

Chapter 5. Public conflicts and trust

This chapter explores the relationship between public conflicts and institutional trust¹ in Korea. It emphasizes that the lack of effective mechanisms to prevent and resolve frequent and prolonged public conflicts in Korea may have generated a climate of distrust and animosity. In turn, based on evidence from the OECD-KDI survey, it argues that by endorsing innovative forms of conflict management such as sharing information on controversial policy issues before a decision is made, consulting public opinions early on and incorporating such opinions in the final decision, engaging relevant stakeholders in the creation of solutions, and finding facts jointly with stakeholders, a virtuous cycle transforming relations between citizens and public institutions from adversarial into collaborative could be created.

Introduction

While the public's trust in government and in fellow citizens is the foundation for collaboration and social cohesion (Fukuyama, 1995), prolonged or frequent conflicts between the public and government are likely to create a vicious circle of distrust and further conflict within society. In other words, a history of conflict is likely to express itself in low level of trust, preventing collaboration and producing low levels of commitment, strategies of manipulation, and dishonest communications – further decreasing already low levels of trust (Ansell and Gash, 2008).

The level of public trust in many countries is generally low, and decreasing (OECD, 2017). Policy making in a democracy, for instance to distribute scarce resources or set standards of various kinds (such as regulations for public health and environmental protection), as well as moral disagreement on policies, are likely to create conflict between the public and the government (OECD, 2010).

With a background of low level of public trust, inevitable public conflicts around policy are difficult for governments to manage without a vicious circle ensuing. Ineffective government conflict management may decrease trust further, leaving government and public locked in a downward spiral. However, effective conflict management may help to rebuild trust, break out of the vicious circle and move into a virtuous circle.

South Korea provides a good context for research into the relationships between public conflicts, government conflict management and the level of public trust. Public trust in government in Korea has been very low; almost seven out of ten citizens did not trust the government in Korea in 2014, ranking Korea 26th out of 41 OECD member countries according to *Government at a Glance* (OECD, 2015). Since its democratisation in 1987, an increasing number of conflicts around public policies or projects (e.g. large infrastructure projects, welfare policies, education policies, urban planning) has incurred a high social cost (Kim and Cha, 2001; Lee et al., 2014; Park, 2009; Park, 2010). Korea was in the group of countries with the greatest severity of public conflicts in 2009 (Park, 2009) and ranked 27th of 34 OECD member countries in terms of public conflict management capacity in 2011 (Chung and Ko, 2015).

This lack of effective mechanisms to prevent and resolve frequent and prolonged public conflicts in Korea may have generated a climate of distrust and animosity (Kim, 2014). Korea's score in terms of social cohesion is among the lowest for OECD member countries, although social cohesion has gradually increased since the early 2000s (Park, 2010).² Citizens are constantly exposed and increasingly tired of conflicts between politicians and serious public conflicts, such as over large infrastructure projects (e.g. the four major rivers restoration project in 2009-2011,³ and the relocation of the capital city in 2003-2012)⁴ and show disturbing levels of apathy about significant public issues (Kim, 2014).

Is Korea in such a vicious circle of public conflicts and lack of trust? If so, how can the country move into a virtuous circle of effective public conflict management and trust-building? There is little empirical research globally or in Korea on these questions. To get more insight into them, newly designed survey questions on public conflicts were added to the nationally representative survey introduced in Chapter 1, on public perceptions of trust in government, conducted by the Korea Development Institute (KDI) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and fielded in early 2016. This survey on public conflicts and public trust is the first effort in Korea to better understand 1) the general features of public conflicts in Korea; 2) public perceptions of government

conflict management; 3) the relationship between public conflicts and public trust; and 4) potential effects of improved conflict management on public trust in Korea.

This chapter begins by explaining the research methodology used to draw implications about the relationship between public conflicts and public trust in Korea. The outcomes of the analysis are then discussed to generate policy recommendations in order to break the vicious circle and move into a virtuous circle of effective conflict management, trust-building, and more collaborative governance in Korea.

Research methodology

Testing a vicious circle of conflict and trust involves two types of relations: first, public conflicts is associated with levels of public trust, and second, low levels of trust influence the occurrence of public conflicts. Without sequential observations over time, this research designed survey questions to ask Korean citizens whether they had experienced public conflicts in the past and how they would behave in a potential public conflict in the future.

A conceptual distinction reflected in the survey questions teases out public conflicts, perceptions of public conflicts and actual experience of public conflicts. Individual perceptions of public conflict and government conflict management may be formulated by media coverage alone, rather than by actual experience. Thus, understanding the impact of public conflicts on public trust more accurately requires an assessment of individuals' perceptions who have experienced public conflicts as stakeholders, and a comparison between these individuals' levels of trust in government with those who have not experienced public conflict.

This study defines individual experience as a stakeholder of public conflicts as “an experience or expectation that your personal or group’s interests were (or will be) affected negatively by government policies or projects (e.g. large infrastructure projects, welfare policies, education policies, urban planning) during the past three years (2013-2015).” People simply answered “yes” or “no”.

The survey question that measures trust in the government in a broad sense was: “How much confidence do you have in the government in the broad sense to act in the best interests of society?” The level of public trust in other public institutions was measured using the same question, naming each institution. Respondents rated their levels of trust on an 11-point scale, where 0 is “no confidence” and 10 is “complete confidence”. To test whether conflict experience in the past affected levels of public trust in public institutions negatively in Korea, a multiple variables regression analysis was conducted over the entire sample with control variables of gender, age, education, income and political ideology.

The study also tested the second relation: whether lower levels of public trust is associated with citizens' predisposition to generate more conflicts rather than collaboration. This research assumes that citizens' efforts to resolve a conflict that are more adversarial rights-based or power-based approaches, such as litigation or demonstration, are far costlier and likely to worsen relationships between stakeholders than an interests-based approach, such as negotiation and mediation (Ury, Brett and Goldberg, 1988). In some cases, people will ignore conflicts rather than face them, either because they perceive themselves as weak or because they trust the government. However, ignoring or avoiding conflicts may not satisfy people's interests in the long run but simply cause them to accumulate grievances.

