

The South Korean Democratization Process:
The Applicability of S.M. Lipset's Work to South Korea

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Introduction

The academic literature on the subject of democratization and its relationship to economic development is strongly divided. On the one hand, there are scientists who state that the regime type in a country determines the level of economic development of said country. For example, Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) argue that pluralistic political institutions foster sustainable economic development, whereas political institutions in which power lies with a small, privileged group, will cause economic stagnation. On the other hand, there are scholars who pose the alternative view that the economic situation in a country determines the domestic political system. Prominent amongst them is Lipset (1959), who helped introduce the notion that economic development causes democratization.

The political system of South Korea is a remarkable example of a fast and successful democratization process. Looking back at the post-war situation one can see that the 1948 elections in South Korea were very disorderly (Jun, 1992). These elections set the tone for the next few decades, as, under the Korean Democratic Party led by Rhee Syngman, the period between 1948 and 1960 was a tumultuous and politically instable time for the country. The Rhee regime "narrowly survived the [Korean] war (...) with the help of the United States" (Jun, 1992, p.199). It was toppled in April 1960 during the Student Revolution and replaced by a more liberal government. The protesters did not achieve their long-term goals however, as the liberal administration was ousted in a military coup only nine months later (Amsden, 1989, p.30). Afterwards, general Park Chung Hee ruled the country until he was assassinated in 1979, extending the term limits of his presidency several times (Heo & Roehrig, 2012, p.22-23).

South Korea under Park Chung Hee is often described as a 'developmental state' (Jun, 1992; Evans, 1995), a state where the political goals and institutional structures are developmentally driven (Leftwich, 2000, p.154). Governing elites in a developmental state aim

to economically develop by harnessing the internal market to serve the national economic interest (White and Wade 1988, p.1). The model of the developmental state is often typified by its strong bureaucratic apparatus and nationalistic governing elites that suppress opposition of civil society (Jun, p.186; Leftwich p.160-164).

Starting from the nineteen-eighties, South Korea transformed from a state where the economy was controlled by the state and competition for power was limited, into a much more democratic country with an open economy. Pirie (2016) argues that South Korea today can no longer be described as a developmental state. In his earlier work (2008) he describes the South Korean economy as thoroughly neoliberal. Furthermore, in their *Freedom in the World 2017* report, Freedom House awards South Korea a score of 82, with 1 being least free and democratic and 100 being most free and democratic.

In this thesis, I will research the theory put out by Lipset, in which economic development causes democratization, in the South Korean context. At first glance, Acemoglu and Robinson's view of the relationship between the political character of a regime and economic development seems to run contrary to that of Lipset. The relationship between the two theories will be investigated and Acemoglu and Robinson's theory will be challenged on several points. However, I will also attempt to unify Lipset's work with that of Acemoglu and Robinson.

Research Design and Method

Flick (2007, p.62) argues that when it comes to qualitative research, the quality of the research is mostly based on explicit and motivated decisions for using a specific research design and specific methods. Thus, I aim to expand on my choices regarding the design and methods of this thesis below.

As mentioned above, this thesis is concerned with the democratization process that took place in South Korea, leading up to the first democratic elections in 1987. The goal is not to develop a full causal explanation of this process. Instead, the central aim of this thesis is to see if Lipset's theory on democratization can explain the shift in South Korea from an authoritarian to a democratic regime.

The first proposition that was investigated is that when we see economic development in the way Lipset defines it, we will see democracy emerging. Lipset's definition of "economic development", as shown later, includes not just wealth, but also industrialization, urbanization and education. For this proposition, a comparison was made between South Korea under Park Chung Hee's regime on the one hand and the country after the first democratic elections in 1987 on the other hand. In addition, this study shows that economic development took place between Park Chung Hee's coup in 1961 and the elections of 1987. However, this only points at correlation between economic development and democratization. The question also had to be assessed whether the causal mechanisms that powered this democratization match the ones Lipset identifies, namely the strengthening of the lower and middle classes and the emergence of voluntary organizations. These mechanisms will be further operationalized on pages 26-34.

Throughout the study, political institutions and economic performance were assessed in different periods, with a focus on broad trends and important events. One might call the approach that was followed historical institutionalism. As Mahony and Rueschemeyer state, processes such as democratization are most appropriately viewed within the context of temporal sequences and "the unfolding of events over time" (2003, pp. 6-7), which, according to Sanders (2008, p.1) is one of the strengths of the historical institutionalist approach. The way the research was carried out also bears resemblance to a longitudinal design, seeing as the process of South Korean democratization is studied at several key points in history.

Several strategies were employed to ensure the validity and reliability of this study. To begin with, Morse et al. (2002, p.18) argue for “methodological coherence”, so that the method of analysis used matches the data. Looking at the South Korean case in this thesis, qualitative literature and document study is the method that is employed most often. Literature study is a relatively in-depth tool, suited to the level of exhaustive detailing case studies and comparative studies usually show. This allows the researcher to focus on aspects that cannot easily be quantified (Flick, 2007, p.3). For this thesis, the advantage of academic literature being a type of data that is readily available was important, as well as the fact that quality literature analysis can be done in a relatively short time span.

Furthermore, an appropriate case should be selected. South Korea was selected because it seemed to fit Lipset's theory well. As mentioned before, South Korea transitioned from a so-called “developmental state” to a democracy with a freer, neoliberal economy, being perhaps one of few countries to do so successfully¹. Moreover, the model of the developmental state is often thought to bring rapid economic development. In short, the case was likely to show strong economic development taking place prior to a successful democratic transition. This makes South Korea an excellent case with which to research the relationship between economic development and democratization.

Would this thesis have covered many cases, the relationship between economic development and democratization could have been analyzed using large-N, statistical methods. This could have offered the advantage of broader generalizability, whereas in qualitative research there is usually less room for generalization to a large group of cases (Flick, 2007, p.42). However, Yin (1994, pp.30-32) states that empirical results from a case study can help advance a previously developed theory (in this case Lipset's), which is what he calls “analytical

¹ Adrian Leftwich (2000) for instance discusses Botswana, a country that he states had a developmental regime, but is now a relatively successful democracy.

generalization”. In this aspect, this research is more robust, seeing as Lipset’s theory covers a very universal relationship.

