

Preview of the 17th Presidential Election in Korea: Candidates, Issues and Cleavages

*Kap Yun Lee, Ph.D.
Sogang University*

Introduction

At present, all signs seem to point in the direction of a conservative victory in the 17th presidential elections that will be held on December 19, 2007.¹ President Roh Moo-hyun's job approval rating has been lower than 30%, and often below 20%, for more than two years, and his UP (Uri Party) is supported by barely 10% of the public. The opposition GNP (Grand National Party) has become by far the most popular party, enjoying more than 40% of the popular support. The economy has been in doldrums since 2002, slowing down to an annual growth of 4%, after an average annual growth of 7% in the preceding decade. Business and consumer confidence in the market is declining, gaps between the rich and the poor are ever more increasing, and unemployment among young people is steadily on the rise. North Korea's Kim Jong-il did not help Roh either. Despite the sincere and continuous provision of economic aid to the North by the Roh government, North Korea responded only by demanding more unconditional aid without taking any reciprocal measures to contribute to the peace and prosperity of the peninsula. The nationalistic public mood soured, in particular after a nuclear test by the North in 2006, and the people no longer wholeheartedly support Roh's conciliatory policy.

Not surprisingly, two GNP presidential candidates are currently leading in the polls. Lee Myung-bak is supported by over 40% of the public as a presidential candidate, followed by Park Geun-hye with about 20% of those polled. No other candidates including UP candidates have been able to score more than 10%, most of them showing less than 3%. Yet many experts are hesitant to predict a return to a conservative government after 10 years. During the remaining six months many things may happen, such as an appearance of a strong new

candidate from the UP and/or other parties, the emergence of surprising issues, the revelation of any GNP candidate's personal scandals, the holding of a North-South summit, and not to mention some inexplicable change of the public mood, any of which could turn the tide in favor of the center and progressive side. In the last two presidential elections, the front runner in the polls, Lee Hoi-chang, was prevented from winning the office by unexpected turns of events before the election. In 1997 it was the rebel candidacy of Lee In-je that divided the GNP supporters, and in 2002 it was the last minute withdrawal of Chung Mong-jun from the race in support of Roh that helped the latter win the election.

It will not be known at least until September who will make up the final set of presidential candidates. On the GNP side, the two leading candidates, Lee and Park, will hotly contest the party primary in which both the party members and the general public will take part.² Their intense confrontation over the rules of the party primary recently brought the party to the brink of division. The party primary election is expected to be very competitive because while Lee is leading in the public polls, Park is believed to have a strong following among the party members. Party leaders are less worried about who will win the primary than about whether anyone can win without much scathe that may damage chances for winning the December election.

The other center and progressive parties on the anti-GNP side are in a state of flux. The ruling UP is in the process of disintegration as a third of its Assembly members already left the party to support their own presidential candidate and many others are expected to follow soon. They are fleeing from the party because no presidential candidate under the name of UP, whoever that may be, would have a realistic chance of becoming the next president due to Roh's extremely low popularity. The small DP (Democratic Party) is currently engaged in negotiating with the UP and other groups to coalesce into a new party in order to form a united front against the GNP and nominate a unified candidate in the election. Unification, or reunification, of the UP and DP is also geared for the next General Assembly election that will be held in April, 2008. If the current pattern of partisan support continues, they, when divided, would be not

able to generate much of a challenge against the GNP in the Assembly election. A small radical party, the DLP (Democratic Labor Party), is going to nominate its own candidate who will run in the election regardless, without having any chance for winning. Some citizens movement organizations including the leading environmental groups have also expressed their intention to run their own candidates in the election.

Besides presidential candidates, it is also uncertain what will become important issues and which side will benefit from them in the election. Will foreign and security policy become issues again and help progressives as they did in the last presidential election in 2002?³ Will blame for Roh's failure with the economy fall on center and progressive candidates on the government side and provide deciding edges to the GNP candidate? Will policy proposals such as Lee's canal project and Park's tax cut be controversial and divide the public? These are a few examples of issues that may decide the election outcome.

The partisan support of the public in the 17th election will not be much affected by candidates or issues if the regional voter alignment remains as strong as it has in the past. Since the first democratic presidential election in 1987, the election outcome has been largely decided by the structure and strength of regional party cleavages. Progressives could not have won the last two presidential elections if not for their effective strategy of building a regional alliance in Chungcheong and Honam. As before, Youngnam voters are expected to support the GNP candidate while Honam citizens are for the anti-GNP candidate, but it remains to be seen how strong the regional voting of Honam and Youngnam will be and what role Chungcheong will play in determining the eventual winner.

The outcome of the upcoming presidential election will be in all likelihood determined by the combined effects of a set of candidates and issues and structure and strength of regional cleavages. This article attempts to present a preview of the 17th presidential election in Korea by looking into candidates, issues and cleavages. With many important factors undecided, it cannot avoid being a speculative essay which makes a number of assumptions and assertions that may turn out to be false.

