

**Political Party Development in South Korea
: focusing on the 2017 presidential election**

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Abstract

This study analyzes the extent to which the media and the public spurred changes in South Korean political parties following the impeachment of Park Geun-Hye. By analyzing the five parties in the subsequent 2017 presidential election, I find evidence of a loose trend that suggests a further transition of South Korean parties into electoral-professional parties. The abrupt changes in media platforms, rapid technological development, and rise of public awareness prompted parties to resort to highly professionalized campaigns for electoral success. However, the extent of change in each party varied, depending on its history and agenda.

Keywords: South Korea, political parties, electoral campaign, Park Geun-Hye

I. Introduction

In 2016, South Korea was enveloped in a corruption scandal that utterly reshaped its political landscape. The scandal mainly involved President Park Geun-Hye and her long-time confidante Choi Sun-Sil, along with a number of South Korea's leading conglomerates. Park, the first female president of South Korea, is also the daughter of former President Park Chung-Hee, a military strongman who ruled South Korea from 1961 to 1979. Throughout the last quarter of 2016, the media exposed Park's malfeasance, which greatly enraged the public. Citizens soon organized mass protests, demanding Park's removal from office. Park's impeachment was finalized in March 2017, marking a milestone moment in South Korea's history of democracy.

Park's party, the Saenuri (New Frontier) Party, also confronted a crisis. The motion to impeach Park intensified factional conflict within the Saenuri; it soon split into the rightist Liberty Korea Party (LKP) and the center-right Bareun (Righteous) Party. Meanwhile, Democratic Party nominee Moon Jae-In maintained a firm lead in polls, despite the rise of Ahn Cheol-Soo, a software mogul-turned politician. Hong Joon-Pyo of LKP, Yoo Seung-Min of the Bareun Party, and Sim Sang-Jung of the leftist Justice Party also emerged as major candidates in the election, engendering an unusual five-party dynamic.

Democratic elections in South Korea only began in 1987. The June Democracy Movement of 1987 led to constitutional reform, which finally guaranteed direct elections and plural politics. In its mere three-decade-long history of "fair" elections, South Korea has only witnessed elections dominated by two or three parties. In this sense, the 2017 presidential election was indeed an anomaly. What accounts for such a drastic change? Does the five-party dynamic signal a transition in South Korea's political party development? In order to answer these general questions, I propose the following as my central research question: to what extent did the media and the public act as an impetus for change in South Korean

political parties?

The literature suggests that this question is a controversy. While some continue to lay emphasis on traditional factors such as regionalism and conservative hegemony over politics, others stress the rise of media and public awareness as new sociopolitical forces that shape party politics. This necessitates a reevaluation of the frameworks commonly used in the literature and an establishment of an analytical strategy that encompasses recent sociopolitical changes in South Korea.

Accordingly, the remainder of this study is structured as follows. Section II delineates the analytical strategy of this study, laying out the standards used to analyze the five parties in the 2017 presidential election. Section III provides the contextual background of party development in South Korea, setting the grounds for Section IV. Section IV analyzes the five parties as electoral-professional parties and examines whether there is a general trend of organizational change shared amongst them. Section V first discusses the results of the analysis, then assesses the implications of the 2017 presidential election and its aftermath.

II. Analytical Strategy

In his seminal book, *Political Parties: Organization and Power*, Panebianco (1988) accentuates the increasing importance of professionals in political parties, suggesting that parties are transitioning into what he calls “electoral-professional parties.” He yet notes that no party perfectly fits the “mass bureaucratic type” or the “electoral-professional type.”¹ Since each party has a distinct organizational history, even an identical series of events gives rise to a distinct pattern of change. However, this does not mean that the application of Western frameworks to South Korean political parties is not flawed.

¹ Angelo Panebianco, *Political Parties: Organization and Power*, trans. Marc Silver, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 265.

The literature on South Korean parties has relied on and still relies on Western party typologies and theories of party development. This trend has been criticized by a number of scholars since the late 2000s, including Park Kyungmee, Joo In-Suck, and Kang Won-Taek. Park (2011) argues that scholars have been conveniently selecting models that seemingly suit South Korean parties, without sufficient consideration of the sociopolitical context that gave rise to such models. In other words, the lack of a juncture marked by mass parties in South Korea, unlike in Western European nations, makes the dependence on typologies created in response to the mass party inept.² Joo (2009) argues that the Western theory of linear party development is problematic in itself, not to mention the problems that arise when applying it to South Korean parties. Kang (2009) criticizes the confinement of previous scholarship to existing party typologies, calling for the creation of an original framework that can explicate the unique political experiences of South Korea.

As a result, primarily two approaches have addressed the limitations of Western frameworks: one resorts to analyses of specific parties or elections, the other focuses on identifying structural factors that shape elections. Representative of the first approach are the works of Joo In-Suck, Park Yun-Hee, and Lee Gyoung-Min. Their findings convey that there is a loose consensus among scholars that South Korean parties are transforming into organizations most approximate to the catch-all or electoral-professional party model. Analyzing a series of presidential elections from 1987 to 2012, Lee (2008) finds increased mobilization of technological resources and media professionals in recent elections. The conclusions of Park (2012) also lend support to the view that South Korea's transition into an advanced industrial democracy is leading parties to display tendencies of electoral-professional parties.

² Kyungmee Park, "A Critical Note on Eurocentric Party Crisis Thesis," *Comparative Democratic Studies* 7, no. 1 (2011): 109.

The second approach concentrates on the overarching, systematic factors that have molded South Korean elections. Steinberg and Shin (2006) attributes the symptoms of frequent one-party dominance and unhealthy electoral competition to South Korea's single-term presidency. Kwak (2009) adds that such a system induces frequent mergers and splits of parties, whose sole motive is to achieve electoral success. Also, Kim (2015) shows that the high degree of government centralization is correlated with frequent re-labeling of parties in South Korea. Hence, certain features of South Korea's political system are as crucial as the parties themselves to the analysis of party politics.