Alongside generalizability, or external validity, Yin mentions two other types of validity that one encounters in qualitative research. Firstly, “construct validity” is concerned with establishing correct operationalizations (Yin, 1994, p.32). Lipset offers some operationalizations of his definition of “economic development” that were easily adaptable for this study. Nevertheless, the causal mechanisms that were mentioned before are identified more vaguely by Lipset. To operationalize for example Lipset’s “voluntary organizations”, I consulted authoritative literature on these organizations, and Toqueville, to whom Lipset refers himself.

Secondly, internal validity (Yin, 1994, pp.32-33) revolves around making correct causal inferences. In this study, the causal mechanisms that Lipset identifies were inspected to infer causality. Moreover, an important alternative explanation, that of Acemoglu and Robinson, is refuted in several points.

Lastly, there is reliability, defined by Yin (p.37) as minimizing error and bias so that a later investigator can arrive at the same findings. To achieve this, Baxter and Jack (2008, p.556) advise researchers to effectively organize their data. For this study, this was not a difficult task, since only a few types of data were used. They also suggest providing clear propositions, which for this study has been done above.

1 Lipset: The influence of the economy

Before looking at South Korea, it is useful to study Lipset's work in more detail and address several common misperceptions. Firstly, there is the misunderstanding of the conceptual scope of the term "economic development". Secondly, there are some refutations of Lipset's theory that have themselves been refuted.

An oft-quoted line from Lipset's work is the following: "the more well-to-do a nation, the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy" (1959, p.75). According to Wucherpfenning and Deutsch (2009), many scholars treat this relationship between GDP and democratization as the core of Lipset's theory. However, Lipset treats "wealth", which he defined primarily as per capita income (1959, p.76), as just one of the indicators of a broader concept of "economic development". Besides wealth, the factors of urbanization, education and industrialization are all indicators of what Lipset sees as the economic development of a society (p.75). This broad "development" is what causes democratization.

Some of the most important causal mechanisms behind this relationship that Lipset speaks of are the strengthening of the middle and lower classes and the emergence of voluntary organizations. The middle class plays a role in reducing the chance that conflicts escalate, since this class tends to reward moderate political parties (1959, p.83). Lipset does not clearly state why the middle class would be eager to support moderate politicians. However, scholars such as Hattori, Funatsu and Torii (2003, p.129), placing Lipset in the tradition of modernization theory, have interpreted his claim as the middle class being created by economic development, therefore embracing modern values and spearheading democratization. Other writers within the modernization school argue that a newly formed middle class, having recently obtained some economic freedom, will try to protect this newfound affluence by supporting a democratic system that promotes property rights and the rule of law (Glassman, 1995).

The lower classes, through economic development, gain increased income security and higher education. This, according to Lipset, permits them to "develop longer time perspective and more complex and gradualist views of politics" (1959, p.83). They are also increasingly exposed to "cross pressures", or more and wider social contacts, especially through voluntary organizations, making them less receptive to extremist ideology (p.83-84).

Voluntary organizations, such as labor unions, are especially important to Lipset. For his understanding of these organizations, Lipset draws on the work of authors such as Selznick (1952) and Lederer (1940). As Lipset surmises, these writers both concluded that a "mass society", without a variety of organizations independent from the state, is vulnerable to demagogues and revolutions (p.84). According to Lipset, voluntary organisations serve a host of functions that promote democracy, as they

are a source of countervailing power, inhibiting the state or any single major source of private power from dominating all political resources, they are a source of new opinions; they can be the means of communicating ideas, particularly opposition ideas, to a large section of the citizenry; they serve to train men in the skills of politics; and they help increase the level of interest and participation in politics. (1959, p.84)

Besides the fact that Lipset's theory has been misunderstood, the validity of his claims has been disputed. Przeworski and Limongi (1997) and Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub and Limongi (2000) have attempted to refute Lipset's ideas on the basis of statistical analyses relating GDP to regime type. They argue that a higher GDP merely increases the chance that a democracy survives once it has been established, but that higher levels of income do not lead to democratization.

However, Epstein et al. (2006) show that Przeworski and his colleagues made statistical mistakes, such as "failing to correctly estimate the standard errors of the coefficients reported

in their Markov model" (p.566), leading them to believe the effect of GDP on democratization was insignificant. After running their own statistical analyses of the same data, the results that Epstein and his colleagues found ran "counter to PACL's [Prezowski, Alvarez, Cheibub and Limongi's] central hypothesis" (p.553). Thus, they showed that a higher GDP does in fact lead to democratization.

Moreover, there are scientists who believe that the relationship between democracy and economic development is of an altogether different nature. Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) argue that the character of political institutions determines that of economic institutions. They state that in extractive political institutions, a ruling political elite produces economic institutions that serve its own narrow economic interests (2012, p.81). I will discuss in a later section how, according to Acemoglu and Robinson, institutional drift and critical junctures help turn extractive political institutions into inclusive political institutions. Acemoglu and Robinson argue that these inclusive political institutions are typified by a pluralistic division of power, so that no societal group is excluded (p.80). This political inclusivity makes it nearly impossible for any group to grant itself economic privileges (p.102). This gives rise to inclusive economic institutions, where property rights are protected and economic actors enjoy a level playing field (p.74-75). According to Acemoglu and Robinson, these inclusive economic institutions vastly outperform extractive ones in the long term.

At the core, Acemoglu and Robinson's theory describes the relationship between democracy and economic development as moving in the opposite direction as that of Lipset: where Lipset believes that economic development causes democratization, Acemoglu and Robinson argue that democratization causes economic development.

2 The South Korean Developmental State

Before one can discover if economic development has had any influence on the democratization of the South Korea, an assessment must first be made of the South Korean developmental state under Park Chung Hee. In doing so, one avoids the risk of attributing democratic elements of the post-democratic transition South Korean political system to economic development, when in fact they were already present in the pre-transition developmental state.

Given a lack of time, the analysis of Park Chung Hee's regime that is presented in this section will be a broad one. It will not account for subtle differences between the years of Park's reign and it will be limited to the major governmental institutions such as the executive and parliament and their relation to society.