In order to understand how Korean people would behave when face similar public conflicts in the future, the survey asked respondents to choose one of several choices for possible

behaviours including ignoring, interests-based approaches and rights-based or power-based approaches. For a more meaningful statistical analysis, their answers were grouped into five categories of approaches to conflict: 1) ignoring; 2) grievance-lodging activities; 3) rights-based approaches; 4) power-based approaches; and 5) negotiation. Multiple logistic regression analyses were conducted for each category in order to test whether Korean people with a lower trust in government will use more rights-based or power-based approaches that may reduce the level of trust, which implies a vicious circle of conflict and trust in Korea.

Survey outcomes

Demographic characteristics of respondents and various kinds of public conflicts in Korea

According to the survey results 13% of respondents reported to have experienced various public conflicts as stakeholders between 2013 and 2015. Table 5.1 describes the demographic characteristics of the respondents according to several variables. The data suggests that middle-aged, progressive, more educated, relatively rich, male respondents experienced more conflicts than others.

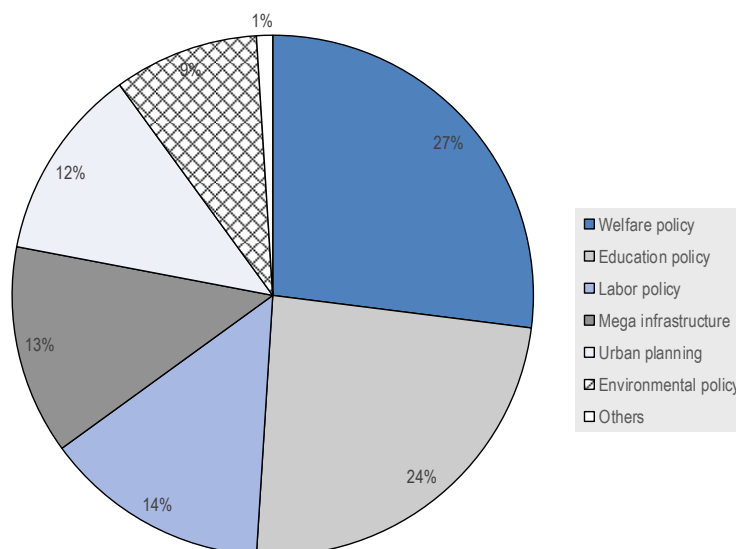
Table 5.1. Demographic characteristics of respondents

Variables	3,000	Percentage (%)	
		Citizens who had experienced public conflicts directly as a stakeholder (N=397)	Citizens who had not experience public conflicts (N=2,603)
Age			
20s	538	71 (13%)	467 (87%)
30s	636	99 (16%)	537 (84%)
40s	670	122 (18%)	548 (82%)
50s	536	63 (12%)	473 (88%)
60 and above	620	42 (7%)	578 (93%)
Gender			
Male	1 467	218 (15%)	1 249 (85%)
Female	1 533	179 (12%)	1 354 (88%)
Education			
No schooling	8	2 (25%)	6 (75%)
Elementary school	132	7 (5%)	125 (95%)+
Middle school	177	4 (2%)	173 (98%)
High school	948	84 (9%)	864 (91%)
Vocational college	502	61 (12%)	441 (88%)
Four-year university	1 176	212 (18%)	964 (82%)
Master's degree	51	24 (47%)	27 (53%)
Doctoral degree	6	3 (50%)	3 (50%)
Income			
<24m KRW	2 480	299 (12%)	2 181 (88%)
24-36m KRW	748	90 (12%)	658 (88%)
36-48m KRW	353	53 (15%)	300 (85%)
48-60m KRW	156	25 (16%)	131 (84%)
>60m KRW	56	15 (27%)	41 (73%)
Political preference			
Very progressive	109	25 (23%)	84 (77%)
Progressive	782	132 (17%)	650 (83%)
Neutral	1 393	151 (11%)	1 242 (89%)
Conservative	638	75 (12%)	563 (88%)
Very conservative	78	14 (18%)	64 (82%)

Note: N – number of respondents; m KRW – million Korean won.

Public conflicts that respondents experienced directly between 2013 and 2015 related to welfare policy, education policy, labour policy, mega-infrastructure projects, urban planning and environmental policy (Figure 5.1).

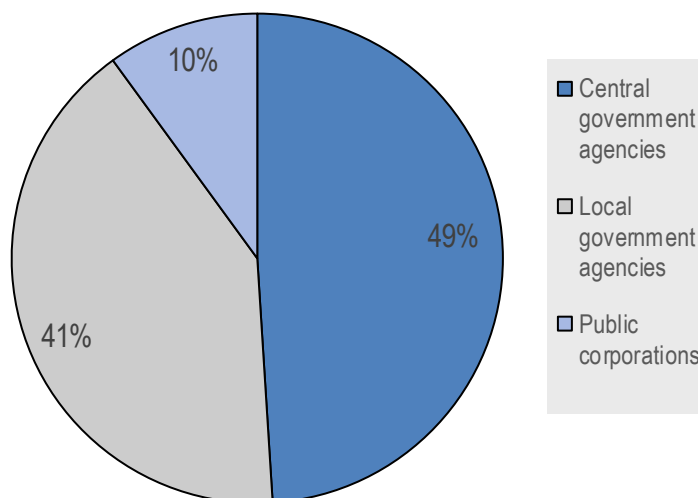
Figure 5.1. Policies for which respondents experienced public conflicts in Korea, 2013-2015



Note: 397 households experienced conflict and each household could select various types of conflicts. A total of 766 answers are from 397 households.

