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The Role of Timing and Presidential Popularity in Local Elections: Upheaval in the 2018 Busan City Council Election*

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Abstract

The 2018 local elections completely upended the composition of Busan's city council, with the council membership changing from being solidly and consistently conservative to being over 80% liberal. What explains this anomalous outcome? While existing literature suggests the outcome of the 2018 city council elections was the consequence of a combination of structural and strategic factors, such as the decline of regional voting, we argue that the individual-level evaluation of President Moon Jae-in is one of the primary factors driving this result. Although coattails effects are commonly considered in concurrent national legislative elections, the Presidentialized and nationalized politics of Korea makes it possible for Presidential elections to affect local elections as well. We assess our explanation through an analysis of repeated cross-sectional survey data collected just before the 2018 local elections. The results of the analysis show that support for the Democratic Party is very strongly predicted by individual-level evaluation of President Moon. When considered in the context of the timing of presidential and local elections, the results suggest that Presidential coattail effects are capable of destabilizing established political patterns, such as regional voting, if perhaps only in a sporadic and idiosyncratic fashion, depending on whether or not local elections are held early on in a President's term.

Keywords

Coattail Effect, Local Elections, Regional Voting, Busan City Council Election

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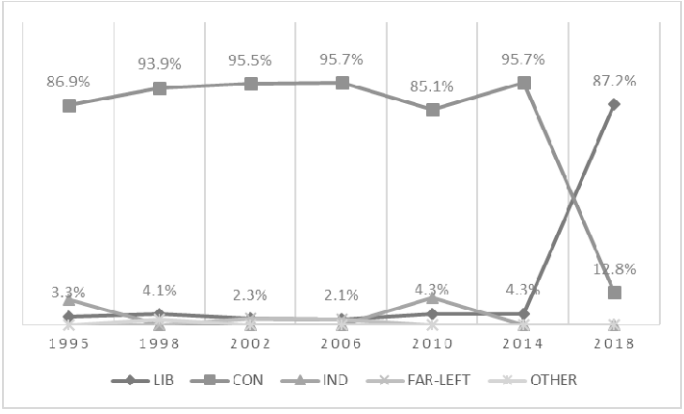
Ⅰ. Introduction

City council elections constitute an important part of local elections in South Korea. They are thought to enhance the autonomy of the provinces and major cities from the central government and national politics. Yet, our understanding of the determinants of vote choice in city council elections is far from complete.

The case of the 2018 Busan City Council elections provides an excellent and telling illustration of this lacuna. Since the restoration of local elections 1991, the conservative party has dominated local elections (Chung and Cha, 2020). Indeed, members of the primary conservative party held a super majority of Busan's City Council seats from 1991 to 2018. However, the 2018 local elections brought dramatic change, with liberal party candidates gaining a super majority as a result of the 2018 local elections, as shown in Figure 1. This dramatic shift from a 95.7% conservative seat share to a 87.2% liberal seat share in a single election is interesting both as a political question in its own right, as well as in the broader context of Korean politics, in which the regional cleavage has long been a strong determinant of vote choice (Kim, 2010). What explains this incredible outcome, and what are the consequences for Korean politics more broadly?

Figure 1. Busan City Council Seat Share by Party Family and Year



Source: National Election Commission

In this study, We argue that the liberal party's unprecedented victory in the 2018 Busan City Council election is largely a result of the timing of local elections, along with the particularly long honeymoon period of Moon's early presidency. Although well-known structural changes, such as the decline of regionalism and changes in the local party system, may have increased the potential for electoral turnover at the local level, the evidence suggests that the massive liberal victory in the 2018 Busan City Council elections is a result of the popularity of President Moon Jae-in. Previous local elections held under "liberal" presidents — in 2002 and 2006 — took place later on in the President's term because of the difference between the four-year local election cycle and the five-year presidential election cycle. By contrast, the 2018 local elections happened to be held towards the beginning of the second year of Moon's presidential term, when he was still enjoying the high approval rating typical of the early stages of a presidency. Busan City council candidates running

on the Democratic ticket are likely to have received an electoral boost that they otherwise would not have because 1) they belonged to the same political party as Moon, and 2) the election happened to occur early on in Moon's term, when his popularity was still quite high, resulting in voters rewarding Moon by selecting liberal party candidates in the 2018 Busan City Council elections.

We support our argument with an analysis of repeated cross-sectional survey data collected in the run-up to the 2018 local elections. The results of the analysis show that individual-level evaluation of President Moon Jae-in is strongly positively correlated with support for the liberal party, even when controlling for ideology and a variety of other theoretically relevant covariates. We also find that average presidential approval rating at the district level is strongly associated with actual district-level Democratic vote share in the city council elections. Although the analysis presented here is correlational, it suggests that presidential coattail effects were likely an important factor in the 2018 City Council elections. Because local elections and presidential elections take place at different time intervals, such a spectacular result is unlikely to obtain again until the elections align in this particular manner. The analysis presented here suggests that, if there is to be a realignment of local politics in South Korea, it is likely to develop in an irregular and idiosyncratic fashion, as the interaction between national and local politics is structured by institutions like the differently paced election cycles. We conclude with a discussion of the limitations of the analysis, as well as suggestions for future studies of the relationship between Presidential politics and local election outcomes.

II. EXPLAINING THE 2018 BUSAN CITY COUNCIL ELECTIONS

1. Local Elections in the Context of Regional and National Politics

Local elections in Korea were reintroduced in 1991 in order to increase the autonomy of the provinces from the central government (Ahn and Lee, 2002). Local government consists of two tiers: an upper tier and a lower tier, each with multiple levels of authority. Metropolitan cities (gwangyeok-si) and provinces constitute the upper levels, whereas cities, counties, and autonomous districts form the lower levels. Metropolitan city governments are considered to have equal authority and power as provincial governments, hence have considerable authority, though they too are ultimately subject to the power of the central government.