Presidential Candidates

It seems very likely, at least at the moment that the electoral competition in the upcoming presidential election will be a two-candidate race between the GNP candidate and a unified candidate from center and progressive parties on the anti-GNP side. Although current polls suggest that one of the GNP candidates will win the presidency, even if they both run, the GNP, eager to regain power, is not likely to be divided because they know too well that party division will turn off a lot of their supporters. Furthermore, election law forbids any candidates, after registering their names in the party primary election, to run in the presidential election as independents or on any other ticket. Just as the GNP will stay united for the sake of winning the election, parties and groups of the other side will very likely be united before the election. Above all, a unified candidacy is necessary, though not sufficient, for the UP and the DP as well as other parties and groups on the anti-GNP side to have any chance of winning against the GNP candidate in the election. Moreover, major candidates on the anti-GNP side have already begun to criticize the Roh government in order to distance themselves from Roh and avoid responsibility for running the government.

Table 1. Popularity of Presidential Candidates

	Groups	Lee Myung-bak	Park Geun-hye	Sohn Hak-kyu	Chung Dong-young	Kim Geun-tae	Other Candidates	Total
Sex	Female	222 (53.5%)	95 (22.9%)	31 (7.5%)	23 (5.5%)	4 (1.0%)	40 (9.6%)	415 (100%)
Sex	Male	221 (55.3%)	92 (23.0%)	24 (6.0%)	20 (5.0%)	2 (.5%)	41 (10.3%)	400 (100%)
Age	20-29	108 (58.7%)	30 (16.3%)	12 (6.5%)	14 (7.6%)	2 (1.1%)	18 (9.8%)	184 (100%)
Age	30-39	104 (54.2%)	32 (16.7%)	14 (7.3%)	15 (7.8%)	1 (0.5%)	26 (13.5%)	192 (100%)

Age	40-49	88 (46.6%)	54 (28.6%)	14 (7.4%)	6 (3.2%)	2 (1.1%)	25 (13.2%)	189 (100%)
Age	50 or more	143 (57.2%)	71 (28.4%)	15 (6.0%)	8 (3.2%)	1 (0.4%)	12 (4.8%)	250 (100%)
Education	Middle School	53 (50.5%)	31 (29.5%)	6.0 (5.7%)	4 (3.8%)	0 (0.0%)	11 (10.5%)	105 (100%)
Education	High School	123 (49.4%)	72 (28.9%)	16 (6.4%)	12 (4.8%)	1 (0.4%)	25 (10.0%)	249 (100%)
Education	College	264 (58.1%)	80 (17.6%)	33 (7.3%)	27 (5.9%)	5 (1.1%)	45 (9.9%)	454 (100%)
Income	Lower	141 (49.0%)	84 (29.2%)	14 (4.9%)	15 (5.2%)	4 (1.4%)	30 (10.4%)	288 (100%)
Income	Middle	186 (57.9%)	61 (19.0%)	27 (8.4%)	14 (4.4%)	2 (0.6%)	31 (9.7%)	321 (100%)
Income	Upper	105 (55.9%)	35 (18.6%)	14 (7.4%)	14 (7.4%)	0 (0.0%)	20 (10.6%)	188 (100%)
Region	Seoul, Kyunggi	232 (57.6%)	81 (20.1%)	31 (7.7%)	16 (4.0%)	4 (1.0%)	39 (9.7%)	403 (100%)
Region	Chungcheong	39 (46.4%)	28 (33.3%)	2 (2.4%)	5 (6.0%)	1 (1.2%)	9 (10.7%)	84 (100%)
Region	Honam	32 (43.2%)	5 (6.8%)	16 (21.6%)	13 (17.6%)	1 (1.4%)	7 (9.5%)	74 (100%)
Region	Yeongnam	122 (55.7%)	64 (29.2%)	5 (2.3%)	8 (3.7%)	0 (0.0%)	20 (9.1%)	219 (100%)
Region	Other Regions	18 (51.4%)	9 (25.7%)	1 (2.9%)	1 (2.9%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (17.1%)	35 (100%)
	Total	443 (54.4%)	187 (22.9%)	55 (6.7%)	43 (5.3%)	6 (0.7%)	81 (9.9%)	815 (100%)

Source: Data from Korean Research (April, 2007)

A decisive victory by the GNP candidate would not only mean a transfer of power but also a wholesale change of policies. This is why former president Kim Dae-jung, who desperately wants his engagement policy toward North Korea to be continued by the next administration, has repeatedly demanded

unification of the parties on the anti-GNP side to offer a single candidate. The reunification of the UP and the DP is now supported by Roh, who had opposed it earlier, arguing that it would produce no more than a regional party in Honam. Therefore, many believe that the anti-GNP side except for the DLP, will eventually offer a single candidate either through unification of the currently divided parties and groups or through one final open primary election that will provide unity before the election.

On the GNP side, there are two candidates, among the five candidates who have announced their intention to run, and who may win the party primary. A front runner, Lee Myung-bak, started his political career as a member of National Assembly in 1992 after a successful business career in construction. In 2002 he was elected mayor of Seoul and became a nationally-prominent figure for his aggressive style of leadership, completing an urban redevelopment plan called the Cheonggyecheon Project and reforming the public transportation system during his term. Lee has consistently emphasized economic recovery as the most important task for the government and promises that his presidency will achieve the 7-4-7 economy, a 7 percent annual growth, US\$ 40 thousand per capita income, and the 7th largest economy in the world. His strategy of economic growth is driven by construction and includes two projects, the Great Canal Project that will connect the main rivers of the country to provide waterways for physical distribution and the Science City Project that will accommodate high technology companies, research institutes and universities.

