

Anti-Authoritarian Attitudes after Democratic Movements: Evidence from the June Struggle of 1987 in South Korea

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A momentous democratic protest against an authoritarian regime can affect people's social attitudes. This study empirically examined the impact of democratic movements on anti-authoritarian attitudes by focusing on the June Struggle of 1987 in South Korea, which was one of the most successful democratic uprisings in Korean history. Using representative survey data, we compared cohorts who started college before and after the year of the June Struggle. Because the year of college enrollment itself can be an endogenous variable, we applied the fuzzy regression discontinuity method using birthdate as an instrumental variable. We found that people whose began attending college after the successful democratic movement tended to demonstrate stronger anti-authoritarian attitudes in their late 30s. A battery of robustness tests supported the results. This study's results reaffirm the argument that historical events can have enduring effects on social attitudes, helping us to understand one potential channel of anti-authoritarian attitudes in Korean society.

Keywords: Anti-authoritarian attitude; democratic movement; fuzzy regression discontinuity; June Struggle; South Korea

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* This study is heavily dependent on Desposato and Wang (2020).

I. Introduction

Historically, mass political movements have aimed to achieve democracy and liberation from authoritarian regimes. These movements have emerged across the world, with examples including the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the Prague Spring of 1968, the Tiananmen Square Protest of 1989, the Velvet Revolution of 1989, the Arab Spring of the 2010s, and Hong Kong's Umbrella Revolution of 2014. These movements act as critical drivers of social change (Robinson and Acemoglu, 2012). From this perspective, examining the enduring impact of political movements on social attitudes is crucial for understanding social progress (DeMartini, 1983; McAdam, 1989; Desposato and Wang, 2020). Thus, scholars have paid close attention to major historical events and have examined how people's perceptions and attitudes change in the aftermath (Bursztyn et al., 2020).

This study focuses on one of the most important and successful democratic movements in Korean history—the June Struggle of 1987—and examines its attitudinal impact on cohorts who started college after the revolution. Becoming a college student is often considered as a turning point in one's life, and college experiences can affect one's perceptions and attitudes significantly (Astin, 1977; Feldman and Newcomb, 2020; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991; Terenzini and Pascarella, 1998; Weidman, 1989). Korean society has changed significantly since the June Struggle, including the college environment (Kim, 1998; Shin and Chang, 2011). This study examines whether the cohorts whose college attendance began under the democratic regime became anti-authoritarian in their late 30s (i.e., in 2005), by which point democracy had been in place for nearly 20 years.

We are devoting attention to the formation of anti-authoritarian attitudes because the nature of democratic movements—resistance to the oppression of dictatorship and the pursuit of a liberal society—can be reflected in people's social attitudes. South Korea's authoritarian regime had instituted a society-wide authoritarian culture to maintain its power. Anecdotal evidence suggests that even the college culture during the authoritarian regime was hierarchical and coercive because solidarity among students to dismantle the oppressive dictatorship was inevitable (Choi, 2012; Kwon, 2005; Lee, 2005), spreading authoritarian attitudes among students during this time (Bisin and Verdier, 2001). The June Struggle of 1987 was the historical event that successfully broke this cycle. It induced abrupt changes in the college experience for cohorts who began attending after the revolution. Considering that college experiences play a significant role in shaping individuals' social perspectives, we can infer that the successful democratic movement likely had a profound impact on social attitudes (i.e., individuals becoming more anti-authoritarian throughout their lives).

Scholarly efforts to address this question empirically have been limited, largely due to great difficulty in establishing a credible identification strategy. Existing studies have generally relied on fragmentary anecdotes, descriptive storytelling, and interviews with participants to explain the impact of the democratic movement on their social attitudes. Our study addresses this limitation based on Desposato and Wang (2020), suggesting the fuzzy regression discontinuity method. Building upon their study, we compare the cohorts before and after the successful democratic protest, noting that the college culture changed dramatically after the June Struggle of 1987. Concerns that other factors might have affected students' enrollment year decisions are alleviated by using birthdate as a proxy for the year of college enrollment (Kim, 2021). Moreover, we extend the literature by focusing on successful democratic movement and respondents' anti-authoritarian attitudes by using surveys from the Korea Labor & Income Panel Study. As this observed dataset is not directly relevant to the June Struggle of 1987, it can restrict any priming effect caused by the design of the survey and provide another evidence to the prior research.

