

The Impact of South Korea's Democratic Movement on National Values: A Study using World Value Survey Data

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Abstract: This study examines the impact of South Korea's democratic movement on national values using data from the World Value Survey. The study explores the relationship between political activism, age, and three dimensions of national values: attitudes toward democracy, emphasis on individualism, and acceptance of LGBTQ groups. The findings reveal trends and correlations, highlighting the complex interplay between the democratic movement and these values. The results suggest that while attitudes toward democracy and emphasis on individualism have evolved over time, acceptance of LGBTQ groups remains relatively low. The discussion provides insights into the reasons behind these trends and their implications for South Korean society.

Introduction

This article investigates the impact of South Korea's democratic movement on shaping national values, utilizing data from the World Values Survey. The researcher focuses on three key dimensions - attitudes towards democracy, emphasis on individualism, and acceptance of LGBTQ groups. To determine participants' level of activism, the study draws on their engagement in political activities like signing petitions and joining demonstrations.

The central hypothesis is that with deepening democratization, South Koreans'

attitudes towards democracy will become more positive. Additionally, greater activism is expected to correlate with more favorable democratic attitudes. For individualism, the assumption is that contemporary participants and more active ones assign greater importance to self-expression, reflecting democracy's enablement of diverse participation. Lastly, though no direct link exists between LGBTQ acceptance and democratization, evolving tolerance may accompany democratic shifts.

Preliminary visualizations reveal ambivalent attitudes towards democracy, with growing negativity towards the country's democratic system but rising recognition of its democratic progress. Individual autonomy gains increasing respect across age groups, potentially attributable to internet-facilitated civic engagement. Acceptance of homosexuality remains low, especially among older citizens, yet positive activism correlations suggest gradual openness.

While unable to conclusively validate hypotheses thus far, the article notes perceptible generational differences that underscore South Korea's complex negotiating of traditional mores and progressive impetuses amidst democratization. Limitations in fully affirming expected patterns also highlight the intricacy of tracing value formation. Nonetheless, the multi-faceted analytical approach adopts a appreciably nuanced perspective. Moving forward, the author's discussion of contextual factors and speculation of causal mechanisms further enriches the study's promise in unraveling the multifarious legacy of South Korea's unfinished democratic odyssey.

Literature Review

The modern democratic movement in South Korea stands as a compelling testament to the nation's persistent pursuit of self-determination, freedom, and human rights. This literature review critically analyzes the multifaceted impact of the South Korean democratic movement on national values, tracing its evolution from opposition against colonial rule and authoritarian regimes to becoming a catalyst for societal transformation. By synthesizing insights from multiple scholars and theoretical perspectives, this review elucidates how the democratic movement has shaped and influenced national values while redefining cultural norms.

Originating from a turbulent historical context marked by Japanese colonial rule and subsequent political upheaval, South Korea's modern democratic movement emerged. Following the end of Japanese colonial rule in 1945, South Korea plunged into a forty-year period of military dictatorship until the establishment of a presidential electoral system in 1987. From the 1960s to the present day, the pursuit of democracy has remained unabated among the South Korean populace, leading to continuous development and innovation within the democratic movement. Shin Gi Wook, in his work *South Korean Social Movements: From Democracy to Civil Society*, highlights that the transition towards democratic governance was partly driven by pressure from social movement groups advocating for democracy and national transformation. [1] However, post-transition, these social movement groups encountered a qualitatively

changed political environment, fostering the growth of the social movement sector.

Jin-Wook Shin categorizes South Korea's democratic movement from the 1960s to the 2020s into four stages: Testimony, Firebombs, Lawsuit, and Candlelight. [2] He also notes that technological advancements and increased social interconnectedness expanded the demographics of democratic movement participants beyond students and workers, encompassing the middle class and upper echelons of society, including legal professionals. As a result, the movement transitioned from a class-based movement dominated by parties and organizations to a citizen movement. Moreover, as more individuals joined, the forms of the democratic movement diversified in response to changing eras, encompassing activities ranging from firebomb protests to offline gatherings organized through online networks. The focus also shifted to encompass a variety of issues, from advocating for the release of wrongfully detained students to addressing policies related to import and export of goods.

Prominent scholars such as Bruce Cumings and Kim Dae-jung emphasize that this movement was a response to the suppression of Korean identity and foreign domination. Cumings' work "Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History" highlights the role of the movement in cultivating a new sense of Korean identity, underscoring the shared desire for freedom and self-governance. [3] Kim Dae-jung further expounds on the transformative nature of this movement in his article "The Spirit of Democracy: Struggle for Freedom and Justice," underscoring its ability to kindle hope

even in adversity.[4]

The democratic movement in South Korea undeniably reshaped national values by challenging traditional Confucian hierarchical structures and fostering civic engagement. Alexis Dudden's work "Troubled Apologies Among Japan, Korea, and the United States" underscores the movement's role in reassessing hierarchical systems, promoting equality, and democratic ideals. [5] Through resistance against oppressive regimes, the movement laid the groundwork for societal values rooted in justice, accountability, and human rights. Kim Dae-jung's words suggest he viewed democracy as a means to establish a just society that respects the dignity and rights of all citizens.

Examining the impact of the democratic movement on national values is facilitated by several key theoretical frameworks. Social Identity Theory, as proposed by Tajfel and Turner, suggests that participation in social movements fosters a shared sense of identity among individuals. This theory underscores how the democratic movement in South Korea united citizens in their pursuit of democracy and human rights. [6] Drawing from Gramsci's work, Cultural Hegemony Theory posits that dominant groups shape cultural norms. [7]The challenge posed by the South Korean movement to Confucian values and its assertion of democratic ideals reflects the influence of cultural hegemony. Frame Alignment Theory, developed by Snow and Benford, explains how movements align their narratives with dominant societal values. [8] The

South Korean democratic movement effectively framed its messages around justice and freedom, resonating with the broader societal yearning for democratic governance.

