



An Analysis of the 17th General Elections in South Korea

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ABSTRACT. This paper discusses the results of the 17th general elections in South Korea held on April 15, 2004. Using relevant data from the website of the National Election Commission, the results demonstrate that the elections indeed changed the landscape of Korean democratic politics. Koreans made the ruling party the majority and replaced leading politicians of old with more liberal, neophyte, and younger politicians. They also brought more women into the National Assembly. Also, the results indicate the weakening of regionalism in the country. These are promising signs of advancement toward democratization in South Korea as more reform-oriented, liberal policies are expected in domestic and foreign affairs.

KEYWORDS. South Korea · 17th general elections · Korean politics

INTRODUCTION

The 17th general elections in South Korea were held on April 15, 2004. Around 35.6 million registered voters out of 48.2 million people elected one district representative and a party of his or her own choice. With the two different votes, electors selected 243 district representatives from each election district and 56 party representatives in proportion to the votes for each party nationwide. Composing the 17th National Assembly, these 299 parliamentarians took office on June 2, 2004 to fulfill the legislative function of the government in the next four years. Together with the president, these newly elected representatives will change the course of Korean politics as well as the nation's development. This is highlighted by the fact that the dominant role of the president was diminished in the area of domestic policymaking, while the National Assembly will play a larger role in major policy decision areas as a symbol of democratization in South Korean politics. In a sense, democratization refers to the decentralization of presidential power in

South Korea in recent years. What used to be monopolized power wielded by the central government, the president, and the executive branch is now shared with the local government and the legislative and judicial branches of government. Likewise, there is power sharing among the government, civil society, and business sectors.

POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF SOUTH KOREA, 1945 TO 2003

In the course of its history, Korea's political and economic development can be divided into three periods. The first period (1945-1960), characterized as the period of independence and nation building, started with the nation's liberation from Japanese colonial rule and subsequent division of the Korean peninsula by the Russian and American armies in 1945. The first government was established in the south as the Republic of Korea with the first general elections on May 10, 1948. In July of that same year, the first constitution was declared, culminating in the inauguration on August 15, 1948, of the first republic patterned after the American presidential system. It was the period when Koreans struggled to build the nation as an identical polity. However, political development was disrupted with the eruption of the Korean War in 1950, which devastated the whole country. This ended with a truce agreement between North Korea and the US in 1953. The first period ended with the student revolution against the dictatorship of founding president, Rhee Seung-man, in 1960. The ouster of the dictator led to the establishment of a parliamentary system of government, which was later designated as the Second Republic.

The military coup led by Gen. Park Chung-hee in 1961 marked the beginning of the second period (1961 to 1986) in Korean history. The presidential system of government was restored in 1963, designating itself as the Third Republic. Known as the period of national economic development, the first five-year economic development plan was devised and implemented strongly from 1962. The plan transformed the economy from agricultural to light industrial. At this time, Koreans endeavored to develop the nation economically. But this period of economic growth was matched by the curtailment of democracy. Park Chung-hee revised the constitution in 1972 and heightened dictatorship in the name of economic development. The revision of the constitution changed direct popular election to indirect

presidential election, ushering what is now known as the Fourth Republic. By this time, the economy began to change in emphasis from light to heavy industry. It was an era marked by major policies such as export-oriented economic development, two-child policy, and the new community (*Saemaetul*) movement.

Park Chung-hee's Fourth Republic ended when he was killed by one of his subordinates in 1979. Military strongman Chun Doo-hwan's power-grab elevated him to the presidency of the Fifth Republic in 1980. During this regime, the nation's economy shifted from heavy to high-technology industry.

A people power revolution in 1987 toppled this despotic regime and led to the beginning of the third period (1987 to the present) in South Korean history. This period ushered the struggle for democratic advancement. The popular uprising reestablished the democratic system of government through a change in the constitution. With direct popular presidential elections restored, the president was given a five-year term of office compared to the four-year term in the First and Third Republics, the six-year term during the Fourth Republic, and the seven-year tenure during the Fifth Republic. Roh Tae-woo was elected as the first president of the Sixth Republic in 1987.

Aside from the direct popular election of the president, the legislative branch was also given the power to impeach the president. The new constitution also provided for some elements of a parliamentary system, which makes the South Korean system unique. One feature of this system is the appointment of a prime minister by the president with the consent of the National Assembly. Originally patterned after the American federal system of government, the South Korean model was modified. Unlike the presidential federal system of the US, the South Korean version does not have a vice president and a senate. The constitution adopted a single-chamber system of legislature; the national government consists of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government, as well as the Constitutional Court and the National Election Commission. The executive branch is headed by the president who is elected directly by the people for a single five-year term of office (Korean Overseas Information Services 2003, 117-156).