We find that the impact of the June Struggle on social attitudes has been long-lasting; the cohorts who enrolled in college around 1987 were more likely to become anti-authoritarian when they reached their late 30s relative to those who were exposed to the oppressive environment fostered by the authoritarian regime. These results confirm that successful democratic movements can affect people's social perceptions in the long term. Our findings also help us to understand other countries' transitions to democracy.¹⁾

II. Political Movements' Effects on Attitudes

Political protests have been a subject of interest across the social sciences (Goldstone, 1991; Tilly, 1979), and an extensive literature examines how mass democratic movements affect participants and bystanders (Amenta et al., 2010; Corrigan-Brown, 2012). Studies have revealed that social protests' effects on political attitudes are not limited to direct participants, as these movements increase the salience of certain issues and spread ideologies across generations (Carey et al., 2014; Roland and Yang, 2017; Wallace et al., 2014).

The main dependent variables of these studies include political efficacy (Finkel, 1985), ideological orientation (Braungart and Braungart, 1990), and political predisposition (Fuchs-Schündeln and Schündeln, 2015), among others. Considering the nature of democratic

1) According to the Freedom in the World 2015 report by the Freedom House, at the time of the survey about one-fourth of the world's population still lived in countries classified as "not free."

movements—resistance to repressive and violent dictatorship—researchers have focused particularly on these movements’ impacts on social attitudes (Davenport, 2007; Lupu and Peisakhin, 2017). Conclusions have been mixed depending on the subjects and contexts (Blattman, 2009; Desposato and Wang, 2020).

Furthermore, many studies suggest that experiences during college, including political movements, have a significant impact on individuals’ life perspectives and attitudes (Astin, 1977; DeMartini, 1983; Feldman and Newcomb, 2020; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991). Researchers argue convincingly that this period is critical for individuals to develop their own outlooks on social issues by interacting with various people (Dey, 1997; Lottes and Kuriloff, 1994; Pascarella, 2005).

III. June Struggle of 1987

South Korea, which had been in turmoil during the Korean War, established an authoritarian government in the wake of Park Chung-hee’s coup in May 1961. A military dictatorship suppressed social movements toward democracy. Since the 1972 implementation of the Yushin Constitution, the president of South Korea had been elected indirectly. The assassination of sitting president Park Chung-hee in October 1979 created an atmosphere in which democratization could take place, which was called the Seoul Spring. However, in December 1979, military forces led by Chun Doo-hwan regained power, and the authoritarian regime reasserted its power. Another democratic movement, the Gwangju Uprising, failed in May 1980 due to the current regime’s suppression.

The attempt in June 1987 to resist military dictatorship and achieve democracy marked a turning point. The Chun Doo-hwan administration ignored the public’s desire for a direct presidential election and chose Roh Tae-woo as his successor on June 10. The public resisted these measures, leading to a mass street protest. In the end, the authoritarian government announced on June 29 that it would introduce a direct presidential election system through a constitutional amendment, and democracy thus began to take root in South Korea.

The June Struggle was one of the most significant uprisings in modern Korean history (Kim, 1998; Shin and Chang, 2011). As a rare successful movement that overcame authoritarian violence, it played an essential role in the establishment of democracy—politically, socially, and culturally. After the June Struggle, Korean society rapidly underwent democratization, including the introduction of the local autonomy system.

IV. Research Design

1. Identification Strategy

Examining the causal effects of successful democratic movements on people's attitudes requires that two major issues be addressed—(1) measuring the degree of exposure to the democratic environment at the critical phase and (2) dealing with the endogeneity among variables.²⁾ We borrow the identification strategy suggested by Desposato and Wang (2020).

