

# Some Suggestions for Korean Political Development

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## Abstract

Korean society is struggling with confusion and pains on the direction to reform our political institution. We should establish the political party and election system that encourages general public to participate in political process freely. This paper reviews the problems in current system and suggests some ideas for the amendment in politics-related laws to achieve political development.

The Political Party Act limits the freedom of political activities and access of general public to political parties. It should allow employees in school and mass media and labor union to participate in political parties. Political parties should shift power from central party to district parties.

The National Assembly Members Election Act allows major parties to over-represent in national constituency and the disparity between the percentage of votes and seats a party obtains should be reduced. Public management of election affairs should be changed in order to increase the scope of freedom for election campaigns.

Most official political funds are distributed to governing party and opposition parties have difficulties in collecting funds. The Political Funds Act should be amended to achieve more equal distribution of political funds among political parties.

## I. Introduction

The Korean accomplished the liberalization, the first step for democratization,

by the peaceful transfer of political power and new democratic constitutional order in the end of 1980s and faces the tasks of establishing the tradition of civilian government and stable democratic society. At the present time, Korean society is struggling with confusion and pains on the direction and policies to reform our political institutions.

Governing and opposition political power groups should transform toward the competition by developing productive policies, and the extreme conflict structure between institutionalized and non-institutionalized political power groups, between democratic and non-democratic power, conservative and progressive power should be dissolved so as to establish civilian culture to encourage compromise and consensus among competing power groups. First of all, we should establish the political party and election system that improve the participation of general public in political process and the political freedom of general public. At the transitional period when people demand reforms in politics strongly, I will review the problems of political institution in Korea and suggest some ideas for the change by focusing on the Political Party Act, National Assembly Members Election Act, and Political Funds Act.

## **II. Amendment in the Political Party Act**

### **1. Modifications in the qualification of political party establishment**

New political party should be easy to establish in order to include various political groups into institutionalized political system. Up to now, we have had major party system under which new or radical parties have hardly succeeded in existing. It is argued that the reason for tough qualification of party establishment is to prohibit the coexistence of too many small parties. However, the reason is authoritarian and against the principles of pluralistic democracy. The current tough qualification in party establishment should be relaxed.

According to the proposed amendment by central election management committee, the number of district parties is reduced to the number of provinces(15) from one fifth of the number of districts for the member of National Assembly(48) and the restriction that central party office shall be located in Seoul and that district party establishment shall be notified to Central Election Management Committee should be abolished. In addition to the proposed amendment, the article on forced dissolution is unnecessary if any party satisfies the establishment qualification and political party shall be dissolved on condition that it fails to obtain people's support.

## **2. Party membership to employees in school and mass media**

Current political party act prohibits public officials, teachers, and mass media employees from being party initiators or party members. It is time to allow teachers and mass media employees to participate in political parties. Unofficial teachers' union should be included in institutionalized political system and a teacher is free to become a party member. If mass media employees are free to choose their party membership, they will keep each other in check and build the neutrality of mass media.

## **3. Labor union's party support**

Input of civil organizations such as labor union into political system is crucial to the development of democratic welfare state. Various social groups should be allowed to do political activities in order to realize their interests. Under pluralistic democracy, labor union's political activities including freedom to choose and support its political party should be quarantined.

## **4. Required party members fee**

Lack of identification of party members is one of main causes for the top-down operation of political parties. The required payment of party members fee shall improve party members' participatory identification. Annual affiliation fee composes 90% of annual budget for the Labor Party in Britain. The required payment of members fee is a prerequisite to the democratic operation of political party and only members who pay members fee should have voting power.

## **5. Power transfer from central party to district parties and provincial chapters**

The decision rights of political parties in Korea are highly centralized to central party and most of important decisions are made by a few persons in high rank positions. Central party grips full controls over district parties and provincial chapters, which only plays advance guard to collect election votes. Central party needs financial support for its big bureaucracy, which causes the adhesion of economy and politics. Unbalanced fund distribution of central party among district parties and provincial chapters leads to strong protest and resistance of district parties and provincial chapters, which argue fund management of central party should be

disclosed. In order to enable political party to operate democratically, The roles of district parties and provincial chapters should be strengthened.

