

Are Children Punished for Their Parent's Sins?: The Impact of the Candidate's Family Tie to a Former Dictator on Vote Choice in Korea

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I. Introduction

Much anticipated second round of the presidential election took place in Peru on June 5, 2016. Under the election law in Peru, the two top vote getters in the first round would face each other in the second round when there is no majority winner in the first round. Preliminary results gave Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, a former prime minister, a 0.25 per cent advantage over Keiko Fujimori, a former member of the congress, with less than 50,000 votes between them. Fujimori conceded the election to Kuczynski on June 10. ("[Peru elections.](#)" June 11, 2016). One thing to note is that Fujimori led Kuczynski by a comfortable margin (39.74 to 21.04 per cent of the votes cast) in the first round.

Keiko Fujimori is a daughter of a former president of Peru, Alberto Fujimori. The latter was in office between 1993 and 2000 and was a very controversial figure. He ended his presidency by fleeing Peru for Japan amid a major corruption scandal and human rights violations. A Peruvian of Japanese descent, Fujimori took refuge in Japan. Wanted in Peru, Fujimori maintained a self-imposed exile until his arrest during a visit to Chile in 2005. He was extradited to face criminal charges in Peru in. Since then Fujimori has been convicted on four separate occasions of ordering an illegal search and seizure, human rights violations, embezzlement, and bribery respectively.

[Keiko Fujimori](#) was a highly polarizing figure during the election. She was popular among the poor people, and the loyalists who credited Alberto Fujimori with the defeat of *Shining Path*. She was resisted by the people who rejected her farther for human rights abuses and corrupt practices, and feared that her victory would mark a return of *Fujimorismo*. Veronika Mendoza, who placed third in the first round, gave her full support to Kuczynski, in order to prevent the victory of Keiko (Collins, June 7, 2016).

On the other side of the globe, in Korea, Park Geun-hye, a daughter of infamous dictator, Park Chung-hee was elected president in a pairwise and close election in 2012. The two elections in Peru and Korea make us wonder about what impact, if any, candidate's having a controversial parent has on the vote choice of the electorate.

By family name in politics, we usually think of Kennedys and Bushes in the U.S., and probably in positive terms. Few have studied the impact of family history during the authoritarian era on vote choice in democratically contested elections. This may be partly because the descendants of former dictators running in elections has been a rarity in the real world. Since the third wave of democratization began, many new democracies have practiced free and fair elections. We may see increasingly descendants of former authoritarian leaders running in democratic elections. What impact does negative family history have on vote choice of the electorate in these countries? So far, there has not been a systematic theoretical study, and the nature of the studies will be empirical at least for a time being.

In this manuscript, we study the impact of negative family history on electorate's vote choice in Korea. Previous studies of elections in Korea have found that three factors primarily determine the vote choice of the electorate (Kang 2002, 2003, Kim, Choi, and Cho 2008, Kim 2011). They are ideological, regional, and generational differences. We are aware of few studies of Korean elections focusing on candidate's personal traits. In this paper, we build a model of vote choice in the 2012 Korean presidential election that includes family history as well as the three abovementioned factors that we believe have affected vote choice.

II. Expectations and Hypothesis

Park Geun-hye entered politics in 1998 when she was elected to the National Assembly of Korea. Since then she served five terms in the Assembly. By 2007, Park Geun-hye had

established herself as one of the most influential leaders of the Grand National Party (GNP) and sought the Party's nomination for the presidential election, which she lost by an extremely narrow margin to Lee Myung-bak, a former mayor of Seoul, who went on to win the presidency in 2007.

During the next five years (that is, under Lee Myung-bak's government), no significant alternative candidate to her emerged in the GNP, and people regarded her as *de facto* presidential nominee of the party for 2012. Under the Korean election law, the presidency is limited to a single-term, and thus, Lee could not run again. With declining popularity of both the GNP and President Lee, the party changed its name to Saenuri Party.

The opposition party, the Democratic United Party (DUP), nominated Moon Jae-in as its presidential candidate. In an essentially pair-wise contest, Park beat Moon 51.6% to 48% and became the first woman president in the history of Korea in 2012.

