The Two Driving Forces of Populism and Democracy in South Korea: A Conceptual, Historical, and Empirical Analysis*

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This paper is organized into three sections: conceptual, historical, and empirical. The first section introduces the basic conceptual scheme of populism, which includes its driving forces, components, functions, and dimensions. A "multiple dualities" perspective is emphasized to take account of the fact that populism can be defined as either the advocacy on behalf of the people as an integrative normative symbol of politics or the distrust in elites and other groups targeted as enemies of the people. Accordingly, it may promote but also hinder democracy. The second section shows how populism has unfolded in the history of Korean politics. The third section deals with an empirical analysis of data collected in 2018 on the topic of populism. Throughout these steps, the paper attempts to integrate a conceptual, historical, and empirical analysis together to examine whether populism offers resilience to the people or is conversely a threat to democracy. More precisely, it seeks to identify which kind of populism may offer resilience and which may pose a threat to democracy. We present the case of Korea with the view that the multiple dualities of populism have not only been inscribed in history but have also confronted each other today as embedded in two diverging populist movements in 2016-2017: the candlelight vigils and the national flag (taegeukgi) movement. The most striking finding of our empirical analysis is that the type of populism driven by such push factors as distrust and hatred tends to threaten democracy, as measured by popular support for political autocracy, whereas the other type of populism that advocates for the primacy of the people, as can be found in the candlelight vigil, tends to protect democracy from backsliding or regressing.

Introduction

The inextricable links between the political imaginations of populism and democracy call for a careful and balanced comprehension. In day-to-day political reality, however, the use of the term populism today has become so ambiguous, inflammatory, and even ideologically contaminated that it has become increasingly difficult to understand what populism means in the realm of the social sciences. Populism has become confounded in this way because the term has often served as a tool to demonize one's political opponents. Against this backdrop, we want to elucidate the relationship between populism and democracy in this paper and in doing so, explore the sustainability of democracy in the era of global economic crisis and populist challenges (Abromeit 2017; Galston 2018; Inglehart 2016; Morline and Quaranta 2016).

In our investigation of populism, we start with a conceptual analysis, focusing on the multiple dualities anchored in the operation of populism. The dualities are present when we talk about such defining characteristics of populism as its driving forces, i.e., push and pull energy, components, functions, and dimensions. A multiple dualities approach means that there are ambiguities, flexibilities, and uncertainties when it comes to populism. In its relationship with democracy, populism can be a positive or negative force, as it can be inclusionary or exclusionary. Likewise, populism may promote or hinder democracy. In our analysis of populism here, we use the terms *components*, *drivers*, *functions*, and *dimensions* interchangeably.

The rationale for our methodological approach is that we need not only a conceptual work but also an empirical data analysis of populism. The latter is needed to devise a set of clear-cut indicators through which we can measure the extent to which the main components of populism may promote or hinder democracy.

The combined conceptual and empirical analysis presupposes a shift of focus in the study of populism. Though there have been numerous studies on populism, most of them have concentrated on the role of populist leaders and/or parties with respect to their ideologies, policies, strategies, emotions, messages, and so forth. These works of research carry a tacit assumption that

citizens are just followers of demagogues and/or movements, lacking agency themselves. We consider this assumption, for the most part, ill-founded. To move beyond it, we believe in recentering the research and analysis of populist politics around the perspectives and behaviors of citizens themselves (Zaslove et al. 2021). Upon adopting the citizen-centered analytical lens, we can then carry out a rigorous empirical analysis with scientific evidence to get away from any confusion or contamination in understanding.

It is precisely by making the citizen the unit of analysis that this study continues our past research on democratic politics (Han and Shim 2018). With a focus on citizen attitudes and value orientations in Korea, we designed a conceptual model of path analysis and tested how independent variables such as socio-economic cleavages, party affiliation, and political ideology contribute to the support of autocratic presidential rule as a dependent variable. Given the two-party system of the mid-2010s in Korea, we found that the potential threat to liberal democracy did not come from the citizens who supported the progressive-oriented opposition party. On the contrary, it came from the citizens who supported the conservative ruling party in power (Han and Shim 2018, p. 296). Seen from the assumption that populist sentiment derives from political disillusionment and frustration rather than satisfaction and privilege, this finding was rather surprising. In that paper, however, we did not pay full attention to the role of populism in relation to democracy. To fill in this gap, we co-authored a subsequent paper "Economic Crisis and Populist Responses: A Comparative Look at the Potential Threat of Populism to New Democracies" and took part in the World Congress of International Sociological Association (ISA) held in Toronto, Canada in July 2018 where we presented our paper at a social theory session on "Populism and the New Political Order."

Conceptual Analysis

The Toronto Debate

The Toronto debate was held at the time when populism was spreading widely throughout the world, including in Western Europe and the United States where it was previously assumed that liberal democracy had been firmly institutionalized (Andreadis and Stavrakakis 2017; Eiermann, Mounk, and Gultchin 2017; Greven 2016). A pessimistic outlook was growing as evident from phrases being used like "democracy in retreat," "electoral

authoritarianism," and "Western democracy is threatening suicide!" (Mounk 2016; Intelligence Squared 2017). In this context, we can examine two background questions. First, what does the failure of liberal democracy mean, and how can we explain such a failure? Secondly, given this failure of liberal democracy, why is it that populism should reemerge rather than other kinds of radicalism of past eras?

As to the first question, the so-called "overstretch of the (neo)liberal project" offers an answer (Manow 2010; 2021). This project has degraded liberal democracy to the point of a technocracy that separates important socio-economic issues affecting ordinary people from politics, thereby immunizing the law from politics, and creating "a post-political administration of free markets." Educated elites and experts have often controlled these systems through cosmopolitan networks of cooperation way beyond the reach of ordinary people. This neoliberal project has broken down, resulting in serious socio-economic crises.

