 1997: 4) Or, “poor government performance as manifested, for example, in rampant political corruption may create a cycle that contributes to widespread social distrust.” (Pharr and Putnam, 2000: 72-73) Representative democracy requires public support to sustain its durability and effectiveness. Loss of citizen trust means low support and unstable government, which will make government not to be effective in producing public goods. When people withdraw from providing supports (and resources) to ineffective government, there will be low stability of the regime. Inefficient, unstable government will also breed cynicism about politics and elected officers, which in turn may reduce citizens’ participation. The more cynicism and the less participation, the more it is likely that the public support for ‘democracy as a way of governance’ will erode.

Reasons for low trust in government can be many — inefficiency, corruptions, costing too much, doing the wrong things, authoritarian character and behavior of leaders, and so on. Attempts, both theoretical and empirical, given for explaining the causes and problems of low public trust also abound in the literature. Among them, three modes of explanations stand out. The first looks to the economic performance as the main cause for low public trust. It posits that economic prosperity leads to public satisfaction, while economic downturns erode citizens’ confidence in government. The second explanation turns to social and cultural hypotheses. The culturalist model attributes a decline of political trust to a long-term secular trend, arguing that the disrespect to authority is a part of post-modern society as citizens pass from (modern) survival to (post-modern) quality-of-life values. (Inglehart, 1997) Another popular explanation is the civil society model, synonymous with social capital theory.

According to this theory, confidence in government diminishes when social capital runs low, while it can flourish when civil society is endowed with good supply of social capital. (Putnam, 1993) The third explanation attributes the decline in confidence primarily to political and institutional factors. This approach emphasizes unaccountable, unresponsive political leaders and institutions (parties, legislature, bureaucracy), constitutional arrangements, dishonesty of leaders, political corruptions as the main causes of dissatisfaction and low confidence in government.¹⁾ (Norris, 1999; Pharr, Putnam, and Dalton, 2000: 3-27; Pharr, 2000; Newton and Norris, 2000)

This paper is intended to explore a ground for a better understanding of where South Korea stands in the evolution of democratic governance. We do this by comparing Korea with neighboring Asian countries on how well the government is performing various functions in the eyes of its citizens. The term political trust has many synonyms such as “civic-mindedness and participation, citizenship, political interest and involvement, a concern with the public interest/public good, political tolerance, the ability to compromise, and confidence in political institutions.” (Newton, 2001: 205) For the sake of analytical simplicity and an extended applicability for empirical indicators across countries, we define political trust broadly in this study and use it as interchangeable with confidence and satisfaction in politics. Trust, confidence and satisfaction in politics refer herein to the aggregate property of politics seen from citizens’ evaluation of the political world. They are expressed in citizens’ perception that a political system and its institutions perform their functions satisfactorily. This study uses cross-national survey research data collected by the Gallup International during August-October 1999, mainly for the pragmatic reason that it is open for public use and provides a good base for cross-national comparison about political trust and confidence. The survey, one of the largest surveys

1) For example, Newton and Norris conclude, “our research provides substantial support for theories that focus on the performance of governments and political institutions to explain citizens’ declining confidence in them.” (Newton and Norris, 2000: 72.)

on global opinion at the steps of the new millennium, covered 60 countries in the world with a total sample size of 57,000, including 10 countries in Asia. Out of the global data, we took out and used only the samples of Asian countries in this analysis. The sample size per country varies between 500 and 1000. The questionnaires were designed to use either telephone or face-to-face interviews. The specific measures we focus on the analysis in this paper is in the appendix.

In the following sections, we will first provide comparative statistics to show how South Korea stands in Asia on selected measures of citizen confidence in politics. We will then look into plausible causes of South Korea's low trust and confidence in politics. Our purpose in this exposition is not to lay out full answers to the question, or provide solutions for the problem of the public disaffection in politics. By examining a series of political, economic, and social-cultural hypotheses about the causes and correlates of political disaffection, we think we can clear the ground for telling something in depth about the institutions, governance, and performance of the new democracy in South Korea.

II. Political Trust in South Korea: Comparative Assessments

1. Democracy and Government Performance

A. Representation and Responsiveness

Democratic government should represent the will of the people. Democracy also requires a government that responds well to the wishes of the people. We took the question "would you say your country is governed by the will of the people?" as a measure of democratic representation, and the perception whether one considers his or her own country "responds to the will of the people" as that responsible governance. Figure 1 shows plotting of 8 Asian countries. It looks intriguing that Koreans are most dissatisfied in 'representation' and discontent with the level of 'responsiveness' in spite of its hard-won democrati-

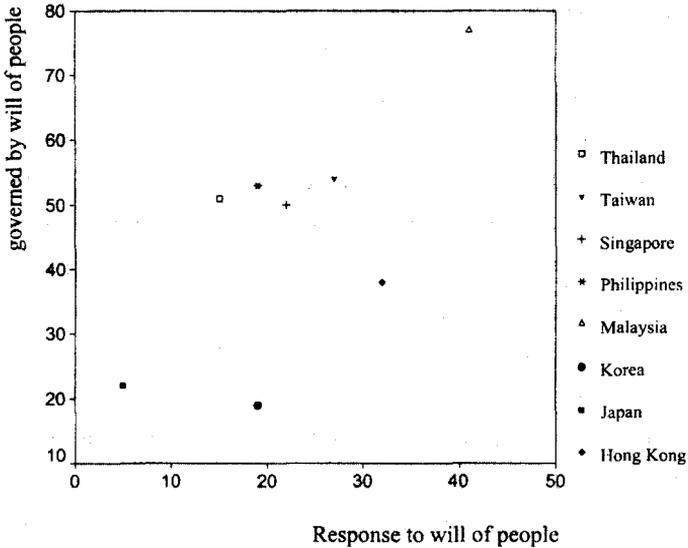


Figure 1. Democratic Representation and Government responsiveness

zation. Positive answer among Koreans is the lowest 19 percent to the question "is your country governed by the will of people?" 19 percent of the Korean sample said that the government 'responds to the will of the people'. Though the percentage is higher than Japan and Thailand, it is still below the average (21 percent) of 8 Asian countries. The figure suggests that Koreans' feeling of political efficacy is extremely low. It is also worth noting an equally low level of positive answers from the Japanese sample.