Family History

As we mentioned above, Park Geun-hye was a daughter of the former president Park Chung-hee, who engaged in a coup d'état in 1961 and ruled Korea until 1979 when he was assassinated by his own Korean CIA director. Park Chung-hee ruled the country by ruthlessly cracking down on dissidents and forced constitutional amendments to stay in power for life by avoiding direct popular election of the president, i.e., the so-called *Yushin* constitution. Many dissidents were tortured, and some were probably killed. It is also true that, to gain legitimacy after the coup, Park consistently pushed for economic development plans under his reign, which most Korean people believe to have moved Korea from one of the world's poorest countries after the Korean War to its current position as one of the 15 largest economies in the world. Even so Park Chung-hee is remembered as one of the world's most notorious dictators much more so than a leader that saved the nation from poverty. Therefore,

when the Korean voters voted to elect the president in 2012, we believe many cast negative votes against Park Geun-hye. As we discussed above, there is little theoretic grounds to make our judgements due to the lack of studies dealing with the impact of family history. Purely based on our intuition, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis : Park Geun-hye's negative family history caused negative vote choice on the part of the electorate in the presidential elections in Korea in 2012.

Regionalism, Ideology, and Generations

With democratic opening and free elections came regionalism as the dominant cleavage in Korean politics. This was especially the case in the rivalry between the southeastern region of *Youngnam* and the southwestern region of *Honam*. To this day regionalism remains a powerful determinant of vote choice in Korea. In the election we analyze in our manuscript, the DUP was the *Honam*-based party while the Saenuri Party was backed up by the *Youngnam*. There is also common perception among the observers of Korean politics that, since the turn of the millennium, the left-right ideology has affected the electorate's choices in a significant manner in Korea. Another cleavage that began to develop around the turn of the century and still exerts influence is generational differences – the old primarily supports the Saenuri Party, while the young prefers its counterpart.¹

III. Data and Methods

In order to test the hypothesis proffered in the previous section, we use the 2012

¹ For the origin and history of these cleavages after democratic transition began in Korea, see Chung 1993, Park 1993, Choi 1995, Lee 1998, 1999, Kang 2002, 2003, Kim, Choi, and Cho 2008, and Kim 2011.

presidential election survey conducted by the Korean Social Science Data Center (KSDC).² Our dependent variable is the electorate’s binary choice of candidates coded 1 for Park Geun-hye and 0 for Moon Jae-in. Therefore, we estimate the models using logit regressions. As our main independent variable of interest, we use *Yushin* variable based on the respondent’s placement of score 1 “not important at all” to 10 “very important” for the legacy of *Yushin* constitution in deciding for whom they voted. It is appropriate to test our hypothesis as it is related to Park Geun-hye’s ill association with the past.

We also consider all variables required in a basic voting choice model in Korea. Regional differences are captured in dummies indicating the region from which a respondent comes. The regional dummies are *Younghnam*, *Honam*, *Choongchung*, and *Other*. The *Seoul-Incheon-Gyeonggi* metropolitan region is used as a base category (excluded). The *Ideology* variable is included in the analysis based on the responses to the self-ideological tendency item, which is measured on an 11-point scale ranging from 0 for “extremely left” to 10 for “extremely right.” The *Age* variable is included to account for the effect of the generational differences. In addition to these fundamental determinants, we include the usual control variables of *Gender*, *Education*, and *Income*.³

VI. Findings

Table 1 presents the estimated coefficients and robust standard errors from logit regressions. An unadjusted coefficient estimated without controlling for other variables is pre-

² The KSDC maintains all post-democratization presidential and National Assembly election studies run jointly by the National Election Commission (NEC). Those who are not familiar with Korean surveys can simply consider these studies as equivalent to the NES in the US or the BES in the UK. These data are the most frequently used data for analyzing Korean elections.

³ For *Gender*, a 1 is assigned if a respondent is female while 0 is assigned if a respondent is male. The level of *Education* was categorized into three groups: 1 = “less than middle school,” 2 = “high school graduate,” and 3 = “more than some college education.” *Income* variable is a 12-point scale variable. Higher values represent higher income.

sented in Model 1. As one can see, our hypothesis is supported. Those who thought the legacy of *Yushin* was relevant voted against Park Geun-hye in 2012.

(Table 1 about here)

Model 2 of Table 1 includes the three dominant factors of regional, ideological, and generational differences. As shown in the first row, the statistically significant relationship between *Yushin* and voting against Park is robust to the inclusion of these variables. The results for the variables we put in our model based on previous studies of Korean elections are generally consistent with expectations. We see the *Honam-Youngnam* split in their voting decisions. The candidates of the left (Moon representing the DUP) and right (Park representing the Saenuri) received their respective ideologically oriented support, statistically speaking. Usual control variables are added in Model 3, which does not change the results: our hypothesis is still supported and the results for the three dominant factors remain consistent with expectations as well.