With that granted, why is it that populism should reemerge as an alternative? It may be harder to provide an answer to this question. The aim of the Toronto debate was to search for such an answer. Here too, it is clear that the radical (or extreme) alternatives in the past such as totalitarianism and communism have lost credibility. Why and how, then, has populism survived and reemerged today with considerable success? We should note the ambiguous yet intrinsic relationship between populism and democracy. Populism differs from other forms of extremism in that it is not anti-democratic. On the contrary, populism maintains a strong impulse of universal inclusion and equality, as inscribed in democracy, from its very beginnings. This is the reason why John Dunn argued in Seoul that populism and democracy are not disparate topics but in fact were the same topic originally. We will return to this point of discussion shortly.

What has emerged from the above reflections is the ambiguous, fluid, and complex relationship between populism and democracy (Laclau 1977, 1996, 2005a, 2005b; Filc 2015; Finchelstein and Urbinati 2018; Kaltsasser 2012; Adamidis 2021). The relations are neither oppositional nor homogeneous. The old tensions between populism and liberal democracy have been revived in this context (Manow 2020). They both have democratic roots, but they differ in some important respects. Populism commits itself to popular sovereignty in its full version whereas liberalism is in favor of certain legally constrained institutions such as the separation of powers, constitutionalism, protections of minority rights, and cosmopolitan cooperation. This means that they invoke different versions of democracy.

Populists are anti-liberal but democratic. What does that teach us today? It challenges us to open our eyes and explore the question of populism in greater depth to better comprehend the relationship between populism and democracy. As Rosanvallon (2011) puts it, populism is neither a Pavlovian matter of condemnation nor external parasitic contamination; its presence forces us to reflect on democracy in order to make it work better.

In this regard, the Toronto debate offered a show window of the diverging approaches to different aspects of populism from multiple theoretical perspectives. These approaches include not only a post-Marxian theory of populist hegemony (Laclau and Mouffe) but also a post-truth approach to populism (Durnova 2018). The concept of a fractured (rather than reflexive) modernity emerged with its argument that the basic task of social theory today is to grasp the transition from reflexive to fractured modernity, as the historical background of populism (Legett 2018). According to this view, it is no longer possible to treat truth, reason, and rationality as clear indicators of progress. Instead of reaching a state where these practices have become commonplace, the world has become ever more divisive, fractured, uncertain, and contradictory.

Concerning the relationship between populism and democracy, Filipe Silva (Lisbon) and Wiebke Keim (Strasbourg) have been instructive. To put it simply, Silva has offered a theoretical reflection which regards it possible for populism to make a genuine contribution to democracy by advocating a populist vision of inclusionary democracy. In contrast, Keim has outlined a case study of the right-wing populism in Europe today that makes her reluctant to accept this perspective. We would thus like to focus on these diverging perspectives in more detail.

Silva's stance is in line with the theoretical position originally proposed by Laclau and Mouffe and reiterated by Mude and Kaltwasser, among others. Despite the complex and complicated theoretical issues involved, Silva put the central thesis of the political tradition of populism quite aptly in his description that its origins can be traced back to a "fundamental yet neglected paradox at the heart of democracy." The paradox has to do with the impulse towards universal inclusion that is inscribed in democracy. Seen from this normative perspective, a gap is unavoidable because "with every attempt to broaden inclusion, new forms of exclusion emerge" (Silva 2018). In other words, democracy's promise of universal inclusion can never be fully realized. Thus, Silva says that democracy cannot but help but be riddled in an "insurmountable paradox."

Silva offers a sobering reflection. He grasps the inherent dualities in the

relationship between populism and democracy: preventative and restorative. Simply put, populism may hinder democracy insofar as it is primarily preoccupied by the binary opposition between friend and enemy. Yet it also "points to the restoration of democracy's broken promises and shared commitments." Populism, in Silva's view, is an "outgrowth of popular sovereignty and its egalitarian promises." The populist logic of resentment includes a normative element, that is, democracy's superordinate commitment to equality and popular sovereignty. When democracy faces a crisis, populism reemerges with an appeal to democratic equality in the name of the people it claims to represent.

Undoubtedly, one may ask how populism can possibly represent all people as a whole. There is no reliable answer to this question.[1] Yet despite this difficulty, it is true that populism shares a normative vision with democracy. Both share an aspiration toward universal inclusion and justice. The populist challenge has reemerged today because the neoliberal project has broken down. In this context, populism presents itself as a defender of a real democracy against the unresponsive elite rule which is democratic in name only.

The Toronto debate also produced many case studies of populism, including those on Fascism and Peronism. The political phenomenon was stretched widely to cover Asia, Russia, and China as well as such diverse personalities as Trump (the United States), Putin (Russia), Modi (India), Erdogan (Turkey), Bolsonaro (Brazil), and Duterte (the Philippines). For our purposes here, Keim deserves attention because she diverged from Silva's perspective. She collected data on a large number of European right-wing populist politics and formulated the concept of "authoritarian restoration" to account for a global trend. As she put it, "We are witnessing the worldwide rejection of liberal democracy and its replacement by some sort of populist authoritarianism" (Keim 2021a, p. 1). In her mind, Fascism provides scholars of populism with "an overarching, systematic, and coherent theoretical framework" (Keim 2021b) for the internal dynamics involved in populist "authoritarian restoration" as a general trend in Europe (Keim 2021a, p. 4).

Felipe Gaytan's (La Salle University, Mexico) case study of Latin American populism was also informative. The first generation of populist politicians represented by Peron (Argentina); Cardenas (Mexico), and Vargas (Brazil) exhibited the common traits of left-wing populism: They advocated

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[1] How to make use of Laclau's concept of hegemony as discursive struggle in social sciences is an interesting question to be explored (Rear and John 2013).

for the primacy of people as the ultimate source of political legitimacy while treating the state as an instrument of political inclusion and justice. This style of populism confronted the oligarchy of the economic and political elites and mobilized the people to support an inclusionary populism. However, the second generation, represented by Fujimori (Peru) and Menem (Argentina), for instance, was representative of a right-wing populism that advocates the principle of salvation of the nation from economic disaster. They significantly differed from the first generation in that they asked the people to accept economic austerity with the promise of economic paradise in the future (Gaytan 2018).

