



## **Empowering Women in South Korea's New Democracy through the Quota System: Analysis of the 2006 Local Election\***

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This article is an interpretative empirical account of South Korea's rapid rise in political representation of women during its democratic transition and early period of consolidation. In this article, we first provide a brief background and factual accounts of women-friendly reforms in electoral systems. Second, we trace the impact of the institutional changes on women's empowerment operationalized as the ratio of women elected in national and local elections. Third, to identify the extent and effectiveness of such electoral change in detail, we analyze the turnouts of South Korea's 2006 local elections. Our analysis showed that the empowerment of women is one of the prominent achievements of South Korea's new democracy during the past decade. We also uncovered that institutional reforms in democratizing contexts such as intensified competition among political parties, inner-party democratization and changes in electoral laws and practices — i.e. the adoption of the proportionality system and the quota for women — have all contributed to an enhancement of women's position in politics.

**Keywords:** new democracy, empowerment of women, gender quota system, electoral system, local election

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## I. Introduction

This article is an interpretative empirical account of South Korea's rapid rise in women's empowerment and political representation during its democratic transition and early period of consolidation. Multiple factors added up to pressurize the government and political parties to be more open-minded about reform bills, ready for inclusionary options in sharing power, and thus become more adaptive than before to politics of the new empowerment of women in South Korea. Two most prominent sources of the political inputs for changes and reform in this respect can be summed up as the global trend of 'gender mainstreaming' and the 'democratizing context' of the changing social, cultural and political climates of South Korea's national and local governance. The gender quota system in South Korea's general (National Assembly) election was first adopted in 2000. The proportionality principle mixed with a quota rule for women candidates was also applied to local elections of the past 4 consecutive terms since 1995. A mid-term review and assessment of these institutional changes and their effects on empowering women in South Korea's new democracy are particularly relevant in this juncture, and this, therefore, is the primary objective of our paper.

In the following sections, we will first provide a brief background and factual accounts of reforms in electoral systems and spurring adoption of female-friendly policy programs by the government and political parties. Second, we will trace the impact of the changes in electoral laws, party rules and candidate selection methods on turnouts in seat compositions of the national assembly and local councils. By assessing the process of progress and revisions of the election-related laws and regulations on the way, we hope we can offer, using the South Korean case, a constructive research program to conduct comparative assessments on the impact of various institutional reforms on the numbers, modes and extent of women's empowerment in national and local politics. Third, the restoration of South Korea's local self-government in 1991, after 30 years of forced suspension under military authoritarian rule, offers a unique and fertile research ground for opening new theoretical insights and empirical investigations on the issue at

hand. For this, we will analyze, in detail, the turnouts of South Korea's latest local elections held in May 31, 2006.

## **II. New Democracy and Revision of the Electoral Laws: 1991~2006**

### **1. Democratic Juncture**

South Korea's entry for active gender policy at the national level was encouraged by the global trend of 'gender mainstreaming.' Before the era of gender mainstreaming, women's development in the world had focused mainly on a strategy of integrating women into pre-set national economic development plans. This strategy identified women's exclusion from the economic development process as a major cause for their political and economic marginalization, with its policy prescriptions aimed at providing jobs and improved welfare provisions to women. When such policy perspective turned out to be insufficient for resolving women's marginalization, a new policy cycle of gender mainstreaming began to gain force since the mid-1980s (Peet 1999, 164-166). The theory of gender mainstreaming posed fundamentally different questions on the core concept of 'development' and 'policy-making' that are said as exclusive of the women's rightful positions in society, economics and politics. It called for a basic shift of the gender-related policy from targeting women who were excluded from the development process to a shift toward a new perspective — calling for changes in the concept of 'development': The prescription was followed by a new strategy aimed at, first and foremost, making the basic interests and voices of women heard into the mainstream of decision-making in framing development strategies and delivering policy decisions.

The gender mainstreaming approach was first endorsed by the UN Commission on the Status of Women in 1985 and was adopted as an explicit code of conduct at the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing, 1995. Afterwards, many countries have been pushed by the UN to reform the existing laws and institutions of discrimination and

establish a new system of policy measures, adopting the idea of gender mainstreaming. (Kang Nam-Shik 2001, 215-216). South Korea's democratic transition, dramatically evolved between 1987 and 1990, was coincidental with a mounting pressure from the global society to improve women's political representation, and this in turn greatly influenced the rise of women's political status during the nation's 'democratizing juncture.' The adoption of enlarged proportional representation of women in South Korea's national assembly and reforms in election-related laws to allocate women-friendly quota rules in national and local politics were made possible against the backdrop of these changing contexts and window of political opportunities in South Korea's 'new democracy.'

In spite of appeals and campaigns by women's rights groups and intermittent debates in the National Assembly to send more women to politics it was not until the mid 1990's that concrete policy measures were seriously sought for improving women's role and participation in the political system (Kim Kyeong-Hee 2005, 11). The 1995 legislation of the Women's Development Act was a turning point for the government's policy view to change from a perspective of "women's problem" to that of the "gender policy." The Women's Development Act pointedly defined that it is the fundamental responsibility of the national and local agencies to speed up gender equality policy and promote women's development in all areas including politics, economy, society and culture. The law also obliged the national government to establish a set of consolidated institutional reforms. Accordingly, the master plans for gender-related policy were to be laid out every five years. The first master plan for gender policy, covering the year 1998-2002, clarified its primary tasks as promoting the women's political representation by reforming laws, institutions and customary practices. More specifically, the plan set as one of the twenty national policy tasks engaging more women at all levels of the national process of policy.

The contexts of ascending women's policy on the priority list of the national policy agenda and evolving progress of women-friendly reforms in electoral laws and regulations were additionally influenced by the partisan interests of major political actors for inducing wider support from female voting blocs in electoral competitions.

