

# Patterns and Causes of Korean Voters' Candidate Choice in the 2012 Presidential Election

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## 논문 요약

본 논문은 2012년 한국 대통령선거에서 유권자의 후보선택을 설명한다. 선거일 직전과 직후 유권자 표본을 대상으로 실시된 패널조사 자료에 대한 분석이 수행되었다. 박근혜, 문재인 후보가 경합한 이 선거에서 유권자들의 대조적인 후보선택을 통해 지속적인 지역 균열과 세대균열이 명료하게 드러났다. 분석결과에 따르면 지역과 연령 변수의 효과는 주로 다른 독립변수들에 의하여 매개되어 후보선택에 강한 영향을 준다. 후보선택에 직접적인 영향을 미치는 독립변수는 정당일체감, 이념성향, 이전 대통령의 직무수행 평가, 후보자 특성이다. 서구 민주주의 유권자의 투표행태에 관한 연구에서 도출된 개념들이 한국의 경우에도 경험적 적합성을 갖는다.

주제어 : 한국 대통령선거, 유권자 투표행태, 후보선택, 정당일체감, 이념성향, 대통령 직무수행의 평가, 후보자 특성

## I. Introduction

The objective of this paper is to systematically investigate the ways in which Korean voters made their candidate choice in the 2012 presidential election. This study seeks to answer the questions of substantive and theoretical significance regarding vote choice in Korean elections. In which pattern and to what extent are voters divided along the line of region, generation, or ideology? Do conceptual frameworks originating from studies on elections in western democracies have utility for research on candidate choice in the context of Korean electoral politics? More specifically, how strongly was voters' candidate choice in the 2012 presidential election affected by their party identification, ideological self-placement, retrospective presidential approval rating, affection toward a candidate, perception of candidate's competence, and prospective judgment over campaign promises? Which independent variables are relatively important for explaining candidate choice?

First of all, this paper briefly highlights the development of presidential race in order to provide the context for the main discussion. Second, it discusses the conceptual framework for analysis and also the data used in the analysis. Third, it provides detailed analysis of voters' candidate choice in relation to four sets of independent variables, and also discusses the findings.

## II. The Context of the Study : The 2012 Presidential Election

In 2012, two major elections were held nationwide in Korea. The general election for the National Assembly took place on April 11, and about eight months afterwards the presidential election followed on December 19. Around the April general election, three most popular presidential hopefuls were Park Geun-hye, Moon Jae-in, and Ahn Cheol-soo. Park, eldest daughter of the late President Park Chung-hee and member of the National Assembly first elected in 1998, headed the ruling Saenuri Party (or New Frontiers Party) from December 2011 through immediately after the general election. Moon, former chief of staff under the late President Roh Moo-hyun and a freshman member of the National Assembly elected in 2012, had a good prospect for winning the presidential nomination race of the main opposition Democratic United Party. Ahn, then a professor at Seoul National University, was a celebrity owing to his successful career as a doctor-turned-businessman who invented well-known computer vaccine programs. Ahn had never entered real politics before. His intention to run for the presidency became known since after the by-election for the mayor of Seoul in October 2011 when he declared not to stand as a mayoral candidate but to support Park Won-soon, an opposition hopeful.

Up until early November, the presidential race seemed to be a three-way race among Park Geun-hye, Moon Jae-in, and Ahn Cheol-soo. The Saenuri Party officially endorsed Park's candidacy on August 20, and the Democratic United Party nominated Moon as its presidential candidate on September 16. Ahn announced his presidential candidacy

as an independent on September 19. Every poll indicated Park was a leading candidate with Ahn and Moon vying each other for the second place. In the competition of multiple viable candidates under the one-shot plurality rule, Ahn or Moon had a remote chance of winning. Ahn and Moon met on November 6 and agreed in principle to the single candidacy between them until November 26, the last day for official filing with the National Election Commission.

On November 23, while the negotiation for unifying the opposition candidacy was falling into a serious deadlock, Ahn Cheol-soo declared his withdrawal from the presidential race. About a dozen days before the election day, Ahn joined the campaign for Moon Jae-in. At the final stage of presidential campaign, the structure of competition shaped into a neck-and-neck, two-way race between Park Geun-hye and Moon Jae-in.

Park Geun-hye of the ruling Saenuri Party won the presidency with 51.6 percent of the vote. She was the first winner elected by a majority of the voters in the presidential elections since the country's democratization in 1987. She defeated Moon Jae-in of the Democratic United Party by a margin of 3.6 percentage points or 1,048,496 votes. The competition was clearly bifurcated, as indicated by the remaining 0.4 percent received by all of the four minor candidates on the ballot. Park became Korea's first female president and also the first offspring whose father ever served as a president of the nation.

### III. Conceptual Framework and Data

In explaining Korean voters' candidate choice in the 2012 presidential election, this study focuses on the four sets of determinants acting upon a voter's decision about whom to vote for: his or her social background factors, party identification, ideological and issue positions, and perception of candidate's personal traits.

#### 1. Voters' social backgrounds

The Columbia researchers who initiated research on U.S. voting behavior in 1940 employed several social backgrounds as key explanatory variables for voting behavior patterns.<sup>1)</sup> They found a voter's social background factors such as place of residence and socioeconomic status were associated with vote choice. Voting research along this intellectual tradition emphasizes the social group context of voting. Especially, studies on voting behavior in West European countries have put an emphasis on the concept of class. In these countries, class cleavages and ideology-based parties have existed for a long time.<sup>2)</sup> Recently, much controversy has risen on the continuing or declining effect of class factors on vote choice.<sup>3)</sup>

1) Lazarsfeld, Paul, Bernard Berelson and Helen Gaudet, *The People's Choice*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1944; Berelson, Bernard R., Paul F. Lazarsfeld and William N. McPhee, *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954.

2) Lipset, Seymour M. and Stein Rokkan, eds., *Party Systems and Voter Alignment: Cross-National Perspectives*. New York: Free Press, 1967; Butler, David and Donald E. Stokes, *Political Change in Britain*, 2nd ed., New York: St. Martin's, 1974.

Existing studies on Korean citizens' voting behavior in this democratic era since 1987 have greatly stressed a voter's region of birth or residence as the most influential social background factor. In other regions than Seoul and its adjacent cities of the Capital region, a good majority of voters live in the regions where they were born. For most of Korean voters, a voter's native region coincides with the current residential region. A voter has region-based preference for a party or candidate. In the presidential election, there is a stark tendency that the voter supports a candidate whose party has a firm base in one's region of birth or residence. Regional voting in Korea is conspicuous in the contrasted choice by the residents between Honam and Yeongnam. Honam, which includes the city of Gwangju, and North and South Jeolla provinces in the southwestern part of the Korean Peninsula, has continued to be a strong base of the major progressive party since 1987. On the other hand, Yeongnam has persistently been a strong bastion of the major conservative party. This region encompasses the city of Daegu and North Gyeongsang in the upper southeastern part of the peninsula as well as the cities of Busan and Ulsan, and their surrounding South Gyeongsang in the lower southeastern part.<sup>4)</sup>

Next to region, the age variable has drawn attention in the past decade for explaining Korean voters' choice behavior. One may find a life-cycle

3) Dalton, Russell J., "Political Cleavages, Issues, and Electoral Change." in LeDuc, Lawrence, Richard G. Niemi and Pippa Norris, eds., *Comparing Democracies II: New Challenges in the Study of Elections and Voting*. London: Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2002, pp. 189-209.