2.1 A working definition of democracy

At the core of democracy is the principle that power lies with the people, or as Easton (1956) calls it, the principle of "upward control". According to Dahl (1971, p.2), every basic democracy requires at least the possibility of formulating one's own political opinion, expressing and sharing this opinion, and having governing bodies respect these opinions. As Diamond and Morlino (2004, p.21) state, a political system where this electoral freedom is respected calls for various alternative sources of information, universal suffrage, and free, competitive and fair elections in which more than one political party competes.

In a seminal article, Zakaria (1997) calls those regimes that were elected democratically, but then proceed to deprive citizens of individual freedoms 'illiberal democracies.' Diamond and Morlino state that a "quality" democracy provides more than just free elections. It also grants citizens "ample freedom" (2004, p.22). Concretely, this freedom

includes the following dimensions: the rule of law, participation, competition, accountability of the executive towards other institutions of the state and the people, civil freedoms and political equality of all citizens and responsiveness of the state to the wishes of its citizens (p.22).

2.2 Electoral and individual freedom in the South Korean developmental state

Jun writes that the developmental state in South Korea could not have developed without the legacy of Japanese colonialism and US stewardship. He calls the Japanese rule of South Korea 'totalitarian', mainly because of the rapid, large-scale development of repressive state bodies, that pervaded in many aspects of life (1992, p.187). Then, when the US army arrived in the country, they were met with left-wing revolutionists (p.190). In response, US forces restored and even augmented the oppressive government apparatuses of the Japanese (Jun, 1991, p.181-198). Thus, the Japanese and Americans laid the groundwork for a state that did not allow much interference in politics and had little respect for individual rights.

Immediately after Park Chung Hee staged a military coup and took control of the country in 1961, he ruled through the 'Supreme Council for National Reconciliation'. Heo and Roehrig call it a "military junta", that Park used to run the country after he had "dissolved the National assembly, declared martial law and arrested or purged thousands in the military and in government" and "banned countless politicians from participating in politics and imposed strict censorship on the press (2010, p.22).

It seems obvious that in this early phase of the regime, democracy was nowhere to be found. Not only was Park ruling through a government body that citizens had no influence on, but by declaring martial law, ordering mass arrests and curbing the press he reduced the

possibility for upward control even further. This style of governing also disrespected many individual liberal rights such as free speech.

As mentioned before, the US pressured Park into allowing presidential elections in 1963. Park ran in these elections and won, partly because of his manipulation of the election date. Writing in the same edited work, Domínguez (2011) and Hutchcock (2011) seem to disagree about the level of cooperation between Park and the legislature in the time between after Park won the elections and 1979, when he was killed.

Domínguez states that after seizing power, most successful authoritarian regimes choose to rule through the legislature and existing political parties, coopting them (2011, p.574). The Park regime, according to Domínguez, was an example of a successful authoritarian regime, as it employed the legislature by endorsing a political party, preferring to "co-opt rather than to repress" (p.600).

Hutchcroft draws a comparison between Park and Marcos, the authoritarian ruler of the Philippines at the time when Park ruled South Korea. He states that "the two authoritarian regimes were based on a high concentration of personal authority and power, with a relatively weak role for the ruling political party in each country" (2011, p.542).

Hutchcroft's vision of Park's rule is personalistic, leaving the legislature on the sidelines. I support it over that of Domínguez, for several reasons. Firstly, Park mainly ruled through two non-legislative government agencies: the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) and the Economic Planning Bureau (EPB) (Kim Byung-Kook, 2011, p.142). This meant that the South Korean people had little influence on the decision-making process.

Secondly, the KCIA was not only a tool for governing, but it also enabled widespread repression of individual liberties. The agency censored and arrested supporters of Park's political adversaries (Chung, 2014, p.1141). Still, this does not mean that political opposition

was entirely eradicated. For example, when Park amended the constitution, allowing him to run for an additional third term as president, the political opposition rallied around the National Democratic Party of Kim Dae-Jung (Chung, 2014, p.1139).

However, the oppressive nature of Park's regime worsened in 1972 through Park's *Yushin* (revitalizing) reforms. These exacerbated the authoritarian and personalistic elements of the president's rule. Not only did Park change the constitution to rule without any legislative or judicial checks on his power (Im, 2011, p.233), he also gained the power to "appoint and dismiss cabinet members and the prime minister, suspend civil liberties" and "rule by emergency decree" (Heo & Roehrig, 2010, p.23). Moreover, Park effectively made himself president for life, replacing presidential elections by an electoral college that he controlled (Im, 2011 p.233).

Eugene Kim (1978) states that after Park made these constitutional changes, the South Korean government gained the character of an "emergency regime", a political system where the executive branch widely abuses emergency powers, sometimes without there being an actual emergency. A poignant example is the kidnapping of opposition leader Kim Dae-Jung by the KCIA in 1973. State oppression had become so intense, that "despite widespread outrage over the event, both the South Korean press and public remained silent" (Chung, 2014, p.1141).

3 South Korean economic development between 1961 and 1987

It has been established that Park's regime knew very little democratic elements. Acemoglu and Robinson would typify it as an extractive political regime, seeing as power was very much centered around Park's personal authority and the small military-political elite that surrounded him. However, many scholars agree that Park's radical economic policies did bring rapid economic development.

Cumings (1997, p. 312) states that Park found a way to avoid the inefficiencies and corrupt ties between businessmen and politicians that plagued Latin American economies who had, at the time, adopted strategies of import substitution. At first, he publicly condemned the nations wealthy business leaders, who had employed - and profited from - import substitution strategies under Rhee Syngman. However, soon after he began listening to the advice of the businessmen and let them "seek foreign capital to get the economy moving" (Cumings, p.312). Thus, Park struck a deal with them: he refrained from arresting the business leaders, on the conditions they would give shares to the government and follow the economic policies the government set out. During Park's reign, the Economic Planning Board mainly steered the economy through the *chaebols* or large business conglomerates. As Woo (1991, p.175) mentions, these business groups closely followed the EPB's directions, in exchange for the privileged positions they gained. In combination with the large bureaucratic apparatus of the EPB and KCIA and the oppressive nature of the Park's regime this shows that it resembled the model of the developmental state put out by White and Wade (1988), Evans (1995) and Leftwich (2000) quite closely.

