

Politically Matured? Is It Time To Reform The South Korea Single-Term Presidential System?

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Abstract: South Korea's democratic route has often been messy, but it has led to consolidation. It allowed opposition leaders to wrest political power from entrenched dictators and repressive authoritarian institutions, thus making former dissidents and antisystem radicals responsible stakeholders in a system that had long oppressed the South Korean society. Because each subsequent government after the 1987 transition was more progressive than the one before, South Korea's ideological range expanded from one that was resolutely anti-leftist to one that accepted even the most radical elements. Each new chapter in South Korea's democratic development was made possible through pact-making between unlikely political partners; the political system was spared any radical destabilization from the transfer of power to the opposition (Chaibong, 2008).

I. TRANSITION INTO DEMOCRACY

South Korea, officially the Republic of Korea (ROK), is a sovereign state in East Asia, constituting the southern part of the Korean Peninsula. The name Korea is derived from the ancient Kingdom of *Goguryeo*, also known as *Koryŏ*. It shares borders with North Korea to the north, and sea borders with Japan to the east and China to the west (Byington, 2016).

The South Korean civilization began with *Gojoseon*, with the earliest Korean pottery dating back to 8000 BC (Choe & Bale, 2002). Around 1st century BC, three Korean kingdoms (Pratt, 2007) emerged, the largest being *Goguryeo* that ruled Northeast China, parts of Russia's Primorsky Krai and Inner Mongolia under *Gwanggaeto* the Great. South Korea enjoyed over a millennium of relative peacefulness under dynasties lasting for centuries. Its strategic and central location in East Asia led to annexation by Imperial Japan in 1910, after whose surrender in 1945, Korea was divided into Soviet and U.S. occupation zones, with the latter becoming the Republic of Korea in 1948 (Columbia University). An invasion from North Korea (People's Republic of Korea, P.R.K.) in 1950 led to the Korean War that ended in 1953 with a settlement between the two Koreas. Despite trivial incidents with the North, peace has since continued with the two agreeing to reunify peacefully and the South dominating inter-Korean

politics as a regional power with the world's 10th largest defense budget.

Between 1962 and 1994, South Korea's tiger economy soared with a high growth rate, which rapidly and successfully transformed it into a high-income advanced economy and the world's 11th largest economy by 1995, providing valuable development models that are benefiting developing countries today. In 2015 South Korea officially overtook Japan in GDP terms moving second place to China in terms of financial feasibility (Winkler, 2017). South Korea is among of the richest countries in the world, enjoying Asia's highest median income and average wage (Gallup, 2013). It is a top global performer in education, quality of healthcare and simplicity of doing business. It is notable for being the world's largest shipbuilder and having the world's fastest Internet speed, ranking first in ICT Development Index, e-Government, 4G LTE coverage and IoT devices online (United Nations, 2014). Thus it is clear that South Korea fits the profile of a capitalist country where democracy can flourish.

Since the first free election in 1987, South Koreans have enjoyed high civil liberties and is viewed as one of the world's most developed democracies, with all fundamental rights protected by a highly effective rule of law system. Due to a recent multicultural policy, immigration to South Korea is rising quickly, with over 220,000 accepted in 2014 (Bai, 2016).

The presidential system of the ROK changed various times mostly due to each president's personal power cult. The South Korean democratic transition in 1987 can be divided into three periods; the first period is from national division and the Korean War to the 19th Revolution in 1960 when the democratization movement against SyngMan Rhee regime's anticommunist dictatorship began to surface. The second period is from the May 16th Coup d'état in 1961 to the Spring of Seoul in 1980. The student led April 19th uprising which transferred power to a civilian government owing to the newly evolving civil society that had developed since the late 1950s but the military was strong enough to counter the revolution because it monopolized physical coercive power. This was an unanticipated outcome considering the fact that the revolution from below had been powerful enough to bring the fall of the SyngMan Rhee regime. Lastly the third period is from the December 12th Coup and the May 17th Coup launched by Chun Doo Hwan's neo-military forces to the June Democratic Uprising in 1987 when the democratization movement was so greatly enhanced that the authoritarian regime was democratized through the June Uprising. The democratization crusade successfully brought about a democratic transition in South Korea through the June Democratic Uprising but unsuccessfully took initiative in establishing a democratic government. Rather it provided a chance for remnants of the past dictatorial regime to come back to power legitimately. For that reason the democratic transition was made without rooting out dictatorial legacies. Yet there is no hesitation that the transition to democracy was legitimate.