Moreover, the democratic movement in South Korea has engendered various themes, including the burgeoning gender activism. In the midst of societal transformation and the democratization process, gender equality issues in South Korea have garnered increasing attention. Gender activism, through its advocacy for women's rights, gender equality, and the eradication of gender discrimination, has brought about significant shifts in societal values. Research suggests that gender activism emerged against the backdrop of the South Korean democratic movement, intertwining with other social movements to collectively drive multifaceted societal changes. For instance, the "postpartum protest" movement in South Korea serves as a notable manifestation of gender equality concerns, advocating for reforms in the treatment of new mothers and reflecting a reevaluation of societal perspectives on gender roles and rights.[9]

In the book "South Korean Feminist Movements: From Gender Politics to Intersectionality," author Kyounghee Kim analyzes the evolution of gender activism in South Korea, emphasizing its role in challenging societal norms and advancing gender equality. [10] Gender activism not only brings gender-related issues into the public spotlight but also collaborates with other social movements to effect more

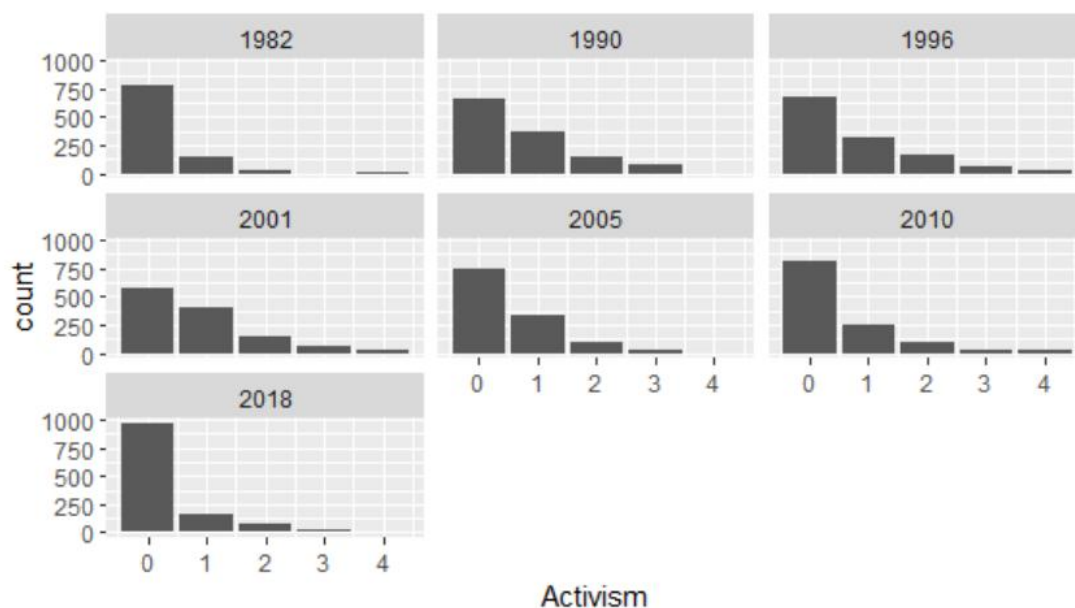
profound societal changes.

The impact of South Korea's democratic movement extends beyond its borders, resonating with universal desires for human rights and freedom. Western scholars, including Alexis Dudden, underscore the global significance of South Korea's struggle for democracy, portraying it as a beacon of hope in a world grappling with authoritarianism. By challenging oppressive regimes and advocating for democratic principles, South Korea's democratic movement has catalyzed similar movements on a global scale.

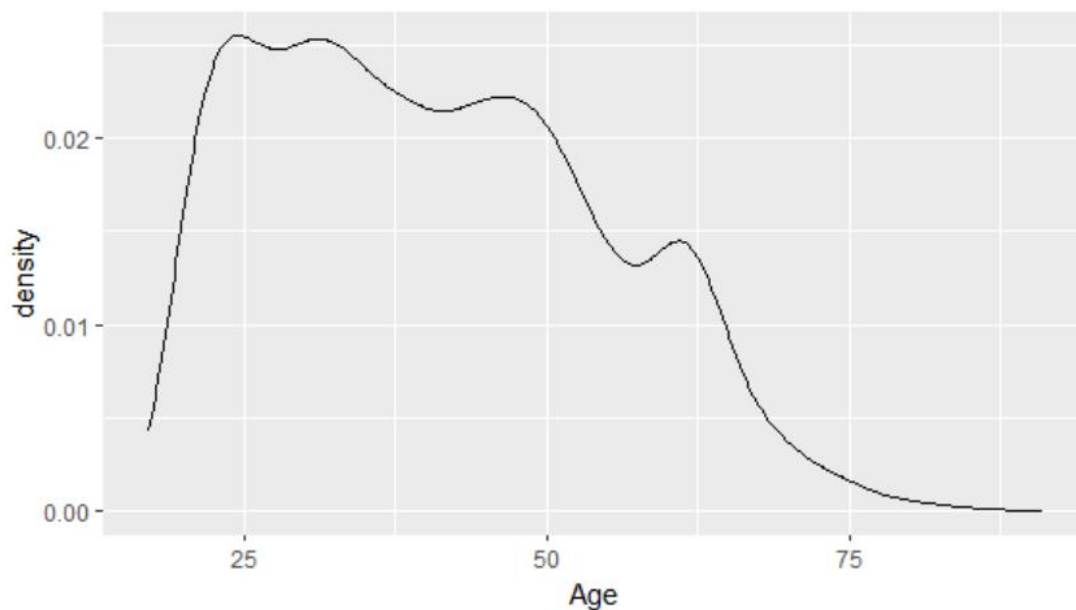
In summary, South Korea's modern democratic movement stands as a transformative force that profoundly influences national values. Through examination via various theoretical frameworks, scholars have elucidated the movement's role in challenging traditional norms and fostering new ideals of justice, equality, and human rights. Moreover, scholars commonly recognize a positive, reciprocal interaction between social movements and civic values. The ongoing evolution of South Korea's democracy promises continued insights into the intricate interplay between societal change and fundamental value changes, reaffirming the enduring significance of the democratic movement for current and future generations.

Discussion of Data and Key Variables

The dataset utilized in this study derives from various waves, spanning from wave 1 to wave 7, of the World Value Survey with specific relevance to South Korea. The central aim of this research is to delve into the ramifications of South Korea's democratic movement on the shaping of national values. To delineate participants as activists, the study employs four distinct questions from the World Value Survey that pertain to political activities. These questions revolve around signatory actions for petitions, participation in boycott initiatives, engagement in unofficial strikes, and attendance at lawful and peaceful demonstrations. The resultant depiction, as shown in the subsequent chart, features a horizontal axis annotated with numeric labels ranging from 0 to 4. This scale represents the extent of participants' involvement in political activities, with a score of 0 denoting a lack of engagement in any political activities and a score of 4 symbolizing participation in all the aforementioned activities.



Furthermore, an additional predictor variable in this study is age. The significance of age is underscored by Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris in their seminal work "Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy." The focus of their discourse on age effect, cohorts effect, and cycle effect makes it pertinent to explore the dynamic between age and values, thereby validating the applicability of these theoretical constructs.