In this study, we first determined whether students enrolled in college after 1987 when the June Struggle took place. The authoritarian government tried to control college students especially because they considered students as the main leaders of the democratic movement. Those who were students before 1987 experienced enormous government suppression in college. The environment changed dramatically after the June Struggle, and a democratic culture emerged rapidly. Students who started college after the June Struggle of 1987 experienced a less authoritarian culture. Therefore, the year of college enrollment can serve as a proxy for exposure to the democratic environment at the critical stage.

Second, we applied the fuzzy regression discontinuity method to identify causal effects. Other factors may affect the decision of when to enroll in college; for example, a person with an authoritarian attitude who values honor may have delayed enrollment in order to attend a prestigious college. We attempted to address the endogeneity problem by adopting the fuzzy regression discontinuity design (Lee and Lemieux, 2010), using birthdate as an instrument for the year of college enrollment (Desposato and Wang, 2020; Kim, 2021). Based on age, Koreans tend to follow the same education plan before entering college: six years of elementary school, three years of middle school, and three years of high school. Schools apply a strict age-based admission cut-off each year in February. For example, an individual born between March 1968 and February 1969 was supposed to enter elementary school in 1975, middle school in 1981, high school in 1984, and college in 1987. However, additional factors affect college enrollment (e.g., early admission and exam retake), which makes it impossible to use age to draw sharp distinctions regarding college enrollment. Based on the close relationship between birthdate and year of college enrollment, we applied fuzzy regression discontinuity in the form of two-stage least squares (TSLS) estimation (Hahn et al., 2001).³⁾

2) For example, it is not clear whether exposure to the democratic environment affects people's social attitudes, people's attitudes cause the democratic environment, or both.

3) This strategy also has the advantage of being able to control age's effect on social attitudes in that it compares two groups with small differences in age or college entrance years.

2. Data and Empirical Framework

We utilized data from the Korea Labor & Income Panel Study, Korea's annual representative panel survey that tracks about 10,000 samples' economic and social activities. We used the 8th Survey (2005) in this study because it was the only year including an investigation of the samples' authoritarian attitudes. The year 2005 was nearly 20 years after the June Struggle of 1987 and thus suitable for measuring the long-term effects on social attitudes. To control the confounding effects of age and education level, we limited the birthdate range to between March 1963 and February 1974 and extracted only those who had enrolled in college. We applied the following regression model:

$$Y_i = \alpha + \beta T_i + X_i \Gamma + \epsilon_i \epsilon^4$$

The dependent variable measured the sample's authoritarian attitudes on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) for four items: "Young people should respect traditional values," "Schools should teach children a mindset of respect for authority," "Internet censorship is necessary," and "Even bad laws should be abided by." We averaged the scores for these items and designated this value as the main dependent variable.⁴⁾ **Additionally, we subdivided this variable by categorizing the first two items as authoritarianism in the life domain and the latter two items as authoritarianism in the social domain.**

The treatment variable measured the degree of exposure to a liberal democratic environment in college after the June Struggle. We designated the year of college enrollment as the primary variable, assigning a value of 1 if 's admission was in 1987 or after and a value of 0 otherwise. We designated birthdate as an instrumental variable. Figure 1 shows the ratio of college enrollment during and after the June Struggle by birthdate. We can observe that the chances of entering college in 1987 or later increased rapidly with birthdates after March 1968. Manipulation at the birthdate would diminish the validity of the instrumental variable. Thus, we tested whether there was any manipulation at the birthdate of March 1968. As shown in Figure 2, there was no statistical evidence of significant changes in the population's birthdate distribution in March 1968. Finally, the control variables included the sample's sociodemographic traits: wage employee status, marital status, gender, income level, college location, and residence.

4) The Cronbach's alpha value for the scale was .6653, which indicates high reliability.

