

**A Study of the Influence of the Sewol Ferry
Accident on the Voting Behavior of the Electorate in
the 2014 Seoul Mayoral Election**

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< Abstract >

This study analyzes the influence of the Sewol Ferry accident, which occurred 52 days before the Seoul mayoral election on June 4, 2014, on the behavior of Seoul voters. There are two reasons for this study. First, previous studies have not adequately examined the influence of issues on voting behavior in Korea. Second, the Sewol Ferry accident was one of the most influential and prominent issues on voting behavior in the past 20 years. For this study, we conducted a telephone survey of Seoul voters after election day. The total sample of the survey was 970, which was proportionally extracted by gender, age, and region. The main findings of this study are that only 16.9% of Seoul voters voted based on the Sewol Ferry accident, although the accident was a dominant issue, and that the accident had little effect on variations in voters' support for a candidate in the Seoul mayoral election. We obtain these findings when we control for two traditionally crucial variables, party identification and the personality and pledges of candidates. In the meantime, 75.6% of respondents estimated that the Sewol Ferry accident influenced the voting behavior of the electorate. More than three-fifths (61.8%) of the respondents answered that the accident was beneficial to the candidate Wonsun Park, while only 3.2% said that the accident might be beneficial to the candidate Mongjun Jeong. The results show how voters' unscientific estimate of the effect of the Sewol Ferry accident on voting behavior differs from that when party identification and the personality/pledge of candidates are controlled for.

[**Keywords**] Sewol Ferry accident, issue voting, voting behavior, party identification, candidate-centered voting, party voting

I. Introduction

1. Purpose of study

Elections are the starting point of a representative democracy, in which the people elect representatives, such as the president or national assembly members. This allows them to represent the people and make various policies. Therefore, elections are one of the core factors in a representative democracy.

In the local elections held June 4, 2014, the ruling Saenuri Party won 8 out of 17 mayoral and gubernatorial positions, including the Incheon mayoral seat and the Kyungki-Do gubernatorial office, while the opposition New Politics Alliance for Democracy (NPAD) won 9, including the Seoul mayoralty. However, in local government elections, the Saenuri Party won 117 seats, and the NPAD won only 80 seats. It could be said that no party won in the June 4 local election.

The main characteristic of the June 4 local election was that recurring discussion about the Sewol Ferry accident, a sudden and significant issue, was a significant characteristic of the election. Fifty-two days before the June 4 election, the Sewol Ferry, departing from the city of Incheon to Jeju Island, sank. More than 300 people perished, most of whom were high school students on a school trip to Jeju Island.

In the aftermath of the accident, each party delayed the procedure of nominating candidates for the election for one to two weeks. Candidates halted their campaign activity for up to a month, though it was the primary season, in which they had to invest as much effort as possible to get votes. After the Sewol Ferry accident, safety became the hottest issue in the election.

The Sewol Ferry accident was the most influential issue on an election in the past 20 years, aside from the National Assembly's passage of the impeachment resolution against President Moo-hyun Roh in 2004. In most other elections, the issues were of considerably less importance. There were even

elections that had no significant issue. The 18th presidential election in 2012 did not have any significant issue (Jang 2013, 88).

The purpose of this study is to analyze the influence of the Sewol Ferry accident on voting behavior in the June 4 Seoul mayoral election with controlling variables such as party identification (hereafter also cited as party voting) and candidate-centered voting (hereafter also referred to as candidate voting), traditionally regarded as influential variables on the voting behavior of the Korean electorate.

This study also focuses on the electorate's estimate of the influence of the Sewol Ferry accident on voting behavior in the June 4 Seoul mayoral election without controlling variables, such as party identification and candidate-centered voting. This is to show the degree to which estimations of the influence of an issue without controlling for party identification and candidate-centered voting differ from the actual influence of that issue when controlling for the above two variables.

2. Necessity of study

Studies have neglected to examine how issues influence voting behavior in Korea. There are three reasons for this.

First, the major interest of most studies of voting behavior focuses on party voting based on regionalism and candidate voting. Especially in the Yeongnam and Honam areas, where party voting is predominant based on regionalism, neither candidate voting nor issue voting have been important factors.

