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**The Birth of Social Election  
in South Korea, 2010-2012**

*By Dukjin Chang and Young Bae*  
2012

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## *Abstract*

By getting connected with each other again, social media users seem to have more incentive to vote because approval by friends becomes an integral part of benefits from voting. In South Korea this phenomenon came at the dusk of the 1987 regime, which is a conservative representation system where younger, less wealthy, and progressive voters are under-represented and, thus, have little incentive to vote. Voter turnout going up again because of social media after twenty five years of going down has reversed a series of election outcomes since 2010. We pay special attention to Twitter which has played most of the political role for the past two years. The election law, last amended when there was no such thing as social media, failed to catch up with the political realities. Is democracy after Twitter going to be qualitatively different from the 1987 regime (i.e., democracy after democratization)? The reason to believe in the affirmative is that it solves at least partially the political representation problem inherent in the old system. The reason to remain pessimistic is that the offline party organizations, even democratic ones, tend to move in their vested interest rather than incorporating the new political energy accumulated in the social networks.

# The Birth of the 1987 Regime

In order to understand the relationship between new media and politics in the present-day Korea, it is instrumental to understand the fundamentals of the so-called 1987 regime. The period prior to 1987, especially 1961 through 1986, had been characterized by fast economic growth on the brighter side and military dictatorship on its flipside. Korean economy was barely above the subsistence level in 1961 when Park Chung Hee came to power by a military *coup* with its per capita GDP slightly over US \$60, close to Kenya and much below the Philippines. Park's eighteen year rule was characterized by export-led fast growth, sometimes dubbed "the Miracle on River Han." On the political arena, however, he was a cold-blooded dictator, especially after the October Self-Coup in 1972 by which he amended the Constitution to allow himself to stay in the President's position for his lifetime. Park was assassinated on 26 October 1979 by one of his loyal men Kim Jae Kyu, the head of KCIA, during an informal dinner. Although Park Chung Hee was gone, the military dictatorship was prolonged once again because another military general, Chun Doo Hwan, became the new President of Korea in 1981 after he massacred thousands of innocent civilians to suppress Gwangju Democratization Movement in May 1980. The Korean economy kept growing during the seven years of Chun's rule due to the returns that began to be realized to the massive investment in HCI (Heavy and Chemical Industries) since 1972<sup>1</sup> and also to the three-lows<sup>2</sup> that characterized the world economy for most of the 1980s.

The year 1987 began with the revelation of the news that a college student died by torture in a police department. Park Jong Chul, a student at Seoul National University, was arrested by the police and demanded to disclose the whereabouts of another student activist, which he refused. One million citizens gathered on his funeral day to mourn and protest against Chun Doo

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1 The investment in HCI such as the chemicals, steel mill, and autos was literally massive. One characteristic of HCI is the long digestion period, which means it takes a long time – usually more than ten years – from the initial investment to the return. Because Park began the HCI investment in 1972 and was assassinated in 1979, it is realistic to think that Chun Doo Hwan benefited from Park's investment. There are abundant literatures on Korea's HCI investment. See Frieden (1981), Johnson (1987), Kim (1997), Saxonhouse (1983), Wade (1990), and Woo (1991).

2 Three lows are low oil price, low exchange rate, and low interest rate.



Hwan's brutal dictatorship. Demands for democracy converged to direct election. Since the October Self-Coup of 1972 an indirect election system was installed where only the delegates – often appointed by the current president – cast vote for the next president. Taking advantage of this indirect election rule, Chun Doo Hwan planned to hand over his position to his best friend Rho Tae Woo, in order to protect himself after his term. In June 1987, Lee Han Yeol, another college student at Yonsei University, died during a protest, shot in his head by a tear gas shell. Another death of an innocent young student triggered much bigger anger and, accordingly, bigger protest among the citizens. Rho Tae Woo, who was already the presidential candidate of the incumbent Democratic Justice Party, realized that he could no longer totally ignore the citizens' demand for democracy. On 29 June 1987 he announced the so-called 6.29 Declaration, in which he accepted direct election.

Because the indirect election was stipulated in the Constitution, it had to be amended before the upcoming presidential election in December 1987. The Constitution was amended through a national referendum on 27 October in the same year. On 29 November 1987, another unpredicted event unfolded. The Korean Air 858 aircraft was bombed during flight, which took away the lives of all 115 passengers. Two suspects were instantly arrested and known to be terrorists dispatched by North Korea. Kim Seung Il, one of the two suspects, killed himself during interrogation. Kim Hyun Hee, the other suspect, was transferred into Korea and, broadcast live on TV, on 15 December which happened to be the day before the presidential election.<sup>3</sup> Given the intense military tension between North and South and the painful memory of the Korean War, it alerted people with the importance of national defense, which obviously helped Rho Tae Woo who was a former military general. Rho won the presidential election on the next day, gaining 36.6 percent of effective votes. Although the election result was not different from Chun Doo Hwan's original plan to have his friend Rho as his successor, the 1987 presidential election has an important meaning in the modern political history of Korea because it was the first presidential election since Park Chung Hee's 1961 coup in which a new president was elected without military intervention. Also, the *Yushin Constitution* which was the result of Park's 1972 Self-Coup was amended and the citizens were given back their basic political rights to elect their president with their own votes.

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3 Because of this coincidence, there have been rumors that the bombing of Korean Air 858 was self-fabricated. So far the evidence generally suggests that they were in fact North Korean terrorists. However, in a self-investigation in 2007 the National Security Service (formerly KCIA) concluded that, although it had not been self-fabricated, it was also true that NSS had attempted to take the most advantage of the bombing to make the situation favorable to Democratic Justice Party. See National Intelligence Service (2007).

Although Rho Tae Woo won the presidential election in 1987, his Democratic Justice Party failed to win the majority in the general election in the next year, creating a political atmosphere unfavorable to the new president. Rho Tae Woo started under-the-table negotiations with two of the so-called Three Kims to change the political circumstances. Three Kims refer to three most prominent opposition leaders who happened to have the same last name, Kim. Kim Dae Jung and Kim Young Sam had been long-time democratization movement leaders, with regional political base in the Southwest (Jolla Province) and Southeast (Kyongnam Province), respectively. In their long-time commitment to democratization movement, they cooperated sometimes and competed some other times. Both ran in the 1987 presidential election, Kim Dae Jung gaining 27.0 percent and Kim Young Sam 28.0 percent, providing a *tertius gaudens* victory for Rho Tae Woo. Kim Jong Pil came from a different political background. He helped Park Chung Hee in his 1961 military *coup*. Married to Park's niece, he also had a family tie to Park Chung Hee. During the 18-year rule by Park, Kim Jong Pil was often regarded as the 'second man' but was at the same time also checked by Park as a potential rival. He formed New Democratic Republican Party in 1987. Although he could never be considered a democratization leader, he could successfully position himself as the new political leader of the central region (Chungchong Province) which was his hometown.

Rho Tae Woo's under-the-table negotiations finally saw a success in January 1990 when the 'Three-Party Merger' among Rho's Democratic Justice Party, Kim Young Sam's Unified Democratic Party, and Kim Jong Pil's New Democratic Republican Party was announced. If the Constitutional amendment in 1987 was the beginning of the formation of the 1987 regime, Three Party Merger could properly be named the completion of it. In an important sense, the presidential election of 1987 was the *founding election* which gave birth to the 1987 regime, which defined Korean politics for the upcoming 25, or more, years. One important characteristic of the 1987 regime lies in its conservativeness in its political representation. It was formed by a merger among political forces representing cold-war politics (Democratic Justice Party), regionalism (New Democratic Republican Party), and reformist faction of the democratization movement (Unified Democratic Party). In fact, the official name of the Three Party Merger used by Rho and the two Kims was 'Grand Conservative Alliance.' The newly formed party named itself as Democratic Liberal Party. It later changed its name a few more times to New Korea Party (1995), Hannara Party (1997), and Saenuri Party (2012).

Although it is enough to discuss in detail the period 1987 through 1990 for the

purpose of introducing readers to the conservative nature of the 1987 regime in Korea, one question still remains: *why did the two liberal governments by Kim Dae Jung (1997-2002) and Roh Moo Hyun (2002-2007) fail to recover the balance?* Kim Dae Jung's victory in the presidential election came hand in hand with Korea's sudden fall into the Asian Economic Crisis of 1997/98. The crisis came all of a sudden and with such huge magnitude that Kim Dae Jung had to step in as if he had been an Acting President even before his inauguration in February 1998. His term began with an urgent need to comply with the IMF's bailout conditions and put the country back into its usual economic track. Korea 'graduated' from the IMF bailout program in two years, which was the fastest among the crisis-ridden countries. It may not have been possible if someone else had been elected in the 1987 election because Kim Dae Jung could rely on the long-accumulated trust on him from the civil society and labor in drawing agreements and consensus among different interest groups. In this process, however, he had to accept in a hastened manner much of neoliberal practices without enough time to examine their impact on Korean society. Although he was a much-respected democratic leader in the political arena, he had to become an evangelist of neoliberalism on the economic side.