In light of the above, my research first pays due attention to the unique trajectory of political party development in South Korea. Next, I adapt Panebianco's electoral-professional party model to analyze the five parties in the 2017 presidential election. My specific standards of analysis are: (1) the central role of professionals, (2) the appeal to the "opinion electorate", (3) the pre-eminence of public representatives and personalized leadership, (4) the emphasis on issues, and (5) the reliance on public funding. In each section, I examine the extent to which the media and the public brought about changes in South Korean parties. To this end, I look at party manifestos, opinion polls, governmental reports, and media coverage of candidates. The focus of the analysis is to assess whether South Korean parties as a whole are transitioning into electoral-professional parties, or, as some may put it, professional campaign organizations.

III. Contextual Background

Before analyzing the five parties in the 2017 presidential election, I consider the contextual background of party development in South Korea. Since its liberation from Japanese colonial rule in 1945, South Korea has experienced extreme political turmoil. After the Korean War (1950-1953), South Korea was under the consecutive reign of two authoritarian rulers,

Park Chung-Hee and Jun Doo-Hwan. During this period, strong anti-communist measures were implemented, severely limiting the ideological spectrum of parties. As a result, only right-wing parties thrived as entourages of prominent politicians. Such parties quickly built infrastructure and networks, which served as a basis for their lasting hegemony even after democratization. This was precisely the reason left-wing parties, despite spearheading the democratic uprising in 1987, were unable to enforce a new democratic order. Jaung (2003) describes this state by using the term “cartel party system,” a system in which a few parties monopolize available resources and systematically prevent new parties from entering electoral competition.³

Nonetheless, the gradual realization of democratic principles and the incorporation of practices such as open primaries made the term “cartel party” a somewhat outdated description of South Korean parties. Sim and Kim (2007) argues that the term “post-cartel party” be used for South Korean parties, striving to account for organizational change in parties as further democratization takes place. Loxton (2015), however, points out the frequent success of “authoritarian successor parties,” which thwarts deep democratization in many nations, including South Korea. Citing Saenuri as an example, Loxton claims that authoritarian successor parties are highly likely to inherit infrastructure and a party brand remembered by voters. Electoral success comes much more easily to parties of this kind, as opposed to new parties struggling to garner resources, build networks, and establish a distinguishable platform.⁴

GNP (Grand National Party)/Saenuri’s⁵ pre-eminence since its foundation in 1997 until 2017 indicates that South Korea was no exception to this phenomenon. To elaborate, GNP/Saenuri’s dominance prevented successful emergence of opposition parties, delaying ideology or policy-oriented elections in South Korea. With no conspicuous religious, class, or

³ Hoon Jaung, “The Rise of Cartel Party System in Democratic Korea,” *Korea and World Politics* 14, no. 4 (2003): 34-35.

⁴ James Loxton, “Authoritarian Successor Parties,” *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 3 (2015): 160-161.

⁵ The Grand National Party renamed itself the Saenuri Party in 2012.

urban-rural partition to develop into cleavages, parties depended on regional roots to strengthen the otherwise meager ties with voters.⁶ Regionalism became further entrenched in elections as presidential candidates made promises to allocate public resources to specific regions. Coupled with a two or three-party dynamic, this trend was crystallized, continuing well until the 2012 election.

An illustration of the extent to which regionalism shaped the 2012 presidential election demonstrates its remaining influence on South Korean politics. Table 1 shows that Moon Jae-In gained a big portion of his votes from Jeonbuk, Jeonnam, and Gwangju—regions known for their consistent support of liberal candidates. Park Geun-Hye secured her victory on the basis of firm support from Daegu, Busan, Gyeongbuk, and Gyeongnam—regions conservative parties have historically enjoyed support.

<Table 1> 18th presidential election results in South Korea, by province⁸

	Park Geun-Hye (Saenuri)	Moon Jae-In (Democratic United) ⁷
Seoul	48.18	51.42
Busan	59.82	39.87
Daegu	80.14	19.53
Incheon	51.58	48.04
Gwangju	7.76	91.97
Daejeon	49.95	49.7
Ulsan	59.78	39.78
Sejong	51.91	47.58
Gyeonggi	50.43	49.19
Gangwon	61.97	37.53
Chungbuk	56.22	43.26
Chungnam	56.66	42.79
Jeonbuk	13.22	86.25
Jeonnam	10	89.28
Gyeongbuk	80.82	18.61
Gyeongnam	63.12	36.33
Jeju	50.46	48.95

⁶ David Steinberg and Myung Shin, “Tensions in South Korean Political Parties in Transition: From Entourage to Ideology?” *Asian Survey* 46, no. 4 (2006): 527.

⁷ The Democratic United Party renamed itself the Democratic Party in 2016.

⁸ National Election Commission (South Korea), *Results of the 18th presidential election in South Korea in 2012, by province*, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/706306/south-korea-2012-presidential-election-results-by-province/>.

Just based on the figures, it is easy to assume that the 2012 presidential election was no different from past elections. Here it is necessary to pay attention to the mid-provinces, such as Gangwon, Chungbuk, and Chungnam—regions that exhibit a split between conservative and liberal voters. What led to Park’s triumph over Moon in these regions? The findings of Song and Park (2012) suggest that the answer may lie in Park’s stances on key issues during the election. In their analysis, Song and Park show that Park Geun-Hye’s policy promises of economic development appealed to independent voters, while her stances on welfare policies attracted liberal voters.⁹ Vincent (2017) also claims that the GNP/Saenuri started to put more emphasis on social issues, seeking votes through broad issue appeal.¹⁰ It thus seems that Park’s victory in “swing regions” can be explained, at least partially, by Saenuri’s broadened issue appeal.