The role of central party should be limited to a liaison organization supporting party convention which is the highest representatives' legislative body and votes for amendment of party constitution and party platform, national policy, election of presidential candidate and party president. The general meeting of National Assembly Members can handle policy development and increase of number of staffs for Assembly Members will help the Member to develop policy and act. In the period of localization, central party can not control over selection of candidates for government positions but party members in district and province should decide over it. The power shift from central party to district party and provincial chapters will result in the development of a grassroots political party eventually.

### **III. Amendment in the National Assembly Members Election Act**

Election is a rational way for people to express their opinion and to control government and is essential process to realize democracy in political process of modern state. Establishment of fair and democratic election order is crucial for democratization and political development. Under democratic election order, political parties and candidates compete one another on equal basis, and electors are free to choose candidates, and the election results are transformed into fair power distribution.

In our election history since the first election on May 10, 1948, most of elections have been contaminated by corrupt and illegal activities and the aftermath of elections have been serious. Losers in elections and general public usually refused to accept election results and governing party had hard time in gaining legitimacy. The corrupt and illegal activities result not only from the deficiency of election institution but from voters' election perception and candidates' campaign behaviors.

We can find some characteristics in our election affairs. First of all, people are authoritarian and obedient to authority and comply to government. They tend to vote on the basis of group pressure and external stimuli. The tendency should be reduced by prohibition of money power and bureaucratic power in election process and strict public management of election. Second, voting behavior has different characteristics according to regions. Rural areas have supported governing party while urban areas have supported opposition parties. Youngnam region and Honam region have been antagonistic to each other on political party support. Modern political party should overcome the regional limitation of supporting groups and extend its nation-wide support base. One-member electorate system deteriorates the regional conflicts and we need to change election district system

in order to solve the conflicts.

Third, most of voters tend to determine for whom to vote before election process starts, which means election campaign has little impact on voting behaviors. Therefore, well-known figures run for election and new-face have little chance to win in major party candidacy and election. Election campaign should be activated in order to provide information on candidates to voters. Fourth, National Assembly Members electoral systems have been designed to enable governing party to obtain a majority of National Assembly Members' seats and have not got full support of general public. There are some suggestions for improving election system. I focus on election district system, public management of election affairs, and freedom of election campaign and amendment in National Assembly Members Election Act.

### **1. Election districts**

The current National Assembly Members Election Act specifies the number of members shall be 299 and 237 members shall be elected in local constituencies and 62 members in national constituency. We can witness various problems on account of single-member electorate system in local constituency.

Party support is based on specific region and region-based party deteriorates regional antagonism and nation-building among general public. Severe competition among candidates and parties may lead to corrupt and illegal campaign. There is little chance that new-face wins the race and incumbents are difficult to replace in party candidacy. National figures take disadvantage to local figures and candidates' pool is relatively limited. The percentage of Assembly Members a party wins disagree disproportionately to percentage of votes the party captures. The disparity of number of electors among election districts has increased and violated the principle of equal representation. In the 14th National Assembly Members Election, the number of electors in Songpa-kap, Seoul (229,000) is 5 times as large as that in Jangheung, Junnam (46,000).

There are some problems in national constituency. According to current law, seats for the national constituency are allotted in proportion to seats for local constituencies of each political party which occupies five or more seats in the general election for the local constituencies. If there are political parties which obtain over 3/100 of the total effective votes and less than 5 seats in local constituency, one seat shall be allotted preferentially to each of such parties. Despite the proviso, inequality between vote and seat percentages is still severe. In the 14th Assembly Members election, Democratic Liberal Party obtained 38.5% of votes but 53.2% of seats in national constituency. National Party obtained 17.4% of votes but only 11.3% of seats in national constituency. Current list of candidates in national con-

stituency for each political party does not reflect national figures but top party leaders' interest to allocate positions and compensate for losers in party candidacy for local constituency.