[Figure 1 and 2 here]

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics. We identified total of 623 samples providing all the information specified above. Of these, 410 had enrolled in college since 1987. The average birth year was 1968, and 78% were wage earners at the time that they completed the survey. About 82% were married, and 72% were male. The average monthly income was about 2.42 million KRW, with 21% graduating from a college in Seoul. About half lived in metropolitan cities.

[Table 1 here]

V. Results and Discussion

Table 2 presents the basic results. According to the OLS specification, the relation between college attendance after the democratic movement and their anti-authoritarian attitude is negatively correlated and statistically significant (column 1). Our IV estimator shows the similar results. Columns 3, 5, and 7 contain the results of the TSLS's first stage estimation, indicating the validity of the instrumental variable by demonstrating the close relationship between birthdate and college enrollment year.⁵⁾ The cohorts who started college in 1987 or later were more likely to be anti-authoritarian in their late 30s (column 2). The effects were consistent across the domains (columns 4 and 6). Overall, we found that differences in social attitudes arising from differences in college experiences due to the democratic protest persisted even after 20 years.

[Table 2 here]

Table 3 shows the results of the robustness test. Our finding that the June Struggle has affected peoples' anti-authoritarian attitudes was strengthened when we restricted the cohorts to those near the event. The coefficient was -0.314 when we narrowed the window to between March 1966 and February 1970 (column 1) and -0.690 when the window was between March 1967 and February 1969 (column 3). The effect on anti-authoritarian attitudes was greater when we limited the scope of analysis to samples centered around 1987. Considering that a narrower range of birthdates makes the samples less confounded by age and more homogeneous in terms of sociodemographic characteristics, the difference between the two groups is likely due to

5) F-statistic values significantly exceeded the rule-of-thumb value of 10.

differences in college experiences just before and after the June Struggle. These results further support the argument for the democratic movement's effect on anti-authoritarian attitudes. Finally, we divided the samples based on whether they graduated from college before or after 1987 because this also differentiates the degree of exposure to the democratic college environment.⁶⁾ This shows that the cohorts graduating from college before the June Struggle reported being more authoritarian at the time of the survey (column 5).

[Table 3 here]

VI. Conclusion

Political protests to achieve democracy occur frequently worldwide. Thus, examining the impacts of democratic movements on peoples' social attitudes helps us to understand social progress. Using the fuzzy regression discontinuity method with representative data from South Korea, we found that cohorts entering college in 1987 or later espoused anti-authoritarian views nearly 20 years later when they reached their late 30s. The results show that changes in the college environment due to successful democratic protests have a significant impact on people's social attitudes.

6) Here, we use this specification as the robustness test because the linkage between birthdate and year of college graduation is relatively weak. For various reasons, students do not necessarily graduate from college on schedule. For example, most men in South Korea generally fulfill military obligations during college, and taking a leave of absence for personal reasons is also common.

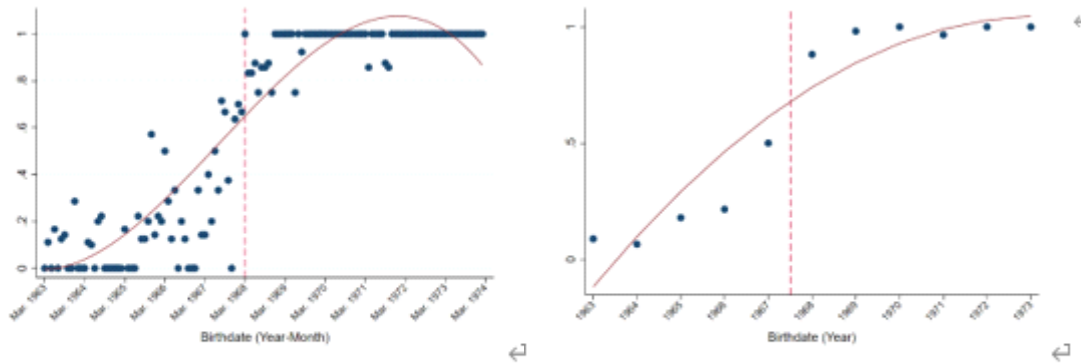
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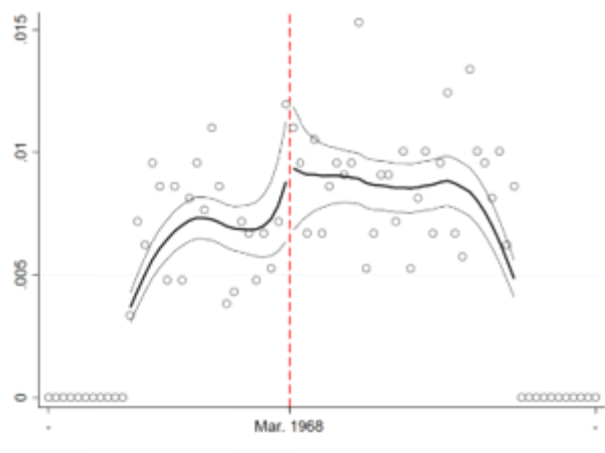
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Figure 1. Ratio of college enrollment during and after the June Struggle by birthdate