4) See Park, Chan Wook, "Elections in Democratizing Korea." in Fuh-sheng Hsieh, John and David Newman, eds., *How Asia Votes*. New York: Chatham House, 2000, pp. 118-146; Walker, Scott and Kyung-Tae Kang, "The Presidential Election in South Korea, December 2002." *Electoral Studies*, vol. 23, 2004, pp. 840-845.

effect. As a voter grows older, he or she becomes more likely to vote for a conservative candidate or party than a progressive alternative. When the electorate is grouped according to age, the younger group is more likely to choose a progressive candidate or party. Beyond the influence of life cycle, this may suggest a generation effect. The members of one age cohort sharing common socialization experience during their formative years have developed political attitudes similar among themselves but different from those of another age cohort.<sup>5)</sup> This may result in the vote choice varying between generations. For example, in Scandinavian countries, age cohorts show different patterns of choosing social-democratic parties at elections.<sup>6)</sup>

In the 2002 presidential election, an exit poll administered by the Media Research on the election day, showed the results that Roh Moo-hyun of the New Millennium Democratic Party, the Democratic United Party's predecessor, was supported by roughly six out of every ten voters in their twenties or thirties, while Lee Hoi-chang of the Grand National Party, renamed Saenuri Party afterwards, was backed by about six out of every ten voters in their fifties and older. The voters in their forties were more or less evenly divided in their choice of Roh and Lee. To some extent, these age differences were explained by the notion of life-cycle effect. However, the age differences can be fully understood when one considers different socialization experiences

5) Converse, Philip E., "Of Time and Partisan Stability." *Comparative Political Studies*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1969, pp. 139-171; Converse, Philip E., *The Dynamics of Party Support: Cohort-Analyzing Party Identification*. Sage Library of Social Research, Series No. 35. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1976.

6) Knutsen, Oddbjørn, *Generations, Age Groups and Voting Behaviour in the Scandinavian Countries: A Comparative Study*. Oslo: University of Oslo, 2003.

among the age cohorts. The 20s generation grew up in the atmosphere of political democratization, economic prosperity, and social diversity. The cohort of 30-to-39 year olds was represented by the "386 forces" referring to those in their 30s who attended college in 1980s after being born in the 1960s. They engaged in pro-democracy protests against military authoritarianism and espoused anti-U.S. and pro-North Korea nationalism. The voters in their 40s were brought up under economically improving but still straitened conditions. They lacked actual democratic experiences. The voters in their 50s and over were socialized under the strong influence of anti-communism, lived through economic hardship and social unrest, and thus were prone to favor economic growth, national security, and social order.<sup>7)</sup>

Other social background factors, such as sex and class remain largely marginal in explaining Koreans' voting behavior. No robust influence of sex on candidate choice has been settled in empirical research, though a conservative candidate often receives a higher percentage of support among female voters than their male counterparts. Previous studies have also examined the effect of voters' socioeconomic status as indicated by their education, income, and occupation. Sometimes, voters in low socioeconomic status are more supportive of a conservative candidate than those in high socioeconomic status. This betrays a researcher's

7) Juang, Hoon, *President Roh Moo-hyun and the New Politics of South Korea*. New York: Asia Society, 2003; Chung, Jin Min, "A Generational Analysis of the 1992 Presidential Election in Korea." *Korean Social Science Journal*, vol. 22, no. 1, 1995, pp. 145-164; Walker, Scott and Kyung-Tae Kang, "The Presidential Election in South Korea, December 2002." *Electoral Studies*, vol. 23, 2004; Park, C. W., "Effects of Social and Ideological Cleavages on Vote Choice in the Korean Presidential Election of December 19, 2007." *Hyeondae Jeongchi Yeongu*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2009, pp. 85-121.

initial expectation about class voting. Also, the relationship sometimes found in a bivariate analysis turns out to be insignificant or negligible when any control variable is taken into account.<sup>8)</sup>

## 2. Voters' party identification

The Michigan group of voting studies devised the concept of party identification defined as a long-term psychological attachment to a political party among the voters.<sup>9)</sup> Party identification affects not only the vote directly, but also the other major determinants of the vote: issues positions and candidate evaluations. Since the concept was introduced, a lot of questions have been raised about it. For one thing, there has been a disagreement over the utility of the concept in non-American democracies.<sup>10)</sup> Also, even in the American setting, the stable nature of party identification was questioned and has undergone revision.<sup>11)</sup>

With due caution, this study tries to apply the concept of party identification for explaining Korean voters' candidate choice. Despite a low level of party institutionalization, one cannot judge that party

8) Park, C. W., *ibid.*: Kang, Won-taek, "Social Class and Vote Choice." In Park, C. W. and Won-Taek Kang, eds., *Analyzing the 2012 Presidential Election in South Korea*, pp. 111~138.

9) Belknap, George and Angus Campbell, "Political Party Identification and Attitudes toward Foreign Policy." *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 15, no. 4, 1951-1952, pp. 601~623; Campbell, Angus, Gerald Gurin and Warren E. Miller, *The Voter Decides*. Evanston: Row, Peterson, 1954; Campbell, Angus, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller and Donald E. Stokes, *The American Voter*. New York: Wiley, 1960.

10) Niemi, Richard G. and Herbert F. Weisberg, eds., *Controversies in Voting Behavior*, 2nd ed. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, 1984, pp. 393~405; Budge, Ian, Ivor Crewe and Dennis Farlie, eds., *Party Identification and Beyond*. London: Wiley, 1976.

11) Fiorina, Morris P., *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981, pp. 84~105; see Asher, Herbert B., *Presidential Elections American Politics*, 5th ed. Pacific Grove: Brooks/Cole, 1992, pp. 70~74.

identification is irrelevant to Koreans' voting behavior. Korean parties continue to undergo breakups and mergers among themselves, and change their names frequently. Not only individual parties but also the party system is fluid. Political parties used to be dominated by personalities, not by ideological or policy lines. Granted, political parties are highly distrusted by the public. Still, since the country experienced peaceful interparty transfer of power to the main opposition for the first time in the 1997 presidential election, party politics has begun to be seen increasingly in ideological terms. Now it goes without saying that the country was ruled by the progressive ruling party under President Kim Dae-jung and also under his successor President Roh Moo-hyun during a decade from early 1998 to early 2008. When Lee Myung-bak won in the December 2007 presidential election, this recorded another peaceful inter-party shift of political power, returning from the progressive to the conservative ruling party. The election of Park Geun-hye in December 2012 has enabled the conservative party to rule for another five years.

All the shortcomings of Korean parties notwithstanding, no other political organizations play a greater role than do parties in linking politicians to ordinary citizens, and campaigning during the election season. Political parties are most influential as a cue-giving force on vote choice.<sup>12)</sup> Thus independent candidates are hardly electable. Ahn Cheol-soo, popular but without the organizational backing of a party, was confronted with difficulties campaigning, which led him to quit

12) Park, Won-ho, "Reconstruction of Party Identification." In Park, Chan Wook and Won-Taek Kang, eds., *Analyzing the 2012 Presidential Election in South Korea*, pp. 51~74.

just before registering his candidacy officially. Opinion polls indicate a good majority of voters, though varying in specific figures, keep their favorable attitude toward a specific party.

### 3. Voters' ideological and issue positions

The Michigan school posited political attitudes as determinants of vote choice. Among the attitudinal variables, the scholars of the school focused on party identification, not much on ideology and issue positions. A typical American voter in the 1950s and 1960s was depicted as an unsophisticated one with a low level of ideological constraint on issue stands. However, later studies such as *The Changing American Voter*<sup>13)</sup> suggested the level of ideological thinking among the Americans rose during 1970s. Despite the controversy about the level of ideological conceptualization among the American mass people, there is no denying that in many advanced democracies voters' liberal/conservative or left/right ideological constraint on major issues provide an important clue to their voting decision.