In the realm of values, the researcher zeroes in on three distinct dimensions: attitudes towards democracy, emphasis on individualism, and acceptance of LGBTQ groups. Among these dimensions, attitudes toward democracy exhibit the most immediate connection to the democratic movement. Consequently, it is hypothesized that as the democratization process deepens, citizen attitudes towards democracy should undergo a gradual shift towards more positive sentiments. Furthermore, participants who engage in a higher number of political activities are expected to exhibit more favorable responses towards democratic principles. To elucidate this dimension, the

study incorporates data from three pertinent questions: "Democraticness in own country," "Importance of democracy," and "Evaluation of having a democratic political system."

By contrast, the interrelation between emphasis on individualism and the democratic movement is comparatively less explicit. With the evolution of democracy, collective political behavior has transcended conventional partisan affiliations and organizational structures. This paradigm shift, encompassing participation from diverse professional backgrounds and social strata, underscores the escalating prominence of individualism within the societal fabric. As a corollary, individuals hailing from more contemporary periods may manifest heightened inclinations for self-expression. Correspondingly, individuals participating in a greater number of political activities might assign greater significance to individualistic values. To scrutinize this dimension, the researcher relies on the question "Respect for individual human rights nowadays."

The third dimension, relating to the acceptance of LGBTQ groups, does not manifest a direct correlation with the democratic movement. The acceptance of sexual minority groups is underpinned by multifaceted factors such as geographical context, religious beliefs, and prevailing societal norms. Consequently, the nexus between this dimension and the democratic movement is inherently limited. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that democratic development frequently coincides with shifts in societal

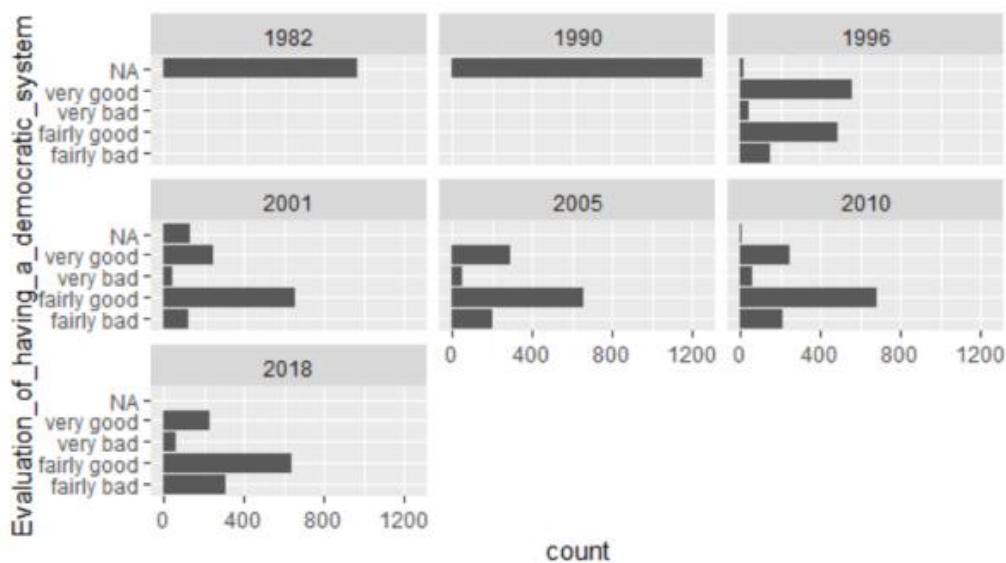
tolerance levels. As such, this dimension is integrated as the final variable. The study examines this aspect by employing the question "Justifiable: Homosexuality."

The utilization of data from various waves of the World Value Survey enables an exploration of the repercussions of South Korea's democratic movement on distinct facets of national values. Moreover, age and the selected value-oriented questions play a pivotal role in the predictive framework of this investigation.

