Democratization and Politics of Trasformismo : Explaining the 1990 Three-Party Merger in South Korea

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Abstract

Research on democratic transitions has relatively ignored the question of why some countries experience a regressive form of political pacts, while others do not. This paper develops a simple game-theoretic model to explain the phenomenon of collusive pacts in the process of democratization. Trasformismo is a term that refers to a system of political exchange based on informal clientelistic politics. The existing studies of the politics of trasformismo have emphasized the timing of industrialization and the tradition of strong state as conditions of the politics of trasformismo. However, not every late industrializers and not every strong states experienced some variants of collusive political pacts in their trajectories of democratization. In this paper, I contend that the politics of trasformismo is rather a generalizable pattern of political elites' behavior under particular circumstances. By developing a simple game theoretic model, this paper suggests the conditions under which political actors are likely to collude to a regressive form of political pacts.

The model shows that the likelihood of collusion to a regressive form of political pacts is a function of a set of parameters. First, a higher level of incumbency advantage in electoral competition is likely to be associated with a higher probability of collusive political pacts. Second, a higher degree of the monopoly of political representation of political parties without a close link with a variety of societal forces is likely to induce collusive behavior among politicians. Third, the ruling party leader's expectations about the likelihood of a safe extrication are related to collusive political pacts.

This paper then engages in a case study of the 1990 three-party merger in South Korea. The 1990 Korean case is interesting in that the ruling party created a new party after having merged with two opposition parties. This case can be considered a result of political maneuver in a context of democratization. The case study suggests the empirical relevance of the game-theoretic model. As the game of trasformismo and the case study of the 1990 three-party merger in South Korea have shown, the collusive political pact was neither determined by a certain stage of economic development nor by a particular cultural systems. Rather, it was a product of the art of trasformismo based on party leaders' rational calculations of the expected likelihood of taking governing power.

Keywords

Democratic transition, political pacts, party merger, game theory, South Korea

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I. Introduction

This paper explores the formation of a particular kind of political pacts in new democracies. The consequences of political pacts in the process of democratization are Janus-faced. While political pacts establish the rules of the game in the political process, they more often than not intend to exclude some political actors and societal forces, constraining competitive processes. It has been argued that pacts can range from very democratic to very non-democratic in their intention and consequences (Linz and Stepan 1996, pp.56-61). Political pacts tend to reduce the competitiveness of the polity, seek to limit accountability to the mass public, attempt to control the policy agenda, and deliberately distort the principle of citizen equality (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986, p.38). After thirty years of third-wave democratization, it is still debatable whether democratic transitions via political pacts are likely to lead to a conservative regime relative to other types of transition cases (Brownlee 2007; Pepinsky 2009).

Political pacts can be considered as agreements among leaders of political parties 'to divide government offices among themselves independent of election results and to exclude some political actors' (Przeworski 1990, p.90). In their extreme form, such pacts accompany a transformation of some members, even the whole members, of an opposition party into governing party members. Under what conditions and incentive structures do these collusive pacts---what can be termed as 'the politic of trasformismo'---occur?

Trasformismo is a term that refers to a system of political exchange based on informal clientelistic politics. This term denotes political experiences in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Italy. The Italian ruling elites after the unification (Risorgimento) had to maintain their established power in confrontation with societal forces and the extension of universal suffrage. Trasformismo was a political technique by which leaders of a weak governing party 'transform' some opposition legislators into members of the governing party through clientelistic political exchanges, thereby constituting a majority in the legislature (see, e.g., Barnes 1966; Gramsci 1971; Di Palma 1981). Existing studies on the politics of trasformismo as a prototype of collusive political pacts have focused on the role of a particularistic political culture (Grew 1978; LaPalombara 1965); the influences of late industrialization and product cycles (Kurth 1979); and a weak liberal bourgeois class and their inability to form a coalition with lower classes (Luebbert 1991).