II. CONTROVERSY AROUND CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS

At first, the ROK's presidential system was no different from that of America's; the constitution of Korea enabled that the president could be re-elected for an additional term, and that the term in office would be four years. However, after President Rhee Syng-Man amended the constitution in order to maintain his authority, he dictated the country until the 4.19 revolution in 1960 occurred (Hwang, 2015).

After the 4.19 revolution, despite the desires of the citizens for democracy, the 5.16 coup d'état occurred, and President Park Chung-Hee dictated the country for more than 18 years. At first, he also claimed that he would be a president for only two terms, but his words changed afterward. It took hundreds of people's lives and several pro-democracy movements until democracy got settled in Korea. It was not until the 1987 June Democratic Uprising that the amendment of the constitution took place, and the direct election system was settled down (Jung, 2006). Since then, the discussion for a two-term presidential system and reappointment of presidents became a taboo in Korean politics, and no one dared to bring the matter to light. In addition, whenever the amendment of the constitution for reappointment of presidents is shed upon, the immediate repulsion due to national emotions, built by historical factors, also play a significant role to suppress the discussion. According to Professor Nam Kwang Kyu (College of Political Science and Economics)(The Granite Tower, 2014), one of the main reasons the Korean presidential system

remains unchanged is because the adverse effects from dictatorship in the 1970s, which occurred because the president could be re-elected, was too massive. "Korea has adopted single term presidential system because of the distinct characteristics of Korean history."

It was not until President Roh Moo-Hyun that the discussions about redesigning the presidential system in Korea came on the stage. In 2007, president Roh suggested the constitutional amendments, which would facilitate the president to be re-elected for more than one term (Yoon Se Young, The Granite Tower, 2014). Yet he encountered huge oppositions, all claiming that the amendments were only designed to extend his term in office.

The discussion of amendment to the constitution came into light again in 2014, when impeached President Park Geun-Hye proposed the amendment as one of her pledges. The discussion for was actively progressing, until, the scandals about National Intelligence Service (NIS) and the Saewol tragedy occurred. The dialogue has been put on hold since the National Assembly voted in December 2016, 234 to 56, with six abstentions for her impeachment after allegations emerged that she let her longtime confidante Choi Soon-sil pull government strings in the backrooms and extort an enormous amount money from companies in collaboration with presidential officials. Choi and several of Park's former presidential aides have already been investigated over the scandal but following the South Korean Constitutional Court ruling which has voted unanimously to uphold the impeachment of President Park Guen-hye and remove her from the Blue House is a clear indication that the citizens of South Korea, the National Assembly and the Constitution are fully entrenched within civil society to remove a president whom misuses their powers. It is with this basis that this essay aims to suggest that South Korea should start re-considering a two-term presidential term like most modern democracies around the world. Despite broad public consensus for constitutional reform, it is not clear how the debate will play out, with political power split between a powerful presidency and a fractious parliament.

It has to be pointed out that South Korea is in its Sixth Republic, which means there have been six fundamentally redrafted Constitutions in fewer than 70 years. That's a lot of instability. France is in its Fifth Republic, nevertheless that's over a much longer period, 226 years (their first Constitution was ratified in 1791). Though before Park's impeachment her proposal was welcomed by her Saenuri Party but drew suspicion from rival parties which saw it as a move to divert attention from an influence scandal involving old acquaintances and to keep herself relevant as her presidency winds down. Surveys do suggest that an overwhelming majority of South Koreans support the need for a constitutional revision, but the timing of Park's announcement has largely been viewed negatively (Choi, Asia Foundation, 2016).