With democratic space restored, South Korea successfully hosted the 24th Summer Olympics in Seoul for the first time in 1988. This led to the wide acknowledgment of South Korea as one of the Newly Industrialized Countries (NIC), together with Taiwan, Hong Kong,

and Singapore. Another event that stamped the country's reputation was the 1993 World Exposition which was held for the first time in Daejeon, South Korea, and mobilized more than ten million visitors. The year was also marked by the inauguration of the second president of the Sixth Republic, Kim Young-sam.

In 1997, South Korea was hit by the Asian financial crisis and was bailed out by the International Monetary Fund. Opposition presidential candidate Kim Dae-jung was elected as the third president of the Sixth Republic. In the midst of the financial crisis, the whole population was caught up in the worldwide trends of globalization and informatization (Park and Kim 2000, 133-155).

Another important event in South Korea's recent history was the 24th World Cup in 2002. Jointly hosted by Korea and Japan, this erased the so-called red-complex associated with the Korean people. In February 2003, Roh Moo-hyun was inaugurated as the fourth president of the Sixth Republic.

During the nation's economic and political development, most South Koreans had been inspired by Western political systems as well as perspectives regarding economic development. From the beginning, South Koreans favored the American and British systems of government, including their party systems. However, it should be recalled that South Koreans were mainly mobilized by dictatorships, and they have also suffered the horrors of war. In addition, South Koreans had been ruled by different parties in the course of its history. For instance, the Liberal Democratic Party was at the helm of government during the First Republic; the Democratic Party ruled the Second Republic, replaced in the Third Republic by the Democratic Republican Party, which continued to rule the Fourth Republic. The Democratic Justice Party reigned in the period of the Fifth Republic. The Sixth Republic, which opened up the democratic space in South Korea, is also characterized by the same constant changes in ruling parties through the years. The first president of the Sixth Republic came from the New Korean Party, which, by virtue of having the president from its roster, became the ruling party. In the succeeding terms of office, the following parties were considered as the ruling parties of the Sixth Republic during the respective terms of their presidents: Grand Korea Party (Kim Young-sam, second president), Peace and Democratic Party (Kim Dae-jung, third president), and the Open-We Party (Roh Moo-hyun, fourth president). These ruling parties, in effect, were sources of support for

the president and the corresponding republics they ruled. At present, the Open-We Party and the Grand Korea Party are the ruling party and the major opposition party, respectively.

THE 17TH GENERAL ELECTIONS

The run-up to, as well as the conduct of, the 17th general elections was strictly governed by the revised election rules. This resulted in a relatively short and restricted campaign period. This is in contrast to past elections in which the preelection campaign was hardly checked by the election authorities since the clause of punishment was not strong enough to prevent violations. The relatively short election process, which took only a few months, is a step forward in the advancement of democratization because of the strict application of the election rules and regulations by the National Election Commission. According to the rules, which were strictly enforced, those found guilty of campaign violations will be fined KRW 1 million (approximately USD 1,000) by the court. Apart from the strict enforcement of election rules, the 17th general elections were also held under peculiar circumstances—President Roh Moo-yun, who was inaugurated in 2003, was impeached by the National Assembly and was saved by the constitutional court supported by the people through the general elections of April 2004. The results of the election demonstrate, among other things, the public's aspiration for change. By giving the ruling party a majority of seats, the electorate enhanced the governing power of the impeached president.

A detailed analysis of the 17th general elections is required to understand the changing features of South Korean politics and society. Accordingly, this paper summarizes and evaluates the election results using data available from the National Election Commission website as well as online newspapers.

Major changes in the 17th general elections

South Korea experienced rapid economic development during the 1960s and 1970s. During this time, “Build while Fight[ing]” was the national slogan that symbolized the concentrated efforts of the people for economic development and national security. Also, South Koreans seemed to put more weight on economic development than on political democracy. South Koreans further experienced a new political

Table1. General features of the 15th, 16th, and 17th Korean elections

	15th (April 11, 1996)	16th (April 13, 2000)	17th (April 15, 2004)
Population (million)	45.5	47.0	48.2
Registered voters (million)	32.3	33.5	35.6
Turnout (%)	63.9	57.2	60.6
District representation seat	253	227	243
Proportional representation seat	46	46	56
Total	299	273	299
Majority party	New Korea Party	Grand Korea Party	Open-We Party
Votes won (%)	47.8	49.3	50.2
Seats won	121	112	150
Minority party	People's Assembly	Democrat Party	Grand Korea Party
Votes won (%)	26.1	42.3	41.1
Seats won	66	96	123
Third party	Liberal Association	Liberal Association	Labor Party
Votes won (%)	16.2	5.3	3.3
Seats won	41	12	10
Others			
Votes won (%)	9.9	3.0	5.3
Seats won	25	7	16

Source: National Election Commission, Republic of Korea, 2004.

development in the 1980s and 1990s. By that time, people began to ask for more political liberty rather than just material affluence.

Since South Korea entered the new millennium, it has aimed for economic and political development on par with most developed countries. This position is enhanced by the leading roles played by South Korea in informatization. Now, the people seem to be interested in both economic development and political democracy. South Koreans no longer need to sacrifice one for the other. Both issues are considered important, in addition to national security and unification.