In the 2002 presidential election in Korea, voters' ideological self-placement was significantly associated with their candidate choice. One could find a contrasted voting pattern in which a majority of progressive voters were aligned with the progressive candidate and a majority of conservatives came along with the conservative candidate. The results of the post-election nationwide interview survey conducted by the

13) Nie, Norman, Sidney Verba and John R. Petrocik, *The Changing American Voter*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976.

Korean Social Science Data Center showed that seven in every ten progressive voters tended to support Roh Moo-hyun. In contrast, among every ten conservatives, six voted for Lee Hoi-chang. Among the voters positioned on the center, there were somewhat more supporters for Roh, the winner than for Lee. Importantly, voters' ideological self-placement had a significant bearing on their positions on an array of issues raised during the election. Economic issues, including that of growth versus distribution, turned out to be less correlated with the perceived ideology than political or social issues, such as North-South Korean or Korea-U.S. relations, national security law, domestic order, and traditional values. Among these, voter's ideological self-placement showed the strongest constraint on his or her stance toward the U.S.: Progressives were more likely to be anti-American than were conservatives.<sup>14)</sup>

According to the argument offered by the Michigan researchers in the late 1950s, American voters had no genuine opinions on many issues. Even when they had opinions on some issues, their concern was minimal.<sup>15)</sup> Hence issues played a less important role in the citizen's voting decision than did candidates or parties. This traditional view

14) Kang, Won-Taek, "How Ideology Divides Generations: The 2002 and 2004 South Korean Elections." *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2008, pp. 461-480; Jhee, Byong-Kuen, "Ideology and Voter Choice in Korea." *Korean Political Science Review*, vol. 40, no. 4, 2006, pp. 61-83; Park, C. W., "Effects of Social and Ideological Cleavages on Vote Choice in the Korean Presidential Election of December 19, 2007." *Hyeondae Jeongchi Yeongu*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2009; Kang, Shin-Goo, "Korea's 2012 Election and Voters' Ideology." In Park, C. W., Jiyeon Kim, and Jung-Yeop Woo, eds, *Korean Voters' Choice 2: The 18th Presidential Election*. Seoul: Asan Policy Institute, 2013, pp. 87-134.

15) Campbell, Angus, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller and Donald E. Stokes, *The American Voter*. New York: Wiley, 1960, pp. 169-171; Asher, Herbert B., *Presidential Elections American Politics*, 5th ed. Pacific Grove: Brooks/Cole, 1992, pp. 93-100.

of the American voter was called into question, and has been revised. Studies have found higher levels of issue awareness among the American voters in the 1960s and 1970s, suggesting greater issue voting.<sup>16)</sup> The general increase in issue voting in the 1970s has been documented in West European countries, too.<sup>17)</sup> For example, Franklin's analyses of British electoral behavior<sup>18)</sup> uncovered a similar trend toward a decreasing level of class voting and greater issue voting.

Grounded on the works done by Key<sup>19)</sup> and Downs<sup>20)</sup>, Fiorina<sup>21)</sup> has developed a sophisticated retrospective voting model. He stresses the point that issue voting is prevalent when voters have an opportunity to evaluate the performance of an incumbent candidate or party in hind sight. Even though the voter lacks sufficient information, he or she can reward the incumbent for good times and punish the incumbent for bad times.

Since democratization, the Korean election has gained its meaning as a referendum on the government's policy performance. Policy issues are not irrelevant to the Korean voter. Evidence showed that economic crisis did much damage to Lee Hoi-chang's electoral fortune but helped

16) See the works discussed in Asher, Herbert B., *Presidential Elections American Politics*, 5th ed. Pacific Grove: Brooks/Cole, 1992, pp. 100~108; and those in Niemi, Richard G. and Herbert F. Weisberg, eds., *Controversies in Voting Behavior*, 2nd ed. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, 1984, pp. 89~103.

17) Dalton, Russell J., *Citizen Politics in Western Democracies*. Chatham: Chatham House, 1988, pp. 192~195; Knutsen, Oddbjørn, "Value Orientations, Political Conflicts, and Left-Right Identification: A Comparative Study." *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 28, no. 1, 1995, pp. 63~93.

18) Franklin, Mark, *The Decline of Class Voting in Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.

19) Key, V. O., *The Responsible Electorate*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1966.

20) Downs, Anthony, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper and Row, 1957.

21) Fiorina, Morris P., *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981.

Kim Dae-jung get elected. Despite all of Lee's efforts made to distance himself from the Kim Young-sam administration, a majority of Korean voters held the then ruling Grand National Party responsible for economic crisis.<sup>22)</sup>

Campaign themes and issues in the presidential election refer not only to the performance by the past or incumbent government but also to promises of what the government under the winning party or candidate will do, inducing voters to decide based on their prospective evaluation about the nation's future. For instance, in the 1992 presidential election, Kim Young-sam campaigned on the theme of "creating a New Korea" and "reform and stability." He claimed that the country suffered from the "Korean disease" as indicated by rampant corruption, withering work ethics, and weakening authority. Then he promised to restructure the nation's politics, economy, and social life. By reform he meant a predictable change within the system and from within the establishment. By presenting himself as a blend of old and new, Kim Young-sam attempt to firmly embrace centrist and conservative votes.<sup>23)</sup>

#### 4. Voters' perception of candidate's personal traits

Candidates, together with parties and issues, constitute the three major determinants of the voting decision in most prominent analytic models concerning American presidential elections.<sup>24)</sup> The models posit

22) Park, C. W., "The Korean Presidential Election in December 1997: Kim Dae-jung's Victory as a Momentum for Democratic Consolidation." *Hanguk Jeongchi Yeongu*, vol. 8, 9, 1999.

23) Park, C. W., "Korean Voters' Candidate Choice in the 1992 Presidential Election: A Survey Data Analysis." *Korea and World Affairs*, vol. 17, no. 3, 1993.

that the effects of party identification and issue attitudes are channeled via candidate assessments to vote choice.

The criteria for evaluating the candidates have been much discussed. For example, Kessel has suggested seven such criteria: the candidate's record in public office, non-public-office experience, executive capacity, intelligence, trust, personal images, and the general category (too general to be assigned to a specific one).<sup>25)</sup> Markus<sup>26)</sup> has offered the two general dimensions of competence and integrity. To take a further example, Fiorina<sup>27)</sup> mentions two aspects of the personal characteristics of a candidate: first, capabilities instrumentally relevant to governing and second, pure personal attractiveness generating voters' affection toward the candidate. The recent analyses of candidate attributes emphasize that candidate assessments are based mainly on perceptions of how the candidate has performed in office or will perform in the future.<sup>28)</sup> The main thrust is that candidate-based voting has a rational

24) Goldberg, Arthur S., "Discerning a Causal Pattern among Data on Voting Behavior." *American Political Science Review*, vol. 60, no. 4, 1966, pp. 913~922; Schulman, Mark A. and Gerald M. Pomper, "Variability in Electoral Behavior." *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 19, no. 1, 1975, pp. 1~18; Jackson, John E., "Issues, Party Choices, and Presidential Votes." *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 19, no. 2, 1975, pp. 161~185; Page, Benjamin I. and Calvin Jones, "Reciprocal Effects of Policy Preferences, Party Loyalties, and the Vote." *American Political Science Review*, vol. 73, no. 4, 1979, pp. 1071~1089; Markus, Gregory B. and Philip E. Converse, "A Dynamic Simultaneous Equation Model of Electoral Choice." *American Political Science Review*, vol. 73, no. 4, 1979, pp. 1055~1070.

