Comparing the 16th and 17th Korean Presidential Elections

— Candidate Strengths, Campaign Issues, and Region-Centered Voting —

Byoung Kwon Sohn

Abstract: This article aims at comparing the 16th and 17th presidential elections in terms of the number of major competitive candidates, candidates' strengths, major campaign issues and the effect of region-centered voting. Among other things, both elections are commonly characterized by the major party's presidential candidates being selected via U.S. style primary, which had been first adopted in the 2002 presidential election. Rampantly strong region-centered voting pattern counts among continuities as well, while in 2002 the effect of region-centered voting appeared in a somewhat mitigated form. Contrasts, however, loom rather large between the two elections. First, while the 2002 election was a two-way election between NMDP and GNP, the 2007 election was a three-way election among DNP, GNP, and one competitive independent candidate. Second, strong anti-Americanism, relocation of Korean capital, and younger generation's activism counted among major issues and features in 2002, while in 2007 voters' anger at the incumbent president and their ardent hope for economic recovery were atop campaign issues. Third, strong as region-centered voting may be across the two elections, its effect was somewhat mitigated in the 2002 presidential election, because NMDP candidate Roh's hometown was in Pusan, where GNP had traditionally ruled as a regional hegemonic party. Lastly, in 2002 Roh was able to get elected partly due to his image as a reform-oriented, non-mainstream, anti-American stance politician. Besides, Roh's personality and policy posture particularly appealed to younger voters. On the other hand, Lee became a winner in 2007 by proposing himself to the public as a ready-made CEO-style candidate most competent to deliver Korea from economic hardships.

I. Introduction

Despite continuities, the 16th presidential election of 2002 and the 17th presidential election of 2007 show contrasts as well in several important aspects. Only five years apart from each other, the two elections were still quite different in such respects as the number and nature of major candidates, prime campaign issues, and the winner's strengths. For example, while the 2002 presidential election was characterized by a two-way election between major leading parties(1), the 2007 election was mostly a three-way election, with a front-runner far ahead of the trailing second and third runners; the major campaign issues in the two elections were entirely different from each other, with the 2007 elections being wholly dominated by such issues as economic recovery and BBK scandal; candidates' attractiveness to voters had different sources as well. Given these general differences, this paper attempts to contrast the two presidential elections with a specific focus on the number of major competitive candidates and their strengths, major campaign issues, and the effect of region-centered voting. In comparing the elections from this viewpoint, the

author also intends to highlight the continuities of the Korean presidential elections, specifically with a focus on strong regionalist tendency of voting behavior of the public.

II. Presidential Elections since 1987

Since the democratization of 1987, Korean voters have cast their presidential ballots five times: 1987, 1992, 1997, 2002, and 2007. According to the stipulations of the new 6th Republic Constitution, Korean voters were able to directly elect their president every five years. Thus elected, each president can serve no more than a single, five-year term. Each election had its own uniqueness, and the prime features of each election can be summarized as follows.

In 1987 Korean voters elected Taewoo Roh, then-ruling Democratic Justice Party's candidate, the first president of the 6th Republic, pushing Youngsam Kim, Daijung Kim, and Jongpil Kim behind as 2nd, 3rd, and 4th runners respectively. Since the vote share given to Jongpil Kim was meager, the election was three-way one. The first two Kims, once longtime pro-democratization leaders, endeavored to shape the election as a fight between pro-democracy forces and old-guard authoritarian rulers. As it turned out, however, they failed to get unified to have a single candidate among themselves and ran separately, virtually helping to pave the way for Roh's victory in the end.

Among other things, the 1987 presidential election was a landmark one at least in two aspects. First, it was the first direct popular presidential election since 1971. Voters' turnout rate was very high, reflecting their long-suppressed zeal for participation in directly electing president. Their desire for ending the authoritarian rule of the Democratic Justice Party(DJP hereafter) was also strong, as the less than 40% votes share for Roh, 36.3%, showed. The two pro-democratization movement leaders, Youngsam Kim and Daijung Kim, however, failed to agree on having one unified candidate and went their own ways, and neither was able to get elected. Second, and more importantly, a remarkable regionalist voting cleavage began to emerge among Korean voters, with each region voting its own favorite son. The four major parties during the election of 1987 had their own regional electoral bases, and the voters in each party's stronghold region predominantly voted the parties of the region. The opposition party candidates, in particular, were able to command the absolute support from their own regions respectively, thus opening the so-called "three Kims' era." As regional hegemonic leaders since that time on, the three Kims had reigned as if they were medieval absolute monarchs. As omnipotent party leaders, they were able to monopolize nomination in the successive parliamentary elections, and thus were able to have a tight rein over their own party members as well.

The 1992 presidential election was a three-way competition in which Daijung Kim endeavored to catch up with the front-runner, Youngsam Kim, who eventually won that election, and in which Jooyoung Chung, a tycoon of Hyundai Group, ran as a third runner. Youngsam Kim ran for presidency as the candidate of the New Korea Party(NKP hereafter), whose predecessor was the Democratic Liberal Party created through a merger of three conservative parties(2), and he was able to beat the other two with a comfort margin. The region-centered voting pattern, however, persisted; Daijung Kim was not able to excel Youngsam Kim outside Cholla province. The campaign evolved around the issue of the three-party merger in 1990, and Daijung Kim raised that issue to denounce NKP's Kim as a betrayer

of representative democracy, but in vain. Jooyoung Chung ran as a candidate of the Unification National Party, but ended up as the 3rd runner.

In 1997, Daijung Kim, reneging on his promise to retire, made his third presidential bid against the ruling Grand National Party(GNP hereafter)'s Hoechang Lee, and finally achieved his life-long dream of becoming president. The race was three-way one between Daijung Kim, Hoechang Lee, and Inje Lee, who had bolted from GNP after being defeated in the party's nomination convention. Region-centered voting pattern recurred this time again, and Daijung Kim of the New Millennium Demoratic Party(NMDP hereafter) won the presidency with the help of Jongpil Kim of the United Liberal Democrats. Jongpil Kim was the favorite son of Chungcheong province, and he cooperated and campaigned with Daijung Kim in Chungcheong region, calling on Chungcheong voters to support Kim. The collaboration between the two bosses worked as expected, and Kim was able to keep a thin edge over Hoechang Lee with less than 2 percent vote margin. Inje Lee was the 3rd winner far behind.