During the opening years of South Korea's inclusionary politics, prominent populist leaders severely competed with one another to win the newly empowered citizen's supports, and women voters were a precious source for their political capital. Thus, populist (male) politicians could hardly say 'no' to women's demands for a speedier reinstatement of women's rightful positions in politics.

One of the long-held prejudices about women and politics have been that women are likely to be indifferent to politics, and women voters do not prefer female politicians in higher political posts. But stepping into the 1990's, researches and polls have offered challenging views. The results of opinion polls conducted by women's organizations such as the Korean League of Women Voters, the Center for Korean Women and Politics and the Korean Women's Development Institute showed that women voters were turning less anti-political; they no longer avoided to support female politicians, and were gradually becoming more openly and positively engaged in issues of women and politics than before. Furthermore, this tendency was reportedly getting stronger among younger generations. In short, interpretations of disappearing prejudice against female politicians have steadily been spreading (Park Kyoung-Ae 1999, 440). It is still contentious whether Korean women are better organized to form effective voting blocks and more actively support female candidates, or think that women politicians are more effectively representing their interests over male counterparts. However, the wave of democracy stimulated expectations that female voters will vote on the basis of their own interests rather than the preferences of their husbands or family members as before. A complex interplay of the above process paved a political road to spur the social cognizance and institutional reforms for empowering women in Korea.

## 2. Evolution of Gender-Friendly Laws and Policy Programs

It is well known that the level of women's political participation hinges on variations of the electoral system (Rule 1987; Rule 1994; Norris 1993; Darcy et al. 1994; Matland 1998; Vengroff et al. 2000). In Korea, the recent elevation of women's political position also owes a lot to the improvement in the election laws and the related legal-institutional

Table 1. Major Revisions of Election-related Laws

Year	Revisions of Election-related Laws and Elections
1995. 4 6	POEA: 10% of the high-level local assembly seats were designated as proportional seats. 1st Nationwide Simultaneous Local Elections
1996. 4	15th General Election (for National Assembly Members)
1998. 4 6	POEA: Reduction of the total seat number in local assemblies 2nd Nationwide Simultaneous Local Elections
2000. 2 4	PPA: Adoption of the minimum 30% mandatory quota for female candidates on the party lists of the proportional seats of National Assembly and high-level local assembly 16th General Election
2002. 3      6	POEA: Minimum 50% mandatory quota for female candidates on the party lists for proportional seats of high-level local assembly. One in every two candidates must be a female in the ranking of the candidates list. In case of non-compliance, the party list is null and void. PPA: Adding to revisions in accordance with the POEA, allocation of Female Nomination Subsidy to parties with more than 30% female district candidates for high-level local assembly election. PFA: Allocation of Female Nomination Subsidy to parties with more than 30% female district candidates for high-level local assembly election 3rd Nationwide Simultaneous Local Elections
2004. 3  4	PPA: Minimum 50% mandatory quota for female candidates on party lists for proportional seats of National Assembly. Allocation of Female Nomination Subsidy to parties with more than 30% female district candidates 17th General Election
2005. 8	POEA: Introduction of party nomination system to lower level local election, allocating 10% of the seats to proportional seats. Rearrangement of district zones from 1 seat per electoral district to 2-4 seats. Reservation of odd numbers on party lists for female candidates in all (national and local) proportional seats. PFA: Even parties that nominate less than 30% female district candidates can benefit from Female Nomination Subsidy in National Assembly and high level local assembly elections.
2006. 5 10	4th Nationwide Simultaneous Local Election POEA: In case of non-compliance with 50% gender quotas and odd numbering regulation, the party list is null and void in proportional seats of lower level local assembly election.

Note: POEA: Public Official Election Act; PPA: Political Party Act; PFA: Political Funds Act.

Source: Ministry of Government Legislation (<http://www.moleg.go.kr/>).

reforms. Table 1 highlights major changes and revisions of the legal measures regarding women's political participation in the course of revising election-related laws between 1995 and 2006.

After the local election in 1991, women's society actively campaigned for the adoption of the proportional representation system as a means of speeding up women's political representation in local politics. The Public Official Election Act was revised to elect 10 percent of high-level local assembly seats through the proportional representation system in April 1995, two months before the election. Also before the local election in June 1995, major parties agreed to nominate 50 percent of proportional candidates among women. However, it was a political agreement without effective legal binding power, precipitated by the time pressure and aggressive campaign demands of women's organizations.

In 1998 ahead of the 2nd Nationwide Simultaneous Local Elections, the bill reducing the total seat numbers of local assembly members was passed; and this reduction affected the number of elected women at the 2nd nation-wide election. The 16th National Assembly Election was held in 2000. According to the Political Party Act revised two months before the election, all parties were obliged to nominate female candidates for more than 30 percent of the proportional seats both general (national assembly) elections and high-level local assembly elections. By this enactment of the revised Political Party Act, the quota system for women became settled as a legally binding system.

There were also important changes and revisions in the Public Official Election Act, the Political Party Act, and the Political Fund Act in 2002 ahead of the 3rd Nationwide Simultaneous Local Election in June. There are three noteworthy points in the revisions of laws and regulations in March, 2002. First, the mandatory quota for female candidates in high-level local assembly seats increased from 30% to 50%. Second, by introducing a zipper system under which parties were required to nominate one female candidate for every other male candidate on the list, a systematic safeguard rule was set for all parties not to list women where they have a slim chance of being elected. Third, it was decided that subsidy would be provided to parties if they recommended more than

30% of women in district elections for high-level assembly elections. However, the quota system in district elections was left as a recommendation clause with no compulsory enforcement, considering the circumstances of those parties complaining about insufficient female candidate pools. Before the 17th General Election, the Political Party Act was also amended to increase the quota rate for females from 30% to 50%, with a subsidy granted if a party recommended women candidates for more than 30% of district elections in the general election.