Table 1 is distribution on the question "do you feel that elections in (your country) are free and fair?" 41 percent of the Korean people answered "yes". Compared to the other questions, the proportion of positive answers is somewhat high here, indicating that electoral procedures are gaining legitimacy. However, we should note that more than a half of the respondents did not agree elections being free and fair. Moreover, when compared with the other 8 countries (average 48 percent in positive response), South Korea

Table 1. Perception on Free and Fair Elections

	Korea	Japanese	Taiwan	Hong Kong	Phillipines	Malaysia	Singapore	Thailand	Pakistan
Approval rate (%)	41	42	40	67	45	71	75	31	24

is 6th in rank with its percentage in positive response lower than the regional average.

B. Efficiency and Performance

Four questions were used to evaluate government efficacy and its performance: perception of the government as 'efficient' and 'just' on positive scale, and 'bureaucratic' and 'corrupt' on the negative. We plotted countries across each of the two pair questions in Figure 1 and Figure 3. Only 8 percent of Koreans agreed that the government is efficient. Again Korea lies among the lowest, only followed by the lowest 3 percent of the Japanese. Similarly, very few Koreans see their government 'just' in performance. Only 4 percent gave positive evaluation, with Korea being placed among the lowest along with Japan, Thailand and a slightly better Taiwan. Singapore and Malaysia are perceived as most efficient in governance, while Philippines and Hong Kong fall in the middle way between three East Asian democracies and two Southeast Asian semi-authoritarian governments.

Political discontent among Koreans is also high in a 'bureaucratic way of governance'. (Figure 3) More than a half of respondents said that the government is bureaucratic. Except Taiwan, Korea is placed highest. On corruption, nearly three quarters of Korean people perceive that the government is corrupt. South Korea is a stark contrast to Singapore, where only 1.4 percent see the government corrupted.

In short, a majority of Koreans perceive their government highly bureaucratic, most corrupted, extremely low in efficiency, and not performing justly. The

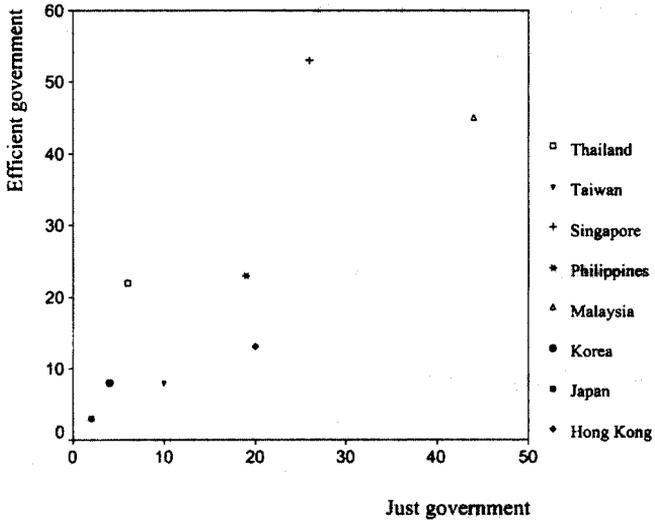


Figure 2. Is Your Government Efficient and Just?

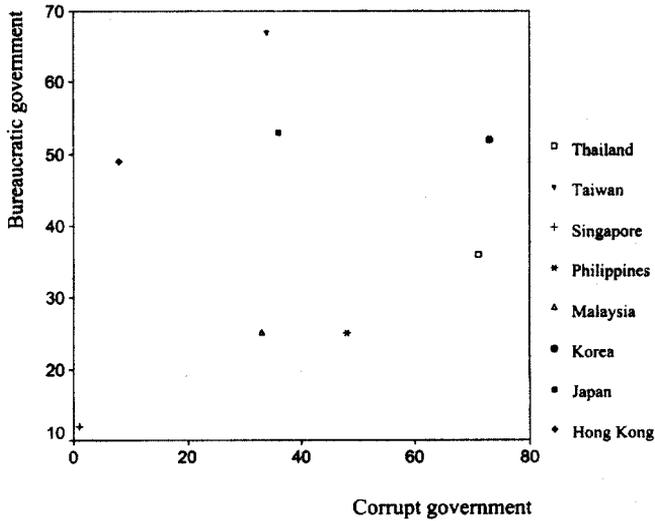


Figure 3. Is Your Government Bureaucratic and Corrupt?

data clearly implies that democracy in South Korea lacks supports and trusts of its citizens towards government. Another interesting point is that there is a seeming contrast between East Asian countries and Southeast Asian countries in the ways citizens evaluate their governments. People in Korea, Japan, and Taiwan tend to have more critical views than those in Southeast Asian countries. Across all questions examined, the response pattern looks quite similar in Korea, Japan and Taiwan.

C. Policy Performance on Environment and Crime Control

Environment and crime are two indicators we have chosen to tap on the perceived quality of social life as affected by government policy. We first looked into how satisfactory do citizens find about the 'overall state of environment' and how concerned they are about 'the level of crime' in their country. Then, we plotted them with corresponding questions on how people think about the government's policy to address the issues of environment and crime. As expected, satisfactions with the state of environment and crime are highly correlated with the approval rating of government's handling the issues. Generally speaking, the assessments of Koreans about the quality of social life are quite negative. Those who are satisfied with the current condition of environment are only 17.6 percent, which is among the lowest along with Japan and Pakistan (Figure 4). The statistics is well below the average of the nine countries' 44 percent. Dissatisfaction in government performance in addressing the environmental issue was equally high among Korean people; Merely 13 percent agreed that 'the government has done the right amount to address the environmental issues'. In this respect as well, Korea and Japan look similar, the latter being the least satisfied with the government's handling the environmental issue.

