ABOUT SHORENSTEIN APARC

The Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center (Shorenstein APARC) addresses critical issues affecting the countries of Asia, their regional and global affairs, and U.S.-Asia relations. As Stanford University's hub for the interdisciplinary study of contemporary Asia, we produce policy-relevant research, provide education and training to students, scholars, and practitioners, and strengthen dialogue and cooperation between counterparts in the Asia-Pacific and the United States.

OUR WORK

Founded in 1983, Shorenstein APARC today encompasses six regional and thematic programs that advance our mission. They include five vibrant research programs—focusing on China, Japan, Korea, Southeast Asia, and comparative health policy in the Asia-Pacific—and a Global Affiliates Program that strengthens relations and creates new opportunities for collaboration between the Center and Asian partners in the public and private sectors.

Our research is broad and wide-ranging, covering topics including innovation and entrepreneurship, education and development, political economy, governance and political movements, comparative health and health policy, Asia-Pacific regional cooperation, and U.S.-Asia relations.

We share our research findings through an active publishing program and pursue our education mission and public engagement goals by offering courses and training opportunities, policy outreach, numerous events, and expert commentary on topics in the news. APARC is a gathering place for leaders from academia, business, government, and the social sector, as well as for community members to examine together timely, policy-relevant topics that shape contemporary Asia and are of mutual importance to the United States and Asian nations. Through these activities, our scholars bring multiple disciplines and new insights to bear on matters of vital importance to Asian nations and the United States.

Published by the Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center, Stanford University

© 2023 The Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Junior University
Korea Foundation For Advanced Studies–Stanford Sustainable Democracy Roundtable Conference Report

August 29–30, 2023
Stanford, California

Jointly presented by the Korea Program and the Stanford Next Asia Policy Lab (SNAPL) at the Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center

In partnership with the Korea Foundation for Advanced Studies Seoul, Republic of Korea

CONTENTS

Opening Remarks from the Conference Organizers 2
Executive Summary 5
Workshop Session Summaries
Session I: Where We Stand Now 7
Session II: Looking into Backbone: Institutions 12
Session III: Under the Microscope: Pathology 16
Session V: Prescribing for Democratic Malaise 20
Conclusion 22
Workshop Materials 23
Workshop Agenda 25
Participant Biographies 25
Welcome to the inaugural Sustainable Democracy Roundtable. This incredible effort was made possible thanks to the generous support and partnership with the Korea Foundation for Advanced Studies (KFAS). I especially thank its president, Dr. Choi Byung-il, for his leadership and support for this roundtable. We are grateful to be here at the Stanford Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center (APARC) with our partners and participants from across the United States and Korea.

This roundtable comes on the heels of several international crises and threats to our democratic values. To name a few, we have seen the horrors of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, China’s increasing threat in the Asia-Pacific, including Taiwan, an ongoing North Korean nuclear crisis, and rising global trends in populism, illiberalism, and political polarization. We cannot stand removed from these crises either, as the threats to our democracies have permeated our societies and political systems. The last South Korean presidential election saw the worst of mudslinging and division. Here in the United States, the responsibility to protect democracy will be tested once again in the upcoming 2024 presidential elections.

We are at a critical moment in the preservation and strengthening of the tenets of liberal democracy. This is undoubtedly a tall order, rather than a task we can achieve independently. Through collaborative efforts, such as this roundtable, we can advance liberal democratic values and produce change for the better.

This summer at Shorenstein APARC, we launched a new policy lab named the Stanford Next Asia Policy Lab (SNAPL). Because we recognized the importance of continuing research on democracy, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, we focused a research track specifically on democratic crises and reform.

After this conference, we will produce a report, which will be accessible through our APARC website. Most importantly, we encourage all of you to maintain the connections made at this conference and use these collaborations to continually enhance the state of liberal democracies across the globe. As the name of the conference suggests, we are looking for ways to sustain democracy in the long run. Protecting a liberal democracy is a joint effort.

GI-WOOK SHIN
The Korea Foundation for Advanced Studies (KFAS) will celebrate its fiftieth anniversary next year. With that in mind, I thought we needed to create something significant and, at the same time, sustainable for the next fifty years of our intellectual journey.

I looked back to the very humble beginnings of KFAS when I was a college student. The late founder of KFAS, Chey Jong-hyon, used to say, “While Korea is a war-torn, poor country and we are trying to modernize the economy, the day will come when we will rise to the top. By then, we will confront a new set of problems. We need the intellectual capital to solve them, and that is why I have decided to create KFAS.”

As a young student, when I heard this, I thought we were daydreaming because we were not an economically affluent society, not to mention the political suppression taking place. During Korea’s catch-up period, we looked to the United States for a model to follow. We emulated a focus on “market economy,” “liberal democracy,” and “strong civil society.”

Fast-forwarding to the twenty-first century, it looks like Korea has achieved all of these. However, as our founder Chey predicted, with such remarkable pre-science, new sorts of problems are emerging. Liberal democracy faces unprecedented challenges, both from within and from without. Some have even voiced deep-rooted concerns that liberal democracy may not survive the twenty-first century.

To tackle all these questions, we are set on a series of collaborations with leading institutions to investigate how we can chart a new course for the future of liberal democracy. The intentional focus is to facilitate and provoke serious dialogue among social scientists from all generations, whom KFAS has helped to empower over the last half-century.

This year, we will identify and share the problems we face in the United States and South Korea. Next year, we will focus on what actions we can take and broaden our scope to Europe and other regions. I hope that this gathering lays the basic foundation for more profound discussions to come.

BYUNG-IL CHOI
ABOVE: Sustainable Democracy Roundtable participants outside the Faculty Club at Stanford University.
Executive Summary

The foundations of democracy and the people’s belief in its values are crumbling with the rise of populism, nationalism, and illiberalism. With democratic backsliding threatening democracies old and new, we are now in a critical moment to reverse this destructive path.

In partnership with the Korea Foundation for Advanced Studies, the Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center and the Stanford Next Asia Policy Lab (SNAPL) at Stanford University presented the inaugural event in this new annual roundtable series, where experts diagnosed the current state of democracy, its threats, and possible prescriptions for democratic prosperity. This series, titled “Sustainable Democracy Roundtable,” aims to create a necessary platform and opportunity for scholars of various disciplines and ranks to identify core issues and propose unique solutions to globally pertinent policy issues.

Participants for the inaugural conference hailed from both the United States and South Korea, mostly from academic backgrounds and institutions. In pursuit of honest discussions, the conference gathered participants in closed-door Chatham House–style sessions. The discussions highlighted in this report are summarized captures of the essential features of each session. Participants’ quotes are only attributed to their country of origin.

The six sessions covered diagnoses of the current state of liberal democracy, the role of the judiciary, the intersection between civil society organizations and political parties, the rise of technology and its impact on democratic values, and future prescriptions for further conferences. Participants also saw a research presentation from a senior scholar and a student presentation session featuring research from five students from Korean universities and Stanford University.

Key Takeaways

1. While the period from the early 1970s to the early 2000s saw a “third wave of democratization” with numerous states transitioning into democratic systems coupled with the fall of communism, the upward trend of the spread of democracy has since flatlined. Across the board, global democracy scores have consistently dropped since the 2008 financial crisis. The rise of populism, the problem of corruption, the ossification of traditional political parties, the failure of democracies to deliver, and an attack on modern, natural science all hinder the sustainability of healthy democratic systems. Notably, the United States, once a leader in democratic models, has no longer been able to contain its own democratic demise, particularly underscored by the violations of liberal norms by President Trump and his supporters.

2. Despite the current context of emerging and ongoing global crises—the invasion of foreign territory, the climate crisis, and rapid technological change that may be creating more problems than it solves—some
participants were concerned that the state of democratic decline was being exaggerated, and others felt there was room for optimism. Although illiberal governments seem to deliver on the surface, deeper dynamics reveal that they are not performing well overall. Citizen trust in authoritarian governments remains low. The solution to addressing democratic decline is not to defer to authoritarian models of government but rather to find a suitable set of checks and balances to fight against arbitrary government power while also reaching collective decisions and respecting individual rights.

3. Expansion of judicial power, politicization of the judiciary, and declining legitimacy of court decisions due to justice bias were common concerns for all democracies. The rising trend of judicial activism comes with risks when deferring to the higher courts as the final arbiter on social and political issues that do not have direct solutions.

4. The declining functionality of political parties has led to the rise of civic organizations, but neither can replace the other to fully and accurately represent the people’s interests. Political parties matter in that they aggregate competing interests. Still, the current trends show that these political parties focus more on power-seeking campaigns than interest representation, leading to citizen disconnect. However, civic organizations and direct citizen participation do not exist without criticism. Disgruntled citizens may view these civic organizations as lesser-qualified extensions of the very political parties that they no longer trust. At the same time, overt participation of the radical, vocal few may further erode political cohesion. Even with clear avenues for interest representation, citizens need to be well-informed and active during the bargaining and decision-making processes, placing a significant burden on the voters that risks lowering participation.

