

## **The Contextual Model of Electoral Turnout in Emergent Democracies-the Case of the 2004 Korean Legislative Election**

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### Abstract

What sources of information do individuals turn to in making the decision to participate in elections? Do the contextual factors matter in this decision? This study attempts to answer these important but understudied questions in electoral politics in emergent democracies. Based on the 2004 Korean legislative election, this study elucidates the relevance of the contextual model: in particular, the role of political discussions with others in explaining citizens' decisions to vote. The main findings of this study have implications for the future study of comparative political behavior.

Keywords: political talk, context, turnout, new democracies, Korea.

How much do contextual factors influence a voter's decision to participate in an election? According to a series of studies<sup>1</sup> and the theory of the social (political) networks,<sup>2</sup> contextual factors matter. Political parties and candidates have a strong incentive to mobilize citizens to participate in an election by contacting citizens directly or indirectly. Citizens themselves also have a strong incentive to interact with others. In other words, citizens are embedded in social and political milieus, which may affect their political behavior. In particular, this environment can exercise important influences on political behavior through social and political interactions. Indeed, many studies have found strong contextual effects on political participation.

However, the existing literature on political participation in Korea fails to incorporate these factors appropriately, leaving many aspects unexplained.<sup>3</sup> This article attempts to fill this gap by focusing on the role of contextual factors: in particular, political talk with others. How often do Korean voters engage in political talk with others? How much does it affect citizens' decisions to participate in an election? This article tests the effect of political talk on participation in the 2004 Korean legislation

election. As will be explained in more detail later, the 2004 Korean legislative election was held under unusual circumstances: specifically, the aftermath of the unprecedented presidential impeachment, which had occurred a few months before the election. For this reason, the 2004 election attracted the interest of many voters, and, indeed, the turnout for this election broke the declining trend of voter turnout since South Korea's democratic transition. In this respect, the 2004 national election represents a good situation for testing competing models of participation in the election.

The main findings of this study highlight the fact that contextual factors (in particular, political talk with others) significantly promote citizens' propensity to participate in elections.

This article is organized as follows. First, studies on political participation are reviewed. Then, a theoretical framework of the contextual model of political participation with a focus on the role of political discussion is presented. Next data, variables, and the empirical model are discussed. Finally, the findings are presented along with their implications and directions for future research.

### **Theoretical Framework of Political Participation**

What is political participation? According Verba, Nie, and Kim's seminal studies,<sup>4</sup> there are four types of political participation: voting, participating in campaigns, community engagement, and direct contact with officials. Of these, voting is (perhaps obviously) the most common and important political participation.<sup>5</sup> What factors, then, affect political participation? Because the main focus of this study is to examine causal determinants of political participation, this brief review of the literature will concentrate on such determinants at the individual level.<sup>6</sup> So, what determinants affect citizens' propensity to vote in an election? The studies of political participation have identified at least three perspectives on political participation: the rational choice model, the socio economic status (SES) model and demographics, and the psychological engagement model. After briefly reviewing these models, I will present a contextual model of political participation to offer a more comprehensive view of political participation.

#### ***Rational Choice Model***

The rational choice perspective is the most straightforward and powerful framework for explaining individual decisions to participate in

elections. According to Downs,<sup>7</sup> an individual's voting decision is a function of his/her estimation of the costs and benefits. This basic idea was expanded by Riker and Ordeshook's seminal study,<sup>8</sup> one based on a more clearly defined concept of *expected utility*; the authors argued that individuals vote if the expected utility is greater than that of not voting. Ferejohn and Fiorina<sup>9</sup> presented the rational choice theory of voting in a different way: that is, voting decisions are not based on voters' propensity to increase their expected utility but on their minimax regret decision. Based on this formulation, voting decisions are motivated by the desire to avoid subsequent regret that a less preferred candidate will win in part because they abstained from voting. But, even if the benefits of participating in the election may be trivial in actuality, this approach faces a 'paradox of participation' (Olson, 1965).

Rational economic voting theory<sup>10</sup> can contribute to the rational choice theory in regard to political participation. Voters can use retrospective evaluations to infer expected benefits for future participation. If voters are pessimistic about the opposition's ability to make a significant difference in managing the economy, they will not participate in the election. According to Tillman's recent comparative study,<sup>11</sup> voter's rational economic judgment influences their decisions of whether to participate in an election as well as how to cast their votes in that election.

In Korea, several studies have attempted to test the relevance of the rational choice model. For example, based on data of 14<sup>th</sup> legislative election, J. Kim's study<sup>12</sup> found that if voters perceived that his/her participation could affect election results, he/she would participate. Also, the perception of a close race increases voters' turnout. J. Kim's study<sup>13</sup> focused on the potential benefits of participating in an election whereas W. Kim's study<sup>14</sup> focused on the costs of participating in an election. According to his argument, because Election Day in Korea is a holiday, the cost of voting is relatively low. However, for that reason, opportunity cost can be higher. Han and Kang's study<sup>15</sup> demonstrated that the turnout rate is determined by both closeness of the race and the amount of campaign spending. The first identify how citizens' rational calculations work; the latter elucidate how strategic political elites respond to electoral competitiveness.