Those who had experienced public conflicts perceived that central government (49%), local governments (41%) and public corporations (10%) were responsible for them (Figure 5.2). Public corporations, such as KEPCO (Korea Electric Power Company) and K-Water, implement development projects and deal with residents who oppose those projects.

Figure 5.2. Public institutions perceived as responsible for public conflicts

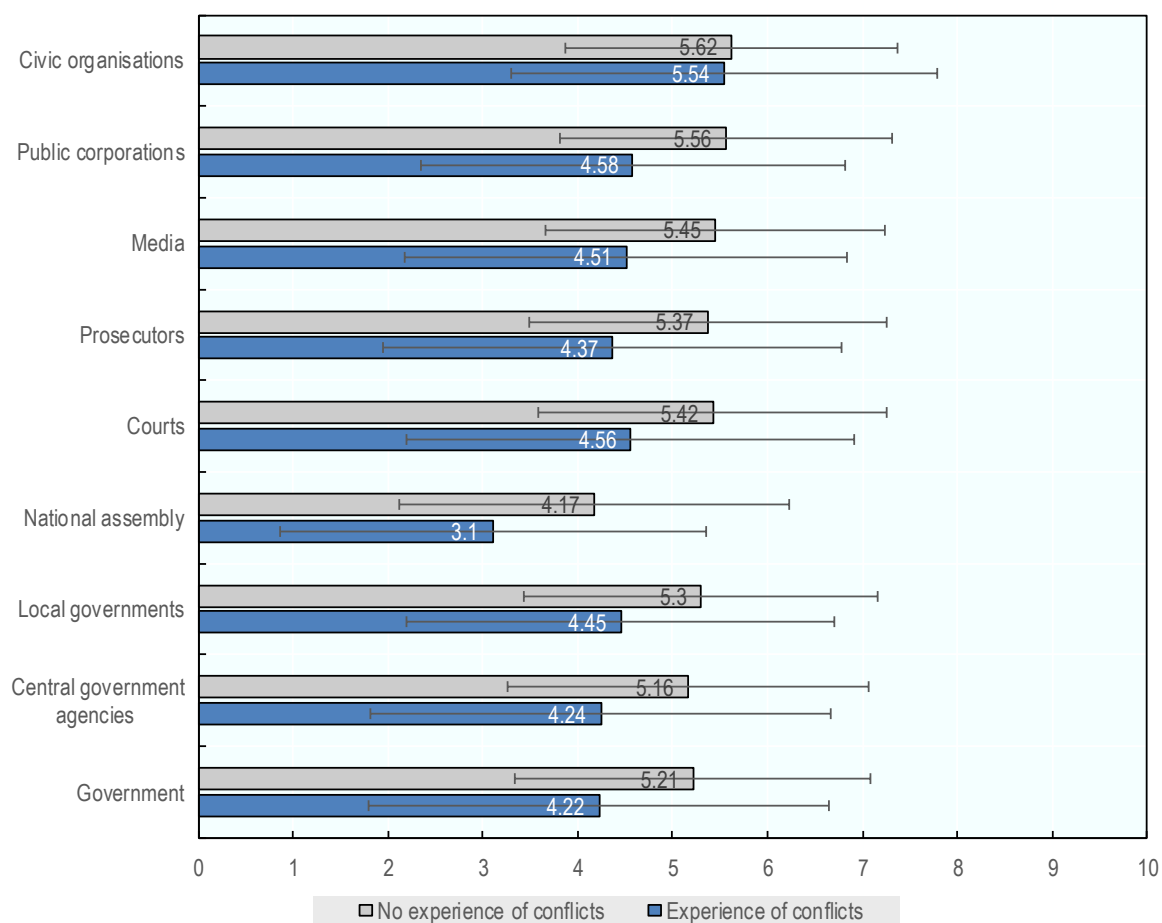


Note: 397 households experienced conflict and each household could select various institutions responsible for public conflicts. A total of 572 answers are from 397 households.

Impact of conflict experience on public trust

Figure 5.3 depicts the mean values of trust in various institutions perceived by people who have experienced public conflicts (N=397) compared to people who have not (N=2 603). In general, people who had experienced public conflicts seem to show less trust in various institutions. Where 5.0 is interpreted as a medium level of trust, those who had experienced public conflicts had mean values of institutional trust lower than 5.0, except in the case of civic organisations (5.54). The National Assembly scored the lowest mean values of public trust in both cases.

Figure 5.3. Institutional trust and individual experience of public conflict



Note: 0 means “No confidence” and 10 means “Complete confidence”. Numbers are mean values.

A multiple variables regression analysis controlling variables of gender, age, education, income and political ideology suggests that when a person has experienced a public conflict in Korea, the level of his or her trust in government is lower than that of a person who has not ($\beta = -.943$, $p < .001$) (Table 5.2). Considering all the significant control variables, experience of public conflict seems the most powerful predictor of level of public trust. The negative relationship between conflict experience and public trust in Korea suggests that government conflict management or citizens’ behaviour (or strategy) in conflict was not effective or satisfactory enough to build trust in government.