5. While social media, technology, and artificial intelligence changed the landscape of how information is created, disseminated, and consumed, these emergent technologies did not create the drastic polarization seen today. Instead, they serve as amplifying platforms that help magnify social and political issues such as economic inequality, perceived threats to cultural integrity and notions of nations, and threats to national sovereignty. Although this magnification exacerbates echo chambers for the worse, it may also encourage democratic mobilizers and information sharing for the best.

Future iterations of the conference will aim to incorporate a more comprehensive array of participants from diverse backgrounds, such as policymakers, technologists, and environmentalists, in addition to academics, to foster more dynamic and thorough discussions about overcoming democratic decline. As such, the work here is not finished. There are still numerous avenues to pursue that will alleviate the trends of global democratic decline, starting with collaborative solution-seeking environments like the Sustainable Democracy Roundtable.
GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS:
1. How would you diagnose the current state of liberal democracy?
2. What are notable global trends in liberal democracy?
3. How do you envision the next ten years of democracy from international perspectives?

The fall of the Berlin Wall signaled for many a new era for liberal democracy, one led by the Western beacons of the liberal world. Over time, however, the hopes for a world under a liberal democratic system have diminished. We now face a democratic recession, with authoritarian regimes and non-democratic practices prevailing in the interests of the vocal, radical few. Populism, illiberalism, and extreme nationalism all characterize and threaten not only the democratic states that were once aspiring leaders of liberal democracy but also the budding democratic hopefuls.

With this global context of an ongoing democratic recession, a U.S. participant delivered the keynote address by highlighting two issues: the global crisis of democracy and trends in social trust.

The Global Crisis of Democracy

In the aggregate, there was a concern regarding the rise of authoritarian great powers and populist nationalism. Starting around the early 1970s with the “third wave of democratization,” countries such as Spain, Portugal, and Turkey emerged from military dictatorships, with this trend peaking around 1989 to 1991, along with the fall of communism. Sub-Saharan Africa had momentum with their democratization. In the 1990s, in Asia, Taiwan and South Korea also became democracies. But, these trends began to reverse around the 2008 global financial crisis. Since then, for seventeen consecutive years, there has been a decrease in aggregate democracy scores, noted by the “Freedom in the World” rankings by Freedom House. But the bigger threat has been about the “liberal” part of liberal democracy.

A related issue focused on the alternative models of government. For many years during the third wave of democratization, it was not clear if there would be viable alternatives to liberal democracy, and if there were, what they might be. However, the answer, it seems, is that Russia and China have consolidated into a very hard form of authoritarian government. The most prominent assertion of these alternative models into reality was the full-scale invasion of Ukraine that Russia launched on February 24, 2022. While some might characterize this as a territorial or regional dispute, this was Russia’s attempt to reverse the entire European settlement that occurred after the breakup of the Soviet Union.

China has spiraled into a new form of authoritarianism in which the government has been able to exercise an unprecedented degree of social control. In a certain sense, technology has given China the ability to control individual behavior—from a social credit system to monitoring day-to-day behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic. Until Xi Jinping’s rise, China was focused on its own economic development, but it has now asserted and projected the model outwards. After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the possibility of a Chinese military action against Taiwan has become a vivid concern. There are additional worries regarding the extent of China’s “sharp power,” where China can project its authoritarian values outside its borders—e.g., the coercion of people residing internationally, such as Chinese students studying abroad at U.S. universities.

There is the rise of populist nationalism, the threat to the “liberal” part of liberal democracy. All of the recent populist leaders—Modi in India, Erdoğan in Turkey, Bolsonaro in Brazil—were legitimately elected but then used that legitimacy to erode the checks and balances that are the essential part of a true, full liberal democracy. They did this by attacking the judiciary and independent media and by politicizing the bureaucracies. The link between these countries to both Russia and

---

China is their complaints against liberalism. As such, when Vladimir Putin rails against liberal values, he has the same targets as the populists: gender equality, transgender, LGBTQ rights, and the like. There is a dense web of ties between Russia and many U.S. evangelicals who see themselves as engaged in a joint fight against these kinds of liberal values.

The position of the United States as a leading influence on global democracy cannot be underestimated. That is why the unprecedented violations of liberal norms by Donald Trump and his supporters—interfering with a legitimate election and attempting to overturn an election to prevent the peaceful transfer of power—are issues of great concern. It remains the case that a third of American voters think the election was illegitimate. There has been an evolution in the American right toward a much more hostile and overtly authoritarian understanding of conservatism, using state power to project their own values onto society. This is apparent in the behavior of Ron DeSantis, the current governor of Florida, who wants to control what is taught in schools and uses the state to push those values.

Part of the world remains moderately democratic because almost none of these populists are challenging fundamental liberal constitutional norms in the way that Donald Trump has. They want more social policies and more equality, but have been unable to achieve these goals because almost none of them has a solid legislative majority; therefore, there is a pendulum shift away from this kind of left-wing populism to a right-wing populism.

The Global Crisis of Trust

Discussions turned to the global crisis of trust, highlighting five issues: the rise of populism, the prevalence of corruption, the ossification of traditional political parties, the failure of democracies to deliver, and an attack on modern, natural science.

Populist leaders espouse the idea that existing institutions have been captured by elites operating behind the scenes and not acting on behalf of the average citizen. Once elected, such leaders then protest that existing institutions are obstructing their efforts—the courts, the media, and the rule of law, essentially. Unable to accomplish their goals, they devote themselves to attacking these institutions.

Donald Trump typified this in 2016 when the Republican Party first nominated him. He put himself forward as the only person who could understand America’s problems and the only one who could fix them. In many ways, this is the playbook of every populist leader, who all evoke some version of the claim that only their personal authority, not any institution or party, or even the constitutional system, can save the populace. Therefore, populists are inevitably anti-institutional.

Corruption is a big issue in every country, but it also is something that can be easily weaponized by people who are themselves corrupt.

Many of today’s political parties have existed for a long time, and many of the leaders of these parties have become less interested in enacting agendas than retaining power, leading to an ossification of the traditional party system. Because voters recognize this phenomenon, they seek an outsider who can completely overturn the existing party system and replace it with something else.

There has been an across-the-board similarity among modern democracies of failing to deliver results, causing an erosion of citizens’ confidence in the ability of democratic governments to do the things that citizens need their governments to do.

There has been a broad attack on modern natural science. Michel Foucault proposed that modern elites do not use overt power, but they use their power over

---

2 Liberalism, at least on a theoretical basis, is a doctrine that asserts the equal dignity of all people, that there is no particular subgroup of human beings that have superior rights to human beings in general. Therefore, the assertion of universal human rights is fundamental to classical liberalism but antithetical to these populist leaders who, in one way or another, try to make distinctions among humans.
thought. Today’s elites attack science by claiming that scientific findings are immaterial, ridiculous, or even part of a larger scheme. This strategy played out notably during the COVID-19 pandemic, where such elites claimed that authorities were part of a grand conspiracy in which public health authorities were attempting to manipulate the public to force acceptance of mask-wearing and vaccinations.

The impact of technology has several components. The rise of the Internet was greeted as a pro-democratic development in the 1990s because it undermined the power of all the gatekeepers, like publishers and editors. But what has replaced curated content is weaponized, non-credible information where anyone can say anything with equal authority. And then came the weaponization of social media, where anti-democratic forces figured out how to target particular audiences using these tools, and equally important, that we will trust whatever narrative elites are pushing.

Elites are, in fact, necessary in a democracy. If there are no credible sources of factual information, then there will be no democratic discussion. This is one of the consequences of the mass shift away from legacy media to online sources of information. And then we have the rapidly dawning future, where artificial intelligence has been a source of political targeting. But in a democratic society, a degree of surveillance via artificial intelligence similar to that of authoritarian regimes will simply not be possible. In China, the government does the surveilling, but in the United States and Europe, the surveillance is done by the big Internet companies. The amount of knowledge these companies have about people’s daily activities is as great as what the Chinese government collects. This is a situation that should worry a lot of people.

There have been a lot of assertions about the relationship between our democracy and the ability to both mitigate and adapt to climate change. It is true that capitalist democracies are responsible for the lion’s share of carbon in the atmosphere right now. The reason is not because they are either democratic or capitalist but because they are rich. There is no reason to think that an authoritarian government with only a semi-capitalist economy will take the climate crisis more seriously.

**Are There Alternatives to Democracy?**

Following the groundwork laying out the initial concerns on the current state of democracy by the U.S. keynote speaker, participants engaged in open-floor discussions regarding the ongoing democratic recession and speculated if there were viable alternatives to democracy. The question of alternatives is pertinent as democratic governments have made their share of mistakes and, in some cases, have failed to deliver on challenging issues that autocracies have succeeded in, in particular short-term issues like infrastructure projects.

Some participants pointed to South Korea’s rapid development under an authoritarian regime as a prime example of authoritarian governments delivering—Korea has transformed into a highly developed economy. However, a Korean participant emphasized two critical factors when evaluating economic development that are independent of an authoritarian model. The first factor is long-term planning. Economic policies cannot be easily flip-flopped. Bureaucrats have institutional memory, meaning that they are the ones who give long-term perspectives on economic policies regardless of administrative change. Japan, for example, did well because they used the best and brightest bureaucrats to serve as conduits between the government and business.

