

Downsizing Democracy in South Korea: Limited Liberty and Increasing Inequality

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Introduction

Democracy today is chiefly understood as a political arrangement that seeks to solve and manage conflicts on the basis of two fundamental principles: liberty and equality. Democracy has been praised as the most enduring and wisest of political arrangements that have appeared in history, and is almost universally supported as an ideal. According to Barber, the democratic government represents citizens' daily exercise of power which enables them to place checks on the abuse of power (2006, 110). Democracy thus hinges upon granting citizens' basic rights to liberty and equality.

Emphasizing civil rights as a key metric for deciding whether a democracy is mature or in crisis, Charles Tilly (2007, 23-27) argues that the greater the scope of protected civil rights the higher the level of equality; the greater the extent of protection or liberty from arbitrary actions of the state; and the higher the level of mutually binding discussions, the more democratic a given society is. Scholars strenuously stress liberty and equality as inalienable rights of the democratic citizen that must be protected against all abuses of power. The strength of a democracy, in other words, lies in its ability to protect these basic civil rights.

In assessing, normatively or empirically, the maturity, development, or decline of a given democracy, it is thus crucial to analyze and determine how well it protects liberty and equality in the fields of politics, economy, and civil society.¹

Using liberty and equality as key measures, what assessment can we make of Korean democracy today? Is it progressing or regressing?

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In an effort to answer this question, we used the Asian Democracy Index (ADI) principally developed by the Democracy and Social Movements Institute of Sungkonghoe University in Korea. The two basic principles comprising the ADI are liberalization and equalization. Liberalization is made up of the subprinciples of autonomy and competition, while equality is constituted by the subprinciples of pluralization and solidarity. Unlike other indices of democracy, the ADI measures the extent of liberalization and equalization in different fields of each given democracy, i.e., the fields of politics, economy, and civil society.

The ADI consists of forty-nine attributes and fifty-seven indicators in total. More specifically, the political field consists of eighteen attributes and nineteen indicators; the economy field, sixteen attributes and twenty indicators; and the civil society field, fifteen attributes and eighteen indicators.

Liberalization of politics is measured along ten attributes-cum-indicators; equalization of politics, along eight attributes and nine indicators. Liberalization of the economy, on the other hand, is measured along seven attributes and eight indicators, while equalization in the same field is measured along nine attributes and twelve indicators. Liberalization in civil society is measured along eight attributes and eleven indicators, while equalization of the same field is measured along eight attributes-cum-indicators. Further divisions of the arrangements of attributes and indicators on the ADI are summarized in table 1.

Copies of the field-specific questionnaires developed on the basis of the ADI were distributed to experts in each of the three fields. Two decisions were made in order to ensure the objectivity and professionalism of the survey results. First, we sought to control the distribution of ideological biases in the sample of experts we have gathered by employing an ideological measure or standard in selecting the experts to be included. Next, we provided different evaluation groups for different sections of analysis. In other words, each of the three fields of democracy—i.e., politics, the economy, and civil society—had a group specializing in its evaluation.

In sum, we gathered responses twenty-seven experts representing the conservative, centrist, and progressive ends of the ideological spectrum in Korea. The experts were again divided into three groups (each with nine members) to assess politics, the economy, and the civil society of the Korean democracy. Each group of nine, in turn, was designed to include three progressives, three centrists, and three conservatives. The twenty-seven members were career scholars and activists. The questionnaire was distributed and collected via e-mail between early June and late July 2013.

Table 1. Asian Democracy Index

	Field		
	Politics	Economy	Civil Society
	The Number of Attributes	The Number of Attributes	The Number of Attributes
	The Number of Indicators	The Number of Indicators	The Number of Indicators
Principle			
Liberalization	4	3	4
Autonomy	4	3	4
Competition	6	4	4
Equalization	4	5	4
Pluralization	4	5	4
Solidarity	4	4	3
Total	18	16	15
	19	20	18

Current Political and Economic Status of Korean Democracy

Worries over the signs of the decline of democracy are widespread in Korea today. Violations of civil rights to liberty and equality were commonplace sights throughout the five years of the conservative Lee Myung-bak administration, and also the first six months of the current Park Geun-hye administration. During this period liberty and equality took a step backward, raising significant concerns across Korean society. The most shocking of the incidents that have threatened Korean democracy during this period is the inexcusable and systematic meddling by the National Intelligence Service (NIS) with the presidential election of December 2012 and the subsequent attempts by the police to cover up the NIS's involvement. In response, opposition parties, activist organizations, and citizens have been organizing massive candlelight demonstrations since June 2013 demanding a thoroughgoing and transparent investigation into the suspicions surrounding the NIS and the police. The fact that an agency of the state has so systematically interfered with the presidential election to make a specific candidate the victor seriously threatens to undermine democracy in Korea.