Each of Korea's eight major metropolitan cities is governed by both an elected city council and the central government. The size and method of election varies by city, but largely they are elected by first past the post vote (FPTP). Busan is Korea's second largest city by population, with approximately 3,448,737 residents as of 2018. Busan's city council is currently composed of 47 elected members, 42 of which are elected by FPTP, while the remaining 5 are elected by party-list proportional representation (PR).

Prior to 2018, Busan's city council was dominated by members of the conservative party. This dominance can in part be explained as a result of Korea's regional voting pattern, wherein voters from the Southwest provinces (North and South Jeolla, along with Gwangju metropolitan city,

collectively known as “Honam”) overwhelmingly vote for the liberal party, whereas voters from the Southeast provinces (North and South Gyeonsang Province, along with Busan, Daegu, and Ulsan metropolitan cities, collectively known as “Yeongnam”) consistently vote for the conservative party (Kim, 2010). Regionalism has been a fundamental feature of Korean politics since Democratization, and can be evidenced at virtually every level of government. Given this longstanding voting pattern, the main liberal party has typically declined to nominate many candidates in Yeongnam, owing to the low probability of success. All of this makes the main liberal party’s victory in the 2018 Busan City council elections quite puzzling.

2. Assessing the Role of Background Conditions in Local Election Outcomes

Although the primary explanatory variable considered in this study is presidential approval, any explanation of the curious results of 2018 would be inadequate without sufficient consideration of broader structural and contextual changes that have occurred in Korean politics in the past decade and the way these changes might have acted as necessary — if not sufficient — conditions for Presidential coattail effects. For example, presidential coattail effects are extremely unlikely if no legislative candidates run as members of the president’s party. In this section, we consider the most relevant factors suggested by the literature, and evaluate their potential contribution to local election outcomes.

One potential factor behind the overwhelming success of the liberal party in 2018 is the decline of regionalism. Since at least the early 2010s,

scholars have observed a weakening of the regional cleavage in South Korea, particularly in the Southeast (Yeongnam) region. Yoon (2013), for instance, finds that residents of Busan, Ulsan, and Gyeongnam (South Gyeongsang) province exhibit little evidence of in-group regional preference or out-group regional avoidance with regard to candidate choice and political party preference. Yoon finds that individuals that claim to be from Daegu and North Gyeongsang province, as well as of North and South Jeolla province, exhibit stronger region-based vote preferences than those from Busan, Ulsan, and South Gyeongsang province. Similarly, Kim (2010) finds evidence of weakened regionalism in the 17th presidential election. If it is true that regional voting is on the decline, then it is possible that the 2018 City Council elections can be explained in part as a consequence of weakened regional voting, in so far as voters-particularly in Busan, Ulsan, and South Gyeongsang — no longer reliably vote for the conservative party in the same that they had in past elections. While this kind of structural explanation may help in understanding the specific electoral outcome in question, it is by no means sufficient. Above all, while weakening regionalism can help explain gradual long-term trends, it is unclear that it can explain sudden dramatic shifts in voter behavior such as that observed here.

A second possible explanation relates to ideological change. Given the propensity to vote for the conservative party among Yeongnam residents, one would expect Yeongnam voters to also have conservative ideological leanings. While this may at point have been true, there is increasingly greater ideological heterogeneity among Yeongnam voters. Yoon (2020) finds that those claiming Busan or Gyeongnam as their place of birth show policy preferences on a set of major policy issues that are nearly

indistinguishable from those of citizens from the Honam region, including the deployment of THAAD anti-missile defense system, North Korean policy, and the repeal of the national security law. By contrast, residents of Daegu and North Gyeongang exhibit more consistently conservative preferences on these issues, and diverge significantly from Honam voters. This suggests that, whereas citizens from Daegu and North Gyeonsang province appear to be maintaining their regional preferences and conservative ideological leanings, those from South Gyeongsang province are becoming more liberal-leaning. If true, this could perhaps explain the liberal turn in 2018. Indeed, whereas both Ulsan and Busan elected largely Democratic city councils, Daegu remained solidly conservative even after 2018.

However, there is now a great deal of evidence that suggests that most voters in most democracies are ill-informed about politics and do not vote ideologically in the sense imagined by traditional theories of voting (e.g., Achens and Bartels, 2017). Moreover, it would be unlikely for voters to attribute blame or success on national policies to local politicians (Song, 2009). Finally, if voters in the 2018 Busan City Council elections did choose to vote for the liberal party in response to local issues, as opposed to national ones, it is unclear why the pattern of voting for the liberal party would extend across the entire cities of Busan and Ulsan. In other words, it seems unlikely that such a sweeping outcome was the result of voter-candidate proximity on local or national issue positions.

A related argument concerns changes in the population composition. As Chung and Cha (2020) point out, apartment ownership is considered one of the defining symbols of middle-class socioeconomic status in Korea, which is in-turn associated with liberal voting. The authors use

aggregate panel data to show that move-in rates to large apartment complexes are strongly positively correlated with liberal vote share in the 2018 elections.