The second factor is discipline—performance has to follow. When the Korean government started funding the semiconductor industry, they funded three or four different channels, not just one. If one company was unsuccessful, it had to sell its semiconductor divisions to its competitors. This fostered a competitive environment within the domestic players.

What is missing with authoritarian governments now are these two factors. One way development opens the door for political liberalization is by creating checks and balances against arbitrary governance. Increased development means that people have more private property to protect. Under China’s Zero-COVID policy, citizens...
realized that the nation’s huge government machine could arbitrarily shut down whole economic sections overnight without putting supportive measures in place. Previously, the Chinese government relied on domestic consumption as the vehicle for economic recovery, but this solution will fail if people instead find ways to save cash at home or channel their money out of the Chinese system. To continue the economic miracle, there needs to be a structural change that recognizes the relationship between sustained economic development and democracy. China has now reached the point where liberty and freedom of choice are needed to continue economic development.

When evaluating how democracies deliver, participants stressed that it is important to think about the context of a system with checks and balances so that the government does not function arbitrarily, one that allows collective decisions while respecting the rights of individuals. One of the tendencies in the United States and other liberal democracies is to add an increasing number of procedures under the belief that it creates democratic legitimacy, regardless of the impact on actual outcomes. But if there are no outcomes due to procedural difficulties, the legitimacy (or perceived legitimacy) decreases.

Both Korean and U.S. participants posed questions about countries like the Philippines or El Salvador, where the populism was not as toxic, but patterns emerged where authoritarian-like actions seemed to have favorable outcomes. Rodrigo Duterte, the former president of the Philippines, was elected under a liberal democratic system but single-handedly defied the rule of law by declaring war against corruption. Similarly, a U.S. participant highlighted the case of El Salvador, where the elected leader Nayib Bukele tackled the gang issue by arresting 10 percent of the population. On one hand, he violated the rule of law and democratic norms, but on the other, the crime rate has fallen drastically by 90 percent. The people tend to favor a leader who can deliver actual results.

However, a U.S. participant emphasized that asking which system of government—democratic or authoritarian—is better is not the right way to frame the problem. No one is going to pick an authoritarian. Political systems lie on a continuum: on one end, there is a concentrated decision-maker who is quick and efficient; on the other end, there is an increasing number of checks and balances and veto players.

There are also good reasons to believe authoritarian states are not as strong as they appear. Russia made a gigantic gamble and lost it with its invasion of Ukraine, which participants characterized as one of the most significant strategic mistakes of any great power. The invasion has weakened Russia but strengthened the West. NATO has now shown a kind of solidarity that is unprecedented and unexpected.

Similarly, China has made some horrible decisions. The Chinese economy is growing at only 1 or 2 percent right now, beyond Zero-COVID, partly because Xi Jinping has been trying to exert too much control. The Chinese government escaped the 2008 crisis by over-investing in housing and real estate; however, that whole sector of the Chinese economy, which at one point was 50 percent of GDP, is now collapsing. The system of agricultural self-sufficiency is not doing them any good, either. Now, instead of catching up with and surpassing the United States at some point in the future, many economists think that China will never catch up—not just in per capita terms, but in absolute output.

Is Democratic Backsliding a New Trend?

A Korean participant asked if the current democratic backsliding has been a gradual phenomenon that people just realized is happening or if there was an observable breakthrough. In response, a U.S. participant expressed that while there is no clear breakthrough moment, there is most definitely “a realization at a certain point that all of the anti-democratic forces have something in common.” The ties between Russia and China and among right-wing nationalist groups were signposts, but so was the failure of the United States to live up to its own democratic ideals. One U.S. participant highlighted “the invasion of Iraq and the global financial crisis—both of which were results of bad policy...
decisions. In a way, these two events catalyzed critique of both democracy and of the United States’ economic system.”

Another U.S. participant questioned if there is an overemphasis on the current crisis of democracy taking place around the world. The statistics show a decline in the past 15–20 years, but this decline is within the margin of statistical error, and the decline was much bigger in the 1930s and 40s. The participant questioned whether democratic decline was overemphasized because it is occurring in large countries such as Brazil, India, and the United States. Similarly, a Korean participant asked why we are pondering the question of democratic decline now when the failure of democracies has been taking place over a much longer period.

A U.S. participant emphasized that the debate around the 2016 rise of Donald Trump offered two explanations: economic and cultural. The economic explanation was that an extreme form of globalization stagnated working-class incomes and brought about resentment. However, these issues expanded beyond the economic sphere, breaching into cultural issues. In the United States, immigration is a point of contention, and the arguments have triggered questions about critical race theory and other civil rights–related issues. Across the Atlantic, the Syrian refugee crisis provoked an upsurge in European populism in 2014. These were cultural tipping points where many felt their national identities were threatened by rising levels of cross-border migration.

Both the left and right sides of the political aisle are unhappy with the status quo. The 2008 global financial crisis empowered left-wing parties and their supporters to rethink the current status of globalization pushed by big corporation-led investments. The refugee crisis empowered the right side to blame and shame immigrants and accuse China and India of benefiting more from globalization.

However, a U.S. participant pointed out that the left confuses liberalism with neoliberalism. A neoliberal set of pro-market, anti-state policies was the dominant economic paradigm for a generation from the late 1970s onward. This paradigm resulted in the global financial crisis, contributing to inequality between and within countries. Consequently, people sought a return to a kind of social democracy that could increase social protections and safeguards against the excesses of neoliberalism.

Earlier forms of globalization did not consider the possibility of actual military conflict. This became very evident with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which forced some countries to struggle to disentangle from certain strategic supply chains. It also served as a wake-up call to Western countries regarding their over-reliance on China. Despite the increasing U.S.-China rivalry, U.S. participants were still wary of attempts to completely unravel the two intertwined economies aside from those sectors related to military production.
GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS:
1. Should the judiciary serve as the final arbiter of a country’s disputes?
2. Is the party system the one and only? Can direct citizen action serve as an alternative?
3. Is liberal democracy necessarily better than other political regimes in terms of livelihood or quality of life?

The second session of the conference focused on the effectiveness and legitimacy of democratic institutions such as the judiciary and the role of political parties. To start, one U.S. participant emphasized that the defining feature of American politics is partisanship and deep polarization. Throughout the session, it became clear that while these trends can be closely observed in the United States, domestic political and social divisions were prevalent globally.

The Judiciary as the Final Arbiter of Politics?

Participants engaged in conversations regarding the legitimacy of the judiciary—where the legitimacy comes from and which factors limit the legitimacy of the judiciary. Given these limiting factors, participants discussed whether justices should be invested with this legitimacy. Citizen trust in government is declining, and the judiciary is not immune to these trends. In particular, a Korean participant questioned the justifications behind judiciary decisions and wondered what obligation citizens have to trust and follow their decisions.

Despite being unelected officials, overall, justices maintain democratic legitimacy. One classic strategy shows that this legitimacy is outcome-based, meaning that because judicial actions usually align with public opinion, judicial partisanship does not matter as much in determining the legitimacy of judicial power. But what separates the judiciary from other political institutions is that the judiciary is supposed to be an impartial institution that arbitrates the “moral north star” of the nation. Despite this supposed impartiality, because both sides of the political aisle have been preoccupied with holding the government accountable for neoliberalism’s failures, the decisions of the judicial system have also been scrutinized.

Dangers of inherent bias affect the judiciary and its impartial nature. Participants pointed to studies showing how a justice’s personal background, such as gender and age, can predict final rulings. For example, studies on Israeli judges found that justices showed a trend of favorable judgments in the morning, with a tendency to turn increasingly unfavorable throughout the day; judgments jumped back up towards the favorable side after lunch, only to drop towards the unfavorable side again as the day passed. Humans are subjective and are susceptible to mistakes—those sitting on higher court seats are no different.

An additional concern raised by a U.S. participant centered around judicial tenure. In the United States, Supreme Court justices have lifetime tenure, but in Korea, justices only serve single six-year terms. This system means that any sitting president in Korea can nominate multiple justices during their tenure, and so judicial nominations and confirmations are heavily influenced by the ruling party’s preferences, again undermining the supposed impartiality of the appointments. Participants then proposed reforming both sides, such as changing to a single 12-year tenure for justices, to eliminate potential biases and political influence on the courts.

In the United States, a long-standing conservative legal movement has reshaped the philosophy of judges and the way they are educated and selected. There can no longer be the pretense that the judicial nomination process is neutral. The various indictments against Donald Trump showed how much the U.S. judicial court nomination process has turned political. Any pro-Trump Republican wishing to downplay the validity of a case against Trump could make a case for judicial bias simply by examining the justice’s campaign contributions or their past speeches.

