

**The Political Effects of the Introduction of “Two-Ballot Votes” System  
in Korea: Comparison with Japan, New Zealand, and Germany**

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This is a draft prepared for presentation at the CSES Conference in Taiwan (April 10-11, 2005). Please do not cite.

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## Introduction

Political institutions, and electoral systems in particular, are believed to affect and shape (if not predetermine) the way voters behave. In Korea, there has been an important change in the electoral system recently. That was the introduction of a “two-ballot” system in the 2004 National Assembly election. The purpose of this paper is to examine the effects this change has had upon Korean politics as well as upon Korean voters. In doing so, we take a comparative approach, and compare the Korean case with those of three other political systems that employ two-ballot systems, Japan, New Zealand, and Germany.

The previous electoral system of Korea was a peculiar one. It was a type of mixed system, where simple plurality dominated proportional representation. The dominance was not only in the seat allocation, but also in the balloting system. Each voter was allowed to cast only one vote to a candidate in the single-member district (SMD) race, and that vote would be also used in distributing proportional representation (PR) seats among the parties. In effect, one vote was used for the two different purposes.

On July 19, 2001, the Constitutional court ruled this electoral system unconstitutional. Accordingly, the National Assembly changed the existing electoral law, incorporating a “two-ballot” system. The new system allows voters to cast two votes, one to a candidate in SMD and the other to a party list in PR. The first vote is to be used to determine the winner in each district, while the second one is used for distributing proportional representation seats among parties.

This new electoral system is not totally new. It is an electoral system that is being implemented in Japan, Russia, and Italy. Since it includes both SMD and PR, and the two are operated independently of each other, it is often called “parallel mixed system.” In

this system, it is typical that SMD weighs more heavily than PR. For instance, the share of PR seats in Korea is only 18.7% (56 out of 299), and in Japan 37.5% (180 out of 480). For this reason, the system is also called “mixed-member majoritarian system” (MMM).

This system must be distinguished from another mixed system employed in Germany and New Zealand. The two countries’ electoral systems are almost identical, as New Zealand literally borrowed the German system. It is a mixed system in that it includes both SMD and PR, but here the two are operated in close connection, with PR playing the central role. In contrast to the above mentioned mixed-member majoritarian system, it is called “mixed-member proportional system” (MMP). To emphasize the close relationship (of compensatory nature) between SMD and PR, it is also called “compensatory mixed system.”

The focus of this paper is on the political effects of the introduction of a two-ballot system in Korea. In particular, we will rely heavily on the 2004 National Assembly election data (both macro level data and micro level survey data) for our analysis. In order to fully understand the effects of such an institutional change, however, we believe that a comparative approach is essential. It is fortunate that we have cross-nationally comparable data set available, that is, CSES data.

## The Effects on Voting Participation

One possible effect of the introduction of two-ballot system is the increase in voting participation. Theoretically, one is more likely to exercise one’s voting right when given two ballots than when given only one ballot. With two ballots, it is simply easier to find a candidate or a party worth voting for. Let us assume, for instance, that you like none of the candidates in your district. With the previous voting system, you may simply abstain. With the new system, however, you may still go out and vote if the policy platform proposed by one of the parties is appealing to you.

Of course, the unfamiliarity with the new system could have some negative effects on participation. According to many reports and some survey results, however, the confusion from the new voting system has not been very serious. Assuming this negative effect negligible, one can expect the turnout rate to go up with the new voting system.

The turnout rate in the 2004 election did go up as expected. In fact, the turnout rates in recent National Assembly elections had been consistently decreasing. As can be seen in <Table 1>, the turnout rate was 71.9% in 1992, dropped to 63.9% in 1996, and further dropped to 57.4%. The trend was reversed in the 2004 election, however, as the turnout rate went up to 60.6%, recording a net increase of 3.2% point. This is a significant increase, given the consistent downward trend in recent years.

It is difficult to confirm, of course, that this increase in turnout was mainly due to the new voting system. Another possible explanation for the turnout increase is that the Presidential impeachment by the National Assembly, which took place about a month before the election, had the effect of inducing many voters to the poll.