25) Kessel, John H., *Presidential Campaign Politics*, 4th ed. Pacific Grove: Brooks/Cole, 1992, p. 266.

26) Markus, Gregory B., "Political Attitudes during an Election Year." *American Political Science Review*, vol. 76, no. 3, 1982, pp. 538~560.

27) Fiorina, Morris P., *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981, pp. 148~153.

28) Ibid: Miller, Arthur H., Martin P. Wattenberg and Oksana Malanchuk, "Schematic Assessment of Presidential Candidates." *American Political Science Review*, vol. 80, no. 2, 1986, pp. 505~521.

basis.

Korean voters' candidate imagery in the presidential election also relates to the candidate's competence as well as the candidate's affection-generating personality. The affective component of candidate images probably counts more in Korea than in Western democracies. Korea has a highly personalistic political culture in which the linkage between the leader and followers is rather consolidated by emotional exchange than by common policy views or class interests. It is conventional wisdom that candidates matter more than do parties or issues. The study of voters' candidate choice in the 1992 presidential election showed that their positive affection toward Kim Young-sam, the victor, was significantly linked to the vote for him while candidate assessment in terms of morality or leadership style was not associated with their decision about him.<sup>29)</sup>

## 5. Data

This study draws on two sets of survey data, pre- and post-election. These two data sets are part of the whole data from seven-wave panel surveys conducted throughout the election year of 2012 by the Asan Policy Institute in collaboration with the Research and Research, a commercial opinion poll agency.<sup>30)</sup> The pre-election survey was carried out from the 13th to 18th and the post-election, from the

29) Park, C. W., "Korean Voters' Candidate Choice in the 1992 Presidential Election: A Survey Data Analysis." *Korea and World Affairs*, vol. 17, no. 3, 1993.

30) See Park, C. W., Jiyeon Kim, and Jung-Yeop Woo, eds, *Korean Voters' Choice 2: The 18th Presidential Election*.



21st to 30th of December 2012. Each survey was administered to a nationwide sample of eligible voters aged 19 or more through the computer-aided telephone interviews. Telephone numbers and households were randomly selected, and the respondents were chosen so that the quota based on region, age group, and sex could be fulfilled. The two surveys were based on a panel design. The sample size of the pre-election survey is 2,543, and the sampling error is within the range of  $\pm 1.95\%$  at the confidence level of 95 percent. Of the respondents in the pre-election survey, 2,174 individuals or 85.5 percent were retained for the post-election survey. To keep up the representativeness of the sample, additional 380-some respondents were recruited to achieve a sample size of 2,551 for the post-election survey. The sampling error for this survey is at most  $\pm 1.94\%$  at the 95-percent confidence level. This study also uses the official election results tallied and publicized by the National Election Commission.

#### IV. Analysis and Findings

##### 1. Voters' social backgrounds

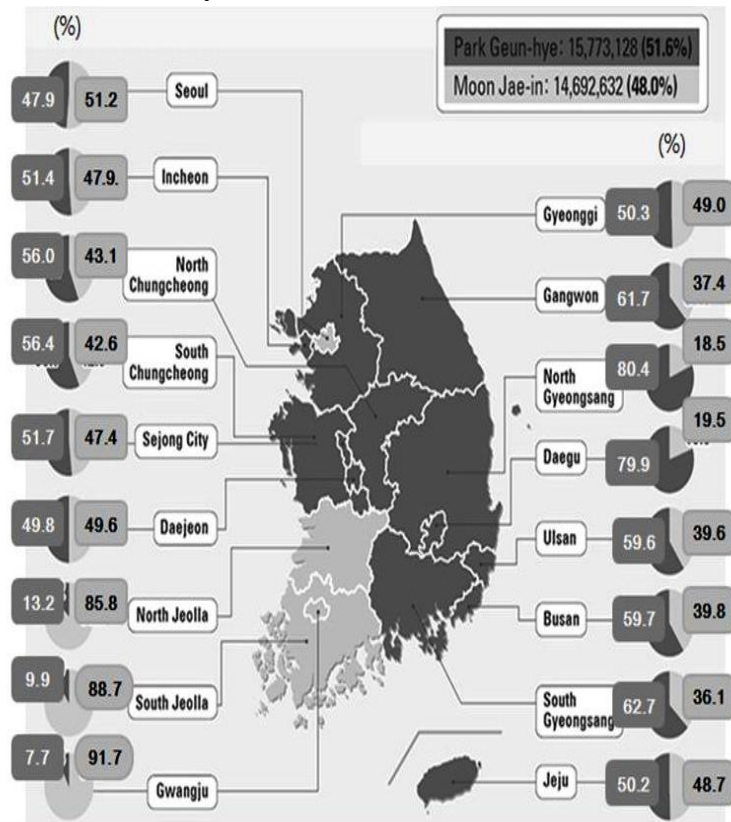
As already mentioned in this paper, voters' regional voting and the consequential regional cleavage have persisted in this democratic era since 1987. In the 2012 election, Park Geun-hye garnered 51.6 percent of the vote nationwide, and the runner-up Moon Jae-in obtained 48.0

percent. <Figure 1> shows that Park finished first in all of the 13 metropolitan cities and provinces except for Seoul, North Jeolla, South Jeolla, and Gwangju. Especially, she received 79.9 percent of the votes in Daegu and 80.4 percent in its adjacent North Gyeongsang. Park is actually a native of Daegu. And her party, the conservative Saenuri has kept the Yeongnam region, especially Daegu and North Gyeongsang, as its citadel. On the other hand, Moon secured a sweeping majority of the votes in Honam (91.7 percent in Gwangju, 85.8 percent in North Jeolla, and 88.7 percent in South Jeolla). He is in fact a native son of Busan, but he could not overcome the 40-percent hurdle in getting votes from his native region, the lower part of Yeongnam, including Busan, Ulsan, and South Gyeongsang (where he earned 39.8 percent, 39.6 percent, and 36.1, respectively). His electoral appeal to the residents of his native region was limited, because he ran as the candidate of the progressive Democratic United Party having a fervent support base in Honam. We clearly see the pattern of regional cleavage, the Yeongnam-Honam divide.

Let us now turn to age differences in the vote choice of the 2012 presidential election. According to the results of the post-election survey for this study, 53.2 percent of the respondents who voted enlisted their support for Park Geun-hye; 46.3 percent for Moon Jae-in; and 0.5 percent for the other candidates, excluding "don't now" answers and nonresponses. As compared to the actual official returns, the survey got 1.6 percent points higher for Park, whereas it did 1.7 points lower for Moon. Considering the sampling error margin of  $\pm 1.94\%$ , one can say that the survey results do not deviate from the actual aggregated

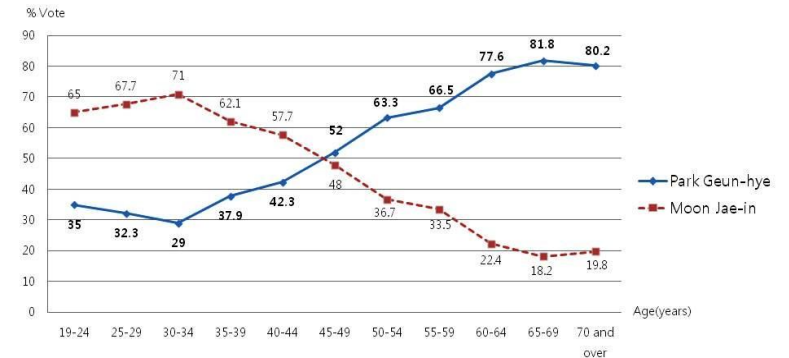
figures. These two leading candidates have absorbed most of the votes, and so the analysis here focuses on the electoral performance of Park and Moon only. With minor candidates omitted, it is assumed that Park and Moon received 53.5 percent and 46.5 percent of the vote, respectively.