Some suggestions to improve election district system are discussed. two thirds of Assembly Members should be elected in local constituencies and one third, elected in major constituencies. One through three members shall be elected in one local constituency because current maximum number of seats is three for a shi-gun-gu. In proportional representative system, Assembly members shall be elected according to party candidate lists for each region which is partitioned based on provinces(shi-do) and population.

Elector shall cast two votes; one for candidate for local constituency and the other for party list. The seats given to each region is allotted in proportion to percentage of votes each party obtain in party list voting. Voter doesn't have to vote for the same party to which the candidate she/he votes for belongs. If a candidate loses in local constituency and his name is in party list, she/he can be an Assembly Member based on the percentage of votes of her/his party in the region. If a candidate wins by party list and win in local constituency at the same time, she/he shall be excluded from the party list and other candidate next to her/him shall succeed her/his turn.

Law shall require democratic procedures within party for writing the party list. It is wrong for a few party elites monopolize the decision power for candidates in current national constituency. General meeting of party members or representatives is necessary for selecting candidates for local constituencies or party list for regional constituencies. However it is expected that severe competition in general meeting of party members or representatives for choosing candidates will lead to a kind of plutocracy, and it is a prerequisite for democratic procedures within party to install the institution to regulate the dysfunction.

These suggestions to change the current election district system have some advantages. First, we can secure equal value of vote and regional representation in establishing constituencies. Second, the degree of corrupt and illegal activities during the election campaign will decrease. One candidate has little incentive to work out a trick or propaganda against a specific counterpart because multiple candidates have good chances to win the race. Third, political parties tend to be separated by region, which intensifies regionalism under single-member electorate system. Switch to multiple-members electorate system shall encourage harmony among regions and political development. Fourth, during the election campaign, election pledges shall focus on national policy and leadership vision rather than on district's development projects. Finally, the changes in electorate system shall lessen the disparity between percentage of votes and percentage of seats.

## **2. Meaningful operation of public management of election affairs**

Public management of election affairs means that central or local government or independent public institution manages election affairs and that it guarantees the equal opportunity among candidates and that it supports financial cost for election campaigns enough for candidates to spend their own money at minimum level. The article 116 of the Constitution says "election campaigns shall be conducted under the management of the Election Management Committees at each level within the limit set by law." Equal opportunity shall be guaranteed. Except as otherwise prescribed by law, expenditures for elections shall not be imposed on political parties or candidates. If candidates have to spend much money, politics may be corrupted.

We devise a variety of proposals to diminish election campaign expenditures. In capitalist economy, public management of election affairs might be undesirable but the public management is indispensable where open and fair political funds system is not firmly settled down. Huge campaign expenditure and corruption result from the fact that actual campaign scope is much wider than specified by law and regulation. The scope of election campaign shall reflect the actual scope and expenditures for wider scope of campaign is publicly supported. For instance, the expenditures for production and distribution of posters, newsletters, pamphlet and the other candidates' PR materials shall be supported publicly. A hanging placard little help voters to know candidates and tends to intensify the heat of campaigns too far.

One joint speech meeting shall be held by local constituency election committee, which, in return, shall allow candidates to hold speech rally or joint debate via mass communications. Election committee shall support policy debate by way of cable TV as well as radio and TV and diminish the probability that candidates utilize underground money. Public support for campaign expenses can not be applied to candidates who obtain votes fewer than a certain level. The critical level depends upon the number of candidates in a local constituency now, which is not rational. The critical level shall be fixed as 5% of total effective votes in a local constituency.

## **3. Freedom of election campaign**

The National Assembly Election Act, article 38 through 86, limits the freedom of election campaign too far and has little effectiveness in implementation and causes people's disregard to the Act. The Act shall be amended to secure the freedom

of election campaign and to list the limited number of limitations and prohibitions in campaign for the purpose of eliminating corruption and propaganda and unequal opportunity.