Although he is considered a centrist by the public, Lee is closer to the conservative viewpoint in economic policies as well as foreign and security issues. He favors small government and the deregulation and privatization of the economy. At times, Lee is ambiguous about North Korean issues so as not to alienate young nationalistic voters, but he is in general critical of Kim and Roh's engagement policy and has demanded postponement of economic aid until after the disablement of North Korea's nuclear reactor. Besides his popular support that has exceeded 40% for more than six months, Lee's electoral strength lies in the nature of his supporters. He is a catch-all candidate who draws

support from all sectors of society and leads other candidates, even among Honam residents who have shown strong antipathy to the GNP. Lee's road to presidency may not be as smooth as his popularity suggests, however. First, he must win the party primary over Park without serious wounds and then he needs support from her after the primary, which may be difficult as personal animosity between the two has already reached the dangerous level. Some experts also point out as a sign of weakness that many of his supporters come from anti-GNP voters, the young and Honam citizens who may well switch their support to the unified progressive candidate on election day. Lee has been hard-pressed to explain to the public his accumulation of wealth, believed to be worth over US\$ 30 million, and may indeed fail to pass the so-called morality test by the public as was true for Lee Hoi-chang in 1997 and 2002, when he was unable to handle scandals about his son's draft evasion.

Park Geun-hye of the GNP, the second leading candidate in the polls, is the daughter of the late president, Park Chung-hee, who engineered the country's remarkable economic growth during his twenty years of authoritarian rule. After her father's assassination, Park disappeared from the public scene for 18 years before she joined the GNP in 1998. She became party chairman in 2004, when the party was devastated by the unsuccessful and unpopular impeachment of president Roh. She reversed party fortunes from being the most hated, to becoming the most liked parties and scored consecutive victories in subsequent local and supplementary General Assembly elections before resigning from office to run in the presidential primary in 2006. Park's uncompromising style of leadership earned her the nickname of Korea's Thatcher.

Unlike Lee, Park is considered a conservative by the public probably because, she as party chairman, has been very vocal in opposing Roh's progressive security and social policies. But ideological differences between Lee and Park are minimal, and their policy orientations share common roots in conservatism. Like Lee, Park considers economic growth the government's first priority, and promises 7 percent annual economic growth and US\$ 30 thousand per capita income. She also offers a 2% tax

cut and supports deregulation and privatization of the economy. Park strongly believes in human capital development and emphasizes education reform. She favors strengthening the US-Korea military alliance, supports free trade, and has demanded strict reciprocity in North-South relations and complete dismantlement of North Korea's nuclear program as preconditions for the South's economic aid to North Korea. Like her father, Park commands strong support from Youngnam voters, the old, the rural, and the less-well educated. Thanks to her family connections to the Chungcheong region, she is well received by residents there, which will be an asset in the presidential election if she is nominated by the GNP. While her outspoken conservatism may have strengthened the loyalty of conservative followers, many consider her too conservative to lead a country that has become much less conservative than it used to be.

On the anti-GNP side, two notable candidates have already withdrawn from the race for the unified candidacy that has not even begun because their popularity lagged far behind the two GNP candidates. Koh Gun, a career bureaucrat who served as prime minister twice under the Kim Young-sam's and Roh's administrations and led in the polls as a future presidential candidate two years ago, surprisingly retired from politics in early 2007 as his popularity had steadily declined. Chung Woon-chan, an economist and former president of Seoul National University, was sought after as an ideal candidate who could build a winning coalition of Honam and Chungcheong citizens but decided not to enter politics as he never gained more than 2% of the public support. Continuous searching by parties and candidates on the anti-GNP side has so far failed to produce a surprise candidate to retain the party's power, and they will probably have to choose from five or six candidates who have been campaigning for the unified candidacy.

Sohn Hak-kyu, who recently defected from the GNP to pursue his own presidential candidacy, is currently running third in the polls and is considered one of the favorites to win the unified candidacy of the anti-GNP side. Sohn was a democratization activist in the 1970's, and later received a Ph.D. in political science from Oxford University. He taught political

science at Sogang University before joining Kim Young-sam's party as a member of the General Assembly in 1993. He also served as governor of Kyunggi province (2002-2006) and received favorable job ratings for his efforts in attracting foreign investment for regional economic development. Sohn is considered a centrist and somewhat ambivalent ideologically. He advocates progressive liberalism, a combination of economic liberalism and social progressivism, based on communitarian values that emphasize open and egalitarian virtues. Although his economic approach is conservative, supporting free trade and a market economy, Sohn is a nationalist and while in the GNP openly supported Kim and Roh's engagement policy toward North Korea, often against the wishes of the party leadership. Sohn has yet to receive more than 10% of the public support, and no noticeable group of followers can be found except among Kyunggi residents.

Two leading presidential candidates within the UP are about to leave the party amidst a power struggle that has developed between them and President Roh. Chung Dong-young, who was an evening newscaster for a major television station before joining Kim Dae-jung's Democratic Party, is the leader of the largest faction within the UP. Compared with other progressives in the UP, Chung may be classified as a center reformist, close to Sohn in ideological orientation. He is a liberal in social and economic policy, but a progressive with regard to foreign and security issues. Chung was deeply involved in the project of the inter-Korean railway as minister of the National Unification Board and one of the few South Koreans who have met Kim Jong-il in person. He is supported in his home Honam region and by young adults and is one of the leading candidates for the unified candidacy along with Sohn.