It is worth noting that Acemoglu and Robinson do account for the possibility of economic growth under extractive regimes. As mentioned before, inclusive political institutions enforce property rights and a level playing field. This allows for innovation, which according to Acemoglu and Robinson is the key to sustainable economic growth. Extractive growth however is based on the top-down allocation of resources in a more efficient way, yet still using existing technologies (2012, pp. 124-126). This type of growth is not sustainable, since without technological innovation, all inefficiently used resources will eventually have been reallocated already and growth will falter (p.128).

Growth spurred on by the increased efficiency of labor was certainly an important factor in South Korea's economic growth during the nineteen-sixties and -seventies. Chau (2001,

p.123) even calls it the most important source of growth, accounting for almost a third of South Korea's GDP growth. Yet, he also adds that "contribution from productivity growth was by no means negligible. A significant component of which was advances in knowledge" (p.124).

Kim Linsu (1997, p.23) argues that generally, developing countries that are catching up go through three phases of technology use: using imported foreign technology, creative diffusion of imported technology, and domestic research and development to improve the imported technology and make innovative new technology. Kim Linsu (1997, p. 193-194) and Chau (2001, p.142) believe that South Korea went through all these phases, with the economy eventually maturing enough to make innovation possible. This seems to run contrary to Acemoglu and Robinson's argument that only inclusive institutions can lead to economic innovation.

"Economic development" as defined by Lipset on the other hand did take place in South Korea between the start of Park's rule and the first democratic elections in 1987. GDP (per capita) increased rapidly, and education, industrialization and urbanization, factors that according to Lipset contribute to economic development as well, show strong growth.

3.1 GDP

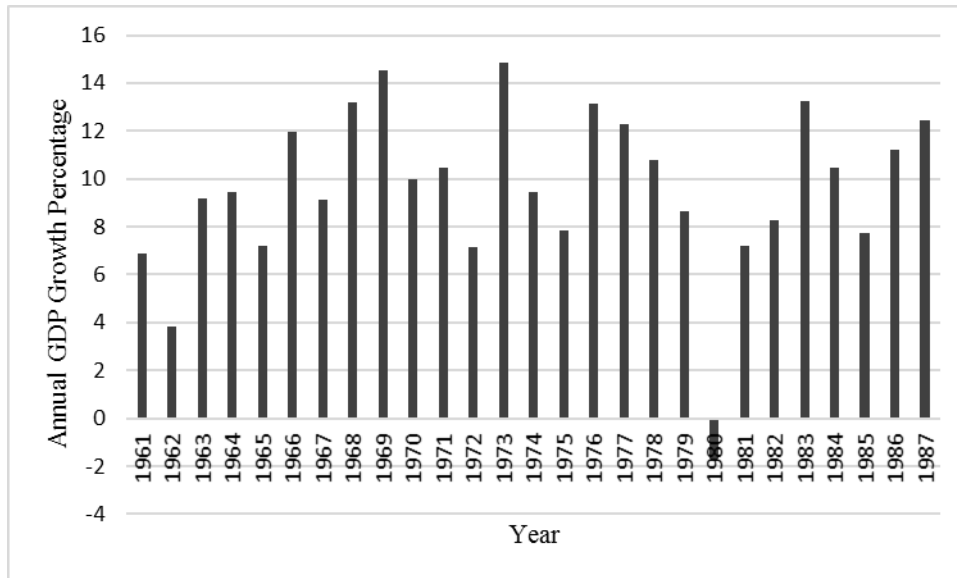


Figure 1. Annual GDP growth rate in South Korea, 1961-1987

Adapted from The World Bank, *GDP growth (annual %)*, Retrieved from: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?end=1987&locations=KR&start=1961&view=chart>

GDP per capita growth was higher than 4 percent every year except for 1962, and 1980 when political unrest and the second oil crisis contributed to the economic malaise (Heo & Roehrig, 2012, p.28; Chau, 2001, p.118). The average growth rate for the entire period was 9,5 percent.

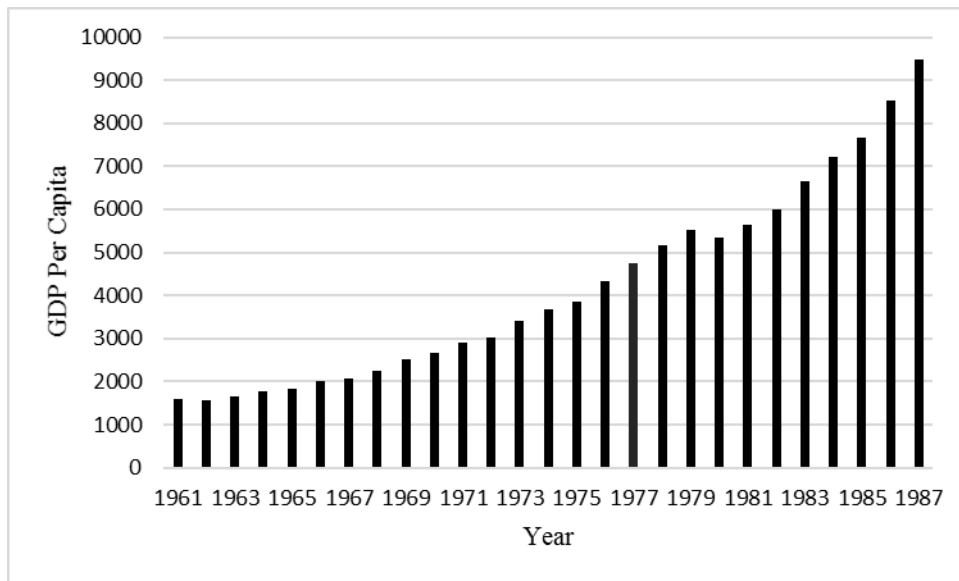


Figure 2. GDP per capita in South Korea in USD (PPP 2011), 1961-1987

Adapted from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2012). *International Comparisons of GDP per Capita and per Hour, 1960-2011*. Retrieved from: https://www.bls.gov/ilc/intl_gdp_capita_gdp_hour.pdf

Adjusted for purchasing power parity in 2011, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012) found that GDP per capita grew from 1579 dollars per person in 1961 to an astonishing 9475 dollars in 1987.