Roh Moo Hyun's political background was much different from his predecessors in the Blue House. Unlike his predecessors, he was from neither elite schools, nor wealthy family, nor regional background. In a country where regionalism had been a huge factor in politics, he repeatedly volunteered to run, only to fail, in the Southeast with recommendation by Democratic Party, a party strongly favored in the Southwest and strongly disfavored in the Southeast. In a sense, he was in the best position to pursue political reform because he did not have political debts to any school ties, wealthy capitalists, or a certain region. Unfortunately for him, however, the *Four Major Reform Bills* largely failed because of the fierce opposition by the Hannara Party during the first and second year of his tenure. Once his political reform lost momentum, what remained was the economy, which was not really something he could do best. Hannara Party and the conservative mass media criticized him every day for his inability at economic performance. Ironically, however, the economic performance during his term turns out largely better than anyone else could have done. In an effort to escape from the political deadlock he needed to adopt growth-oriented economic policies. In addition to the criticisms coming from the conservatives, he was also criticized by the progressives for "turning right with a left-turn signal on."

# Democracy after Democratization

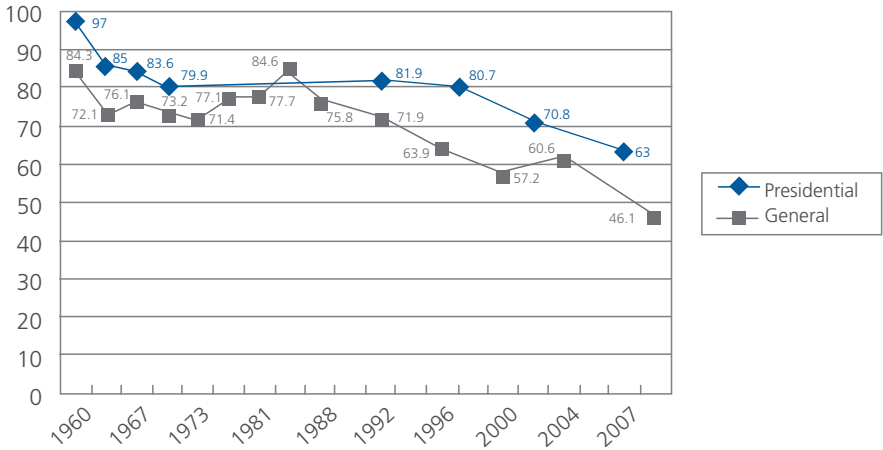
Formal, or procedural, democracy in Korea has its origin in 1987. There is no denying that the amendment of the Constitution gave back the basic political rights to the hands of the voters. Korean democracy has also made some significant progress since then. One important progress is that it is now unthinkable that the military interrupts the constitutional order or a military general becomes the president through a *coup d'état*. These changes seem irreversible. Despite the progress, many experts have worried about the *qualitative* aspect of Korean democracy. When it comes to the *consolidation of democracy*, many agree that the quality of democracy after democratization cannot be safely said to be better than before. Choi Jang Jip is the best-known scholar in articulating this thesis.<sup>4</sup> He begins his argument by paying attention to the 'conservative' nature of the 1987 regime. Korea's institutional politics formed by the 'Grand Conservative Alliance' is destined to represent the conservative, but not the progressive, groups of the electorate. Choi calls this phenomenon the 'conservative monopoly' of Korean politics.

Those who feel that they are not properly represented by this conservative monopoly have little incentive to spend their time and energy in politics, nurturing political apathy. Political apathy is most frequently expressed by the choice not to vote. Seeing the same phenomenon from the opposite end, i.e., the elected representative's point of view, they also have little incentive to represent voters who do not vote. If they represent voters who do vote, politicians' efforts will be repaid by votes in the next election. If they represent voters who do not vote, they are unlikely to have a chance to be repaid. This incentive structure reinforces conservative monopoly, completing the vicious circle.

Figure 1 demonstrates voter turnout for both presidential and general elections for the period 1961 through 2008. Voter turnout in the 1960s and 1970s remained above 80 percent for presidential elections and above 70 percent for general elections. Recall that Korea's procedural democratization began in 1987. However, it is after 1987 that voter turnout for both kinds of

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4 Unfortunately, English translation of Choi's famous work is not yet available. See Im (2007) for a brief summary of Choi and related arguments.



**Figure 1.** Voter Turnout in Korea: Presidential and General Elections, 1961-2008  
 Source: National Election Commission. Data compiled by the author.

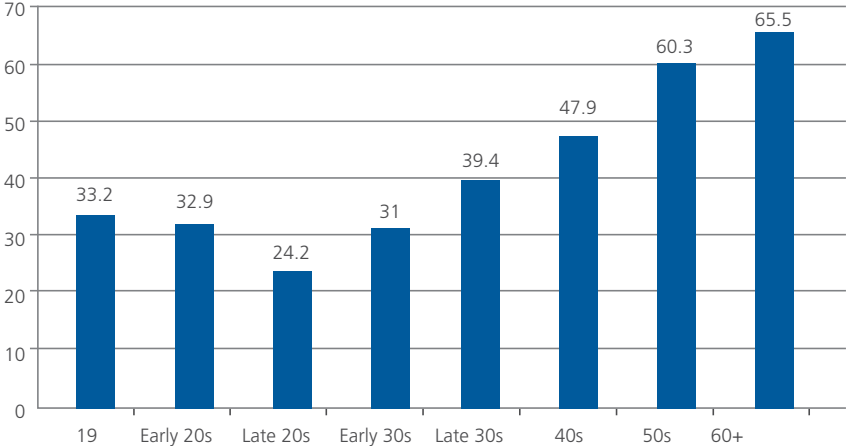
elections begins to drop. Although it may seem ironical that voter turnout drops after democratization, it is predicted by the problems of the democracy after democratization as proposed by Choi. For the presidential election, the lowest voter turnout was 63 percent in the latest election in 2007. For the general election, it went down as low as 46.1 percent in 2008. This very low voter turnout creates various problems in Korean politics. One such problem is political uncertainty.

Take the latest presidential election in 2007 as an example. Presidential elections are usually very close games because, no matter how many candidates join the race, they eventually become a game between the dominant two. However, the 2007 presidential election was an exceptional case because Lee Myung Bak, the conservative Hannara Party candidate, won a landslide victory with a gap of more than five million votes. It was the largest gap in the history of presidential elections in Korea. One can easily guess that this must have given the new president with great confidence. Lee Myung Bak was officially inaugurated on 25 February 2008 and paid an official visit to the United States one and a half months later in April. He was warmly welcomed by the U.S. President George Bush and was invited to Camp David. As is well known, it is of special significance for a foreign country leader to get invited to Camp David because it often implies that the foreign country is an important counterpart to the U.S. or the invited leader is a close friend of the U.S. President. Lee Myung Bak was the first Korean President who ever got invited to Camp David, adding

even more confidence to the new president. However, on the same day he arrived at Camp David, the number of Koreans who signed an online petition on Daum Communications, Korea's largest portal site, for the impeachment of Lee reached one million. At Camp David Lee signed an agreement on the import of U.S. beef, which caused months-long candlelight protests in Seoul. The daily number of participants in these candlelight protests reached one million at its peak. Daily polls show that the support rate of the new president had been around 65 percent when the candlelight protests started in early May but dropped to as low as 13 percent in mid-June. How is it possible for a new president who won the election with the largest gap in history becomes a target of an impeachment petition by more than one million people in less than two months after his inauguration and finally has to see his support rate shrink to less than one fourth in another one and a half months? The roller-coaster ride of popularity cannot be understood without considering the low voter turnout. Although Lee Myung Bak won the election with the largest gap, this election also saw the lowest voter turnout with 63 percent. When the effective votes are used as the denominator, it is true that he won the highest support in the election. When the whole electorate, rather than effective votes, is put in the denominator, Lee becomes the president with the lowest support in history. Because the non-voters did not vote, there is no way to figure out what they have in mind in terms of politics. As is clear in this example, the low voter turnout poses the problem of fundamental uncertainty in Korean politics.