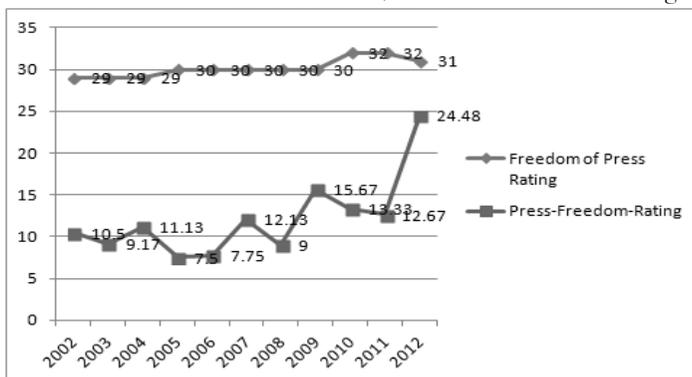
Increasing limits on the freedoms of expression and the press have also been common features of the last several years. Freedom House's Freedom of the Press Index had assessed South Korea as having a "free" press from 1993 to 2009, but has assessed the Korean press as only "partly free" since 2010. Reporters without Borders, an organization of journalists established in 1985 to promote freedom of the press, has been publishing the Worldwide Press Freedom Index reports each year since 2002. The closer a country's reading on this index to zero, the freer its press. Conversely, the higher the reading, the less free its press. A survey of South Korea's performance on this index between 2002 and 2012 shows that the country's reading suddenly began to rise under the Lee Myung-bak administration. Reporters without Borders ranked Korea in the fiftieth place among 179 countries surveyed in 2013, six ranks lower than the forty-fourth place that the country obtained last year. The level of freedom of the press has been declining steadily over the last several years (see figure 1).

Korea is also not free from the trap of intensifying corruption. Despite the transition it has made to democracy, Korea still suffers from chronic and pervasive practices of corruption and bribery. At the close of the Lee administration, the corruption of the president's relatives and cronies surfaced. The most major incident involved the president's older brother, Lee Sang-deuk, who was eventually arrested. Since the current Park Geun-hye administration came into power, widespread practices of corruption and bribery surrounding the Four Rivers Project championed by the Lee administration have been reported almost on a daily basis.

The corrupt state of Korean politics and society is well reflected in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI). On the CPI, Korea came in thirty ninth among 178 countries surveyed in 2009 and 2010, with scores of fifty-five points and fifty-four points, respectively. It stepped down further to the forty-third position among the 182 countries surveyed in 2011 with a score of fifty-four points. Although it managed to raise its score by two points in 2012 to fifty-six points, its international position declined by two ranks to the forty-fifth among 176 countries surveyed. The deterioration of transparency in Korean society necessarily harms the public's trust in the democratic enterprise itself and will ultimately contribute more to the decline of democracy in Korea rather than its consolidation.

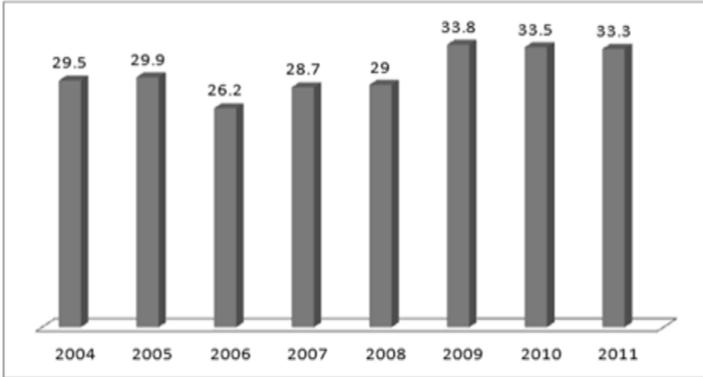
The ongoing deterioration of socioeconomic equality has been posing a major challenge to Korean society since the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997-98. Growing socioeconomic gaps are commonly blamed as major factors contributing to rising rates of suicide and homicide. James Gilligan's study (2011) on the relationship between suicide rate and socioeconomic inequality shows that the sense of shame attendant upon growing socioeconomic inequality fuels various forms of "lethal violence" such as suicides and murders. If we took Gilligan's argument and used the suicide rate as a measure of socioeconomic inequality in Korea, inequality in Korea has notably been worsening since 2009.

Figure 1. Trends in "Freedom of the Press"/Press Freedom Index Ratings



Sources: Freedom House 2013, Reporters without Borders²

Figure 2. Suicide Rate in Korea, 2004-2011



Source: OECD 2013

The pervasive discrimination against non-regular workers, such as contract-based and part-time employees, seriously threatens the project of national integration which is crucial to the consolidation of democracy. Despite the Korean court's ruling that sided with the reinstatement of the unfairly laid-off workers of Ssangyong Motor Company, the company still refuses to comply with the court's decision, thus dragging the messy legal battle with the company's labor union for years.