The revision of the Public Official Election Act and Political Fund Act in 2005 is also noteworthy. First, the party nomination system was extended to lower level local elections, allocating 10% of the total seats to the proportional representation scheme. Second, the revision further strengthened the existing 'zipper system' by mandating women candidates to appear in every odd-number orders on the candidate list. Under the previous zipper system, political parties could not concentrate women lower down in the lists but had a tendency to place female candidates on even number orders. Considering the small portion of PR seats per electoral constituency of local election, male candidates listed on the first place of the party lists had a greater chance of being elected. The odd numbering system, ensuring the elected to be a female even when a party gets only one PR seat in a given electoral constituency, is a much stronger measure to enhance women's political representation through the PR system.

Even though the 2005 revision targeted all the PR elections including national and local levels, the penalty regulation — nullifying the registration of party lists in case of not abiding by the 50 percent quota and the odd numbering for women — was left to apply only to high-level local elections. It meant that there were no effective means of enforcement in lower level and National Assembly elections. The outcome of the 4th Nationwide Simultaneous Local Election in 2006 actually showed a loophole in the 2005 revisions. With the exception of the Democratic Labor Party, all parties assigned the first place on the list to male candidates in some lower level local PR constituencies, and ended up electing only one male councilor in many local constituencies. In order to correct this flaw, the Public Official Election Act was revised again in October 2006 (after the election) to nullify party lists which fail to observe both the 50% quota and

odd numbering rule in the lower level local election.

### III. Impact of the Quota System in Seat Distributions

#### 1. Overview of National and Local Elective Positions

##### 1) National Assembly, 1992~2004

In the National Assembly election in Korea, a mixed system of district elections and a nation-wide proportional election is applied. The number of seats for proportional representatives is not pre-determined. Currently, the total number of assembly seats is set at 299. Once the number of electoral districts is fixed, the rest are allotted to proportional seats. For the 17th National Assembly Election of 2004, 243 single-majority districts had been determined and the remaining 56 seats were filled through proportional elections.

Table 2 summarizes the results of four National Assembly elections since Korea's democratization. In the 14th General Election of 1992, three women (4.8%) were elected only for proportional seats. Women occupied only 1.0 percent out of 299 elected. The situation of women's under-representation remained unchanged in the 15th National Assembly of 1996. Two women were elected in district elections and seven in

Table 2. Women in the National Assembly Number (%)

	District		PR		Total	
	Seat Total	Women	Seat Total	Women	Total	Women
1992 (14th)	237	0 (0.0)	62	3 (4.8)	299	3 (1.0)
1996 (15th)	253	2 (0.8)	46	7 (15.2)	299	9 (3.0)
2000 (16th)	227	5 (2.2)	46	11 (23.9)	273	16 (5.9)
2004 (17th)	243	10 (4.1)	56	29 (51.8)	299	39 (13.0)

*Note:* Additional elections to fill vacancies were not included.

*Source:* National Election Commission (1992; 1996; 2000); National Election Commission's Electoral information System (<http://www.nec.go.kr/sinfor/index.html>).

proportional seats so that the total number of females elected barely reached nine (3.0%). The 16th General Election of April 2000 is noteworthy as the first general election after the legislation of the gender quota system. With the introduction of the 30 percent gender quota in PR election, the ratio of female assembly members rose significantly to 23.9 percent of the proportional seats. However, the results in 2000 show two limitations in terms of women's representation. First, the quota regulation was too loose to cause substantial changes in parties' behavior. In spite of the 30 percent quota, the female share in the National Assembly marked under 30% percent. While requiring 30% quotas of the parties, the Political Party Act kept silence on how to rank the candidates on the list. In addition, without penalty clauses, there were no means of sanctioning non-compliance of the rule. These led parties to put female candidates on the lower places of the list. Second, an unstable composition between PR and district seats could have been an obstacle. Of the 26 seats reduced in 2000, ten seats were from district constituencies and 16 from the proportional seats. Therefore, even with the sharp increase of women in proportional seats, the overall rate of women in the National Assembly remained less than satisfactory.

The 17th general election of 2004 set an important milestone in the progress of political empowerment of South Korean women. A total of 39 women legislators (13%), 10 from district elections and 29 out of the total 56 proportional seats, were elected, reaching the largest number in history. The revision of Political Party Act in 2004 strengthened the gender quota from 30% to 50% and accordingly raised women's proportion to 51.8% of the proportional seats. Despite the lack of an ordering method and penalty clause as in 2000, all major political parties nominated female and male candidates by turns from upper ranks, allowing women a higher possibility to be elected. In this regard, we might assume that the political parties have begun to regard the odd numbering rule and the 50 percent female quota principle as norms in the electoral process.<sup>1)</sup>

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1) All major parties followed the quota rule relatively well, nominating women and men by turns; the Grand National Party used odd-numbers for its female candidates until No. 40; the Uri Party consecutively nominated women for No. 25 and No. 26. rank, but followed the odd-numbering rule

However, district election is still left as an area marginal to women (10 out of 243 district seats in 2004 election). In the revision of the Political Party Act in March, 2004, a thirty percent quota for women was introduced in the form of recommendation (without mandatory regulation) for district elections. Recommendation without legal binding power does not have an immediate and direct impact, and only serves as a symbolic guide for future policy direction. With the mild increase in the rate of females to 4.1 percent in 2004, it is premature to conclude that even a non-binding proposition for gender quota helps to empower women in district constituencies as well. On this, we consider it more appropriate to analyze the effects of non-binding regulations in a long-term and rule out the effects of a natural increase resulting from the advancement of women's social status.

