

Is Regional Voting Still Effective?

Empirical Analyses of Local Elections in Korea

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| ABSTRACT |

This paper aims at examining whether or not regional voting behavior disappears in Korean politics. Regional voting behavior has been one of crucial factors to affect election outcomes in Korea, thereby suffering from regional conflicts. A series of recent studies shows, however, that it may fade away. Utilizing from 1995 to 2010 gubernatorial elections, it shows that regional voting behavior remains to be a significant element in Korean elections. It concludes that Korean politics is still suffering from regional fragmentation.

Key Words | regionalism, residence regionalism, birthplaceregionalism, local elections, Korea

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INTRODUCTION

These days, we can say that the biggest factor that determines all elections in Korea is regionalism. Regionalism in voting behavior, which is now the main issue in Korean political society, became the crucial factor affecting all elections starting with the Youngnam, Honam and Chungcheong regions and, as a result, the quantity of research into regional feelings, regional conflict, and regional voting behavior started to grow. Findings as to the causes of regionalism put forward various arguments as explanations, including uneven economic growth, political mobilization, and rational choice theory etc. (Lee, 1998; Chol, 1999; Chol, 2008; Cho, 2000; Chol, 2002; Kang, 2003; Kim, 2004; Park, 2004; Yoo, 2004).

However, the problem of regionalism has continued for almost 30 years since the 1987 democratization and, over this time, regional voting behavior has alleged to show gradual changes, especially after the 16th presidential election in 2002. This might be shown by the candidacy of Lee Myung-bak in the 17th presidential election in 2007 where he claimed nearly 10 percent of the vote in Honam region. This is significant because it marks a change in the voting pattern of Honam region where the percentage share of votes has been robust. In addition, in the 18th presidential election in 2012 regional voting behavior appeared to be less in Busan, Ulsan and Kyungnam, where are sub-regions of Youngnam, compared to past elections, even though in Daegu and Kyungpook provinces, where are also sub-regions of Youngnam, regional voting pattern was still apparent.

Scholarly debate on regionalism, however, is still on-going. Some argues that regionalism and regional voting behavior still exist (Jeon and Cha, 2007; Jeon, Kim and Seo, 2008; Eom and Kim, 2010). In recent elections, regionalism has been eased but still there in Daegu, Kyungpook provinces, which are sub-regions of Youngnam, and Gwangju, Jeonnam regions, which are sub-regions of Honam (Jhee, Shin and Eom, 2013). Other argues that analysis of regional voting behavior elsewhere shows that it has changed. The recent elections which have taken place in Youngnam and Honam have not displayed the same patterns

of regionalist voting behavior as before (Chol and Cho, 2005). In Busan, Ulsan, and Kyungnam provinces in particular, regional voting behavior has declined considerably compared to the past (Kang, 2003; Lee, 1998; Cho, 1996; Cho, 2005).

However, the most significant problem of these arguments is that there is no hard evidence to prove that whether or not regional voting has been faded away in a nationwide. This phenomenon is limited to only some regions. Furthermore, people can move out their hometown into a new residence; by definition of regionalism, people with a place away from home cast a vote along with their hometown. Only showing the residential vote percentage is not enough to show a change in regional voting behavior.

To research the conflicting claims as to whether regional voting behavior has changed, the paper will attempt to explain the phenomenon through empirical evidence. For this, the paper will study in detail whether or not regional voting behavior has changed based on the nationwide surveys as well as on the birth place of survey respondents conducted after the last five local elections.

The following are the reasons for analyzing the local elections. Since the many researches related to the voting behavior of the regionalism is based on the analysis of the presidential and parliamentary elections results, the research on the voting behavior of local elections in the regionalism has a meaningful difference comparing to the previous studies. Even though the origin of the voting behavior presents a disagreement, in one hand, democratic phenomenon was strongly indicated before the election but on the other hand, after the democratization not only the presidential election but also the result of general elections and local elections became the dominant factors for the election. Moreover, the regional voting behavior appears usually through the national politics, but here the voting behavior has shown in the local region. Therefore, it will be meaningful to analyze the local elections. Therefore, in order to see the changes in voting behavior which appeared strongly after the democratization, it is necessary to analyze the local elections.

