

## Party System Institutionalization Without Parties: Evidence from Korea

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*Formally institutionalized party organization is usually considered a prerequisite for the development of programmatic linkages between parties and voters. However, in this article I show that political parties in South Korea have succeeded in stabilizing interparty competition through programmatic linkages without making any significant efforts to build a formal organizational base. In fact, it could be argued that South Korea is a “partyless” democracy, as political parties get easily captured by the interests of ambitious politicians, thus failing to establish themselves as independent actors. I therefore make a more general argument about the concept of party system institutionalization: we need to rethink the current practice of aggregating the different attributes of party system institutionalization into a single scale, as these attributes do not seem to be connected in a linear fashion. **KEYWORDS:** South Korea, party system institutionalization, political party organization, voting behavior, electoral volatility, programmatic linkages*

AT THE HEIGHT OF THE “THIRD WAVE” OF DEMOCRATIZATION—IN THE mid-1990s—Mainwaring and Scully (1995) made a startling observation that has significantly shaped the research agenda in the field of party politics and electoral studies: party systems in new democracies are, by and large, characterized by much lower levels of institutionalization than party systems in established democracies. To measure differences in party system institutionalization, Mainwaring and Scully put forward a set of four attributes: (1) the stability in the nature of interparty competition, (2) political parties’ rootedness in society, (3) the degree of legitimacy attributed to parties and the electoral process, and (4) the extensiveness and “systemness” of political party organization. Although Mainwaring and Scully leave themselves a way out by noting that “these four dimensions of institution-

alization need not go together, but they *almost always* do” (Mainwaring 1999, 27; emphasis added), the underlying assumption is that the relationship among the four attributes is linear: if one attribute goes up, so do the other attributes. This assumption is reflected in the fact that Mainwaring and Scully aggregate the different attributes into a single scale of party system institutionalization—an approach subsequently adopted by many other scholars (for example, Croissant and Völkel 2012; Kuenzi and Lambright 2001; Payne 2005; Stockton 2001). Moreover, the three different types of party system that Mainwaring and Scully identify—*institutionalized* systems, *inchoate* systems, and *hegemonic systems in transition*—are not defined by combinations of different values on the four separate dimensions; instead, they describe different points on the single, aggregated scale.

However, more recent research from Latin America challenges this one-dimensional understanding of party system institutionalization: not only do contradictory combinations of conceptual attributes seem to be much more common than Mainwaring and Scully would believe (Luna and Altman 2011), but party systems that are only institutionalized on some dimensions—not on all of them—still seem to possess the potential to positively contribute to democratic consolidation (Zucco forthcoming). In other words, these recent studies highlight the fact that it might be necessary to move away from aggregate models and “unbundle” the concept of party system institutionalization.

The case of South Korea (Korea hereafter) supports the emerging “revisionist” argument: while the postautocratic party system scores very high on the first dimension of party system institutionalization—stability of interparty competition—other dimensions display features that are commonly associated with inchoate systems. In particular, Korean parties are characterized by a lack of extensive and elaborate organizations, which makes it easy for individual politicians to capture parties for their own self-serving interests. In fact, it could be argued that parties do not exist as independent actors but mainly serve as personal instruments for the achievement of political power.

To demonstrate that the Korean party system presents a challenge to the aggregative conceptualization of party system institutionalization, I take the following steps: First, I provide a theoretical discussion of why Mainwaring and Scully—and the literature on party system institutionalization in general—understand stability of interparty competition and party organization to be connected in a

linear fashion. As will be seen, the explanation goes something like this: the best way to stabilize interparty competition is through programmatic linkages; developing programmatic linkages, in turn, requires formal party organization. Second, I present a descriptive analysis of the Korean party system through Mainwaring and Scully's framework, revealing that the system combines high stability in interparty competition with a lack of formal party organization. Third, given that the framework is based on the assumption that competitive stability is achieved through programmatic linkages, I devote the subsequent section to showing that this assumption holds in the Korean context. Finally, in the fourth section I offer an explanation for uneven party system institutionalization in Korea, and discuss how parties have succeeded in anchoring themselves in society through programmatic linkages, despite the lack of formal organization.

### **Party Organization and the Stability of Interparty Competition**

The *stability of interparty competition* has been the central focus of most analyses of party system institutionalization. While the other three components of Mainwaring and Scully's original framework have frequently been replaced or modified by subsequent researchers, the stability component has remained a constant feature. In fact, numerous studies adopt the nature of interparty competition as the only criterion of party system institutionalization (e.g., Hicken and Kuhonta 2011). One reason is that, more than any other criterion, the degree of electoral stability captures the *systemic* aspect of institutionalization—that is, the regularity of the framework in which political parties compete with each other. As Mainwaring explains, “*more institutionalized party systems enjoy considerable stability; patterns of party competition manifest regularity*. A system in which parties regularly appear and then disappear or become minor parties is weakly institutionalized, as is one in which parties' vote totals often fluctuate widely” (1998, 69; emphasis in original).

Broadly speaking, party competition can be structured around three different types of politician-voter linkage: (1) clientelism, (2) programmatic/ideological attachments, and (3) traditional/affective ties. While traditional/affective linkages emerge from shared physical or cultural traits between the voter and politician (such as language, region, or ethnicity), both clientelism and programmatic/ideological

linkages are based on the distribution of material goods—they differ, however, as to whether citizens' entitlements to these goods are codified in a formal document. We speak of *programmatic* linkages when politicians develop “packages of policies that they commit to enact if elected to political office with sufficient support” and these policy packages “award benefits to citizens regardless of whom they voted for in the election” (Kitschelt et al. 2010, 16). If, on the other hand, politicians are not guided by transparent principles of distribution and the delivery of material benefits comes with “electoral strings” attached—that is, if benefits are only distributed to individuals or small groups who have already delivered or who promise to deliver their votes—this would be classified as a *clientelistic* electoral strategy (Hicken 2011).

Of the three types of linkage mechanism, programmatic/ideological linkages are usually considered to provide the most favorable conditions for the stabilization of interparty competition. According to Mainwaring and Torcal, “although programmatic or ideological linkages between voters and parties are not the only ways to create party system stability, they are an important means by which voters become attached to parties and hence an important means by which parties become rooted in society. Where ideological linkages to parties are strong, electoral volatility tends to be lower” (2006, 211; also see Kitschelt et al. 2010, 290). Clientelism, on the other hand, generally has less of a stabilizing effect on interparty competition because the distribution of material goods is commonly based on a personal relationship between a voter and a vote broker. Thus, if vote brokers—or politicians controlling the broker network—decide to switch to a different party, this can result in a significant transfer of votes between parties and even in the complete destruction of the first party. Likewise, traditional/affective ties have been found to stabilize interparty competition only under certain circumstances. For example, Mozaffar and Scarritt show how political parties in Africa have largely failed to develop stable support bases among ethnic groups because the complex “ethno-political demography features politically salient differences within as well as among groups” (2005, 413). Pointing in a similar direction, findings by Birnir (2007) suggest that only language identity “jump-starts” party system stabilization in new democracies, while racial and religious identities take much longer in developing a stabilizing effect.