By way of summing up our analysis so far, we could offer the following generalizations on women's political empowerment in the National Assembly. First, we confirmed that, in the National Assembly elections in South Korea, the proportional representation part is more effective for women to gain political positions compared to the district part. This is also supported by the significantly different numbers of female elected candidates in the two electoral parts before the quota rule was applied to the proportional representation system. Second, the quota rules combined with the proportional representation system have prominent and immediate effects. With the introduction of 30% gender quotas, the rate of women in proportional seats increased to 23.9% in the 2000 election. The rate, again, surged to 51.8% in the 2004 general election when the 50 percent quota was allotted to female candidates. Third, the recommendation clauses have hardly any substantial impact on improving women's representation. In the district elections where the quota was only recommended, the electoral outcome was far less than 30 percent, the recommended level. Considering that

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for the rest; the Democratic Party allocated odd-numbers to female candidates up to No. 10 rank, positioning women in relatively higher order than other parties, but, after No. 10, it posted male candidates on upper ranks. Meanwhile, the minority United Liberal Democrats recommended all male candidates for first 5 numbers and assigned female candidates to last numbers, which in fact had no possibility to be elected.

the number of proportional seats is limited to only about 20% of the total legislative seats, one way to move ahead for empowering more women at the national level would be to revise the electoral system to increase seats in the proportional system in relation to the district portion. If this is not possible under given political circumstances, another solution would be to introduce more specific regulations with an enhanced enforcement mechanism within the quota rules for district elections.

## 2) Local Governments, 1991~2006

Table 3 shows the trend of women's advancement to local assemblies in the five consecutive local elections held between 1991 and 2006. The restoration of local autonomy and first local election of 1991 were hailed as opening a new window of political opportunities for women. The results of the 1991 local election for high and lower level local councilors, however, were disappointing, with only 0.9% women councilors elected. After a disappointing return in the 1991 election, women's organizations recognized that it was necessary to introduce a proportional system and a quota for women in order to upgrade women's political participation in local politics. In 1994, while waging intensive public campaigns and organizing lobby activities, women leaders organized the 'Women's Solidarity for Quota System.' As a result, the proportional representation system covering 10 percent of the total seats was established at high level local elections in 1995. Additionally, major political parties promised the

Table 3. Women in Local Assemblies Number (%)

	High Level (Province and Big Cities)		Lower Level (City and Country)		Seat Total (Women as % of Total)
	District	PR	District	PR	
1991	8 (0.9)	-	40 (0.9)	-	48 (0.9)
1995	13 (1.5)	42 (43.3)	72 (1.6)	-	127 (2.2)
1998	14 (2.3)	27 (36.5)	56 (1.6)	-	97 (2.3)
2002	14 (2.3)	49 (67.1)	77 (2.2)	-	142 (3.2)
2006	32 (4.9)	57 (73.1)	110 (4.4)	327 (87.2)	526 (14.5)

Source: Sohn Bong-Scuk (2003, 52); National Election Commission (<http://www.nec.go.kr/>)

leaders of women's movement that they would implement a 50 percent gender quota for proportional seats. In June 1995's first Nation-wide Simultaneous Local Elections, the number of women council members increased about three times with 127 women elected. In the 1998 local elections, the total number of elected women decreased compared to the previous election for two reasons; reduction in the total number of local council seats under proportional representation, and certain parties' behavior placing women candidates on the lower places of the lists. Thus, until 1998, the rate of women councilors remained at around two percent.

Three months before the local election of 2002, the Public Official Election Act, the Political Party Act and the Political Funds Act were amended, introducing the 50% legally binding quota, zipper system as an ordering method, and penalty for non-compliance. Under the new institutional setting, the 2002 local election result showed a big surge in the number of women in local councils; 49 women were elected for proportional seats in upper-level local councils, comprising 67.1 percent of the total seats available. Another noticeable feature of the 2002 election was the 30 percent quota in the high level district elections. Similar to the National Assembly election, it was non-binding, and left to the party's discretionary implementation policy. Consequently, the number of elected women did not increase between 1998 and 2002 in upper-level district elections. In lower-level district elections, the number and ratio of women modestly increased, but this had little to do with the adoption of quotas as the party nomination system was not applied to lower level elections at the time of the 2002 election.

Election-related acts underwent another revision in 2005 before the 2006 local election. In the 2006 election, a total of 1,411 female candidates ran for office, covering 11.6 percent of the total 12,213 candidates. Among them, a total of 529 female candidates were elected, comprising 13.7 percent out of the total 3,867 elected candidates. Even though the result was still below a satisfactory level, the outcome was highly significant compared to previous local elections. Elected female local councilors (lower and high level combined) surged four times from 3.2 percent in 2002 to 14.5 percent in 2006. In district elections, 107 women ran for upper-level council seats and

32 were elected; 391 women came forward to lower level elections and 110 women won. Although the Public Official Election Act recommended that each party nominate female candidates for more than 30 percent of the total seats in district elections, the actual rate of female candidates was far below the target, with 5.2 percent in upper-level districts and 4.9 percent in lower-level district constituencies.

A sharp increase in the number of female candidates and elected in the May 31 election is contributed to the proportional representation seats in upper and lower level councils. 137 women (64.5%) registered as party lists' candidates in high level PR election and 57 (73.1%) were elected. In lower level PR elections, 750 women registered and 327 were elected, covering 73.2 percent of the total candidates and 87.2 percent of the elected. This means that 327 women, more than 60 percent of the total 526 women elected, could advance into the formal political sphere through the newly installed electoral system. From the statistics above, we are led to conclude again that the adoption of the proportional system mixed with a quota rule has been the primary reason for the substantial increase in the political empowerment of women in local governance during the recent years. The seats of proportional representation to which a quota rule can be most effectively applied are limited in numbers and scopes (to 10% of the total posts). Nevertheless, our finding strengthens the proposition that reforms in electoral institutions and changes of political party's internal rules are essential for the democratic empowering of those groups in society which have been left out of inclusionary politics.