### ***Socioeconomic Status (SES) Model and Demographics***

A classic study by Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet<sup>16</sup> found that there is a strong correlation between voters' socio-economic status and their decisions to vote. In particular, the SES model emphasized voters' level of education, income, and job status as important predictors of voter participation.<sup>17</sup> According to Verba and Nie's seminal work, "the higher-status individual has a greater stake in politics; he has greater skills, more resources, and greater awareness of political matter."<sup>18</sup>

Numerous studies have confirmed the relevance of the SES model, but the debate is ongoing. According to the Civic Voluntarism Model, "it fails to provide a coherent rationale for the connection between the explanatory socioeconomic variables and participation."<sup>19</sup> They, instead, proposed an alternative model, the Civic Voluntarism Model, which emphasizes resources, such as money, time, and civic skills as main determinants of political participation. According to Bray and his colleague's insightful study why didn't citizens participate? Simply "because they can't, because they don't want to, or because nobody asked."<sup>20</sup>

Many studies identify age as the strongest predictor of political participation.<sup>21</sup> They contend that, as voters age, they are more likely to engage in political participation; however, after a certain point, this interest may also decline. In other words, there may be a curvilinear relationship between age and political participation.

Several studies have tested the explanatory power of the SES model in explaining political participation in Korea. Overall, these studies have failed to find any relevance of the SES model in Korea. In an earlier study, Park found an insignificant relationship between education/income and electoral participation in the 14<sup>th</sup> legislative election in 1992.<sup>22</sup> Along these lines, W. Kim also failed to confirm a significant relationship between SES and turnout in the presidential election.<sup>23</sup> However, Jeong presented an interesting result in his analysis of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> legislative elections.<sup>24</sup> He argued that the relevance of the SES model depended on the political supply. In other words, SES may work through political interest; when political supply is high as was the case in the 17<sup>th</sup> election, the relevance of SES increased. By contrast, it decreased when the political supply was low as was the case in the 18<sup>th</sup> election. Therefore, we cannot totally reject the effectiveness of the SES model.

### *The Psychological Engagement Model*

Another perspective sheds light on the role of voters' psychological engagement, including political attachments and political attitudes. Specifically, in terms of political attachment, strong partisanship and group membership (e.g., labor unions) are important factors that influence election participation.<sup>25</sup> The stronger a voter's attachment to a party, the greater his/her tendency is to vote.<sup>26</sup> As a logical consequence, many studies attribute the decline of turnout in advanced democracies to waning partisanship, declining party membership, and weakening labor unions.

According to the literature, voters' political attitudes are also an important factor. Indeed, several aspects of political attitude have been identified as important factors in determining political participation: political interest, political efficacy, and political distrust. In particular, political interest and political efficacy are the most prominent predictors of political participation. In regard to the relationship between political attitude and political participation, Hirschman's seminal work argued that citizens can either exit (e.g., abstention) or speak up (e.g., turnout or other types of political participation).<sup>27</sup> There are good reasons to expect that political interest will exercise an important role in citizens' political participation.<sup>28</sup> If the citizen has a strong interest in politics, he/she is more likely to seek additional information about the election, which may reduce the voter's perceived cost of voting, thereby increasing his/her probability of voting. There are also a considerable number of previous studies that associate voters' perceptions of political efficacy with turnout.<sup>29</sup> Those who have higher levels of political efficacy may have a strong belief that their participation can influence electoral outcomes, and, as a result of this belief, they are more likely to participate in the election than are the citizens who have a lower sense of political efficacy. A recent study sheds light on citizens' attitudes toward the political system as a predictor of political participation.<sup>30</sup> Specifically, trust in political institutions and satisfaction with democracy can influence citizens' political participation. In new democracies, attitudes toward democracy itself may also factor into this relationship.

In the Korean context, several studies have confirmed the effect of psychological factors. Park's analysis of the 14<sup>th</sup> election found that political interest and political efficacy are important predictors of voting behavior.<sup>31</sup> Presidential elections are not an exception. According to Kang's analysis, in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> presidential elections, citizens'

interest in politics was the most important factor.<sup>32</sup> Those who had strong political interests were more likely to vote in the presidential election; those who had less interest tended to abstain in the election. This finding was also confirmed by Seo's study of the 17<sup>th</sup> presidential election.<sup>33</sup> In his study of nonvoters in the 17<sup>th</sup> presidential election and 18<sup>th</sup> legislative election, Kang found that ideological distance between voters and candidates combined with weakening party support are more important than candidate-related and system factors like satisfaction with democracy.<sup>34</sup>

### ***Contextual Model of Political Participation***

Although these perspectives advance our knowledge of political participation, there is an important pitfall. These frameworks do not consider the role of context in explaining political participation, leaving important aspects of participation unexplained. Many studies in advanced democracies emphasize that social and political environments can exercise strong influence on individuals' political behaviors. Therefore, any study of political participation that does not consider voters' context is incomplete.

Many studies have emphasized the contextual influence by political parties' activity such as party contact and campaign rallies. In regard to turn out, some studies<sup>35</sup> emphasize the effectiveness of party contact (personal canvassing) on turn out.

In the literature related to advanced democracies, many studies have confirmed the effectiveness of party contact on political participation, and in particular, on voter turnout.<sup>36</sup> In the U.K. context, a series of studies found that party canvassing can increase voter turnout. Bochel and Denver, for example, demonstrated that canvassing activity produced a strong increase in turnout and had decisive effects on the election results.<sup>37</sup> Specifically, the Labor vote-share was significantly increased in the experimental block (contacted intensively by the Labor Party). Simply put, voters voted because someone asked them to do so.