Exploratory data visualizations

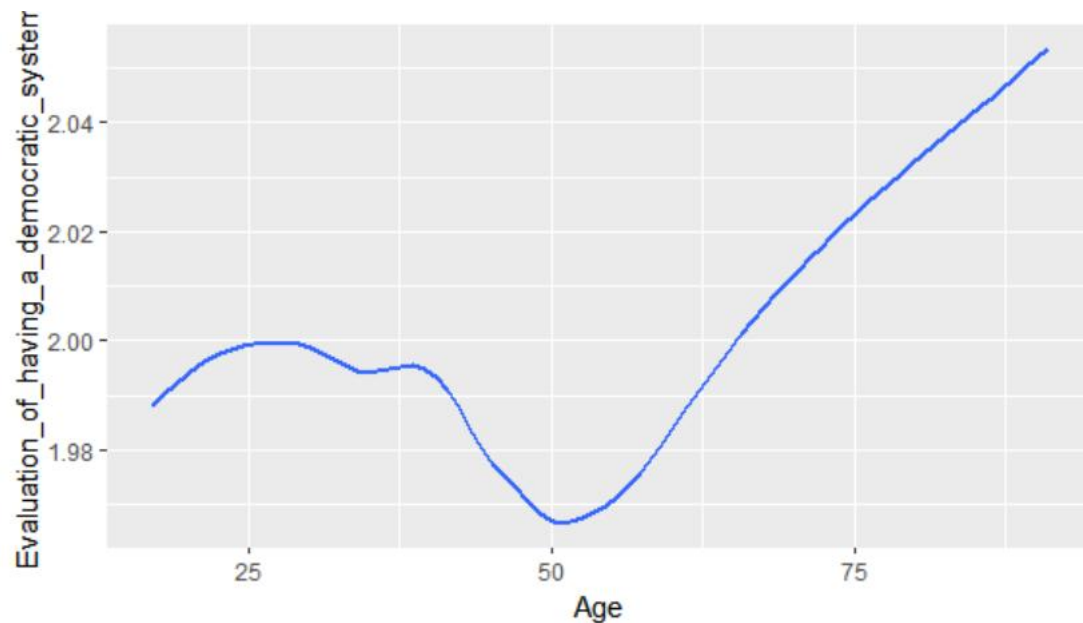
1. Attitudes toward democracy

1.1 Political system: Having a democratic political system

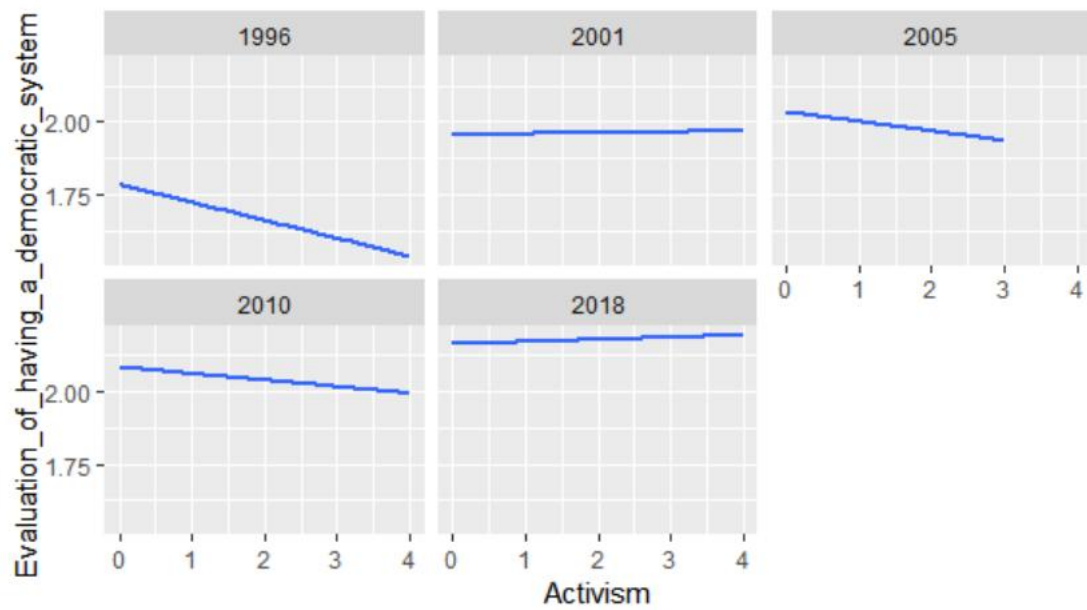


The data regarding the “Evaluation of having a democratic system” (rated on a scale of 1-very good, 2-fairly good, 3-fairly bad, 4-very bad) exhibits an unexpected trend, revealing a lack of confidence and affirmation towards democratic governance. It is evident that the number of respondents selecting "fairly good" has gradually

decreased over the years, while those choosing "fairly bad" reached its peak in the 2018 survey. In comparison, the counts for "very good" and "very bad" remain consistently low.

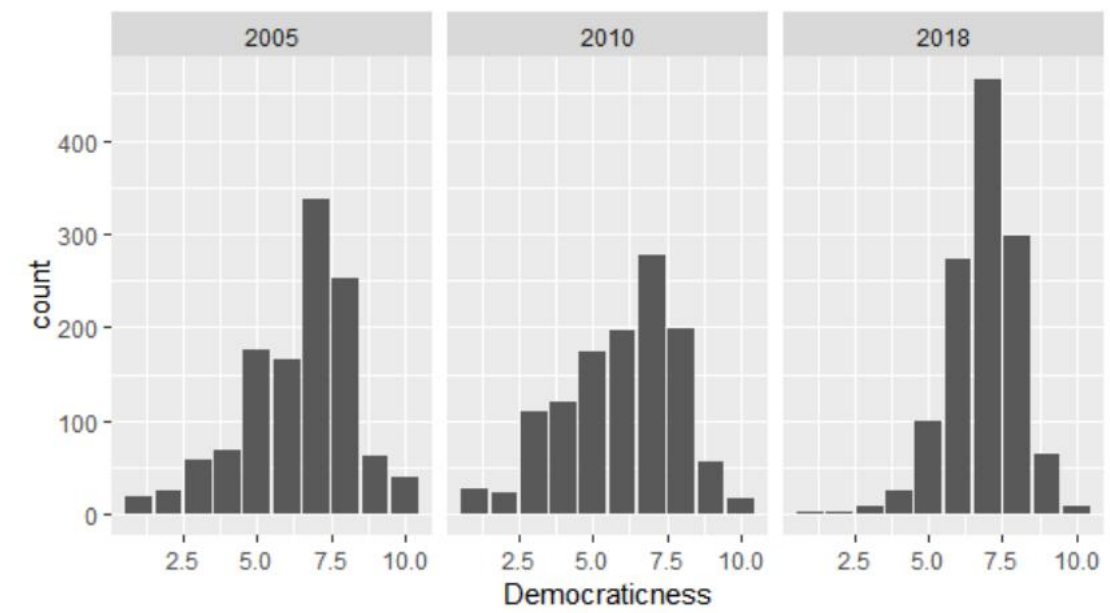


When examining the relationship between age and the “Evaluation of having a democratic system”, subtle differences can be observed among different birth cohorts. Although the overall data revolves around the "fairly good" range, responses from participants aged 20 to 60 consistently fall within the range of 1 to 2 (indicating good to fairly good), while those aged over 60 tend towards "fairly bad." The age group with the highest level of agreement towards democratic governance is around 50 years old.

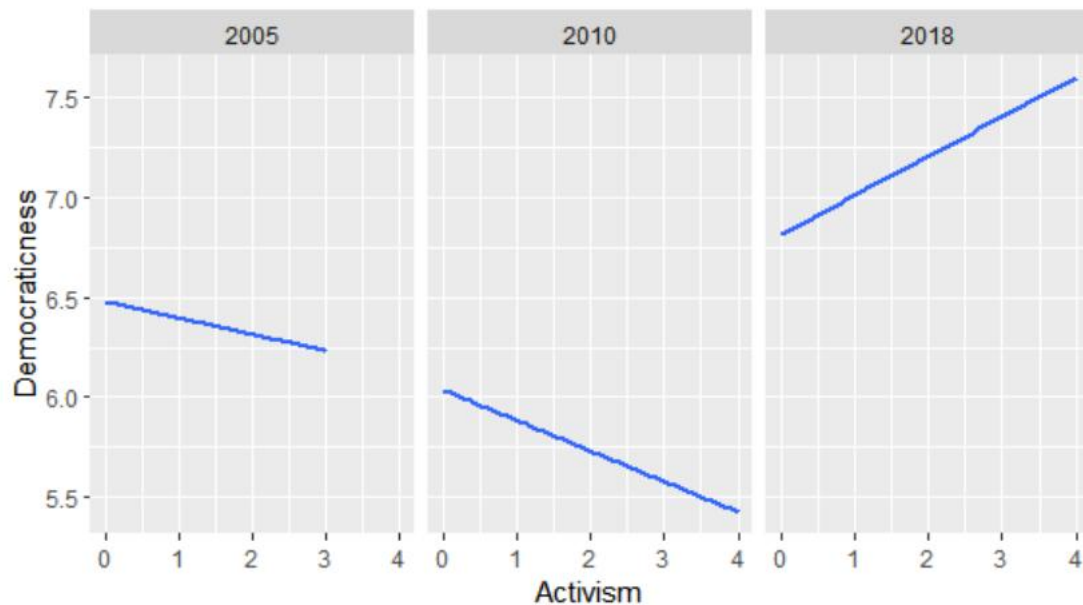
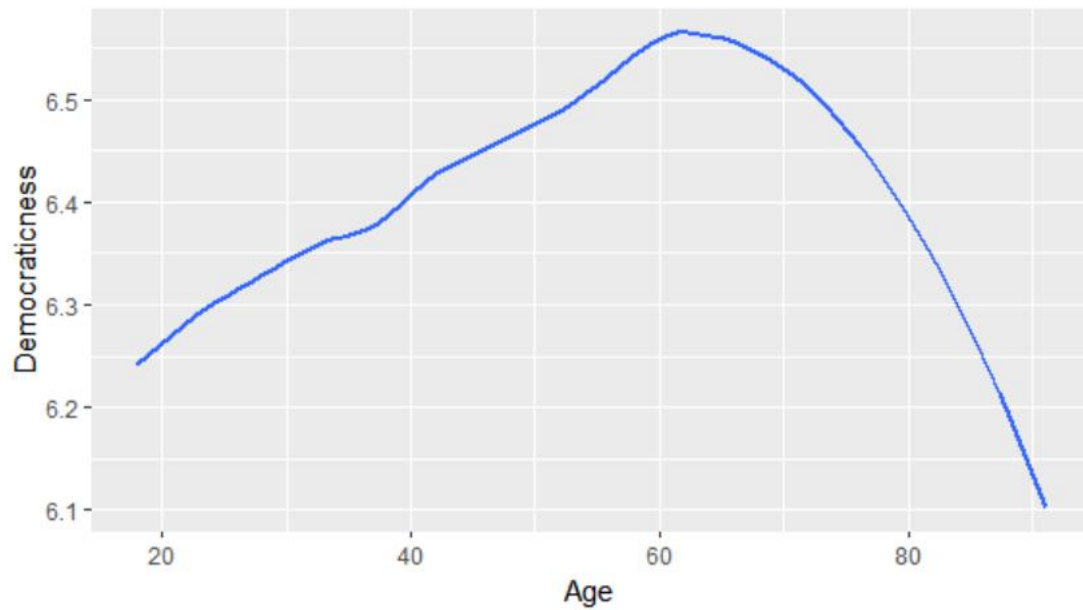


