

Discussion for "Promoting Human Rights and Democracy in Today's World: Digital Activism, Popular Culture and Environmental Advocacy Among South Korean Youth"

Ki Eun Ryu

1. Causal mechanism

The idea that law evolves through civic participation is compelling, but in this presentation the causal link is not sufficiently demonstrated.

To prove causation more convincingly, we would need:

- Comparative evidence: Were there reform efforts that succeeded or failed depending on the presence of public mobilization? If legal change only occurred when protests happened, that would strongly support the demosprudence claim.
- Ruling out common causes: Perhaps both activism and reform were influenced by third factors—such as international human rights norms, media pressure, or party strategies. In that case, activism may correlate with reform but not directly cause it.

2. Case Study Differences

The three cases—deepfake regulation, democratic crisis and impeachment, and climate litigation—are very different in nature: The democracy/impeachment case involved broad-based, cross-generational mobilization and was politically divisive. Climate litigation was largely youth-driven but limited to activist circles and not widely embraced across society. Deepfake regulation was pushed strongly by feminist and youth groups, yet it had a narrower scope of participation compared to the mass protests for democracy.

This raises the question: are these truly the same type of "youth activism," or do they reflect distinct logics of mobilization depending on the issue? Should youth activism be treated as a single category, or analyzed in terms of issue salience, generational consensus, and identity politics?

3. Critical approach for K-pop Fandom based Activism

The focus on K-pop and fandom activism is innovative and highlights how culture intersects with politics, but it also brings challenges.

Is fandom activism sustainable in the long term, or is it more episodic, tied to symbolic events?

Does this type of activism only attract those already predisposed to engagement, while alienating others who view it as trivializing politics?

Potential downsides: Risk of depoliticization, where entertainment and “festival-like” forms overshadow substantive debate. / Possibility of instrumentalization by political actors or commercial interests./ Reinforcement of exclusionary dynamics, such as gendered divisions in participation.

A deeper analytical approach would be needed to evaluate not just the mobilizing power of fandom, but also its structural limits, sustainability, and unintended consequences for democracy.

4. Korean Exceptionalism and Generalizability

The presentation highlights Korea’s unique protest culture, shaped by democratization struggles and strengthened by cultural resources such as K-pop fandoms.

This is valuable, but it raises the question of whether the framework can travel beyond Korea.

Would similar demosprudential dynamics—where youth activism directly influences law—be observable in other democracies such as Taiwan, Chile, or European countries with strong student/youth movements?

If not, the argument risks becoming a Korea-specific story rather than a broader theoretical contribution. For greater impact, the scope conditions of this argument need to be clarified: under what circumstances can the Korean case be generalized?