III. CURRENT SINGLE-TERM PRESIDENTIAL SYSTEM: LAME DUCK PHENOMENON

South Korea's democratic route has often been messy, but it has led to consolidation. It allowed opposition leaders to wrest political power from entrenched dictators and repressive authoritarian institutions, thus making former dissidents and antisystem radicals responsible stakeholders in a system that had long oppressed the South Korean society. Because each subsequent government after the 1987 transition was more progressive than the one before, South Korea's ideological range expanded from one that was resolutely anti-leftist to one that accepted even the most radical elements. Each new chapter in South Korea's democratic development was made possible through pact-making between unlikely political partners; the political system was spared any radical destabilization from the transfer of power to the opposition (Chaibong, 2008). Internal and external shocks assisted changes of power and major reforms that otherwise would not have been possible. The phenomenal quality of South Korea's democratic development ascends from the fact that the very events and features which analysts argue as signs and symptoms of weakness were time and again turned into opportunities to enact far-reaching reforms. The consequence, a society that was suffering from poverty, political turbulence, and dictatorship has now joined the ranks of industrialized liberal democracies. There are still areas in which democratization and liberalization need to make more progress, but the fundamentals of a liberal-democratic order have been consolidated (Chaibong, 2008).

The current president is elected by popular vote to serve a single 5-year term, and is considered the head of state. In addition to being the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, the president also has considerable executive powers however, is kept in check by the independent judiciary and the members of the National Assembly (Kukhoe). The president appoints the prime minister with approval of the National Assembly, as well as appointing and presiding over the State Council of chief ministers. The 243 National Assembly members are elected in single-member constituencies to serve a 4-year term and 56 members are elected by proportional representation to a serve 4-year term (Gateway to Korea, KOCIS). The mixture of single member district voting and proportional representation balances out the tendency towards a two-party majoritarian system, although in most cases, there are two prominent parties that compete to capture the most votes. Over the years, the election turnouts have shown increasingly competitive trends among various different parties, South Korea still enjoys a stable government and public participation in the democratic process seems to be gaining a firm foothold with a balance of mass demonstrations and corresponding government

The Constitution and the amended Presidential Election Act of 1987 provide for election of the president by direct, secret ballot, ending sixteen years of indirect presidential elections under the preceding two governments. The President is directly elected to a five-year term with no possibility of re-election. If a presidential vacancy should occur, a successor must be elected within sixty days, during which time presidential duties are to be performed by the prime minister

or other senior cabinet members in the order of priority as determined by law. While in office, the chief executive lives in Cheong Wa Dae (the "Blue House"), and is exempt from criminal liability (except for insurrection or treason).

With the national assembly and the presidential term not elected within the same timeline it creates a lame-duck phenomenon and seepage of power for the president towards the end of the president's term which is very problematic (Nagle, 2012). Korean presidents have little time or impetus for consensus building or compromise because they are forced from the get-go to focus on legacy issues, not re-election. They typically enjoy just the briefest of honeymoons and then move too aggressively, making enemies before they have a chance to learn to smoothly manipulate the levers of power (Lee, 2008). The authority of the president becomes weak, and it is difficult for the president to administer affairs of state without problems. Yet a two-term presidency would not be subjected to such difficulties, because the term of the president is guaranteed, and he/she can lengthen the term once, the president can view the affairs of state in long term and practice responsible politics. In addition, it is also easier for the citizens to keep the president in check, through if the president's policies do not satisfy their standards, they can simply unseat him or her in the next election. While it is accepted that the chances of getting reelection is higher, the general public can still influence the president and lead him or her in a way that benefits the general public the most. Also, it is more feasible to implement huge national projects (Moe, 1999).