This politicization of the courts has overarching effects that seep into political issues. Instead of hurting the
candidate, Trump’s indictments were a boon, boosting campaign donations and his rating in polls for the Republican presidential nomination. However, some U.S. participants still believed that the benefits to Trump from the indictments are limited; while helping in the short term, there were doubts about whether these court cases could actually help him in the 2024 presidential election. The popularity that led to Trump’s 2016 election win was due, in part, to his cult of personality; in showing him as a martyr figure, the indictments momentarily ignited that cult, but the majority U.S. public opinion still holds that Trump engaged in criminal behavior, which will ultimately affect voter choices.

With these inherent and structural biases facing the judiciary in many democracies, participants questioned whether the judiciary can or should be the final arbiter of politics. Participants were particularly concerned about the heavy reliance on the judiciary. They emphasized the dangers of deferring to the courts as the final say on issues that do not have firm solutions. Judicial activism was a cause of concern as it is at odds with justices’ status as unelected officials. As a U.S. participant highlighted, “The court has been very expansive in interpreting rights—e.g., the rights of gun owners, of unborn fetuses, etc.—at the expense of majorities who want something different, whether it is regulation or protection.”

Moreover, it was not only a question of whether the judiciary should serve as the final arbiter; participants also focused on when in the political process the arbitration of disputes takes place. Citizen trust in the judiciary has declined, threatening to render their decisions practically obsolete as citizens pursue alternative routes to achieve their ends. A Korean participant noted the example of political trends in a number of African nations where the courts have been increasingly adjudicating election disputes; there, the involvement of the courts in nullifying elections has had a partisan, polarizing effect, and voters aligned with the losing party express a dramatic decline in their trust of the judiciary and the court system. Korean participants stressed that, although justices are chosen based on merit, disappointment in the judiciary has become so commonplace in South Korea that citizens no longer recognize chosen justices as the right people for those positions.

**Tenets of Democracy: Civil Society Activism as an Alternative to Party Systems?**

Turning to the second guiding question of the session, participants engaged in discussions regarding the nexus between political parties and civic organizations. Political parties perform at least two functions that differentiate them as intermediary organizations from civil society organizations: they represent interests and aggregate these interests to politically socialize citizens, win elections, and govern.

Interestingly, the importance of civil society organizations and political parties to democracies can also be seen through the actions of autocrats. Autocrats tend to understand what makes democracies work, so they try to undermine those elements that sustain democracies. We can see what autocrats fear by observing which institutions and organizations they attack first. For example, in the Russian case, Putin’s actions in 2000 (attacking private media, civil society organizations, and political parties) are reasonably good evidence that he was concerned about popular mobilization and social organization in the form of civil society organizations and political parties.

However, participants also emphasized the lack of citizen faith in these democratic tenets. Public opinion polls in democracies like South Korea show a growing dislike for the legislature, political parties, and other core tenets of democracy. The function of political parties in many advanced liberal democracies has eroded away from representation and shifted to power-seeking and campaigning. This trend has led to voter disconnect when it becomes apparent that the people in power are only there to seek power; voters feel ignored by political parties but have no choice but to continue voting for them. The intermediaries that parties once relied on, such as churches or labor unions, have all declined,
leading to a lack of civic backbone that parties can build upon.

This overall distrust in political systems and parties led to increased citizen activism. Participants pointed to countries with such prolific civic activism, like Korea, where activism is seemingly coupled with tangible results. Activism is seen as the engine of South Korean democracy—when mass demonstrations filled the streets in South Korea, major political changes ensued. Korean activists on both the right and left share a mistrust of the National Assembly and see demonstrations as the conduit through which their voices can be heard. Mass demonstrations in 1987 paved the way for free elections in South Korea, and the Candlelight Vigils, mobilizing one million people, led to the impeachment of President Park Geun Hye in 2017.

However not all activism leads to productive results. Participants were concerned with the direction of civil society activism. Civil society is highly politicized, hinging on explicit identity linkages that underlie civil society movements. For example, the January 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol was a mobilized civil society action driven by a sense of identity alienation and exclusion from the state. Participants also pointed to examples of how fracturing of identity linkages has also occurred in South Korea. The formative political experiences for the younger generation have been shaped by great national tragedies—the same generation that was in high school during the sinking of the Sewol ferry were college students or young adults during the Itaewon crowd crush. These catastrophic events have disheartened youth and showed them the state does not necessarily hold their best interests at heart. Participants warned that seeking pseudo-democratic populist alternatives to the party system usually results in a worse state of democracy; there is a risk that increased political engagement could, over time, manifest into a counterstate version of civil society that could destabilize South Korea’s future. Participants noted growing distrust, not only in political parties but in civil society groups, partially stemming from the suspicion that these organizations are simply less-accountable satellites of political parties. The discussion around civil society organizations also intersects with the discourse on fairness, equal opportunity, and meritocracy. There is a growing sentiment that workers in these civil society organizations do not do real work but instead stir up conflict, partly using taxpayer money, and then, when an administration friendly to their ideas comes into power, they use their positions to attain high-level government appointments. In other words, some people in civil society organizations merely try to skirt through arduous civil service exams to become a civic employee.

When civil society organizations heavily rely on state funding, distrust in them is only magnified further. Participants pointed out that in Korea, many government-reliant NGOs in rural areas are mobilized by political actors. Civil society movements are not a spontaneous representation of disaggregated interest but rather a systematic mobilization by political actors and parties. When civil society organizations are dominated by concerns about funding, which can primarily come from political parties, it is difficult to conceive that these organizations can cut off their party connections.

While participants saw clear problems with the party system, they also recognized explicit threats to the stability of political engagement, particularly from activism by civil society organizations. As civil society organizations mobilize and advance their political outcomes, they tend to morph into one-issue, quasi-political parties. Social activism then becomes an extension of politics: citizens raise their concerns, engage in activism, and, as a result, get a seat at the bargaining table.

As complex social political beings, people are not on the other end of the bargaining table as passive consumers looking for a political outcome; so, participants stressed, there should be more emphasis on the process of the delivery of that outcome: Were people included in the bargaining process as real political beings? Was the process conducted in a way that people could trust their concerns were heard?
The burden on citizens to participate in politics has grown. A U.S. participant pointed out that many processes—policy issues, initiatives, referendums, and the recall of elected officials—are all easily co-opted, but participation in these processes places an enormous burden on the voters to be adequately informed about the issues. Moneyed interests also intervene in these decision-making processes in quite direct ways.

Participants debated the very idea of whether people truly engage in politics at all, noting vast differences in interest in politics among different countries. One participant observed that in the United States, there is a correlation between income level and education that has a bearing on political participation, knowledge of politics, and more, while in South Korea, there is zero correlation between education and income. Korean participants were more optimistic about citizen activism in Korea than in the United States; at least in Korea, general public interest in politics is much higher. While the average Korean cab driver knows the names of minority politicians, participants questioned whether the average U.S. citizen knows the name of the minority leader.

The ability of political parties and civil society organizations to be influential is premised on a politically active population willing to develop agendas and discuss politics. But many people do not discuss politics and civil organizations can be dominated by those who are already politically active and, in many cases, hold radical positions.
GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS:
1. Can liberal democracy be saved from digital media?
2. Under the assumption that polarization is incurable, how should a highly polarized society live with it?
3. Is populism necessarily pernicious for democracy?

Polarization does not exist in a vacuum. Participants were hesitant to assign blame for the current democratic crisis solely to polarization; instead, they looked to discern global polarization variations—why some democracies are threatened by polarization, and others are not—and to consider international ramifications of the waning of American power and China’s rise. The counterfactual was also raised: would there still be polarization without artificial intelligence (AI) or social media platforms? In working through these questions, participants emphasized socioeconomic, post-capitalist, and globalization factors in the polarizing events of the past few decades.

Technology and Polarization

The conversations of the third session focused on the advent of social media and the overarching influence of digital media. From a historical perspective, the rise of the printing press built nations. Digital media did not exist half a century ago, and terms like “polarization” were much less used to describe splits in public opinion. Today, social media has not only contributed to public polarization but has had the same effect in the political sphere.

Participants discussed the effect of “fake news” but were pressed to agree on a clear definition of what the term means. A U.S. participant pointed out that it is possible to empirically show that the earth is not flat, just as it is possible to prove that the 2020 election results were legitimate (as evidenced by Trump’s failure to contest those results in court). Polarization arises when people refuse to accept facts or reject falsehoods, especially when the person with the loudest microphone is the person who lost an election. Social media does not merely act as an echo chamber; it has also evolved into an avenue where people can spin narratives that fit already-established agendas. A Korean participant argued that while social media plays a role in polarization by giving consumers more information that suits their political slants, it does not change basic political attitudes.

Participants were interested in historically disruptive eras of identity and questioned whether the outcomes from these moments were inevitably negative. For example, the rise of fascism was clearly a bad outcome of such an era in Germany, but the creation of trade unions in the United States was a good outcome of a disruptive era of identity. Was the rise of Hitler a contingent outcome that was just a one-time chance, or was it a reflection of deep structural factors in Germany that would have inevitably produced a Hitler-like leader? Would Trump have been elected if there were no Twitter? Participants noted that although he was always in the news, he lost the 2020 election because many used social media to mobilize against him. But participants wondered what would have happened if he had not won in 2016. Would we not be having these same conversations about polarization, or did Trump reflect a deeper truth, and another controversy-embracing candidate would have revealed the same truth about U.S. society?