Major results of the election

We can observe several trends in the general elections through an analysis of the data of the three most recent elections in Table 1.

From the data in Table 1, we can track the major trends in Korean politics in pursuit of democratization. First, the population increased slightly, with a corresponding increase in the number of voters. The population in the 17th elections (2004) was 48.2 million, which increased by 2.7 million (6 percent) from the 15th elections (1996). On the other hand, the number of voters during the 17th elections was 35.6 million, which increased by 3.3 million (10 percent) from the 15th

elections. This is an indication of the aging phenomenon experienced in the country in recent decades. In a decade, half a million more youngsters became eligible in the election. Among the youngsters, groups of supporters were formed and exercised political influence through the Internet (Yoon, Sung-yi 2004, 28). For example, the so-called Netizens—i.e., Internet citizens—organized RohSaMo (a society of those who love Roh Moo-hyun), campaigned for him, and exercised critical influence on the election results. The Open-We Party was more favorable to these young voters in the 17th general elections.

Second, the turnout rate of the voters have experienced fluctuataions. It was 63.9 percent in 1996, and decreased sharply in 2000 to 57.2 percent. It then increased to 60.5 percent in 2004. The turnout rate decreased in the 16th general elections due partly to the general public's perception that the election was less significant after the switching of the ruling party for the first time in South Korean history. Generally, the turnout rates of voters decrease as society matures in its democratic practices. The turnout rates of South Korean local elections, which have been held every four years since 1990, support this trend. Once the democratic system is installed, democratic participation declines in general.

Third, the number of representatives has generally declined, depending on the country's situation. For instance, it is noteworthy that 26 (10 percent) of the seats during the 16th National Assembly were reduced so that the government could deal with the 1997-1999 financial crisis. To cope with the national crisis, all branches of government were requested to reduce the bureaucracy by at least 10 percent. Accordingly, the 16th National Assembly had to accept the downsizing of the legislature. However, the numbers were restored during the 17th National Assembly after South Korea successfully overcame the crisis by the nation's all-out efforts. However, the number of seats was changed with the allocation of 10 more seats proportional to the votes given to the parties while reducing 16 seats from the election district representatives (Kim, Young-lae 2004, 13).

With the proportional increase in the number of seats, the political parties have been able to accommodate more female candidates for the election. More female representatives mean more democracy in South Korea, since equalization of sexes in politics has become a major political issue (Lee 2004, 106). However, the total number of representatives has been almost fixed in recent years. Theoretically, one

representative out of every 100,000 people might be desired; the general public, on the contrary, prefer a smaller number of representatives. The people have always considered the legislators' productivity low and, therefore, costly; hence the number of representatives cannot be increased drastically.

Fourth, the majority party has varied throughout South Korean electoral history. Each election has seen dramatic changes in the majority and minority parties as well as the third party. South Koreans have elected in a new majority party in every election in recent decades, specifically after the democratization process brought about by the 1987 people power revolution. Furthermore, as a result of the three consecutive elections, the majority party became the liberals (leftist and socialist in general) instead of the conservatives (rightist and capitalist in general). In Korea, liberals are associated with socialist ideals, labor, and North Korea, while conservatives are linked with capitalist ideals, management, and the United States. Liberals emphasize the value of equality over liberty and social distribution over economic growth, while conservatives emphasize the value of freedom over equity and economic growth over social distribution. During the economic development era, the conservatives governed and were overwhelmingly supported. The opposition party held power for the first time in South Korea as a result of the 1997 presidential elections (Kim, Ill-young 2004, 4).

In Korea, liberals are related to the left, while conservatives are related to the right. People in the left are generally more in favor of policies for economic distribution rather than economic growth. Also, they are more sympathetic to North Korea and less willing to follow American security policies regarding the Korean peninsula. They primarily belong to the younger generations who benefited from the results of economic development compared to the older generations who worked hard for economic development in the midst of poverty. Currently, the ruling party is regarded as liberal while the major opposition party is regarded as conservative. However, both liberals and conservatives are mixed in the two major parties in South Korea. This is one of the reasons why party reshuffling and reorganization are anticipated in the near future (Kim, Ill-young 2004, 11).

The third parties in South Korean politics range from the most conservative—the Liberal Association—to the most radical—the Labor Party. The current situation of the third parties is significant to Korean

Table 2. Votes received by the majority party by region in the 15th, 16th, and 17th Korean elections

Region	15th (April 11, 1996)		16th (April 13, 2000)		17th (April 15, 2004)	
	New Korea Party		Grand Korea Party		Open-We Party	
	Seats won	Votes won (%)	Seats won	Votes won (%)	Seats won	Votes won (%)
Seoul Area	54/96	56.3	40/97	41.2	76/109	69.7
Gangwon	9/13	69.2	3/9	33.3	2/8	25.0
Chungcheong	3/28	10.7	4/24	16.7	19/24	79.2
Gyungsang	51/76	67.1	64/65	98.5	4/68	5.9
Jeolla	1/37	2.7	0/29	0	25/31	80.6
Jeju	3/3	100	1/3	33.3	3/3	100
Subtotal	121/253	47.8	112/227	49.3	129/243	53.1
Proportional representation					23/56	41.1
Total					152/299	50.8