III. Main Features of the 17th Presidential Election

Different from 2002, the 17th presidential election held in 2007 reverted to the familiar pattern of the past decades, that is, a three-way election. The three major candidates, to be described in detail shortly, were Dongyoung Chung of the Democratic New Party(DNP hereafter), Myoungbak Lee of GNP, and Hoechang Lee, a former two-time presidential nominee of GNP, who opportunistically jumped into the race at the last phase of the campaign(3). Other than a revival of three-way competition, the 17th presidential election showed other interesting features.

First of all, the 17th presidential election will be remembered as a race in which GNP's nomination process was very competitive. When the nomination race started early in the spring of 2007, the widely circulated prediction was that Geunhye Park, a daughter of the former President Chunghee Park and a very popular conservative politician with a clean image, would not be a serious challenger to Lee. Lee's popularity in the polls continued to prevail over that of Park by comfort percentage margin. Lee also seemed to be the only guy to give a solution to economic distress of Korea(4). The unchallenged prediction was shattered when the outcome of the intra-party race was tight. Given the fact that opinion polls were consistently in favor of Lee, the primary vote outcome was contrary to prior expectations, and the Park's good performance was due to the wide support given to her by the party loyalists. If GNP had decided to exclude the public opinion poll outcome in counting primary votes, Lee would have been defeated by Park, as the final tally of the votes showed(5). The GNP primary was a lot more intense, strenuous, and interesting than the Lee-dominated general election campaign between party candidates.

Among other peculiar features than the tense nature of the GNP nomination, Myoungbak Lee's consistent lead, never ever falling behind any other candidate in public polls before and throughout the campaign, was noteworthy. Despite bad rumors surrounding his rise as a successful CEO, such as reputedly illegal accumulation of wealth, including real estate ownership, his popularity hovered around 45% all the time and never went down below 40%, sometimes defusing the momentum of challengers' negative campaign against him. Even amid the harsh partisan offensive against him in the turmoil of BBK investigation in October, 2007, his voter popularity stood firm, never declining below 40%. Due to the unin-

terrupted high popularity, his victory on the election day almost seemed to be a foregone conclusion as the campaign approached the final end line.

The other interesting aspect of the 2007 election could be found in the camp of the pan-ruling parties. First of all, the 2007 presidential election was notorious for the ruling DNP's belated selection of its final candidate. As a matter of fact, the (virtually) ruling DNP was struggling with low popularity, and was desperate to recruit a presidential candidate appealing enough to electrify the voters, just as Roh did in 2002. The venture was not easy, delaying the party's nomination process further and further. Finally, as a step toward this goal, they were able to recruit a GNP defector, Hakkyu Sohn, in July, 2007, and held a national presidential primary in September, with Sohn, Chung, and other major party heavyweights, including former prime ministers Myoungsook Hahn and Haechan Lee, participating. As it turned out, the newly emerged winner was Dongyoung Chung, yet the story was not over there. Still suffering from endemic low public support even after the nomination was over, DNP attempted to get a united presidential candidate in collaboration with other parties. The process and negotiation for that endeavor dragged on and on, with little progress, and eventually failed. Chung had to fight by himself, failing to boost public support, and ended up as the 2nd runner on the reckoning day.

Another peculiar episode of the 2007 election was Hoechang Lee's joining presidential race, which made the otherwise loose race tight and intensive. Obviously, Lee's belated joining the presidential race was able to catch the public's attention to the race, which otherwise would have ended as an insipid "one-man show" performed by Myoungbak Lee. Taking advantage of the loophole created by the General Prosecutor's investigation of BBK scandal, in which Byoungbak Lee was rumored to have been deeply involved, Lee ran again as an independent candidate, claiming that he was the genuine heir of Korean conservatism. His claim was largely hollow, but resonated with the conservative segment of population, helping him to finish the race as the third runner.

The final, noteworthy fact was to be found in the campaign mode itself. In one word, the campaign battle between contending parties was not waged on the basis of major political, social, economic issues. Instead, it was run focused only on a single hot potato: the widespread rumor that Myoungbak Lee had been involved in the BBK financial scandal. The popularity-hungry DNP decided to concentrate on the BBK issue to reverse Lee's lead to their favor, claiming that Lee had been enmeshed with BBK management from the start, and that he should not be elected given his alleged "crimes" related to BBK's fraudulent financial behavior. DNP was desperate to persuade the voters that Lee should not avoid the responsibility for deceiving BBK investors and for managing the company illegally. Voters, however, was not moved by the appeal as much as DNP initially expected. It was, now it seems, not because they believed in Lee's innocence, but because they bought into Lee's self-claim that he was most qualified to revive Korean economy. It was also because they had very a negative attitude toward the incumbent president and the party he patronized, DNP. Due to this state of mind of the voters, the BBK scandal failed to stop Lee's lead in the polls and, to boost up NDP's public support, its explosive nature notwithstanding.

IV. Major Candidates of the Two Presidential Elections

IV-1. the 16th presidential election

Among other things, one remarkable fact about the 16th presidential election was that it was the first two-way contest since the beginning of democratization in 1987. As a matter of fact, all the presidential elections since 1987 had been contests among at least 3 major candidates, usually ending up with a president-elect supported by about 40% of voters(6). In 2002, however, the presidential contest was a razor-thin, super-close contest between NMDP's Moohyun Roh and GNP's Hoechang Lee. President-elect Roh's vote margin over Lee was less than 3%, with 95.5% of total votes claimed by the two combined.

In 2002, NMDP's candidate Roh was selected as party nominee through a U.S.-style presidential primary. During 2001 through 2002, the ruling NMDP's popularity plummeted as a result of scandals related to the then-president Daijung Kim's cabinet members and to Kim's own son. To recover from this damage, NMDP finally decided to adopt the primary system as a way to restore its popularity. Praised by the public and party members alike as a way to induce more participation than the convention-delegate system, the NMDP's primary succeeded in electrifying the public and attracting their attention to its nominating process. And the hero from this new experimentation was Moohyun Roh.