Some principles for the limitation of freedom can be identified. First, the activities to distribute money, to provide convenience, or to give food, drink or materials shall be limited. Current articles restricting campaign expenses can be observed by writing detailed report on expenses and strict accounting audit. It shall force all the candidates to spend money within the budget set up by election committee. Second, special status and position shall not be used in campaign. Public officials in governments and government-supported organizations shall not participate in campaign, and during the campaign period, they shall be kept from publicizing or implementing new programs and top officials in public agency, from meeting together in privacy other than regular official meeting. During the campaign period, political party's activities shall be limited to party members and party's activity whose audience is general public shall be limited. Third, street demonstration or group nuisance disturbing order and peace of civil life shall be banned. Officials of election committee shall be endowed with judicial police authority in order to implement order and arrest violators for illegal activities. The way current law regulates is to specify various cases very much in detail, which obstructs the free campaign activities. Except for those specific limitations, the freedom of campaign can not be restricted.

#### **IV. Amendment in the Political Funds Act**

As business company spends production cost, politics spends money to establish and operate political party and develop agenda and policy. In a free democratic society to realize people's sovereignty by way of election, we can not eliminate political cost but reduce it. We must pay the cost for the election to select representatives governing the nation and the cost is ultimately cost for democracy. Political funds which general public is ready to pay for the development of democratic politics should be managed in accordance with the principles of legalization, openness, and equal allocation. Clear management of political funds is a foundation of democratic political development and is preceded by legalization and openness of any political contributions.

People hate the election campaign corruption and explosive general price hike as the aftermath and accumulate the disbelief and antagonism toward politics, politicians, and government power. Current political funds system is operated unequally among political parties and arouses suspicion of something wrong. Fair allocation of political funds among competing parties is essential to party politics and political development. There are not a few problems in current political funds



act and illegal and private political funds still prevail. Political funds should be collected and allocated through open mechanism to parties and Assembly members in order to encourage them to behavior according to the law. The amendment in Political Funds Act will contribute to the clean political funding system.

### **1. Deposit money**

According to article 3, item 6 of the Political Funds Act, deposit money means money, securities or other objects that any individual or organization entrusts to the election management committee, and it plays the most important role in political funding system. But current deposit money system does not work to contribute to the development of political funding and it leads to adhesion of politics an business. As the amount and scope of deposit money grows and prevails, various aspects of dysfunction take place and encourage corruption in the society. In 1992, governing Democratic Liberal Party received 17.4 billion won but all the opposition parties received only 6.5 million won. More than 90% of deposit money is distributed to governing party and all 53 contributions of deposit money specifying recipient party are for governing party.

The disparity of political funds between governing party and opposition party shall be reduced by distributing a certain percentage of deposit money specifying recipient party to the other parties. Corporation's deposit money and supporting money shall be prohibited in order to prevent corruption and black money. Non-specified deposit money shall be distributed to improve fair distribution among political parties.

### **2. Supporters' association**

Supporters' association is to improve reliance in politics and make public the sources of political funds by allowing voters to directly support political party or politicians and increasing voters' participation in political process. It means to prevent political funds from concentrating in central parties and encourage politician of great capacity to grow up to political leadership. According to law, supporters' association can be formed for a party (central party, provincial branch, or district party), a member of the National Assembly, or a candidate for the Assembly Member, and association members are composed of individuals or organizations. Currently, supporters' associations for governing Democratic Liberal Party or its Assembly Members function vitally but few associations for opposition parties or their members are formed or the formed associations lose their vitality. In 1993, only Democratic Liberal Party and Democratic Party received supporting money from supporters' associations and about 99% of total supporting money was

received by governing party. On 31st of May, 1993 205 associations were formed for Democratic Liberal Party, while only 29 associations were formed form opposition parties. In reality, governing party establishes many supporters' association and collects lots of money from the association members while opposition parties have difficulty in forming supporters' association and collecting supporting money. To prefer governing party and to keep away from opposition parties is mainly due to the fact that people have tendency to avoid supporting opposition party for fear of getting penalties under authoritarian information politics.