Recently, a series of studies has presented the theory of social networks in relationship to political participation.<sup>38</sup> According to this theory, the contextual effect (e.g., interaction in the social network) can exercise a strong influence on the voters' propensity to participate in the election. This theory argues that the model of political participation that does not consider this effect may be underspecified.<sup>39</sup>

Since Huckfeldt and his colleagues, a pioneer in the theory of social networks studies, numerous studies have documented a strong effect of contextual factors on the citizens' political behavior.<sup>40</sup> There are many types of contextual effects that are based on social interaction, but a growing number of studies are illuminating the role of political talk.<sup>41</sup> Discussion of political issues between citizens lies at the heart of democracy.<sup>42</sup> Also, based on political talk with others, citizens are exposed to politically-relevant information, which can help citizens' decision to participate in an election.<sup>43</sup>

According to Lake and Huckfeldt's study, politically relevant social capital is the consequence of social interaction among discussants, which can be strongly associated with citizens' engagement in political matters.<sup>44</sup> More directly, Klofstad reported a strong relationship between political discussion and political participation.<sup>45</sup> Based on data about college students, Klofstad documented the fact that talking about politics with peer-facilitated political engagement reduced the perceived costs and increased the perceived benefits.<sup>46</sup> His other work confirmed a more specific causal path by arguing that the effectiveness of civic talk on civic participation is mediated by citizens' civic predispositions.<sup>47</sup> That is, the influence of civic talk on civic participation is stronger for those who have strong civic predispositions before being engaging in such discussion than it is for those who held weak civic predispositions.

Based on the above theoretical discussion, this study expects that, all things being equal, those who engage in political discussion with others are more likely to turn out to vote than are those who do not.

Hypothesis 1: *Party contact is positively related to citizens' participation in elections.*

Hypothesis 2: *Political talk with others is positively related to citizens' participation in elections.*

### ***Other Variables***

Numerous studies<sup>48</sup> have showed that voting is a habit-forming process.<sup>49</sup> Habit involves a repetition of actions under similar circumstances. Whenever the conditions meet, political action will occur. Surprisingly, there is no empirical study measuring the effect of habit formation on electoral participation in Korean politics, even though many studies have confirmed its presence.

Other studies have emphasized the effect of social capital like social trust on democratic engagement by creating cooperation and reducing

collective action problem.<sup>50</sup> According to Lee and Yu, cognitive social capital as measured by social trust is likely to increase political participation such as voting turnout and interactions with public officials and politicians.<sup>51</sup>

***Contextual Factors and Political Discussion in Korean Electoral Politics***

It is well known that there is a very weak programmatic link between party and voters in Korea, and personalization of politics creates a stronger political phenomenon. However, Korean democracy fails to stabilize party systems, demonstrating high electoral volatility<sup>52</sup> and low institutionalization.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, Korean political parties tend to be short-lived, following a cycle of splits and mergers.

Under these conditions, traditional partisan cues do not provide voters with shortcuts for their decisions. Indeed, in Korea, the percentage of nonpartisan voters has increased from 22.0% in the 12<sup>th</sup> Presidential election in 1992 to 52.1% in the local elections in 1998.<sup>54</sup> Results from the legislative election seem surprising. In the 15<sup>th</sup> election, 41.92% of voters identified themselves as non-partisan; this increased to 61.71% in the 16<sup>th</sup> election. In other words, electoral volatility is high, and party system institutionalization is low.<sup>55</sup> As a result, many Korean voters make an electoral decision during the campaign period. Table 1 presents the answers of respondents who answered the question, “when did you decide which candidate to vote for?” Only a small number of respondents had decided on a candidate two weeks before Election Day (28.27% in the 14<sup>th</sup> election, and 33.27% in the 15<sup>th</sup> election). Therefore, more than two thirds of Korean voters tend to make an electoral decision within two weeks of Election Day.

**Table 1: The Timing of Electoral Choice**

	<b>14<sup>th</sup> (1992)</b>	<b>Election</b>	<b>15<sup>th</sup> (1996)</b>	<b>Election</b>
Election Day	18.46%	(192)	15.09 %	(147)
2-3 days before	24.62%	(256)	23.10 %	(225)
4-7 days before	13.94%	(145)	14.68%	(143)
1-2 weeks before	14.71%	(153)	13.55%	(132)
2+ weeks before	28.27%	(294)	33.57%	(327)
Total	100.00%	(1,040)	100.00%	(974)

Source: Post-election surveys in Korea.



Under these conditions, voters' information cues are, "less clear with weakly institutionalized systems, and voters have less information about likely outcomes."<sup>56</sup> In this situation, voters may be more impressionable to influences from context. Indeed, survey data demonstrate the usefulness of contextual variables. With regard to electoral decisions, 64.61% and 54.41% of respondents in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> elections, respectively, identified contextual sources such as political discussions and participation in political rallies as useful (*Korean Post Election Surveys*). Additionally, Korean electoral politics since the democratic opening have been characterized by multi-party competition, as part of this phenomenon each party has had its own regional stronghold. In a multi-party setting where spatial dimensions are conspicuous, contextual effects may be more influential and easily detected.<sup>57</sup>

If contextual factors exercise greater influence, to what extent are Korean voters exposed to party contact and political discussion with others? Tables 2 and 3 reports these results.

**Table 2: Percentage of Respondents Contacted by Party**

		14 <sup>th</sup>	15 <sup>th</sup>	16 <sup>th</sup>	17 <sup>th</sup>
<b>Party Contact</b>	Yes	38.22% (459/1201)	43.07% (561/1198)	44.64% (491/1100)	22.61% (222/982)
	No	61.78% (742/1201)	56.93% (682/1198)	55.36% (609/1100)	77.39% (760/982)

Note: The total number of observation is the second value in the parentheses. The first value in the parentheses indicates the number of observations in each category

Table 2 summarizes the percentage of respondents who had been contacted by a party. As can be seen, a considerable number of voters had been contacted by a party during those periods. In the 14<sup>th</sup> legislative election, 38.22% of respondents reported that they had been contacted by a party. This value increased gradually to 44.64% in the 16<sup>th</sup> legislative election. Interestingly, this number decreased in the 17<sup>th</sup> election in 2004 (22.51%). This may be due to political turmoil related

to the presidential impeachment.