Whereas the literature on European democratization has heavily focused on social structural or cultural approaches, many studies on the third wave of democratization in the 1970s and 1980s have drawn our attention to micro-analysis of democratic transitions. However, research on democratic transitions has relatively ignored the question of why some countries experience a regressive form of political pacts, while others do not. By developing a simple game theoretic model, this paper suggests the conditions under which political actors are likely to collude to a regressive form of political pacts. The model shows that the likelihood of collusion to a regressive form of political pacts is a function of a set of parameters. First, a higher level of incumbency advantage in the

electoral competition is likely to be associated with a higher probability of collusive political pacts. Second, a higher degree of the monopoly of political representation of political parties without a close link with a variety of societal forces is likely to induce collusive behavior among politicians. Third, the ruling party leader's expectations about the likelihood of a safe extrication are related to collusive political pacts.

The politics of trasformismo is by no means limited to a peculiarity of the Italian context at the turn of the century. As Di Palma (1978, p.12) puts it, 'trasformismo has its analogues in Spain and Portugal, where the phenomenon is variously known as turno and rotativismo.' In light of Di Palma's insight, I contend that the politics of trasformismo is rather a generalizable pattern of political elites' behavior under particular circumstances. In this sense, a contribution of this paper is to shed some lights on the conditions under which collusive political pacts are likely to occur during the process of democratic transitions.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. In the next section, I develop a simple game-theoretic model to explore the conditions under which political actors may choose to establish collusive political pacts. I then engage in a case study of the 1990 three-party merger in South Korea. The 1990 Korean case is interesting in that the ruling party created a new party after having merged with two opposition parties. This case may be considered a result of political maneuver in a context of democratization. The case study shows empirical relevance of the game-theoretic model. The last section summarizes the findings and concludes with some empirical implications.

II. The Game of Trasformismo

According to Linz and Stepan (1996), party pacts have two requirements: (1) leaders with organizational ideological capacity to negotiate for a coalition; and (2) the allegiance of their political followers to the terms of the pact (p.61). In the game of the politics of trasformismo, actors are the leaders of the ruling party and opposition party. I assume that political followers have a strong allegiance to their leader. A strong allegiance can stem from the leader's monopolistic control of the process of candidate nominations. It may also result from various forms of political rents that the leader controls. Lower levels of institutionalization of party systems is related to such monopolistic controls of political rents by the leader. I also assume that the goal of party leaders is not policy achievements, but vote maximization (Ames 1987; Geddes 1994).

The game is a non-cooperative, one-shot game. The leader of the ruling party offers a collusive political pact to the leader of an opposition party. The leader of the opposition party then decides whether to accept the offer or to reject it. If she accepts the offer, a collusive political pact is achieved. However, if she rejects it, electoral competition between the ruling party and the opposition party continues. The order of moves is as follows.

1. The leader of the ruling party, G, offers a collusive political pact, C, to the leader of an opposition party, O. The values of the collusive political pact may be either positive or negative.

$C \in [-\infty, \infty]$. In reality, the offer of a collusive political pact may be given to a multiple number of opposition parties. However, it is not reasonable to believe that opposition leaders would cooperate with one another after having received the offer from the governing party leader. Even if that is the case, opposition leaders' cooperation is not binding, for the ultimate goal of a collusive pact is in a zero-sum relationship. That is, electoral gains of a party directly lead to another party's electoral losses.

2. The opposition leader chooses her response from a set $x \in \{A, R\}$, where A refers to acceptance of the offer from the ruling party leader and R denotes refusal and competition with the ruling party (as well as with other opposition parties) in the next election.