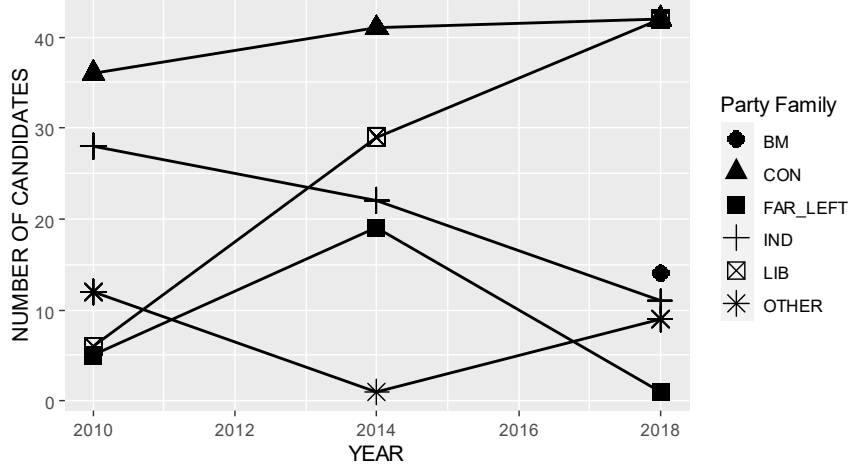
However, compositional change can only form part of the explanation. To see this, consider the 2020 elections. If compositional change were as strong a predictor of vote choice as indicated by the analysis of Chung and Cha (2020), we would have expected a relatively strong liberal showing in the 2020 legislative elections. Contrary to these expectations, the major liberal party garnered a mere 28.4% of the constituency vote, electing only 3 liberal representatives, a figure that is similar to previous election periods. Such an outcome is hardly indicative of a fundamental electoral shift or realignment. Furthermore, aggregate analyses cannot be used to identify individual level effects because of the problem of ecological inference. That is, we cannot use aggregate data to infer information about individual-level behavior.

Another important factor is changes in candidate nomination patterns that occured prior to the 2018 local elections. Before this time, the liberal party generally did not nominate candidates in Yeongnam, likely owing to the low probability of being elected. This began to change in the mid-2010s, when the liberal party started to nominate an increasing number of candidates in Yeongnam at various levels of government, perhaps in response to the loosening of regional voting patterns noted above.

To see this, consider Figure 2, which shows the number of candidates nominated by each party family. In 2010, the main liberal party (“LIB”) nominated fewer than 10 candidates for the city council elections. This number increased dramatically in 2014 to about 30, and by 2018 the liberal party had nominated candidates in all available 42 districts. Secondly,

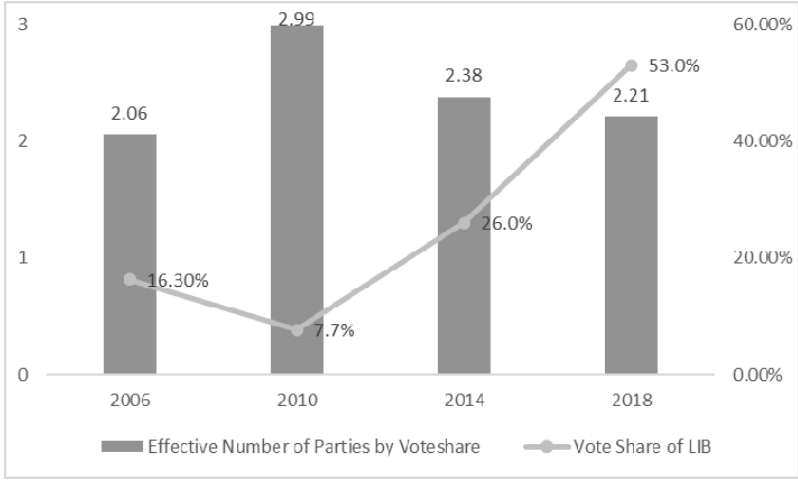
as shown in Figure 3, we notice that, whereas the local party system was relatively fragmented in 2010, by 2018 the party system converges roughly to a two-party system dominated by candidates for the main liberal and conservative parties. As Duverger (1954) suggests, this encourages voters to vote for one of the two parties, owing to psychological and mechanical effects, which might lead to a higher probability of electing a liberal party candidate.

Figure 2. Number of Candidates Nominated in Busan City Council Races by Party Family



Note) BM = Bareun Mirae, Con = Main Conservative Party, Far_Left = Far Left Parties, IND = Independent Candidates, LIB = Major Liberal Party.

Figure 3. Fragmentation of the Party System and Vote Share of the Liberal Parties in Busan City Council

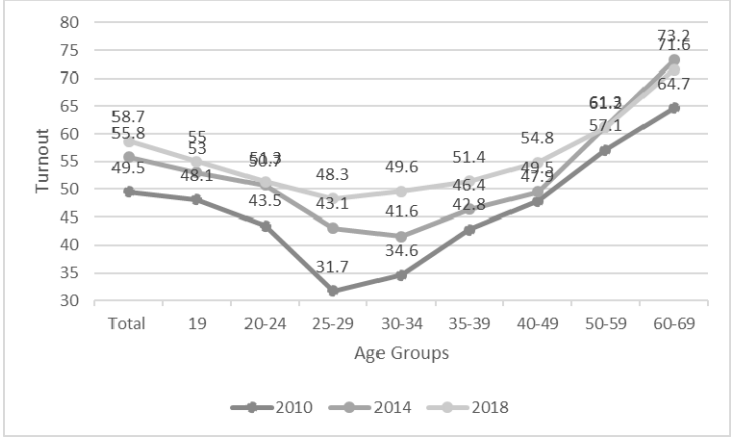


Of course, the winnowing of the party system cannot by itself explain why voters would chose the liberal party over the conservative party. At the very least, however, we should expect that some of the voters disposed to vote for an independent or a small party to be forced to choose between candidates of the two major parties. In such a circumstance, we should expect voters that normally favor candidates of far-left parties or independents to vote for a liberal party candidate, in the traditional Downsian fashion (Downs, 1957). It is also possible that voters predisposed to vote for the liberal party abstained from voting, owing to the lack of a liberal candidate in their district. If this is true, we might expect an increase in turnout over this period as more mainstream liberal voters turn out to vote.