The structure of the paper is as follows: the second chapter reviews the existing

research relevant to local voting behavior changes and argues the point that regionalism is continuing but has changed. After this, the paper will try to validate the hypotheses. In the third chapter, the empirical validation of the proposed hypotheses looks at data and methodologies and in the fourth chapter, the paper explores regionalism analysis and whether to use the existing sources or change it through a survey conducted after the last five local elections throughout the province. Finally, an empirical analysis of the conclusions of these five chapters will show the views of and phenomena related to regionalist voting behavior.

THEORY AND LITERATURE

Prior to discussing regionalism, it is necessary to clarify what the concept of regionalism consists of. When looking at the definitions of existing research, one may find so different kinds of definitions; “regional awareness and emotion, systematically organized in terms of a single practical ideology and belief system, which stems from regional awareness and emotion” (Kim, 1997a), “the egocentrism of region, which is formed for the unity and identity of regional insiders, relative to the other regions as a competition or for the exclusion” (Kim, 1997b), “the cultural, social, economic and political independence and autonomy of the region based on a spatial unity” (Choi, 1999), “a methodical belief, which intends to increase profit in the region” (Kim, 2010), and collective consciousness beyond personal prejudices (Moon, 2004). We can integrate these various definitions, and what they hold in common is “regionalism based on regional benefit in pursuit of collective consciousness,” which is a sufficient definition, with region including both the place of ‘residence’ and the place of ‘birth.’ However, the topic of ‘regionalism’ is not itself, it is necessary to point out, the same as ‘regionalist voting behavior.’ In other words, it is necessary to define ‘regionalism’

in a broad sense to differentiate it from the concept of voting behavior.

In this regard, there are various definitions from existing research. One of the most representative political acts of regionalism, regionalist voting behavior is “a phenomenon where voters, when choosing a candidate, focus on a candidate's birth place or the candidates who come from the birth place of affiliated party leaders, or, perhaps one of the most important, a candidate who symbolizes the region where voters are considering voting for the affiliated political party” (Kim, 2004). In other words, regional voting behavior refers to political acts of regionalism seeking for collective interests based on regional unit (Kang, 2003; Park, 2010; Kim and Kim, 2010; Moon, 2004).

Recently, scholars of regional voting behavior debate on whether or not regional voting behavior has remained unchanged. First, in the case of recent elections it was pointed out that regional voting behavior did not appear in Youngnam and Honam regions compared to the past. In particular, in Youngnam region, regional voting behavior in Busan, Ulsan, and Kyungnam was somewhat reduced compared to the past. The reasons were that regional economic discrimination and the biased selection of persons from different regions, which had been considered as a main cause of regionalism, had disappeared regionalism. Therefore, unlike in the past, the specific reason for each region to compete with or be vigilant towards others disappeared. In addition, the political force mobilized by the policies of “Three Kims” represented by Young-sam Kim, Dae-joong Kim, and Jong-pil Kim, had ended, and gradually changed to more reasonable choices in the perspective of regional development (Kang 2003; Lee 1998; Cho 1996; Cho 2005). Supporting such an analysis are the changes in the percentage of votes in Busan and Kyungnam in recent elections (Choi and Cho 2005).

However, there is also evidence that regional voting behavior still persists (Jeon and Cha 2007; Jeon, Kim and Suh 2008). Even though regional voting behavior appeared to have declined as a factor in the recent elections compared to the past, this is true only of some regions and candidates, and the regional voting patterns for regional political parties in Daegu-Kyungpook, which are sub-regions of Youngnam, and Gwangju-Jeonnam, which are sub-regions of

Honam, still remain as before. In addition, the voters usually succeed in imposing similar political beliefs and attitudes through political socialization within those same regional parties (Jhee, Shin and Eom 2013); as a result, the political predispositions which have already formed will not be easily changed.