3. If the opposition leader chooses A, she gets punishment, B, by her party's constituencies. The value of B is likely to increase as their supporters vote on the party's ideological position or policy programs and to decrease as the supporters' vote choice is more or less based on clientelistic networks. The parameter B captures the idea that political actors participate in games in two different arenas: parliamentary and electoral arena. In this respect, each move political actors make has consequences in both arenas. This idea is what Tsebelis (1990) termed 'nested games.' On the other hand, the opposition party leader expects the incumbency effect, I, by choosing to accept the offer of a collusive pact. The value of I is a function of an electoral advantage and the degree of monopolistic rents the governing party controls such as the distribution of government job posts and the influences on mass media, etc. As Przeworski (1991) points out, the distribution of probability of realizing individual- or group-specific interest is in part determined by the distribution of resources and 'the source of rents is monopoly' (p.90).Figure 1 shows an extensive form of the game of trasformismo.

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Figure 1. The Game of Trasformismo
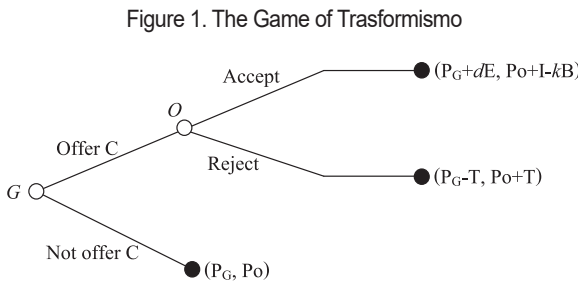
The utility function of acceptance of a collusive pact by the leader of an opposition party may be written as:

$$Uo(A) = Po + I - kBo$$

where Po is the probability that the leader would be elected in the next presidential election. I is

the incumbency effect in electoral competition and B is electoral punishment by core constituency when the opposition leader accepted the offer of a collusive pact and became a member of the ruling party. $I > 0$, $B > 0$, and $I \in [0, 2B]$, which implies that the benefits of the incumbency effect are, on average, the same as the cost of getting electoral punishments by opposition constituency. The electoral punishment B is weighed by the characteristics of party systems. That is, the parameter k captures the degree of political party's monopoly of representation. When there is only one opposition party, it can be said that the party enjoys the monopoly of representation. Conversely, when there are a multiple number of opposition parties, no opposition party is likely to control a monopolistic representation. $K \in [0,1]$, and $k = 0$ if the prefect monopoly of representation exists, and $k = 1$ in the case of a perfect competition and perfect 'replaceability.' When a replaceable rival party is not existent, the degree of monopoly is likely to increase. On the other hand, the parameter k can be also considered to imply politicians' lack of accountability to the constituency. In this respect, $k = 1$ refers to the case where the leader of an opposition party is perfectly accountable to her constituency, and $k = 0$ to a perfect unaccountability.

The utility function of rejection to the offer from the ruling party may be written as:

$$Uo(R) = Po + T$$

where T denotes the opposition leader's expected electoral gains from the support from the defected ruling party supporters, who punishes the ruling party leader's collusive behavior.

The utility function of the ruling party leader may be written as:

$$UG = PG + dE$$

where E refers to the ruling party leader's wish for a safe extrication. As shown in various cases, some of the former-authoritarian incumbents faced with incarceration for their past records during the authoritarian period. It is therefore reasonable to believe that a safe extrication from the incumbency would be one of the top priorities of former-authoritarian presidents. D denotes ideological affinity between the ruling party and opposition parties. The parameter d increases as ideological distance between the ruling party and opposition parties is close. On the contrary, the parameter d decreases in the context of polarized party systems. Di Palma (1978) mentioned that the political coalition in Italy is nothing but the 'political syncretism', which means that the problem of government and opposition is circumvented by manipulative absorption of heterogeneous forces toward a political center that monopolizes government for a time (p.11). If a potential coalition partner's ideological position is far from the ruling party's, for instance, the incumbent president cannot expect a safe extrication from his authoritarian past. Neither is it reasonable to include too ideologically heterogeneous opposition party into a collusive political pact. In this respect, the parameter d resonates with what Bawn (1999) termed 'natural alliance': person 1 and person 2 are natural allies 'if the total long-term stream of benefits they gain from cooperating with each other

is greater than what either would gain from cooperating with person 3' (p.320). $d \in [0,1]$, where 0 denotes a perfect ideological heterogeneity and 1 refers to a perfect ideological affinity. The bigger the value of parameter d is, it is more likely that the ruling party leader's hope for a safe extrication is being realized.