As widely known at that time, Roh was a non-mainstream, anti-American, reform-oriented politician, who had entered into politics via former President Youngsam Kim's invitation. His life-long goal was to break down endemic Korean regionalism, against which he had volunteered to run for a parliamentary seat in Pusan as a candidate of the opposition Democratic Party, which was a party led by Daijung Kim, and whose regional base was not in Pusan but in Cholla province. Roh's anti-regionalism and anti-American stance, along with his sensational, outright, and straightforward speech style, captured the minds of younger generation voters, especially collegians, who later became his ardent supporters. The newly adopted primaries, which were held across the nation during a couple of months, was a best occasion in which he can "show" his rhetorical skill and reformist stance to the general public. During the primary, he continued to decry Inje Lee, who had been thought to be a pre-ordained party nominee. On the contrary to the initial expectation, as the primaries went one by one, Inje Lee lost steam, and was discouraged, while Roh got more and more momentum, and eventually was able to get nominated.

In its turn, GNP ran Hoechang Lee once more for the presidential race. Despite his failure in 1997 presidential election against Daijung Kim, he had continued to remain the party's president, monopolizing party finance and nomination power. Thanks to the fallouts of Daijung Kim-related numerous scandals, GNP's popularity was a lot higher than NMDP, and buoyed by that, Lee was expected to run a relatively easy campaign against the latter. As a matter of fact, a series of party polls conducted by numerous poll organizations anticipated an easy victory for Lee, and Lee was comfortable with the result and able to take a more or less assured stance.

As the NMDP's primary seemed to succeed in gaining public attention, however, GNP also hurriedly decided to hold primaries as its way of candidate selection. No doubt the primary was only a ritualistic step for crowning Lee as the party's nominee in GNP's case, and it failed to capture public's attention and imagination. Amid the primary, there were several challengers to Lee, but Lee was renominated with little difficulty.

When it comes to personal backgrounds and

characteristics, Lee was quite a contrast to Roh in many ways. He was one of the blessed few in Korean social strata, who had occupied several important high-ranking positions in government, including Prime Minister and Chairman of the National Audit and Inspection Board; he had credentials as SNU graduate; he was consistently conservative, and had never been thought of as an outsider in Korean society. These exceptional career backgrounds and initially high popularity notwithstanding, Lee ended up being defeated by Roh in December, 2002, mainly because Roh's outmaneuvering and his promise to relocate the capital to Chungcheong region, which succeeded in sweeping the region's voters to Roh's side.

IV-2. the 17th presidential election

Different from the 2002 election, the 17th presidential election in 2007 reverted to its traditional pattern, a three-way election. The three major candidates, to be described in detail shortly, were Dongyoung Chung of DNP, Myoungbak Lee of GNP, and Hoechang Lee, who opportunistically jumped into the race at the last phase of the campaign. The all-the-time front runner, and the final winner, was the same Myoungbak Lee, and Chung and another Lee were second and third runners respectively.

For his part, Chung entered politics at Daijung Kim's invitation at the 1996 parliamentary election. Before knocking at the door of politics, he had been a widely recognized MBC news anchorman. After being elected National Assembly member by scoring the largest number of votes in the 15th election in 1992, his way for success was widely opened. He was elected again in the 16th parliamentary election, this time, too, with the largest number of popular votes in the nation. He worked as NMDP's spokesman during most of Daijung Kim's presidency, and was later selected as one of the members of the same party's Supreme Council. He was particularly spotlighted and praised as loyal to the party during the NMDP's primary in 2002, since he did not drop out of the race when it became apparent for Roh to be nominated(7). In contrast to Inje Lee, Chung ran all the primaries with Roh until the end, keeping his promise that he would finish the whole race regardless of the outcome. That commitment to his party later became his political capital when he pursued higher governmental positions.

After Roh's election in 2002, he led a party-cleansing movement intended to incapacitate old-guard politicians within NMDP, and recognizing insurmountable difficulties it entailed, Chung decided to bolt from the party along with other reformist members. It was attempted with an implicit endorsement of President Roh. Later, he and his colleagues built the Open Uri Party (OUP hereafter), which later won the majority of parliamentary seats in the 17th National Assembly election held in April 15, 2004. Among other things, the victory was thanks to the backlash against GNP and NMDP after the two parties' abortive impeachment attempt targeting at President Roh. After the election victory, he served as OUP chairman, was appointed as high-ranking Unification Department Minister, and was reelected party chairman again. As a progressive politician and pro-North Korea engagement supporter, he was elected the presidential candidate of DNP, which is a heir party of OUP, at the last stage of the campaign in 2007. But, after all, he failed to prevail over Myoungbak Lee.

In contrast to DNP, which was unusually late in selecting its own presidential nominee, GNP selected Myoungbak Lee as its nominee after weeks-long intraparty primary campaign. Surviving the tight race with Geunhye Park, Lee contin-

ued to command consistent, unchallenged high popularity among the public. Lee had a credential as a successful CEO of Hyundai Construction Company, and was widely known as "bulldozer man" throughout the nation. Originally, he entered politics after getting elected in the 14th National Assembly Election in 1992. He ran as a NKP's candidate at the invitation of then-President Youngsam Kim, and was reelected in 1996. After several years' public invisibility, he came back to politics, ran for Seoul mayoral election in 2002 as GNP's candidate, and was finally elected. During his term as a mayor, he restored the Chengghe Stream (meaning "Clean Stream"), overhauled the city's public transportation system, and made various efforts to upgrade Seoul's public image. Remembered with these legacies nationwide, he was able to impress the public as a competent statesman. Encouraged by the high public approval rate of his mayoral performance, he decided to run for the 17th presidential election and succeeded in grasping the crown. As a pragmatic politician with followers in the both moderate and conservative wings of GNP, he ran the campaign by publicizing himself as the most competent to salvage the decaying Korean economy. And his message appealed to the voters, eventually paving the way for his final victory.

Given the big lead of Myoungbak Lee over all the other parties' candidates, the widely shared view was that unless the camp of pan-ruling parties could get a united candidate, Lee's victory seemed preordained. Amid the pan-ruling camp's endeavors to find out a solution for one single united candidate, surprising news came from an unexpected corner. Hoechang Lee, former GNP's two-time presidential candidate, announced his independent candidacy, giving up his GNP membership. That announcement at first shocked both GNP and DNP, but, as time passed by, it turned out to have little effect on Myoungbak Lee's popularity. Hoechang Lee, according to some polls, gained about 20% of public support, surpassing that of Chung of DNP. That is, after Lee's jumping into the race, the election suddenly became a three-way competition, with Lee being a predominant candidate and with Hoechang Lee and Chung competing for the second place.