Many scholars have argued that the decline of party identification has induced parties to promote catch-all policies. In line with this, Moon (2017) shows a gradual increase of undecided voters in South Korea, a group that tends to be younger, better educated, and have more interest in politics.¹¹ This trend most importantly implies that voters are now actively garnering political information, made accessible by the rapid development of technology and introduction of social media. Parties also became increasingly aware of this trend: for instance, in the 2012 presidential election, Saenuri set up a “social media department” for the first time. Its nominee Park Geun-Hye quickly gathered followers on Kakao Talk, the most used messenger application service in South Korea.¹² Moon Jae-In promptly followed Park by

⁹ Jinmi Song and Won-Ho Park, “Issue Ownership and Party Identification: The 2012 Korean Presidential Election,” *Korean Party Studies Review* 13, no. 1 (2014): 27.

¹⁰ Sean Vincent, “Dominant Party Adaptation to the Catch-All Model: A Comparison of Former Dominant Parties in Japan and South Korea,” *East Asia* 34, no. 3 (2017): 213.

¹¹ Eun-Young Moon, “The Study of Korea’s Undecided Voters’ Attributes,” *Korean Party Studies Review* 16, no. 2 (2017): 60.

¹² Han-Na Park and Min-Sik Yoon, “Social Networking Services and Korean Elections,” In *Social Media and Elections in Asia-Pacific – the Growing Power of the Youth Vote*, eds. Alastair Carthew and Simon Winkelmann, (Singapore: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2013), 54.

incorporating Facebook into his campaign, using it as a medium for publicity of party agendas and communication with voters.¹³ In 2012, social media was yet to serve as an indispensable component of political campaigns, but with increasing public awareness and declining party identification, its force was to be reckoned with.

IV. Analysis of South Korean Parties as Electoral-Professional Parties

a. Central Role of Professionals

Panebianco (1988) deems that the advent of television stimulated parties to depend on media professionals and devote resources to public relations.¹⁴ Many studies have researched the influence of television on political campaigns, seeing it as a critical conduit of political communication. Granted, Farrell & Webb (2002) argues that it is time to shed more light on new media platforms. Building upon Panebianco's arguments on the professionalization of party bureaucracies, Farrell and Webb (2002) proposes that parties have now become professional campaign organizations in the following aspects: first, "increased reliance on specialist campaign agencies and political consultants" and second, "the gradual emergence of the party leader's office staffed by handpicked campaign, media, and policy specialists working directly with the party leader."¹⁵ Based on the arguments of Panebianco (1988) and Farrell and Webb (2002), the first two sections of the analysis examine the construction of each party's electoral campaign. The first section focuses on the role of think tanks and political consultants *within* parties; the next section focuses on the role of media professionals as a bridge *between* parties and voters.

¹³ Han-Na Park and Min-Sik Yoon, "Social Networking Services and Korean Elections," 54.

¹⁴ Angelo Panebianco, *Political Parties: Organization and Power*, trans. Marc Silver, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 266.

¹⁵ David M. Farrell and Paul Webb, *Parties without Partisans: Political Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002): 120.

In fact, the foundation of think tanks was mandated by Article 38 of the Political Parties Act. It states that “a political party entitled to allotment of subsidy under the provisions of Article 27 of the Political Fund Act shall establish and operate in the Central Party a policy research institute as a separate legal entity in order to promote the development and research of policies.”¹⁶ The article was written into the act in 2004, during President Roh Moo Hyun’s reign. This suggests that think tanks did not suddenly rise to prominence in 2017, but had been playing a part, one of growing importance, in South Korean elections.

In 2017, think tanks were at the core of electoral campaigns. Since 2016, Moon assembled a cohort of more than 500 leading academics and professionals from various fields.¹⁷ Moon’s campaign surely demonstrated the organizational strength and expertise the Democratic Party had been accumulating since the last decade. In the meantime, Ahn had been working with members of the recent-founded “Policy Network Nae-il (Tomorrow)” since 2012.¹⁸ The institute hosted annual forums on policy and formulated policy promises for the upcoming election. Its members were quick to join Ahn’s campaign as soon as the official election campaigning began. A party of small size, the Justice Party chose to run a small, compact campaign. It had been running a policy research institute of its own since 2012, steadily holding conferences to construct party agendas. The Bareun Party founded the Bareun Policy Research Institute only in April 2017, being the latest among the five parties to found a think tank. Nevertheless, in virtue of Yoo and his staffs’ expertise on policy research, the Bareun Party managed to devise a well-rounded manifesto, one that addressed even liberal agendas such as welfare and labor issues.

¹⁶ Political Parties Act, Art. 38 (S. Korea).

¹⁷ Kook-Hee Park, “Moon Jae-In’s Think Thank of Five Hundred People to Launch Tomorrow,” *Chosun*, October 5, 2016, http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2016/10/05/2016100500364.html?Dep0=twitter&d=2016100500364.

¹⁸ Se-Jin Kwon, “Close Analysis of Ahn Cheol-Soo’s Personal Connections,” *Monthly Chosun*, May 2017, <http://monthly.chosun.com/client/news/viw.asp?ctcd=A&nNewsNumb=201705100010>.