1. Equilibrium

In the game of trasformismo, the history and payoffs are common knowledge. Solving this game by backwards induction, the opposition leader will accept the offer of a collusive political pact if and only if $Po + I - kB > Po + T$. By rearranging terms, we can observe $I > kB + T$. Let us assume that T is smaller than I. That is, it is reasonable to assume that the opposition leader's electoral gains due to defection from the previous ruling party supporters are less than the opposition leader's electoral gains from becoming a member of the incumbent party. When the bargaining process of a collusive political pact proceeds in a perfect secrecy, or when the constituencies of the ruling party support the ruling party leader's attempt at a collusive pact, T significantly decreases. When the opposition party leader has a monopoly of representation $(k = 0)$, $I > T$. In this case, 'Accept' is the strategy the opposition leader chooses.

In contrast, the opposition leader will choose to reject the offer of a collusive pact when either there exist a multiple number of opposition parties or voters' punishing behavior can clearly be foreseen. In other words, if there are available alternative opposition parties in the electoral arena, the term kB becomes larger so that the opposition leader is likely to calculate the benefits and costs of the incumbency effect and electoral punishments with greater caution. By rearranging terms again, we observe that the opposition leader is better off by choosing 'Accept' when $B < (I - T) / k$. As k decreases, that is, as the monopolistic representation of the opposition forces decreases, or as the incumbency effect is far greater than potential electoral gains from defection of the previous ruling party supporters, the likelihood of the opposition leader's choice of 'Accept' increases.

Anticipating this, if the opposition party leader chooses to accept a collusive pact, the ruling party leader is better off by offering such a pact, since $PG + dE > PG$, provided that $E > 0$ and $d \in 0$. However, if the opposition leader chooses to reject the offer of a collusive pact, the ruling party leader in the first stage of the game is better off by choosing not to offer a pact and stay in competition with each other in the next election, since $PG - T < PG$.

2. Comparative Statics

Figure 2 presents comparative statics by varying the values of the incumbency effect (I) and the degree of monopolistic representation (k). As shown above, {Offer, Accept} is a subgame perfect equilibrium if and only if $d \in 0$ and $I > kB + T$, or alternatively, $B < (I - T) / k$. From the opposition party leader's perspective, she is more likely to choose to accept the offer of a collusive pact when

k is smaller and I is larger.

The likelihood of the politics of trasformismo increases when the incumbency effect (I) is greater and when there is a higher degree of monopolistic representation of opposition forces by one opposition party (lower k). A lower level of k also implies a lower accountability of the party leaders to their constituencies.

Figure 2: The Incumbency Effect and the Monopoly of Representation
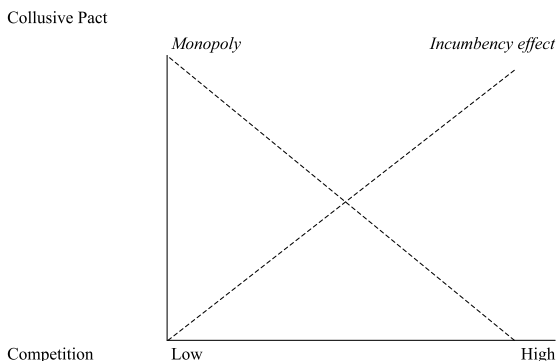
Under the conditions in which the threat of radical factions in society is not significant such that the ruling party leader is not forced to make some kinds of insurance scheme such as a safe extrication, the politics of trasformismo is less likely to occur. Moreover, when the political rents the ruling party controls are significantly small so as to make the electoral advantage of the incumbent party nearly indistinguishable, the opposition party leader has less incentives to make a collusive pact with the ruling party leader.