The Seoul Debate

Compared with the Toronto debate, which was largely centered around the West, the Seoul debate on populism and democracy that took place in May of 2018 paid close attention to South Korea from a global perspective. Three points of consideration are necessary to keep in mind. First, in Korea today, the term *populism* is almost always used pejoratively, evoking a negative reaction. In Europe too, as Rosanvallon observes, "Populism is loathed, while the principle of the people's sovereignty is lauded. What lies behind this paradox?" Even with this similarity with Europe, the paradox seems incomparably high in Korea. Second, despite this aversion to populism in the contemporary age, Korea has exhibited a rich set of traditions of populist imagination since the second half of the nineteenth century. It should be possible, therefore, to develop a constructive theory of populism to broaden the scope of democracy. However, due to political misrecognition, such work has been discouraged at the cost of a missed opportunity to devise a social theory of populism rooted in historical experience. Third, given the observation that the populist challenge has reemerged in the context of system failure, Korea is different since modern Korea is characterized more by success than failure in economic and political modernization. Thus, a question arises as to why populism should be as condemned as we find it to be today, if not for political reasons.

The Seoul debate aimed to go beyond this solely negative understanding of populism. We invited John Dunn from Cambridge, England who is well known for his study of Kim Dae-jung and Korean politics. We organized a series of discursive events in Seoul and Gwangju and examined where Korea stands, focusing on the relationship between populism and democracy. The basic design of the inquiry was that Han would provide an empirical analysis,

Dunn would offer theoretical reflections, and then both would engage in dialogue together with the panelists. Along with this plan, Han (2019) constructed analytical representations for the multiple types of populist citizens based on survey data analysis, and compared how they differed from each other and where a potential threat to liberal democracy could conceivably emerge from.[2]

Dunn's presentation can be summed up with three points: First, populism and democracy originally were not separate concepts but instead were components of the same idea. In nineteenth-century Russia (Walicki 1969), for example, the term *Narodniki* was a "name for populism that a set of deeply engaged political actors chose deliberately and proudly for themselves." The term *Narodniki* conveyed "much the same as their European contemporaries meant by calling themselves democrats" (Dunn 2019, pp. 53-54). We can easily extend this observation to Latin America from the beginning of the twentieth century (Laclau, 1977; Mude and Kaltwasser 2012). *Pueblo,* an alignment of popular forces, emerged as political actor demanding democratic inclusion vis-à-vis the traditional power structure of oligarchy and support for the expansion of the domestic market via the import-substitution industrialization policy. Frank (2020) has vividly demonstrated how a populist movement started in the United States from the Kansas House of Representatives in Topeka, Kansas, in February 1893.

Second, the populism of today, however, is sadly nothing but a pathological state of democracy. Dunn argued that "there is no purely external corruption of democracy. Populism refers to a democracy that has allowed itself to be corrupted. Democracy, like all human political institutions, is readily subject to pathology. Keeping it healthy is a huge achievement, while letting it become deeply unhealthy is quite easy and could happen quite quickly pretty much everywhere." He identified many reasons for this phenomenon, such as political establishments' lack of sensitivity to the needs of ordinary people, a socioeconomic crisis resulting from the inability of political elites to manage the capitalist economy properly, and a deterioration of public debt due to the government's irresponsible squandering of public resources. Populism has arisen as a response to one or more of these systematic failures.

Third, in the case of Korea, however, Dunn emphasized that "by no stretch of the imagination is Korea a failing society or economy." The threat

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[2] Based on this presentation and debate, the papers by Han and Dunn were respectively published in the journal *Populism* together with the panelists' discussion papers.

to democracy, "insofar as it arises at all, is bound to prove weaker." Dunn grasped the dualities involved in the relationship between populism and democracy. On the positive side, populism provides energy for democratic transitions. On the negative side, the democratic government fails to manage the system properly resulting in crises which give rise to populist revivals and threats to liberal democratic systems. In Korea, according to Dunn, the positive function of populism has been significant whereas its negative side has not been as present as it has been elsewhere.

These presentations triggered an intense debate among participants (Kim B. 2019; Lim 2019). All agreed with Dunn's assessment of the role of populism in Korea. Moving further, as Kim asked, if "all forms of democracy true to its name are basically populistic," then how can we make populism compatible with democracy while avoiding its potential dangers? Dunn responded that "the task of protecting democracy from danger is very different from the task of fighting for it." A rigorous debate proceeded as to whether it is possible for liberal democracy to deal with populist challenges without some fundamental structural changes. For instance, how to better realize citizen involvement and monitoring.

The Two Driving Forces of Populism

With these debates as our basis and in pursuit of answers to the questions raised in Seoul, we now turn to a conceptual framework of populism that distinguishes among the components, drivers, functions, and dimensions of populism in relation to democracy. Although in the real world, all of these aspects are operating in tandem with each other, this work is only an analytical abstraction. Nevertheless, we need conceptual separation to see more clearly how populism is constituted and where a potential danger to democracy may come from.

Yet care should be taken not to evade the difficult questions one may encounter in the study of populism. How can we accept the binary opposition assumption underlying populism between the corrupted elites and the pure people as well as the claim that populism alone can represent the people as a whole? Another difficulty concerns the high extent of complexities, fluidities, and varieties. Populism easily transcends conventional boundaries like class, gender, ethnicity, and generation. It relies more on individual personalities than institutionalized party politics (Pappas 2016; Block 2017; Foa and Mounk 2016). Populism may represent the interests of farmers, the working poor, the consumers, or the declining

middle class. The function of populism in fact varies depending on whether a particular form of populism is progressive or regressive, inclusionary or exclusionary, and right-wing or left-wing (Zuquete 2008; Mude and Kaltwasser 2013). One can even speak of a neo-liberal populism (Akcay 2018). How then can we develop a relatively coherent theory of populism in relation to democracy? Do we need a minimum definition of populism (Torre and Mazzoleni 2018)?