Source: National Election Commission, Republic of Korea, 2004.

politics. First, the public's tolerance for radicals and/or liberals has grown during the democratization process. For the first time, the most radical political party in South Korea has been able to receive formal and official recognition in the general elections. This demonstrates the overcoming of the so-called red complex in South Korean society. The red complex was strong in South Korea during the authoritarian regimes when relations between the North and South were tense. Moreover, the decline of the Liberal Association attests to the weakening of regional politics, specifically in the Chungcheong region. Also, the change in policy from confrontation to engagement toward North Korea seems to have diminished regionalism, since ideological diversity and tolerance prevailed over traditional regional political competition. This is not to say that regionalism has been eradicated. It might regain its strength in future elections. However, the influence of regionalism, which developed and prevailed through the elections, has generally weakened in Korea (Chung and Im 2004, 14-15).

Overall, the three recent general elections in South Korea have reflected the people's aspiration for change, leading to Korea's advancement of democratization comparable to that of developed countries. This political advancement was facilitated by economic development in Korea. This course was possible and inevitable in Korea even in the midst of poverty and despite continuous threats from the North. Korean history after independence and division shows the struggle of Korea for economic development as well as democratic governance since 1945.

Table 3. Votes received by the minority party by region in the 15th, 16th, and 17th Korean elections

Region	15th (April 11, 1996)		16th (April 13, 2000)		17th (April 15, 2004)	
	People's Assembly		Democrat Party		Grand Korea Party	
	Seats won	Votes won (%)	Seats won	Votes won (%)	Seats won	Votes won (%)
Seoul Area	30/96	31.3	56/97	57.7	33/109	30.3
Gangwon	0/13	0	5/9	55.6	6/8	75.0
Chungcheong	0/28	0	8/24	33.3	1/24	4.2
Gyungsang	0/76	0	0/65	0	60/68	88.2
Jeolla	36/37	97.3	25/29	86.2	0/31	0
Jeju	0/0	0	2/3	66.7	0/3	0
Subtotal	66/253	26.1	96/227	42.3	100/243	41.2
Proportional representation					21/56	37.5
Total					121/299	40.5

Source: National Election Commission, Republic of Korea, 2004.

First, in the 1950s, after the forced division of the peninsula, Korea pursued unification in vain. Second, in the 1960s, Korea failed again to institutionalize a democratic political system. Third, in the 1970s, in the midst of poverty and confrontation with North Korea, South Korea finally succeeded in economic development. Beginning in the 1980s, on the basis of economic development, South Korea was able to shift from an authoritarian system to a democratic one.

In the 1990s, after having achieved economic development and political democratization, Korea again pursued unification. In the first decade of the new millennium, South Korea's relations with North Korea became closer than ever before. The threat of military confrontation has recently been reduced after the conclusion of the nuclear program of North Korea among the six parties in and around the Korean peninsula. The six parties include South Korea, North Korea, the United States, China, Russia, and Japan.

In recent years, democratization has pervaded every corner of Korean life, from politics to economics, society, and culture. Now, Korea wants to be one of the developed countries. It is therefore opportune to analyze the results of the most recent general elections in Korea given such a unique historical background.

Changes of party composition

Tables 2, 3, and 4 reflect the changes in the votes of the majority party and minority party as well as the third party in specific regions throughout South Korea. The Seoul metropolitan area comprises

Table 4. Votes received by the third party by region in the 15th, 16th, and 17th Korean elections

Region	15th (April 11, 1996)		16th (April 13, 2000)		17th (April 15, 2004)	
	Liberal Association		Liberal Association		Labor Party	
	Seats won	Votes won (%)	Seats won	Votes won (%)	Seats won	Votes won (%)
Seoul Area	5/96	5.2	1/97	1.0	0/109	0
Gangwon	2/13	15.4	0/9	0	0/8	0
Chungcheong	24/28	85.7	11/24	45.7	0/24	0
Gyungsang	10/76	13.2	0/65	0	2/68	2.9
Jeolla	0/37	0	0/29	0	0/31	0
Jeju	0/3	0	0/3	0	0/3	0
Subtotal	41/253	16.2	12/227	5.3	2/243	0.8
Proportional representation					8/56	14.3
Total					10/299	3.3

Source: National Election Commission, Republic of Korea, 2004.

about 40 percent of the population while all others make up about 60 percent. Among the non-Seoul regions, Gyungsang, Jeolla, and Chungcheong have been competing against one another for national political power. These three regions are the basis of the political power of the majority party, the minority party, and the third party, respectively.