V. Factors for Victory

V-1. factors for Roh's victory in the 16th presidential election

In the 2002 presidential election, NMDP candidate Roh was able to get elected based on a couple of factors. His campaign promises, his personality, and the events and accidents surrounding the 2002 presidential election all may have contributed to his victory in one way or another. In what follows, I will attempt to sort out those factors that are widely believed to have contributed to his victory in 2002.

1) national capitol relocation and gaining Chungcheong's support

Among other things, Roh was able to get elected primarily due to his campaign promise to relocate the capital of Korea to somewhere in Chungcheong province. The importance of Chungcheng province had been repeatedly emphasized in the presidential elections since the 1987, especially when the election was a competition between two leading candidates, and when the major electoral support for the two leading candidates is based on Cholla and Kyoungsagn provinces respectively. Given the proved tendency of Cholla and Kyoungsang voters to overwhelmingly support their region's favorites, the choice of the Chungcheong voters was crucial in determining who will be the final winner. As a

matter of fact, NMDP's candidate Roh was overwhelmingly supported in north and south Cholla provinces, which were not only NMDP's stronghold but also the former president Daijung Kim's political hometown. As a self-proclaimed heir of Kim's sunshine policy, Roh had an assuring reason to take his and Cholla voter's absolute support for granted.

On the other hand, Hoechang Lee, the candidate of the conservative GNP, had overwhelming support from Kyoungsang voters. With this diametric and lopsided support of each region's voters toward their favorite sons, the role of Chungcheng voters was pivotal. As a corollary, gaining as many votes as possible in Chungcheng region became a top priority for both candidates. Roh was more shrewd and quick than Lee in capturing Chungcheong voters' imagination. That is, aware of Chungcheng region's crucial role, Roh was much bolder than Lee to promise Chungcheng voters the relocation of Korean capital city to some place in the region. That promise electrified Chungcheng voters, who had complained about their region's underdevelopment. They decided to vote for Roh. Even though Chungcheng was Lee' birthplace, he failed to carry that region.

2) campaigning on the wave of anti-American sentiment

The second factor for Roh's victory can be ascribed to the strong anti-American sentiment prevalent among younger generation voters during the 2002 presidential campaign. Roh was able to win over their support by positioning himself as an independent nationalist, and thus by taking advantage of this sentiment. The anti-Americanism is a worldwide and universal phenomenon in some sense, but during the 2002 election, it was magnified particularly among younger generation of Korean voters.

There are a couple of reasons for that. First of all, the younger generation voters, mostly collegians, had their own mindset distinguished from that of the older breed voters in national security affairs. Mostly born in the 1980s, having spent their teenage in the 1990s, and relatively more favorable to President Daijung Kim's sunshine policy toward North Korea, they were free from traditional Korean pro-American bias in security affairs. Besides, they were more sympathetic to the economic hardships of North Korea than other generations, feeling that South and North Koreas belong to one and the same nation, and blaming that the United States just stands in the way in Korean reunification. Secondly, the anti-American sentiment was partly based on the enhanced sense of national pride among younger voters. Korea co-hosted the 2002 World Cup Game with Japan, and its economic standing on the global scene had been ascending. All these events and feelings contributed to their heightened sense of national pride and to their pursuit of experimentalism, eventually leading to their more independent posture toward the United States. They believed the U.S. had been presumptuous and arrogant toward South Korean people and government. Finally, the Hyosoon-Miseon accident, in which two middle school girls were killed during the military exercise of the U.S. troops, galvanized Korean younger voters, sweeping them into the Roh's side. Running against the conservative GNP obsessed with anti-communism and pro-Americanism, Roh could take advantage of these feelings to his benefit.

3) Roh's personality appeal

The third factor for Roh's victory would be his image as a person and as a politician. Roh was quite a contrast to Hoechang Lee in many respects. Roh was relatively young, had no col-

lege diploma, and more reform-oriented, non-mainstream politician, while Lee was older, got best education in Korea, and had served in the highest governmental positions for a long while. These career backgrounds of Roh's helped him to position himself as a son of small people without entrenched political connections to Korea's social and political establishments. Utilizing his humble background, Roh was in an advantaged position to make Hoechang Lee of GNP look belonging to a self-contained privileged class. This contrast distinguished Roh's reformer image from the old breed, conservative image of Lee, and made Roh's claim of anti-establishment sound genuine.

On the other hand, Roh's "emotional politics" and rhetorical skills also played a role to his benefit during the campaign. Bored of meaningless exchanges of political harangues between parties, the voters in 2002 were susceptible to Roh's direct emotional appeal, his passionate gestures, and his honesty and straightforwardness. He was not reluctant to express his angers and sorrows in public, giving an impression that he was just like "you, the common people." In this emotional politics, his sensational rhetorical skill was helpful. Relying on his straightforward and sometimes populist oratory, he tried to prove that he is not a reserved, authoritarian type of traditional politicians but just a guy sharing the same feelings as commoners. Roh was able to electrify collegians and the general voters, sometimes with his sensational slogans and speeches, while Lee's campaign speech seemed insipid and tasteless. Simply put, Lee was out of touch with a new wave of national sentiment, especially of the sentiment of younger generation, while Roh was able to run on the wave of the changing mood.

V-2. factors for Myoungbak Lee's victory in the 17th presidential election

1) hope for economic recovery

Suffering from economic hardship and unemployment, Korean voters were ready to welcome an economic savior, and this expectation had been well reflected in the various polls conducted by media organizations. As reflected in the poll outcomes, Myoungbak Lee's public support was maintained at more than 40% throughout 2007, while President Roh's popularity was gradually in the decline. As a matter of fact, beginning with the late 2006 polls, Myougbak Lee's approval rate never went below 40% among the Korean public, moving within the bounds of 40-50%. The approval rate had been consistently maintained up to the day of 2007 presidential election, finally ending up with 48.7% of votes cast for him. Why is it that this high rate had persisted throughout the election year? It can be explained by two predominant factors: Lee' public reputation as a successful businessman and a mayor on the one hand, and by the extremely low approval rate for the incumbent president Roh on the other hand.