<Figure 1> Vote Percentages Received by Park Geun-hye and Moon Jae-in in 17 Metropolitan Cities and Provinces



Source : National Election Commission.

<Figure 2> Vote Percentages Received by Park Geun-hye and Moon Jae-in, within Age Groups



Note :  $\chi^2 = 318.19$ ,  $p = .00$ , Cramer's  $V = .36$ ,  $N = 2,400$ .

The survey results in <Figure 2> vindicate the clear existence of generational cleavage in the 2012 presidential election. The graph displays the percentages of votes received by Park Geun-hye and Moon Jae-in in each of the 11 age groups from 19–24 years old up to 70 years old and over. There is a stark contrast in candidate choice between the five younger groups of ages 40–44 and less, and the six older groups of ages 45–49 and more. In the former, Moon received a higher percentage of votes than did Park. By contrast, in the latter, Park earned a much higher percentage of votes than did Moon. The voters in their 40s, including 40–44 and 45–49 age groups altogether, were moderately divided into Moon and Park, in a way closest to the total vote distribution between the two candidates. However, in candidate preference, the 20s(including age 19)–30s generations were without confusion opposite to 50s–60s(including age 70 and more) generations.

On the whole, electoral support for Park Geun-hye increased with

age, as suggested by a life cycle effect. Still, the exceptionally lowest level of support for her came from the voters in their early thirties (ages 30–34). Ten years ago, they were members of the 20s generation that showed the strongest support for Roh Moo-hyun. Most of these voters were then college students and socialized into newly democratized politics. Their progressive ideological orientation was reinforced by the events and electoral campaigns at the time. Both the World Cup soccer games and the accident of a United States military vehicle in June 2002 deserve mention. Korea and Japan co-hosted the World Cup soccer games that year. The Korean soccer team won a series of games and finished fourth. The Korean “red devils” rooting enthusiastically for their national team were predominantly from 20-somethings. Several hundreds of thousands of them filled the City Hall Square and its adjacent high streets in Seoul every time the home team took the field. This event boosted national pride of the young generation. In the midst of the World Cup games, two junior high school girls were accidentally run over by an armored vehicle near a U.S. military base. This accident attracted nationwide attention when the two American soldiers were acquitted at a U.S. court martial in November 2002, a month before the election day of December 19. Anti-American sentiment suddenly surged up among Koreans, and many of the young in their twenties took part in countless candlelight vigils and even violent demonstrations in front of the U.S. Embassy. The Korea-U.S. and North-South Korean relations emerged as major campaign issues. Conservative Lee Hoi-chang favored stronger Korea-U.S. alliance and tough stance against North Korea. On the other hand, Roh advocated

continued engagement with North Korea and equal relationship with the U.S.<sup>31)</sup> The progressive political tide peaked when Roh won the election, and then gradually weakened. The 2007 presidential election was swayed by the strength of conservative political tide, which resulted in the victory of Lee Myung-bak, the candidate of the Grand National Party. From that time on, the dominance of conservative political forces has not fundamentally changed. The voters now in their twenties tend to be ideologically less progressive than those in their twenties a decade ago. In this sense, apart from a strong effect of life cycle, a generational effect has some meaning for explaining age differences in candidate choice as shown in <Figure 2>.

In the 2012 presidential election, a clear majority of the 20s–30s generations supported Moon Jae-in, but an overwhelming majority of the 50s–60s generations rallied behind Park Geun-hye of the conservative camp. The voters in their forties supported Moon somewhat more than Park, but still did not much tilt toward Moon. If this pattern of electoral alignment continues, demographic change will give an advantage to the conservative side. The Korean electorate is rapidly aging. As of 2012, the 50s–60s generations overwhelm the 20s–30s generations in age composition by 43.6 percent to 34.8 percent. Moreover, with regards to turnout, the former ones are remarkably much higher than the latter ones. For example, the rate of turnout among the voters in their twenties was around 70 percent, whereas

31) Juang, Hoon, *President Roh Moo-hyun and the New Politics of South Korea*. New York: Asia Society, 2003; Park, Chan Wook, “Effects of Social and Ideological Cleavages on Vote Choice in the Korean Presidential Election of December 19, 2007.” *Hyeondae Jeongchi Yeongu*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2009.

that among those in their fifties was a bit over 80 percent. As long as the generational gap in turnout and candidate choice as well continues, the progressive forces will find difficulty winning elections.

<Table 1> Voters' Social Backgrounds and the Vote for Park Geun-hye : Binary Logistic Regression

| Independent Variables                   | Coefficient B | Standard Error |
|---|---------------|----------------|
| (Constant)                              | -1.753***     | .370           |
| Sex (reference: male)                   | .038          | .096           |
| Age (years old)                         | .054***       | .004           |
| Region of residence (reference: others) |               |                |
| Gwangju/Jeolla                          | -1.731***     | .178           |
| Daegu/North Gyeongsang                  | 1.016***      | .170           |
| Education (3-point scale)               | -.209*        | .087           |
| Household income (reference: low)       |               |                |
| Lower middle                            | -.040         | .137           |
| Middle                                  | -.206         | .166           |
| Upper middle or high                    | .008          | .157           |
| Number of cases                         |               | 2,278          |
| Chi-square                              |               | 466.532***     |
| Cox & Snell R2                          |               | .185           |
| Nagelkerke R2                           |               | .247           |
| Percentage Correct                      |               | 69.3%          |

Note : \*\* p<.05, \*\*\* p<.01.

To ascertain the effects of social background factors on vote choice, binary logistic regression analysis was performed. Candidate choice was coded 0 for Moon Jae-in and 1 for Park Geun-hye. The dependent variable is the probability of voting for Park over Moon. Independent variables were coded as follows. Sex has a value of 0 if male, and that of 1 if female. Age was measured in years. Regarding the region of residence, two dummy variables, Gwangju/Jeolla and Daegu/North Gyeongsang, were put into the analytic model. One category referring to the other regions was left out as a reference. Education was coded 1

for junior high school or less; 2 for high school; and 3 for junior college or more. The survey collected respondents' monthly household income data in million won, which were grouped into four categories: low (under 2 million won), lower middle (from 2 up to 4 million), middle (from 4 up to 5 million), and upper middle or high (5 million or more). As of the third quarter of 2012, the median monthly household income was 4 million and 14 hundred thousand won. With the low category omitted for reference, the other ones were included into analysis.

In interpreting the results displayed in <Table 1>, the statistical significance of estimated regression coefficients is of crucial concern. Of the social background factors, age and region variables stand out as expected. Their coefficients are all statistically significant at the .01 level. Older people are significantly more likely to vote for Park Geun-hye. Residing in Daegu or North Gyeongsang has a positive impact, but living in Gwangju or Jeolla has a negative impact on the likelihood of choosing Park. Education has a significantly negative association with the probability of voting for Park. The other independent variables, such as sex and income exert no perceptible influence on vote choice.