Yet another thing that has to be closely inspected is the asymmetry of political representation. As is the case in any other countries, Korean politics is not so simple as to be easily characterized by conservative-progressive dichotomy. Although there can be many different lines of political alignments, let us take generation and class as examples. Looking back at the modern history of Korea, the country had to suffer from the Japanese Colonial Rule from 1910 to 1945, followed by the Korean War from 1950 to 1953. To older people who experienced the colonial period and the war, having an independent and strong country may be of utmost importance. To many of them, Park Chung Hee is the leader who accomplished exactly this. When Park first became President, Korea was one of the poorer countries in the world. When he was assassinated eighteen years later, Korea was beginning to export autos to foreign markets. To their mind democracy is something good if you have it but can be postponed if it undermines economic growth or national defense. The military tension with North Korea amplified this mindset even more. To younger generations who experienced neither colonialism nor the war, democracy is of much more importance in its own right. This suggests that

older people tend to be more conservative politically and, thus, may feel that they are better represented than their younger counterparts. In an extension of the same logic, wealthier people will find themselves better represented than their poorer counterparts.



**Figure 2.** Voter Turnout by Generation, 2008 General Election  
Source: National Election Commission (2009).

Consider Figure 2 which shows voter turnout by generation in the 2008 general election which saw the record-low turnout of 46.1 percent. Although the average voter turnout was 46.1 percent in this election, there is a dramatic difference by generation. Older voters with the age of 60 and above voted 65.5 percent. Voter turnout goes down as the voters become younger. People in their late 20s voted only 24.2 percent – a 41.3 percent difference from the oldest segment of voters. If Figure 1 shows the general problems of political representation in the democracy after democratization, Figure 2 shows the dramatic asymmetry in their representation. Since the National Election Commission of Korea only publishes turnout data by generation, we have to rely on subjective responses in surveys to estimate the turnout difference between class, ideology, or other variables. Although voter turnout itself may vary somewhat across different surveys, the difference between classes and ideological groups is quite stable around twenty percent: wealthier and conservative voters vote around twenty percent more than their poorer and progressive counterparts.

# Is Voting Rational or Irrational?

In studies of voting in the tradition of Anthony Downs, voting is simply irrational. For a rational actor, voting is irrational because the benefit from voting is almost always smaller than its cost. The benefit from voting can be having one's preferred candidate elected, having one's preferred policy implemented, or simply contributing to the reproduction of the public good called democracy. However, it is almost always true that the possibility of her vote playing this intended role is infinitesimally small and converges to zero because of the large number of the electorate. On the contrary, the cost of voting, no matter how small, is always a positive value. Comparing cost and benefit of voting, it is always rational not to vote. Some may argue that the cost of voting is also negligibly small and, thus, may not count. But there is systematic evidence that varying costs of voting have predictable and significant effects on voting such as turnout going down on rainy days due to heightened costs associated with going to the polling place (Barry 1978).

This argument may sound universally applicable regardless of the societal context. The only way to oppose to this argument may seem to oppose to the view that people act rationally. However, there can be a more powerful criticism, i.e., to argue that the conclusion that voting is irrational depends on the societal context. In a closer examination, it is revealed that the Downsian argument implicitly relies on the assumption that decisions are made by isolated individuals without consulting each other. What would have happened if the individuals were *connected*, rather than *isolated*, and *consult* each other when it comes to the decision whether or not to vote?

Coleman compares the two situations in his modern classic *Foundations of Social Theory* (1990). Consider the following.

- c: cost of voting
- b: benefit from the election's having the preferred outcome
- p: subjective probability for the preferred outcome to occur if s/he does not vote
- $p + \Delta p$ : subjective probability for the preferred outcome to occur if s/he does vote
- $b(p + \Delta p) - c$ : expected return if s/he participates
- bp: expected return if s/he does not participate



In this formulation with decision-making by isolated individuals assumed, a rational voter will participate only if  $b(p + \Delta p) - c > bp$ , or  $b \Delta p > c$ , which in most cases would not be satisfied. However, Coleman experiments with a situation where individuals are connected, rather than isolated. According to Coleman, "if voting is highly approved by a person's friends and not voting is disapproved of, the outcome of the election does not have to be of interest to the person in order for him to vote, nor does he have to believe that his vote will affect the outcome" (1990: 290).

$b^*$ : psychic benefits s/he experiences from approval

$c^*$ : costs s/he experiences from disapproval

$b(p + \Delta p) - c + b^*$ : expected return from voting

$bp - c^*$ : expected return from not voting

In this modified situation, a rational voter will participate if  $b\Delta p + b^* + c^* > c$ , which can be fulfilled even if  $\Delta p = 0$ .

The above situation where voters are connected and voting is highly approved by a person's friends is exactly the one brought by Twitter in the context of Korean politics at the dusk of the 1987 regime. For about a quarter century since 1987 there has been the problem of inadequate representation in Korea's democracy after democratization. Moreover, there also has been the asymmetry of representation because younger, less wealthy, and progressive voters feel that they are unrepresented and, thus, choose not to vote. However, note that these are the people – especially the younger generation – who use Twitter much more and, thus, are much better connected. Combined with Coleman's explanation, this suggests the possibility that voter turnout may go up especially more among younger voters who use Twitter.

One interesting and predictable phenomenon was the spread of encouragement on Twitter to vote. Since Twitter became popular among Koreans, it is repeatedly observed that Twitter users begin political discussions and set the agenda much ahead of the election – something that is unprecedented in the history of Korean elections. As the Election Day nears, the number of tweets encouraging voting increases exponentially. On Election Day, many Twitter users play with the so-called *photo evidence*.

Photo evidence is a photo of oneself taken in front of the polling place and uploaded on Twitter. Because the election law stipulates that photos cannot be taken inside the polling place, these photos are taken in front of it. This is

possible thanks to the very widespread use of smart phones with a camera and instant access to the Internet. This photo becomes powerful evidence that the user actually voted and gets retweeted on Twitter usually with nice comments, creating a situation where “voting is highly approved by a person’s friends.” Playing with photo evidence was first suggested by Lim Sang Ok, a printmaking artist, in the local election of 2010. A few days prior to the election Lim wrote on Twitter that he would donate 1,000 copies of his artwork to those randomly chosen among Twitter users who vote, take a photo and upload it on Twitter. This proposal was sensationally welcomed and triggered similar proposals by others. Writers volunteered to donate signed copies of their books. Actors and actresses volunteered to invite people to their acts. Some celebrities suggested that they would give a hug. A hospital owner even suggested that he would invite ten people for comprehensive medical examination at his hospital.<sup>5</sup>

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5 There is ample evidence that playing with photo evidence actually affects voting behavior. In our survey of 2,000 Twitter users, people who were involved in photo evidence report significantly higher willingness to vote. They not only vote more, but they vote against the conservative party. What is even more interesting is the contamination effect. Not only those who actually uploaded photo evidence, but also those who retweeted other people’s photo evidence predominantly answer that they would never vote for the conservative Saenuri Party (65.4 percent and 65.7 percent, respectively). Contamination does not stop there. People who have seen someone else’s retweets of photo evidence very strongly answer that they would never vote for Saenuri Party (62.6 percent). The figure drops significantly to 51.8 percent if the respondent has never seen photo evidence uploaded or retweeted. It goes down even lower to 43.3 percent if the respondent did not know what photo evidence was.

# The Birth of Social Election and Reversal of Election Outcomes

The interplay between the characteristics of the 1987 regime and the fact that people are now connected via social media such as Twitter significantly transformed the nature of elections in South Korea. We name this new type of election *social election*<sup>6</sup> and define it as follows.

A social election is an election where more than usual voters, whose political identities are known rather than anonymous, and, who are connected with each other rather than isolated, turn out.

In this new type of elections voter turnout usually goes up due to the approval by friends and accompanying psychic income as explained above. Although Twitter users may choose not to disclose their real names and thus remain anonymous, their political identities are known to a significant degree from the tweets they write.<sup>7</sup>

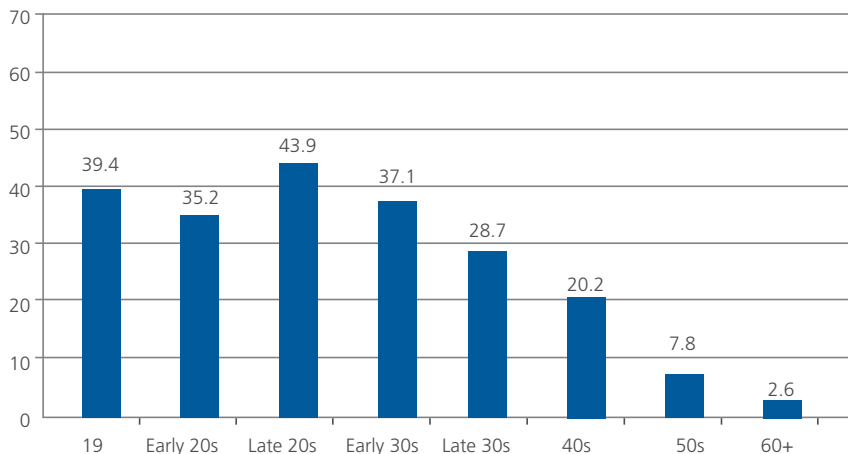
Note that increasing voter turnout has an extremely important political significance in the context of the 1987 regime. In addition to the general representation problem, the 1987 regime has been marred by the asymmetry of representation whereby older, wealthier, and conservative voters are over-represented with their younger, less wealthy, and progressive counterparts being under-represented. Once the voter turnout begins to go up, it is destined to go up disproportionately more from those who have not voted so far. Compare Figure 3 to Figure 2.