The correlation between activism and the “Evaluation of having a democratic system” demonstrates an unstable pattern. With an increase in the number of participants engaging in political activities, responses show occasional increments and decrements. However, it is evident that from 1996 to 2018, participants' evaluations of democratic governance gradually turned negative, peaking in 2018, which contrasts sharply with initial expectations.

1.2 Democraticness of Our Own Country



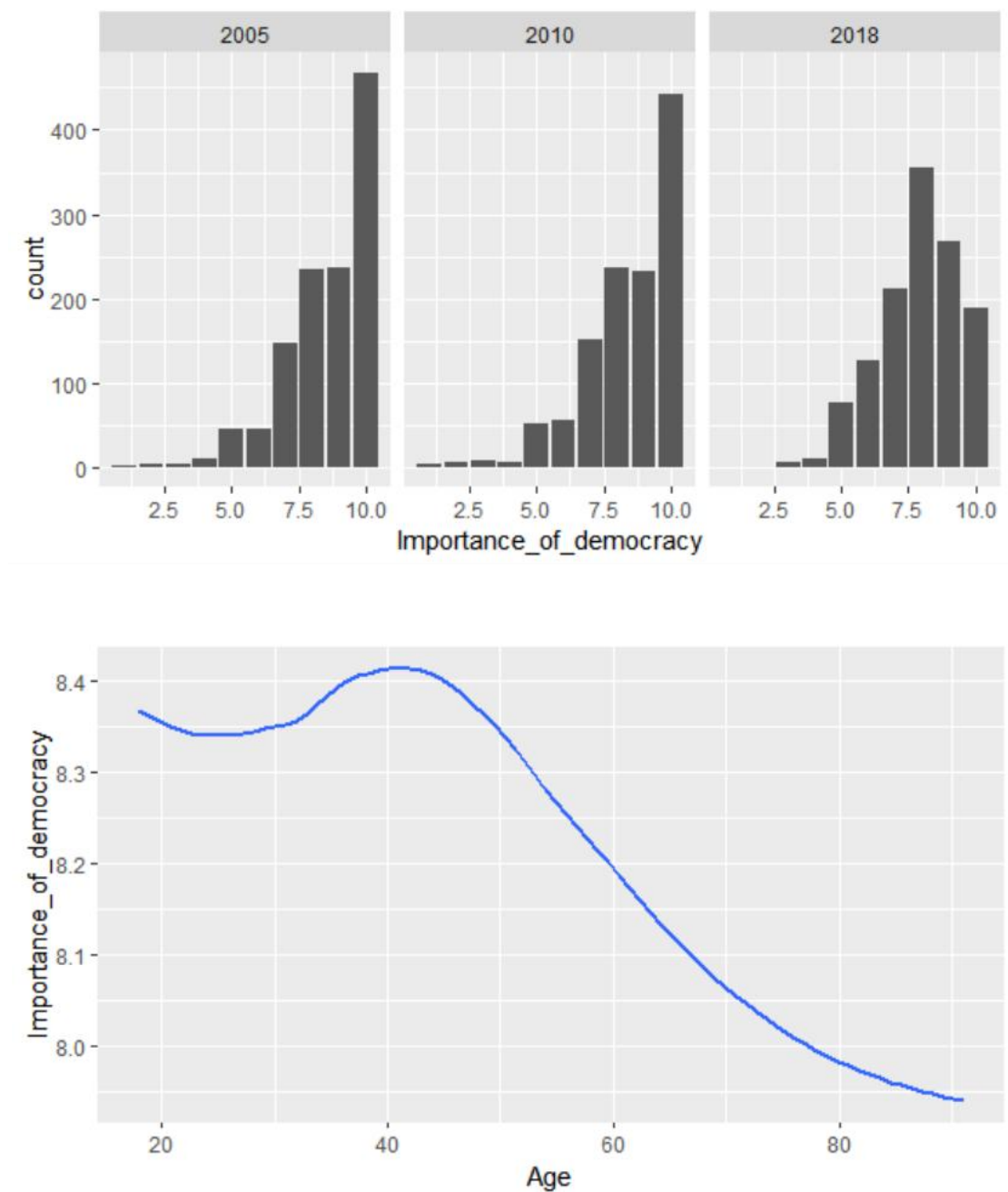
Regarding the “Democraticness of our own country”(rated on a scale of 1-no democracy at all to 10-very much democratic), participants' responses predominantly cluster in the higher score range (7.5-10). While the peaks were at 10 in the surveys of 2005 and 2010, the peak lowered to 8 in 2018. Nevertheless, the number of respondents in the lower score range in 2018 was notably fewer compared to the previous two surveys, suggesting an overall increase in the general populace's awareness of the country's democratic level.