<Table 1> Trends of Voter Turnout Rates in the Four Political Systems

Korea	71.9% (1992)	63.9% (1996)	57.4% (2000)	<b>60.6%</b> (2004)
Japan	73.3% (1990)	67.3% (1993)	<b>59.7%</b> (1996)	<b>60.6%</b> (2000)
New Zealand	76.0% (1990)	76.7% (1993)	<b>78.4%</b> (1996)	<b>74.9%</b> (1999)
Germany	77.8% (1990)	79.0% (1994)	83.0% (1998)	79.1% (2002)

( ) = election year

<Table 2> Change in the Proportion of Respondents Certain to Vote after Impeachment by Age Groups

	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60 & over	total
Before Impeachment (2004.3.6)	40.7%	44.0%	50.0%	58.9%	59.1%	48.4%
After Impeachment (2004.3.16)	55.3%	67.9%	71.3%	77.6%	77.0%	67.9%

Source: Han-Gyeo-Re Shinmun (Newspaper) 2004. 3. 17

One survey result indirectly supports this alternative explanation. According to <Table 2>, the number of respondents saying that they would definitely vote in the upcoming election dramatically increased after the Presidential impeachment. It went up from 48.4% to 67.9%, an increase of almost 20% point. It is also to be noted that the increase was greatest among those voters in their 30s, who had the strongest support for President Roh Mu-hyun.

This evidence should not be taken as definitive, however. For one thing, surveys are proven to be inaccurate in regards to voting intention. Moreover, the evidence is about how the Presidential impeachment might have raised the voter turnout, not about why the turnout was higher than before. It is granted that the Presidential impeachment was likely to raise voters' interest in the election and thus increase the turnout rate to some degree, but it is difficult to believe that this single event was significant enough to reverse the trend of decreasing turnout rate.

A more plausible explanation would be that both the institutional factor (new voting system) and some other factors (including the Presidential impeachment) were responsible for the reversal of the trend of decreasing turnout rate. We do not have data, of course, to test how important the former was vis-à-vis other factors. We will have to

wait for the accumulation of longitudinal data to see if the introduction of two-ballot system would have a lasting effect on the turnout rate.

## The Effect on Election Outcome and Proportionality

Many analysts believe that the introduction of new voting system affected the electoral outcome. The most often discussed is the great success of Democratic Labor Party. The progressive party, which had no seat, was able to win a total of 10 seats (2 SMD seats and 8 PR seats), thus emerging as the third largest party. Many attribute the party's success to the adoption of two ballot system.

In more general terms, the new voting system is expected to have benefited nationally based parties more than regionally based parties. It is widely believed that PR system favors nation-wide parties, while simple plurality system favors regional parties. The new voting system, in essence, constitutes the strengthening of PR element in the sense that PR seats are distributed independently of SMD seats. It follows that the system is in favor of nationally based parties.

The electoral outcome supports this theoretical expectation. Those parties with relatively strong regional bases did not fare well. In particular, the United Liberal Democrats (ULD) with support base on Chungchung region, and Millenium Democratic Party (MDP) with Honam support base both suffered a great loss. On the other than, those parties with relatively wide support base (DLP and the Uri Party) fared much better. Not to mention the success of DLP as mentioned above, the Uri Party, which split from MDP with the rationale of overcoming regionalism, emerged as the majority party.

<Table 3> Electoral Outcomes and Proportionality by Political Parties

	Electorate vote			Party vote			Proportionality Index*
	vote (B)	seat(A)	B-A	vote (C)	seat (D)	D-C	
Uri	41.9%	53.1% (129)	+11.2	38.3%	41.1% (23)	+2.8	1.23
GNP	37.9%	41.2% (100)	+3.3	35.8%	37.5% (21)	+1.7	1.08
DLP	4.3%	0.8% (2)	-3.5	13.0%	14.3% (8)	+1.3	0.56
MDP	7.9%	2.1% (5)	-5.8	7.1%	7.1% (4)	0	0.39
ULD	2.6%	1.6% (4)	-1.0	2.8%	0%	-2.8	0.51

\* (electorate vote\* 0.813)+(party vote \* 0.187) / seats %

Uri=Uri Party, GNP=Grand National Party, DLP=Democratic Labor Party, MDP=Millennium Democratic Party, ULD=United Liberal Democrats

Another effect we can expect from the strengthening of PR element in the voting system is a rise of proportionality. In general, PR system is likely to be less biased against small parties, while simple plurality system tends to favor major parties at the expense of smaller ones. With the new voting system, therefore, small parties are expected to fare better than they did in previous elections, this resulting in a rise of the overall proportionality.