Viewed on the basis of the existing literature, the regional voting behavior in Youngnam and Honam regions have the potential to be an important focus of research in relation to the two different viewpoints of regionalism. In addition, this paper will investigate the differentiation of regional voting behavior in Youngnam and Honam regions. Thus, based on the existing literature and theories, it is possible to make a hypothesis, as follows.

Therefore, the research paper will attempt to test statistically whether such a tendency exists.

Hypothesis

Voters who were born in Honam compared to voters who were born in Youngnam will select the gubernatorial candidate from the Liberal party rather than the gubernatorial candidate from the Conservative Party in the five local elections.

Hypothesis2

Voters who reside in Honam compared to voters who reside in Youngnam will select the gubernatorial candidate from the Liberal party rather than the gubernatorial candidate from the Conservative Party in the five local elections.

We attempt to examine Hypothesis 1 and 2 through the five cycles of local elections, thereby showing that the trend in regional voting behavior became weaker or remained. In the next section, the paper introduces data and variables to verify these research hypotheses, and outlines the methodology.

DATA AND METHODS

The research intends to examine whether regional voting behavior is really changing based on the results of five recent local elections. For this, the study surveys gubernatorial candidates in the local elections for governor in the first to the sixth local elections, except for the third local election where there were questions on the birth place of a respondent. This survey will be the research focus of the paper.

The research will focus on the two major parties, which happens to be regional parties in accordance with the research hypothesis. Here, the regional parties are: the Democratic Liberal Party vs. the Democratic Party from the first election; the Grand National Party vs. the New Politics National Conference from the second election; the Grand National Party vs. the Uri Party from the fourth; the Grand National Party vs. the Democratic Party from the fifth; and the Saenuri Party vs. the New Politics Alliance for Democracy from the sixth election. The parties mentioned above are divided into the former in each case which we will generally call a Conservative Party and the latter which we will call a Liberal Party. Based on this, it is necessary to explain why the research scope is limited to regional parties.

The purpose of the research is to conduct an analysis by comparing the “Liberal” parties, which can be considered parties associated with the Honam region, with the “Conservative” parties, which can be considered parties associated with the Youngnam region (Kim 2004). The analysis focuses on Youngnam and Honam as regions where regionalism has been present for a long time. The survey data are based on “Political awareness of voters” implemented by Korean Social Science Data Center after the regional elections and statistical materials for the research are obtained from the local elections statistics system of the National Election Commission.

The dependent variable is the selection of gubernatorial candidate, and the major independent variables are the regional variable of “birthplace” and

“residency” of a respondent. The processing of regional variables that are independent variables divides the regions as follows: Kyungpook, Kyungnam, Daegu, Busan, and Ulsan are related to “Youngnam” region, Gwangju, Jeonpook, and Jeonnam are related to “Honam” region, Daejeon, Chungnam, Chungpook are related to “Chungcheong” region and the “other region” will include those regions which are not mentioned above. Then, the value of the regional variables will be coded according to the birthplace of region and the residence of region. For example, the variable of “Youngnam_R” (Youngnam resident) will be coded as 1 if a respondent resides in Youngnam region, and 0 otherwise. In a similar way, the variable of “Youngnam_B” (Youngnam birthplace) will be coded as 1 if a respondent was born in Youngnam region regardless of a current residence, and 0 otherwise. The rest of the regional variables are coded in a similar vein. The dependent variable, “selection of gubernatorial candidate,” will use the responses that what parties a voter selected from the gubernatorial candidates.