Table 2. Policy Positions of Candidates

Policy	Lee Myung-bak	Park Geun-hye	Sohn Hak-kyu	Chung Dong-young	Kim Geun-tae
Revision of Presidential Term Limit	O	O	O	O	O
North-South Summit	□	□	O	O	O
Unconditional North Korean Aid	X	X	O	O	O
Transfer of Wartime Operational Control	X	X	?	O	O
National Information Board	X	X	?	O	O
US-Korea FTA	O	O	O	O	X
Opening of Rice Market	X	X	X	X	X
Regulation of Regional Development	□	□	X	O	O
Regulation of Big Business	X	X	□	O	O
Comprehensive Property Tax	□	O	O	O	O
Reducing Military Service	□	X	O	O	O
College Entrance Exam	O	O	?	X	X
Private School Reform Law	X	X	?	O	O
Death Penalty	O	O	?	X	X
Adultery Law	O	O	□	X	X
Division of Newspaper and Broadcasting	X	X	?	O	O

O: Agree, □: Neutral, X: Disagree, ?: Unknown

Source: Compiled from South Korean Daily Newspapers (April, 2007).

Kim Geun-tae, a career democratic involvement activist turned politician, is an ideologue and leader of the most progressive faction in the party. He served as minister of health and welfare and wants to build a system of social safety nets for the poor and the disadvantaged. Kim is probably the most sympathetic to North Korea of all the candidates and strongly opposes the US-Korea free trade agreement. He has never been able to gain enough popular support to be considered a serious contender for the unified candidacy because of his ideology.

President Roh's followers in the UP, though dwindling in size due to Roh's decreasing popularity, want to present their own candidate, not necessarily for the presidential nomination but probably for the next Assembly election. Roh and his

followers think that, by running their own candidate, they can keep the UP for themselves after Chung and Kim leave and field their own candidates in the next Assembly election. Currently mentioned as their presidential candidates are, Lee Hae-chan and Han Myung-sook, both of whom served as prime minister in the Roh government. They are loyal followers of Roh's progressive policies and received fair job ratings from the public while in office for their pragmatic and moderate style of leadership. Neither has been able to gain popularity of more than 2% from the public, but Lee may be considered as a dark horse for the unified candidate because of his close relations with both Kim Dae-jung and Roh.

Ideological and Valence Issues

As candidates on the two sides are involved in intra-party or intra-camp competition for their party nomination, major issues of the December elections have still not emerged. If the presidential race becomes a two-candidate competition between the GNP and anti-GNP side, as is expected, issues that differentiate the two groups will likely arise as major factors. Although all candidates are portraying themselves as centrist in order to woo the support from the center voters who hold the balance of power, there are important ideological differences between the GNP candidates and the anti-GNP candidates, from foreign and security policy to social and economic policy. As we have seen above, Lee and Park of the GNP are basically conservatives who favor a pro-US and anti-North Korea policy as well as neo-liberal social and economic policies in contrast to candidates of the anti-GNP side who are, in general, nationalists supporting an engagement policy toward North Korea and progressives favoring economic justice and social egalitarianism.

Ideological differences between presidential candidates are relatively new in the Korean election, having first appeared in the last presidential election between conservative Lee and progressive Roh.⁴ They were then limited to foreign and security policy and more personal differences than party ones as both parties contained conservative as well as progressive members. Shortly after Roh was elected president, progressive members of the two joined to form the UP in support of the Roh

government. Under Roh, areas of ideological differences between the two sides expanded to social and economic policy and became party differences as Roh carried out with the UP's legislative support egalitarian social and economic reforms which have been increasingly opposed by the GNP.

Among the various ideological issues, North Korea policy is likely to be the most salient one dividing the two sides in the election. Although both sides agree with the principle of peaceful reconciliation and economic cooperation between the North and the South, all of the major anti-GNP candidates consider economic aid to North Korea more or less the only viable policy option to maintain peace while the GNP candidates want to employ sticks as well as carrots in close cooperation with the US and Japan in dealing with the North. The conciliatory approach taken by anti-GNP candidates is also based on political factors. In order for them to earn the unified candidacy, not to mention the presidential election, they need to win the support of Kim Dae-jung who is still revered as the leader by the residents of Honam.

Depending upon the course of events leading to election day, the two sides will take turns in bringing up the North Korea issue. If North Korea disables its nuclear reactor and makes substantial progress in her relations with the US, anti-GNP candidates will take the offensive arguing that the engagement policy has succeeded. But if North Korea does not carry out the agreement of the Six Party Talks reached in February, 2007 and therefore Six Party Talks stall, the GNP candidate will point to it as proof that the engagement policy has failed and demand a complete overhaul of economic aid and cooperation programs toward North Korea. One may not rule out a sudden turn of events that may help the anti-GNP side, as Roh's government is rumored to be in serious negotiations with the North for a break-through in North-South relations by holding a summit between Roh and Kim Jong-Il.

Along with North Korea policy issues, military issues might also arise with regard to transfer of the wartime operational control of allied forces in Korea. In early 2007, the Bush and Roh administrations agreed to transfer wartime operational control to the Korean army by 2012. This received strong

criticism from conservatives. The GNP candidates have promised to review and postpone the transfer so that it will not harm the wartime military capabilities of the allied forces. The anti-GNP side considers it a matter of national sovereignty, one that should be completed as soon as possible.