The entire task before us is immensely complex and lies beyond the scope of this article. Our aim here is to develop a simplified conceptual framework of populism that is easily applicable to empirical research. For instance, Mavrozacharakis (2018, pp. 19-35) has made a strong claim that "it has not been proven by any empirical research that populism acts as a corrective element on the quality of democracy, facilitating the integration and inclusion of marginalized groups of people." This critique is addressed to Laclau, Mouffe, Mudde, and Kaltwasser, who have argued that the inclusion attribute of populism has a positive effect on democracy. The negative view of populism was explicitly formulated by Hofstadter (1955) who set the trends of anti-populism. This is precisely the point we want to test. It is an open question whether populism functions merely as a threat to democracy (Abts and Rummens 2007, p. 415) or if it can revitalize democracy by forcing it to adjust to the structural changes taking place.

For the sake of convenience, we can distinguish between two groups of scholars. One group argues that the challenge posed by populism can promote and stabilize democracy and therefore be functional to democracy because it forces the broadening of political agendas (Akkerman 2003, p. 154). Vittorio (2017, p. 137) says:

> Populism is what we have when elites lose their ability to engage in democratic politics and fail to adjust them to the social changes, which call for ongoing adaptations…. Populism ... reflects the necessity of adaptation following a change. Populism is an evolutionary political concept; it warns that the balance has been upset and that a new set of political ideas, plans, and actions is needed.

Another group of scholars insists that the positive role attributed to populism is "superfluous" or "fictitious," because "it ignores the aggressiveness of the populists against the established democratic institutions such as the traditional parties, the parliaments and their procedural functions, the democratic dialogue, the search for consensus, the respect of

opposing viewpoints, etc." They therefore argue that there are "fundamental distinctions between democracy and populism," denying the possibility of populism having such a positive effect as a corrective element in democracy.

We believe that both of these positions are one-sided. Because it involves multiple dualities, populism is unavoidably ambiguous and fluid, embracing contradictory tendencies and orientations. These contradictions are due to its internal characteristics and dispositions rather than any external influence or historical contingency. The question of whether populism functions positively or negatively in relation to democracy depends on which component or driver wields more influence in populist movements. We need a conceptual framework that is flexible enough to recognize such an interaction taking place.

For example, Vittori (2017, pp. 54-56) identified ten basic features of populism derived from previous studies: "(1) populism as an ideology lacking core value; (2) anti-elitism; (3) the hostility to representative politics; (4) a mobilization against the political status-quo (5) the personal appeal to the people; (6) the homogeneity of the people; (7) ethnic and cultural discrimination; (8) the idealization of the 'heartland'; (9) a sense of a perceived crisis; and (10) a context dependent and self-limiting phenomenon." According to his analysis, populism is a "thin-centered ideology that incorporates two necessary attributes: anti-elitism and criticism of political representation" (Vittori 2017, p. 59).

The list includes many features yet is largely descriptive and lacks a coherent conceptual scheme. Instead, we want to pay attention to the driving forces of populism that are composed of push and pull drivers. The push driver is concerned with frustration, disappointment, resentment, hatred expressed against certain target groups like the power elite, technocrats, and immigrants. The pull driver offers hopes, dreams, aspirations, and motivations for action toward an imagined future (Brysk 1995; Min and Yoon 2016). The imagined future is distinguished from a distorted, corrupted, unhealthy, shameful, and unresponsive democracy. The articulation of the concept of people and the enunciative function of true democracy deserves a careful and emphatic reading.

For this reason, we propose that populism can be defined by two driving forces that we call the *push driver* and the *pull driver*. Populism is constituted by the advocacy of people as the pull driver, and distrust and hatred against certain target groups as the push driver. We use the terms drivers, components, functions, and dimensions in a way that acknowledges how closely related they are to each other. In the next section, we will see how

populism in its multiple dualities has functioned in the history of Korean politics and democracy. An empirical analysis will follow.

Historical Analysis

The conceptual framework of democratic transition and consolidation have often been used in the study of Korean politics. It may be controversial then to consider the conceptual framework of populism. Therefore, special care is needed when engaging in such an analysis. First, it is important to point out that populism has historical and cultural roots in Korea. Etymologically, terms like *minjung*, *inmin*, and *pyeongmin* indicate different combinations of characters that all contain the common root *min. Min* connotes the common people as the basis of a nation. There have been considerable discursive struggles since the mid-nineteenth century to construct *minjung* as a meaningful concept denoting a political actor.[3] Therefore, there are historical and cultural grounds for using the term populism in the social and human sciences (Lee 2011; Chang 2015, 2018).

Second, the two driving forces of populism, push and pull, have always existed in history and are necessarily mutually related. Han (2019) has traced the origin of populism back to the end of the nineteenth century when the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910) crumbled, leaving the ordinary people in great pain and agony. Since then, time and time again, the populist inspiration—associated with the word *minjung*—has repeatedly arisen in the context of the sovereign status of the people. As Kim Leest (1992, p. 6) has observed, during the 1970s, the concept of the *minjung* began to be explicitly constructed as "the subject of history" (*yeoksa-ui juche*) meant to refer to those "struggling against political, economic and cultural oppression," and was widely used during the 1980s.