The proportionality index for each party can be calculated by considering the relative shares for SMD seats ( $243/299=0.813$ ) and for PR seats ( $56/299=0.187$ ). The proportionality index for the largest party, the Uri Party, was 1.23, while the index for the second largest Grand National Party (GNP) was 1.08. The two major parties did gain more seats than expected of their popular votes. Each of the three small parties, on the other hand, had a proportionality index that is lower than 1, suggesting that they were disadvantaged. (refer to <Table 3>)

What is more significant for our purpose is the comparison with the numbers for the previous election. In the last National Assembly election held in 2000, the largest party (GNP) had a proportionality index of 1.25, and the second largest (MDP) an index of 1.16. Overall, one can say that the level of proportionality in this election has improved from that in the previous election.

It is difficult to say, however, whether this improvement is due to the new voting system or merely due to the enlargement of PR seats. The share of PR seats has increased from 16.8% (46 out of 273) in the previous election to 18.7% (56 out of 299) in this election. There is little doubt that this enlargement has contributed to the improvement of proportionality to some degree, but it is likely (though not certain) that the change in ballot system has been also responsible for the improvement.

So far we have focused mainly on the effects of the new ballot system with macro level data. This macro level analysis is incomplete, since it lacks the micro level process by which the institutional change at the macro level has affected the macro level phenomena, such as electoral outcome and proportionality. Without the knowledge of this middle process, all the previous explanations could not help being inconclusive and provisional.

That process consists largely of how individual voters behaved, responding to the institutional change, that is, the introduction of a new voting system. Given the opportunity, did they ever split their ballots? If so, how many, in what manner, and for what purposes? To answer these questions, we now turn to the micro level analysis that is based on the CSES survey.

## The Effects on Voter Behavior



## The Extent of Split Ticket Voting

One basis question is how many voters split their tickets. Since there is no data on how voters actually cast their ballots, we have to use some estimation methods. One is to use aggregate data at the national level. We simply subtract the party vote share from the SMD vote share for each party, take an absolute value for the difference, add all the absolute values, and then divide the sum by 2 to account for double counts. Following this method, 7.2% of the Korean voters are estimated to have split their tickets in the election. (refer to <Table 4>)

Another similar method is to use aggregate data at the district level. Again, we calculate the difference between the party vote and the SMD vote for each party at each district. If we add them up, it amounts to 4,324,025, which is around 20% of all votes (21,518,500). Dividing it by 2 to account for double counts, we can estimate that around 10% of the voters split their tickets in the election.

Of course, these are all very rough estimates, based on aggregate level data. For a more reliable estimate, we can rely on survey results. One way of doing it is to directly ask respondents whether they have split their tickets or not. This method was used in a couple of post-election surveys. According to them, the share of ticket splitters is estimated to be around 35% (35.3% in one poll and 34.1% in the other).

Another way of estimating with survey results is to ask respondents which party (and candidates from which party) they voted for in the district contest as well as in PR contest. The researcher can then determine objectively whether each respondent has split the tickets or not, based on the responses. This is the method used in CSES survey. According to this method, around 20% of the voters are estimated to have split their tickets in the election.