3.2 Other factors influencing economic development

The timescale of this thesis was too limited to touch on all the indicators Lipset employs to measure these three variables, but several of the most important ones, on which data was readily available, have been considered. For industrialization, one of the indicators Lipset uses is the per capita energy consumption, which increases as a country becomes more industrialized. When it comes to education, the enrollment rate is an important indicator Lipset considers. And finally, for urbanization, Lipset takes the percentage of the population living in cities with over 20 000 inhabitants and over 100 000 inhabitants, and the percentage of the population living in

metropolitan areas (Lipset, 1960, p.51-54). As cities have grown, and are growing rapidly, in number but also in size (United Nations ESA, 2016), what could have amounted to a city in 1960 might be called a village in 1990. Therefore, I have only considered the second variable.

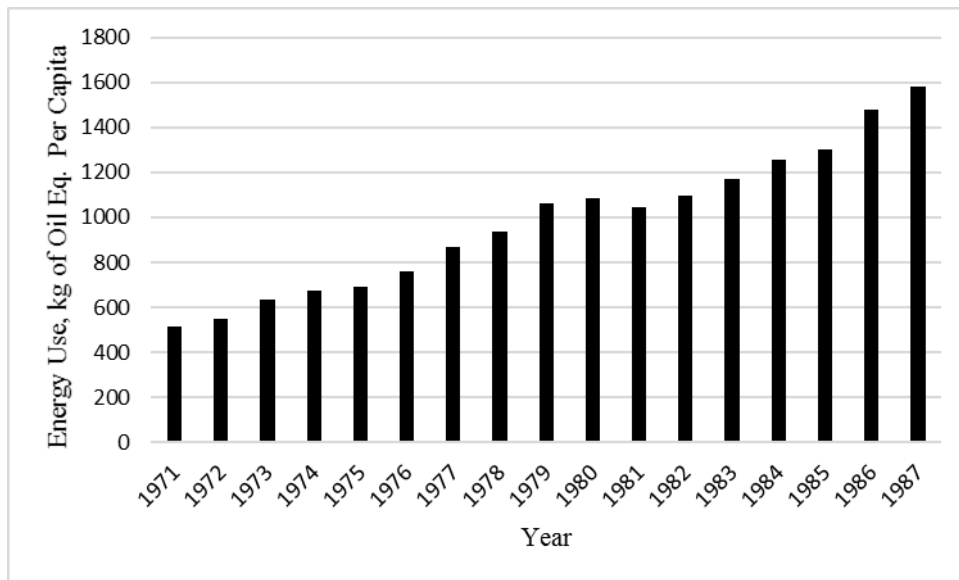


Figure 3. Energy use (kilogram of oil equivalent per capita) in South Korea, 1971-1987.

Adapted from The World Bank, *Energy Use (kg of oil equivalent per capita)*, Retrieved from: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EG.USE.PCAP.KG.OE?locations=KR>

Data on South Korea's energy use and enrollment rate was only available starting at 1971, approximately half way through Park's reign. South Korea's energy use steadily increased, tripling between 1971 and 1987

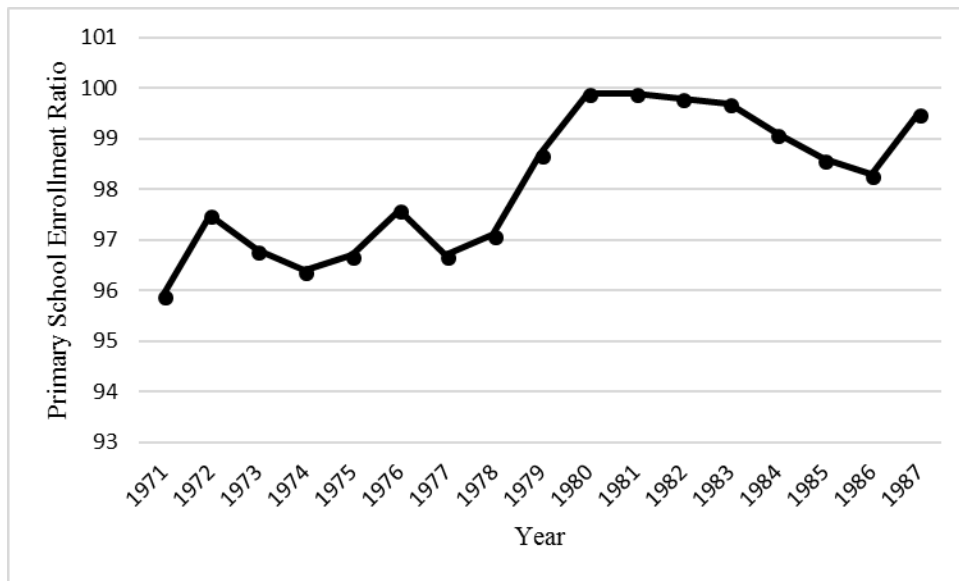


Figure 4. Primary School Enrollment Ratio (Net Percentage) in South Korea, 1971-1987.

Adapted from The World Bank (n.d.), *School Enrollment, Primary (% net)*. Retrieved from: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.PRM.NENR?locations=KR>

The same rapid growth did not take place for the primary school enrollment ratio, since it had always been quite high, starting at 96 percent in 1971. It did however continue to grow to over 99 percent in 1987. Also, Chau (2001, p. 124) states that secondary school enrollment did rise quite rapidly, from 27 percent in 1960 to 82 percent in 1982.

Lastly, data on the rise of the urban population is less readily available for the period between 1961 and 1987, but Kang (1998, p.102) reports a rise in the percentage of the population living in urban areas, from 18,8 in 1960 to 42,5 in 1990.

4 Democracy in South Korea after 1987

As mentioned earlier, after Park was assassinated in 1979, power passed briefly to a new civilian government. Six months later Chun Doo Hwan, another army general who had been a protégé of Park seized power in a violent coup, ruling the country until 1987 in a manner not unlike Park had done (Adesnik & Kim, 2008, p.1).

In the previous section, it was shown that the oppressive regimes of Park and Chun lead to economic development and innovation. In this section, using the working definition of democracy from the second section, I will show that South Korea's political system after 1987 was a truly democratic one, especially when it comes to electoral freedom. Whilst the individual rights situation also improved, it did not advance as quickly.