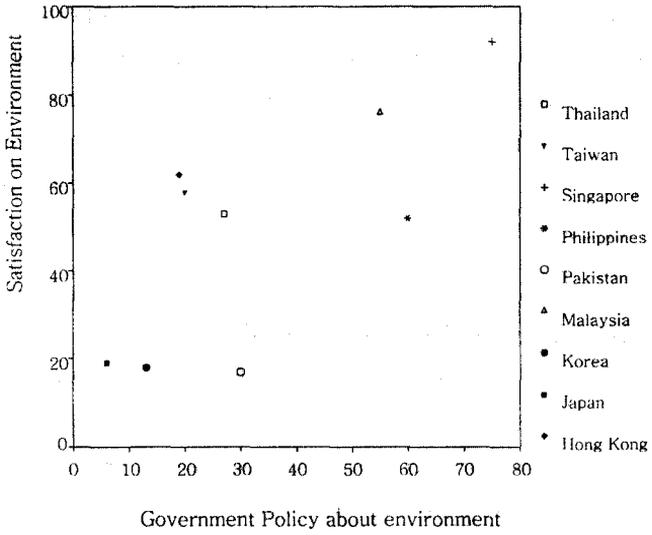


Figure 4. Government Performance: Environment

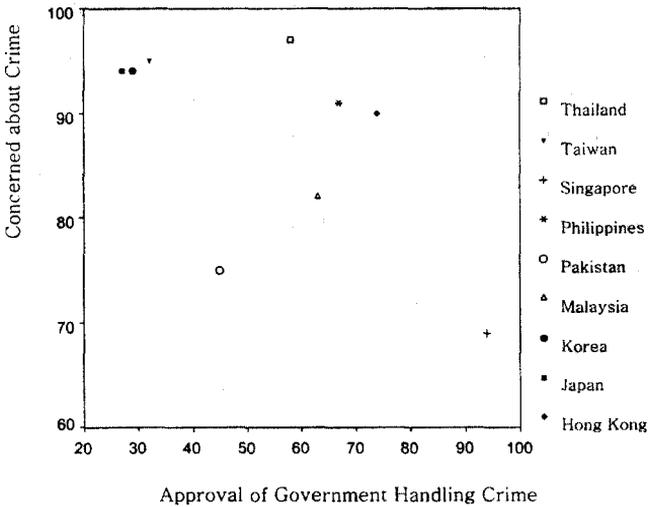


Figure 5. Government Performance: Crime

2. Human Rights, Freedom and Equality

A. Human Rights and Freedom

Human rights, freedom, and equality are three most substantial values of democracy. On the question whether human rights are 'fully respected' in Korea, only a tiny fraction of the Koreans (4 percent) agreed. (Figure 6) That is, a great majority of Korean people tends to think that the authorities still breach human rights. Given uninterrupted democratic development in South Korea for the last decade, such a low esteem on the protection of human rights looks surprising. Intriguingly enough, the Japanese respondents also expressed their huge discontent with human rights. However, the responses in South Korea and Japan sharply contrast in the question whether any use of torture is documented. An affirmative answer to this question is highest among the Korean respondents (80%). (Table 2) By contrast, the proportion of Japanese who answered that torture is still being documented is 19 percent, which is the low-

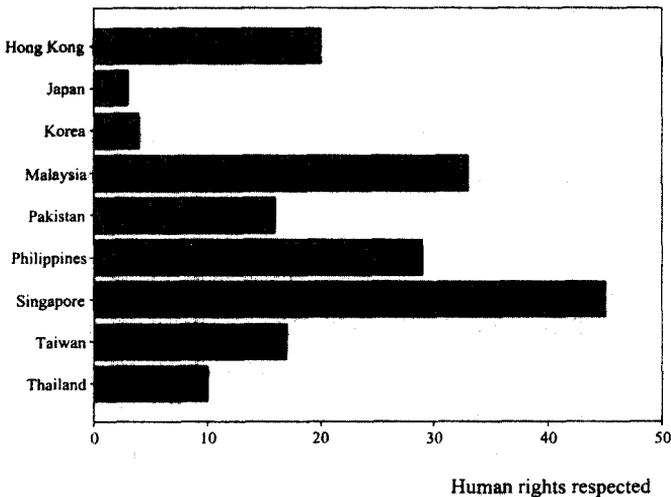


Figure 6. Are Human Rights Fully Respected?

Table 2. Approval Rates of Human Rights and Freedom

	Rights to Freedom of Speech Respected?	Discrimination on the basis of Political Opinion?	Use of Torture Documented?
Korea	36	36	80
Japan	14	6	19
Taiwan	51	38	27
Hong Kong	59	14	22
Philippines	72	25	29
Malaysia	52	20	49
Singapore	41	10	25
Thailand	51	30	74
Pakistan	28	37	58

est among the nine countries in the survey.

Discontent of Korean people is high not only in human rights issue, but in political freedom. As Table 2 shows, only 36 percent of the Korean respondents agreed that everyone has the right to freedom of speech, which amounts to a half of the approval rate among the Filipinos. A similar result is found in responses to discrimination on the basis of political opinion. 36 percent of the Koreans say that discrimination 'frequently' takes place on the basis of political opinion. The ratio is among of the highest along with Taiwan and Pakistan. In Japan and Singapore, the lowest 6 percent and 10 percent believe in the incidences of the 'discrimination on the basis of political opinion' respectively.

B. Equality

In Figure 7, we plotted the question on the 'equality before the law' against the 'right to equal pay for equal work'. 22 percent of Koreans agreed that 'equality before the law' is respected in Korea, while 34 percent said that the 'right to equal pay for equal work' is guaranteed. Except Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia, the approval rates on the 'equality before the law' are generally low. However, the fact that almost 8 out of 10 Koreans think that they are not fairly treated by law implies a very high level of distrust in the legal justice. The

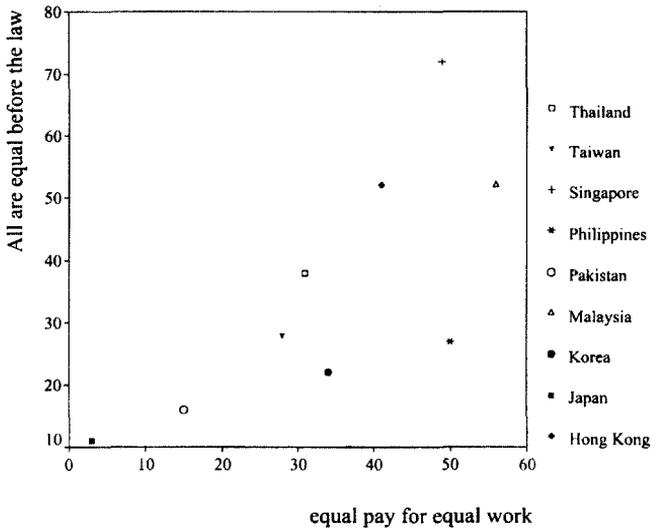


Figure 7. Equality before the Law and Equal Pay for Equal Work

approval rate of Koreans to the 'right to equal pay for equal work' is modest in relative terms. Korea stands about the median among 9 Asian countries on this scale. Interestingly enough, the approval rates among the Japanese sample on both dimensions are surprisingly low.