<Table 4> Gap between Party Vote and District Vote for Each Party

	party	party vote(A)	electorate vote(B)	B-A
Korea	Uri	38.3	41.9	3.6

	GNP	35.8	37.9	2.1
	DLP	13.0	4.3	-8.7
	MDP	7.1	7.9	0.8
	ULD	2.8	2.6	-0.2
Japan	Liberal Democratic	32.8	38.6	5.8
	New Frontier	28.0	28.0	0
	Democratic Party	16.1	10.6	-5.5
	Social Democratic	6.4	2.2	-4.2
	Communist Party	13.1	12.6	-0.5
New Zealand	Labour	41.3	44.7	3.4
	National	20.9	30.5	9.6
	NZ First	10.4	4.0	-6.4
	ACT NZ	7.1	3.6	-3.5
	Green Party	7.0	5.4	-1.6
	UFNZ	6.7	4.6	-2.1
Germany	Social Democratic	38.5	41.9	3.4
	CDU/CSU	38.5	41.1	2.6
	Alliance 90/Greens	8.6	5.6	-3.0
	Free Democratic	7.4	5.8	-1.6
	Democratic Socialism	4.0	4.3	0.3

<Table 5> The Extent of Split-ticket Voting for the Four Political Systems

	Korea (2004)	Japan (1996)	New Zealand (2002)	Germany (2002)
Straight Voting	80.8%	74.9%	65.6%	75.8%
Split Voting	19.2%	25.1%	34.4%	24.2%

Note: Parties with less than 1% votes are excluded.  
Source: CSES Module II (Japan= CSES Module I)

For an international comparison, the extent of split-ticket voting in Japan, Germany, and

New Zealand is also reported in <Table 5>. Since the same set of questionnaires was administered to all the countries, the numbers reported here are very much comparable. According to the survey results, split-ticket voting is most prevalent in New Zealand (34.4%), followed by Japan (25.1%), Germany (24.2%), and Korea (19.2%).

How accurate are these estimates? New Zealand, as the country publishes the number of actual ticket splitters based on official records, provides us with an opportunity to check the accuracy. According to the official report, 39.0% of the voters actually split their tickets, and the estimate reported from the survey was 34.4%. Considering that votes for independent candidates and very small parties (less than 1% of the total votes) were excluded from the survey estimate, one can say that the survey estimate is quite close to the actual number.

Returning to the international comparison, Korea seems to lag behind other countries in terms of split ticket voting. Why is it so? One possible reason is the unfamiliarity with the new system. Considering the fact New Zealand showed a high rate of split ticket voting in the first election with a two ballot system, however, this explanation is not so compelling.

A more plausible explanation would be that there are some cultural, institutional, or structural factors that inhibit split-ticket voting in Korea. For example, the relative underdevelopment of political parties might force Korean voters to cast their ballots primarily on the basis of personal factors. Or the relatively little weight given to the PR seats might prevent them from realizing the value of the second vote, thus discouraging split ticket voting.

### **Types of Ticket Splitting**

Split ticket voting is usually classified into two types. One is strategic voting, and the other non-strategic voting. Originally, strategic voting refers to the act of voting for a viable candidate in SMD even if one prefers another nonviable candidate most. This

voting is strategic in the sense that one tries to avoid wasting one's vote. Most typically, the viable candidate is from a major party, and the most preferred (yet nonviable) candidate is from a small party. In the context of two-ballot system, therefore, strategic voting consists of voting for a major party in SMD and voting for a small party in PR.

One could further divide strategic voting into two, on the basis of the ideological closeness of the two parties supported. When the two are ideologically close and thus likely to form a coalition,<sup>1</sup> it may be called "coalition-motivated" strategic voting.<sup>2</sup> When the two parties are not close ideologically, thus unlikely to form a coalition, it is simply strategic voting to avoid wasting votes.

Non-strategic voting can be also divided into three different types. One involves voting for a major party in SMD, and voting for another major party in PR. This type is sometimes referred to as "check and balance motivated" voting in the sense that the voter is trying to check and balance the two major parties competing with each other. Although it has some strategic element, it is not genuinely "strategic" voting as we use the term here.

The other two types of non-strategic voting include the case of voting for a small party in SMD and a major party in PR, and the case of voting for a small party in SMD and another small party in PR. These two types of split ticket voting are difficult to explain in terms of instrumental rationality. There might be some emotional and/or supra-rational factors involved. These five types of split-ticket voting are summarized in <Table 6>

#### <Table 6> Types of Ticket-splitting Voting

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<sup>1</sup> It may be a coalition government in a Parliamentary system, and simply a policy coalition in a Presidential system.