Although to a lesser degree than in foreign and security policy, noticeable ideological differences also exist between the two sides in economic and social policy. The deregulation of business in particular, may be another divisive issue in the election. Compared with the anti-GNP side, which in general, agrees with Roh's regulatory policy which is designed to ensure fair practices and distributive justice, the GNP advocates deregulation of big business to enhance management efficiency and induce investment increases. The two sides also differ with regard to issues of educational reform. Progressive candidates on the government side generally want to ensure the social responsibility of schools and enlarge opportunities for college education for disadvantaged schools and students. But conservatives want to maintain the principle of school autonomy and enhance academic performance by encouraging competition among the students. Specifically, the GNP has sought to revise the private school reform law enacted by the Roh government, a law that requires every private school to include in its board representatives from the teacher's union and parents. The law also promised to repeal at least part of the so-called three non-college admission principles that forbid colleges, when selecting students, to differentiate high schools according to academic performance, to allow special admissions for financial contributions, and to administer their own entrance examinations.

As a rule, the elderly and more conservative voters will side with the GNP while the young and progressive will support the anti-GNP candidate.⁵ But generational and ideological differences between the two may not develop into a full-fledged confrontation during the campaign. Once the party primary is over, policy positions of the two sides will converge toward to the center in efforts to maximize the vote share in the election. In fact, both Lee and Roh committed themselves to the public revision of the SOFA (Status of Forces Agreement) as well as strengthening the US-Korea military alliance in the 2002 election,

when the presidential debate focused on the future of the US-Korea military alliance amidst the rising anti-Americanism following the tragic death of two schoolgirls by a careless US military vehicle. If a center candidate, such as Sohn and Chung, is nominated as the unified candidate of the anti-GNP side, ideological differences between the two sides will be further blurred, except in North Korea policy.

Although controversial positions may be highlighted, it may be valence issues, such as economic growth, that will have greater effects upon the people's voting. Here the issue may be which candidate can be more effective in following similar policies. Since democratization, the most important concern of the Korean public has always been the state of the economy and, consequently, all candidates have promised robust economic growth. It is surprising; however, that economic issues have never decided election outcomes as economic voting has been minimal. Even in the 1997 election, when the economy suffered a serious foreign currency crisis locally (the IMF crisis known internationally as the East Asian Financial Crisis), there was no evidence that the voters punished the ruling GNP candidate for mismanagement of the economy.⁶ This is not simply because they could not find any differences among candidates' economic policy proposals, which has been usually the case; more importantly, they could not differentiate between the candidates in terms of management skills.

Table 3. Relative Importance of Economic Growth and Political Democracy

	Groups	Growth much more important	Growth more important	Democracy more important	Democracy much more important	Total
Sex	Female	237 (40.2%)	256 (43.5%)	64 (10.9%)	32 (5.4%)	589 (100%)
Sex	Male	221 (36.2%)	301 (49.3%)	62 (10.2%)	26 (4.3%)	610 (100%)
Age	20-29	78 (29.8%)	119 (45.4%)	47 (17.9%)	18 (6.9%)	262 (100%)
Age	30-39	104 (35.3%)	146 (49.5%)	31 (10.5%)	14 (4.7%)	295 (100%)
Age	40-49	109 (39.8%)	133 (48.5%)	22 (8.0%)	10 (3.6%)	274 (100%)
Age	50 or more	167 (45.4%)	159 (43.2%)	26 (7.1%)	16 (4.3%)	368 (100%)
Education	elementary school	22 (47.8%)	18 (39.1%)	3 (6.5%)	3 (6.5%)	46 (100%)
Education	Middle School	47 (45.6%)	48 (46.6%)	3 (2.9%)	5 (4.9%)	103 (100%)
Education	High School	261 (41.2%)	288 (45.4%)	55 (8.7%)	30 (4.7%)	634 (100%)
Education	College or more	127 (31.0%)	198 (48.3%)	65 (15.9%)	20 (4.9%)	410 (100%)
income	lower	164 (48.0%)	129 (37.7%)	29 (8.5%)	20 (5.8%)	342 (100%)
income	middler	268 (35.2%)	375 (49.3%)	81 (10.6%)	37 (4.9%)	761 (100%)
income	upper	24 (26.4%)	51 (56.0%)	15 (16.5%)	1 (1.1%)	91 (100%)
region	Seoul, Kyunggi	105 (38.3%)	124 (45.3%)	28 (10.2%)	17 (6.2%)	274 (100%)
region	Chungcheong	99 (50.8%)	69 (35.4%)	16 (8.2%)	11 (5.6%)	195 (100%)
region	Honam	104 (35.5%)	145 (49.5%)	27 (9.2%)	17 (5.8%)	293 (100%)
region	Yeongnam	127 (34.5%)	184 (50.0%)	48 (13.0%)	9 (2.4%)	368 (100%)
region	Other Regions	23 (33.3%)	35 (50.7%)	7 (10.1%)	4 (5.8%)	69 (100%)
Total		458 (38.2%)	557 (46.5%)	126 (10.5%)	58 (4.8%)	1199 (100%)

Source: Data from Sogang Institute for Political Research (July, 2007).

The upcoming election may differ from previous ones with regard to effects of the economy because people expect that candidates to produce different economic results.⁷ They consider the GNP candidates more capable of engineering economic growth than anti-GNP candidates, which is the very reason why GNP candidates are currently leading in the polls. Lee and Park have preempted claims of economic growth by others who have supported the Roh government, consistently criticizing Roh's negligence in the management of the economy and championing the ideas of an economic presidency. They also have reminded people of their background in economic growth under authoritarian regimes. Lee was responsible for making a construction legend of the Hyundai Co. during the Middle East construction boom years of the 1970's, and Park is, after all, a daughter of Park Chung-hee, who is by far the most respected president in history among the public for directing the country's successful industrialization.