After the 1997 Asian financial crisis, which had devastated Korean economy and left a great number of Koreans unemployed, economic recovery became a necessarily paramount concern for Korea voters. The voters simply wanted their economic conditions to improve; the unemployed men and women wanted their president and representatives to quickly bring out plans to get them back to work; college graduates hoped for job markets to be more widely open. In one word, the public desperately wanted some competent statesman to emerge, delivering them from economic hardships. And finally, there came along a politician who was able to claim credit as a successful CEO. He was Myongbak Lee.

Lee, a former CEO of Hyundai Construction Company, was elected mayor of Seoul in 2002 as

a GNP candidate. After inauguration, he initiated several measures to improve the living conditions of Seoul, sometimes muddling through strong oppositions of the ruling OUP and citizen groups. He set up the system of 'bus only street lanes' across Seoul; he opened the yard in front of City Hall to the public use; he endeavored to beautify the landscape of Seoul. Despite some opposing voices, he went his own way without hesitation, gaining himself the nickname "bulldozer politician." Finally, his landmark achievement as Seoul mayor, which was restoring the Cheonghye Stream, helped him to win over the support of the Seoul residents and other voters nationwide. That legacy was a symbol of his competence, perseverance, and can-do spirit. As time passed, Korean voters began to embrace a high expectation of him, considering him as the man who can deliver. Voters' support was robust, as his ever high popularity proves even during the BBK investigation. Myoungbak Lee was a symbol of hope for economic recovery, and that hoped sustained his popularity until the last moment.

2) public sentiment for "anything but Roh"

As described above, Lee's credentials as a successful former CEO and competent Seoul mayor widely opened his chance to run for, and win, the 17th presidential election. Besides this, the declining popularity of the incumbent president and his ruling party only assured Lee's invincibility. By taking a progressive ideological posture throughout his presidency, Roh betrayed the public's hope for economic improvement, and failed to maintain the support of Korean voters. Believe or not, the Korean voters saved him and his party during the 17th parliamentary election when they voted out the candidates of the old guard parties attempting to impeach Roh. Finding out that Roh's real concern did not lie in caring about public welfare rather in pursuing policies fitting his progressive agenda, however, they began to desert him.

Besides, people were deeply disappointed at Roh's repeated provocative statements and unrealistic proposals. He once offered to Geunhye Park that she should join his cabinet, sharing powers with him, when the latter was GNP's chief. At another time, Roh proposed a constitutional amendment all of a sudden at an unlikely time, saying it is necessary for the Korean Constitution to be revised in a way to assure the president two consecutive terms and to shorten the term to four years for synchronizing presidential and parliamentary electoral cycles. His proposals, if had been taken, may have contributed to upgrading Korean politics, but politicians and the public alike doubt his genuine intension when the president made such proposals extemporaneously.

In addition, Korean voters were almost sick of his speech style and choice of words. He was very vulgar and too straightforward in public speeches. Not frequently but once in a long while, his manners in public occasions bordered on losing civility. He was not reluctant to use slangs in his speeches when he thought it was necessary. The general public, however, were uneasy with his style, thinking that it is too unconventional and unpresidential. All these negative feelings and evaluations toward Roh made Korean voters turn their backs on him, and his party. Public anger translated into an additional support for Lee, thus shrinking support base for Dongyoung Chung.

VI. Characteristics of Voting Patterns And the Case of Region-centered Voting

In this section, the general information on the 17th presidential election will be given in compari-

son with previous presidential elections. Then, region-centered voting tendency, if it continues to exist, will be discussed.

VI-1. general statistical configurations of the 17th presidential election

The 17th Korean presidential election has several noteworthy features compared to previous presidential elections since the 1987 democratization. Among other things, the 17th presidential election is characterized by the lowest turnout rate since the 13th presidential election. As table 1 shows, the turnout rate has decreased throughout the elections over time, and it precipitously declined in both the 16th presidential and 17th presidential elections. The turnout rate was highest in the 13th presidential election, which, as the first direct election of president held since 1971, reflected voters' long suppressed zeal for political participation. In quite contrast to that, the 17th presidential election failed to evoke voters' interest in participation. The reason was obvious: the outcome was predetermined by the predominant popularity lead of Myoungbak Lee over other candidates.

In addition to the lowest turnout rate, the 17th presidential election is also remarkable in that the winner's lead over the 2nd runner was the hugest. As table 2 below clearly points out, GNP candidate Lee's victory was a landslide one, with vote margin of more than 20% over the second runner. Before the 17th presidential election, the largest votes-share percentage difference was that between Taiwoo Roh, then-ruling DJP's candidate, and Youngsam Kim, then-candidate of the Unification Democratic Party, in the 13th presidential election of. It was only 8.6%. That margin was followed by that of the 14th presidential election's margin, 8.2%. As time passed by, the margin shrank remarkably, recording 1.6% and 2.3% in the 15th and 16th presidential elections each. Given these past records, the vote margin in the 17th presidential election was exceptionally huge.

Next, the following two tables(table 3 and table 4) show each candidate's vote tallies in the 16th and 17th presidential elections. In each table, the second column from the left indicates the total number of votes cast in the respective region first, and, next, the respective region's vote percentage share out of the total national votes cast. The individual columns beginning from the third from the left show the total number of votes cast for each candidate in the respective region first, and, then, the candidate's vote percentage share out of the total votes cast in that

table 1 turnout rates of presidential elections since 1987

	13th presidential election(1987)	14th presidential election(1992)	15th presidential election(1997)	16th presidential election(2002)	17th presidential election(2007)
Turnout rate	89.2%	81.9%	80.7%	70.8%	63.0%

table 2 percentage of votes gained by the winner and the 2nd runner: 1987-2007

	13th presidential election(1987)	14th presidential election(1992)	15th presidential election(1997)	16th presidential election(2002)	17th presidential election(2007)
Winner	Taiwoo Roh	Youngsam Kim	Daijung Kim	Moohyun Roh	Myoungbak Lee
Winner's percentage of votes	36.6%	42.0%	40.3%	48.9%	48.7%
2nd runner	Youngsam Kim	Daijung Kim	Hoechang Lee	Hoechang Lee	Dongyoung Chung
2nd runner's percentage of votes	28.0%	33.8%	38.7%	46.6%	26.1%
Percentage difference	8.6%	8.2%	1.6%	2.3%	22.6%