Political atmosphere in which people are free to support sound opposition party is essential to realizing mature democratic politics. Limitation in the number of members for supporters' association and limitations in methods of collecting money should be removed as as to increase general public's participation in political process. The scope of elections for which supporters' association collect more than twice than fixed amount should include not only presidential election and National Assembly Members election but local elections for i.e. mayor or governor. Law should relax the requirement for establishment of supporters' association so as to allow all the political party's district parties irrespective of status of floor negotiation group and members of local legislatures and candidates for local election to form supporters' associations.

### **3. Party members' fee**

Party members' fee means money or securities that members of a party bear under the constitution and regulation of the party, and it contributes to increasing participation of party members as well as collecting political funds. The percentage of party members' fee out of total budget of a political party is an important indicator to measure autonomy of a party.

Political parties in Korea require members to pay members' fee by the party constitution and regulation but members' fee shares small portion of total operating revenue. In 1991, members' fee shared 5.3% of total revenue for Democratic Liberal Party and 21.9% for all the political parties. In 1992, the share of members' fee increased up to 66% but the share for governing party was still only 36%. Party members should be required to pay their members' fee by law and only members who paid fee should be endowed with right of voting so as to strengthen the channel through which rank and file expresses its opinion on major issues.

### **4. Subsidy**

While deposit money, supporting money, and party members' fee depend upon civil society where voters participate in political process voluntarily, subsidy

depends upon state's role. Subsidy was newly introduced by the political funds act amended in 1980 so as for the State to support political party activities and to protect and foster the political parties.

According to the article 18 of the Political Funds Act, 40% of the subsidy shall be divided equally by political parties forming a negotiation group with Assemblymen belonging to the same political parties and out of the remainder, 5% shall be distributed to party which can not form a negotiation group and have five or more Assemblymen, and 2% shall be distributed to party which obtained more than 2% of effective votes in recent National Assembly Members election or 0.5% of effective votes in recent provincial election. The half of remaining portion shall be distributed in proportion to the number of the National Assembly seats and the other half shall be distributed in proportion to the number of votes party obtained in recent National Assembly Members election. The annual appropriation for the subsidy amounts to the total number of electors in the general election multiplied by 800 won. For the year in which presidential, general, or local election is held, the subsidy shall be added by 800 won by election.

In the first half of 1993, 8,701 million won was distributed to the political parties and 48.6% of the subsidy was paid to Democratic Liberal Party, 38.7% to Democratic Party, and 11.8% to National Party. But the share of the subsidy was less than 20% of total revenue of political parties and the subsidy should be increased so as to make public political funds. In addition to the increase of subsidy appropriation, the openness of the purpose of subsidy expenses is an important issue.

According to item 1, article 19 of the Political Funds Act, the subsidy shall be used for the purpose of personnel expenses, office equipment and supply expenses, office maintenance expenses, public utility charges, expenses for policy development, party member training expenses, expenses for organization and activities, expenses for PR and expenses related to election. The main function of the subsidy is to support election affairs and it is more desirable that the subsidy is used for the purpose of election campaign or developing policy rather than the operating expenses. Now, no political parties spend revenues by separating the subsidy from the other revenues such as party members' fee, supporting money and deposit money and the purposes of the subsidy use are unclear. In reality, the subsidy is used for the expenses of personnel, office maintenance, higher party officials' activities in central party so as to improve the image of a few top party leaders. The degree of detail in the report to the election committee is artificial and formal and the contents of the report disagree with the real expenses. It accumulates the suspicion about political funds from the general public.

State subsidy should be limited to the expenses of election campaign and a portion of current subsidy should be switched to the budget of election committee so

as to improve the public management of elections. The distribution of the subsidy should be more equal among political parties than now. The outside audit on the purpose of subsidy use should be required in order to make political funds public and clear.

## **V. Conclusion**

We, Koreans, live in the transitional age of our history and have to reform our society so as to overcome the challenge from the inside and outside. We should develop the ideas and institution to change the distorted political behaviors and culture. The freedom and opportunity for political activities should be secured in order to develop democratic politics. Legislative process is the core of political process and therefore, National Assembly should function as focal point of political process. The suggestions for the amendments in politics-related laws will strengthen the bases for political parties and politicians to link general public and contribute to political development in Korea.