LKP was the only party that did not align with the further professionalization of think tanks. The Yeouido Institute, a think tank of the Saenuri/LKP which was founded as early as in 1995, served as the pivot of Saenuri in its heyday.¹⁹ Unfortunately, it has been marred by factionalism since the mid-2000s. Once considered the most reliable policy research and polling institute in South Korea, it waned alongside its outdated polling techniques and lack of consolidation. Its decline reflects the weakened status of Saenuri/LKP as a political powerhouse, which signals the reduced clout of authoritarian successor parties in South Korean politics. Its decline also signifies that the political environment is becoming more conducive to policy-oriented competition and professionalization of parties. In short, with the exception of LKP, parties relied on existing or newly founded think tanks to devise party manifestos, while carefully selecting political consultants to serve as central members of their campaigns.

b. Appeal to the “Opinion Electorate”

According to a survey by the Korea Information Society Development Institute in 2017, 84.8% of South Koreans possessed a smart phone—a huge leap from 21.6% in 2011.²⁰ 98.2% of surveyed households possessed at least one television and 72.3% possessed a desktop, laptop, or tablet computer. Smart phone applications were the primary medium subscribers of news channels accessed news. These statistics are important for two reasons. First, they illustrate the rapid degree at which the media is permeating all levels of South Korean society. Second, they signify the start of a new epoch marked by drastically different

¹⁹ Hye-Woon Lee and Woon-Joong Kim, “The Yeouido Institute Now A Mere Battleground of Factional Conflict—Hastens the Decline of Conservatives,” *Monthly Chosun*, July 21, 2018, http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2018/07/20/2018072001602.html.

²⁰ Jee-Hyung Shin, Yoon-Hwa Kim and Yoon-Seok Oh, “2017 Korea Media Panel Survey,” *Korea Information Society Development Institute*, December 31, 2017, http://m.kisdi.re.kr/mobile/repo/res_view.m?controlNoSer=5&key1=32770&key2=13799&key3=_&category=3&publishYear=&selectPage=1&category1=1&category2=2&category3=3&category4=4.

forms of social and political communication.

Closely monitoring the growing importance of media and online campaigning, parties were quick to consult media professionals for effective campaigning tactics. Before long, media platforms became a fierce battleground for parties. For instance, several committees in Moon's campaign managed social media accounts, designed publicity materials, and created advertisements. Moon's campaign launched "Moon 1st," a website whose layout resembled that of an online shopping mall. The underlying idea was to allow voters to "shop" for their preferred policy promises, epitomizing party efforts to appeal to the "opinion electorate." Deemed as ingenious by many, the website successfully conveyed the Democratic Party's main agendas and encouraged voter input.

Ahn made headlines by commissioning Je-Seok Lee, a world-famous advertising specialist, to design his publicity materials. Sim and Yoo also drew attention by incorporating elements from popular culture, such as television shows and K-pop, into their election posters and advertisements. Sim widened her appeal by posting election-related content on several online platforms, not at all confined to her humble start. In contrast, Hong targeted a conservative audience by taking a firm stance on security issues. Hong's campaign did show moderate engagement with new media platforms, but was not as aggressive as those of other parties.

Albeit more refined in 2017, election posters and television advertisements were not new to the South Korean public. Instead, Facebook was what caught the attention of both voters and parties. In 2017, Facebook rose as a medium that fostered political communication between candidates and voters. Table 2, which quantifies the volume of communication via Facebook during the election, captures the overall high engagement of the five candidates with the new medium. Sim and Moon were the two candidates that best utilized Facebook, as the high number of video views and the average amount of communication per day shows.

Although Sim entered the presidential race as the nominee of a small-sized party, her presence in social media was far from small. Moon’s social media strategy was consistent and solid, a result of steady efforts dating back to the last election. Yoo, Ahn, and Hong became much more involved in social media during the election and saw a sharp increase in the number of followers, but were unable to outrun Moon.²¹

<Table 2> Facebook Usage by Major Candidates During the Election Period, 2017²²

During Election (April – May, 2018)	Moon Jae-In	Hong Joon-Pyo	Ahn Cheol-Soo	Yoo Seung-Min	Sim Sang-Jeong
Total Amount of Communication	748,700	64,800	478,700	93,800	1,070,000
Average Amount of Communication per day	32,600	2,800	20,800	4,100	46,500
Video Views	5,750,000	212,200	3,000,000	1,780,000	11,890,000
Communication via Video	54,500	17,000	37,500	59,600	550,300
Communication via Facebook Live	453,800	221	343,500	0	90,500
Number of Posts	175	283	248	210	164
Average Number of Posts per day	8	12	11	9	7
Number of Posted Facebook Lives	89	2	41	0	30
Number of Facebook Videos	24	70	71	128	38

In a nutshell, in the 2017 presidential election, media experts proved their caliber by deftly handling various platforms. All five parties sought to maximize their reach by employing various media platforms, most notably Facebook, as channels of political communication. Changes in the media environment are reinforcing the importance of media professionals, which drive South Korean parties to allot even more resources to professional electoral campaigns.

²¹ You-Hyang Kim, “Social Media Usage of Candidates of the 19th Presidential Election,” *Issue wa Nonjeom (Issue and Point)*, January 9, 2018, <https://www.nars.go.kr/brdView.do?cmsCd=CM0018&brdSeq=22369>.

²² Table adapted from You-Hyang Kim, “Social Media Usage of Candidates of the 19th Presidential Election,” *Issue wa Nonjeom (Issue and Point)*, January 9, 2018, <https://www.nars.go.kr/brdView.do?cmsCd=CM0018&brdSeq=22369>.

c. Pre-eminence of Public Representatives and Personalized Leadership

The tendency to promote presidential candidates as “public” representatives rather than representatives of a certain class or region, began as early as in the 2002 presidential election. In 2002, President Roh Moo-Hyun won by emphasizing his identity as a candidate not bound to pre-existing ties between regions and parties.²³ Moon was especially keen on continuing this legacy, given his close relations to Roh. With popular support, Moon gained more votes than the two conservative candidates combined from Seoul, Incheon, Ulsan, and Chungbuk, regions that have usually preferred conservative candidates. Table 3 indicates that a significant portion of Moon’s votes came from the Jeolla region (Jeonbuk, Jeonnam, and Gwangju), but he still managed to gain at least 20% of the votes from regions famous for their steadfast support of Saenuri.