Populism inspires cultural reawakening movements. During the 1980s, college students and Christian groups (Kim S. 1998; Kim Y. 1982) called for a revival of traditional culture like the mask dance (*talchum*) and courtyard

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[3] Shin Chae-ho (1880-1936), a leading historian and revolutionary declared in 1923: "In order to maintain the life of the Chosen nation, one must get rid of the Japanese, the robbers. In order to get rid of the Japanese, revolution is the only answer...[and] the first step of our revolution is to call for the awakening of the people *(minjung)*" (Shin 1923, p. 407). Shin Chae-ho (1880-1936), a leading historian and revolutionary declared in 1923: "In order to maintain the life of the Chosen nation, one must get rid of the Japanese, the robbers. In order to get rid of the Japanese, revolution is the only answer...[and] the first step of our revolution is to call for the awakening of the people *(minjung)*" (Shin 1923, p. 407).

plays (*madang-geuk*) as a manifestation of popular culture in the ordinary life of the *minjung*. They made various attempts to reconstruct social history from the perspective of the *minjung*. In so doing, *minjung* proponents questioned the validity of assumptions of history that were previously taken for granted.

How did populism operate in terms of its two drivers? According to the normative political philosophy of Confucianism, as a pull driver, the ruling elites are morally obliged to take good care of the people who are the basis of the polity However, history has often revealed a profound gap between this normative goal and the actual political circumstances. Populism then functioned as a push driver through expressions of anger and resentment against the exploitation and repression internally by the domestic ruling class and/or externally by a colonial power. During Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945), this resistance became particularly fierce and intense. Since then, the term *minjung* as the principal maker of history has acquired a strong normative and affective appeal (Chang 2015, 2018).

Third, although the conceptual framework of populism is useful for considering the case of Korea, we would be better off not overstretching it across too many distinct historical and social processes. While it is true that the democratic movements of the 1980s overlapped with populist movements, it may be too much to lump all political and social movement into an overarching framework of populism. In our discussion here, we will limit our historical analysis largely to the time period up until the 1980s and the recent experiences of the candlelight vigils and the national-flag movements.

Authoritarian Politics and Populism

The precise function of populism in a given society depends on the combination of many factors such as the form of government, the types of political parties, the characteristics of civil society and their reciprocal interactions. To introduce the history of Korean democracy briefly, the student April Revolution in 1960 was the first turning point away from the political autocracy of Syngman Rhee. However, the new democracy introduced was soon wrecked by a military coup d'état one year later and the resulting military government launched a program of economic modernization, in close coordination with civilian economic experts. Thus, the economy soon took off, sparking a popular dream of upward mobility while widely spreading a "can-do spirit."

The developmental state mutated, however, into a bureaucratic-authoritarian (BA) dictatorial regime as a result of the Yushin reforms in 1972 that suspended all basic political and civil rights and key institutions of democracy. The BA regime relied on emergency decrees in the name of national security and the fear of communism from North Korea was systematically manufactured by the security apparatus. Consequently, civil society was suppressed while the bureaucratic regime of control heavily penetrated into civil society.

Despite the risks, college students continued to stand firmly against the authoritarian regime, since the 1960s. Of decisive importance in this regard was the popular protest movement of Gwangju residents in May 1980, which served as a new watershed moment in the democratization movement (Han 1999). The Gwangju *minjung* stood up with unusual solidarity against the military forces specially trained and dispatched to crackdown on the protest movement, pushing the army to the outskirts of the city and thus realizing a large-scale community of fraternity and mutual aid (Choi 2005). Although this experiment of people's autonomy did not last long, its spirit gave rise to a strong populist movement and political democracy.

A delicate dialectical process was set into motion as a result of this process (Han 1987, 1997b, 2001). On the one hand, the BA regime was notoriously repressive, dismantling democratic institutions and suppressing civil and political rights as well as labor union activity. On the other hand, the state apparatus in charge of national security and economic planners managed the economy in cooperation with each other, accelerating the growth in industrial production, GNP, GDP, exports, and the heavy and chemical industries by efficiently mobilizing all the available resources to achieve the declared national targets of development earlier than planned.

Benefiting from this, the number of skilled workers and the middle class increased rapidly as the fruits of this economic modernization. This made it possible for the *minjung* movement to expand its social space broadly to include various social forces such as students, blue- and white-collar workers, and professionals, not to mention the urban poor and peasants. Each year, the large number of graduates from universities equipped with progressive worldviews joined the labor force and entered civic institutions. This young and educated generation, as a democratic transformer, became larger and larger in social institutions and began to make demands for freedom and democracy (Han 1997a, 2009, 2010). When they were college students, they not only supported democratic movements but also felt indebted to the people at the grassroots level, in the sense that the opportunities the college

students enjoyed were in fact a result of the sacrifices imposed on the *minjung*. For this reason, many of the students regularly visited the poor urban communities to offer such voluntary services as night class education, medical treatment, legal counseling, and more. Some of them even entered firms as menial workers to form democratic labor unions. It soon become evident that this popular solidarity movement had expanded horizontally from one social sector to another as well as vertically into the main social institutions like the state administration, political parties, corporate firms, the education sector, professional organizations, and so on (Han 1997b, 2001).

In the political realm, however, the two main political parties were in deep confrontation with each other, holding contrasting views of the relationship between populism and democracy. To put it simply, the BA regime and the conservative governments in power depicted the opposition party and the popular forces behind it as dangerous, divisive, and irresponsible, and in this way preoccupied themselves with their political motive of gaining power and their strategy of mobilizing the people for this purpose. In contrast, the opposition party and the popular forces advocated for democratic principles of inclusion, equality, and justice, criticizing the entrenched power of the Establishment.

Democratic Resilience and Two Populist Movements

The tendencies of the two divergent political perspectives discussed above can be confirmed by the recent experience of the candlelight vigils and national flag (*taegeukgi*) movement in 2016. These movements offer an excellent opportunity to test the relationship between populism and democracy. Here again, self-scrutiny is required. One may question whether it is appropriate to take the national flag movement as an instance of populism in Korea. In the past, right-wing movements were often nothing but state mobilization. The case of the national-flag movement, however, is different. Many identifying with it voluntarily came out to the streets based on their individual judgments (Choi J. 2017). The push and pull drivers of populism were clearly present in this context. They expressed their distrust and hatred with populist politicians believing they had contaminated democratic politics by introducing a style of street confrontation. They also demonstrated the advocacy of people who had fought for liberal democracy against the North Korean communism. Han (2018) has demonstrated the populist characteristics of this movement. Thus, we can take this experience as an opportunity to test the relation of populism and democracy.