**Table 3: Percentage of Political Discussion from the 14<sup>th</sup> Election to the 16<sup>th</sup> Election**

Political Discussion	14 <sup>th</sup> (1992)	15 <sup>th</sup> (1996)	16 <sup>th</sup> (2000)	17 <sup>th</sup> (2004)
Very Often	5.99%	3.83%	2.64%	11.96%
Often	19.22%	20.25%	13.09%	46.11%
Less Often	44.09%	38.42%	72.36%	31.19%
Never	30.70%	37.42%	11.91%	10.74%

Note: Total numbers of observations are 1,202, 1,200, 1,100, and 978 in 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, and 17<sup>th</sup> elections, respectively.

Table 3 summarizes voters' self-reported frequency of political discussion during electoral contests in Korea. In the 14<sup>th</sup> election survey, the majority of voters (69.30%) reported that they engaged in political discussions with others "less often" or more frequently. In the 15<sup>th</sup> election survey, a similar percentage of voters (62.50%) answered that they had discussed politics with similar frequency. In the 16<sup>th</sup> election, it increased to 88.09%. In the 17<sup>th</sup> election, those who said "very often" and "often" again increased significantly. Of the respondents, 58.07% said that they talked at least "often." These data demonstrate that Korean voters are becoming considerably more involved in political discussions with others during electoral contests.

To understand contextual influences in the 2004 election, it is worth presenting background information briefly. The 2004 election was held under an unprecedented political crisis: presidential impeachment. A conflict that escalated between the Ro Moo-hyun administration and a majority with over two-thirds of the assembly seats ended in impeachment on March 12, 2004. After this stunning political event, nation-wide resistance swept civil society away. During this political turmoil, the 2004 election was held on April 15. Leading actors in the impeachment process had become politically tainted. The Uri Party, the incumbent, surprisingly expanded its influence by increasing its seats from 47 to 153, gaining a majority position. Under these conditions, turnout in the 2004 election increased from 57.2% in the previous election to 60.6% (3.4% increase). This exceptional election reversed the turnout trend, which had been on the decline since the democratic transition.

### **Variables, Measures, and Empirical Model**

To examine the hypotheses, this study employs the Korean Democracy Barometer (KDB hereafter), which was conducted in 2004 after the 17<sup>th</sup> legislative election ( $N = 1,037$ ). The survey provides several measures of political participation and enables testing several theoretical perspectives of political participation.

#### ***Dependent Variable***

This study is based on an individual-level data analysis. As a result, the main dependent variable is measured by voters' participation in the 17<sup>th</sup> national election in 2004 as self-reported in response to a survey. I created a dummy variable; those who participated in the election were

Coded as "1", otherwise they were coded as "0".

#### ***Independent and Control Variables***

##### Contextual Effects in Korean Electoral Politics

Based on the relevant literature, this study aims to test the contextual dimensions of electoral politics at the individual level. For this reason, this study employs several related survey items including party contact, political discussions, and internet access. These variables are based on the following questions: *In the April parliamentary elections, did anyone ask you to vote for any particular candidate or party? How often did you discuss politics and government with other people? (1. Often; 2. Sometimes; 3. Rarely; 4. Never). How often did you use the internet? (1. Daily; 2. 4-5 times a week; 3. 2-3 times a week; 4. Once a week; 5. Never).*

#### ***The Rational Choice Model***

The Rational Choice Model focuses on citizens' calculations of the costs and benefits of participating in an election. Indeed, in an empirical sense, it is very difficult to measure citizens' perceived benefits as many studies have pointed out. Bearing this issue in mind, this study employs a proxy measure of the benefit: *make a difference*. The more the voter thinks that he or she can influence what the government does, the more likely he/she is to participate in an election. This is based on the following question: *People like me don't have any influence over what the government does. 1. Strongly agree; 2. Somewhat agree; 3. Somewhat disagree; 4. Strongly disagree*). Also, according to the Rational Economy Model, citizens' perceptions of the benefits can be

expressed by casting an “economic vote.”<sup>58</sup> The two main variables in economic voting—sociotropic and pocketbook—are measured on the standard survey questions: Compared to now, what do you think will be the state of our country's (or your family's for “pocketbook”) economic condition in a year from now? (1. *Much better*; 2. *A little better*; 3. *Changed little*; 4. *A little worse*; 5. *Much worse*).

### ***The SES Model and Demographics***

The KDB surveys contained standard questions for respondents' education, income, and age. A higher reported number was associated with a higher value for these variables. These variables were based on the following questions: *How much education have you had?* (1. *Primary school or less*; 2. *Middle school*; 3. *High school*; 4. *College*); *How old are you this year?*; *What is the average monthly total income for your household? For the monthly average, please take into account all of your family income, such as pensions, government benefits, interest from savings, and rent for your properties* (1. *Less than 1,000,000 won*; 2. *1,000,000 - 1,499,999 won*; 3. *1,500,000 - 1,999,999 won*; 4. *2,000,000 - 2,499,999 won*; 5. *2,500,000 - 2,999,999 won*; 6. *3,000,000 - 3,999,999 won*; 7. *4,000,000 - 3,999,999 won*).

### ***The Psychological Engagement Model***

Measuring partisanship in new democracies is a daunting task because it is not easy to differentiate partisanship from voting intention in the coming election. Also, since parties in new democracies (and in Korea in particular) are often short-lived with frequent name changes, it is hard to measure enduring partisanship. Bearing these issues in mind, this study uses a question related to feeling close to a party to measure citizens' partisanship. This measure is based on the following question: *Is there a political party that you feel close to?* I create a dummy variable for partisanship, assigning “1” those who said there is any party they feel close to, “0” otherwise.