It is already explained that voter turnout goes up in a social election. However, how much will it go up? Obviously, it will not go up as high as 100 percent. One realistic guess is that it will go up to the average turnout of countries comparable to Korea. We chose Turkey (84.2 percent), Italy (80.5 percent), Spain (76 percent), Greece (70.9 percent), Japan (69.3 percent), Portugal

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6 The term social election was first coined by the first author, Dukjin Chang, of this paper to describe the June 2 local election in 2010, and is now widely used by the media.

7 This is even possible for large-scale data. We collect tweets from millions of Korean Twitter users and analyze them with text-mining techniques. Compared with survey answers about which party they voted for in the latest election, the predictability of voting from their tweets is usually quite high. It is especially accurate if one wants to predict which party the respondent will never vote for.



**Figure 3.** Room for Increase of Voter Turnout by Generation

(58.9 percent), and Taiwan (58.5 percent). The first six countries were selected because, of the OECD countries, these are the ones that repeatedly turn out to be similar to Korea in cluster analyses with varying economic and social indicators. Although Taiwan is not an OECD member, we decided to include Taiwan because it is most frequently compared to Korea in development literature. The percentage in the parenthesis following a country name shows the voter turnout in the latest general election in that country. The average voter turnout of these countries is 68.1 percent. Once the voter turnout begins to go up in Korea, it is realistic to assume that it may go up as high as 68.1 percent, if not 100 percent.

Then there comes the interesting question, where the increase in voter turnout will come from. Simple math will give the answer. Subtracting the turnout in the latest election from 68.1 percent, one can estimate how much room each group of voters has for the increase. Figure 3 gives these rooms by generation. It is ironic that the oldest group of voters – 60 years of age and above – has only 2.6 percent of room for increase because of the fact that they have voted disproportionately more in the past elections. On the contrary, voters in their late 20s have a large room of 43.9 percent. The size of this room shows how much they must have been under-represented in the past because they did not vote. However, when the voter turnout begins to go up, the same figure gives an approximation of how much power they can have in deciding the election outcomes.

Since the emergence of social election for the first time in the local election of June 2010, South Korea has experienced five such elections. In all these five elections, the outcomes were different – sometimes dramatically – from the usual predictions based on voter surveys. In the June local election of 2010, the biggest event was the election of the Mayor of Seoul. In a country where everything is highly concentrated in the capital city including one fourth of the population, the Mayor of Seoul has a very important political presence. Oh Se Hoon, the incumbent mayor and the conservative Hannara Party candidate, was running for his second term. Although very young in his mid 40s, he was regarded as one of the potential candidates in the Presidential Election two years later in 2012. The Democratic Party candidate was Han Myung Sook. Coming from democratization movement career since her college years, she was well known but was not even close to a potential presidential candidate. Rather, she had the image of a conscientious, gentle, but not charismatic politician. Almost all experts predicted an easy victory for Oh as pre-election polls suggested. However, TV viewers could not believe their eyes when it turned out that the two candidates were extremely close. Most people expected they would be able to know the outcome before midnight at the latest, but they had to wait until six o'clock the next day morning only to learn that Oh won the election with a gap by less than 1 percent.

Another drama was written surrounding the election of the Superintendent of Education. Because superintendents of education are not allowed to have party affiliations, it is impossible to distinguish the candidates by party. In a country where competition for admission to prestigious colleges is perhaps severest in the world, education policies are hotly debated. The culture of education in Korea has been very authoritarian, often involving physical punishment of students and numerous other regulations such as mandatory school uniforms and short hair. There is also the widespread belief that providing the best possible education to children is the parents' most important responsibility, as a result of which the government is often exempted from public expenditure on education.<sup>8</sup> Without party affiliations, candidates were often distinguished as either *conservative* or *progressive*. Conservative candidates argued for the effectiveness of authoritarian method of education. Although it often implied continued physical punishment of their children, many parents were willing to accept it if it helped their children study harder and finally have a better

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8 In fact, Korea belongs to the highest group of countries in terms of educational spending and achievement. However, public expenditure on education is about one fourth of the OCED average. The remaining burden is transferred to the parents for the private tutoring of their children. It has now become an important political and policy issue.

chance of admission to prestigious universities because they believed that college diploma largely determines the rest of one's life in Korean society.

Progressive candidates wanted to ensure the human rights of students. They wanted to prohibit any enforcement contrary to students' own will including physical punishment. They wanted to guarantee political rights to students as much as they are given to adults, such as the right to political activity on campus and the right to organize protests within schools. Also, progressive candidates argued that providing meals at school is part of mandatory education and, thus, should be free of charge. In the past, the cost of school meals had been billed to parents, which often meant that students from poor family had to endure the humiliation of being named before his or her classmates or skip lunch. Progressive candidates suggested that they would provide school meals for free. Conservative candidates argued that this was only a populist policy that would eventually deprive the country of the resources for further economic growth. Prior to the June local election of 2010, there was only one progressive Superintendent of Education, Kim Sang Gon of *Kyunggi* Province. As surveys usually showed that the majority of voters preferred conservative education policies, the only remaining question was whether Kim Sang Gon would be re-elected. As it turned out, the local election surprised everyone by electing six progressive superintendents of education. This was the first experience of social election in Korea.

The second one came in the by-election of April 27 in 2011. Of the several electoral districts where the by-election was going on, most attention was paid to two districts: *Bundang* and *Kangwon* Province. Since these two cases will be dealt with in great detail in a separate section, it suffices here to simply state that some 20-25 percent gaps in pre-election polls were reversed in these two elections.

There is some ambiguity whether or not the third one was a social election, although it obviously delineated some related characteristics. As an outcome of the June local election of 2010, Kwak No Hyun, a progressive candidate, became the Superintendent of Education of Seoul. Although the educational policies were supposed to be decided between the Superintendent of Education and the Seoul Metropolitan Council – the latter being dominated by Democratic Party also as a result of June local election – , part of the necessary budget was going to come from the city government of which Oh Se Hoon, one of the potential presidential candidates of the conservative Hannara Party, was the mayor. To borrow an expression widely used by the

media, Oh decided to become the “idol of the conservatives” by colliding with the progressive policies of Kwak. As soon as Kwak began his term, two policies were instantly at issue: declaration of the Student Human Rights Ordinance and free lunch for elementary and middle school students. Progressives agreed and conservatives opposed. Oh Se Hoon decided to focus his criticism on free lunch, perhaps because it was easier for him to criticize on the ground that it costs city budget. He argued that it would pose a huge burden on the city budget, cause tax increase, and eventually would ruin the whole country by spreading populist politics. Finally he called for a referendum on this issue and declared that he would resign if he lost. The referendum was scheduled on 24 August 2011.

One caveat was the voter turnout. According to the Referendum Law, the voter turnout has to be at least 33.3 percent to open the ballot boxes. If the voter turnout is lower than 33.3 percent, the referendum is automatically declared invalid without opening the ballot boxes. Kwak and the Democratic Party had two choices: mobilize supporters to win the ballot; or discourage voting to make the referendum invalid. They chose the second strategy. Learning from the experiences of the June local election of 2010, by this time they knew that Twitter was an effective tool for political campaigns. Numerous tweets, including those coming from Kwak himself, the Democratic Party official account, and their supporters, pleading not to vote in this ‘bad referendum’ were circulated on Twitter. On 24 August 2011, the final voter turnout was 25.7 percent. Oh resigned from the mayor’s office two days later and lost his political status as a potential presidential candidate in the 2012 election.