Furthermore, we can also test democratic resilience. Democratic regression, backsliding and breakdown have been found in many countries (Bermo 2016; Mechkova, Lührmann and Lindberg 2017; Tomini and Wagemann 2018), as outlined below.

> Democratically elected leaders increasingly engage in more subtle and nuanced attacks on democratic institutions and practices, such as executive aggrandizement, curtailment of media freedom, the gradual erosion of horizontal accountability. (Boese et al. 2020, p. 3)

Korea is not an exception to this phenomenon. As a new democracy with a strong legacy of authoritarianism, the tendency of executive aggrandizement and autocracy formation is not only possible but even quite likely. Democratic resilience refers to the ability of democracies to prevent such regressions after a democratic transition (Burnell 1999). It is then of crucial significance to check whether or not there are pro-democratic actors capable of preventing Korea from facing a democratic backlash.

During the 1970s, as noted earlier, Korean politics experienced democratic breakdown, but civil society regained strength and vitality throughout the 1980s, paving the way towards democratic transition and consolidation. To that extent, democratic resilience proved to be strong. However, Korea faced a new wave of bureaucratic aggrandizement when the conservative governments (2008-2016) strengthened their bureaucratic control from above and narrowed the channels for bottom-up political participation. A wide gulf emerged between the common people and the government (Shin J. 2018). The moral breakdown of the government due to the misuse of power and the lack of attention to the sense of urgency felt by ordinary people were also noticeable (Jung 2009, 2015).

The candlelight vigil and the national flag movements, as two instances of populism, emerged from this historical context. With the context in mind, we tested democratic resilience by examining the confrontation of the two aforementioned populist movements (Soh, Yu and Connolly 2018; Lee J. 2017; Choi J. 2018; Park 2017; Han 2019; Shin J. 2018) dramatically opposed to each other in terms of ideologies, political aspiration, and demographic profile. The candlelight vigil populists considered the national flag populists as a threat to the republican vision of democracy that they were defending. They strongly expressed their voices demanding the resignation of the president and a return to a republican democracy based on popular sovereignty. The candlelight vigil has become the most popular form of

collective civic action for young Koreans, especially for the groups who consider themselves democratic and progressive (Shin W. 2016). In contrast, the national flag populists projected themselves as defenders of national unity and liberal democracy. They were eager to eliminate the progressive populist leaders, considering them pro-North Korea and pro-communist. Thus, they argued for joining in the street demonstrations to defend the anti-communist foundation of liberal democracy.

This collective experience was not only dramatic but consequential. It was consequential because the President of Republic of Korea at the time, Park Geun-hye, was impeached and removed from office through the decision of National Assembly and the Constitutional Court. It was dramatic because despite the large number of protesters from both sides and their so-called "adversarial nature," the whole processes of confrontation "remained remarkably peaceful" for an unusually long time (Soh et al. 2018, p. 374). According to one interpretation, this collective experience amounted to "an unprecedented civil revolution and Glorious Revolution without the hurl of a single stone" (Lee D. 2017, p. 4). In this sense, one can say that the capacity of democratic resilience proved to be strong once again.

Empirical Analysis

We now turn to an empirical analysis to test which types of populist citizens are likely to contribute to democracy and which types are likely to hinder it. Whether populism has a positive or negative impact depends on the context of its development and the issues involved. An economic crisis is an example of such a context (Morline 2016). As Dunn observes, populism emerges as a response to economic crisis but instead of acting as a solution, ends up further aggravating the crisis. This proposition makes sense as a historical observation. From the point of view of empirical analysis, however, we need to be more specific about what drives populism, which drivers of it are likely to pose a threat to democracy, and furthermore how we can measure its threat to democracy.

Thus, we have examined a battery of questionnaires used by the Hellenic study group in Greece to address the problems pertaining to the definition of populism (Rico, Guinjoan, and Anduiza 2017) and measure populist attitudes thereof (Andreadis and Stavrakakis 2017; Akkerman, Mudde, and Zaslove 2014). Among the eight items they have used, we selected five items and used them in our survey research in 2018. In this paper, however, we use

only four items. The first and fifth items refer to the push driver of populism, namely, the distrust in political elites. The fourth item refers to the advocacy by the people as a pull driver. And the third item refers to the threat to democracy since it means distortion of the rule of law in favor of some kind of exceptional—personal or institutional—arrangement of things.

1) Most politicians do not care about the people.
2) Most politicians are trustworthy.
3) Having a strong leader in government is good even if the leader bends the rules to get things done.
4) The people, and not politicians, should make our most important policy decisions.
5) Most politicians care only about the interests of the rich and powerful.

We asked the respondents to rate how much they agreed or disagreed with each statement by choosing one of the following scaled options: "strongly disagree," "disagree," "agree," and "strongly agree."

The analysis of the data has resulted in the following preliminary results. First, the factor analysis of the five items above reveals a reasonably high degree of consistency. Thus, we have constructed an index of populist attitudes based on the questions one, two, four, and five, and divided citizens into two groups, that is, the populist group and the conventional group. The populist group made up 56.2 percent of the total respondents while the conventional group made up 43.8 percent. In addition, we treated question four as the dependent variable to be explained.

Second, the divide between these groups turned out to be deeply connected to perceptions of justice or fairness. As shown elsewhere (Han 2019), we have found a consistent and significant difference between the populist and the conventional groups with respect to their assessment of social justice measured by the 13 items of justice used in our survey research. The populist group turned out to be more negative while the conventional group turned out to be more positive in their justice assessments.