The paper uses two types of variables as a control variable to prevent a spurious relationship between the selection of regions and parties. The first control variable is generation effects (Cho and Eom 2012; Shin, Jin, Gross and Eom 2005). In general, much electoral research shows that young people tend to be more liberal but, on the other hand, elderly people are more likely to be conservative. Therefore, young people are likely to vote for relatively liberal parties (Park and Kang, 2013). Age variables are ordinal variables and categorized as 20s, 30s, 40s, and over 50s. In addition, ideology was inserted into the model measured from 0 (very liberal) to 5 (very conservative). Discussion so far can be summarized in the following equation.

$$\text{Vote}_i = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Honam_R}_i + \beta_2 \text{Honam_B}_i + \beta_3 \text{Chungcheong_R}_i + \beta_4 \text{Chungcheong_B}_i + \beta_5 \text{Other_R}_i + \beta_6 \text{other_B}_i + \beta_7 \text{Age}_i + \beta_8 \text{Ideology}_i + e_i$$

Multinomial Logit analysis is utilized for regressing the Vote on the independent variable, because the Vote variable is a discrete choice model that explains the probability of selecting exclusive alternatives. This analysis’s base outcome

for dependent variable is “voted for Conservative Party’s Candidate. And, the base categories for the regional variables are “Youngnam_R” and “Youngnam_B.” The research topic of this paper is the changes in regional voting behavior. Therefore, the research shows the result of analyzing the two major political parties with regionalism while using multinomial logit analysis.

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

This paper analyzed changes in regional voting behavior based on candidate selection in gubernatorial elections from the first election to the sixth. Specifically, we analyzed residence regionalism, birthplace regionalism and an integrated model.

Table 1 is a multinomial logit analysis of regionalism based on residence. Table 1 shows that residence regionalism continues to be statistically significant whether one analyze the 1st local election, the 2nd local election, the 4th local election, 5th local election or 6th local election.

(Table 1) Residence Regionalism

	1 st Election	2 nd Election	4 th Election	5 th Election	6 th Election
Honam_R	3.615** (0.388)	7.876** (1.089)	3.154** (0.787)	3.949** (0.437)	4.457** (0.578)
Chungcheong_R	1.517** (0.445)	3.719** (0.634)	0.531 (0.336)	2.254** (0.358)	1.097** (0.321)
Other_R	2.662** (0.259)	3.900** (0.431)	-0.206 (0.247)	1.277** (0.243)	1.050** (0.219)
Ideology	-1.037** (0.093)	-0.332** (0.087)	-0.506** (0.118)	-0.020 (0.024)	-0.524** (0.051)

Age	-0.191*	-0.082	-0.235*	-0.577**	-0.021**
	(0.087)	(0.084)	(0.096)	(0.088)	(0.006)
Intercept	1.534**	-2.177**	0.819	0.142	42.884**
	(0.371)	(0.520)	(0.422)	(0.313)	(11.647)
N	1022	1217	635	674	879
Pseudo R ²	0.2611	0.2014	0.2856	0.2332	0.2489

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

As shown in Table 1, Honam residents tend to favor liberal party candidates throughout all the elections, compared to Youngnam residents. For example, Honam_R's coefficient is positive and significant from the first election to the sixth election. Compared to Youngnam residents, Honam residents tend to choose the liberal party candidates rather than the conservative party's ones. In addition, Chungcheong_R's and other_R's coefficients are positive and significant for all except the fourth election. It means that compared to Youngnam residents, the residents of Chungcheong and other regions choose the liberal party candidates over conservative party candidates except in the fourth election. The insignificance in the fourth election may be due to a negative assessment of the President Roh's administration. The factors of ideology and age show the expected results and reach statistical significance, as existing literature pointed out. All in all, the analysis from 1995 to 2010 shows that regional voting behavior based on the residence does not go away.