<Table 3> 19th presidential election results in South Korea, by province²⁴

		Hong Joon-Pyo (LKP)	Ahn Cheol-Soo (People’s Party)	Yoo Seung-Min (Bareun Party)	Sim Sang Jung (Justice Party)
Seoul	42.34	20.78	22.72	7.26	6.47
Busan	38.71	31.98	16.82	7.21	4.85
Daegu	21.76	45.36	14.97	12.6	4.72
Incheon	41.2	20.91	23.65	6.54	7.16
Gwangju	61.14	1.55	30.08	2.18	4.57
Daejeon	42.93	20.3	23.21	6.34	6.75
Ulsan	38.14	27.46	17.33	8.13	8.38
Sejong	51.08	15.24	21.02	6.03	6.14
Gyeonggi	42.08	20.75	22.91	6.84	6.92
Gangwon	34.16	29.97	21.75	6.86	6.56
Chungbuk	38.61	26.32	21.78	5.9	6.7
Chungnam	38.62	24.84	23.51	5.55	6.79
Jeonbuk	64.84	3.34	23.76	2.56	4.93
Jeonnam	59.87	2.45	30.68	2.09	4.01
Gyeongbuk	21.73	48.62	14.92	8.75	5.17
Gyeongnam	36.73	37.24	13.39	6.71	5.32
Jeju	45.51	18.27	20.9	6.11	8.51

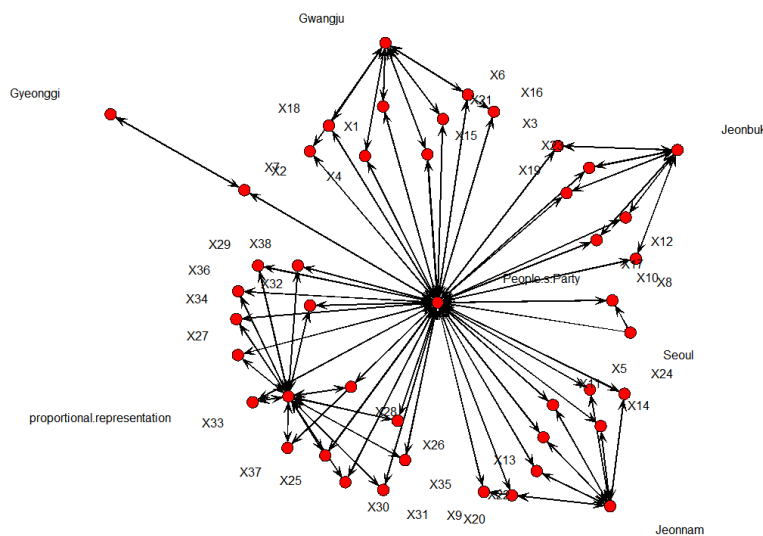
²³ Gyoung-Min Lee, “A Study on Changing into ‘Electoral-professional party’ in Korean Political Party: Focused on Transformative Aspect in Electoral Campaign in the Era of Post-democratization,” Master’s Thesis, Seoul National University, 2008, 58.

²⁴ National Election Commission (South Korea), *Results of the 19th presidential election in South Korea in 2017, by province*, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/706306/south-korea-2012-presidential-election-results-by-province/>.

Figure 1 shows that the People’s party relied heavily on constituencies in the Jeolla region, which makes the party appear even more left-skewed than the Democratic Party. Its seemingly strong regional basis in the Jeolla region, in fact, belies its popular support beyond traditionally liberal regions. It gained 13 out its 38 seats in the National Assembly through proportional representation in the 2016 general elections, a feat that cannot be achieved without popular support under South Korea’s first-past-the-post system.

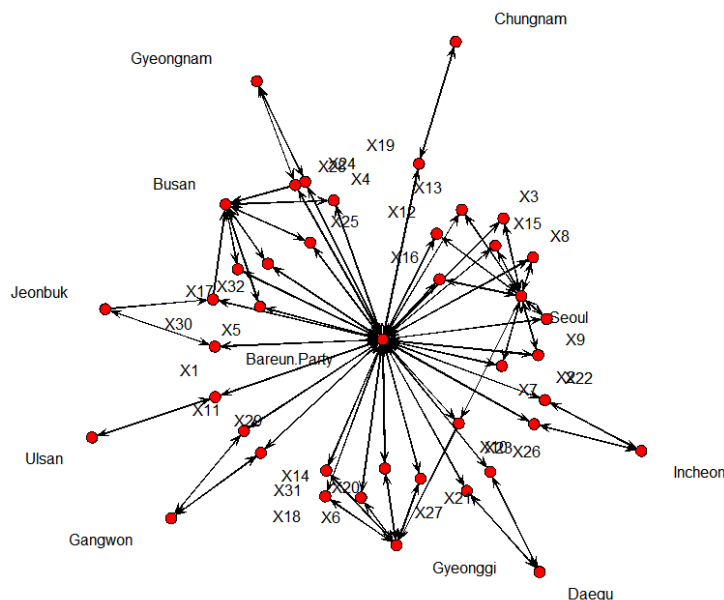
With only six seats, the Justice Party had hardly any leverage in the National Assembly, nor did it have strong networks with certain constituencies. However, Sim gained 6.16% of the votes in 2017, the highest percentage of votes a progressive candidate has ever earned in South Korea’s presidential election. Table 3 shows that Sim was on par with Yoo in several regions, suggesting that Sim stepped up as one of the major players in South Korea’s elections. Ironically, support for Sim rooted from Sim’s lack of strong regional ties, which allowed Sim to establish herself as a representative of the common people. As Sim voiced the concerns of the socially weak on their behalf, she undermined the idea of party politics as a power play among elite politicians. Sim’s stance especially resonated with the younger generation, resulting in increasing support for Sim.