When we move to the gender equality, South Korea is again consistently low in terms of women's rights or gender equality. The plotting in Figure 8 clearly attests to that South Korean society is highly male-dominant. On the question of equal rights between men and women, the lowest 26 percent Koreans agreed. The figure is only a half of the average of all the countries and about one third of the Malaysia. The response rate on discrimination taking place on the basis of sex is also the highest among Koreans; 39 percent said that discrimination 'frequently' takes place because of gender difference.

The foregoing analyses reveals two striking features of the 'Korean syndrome' in political values. First, among Korean sample, low trusts prevail in almost all questions on democratic governance. This is unique to Korea, along

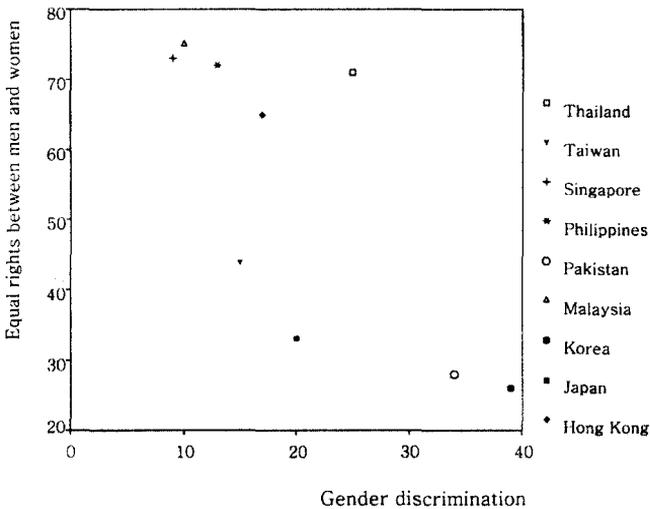


Figure 8. Gender Equality

with Japan perhaps, and is in stark contrast to the aggregate properties of other Asian samples. Considering many democratic achievements during the last 10 years, such low esteems in government among Korean citizens seem hardly justifiable. For example, the political freedom score of Korea by the Freedom House survey is relatively high 27 in the 2001, when compared to other Asian countries. (<http://www.freedomhouse.org/pfs2001/pfs2001.pdf>) However, only 36 percent of the Korean sample in the Millennium survey responded that 'everyone has the right to freedom of speech'. This is well below the average (43%) of nine countries under comparison, tailed only by Pakistan (28%) and the lowest, and equally intriguing, Japan (14%). In short, Koreans tend to be unusually critical and disaffected in their democratizing government.

Second, we find that there exists a wide gap between the objective indicators of democratic governance and the subjective measures of the citizens' evaluation on government. Table 3 is country rankings based on analyses of 60 countries covered both by Freedom House data and Gallup Millennium survey. The

Table 3. Country Rankings in the Freedom House Data and Gallup Millennium Survey

Country	Rank by Freedom House	Rank by Gallup Millennium Survey
Japan	13	53
South Korea	28	36
Taiwan	28	15
Thailand	33	22
Philippines	33	10
Hong Kong	46	4
Malaysia	53	1
Singapore	53	1
China	59	NA

Source: Inoguchi, 2000, p. 4.

table clearly shows that objective and subjective indicators are almost completely reversed in the ranking. As Inoguchi says; (Inoguchi, 2000: 4-5)

It is those quasi-democratic and semi-authoritarian countries that are accorded highest scores for subjective democratic governance along with such seemingly highly democratic countries as Switzerland, Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden and UK. It is those highly democratic counties such as Japan and South Korea that are given low scores of democratic governance along with Cameroon and Colombia. ... Those quasi-democratic and semi-authoritarian countries are given bonuses to their democratic scores despite some illiberal practices.

Why are Korean people so dissatisfied with their newly won democracy? What makes up the seemingly unique culture of political disaffection in South Korea? How can we explain the extremely low confidence and eroding trust in democratic governance in South Korea? Interpreting the Korean syndrome and explaining the context and dynamics of political distrust in South Korea is our paramount task to which we now turn.

III. Interpreting Trends and Dynamics

Economy, society and politics of South Korean underwent radical transformations in the past decades. In this regard, it is natural to assume that they affected attitudes, values, social norms, networks of the Korean people, and have caused shifts in how citizens feel about and evaluate government and public institutions. We will look into the question starting from exploring hypotheses drawn from economic perspective.

1. Economic Factors

South Koreans have experienced both exhilaration of political liberalization and frustration of economic downturn in recent years. The country had decades of prospering economy under authoritarian rule before it underwent democratic transition in 1987. For the years between 1988 and 1996, the country was in slow but relatively steady progress from a soft transition to the uplift of democratic consolidation. Political involvement by the military was completely removed during Kim Young Sam's presidency. In 1996, Korea was admitted to the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). However, its reputation as a nation capable of achieving both the 'economic miracle' and 'democratic breakthrough' has been shattered with the financial crisis in 1997. The crisis forced Kim Young Sam government to seek a bailout by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Kim Dae Jung was able to win his hard-won presidency at the end of 1997 largely because he had effectively capitalized the 'critical mood' among voters against then ruling party for turning the country's economy into a fiasco.

The Millennium survey was taken while Koreans were struck amid the financial crisis. One may presume that the timing and the specific social context of the survey would have biased the result of Korean data. It is equally plausible

that, in the wake of the economic crisis, more people would be dissatisfied with the way national economy has been governed. However, we are cautioned not to take the economic explanation so simple-mindedly for several accounts. First, other countries such as Thailand and Malaysia underwent similar economic crisis, but the statistics of these countries do not match with the Korean pattern. Second, the sheer intensity and consistency of the responses among Korean sample attest to the fact that there must be more than the effects of the timing and financial crisis.