Second, because the types of issue and the degree of issue influence among elections are quite different from one election to another, studies of the influence of issues on voting behavior have been pushed back on the priority list. Despite some fluctuations, the influence of political parties or candidates on the voting behavior of the electorate has been very consistent. In contrast, issue influence is varies considerably. There have even been elections that lacked any special issue.

For example, Choi (2001, 194) argued that many felt there was no clear issue in the 16th national assembly election.

The third reason is that there is insufficient methodology to measure the influence of issues. No researcher of issue voting can anticipate when issues will emerge. Panel surveys or tracking polls conducted before and after the occurrence of the issue measuring the issue influence on voting behavior are almost impossible. In addition, when multiple issues occur in a short period of time, how much one particular issue influences voting behavior is hard to measure in isolation. Although specific issue influence can be measured to some degree by panel surveys or tracking polls conducted before and after the occurrence of the issue, it is hard to gauge the influence of each issue on voting behavior on election day.

This study attempts to contribute to the creation of theory of issue voting by analyzing the influence of the Sewol Ferry accident on voting behavior. Its contribution is possible for the following two reasons.

First, since the Sewol Ferry accident was a dominant issue in the June 4 local election, it permits us to measure the influence of a dominant issue. An issue as dominant as the Sewol Ferry accident is rarely seen in other elections, certainly providing us with an opportunity to measure the issue influence.

Second, because the Sewol Ferry accident was an accidental issue not created by a political party or candidate to get votes and not correlated to issues in other elections, it provides us with a chance to analyze the influence of an accidental issue on voting behavior. Most issues in Korean elections have not been accidental but rather intentional in nature. Examples of intentional issues include relocating the capital to the Chungcheng area, proposed by candidate Moo-hyun Roh in the 16th presidential election in 2002 (Lee 2006), and economic democratization proposed by candidates in the 18th presidential election in 2012 (Jang 2013).

II. Review of Preceding Studies

There have been many studies of the factors leading voters to vote for certain candidates. One variable, regarded as crucial by scholars in Korea as well as in other countries, is party identification. This variable means that voters vote for the candidate of a certain party they have favored as long as there is no special reason to support the candidate of another party (Campbell and Converse et al. 1960). Party identification is usually formed over a long period of time, so it does not disappear easily. For example, voters in the Yeongnam and Honam areas in Korea have long supported a certain political party regardless of the candidate. This is a kind of party identification based on regionalism.

The other variable regarded as crucial by scholars is the candidate. Candidate-centered voting is defined as the phenomenon in which voters vote for a candidate based on their evaluation of his/her career, accomplishments, pledges, and image (Cain and Ferejoh et al. 1987). This is possible only when voters know enough about a candidate. One example demonstrating the existence of candidate-centered voting is the so-called 'incumbent effect.' The incumbent effect means that, all other conditions among candidates being equal, the incumbent candidate tends to win in the election (Krashinsky and Milne 1983). Because of candidate-centered voting, an independent candidate can win even in a district where voters' support for a certain political party is overwhelming.

After party voting and candidate voting, policy voting is also addressed by scholars. Policy voting refers to the phenomenon in which voters vote for a candidate based on their evaluation of his/her public pledges. Almost all scholars agree that policy voting is hard to measure because voters do not know candidates' pledges in detail (Kim 2013, 255). In other words, voters are not intelligent enough to compare candidates' pledges and also do not put in enough time to understand those pledges (Miller and Shanks 1996). For these reasons, only a very small portion of voters engage in policy voting (Sniderman and Brody et al, 1991).

Issue voting is recognized as more influential on the voting behavior of the electorate than policy voting. Issue voting, which is perceived as a crucial variable to explain the voting behavior of the electorate alongside voting and candidate voting, refers to the phenomenon in which voters vote based on differences of political standpoints in significant or controversial issues among candidates or parties (Denver and Hands 1990). In other words, voters cast ballots based on their evaluation of a few controversial issues rather than all policies proposed by candidates (Kim 2012, 225). In particular, the bigger the difference between candidates' opinions on an issue, the greater will be the influence of issues on voting behavior (Aldrich and Sullivan et al. 1989).

Kim (2012, 256) argues that the following four conditions have to be fulfilled for issue voting to take place. First, voters must recognize the existence of the issue and have an opinion about it. Second, the issue must be important enough to be influential. Third, candidates or political parties must differ in their opinions of the issue. Fourth, voters must be able to identify a candidate or a political party whose opinion is close to their own views.