Measuring political interest is quite straightforward. I use the following four-point likert scale question: *How much are you interested in politics?* (1. *Very interested*; 2. *Somewhat interested*; 3. *Not very interested*; 4. *Not at all interested*).

In order to measure citizens' political efficacy, I use the four-point likert standard question: *Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what is going*

on. *People like me don't have any influence over what the government does (1. Strongly agree; 2. Somewhat agree; 3. Somewhat disagree; 4. Strongly disagree).*

Regarding citizens' attitudes toward the democratic system and their trust in the political system, I use the following questions: *Let us consider the idea of democracy, not its practice. In principle, how much are you for or against the idea of democracy? (1. Very much for; 2. Somewhat for; 3. Somewhat against; 4. Very much against); On the whole, how much are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way democracy works in our country? On a scale where 1 means complete dissatisfaction and 10 means complete satisfaction, where would you place the current practice of democratic politics?; How would you rate the overall political situation our country is in now?( 1. Very good; 2. Good; 3. Neither good nor bad; 4. Bad; 5. Very bad).*

### ***Other Variables***

In regard to Social Capital theory, this study employs a variable of general trust. To measure the effect of general trust, this study employs a standard four-point likert scale question for general trust: *To what extent do you trust the majority of people?( 1. A great deal; 2. Somewhat; 3. Not very much; 4. Not at all).*

Unfortunately, the KDB 2004 only contains one item that asks about respondents' participation in previous elections (the 2002 presidential election). So, as a proxy measure of voting as a habit, this study uses the question: *Did you vote in the December 2002 presidential election?* I create a dummy variable for this, assigning "1" for those who participated in the 2002 presidential election, "0" otherwise.

As discussed earlier, the 2004 legislative election was held under the extraordinary circumstance of an unprecedented presidential impeachment. In order to measure the effect of this issue, I use the following four-point likert question: *The National Assembly impeached President Roh Moo Hyun last year. Do you approve or disapprove of this action? (1. Strongly approve; 2. Somewhat approve; 3. Somewhat disapprove; 4. Strongly disapprove).*

Also, I create a dummy variable of male to control for a gender effect on electoral participation.

## Results

What factors influence the likelihood that voters will participate in an election? Because the dependent variable is dichotomous, this study uses a logit model to estimate the effects of different models. Table 4 reports the results. In order to examine a substantive effect of the variables, I calculate a marginal value of predicted probability of significant variables that influence voters' participation in the 2004 election. See Figure 1 for a graphical display of this information.

**Table 4: Logit Analysis of Electoral Participation in the 2004 Legislative Election in Korea**

Variable	Model of Turnout
<b>Contextual Model</b>	
Political Discussion	-.542 (.163)****
Party Contact	-.658 (.259)**
Internet Use	.041 (.062)
<b>Rational Choice</b>	
Make a Difference	-.013 (.067)
Pocketbook	.258 (.166)
Sociotropic	-.002 (.084)
<b>SES and Demographics</b>	
Education	-.230 (.199)
Income	.019 (.058)
Age	.241 (.140)*
<b>Psychological Engagement</b>	
No Partisanship	-.374 (.232)
Political Efficacy	-.024 (.063)
Political Interest	-.289 (.146)**
SWD	.010 (.010)
Democracy as an Idea	-.149 (.007)**
Political Situation	-.127 (.131)
Ideology	-.003 (.004)
Habit	1.988 (.257)****
General Trust	-.106 (.102)
Impeachment	-.076 (.082)
Male	-.345 (.235)
LR chi2	191.57

Adjusted R-square	0.2666
Number of Obs	611

Source: the 2004 KDB survey.

Note: \* $p \leq .10$  \*\* $p \leq .05$ . \*\*\* $p \leq .01$ . \*\*\*\* $p \leq .001$ . The dependent variable in this model is voters' participation in the 2004 election. Standard errors are in parentheses.

Let's first consider the rational choice model. None of indicators of the rational choice model reach any level of significance. This may be related to a measurement issue. In an empirical sense, it is not an easy task to develop a reliable indicator of voters' perceived benefits for participating in an election. This study employs several indicators, but none of them are significant. In particular, based on a recent study, this study attempts to test whether citizens' evaluations of the economy affect electoral participation; however, significant results were not achieved for this variable. Additionally, citizens' views of their ability to influence what the government does, is not significant either.

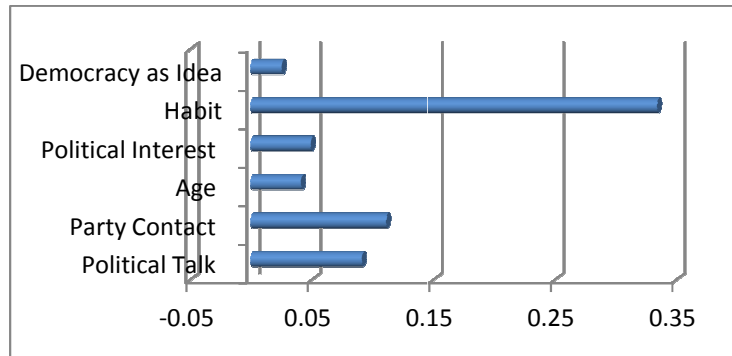
Among the several indicators of the SES model and demographics, only age had a significant effect on electoral participation as previous studies have confirmed. The older the respondent, the more he or she participates in elections. Interestingly, education and income did not exercise a statistically significant influence on turnout.