The flaws of the two-term presidency are also apparent. The most definite one is that the president might administer the affairs of state in a way that could benefit the president's party and the president personally, so that the reelection could be easier for them. Which is one of the main reasons South Korea implemented a single presidential term policy. Populism can be a problem in this kind of presidential system. In other words, the president might offer policies that can only fit into the public's interest, without considering whether they are viable or not.

Despite such weaknesses, the two-term presidency or full on parliamentary system is more suitable for the Korean political system. Even though that the single term presidential system is more favorable, because it can serve as a means to check the power of the president, and because it provides the possibilities for regime changes, if Korea is to remain in the presidential system, it is more suitable to modify it into a two-term presidential system or full on parliamentary system. The biggest problem in the current presidential system is the absence of a responsible government; because of the single-term presidential system most presidents do not see themselves to bear the responsibilities after they complete their term as president.

Rather than reacting emotionally to the amendment, it is required to view the matter rationally and consider the matter seriously. Park Jin, a lawmaker with the Grand National Party said: "Our democracy is too mature to [fear] dictatorship," which have been displayed with the impeachment of Roo Moo Hyun, the mass protests about Lee Myung-Bak's controversial beef-import deal with the United States and the recent impeachment of Park Geun-Hye (Newsweek, 2008).

IV. SOUTH KOREAN PUBLIC POLITICAL CULTURE 'INFLUENCE' IN AMENDING THE CONSTITUTION

Korean political culture has been deeply influenced by Confucianism, the official state doctrine of the *Choson* dynasty (1392-1910). Confucian moral principles and ethical norms regulating human relations permeated traditional Korean society. Under the Confucian system, the fundamental goal of government was to create harmony and unity among men and between man and the universe. Provided that the king exemplified moral behavior by acting in accordance with Confucian precepts, his subjects would voluntarily emulate him and thereby ensure harmony in the sociopolitical order. The king ruled as the symbolic head of his extensive family, the Korean people. Obviously, such idealistic theory was violated in practice, as paternalism frequently became despotism (Kim, 1998). Confucianism placed great emphasis on maintaining a hierarchical social order, stressing that an individual's social identity was to be defined in the context of collectivity, particularly within the context of family and kinship in Korea. The primary focus of loyalty was, therefore, to family and kinship group, not to the state. The authority of the superior over the inferior was almost absolute, as with father over son and elder brother over younger brother. This gave special strength to the groups (e.g., the family) in this hierarchically arranged society (this can be viewed through the power of the chaebols in the South Korean economy (Pae, 2018) South Korean society has undergone massive social and economic changes in the process of rapid industrialization. Many new ideas and values that were alien to the traditional culture have been introduced and diffused into the society (Asia Society). More importantly, more Koreans have acquired democratic values and concepts such as political participation, equality, freedom, majority rule, and individual rights. As they have absorbed democratic values and have been willing to preserve their civil rights and liberties, it has become untenable for the leaders of an authoritarian regime to stonewall popular demands for democratization. The new beliefs and values accompanied by rapid industrialization have often been added to, and not fully integrated with, the existing ones. Thus, present-day Korean culture may be best described as a complex mixture of old and new values and cognitions, with the proportions varying by individuals and social groupings. The coexistence of the new and old beliefs and values has not only given rise to cultural tension and unrest at the social level but has also generated inconsistencies among beliefs and values at the individual level. According to Korean scholars, the major characteristics of South Korean political culture are (1) civic orientation, (2) collectivism (an orientation stressing collectivity over individual members, like familyism), (3) alienation, (4) factionalism, (5) propensity to resistance, and (6) national identity (or nationalism). Some have added anti-communism (*due to their northern cousins*) as another distinct element of South Korean political culture (Kim 1998). Furthermore, if one looks more specifically to the presidential campaign races in South Korea their characteristics are not far off as Kim noted:

- ✓ *Negativity*: Trying to cast a negative image over your opponent (even from the same camp) and to be inferior.

- ✓ *Regionalism*: South Korean society is still very polarized along the line of regionalism. Voters then to support a candidate that originate from their area or region.