Table 5.2. Results of multiple variables regression of conflict experience and public trust in government

Variables	Trust in government			
	β	Std. Err.	t	VIF
Constant	4.36	.149	29.28	-
Control variables	- .103			
Male	.018***	.081	5.40	1.32
Age	-.408*	.003	-1.28	1.86
Education (\leq middle school)	-.096	.161	-2.54	1.98
Education (high school)	-.110	.099	-.98	1.70
Education (vocational college)	.196	.103	-1.06	1.21
Income: poor (12 m~24 m KRW)	.106	.101	1.95	1.30
Income: medium (24m~60m KRW)	.274	.094	1.13	1.75
Income: rich (\geq 60m KRW)	-.633**	.243	1.13	1.15
Very progressive	.012	.192	-3.29	1.05
Progressive	.383***	.087	.14	1.19
Conservative	.103	.095	4.04	1.22
Very conservative		.227	.46	1.05
Independent variable				
Conflict experience	-.943***	.106	-8.91	1.04
F		14.05***		
Adjusted R ²		.058		

Note: β stands for the regression coefficient or the size or the change of value in the dependent variable corresponding to the unit change in the independent variable * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$. P – probability value or statistical significance. The results of the F test indicate the joint significance of a group of variables. The adjusted R² indicates the percentage of variation explained by only the independent variables that actually affect the dependent variable

To estimate the effect of individual experience of public conflict on the levels of trust in each of the various public institutions, this study uses the same as previously presented multiple variables regressions approach (Table 5.3). The statistical results suggest negative relationships between conflict experience and levels of trust in all the various public institutions, and different degrees of impact of conflict experience. The impact of conflict experience was the largest ($\beta = -1.01$) on the level of trust in the National Assembly and the lowest ($\beta = -7.60$) on the level of trust in local government in Korea. The different characteristics (e.g. frequency, severity or scope) of public conflicts that had something to do with each public institution may have influenced the relationship between conflict experience and levels of trust in different public institutions.

Table 5.3. Results of multiple variables regression of conflict experience and trust in various public institutions in Korea

Variables	Trust in				
	Central government agency	Local government	National assembly	Court	Public corporation
Constant	4.31	4.48	3.76	4.84	4.96
Control variables					
Male					
Age					
Education (≤Middle School)	-.036	-.136	-.087	-.213**	-.214**
Education (High school)	.018***	.017***	.008*	.013***	.014***
Education (Vocational college)	-.294	.072	.025	-.213	-.122
Income_Poor (12 m~24 m KRW)	-.135	.045	.138	-.170	-.121
Income_Medium (24m~60m KRW)	-.059	.001	.114	-.040	.031
Income_Rich (≥60m KRW)	.170	.058	.026	.169	.114
Very progressive	.063	.099	-.054	.146	.163
Progressive	.166	.118	-.114	.069	-.385
Conservative	-.541**	-.385*	-.218	-.568**	-.311
Very conservative	-.012	.024	.120	.078	.035
Independent variable					
Conflict experience	.402***	.191*	.154	.329***	.186*
<i>F</i>	.172	-.165	-.768**	-.183	-.101
<i>Adjusted R</i> ²					
Conflict experience	-.882***	-.760***	-1.01***	-.811***	-.914***
<i>F</i>	12.61***	11.32***	9.69***	10.20***	11.95***
<i>Adjusted R</i> ²	.052	.047	.041	.043	.050

Note: *p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001. P – probability value or statistical significance. The results of the F test indicate the joint significance of a group of variables. The adjusted R2 indicates the percentage of variation explained by only the independent variables that actually affect the dependent variable

Impact of the level of trust in government on individual conflict approaches

As shown in the previous section, individual experience of public conflict in Korea appears to lower the level of trust in government and other public institutions. So how will these current lower levels of public trust affect individual choice of conflict approaches in the future? If people with a lower trust in government tend to resort more to rights-based or power-based approaches, there may be a vicious circle between conflict and trust in Korea.

Survey respondents were asked to choose one approach they would use to address public conflict in the future (Table 5.4). Their answers were grouped again into five categories of conflict approaches (Table 5.5). Grievance-lodging activities include signing a petition or meeting with a National Assembly member. The rights-based approach covers administrative litigation only. Power-based approaches refer to signature campaigns, press conferences, alliances with another group or demonstrations. The negotiation category includes citizen negotiation with government, or multi-party collaborative governance.

Table 5.4. Potential approaches to public conflict in the future

Categories of individual approach	Frequency
Ignoring	1 327 (44.2%)
Filing a petition	641 (21.4%)
Meeting with a National Assembly member	16 (0.5%)
Participating in a signature campaign	492 (16.4%)
Organising a press conference	12 (0.4%)
Pursuing legal action against the administration	220 (7.3%)
Building an alliance with another group	87 (2.9)
Engaging in a demonstration	113 (3.8%)
Negotiation with government	20 (0.7%)
Participating in a multi-party forum	65 (2.2%)
Other	7 (0.2%)
Total	3 000 (100%)

Table 5.5 shows the approaches chosen by both groups of citizens with and without conflict experience. Citizens with conflict experience chose more power-based approaches (39.5%), the rights-based approach (9.4%) and negotiation (4.0%) to deal with public conflict in the future than citizens without it. Almost 50% of citizens with conflict experience in Korea seem to choose relying on power-based or rights-based approaches to address public conflict in the future. Also 26% of them would ignore it. Those potential patterns of public behaviour in conflict situations would make conflict management more difficult, incurring higher social costs and lowering trust between citizens and government.

Table 5.5. Individual approaches by citizens who have or have not experienced public conflict

Categories of individual approaches to public conflict	Citizens with experience of public conflicts <i>N=395 (100%)</i>	Citizens without experience of public conflicts <i>N=2 598 (100%)</i>
Ignoring	104 (26.3%)	1 223 (47.1%)
Grievance	82 (20.8%)	575 (22.1%)
Rights-based approach	37 (9.4%)	183 (7.0%)
Power-based approach	156 (39.5%)	548 (21.1%)
Negotiation with government	16 (4.0%)	69 (2.7%)

Note: N= number of respondents.

A multiple logistic regression⁵ was conducted to analyse the impact of the level of public trust on individual choice of conflict behaviour (Table 5.6). Marginal effects after logistic regression show that public trust has a positive relationship with the ignoring approach and a negative relationship with the rights-based and power-based approaches, which implies that levels of trust in government may affect individual behaviours in addressing public conflict. If levels of trust increase (or decrease) by one unit, then the willingness to use a power-based approach may decrease (or increase) by 2.2%, and the willingness to use a rights-based approach may decrease (or increase) by 0.5%. Also, the ignoring approach will increase by 3.5% when the level of trust increases by one unit.