First, the New Korea Party and its successor, the Grand Korea Party, were the majority parties until the 16th elections. These parties mostly represented the ruling elite from the Park Chung-hee regime based in Gyungsangdo. However, during the 17th elections, the majority party became the Open-We Party which originated from the Jeolla region under the leadership of former President Kim Dae-jung.

Second, the People's Assembly and its successor, the Democrats Party, and then the Open-We Party, were the main minority parties until the 16th elections. These parties basically represented the opposing elite group based in Jeolla during the period of rapid industrialization. However, the 17th elections replaced the minority party with the majority party for the first time in recent Korean politics under the leadership of President Roh Moo-hyun.

Third, up to and including the 16th elections, the Liberal Association had been the major third party that competed with the majority and minority parties for national political power. It was based in Chungcheongdo under the leadership of Kim Jong-phil. However, during the 17th elections, the Liberal Association was almost ignored. The voters in the area chose the president's party instead of the Liberal

Table 5. Ratio of male to female elected representatives in the 15th, 16th, and 17th Korean elections

Sex	15th (April 11, 1996)		16th (April 13, 2000)		17th (April 15, 2004)	
	Seats	Percent	Seats	Percent	Seats	Percent
Male	251	99.2	222	97.8	260	87.0
Female	2	0.8	5	2.2	39	13.0
Total	253	100	227	100	299	100

Source: National Election Commission, Republic of Korea, 2004.

Association. It is believed that the relocation policy of the administrative capital from Seoul to the Chungcheongdo region swung the votes in favor of the Open-We Party (Kim, Ill-young 2004, 3-4).

Overall, the nexus of regionalism still persists in Korean politics, but its influence has been diminishing with each election. The problem of regionalism has been acknowledged by both politicians and the people, and much effort has gone into dealing with this problem. The most important problem bred by regionalism is the dominance of one political party in each region (Yoon, Jong-bin 2004, 8). This dominance prevents open and fair competition among the competing candidates and political parties, which is not healthy for a democracy. Certain regions, especially the Seoul metropolitan area where 40 percent of the total South Korean population resides, also exert undue influence in the outcome of elections.

Changes in the Composition of the National Assembly

In Tables 5, 6, 7, and 8, we can see the general characteristics of the elected representatives from each election period. First, the number of females represented in the National Assembly has increased significantly. This was made possible by the compulsory rule to give female candidates equal opportunity with male candidates in the party-list system of proportional representation. The increased number of the proportional representatives over the decreased number of the regional representatives also made this possible. As such, Korea has gone one step forward to the ideal of equal rights and equal representation.

Second, more young people are represented in the National Assembly. The younger generations of the current industrial and information society are replacing the older generations from the agricultural and industrial society. The younger generations are more liberal than conservative, more policy-oriented and less influenced by

Table 6. Age of elected representatives in the 15th, 16th, and 17th Korean elections

Age	15th (April 11, 1996)		16th (April 13, 2000)		17th (April 15, 2004)	
	Seats	Percent	Seats	Percent	Seats	Percent
30s	7	2.8	13	5.7	23	7.7
40s	52	21.3	60	26.4	106	35.4
50s	142	56.1	87	38.3	121	40.5
60s +	50	19.8	67	29.5	49	16.4
Total	253	100	227	100	299	100

Source: National Election Commission, Republic of Korea, 2004.

regionalism, more tolerable than confrontational vis-à-vis North Korea, and they are more adept in information and communications technology. Basically, the younger candidates are more flexible. This is why they are elected into the National Assembly (Kim, Young-lae 2004, 6).

Higher education is widespread in Korea, and the number of college graduates has been rapidly increasing. The portion of undergraduate representatives decreased to 3.7 percent in the 17th elections from 9.5 percent in the 15th elections, while the portion of representatives with more than a bachelor's degree increased to 49.2 percent in the 17th from 36.8 percent in the 15th. Now, almost half of the representatives are holders of either a master's or a doctorate degree.

It is noteworthy that the number and the portion of former assemblymen had decreased rather rapidly from 112 (44.3 percent) in the 15th to 89 (29.8 percent) in the 17th. This signifies the drastic changes that took place among the legislative elite in Korea. In the 16th elections, more than half (52.0 percent) of the representatives had been reelected and remained in the National Assembly. In the 17th elections, however, more than two-thirds (70.2 percent) were newcomers (Kim, Uk 2004, 136-137).

In sum, the trend nowadays is to elect into office more females, more young people, more people with college degrees, and more liberal candidates. Hence, new faces are occupying the nation's legislative body.

ANALYSIS OF THE 17TH ELECTION

In Tables 9 and 10, we can see the major characteristics of the 17th elections. First, the Open-We Party, which succeeded the major

Table 7. Educational attainment of elected representatives in the 15th, 16th, and 17th Korean elections

Education	15th (April 11, 1996)		16th (April 13, 2000)		17th (April 15, 2004)	
	Seats	Percent	Seats	Percent	Seats	Percent
Without a bachelor's degree	24	9.5	17	7.5	11	3.7
With a bachelor's degree	136	53.8	145	63.9	141	47.2
With more than a bachelor's degree	93	36.8	65	28.6	147	49.2
Total	253	100	227	100	299	100

Source: National Election Commission, Republic of Korea, 2004.

opposition party, became the majority party for the first time. Also, the Grand Korea Party, which was the perennial ruling party, became the minority party for the first time in South Korean electoral history. The major third party also changed from the Liberal Association (conservatives) to the Labor Party or Democratic Labor Party (radicals).