Two models of issue voting have generally been proposed. The first is the proximity model, proposed by Downs (1957). According to this model, voters cast their votes for the candidate or party that has the most similar opinion to theirs. In contrast, the directional model insists that voters prefer the strongest party with a similar opinion about the issue to theirs (Rabinowitz and Macdonald 1989). Besides these models, there is an argument that voters cast their votes for candidates who can resolve the issue most effectively after being elected (Grofman 1985).

Which is the most influential on voting behavior: political party, candidate, or issue? Enelow and Melvin (1984) argue that in low-information elections, such as the municipal election in Korea, voters tend to vote based on their evaluation of political parties or candidates rather than on issues, while in high-information elections, such as the presidential election, they are inclined to vote based on their evaluation of issues rather than parties and candidates.

Many have argued that the influence of issues on voting behavior has gradually increased, but research has rarely found that issue voting is more

crucial than party voting or candidate voting. Even in the United States, where there has been substantial research on issue voting, theories on issue voting have not been established (Goren 1997, 387).

There are three reasons for this. First, since the same political parties and candidates have existed in every election, support for them has accumulated over a long period of time. However, issues have not been consistent in terms of type and strength, so support for issues cannot accumulate. Thus, support for issues is hardly greater than that for political parties or candidates. Second, researchers of issue voting may have difficulties in measuring the influence of issues. Third, voters do not have much interest in most issues; consequently, it is hard for them to choose a candidate based on issues (Jang 2013).

To increase the influence of issues and policies on voting behavior, the manifesto movement has been active since the 2006 Korean election. However, its effect is very limited (Ahn 2006).

In spite of this fact, issue voting can play as crucial a role as party voting or candidate voting because it can decide victory or defeat in an election. It is all the more influential in close elections.

Issues can be divided into two categories. The first is the intended issue created by political parties or candidates. One of the issues in the 18th presidential election in 2012 was economic democratization (Jang 2013; Park and Ahn et al, 2013). The issue was deliberately raised by candidates to gain an advantage over the competition. If a negative campaign against the opponent became the issue, it was also the intended issue.

The second issue type is the accidental issue, which emerges unexpectedly. In other words, it is not an issue created by any political party or candidate to get votes in the election.

Kim (1997) studied the influence of the North Korean army's trespasses into the Joint Security Area of Panmunjeom a few days before the 15th general election in 1996. The Sewol accident and the Panmunjeom incursions were both examples of accidental issues not caused by any political party or candidate to get votes. The influence of the accidental issue on voting behavior depends on who is responsible for the situation and who can resolve it effectively.

III. Research Design

1. Object of study

This study is about the influence of the Sewol Ferry accident on voting behavior in the Seoul mayoral election on June 4, 2014. The reason the Seoul mayoral election is chosen as an object of research is that in Seoul, party voting based on regionalism is less than in other areas of Korea, such as the Kyungsang, Jeolla, and Chungcheong areas. Thus, Seoul is the best place to see the effect of issue voting clearly.

The Sewol Ferry accident is the focus here for two reasons. First, this accident was a dominant issue in the local election of June 4, 2014. Second, it was not an intended issue created by any political party or candidate, but is a fortuitous, unanticipated issue. The Sewol Ferry from Incheon to Jeju sank near Jodo-myon, Jindo-gun, Jeollanam-do, on April 16, 52 days before the local election day. The accident took the lives of more than three hundred passengers, most of whom were high school students on a school trip to Jeju Island.

The accident had a huge influence on the June 4 local election. Because of it, each party delayed the nomination process for one to two weeks. Candidates had to halt their election campaigns for up to a month, although it was the primary season, in which they had to invest their effort to get votes. In fact, the National Election Committee reported that the number of detected election illegalities in the 2014 local election was 25% less than in the 2010 local election due to the Sewol Ferry accident. In addition, while the main issues of the recent election were related to economic or educational problems, such as 'cutting college tuition in half' and 'job creation for young people,' the main pledges of the candidates in the June 4 local election were related to safety problems after the Sewol Ferry accident.

2. Research problem

The purpose of the study is to analyze the influence of the Sewol Ferry accident on voting behavior in the June 4 Seoul mayoral election. The three major research problems are summarized here.