Third, the divide was also deeply related to the perceived importance of family background and social capital (network) for individual success. The data suggest that the populist group is more sensitive than the conventional group to aspects of unequal family backgrounds anchored in the division of "gold spoon" (rich families) and "dirt spoon" (poor families), so to speak, as often expressed in Korean media reports. The metaphor of a dirt spoon reflects a sense of frustration, anger, and deprivation.

The regression analysis displayed in Table 1 shows what we have briefly discussed, that is, the determinants of populist attitudes. Among the demographic factors, age and social class yield independent influence to a considerable extent. Model 2 in Table 1 indicates the following tendencies: 1) As one becomes older, one exhibits more populist attitudes. 2) The lower class is more strongly associated with populist attitudes than the middle class. 3) The higher the household income, the less populist one's attitudes are. But the most important independent influence was found to be the perception of justice and family background. These variables indicate that people are likely to become populist if they perceive a lack of justice in the society and an influence of family background on individual success.

TABLE 1
REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF POPULIST ATTITUDES

Dependent Variable: Populism	Model 1	Model 2
age	0.003(0.006)	0.015(0.006)**
sex (woman=0, man=1)	-0.117(0.133)	-0.007(0.126)
marital status1 (unmarried=0, married=1)	0.176(0.196)	0.167(0.185)
marital status2 (unmarried=0, bereaved/divorced/seperated=1)	-0.360(0.308)	-0.380(0.291)
class (lower class=0, middle class=1)	-0.472(0.156)**	-0.318(0.148)*
health (good=0, bad=1)	0.012(0.136)	0.078(0.129)
housing1 (own home=0, charter=1)	0.036(0.168)	0.010(0.158)
housing2 (own home=0, monthly rent/etc=1)	-0.040(0.189)	-0.071(0.178)
education	0.055(0.070)	0.030(0.066)
household income	-0.042(0.054)	-0.070(0.051)
social justice		-0.080(0.011)***
family wealth		0.338(0.042)***
constant	10.684(0.459)***	9.696(0.659)***

$^+ p<0.1$ * $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$

In addition, we have measured the extent to which distrust of elites and the advocacy of the people, the two major drivers and components of populism, are represented by the two populist citizen groups. Such questions as "Most politicians do not care about the people" and "Most politicians care

only about the interests of the rich and powerful" were used to scale distrust of elites. The scale of the primacy of the people was constructed by the answer to the item "The people, and not politicians, should make our most important policy decisions."

Our findings are revealing. First, we found that the higher the distrust of elites, the stronger the support for the national flag movement. Second, the higher the primacy of the people, the stronger the support for the candlelight vigils. The two movements are equally populist yet their strategic foci differ. What does it mean to have democratic resilience? We will test that soon, but the regression analysis in Table 2 demonstrates that the pull driver of the primacy of the people is clearly embedded in the candlelight vigil movement whereas the push driver of elite distrust is internalized in the national-flag movement. This finding is significant since we have separated the two drivers of populism and tested their influences. What remains to be seen though is how this tendency is linked to the support for political autocracy.

Table 2 also shows the independent influence of such demographic variables as age, class, ideology, and income, as well as the variables of social justice, wealth of the family, and social network on the two types of populism. We should note the difference between Table 1 and Table 2. The former shows how the populist and conventional groups differ from each other, whereas the latter shows the internal relations within each type of populism. Now we can say more clearly that the higher the positive assessment of social justice, the stronger the inclination to support national flag populism. In contrast, the higher the negative assessment of social justice, the stronger the inclination to support candlelight vigil populism. Likewise, the weaker the perceived influence of family wealth on individual success, the stronger the inclination to support national flag populism, whereas the greater the perceived influence of one's social network, the stronger the inclination to support candlelight populism. With respect to age, it can be said that the younger the respondent, the more the support he or she has for candlelight vigils. In contrast, the lower the social class to which one belongs, the stronger the support one has for national flag populism. As to the role of ideology, it is undoubtedly clear that the more conservative one is, the stronger he or she supports national flag populism whereas the more progressive one is, the stronger he or she supports candlelight vigil populism.

TABLE 2
REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF TWO POPULIST MOVEMENTS

	National Flag	Candlelight
Distrust in Elite	-6.355***	1.485
	(0.000)	(0.362)
People Primacy	-0.416	4.585***
	(0.719)	(0.000)
Sex (Ref: female)	-3.037	-1.182
	(0.057)	(0.448)
Age	0.191**	-0.318***
	(0.001)	(0.000)
Class (Ref: Lower Class)	-3.962*	-0.969
	(0.025)	(0.575)
Ideology	-5.678***	8.465***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Income	-1.732*	2.373***
	(0.011)	(0.000)
Education Level (Ref: $R <=$ high school)		
$R <=$ College degree	-1.937	0.203
	(0.349)	(0.920)
$R >$ College degree	-0.805	-1.770
	(0.783)	(0.536)
Social Justice	0.180**	-0.267***
	(0.002)	(0.000)
Family Wealth	-2.623*	1.288
	(0.011)	(0.198)
Social Network	-0.269	2.330*
	(0.813)	(0.036)
Constant	76.39***	12.21
	(0.000)	(0.104)
N	1123	1123
adj. R^2	0.211	0.366
F	25.98	55.00

p-values in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Our final analysis involves testing the above thesis by investigating the influence of the two types of populist movements on the dependent variable of political autocracy. While we used the 2014 dataset, the dependent variable was measured by the response to the question how one would consider "having a strong president who does not have to bother with parliament and elections."[4] However, the scale of political autocracy in 2018 was measured by the response to the statement "Having a strong leader in government is good even if the leader bends the rules to get things done." Though these questions are not identical, we judge that we can construct a reliable scale of political autocracy from these data as the dependent variable to be explained.