For political parties to build a programmatic platform, two crucial steps are involved: not only do parties, first, have to take a dif-

ferentiated position along key policy dimensions but, second, because voters are information misers and typically lack the resources to review all parties' specific issue positions, parties have to build a *brand personality* (see Jones and Hudson 1998). Essentially, a party brand can be defined as “an associative network of interconnected political information and attitudes, held in memory and accessible when stimulated from the memory of a voter” (Smith and French 2009, 212). In other words, political party brands provide voters with an informational shortcut for simplifying decisionmaking, as they signal a certain value proposition to voters that summarizes the party's position in the electoral marketplace. The associations that voters connect to a political party brand are developed over time, for example, through the party's proposed policy programs, electoral marketing and advertising, the image of candidates for public election, and growing groups of stereotypical voters (Smith 2009).

Building and maintaining a consistent party brand, however, constitutes a collective action problem: for individual politicians it is most rational to pursue their own interests—for example, by voting for particularistic legislation or engaging in corrupt activities—and rely on their fellow partisans to invest in the party's collective image. To resolve this tension between individual and collective incentives, political parties can delegate decisionmaking to leaders who internalize the collective interest of the party and—by controlling the allocation of selective incentives—monitor their fellow partisans. Cooperating party members get rewarded, while those whom the leaders deem to be “defecting” are punished (Cox and McCubbins 1993, 91). This creates a dilemma, however, as party leaders could simply employ the resources or authority they have been delegated to further their own private interests rather than act in the collective, organizational interest of the party. Put differently, high personalization of party control in the hands of one or a handful of leaders may result in “goal displacement” (Kitschelt and Kselman 2010, 11).

Mainwaring and Scully acknowledge this problem when they say that, in a more institutionalized party system, parties “are not subordinated to the interests of ambitious leaders; they acquire an independent status and value of their own” (1995, 5). The problem's solution is a system of organizational checks and balances on the party leadership's authority. Accordingly, a higher level of institutionalization can only be achieved “if parties have firmly established structures; if they are territorially comprehensive; if they are well organized; if they have clearly defined internal structures and procedures;

and if they have resources of their own” (Mainwaring 1999, 28). In short, for interparty competition to become stabilized through programmatic linkages, parties must not be “the personal instrument of a leader or a small coterie” but must be characterized by “a routinization of intraparty procedures.”

While Mainwaring and Scully do not go into much detail as to which particular intraparty structures and procedures help parties develop a stable and credible brand, the more specific literature on party organization contains more detailed indications. First, numerous authors have pointed out that brand building is an easier task—or put differently, opportunistic behavior by party leaders is made more difficult—if the party is based on an extensive formal membership organization, or if the party at least maintains close links with civil society organizations (e.g., Strom 1990; Ware 1992). More specifically, a formal organizational base allows for members to receive ideological education before moving into public office and adds an element of stability to the party’s programmatic platform, preventing leaders from constantly shifting policy positions. Second, scholars of party organization have argued that procedures for the nomination of parliamentary candidates significantly condition the distribution of power within a party (e.g., Rahat 2007, 159). Of particular relevance for the discussion here is the fact that political parties are more likely to turn into a personal instrument if nominations are centrally controlled by a small group of party leaders, as this means that all candidates owe their political careers to these very leaders. Third, party brand building is enhanced by transparent party financing structures, as they make it more difficult for party leaders to (1) engage in self-enrichment through rent-seeking behavior and (2) exchange financial contributions for policies that are inconsistent with the party’s programmatic program (Kitschelt and Kselman 2010, 14–15).

Having discussed the importance of formal party organization for stabilizing interparty competition through programmatic linkages, I should briefly point out that formally organized parties are considered to be much less important when developing affective and clientelistic linkages. When mobilizing voters along affective loyalties, politicians can simply rely on their own personal attributes and characteristics; when mobilizing voters through clientelistic means, politicians—rather than building up formal party organization—will invest in *informal* “organizational hierarchies of exchange” and “organizational devices . . . of supervision that make direct individual or

indirect group-based monitoring of political exchange relations viable” (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007, 8).

In short, Mainwaring and Scully’s model of party system institutionalization is based on the assumption that interparty stability is best achieved through programmatic linkages. This is the reason why the first dimension (stability of interparty competition) and the fourth dimension (party organization) of the model are thought to be connected in a linear fashion: stability of interparty competition requires programmatic linkages, which in turn requires formal party organization. However, as I show in the next sections, Korean parties have succeeded in developing programmatic linkages with voters without a significant investment in formal organizational structures.

### Uneven Party System Institutionalization in Korea

Studies adopting an additive, one-dimensional definition of party system institutionalization commonly rank Korea as the least institutionalized party system among the new democracies in East Asia (e.g., Croissant and Völkel 2012, 248; Stockton 2001, 99). However, such a definition masks the fact that Korea’s party system is *unevenly* institutionalized: the system scores remarkably high on the attribute of competitive stability but relatively low on all other attributes.

To measure the *stability of interparty competition*, scholars mainly rely on the concept of electoral volatility. Essentially, electoral volatility expresses the change in aggregate party vote shares from one election to the next. Whereas low volatility means that there is a great deal of continuity in the distribution of votes among parties, high volatility can reflect either elite-driven changes in the party system (such as the emergence of new parties or party mergers) or changes in voters’ party preferences (Mainwaring and Zoco 2007, 158).

The most widely used method to determine electoral volatility is the Pedersen index (Pedersen 1979), which is calculated by taking the sum of the absolute changes in vote shares from one election to the other and then dividing this sum by two:

$$\Sigma | v_{pt} - v_{pt+1} | / 2$$

(where  $v_{pt}$  stands for the percentage of the vote obtained by a party  $p$  at election  $t$  and  $v_{pt+1}$  for the percentage in the following election).



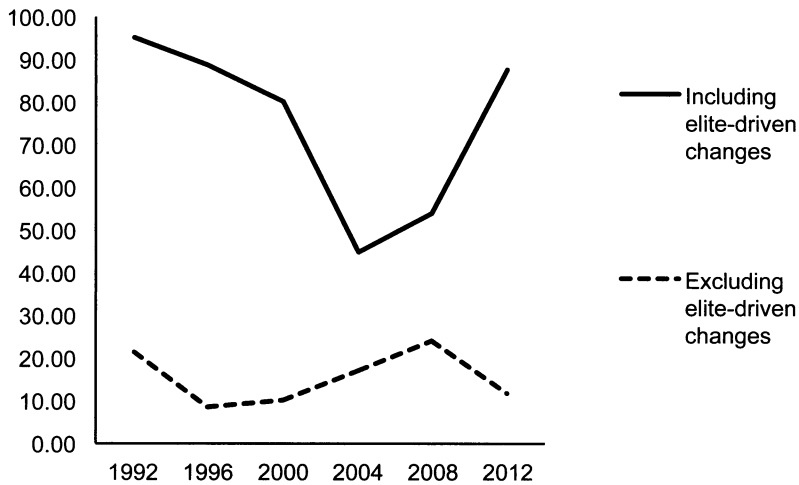
The index varies between the extremes of 100 (all votes have shifted to other parties) and 0 (the same parties received exactly the same share of votes).