Table 5.6. Individual conflict approaches in the future and their relation to trust: logistic regression

Variables	Potential future approaches to conflict				
	Ignoring	Grievance-lodging	Rights-based	Power-based	Negotiation
Control variables					
Male	-.170	.025	.029**	-.042*	.021**
Age	-.002	.002*	-.000	-.001	-.000
Education (≤middle school)	1.27***	-.096***	-.033*	-.124***	-.014
Education (high school)	.524***	-.033	-.023*	-.057**	.003
Education (vocational college)	.600***	-.009	-.027*	-.091***	.006
Income: poor (12m~24m KRW)	.139	.005	-.001	-.030	-.002
Income: medium (24m~60m KRW)	.129	.008	-.012	.002	-.014*
Income: rich (≥60m KRW)	-.411	.072	.025	.023	-.006
Very progressive	.244	-.031	-.034*	.014	.016*
Progressive	-.066	-.017	-.010	.021	-.004
Conservative	-.055	.028	.003	-.017	.015
Very conservative	-.219	-.032	.059	.006	
Independent variable					
Trust in government	.036***	-.006	-.005*	-.022***	-.002
χ^2	177.74***	29.45**	40.67***	102.55***	26.87**
Pseudo R ²	.043	.009	.026	.031	.035

Note Logistic regression is similar to linear regression analysis except that the outcome is dichotomous (e.g. yes/no) multiple logistic regression analysis applies when there is a single dichotomous outcome and more than one independent variable. χ^2 indicate the joint significance of a group of variables. The Pseudo R² indicates the percentage of variation explained by only the independent variables that actually affect the dependent variable

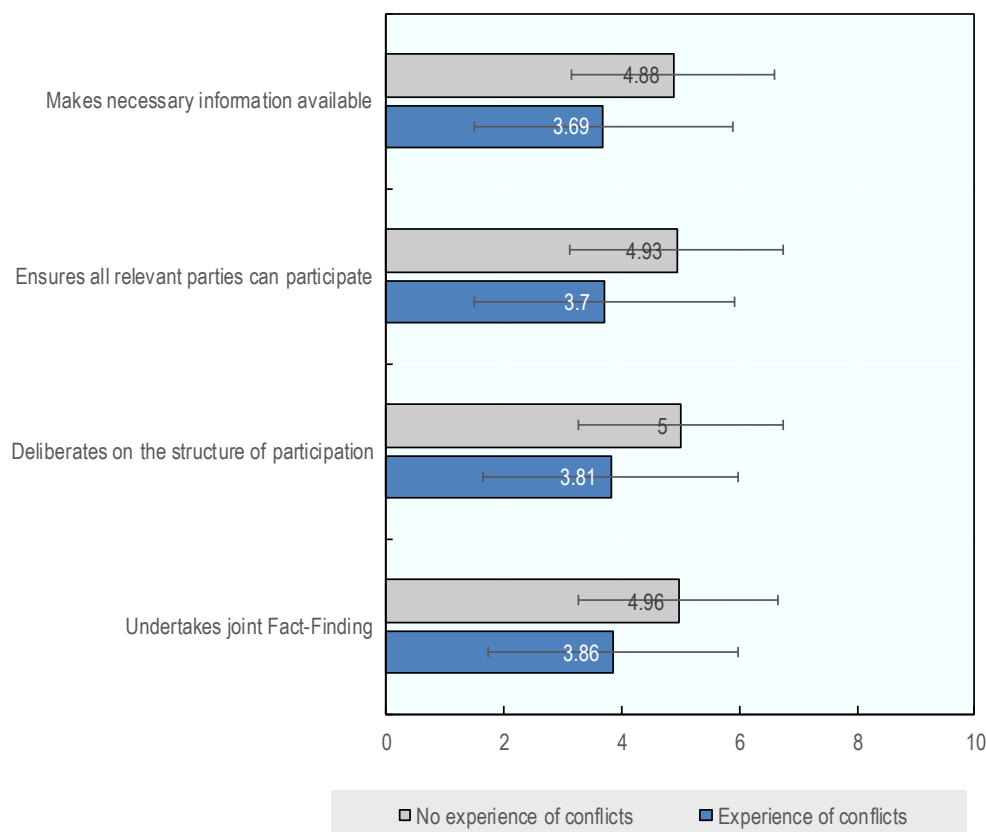
Public perception of conflict management by government

In order to understand how the public perceives conflict management by central government, the survey asks how much people agree that central government: 1) makes necessary information available in order to resolve public conflicts; 2) ensures that all the relevant stakeholders are involved in a collaborative governance committee; 3) deliberates with stakeholders on the structure of collaborative processes, such as scope of participants, agendas, timetable, and a decision-making rule in advance; and 4) makes an effort to fact-find jointly with stakeholders and experts when they face scientific and technical uncertainty in a conflict.

Mean values of public perceptions of the performance of conflict management by central government are relatively low (less than 5.0) (Figure 5.4). For those who have experienced conflicts before, the mean values of their perception are much lower (below 4.0).

Figure 5.4. Public perceptions of conflict management by central government

Answers to survey question: “How much do you agree that central government does the following?” 0 means “Completely disagree” and 10 means “Completely agree”.



Note: Numbers are mean values and error bars represent standard deviation.