Second, it is evident that regionalism has persisted, despite changes in the political atmosphere during the 17th elections. The New Korea Party dominated the regions of Seoul, Gangwon, Gyung-sang, and Jeju, while the People's Assembly dominated the region of Jeolla. The Liberal Association was dominant in the region of Chungcheong in the 15th elections. Each party, led by Kim Young-sam, Kim Dae-jung, and Kim Jong-phil, respectively, comprised the three-party system in the so-called politics of the three Kims' era.

The 16th elections saw a minor transition from the existing political structure. The Grand Korea Party, the successor of the New Korea Party, was still strong in the Gyung-sang region, while the Democrats, the successor of the People's Assembly, was still strong in the Jeolla region. The Liberal Association remained strong in the Chungcheong region. The basic regional political structure was the same as in the 15th elections. However, the Democrats became the majority in the rest of the regions including the Seoul metropolitan area. As a result, the Democrats scored a majority in the 17th elections.

In the 17th elections, the Open-We Party, the successor of the Democrats, became the majority in the regions of Seoul, Chungcheong, Jeolla, and Jeju, while the Grand Korea Party became the majority in the regions of Gangwon and Gyung-sang, becoming the minority party for the first time. Traditionally, these two regions had been regarded as a rural-conservative power base. During the development era, the southern part of Korea was divided into east (the power base) and west

Table 8. Occupation of elected representatives in the 15th, 16th, and 17th Korean elections

Occupation	15th (April 11, 1996)		16th (April 13, 2000)		17th (April 15, 2004)	
	Seats	Percent	Seats	Percent	Seats	Percent
Assemblymen	112	44.3	118	52.0	89	29.8
Politicians	86	34.0	71	31.3	103	34.4
Others	55	21.7	38	16.7	107	35.8
Total	253	100	227	100	299	100

Source: National Election Commission, Republic of Korea, 2004.

(the opposition base). The Chungcheong region, the middle part of South Korea, usually exercised the swing vote in the midst of a confrontation between the East and the West. However, the Liberal Association was basically neglected in Chungcheong, while the Labor Party, which is supported mostly by the labor unions, became the major third party (Chung and Im 2004, 14).

Also, the turnout rate of 60.6 percent was higher by 3.4 percent from the previous voting turnout of 57.2 percent. Various factors account for this relatively high turnout rate. First, the impeachment of the president had paramount influence. Voters supporting the president came to the ballot box to save the president from the impeachment trial in the constitutional court. Furthermore, the general elections were regarded as a major confrontation between East and West, between young and old, between newcomers and old-timers, and between conservatives and liberals. These various factors of regions, generations, elites groups, and policy orientations combined to influence the high turnout rate in the 17th general elections.

The influence of individual leaders in specific regions combined with the persistence of regionalism. Ruling party leader Jung Dong-young of the Open-We Party was mostly favored in the Jeolla province, while opposition party leader Park Keun-hye from the Grand Korea Party was mostly favored in the Gyung-sang region (Yoon, Jong-bin 2004, 8). In the Chungcheong region, no one was recognized as the favored party leader in the Liberal Association. This contributed to that party's loss in the region.

Party platforms also had a strong impact on voters in Chungcheong province. The Open-We Party was favored again for its support to transfer the administrative capital from Seoul to the Chungcheong region for the purpose of the reducing the dominance of Seoul and balancing the development of the country. The Open-We Party also

Table 9. Majority party in each region in the 15th, 16th, and 17th Korean elections

Region	15th (April 11, 1996)	16th (April 13, 2000)	17th (April 15, 2004)
Seoul Area	New Korea Party	Democrats	Open-We Party
Gangwon	New Korea Party	Democrats	Grand Korea Party
Chungcheong	Liberal Association	Liberal Association	Open-We Party
Gyungsang	New Korea Party	Grand Korea Party	Grand Korea Party
Jeolla	People's Assembly	Democrats	Open-We Party
Jeju	New Korea Party	Democrats	Open-We Party

Source: National Election Commission, Republic of Korea, 2004.

benefited from the anti-impeachment movement in favor of President Roh Moo-hyun. The radical platform of the Labor Party, such as its proposed policies of income redistribution through radical tax reforms, gained substantial support and was viewed as acceptable in Korean politics. It became the major third party, replacing the Liberal Association.