Another hypothesis focusing on economic reasoning is that people get angry and tend to hold a low esteem for politics when a good economic record of the past is sharply reversed to bad performance. Generally speaking, management of Korean economy under democratic regimes is far from impressive. As Table 4 shows, economic performance of the post-transition Korea was not as good as that under the authoritarian government. Annual growth rates continued to decline from a high 10.5% under Park Chung Hee and 9.5% under Chun Doo Hwan to 6.9% and 4.9% during Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung's presidency respectively. Current account surplus turned into net deficits from 1990 to the whole period of the Kim Young Sam government. Particularly in 1996 the annual deficit of the current balance amounted to 2.3 billion US dollars.

Moreover, the lingering memory of the 'miraculous' economic development under authoritarian regimes may well explain some part of the declining confidence in current government. Until the late 1980s when economic downturn

Table 4. Macroeconomic Performances by Administrations

	Year	Growth Rates Index	Consumer Price (\$ Billion)	Current Account Balances
Park Chung Hee	1973-1979	10.5	15.9	1.4
Chun Doo Hwan	1981-1987	9.5	6.1	2.8
Roh Tae Woo	1988-1992	8.0	7.4	1.1
Kim Young Sam	1993-1997	6.9	5.0	-8.5
Kim Dae Jung	1998-2000	4.9	3.5	2.5

started, South Korea economy looked good. The consumer price was well stabilized under Chun Doo Hwan. Park and Chun's regimes maintained effectively full employment combined with rapid growth rates. In contrast to such glittering economy in the past, economic performance under democratic governments looked meager. At the same time, new groups who were formerly oppressed under the authoritarian regimes began to claim their rights of participation in the wake of democratization. Labor movement is a case in point. Authoritarian regimes were able to force the workers remain underpaid, or effectively keep them from explosive participation. However, with democratization, radical demands for high wage and better working conditions fervently burst out. For example, loss of working days from labor disputes abruptly rose to 6,947 days in 1987, whereas the number was 72 days just one year ago. Eruption of sectional interests was not limited to trade unionism; it dispersed to other parts of the society. A newly democratized government tends to be vulnerable to such collective actions, resulting in a lack of coordination and consistency in economic policy-making.

The combination of a low growth and reduced effectiveness in the management of the national economy followed by a good economic time might have rekindled sense of exclusion, deprivation, dissatisfaction, public distrust and disaffection in the newly democratizing regime in South Korea. The explanation appears convincing to those who take the economy seriously in understanding the dynamics of citizens' support for government. However, we find it difficult to establish that a reduction in public confidence in government was primarily due to economic downturn or the economic crisis. Widespread discontent and perception on government ineffectiveness showed a growing tendency even well before the eruption of the 1997 economic crisis. As Table 5 suggests, a low and declining confidence in government had actually preceded the outbreak of the economic crisis. As Shin reported, the proportion of citizens who felt that democratizing Sixth Republic did a better job than the preceding authoritarian government in running "the government for and by the people" had declined

Table 5. Changes of political efficacy and system responsiveness

	Political efficacy		System responsiveness	
	1994	1996	1994	1996
Increased	56.1	40.8	53.7	44.9
Stayed about the same	34.5	51.6	34.7	47.8
Decreased	9.4	7.6	11.6	7.3
N	1475	1000	1475	1000

*The original table with five categories was collapsed into three here. (Modified from Shin (1999: 34), Table 1.6)

significantly between 1994 and 1996. (Shin, 1999: 35)

We would not prematurely rule out that, in Korean context, an economic downturn combined with ensued economic crisis in 1997 significantly disaffected citizens' perception of government. However, we are inclined to limit the generalization applicable only to specific circumstances (i.e., hard times such as the economic crisis) in conjunction with certain socio-political context or settings (i.e., in semi-democracies or transition economies). It may be that people become politically disenchanted in certain socio-political context at a given economically hard time.

2. Socio-Cultural Dynamics

Is there something unique to Korean culture that makes its citizens stingy in giving fair scores to what government does? Are Koreans culturally inclined to be 'critical', 'rebellious', and 'cynical' toward government? Are they intrinsically less trustful in politics than, for example, Malays or Singaporeans? There certainly are some indications that three Confucian states of Korea, Japan and Taiwan tend to cluster together in some measures of confidence and trust in government. However, the data at hand do not warrant any systematic evidence to tell that Confucian East Asians are more disrespectful to authority than other Asians.

Another hypothesis pertaining to cultural exposition is the gap theory. The theory posits that the actual or the perceived gaps between perception and reality, between the expectation and achievement, between socio-economic and political development produce dissatisfaction, mistrust, and low confidence in government. Critical attitudes may also reflect the laggard social, political, and economic development or lingering effects of the authoritarian era.

A related, but analytically differentiated, mode of placing 'the Korean syndrome' onto a socio-cultural plane of analysis can be found in the debates on 'the Asian values' to democracy and its performance. Singapore's senior minister Lee Kuan Yew has long argued that Western-style democracy brings deleterious effects in Asian society. (Zakaria, 1994; Emmerson, 1995) A 'soft' form of authoritarianism, according to him, is more appropriate to East Asia's Confucian tradition than Western-style liberal democracy. On the basis of this (illiberal) logic, he justified the suppression of freedom of speech or political dissents. According to this view, (liberal) democracy represents not the universal values, but is a unique one rooted to the Western culture, and therefore is not always conducive to the 'Asian culture'.

By contrast, Kim Dae Jung, while he was still an opposition leader in Korea, challenged Lee's view on democracy and Asian values, reputing that democracy represents the same principle of human being be it in the West or in Asia. Kim also argued that economic development could not compensate for democratic values. He said that democracy and economic prosperity should be pursued simultaneously. In his presidential inaugural address in 1998, Kim declared that his government would pursue the 'parallel development of democracy and market economy'.²⁾ Kim's view of the parallel development of democracy and market economy contrasted to Lee Kuan Yew's model that

2) Kim Dae Jung diagnosed at the time that 'if South Korea had developed democracy and a market economy in a parallel, collusion between the government and business would not have occurred, and the disastrous and painful financial crisis could have been averted.' (S. Kim, 2000: 164).

Asian values are less conducive to the 'Western-style' democracy.

These two opposing views were widely debated in Korean society.³⁾ By and large, perhaps somewhat dissimilar to Singapore or Malaysia, a majority of Koreans are socialized to oppose the view that democracy is alien to Korea or to Asian culture(s). Few Koreans challenged Kim's view of the parallel development of democracy and market economy, whether they supported his government or not. Korean people tend to understand that democracy represents universal values that cannot be confined in the Western world. This notion implies that democratic values and culture, its institutions and practices in the Western countries are not ethnocentric; Achievements made in the West such as political freedom, human rights, fair and free elections, and the rule by law are models and standards for every country to emulate; The standards formulated in 'advanced' democracies are 'normal', 'desirable' and can serve as 'universal' categories to judge and compare his or other's government and its performance.