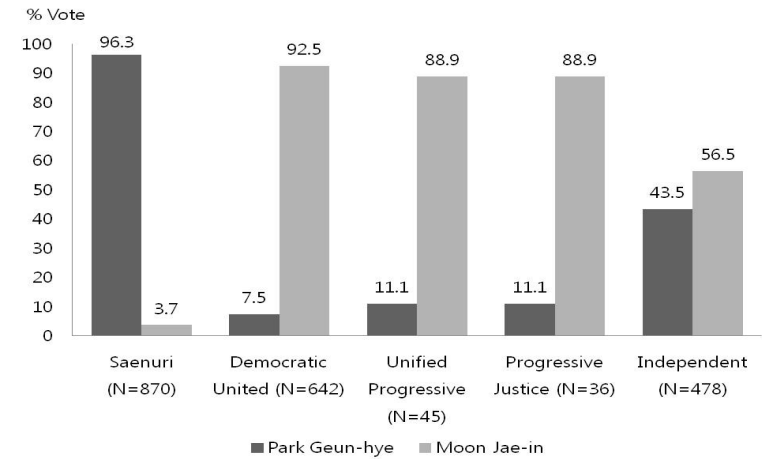
## 2. Voters' party identification

In both of the pre- and post-election surveys, the following question was included to tap the respondent's party identification: To which of the following parties do you feel close? This analysis depends on the relevant data obtained by the pre-election survey, because the conceptual framework for analysis posits party identification is an

important determinant of vote choice. In the post-election survey, voters' response to the question as above might be affected by their vote choice already made. If this had been the case, the path of causation would have gone reverse from vote choice to party identification. With this problem in mind, the analysis attempted to find a relationship between a respondent's party identification measured before the election and candidate choice at the election day.

<Figure 3> shows the vote choice made by four groups of party identifiers and also independents. A bit over 70 percent of the voters identified with one of two major parties, the Saenuri Party or Democratic United Party. A handful of voters identified themselves with one of two minor progressive parties, the Unified Progressive Party or Progressive Justice Party. About one fourth of the voters were independents having no party toward which to feel close. The data suggest that party identification greatly affects candidate choice. Almost (96.3%) but a small percentage of the voters who felt closer to the Saenuri Party than any other one voted for Park Geun-hye. Likewise, 92.5% of the voters feeling an affinity for the Democratic United Party indeed voted for its candidate Moon Jae-in. A great majority of either minor progressive party also voted for Moon. Independents finally supported Moon more than Park, though not a great deal.

<Figure 3> Voters' Party Identification and Candidate Choice.



Note :  $\chi^2 = 1,264.68$ ,  $p = .00$ , Cramer's  $V = .78$ ,  $N = 2,071$ .

<Table 2> shows the results of the logistic regression analysis regarding party identification and vote choice. The party identification variables are indicated by the corresponding dummies. The model performs reasonably well, whose goodness of fit is demonstrated by R2 values: Cox & Snell R2 is .523 and Nagelkerke R2 is .698. Based on the estimated model, 85.6% of the cases analyzed are correctly predicted. All the coefficients are significant at the level of .01 and meet the initial expectation. Independents being a reference group, a voter's identification with the Saenuri Party had a significantly positive relation to choosing Park Geun-hye over Moon Jae-in, whereas a voter's identification with a progressive party, major or minor, had a significantly negative association with such candidate choice. A look at the absolute

magnitude of the coefficients tells that the influence of the Saenuri Party identification is strongest, that of the Democratic United Party identification being second strongest.

<Table 2> Voters' Party Identification and the Vote for Park Geun-hye : Binary Logistic Regression

| Independent Variables                          | Coefficient B | Standard Error |
|--|---------------|----------------|
| (Constant)                                     | -.262***      | .092           |
| Party identification (reference: independents) |               |                |
| Saenuri Party                                  | 3.528***      | .202           |
| Democratic United Party                        | -2.253***     | .176           |
| Unified Progressive Party                      | -1.817***     | .483           |
| Progressive Justice Party                      | -1.817***     | .538           |
| Number of cases                                |               | 2,076          |
| Chi-square                                     |               | 1,535.973***   |
| Cox & Snell R2                                 |               | .523           |
| Nagelkerke R2                                  |               | .698           |
| Percentage Correct                             |               | 85.6%          |

Note : \*\*\* p<.01.

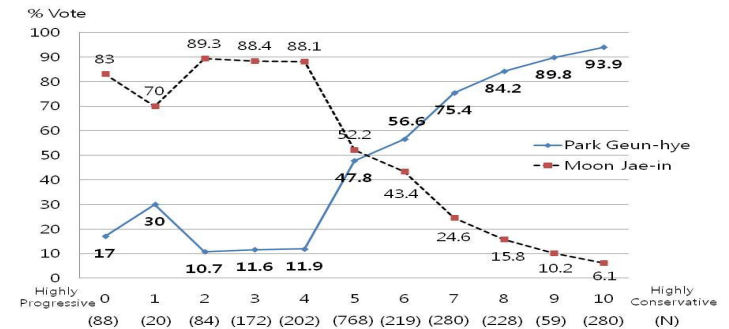
### 3. Voters' ideological and issue positions

In the post-election survey, a voter's ideological orientation was measured by his or her own self-placement on an 11-point scale ranging from (most progressive) to 5 (middle of the road) to 10 (most conservative). When this measure was condensed into a 3-point scale, the scores of 0 through 4 were recoded into 1 (progressive); 5 into 2 (centrist); and 6 through 10 into 3 (conservative). Conservative identifiers overwhelmed progressive identifiers by 43.3 percent to 23.8 percent. And 32.9 percent located themselves on the centrist position.

An ideological landscape of Korean politics now seems to work to conservatives' advantage.

<Figure 4> vividly depicts the ideological divide in candidate choice. Centrists scored 5 slightly favored Moon Jae-in over Park Geun-hye. Almost 90 percent of moderately progressive voters (scored 2-4) supported Moon, and a lower percent, roughly 80 percent, of highly progressive ones (scored 0-1) did so. On the whole, progressives overwhelmingly lent support to Moon. On the conservative side, the relationship between the strength of voter ideology and the vote for Park is clearly linear. About three fourths of moderate conservatives voters (scored 6-8) backed Park, and 90 percent or so of highly conservative voters did so.

<Figure 4> Voters' Ideological Self-placement and Candidate Choice



Note :  $\chi^2 = 741.53$ ,  $p = .00$ , Cramer's  $V = .56$ ,  $N = 2,400$ .

The post-election survey asked the respondents to pass retrospective judgment on the job performance of the incumbent President Lee Myung-bak affiliated with the Saenuri Party as well as that of the former

President Roh–Moo Hyun having belonged to the predecessor party of the Democratic United Party. These variables was each coded as follows: 1 = very poor, 2 = poor, 3 = good, 4 = very good. During the campaign, Moon Jae–in and his party criticized the Lee administration, hardly popular at its twilight, about its failures. In response, Park Geun–hye attempted to remind voters of the ill performance by the late President Roh, the former boss of Moon’s. The analysis examined whether and in which way this game of blaming each other’s former or outgoing president was electorally beneficial.

The 2012 presidential election was seen as lacking in activated policy debates among the candidates. The main opposition made the utmost efforts at unifying the candidacy on the opposition side up to the last stage of the campaign. Moon Jae–in, a candidate of the main opposition, fell short of his supporters’ expectation about his initiating a challenging debate and persuading voters of the nation’s better future. Rather, Park Geun–hye was proactive in making policy appeals to centrist or even ideologically incompatible voters. Under the cause of “sprit of the times,” she also adopted and presented catch phrases, such as expansion of social welfare benefits or economic democratization, which were reserved weapons for the progressive side’s policy agenda. On the general level of policy slogans, Park and Moon appeared to be not much different between the two. Both pledged to take many populist and cost–increasing policies. They promised the stabilization of employment by creating jobs; the provision of welfare benefits; and economic democratization. On national security and foreign policy issues, both candidates put an emphasis on the alliance with the United States and more engagement

with North Korea than under President Lee Myung–bak. They disagreed when it came to policy details and concrete measures. Park was more cautious in raising taxes and government spending, and less strict in chaebol policy measures. In policy stands on North Korea, Moon was more reconciliatory than Park.