Research problem 1:

How much did the Sewol Ferry accident influence the voting behavior of the electorate in Seoul, where regionalism is weaker than in the Honam, Yeongnam, and Chungcheong areas, controlling for traditionally crucial variables such as party identification and the personality/pledges of the candidates?

Research problem 2:

How much did the Sewol Ferry accident influence variations of support for a candidate, when variables such as party identification and the personality/pledges of the candidates are controlled for? This is directly related to how much the Sewol Ferry accident affected the outcome of the election.

Research problem 3:

What is voters' estimate of how much the Sewol Ferry accident influenced voting behavior and voters' variations in support for candidates, when party identification and the personality/pledges of the candidates are not controlled for? This is to show to what degree voters' rough estimate of the effect of an issue on voting behavior differs from that when party identification and the personality/pledges of the candidates are controlled for.

3. Dependent variables and independent variables

1) Dependent variables

The dependent variable in previous studies on issue voting has generally been the electorate's voting behavior. This study divides the dependent variable into two elements.

The first is the electorate's voting behavior, as in previous studies. The reason one of the dependent variables is defined in this way is that the results of previous analyses can be verified with this study.

The second dependent variable is the degree to which issue voting influences variations in support for a candidate. It is the dependent variable to which some political scientists interested in election strategy or election campaigns pay particular attention. Kim (1997) analyzed variations in support for a candidate with tracking polls of a district in the 15th Korean general election in 1996. This is an example of a study in which variations in support for a candidate were set up as a dependent variable.

The reason some political scientists focus on this aspect is related to representative democracy. In a representative democracy, the tendency of an elected candidate determines how the wishes of the people are realized. A candidate with a conservative tendency prefers conservative policies after being elected, and a candidate with a progressive tendency prefers progressive policies.

The dependent variables of this study are the two variables described above. This study will demonstrate how the influence of issues on voting behavior differs depending on the dependent variable.

To determine the influence of the Sewol Ferry accident on the electorate's voting behavior, controlling for party voting and candidate voting, the survey asked, "What factor was the most influential on your vote in the Seoul mayoral election?" Respondents were asked to select one from the following, a political party, a candidate's personality/pledge, and an issue, such as the Sewol Ferry accident, because preceding studies insisted that party, candidate, and issue are the three most influential variables on the electorate's voting behavior.

To understand why many voters switched their support because of the Sewol Ferry accident, the survey asked, "Then how did the Sewol Ferry accident influence your voting?" The number of voters who switched their support after the accident is important because it is directly related to the outcome of the election. This question was asked only of respondents who said that they were most influenced by the Sewol Ferry accident in the above question. Respondents were asked to select one of the following: "Change in support from Mongjun

Jeong to Wonsoon Park," "Change in support from Wonsoon Park to Mongjun Jeong," "Continue to support the candidate I supported before the Sewol Ferry accident occurred," and "I don't know."

In addition, respondents who answered in the above question that they switched support for a candidate were asked, "Why did you switch from one candidate to the other candidate?" This was asked in order to understand the reasons for changes in support for a candidate.

The survey conducted for this study also asked the question, "Overall, how much did the Sewol Ferry accident influence the electorate's voting behavior in the Seoul mayoral election?" This question was asked in order to discern to what degree voters were influenced by the Sewol Ferry accident in the June 4 Seoul mayoral election when party identification and the personality/pledges of candidates are not controlled for.

The survey asked, "Which candidate do you think benefited from the Sewol Ferry accident?" of respondents who responded "Very influential" or "Influential" to the above question. This question was asked to understand which candidate voters believe benefited most from the Sewol Ferry accident when party identification and the personality/pledges of candidates are controlled for. The results of this question demonstrate how much the people's rough estimate of which candidate benefited most from the Sewol Ferry accident, without controlling for party identification or candidates' personality/pledge, differs from that when the above two variables are controlled for.

2) Independent variables

An issue must be sufficiently acknowledged by the electorate for it to influence their voting behavior (Carmins and Stimson 1980, 78). The Sewol Ferry accident, the independent variable, satisfies this condition. News concerning the Sewol Ferry accident was very accessible to Seoul voters because it was broadcast repeatedly every day in all kinds of media for 52 days before election day. Therefore, safety became the most popular and dominant issue in the June 4 local election. No one can argue that voters had insufficient information about the Sewol Ferry accident to influence their voting behavior.