The aim of the path analysis shown in Figure 1 is to examine how the scale of sympathy for the candlelight and national flag movements as independent variables and the scale of the support for autocratic strong leader as the dependent variable is linked causally. The data analysis demonstrates that: 1) the two independent variables, the candlelight vigil and the national flag orientations yielded strong independent influence on the assessment of social justice in opposite ways; 2) the intermediate variable of social justice also yielded independent influence on the support for an authoritarian strong leader; and 3) the independent variable of the national flag orientation had a significant direct influence on the dependent variable. To translate these findings into ordinary language, we can say that: 1) the more one is oriented towards candlelight vigils, the more one is likely to be frustrated by the lack of social justice; 2) the more one is oriented toward national flag marches, the more one is likely to recognize the extent of realizing social justice; 3) the higher the assessment of social justice, the greater the support for an authoritarian strong leader; and 4) the more one is oriented towards national flag populism, the more one is likely to support an autocratic leader. Our findings also clearly proved that one's orientation towards candlelight vigils has nothing to do with one's support for an autocratic leader.

Given the fact that liberal democracy can work properly only when an institutional division of power and fair procedural rules are well maintained, liberal democracy is likely to be threatened if an autocratic leader is eager to have things done in a way that deconsolidates legal institutions and strengthens personal or factional networks over the National Assembly, legal

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[4] We decided to delete the empirical analysis of the data collected in 2014 from this paper. We plan to write another paper to bring the discussion of populism more closely to the concept of liberal democracy by decomposing the latter into political liberalism and economic liberalism.
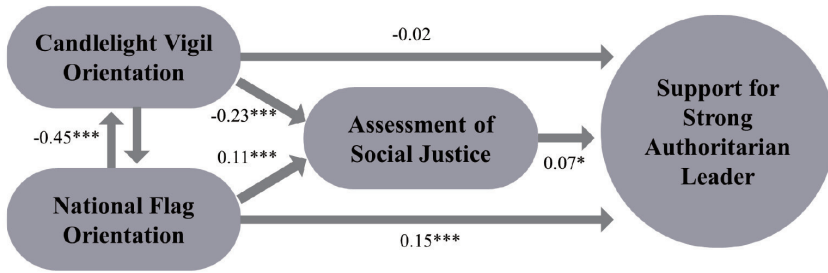
FIG. 1.—PATH ANALYSIS OF THE THREAT TO LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

institutions, and other state administrative bodies. In this regard, our empirical analysis has demonstrated that the threat to liberal democracy does not come from the candlelight populist movement. On the contrary, it comes from the national flag populist movement. Furthermore, of the two constitutive components of populist orientation, the push driver of political distrust and hatred tends to threaten democracy. This is the case with the national flag movement in which distrust is deeply internalized. On the contrary, the primacy of the people as a pull driver of populism tends to promote democracy. This is the case of candlelight vigil populism in which this component is deeply embedded.

Concluding Remarks

How to assess the role of populism in relation with democracy is an issue of crucial significance for social and political theory today, but the debate is likely to continue as we are still far from a reasonable consensus (Laclau 2015a; Harpen 2021; Inglehart 2016; Mude and Kaltwasser 2018; Manow 2020). On the other hand, the political use of the term populism has increased confusion, distortion, and demonization. To go beyond this, this article has attempted a conceptual analysis in the first section, suggesting multiple dualities embedded in the concept of populism. In the second section, we offered an historical analysis describing how populism has unfolded in South Korea. The third section showed the main outcomes of an empirical analysis of survey data collected in 2018 concerning the relationship between populism and democracy.

    In this final section, we would like to return to the argument that we

examined in the first section, that is, the thesis that a positive contribution of populism to democracy has not been proved at all by any empirical analysis. However, we have proved two points. First, historically, the Korean experience shows that the *minjung* popular movements during the 1980s and the candlelight vigil in 2016 functioned to foster democratic transition or keep democracy from backtracking. Secondly, our empirical analysis shows that the pull driver of populism—that is, the advocacy by the people as an integrative normative symbol of politics deeply embedded in candlelight vigils—promotes democracy, whereas the push driver—the distrust and hatred deeply anchored in the national flag movement—poses a threat to democracy by increasing one's propensity for supporting an autocratic leader. This finding is significant in that it enables us to see on a deeper level the internal relations between populism and democracy.

Finally, one may boldly ask, "Are you sure that the candlelight vigil populist movement poses no threat to democracy at all?" Apart from our empirical analysis which we consider to be valid as of 2018 when the survey was conducted, we have no intention to argue so strongly. The current government of the Republic of Korea emerged as an outcome of the so-called Candlelight Revolution. The candlelight vigils clearly protected Korean democracy from authoritarian backlash, and in that sense, we can say that it promoted democracy. However, since then, the candlelight vigil movement seems to have gradually fallen short of reflexive capacity. Strongly supported by the extra-institutional organization and mobilization of progressively oriented social forces, the current government, equipped with ever more monopolized power at its disposal, has tended to jeopardize certain key institutional principles of liberal democracy, such as separation of powers, the independence of the judiciary and media institutions, and coalition-building with opposition parties. The candlelight vigil movement may indeed have already degraded significantly into a power instrument of political mobilization.[5] Therefore, we need to keep our eyes open and sharpen our historical sensitivity toward the post-COVID-19 era (Soborski, 2021).

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[5] Kim S. (2018) traced the cultural reason for candlelight vigil back to the Confucian ethical and moral virtues severely broken down by previous authoritarian governments. If we follow this perspective, the current government may seem to possess certain virtues as generosity, sympathy, justice, and fairness at least at the rhetorical dimension. Yet, if the reason lies not in these traditional virtues but the discursive claim of post-Confucian political culture which has become particularly strong in South Korea today (Han 2020), the current government looks practically the same as the previous one. Consequently, many of those who either participated in or showed sympathy for candlelight vigil may have turned away from the government and its highly politicized and organized extra-institutional forces.

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