#### **IV. Analysis of the 2006 Local Election Results**

##### **1. Effects of Electoral System Changes**

In the first local election of 1991, in which only district elections were held for both levels of local assembly, 48 female members (0.9%) were elected. The proportional representation system was introduced in two stages. The first stage was the 1st

Nationwide Simultaneous Local Election of 1995, in which 10 percent of upper-level assembly seats were reserved for proportional representatives. In the 1995 election, 42 women were elected through the newly introduced proportional election, occupying 43.2 percent of proportional representatives' seats. With the introduction of the proportionality in 1995, the number of female councilors rose from 48 (1991) to 127 or more than two times (See, Table 3). The second stage was unfolded ahead of the 4th nationwide local elections of 2006, when the proportional representation system was installed in lower level local councils. Out of the total 2,888 seats of lower-level local councils, 375 were allocated to proportional representatives, and 327 among the 375 seats were newly occupied by female members. In effect, 87.2 percent of the lower-level proportional seats went to female candidates. Compared to the fact that 77 women had been elected in 2002 for the basic-level councils, gaining an additional 327 seats was a significant jump. Accordingly, in lower level councils only, the number of female councilors increased from 77 to 437, enough to be called a 'great leap forward.'

Does the proportional system help more women to get in public office than the district constituency system? Our counts say 'yes'; in upper-level local elections where 78 out of 655 seats are proportional seats, 57 (73.1%) proportional seats went to women, whereas in district elections, the elected women were only 32 (4.9%) (See, Table 3). The same was true in lower level elections. Among the total of 2,513 seats wherefrom 375 were to be elected from proportional elections, 110 women (4.4%) were elected from district constituencies, while 327 women (87.2%) won their seats through the proportional system. This attests again that more women were able to advance into politics through the proportional representation system, and it is tougher for women to compete with men for gaining nomination and winning the election under the district constituency system.

Two caveats are worthy of careful consideration here. When talking about the correlation between the introduction of the proportional representation system and the improvement in women's political participation, it is difficult to decide whether the difference in numbers and rate of women elected in local governments was due simply to the adoption of the proportional representation system or whether it was the combined

effect of the electoral and the quota rule. This is a valid question as the proportional representation system in South Korea's local elections has been put into operation simultaneously along with the quota rule. The second caveat is that a good part of the increase in the rate of female seats over the past election terms owes not only to the effect of proportionality and a quota rule, but also the consequence of overall improvement of women's social status and, accordingly, a natural growth in the number of women equipped with capability and aspirations for upward political participation. These matters could be indirectly answered by comparing the national assembly and local election results. It was at the 16th National Assembly Election of 2000 that the quota system was first adopted in the proportionality system. In table 2, we can compare differences between pre-2000 election results with the post-2000 results. The 14th and 15th National Assembly had the same numbers of seats, 299 in total. Between 1992 and 1996, the number of women's seats remained relatively constant. It seems that the improvement in women's social status had little to do with these election results; no women in 1992 and two women (0.8%) in 1996 elected from district constituencies, with three and seven proportional seats for women in both the 14th and 15th terms. Meanwhile, between the 16th and 17th terms, both held after the effects of the added and strengthened quota system on proportional seats, a more rapid increase in women's advancement is evident, and as it was so in local election results. The effect was even stronger in proportional seats than in district constituencies. In consequence, we are on a safer empirical ground to say that the electoral system change has significantly elevated women's political empowerment; and that it is also true in Korean experience that the proportional representation system can bring about more positive effects on women's advancement than the district constituency system.

Why does a proportional system favor women's representation? According to Duverger, party leaders make different decisions in the selection of candidates depending on differences in electoral system. In the winner-takes-all principle, party elites do have little options but to choose a competitive candidate who already built a national reputation and is better equipped with the ability and experience to win competitions. On the other hand, when several candidates in their party seem to be able

to gain office, party elites may more seriously consider representing various groups in the party and society (Duverger 1955). District elections with a single-member majority system have been a dominant electoral rule in South Korea in almost all post-democratization elections. Under the circumstance where simply a person with the highest votes won would be elected, parties might prefer selecting candidates based on electoral competitiveness or popularity to considering fairer representation in the registration lists. Hence, it did not seem to be rational for political party leaders to nominate women as district candidates so long as the possibility of women winning the majority was thought to be lower than their male counterparts. It is from this perspective we ascertain that a proportional representation system works better for a speedier reinstatement of gender equality in the so-called 'new democracy' countries like South Korea where women have long been left under-represented, even unduly for its economic scale and social plurality compared in the global scale.

Within district constituency system, some say that the district magnitude matters. At least one study reported that Korea's single-member constituency system tends to penalize newcomers like women for their political entry, and that the system also

Table 4. Elected Female Candidates by District Size in the 2006 Local Election

Seats per district	URI		GNP		MDP		DLP		Others		Total	
	total	female	total	female	total	female	total	female	total	female	total	female
2 (n=610)	260	11 (4.2)	715	40 (5.6)	105	4 (3.8)	16	2 (12.5)	124	2	1,220	59 (4.8)
3 (n=370)	249	8 (3.2)	637	20 (3.1)	95	4 (4.2)	30	12 (40.0)	126	2	1,137	46 (4.0)
4 (n=39)	34	2 (5.9)	49	2 (4.1)	33	0 (0.0)	6	1 (16.7)	34	0	156	5 (3.2)
Total	119	6 (5.0)	233	23 (9.9)	10	2 (20.0)	2	1 (50.0)	2	1 (50.0)	2,513	110 (4.4)

Note: URI: The Uri-Party; GNP: The Grand National Party; MDP: The Millennium Democratic Party; DLP: Democratic Labor Party.