The Sewol Ferry accident is an accidental issue. It is not an issue created by any candidate to increase his/her support. Most issues in Korean elections are intentional issues, raised by candidates to get votes. In contrast, as the Sewol Ferry accident was not created by any political party or candidate, it was not intended to change support for any candidate.

4. Data and method of analysis

To determine the influence of the Sewol Ferry accident on the electorate's voting behavior, this study conducted a telephone survey of voters in Seoul after election day. The survey was conducted for two days, July 1st and 2nd, and its total sample was 970, which was proportionally extracted by gender, age, and regional location. The sampling error of this survey is $\pm 3.2\%$ in the 95% confidence level.

This survey's methods of analysis are frequency analysis and ratio analysis. These methods are very basic. However, they present statistics as they stand without data loss, so they are just as helpful in explaining and understanding the phenomenon as higher-level statistical analyses would be (Jang 2012, 106).

IV. Results of Analysis

1. Influence of the Sewol Ferry accident on voting behavior after controlling for party voting and candidate voting

<Table 1> shows responses to the question, "What factor was the most influential on your vote in the Seoul mayoral election?" This question was asked to understand to what degree voters were influenced by the Sewol Ferry accident in the June 4 Seoul mayoral election when party voting and candidate voting are controlled for.

Of the total respondents, 19.4% answered that they were most influenced by "issues such as the Sewol Ferry accident." In addition, 56.8% cited "the personality/pledges of candidate," while 19.4% said "party."

This means that the Sewol Ferry accident was as influential on voting behavior as party voting and candidate voting in the June 4 Seoul mayoral election. It was all the more so, considering that the difference in support between the two main candidates, Mongjun Jeong and Wonsoon Park, was 16.9%.

In the meantime it also means that although the Sewol Ferry accident was the dominant issue in the election, its influence was still less than that of party voting or candidate voting, which traditionally are crucial variables in explaining voting behavior in Korean elections.

<Table 1> Responses to the question, "What factor was the most influential on your vote in the Seoul mayoral election?"(N=970)

Responses	% (Frequency)
Political party	19.4% (188 respondents)
Issue, such as the Sewol Ferry accident	16.9% (164)
Personality/pledges of the candidate	56.8% (551)
I don't know	6.9% (67)
Total	100.0% (970)

2. Influence of the Sewol Ferry accident on variations in support for a candidate

<Table 2> shows responses to the question "Then how did the Sewol Ferry accident influence your vote?" The question was asked of only the 164 respondents, who said that they were most influenced by the Sewol Ferry accident in <Table 1>. It was asked in order to determine how many voters

switched support because of the accident and to determine whether the accident had an effect on the outcome of the election.

Of the total respondents(N=970), 4.2% answered that they changed their support from Mongjun Jeong to Wonsoon Park, while 3.6% said they changed their support from Wonsoon Park to Mongjun Jeong. Another 7.2% responded that they continued to support the candidate they had supported before the Sewol Ferry accident occurred. Meanwhile, 1.9% responded, "I don't know."

This result is quite different from the overall expectation that the Sewol Ferry accident was very advantageous for Wonsoon Park, as seen below in <Table 3-1>. The difference between the number of respondents switching their support from Mongjun Jeong to Wonsoon Park and the number switching from Wonsoon Park to Mongjun Jeong is only 0.6%. Considering that the sampling error of this survey is at least ±3.2%, 0.6% is not statistically significant. This result suggests that the Sewol Ferry accident hardly influenced variations in voters' support for a candidate in the Seoul mayoral election.

<Table 2> Responses to the question, "Then how did the Sewol Ferry accident influence your vote?" (Asked of only the 164 respondents, who cited "the Sewol Ferry accident" in Table 1 above)

Responses	% (Frequency)
Change support from Mongjun Jeong to Wonsoon Park	4.2% (41 respondents)
Change support from Wonsoon Park to Mongjun Jeong	3.6% (35)
Continue to support the candidate I supported before the Sewol Ferry accident occurred	7.2% (70)
I don't know	1.9% (18)
Total	16.9% (164)

% is frequency/entire sample (N=970)

<Table 2-1> shows responses to the question "Why did you switch support from the candidate Mongjun Jeong to the candidate Wonsoon Park?" The question was asked of only the 41 respondents who answered that they switched their support from Mongjun Jeong of the ruling party to Wonsoon Park of the opposition party. It was asked in order to know why they switched.