With regard to the relevance of the psychological engagement and attitude model, as many studies have found, citizens' interest in politics produces a significant result. Even after controlling several factors, political interest exercises a fairly strong influence on citizens' participation in elections. Citizens' attitude about democracy as idea is worth discussing. It appears to be significant at .05 levels even though its marginal effect is not strong (.025); by contrast, citizens' evaluations of the current political situation were not strong enough to lend empirical support to this area. The latter may not show a significant result because of a measurement issue. The KDB 2004 did not contain a question on trust of political institutions. This result implies that, given the declining turnout in Korea, the growing number of absentees may be significant symptom of the crisis of democratic legitimacy. If this is the case, it may have a long-term detrimental effect on democratic consolidation at the mass level.

The results for the contextual model are interesting. To measure contextual effects, this study employs two indicators: political talk (main

indicator) and party contact (secondary indicator). Per H1, political talk had strong results in the expected direction. Its marginal effect is 0.091. In other words, the more citizens engaged in political conversations with each other, the more likely they are to participate in an election.

**Figure 1: Marginal Effect of Significant Variables on Electoral Participation**



Source: This figure is based on calculations of marginal effects. Only significant variables are reported.

The coefficient of party contact is strongly significant; as we can see in Figure 1, its marginal effect is second in power only after habit (0.111). However, contrary to previous studies<sup>59</sup> and the expectations for H2, the direction of the coefficient of party contact is opposite from our expectations. In other words, voters who had been contacted by a party were less likely to participate in the election. How can we interpret this perplexing result? This may have been the results of the widespread distrust toward political parties in Korea, especially after the impeachment.<sup>60</sup>

Importantly, the variable of habit had the strongest influence on turnout in an expected direction, recording a marginal value of 0.334 (Figure 1). Combining this result with age, it is possible to infer that electoral participation as a habit may be reinforced when it is repeated. Several previous studies confirm this trend.<sup>61</sup> But the question remains as to why election turnout in Korea continues to decline.

Another interesting result worth discussing is the effect of citizens' attitudes toward salient political issues (e.g., presidential impeachment). Recall that the 2004 election was overshadowed by the recent



impeachment; citizens' attitudes toward this issue were expected to increase the likelihood of voting participation. Many studies<sup>62</sup> have confirmed this as one of the most important determinants of electoral choice in the 2004 election. The effect of this issue is, I speculate, already reflected in main explanatory variables (political discussion). As discussed earlier, the frequency of political talk increased in the 2004 election. Contrary to previous studies<sup>63</sup> the empirical analysis in this study did not show any significant influence of social trust on citizens' participation in the election.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

This study attempts to elucidate the relevance of the contextual model of electoral participation in Korea. After controlling for several competing models, an empirical analysis of the 2004 legislative election confirmed that contextual factors (in particular, political talk with others) exercise a strong, significant influence on citizens' decision to vote. Empirically, this study contributes to a better understanding of electoral participation in Korea. This study also has important theoretical implications in the areas of comparative political behavior.

First, this study confirms that individual political behavior is embedded in the social and political structure in the new democracies. Specifically, political discussions with others matter. As Page<sup>64</sup> reminded us, political discussion is an important aspect of democracy. Specifically, in new democracies where traditional programmatic links and partisan bonds between parties and voters are weak, alternative cues (e.g., discussions within a social network) may be more important for determining citizens' political behavior. As Baker, Ames, and Renno pointed out, under these conditions, political information collected through social networks plays a key role in voters' political behavior.<sup>65</sup> It is not clear whether this is a consequence of interpersonal mobilization because we do not have a survey that contains relevant items to test. But based on previous studies, there is good reason to believe that this may, indeed, be the effect.<sup>66</sup> Examining the specific path of this mobilization (how does mobilization occur in the discussion network?) is a possible direction for future research.

Second, as a series of studies by Huckfeldt and Sprague has confirmed, the political leanings of voters' discussants may influence the voters' political preferences.<sup>67</sup> For example, homogeneity of political preference in the discussion network may increase the likelihood of

political participation<sup>68</sup> whereas heterogeneity of political preference may impede political participation.<sup>69</sup> But our understanding of this effect in electoral politics in Korea is limited; further, only a few studies examine this effect in the context of new democracies. This could be an important direction for future research using updated survey data.

### Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see Steven Rosenstone and John M. Hansen, *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy In America* (New York: MacMillan, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> Robert Huckfeldt, "Political Participation and the Neighborhood Social Context." *American Journal of Political Science* 23: 3 (1979); Robert Huckfeldt R., *Politics in Context: Assimilation and Conflict in Urban Neighborhoods* (New York: Agathon Press, 1986); Robert Huckfeldt, Paul A. Beck, Russell J. Dalton, and Jeffrey Levine, "Political Environments, Cohesive Social Groups, and the Communication of Public Opinion." *American Journal of Political Science* 39: 4 (1995); Christopher Kenny, "Political Participation and Effects from the Social Environment." *American Journal of Political Science* 36:1 (1992).

<sup>3</sup> According to Leighley's (1995: 197) important study, "we have learned much from participation studies of past several decades, particularly with respect to *who* participates...However, the question of *why* people participate is not yet resolved." See Jan Leighley E, "Attitudes, Opportunities, and Incentives: A Field Essay on Political Participation." *Political Research Quarterly* 48 (1995). This point can be applied well to the studies of participation in Korean politics.

<sup>4</sup> Sidney Verba, Norman H. Nie, and Jae-On Kim, *The Modes of Democratic Participation: A Cross-National Comparison* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1971); Sidney Verba, Norman H. Nie, and Jae-On Kim, *Participation and Political Equality: A Seven-Nation Comparison* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

<sup>5</sup> John Aldrich, "Rational Choice and Turnout." *American Journal of Political Science* 37(1992).