table 3 national and regional tallies of the 16th presidential election

		Votes gained by candidates		
	total number of votes and regional % of total votes cast	total number of votes for Hoechang Lee and his % of votes in respective regions	total number of votes for Moohyun Roh and his % of votes in respective regions	total number of votes for Youngghil Kwon and his % of votes in respective regions
National	24,784,963	**11,443,297**	**12,014,277**	957,148
	100(%)	**46.2(%)**	**48.5(%)**	3.9(%)
Seoul	5,475,715	**2,447,376**	**2,792,957**	179,790
	22.1(%)	**45.0(%)**	**51.3(%)**	3.3(%)
Pusan	1,983,492	**1,314,274**	**587,946**	61,281
	8.0	**66.8**	**29.9**	3.1
Taegu	1,299,968	**1,002,164**	**240,745**	42,174
	5.2	**77.8**	**18.7**	3.2
Incheon	1,236,477	**547,205**	**611,766**	61,655
	5.0	**44.6**	**49.8**	5.0
Kwangju	755,398	**26,869**	**715,182**	7,243
	3.0	**3.6**	**95.2**	1.0
Taejeon	675,029	**266,760**	**369,046**	29,728
	2.7	**39.8**	**55.1**	4.4
Ulsan	510,496	**267,737**	**178,584**	57,786
	2.1	**52.9**	**35.3**	11.3
Kyounggi	4,831,412	**2,120,191**	**2,430,193**	209,346
	19.5	**44.2**	**50.7**	4.3
Kangwon	773,560	**400,405**	**316,722**	38,722
	3.1	**52.5**	**41.5**	5.0
North Chung-cheong	734,835	**311,044**	**365,623**	41,731
	3.0	**42.9**	**50.4**	5.7
South Chung-cheong	922,882	**375,110**	**474,531**	49,579
	3.7	**41.2**	**52.2**	5.4
North Cholla	1,064,744	**65,334**	**966,053**	14,904
	4.3	**6.2**	**91.6**	1.4
South Cholla	1,161,511	**53,074**	**1,070,506**	12,215
	4.7	**4.6**	**93.39**	1.1
North Kyoung-sang	1,463,664	**1,056,446**	**311,358**	62,522
	5.9	**73.5**	**21.7**	4.3
South Kyoung-sang	1,628,033	**1,083,564**	**434,642**	79,853
	6.6	**67.5**	**27.1**	4.9
Cheju	268,227	**105,744**	**148,423**	8,619
	1.1	**39.9**	**56.1**	3.2

Source: National Election Commission: http://www.nec.go.kr:7070/pdextern/index.html

region. Before we discuss the region-centered voting patterns in the next section, we can summarize the statistical characteristics of the 17th presidential election as follows on the basis of the whole 4 tables.

1) Myoungbak Lee of GNP was an overwhelming winner, with more than 20% vote edge over Dongyoung Chung of DNP. But still he could not command more than 50% of the votes. He failed to get an absolute majority. He was an overwhelming winner but still only a plurality winner.

2) Lee was the winner in all regions except

table 4 national and regional tallies of the 17th presidential election

		Votes gained by candidates				
	total number of votes and regional % of total votes cast	total number of votes for Dongyoung Chung and his % of votes in respective regions	total number of votes for Myoungbak Lee and his % of votes in respective regions	total number of votes for Youngghil Kwon and his % of votes in respective regions	total number of votes for Kookhyun Moon and his % of votes in respective regions	total number of votes for Hoechang Lee and his % of votes in respective regions
National	23,732,854	**6,174,681**	**11,494,389**	712,121	1,375,498	**3,559,963**
	100(%)	**26.1(%)**	**48.7(%)**	3.0(%)	5.8(%)	**15.1(%)**
Seoul	5,066,022	**1,237,812**	**2,689,162**	116,344	358,781	**596,226**
	21.3(%)	**24.5(%)**	**53.2(%)**	2.3(%)	7.1(%)	**11.8(%)**
Pusan	1,765,231	**236,708**	**1,018,715**	48,901	94,285	**346,319**
	7.4	**13.5**	**57.9**	2.8	5.4	**19.7**
Taegu	1,267,969	**75,932**	**876,719**	25,777	50,514	**228,199**
	5.3	**6.0**	**69.4**	2.0	4.0	**18.1**
Incheon	1,210,220	**286,565**	**593,283**	42,069	84,814	**183,057**
	5.1	**23.8**	**49.2**	3.5	7.0	**15.2**
Kwangju	663,338	**527,588**	**56,875**	13,597	31,524	**22,520**
	2.8	**79.8**	**8.6**	2.1	4.8	**3.4**
Taejeon	680,264	**159,700**	**246,008**	17,207	48.143	**195,957**
	2.9	**23.6**	**36.3**	2.5	7.1	**28.9**
Ulsan	521,216	**70,736**	**279,891**	43,607	28,605	**90,905**
	2.2	**13.6**	**54.0**	8.4	5.5	**17.5**
Kyounggi	5,035,641	**1,181,936**	**2,603,446**	144,830	354,492	**670,742**
	21.2	**23.6**	**51.9**	2.9	7.1	**13.4**
Kangwon	782,894	**136,668**	**376,004**	28,129	42.552	**127,102**
	3.3	**18.9**	**52.0**	3.9	5.9	**17.6**
North Chungcheong	702,593	**165,637**	**289,499**	25,285	39,884	**162,750**
	3.0	**23.8**	**41.6**	3.6	5.7	**23.4**
South Chungcheong	924,039	**192,999**	**313,693**	32,132	43,383	**304,259**
	3.9	**21.1**	**34.3**	3.5	4.7	**33.2**
North Cholla	957,575	**777,236**	**86,149**	18,139	26,573	**34,630**
	4.0	**81.6**	**9.0**	1.9	2.9	**3.6**
South Cholla	971,461	**757,309**	**88,834**	23,178	31,289	**34,790**
	4.1	**78.7**	**9.2**	2.4	3.2	**3.6**
North Kyoungsang	1,437,209	**96,822**	**1,033,957**	39,327	47,345	**195,526**
	6.1	**6.8**	**72.6**	2.8	3.3	**13.7**
South Kyoungsang	1,549,070	**189,463**	**843,662**	82,645	73,893	**329,486**
	6.5	**12.4**	**55.0**	5.4	4.8	**21.5**
Cheju	252,111	**81,570**	**96,495**	10,954	19,421	**37,495**
	1.1	**32.7**	**38.7**	4.4	7.8	**15.0**

Source: National Election Commission: http://www.nec.go.kr:7070/pdextern/index.html

Cholla provinces, where the governing party had strong traditional local bases. In these areas, the candidate of the governing party, Chung, was strongest.