Indeed, voter turnout in Busan City Council elections did increase

almost 10 percentage points between 2010 and 2018, going from 49.5% in 2010 to 58.7% in 2018. This could be attributed to a decline in reliable conservative voter turnout, an increase in liberal voter turnout, or some combination of the two. As Figure 4 shows, however, turnout among young adults increased significantly between 2010 and 2018, especially those between 25 and 29 years of age. This subset of voters is traditionally considered to be likely to support left-leaning parties and policies (Park, 2012; Noh et al., 2013). Still, while a relatively higher proportion of liberal voters would seem likely to result in higher liberal party vote shares, such an outcome is by no means guaranteed.

Figure 4. Turnout in Busan City Council by Age Groups



3. The Influence of the President: A.K.A. Presidential Coattails

There is little disagreement among scholars regarding the effect if Presidential elections on local and national legislative elections. The coattail effect refers to the advantage that presidential party candidates generally

enjoy in congressional elections, which are held in concurrent elections. To support popular presidential candidates, peripheral voters "surge" into high-stimulus presidential and congress elections, which increases the likelihood that the president's congressional co-partisans will also win the concurrent election. Conversely, peripheral voters "decline" in relatively low-stimulus congressional midterm elections. Campbell (1960, 1985) developed this logic to explain why the presidential party loses seats in midterm elections. Tufte (1975, 826) explained the midterm election loss of the president's party as a referendum on the president. According to Tufte, "voters reward or punish the party of the president by casting their votes for representatives in line with their perceptions and evaluations of the president" (Abramowitz et al., 1986; Rogers, 2019). Studies have also shown that peripheral voters support opposition parties in midterm elections as a means of "balancing" the president's party (Alesina and Rosenthal, 1989; Bailey and Fullmer, 2011).

In the United States, where presidential and congressional elections are regularly held, it is relatively easy to observe coattail effects. When non-concurrent elections are held irregularly, with different terms for the president and members of the parliament, the coattail effects are a bit more complex. In general, it is known that the president's party benefits when presidential and parliamentary or local elections are held in close temporal proximity (Jones 1994; Negretto, 2006; Shugart, 1995). In the honeymoon election held at the beginning of the president's term, the president's party is highly likely to win because of the president's high approval rating. During midterm elections or counter-honeymoon elections held later in the presidential term, the president's party is more likely to lose (Shugart and Carey, 1992).

Furthermore, in a presidential system, presidential elections are tend to be vastly more politically influential than local or even national legislative elections. As Elgie et al. (2014) point out, presidential elections are "system-defining" elections, and have the tendency to shape subsequent legislative elections, especially when they are carried out directly after the Presidential elections. For example, substantial coattail effects were observed in the 2000 French legislative elections due to a constitutional amendment that made it so that legislative elections were held directly after presidential elections (Elgie et al., 2014). These effects are thought to be a result of the tendency of the electorate to confirm or strengthen a president's power during the initial "honeymoon" stages of their term, when the president is likely to be at or near the peak of their popularity. This influence is then expected to decline over time, perhaps as the electorate's expectations collide with reality, and a president's approval rating declines.

There is no scholarly agreement on a precise time limit on coattail effects, nor is there any reason to expect coattails effects to be limited to national legislative elections. A reasonable expectation is that this influence will persist as long as presidential approval remains near levels observed at the start of the term, and that it will extend to elections at any level, so long as there partisan affiliations at the local level correspond to those at the national level.

4. Presidential Popularity and Local Elections in South Korea

Despite the intentions behind the reinstitution of local government, local elections have long been criticized as being heavily influenced by

national politics (Song, 2009). This influence is at least in part a result of Korea's political institutions. First, Korea's presidential system provides a focus for blame and credit attribution in the personage of the President (Bae and Park, 2018; Choi, 2012; Im, 2004). Second, there is the issue of timing. Whereas the President serves one five-year term, local officials serve four-year terms, meaning that local elections can take place during any of the five years of a President's term. As Song (2009) argues, a president's high approval rating during the early years of a term can bring about coattail effects in local elections, whereas waning approval in the later years can adversely affect candidates who are members of the President's party.

As shown in Figure 5, only two South Korean presidential elections were held near local elections and featured a high presidential approval rating at the beginning of their tenure; Kim Dae-jung, who was in his first year in 1998, and Moon Jae-in, who was in his second year in 2018. These two elections created an environment where high presidential approval ratings could cause coattail effects. Since the remaining five local elections were held in the mid to late period of the president's term, we should not expect to observe strong coattail effects in these elections. President Roh Moo-hyun makes for an excellent comparison case, in so far as both Roh and Moon are liberals from the Southeastern Yeongnam region. During Roh's tenure, the liberal party was expected to do well in the 2006 Busan local elections. However, as shown in Figure 5, local elections were held in the fourth year of his term, when Roh's presidential approval rating fell in the 20% range. There is little reason to expect coattail effects when the president is unpopular, as the liberal party's poor showing in the 2006 Busan local elections illustrates.

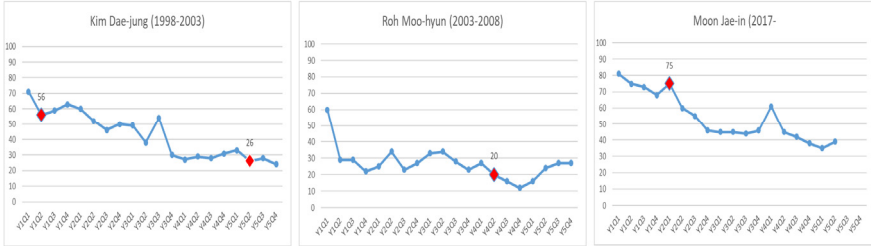
The 1998 local elections were held at the beginning of the president's term, but Kim Dae-jung's liberal party was defeated in the Busan City Council Elections because of the high regionalist voting tendency. Furthermore, as mentioned above, few candidates ran as members of the president's party. While there are other ways that voters can identify candidates with political ties to the President, partisan affiliation is known to be a reliable heuristic that voters depend on to select political candidates (see, e.g, Gerber et al., 2010). Coattail effects based on partisanship require minimal knowledge on the part of the voter; they need only the president's party and the local candidate's party[1]. In 1998, few Busan City Council candidates ran as members of Kim Dae-jung's party, making coattail effects all the more unlikely.