Culturally and psychologically, Korean views of democracy may lead to setting an unduly high level of democratic aspirations, which in reality may be difficult to achieve. 'To be democratic', for example, we need to be 'as democratic enough as to match the Western democracies'; Otherwise, we will always remain 'something to be desired'. Such a high level of aspiration is likely to cause a low esteem for his or her own government, and may increase the number of 'critical citizens'. Even if some improvements are made in democratization and its consolidation, people would want 'more democracy' and 'better governance' with reference to ever rising comparative grounds for 'asking more and better'.

Although we do not have sufficient data to test the validity of this hypothesis, we should not rule out such a possibility in the Korean context. Formal education in South Korea has long instilled the youth into modern, democratic values

3) See, for example, various articles in the special issue on the topic in *Gegansasang* (winter 1996).

of liberal individualism. Student activism and working class movements have been deeply affected by the progressive ideology, drawn from the leftist literature in the West. With economic globalization, leaders and policy-makers emphasize the need for Koreans to restructure the society and its economy to adopt the global standards. Korea's early entry, or perhaps a premature one to some critics, into the OECE was welcomed by many as it would provide the country a good opportunity to reach and meet the global standards. An editorial highlighted the positive consequence of joining the OECD as following: (*Dong-A Ilbo*, November 18, 1996.)

It is very important that by joining the OECD the principles of pluralist democracy, market economy and human rights will be obviously applied to the Korean society in general. Domestic policies, from human rights, labor, and environment to finance, education, and health and so on, should be revised to meet 'the international standards'. With the entry we will actively participate in the international economic order led by advanced economies".

President Kim Young Sam also said in 1996 that the Korean government would reform and liberalize its domestic systems to match with 'the standards of advanced countries'. (*Chosun Ilbo*, December 12, 1996.)

A ramification of the above discussion is that low approval rates of government performance among Koreans in the Millennium survey do not necessarily express that citizens perceive no improvement having been made in politics of democratizing Korea. Neither is it that citizens do not support for the democratic regime. Studies widely support that people would not allow a return to the authoritarian past, and are more satisfied with the quality of life under democratic regime than under the authoritarian regimes. (Shin, 1999; Ahn, 2000b) Rather, it may be that those who aspire for a very high level of democratic achievement tend to become more critical to their government, and that Korean people as a whole do not see changes made so far in democratizing

Korea have brought about sufficient progress to meet their aspiration level. Or, poor grading more or less may reflect that people are getting exasperated at sluggish reforms. Testing of these hypotheses requires further works with improved theory and data that go beyond the scope of this study.

3. Constitutional Arrangements and Institutional Flaws

Constitutional arrangements adopted at the time of the democratic transition in South Korea have built-in defects of producing divided government and the problem of a dual legitimacy. And this may have caused ineffective governance, which in turn results in disenchantment in government. High public disaffection in government can also be attributed to poor performance of political leaders, representative institutions, political parties, and policy implementing agencies. South Korea's party alignment primarily based on regional rivalry poses additional problems. The hypothesis underlying these arguments is that it is primarily the performances of political leaders, public institutions/agencies, and policies that produce (or reproduces) the citizens' trust and confidence in politics.

In all elections held after 1987 transition, the country's voting turnouts were divided along with four politically distinctive regions, upon which three or four parties heavily relied for backing. Voters have been strongly aligned with 'their' region-based parties. The ramification of the regional voting is the emergence of divided governments. Table 6 shows that no governing party succeeded in securing the majority seats in the National Assembly in all four elections held since 1988. In fact, every election of the post-transition Korea produced divided governments. Unlike in the American politics, presidents with a divided government in South Korea had to deal with hostile and united oppositions in the legislature. According to Sartori (1994: 89), three factors help the American presidential system to function effectively: ideological unprincipledness, weak and undisciplined parties and locally centered politics. America has weak political

Table 6. Share of Seats by Governing Parties

Election year	President's Party	Governing Party's Number of Seats (%)	Difference from the majority seats
1988	Democratic Justice Party	125 (41.8)	25
1992	Democratic Liberal Party	149 (48.9)	1
1996	New Korea Party	139 (43.5)	11
2000	New Millennium Democratic Party	115 (42.1)	22

parties in which electoral politics are run on the basis of the 'individualistic' campaigning. Campaign resources are made available mainly to individual candidates rather than through political parties. (Ware, 1996: 295) Such a weak grip of a political party allows the lawmakers to defy the party's policy line, if any, when voting in the Congress.

In spite of a seeming similarity of ideological unprincipledness, South Korean parties operate under a different logic. National issues dominate party politics, while all parties are under the tight control of the top leaders who monopolize political resources. Individual lawmakers cannot effectively challenge the official party policy without running a risk of being disciplined or even expelled. Because of such a strong party discipline, individual legislators of opposition parties cannot freely cooperate with government party or the president in Blue House, even when they are sympathetic with government policy positions. Accordingly, problems will arise when the government party fails to win the majority in the National Assembly. As parties are solidly united, political disagreement with an opposition party (or parties) can lead to a conflicts and stalemate between the president and the legislature.

Dual legitimacy is not unique to Korea. It can be found in any of the presidential system of government. The problem in Korean case is that its constitutional system lacks institutionalized solutions to settle conflicts when they arise between president and the opposition-dominant legislature. In the United States, presidential leadership and power to persuade opposition lawmakers

play an important role in settling disagreements with the Congress (Neustadt 1980: 10). The French way is much subtler. Even though the designers of the Fifth Republic intended for a strong presidency, the president are allowed to wield a strong power only when his party (or coalition of parties) wins a majority in the National Assembly. Otherwise, administrative power would go to the opposition that controls the National Assembly, which is often dubbed as the 'cohabitation'.