4.1 Electoral and individual freedom in post-transition South Korea

As stated by Heo & Roehrig (2010, p.36), throughout his term, Park's successor Chun Doo Hwan had claimed that he would honour the presidential term limit. In 1986 he had tentatively begun to negotiate with opposition groups to modify the constitution. Yet, in June 1987, he announced that he would put forward his confidant Roh Tae Woo as presidential candidate and that he would not revise the constitution. Massive demonstrations flared up in the country (M.E Robinson, 2007, p.167). Eventually, instead of cracking down on protests as many had feared, Chun Doo Hwan's successor Roh Tae Woo had announced the following: he would adopt whatever new constitution the government and the opposition groups would agree on and adopt a democratic presidential election system (Heo & Roehrig, 2010 p.37).

The 1987 elections and the 1988 parliamentary elections were the founding democratic elections in the country according to Kim Sunhyuk (1997, p.1136). In 1987 Roh Tae Woo was elected president, since opposition leaders Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung had both ran

for president separately and had split the vote between them (Heo & Roehrig, 2010, p.41). Still, in 1992, Kim Young Sam won the presidential elections. This shows that in a short period of time, the South Korean democracy had matured enough to handle free presidential elections and a power transition to another administration (Heo & Roehrig, 2010, p.44), led by “a lifelong opponent of authoritarian rule who was nearly put to death by the military” (Diamond & Kim, 2000, p.1).

Whilst electoral freedom seems to have immediately improved after the 1987 elections, the improvement of individual civil rights seems to have been asymmetrical. The unique situation of South Korea sharing a border with a possibly hostile nation seems to have contributed to the curtailing of individual rights. According to Cho, (1997, p.130) South Korea’s National Security Act of 1948 was enacted to suppress the left-wing movement in the country, due to the threat of communist North Korea. The law states that “any person who praises, incites or propagates the activities of an antigovernment organization is punishable” (Korea Legislation Research Institute, n.d.). This is a very broad statement, potentially targeting those who are simply critical of the South Korean government. For instance, Cho (p.127) wrote that the law had been used to imprison leftist South Koreans.

Nonetheless, this lagging development of civil rights is not enough to call the post-transition democracy “illiberal”. In the 1998 *Freedom in the World Report* published by Freedom House, Korea was awarded a score of 2 on civil liberties, with 1 being best and 7 being worst. The report mentions that the judiciary was independent, civic instructions were strong and local human rights groups operated openly, yet also adds for example that “women face social and professional discrimination” (Freedom House, 1998).

One important factor that helps in keeping the executive accountable towards the public is judicial review. As stated by Cox (1987, p.372), when politicians lose sight of individual

rights, judicial review helps protect liberties such as freedom of speech and the right to privacy. Youm (1994, p.3) argues that by fulfilling this role after the new democratic constitution of 1987, the Korean Constitutional Court became a very important safe keeper of human rights. According to Youm, this newfound protection of human rights improved the freedom of the press as well (1994, p.3-3).

5 Democratization in South Korea: the strength of Lipset's explanation

In the previous sections, we have seen that, although the political system of South Korea knew very little democratic elements under president Park Chung Hee, it fostered rapid economic development in every area that Lipset identifies. After 1987 we see a democracy emerging, that offers electoral freedom, yet still had room to grow when it comes to civil rights.

Nevertheless, this only points at a correlation between economic development and the rise of democracy. As mentioned before, Lipset mentions the strengthening of the lower and middle classes and the emergence of voluntary organizations as mechanisms that drive democratization. In this section the question will be answered if these causal mechanisms have played any role in the democratization process in South Korea.

5.1 Civil Society in South Korea

Civil society has played an important part in the democratization of South Korea. As a concept, it is closely related the voluntary organizations in Lipset's work. To see how, one must trace the concept back to Alexis de Tocqueville. According to Woldring (1998, p.363), de Tocqueville saw civil society as "free associations" that act as intermediaries between the people and the state that citizens can use to realize their social freedom and equality. These free

associations bear great resemblance to the role Lipset ascribes to voluntary organizations. As mentioned before, this role is to prevent the power of the state from dominating political decision-making and to recruit citizens to participate in the political process (Lipset, 1959, p.84-85). Lipset, drawing on Banfield's (1985) analysis of poverty and community organizations, further states that voluntary organizations will be formed as a result of economic development:

Since (...) the more well-to-do and the better educated one is, the more likely he is to belong to voluntary organizations, it seems likely that the propensity to form such groups is a function of level of income and opportunities for leisure within given nations. (1959, p.85)

However, Lipset does not fully cover why voluntary organizations play such an important part in causing democratization. The core of this relationship can be found with authors such as Almond and Verba (1963). They state that politically oriented civic associations equip citizens with political knowledge and tools and push them to participate to achieve their own political goals. Putnam, Leonardi and Nanetti (1993) go even further, claiming that all civic organizations, even non-political ones, are vital for democratization. They argue that these organizations promote a shared civic identity and social capital, which according to Salzman (2011) can be described as the dynamic of trust and generic reciprocity. In Putnam and his colleagues' famous study of Italian regions, we can find that politics in regions with few civic organizations was typified by "vertical relations of authority and dependency, as embodied in patron-client networks" (1993, p.101). They argue that in regions where social capital is fostered and there is a high degree of "civic-ness", "people believe in popular government, and they are predisposed to compromise with their political adversaries" (p.101).

Unfortunately, Lipset never mentions which real-world groups classify as voluntary organizations to him. However, I believe that civil society groups in South Korea fit Lipset's idea of voluntary organizations, seeing as they serve the same analytical role.

Seong describes the relationship between the state and society in South Korea before and after democratization by stating that the imbalance between an “overdeveloped state and underdeveloped society came to be largely redressed” (2000, p.88). In a sense, this is true: under Park and Chun, the South Korean state had a much larger role than the state does in many western countries, governing the economy through the EPB and keeping society in check through the KCIA. The latter used harsh means trying to prevent citizens from developing any channels to express their discontent with the government, causing society to remain underdeveloped in this sense.