<Figure 1> Regional Constituency Network of People’s Party Members



Whilst left-wing parties saw a sharp increase in popular support across regions, right-wing parties failed to establish such wide appeal. Figure 2 clearly shows that the Bareun Party relies on regional constituencies that have been traditionally pro-Saenuri. Yet, the distribution among the regions is fairly equal, except for the slight clustering of members with constituencies in Busan. Unlike the People’s Party, the Bareun Party acquired seats in the National Assembly almost exclusively by support from the regional bases of its leadership. The Bareun Party failed to attract enough supporters of the Democratic Party or the People’s Party to itself, ultimately banking on previous ties to its constituencies.

<Figure 2> Regional Constituency Network of Bareun Party Members



LKP performed much better than the Bareun Party, notwithstanding its damaged reputation due to associations with Park. It still managed to garner around 50% of the votes from Gyeongbuk and Daegu, and 30% from Busan. These results must be interpreted with caution, however, since the situation defies easy explanation. Some argue that the Saenuri/LKP’s predominance in politics is deteriorating as a whole, while others argue that its organizational strength and regional roots allowed Hong to earn the second-most votes among the five candidates. Nonetheless, the general trend of the 2017 presidential election suggests that Saenuri/LKP’s position in party politics is changing, most likely in the direction

of its decline.

Next, the idea of “personalized leadership,” a practice already notoriously ingrained in South Korean parties, was somewhat altered by Park’s impeachment. Moving away from regional or personal rivalries, the South Korean public was now concerned with both the competence and character of the nation’s new leader. This brought the personal backgrounds and careers of each candidate into the limelight. Each candidate hence strove to portray oneself as the one that would sweep away old evils and righteously represent the people.

All five candidates carefully produced their minute-long television advertisements and election posters, yet it was Ahn who best embodied the idea of a “public representative.” The work of a renowned advertising specialist, Ahn’s election poster was extremely unconventional in that it neither included the name of his party nor his major policy promises. The poster evoked some controversy at first but was eventually received as a novel attempt that enhanced Ahn’s innovative and fresh image. As can be seen in Figure 3, Ahn’s poster (in the middle) is even more conspicuous when juxtaposed with those of the other candidates. His other publicity materials also highlighted his novelty, differentiating Ahn from the other candidates.

<Figure 3> Election Posters of Five Major Presidential Candidates²⁵²⁶



²⁵ Image adapted from Ji-Ye Hong, “An Unprecedented Fifteen Register for Candidacy in the 19th presidential election,” *Joongang*, April 17, 2017, <https://news.joins.com/article/21482358>.

²⁶ The posters are in the order of Moon Jae-In, Hong Joon-Pyo, Ahn Cheol-Soo, Yoo Seung-Min, and Sim Sang-Jeong, from left to right.

Meanwhile, Moon, in his minute-long TV advertisement, emphasized the slogan of a “happy country.” Moon’s advertisement portrayed people from different age groups and occupations, reinforcing his wide spectrum of representation. Hong’s advertisement was in stark contrast with that of Moon, in that he stressed the idea of a “strong country” and the necessity to take stern measures against North Korea. On the other hand, Sim and Yoo laid emphasis on cultivating policy-oriented personas in their advertisements, fully utilizing their respective professional careers as a labor activist and an economist.

In the end, Moon was able to lead the other four candidates by capitalizing on his solid foundations of support and broad appeal. Ahn’s innovative campaign was well received, but was not enough to outstrip Moon. Sim and Yoo also used the media to their advantage, maximizing their appeal to the public. Once again, Hong was the least responsive to the changing media environment, showing that the public appeal was achieved in varying degrees according to the history and agenda of each party.

d. Emphasis on Issues

Although social media received increasing attention in the 2017 presidential election, television remained a significant medium of campaigning. A series of televised presidential debates hosted candidates to cross-examine their policy promises, allowing voters to evaluate each candidate’s performance. According to a report by the Korea Political Science Association, 96.8% of those surveyed answered that they watched the televised debates in 2017.²⁷ The percentage is reflective of the South Korean public’s high awareness toward the election, a factor that pressed parties to compete for issue ownership.

Televised debates gave rise to many controversial issues during the election. The two

²⁷ So Young Lee et al., “An Analysis of the Effects of the 19th Presidential Debates,” *Korea Political Science Association*, 2017.

most salient issues were the deployment of THAAD, an anti-ballistic missile defense system proposed as a security measure against North Korea, and the employment crisis. Hong and Yoo supported the deployment, maintaining a strong conservative stance on national security. Moon and Sim were critical, calling the deployment a coercive measure that lacked public consent. Ahn, who had originally sided with Sim and Moon, reversed his position as soon as official campaigning began in April.²⁸ Many interpreted this as a strategic move to appeal to conservative voters. While Ahn failed to “own” the issue at the end, his attempt illustrates the influence of issues on the election.

Another key issue in the 2017 presidential election revolved around employment. In 2017, South Korea was faced with a soaring youth unemployment rate of 9.9%,²⁹ let alone a record-high unemployment rate. Job insecurity was also plaguing the South Korean public, and candidates rushed to propose feasible solutions. Sim had long been focusing on labor issues, producing the most thorough policy promises for laborers and the unemployed. As a former businessman, Ahn emphasized the role of the market and companies in creating quality jobs, stressing practicality. In contrast, Moon argued for the increase of public sector jobs for the youth, laying more emphasis on the role of the government. Yoo proposed measures to transform business environments for small companies and start-ups, in addition to forward-looking reforms to ameliorate job insecurity. Hong prioritized weakened regulations for corporations, maintaining the traditional stance of conservatives.

Although the five parties displayed their ideological orientation through their stances on certain issues, their policy promises overlapped at times, calling for other standards of evaluation. A poll by Gallup Korea suggests that each candidate’s performance in the

²⁸ Jung-Woo Lee, “Ahn Cheol-Soo should explain why he changed his stance on THAAD deployment,” *Hankyoreh*, April 11, 2017, <http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/opinion/editorial/790097.html>.