It is not clear whether this referendum can be safely classified as a social election. It was true that voters were connected on Twitter and their political identities were largely known. However, the message that was being circulated was “don’t vote!” rather than “vote!” In a social election, people who otherwise would not have voted would vote because of the additional psychic income coming from her friends’ approval as observed in the case of photo evidence. In the August Referendum, this mechanism could not work. It is simply impossible to prove that one did not vote in the referendum. Not uploading photo evidence is not evidence that one did not vote. Although the voter turnout was low enough to prevent the ballot boxes from being opened, turnouts in referendums are usually much lower than in elections anyway.

The fourth social election was another by-election on 24 October 2011. In this by-election, all the attention was concentrated on the election of the mayor

of Seoul. Because Oh resigned after losing the August Referendum, Seoul had to be included in the by-election districts. Na Kyong Won was nominated as the Hannara Party candidate. Graduated from Seoul National University Department of Law, she became a judge at an early age. In a country where universities are ranked by a strict hierarchy, Seoul National University has been the number one university for a long time. The Department of Law especially attracted the most talented students. Perhaps one out of ten thousand high school students was able to get admitted in this department when Na entered college in 1982. She also passed the National Bar Examination. The Bar Exam in Korea is different from the American system. Unlike American universities where law schools usually belong to the graduate school, Korea until recently did not have law schools in the American sense. Korean universities had department of law in the undergraduate system and students had to pass the National Bar Exam to obtain a license to work as a judge, prosecutor, or a lawyer. Naturally, not all law department graduates pass the exam, meaning that passing the exam is another evidence that she is smarter than the other students who failed. Although not necessarily true, there is also an implicit hierarchy even among those who passed the exam. Those who pass the exam are supposed to go through one year of training at the national Judicial Research and Training Institute where they are ranked by their performance. The best performers tend to choose positions in the court. The next best performers tend to become prosecutors. The rest tend to become lawyers. Thus, the fact that Na Kyong Won graduated from Seoul National University Department of Law, passed the National Bar Exam, and became a judge, tells a lot about her. She survived the toughest of competitions and proved herself.

Another thing that was politically significant was what was happening in the opposition parties and the civil society. On 1 September 2011, Ahn Cheol Soo, Seoul National University professor and a former CEO of AhnLab, revealed in a news interview that he was thinking of running for the mayor of Seoul. Ahn Cheol Soo is a very famous entrepreneur. Graduated from Seoul National University Medical School, he started his career as a physician. Together with the Department of Law, the Medical School at Seoul National University is every high school student's dream. A rich and comfortable life was guaranteed for him. He was quite successful as a physician and even became the youngest head of a general hospital in Korea. But he quit the medical career and started AhnLab to develop vaccine software for computer viruses. Instead of making money from his vaccine software, he distributed it for free for over twenty years, helping every computer user in Korea. In this process he gained the image of a Good Samaritan drastically different from the other greedy capitalists.



Unlike other successful entrepreneurs who stay in their companies for lifetime and try to hand down the company to their children, Ahn left AhnLab and became a university professor. It was not even that he declared to run. He just mentioned that he was thinking of running. As soon as the news spread, his support rate skyrocketed. Although he said he was thinking of the mayor of Seoul, the media began to compare him with Park Geun Hye, the indisputable presidential candidate of Hannara Party. The eldest daughter of Park Chung Hee, Park Geun Hye has long been a dominant candidate of Hannara and had the highest support rate among all potential candidates of the incumbent or opposition parties. One week after the news, the whole country was shocked at poll results showing that Ahn Cheol Soo had a higher support rate than Park Geun Hye if he runs for presidency.

In the middle of this turmoil, Park Won Soon also declared that he would run for the mayor of Seoul. Park was a well-known civil society leader. He was also a student at Seoul National University Department of Law, but was kicked out of the school by the dictatorial government of Park Chung Hee because he was an active member of student movement. After completing his mandatory military service, he enrolled at another university. He passed the National Bar Examination and became a lawyer. Unlike other lawyers who usually pursue comfortable life, he quit practicing law after several years and devoted himself to civil society movement. Later he explained that he wanted to fulfill his responsibility as the head of the family by making some money for his family before he started his civil society career. He started and successfully settled down numerous NGOs including the biggest and most influential PSPD (People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy), The Beautiful Foundation, and the Hope Institute. If both Ahn Cheol Soo and Park Won Soon run for the mayor, it would not be possible for either to win the election over Na Kyong Won. The two Good Samaritans decided to meet. In this meeting it took only twenty minutes before Ahn declared that he would yield to Park. Supporters enthusiastically praised both. Park Won Soon became the civil society candidate without party nomination.

Democratic Party was in a dilemma. Although it was the largest and most influential opposition party with the longest history in Korean politics, it was predictable that voters would support Park Won Soon more than the Democratic candidate. As a component of the 1987 regime, the Democratic Party could not be free from the responsibilities for the deficiencies of the institutional political system, either. Although it is true that many politicians of the Democratic Party fought for democracy and against authoritarianism in

the past, it is also true that they benefited from the 1987 regime. For example, they did not really want to totally eliminate regionalism, an important element of the 1987 regime, in Korean politics, because it guaranteed them minimum support no matter what they did. They did not really want to totally change the conservative nature of the 1987 regime because they were afraid of losing the 'median' voters. Even if they lost the presidential election, they could remain as the largest opposition party. Suddenly the political atmosphere changed and the most promising candidate was being nominated by the citizens outside the boundary of party politics. The Democratic Party could not even criticize Park because it would only worsen the already bad situation. Democratic Party finally gave up nominating a candidate and decided to support Park Won Soon. This episode evidences that the new politics associated with social media is not only a threat to the conservative party but also the relatively progressive Democratic Party, and also the 1987 regime as a whole. Park won the election and became the new mayor of Seoul.

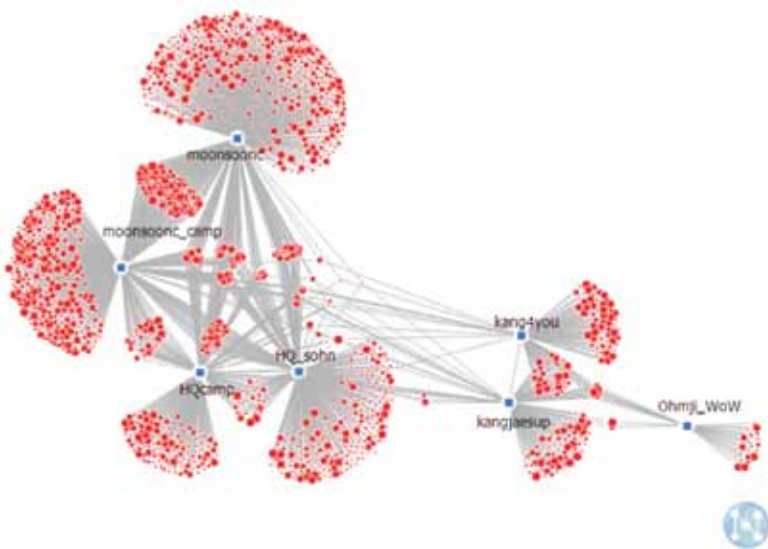
# Twitter as a Campaign Tool: *Bundang* and *Kangwon* Elections of 2011

The power of Twitter as an election campaign tool was most dramatically evidenced in the by-elections in *Bundang* and *Kangwon* in April 2011. *Bundang* is a town with an interesting political nickname: “right next to heaven.” It is an upper middle class bed town south of Seoul. Reflecting its class characteristics, conservative candidates – nominated by the Hannara Party – have never lost a single election in *Bundang* since the town became a separate electoral district. No matter who the candidate is, the Hannara nomination meant winning the election. The nickname is a combination of this fact and the Korean word for heaven. The Korean word for heaven is *chondang*. Because both *bundang* and *chondang* end with the same syllable –dang, the nickname was widely used to mean that *Bundang* is a heaven for conservative candidates.

If *Bundang* was politically conservative because of the residents’ class consciousness, *Kangwon* was so for a different reason. Adjacent to the DMZ (demilitarized zone) separating North and South Korea and covered with mountains, *Kangwon* is one of the poorer provinces. With its concentration of military camps, *Kangwon* is also an area where the military tension between North and South can be most intensely felt. If economic growth and national defense are the two major pillars of political conservatism in Korea, it can be easily understood why *Kangwon* has been politically conservative in the past elections.

Sohn Hak Kyu, Democratic Party leader at the time of the by-election and one of the potential presidential candidates for 2012, was pressured to run in *Bundang*. In the heightened political mood since the unexpected victory of the local election in the previous year, his supporters thought that he might win in *Bundang* and establish himself as the dominant opposition candidate for the 2012 presidential election. His competitors might have thought that he could be eliminated from competition if he lost in *Bundang*. For whichever reason or both, he decided to run in *Bundang*. The Hannara Party candidate was Kang Jae Sup, also a well-known politician and a former leader of the party. In pre-election polls Kang saw a wide and consistent gap over Sohn as one can expect from ‘right next to heaven.’ The largest gap polled was 20 percent.