3) Slightly less than 50% of the total number of voters reside in Seoul, Incheon, and Gyounggi areas. That means that you have to really excel your contenders in these areas to be elected. In the 16th presidential election, Roh was able to prevail in these areas. Unlike in the previous presidential elections, however, Lee, as a candidate of a conservative party, gained more than 50% of the votes cast in Seoul and Kyounggi province.

In Incheon, he almost got 50% of the votes. In sum, these tallies mean that he, as a candidate of a traditional conservative party, was unusually strong in Seoul Metropolitan area. The percentages of votes gained there are higher than his national average.

4) He was the strongest in North Kyoungsang province and Taegu, the regional strongholds of the conservative GNP.

VI-2. region-centered voting: change and stability

Region-centered voting has been strong since the 1987 presidential election. Beginning with the 13th presidential election of 1987, voters in specific regions predominantly voted the candidates of their region's favorite party. For example, Cholla and Kyoungsang regions' voters has traditionally voted the candidates of their favorite regional hegemonic parties, such as the Peace Democratic Party, the National Congress, and the NMDP in Cholla region, and such as DJP, NKP, and GNP in Kyoungsang region. Just as candidate-centered voters vote the candidate they like most, region-centered voters cast their votes for their favorite party's candidates without seriously considering other factors. As a result of this region-centered voting, the Korean regionalism tends to be reinforced(8).

Region-centered voting is not necessarily confined to the voters of a party's stronghold area. That is, you can count among region-centered voters regardless of your residence as long as you vote a certain party's candidate solely on the basis of that party's regional and familial ties to you. For example, suppose that you are living in Seoul, but that your family origin is of Kyougsang area. And if you vote GNP's candidates solely out of that family connection, you can be classified as a region-centered voter. Seen this way, it is not easy to sort out an independent effect of region on voter's choice in elections, presidential or parliamentary, unless you do not control other important variables. The difficulty is especially great outside each party regional stronghold like Cholla and Kyoungsang areas.

Given this background information, this paper attempts to find out the difference, if any, in the level of region-centered voting tendency across the two presidential elections. Rather than resorting to a rigorous statistical analysis, this paper utilizes the previous two tables (tables 3 and 4) to discern any change in region-centered voting habit by comparing the vote tallies of the two presidential elections. As widely acknowledged, given Myoungbak Lee's one-sided victory in Seoul and Kyounggi areas, we can more safely say that the region-centered voting definitely declined in these two areas. That is, Lee's final share of votes in these areas goes way beyond the areas' proportion of the population who are connected to Kyoungsang provinces (a regional fortress of GNP), in family or birth place ties. With this in mind, the author selected to concentrate on the areas of traditionally strong regionalism, Kyoungsang and Cholla areas, and see if there is any remarkable change in region-centered voting tendency.

As defined at the beginning of this section, region-centered voting tendency seems to have declined in the 2007 presidential election compared to the 2002 one. To explore the degree of decline, we first need to identify the parties with a strong regional base, and then compare the vote shares of these parties in respective areas.

In the 2002 presidential election, it is no doubt that there were two major parties with a strong regional base, NMDP and GNP; in 2007, there also were two major parties with a strong regional base, DNP and GNP. Traditionally, the lib-

eral NMDP and OUP, like their ancestor parties such as the Peace Democratic Party and the National Congress, had a strong supportive backyard in Cholla region, while GNP, just like its precedent NKP, had Kyoungsang region as its stronghold. These parties obtained a predominant support in these two regions in both presidential elections, with their respective vote share never declining below 50%. Let's take a look at each party's vote share in its stronghold area in 2002 and 2007 respectively.

No one will challenge the conventional idea that such large cities as Pusan, Taegu, Ulsan in Kyoungsan region, and such provinces as North Kyongsang and South Kyongsang count among the regional bases of GNP. Likewise, the city of Kwangju in Cholla region, and the provinces like North Cholla and South Cholla are considered as the regional base of DNP. Traditionally, the voters in Kyoungsang area voted mostly the candidates of GNP or its predecessor parties, while and those in Cholla region heavily voted the candidates of NMDP or OUP or their predecessors. These are usually liberal parties. Obviously, these strong region-centered voting tendencies began to develop beginning with three Kims' era, and have continued to influence Korea elections, presidential and parliamentary alike. Turning to the main thrust of this section, we now proceed to count and compare votes gained by these two parties in their respective strongholds in both 2002 and 2007.

As the tables 3 and 4 show, the region-centered voting pattern was pretty weakened in the case of GNP, except for Ulsan. In the 16th presidential election, Hoechang Lee of GNP garnered 66.8%, 77.8%, 73.5%, 67.5% in Pusan, Taegu, North Kyoungsang, and South Kyoungsang respectively, while Myoungbak Lee, in the 17th presidential election of 2007, obtained less vote percentage than what the other Lee had obtained in each corresponding city and province: 57.9%, 69.4%, 72.6%, 55.0%. On average, in GNP's regional stronghold Hoechang Lee got 71.4% in 2002, and the other Lee 63.7% in the same area in 2007, with the difference being about slightly less than 8%[9].

One note, however, is in order. That is, we should not forget that the endemic region-centered voting habit had been still predominant in these areas. The comparisons described so far only show that its intensity was mitigated compared with that of 4 years ago. Why this change? One apparent reason was Hoechang Lee's independent candidacy and its penetration into old-guard conservative population in the regions. Late as he was in joining the race, he was successful in picking up a sizable conservative segment of initial GNP supporters, who were disappointed at Myoungbak Lee's reputedly unprincipled pragmatism and upset at the BBK scandal. Feeling betrayed at Myoungbak Lee's disputable past and murky explanations only for defending his position, the conservative part of the region defected from a pragmatic Lee to an old guard conservative Lee.