²⁹ Eun-Joo Jeong, “Last Year’s Youth Unemployment Higher-than-ever at 9.9%,” *Hankyoreh*, January 10, 2018, http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/economy/economy_general/827077.html.

televised debates were one of the major factors that influenced their reception by the public. 52% of the respondents indicated that their perception of Sim changed positively after watching the debates; only 10% answered otherwise.³⁰ 33% of the respondents indicated a positive change of perception toward Yoo. On the other hand, televised debates had damaged, rather than benefited, the public image of Hong, Moon, and Ahn. In particular, 44% of the respondents answered that they had negative perceptions about Ahn after watching the debates. The declining support for Ahn also led to decreasing support for the People's Party, which dropped from 24% to 16% between mid-April and May.³¹

Indeed, the two issues were important in themselves, but the increased awareness of the public toward each candidate's stances was also important. In the report by the Korean Political Science Association mentioned earlier in this section, when asked to name the most significant factor in choosing a candidate to vote for, 30% of the respondents said policy, while only 0.7% said the candidate's regional background.³² This result suggests that the regional base of parties or candidates are becoming less relevant to voter decisions.

Furthermore, Gallup's post-election survey indicates that the main reasons voters voted for a certain candidate coincided with the primary policy promises of each candidate. In Table 4, the top three policy promises of each candidate are juxtaposed with the main three reasons voters chose to vote for a certain candidate. Moon's first three promises addressed anti-corruption, fairness, democratic principles, and human rights; more than 51% of those who voted for Moon replied that "reform, the transition of power, and positive image" were the reasons they voted for Moon. Yoo and Sim, whose policy promises focused on advocating

³⁰ "Gallup Korea Daily Opinion: Report no. 256" [in Korean], *Gallup Korea*. April 27, 2017. <http://www.gallup.co.kr/gallupdb/reportContent.asp?seqNo=828>.

³⁰ "Gallup Korea Daily Opinion: Report no. 257" [in Korean], *Gallup Korea*. May 2, 2017. <http://www.gallup.co.kr/gallupdb/reportContent.asp?seqNo=829>.

³² So Young Lee et al., "An Analysis of the Effects of the 19th Presidential Debates," 2017.

for the well-being of under-represented groups, garnered votes because of their policy promises and performance in the televised debates. An educator and a revered CEO, Ahn was preferred by voters because of his associations with educational reform, economic development, and novelty. Lastly, Hong attracted conservative voters who shared his stance on security issues and were dissatisfied with the other candidates. Indeed, more rigorous research is required to confirm a correlation between issues and voter decisions, yet the below table can be a starting point for further research.

<Table 4> Top Three Policy Promises and Reasons for Voting

Candidate	Top Three Policy Promises ³³	Top Three Reasons for Voting (of voters) ³⁴
Moon Jae-In	1. Anti-Corruption 2. Fairness 3. Democratic principles and human rights	1. Reform 2. Transition of Power 3. Positive image/character
Hong Joon-Pyo	1. National security 2. Employment and growth 3. Fair society and amelioration of socioeconomic polarization	1. Stance on national security 2. Conservative candidate 3. Better than the other candidates / disliked other candidates
Ahn Cheol-Soo	1. National security 2. Education 3. Fourth Industrial Revolution	1. Honesty 2. Different from established politicians, novelty 3. The Fourth industrial revolution, preparation for the future
Yoo Seung-Min	1. Low birth rates and child care 2. Temporary Employment 3. Fair Market Economy	1. Good policy promises 2. Positive image/character 3. Performed well in televised debates
Sim Sang-Jung	1. Temporary Employment 2. Farmers and Small Businesses 3. Gender Equality and Women' Rights	1. Good policy promises 2. Interest in labor issues, represents laborers 3. Performed well in in televised debates

To conclude, the five parties devoted substantial effort to drafting manifestos, which

³³ "19th Presidential Election Manifestos" [in Korean], *Korea Manifesto Center*, Accessed September 29, 2018, <http://manifesto.or.kr/?p=5106&ckattempt=1>.

³⁴ "Gallup Korea Daily Opinion: 19th Presidential Election Post-Investigation," *Gallup Korea*, May 12, 2017, <http://www.gallup.co.kr/gallupdb/reportContent.asp?seqNo=831>.

were extensively addressed in the media. Security and economic issues were the two most salient ones that parties competed for ownership. The ability of candidates to present themselves as being knowledgeable about key issues and coherently articulate their policy promises were also important. The issues generated through television debates were not always policy-related, but the wide viewership of the televised debates made parties pay particular attention to issues in 2017.

e. Reliance on Public Funding

Facing the dwindling number of loyal party members paying membership fees, electoral-professional parties gradually turned to government subsidies for financing. In truth, South Korean parties, especially right-wing parties, have relied on government subsidies since the 1980s.³⁵ Weak voter-party ties and the enactment of the Political Funds Act enabled parties to eagerly seek government funding even before their transition into electoral-professional parties. Keeping this in mind, this section analyzes party financing during the 2017 presidential election, with a particular focus on the financing of the Justice Party.

The Political Party Activity and Finance Reports published by the National Election Commission in 2015 and 2016, respectively, reveal that 34.9% of Saenuri's income came from government subsidies in 2015, which increased to 38.4% in 2016.³⁶ The numbers were similar for the Democratic Party, which also showed an increase from 37.3% to 38.1%. The People's Party was the most dependent on government subsidies with a percentage as high as 65.7%. In contrast, only 27.1% of the Justice Party's funds came from the government, and the percentage remained the same throughout 2015 and 2016.³⁷ One may see the Justice

³⁵ Won-Taek Kang, "A Review of Research Trends of South Korea's Political Parties," *Korean Party Studies Review* 8, no. 2 (2009): 126.