One crucial question that researchers need to answer when calculating electoral volatility is how to deal with party mergers, party splits, and parties changing names. In the Korean context, in particular, this question is unavoidable, given the high frequency of elite-driven modifications to the party system. If these elite-driven modifications are included in the calculation of electoral volatility, scores for competitive instability go “through the roof” (see Figure 1). However, calculating electoral volatility in this way does not make any sense, as behind all the mergers, splits, and name changes lies a profound continuity of personalities and intra-elite networks held together by school and regional ties (B. Kim 1998). On a closer look, it therefore becomes very clear that the Korean party system has actually not seen much change in who the principal actors are and how these actors have performed in elections (see Figure 2). The last significant shift in the party system took place in 1990, when three parties that had played very different roles under autocratic rule agreed on a “surprise merger” (H. Kim 1997, 85) to form the Democratic Liberal Party (DLP).<sup>1</sup> Since then, the Korean party system has consistently been a two-party system, despite the fact that, in 2000, the Democratic Labor Party (KDLP) succeeded in establishing itself as a third-party alternative. Crucially, all major party mergers and splits have since 1990 occurred *within* the three main ideological streams—commonly labeled by the Korean media as the conservative, liberal, and progressive camps. Cases of politicians crossing the divide between these streams have been incredibly rare. What is more, splits and mergers have mostly been motivated by conflict over party posts and nominations for public elections, not by policy disagreements (K. Park 2010).<sup>2</sup>

This descriptive account of a stable two-party system receives further empirical support if we quantify the fragmentation of the party system using Laakso and Taagepera’s (1979) measure of the *effective number of political parties*. The measure captures the number of parties weighed by their size—either parties’ vote share (effective number of electoral parties [ENEP]) or parliamentary seat share (effective number of parliamentary parties [ENPP])—through the following formula:

$$1 / \sum p_i^2$$



**Figure 1 Electoral Volatility Score in Parliamentary Elections**

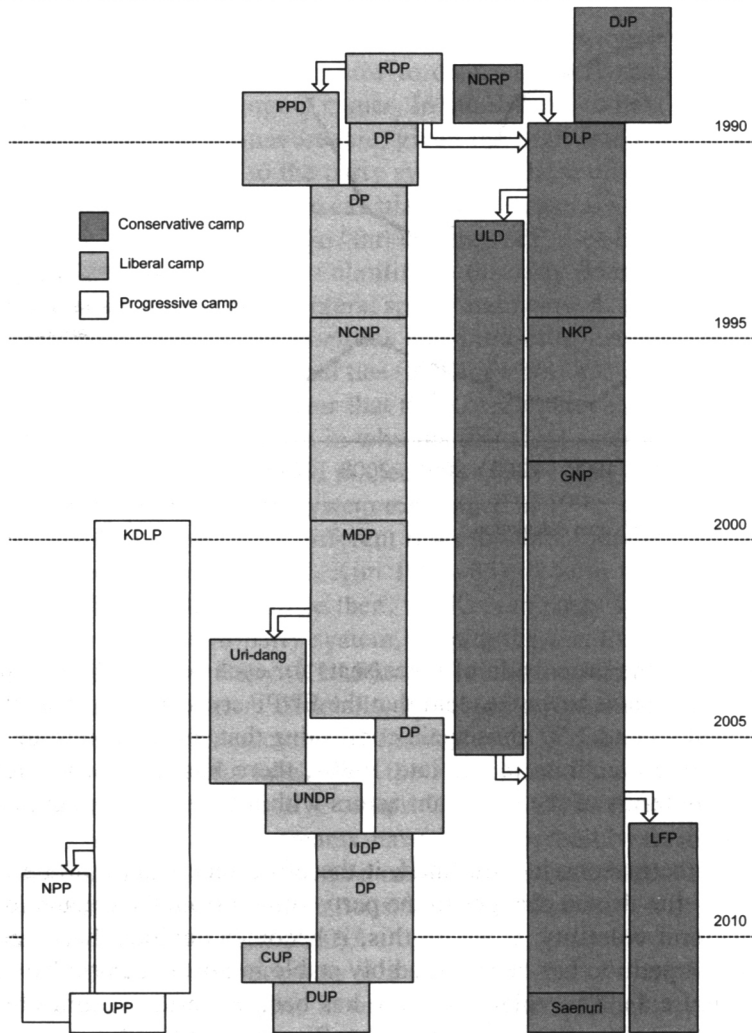
Source: Author's own calculation.

(where  $p$  is the proportion of votes/seats for each party  $i$ ). When applied to Korea, it becomes clear that the ENPP score has consistently remained around 2.50, thus again confirming that, since the introduction of free elections in the late 1980s, there has not been much change in terms of the dominant actors within the party system (see Figure 3).

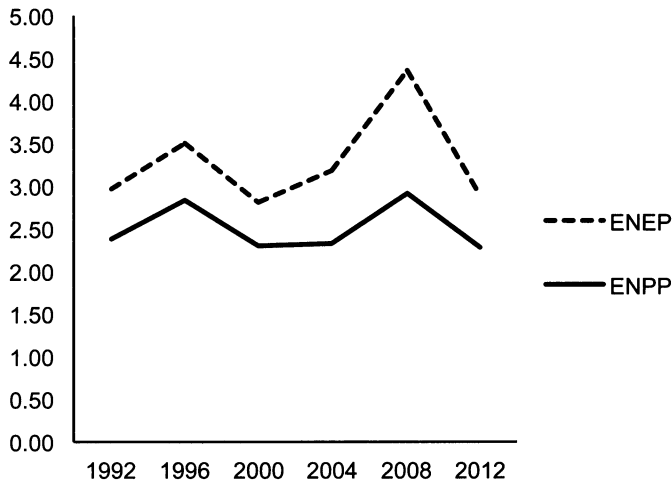
For the reasons just outlined, it therefore seems appropriate to exclude elite-driven changes to the party system from the calculation of electoral volatility. If we do this, it becomes obvious that inter-party competition has been incredibly stable in postautocratic Korea (see Figure 1). The volatility score has been hovering roughly between 10 and 20, which is a value usually associated with party systems in established democracies.

Mainwaring and Scully's second attribute of party institutionalization is *parties' roots in society*. For a party system to be considered institutionalized, "parties must have somewhat stable roots in society; otherwise they do not structure political preferences over time and there is limited regularity in how people vote" (Mainwaring and Scully 1995, 5). To operationalize political parties' rooted-

**Figure 2 The Development of the Korean Party System**



*Notes:* CUP = Citizens' Unity Party; DJP = Democratic Justice Party; DLP = Democratic Liberal Party; DP = Democratic Party; DUP = Democratic United Party; GNP = Grand National Party; KDLP = Korean Democratic Labor Party; LFP = Liberty Forward Party; MDP = Millennium Democratic Party; NCNP = National Congress for New Politics; NDRP = New Democratic Republican Party; NKP = New Korea Party; NPP = New Progressive Party; PPD = Party for Peace and Democracy; RDP = Reunification Democratic Party; ULD = United Liberal Democrats; UDP = United Democratic Party; UNDP = United New Democracy Party; UPP = United Progressive Party.