Note: Those who were born between March 1968 and February 1969 were supposed to begin college in 1987 based on South Korea's cut-off rules. Each dot on the graph is the average value of the ratio of college enrollment during and after the June Struggle across birthdate (year-month in left panel, year in right panel).

Figure 2. Manipulation test of birthdate



Note: The graph depicts a test of whether the samples' distribution diverge in March 1968, which differentiates the year of college enrollment based on the age cut-off.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

	All samples	College-enrolled during and after the revolution	College-enrolled before the revolution
Birth year	1968.368 (3.143)	1970.073 (2.297)	1965.085 (1.533)
Wage earner	0.778 (0.416)	0.807 (0.395)	0.723 (0.449)
Marriage	0.817 (0.387)	0.746 (0.436)	0.953 (0.212)
Male	0.721 (0.449)	0.698 (0.460)	0.765 (0.425)
Income	241.905 (144.740)	225.285 (118.008)	273.897 (181.761)
College in Seoul	0.213 (0.410)	0.210 (0.408)	0.221 (0.416)
Metropolitan	0.520 (0.500)	0.546 (0.498)	0.469 (0.500)
<i>N</i>	623	410	213

Standard errors in parentheses, + $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, and ** $p < .01$.

Table 2. Basic results[↵]

Dependent [↵]	OLS [↵]		IV [↵]					
	(1) [↵]	(2) [↵]	(3) [↵]	(4) [↵]	(5) [↵]	(6) [↵]	(7) [↵]	
	Authoritarian attitudes [↵]	Authoritarian attitudes [↵]	Treatment [↵]	Authoritarian attitudes (life) [↵]	Treatment [↵]	Authoritarian attitudes (social) [↵]	Treatment [↵]	
Treatment [↵]	-0.143** [↵]	-0.157* [↵]	- [↵]	-0.158* [↵]	- [↵]	-0.156+ [↵]	- [↵]	
	(0.052) [↵]	(0.072) [↵]	- [↵]	(0.080) [↵]	- [↵]	(0.087) [↵]	- [↵]	
Birthdate [↵]	- [↵]	- [↵]	0.010** [↵]	- [↵]	0.010** [↵]	- [↵]	0.010** [↵]	
	- [↵]	- [↵]	(0.000) [↵]	- [↵]	(0.000) [↵]	- [↵]	(0.000) [↵]	
Wage earner [↵]	0.008 [↵]	0.009 [↵]	0.015 [↵]	0.003 [↵]	0.015 [↵]	0.014 [↵]	0.015 [↵]	
	(0.053) [↵]	(0.053) [↵]	(0.031) [↵]	(0.061) [↵]	(0.031) [↵]	(0.067) [↵]	(0.031) [↵]	
Marriage [↵]	0.007 [↵]	0.004 [↵]	0.028 [↵]	-0.034 [↵]	0.028 [↵]	0.041 [↵]	0.028 [↵]	
	(0.060) [↵]	(0.062) [↵]	(0.030) [↵]	(0.070) [↵]	(0.030) [↵]	(0.081) [↵]	(0.030) [↵]	
Male [↵]	-0.038 [↵]	-0.039 [↵]	0.035 [↵]	-0.013 [↵]	0.035 [↵]	-0.064 [↵]	0.035 [↵]	