Source: National Election Commission (<http://www.nec.go.kr/>).

disfavors candidates backed by minority groups or small parties. (Sohn Bong-Scuk 2000, 28-29). In the 2006 Local Elections, the medium constituency system was newly installed to make it possible to elect two through four candidates. However, an absolute majority of districts settled to elect two winners. During the negotiation on district re-drawing, two major parties (governing Uri-Party and opposition GNP) colluded to rezone districts in the interest of 'winning together,' allowing two major political parties to have an easier way to monopolize the winning possibility. They also influenced to split most of the 4-winner districts into two 2-winner district zones.

As Table 4 shows, the total number of basic-level council members elected from district constituencies was 2,513; 1,220 seats were elected from 2-winner district constituencies, 1,137 seats from 3-winner districts and 156 seats from 4-winner districts. Among the 1,220 successful candidates from 2-winner zones, 59 are women (4.8%), and among the 1,137 elected from 3 winner districts, 46 are women (4.0%). The number of women elected in 4-winner districts was only five (3.2%) out of all 156 councilors. When considering the result of the 2006 local election, the installation of a mid-size district system did not bring noticeable effects on extending women's political participation as commonly expected. More information is necessary to assess the impact of the mid-size district system with statistical validity. It is also premature to test the effect of the change as the new district zoning was introduced for the first time in 2005, one year before the 2006 local election. Nevertheless, at least for the 2006 local election, we can say that the larger district did not help women candidates to win more seats.

## 2. Specification of Quota Regulations and Penalty for Non-compliance

Effects of the quota system on electoral results can vary depending upon how specific the regulations are, or whether or not penalty exists for non-compliance. Let us compare the quota impacts between the district constituency system and the proportionality system first. After that, we will scrutinize the case of the proportionality system, comparing the differences, if any, between upper-level and basic level elections. The 30 percent female quota rule which applied to district constituency elections did not

specifically define how the rule should be implemented; at the same time, the quota rule was exempt from penalty, and could only be taken as a strong recommendation.<sup>2)</sup> On the contrary, the quota rule for the proportional share had a specific ranking method to nominate candidates, and was combined with detailed penalty regulations for non-compliance. In the case of the upper-level assembly's proportional seats, the regulations regarding quotas underwent several revisions and gradually became more specified and strengthened. When the 30 percent quota rule was first introduced in 2000, the Political Party Act stated only the ratio of women without specific prescriptions on how to implement the system. A revised version that was enacted right before the 2002 local election raised the quota ratio to 50 percent, and introduced the zipper system to protect female candidates from being pushed down to lower ranks. The amendment applied to the 2006 election mandated political parties to give odd numbers to women candidates. Additionally, while no penalty clause was attached in the 2000 quota, by 2002, compulsory effectiveness was ensured by rejecting list registration. Likewise the rule of upper-level assembly's proportional seats, the odd numbering system for women was specified to basic-level proportional seats from the 2006 local elections. But, unlike the high-level assembly, the quota rule for basic-level proportional lists was exempt from penalty, and therefore no mandatory enforcement was possible for the 2006 election.<sup>3)</sup>

Table 5 shows how many women were nominated by major parties for district constituencies and the proportional lists. The quota system recommended parties to nominate women candidates for more than 30 percent of total district seats. In the elections for upper-level assembly members, the Uri Party (hereafter, 'URI') nominated women for 4.2 percent of total candidates, the Grand National Party (hereafter, 'GNP') 5.8 percent, the Millennium Democratic Party (hereafter, MDP') 4.3 percent and the Democratic Labor Party (hereafter, 'DLP') 16.5 percent. Most parties recommended

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2) Even though the act says that it will offer subsidy for women reference to a party that comply with the 30 percent female quota, many parties did not observe the regulation since in actual, the total amount of subsidy was not big enough to be a critical attraction factor.

3) But, a penalty regulation was added to cancel the electoral regulation of the party that fails to implement in October, 2006, after the Nationwide Simultaneous Local Election.

Table 5. Party Nominations and Election Outcomes for District Constituencies and Proportional Representation Number (%)

			District Constituencies		Proportional Representation	
			High-level	Lower level	High-level	Lower level
URI	Candidate	Total Women	521 22(4.2)	1,303 53(4.1)	58 35(60.3)	308 241(78.3)
	Elected	Total Women	33 0(0.0)	543 21(3.9)	19 15(79.0)	87 86(98.9)
GNP	Candidate	Total Women	565 33(5.8)	1,944 90(4.6)	65 42(64.6)	430 308(71.6)
	Elected	Total Women	519 29(5.6)	1,401 62(4.4)	38 23(60.5)	220 188(85.5)
MDP	Candidate	Total Women	235 10(4.3)	749 25(3.3)	28 18(64.3)	124 71(57.3)
	Elected	Total Women	71 1(1.4)	233 8(3.4)	9 7(77.8)	43 30(69.8)
DLP	Candidate	Total Women	97 16(16.5)	467 126(27.0)	42 26(61.9)	127 107(84.3)
	Elected	Total Women	5 1(20.0)	52 15(28.9)	10 10(100.0)	14 14(100.0)

*Note:* This table shows the election outcomes of the 4 major parties. There were other small parties which ran in the 4th local election, such as Kukmin-Joongsim Party (For the People Party), Simin Party (Citizen Party), Hanmijoon (Future of Korea Party) and Socialist Party.

*Source:* Kim Won-hong et al. (2006, 5); National Election Commission (<http://www.nec.go.kr>).

only 3-5 percent, with no party observing the 30 percent quotas as recommended by laws. The progressive DLP party nominated 16 women for upper-level council elections in district constituencies and 126 for basic-level district contests. This outstanding performance of the DLP was due to its party platform mandating a 20 percent female quota and recommending a 30 percent quota as a target for nominating candidates for district elections. As far as the district constituencies were concerned, the 30 percent female quota was hardly observed. The primary reason would be that the quota rule did

not contain specific methods to apply penalty for non-compliance. Under such a circumstance, women's political representation depended mainly on internal party rules and decisions of party leaders.

