Democracy is regarded as the greatest achievement of the Republic of Korea (ROK), along with the rapid economic growth in what is dubbed “the miracle on the Han River.” Korean democracy was based on the idea of participatory democracy and active voter participation. Recently, various efforts such as making the law on the families to overcome solitary residents, implementing an early-voting system, and lowering the election age have been introduced to guarantee voting rights and increase voter participation. The ROK has adopted a five-year single-term system for the presidency and the unicameral National Assembly. National Assembly members are elected in single-member district first-past-the-post voting. These members are also elected in proportional representation, with seats allocated by political parties.

In the 19th presidential election in May 2017, 13 candidates, such as Moon Jae-in of the Democratic Party of Korea, Hong Jun-pyo of the Liberty Korea Party, Ahn Cheol-soo of People's Party, Yoo Seung-min of the Bareun Party, and Sim Sang-jung of the Justice Party, ran for the position. The turnout rate was 77.2%. Voters chose Moon Jae-in of the Democratic Party of Korea, who received 13,141,913 votes (41.09%). Candidate Moon Jae-in took first place in the Seoul Metropolitan Area, the Honam region, the Chungcheong region, and Busan. Candidate Hong Jun-pyo received high support in the Yeongnam region and some parts of Gangwon. Presidential elections are generally between candidates of either a progressive or conservative political leaning. Voting tendencies vary by region, urban-rural divide, class, and gender. Voting tendencies by region and generation have struggled as important factors in election results, leading to high interest in the differences in voter turnout by region and generation.

In the 18th presidential election in 2012, Park Geun-hye of the Saenuri Party, Moon Jae-in of the Democratic United Party, and independent Park Yong-sun, Kim Soo-yeon, Kang Kuk-joon, and Kim Sam-jae ran for the position. Park Geun-hye of the Saenuri Party won the presidency with 33.03% of the vote. In the 19th presidential election, Moon Jae-in of the Democratic Party of Korea received 41.09% of the votes. Jung-gu Hong of the Liberty Korea Party, the second most voted candidate, received 26.14%. There are a few cities and districts that show results similar to the national average, such as Gwangju, Hanam, Uijeongbu in Gyeonggi-do, Jeonju and Seongju in Chungcheongbuk-do, Yangju in Gyeonggi-do, and Cheonan in Chungcheongnam-do. In particular, cities and districts where the voting turnout follows the nationwide pattern are concentrated in the Seoul Metropolitan Area. Traditionally, the Seoul Metropolitan Area is free from the voting tendency that shows dominant support for the conservative or progressive parties in other regions. Therefore, no single party was dominant at the previous elections in the Seoul Metropolitan Area. Considering an apparent difference in voting patterns between young adults and older and middle-aged populations, such competition between conservative and progressive political parties can partly be explained by the cross-composition of the population in the Seoul Metropolitan Area where the young adult and older and middle-aged populations are evenly distributed due to the consistent influx of young adults.
The ROK National Assembly is a unicameral legislature in which district representatives are elected every four years, and political parties choose representatives proportionally by voters and experts, based on approval by party members. In the 21st National Assembly Election of April 2020, a total of 233 district representatives and 47 proportional representatives were elected.

The 233 district representatives included 163 seats for the Korean Democratic Party, 64 for the United Future Party, 4 for the Justice Party, and 3 independents. Representatives chosen proportionally included 17 seats for the Citizen’s Party of Korea, 19 for the Future Party, and 5 independents. Representatives chosen proportionally included 17 seats for the Citizen’s Party of Korea, 19 for the Future Party, and 5 independents.

The National Assembly elections reflected a regional voting pattern similar to that of the presidential election. The Democratic Party of Korea secured many seats in the Seoul Metropolitan Area and the Honam region. On the other hand, the United Future Party of Korea secured many seats in the Seoul Metropolitan Area and the Gyeongsang region. In addition, as the members of the National Assembly have adopted a single-member constituency, by which a candidate who receives a majority of votes is elected, many votes are wasted in areas where the difference in approval ratings for competing political parties is narrow. Particularly, the difference in the number of votes between the elected and second-place candidates is relatively small in the Seoul Metropolitan Area and the central regions and is large in the Jeonbuk and Yeongnam regions.

The number of women elected to the National Assembly has been increasing proportionally. However, the proportion of women elected to local positions is still low. There is also a growing demand to reflect the voices of the younger generation in politics. Recently, more representation in their 30s and 40s are entering the National Assembly.
The constituency reflects the political system and always changes with demographic change and movement. Recently, the debate about the National Assembly constituency has become an important political issue as the population continues to decline in some constituencies, and the population continues to increase in the Seoul Metropolitan Area. Thus, realignment of the National Assembly constituencies of the National Assembly election in areas with declining population has been carried out just before elections. Followed by the verdict of the Supreme Court, the ruling party secured many more seats. 452 candidates from the Democratic Party of Korea and 157 from the Liberty Korea Party were elected as mayors, county heads, and district heads. Regarding the result of the local council election, 2016 council members were elected with the exception of Sejong Metropolitan City and Jeju Special Self-Governing Province, where local councils are not established. The local council is the foundation for governance democracy and accommodates diverse constituencies, including women and members of the younger generation.

Local Election

In local elections (every four years), local and metropolitan council members and heads of local and metropolitan governments are elected. Council members consist of directly representatives and proportional representatives.

At the 7th simultaneous local election of 2018, 14 candidates from the Democratic Party of Korea, two from the Liberty Korea Party, and one independent were elected as mayor, county governors, and district heads. In the election of the metropolitan council, the ruling party secured many seats. 452 candidates from the Democratic Party of Korea and 157 from the Liberty Korea Party. As the result of the election for the heads of local governments, 151 candidates from the Democratic Party of Korea, 51 from the Liberty Korea Party, four from the Party for Democracy and Peace, and 17 independents were elected as mayors, county governors, and district heads. Regarding the result of the local council election, 2016 council members were elected with the exception of Sejong Metropolitan City and Jeju Special Self-Governing Province, where local councils are not established. The local council is the foundation for governance democracy and accommodates diverse constituencies, including women and members of the younger generation.

Results of the 7th Local Election: Heads of Metropolitan Governments and Councils (2018)

Results of the 7th Local Election: Heads of Local Governments (2018)

Changes in the Constituency Numbers for National Assembly Elections and Seats (1966-2019)

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