In addition, the politics of trasformismo is less likely to occur, other things being equal, if the opposition party does not have a monopolistic representation of opposition forces in the society. A monopolistic representation would lead to underestimation of potential electoral punishment by its constituencies and a less accountability to its constituencies.

III. The 1990 Three-Party Merger in South Korea

The founding general election for National Assembly in 1988 that was held under a simple plurality rule drafted after the democratic transition in 1987 resulted in a four-party system. The Democratic Justice Party (DJP) with the military authoritarian past, the ruling party that won the founding presidential election in December 1987, gained 129 seats. The New Democratic Republican Party (NDRP) won 35 seats. The Reunification Democratic Party (RDP), led by a moderate opposition leader Kim Young Sam, gained 59 seats. The Party for Peace and Democracy (PPD) under the leadership of Kim Dae Jung took 70 seats (Korean National Election Commission).

As a result of the 1988 founding general election, the three opposition parties together gained more than enough seats to control the legislative processes and agenda whenever they cooperate. The minority ruling party and a big opposition bloc in the National Assembly led to various political reform campaigns and propositions for progressive labor and social policies. Faced with this situation, then President Roh Tae Woo, one of the 1980 military coup leaders, and the ruling DJP began to call for a reorganization of the party system. With the presidential system and five year one-term limit, it was necessary for Roh Tae Woo to ensure his safe extrication. As was the case in other new democracies, the former-authoritarian leader faced with the possibility of legal punishments for his wrongdoings and tortures in the past authoritarian regime.

The leader of NDRP, Kim Jong Pil, the ex-prime minister during the authoritarian Park Chung Hee regime (1961-1979), was well aware of the incumbency effect in both legislative and presidential elections. Also, being the leader of the smallest of the four parties, he was not able to assume presidential power without forming a coalition with other parties. On the other hand, after having lost its status as the largest opposition party to the PPD, the leader of RDP, Kim Young Sam began to worry about the prospect of winning the next presidential election. As for the PPD and its leader Kim Dae Jung, their constituency's support was heavily based on Kim Dae Jung's reputation for pro-democracy struggles under authoritarian regimes. Kim Dae Jung also proclaimed his conviction of victory under any potential two-candidate competition in the next presidential election.

All the three opposition leaders were clearly aware of the higher incumbency effect in the electoral competition. A higher level of the incumbency effect in Korea mainly stemmed from a higher degree of political rents controlled by the governing party. These rents included, but not limited to, creeping electoral interventions by the police forces, a considerable control of mass media, and 'anti-North Korea, anti-Communism' ideological mobilization by the state intelligence apparatuses.

The degree of monopolistic representation of opposition forces was high in Korea for the following two reasons. First, under the condition of inter-Korean confrontation between North and South Korea, the notorious National Security Law banned the formation and participation of any leftist party in the electoral competition. Even after the ban was repelled since democratic transition in 1987, a very high electoral threshold of single-member district, the first-past-the-post system significantly increased entry barrier. Second, the political cleavages in Korea revolved, especially since the democratic transition in 1987, around regional cleavages. Whereas the PPD was based on heavy support from Cholla province, both the ruling DJP and RDP drew their support from Kyungsang province. The NDRP based its electoral support on Choongchung province (see, e.g., Choi 1993). For instance, in the 1987 founding presidential election, Roh Tae Woo and Kim Young Sam, both of them from Kyungsang province, together gained 93.5 percent of votes of the region. Kim Dae Jung gained 84 percent of total votes of Cholla province. In the 1988 general election, the ruling DJP gained 25 seats out of 29 districts of Taegu city and North Kyungsang province. The PPD took all of the 32 districts of Cholla province (Choi 1994, p.5). The regional cleavage has had negative consequences in Korean politics. Not only did it make socioeconomic issues less

salient in the electoral competition, but political parties had a monopolistic representation in their core region.