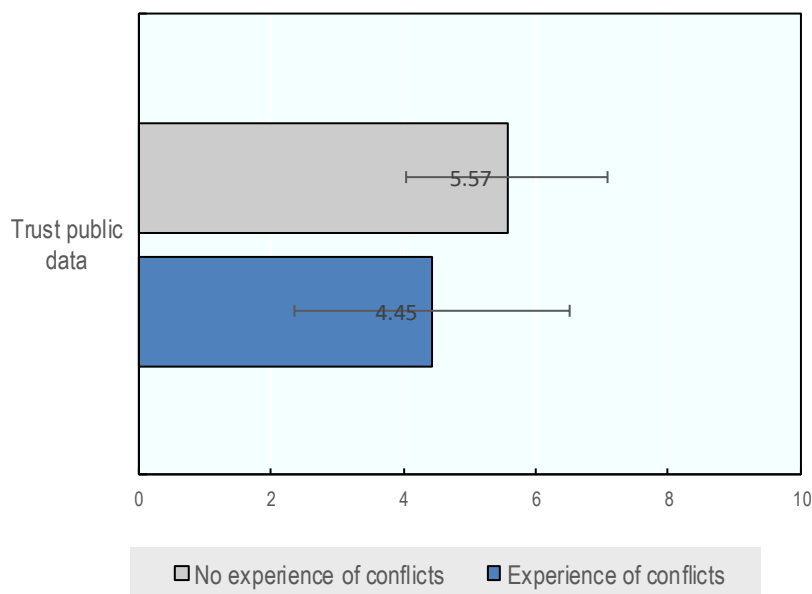
Trust in data from public institutions

Public conflicts resulting from government policies and projects often involve scientific or technical uncertainties about their impacts or consequences. In such a situation, trust in scientific or technical evidence, including data, from the government is very important in decision making. However, conflict often induces “advocacy science”, where different stakeholders use their own experts strategically to attack the legitimacy of data from others, which makes conflict resolution difficult (Ozawa and Susskind, 1985; Wynne, 1992). For example, experts from both camps for and against the four major river restoration projects in Korea disputed the potential environmental impacts of the project.

Responding to the survey question about trust in data produced by the government and public corporations regarding controversial public policies and projects, Korean people showed moderate levels of trust in the data generated by those institutions (Figure 5.5). However, people with conflict experience trusted the data less (4.45 out of 10) than people without experience of conflicts (5.57 out of 10).

Figure 5.5. Trust in public data

Answers to survey question: “How much do you trust data from public institutions?” 0 means “Not at all” and 10 means “Completely”



Note: Numbers are mean values and error bars represent standard deviations.

A virtuous circle: Effective conflict management and public trust

According to data and statistical analyses from the questionnaire survey in this study, public conflicts in the past and citizens’ conflict behaviours appear to lower levels of trust in various public institutions in Korea. This implies that there is plenty of room to improve government conflict management. Without any change or improvement in this area, the Korean people are highly likely to keep experiencing a vicious circle of more serious and frequent public conflicts, and even less trust, which may prevent collaborative governance in Korea.

How can the Korean government change the situation from a vicious circle and move into a virtuous circle, managing conflict effectively and therefore helping to build trust through more collaborative governance mechanisms, rather than rights-based or power-based approaches? In order to assess whether there are any positive expectations that the government and public can curb this trend, people were asked a few questions in the survey.

Belief in others’ public-mindedness

People were asked if they believed that other stakeholders in conflict situations in Korea were “public-minded”– in other words, can people overcome their self-interest and consider public interests in conflicts? If they trust others’ public-mindedness more, it may be more possible to engage people in collective discussions or deliberation to seek public interests collectively. If, however, they consider other citizens to be simply maximising their own self-interest, then people tend to compete rather than collaborate.

Survey respondents showed modest levels of trust in other stakeholders’ public-mindedness in conflict situations, although people with conflict experience had lower levels

of trust (4.67 out of 10) than those without (5.61 out of 10) (Figure 5.6). These levels of trust among citizens may be used as a foundation on which to build more trust in each other through various conflict-prevention or resolution mechanisms.

Figure 5.6. Perceptions of other stakeholders' public-mindedness in public conflicts

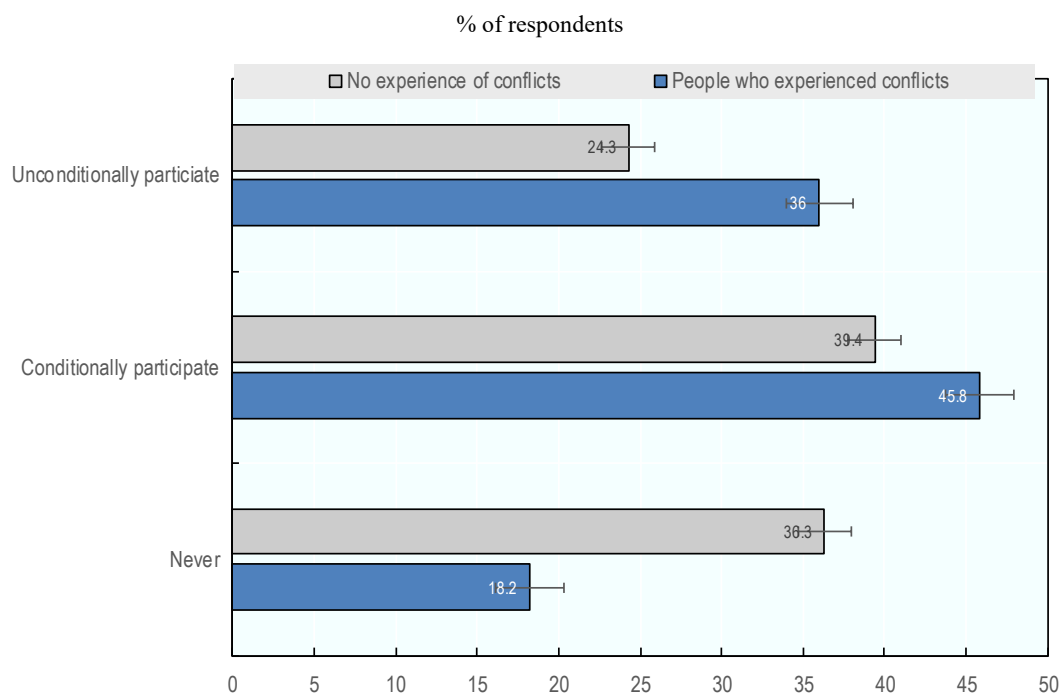
Answers to survey question: “How much do you think other stakeholders were ‘public-minded’ in conflicts you have experienced?” 0 means “Not at all” and 10 means “Very much so”



Note: Numbers are mean values and error bars represent standard deviations

Another survey question assesses people’s willingness to participate in “deliberative polling”, an innovative way to consult the public through citizens discussing controversial public issues with other citizens and with policy makers. Empirical studies show that people engaging in deliberative polls may create social capital (interpersonal and institutional trust), since participants may form a habit of deliberation with other ordinary citizens, hence trust-building (Ackerman and Fishkin, 2004). If a deliberative poll is prepared and managed fairly, and decision makers take the results seriously, participants and the general public may put more trust in politicians and the government agencies that endorse the poll.