Overall, our results in Table 1 show that the *Yushin* significantly affected the vote choices of Korean electorate. The results further show that the relationship between *Yushin* and voting against Park Geun-hye is statistically very strong (p-values smaller than .00001 in all three models). However, the coefficient estimates of logit models reported in Table 1 cannot tell us how important *Yushin* variable is in substantive terms because it is not possible to directly interpret the estimated parameters from a non-linear response model.

Therefore, we calculate the changes in the probability of voting for Park Geun-hye for changes in an independent variable, holding other variables constant. These are visualized in Figure 1. These charts display the calculated probability changes of voting for Park based on Model 3. The white, gray, and black bars represent the changes in the probability of voting

for Park as the value of the relevant variable changes from 25th to 75th percentiles (inter-quartile), from 10th to 90th percentiles (inter-quintile), and from its minimum value to a maximum, respectively. For example, the second white bar in the Figure shows that a respondent's probability of voting for Park Geun-hye increases by 0.231 as his or her ideology changes from 25th (left) to 75th (right) percentiles. Note that, for dummy variables, we can calculate the effects of min-max changes only. As shown in Table 1, *Yushin* and *Honam* have negative effects on the probability of voting for Park. In order to aid comparison with other effects, the effects of *Yushin* and *Honam* are displayed in absolute value.

The effects of ideological, generational, and regional differences serve as good benchmarks for evaluating the effect of *Yushin* variable in substantive terms. The inter-quartile difference in *Yushin* is greater than the corresponding difference in *Age* and is not much smaller than the same difference in *Ideology* in its impact on the probability of voting for Park. Using the variables' larger ranges, *Yushin* effects are generally greater than other effects except *Ideology*. All in all, our results show that the legacy of *Yushin* is an important determinant of Korean electorate's voting decision.

There is an interesting question in the 2012 survey that asked the respondent to choose from the following options: 1 = "s/he voted for her/his favorite candidate hoping that the person would be elected"; 2 = "s/he voted against a particular candidate s/he disliked"; and 3 = "s/he did not particularly care for who would get elected." In a way, this question directly asks whether the respondent cast a negative vote. We utilize this survey question to establish the causal link for the story we tell in this manuscript.

(Table 2 about here)

First, we analyze who the negative voters are, i.e., who chose the option 2 in the abovementioned survey item. The results reported in Model 1 of Table 2 show that, after holding other variables constant, those who think the legacy of *Yushin* important are strongly more likely to be negative voters in the 2012 Korean presidential election.⁴ In other words, voters vote negatively because of their aversion for the memory of *Yushin*. Second, we analyze the impact of negative voting on vote choice. We generated three dummy variables from the responses to the abovementioned survey question. We used option 1 as a reference category (excluded) and show the impact of options 2 (*Vote Against*) in Model 3 of Table 2. The results clearly indicate that negative voters voted against Park Geun-hye.

Taken together, the results reported in Table 2 show that the electorate's aversion for *Yushin* is closely associated with negative voting which is directed against Park. When it is connected to the results in Table 1, this analysis allows us to establish a probable direction of causal relationship between *Yushin* and vote choices in the 2012 Korean presidential election.

VI. Conclusion

In this manuscript, we study the impact of negative family history on electorate's vote choice in one of the new democracies, Korea. Few have studied the impact of family history during the authoritarian era on vote choice in democratically contested elections. This may be partly because the descendants of former dictators running in elections has been a rarity in the real world. Since the third wave of democratization began, many new democracies have practiced free and fair elections. We may see increasingly descendants of former authoritarian leaders running in democratic elections. It is for that reason that we feel our work is interesting and

⁴ The dependent variable is coded 1 for those who chose option 2; and 0 otherwise. We repeated the analysis after excluding the respondents who chose option 3 (not reported). The results were essentially the same.

potentially important. What impact does negative family history have on vote choice of the electorate in these countries?

We have found strong evidence that the electorate punishes the descendant candidates for their parent's (ancestor's) sins in elections. In Korea, the so-called *Yushin* legacy significantly impacted the vote choice in the presidential election of 2012. Given what we found in Korea, we conjecture that her father's legacy had negative impact on the candidacy of Keiko Fujimori in Peru. Of course our conclusion is based on just one case in Korea. As more descendants of former dictators start to run in elections in new democracies, we will be able to build more concrete theory about the causality we study in this manuscript.⁵

⁵ Differences in the electoral fortune of Park and Fujimori may be explained by the other factors that affect vote choice: ideological, regional, and generational differences in the case of Korea. In that sense, negative family history works like corruption. According to the "implicit trading theory," first coined by Rundquist, Strom, and Peters (1977), candidate corruption is treated like any other relevant components in the voter's choice and thus, voters may still vote for a "corrupt" candidate if the candidate shares views or is closer to the voter's own political preferences on other issues compared to a "clean" candidate.