Nonetheless, much of the literature that was consulted for this section reflects the importance of civil society organizations for the democratization process. According to many authors, these organizations fought Park Chung Hee and helped end Chun Doo Hwan's regime in 1987. As Kim Sunhyuk (2009, p.82) writes, South Korea was not unique for having a repressive regime, but it was unique for its vibrant and resistant civil society. Kim Sunhyuk (1996) traces the influence of civil society in South Korea back to 1960. In this year, Rhee Syngman had just stepped down and a new civilian government was trying to push for democratic reform. Kim Sunhyuk states that the issues raised at the time by civil society were mostly abstract, radical and idealistic (1996, p.87). Civil society, which was most prominently embodied by students and the Teachers' Labor Union, united a diversity of groups in society pushing for reunification with the North and the punishment of politicians from Rhee's oppressive regime. Kim Sunhyuk characterises these civil society groups as being a loose-knit collective, “with little regard to organizational basis and long term strategies” (p.87).

Kim Sunhyuk (1996, pp. 87-88) continues to describe how right-wing organizations violently opposed the “pro-communist” Teachers’ union and student groups. The military, led by Park Chung Hee, stepped in after clashes between these groups became bigger and more violent. Heo and Roehrig (2010, p.20) agree that “the increasingly chaotic state of South Korean politics... pushed some in the military over the edge”.

In the period before Park Chung Hee’s developmental regime brought economic development, civil society could be typified as unorganised, but it was still influential. Organizations were present on both sides of the political spectrum, and their struggle was so hard-fought it might have convinced military leaders such as Park that they had to intervene in politics. During Park’s reign however, the character of South Korean civil society began to change.

Firstly, a new coalition of groups emerged, which stood united against Park’s regime. According to Adesnik and Kim (2008) and Kim Sunhyuk (1996), labor unions, religious groups and student groups began to work together. “Labor and the church, in close cooperation with students, emerged as integral elements in South Korean civil society and thus in the democratic struggle against Park's dictatorship” (Kim Sunhyuk, 1996, p.88). This democratic struggle was fought even harder after Park’s *Yushin* reforms. In the previous quotation, Kim Sunhyuk equates the entirety of civil society with the democratic struggle against Park’s dictatorship. Moreover, afterwards he states that laborers, students and religious activists even allied themselves with conservative right-wing politicians against the *Yushin* constitution (1996, p.88), indicating how almost all of civil society had become united in its struggle against the “overdeveloped” state.

As Adesnik and Kim (2008) state, the conditions for a transition to democracy were ripe in 1979. Besides protests emerging against the *Yushin* reforms, the general public was also

unhappy about the economic recession following the oil crisis. According to Adesnik and Kim, the U.S. typically favored a stable government in South Korea over one that made concessions to the opposition (2008, p.1). The same would occur in Vietnam several years later, with the U.S. for instance supporting Ngo Dinh Diem's oppressive regime to ensure stability during the Vietnam war (Chapman, 2013, p.116-117). Still, the U.S. president in 1979, Carter, had not been eager to support Park's regime, "both because of its human rights violations and its apparent efforts to bribe American legislators" (Adesnik & Kim, 2000, p.1).

However, the country had to endure almost eight more years of oppressive government under Chun Doo Hwan after Park was assassinated and the interim civilian government that followed crumbled. As stated by Adesnik and Kim (2000), the main groups that were active in civil society protests in 1987 were the same as in 1979: students, religious groups, labour unions and the remaining politicians of the opposition. One of the reasons Adesnik and Kim offer explaining why the democratization succeeded in 1987 and not in 1979 is that the various civil society groups fighting for democracy managed to form a "grand coalition" to coordinate their activities (2000, p.2). Moreover, Kim Sunhyuk (2009, p.83) adds that the middle class became more engaged in civil society leading up to 1987.

Furthermore, Kim Sunhyuk (2009) typifies the democratic transition that civil society helped shape as a "mass-ascendant" mode of democratization, referring to Karl (1990). Karl uses the term to differentiate between cases in which incumbent elites themselves instigated democratic transition, usually retaining some power in the new democratic system, and those in which civil society groups "have gained the upper hand, even temporarily, vis-a-vis those dominant elites" (p.8). This seems to suggest that the transition towards democracy in South Korea was not just made possible by voluntary organizations, but led by them.

I argue above that at first, civil society was repressed. Yet, it gradually gained more influence, because of two reasons: Firstly, new groups such as labor unions joined the struggle for democracy. Secondly, the level of organization became higher, resulting in the “grand coalition” Adesnik and Kim identified. One could state that this allowed a larger diversity of groups in society to exert an increasing amount of influence on the government, making South-Korea’s political system at least marginally more pluralistic.

Interestingly, Acemoglu and Robinson argue that small pluralistic elements play a crucial role in democratization. They state that "institutional drift", or incremental changes towards or away from pluralism can determine how a given institution reacts to "critical junctures", major events in history (2012, pp. 108-113). If the institution changes to become more politically inclusive due to the institutional drift and the critical junctures, it will in turn foster inclusive economic institutions (p.107) and thus perform better economically. Institutional drift does not have to be limited to governmental institutions only but can be an informal process as well. Acemoglu and Robinson for instance describe how British guards in the then-penal colony Australia gradually allowed convicts to work for themselves, keeping or selling what they produced, setting them on a path towards pluralistic economic institutions with property rights (2012, p.277). I believe that the gradual increase in influence of the South Korean civil society organizations described above should also be seen as institutional drift towards a more pluralistic political system.

5.2 Class in South Korea

Besides being the vehicle for the bottom-up struggle for democracy in South Korea, voluntary organizations could also be said to weaken lower class support for radical, anti-democratic ideology. Huckfeldt, Plutzer & Sprague state that any member of society lives simultaneously

in a variety of “social worlds”, which all have important political consequences (p.365). A person belonging to different social groups and organizations will experience political reality through different perspectives. Political influence coming from two or more of these social worlds can contradict each other, causing cross-pressures. For example, a person’s opinion on same-sex marriage could be influenced by their religion on the one hand, and their close personal contact with LGBT+ individuals on the other (Bramlett, 2012).