Measuring Korean Democracy with the ADI in 2013

Index of Democracy in Korea, 2013

A survey of the index of democracy in Korea in 2013 shows the country scoring 4.50 on an eleven-point scale. This mediocre score indicates that the status of the Korean democracy still has a long way to go. The index of liberalization is 4.96 while the index of equalization is 4.04, showing a sizable gap between the development of liberty and the development of equality in Korea. This suggests that Korean democracy has evolved in a way that is biased in favor of autonomy and competition instead of seeking a more balanced approach to liberty and equality.

We compare the indices of liberalization and equalization in Korea to examine how the two ideals have evolved in Korean politics, economy, and society. The index of democracy in politics is 5.91, significantly higher than its counterparts in civil society (4.30) and economy (3.43). The economy lags

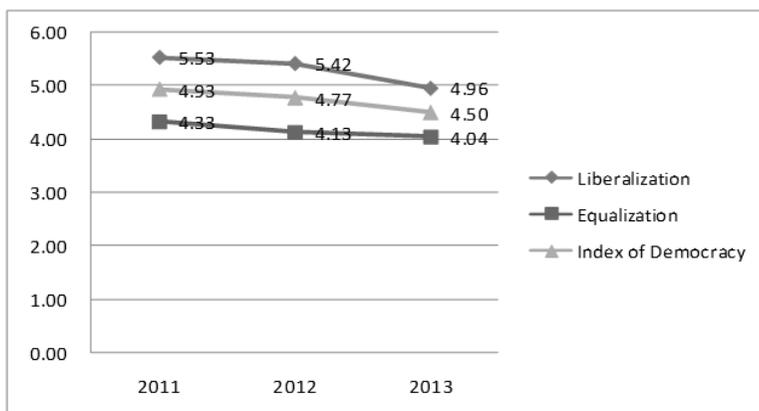
far behind other fields in terms of liberalization and equalization, mainly as a result of the neoliberal market policy pursued by the Lee administration.

Table 2. Index of Democracy in Korea, 2013

	Politics	Economy	Civil Society	Total
Liberalization	6.48	3.67	4.75	4.96
Equalization	5.34	2.95	3.84	4.04
Index of Democracy	5.91	3.43	4.30	4.50

The conservative Lee administration lowered the corporate income tax and loosened regulation from its very first days. It insisted that redistribution was not possible without farther growth and the trickle-down effect it would generate. Yet the effect the administration aimed for never materialized and its policy has only served to widen the gap between large corporations and smaller businesses. The economic inequality in the corporate world is further deteriorated by the increasingly unfair system of competition in general and concentration of wealth. The low economic index indicates these phenomena character Korean society today.

Figure 3. Trend in the Index of Democracy in Korea, 2011-2013



Comparing the three indices of democracy Korea scored over the last three years shows a clear and consistent downward pattern. The index of liberalization, in particular, has decreased from 5.53 in 2011 to 4.96 in 2013, reflecting the increasing restrictions of civil rights that are crucial to procedural and representative democracy. The numerous recent cases of restrictions on liberty in Korea include: the increasing censorship and control of the press and the Internet in general and social network service posts in particular; the curtailing of political participation; the weakening of the protection of the right to assembly and unionization; the decline in economic transparency; the increasing controversy over the unfairness of the competition system in general; and the growing vulnerability of the rights of minority groups.

The index of equalization has similarly been declining, from 4.33 in 2011 to 4.04 in 2013. Although the margin of difference is smaller than the case with the index of liberalization, the declining index of equalization nonetheless indicates that Korean democracy is growing more and more non-egalitarian from year to year. The index of equalization reaches its dearth in the economic domain at 2.95 reflecting the nature of the financial and economic policies pursued by the last and current conservative administrations. Both administrations have prioritized growth over welfare and economic democratization without genuine regard for decreasing economic inequality in Korea.

Responses and Characteristics

Politics

Given the significant difference in the extent of guarantees accorded to liberty and equality in Korean politics, it is important to ask from what source or sources the difference originates and what liberty and equality mean in the context of the Korean democracy. We have sought to answer these questions by assessing the democracy of Korean politics and by comparing the 2013 survey results to the survey results from 2011 and 2012.

The survey in 2013 yielded 5.91 for the index of democracy in Korean politics, which is slightly higher than the 5.73 and 5.57 it scored in 2011 and 2012, respectively. This suggests that democracy, at least in the domain of domestic politics, has matured somewhat. Table 3 shows that both Korean politics has improved along both dimensions of liberalization and equalization.