In contrast, all major candidates of the anti-GNP side share a background in democratization as they all were at one time or another student and citizen democratic activists. This is why some compare competition between the GNP and the anti-GNP side in the upcoming election as being between industrializers and democratizers, the old party cleavages of the authoritarian years.⁸

Before democratization, the ruling party gained support from the old and less well-educated by their performance in engineering economic growth and maintaining law and order, while opposition parties were supported by the young and well-educated who preferred such democratic values as freedom and human rights. The voting strengths of the two sides were relatively even, though the distorted electoral system provided victory to the industrializers. It may be unfortunate for democratizers in this election; however, that today all social groups regardless of age and level of education consider economic growth much more important than political and social reforms, although issues of economic growth may not always favor the GNP. The GNP candidates must show their valence in economic growth over their opponents by proving their promises to be practical and attainable. Many have already

begun to question the sincerity of Lee's target of the 7-4-7 economy, which is almost impossible to reach within five years. His canal project is also criticized, based on cost-benefit analysis and adverse environmental effects. Park's economic growth by tax cuts is also viewed as too simple a promise without specific policy content.

Regional Voter Cleavages

It is impossible to explain or predict the Korean election without understanding the nature of the regional cleavages of the party system. Since democratization, regionalism has been the dominant pattern of electoral alignment in every presidential, General Assembly and local election. Not until last presidential election in 2002, had any other demographic, social and economic, or attitudinal variables, shown statistically significant effects upon partisan voting.

Korea's regional party system after 1987 has been to a certain degree, a reflection of social and cultural cleavages caused by the uneven regional development in industrialization and traditional regional parochialism.⁹ One cannot over-emphasize political causes, however, because regionalism was carefully designed, developed and utilized by political leaders such as the three Kims in competitively mobilizing their vote support. Regionalism had become invisible during the campaign since the parties and candidates refrained from openly appealing to the loyalty of regional interests. In addition, regionalism has been condemned by political leaders for its unnecessary divisiveness and unjustifiable biases.

Regionalism lacks any policy contents and has not been a controversial issue. All candidates and parties have promised, when discussing regions, balanced regional growth and fair and open political recruitment. But they have always depended upon regionalism for their support, and the voters, in particular in Honam and Youngnam have, never disappointed them. Many have considered the lack of ideological and policy differences between candidates and parties important causes for the continued strength of regional voting, that, however, was disproved by the 2002 election.¹⁰ While one's age and ideology strongly affected voting because of the ideological differences

between the two leading candidates, regionalism remained as strong as ever. Roh was able to penetrate and win some support from the young Youngnam people, not only because he was a progressive but also because he was from Youngnam. To a significant extent, this regional calculation was a driving force behind Roh's successful campaign, beginning in the party primary and ending in the presidential election.

The basic structure of Korea's regional cleavages consists of two southern regions, Honam and Youngnam, with which about 60% of Koreans still identify as their home regions. They have been relatively equal in their electoral strength as the voting strength of the more populous Youngnam was matched by the unity of the Honam population which consistently provided their candidates with 90% of the votes in presidential elections. Consequently, election results have been extremely close, less than 3% of the total votes dividing the winners and the losers of last two elections.

The 17th presidential election will be a regional contest as usual in which the GNP candidate will be supported by Youngnam voters and the anti-GNP candidate by those from Honam.¹¹ The question is whether the relative strength of regional voting will change. The regional voting of Youngnam residents may increase because the GNP candidates will not be divided and because no major candidates on the anti-GNP side will likely come from Youngnam. If Youngnam citizens, who have lost the election twice because of their divided support, unite as much as those from Honam, that alone could make the difference in the election outcome. There is some possibility that Honam unity may weaken as the polls show that Lee of the GNP leads, albeit by a small margin, over anti-GNP candidates in the region. But once the anti-GNP side offers a unified candidate, Honam will probably rally around and unite in their support. Kim Dae-jung will likely play a major role in solidifying Honam votes behind the unified candidate of the anti-GNP side.

Another question with regard to regionalism is whether a third region, Chungcheong, will play a pivotal role in the regional contest as it did in the last two elections. If not for Kim's power-sharing agreement with Kim Jong-pil in 1997 and

Roh's promise of moving the capital city to the region in 2002, Chungcheong would not have voted for them as strongly as they did, which might well have reversed the election outcome in favor of the GNP candidate. So far anti-GNP parties and groups, including a small regional party from Chungcheong, have been unsuccessful in finding candidates or platforms that will mobilize the voters of the Chungcheong region in an effort to turn the tide against the leading GNP candidates in the polls.

Table 4. Candidate Vote Share in the Presidential Election

Year	Candidates	Seoul, Kyunggi	Chungcheong	Cholla	Kyungsang	Total
1992	Kim Young-sam	40.3%	36.9%	4.3%	68.8%	42.0%
	Kim Dae-jung	34.3%	27.8%	91.9%	10.1%	33.8%
1997	Lee Hoi-chang	38.3%	27.4%	3.3%	59.1%	38.7%
	Kim Dae-jung	42.0%	43.9%	94.4%	13.5%	40.3%
2002	Lee Hoi-chang	44.6%	41.3%	4.9%	69.4%	46.6%
	Roh Moo-hyun	50.9%	52.5%	93.2%	25.8%	48.9%

Source: Data from National Election Commission (1992, 1997, 2002).