〈Table 2〉 Birthplace Regionalism

	1 st Election	2 nd Election	4 th Election	5 th Election	6 th Election
Honam_B	2.982**	5.548**	1.822**	3.265**	3.096**
	(0.299)	(0.468)	(0.367)	(0.330)	(0.332)
Chungcheong_B	1.572**	3.134**	0.081	1.527**	0.802**
	(0.315)	(0.381)	(0.313)	(0.301)	(0.271)
Other_B	2.100**	2.669**	-0.244	1.141**	0.602**

	(0.253)	(0.295)	(0.259)	(0.232)	(0.210)
Ideology	0.936**	-0.343**	-0.448**	-0.017	-0.504**
	(0.091)	(0.088)	(0.120)	(0.021)	(0.051)
Age	-0.146	-0.065	-0.335**	-0.603**	-0.025**
	(0.085)	(0.084)	(0.100)	(0.088)	(0.006)
Intercept	-4.065**	-1.274**	0.859*	0.377	49.798**
	(0.429)	(0.411)	(0.420)	(0.292)	(11.911)
N	1022	1217	635	674	879
Pseudo R^2	0.2224	0.1651	0.2566	0.1862	0.2416

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Table 2 is a multinomial logit analysis of regionalism based on birthplace. Similar to the results in Table 1, Table 2 shows that birthplace regionalism is continuously significant in an expected direction. Honam_B's coefficient is positive and significant from the first election to the sixth. Compared to respondents born in Younngnam, respondents born in Honan tend to choose the liberal party candidates rather than the conservative party ones. In addition, the Chungcheong_B's and other_B's coefficients are positive and significant except for the fourth election. Thus, compared to respondents born in Younngnam, respondents born in Chungcheong and other regions tend to choose the liberal party candidates rather than the conservative party ones except in the fourth election.

(Table 3) Integrated Model of Regionalism

	1 st Election	2 nd Election	4 th Election	5 th Election	6 th Election
Honam_R	2.254**	5.355**	2.217*	2.461**	3.001**
	(0.517)	(1.140)	(0.936)	(0.558)	(0.677)
Chungcheong_R	0.963	2.543**	0.684	1.777**	0.977*
	(0.540)	(0.713)	(0.585)	(0.467)	(0.430)
Other_R	2.101**	2.901**	-0.345	0.829*	0.819*

	(0.338)	(0.489)	(0.465)	(0.349)	(0.320)
Honam_B	1.578**	3.380**	1.578**	1.815**	1.688**
	(0.418)	(0.515)	(0.550)	(0.434)	(0.422)
Chungcheong_B	0.599	1.615**	-0.301	0.526	0.199
	(0.397)	(0.444)	(0.554)	(0.402)	(0.369)
Other_B	0.661*	1.049**	-0.026	0.541	0.029
	(0.335)	(0.351)	(0.463)	(0.329)	(0.303)
Ideology	-0.947**	-0.346**	-0.433**	-0.016	-0.506**
	(0.094)	(0.091)	(0.122)	(0.021)	(0.052)
Age	-0.192*	-0.079	-0.342**	-0.601**	-0.026**
	(0.089)	(0.087)	(0.103)	(0.091)	(0.006)
Intercept	1.549**	-2.440**	0.871*	0.075	52.606**
	(0.361)	(0.542)	(0.434)	(0.318)	(12.232)
N	1022	1217	635	674	879
Pseudo R^2	0.2827	0.2238	0.3304	0.2585	0.2712

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Table 3 is the integrated model. In this model, both birthplace regionalism and residence regionalism are considered together. In Table 3, Honam_B's coefficient and Honam_R's coefficient show that regional voting behavior remains unchanged. That is, these coefficients are positive and statistically significant from the first election to the sixth election. It means that compared to respondents born in Youngnam and Youngnam residents, respondents born in Honam tend to choose the liberal party candidates rather than the conservative party ones. The same was true for Honan residents. In addition, some of the Chungcheong_R's coefficients and other_R's coefficients show an expected direction with statistical significance. Of course, Ideology and Age variables achieved a statistical significance with an expected direction.

In summary, despite scholarly debate on regionalism, empirical analysis of

regional voting behavior show that the phenomena appeared constantly based on both residence and birthplace. In particular, despite the negative assessment of the late President Roh’s administration, Honam still showed strong support for the liberal parties.