- ✓ *No Policy*: Due to presidential and legislative elections not being at the same time the candidates have a clear mandate to develop proper policies for when is office but rather focus on personal characteristics.

In light of the mentioned political culture and characteristics of the presidential campaigns in Korea, the effectiveness of the Presidents legitimacy in office is very short lived because half way in their term the potential candidates start to surface and the current president is trying to ensure he/she leaves a legacy behind. Therefore amending the constitution must not just be initiated but political parties or 'current' presidents but needs the support and backing of the public to succeed.

As O'Donnell (1994, 1998) concisely points out, the excessive use of presidential power is not unusual in inexperienced democracies, and Korea is not an exception to this. The unconstrained presidential power, often called "imperial presidency," has emerged as one of the most crucial problems in consolidating its democracy (Choi, 2002). Korean presidents, in the shadow of authoritarian legacies, have been virtually free from checks and balances in exercising their power. A range of institutional reforms have been introduced to boost the legislative authority, but the original optimism that the National Assembly would play a more active part in limiting the presidential power has quickly evaporated (Park, 2000). A mixture of several factors contributes to enhancing presidential power in the budget-making process in Korea. The budget making system is highly centralized in that the budget-compilation process is dominated by the Presidential Office, the Ministry of Finance and Economy, and the Ministry of Planning and Budget (Shin, 1993). A president's policy priorities are usually delivered through these agencies to individual ministries (Jeong, 2001). Because these three key agencies have a firm grip on budgetary matters within the government, it is relatively easy to reflect a president's interests in the budget-compilation stage. Individual ministries eager to increase the ministerial budget also have a reasonable incentive to closely follow the guidelines.

An incumbent president tends to intervene in budgetary issues with national salience. The most prominent case occurred during the Kim Young Sam administration. Observing his popularity rapidly eroding through a mishandling of the negative repercussions of agricultural liberalization, the then-President Kim Young Sam announced an injection of 15 trillion won to restructure the agricultural sector. Reflecting the President's interests and determination, the government quickly created a special tax for farming and fishing villages to finance this project, and, in 1994, the budget for the agricultural restructuring increased by 61.2% (Chang, 2000), which arguably demonstrates how presidential interests are effectively incorporated into the budget compilation. The Ministry of Agriculture also skillfully seized this opportunity. Its overall budget size increased 3.9 times during the Kim Young Sam period. This change was quite dramatic given that the Korean government's total budget increased 2.1 times during the same period (Y. S. Chang, 2000).

Korean presidents do not face serious challenges and restrictions from the National Assembly in the budgetary review process the executive dominance over the legislature is firmly established, with the National Assembly making only slight modifications to the executive's original budget proposal. This was shown in the cases of the Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung administrations, during which the net changes made by the legislature never exceeded 1% of the proposed budget (C. W. Park, 2003). In addition, it turned out that the legislature's influence is also minimal at the government's budget-Compilation stage (i.e., before the government officially submits the budget proposal to the National Assembly), as consultation between the executive and the ruling party often runs in formality, failing to produce tangible outcomes regarding budget making (J. M. Park, 1998).

The problem rests not with the men or recently impeached woman but the institution they occupy. South Korea, the world's 12th-largest economy, is one of the few modern democracies to limit its chief executives to a single term. The rule was created for good reasons back in 1987: to prevent the return of authoritarian leaders. Through that attempt the current constitution, it's succeeded. But in a good demonstration of the law of inadvertent consequences, it has also rendered the presidency perpetually unstable, turning governance into a sprint, not a marathon.