Unlike the USA or France, Korean presidential system has yet to invent an institutional mechanism to settle a deadlock of the dual legitimacy. In the absence of such a mechanism, political disagreements often developed into serious showdowns between president and legislature, resulting in protracted stalemates. The deadlocks inevitably lessen the effectiveness of policy making and policy implementation. In this situation, the reform agenda of the president can easily be blocked in the National Assembly. Many bills can be delayed or even cancelled out. When urgent reform bills at the time of crisis were dawdled away by the legislative entanglement, huge public outcry and criticism would rise. Widespread political negativism among Korean respondents seen in the Millennium survey can be interpreted in this context.

Another facet of institutional flaws in Korean political system is the timing of the executive and legislative elections. The Latin American experiences show that non-concurrent elections (where the executive and legislative elections occur on separate dates) are likely to bring about multipartism (Jones, 1995: 103-118). Effects of non-concurrent elections in Korea are twofold. First, it is more likely to produce divided governments. Elections in the midst of the executive's term (especially after the 'honeymoon period') are interpreted as popularity polls to an incumbent president. When the governing party (or a coalition of parties) does not fare well, which has often been the case in the past, the outcome results in a divided government. Second, mid-term elections often make the momentum of reforms run out of steam. In election times, every party tries to woo as many voters as possible. Reforms inherently entail

changes in the *status quo*, which is likely to turn some voters against a ruling party. To avoid the loss, the president should compromise or soften reform programs. In consequence, the momentum would be politically enfeebled. This explains a good part of the reason, for example, why attempts to reform South Korea's bureaucracy by successive presidents have all been abortive.

Political distrust may also reflect unpopularity of the incumbent president, political parties and politicians, and discontentment in their political conducts. In less than three years of their tenure, all presidents in the Sixth Republic Korea lost much of their credentials as effective leaders, turning themselves into early lame ducks. Many people perceive that not only presidents but also all legislators are collectively to be blamed for inefficiency, dishonesty, and engrossed partisan interests. Frequent occurrences of political deadlock and partisan bickering turned people away from politicians as a whole regardless of their parties or positions. The level of public support for main parties is quite low. According to a survey reported by *Joong-Ang Daily* in September 2000, 40 percent of the respondents replied that there was no party close to them. 25.5 percent favored the main opposition Grand National Party, while 22.7 percent supported the ruling New Millennium Democratic Party. Civic movement groups and Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are rated much more favorably than political parties. Independent candidates were no less favored than party affiliated candidates in legislative elections. (Hwang and Kang, 1998)

Unceasing disclosures of corruption scandals in high politics and official misconducts at the time when electoral democracy widens the scope of press freedom and freedom of speech provide further grounds for mounting public distrust in government and widespread cynicism towards politicians. Installation of electoral democracy enhanced political transparency and mechanisms for institutional checks in governing processes. Democratization expanded the scope of civic participation in decision-making, subjecting officials to closer public scrutiny for more accountability. The National Assembly has been substantially empowered to oversight executive misconducts. Local councils were set up to

check local governments. Mass media, freed from government control and interventions, find it more 'profitable' to scrutinize or criticize government activities. In addition, many voluntary civil watchdog groups sprang up during and after democratic transition. NGOs regularly monitor government policies, covering various issues such as environments, women's issue, political financing and elections. Activities of NGOs have also been expanded to sub-national levels, watching local policy-making processes. Trade unions (particularly white-collar trade unions) played important role in enhancing transparency within large firms and conglomerates (*chaebols*).

All in all, democracy has made Korean society much more open, transparent and contentious at various levels, when compared to the authoritarian period. Growing civil society and institutions of monitoring systems pressurize political power and public institutions to enhance responsiveness and accountability. Given the openness and transparency, it is no small surprise that a big majority of Korean people regard their government inefficient, corrupt, bureaucratic, and unjust. Almost three quarters of the Korean sample in the Millennium Survey responded that 'the government is corrupt'. The number is highest among the eight Asian countries, followed by Thailand. How can we explain this seeming paradox? It does not make sense to assume that democratization brought about more corruption than under the authoritarian regimes. Table 7 is taken from the Transparency International data. Korea was ranked 48 among 90 countries surveyed in the 2000 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI). It was placed about in the middle rankings among countries surveyed between 1995 and 2000. The table also shows that Korea's ranking and CPI scores are gradually being lowered, suggesting that corruptions become less rampant, albeit still remain continuing. As Table 7b shows, Korea's CPI rank in Asia is about in the middle as well.

One possible way to solve the puzzle is to look into whether there are changes in public attitudes towards corruption to the extent that even the less rampant corruptions (than before under authoritarianism) can cause more seri-

Table 7a. CPI Rankings of Korea (1995-2000)

Year	Number of countries surveyed	Ranking of Korea	CPI Score	Standard deviation
1995	41	27	4.29	1.29
1996	54	27	5.02	2.30
1997	52	34	4.29	2.76
1998	85	43	4.20	1.20
1999	99	50	3.80	0.90
2000	90	48	4.00	0.60

Table 7b. CPI Rankings of Asian Countries in 2000

	Ranking	CPI score
Hong Kong	15	7.7
Japan	23	6.4
Singapore	6	9.1
Taiwan	28	5.5
Thailand	60	3.2
Philippines	69	2.8
Indonesia	85	1.7
China	63	3.1

Sources: <http://www.transparency.de/documents/index.html#cpi>.

<http://www.transparency.org/documents/cpi/2000/cpi2000.html>

ous disaffection in the democratizing context. People might have taken corruptions for granted in the past, either because they had no alternative but to put up with them, or because there were no institutional channel to express their frustrations. However, in democratic environments with expanded scope of monitoring institutions and public participation, citizens are probably more willingly inclined to openly deplore and defy them. In consequence, the 'usual' practices under the authoritarian regimes are not anymore regarded as 'usual'.

Successive presidents and their cabinets embarked on the anti-corruption

campaigns in many occasions. However, corruption scandals implicating powerful politicians erupted more frequently since democratization than before. Without exception, democratically elected presidents themselves or close aids and relatives turned out to have involved in corruptions. Two former presidents, Chun Doo Hwan and Roh Tae Woo, were jailed for illegally accumulating huge amounts of slush funds. A son of president Kim Young Sam was charged with accepting bribery and evading tax. Kam Dae Jung's presidency is not an exception to the cycle. Naturally, these scandals provoked furious reactions from the public. Unlike under the authoritarian rule, people nowadays would not condone corrupt behaviors and official misconducts. Citizens and social groups are more inclined to publicize their dissatisfaction than before. Statistics of the Millennium Survey data might have reflected this kind of public discontent and political disaffections.