The moderated tendency of region-centered voting was also the case in DNP's stronghold region, Cholla area. Compared to 90% of support given to Roh of NMDP in 2002, Chung's vote share in Cholla region, which was more than 75%, was not impressive. As a matter of fact, Roh of NMDP gained 95.2%, 91.6%, 93.4% in Kwangju, South Cholla, and North Cholla respectively, which was really impressive compared to those of his predecessors. Chung, on the other hand, ended up gaining 79.8%, 81.6%, 78.7% in the same places respectively. In other words, region-centered voting pattern weakened in this area, too, proving his popularity fell much short of

unanimity.

Why did Chung fall behind in 2007 compared to Roh of 2002? There are several reasons. First of all, he himself was not that popular in the region. Anything but a real threatening challenger to Myoungbak Lee, he was, in fact, desperate to stay the second once Hoechang Lee announced his decision to jump into the race. He was not able to avoid the public blame of his opportunism, either, since he took the initiative in ending OUP of his own making and creating a quickly fabricated party called DNP. Secondly, his vote base was chipped away at by the other candidates, including Myoungbak Lee, who made tiny inroads into Cholla voters. Lee gained a record high vote percentage in Cholla region as a conservative party nominee since the 1987 election. Although his average 9.3% in the region was meager, it was historically highest support given to conservative nominees in Cholla region. Along with him, other candidates bit out some portion of Cholla votes so that Chung failed to have quasi-unanimous support in the area as his predecessors did.

In summary, region-centered voting tendency in 2007 definitely weakened compared to that of 2002. The decline was observed in Seoul and Gyounggi areas as well as Cholla and Kyoungsang areas. That, however, does not mean that region-centered voting tendency is no more a major factor in explaining the outcomes of Korean presidential elections. As can be seen in tables 3 and 4, region-centered voting tendency has been, and is, still prevalent in a large sector of voters. It also proved its power in the 18th parliamentary election, particularly in Kyoungsang and Cholla provinces as usual.

VII. Conclusion

Compared with the 16th presidential election, the 17th presidential election can be defined as an issueless one. As the BBK investigation was one all-encompassing predominant issue throughout the campaign, the other major issues of crucial importance, including the national canal construction, were neglected by politicians and voters alike. With Myoungbak Lee's popularity far ahead of other candidates from the start without any signs of fall, the election outcome seemed predetermined, and the campaign was only strewn with negative propagandas against him. Lee dodged tough questions all the time when the BBK issue was raised by opponents, instead hurriedly emphasizing his ability to revive Korean economy.

With no major issues at hand, the election was insipid and failed to attract voters' attention. In contrast to the 2002 election, which was held amid the turmoil of anti-Americanism, the heated debates surrounding capital city relocation, and Roh's personality, the election last year was only for Lee's one-man show without voters' interest. The turnout rate was record low, since the voters were sick of partisan brawling surrounding the BBK scandal, and since the election outcome was easily predictable for sure as the election day approached.

Despite the unusual lack of voters' interest, Myougbak Lee was elected president by taking advantage of his image as a successful CEO and Seoul Mayor. He made every effort to show him as the most competent to deliver Korea from economic hardships, and that strategy worked. Voters' wish for economic recovery was so desperate that it was enough to cover up his other weaknesses and past mistakes. On top of this, then-president Roh also helped him to be elected by keeping his own popularity extremely low. Chung of DNP was so weak as a candidate to be an effective black hole absorbing all anti-Lee forces. All these factors contributed to Lee's final

victory.

While the region-centered voting remarkably weakened in Seoul and Kyounggi areas in the 17th presidential election, it was still powerful in the DNP's and the GNP's strongholds, i.e., Cholla and Kyoungsang areas, although in a somewhat mitigated form. Announcing a death sentence to region-centered voting is still premature. The outcomes of the recently held 18th National Assembly Election was only disappointing, confirming the unyielding power of region-based voting pattern in Cholla and Kyoungsang regions. The emergence of Chungcheong-based Liberal Advanced Party also frustrates our premature optimism on regionalism.

The next five years of Lee's presidency will be important in various ways. The long days of economic recession accelerated social bipolarization, which must be ameliorated by the Lee administration. He is also in charge of restoring the traditional Korea-U.S and Korea-Japan relationship. He also has to come to terms with his party's second man Geunhye Park. Depending on his performance in solving these problems, voters' evaluation of his presidency will move up and down. On the other hand, after being defeated in two consecutive elections the liberal forces in Korea are all in miserable shatters. Whether they can regroup themselves also remains as an important question. At this moment, nobody knows where the future of the liberal political forces lies. That is another reason why we are curious and concerned about next five years.

(1) The two major parties were the New Millennium Democratic Party and the Grand National Party. The former is a relatively progressive party; the latter is a traditionally conservative party.

(2) The three conservative parties that participated in the merger of 1990 were the ruling Democratic Justice Party, the New Korean Democratic Party of Youngsam Kim, and the New Democratic Republican Party of Jongpil Kim.

(3) Hoechang Lee, after defeated in the presidential race in 2007, later created the Liberal Advanced Party in 2008 and participated in the 18th parliamentary election. His party gained 18 seats, with the voters' support mostly coming from his hometown, South Chungcheng Province. He was criticized for creating another regional party.

(4) Traditionally, the party nomination process in Korea ended up with a one sided victory for a strong candidate whether the candidates are nominated by a primary or a party convention. It was the case even with the 2002 nomination process both in NMDP and GNP, when US-style primary system was first adopted as a nomination method. At that time, Roh of NMDP took the lead from the start, and Hoechang Lee of GNP virtually had no serious challenger.

(5) The poll survey outcome was counted as a part of total tallies for the candidates. The new system was adopted in order to reflect the public sentiment into the nomination process.

(6) In the 13th, 14th, 15th presidential elections, the winner's vote percentage were 36.6%(Taiwoo Roh of DJP), 42%(Youngsam Kim of NKP), and 40.3%(Daijung Kim of NMDP) respectively.

(7) Inje Lee, a strong presidential hopeful, initially expected to have an upper hand in the race, simply quit the race in despair and frustration at the early stage when his self-prediction of victory turned out to be ill-founded.

(8) On the origin of regionalism, there are various explanations and debates, on which this paper does not concentrate. Some argue that regionalism was entrenched well before the onset of region-centered voting, while others argue regionalism is a very product of the region-centered voting begun in 1987.

(9) Only in Ulsan, was region-centered voting stronger in 2007 than in 2002, but with ignorable difference: Myoungbak Lee's 54.0% over Hoechang Lee's 52.9%.

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