It is generally assumed that individual legislative members' party loyalty is not geared toward party ideology or platform but toward particular political leaders because their political careers, such as party nomination for the next election, largely hinge on these leaders or their personal organizations (B. K. Kim, 2000). Thus, legislative members have fewer incentives to cultivate policy expertise related to budgetary matters for the purpose of their reelection. Seen from this perspective, the president is the single most important political actor in Korea who has authority and capability to influence distributive policies. Thus, any theoretical model of distributive politics in Korea should properly capture the incentives of the president and test the relationship between the level of presidential support and the outcome of distribution. One vital institutional characteristic shaping a Korean president's incentive is that an incumbent cannot seek reelection. Although the term limit is not unique to the Korean presidential system, it generates more significant political consequences in Korea than in other established democracies. This same phenomenon can be viewed in the Philippines which also have a single 6 year presidential term and its based on the same reason as Korea after a 20-year dictatorship by Ferdinand Marcos. A number of political scandals, such as imprisonment of ex-presidents, their sons, their family members, and political supporters in the National Assembly and the Presidential Office, suggest that an unchecked president is more likely to abuse his power than are his counterparts in other countries such as last-term politicians in the United States (Besley & Case, 2003; Persson & Tabellini, 2003). It is quite reasonable to assume that the Korean president, who serves only one term and is relatively free from horizontal checks of power, enjoys greater room for maneuvering budget allocation according to his own interests.

V. WHY IS A SINGLE-TERM PRESIDENCY OUTDATED AND HARMFUL TOWARDS A CONSOLIDATED DEMOCRACY

The problems with the current system are apparent in a variety of ways. Unlike in the United States—a system Korea's Constitution drafters sought to imitate—Korean presidents have little time or incentive for consensus building or compromise because they're forced from the get-go to focus on legacy issues, not re-election. They typically enjoy just the short-lived of honeymoons and then move too aggressively, making enemies before they have a chance to learn to smoothly manipulate the levers of power.

Lee Myung-Bak troubled tenure shows how the single-term gambit works. The former Hyundai executive and popular Seoul mayor never faced a serious challenge for the presidency; he spent the year before entering the Blue House constructing new programs he intended to implement, rather than listening to the Korean people. With Lee's huge electoral victories—he won the December 2007 election by the biggest margin in Korean history (5.3 million votes), and then scored big again in April 2008 when his Grand National Party gained an absolute majority in Parliament—seemed to send him the wrong message (Lee, 2008). The conservative Lee assumed that his triumphs meant that liberals like his predecessor, Roh, were a spent force in Korea, and that the public wholeheartedly embraced Lee's neoliberal, pro-globalization agenda. So he rapidly concluded the beef deal without comprehending that he was handing his enemies a powerful wedge issue.

Predictably, Lee's oppositions took advantage of every misstep. Netizens, civic groups and labor unions hit the streets to denounce him, and as their ranks swelled, his support within the conservative camp faded (Lee, 2008). In typical Korean style, rather than rally around their embattled leader, GNP lawmakers began taking shots at him on the logic that by doing so, they could avoid falling themselves because the South Korean president focuses on doing their job and is less impacted by how his decisions will impact reelection and the status of his political party. It was an expression of the immaturity of South Korea's party system (which the presidential- and national assembly elections are not on the date or period thus both entities have to fight for their own survival instead of complementing each other and building a stronger party platform and loyalty between the two entities), and which is driven more by inspirational personalities than ideology or collective political vision, leaving leaders/presidents little to fall back on when the tide begins to turn.

Various schemes are being presented to address the fact that "Korean presidents become lame ducks from day one," according to a political scientist in Seoul who asked not to be named because of the sensitivity of the matter. The most popular (and least intrusive) fix would be to institute a style two-term presidency, though more radical proposals include scrapping the presidency altogether in favor of a Westminster parliamentary system. Either would make sense, since the original reason for the limit has faded. "Our democracy is too mature to [fear] dictatorship," says Park Jin, a lawmaker with the Grand National Party.

South Korean politics needs most: a more stable presidency freed from the limit of a single, make-or-break term. A single term denies the electorate the right and desire to vote out a non-performing president, thus each presidential candidate can launch a campaign to gain public favor and once in power the president can follow their own agenda without taking in consideration the electoral mandate they should represent. A president who is voted out after the first term is a persuasive testimony of non-performance and such bad record will continue to haunt the person. The anxiety of losing a re-election will induce performance in a president who ordinarily will not have been motivated implement public policies which favor public approval.