<sup>6</sup> We can distinguish determinants of electoral participation at three levels: the national, district, and individual levels. For the national level determinants, institutional and non-institutional factors are important to consider. Institutional factors include compulsory voting, electoral systems, and party systems whereas non-institutional factors include the GDP, inequality, and the length of time that the country has been a democracy, for example. For district level determinants, competitiveness and characteristics of the district (e.g., urban vs. rural) are important.

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- <sup>7</sup> Anthony Downs, *Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957).
- <sup>8</sup> William Riker, H., and Peter C. Ordeshook, "A Theory of the Calculus of Voting" *American Political Science Review* 62 (1968).
- <sup>9</sup> John Ferejohn A. and Morris P. Fiorina, "The Paradox of Not Voting: A Decision Theoretic Analysis." *American Political Science Review* 68:2 (1974).
- <sup>10</sup> Steven Rosenstone J, "Economic Adversity and Voter Turnout." *American Journal of Political Science* 26 (1982); Tillman Erik, "Economic Judgments, Party Choice, and Voter Abstention in Cross-National Perspective." *Comparative Political Studies* 41:9 (2008).
- <sup>11</sup> Tillman "Economic Judgment"
- <sup>12</sup> Jae Han Kim 1993, "Purposefulness of Participation in Voting" *Korea and World Politics* 9: 1(1993): 89-100.
- <sup>13</sup> Kim "Purposefulness"
- <sup>14</sup> Wook Kim, "Voting Participation and Abstention: Who and why do they abstention?" Korean Election II, (Seoul:Purngil, 1998) (in Korean).
- <sup>15</sup> Jeong Hun Han and Hyun Gu Kang, "Two Perspectives on Explaining Variations in Turnout Rate in the 18th Korean General Election." *Studies of Korean Politics* 18:1 (2009) (in Korean).
- <sup>16</sup> Pau Lazarsfeld I F., Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet, *The People's Choice: How the Voter Makes Up His Mind in a Presidential Campaign*, 3rd ed, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968) (Originally 1944).
- <sup>17</sup> Verba and Nie, *Participation in America: Political democracy and social equality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972)
- <sup>18</sup> Verba and Nie, *Participation*, 126.
- <sup>19</sup> Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady, *Voice and Equality, Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 281.
- <sup>20</sup> Henry Brady E., Sidney Verba, and Kay Lehman Schlozman, "Beyond SES: A Resource Model of Political Participation." *American Political Science Review* 89:2 (1995), 247.
- <sup>21</sup> Mark Franklin N, *Voter Turnout and the Dynamics of Electoral Competition in Established Democracies "since 1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Verba and Nie, 1972; Verba et al 1995.

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- <sup>22</sup> Chan Wook Park, "Voter's Political Interest, Cognitive Knowledge of Candidate and Intention to Vote." *Korean Political Science Review* 26:3 (1993) (in Korean).
- <sup>23</sup> Kim Wook, "Voting Participation"
- <sup>24</sup> Joon-Pyo Jeong "Socioeconomic Status and Voting." *Studies of Modern Politics* 1:2 (2008).
- <sup>25</sup> Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes, *the American Voter* (Chicago University: Chicago Press, 1960).
- <sup>26</sup> Michael Lewis-Beck, M, Jacoby W. G., Norpoth, H and Weisberg, H, *The American Voter Revisited* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2008).
- <sup>27</sup> Albert Hirschman, O, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970).
- <sup>28</sup> Verba et al, *Voice and Equality, Civic Voluntarism*.
- <sup>29</sup> Campbell et al 1960; Verba and Nie 1972.
- <sup>30</sup> Kimmo Grönlund and Setälä Maija, "Political Trust, Satisfaction and Voter Turnout" *Comparative European Politics* 5:2 (2007).
- <sup>31</sup> Park Chan, "Voter's Political Interest"
- <sup>32</sup> Won Taek Kang, "Nonvoting and Political Distrust: Absentee and Supporter for Third Party." *Korean Political Science Review* 36: 2 (2002).
- <sup>33</sup> Hyun Jin Seo, "17th Presidential Election and Electoral Participation" in Lee Hyun Woo and Kwon Heok Yong, ed, *Changing Korean Voters 2* (Seoul: EAI, 2008).
- <sup>34</sup> Won Taek Kang, "Voting Turnout, Democracy and Party Politics: Analysis of Nonvoter in the 2007 Presidential Election and 2008 legislative Election." *Studies of Modern Politics* 1:2 (2008)
- <sup>35</sup> Alan Gerber S. and Donald P. Green, "The Effects of Canvassing, Telephone Calls, and Direct Mail on Voter Turnout" A Field Experiment," *American Political Science Review* 94: 3 (2000); Wielhouwer Peter and Brad Lockerbie, "Party Contacting and Political Participation 1952-90," *American Journal of Political Science* 38 (1994).
- <sup>36</sup> Michael Krassa A, "Context and the canvass: The mechanisms of interactions." *Political Behavior* 10 (1970).
- <sup>37</sup> J Bochel, M and Denver, D. T, "Canvassing, turnout, and party support: An experiment, *British Journal of Political Science* 1(1971).

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<sup>38</sup> Huckfeldt, "Political Participation", *Politics in Context*. ; Huckfeldt and Sprague, *Citizens, Politics, and Social Communication*; Kenny, "Political Participation".

<sup>39</sup> Scott McClurg .D, "Social Networks and Political Participation: The Role of Social Interaction in Explaining Political Participation." *Political Research Quarterly* 56 (2003). According to Huckfeldt and Sprague (1993:281), "the distinguishing irreducible element of contextual analysis is that, in addition to measures of individual properties, the political behavior of individuals is characterized as contingent on the environment."