Interestingly, people with conflict experience showed more willingness to participate in deliberative polling (81.8 %) than people without (63.7%), whether their participation in a deliberative poll was conditional (i.e. contingent on child care services or transportation cost reimbursement) and unconditional (Figure 5.7). Only 18.2% of people with conflict experience answered that they would never participate in a deliberative poll, while 36.3% of people without conflict experience expressed no interest in participating. This distribution of answers implies that people who are not satisfied with the government’s conventional conflict management, even if they have little trust in the government, are willing to participate in alternative ways of conflict management or participatory decision making – as long as they are given the opportunity to participate and appropriate conditions for their participation are met.

Figure 5.7. Public willingness to participate in a deliberative poll

How conflict management could help increase public trust

Can Korean citizens trust the government more if public conflict is managed more effectively by the government? In order to assess the potential impacts of effective conflict management on public trust, we asked citizens how government improvements of certain components of conflict management might affect their level of trust in government. Three components of effective conflict prevention and conflict resolution were defined in the survey question: “In order to prevent a public conflict, the government should 1) make any necessary information on a proposed policy available to the public and important stakeholders before a decision is made; 2) actively consult important stakeholders and the public; and 3) incorporate the resulting opinions in actual policies. Also, in order to resolve a public conflict, the government should 1) provide the necessary information about controversial public issues for important stakeholders and the public; 2) ensure that all the relevant stakeholders participate in conflict resolution processes; and 3) allow stakeholders to deliberate on the structure of the process.”

As a whole, respondents expected that the improvement in each component of conflict management of the government would increase public trust (averages were between 5.31 and 5.41) (Table 5.7). The numerical values of the answers do not represent the level of public trust, but the degrees of change in the level of trust in government. The potential impacts of each government activity on the level of public trust should be tested empirically in actual cases of conflict management in Korea in the future.

Table 5.7. Potential impacts of conflict management on public trust

Answer surveys to the question: How much do you think your level of trust in the government would change if it took the following actions prior to or following a public conflict?

0 means no change and 10 means a lot of change

Conflict prevention	Average	Standard deviation
Make necessary information available to the public and important stakeholders	5.31	1.82
Actively consult important stakeholders and the general public	5.37	1.87
Incorporate resulting opinions in actual policies	5.37	1.87
Conflict resolution		
Provide necessary information to important stakeholders and the public	5.38	1.85
Involve all the relevant stakeholders in conflict resolution processes	5.38	1.91
Deliberate on the structure of the process jointly	5.41	1.89

Note: Total number of respondents 3 000.

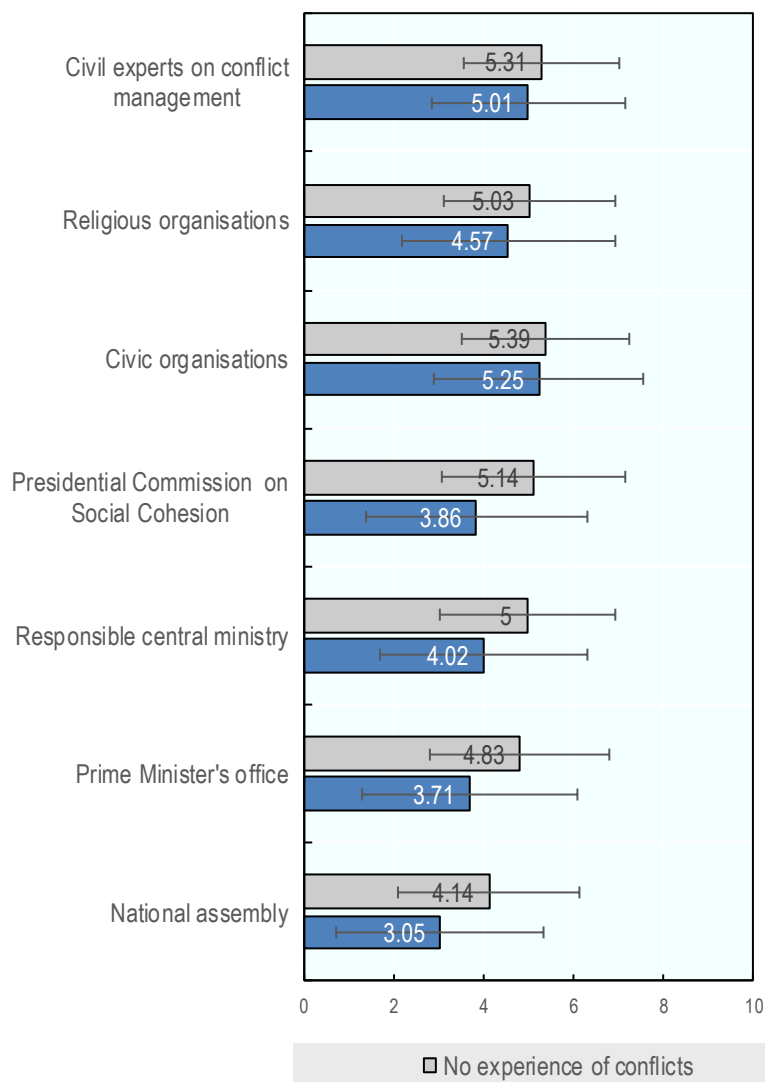
A convening role for institutions

The lack of public trust in government often makes it difficult for the government to convene or initiate a conflict management process that could involve multiple stakeholders in collaborative governance. In this case, other institutions or actors could play a convening role. Assuming that the level of trust in convening institutions and actors may affect stakeholders' motivation to participate in a collaborative process, we asked citizens how much they would trust a multi-stakeholder process convened by a specific institution.