It is important to note that one's position in foreign and security policy issues, concern about the state of the economy and regionalism are related to each other and will reinforce and strengthen the partisan support in the election. Honam residents, who supported the engagement policy regardless of their ideology because it was Kim Dae-jung's policy, have become genuine believers in progressive foreign and security policies. But Youngnam citizens, who opposed them for the same reasons, now sincerely disapprove of their effectiveness in failing to bring about the peace and prosperity of the country.¹² Therefore, the regional party alignment in the election will be strengthened by the foreign and security issues such as the North Korea policy. Although both the young and old are much more concerned about the economy than about political and social reforms,

young adults are less concerned about the economy and more concerned about political and social reforms, compared with the old. Consequently, generational voter cleavages based on ideology will also be reinforced by concerns about the economy and political social reforms.

We should also note that the relative importance of the three voting determinants, foreign and security policy, the economy, and regionalism, will, to a significant extent, decide the degree of competitiveness in the election. If the partisan support is largely determined by one or both of the ideological issues, such as foreign and security policy, and regionalism, the election outcome will be much closer than is currently predicted. But if economic issues predominate over the others, the unified candidate of the anti-GNP side will find it extremely difficult to win. This is why the GNP candidates have consistently emphasized the economy as the primary concern of the public, while the anti-GNP side is trying to base the electoral campaign on regionalism and ideology.

Conclusion

Since the East Asian Financial Crisis in 1997, Korea has experienced important changes. Since the economy entered that period of decline, the country has been looking for an alternative model of growth to state developmentalism, which proved ineffective in an open and globalized economy. Increasing are the demands for government social services due to the widening gaps between the rich and the poor and the rapidly aging nature of society. In politics, ideological cleavages between progressives and conservatives deepened during the Kim and Roh administrations, both of which have consistently pursued an engagement policy toward North Korea, tightened reins on big business, expanded social welfare for the poor and actively recruited progressives into the government. The Korean people will express in the upcoming presidential election their evaluations of and responses to these changes of the last ten years.

The foregoing analysis suggests that the 17th presidential election will likely show continuity and change. Contrary to the earlier expectation that regionalism would considerably weaken

after retirement of the three Kims, regionalism is likely to remain as strong as it was in the past, although it is uncertain what role the Chungcheong region will play. Ideological differences between candidates will surface again, centering around North Korea policy. The question is whether youthful voters will support the progressive anti-GNP candidate as much as they did in the 2002 election. Unlike past elections, the state of the economy is certain to have some effect upon the outcome. What is most interesting to watch in the election will be how much the overriding concern of the public about the economy will be translated into voting choices.

The 17th presidential election will determine the direction the country will take for the next five years. If the GNP candidate wins the election easily as recent popularity polls indicate, it will send a clear mandate to the government that it should reverse the progressive course in the direction of a conservative one in foreign and security policies and in social and economic policies. But if the anti-GNP candidate somehow pulls out a miraculous comeback victory, it will mean the continuation of the progressive course which the two previous administrations have taken.

Whichever side wins, the newly-elected president will be faced with three immediate tasks, none of which seems easy. Economic recovery will be the most important and probably the most difficult. The previous governments, including Roh's have failed to receive the economy, neither because of a lack of determination nor because of ill-designed policies. People are more worried about the future state of the economy than about the present one as the economy has yet to show signs of recovery. In the age of information and technology, growth by public works such as big construction projects may not be feasible or even desirable. The best the government can do will probably be to the further deregulation and privatization of the economy and cut the government budget. But experts agree that advocating neo-liberal reforms is largely rhetorical, since deregulation and privatization of the economy has already been achieved to no avail and cutting the budget may not be politically advisable when they involve welfare services for the poor and the aged.

The second task for the new president will be to build a consensus among the public regarding foreign and security policies including North Korea policy, which has unnecessarily been dividing the country along ideological and generational lines. The president must move toward the center and persuade both sides that the country has no economic or military leverage in dealing with the US and North Korea and no alternative to walking a fine line between the two antagonistic governments if she wants peaceful, cooperative relations with the North and at the same time, to maintain a strong political and military alliance with the US. Although the president is still the most powerful office in Korea, winning a presidential election alone does not guarantee a party power to enact whatever the laws it wishes. Needless to say, it must also control a majority of the seats in the legislature. In the 18th General Assembly election that will be held four months after the presidential election, the president's party may find it difficult to win a majority of the seats; that has been done only once following democratization by the UP in the 2004 election, thanks to the nationwide public sympathy toward Roh who was then impeached by the legislature for violation of election laws and suspended from presidency, waiting for the Constitutional Court's final decision.¹³ If the new president's party fails in obtaining a majority of the seats in the legislature, stalemate and immobilism will continue to plague South Korea.