The Busan City Council elections of 2018 were conducted about one year after liberal presidential candidate Moon Jae-in was elected President. As expected, because one year is enough time for voters to form reasonable judgments about the effectiveness of a President, but not long enough to become disillusioned with a President, members of the President's party should expect to be likely to ride the President's coattails into office. Indeed, Moon Jae-in was very popular in 2018. Around the time of the election, Moon had a national approval rating of about 78%, according to Korea Gallop, and 76% according to Realmeter. Given the findings of Song (2009), we should expect evaluation of President Moon to be a strongly predict support for the liberal party in the 2018 Busan City Council elections. We state this expectation formally as the following hypothesis:

1) Candidates could of course run as independents affiliated with the President, but this requires voters to have a deeper understanding of local politics.

Hypothesis: Evaluation of President Moon is strongly correlated with support for the liberal party amid the 2018 Busan City Council elections.

Figure 5. Presidential Approval Rating and Local Elections in South Korea



Source: Gallup Korea Daily Opinion, October 1, 2021

Ⅲ. DATA AND METHOD

In order to evaluate our hypothesis, we analyze individual-level survey data collected by Joongang Ilbo. These data comprise three waves of cross-sectional public opinion data that focuses on questions pertaining to the 2018 local elections. We analyze only the first two waves, as they contain information pertinent to the present study. The surveys were conducted through telephone. The samples were constructed using quota sampling based on sex, age, and region. The first wave of data was collected between 11 and 12 April 2018 (N = 800, response rate = 24%), and the second wave between 20 and 21 May 2018 (N = 803, response rate = 21.6%). Election data for the 2017 Presidential election and 2018 Busan City Council elections are obtained from the national elections

commission website.[2)]

1. Dependent Variable

The main dependent variable in the analysis is support for the Democratic Party. This is indicated by a survey item that asks respondents which of the major parties the respondent supports (Democratic Party, Liberty Korea, Justice Party, etc.). Responses to this item are recoded so that a value of 1 indicates that the respondent supported the Democratic Party (the main liberal party) and a value of 0 indicates that the individual supports another party. We consider this variable to be a valid proxy for actual vote choice based on previous research showing that party preference at the national level is correlated with regional-level voting (e.g. Lee, 2011). Support for the Democratic party is thus a valid measure of likely vote choice in city council elections, in so far as voters that choose the Democratic party just prior to the election should be likely to choose the Democratic candidate in their local race.[3)] This connection is possible because partisan divisions at the local level correspond to those at the national level.

While it would be ideal to obtain data on candidate support, we identify two reasons why party support is a sufficient proxy. First, the results of the election show Democratic candidates being overwhemingly elected across a wide range of districts, not only in Busan, but also in nearby

2) https://www.nec.go.kr/site/nec/main.do

3) While this connection is only probabilistic, the district-level share of respondents supporting the Democratic Party is strongly positively correlated with actual district-level Democratic Share of the city council vote, as shown in Figure 8, supporting the validity of this measure.

Ulsan as well. The Democratic party also gained victories in the mayoral races of both cities, further suggesting that the primary variable to be explained is support for the Democratic party, rather than support for individual candidates. In other words, it seems unlikely that the common factor underlying the results is candidate specific. Furthermore, as we explain below, we control for district-level effects by including a dummy variable for each district. While this does not entirely control for candidate-specific effects, it should capture some of the variation due to candidate quality and related variables.

2. Independent Variable

Our primary independent variable is individual-level evaluation of president Moon. Waves 1 and 2 of the survey series include an item that asks respondents how well president Moon is governing the country. Responses range from "He is doing very well" to "He is doing very poorly". These are recoded so that a score of 1 indicates the latter, whereas a score of 4 indicates the former (Possible Values: {1,2,3,4}, Mean = 2.919, SD = 0.850).

3. Control Variables

In all analyses we include controls for age, sex, and political ideology, since these are known to be correlated with vote choice (Chung and Cha, 2020; No, Seong, and Kang, 2013). Age is measured as age in years, sex is measured by a binary variable that equals 1 if the respondent is male and 2 if the respondent is female. Political ideology is measured by self-placement on a 1 ("very liberal") to 5 ("very conservative") scale.

We also include district dummies because there could be shared characteristics of residents in particular districts that affect the results of the analysis (Kwak, 2007). We also include controls for policy issue importance, since this may affect support for the Democratic Party. Wave 1 of the survey includes an item that asks respondents what they think the most important issue of the election is. Reponses include North Korea - South Korea relations, the economy, political reform, Park Geun-Hye's impeachment trial, and the "MeToo" movement. While it would be ideal to include a measure of respondent stance on these issues, this should provide some indicator of the effect of issue on vote choice.

4. Analytical method

We test our hypothesis by estimating the relationship between our main dependent and independent variables with ordinary least squares regression (OLS). We choose OLS because it provides easily interpretable estimates of regression coefficients that are nearly identical to those of logistic regression (Hellevik, 2009), and that are also unbiased and reliable estimates of a variable's average effect (Allison, 1999; Baetschmann, Staub and Winkelmann, 2015; Hellevik, 2009). We note that the results of the analysis are identical when estimated with logistic regression. Because the data are binary time series cross-sectional (BTSCS), the use of traditional panel methods — i.e., panel fixed effects — is not possible. We also considered other methods of estimation, such as the Cox proportional hazards model, which has been proposed as a suitable method for analyzing BTSCS data (Metzger and Jones, 2021). Unfortunately, the assumptions required by such models were found not to hold for our data. Accordingly, we analyze each wave separately, and

then together in a pooled analysis with a wave dummy. While this method does not provide causal estimates, it at least accounts for some of the across-time variation in the variables of interest.