In January 1990, the ruling DJP, NDRP, and RDP announced a party merger to form the Democratic Liberal Party (DLP), which resulted in a two party system with a strong governing party DLP. As a consequence of the merger, the ruling DLP commanded 223 seats as opposed to 70 seats by the opposition PPD. It was known that Roh Tae Woo initially offered a party merger to Kim Dae Jung, who turned it down. This is indeed puzzling from a perspective of this game-theoretic framework because ideological affinity (d) between the two is virtually zero. In any case, the PPD was excluded from the new governing coalition because its leader Kim Dae Jung's ideological affinity with the ruling party was most heterogeneous. Given Kim Dae Jung's pro-democracy movement records and policy orientations, the ruling party leader was better off by not offering him a collusive political pact because in this case ideological affinity (d) is nearly zero. Then president Roh Tae Woo may have not been able to ensure his safe extrication if he had invited Kim Dae Jung to a new governing coalition.

The three-party merger was puzzling because these parties had very different political lineages. Each party leader's political interests and their estimation of the likelihood of winning the next presidential election determined this regressive form of coalition. The merger was regressive not only in terms of its processes but its content. It should be noted that the so-called 'public security political situation' initiated by the Public Prosecutor Office and the Agency for National Security and Planning (former Korean CIA) in 1989 paved way for the three-party merger. These repressive state apparatuses played a role in curbing democratic mobilization after the transition. The three-party merger was claimed to be a new alignment suitable to the advent of post-Cold War era and economic globalization. Right after the merger, a series of regressive policy changes soon followed: for instance, the nullification of pro-labor acts, the change toward orthodox growth-first economic policies, and the postponement of transparent financial transactions act.

We have assumed that the party members' preferences coincide with their leaders' preferences. In other words, one of our assumptions was the party leaders command a strong allegiance of their followers. The characteristic of Korean political parties that rely heavily on the charisma of individual party leader made this assumption reasonable. Given this, it is unlikely for politicians to survive in the electoral arena if their leader decided to join a collusive pact and they choose not to follow their leader. Resonating with this argument, among 221 potential members of the newly created governing DLP, only 6 did not join the DLP (Kim 1997, p.96).

IV. Conclusions

This paper has shown that a particular form of regressive political pacts, trasformismo, can be explained by a simple game-theoretic model. The existing studies of the politics of trasformismo

have emphasized the timing of industrialization and the tradition of strong state as conditions of the politics of trasformismo. However, not every late industrializers and not every strong states experienced some variants of collusive political pacts in their trajectories of democratization. Structural and institutional conditions themselves do not explain why some countries experience collusive political pacts, while others with similar conditions do not. As the game of trasformismo and the case study of the 1990 three-party merger in South Korea have shown, the collusive political pact was neither determined by a certain stage of economic development nor by a particular cultural systems. Rather, it was a product of the art of trasformismo based on party leaders' rational calculations of the expected likelihood of taking governing power.

The findings of this paper suggest several empirical implications. First, collusive political pacts are likely to occur when the ruling party suffers from a minority position in the legislature so that the ruling party leader's desire for future security is significantly high. Given that, the ruling party leader offers a collusive political pact to ideologically close opposition party leaders, while excluding opposition parties farther from a concentric circle. Second, a higher level of the incumbency effect in electoral competition significantly increases the likelihood of a collusive pact between the ruling party and opposition party(ies), ceteris paribus. Third, a higher degree of monopoly of representation or lower levels of accountability to constituency of political parties, other things being equal, induces the politics of trasformismo.

The politics of trasformismo is by no means confined to the particular Italian political context at the turn of the century. Rather, it can be considered one of the stylized patterns of politicians' behavior and choices under certain conditions. The game-theoretic model in this paper sheds some light on the incentive structures that may induce political actors to the politics of trasformismo. The claim about the generality of inferences drawn from this model should be restricted, however. Carefully designed comparative case studies would be warranted for future research.havior and choices under certain conditions. The game-theoretic model in this paper sheds some light on the incentive structures that may induce political actors to the politics of trasformismo. The claim about the generality of inferences drawn from this model should be restricted, however. Carefully designed comparative case studies would be warranted for future research.

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