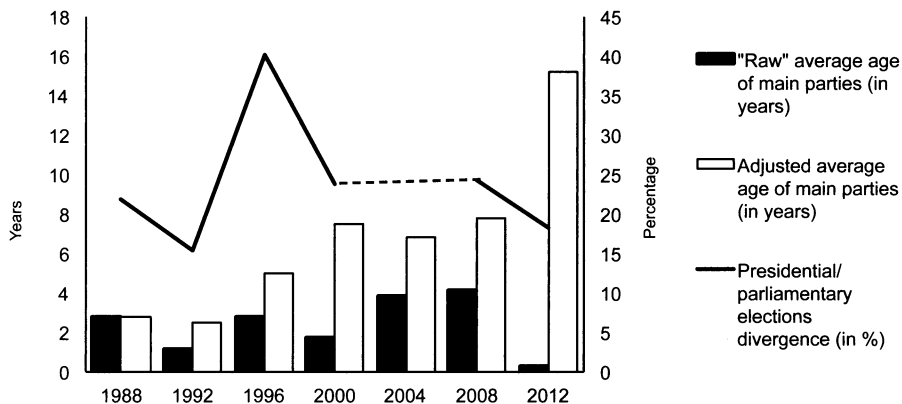
**Figure 3 Party System Fragmentation**

*Source:* Author's own calculation.

*Notes:* ENEP = effective number of electoral parties; ENPP = effective number of parliamentary parties. For elections after the 2004 electoral reform, which introduced a dual ballot, ENEP was calculated using parties' share of votes in the plurality tier—that is, single-member districts.

ness in society, the original model of party system institutionalization suggests two indicators: (1) the difference between presidential and legislative voting, and (2) party longevity. When applied to the case of Korea, these indicators reveal a certain degree of institutionalization. Political parties—if we ignore elite-driven changes to the party system—are characterized by increasing life spans, and the divergence between parties' performance in legislative and presidential elections is relatively low (see Figure 4). We could thus be tempted to conclude that Korean parties have succeeded in capturing the long-term loyalties of certain social groups.

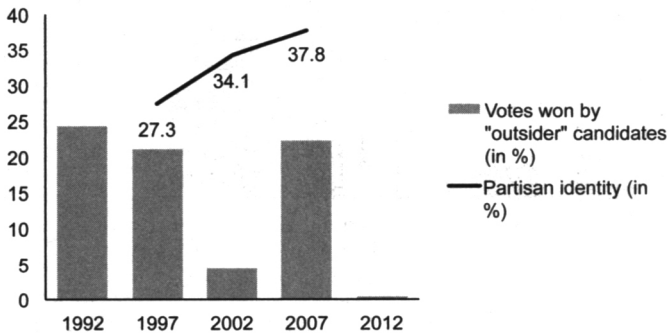
However, the two original indicators suffer from a number of problems. In particular, they lack validity—that is, they do not really measure what they are supposed to measure. For example, low differences between presidential and legislative voting are not necessarily a pointer to strong voter attachments to parties; instead, this could be driven by other factors, such as whether presidential and parliamentary elections are concurrent. Similarly, a party's age does not really tell us much about how firmly rooted the party is in society. In the-

**Figure 4 Parties' Roots in Society, Original Indicators**

*Notes:* The average age of parties takes into account parties that won at least 4 percent of the vote in that year's elections. The raw average factors in elite-driven changes to the party system; the adjusted average ignores splits, mergers, and name changes for the most obvious successor party. To calculate the difference between presidential and parliamentary voting, the following elections were compared: 1987 vs. 1988; 1996 vs. 1997; 2000 vs. 2002; and 2007 vs. 2008. In 1992 and 2012, presidential and parliamentary elections were held in the same year. The divergence score was obtained by taking the sum of the differences (in percentage points) between each party's performance in presidential and legislative elections.

ory, political parties can survive over long time periods without developing strong linkages with social groups.

Given these weaknesses, it is not surprising that more recent studies of party system institutionalization have replaced—or at least supplemented—the original indicators of social rootedness with more valid measures. In particular, scholars now increasingly rely on (1) partisan identity (e.g., Payne 2005) and (2) the electoral success of “outsiders” in presidential elections (Mainwaring and Torcal 2006). If we apply these revised indicators to the Korean party system, a rather different picture emerges (see Figure 5): first, outsider candidates have generally performed strongly in presidential elections, often winning a significant vote share between 20 and 25 percent; second, partisan identity is quite low, even compared to other new democracies in the third wave of democratization. However, although these indicators seem to suggest that Korean parties lack strong roots in society, the party system might be moving toward stronger institutionalization on this dimension: in the 2012 presiden-

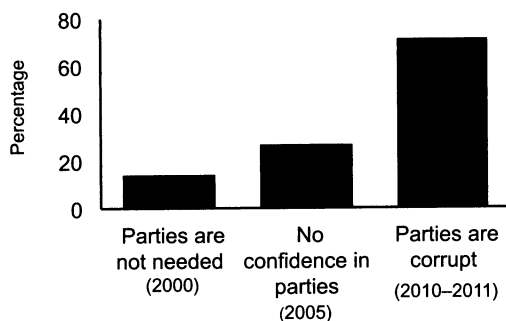
**Figure 5 Parties' Roots in Society, Revised Indicators**

*Source:* Partisan identity data are from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) survey, <http://www.cses.org/>.

*Notes:* In line with Mainwaring and Torcal (2006, 216), "outsider" presidential candidates were defined as "independents (with no party affiliation) or candidates from a party that won less than 5% of the vote in the previous election and did not have presidential candidates in any election prior to the previous one." The score for partisan identity is the percentage of respondents answering "yes" to the question "Are you close to any political party?" Please note that these data come from postelection surveys in years with parliamentary elections (2000, 2004, 2008).

tial elections outsider success was almost nil, while partisanship has been steadily increasing in recent years.

On the third dimension of party system institutionalization, Korea also scores low. As Mainwaring and Scully make clear, "in an institutionalized democratic party system, the major political actors accord *legitimacy* to the electoral process and to parties" (1995, 5; emphasis added). Korean parties, however, even after the turn to democracy, have largely failed to capture the trust of voters. In fact, quite the opposite has been the case. Alarmingly widespread perceptions of corruption and deep distrust in politicians have consistently fueled a "prevailing sense of democratic crisis among the Korean people" (Shin 2001, 193). As can be seen from Figure 6, more than 70 percent of voters perceive political parties to be "corrupt." This is a remarkably high score, even considering that, in any democratic political system, political parties are typically the institution most likely to be labeled as corrupt. What is worse, more than 25 percent of Koreans have absolutely no trust in parties, while around 15 per-

**Figure 6 The Legitimacy of Political Parties**

Sources: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) survey (2000), <http://www.cses.org/>; World Values Survey (2005), <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>; Transparency International Global Corruption Barometer (2010–2011), <http://www.transparency.org/research/gcb/>.

Notes: More specifically, data come from the following questions: (1) “Are parties needed to make our political system work?” (bottom two boxes on five-point scale); (2) “How much confidence do you have in political parties?” (bottom box on four-point scale); (3) “To what extent do you perceive political parties to be affected by corruption?” (bottom two boxes on five-point scale).

cent agree that parties “are not needed.” In short, the legitimacy of political parties is very low.