Table 3. Liberalization and Equalization in Korean Politics, 2011-2013

Year	Liberalization	Equalization	Index of Democracy
2011	6.35	5.11	5.73
2012	6.33	4.82	5.57
2013	6.48	5.34	5.91

A comparison of the indices of liberalization and equalization in Korean politics also shows that in 2013, as in 2011 and 2012, the principle of liberty maintained its precedence over the principle of equality. The persistent gap between liberalization and equalization indicates that democracy in Korean politics is still mostly about procedural and formal aspects. Yet the gap between the two processes has decreased slightly in 2013 from the gaps noted in 2011 or 2012.

The subprinciples of liberalization and equalization in 2013 show that the level of autonomy has somewhat decreased from those measured in 2011 and 2012, while the levels of competition and pluralization have grown. The level of solidarity in 2013 is similar to the one in 2011, and higher than the one in 2012.

As for autonomy, civil liberties (Q2) and the freedom of assembly and political activity (Q3) were ranked lower on the 2013 survey than they were in the previous two years. The decline in the rankings of civil and political freedoms on the index of democracy in Korea indicates that the country is increasingly losing its grip on “polyarchy” or “liberal democracy,” as defined by Robert Dahl (1998) and Larry Diamond (1999), respectively.

Table 4. Autonomy, Competition, Pluralization, and Solidarity in Korean Politics, 2011-2013

Year	Autonomy	Competition	Pluralization	Solidarity
2011	6.86	5.83	4.86	5.36
2012	6.97	5.69	4.72	4.91
2013	6.78	6.17	5.36	5.31

Table 5. Indicators of Democracy in Korean Politics, 2011-2013

		Attribute	Indicator / Question	2011	2012	2013	
Principles	Pluralization	▷ Independence and checks and balances between state power apparatuses	11. How well do you think government agencies maintain checks and balance?	5.11	5.11	5.00	
		▷ Dispersion of political power in the parliament	12. How well do you think the power within the legislature is distributed in your country?	4.78	5.00	5.78	
		▷ Political representation	13. How well do you think the Parliament or the legislature represent various social groups in your country?	4.78	3.89	5.11	
		▷ Democratization of state institutions	14. How fairly and rationally do you think government agencies are being implemented in your country?	4.78	4.89	5.56	
	Equalization	▷ Participation system and degree of participation	15. How actively do you think citizens are participating in elections and other political decision making processes in your country?	7.00	4.44	5.33	
		Solidarity	▷ Affirmative action	16. How well do you think affirmative actions are established and implemented in your country?	4.33	4.44	5.11
			▷ The public credibility of the current democratic institution	17. How much do you think the public trust the government?	4.00	4.67	4.67
				18. How much do you think the public trust the Parliament/ Legislature?	4.11	3.78	3.78
				19. How much do you think the public trust Democracy?	7.33	7.22	7.67

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Table 5. (continued)

		Attribute	Indicator / Question	2011	2012	2013	
Principles	Autonomy	▷ The level of the performance of state violence	1. How well do you think the citizens are protected from the violence wielded by government agencies in your country?	6.56	6.89	6.67	
		▷ Civil rights	2. How well do you think the citizens' freedom is protected in your country?	7.22	7.33	7.11	
		▷ Freedom to organize and act in political groups	3. How much do you think the freedom of assembly and activities of political groups (parties and quasi-political organizations) are protected in your country?	7.11	7.44	6.89	
		▷ Permission for political opposition	4. How much do you think the opposition movements to the government or governing groups and the governing ideology are allowed in your country?	6.56	6.22	6.44	
	Liberalization	▷ The expansion of the universal suffrage	5. How well do you think suffrage of the citizens is protected in your country?	8.22	7.11	7.89	
		▷ Efficiency of the state	6. How well do you think all government agencies implement government policies in your country?	4.33	5.00	5.67	
		Competition	▷ The presence of the non-elected hereditary power	7. How much do you think non-elected groups account for the political power in your country?	4.00	3.78	4.33
			▷ The rule under the laws	8. How well do you think the rule of law is established in your country?	5.33	5.22	6.22
			▷ Electoral fairness	9. How fairly do you think elections are conducted in your country?	7.78	7.67	7.56
			▷ Transparency	10. How transparent do you think the operations of government agencies are in your country?	5.33	5.33	5.33

The level of competition, on the other hand, has increased between 2012 and 2013. All the sub-indicators of competition except for transparency received higher scores in 2013 than they did in 2012. Especially noteworthy were the score increases in the efficiency of the state (Q6), the presence of a non-elected supreme power (Q7), and the rule of law (Q8). Electoral fairness and competition, by contrast, received lower scores in 2013 than they did in the previous two years, most likely reflecting the ongoing controversy over the NIS's involvement in the online campaigns of the last presidential election held in 2012. As of August 2013, the National Assembly is still conducting an investigation into the affair while tens of thousands of people have taken to the streets to demand a thoroughgoing investigation of the truth and the reform of the NIS.