The effects of digital media’s amplification of polarized opinion are widespread. The concern for younger people is their potential to learn harmful rhetoric through early exposure to social media, before they have the opportunity to form their own independent political opinions; for adults, the fear is they may seek only confirmation of the information they already believe, further contributing to the lack of communication with those on the other side of the political aisle. Spreading bias seems more popular than spreading the news.

A participant noted that social media has been shown to be only an amplifier of divisiveness, not the cause, which raises the question of why it is so effective at amplification. What makes social media different from the printing press or even digital media, participants noted, is that it is social. While disagreements have always existed between left and right, they have been exacerbated by social media usage. Visceral language,
such as “not my president,” is now spreading in places beyond the United States.

One U.S. participant held that certain types of polarization hinged on identity were particularly dangerous—when polarization reflects mutually exclusive national visions, it is incredibly detrimental to democracies.

At its core, nationalism is about groups who see themselves as deserving of their own states. When an opposing political party represents an existential threat to a nationalist vision of those in power, they weaponize that threat in their own efforts at nation-building. A U.S. participant feared this is where institutional breakdown occurs, with motivational reasoning going out the door. Social media content, when it is identity-affirming, becomes even more attractive and credible.

Participants expressed concerns about conflicts around identity politics that seriously divide societies, including topics ranging from gender conflict and gay rights to government support for North Korean defectors and relations with China. A Korean participant aptly summarized the problem: technology does not create polarization; it interacts with existing cleavages and exacerbates the level of polarization.

There are indications that the continued rise of technology and robotization may impact polarization even further. As technology rapidly advances and AI begins to render some jobs obsolete, the dignity of work suffers. It is difficult for people to blame a robot or an algorithm when there are job losses, but it is easy to misplace blame onto someone in an out-group. It is human nature to look for an easy scapegoat, something that those advocating to “make America great again” understand all too well. Social media is adept at spreading hateful messages rapidly, and its algorithms serve to keep people in echo chambers.

Nuances in Social Media Usage vs. Traditional Media

Participants emphasized key differences between social media and traditional media. Social media is not just a venue for information intake but also for collective action and mobilization. While participants generally agreed that social media exacerbates polarization, the platform has potential societal benefits beyond what is possible with traditional media. Younger generations, participants observed, are socially active and mobilize online, as shown by boycotts against corporations using Xinjiang cotton or the Black Lives Matter movement, for example. While many youth may have concluded that voting in elections does not result in change, they can see that when they boycott or use their wallets to make political statements, corporations can change policies overnight. A Korean participant mentioned that popular YouTube channels use their platforms to hold civil political discourse, helping bridge political differences. These channels bring people of different political backgrounds together to engage in productive conversations with those they would never have otherwise engaged with. In comparison, traditional media is too slow to adapt to fast-paced social changes and facilitate discussion.

However, a U.S. participant pointed out that the lines of division between traditional media and social media are blurred; for example, content that begins on conventional media can then be reposted on social media sites such as YouTube or TikTok. So, what separates social media from traditional media may be the scale and speed of information dissemination. One Korean participant discerned that speed and scale have been problems for a long time. Still, one big difference with social media is that people can directly be involved in producing content, and content can be accessed much more quickly. Information suppliers tend to generalize and take information out of its context, then use it to provide an overly generalized or distorted understanding of people and events. Social media technology was designed to create addiction and, through its algorithms, facilitate echo chambers.

Another concern raised by a U.S. participant was that in many Asian countries, a social media account is not simply used to post and consume social media but can be connected with banking information, ride-sharing services, and other common mobile phone functions, increasing the odds that misinformation can permeate into a user’s world. In Asia, social media is also more
commonly seen in chat rooms with large groups of people sharing videos and news articles. Social media companies generally try to a greater or lesser extent to regulate misinformation spread on their own platforms, but these extremely closed, chat-room-based platforms have little or no regulation apart from self-regulation.

There are generational differences in social media usage as well. One Korean participant mentioned that younger generations in Korea are not vocal about their political beliefs at all on social media. Instead, these political conversations are taking place in anonymous, gender-based forums. These formats are dangerous because there are no personal connections to information and opinions; instead of talking to other human beings, users of these forums are bouncing ideas around an echo chamber. The participant observed that it was critical to consider the way that social media can mobilize users to act in a way that exacerbates the pre-existing divisions in their societies.

While social media offers the public quicker and easier access to information and provides the tools for better mobilization and collective action, it also means that not all governments, especially authoritarian regimes, will be receptive to these functions.

Because of its power to mobilize citizens, authoritarian regimes have gone to great lengths to control social media. In China, for example, criticism of individual leaders is often not controversial; what instantly triggers Beijing’s censorship network is the possibility of collective action. It is not polarization that keeps authoritarian leaders up at night but the ability for people to act on their ideas, especially when those ideas reveal cleavages in society and government.

### Populism and Polarization

Discussing polarization, a U.S. participant referenced Marx, noting that class consciousness is “knowing which side of the fence you are on.” Polarization has rapidly increased in the United States to the extent that once-established divisions no longer make sense. For example, surveys often use groupings like “white working class,” but such a category makes less sense when the economic profile of the white working class is the same as those of U.S. minorities. Today, Republican voters are overwhelmingly white, while people of color tend to vote Democratic, but these cleavages did not always exist. For example, in the 2020 presidential election in Montana, Barack Obama received 47 percent of the vote even though the state’s black population is less than 1 percent. Participants questioned how this transition happened so quickly. Participants also discerned important nuances when talking about polarization. While globally we have seen polarization and the rise of populists, it is unclear what this ultimately means—is it us vs. them, workers vs. capitalists, Koreans vs. non-Koreans? Polarization can also happen in many layers; for example, as a U.S. participant pointed out, South Korean regionalism can bring cleavages in terms of political participation levels. In addition, while polarization is clearly evident in some regions, in others, particularly regions with smaller populations, there is a lack of such visible divisiveness.

Participants remarked that there are assumptions about polarization that are contradictory. As a U.S. participant pointed out, the session seemed to assume that less polarization is good. However, any political system will come with some degree of polarization and cleavages. The benefit of parties is that they freeze cleavages, which creates better representation over time. Participants referenced topics mentioned in the previous sessions—intermediaries and the decline of cross-cutting institutions that build social capital bonding—knowing that some degree of polarization is necessary in a democracy and a party system. To some U.S. participants, the current problem with polarization is its apparent devolution into overt hostility between two camps, with no area of agreement.

Another U.S. participant pointed out that the session discussion assumed that connectivity automatically leads to polarization, but Japan, where the degree of polarization is nowhere near that of the United States or even South Korea, has the highest global level of Twitter usage. There, prevalent social media usage has yet to translate into political division on a par with the U.S. or Europe.
A U.S. participant pointed to three factors in the different rates of populism in countries with comparable high social media usage. Using Japan as an example, while there is growing inequality, it is much less than that of the United States. The second factor is the (lack of) perceived threat to the cultural integrity and traditions of the nation. Japan has always been criticized for not accepting enough immigrants, but there is no strong backlash against immigration to the same degree as parts of Europe, for example. Third is the varying level of threats to the nation’s sovereignty—again, in Japan, such threats are much less than those in the United States. These three factors relate to Japan’s relatively low level of social and political division despite the massive usage of social media.
Session V  Prescribing for Democratic Malaise

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS:
1. What are key takeaways from the discussion?
2. What are policy prescriptions for the democratic malaise facing the world?

Participants used the last session to reflect on the state of democracy, identity formation, institutional expectations, and additional prescriptions for a healthier democratic system. Participants also engaged in conversations to plan for future iterations of the Sustainable Democracy Roundtable, including their recommendations for including a wide range of participants, from policymakers to scholars of autocracies.

Reflections on Identity and Democratic Values

Participants reflected on contentious notions of identity, particularly regarding contradictions in South Korea’s identity formation. One Korean participant reflected the Korean definition of self-identity—one that centers on South Korea as a small nation surviving continual foreign invasion and eventually becoming an industrialized, democratic nation—may have become too narrow for the present day, and may be spawning polarization in South Korea. A Korean participant, quoting Rousseau’s dictum, “Take people as they are, institutions as they might be,” relayed that following this advice is difficult, as people are complex and hard to fathom, especially considering generational differences. Older generations who lived through the colonial period or the Korean War can have vastly different views of their identities as South Koreans. Different considerations across generations can bring challenges to efforts to build a common national identity.

