

# Guardianship Democracy in East and Southeast Asia

Support for Elite Rule in Democracies: Focus on South Korea

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# Overview

1. Question
2. Motivation
3. Concepts and Methods
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5. Discussion and Next Steps

## Core Question

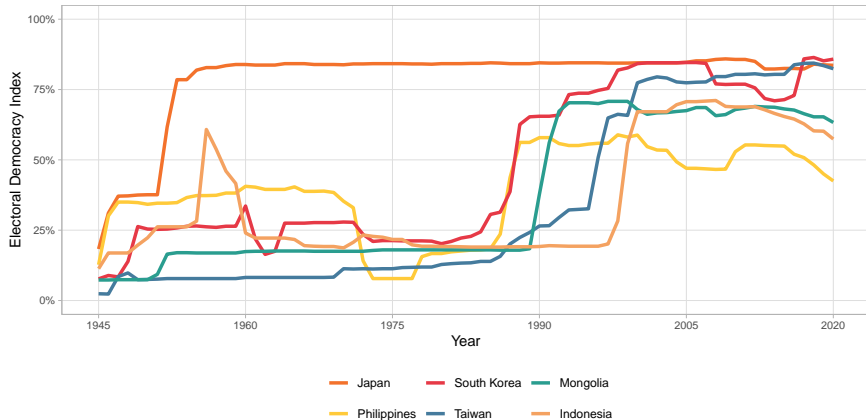
To what extent do citizens simultaneously support democracy and elite-led alternatives?

- Citizens affirm democracy, but many endorse rule by experts, generals, or strong leaders
- Co-endorsement reflects under-theorized support for guardianship democracy
- Especially relevant in post-transition contexts with legacies of authoritarian rule

# Motivation II

## Democratic Transitions in East and Southeast Asia

Electoral Democracy scores (V-dem) in the postwar era



## Motivation III



Type	Core Logic
Technocratic	Delegation to experts (output legitimacy)
Military	Military as guarantor of unity/order
Strongman	Concentration of executive authority

Table: Ideal Types of Guardianship Democracy

- 6 countries: South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Mongolia, and Japan
- World Values Survey (1995–2020), N = approx. 35,000
- Outcome measures: co-endorsement of democracy & elite rule (one of three types)
- Generational coding based on regime transition
- A look at the Emancipative Values Index (EVI)



# WVS Survey Items

Regime Type	Full Question Wording
Democracy	Having a democratic political system is a very good, fairly good, fairly bad, or very bad way of governing this country?
Experts Rule	Having experts, not government, make decisions according to what they think is best for the country is a very good, fairly good, fairly bad, or very bad way of governing this country?
Military Rule	Having the army rule the country is a very good, fairly good, fairly bad, or very bad way of governing this country?
Strong Leader Rule	Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections is a very good, fairly good, fairly bad, or very bad way of governing this country?

*Note:* Responses coded as binary indicators (1 = “Very good” or “Fairly good”; otherwise = 0). If ‘democracy’ = 1 & [other rule] = 1, then the outcome is positive.

# Finding I: Support Across Systems

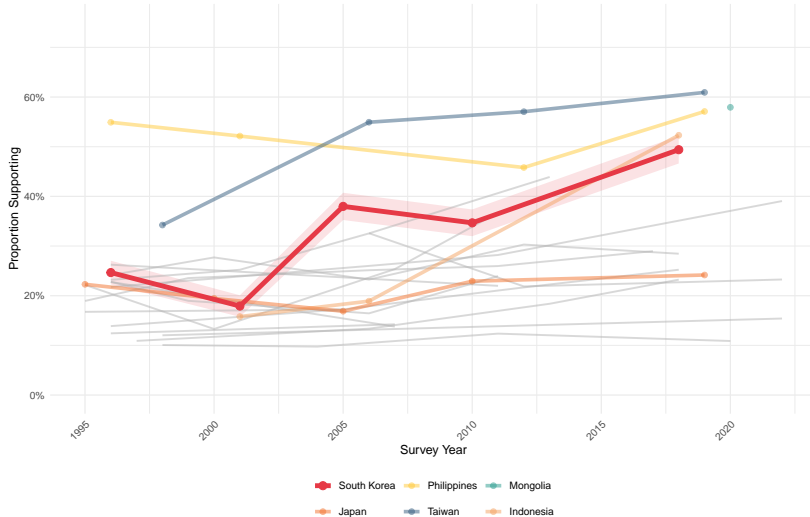
- Democracy: high support in all cases
- Technocracy: widely accepted overall but not increasing
- Military: high in the Philippines & Indonesia; low in South Korea & Taiwan, but **rising in Korea**
- Strongman: High across Asian democracies and **rising in Korea and Taiwan**
- Japan stands out: high support for democracy, low support for elite-rule