Also, public scrutiny and institutional checking enabled many, otherwise, concealed cases of corruption disclosed to the public. As press freedom expanded, mass media would disclose malpractices, bad conducts, corruption cases much more frequently than before. Such frequent disclosures of corruption cases, in turn, helps many people perceive that 'the government is corrupt.' Moreover, frequent revelations of corruption scandals can mirror an image of weak controls or lack of disciplines within the government. However, the impression that corruptions greatly increased along with democratization cannot objectively be justified. Many of them could have been swept under the carpet under authoritarian regimes. The press could have been forced not to publicize scandals. Considered as such, it would not be appropriate to say that democratization has brought about more corruptions. Thus, we conclude that extreme negativism expressed in the political orientations of South Korean people as seen in the facts and figures in this paper is overstated to some extent. However, such critical attitudes show that, while Korea is slowly proceeding towards democratic consolidation, its people do not feel content. As a matter of fact, they are still far from being proud of the way they are governed in an

electoral democracy.

IV. Conclusion: 'Crisis of Democracy' or 'Dissatisfied Democrats'?

Public opinion and mass political culture received marginal attention in the past studies of Asian politics, reflecting a view in part that ordinary peoples matter little under the military regimes or authoritarian governments. Instead, greater scholarly attentions were given to studies of elite dominance, regime characteristics, political economic dynamics, and international linkages. However, as democracy spreads widely, public opinion and citizen values are taken increasingly as important subjects of inquiry. Accordingly, studies on mass culture and citizens' orientations have emerged as vital areas of research on comparative democratization. The approach of this paper is grounded in the assumption that studying subjective evaluations of citizens on their government is one of the most effective methods to understand and explain the dynamics of democratic changes in Asia. Analysis undertaken herein is a modest attempt in filling the academic gap on this emerging research agenda.

The findings in the study lead to the conclusion that Korean politics today after a decade of a democratic turn in 1987 is still far from a stable and mature democracy. The quality and performance of South Korea's new democracy has a long way to go. People in general see that an electoral democracy they won a decade ago remain not much progressed in delivering its promises of accountability, responsiveness, effectiveness, and respect for the rule of law. Records in human rights, freedom and equality are still far from expectations. Those who believe that democracy works satisfactorily are small. Public support for the regime and the institutions of representation remains remarkably low, even compared to those illiberal, authoritarian governments in Southeast Asia. On the whole, we find little evidence of declining public commitment to

the principles of democratic governance among Korean citizens. We do not see democratic regime in South Korea is at risk of being supplanted by 'a return to authoritarianism'. Both by perception and reality, authoritarian past has been effectively relinquished in favor of an electoral democracy. However, evidence shows that there is a decline in political confidence among Koreans. A majority of Korean citizens perceive disillusionment with politicians, with political parties, and with political institutions. A growing segment of the people express public disaffection with government and the institutions of representation.

Growing negativism in politics and government may reflect a post-modern trend, that is, general anti-authority attitudes that grow with broad socio-economic transformations. But, our analysis appears to confirm that what is happening in politics matters much more in shaping public confidence in politics than what is happening in economy and social structure. Or, the problem would be in part that popular expectations to a hard-won democratic government after a long authoritarian rule have been too high since democratization in the 1990s. It may be that performance of South Korea's electoral democracy is poor, or that Korean political culture tends to incite too high expectations. In either way, low confidence and high distrust in politics may tell us something is deficient in Korean democracy. The heart of the problem may lie in the inability of government to fill the gap between expectations and actual performance of government. (Norris, 1999; 2-3, 21-25)

Is the high level of political distrust in South Korea reflecting a 'crisis of democracy'? Or, is it "the tension between ideals and reality", which is "essentially healthy for the future of democratic governance?" The growth of more critical citizens in the 1980s increased the pressure for the democratic transition in South Korea in the 1990s. (Ahn, 2001) Will the same be true in the consolidation process? The answer lies in how we make our elected government more accountable to the public before citizens turn to be highly skeptical about democratic principles. In this perspective, the challenge is first to reform existing institutions and their structures to quick fix the flawed and incomplete qual-

ity of democratic government. Sustaining and strengthening democracy requires public trust and popular supports. Hence, the next critical problem facing South Korea's democracy is to foster responsible leadership and democratic governance under which trust and confidence can be generated and upheld.

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Appendix: Indicators Selected to Analyze Political Trust

1. Democracy and Government Performance:

<DEMOCRACY>

Would you say that your country is governed by the will of the people?

Yes

No

Don't know

Do you feel that elections in your country are free and fair?

Yes

No

Don't know

Which of the following words describes your perception of the government of your country?

Efficient

Bureaucratic

Corrupt

Just

Responds to the will of the people

<POLICY ON ENVIRONMENT>

How satisfactory do you find the overall state of the environment in your country? Do you find it ...

Very satisfactory

Mainly Satisfactory

Mainly unsatisfactory

Very unsatisfactory

Don't know

In your opinion, has the government done too little, too much or the right

amount to address the environmental issues in your country?

Too little

Too much

The right amount

Don't know

<POLICY ON CRIME>

How concerned are you personally about the level of crime in your country?

A great deal

A fair amount

Not very much

Not at all

Don't know

How well do you think the government is handling the issue of crime?

Very well

Fairly well

Not very well

Not at all well

Don't know

2. Human Rights, Freedom and Equality:

In general do you think that human rights are being fully respected, partially respected or are they not being respected at all in your country?

Fully respected

Partially respected

Not respected

Don't know

I am now going to read out to you some of the rights mentioned in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and I want you to tell me whether you think that this right is being fully respected, partially respected or not respected

in your country.

No one shall be subjected to torture

All are equal before the law

Everyone has the right to freedom of speech

Everyone has the right to equal pay for equal work

Do you think that any use of torture is documented in your country?

Yes

No

Don't know

Would you say that in your country women have equal rights with men or not?

Yes, women have equal rights

No, women do not have equal rights

Don't know

In 1948 The United Nations proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states that all human beings are entitled to human rights irrespective of race, colour, sex, language, religion or political opinion. Please tell me for each of the following whether discrimination is taking place frequently, sometimes, rarely or whether such discrimination never takes place in your country.

Discrimination on the basis of sex

Discrimination on the basis of political opinion