Both presidential and legislative elections are influenced by constitutional and electoral systems, what is the most influential is that they are non-concurrent, and time intervals between the two differ for different presidencies. When the time interval is shorter, the presidential party's seat share in the legislature is likely to increase, but the president will have less control over the party. In contrast, when the time interval between elections is longer, the presidential party's seat share in the legislature is likely to decrease, but the president will have more control over the party. In short, the presidential party's seat share in the legislature and the president's control over the party contradict each other, and thus presidents tend to face either a divided government or weak party discipline (Asaba, 2014.)

Furthermore the current single-term presidential system in Korea creates a culture where party loyalty or continuity of party policy is weak. Projects that need a longer time span to develop would be hampered with the regime change each five years. Thus in return hampers the progress and development of the Korean society. The single term system also prevents the Korean society to develop a clear distinctive Korean ideology because each presidential term is deeply rooted in the individual personality and persuasion.

VI. CLOSING REMARKS

However controversial constitutional reform may be, a more serious challenge to Korea's democratic consolidation is the extreme malapportionment of its single-member districts, which lessens the representativeness of lawmakers. Rapid urbanization and an aging Korean society has created an electoral landscape in which votes from rural constituencies outweigh those of urban areas since the latter often has much larger populations (The Diplomat, 2015). This distortion reached such an extreme that some urban districts have almost four times the population of their smallest rural counterparts.

Despite its grave importance of electoral reform, the issue has essentially failed to attract public interest partly due to the lack of enthusiasm both parties have shown towards its resolution. In October 2015, the constitutional court ruled that the population ratio between the smallest to largest districts be raised to 1:2 to better match the current population distribution. This has prompted a visceral debate in the National Assembly, in which 246 out of the 300 seats are elected on a first-past-the-post basis from single-member districts. Rural districts which do not meet the minimum

population requirements will have to be merged while new urban seats will need to be created for the growing satellite regions in the capital metropolitan area, which is home to over half the national population. Naturally those whose seats are under threat of merger have challenged the decision and their party leadership, putting bipartisan negotiations over redistricting and reform at an impasse (The Diplomat, 2015).

Underlying this procrastination is a conflict of interest; the current system nurtures two-party dominance and gives an advantage to the incumbents that have governed intraparty politics since democratization. Of the two parties however, the Saenuri Party has been the more vocal opponent of electoral reform, since it threatens the conservatives' structural dominance over the legislature (The Caravel, 2015).

Korea's electoral landscape is characterized by a prevailing regional cleavage that often transcends economic or policy-based interests. For a number of historic reasons both new and old, a partisan split occurs across a geographic east-west axis, with the southeastern Gyeongsang and southwestern Jeolla provinces supporting Saenuri and NPAD respectively. Yet with Gyeongsang's much larger population and industrial clout, Saenuri holds more of these "guaranteed" constituencies at around 70 seats. To match these numbers the opposition needs to win a substantial majority in the highly competitive capital metropolitan area, where candidates have been elected with margins under five hundred votes. For the same reasons, however, some incumbent politicians in the NPAD whose seats are in Jeolla do not favor reform due to the fear their districts will be merged to correspond to contemporary demographic standards.

Given the difficulty of adjusting these constituencies to suit both diverse political interests and standards of representativeness, various conflicting alternative proposals have been raised to rectify the imbalance. The NPAD and the leftist Justice Party has advocated expanding proportional representation (PR) seats in the National Assembly, which stands at a mere 54 seats at present. Such a move however, has been blocked by the cap of the total number of seats set at 300 as well as opposition from Saenuri, who lost the PR vote in the last legislative elections despite winning more seats in total due to their regional advantage. The governing party has instead insisted that the PR bloc be reduced to make room for creation of new single-member districts where the population has exceeded the minimum threshold. In opposition, NPAD proposed the creation of multi-member PR districts similar to that in the Japanese Diet, since this would also increase the likelihood of candidates winning seats in 'difficult' regions.