Regardless of their experience of conflict, respondents to the survey said that they would not trust a multi-stakeholder process convened by the National Assembly, but would have more confidence in processes convened by experts on conflict management or civic organisations than by other institutions (Figure 5.8). People with conflict experience tended to trust a collaborative process less than people without. Particularly for those who had experienced conflict, a multi-stakeholder process would not be trusted much, unless convened by civic organisations (trust level of 5.25) and civil experts on conflict management (trust level of 5.01). These results imply that Korean citizens believe a multi-stakeholder process, if necessary, may have a higher chance of success if it is initiated, endorsed, or advised by civic organisations and experts on conflict management.

Figure 5.8. Trust in a multi-stakeholder process convened by various institutions and actors

Answers to survey question: “How much would you trust a multi-stakeholder collaborative process convened by the following?” 0 means “Not at all” and 10 means “Completely”



Note: Numbers are mean values and error bars represent standard deviations.

Opportunities for policy action

Public conflicts are an unavoidable component of modern democratic societies. However, such conflicts can be managed in ways that prevent them from becoming unnecessarily harmful, incurring a high social cost and reducing trust between stakeholders and in the government.

There are two possible dynamics linking trust in public institutions with conflict or co-operation: a vicious circle and a virtuous one. According to the survey answered by Korean citizens for this report, individual experience of public conflicts in the past seems

to lower the level of trust in government. In turn, public perceptions of conflict management by the government in Korea are relatively negative. Perceived low levels of transparency, participation, representation of consulted opinions and joint-fact finding are influencing negatively public trust. Consequently, rights-based or power-based approaches to address public conflicts are more common than multi-stakeholder or collaborative governance processes reinforcing patterns of low institutional trust.

The results presented in this case study shed light on perceptions and behaviour patterns of the Korean population about social conflict as well as the relation between conflict and trust in government institutions. However, an open research agenda exists to investigate why the public in Korea is more prone to using ineffective conflict strategies, such as power-based or rights-based approaches. Some hypotheses that could be tested with additional empirical research are the following: are people who perceive themselves as weak when faced with a powerful government are likely to use power-based strategies in try to appear powerful before they negotiate with the government? Or have people learned from their experience that power-based approaches, such as demonstrations, are the most effective tool to get more from the government? Or, May people choose to use power-based or rights-based approaches simply because no other opportunities are given to them, such as dialogue, negotiation or deliberation. In turn, a variety of policy actions could be considered to address each of these patterns. For example, designing mechanisms to empower seemingly weak stakeholders, reviewing communication methods and channels between government and the public (see Chapter 5), or considering the adoption of additional participation mechanisms.

More generally government efforts to reduce the number and severity of public conflicts through innovative and effective forms of conflict management may help increasing public trust in Korea. For such purpose, the roles and capacities of public sector institutions in managing public conflicts will be crucial. In particular the identification of mechanisms and processes influencing the drivers of trust in public institutions (e.g. transparency, openness, responsiveness and fairness). Sharing information on controversial policy issues transparently before a decision is made, consulting public opinions early on and incorporating such opinions in the final decision, engaging relevant stakeholders in the creation of solutions, deliberating the rules of participation together, and finding facts jointly with stakeholders are steps in the right direction.

A substantive body of academic and practical work relies on collaborative governance or multi-stakeholder processes have as a mechanism for conflict management in order to transform adversarial relationships among stakeholders into more collaborative ones, and therefore enhance trust in government institutions (Ansell and Gash, 2008; Beierle and Konisky, 2001; Glasbergen and Driessen, 2005; Imperial, 2005; Murdock, Carol and Sexton, 2005; Vangen and Huxham, 2003).

Notes

¹ This chapter was drafted by Dong-Young Kim (KDI School of Public Policy and Management).

² Park (2010) constructs the index of social cohesion that consists of two groups of sub-indexes (free and safe society, and social tolerance and public trust). For more details of datasets and methodological notes, please refer to Park (2010).

³ The rivers diversion and restoration project is a massive project covering South Korea's four main river systems. It aims to secure water resources, implement comprehensive flood control measures, improve water quality, restore river ecosystems, create multi-purpose spaces for local residents, and deliver watershed-based regional development. The project was proposed by the former South Korean president, Lee Myung-bak, in 2009 and was completed in October 2011. However, the project faced strong criticism from environmental non-government organisations and a group of scientific experts on the grounds that it would influence water quality and ecosystems negatively, and that the decision-making process was not democratic.

⁴ In 2003 President Roh Moo-hyun spearheaded the relocation of South Korea's capital city to a rural area in Korea's midlands, in order to ease chronic overcrowding in Seoul and redistribute the state's wealth. Although the constitutional court declared the plan unconstitutional in 2004, the South Korean government adjusted the original plan to create a new administrative capital by moving all the major government agencies. The public was evenly split on the issue and political parties engaged in the conflict from two opposing rationales: fairness and equality versus efficiency and competitiveness.

⁵ Logistic regression analysis is a popular and widely used analysis that is similar to linear regression analysis except that the outcome is dichotomous (e.g., success/failure, trust/don't trust, or yes/no). Simple logistic regression analysis refers to the regression application with one dichotomous outcome and one independent variable; multiple logistic regression analysis applies when there is a single dichotomous outcome and more than one independent variable.

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