<sup>2</sup> Broadly speaking, coalition motivated strategic voting could include the case of voting for a small party in SMD and voting for a major party in PR as long as the two parties are ideologically close to each other. Such a case is excluded in this paper on the basis that it violates the basic principle of getting most out of one's vote by failing to utilize the chance to avoid wasting one's vote.

Basic Types	Detailed Types	Support Patterns (SMD vote/PR vote)
strategic voting	coalition motivated (Type 1)	major party/small party (the two parties ideologically close)
	avoid wasting vote (Type 2)	major party/small party (the two parties ideologically not close)
non-strategic voting	check & balance motivated (Type 3)	major party/major party
	no particular type (Type 4)	small party/major party
	no particular type (Type 5)	small party/small party

<Table 7> Distribution of Split-ticket Voters across Different Types (%)

Types	Korea	Japan	New Zealand	Germany
Type 1	39.9	28.9	52.6	56.6
Type 2	14.4	19.5	5.4	3.5
Type 3	23.1	25.9	13.5	12.1
Type 4	19.2	13.2	18.7	25.8
Type 5	3.4	12.5	9.9	2.1

<Table 7> shows the distribution of split ticket voters across the five different types for the four political systems. The overall patterns of distribution are similar across different countries, with strategic voting (and Type 1, in particular) being the dominant type. The fact that Korea's pattern of distribution is similar to the other countries is encouraging, as it implies that the new ballot system did not cause much confusion among voters. It seems that most voters had an adequate understanding of the new system and responded

to in a proper manner.

If one looks at the distribution more carefully, there are some notable differences among the four countries. First of all, Korea and Japan show relatively high percentages for Type 3 voters. In contrast to the low percentages in New Zealand (13.5%) and in Germany (12.1%), around a quarter of split ticket voters belong to this type (Korea 23.1%, and Japan 25.9%).

The difference might be explained in terms of numerous factors. One is the political culture. Korean and Japanese voters might value moderation more than the Western voters do. Therefore, they might try to prevent one party from becoming a dominant party by splitting their two ballots to the two major parties. Alternatively, the relatively greater vulnerability of small parties in Korea and Japan (particularly severe in Korea) might force the voters to give their ballots exclusively to the major parties.

Another cross-national difference is that Korea and Japan have relatively low percentages of Type 1 voters. Although Type 1 has the greatest percentage among the five types in each of the two countries (Korea 39.9%, and Japan 28.9%), these numbers pale when compared to the numbers in New Zealand (52.6%) and Germany (56.6%).

Again, the difference can be explained by various factors. The vulnerability of small parties in Korea and Japan, noted above, might be also employed here. A more important and more relevant factor, however, would be the relative lack of ideological diversity and clarity on the part of Korean and Japanese political parties. This is particularly true in Korea, where the North-South Korean confrontation has long inhibited the growth of progressive parties. It is only in recent years that the DLP has been recognized as a significant political actor.

## Summary and Discussion

The purpose of the study was to find out the political effects of a two-ballot system in the context of Korean politics. Major findings can be summarized as

follows:

1. The turnout rate in the 2004 election which adopted two-ballot system for the first time did go up as expected.
2. The electoral outcome of supports our theoretical expectations that two-ballot system strengthened overall proportionality among political parties.
3. Even though the rate of split ticket voting was relatively low compared to other counties, about 20% of voters did split their votes.
4. Theoretically we suggested five types of ticket splitting. Coalition motivated voters were predominant. 39.9% of voters were categorized into this type. Check and balance motivated voters were reached 23.1% of the total voters.

Based on the above major findings, we can make several suggestions on the political effects of two-ballot system. Firstly, Two-ballot system seemed to exert positive functions on the political participation. Secondly, two-ballot system raised the representativeness of national assembly by increasing overall proportionality among parties. Thirdly, two-ballot system seems to make coalition building easier in terms of ideology or policies.

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