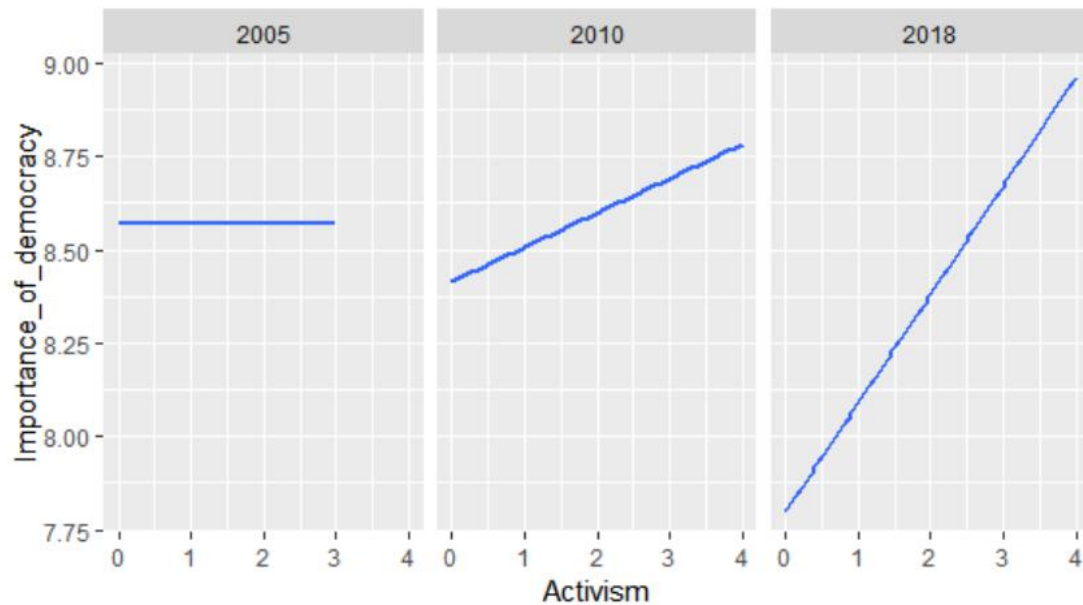


When investigating the relationship between age and the “Democraticity of our own country”, it is noted that participants who provided the highest evaluations of the country's democratic level were around 60 years old, gradually decreasing towards both ends. Concerning the relationship between activism and this aspect, an unstable trend persists. In the surveys of 2005 and 2010, there was a declining overall trend in

scores; furthermore, scores from groups with higher levels of political activity also declined. However, by 2018, scores demonstrated an overall increase and presented a positive trend.

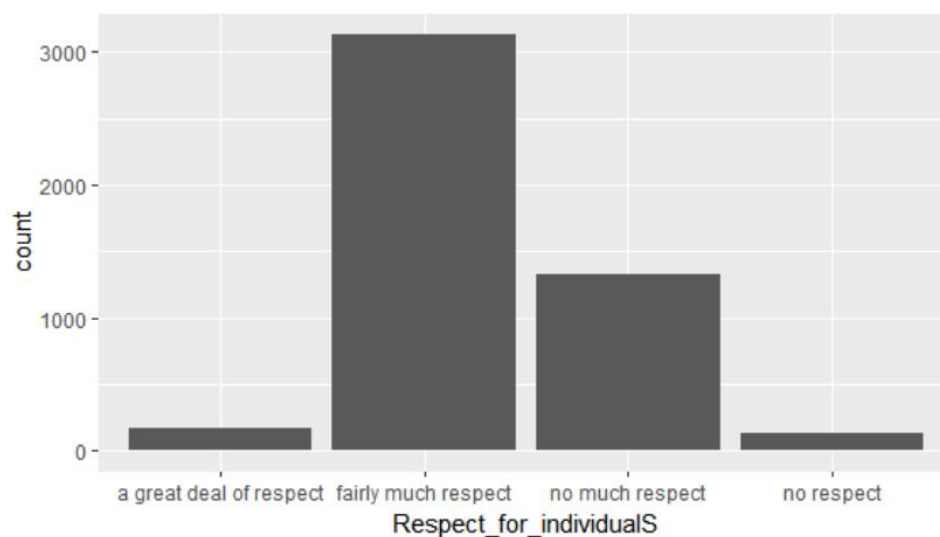
1.3 Importance of Democracy

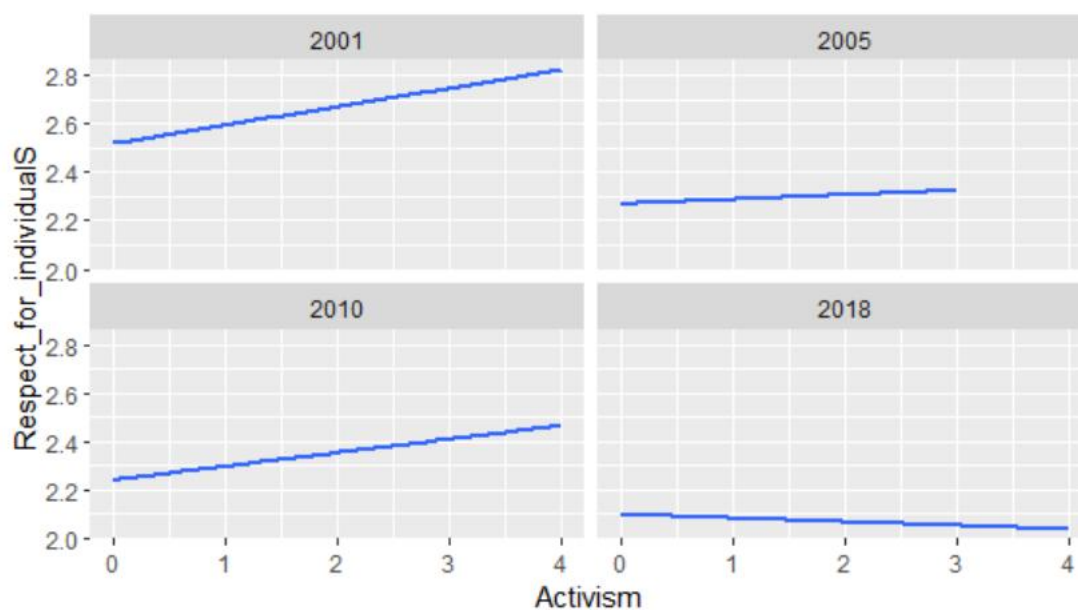
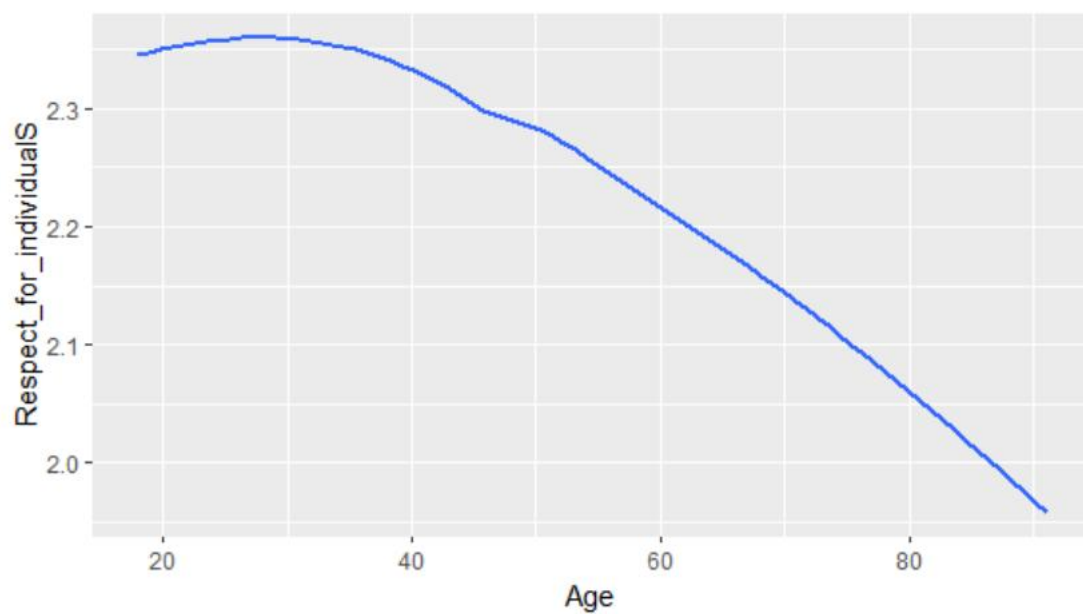