The survey asked the respondents what they thought was the nation’s most important policy problem faced by the incoming president. The five most frequently mentioned responses included economic growth, social integration, expanding welfare benefits, political reform, and improving South–North Korean relations. Five dummy variables were created from the responses, with the category of “others” being omitted.

<Table 3> Voters’ Ideological and Issue Positions, and the Vote for Park Geun–hye : Binary Logistic Regression

| Independent Variables   | Coefficient B | Standard Error |
|---|---------------|----------------|
| (Constant)  | -1.809***     | .461           |
| Ideological self–placement<br>(progressive–conservative, 11–point scale)  | .492***       | .036           |
| President Lee’s job approval rating<br>(positive–negative, 4–point scale) | -1.528***     | .095           |
| President Roh’s job approval rating<br>(positive–negative, 4–point scale) | 1.552***      | .102           |
| Next President’s Most Important Policy Problem                            |               |                |
| Social integration  | -.414*        | .243           |
| Economic growth   | .258          | .228           |
| Social welfare  | -.328         | .268           |
| Political reform  | -.734**       | .299           |
| South–North Korean relations  | -.158         | .332           |
| Number of cases   |               | 2,213          |
| Chi–square  |               | 1,506.294***   |
| Cox & Snell R <sup>2</sup>  |               | .494           |
| Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>   |               | .659           |
| Percentage Correct  |               | 84.8%          |

Note : \* p<.10, \*\* p<.05, \*\*\* p<.01.

<Table 3> reports that a voter's ideological self-placement had a significant bearing on vote choice. The more negative a voter was toward the Roh administration, the more likely one would vote for Park Geun-hye. To the contrary, a negative verdict on the Lee administration decreased the probability of voting for her. Two measures about the nation's impending policy objective are significant at the .05 or .10 level. Voters who singled out social integration or political reform as the next president's utmost important task were less likely to vote for Park. On balance, ideology and presidential approval ratings had more influence on vote choice than prospective policy goals.

#### 4. Voters' perception of candidate's personal traits

As seen in <Table 4>, the pre-election survey measured a voter's candidate favorability by a feeling thermometer ranging 0 (dislike very much) through 5 (neutral) to 10 (like very much), and perception of candidate's leadership ability, by a 5-point scale of 1 (very poor) to 5 (very good). The average score of feeling thermometer attributed by the voters to Park Geun-hye was 5.48, and the comparable figure for Moon Jae-in was 5.73. The difference underwent a T-test, and it was significant at the .05 level. This suggests that Moon was accepted by the voters as a more likable person than Park. On the dimension of leadership, however, Park's mean score was greater than Moon's, and the difference (3.39 - 3.28 = .11) was also statistically significant at the same level.

<Table 4> Differences in Voters' Perception of Candidates' Personal Traits

| Candidate's personal traits (scale) | Mean score        |                 | Difference (A-B) | T- test                                     |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|------------------|---|
|                                     | Park Geun-hye (A) | Moon Jae-in (B) |                  |   |
| Feeling thermometer (0-10)          | 5.48              | 5.73            | -.25             | t = -2.41, df = 2,542<br>p = .02 (2-tailed) |
| Leadership (1-5)                    | 3.39              | 3.28            | .11              | t = 2.60, df = 2,473<br>p = .01 (2-tailed)  |

A voter's affection toward Park Geun-hye was significantly and positively linked to the vote for her (<Table 5>). Understandably, affection toward Moon exerted a negative impact on the vote for her. In absolute terms, the positive effect of favorability toward Park was greater than the antithetical effect of favorability toward Moon. Voters' perceived leadership ability of the two leading candidates was likewise associated with the decision about whether to support Park. The summary statistics, R2 and Percentage Correct, are all largest of the four estimated models thus far, corroborating the best empirical fit of this one concerning candidates' personal traits.<sup>32)</sup>

32) Concerning the argument that voters' affective evaluation of candidates and parties exerted the strongest influence on vote choice in the 2012 presidential choice, see Jang, Seung-Jin, "Did the Democratic United Party Lose the Election Because of Its Movement to the Left?" *Uijeongyeongu*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2013, pp. 73-98.



<Table 5> Voters' Perception of Candidate's Personal Traits and the Vote for Park Geun-hye: Binary Logistic Regression

| Independent Variables                                       | Coefficient B | Standard Error |
|---|---------------|----------------|
| (Constant)  | -.611         | .563           |
| Feeling thermometer (unfavorable-favorable, 11-point scale) |               |                |
| Park Geun-hye   | .986***       | .063           |
| Moon Jae-in   | -.885***      | .069           |
| Leadership ability (negative-positive, 5-point scale)       |               |                |
| Park Geun-hye   | .414***       | .096           |
| Moon Jae-in   | -.355***      | .114           |
| <hr/>   |               |                |
| Number of cases   |               | 2,027          |
| Chi-square  |               | 2,030.998***   |
| Cox & Snell R <sup>2</sup>                                  |               | .633           |
| Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>                                   |               | .845           |
| Percentage Correct  |               | 93.1%          |

Note : \*\*\* p<.01.

### 5. A Comprehensive Scrutiny of Vote Determinants

The analysis of voters' candidate choice in the 2012 presidential election has so far found some evidence for each set of explanatory factors in a varying degree. At this stage, a more comprehensive examination of vote determinants seems natural. A full model can be constructed by incorporating one or more statistically significant variables from each model. The independent factors include age, two region variables, four party identification variables, ideological self-displacement, President Lee's and President Roh's approval ratings, two policy-related variables, and four candidate trait variables.

<Table 6> Assorted Determinants of the Park Geun-hye Vote : Binary Logistic Regression

| Independent Variables   | Coefficient B | Standard Error |
|---|---------------|----------------|
| (Constant)  | -3.560***     | 1.344          |
| Age (years old)   | -.006         | .010           |
| Region of residence (reference: others)   |               |                |
| Gwangju/Jeolla  | -.546         | .390           |
| Daegu/North Gyeongsang  | .483          | .398           |
| Education (3-point scale)   | -.052         | .202           |
| Party identification (reference: independents)                                      |               |                |
| Saenuri Party   | 1.304***      | .311           |
| Democratic United Party   | -.709**       | .277           |
| Unified Progressive Party   | -.034         | .704           |
| Progressive Justice Party   | -.723         | 1.066          |
| Ideological self-placement (progressive-conservative, 11-point scale)               | .368***       | .072           |
| President Lee's job approval rating (positive-negative, 4-point scale)              | -.462***      | .168           |
| President Roh's job approval rating (positive-negative, 4-point scale)              | .859***       | .189           |
| Next President's Most Important Policy Problem                                      |               |                |
| Social integration  | -.341         | .293           |
| Political reform  | -.513         | .366           |
| Candidate's Personal Traits   |               |                |
| Feeling thermometer about Park Geun-hye (unfavorable-favorable, 11-point scale)     | .684***       | .074           |
| Feeling thermometer about Moon Jae-in (unfavorable-favorable, 11-point scale)       | -.582***      | .081           |
| Perceived leadership ability about Park Geun-hye (negative-positive, 5-point scale) | .412***       | .116           |
| Perceived leadership ability about Moon Jae-in (negative-positive, 5-pointscale)    | -.321**       | .143           |
| <hr/>   |               |                |
| Number of cases   |               | 1,887          |
| Chi-square  |               | 2,064.837***   |
| Cox & Snell R <sup>2</sup>  |               | .665           |
| Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>   |               | .887           |
| Percentage Correct  |               | 94.6%          |

Note : \*\* p<.05, \*\*\* p<.01.