While on the second and third attributes the Korean party system is thus best described as inchoate, the system is probably even much less routinized and predictable on the fourth indicator of party system institutionalization: *party organization*. Most importantly, the Korean party system violates Mainwaring and Scully’s requirement discussed earlier that political parties not be “subordinated to the interests of ambitious leaders” (1995, 5).<sup>3</sup>

During the “three Kims” era—which refers to the first generation of postautocratic politicians who dominated politics up until the 2002 presidential elections—party bosses literally ran their parties “as if they were feudal lords” (Im 2004, 189): “Essentially, whenever Kim Dae-Jung, Kim Young-Sam or Kim Jong-Phil . . . founded a party, they brought with them their own leadership group, funding and popular support base. When one of these personalities left to form another party, they gutted the organization, leaving it to wither on the vine” (Heo and Stockton 2005, 676).

Political parties were unable to acquire an independent status vis-à-vis their leaders precisely because of their organizational properties. First, parties lacked formally institutionalized and territorially extensive organizational structures—in particular, parties never developed a formal rank-and-file membership. Instead, local party branches were based on “personal and particularistic bonds between a political boss and followers,” and party members were “mobilized for a particular politician’s political success,” not to contribute toward the attainment of a collective goal (C. W. Park 1988, 1051). In other words, there was no formal rank-and-file membership that could have acted as a check on the power of the party leader. What is more, to maintain these clientelistic machines at the local level, individual politicians depended heavily on financial support from the top, as it was presidential candidates who collected the major share of corporate campaign contributions (C. H. Park 2008, 115). And finally, because of the highly skewed *informal* power distribution, party leaders were able to monopolize all *formal* decisionmaking, including the nomination of candidates for public elections (Y. Kim 1998, 150–152; K. Kim 1997), which, in turn, further reinforced individual politicians’ loyalty.

In 2004, the Roh Moo-hyun government passed new campaign funding laws aimed at reducing the influence of money in politics. The main components of these reforms were (1) outlawing corporate contributions to electoral campaigns, (2) setting strict campaign spending limits, and (3) increasing the amount of public funding available to political parties. While making it much harder for individual politicians to maintain clientelistic machines, the reformed campaign funding laws have generally had very little impact on the organization of political parties (see Hellmann 2011, 59–63). First of all, political parties have not made any effort toward developing a formally institutionalized membership organization—either to replace withering clientelistic machines with formal party branches or to generate regular income through membership fees—or toward establishing institutionalized links with organized civil society groups.<sup>4</sup> Second, the old “home boy” and “school boy” networks continue to persist, despite the fact that presidential candidates find it impossible to attract the same levels of funding to keep these networks together. Rather, it seems that faction leaders now primarily rely on alternative mechanisms to foster loyalty among individual politicians. For one, through the power to determine cabinet composition, presidential



candidates control access to executive political office. In addition, presidential candidates still monopolize the process of candidate selection—a feature that manifests itself before every parliamentary election, when politicians' personal ties to presidential candidates become a strong predictor for nomination.<sup>5</sup>

However, while political parties have thus still not established themselves as independent actors vis-à-vis ambitious politicians, one thing has changed: whereas during the era of the three Kims, party leaders were automatically nominated as presidential candidates for their respective parties, parties have since 2002 moved toward more democratic procedures for nominating presidential front-runners, who generally then also assume the party leadership. In other words, while party internal power continues to be *exercised* in the same hypercentralized way, the way in which power is *captured* has been democratized to some extent. Yet, it needs to be stressed that these nomination procedures have not yet become institutionalized; instead, they get renegotiated before every election, with the final outcome reflecting the preferences and negotiating power of each pre-candidate (see Table 1).

**Table 1 Nomination Procedures for Presidential Candidates**

Election Year	GNP/Saenuri	MDP/UNDP/DUP
2002	Combination of closed primary (50% of the vote) and open primary (50%)	Combination of closed primary (50% of the vote) and open primary (50%)
2007	Combination of vote among “representative party members” (public officeholders and representatives appointed by these officeholders; 20% of the vote), “other party members” (30%), and public opinion surveys (50%)	Two-round process, with the two leading candidates qualifying for the second round: (1) combination of public opinion survey (50%) and vote among 10,000 randomly selected party members (50%); (2) combination of open primary (90%) and public opinion survey (10%)
2012	Combination of “electoral college” vote (80% of total vote consisting of 20% executive party members, 30% of regular party members, and 30% of ordinary voters) and public opinion survey (20% of the total vote)	Open primary staggered over 13 regions (voting either through physical ballot or mobile phone); second round of voting if no candidate wins an absolute majority of votes in the first round

To sum up the preceding discussion, it can be concluded that the Korean party system is unevenly institutionalized. The system is characterized by extremely stable patterns of interparty competition but achieves only low scores on the other three dimensions. In particular, the typical Korean party displays a lack of extensive and elaborate organizational structures, which makes it very easy for ambitious leaders to capture parties for their own personal interests. However, in order to show that this uneven institutionalization of the Korean party system presents a challenge to Mainwaring and Scully's model of party system institutionalization, it is necessary to demonstrate that the model's underlying assumption holds in the Korean context—that is, that interparty competition is being stabilized by programmatic/ideological linkages. This is precisely my aim in the next section.

### **Party System Stability: Toward Ideological Competition**

In the immediate postautocratic period, Korean politicians relied mainly on clientelism and affective ties to mobilize voters. As outlined above, during the three Kims era, political parties were mere clientelistic networks, connecting resource-rich presidential candidates at the top with individual candidates and their political machines at the local level. The linkage with voters was made as candidates doled out particularistic goods and benefits to voters, such as helping constituents in their job hunt, providing assistance in obtaining bank loans, making gifts at weddings and funerals, or assisting with children's school expenses (Park 1988, 1059). However, with economic development, the effectiveness of clientelism declined. It was already under autocratic rule that middle-class voters moved beyond the reach of patron-client networks—a trend that revealed itself in the phenomenon of *yochon-yado* (which can roughly be paraphrased as “the regime's clientelistic machine performs strongly in rural areas; the opposition's prodemocracy platform receives stronger support in urban areas”). The final nail in the coffin of clientelism came with the 2004 campaign funding reforms outlined above, which have made it almost impossible for individual politicians to maintain clientelistic ties with voters.<sup>6</sup>

While clientelism played an important role in tying voters to individual politicians, the main source of party system stability after the breakdown of autocratic rule were affective linkages based on regional identities. The early party system became anchored in regional strongholds, as many voters supported political parties whose presi-

dential candidate shared their regional background: political parties associated with Kim Young-sam thus came to control the southeastern region of Yeongnam, parties paying allegiance to Kim Dae-jung held an electoral monopoly in the southwestern Honam region, and Kim Jong-pil's parties dominated the central Chungcheong region (Park 2002; Sonn 2003). However, more recent evidence seems to suggest that the regional-identity factor has lost much of its significance as a determinant of voting behavior. For example, a number of scholars have found that issue voting (Kwon 2010) and retrospective voting (Jang 2012) are becoming more widespread, while others claim that new intergenerational (Choi and Cho 2005; Kim, Choi, and Cho 2008) and class-based cleavages (Kim 2010) have grown in significance.