Ⅳ. RESULTS

We begin by presenting descriptive statistics in Table 1 below, weighted by the survey weights included in the data set. The average age of respondents is about 48 years old, with the proportion of respondents older than 60 less than 30% across the sample. We see that the level of support for Moon is fairly high in both waves, with most respondents reporting that President Moon is performing well in the office of the Presidency. Conforming to the results of Yoon (2020), we see that overall the sample leans slightly liberal, scoring a 2.8 on the 5-point ideology scale. The “Decide” variable indicates the proportion of respondents that have decided their vote choice in the 2018 local elections, and the “Support for Liberal Party” variable indicates the percentage of respondents reporting that they support the Democratic Party. We observe a considerable increase in support for the Democrats in the second wave of the survey, as well as approximately a 10 percentage point increase in the percent of respondents that have decided which candidate they will vote for.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics (Mean, with Standard Deviation in Parentheses)

Wave	N	Age	Male	Ideology	Moon Evaluation	Decide	Support for Liberal Party
1	800	48.663 (0.567)	0.47	2.875 (0.037)	2.826 (0.033)	0.329 (0.017)	0.568 (0.021)
2	803	48.856 (0.604)	0.498	2.841 (0.039)	3.011 (0.032)	0.436 (0.018)	0.64 (0.02)

The results of the main analyses are shown in Table 2. The first column of Table 2 shows the results for the analyses of wave 1 data. the second column shows the results for wave 2, and the third column in Table 2 shows the results of the analysis using the pooled data set that includes both waves. Looking at the coefficient associated with the "Moon Evaluation" variable, we see that it is positive and highly statistically significant across all three models ($p < 0.01$). The coefficient indicates that one-unit increase in evaluation of President Moon is associated with a roughly 0.25 increase in the probability of supporting the Democratic Party. Substantively, this is quite a large effect. In order to see this, we graph the predicted probability of supporting the Democratic Party given evaluation of President Moon in Figure 6. We used column 3 in Table 2 to calculate these probabilities. All control variables are held at their mean, if numeric, or mode, if categorical. Figure 6 shows that the probability of supporting the Democratic Party jumps from about 17% for the lowest rating (1) to about 93% for the highest rating (4). This is a considerably strong effect, and the narrow confidence intervals indicate that it is quite consistent.

Table 2. Results of OLS Regression of Moon Evaluation on Support for the Democratic Party

	Dependent variable:		
	Support for the Democratic Party		
	(Wave 1)	(Wave 2)	(Wave 1 & 2)
Me2	−0.071 (0.117)		
North Korea	0.001 (0.052)		
Park	0.025 (0.049)		
Reform	−0.068 (0.061)		
Moon Evaluation	0.265*** (0.022)	0.250*** (0.021)	0.255*** (0.015)
Age	−0.004*** (0.001)	−0.007*** (0.001)	−0.006*** (0.001)
Sex (Female)	0.037 (0.037)	0.069** (0.032)	0.062*** (0.023)
District	0.002 (0.005)	0.012*** (0.004)	0.007** (0.003)
Ideology	−0.095*** (0.020)	−0.070*** (0.017)	−0.084*** (0.013)
Vote Intention	−0.028 (0.030)	−0.012 (0.027)	−0.015 (0.019)
Decide	−0.008 (0.039)	−0.022 (0.034)	−0.016 (0.025)
Wave 2			0.038 (0.024)
Constant	0.346** (0.166)	0.343** (0.140)	0.324*** (0.105)
Observations	437	540	1,022
R^2	0.418	0.412	0.415
Adjusted R^2	0.403	0.405	0.411
Residual Std. Error	0.380 (df = 425)	0.366 (df = 532)	0.372 (df = 1013)
F Statistic	27.768*** (df = 11; 425)	53.335*** (df = 7; 532)	89.974*** (df = 8; 1013)

Note) *$p < 0.1$; **$p < 0.05$; ***$p < 0.01$

Figure 6. Predicted Probability of Endorsing Democratic Party by Evaluation of President Moon.

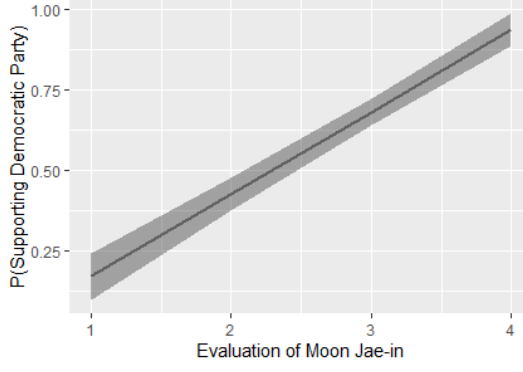
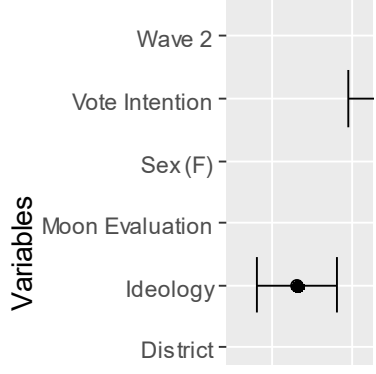


Figure 7 shows plots of the coefficients shown in column 3 of Table 2. Whiskers indicate 95% confidence intervals. Looking at Figure 2, we see that respondent evaluation of President Moon has by far the strongest association with support for the Democratic Party. Indeed, when Moon Evaluation is excluded from the model used to calculate the results in column 3, the adjusted R-squared is only 0.236. The results of an ANOVA showed that the roughly 0.19 increase in variance explained by the model when Moon Evaluation is included is highly statistically significant ($F = 289.26$, $p < 0.001$). The only other statistically significant coefficients in Figure 7 are that on sex, ideology, and age in years. These are all expected and in the expected direction.