Responses from participants towards the “Importance of democracy” align generally with their responses towards the Democraticness of our own country. Notably, in the bivariate plot of age and “Importance of democracy”, there are peaks around 20 and 40, showing an inclination to shift earlier than the peaks of the previous two questions. In the bivariate plot of activism and “Importance of democracy”, a clear positive trend is observed, aligning with initial expectations.

2. Emphasis on Individuals

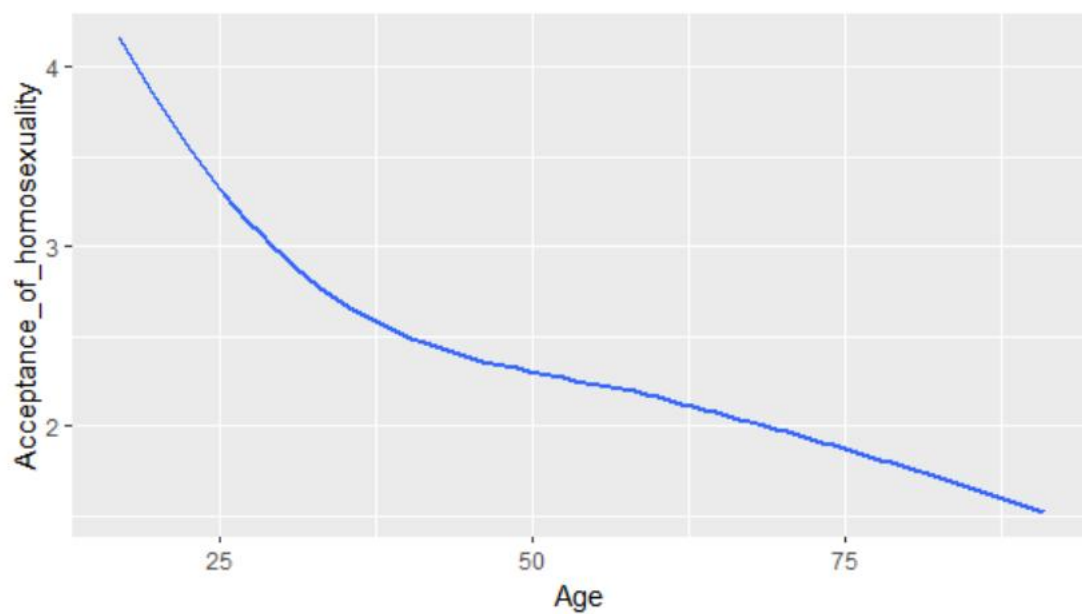
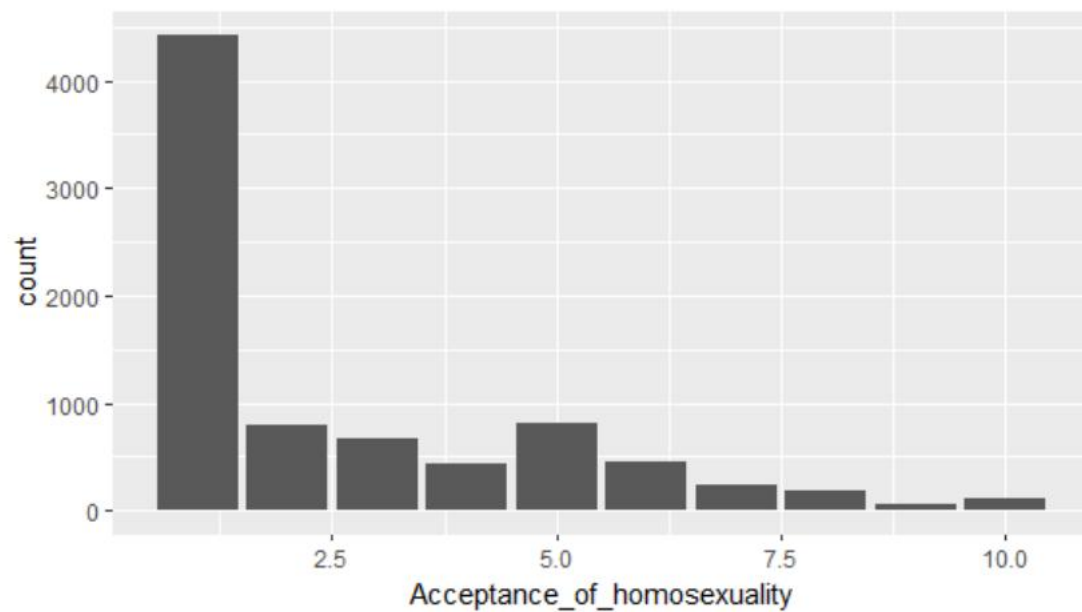