One great danger participants recognized was when the idea of democracy itself becomes an object of polarization. A Korean participant emphasized the importance of identifying the specific problems contributing to skepticism toward democracy. One example raised was the rising role of identity politics in an era of increasing multiculturalism. Mentioned in earlier sessions was the threat of globalization and its effect on labor opportunities. Other concerns were raised about the underlying phenomenon of declining state capacity, given these demands from identity cleavages. Whether it is to align the lines of class, gender, or in-group/out-group nationality, these identity formations manifest into different visions and expectations of their state and what it should provide. When people lose faith in the capacity of the state, they resort to alternative outlets or rely on extreme ideas. Areas for left and right agreement are hard to find. A U.S. participant pointed to two broad areas that stand at the frontier of the democratic theory. First, regarding public participation, the participant noted how it has been a long time since anyone thought it was adequate in a democracy to vote every few years for a representative. But today, not much can be done without extensive public hearings, which are required by transparency laws and open up many opportunities for public participation. Many see this as the solution to the problem of populism: providing more participatory opportunities to have direct input into what the government does. Scholars point out that most democratic reformers over the last few decades have had the attitude that the more participation, the better, that increased public participation in the democratic process is an unalloyed good without any trade-offs. But, the participant argued, this is not true: too much participation undermines state capacity in several ways, not the least that participatory mechanisms become so procedural that the state becomes powerless to execute what the people want.

Second, in many democratic states, judicial activism has risen because of legislative failure. In the United States, the failure of legislatures to do their jobs has led to two consequences: either the courts take it upon themselves to make policy (for example, landmark cases such as Brown v. Board or Roe v. Wade), or the bureaucracy makes decisions. One trend in modern constitutions is to load up bills of rights so that the courts can make social policy. There are second-generation rights built into many modern constitutions in anticipation of the fact that legislatively, policies on housing, education, and so forth can be bypassed by using the courts.

The ongoing democratic crisis has overarching effects on both new and mature democracies and all types of
democratic institutions. A crisis in one branch of government has a rippling impact on other institutions that were once considered democratic strongholds. Identity cleavages have been exacerbated not only by the advent of social media but also by citizen distrust and fatigue in the failures of democratic institutions to protect and deliver.
Participants strategized prescriptions toward healthier, sustainable democratic societies. One crucial path to ensuring democratic longevity is to have systems in place to retain individuals talented in policymaking and government. One Korean participant noted that Singapore, one of the few countries successful in maintaining their best and brightest in government, manages to do this by offering competitive salaries with the private sector. While participants recognized that money is not the most important metric, they noted that the annual salary of Singapore’s prime minister, at around $2.2 million, matches the public’s expectations of the importance of a head of government. An alignment between public and private incentives ensures that the salary gap between public and private careers is small enough to prevent brain drain.

On a more personal level, participants recognized the need to expand the syllabi in their classes. One Korean participant stated that their course on the Korean economy needed updating to include topics on democracy, especially given that the transition from an authoritarian regime to a democratic system was so significant to South Korea’s development.

Participants also discussed the shape of future conference topics and goals. A U.S. participant suggested that future sessions should engage more with technology-related topics. Participants noted that while there was a session focused on social media, there needed to be more discussion about AI and the potential dangers of its rise. Because AI learns from online discourse, it may end up uncritically discussing contested and controversial topics, like East Asian territorial disputes, gender conflicts, etc. The fear is that increasing reliance on AI may do even more harm to public discourse, so to enable more comprehensive conversations around technology and the rise of AI, participants suggested the inclusion of technologists and practitioners in the next conference.

Participants also suggested including topics on a broader range of global issues and inviting more scholars of autocracies. In particular, a U.S. participant advocated for including scholars of sliding democracies to see how and why regimes like Hungary and Venezuela have achieved unexpected success. Additional recommendations focused on the role of policymakers and including in future conferences those who are in the position to deliver goods in democratic or non-democratic societies. While such individuals may not help in the discovery of real solutions, such practitioners can supply a healthy dose of realism and assist as future conferences explore populism and generational, class, and party-based divisions.

Democracy is constantly in a state of evolution, with no definite, final shape in sight. Threats to democracy, like those from populism, illiberalism, and polarization, will always exist, but there are also opportunities to strengthen citizen trust in the core values of democracy. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, it is vital that we elevate and pursue shared objectives to protect democratic values and institutions.
AGENDA

DAY 1: MONDAY, AUGUST 28
6:00 PM Reception and Welcome Dinner

DAY 2: TUESDAY, AUGUST 29
8:30-8:45AM Registration & Breakfast (Faculty Club, Stanford University)
8:45-9:00AM Opening Remarks

GI-WOOK SHIN  Director, Shorenstein APARC; William J. Perry Professor of Contemporary Korea; Professor of Sociology, Stanford University
BYUNG-IL CHOI  President, Korea Foundation for Advanced Studies (KFAS); Professor, Graduate School of International Studies, Ewha Womans University

9:00-10:00AM Session 1 “Where We Stand Now”
Guiding Questions:
• How would you diagnose the current state of liberal democracy?
• What are notable global trends in liberal democracy?
• How do you envision the next 10 years of democracy from global perspectives?

10:00-10:15AM Break
10:15-12:15PM Session 2 “Looking into Backbone: Institutions”
Guiding Questions:
• Should the judiciary serve as the final arbiter of a country’s disputes?
• Is the party system the one and only? Can direct citizen action serve as an alternative?
• Is liberal democracy necessarily better than other political regimes in terms of livelihood or quality of life?

12:15-1:30PM Luncheon
1:30-3:30PM Session 3 “Under the Microscope: Pathology”
Guiding Questions:
• Can liberal democracy be saved from digital media?
• Under the assumption that polarization is incurable, how should a highly polarized society live with it?
• Is populism necessarily pernicious for democracy?

3:30-4:00PM Break
4:00-5:15PM  Session 4 “Scoring Cards: Performance”
6:00-8:00PM  Dinner

DAY 3: WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 30

8:30-10:00AM  Student Session
10:00-10:15AM  Break
10:15-12:00PM  Session 5 “Prescribing for Democratic Malaise”
   Guiding Questions:
   • What are key takeaways from the discussion?
   • What are policy prescriptions for the democratic malaise facing the world?
12:00-12:30PM  Wrap-up
   Guiding Questions:
   • What is the next step? What would be possible dates/venues for the next iteration?
   • What are specific plans for the final output?
12:30-2:00PM  Farewell luncheon
Participant Biographies

SANGHOON AHN is a Senior Fellow at the Korea Development Institute (KDI) and Adjunct Professor at the KDI School of Public Policy & Management. He is a member of the Committee for International Development Cooperation chaired by the Prime Minister. He has also served as a member of the President’s National Economic Advisory Council (2020–22) and chaired its Sub-council on Innovation. As Executive Director of the KDI Center for International Development (2019–21), he was in charge of research and knowledge sharing activities with developing partner countries mainly through the Knowledge Sharing Program of the Ministry of Economy and Finance. He was Senior Advisor to the Deputy Prime Minister of the Korean government (2017–18), and Director of Industry and Service Economy at the KDI (2016–17). He worked at the Science, Technology and Innovation Directorate of the OECD as a senior economist in the Structural Policy Division (2013–15). Ahn holds a PhD in Economics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His main areas of interest are economic growth, technology, innovation, structural reforms and productivity.

JOAN CHO is Assistant Professor of East Asian Studies, and Assistant Professor by courtesy of Government, at Wesleyan University. Her research and teaching interests are authoritarianism, democratization, social movements, and authoritarian legacies in Korea and East Asia. Dr. Cho’s first book, Seeds of Mobilization: The Authoritarian Roots of South Korea’s Democracy, is forthcoming at the University of Michigan Press (Weiser Center for Emerging Democracies Series). Her work on authoritarian regime support, South Korean democracy movement, and electoral accountability in post-transition South Korea are published in Electoral Studies, Journal of East Asian Studies, Studies in Comparative International Development, and Routledge Handbook of Korean Culture and Society. She is an adjunct fellow (non-resident) at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Korea Chair, associate-in-research of the Council of East Asian Studies at Yale University, Vice President and governing board member of the Association of Korean Political Studies, and a 2018–19 CSIS-USC U.S.-Korea NextGen Scholar. Joan Cho received her PhD in Political Science from the Department of Government at Harvard University.

SANG-HUN CHOE is the Seoul bureau chief for the New York Times, focusing on news in North and South Korea. He worked for the Associated Press for 11 years before joining the Times in 2005. He is a co-author of two books on Korea and co-editor of another two, also on Korea. He was a 2010–11 fellow in Korean studies at the Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center of Stanford University. He has won journalism awards for his reports on Korea and Myanmar, including a 2000 Pulitzer Prize.
BYUNG-IL CHOI has been the President of Korea Foundation for Advanced Studies (KFAS) since September 2020. He is also a professor and the former Dean of the Graduate School of International Studies, Ewha Womans University. As a renowned scholar in the field of international trade and US-China relations, he took various leadership roles, including President of Korea Economic Research Institute (2011–14), a think tank representing the Korean business sector. He served as the President for Korea International Economic Association, the President of the Korea Association of Negotiation Studies, and the President of the Korean Association of Trade and Industry Studies. Prior to joining the academia, he was the Korean chief negotiator for the WTO basic telecom negotiations (1994–97), and trade negotiator for service agreement and the telecom annex at the Uruguay Round, the Korea-US telecom agreement, and the Korea-EU telecom agreement. He led the Korean initiative of the Asia-Pacific Information Infrastructure (APII) at the 1995 APEC Summit. His book includes Politics of East Asian Free Trade Agreements: Unveiling the Asymmetry between Korea and Japan (2021), The US-China Competition: Who Will Rule the World? (2019), Northeast Asia in 2030: Forging Ahead or Drifting Away (2018), China, New Paradigm (2016), The KORUS FTA: Against All Odds (2006), and The Success and Failure of Trade Negotiations of Korea (2004). He received a BA from Seoul National University and PhD in economics from Yale University.