Choi Moon Soon and Um Ki Young confronted each other in Kangwon. Both happened to have worked as reporters at Munhwa Broadcasting Company (MBC) and served as the CEO of MBC at the end of their media career. Although they may look very similar on the surface, in fact they were very different. Choi Moon Soon, the Democratic Party candidate, had been the chairman of MBC labor union before he became the CEO. Despite the fact that he later became a member of National Assembly, he was not a popularly known politician. If he walked in the street, few people would recognize him. He graduated from Kangwon National University. Although it is a decent local elite school, there can be no competition with Seoul National University in a society where diplomas decide much of one's reputation, social networks, and life trajectory. In a sharp contrast with Choi, Um Ki Young spent most of his career at MBC in the spotlight. He had been the main anchor of the most important 9 o'clock evening news for almost two decades. Every Korean knew his name and face. One might want to say that he was a celebrity. Graduated from Seoul National University, his educational background, hence his reputation and personal networks, was much better than Choi. Pre-election polls suggested that Um would win over Choi by a 25 percent gap.



**Figure 4.** Retweet Network Map during April By-Election of 2011

Figure 4 gives an interesting comparison of what was happening on Twitter. Seven Twitter accounts are captioned in Figure 4. Since we are looking at two candidates in each of two electoral districts, we have four candidates of interest. Candidates usually open a separate campaign account for an election, doubling the number of accounts that we would have to pay attention to. In Figure 4 there are seven, rather than eight, accounts marked with their IDs. This is because Um Ki Young, although he had opened a campaign account, did not write a single tweet on this account. Because Figure 4 is a retweet network map, his campaign account could not be included. In Figure 4, @moonsoonc is Choi Moon Soon's personal account and @moonsoonc\_camp is his campaign account. His competitor Um Ki Young's personal account is @Ohmji\_WoW to the lower right corner of the figure. @HQ\_Sohn and @HQcamp are Sohn Hak Kyu's personal and campaign accounts, respectively. @kangjaesup and @kang4you are Kang Jae Sup's personal and campaign accounts.

The other nodes in Figure 4 are accounts that retweet tweets from these seven accounts. By retweeting, they spread the messages from the accounts of the candidate or his campaign office. Seen more closely, these nodes are different sized, reflecting their number of followers. If a message from a candidate is retweeted by someone with ten followers, it will of course help. But what if the same message gets retweeted by someone with one million followers? There is a huge difference. Although almost indistinguishable in Figure 4, lines connecting nodes are also of different width, reflecting how many times each node has retweeted messages from a certain other node. Accounts that unilaterally receive messages from the candidate's or campaign accounts were removed from Figure 4 to make the figure readable. At the time of the April By-Election of 2011, there were about 2.8 million Twitter users in Korea. If we included all 2.8 million nodes in Figure 4, it would be covered with millions of nodes without delivering useful information. Although not seen on Figure 4, note that there are numerous other people who receive the messages via this retweet network.

Compare the number of retweeters between Democratic and Hannara candidates. Numerous people retweet, and thus spread, the words from @moonsoonc and @moonsoonc\_camp, looking like a huge mushroom in Figure 4. In contrast, there are only a handful of accounts that retweet messages from @Ohmji\_WoW. One of the most important strategies in election campaigns is of course to meet with as many people as possible to deliver the candidate's message. In Korea the candidate usually starts his or her first schedule very early in the morning at subway stations. People on their way to work are quite

busy and have little time to stop and think about the candidate. The candidate keeps bowing, tries to shake hands with the passers-by, and deliver his or her message to, as many voters as possible, which is usually ignored by busy commuters. What is happening for Choi Moon Soon in Figure 4 vividly shows that things can be quite different in social elections. Choi Moon Soon may have spent a few minutes thinking of what to tweet, and numerous other people unrelated to his campaign crew voluntarily spread his words with their own time and efforts. This hardly happened for Um Ki Young. This is what was also happening on Twitter surrounding the election of the Governor of Kangwon Province. While the traditional media was reporting that Um Ki Young was leading the election by 25 percent gap, exactly the opposite was happening on Twitter without being noticed. Although the difference is not as huge as the one between Choi and Um, similar phenomenon is also observed between Sohn Hak Kyu and Kang Jae Sup.

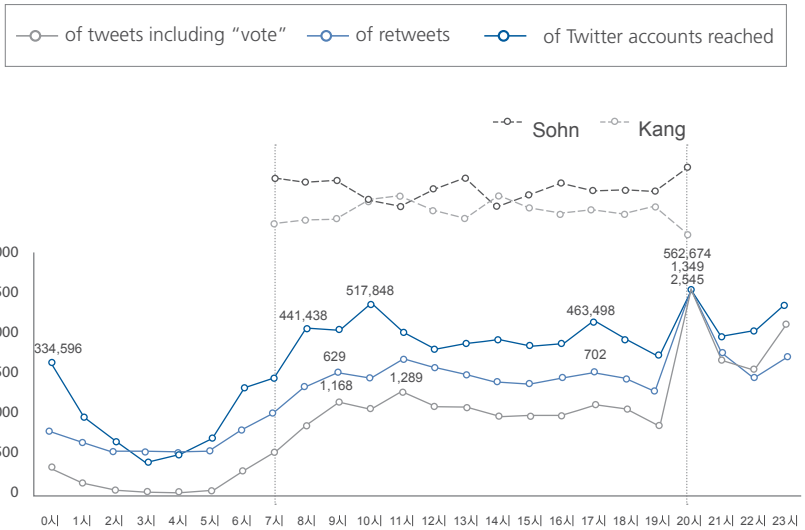
Yet another thing that is enormously important was the people who connect the two electoral districts. Note how many people connect the four accounts of Choi and Sohn. In contrast, only a few accounts connect the two accounts of Kang Jae Sup and @Ohmji\_WoW. Unlike general elections or presidential elections, by-elections can hardly be of national interest because they are usually only of local concern. Thanks to the people who connect Choi and Sohn, the April By-Election of 2011 looked like a national election to the eyes of the Democratic Party supporters. Simply reading the timeline, they could instantly find out what was going on in Kangwon and Bundang. However, this 'nationalization' of local interest did not happen for supporters of Hannara Party. To them, Bundang election was Bundang election and Kangwon election was Kangwon election. This difference loomed large when an illegal campaign was revealed in Kangwon. The election law stipulates that phone calls to voters can only be made by non-paid volunteers from within a campaign office registered at the National Election Commission. However, in the middle of the campaign period it turned out that Um Ki Young operated a secret office where 33 women hired for money made illegal phone calls. Of course this scandal hit Um Ki Young hard. However, it did not stop there. It was passed on to Bundang via the retweet network on Twitter and did a serious damage to Kang Jae Sup as well.

Rank	Twitter Account	Number of Accounts Reached
1	@moonsoonc_camp (Choi Moon Soon campaign account)	2,664,295
2	@HQcamp (Sohn Hak Kyu campaign account)	1,314,555
3	@kang4you (Kang Jae Sup campaign account)	698,775
4	@moonsoonc (Choi Moon Soon personal account)	620,163
5	@HQ_sohn (Sohn Hak Kyu personal account)	524,395
6	@Ohmji_WoW (Um Ki Young personal account)	272,836
7	@kangjaesup (Kang Jae Sup personal account)	247,174

**Table 1.** Number of Twitter Accounts Reached by Candidates through Retweet Network during April By-Election of 2011

Exactly how much difference Twitter made in terms of delivering messages can be found in Table 1. By retweets Choi Moon Soon campaign office could reach 2,664,295 unique accounts out of 2.8 million Korean Twitter users. This means that he could reach virtually every Korean Twitter user. While his competitor was reaching not only the voters in the electoral district but also every Twitter user in the whole country, Um Ki Young did not even use his campaign account, reaching zero people. Choi’s personal account could also reach 630,163, while Um’s could reach less than half. Democratic candidate for Bundang, Sohn Hak Kyu, performed about twice better than Kang Jae Sup, the Hannara Party candidate. Sohn’s campaign and personal accounts could reach 1,314,555 and 524,395 accounts respectively, compared to 698,775 and 247,174 of Kang’s campaign and personal accounts.