Although these existing studies contain important clues about changes in the Korean party system in recent years, they do not help us establish whether interparty competition is in fact becoming more programmatically structured. As explained earlier, programmatically structured party systems require that political parties take committed and differentiated positions on key policy issues—a party system feature that cannot be captured through a sociodemographic analysis of voting behavior. Hence, to fill this gap, here I will adopt a method to determine programmatic/ideological linkages developed by Mainwaring and Torcal (2006, 210–211) specifically in the context of party system institutionalization. This method is based on a logistic regression model with a single continuous predictor: voters' self-reported position on the left-right scale. The dependent variable is voters' choice between two given parties (pairing off the three largest parties in each election and filtering by those respondents who expressed a preference for either one of the two parties). Using the estimated logistic regression coefficients, I then ran two simulations to assess the probability that voter *A* would choose party *i* over party *j*. The first simulation assumed that voter *A* would locate herself at 3.25 of the left-right scale (the exact median point between the exact center and the farthest left point), while the second simulation assumed that voter *A* would locate herself at 7.75 on the left-right scale (the exact median point between the exact center and the farthest right point).

The last column in Table 2 reports the difference between (1) the probability of *A* voting for *i* rather than *j* at 3.25 on the left-right scale and (2) the probability of *A* voting for *i* rather than *j* at 7.75 on the left-right scale. As can be seen, for each of the three party pairs,

**Table 2 Ideological Voting in Korea**

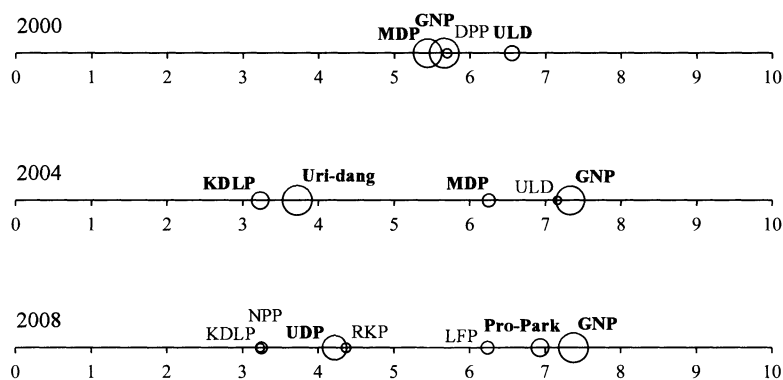
Election Year	Electoral System		Difference Probabilities
	Tier	Party Pair	
2000	SMDs	GNP vs. MDP	0.07
		GNP vs. ULD	0.04
		MDP vs. ULD	0.04
2004	SMDs	GNP vs. Uri-dang	0.47***
		GNP vs. MDP	0.17***
		Uri-dang vs. MDP	0.10**
	PR list	GNP vs. Uri-dang	0.52***
		GNP vs. DLP	0.48***
		Uri-dang vs. DLP	0.06
2008	SMDs	GNP vs. UDP	0.39***
		GNP vs. Pro-Park	0.06
		UDP vs. Pro-Park	0.30***
	PR list	GNP vs. UDP	0.39***
		GNP vs. Pro-Park	0.29
		UDP vs. Pro-Park	0.37***

Source: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) survey.

Notes: \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

this difference was almost nil in the 2000 parliamentary elections.<sup>7</sup> It was only from the 2004 elections onward that coefficients became statistically significant and differences between the probabilities grew larger. In other words, the model provides strong evidence that voters' programmatic/ideological position is now an important predictor of party choice. Or put in the terms of the party system literature, the Korean party system increasingly derives its stability from programmatic/ideological linkages between voters and parties.

Figure 7, which visualizes how voters place political parties along the left-right spectrum, further supports this argument. As is evident, voters in Korea perceive parties to be moving away from each other in terms of their programmatic appeals. Whereas in 2000 parties were virtually indistinguishable, the major parties now seem to have carved out highly distinctive positions on the policy issue space. When read in conjunction with Table 2, it becomes clear that voters' own programmatic/ideological position turns into an important driver of voting choice when programmatic/ideological differences between parties are more pronounced, such as between the Grand National Party (GNP) and the Uri-dang in 2004, or between the GNP and the United Democratic Party (UDP) in 2008.<sup>8</sup> If, in con-

**Figure 7 Voters' Placement of Parties on the Left-Right Scale**

Source: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) survey.

Notes: Bubbles indicate the mean placement of political parties on the left-right scale (0 = left; 10 = right). The size of the bubble is proportional to the party's vote share. Parties in bold are included in the logistic regression in Table 2.

trast, parties are perceived to be sitting relatively close to each other on the left-right scale, voters' ideological/programmatic position becomes less significant as a determinant of party choice. For example, in 2008, voters struggled to keep the GNP and the Pro-Park Alliance apart—which is not surprising, given that the latter had split off the former only a few months before the election because of mere office-seeking squabbles over leadership positions and candidate nominations.

Although it is beyond the scope of this article to provide a comprehensive explanation for why the major parties have been developing differentiated positions on the policy spectrum in recent years, it seems important to at least briefly point at what is probably the most significant explanatory factor: the emergence of the Korean Democratic Labor Party (KDLP). As Steinberg and Shin (2006, 535) explain, since the KDLP successfully broke into the party system “the composition of Korean politics . . . has shifted markedly towards a pluralistic ideological dichotomy.” More specifically, “with the [K]DLP representing a relatively hard-line left-wing political per-

spective and having attained relative political prominence, and the Uri Party [Uri-dang] reflecting an amorphous body of opinion from the moderate to the more pronounced left, the contrast with the generally conservative GNP is stark.” Put differently, as the KDLP positioned itself in the electoral market with an explicitly left-wing programmatic platform, other parties were forced to sharpen their own programmatic/ideological positions on the left-right scale, which, in turn, has led to growing ideological polarization at the party system level.

Obviously, this leaves us with the question of what facilitated the emergence of the KDLP. To answer this question, scholars usually highlight three factors (see Gray 2008; Lee and Lim 2006; Steinberg and Shin 2006): First, the KDLP capitalized on the IMF-imposed neoliberal reforms after the 1997 financial crisis and growing social inequalities in the wake of these reforms. In particular, the reorganization of the labor market—which considerably increased the number of nonregular and temporary workers—and the continuing inadequacies in social safety nets may have enhanced the electoral appeal of the KDLP. Second, the KDLP was also helped by electoral reform in 2004, which added a second vote to Korea’s mixed-member electoral system, giving voters the ability to vote both for a national party list and for a candidate in the local constituency. This second vote significantly increased the chances of smaller parties winning a seat. Third, it could be reasoned that a window of opportunity for a left-wing party to emerge only opened in the context of the post-Cold War era and after the military threat from North Korea had declined in the face of growing economic hardship.

To summarize the argument so far: the Korean party system is unevenly institutionalized, scoring high on the attribute of competitive stability but low on all other dimensions—in particular, on the dimension of party organization. The question that I tried to answer in the preceding section was, what is the source of party system stability in Korea? I argued that while stability during the three Kims era was mainly created through affective and clientelistic linkages, in recent years the Korean party system has become more firmly anchored through programmatic/ideological linkages. However, this answer begs an even more puzzling question: How have Korean parties been able to develop programmatic/ideological linkages with the electorate, despite the lack of formally institutionalized organizational structures?

### Developing Programmatic Linkages: Where Is the Party?

As explained in the first section of the article, formal party organization facilitates the development of programmatic/ideological linkages because it prevents political parties from being hijacked by ambitious leaders and their own self-serving interests. In particular, three organizational elements are considered important for keeping party leaders in check: an extensive grassroots membership, inclusive procedures for the nomination of candidates, and transparent financing structures. Korean political parties, however, fail to check any of these boxes, as a result of which political parties get easily captured by individual interests. The only significant organizational change introduced since the breakdown of autocratic rule has been the adoption of more democratic procedures for nominating presidential candidates, which regulates the conflict over *who* will take the party leadership but does not impose any limits on the *exercise* of leadership.