## Focus on South Korea

# Finding II: Rise in Strongman Support

## Support for Strongman Guardianship Over Time

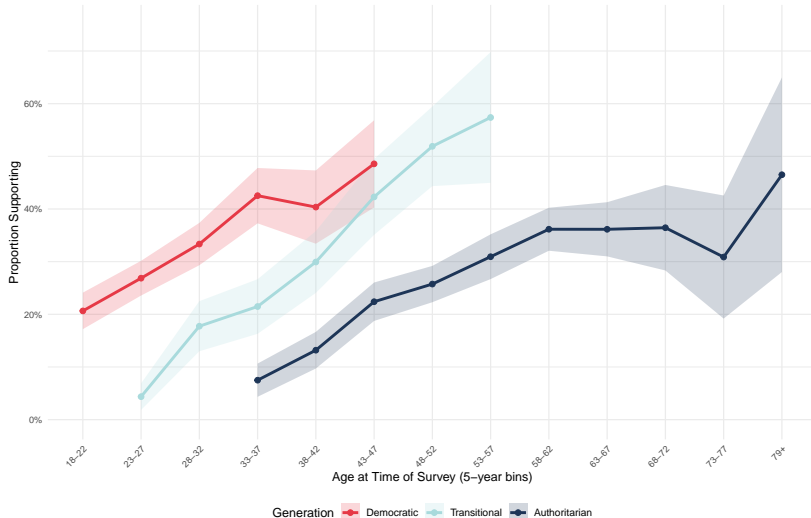
South Korea highlighted with 95% CI; others shown for context



# Finding III: Korean Generations

## Strongman Guardianship Support in South Korea

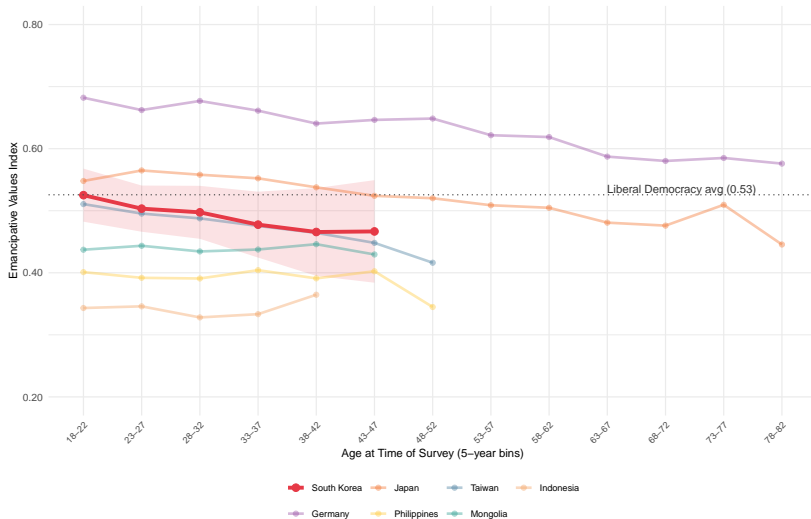
By political generation and age at time of survey (with 95% CIs)



# Finding IV: Emancipative Values Index (EVI)

## Emancipative Values in East Asia and Germany

Democratic generation only; South Korea highlighted with 95% CI



- Generational turnover alone **does not** produce liberal-democratic consolidation
- Citizens of the democratic generation (and transitional) in Korea are often **most supportive** of strongman rule
- Relatively low emancipative values (EVI) within democratic generation in Korea indicate weaker liberal norms
- Support for guardianship democracy may reflect both *normative ambivalence* and *adaptive pragmatism*
- Existing survey instruments (e.g., WVS) insufficient to capture conditional democratic commitments

# Next Steps: Experimental Design

## Survey Experiment in South Korea (2025–2026)

- Is guardianship democracy a *stable preference*?
- Why support it? Test effects of:
  1. Polarization (affective and nationalist)
  2. Perceived dysfunction (gridlock, performance failure)
  3. Authoritarian predispositions (values)
- Compare framing: efficiency vs. security vs. politics and identity



# Thank You

Comments and feedback welcome.

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