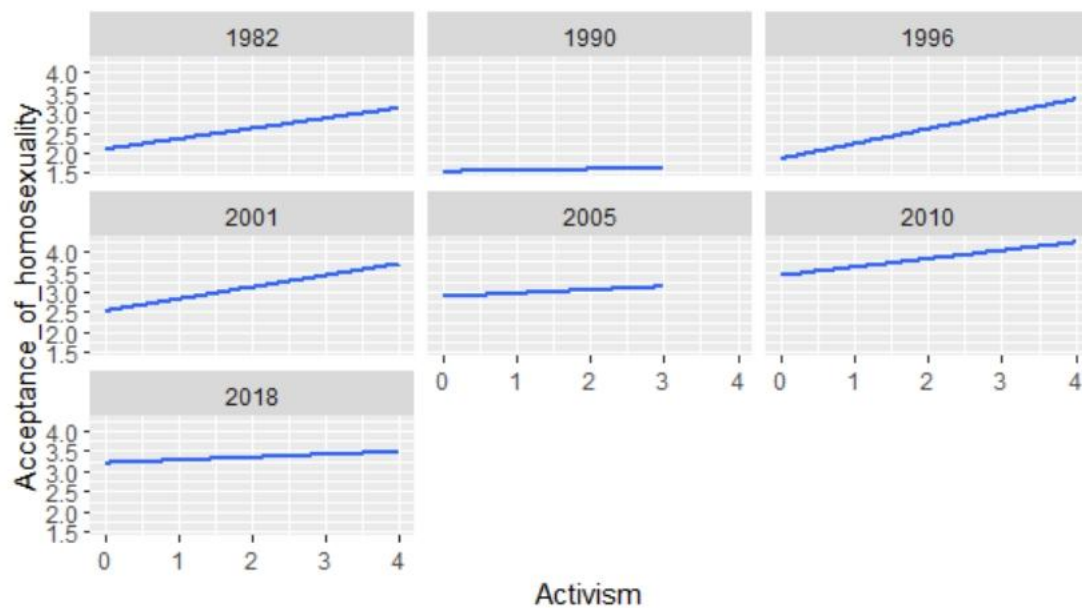


When tabulating participants' responses to the question of “Respect for individuals”, those indicating societal respect for individuals significantly outnumber those indicating the opposite. When correlated with participants' age, it is surprising to note that evaluations of the extent to which individuals are respected in society increase with age. When associated with activism, it is observed that over time, overall

evaluations of Respect for individuals are converging towards "a great deal of respect."

3. Acceptance of LGBTQ Groups





Responses to the question of “Acceptance of homosexuality” display consistently low scores. The count of individuals selecting "1-never justifiable" constitutes a significant portion of the total respondents. However, it is distinctly evident that the values of younger individuals are more open-minded compared to those of middle-aged and older individuals. Their acceptance of homosexuality is highest, hovering around the score of 4. Moreover, there is a clear positive correlation between political activism and acceptance of homosexuality. This indicates that even though acceptance of homosexuality is currently low in South Korea, the population participating in democratic political activities and the emerging cohorts are gradually acknowledging and endorsing the existence of minority groups.

Discussion

In the context of attitudes toward democracy, among the three questions, the Evaluation of having a democratic system exhibits a significantly different overall trend compared to the other two questions, Democraticness of our own country and Importance of democracy. The former's assessment has become more negative over time, while the latter two have become more positive. This phenomenon, in the author's view, is due to the fact that the Evaluation of having a democratic system specifically targets the Korean government, societal structure, and the interaction between citizens, making its focus more pointed. In contrast, Democraticness of our own country and Importance of democracy imply broader, societal, and populace-driven democratic progress.

Even though the Korean government may be broadly labeled as a "democratic government," and the country's societal system could be termed a "democratic system," significant flaws in these systems remain evident from news reports and artistic representations spanning recent decades. Classic examples include former Korean presidents Roh Moo-hyun and Park Geun-hye, prominent figures in the national political system, the former criticized for corruption, and the latter imprisoned in 2017 due to corruption allegations and association with a cult. Furthermore, the Korean judicial system is not without its shortcomings. For instance, until just a decade ago, an unwritten "prior official favor" rule dictated that when respected retired lawyers reentered the field, they must win their first case. Such

irrational regulations persisted until they were abolished as a result of the movie "The Crucible" and the subsequent nationwide movement it sparked. These ongoingly uncovered societal issues and corresponding social movements have, in the author's perspective, directly contributed to the unstable trends in activism plots.

In contrast, emphasis on individuality exhibits a stable upward trajectory. In the author's view, this is linked to evolving forms of social movements in Korea and the increasing government response they evoke. Prior to the 20th century, social movements in Korea were largely restricted. Colonialism and military dictatorship significantly curtailed personal freedoms. Consequently, social movements were confined to specific social groups. Moreover, many movements during this era were brutally suppressed and ended tragically, such as the 1980 Gwangju Massacre. However, in the 20th century, with political reforms and the development of the internet, most social movements are organized and mobilized online. This signifies a breaking down of barriers between different groups and classes, allowing everyone an equal platform to express opinions and participate. Most importantly, with more participants and a larger audience through online media, the government pays greater attention to public feedback and responds under public pressure. This active two-way communication serves as a cradle for cultivating self-expression.

From this, the author speculates that the changing forms of social movements in Korea and their significant achievements likely explain why the 40-60 age group is

most satisfied with the country's level of democracy. In comparison to those born after the 1990s, they experienced oppressive times and witnessed the entire process of democratic reform and immense progress, leading them to have a more positive evaluation of the current level of societal democracy.

Although the Acceptance of homosexuality receives the lowest overall scores, its relationship with democratic movements is closely intertwined. The author posits that this is greatly connected to the emergence of gender movements in Korea within the last 30 years. Equally significant is the notably higher scores among the youth in responding to this question, which is likely due to Korea's deeply ingrained traditional societal and family norms. Furthermore, the author believes that Korea's generally low acceptance of sexual minorities can be attributed to the immense societal pressure of being a collectivist nation and its religious beliefs.

Conclusion

The South Korean democratic movement has had a significant impact on national values, reshaping cultural norms, fostering civic engagement, and challenging traditional hierarchical structures. The study's findings reveal complex relationships between political activism, age, and attitudes toward democracy, emphasis on individualism, and acceptance of LGBTQ groups. While attitudes toward democracy and emphasis on individualism have evolved over time, acceptance of LGBTQ groups remains relatively low. The study provides insights into the reasons behind these

trends and highlights the ongoing dynamics between the democratic movement and national values in South Korea.

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