Figure 7. Plot of Coefficients from Column 3 of Table 2



1. Supplemental Evidence

We present two sets of supplemental analyses. The first addresses limitations of the dependent variable. As noted above, because we do not have data on candidate support, the analysis presented above is largely

suggestive. In order to strengthen our interpretation of the results, we estimated the association between support for President Moon and intention to vote, controlling for Democratic Party support. The logic here is that if it is true that support for Moon is positively associated both with support for the Democratic Party and intention to vote, then it is likley to account for the observed electoral outcomes across the districts. Intention to vote is an ordinal variable that ranges from 1 to 4. We recoded this variable to be a dichotomous variable that equals 1 if the respondent reported an intention to vote, and 0 if the respondent did not show a strong intention to vote. The results are shown in Table 3. They show that support for Moon positively predicts intention to vote. In fact, support for Moon and age are the only statistically significant predictors of intention to vote. The coefficient is statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 3. Results of OLS Regression of Moon Evaluation on Vote Intention

	Dependent variable:
	Intention to Vote
Moon Evaluation	0.029** (0.011)
Support for Democratic Party	−0.033 (0.021)
Age	0.001*** (0.001)
Sex (Female)	0.015 (0.016)
District	−0.001 (0.002)
Political Ideology	−0.002 (0.009)
Wave 2	0.005 (0.016)
Constant	0.801*** (0.057)
Observations	1,034
R^2	0.016
Adjusted R^2	0.010
Residual Std. Error	0.251 (df = 1026)
F Statistic	2.435** (df = 7; 1026)

Note) *$p < 0.1$; **$p < 0.05$; ***$p < 0.01$

Second, because these results are drawn from survey data rather than real-world election data, we supplement the results above with the actual election results of the 2018 Busan city council elections. If it is true that support for President Moon is the major determinant of vote choice in the 2018 City Council elections, then we should a positive correlation between various measures of support for Moon and Democratic vote share in the 2018 City Council elections.

In order to provide empirical verification of these expectations, we present two additional plots. In the first of these plots, individual-level evaluations of President Moon given in survey data are aggregated up to the level of electoral district. This data is then plotted against the proportion of the vote that the Democratic Party received in the 2018 city council elections in that district. The results are shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8. District-Level Democratic Vote Share by Average District-Level Moon Evaluation

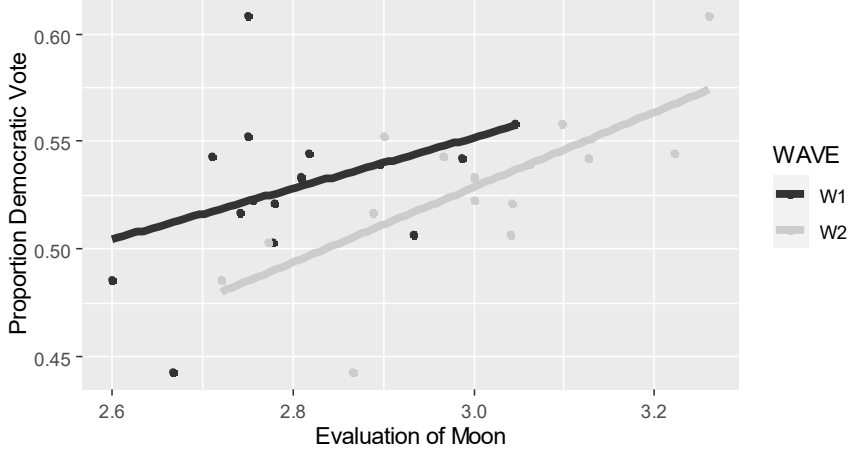
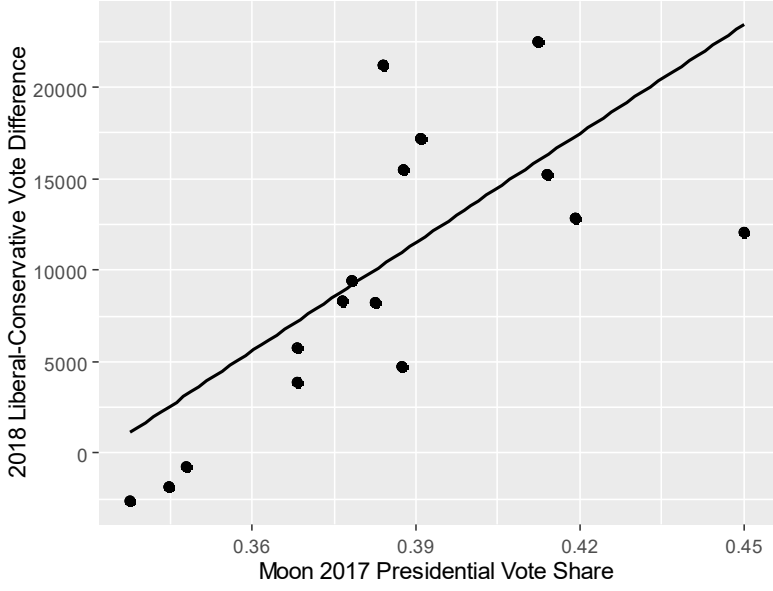


Figure 9. District-Level Liberal-Conservative Party City Council Vote Share Difference by Moon's 2017 Presidential Vote Share



We observe in Figure 8 that both waves of the survey data exhibit a fairly consistent positive correlation between evaluation of President Moon and Democratic vote share in the 2018 city council elections. That is, districts with higher aggregate evaluations of President Moon display higher Democratic vote shares. We further see that the slope of the regression line increases in the second wave and that it shifts to the right, indicating that the strength of the correlation between the two variables increased in the second period.