Of the 970 respondents, 0.8% answered that the president/Saenuri Party/government was responsible for the accident, while 1.8% said they were unsatisfied with the action of the president/Saenuri Party/government after the accident. Another 1.6% gave other reasons. However, considering the sampling error, percentages in <Table 2-1> are not statistically significant.

<Table 2-1> Responses to the question, "Why did you switch support from the candidate Mongjun Jeong to the candidate Wonsoon Park?"

(Asked of only the 41 respondents who responded that they switched their support from Mongjun Jeong to Wonsoon Park)

Responses	% (Frequency)
The president/Saenuri Party/government are responsible for the Sewol Ferry accident.	0.8% (8 respondents)
Unsatisfied with the action of the president/Saenuri Party/ government after the accident.	1.8% (17)
Other reasons	1.6% (16)
Total	4.2% (41)

% is frequency/whole sample (N=970).

<Table 2-2> shows responses to the question "Why did you switch support from Wonsoon Park to Mongjun Jeong?" The question was asked of only the 35 respondents who said they had switched support from Wonsoon Park to Mongjun Jeong. It was asked in order to determine why they switched.

Of the 970 respondents, 1.3% answered that the president/Saenuri Party/government's role in safety had become more important, while 1.6% of respondents said the actions of the president/Saenuri Party/government after the

accident were appropriate. Another 0.6% gave other reasons. However, percentages in <Table 2-2> are not statistically significant, considering the sampling error.

<Table 2-2> Responses to the question, “Why did you switch from Woonsoon Park to Mongjun Jeong?”
(Asked of only the 35 respondents who switched their support from Woonsoon Park to Mongjun Jeong)

Responses	% (Frequency)
The president/Saenuri Party/government's role in safety has become more important	1.3% (13 respondents)
The actions of the president/Saenuri Party/government after the accident were appropriate	1.6% (16)
Other reasons	0.6% (6)
Total	3.5% (35)

% is frequency/whole sample (N=970).

3. Estimate of the influence of the Sewol Ferry accident on the electorate's voting behavior in the Seoul mayoral election without controlling for party voting and candidate voting.

<Table 3> shows responses to the question, “Overall, how much did the Sewol Ferry accident influence the electorate's voting behavior in the Seoul mayoral election?” This question was asked to grasp the degree to which voters were influenced by the Sewol Ferry accident when party voting and candidate voting are not controlled for. The purpose is to determine the degree to which the people's estimate of the effect of the Sewol Ferry accident on voting behavior differs from the result when party identification and the personality/pledges of the candidates are controlled for, as seen in <Table 1>.

Of the 970 respondents, 34.2% answered that the Sewol Ferry accident was “very influential”; 41.4% responded “somewhat influential”; 21.6% said “hardly influential”; while 3.0% answered “absolutely not influential.” The sum of the “very influential” and “influential” results is 75.6%. In short, about three-fourths of Seoul voters estimated that the Sewol Ferry accident influenced voting behavior.

These attitudes are quite different from the results when party voting and candidate voting are controlled for, as seen in <Table 1>, which shows that the Sewol Ferry accident influenced only 16.9% of the electorate in the Seoul mayoral election. In short, there is a huge difference in the influence of the Sewol Ferry accident on voting behavior between when only the Sewol Ferry accident is considered and when three variables, party, candidate, and the Sewol Ferry accident, are considered together. This demonstrates that voters' unscientific estimate based on only one variable is quite inaccurate.

<Table 3> Responses to the question, “Overall, how much did the Sewol Ferry accident influence the electorate's voting behavior in the Seoul mayoral election?”(N=970)

Responses	% (Frequency)
Very influential	34.3% (332 respondents)
Somewhat influential	41.1% (400)
Hardly influential	21.6% (209)
Absolutely not influential	3.0% (29)
Total	100.0% (970)

% is frequency/whole sample (N=970)

<Table 3-1> shows responses to the question, “Which candidate do you think benefited most from the Sewol Ferry accident?” The question was asked of only

the 732 respondents who responded “very influential” or “influential” in <Table 3>.

Only 3.2% of the 970 respondents answered that the accident benefited candidate Mongjun Jeong, while 61.8% respondents said that the accident helped candidate Wonsoon Park. Meanwhile, 2.8% responded that the accident might be beneficial to other candidates outside the two major parties, while 6.9% said that they did not know.