	(0.051) [↵]	(0.050) [↵]	(0.028) [↵]	(0.059) [↵]	(0.028) [↵]	(0.063) [↵]	(0.028) [↵]	
Income [↵]	-0.000 [↵]	-0.000 [↵]	-0.000+ [↵]	-0.000 [↵]	-0.000+ [↵]	-0.000 [↵]	-0.000+ [↵]	
	(0.000) [↵]	(0.000) [↵]	(0.000) [↵]	(0.000) [↵]	(0.000) [↵]	(0.000) [↵]	(0.000) [↵]	
College in Seoul [↵]	0.087+ [↵]	0.088+ [↵]	0.023 [↵]	0.105* [↵]	0.023 [↵]	0.070 [↵]	0.023 [↵]	
	(0.046) [↵]	(0.046) [↵]	(0.025) [↵]	(0.052) [↵]	(0.025) [↵]	(0.058) [↵]	(0.025) [↵]	
Metropolitan [↵]	-0.100+ [↵]	-0.100+ [↵]	0.013 [↵]	-0.080 [↵]	0.013 [↵]	-0.120+ [↵]	0.013 [↵]	
	(0.052) [↵]	(0.051) [↵]	(0.031) [↵]	(0.059) [↵]	(0.031) [↵]	(0.067) [↵]	(0.031) [↵]	
F-statistic [↵]	- [↵]	904.148 [↵]	- [↵]	904.148 [↵]	- [↵]	904.148 [↵]	- [↵]	
R ² [↵]	0.027 [↵]	- [↵]	- [↵]	- [↵]	- [↵]	- [↵]	- [↵]	
N [↵]	623 [↵]	623 [↵]	623 [↵]	623 [↵]	623 [↵]	623 [↵]	623 [↵]	

Standard errors in parentheses, + $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, and ** $p < .01$.[↵]

Table 3. Robustness check

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Specification	Narrow window: 1966.3~1970.2		Narrow window: 1967.3~1969.2		Treatment: Graduated before 1987	
Dependent	Authoritarian attitudes	Treatment	Authoritarian attitudes	Treatment	Authoritarian attitudes	Treatment
Treatment	-0.314*	-	-0.690*	-	0.399*	-
	(0.149)	-	(0.278)	-	(0.188)	-
Birthdate	-	0.020**	-	0.030**	-	-0.004**
	-	(0.002)	-	(0.006)	-	(0.000)
Wage earner	-0.024	0.007	-0.023	-0.045	0.013	-0.017
	(0.073)	(0.053)	(0.118)	(0.094)	(0.054)	(0.029)
Marriage	-0.018	-0.008	-0.326	-0.115	0.014	-0.038+
	(0.128)	(0.067)	(0.215)	(0.114)	(0.062)	(0.021)
Male	-0.089	0.039	0.071	0.105	0.001	-0.112**
	(0.091)	(0.058)	(0.163)	(0.094)	(0.054)	(0.027)
Income	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000	0.000	-0.000	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
College in Seoul	0.119	0.034	-0.037	0.088	0.091+	-0.019
	(0.074)	(0.049)	(0.113)	(0.080)	(0.047)	(0.021)
Metropolitan	-0.115	0.006	-0.174	-0.108	-0.078	-0.060**
	(0.079)	(0.057)	(0.124)	(0.097)	(0.052)	(0.023)
<i>F</i> -statistic	129.829		25.657		89.950	
<i>N</i>	236	236	115	115	623	623

Standard errors in parentheses, + $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, and ** $p < .01$.