DONGHYUN DANNY CHOI is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Brown University. His research focuses on two broad themes: political parties and identity politics. His first co-authored book, Native Bias: Overcoming Discrimination Against Immigrants, examines the extent to which common norms, identities, and ideas can reduce prejudice and discrimination against immigrants and ultimately facilitate their inclusion in democratic societies and was published by Princeton University Press in the Princeton Studies in Political Behavior series. His second book project, Severed Connections: Intraparty Politics and Representation in Africa, investigates how political parties and the nature of candidate selection institutions influence the relationship between elected representatives and their constituents in new democracies. This project won APSA’s Juan Linz Prize for Best Dissertation in the Comparative Study of Democracy. Danny’s work on these two themes has been published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, American Political Science Review, American Journal of Political Science, Journal of Politics, and Political Analysis among others. Before joining Brown, Danny was an assistant professor of political science at the University of Pittsburgh and a pre/postdoctoral fellow at the University of Pennsylvania’s Identity and Conflict Lab. He received a BA in economics from Korea University and his MA and PhD in political science from the University of California, Berkeley.
FRANCIS FUKUYAMA is Olivier Nomellini Senior Fellow at Stanford University’s Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies (FSI), and a faculty member of FSI’s Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law (CDDRL). He is also Director of Stanford’s Masters in International Policy Program, and a professor (by courtesy) of Political Science. Fukuyama has written widely on issues in development and international politics. His 1992 book, The End of History and the Last Man, has appeared in over twenty foreign editions. His most recent book, Liberalism and Its Discontents, was published in the spring of 2022. He received his BA from Cornell University in classics, and his PhD from Harvard in Political Science.

SHANG EUNG HA is a professor of political science at Sogang University. His research interests include political psychology, public opinion, and voting behavior. He has authored numerous articles in journals such as American Political Science Review, Political Research Quarterly, American Politics Research, and Political Psychology on topics ranging from personality traits to voting behavior in local elections. He is currently working on papers about the association between personality traits and political behavior, the antecedents and consequences of populist attitudes, and the effects of deliberation on political behavior of underinformed and misinformed citizens, all using large-scale, face-to-face or online, surveys conducted in South Korea. Before coming to Sogang University, he served as a dissertation fellow at the Public Policy Institute of California, a postdoctoral associate at the Institution for Social and Policy Studies at Yale University, and an assistant professor of political science at Brooklyn College–The City University of New York. He earned a BA and an MA in International Relations from Seoul National University, as well as an MA and a PhD in Political Science from the University of Chicago.

JI YEON (JEAN) HONG is an Associate Professor at the Department of Political Science and Korea Foundation Professor of Korean Politics at Nam Center for Korean Studies in the University of Michigan. Her research focuses on authoritarian politics and authoritarian legacy, with particular attention to East Asia such as China, Korea, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. She has various ongoing research projects related to authoritarian elites’ behavior, political legacies of authoritarianism, and contemporary state building in East Asia. She obtained her PhD at the Department of Politics, New York University. Her research has been published or forthcoming in the American Journal of Political Science, Journal of Politics, and British Journal of Political Science among others.

ARAM HUR is the Kim Koo Chair in Korean Studies and Assistant Professor of Political Science at The Fletcher School of Tufts University. Hur studies nationalism and democracy, with special focus on integration, identity change, and democratic support in East Asia. Hur’s research is published or forthcoming
in academic journals such as *Comparative Political Studies, British Journal of Political Science,* and *Journal of East Asian Studies.* Her first book, *Narratives of Civic Duty: How National Stories Shape Democracy in Asia,* is the winner of the 2023 Robert A. Dahl Award for the best book on democracy by an untenured scholar from the American Political Science Association. She is the 2021 Korea Society Sherman Emerging Scholar Awardee and a proud alumnus of CSIS US-Korea NextGen, which selects and trains the “next generation of Korea specialists in the United States.” Hur holds a PhD in Politics from Princeton University, MPP from the Harvard Kennedy School, and BA with honors from Stanford University.

**JAE YEON KIM** is a Senior Quantitative Researcher at Code for America and a Research Fellow at the SNF Agora Institute and P3 Lab at Johns Hopkins University. Kim earned his PhD in political science from UC Berkeley, where he was a senior data science fellow at D-Lab. Since 2020, he has been working on the Mapping Modern Agora project, incubated at the SNF Agora, which utilizes big data and machine learning to map civil society at scale in the United States. Kim’s research focuses on civic engagement, political participation, and policy implementation in the US, Canada, and East Asia. He has published extensively in leading general science, political science, and computational social science journals. Kim received the Best Dissertation Award in Urban and Local Politics from the APSA (2022) and the Best Paper Award in AAPI Politics from the WPSA (2020).

**SUNHYUK KIM** is Professor in the Department of Public Administration at Korea University where he was the Vice President for International Affairs in 2015–19. He has been an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Southern California, a Visiting Professor at Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies at Harvard University, and a Research Fellow at the Center for International Security and Cooperation at Stanford University. He is the author of *The Politics of Democratization in Korea,* *Economic Crisis and Dual Transition in Korea,* and numerous scholarly journal articles and book chapters. His most recently published articles include “The Origins of ‘Collaborative Governance’ in South Korea,” “Dealing with COVID-19 in South Korea,” “The Making of Presidential Agendas in Korea,” and “Historical Development of Civil Society in Korea since 1987.” His research interests include democracy, comparative democratization, civil society, and social movements. Professor Kim received his MA and PhD in Political Science from Stanford University and BA in Economics from Seoul National University.

**DIDI KUO** is the Associate Director for Research at the Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law, and a Center Fellow at the Freeman
Spogli Institute for International Studies (FSI) at Stanford University. She is a scholar of comparative politics, with a focus on democratization, corruption and clientelism, political parties and institutions, and political reform. Her recent work examines changes to party organization, and the impact these changes have on the ability of governments to address challenges posed by global capitalism. She is the author of *Clientelism, Capitalism, and Democracy: The Rise Of Programmatic Politics in the United States and Britain* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), which examines the role of business against clientelism and the development of modern political parties in the nineteenth century. She received a PhD in political science from Harvard University, an MSc in Economic and Social History from Oxford University, where she studied as a Marshall Scholar, and a BA from Emory University.

**Munseob Lee** is an Assistant Professor at the School of Global Policy and Strategy (GPS) at the University of California San Diego. Lee is also an Associate Director in GPS’ Korea-Pacific Program. He got a PhD in Economics from the University of Chicago in 2017. His research areas are macroeconomics, economic growth, and the Korean economy. He has been a short-term consultant at the World Bank, a visiting fellow at the Asian Development Bank, and a visiting scholar at the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis and Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis.

**Michael McFaul** is the Director and Senior Fellow at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies; the Ken Olivier and Angela Nomellini Professor of International Studies in Political Science; and the Peter and Helen Bing Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, all at Stanford University. He was also the Distinguished Mingde Faculty Fellow at the Stanford Center at Peking University from June to August of 2015. He joined the Stanford faculty in 1995. Ambassador McFaul is also an analyst for NBC News and a contributing columnist to the *Washington Post*. He served for five years in the Obama administration, first as Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Russian and Eurasian Affairs at the National Security Council at the White House (2009–12), and then as U.S. Ambassador to the Russian Federation (2012–14). He has authored several books, including most recently the *New York Times* bestseller, *From Cold War to Hot Peace: An American Ambassador in Putin’s Russia*. He is currently writing a book on great powers relations in the 21st century.

**Seung-Youn Oh** is an associate professor in the Department of Political Science at Bryn Mawr College, specializing in international relations and comparative politics in East Asia. She also serves as faculty director of the China and Korea sections of the Global Immersion Program at Wharton Business School, and a visiting professor at INSEAD Business School.

Her broader academic interests include China’s economic statecraft, the nexus between economy and security, trade disputes, industrial policy, global supply
chains of emerging technology, and US-China strategic competition/cooperation. In the past, she was a POSCO Fellow at the East-West Center in Honolulu (2016–17), a research fellow at the East Asia Institute in Seoul, Korea (2014–15), a post-doctoral fellow at the Center for the Study of Contemporary China at the University of Pennsylvania (2012–13), and a visiting scholar at the Institute of World Economics and Politics of the Chinese Academy of Social Science in Beijing, China (2009–10). She holds an MA and a PhD in Political Science from the University of California at Berkeley and a BA in Political Science from Yonsei University in South Korea.