According to Lipset, lower class individuals’ low socio-economic welfare typically makes them vulnerable to more radical ideologies (1959, p.83). The cross-pressures these individuals encounter when influenced by a host of voluntary organizations expose them to values of other classes, making them less intensely committed to any ideology and less receptive to radical ideology. Moreover, Lipset claims that increased income security due to economic development grants lower-class individuals a more gradualist view of politics (p.83).

This seems to have been the case in South Korea. Civil society at first contained elements that leaned to the extreme left. Yet, as time passed, worker's unions came to fight alongside students and religious groups as one of the three core civil society groups in South Korea for what were essentially the same goals: to put an end to the oppression of political opposition and eventually achieve free and fair elections (Kim Sunhyuk, 1996, pp.86-88).

Yet, on the other hand, it is worth noting that the struggle to overthrow the oppressive regimes of Park and later of Chun Doo Hwan was a radical struggle in itself. For example, Seong states the following of the opposition against Chun Doo Hwan in the late nineteen-eighties: “Student and labor activists sought to overthrow the Chun regime using all available means, including revolutionary ones. The state and military regime were simply considered as the enemy to be destroyed and replaced with a populist or socialist regime” (2000, p.88).

Another underlying mechanism connected to economic development is the strengthening of the middle class. This social class, according to Lipset, tends to support moderate, democratic political parties (1959, p.83). As mentioned before, some authors state that this middle-class support for moderates is due to the middle class itself being a product of economic development, which causes the group to identify with modern values (Hattori, Funatsu & Torii, 2003). Others believe that the middle class might simply be trying to protect their economic status by fighting for property rights (Glassman, 1995).

To uncover whether the middle class played such an active role in South Korea, it is important to first define what the term "middle class" entailed in nineteen-seventies Korea. Yang (2012) offers a useful distinction between several classes, indicating that in Korea middle class is often seen as synonymous with white-collar professions, such as managers, teachers and engineers. Yang adds that what sets the middle class analytically apart is that their income is reliant on scarce occupational skills, instead of relying on property like the bourgeoisie, or on simple manual skills like the working class (2012, p.428). The South Korean middle class grew enormously due to the economic development under Park Chung Hee's regime. For example, as Amsden (1989, p.171) shows, economic development brought a large increase in the amount of managerial positions and the growth of heavy industry increased the number of engineers by ten.

The literature on the role of South Korea's middle class in the struggle for democracy seems divided. On the one hand, Yang agrees that the middle class grew strongly under Park. However, she poses that this growth was not a spontaneous, organic process. Instead, she speaks of a "state sponsored middle class formation" (2012, p.425), arguing that Park intentionally nurtured the urban middle class to create a section of society that would be supportive and obedient. She refers to Gorski (2003), who wrote that fostering obedience in citizens is an effective alternative to violent coercion for a government.

Yang concludes that the appeal of the middle class “dream” of wealth and comfort that Park's economic policy brought, a narrative that was promoted by cultural practices and state-led media, made Koreans "overlook the increasing social inequality" (p.440) under Park's regime. Yet there are also scholars who state that, even though it is never mentioned as a core group of the civil society protest movement, the middle class did in fact gradually join the protests against Park. Kim Sunhyuk (2009, p.82) for example states that groups of intellectuals, journalists and professionals joined students, religious groups in their protests against Park after the Yushin reforms.

Kim Sunhyuk goes on to state that one of the reasons that the middle class eventually joined the protests was that "the middle class was no longer satisfied with only economic prosperity – they wanted political freedom" (1996, p.91). He continues to add that the "classical Lipsetian thesis seems to hold true in the case of South Korea" (p.93), stating that postponed political rights made the middle class become increasingly impatient with the regime.

6 Conclusions and discussion

As mentioned in the introduction, the central aim of this thesis was to find out whether Lipset's theory could explain the establishment of democracy in South Korea. To begin with, it was shown that South Korea, when it was a developmental state under Park Chung Hee, knew very little democratic elements. At the same time, unprecedented economic development took place on all areas Lipset identifies. GDP, industrialization, education and urbanization all show rapid growth. After the country had experienced its first democratic presidential elections, we see a democracy emerging, showing high electoral freedom and an improving civil rights situation. The clear difference between Park Chung Hee's Korea and the country after 1987 shows that there is some correlation between economic development and democratization.

Still, while electoral freedom improved almost immediately after the 1987 elections, the development of individual rights fell behind in various areas. Whilst I argue that the South Korean post-transition democracy is not an illiberal democracy, due to the improvement of individual rights in other areas, a possible explanation might be that economic development might be more conducive to the development of electoral liberties than individual rights. This could be an interesting starting point for future research.

This study further shows that of the three causal mechanisms that Lipset argues drive the relationship between economic development and democratization, two played an important role in the South Korean democratization process. To begin with, civil society groups seem to have played a crucial role in leading the popular struggle for democratization. As I argue that civil society in South Korea can be seen as synonymous with Lipset's view of voluntary organizations, the role it played in the democratization process seems to speak for Lipset's theory. Furthermore, one might argue that South Korea's lower class shows signs of being cross-pressured; accepting and fighting for values it came to share with students, religious groups and the middle class. Nevertheless, the role of the middle class remains subject to academic debate.

Moreover, it was shown that, even though Acemoglu and Robinson argue that growth under extractive regimes inevitably falters, the South Korean economy made use of innovative technologies during the nineteen-sixties and -seventies under Park's regime. Lipset's theory is much more optimistic about growth under such a regime. Yet, the question also arose if Lipset's work might be unified with that of Acemoglu and Robinson. Acemoglu and Robinson argue that political and economic institutions can evolve to become more pluralistic through institutional drift, interspersed with critical junctures. The example of Australian convicts illustrates how institutional drift is not limited to formal governmental institutions. Civil society, or the voluntary organizations that Lipset deems so important, have evolved in South

Korea. When at first, they were divided, idealistic and unorganized, in the years leading up to 1987 these organizations joined in a grand coalition, resulting in increased influence, eventually leading to democratization. I suggest that this informal increase of plurality in South Korea's political system might be seen as institutional drift. Future studies might research the degree in which this gradual increase of voluntary organizations' influence can truly be equated to institutional drift in the way Acemoglu and Robinson defined it and if perhaps the 1987 elections could be seen as a critical juncture.

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