Results of the analysis based on the full model in <Table 6> show that it has improved the goodness of fit upon any previous one: Cox & Snell R<sup>2</sup>= 0.665, Nagelkerke R<sup>2</sup>= 0.887, and Percentage Correct being 94.6%. Controlling for other sets of important determinants, the

following ones maintain their significance at the .05 or .01 level. They are voters' sense of identification with two major parties, ideological self-placement, job approval ratings of two ex-presidents, and perception of candidate traits on the dimensions of affection and leadership. The direction of relationship, found earlier, between each of these independent variables and candidate choice remains intact. These variables as a whole constitute the first tier in their relative importance for explaining candidate choice.

Ceteris paribus, voters feeling close to a major party were most likely to choose the candidate running under the respective party's banner. A more conservative voter had a greater likelihood of picking Park Geun-hye over Moon Jae-in. A voter's negative assessment of the incumbent President Lee Myung-bak's job performance was a significantly prohibiting factor for increasing the probability of voting for Park of the ruling party. But the probability of voting for her was enhanced by voters' negative evaluation of the Roh administration during which her opponent Moon served as a high-ranking presidential staff. It is interesting that given the magnitude of the corresponding coefficients, voters' negative attitude toward Ex-President Roh's job performance helped Park win the presidency to a greater extent than voters' such attitude toward outgoing President Lee hurt her chance of winning.<sup>33)</sup> Voters' positive feeling toward Park led to the likelihood of choosing her instead of Moon. But, voters' favorable feeling toward Moon decreased the likelihood of choosing in the same manner. Voters'

33) Similar findings were suggested by Nae-Young Lee, and Chong-Ki An, "The 18th Presidential Election and Retrospective Voting." *Hanguk Jeongdang Hakhoibo*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2013, pp. 5~36.

positive perception of Park's leadership also showed a significant tendency of enlisting support for her at election. Conversely, voters' positive perception of Moon's leadership lowered the probability of lending electoral support to her. On balance, favorable feeling about Park and positive perception of her leadership ability had a stronger positive effect on the vote for her than did those about Moon a negative effect on such vote choice.<sup>34)</sup>

Other sets of determinants being considered, social background variables exerted no great effect directly on candidate choice. Age and region variables, which have a strong effect on candidate choice in the bivariate analysis or in the multivariate one including social background factors only, turned out to be insignificant in the full analytic model. This means that the effects of age and region were largely intermediated by party identification, ideological orientation, and candidate favorability.<sup>35)</sup>

## V. Conclusion

In December 2012, Korea held the 6th presidential election since democratization in 1987. In less than a month before the election, the

34) Ibid.

35) This has been actually verified by the author's undertaking of path analysis regarding the vote choice in the 2012 presidential election, whose results are not reported here because of limited space. For one thing, a voter's age and region exert a robust influence on his or her identification with a major party, and likewise on the final dependent variable of vote choice when party identification is not taken into consideration. However, the independent effects of age and region become relatively small and unimportant when party identification is controlled for. The estimation of structural equations in a greater detail will be in order for future research.

structure of competition shaped into a close two-way race between Park Geun-hye of the ruling Saenuri Party, and Moon Jae-in of the main opposition Democratic United Party. Park got elected by garnering 51.6 percent of the vote, with a winning margin of 3.6 percentage points.

To explain the candidate choice in the presidential election, the study has considered four sets of independent variables derived from exemplary existing studies on voting behavior in the United States and other western democracies. The four sets include voters' social backgrounds, party identification, ideological and issue positions, and perception of candidate traits. The influence of these independent variables on candidate choice has been empirically examined against the data from pre- and post-election panel surveys. Empirical analysis has proceeded from examining simple bivariate relationship to serially investigating the effects of each set of independent variables in a multivariate model and finally, to ascertaining the influences of all significant independent variables in a full multivariate one.

Park Geun-hye reaped an overwhelming majority of the votes in Daegu (79.9 percent) as well as in North Gyeongsang (80.4 percent). In contrast, Moon Jae-in received a sweeping majority of the votes in Gwangju (91.7%), North Jeolla (85.8 percent), and South Jeolla (88.7 percent). This contrast confirms persisting regional cleavage between Daegu/North Gyeongsang and Gwangju/Jeolla. Generational cleavage was also clearly revealed by the contrasted candidate choice between voters aged 44 or less, and those aged 45 or more. Moreover, 20s-30s generations were vividly antithetical to 50s-60s generations

in their candidate choice. A dominant majority of the former backed Moon, while an enormous majority of the latter supported Park.

The strong influence of region and age variables on candidate choice has almost vanished after party identification, ideological self-placement, candidate traits were simultaneously taken into account. This suggests that the effects of region and age are mostly intermediated by these other independent variables.

Immediately before the election day, 70 percent or so of the voters identified with one of two major parties. Well over 90 percent of major-party identifiers chose the candidate fielded out by their own preferred party. The effect of major-party identification does not disappear in any scale of multivariate analysis.

The study has shown the ideological divide in candidate choice at the 2012 presidential election. Well over 85 percent of ideologically progressive voters supported Moon Jae-in, whereas roughly 80 percent of conservative voters backed Park Geun-hye. The effect of voter ideology has remained intact in any form of multivariate analysis.

Empirical evidence corroborates the effect of voters' retrospective presidential approval ratings on vote choice in the 2012 election. Negative ratings of Ex-President Roh Moo-hyun's job performance enhanced the probability of voting for Park Geun-hye, while those of President Lee Myung-bak lowered the probability of voting for her to a smaller extent.

Voters perceived Moon Jae-in more favorably as a likable person than did they Park Geun-hye. Still, Park was seen as a more capable leader for governing the nation than was Moon. Evidently, voters' affection toward Park and their positive perception of her leadership

increased the likelihood of choosing her instead of Moon. Contrarily, voters' favorable feeling toward Moon and their appreciation of his leadership decreased the likelihood of giving her electoral support to a lesser extent.

All things considered, Korean voters' candidate choice in the 2012 presidential election can be accounted for primarily by the influence of voters' party identification, ideological self-placement, approval rating of job performance by Presidents Roh Moo-hyun and Lee Myung-bak, candidate favorability, and perception of candidate's leadership. Region and age have affected candidate choice through these outstanding independent factors.

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ABSTRACT

Patterns and Causes of Korean Voters' Candidate Choice  
in the 2012 Presidential Election

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Drawing on the data obtained from the pre- and post-election panel surveys, this paper describes and explains Korean voters' candidate choice in the December 19 presidential election of 2012. Park Geun-hye defeated Moon Jae-in by receiving 51.6 percent of the vote. Persisting regional cleavage as well as young-old generational cleavage was clearly revealed by a sharp contrast in candidate choice. Analysis suggests that the strong influence of region and age variables are largely intermediated by other independent variables, such as party identification, ideological self-placement, retrospective judgment of past or outgoing President's job performance, and perception of candidate traits. These attitudinal variables as a whole have a direct impact on candidate choice, and demonstrate outstanding explanatory power. Conceptual frameworks derived from time-honored studies on voting in western democracies have proven their empirical relevance to the candidate choice in Korea's 2012 presidential election.

Keywords : Korean presidential election, candidate choice, party identification, ideological self-placement, retrospective voting, candidate traits

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