Pluralization, a subprinciple of equalization, performed better in 2013 than it did in either of the two preceding years. The distribution of power within the national legislature (Q12), political representation (Q13), and the democratization of state organizations (Q14) all managed to score higher in 2013 than they did in previous years. The mutual independence and checks and balances among powerful organizations (Q11), on the other hand, scored 5.00, which is lower by 0.11 points from the previous year's result.

Solidarity, the other subprinciple of equalization, managed to do somewhat better than it did in 2012 but still lagged a bit behind the score it obtained in 2011. The indicators of solidarity that continue to garner rising scores are affirmative actions for minority groups (Q16) and trust in democracy (Q19). Citizens' trust in government and the legislature (Q17 and Q18), on the other hand, have remained the same for the last two years, albeit slightly higher than the score in 2011. Citizens' participation in political decision-making (Q15) also scored higher in 2013 than it did in 2012 but lags far behind the score it had in 2011.

Economy

A common characteristic of the index of democracy surveys conducted in the last three years is that Korea always scores highly in the domain of politics, and performs poorly in the field of economy. The index in the field of politics in particular was higher in 2013 than in the previous year, while the index in the field of the civil society in 2012 was also higher than in the previous year. In the meantime, the index in the field of economy has continued to decline steadily over the last three years. This suggests that peoples' satisfaction is lowest when it comes to democratization in the economic field.

Table 6. Liberalization and Equalization in the Korean Economy, 2011-2013

Year	Liberalization	Equalization	Index of Democracy
2011	4.46	3.71	4.09
2012	4.51	3.17	3.84
2013	3.67	2.95	3.31

The index of democracy in the economy field in Korea is 3.31 in 2013, which is significantly lower than the 3.84 it scored in 2012 (see table 6). The margin of decrease in economic liberalization (-0.84, from 4.51 to 3.67) is much greater than the margin of decrease in economic equalization (-0.22, from 3.17 to 2.95).

As table 7 shows, the index of liberalization stayed more or less the same along both indices of autonomy and competition from 2011 to 2012. Yet it declined by a big margin in 2013. The liberalization of the economy fared especially poorly under most questions in the 2013 survey, except for Q3, which is on the ban on child and forced labor. The widening gap between large corporations and smaller businesses, which reached its peak in the latter period of the Lee administration, demonstrated that the flagrant neoliberal and pro-business policy the Lee administration pursued had no trickle-down effect. The situation eventually culminated in the establishment of the National Commission for Corporate Partnership promoting greater equity between large corporations and smaller businesses. Yet the continuing tension between the government and the corporate community eventually forced the Commission's first chairman, Jeong Un-chan, to resign from his post in March 2012, exhorting the government and the corporate community to outgrow their narrow perspectives. His resignation resulted in turning large corporations' habitually unfair treatment of smaller businesses into a major social issue. It was amid the heightening public resentment against the oligopolistic practices of large corporations that the Namyang Dairy Products scandal broke out in May 2013. This scandal, involving a large producer and distributor of dairy products that customarily forced its retailers to suffer innumerable humiliations, incited the public's condemnation of the gross socioeconomic and psychological inequality characterizing the business community and Korean society at large.

Table 7. Autonomy, Competition, Pluralization, and Solidarity in the Korean Economy, 2011-2013

Year	Autonomy	Competition	Pluralization	Solidarity
2011	5.19	3.72	3.78	3.65
2012	5.14	3.89	2.58	3.75
2013	4.33	3.00	2.39	3.51

The Fair Trade Commission launched an investigation and prosecution of Namyang Dairy Products in response. The investigation eventually went on to embroil the distribution industry as a whole. The investigation goes directly against the spirit of deregulation that marked the Lee administration's economic policy and hinted at the new administration's willingness to get involved in the market again. The answers to Q1 and Q6 reflect this overall social atmosphere.

The level of the external autonomy of policy decisions (Q4) has also dropped, given the fact that it is impossible to increase the external autonomy of policy decisions when the world economy is being tightly integrated. Yet the incident in May 2013 involving the meeting of President Park Geun-hye with Dan Akerson, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of General Motors, illustrated the seriously compromised state of the Korean government's capability to make independent decisions. On his meeting with President Park, Akerson made a direct request to President Park to address the "normal wage" (a regular pay that a worker receives in a given period) issue in Korea.

President Park eventually promised she would seek a solution to the matter. Complicating the situation was the fact that the Korean judiciary itself had earlier rendered a decision on what constituted a "normal wage," which a foreign CEO sought to overturn by making a personal appeal to the Korean president. Although it is difficult to predict how this issue will pan out in the future, settling the normal wage issue may well act as a measure of the external autonomy of the Park administration.