Moreover, the country seemed to be divided by the Opposition East (the Gangwon and Gyungsang regions) and the Ruling West (Seoul, Chungcheong, Jeolla, and Jeju). However, the data's details were compressed and not available in this paper. A further analysis of locales within the regions shows that the volume and intensity of the support in each area is more fragmented than it seems initially. For example, the Open-We Party is supported heavily in north Jeolla, while the Grand Korea Party is dominant in north Gyungsang. South Jeolla is less supportive of the ruling party, while south Gyungsang is less supportive of the opposition party. Thus, after a closer examination of the election data, it can be deduced that the strength of regionalism has weakened (Chung and Im 2004, 11). Only the future can tell how people will change this political map again.

Table 11 indicates the seat changes among the competing parties as well as a brief interpretation of the meaning of the election results. The above qualitative comments are based on a comparison to the results of the 16th general elections and the expectation held by the public based on opinion polls taken before the 17th general elections (Kim, Young-lae 2004, 3-4). Table 12 contains other statistical comparisons of the major competing parties.

Overall, the ruling Open-We Party drew more support than the opposition Grand Korea Party by 4.0 percent, and thus it secured 29 more seats. This granted the ruling party two more seats in the

Table 10. Seats held by major parties during the 17th Korean elections

Region	Number of seats	Open-We Party		Grand Korea Party		Labor Party		Others	
		Seats	Percent	Seats	Percent	Seats	Percent	Seats	Percent
Seoul Area	109	76	69.7	33	30.3	0	0	0	0
Gangwon	8	2	25.0	6	75.0	0	0	0	0
Chungcheong	24	19	79.2	1	4.2	0	0	4	16.7
Gyungang	68	4	5.9	60	88.2	2	2.9	2	2.9
Jeolla	31	25	80.6	0	0	0	0	6	19.4
Jeju	3	3	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
Subtotal	243	129	53.1	100	41.2	2	0.8	12	4.9
Proportional representation	56	23	41.1	21	37.5	8	14.3	4	7.1
Total	299	152	50.8	121	40.5	10	3.3	16	5.4

Source: National Election Commission, Republic of Korea, 2004.

Table 11. Seat changes among the competing parties

Party	District representation	Proportional representation	Total	Qualitative comment
Open-We Party	129	23	152	Won substantially
Grand Korea Party	100	21	121	Won partially
Democratic Labor Party	2	8	10	Won surprisingly
Democrat Party	5	4	9	Lost drastically
Liberal Association	4	0	4	Lost drastically
People's Unity 21	1	0	1	Lost drastically
Independent	2	0	2	-
Total	243	56	299	

Source: National Election Commission, Republic of Korea, 2004.

proportional representatives by a 2.5 percent margin against the opposition party. Also, the Open-We Party won over the Grand Korea Party in the Seoul Metropolitan area. For the Open-We Party, the support from Seoul was marginal; from Incheon, it was substantial; and from Gyonggi, it was moderate. For the Grand Korea Party, the support from Seoul was slightly lower than the Open-We Party; from Incheon, it was substantial; and from Gyonggi, it was moderate.

EVALUATION

The ruling and the opposition party

The ruling Open-We party holds just more than half of all the seats in the National Assembly, while the opposing parties (Grand Korea Party and Democratic Labor Party) hold just less than half of the whole seats. This is the first time after sixteen years that the Grand Korea Party became the minority while the Open-We Party became the majority.

In the last election, the conservatives became the minority while the liberals became the majority. Faster change in the form of governance can be expected. The government will share more power with the business sector as well as the civil society. Policies for reform, reorganization, and decentralization are expected to be implemented more radically. A policy of engagement rather than confrontation will be pursued continuously with North Korea. Nationalism, independent diplomacy, and a self-defense policy will be advocated more strongly, especially against the United States.

Table 12. Seats won in key areas by Open-We Party and the Grand Korea Party (percent)

Area		Open-We Party	Grand Korea Party
District representation		41.9	37.9
Proportional representation		38.3	35.8
Seoul Metropolitan Areas	Seoul	42.8	41.3
	Inchon	44.7	30.1
	Gyeonggi	45.7	40.7

Source: National Election Commission, Republic of Korea, 2004.

The end of the three Kims' era

The political influence of the so-called three Kims (Kim Young-sam, Kim Dae-jung, and Kim Jong-phil) in South Korean politics finally ended when the last Kim, Kim Jong-phil, retired completely from his 43-year-long political life (Yoon, Jong-bin 2004, 1-2). He had participated actively in the 1961 military coup led by Park Chung-hee.

The three Kims held regional hegemony for about three decades. They divided South Korea politically into three regions: Kim Young-sam was based in the Gyeongsang area, Kim Dae-jung was based in the Jeolla area, and Kim Jong-phil was based in the Chungcheong area. All three possessed personal charisma. All three were considered politically powerful. After their retreat from politics, no single figure could exercise such a charismatic leadership in Korea. Open and pluralistic competition was possible among the new political leaders. Roh Moo-hyun was elected as the fourth president in the Sixth Republic under such political circumstances.