As often claimed by parties, a lack of women aspirants to run for prominent political positions partly contributed to the adoption of the 30 percent female quota system to remaining only as a strong-worded recommendation without effective means for enforcement. Party leaders often say that it is not easy to secure enough women candidates enough to fill the 30 percent quotas; and if any, it is difficult to check whether those candidates are well-prepared to run for electoral competition and capable of dealing with public affairs. In the case of the URI Party in the 2006 election, among the registered candidates for the party's nomination, only one woman applied for governorship, 15 for headship of small cities and urban districts, 28 for upper-level councils in district constituency and 78 women filed applications to run for basic-level assembly election in district contests. All but these 122 women aspirants are said to have preferred to run for proportional seats (Hong Mee-Young 2006, 49). Other parties faced similar situations, and even if parties have nominated all of the women expressing to run in district races, it would have been far less than the target 30 percent quota.

The statistics above do not necessarily dismiss the responsibility of political parties to proactively engage in educating, training and discovering promising women politicians, and improving women's competitive power in elections. To wit, the scarcity of women aspirants in district constituencies ironically implies that there still remains a long road for political parties to achieve gender-balance and that they are facing many challenges ahead: To overcome the problem of gender inequality, parties can implement a variety of reforms aimed at widening women's place in district elections; they can organize more effective political leadership programs for women, and enhance women's electoral competitiveness with financial support or campaign training; they can encourage and attract more women to run in district constituencies, perhaps by implementing the female quota rule in a way to promote these efforts.

If we look at the proportional system, the quota rule has been applied to a wider range of scope, and the implementation methods are more clearly specified with more detailed

regulations than in the district-based electoral system. However, regarding the penalty regulations, there are some differences between the high-level and the basic-level council elections. As seen in Table 5, all major parties allocated women candidates to over 50 percent of their lists for proportional seats in both the lower and upper-level assembly elections. Intra-party regulations and party-based specifications about the ranking of candidates on the party list also make some differences in electoral outcomes of the proportional representation system. While the quota rule which applied to the 2006 election required parties to recommend women candidates for at least 50 percent of the list and give every odd-number to women candidates, there had been great discretionary powers. Abiding by the rule, political parties could decide to nominate women for 60 percent or 80 percent; or to give only odd-numbers to women or all (both odd and even) to women. An interesting point of Table 5 is that, in the 2006 proportional representation election, in almost all parties, the ratios of elected women to registered candidates are higher than the ratios of women candidates to total candidates. In the high-level proportional representation sector, rates of nominated women were around 60-65 percent, while the rates of successful women candidates showed striking contrasts across parties; i.e., 60.5 percent for the GNP, but 100 percent for the DLP. Does it mean, for example, that the GNP allotted women to lower ranks than the DLP did? Or can it be evidence of the DLP's women-friendly policy and the opposite for the GNP? Reviewing the lists for elected proportional representation seats, we found no significant relationship between each party's rate of successful women candidates and the parties' position about women-related policy lines. Rather, it seems to reflect the extent of support that each party drew in the relevant election. The reason why the DLP marked all the successful candidates to be women is that only one proportional seat was allotted to the DLP per proportional representation constituency, and all the first places of the lists were filled with women candidates in accordance with the quota rule. On the other hand, the GNP, which attracted a great amount of support in the 2006 election, took a maximum of six seats per proportional representation constituency, and both male and female candidates were elected by turn. Therefore, despite the fact that the GNP observed the quota rules as other parties did, their success rate for women candidates

was relatively lower than that of others. Such results again implicate the effects of the compulsory odd number rule for women candidates.

In the lower level proportional representation sector, the success rate of female candidates also varied across parties. The cause of this result was also, as was the case in the upper-level proportional sector, related to varied numbers of proportional seats that each party assured. Nevertheless, upon looking more carefully, we can find a difference from the case of upper-level proportional elections. When it comes to the lower level local election, with the election-related laws keeping silence over the violation of the quota rule, the 50 percent allocation to women and odd-numbering were not indispensable conditions to party list registration. In effect, all parties observed the recommended rule of giving a 50 percent quota to women, but some parties decided to allot male candidates to the first place of the list, or not to observe the odd numbering. For example, the URI party nominated male candidates for no. 1 seats in 8 districts, the GNP in 14, the MDP in 23, the People First Party in 7 districts. But in the case of the DLP, all of the top spots on the lists went to women candidates, regardless of whether there was any penalty regulation or not; rendering in the DLP's rate of 100 percent seats for women.

Taking these considerations into account, we offer additional argument that a party's internal decision rules do make a difference. Given the differences in election results between the district system and proportional representation system, parties can still bring about changes and improvement in women's share of power by exercising a degree of discretion in selecting candidates for seats (in proportional and/or district elections), in ranking the order on its list whether or not there was a fixed quota rule or penalty regulation. Within the given quota rules, parties can still decide how to implement related regulations, creating different results in the final process. This is why internal party reforms and the institutionalization of inter-party systems are essential for upholding the quality of democracy and consolidating new democracies to maturing democratic polities.

## V. Conclusion

The preceding analysis shows that gender empowerment has been one of the prominent political changes and achievements of South Korea's new democracy over the past decade. It is also known that policy efforts and reform programs stimulated by the UN's gender mainstreaming movement in the opening juncture of South Korea's new democracy added momentum to the steady empowerment of women in a speedy mode of catching up with the global standard. In lieu of conclusion, we will briefly reflect on the meaning and significance of our foregoing analysis in a way to compare and assess the relative performance of South Korea's new democracy in terms of its standing on the scale of global gender empowerment indicators.