Korea's score fell along almost all indicators of labor (Q2, Q3, Q7, and Q8), except Q3. The decline mainly stems from the pro-capital and pro-business policy the Park administration has inherited from its predecessor. Yet multinational conglomerates like Samsung Electronics and Hyundai Motor continue to rely on illegal, contract-based forms of employment in an effort to cut down their business costs. The pervasiveness of contract and dispatch-type employment attests to the fact that neither the government nor the private sector is doing much to protect people's labor-related rights.

The margin of fall in the index of economic equalization is not as great as that in the index of economic liberalization, mainly because the index of equalization was so low to begin with. The only indicator of equalization along which a marginal increase in score was noted was Q20, which is about citizen's awareness of inequality. The increase along this indicator proves that it is citizens and not labor unions that are playing increasingly decisive roles in the unfolding of the string of corporate scandals that have infuriated the public, such as the strikes at Hanjin Heavy Industries and SsangYong Motor Company as well as the Namyang Dairy Products humiliation.

Table 8. Indicators of Democracy in the Korean Economy, 2011-2013

		Attribute	Indicator / Question	2011	2012	2013
Principles Liberalization	Autonomy	▷ Freedom/ autonomy of economic activities without political intervention	1. How much influence do you think the political power/elite have on the operation of private companies in your country?	4.78	5.22	4.00
		▷ Protection of basic labor rights	2. How well do you think labor rights are established in your country?	4.33	4.89	3.56
			3. How well do you think the prohibition of forced labor and child labor is observed in your country?	5.78	5.67	5.67
		▷ Autonomy of decision making in the policy of the international political economy	4. How independent do you think decision making processes of the central government is from foreign countries and/or foreign capital in your country?	5.89	5.22	4.11
	Competition	▷ Economic transparency	5. How transparent do you think the corporate operations are in your country?	4.22	4.33	3.22
		▷ Economic fairness	6. How fair do you think the competition between companies is in your country?	3.67	3.44	2.78
		▷ Government's accountability	7. How much effort do you think the government is exerting to protect and guarantee labor rights in your country?	3.56	4.11	3.00
		▷ Corporate accountability	8. How well do you think private companies protect/guarantee labor rights in your country?	3.44	3.67	3.00

Table 8. (continued)

		Attribute	Indicator / Question	2011	2012	2013	
Principles	Pluralization	▷ Economic monopoly	9. How much do you think the economy is dominated by certain groups in your country?	3.13	2.78	1.78	
		▷ Regional inequality	10. How serious do you think the economic disparities/ inequality are between regions in your country?	4.67	3.22	2.56	
		▷ Inequality of income	11. How serious do you think the income disparity is in your country?	4.22	2.11	1.89	
		▷ Inequality of asset	12. How serious do you think the asset disparity is in your country?	3.00	1.89	1.22	
		▷ Inequality of employment	13. How serious do you think discrimination is in the labor market in your country?	3.78	2.89	2.11	
	Equalization	▷ The social security system	14. How well do you think support systems for the poor are working in your country?	4.56	4.22	4.22	
			15. How well do you think the social insurance programs are operated in your country?	4.89	5.22	4.33	
		Solidarity	▷ The activity of trade unions	16. How well-organized do you think labor unions are in your country?	3.11	3.33	3.11
				17. How much influence do you think labor unions have on the policies of the central government in your country?	4.00	3.67	3.11
				18. How much do you think labor unions participate in the management process in your country?	2.11	2.11	2.00
	▷ Corporate watch	19. How well do you think public monitoring is carried out on the corporate activities in your country?	3.44	3.89	3.67		
	▷ Awareness of reducing inequality	20. How enthusiastic do you think the general public is about improving the economic inequality in your country?	3.88	3.78	4.11		

The rest of the indicators of equalization have remained either stagnant (Q14) or have declined. The decline in the index of pluralization reflects the increasing monopolization of the economy and the polarization of the rich and the poor. The efforts to mitigate or correct these problems at a systematic level have not borne much fruit so far; such was reflected in the drop in solidarity.

The rest of the indicators of equalization have remained either stagnant (Q14) or have declined. The decline in the index of pluralization reflects the increasing monopolization of the economy and the polarization of the rich and the poor. The efforts to mitigate or correct these problems at a systematic level have not borne much fruit so far; such was reflected in the drop in solidarity.

Monopolization and polarization are ongoing phenomena in the Korean economy and both are problems that are unlikely to go away without conscious political efforts. Should the government decide to divert at least a little from the neoliberal movement of deregulation, it will necessarily have to interfere with the management of corporations, which, in turn, may decrease the index of liberalization, especially along the indicator of autonomy. Change in the economic domain however is slower than its counterparts in politics and civil society, and rarely produces visible results in a short period of time. It will take some time before the mounting criticisms against monopolization and polarization translate into actual legal and practical changes. This means that the downward trend in the democratization of the Korean economy is likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

Civil Society

Civil society represents the potential and strength of a given state's democracy. A high index of democracy in the civil society, notwithstanding the low indices in other domains, suggests the health and potential of the democratic enterprise in a given state.