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Table 1. Determinants of Vote Choices in the 2012 Korean Presidential Election

VARIABLES	(1) vote_Park	(2) vote_Park	(3) vote_Park
Yushin	-0.256*** (0.026)	-0.224*** (0.034)	-0.218*** (0.035)
Youngnam		0.533*** (0.196)	0.467** (0.201)
Honam		-1.957*** (0.294)	-2.108*** (0.304)
Choongchung		-0.350 (0.250)	-0.445* (0.254)
Others		-0.263 (0.335)	-0.317 (0.346)
Ideology		0.481*** (0.049)	0.475*** (0.050)
Age		0.039*** (0.006)	0.032*** (0.007)
Gender			0.023 (0.167)
Income			-0.008 (0.029)
Education			-0.289* (0.166)
Observations	1,041	1,010	978

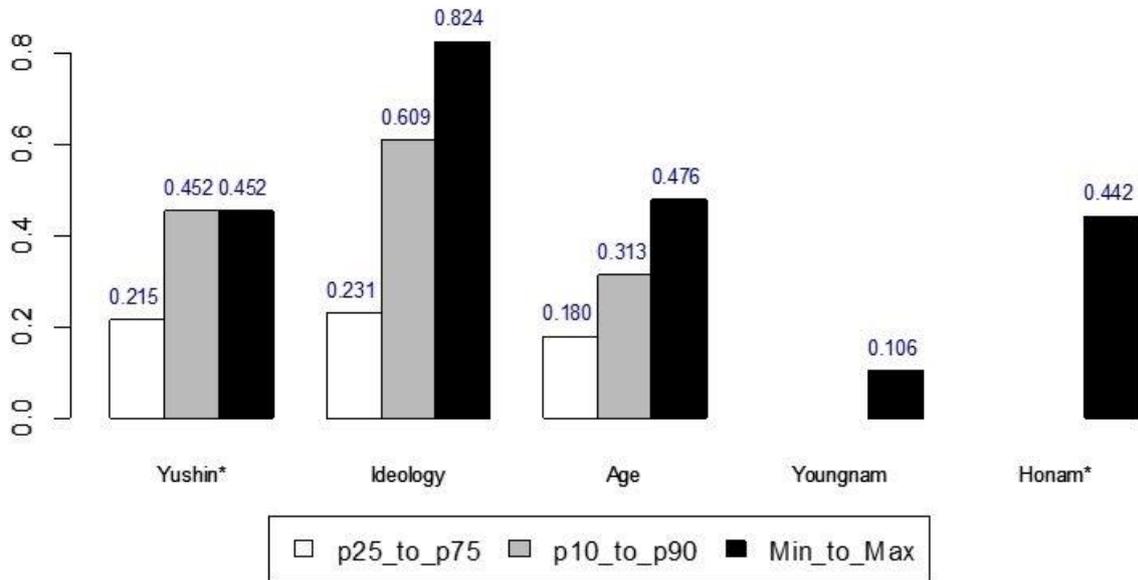
Robust standard errors in parentheses. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

Table 2. Determinants of Negative Voting against Candidates with Negative Family History

VARIABLES	(1) Vote_Against	(2) Vote_Park
Yushin	0.129*** (0.033)	
Vote_Against		-0.770*** (0.194)
Vote_None		0.056 (0.272)
Youngnam	-0.364* (0.211)	0.566*** (0.195)
Honam	0.219 (0.230)	-2.035*** (0.296)
Choongchung	-0.142 (0.267)	-0.391 (0.245)
Others	0.634** (0.323)	-0.151 (0.352)
Ideology	-0.062 (0.039)	0.480*** (0.048)
Age	-0.015** (0.007)	0.033*** (0.007)
Gender	-0.144 (0.164)	0.105 (0.163)
Income	0.055** (0.028)	-0.008 (0.029)
Education	0.347** (0.175)	-0.256 (0.166)
Observations	979	991

Robust standard errors in parentheses. * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

Figure 1. Changes in the Probability of Voting for Park Geun-hye for Inter-quartile, Inter-quintile, and Min-Max Changes in Key Independent Variables



Note: These figures display the simulation results based on Model 3 of Table 1.

*We present *Yushin* and *Honam* effects in absolute value in order to aid comparison (the effects are originally negative as shown in Model 3 of Table 1).