Dramatic retreat of the Democratic Party and the Liberal and Democracy Association

Both the Democratic Party and the Liberal and Democracy Association lost much of their influence in their respective regions as well as in the whole nation. Regionalism was reduced because of this. Both parties were almost ignored in the 17th general elections. Most of the support for the Democratic Party went to the Open-We Party, while most of the support for the Liberal and Democracy Association split somewhat proportionally between the majority and minority parties.

Official debut of the Democratic Labor Party in the National Assembly

The Democratic Labor Party made its debut in the national assembly. The party's policies and ideology are similar to those of North Korea. They are advocated by the radical union movement and student

demonstrations. They are strongly against the US military presence in South Korea. The party is one of the most radical and leftist in the ideological spectrum of Korean politics. Because of its presence in the national assembly, policies in favor of labor and against capital will receive more serious consideration. However, the Democratic Labor Party holds only 10 out of the 299 seats in the National Assembly. Nevertheless, cooperation on specific policies between this party and the ruling party is likely in the future.

Improvement of gender parity

In the 16th National Assembly, seventeen congressional women (6.2 percent) were elected, while in the 17th National Assembly, their number increased sharply to 39, comprising 13 percent of the 299 parliamentarians. This sharp increase in the number of women in congress was made possible by the compulsory article in the election law prioritizing women candidates for the proportional seats. For the proportional representation candidate, each party had to submit a male and a female candidate to the National Election Commission for the 2004 general elections to close the gender gap in the National Assembly. Most of the proportional congressional women were professionals and less bound to regional interests.

Generation change

Newcomers occupy 187 seats (63 percent) out of the 299 seats in the 17th National Assembly. Newcomers represent 45 percent of the 15th Assembly and 42 percent of the 16th Assembly. The average age of the representatives is younger by three years than the former assembly. The 10 elected members from the Labor Party are all newcomers. Likewise, 109 of the 152 elected members from the ruling Open-We party are newcomers. The newcomers are mostly young and reform-oriented. They are typically more idealistic and eager to change the existing system of interest articulation in politics. They have already changed the atmosphere of politics in general and the legislative branch in particular. They are less corrupt and authoritarian, and more open. They are more professional and have higher educations. Finally, they are more democratic in their values, attitudes, and behavior.

Favorable response from North Korea

North Korea expressed pleasure with the results of the South Korean general elections, and it expected a more favorable relationship to be built with the South. North Korea also denounced the South Korean conservatives as well as US imperialism, based on the June 15, 2000 Joint Communiqué issued at the Pyongyang Summit.

South Korean policy toward North Korea can be divided into two: engagement and confrontation. The Open-We party adopted the engagement policy, while the Grand Korea Party adopted the confrontation policy. The former won against the latter. Under the circumstances, political tensions might be mitigated and military threats might be decreased, while humanitarian efforts and economic cooperation might be expanded in the coming years.

Going up one step further in the democratic election process

The whole election process was fairly managed and tightly controlled by the National Election Commission. The commission exercised stronger power than before in its drive for fair and just elections as well as the elimination of corruption and violence. Citizens actively supported the commission by reporting evidence of irregularities caught in electronic devices such as the portable video camera and the camera-phone. The election process was also fully covered by the media.

These efforts as well as the candidates' awareness of the rules ensured fairer and more transparent elections. Information technology, which is rapidly transforming the lives of Koreans, also helped.

For the first time in Korean history, the people changed the ruling party through the general elections. In the past years, the ruling party was always the minority party usually because of the people's general tendency to check the president's power. This is a good sign of confidence in the democratic governance in Korea, since the citizens chose to be actively involved in the process of governance locally, nationally, and internationally as well.

PERSPECTIVES FOR POLICY REORIENTATION

South Korean foreign policy based on the Mutual Defense Coalition Treaty with the United States will remain, but it was weakened when the ruling Open-We Party became the majority. China's influence and

its role in inter-Korean relations has been considered more important than the role of the United States by 50 percent of the members of the majority party, while 42 percent considered the role of the United States to be more important. However, the opposition Grand Korea Party members have the opposite perspective; 52 percent favor the United States, while 39 percent favor China.

Policies on North Korea will be led by the liberal doves rather than the conservative hawks in parliament as most young newcomers show a favorable attitude toward the North. Therefore, the North-South relationship can be expected to improve in the near future. One of the biggest challenges to the relationship is the nuclear weapons issue in North Korea.

Conflicts in internal affairs also remain significant. West vs. East regionalism, liberal vs. conservative policies, and the young generation vs. old generation conflict are still occurring. Each conflict will function dynamically according to policy issues as well as changes in the internal and the external situations. Also, the greater number of female legislators signifies that gender parity issues will gain more attention.

Already, issues such as the dispatch of military forces to Iraq, the relocation of the administrative capital from Seoul to Chungcheong, and national economic policies have become controversial among the parties and the general public as well. However, these controversies will eventually be resolved through the National Assembly and by the constitutional court in case of conflicts among the stakeholders. Korea has experienced many different crises, problems, and issues throughout the 60 years of Korean development, but it has dealt with these challenges in dynamic ways. ❀

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