One may argue that change in regional voting behavior may occur at the sub-regional level (Park and Kang, 2013). That is, it can be shown in Busan·Kyungnam provinces, while Daegu·Kyungpook provinces continuously show regional voting behavior. Thus, the analysis should be done at the sub-regional level. Therefore, we divide Youngnam region into “Daegu, Kyungpook” and “Busan, Ulsan, Kyungnam” for the analysis of sub-regionalism. “Busan·Kyungnam residents” (BK_R) is coded as 1 if a respondent resides in Busan or Kyungnam provinces and 0 otherwise. And, “Busan·Kyungnam birthplace” (BK_B) is coded as 1 if a respondent was born in Busan or Kyungnam provinces and 0 otherwise. The results are shown in Table 4. The base category in Table 4 is respondents residing and born in Daegu·Kyungpook.

〈Table 4〉 Integrated Model of Regionalism at the Sub-Regional Level

	1 st Election	2 nd Election	4 th Election	5 th Election	6 th Election
BK_R	15.540 (903.677)	14.115 (522.044)	0.014 (0.688)	0.510 (0.612)	-0.698 (0.543)
Honam_R	17.664 (903.678)	18.896 (522.045)	2.222* (1.056)	2.773** (0.692)	3.665** (0.734)
Other_R	17.409 (903.677)	16.458 (522.044)	-0.176 (0.673)	1.279* (0.506)	0.331 (0.474)
BK_B	0.136 (0.506)	0.656 (0.634)	0.926 (0.611)	-0.017 (0.502)	1.088* (0.466)
Honam_B	1.583** (0.515)	3.677** (0.612)	2.108** (0.679)	1.805** (0.514)	0.900* (0.447)
Other_B	0.632 (0.425)	1.449** (0.472)	0.517 (0.604)	0.564 (0.399)	0.957* (0.412)

Ideology	-0.920** (0.093)	-0.348** (0.091)	-0.418** (0.122)	-0.018 (0.022)	-0.520** (0.052)
Age	-0.213* (0.089)	-0.070 (0.087)	-0.342** (0.102)	-0.589** (0.089)	-0.020** (0.006)
Intercept	-14.299 (903.677)	-16.318 (522.044)	0.267 (0.534)	-0.262 (0.434)	40.604** (11.860)
N	1022	1217	635	674	879
Pseudo R^2	0.2749	0.1962	0.3168	0.2364	0.2696

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

BK(Busan and Kyungnam)

Table 4 shows, the difference between Daegu-Kyungpook and Busan-Kyungnam did not appear from the first election to the fifth election. None of BK_R variables show a statistical significance, and most of BK_B except the sixth election are not statistically significant. That is, there is no sub-regional difference of regional voting behavior, at least Youngnam region. In addition, Table 4 shows that based on both birthplace and residence, Honam showed continued support for the liberal parties.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This paper set out to examine the possibility of changes in regional voting behavior in Korea in six local elections. Through this, by presenting two conflicting opinions for the prediction of regional voting behavior, this paper tried to present empirical evidence of the opinions.

The findings can be summarized as follows. First, regional voting behavior appears continually, centering on Youngnam and Honam regions. Secondly, this trend has been observed as valid on the basis of both residence and birthplace.

Thirdly, sub-regionalism, which argues that regional voting behavior differ within alleged regional blocs, seem to have not specifically appeared, at least in Youngnam region. Based on these results, there appears to be little possibility of change in regional voting behavior in Korea. Therefore, it is expected that elections in Korea will continue to be unable to escape the effects of regional domination.

However, it is necessary to point out the limits of this research. Because of data limitation, this paper did not analyze sub-regions of Honam; this paper was only possible to analyze the differentiation of Youngnam regionalism, while Honam could not be analyzed. In addition, because the data relating to the third local election was not analyzed, the overall data is limited.

Despite these problems, we can conclude that regional voting behavior still appears to be a factor in Korean elections, and it continues to exert a major influence on elections when one looking at Youngnam and Honam regions or people who were born Youngnam and Honam regions.

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