The index of democracy in the Korean civil society read 4.30 in 2013. It is quite a low score in a 0-10 scale. The score represents dire prospects for the future of Korean democracy in general.

The index of liberalization in the Korean civil society measured 4.75, which is significantly higher than the 3.84 the index of equalization in the same field scored. This suggests that, while Korean civil society has managed to achieve relatively greater independence from the political and economic fields, the quality of democracy within civil society itself still remains in a backward state.

Table 9. Liberalization and Equalization in Korean Civil Society, 2011-2013

Year	Liberalization	Equalization	Index of Democracy
2011	5.54	4.14	4.84
2012	5.42	4.40	4.91
2013	4.75	3.84	4.30

In the civil society field, Korea scored 4.52 and 4.97, respectively, along the two subprinciples of liberalization, i.e., autonomy and competition. Pluralization, a subprinciple of equalization, scored 3.83, while the other subprinciple, solidarity, scored 3.85. Table 10 shows a clear pattern of regression in the democracy of Korean civil society, especially along the indicators of liberalization over the last three years.

Table 10. Autonomy, Competition, Pluralization, and Solidarity in Korean Civil Society, 2011-2013

Year	Autonomy	Competition	Pluralization	Solidarity
2011	5.30	5.78	4.69	3.59
2012	4.94	5.89	4.50	4.30
2013	4.52	4.97	3.83	3.85

The level of independence from political and economic influences began to decline in 2012. Basic conditions of freedom for minority groups and the marginalized deteriorated even more rapidly during that time. The state's supervision and control of the civil society reached a new height in Korean history when the Lee administration began to trail and investigate innocent civilians. Social conflicts escalated during the campaign period for the presidential election late in 2012. The continuing socioeconomic polarization has increased economic and other hardships to which the minority groups and the poor are exposed. The popularity that the slogan of "economic democratization" enjoyed among the followers of both camps during the presidential election campaign reflects the increasing economic toils that the socially vulnerable were experiencing at the time.

Another key feature to be noted is the consistent decline in the level of citizens' tolerance of one another, probably indicating the increasing level of social conflicts within civil society before and after the last presidential election. Politics of hatred became a major concern around the time of the election, while an online community for humor known as Ilbe, which popular among supporters of extreme right-wing politics, has raised a sharp controversy. The increasing popularity that the causes of exclusion and hatred enjoy in Korean political discourses suggests an erosion of tolerance that is integral to democracy.

Competition is the indicator along which the biggest margin of fall between 2012 and 2013 was noted. Competition in the civil society context is a principle that assesses the capability and democratic nature of voluntary associations. Korea's score along this plane dropped by 0.92 between 2012 and 2013. The decline was prominent in the area of the influence and diversity of voluntary associations. The finding matches those of other studies pointing toward the declining influence of civil activism in Korea. The decline, in turn, suggests that civil activism has failed to accommodate the diverse demands raised in Korean civil society.

Equalization has always lagged behind liberalization since the first survey conducted in 2011. The tendency continues into 2013. Korea's score for pluralization, in particular, maintains its steady downturn. In the meantime, Korea's score of solidarity in 2013 dipped slightly from the score measured in 2012 but is still higher than the score from 2011. The consistent decline in the score on pluralization indicates that the inequality in the distribution of power and resources across the Korean civil society continues to deteriorate.

The indicator of autonomy that received the lowest score in 2013 is tolerance (Q7, 3.33). This is due to the escalating ideological tension and conflict in the Korean society that was fuelled by the last presidential election. The indicator that received the highest score was the opportunity of education (Q6, 6.0), suggesting the increasing affluence of the Korean society in general. Importantly, of the attributes making up autonomy in the civil society, the satisfaction of basic needs, including education, received a relatively high score, while the satisfaction of the basic needs of the weak and the vulnerable (Q5) received a low score. This suggests that the Korean civil society still fails to provide adequate support and care for minority groups and the marginalized.