<sup>40</sup> Huckfeldt, "Political Participation, and Huckfeld and Sprague, *Citizens, Politics, and Social Communication*.

<sup>41</sup> Huckfeldt et al, "Political Environment"; Casey Klofstad, "Talk Leads to Recruitment: How Discussions about Politics and Current Events Increase Civic Participation, *Political Research Quarterly* 60:2 (2007):180-191; McClurg, "Social Network"; Scott McClurg, D "Political Disagreement in Context: The Conditional Effect of Neighborhood Context, Discussion, and Disagreement on Electoral Participation." *Political Behavior* 28:4 (2006). ; Diana Mutz C, "The Consequences of Cross-Cutting Networks for Political Participation." *American Journal of Political Science* 46:4 (2002).

<sup>42</sup> Benjamin Page, , *Who Deliberates*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996)

<sup>43</sup> There are many good examples of this information such as "information about which candidate to support, why to support that candidate, when the candidate is holding a rally, or even how to just get involved." (McClurg 2003: 450).

<sup>44</sup> Lake R and Robert Huckfeldt, "Social Networks, Social Capital, and Political Participation." *Political Psychology* 19 (1998).

<sup>45</sup> Klofstad, "Talk Leads to Recruitment"; Klofstad, "Civic Talk and Civic Participation: The Moderating Effect of Individual Predispositions." *American Politics Research* 37 (2009).

<sup>46</sup> Klofstad, "Talk Leads to Recruitment"

<sup>47</sup> Klofstad, "Civic Talk and Civic Participation"

<sup>48</sup> Eric Plutzer, "Becoming a Habitual Voter: Inertia, Resources, and Growth in Young Adulthood." *American Political Science Review* 96 (2002); Alan Gerber, S., Donald P. Green, and Ron Shachar, "Voting May be Habit Forming- Evidence from a Randomized Field Experiment." *American Journal of Political Science* 47: 3(2003).

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- <sup>49</sup> According to Plutzer (2002:42), “virtually all major works on turnout have concluded that voting behavior is, in part, a gradually acquired habit.”
- <sup>50</sup> Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).
- <sup>51</sup> Sook Jong Lee and Hi Jeong Yu, “The Effect of Social Capital on Political Participation.” *Korean Political Science Review* 44:4 (2010) (in Korean).
- <sup>52</sup> Jack Bielasiak, “Institutionalization of Electoral System and Party Systems” in Post-communist States. *Comparative Politics* 34 (2002); Roberts, Kenneth M., and Erik Wibbels, “Party Systems and Electoral Volatility in Latin America: A Test of Economic, Institutional, and Structural Explanations.” *American Political Science Review* 93:3 (1999).
- <sup>53</sup> Scott Mainwaring and Timothy Scully, *Building Democratic Institutions: Party Systems in Latin America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).
- <sup>54</sup> Soon Chang So, “An Empirical Analysis of Nonpartisan in the Korean Local Election” in Cho Joong Bin, ed. *Korean Election III* (Seoul: Purungil, 1999), 404-405.
- <sup>55</sup> According to Stockton’s (2001: 104) insightful study, electoral volatility in Korea from 1981-1992 is 72.3, which is much higher than any of the Latin American countries. Also, for the 1992 legislative election, the oldest party (the Democratic Liberal Party) was only 2 years old. Even after considering the age of its predecessor (the Democratic Justice Party), “its age of 12 would rank 27<sup>th</sup> in comparison to the 37 Latin American parties.”
- <sup>56</sup> Scott Mainwaring P. and Edurne Zoco, “Political Sequences and the Stabilization of Interparty competition.” *Party Politics* 13:2 (2007), 158.
- <sup>57</sup> According to Canache et al. (1994: 511) “in a multi-party system, voters confront a relatively rich menu of political offerings and can identify the specific options that best express their political view.”
- <sup>58</sup> Lewis-Beck et al, *The American Voter Revisited*.
- <sup>59</sup> Gerber and Green, “The Effects of Canvassing”; Wielhouwer, Peter and Brad Lockerbie, “Party Contacting and Political Participation 1952-90,” *American Journal of Political Science* 38 (1994).
- <sup>60</sup> As Heo and Stockton (2005: 676) argue, “Parties have been formed to serve as personal vehicles for Korea’s leading political personalities in both regime and opposition camps,” rather than, “to play a pivotal role in connecting the ruler with the ruled.” See Uk Heo and Hans Stockton, “Elections and Parties in South Korea Before and After Transition to Democracy.” *Party Politics*, 11:6 (2005).

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<sup>61</sup> Gerber et al., “Voting May be Habit Forming”; Plutzer, “Becoming a Habitual Voter.”

<sup>62</sup> Chong Bin Yoon, “An Analysis of Issue of Presidential Impeachment in the 17th National Election.” *Party Studies Journal* 4: 1 (2005) (in Korean).

<sup>63</sup> Lee and Yu, “The Effect of Social Capital on Political Participation.”

<sup>64</sup> Page, *Who Deliberates*.

<sup>65</sup> Andy Baker, Ames Bary, and Renno Lucio, “Social Context and Campaign Volatility in New Democracies: Networks and Neighborhoods in Brazil’s 2002 Election,” *American Journal of Political Science* 50:2 (2006).

<sup>66</sup> Rosenstone and Hansen, *Mobilization*,

<sup>67</sup> Huckfeldt and Sprague, “Networks in Context”; *Citizens, Politics, and Social Communication*.

<sup>68</sup> Kenny, “Political Participation”

<sup>69</sup> Leighley, “Attitudes, Opportunities, and Incentives”; McClurg, “Political Disagreement”