The UN Human Development Report has compiled yearly reports of Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) of various countries in the world. The GEM index captures gender inequality in three key areas such as political participation and decision-making power (as measured by women's percentage shares in parliament), economic participation and decision-making power (as measured by women's percentage shares of positions as legislators, senior officials and managers, and of professional and technical positions), and power over economic resources (as measured by women's estimated earned income). In Table 6-1 and 6-2, we selected Korea's neighboring democracies in Asia and showed a comparative performance measured in terms of the GEM index and a simpler but straightforward measure of percentage shares of women in national assembly. In the year 1995 when Korea passed the Women's Development Act, its standing among the world's 116 countries was 90th out of 116 countries, and it was at the bottom of the six Asian countries. During the next five years Korea's GEM index moved up to 63rd in the year 2000 (out of 70 countries that became objects of estimation), then progressing toward the 50s in world-wide ranking for the years 2005-6.

During the years 2000-2006, South Korea's GEM rank steadily moved up, while fellow democracies such as Malaysia and Thailand began to show a trend of falling behind Korea in gender equality. Looking at the table 6-1, Korea's gender

Table 6-1. Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) ranks of Selected Asian Democracies: 1995-2006

Countries	Ranking											
	95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06
Japan	27	37	34	38	38	41	31	32	44	38	43	42
Philippines	28	39	35	65	45	44	46	35	35	37	46	45
S. Korea	90	78	73	83	78	63	61	61	63	68	59	53
Malaysia	49	46	48	45	52	47	38	43	45	44	51	55
Thailand	54	53	52	60	64	-	-	50	55	57	63	60
Indonesia	56	61	59	70	71	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	116	104	94	102	102	70	64	66	70	78	80	75

Source: UNDP, *Human Development Report*, 1995; 1996;1997; 1998; 1999; 2000; 2001; 2002; 2003; 2004; 2005; 2006.

Table 6-2. Women's Percentage Shares in Parliament: 1997-2007

Countries	%											
	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	97-07
Japan	4.6	4.6	4.6	7.3	7.3	7.3	7.1	7.1	9.0	9.4	9.4	▲4.8
Philippines	11.1	12.4	12.4	11.3	17.8	17.8	17.8	15.3	15.3	15.3	22.5	▲11.4
S. Korea	3.0	3.7	3.7	5.9	5.9	5.9	5.9	13.0	13.4	13.4	13.4	▲10.4
Malaysia	7.8	7.8	7.8	10.4	10.4	10.4	10.5	9.1	9.1	9.1	9.1	▲1.3
Thailand	5.6	5.6	5.6	4.8	9.2	9.2	9.2	8.8	10.6	8.7	8.7	▲3.1
Indonesia	11.4	11.4	11.4	8.0	8.0	8.0	8.0	11.3	11.3	11.3	11.3	▲0.1

Note: Percentage shares of women in Lower or Single House.

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (<http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif-arc.htm>).

empowerment ranking moved up from the world's bottom level 90th to one of the top three Asian democracies, next to Japan and the Philippines.

The rank of 53rd out of 75 countries in the world (for 2006) means that the status of women in South Korea's political society is still a long way from catching up to the group of leading democracies. In particular, as we have discovered, political competition in district level elective positions still remain an uphill fight for women political aspirants in both the national and local politics. Nevertheless, the GEM trend between 1995 and 2006 seems to give a positive picture. Compared to other Asian countries,

Korea's records for 2000-2006 seem to move up faster than any of its neighbors, while countries like Japan, Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia showed a slide in ranking during the same period. As of 2006, South Korea is ahead of Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. There is a time lag between the point of time the data was gathered and the year the report was published. For example, the 2005 report reflected the data for 2003 or 2004. This means that the 2006 index did not adequately reflect the much improved gender-equalizing effects as revealed in our analysis of the 2006 local election results. Table 6-2 further attests to a speedy trend of uplifting political women in South Korea: South Korea stood at the bottom of the six East Asian democracies until 2003; then moved up to the second place since 2004, overtaking Japan, Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia. As of 2007, the Philippines and South Korea are two leading countries in East Asia whose increase rates of women parliamentarians are above two digits. Taking the statistics into account, we conclude that the gender mainstreaming record of the last ten years shows a robust policy cycle of South Korea's new democracy that deserves political cognizance with further systematic research.<sup>4)</sup>

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4) For a step pointing to this line of research, see Jeeseon Jeon, *Advancement of Women in Proportional Representation System and Its Impact on Political Recruitment Process of District Elections: Simultaneous Elections of 2006*, MA thesis, Seoul National University, 2007.

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## 신생 민주주의 한국의 여성정치진출과 할당제 효과: 2006년 전국동시지방선거 분석

안 청 시 : 서울대 정치학과  
전 지 선 : 서울대 정치학과 대학원

이 연구는 한국의 민주화 국면에서 여성의 정치적 대표성을 증진시키기 위한 제도 개혁이 이루어졌음에 주목하고, 제도개혁의 과정과 성과를 경험적으로 분석하였다. 이 연구는 첫째, 여성의 정치진출을 진작시키기 위한 선거제도 개혁의 배경과 경과에 대해 설명하고, 둘째, 민주화 이후 치러진 국회의원 선거와 지방선거 결과를 통해 제도 개혁이 여성의 정치적 대표성 향상에 미친 효과를 추적하였다. 셋째, 2006년 지방선거 결과를 통해 비례대표제의 도입, 여성할당제의 확대와 강화, 선거구 조정 등 일련의 제도적 변화의 효과를 구체적으로 살펴보았다. 중앙과 지방에서 보다 활발해진 여성의 정치진출은 한국의 민주주의가 지난 10년 동안 이루어낸 주요 성과 중 하나로 평가될 만 하다. 이 배경에는 민주화 국면에서 이루어진 일련의 제도개혁과 선거법 개정 등이 크게 작용하였다.

**주제어:** 신생 민주주의, 여성의 정치적 대표성, 여성 할당제, 선거 제도, 지방 선거