Table 11. Index of Democracy in Korean Civil Society, 2011-2013

		Attribute	Question / Indicator	2011	2012	2013	
Principles	Liberalization	▷ Autonomy of society from state intervention	1. How free do you think citizens' social activities are from government interference in your country?	4.33	5.00	4.67	
			2. How much influence do you think government organizations have on society in your country?	6.11	4.11	4.00	
		▷ Autonomy of society from the market	3. How much do you think private companies have influence on society in your country?	6.00	3.56	4.22	
		Autonomy (basic needs and basic human development level)	▷ Autonomy of social member	4. How much do you think citizens' basic needs are met in your country?	5.67	5.89	5.67
			5. Aside from the basic needs stated in question no. 4, how much do you think special care is provided for vulnerable people or minorities, such as children, women, people with disabilities, and immigrants in your country?	4.11	4.67	3.78	
			6. How much do you think citizens are provided with education opportunities in your country?	5.78	6.67	6.00	
		▷ Tolerance	7. How much do you think citizens respect different cultures, religions, languages, races, nations, and ideas in your country?	5.11	4.67	3.33	
	Competition	▷ Capability of voluntary association	8. How much influence do you think NGOs have on society in your country?	5.56	5.33	4.44	
		▷ Public good of voluntary association	9. How well do you think NGOs represent public interest in your country?	6.56	6.56	6.00	
		▷ Transparency of voluntary association	10. Do you think NGOs are democratically operating in your country?	5.22	6.11	5.22	
		▷ Diversity of voluntary associations	11. Do you think NGOs well represent different values and demands of society in your country?	5.78	5.56	4.22	

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Table 11. (*continued*)

		Attribute	Question / Indicator	2011	2012	2013	
Principles	Pluralization	▷ Inequality of public spheres	12. Do you think the media is fair and just in your country?	2.75	3.78	2.56	
		▷ Inequality of culture and information	13. How wide do you think the information gap between citizens is in your country?	7.22	4.33	4.00	
		▷ Inequality of interest relations	14. Do you think citizens have equal access to cultural facilities and activities in your country?	4.67	5.11	4.89	
		▷ Inequality of power	15. How equally do you think power is distributed among people in your country?	4.11	4.78	3.89	
	Equalization	▷ Institutional guarantee of diversity and affirmative actions	16. Do you think affirmative actions are well established and operated in your country?	3.11	3.89	3.00	
		Solidarity	▷ Participation and support of social groups	17. How actively do you think citizens are participating in NGO activities in your country?	3.89	4.00	3.89
			▷ Governance of the state and civil society	18. How much influence do you think NGOs have on government's policy making processes in your country?	3.78	5.00	4.67

The indicator of competition that received the highest score was the public nature of voluntary associations (Q9), while the indicator that received the lowest score was diversity (Q11). This result reflects the contrast between the potential and the actual problems of civil activism in general in Korea. While Koreans generally view the public contributions of civil activism in a favorable light, they also think of civil activism as too centralized and not sufficiently representative of Korean society. Of the sub-indicators of pluralization, access to culture received a score lower than 5.0, but the survey respondents commented that Korean culture still maintained a relative equality of opportunity. The inequality of fora for public debates, however, had the lowest score, with 2.56 (Q12). The dominance of conservative newspapers in the press, the control of the airwaves by the government, and the emergence of extremely conservative cable general programming channels seem to have led to this perception.

Of the indicators of solidarity, the governance of the state and the civil society received the highest score, which is nonetheless lower than 5.0 (Q18). The presence of diversity-protecting systems and affirmative actions was the indicator that received the lowest score (Q16, 3.00). The score is despairingly low even without comparing it to the scores under other indicators, attesting to the absence of solidarity and systems according respect and care to minority groups and the marginalized.

Conclusion: Characteristics and the Future of Korean Democracy

The survey of democracy in 2013 reveals a clear pattern of decline in Korean democracy, as apparent in the increasing erosion of the basic rights to liberty and equality. The steady pattern of decline in liberalization, in particular, presents grim prospects for Korean democracy. Restrictions on civil liberties necessarily undermine participation and accountability, which are the key values of democracy. Robert Dahl has defined democracy as essentially a system of rights. Effective participation in such a system, he argues, crucially depends on citizens' rights to participate in solving collective problems by expressing and debating their opinions (Dahl 1998).

The deterioration of socioeconomic inequality darkens the future of Korean democracy even further as it tends to distort the political equality that even minimal procedural democracies aspire to achieve. The distortion in political representation will make it easier for certain groups or classes of people to mobilize their resources and monopolize access to power. Worsening socioeconomic inequality, in turn, will undermine people's trust in the democratic system, and may even lead to the collapse of the system by fuelling people's desire for its destruction and displacement by a political arrangement of another sort.

Democracy is a political arrangement that revolves around the principles of liberty and equality. In a democracy, free and equal citizens participate in procedures allocating social, economic, and political resources and outcomes, and guarantee the rule of people by allowing them to continue to participate in decision-making processes. The last five years and a half of conservative administrations, however, present a serious setback to Korean democracy by increasingly restricting civil liberties. Democracy still remains in a restricted and partial sense in Korea as citizens' participation in political decision-making continues to be curtailed and their access to democratic processes blocked.

Note

1. On our definitions of “principle,” “subprinciple,” “attribute,” and “indicator,” as well as the rest of the ADI terminology, see CADI (2012).
2. Data taken from <http://en.rsf.org/press-freedom-index>.

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