In the second plot, we report the difference between the absolute vote share of the liberal and conservative candidates in each district as a function of President Moon's 2017 vote share. Given the hypotheses above,

we should expect Moon's district-level vote share in the 2017 election to be positively correlated with the Democratic Party's vote share in the 2018 City Council elections. Figure 9 shows that support for Moon in the 2017 Presidential election is indeed nearly perfectly correlated with Democratic margin of victory in the 2018 city council race, providing further support to the expectations state above. Indeed, we see that the three conservative victories occurred in districts where Moon received the lowest vote share.

2. Alternative Explanations

While we are unable to address causality directly here, we are obliged to address some sensible counter arguments. One issue is that of causal direction. That is, it may be the case that support for the Democratic Party is driving support for president Moon. While we cannot rule this out, this seems unlikely. First, we note the existing research showing that Presidential popularity drives party support above (Song, 2009). Secondly, if it were true that support for the Democratic Party is separate from support for Moon, then we should expect to observe a stronger correlation between issue position and Democratic Party support.

Another possibility is that the change in vote is due to candidate-specific factors, rather than their party affiliation. Again, this is unlikely, since the increase in support for the Democratic Party was evidenced across nearly every district in Busan, as well as Ulsan. It is unlikely for such a uniform pattern to be due to candidate quality.

V. DISCUSSION

The 2018 Busan City Council elections were truly anomalous, both in the context of Korea's long-standing regional political cleavage, as well as the sheer degree of electoral overturn. The results of the analysis presented here support our argument that presidential coattails and election cycle timing should be considered primary factors in the Democratic victory in the 2018 Busan City Council elections, in so far as individual-level evaluation of President Moon Jae-in is strongly correlated with support for the Democratic Party in 2018, even when controlling for political ideology, electoral district, and a host of other releveant variables. The district-level aggregated results and actual vote data strengthen this interpretation.

The results presented here have two main theoretical implications. Namely, they imply that coattail effects are not limited to national legislative elections, and that it is entirely possible that they extend well beyond the immediate time-period surrounding the presidential election. In other words, members of president's party may potentially expect a boost in their vote or seat share because of the president's popularity in any *year* of the presidency; it just happens to be the case that a president tends to be more popular early on in their term, and that this popularity tends to decline consistently across their term. If there are precise temporal limits to coattail effects, they have not yet been sufficiently empirically or theoretically identified in the literature, hence remain subject to further investigation. We reach a similar conclusion with regard to the question of whether coattail effects can be reasonably

said to apply to local elections. The theoretical and empirical analysis presented here suggests that they can. Yet, our broader purpose here is not to propose definitive answers, but rather to spur further investigation on both of these questions, as they may have important implications, both in their own right, as indications of the independence of local political systems, and as bellwethers of the national political scene.

To be clear, the peculiarities of the case of Busan demand that any potential coattail effects must be placed in the broader context of structural changes and institutional factors that made these effects possible in the first place, perhaps limiting their generalizability. In addition to the different timing of presdiential and local elections, we would not expect presidential coattails effects at the local level if there are no co-partisan candidates at the local level. Indeed, there was not a meaningful number of liberal party candidates in Busan City Council elections until 2014. Neither would we expect coattail effects if regional voting patterns are strong and consistent with voters' expressed policy preferences; the president's popularity hardly matters if voters are unwilling to vote for his or her party owing to its traditional regional alliances. This point begs the question of whether we would expect to observe such coattail effects in Busan for a popular liberal president that is from Honam, rather than Yeongnanm. This, too, remains an open question, and perhaps a further test of the dealignment or relaignment hypothesis.

In any case, our results suggest that caution is required in interpretating specific electoral trends as realignment. The regional cleavage that underpins Korean politics is indeed undergoing change. But the results of our analysis suggest that, while structural changes may have made possible the electoral overturn observed in the 2018 Busan City Council elections,

the more direct cause is arguably the institutional idiosyncrasies of Korea's electoral systems. Having local elections at 4 year intervals but presidential elections at five-year intervals necessarily invites a bit of randomness into the relationship between local and presidential elections. Whereas we may not expect coattail effects for some years, local elections that occur in the first or perhaps second year of a President's term are likely to boost the electoral fortunes of the party that happens to occupy the presidency because of the high approval rating that presdients tend to enjoy during. This interpretation is bolstered by the liberal party's losses in the 2020 national legislative elections and 2021 mayoral election. That is, if the change observed in 2018 was ultimately due to underlying strcutural factors, rather than temporary presidential popularity and election cycle timing, then we should have observed some evidence of continued Democratic success. However, since 2018 we have largely observed a return to the status quo.

All of this makes it unclear whether to expect our findings to generalize to future elections. The circumstances of Moon's presidency were unusual, to say the least. The conservative party was thoroughly discredited by the unprecedented corruption witnessed in the Park administration, as well as the intransigence of the pro-Park faction of the conservative party. Additionally, the historical meeting between Moon and North Korean leader Kim Jong-Eun that occurred just before the local elections is very likely to have provided Moon an additional political boost. It suffices to say that we do not expect all of these events — local elections in the second year of a president's term, historical diplomatic breakthroughs, and the collapse of the conservative party — to happen again in this particular order any time soon. On the other hand, given the changes

discussed above, such a strong combinations of factors may perhaps not be required to produce the type of electoral change observed in 2018.

Ⅵ. CONCLUSION

With regard to the original intent of the implementation of local elections, it would seem that local political outcomes will remain largely a product of national political trends, while at the same time remaining subject to considerable time-dependent heterogeneity resulting from the institutional arrangements described here. The recently passed reforms to local elections are likely to bring further idiosyncratic influences that will require the attention of scholars of local politics and electoral systems.

This study has limitations that can be improved on by further studies. First, as we have already noted, the present data permit only descriptive analysis as they are cross-sectional in nature. Second, there are other potential mechanisms to consider, such as changes in population composition. We hope that sufficient data is made available to allow further analysis in this regard. That said, this study provides an analysis of individual-level behavior that can be used to build upon in future research.

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