Politicians' Contentious and Institutional Responses to Scandals in their Party: Experimental Evidence from South Korea.*
Pre-Analysis Plan.

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1 Introduction

How do politicians react to political crises that significantly impact the quality and image of their parties? And how does the public perceive and evaluate these different responses by politicians? This paper draws on Hirschman (1970)'s seminal concepts of exit, voice, and loyalty to examine which strategy – leaving the party or trying to fix the problem within the party – is perceived as being more responsive to the electorate. Using an experimental survey design, we explore this question in the context of the recent political scandal in South Korea surrounding former President Park Geun-hye, which has generated heterogeneous response from the ruling Saenuri Party (SP) politicians. In the aftermath of the scandal, some SP politicians voiced their concerns by participating in anti-Park protests and/or making statements that criticized Park, while others exited the SP and created a new party called

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the Bareun Party. The remaining SP members decided to change its party name to Liberty Korea Party to dissociate themselves from Park's corruption scandal.

In post-transition South Korea (1987-present), there is no salient cleavage and parties and party leaders hold inconsistent and often contradictory positions given the impediments to party development under military rule (1961-1988) and bigger role played by civil society (and lesser role played by the opposition parties) during the democratic transition process (Wong, 2015). Whenever these parties foresaw or experienced an electoral setback, they responded with party merges, splits, and name changes to create a new image and secure new voters. The main conservative party, which is an authoritarian successor party (Loxton, 2015), has changed its name around 10 times while the main progressive (center-left) party (currently the Minjoo Party) has changed its identity 20 times since 1955 (The Wall Street Journal, 2016).

While scholars have documented the volatility of party system in South Korea (e.g., Wong 2015; Choi 2012), to our knowledge, no study as actually examined the public perceptions of such strategies. If these tactics offer an effective way for politicians to distance themselves from a party with a deteriorating brand and preserve personal reputation, then arguably voters might be providing incentives for politicians to pursue strategies that further weaken the party system.

2   Hypotheses

A recent study shows that weakly institutionalized party system "not only complicates for voters the task of attributing responsibility for corruption, it also undermines electoral co-ordination, and thus the ability of voters to employ electoral choice effectively to oust corrupt incumbents and hold their representatives accountable" (Schleiter & Voznaya, 2016, 1). In this context, we expect voice and exit to be effective strategies in signaling less corruption and increasing the likelihood that the candidate will be elected relative to loyalty - staying

in the party and not taking a stance on the scandal - which is the baseline.

We consider two strategies for voice: protest participation or statement of criticism. We expect protest participation to be more effective strategy in signaling less corruption and increasing the probability of the candidate's electability. In post-transition South Korea, voters have rewarded dissident candidates for their activism in the pro-democracy movement (Kim et al., 2013; Shin & Chang, 2011). Over 30 percent of both the sixteenth and seventeenth National Assemblies consisted of past activists who were members of pro-democracy social movement organizations (Kim et al., 2013). These past activists claimed "moral superiority" over the traditional politicians (Lee, 2004), and were deemed "legitimate and trustworthy" for their participation in the democracy movement (Kim et al., 2013).

Hypothesis 1: Voice:

H1A Protest and criticism will both translate into higher support for a candidate than staying in SP, now LKP (loyalty). Voters will also perceive a candidate who took part in candlelight protests and a candidate who criticized the party to be less corrupt than a candidate who stayed in SP.

H1B: Protest will increase support for the politician more than statements of criticism, especially among MP voters and people who themselves participated in candlelight protests. Effects of protest on perceptions of corruption will also be larger than effects of criticism.

Hypothesis 2: Exit: Leaving SP to join Bareun Party will increase support relative to staying in in SP (now LKP) and decrease assessment of candidate's corruption.

3   Design

In this section, we present an experimental design intended to test the hypotheses presented in the previous section. In the experiment, respondents are asked to read a vignette about

a politician affiliated with Saenuri Party (SP), President Park's party. In the vignette, we randomize the politician's response to the decline in party quality: voice, which takes the form of either public criticism of President Park or participation in candlelight protests calling for her impeachment; exit: leaving the party to join Bareun party, a new split party; and loyalty: remaining in SP (now Liberty Korea Party) and not taking a stance on the crisis. In the aftermath of the recent political crisis in South Korea, SP-affiliated politicians pursued all of these strategies. The language will be phrased in a gender neutral way in Korean to not limit the analysis to a male or female candidate.

3.1 Vignette

Please consider the following hypothetical scenario. Some parts of the description may strike you as important; other parts may seem unimportant. Please read the details very carefully. After describing the situation, we will ask your opinion.

A member of National Assembly is running for re-election. (S)He has been affiliated with the Saenuri Party. In response to the political crisis surrounding President Park, (s)he [participated in anti-Park Geun-hye candlelight protest//criticized President Park and called for her impeachment//did not take a stance on Park's impeachment and remained in SP, now Liberty Korea Party//left SP to join Bareun Party, a new party which emerged out of SP.]

3.2 Outcome Questions

[Order of first two outcome questions will be randomized]

- On a scale of 1-7, where 1 is "not likely at all" and 7 "very likely", how likely would you be to vote for this candidate?

- On a scale of 1-7, where 1 is "not corrupt at all" and 7 "very corrupt", how corrupt do you think is this candidate?

- In a previous question, you indicated how likely you would be to vote for the candidate. What are your reasons for supporting / not supporting this candidate? Please write a few sentences justifying your answer. [open-ended]

3.3 Sample

The study will be fielded on a nationally representative sample of 1,000 adults in South Korea in partnership with Embrain,[1] one of the main survey companies in the country. Embrain has built its respondent panel based by national census (Gender, Age, Regions). Respondents are recruited through web portals banner advertising, radio broadcasting of current issues, and panel member's recommendation, and compensated financially for participation. The survey will be implemented online shortly before the nineteenth president election to be held on May 9, 2017.

4 Analysis

Hypothesis tests will consist of difference-in-means tests, using an α of 0.05. Additionally, an open-ended question asking respondents to explain their support or lack of support for the candidate will be included. If respondents produce enough text, the results of the open-ended question will be analyzed using the Structural Topic Model to explore potential mechanisms (Roberts et al., 2014).

We will test whether treatment effects are different for SP-supporters and for supporters of other parties. We expect that it will be more difficult to move the attitudes of participants who were not SP supporters, given that the study focuses on strategies employed by politicians from that party. At the same time, supporters of opposition parties should be more likely to reward the politician for participating in the anti-Park candlelight protests given that the opposition party members played a more visible role during the anti-Park/pro-

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[1]http://embrain.com

impeachment movement.

5 Conclusion

Frequent changes in party arrangements – merges, splits, and name changes – have plagued post-transition South Korea, contributing to weakly institutionalized party system and high levels of electoral volatility. The common understanding among South Korean politicians is that a change of party name is a way to create a new image and secure new voters. Findings from this experiment allows us to investigate whether and how voters perceive such strategy to be effective in appealing to new voters. Moreover, citizens' perceptions of politicians' responses to scandals within their party will speak to the issues of democratic accountability.

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