If the parties do not reach an agreement in time, it is likely that a fairly high degree of gerrymandering will ensue to certify that the court's ruling is obeyed without inflaming intraparty dissent. This may be a quick fix to the backroom deals, but this inability to achieve compromise on the rules of political contestation attests to the increasing alienation of voter interests from Yeoido politics as well as the general fragility of Korean democracy.

South Korea's democracy is consolidated and the chances that it would revert back an authoritarian regime are highly unlikely. The only possibility is that it might be dominated with a more conservative approach in light of the global financial crisis in order to protect local jobs and –economy.

As observed during the Lee Myuan Bak presidency and clearly visible in impeached Park Geun-Hye administration. But for South Korea to ensure that a more stable and effective government implementation a two-term presidency would be more favorable.

In conclusion on what could be possible outcomes for the future South Korean presidencies? South Korea's liberal democracy was under threat during Park's tenure. A series of political scandals have cast doubt over the democratic credentials of the Saenuri Party and Park's own presidency. The National Intelligence Service's alleged meddled in the 2012 presidential election in favor of Park and the enforced resignation of the Prosecutor General leading the investigation into the allegations; the arrest of the United Progressive Party (UPP) MP Lee Seok-ki; antagonism towards the labor unions; the legal suit against Sankei Shimbun journalist Tatsuya Kato and the 'memogate scandal' have all wounded Park's public support and thus in the end caught in the middle of an impeachment case in court (East Asia Forum, 2015).

It is no secret in South Korea that conservative governments have used security concerns for domestic political purposes. Some suspect Park's previous administration of abusing the security agenda to camouflage its poor political performance. From the beginning of her tenure, numerous nominees for key government positions — including the prime minister — have not passed the parliamentary hearings process or have had to quit once in office because of sex and political scandals.

Running an administration in this way is very irresponsible as the 'commander in chief' have free range to do what he/she likes during their term in office, because there is no fear/motivation of being reelected, which to an extent is one of the basic principles of democracy. The reforming of the South Korean electoral system can be done in either one of the following two options. Both systems will include extending the presidential term from a single term to the option of being reelected in office. South Korean democracy is still evolving and constantly changing and if the governmental mechanisms do not adapt or adjust to the changing times; democratic systems will become just as redundant as those communism systems of past.

Option 1: Presidential- and legislative elections must coincide. The elections should take place on the same date and extend over the same period, be it four or five years. This would allow both party and presidential candidate to develop better long term policies and enhance the loyalty to the party and its workings rather than personal loyalties to the person in the Blue House. Furthermore it will enhance the effectiveness between the executive and legislative branches of government as both entities would have to work together to ensure that government policies are implemented correctly and that those policies reflect the needs of the current Korea society.

Option 2: If one look at the history of party politics, it is overwhelmed by the amount of mergers and alliances that happened after South Korea democratic transition. This creates an image that lawmakers are just moving in the direction that will ensure they have more power or that a certain personality be elected as president. With this in mind switching to full-on parliamentarian system would be another option to stabilize the multi-party democracy currently in

South Korea. This would also allow parties to build a support base build on policy and not regionalism. Furthermore this would prevent an individual aiming to implement policies in favor of their administration or cronies supporters, by holding the president accountable to their actions and that they reflect those of the party's.

With either one of these options or even a combination will take more than a few brave lawmakers to step up and push through, it will require an active bottom-up support from the general public to enable for these changes to gain legitimacy.

On the other side of the spectrum of electoral reform, considering the unification of two Koreas, neither the current system nor the two-term presidential system can bring mutual consent from the Republic of Korea (ROK) and Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). The parliamentary government, on the other hand, could bring consents from the both sides and unite the political powers more effectively. The settlement of the responsible politics based on parliaments and flexibility of transfer of power is another advantage of the parliamentary government.

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