³⁶ National Election Commission (South Korea), *2016 Political Party Activity and Finance Report*, 2016, http://m.nec.go.kr/m/bbs/viewPop/B0000338/36880.do?menuNo=200185&searchOpti_on2=Y&searchWrd=&searchCnd=&viewType=&pageIndex=4.

³⁷ Since the Bareun Party was only founded in 2017, data on the Bareun Party's sources of income are yet to be

Party as an aberration, but its unique position as a small-scale, left-wing party suggests otherwise. A close look at the current law concerning the allocation of government subsidies also provides further explanation for the Justice Party's relatively low reliance on public funding.

The Political Funds Act states that 50% of the ordinary and election subsidies shall be evenly distributed and paid to political parties that form negotiation groups.³⁸ Parties that hold at least five seats in the National Assembly are then each paid 5% of subsidies. Parties that hold less than five seats receive 2% of the subsidies. The remaining subsidies are then distributed according to the ratio of the number of seats and the number of votes obtained in an election for National Assembly members.³⁹ This article indicates the unequal distribution of resources that disadvantage small or medium-sized parties and perpetuate the imbalance of power between majority and minority parties.

One surprising occurrence in the election was the massive amount of donations Sim received, which totaled up to 15 billion won (approximately 13.3 billion US dollars). What is more remarkable is that the amount was accrued by small-scale donations, with no donations exceeding 5 million won (approximately 4,500 dollars). Furthermore, the fact that Sim collected more than 1 billion won immediately after her appearance in the final television debate in April attests to the impact of media and public perception in the financing of parties during the election.⁴⁰ Moon ranked below Sim with 14 billion won, followed by Yoo who received 9 billion, then Hong with 3 billion, and lastly Ahn with 2.2 billion.⁴¹ A

reported. The National Election Commission will release reports on its financial activities during 2017 in its 2018 annual report.

³⁸ Political Funds Act, Chp. V Art. 27 item 1 (S. Korea).

³⁹ Political Funds Act, Chp. V Art. 27 item 2 (S. Korea).

⁴⁰ Tae-Gyu Kim, "Sim-Sang Jung's approval rating soars to 8%, donations mount as well," *Hankyoreh*, April 26, 2017, http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/politics/politics_general/792433.html.

⁴¹ Nam-il Kim, "Shim ranks first and Moon ranks second in party fundraising," *Hankyoreh*, June 22, 2017, http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/politics/politics_general/799862.html.

possible explanation is that this ranking aligns with the degree of loyalty displayed by supporters, which translates to not only votes but also financial support.

Therefore, due to legal regulations, larger parties tended to monopolize governmental resources, barring small parties from accessing more public funds even in 2017. Despite this, the Justice Party thrived by financing its operations via donations from loyal voters. Granted, two factors—the rising percentage of government subsidies in a party’s total income and the declining amount of monetary contributions from members—indicate that the majority of parties are now even more reliant on public funding, qualifying as electoral-professional parties.

V. Discussion

In this research, I find that the five parties in the 2017 presidential election show moderate to high engagement with new media technologies for electoral success. Increased public awareness ensuing Park’s impeachment facilitated political communication between parties and voters, which reinforced the central role of professionals and broad appeal of parties. Declining party identification resulted in a smaller amount of party income collected from members, increasing the reliance of parties on public funding. Regionalism was no longer the sole dominant cleavage in 2017, especially with the rise of policy and issues as the main grounds for voter decisions.

As for specific parties, the Democratic Party, based on its stable and well-rounded support, constructed campaign strategies with its large pool of experts, cumulating experience as a successful campaign organization. The Liberty Korea Party heavily relied on its established party brand and voter base, but still engaged with new media platforms to appeal to its supporters. The Justice Party made a very strategic use of media, which earned Sim popularity among the younger generation and a reputation as the representative of the socially weak. The

People's Party leveraged the fresh image associated with Ahn, but its short history and excessive focus on the persona of Ahn engendered confusion rather than anticipation among voters. The Bareun Party, despite its unique agendas and Yoo's expertise, failed to attract enough loyal voters.

One major consequence of the 2017 presidential election was the merger of the Bareun Party and People's Party in 2018. The Bareun Party experienced mass defections, driving it to the verge of losing its status as a negotiation group in the National Assembly. The People's Party also suffered from factional conflict, not to mention the declining support for Ahn. After a series of negotiations, the two parties merged to form the Bareunmirae (Bareun Future) Party, remaining the third-largest party in the National Assembly. It was expected that the merger would bolster public support for the party, giving it a chance to reemerge as a major player in South Korean politics.

To one's surprise, the party failed to win any of the 17 big-city mayoral and gubernatorial posts and 12 vacant parliamentary seats. What accounts for its utter defeat? Since Moon had already won the election, did voters see the local elections as a chance to entrust him with even more power? Is the Bareunmirae Party targeting the right audience? Recently, the party demonstrated the will to persevere with its centrist platform by declining to merge with the Liberty Korea Party. However, if it wishes to stand on its own, it must relentlessly seek answers for these questions. In light of this, another question may be posed for further research: what does the low support of the centrist Bareunmirae Party indicate in terms of the ideological spectrum and "public" appeal of South Korean parties?

As for the time being, the recurring features of fluidity and factionalism coupled with decreased momentum for sociopolitical reform seem to be undermining the Bareunmirae Party. Moreover, without further constitutional reforms or consistent efforts to institutionalize policy-oriented electoral competition, the characteristics of South Korea's former party system,

namely personalized practices and frequent mergers and splits, may easily reappear. Park's impeachment catalyzed a transition in South Korea's political party development, but whether parties will simply remain as professional campaign organizations or regain public trust as channels of representation is left open to question.

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