Because of these organizational features—and thus confirming the theoretical expectations in the literature—party brand building faces severe problems in Korea. For one, the lack of formal party organization creates strong incentives for goal displacement.<sup>9</sup> Two blatant examples of this happening occurred under the Roh Moo-hyun presidency (2002–2007) when the government—despite tapping into a rising tide of anti-Americanism during the election campaign and promising to limit the influence of export-oriented conglomerates in politics—committed to providing military troops to support the United States in Iraq and pushed for a Korea-US free trade agreement. Both of these policies prompted strong resistance within the ruling Uri-dang, with a number of lawmakers even resorting to hunger strike.

Second, the intransparent financing structures of political parties encourage self-serving rent seeking and “money politics.” For example, repeated allegations of corruption and illegal money transfers significantly hurt the approval ratings of the Lee Myung-bak administration (2007–2012). The list of scandals starts with a number of very close aides to Lee Myung-bak being arrested on graft charges, such as Chang Soo-man, one of the key architects of Lee’s “747 plan,” and Choi Young, a key adviser during Lee’s time as Seoul mayor. Various family members were also investigated over corruption and favoritism, including Lee’s older brother, Lee Sang-deuk (accused of bribe-taking); Lee’s son, Lee Si-hyung (accused of irreg-



ularities in the purchase of a plot of land for his father's retirement home); and Lee's son-in-law and CEO of Hankook Tire, Cho Hyun-beom (accused of stock price manipulation). Relatives of the first lady, Kim Yoon-ok, were implicated in similar scandals, such as two of Kim's brothers-in-law, Hwang Tae-seob (who was paid substantial consultant fees by Jeil Savings Bank, despite lacking any credentials for the job) and Shin Ki-ok (who is accused of pulling the strings in the so-called BKK scandal). Adding to the list, in December 2011, an assistant of a GNP lawmaker was arrested on suspicion of ordering a denial-of-service attack to take down the website of the National Election Commission shortly before the Seoul mayoral by-election; in February 2012, a whistle-blowing lawmaker revealed that former party leader Park Hee-tae had engaged in systematic vote buying to secure his election in 2008.

Such incidents of goal displacement and self-serving rent seeking severely undermine political parties' brand-building efforts, as they send the message that, whatever the brand's value proposition, there is nothing that stops individual politicians from pursuing their own narrow interests. However, despite these formidable challenges, Korean political parties have, over recent years, still succeeded in developing distinct and increasingly popular brand identities. A number of indicators presented earlier reflect this success: voters are now able to distinguish political parties according to their positioning on the left-right scale (see Figure 7), voting has become more ideologically oriented (see Table 2), and partisan identity has steadily increased (see Figure 5).

Although we can only speculate why repeated violations of campaign pledges and widespread corruption scandals have not completely derailed all brand-building efforts, a likely explanation are parties' carefully crafted rebranding exercises. Before major elections political parties tend to go to extreme lengths to distance themselves from outgoing governments and party leaders by making strategic changes to their brand image, such as adopting a new name, logo, or tagline. For instance, when, in early 2007, the leadership of the Uri-dang showed no signs of wanting to overhaul the highly unpopular party, lawmakers started defecting in large numbers. Eventually, four months before the presidential election in December, the defectors and the remnants of the Uri-dang merged with the Democratic Party (DP) to regroup under the new brand name of the United New Democratic Party (UNDP). Likewise, Lee Myung-bak's party—the GNP—was carefully rebranded before the 2012 presidential elec-

tions, after the government's approval ratings had hit rock bottom. In an attempt to disassociate itself with the Lee administration, the party changed its name to Saenuri (literally *new country*), and adopted a new logo—a red curved line resembling an ear—to highlight “the party's determination to listen to the people's calls” and shake off the image as an organization driven by self-interested greed.

In voters' minds, these rebranding exercises do not produce a complete collapse of associative networks because, as explained earlier, party brands are determined by a number of factors, not just advertising and marketing.<sup>10</sup> First, as politicians continue to be organized in “home boy” and “school boy” networks, Korean political parties can draw on a distinctive *brand heritage*, rooted in their regional—albeit weakening—electoral strongholds. While parties linked to the southwestern Honam region, due to the fact that the region had been a hotbed of political opposition to the military regime, are associated with more progressive values, parties connected to other regions evoke a rather conservative image (see Moon 2005). As can be seen in Figure 7, even before parties began investing in programmatic platforms, voters located Honam-based parties (MDP) further left on the ideological spectrum than other parties.

Second, in addition to historical factors, a party brand is strongly shaped by the image and personality that voters associate with the *party leader* or *presidential candidate*. In Korea, presidential candidates have in the three elections since 2002 undoubtedly further contributed to the development of distinctive brand images. Whereas Honam-based parties nominated Roh Moo-hyun (a former human rights lawyer), Chung Dong-young (a TV anchorman and prodemocracy activist under the autocratic regime), and Moon Jae-in (as Roh, a former human rights lawyer), Yeongam-based parties nominated Lee Hoi-chang (a Supreme Court judge during military rule), Lee Myung-bak (former CEO of Hyundai), and Park Geun-hye (the daughter of former dictator Park Chung-hee).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a party brand is influenced by the party's *policy proposals* and *decisions*. Here, continuity has since the end of the three Kims era been facilitated through parties' procedures for selecting the presidential candidate, which ensure that proposed policy programs remain within the respective party's ideological space. Policy programs are usually developed by presidential precandidates and their think tanks in the run-up to presidential elections.<sup>11</sup> To then be nominated as the party's candidate, precandidates need to put themselves and their policy proposals to a

vote—either among party members or through an open primary (or, in fact, a combination of the two) (see Table 1). To begin with, open primaries ensure that proposed policy programs remain within the party's ideological space, as they—generally speaking—tend to attract the most ideologically driven voters (e.g., Brady, Han, and Pope 2007). On the other hand, to understand why a vote among party members helps to promote ideological consistency, we need to remember that citizens do not join political parties for collective incentives; instead, they are recruited by candidates and assemblymen locally. These local “bosses,” in turn, instruct “members” how to vote in party internal elections and therefore have a powerful influence on the final outcome. Bosses are interested in keeping the policy program within the party's ideological framework because they have a longer time horizon than presidential candidates. While presidential candidates are only concerned with the next election—and would thus, ideally, chase the median voter—backbench politicians' main concern is to develop a stable party brand over a number of elections.<sup>12</sup>

In short, Korean political parties have succeeded in developing programmatic linkages with voters, despite lacking extensive organizational structures. A minimal set of formal rules to select the presidential candidate—although not regularized and institutionalized—seems to be enough to ensure that parties' campaign platforms stay within a certain ideological framework, and thus contribute toward building a distinct and consistent brand image. Informal “home” and “school” networks also seem to play a role in building a distinctive brand image, as they allow parties to lay claim to historical events (democratization vs. economic takeoff) and help parties to prefilter presidential candidates on the basis of their political values. Before elections, parties deal with problems of goal displacement and individual rent seeking by discarding their brand names, logos, and taglines, thereby communicating a clear break with outgoing leaders/presidents and renewing their commitment to collective programmatic goals.

