Students’ Role in Democratization:  
A Case Study of the Republic of Korea  
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Abstract

Students have had a significant role in the shaping and development of democracy in the Republic of Korea. They were the front-liners in the main resistance against Rhee Syngman, Park Chung Hee, and Chun Doo Hwan’s respective dictatorial/military regimes during the 1960s, ’70s, and ‘80s. They organized protests and educated the masses on their rights as citizens, their estate of political deprivation, and prospects for a better future. Students transformed political rights into a priority and earned the support from laborers, peasants, and the elite in particular. Although students faced many challenges, their perseverance, flexibility, strategic abilities, and personal relations in combination with the above efforts, ultimately led to the successful introduction of democratic principles to the South Korean political arena. The Korean case suggests that students are indeed the catalyst for political change; however, popular support is indispensable to effect change in the political system of a nation.