This result is very different from the results of <Table 2>, which indicated that no candidate noticeably benefited from the Sewol Ferry accident. It suggests that the assumptions displayed in <Table 3-1> are distorted because other crucial variables such as party identification and candidates’ personalities/pledges are not considered as independent variables.

<Table 3-1> Responses to the question, “Which candidate do you think benefited most from the Sewol Ferry accident?”

(Asked of only the 732 respondents who responded “Very influential” or “Somewhat influential” in <Table 3>

Responses	% (Frequency)
Saenuri Party Mongjun Jeong	3.2% (37 respondents)
NPAD Wonsoon Park	61.8% (600)
Other candidates	2.8% (28)
I don't know	6.9% (67)
Total	74.7% (732)

% is frequency/whole sample (N=970).

V. Conclusion

This study investigates the influence of the Sewol Ferry accident, which occurred 52 days before the June 4 local election, on voting behavior in the

Seoul mayoral election. It analyzes the Sewol Ferry accident’s influence with controlling variables, such as party identification and candidate-centered voting, which are traditionally regarded as influential variables on voting behavior in Korea.

This study also analyzes voters’ estimate of the influence of the Sewol Ferry accident on voting behavior without controlling for party identification and candidate-centered voting. This is done in order to show how much voters’ estimate of the influence of the Sewol Ferry accident, without controlling for party identification and candidate-centered voting, differs from the issue’s actual influence, as determined when controlling for the above two variables.

There are two reasons why this study focuses on the Sewol Ferry accident’s influence on the electorate’s voting behavior. First, the Sewol Ferry accident was one of the most influential and prominent issues shaping voting behavior in Korea in the past 20 years. Therefore, it should be meaningful to investigate its effect on voting behavior. Second, previous studies have neglected to examine the influence of issues on voting behavior in Korea.

The Seoul mayoral election was chosen as the research object because in Seoul, party voting based on regionalism is less influential than in other areas of Korea, such as the Kyungsang, Jeolla, and Chungcheong regions. Thus the effect of issue voting can be seen clearly in Seoul.

To measure the influence of the Sewol Ferry accident on voting behavior, this study conducted a telephone survey of voters in Seoul after election day. The total sample of this survey was 970, which was proportionally extracted by gender, age, and regional location.

Despite the Sewol Ferry accident, which was a prominent and accidental issue, about 83% of Seoul voters voted in the June 4 Seoul mayoral election based primarily on their evaluation of political parties or candidates’ personalities/pledges. In other words, voters’ party identification formed over a long period of time and voters’ positive opinion of candidates turned out to be more influential on voting behavior than the unanticipated Sewol Ferry accident.

However, 17% of Seoul voters were still influenced by the Sewol Ferry accident. This means that the Sewol Ferry accident was second only to party and

candidate voting in its influence on the electorate's voting behavior in the June 4 Seoul mayoral election.

In terms of variations in support for a candidate after the Sewol Ferry accident, only 4.2% of all respondents (N=970) answered that they switched their support from Mongjun Jeong to Wonsoon Park, while just 3.6% said that they switched their support from Wonsoon Park to Mongjun Jeong. This result means that the accident hardly influenced any change in voters' support in the Seoul mayoral election.

Voters' estimate of the influence of the Sewol Ferry accident on voting behavior, without controlling for party identification and candidates' personalities/pledges, is as follows: 75.6% of respondents believed that the Sewol Ferry accident influenced the electorate's voting behavior. Of the respondents, 61.8% responded that the accident benefited candidate Wonsoon Park, while only 3.2% said the accident benefited candidate Mongjun Jeong.

This result shows the degree to which voters' estimate of the effect of the Sewol Ferry accident on voting behavior differs from the result when party identification and candidates' personalities/pledges are controlled for, as seen above.

This study has two limitations. First, previous studies have neglected the influence of issues on voting in Korea. Under these circumstances, it is hard to construct theories with a study of the Sewol Ferry accident's influence on voting behavior. Only after more studies of various issues are conducted can academically meaningful theories be established.

Second, in addition to a survey conducted just after the election, this study must be complemented by regular panel surveys or tracking polls conducted both before and after an issue suddenly arises. With this supplementary information, the impact of an unanticipated event such as the Sewol Ferry accident on the electorate's voting behavior can be assessed more accurately.

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