What actually happens on Twitter on Election Day is presented in Figure 5. Recall that this was a by-election, meaning that it was not a holiday. Given the conservative-progressive divide between generations, the supporters of Kang Jae Sup, the conservative Hannara Party candidate, were mostly people in their 50s, 60s, and above. Accordingly, those who support Sohn Hak Kyu, the Democratic Party candidate, were mostly younger voters in their 20s, 30s, and sometimes 40s. This generational divide and the fact that it was not a holiday strongly suggested that Sohn was disadvantaged because his supporters had to go to work while many of Kang’s supporters were retirees who had the whole day to vote. As already explained, Bundang is an upper middle class bed town south of Seoul. It usually takes about an hour or longer from Bundang to Seoul where many Bundang residents find their work. This suggests that Sohn’s supporters, if they wanted to vote for Sohn, had to either get up much



**Figure 5.** Hour-by-Hour Comparison of Votes Gained by Sohn Hak Kyu and Kang Jae Sup and Twitter Activities in the By-Election of Bundang, 27 April 2011

earlier than usual to make time to go to the polling place before they went to work, or leave their workplace much earlier than usual to vote before eight o'clock in the evening, the end of voting time stipulated by the election law. To make things even worse for Sohn, there were some scattered showers on the Election Day, prolonging the commuting time to and from Seoul.

The two curves toward the top of Figure 5 show hour-by-hour votes gained by Sohn and Kang. It is very interesting to observe that they closely follow the prediction above. Sohn wins early in the morning. By the time people arrived at their workplace, Kang wins. Sohn once again wins during lunchtime. Again, Kang wins as lunchtime ends in the early afternoon. Sohn begins to win in the early afternoon and greatly broadens the gap during the last one hour. What is even more interesting is what happens on Twitter hour by hour on the Election Day, as presented in the bottom half of Figure 5. There are three curves showing the Twitter activities. The bottom curve gives how many tweets including the word "vote" were written during the one hour. The middle curve shows how many times the tweets including the word "vote" were retweeted during the same one hour. The top curve presents how many people received tweets including the word "vote" during the corresponding hour. For example,



between 10 o'clock and 11 o'clock in the morning about one thousand tweets including the word "vote" were written, retweeted about six hundred times, and reached 517,848 people.

What is interesting about this voting encouragement on Twitter and the votes gained by each candidate is the relationship between the two. Although not very visible in Figure 5, there is a slight negative correlation between percent gained by Sohn and the number of tweets encouraging voting except the final one hour between 7 and 8 o'clock in the evening. We can easily think of an understandable explanation for this phenomenon. Sohn's supporters who had to go to work got up early in the morning, went to the polling place and voted, and had no time to tweet there. This is why tweets tend to go down while Sohn wins. They hurried their way to the workplace. Once they arrived at the workplace, they began to worry. This worry is very rational because the disutility of having one's preferred candidate lose the election gets much bigger if the person voted. Those who paid their cost up front would never want to see the loss of the election. It is a situation equivalent to one in which someone who paid the price up front fails to get the purchased goods delivered. Being worried, they began to tweet instead of focusing on their work. They tweeted messages like "Please vote. I did." This is why tweets tend to go up while Sohn loses, making the negative correlation. During the final one hour both the votes gained by Sohn and the tweets explode. This is because Sohn's supporters who arrived at the polling place before 8 o'clock in the evening now have enough time to vote and to tweet.<sup>9</sup>

After losing the election in an unexpected and surprising way for the first time for a conservative candidate in an electoral district known as "right next to heaven," Kang Jae Sup's first remark was the following: "In the upcoming elections, Hannara candidates should be extremely cautious about SNSs. Once tweets encouraging voting circulated on the Election Day, the game is over."

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9 According to the election law, voters who arrive at the polling place before 8 o'clock in the evening can vote, no matter how much time it takes for actual voting after arrival.

# Legal Issues on Social Media

Although Twitter became an influential factor in politics in general and specifically elections, it was unclear whether it was to be regulated by law and, if it was to be regulated, by which law. The Public Officials Election Law (hereafter Election Law) was last amended when there was no such thing as social media and therefore does not have relevant regulations. In this situation what mattered most was the interpretation of the existing law by relevant authorities such as the NEC (National Election Commission) and the Prosecutor's Office. The two authorities added more and more regulations on Twitter as Korea experienced more social elections. In the Local Election of June 2010, people could freely offer and accept gifts for uploading photo evidence. The NEC later interpreted it against the Election Law but only sent disciplinary warnings to those actively offered gifts on Twitter.

In the By-Election of April 2011, the NEC came up with a new, more conservative interpretation of the Election Law. This time their interpretation was that people could not offer gifts, although photo evidence was allowed. The Election Law stipulates that anyone who offers money, goods, transportation, service, monetary incentive, or public or private office, or anyone who promise to offer the aforementioned for the purpose of inducing other people to vote or not to vote, or helping someone to be or not to be elected, is to be sentenced a maximum of five years of imprisonment or a maximum fine of 10 million won.

In a technical sense this interpretation may be correct, because offering gifts for photo evidence on Twitter can be seen as offering goods for the purpose of inducing people to vote. However, this conservative interpretation brought about huge criticism and resistance. Although the NEC did not mention it, the political context of the conservative interpretation seemed quite obvious. Because the increasing voter turnout through SNS put great disadvantage on the incumbent Saenuri Party, people naturally interpreted the NEC's interpretation as an attempt to help the current government and the Saenuri Party.

In the By-Election of October 2011, the NEC came up with an even more conservative, unreasonable, and inconsistent interpretation. Their new

interpretation was that “although ordinary people are free to encourage others to vote, it is not allowed for political parties, political organizations, or well-known people whose encouragement can be perceived as supporting a specific candidate.” In other words, famous people whose political conviction was known could not encourage voting on Twitter even if they did not offer gifts. Once again, this interpretation caused huge controversy and criticism. There were numerous questions that NEC had to answer. How famous is famous? What if a famous person whose political conviction is known suddenly changes his or her conviction? Although one can often predict that some famous people on Twitter will never vote for Saenuri Party, it is much more difficult to predict which of the opposition parties he or she will vote for. Can we say we know his or her political conviction simply because we know he or she will not vote for a certain party? Can it be allowed to oppress someone’s basic human rights such as the right to encourage voting simply because he or she is famous? This interpretation of the Election Law was never respected. As soon as the NEC announced its new interpretation, many celebrities on Twitter explicitly refused to respect it and started writing encouragements, for which the NEC could do nothing.

This confusion surrounding the interpretation of the Election Law was finally resolved by the Constitutional Court on 29 December 2011 when it decided that Section 1 of Article 93 of the Election Law was partially against the Constitution. Section 1 of Article 93 of the Election Law stipulates that “for 180 days prior to the election day one cannot distribute, attach, play, or post advertisement, letters, wall-postings, photos, documents, pictures, printed matter, tapes, or *anything similar* that contain support for, recommendation of, or opposition to a political party or a candidate.” This part of the Election Law had been controversial even before the advent of social media because it put too much regulation on freedom of speech. Specifically with regard to social media, the issue was whether SNSs were *anything similar*. The NEC interpretation was that not only SNSs but also emails and UCCs belonged to this *anything similar* category.

Setting aside the debate on the correct interpretation of anything similar, it would be unrealistic to expect that this would be respected by ordinary Twitter users. There were about 5 million Twitter users as of the end of 2011. For this interpretation to be respected, one should expect that every single user of this 5 million was aware of Section 1 of Article 93 and also aware that Twitter was one of those anything similar, which is simply impossible. Another interesting question was raised regarding retweeting on Twitter. Suppose the

NEC interpretation is correct and one should not write tweets that may affect the election for 180 days. What if someone simply retweets a political tweet composed by someone else?

Compared to the NEC interpretation, the verdict by the Constitutional Court was much more reasonable. It stated that the Internet, with its high accessibility with low cost by almost everyone, was a media in accordance with the purpose of the Election Law because it promoted equality of opportunity, transparency, and lowering the cost of political discourse. It also stated that in areas where regulation was in fact necessary such as spreading false fact and matador, there already existed other laws that regulated these. The Constitutional Court also decided that regulating campaigns for 180 days was oppressing basic rights for too long. It also commented that prohibiting expressions of support for or opposition to political parties was equivalent to prohibiting criticisms about the government or the incumbent party. With the verdict by the Constitutional Court, the NEC could no longer use the Election Law to regulate political expression on Twitter.

