

## **Master or Servant? Public Opinion, Polling, and Democratic Responsiveness in Korea and Beyond (with Taeku Lee)**

James Bryce famously declared that in the United States, "public opinion stands out ... as the great source of power, the master of servants who tremble before it." To Bryce's point, polling the public is commonly assumed to be a democratic practice—a scientifically-based proxy for instantaneous elections to enhance the marketplace of ideas and inform elite political actors. We interrogate this presumed role by examining political polling in the context of democratization. What does the practice of polling look like in the transition from authoritarianism to democracy? Do polls serve or subvert the aims of free and competitive elections? Drawing on 23 in-depth elite interviews of pollsters, journalists, campaign experts, and academics in Korea, we find a decidedly mixed account of high reliance on polling, endemic challenges to the quality of poll data, and generally poor understanding of the vulnerability of polling technology to error and manipulation. This is a critical and cautionary tale, with implications for the extant literatures on political responsiveness and democratic consolidation.