## Conclusion

In this article I presented clear evidence that the party system in Korea is unevenly institutionalized. Whereas interparty competition—if not factoring in elite-driven changes to the party system—has been remarkably stable since the introduction of democratic elections in the late 1980s, Korea's party system is best described as inchoate on the other three dimensions of Mainwaring and Scully's (1995)

original model: parties have only shallow roots in society, suffer from serious legitimacy problems, and—probably most strikingly—are characterized by a lack of extensive and sophisticated organizational structures. The article therefore supports the argument recently put forward by scholars working on Latin American party politics that the different dimensions of party institutionalization are not connected in a linear manner. The resulting lesson is the same: we may have to rethink the common practice of aggregating the different attributes of party system institutionalization into a single scale.

In particular, I focused on the question of how to explain the “inconsistent” combination of stable patterns of interparty competition and a lack of formally institutionalized party organization. From a theoretical perspective, formal party organization—because it helps to control party leaders’ opportunistic behavior—is generally assumed to be a necessary condition for stabilizing interparty competition through programmatic linkages. In Korea, however, interparty competition is becoming increasingly structured by programmatic linkages *despite* political parties not making any serious effort to formally institutionalize internal rules and procedures. Significant party organizational change has only occurred on the dimension of candidate selection as political parties have implemented formal—albeit not institutionalized—procedures for the nomination of presidential candidates. Still, it seems that this minimal degree of organization is enough to ensure that proposed policy programs remain within parties’ respective ideological framework, thereby promoting the development of programmatic linkages between parties and voters. To deal with the problem of politicians opportunistically defecting from the party’s programmatic position *after* elections, Korean parties carefully rebrand themselves at regular intervals, which, first of all, renews the party’s commitment to its programmatic goals and, secondly, explains the high rate of elite-driven changes to the party system.

Moreover, not only do the attributes of competitive stability and party organization vary independently, but the Korean party system—although scoring relatively low on three of the four dimensions—also seems to avoid the negative aspects usually associated with weak institutionalization. Perhaps the most widely cited problems of weak party system institutionalization are (1) lowering the entry barriers for personalistic antisystem politicians and

(2) making it more difficult for voters to hold their representatives accountable (Mainwaring and Torcal 2006, 221; Mainwaring and Zoco 2007, 157–158). On both these points the Korean party system performs relatively well: (1) Even though “outsider” candidates have had some success in past presidential elections (see Figure 5), personalistic campaigns based on ambivalent attitudes toward democracy have not enjoyed much electoral support. (2) While parties regularly rebrand themselves, the high degree of personal continuity through intra-elite networks as well as parties’ distinct ideological profiles allow voters to attribute responsibility to political parties and reward/punish these parties at the next election.

However, a discussion of the party systems’ effects on democratic politics would not be complete if we did not again highlight the extraordinarily poor performance on the conceptual dimension of legitimacy. As noted earlier, parties have largely failed to earn the trust of voters and are widely perceived to be the most corrupt institution in the political system, thus fueling concerns among many Koreans that democracy is in crisis. Possibly reflecting these negative attitudes toward political parties, voter turnout in Korea has remained lower than in most other industrialized democracies, with generally only about half of voters participating in parliamentary elections.<sup>13</sup> In other words, although I have provided evidence that political party brands in Korea are developing increasingly positive relationships with voters—as indicated, for example, by strengthening partisanship among voters—it seems that a large part of the electorate is not responding to parties’ brand-building efforts and remains disillusioned with the electoral process.

The lack of formally institutionalized party organization undoubtedly contributes to these problems of legitimacy. Parties get easily captured by ambitious politicians and their selfish interests, untransparent financing mechanisms provide strong incentives for corruption and rent seeking, and political bosses’ control over local branches keeps citizens from participating in party politics as independently minded individuals. This suggests that there may be a positive relationship between the dimensions of party organization and legitimacy: if parties are formally institutionalized as abstract organizations, legitimacy goes up. However, only more systematic research can reveal more precisely whether this relationship holds true and how—more broadly—the different dimensions of party system institutionalization relate to each other.

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## Notes

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1. These three parties were the former regime party: the Democratic Justice Party (DJP), the New Democratic Republican Party (NDRP) led by Kim Jong-pil—who had served as prime minister under the Park Chung-hee regime (1961–1979)—and the Reunification Democratic Party (RDP) led by a prominent leader of the prodemocratic opposition, Kim Young-sam.

2. The split-up of the KDLP in 2007 was an exception, as it appeared to have been driven by ideological differences between the two main factions—the Political Democracy faction and the National Liberation faction. However, the Political Democracy faction, which broke away to form the New Progressive Party, rejoined the KDLP in 2011 to establish the United Progressive Party (UPP).

3. Please note that the following discussion is based on a broad generalization of party organization in Korea. The minor KDLP—and its successor party, the UPP—has been characterized by remarkably high levels of institutionalization on all three indicators of party organization.

4. The closest that political society and civil society have come in recent years is through presidential candidates seeking the endorsement of on-line political commentators and podcasters, some of whom have attracted a huge popular following—including, for example, Mun Seong-geun, Kim Eojun, and Jeong Bongju. The endorsement by podcasters and virtual political media producers played an important role in the Democratic United Party's presidential primaries in 2012, benefiting, in particular, candidate Moon Jae-in. For a more detailed discussion of why Korean parties are unlikely to develop formal membership organizations and linkages with civil society in the future, see Hellmann (2013).

5. For example, before the 2008 parliamentary elections, the Grand National Party (GNP)—then dominated by president Lee Myung-bak and his faction—refused to nominate a large number of supporters of Lee's main rival, Park Geun-hye. These supporters then formed a splinter party, winning a considerable number of seats in the elections. Before the 2012 parliamen-

tary elections—after Park Geun-hye succeeded in taking control of the party—nomination patterns were reversed: of the sixteen lawmakers who were refused renomination, eleven were outspoken Lee loyalists.

6. At least, this is the conclusion to be drawn when using vote buying as a proxy for clientelism, which has significantly declined in recent years (see Transparency International 2006, 40).

7. Unfortunately, the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) dataset only goes back as far as 2000.

8. See Moon (2005) for a very similar argument.

9. However, it could be argued that the risk of “agency loss” is a general problem of presidential systems that cannot be solved by party organization (see Samuels and Shugart 2010).

10. See Smith and French (2009) for a more detailed discussion.

11. These are not “think tanks” in the strict sense but rather close circles of personally trusted advisers, who hope to be appointed to a cabinet post after the election. For example, in the 2012 election, Park Geun-hye was supported by a think tank named Nation’s Future Research Center, chaired by Sogang University professor Kim Kwang-doo. DUP candidate Moon Jae-in surrounded himself with the Damjaengi Forum under the direction of former Korean Red Cross president Han Wan-sang.

12. See Kitschelt et al. (2010, 26) for a similar argument.

13. In the 2012 parliamentary elections, a mere 54 percent of voters turned out to vote. Based on the most recent figures, the only Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries with lower turnout rates are Switzerland (49 percent in 2011), Poland (49 percent in 2011), Hungary (47 percent in 2010), and the United States (42 percent in 2010).

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