However, freedom of political expression on social media is not yet fully guaranteed because the Prosecutor's Office also intervened. For example, the Prosecutor's Office announced on 16 January 2012 announced that "anyone who post false information on the Internet, including SNSs, for the purpose of making someone not elected will be demanded imprisonment," and also that "anyone who repeat this 30 times or more will be investigated under arrest." At issue here are "purpose of making someone not elected," "false information," and "30 times or more." If the person who wrote the tweet explicitly argued that a certain candidate should not be elected, things become easier. However, if the person simply listed negative facts about a candidate, it is not easy to tell whether or not the person had the purpose of making the candidate not elected. False information also poses a problem. It is quite common that negative pieces of information about a candidate are spread during the campaign period. It usually takes years of legal dispute to reach a decision whether or not they were false information. The announcement of the Prosecutor's Office somehow supposes that it can instantly tell between true and false information. From the perspective of the social media users, what was most interesting was "30 times or more." This was often ridiculed as demonstrating how ignorant the Prosecutor's Office was about social media. On Twitter, for example, there are many accounts with no followers. If someone writes false information on this account 30 times, the person will be arrested even though those tweets were delivered to nobody. On the other hand,

there are Twitter users with more than one million followers. If they tweeted false information 29 times, they will not be arrested even though the false information was repeatedly delivered to millions of people.

In sum, the legal framework surrounding social media in Korea is in the formative process. As the freedom of speech retreated in the current government compared to the two liberal preceding ones, there are many attempts to regulate social media in an inappropriate way. However, as witnessed in the verdict of the Constitutional Court, there is a certain limit to those attempts because Korea has been a democratic country for twenty five years at least in the procedural sense of the term.

# Conclusion: Democracy after Twitter?

So far we have examined the characteristics of Korean politics since democratization in 1987 and how SNSs such as Twitter are changing the political landscape in Korea. In this concluding section, now it is time to ask the critical question: "Is there a prospect for *Democracy after Twitter* which will replace *Democracy after Democratization* in Korea?" There are reasons to believe the answer is in either the affirmative or the negative. Let us examine each as a conclusion to this paper.

The reason to believe that SNSs may bring a qualitatively new kind of democracy lies in the fact that it at least partially solves the representation problem inherent in the 1987 regime. Those who were uninterested in politics because they felt unrepresented began to regain political efficacy. Younger, less wealthy, and progressive voters began to realize that connected they can change politics. This is evidenced by increasing voter turnout for the first time in twenty five years since 1987. The voter turnout in the April 11 General Election of 2012 was 54.3 percent, 8.2 percent up from the record-low 46.1 percent four years earlier. Even more surprising was the turnout among voters in their 20s residing in Seoul and adjacent region, which was 64 percent. In the 2008 General Election voters in their late 20s voted only 24.2 percent. Although direct comparison cannot be made, it seems obvious that those who are affected by SNSs most vote a lot more than before.

This poses a very interesting question about the so-called median voter theorem, which is often regarded as the 'proven wisdom' in elections. As the theorem predicts, it is usually true that more voters are concentrated toward the median, which is the reason why political parties try to pretend they are centrist parties operating around the median as the election nears. However, it is too often forgotten that the theorem relies on the assumption that voter preferences form a unimodal distribution. The situation since 2010 in Korea raises a question about this assumption. The fact that in the 2008 election we had the record-low voter turnout of 46.1 percent means that we have 53.9 percent of voters to come back if they choose to come back. The fact that there was an asymmetry of unrepresented-ness in the 1987 regime especially under-representing younger, less wealthy and progressive voters suggests that the votes coming back are very likely to be progressive. If we draw a distribution

of self-rated ideological orientation from standard international comparative surveys such as World Values Survey, Koreans demonstrate a near-perfect normal distribution, although the mean ideology is slightly more conservative than the OECD average. However, since progressive voters often choose not to vote, the distribution drawn with only those who vote is right-skewed. When the votes who did not vote in the past decide to come back, will they come back to the same position where they exited from? The evidence so far suggests that they are coming back to a position much more progressive than they had been. This brings up a possibility that there is likely to be a bimodal, rather than unimodal, distribution of voter preferences in the Korean elections in the democracy after Twitter. If this is the case, median voter theorem will no longer hold, because in a bimodal distribution median is where the smallest number of votes are. Candidates and political parties would no longer be able to pretend they are centrists. They would have to choose a clear political stance and try to appeal to their own audience, rather than try to become a catch-all party.

There are also reasons not to believe that democracy after Twitter will be qualitatively different from democracy after democratization. If Twitter is the only factor that decides the elections, the equation becomes easy to solve. However, Twitter seems to be one of two major factors, the other one being the offline party organizations. The two factors interact with each other, creating some unpredictable outcomes. This was witnessed in the latest general election of April 11, 2012. Because the Democratic Party had won four elections in a row since the advent of Twitter in 2010, optimism prevailed prior to the general election. There was also the widespread sentiment that the Election Day was going to be the Judgment Day for the current Lee Myung Bak government and his Saenuri Party. One convincing evidence of this widely shared sentiment was the fact that Hannara Party changed its name to Saenuri Party right before the general election. They realized that chances were extremely slim for them to win the general election, and the only thing they could do in a desperate attempt to look unlike themselves was to change the name. However, the election outcome was that Democratic Party lost by a very slim margin. Because every expert predicted a victory for Democratic Party, defeat, though by slim margin, was a big blow.

What happened was related with the offline organization within Democratic Party. Those who took over the party power did not really understand how democracy after Twitter works. The support rate for the Democratic Party on Twitter is in fact much lower than its offline survey figures. In spite of the low

support on Twitter, Democratic Party could win the past four elections because people wanted to prevent the most hated Hannara candidates from becoming the mayor or entering the National Assembly. In other words, the four past elections were retrospective elections. In this sense, Democratic Party did not achieve victory in these four elections. They were just given victory simply because they were not Hannara Party and, thus, were less hated. The General Election of 2012 was different. The two elections in 2012, General Election in April and Presidential Election in December, are of great significance. There is a consensus that, like the presidential election in 1987, the December election will be a founding election which will end the 1987 regime and start a new political regime in Korea that will last for another twenty five or more years. This suggests that, unlike the four previous elections in 2010 and 2011, the two elections in 2012 will be prospective elections. In prospective elections voters want to see the vision and policies of the candidates.

As already explained, those who had not voted in the past but were now coming back were coming back to a political stance much more progressive than before. Without really understanding what was the driving force transforming the political landscape, the Democratic Party leaders simply assumed that Twitter would be on their side, like it had been in the four previous elections. Not knowing, or perhaps ignoring, the preferences of voters coming back, they nominated candidates who favored centrist, rather than reformist, policies. Of course political calculations and vested interests of intra-party factions were at work. This triggered huge anger and sense of betrayal on Twitter. As the nominations were being made, Twitter was full of tweets that criticized the Democratic Party. Many people declared on Twitter that the Democratic Party was no longer 'our ally,' but just another element of the 1987 regime that had to be cleaned away together with Saenuri Party. Many voters gave up voting for Democratic Party and chose the much less influential Unified Progressive Party instead. The collective outcome has already been reported above.

A few additional words are due before concluding this paper: Why Twitter and *Why Progressive*. Although both are important, Facebook has a bigger membership and is generally considered more important in the U.S., for example. However, in Korea, especially when it comes to politics, it is absolutely Twitter rather than Facebook, that matters. One explanation comes from the different social contexts of the two countries. Facebook, as the name suggests, focuses more on connecting and re-connecting people who already know each other or with some common affiliation. It may be useful in a geographically large country like the U.S. where it is not easy even for family members to



reunite once they leave their hometown. In Korea it takes only five hours by car from one end of the country to the farthest end. You can always see your family and friends and come back home in one day. Cross-national surveys consistently suggest that voluntary organization membership in Korea is much lower than the Western countries. However, Korea has an absolutely high percentage of membership in affiliational social capital such as school alumni associations and extended family organizations. It means Koreans live with more social obligations to their family and friends, which explains why there is less demand for the type of service provided by Facebook. In contrast, public sphere in which citizens can freely exchange their opinions about public issues is less well developed. Compared to Facebook, this is a social function provided by Twitter. People get connected with people they do not personally know and from different walks of life. Because there is little common background, it is natural that they discuss things everyone knows, i.e., public issues.

Although Twitter is political and progressive in Korea, we do not intend to argue that this is so in other societies. We do not argue that the political and progressive nature of Twitter in Korea is significantly determined by its technological architecture. In fact, Twitter is not political in many countries. Twitter is not progressive, or is sometimes used by ultra-rightists in some societies. All these suggest that whether Twitter becomes political and whether it becomes progressive or conservative is determined by its interaction with the offline realities of the society. In Korea Twitter has become political and progressive. It has become *the weapon of the unrepresented* because the political realities in the offline society have systematically excluded certain groups of voters for an extended period of time. It has become progressive largely because the conservatives dominated the traditional mass media. If people who felt they were not properly represented wanted to seek news and information that were not properly covered by the conservative mass media, Twitter could be the social media they turn to.

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