The biggest obstacle for the new president in carrying out these tasks may be the weakened presidential authority that has developed during the five years of the Roh government. People have become so disenchanted with Roh's amateurism and self-righteousness, among other things, that they no longer respect and follow the presidential lead. The office has now become the target of popular and press criticism and ridicule. Recently, Roh could not carry out any policies, even those that are supported by the public, with effectiveness because it seems that people do not want him to succeed in anything.¹⁴ In order to recover presidential authority, the new president must quickly show that he or she is equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to manage the economy. He or she must also play a role of an arbiter bridging and mending the divisions between Honam and Youngnam, the young and the old, and business and

labor which will have been further exacerbated by two successive national elections. Otherwise, a honeymoon period for the new administration may be over soon after it starts.

Notes:

¹ The progressive-conservative ideological dimension used here to measure ideologies of the Korean parties corresponds to the European left-right dimension based on public ownership and social policy. One of the peculiar characteristics of the Korean ideological dimension is importance of foreign and security policy dimension regarding the country's reunification and self-assertive foreign policy. A. Ware, *Political Parties and Party Systems*, Oxford University Press, (1996)

² According to the newly adopted rules, the primary votes are composed of party members (30%), party delegates (20%), popular voting (30%) and popularity survey (20%).

³ Candidate Roh gained in the 2002 election the additional votes of 5% for his progressive position in foreign and security policy. Lee Kap-yun, "Vote Determinants of the 2002 Presidential Election in Korea" *Korea Journal*, Vol.43 No.2, (2003): 129-145.

⁴ Kang argues that ideological and generational cleavages appeared two years earlier in the 2000 General Assembly Election. Kang Won-Taik, "Yugwonja-ui Jeongchi Inyeom-gwa 16 dae Chong-seon" (Ideologies and the sixteenth Congressional Election: Regional and Ideological Cleavages). In *Hanguk-ui Seon-geo (Korean Election) 4*, edited by Jin Yeong-jae, (2002)101-144. Seoul: Korean Social Science Data Center.

⁵ Jhee Byong-Kuen, "Hanguk-esu Yinyum-gwa Tupyojaeui SunTaek: Se Gaji Yinyumtupyomodeleui Sulmungryuk-e Daehan Kyeonghumbunsuk (Ideology and Voter Choice in Korea: An Empirical Test of the Viability of Three Ideological Voting Models)" *Korean Political Science Review*. Vol. 40 No. 4, (2006. 12): 61-83. Chung Jin-min and Hwang Ah-an, "Minjoohwa Yihoo Hankook-eui Sungeo jungchi: Sedea Yoin-eul joongsim-eoro" (The Korean Electoral Politics in the Post-Democratization Era: A Generational Perspective), *Korean Political Science Review*, Vol.33, No.2, (1999): 115-134

⁶ Korean people may be prospective economic voters, though they are not retrospective voters. Lee Hyeon-woo, "Economic Voting in Korean Elections after Democratization", *International Journal of Korean Studies*, Vol. 4 No.1, (2000): 83-106.

⁷ Lee leads all the other candidates in economic performance scores expected by the public and Park is the second. Korean Social Opinion Institute, "17Dae Daeson, Saeroun Saeryukkwa Noseonui Daechungdol" (The 17th Presidential Election: Confrontation between New Forces and Ideologies) (2007) KSOI.

⁸ Progressive people call the presidential competition in the 17th election a struggle between authoritarian forces and peace and democratic forces.

⁹ Regional party cleavages as reflection of social and cultural cleavages may have been frozen in Lipset and Rokkan's sense. S. M. Lipset and S. Rokkan, "Cleavage Structures, Party System, and Voter Alignments" in Lipset and Rokkan eds. *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives*. (1967): 1-64. New York: Free Press.

¹⁰ Cho, Kisuk, *Jiyeokjuui Seon-geo-wa hamniyeok yugwonja (Regional Voting and Rational Voters)*. Seoul: Nanam Publishing House. (2000), Lee Kap-yun, *Hanguk-ui seon-geo-wa jiyeokjuui (Elections and Regionalism in Korea)*. Seoul: Oruem Publishing House. (1998), Ahn Soon-chul, *Jiyeokjuui Jungchiwa 16dae Daesun (The Politics of Regionalism and 16th Presidential Election)*, *Political Science Review in the 21st Century*, Vol. 13, No.2, (2003): 1-22.

¹¹ About two thirds of the Korean people expect that regionalism will affect the partisan voting in the December election. Opinion survey by Korean Research (April, 2007)

¹² Different issue positions among the regions with regard to foreign and security policy are results of the regional party alignment not those of ideologies. The region people differ little in ideological orientation and political attitudes such as political trust, interest and efficacy. Lee Kap-yun. "Jiyeokjuui Jungchijuk Junghyanggwa Taedo" (Political Orientations and Attitudes of Regionalism in Korea), *Hangukgwa Kukjejungchi (Korean and World Politics)*. Vol. 18, No. 2, (2002): 155-178.

¹³ Some argue that the 2004 Assembly election is a critical election in which the impeachment issue dominated the other issues including regionalism. Lee Jun Han and Leem Kyung Hoon, "Gwayeon "Joongdae Sungeo"inga? - 17dae Kookhoiuiwon Sungeo-esueui Yukwonja Tupyokyuljung-Yoin Bunsuk" (The 2004 National Assembly Election: A Critical Election? Korean Politics Studies), *Korean Political Science Review*, Vol.13, No.2, (2004): 117-141.

¹⁴ Roh had to withdraw a proposal of constitutional revision in early

2007 that will allow the incumbent president to run for the 2nd term because the public demanded the revision be postponed to the next administration in spite of the fact that a majority of them supported the change.