SUNG MIN RHO is an Associate Professor in the Department of International Relations and Political Science at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies. Her research examines the relationship between structural labor market changes and political and social contention with a regional focus on East Asia. Her recent book, *Atomized Incorporation: Chinese Workers and the Aftermath of China’s Rise*, examines patterns of labor protests in China’s manufacturing sectors and explores their social and political implications amid increasing labor shortages and turnover. She is currently researching the political and social effects of automation and digitalization in Korea and China, focusing on the overt and covert forms of non-cooperation among young workers.

GI-WOOK SHIN is the William J. Perry Professor of Contemporary Korea in Sociology and a senior fellow of the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies at Stanford University. He has served as director of the Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center since 2005, and as founding director of the Korea Program since 2001. His research concentrates on social movements, nationalism, and international relations, focusing on Korea and Asia. Shin is the author/editor of numerous books and articles, including *South Korea’s Democracy in Crisis: The Threats of Illiberalism, Populism, and Polarization* and *The North Korean Conundrum: Balancing Human Rights and Nuclear Security*. Shin’s current research initiatives include Global Talent Flows and Nationalism and Racism, focusing on the Asia-Pacific region. Shin previously taught at the University of Iowa and the University of California, Los Angeles. He holds a BA from Yonsei University and an MA and PhD from the University of Washington.

JIEWUH SONG is an Associate Professor of Political Science and International Relations at Seoul National University. She works on questions at the intersection of philosophy, law, and the social sciences and has particular interests in egalitarianism, human rights theory, theories of justice, and the political philosophy of international law. Her publications include “Human Rights and Inequality” (*Philosophy and Public Affairs*) and “Pirates and Torturers: Universal Jurisdiction as Enforcement Gap-Filling” (*Journal of Political Philosophy*).
JIYEOUN SONG is a Professor at the Graduate School of International Studies, Seoul National University. She has earned a Ph.D. in Government from Harvard University, and her M.A. and B.A. degrees in Political Science and International Relations from Korea University. Her research lies at the intersection of comparative political economy and international political economy, with a regional focus on East Asia. It examines several related themes: the politics of labor market reform, the diverging paths of social welfare policies under the pressure of socio-demographic challenges, and the political economy of social and economic development. Song is the author of *Inequality in the Workplace: Labor Market Reform in Japan and Korea* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014) and articles in *Governance, Social Policy & Administration, Journal of Contemporary Asia, Asian Survey, Journal of East Asian Studies*, and other outlets. Before coming to Seoul National University, she had served as an advanced research fellow with the Program on U.S.-Japan Relations at Harvard University, an Assistant Professor of Political Science and International and Area Studies at the University of Oklahoma, and an Assistant Professor at the Graduate School of International Studies, Sogang University in Korea. She has also been a Visiting Scholar at the Institute of Social Science as well as the Department of Advanced Social and International Studies at University of Tokyo.

KATHRYN STONER is the Mosbacher Director of the Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law (CDDRL), and a Senior Fellow at CDDRL and the Center on International Security and Cooperation at FSI. From 2017 to 2021, she served as FSI’s Deputy Director. She is Professor of Political Science (by courtesy) at Stanford and she teaches in the Department of Political Science, and in the Program on International Relations, as well as in the Ford Dorsey Master’s in International Policy Program. She is also a Senior Fellow (by courtesy) at the Hoover Institution. Prior to coming to Stanford in 2004, she was on the faculty at Princeton University for nine years, jointly appointed to the Department of Politics and the Princeton School for International and Public Affairs (formerly the Woodrow Wilson School). At Princeton, she received the Ralph O. Glendinning Preceptorship awarded to outstanding junior faculty. She received a BA (1988) and MA (1989) in Political Science from the University of Toronto, and a PhD in Government from Harvard University (1995). In 2016 she was awarded an honorary doctorate from Iliad State University, Tbilisi, Republic of Georgia.

KIYOTERU TSUTSUI is the Henri H. and Tomoye Takahashi Professor and Senior Fellow in Japanese Studies at Shorenstein APARC, the Director of the Japan Program and Deputy Director at APARC, a senior fellow of the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, and Professor of Sociology, all at Stanford University. Tsutsui received his bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Kyoto University and earned an additional master’s degree and a PhD from Stanford’s sociology department in 2002. Tsutsui’s research interests lie
in political/comparative sociology, social movements, globalization, human rights, and Japanese society. His most recent publication, *Human Rights and the State: The Power of Ideas and the Realities of International Politics* (Iwanami Shinsho, 2022), was awarded with the 2022 Ishibashi Tanzan Award and the 44th Suntory Prize for Arts and Sciences.

**Robb Willer** is a Professor of Sociology, Psychology (by courtesy), and Business (by courtesy) at Stanford University where he is Director of the Polarization and Social Change Lab and Co-Director of the Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society. Willer’s teaching and research focus on social forces that bring people together (e.g., morality, altruism), forces that divide them (e.g., fear, prejudice), and domains of social life that feature the complex interplay of the two (e.g., hierarchies, politics). The primary area of his research looks at the social and psychological forces shaping Americans’ political attitudes. He has a particular interest in techniques for overcoming polarization to build political consensus. He studies how political psychology findings can be applied to construct persuasive political messages. He holds a BA from University of Iowa, an MA and a PhD from Cornell University.

**Hye Young You** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Politics and School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University. Her research interests are in political economy, interest groups, lobbying and campaign contributions, and American political institutions. She received her PhD in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University in 2014. Her research has been published in the top outlets in political science such as *American Political Science Review, American Journal of Political Science*, and *Journal of Politics*.

**STUDENT PRESENTERS**

**Seongjae Hong** is a first year MA student in the Department of Politics and International Relations at Seoul National University. His research interest is in international security, alliance politics and global democracy. Seong Jae earned his BA in Global Korean Studies and Political Science from Sogang University, where he graduated Magna Cum Laude. While at Sogang University, he received “The Next Century Humanities Scholarship” from Korea Student Aid Foundation for academic excellence. He interned at the Ministry of Justice of ROK and Chosun Ilbo (daily news distributor). After finishing the masters, Seong Jae aims to further study for a doctoral program in international politics.

**Jeong Won Lee** is a third-year undergraduate student double majoring in International Studies and Business Administration at Ewha Womans University. Her main areas of interest are international economics and international law. Having grown up in both South Korea and America, she has developed an interest in international relations and issues, which she has explored through public speaking as well as journalism, writing for English newspapers
at her high school and university. Jeong Won plans to study as an exchange student at George Washington University in the fall this year and graduate from Ewha in 2025.

JOSEPH S. MERNYK is a PhD student in the sociology department at Stanford University and a member of the PACS Polarization and Social Change Lab at Stanford. His research focuses on developing social psychological interventions to increase public support for policies and programs that tackle pressing social issues such as economic inequality, racial division, and political animosity. Passionate about maximizing the real-world impact of his work, he collaborates with external organizations and practitioners to deploy these interventions in the field. Joe has been awarded the Stanford PACS PhD Fellowship, the Stanford Impact Labs PhD Fellowship and is a winner of the Barbara and Sandy Dornbusch Award for Contribution to the Understanding or Solution of a Social Problem. Prior to graduate school, he earned his BS in psychology from the University of Pittsburgh before serving as a research coordinator for the Polarization and Social Change Lab.

KERSTIN NORRIS is a Foreign Language and Area Studies fellow currently in her second year of Stanford’s East Asian Studies master’s program. Her research interests are focused on democracy, popular sovereignty, militarism, and imperialism. Her thesis is a political science project that concerns the rise of Trumpism and Moonppa (문빠), or the extreme supporters of President Donald Trump and President Moon Jae In. She compares the previous U.S. and South Korean presidencies and questions the role of fandomism in democracy, its contribution to polarization, and spread of misinformation in liberal democracies. Before coming to Stanford, Kerstin earned her BA from the Ohio State University in International Relations and Korean with a minor in Spanish language. Her undergraduate thesis researched the Yongsan Garrison’s location, the installation of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system, and the relocation of the United States military to Camp Humphreys in Pyeongtaek, South Korea through a neocolonial lens. At Stanford, Kerstin has participated in research under Professor Gi-Wook Shin, studying race in Asia. Additionally, she completed an exchange year at Sungkyunkwan University in Seoul, South Korea, where she researched hybrid coloniality and South Korean populism. Kerstin plans to graduate from Stanford this fall and go on to complete a PhD in Political Science.

BYUNGOON YOO is a senior student in the department of education at Seoul National University. He is exploring the intertwining between meritocratic and educational value system, manifested through public discourse and admission procedures, amplified by technological disruption and innovation. During his sophomore year, he started his military service as a member of the KATUSA (Korean Augmentation to United States Army) and was honorably discharged as a sergeant in the 532nd MI BN, 501st MI BDE with an Army Achievement Medal for his performance as a cryptological linguist and a Senior KATUSA.
His undergraduate thesis analyzed the implementation process of learning analytics at secondary education institution, exploring factors that constitute students’ and faculty members’ trust and support towards its adoption. He has been awarded the Humanities 100 Year Scholarship from the KOSAF and the Ilju Academic Scholarship. He plans to participate in exchange program next semester at Humboldt University, Germany and hopes to continue his further academic endeavor in the U.S.